

# Screen

FutureNow is the Western Australian Training Council for the creative, leisure and technology industries. The Council is a skills advisory body that represents the voice of industry, advising the State Government on the training and workforce development needs of our industry sectors.

Western Australia is home to a vibrant, culture-defining screen sector, known for its warm portrayals of people and landscapes. The WA screen industry make a significant contribution to the local, national and global understanding of Western Australia, and impacts on perceptions of WA's liveability. While the current environment is challenging for the sector, industry sees opportunities to turn conditions to their favour and grow the size and capacity of the Western Australian screen workforce in the long term. A well promoted campaign to advocate for improved physical infrastructure for the WA Screen sector may deliver a hub housing production and post-production suites, as well as premises for creative technologies businesses. However for the industry to thrive, an accompanying whole-of-sector workforce development plan will be required to ensure that Western Australia has access to the talent it needs to deliver ongoing activity, sustainable careers, and capacity for the sector.

## Current environment and emerging trends

### Impact of Covid-19

Screen production involves a high level of up-front investment with unpredictable returns. This permanent feature of the industry makes it vulnerable to economic fluctuations, and current uncertainty is creating challenges for the sector.

The WA screen sector is facing supply-chain challenges in the current environment, even while consumer demand for content grows. Quarantine measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have had a profound effect on film and television production globally, including in WA. Social distancing made filming difficult, and travel bans made it difficult or impossible to assemble a full production crew in one place.

Screen sector workers cross the creative and technical divide and, depending on the scale and nature of the project, can require high degrees of specialism or very broad skills. The smaller scale of WA's screen sector means that industry can struggle to find workers with deep, rigorous knowledge in specific areas when required. This is a contributing factor in the mobile nature of the sector, where temporary and large teams assemble here or in other states from across the country and internationally. A halt to travel therefore had a significant effect on local industry's capacity to work.

### Government support

\$2.5m in Lotterywest funding was redirected to the Western Australian Screen Industry Sustainability Package via Screenwest in response to the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. The package includes the Taking Care of Business funding initiative which saw \$1.5m directed to supporting 60 production and post-production companies and producers to sustain and develop their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic and; the Bright Ideas Crew Capacity Initiative, targeted at below-the-line crew and directors, which supported 27 practitioners to deliver 25 projects during the quarantine period. A national \$5m Fresh Start Fund<sup>2</sup> was announced by the ABC in April, to support Australian producers, creatives and musicians amid the shutdown of the production industry. 44 children's content ideas and productions, 30 comedies, 15 dramas and 14 documentaries were supported through the fund.

## Australian Content Quotas, SVOD, and Australian workforce implications

The film and television production sectors have access to expanded audiences through the entry of Netflix, Disney and other SVOD (subscription video on demand) platforms. These services act as commissioning agents, growing the demand for content, though also directly challenging the viability of alternative platforms. Free-to-Air broadcast television has seen a fall in market share directly in relation to growth in the SVOD market.<sup>3</sup>

SVOD service providers are not held to the Broadcasting Services Act 1992,<sup>4</sup> which requires free-to-air broadcasters to screen at least 55% locally produced content. Research suggests SVOD catalogues can hold as little as 2% Australian content.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, consumers are accessing a higher proportion of foreign content than previously, limiting opportunities for local producers. In April 2020, Australian content quotas were temporarily suspended as part of a broadcast media relief package.<sup>6</sup> While this puts Free-to-Air broadcasters on a level playing field with SVOD providers, it diminishes opportunities for Australian content producers and their associated workforce.

Conversely, in November 2018, the European Union legislated that SVOD producers should screen at least 30% European content.<sup>7</sup> A recent Australian Federal Inquiry into the issue- and subsequent Options Paper which closed for review on 3rd July 2020, highlighted a wide range of positions are held across the broadcast and production sectors.<sup>8</sup> A subsequent Green paper is now out for comment, closing in March 2021<sup>9</sup>. Australian industry is watchful of potential changes following on from the review- given the rapid growth of SVOD, any change could significantly impact demand for local production, and consequently for skilled local labour.

## Workforce enhancement strategies

### Emerging sector needs review

A Screenwest review of emerging sector needs<sup>10</sup> identified four core issues affecting the sector, which demonstrate the broader barriers to entry for graduates: 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 and; insufficient growth in government and private-sector funds. Screenwest's West Coast Visions initiative is a production program intended to support emerging talent via funding for a first-time director to direct a feature film.

### Creating opportunities for women in the screen sector

Nationally, women are under-represented in the screen sector, and the trend has worsened in the past 20 years. However, Screenwest noted in their 2018-19 Annual Report that 50% of key creative roles (producer, director, writer) filled by Western Australians in funded projects commencing principal photography within the financial year, were women.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates the effectiveness of industry-driven initiatives and affirmative action to address gender disparity in the sector.

### Industry-immersed training

The project driven nature of most work in the Screen sector underlies the character of its workforce and in particular its career pathways and associated issues. Screen projects are generally short-term and characterised as high-risk financially, and this situation contributes to an environment where employers prefer to work with established professionals, rather than invest in emerging creatives and technicians. The Screen Australia report Emerging Visions identified a 'career wilderness' where early career workers needed to 'prove themselves' but were largely unable to access opportunities to do so.<sup>12</sup>

Given the issues faced by graduates, and the subsequent impact on the sector of a lack of pathways to established careers, industry seeks solutions to nurture sustainable careers for graduates. A lack of industry networks and screen

credits are cited as the key barriers to becoming established in the Australian screen sector, so training programs which provide opportunities to be immersed in the field are vital.

Screenwest collaborated with Matchbox Pictures and For Pete’s Sake Productions on 30-episode series *The Heights* in 2018-19.<sup>13</sup> The production model saw students from North Metropolitan TAFE and the WA Screen Academy work with experienced creatives across the team. The production supported 41 interns and attachments, gave 30% of staff their first screen credit, and adopted a proactive diversity hiring strategy. Professional attachments, such as an upcoming Editorial Assistant attachment with *Siamese*, are another formalised internship model accessed by the WA screen sector.

## Please get in touch with FutureNow

FutureNow is continually seeking broad input from stakeholders and representatives in the Western Australian Screensector. If you would be interested in providing your perspective on this snapshot or related workforce matters for your sector, our Creative Industries Industry Manager would love to hear from you:

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## References

Note that unreferenced information in this snapshot is based on direct consultation by FutureNow with WA industry.

All references current as at 14.12.2020

1 <https://www.screenwest.com.au/news-events/2020/03/screenwest-announces-wa-screen-industry-sustainability-package/>

2 <https://www.abc.net.au/events/freshstart/>

3 IBISWorld Industry Report J5621: Free-to-Air Television Broadcasting in Australia

4 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A04401>

5 <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018/10/apo-nid196611-1121701.pdf>

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/apr/15/local-content-quotas-suspended-in-54m-package-for-australias-coronavirus-hit-media>

7 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/eu-agrees-30-european-vod-quota/5133236.article>

8 <https://www.communications.gov.au/have-your-say/supporting-australian-stories-our-screens-options-paper>

9 <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/fletcher/media-release/media-reform-green-paper>

10 <https://www.screenwest.com.au/news-events/2018/02/final-days-to-have-your-say-in-the-emerging-sector-review/>

11 [https://www.screenwest.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Annual-Report-2018-19\\_Screenwest-Web-Version.pdf](https://www.screenwest.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Annual-Report-2018-19_Screenwest-Web-Version.pdf)

12 [https://metroscreen.org.au/EmergingVisions\\_Metro\\_Screen.pdf](https://metroscreen.org.au/EmergingVisions_Metro_Screen.pdf)

13 <https://www.screenwest.com.au/news-events/2018/06/abc-new-series-the-heights-western-australia/>