



6 March, 2020

Dear members of the Citizens Assembly,

Women in Film and Television Ireland is a voluntary body run by film and TV professionals representing the creative, business, technical and educational divisions of the Irish audiovisual sector. We promote greater representation of women on screen and behind the camera and believe that film and television play a formative role in the cultural and economic life of our citizens, our communities and our country. Although pressure of time prohibits a detailed submission on this occasion WFTI would like to highlight three areas we consider to be extremely important. These are issues around caring, occupational segregation and leadership, all of which we believe are central to understanding the gender disparity in the film and television industry. For many reasons, cultural and economic, it is of crucial importance that gender equality and diversity are embedded in an industry that until relatively recently was gender blind.

Although there is a dearth of detailed statistical information available to quantify women's participation in the Irish film and television industry we do know that the sector is highly gendered. Screenwriters, directors and producers are the key creatives involved in the industry and it is their vision that shapes the stories and characters we ultimately see on screen. Yet, from 2011-2017, only 21% of female writers and 17% of female directors were attached to Screen Ireland funded films, with female producers faring rather better.

It is true that over the last four years there has been a significant cultural shift. Industry discourse has become infused with the importance of gender equality; the need for more

women behind the camera in key creative roles, the need for more women's stories and perspectives on-screen. Public funders have issued quite forthright statements about the importance of achieving gender equality and gender policies have been formulated and implemented by, for instance Screen Ireland and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and there are early indications that more women are coming forward and being awarded funding. Yet there is a lot more to be done; change is slow and it is far from clear if enough has been achieved to ensure that even the green shoots of change that are starting to surface are sustainable (Liddy 2020).

Wherever you look, women are still underrepresented in the film industry. They are less likely to be funded and when they are, the proportion of finances allocated to their projects is less than their male colleagues. Women are largely absent behind the camera in a range of technical areas. Researchers paint a picture of continuing exclusion; small incremental achievements and seeming inevitable reversals; a lack of transparency and opaque decision making; a resistance to power sharing within the industry. In western industries globally progress is literally creeping along; two steps forward and one step back.

In 2018 the Irish Government made a long-term commitment to film culture by directing funding of €200 million to SI from 2018 to 2027. Screen Ireland acknowledges that the film and screen industry “is poised to continue to increase and expand the significant economic and social contribution it makes to Irish society” (Screen Ireland 2019, *Statistics*). Achieving gender equality is vitally important in order to ensure women have an equal presence and a voice in a burgeoning industry.

WFT believes that the issue of care and caring is central to women's equality. The expectation that women will inevitably and automatically undertake the caring roles has implications for our position in society and specifically, in this context, our participation in the film and television industry. Women face a range of gender specific challenges during pregnancy, maternity leave and later in their careers as they struggle to accommodate the care of small children with the ‘always on’ culture of work in much of the sector (Liddy & O'Brien in process). Care must become a shared responsibility between women and men, with quality, accessible and affordable care supported and resourced by the state.

Women's participation in the film and television industry must be supported and resourced at all levels. Issues that are in play across other sectors, such as horizontal and vertical segregation, a lack of women in leadership positions, and stereotypical perceptions of what constitutes a leader, are in evidence in the film and television industry also. We are supportive of the NWCi position that 'adopting a legislative quota indicates business communities and policymakers understand women's underrepresentation will not be fixed by individual women's efforts'. To achieve gender equality in our industry we believe that 'larger structures, cultures and biases' must be challenged and are of the view that legislative gender quotas could well play a part in achieving gender equality. We would certainly welcome an exploration of that issue as it might pertain to the film and television industry.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Dr Susan Liddy

Chair

Women in Film and Television Ireland