

## **FIRST SET OF CONCLUSIONS OF THE INTERACTIVE EDITION OF TEST**

A number of professionals from all over Europe and the USA have contributed their opinions in this forum. These professionals include representatives from most sectors of the industry, including writers, producers, directors, script consultants and teachers. They covered a myriad of countries, including small countries like Greece, or bigger ones like France, the UK, Germany, Spain or Italy.

It is very interesting to note the combination of professions and nationalities, since the traditions of each country permeate the reflection. But since the aim of this forum is to try to arrive to conclusions, we have tried to skip the specifics and focus in the consensus.

There was a considerable agreement with the conclusions of the TEST seminar, which were deemed “necessary and rightly provocative”.

### **1- On the issue of training for screenwriters in general**

Consensus exists on the necessity to train the existing and the next generations of screenwriters.

There is no consensus on the type, kind and scope of such training, nor on the target for such a training.

But the lack of consensus is in itself a form of consensus, since we can identify several areas where training for screenwriters has been considered necessary.

Considering the type of recipient:

Training for beginners: There is a clear mandate that such a training is very much needed to help writers understand the particularities of writing for the screen.

Training for professionals: This “training” acquires in the different responses, the form of “development combined with training”, where producers and writers join to discuss particular projects, or “crash short courses” on specific aspects of the industry itself. In this sense, an important cry is made by writers themselves to have some sort of forum to debate ideas and cross information.

Training for trainers: It permeates from the contributions that the higher the level of trainers, the better the training. But the lack of tradition in training for the screen has prompted the appearance of teachers lacking the necessary skills. Hence the need to improve those skills.

Considering the recipients:

Training should primarily be aimed to writers in the craft of writing. But there was clear consensus that directors and producers (and even actors, in one

form or another) would definitively benefit from training programs.

The “training for trainers” programs must be specifically designed for those needs. This was especially relevant in countries with a less developed industry.

Considering the specialisation:

Training seems, according to the responses, too much oriented to cinema. But the growing specialisation of drama for TV (and other forms of entertainment) is asking for other concrete measures. Writing for television must take into consideration realities that go beyond pure drama writing. Analysis of formats, audiences, cost/expenditure, etc, are also part of the training the writer must receive.

In what refers to training for cinema, there is a considerable demand to bear in mind the specificities of each of the different film traditions in Europe, and not focus only on one type of dramaturgy dominated by the so called “Hollywood model”. In this sense, even the programs supported by “Hollywood” defend a more “tailored” approach to projects.

In what refers to television, there is an identification of the need for training, but there are no clear positions on how or what specific type, probably since there is a lack of tradition of such training, or since some of this training was provided in the past by the broadcasters themselves. Mention was made to the successful existing ones.

Considering the scope:

There is a lack of consensus on the exact type of program demanded in the future. But there is a clear agreement that training is needed in all sort of forms: In theory longer training courses would be better for participants, but the reality is that the longer the course, the younger and less experienced participants seem to be. To attract professionals working in the industry training courses need to be short, or at least as flexible as possible, with one or two group workshops, interspersed with on-line tuition and guidance.

Short intensive courses have been identified as ideal for interchange of ideas or have access to late information. They are easier to access by professionals, especially producers.

Medium term courses (2 weeks to 9 months not consecutive) have been identified as ideal for development/writing courses. They should link writers with directors and producers, and all of them with a viable project susceptible to be turned into a successful film (the issue of what is a successful film remains open).

Long term courses (one to more years in the form of master or university courses) have been identified as fundamental for beginners but only when they have strong presence from the industry (more “academic” approach has been regarded less highly).

Considering the territoriality:

Training in the different nations is considered a must. In some nations, complementing this training with other countries is deemed fundamental. In bigger countries, this is not the case. Language is an issue.

Training in a pan-European dimension in the type of programs developed within the Media Program is considered fundamental in order to nurture the necessary contacts and help understand the complexity of the European/international markets. English is normally the language of this training, hence the difficulty of access for some writers who do not write in that language.

In general, the training of (professional) screenwriters is needed/wanted for a number of reasons:

*Rosa Verges: “Training offers the possibilities to thoroughly discuss and reflect on what we are doing. In the everyday working practice there is hardly time to do so.”*

*Stephane Michell: “writing requires craft. Craft to understand how to better write, to understand structure, to comprehend that screenwriting is both solitary confinement and a team sport once the producer and the director hop on board. Craft to learn how to protect yet forget her ego. And then, craft to understand how to sell her project.”*

*Isabelle Fauvel: “Training scriptwriters in Europe responds to a number of needs:*  
*-the need to increase the professionalism of the activity.*  
*-the need for new generations of directors to find “writer alter-egos”, something that in a country like France for instance is a must. Although some of the directors do not have the will to write themselves, they are almost forced to do so by the current system.*  
*-the need to create an environment of communication, since writing is a very solitary job.”*

*Antonio Saura: “Training can/must play an important role in two areas:*  
*-by helping the producers guide the talent towards the achievable goal (i.e. the making of the film). This can be done exposing the developing team to all sort of information, which should include, among others, an awareness of the trends of the industry, and awareness of the marketing needed for the work.*  
*-by helping the producer find the financial partners for the project.”*

There was a feeling that writers lack information about the industry or means to have access to that information.

*Stephane Mitchell: "I, the writer, must understand not the industry, but the different needs and wants of the people who pay me (sometimes) : some directors/ producers beat the war drum, want to compete with Hollywood or France, and so I must master Dramatica, shake hands with McKee, recite "the hero's journey" etc.... Some others are guerilla filmmakers: there's no money, no budget, they're "auteurs" and so I must understand that dramaturgy means squat to them, that dialogue must be poetic, that scripts are a nuisance, that sets and props will be too expensive. Then there's the TV producers who wants to appeal to the old and young and plain and cool. So I must understand that I have to write a local story with universal appeal which must please, yet must not alienate anybody..."*

## **2- On the issue of what training programme for Europe**

There is a clear recognition on the advance made in Europe in the last 15 years regarding the availability of training for the writers. Some very high quality training has emerged, both in the public and in the private sector. But there has also been a proliferation of not so good courses. The confusion in some countries is such, that some participants in the forum proposed to have a mechanism to measure the quality of the different courses.

In recent years a lot of training programmes for professional screenwriters have emerged in Europe. This is very confusing for potential participants, because it is hard to differentiate between programs. Apart from that, training programmes are more and more competing with each other for participants. The entrance level has therefore gone down.

There is some perception that it is not clear what purpose some of the existing programs serve: are they oriented at beginners?, at professionals? Are they aimed at participants with a project under development?

There is also agreement in another matter: Training programmes have to accept participants that can afford to pay the fee, rather than looking at the quality of their project. Therefore, the proliferation of offer has not brought better quality, as the advocates of free market would have guessed, but, on the contrary, the rationalisation of expenditure imposed by the competition has resulted in poorer quality of teaching. Some suggest that the training in pan-European programs should be totally free, thus allowing the training programs to select the participants in the light of their capacities, and therefore render a better service to the industry.

*Christian Routh: "There is indeed much more training available than 20 or even 10 years ago, but it certainly lacks a coherent European co-ordination, & is increasingly confusing for applicants, faced with a bewildering array of courses that are hard to distinguish from one another. One effect of this is that courses are*

*forced, somewhat artificially, to be in competition with each other for applicants. Given the harsh reality that very few of the courses are free, as one might wish them to be in an ideal world, courses are obliged to accept applicants who can afford to go on them, rather than necessarily finding the best ones. I don't think anyone in training can put their hand on their heart and say that the quality of applicant has steadily improved over this time. The reality is that the entrance level barrier has gone down, not up, even though the knowledge of the craft of screenwriting is undoubtedly more widespread"*

The issue of what training for what territory in Europe has also emerged:

*Eva Evangelakou: "There is a hugely developed northern European audiovisual industry, a developing one for the rest of the EU countries and an emerging one for countries like Greece. Collaboration amongst unequal partners can only be stipulated and hence not beneficial. The, by all means necessary, EU training for screenwriters should firstly bring most trainees to an even level and then work towards the amalgamation of common experiences and goals"*

The issue of what training to provide links with the realities of the different nations of Europe in a way that can not be avoided when discussing training programs.

Either if we discuss training in cinema, where the realities of the box office in the different nations, as well as the budgetary limitations of the national films in a way determine the type of narrative; or in television, where the demands of the audience somehow dictates the demands on the authors.

*Antonio Saura: "There is not such a thing as "European audiovisual industry". We have the national industries of each territory. But in order to survive the always changing world of offer and demand in the audiovisual, this should change. The EU has a duty to offer ways so circulation of works and collaboration among the nations in Europe take place. It is the EU duty to transform the national into pan-European.*

*In this sense, training in writing and development should insist in the need for pan-European analysis of the projects: bearing in mind the national peculiarities, and helping the circulation of different ideas."*

*Patrick Cattrysse : "I very much agree. Interesting concepts here are "national peculiarities" and "different ideas". My feeling is that up till now, discourse has been too "global". I compare with our discourse on "culture": "our" culture vs. "their" culture. Hence "European" cinema vs. "American" or "Hollywood" cinema. What is specific exactly? What common? Is a simple sentence "Are you hungry" specific to the English language? It is probably to the extent that only people speaking English can understand it. It is not for example in the way it distinguishes between the question and affirmative form (inverting subject and verb). And I have not commented here on the content of that sentence. Are stories specific for what they tell? Or for the way they tell the story? Or both? "*

In this sense, the issue of language acquires a considerable dimension in Europe, since most of the writers refuse to write in any other language but their own. This affects the design of training courses in the less advanced territories for lack of trainers, and limits the development of pan-European programs. Hence the importance of translation in this type of programs.

### 3- On the issues of methodology and content

There is a clear consensus on not fixing a single method of training. This is not surprising since there is no proven method in an industry where there is no proven recipe for success.

*Christian Routh: "Concerning methodology, I do not believe it is useful to be rigid about any particular method of training, though it is certainly useful for trainers to be knowledgeable about the various different schools of thought, as long as they are not blinkered about them. In my view the only methodology one should apply to a screenwriting course is that it is market-oriented."*

But there is also a clear consensus that the quality of the training should be judged or evaluated, in order to protect the users from wrongdoing. In this sense, two key factors were identified:

- Selection criteria: It was perceived that programs must be able to select the better applicants in the light of their creative capacities, and not in the light of a need to cover a budget.

*Nicholas Proferes: "Of course we must first choose participants. How do we do that? A simple treatment of no more than ten pages can give us a very good clue as to the potential for a cinematic story. It would then be up to us to help craft that story into a screenplay."*

*Christian Routh: "Free courses would certainly enable us to attract the highest quality talent, but there needs to be a huge change in the thinking of corporate sponsorship and state subsidy for this to be a realistic proposal, especially in southern Europe." "It is desirable to encourage promising writers from other mediums to attend screenwriting courses (e.g. novelists and theatre writers)."*

- credit or final evaluation- Having received training should serve as a "stamp" or "certify" of quality and therefore the programs must be responsible for the quality of the former student.

*Giovanni Robbiano: "... it should be easier (for anyone willing to learn) to pick the right people and determine a number of solid, certified institutions. - Our access should be easier as well, Media serves a limited number of candidates, therefore its influence is important but not*

*decisive. On this behalf promoting, sharing and circulate both brand and ideas should be DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED, it is not (only) that I want to tour Europe, the problem is that I don't know my fellow partners, what they do, who they work with. One result of this would be in a limited number of years the development of projects that are not just the usual co-production fairy tale, but are promoted by real partners and may develop ultimately a sense of European cinema (or tv)."*

*Nicholas Proferes: "TEST has to take the bull by the horns, and rate the various programs. One criteria would be in results -- the films made. Rating would weed out those programs that are deficient."*

Although no method of training was favoured, there is a recurrent one that is always mentioned: the combination writing/development.

*Isabelle Fauvel: "In my opinion the best way to transmit writing skills is through working with real projects that must be that of the students. This way you combine both: training and development."*

Those programs, created around Media I in the early 1990's have proven their worth. A new generation, more specialised, is sort of being asked for. Although there is no clear definition of what this program should look like, except for the fact that it must be a medium term program that combines different approaches of training, but asks for the presential participation of writer, producer and/or director.

*Tom Abrams: "One way to help solve the problem of improving a writer's ability, education and understanding of the needs of his profession is also to better educate the PRODUCERS. There are lots of training programs for writers -- and okay, maybe their success or methods are suspect -- but there are few training programs for producers and very little of that training is "creative" (dealing with how to understand story and more importantly, work with writers.) I think that by putting producers INTO workshops WITH writers would go a long way toward educating both partners creatively and maybe more importantly, make both partners understand the needs of the other occupation. At worse, writers see producers as an enemy whose bottom line is the dollar or euro or the peseta, and producers see writers as arrogant idiots with their heads in the clouds. Putting these two professionals together in training programs could help to some extent. (Then, of course, it's an issue as to what is the right training program and what do they "teach".)"*

Workshops have also been mentioned, either as long term development programs, or as shorter four-day meetings.

*Tony Macnabb: "Workshops can be a cost-effective way for broadcasters or production companies to develop promising projects - depending on how they are organised. PILOTS, which uses a one-to-one approach, has fulfilled this role with some success. It might be worth exploring funding structures, which split the cost*

*between the TV/Film Company, local arts funding organisations and the writer/producer teams. If a broadcaster runs a training scheme, they might be willing to out-source parts of it."*

The details of the day to day organisation of the work have not been addressed in this forum. Nevertheless, mention to time and access to the materials has been recurrent. On the relationship between the student and the teacher/adviser, there is agreement that the materials must be received as early as possible.

*Nicholas Proferes: "Much can be accomplished via e-mail, and in fact, can be preferable. To have a hard copy of a completed script before me gives me more time to come up with solutions and offer detailed notes... The biggest problem that I see is lack of imagination in the participants. Stories are weak, or non-existent. Face to face meetings would be most profitable if they were limited to "inventing the story". Concocting in a group with guidance from the trainer can be very helpful. In other words, more talking the story in the face to face. Let the writing take place once the story is gotten out."*

On the issue of who should train, there was no strong declaration. What emerges is the notion that professionals should be an important part of any training initiative (as opposed to "non professionals or university teachers"). Those professionals should be not only writers or script editors, but include other members of the industry.

*Tony Macnabb: "it is invaluable to incorporate contributions from producers, TV execs, actors, agents and directors in courses."*

Trainers must also be trained to keep up with the evolution of the industry. Although the craft of writing does not change considerably with the pass of time, the conditions of the industry, and hence the demands it imposes in the writers do change dramatically from year to year. It is therefore considered important to keep abreast of those developments.

On content, there was an overall agreement that training, whatever form it takes, when addressed to the writer, must help develop the talent, and help the creator find the better way to tell the story he/she wants to tell. In this sense, there was not a clear consensus on how this must be achieved, but there was a strong sense that it is achievable, and that the good programs are successful on doing it.

*Stephane Mitchell: "Training programs should train writers to better their craft, and to understand the language of the producer and the director. It should not teach them what to write about, it should not scare them about what the industry want or doesn't want."*

Tutors and producers agreed that the experience of writing for a living is far different than that what most writing courses teach: writers lack understanding of the industry and there should be more understanding between writers and



producers. Emphasis was placed in that screenwriters especially need to learn is how to deal with critique and how to work in teams.

*Isabelle Fauvel: "It is important to transmit a sense of the narrative structure, a notion of rhythm as the story unfolds. It is also important to guide the students towards an analytical and critical approach of their writing work, so they can accept the comments and corrections of their work, in order to improve their screenplays."*

Participants in the forum said that writers have the idea that creativity and commercial demands can not go together: the result is a vast number of products that are impossible to finance, and hence do not fulfil the objective of a screenplay which is to be turned into a film or a TV program. Or, when financed, are not worth watching for lack of originality, or capacity to communicate.

*Giovanni Robbiano: "The problem, at least here in Italy but I guess around Europe, is the idea that there is a gap between quality and market, I mean the strict belief that there is no possible area between the two."*

One very strong issue that emerged regarding content and the different programs was the need of a co-ordination among the existing offer of training. Continuous mentions to the "proliferation of programs", the "excess of offer", or the "impossibility to distinguish the good from the bad" were made in most contributions. In this sense, two areas of co-ordination were suggested:

- A certain type of "observatory" of the existing programs, both in the national and pan-European level, to identify the programs and measure their quality. One contributor suggested to focus in the results as a way to measure the quality. But this prompted immediately the reaction that "education should not be linked with instant results", in the sense that "we can not force all training programs to select only the projects that are going to be made, rejecting those presented by talented people, but not susceptible to be done in a determined moment of the industry of a given country".
- A certain type of office or program to co-ordinate the existing offer to provide a service to the users in a pan European way.

Overall, the issue of evaluation of the programs by results remained open, but the agreement that it is important to provide help and advise to the user was also strong.

#### **4- In the area of the relationship between the training programs and the industry**

It seems clear that the industry appreciates the work of the training programs. But there is consensus that the industry will support primarily those programs that yield concrete results.

The industry needs trained writers capable of generating the consumer product of the future. And writers need an industry capable of passing the information to them in a way that allows them to achieve the creative goals.

Partly due to a tradition in Europe that has cultivated the separation between creators and producers, or due to a lack of willingness from the producers to understand the needs of the creators, the perception among the members of the forum was that the rift between producers and writers is far from being settled.

In this sense, training was considered fundamental both for writers and producers.

*Isabelle Fauvel: "If the programme integrates producer and writer together there is a good and unique way of really focusing on the project, with the help of professionals who can provide the necessary advice which this binomial can react to. This way they learn to work in teams."*

*Michel Gaztambide: "The training of screenwriters should be accompanied by training aimed at directors and producers that accept and understand the need and importance of working together with screenwriters. They should know how to collaborate."*

*Claes Lillieborg: "The training has to work both ways. I would say that it is very important to higher the level of competence in all fields as to directors, producers, decision makers at TV, commissioning editors, dramaturgists, readers etc. etc."*

But in an industry that is traditionally so short of money, investment in training and in supporting new talent is risky. Hence that the focus in the support of training should be linked to the results of this training.

*Steve Solot (MPA): "The MPA focus on screenwriting training is inherently linked to the real potential of getting the writer's work onto the screen. The MPA member companies are seriously interested in identifying "filmable" screenplays, which has been a formidable task in our region. Thus our most successful Workshop model used in Latin America includes a direct link to producers (MPA and others, and is often combined with a competition."..." Our mandate is to contribute to training of writers with the specific purpose of leading to production of their work. Since we are not equipped to provide the technical training for writers to learn their trade from scratch, we rely on film schools and other basic training to prepare them before they participate in our workshops as professionals."*

There is a perceived gap between the demands of the industry and what the training programs are offering now. How to bridge that gap was perceived as being the task of programs such as TEST. Suggestions were given as to create a type of "Michelin guide" of training programs, to help users both ends (students and producers) to identify the best programs for each demand.

Again, the suggestion around the idea of creating a permanent observatory that could pass information in all different levels was considered a useful tool for the producers when looking for the right talent.

But what permeated some of the debate was whether the European industry was willing to commit to contribute to the funding of some of the programs. In this sense, the debate was far from closed.

*Christian Routh: "I hope that in the future we will be able to develop closer links with the industry by persuading successful commercial production companies of the benefits of funding the actual courses directly themselves. In this way, one could have 'First Look' deals with the course sponsors on the material generated at the courses, in the same way that large studios do with independent producers. The trouble is that we don't really have large European films studios (or whenever it seems that we are about to, they go bust). What we do have though, are large, powerful, and rich broadcasters, who do not do enough for training, or the film industry in general, come to that. We need to persuade them to become more directly involved in the training of screenwriting, with the carrot of having first option on new talent to attract them. I have always been puzzled as to why the major European broadcasters have not been more closely involved in agencies such as the MEDIA Programme. Surely a closer collaboration between them would be of tremendous benefit to the business of training both film and programme makers, and it would be mutually beneficial?"*

## EPILOGUE

What has emerged from this two months of open forum is that the debate is open and active. There is a vast amount of curiosity about the development of better forms of training in screenwriting, and a willingness to share the experience.

But this willingness must be co-ordinated if results are to be obtained.

There is also some degree of fear from the part of some training institutions that perceive this sharing of information as a form of aggression. This should never be the case. As most of the participants stated, there should be no imposition on methodology or content. But there is a perception that a certain degree of overview of the results of the training should be exercised.

It is very clear that producers should be stimulated to participate in creative programs, and writers should be open to learn more about the conditions of the industry. Both activities must be done in a clear understanding that writing is a creative process that need nurturing and care. It is clear that one can train people, but talent- and more specifically, talent that adapts to a given moment of the development of an industry (which is what yields economic success in this business) -, is very rear and must be helped.