Education and Culture Committee

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

Professor Robin MacPherson

3/3/14

Dear colleagues

In my capacity as Director for the Institute for Creative Industries and Screen Academy Scotland at Edinburgh Napier University and as former film and television producer with 20 years experience in the sector I welcome the Committee's inquiry and the opportunity to comment in particular on some aspects of Theme 3, Broadcasting and Culture as they relate to the film and television sector.

'***The current capacity of Scottish producers, and whether any planning and investment would be required to increase opportunities for this sector***. '

Scotland's producers have over the past thirty years (especially since the opportunities afforded by the establishment of Channel 4, the subsequent expansion of the independent production sector and measures to devolve more programming from London and the South East to the rest of the UK) built up a significant track record in the production of high quality factual and documentary programming for all the major broadcast networks. While this has helped to slightly redress the 'balance of payments' deficit in both cultural and industrial terms there remain serious limitations on the sector's capacity to secure network commissions in genres such as drama and higher value specialist factual. These limitations are both a cause and effect of the structural weakness in access to finance/commissioning of the film and broadcast sector in Scotland, reinforced by the marginal political and policy-influencing position of Scotland across both television (BBC, Channel 4, ITV) and film (e.g. the British Film Institute or before it the UK Film Council)

In the event an SBS is established, to ensure the full range of genres that the Scottish audience has a right to expect from a national Public Service Broadcaster , the talent, skills and commercial base of the sector in Scotland will require specific investment to redress the historic imbalances which currently make us overwhelmingly dependent on 'imported' television (and film) to the detriment of audiences, producers and the wider workforce in Scotland and limited in our 'export' capacity to the rest of the UK.

Some useful sources on what needs to be done can be found in reports such as Growing the Television and Broadcast Production Sector in Scotland (2010) the Review of Broadcast and TV Production Incentive Finance for Scotland (2011) and, in relation to the particular connection between film production and television drama as part of a single ecology the Review of the Film Sector in Scotland (2014).

However none of these reports considers the specific requirements and dynamics of growing film and television production, broadcasting (and other distribution platforms), quality, audiences, exports, jobs or impact *in an independent country*. Nor do they address the potential impacts and costs/benefits/opportunities of a reconfigured (former) UK network broadcasting system, separate regulatory, tax and incentive systems or changes to the role and remits of public agencies whereby functions currently undertaken by the DCMS and BFI would revert to the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland etc.

There are undoubtedly some threats to Scotland's Broadcast and film ecology in the event of independence. The termination of Scottish access to current nations and regions quotas in the BBC for example and more broadly the potential downgrading of Scottish companies as newly 'foreign' competitors to RUK suppliers could precipitate a drop in sales to the currently critical network buyers which almost certainly only be partially compensated for by an upsurge in domestic commissioning which, in any case is likely to be at significantly lower budget-per-hour levels in most if not all genres. This very real short/medium term threat needs, however, to be seen in the context of the longer term opportunities as well as the more immediate benefits of a proper domestic distribution platform with a much more consistent commissioning profile. Though a fall-off in London-based commissioning is a definite risk, against that there is the opportunity for Scotland to be, in effect, a co-producing partner with RUK, particularly as Scotland will remain a significant audience/market for those broadcasters and advertisers.

Managing the transition to a new balance of power between London-based and Scottish Broadcasters in order to secure these longer terms benefits will therefore be critical to the sector's survival and work urgently needs to be undertaken to establish how best to achieve this. Funds to allow the SBS and/or Scottish based producers to deal with RUK commissioners as full co-production partners would an essential component in that.

The future of television drama in Scotland is particularly bound up with the future of the film sector which requires significant strategic investment if it is to reach the critical mass and secure the audience, economic and critical success that other similar sized European countries can and have secured (in addition to the Review of the Film Sector in Scotland cited above see Is bigger better? Film Success in Small Countries 2011). Television drama, particularly of the scale and ambition which can be exported worldwide, requires the same base of talent, skills, facilities and infrastructure that film does and, in Scotland as in other small countries, producers, crews and onscreen talent work across both for both practical and creative reasons. Beyond that, however, success in film almost invariably requires serious an sustained investment and support from one or more domestic broadcasters and so far Scotland has failed to secure a strong direct relationship between its local broadcasters and its film sector. This is of course partly because of the inherent weakness of the broadcasters, particularly the BBC, in having almost no autonomous budget to invest in film production and a parallel lack of influence on London-based investment decisions.

The range of measures that have been suggested to help grow the film sector in Scotland are, therefore, of equal significant to the development of both a culturally robust and economically 'exportable' television drama ecology and need to be seen as part a necessary intervention to address the uneven development of the entire screen sector over many decades.

'***The benefits that could derive to Scotland if its cultural and creative output were promoted more widely'***

'How new powers over the economy and an overseas diplomatic and trade network could encourage the Scottish cultural and creative sectors;'

Scotland stands to gain significantly from an enlarged, more diversified and more ambitious broadcasting and film sector, one that is able to reach more of both the domestic and global audience with more content in more ways. The limited capacity of our domestic screen economy has acted as an historic brake on the acquisition of experience, credibility and investment in precisely those programme areas which are central both to sustaining the cultural identify of a nation – film and television drama – *and* to projecting it externally to both cultural and economic ends. Reliance on access to UK television networks and UK financing sources for film as a route to accessing national and international audiences has deprived Scottish talent and businesses of the opportunity to grow and has reinforced the 'talent and skills' conveyor belt to London and further afield.

Although there are, and may continue to be, benefits to sharing a linguistic and structural 'umbrella' as part of a UK TV and film sector we need to distinguish between the benefits of shared promotion and marketing on a global stage with the drawback of being in a subordinate position in the creation of film and TV content in the first place. So for example for as long as we are dependent on UK broadcasters for a share of BBC/ITV/C4 network drama commissioning as the basis for ALL of our non-film drama output we will have no way to generate or co-produce content that is *not* subject to a London filter and *not* directly competing with other UK producers for a finite investment pot. Similarly if we are unable to secure investment in Scottish film without a UK broadcaster and or the British Film Institute we will remain subject to their tastes, industrial/talent development priorities etc.

A separate (but perfectly willing to co-operate with the 'RUK' where it is in our joint interests) international promotion effort would allow a future increasingly 'full service' Scottish film and TV sector to attract both international audience and investor awareness and interest in the output, talent, skills, infrastructure and support on offer from enabling bodies (SBS, Creative Scotland, Film Offices etc). Scotland cannot rely on even the friendliest of partner countries to promote our national/sect oral interests in front of theirs.   Whether promoting the work of Scottish talent and companies overseas or attracting inward investment productions a distinct effort is required to ensure our offer is not sidelined or drowned out. This isn't to say we cannot work cooperatively with the rest f the UK or indeed other European countries where appropriate.

Fiscal measures including tax reliefs and direct incentives to produce in or co-produce with Scotland will have a major role to play in growth of film and television to the cultural and economic benefit of our citizens. This is amply demonstrated by Ireland whose screen ecology was very similar to Scotland's in the 1980s but has been transformed through a mix of interventions including the revived Irish Film Board and the succession of tax incentives and strategic investments that have helped grow the scale and success of Irish film over the past twenty five years, helped by a clear and visible presence across international markets, festivals and through joined up promotional work via embassies and consulates. We do however need to beware a 'race to the bottom' and to ensure that the regime put in place is both sustainable and compliant with EU State Aid regulations for example.

That said one of the advantages of an independent Scotland is that it would finally be able to assert the case for its undoubted 'lower audiovisual capacity' which being part of the UK has in recent times put it at a disadvantage compared to e.g. Ireland in a number of areas (e.g. the points system used by the EU MEDIA programme to determine relative priority for support)

Particularly in relation to the RUK but also the rest of the world attention needs to be paid to establishing a co-production treaty or similar agreement to encourage and facilitate both film and high-end television production across the new border, allied to what one would expect to be in place in terms of tax and other production incentives on offer from the Scottish Government.

'How Scottish cultural bodies currently work together with their counterpart bodies in the rest of the UK, and whether this relationship may change'

Setting aside the broadcasters (See above) the main cultural institutions acting in support of film and TV in Scotland are Creative Scotland and the British Film Institute. Both are in the relatively early stages of developing (Creative Scotland) or implementing (BFI) their policies and strategy for the moving image. In that context the relationship between the two is in any case very much a work in progress but clearly needs to address concerns across the moving image sector regarding their respective and in most areas overlapping responsibilities.

The BFI is widely considered, in Scotland (and indeed in non-metropolitan parts of England and Wales) not to take sufficient account of our distinct structures, needs or resources and expertise. It is perceived to operate an overly top-down approach to developing and implementing strategy and to treat organisations it works with more as sources of finance, support and delivery channels rather than as genuine partners. The Governance of the BFI has, in respect of Scotland, significantly deteriorated in recent years and, unlike the BBC for example, it has no formal mechanism for taking account of Scottish views beyond its relatively informal links with Creative Scotland and Scottish Ministers. It has not as far as I am aware ever being called to give evidence to a committee of the Scottish Parliament for example.

Whether or not independence for Scotland is secured, the respective roles of Creative Scotland and the BFI require clarification as it would be naïve to assume that across production, education, exhibition, skills, heritage etc. there is or will always be an identity of interests or priorities. The BFI needs to be able to differentiate between the distinct needs of different parts of the current UK more effectively and, likewise, Creative Scotland but also the wider moving image community in Scotland needs to be in a stronger position to assert those needs and influence the BFI's policy and strategy.

Given the possibility of independence much greater thought needs to be given to the extent, and practicalities of transferring BFI responsibilities and resources to Scotland including an appraisal of those that might be shared in a cross-border fashion.

I would be happy to enlarge on any of these points should you find that useful.

Yours sincerely

Prof. Robin MacPherson FRSA| Director | **Institute for Creative Industries** and **Screen Academy Scotland (A Creative Skillset Film Academy)**| Edinburgh Napier blog:
www.robinmacpherson.wordpress.com
Institute website: www.napier.ac.uk/randkt/creativeindustries/Pages/InstituteforCreativeIndustries.aspx

Academy website: www.screenacademyscotland.ac.uk