

Introduction to the Film Board Presentation - 28 June 2006

By James Morris

Chairman, Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board

On behalf of the Board Members and staff of the Irish film Board, welcome to today's presentation. I will shortly hand over to Simon Perry who will be presenting a number of new initiatives we are introducing in relation to project assessment, multiple project development and a new office of the Irish Film Commission in Los Angeles.

Before we begin the presentation I would like to take this opportunity to mark some highlights from the last year and emphasise the priorities that the Board is currently working to.

The year 2005 was a challenging year for Film makers and all those working in the Irish film industry with inward co-production feeling the effect of the uncertainty and increased competition from film financing regulations in other jurisdictions. In response to this we were able to secure additional funding for the Board towards the end of the year which has resulted in a number of new productions from the start of this year. More importantly the Minister increased the Board's capital grant for 2006 by a further 20% and this has a significant effect on our ability to continue to support the development and production of Irish films. In November of last year, following Industry consultations, the Board presented a report to the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism on the changing competitive environment in the International film industry which resulted in significant changes in the 2006 Finance Act to Ireland's section 481 tax incentives for film production. The full report will be published on the Film Board website this week.

In each of these initiatives we have worked closely with the officials in the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and had the benefit of the strong support of the Minister – we know that this level of involvement and support is not automatic but it is essential to the on-going development of the Irish film industry and it is reinforced every time the film industry demonstrates its own ability to compete and create successfully. Maintaining the public will to support the development of a dynamic Irish film sector requires constant and full attention and already, for example, since the passing of our own finance act this April, further details of the UK film tax incentive have emerged which again present us with significant competitive challenges. We are now in discussion with industry representatives and our Department to assess the impact on future inward production. In relation to our international competitiveness we want to be sure that we have assessed our strengths as well as our weaknesses in relation to a wide range of international production opportunities before making any further recommendations.

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Our ability to remain competitive in this area relies on a number of integrated factors including not only direct financial incentives but our cost base, levels of expertise and film infrastructure. All these elements are crucial to the industrial agenda which is a key priority for the Board.

Also last year we engaged in the task of recruiting our new Chief Executive Simon Perry who has now been with us now for nearly six months – I think its fair to say that he hit the ground running, didn't bother with his honeymoon period, and will be setting out today a range of new initiatives that he and his team have put together. While the Board is responsible for developing strategy and securing longer term industry goals - Our first priority has to be to deliver the day to day services to you the film makers and maintain a constant effort to attract inward production. To a large extent what Simon will be presenting today is about the here and now difference that the Board can make for Irish film makers and the industry as a whole.

The Board is setting out an ambitious plan to broaden and deepen its support for the growth of the Irish film industry and this inevitably increases the demands on the executive. With Simon at the helm the Board has recently recruited new members of staff in the area of production and development and in business affairs which will increase the capacity to work on projects in development and production and in the completion and execution of all projects. A Board can call for as many ambitious plans as it likes but without a solid organisation to deliver them and without the political support to resource them, they remain just that – ambitious plans. The work in this area is not always visible but I believe the effects will increasingly be seen by the end of this year. And they will be specifically targeted to deliver on the Board's dual mandate to support the indigenous film makers and to attract inward production.

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The members of the Board, working with the executive, have put considerable time and thought in the last year into defining the vision of what we believe should be the focus of the next three years. Goals that we can articulate clearly and against which all the activities and resources of the Board should be concentrated and measured – they are:

- To enable the making of film in Ireland
- To enable the growth and quality of Irish film talent
- To enable Irish film makers to express their own vision in film and television
- To grow the audience for Irish film in Ireland and abroad
- To promote an integrated government policy for the audiovisual/ digital content sector, with film at its centre

The task ahead is to organise our resources behind these five separate but connected goals – they are strongly reflected in the initiatives being announced today. We use the word enable because that is the primary role of the Board – we can be most effective by working collaboratively with all sections in the industry. Achieving significant impact in any of these five areas will depend on a wide range of initiatives and programmes and developing smarter ways to leverage our finite resources to greater effect. We are under no illusion that making any significant and measurable impact will be easy, and the ambition has to be turned into action realistically, which means building consistently and over time.

Arts Council Director Mary Cloake recently articulated to the Government the importance of not just supporting the Arts as culture for its own sake but recognising the vital role the Arts play in reflecting our society and articulating our own sense of ourselves to each other and to the greater world. The same is true of film and more so because of its equally powerful potential for economic growth and value. Film is an art form that requires resources on an industrial scale which is why the Board has a dual mandate – an industrial policy for inward production on its own cannot be an answer, it would expose us to the constant downward pressure on costs that we experience from competing countries. It only makes sense in the context of building our own film industry and keeping the long term benefits socially and economically that a successful indigenous industry can deliver. Developing indigenous film making is our core purpose.

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We are looking closely at how we can improve our communication channels with all sections of the industry and provide our resources more efficiently – we will seek to build stronger links with other government agencies and we will argue the importance of the film industry to government industrial strategy – to make it clear why film matters. We will work to develop sustainable strategies in conjunction with our colleagues in the NIFTC. If you wonder why the British film industry has been so effectively supported it is worth reflecting that the creative industries represent 14% of Britain's GDP – their economic value has overtaken the City of London. A thriving film industry is the driving force of creative content that our more digital friends are so desperately searching for – in time we will get this message across to our own economic planners. You cannot legislate for creativity but you can make the conditions that allow it to emerge and for this purpose the Film Board is an effective structure.

Thank you for listening – A final word of thanks and appreciation to my fellow Board members and the film board staff – if you are able to make it we look forward to meeting with you again soon at our open forum during the Galway Film Fleadh.