Directors UK calls for 50% of publicly funded films in the UK to be directed by women by 2020

Directors UK has today called on the film industry to take decisive action to tackle the issue of gender inequality among film directors in the UK. This comes off the back of a new report which shows that the figures for women film directors have not improved in ten years.

Directors UK, the professional association for British screen directors, is proposing a number of recommendations including calling for 50% of films backed by UK-based public funding bodies to be directed by women by 2020; amending the Film Tax Relief cultural test rules to take account of diversity, including gender equality; and an industry wide campaign to ensure gender equality.

The recommendations come in a Directors UK commissioned study “Cut Out Of The Picture - A study into Gender Inequality Amongst Directors within the UK Film Industry”, by Stephen Follows, which explores the factors affecting women directors, such as career progression, industry culture, budgets, genres, critics, audiences and public funding.

The report studied 2,591 UK films released over a ten-year period (2005-2014) and found that just 13.6% of working film directors in the last decade were women. The report also revealed that there has been no real improvement in prospects for women directors, with the percentage of films directed exclusively by women only increasing from 11.3% in 2004 to 11.9% in 2014.

Despite women making up 50.1% of all film students in the UK and 49.4% of new entrants in the film industry, only 27.2% of short films and 21.7% of publicly funded films studied were directed by women. As budgets rise fewer women are hired; just 16.1% of low budget films (under £500,000), 12.8% of mid-budget films (£1-£10million) and as little as 3.3% of big budget films (over £30million) were directed by women. This filtering effect has resulted in the disappearance of women directors at every level as they try to progress their careers.

Even publicly funded films, which were the best performing area of the industry, showed a dramatic fall in the percentage of films directed by women from 32.9% in 2008 to just 17% in 2014.

The study concludes that gender inequality is caused by unconscious bias stemming from systemic issues within the industry. These include:

- an absence of a regulatory system to monitor, report and enforce gender equality;
- no structured hiring and recruitment practices;
• the industry’s short-term focus leading to greater risk-aversion and greater reliance on the stereotype of the male director;
• the project-based production of films discouraging long-term thinking and preventing the use of positive HR practices.
• All of these have resulted in a vicious cycle which perpetuates and enforces the low number of women directors.

The study highlights that the scale of the gender disparity identified will only rectify itself if direct action is taken. Directors UK’s recommendations call on the industry to act together now.

Beryl Richards, Chair of Directors UK and Chair of Directors UK Gender Equality Group said, “It cannot be acceptable that in 2016 any industry with this level of inequality continues to go unchecked - not least the film industry that plays such an influential role in our economy, our society and our culture. The first step to tackling this is by understanding why these disparities are happening in the industry. With such comprehensive evidence we can now pinpoint and address the areas that need the most attention and focus on rectifying it. Our suggestion of a 50:50 split in public funding is something that has been achieved in other countries, such as Sweden. Equality of opportunity in UK film making is something we should all be working towards.”

Andrew Chowns, Chief Executive of Directors UK commented: “We are calling for strong action because we don’t believe that the situation will change without it. This report shows that women directors are limited and inhibited at every stage of their career – from making their first short films to working on big budget productions. Gender inequality must be tackled at every level by everyone involved in hiring and funding decisions, including directors themselves. The time for talking about low numbers has passed. Now it’s time for change.”

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Notes to Editors:
• DIRECTORS UK is the single voice of British screen directors representing the creative, economic and contractual interests of over 6,000 members – the overwhelming majority of working film and television directors in the UK. Directors UK campaigns for the rights, working conditions and status of directors in the industry and works closely with fellow organisations in the UK, Europe and around the world to represent directors’ rights and concerns. It also promotes excellence in the craft of direction both nationally and internationally, and champions change to the current landscape to create an equal opportunity industry for all.
• A PDF copy of the full report “Cut out of the Picture – A study of Gender Inequality Amongst Directors within the UK Film Industry” and further information can be found at www.directors.uk.com
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