Tools for European Screenwriters' Training



Proposed by





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Training Professional European Screenwriters The Views of the Trainers

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1. Introduction

A great number of training programmes aimed at professional screenwriters has emerged in Europe in the past fifteen years. Often these training programmes combine the training of general writing skills with the development of projects for the screen. TEST (Tools for European Screenwriters' Training) aims at improving the competence of trainers working in these programmes by launching a platform that will allow to reflect on which are the best practices in screenwriters' training, to exchange methodologies and create a network of European screenwriters' trainers.

To improve the training of professional screenwriters in Europe more information is needed than is available for the time being. One step to reveal this information is to collect relevant and comparable data about the views of the "key agents" in these training programmes: the script consultants or script doctors, experienced screenwriters that work as tutors and screenwriting trainers.

This report presents the results of a questionnaire aimed at the trainers of professional European screenwriters. The scope of this research is limited to trainers working in training programmes that are oriented to fiction and combine training and development. Described is who the trainers are, what they do and how they perceive the impact of their work. Apart from that we asked for their views concerning the interplay between training and the industry, about the European dimension in training and about the evolution of the training/ development programmes in the next years. Our thanks go out to the trainers who made time to answer our questions.

This research is one of the tools elaborated in the framework of TEST (Tools for European Screenwriters' Training) and was carried out during the last months of 2004. Separately from this study aimed at trainers, TEST sent out another questionnaire aimed at training programme managers.

TEST is an initiative proposed by FIA, Foundation for Audiovisual Research based in Spain and FOCAL, foundation for professional training in cinema and audiovisual media (Switzerland) with the support of the MEDIA Programme of the EU, which counts on the academic support of SOURCES 2, PAL, ECAM and ESCAC. The views represented here are not necessarily shared by these institutions. More information about TEST can be found on our website (www.test-online.org) or by email (test@uimp.es).

2. Methodology

To understand the views of the trainers of professional European screenwriters we chose to distribute a questionnaire by email. The use of standardised questions makes it easy to compare answers. Surveys serve to describe the characteristics of a large population, allowing generalisation of the results.

The first drafts of the questionnaire were based on MEDIA's *Where to be trained in Europe guide 2004¹* and the consultation of the websites of European training institutions. Special attention was paid to the description of training methodologies and tools. The publication *Scriptwriting training and research; some considerations* by Patrick Cattrysse² served as inspiration for the questions about professional and didactical experiences of trainers. Other articles, for example *New challenges in European screenwriter training* by Joan Alvarez (2004) and 2 or 3 things I know about her; discussing the training of professional European screenwriters by Arjen van Dalen (2004)³, served as background information.

External experts with large experience in the European audiovisual industry made suggestions to improve these first drafts. Furthermore, forty trainers and training programme managers discussed the questionnaire during the TEST seminar that took place in Valencia in June 2004. Using these comments, FIA, FOCAL and PAL came to the final version of the questionnaire, which can be found in annex A. The total number of questions is forty, including both open-and close ended questions.

The questionnaire is aimed at trainers who work in training programmes for professional European screenwriters. It was difficult to contact these people as they are not united in a network. To contact these trainers we depended on the co-operation of the training programmes they work for. Of the institutions contacted ten agreed to co-operate. Some institutions did not allow us to contact their tutors because 'that did not fall within their policy of a business-related company' (they did not want to volunteer their efforts). Trainers often work or have worked for different training institutes. Therefore, we think the tutors contacted reflect a large part of the European training spectrum.

The trainers who responded are working or have worked for 18 different European training institutes or programmes: Conservatoire Européen d'Écriture Audiovisuelle, Drehbuchforum Wien, Equinoxe, Fundación para la Investigación del Audiovisual, La Fémis, Flanders Script Academy, FOCAL, Maurits Binger Film Institute, Master School Drehbuch, Mediterranean Film Institute, Norsk Forening for Utviklingsforskning, nordmedia, Performing Arts Labs, Pilots, La Poudrière, Pygmalion, Sources2 and Step by Step.⁴ These training programmes are located in ten European countries, including four countries with

¹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/media/forma_en.html

² Patrick Cattrysse (2003) <u>Scriptwriting: training & research; some considerations</u>. In E-View. [WWW-document] Url: http://comcom.uvt.nl/e-view/04-1/cattrijsse

³ These articles can be found in TEST newsletter 1, which can be downloaded following this link: http://www.test-online.org/newsletter/index.html

⁴ Only included are training programmes aimed at professional screenwriters that work through projects in development. Two- or three- year master programs and film schools are not included.

a big film industry (France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom). Also represented are countries with a lower production capacity or a restricted linguistic area, like Switzerland, Holland or Greece.

We sent out questionnaires to 73 trainers.⁵ Two versions of the questionnaire were available, one in English and one in French. Eventually, after two reminders, 32 were completed. From the three institutions that preferred to carry out the distribution of the questionnaire themselves, ten trainers filled it in, which brought the total number of respondents to 42.

In the analysis we combined quantitative and qualitative methods. The open questions were analyzed by categorizing statements, looking at differences and similarities in the answers. While doing this we have tried to stay as close to the original questions as possible. Of two questionnaires only the open questions could be read. These were included in the analysis.

⁵ The actual population might be a little smaller. Some of the trainers who did not respond to the questionnaire informed us that they felt they did not belong to the target group, for example because they are training documentary writing.

3. Results

The results of this questionnaire aimed at the trainers of professional European screenwriters are presented in four sections. The first section deals with the profile of the trainers. The second section focuses on what they do when they train. The impact of their work is described in the third section. The final section deals with views about the relationship between training programmes and the industry, training in Europe and possible ways ahead for the future.

Who they are

Respondents were asked what term they use when they refer to their profession within screenwriters' training/development programmes. It is clear that there is not one single term to describe this. Most used is the term *experienced screenwriter as tutor, mentor* (22 times), followed by *script consultant* (21) and *screenwriting trainer* (16 times). Germans use the term *dramaturg* to describe their profession. Among the respondents there was one pitching expert.

When we talk about the expertise of people involved in education or training, we can differentiate between two kinds of knowledge: content expertise (knowledge about the subject) and didactical expertise (knowledge about how to pass on this knowledge to the trainees).⁶ The use of the term *experienced screenwriter as tutor* reveals that content expertise is clearly dealt with. Apart from one respondent, all tutors have experience as a professional screenwriter or in another function within the film production process. "*I make a living screenwriting*", "*I have written scripts for five films and one TV movie*", "*Thirty years of experience as a script editor/producer in UK TV industry*" etc.

Most trainers seem to learn how to train from practice. Only 33 % of the respondents have followed special training on how to teach or how to transmit skills (box 1). Courses mentioned include both the training of general communication or training skills and *applied didactics*: training in a specific screenwriting method (for example *Frank Daniel*) and train-the-trainer courses specially aimed at script consultants. 61 per cent of respondents said they would be interested in training of trainers: improving their teaching skills, sharing professional experiences with colleagues and learning how to guide writers' creativity (box 2).

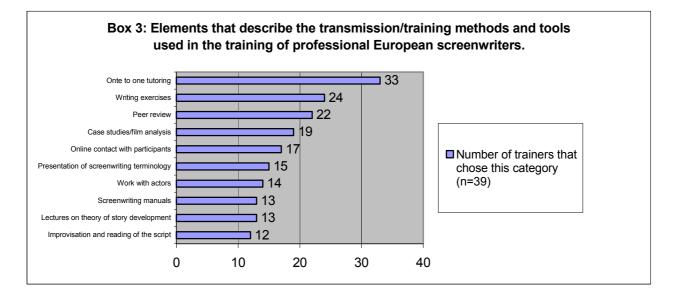
Box 1: Did y	you follow a	a specific t	raining on teaching/transmitting skills? (n = 39)
Yes	13	33%	
No	25	64%	
Other	1	3%	
	•		ing of trainers? (n = 38)
Yes	23	61%	
No	13	34%	
Other	2	5%	

⁶ According to Patrick Cattrysse (2003, p. 9). <u>Scriptwriting: training & research: some considerations</u>. In E-View. [WWW-document] Url: http://comcom.uvt.nl/e-view/04-1/cattrijsse

The trainers of European screenwriters can roughly be divided in two groups when referring to their experience (number of programs they have worked for; over how many days and years). For the first group training absorbs a huge part of their professional time. They have worked for a large number of programmes, during a number of days that is *"impossible to count"*. These tutors are often also involved in initial training in film schools or screenwriting master studies. For the second group of respondents training is more occasional. They work for one or two development programs a year, which occupies about two to three weeks of their time. They often work for the same programme over a number of years. Most tutors get involved in training through their network, personal contacts or by invitation.

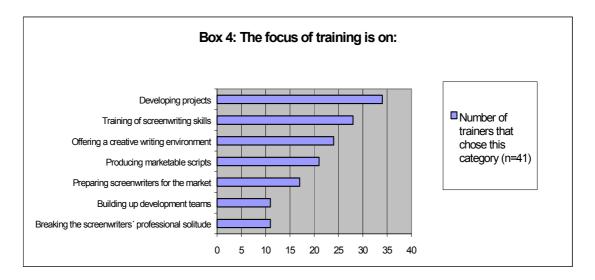
What they do

We asked the respondents to mark the training methods and tools that they use when training professional European screenwriters. The categories that were mentioned more that ten times can be found in box 3.



The methods and tools used include both practical work on the script (one to one tutoring, improvisation and reading of the script, online contact and work with actors) and the transmission of theoretical knowledge (lectures, presentation of screenwriting terminology, the use of manuals, case studies/film analysis). 21 respondents (54 %) said that a specific method, pedagogy, philosophy or spirit inspired their training, against 18 (46 %) that did not. Mentioned were "*inspiring*" screenwriting trainers like Frank Daniel, Linda Seger, Chris Vogler or Yves Lavandier. Other spirits are for example "*focusing on the human elements of story*", "*the market place*", "*finding the author within the script*".

To describe the focus of their transmission/training method, tutors were asked to mark five fields that they think correspond to their situation. The categories that were chosen more than ten times can be found in box 4. The two categories that were mentioned most show that trainers aim at combining development and training and do not seem to place one high above the other. This could also be seen in the combination of practical and more theoretical methods and tools used. The other three categories among the five mentioned most reveal a double focus in another area: training wants to offer a *creative* writing environment and at the same time produce *marketable* scripts. Other elements that seem to be important in the training of European professional screenwriters is teamwork: 'breaking the screenwriters' professional solitude' (chosen 11 times) and 'building up development teams' (11 times).



We asked respondents if they have noticed an evolution in the projects that are presented.⁷ Half of the trainers that have more than five years experience answered "Yes" and the other half "No". Among the changes mentioned were more comedy, more awareness of genre and interest in engaging larger audiences. One respondent perceived younger screenwriters as more market oriented.

70 % of the respondents think training should not be free of charge. The most important reason to charge a writer is that it raises his commitment. "*If it is free some people lose their motivation.*", "*Sometimes payments separate those who are really committed.*" According to the trainers participation fees should be reasonable and grants should be available for people who can not afford to participate. Some respondents think that charging writers to participate is wrong, because "participants should be chosen on merit, not on wallet."

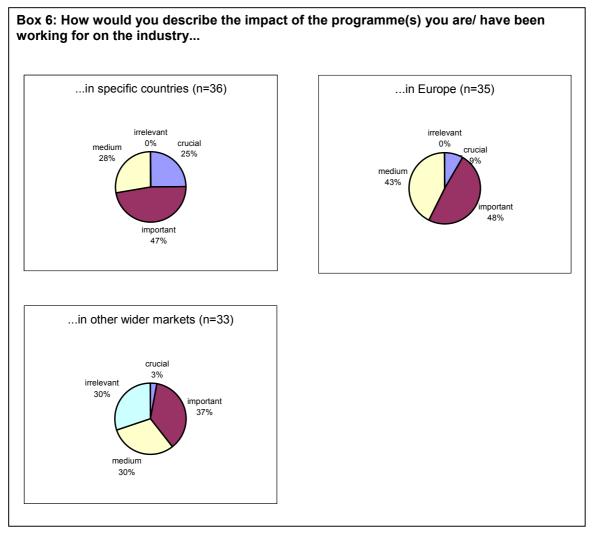
Box 5: At what moment do you like to enter a project´s development? (n = 38)				
Treatment	22 1	times	chosen	
Synopsis	19	"	"	
Script	17	"	"	
Any point/depends on project	5	"	"	
First idea	4	"	"	

⁷ Only the answers of trainers that have been involved in training for over five years were analysed.

Two thirds of the respondents want to be involved in the selection of projects. There is no clear preference regarding the moment to enter the development process of a project (box 5).

The impact of their work

The trainers of professional European screenwriters described the impact of the programme(s) they have been working for. They described the impact on industries in specific countries, in Europe and on wider markets (see box 6).



As expected, the impact was perceived as most important in specific countries. Especially in countries with a lower production capacity and a restricted linguistic area (for example Greece, Hungary or Turkey) training programmes were considered of crucial influence. One respondent considered training programmes *"as vital for the health and diversity of European feature films."* Many respondents seem to share this view: 56 % of the respondents considered the impact of training on European industries as important or crucial. All respondents think training programmes have a medium to crucial impact in specific countries and in Europe. On the other hand, in other wider markets 30 % considered the impact irrelevant. Respondents use different ways to describe the impact of their training activities. Some focus on the projects that they have worked on and have actually been produced: "35 % of films developed in our workshop get made", others focus on the improvement of skills: "I am in favour of writer based training rather than project based. We build writers, we help them on the script, but take credit for everything they do in the future." Someone evaluated the impact of his work positively, although projects hardly ever get produced. For him it is more important that writers who took part in training programmes often got work.

It is hard to give a number of projects developed in workshop that actually get produced. Trainers often do not keep track or are confronted with many projects over the years. Apart from that it sometimes takes up to six years for a project to develop from its first idea to the actual film.

Their views

We asked the trainers of professional European screenwriters about their views on the interaction between training programmes and film industries, about the European elements in training and about the evolution of the training/development in the next years.

Interaction between training and industries

Box 7: Do yo closer relate		European film industry and training programmes should be
Yes	29	74 %
No	8	21 %
Other	2	5 %

74 % of the trainers of professional European screenwriters think European film industries and training programmes should be related more closely (box 7). Four answers kept reappearing when respondents explained how:

-"Producers and script executives should come to the course";

-"Industries should help pay the costs of training";

-"Training programmes can help raise the status of professional screenwriters and increase respect for the development process";

-"There should be more discussion and interchange of ideas: industry closes itself away from training, they never really tell what they expect."

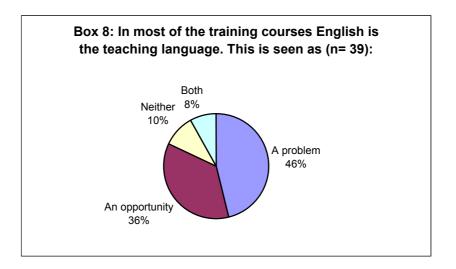
Some trainers warn that a closer relation between training programmes and industries could have negative consequences. They warn that industry demands could cannibalize and ruin cinematic expression.

Respondents were asked what they thought were the missing elements in screenwriters' training/development programmes compared to industry demands. Someone answered that to improve training, industry should make the first step and better define its needs. One important element seems to be *"lack of profound knowledge of market-place realities"*. Writers need to better understand that "screenwriting is an incomplete art": they have to understand

what happens to the script once it is finished and should know how actors, directors, music scores etc. work. Therefore it is important to incorporate advice from industry professionals in the training programmes as a *"reality check"*. Another advice was to focus on teaching writers how to work collaboratively.

Training and Europe

Only 38 % of the trainers of professional European screenwriters feel there is a need for one shared (European) screenwriting terminology. 62 % does not see this need. One respondent motivated his choice as follows: "Script development is not a science. Everyone has to define his specific use of terminology at the beginning of the development process."



According to the mid-term evaluation of MEDIA training, in most courses English was the teaching language.⁸ 46 % of the respondents sees this as a problem, 36 % as an opportunity (see box 8). When interpreting these results it is important to note that most respondents to the questionnaire were native English speakers or can express themselves fluently. Of the eight respondents that answered the French version of the questionnaire six saw the dominance of English as a problem.

The dominance of English in training is seen as a problem because it is difficult to write in a language that is not yours. Nuance may be lost. Apart from that writers want to write about their own culture in their own language: *"If we support diversity of stories and cultural experience, we can not ignore the diversity of language."* The use of translators is therefore important. Offering training in English excludes some potential participants. *"Training in English satisfies the small countries, the United Kingdom and Germany, but leaves Spain, France and Italy aside."*

Trainers who saw the dominance of English as an opportunity motivated their choice with the observation that it is a *reality*. According to them English is the global language, especially in the media business, and if you want to make a career in filmmaking in Europe you will have to speak it. The use of English

⁸ This report can be downloaded following this link:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/media/eval2_en.html

allows training programmes to incorporate participants from different countries. This enriches discussions and allows exchanging different views and experiences. One of the respondents chose an intermediate position that summarizes the discussion: "In European training it is crucial to have one language for instruction, but a writer should be allowed to write in his/her own language. "

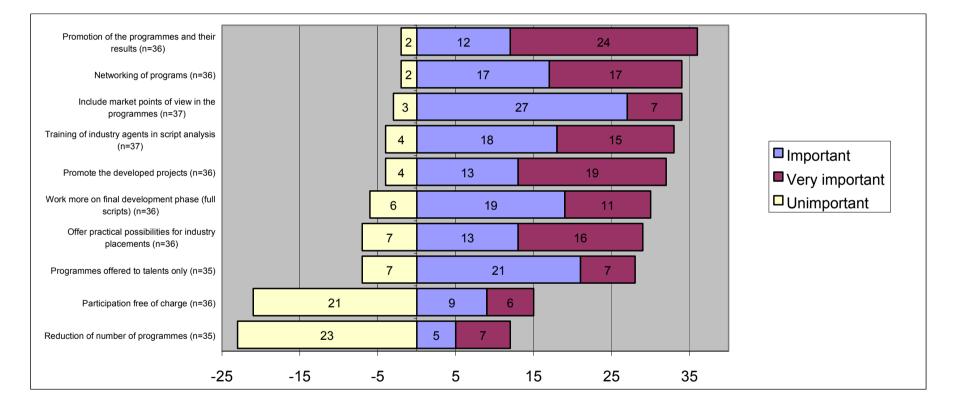
It was said that it is important to differentiate between training in different countries. Regions and their specific needs should be taken into account: *"there should be special, different attention to training in Mediterranean regions and countries that have recently entered the European Union."* Taking into account these needs would mean better co-ordination and more interactions between training programmes across borders. Interaction across borders is not yet a reality: *"I notice that training programmes in different countries are not really in touch with each other: for instance, there are three Balkan script development programmes (one in Serbia, one in Bosnia and one in Greece) and none are in touch."*

Future

We asked trainers about ten hypotheses regarding the evolution of the training/development programmes in the next year (see box 9). These hypotheses partly dealt with topics covered before, but also present new perspectives. The majority of respondents considered hypotheses that deal with a closer relation between training and the industry as (very) important. Networking of programmes is considered as important. A new view that is revealed here is the importance of promotion: programmes and their results, as well as the developed project should be placed in the spotlight.

The majority of respondents considered two possible developments as unimportant. They do not see the need to reduce the number of programmes. According to one respondent it is more important to differentiate the focus than to reduce the number of programs. One respondent believed in the free market logic: there is no need to bring down the number of programmes, because programmes that are not useful will eventually disappear anyway.

The disagreement with the idea of offering training free of charge is reaffirmed here.



Box 9: How do you quote the following hypotheses with regard to the evolution of the training/development programmes in the next years?

4. Discussion

In this report we described who the trainers of professional European screenwriters are, what they do, how they perceive the impact of their work and what their opinions are.

The trainers of professional European screenwriters, generally speaking, have large experience as professional screenwriters or in another function within the film production industry. They seem to teach without previous ordinate reflection on methodology: only one-third has followed special training on how to teach or how to transmit skills.

Training through projects under development seems to succeed in combining training and development, without placing too much emphasis on either of these two elements. Trainers aim to provide a creative writing environment and at the same time produce marketable scripts. 70 % think that training should not be free of charge for participants.

The impact of European training programmes on the industry is considered important or even crucial for specific countries, especially for countries with a lower production capacity. Impact is measured as number of projects that get developed the improvement of writing skills or the number of writers that get work after enrolling in a training programme.

74 % of the respondents think that training programmes and the industry should be related more closely. One of the missing elements in the training of professional European screenwriters compared to industry demands is the lack of knowledge of market realities. The dominance of English as a teaching language is mostly seen as an opportunity because it allows training writers from different countries together. On the other hand it is seen as a problem, because writing is preferably done in ones own language.

'Promotion of the training programmes and their results', 'including market points of view' and 'networking between programmes' are considered as (very) important by the largest number or respondents.

This questionnaire is not an end in itself. The statistics described here mainly give basic information. A next step would be to exchange opinions on the basis of these outcomes. In addition to the limitations that any questionnaire poses, there could be a qualitative method to further explore the topics covered here, for example case studies and interviews. An interesting follow up would be to find out how training programmes and their impact are perceived by market players like producers, heads of development and industry agents.

TEST will continue to provide a place for debate about the training of professional European screenwriters. 37 of the 42 respondents to the questionnaire stated that they want to be part of a network of screenwriters' trainers. This strengthens us in the thought that a platform like TEST is wanted.

ANNEX A: TEST QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CONSULTANTS

Dear Madam or Sir,

To fill out the questionnaire, please proceed as follows:

1. Save the questionnaire on your hard disk.

Open the document and answer the questions by writing in and ticking . You can tick the boxes by placing your mouse in the middle of the box and clicking the left mouse button.
 When you have answered all the questions, save the completed questionnaire.

4. Please return the completed questionnaire by email to <test@uimp.es> before 1st December 2004. Please attach your CV.

We assure you that all responses will be treated in strictest confidence. By participating in this questionnaire you will be making an important contribution to future planning to encourage best practice in audiovisual training and development.

For any questions, please contact Arjen under <test@uimp.es> Tel. +34 963 865 216, Fax +34 963 865 213.

CHAPTER 1. PROFESSIONAL AND DIDACTIC EXPERIENCE

- 1.1. Your name:
- 1.2. How do you name your profession within screenwriters' training/development programme?

Please tick the appropriate category/categories

- Script Doctor
 - Script Consultant
 - Screenwriting Trainer
 - Experienced Screenwriter as Tutor, Mentor

Other (specify):

- 1.3. In which screenwriters' training/development programme(s) have you been working until now?
- 1.4. How many days in total (more or less) have you been working within screenwriters' training/development programme(s) as consultant?
- 1.5. Over how many years?
- 1.6. How did you develop collaboration with this/these programs?
- 1.7. What experience do you have in professional screenwriting?
- 1.8. Did you follow a specific training on teaching/transmitting skills?
 Yes
 No

If yes, please write down the name or a one-line description of the course(s):

1.9. Are you interested in training of trainers?

□ Yes □ No

If yes, please explain shortly what could be relevant training topics (for example communication skills, teaching skills, sharing professional experience, etc.):

CHAPTER 2. TRANSMISSION METHODS AND TOOLS / SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

- 2.1. Is the focus of your transmission/training method more on:
 - Please mark five fields that you think correspond to your situation.
 - Training of screenwriting skills
 - Developing projects
 - Producing marketable scripts
 - Feeding the mainstream market
 - Feeding the niche/cinema d'auteur market
 - Offering a creative writing environment
 - Preparing screenwriters for the market
 - Taking over from the producers during the development period
 - Being a place of resistance against cinema fashion dominance
 - Offering a chance to difficult, controversial, unfashionable scripts
 - Building up development teams
 - Reinforcing the screenwriters' rights
 - Breaking the screenwriters' professional solitude
 - Other subjects (specify):
- 2.2. Which of the element(s) hereafter could describe your transmission/training method(s) and tool(s) for screenwriters?

Please tick the appropriate category/categories

- Writing exercises (synopsis, scenes, treatment, character biography)
- One to one tutoring
- Peer review (trainees receive feedback from other trainees)
- Presentation of screenwriting terminology
- Work with actors

- Screenplay sculptures
 - Screening of filmed scenes from scripts written by students
- Case studies of film / Film analysis (please write down the titles of the films used):
- Lectures on theory of story development
- Online contact with participants
 - Case studies of successful screenplays (please write down the titles of the scripts used):
 - Improvisation and reading of scripts
 - Training on project presentation, pitching
 - Screenwriting manuals (please write down the titles of the manuals used):
 - Other methods and tools:
 - Other documents:
- 2.3. Does a specific method, pedagogy, philosophy or spirit inspire your transmission/training method?
 - Yes
 - No

If yes, please describe it:

2.4. At what moment do you like to enter a project's development?

- Synopsis
- Treatment
- Script
- Other moment (specify):
- 2.5. Do you think the consultants must be involved in the selection of participants?
 - Yes
 - No

- 2.6. What are the most important criteria to select projects? *Please mark three categories*
 - Quality of the project
 - Biography / Talent of the screenwriter
 - Feasibility / Marketability of the project
 - Track record of the producer
 - Quality of the development team
 - Other criteria (specify):

CHAPTER 3. IMPACT OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES ON THE EUROPEAN AUDIOVISUAL INDUSTRY

- 3.1. How many projects (more or less) have been developed under your responsibility within screenwriters' training/development programme(s)?
- 3.2. As far as you know it, how many of these projects have been produced: As feature films? As TV movies? As other formats (*specify*)?
- 3.3. Did you notice an evolution in the type of projects getting into the programme(s) you are working/have been working for over the years (genres, budget, etc.)?

Yes
No

If yes please explain how:

3.4. Do you think taking in account demands of the industry frustrates the creative writing process?

Please tick the appropriate category/categories:

- Yes, always
 - Yes, sometimes
- No, rarely
 - No, never
- 3.5. How would you describe the impact of the programme(s) you are/have been working for on the industry?

Please tick the appropriate category/categories:

- 3.5.1 in specific countries?
 - irrelevant
 medium
 important
 crucial
- 3.5.2 in Europe?

- irrelevant medium
 - important
- crucial
- 3.5.3 <u>in other wider markets</u>?
 - important
 - crucial

Comments:

CHAPTER 4. PERSPECTIVES

4.1. Do you think the European film industry and training programmes should be closer related?
 No

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Yes (please explain how:

- 4.2. What do you think are the missing elements in screenwriters' training/development programmes compared to industry demands?
- 4.3. Do you consider training/development programmes should be free of charge for the participants?

Yes	
No No	
Please explain	shortly your position:

- 4.4. Do you think there is a need for one shared (European) screenwriting terminology?
 Yes
 No
- 4.5. According to the mid-term evaluation of the MEDIA training programmes in most of the training courses English was the teaching language. Do you see this:
 - as a problem?
 - an opportunity?

Please explain shortly your position:

4.6. How do you quote the following hypothesis with regard to the evolution of the training/development programmes in the next years?

Please tick one rubric (very important, important or unimportant) per line

Reduction of number of progra		
└ very important		
Programmes offered to talents		unimportant
 Include market points of view in 	·	_
very important		Unimportant
 Work more on final developme 		_
very important	important	unimportant
 Participation free of charge: 		
very important	□important	unimportant
 Promote the developed project 	ts:	
very important	□important	unimportant
 Offer practical possibilities for practical p	placements for screenwrite	rs in the industry:
very important	□important	unimportant
 Networking of the existing prog 	grammes:	
very important	□important	unimportant
 Promotion of the programmes 	and their results:	
very important	□important	unimportant
 Training of industry agents in s 	cript analysis:	
very important	□important	unimportant
 Others (if so specify): 		
very important	important	

Comments:

- 4.7 Are you in favour of a network of screenwriter trainers? ☐ Yes No
- 4.8 Would you like to be part of such a network?
 - Yes
 - No

If yes, you can leave your contact details and we will get in touch with you:

Could you help us with documents for our online library?

Documents about personal ways of teaching

 \square

- Reflection on transmission of shared professional experience
- Documents on pedagogic of teaching for creative writing
- Examples of exercises used during the training course for professional writers Examples of criteria used to determine qualities of professionalism in mentoring
- Examples of criteria used to determine qualities of profe

If yes, we will contact you to get the documents.

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