

**REPORT TO THE FEDERATION OF SCREENWRITERS IN EUROPE  
FROM THE WRITERS' GUILD OF IRELAND  
(formerly the Irish Playwrights' and Screenwriters' Guild)  
FOR 2012**

October 2012



**INTRODUCTION**

Austerity in Ireland is a series of increasingly difficult annual budgets which increase the cost of living (including taxes) and reduce services. The arts and culture budgets are obvious targets. Cumulative cuts to the Irish Film Board have now reached 40% of its income from the state at its highest point and more than 30% of the budget of the Arts Council. Audiences for the arts in general are down about 20% (though art house cinema has actually gone up). RTE, the state broadcaster which relies on advertising as well as a licence fee, has cut wages and staff but is still losing money. There are more cuts to come for the foreseeable future and the absence of growth in the economy along with high unemployment (now at 14.8% of the

workforce) means that the prospect for any restoration of available funds to their previous level is highly unlikely.

Working artists are suffering with their already modest incomes reduced by a fall in prices (rates); a reduction in the volume of work available and a reduction in the volume of other arts related work (teaching, journalism, etc.) which many artists used rely on.

So far the infrastructure of the arts in general has apparently held up. Independent production companies for example have cut staff, closed offices and so on, but have not yet actually gone bust. Individual writers are leaving the profession or leaving the country.

## **FINANCIAL SITUATION**

The Guilds own income, modest to start with, has been reduced by 40% from its highest point. Further cuts will put us in a situation where our capacity to have a staffed office would be in doubt.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership has dropped to 337 (from a high of 420) because people are dropping out and we are taking a harder line in respect of payment of fees.

## **ONGOING ACTIVITIES**

Despite the generally difficult situation the guild has managed to continue the bulk of its activities.

### **Annual Awards**

Our annual ZeBBie awards took place in May, although this year we had to ensure that the event covered its own costs. You can see a various reports on this year's event at this address: <http://script.ie/zebbies/z2012/>.

### **Direct services to members**

We continue to provide individual advice on contracts to members; to publish a fortnightly e-newsletter and maintain a twitter feed and a blog; we provides various meetings and events during the year – on writing for radio, and a major event for playwrights, for example - ; to organise writers groups, of which there are now five; and so on.

### **Representation**

We also of course continue to represent writers in negotiations with producers, chiefly the broadcasters, in respect of ongoing and new disputes and problems of one kind or another. The recession has both reduced the amount of new contracts being signed; disimproved their terms and been the subject of an increasing number of disputes over individual contracts.

## **Lobbying**

We are also active in lobbying state organisations and government agencies and departments. One quite effective strategy has been to set up a grouping of all artists' organisations in Ireland (Association of Artists Representative Organisations – AARO). This grouping has campaigned on a variety of issues including terms of trade between the producers and the broadcasters, trust funds for artists held by the Art Council, and so on.

Two major issues are 1) competition law and 2) a new campaign on the basic principle of copyright. In respect of the first a politically complex proposal is working its way through the parliament at the moment. The ideas in the new proposal are good but we do not know whether they will succeed in being adopted by government and brought to fruition. It will certainly take some considerable time. The second initiative will hopefully be funded by the various collecting societies in Ireland and is a campaign intended to try to provide some alternative to the views of Google and the internet users groups whose views have dominated the public space.

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