

FEDERATION OF SCOTTISH THEATRE/SCOTTISH SOCIETY OF PLAYWRIGHTS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE-LINES FOR THE COMMISSIONING OF A PLAY

for use by Playwrights, Directors and Producers.

(to be used in conjunction with the Minimum Terms Agreement between the Federation of Scottish Theatre and Scottish Society of Playwrights.)

The following is not intended to be prescriptive but a guide to the areas which a Writer and Director/Producer should be exploring. It is based on the assumption that the successful completion of a first and subsequent drafts of a script, and a creative rehearsal period are most likely to flow from a strong working relationship between Writer, Artistic Director and Director of the play. This in turn is most likely to result from a shared commitment to and discussion of the project from its earliest stages.

Whilst most of the following will already be common practice for producing theatres and writers in Scotland, the Federation of Scottish Theatre and the Scottish Society of Playwrights felt it was important to produce a check list of guidelines to promote good practice.

STAGE ONE

Communication and Establishing the Brief

Experience has shown that problems can be avoided if the Director/ Producer & Writer come to a common understanding of how the process will work and therefore at an early stage there are key areas for discussion.

The Producer should articulate their commissioning policy and their commitment to produce; it is important for the writer to understand the commissioning policy as defined by the organisation commissioning the work.

Where the Producer identifies particular aims of a project or particular restrictions, the Producer must communicate the nature of these to the writer and ensure that the Writer is supported in meeting these aims.

The Writer and Producer/Director should meet to discuss the brief in more detail. Topics for discussion may include:

- subject matter/theme
- length of play (the commissioning brief will determine the length of the play for the purposes of the contract i.e. a full length play or a shorter play)
- cast size
- set/venue/touring restrictions
- who the audience is likely to be
- working methods of writer and director (this is essential)

- other creative personnel who are/may be part of the process and how input/communication works
- writing schedule and deadlines (the writer should be realistic about when they will be doing the writing)
- rehearsal process (see STAGE THREE)
- future meetings and consultation

Additionally in relation to the contract the following topics should be discussed:

- fee and schedule of payments
- writing schedule and deadlines (see above)
- play title and billing
- PR obligations on writer

It is recommended that the commissioning brief should be written up by the Producer and appended to the contract.

Writers and Directors working on more than one play

While the Producer does not have the right to insist that a Writer should work exclusively for him at any one time, Writers should not take on too many commissions at any one time and jeopardise the quality of the work. Equally Directors working on more than one project should be aware of the commitment and support required by each Writer during the commissioning process.

STAGE TWO

Regular Communication

Changes to Brief or Delivery Schedule

Any future changes to the commissioning brief should be mutually agreed. Writers should give advance notice to the Producer if delivery schedules are not going to be met and a new schedule agreed. Any changes in circumstances which affect the script or the production should be communicated in writing.

Delivery Feedback and Development

The Producer should acknowledge delivery of drafts within a week and arrange a meeting to discuss its future development within a reasonable period of time. For most Writers feedback from the Director/Producer is essential for the next stage of the development of a script. A meeting should be followed by written confirmation by the Producer/Director of the discussion and agreed development.

Theatre is a collaborative artform and the Producer/Director should involve the writer as much as possible in the creative process of the production.

STAGE THREE

Agreement to Produce and The Rehearsal Process

It is recommended that Producers should not programme the production of the play until both Writer and Producer are happy that the script will be ready for production.

In advance of rehearsals starting the Director and Writer should discuss how they want the relationship to work and discuss rehearsal etiquette. Topics that might be discussed:

- how changes or cuts to script are agreed (e.g. outside the rehearsal room)
- intervention of the writer in the rehearsal room
- how the writer can contribute to the rehearsal process
- agreement to a series of meetings during the rehearsal process to iron out script problems

Disputes between Writers and Directors/Producers

If there is a dispute which is brought before the Scottish Society of Playwrights/Federation of Scottish Theatre Committee for conciliation whether these guidelines have been followed will be taken into account.

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Please contact either of the above organisations for further advice on commissioning a play or to discuss variations on the minimum terms agreement.