

CHANGING FOCUS:

Collaboration, Creative Process and Critical Awareness in UK and European Screenwriting Education

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

NOEL MALONEY

Sponsored by the Higher Education and Skills Group, Department of Education and Training (Victorian Government)

© Copyright October 2018

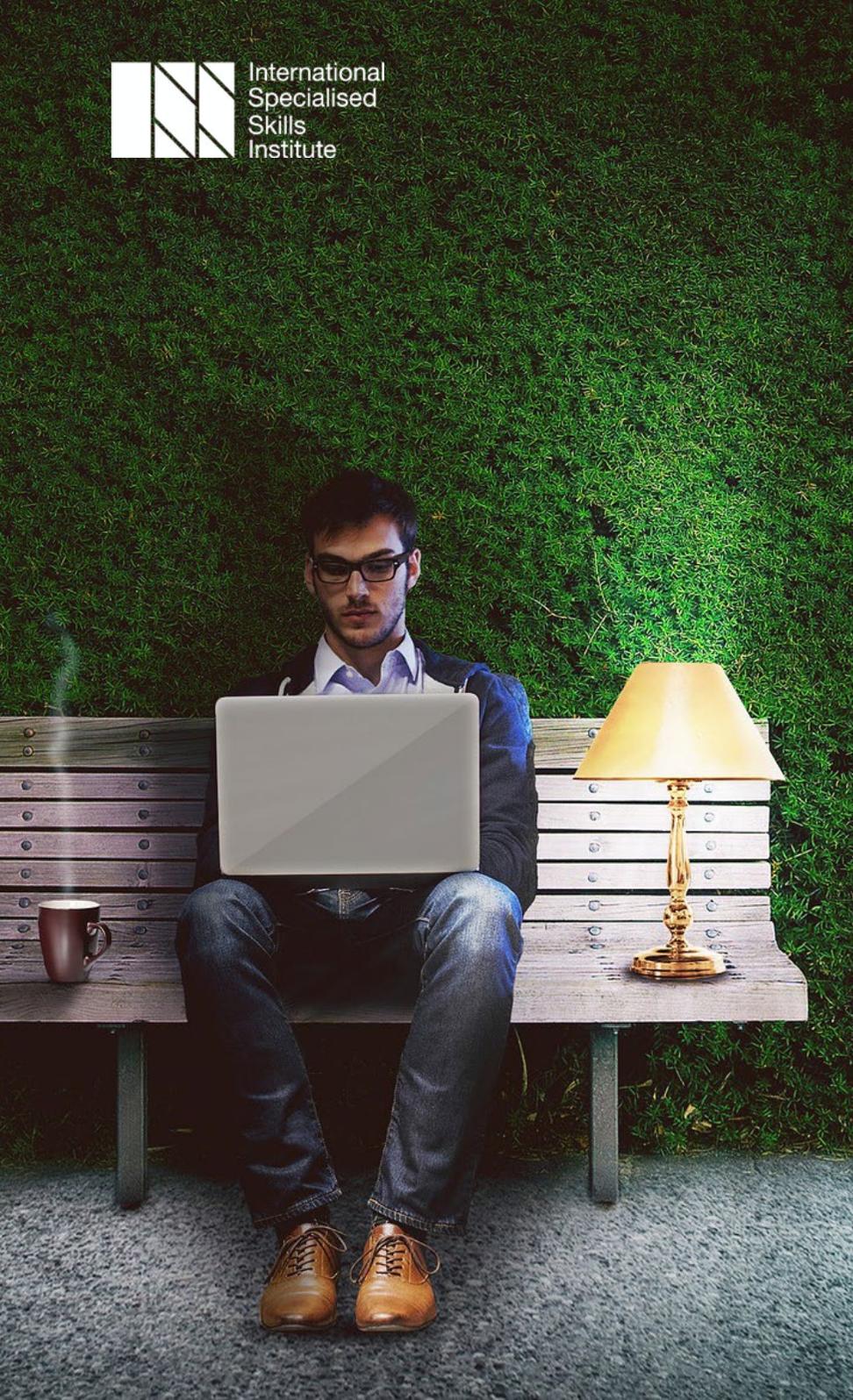


Table of Contents

i.	Executive Summary	3
1.	Fellowship Background	5
2.	Fellowship Learnings	9
3.	Conclusion	26
4.	Recommendations and Considerations	27
5.	Acknowledgements	29
6.	References	31
7.	Appendix: Project Participants	34

i. Executive Summary

This Fellowship researched UK and European screenwriting programs that are offered in an interdisciplinary setting and that promote a collaborative, industry-connected, project-based approach to screen production.

Film maker Werner Herzog famously quipped that ‘academia is the death of cinema. It is the very opposite of passion. Film is not the art of scholars, but of illiterates’ (Cronin & Herzog, 2002:16). Contrary to Herzog, this report argues that screenwriting pedagogy, employed in many of the schools I visited, is breathing new life into film making practice and thought. The screenwriting teachers I interviewed for this fellowship, and the curricula and pedagogies they shared, are contributing to a rewriting of screenwriting practice in a positive and creative way.

In the past three decades, dedicated screenwriting education has focused on the acquisition of an identifiable set of skills, with a bias towards systems and practices as they are thought to exist in mainstream production (Macdonald, 2013). In doing so, it has drawn heavily on screenwriting manuals that promote an authoritative and directive, or ‘how to’, approach to screenwriting (Conor, 2014). However, this limited notion of screenwriting education seems to be fading. The range of screenwriting projects on offer at the schools I visited, and the sophisticated approach to collaborative and interdisciplinary pedagogies I investigated, paint a dynamic picture of a creative arts discipline that is undergoing change. Teachers continue to draw on craft traditions in their work, but they do so with a critical eye. Screenwriting is seen less as a craft-based exercise that should meet predetermined structural specifications, and more as something that needs to be situated dynamically within the field of film or television production.

Personal, Professional and Sectoral Impact

This report argues that the relationship between screenwriting education and industry is not a one-way street. While the programs I visited hold themselves accountable to the screen industry, they are also having an impact on it. Far from being academically isolated, this report shows screenwriting to be a discipline shaped by complex and productive collaborations between scholars, teachers, practitioners and producers. The programs I researched are exploring new ways of negotiating the boundaries between arts education and industry, and they are changing the way screenwriting is theorised and practiced. Screenwriting educators are recognizing the need to move beyond a simple, skills-based approach, and are embracing the need to educate students to be creative within interdisciplinary, collaborative environments.

At a more personal level, this project has widened my understanding of screenwriting pedagogy, and has encouraged me to think more deeply about the philosophies that guide my teaching. It has also made me question the role and purpose of arts education at a time when universities and institutions must increasingly rationalise themselves according to industrial need. It has also enabled me to meet colleagues internationally, to feel part of a broader fellowship of educators, and provided me with an opportunity to further develop these relationships. I was particularly impressed with DFFB’s screenwriting program and its approach to collaboration; its postgraduate program, ‘Serial Eyes’, which is a major leader in the training of show runners for European television; the extensive industry collaborations at Bournemouth University’s Bachelor of Screenwriting; the interdisciplinarity and mentoring offered by the London Film School and the

National Film and Television School; and the highly integrated curriculum at the National Film School of Denmark.

Considerations & Recommendations

- » That a postgraduate qualification with a global focus is specifically developed for Australian television writer-producers.
- » That industry partnerships are better integrated into curricula, in order to assist emerging screenwriters to develop creative goals, capacities and networks, and promote their projects.
- » That screenwriting courses continue to develop beyond an orthodox skills-based approach, to promote discovery, creativity and experimentation informed by a critical engagement with industry practices, theories and histories.
- » That student and teacher exchanges are developed between Australian, UK and Europe institutions referenced in this report.
- » That further research is undertaken into specific institutions such as the Danish Film School that are pioneering the integration of screenwriting education with film and television production and design.
- » That this report's findings are shared with relevant industry and educational bodies.

1. Fellowship Background

This project is situated within a broad, international conversation in which practitioners, educators and scholars are reshaping screenwriting as a collaborative, interdisciplinary and outwardly-focused discipline. This report articulates the trends that are already taking shape, provides a useful reading of the highly creative and adventurous curricula and pedagogies that are emerging internationally, and identifies specific projects that are changing our understanding not only of how screenwriting can be taught, but the very practice of screenwriting itself.

I undertook the research in April and May 2017, interviewing teachers, students and industry practitioners in the UK, as well as Berlin, Copenhagen and Paris. Using a case study approach, I profiled key programs and their approaches to interdisciplinary collaborative projects and industry partnerships. I focused on several key issues:

- » Industry engagement
- » Project Management
- » Curriculum
- » Ethos
- » Creative industry policies
- » Intellectual property
- » Practitioner teachers

It should be noted that these issues are of relevance, not just to screenwriting, but also to a wide-range of other creative disciplines, such as directing and producing.

The UK media education landscape provides fertile ground for this investigation. A landmark investigation of art, media and design education in the UK by the Higher Education Academy found that 85% of the departments it surveyed were actively engaged with industry bodies and business organisations (Clews & Mallinder, 2010:4). This is not surprising, given that the creative industries are significant players in the UK economy (DCMS, 2016: 7).

Australian Situation

Victoria's screen industry is a vibrant and important component of the cultural and creative industries, contributing around \$1.4 billion per annum into the economy in 2015, and home to more than half of national television drama production (Creative Victoria, 2015:11). It is estimated that by 2021, the contribution of the film and TV sectors supported by Film Victoria will reach an estimated \$407 million in total value added (a 15% increase from 2014-15) and an estimated total FTE employment of 2,897, a 7% increase from 2014-2015 (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016).

Nationally, 2016/17 saw a resurgence of television drama series production, with a record 46 titles in production, generating 457 hours of content. However, emerging screenwriters face distinct hurdles. Most of the series production slate comprises comedy shows with episodes of 30 minutes and under five hours in total, and mini-series below 10 hours. Australian serial production, traditionally an entry level opportunity for screenwriters, remains stagnant, with Neighbours and Home and Away being the only titles produced in this category. As well, expenditure in children's television production, another entry point for new screenwriters, slumped in 2016/2017 (Screen Australia, 2017).

In 2011 NBC Universal (NBCU) UK took a majority stake in Victorian television company Matchbox Pictures, and then acquired the company outright in 2014. This investment recognised the strength and capability of the local screen business and has provided Victorian projects with greater access to a global distribution market. This year, Matchbox co-founder Tony Ayres has branched out with his own production company to produce television and feature films with an international focus (Groves, 2018).

How then can screen and media writing programs, and other related qualifications, shape curriculum to work with contemporary industry dynamics and enhance employability, while at the same time foster critical awareness and promote creativity and experimentation?

In 2017, RMIT University re-accredited the Advanced Diploma of Screenwriting and as part of this, consulted with industry about emerging trends, opportunities and challenges. The skills and knowledge profile that emerged from this process is quite different from that which shaped the program six years ago. In a screen industry forum held at RMIT, established television producers and screenwriters agreed that graduates will increasingly need to:

- » be more connected to industry prior to graduation
- » have produced a portfolio of work that demonstrates highly developed storytelling
- » collaborate creatively
- » take advantage of digital platforms
- » be more aware of both local and global media markets (Maloney, 2016).

Implicit in their recommendations is a curriculum that focuses on project-based learning and fosters strong industry connections through collaborative projects. These suggested outcomes are echoed by Price Waterhouse Cooper's industry brief for the new Cultural Industries Training Package, which emphasises the need

for cultural workers to be more entrepreneurial in their outlook (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2016).

Historical Context

Screenwriting is shaped by a complex range of processes, including formal industrial agreements and practices (Conor, 2014), discrete workplace cultures (Caldwell, 2008) and narrative theories, some of which are popularised in how-to-write manuals (Maras, 2011).

Screenwriting has distinct industrial histories in the US, UK and Europe (Price, 2013), and is also shaped by ideas of craft and forms of collaboration (Conor, 2014). Screenwriting pedagogy has been heavily influenced by how-to-write screenplay manuals, which promote screenwriting as a predictable practice requiring an understanding of key narrative frameworks (Conor, 2014). Screenwriting manuals such as Robert McKee's *Story* assume that screenplay problems are relatively easy to diagnose and remedy (McKee, 1997). However, screenwriting is increasingly theorised as a process of development that has social, cultural and individual dimensions, in which creative activities and industrial demands intersect (Kerrigan & Batty, 2016; Macdonald, 2013).

In their detailed survey of film making education in the US, UK and Europe, Duncan Petrie and Rod Stoneman note that, since the 1980s, there has been a distinct shift away from a singular, auteur approach to film making education, and towards a more market-focused, skills-based model that favoured specialisations, including screenwriting (2014). In the US, the University of Southern California (USC) established a dedicated graduate screenwriting program in 1988. This was part of a proliferation of screenwriting courses at the time that Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush believed heralded screenwriting's new-found status as the 'creative centre of feature film production' (1990:3). In 1983, the UK's National Film and Television School replaced its single three-year film making course with specialisations including screenwriting. The French film school La Fémis opened

its doors in 1986 with an industry-focused curriculum that included screenwriting as a specialisation and in 1988, the National Film School of Denmark introduced a separate screenwriting department (Redvall, 2010). Similarly, in Australia the first accredited qualification focusing solely on screenwriting began at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), in Sydney, as a one-year full-time certificate, in 1986. RMIT University, Melbourne, followed in 1994 with a dedicated two-year full-time vocational Diploma of Arts in screenwriting. The first Australian vocational Masters by coursework in screenwriting was offered by AFTRS in 1996.

The participants I interviewed are well acquainted with their discipline's history, and the economic and cultural forces that have shaped it. Some are highly critical of the way creative industries policies in the UK have instrumentalised film-making education, though most take a pragmatic approach to this. All are focused on finding how to move beyond a narrow, skills-based approach to screenwriting, by developing curricula that emphasises collaboration, interdisciplinarity, creative process, critical awareness and new, dynamic ways of engaging with industry. This is the main finding of this report.

Fellowship Methodology

In April and May of 2017, I interviewed educators in screenwriting programs in the UK and Europe, in order to investigate innovative approaches to curriculum, work integrated learning and industry partnerships.

I began selecting potential interviewees by consulting with my colleagues in the Screenwriting Research Network (SRN), an international body of screenwriting teachers and researchers that provided me with initial contacts. As research began, more possibilities for interviews emerged. In all, I carried out 25 interviews. I researched 12 universities, six film schools and Creative Skillset, the UK quality standards body for creative arts tertiary education. 18 interviews were in the UK, 16 of which were conducted face to face and the other two via skype. As well, there were three interviews in Germany, three in Denmark and one skype interview

in France. Of the programs researched, one was non-accredited, one was a diploma, 10 were masters and 7 were undergraduate programs. A more detailed list of participants and institutions is provided in an appendix.

The project focused on the following skill and knowledge areas:

1. Industry engagement

I focused my research on screenwriting programs, primarily in the UK, that pursue innovative industry partnerships. I considered the following questions: how do they identify industry partners; how do they develop specific projects with them; how do they balance curriculum requirements with industry expectations and creativity; and in these programs, what is the relationship between teaching and the screen industry?

2. Project management

The management of industry partnered projects in educational settings is often time and resource intensive. Tertiary education systems, with their emphasis on curriculum outcomes, validation and quality assurance, are often at odds with creative industry economies and cultures. The latter are market driven in a way education is not. Given these differences, how do educators and media professionals collaborate together in a creative and effective way?

3. Curriculum

In any educational program with a creative industry focus, the challenge is often to acknowledge industry and craft orthodoxies while at the same time provoke learners to imagine and create outside the box. What innovative approaches have these programs developed to account for these competing needs? And how do they assess creative projects?

4. Ethos

While curricula will explicitly state course content, teaching methods and

assessment, I was also interested in the ideas that shaped teaching practice. What educational philosophies inform their curriculum?

5. Creative industry policies and their impact on curriculum

In the UK, Creative Skillset has been promoting standards and providing resources for creative industry education for the past ten years. How successful has this been for screenwriting educators, learners and practitioners, and what principles and practices might be applied in Australian educational settings?

6. Intellectual Property

The negotiation of intellectual property in educational partnerships with media producers traditionally favours industry. Networks demand a clear chain of title from producers pitching projects. How do screenwriting programs manage this problem?

7. Practitioners and Teachers

The credentialing and certification of industry professionals in Australian tertiary media education remains problematic. In Australian vocational education, the minimum trainer requirement is the Cert IV in Training and Assessment, but it is often not contextualised effectively for industry specific needs. How do screenwriting programs in the UK support, train and manage industry professionals as teachers?

Fellows biography

Noel Maloney teaches screen and theatre writing at La Trobe University, Melbourne. He researches the relationships between creative practice, craft and industry in performance writing, with a specific interest in collaboration. Prior to that, he managed the screenwriting program at RMIT for six years. His creative practice includes writing for television and theatre, and his play, P.O.V. Dave, was produced at La Mama Courthouse in 2016. In 2016 he received a prize for the best doctoral thesis in the Centre for Theatre and Performance Studies at Monash University, Melbourne.

Abbreviations/Acronyms / Definitions

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DFFB	Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie Berlin
La FÉMIS	Fondation Européenne pour les Métiers de l'Image et du Son
LFS	London Film School
NFTS	National Film Television School

2. Fellowship Learnings

Introduction

All the programs I researched have a stated, vocational purpose to educate students as future script and screenwriters. Some programs were scriptwriting programs with a screenwriting major, such as the MA in Scriptwriting at Goldsmiths. Others were solely focused on screenwriting, such as the BA (Hons) Scriptwriting for Film and Television, at Bournemouth, which is the only degree of its type in the UK.

Traditionally, these programs have had a stronger focus on film than TV, but this is changing. La Fémis in Paris has developed a dedicated TV scriptwriting course, DFFB has Serial Eyes, the TV series development course, since 2013, and the Danish film school was a pioneer in television script writing over ten years ago. Five of the programs include webisode writing in some form or another.

A defining feature of these programs is that they typically have only one tenured position and a large number of sessional staff, who by and large tend to be industry practitioners. Most participants are practicing writers, with a strong record of work having been produced. Some are also writing in areas other than screenwriting, such as novels and drama. Bar one, they also have many years' experience as teachers and academic managers.

Relationships

One of the most dominant themes to emerge from these interviews is the importance of strong engagement with, and among, students: how they develop, the stories they bring, the breakthroughs they make, the hardships they manage, the futures they may create and what they bring back to share after graduation. There is something intimate about the way participants describe their teaching. Teacher-student relationships are highly valued, and the teaching culture is very

personalized. Given the increasing emphasis on administration for teachers, I found it heartening that the stress fell firmly on student wellbeing and educational development.

When discussing their teaching, participants were very positive about their practice. However, these pleasures are offset by concerns about encroaching administrative burdens, and a sense that universities are changing and becoming more corporate in their outlook.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a particularly dominant concept, but it sits in tension with the theme of autonomy. Several interviewees critique the concept of the autonomous creative writer. For others, individual creative development is the main focus. Some schools such as DFFB are experimenting with different ways of giving students individual writing time, in order to help them build better creative habits. Solitude is an important part of the process, but workshopping, peer partnerships and interdisciplinary projects are also central to the curricula.

Interdisciplinarity

Many of the screenwriting programs I visited promoted an interdisciplinary approach to screenwriting. All participants view screenwriting as an inseparable component of film making. For Brian Dunnigan, recently retired head of screenwriting at the London Film School, this is literally so. For him, screenwriting is film making.

Many of the programs combine film making and screenwriting in their first year, such as the Danish Film School, NFTS, LFS and Bournemouth's BA (Hons) Scriptwriting, with students collaborating on short film projects. Surprisingly,

playwriting is also a featured element in several of the programs, including the masters at NFTS and London City University, where it is valued as a means of understanding dramatic action, and as an opportunity to work closely with actors in a cost-effective way.

Some of the programs benefited from being part of a cluster of screen-related qualifications. At Goldsmiths' College in London, students from the MA in Script Writing work closely with those from the MA in Filmmaking. One particular exercise involves film makers choosing a story or film they would like adapted. They partner with screenwriting students who realise the work as a screenplay. Phillip Parsons, the MA in Script Writing coordinator, believes this exercise provides writers with production experience, as well as enabling them to develop transferable skills in collaboration. Similarly, the National Film School of Denmark has recently reshaped its cluster of qualifications to offer a more integrated film and television making experience.



Goldsmith's College (Alex Blandford)

Script Development

Script workshopping sits at the heart of most programs and is the main approach to script development. The teaching ratios are enviable, with MA programs averaging five students to one teacher. Participants describe workshopping as a powerful, transformative and an enjoyable teaching experience, although they acknowledge that workshopping in these environments is not a simulation of industry conditions.

Phillip Parsons was careful to differentiate script workshopping from script editing. For Parsons, the former requires the teacher to know when to move from offering general craft concepts to encouraging specific story possibilities. At the same time, the work at hand must remain the focus, with care taken not to generate ideas for their own sake. Parsons suggested it is a very particular conversation that involves reflection, provocation, and summarizing. "It's when ideas transmit and transform and become better ideas and as a consequence scripts become enhanced by something that was not pre-programmed. It is entirely organic and improvisational in a way."

Script development also happens through production: as mentioned, many of these qualifications require students to produce work in teams in the first year. Again, this was seen as a very positive and effective strategy. However, James Mavor, head of the MA in Screenwriting at Edinburgh Napier University, was critical of the preference given to short film production. He argued that screenwriters are better served by learning how to work with more industrialised forms of writing, such as TV drama series, or short, interstitial TV episodes.

Television Drama

The rapid expansion of cable, and more recently streaming platforms, have seen a much more complex approach to creating television drama narratives. Hybrid productions that combine serialized and series narrative conventions are becoming more common (Mittell, 2015). This suggests the need for storytellers who are more flexible and creative in their ability to produce these complex narratives, and

there are signs that screenwriting programs are beginning to respond to this need. The DFFB is now in its fourth year of offering Serial Eyes, a specialized program for early career television writers that provides an opportunity to develop complex drama projects. La Fémis in Paris now offers a specialized one-year course for television screenwriters. Out of the television projects students develop, the school funds the production of three pilot episodes, which are produced in-house.

Narrative Structure

Approaches to the teaching of screenwriting narrative vary. Some participants universalize the narrative by arguing in favour of a set of common structures, while others believe it is culturally and socially determined. However, the three-act structure is no longer a pre-eminent concept. Instead, participants look to a variety of narrative forms and approaches.

For some teachers, such as Adam Ganz at Royal Holloway and Phillip Parsons at Goldsmiths College, narrative structures are mutable and varied. They argue that screenwriting form should be taught as something that is emergent, rather than predetermined. Ganz also encourages students to think of screenwriting as being distinguished by 'the immanent form of the lens' (Ganz, 2013:20), and to imagine film as something that is perceived rather than thought (2013).

Jacques Akchouti, the head of screenwriting at Paris' La Fémis, noted the cultural and industrial influences on narrative structure. According to Akchouti, the French cinema is historically director-led. In television drama, on the other hand, the writer is more prominent. However, Akchouti argues that France's intellectual tradition is a challenge for teaching students the more concrete problems of plotting for television drama. La Fémis has addressed the increased demand for French television drama production with a special one-year program for training television writers. Students in this program travel to the US to study the show runner model. They create a television series concept, and the school then selects three pilot episodes. These are produced by the school and directed by production students.

The recent development of screenwriting scholarship has provided much needed historical contexts for critiquing screenplays. For instance, Terry Bailey, who currently manages the MA in screenwriting at Bournemouth, draws on screenwriting research to argue that the three-act structure as it has typically been taught, is a product of specific pedagogical and industrial histories.

Industry Engagement

Participants describe a range of industry engagement activities. One of the more widely known industry engagement strategies is the long running partnership between the Danish Film school and Danish Broadcasting Corporation, in which the latter presents students with production briefs, based on their programming needs. In response, students develop TV series pitches which they deliver at the end of the year. This process has been researched in detail by Eva Redvall at the University of Copenhagen, and I will refer to her work in the case study on the Danish Film School below. Other strategies include industry showcasing of pitches and rehearsed readings, and simulating television pre-production processes such as writers' rooms. Industry mentoring is also a common feature across the programs I researched, with students typically assigned an individual screenwriting practitioner for one or more semesters.

Participants also detail a range of informal industry engagement strategies, such as introducing students to industry contacts and coaching for industry prizes. Some programs, by virtue of their history and status, open industry doors for their students that others do not.

Perceptions of Industry

One of the most common words to occur in these interviews is 'industry'. It is used almost as many times as the term 'screenwriting', and often paired with it. This is not surprising, given that screenwriting is a highly industrialised form of writing. However, an examination of the word's use in the interviews I did also tells us something about the assumptions these participants make about their educational roles and the purpose of the institutions in which they work.

At times, participants use the term more specifically to differentiate between the highly industrialised conditions television drama produces, and the more unique systems required in feature film production. One participant perceptively argued that there is not one industry, but many.

Overall, 'industry' is used as a form of shorthand to refer to the screen industry as a whole, and includes producers, production houses, funding bodies, distributors and agents. The word is used as a form of demarcation, to differentiate educational institutions from various screen production systems and professional activities that screenwriting programs may work model, or reference. It is sometimes paired with other words to emphasise this general connotation, such as 'industry landscape'. More specifically, it is used to refer to production economies ('an industry problem') or professional relationships ('someone from industry', 'industry representatives'). It denotes specific relationships the institution pursues. 'Someone from industry' may visit the program, an 'industry professional' may mentor a student, or the program's board may include 'industry representatives'.

It is this latter use in particular that reveals the particular ways in which screenwriting educators value industry relationships, but also, importantly, how the industry values its educational institutions. There are three distinct ways in which this value is expressed. Firstly, there is a type of formal border crossing, between institution and industry, in which industry is 'invited in' to the classroom in the form of guest speakers or lecturers. As well, in many of the programs I investigated, industry representatives attend a formal graduation event to hear project pitches. This situation is also reversed. Students are sent out on 'industry placements', or more generally 'into industry'. However, they also return as alumni to share their experiences, or in some cases, to work as script editors on students' projects.

Secondly, teachers see themselves as 'industry practitioners', whose job it is to impart the realities of screenwriting work to their students. In this role, teachers sometimes operate as industry agents, providing introductions for students with producers, writers or production houses. Finally, teachers operate as project

managers or producers, in order to simulate projects to industry conditions. This may be as simple as organizing a production company to present a simulated brief to students and then revisiting to judge the results, through to more sophisticated arrangements such as at La Fémis, where three student television pilot episodes each year are selected for full production.

In an age where education is encouraged to rationalise itself according to its commercial or industrial value, all these activities are highly valued by the institutions I visited. However, while institutions see the importance of being seen to respond to industrial need, such activities are not straightforward. The intense rate of exchange between institutions and industry forms part of an intricate and complex screen ecology. These institutions are not only serving industry but informing and shaping it in a range of ways. For instance, Eva Redvall credits the Danish National Film School with helping to create a more collaborative film and television production culture in Denmark, in which screenwriters play a much more important role (2010).

However, despite these intense and complex relationships between institutions and industrial agents, it is worth noting that the concept of a school as a protected, nurturing environment that provides an opportunity for students to develop unique, artistic identities, remains. Not surprisingly, this concept is more commonly expressed by those who teach in film schools with a conservatory tradition, than those in university programs.

Creative Skill Set

Creative Skill Set (CSS) is a UK employer-led, sector-skills council that provides, among other things, quality assurance accreditation to higher and further education qualifications in the creative industries (Creative Skill Set, 2018) .

The CSS accreditation process requires programs to demonstrate graduate employment rates, high standards of student work, a focus on professional preparation of students including team work, soft skills and business skills,

relationships with employers and an industry focus of the curriculum and its delivery. Since 2016, the accreditation process has a reduced emphasis on curriculum, and now focuses more on employability (2018). Qualifications that receive accreditation are able to advertise the CSS logo, in the form of a large 'tick'.

According to Alex Martin, Senior Development Manager with UK Creative Skill Set, this is an effective way for qualifications to signpost their employability, or job readiness credentials, to potential students and their parents. The accreditation process also assists qualifications design industry-relevant creative briefs and to build and develop industry connections and partnerships. Martin argued that employers are more likely to take note of students who have graduated from CSS accredited qualifications.

CSS accreditation is voluntary. Of the 11 UK qualifications I researched, seven have CSS accreditation, and one other is in the process of applying. Reactions to the value of this accreditation varied. It has been argued that industrial benchmarking of screenwriting qualifications in the UK has encouraged too narrow a focus on orthodox skills (Macdonald, 2013). While acknowledging this problem, some participants took a pragmatic approach and believed it usefully promoted their programs not only to potential students, but also gave the program a valuable status within the university. Others were less enthusiastic, and regarded the process as too prescriptive and limiting, with one participant arguing that CSS accreditation experts lacked the necessary discipline knowledge to provide effective assessment advice. Another noted that while accreditation had certain marketing advantages, CSS qualifications may not necessarily offer better graduate outcomes.

CASE STUDIES

Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie, Berlin (DFFB)

DFFB 

Deutsche Film- und
Fernsehakademie Berlin
German Film and
Television Academy Berlin

The German Film and Television Academy DFFB, based in central Berlin, is a graduate film academy with a particular focus on screenwriting, directing, production and cinematography, and as from 2017, sound and film editing. Established in 1966, the DFFB has traditionally taught these areas as distinct specialisations but has recently redesigned its curriculum to create a more interdisciplinary focus.

It offers screenwriting through a separately funded academy, but all students in the DFFB now participate in a first-year program that is more integrated, and this requires them to work across a range of filmmaking disciplines in order to develop a more collaborative approach, as well as learn essential filmmaking and storytelling skills.

Like many film schools, the DFFB has a small contingent of in-house staff. Ellis Freeman, head of Screenwriting and Development, is the only in-house teacher. All other screenwriting teachers are sessional. This approach enables the program to draw on a strong, diverse contingent of film practitioners.

Curriculum

The screenwriting program selects ten students each year, based on a portfolio of work and an interview. To graduate, students present either a feature script or a TV series proposal and pilot, which they will have developed with an industry mentor.

» **First year**

Students from all disciplines work together to produce a silent film, a short documentary and a short drama. As well as having the opportunity to write, they gain experience in production, directing, cinematography and editing.

» **Second year**

Students develop a short screenplay, a genre treatment and a feature project.

» **Third year**

Students undertake feature and a TV series subjects, with the latter providing the skills to work in a television writers' room, as well as develop solo projects.

The program is also offering a module specifically aimed at low budget, independent film, and another on adaptation.

In addition to the formal curriculum, students participate in exercises set by industry partners. The program has partnered with a range of German production companies and broadcasters including rbb, the Medienboard in Berlin Brandenburg and arte, and recently, students developed a webisode series in conjunction with Berlin-based company, Funke. The program also encourages its graduates to return and participate in the curriculum. Graduates are able to train as script readers, which then enables them to provide reports on students' scripts.

Ethos

Collaboration sits at the heart of the program's, and the school's, education philosophy. According to Freeman, this reflects the realities of script development and screen production.

"Screenwriting is highly collaborative, and it is never just about writing. We need to develop a writer's social skills and get them used to talking with people about their work," Freeman argued. He believes that the script is never just about the words

on the page, and one of the key questions he asks is, "How do you build a good collaboration in screenwriting?"

In addition to emphasising collaboration, the DFFB screenwriting program simulates real world production conditions and contingencies. Students encounter the demands of television writers' rooms, take on the roles of show runner and senior writer, and experience the pressures of liaising with commissioning organisations.

Mentorship is central to the student experience. Each student meets with an industry mentor to develop a project, over the course of a year. Another key feature of the program is that student work is not graded. Students are simply required to develop and deliver their projects during the three years.

Freeman also believes strongly in teaching students to build regular writing routines, and to this end the school is experimenting with reducing class contact time. "Some film schools require students to attend classes from nine in the morning through to the afternoon. That is counter-productive. Students need to have time to write and they need to develop good writing habits." Under this proposal, the school is scheduling formal classes for two days a week and providing two days for writing.

A central philosophical approach for Freeman is to ensure students are encouraged to play and imagine. For Freeman, the concept of playfulness is fundamental to a writer's craft. "The deepest and most lasting journey is still grounded in play. This is played out between the audience and the film, between the characters, and even played out in the relationship between the director and the writer." This playful approach to writing cannot be taught, he maintains; it can only be experienced.

DFFB 'Serial Eyes'.

In addition to its graduate programs, DFFB also provides a range of postgraduate specialised programs.

'Serial Eyes' offers 12 screenwriters from European Union member states the opportunity to participate in an eight-month program that will enable them to create and develop a television drama series and pitch the project to industry professionals. The program was established by Lorraine Sullivan in 2013. Ben Harris, who ran the producers' course at the UCLA film school, heads up the program. "It's very different to the European film school experience, which focuses on an auteur culture. This is very much about networking and collaboration," Harris explained.

English is the primary language spoke in the program, which provides students with the skills to develop and create television drama, procedural series and digital media series. Participants will normally have some previous screenwriting experience, either from short or feature films, or television. The program receives a range of funding, from the public body Medienboard, Berlin-Brandenburg, and also from private companies including Vivendi, RTL, Atlantic Productions and Makever Productions in France and Sky Italia.

Curriculum

The program is delivered full time, over eight months. Classes commence in September. The first semester is more structured and combines instruction and lecturing with workshops. Workshopping provides students with the opportunity to present their work in a supportive environment and receive feedback.

The backbone of the program is the development of an original TV series. Each writer develops a TV series concept and then a pilot, along with a project proposal. The core learning experience is grounded in the simulated writers' room environment.

While the program's primary focus is on creating television content for local markets, students are also encouraged to consider co production opportunities. The program also provides students with the opportunity to do study trips to the London Film School, the Danish National Film School, and the Series Mania convention in France.

Mentoring

Once a student's television concept has begun to emerge from structured classes and workshopping, mentoring commences, normally in November or December. Mentors are working television writers, although they may include some producers and commissioning editors. Students are assigned one mentor each, and the mentorship runs parallel with classes and individual supervision.

In addition to mentoring, and similarly to the graduate screenwriting program at DFFB, Serial Eyes maintains strong relationships with its alumni. "Whether you have them as teachers, mentors, advisors and internship opportunities, alumni networking is fundamental and helps place the program squarely inside the industry," Harris explained.



Workshop, 'Serial Eyes, DFFB

The program finishes with each student pitching their television project to an invited audience of producers, agents and commissioning editors from all over Europe. The pitches are between eight and fifteen minutes, in which participants introduce their project, the anticipated audience, the central story premise and selected character arcs. After the pitch, and once they have received feedback, they refine their project over the summer break, and then send out their projects to interested parties. Graduate projects have yet to be produced. However, most graduates from recent years have now had their projects optioned and are in active development with European companies including Sky Italia, ZDF, France Télévisions, Canal+, H&V Entertainment, and Vivendi.

Harris was also keen to emphasise the importance of protecting students' copyright and intellectual product, especially when inviting industry bodies to partner with the program. "If students are pitching to a specific company in an educational event or workshop, there is no transmission of copyright. It belongs to the creator until there is an option agreement on the table. Companies could negotiate a 'first look' deal, but until a contract is signed, IP and copyright need to remain with the student."

Ethos

For Harris, television series development is an art form that programs such as his are only now starting to explore. "We find that most people don't really have a sense of TV writing, nor a sense of what serialised story telling is about. We find that we have to explain and emphasise that idea much earlier in the program.

"TV series storytelling is really about the story engine at the heart of the series, the thing that enables stories to keep being invented around the same problem and produce dramatic conflict that will never be resolved. Even in film schools, we are only just starting to understand this concept." The 'story engine', explained Harris, is a dramatic situation that can continue to play out over a number of episodes, or series.

The emphasis is on the writers' room, with all the skills to collaborate and self-manage that such a high-pressured environment requires. The program is taught by industry professionals, and workshopping sits at the core of the curriculum. For this to work in the students' best interest, according to Harris, there needs to be a clear ethical framework. "Creating a safe, supportive environment is paramount. We avoid saying, 'that doesn't work', and instead try to find out how something might work better. So first and foremost, we create an open, positive space. However, when playing the role of the head writer, students need to learn how to ultimately be in charge. They have to be able to figure out what can be retained in a project that's being workshopped, and what can't. They have to learn to take that responsibility."

Harris noted how, over time, the approach to character development in television has changed. "Ten, fifteen years ago in US television characters would never change. Now there is a sense that a character can change and develop over the course of a season. However, the core idea of the show, the story engine, has to remain the same."

The Bachelor of Scriptwriting (Hons) & the MA Scriptwriting, Bournemouth University

Bournemouth's BA in Scriptwriting is the only UK undergraduate qualification of its type that has a practice-based focus.

The program started in 1992 and now boasts an impressive range of alumni working across the film, television and games industries in the UK, Europe and the US. As well as offering a grounding in scriptwriting technique and professional practice, the three-year program aims to provide students with a distinctive voice and ability to collaborate effectively. It is distinguished by a strong interdisciplinary focus, and extensive industry partnerships. Its current enrolment is at around 150 students. It receives Creative Skillset accreditation.

The MA Scriptwriting is part of a suite of MA qualifications in film production that include scriptwriting, directing, post production editing, producing, cinematography and sound design. It offers students an opportunity to develop screenwriting projects from pitch to industry standard final draft and, like the BA in Scriptwriting, encourages the development of a distinctive writing voice within a collaborative environment. Writing projects comprise short film scripts produced in collaboration with directing and producing students, and a major project as either a feature screenplay or long form television series.

BA Scriptwriting Curriculum

First Year

- » Scriptwriting principles
- » Script editorial
- » Media scholarship
- » Production processes
- » Professional practices

Second Year

- » Developing Spec Scripts
- » Writing Spec Scripts
- » Media Perspectives: students develop a sustained, critical and evidence-informed argument in relation to practice and research findings, and how it might be applied to the field.
- » Developing Original Narratives
- » Writing Original Narratives
- » Researching media

Third Year

- » A portfolio of projects developed across multiple platforms, including film, television, theatre and radio, one of which is then pursued as a graduate script project
- » A dissertation, which researches and critiques an issue or debate within chosen practice or discipline
- » Enquiry and experiment: a practice-based or practice-led project, which investigates and challenges practice conventions
- » Industry research project
- » Career pathways, which includes the developed of a reflexive career plan
- » Graduate script project, involving a longer form script work – original feature film or television drama

As one of their first-year projects, students write six-minute short film scripts without any dialogue. Of these scripts, six are chosen to go into production. According to program coordinator Phil Mathews, this exercise aims to give students experience in directing, camera editing, sound and lighting, and provides an opportunity for students to understand how scripts translate from page to screen. This interdisciplinary focus is typical of many of the screenwriting programs investigated.

Second year becomes more project-focused. Students come together to produce an original television series. The project replicates industry conditions as it moves students through the development of the initial pitch, story and script development. During the process, a script editor is assigned to small groups of five to six students

The third year of the program culminates in a showcasing event at a London venue, in which students pitch their major television or feature project to an invited industry audience. Lecturer Resh Somauroo, who coordinates the event,

described it as a good opportunity for students to practice their networking skills, while also making important industry contacts.

Somauroo also coordinates the annual 'Deep Dive' event. This is an initiative he created in 2013 and is inspired by his experience in script-development and his time at LEGO, where he was International Head of Development for Character and Story. Deep Dive is an intensive, forty-eight-hour development weekend where the entire media faculty and students have the opportunity to provide feedback for over forty feature film and television graduate projects developed by the third-year scriptwriting students. The first day offers a carefully structured 'mass peer feedback' session, which enables BA Film, Television and Media production-course students, along with the MA directors, producers, cinematographers and editors, to provide insights into these screenwriting projects.

Somauroo believes the intensive not only enhances the quality of the narratives, but also ensures that screenplays are that much closer to being production-ready, with production-related students offering input from their given specialism. "For instance, an MA editing student might be able give input on structure, while an MA cinematographer could discuss visual story-telling opportunities," he said.

On the second day, scriptwriting students work together on each script project, helping to make key content and structural changes based on the previous day's feedback, while also assisting in the planning for the next stage of the development.

Somauroo also oversees a script clinic, an initiative he also set up in 2014 as a resource for all Faculty of Media and Communication students who require editorial assistance with their narrative-based scripts. Managed each year by a team of third years, and with a staff of second and third-year script-editors, it provides a place for undergraduate and postgraduate media students, including those from film, television, animation and radio, to get script guidance. The service is free, with scriptwriters or editors receiving the appropriate screen credits.

Ethos

In the first year of the program, the focus is on developing core writing skills within an interdisciplinary environment. As well, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration as a key component within script development. According Mathews, it is important for students to develop the strength and openness to allow their work to be interrogated by their peers. "We aim to break down preconceived ideas of scriptwriting as an insular practice. We work towards a more inclusive, collaborative approach that encourages the building of networks and developing relationships."

Workshopping is central to this collaborative pedagogy. Mathews explained that from the beginning, students share their work and learn to provide feedback in a productive and supportive manner. This also promotes a growth in self-confidence and individual creative identity. "More important than specific craft skills or even any kind of particular narrative doctrine is building confidence. You've got to focus on a student's confidence and make sure that they feel empowered to take risks and develop themselves and have the confidence to put themselves out there. It's not just about creative writing or writing in general; it is about your ability to communicate."

Mathews also emphasised a diverse, pluralistic approach to teaching narrative. "There are numerous ways to describe a narrative, and I think it is important to avoid promoting one particular paradigm. Script readers can spot scripts that have copied a particular structure or paradigm, and that's not helpful. A love story is not necessarily a quest story."

Instead, Mathews underlined the importance of developing unique writing voices. "We ensure that students feel supported and nurtured in terms of their own voice and have the confidence to have a goal. You can be the most talented writer you know but if you are not confident in your own abilities you're not going to promote yourself."

To this end, Matthews and his colleagues make students aware of success stories in order to encourage them to develop their own careers. “There are lots of different avenues and no single route. All you have is your own individual experience and your own voice. I think the main thing is to encourage and support and nurture.”

The program draws alumni into various activities, either as mentors, guest lecturers or participants in graduation events, such as ‘The Bourne Legacy’, an alumni day in which graduates talk about their careers. It is estimated that around thirty percent of graduates from this degree find screenwriting work. Others will gravitate to other forms of writing such as fiction or graphic novels or move in to related fields such as journalism or theatre.

The degree offers a minimum work placement requirement of four weeks. However, students also have the option of taking a whole year off between second and third year to undertake a more involved work placement of 30 weeks.

The MA Scriptwriting Curriculum

According to Terry Bailey, who is the program leader for the MA, the emphasis is on the development of a creative voice within a collaborative environment, with a major screenwriting project, or research artefact as the main outcome. As well, students can write a five-minute film in first semester. They also create a short radio drama in semester one, and a ten-minute film with directing and producing students, which spans both semesters. In order to replicate real world conditions, they must go through a process to get their projects ‘green lit’.

They are encouraged to pitch their ideas to students in the directing and producing master’s programs.

MA Curriculum

- » Scriptwriting across platforms and genres
- » Creative story development

- » Narrative constructions
- » Professional practice

Ethos

According to Bailey, one of Bournemouth’s strengths is its successful alumni track record. Alumni now actively working through the UK film and television industry provide a useful network for current students and recent graduates, in both the BA and the MA. As Bailey noted, this history reflects one of Bournemouth’s key strengths, which is to provide a real-world experience for students where possible. “Bournemouth has a really good reputation in the screen industry and it is known for putting students out there and getting them work,” according to Bailey.

Bailey, whose PhD researched the history of the screenwriting manual, noted the emerging scholarship on screenwriting history and practice, and the impact this is having on screenwriting programs by challenging orthodoxies and providing teachers with new opportunities to rethink approaches to pedagogy and curriculum. In his research, Bailey identified the impact television writers who taught at US film schools in the 1960s had on concepts of feature screenplay structure (Bailey, 2014). According to Bailey, these teachers drew on their television writing experience to apply the three-act model, as it was then used in television drama, to feature film narratives. Up until this period, the concept of the three-act structure was hardly used in Hollywood film making (Price, 2013).

Bailey believes screenwriting manuals remain very useful as a means for teaching basic structuring principles in screenwriting narratives. While he values students having an opportunity to pitch their projects, he believes it important for them to have as much time as possible to gain confidence in their script, and he prioritises a strong grounding in story structure technique. For Bailey, story structure and character are closely intertwined. “You’re either imposing plot upon a character or you’re imposing a character upon a plot.” He devotes considerable class time to allowing students to develop a structure that works, before they launch into their first draft.

One of the challenges in screenwriting pedagogy is the time it takes for teachers to assess first and second drafts of large projects. Bailey argues that peer learning, if done properly, provides an effective and efficient way to provide feedback on drafts. The key is to ensure students become confident in story structure. “None of us has the time to go through several iterations of scripts for sixty students, but when you teach students how to use structuring, editing tools and give feedback, and then put them together, it’s amazing the feedback they get from each other. It really works.” Students produce a critical reflection to accompany their scripts for assessment, and both are marked together. “It is important to assess them on their level of awareness about the process they’ve been through.”



London Film School (Stephen Richards)

The Film Schools

In this section, I profile screenwriting programs at two of the UK’s leading film schools, The London Film School (LFS) and the National Film and Television School (NFTS), and one of Europe’s leading film schools, The National Film School of Denmark.

These schools have an expressed aim of developing a writer’s unique voice and use a conservatory model of education. They have a strong vocational focus, reflect industry practice and expectations in their delivery, and draw on practising professional writers to teach. They pride themselves on offering students extensive industry connections.

The London Film School

Beginning in 1957, the LFS is the oldest film school in Britain. As with many other film schools, however, screenwriting was not treated as a separate discipline until 2005, when Brian Dunnigan developed a dedicated program. According to Dunnigan, the school is characterised by an intense, filmmaking culture. Students often make between 50 and 60 films a term, and screenwriting has now become an integral part of this culture.

The school is private, and registered as an independent association, limited by guarantee. It depends upon charitable donation. Students become members of the school’s association, and with other members elect a board of governors. Prominent screenwriting graduates include Shimako Sato, Arnold Wesker, Michael Mann and Anjali Menon.

The LFS offers a one-year screenwriting program that focuses on the development of a feature screenplay. The program is characterised by small group tuition, strong mentoring and detailed written feedback on each draft of the project.

Curriculum

The program offers three units:

- » Screenwriting craft.
- » Screenwriting practice: the development of a feature screenplay as its focus. Small group workshopping and mentoring.
- » Redrafting of the feature.

The program hosts a showcase event at the end of the academic year, with students presenting selected scenes from their screenplays to an invited audience of industry professionals.

Brian Dunnigan, the head of screenwriting at the school, noted that while the program’s length is nominally a year, the course runs for effectively 10 months. In the first twelve weeks of the course, students produce a prose outline of their

feature project, character sketches, a reflective statement on the meaning and context of the film, and some sample scenes. In addition to this, they submit a short script, which is then given a workshopped reading by actors and a director. Students also maintain a research journal, which sits somewhere between an academic essay and a personal blog. "Its aim is to produce a clear account of what they are deriving from their classes, films, books and experiences beyond this," Dunnigan explained.

In the second part of the course, students focus on producing a first draft of the feature script. They then submit a second draft polish of their feature script in the third part of the course, by July. The course provides classes on television writing, but its focus is primarily on feature film.

In addition, students are taught to write a script report and script edit. Students are also encouraged to build relationships with producers and directors, not only within LFS, but beyond. The LFS organises network sessions for its screenwriting students with the producers program at Royal Holloway.

Dunnigan also emphasised the value of the mentoring program, which begins in the third part of the course, and offers each student three one-on-one meetings with an industry professional. "In the first two meetings they get verbal feedback on the first draft that they've submitted at the end of the second unit, and at the third meeting the mentor advises students where to go with the project and provides contacts and advice on how to build a career. If the relationship works out, you keep in touch with them."

Ethos

Dunnigan describes the film school as "a post-enlightenment space of learning rather than teaching: that's something that excites me and that's what I bring. We are not driving things into people. We don't have an agenda. We create a space where people will figure what they need to do, in order to make good films."

Much contemporary scholarship about screenwriting debates its textual status (Macdonald, 2013; Maras, 2009). Dunnigan takes a particularly strong position in this regard and argues provocatively that screenwriting should cease to be writing. "It is film making. Its ambition is to disappear and vanish into a film. The more you understand about how film creates meaning, the better a screenwriter you will be. What are you writing on the page but the dream of a film?"¹

Dunnigan teaches a class titled, 'Elements of Dramatic Writing', in which students read a feature script every week. Each script is discussed in terms of a particular dramatic problem, such as character or plot. Dunnigan brings to these seminars his own life experience.

For Dunnigan, teaching has a strong relational dimension. "You have to be a great listener in order to get the best out of people. And you've got to manage failure and defeat in the creative process, so people need to be good at working with other people creatively."

As with Brian Ward, head of screenwriting at NFTS, Dunnigan is the only full-time staff member. He manages a small team of writing professionals, who work sessionally on the program, supporting students to write and providing detailed feedback on their work. However, selecting the right tutors is a challenge. Dunnigan's goal is to find people who bring something innate and intuitive to the process. "The very important thing is getting people who are not only experienced and confident in their knowledge of screenwriting and filmmaking. There has to be something in their bones. They need a huge repertoire and sets of references that they can bring to bear when they are talking about projects."

¹ This alludes perhaps to Jean Claude Carriere's proposition that '...once the film exists, the screenplay is no more... It is fated to undergo metamorphosis, to disappear, to melt into another form, the final form.' (1995: 148, 150).

The National Film and Television School

Now in its forty fifth year, the NTFS promotes itself as a world leader in screen education. Extensive industry networks, real world projects and leading practitioners as tutors are all central to its curriculum and pedagogy. Like the LFS, the NTFS is a dedicated film school. It offers a Master's in screenwriting that covers film and television writing. As with the LFS screenwriting program, this is Creative Skillsset Accredited.

Curriculum

- » **First Year** focuses on screenwriting craft for film and television, interdisciplinary, collaborative exercises with production students, and short plays performed by a professional cast.
- » **Second Year** students undertake a full-length feature or full hour screenplay, a shorter piece for film or animation, or a short stage play or sitcom. Attention is also given to genre-based writing such as comedy or horror.

Brian Ward coordinates the program and is the only full-time staff member. All other teachers are hired as industry practitioners on a sessional basis. Major projects include a full-length feature script, a TV pilot script and TV bible. Students are also encouraged to work with the games and animation department. The school is currently incorporating a sitcom project into the curriculum.

Students also write short, ten-minute pieces for theatre, which are professionally directed and performed at the SoHo Theatre in London, over two afternoons. These pieces can be adaptations from existing screenplays, or original work. While initially sceptical about this exercise, Ward is now won over and argues that theatre writing is a relatively quick way for screenwriters to gain experience writing for actors, and to see how their writing performs.

As the program progresses, engagement with industry intensifies. In the final year, three weeks are set aside for intensive meetings with industry, in which they

meet with key agents and production companies. Students prepare written pitch documents that include project summaries, personal biographies and writing samples of their feature and TV projects.

In the final year, students are introduced to legal and self-management practicalities, and they have the opportunity to pitch their portfolios to an invited industry audience. Ward noted that the graduates from the program are keenly welcomed by industry. Such a situation is, Ward explained, the result of work done by his predecessor, Corin Carter, who spent years cultivating strong industry contacts.

The school has a rigorous application process, with an initial submission of the first twenty pages of a screenplay, along with another piece of creative writing that can be either fiction, theatre or scenes from another project. Applicants complete a questionnaire, in which they discuss their goals. In 2016, the screenwriting master's had 180 applications for ten places. The Masters in Directing receives around 400 applications for eight places.

Each application is read by two industry professionals. Out of the initial applications, between 25 and 30 applicants are invited to an interview panel of four. There are bursaries available but the fees, 14,300 per annum, can be daunting. However, NFTS is the only film school in the UK that covers production costs.

Ethos

Brian Ward, a graduate of the program himself, described its ethos as primarily about experimentation. "It is a place in which it's okay to fail."

The program has two goals: one poetic; and the other industrial. "We aim to develop the individual voice of the writer. Or at least, the beginnings of a voice. That voice is about inspiration and imagination. We try to give the writer the freedom to develop these things," Ward said.

“On the other hand, we prepare people for the industry, we prepare them for life, and what the life of a professional screenwriter is likely to be. So, we make connections with the industry. We show them how it works, what its business end is like.”

Ward emphasised the absence of any preferred house style, with no distinction made between commercial and non-commercial work. For Ward, the key question is, “will the script move me?” It is that criteria, rather than preferencing a particular kind of film making, that sits at the heart of the program.

Like many of the other participants interviewed for this project, Ward remains cautious about screenwriting manuals. “There is a dangerous illusion running through all of them, that there is only a small number of ways of screenwriting. We are all different writers, and I think our stories are going to be different, and we are going to tell our stories in different ways. If we want to call the beginning, middle and end ‘act one’, ‘act two’ and ‘act three’, and it helps, that’s fine. But I worry about being prescriptive.”

Similarly to Brian Dunnigan, Ward draws on his own screenwriting experience in his teaching, and this personalises his teaching style. “I have had moments of great success and moments of deep despair. I can’t stop myself talking to them as another writer, treating them as other writers. That’s the starting point.”

Group work is central to the program’s pedagogy. “We are lucky that we get people who are completely committed. We encourage the students to push each other, in a supportive way. We try to make it a place where we can say what we want, and that it will stay inside the group. We have to find that unpleasant and frightening place in ourselves as writers in order to be about to talk with any kind of validity.

“I encourage them to be open. I have to engage with them in a personal way, in order to teach them about what it’s like to have a professional life as a writer. They are going to be rejected, they are going to have to cope with ill-informed criticism,

they’re going to be out of work. But at the same time, I don’t want them to run away.”

For Ward, a writer’s main resources are themselves and their ability to draw on their own experience and emotional life.

Assessment

While the program is obliged to formally mark work, Ward values more informal feedback. “Much more useful and important for students is to have tutors and mentors individually work with them to identify the things that work, and the things that don’t.”

The program offers a series of informal reviews through first year.

The National Film School of Denmark

Of all the schools and courses I researched, the Danish National Film School offers one of the most integrated curriculums, in which writers, directors and producers work on assignments continuously. The school was founded in 1966 and is famous for producing, among other things, the Dogma school of film makers including Thomas Vinterberg and Susanne Bier. As an art school, it focuses on the development of individual students’ unique creative potential. Disciplines include screenwriting, sound, editing, fiction directing, documentary directing, animation, games directing, cinematography and producing.

Curriculum

The screenwriting program has recently been redeveloped from a two to a four-year program. It educates screenwriters to collaboratively develop original television series and feature screenplays, adapt existing works, script edit and write for existing television shows. Craft elements include narrative structure, dramaturgy, character development and scene structure.

Ethos

Screenwriting has had several distinct periods of development at the school. As with many film schools and courses in the 70s and 80s, screenwriting lagged behind as a discipline in its own right. Even when the school established a dedicated screenwriting department in 1988, it took some time to attract the interest of directors, and it only included television writing in the curriculum in 1997 (Redvall, 2013). In my interview with screenwriter Lars Detlefsen, who taught screenwriting at the school between 2003 and 2016, he noted that there was initial resistance to television writing, something that eventually changed as international television drama series grew more popular.

Detlefsen, along with Screenwriting Department coordinator Charlotte Omann, organised the first dedicated television writing term in 2004. Their aim was to structure the term, the third out of a four-term program for screenwriters, around a specific practical assignment (2013). In order to build industry relationships, and provide real-world experience for students, Detlefsen approached the Danish broadcaster, DR, to partner with the school in simulating a television development project. In his interview with me, he described the structure they developed, which continues on today. Each year, DR works with the school to simulate a pre-production environment in which students are presented with specific 'dummy' comedy or drama program briefs. Students develop pitches and concepts, which they then present back to DR's commissioning agents at the end of the term, along with series bibles, character and story arcs, and a pilot for the proposed first season. Students from the school's production and design departments also participate in the project. Detlefsen emphasised the real-world relevance of this project, in the way it taught writers to collaborate effectively in production environments, but at the same time, to develop their own creative agency. While no concepts have yet been picked up by DR, it has used the project as an opportunity to head hunt talent.

Since 2016 screenwriting, along with all other programs at the school, now run for four years, and are part of a much more intensive, interdisciplinary and collaborative culture. According to the school's rector, Vinca Wiedemann (2016), these changes

reflect the increasingly sophisticated collaboration between directors, producers and writers, as well as the growing prominence of writer/producers in television drama production.

In the redeveloped screenwriting program, students are able to participate in productions and gain a stronger sense of how their stories develop through production and post production. Screenwriting students can also participate in the making of documentary, animation and computer games. The screenwriting program is also collaborating more broadly with playwriting, creative writing and acting programs, and stronger collaborations with television broadcasters and film producers are in development.

The head of scriptwriting at the school, Kim Leona, echoed these sentiments. "When screenwriting was just a two-year program, students didn't have the time to rewrite. Now, the focus is on collaboration and rewriting," Leona explained. Her brief has been to better integrate the screenwriting program into the school. She noted that, with screenwriting and film making courses now offered over four years, there is a stronger interdisciplinary culture emerging that encourages writers and film makers to collaborate on projects. Writing students now work much more closely with producing and directing students on a variety of projects, starting with short films and working their way up to longer projects, including the simulated series pitch with DR. Leona noted the impact Detlefsen's earlier initiatives with DR have had on Danish television. Many of the students that graduated in Detlefsen's time are now working in Danish TV drama.

For Leona, one of the challenges in educating young screenwriters is to get them to expand their life experience and look out into the world. "It's important that they research their characters and stories." As well, she believes screenwriters need to identify the importance of the story in the protagonist's life. Leona also values communication between writers, directors and producers, as well as the vital role verbal storytelling plays in the development of a screen project. Students are required to retell the story of the script over and over to others in their production

group. “Oral storytelling can yield unexpected discoveries. When you are telling each other the story, you can feel when it works and when it doesn’t.” Leona differentiates this story telling process from pitching and she regards the latter as being something that best arises from a project that has already been developed.

Eva Redvall, who teaches screenwriting at the University of Copenhagen, has been documenting the film school over a number of years. She noted that a key development in the school’s history has been its gradual acceptance and integration of screenwriting as a recognized craft, and she argues that the school’s screenwriting department has contributed to an increased professionalization of screenwriters in Denmark. This, in turn, has produced a new culture of collaboration between directors and screenwriters (2011).

3. Conclusion

The siloed thinking that once shaped screenwriting pedagogy is dissolving. This is one of the clearest messages to emerge from this project. Instead, collaboration between film making disciplines and between other arts disciplines such as theatre writing, is growing strongly.

In turn, this growing interdisciplinary collaborative approach to film making suggests a different way of thinking about storytelling, as something that involves both writing and orality, and which includes all aspects of production. It also implies a need for a more relational approach to screenwriting, one that requires an ability to not only tell a story, but to also listen. As well, the power that screenwriting manuals once exerted upon the discipline has waned. The models and structures that emerged from US film schools from the 1970s must now compete with a more intuitive and relational approach to storytelling.

This collaborative approach also suggests the role of the teacher is transforming, from simply one who arranges curriculum and imparts knowledge, to someone who nurtures creativity, fosters connections, and builds relationships between disciplines and with industry.

As well, the institutions themselves are changing. The growth of sophisticated series and serial narratives, delivered through streaming platforms, is having an enormous impact on screenwriting education, requiring more specialist attention is given to the narrative structures demanded by these new, emerging modes of production and distribution. Institutions are increasingly looking outward, and many of them are beginning to see themselves as an intricate part of the media ecology. This partnered approach to education is changing the way arts knowledge is structured and produced. Many of the screenwriting programs I

profiled view themselves less as passive respondents to predetermined industry needs, and more as active participants.

These developments challenge more traditional approaches to vocational arts education in Australia, which is bound by a training framework that continues to describe creativity in terms of granulated behavioural and cognitive outcomes. This framework lacks the flexibility to engage creatively and dynamically with the needs of contemporary creative industries.

This project has begun a series of conversations with institutions in the UK and Europe that offer great potential. One outcome could be specific partnerships between Australian, UK and European institutions, with the possibility of creating placements and exchanges for students and teachers.

4. Recommendations and Considerations

The Fellow offers the following recommendations:

4.1 That a postgraduate qualification with a global focus is specifically developed for Australian television writer-producers.

DFFB's 'Serial Eyes' program, with its focus on series development and show runner training, has attracted strong industry support in Europe. With markets for streamed drama series strengthening, writer producers who can develop complex narratives with a global reach, in a collaborative setting, will be in increasing demand.

This recommendation also responds to Ros Walker's ISSI report into the US show runner model for television drama series, which recommends a show runner approach be developed for television series in Australia (Walker, 2013).

A postgraduate higher education qualification, targeted to early career screenwriters, may be an effective way if responding to this need. Such a qualification would allow flexibility in design and would attract better levels of funding than vocational qualifications.

4.2 That industry partnerships are better integrated into curricula, in order to assist emerging screenwriters to develop creative goals, capacities and networks, and promote their projects.

Networking and collaboration have emerged as strong themes in this report, with all participants in agreement about the importance of these practices. In particular, participants have emphasised the value of embedding such activities across all years of the qualification, so that students can develop an awareness

of industry realities, as they also shape their values and explore their creative potential.

4.3 That screenwriting courses continue to develop beyond an orthodox skills-based approach, to promote discovery, creativity and experimentation informed by a critical engagement with industry practices, theories and histories.

With most of the programs I researched, there is clearly a move away from rigid and essentialised conceptions of screenwriting form. Many participants valued creative risk taking and experimentation. While they acknowledged the need to be aware of industry realities and to understand screenwriting orthodoxies, there was a general unease with reducing curriculum to a narrow set of craft skills. Instead, participants valued the building of environments and relationships that allow students to critique practices and theories, experiment with forms, make discoveries, take risks, and extend their creative capacities.

This approach was seen as compatible with the need to develop industry awareness and market knowledge.

4.4 That student and teacher exchanges are developed between Australian, UK and Europe institutions referenced in this report.

Many participants expressed interest in exploring such exchanges, which will enable further knowledge to be developed.

4.5 That further research is undertaken into specific institutions such as the Danish Film School that are pioneering the integration of screenwriting education with film and television production.

All participants interviewed in this study valued an interdisciplinary approach to screenwriting education. Most of the programs profiled included some form of collaboration between film makers, producers and writers, but it is The Danish National Film School, which is now in its second year of integrating its screen production subjects, that offers the strongest role model for developing such an approach in Australia.

4.6 That this report's findings are shared with relevant industry and educational bodies.

There is an informal screenwriting research group based at RMIT, which represents Swinburne University, RMIT, Victoria College of the Arts, Melbourne University, the Australian Writers' Guild, the Australian Directors' Guild, and La Trobe University. As a starting point, I will distribute the report with this group, and discuss how best to then share it more widely. I will also approach Open Channel and Melbourne Polytechnic, both of which offer vocationally-accredited screenwriting courses.

Many of the screenwriting teachers interviewed for this study are members of the Screenwriting Research Network, an organisation hosted by the University of Leeds in the UK. I shared initial findings from this study at the Screenwriting Research Conference in Dunedin, in 2017, and I will submit a paper for the next SRN conference in Portugal, in 2019.

5. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many project participants and organisations who generously gave their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide me throughout me Higher Education and Skills Group (HESG) Fellowship. Their observations and insights sit at the heart of this project. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Screenwriting Research Network, who through their research are opening up new ways of thinking about the discipline, and Professor Craig Batty, who provided the initial introductions that began the research process. And finally, my thanks to RMIT university and in particular, Penny Johnson, Program Manager, Screenwriting and Liam Freeman, Deputy Dean, Vocational Education, in the School of Media and Communication, for their encouragement and support.

Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

The ISS Institute exists to foster an aspirational, skilled and smart Australia by cultivating the mastery and knowledge of talented Australians through international research Fellowships.

The International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute) is proud of its heritage. The organisation was founded over 25 years ago by Sir James Gobbo AC CVO QC, former Governor of Victoria, to encourage investment in the development of Australia's specialised skills. Its international Fellowship program supports many Australians and international leaders across a broad cross-section of industries to undertake applied research that will benefit economic development through vocational training, industry innovation and advancement. To date, over 350 Australian and international Fellows have undertaken Fellowships facilitated

through ISS Institute. The program encourages mutual and shared learning, leadership and communities of practice.

At the heart of the ISS Institute are our individual Fellows. Under the International Applied Research Fellowship Program, the Fellows travel overseas and upon their return, they are required to pass on what they have learnt by:

- » Preparing a detailed report for distribution to government departments, industry and educational institutions
- » Recommending improvements to accredited educational courses
- » Delivering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

The organisation plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice. By working with others, ISS Institute invests in individuals who wish to create an aspirational, skilled and smart Australia through innovation, mastery and knowledge cultivation.

For further information on ISS Institute Fellows, refer to www.issinstitute.org.au

Governance and Management

Patron in Chief: Lady Primrose Potter AC

Patrons: Mr Tony Schiavello AO and Mr James MacKenzie

Founder/Board Member: Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO

Board Chair: Professor Amalia Di Iorio

Board Deputy Chair: Katrina Efthim

Board Treasurer: Jack O'Connell AO

Board Secretary: Alisia Romanin

Board Members: John Baker, Bella Irlicht AM, Maria Peters, Camilla Roberts and Mark Kerr.

CEO: Wendy Draayers

Fellowship Sponsor - The Higher Education and Skills Group

The Victorian Government, through the Higher Education and Skills Group (HESG) of the Department of Education and Training, is responsible for the administration and coordination of programs for the provision of training and further education, adult education and employment services in Victoria and is a valued sponsor of the ISS Institute. The Fellow would like to thank them for providing funding for this Fellowship.

6. References

Bailey, T. (2014). Screenwriting manuals 1911-present. (Ph.d), Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth.

Caldwell, J. T. (2008). Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television. Durham: Duke University Press.

Clews, D., & Mallinder, S. (2010). Looking Out: effective engagements with creative and cultural enterprise. Retrieved from Brighton, UK: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/looking-out-effective-engagements-creative-and-cultural-enterprise-key-report>

Conor, B. (2014). Screenwriting: Creative labor and professional practice. Oxford: Routledge.

Creative Skill Set. (2018). Creative Retrieved from https://creativeskillset.org/about_us

Creative Victoria. (2015). Creative State, Global City: Creative industries taskforce report. Retrieved from Melbourne: strategy.creative.vic.gov.au

Cronin, P., & Herzog, W. (2002). Herzog on Herzog. London: Faber and Faber.

Dancyger, K., & Rush, J. (1990). Introduction. *Journal of Film and Video*, 42(3), 3-4.

DCMS. (2016). Department of Culture, Media & Sport Sectors Economic Estimates. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544103/DCMS_Sectors_Economic_Estimates_-_August_2016.pdf

Deloitte Access Economics. (2016). Analysis of the Victorian screen industry. Retrieved from Melbourne: https://www.film.vic.gov.au/images/uploads/FV-DAE_Analysis_of_the_Victorian_screen_industry_Key_Findings_2016.pdf

Ganz, A. (2013). 'To make you see': screenwriting, description and the 'lens-based' tradition. *Journal of Screenwriting*, 4(1), 7-24.

Groves, D. (2018). Tony Ayres Goes Solo with a New Deal with NBC Universal. IF. <https://www.if.com.au/tony-ayres-goes-solo-with-a-new-deal-with-nbcuniversal/>

- Kerrigan, S., & Batty, C. (2016). Re-conceptualising screenwriting for the academy: the social, cultural and creative practice of developing a screenplay. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 13(1), 130-144.
- Macdonald, I. (2013). *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Maloney, N. (2016). *Screenwriting Skills and Knowledge Forum*. RMIT. Melbourne.
- Maras, S. (2009). *Screenwriting: history, theory and practice*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Maras, S. (2011). Some Attitudes and Trajectories in Screenwriting Research. *Journal of Screenwriting*, 2(2), 275-286.
- McKee, R. (1997). *Story*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: NYU Press.
- Petrie, D., & Stoneman, R. (2014). *Educating Film-makers: Past, Present and Future*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Price, S. (2013). *A History of the Screenplay*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Price Waterhouse Coopers. (2016). *Cultural Industries Brief*. Retrieved from Melbourne: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/pwcau.prod.s4aproduct.assets/wp-content/uploads/20160630152802/Website-industry-brief-CUA.pdf>
- Redvall, E. (2010). Teaching Screenwriting in a Time of Storytelling Blindness: the meeting of the auteur and the screenwriter in Danish film-making. *Journal of Screenwriting*, 1(1), 59-81.
- Redvall, E. (2013). *Writing and Producing Television Drama in Denmark: From the Kingdom to the Killing*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- RMIT. (2015). C6125 Advanced Diploma of Professional Screenwriting. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2xMd03i>
- RMIT. (2017). C6160 Advanced Diploma of Professional Screenwriting. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2QUvc3h>

- Screen Australia. (2017). Annual Report, Screen Australia 2017. Retrieved from Sydney: <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/aeb0ff70-226e-4b35-929b-5a599db5ac3f/SA-Annual-Report-2016-2017.pdf?ext=.pdf>
- Walker, R. (2013). TV Drama Series Development in the US: new possibilities for the Australian industry. Retrieved from Melbourne:
- Wiedemann, V. (2016). Educating for Innovation: Ten Tips for Future FilmSchool Heads.

7. Appendix: Project Participants

- » Bangor University: Steven Price, Associate Professor Literature and Film
- » Bath Spa University: Robin Muckherjee, Lecturer, Scriptwriting. Screenwriter. Mary Mullen, Lecturer, Television Production
- » Bournemouth University: Screenwriting lecturer, Resh Somauroo. Screenwriting lecturer, Phil Matthews; MA Scriptwriting leader, Terrie Bailey, Screenwriter, novelist.
- » City University of London: Phil O'Shea, Programme Director, MA Creative Writing (Playwrighting and Screenwriting), Screenwriter and playwright.
- » Creative Skillset, UK: Alex Martin, Senior Development Manager
- » DFFB: Ben Harris, Head of Programme, 'Serial Eyes'; Ellis Freeman, Head of Screenwriting and Development
- » Edinburgh Napier University: James Mavor, Leader Postgraduate Screenwriting, Screenwriter.
- » Falmouth University: John Finnegan: leader, MA Writing for Script and Screen
- » Goldsmiths College: Phillip Palmer, Lecturer Screenwriting, Screenwriter, Novelist.
- » La Fémis: Jacques Akchoti, Lecturer Screenwriting, Screenwriter, Director, Script Consultant
- » Lars Detlefsen: screenwriter.
- » London Film School: Brian Dunnigan, Head of Screenwriting.
- » Mark Hibbert, Scriptwriter, Graduate, London Film School.
- » National Film School of Denmark: Kim Leona, Head of Screenwriting, Screenwriter
- » National Film Television School: Brian Ward, Head of Screenwriting, Screenwriter.
- » Royal Holloway University: Adam Ganz, Reader of Media Arts, Screenwriter.
- » Salford University: Colin Muir, Lecturer Screenwriting
- » University of Arts, London: Geoff Posner: Lecturer Television, London College of Communication, Television Producer
- » University of Babelsberg Konrad Wolf: Torsten Schulz, Professor Dramaturgy, Screenwriter, Film Director, Novelist.
- » University of Copenhagen: Eva Redvall, Associate Professor in Film and Media Studies.
- » University of York: Simon van de Bourgh, Lecturer, Screenwriting, Screenwriter.



ISS Institute
Level 1, 189 Faraday Street
Carlton VIC 3053

T 03 9347 4583
E info@issinstitute.org.au
W www.issinstitute.org.au

Published by International Specialised Skills Institute, Melbourne | www.issinstitute.org.au

© Copyright ISS Institute October 2018

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Whilst this report has been accepted by ISS Institute, ISS Institute cannot provide expert peer review of the report, and except as may be required by law no responsibility can be accepted by ISS Institute for the content of the report or any links therein, or omissions, typographical, print or photographic errors, or inaccuracies that may occur after publication or otherwise. ISS Institute do not accept responsibility for the consequences of any action taken or omitted to be taken by any person as a consequence of anything contained in, or omitted from, this report.