

Annual Report 2019

FLH – ICELAND

FLH currently has 120 members – screenwriters and playwrights. We have no staff and most of the work and activities falls on the hands of members of the board, which consists of five volunteers. Occasionally, tasks are delegated to eager and willing members. The board is unchanged since last year:

Margrét Örnólfsdóttir, Chair
Ólafur Egill Egilsson, Treasurer
Huldar Breiðfjörð, Secretary
Nanna Kristín Magnúsdóttir, Board member
Andri Óttarsson, Board member

Our sole income comes from the membership fees, which are quite modest (equivalent of 73€). For that reason, as well as the fact that the work for the guild is done in our spare time, we have to limit our activities and efforts quite a bit.

It can't be denied that this past year, the activity of the board has been extremely low. It's been difficult to find time for board meetings, and due to everybody's busy schedule we've not been able to attend to the work as we would have liked to. It's clear that we need to do a thorough review how we want to carry on, as it doesn't make much sense that the functionality of the organisation depends fully on the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice of a few individuals. This we need to do in the near future. But we're not dead yet, just in a bit of hibernation.

Agreements and Contracts

There are no standard writers' agreements in Iceland, neither with the producers nor the Broadcasters. Last winter we joined hands with the Writers' Union (book authors) and the Directors Association, and formed a working group on contracts, in the aim to put together model contracts, for features and TV series. The work is ongoing and we hope to finish before the end of the year. When we have documents or guide lines that we are happy with, the plan is to hold a public presentation, for the members and others that work within the field, and have discussions about contracts and rights.

The matter is pressing, since unfortunately things don't seem to be evolving in the right direction, there even appears to be a bit of a back-lash. While nobody (nor the Producers' Association nor the broadcasters) is willing to talk to us about improved contracts, we'll at least try to educate our members, as well as aspiring writers who are not members.

RÚV – The National Broadcaster

In spite of our efforts to try to get RÚV to the table to talk about agreements, nothing has happened. This has been the situation for years now, and it's not just limited to writers, they are not negotiating with anybody.

Furthermore, RÚV is conducting a very strange policy in how they handle projects. They practice to take them into a kind of a hostage, where the creators are encouraged to develop the work further and further, without any payments from RÚV. Thus, RÚV doesn't fully commit to the project, but doesn't reject it either, and therefore keeps people in uncertainty for months and even for years.

The producers are also having huge problems since lately RÚV is claiming larger and larger ownership of the projects they co-produce, by overestimating the broadcaster's contribution. It's worth a mention that RÚV outsources almost all production of drama, very little is produced inhouse. Negotiations between the producers and RÚV about this situation have been quite fierce and are not yet solved.

Síminn / 365 – commercial broadcasting services commissioning TV drama

Fortunately, RÚV is not the only player in the TV drama league. Recently Síminn, which is the largest telecommunication group in Iceland, is investing quite a bit in new TV drama for its SVOD service – Sjónvarp Símans Premium. They put substantial money into development and buy exclusive broadcasting rights in Iceland, but make no further claims, i.e. they don't co-produce.

The other commercial broadcaster, 365, used to produce quite a bit of TV drama but in the past few years they haven't. Now there seems to be a change in policy so we could be expecting some new drama coming from that direction in near future. This of course is good news for us, with more competition and more work for writers, but also calls for something to be done sooner than later about the contract situation.

A new film policy 2020-2030

A Working Group has been appointed by the Minister of Culture and Education, ment to put together a report with suggestions for a new 10 year film policy, for 2020–2030. The group consists of 12 people, representatives from all fields of the film industry, politicians and representatives from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Industry and Innovation, which deals with the tax rebates. Margrét Örnólfsdóttir, the Chair of FLH, represents screenwriters in the group. The Working Group is supposed to be ready with the report no later than March 2020.

So far the work is going well, even though it was a bit disheartening when the representative from the Ministry of Culture blurted out that she'd been asked to keep us (the filmmakers) close to the ground in regards of increased funding. Still, it's a sign that the Ministry has taken a keen interest and understands the importance of making longterm plans for Icelandic film making.

Education

Finally a university level film education seems to be on the horizon in Iceland. Preparation for a film study program at the Arts University of Iceland is underway and the plan is to

launch it as soon as in fall 2020. The program will be constructed during this next winter and currently people from all fields of the industry are being called in for interviews to brainstorm about it.

A few facts and figures

Each year about 5-8 feature films and 2-4 TV series premiere in Iceland. For the last few years our films and TV series have been doing very well, both locally and in the world, much in the same way film making from other Nordic countries has. Recently, Netflix ordered the first TV series out of Iceland and it's not unlikely that we'll see more of that coming. There also seems to be an increasing interest in talent from Iceland and some of our members have been recruited for projects abroad. All this is very positive of course, there's more work for writers and hopefully the increasing demand will lead to better contracts and higher numbers.

In December 2020 The European Film Awards will be hosted in Reykjavík, at Harpan Music Hall, which is a great honor for Iceland and an event much looked forward to.