

Melanie McGinnis
Economic Policy Unit
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Dear Ms McGinnis

I am writing to urge that the ongoing development of film, television and digital content is sufficiently prioritised within the Programme for Government and that its full economic, cultural and educational value is supported.

To this end, I would highlight that, as a direct consequence of the poor settlement for the Arts in general, funding available for the development and production of culturally important programming from and about Northern Ireland has been slashed from approximately £1 million a year to £200,000.

This Lottery funding was critical to the development and production of Lord Attenborough's CLOSING THE RING which premiered in Belfast recently and it also provides most writers, directors and producers in Northern Ireland with their first opportunity in the industry.

The fund has supported local writers Daragh Carville, Gary Mitchell, Pearse Elliott and Lisa McGee, as well as more than a dozen new writers every year through short films; it has supported an amazing array of animation including the multi-award winning HORN OK PLEASE! from Joel Simon and local documentaries reflecting our history and community including CHARGE OF THE BIKE BRIGADE on local motorbike racing, Tim Collins' ULSTER GENERALS, WAVERIDERS on big wave surfing and the award-winning BATTLE OF THE BOGSIDE. The fund has also supported a number of grass-roots projects including HOMELANDS & TOWNLANDS with the Community Relations Council, local arts series ARTERY with Northern Visions and the new local version of Sesame Street, SESAME TREE.

It is startling that, at a critical juncture when the screen industries are beginning to find their feet in Northern Ireland, this life blood should be removed. The rest of the funding for the screen industries makes little sense if there is no funding for writing and development of talent. It would also be culturally bankrupt to promote

a screen industry which facilitates large-scale production reflecting the culture of other places, without also supporting the production of material on local subject matter.

I would also draw your attention to the omission of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund from the Programme for Government. Over the past 3 years the Irish Language Broadcast Fund has supported the production of Irish language television from Northern Ireland. This funding is a fraction of what is available in Scotland and Wales for indigenous language programming but it has made a huge impact with audiences and in the production sector. As well as providing audiences with a wide range of Northern programming, the fund has created an important extra dimension to the television production sector and in particular has assisted greatly in the development of expertise in children's and low budget drama production.

The screen industries have wide-ranging cultural, educational and economic benefits. Please ensure that they are supported at this time.

Yours sincerely,

Jannine Waddell
HEAD OF PROGRAMMES
WADDELL MEDIA