

Response to Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament inquiry into the challenges facing the creative industry workforce in Wales

Introduction: Ffilm Cymru Wales is a sector development body for film in Wales. The company is a lottery delegate of the Arts Council of Wales and BFI, as well as managing independent film production funding for Welsh Government's Creative Wales. Work spans across the social, cultural, economic and educational value of film, delivering support for filmmakers, exhibitors, education practitioners and directly delivering inclusive sector training.

We have focused our response to the committee's inquiry specifically on the film sub-sector and its component parts relevant to Wales – particularly production companies, freelance cast and crew, facility and service companies and exhibitors (comprising cinemas, multi-arts venues that provide screenings and film festivals). It is notable that these various component parts also frequently cross-pollinate other sub-sectors such as television production, with personnel, facilities and venues often working across the sector.

Please see www.filmcymruwales.com for more information.

- **What is the current health of the sector's workforce, including the impacts of the pandemic, Brexit and cost of living crisis? Have workers left the sector, and what impact has this had?**

The first nine-twelve months of the pandemic were particularly challenging for the film sector – with film production effectively closed whilst safety measures were developed alongside proposals to Treasury that resulted in the £500m Film and TV Restart Scheme, which effectively addressed defective insurance, allowing the financing of films to resume. At the consumer end of the business, cinemas and arts-centres were required to close, and later to implement measures such as covid-passes. During this time, the availability of Cultural Recovery Funds – distributed in Wales via the Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Government's Creative Wales – were absolutely vital in providing income to venues, businesses and (to Wales' credit) to freelancers, on whom this sector depends.

On a smaller scale, Ffilm Cymru additionally provided Emergency Relief Funds to writers, directors and producers, and redirected funds to development based activities, helping to prepare projects for when production could resume. We also actively helped to shape sector specific safety and fiscal proposals, as part of a UK-wide working group convened by the BFI, whilst contributing sector information as Creative Wales shaped its support for cinemas, festivals and freelancers.

Since the sector re-opened we have seen production activity resume and exceed pre-pandemic levels (<https://www.bectufreelance.org.uk/2021/12/15/bfi-screen-business-report-details-the-scale-of-the-uk-production-boom/>), fuelled by the increase demand from streamers, whose subscription base significantly increased during the pandemic, coupled with a concentration of productions that had been delayed. Both Screen Skills and the BFI Skills Reports demonstrate this sector growth, evidencing an estimated need for between 15,130 and 20,770 additional full-time workers in film and high-end TV across the UK by 2025, which will require up to £104million of annual investment in training for the new and existing workforce by 2025. The BFI highlighted that that level of investment would necessitate commercial entities, including the streamers and studios to coinvest in this skills and training work:

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/reports/bfi-skills-review-2022>

<https://www.screenskills.com/media/5559/2022-06-23-labour-market-shortages-and-training-investment-needs-research.pdf>

Film and TV have a tendency to provide relatively highly-paid jobs, which coupled by the high-rates of production might be taken to indicate a healthy sector. However, this is arguably off-set the undue pressure and threat of burn-out that professionals face when working long-hours, across back-to-back projects without the breaks that were previously typical across production. This places workers under significant pressure, putting mental health at risk, whilst also increasing the probability of workers considering alternative work.

The need to increase sector-capacity, which in turn can support better well-being practices such as offering job shares and flexible working hours, is further evidenced in the Film & TV Charities Through the Looking Glass Report (https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/LookingGlassReport_2021_Final.pdf), where a large-scale survey of creative industry workers across the UK showed poor mental health and increased evidence of suicidal thoughts as compared to the general population. Improvements to working conditions – hours, breaks, flexible working – would also likely be more attractive to a greater diversity of new entrants to the sector.

In Wales, the Clwstwr supported Screen Survey Wales 2021, which had a focus on the Cardiff Capital Region, followed by a pan-Wales survey funded by Creative Wales, was most welcome and should be encouraged as a regular addition to available data, in order to track trends and to better understand the impact of interventions:

https://www.academia.edu/78129712/Screen_Survey_Wales_2021

Whilst production has been booming, this does not mean that it's immune to the cost of living crisis, which is likely to see less productions produced with public money in the future, as individual projects require more funding to meet inflationary costs of energy, transport, salaries and materials. And, on an individual level, people who are starting out in their careers and have yet to establish themselves, may find cost of living an increasing deterrent to their taking on work that is project-by-project by its nature. Consequently, in our development work, we are seeing and supporting increased per project costs to support writers, directors, producers and associated talent that are earlier on in their careers.

Similarly, for the past 3-years we have used funding support from Ymddiried/Welsh Broadcasting Trust in order to provide bursaries to new entrant and trainee crew that are living in financial hardship – with the aim of diversifying the socio-economic status of people working in the creative sector as capacity is built. This work will be at threat if further funds are not sourced. To that end, we have developed skills and training bids that include measures to offset financial hardship for the BFI, Creative Wales and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

We welcome the work of NESTA's Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), as commissioned by DCMS and working in partnership across the devolved nations, into what constitutes 'Good Work' in the creative industries (see <https://pec.ac.uk/news/good-work>). This is expected to be published in November. Emerging themes echo the reports referenced here, but also moves towards practical recommendations. For example, any funder can aim to use their financial and contractual position to encourage change. For Ffilm Cymru this takes the form of requiring 'Sustainability Plans' from productions we support that identify the measures that are right for them to advance progress across: environmental, diversity and inclusion, and business innovation. In turn, we are committed to capturing and sharing the good practice that emerges, and developing resources that can support further change. In doing this work within this sector however, it is vital to acknowledge that, in the main, these are small and micro-companies that are producing content, rapidly scaling up and scaling back their freelance crew, and we need to be realistic about what can be achieved without further investment and resource support.

There's a lot of positive work progressing with these challenges in mind, including for example, Cult Cymru's and the BFI's piloting of Wellbeing Facilitators, supported by Creative Wales; the requirement to adopt and widely share Bullying and Harassment codes of practice, with white labels made available; and bespoke training programmes, such as Ffilm Cymru's Foot in the Door training programme (<https://ffilmcymruwales.com/funding-and-training/foot-door>) that specifically works with Housing Associations, Further Education and grassroots organisations within communities, alongside providing support for transport, childcare and other potentially cost prohibitive measures, to enable people into the sector that wouldn't otherwise consider it for them. That work has to be done alongside provision of pastoral support and with on-going commitment to cultural change across the sector, from hiring practices to progression opportunities and the strengthening of union agreements (such as the Pact/BECTU agreement that is currently under negotiation). This is perhaps a particular point to note in the context of Brexit, where there is potential for working directives to be watered down if we do not collectively work to avoid that.

How financially stable is the sector and how suitable are pay and working conditions?

As reflected in the Arts Council of Wales' (ACW) evidence to this committee for its Cost of Living inquiry, we are similarly seeing significant financial challenge faced by exhibition venues – those being cinemas and multi-arts venues, including those who screen films. ACW noted that more than 50% were indicating significant financial pressures – and that would be consistent with the feedback we receive from venues that we co-fund across Wales where they are facing the combined challenge of ticket sales that have not fully

recovered post covid, with the rising costs of living, which both increase operational running costs and further the downward pressure on ticket sales.

Two recent developments illustrate this point with the World's second largest cinema-chain, CineWorld, going into administration¹; and Scotland's Centre for Moving Image² went into administrating, with the knock-on impact of Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh's FilmHouse and Aberdeen's Belmon cinema all ceasing trading with immediate effect, including the loss of 102 jobs. Overall, 'Business Insolvency' publication notes that box-office takings are down 32% from last year, compared to around a third in 2019.

There is a real and present danger that these latest developments represent the canary in the coalmine for exhibition. After the support exhibitors received from the Cultural Recovery Funds, we would argue there is need for further emergency funds for exhibitors, noting that if they collapse they'll take the route to market for independent films with them. These venues showed tremendous agility in the face of covid, adapting how they worked – sometimes going on-line, albeit swapping pounds for digital dimes; and where they could, continuing to provide valued offers to their communities, such as offering food services. Vitally, these cinemas provide cultural enrichment on the high-street and within communities - providing a breadth of storytelling that helps us as a society to better understand ourselves.

From a production point of view, in addition to comments above where in particular we'd like to see strengthening of union agreements to improve working hours and flexibility of working conditions, we'd note the BFI's recently commissioned independent Economic Review of UK Independent film:
<https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/reports/economic-review-uk-independent-film>

In particular, this report illustrates the “considerable threat.... That this culturally important part of the sector” is facing when taking into consideration stagnating revenue with digital media not fully replacing falling revenue from sources such as cinema; significant inflation of costs and increased uncertainty in the sector as it emerges from the pandemic, creating an environment that is in turn less attractive to investors.

In this context, Alma Economics draws attention in its recommendations to the importance of public funding incubating talent that offers a diversity of voice; and supporting adaptation of business models across the sector. There is also a call for greater demands to be made of the streamers – which might range from increased local sector support, to direct investment in training (a point also made in the BFI's Skills Review, as above).

¹ <https://business-insolvency-helpline.co.uk/cineworld-bankruptcy/> Cineworld has 30,000 employees and 9,500 screens across 7 countries, including Picturehouse in the UK, which recently released Ffilm Cymru, BFI and S4C co-financed feature, Gwledd/The Feast

² <https://www.screendaily.com/news/edinburgh-international-film-festival-to-cease-trading-as-parent-charity-enters-administration/5175146.article>

• **How equal, diverse and inclusive is the sector? How can this be improved?**

According to NESTA's Policy and Evidence Centre³, the UK's Creative Industries would need to employ 250,000 more working-class people to be as socially economically diverse as the rest of the economy. This deficit is the equivalent to the size of the creative workforce in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined.

This is a reflection of structural and cultural challenges for a sector that is largely comprised of micro and small enterprises and freelancers, who tend to recruit through known networks, at pace and without consideration of socio-economic barriers – such as access to transport, childcare, and work-related costs.

Inclusion and wellbeing is actively embedded in all of Ffilm Cymru Wales' activity and we have long-led on the benefits of this approach.

Ffilm Cymru Wales 'Film For Everyone' plan (<https://ffilmcymruwales.com/film-everyone>, which includes targets reflective of our society⁴, is an example of how it is feasible to embed inclusive practice in terms of using levers for best practice, combined with partnership with grassroots organisations within communities.. For example, production funding can be coupled with contractual terms that encourage those we work with to make change and we are actively looking as to how we can do that throughout the screen eco system. This begins with influencing policy around sustainability and runs right through to our work on our award winning training programme 'Foot in the Door' working with communities across Wales.

One of the most significant challenges of the screen sector in terms of achieving better diversity and inclusion, is the manner in which work is organised and structured. Work across screen is largely project based, short term and high risk(Eikhof, 2018). The associated risks that accompany short term, precarious work structures are often filtered through the chain of productions. In practice, this means that staff on short term contracts with limited autonomy and a 'task and finish' role to undertake against the clock, does not in any way lend itself to these structures embedding 'diversity and inclusion in practice'.

There has been some progress over the last five years that seeks to address the limitations of the way that productions are structured from a support and wellbeing perspective, that build temporary human resource support systems around short-term productions including:

- Film & TV Charity mental health helpline

³ Social Mobility in the Creative Economy. Rebuilding and Levelling Up? <https://pec.ac.uk/research-reports/social-mobility-in-the-creative-economy-rebuilding-and-levelling-up> 9th September 2021

- BFI Bullying and Harassment policies
- Wellbeing Facilitators
- Access co-ordinators
- Intimacy co-ordinators
- BFI Diversity Standards
- Call it App!

What is now required is for the screen sector in Wales to work with funders and industry bodies to understand and develop sustainable embedded solutions to how productions practically address and embed wellbeing and inclusion within a high-risk environment. This change and any subsequent activity must be led by industry to affect change.

- **How sufficient are skills and training opportunities? Are there gaps, and how should they be filled?**

There are structural and cultural challenges – such as how the sector recruits, trains and advances its workforce. Skills and training for screen in Wales can be perceived as a crowded marketplace. In an environment where sourcing below the line crew is a challenge with issues of supply and demand. Feedback from production anecdotally is that this is confusing when skills and training organisations have competing priorities. Ffilm Cymru Wales are now developing systems through their Production funding to simplify this with and for productions we work with, including:

- Transparently mapping what each Sector skills and training organisation does and offers across Skills and training in Wales
- What 'level' each intervention is at and what they will gain from engagement
- How engaging with organisations will support productions needs

There is an urgent need to simplify this for productions and individuals looking to work in the sector; Ffilm Cymru Wales are developing a first of its kind 'signposting' in terms of the screen sector toolkit for Wales, that will be published November 2022. It has the aim of explaining and de-mystifying the sector for new-entrants and supports understanding of what each organisation does and offers. There will also be 'place-based' versions of this that will ensure that localised and regionalised offers are considered across Wales.

Research from both Wales and UK wide has identified that succession planning and mid-senior level talent development and training needs to be developed to offer sector sustainability and we will be looking to develop training at this level that meets production needs.

Across all of this work, increased collaboration would be beneficial and welcome. Many of the screen industry skills and training bodies are themselves micro or small companies that work from project-to-project, as noted in the McAvoy, Skills Survey. By joining together for collaborative and joined up bids that are clearly signposted there are opportunities to simplify and increase the efficacy of training, for the benefit of all. This is the approach that Ffilm Cymru took in its successful bid to UK Government's Community Renewal Fund through Newport Council, working in partnership with Sgîl Cymru, Screen Alliance Wales, Cult Cymru, Coleg Gwent, housing associations and grassroots community organisations. There's potential to

take a similar model with greater scale with the Shared Prosperity and up to 9-years of skills cluster lottery funding, as distributed by the BFI.

- **What has been the impact of support from public bodies such as the Welsh Government, and is further support needed?**

Please refer to Ffilm Cymru's previous evidence submitted to the committee's inquiry into the impact of Covid and support provided, where amongst other items, we noted the vital importance of Welsh Government's provision of Cultural Recovery Funding, including for freelancers and venues.

As above, financial support is now needed to further the following:

- Emergency relief for exhibition venues (cinemas and multi-arts) during the Cost of Living crisis and to support adaptive business practice;
- The combined use of contractual levers (Cultural/Economic Contract) and funding to enable support and provision of resources to support changes in working practice – in line with emerging Policy and Evidence findings and as further reviewed and adopted within Wales;
- Scaled-up and joined up skills and training provision that puts diversity and inclusion at it's heart. This should take into consideration the value of transferable skills to support resilience and the importance of leadership skills – for advancing progressive businesses that keep pace with the market, to recognising and embedding behavioural change that substantially improves wellbeing in the workplace.
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