



**AUSTRALIAN
FILM TELEVISION
AND RADIO SCHOOL**

Australian and Children's Screen Content Review Submission

The Australian Film, Television and Radio School welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Review of Australian Content and Children's programming.

The Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) is the national screen and broadcast education, research and training institution. AFTRS has a leadership role in supporting and building Australia's screen and broadcast sector. It does this by fostering excellence and innovation in industry-focused education, training and research. The School works in partnership with others across the country and internationally to leverage its reach and impact. In doing so, it develops and sustains a professional workforce that Australia is known for across the globe. Our purpose is: *to find and empower Australian talent to shape and share their stories with the world by delivering future-focused, industry-relevant education, research and training.*

AFTRS has a unique perspective on content funding and regulation as our focus is on training the production teams and creative talent of the future industry.

Across the screen industry, we all celebrate the power of local storytelling for its ability to move, inspire and connect people with each other and our national identity. At AFTRS, we also focus on the depth of creativity, innovation and skills for the creative digital economy that we are building.

A 2016 alumni survey found that 74% of AFTRS graduates are actively working in the screen industry. Our graduates are finding roles in, and creating work for, a sector that is far broader than the traditional structures of funding and broadcast, with new digital players, new forms of video production and communication and alternative pathways to audience.

However, the new business models, new forms of content and growing ecosystem of production and consumption of screen content all still rely on the engine room of production – sustained by a core, regulated local content industry – to create opportunities for skills development, to keep people in work and to maintain an appetite among audiences for quality Australian storytelling. The recently released ABS screen businesses survey found that, while online, non-TV production, costs had increased substantially, from \$5.5m in 2011/12 to \$93.6m in 2015/16, "Feature films, TV drama and children's TV drama are the



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biggest drivers of income for production businesses, representing 30.7% of their \$2.3b income”.¹

In contemplating changes to Australian content policy settings and their practical implications, AFTRS urges foresighted consideration of the following priorities:

A focus on skills

Skills and talent are the currency of the screen industry.

Changes to incentives or structures on talent development, training and professional pathways for our creatives and screen practitioners. The health of the screen industry relies on effective skills development and strong career pathways.

AFTRS’ 2016 skills survey of industry found that 90% of Australian screen practitioners would like the opportunity to develop their skills further through training.²

Local production as a training ground

Practitioners require substantial opportunity, afforded by strong levels of local production, to develop their skills on-the-job. Traditionally, these opportunities have been provided through productions such as long-running soap operas, which have been incentivised by local content quotas.

Much of Australia’s production and on-screen talent have cut their teeth in long-running dramas and children’s television, and these forms of production have long been the bread-and-butter of the Australian industry. Incentives and interventions have always been required to encourage Australian production.

Without adequate production levels, the screen industry will be de-skilled. Without skills, the industry disappears.

In a constrained budget context, the capacity for broadcasters, funding agencies and facilities to support emerging talent has contracted significantly. There is a need support emerging talent across the sector to build the next generation of creative practitioners.

Australian Intellectual Property

The ability to generate original IP – of content, formats, development models, education and training and businesses – is the area of greatest opportunity for the industry, including for international export. The sector identified, in the AFTRS’ 2016 industry skills survey, the need for greater business skills and to build their capacities in creative entrepreneurship.³

Australian creative practitioners and businesses need to be empowered to maintain control of their own IP, via content policy and incentives that empower businesses and practitioners to hold equity in their creative output and be viable enough to innovate.

¹ <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/media-centre/news/2017/06-15-abs-survey-results>

² http://www.aftrs.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/56846/AFTRS-Future-Vision-2021.pdf

³ http://www.aftrs.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/56846/AFTRS-Future-Vision-2021.pdf



Innovation in Technology, Platforms and Business Models

Sector support must include scope for the development of new approaches to creative practice and outputs, via innovations in craft, technology and the audience experience, and in finding ways to fund, develop and deliver content. AFTRS has been incubating a range of new, applied technologies including: augmented reality, binaural podcasting and audience biometric feedback. The industry needs embedded sites of innovation to equip Australian creative practitioners with skills and insight into the latest emergent possibilities of the storytelling medium.

Regulatory frameworks will need to be flexible enough to allow for new approaches to content delivery that are not confined to existing program formats. AFTRS, in line with its focus on creative entrepreneurship, is leading conversations about the business models of the future, including through its upcoming Grow Initiative, which will provide education for creative practitioners to navigate disruption and make the most of screen business opportunities.

Cultural value content

High 'cultural value' content that is harder to gain market support for (documentary, feature films, children's content) will require ongoing government support – and should not be assessed on purely market terms.

The economies of screen production have always meant that certain forms Australian content is costly to produce and struggle to make a commercial return. The benefits of production activity to the economy⁴ and the profound cultural dividends of this kind of work⁵ are more relevant measures for this kind of production.

AFTRS was established to find and support the most talented Australian talent and broadcasters and continues this tradition to ensure the Australian voice is not lost in an era of ubiquitous access to content.

Volume as well as spend

The volume of production incentivised, including numbers of hours commissioned and range of projects, is important to ensure that a range of talent is provided with opportunities to work, experiment and hone their craft.

Leading Australian television drama producer John Edwards made this point in his Hector Crawford lecture at the Screen Forever conference in 2015.⁶ He noted that expenditure-based requirements can lead to small amounts of high cost production, which generate opportunities for few – the proven 'A teams' – rather than encouraging risk-taking on new writers, directors or crew.

⁴ <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/fact-finders/reports-and-key-issues/reports-and-discussion-papers/screen-currency>

⁵ <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/fact-finders/reports-and-key-issues/reports-and-discussion-papers/hearts-and-minds>

⁶ <http://www.spaa.org.au/news/hector-crawford-lecture/>



Platform diversity

A diversity of channels and platforms for Australian content is important to the vitality of screen production, decision making and innovation in the sector. No player wants to hold a monopoly on a particular form of content or production as diversity sustains the work a range of production teams, improving output diversity, quality and the viability of the sector.

The definition of the screen industry is changing as 'screen work' becomes integral to a huge number of contemporary applications: from platforms like buzzfeed to education from primary schools up, to former print models of journalism and new forms of political engagement. However, the majority of active Australian screen business still produce the bulk of their work for traditional platforms, while there has been substantial shift towards online and new platforms (ABS screen businesses survey online stat).

Diversity of practitioners and on screen

The screen industry has work to do to ensure it is representative of the diversity of Australian population, in terms of gender identity, cultural diversity, disability, sexual identity, socio-economic background and regional location.

AFTRS has taken a lead in proposing ways to address these issues, via the Inclusive Pathways Framework, and in bringing industry funding bodies, guilds and broadcasters together to address the issue. The Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network (www.sdin.com.au), launched in July 2017, offers a model for industry collaboration to create new career pathways and content outcomes that are more representative of the diversity of contemporary Australia.

The production industry needs to realise the diversity dividend of new audiences, new voices and new perspectives from previously underrepresented groups.

Conclusion

AFTRS urges the review to consider career pathways and opportunities for skills development in any new models put forward.

We need to skill up and prepare our industry for the content and media landscapes of the immediate and longer-term futures, without undermining the bedrock of production, opportunities and career progressions that make screen work in this country possible.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss our submission with you.



Neil Peplow,
CEO

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