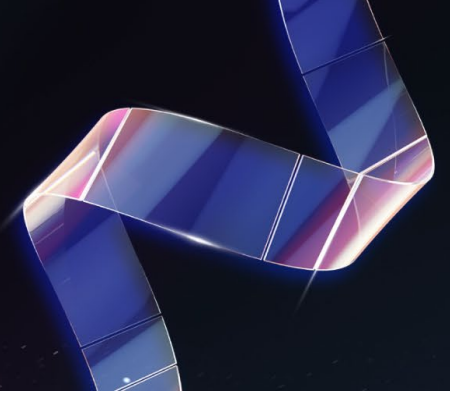




Fís Éireann
Screen Ireland

Submission to the Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight



Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland Opening Statement

7th October 2022

Cathaoirleach and committee members, thank you for inviting us here today. My name is Désirée Finnegan, Chief Executive of Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland and I am joined by Teresa McGrane, Deputy CEO and Gareth Lee, Head of Skills & Professional Development.

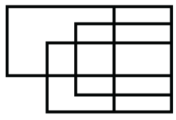
Screen Ireland is the national agency for the Irish film, TV drama, animation, documentary, shorts and visual effects industry. The agency works closely with industry stakeholders and creative teams to fund and assist Irish projects from early stage development through to production, distribution, marketing and exhibition. Screen Ireland is responsible for promoting the expression of national Irish culture on screen and developing skills across the sector.

In recent years, there has been extensive growth in both local and international production. From 2019 to 2021, local Irish feature film activity increased by 52% and local TV drama production spend increased by 40%. Irish animation also demonstrated a further increase in 2021, following a decade of rapid growth that resulted in record-breaking production levels. Last year, Screen Ireland-funded projects earned over 35 major international award nominations, including Academy Award, Emmy and BAFTA nominations.

Screen Ireland has a dual remit and is also responsible for attracting foreign direct investment to Ireland in the form of international production, in line with the Government's Audio Visual Action Plan ambition to make Ireland a global centre of excellence for production.

Ireland is already a recognised leader globally in animation with approx. 2,500 people currently employed across 42 studios, according to Animation Ireland. Ireland has also become a world-class visual effects hub for large scale projects. Screen Ireland welcomed the opportunity to showcase this sector's work on a trade mission to Los Angeles with Minister Catherine Martin TD.

National Irish language cinema has also been redefined in recent years. In the middle of an intensely difficult time for cinemas and the cinema-going experience, an Irish-language film broke domestic



box office records, reaching a diverse audience across many different generations. It created a cultural sensation at home and abroad and is now the Irish entry for the Academy Awards. As a result of the Cine4 scheme and Section 481, we now have more Irish-language feature films being produced than ever before, ensuring that Irish filmmakers' voices can be heard as Gaelge as well as in English.

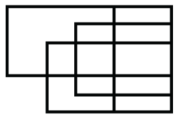
The Section 481 tax incentive for film and television production has been part of public policy in Ireland for more than three decades and we have provided a written submission with further detail on the importance of the credit to the sector. It exists to stimulate and support the local indigenous industry and it also attracts high-end international production to Ireland.

Section 481 supports live-action film and TV production, animation production, creative documentary, post-production and visual effects, supporting both creative endeavour and employment across all these sectors. The credit is administered by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. In March 2019, Screen Ireland was asked by the Department to take on a new role to develop and then oversee a new process for tracking training and skills development opportunities on Section 481 funded projects, which is a requirement of the tax credit.

This was a new departure for the agency, providing an opportunity for Screen Ireland to introduce a more structured approach to work-based learning and skills tracking, making Ireland the first country in the world to link such a formal skills tracking process to a tax credit.

Since the introduction of this new system, Screen Ireland has assessed over 160 skills development plans and have tracked over 1,700 skills participants across Section 481 productions. As well as the skills development aspect of the plan, producers are also encouraged to introduce both Sustainability initiatives and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives on their productions. This has seen significant positive change within the sector.

The value of the Section 481 skills process to Ireland's film production sector is significant. It ensures that formality and structure is given to training. It also gives reliable frontline data on the key skills shortages and gaps that are being experienced on the ground. This in turn allows the sector to ensure that there is a pipeline of skilled talent to support both local and incoming production in a sustainable way.



In 2022, Screen Ireland in collaboration with Screen Guilds of Ireland, launched a new Competency Framework that captures all of the skills, knowledge and competencies for over 80 crew roles across 17 different departments. This resource enhances the Section 481 skills tracking process, opens up access and career progression routes within the sector, and supports third level institutions and training providers with more targeted and relevant curriculum development.

The next evolution is the development of a certification/accreditation model for work-based learning, including micro-credentials and Screen Ireland has already started working closely with third level partners and industry on this.

In order to improve workplace culture, Screen Ireland has developed two new online, self-led programmes on Bullying and Harassment and Unconscious Bias that those working on Section 481 productions will be requested to complete. These new programmes are also included as part of Safe To Create, a new collaborative programme aiming to provide safe and respectful working conditions for those working in the wider arts and creative sectors that was recently announced by Minister Catherine Martin TD.

Screen Ireland works very closely with industry stakeholders and is dedicated to doing everything possible to ensure fair opportunities for all. Before the end of this year, the agency will launch a new Crew and Services Database for the sector that will help increase visibility of employment opportunities and access points for all to the industry. Everyone already working in the industry and any new entrants will be able to self-register on the database and indicate if they are available and seeking work. Producers and companies will also be able to register on the site, search for crew and advertise opportunities centrally.

As evidenced above, a huge amount of positive work in relation to skills and workforce development has happened in the screen sector in Ireland over the last few years. This progress has either been directly related to Section 481 or inspired by the Section 481 skills requirement. Screen Ireland is proud of the work to date and the positive outcomes and impact of the new Section 481 skills process and we are keen to see even further progress in the years to come.

We would like to thank the Committee for their work on the Film Credit and look forward to discussing further and answering any questions the members might have.

Go raibh maith agaibh.