

The logo for the Writers Guild of Ireland is a red square with a white, curled corner in the top right. The text "Writers Guild of Ireland" is written in white, with "Writers" and "Guild" on the first two lines and "of Ireland" on the third line, all in a serif font.

Writers Guild of Ireland

FEDERATION OF SCREEWRITERS IN EUROPE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PARIS, OCTOBER 2016

REPORT FROM WRITERS GUILD OF IRELAND

BACKGROUND

The economic situation in Ireland is finally recovering as the recession which started in 2007 works its way out. The five-year financial package agreed with the European Union, World Bank and International Monetary Fund has been completed and exited; employment levels have recovered and growth has been relatively high (3.7% this year). As a result, government expenditure is recovering and budgets provided to funding agencies in the arts, including film and television, are being gradually restored. An increase of 15%+ has been promised in the recent national budget for 2017 (in the context of 40% cuts during the worst of the recession).

The volume of indigenous production remained the same throughout the recession period but the budget levels – already very low – plummeted. Prices for writers also collapsed at the same time.

Non-indigenous production has grown rapidly – a number of TV series (“Ripper Street”, “The Vikings”, “Game of Thrones”) are largely or partially shot in Ireland based on a generous tax deal, but we have not been able to find a way as yet of including Irish writers in these shows.

THE GUILD

The Guild has survived the period of the recession. Membership, at 380 people, has stayed about the same and the activities of information, representation and lobbying have continued with mixed success. Three particular issues deserve some mention.

UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN WRITING AND DIRECTING FEATURE FILMS

This issue has been of concern to the Guild for many years. In Television women have been reasonably well represented (writing soaps and long-running series), but in feature film women never written more than 20% of produced films in any year. In part because of what happened in Sweden, partly because the new Chair of the Irish Film Board is very sympathetic and partly because of campaigning by the Guild and others the Irish Film Board, which is our main state funding agency, committed in December of 2015 to reach parity of funding within three years.

A key focus for us since then has been doing as much as we can to increase the volume of applications for support from women. We have of course organised information meetings and discussions. Pitching sessions with producers have been heavily over-subscribed. We are also organising meetings with successful published women authors to consider optioning work for adaptation for the screen.

To nobody's surprise the task is difficult and we hope and expect that the Film Board will up the ante and introduce more explicit supports after a review at the end of the first year of the programme.



Meeting on gender – Galway Film Fleadh 2016

NEW INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS COMPETITION LAW PROBLEM

FSE members are aware of the issue of the impact of Competition law on Collective Bargaining. A new piece of legislation in Ireland will address the problem but probably not in a way that we would ideally have preferred. Registered trade unions will be allowed to collectively bargain for certain categories of freelance workers who are in so-called “false self-employment” or in “employment-like” situations. This formulation is unlikely to cause problems with authorities in the European Union but is some way from unfettered collective bargaining. The guild is trying to include “representative organisations of workers” into the list but we don’t expect to succeed. Registration as a trade union will cause us other problems; and may not of itself bring us to a solution.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION

It seems that there will be some additional functions for CMOs as a result of the new Directive. Our existing contract with a British Collecting Society is not working well. Despite the many complex technical and legislative problems, we have established a CMO and are in the process of registering, seeking mandates and setting up the structures.

CONCLUSION

Still here

David Kavanagh
Writers Guild of Ireland
October 2016