

SCREENWEST EMERGING SCREEN SECTOR REVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

“Screenwest now has the opportunity to be unique, to focus on key strategic areas and find its niche, not replicate other funding agencies. Be bold and visionary and take the opportunity over the long term to build the industry from the grassroots.”

- A WA screen practitioner



March 2018

1.0 Introduction

In May 2017, the FTI and Screenwest jointly announced “the proposed consolidation of FTI into Screenwest, with Screenwest taking on responsibility for supporting the emerging screen sector”.

It was explained that FTI, being a not-for-profit organisation, “was faced with an uncertain future funding environment and that the move would provide surety to emerging filmmakers” and that, with the transition of FTI’s core screen programs to Screenwest, FTI’s historical annual funding allocation would continue to be directed towards the support of the emerging screen sector.

At the time, Screenwest was itself in the process of transitioning from its status as a government agency within the arts and cultural portfolio to an independent not-for-profit entity, constitutionally converting from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee. In undertaking this transition, Screenwest argued that it had reached a point in its growth and development where a different structure (as outlined in the Screenwest Strategic Plan 2016 - 2021) would benefit both the agency and the screen sector.

In December 2017, with FTI having ceased to trade in July, CAM was engaged by a reconstituted Screenwest to independently consult with the Western Australian screen industry to inform a review of the needs of the emerging screen sector.

Screenwest identified the scope of the consultancy in terms of:

- conducting a review of the needs of WA’s emerging screen sector, encompassing funding programs and associated services; and,
- as part of this process, to consider the future of the WA Screen Awards, formerly conducted annually by FTI.

The review does not seek to report on Federal Government funding programs and services offered through Screen Australia and the take up by WA emerging screen practitioners.

The executive report is prepared for the Screenwest Board of Directors and its executive staff by the CAM consultant team comprising Shane Colquhoun, Dr Shona Erskine and Barry Strickland.

The consultant team wishes to thank the many individuals from the screen sector who have wholeheartedly provided their thoughts and suggestions to the review over the past weeks. CAM also thanks the staff of Screenwest for their contribution and support for the review.

This extract includes the executive summary and recommendations.

2.0 Executive Summary

In December 2017, Colquhoun Arts Management (CAM) was appointed by Screenwest to undertake a review of the needs of Western Australia's emerging screen sector in the wake of the closure of the Film and Television Institute (FTI).

For most of its 47 years, FTI served as WA's primary incubator for new filmmakers. With the 21st century revolution in screen technologies, FTI's core agenda in providing training and supporting aspiring screen practitioners was increasingly superseded by the in-built 'do-it-yourself' aspect of an explosion of new technologies and distribution platforms. The emergence of ECU's WA Screen Academy also directly impacted FTI's traditional role.

With FTI no longer operating, Screenwest has committed to consult with the sector in order to inform a review of its funding programs and support services dedicated to the emerging screen sector.

The consultation conducted during February – March 2018 involved two 5-hour industry forums attracting 61 screen industry practitioners, individual and group meetings involving 44 stakeholders, and an online survey that attracted 231 respondents.

Globally, screen industries are in an exciting but challenging state of transition, riding on new technologies and distribution platforms, but governed (as always) by a budget imperative to keep production costs at a minimum. Currently in Australia there is a particular concern that our industry "*is in danger of losing world class film and television production talent unless urgent measures are taken to make our industry more globally competitive*". This assertion, from the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA, 28/02/18), comes with a call to the Federal Government to lock-in a recommended increase to the major international film incentive (known as the 'location offset') from 16.5% to 30% in the forthcoming 2018 budget in order to make Australia more competitive in attracting major overseas productions.

Here in WA, the recently 're-corporatised' Screenwest is similarly confronted with the impacts of the global revolution in new technologies and distribution platforms, and the struggle to attract major productions. Local screen practitioners are increasingly anxious about their futures as they seek increased opportunities to sustain professional careers. These anxieties are further heightened during this current period of State Government budget repair, the Federal Government's indecisiveness in its support for the sector, and the continuing downturn in Lotterywest revenue, Screenwest's principle funding agency.

For screen graduates and those emerging practitioners attempting to find a foothold in a diverse and somewhat ambivalent industry, there is relatively limited access to appropriate on-the-job training, up-to-date information and other needs-based support during their critical early years. There are many who argue the current WA screen sector is far from being vibrant or resilient and that the future focus must be on creating more production opportunities for established screen practitioners, thereby providing increased opportunities for the emerging sector.

In summary, the key constraints inhibiting growth for the sector in WA reinforced throughout the consultation include:

- inadequate screen sector infrastructure
- a too-narrow definition of production activities that constitute the screen sector
- comparatively modest levels of production activity that limit career pathways and the ability to sustain a career
- insufficient growth in government and private-sector funds.

At the same time, the WA games and mixed reality mediums sector is starting to produce results in a highly competitive global market. These practitioners are firstly seeking acknowledgement, and then strategic support to continue building market and business-ready projects that will provide jobs and benefit the economy.

As the State's leadership screen organisation, Screenwest's Board of Directors and Executive have a unique and exciting opportunity to work with the entire screen sector to navigate these very real challenges and bring about systemic change that will provide a more sustainable WA industry in the long term.

A majority of WA's screen practitioners are passionate in their support for Screenwest and its programs and services. They are seeking more work and greater opportunity, so that they can remain in WA and help build a diverse and thriving industry. Screenwest's challenge is to harness this passion to build a niche industry that reflects the very best of WA and draws applause across Australia and beyond.

To Screenwest, we say:

Seek out and identify talent wherever it is and nourish it. This is not the time for more of the same. You have the opportunity to make real change. Be bold, make well considered strategic decisions for the next 10 - 20 years. You have an incredible story to tell, both about Screenwest and the WA screen sector, that will attract the support of government and the private sector in the medium-to-longer term.

The findings and 18 recommendations in this report are focused on ensuring continued support for emerging screen practitioners. The reality is that the recommendations are much broader in their remit to provide long-term and systemic change throughout the entire WA screen sector.

Shane Colquhoun, Barry Strickland & Dr Shona Erskine
(The Consultant Team)

3.0 Summary of Recommendations

For consideration by Screenwest's Board of Directors, this report makes 18 recommendations across six existing operational areas and one proposed new area (games & mixed reality mediums) for formal support and investment.

3.1 Policy

- 3.1.1 That in consultation with the screen sector, Screenwest reviews and better defines what it is to be an emerging screen practitioner.
- 3.1.2 That as part of a review of its current strategic plan 2016-21, Screenwest more precisely defines and communicates its support for the emerging screen sector to ensure it identifies talent, providing for a vibrant and resilient industry.
- 3.1.3 That Screenwest reviews its programs and services to allow for greater flexibility, encouraging more commercial opportunities and entrepreneurialism, and ultimately supporting a more diverse screen culture that generates commercially viable projects, providing increased work opportunities and greater market returns.
- 3.1.4 That Screenwest ensures that its support for emerging screen practitioners from diverse backgrounds and regional areas continues across all programs.

3.2 Training & Professional Development

- 3.2.1 That Screenwest facilitates an industry round table with tertiary screen course providers and screen guild representatives to discuss sector pathways, graduate expectations and opportunities for industry collaborations and partnerships.
- 3.2.2 That Screenwest considers resourcing a central point of contact for industry advice and support to emerging screen practitioners.
- 3.2.3 That Screenwest supports the establishment of an initiative by the screen industry guilds designed to bring together industry organisations, mentors and emerging practitioners.
- 3.2.4 That Screenwest, in partnership with the screen industry guilds, considers the establishment of an employment register with an on-line search function on its website (or even a specific application that can more broadly be downloaded) that lists both short and long-term employment opportunities within the WA screen sector
- 3.2.5 That Screenwest supports industry guilds or other appropriately placed organisations with increased and targeted funding to improve industry-wide communications, collaborations and networking, including targeted training opportunities for the emerging screen sector in key areas of need, including:
 - marketing & distribution
 - project management and business skills
 - screenwriting
 - technical and craft skills (as required)

3.3 Funding

- 3.3.1 That Screenwest prioritises a range of funding interventions in support of emerging practitioners and increased screen activity in general, generating more opportunities for emerging practitioners in WA. These could include (in no particular order):

- structured paid attachments including incentives to productions
- mentorships (paid and unpaid)
- staged development of projects
- short film opportunities
- negotiated distribution arrangements tied to funding programs
- increased opportunities for low budget features (with reduced budgets) that bridge the gap between the existing Elevate and West Coast Visions programs
- a new fund focused on risk taking (this program could be tendered to an industry organisation annually)
- an innovative investment program
- support for guilds

3.4 Infrastructure

3.4.1 That Screenwest seeks expressions of interest for a third party to oversee and manage the existing Fielder Street Creative (FSC) initiative or to propose a similar centrally located cross-industry multipurpose creative hub with key objectives, requirements and KPIs that include:

- a three-to-five year business and financial plan
- mixed tenancies across all genres and types/scale of screen organisations, including games developers and practitioners in the mixed reality mediums
- collaboration of tenants through industry events, initiatives and networking
- appropriate access, i.e., parking, cost, transport
- support for screen guilds
- the potential for Screenwest to co-locate (if not FSC)
- potential to provide a point of contact for industry information for emerging practitioners
- private sector and industry partners
- appropriate return on investment

3.5 Marketing & Showcasing

3.5.1 That Screenwest continues to support showcasing opportunities that reflect the diversity of emerging practitioners and their work via festivals and other initiatives, e.g., expos.

3.5.2 That Screenwest develops a comprehensive industry-wide marketing plan to create greater awareness of the WA industry and its emerging talent within national and international markets

3.5.3 That Screenwest calls for expressions of interest from third parties to produce an annual celebratory event that appropriately acknowledges and showcases the diverse screen industry including the emerging screen sector.

3.6 Private Sector Investment

3.6.1 That in order to provide additional support to the emerging and broader screen sector, Screenwest engages a full-time highly-skilled fundraiser to immediately

develop a three-year fundraising plan that builds relationships and support from businesses, foundations and individual donors.

- 3.6.2 That a structure is implemented that enables Screenwest to accept and pass on tax deductible donations to screen practitioners and projects.

3.7 Games & Mixed Reality Mediums (G&MRM)

- 3.7.1 That in consultation with the G&MRM sector and subject to increased resources, Screenwest formally amends its Terms of Trade to allow for the G&MRM sector to access a range of funding and support programs addressing the current and emerging needs of G&MRM companies and individual practitioners in WA.

- 3.7.2 That Screenwest engages a dedicated and appropriately skilled G&MRM member of staff and identifies appropriate peers, including at Board level, to provide expert advice to Screenwest.