



**Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology  
MA in Screenwriting for Film and Television**

**External Panel Validation  
8<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

**Panel Members:**

Academic Experts:

Chair: Dr Seamus Cannon, Blackrock Education Centre (Retired)

Ms Karin McCully, The Lir Academy, Trinity College Dublin

Industry Experts:

Mr John McDonnell, Head of Production/Company Manager, Fantastic Films, Dublin

Ms Ailish McElmeel, Producer/Company Director, Deadpan Pictures, Dublin

**IADT/:**

Dr Andrew Power, Registrar, IADT

Mr David Smith, Head of Faculty of Film, Art & Creative Technologies, IADT

Mr Rónán O'Muirthile, Head of National Film School, IADT

Mr Paul Freany, Course Coordinator, MA in Screenwriting for Film and Television

Ms Jean Rice, Lecturer, MA in Screenwriting for Film and Television

Ms Eilish Kent, Freelance Story Consultant, Dev. Executive, Script Editor, Producer

Mr Tom Kennedy, Lecturer, MA in Screenwriting for Film and Television

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## **1. Introduction**

IADT is an Institute of Technology established under the Institutes of Technology Act (1992 – 2006). IADT has delegated authority to make awards at level 7, 8 and 9 – the latter for both taught and research programmes.

The current Masters in Screenwriting for Film & Television (60 credits) has been running successfully for 16 years. In that time, more than 165 students graduate with Masters Degrees in Screenwriting. A Faculty strategic priority is to bring all graduate programmes in line with the ECTS standard relative to national and international benchmarks with a total of 90 credits. Screenwriting for television in particular has, in the last 5 years, become the driver of what is a 'golden age' of television and this proposal seeks to capitalise on this development.

Rationale for change from 60 to 90 credits offering on the MA in Screenwriting for Film and Television:

- Meet the Faculty and Institute strategic aim to extend this MA programme to a one year (12 month) 90c masters from its current 60c (30week) format
- Reflect the international standards required of a Level 9 course
- Meet the significant demand for graduates skilled in TV drama writing.
- Continue a critical evaluation of the programmes within the Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies
- Assess the continued effectiveness and efficiency of the programmes in the context of the requirements of employers, industry, professional bodies, the economy and International developments

The following report is a review report from the external validation panel. Over the course of the day, the panel were given a tour of the space resources and technical facilities available to students at IADT.

## **2. Private meeting of panel**

The Panel held private discussions to identify key issues for discussion with the senior management and the programme team, including:

- Growth of Television Drama
- International aspirations versus local opportunities
- Pilot/soap script and developing longer, original script
- Graduate Opportunities

### **3. Meeting with IADT Management**

The Panel met with senior IADT management to discuss overarching issues relating to the delivery of the programme (staffing, facilities) and how the proposal fits within the IADT strategy. Core objectives of the strategy include a focus on industry and employability, collaborations and a partnership approach.

The programme sits within the IADT suite of programmes, and the Institute is the awarding body, under their delegated authority remit. All modules are designed to prepare students for writing scripts, with an emphasis on theory as well as developing the craft of writing. This format appeals to the cohort of students who apply, many of whom are mature and already working in the industry and who wish to develop more depth and breadth in their practice.

All proposals are subjected to a rigorous internal quality assurance process, as outlined in the IADT Procedure for the Development and Approval of New Programmes (available on the Institute website). All Institute quality assurance processes are informed by the policies and procedures criteria set out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

Writing for television drama offers new opportunities and the new television studios in The National Film School on the IADT campus offer a potential learning environment for this very specific craft. The National Film School Lecture series and NFS Visiting Fellowship may offer the students opportunities to meet filmmakers with international reputations.

### **4. Meeting with the Programme Team**

The team outlined the students' trajectory in developing critical analysis and writing skills in tandem on the programme. Students are introduced to the principles of narrative structure and the origins of Drama, with reference to Aristotle's 'Poetics'. Storytelling is a key component of the craft of writing and students are encouraged to find their own voice and material.

Learning the rules around structure is essential for Television Drama. The growth in Television drama has been dramatic and specific craft areas need to be taught. While longer form writing (a full length script) is the overall aim of the programme (as outlined in the 40 credit module Project Development), students are also required to complete a Television drama proposal or a soap script, to industry standard. The latter option is a useful skill for the intermediate stage of a career in writing and is of benefit to a student for example, who does not yet have an original idea of their own to develop, but wants to learn the skills for episodic writing.

The development of a soap script can be a very real world experience for a student and an opportunity to learn the craft, and is in no way aimed at curtailing the ambition of students. The team are conscious that for many students the reality will be to seek work outside Ireland but learning to write for a home produced soap (Fair City, Red Rock) will be an opportunity for students to use their current skills to get a foot in the door of the Television industry. If a student has work produced on Irish television, outside organisations (BBC, Channel 4 etc.) will tend to consider submissions more readily.

Learning to develop an original idea for television is front loaded with an emphasis on story, words, and characters. Recent developments in Television drama have seen an increase in long form writing, and some students will aspire to developing their own television series. The cohort on the programme is very diverse and students generally arrive with some previous industry experience.

## **5. Findings and Recommendations of the Panel**

### **The Panel recommends approval of the level 9 MA in Screenwriting for Film and Television (90 credits)**

#### **Conditions**

There were no conditions attached to the validation of the programme.

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Panel recommends the team continue to develop the international aspect of the programme, to encourage the ambition of students. By exposing them to the extent of the market, students will learn they have to compete in an industry where the bar is set very high.
2. The balance between the craft of writing and time for reflection could be expanded.
3. The Panel noted the diversity of the student cohort was a resource in itself. Create opportunities where students can share and reflect on their experiences. The creation of a Writers' Room was suggested, as a way to share ideas and an aid in the creative process. Students could hot house ideas, break up a script and learn to collaborate
4. The Panel noted the benefit of collaborations; a weekly critique workshop for example, would help to forge links that students can take with them into the real world
5. The content of theory and literary traditions modules could be expanded (currently there is an emphasis on the Greek tradition) to include more contemporary forms of drama.

#### **Commendations**

The Chair thanked the team for their engagement with the validation process, noting the discussion had been very interesting and engaging, and extended best wishes for the future success of the programme.