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# Scotland: A place for playwrights? Final Report

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## Executive Summary

*I want more poetry on the stage and more plays on the stage. I want more words. More drama as constructed action through time shaped by an individual mind because that is an art I value and yearn for it and there is an audience for it and I believe it has some really fantastic qualities that I highly value: it's transferable, translateable, long lived and carriable in the memory and so forth. So I want more of that and I want it better and I want it to come from a much wider range of people not because I want to tick boxes but because the best work has always come from surprising sources. (Interviewee)*

Playwriting remains one of Scotland's cultural strengths. However there are issues over sustainability of individuals, the theatres and the audience.

### What was done

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP) commissioned Christine Hamilton Consulting to undertake programme of research and consultancy examining the question, 'Scotland, a place for playwrights?' The aim was to better understand the context in which playwrights operate and to uncover more about individual needs.

Christine Hamilton and Fraser White undertook this work between July 2015 and March 2016.

There were three aspects to the research.

- A survey of 186 playwrights in Scotland. 129 responses were obtained in total (69%), 106 of which were complete (57%). An analysis of the survey is published as a companion to this report.
- Interviews with a range of those with an interest or involvement with playwrights and playwriting in Scotland including: playwrights; artistic directors; representatives of Creative Scotland and the Federation of Scottish Theatre; those involved in broadcasting and film; and a translator.
- Desk research: a number of policy documents and reports were consulted to provide context to this work. These include reports on theatre in Scotland and the UK and research on writers in other genres.

## Findings

### Profile

- The largest responses to the survey were from playwrights aged 35-44 and 45-54 (31% and 24% of the total respectively).
- 55% of respondents were female and 45% male.
- Of 106 respondents who provided such information, 14 (13%) described themselves as LGBT, 89 (84%) said they are not LGBT and three (3%) preferred not to say.
- 7% of respondents were from an ethnic minority background: the ethnic diversity of the survey sample is roughly in line with the population as a whole.

- 106 respondents responded to a question asking if they considered themselves to have a disability. Five (5%) preferred not to say, six (6%) said they have a disability and 95 (90%) said they do not have a disability.

### ***Commissions***

- The survey identified 152 Scottish commissions in 2014/15. Eleven of the commissions were co-written.
- Men received more Scottish commissions than women within our survey sample: 87 (57%) went to men and 65 (43%) to women.
- In the case of professional FST/SSP contracts: of the 60 identified in the survey, 39 (65%) went to men and 21 (35%) to women.

### ***Productions***

- 57 playwrights (49%) wrote at least 98 new plays that were produced in Scotland in 2014/15. 34 playwrights (29%) had at least 62 second or subsequent productions produced in Scotland in 2014/15.
- New work has a major role to play in the Scottish theatre repertoire: an analysis of repertoire of Scottish theatre in 2014/15 indicated 124 productions of new work and 37 of existing plays/pieces of work.
- For most of Scotland's active playwrights, income from playwriting alone is insufficient to sustain them: median earnings (i.e. the earnings of the 'average' playwright) fall in the £5,000 to £9,999 range.
- Other forms of work are important in supplementing the incomes of Scottish playwrights. Minimum median earnings are in the range of £10,000 to £19,999 and maximum median earnings exceed £20,000 when these are taken into account.
- The contract between the SSP and FST is better than those found elsewhere in the UK and there is no evidence that any of the funded theatres are breaking this contract.

### ***Development***

In 2014/15, out of our survey sample:

- 23% had undertaken mentoring-based development.
- 19% had undertaken dramaturgy-based development.
- 20% had taken part in a residency or attachment to an organisation.
- 18% had participated in a writer's retreat.
- 29% had used a bursary or grant to develop their work.

All 23 respondents who participated in mentoring programmes considered the experience to be 'very useful'.

The development of playwrights and playwriting is in a healthy state with overwhelmingly positive support for the work of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and other development activities.

### ***International***

- The survey identified at least 36 individual playwriting commissions from non-Scottish organisations and venues in 2014/15. The largest number of non-Scottish commissions came from England.
- 21 playwrights (18%) wrote 21 new plays produced outside Scotland in 2014/15.
- 29 playwrights (25%) had at least 68 second or subsequent productions produced outside Scotland in 2014/15 and 23 playwrights (20%) said they had written plays originally produced in Scotland that went on to tour beyond Scotland in 2014/15.

- 110 (97%) write in English, 38 (34%) in Scots and five (4%) in Gaelic. Two writers specified other languages they write in, namely French and Croatian

### ***Broadcasting and Film***

- BBC Radio is a big supporter of Scottish writing with 60 hours a year of drama and book adaptations/readings being produced by the BBC in Scotland.
- In contrast, BBC Scotland's TV drama is, many said, in a poor state with few drama commissions coming to Scotland.
- Film commissions and production is also an area in which a few have worked and remains a patchy area for Scottish writers.
- There are no dedicated play agents in Scotland. The routes to getting a London agent is the best way to get one from London is to have a show on at the festival get a transfer to London. This is a challenge for emerging playwrights.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Structure of theatre***

Despite its success, there is a perception and some evidence that playwriting in Scotland, while not in crisis, is facing difficult times. Playwrights, with few exceptions, are not able to make a living for writing for theatre alone. While radio remains a creative outlet for the work of many, there is no evidence that it is likely to expand and other areas of broadcasting and film are difficult to access for most writers in Scotland.

While lots of new work is being written, developed, commissioned and produced it is very hard to make a living. All playwrights we interviewed expressed the contradiction in their own minds between wanting to create work, and present that work to an audience no matter what, while wanting to be paid for it.

Analysis of the funding to theatre following the announcement in October 2015 of the arts organisations to receive three-year funding, indicates as a whole it has not declined. However the cuts/standstill faced by many of the *producing* theatres has had an impact on the number of productions they can mount each year. There are concerns about the loss of The Arches and a decline in touring at small and mid scale.

While there are successes with A Play, A Pie and A Pint at one scale, and the NTS and larger theatres at the other, the production of new work has diminished at middle scale. Funding cuts have hit the Traverse particularly badly and there has been contraction in their ability to produce new full-length plays.

To sustain a vibrant playwriting culture, new plays need to be produced at every level - small, medium and large scale and to be able, to tour where appropriate. The gaps which are emerging, which put at risk Scotland's reputation as a place for playwrights, will potentially lead to a smaller narrower group of (ageing) playwrights with little or no new talent coming through. Such a situation will lead to a less diverse playwriting culture and in turn a narrower and shrinking audience for new work, with less demand internationally.

### ***Individual needs***

The biggest area of concern for playwrights is to have their work produced and to be rewarded for that. At the end of the day that is going to come down to decisions taken by individual theatres and above all, Creative Scotland.

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, and the SSP, have helped to develop a strong mutually supportive network. The challenge is to find ways of developing playwrights as they move from the initial development stage on to main stage production.

There are those who feel excluded from the network because of geography or other reasons. There are issues around the position of women playwrights, BAME writers and those with a disability. Gaelic drama is another area which has development needs.

There is scope to provide information and advice on international work. A rich seam of knowledge already exists within many playwrights in Scotland and Playwrights' Studio, Scotland is well placed to create the conditions for that to be shared as well as taking up any opportunities for collaboration which come from the Review of Literature and Publishing.

There is an opportunity to develop relations between playwrights and agents who are usually based in London. Playwrights' Studio, Scotland can neither be an agent nor be responsible for creating a Scottish-based agency. However theatres in Scotland could do more to use the intelligence that sits within the organisation.

While radio continues to be an important source of new writing in Scotland, television proves a difficult area to enter for most writers.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Playwrights' Studio Scotland***

Many of the issues that arose in this report, are already being tackled by Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and included in their current Business Plan.

These include:

- Support for Playwright Studio Scotland 'graduates' and mid career playwrights through the expansion of its Professional Workshop Programme.
- Development of playwrights in Gaelic, BAME playwrights and disabled playwrights through its Diversity, Public Engagement and Creative Learning strategy.
- Widening the geographic impact of its work through its National Workshop Programme and Associate Playwrights and extending the reach of its TalkFest discussions and workshops.
- Supporting opportunities for playwrights in broadcasting through continuing its work with BBC Radio and developing its links with BBC TV through its development project, the Writers Room.
- Ensuring (even) closer working between Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the rest of the theatre sector.

Other areas for consideration are:

- Develop an international policy that includes reacting to invitations and identifying new areas for links using and sharing the 'intelligence' from established playwrights. Develop the website to include a desire to promote Scottish playwrights internationally. Provide advice for playwrights on good practice in translation of work.
- Consider an event during the Edinburgh Festival involving agents and playwrights seeking agency support.
- Without compromising its role, continue provide advice to literary managers and artistic directors on new emerging playwrights.

### ***SSP***

- Continue to monitor the application of its agreements and flag up to theatres/producer and Creative Scotland (where relevant) if contracts are not being adhered to.
- Debate the position of SSP regarding development work, scratch performances and works in progress to identify principles for working which do not undermine the importance of this work.

### ***Both organisations***

- Work together with FST and individual theatres make the case to Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government about the importance of playwriting in Scotland and the emerging problems which can undermine its success. In particular raise the issue of mid scale and touring.
- Discuss with FST and theatres the principle of new models of commissioning and production which can happen within the existing funding framework and which link commissioning and production more closely.
- Work together to and raise issues with theatres about productions by BAME and writers with a disability.
- Together raise the issue of productions by women playwrights with Scottish theatre companies.



## **Introduction**

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP) commissioned Christine Hamilton Consulting to undertake programme of research and consultancy examining the question, 'Scotland, a place for playwrights?' The aim was to better understand the context in which playwrights operate and to uncover more about individual needs.

Christine Hamilton and Fraser White undertook the work with the guidance of a Steering Group comprising representatives of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and SSP. The work began in July 2015 and this report was completed in February 2016.

This report outlines our approach, what was done, the key issues we were asked to examine, our findings both quantitative and qualitative, the context for playwriting in Scotland. From this we have developed our conclusions and recommendations for our clients, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and Scottish Society of Playwrights.

## **Approach**

### **Survey**

There were several aspects to the research. First, we conducted a survey of playwrights in Scotland. The survey sought to gather quantitative and qualitative information and data around a few key themes: plays, productions and commissions within and outside Scotland; professional development needs and opportunities; playwriting as a source of income; and demographic data about those working within the sector in Scotland. It was designed to be able to be repeated in the future to build a picture over a period of years.

The survey was distributed to a closed group of 186 playwrights who either live in Scotland or have a strong Scottish connection. The playwrights who were surveyed had a broad range of professional experience. We were made aware of the enormous contribution made to the new writing 'ecology' by emerging playwrights working at the grassroots, who have not yet been professionally commissioned or produced; and those working in the voluntary sector. However, to include their views was beyond the scope of this particular study.

129 responses were obtained in total (69%), 106 of which were complete (57%), making it one of the most comprehensive surveys of Scottish playwrights carried out. The information and data, which covered the year 2014/2015, was gathered and analysed by Fraser White on behalf of Christine Hamilton Consulting. An analysis of the survey is published as a companion to this report.

### **Consultation**

Interviews were held with a range of those with an interest or involvement with playwrights and playwriting in Scotland. Those interviewed covered the following categories:

- Playwrights
- Artistic directors
- Representatives of Creative Scotland and the Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST)

- Those involved in broadcasting and film
- A Translator

A full list is given in Appendix 1.

Christine Hamilton carried out interviews. In addition, we presented preliminary findings to playwrights, theatre directors and makers at *Different Stages*, a gathering organised in November 2015 by Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, the SSP, the FST and in association with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. From this event we gathered feedback on our initial findings and conclusions.

### **Desk Research**

We consulted a number of policy documents and reports to provide context to this work. These include reports on theatre in Scotland and the UK and research on writers in other genres. A full list of these is given in Appendix 1.

We also undertook a simple review of the repertoire of publically funded theatres and companies during 2014/2015 to identify the level of new work being produced in Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

## **Our Starting Point**

At the start of this project, we summarised the context for playwriting in Scotland and some assumptions.

On one hand there was a perception that playwriting in Scotland is flourishing. As highlighted in the Review of Theatre Sector in Scotland, 'new work is the lifeblood of Scottish theatre'. The larger companies and theatres such as the National Theatre of Scotland and Citizens' and Lyceum Theatres are programming new writing. There is an audience for new work - underlined by recent research published on new work in the UK.

Scotland's playwrights have their work performed all over the English-speaking world as well as being translated into a large number of languages.

Playwrights have been seen to take a leading role in 'civic Scotland' with their engagement in the wider political discourse - not least during the 2014 Scottish Referendum campaign.

On the other hand we understood that there concerns about the rewards to playwrights for their work and that there were issues around progressing from being an 'emerging' playwright to becoming established and receiving full commissions. Accessing international networks was seen to be difficult and television hard to break into.

There was also a view that there are gaps: plays in Gaelic, plays by non-white writers and migrants from elsewhere in Europe, and the ever-concerning issue of gender balance.

Therefore the aim of this research was to test these assumptions and uncover the evidence that tells the story of the current place of the playwright and playwriting in Scotland today and potential areas of growth.

One respondent to our survey succinctly summed it up as follows:

*The current state of playwriting in Scotland is very healthy artistically although a lot less so financially.*

In response to the brief we said that if the only thing that came out of this work was the conclusion that playwrights earn less than required to sustain themselves from writing, then we would have failed. While it is true and important that very few can earn a living from writing for theatre alone, we were determined to get beneath this and look at the position of writers and new work in theatre. This is, of course, about the playwright but it is also about the producer, the audience and wider civic society.

## **Who are the playwrights?**

From the survey results we can paint a good picture of who the playwrights are in Scotland today and the issues that face them.

### **Place of residence**

The survey attracted responses from playwrights living across Scotland and beyond:

- Almost 40% live in Glasgow and 21% in Edinburgh
- 23 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas are represented by survey respondents' places of residence
- 9% of responses are from playwrights who live outside Scotland

Of the nine local authority areas not represented in the survey, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Dundee are above average in terms of general population size and therefore stand out as areas that may have been expected to generate responses. What we know from further research carried out via interview, playwrights, attracted to Glasgow and Edinburgh from other parts of Scotland to study or work, remain there but reflect in their writing their roots elsewhere in the country. However that does not explain why both major cities of Dundee and Aberdeen are not better represented in the survey - especially Dundee where there is a major theatre and dance company, a contemporary visual arts centre and a very active music scene.

We also received responses via the survey from writers based in the Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Ayrshire and other (semi) rural areas who expressed frustration that they perceived development and support activity happened predominantly in the central belt.

### **Age ranges**

The largest responses to the survey were from playwrights aged 35-44 and 45-54 (31% and 24% of the total respectively). Fewer responses were received from those at the youngest and oldest ends of the age range categories: no responses came from playwrights under 25 while respondents aged 75 or over represented 3% of the total survey response.

When the age range analysis is applied only to respondents who were commissioned to write plays in 2014/15, the overall spread is similar. Those aged 35-44 and 55-64 become proportionally better represented, however, with the other age ranges slightly less well represented.

From the interviews we discovered that many of the playwrights had begun their career in theatre as actors or directors before being attracted to writing. Several had also

benefited from postgraduate courses. This might go some way to explaining the older demographic.

## **Gender**

55% of respondents were female and 45% male.

When analysis of gender was applied only to those who had received commissions within or outside Scotland in 2014/15, the distribution was marginally more evenly split: 53% were female and 47% male.

This finding implies that women are better represented in playwriting in Scotland than they are in the population generally (51.5%). However, as we will see below the opportunities for female writers are less lucrative than their male counterparts.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they are transgender. 106 respondents answered the question: one is, two preferred not to say, and 103 are not.

## **LGBT**

Of 106 respondents who provided such information, 14 (13%) described themselves as LGBT, 89 (84%) said they are not LGBT and three (3%) preferred not to say.

## **Ethnicity**

93% of the survey sample is white:

- 60% consider their ethnicity to be white Scottish,
- 22% white British, 4% white Irish, and 8% any other white ethnic group (i.e. a white ethnic group that was not specified in the survey ethnicity headings).

7% of our sample is from an ethnic minority background:

- 3% of respondents are Indian Scottish or Indian British.
- One respondent is black (Black Scottish or Black British).
- The three remaining respondents detailed their ethnicity descriptions under the headings 'any other Asian ethnic group', 'any mixed or multiple ethnic groups' and 'any other ethnic group'.

The ethnic diversity of the survey sample is roughly in line with the population as a whole. <sup>2</sup>

## **Disability**

106 respondents responded to a question asking if they considered themselves to have a disability. Five (5%) preferred not to say, six (6%) said they have a disability and 95 (90%) said they do not have a disability.

It is difficult to undertake a strict comparison with the Scottish population as a whole since the definition of disability used in the Census includes those with 'long-term activity-limiting health problem or disability'<sup>3</sup> This includes those with age-related health problems or disability. 20% of Scotland's population falls within this definition of disabled.

## **The Work: Commissions within Scotland**

The SSP and the Federation of Scottish Theatre operate a contract that covers plays commissioned by theatres in Scotland. The contract takes account of the length of commission and specifies fees for writing and rehearsal attendance as well as royalties. There is a separate agreement between the SSP and Glasgow Lunchtime Theatre that covers A Play, A Pie and A Pint and is effectively a licence to produce the play with the rights remaining with the playwright. The survey identified 152 Scottish commissions in 2014/15. Eleven of the commissions were co-written.

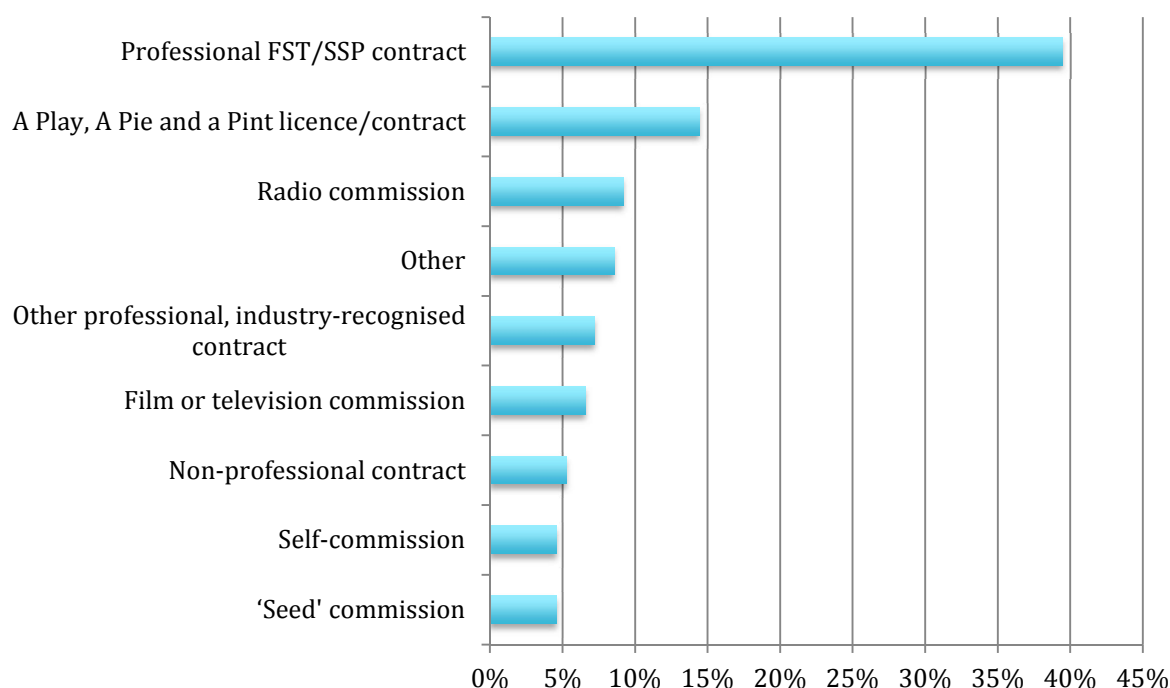
### Types of Scottish commissions

Scottish commissions were most commonly ‘professional FST/SSP contracts’. A Play, A Pie and A Pint licences and contracts were also commonly taken up by survey respondents.

The survey identified a large range of theatres commissioning work including the Creative Scotland Regularly Funded theatres and companies, as well as those in receipt of project funds: National Theatre of Scotland, Citizens Theatre, Lyceum Theatre, Dundee Rep, Traverse Theatre, Tron, Horsecross, Mull Theatre, Eden Court, MacRobert, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, A Play, A Pie and A Pint, Lung Ha’s, Fire Exit, Vanishing Point, Stellar Quines, Catherine Wheels, Random Accomplice, Magnetic North, Company Chordelia and many more. (See survey report for a full list of commissions reported by respondents).

There were a variety of other types of contracts and commissions in Scotland in 2014/15, as illustrated in the following chart:

**Chart: Scottish commissions by contract type, 2014/15**

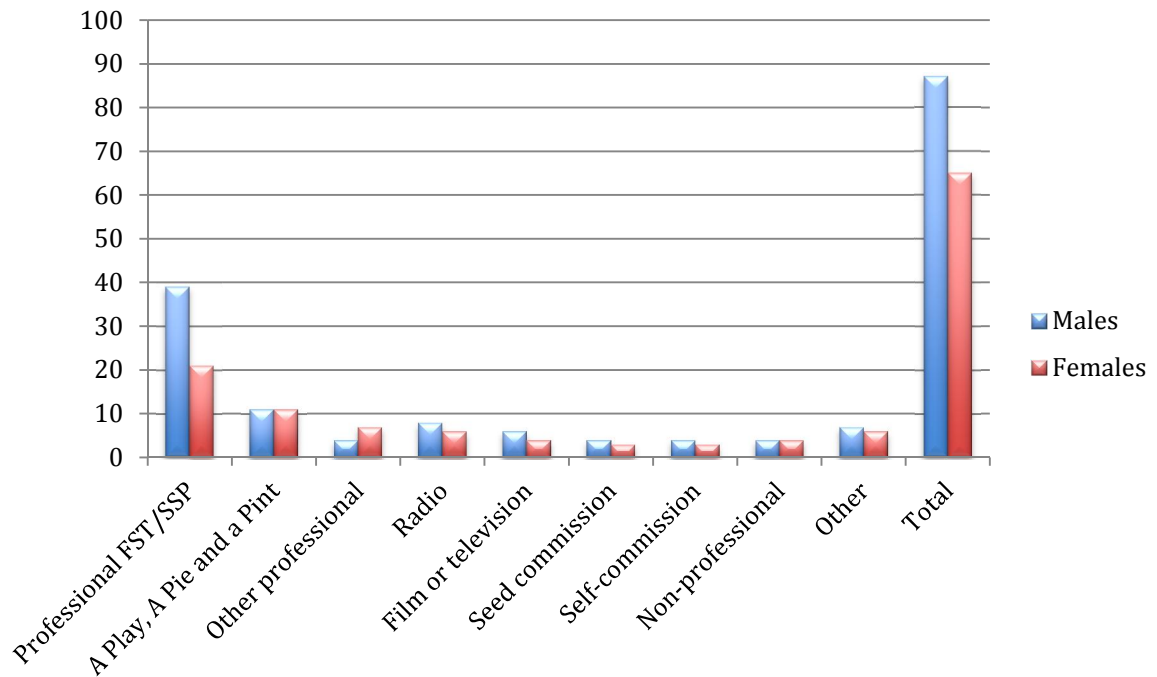


It is worth noting that the third highest level of commissions came from radio and this is discussed further later.

Men received more Scottish commissions than women within our survey sample: 87 (57%) went to men and 65 (43%) to women.

Similar numbers of each type of commission went to men and women except for professional FST/SSP contracts: of the 60 identified in the survey, 39 (65%) went to men and 21 (35%) to women.

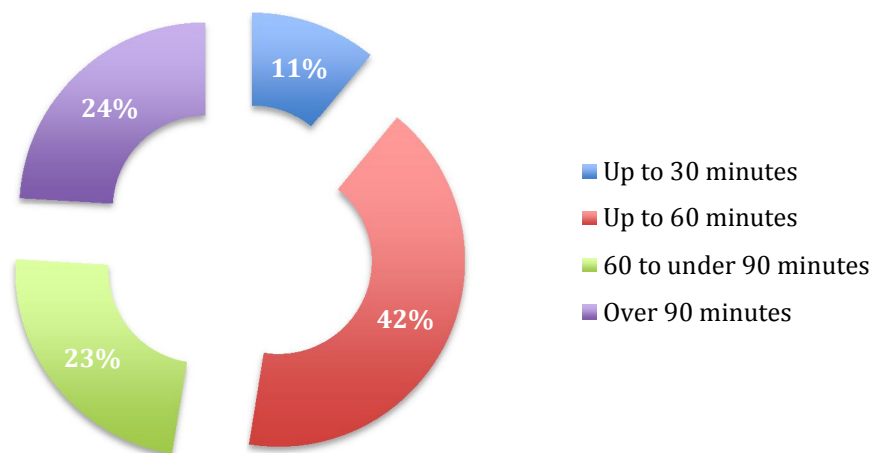
**Chart: Scottish commissions by contract type and gender, 2014/15**



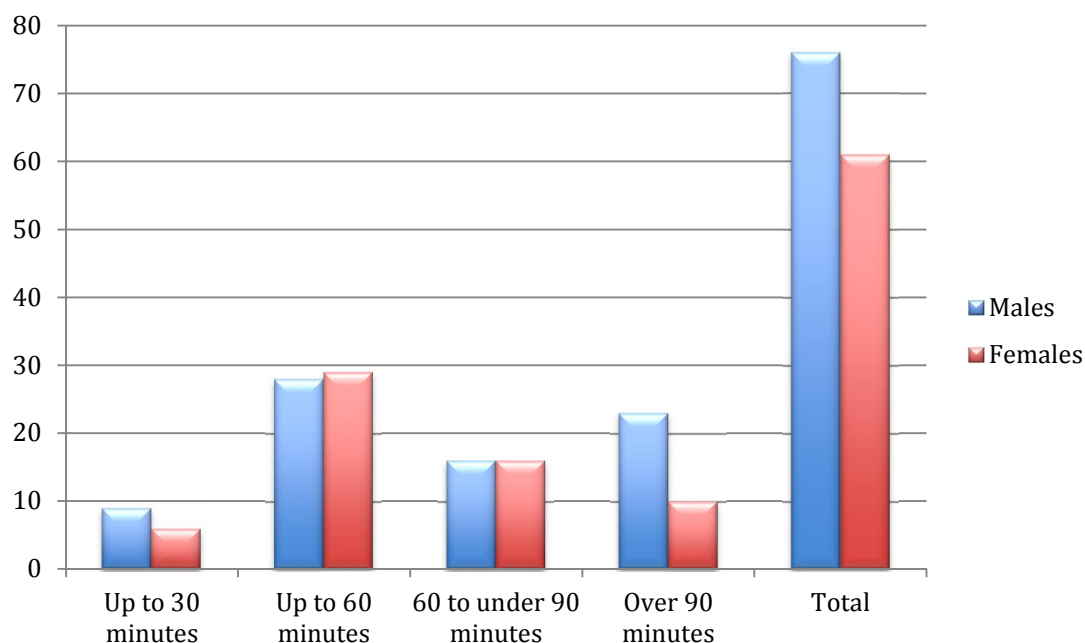
### Lengths of Scottish commissions

The most common category of Scottish commission length was ‘up to 60 minutes’, which made up 42% of the total. Marginally less than a quarter of Scottish commissions were ‘60 to under 90 minutes’ and a similar proportion were ‘over 90 minutes’. 11% of Scottish commissions were ‘up to 30 minutes’.

**Chart: Scottish commission lengths, 2014/15**



**Chart: Scottish commission lengths by gender, 2014/15**



Survey responses suggest that females received more short commissions than men (60% of commissions up to 30 minutes went to women) while men were commissioned to write longer-length plays (70% of commissions over 90 minutes went to men). As a playwright receives a higher commissioning fee for longer work, this finding implies that women are less well rewarded for writing than men.

Of the 59 respondents commissioned to write plays in 2014/15 who answered the equalities monitoring questions:

- Nine (15.3%) said they are LGBT (and one preferred not to say)
- Two (3.4%) said their ethnic group or background is non-white
- Two (3.4%) said they consider themselves to have a disability (and three preferred not to say)

Across all playwrights, the largest number of play commissions were for ‘up to 60 minutes’. This reflects the importance of A Play, A Pie and A Pint and also, it is assumed, radio drama.

## **Productions**

We looked at the number of plays produced in 2014/15 in Scotland.

57 playwrights (49%) wrote at least 98 new plays that were produced in Scotland in 2014/15. 34 playwrights (29%) had at least 62 second or subsequent productions produced in Scotland in 2014/15.

We also did an analysis of the repertoire of work produced in Scotland in 2014/15. There were 124 productions of new work and 37 of existing plays/pieces of work.<sup>4</sup> This by any measure suggests that new work has a major role to play in the Scottish theatre repertoire.

## **A little more about respondents' work in 2014/15**

In terms of other work related to playwriting:

- 17 (15%) said they had plays published.
- 22 (19%) were employed as dramaturgs.

### **Devised shows and Work in Progress**

- 41 respondents (36%) said they had presented 66 pieces of work as rehearsed readings.
- 33 respondents (29%) said they had presented 48 pieces of work as scratch or platform performances with some staging.
- 56 (50%) said they had presented work as a 'work in progress' in 2014/15
- Six respondents (5%) said they had presented 12 pieces of work as some 'other' kind of work in progress performance.
- 19 (17%) worked as writers on devised shows.

## **Playwriting as a source of income**

For most of Scotland's active playwrights, income from playwriting alone is insufficient to sustain them: median earnings (i.e. the earnings of the 'average' playwright) fall in the £5,000 to £9,999 range.

Other forms of work are important in supplementing the incomes of Scottish playwrights. Minimum median earnings are in the range of £10,000 to £19,999 and maximum median earnings exceed £20,000 when these are taken into account.

Commissions provided higher playwriting income levels than royalties for most respondents in 2014/15.

48% of respondents said they were not commissioned to write any plays in 2014/15: it is therefore unsurprising that a similar proportion (45%) of survey respondents said they did not earn anything from commissions in the same financial year.

56% of 'active' playwriting respondents (those with commissions in 2014/15) earned more than £5,000 from playwriting, 41% more than £10,000 and 22% more than £20,000.

Other arts employment appears to play the biggest role in topping up active playwrights' earnings: almost 70% earned something from employment of this kind and 22% said they earned over £10,000 from this type of work in 2014/15.<sup>5</sup>

The above earnings figures may sound low and they should therefore be treated with caution. As the Office for National Statistics states, '*Self-employment income is generally underestimated in surveys since their income generally comes from a wide variety of different sources which can be difficult to recall exactly*'.<sup>6</sup> ONS surveys found that median self-employed income was £207 per week, which is around £10,700 per year, in 2012/13.

The Review of Literature and Publishing in Scotland, quotes Annual Population Survey figures which suggest that there are approximately 2,300 artistic creative writers in



Scotland<sup>7</sup>. The Review goes on to estimate writers earn the gross mean of approximated £6000 per annum from literature-related income<sup>8</sup>.

### **Agreed Rates of Pay**

The SSP/FST contract for full commissions is acknowledged as being better than similar agreements which operate elsewhere in the UK and there is no evidence, from the survey and interviews, that any of the Creative Scotland funded organisations are breaking that agreement where it applies. It is, of course, the role of the SSP to intervene where this happens and Creative Scotland is clear that its funding is conditional on industry rates being paid.

However some respondents indicated that they received less than the agreed rates. Explanations were:

- In some cases the nature of the work meant writers were content not to seek Scottish Society of Playwrights/Federation of Scottish Theatres agreed rates.
- Others who worked for less than the agreed rates did so because they felt it was necessary to gain opportunities to work and develop their writing.
- Several respondents highlighted that written work for A Play, A Pie and A Pint achieves different rates. This is a rate agreed by the SSP and Glasgow Lunchtime Theatre, but this appeared not to be understood by some respondents.
- Some respondents said the rate they were paid was dependent on the work's success at generating income and keeping costs down.
- Others pointed to the fact that devised shows can lead to writers achieving rates of pay lower than those agreed by SSP and FST.

The tension between opportunities to showcase and the commitment to adhering to union agreements, was explored further in interviews.

## **Professional development opportunities**

In 2014/15, out of our survey sample:

- 23% had undertaken mentoring-based development.
- 19% had undertaken dramaturgy-based development.
- 20% had taken part in a residency or attachment to an organisation.
- 18% had participated in a writer's retreat.
- 29% had used a bursary or grant to develop their work.

All 23 respondents who participated in mentoring programmes considered the experience to be 'very useful'.

Writers' retreats, residencies/organisational attachments and dramaturgy opportunities were each accessed by similar numbers of respondents. The vast majority rated these experiences 'very useful', although the proportion was lower for dramaturgy (80%) than for writers' retreats (95%) and residencies/attachment to an organisation (90%). All other respondents rated these opportunities 'quite useful'.

87% rated grants and bursaries 'very useful' for their professional development, with the remainder considering them 'quite useful'.

Overall the survey respondents reflected a strong appreciation for the work of both Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the SSP.

### **Playwrights' Studio, Scotland**

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland has four main aims. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they think it currently achieves these aims:

- To strengthen and provide vital support and resources to Scotland's playwrights;
- To actively promote Scotland's playwrights, playwriting and plays;
- To facilitate critical thinking about playwriting, plays and playwrights through debate, discussion and advocacy;
- To increase the efficiency and sustainability of Playwrights' Studio for the benefit of Scotland's playwrights.

For all four aims a significant majority (71%-86%) said Playwrights' Studio was doing 'quite' or 'very' well. Similarly, for each aim only 3%-4% felt it was not doing well.

### **Scottish Society of Playwrights**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had benefited from any of the following from the Scottish Society of Playwrights:

- Advice on commission or pay rates;
- Advice on contracts;
- Lobbying on behalf of playwrights;
- Dispute resolution.

A majority of surveyed playwrights have benefited from the SSP's advice on commission or pay rates (64%) and lobbying (62%). 45% have drawn on the society's expertise and support for contracts advice and 28% for dispute resolution.

### **Issues for Playwriting in Scotland**

Few suggest that there is a full-blown crisis in Scotland's playwriting but most we spoke to believe there is fragility in the system. As one established playwright who began writing in the 1980s put it:

*[Things are a] helluva lot healthier than it was when I started out which is something we need to keep reminding ourselves about but I think the things which have created our health are fragile and whether they will sustain is debatable.*

Another described the situation as 'a perfect storm' with funding cuts and no ring fenced money for new writing. The interviewee was not advocating the creation of special funds but did stress the need that something had to be done to encourage more new work - not just translations and adaptations.

While all had concerns about what is happening no one was absolutely clear about where the problem lies or indeed how to tackle it.

On the face of it there are plays being commissioned and produced. On the other, some expressed concern about work being 'done for nothing'.

One playwright summed up this dilemma:

*It would never occur to me not to write a play because I was not getting paid for it. There is me. There is the audience. On the other hand I want to be paid for what I do. [...] Sometimes when I hear 'I really want to write this play but no one will pay me', I think, 'well you don't really want to write the play'.*

As another said, 'It's hard but no one asked us to do it.'

Others talked about feeling depressed when not writing and the need to write to 'stay sane.' This reflects the complexity of the issue: on the one hand the urge to write and have work produced, and on the other the need to be paid and make a living.

## **Development and Production**

In responses to the survey and in interviews, many put huge value on the development opportunities via the work of Playwrights' Studio, or initiatives by the Traverse or the Tron, or scratch performances, play readings, platform events, etc. Concerns were expressed that events like these are being marketed as 'plays' and audiences are paying for something which is far short of being a completed work.

Yet putting the work in front of an audience - especially a work in progress - is invaluable to many and of course can and does lead to commissions. This is the challenge for the SSP: to ensure its members are not exploited while not blocking good opportunities for development.

There were some very positive comments made about Scotland as 'a place for playwrights'. One survey respondent said:

*As a former TV and film writer, I find playwriting in Scotland exceptionally well supported so all I would really say is keep doing what you are doing and maybe do it more.*

And another

*I think it is a good time to be a playwright in Scotland. Although work opportunities and commissions may be limited in number, there is still a healthy scene and output for writers.*

It was suggested that this 'healthy scene' and feeling part of a wider network was due in no small part to the mentoring and other schemes offered by Playwrights' Studio, Scotland which put established and emerging writers together and broke down a sense of isolation many writers feel. But one person's network is another's closed shop and one successful writer for stage and TV, commented that they had yet to be invited to have a chat with 'one [single] artistic director' and suggested SSP do more to break down 'closed network'. This may equally apply to Playwrights' Studio, Scotland.

There were concerns from mainly young women writers about a lack of confidence when talking about their work and a perception that they had to become business/sales

people. There was also a strong reaction against competitions for new plays which one playwright described as the '*X Factor approach*'.

### **The Work: Stepping up**

There is a significant gap between development opportunities and full-scale production for new playwrights and the rewards that come with that. As one put it:

*The gap between the professional and the new or 'emerging' writer seems to be widening. There are many opportunities to have your work seen but it is increasingly difficult to build a career and be paid for writing.*

Another explained this difficulty as:

*When I talk to emerging writers – [there are] lots of scratch performances going on and there is mentoring. The ambition from that is to get A Play, A Pie and A Pint [but] the next ambition is a bit unclear. Then what do you aim to do? A Play, A Pie and A Pint every year? Where do you go from here?*

So the challenge for emerging writers is where to go next.

And the perspective from an established playwright is:

*When I am abroad [and asked about Scottish playwrights], I say Douglas Maxwell, Zinnie Harris, David Harrower, Stephen Greenhorn, Rona Munro, Liz Lochhead, John Byrne for a country of our size or a region of Britain of 5 million people - whichever way you want to view it - that is really good and the conditions that created that are specific and replicable and great - really strong. But when I say to myself where 10-15 years younger are the equivalent of these people, I feel less certain.*

It is not, as this speaker later acknowledged, a lack of talent or a lack of new playwrights, it is about a lack of opportunities for their work to be developed to full production. This is explored further below.

### **A Play A Pie and A Pint**

It is important at this point to underline that Glasgow Lunchtime Theatre has an agreement with the SSP that licences the play to Glasgow Lunchtime Theatre. There are several examples of plays presented in this way going on to be fully commissioned for further touring/presentation. A Play, A Pie and A Pint is acknowledged by emerging playwrights as a great step in their career and for the more established a chance to present work or idea which are a not a good fit for a full length play. And A Play, A Pie and a Pint is undoubtedly popular with audiences.

A concern for the SSP is how do you hold the line on A Play, A Pie and A Pint when other theatres want to do the same - specially now Glasgow Lunchtime Theatre is receiving Creative Scotland funding? There is also a concern that Creative Scotland views this kind of work as evidence of a healthy playwriting sector. A Play, A Pie and A Pint provides a platform for presenting new work but it does not provide development for full commissions.

### **Traverse**

It appears that the danger is that Scotland's playwriting will exist on two parallel but unbridgeable strands: A Play, A Pie and A Pint on the one hand and large scale plays produced by the National Theatre of Scotland, Citizens' Theatre and Lyceum Theatre on the other - with platform and play readings in between. Many spoke of '*the ladder*' for playwrights that appeared to exist in the past but no longer is clear.

This becomes an issue for the Traverse, the home for new writing in Scotland - and to some extent the Tron, and other mid-scale producers. There is no criticism of the Traverse's artistic leadership – who share the frustration. The cuts to its budget from Creative Scotland leaves it facing a challenge in being able to produce more full length new plays.

As one interviewee commented:

*Those [theatres] most likely to do the high value commissions are the most squeezed financially. All the major producing venues have had their funding on standstill - effective cut - for about 10 years now. And in the case of Lyceum and Traverse had a cut and really are squeezed.*

The Traverse's policy is to commission and produce only brand new plays – not adaptations or re-workings of the existing texts. Since 2012 the theatre has commissioned 25 new full-length plays including six in the last 12 months, despite the cuts. Of these 4 to 5 have been given a full production or remounted in the last three years. However the funding situation means the theatre cannot take as many as it would like to full production. The Traverse is acutely aware of these issues and how they play in the wider theatre community. They are looking at ways of increasing this output - including working with others on co-productions.

These commissions do not include the Breakfast Play commissions which number six a year - or the 10 plays on average, the theatre presents annually in association with A Play, A Pie and A Pint. As pointed out above, some of these have gone on to full commission and production.

### **National Theatre of Scotland (NTS)**

The NTS is committed to new writing and its artistic director Laurie Sansom described it thus:

*Our role is to give writers a platform to write their most ambitious work. I want them to feel that we are the place to write the thing they have always wanted to write.*

However he shares concerns about the issue of the production opportunities for new talent:

*I don't see right now a body of early career writers who could give a run for their money to more established writers. Still dominant voices should have the new wave snapping at their heels.*

The good news is that the NTS is in a position to do something about this. It recognises its role in developing talent at the mid-scale that in turn might lead to the production of work by the NTS at the large-scale. Currently it is developing collaborations to address this. The bad news is that recent cuts in its budget may mean that these plans require to be scaled back or phased differently.

### **Changing face: rise of the auteur**

The rise of the 'auteur' or theatre maker is a key point of discussion. It is described as theatre that comes out of the experience of the theatre maker, and is produced, directed and performed by them. Often they are developed in collaboration with other artforms - dance, music, video etc.

There is a perception that the auteur-led work is somehow changing playwriting. ‘*Are we framing it as a crisis because change is always hard and difficult?*’, one artistic director said. Yet there is a view, but not much evidence, that younger writers are shying away from ‘the play’ - described by one in these terms:

*Everything has its place but audiences like stories - don't have to be conventional story - or traditional. You can do it in a variety of different ways but if you have a script, you have longevity. It can be done again and we ignore that at our peril - because you can create a hit at the festival - one off - and do another amazing thing next year, but it is fragile, of its moment. You cannot repeat.*

It might also be about fashion and trends: ‘*The cooler thing to do is to be an emerging theatre maker and not a writer*’.

However it is difficult to see how this strand of performance/writing is diluting the form since it is not being favoured in funding or commissions. What is true is that Creative Scotland has identified this as a new trend in writing and, as several have suggested, this kind of work implies a level of impressive entrepreneurialism. Yet for those wishing to work in this way, opportunities have dwindled with the demise of The Arches, in particular the collaboration it enjoyed with the NTS.

The issue is less about different styles of work and different ways of producing, crowding out the full-length play, but more about the funding and resources to present new full-scale work.

### **Themes and content**

It is not the intention of this consultancy to examine the content of Scottish theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but some interesting observations were made about some of the trends and influences on Scottish theatre over the last 30-40 years and indeed the role the playwright has played in civic Scotland.

Not all writers want to write plays that have a Scottish accent or deal with broadly political issues. But from the 70s onwards one can detect in both style and content a strand of work that strives to define what it means to be Scottish or live in Scotland. An interesting question that was raised is – following devolution, the referendum and the General Election has civic Scotland caught up with what playwrights (and indeed other artists) have been saying? And if so, what is the role for the playwright now?

One comment:

*Are Scottish artists going to have a crisis of identity when they have nothing to rub up against? Scottish culture is one of opposition.*

And another on the types of plays being written:

*That sense of the big new play you don't see very often - the big serious new play - the political new play - discussing what we are doing and who we are. Maybe that's a cultural thing and maybe we just don't do that. Our writing has been more grass roots.*

We did not detect any sense in which this is a crisis, more a re-alignment – as one said:

*If the job of Scottish theatre and literature [since 1979] has been about staking a claim for unique cultural identity so yes on those terms civic Scotland has caught up with cultural Scotland. I don't see that as a threat for the need for art.*

A director commented:

*[It is a] harder job to look at how we organise ourselves and how we live and be really truthful about that. I think that is what the new wave of writers can do because they are not quite so bound up in that sense of 'we are fighting to establish a Scottish identity'. They are going 'do we like who we are? Are we as liberal as we think we are? Are we an egalitarian society? Do we look after the marginal?' And something about diversity which is right at the top of the agenda. [...] Scotland has not looked at itself in that way.*

It was interesting to hear both producers and writers raise the question of 'where do we go from here?'

## **The Audience**

It was not part of our remit to look in detail at the audiences for new work. However in our research we found that the old view, 'new work is risky' does not accurately reflect the situation in Scotland – or indeed in the UK as a whole. One might just as easily say 'all work is risky'.

Recent research carried out for the British Theatre Consortium, UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatre found that:

*For the first time since records began, new work has overtaken revivals in the repertoire. In 2013, new work constituted 59% of all productions, 64% of all performances, 63% of all seats sold, and 66% of box office. <sup>9</sup>□*

This trend can also be seen specifically in Scotland, evidenced by our work on repertoire in 2014/2015.

At one end of the scale there is the success of the NTS and the larger theatres in presenting new work and at the other, the phenomenal success of A Play A Pie and A Pint. The Traverse, particularly during the Edinburgh Festival, is a magnet for audiences for new work from Scotland and elsewhere.

Nevertheless there is a big difference between popping along to Oran Mor at lunchtime or spending time during August in Edinburgh, and turning out on a cold February night at 7.30 in the Gorbals to watch a play by an unknown (to you) writer. Equally tricky is to attract audience to venues where new work is not often seen and where it is on for only one night. So this is not a straightforward issue.

One obvious way of developing an audience for new writing - and indeed for theatre in general - is to make it available and many we spoke to talked about the need for longer runs and to revitalise the touring network. Again this is beyond our remit, but the move to co-productions begins to address the issue of longer runs.

## International

### Commissions outside Scotland

The survey identified at least 36 individual playwriting commissions from non-Scottish organisations and venues in 2014/15. The largest number of non-Scottish commissions came from, not surprisingly, England- 22 in all (including National Theatre and Royal Court), two from the United States, and one each from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Italy. Three of these were translated into another language.

The most common category of non-Scottish commission length was 'over 90 minutes', which made up 36% of the total. A quarter were 'up to 30 minutes' and another quarter were 'up to 60 minutes', while 14% were '60 to under 90 minutes'. Two of the non-Scottish commissions identified in the survey were co-written.

### Productions outside Scotland

21 playwrights (18%) wrote 21 new plays produced outside Scotland in 2014/15. 29 playwrights (25%) had at least 68 second or subsequent productions produced outside Scotland in 2014/15 and 23 playwrights (20%) said they had written plays originally produced in Scotland that went on to tour beyond Scotland in 2014/15. Countries visited by Scottish productions in that year include England, Italy, Switzerland, Russia, United States, Canada, New Zealand, China, India, Brazil, Jamaica, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Trinidad.

Scottish playwrights are acknowledged to have an international reach whether through commissions, productions or the publication of translations. Royalties for work produced overseas was described by one playwright as '*earning money while you sleep*'. Gaining access to an international network is another matter.

The British Council is recognised as playing an important role in developing opportunities and many playwrights we talked to and surveyed had taken up the chance of exchanges or visits. The British Council offers support for showcasing; exchange; development of art activity in other countries as part of wider development; information and networking.

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland is keen to develop its support and advice for playwrights wishing to work internationally. It already takes up the opportunities offered by the British Council and has recently responded to initiatives with Brazil and New Zealand.

A central question for any organisation working internationally is what are the priorities? Should the focus be the English-speaking world or non-European countries? As for the rest of Europe, while the UK is part of the EU, free movement of labour allows contacts to be made as easily with Berlin as with London. However that might change. An alternative approach is to be reactive: Brazil because of the 2016 Olympics, Japan in 2020. Then there is the economic agenda of the Scottish Government and where they see the development of trade for Scotland - for example China or India.

Those experienced in this area of work put a slightly different emphasis on international cultural development. While it is important to respond to initiatives – such as the links with Brazil, it is also important not to lose those contacts which at the moment may be difficult but which in the longer term may prove again to be fruitful, as they have in the past. This is particularly true of Russia where Scottish companies and individual artists still have close ties even if at a UK Government level relationships are not straightforward.



Similarly there has been a history of links with the Middle East and North Africa. While clearly too dangerous at the moment - most of the Syrian writers are now exiles from their own country - there may be opportunities in the re-building a cultural infrastructure in the future. The suggestion is that Scotland's artists continue to respond to initiatives but also work with areas of the world where 'no-one else is going'.

There were several other suggestions about how Scotland can improve its international links for playwrights and one is the development of the Playwrights' Studio, Scotland website to indicate its interest in finding opportunities for Scottish playwrights. An introduction in several key languages is also advised.

Many playwrights have good international links and important experiences which they would be willing to share and another suggestion is to bring together those already working internationally in an event at which that experience would be shared with each other and crucially with those wishing to take up the opportunities.

Another area of collaboration is with writers in other media (many playwrights work in several media including poetry and novel writing). The Literature and Publishing Sector Review commissioned by Creative Scotland, highlights the importance of international markets for writers and publishers and recommends the establishment of a new body - Scottish Literature International. Such a body offers opportunities for collaboration with playwrights and Playwrights' Studio, Scotland is a member of the Literature Alliance which is taking forward the recommendations from the Sector Review.

### **Language and translation**

When analysing the language of playwrights in Scotland, 110 (97%) write in English, 38 (34%) in Scots and five (4%) in Gaelic.<sup>10</sup> Two writers specified other languages they write in, namely French and Croatian.

Seven (6%) translated plays in 2014/15: into English from Russian, German, Italian and Quebecois; into Scots from Quebecois; and into Gaelic from English.

From the survey we received a comment on translation from other languages into English. There are very few playwrights who are bilingual and/or capable of translating from another language. It is common to take a literal translation and have this worked on by a mono-lingual playwright and/or the director. This, the respondent asserts leads to 'dumbing down' of the work and 'does little-to-no favours' to the writer whose work is actually being translated. They continue:

*I think institutional bias against bona fide literary translation exists, and makes a mockery of a field in which Scotland was recently so notably and internationally strong, in terms of the work of Robert David MacDonald and Bill Findlay in particular (now both of course deceased).*

While this was just one view and covers an area which does not neatly fit within the remit of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland or the SSP, the value put on a translation is clearly important for the playwright and audience alike.

This works both ways. In discussion with an experienced translator of plays from Scotland into French, the strong advice which emerged was to be careful about who you choose as your translator and check their track record. The translator is the bridge to a foreign market where theatre directors are not able to read the plays in the original. 'The first thing you have to do is to get a translation.'

Most playwrights rely on their agents to negotiate translation and foreign rights but it is important that the playwright remains in touch with what is happening. Translations are often speculative - certainly in France - and so when a translator asks for permission to translate they are more often or not doing this on a speculative basis and will not be paid unless the play is produced. Not all agents understand this and try to exact a fee.

The other key issue is for the playwright to keep in touch with the translator directly. The agent has a hugely important role in protecting the writer but to achieve a good translation there needs to be contact and a building of trust between the playwright and their translator directly.

The translator also makes a special plea for acknowledgement:

*We always have to fight to get our names on the posters and programmes and the critics do not even mention us.*

The issue of translation is relevant to only a few but if the writer is to gain an international reputation in the non English-speaking world, then the translator's role becomes vital. Best advice: '*Ne pas mettez des bâtons dans les roues des traducteurs!* / *Don't put a spoke in the wheel of the translator*'.

## **Other opportunities**

### **Broadcasting and Film**

As demonstrated by the survey, BBC Radio is a big supporter of Scottish writing with 60 hours a year of drama and book adaptations/readings being produced by the BBC in Scotland. Although most of the output is networked and has to be 'green lit' by London, once this is given, the writer will work directly with the producer/director with no one else involved until the actors come into the studio. This close collaboration has parallels in theatre. Radio drama tends to be transitory. Once broadcast it has gone, unless repeated, and it is rarely reviewed by critics so has not the profile of other forms of writing. Having said that, it can reach an audience of close to a million on one single broadcast.

In contrast, BBC Scotland's TV drama is, many said, in a poor state with few drama commissions coming to Scotland. River City is an important training ground for writers wishing to work in television but it is not seen as being the answer to drama output from Scotland. Discussion in this area centred around lack of vision and leadership, centralisation in London, poor relationship with the writers and above all, lack of trust. One respondent echoed what others were saying:

*It's vital the BBC in Scotland is devolved. If not devolved then a new SBC created which can open up new commission possibilities for serious Scottish writing work.*

Film commissions and production is also an area in which a few have worked but again, despite funding from Creative Scotland, it still remains a patchy area for Scottish writers.

The other main issue raised about TV work – and film – is the method of working. '*Brutal*' is a term used by some. However learning the craft of screen writing and story telling in those media is one that many find challenging and interesting. It was pointed

out that unlike theatre, the writer is not the most important person in the room and a thick skin and a particular temperament is required to work in TV. For those who are commissioned to write for TV network drama, the rewards are good and can sustain a life in the theatre.

Although it has delivered discrete projects in screenwriting, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland is clear that its primary role is to develop playwrights. It has a limited ongoing role in helping playwrights access opportunities within TV and film. Interestingly the journey is being made the other way with those who have worked in TV in particular, hoping to develop as playwrights – with no expectations of large financial rewards.

Another area of potential area for development is in technology and the digital world. There are examples of films made for online distribution on YouTube etc. However in order for those films to be broadcast, high quality (and expensive) technology is required to meet viewer expectations on production values. So while recording music in your bedroom and distributing online is well established, the position is not as advanced for film.

However there is scope in the use of technology as one playwright said:

*Scottish writers also need to take up the opportunities of technology. Writing plays for distribution by podcast, marketing their work via Twitter, meeting and rehearsing via Skype and so on. Technology - and its open access - is a really fantastic thing for writers who want to live and work in Scotland. We should be at the forefront of taking advantage of that.*

This is not about creating an alternative to theatre, nor about particularly earning money, but about marketing, promoting and exploring new ways of making work.

### **Role of the agent**

A piece of advice which many established playwrights offer to new ones is 'get an agent'. This is normally less important for work in theatre - especially theatre in Scotland where there is a strong support network. It is also interesting to note the number of the SSP members who had spent time on the Committee, who said they knew the contract as well as the theatre managements.

However for film and TV and for international work, an agent is vital.

There are no dedicated play agents in Scotland. The routes to getting a London agent is the best way to get one from London is to have a show on at the festival get a transfer to London. This is of course a challenge for emerging playwrights.

This opens up the question of the role of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland. It is not, nor can it be, an agency promoting one writer's work over another. What it can do is discuss with theatres what kind of work/writer they are seeking and then suggest a range of possibilities. It is also engaged in promoting new and established writers. There is a view from those who know the work of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland that theatres do not take enough advantage of its expertise. Literary managers, where they exist, might do worse than having regular contact with the Playwrights' Studio, Scotland staff.

Nevertheless, they are not agents who, if they are good, support the playwright's whole career not just one production or play. There is potential for Playwrights' Studio, Scotland to arrange meeting(s) between playwrights and London-based agents when they are in Edinburgh for the Festival.

## Lessons from elsewhere in UK

As pointed out above, the SSP/FST rates for a play commission are higher than the rates negotiated between the Writers' Guild and the UK Theatre and ITC. In England new writing appears to be focussed mainly in London. Some SSP members currently live there and some also have transfers or commissions with London theatres.

The Royal Court is a beacon of new writing – not just in England but across the UK and the National Theatre also has a hugely important role to play on the large as well as smaller scale – and both of these organisations pay a proper commissioning fee, rehearsal attendance money and of course royalties.

On the other hand there are many venues known for new writing – some funded by Arts Council England, some not - where commissions for a full play are as low as £2,500 with no paid rehearsal attendance. As they are smaller venues royalties are rarely significant. Indeed in the case of one venue, the writer essentially pays to get their play on. As one writer put it, *'writing is a game for the independently wealthy'*.

This is not raised to suggest Scottish theatre should engage a 'race to the bottom' Quite the opposite. There are areas of real concern in Scotland and if these are not tackled then not only will playwrights struggle even more to survive but the door will be closed to those who do not have private means - as exists in London.

## Conclusions

Our aim in exploring 'Scotland, a place for playwrights?' was to better understand the context in which playwrights operate and to uncover more about individual needs.

### Context

There is a contradictory picture for new writing in Scotland.

The headline is in 2014/2015 nearly half the playwrights we surveyed had 98 new plays produced in Scotland – this includes broadcasting and film. When we looked at the repertoire of Creative Scotland funded organisations we see that new work outstrips productions of the 'canon' by more than 3:1. <sup>11</sup>

The development of playwrights and playwriting is also in a healthy state with overwhelmingly positive support for the work of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and other development activities. New (often young) playwrights are being offered a chance to take their work to the next stage.

The contract between the SSP and FST is better than those found elsewhere in the UK and there is no evidence that any of the funded theatres are breaking this contract.

Yet there is a perception and some evidence that playwriting in Scotland, while not in crisis, is facing difficult times. Playwrights, with few exceptions, are not able to make a living for writing for theatre alone. While radio remains a creative outlet for the work of many, there is no evidence that it is likely to expand and other areas of broadcasting and film are difficult to access for most writers in Scotland.

Here is the contradiction: lots of new work is being written, developed, commissioned and produced but still it is very hard to make a living. All playwrights we interviewed expressed the contradiction in their own minds between wanting to create work, and

present that work to an audience no matter what, while wanting to be paid for it. There is not a 'split' in views between older/younger, emerging or mid-career/established. All shared the same issues as any creative artists: how to make a living and remain creative. And many spoke of the need to keep finding new voices from those excluded from theatre at the moment.

So what is causing this problem? The most obvious issue is funding: more new work cannot be created without more money to take it from the page to the stage. Recent cuts to the culture budget announced by the Scottish Government will have an impact on Creative Scotland's budget as well as that of the National Theatre of Scotland. Although we have yet to see the full effects of this, it is unlikely there will be more money for production.

There remain only two main routes to funding from Creative Scotland— Open Projects and Regularly Funded. There is no specific fund for new writing and there is no indication from Creative Scotland that it is intending to create one. It expects its Regularly Funded Organisations to build the cost of new work into their budget. One of the criteria it uses to assess artistic plans of these organisations is 'excellence and experimentation' which is taken to mean pushing boundaries and taking risks. This does not solely apply to new writing. Creative Scotland also looks for experimentation in the way work is presented – new or not.

Analysis of the funding to theatre following the announcement in October 2015 of the arts organisations to receive three-year funding, indicates as a whole it has not declined. However the cuts/standstill faced by many of the *producing* theatres has had an impact on the number of productions they can mount each year -- and we the impact of local government cuts has still to be felt. The loss of The Arches also removes an important resource for the creation of new work. Many bemoan the lack of support for the creation of new work for touring – a concern shared by promoters. As several interviewees pointed out, touring allows for a longer life for work and widens the audience. While there appears to be an audience for new work, this depends on where, when and how much work. It is harder to develop an audience for new work when it comes by very rarely.

There is an issue around the structure of new writing in Scotland. While we can point to successes of A Play, A Pie and A Pint at one scale, and the NTS and larger theatres at the other, the production of new work has diminished at middle scale. Funding cuts have hit the Traverse particularly badly and there has been contraction in their ability to produce new full-length plays.

To sustain a vibrant playwriting culture, new plays need to be produced at every level - small, medium and large scale and to be able, to tour where appropriate. The gaps which are emerging, which put at risk Scotland's reputation as a place for playwrights, will potentially lead to a smaller narrower group of (ageing) playwrights with little or no new talent coming through. Such a situation will lead to a less diverse playwriting culture and in turn a narrower and shrinking audience for new work, with less demand internationally.

There were several suggestions as to what could be done. On a more radical front, some suggested theatres move to a new commissioning model that increases the obligation of the playwright to deliver and the theatre to produce. There was also a suggestion that work be presented in full production, feedback and responses garnered from the audience and peers, and then a re-mounting taking account of any changes. These ideas are potentially high risk and expensive. At the moment only the NTS is in a position to regularly re-mount work if successful.

Co-productions are certainly one way of extending the run of a new piece and offering to audiences in different towns/cities. Again this is at the heart of the NTS's remit but other large theatres (e.g. Citizens' and Lyceum) have used this as a way of spreading the risk and increasing the life of the play in co-productions inside and outside Scotland. That model could be applied to mid-scale productions as well and indeed could encourage more touring.

While some playwrights we interviewed were critical of the arrangement with A Play A Pie and A Pint, it is difficult to see how undermining one successful approach to presenting new work will aid the development of theatre as a whole. Similarly the 'auteur-led' productions are an important route for theatre artists of a particular sort to develop work.

While not denying the challenges both throw up for the SSP, the debate around the future of new work in Scotland needs to centre around developing new ways of working. As an entirely voluntary operation this is a challenging thought. One approach might be to build stronger, ongoing alliances, where appropriate, with FST, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and individual theatres.

### **Individual needs**

As acknowledged above, the biggest area of concern for playwrights is to have their work produced and to be rewarded for that. At the end of the day that is going to come down to decisions taken by individual theatres and above all, Creative Scotland. As said above, this will be best achieved by a clear message from playwrights and the organisations with which they work,

Beyond that, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, and the SSP, have helped to develop a strong mutually supportive network. The challenge is to find ways of developing playwrights as they move from the initial development stage on to main stage production.

There are those who feel excluded from the network because of geography or other reasons. There are issues around the position of women playwrights, BAME writers and those with a disability. Gaelic drama is another area which has development needs. This is wider issue than writing – there is a lack of directors, design, technical staff and actors who can work in Gaelic.

There is scope to provide information and advice on international work. A rich seam of knowledge already exists within many playwrights in Scotland and Playwrights' Studio, Scotland is well placed to create the conditions for that to be shared as well as taking up any opportunities for collaboration which come from the Review of Literature and Publishing. Similarly there is an opportunity to develop relations between playwrights and agents who are usually based in London. Playwrights' Studio, Scotland can neither be an agent nor be responsible for creating a Scottish-based agency. However theatres in Scotland could do more to use the intelligence that sits within the organisation.

While radio continues to be an important source of new writing in Scotland, television proves a difficult area to enter for most writers. This is seen by those we spoke to as being an issue of a lack of TV drama production in BBC Scotland and the centralisation of decision-making in London. There is little that the clients of this report can do to change this policy save building links where possible and ensuring that those involved in the debate around Charter renewal are aware of the impact of current BBC policy on playwrights and playwriting in Scotland.

Overall we conclude that playwriting remains one of Scotland's cultural strengths. There are real issues over sustainability of individuals, the theatres and the audience. Above all there are real concerns about 'the play' and new work on stage. Last word to the artist from one of our interviews:

*I want more poetry on the stage and more plays on the stage. I want more words. More drama as constructed action through time shaped by an individual mind because that is an art I value and yearn for it and there is an audience for it and I believe it has some really fantastic qualities that I highly value: it's transferable, translateable, long lived and carriable in the memory and so forth. So I want more of that and I want it better and I want it to come from a much wider range of people not because I want to tick boxes but because the best work has always come from surprising sources.*

## **Recommendations**

As indicated earlier, the future of playwriting in Scotland does not rest solely with Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the SSP but involves producers, theatre companies and funders. There was overwhelming support for the work of both organisations. Below are outlined recommendations for strengthening the role of both and in doing so, supporting the production of new work.

### **Playwrights' Studio Scotland**

Many of the issues that arose in this report, are already being tackled by Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and included in their current Business Plan

These include:

- Support for Playwright Studio Scotland 'graduates' and mid career playwrights through the expansion of its Professional Workshop Programme.
- Development of playwrights in Gaelic, BAME playwrights and disabled playwrights through its Diversity, Public Engagement and Creative Learning strategy.
- Widening the geographic impact of its work through its National Workshop Programme and Associate Playwrights and extending the reach of its TalkFest discussions and workshops.
- Supporting opportunities for playwrights in broadcasting through continuing its work with BBC Radio and developing its links with BBC TV through its development project, the Writers Room.
- Ensuring (even) closer working between Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the rest of the theatre sector.

Other areas for consideration are:

- Develop an international policy that includes reacting to invitations and identifying new areas for links using and sharing the 'intelligence' from established playwrights. Develop the website to include a desire to promote

Scottish playwrights internationally. Provide advice for playwrights on good practice in translation of work.

- Consider an event during the Edinburgh Festival involving agents and playwrights seeking agency support.
- Without compromising its role, continue provide advice to literary managers and artistic directors on new emerging playwrights.

## **SSP**

- Continue to monitor the application of its agreements and flag up to theatres/producer and Creative Scotland (where relevant) if contracts are not being adhered to.
- Debate the position of SSP regarding development work, scratch performances and works in progress to identify principles for working which do not undermine the importance of this work.

## **Both organisations**

- Work together with FST and individual theatres make the case to Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government about the importance of playwriting in Scotland and the emerging problems which can undermine its success. In particular raise the issue of mid scale and touring.
- Discuss with FST and theatres the principle of new models of commissioning and production which can happen within the existing funding framework and which link commissioning and production more closely.
- Work together to and raise issues with theatres about productions by BAME and writers with a disability.
- Together raise the issue of productions by women playwrights with Scottish theatre companies.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We analysed the repertoire of Regularly Funded, Programme Funded and Annual funded theatres and companies, as well as funds spent on Quality Productions in 2014/2015. We also added the repertoire of the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) and A Play, A Pie and A Pint. The information was gathered from the companies' websites and we included all new productions of new work – excluding existing work or 2<sup>nd</sup> productions. We also excluded international tours and the online Five Minute Theatre by NTS.

<sup>2</sup> The size of the minority ethnic population in 2011 was just over 200,000 or 4 per cent of the total population of Scotland (based on the 2011 ethnicity classification). <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Equality/Equalities/DataGrid/Ethnicity/EthPopMigration>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Equality/Equalities/PopulationMigration>

<sup>4</sup> The figures for the repertoire will differ from those from the playwrights because not all the playwrights for the former responded to the survey, and vice versa.

<sup>5</sup> See full report of the survey for an explanation of calculation of 'minimum' and 'maximum' median earnings,

<sup>6</sup> *Self-employed workers in the UK, 2014*, [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.creativescotland.com/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/31950/Creative-Scotland-Literature-and-Publishing-Sector-Review-Nordicity-2015-CIRC.pdf](http://www.creativescotland.com/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/31950/Creative-Scotland-Literature-and-Publishing-Sector-Review-Nordicity-2015-CIRC.pdf) (p. 4)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p. 22

<sup>9</sup> <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/513c543ce4boabff73bcoa82/t/55551653e4b0c8565f6fb1ff/1431639635706/British+Theatre+Repertoire+2013.pdf> (p 3)

<sup>10</sup> Although this is a tiny number, in real terms it compares well with the population as a whole. 1.1% of the population over 3 years old speaks Gaelic.

<sup>11</sup> Based on our analysis of repertoire - see note 1 above.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Steering Group**

#### **Playwrights' Studio, Scotland**

Fiona Sturgeon Shea

Emma McKee

#### **Scottish Society of Playwrights**

Davey Anderson

Deb Jones

Jenny Knotts

Morna Young

### **Interviewees**

Susie Armitage, A Play A Pie and A Pint

Lorne Boswell, Scottish Equity (phone call)

Pamela Carter, playwright

Eunice Crook, former British Council

Mike Cullen, playwright

Robert Dawson Scott, playwright

Leslie Finlay, Creative Scotland

Vicky Featherstone, Royal Court Theatre

David Greig, playwright, Royal Lyceum Theatre artistic director designate

Stephen Greenhorn, playwright

Stuart Hepburn, BBC TV

Zinnie Harris, playwright

Dominic Hill, Citizens' Theatre

Gaynor Holmes, BBC TV

Kieran Hurley, playwright

Jenny Knotts, playwright

Lauren Lamarr, STV and independent filmmaker

Laura Mackenzie Stuart, Creative Scotland

Linda Maclean, playwright

Jon Morgan, Federation of Scottish Theatre

Rona Munro, playwright

David Ian Neville, BBC Radio

Orla O'Laughlin, Traverse Theatre

Blandine Pellisier, Translator

Laurie Sansom, National Theatre of Scotland

Morna Young, playwright

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Playwrights' Studio, Scotland Business Plan 2015- 2018

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