

A Study of Feature Film Development and Screenwriter and Development Training in the UK

**A Final Report for the UK Film Council and
Skillset**

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1. Key Points

Quantitative Results:

- Total investment in UK feature film development in 2006 is estimated at £50m, covering 1,700 films in active development. The 13 *major*¹ developers in our UK companies universe contributed 42.6% of this figure, with the remaining 57.4% coming from the 164 *typical* UK developers.
- Skillset invested £675,000 in screenwriter training projects in 2006.
- On average, 4.3% of a UK film's budget is spent on development. Most films in 2006 had budgets between £3m and £10m.
- On average, companies have 3.3 staff with some development responsibilities, and 1.7 working exclusively on development.
- 18% of films that go into development in the UK subsequently go into production.
- Films in the Drama genre accounted for 37.4% of all films in active development in 2006, and took 10% of the UK gross box office.

Qualitative Results:

- Most projects are initiated by production companies in-house, not by writers.
- Development can improve the prospects for a film's commercial or critical success, but there is no direct relationship between success and the intensity of development, according to interviewees.
- The main factor in deciding either whether to greenlight or abandon a project is finance, with financiers often determining the final decisions.
- Key elements of development best practice were perceived to include market awareness, developing relationships with writers, and an experienced team.
- Key elements of best practice in training schemes were perceived to include raising market awareness, and maintaining a balance between artistry and marketability.
- Key elements of best practice for university courses were perceived to include creating 'script-literate' writers and using industry professionals.
- Most production companies have no opinion on the effectiveness of screenwriter training schemes in the UK, most likely because they hire

¹ The terms "major" and "typical" in this study distinguish the relatively small group of companies engaged in a particularly large amount of UK development, from the larger group of remaining firms that must be seen as reflecting the average.

experienced writers whose time in training schemes (if any) is well behind them.

- Of the minority of production companies who expressed views, most felt that training schemes were ineffective in contributing to critical and/or commercial success, as they were perceived to lack market awareness.
- A small number of production companies spoke positively of an individual training scheme that claims to particularly focus on the market.
- Training schemes should train writers in a variety of genres, and train them to write both adaptations and original stories.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. Mapping the Sector

- The total investment (public and private) in UK feature film development in 2006 is estimated at £50m, with 7.3% of companies accounting for 42.6% of this spend.²
- Total development investment in 2001-2006 was between £135m and £250m, and approximately 4,000 films were in active development in the UK during this period.
- Skillset data show investment of nearly £675,000 in screenwriter training projects in 2006, and the total budget for these schemes was £1.4m. Seven screenwriter training schemes were identified that had received Skillset funding prior to 2006.³ In 2006, these 7 schemes had a combined budget of £3m.
- On average, 4.3% of a UK film's budget is spent on development. A comparable average in the US, using a limited sample and informed advice, is 10%.
- There were approximately 1,700 films in active development in the UK in 2006. A small number of companies with *major*⁴ involvement in UK development had an average of 29.6 films in development, while the average for *typical* companies was much lower at 8.1.
- On average, 1.8 writers are used per film. Of the example films in our sample, 53% used just one writer, and 38% used two writers. The remaining 9% used more than two writers.
- Approximately 35% of films in active development in the UK in 2006 involved new talent.⁵
- Drama was by far the most commonly developed genre in 2006, making up 37.4% of all films developed. Comedy and Thriller films also feature highly, at 15.8% and 10.9% respectively. Horror, at 8.7%, was also

² This spend covered all films in active development in 2006 (regardless of whether these films were eventually greenlit).

³ These 7 schemes had received Skillset funding in the past, and were continuing to invest money in screenwriter training in 2006.

⁴ See footnote 1 above.

⁵ 'New talent' was defined as writers new to feature film writing.

significant. In 2006, Drama films grossed 10.1% of the UK gross box office, Comedy 27.3%, Thriller 7.7% and Horror 4.7%.⁶

- Many respondent production companies believed that there was too much Drama currently produced in the UK. Comedy, Action, Horror and Family were said to be the key genres that the UK market wanted but that were not developed and produced to a great enough extent.
- The majority of films in active development in 2006 had budgets between £3m and £10m. Only 3.7% of films in active development in the UK in 2006 had budgets greater than £30m.
- The consensus of opinion from production companies is that a direct relationship between total development expenditure on a film and audience/revenue shares does not exist, as this is reliant on a wide variety of factors.
- Although quantitative data indicated a strong correlation between the total amount spent on development and the total budget for a film, respondents made it clear that they perceived there to be no link between the proportion of total budget spent on development and audience/revenue shares.
- There was no evidence from the limited sample of quantitative data we collected that the proportion of total budget spent on development has an identifiable impact on a film's box-office success.⁷
- In 2006, 54.5% of films in development were based on original scripts and 45.5% based on adaptations.

2.2. The Development Process

- Organisation of development activity depends on a company's size and workload. Larger companies often employ an extensive development team, whereas in smaller companies, a single member of development staff may cover all the work.
- The main avenue of project initiation is in-house development, which is particularly important to independent production companies in order to manage development costs. Most companies said they consider spec scripts, but these are a much less common way of initiating a project.

⁶ The majority of the remaining gross box office was taken by Action (18%), Adventure (7%) and Animation (16%).

⁷ Our film sample here was very small, and in order to acquire robust quantitative data, a future study of a larger number of films will need to be conducted.

- The majority of companies have at least one staff member working full-time in development, and most of them also have a Head of Development. On average, production companies have 3.3 members of staff with some development responsibilities, and 1.7 working exclusively on development.
- Respondents said that marketability is the main factor when deciding whether to fund the development of a script. Originality and quality are seen as key aspects driving this marketability, as they can draw saleable talent.
- The majority of companies agreed that there was no typical duration for the development process and, for the films sampled, it ranged from 6 months to 10 years, with a mean average duration of 3.4 years (the median average was 3 years). These averages were the same for major developers and typical developers.
- Few companies offered an optimum duration for development during the surveys and interviews. Some explained that there was no such concept. Of the few that offered an optimum duration, 2 to 3 years seemed to be the ideal period.
- There was no consensus on the typical number of draft scripts, which varied greatly from project to project. Interviewees explained that the number of drafts varied depending on the writer used and the budget available, ranging from 2 to 20.
- The main factor in deciding whether or not to greenlight or abandon a project is finance, with financiers often determining the final decisions. Few companies have specific timeframes for these processes, but rather regularly evaluate the marketability of the project in order to come to a decision.

2.3. Assessing Impact

- While development is seen as a factor that can improve prospects for a film's commercial or critical success, respondents believe there is no direct relationship between intensity of development and level of success. 'Quality' of development is an important factor.
- On average, 18% of films that go into development in the UK subsequently go into production. This conversion rate is higher, at 23%, among the major companies involved in UK development, while the rate among typical companies is 17%.
- Opinions vary on the optimum conversion rate, although in general companies would like their conversion rate to be higher than it is. Some

smaller companies claim that they only need to convert one film to be successful, and therefore see an optimum conversion rate as irrelevant.

- Just over half of all respondents believe that all film genres require similar levels of development, and will get equal benefit from this development. Of those interviewees that differentiated development across genres, Horror and Action were perceived to require less development, as they are more dependent on execution. These interviewees also explained that genres they perceived as being particularly reliant on complexly-scripted plots, such as Thrillers, generally required more development.
- There is no perceived single 'best practice' model for film development in the UK. Best practice is deemed to vary from company to company, depending on size and scale of their operations. Smaller production companies typically concentrate on fewer development projects, while larger companies (with greater financial and human resources) tend to develop a slate of projects.
- Perceived key elements of best practice were identified. These include being aware of market needs, developing good relationships with writers, and putting together an experienced development team.
- There are a variety of training schemes in the UK covering development and scriptwriting, aimed at different people and with different objectives. There is not a perceived single best-practice model that suits all training schemes.
- Suggested key elements of best practice in training schemes include exercising careful choice of trainees, raising market awareness amongst trainees, and maintaining a balance between artistry and marketability.
- Common suggestions of best practice for university courses include developing the writer as craftsman as well as artist, using industry professionals to ground students in the reality of business, creating 'script-literate' writers, and using a variety of teaching methods, ranging from lectures and seminars to one-to-one tuition.
- Most production companies have no opinion on the effectiveness of screenwriter training schemes in the UK, most likely because they hire experienced writers whose time in training schemes is well behind them.
- Of the minority of production companies that expressed views, most felt that training schemes were ineffective in contributing to critical and/or commercial success, as they were perceived to lack market awareness.⁸

⁸ A small number of these respondents indicated a knowledge of the training history of their writers, but most discussed their experience of 'scriptwriter training' in general terms.

- A small number of production companies did speak positively of an individual training scheme that claims to particularly focus on what the market wants. One production company explained that teaching writers' their "craft" was an important positive result of training.
- In general, training schemes felt that they must train their writers to be able to write within a variety of genres, and to write both adaptations and original stories.
- Training schemes, university course organisers and those production companies that expressed views on training generally agreed that writers should not be trained in isolation from development teams, producers, directors, and actors.

3. Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of this project are to provide data and to make recommendations to assist the UK Film Council (UKFC) and Skillset in providing effective support for development – and screenwriter training – in the UK. These recommendations are based on a programme of research designed to give a clear picture of the current level of investment in feature film development in the UK, the organisation of this development, trends in the sector, existing training schemes, perceived best practice, and international comparisons.

4. Methodology and Approach

4.1. Collecting the Data

It was decided at the start of the project that, to improve the response rate, interviews would be favoured over surveys. Three detailed interview guides were created and used in face-to-face interviews, and in some telephone interviews. One guide was for production companies, one for training-scheme bodies, and one for universities. Three surveys were also created, one for each group.

The benefits of interviews were a high response rate (37 of the 51, 62.8%, selected for interview), and the ability to gain more detailed opinions on development and screenwriter training. In comparison, the response rate for surveys was 22 out of 48 (51%).

4.1.1. Sample Companies

An initial list of primary and secondary production companies to be covered by the study was provided in the tender for the project. During the early weeks of the project, this list was discussed and altered by the UKFC, Skillset and Attentional in preparation for a letter from UKFC Chief Executive John Woodward, introducing the project.

Following the sending of the letter, a first sample of companies was extracted. Some were prioritised and later pursued for interview by Attentional. The remainder were sent the survey, which was designed to capture core data needed for the study.

4.1.2. Sample Training Schemes

A list of training schemes and their respective organising bodies to be covered by the study, was also provided in the tender for the project. During the early weeks of the project this list was discussed and altered by the UKFC, Skillset and Attentional in preparation for a letter from John Woodward. The remaining schemes were sent a survey.

4.1.3. Sample Universities

A list of university (and film school) courses to be covered by the study was provided in the tender. As with the training-scheme bodies, some universities were prioritised and targeted for interview, while those running the remaining courses were sent a survey.

4.2. Sampling Methodology

In consultation with the Steering Group, a universe of firms was defined as those production firms that could be identified, through the Steering Group's knowledge, as significant contributors to film development in the UK.⁹ This universe was to be used to expand the data that we received from the sampled companies in order to map the development sector for the whole of the UK.

The universe of 177 production companies can be seen as accounting for the majority of development activity and spend in the UK, whether coming from private sources or funds provided by public bodies. As the focus is on significant players, there will be some development activity (albeit minor) not captured by this approach.¹⁰

⁹ It should be noted that this companies universe does not include training bodies, regional and national film bodies and funds (e.g. UKFC Development Fund), and universities, which are all covered separately.

¹⁰ The report provides an estimate of the likely development contribution of those firms not captured in our survey. This is arrived at by taking the 2006 data on UK

The firms selected for interviews/surveys were not chosen on the basis of either a stratified or random sample. Instead they were selected by the consultants and the Steering Group, on the basis that some firms were so significant that it would be a mistake to omit them. The sample therefore over-represents key players, as confirmed by subsequent analysis. While it is often a good idea to over-sample key players, this does make the sample unrepresentative of the universe as a whole. It was therefore vital to apply post sampling stratification.

The aim of such post-sampling stratification is to derive weights that determine the correct proportion of key players in our universe, which can then be used to correct the bias in our sample when deriving estimates for the universe as a whole.

Attentional tested a number of possible options for identifying the key players in our universe, but none of these factors correlated well with a company's UK development activity. In consultation with the Steering Group, we decided to use the knowledge of the Steering Group to identify the key players using the two strata defined below:

Major developers: Those firms engaged in a large amount of UK development activity during the survey period. These warrant separate/closer attention;¹¹

Typical developers: All the remaining firms, whose contribution to development must be seen as reflecting the average.

This approach to post-sample stratification proved to be very robust. The difference between some estimates generated by our two strata (for variables such as the average development spend and the average number of films in active development) was very significant. However, using the weights from the universe to reflect the true contributions of each of our strata, we are confident that this bias has been eliminated from our final estimates.

film budgets (held by the UKFC), where the producers are firms not covered in our universe, and applying an estimate of the average proportion of a film's budget spent on development, under the broad assumption that any UK-made film will result in at least some local development spend/activity.

¹¹ It is important to remember that the focus is on UK development activity. Some major US studios will not necessarily be part of this group, as most of their development activity is not UK based.

4.3. Production Companies Universe¹²

Following our methodology outlined above, our universe of production companies totalled 177. During the project, 67 (38%) of these were approached either for an interview or survey (forming our sample).

Of the total universe, 13 (7%) were 'major' in UK development with the remaining 164 (93%) being 'typical'. Of the companies sampled 11 were major developers and 56 were typical. Therefore, 85% of the major developers were surveyed and 34% of the typical developers. We considered the typical companies to be more homogeneous, and therefore justified a smaller sampling rate.

Within the sample of 67 production companies, 41 (61%) responded. Of the 11 major developers, 8 (73%) responded, while a response was received from 33 of the 56 (59%) typical developers.

Within the universe as a whole, the 8 major developers that responded accounted for 62% of all the major companies in the universe. The 33 typical respondents made up 20% of the total universe for these companies.

4.4. Training Scheme Bodies and Universities Universe

As explained in 4.1.2 and 4.1.3, a list of training scheme bodies and universities to be covered by the study was drawn up at the commencement of the project. These bodies and universities were those running Skillset-supported programmes in 2006. For the purposes of this study, the sample of training schemes and universities provided by the Steering Group were determined to be the universe for this project. For the training schemes, 9 bodies with screenwriter training schemes in the UK were chosen for study, with data collected from 8 of these through interviews and surveys. Skillset also provided data to add to the results of the interviews and surveys. We approached 8 universities (including Film Schools) that offer Skillset-accredited screenwriting courses for interviews and surveys, and data were obtained from 6 of these.

5. Mapping the Sector

Data required for this section was sought through both interviews and surveys. Although a good response rate was achieved, the quality of the

¹² For this study 'the universe' refers to the universe of production companies involved in UK development outlined in 4.2. For training schemes and universities we assumed the universe to be those organisations listed in the tender document for this project. These are Skillset supported schemes.

responses varied a great deal from question to question. We therefore state the actual number of usable responses from the two company groups for each question in this section. Most questions for the mapping exercise refer directly to production companies, and therefore use the production companies universe. However, where training bodies and universities are the focus, then their own universe is used.

5.1. What is the total annual investment in feature film development (public and private) in the UK?

In order to answer this question, we asked for data on the total amount of money spent on development in 2006.

It was often difficult to obtain financial data for two reasons. Firstly, many respondents had confidentiality issues with financial data and were either not in a position to supply us with this data, or were unwilling to do so. Secondly, specific financial data were harder for the respondent to recall during an interview or when filling out a survey. Where possible, more time was given to follow up on missing financial data if this was the case.

We received usable data on annual investment in feature film development from 30 of the 41 respondents (73%). 6 out of the 8 major developers (75%) provided usable data, and of the remaining 33 typical companies that responded, 24 provided usable data on total development spend¹³ in 2006 (73%). This provides a robust sample for the mapping exercise.

Double-counting of development investment in the UK was a concern when answering this question. We asked respondents where their funds came from, and it was clear that for many of them public funds made up a part of their development spend.¹⁴ We therefore have to assume that the data we received on total development spend in 2006 includes both public and private investment. We did gain data on public investment in development from the UKFC, MEDIA and the Regional Screen Agencies, but in order to avoid double-counting we have not included these figures when mapping development spend for the whole universe of developers. We take our final investment figure as covering both public and private investment, and later

¹³ In this report, 'development spend' refers to any money expended purely on development, being all activity taking place between the acquisition of rights to underlying material and the production of the final draft of the script. It does not include payments made to key talent (other than writers) or other pre-production or production costs. However, it does include development staff salaries.

¹⁴ It is difficult to be specific as to how much money was public and how much private, as we did not ask for the proportion of their total funds that came from each investor (this was already a sensitive question for many respondents). However, public bodies, in particular the UKFC and MEDIA, were often mentioned alongside private financiers as investors in UK development.

in this section we give an indication as to how much of this figure is public investment.

The sample average investment in development for 2006 was £1,645,833 for major developers and £175,839 for typical developers. Multiplying these figures by the stratified universe figures gives a total investment in development in the UK in 2006 of £50,233,409 (£21,395,833 from major developers and £28,837,576 from typical developers). Despite the major developers only making up 7% of the universe, they contribute 43% of total development spend in the UK in 2006.

As our universe does not include minor players in UK film development, the above figure is likely to be an underestimate. To estimate this shortfall we adopted the methodology described earlier, which combines 2006 UK film budgets where the producers are firms not covered in our universe with our estimate of the average proportion of a film's budget spent on development.¹⁵ We identified 63 UK films from 2006 where the production companies were not within our universe. The majority (46%) had budgets under £2m, with 41% having budgets in the £2-£9m range and the remainder having budgets in the £9-£30m category. As we only had budget ranges rather than specific figures, we assumed that in the lowest category (budgets under £2m) each film cost £1m to make, and for the rest we took a conservative approach and assumed that, on average, each film came at the lower end of the scale plus £1m (i.e. £3m and £10m respectively). Using this methodology we estimated that the possible additional development spend in the UK in 2006 was approximately £8m.

Our estimated total figure of £50,233,409 includes both public and private investment in development. In order to estimate the proportion of this figure that came from public funding we asked the UKFC, MEDIA, Regional Screen Agencies and National Screen Agencies for data on their 2006 development spend. The UKFC Development Fund awarded approximately £2,547,070 in 2006 through single project and slate funding. In the same period, MEDIA spent €1.07m in the UK through single project funding and €1.2m through slate funding. We were informed by the UKFC that £7.1m was spent on 'production and development' through the Regional Screen Agencies in 2006, £1.6m of which came from the UKFC. However, low response rates from the Regional Screen Agencies themselves meant that we were unable to assess the proportion of this money spent exclusively on development. According to publicly available annual reports, Scottish Screen spent £501,000 on development in 2006, and the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission put approximately £236,500 of Lottery Film Funds into development.

¹⁵ See section 5.4 for our estimate of the average proportion of total film budgets spent on development.

'Uncosted' development - time spent on a project that is for 'free' - is also a consideration here, and was discussed with stakeholders.¹⁶ Most stakeholders were unable to come up with an amount of time or money this was worth, but the majority said that it was 'a lot.' One company explained that it amounted to 30 to 40 hours a week. Another explained that £1,000 to £5,000 a year was 'uncosted' (spent on travel, books and scripts), while another simply estimated £50,000 per year.

*5.2. How much have the main public and private investors invested in development since 2001 and in how many projects?*¹⁷

As explained in the previous section, financial data were often difficult to acquire. This difficulty was amplified when we asked for financial data over a five-year period, as it proved much harder for respondents to collect data in an accurate fashion. Therefore, the usable responses for this question were lower than for 2006 data alone. In total there were 9 usable responses (22% of total respondents). All of these were typical investors in development. As we did not gain any responses from the major investors, we were unable to stratify during the mapping process here and had to multiply the average investment in development for 2001-2006 by the total universe of 177 companies. This gives an estimate of £134,997,900 invested in development in the last five years. The lack of responses from major investors means that this figure is likely to be an underestimate.

We also asked respondents whether the figures that they supplied for 2006 were typical of the last five years. In general, they said that the data they supplied was typical. In view of this, an alternative estimate of development spend in the last five years was obtained by multiplying the estimated 2006 spend (£50,233,409) by 5. This gives a figure of £251,167,044. Not all companies in the sample or in the total universe have been in existence for the full five years. However, this figure does take the major developers into account, which our lower figure could not. Combining these approaches, we believe that the actual total development investment in 2001-2006 is likely to fall somewhere between £134,997,900 and £251,167,044.

¹⁶ Of course, nothing is 'free' in an absolute sense. However, unpaid overtime was suggested as being common in development. 'Uncosted' also seems to be used to refer to speculative work before a particular project is identified and started, and other work that is not charged to a budget or otherwise recovered.

¹⁷ The original tender asked the question "How much have the main public and private investors invested since 2000 and in how many projects?" However, during the surveying and interviewing process we looked at the past five years, so since 2001 rather than since 2000. We did this because it was easier to get five-year data than six-year data from respondents.

It is somewhat easier to reach a figure for the number of projects that were in development between 2001 and 2006, and thus were the recipients of this investment. We asked production companies for the total number of films they had in development between 2001 and 2006. Of the respondents, 59% provided usable responses to this question. Of the 33 typical companies, 20 had usable responses (60%), while 4 (50%) of the major companies provided usable data. We were therefore able to provide a far more accurate estimate for this question as we could stratify the responses.

On average, typical companies had 16.7 projects in development over the last five years, whereas major companies had 98.5. Multiplying these figures by the stratified universe totals gives 2,731 and 1,280 projects in development over this period respectively. We estimate that between 2001 and 2005 there were 4,011 films in active development in the UK. This highlights the importance of the stratification process, as a major developer has, on average, nearly six times as many projects in development over this period compared to a 'typical' counterpart. Despite representing only 7.3% of the universe, the major developers accounted for 31.9% of all films in development in the UK during this period.

As the universe does not include several extremely small companies involved in development, the figure of 4,011 is likely to be an underestimate. However, as these small companies are unlikely to have had many (if any) films in development over the past five years, we do not believe that this underestimate is significant.

5.3. What is the total annual investment in feature film writer training in the UK and how does this compare to the USA and Europe?

For this question we had data from Skillset on the schemes that they supported in 2006, as well as data garnered through our interviews with and surveys of training scheme bodies organising feature film writer training.

The Skillset data showed that £674,264 had been invested in screenwriter training projects in 2006. This data also showed that the total budget for these schemes was £1,443,335.

In the interviews and surveys of training schemes and universities we asked for financial data on total budgets for screenwriter training courses. For universities in particular this was very difficult to collect, as it was very hard for the course leaders to extract exact course budgets from total university spending. However, data was acquired from 7 other Skillset-supported training scheme bodies not covered in the Skillset data referenced above. Any Skillset money included in these budgets was awarded to them prior to 2006. The total budget for these schemes was £3,085,654.

In addition to this, we found that the 9 Regional Screen Agencies in the UK spent £2.9m supporting training in 2006, £786,000 of which came from the UKFC.¹⁸ Also, the MEDIA programme puts money into training in the UK, including feature film screenwriter training. This money is distributed from the European Commission directly to the companies running the schemes. The UK MEDIA Desk provided data on the amount of money spent on screenwriter training schemes, broken down by scheme, for 2004 to 2006. Screenwriter training schemes in the UK received €620,961 in 2006, but this was relatively low compared to previous years: €810,208 in 2005 and €984,788 in 2004.¹⁹

We also asked production companies if they spent development money on screenwriter training. Very few respondents said that they spent anything on training schemes (instead the money was spent on writers' fees and optioning), with a small number explaining that some of their development staff had been on training courses in the past.

Total investment in screenwriter training in the US is an extremely difficult figure to obtain since it is mainly privately funded. There are no public funding bodies like the UKFC, and screenwriter training has to either be self-financed, or be funded by the occasional fellowship or scholarship. On the private side, screenwriting programs at film schools are likely to be the largest training investment. There are over 230 accredited film schools in the US²⁰, with well over 1,000 screenwriting programs nationwide. An example of the costs associated with this path can be seen via the University of Southern California's graduate screenwriting program, the annual cost of which is estimated to be between \$42,248 and \$54,096 depending on the number of units the student takes that year.²¹

The European Audiovisual Observatory was approached for data on annual investment in screenwriter training at a European level. Unfortunately, although research has been conducted into public funding for the audiovisual sector in Europe (estimated at €1.5 billion in 2005), this data lacks the resolution necessary for us to ascertain the proportion going to feature film screenwriter training. The Observatory informed us that they had made some early efforts towards stratifying this data, in *Public Funding for Film and Audiovisual Works in Europe - A Comparative Approach*, but could not

¹⁸ This figure is for all training supported through the RSAs and is not specific to screenwriter training. A breakdown of this total training figure was not available.

¹⁹ It should be noted that as MEDIA's goal is to promote European audiovisual content, rather than specifically UK content, money spent in other EU countries on screenwriter programmes may well, given the pan-European nature of the MEDIA programme, go towards helping British screenwriters. On these grounds, however, it should also be noted that the given figures do not detail the total amount spent on UK screenwriters, but the amount spent on screenwriter training schemes that are based in the UK.

²⁰ According to Peterson's University Guide.

²¹ Figures acquired from University of Southern California.

achieve a high enough resolution for our needs. The data was also for 2002, which now makes it significantly out of date. They are, however, in the process of compiling a new report that aims to achieve a higher level of resolution, but this is unlikely to be available until 2008.

5.4. What proportion of total UK film budgets is currently spent on development?

In order to reach a figure here we followed two approaches. Firstly we asked development companies for an estimate of the typical or average proportion of their film budgets that was spent on development. The results from this could be stratified between our two company types and mapped accordingly. In order to investigate the validity of this figure we used a secondary approach. Using the list of 49 example films that we received through the interviews and surveys, we worked out an average proportion of the budget spent on development where data permitted.²²

For the first approach we had a total of 22 usable responses from our 41 survey respondents (54%), with 4 out of 8 (50%) of the major developers and 18 out of 33 (55%) typical companies providing usable data for this question.

The sample average for the typical companies was 4.2% and for major companies it was 4.5%. In order to reach an overall figure, these sample averages were weighted according to the actual proportion of the total amount spent on development that came from typical companies (57.4%) as opposed to major companies (42.6%) to give a more accurate overall proportion. Our final estimate here is that 4.3% of total UK film budgets is currently spent on development.

Of the 49 example films, 26 (53%) contained data on both budget and development spend. These 26 films covered a wide variety of genres and budget sizes. This is still a very small sample, and a much larger number of film examples would be required to reach a more definite figure. However, from our 26 films, we found that the average proportion of total budgets

²² We asked companies for example films where they could provide information on budgets, development spends and development durations. Where desired by the interviewee, examples could be provided without a title. Some example films were given by interviewees to illustrate their points in interviews, others were given when asked for them specifically. Where possible, two example films were asked for. We cannot be certain how representative these films are of the companies that produced them. Also, 49 films is a very small sample that may or may not be indicative of the many films in development (or that have been produced) during the reference period. However, a wide variety of budgets, genres, and development spends were represented in the sample, which reduces the chance of the sample being biased.

spent on development was 4.2%. This is very close to the 4.3% figure reached through our mapping exercise.

From our interviews, it appeared that those companies who were attempting to streamline the film-making process by making only one particular kind of film for a particular audience generally aimed for lower development spends: the lowest proportion, 1% of the total production budget, was said to be a maximum by a company of this type.

The proportion of budget spent on development is low compared to the US, where the proportion is closer to 10% on average for low- and mid-budget films (under \$50m). This was the general consensus figure after we spoke to a number of development executives at US-based production companies. With the big-budget films (more than \$100m), the levels were thought to vary significantly depending upon talent hired and the genre of the piece. According to the US executives we spoke to, A-list actors, like Tom Cruise and Will Smith, secure such a large proportion of the budget that development spend as a proportion of the total budget often suffers. The executives we spoke to thought the same applies to films in the action or historical genres. This is supported by the budgets we managed to obtain directly from the studios on three big-budget films, *Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (\$118m), *Terminator 3* (\$187.3m) and *Spider-man 2* (\$200m). The proportion of total budget spent on development equalled 3.3%, 11% and 15%. Although this is a very small sample, it does suggest that on average the proportion of total budget spent on development is higher in the US than in the UK.

Unfortunately comparable data for Europe was unobtainable. We were able to collect some data from the Danish Film Institute, showing that pre-production spend on Danish films is typically 8.6% of the total budget.²³

5.5. How many projects are currently in active development in the UK?

Those interviewed and surveyed were asked for the number of films that they had in active development in 2006. Active development here referred to a project in development that had some money spent on it during 2006. Given that we were asking about recent events and that this data was not of a particularly sensitive nature, usable response rates were high. Of the 41 respondents, 39 (95%) provided a usable response. Importantly, 100% of the 8 major respondents supplied usable data for this question, while 31 of the 33 (94%) typical companies were included in the mapping process here.

²³ It is important to note, however, that 'pre-production' is a larger part of the film-making process, which includes development spend. Pre-production includes non-development costs including other costs on setting up production before principal photography (such as casting fees).

Major developers had on average 29.6 films in active development compared with 8.1 for typical developers. Multiplying by the stratified universe totals gives 385 films in active development with major developers in 2006, and 1,333 films from typical developers. Therefore, our final estimate for the total number of films in active development in the UK in 2006 is 1,718.

As the universe does not include some extremely small companies who may have been developing films in 2006, it is possible that this is a slight (but not significant) underestimate.

5.6. How many writers have been involved in these projects?

Data to answer this question was obtained from the list of 49 example films. 32 of these (65%) included data on the number of writers involved in the film. From this we found that, on average, 1.8 writers were involved in each project. Of our example films, 17 (53%) had 1 writer involved, and 12 (38%) had 2 writers.

This fits with what we were told by production companies in the interviews. According to most interviewees, the majority of projects in development have retained the original writer/s²⁴. With this in mind, one would usually expect to find one or, at most, two writers on a project, and the data from our example films suggest this. However, the interviewees acknowledged that this was not always the case, and that it was sometimes necessary to replace the original writers. Production companies with studio links were more willing to acknowledge this: one said that two to three writers per project was normal, and another said that whereas two was normal, it has been as many as 12 in the past.

The scope of the project did not allow us to assess how many writers in total were involved in all projects in development in the UK in 2006 or in the last five years. It is not appropriate simply to multiply the average figure of 1.8 by the total number of films in development, as very few writers will only work on one project in a year (and especially over five years). In order to reach this figure, a survey of UK films, and the writers that have worked on them, would be required.

5.7. How many projects involve new talent?

Interviewees and survey respondents were asked to split the films they had in active development in 2006 between those that had used new talent, and

²⁴ As is later shown in 6.2, many ideas for projects are initiated in-house and writers are then selected to write the scripts based on these ideas. 'Original writer/s' here refers both to a writer who originated the idea and created the script *and* an original writer working on an idea developed in-house at a production company.

those that had not. 'New talent' was defined as writers new to feature film writing.

Of the 41 respondents, 35 (85%) provided usable responses to this question. Of the 8 major developers who responded to our survey, 7 (88%) provided usable data and of the 33 typical developers who responded, 28 (85%) provided usable answers.

On average, typical companies had 2.9 films in active development in 2006 that involved new talent, while major companies had 9.6. This equates to approximately 474 and 124 films respectively in active development involving new talent in 2006. When compared to the total number of films in active development in 2006, 32% of films developed by the major developers involved new talent. The figure for typical developers is slightly higher at 36%. Across the entire universe of production companies, this equates to approximately 35% involving new talent.

To assess the validity of this figure we looked at the data from our example film list. Of the 49 example films, 28 (57%) provided data on both the number of writers involved and the number of these that were new writers. Of these, 15 (54%) involved new writers. This figure is very high, and does suggest that our example films have a skew towards those involving new writers. However, of the 54 writers involved in these 28 films, only 19, that is 35%, were new writers and 4 of the 15 films that involved new writers also used an experienced writer. If it is assumed that the experienced writer was the predominant one, and that therefore only 11 of our example films involved new talent in a major role, then 39% of our example films involved new talent. This latter figure is close to that reached through the mapping process.

Sample data from the UKFC suggests a lower figure. Data on 99 films receiving slate funding shows 29 (29%) involving new talent, with 26 (26%) involving new talent only (i.e. with no additional experienced writers involved in the project). Although these figures are lower, we are not in a position to assert which one is indicative of reality as both are based on relatively small samples. However, it does appear that the correct figure is between 25% and 35%. Interestingly, working from a sample of 29 films that received funding from the UKFC Development Fund and were subsequently converted, 13 (45%) used writers that had either never written for feature film before, or had only worked on one previous feature film. Given that all our example films had been converted, our figure of 39% gains further validity.

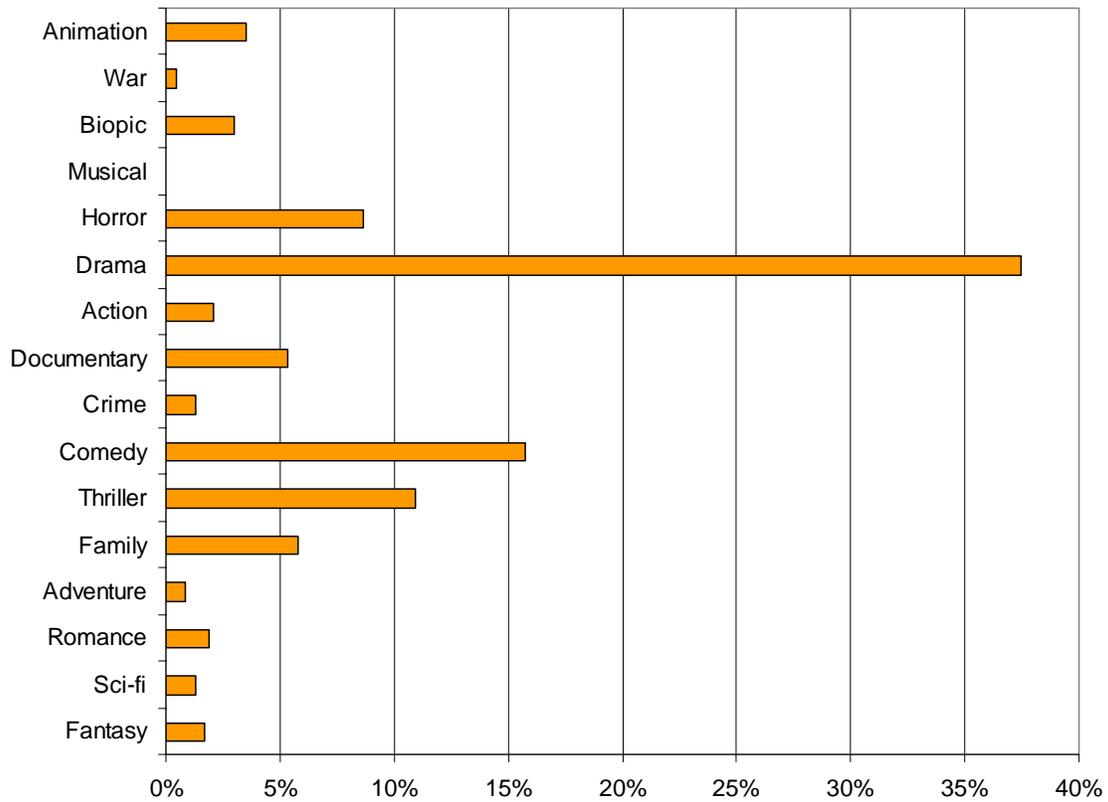
5.8. What types of projects are currently in development (by genre and budget size, subject matter, etc)?

Respondents were asked to split their total development slate for 2006 between the following genres: Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Romance, Adventure, Family, Thriller, Comedy, Crime, Documentary, Action, Drama, Horror, Musical, Biopic, War, and Animation. Most respondents were able to do this for 2006 and we received 29 (71%) usable responses from our 41 respondents. Of the 33 typical developers that responded to our survey, 23 (70%) provided usable data for this question, while 6 (75%) usable responses came from the 8 major developers that responded to our survey.

Figure 1 shows that Drama was by far the most commonly developed genre in 2006, comprising 37% of all films developed. Comedy and Thriller also figured highly, at 16% and 11% respectively. Horror, at 9%, was also significant. Musical was the only genre with 0%.²⁵ Low figures for Romance, Sci-Fi and Fantasy could partly be explained by respondents including them in other 'umbrella' genres such as Drama, Thriller or Comedy. However, we do not feel that, even if this were the case, the dominance of Drama, followed by Comedy and Thriller, would be altered significantly.

²⁵ All percentages for genres here have been weighted and mapped for the whole universe.

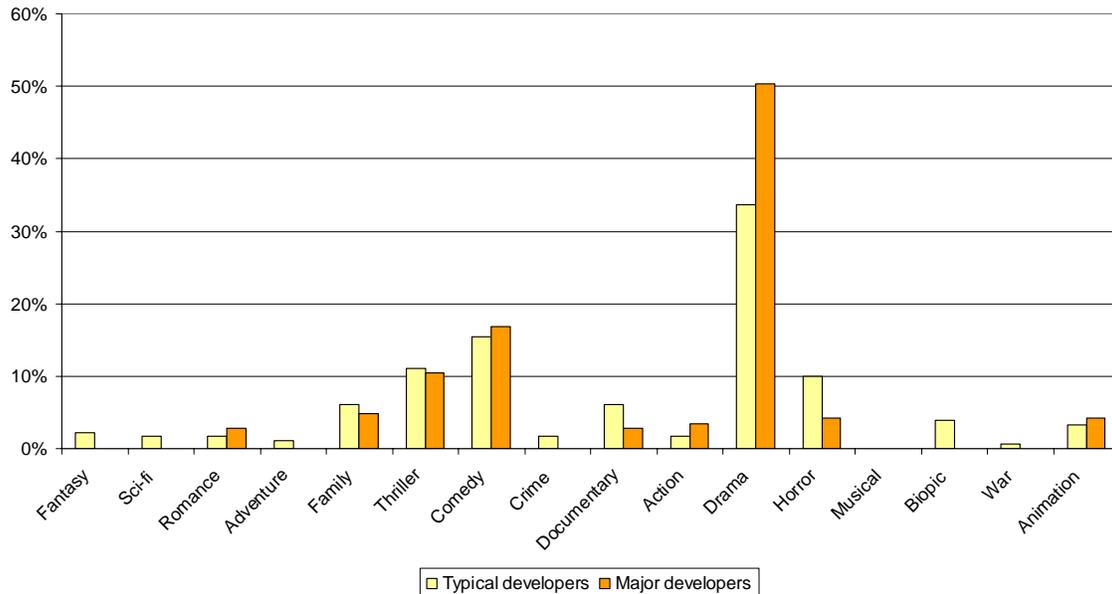
Figure 1: UK films in active development in 2006, split by genre



Source: Attentional

Figure 2 shows that some genres are more likely to be developed by the major developers than the typical developers. The clearest difference here is with Drama: for typical developers, Drama films accounted for 34% of their total development slate in 2006, whereas for the major developers the genre covers 50% of projects in development.

Figure 2: Films in development in 2006 split by genre stratified by typical developers and major developers



Source: Attentional

It is also clear that in 2006 there was less variety in the genres developed by the major developers (who developed films from 9 genres) than typical developers (who developed across 15 genres).

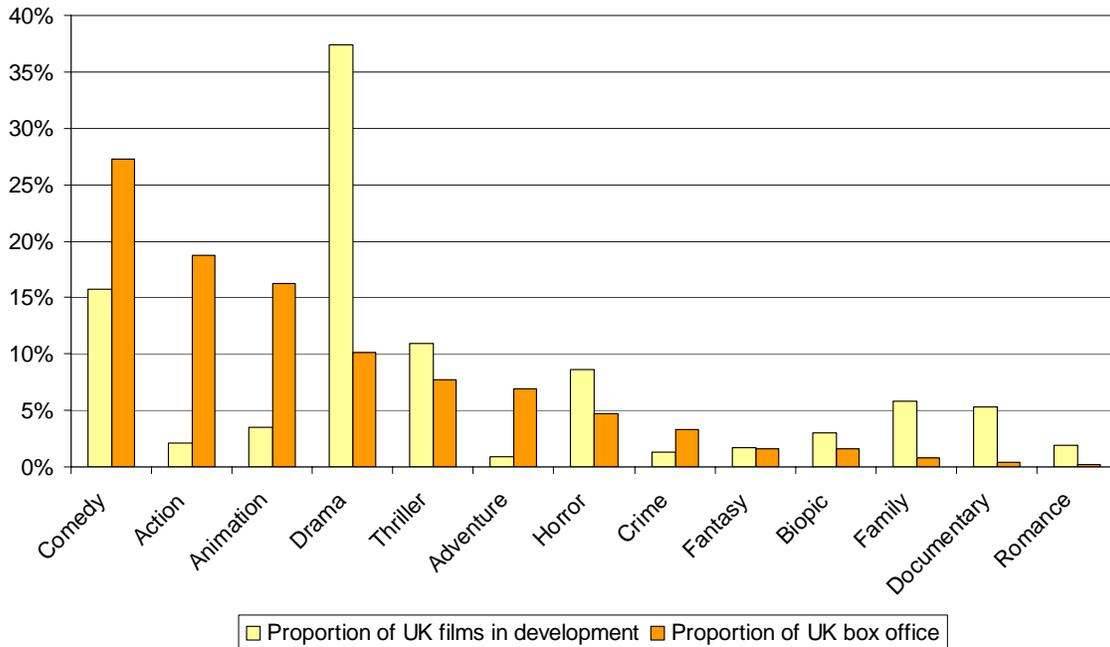
In the interviews and the surveys we asked production companies involved in development what they believed the current market need was in the UK. There was general agreement that the market was constantly fluctuating and that, given the lengthy duration of the film-making process, it was dangerous to develop and produce films simply based on a supposed market need. However, there was a consensus of opinion that the UK market currently needed less Drama, which was perceived as being the least successful genre at the box office. One respondent was concerned that UKFC develop the most Drama, despite it being commercially unsuccessful. 'Comedy' ('Teen Comedy' was mentioned in particular by some respondents), 'Action', 'Horror' and 'Family' were said to be the key genres for which there was an unsatisfied demand in the UK.

Figure 3 shows that Drama is one of the least successful genres at the box office (a fact mentioned by interviewees), but is still the most developed genre in the UK in 2006. Action and Comedy both held a stronger position at the UK box office than their relatively lower proportion of total films in development suggests.²⁶ It is possible that the high cost of an Action film may explain why fewer are made. Contrary to the beliefs of interviewees, it

²⁶ It is important to note that the box office statistics refer to all films, rather than just those from the UK. However, it is still indicative of the genres that the British public pay to see at the cinema.

appears that in 2006 both Horror and Family formed a higher proportion of the total films in active development than their proportion of the UK box office.

Figure 3: Genre as a proportion of all UK films in active development in 2006 compared with genre as a proportion of the total UK box office



Source: UKFC, Attentional

Our research of the US development sector found a slightly different story. By interrogating the front-end of The StudioSystem database as well as searching the Done Deal²⁷ website, we found that 782 films went into development in 2006. Their genre breakdown was as follows: Comedy (275), Drama (124), Action-Adventure (116), Thriller (107) and Horror (54).

The rest are combination of Children/Animation/Musical/Sci-Fi/Fantasy/Historical.

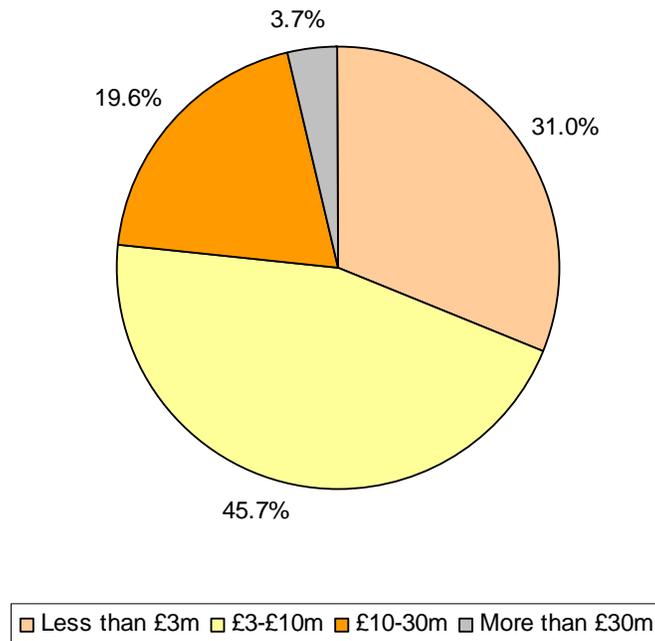
It has not been possible to evaluate the projects on the basis of subject matter as this is a far less specific entity than genre. However, it has been possible to split the films in active development in 2006 by budget size. We stratified budget sizes between four categories: less than £3m; £3m to £10m; £10m to £30m; and more than £30m. Several respondents were

²⁷ Done Deal (www.donedeal.com) takes a log of all publicly announced projects in the trade magazines and from studio publicity materials. It is therefore not a comprehensive account of all US development, but can still be used to give an indication of the number of films in development, and their genre breakdown.

unspecific here, not explaining how many films in development in 2006 fitted under each category and generalising that they covered a wide variety of budgets. These companies could not be included in the mapping exercise. There were 18 (44%) usable responses, with 3 (38%) from the major developers and 15 (46%) from the typical developers.

Figure 4 shows that the majority of films in active development from our sample had budgets between £3m and £10m. Only 3.7% of films in active development in the UK in 2006 had budgets greater than £30m.

Figure 4: UK films in active development in 2006 by budget range (%)



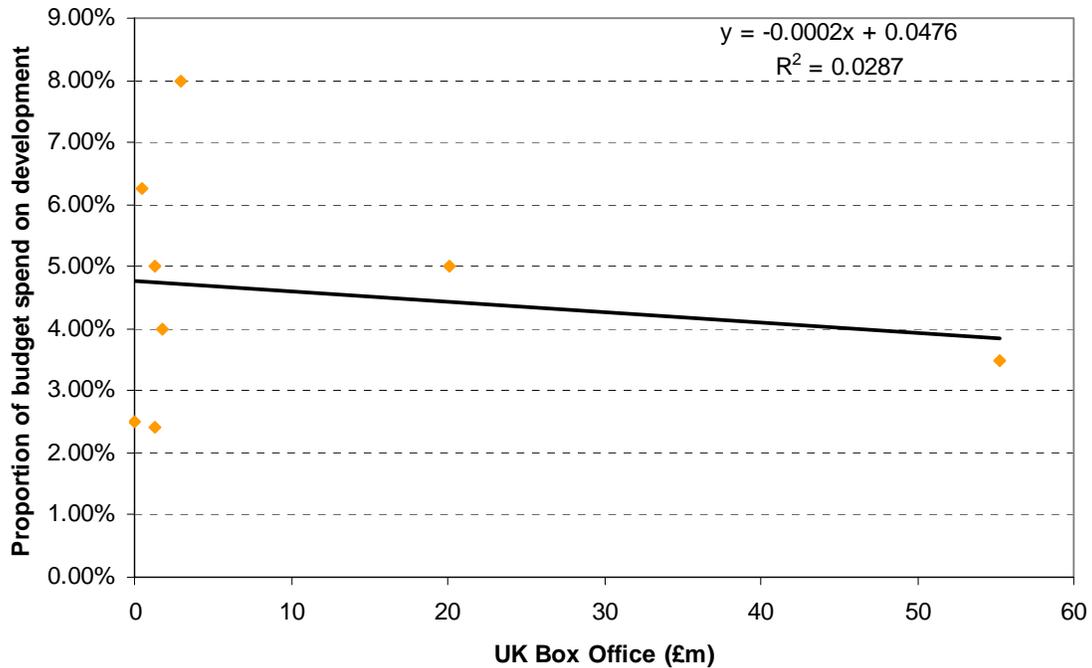
Source: Attentional

5.9. For different types of films, does the pattern of development expenditure match production spend and audience/revenue shares? Should it?

In order to answer this question we had to look at the example films we gained through the interviews and the survey. As this was a limited sample it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. With regards to audience/revenue shares, the data are insufficient. Several of the films given as examples were given anonymously, and so we could not search out data on box office performance. Some films were currently in production, so box office data for them were as yet unavailable. Of our sample of films, 8 had the required

data on budget size, development spend, and box office²⁸ to answer this question. This is an extremely limited sample and reliable conclusions are difficult to draw from it. Figure 5 shows that, from this limited sample, there is no correlation between the proportion of total budget spent on development and the total made by the film at the UK box office.²⁹

Figure 5: Relationship between proportion of total budget spent on development and UK Box Office



Source: Attentional, IMDB³⁰

The consensus of opinion from production companies was that there is no link between development expenditure and audience/revenue shares, as this relies on a wide variety of factors. Development was considered important and improved the *chances* of success, but factors within production (such as the amount of money available to spend 'on-screen') as well as the unpredictable nature of success once a film is released meant that no-one believed development expenditure should match audience or revenue shares.

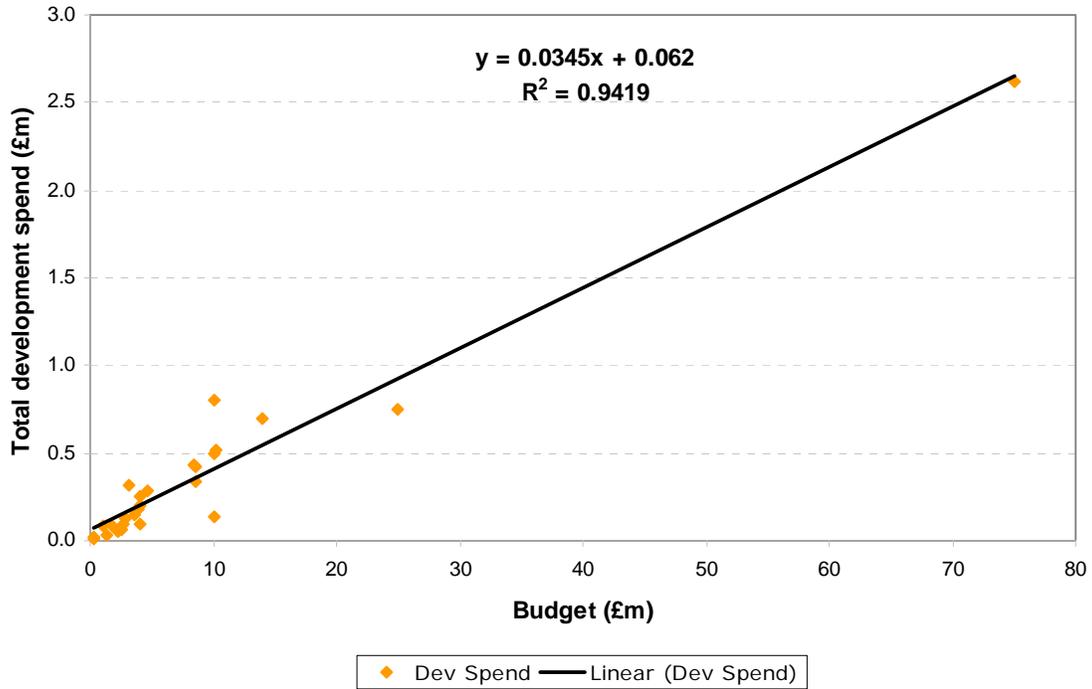
²⁸ Box office data for the UK was obtained through published sources and not through interviews or surveys.

²⁹ There is not enough data available to perform a multivariate analysis to investigate impact of the proportion of total budget spent on development on UK gross box office, which would allow us to be confirm or reject this lack of correlation. A study of a larger number of films on a title-by-title basis is required.

³⁰ It should be noted that IMDB's publicly available box office data for the UK is often estimated. In any study of a larger number of films, purchased box office data from Nielsen EDI would provide for more robust analysis.

However, more data were available with regards to total production spend. Of our example film list, 26 had data on both production budget and the proportion of this budget spent on development. Figure 6 shows that there is a strong correlation between the total amount spent on development and the total budget for a film.

Figure 6: Relationship between total amount spent on development and total budget³¹

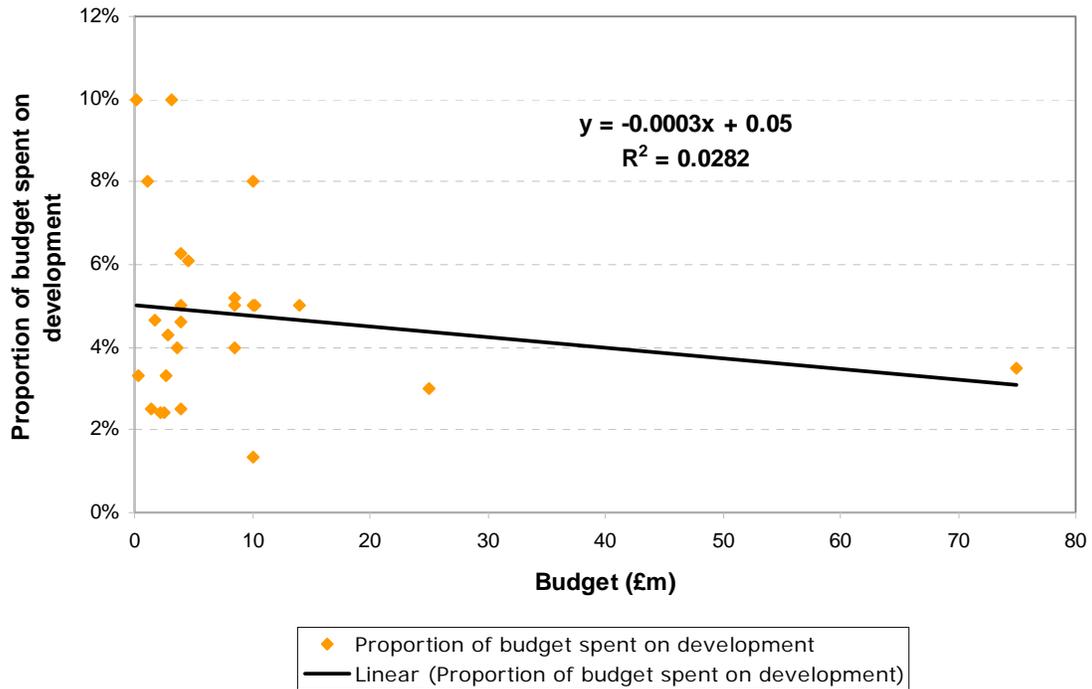


Source: Attentional

Although there is a strong correlation between the total amount spent on development and total budget, there is no correlation between the proportion of the total budget spent on development and total budget, as can be seen in Figure 7 below. This suggests that the average proportion of a film’s budget spent on development (estimated at 4.2% for our 26 usable sample films in section 5.4 above) does not vary significantly with total budget size, and is applicable across the full budget range of UK film productions.

³¹ Figure 6 and Figure 7 both contain a single outlier. In order to make sure that this outlier was not seriously affecting the results, we performed the same analysis without including the outlier. We found that there was no statistically significant alteration to the results when the outlier was removed, which validates the findings in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 7: Relationship between proportion of budget spent on development and total budget



Source: Attentional

In order to see whether there was any variation between genres, we looked at the 26 films from our sample for which genre, total budget and total development spend was available. One problem here is that the production companies were able to choose the genre as they saw fit, rather than match our own genre selection, meaning that there are some 'crossover' genres here (for example 'Comedy/Drama'). Table 1 shows that, although 'Comedy/Drama', 'Drama', 'Horror' and 'Period Romance' have the highest proportion of total budget spent on development, it is not significantly higher than other genres. The high number of genres that are represented by only a small number of films does seriously reduce their reliability: for example, as only one Thriller was in the sample, it is not fair to assert that 3.3% is a typical figure for the proportion of a Thriller budget spent on development.

Table 1: Proportion of total budget spent on development in 2006, split by genre³²

Genre	Number of films in sample	Sum of budgets (£)	Sum of development spend (£)	Proportion of total budget spent on development
Action	1	75,000,000	2,625,000	3.50%
Comedy	3	21,200,000	562,910	2.66%
Comedy/Drama	4	38,000,000	2,250,000	5.92%
Documentary	1	1,400,000	35,000	2.50%
Drama	7	21,260,000	1,195,490	5.62%
Family Drama	1	4,000,000	100,000	2.50%
Horror	3	10,500,000	468,700	4.46%
Period Drama	1	25,000,000	750,000	3.00%
Period Romance	2	18,750,000	937,500	5.00%
Romantic Comedy	1	2,200,000	52,800	2.40%
Thriller	1	300,000	9,990	3.33%
Thriller/Adventure	1	4,600,000	280,600	6.10%
Grand Total	26	222,210,000	9,267,990	4.17%

Source: Attentional

5.10. What is the ratio of original scripts in development compared with adaptations?

We asked respondents to split their total number of films in active development in 2006 between those based on original scripts and those based on adaptations. Response rates were good here, with 38 of the 41 (93%) companies providing usable responses. All the 8 major developer respondents provided usable responses, while 30 (91%) of the 33 typical developer respondents provided adequate data for this question.

The final weighted averages for the entire universe of production companies showed that, in 2006, there was a very slight lean towards developing films based on original scripts, with 54.5% of the total being original scripts and 45.5% based on adaptations. The gap between the two was more pronounced with the typical developers, (56% original scripts) than with the major developers (49% original scripts). Across the industry as a whole there was an effectively equal balance between the two in 2006.

It was clear from our sample that individual production companies did not have this equal balance and that, in general, either one or the other was

³² Please note that firm conclusions cannot be drawn at the genre level because of the small number of films in many of the genre categories and the non-random nature of the sample of films.

favoured. Only 4 of the companies with usable responses (10%) had a proportional split more even than 60%/40% between original scripts and adaptations.

To study the situation in the US, a small sample of development executives were interviewed. They generally agreed on a split of 70% adaptations and 30% original scripts. It is felt that this has turned in favour of adaptations in the past 5 years. Statistics from *The Hollywood Reporter*³³ are somewhat consistent with this. In 2004, 298 new projects were sold in the US: 98 were spec scripts, 87 came from literary material, 70 were pitches, 16 were remakes, 10 were comic books, 6 were true-life stories, 4 came from video games, 2 each derived from television shows and magazine articles, and 1 was from an action figure. 'Spec scripts'³⁴ are the only guaranteed original element here – a pitch could be either original or a pitch to develop some kind of existing material.

6. The Development Process

6.1. How is development activity organised and co-ordinated at the national and company/organisation level, and across public and private bodies? Has this organisation changed since 2000? If so, how?

Qualitative responses we received show that, on a national level, the UKFC is the major public development fund in the UK. It pursues development of projects commissioned by producers, as well as writers creating spec scripts (i.e. '25 Words or Less' competition), through a team of 8 Full Time Equivalent posts.

We have received very limited feedback from regional public bodies, but one National Screen Agency explained that they employed 3 Development Executives who principally focus on building relationships with producers, and usually find writers for their projects through these. In addition, they use readers in the early stages of the development, who take part in the decision-making process on how to take the project forward, whereas script editors are introduced once a script is well-established and may need someone to bring 'fresh' ideas to move it along.

Responses from production companies suggest that the way in which their development activity is organised does depend on a company's size and

³³ Data from January 2005.

³⁴ 'Speculative scripts': scripts written independently by writers, in the hope that they will be optioned by production companies.

workload to some extent. For example, larger companies often seem to employ an extensive development team, whereas in smaller companies a single member of staff (such as the Head of Development) may cover all development work including talent tracking, meeting with the writers, research, maintaining agent relationships, producing notes etc.

Research of new material and talent forms a large part of the development process, and approximately a quarter of the production companies reported that they used at least one (but typically two to four) readers. Most of these were in-house, with only a very small minority of readers being external to the company. A number of companies do not employ readers, but spread the work across all members of the development team. In such cases, a particular member of staff often seems to focus on either a particular medium (such as theatre, TV or books) or, in the case of a small number of respondents, a particular genre. Very few of the interviewees said that they employed script editors, and the ones that do are usually the producers linked to TV production.

During a project, contact with writers seems to vary dramatically between production companies, with a number of respondents only referring to sending notes, whereas others said they regularly met face to face. One interviewee said they had meetings with their writers at least twice a week, often lasting 5 hours. A number of respondents did not comment at all on their relationship with the writers.

A large majority of companies interviewed said that involvement from all levels within a development team was extremely important, although it is mostly the Managing Director or Head of Development who makes final decisions on greenlighting. Brainstorming sessions and creative input from all team members seems to be an important aspect of their work. There were some exceptions to this general trend, and one of the larger companies explained that each of their staff members took on their own separate projects with limited input from anyone other than their immediate superiors.

Organisational changes since 2000, where these occurred (approximately 1/3 of respondents), were largely due to changes in staff, either because of a general expansion of the company or a change of staff at the executive level. One of the interviewees changed the US studio they were affiliated with, but this seemed to have a limited impact on their development activity. A further respondent said that the company has re-focussed to concentrate on more large-scale projects, but failed to explain how this affected their development process. It was therefore not suggested from the interviews that development needs themselves were driving changes made since 2000.

6.2. Who initiates projects?

Two key avenues of initiation were defined in qualitative responses from interviews and surveys: in-house development and spec scripts from writers.

Quantitative data reported that the vast majority of the projects were developed in-house. This production company-led model of development was far more commonly raised in the interviews and surveys than the writer-led method of initiation, namely spec scripts. The qualitative data from respondents show that the most common model starts with internal discussion leading to ideas for projects, and this is followed by a search for writers to work on the selected projects. This can take two forms: original ideas from the development team or the pursuit of the rights to books, plays and articles that the development team think have potential.

Internal development of ideas is relatively more important to independent production companies because of the high cost of optioning a popular story. While one of the US studios in the UK made clear that their process involved finding existing material they liked and then searching for screenwriters, none of the independent producers suggested that this was the primary way they initiated projects. One independent company head, who had recently worked on a major literary adaptation, explained that their development spend on that project was approximately double their typical annual development spend because it was a very expensive book. They added that “in general the projects are generated internally”.

Production companies explained that writers’ agents play an important role here, as once an idea has been developed the production companies turn to agents to suggest writers to work on the project. Only one out of all the production companies responded that they never deal with writers’ agents, but only ever directly with the talent. From an interview with an agent, we gather they also play a crucial role in supporting the writers in their work: “Agents are the guardians of material – film and literary rights, which is a rich source of material for writers”.³⁵

Writers’ agents also get spec scripts sent out to the production companies. The importance of the role of agents here is predicated on whether production companies consider spec scripts, and the importance they place on them. Spec scripts are, according to the respondents, less frequently the point of initiation for a project, but they are apparently considered by most of those we interviewed and surveyed. The value of spec scripts was challenged by one independent production company because there were few writers in the UK with the ability to attract talent and money to a project in a way that a director or star actor can. Two independent production companies that place particularly high importance on in-house activities

³⁵ This agent explained that they represented both the writers (among other talent, for example actors) and the rights-holders of story material.

responded that they never develop anything that ‘just came through the door unasked for or unprompted’. However, several of those interviewed made it clear that they will pick up scripts from writers who they have worked with before.

The consensus of opinion was that, although directors were usually not initiating projects, they should be brought on board at an early stage of development wherever possible. However, several companies made it clear that the script had to reach a certain level of readiness, with at least one completed draft, before approaching a director. A few production companies said that directors were becoming increasingly important. Two ‘younger’ production companies made it clear that director-led projects were important to their process — more so than in established companies. One more established production house explained that directors were increasingly able to attract talent, and so having them on board from the beginning was of growing importance.

The interviewees suggested that there was a careful balance to be struck in deciding when to get a director on board. Directors will not want to be given a project that has already been heavily developed, as it reduces the scope for their own ideas. One development head explained that directors come in at the penultimate stage of development, so that the ‘director’s pass’ is included in, but finishes off, the development process. However, bringing in directors too early to make the film feel more ‘in business’ could be detrimental to the development process if they were then unavailable for many months working on other projects.

6.3. Who is involved in development?

We asked those in the industry for information on the age profile and salaries of their development staff. Quantitative responses from 17 of the 41 companies (41%) suggest that 7% of Development Executives and Assistants are under 25 years old, 45% are between 25 and 35 years of age, 36% are between 35 and 45 years, and the remaining 12% are 45 or older.

In the interviews and surveys, 21 of the 41 (51%) production companies were willing to comment on the salaries of at least one type of staff (i.e. Head, Assistant). However, data was sporadic and so a complete mapping of salaries was impossible. From the responses we received, we estimate that a Head of Development could expect between £30,000 and £100,000 a year, with an average of £56,000. Larger, more established companies would be able to pay more, and the majority of the respondents suggested a figure above £50,000. Development Executives are paid between £30,000 and £70,000 a year, with an average of £41,000, while lower level assistants receive an average of £18,500 a year.

In general, Heads of Development had at least a decade of industry experience, and usually significantly longer. This experience covers all aspects of the film-making process, including script-editing, administration work, assisting production, sales work, distribution and acting. There does not appear to be a typical route to the position of Head of Development, although the majority have had some experience in development prior to taking on the role. Development Executives have less experience, having usually been in the industry for less than 10 years, most having between four and six years prior experience. Their experience is equally varied, although again the majority have some development experience prior to taking on their roles.

The majority of companies had someone working full-time exclusively on development. Most companies had a Head of Development, and of these approximately two-thirds worked full-time. Our quantitative data suggests that the number of development staff ranges from 1 to 15 and, on average, production companies had 3.3 members of staff with some development responsibilities, and 1.7 working exclusively on development.

Our research in the US shows that development teams there are usually much larger.³⁶ Structurally, all production companies, and certainly all studios, have a Head of Development. For the smaller firms there are at least another 3 to 5 members of staff working mainly in development, while for the medium-sized companies this could be anywhere from 5 to 10. For the larger houses this number is likely to be between 10 and 30.

Below the Head of Development there is usually a VP of Development and/or a Creative Executive. Heads of Development are usually 35-45 years old and earn between \$150,000 and \$300,000 a year. VP's are generally younger, aged between 30 and 40, and earn \$80,000 to \$150,000 a year. A Creative Executive is typically between 25 and 40 years old and earns between \$60,000 and \$100,000 a year.

6.4. What are the key factors taken into account when deciding whether to fund the development of a script?

Qualitative interview responses suggest that the principal factors considered were the quality of the material, the originality of the ideas, and the script's marketability. Responses on this question did not vary significantly between major and typical respondents. Most respondents explained that the quality of the script and, in particular, the originality of the ideas within it, were very important to their decision-making process. However, only two of those

³⁶ U.S. data for this section was gained through Attentional interviews of U.S. Development Executives.

companies interviewed suggested that the quality of the script was the *primary* reason it was developed further. The originality and quality of the script was actually seen as a key driver in acquiring talent for the production, which in turn would lead to a greater chance that the film would be financed. (One interesting comment raised by a Head of Development, but not echoed elsewhere, was that the perceived ability of the writer to complete the project successfully and efficiently was a major consideration when deciding to support a script.) “Talent is what drives the finance”, one interviewee explained. Getting marketable talent on board is a crucial part of the development process, and most stakeholders agreed that there are very few writers who would count as ‘marketable talent’.

The majority of respondents made it clear that the market for a script was a primary reason for choosing to develop it. A script needs to be financed, so you must look at what the market wants, and what financiers feel safe with. Some respondents explained that, currently, financiers are more comfortable with ‘genre pieces’ because this is what the market wants.³⁷ One producer explained that the benefit of optioning books (and therefore of funding the development of an adaptation) was that financiers felt more secure putting their money into something specific, and perhaps already commercially successful. A small number of the interviewees added, however, that the ‘neutrality’ of a financier like the UKFC sometimes made the marketability of a production less of a critical concern.³⁸

We also asked whether the main priority of the development process was to get the script funded or to make sure that the script is so well developed its commercial and/or critical success was maximised. The majority of the respondents said that maximising success was the priority, with equally-sized minorities saying it was getting the script funded, or saying both were equally prioritised. Whereas several respondents explicitly referenced commercial success, only one mentioned the possibility of producing a film that was likely to be more of a critical than a commercial success. Two of the three respondents who said that getting the film into production was the key objective made it clear that this was because, as small independents, they needed the money that came from getting into production. On the other hand, two companies with studio backing explained that financing was not a concern, allowing the quality of the script and its potential for commercial success to be prioritised.

³⁷ ‘Genre piece’ is a very general term used by several producers. Of course, all projects have a genre, but ‘genre piece’, as the producers explained to us, refers to films including ‘Psychological Thrillers’, ‘Supernatural Thrillers’, ‘Romantic Comedies’ and could extend in more general terms to ‘Horror’ and ‘Action’. The idea is that ‘genre pieces’ fit a very particular pattern that is understood and accepted by audiences. However, the term is not a precise one and could include ‘Drama’ and ‘Comedy.’

³⁸ This ‘neutrality’ appears to indicate a belief that the UKFC, alongside some other support bodies and financiers, support projects on terms of their artistic merit as much as their commercial prospects.

6.5. What is the typical duration of the development process in the UK? Is there an optimum duration?

It was clear from the interviews that the concept of a 'typical duration' for the development process was unrealistic. The quantitative data we collated on 49 example films included 34 (69%) responses detailing development duration. This data shows that answers to the question about 'typical' duration varied a great deal, from 6 months to 10 years, with a mean average duration of 3.4 years (40 months). The median average was 3 years (36 months). It should be noted, however, that this sample included two outliers (films with an unusually long development time of 10 years), and the average is therefore likely to be somewhat inflated. Of the 34 films, 7 came from major developers and 27 from typical producers. The average development time for both groups was 40 months.³⁹

Few people even offered an optimum duration, with five respondents saying that there was no such thing as an optimum duration. Of the eight that did offer an optimum duration, these ranged from 6 months to 3 years, while one other respondent simply said "much shorter". From these responses, it seems that while the majority of companies favour short development periods (i.e. months), 2 to 3 years is a reasonable timeframe in which to develop a project.

We asked whether a project could be over-developed. Two-thirds of those interviewed (the question was not part of the survey) believed that a film could be over-developed.⁴⁰ They were unable to suggest a typical duration before over-development happened, consistent with the view that there is no 'typical' development duration.

Our research in the U.S., through interviewing development executives, provides the same picture, where development duration depends enormously on *when* talent gets on board a project. Some films can take as little as 6-12 months to develop; for example *Oceans 13* began official development in January 2006, and production was wrapped by 17th October 2006.⁴¹ On the flipside, there are notorious cases of films being developed for years; for example *Forrest Gump*, which was in development for 10 years before writer number 11, Eric Roth, discovered a solution to a narrative problem that

³⁹ However, this is based on a very small sample of films, and this may reduce the reliability of this result.

⁴⁰ In general, interviewees suggested over-development referred to a point at which further development was detrimental to a script, rather than simply suggesting that there was a point at which development made no difference. Comedy was a genre used as an example here by some respondents: a point could be reached where further work on the script in development made it less funny than it once was.

⁴¹ Dates supplied by Jerry Weintraub Productions.

plagued the previous writers (how to avoid the episodic nature of the novel).⁴²

6.6. How many script drafts are typically involved? What is the typical ratio of officially delivered drafts to actual drafts?

The general consensus from production companies was that there is no typical number of drafts with each project they had in development. Because of this, quantitative data is extremely difficult to provide here and answers must be derived from qualitative data from the interviews and surveys. For example, one company explained that they did a great many drafts, approximately 10 to 20 per project, but that they had also gone into production on two films after only 2 drafts. One of the larger companies said 'You would expect an average of 5 or 6 drafts', but added that they have also gone into production after only 3. The consensus of opinion was that the number of drafts varied depending on the writer used and the budget available. According to some interviewees, experienced writers were likely to need fewer drafts. Higher budgets could either afford more drafts, or more experienced writers. UK developers with access to studio-size budgets said that this could allow the bringing in of 'closers' to finish the script-writing process more quickly.

Although there were some small variations as to what was considered a 'draft' by each company, the general consensus was that a draft was actually one draft and two revisions. However, some interviewees explained to us that what counts as a revision can vary a great deal, with one going as far as saying that it can sometimes be the same amount of work as another draft, but labelled a 'revision' for contractual reasons.

From our interviews it was clear that there was a difference between the number of officially delivered drafts and actually delivered ones. One respondent explained that when they dealt with a studio they could expect 3 times as many actual drafts as official ones, given the large sums of money tied up in a project. The majority of other respondents said there was a significant difference, with there being more actual drafts than official ones, but could not be specific as to a ratio between the two. One company did, however, make it clear that fewer 'unofficial' drafts were likely if you used an experienced writer.

⁴² Information acquired through interview with Eric Roth.

6.7. How and when is it decided to greenlight a project or alternatively to abandon it?

This answer was informed through discussion in the interviews and a free-text question in the surveys. In general, according to both major and typical developers, a project is abandoned once it is apparent that further attempts to secure finance will likely fail. Hence, several companies explained that it was the financiers who made the final decision to abandon a project.

Few respondents were able to suggest a specific time when the decision was made; given the aforementioned lack of a typical development duration this was to be expected. The majority of respondents did not suggest a set point at which it was clear that a project would not sell or that this was always apparent, rather that if it was noticed that a film was no longer marketable, then it was not worth developing it further. Two companies had a clear cut-off date: one at six months, one after the second draft's revisions, and another after three years. At this point a decision will be made, again depending on whether there is a market for the film.

Two respondents added that abandonment was only necessary if another payment needed to be made in order to take the project forward. Otherwise it could just stay on the slate and might be resurrected at another time.

Other factors affecting the decision were the attachment of a director and cast to a script and the quality of the script in general. However, it was made clear that these factors were important in getting the project financed. Several respondents made it clear that the package of a well-constructed budget, talent and director, if robust enough, could help a great deal in getting a project greenlit.

7. Assessing Impact

7.1. Is there a relationship between the intensity of development and the commercial and/or critical success of the film?

As was explained in 5.9, it was not possible to make firm conclusions about the relationship between intensity of development and the commercial and/or critical success of a film from the example films supplied by respondents.⁴³ Figure 5 showed that, from our limited sample of films, there was no relationship between the proportion of total budget spent on development and UK Box Office revenue.⁴⁴ However, as the proportion of total budget spent on development appears to be relatively similar across different genres and budgets, it is likely that it is in fact these variables that will have a greater impact on commercial and critical success than the intensity of development.

Further information was collected from the interviews and surveys of production companies. Opinions on the relationship between intensity of development and commercial/critical success were divided, with just over half of respondents believing such a relationship exists. Development was considered to be one of several variables that *could* improve the chances of success, rather than guaranteeing it. Other variables include successful publicity, the intensity of the marketing effort, star power of those involved (which could vary throughout the project), word-of-mouth, qualitative differences amongst films, and other films released at the same time. One interviewee went as far as saying success was due to the “alignment of the stars”, indicating a sense that it was impossible to predict. Another interviewee explained that the recent success of *300* was unforeseen. Commercial success was the focus of discussion here, with no-one making explicit reference to critical success.

It was interesting to note that several interviewees questioned the focus on intensity of development in the question posed to them. Many respondents pointed to a difference between ‘intensity of development’ and ‘quality of development’, and felt that quality had a more direct relationship with

⁴³ Commercial success required example films to have known titles and to have been released. Several of our examples had not yet been released or were supplied under anonymous titles. Critical success would likely require a different approach, perhaps with key awards, festivals and scores from particular reviewers being selected, and then critically-successful films being investigated for data on budgets and development spend. This would require an extensive survey across a large sample of films and is beyond the scope of this study.

⁴⁴ As was explained in 5.9, however, this is an extremely small sample meaning that firm conclusions cannot be drawn.

commercial/critical success than intensity. A timely intervention from a seasoned professional could be worth more than a protracted effort from a less experienced development team. Several respondents felt that development could actually become too intense, to the point where it has a detrimental effect on the script and the project begins to lose vitality. It was also felt that, in some circumstances, it can be more productive to let one individual shape the development process without interference and potential conflict from a development team — particularly if an experienced director was involved.

It became clear from the interviews that quality of the script is perceived to be a critical factor for success, but this does not directly relate to intensity of development. Several interviewees explained that spending a lot of money on development could lead to both good scripts and bad scripts. Although a good script was often seen as important to a film's chances for success, the amount spent on it was no guarantee of its quality. Good scripts may require a lower level of development, because they are of a better quality to start with.

In general, there was actually little difference in opinion between those interviewees who said 'yes' and those who said 'no' to this question. Those that said there was a relationship could not expand on this in any detail ("Yes there's a relationship...but there's not a schematic relationship between the two"), and this lack of a clear and direct relationship led some interviewees to conclude that the relationship did not exist at all.

7.2. What is the average conversion rate in the UK? Does it vary between investors? Is there an optimum conversion rate?

By comparing data on the total number of films in development in 2001-2006 and the number of those that were greenlit, we can estimate an average conversion rate of 18% for UK production companies in 2001-2006.⁴⁵ This rate was higher among the major developers at 23%, while the average among typical developers was 17%. These data were based on a good sample of respondents: 36 usable responses from our 41 respondents (88%), with 7 of the 8 (88%) of the major developers and 29 of the 33 (88%) of the typical developers providing usable data.

Conversion rates for 2001-2006 varied from 8% (1 in 12 projects) to 100%, with over half the respondents indicating a conversion rate of less than 20%

⁴⁵ Data were acquired through the interviews and surveys. Respondents were asked how many films they had in development between 2001 and 2006, and how many of those were green-lit.

(one in five projects). The size and wealth of the company does not appear to have a direct impact on the conversion rates.

After discussions with three US studio executives, who preferred to remain unnamed, there was a consensus that internal studio estimates for conversion rates in the US sector fell between 20% and 30%. However, a UK development executive with experience at a US Studio informed us that conversion rates in the US are generally lower. The higher estimates may be explained by early-stage projects not being acknowledged.

Higher conversion rates often come from film companies with a very specific product. Companies with a clear agenda and a specifically targeted market generally develop fewer films, take fewer risks by only developing films in their chosen market, and convert more of their projects in development. Conversion rates may also be higher for Animation, due to the high volume of pre-production work required for this genre.

Respondents' opinion of optimum conversion rates were similarly varied, although in general people wanted a higher conversion rate than they currently had. Optimum conversion rates are equally distributed between three categories (0%-33%, 34%-66% and 67%-100%). Only one company actually said they wanted 100% conversion, and this was in fact their actual conversion rate. The average of the optimum conversion rates given by respondents was 51%, and this was the same among major developers and typical developers. This was, however, based on only 18 usable responses (44%), including 4 of the 8 (50%) major developers and 14 of the 33 (42%) typical developers. Some smaller companies claimed that all they needed to be successful was to convert one film, and that therefore an optimum conversion rate was irrelevant. Working from this, conversion rates in general may not be very useful indicators of development success for a production company.

One interesting point to emerge from our interviews with U.S. studio and development executives was that it was believed that writers made a very good living due to the number of projects that remained in development and switched from writer to writer. Furthermore, it was claimed that young producers could make a name for themselves by finding a project that was dying in development and resurrecting it. For instance, we met with one young producer who acquired a script written by Josh Schwarz (creator of the television show *The OC*) that was in turnaround (the studio's option on the script had lapsed). He has re-optioned it and managed to re-develop it to the point that it is a lower-budget (under \$10m) feature set to enter production early 2008.

7.3. Does development improve the success of some genres more than others?

As we have shown in 5.9, our list of example films does not give a quantitative answer to this question as the sample size is insufficient. However, qualitative data was obtained in relation to this question.

Just over half of respondents believed that all genres needed development, and that development would not improve the success of a particular genre over another.

Genres that were perceived to require less development to be successful include Horror (“more execution-dependent”) and Action, and (understandably) auteur films or conceptual pieces where visuals are the paramount concern. Conversely, a few genres were identified by some interviewees as requiring more development. These were essentially plot-driven genres such as Thrillers, which are particularly reliant on complex scripts. Several interviewees also explained that any film being made in a crowded genre would require more development to help it stand out in a saturated market. Extra effort in the development stage could help to push the boundaries. This *could* explain the estimated average development spend for ‘Comedy/Drama’ in Table 1 being higher than most (although, as was explained in 5.9, the reliability of this estimate is limited by the small sample it is based on).

Opinion was divided over the development process for Comedy, suggesting that this is a difficult genre to get right. Some interviewees thought this genre benefited more than others from the development process, but several highlighted the danger of over-developing a Comedy to the point that it is no longer funny. As one respondent put it, “you can kill a Comedy more quickly than an Action Thriller”.

7.4. What are the ‘best practice models’ for development and development training in the UK?

From our interviews it has become clear that a single best practice model for all companies involved in development is not a realistic concept. ‘Best practice’ is not a stable entity; it can change over time and it can vary depending on who it is applied to. One interviewee went so far as to say that a multitude of development models was ‘best practice’ for development in the UK, so that there are a range of systems available for people to use as they see fit. Another told us that best practice was ‘flexibility’, so you could adapt to suit individual talent. This idea was reflected by others: “It’s a constantly evolving process depending on who you’re working with.”

Best practice is also deemed to vary from company to company, depending on the size and scale of their operations. For example, having a huge slate of films in development is not a suitable best practice model for a smaller production company, who would not have the necessary financial and human resources to work on a large number of projects. Because of this variation, there is no sense of a single best practice model that can be applied to development in general. However, there are several common areas that stakeholders feel contribute to best practice:

- **Develop in-house.** Allowing ideas to be generated and developed in-house allows for the development team to become more cohesive, more experienced and gain closer ties with writers, directors, talent and financiers. It is also a less expensive way in which to run development than buying in a lot of expensive material.
- **Be aware of the market.** This is a key issue, which the majority of those interviewed felt could still be improved upon in the UK. Keeping development focussed on preparing something marketable is very important to the success of the industry. Many of the interviewees explained that development should never occur in isolation from those involved in marketing the film.
- **Respect the writer.** Several respondents made it clear that a good working relationship with writers was a necessity for best practice. This relationship should not be built on flattery, but mutual respect. The emotional investment of the writer in the project should also be respected.
- **Do not over-develop.** Many respondents made it clear that over-development was possible and did happen in the UK. Clear greenlighting/abandonment decision points are important and projects should be abandoned as soon as it is clear that they will not find a market.
- **Be original.** Fresh ideas were considered to be important by many of the respondents. All types of film, be they based on original scripts or adaptations, or if they were considered 'genre-pieces' or not, were considered to stand a better chance at success if they contained new ideas, rather than if they simply recycled old ones.
- **Development staff must have relevant experience.** Industry experience, particularly in the area of writing, was regularly highlighted as being an important element to the success of a development team. It allows for a better working relationship with writers.
- **Shared vision.** Several respondents made it clear that having the producer, writer and director sharing a similar vision of the project was important to avoid problems during the development process.

One thing that most interviewees agreed on is that it only takes one film to be converted and to be successful for a production company to have a profitable year, so the key to best practice here is for the production company to take the best approach to getting that one film made (and more if possible). For a small company this appears to be to develop few films for specific niche audiences, the idea being that, if you target a smaller group directly, more of that group will want to see the film. For a larger company the best approach appears to be to develop many films in search of one or two successes that appeal to very large audiences.

Several improvements to current development practice were suggested in the interviews, most of them related to the notions of best practice outlined above:

- **Perform more detailed market analysis.** This analysis needs to go to a particularly deep level, beyond what was successful, to what failed and the intricacies of why it failed. It should also take on a global scale, to see how a film works beyond the UK, especially in the United States.
- **Work to a development budget.** If following the practice of having a large slate, firstly work out the number of films that you want to go into production (a), and the typical conversion rate (b). Then work out the typical amount spent on development per film (c). To find the development budget that will be needed to get the right number of films into production, simply use the equation $a \times b \times c$. This was described as the "US system" by one interviewee.⁴⁶
- **Development needs to be paid for.** Following on from the point above, the fact that development needs to be paid for should be realised. Some interviewees explained that in the US financiers understand this, whereas in the UK financiers do not place enough importance on funding development.
- **Never develop a project in isolation.** Too many projects are developed without discussion with sales agents, studios and distributors. Development should be part of a wider film-making process.
- **UK development should pay more attention to the US market.** Several interviewees made reference to the huge sums of money available in the US market and that if you can get a foothold in the US market you can do very well indeed. Many of these interviewees argued, therefore, that stronger efforts should be made to sell a film to the US.

⁴⁶ However, this is not to say that this methodology is in fact indicative of the US development sector as a whole. The key point is that the interviewee believed this was a different methodology from the one employed in the UK.

- **Give more weight to the development process.** Unlike in the US, where development is recognised as a serious business, few in the UK are able or aspire to build a career working exclusively in development.
- **Get the writer's fees sorted.** One interviewee explained that research into the wide variety of prices for writers in the UK would help the development process, as this is currently an area where production companies lack knowledge.

Those surveyed were asked how they would change their own development process if they had access to unlimited funds. The responses to this hypothetical question were varied. Some explained that they would use unlimited funds to increase the number of films they had in development by increasing the size of their dedicated development staff. This fits with the previous suggestion that large development slates are part of the best practice model for larger production companies. Others explained that they would pay for top writers (the 'million-dollar' writers who can guarantee a successful script) and would develop their relationships with existing talent. This would be to address a problem facing smaller production companies, in that, if they nurture a new talent, they can no longer afford them after they are successful. One company said that they would put money into training, although most production companies interviewed and surveyed said that, in their opinion, most knowledge was still gained 'on the job.' One company said that they would not change anything, as they would not want to have more films in development as they believed that, in the UK, there were currently too many films in development at one time.

One further issue that can be raised here regards the UKFC itself. A few stakeholders explained that the perceived "neutrality" of the UKFC, the fact that it did not have an agenda like other financiers have, made it a more approachable body and one that was easier to work with. The companies who voiced this opinion interpreted this neutrality as a desire by the UKFC to achieve critical success along with commercial performance, and that pitches to the UKFC could, if so desired by the production company, be made as much on terms of artistic merit as of commercial viability. Some production companies believed this to be good practice. However, others did not identify critical success as an objective of development.⁴⁷

In trying to ascertain a best practice model for development and screenwriter training in the UK, a similar problem to creating a best practice model for production companies arises: there is a wide variety of schemes, appealing to a wide variety of people. However, the following general elements were identified by the interviewed and surveyed training bodies:

⁴⁷ This is not to say that these more commercially-focused companies said they opposed the UKFC in any way. In fact, the companies who identified commercial success as their over-riding objective were not the ones who mentioned UKFC neutrality.

- **Choose your trainees carefully.** Successful applicants for training schemes need to be able to prove an ability to write, through a physical body of work, but personality is also important. They need to be the kind of person who can survive the industry and thrive within it; in the end a great writer with an inability to withstand rejection is not going to last.
- **Make your trainees industry savvy.** In addition to being hardy enough to survive the industry, it is important to teach people that they are working in an industry and that, in the end, they need to sell their scripts. A great script will never be produced if it has no place in the marketplace. Thus teaching students how to pitch their scripts successfully is an important element of training.⁴⁸
- **Balance artistry with marketability.** Although genre should be taught, and is important in writing successfully for the market, it is also important to encourage students to write what they want as well, so that their talent can develop. It is important to strike a careful balance between the student's artistic voice, writing talent and ability to sell their script in the market.
- **Use their own scripts to teach them.** The best way to get the student to improve is to structure the course around their own work. An entire course based on lectures about screenwriting will never be as useful as the ability to discuss one's own screenplay and improve it.
- **Use the 'Socratic Method'.** This method was proposed by a European scheme, but was echoed in the interviews with some UK training schemes. Answering the student's questions with more questions, especially when developing their screenplays, was said to be the best way to get them to question and develop their own work. Simply lecturing on screenwriting will not suffice.

Some training bodies and production companies made specific suggestions as to how current screenwriter training in the UK could be improved and 'better practice' could be achieved:

- Calls for tender for new screenwriting programmes from Skillset needed to arrive with more warning, meaning that they could be appropriately prepared for.
- A long-running scheme told us that Skillset proposals do not adequately consider the 'architecture' of the planned training schemes,

⁴⁸ It is true that our interviews showed that spec scripts were less important than in-house development in the UK. However, even if ideas are developed in-house, writers need to be selected to create scripts from these ideas. Being able to pitch your own take on these ideas successfully enough to get hired is a skill that can be acquired when learning how to pitch your own spec scripts.

for example the cost of renting rooms and feeding participants, and this needs to change. This could be done by having Skillset consult with a group of various people who organise training schemes before releasing a proposal.

- A production company made it clear to us that the training schemes do not promote their students enough. We were told that those working in development were far too busy to go out to the training schemes in a search for new talent. Instead, training schemes should find ways to let companies know about their new talent. Of course, not all production companies are interested in hiring new talent, but our interviews suggested that some production companies would be more likely to consider new talent if the training bodies and schools pitched their students to them directly.
- One training scheme argued that the current UK fashion of developing and training different professions separately was a bad idea. Writers should not be developed in isolation from others in the industry, including directors, actors and producers. This scheme believed that the UKFC and Skillset should consult more widely with training schemes about whether writer-only training programmes are actually the best way forward.
- Currently, we were told by a minority of the respondent training bodies, there is 'too much' training in the UK that is unfocussed and not based on proven rationales. These bodies felt that there is more than enough money to go around but not enough thought. Some argued that the devolving of all the UKFC training money to Skillset had created a policy vacuum that has not been filled up by Skillset itself. However the UK Film Skills Strategy was developed by Skillset and the UKFC in direct consultation with the industry and Skillset is currently working with a Screenwriting Advisory Group, made up of leading industry professional writers, producers and development executives. Therefore the issue here for these training schemes may be that there is a gap between provision and perception.
- Make screenwriter training more 'elite'. It was argued by one respondent that there are substantially more writers being trained than there are writing opportunities in the industry and that it would be interesting to investigate whether more elite training of fewer people would be better for the industry.

Best practice for university screenwriter courses is harder to ascertain for two reasons: firstly, the response rate from universities has been low on this issue and, secondly, as they are often teaching younger people at the start of their careers, it is harder to evaluate a 'conversion rate' for their students.⁴⁹ Also, at this stage in their careers it can be more about simply getting into

⁴⁹ That is, those going from being students to being professional writers.

the film industry at all, rather than into a specific sector within it such as screenwriting. However, there are some common areas of practice that respondents have been keen to promote:

- **Promote both artistry and craftsmanship.** Courses must not just be about developing the writer as an artist, but must also develop the writer as a craftsman. Without this approach students will not have the industry savvy to succeed.
- **Use industry professionals.** Using professionals from within the industry as tutors and lecturers is important to ensure that students are not isolated from the reality of the business. One university made it clear that a significant amount of money was set aside to pay for industry professionals, suggesting that doing so would encourage support from key players in the industry.
- **A variety of teaching methods is important.** Using a variety of teaching methods is important, ranging from lectures to seminars to one-to-one tuition, so that students are able to learn to work well on their own, but also be aware of the benefits of listening to the ideas of others in the industry. It also begins the networking process that is important to any writer's career.
- **Teach students how to write *any* script.** Making students 'script-literate' was said to be very important, as that will make them an asset to the industry regardless of what style of writing is currently popular or what a particular production company wants.
- **Be prepared to modify your course.** Willingness to adapt and improve courses year on year was regarded as being very important to maintaining their usefulness to the industry and to the students.

European training schemes had the following key points to make regarding UK practice and how it compared to European practice:

- One European training scheme explained that best practice was constantly to develop your schemes, fitting in with the idea of flexibility. Their concern with UK training schemes was that they were too set in their ways, sticking to what has worked rather than what can be improved upon.
- It was argued that UK schemes do not do enough to address the further training of professional writers⁵⁰ and those writers who want to address wider audiences. The key issue here is that European schemes think more globally, helping writers learn how to write stories that can cross borders.

⁵⁰ It should be noted that some UK schemes do in fact target writers from other disciplines.

- A major European scheme explained that an important part of their process was to ask their students to complete a detailed evaluation of the course. The results of this evaluation are analysed by the training scheme organisers and then carefully applied to improve the scheme. This was considered a crucial element of their scheme's success, and something lacking or not taken seriously enough in the UK.⁵¹
- Additionally, it was argued that UK training schemes do not put enough effort into understanding what the industry wants, or what its needs are regarding writers. The market must always be a consideration – writers are not just artists, they are craftsmen too. However, as our report on best practice for development training has shown, this does not seem a particularly fair comment, with most training schemes and universities making it clear that a consideration of the industry was very important to their schemes and courses.
- A European concern was that their industry was too 'snobby' and that therefore art-house films, rather than box-office successes, were being favoured in the training and development stages. Here, we were told, Europe needs to look to the US, where the importance of the market is recognised.

After conducting research on development in the US, where development databases are available, we believe that the UK would benefit from having a database of projects that represents the UK film industry's full slate of projects in development. Every time a producer begins developing a project, they should fill in a basic submission form, perhaps on the UKFC's website.

7.5. Do the screenwriter training schemes match the best practice model(s) identified by this study?

The fact that several suggestions for improvements to training schemes have already been noted in 7.4 suggests that training schemes may not currently match any training scheme best practice model. Of course, as we have shown, there is no single best practice model, and it can be argued that, instead, constant evaluation and improvement of screenwriter training schemes is, in fact, best practice. However, it is also important for training schemes to match production company development best practice, if they are to work together successfully.

The major areas of concern here are:

⁵¹ This is of course the European scheme's own opinion of UK schemes, but it should be noted that UK schemes did not raise evaluations of the schemes by students as a significant issue, even though the final 5% of Skillset funding is released on receipt of evaluations.

- Training schemes are not integrated well enough into the industry. They need to be more aware of the needs of the market so that their writers will 'fit' better with the thinking of the production companies.
- Training schemes must push their writers to be able to write within a variety of genres, and to write both adaptations and original stories.
- Writers do not exist in isolation in the industry, they work closely with development teams, producers, directors and actors, and so developing them in isolation does not fit with the reality of the film industry.

7.6. How effective are the screenwriter training schemes in contributing to the commercial and/or critical success of UK films?

Quantitative data are not available here, as this would require an extensive study of the output of all writers attending training schemes and the commercial and critical success of any produced films. This was beyond the scope of this study. However, qualitative data, acquired through interviews and surveys with training scheme bodies and universities, as well as with production companies, can explain the current perception of the effectiveness of these schemes in the UK.

Commercial production companies were asked to comment on the effectiveness of screenwriter training schemes and, in general, had no opinion on this question. This lack of opinion is likely to in large part be due to producers using experienced writers for films⁵², whose time in screenwriter training schemes is well behind them.⁵³ One production company explained that it would be at least 5 years before they expected to see results from the Skillset-accredited schemes, indicating an expectation that post-training experience will occur before a writer works on a feature film.

Also, the lack of opinion on training schemes from the majority of respondents could indicate that training schemes are not doing enough to advertise what they are achieving.⁵⁴

⁵² As has been shown in 5.7.

⁵³ Of those production companies who did respond, few indicated direct knowledge of their writers' screenwriter training history, and instead spoke about their experience dealing with 'screenwriter training' in general terms.

⁵⁴ One respondent made clear that they had no opinion as they were not aware enough of what the training schemes were doing. It may be that this was a major reason for the general lack of opinion here, although we were not explicitly told this in other interviews or surveys.

Of the minority of production companies who commented, most believed that screenwriter training schemes are ineffective. A few respondents were extremely critical of training schemes, particularly those that allow writers to write “in a vacuum”. One interviewee explained that they were completely ineffective as they were not organised by those within the industry, and therefore were not aware enough of what the industry wanted. This concern that a lack of market awareness reduces the effectiveness of screenwriter training schemes was echoed by other respondents.⁵⁵ One company made it clear that too many people were going on too many courses and leaving thinking they are screenwriters; another simply said that writers learn by writing, so experience is what counted.⁵⁶

A few of the companies who commented felt that the schemes may have some worth, but none were emphatic in their support for the schemes currently available. One production company explained that training schemes were useful in teaching the writing “craft”, but experience remained critical. In fact, one company that was particularly supportive of training new talent explained that they were going to start their own scheme, rather than support one currently in existence.

One UK training body, which explained that it particularly tried to understand what the market wants, was discussed positively by production companies, with some development executives explaining that they had been on its courses in the past. Only one production company made reference to university courses and this was to say that they had no value.

The training schemes themselves are of course more positive. In general the feeling is that training has created more disciplined writers than existed in the past and that this can contribute to the success of the industry. However, European schemes made it very clear to us that training schemes can only directly be effective in contributing to the commercial and/or critical success of the film industry if they take the market into consideration. We have already shown that a good script is no guarantee of commercial success and that, in the end, the script needs to sell.

⁵⁵ However, as has been shown, several training schemes made it clear that industry involvement was crucial to their screenwriter training schemes.

⁵⁶ It is important to note that this shows that some production companies perceive training schemes to be failing, rather than showing that the schemes actually are failing. However, the fact that production companies are either unaware of training schemes or have a negative perception of them may simply be a function of film’s place in the audiovisual value chain. Film is a high-risk activity and has budgets that are higher than television. It is also an attractive destination for writers. Development teams would therefore be unlikely to hire recently trained writers and probably have a ready supply of experienced writers. Writers used by film companies would therefore be likely to have prior experience in TV or another medium, and hired on experience rather than qualifications. This does not mean that graduates from training schemes, universities or film schools are not being used in films, rather that their subsequent writing experience is what development teams are looking for.

Conversion rates, for example the number of students who get their films into development or production, would be useful here and training schemes and universities were asked for these. However, only a small number of respondents provided data, and it appears that there was a wide variety of interpretations of each conversion rate (for example, the number becoming professional screenwriters after leaving the scheme was often 100%, which suggests that part-time screenwriters were considered professional screenwriters, even if it was not supporting them financially). We would suggest that Skillset, in their regular surveys of their supported schemes, create a standardised measure of conversion rates to allow this to be used to compare schemes in the future.

Universities are of course harder to evaluate in these terms. They are often taking on less experienced people, with the majority of those surveyed explaining that 90-100% of their students had never written for feature films before. One film school made it clear to us that it takes 5 to 10 years to build a successful screenwriting career. Therefore, it is difficult actually to measure the effectiveness of the university courses in the same way that you can measure training schemes. This may also explain why production companies can be particularly sceptical about the worth of the university courses.

7.7. How do the schemes funded by Skillset and the UKFC Development Fund compare with other leading international schemes?

It should be realised that Skillset supported schemes do not offer a single, unified approach to training. They cover a wide variety of methodologies and are designed for many different students. Some are very similar to international schemes as they are based-on, or constructed through discussion with, international schemes.

An advisor to the Sundance Institute explained to us that it began in 1981, with an earlier version of the screenwriters' lab. They choose anywhere between 10 and 15 projects annually. Writers work together and are mentored closely at the Utah resort for one intensive month. Participants, though initially American, are now from all over the world. Britain, Iran, Morocco, Haiti, and Iraq are some countries represented in this year's selected group. Jennifer Norridge (from Leeds) is a participant this year.

Writers have to send in their scripts and also state if they have any key attachments (e.g. talent) to the project. The lab is primarily geared at developing the project in order to take it to the 'next stage', which could mean finding the appropriate director or could mean trying to obtain funding and therefore get it into production.

The writer is of less importance compared to the project, which fits with the 'best practice' notion of not developing the writer in isolation. Although some Skillset supported schemes follow this methodology, most appear to be focused on improving the ability of the writer to write scripts of any kind. For these courses, although the project is important, it is the writer that takes precedence.

American training, as mentioned earlier, is also enormously influenced by the film school structure. Graduate degrees in screenwriting provide a 2-3 year education with a vocational approach, rather than academic approach to screenwriting. In eight out of the ten top film schools in the US, it is compulsory for writing students to take some form of directing, editing and business classes, as well as script analysis, screenwriting workshops and pitch seminars.⁵⁷ Writing students at the University of Southern California are forced to take an Entertainment Industry Seminar class that is taught by an ex-William Morris agent. This implies that the writing students are entrenched in the industry, and is also helped by the fact that screenwriting professors have written highly successful films, for example Professor Jack Epps (*Top Gun, Dick Tracy*) and Professor Mardak Martin (*Mean Streets, Raging Bull*). Responses from Skillset accredited university and film school courses did indicate that developing an awareness of the industry was important to teaching screenwriters, although it came across that developing the actual writing craft was more important at this point in the writer's career. A more vocational element, where writers were learning such skills as pitching scripts and working with producers, was more commonly seen with the Skillset supported training schemes, which often took on graduates from the universities or film schools.

The Cannes Residence programme is a particularly intensive 4-5 month programme that takes on 12 directors a year, who have their own scripts. At the residence they work on either their first or second fictional feature film project, working specifically on developing their scripts, although they are also advised on the transition from script to production. The participants have come from over 40 different countries, creating a very international scheme, where people from different cultures can work together and learn from one another. A presentation booklet detailing the various projects is given out to producers and distributors at various festivals, including Locarno, Rotterdam and Cannes. This programme therefore takes both an intensive approach to script development and towards promoting its students. Given that production companies that we interviewed in the UK had often no opinion on the value of students from training schemes, this very direct approach to promoting new talent through festivals may be a way forward in making producers more aware of what new talent is working on. The high regard attached to the 'Cannes' name may also be something that could make production companies take greater note.

⁵⁷ Only NYU and UCLA do not make this wider filmic education compulsory.

The North by Northwest programme in Denmark emphasises its international nature as one of its greatest assets. This international nature here refers to having students from many different countries and film-making cultures learning and writing together. This, according to North by Northwest, allows not only for writers to acquire new ideas, but also teaches them to write for wider, more international, audiences. It was also made clear that it was not just the students who came from many different countries, but the tutors as well, allowing for a wealth of international experience in their courses. Although several Skillset supported courses do have international students and teachers and some also take their students to international festivals to further interact with writers from other countries,⁵⁸ North by Northwest still considered a less international focus to be a problem for UK screenwriter training. However, Skillset notes that its remit is to train and support UK writers.

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⁵⁸ It should be noted here that MEDIA funding, which 3 Skillset supported schemes have received in the past 3 years according to data from the UK MEDIA desk, requires the schemes to work on a pan-European level in order to receive their funding.