

Volume 9, 2021-22

Research Paper:

Prominent careers and Irish screen policy

RUTH BARTON AND DENIS MURPHY

Summary:

This study examines career construction in the Irish screen industries, and the implications for policy makers.

Key words: 'Ireland'; 'Screen industries'; 'careers'

Abstract

Drawing on recent empirical research, we examine career construction among prominent Irish film and television drama workers. Our emphasis is on gender; state patronage; the role of networks; and the necessity to supplement incomes, all of which are observed to impact on building and maintaining screen industry careers. We locate our research within international studies of careers in the screen industries and locally within Irish studies, where the research emphasis has been on gender, notably female, equality. By identifying the key stages in career construction in the screen industries, we suggest how future policy interventions might be staged so as to intervene earlier in the career cycle. We draw on Clive Nwonka's (2021) distinction between *empowering* interventions and *transformative* policies to distinguish between proposals that generally improve the career opportunities of those currently underrepresented in the screen industries and those that specifically implement policies around hiring.

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1. Introduction

The creative screen industry showcases an imaginative and authentic Ireland. This vibrant, valuable industry needs to be more accessible to people from different backgrounds and regions, so that the full breadth of contemporary Ireland benefits and is represented (Susan Bergin, Chair, Screen Ireland).¹

This paper asks how careers are constructed in Irish film and television drama production, hereafter referred to as the screen industry.² Our aim is to illuminate how screen policy might address the key entry points into the industry and to emphasise the fact that subsidies play such an important part in career construction that those who provide those subsidies can call the tune. We commence our discussion with an overview of existing Irish screen policy, specifically that aimed at career development and fostering inclusivity. We place this within wider arguments around careers in the screen industries, drawing on existing research from other territories. We extrapolate the relevant findings from the Ecologies of Cultural Production (Barton and Murphy, 2020) project, a detailed data-driven survey of career construction in three sectors of the creative industries in Ireland: film, television drama and theatre.³ We conclude by considering what, in the light of our findings, an effective policy might look like.

Screen policy and screen careers

Screen policy, as expressed through the functions of the national film agency Screen Ireland (SI), is concerned with 'the making of films in the State and the development of an industry in the State for the

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making of films', as well as the 'expression of national culture through the medium of film-making' (Irish Film Board Act, 1980, s4).⁴ These broad goals require production factors like studio facilities, financial incentives, and well trained screen professionals: film crews, technicians, actors, producers, writers, directors and many other roles. The subset of screen policies that applies to nurturing and developing these careers, including access to work in the screen industries in the first place, is the main focus of this paper. This policy emanates from a number of stakeholders including SI, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), individual broadcasters and production companies, and indeed the framers of the tax incentives that drive much industry activity.

As Screen Ireland chairperson Susan Bergin underlines in the introductory quote, the task of representing 'an imaginative and authentic Ireland' depends on the inclusion and participation of 'the full breadth of contemporary Ireland'. Bergin's statement is interesting in its reflection of the new turn in screen policy outlined below. In the past, particularly in the period following the 1993 revision of the Section 481 tax incentive and the re-establishment of the Irish Film Board (now Screen Ireland), success was measured in financial terms. Successive reports by bodies such as IBEC (the Irish Business and Employers Confederation), Indecon (2011) and Olsberg (2017) emphasised the economic impact of investment in Irish screen industries, not just in terms of direct employment but also indirect benefits, notably in the hospitality sectors.⁵ In this neo-liberal climate, making a career was the responsibility of the individual, and winners rose to the top.

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Since then, the shift to considering wellbeing in the arts, both in terms of the working lives of artists and the benefits of engaging with the arts, has put pressure on policy-makers to reframe how the arts and culture are evaluated. At the same time, the EDI (Equality, Diversity, Inclusivity) agenda has drawn attention to the need to broaden participation in the arts (for both producers and consumers) and in terms of representation. The bodies charged with these tasks are outlined below.

Screen Ireland (SI)

As the agency charged with developing the industry, Screen Ireland disperses public money (over €32 million in 2022) through a variety of development and production loans, funding programmes and other initiatives. SI is also directly involved with training and career development activities through Screen Skills Ireland, the formerly separate training agency it absorbed in 2018 (SI, 2019). As a major funding and training agency, SI is an important regulator of industry entry and progression. Following criticisms about gender inequality in the aftermath of the 'Waking the Feminists' movement in 2015, SI (then known as the Irish Film Board) published a *Six Point Plan on Gender Equality*, its first major commitment to promoting diversity in the industry by addressing the underrepresentation of women filmmakers, including the low number of funding applicants. Under the plan, the IFB committed to monitoring inequalities in its own programmes and publishing gender-related data on a regular basis. It also committed to raising awareness of diversity and equality throughout the industry and addressing issues through education, training and mentorship initiatives (SI, 2022).

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The IFB further committed in its 2016-2020 strategic plan, *Building on Success*, to achieving 50/50 gender equality (IFB, 2016), which has yet to be achieved based on the latest published statistics which are for 2019 (SI, undated). In its current strategy, *Building for a Creative Future 2024*, Screen Ireland extends its diversity objectives beyond gender, aiming to place diversity, equality and inclusion 'at the core' of its industry development activities (SI, 2020, p. 17).

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI)

In a somewhat similar fashion to the SI developments, the BAI adopted in its 2017-2019 strategy document an objective to 'foster a media landscape that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society' with a pledge to make the Irish audiovisual landscape 'more diverse' (in both content and in production personnel) by 2019 (BAI, 2017). Subsequently, its 2018 *BAI Gender Action Plan* responded to a Council of Europe recommendation that member states adopt gender equality measures, pledging action in four areas: data collection, research, encouraging gender initiatives both internally and with external stakeholders, and accountable monitoring/reporting. Applicants to the BAI's Sound and Vision fund, which supports film and television drama as well as other television and radio content, were required to supply gender data relating to key creatives – clearly signalling to screen industry applicants that gender equality would be a factor in determining funding outcomes (BAI, 2018, p. 2-3).

Raidio Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)

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Among broadcasters, RTÉ published a Diversity and Inclusion Charter in 2018, pledging to ensure that content reflected a 'fair and authentic representation of gender, age, social experience, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disability, civil and family status, religious beliefs and membership of the Traveller community' (RTÉ, 2018, p. 4). As much RTÉ content is produced outside of the organisation by the independent sector, the Charter pledged to 'review' commissioning procedures with Diversity and Inclusion in mind, as well as committing to increasing representations of 'persons from a non-Irish background' and the LGBTI community (RTÉ, 2018, p. 6).

Section 481 (S481)

Finally, the Section 481 tax incentive, as a major pillar of screen funding in Ireland, is also relevant to screen careers. While a detailed analysis of EU state aid rules is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to underline that S481 supports (along with public funds distributed by Screen Ireland and the BAI) are all subject to scrutiny by EU regulators as potential anti-competitive measures with the capacity to distort the marketplace by conferring advantage on some firms over others. Such measures are generally prohibited under Article 107 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) unless exempted in the interest of 'general economic development' (European Commission, 2016). This exemption provides the logic behind Screen Ireland's remit to develop the industry as well as fund individual projects, the latter considered an important measure in achieving the former. To that end, S481 is specifically exempted from EU state aid rules subject to the producer's ability to demonstrate that the film will *either or both*:

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1. be of importance to the promotion, development and enhancement of the national culture including, where applicable, the Irish language (referred to as ‘the Culture test’) and
2. act as an effective stimulus to film making in the State through among other things, the provisions of quality employment and training and skills development opportunities (referred to as ‘the Industry development test’) (DHCG, 2019, p. 3).

It is clear from this policy statement that most big-budget incoming film and TV drama projects, with little or no connection to the national culture, qualify for their funding through their capacity for industry development rather than their cultural content and that, specifically, quality employment and training/development opportunities MUST be present. This is the clearest expression of career development requirements in Irish screen policy. Producers receiving Section 481 tax credits are normally required to employ one trainee (or ‘skills development participant’) for every £177,500 of tax credit received, with a detailed skills development plan provided for each participant (DHCG, 2019, p. 11-12). It is worth noting that the requirement to have a skills plan in place was only introduced in 2019, following allegations that trainees were not being properly treated on some productions (Murphy, 2019, p. 321). Clearly, access to these skills development opportunities, especially on large-scale prestigious projects, can have an impact on industry access and career development and should be of major interest to industry researchers.

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While policy objectives and outcomes are not the same thing, this section has listed some of the major career-related policy measures, all of whom have the capacity to impact on industry careers in terms of both quality employment and access to employment, especially for groups that have been underrepresented traditionally. It is striking how recent the above policy interventions have been, too recent in many cases for detailed evaluations of their effectiveness to have been carried out – an important area for future screen industry research. We also note the recent (April 2022) launch of the Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme (BIA), in response to calls from the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce (2020; See O'Brien and Clancy, 2022, this volume). Some screen workers were eligible to apply for the pilot scheme (Murphy, 2022).

2. Rationale for this study

Our research was devised to align with international studies of career-making in the screen industries and the wider Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) workforce. Much of this has focused on issues of casualisation in the screen industries (Christopherson, 2008; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008; Ross, 2008). Critics of industry structures emphasise the less desirable aspects of freelance creative work, where income insecurity undermines life-planning, and can expose the worker to exploitation (e.g. Christopherson, 2008; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Ross, 2008). Others have written on the barriers women, particularly those with caring responsibilities, face to entry into a career in the sector (Berridge, 2019; Dent, 2019; Jones and Pringle, 2015). Another evident barrier to enabling a diverse workforce in the

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CCI is the long-established practice of informal networking, which is likely to exclude women and minorities (Hesmondhaigh and Baker, 2011; O'Brien 2014). A growing body of research is dedicated to issues of EDI in the screen industries (Malik, 2013; Nwonka, 2015, 2020). And it is now widely understood that:

Once primarily a proxy for race, the term 'diversity' has broadened and now draws attention to the wider socio-demographic characteristics of both film and television audiences and those who work in the industries (Newsinger and Eikhof, 2020, p. 47-8).

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Taken together, these writings have consistently drawn attention to the structural inequalities in CCI where the perception of this as being a young, 'cool' industry has distracted attention from its hiring practices and its exclusion of individuals based on gender, class, and racial or geographical identity (Gill, 2002). Yet as most writers recognise, it is also an industry with an immense allure whose product reaches vast swathes of the population.

Irish-based research

Interview-based research into employment and career-construction in the Irish screen industries remains under-developed. To date it has been largely focused on gender, and specifically women's participation in the workforce, with much of this research being qualitative – examining policy documents and interrogating institutional policy. It is also notable that those few academics who have been working in this area have also been actively engaged as campaigners, chief amongst them Susan Liddy.⁶ Others have long critiqued the under-representation of women and the wider Irish population in Irish screen narratives (Barton, 2004, 2017, 2019). Liddy has discussed how the

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impetus for this campaigning work arose out of the local 'Waking the Feminists' movement and was linked to the international #MeToo campaign (Liddy, 2020a). As a result of pressure from Liddy and others, Screen Ireland introduced incentives (see above) to increase female participation in the Irish film industry. This resulted, she writes, in

something of a breakthrough. Production funding decisions with female directors attached increased to 36% and with female screenwriters attached rose to 45%. Greater numbers of women were starting to apply [for funding], suggestive, perhaps, of a cycle being broken (ibid., p. 86).

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In terms of interview-based research, Anne O'Brien's (2014) study of women's reasons for leaving employment in the Irish screen industries identified issues such as: masculine practices of long working hours, prejudices around pregnancy and motherhood, prejudices around skills, low pay, and exclusion from informal networks. This was echoed in O'Brien and Liddy's (2020) analysis of the challenges that mothers faced in the Irish film and television industries, with the authors concluding that:

there is a systemic bias against mothers in film and television production work in Ireland and that mothers articulate subjectivities that have internalized their marginality and so see the status quo as inevitable (ibid., p. 2006).

Liddy's (2020b) analysis of women in the film industry, based on research conducted after the introduction of Screen Ireland's Six Point Plan recognised that the early promise of the scheme (above) had not delivered tangible change. Women she interviewed spoke of the

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disincentives of working in a masculinist culture, their own self-doubt, a lack of transparency in the assessment processes of scripts, resistance to scripts about women (particularly older women), and exclusion from male/class-based networks.

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Páraic Kerrigan and O'Brien's (2020) study of gay and lesbian sexual identity in media work in Ireland identified Irish screen production as overwhelmingly heteronormative and often hostile to LGBTQ+ workers. This led to problems around disclosure, bias, harassment and (inappropriate) humour, but was somewhat mitigated by the formation of gay networks and friendships. By contrast, the report *Auditing Gender & Diversity Change in Irish Media Sectors* (Kerrigan et al., 2021) found that managers in both the TV production sector and independent sectors were very positive around EDI, if often recognising that issues of time and lack of funding impeded them from implementing the relevant measures, suggesting that management's attitude has not always filtered through to the general workforce.

Our own research findings, detailed below, dovetail with this work in several ways. Firstly, we recognise that its limitations (a relatively small group of 'successful', above-the-line workers) cannot be extrapolated to the entire industry or to the international industries. However, we propose that, by outlining how a successful career in the Irish TV and screen industries is constructed, we can determine the key stages at which interventions in this process could be made to widen access and support those currently excluded (by gender, ethnicity, social

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background, geography) who wish to pursue such a career and whose participation would, in turn, benefit these industries. We also note that international research equally cannot be brought to bear on Irish employment conditions in the screen industries and that more research is urgently needed in this sector. We bear in mind Nwonka's (2021, p. 433) critique of Newsinger and Eikhof's (2020) definitions of *empowering interventions*:

that, through training, mentoring and skills acquisition, seek to remedy a perceived deficit within excluded social groups to satisfy the performative demands of the sector that continues to deny entry; and *transformative interventions* that suggest a willingness by cultural policy makers to produce an impact at the institutional level to cultivate a more habitable industrial culture for underrepresented identities.

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As Nwonka notes, *empowering* interventions may land the onus on underrepresented identities to acquire a certain set of skills that will 'guarantee' them employment, and thus *transformative* policies from policy makers are crucial to ensuring change. In our conclusions, we propose a 'symbiotic' model such as Nwonka advocates for (ibid.). Such a model would acknowledge the importance of access to training and educational opportunities while emphasising that the industry's reliance on state funding demonstrates where the policy decisions must be made.

Research design

To analyse how Irish screen workers build and develop successful careers, we chose a sample of occupations (actors, writers, directors) and compiled a database of Irish individuals who had acquired what we termed 'prominence'. Prominence was determined by winning a major Irish film and television drama award or achieving a nomination for

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certain major international film and television industry awards.⁷ The resulting list comprised 86 individuals receiving a total of 179 awards or nominations. Many were multiple winners, and several had won awards in more than one occupational category. As both male and female lead actor categories were included, the sample comprised considerably more actors (44) than writers (20) and directors (29). Figure 1 summarises these numbers, illustrating the extent of the overlapping occupations.⁸

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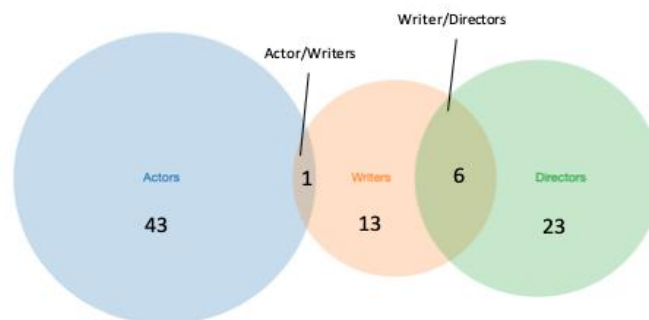


Figure 1: Total sample (n=86) by award occupation

All 86 creative workers were approached, either directly via email or indirectly through their agent. 46 responses (53% of the sample) were received, and 30 of these (35%) agreed to be interviewed either in person or via telephone or video/audio conferencing software.⁹ This represents a relatively high response rate, comparing favourably with similar research elsewhere.¹⁰ Interviews were structured via a set of interviewer questions (provided in advance) designed to elicit information in several broad areas. All interviews were carried out in

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2019 by the same researcher, face to face in an informal coffee shop setting if possible.

We were particularly interested in the extent to which state funding and state-funded film and TV productions had contributed to career progression. Building on studies elsewhere, we also probed the role of education and networks in professional development. Anecdotally aware that career prominence does not necessarily align with financial success, we explored the relevance of paid supplementary work. We were also interested, given recent efforts to create additional funding opportunities for women (responding to the activism outlined above), in exploring the role played by gender in career construction.

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All interview data was coded, anonymised and collated into an Excel database for analysis. In the case of the 56 individuals not interviewed, it was possible to generate a second dataset through analysis of media interviews, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), and other information in the public domain. This second dataset was naturally more limited in scope but was nevertheless useful in addressing some questions. Where relevant, we distinguish between each of these datasets.¹¹

As the original research project from which this study is derived also covered prominent theatre workers, it was possible to delineate the degree of overlap among these sectors. Of the prominent film/TV drama actors, writers and directors identified, just over a quarter were also prominent in the theatre sector. Actors, of whom almost 40% had awards or significant nominations in both sectors, were most likely to demonstrate this dual prominence. A quarter of writers were dually

prominent, but no directors. This clearly points to a lack of mobility between stage and screen, perhaps resulting in fewer employment opportunities, for directors.

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Figure 2 provides further information on the activities of the total sample in terms of stated occupation, which is not necessarily limited to the role for which an individual won an award, e.g. some prominent actors also work as (non-prominent) directors or writers. As Figure 2 illustrates, there is a large element of ‘multitasking’ among actors, writers, and directors – especially between the latter two occupations. Indeed, six individuals (7%) pursue all three occupations. While this phenomenon needs further investigation, it perhaps reflects the value, in a precarious career environment, of having a range of skills. It may also highlight structural anomalies in the financial ecosystem, such as a preference for funding writers to direct their own work.



Figure 2: Total Sample (n=86) by stated occupation

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It is important to stress that the prominent workers participating in the survey were all 'above-the-line' workers. While the thirty individuals interviewed, and the additional 56 for which it was possible to gather partial information, provided a rich dataset for analysis, a limitation of our approach is that our findings cannot be justifiably extrapolated to the entire workforce in this sector. Less prominent but equally competent workers may not have had the same formative experiences. Career paths for other occupations, particularly 'below-the-line' jobs, may be very different. Finally, as some interviewees noted, achieving prominence can itself lead to further roles, lucrative opportunity, and even greater prominence:

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[By] working with a major, highly regarded network, and the length of the contract – 3 years – I could live off that alone, pay off debts... Because it was so successful, people want to cast [you]. This is about castability, being able to say, 'We have people from [Series Name] in this'. Lots of offers after that. Marketability, castability – people want actors like that in their [project], makes it seem more valid (Actor A, male, 51).

As one of the first survey-based research projects of this type in the Republic of Ireland, and certainly the most comprehensive in terms of the size of the resulting datasets, this study should be seen as laying groundwork for further enquiry into creative labour in Ireland. We hope future studies will address some of the limitations identified above. Nevertheless, we do believe the findings make an important contribution to understanding the career development strategies of prominent workers, with valuable implications for cultural policymakers.

3. Findings

Gender

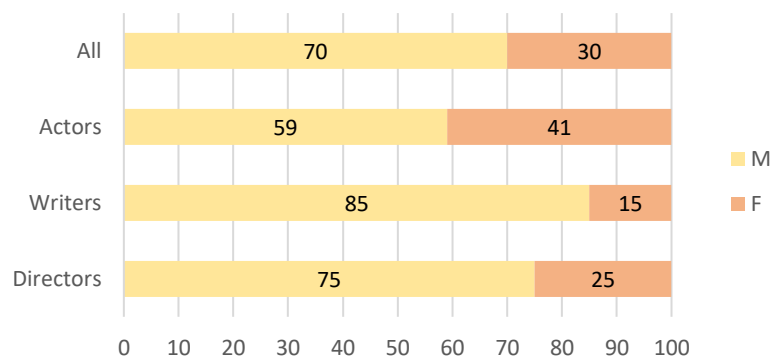


Figure 3: Occupation by gender (n=86)

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It is important to acknowledge that our definition of prominence meant that any gender, class, ethnicity or other imbalances present in the relevant screen awards systems were likely to be replicated in our sample. No measures were taken to correct for this imbalance. As the Irish Film and Television Academy (IFTA); the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA); and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences ('Oscars') are peer award systems, any bias in their selection procedures serves to present an authentic reflection of how the industry, and the people who constitute it, choose to bestow prestige (Lincoln, 2007). While there is evidence that awards systems have been examining their procedures with a view to increasing diversity (e.g. *Guardian*, 2020), it is unlikely that these very recent interventions would have had a noticeable effect on our survey.

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The resulting sample is thus highly gendered, at 70% male (Figure 3). Unexpectedly, despite considering an equal number of male and female actor award categories, even this actor subsample is male dominated, at 59%. This is partly due to the number of women actors receiving multiple awards: 10 in one case, far more than any male actors. This finding suggests a greater diversity of roles for men. It also indicates that fewer prominent women emerge from the talent development ecosystems. This is especially so for directors and writers. These occupations are very highly gendered: prominent writers and directors are overwhelmingly male. The extent to which these differences result from biased award selection procedures, or from unequal access to the filmmaking apparatus itself, is not immediately clear. It *is* clear, however, that recent policy changes aimed at increasing gender diversity, like Screen Ireland's measures to enhance funding opportunities for women filmmakers, have yet to impact meaningfully on the talent pool.

Any additional gender differences emerging are covered in the sections below.

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Education and early training

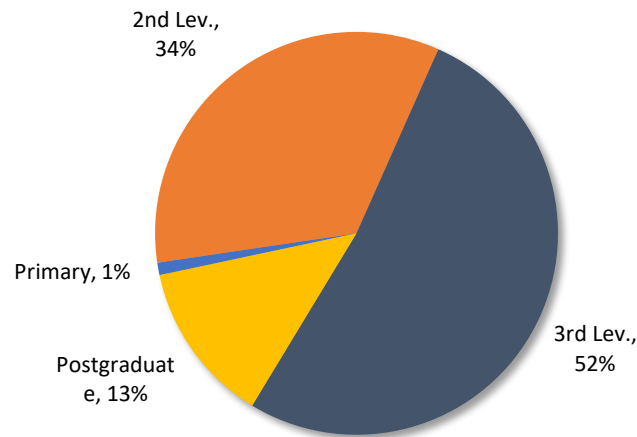


Figure 4: Formal education: highest level achieved (n=77)

As Figure 4 shows, about two thirds of prominent creatives have a third-level degree or higher, well above the national average of 42% (CSO, 2017). Breaking these figures down by main occupation (not shown in the chart) reveals some differences. Directors are very highly educated: almost two thirds possess a third level degree, and a further 28% have a postgraduate degree. While only about half of all prominent actors attended college, this is still above the national average.

The research therefore confirms that prominent Irish creative workers are very well educated, echoing findings in other local and international surveys of the creative sector more generally (e.g. Gill, 2002; PWC, 2008).

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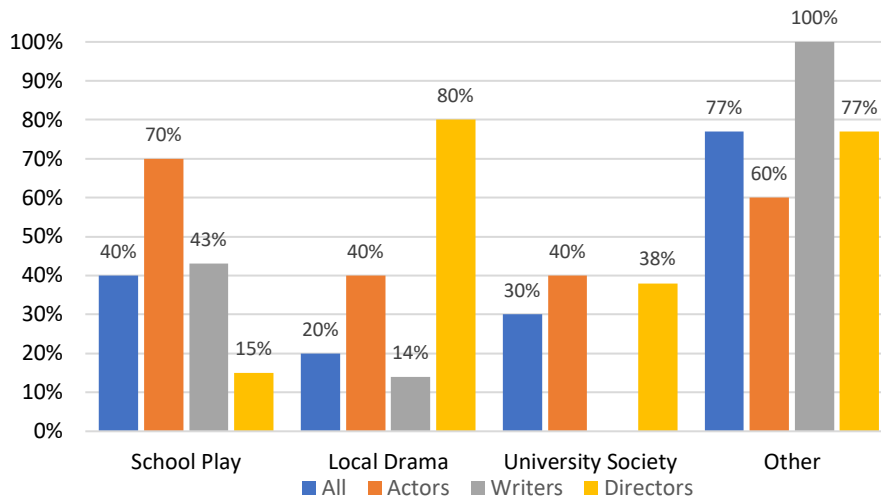


Figure 5: First exposure to theatre/filmmaking (n=30)

Figure 5 illustrates early participation in drama. School plays are an important introduction to performance, especially for actors. University film and theatre societies are also important formative environments, especially for directors. As discussed below, these societies provide opportunities to build lifelong networks. Many other early exposure factors were cited. Some talked of a sympathetic home environment (perhaps through parental interest). Access to cameras and other filmmaking equipment also proved motivational, underlining the importance of early hands-on experiences:

I worked in [a psychiatric hospital]... and when I was leaving, I remember there was a small little super-8 camera that was hidden in the back of a wardrobe, that hadn't been touched in 25 years, and I stole that camera, knowing that it would never be used by anybody there (Writer/director B, male, 49).

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State patronage

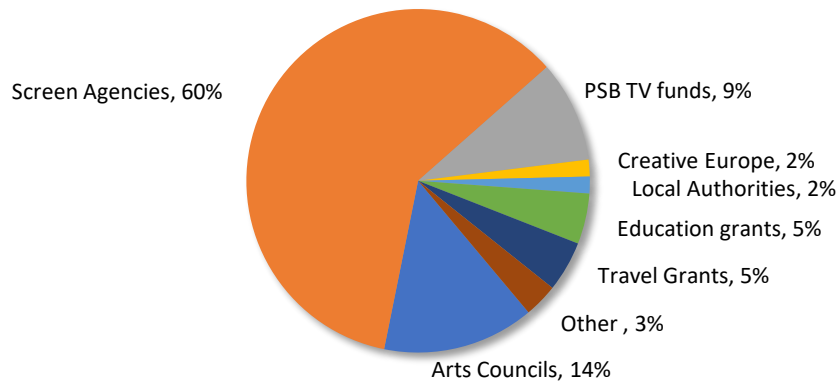


Figure 6: Public funding – major sources contributing to career development (n=30)

Perhaps the most notable survey finding is that four out of five prominent film and TV drama creatives have benefitted during their careers – particularly at early and mid-career stage – from direct grants or subsidy. As Figure 6 shows, the most cited sources of such funding were national arts councils, screen funding agencies, and public service broadcasters (predominantly in Ireland, but also in the UK). Public funding is highly prized by prominent creatives, the vast majority declaring it highly important for building their careers. Private arts funding (e.g. private TV commissions, corporate sponsorship, crowd funding, individual investors) proved far less important. Funding amounts were small, and less than half of those interviewed benefitted from such sources.

It is interesting to see the career importance of public funding confirmed when this question was looked at in another way. Those we

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interviewed were asked to name the three ‘breakthrough’ projects or events most important for launching and progressing their careers. These projects were subsequently categorised, as presented in Figure 7.

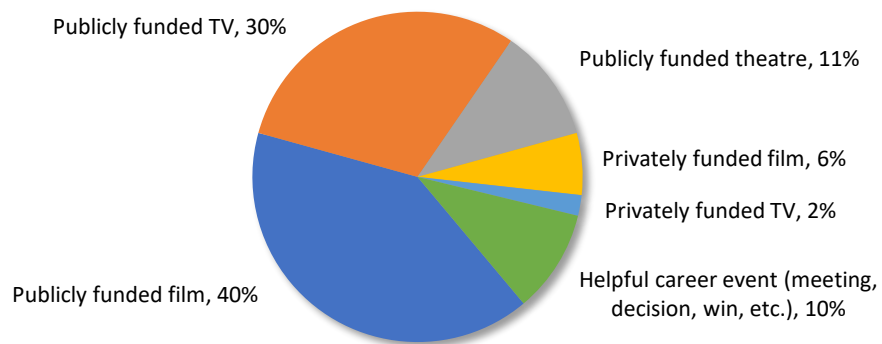


Figure 7: Career breakthroughs classified by type (n=30)

Public funding underlies more than 80% of the breakthroughs named. While film and television projects accounted for more than two thirds of these, theatre also emerges as an important career launchpad. Stressing the importance of stage productions financed by the Arts Council and other public sources, one actor said:

Subsidised theatre is where people cut their teeth. It’s where we get our writers and directors and actors growing and being dangerous. Without subsidised theatre, you don’t get Mark O’Rowe, you don’t discover Cillian Murphy. Subsidised theatre is like the labour ward for film and TV (Actor C, female, 42).

Private funding enabled only a small fraction of projects listed, highlighting the vital centrality of public subsidy to building prominent

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careers. It also demonstrates how the theatre industry cross-subsidises the film and TV drama sectors.

Supplementary work

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I got paid 12 grand for writing and directing [Irish film]. That takes three years of your life. Four grand a year. People on welfare are better off than you. Meanwhile you're travelling around the world, you're winning awards, and you're literally the poorest person in the cinema. If they weren't giving food for free, you wouldn't be eating. That's the reality (Writer/director B, male, 49).

Interviewees were not directly asked about income, as this might have deterred participation. The extent to which respondents could survive via their primary occupations alone was approached indirectly, by asking about supplementary work undertaken in the previous 12 months. Even among the prominent creatives surveyed, the importance of this 'non-core' activity is apparent. Of the 30 individuals interviewed, 13 (43%) had recently worked outside their core occupation. This supplementary work tended to be significant: nine individuals reported that it took up 40% or more of paid time.¹² Overall, non-core supplementary work represented 21% of all paid time worked (Figure 8).

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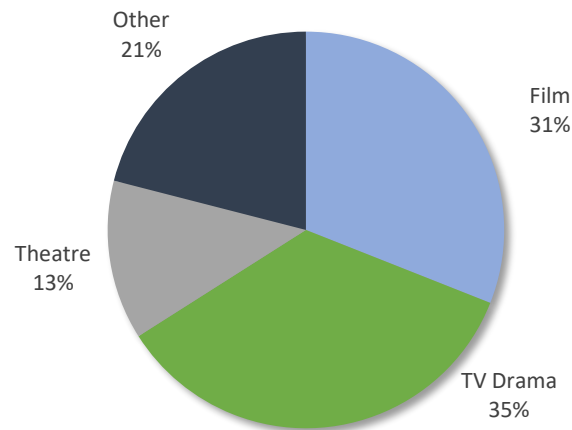


Figure 8: Proportion of paid time worked in different sectors (n=30)

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Considering different supplementary paid activities, the advertising industry emerged as the most financially important (Figure 9). As one actor told us:

I was offered [a prominent role in the Abbey Theatre] and I turned down the job and a tour of America because I was the voiceover for [a major supermarket chain] and I was afraid I might lose the gig. I'm still shocked that I did that.... But it was so lucrative, I just couldn't afford not to do it. I didn't know how long it was going to go on for, so [I thought], 'I have to make hay now' (Actor D, female, 49).

The next most common sources of non-core work were education and training, working on music videos, and working in related occupations (e.g. an actor working as a TV narrator, etc.).

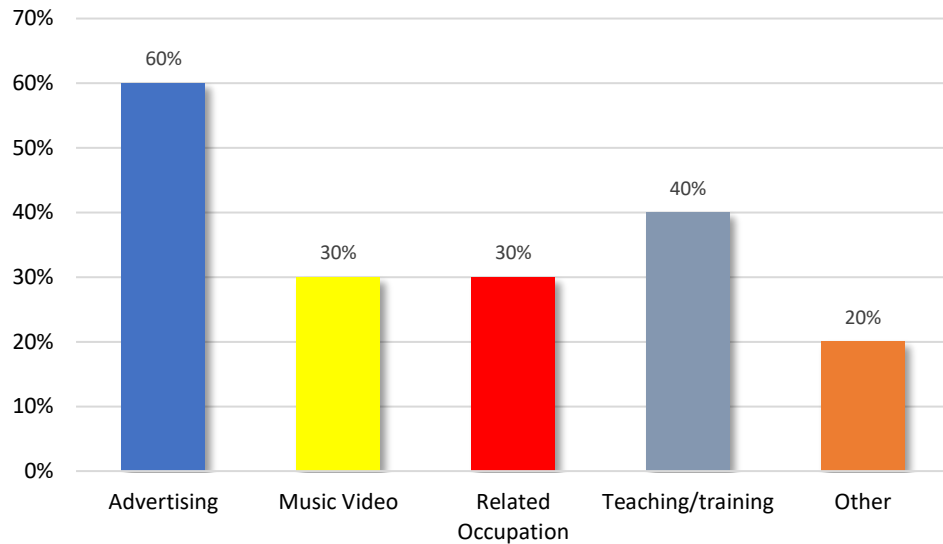


Figure 9: Relative importance of supplementary work (n=30)

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There are two ways to gauge the significance of such work – its importance to the overall sector, and its importance to the individuals concerned. We have chosen the former, to better illustrate how it subsidises cultural work. Interviewees were asked to specify the extent to which they relied on this work to make a living. Figure 10 illustrates the findings. Directors are most dependent and writers the least. Men depend on it more, but the gap is not large, and the difference might be explained by other gender imbalances (e.g. highly dependent directors are mostly male).

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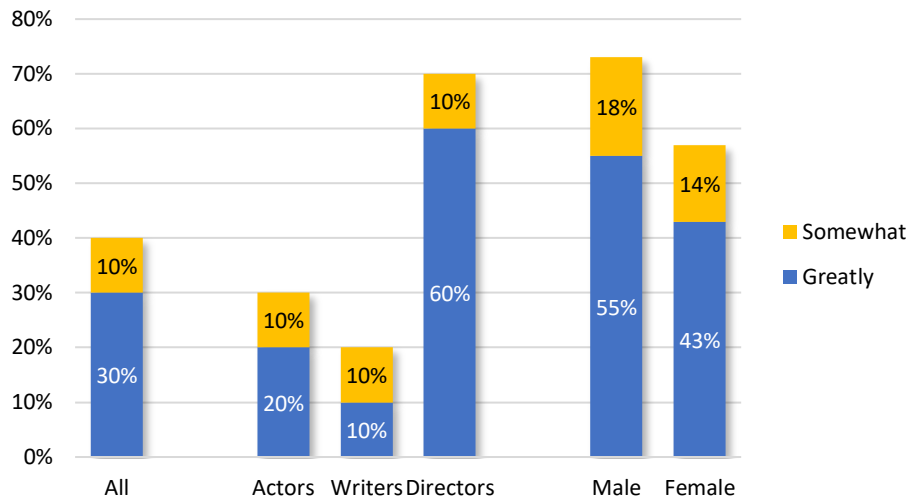


Figure 10: Reliance on advertising work to supplement income (n=30)

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To assess how satisfying supplementary work might be, we asked interviewees to evaluate its creativity, reasoning that the higher the rating, the more satisfying the work. A clear message emerges. In relation to advertising, the most common supplementary work, nobody thought it to be as creative as their main work. This implies that advertising work is not particularly satisfying and may therefore be undertaken primarily to supplement low average and unpredictable incomes arising because of the precarity of creative work discussed earlier. While involvement in music videos is much more satisfying creatively, doing such work is not especially common or well paid. Aggregating all other work types mentioned, almost all respondents find this work to be creative, suggesting a good deal of choice over the type of work undertaken (e.g. enjoyable, prestigious teaching and training work, much of it in the university sector).

Networks and personal connections

As discussed above, personal and professional networks are an important element of contemporary creative work relations, while exclusion from influential networks can affect access to quality work. To explore the importance of such networks for prominent Irish film and television workers, we asked respondents to consider how such networks are developed and their importance for building sustained careers. Figure 11 outlines the extent of such connections and their origins. As one might expect, early and recent career were the most important origins of current networks/personal connections. However, friendships forged at college were also listed by more than a third of respondents. Many college connections prove to be lifelong – reinforcing the importance of a college education to film and television careers, as is already evident from the very high education levels in the sample.

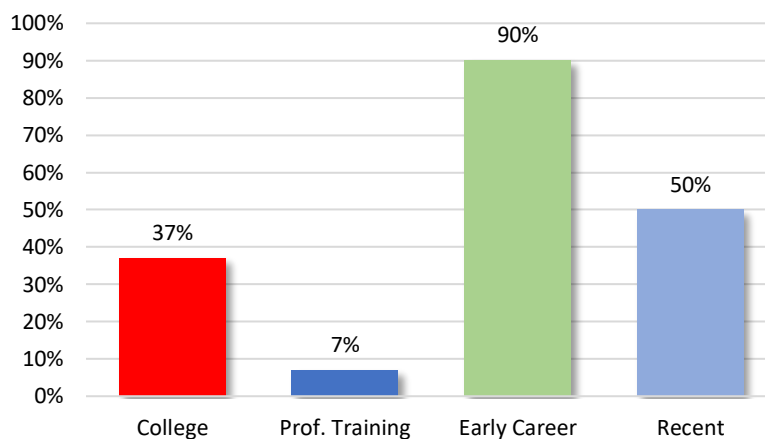


Figure 11: Networks and their origins (n=30)

Looking at *how* networks help in career building, interviewees confirmed their importance for finding jobs/work; generating ideas; and moral support. The following response highlighted how trust within

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professional relationships helps artists take creative risks that ultimately benefit the work:

[Network relationships] make you braver in the room because you know that people support you already. It makes you go further. There's a huge amount of fear. Fear of failure, fear of being found out, that you're a bit shit. That's why the support system is so important. You've got to know that people have your back, because you're going out there every night feeling exposed (Actor C, female, 42).

Summary and Conclusions

This article, and the extensive underlying interview programme, has focused on career construction in film and television drama, asking how certain prominent creative workers entered these fields and how they went about building, developing, and maintaining their careers. The impact of policy instruments like state cultural subsidies and other forms of public spending on developing these careers was of particular interest, as was the degree to which the film and television drama sectors function as part of the overall cultural production ecology, integrating with other arts sectors like theatre and also commercial sectors like advertising and corporate production. These areas of activity, each with their own unique creative challenges, funding mechanisms, audiences and markets, provide opportunities for entry, mobility and advancement, helping to nurture and sustain careers.

First, it emerges that state patronage is strongly linked to achieving career prominence. Clearly, a large majority of the careers we examined were built on such funding, and while there were some notable exceptions, most considered it very important to their early

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career development. This finding strongly aligns with the main rationale for public arts funding, enabling a safe ‘space’ for the exploration of innovative creative output, free from the more obvious constraints of the commercial marketplace (Frey and Pommerehne, 1989; O’Hagan, 2016). However, it also underlines how *transformative* state funding can be in broadening access to employment in the screen industries. Liddy (2020a) notes Screen Ireland’s reluctance to impose a quota system on work it funds. While her interest is in women’s employment, it is at this point that the funder could insist that productions employ a set proportion of workers who are currently excluded from entering this career. This would align them with UK bodies such as the British Film Institute’s (BFI) Diversity Standards and also the BBC, Channel 4 and Film London (Newsinger and Eikhof, 2020; Nwonka 2021). In particular, as noted above, the huge part S481 plays in funding screen production in Ireland points to it as a major potential influence in diversifying career construction, and we feel that considerably more attention needs to be paid to how it can wield this influence.

Second, we have demonstrated the crucial role of the education and professional training sectors, both in skills development and in the building of professional networks on which practitioners draw throughout their careers for employment, creative development, moral support and other benefits – including important (and creatively fulfilling) employment in the education and training sectors themselves. We have shown that prominent Irish film and television drama workers, like those in many other creative occupations, are highly educated. We have also demonstrated the ongoing importance of networks developed during college years. The importance of education and

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networks formed through college and early training years underlines the need for collaboration between screen and education policymakers to reduce related barriers to entry to the creative industries, either by improving third level access or incentivising entry via vocational training programmes. Programmes like the Higher Education Authority's current Human Capital Initiative (HCI) are an important step towards achieving these goals and must be carefully monitored to ensure they are meeting goals to provide better access to undergraduate education, more relevant postgraduate programmes, and innovation in education provision – while also helping to meet the explicit diversity goals articulated in screen policy. Such interventions are part of a wider need to improve access to education and fall into the category of *empowering* interventions, that is they offer individuals the tools to equip them for pursuing a creative career. Similarly, the fact that many of the individuals we interviewed mentioned the school play as a breakthrough moment suggests the importance of incorporating and encouraging creativity throughout the educational system.

Third, we have shown that a sizeable number of prominent creative workers depend on supplementary work to make a living. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that in the Irish case supplementary work is relatively common beyond the early career stage, with a notable number of actors, writers and directors continuing to engage in such work after achieving prominence. This points to structural problems in the funding ecosystem, making work (and wage) continuity difficult for some creative occupations. As one prominent film director, who had transitioned from a related occupation, reported:

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Since I've become a director, my financial situation has taken a massive nosedive. Unless you've got a wealthy family or big inheritance, I don't understand how anyone is able to have a voice and have a career... None of the funding agencies understand... They don't know how to give money to directors, just to be directors, which is basically having the thoughts about how you might shoot it, how you might cast it, approach it. It's a nebulous thing, yet nothing can happen without it (Film director E, female, 54).

This dependence on supplementary work – even after achieving prominence – underlines a failure of screen labour policy. The dramatic increases in spending and employment celebrated in Screen Ireland's latest strategic plan (2021) have been achieved despite the post-Celtic Tiger recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, creating the impression that screen workers do not need additional supports. The employment precarity confirmed in our survey is likely even more marked for individuals outside the prominent group we examined. This situation is surely a concern for screen policy – but also for employment policy and indeed social welfare policy, which needs to be flexible in dealing with this phenomenon. Our observations demonstrate the validity of making screen workers eligible for the BIA scheme, discussed above. If adopted after the pilot phase, BIA, another *transformative* measure, will be welcomed by early-career film and television drama workers – especially those, like directors, whose employment and income patterns have been shown to be particularly episodic.

Workers (particularly early in their careers) require continuity of employment or paid training in order to reduce dependence on non-creative income. While the screen industries in Ireland are already very well supported through public funding and tax credits, there is a need for reallocation of resources within this overall funding ecosystem

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towards strengthening and expanding available training opportunities, particularly through paid trainee and early career programmes with the larger production companies. These companies, which already enjoy superior access to public funding, including EU and tax funding, are best placed to develop and fund such training programmes, alongside those already mandated for projects receiving S481 tax credits. It is essential that such funding is made conditional on the provision of training support targeted at increasing workforce diversity.

Finally, gender imbalances, like those observed among directors and writers, stress the importance of targeted funding and training schemes to encourage entry and facilitate progress for women. While Screen Ireland and its Screen Skills division have responded to calls for gender progress in recent years, initiatives for increasing diversity in other areas such as class, regionality, ethnicity and ability must be developed. Screen policy in these areas needs to be carefully monitored, with clear targets and a viable methodology for evaluating results. It is worth noting that recent proposals to develop regional 'talent academies' and 'crew hubs' in Galway, Limerick and Wicklow (Screen Ireland, 2021) may have the potential to address this need, ensuring that screen worker diversity reflects the 'full breadth of contemporary Ireland'.

It is important to acknowledge that the quantitative research on which this paper is based, while the first of its kind in Ireland, has been necessarily limited by constraints of time and resources, and of course by the narrow focus on prominent creatives. Without ongoing data

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collection, there is no way to monitor the success of the above measures.

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In conclusion, high-level, explicit policy goals can only be achieved if other aspects of state policy (particularly in education) cohere. Following Nwonka's (2021) call to deploy a combination of empowering and transformative measures to achieve screen industry diversity, we outline how these might be achieved through a combination of educational interventions and funding requirements. We acknowledge that policy is moving in the direction of correcting the gender gap, and that policy alone cannot solve a culture conventionally structured around male success. In our review of existing research into the Irish screen industries, we note the heavy emphasis on gender-based enquiries. We also note the gap between the aspirations of policy makers and the experience of workers on the ground. Our own survey provides a general framework for success, however we do not make any claim that it will unproblematically work for all future participants; rather we suggest where the pinch-points that could be the focus of future policy interventions emerge. A screen workforce that reflects the population of Ireland in all its diversity of class, gender, ethnicity, ability and other aspects of the Irish experience will not be created overnight, but without such interventions it will remain little more than the stuff of inspirational speeches.

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¹ Screen Ireland (2021, p. 6)

² We note that this is a label of convenience. The term ‘screen industries’ properly encompasses gaming and other screen-based media.

³ For this paper, survey data relevant to the theatre sector was excluded.

⁴ The term ‘films’ in the legislation reflects the Act’s 1980 origins and, as the Film Board’s rebranding as Screen Ireland in 2019 underlines, is an anachronism. SI’s remit now includes film and TV drama as well as documentary and animation.

⁵ The IBEC reports were invaluable guides to the economic performances of the Irish Film Industry. Published annually over a number of years, they are now held in the library of the Irish Film Institute. Some are available online at, for example, yumpu.com.

⁶ Liddy has been an outspoken advocate for women in the industry and, at the time of writing, is Chair of Women in Film and Television, Ireland, Chair of the Equality Committee of Writers Guild of Ireland, and board member of Raising Films Ireland, amongst other positions of influence. She has published widely in the field.

⁷ The awards chosen were those conferred by the Irish Film and Television Academy (IFTA); the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA); and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (‘Oscars’). The chosen time period for these awards was 1990-2018, to limit the sample to individuals still working.

⁸ The occupation(s) for which an individual won an award is considered the individual's main occupation. Many individuals also have credits in other roles – e.g. actor/directors, as discussed below.

⁹ The survey was conducted just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the attendant normalisation of videoconferencing via Zoom software. Skype was generally used for remote interviews, due to its access to the telephone network and for ease of recording.

¹⁰ A recent survey of European audiovisual authors had a 25% response rate (Willekens et al 2019).

¹¹ All charts include information on the datasets used: n=30 (interview data); n=86 (interview plus public domain data). Some charts (e.g. Figure 4, n=77) indicate that some data was not available.

¹² Six interviewees reported that supplementary work took up 70% of paid time.