

W'GI

WRITERS
GUILD OF
IRELAND

REPORT 2021

Intro

Though 2021 is shaping up to be one of the busiest ever for production, screenwriters in Ireland saw very little upside. As predicted the splurge in development the previous year saw a reduction in activity as producers and financiers sought to put into production the cream of 2020's crop.

The guild continues to be concerned about rates of pay and how that feeds into the sustainability of screenwriting as a full-time career. In a 2020 survey, we learned that only about a third of our 670 members earning their living wholly from writing or the screen. Troublingly, producers, broadcasters and funders still think of screenplays like wild fruit: perpetual, plentiful and there for selective plucking without any significant efforts at husbandry and propagation.

Encouraging signs abound however, Screen Ireland published an ambitious 3-year plan in October after unprecedented industry consultation (including WGI) that would see the agency expand its activities and a new focus on talent development.

WGI Membership continued to grow to 670 but with it, lower revenues from fee renewals. Our new website, launching in early December, will contain a number of additional features for members in benefit that we hope will drive greater uptake.

Additional capacity-building funding from our Arts Council (and Screen Skills Ireland) enabled us to invest in audio-visual equipment that will enable us to create more compelling content for members, public messaging and recording of live events as we pivot away from purely virtual webinars back toward the 'reel' world.

Branding and Website

In 2021 we unveiled our new corporate brand. Fresh, contemporary and iconic, It was designed by Clara Fitzgerald for multiple uses and iterations across our website, social media and print.

Our website offers a wealth of additional information in a mobile-friendly format. A radical overhaul of our membership management system will allow us to largely automate onboarding of new members and manage subscription renewals. It will help us deal with the



drop in subscription income by providing a paywall for certain services including a new 'Writing Talent In Ireland' database that is a effectively a shop window for our members

talents, accessible by accredited producers internationally, our highly popular newsletter and a 'writers toolbox' of essential professional information and insight.

Campaigns

Writer as Executive Producer

The signature campaign of 2021 has been a multi-pronged strategy to secure an ongoing meaningful role for writers in the production and marketing of their work for TV. Firstly, we defined three tiers of enhanced participation (Head Writer, Executive Producer and Showrunner) that we will incorporate into a competency framework document that will be

adopted by our skills development agency Screen Skills Ireland (SSI). Secondly, we have developed a 6-week syllabus modelled on the WGA Showrunner course and will run it in 2022 in association with SSI. Thirdly, we will insist on contracts that reflects these roles for writer/creators with the associated additional remuneration.

Influencing Screen Ireland Policy

As noted above, Screen Ireland adapted its development policy to a more writer-friendly approach including early-stage development (without a producer attached) and access for writers to the International TV development fund that was formerly restricted to producers). We also lobbied successfully for less onerous requirements for writers seeking development funding.

Best Practice Guidelines for Continuing Drama

The guild has been activated a number of campaigns this year including *Best Practice Guidelines for Continuing Drama* which introduced a proposal to regulate the relationship between continuing drama producers and freelance writers. We are currently awaiting a response from the broadcasters. If accepted, we hope that this will be an important first step to a series of collectively-bargained agreements for film, theatre, radio and so forth.

AVMS Levy

A group of sectoral interests including Writers, Directors, Composers, Animators, Producers as well as two of three broadcasters (the third is owned by interests outside the state) have come together to lobby government to quickly introduce a levy on the profits of media services operating in the Irish market. Both the Prime Minister and Minister for Arts and Culture have spoken positively but civil servants have dragged their heels, seeking to punt the implementation as far down the road as possible. We are now seeking to activate our collective memberships on the issue together with a short social media campaign.

IAWG Streamer Campaign

The IAWG is formulating a campaign to pressure SVODs into implementing many of the ECD directives worldwide including a commitment to transparency and fair and proportionate remuneration. Progress has been slow, and it is unclear how much real pressure the organisation can actually exert.

Influencing Talent Development Policy

The Talent Development Agency was established this year to ensure that writers and directors at all stages of their career would receive support and find a harbour for their talents. The WGI has played a part in shaping just how that might work in relation to screenwriters and the Director and Chair are part of an advisory group feedbacking to the agency.

Supporting Writers

Zebbies

The 14th Zebbie awards took place on November 3rd at the Sugar Club in Dublin. A celebration of the best in Irish performative writing, the live show was well attended in COVID compliant environment – a reflection perhaps of the desire to return to some sort of normal social interaction.



BAI/SSI courses

Thanks to the generous support of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and Screen Skills Ireland, WGI was able to host an extensive series of webinars and online mentorship schemes to support its members including events like 'Meet the TV Commissioners' and 'All About Agents'. We also ran informational briefings on the ECD and the Screen Ireland development process.

Supporting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Guild continues to advocate for policies and practices that promote inclusion and diversity. It ran a series of three workshops in Autumn 2021 supporting 12 Female screenwriters with webinars and mentorship. With funding from Screen Skills Ireland, we will in 2022 perform our first diversity audit and offering a number of membership bursaries to writers from underrepresented groups.