



WRITERS GUILD OF IRELAND CLG.

2019 Report

<u>Summary of Contents:</u>	<u>Page:</u>
Introduction	2
The Guild	2
Members	2
Members' Survey; Payment of Dues; The Board	3
Staff; Offices	4
Finances	5
Information Distribution and Related Services for Members	5
Newsletter	5
Lucky Dozen and Other Networking Meetings	5
#creditwriters	5
Freedom of Artistic Expression	6
ZeBBie Awards	6
Gender Related Issues	7
A Proposal to Impose Quotas	7
BAI Funded Events for Women Members	7
Screen Ireland's Producers' Corridor	8
Fair City Writers	8
The National Theatre	9
International	10
Berlin 8th to 13th October – World Conference of Screenwriters 4, International Affiliation of Writers Guilds General Assembly, Federation of Screenwriters in Europe General Assembly	10
Copyright Directive	11
Remuneration Study	11
Collective Bargaining Workshop in Brussels	11
Other Items	11
Training	11
Guilds	11

Advice to Individual Guild Members	12
Conclusion	12

Introduction

It's a strange time in Ireland for writing and writers. An improving economy is not resulting in either an increase in the volume of writing work available or any improvement in rates of pay.

The national film agency (rebranded as Screen Ireland) that had promised to concentrate on talent has not really done so and has become more and more fixated on economic measures of success – employment generated and so on.

RTE has failed in its responsibilities to produce drama, focusing its efforts on sports and news and using the tiny resources allocated to drama to try to do large co-productions.

Even in the theatre things are odd, with the National Theatre, in receipt of more than 50% of Arts Council funding for the theatre, closing its literary department and becoming mired in controversy when an alliance of creative artists sent an open letter to the Minister for the Arts complaining about a programming policy that led to a reduction in Abbey originated productions and a growth in 'bought-in' shows. A mediator was appointed and final response from her is expected in the coming months.

At least on the question of parity of access for women some progress has been made and the Guild is proud of its contribution to that. Screen Ireland appears to be moving away from its commitment to 50/50 by 2020, but it is true that considerable progress has been made.

In Europe a new Copyright Directive promises real change in creators' contracts, which have to be applied, at least in theory, in every member state within two years.

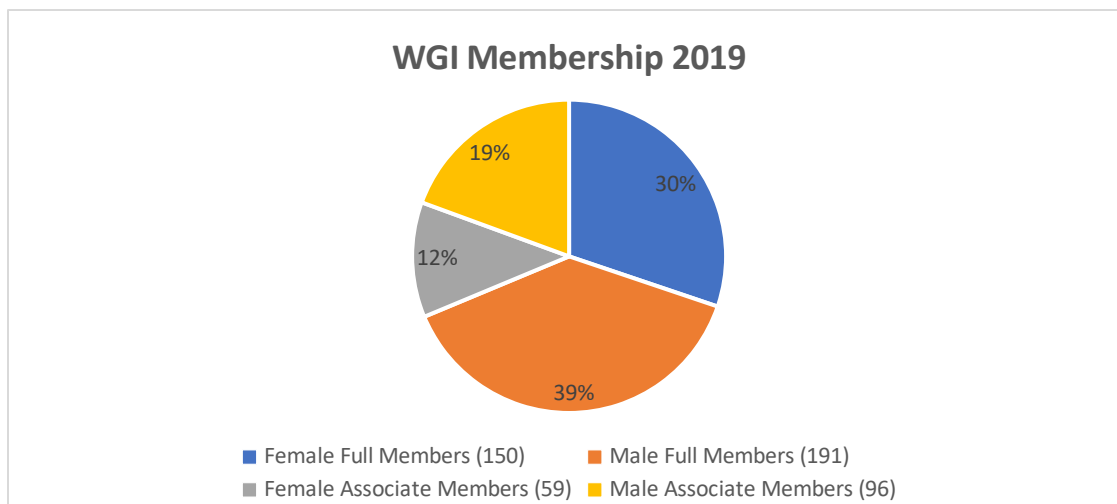
The Guild

Members

Membership of the Guild continues to grow in number, reaching 496 as of today's date. This is about the same as the total number of contracts available to write each year in Ireland.

155 of our members are Associate members, meaning that they have not yet contracted to write for payment.

209 (42%) are women.



Members' Survey

We had a very good response rate to this survey (192 members in total). The vast majority of members are satisfied or very satisfied with our service. The main thing that people asked for were more networking activities. Providing these is to a significant degree a function of resources, but nonetheless we hope to put more emphasis on this area of work in the future.

Payment of Dues

There is a depressing reluctance by our members to pay their dues. More than half do not. While it is certainly true that some people listed as members have effectively dropped out of an impossible career there are those who could pay and don't. It is also true that there are many writers who are not members and finding time to organise a recruitment campaign has not yet proved practical.

For comparison;

2013: 158 members paid €8,839
 2014: 157 members paid €9,675
 2015: 172 members paid €8,877
 2016: 179 members paid €10,555
 2017: 194 members paid €11,369
 2018: 168 members paid €11,605

The Board

The Board of the Guild is made up entirely of members elected at the AGM. The Board have met four times since the last AGM (69th meeting on Thursday 29th November 2018, 70th meeting on Thursday January 31st 2019, 71st on Thursday 4th April 2019 and 72nd on Thursday 23rd May 2019).

The members are Martin Boylan, Jennifer Davidson, Mary Duffin, Gary Duggan, Susan Liddy, John Lynch, Michele Manahan, Thomas McLaughlin (Chair), Elaine Murphy, Joe O’Byrne and Shane Perez. Lauren Mackenzie resigned during the year.

Board members also contribute their time to other activities such as the ZeBBies committee, the Equality Action Committee and so on.

The policy position of the Board is that we should ensure that its composition is 50/50 male/female.

Staff

The Guild employs two part time staff and has a contract with a third. During the year Maura McHugh, who both edited our fortnightly newsletter and managed social media, gave up the work to concentrate on her increasingly successful writing. She has been replaced by Steve Galvin.

Our CEO David Kavanagh stepped down at the end of June after 17 years to concentrate on his work with the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe. The new director is Hugh Farley who took up his post on 16th September.



Hugh Farley, Director of the WGI

Offices

Since the collapse of Filmbase (a resource organisation for independent film-makers) the Art House building where we have our offices has been in gentle decline. Never a particularly handsome edifice, the place is increasingly grubby and abandoned-looking. Temple Bar Cultural Trust is run by Dublin City Council and their efforts to find a new tenant have not been successful so far. A formal attempt, run by Lisneys, produced a couple of candidates, all rejected by TBCT. While we have not been put under any pressure to leave,

the opposite in fact, the need for some kind of resolution of the situation is increasingly urgent.

Finances

The Guild needs a larger annual income that it receives at present. Our turnover of approximately €110,000 is largely made up by the €80,000 we receive each year from Screen Ireland. This is the main constraint on our activities. Some years ago we felt that we were slipping rather inexorably with a growing accumulated deficit, fed by small losses each year. In the last three or four we have brought that back to a more credible position and our income, though very modest, is stable.

An investment in IT and social media is long overdue and the Guild aims to raise additional income from the Arts Council and Screen Ireland.

Information Distribution and Related Services for Members

Newsletter

Our fortnightly e-newsletter has been issued 309 times. We know from Mailchimp that 60% of newsletters issues are opened, which seems quite good. Our social media is moderately popular.

We aim to offer significantly more content for our members in future subject to funding increases.

Lucky Dozen and Other Networking Meetings

A Lucky Dozen meeting for members took place on 6th December with writer Tracey Martin and on 28th February with Roddy Doyle.

There was a meeting for new members on 13th December and a Christmas drink for all members in the Palace Bar on Fleet Street in Dublin on the same date.

David Kavanagh did a number of different meetings over the year for writers such as in the Irish Writers Centre on writing for film and television on Saturday 6th October organised by the Writers Centre; for students in Pulse college and so on.

#creditwriters

At the urging of Guild member Louise Geraghty we tried to start a twitter campaign to draw attention to the failure of the industry to #CreditWriters, following a discussion at last year's AGM. Louise has been very active on this issue on twitter, using hashtags such as #writinganddirectingaredifferent #noscriptnofilm #noscriptnofinance #itstartsonthepage and

#somebodywrotethis. The Guild would encourage all members with twitter accounts to support this initiative.

Freedom of Artistic Expression

An initiative suggested by the Guild and supported by the Irish Writers Union, Irish Writers Centre, Poetry Ireland and the (new) Screen Composers Guild and with the participation of the ICCL and funded by UNESCO (Ireland) resulted in an event on Freedom of Artistic Expression which took place on April 31st in the Project Arts Centre. The meeting called for the repeal of the Censorship of Publications Act.

ZeBBie Awards

This year is the twelfth ZeBBie Awards. As is usual the ZeBBie committee met to review last year's event and at their meeting of Saturday 10th November decided to add two new Awards to the existing five and also not to have a Best Game Script award this year. The two new Awards are Best Animation Script and Best Continuing Drama Script. Board members Michel Manahan, Shane Perez and Susan Liddy joined John Lynch, Thomas McLaughlin and Jennifer Davidson on the ZeBBie Committee.

With assistance from Guild member David Henry, who is a web designer, Clíona Ruiséil managed to organise what is in effect a new process for publishing the scripts on the Guild's website and for voting which seems to have worked well.

The ceremony was held on June 19th in the Sugar Club and our host was Senator David Norris.

Some financial support continues to be provided by the Irish Copyright Licensing Agency.

The winners for the ZeBBie Awards 2019 are:

(Theatre) Furniture by Sonya Kelly; *(Radio)* Ma by Elaine Murphy; *(Feature Film)* Float Like A Butterfly by Carmel Winters; *(Short Film)* Five Letters to the Stranger Who Will Dissect My Brain by Oonagh Kearney; *(Television)* Derry Girls Ep.6 by Lisa McGee; *(Animation)* Space Chickens in Space – Blibli-sitting by Shane Perez and *(Continuing Drama)* Red Rock Ep.187 by Paul Walker.



Former CEO of the WGI, David Kavanagh, receiving a ZeBBie Award for ‘Services To Writers’

Gender Related Issues

The Guild continues to be committed to the ambition discussed at the AGM over the last years of achieving parity of funding on a gender basis, particularly for funding by Screen Ireland, where the imbalance is particularly severe. We have established a joint committee with the Screen Directors Guild – the Equality Action Committee, chaired by our Board member Susan Liddy.

A Proposal to Impose Quotas

After considerable discussion both Guilds agreed on 24th October last on the need for a system of graduated quotas to ensure that the ambition of 50/50 by 2020 would actually be achieved. The idea of quotas has always been part of the discussion on achieving gender parity. A key moment was the discussion of the issue at the by-now annual event organised by the two Guilds at the Galway Film Fleadh.

A detailed draft was made with a specified set of quotas in each area of Screen Ireland’s funding, which was discussed in detail before being submitted to Screen Ireland, where we had every reason to think that it would be successful. Unfortunately, Screen Ireland has decided to reject the idea for the time being. A formal response from Screen Ireland was received by Susan Liddy as Chair of the EAC on the 16th May which essentially says “no” to the introduction of managed quotas.

This is the second time we have had the rejection of a substantial proposal on gender issues which had seemed to be supported by Screen Ireland Board members.

BAI Funded Events for Women Members

The project which we started in 2017 with BAI money to offer pitching training to women writers who might apply to the BAI ran into delays when Screen Producers Ireland proved reluctant to co-operate in organising a pitching event.

The event eventually took place on 4th December 2018 and was attended by 20 of our female screenwriters, who pitched their television and film projects to 14 producers (18 were signed up but 4 didn’t turn up). The feedback from participants on the day was very positive.

As a result of the delay in organising the final event of the 2017 funding we withdrew our application to the BAI for funding for additional activities on gender in 2018, with their agreement, and resubmitted it for 2019.

The programme of events for 2019 have included informational meetings for members on contract and career information; funding applications; a programme of events for a selected group to develop their projects and later in the year, an opportunity for members to meet producers informally at a social-type gathering. BAI has provided us with a grant of €17,000 to assist with this.

The first event of this series took place on 15th May and was an introduction to the “business” aspects of work as a screenwriter. Twenty-eight people attended. David Kavanagh took two of the sessions – the first on the working life of screenwriters using the FSE Remuneration study and the third session on copyright and contracts. Gaby Smith, the accountant, did a session on income and taxes.

BAI funding requires considerable administration and is consequently time-consuming.

Screen Ireland’s Producers’ Corridor

In 2016 the Film Board, as it was then called, included in its policies the idea that a corridor of recoupment monies which had been going to producers should be shared with writers and directors.

A number of months ago, perhaps in response to pressure from the two Guilds, the Board made a proposition as to how the share could be arranged and asked the three organisations – writers, directors and producers - to come to an agreement between them about the proposition.

When the producers proved unwilling to engage an external mediator was appointed.

Clare Duignan (ex RTE) was asked by Screen Ireland to act as mediator and each of the three impacted organisations – Writers’ Guild, Directors’ Guild and Producers’ organisation met separately with her, leading eventually to a meeting with all three. Jennifer Davidson attended one of these meetings with David Kavanagh and your Chair attended the other.

The proposal now suggested by the mediator is complex but broadly has the support of the three organisations and should lead to a situation where writers credited on Screen Ireland funded projects (which return income from sales to Screen Ireland) - that writers will receive 10% of that income.

A complicating factor is that the original proposal which came from SI also introduced a new stream of recoupment – an amount equal to the 481 investment – which could in certain circumstances be recouped by the producer. We have insisted that we want to share in that as well and that our attitude to the draft proposal from Clare Duignan is predicated on our agreeing about the share of the new additional recoupment.

Fair City Writers

A meeting of Fair City writers took place on 15th October 2018 in the Trinity City Hotel. It developed a list of comments and proposals which were eventually sent to the show’s Executive Producer.

The writers’ reps (Jennifer Davidson and Carl Austin) and David Kavanagh met with the management of Fair City on April 1st 2019 to discuss the proposals and to open negotiations on pay.

The atmosphere was cordial and various items agreed.

One of the ideas discussed, suggested by the executive producer of the show Brigie De Courcy, was a reduction in the number of people in the story room subject to a certain level of work being undertaken beforehand. However, it transpires that she intended to go ahead and reduce the number in the story room anyway. This means firstly that those in the room are expected to do a great deal more work for the same money and secondly, they are convinced that they cannot do the work properly under those circumstances.

A letter from the story team to the executive producer was sent but no response has been received. The situation contains the prospect of a serious disagreement.

The National Theatre

On Monday January 7th a letter was sent to the Chair of the Arts Council signed by 315 theatre practitioners from every sector complaining that the approach to the programme and management of the National Theatre by the current Directors and Board was proving very damaging to the fragile infrastructure of theatre in Ireland.

The letter got quite an amount of attention. The main organisers of the letter invited the Guild to participate in the subsequent activities.

Board member Joe O'Byrne, a signatory to the original letter along with many other Guild members, invested quite some time in the issue.

We organised a meeting of playwrights to discuss the situation and devised and sent (via Survey Monkey) an anonymous questionnaire, which was sent to 189 playwrights, 68 of whom (or 36%) are Guild members. The questionnaire contained 16 questions which asked for information relating to the respondent's income from playwrighting and other sources. 50 persons have completed the survey, with depressing results.

The Guild wrote to the Chair of the Board of the Theatre, copied to the Minister and the Chair of the Arts Council, to support the signatories. The Guild is also connected to the group of panellists (of which Joe O'Byrne is a member) set up by the signatories to oversee the discussions with the management of the theatre.

A group of playwrights – Jimmy Murphy, Elaine Murphy, John Lynch and Joe O'Byrne and David Kavanagh for the Guild – met with the theatre's management, as part of the series of meetings set up by the signatories, for what was an unsatisfactory discussion.

We agreed with the Abbey to a) comment on their website from the perspective of writers submitting to the theatre, b) organise a meeting for writers with their new dramaturg and c) to agree a new rate card. While these initiatives are interesting enough they do not of course address the real issue, which is the radical and damaging change in direction of the theatre under its current management and Board, typified, for us, in the closing of the Literary Department.

International

The Guild continues to be active in the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe and to a lesser degree the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds.

Berlin 8th to 13th October – World Conference of Screenwriters 4, International Affiliation of Writers Guilds General Assembly, Federation of Screenwriters in Europe General Assembly

David Kavanagh and Thomas McLaughlin, Chair of the Guild, attended the General assembly of the International Affiliation of Writers' Guilds. Thomas was elected as Chair of the Affiliation's Policy Review Group.

Immediately after the IAWG AGM David, Thomas, Joe O'Byrne and Jennifer Davidson attended the Fourth World Conference of Screenwriters. This was an interesting and very well organised meeting. In addition to the member Guilds of the IAWG and the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe the organisers (the German Guild Verband Deutscher Drehbuchautoren) has located Guilds in Brazil, Korea and Kenya which added to the sense of being at a world conference. The debates and discussion were focused on the topics of power and freedom and the conference ended very well with an appearance of Can Dundar ex-Editor of Cumhuriyet a Turkish newspaper and members of Pussy Riot. A complex musing on truth and storytelling from James Schamus completed the event.

David, Thomas and Jennifer attended the FSE General Assembly which took place over the Friday and Saturday and focused very much on the EU Copyright Directive.

Copyright Directive

The European Union's Copyright Directive was agreed by the European institutions in recent weeks. There are now two years for the Directive to be transposed into Irish law (and the law of all member states). This will certainly require a new piece of copyright legislation in Ireland which will change our individual contracts in substantive ways.

This will have to be a focus of the Guild's work over the next months and years.

The Directive introduces the concept of proportionate remuneration, not uncommon in other member states but new to us, which requires that authors, including writers, share in the economic life of what they create.

Writers will be able to ask producers for financial information about what they have written and seek additional payments under certain circumstances.

The Directive was controversial in respect of the requirement that certain online distributors will have to institute systems of either licensing or taking down copyright content. This might lead to a system where we can earn an income from the use of our work online.

Remuneration Study

The FSE/FERA remuneration study has been completed and published online. It will be a valuable tool in campaigning on the Copyright Directive.

The median European author, who has been writing for sixteen years, earned €19,000 after tax from writing in 2016 and added on an additional €6,000 from other work. S/he starts at about €11,000, rises to about €29,000 at 45 and drops back again to €13,000 at 55. Women earn significantly less than men.

Collective Bargaining Workshop in Brussels

From 6th – 9th December David, for FSE, and Clóna, for the Guild, attended a Collective Bargaining Workshop in Brussels, which was organised by FSE and FERA (The European organisation of Directors' Guilds). The meeting was attended by 48 FSE and FERA Board members and staff from 24 EU member states.

An important and interesting initiative is the development of an online comparative database of writers' and directors' contracts across Europe – intended as a tool for improved Collective Bargaining.

Other Items

Training

Screen Training Ireland has changed its name to Screen Skills Ireland, has a new Chief Executive (Gareth Lee), and has started a process of consulting the industry. A day long series of panel discussions and focus groups took place on 20th November which David attended.

David has been attending a new committee established by Screen Skills Ireland (formerly Screen Training Ireland) with the intriguing title of Creativity and Creative Collaborations Focus Group which will meet on the 22nd of November. It does not seem to be having any impact.

Guilds

A new trend of organising into so-called Guilds has started among the various categories of crew members. This seems to have the reluctant support of SIPTU. Crew who join these new Guilds are asked to join SIPTU as well. These are craft based – (Accounts, Art, Assistant Directors, Camera, Construction, Continuity, Costume, Facilities, Editing, Grips, Hair, Locations, Make Up, Modelmaking, Production, Props, Prosthetics, Set Decoration, Sound, Special Effects, Stunts and Transport Departments).

A volunteer co-ordinator of the Guilds, Elizabeth Brennan, has been in contact and some kind of arrangement with the creative Guilds (writers, directors and composers) will probably be set up.

Advice to Individual Guild Members

We continue to provide information to individual members, mostly on contracts. This seems to be welcome and there are lots of examples of the details of contracts being improved by writers once they are aware of what they can and should ask for. We came across some outrageous examples of bad behaviour, especially by inexperienced producers, and have to have better processes for addressing these.

Conclusion

We need to step up as a Guild. We do good work for our members but not enough progress is being made especially around questions of contracts and payments. We have a responsibility to lobby more effectively for an increase in the volume of TV drama produced and to insist that writers have to be at the centre, not the margins.

Thomas McLaughlin, Chair

Hugh Farley, Director