

## **Pathways to Features: Collated Industry Feedback (May 2014)**

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The following is a collation of all written feedback received by the NZFC in relation to the Pathways to Features document published on the NZFC website on 7 March 2014. Feedback is broken down as follows:

1. Individuals or Group Feedback – Non-Attributed
2. Industry Organisation Feedback – Attributed

For ease of reading the feedback is grouped according to the following areas:

1. Premiere Pathways
2. Fresh Shorts Plus
3. Short Film Post Plus

### **Individuals or Group Feedback – Non-Attributed**

#### **Premiere Pathways**

1. I think it's great that this will include trailers and scenes for possible feature films and will be open to first and second time feature filmmakers. In particular I would like to advocate for the decision-making of this fund to be unified with the Fresh Shorts panel because it's less likely that filmmakers who should be funded will fall between the cracks of both Fresh and Premiere shorts.
2. I welcome the new direction for Premiere Shorts as more reflective of the goals of the NZ Film Commission. It is an excellent opportunity to make additional changes [including] I propose that there be no restriction for a filmmaker to secure additional finance above and beyond the NZ Film Commission's financial commitment.
3. For the most part these changes seem like a step in the right direction; however in my opinion the biggest hurdle to filmmakers is the bottle neck that comes after short films. [Suggests establishing another low budget feature scheme]
4. With regard to a shift in focus towards fostering feature production, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand we have a lot of technical talent in NZ of international quality, but a decrease in Hollywood production taking place here, especially small productions that tap our talent-base at all levels (Evil Dead, Spartacus) and so fostering the growth of a successful commercial industry that can eventually be self-sustaining, and step away from the government is an excellent vision for bringing an income stream into a struggling industry. Fostering proof-of-concept films, that can be highly polished and put in front of big name

producers, to be made in NZ is certainly the way to pursue this goal. However this philosophy comes at the expense of short film as an art form unto itself. Governments, by and large, often have to fund arts through an NZFC-like body because they have cultural value, but not necessarily commercial value. In many senses a government funds filmmakers, painters, writers, not as an investment in its economy, but in its cultural heritage. And this sort of 'fine arts' filmmaking remains a valuable and declining process in our country.

Ultimately, I'd like to see both sides of the coin continue to be supported, rather than a shift into the commercial camp over the fine arts one. I would suggest that perhaps arts funding should focus on the cultural value of a short, and also focus more on providing distribution avenues for these films in large groups (short film festivals, pay-per-view online partners etc.) within the film commission, with a greater focus on ideas and less on final polish. And in parallel, continuing to grow the industry-supporting elements in a more or less investor-only model as you currently do, lifting or loosening any criteria involving cultural significance on such projects.

If you are able to foster both expansion of the industry and the cultural importance of cinema in NZ simultaneously (even if separately) you'd have an admirable mandate, and have more than fulfilled your function within the industry.

5. Our response to the proposed scheme is that there are elements that could be effective but the right place to focus this support is as an extension to the current Premiere Shorts scheme rather than as a complete replacement.

It's also a good idea to be offering funding to first time feature film directors or more experienced directors to create promos, trailers etc. to help sell their films to investors but this should be part of the feature development process – most likely at a point where the NZFC is already on board and the project is at a stage where this is appropriate. For example, to get investors over the line or to convince the NZFC of the true feature potential of the project.

In the current scheme EPs have contact with many young filmmakers through the selection process – far more than would be the case if selection was taking place internally at the NZFC through a panel. For the EPs these conversations enable them to gauge the teams' abilities, experience, potential and commitment to their work and feature film before they commit any funding. This is completely different to a panel submission process where there is no opportunity to really engage with applicants and decisions are made on the strength of a written application.

The proposed scheme to open up Premiere Shorts to trailers, scenes and promos for feature films all seems very back to front. Generally it only makes sense for filmmakers to be making trailers or shooting scenes of their films at an advanced stage of development when a tool is required to help get it over the line with investors. It also makes sense for this funding to come not from a shorts/development scheme but from the NZFC feature development path as part of a project's process towards production.

Creating a box for filmmakers to submit like this seems to encourage production work on projects at an early stage of development which seems crazy when the films are at a nascent stage and there's still a lot of work to be done before the project is really showing its full potential.

Additionally, this ignores the fact that the Premiere Shorts scheme already delivers works which act as a calling card for filmmakers' feature films. Arguably the separation from any feature work is advantageous as there's less risk of potential investors making judgements on the basis of promos, trailers or short films which may not always be a literal reflection of the feature films real potential because of the inherent limitations of working within a \$70k budget.

If we stop funding great short films at a higher budget level and channel this funding only into scenes, trailers, promos and even short films related to feature film work, we won't have these high-production, beautifully made, internationally successful shorts any longer; instead we'll have a bunch of promos for possible feature films which may or may not ever see the light of day and almost certainly not at international festivals.

Our suggestion to resolve the issue of short filmmakers not progressing onto feature film work is to incentivize filmmakers at the point they deliver their Premiere Short films. E.g. When they deliver the NZFC works with the filmmakers to attach an EP to oversee the development of their feature idea for submission for a \$10k feature film development grant. This EP is paid a small sum.

In this way the Premiere shorts filmmakers have an achievable funding goal to strive for straight off the back of their short film delivery. The additional benefit for the NZFC is the opportunity to see the filmmakers short film work before any commitment to financing their first feature idea is made – so the NZFC is better informed about the filmmakers' capabilities.

6. The consultation paper cites the existing Premiere guidelines bent towards features and aim that filmmakers "discuss their career aspirations and intentions". This conflates career progression with making feature films, which is not a given today. There are many forms of screen story and the singular focus on features does not reflect the creative or industrial options available to filmmakers now.

Overall in the discussion paper I detect an institutional frustration with shorts as a form and a desire to manipulate behavioural levers to achieve a centrally planned result. There is a mood of, "if people could just stop messing around with their silly shorts, or at least get a pair of A-list festival ticks and get a move on with features, we'd get more and better screen stories".

Pathways strike me as a formalized version of how Tusi Tamasese was given the opportunity to make a short work as a proof of concept for his feature. The major caveat is that Tusi had written a script acknowledged as remarkable within and outside New Zealand. He primarily needed his proto-Pathway to demonstrate his directing chops. It would be optimistic to think that many candidates of the Pathways scheme would have such a strong script or concept up their sleeve, or that they would be able to conjure one up, even given backing to make a sample piece via Pathways. There is a risk of getting a glossy trailer to a script that proves ho-hum. I suspect it will privilege projects with a genre bent that present better in trailer form, which may be one of the intentions of the change and if so should be articulated explicitly.

I question the need for a theatrical/broadcast experience-level producer to be attached to a Pathways project. This criterion could kick in at amounts over a threshold, but not apply at lower levels. Constraining risk too carefully is part of what dogged the Premiere scheme - and incidentally is one of the risks of aligning shorts with features too early and too closely.

7. Did Alison Maclean have a feature ready to go when she made *Kitchen Sink*? We are mindful that filmmakers need to have the eye on the feature film prize, but not all fit this pathway. There may be real artists that will not blossom under this scheme. This is not a reason to change the Premiere Pathways concept, but it simply requires vigilance within the Talent Development team to support those sorts of emerging artists in other ways.

It is a shame that the cap on funding has dropped from \$90,000 to \$70,000. There are a number of high achieving shorts that were barely achievable on \$90,000, and if they had only had access to a lower budget, may not have been attempted. I recommend that the cap be lifted to \$90,000, or even \$100,000. Otherwise I fear that this fund will be underutilised. At this level, it is about doing it once, and doing it right.

Premiere Pathways requires someone with a feature film credit to assist the team. Is the idea that that credited person is there to fill the EP gap by fulfilling the functions previously undertaken by the EPs? Obviously, if the funding is for a trailer etc., this is not so important. But if it is for a short film, then the EP role has traditionally been very important, and the workload for the EP is not insignificant. What is the likelihood that established producers and EPs will do this work for free – particularly if they are ringers – and not attached to the feature at the outset? I think this issue requires further consideration. Will it also impact the workload of the NZFC's internal short film team if there is no buffer between them and the filmmakers?

8. The strategy also appears to be more practically driven and better aligned to the dynamics of a rapidly changing industry that is becoming broader in its base – in that making feature films is more achievable (but no less arduous) to a wider group of people, and where the traditional routes to funding don't always apply to the reality of the industry and the market. I like that the Pathway to features initiative recognises that while short films are an important stepping stone, they are not the only way to a career in features – in today's environment the opportunities for making a feature are many (mine being a point in case) and I'm pleased to see that documentary has a place in this initiative.
9. Great to have 'Premiere Shorts' replaced, Fresh Shorts in its current form already seems to out-perform it. I think Premiere Pathways as it is described in the consultation document sounds great to me as a film-maker - I get to focus on developing feature films and then have the flexibility to apply with whatever short form is going to help me sell that feature to the world/investors - sounds good to me. It's also great that there are multiple funding rounds during the year.
10. With the present scheme, the outcome is several short films a year - a tangible result. The short film makers have demonstrated their ability to carry a project through all the stages of creation and their short film becomes their calling card. The results of the new scheme will be much harder to evaluate. I have a concern that a lot of money will be spent on visual materials for features that are never made therefore I suggest that most of the money is still retained for the production of shorts, with a smaller portion left for other purposes.
11. My initial reaction is - although in theory it's a good idea to always be thinking of the road to features... (saleable product)The reality though, is that ideas that are good for shorts and ideas that are good for features often don't have much in common? Actually, for the most part practically speaking, I think they're really quite different forms/disciplines?

So yes making shorts does naturally lead to making features...technically and experience wise and that's all good but...Good short film ideas/scripts don't necessarily make the best beginnings for a feature film?

So linking the two of them conceptually could be a mistake and lead to a dilution of ideas for both forms. The outcome in my view may well be mediocre shorts and compromised features.

How about instead the focus be on talent – fund people that exhibit the most talent – and let them make the shorts and features that they see fit. Don't try to control or force the process and content so much – it's a folly and becomes micro-managing.

12. Short Films are very important to our industry and they have been very well supported in different ways across the years and it is great that they will continue to be supported. But it is equally as important to encourage those talented film makers to go on from short films and think about how they can contribute to the global landscape of film making. Premiere Pathways will hopefully provide this opportunity.

Premiere Pathways will also provide the opportunity for film makers who need that extra "something" to help sell their project on the international stage. To have funding available for film makers to put together a promo tape, sizzle reel, taste tape to use as a selling tool will be invaluable.

13. I'm not so sure about the suggested producer criteria for Premiere Pathways, it feels like you are creating a Catch 22 situation, in that you need to have produced a feature before you have produced a short, that seems a little backward and favours the director. Surely these schemes are a pathway for producers as well as directors; they should provide a route for producers into their first feature, not something you do as an afterthought once you have a feature under your belt. Producers should be eligible to be involved in a Premiere Pathways short based on their experience, which for many of us is diverse but no less relevant or indicative of potential. If I can produce a \$1.5 million commercial, the chances are that I could probably produce a low budget feature. The first tier of feature funding should be open to producers who have done a Premiere Pathways project, you have the opportunity to create that stepping stone.

14. It is the right move to give film makers an option of developing feature film ideas with production tools, rather than just script writing tools, especially in a world where pitching and packaging is more important than ever in getting a film from the page to the screen.

Expanding the funding made available at both the premiere and fresh shorts level to include a more specific goal of talent development towards feature film production is an exciting and vital step towards increasing the number of New Zealand film makers who are able to successfully transition into feature films, especially those who want to make commercially minded feature films or aim to develop co-productions that could play theatrically in multiple countries.

For short film makers whose ambitions are only to make shorts there may be some resistance to the idea of change.

To those I would say New Zealand's success at international short film festivals has been impressive indeed - but as stated in Dave Gibson's recent speech the conversion rate to

feature film production has not reflected this success, and we need feature film makers to develop in this country for us to survive and thrive commercially.

15. Premiere shorts... I think it's great that this will include trailers and scenes for possible feature films and will be open to first and second time feature filmmakers. In particular I would like to advocate for the decision-making of this fund to be unified with the Fresh Shorts panel, for several reasons:

- It's less likely that filmmakers who should be funded will fall between the cracks of both Fresh and Premiere shorts. Sometimes in the past, each scheme would say that a certain filmmaker or project budget was better suited to the other scheme, and then get funded by neither.
- The previous Premiere shorts model was too focused on making the films the EP groups wanted, not on allowing emerging filmmakers to make the films that THEY want. Consider this: potential EP groups applied to the NZFC outlining the films that THEY wanted to make; the successful EPs then put out a call for applications outlining the sort of films that THEY wanted to make; and they selected and developed projects towards the sort of films that THEY wanted to make. I have heard many recent examples of talented filmmaker's conflict with EPs who want to make a different film from them, and feeling powerless and frustrated. Surely the point of short filmmaking is to see what certain talented filmmakers have got... to see their flavour, their natural talent, to see what sort of feature film they would make.
- Filmmakers could choose their own EPs. Any filmmaker worth their salt knows talented producers they'd love to work with, and choose EPs that would fit with their own sensibility. This results in better chemistry and a great relationship that is more likely to lead to working together on a feature film.
- By ONE panel making the decision for both schemes, you save money and time for both the NZFC, and for the filmmakers who currently often apply to several places. I think the Fresh Shorts style of panel is the way to go, with a mix of NZFC reps and industry/filmmakers that change each year.
- The NZFC's talent development staff (i.e. Chris Payne) will be better placed than independent EPs to evaluate funding trailers/scenes for future feature films, because they'll be more aware of the landscape of emerging filmmakers.

16. Feedback as a producer, and having discussed with a short film maker (who has made one premiere short, a new one in mind, features developing, and looking to work together), we are quite excited about the proposed changes.

Particularly if:

- The overall approach of an open-mind to definitions of "meaningful pathways", such as the open definition of visual materials for Premiere Pathways, is across the board and that
- this includes the \$10,000 Plus – so that while they can be full scripts, also open to other options (like work-shopping with actors, if that's how that writer actually develops their ideas, rather than from a blank page), ie: what would be "meaningful early stage feature

film project development" to them – but one still with a clear output required (be it a treatment, a draft, a workbook etc). The Seed funding guidelines are a good start for the application requirements, but maybe a less structured list for the Fresh Shorts Plus, given those filmmakers likely to have less knowledge of audience, market etc.

It seems too early to know if the proposed number of deadlines per year will work, as the preparation for and assessment of applications will be quite different, but I guess you start somewhere, and perhaps there could be a "trial period" stated.

Only real concern raised about the changes was the selection process, which doesn't seem to be so specifically explained – would this be the Dev team, a single person, or a committee like previously/long ago (with rotating filmmakers – we like that). Concern with new plan being that with Pods at least there was a range of tastes to appeal to.

Mostly this feedback is just saying we like what you have decided, and letting you know how we've interpreted it. I think it is a great focus to make sure short film teams are more ready for these new demands, when making the enormous leap from shorts to features.

17. My only worry with this Premiere Pathways proposal is that there will probably be less high quality unique short films that can garner directors A-List festival acceptances/awards. The competition to get into film festivals these days is immense. I suppose the question is will Fresh Shorts funding produce high enough quality films to get those A List selections. If so then my points are irrelevant.
18. These changes are being proposed because of a perceived need to provide emerging filmmakers with a more effective and efficient pathway towards feature film careers. The problem identified is not the quality of the films being produced through the Premiere Scheme or their success internationally, but the fact that not enough filmmakers are attending their first festivals with a feature idea in hand, or moving on to pursue feature film work efficiently enough. Our response to the proposed scheme is that there are elements that could be effective but the right place to focus this support is as an extension to the current Premiere Shorts scheme rather than as a complete replacement. We think the proposed PLUS idea is a good one - but maybe it should be focused around Premiere Shorts rather than Fresh Shorts. This seems to be the right stage to expect filmmakers to be developed enough to work towards feature film goals. It's also a good idea to be offering funding to first time feature film directors or more experienced directors to create promos, trailers, shorts or scenes to help sell their films to investors, but this should be part of the feature development process - most likely at a point where the NZFC is already on board and the project is at a stage where this is appropriate e.g. to get investors over the line or to convince the NZFC of the true feature potential of the project.

From an industry perspective there is a long and successful history of filmmakers developing themselves through the scheme as well as gaining acclaim at high profile international festivals around the world to set themselves up for future feature film work. Benefits of the scheme include:

- A fully mentored development scheme for emerging talent through which many filmmakers have their first experience of the professional industry and the processes, tools and expectations of this. This is quite different from the Fresh Shorts scheme where filmmakers (quite rightly) are largely left to their own devices to make films and educate themselves in their own way, on their own terms.

- A thorough external selection process which allows for the influence of a regularly changing range of voices and also engenders a level of responsibility over the projects by the teams appointed as EPs to ensure the films are delivered at the highest possible level. In the current scheme EPs have contact with many young filmmakers through the selection process - far more than would ever be the case if selection was taking place internally at the NZFC through a panel process. For the EPs these conversations enable them to gauge the teams' abilities, experience, potential and commitment to their work and feature film BEFORE they commit any funding. This is completely different to a panel submission process where there is no opportunity to really engage with applicants and decisions are made on the strength of a written application.
- A history of international festival success with Premiere Shorts which enables filmmakers to profile their talent internationally, attend prestigious festivals to begin to establish their own network of contacts, gain credibility for future international funding investment or sales representation for their first films, open up their experience and perspective on the international market place and the quality of filmmaking outside NZ.

Philosophically when a filmmaker gets to Premiere Shorts stage, we agree they should be invested in moving onto feature film work and it would be good to be finding ways to continue to keep them moving forward towards that goal. It would be great to evolve the scheme to make it even more successful than it has been to date - the question is how best to do this.

The proposed scheme to open up Premiere Shorts to trailers, scenes and promos for feature films all seems very back to front. Generally it only makes sense for filmmakers to be making trailers or shooting scenes of their films at an advanced stage of development when everyone is feeling like the film has real potential but a tool is required to help get it over the line with investors. This is likely to come about when a project has been in development with the NZFC for some time, has a producer attached to it and a level of interest around it - NOT at the first submission point for the film to the NZFC (and probably not at the second either!) In this sense it also makes sense for this funding to come not from a shorts/development scheme but from the NZFC feature development path as part of a project's process towards production. The NZFC has previously followed this path with great success through their support for Tusi Tamasese with his short film Va Tapuia at a point where the NZFC was on board but needed to be given confidence of the filmmaker's abilities. Creating a box for filmmakers to submit like this seems to encourage production work on projects at an early stage of development which seems crazy when the films are at a nascent stage and there's still a lot of work to be done before the project is really showing its full potential and there's clarity about what would be really useful to create as a promotional tool. Additionally this ignores the fact that the Premiere Shorts scheme already delivers works which act as a calling card for filmmakers' feature films. Even when short films aren't directly connected with particular features they provide investors with confidence in the director's ability to handle performance, story, tone, style and drama. Arguably the separation from any feature work is advantageous as there's less risk of potential investors making judgements on the basis of promos, trailers or short films which may not always be a literal reflection of the feature film's real potential because of the inherent limitations of working within a \$70K budget. Also it's a major distraction from the development work itself - it can take 12 months of work to pull together the team and resources to make these shorts and that's



time which could arguably be better spent in development at the early stage. \$70K investment is the equivalent spend that you could expect to receive at a professional level to develop your script to financing stage!! Of course there will always be exceptions and there may be instances where it does make sense for supporting promo/tasters to be produced at an early stage of the project (e.g. animated features, some genre or high-concept films which might attract finance on the strength of the idea) - or where the filmmaker is more established and there's ironically more surety around their abilities. At the Premiere Shorts investment level NZ filmmakers have been incredibly successful in making films which succeed in the short form. Audiences enjoy and engage with short films differently to feature films - they're an art form in their own right. If we stop funding great short films at a higher budget level and channel this funding only into scenes, trailers, promos and even short films related to feature film work, we won't have these high - production, beautifully made, internationally successful shorts any longer; instead we'll have a bunch of promos for possible feature films which may or may not ever see the light of day - and almost certainly not at international festivals.

Our suggestion to resolve the issue of short filmmakers not progressing onto feature film work is to incentivize filmmakers at the point they deliver their Premiere Short films. We think there are aspects of the PLUS idea which could be successfully applied at this time. E.g. when filmmakers on the Premiere Shorts scheme deliver their short films to the NZFC (i.e. in the time between delivery of materials and selection of the films for their first festival screening) the NZFC works with the filmmakers to attach an EP to oversee the development of their feature idea for submission for a \$10K feature film development grant. This EP could be either the Premiere Shorts EP if the relationship has been good, or another acceptable EP of the filmmakers' choosing. This EP is paid a small sum to support the filmmakers to develop the idea to a stage where it's ready to go forward to the NZFC for \$10K development grant consideration. In this way the Premiere shorts filmmakers have an achievable funding goal to strive for straight off the back of their short film delivery, they can be guided in their early choices on the idea they pursue by an experienced EP, and quite possibly the timing could be made to work so that the filmmakers hit their first festival with a feature idea in hand (because there's often a 3-12 month delay in the first festival selection.)

19. I would like to firstly tick some positives I see in the proposed changes:

Closing down the PODS scheme. I think this system has been erratic, inefficient, and needlessly frustrating. A year between rounds, dominated by idiosyncratic, labour intensive and hugely bureaucratic selection processes. Net result, about the average hit and miss ratio one might expect from a dartboard oriented approach.

The plan to spread opportunities across the year, with three rounds. Great idea. It's what used to happen under the pre-PODS regime. This encourages DEVELOPMENT, rather than stockpiling of one-off scripts, which can then be dragged out year after year and re-submitted, with or without revisions.

Taking decisions 'in-house'. I'm not clear whether this means NZFC staff will make decisions, or whether a rolling industry 'panel' will be involved. I would considerably favour the latter over the former, in order to avoid the usual problem that ALWAYS occur in any system where the administrative point of view is fixed. With Creative NZ long gone as a funding alternative, there is NO other source of funding for short films available here. This is very, very unhealthy unless some dynamic plurality of viewpoints is built into the system.

I would prefer to see a selection panel made up of 'fixed term' industry practitioners working in tandem with responsible NZFC staffers. Overall my conclusion is I believe a selection system offering three rounds a year will definitely lead to higher quality applications and ultimately better films.

I have a serious reservation about linking the making of short films too soon to feature films. I think the most appropriate term for this is, 'putting the cart before the horse'. Are we seriously proposing that the making of a short film be contingent on the applicant having a viable feature film 'in the works'? Forgive me, but this sounds to me like suggesting that a first year architecture student be required to prove they can build a skyscraper in order to be allowed to sit their first year exams. I understand and recognise the sense in saying that short films ought to lead to tall ones. But it's never such a straight line in the career of any film maker. I think one can take it as read that most film makers taking on short films want to eventually make features. That is the ultimate point for most of them. But we should not directly link the first steps of such a long journey to the destination, or make one dependent on the other. Most feature film makers are made, not born. The 'making' takes time, and more than a short film or two.

There will never be a shortage of film makers who set out to make feature films here. There is no shortage of film makers eager to throw themselves into making the best short films they can. Making the funding of short films dependent on directors and producers having feature films 'in the works' is simply not necessary.

We need feature film makers to be as ready as they can be. But the fact is, nobody is ever truly ready. There are some 5000 new feature films made every year, and most of them are mediocre. There is a world of competition out there ready to tear most of them into insignificant and instantly forgotten atoms. Work that's good, that has a chance, that is truly viable in the fierce Darwinian environment of the international marketplace can only result from a lot more experience than the average short film can generate. Placing unbearable pressure on emerging directors to deliver on unrealistic expectations is a sure-fire way to retard career development, not enhance it. And that's even if one were to ignore the grim reality of today's cinematic world - it's far from certain if anyone outside Hollywood can have a sustainable career making feature films.

I would submit the NZFC's job is not to calculate or forecast the career paths of film makers. Rather, it should be to set up robust and fair and transparent selection systems by which the small amount of production funding available can be allocated to best advantage. That's quite hard enough.

As stated in the NZFC's opening words, short films are THE engine room of NZ Film. The crucible within which film making talent is discovered and developed. Short films are in themselves worthwhile of patronage. There is NO NEED to tie the fate of any particular short film project to the longer term aspirations of its makers. That creates an unreasonable burden on all concerned. Life and the rigours of international competition are more than adequate filters for identifying individuals who have 'what it takes' to make viable feature films.

20. There are a group of filmmakers, myself among them, who might fall between the previous system and this one, and a little clarity for them about entitlements and process would be most welcome. I'm sure, like many other first time/early directors, I already had a career trajectory planned. Although the new scheme shouldn't affect it massively, I do feel a little

sense of having the carpet pulled from under my feet. I think the addition of a career development position in the NZFC is a great one, and will hopefully militate against this and help transition directors towards a professional career. These points aside, I feel you have put good thought into the new proposal and the results should soon speak for themselves. I'm particularly impressed and supportive of the new direction the Premiere fund is taking and completely endorse the linking of short film funding to feature film development, though there is perhaps still some clarity to be achieved about where to apply for further development funding following this.

### **Fresh Shorts Plus**

1. Fresh Shorts Plus, I don't really get it. At the Fresh Shorts stage you have enough to worry about, let alone think about a feature. You would be better off offering that money to those that were successful with funding for a Premiere Pathway. It just seems you would end up with up to ten not very well considered feature props from possible first time short directors and inexperienced teams.
2. I think it sounds like a great idea what you're proposing and I look forward to applying again this year. In my experience crew and cast are prepared to work for free if it is something [they] are passionate about, and new films are getting made all the time for zero dollars, while still maintaining reasonable production standards; i.e. the V48 finalists and Tropfest films, so why not look at ways to support more filmmakers, cast and crew who are prepared to work for less in order to achieve something they can be proud of?
3. I am very excited to see the approach NZFC is taking to improve its function and deliver better support to NZ filmmakers.
4. Now that there are new guidelines involving a proposal and development of a feature film, I would like to know if the 'Short' was supposed to be a snippet of the Feature? Or is it an alternate story about the same character and subject matter? Or are the two meant to be entirely different stories and topics but in the same directorial style?
5. It could be argued that NZFC's mandate and resources prevent it working with emerging talent outside of cinema context (i.e. shorts into features). That may be technically true, however it would be a shame to limit the conceptual scope of talent development to cinema. If the NZFC funds short film as a cradle of talent, then its scope could reasonably be widened - from Fresh Shorts to Fresh Screen.

The addition of the "plus" feature prop element to short film funding for feature proposals is welcome. However tying short success to feature output may take the filmmaker's eye off their current work. There is a risk that the short would fail to get proper attention that allows it to be made excellent in their own right, while the add-on feature project would not be developed to its fullest potential precisely because it is an add-on. Aside from the logistical problem of finding enough hours in the day, tightly marrying shorts to a feature project could take away filmmakers' freedom to play, explore and find their voice that is traditionally a hallmark of making short films.

6. It would be great if the NZFC considered offering two Fresh Short Plus funding rounds per year. With the discontinuation of the bi-annual SPIF fund (NZFC/CNZ partnership), an annual funding round at this level is a difficult wait for new (and less resourced) filmmakers. If two

funding rounds per year are offered at this level, it could be expected that eligibility of applicants would be reviewed.

If the aim is encouraging early engagement in a feature film project and preparing newer filmmakers, I am interested in NZFC exploring the possibility and feasibility of applicants presenting their short film projects either in-person or via audio visual footage. As we know, the reality is that in the bigger film world out there (beyond NZ and short filmmaking) paper applications only do not get films funded. If the future will require talking to producers and financiers about projects, why not get filmmakers/teams talking and pitching at the earliest possible stage? To get a feel for the dynamic of the team should be important at any level - and to ensure names are not only listed in applications for funding only.

I have a few thoughts to share on eligibility and criteria for short film funding (10k/30k): Applicants who have received short film funding before must have delivered the NZFC funded film, exhibited it and completed a report for NZFC. If not, applicant is unable to receive another short film grant. This criteria should apply to directors and producers. A filmmaker whose first (or any) NZFC funded short film that has had no exhibition, festival screening or impact on future work should provide stronger supporting material in an application for funding for a second short film project (10k / 30k). Unfinished or undelivered films (including project completion reports, interim reports) for NZFC funded projects should not be showcased on websites or included in a filmmakers' CV.

7. What cannot be forgotten though is the fact that short films are a training ground and a stepping stone to features. The skills required to create a short film from the core creative roles (writer, director, producer) are not necessarily the same as those required for a feature film. Feature films can also be daunting for those embarking on their initial short film projects. We do not believe that feature film development should become an only priority for the short film funding (particularly at the Fresh10 level) as it could lead to some smaller filmmakers feeling isolated and not applying for funding. Short films in themselves are important both as an art form, as well as development so filmmakers can build the confidence required to step up to features.
8. After having been at environments such as the EFM and understanding the possibilities of capitalising on a presence in such an environment, I think it is completely right that feature film development and this future-thinking should be a thrust of the new Fresh Shorts funding process. Not only is it beneficial from an industry perspective to have these pieces of work to call on, creatively I think it also encourages filmmakers to consider the voice that is being cultivated, and how the seed of the short may develop. That said, what I value the most about the Fresh Shorts funding programme is its very clear objective of accessibility. This aspect of the 'brand' of Fresh Shorts certainly encouraged me to apply. I think communicating future feature development is a useful and pivotal focus, however I would hope this doesn't preclude those potential applicants from following their instinct – those who would see the feature pitch criteria and think 'I'm not ready', but who would submit with a strong short film.
9. I am very heartened that the NZFC is willing to make this investment as it shows faith in the film maker. I invest months of (unpaid) labour into my short films, and this leaves little in the way of resources to put into feature development. In my house, feature development happens at 3am over my tenth cup of tea. To feel the NZFC was backing me in such a concrete way, if I showed early promise, would be hugely encouraging and enable me to work in a much more sustainable way.

10. I like the idea of connecting feature films to the short film, but I don't feel having that connected to the initial application is the best way to assess this.

I think the best way to add the 'plus' section to Fresh Shorts is to offer \$10,000 of development money to Fresh Shorts film-makers once they have completed their film and you can see they are teams worth investing in.

So, say I apply for and receive funding for a Fresh Short film in 2014; I then deliver the film in late 2015 along with a treatment for a feature. The NZFC can now assess my finished film alongside the treatment and see if I'm worth investing in. If I then get the development money I can get the script written and come back to the NZFC with a feature script and a Premiere Pathways plan for that script. I think there is a nice clear pathway here.

And if the NZFC wanted to start this programme this year they could offer Fresh Shorts makers from the previous couple of rounds the chance to apply for this development fund to get it going. I do think though that feature development cash should only be assessed once you can see what the film-makers have produced with the production funds you have given them.

With the carrot of extra development money once you've made your short film I think film-makers will be considering their feature screenplay alongside their short from the beginning, even if they don't have to apply with the feature idea at the first application stage. Also, over the year that they are making their Fresh Short their feature ideas are lively to evolve, develop, and even completely change before they deliver their final short film. Probably impossible, but it would be great if Fresh Shorts had more than one funding round a year too. Unlikely to be practical but thought I'd mention it.

11. As it stands with the "fresh shorts" program the risk is always that a short film may be made, but only play, at some short film festival somewhere. This seems like a dangerous/outcome to have called on so many of the necessary favours in the industry to complete this outcome and therefore as a risk/decision is not compelling.

If these short films could be active parts of the packaging/financing process it then takes the emphasis for this collaborating away from a singular or artist driven project and into a collaborative or team driven one essentially a first pre-production step for the production. Therefore the people that provide favours or help on this project can see a tangible benefit in terms of being the ones who would be first called on should the reel help sell/package/fund a project.

12. The Fresh Shorts application is still a good amount of work, and I think would need to remain the essential focus of the submission (i.e. not 50% of the proposal but 80%). I'm sure there would be a fair drop in submission numbers, and while that's possibly desirable in order to condense the pool of applicants to those who are committed to the work, it would be a pity if it came at the expense of capturing new strong voices.

13. I'd like to share a couple of thoughts about the possible implications of this 'plus' scheme:

Funding is available as Fresh 10, and Fresh 30. Of those applying at Fresh 10, a significant number have had thoughts about their feature, but have not done anywhere near the amount of work that a Seed Application requires. Given that the short film pathway is a process, it would be a shame if Fresh 10 applicants feel discouraged because they are

concerned that preference for the short film funding will be given to those with a feature in a more advanced state.

Realistically, the timeframes look like: June Fresh application due. If successful, shooting might happen over the summer. By the time the film is cut and delivered it is the middle of the following year. Festival applications might take six months before success, and the festival itself might then be another three months away. So from putting the application in to attending the first festival, it might be nearly two years.

On the one hand this is a good amount of time to work on a feature script. But it also provides an opportunity. What if there were two ways to access the 'pluses? As per the current suggestion the 'plus' can be applied for at the time of Fresh Shorts application. But many teams may be working on their feature during this two year period. What if they could also apply for the 'plus' throughout this time, for instance when they deliver a rough cut of the film. Then the NZFC could make an assessment of whether they think this short is going to go the distance. If they received development funding at this stage, the filmmakers would still have a year to work on their script before attending a market.

I suggest this idea is instituted at least for the first year or two. The first round of Seed Funding drew only 49 Applications – many of those from established filmmakers rather than short filmmakers. Last year there were 235 Fresh Short submissions. The fact that very few short filmmakers have feature ideas worked up to the level of a Seed Application is the exact point the 'plus' is trying to address. But the filmmakers need some time to catch up.

14. It would be great if the NZFC considered offering two Fresh Short Plus funding rounds per year. With the discontinuation of the bi-annual SPIF fund (NZFC/CNZ partnership), an annual funding round at this level is a difficult wait for new (and less resourced) filmmakers. If two funding rounds per year is offered at this level, it could be expected that eligibility of applicants would be reviewed.

As it's widely known, the reality is that in the bigger film world out there (beyond NZ and short filmmaking) documents only do not get films funded. I find filmmaking to be a very personable experience. If the future will require talking to producers and financiers about projects, why not get filmmakers/teams talking and pitching at the earliest possible stage? To get a feel for the dynamic of the team should be important at any level - and to ensure names are not only listed in written applications for funding only.

Myself and other filmmakers I have spoken with about the external assessors engaged by the NZFC for Fresh Shorts express an uncomfortableness about being assessed by industry peers - especially where the assessor has a relatively small body of screen work to date. Consider the idea of using more international assessors at the short film funding level (esp. 30K). Nationals of UK, France, Australia, Scandinavia, US (Sundance), for example. Their perspectives do matter and are relevant as many of the NZ made short films are seeking acceptance by prestigious festivals and audiences in these territories.

15. I think there is too much paperwork required when applying for Fresh Shorts. It seems to have snowballed in recent years. A possible solution to reduce the amount of administration would be to invent a rule that the producer is required to produce the budget, it is not a requirement expected of the director. That way, the writer/director isn't wearing ten hats during the application process and his workload is effectively halved. Maybe the other documents could be simply reduced to script, director's vision and of course storyboards/shot lists (optional)?

## **Short Film Post Plus**

1. Short film Post Plus, again I don't get it, I'm not sure of the logic of tying up development funding with a post-production fund. 'I have just been accepted into a festival, can I get some money to finish my short, oh and by the way, I have this great feature idea'. It just doesn't feel like the right platform. Chucking more money at development and making that more accessible is a great idea, but it's a standalone or linked into something like the Premiere Pathways.
2. I just want to see more support to the self-funded/self-made films once they are almost done or are in post - production. I know there are multiple reasons why a filmmaker decided to make his/her film without NZFC involvement or NZFC decided not to get involved, but that is not the point. The point is All NZ movies represent NZ overseas in festivals and competitions and it doesn't matter if they are funded or not there should be some more extensive support there for filmmakers who are still learning and trying to get their footing in this amazing industry.

It will be great to have some kind of point of contact where things can be looked into by NZFC with the filmmaker about her/his project already in post and talk what could be the best approach forward to finish the film. Some Advice or contacts and procedures tailored to that project and achievable for the filmmakers to help the filmmaker to finish his/her film the best possible way.

3. The post production money needs to be accessed when it is needed therefore a single annual deadline for applications wouldn't work at all. Surely it would delay the release of many short films.
4. I just want to see more support to the self-funded/self-made films once they are almost done or are in post - production. I know there are multiple reasons why a filmmaker decided to make his/her film without NZFC involvement or NZFC decided not to get involved, but that is not the point. The point is All NZ movies represent NZ overseas in festivals and competitions and it doesn't matter if they are funded or not there should be some more extensive support there for filmmakers who are still learning and trying to get their footing in this amazing industry. It will be great to have some kind of point of contact where things can be looked into by NZFC with the filmmaker about her/his project already in post and talk what could be the best approach forward to finish the film. Some Advice or contacts and procedures tailored to that project and achievable for the filmmakers to help the filmmaker to finish his/her film the best possible way.

# SHOW ME SHORTS FILM FESTIVAL

Dave Gibson  
Chief Executive  
NZ Film Commission  
by email to: [talentdev@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:talentdev@nzfilm.co.nz)

Friday 28 March, 2014

Dear Dave,

As a key stakeholder in the New Zealand short film industry, we and our colleagues on the Show Me Shorts Film Festival Trust Board are making a submission to you on behalf of the people we serve: This includes the community of New Zealand short film makers, but is primarily the New Zealand public, who Show Me Shorts was created for.

We have a number of key points of concern that we raise below, as well as some key areas where we commend the ideas of the NZFC team. Should you wish to discuss any of the points we raise in more detail, we would be happy to meet with you or discuss by phone, so don't hesitate to get in touch.

## **Ideas We Support:**

- We recognise that the transition between short and feature filmmaking is an issue for filmmakers seeking a career in the industry, and appreciate the effort to address this issue.
- We support the initiative to include documentary short film projects in consideration for short film funding from the NZFC. A greater variety of projects not only fulfills growing audience appetite for variety, but also encourages development of diverse voices.
- As an entrepreneurial organisation we see the value in allowing filmmakers to pitch projects "up to \$70,000", rather than exclusively at the level of \$70,000. This allows for different kinds of projects, and encourages filmmakers to think about their budget in terms of what resources they have available and what is best for their film, rather than seeing the \$70,00 as a target to reach.

## **Areas Of Concern:**

### IT'S NOT BROKEN

New Zealand is acknowledged as a world leader in making short films. We are the country after France to have the most short films screen at Cannes. The current short film funding structures provided by the NZFC are working. The short films made under this scheme have a high success rate of being accepted for local and international festivals. So why fix what isn't broken? The risk is that changing these structures not



only won't help transition short film makers to feature films, but that it will negatively impact the filmmaking ecology in NZ as well as our international reputation.

We believe the linear pathway view of short films solely as a stepping stone to features is not only out of step with international trends, but damaging to the health of the New Zealand film industry. Filmmakers are artists, and artists don't follow a set path. Many of them work in other fields and allowing them a diverse range of interests and projects is what keeps them inspired to create the kind of original, relevant and contemporary work that audiences want to see.

Although the NZFC has always treated short film as calling card, it has also recognised the cultural and creative value of short film. We understand that your position is to view short films as a stepping stone to feature films, and that this isn't happening in the numbers the NZFC Board would like. The feature film sector of the industry is in trouble. Fewer New Zealand feature films are being made and exhibited, while more short films are being made and exhibited. We suggest that the problem is not with the current short film funding structure, which has proven to be successful, and that the NZFC should look elsewhere for how to fix the ailing feature film arena - if indeed you believe it is possible to fix this audience-driven international trend.

### DECREASING DIVERSITY

Placing restrictions on the career trajectory of aspiring filmmakers by imposing a linear pathway is damaging to their creativity. More frighteningly, this restriction also risks leading to a decrease in the number and diversity of voices experimenting in the short film medium.

The EP funding structure has nourished originality and diversity by allowing devolved funding away from bureaucratic structures and protocols where creative decisions and risk-taking can more easily happen. Show Me Shorts strongly advocates for the NZFC to keep the EP structure. Research on the NZFC's approach to short and feature film development and production suggests that the independent status of the EPs has worked well (\* see references below).

Show Me Shorts expresses concern at the inclusion of trailers, 'taste tapes' and scenes from feature films into the same funding pool that is currently available for short film funding. These kind of projects would be better suited to receive funding from feature film development. As opposed to including documentary and animation short films (which we support), adding these kind of projects to compete for the same funding as short films, means less short films will get made. There is no evidence to suggest New Zealand audiences want to see more promo videos, trailers and scenes from potential films in development. There is, however, clear data to support increasing demand for short films. Making fewer short films does not make sense in this context.

### CASE STUDIES

Show Me Shorts would like to point out that using Taika Waititi as an example of the NZFC assisting with the transition of filmmakers from shorts to features is problematic. Taika made a great short film that garnered recognition and was celebrated as a work of art in itself (Academy Award nomination). The recognition that followed for Taika was a direct result of his success with the short film, not from his plans for future feature films. Had the pressure been on him while he was working on his short film to think about making a short that served as a calling card for his feature film (and to have a team in place to make that feature), he may not have had the focus and attention to create such

an iconic short film. Having a feature film idea in development is no guarantee of success either. Taika's story indicates that you can't fully predict success. Supporting talent that expresses compelling original ideas is the only way forward. There is always going to be an element of uncertainty in selecting which filmmakers to support.

Some of New Zealand's top short film makers have made several excellent short films without a clear plan or immediate intention to make feature films. Many have experimented with several shorts before exploring feature filmmaking, e.g. Paul Campion, Mark Albiston & Louis Sutherland. Some of our best and most prolific short film makers have never made a feature film, e.g. James Cunningham, Zia Mandviwalla and Michelle Savill. Some have gone on to make feature films but realised that their skills are better suited to the short film medium e.g. Grant Lahood. Does this mean that their iconic short films have no value without the features? We think not. Under the proposed new scheme, these are voices that would not have received the level of support from the NZFC that enabled them to produce many of our most iconic and critically acclaimed NZ short films. Their absence would lead to an impoverished NZ cinema.

### SHORT FILM ECOLOGY

Film is a medium undergoing dramatic change currently in terms of technology and audience consumption. There is little evidence of strategic thought in this consultation paper about how the funding and production of New Zealand short films fits within the wider international storytelling marketplace.

The main problems with this consultation paper stem from the ongoing NZFC focus on short film production instead of considering the wider short film ecology. New Zealanders make a great number of good short films, but distribution opportunities are limited. We find it strange that there is no mention here of support for helping short films reach audiences. Without fostering connections between films and audiences, the NZFC risks creating films in a vacuum.

There is a surprising lack of mention of transmedia, online distribution platforms or web series in this consultation paper. All of which, are now important options for filmmakers to explore if they choose. We would like to see the NZFC research the links between these mediums and short films.

### **In conclusion:**

Premiere Pathways is a fantastic idea, but NOT at the expense of a dedicated short film fund - it should not replace Premiere Shorts. Before making such a drastic change, we recommend the NZFC consider the potential impact on the quality of short film making in NZ and our international reputation in this sphere. Reduced output of a lesser quality and the resulting drop in our international standing could hinder our filmmakers' international opportunities.

If you are concerned about the commercial success of our films, listen to your market. New Zealanders are watching short films in increasing numbers and feature films in decreasing numbers. We suggest adjusting funding accordingly.

Finally, we express our disappointment that the team at the NZFC did not better publicise this consultation paper. We hope this was merely a reflection of their desire to move forward quickly and respond to changes in the marketplace with regard to creating and consuming films, rather than a sign that the NZFC does not take short film seriously.

The rest of the world looks to New Zealand as a leader in short film production and it would be a shame to squander that hard-won international respect.

We look forward to participating in the planned industry focus groups regarding this consultation paper. Please contact us when you have dates and locations confirmed.

Warm regards,



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on behalf of  
Show Me Shorts Film Festival Trust Board  
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\* References: Joyce, Hester. "In Development: Scriptwriting Policies and Practice in the New Zealand Film Commission 1978-1995." PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 2003.  
Blomkamp, E. 2009. Framing short film : cultural nationalism and economic rationalism in New Zealand film policy. MA Thesis, University of Auckland.



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31 March 2014

Bonnie Slater

Professional Development Executive, New Zealand Film Commission

## SHORT FILM FUNDING

The Screen Directors' Guild of New Zealand is pleased to contribute its view on proposed changes to NZFC's Short Film funding policy and procedures as outlined in the consultation paper Pathways to Features: Fresh Ideas on NZFC Short Film Funding.

Whilst the Guild supports the proposed scheduling and administrative changes, it is concerned that such emphatic emphasis on feature film development so early in a director's career may actually impede rather than enhance the creative and craft development of emerging talent. Our members see value in allowing directors to find their voice and experiment with craft so it is their demonstrated talent that drives their future direction, not a producer's or executive's pre-conceived vision.

Film makers learn and develop most by making films and in this sense short films are the most cost effective training ground we have. We believe that with market experience and the professional development opportunities in place, more marketable feature films will be delivered by directors who've been supported early in their career to find their point of difference – rather than by those who've been channeled from the get-go towards a (sometimes inexperienced) producer's view of what's required for a feature. We feel the proposed policy includes an inherent danger that ambition and entrepreneurship will prevail over true talent development.

Having said that, we appreciate NZFC's attempt to rationalize the process and we support NZFC's view that our limited short film opportunities should support our limited feature film opportunities. But we urge flexibility in decision-making. Sometimes it will be sensible to use funds towards development materials for a feature; sometimes a strong stand-alone short will be more effective in illuminating a career path for a director who will go on to deliver the kinds of features our industry needs.

We support NZFC's determination that short film policy should serve the development of sustainable careers for directors and a sustainable New Zealand film industry, however we believe sustainability comes from careful nurturing of true creative talent, and we caution against pressuring it to run before it walks.

Fiona Copland

**Executive Director | Screen Directors Guild of NZ**

66 Surrey Cres, Grey Lynn, Auckland | PO Box 47294, Ponsonby, Auckland

**31 March 2014**

**SPADA RESPONSE: NZFC INDUSTRY CONSULTATION PAPER**

**Pathways to Features: Fresh Ideas on NZFC Short Film Funding**

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SPADA would like to thank the NZFC for the opportunity to respond to its Consultation Paper on its current short film funding.

SPADA's response focuses on identifying and building on the over-arching goals and objectives of the NZFC short film investment, to ensure it continues to deliver the desired outcomes for both the industry and the NZFC with a minimum of unintended consequences.

To that end, in summary:

**SPADA agrees that:**

- Higher level short film funding should be available to producers as part of an overall feature development strategy
- The higher risk fresh shorts should serve to transition teams to professional filmmaking
- Short films are integral to building the screen industry's infrastructure as well as individual skill sets through the natural mentoring structure of short films
- Many filmmakers have used a strong short film to instigate a successful and lucrative career in TVCs and television (e.g. Steve Ayson, Robin Walters, Chris Dudman, Tammy Davis, Jane Shearer), which are critical planks in the overall development and sustainability of the New Zealand screen industry.
- In the same way that many feature film directors have never made a high profile short film e.g. Peter Jackson, James Cameron, Andrew Adamson - there are, and should continue to be, many pathways to feature filmmaking.

**SPADA is concerned that:**

- In tying premiere level short film funding to feature film script development there is a danger of trying to be too prescriptive and predictive about how this might work; which in turn will mean creative opportunities for development - unforeseen by officials - will be missed.
- The "FRESH SHORTS PLUS" approach (given short films identify and primarily serve directors) incentivizes directors to both write and produce their own work: when they are not necessarily skilled to do either.
- The paper pre-supposes a clear pathway to feature filmmaking via shorts, thus limiting other more innovative and creative routes to feature films. Shorts have traditionally been one opportunity for directors to shine.
- The paper does not take into consideration the ever-changing market; particularly with regard to the traditional methods of distribution are being challenged especially in the independent sector.

- A total investment of \$600,000 for the PREMIERE PATHWAYS production of “various visual material” is high risk (\$70k – equates to 70% of the total feature development spend for a single project).

**SPADA recommends:**

- Retaining PREMIERE SHORTS, but reduce production to four per annum; in line with international agencies e.g. the Irish Film Board funds four short at EURO 65,000 each
- Reducing the total number of FRESH SHORTS (total budget of not more than \$30,000 (cash) grant to six per annum. This must be budgeted with discounts included.
- Replace existing \$10,000 Fresh Shorts with alternative new talent [\$10k] prizes (administered through existing Festivals (Wairoa, NZIFF etc) which will profile new talent and provide them with money to go towards funding their next project
- Increase budget for POST PRODUCTION fund
- All applicants have an experienced producer attached. Building relationships is key at this juncture – which also includes relationships at markets/festivals
- Attendance at Festivals by filmmakers. Believe attendance at festivals by short film “team” feeds into filmmaker’s total awareness of international/global industry and market realities as well as connecting and creating vital relationships. It is also a low-cost opportunity for filmmakers to assess what travels/what doesn’t by watching film with an international audience.
- A consistent approach to how the short film funding is treated. At the moment there are grants/loans and equity. SPADA believes all funding should be grants (similar to Early Seed Development funding).
- Involving active industry professionals currently making films in all facets of decision making as this will greatly increase the current knowledge available to NZFC and develop a greater sense of ownership of new talent initiatives within the industry

## **BACKGROUND**

Short films have, over nearly 30 years been a partnership between the professional industry and the NZFC for mutual benefit as an opportunity to identify new talented directors with distinctive cinematic voices and transition self taught or pre-entry trained new filmmakers into the professional industry with all the disciplines and benefits of working at this level.

The short film initiative has traditionally been generously supported by highly experienced crew and suppliers of professional equipment and technical support for the shoot and post production because it is an opportunity not merely to induct new entrants to the potential of professional level filmmaking, but also an opportunity for the wider industry – producers, writers, crew and suppliers - to assess who has feature film potential.

Short films have served as a relatively low risk opportunity for all involved to test out new jobs, new alliances, and new technologies. This industry and funding body partnership reflects the generous understanding of the benefits of seasoned professionals mentoring new talent at all levels and in all facets of the filmmaking process. It astounds many from other industries where short films are the collaborative work of peer group new entrants.

### **Statutory context**

The NZFC is charged statutorily in Section 17.1.b of its Act

*to encourage and promote cohesion within the New Zealand film industry, and in particular—*

- *(i) to encourage and promote the exchange of information among persons engaged in the film industry; and*
- *(ii) to encourage and promote the efficient use of available resources within the New Zealand film industry; and*
- *(iii) to co-operate with other interested or affected bodies and organisations in order to encourage and promote employment in the New Zealand film industry, and the productivity of that industry:*

In this respect, the short film funds, subsidized heavily by the industry itself has provided a chance to test out the potential of talent in a relatively low risk manner, which, even when it may not result in a great new director talent, may identify a promising producer, cinematographer, designer, editor, composer or at another level – a potential grip assist.

At the same time they have allowed some of those key talents, including writers, to appreciate better the role of and demands on the director, by experiencing the job first hand. Even if those people do not transition to directing at a higher level, their work within the industry is improved.

Short films are not necessarily the best place to spot great feature film writers but that said, there are other strategies for developing feature writing talent. Some beautifully directed, thoroughly entertaining and commanding short films rest on a single very simple idea, which will not sustain more than the duration of a short film.

They also serve as satisfying works in their own right. Paradoxically, some films made without a career objective in mind have succeeded in profiling their makers more than those that have been much more strategically planned.

It is true that many of the most successful director/ writers began their careers with a short film; it is a false assumption that a successful short film will necessarily predict a feature filmmaking talent. Many have used a good short film to instigate a successful and lucrative career in TVCs which have also been a critical plank in the overall development of the industry. Equally many, many feature film directors have never made a high profile short film (e.g. Peter Jackson, James Cameron, Andrew Adamson). There are, and should continue to be, many pathways to feature filmmaking.

Short films therefore have been serving a more complex role than may at first appear. We acknowledge however, that they have become the focus of many who see a short film as key stepping stone in a straightforward pathway to a first feature.

**SPADA looks forward to discussing these ideas further with the NZFC at the Focus Group meetings taking place in late April.**



## **PREMIERE PATHWAYS + FRESH SHORTS PLUS**

### **Aims and Objectives:**

- Showcase directors by offering a “calling card” and fast tracking them to a feature
- Opportunity to test if writers can direct
- Good chance for short form directors (TVCs, music videos) to try a more narrative, longer form screen story
- Transition directors/teams from amateur to professional disciplines and potential
- Build teams
- Provide opportunity for new talent to shine

### *Tying premiere level short film funding to feature film script development*

Feature film development is more than developing a script, and SPADA applauds that this is recognized. However, there is a danger that trying to be too prescriptive and predictive about how this might work will mean creative opportunities for development unforeseen by officials will be missed. Equally such prescriptions risks of incentivizing unproductive pathways.

SPADA believes the best person positioned to strategize the development of an idea to the screen is the producer. The NZFC does not need to serve as a de facto film school; as it is not sufficiently resourced to do so; and it should allow and require the producers to lead their teams. Therefore the producer should free to devise a proposal for whatever best serves the particular needs of a project.

For this reason, such proposals should be able to be submitted to any EDF or ADF meeting and be assessed on a case by case basis within an overall strategy. Teasers and shooting scenes can limit, rather than enhance, a sense of what a film can be given the full power of the team behind it.

### *Fresh Shorts Plus (additional \$10k)*

SPADA believes this approach risks:

- incentivizing director/writers
- disadvantages talented Directors who do not want to be writers (e.g. Sima Urale, Peter Burger, Lee Tamahori)
- encourages peer group teams and lessens the opportunity for enthusiastic amateurs to engage with a more professional and more experienced talent
- creating teams for a feature without the benefit from the participation of more established producers who can neither afford or want to make shorts; however, established producers see them as talent identification opportunities

## **FRESH SHORTS**

SPADA believes there should be funding for six shorts of not more than \$30,000 (cash) grant. This must be budgeted with discounts included.

SPADA does not support \$10k vs \$30k approach, as we believe it slows progress for new talent and \$10k budget attracts film school grads wanting to “meet” the NZFC and meet the NZFC’s “needs”. It would be preferable to incentivise these applicants to “meet” producers (esp those with BDS).

The \$10K budget level incentivizes the enthusiastic amateur. The cost of good quality equipment today means that the NZFC does not need to be financing the hobbyist. The truly innovative and experimental filmmaker may also be excluded in this structured and arbitrary approach to funding.

An alternative approach is offering new talent prizes of \$10k prizes via Film School, short comps @ Festivals, NZIFF, SMS, Wairoa. These prizewinners will almost without exception use the money to make films if that is the career path they are seeking, and such films are more likely to be unalloyed voices.

**SPADA RECOMMENDS reducing the production of FRESH SHORTS to six per annum.**

### **FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE**

SPADA believes it is key for emerging filmmakers to attend Festivals. In most producers’ experience it is rare to meet those who immediately wish to fund a feature at an A list festival. Sales agents and distributors rarely attend shorts screenings: BUT filmmakers and teams get to see the “real” world and experience early in their careers.

Therefore, Festival attendance provides an:

- International framework for filmmaking – meet colleagues at the same level who will continue to serve as a creative community
- Introduction to media and screening obligations as a guest
- Opportunity to get noticed by talent spotters (offered films – from elsewhere and offered chances to take an idea further e.g. Ellory Elkayem’s *Larger than Life* or Taika Waititi’s *Two Cars, One Night*) producers, writers, etc
- Opportunity for filmmakers to develop a direct relationship with Festival Directors and become part of alumni – festivals are very loyal to the talent they launch
- Awareness of international/global industry and market realities
- Chance to assess what travels/what doesn’t by watching your film with an international audience.

Value of Festivals and markets is greatest with regular attendance. It is the producers who will be able to lever the opportunities that festival offer directors but short film producers are not always seeking feature film careers.

## **POST PRODUCTION FUND**

The selection at the NZFC determined “A” list festival and delivery to it requires quick response, it requires that when funding is needed to exploit an extraordinary opportunity, a decision should be actioned expediently. Only some Festivals have value – so called “A list” on your CV. The value of attending is not always easy to predict, but there will be unexpected opportunities. The tyranny of distance from markets is an ongoing problem for New Zealanders and any chance to target exposure internationally at the few truly valuable festivals should be exploited.

## **TREATMENT OF SHORT FILM FUNDING**

Throughout the proposal short film funding is treated in a number of ways: grants, loans and equity. SPADA believes the NZFC should adopt a consistent approach to how the funding for the short films is treated.

**SPADA RECOMMENDS** all short film funding should be treated as grants (similar to Early Seed Development funding).

## **SHORT FILM FUNDING ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

SPADA recommends the involvement of active industry professionals in all facets of the decision making process. SPADA believes this will not only increase the current knowledge available to NZFC, but will also go towards developing a greater sense of ownership of new talent initiatives within the New Zealand screen industry.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

While the objective of creating career pathways is admirable, it risks establishing what that pathway looks like, to the exclusion of other potential options. The highway is not always the most effective route to a destination. It may be better to approach short film making with a philosophy of assisting by removing or avoiding obstacles which crop up unexpectedly adopting a flexible, responsive and accessible funding approach.

It is less useful to create pathways that go nowhere, than being alert to smoothing pathways going somewhere. The industry is the resource to help with this.

Once again, SPADA looks forward to the opportunity to discuss these ideas further with the NZFC at the Focus Group meetings taking place in late April.

## **SPADA**

31 March 2014

[www.spada.co.nz](http://www.spada.co.nz)