

Development of feature films in Australia: A survey of producers, directors & writers

2003

This study investigates aspects of the development of Australian feature films based on a survey of 106 filmmakers (producers, directors and writers) from 68 films made between July 1999 and June 2002. The study was undertaken by the AFC, in collaboration with consultants Urbis Keys Young. It builds on some of the findings of the AFC's report *Development: A Study of Australian and International Funding and Practice in the Feature Film Industry* of November 2000.

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Background

What is 'development'?

The AFC's 2000 report *Development: A Study of Australian and International Funding and Practice in the Feature Film Industry*¹ made a key distinction between project development and practitioner development:

- **Project development** – central to both the 2000 report and this study – encompasses the evolution of projects from concept to screen. Development creates the architecture of the film, production is the construction stage, building on the work done in development, and marketing presents the film to the world.
- **Practitioner – or professional – development** encompasses the growth of a filmmaker's career from their first modest, inexpensive production or script to a major feature film.

The current study focuses particularly on project development.

Models of project development

The 2000 report also identified three typical models of project development, identified according to their geographical prevalence. Pathways to film production in this report should be understood in this context.

The 'Hollywood' model – essentially outcome-oriented and heavily reliant on a strong professional skill base.

In Hollywood, the process of selecting projects tends to begin with a decision by key people to work with each other. This will be followed by the choice of a strong idea for the project, or the acquisition of a promising script or the rights to a good story.

At any point, the studio can decide to give the project the green light. The Hollywood industry is distinguished by its ability to make early green light decisions, which fundamentally change the basis on which development proceeds.

The 'European' model – essentially a process of persistent refinement, with teams working solidly on drafts until a project is as good as it is likely to get, followed by attempts to obtain production finance.

In this model, the project selection process tends to begin with a strong idea or draft script being brought to a team of collaborators by one of its members, usually a writer or writer/director. The team then embarks on script development working together.

The 'Australian' model – essentially opportunistic, characterised by incremental steps and the establishment of 'holding positions' until production opportunities arise.

The project selection process in Australia generally focuses on a promising script, with the strength of the idea often less significant than the quality of the writing. In the Australian model the choice of a script tends to precede assembling a team, and the team may well comprise people who have not worked together before.

The current study indicates that a script-based model of development remains the primary pathway to production in Australia.

1. See www.afc.gov.au/downloads/policies/afc_develop.pdf

Key findings

- Most of the films (79 per cent) in the survey were reported to have been initiated by a filmmaker with a writing role. The script-based model of development remains the primary pathway to production in Australia.
- The average duration of feature film development (from first draft/treatment to pre-production) was three years and 11 months. This was less than the average figure presented in the AFC's 2000 Development Report (four years and 10 months), and closer to the report's suggested benchmark of three years.
- 64 per cent of respondents were content with the time spent on developing their film. On the other hand, 60 per cent of those whose project did not receive government development funding said their film would have benefited from more time in development, mainly in re-drafting and workshopping the script.
- 60 per cent of respondents said their film's development had been 'stop-start'. 72 per cent of these (43 per cent of all respondents) said the discontinuity of development had caused problems for the film.
- The average time spent on the script from first to final draft was three years and six months. Scripts went through an average of eight drafts.
- 63 per cent of the films in the survey had used a professional script editor, and just under half (49 per cent) had used actors to workshop the script. Where these exercises were carried out, they were widely felt by those surveyed to have been useful for the project.
- On average, it took producers one year and eight months to fully finance the film.
- Overall, 56 per cent of the films had received government development funding. Around a third did not apply for any development funding (35 per cent), while a small minority were unsuccessful in their applications (6 per cent).
- 64 per cent of respondents reported that non-government funds had been used for their film's development - mainly their own funds or personal loans (36 per cent) or assistance from a production company (20 per cent).
- Only 28 per cent of respondents felt the film they worked on had an adequate development budget. Inadequate development funding was more commonly reported by those without any government funding than those with government funding.
- Four in five respondents (79 per cent) undertook other work while their film was in development, with 42 per cent spending over half their time on this alternative work. Alternative sources of employment varied widely, with the most common being other feature scriptwriting or production, and television production.

Comparisons to development benchmarks

This table shows results obtained from this survey in the context of 'benchmarks' proposed by the AFC's 2000 report *Development: A Study of Australian and International Funding and Practice in the Feature Film Industry*, as well as values for those benchmarks at the end of the 1990s.

Aspect of film development	1999 value	Benchmark ¹	This survey
Average development time	4 years, 10 months	3 years	3 years, 11 months
Script development (first to final draft)	n.a.	n.a.	3 years, 6 months
Involvement of producers in development	n.a.	n.a.	2 years, 1 month
Time to finance the film (producers view)	n.a.	n.a.	1 year, 8 months
Percentage of features where the director, writer & producer are different	25% ²	At least 50%	37%
Government investment in feature film project development	\$2.69m (1999/00) ³	\$12m annually	\$3.02m (2001/02) ³

Notes: ¹ *Development: A Study of Australian and International Funding and Practice in the Feature Film Industry*, AFC, November 2000.

² AFC, 4-year average 1995/96 to 1998/99; see Prevalence of role overlap among writers, directors and producers on page 6

³ State and federal, from *Film Agency Funding in Australia*, AFC, 2004

n.a. not available

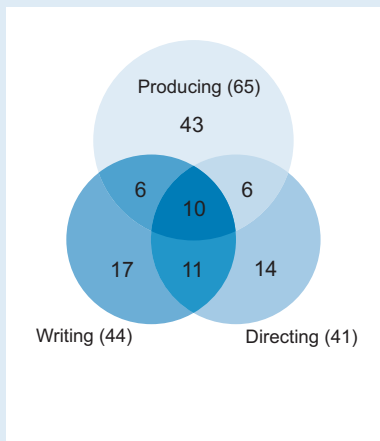
Methodology and sample

The sample for this study comprised producers, writers, directors who had worked on an Australian feature film with a budget of over \$1 million, produced during the three-year period between July 1999 and June 2002.

A total of 106 filmmakers representing 68 films (out of a possible 88 films) were interviewed over the telephone using a structured questionnaire. However, 107 film development 'experiences' have been included in the results (one respondent had worked on two different films), and for the sake of simplicity, this report will generally refer to 107 respondents.

The questionnaire covered six broad areas: respondent role and film type; project initiation; development; general finance; government finance; professional development and experience of the AFC. Telephone interviews were conducted by four AFC representatives who had a good understanding of the Australian film industry.

Respondents by production role



Most respondents (69 per cent) had a single creative role in the production of the film (ie producer, writer or director), with the remaining third (31 per cent) filling multiple roles. Overall, 65 respondents (61 per cent) had been involved in producing the film in question, 44 (41 per cent) in writing the script and 41 (40 per cent) in directing it.

There was less role overlap among the films in this study than the average for the six years to 2001/02. See also *Prevalence of role overlap among writers, directors and producers* on page 6.

Film genre

Most of the 68 films in the survey were dramas (46 per cent) or comedies (29 per cent). This appears to be characteristic of Australian films generally: 49 per cent of local titles shot over the past three years were dramas, and 29 per cent comedies.

Most films were based on an original idea (81 per cent) rather than an adaptation (19 per cent). There were no re-makes or sequels. In contrast, of the top 20 Australian box office films for 2003 (mostly Hollywood-produced), half were either re-makes or sequels.

Genre (n=68)	no.	%
Drama	31	46%
Comedy	20	29%
Thriller	7	10%
Action/Adventure	3	4%
Children's	3	4%
Musical	2	3%
Horror	1	1%
Science fiction	1	1%

Source: AFC

The development process

Project initiation

For most films (79 per cent) a writer was reported as the project's initiator, either alone (34 per cent), or in combination with other roles - with the director (21 per cent), the producer (7 per cent) or both (18 per cent). The director was reported as the sole initiator for 6 per cent of films and the producer for 7 per cent.

This is consistent with the findings of the AFC's 2000 Development Report: script-based development pathways, in which script choice precedes the formation of a creative team, remain the dominant mode.

Who initiated the project? (n=68 films)	no.	%
Producer alone	5	7%
Writer alone	23	34%
Director alone	4	6%
Producer-writer combination	5	7%
Producer-director combination	5	7%
Writer-director combination	14	21%
Combination of all three roles	12	18%
<i>Total writer involvement (any combination)</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>79%</i>
<i>Total producer involvement (any combination)</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>51%</i>
<i>Total director involvement (any combination)</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>40%</i>

Note: Combinations of roles cover a single individual taking more than one role, different individuals working together, and films where respondents working on the same film gave different answers.

Stages of involvement

Overall, 78 per cent of respondents had joined their project by the first draft stage, including virtually all (98 per cent) of participants with a writing role.

Producers tended to join the project later than directors, with 78 per cent of directors on board by the treatment stage, compared to 60 per cent of producers. More than a quarter (27 per cent) of producers joined the project at or after the second draft (including 8 per cent at the financing stage).

	Writer ¹		Director ¹		Producer ¹		Total	
	n=44	%	n=41	%	n=65	%	n=107	%
Initiation stage	41	93%	31	76%	35	54%	67	63%
Treatment	2	5%	1	2%	4	6%	5	5%
First draft	–	–	3	7%	9	14%	11	10%
Second or subsequent draft	1	2%	4	10%	10	15%	15	14%
Workshop	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Casting	–	–	–	–	1	2%	1	1%
Financing	–	–	–	–	5	8%	5	5%
Pre-production	–	–	–	–	1	2%	1	1%
Other ²	–	–	2	5%	–	–	2	2%

Notes: ¹ Includes any combination of roles

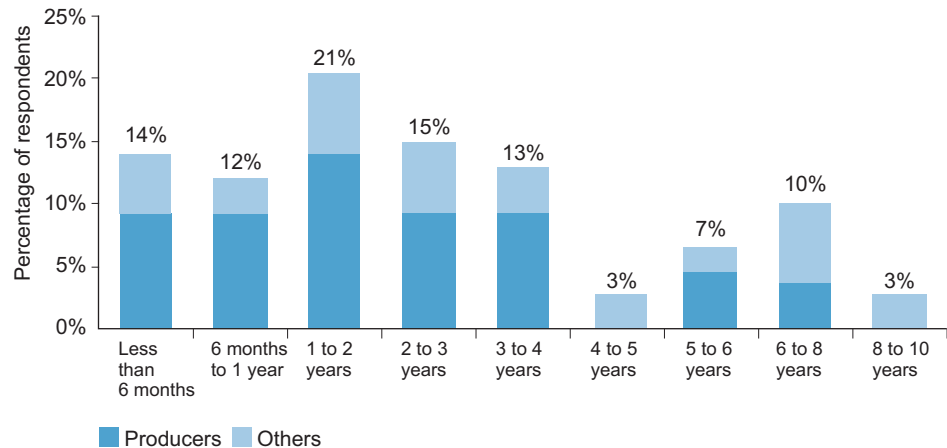
² For example, 2-3 months before pre-production.

The development process

Involvement of producers compared to writers and directors

There was some indication in this study that producers tend to be brought in at a later stage in response to the requirements of funding application processes: overall, respondents were involved in development for an average of two years and 11 months but producers participated for an average of two years and one month.

Length of respondents' involvement with the project



Prevalence of role overlap among writers, directors and producers

The AFC's 2000 Development Report identified the degree of role overlap among writers, directors and producers in Australia as an issue of concern, in that some benefits of early collaboration between individuals may be lost. The report set a benchmark of at least 50 per cent of films with different people in all three roles.

In the current study 37 per cent of films had different individuals in all roles, and half the films had different individuals as writer and director.

Although still less than the benchmark, these proportions are greater than those reported in the 2000 Development Report, when 25 per cent of films shot 1995/96 to 1998/99 had different people in all roles and 35 per cent had different writers and directors. The table also shows the results of similar analyses of UK and US films.

	Writers and directors		Writers, directors and producers	
	Writer and director different	Writer/director same individual	All three different	Some role overlap
Australia				
4-yr av. 1999 ¹	45%	55%	32%	68%
3-yr av. 2002 ¹	44%	56%	30%	70%
current study	50%	50%	37%	67%
UK ²	49%	51%	41%	59%
USA (total) ³	46%	54%	34%	66%
USA (studios) ⁴	73%	27%	56%	44%

Compiled by AFC September 2002

Notes: ¹ Sourced from AFC; includes Australian features 1995/96 to 1998/99 and 1999/00 to 2001/02 released titles with budgets over \$1m only

² 7-year average, based on lists of production in BFI yearbooks for UK features made 1994 to 2000

³ 4-year average 1995/96 to 2000/01, sourced from Motion Picture Almanac; includes independents as well as studio films

⁴ 2-year average sourced from Motion Picture Almanac; 1995/96 and 1996/97

Titles are only included if credits are available for producer, director and writer.

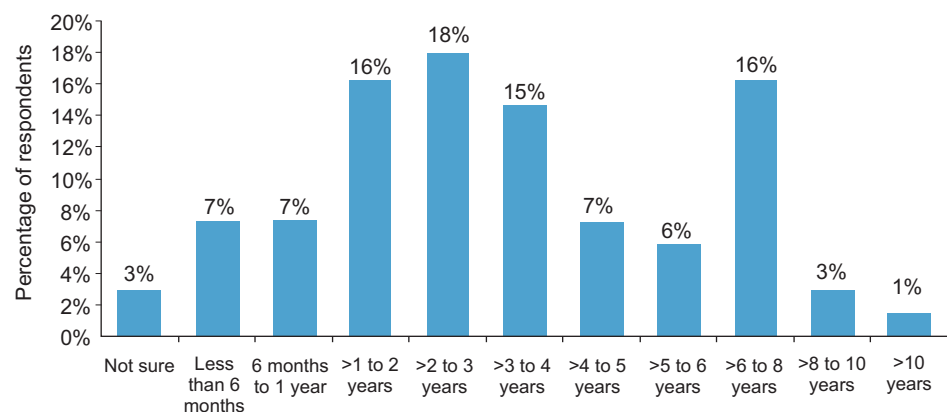
'writer and director the same' includes instances where other writers may also be involved.

Overall development time

Around half the films represented in the study (49 per cent) were said to have taken between one and four years to proceed from first draft/treatment to pre-production. A small number (15 per cent) took less than a year, and 20 per cent took more than six years.

On average, development was reported to have taken three years and 11 months, but this is skewed high by one film that spent 20 years in development. Without this film, the average was three years and eight months. These results are less than the average figure presented in the AFC's 2000 Development Report (four years and 10 months), and much closer to the report's suggested benchmark of three years. The median time for development in this survey was three years exactly.

Elapsed time between first draft/treatment and pre-production (by film, n=68)



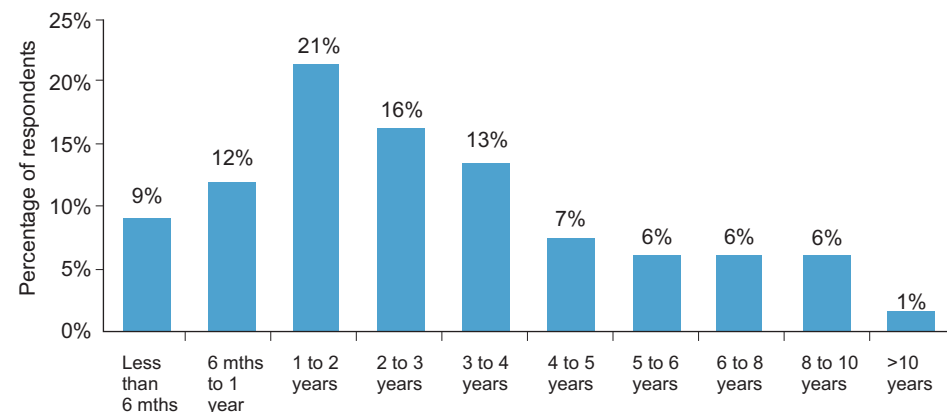
Note: Where representatives of a film gave different answers, the mean time was taken.

Script development time

On average, scripts took three and a half years to complete, although this figure is again skewed high by one script that was reported to have spent 20 years in development. The median time for development was two years and eight months. More than half (57 per cent) took three years or less.

On average, eight drafts were written before the script was finalised. Half the scripts (50 per cent) took between three and seven drafts to complete. This does not include 'unofficial' drafts where the script was in a constant state of flux.

Time spent on the script from first to final draft (by film, n=68)



Note: Where representatives of a film gave different answers, the mean time was taken.

The development process

Adequacy of development time

Only one in three respondents (36 per cent) felt the film would have benefited from more time in development, mainly in re-drafting and workshopping the script. Respondents whose film did not receive government development funding were considerably more likely to see merit in additional development time (60 per cent) than those whose films received funding (19 per cent).

Adequacy of development time (n=107)	no.	%
Would not have benefited from extra time in development	68	64%
Would have benefited from extra time in development	38	36%
At what stage? (n= 38; multiple responses possible)		
Initiation / idea	1	3%
Treatment	2	5%
First draft	3	8%
Subsequent draft(s)	28	74%
Workshopping	9	24%
Casting	1	3%
Financing	1	3%
Other (eg audience research, securing a 'better distribution deal', fostering 'better interaction between writer and producer')	5	13%
Not sure/can't say	1	1%

Continuity of development

Almost two-thirds of those interviewed (60 per cent) – representing 48 out of the 68 films in the survey – said their film's development was stop-start. Among those who described the development process as stop-start, this was a problem for 72 per cent (a major problem for 45 per cent; a minor problem for 27 per cent).

A small number of respondents (13 per cent) said the discontinuity of development had not been a problem for the project. In fact, a few suggested that its stop-start nature had actually been beneficial, allowing respondents to get 'some kind of perspective on the project'.

Reported development times for a selection of films in this survey

Alexandra's Project	3 months	Mullet	5–7 years
Crackerjack	1 year	Lantana	3–4 years
The Bank	1–2 years	La Spagnola	5–7 years
Monkey's Mask	2 years	Chopper	6 years
The Nugget	2 years	Looking for Alibrandi	7 years
Moulin Rouge	2.5 years	The Man Who Sued God	10 years
Take-away	2–2.5 years	The Tracker	10 years
Rabbit-Proof Fence	3.5 years		

Case study: *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

Writer:

Christine Olsen

Director:

Phillip Noyce

Producers:

Christine Olsen

Phillip Noyce

John Winter

1996: Prompted by a newspaper article, Sydney-based documentary maker Christine Olsen reads Doris Pilkington's book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*. After several months of re-reading the extraordinary story – often in tears – Olsen contacts publishers University of Queensland Press (UQP) about acquiring the film rights. UQP asks all interested parties to outline how they envisage the film. Olsen tells them the story will be told simply 'with the kind of restraint Doris uses'.

1997-1999: Olsen is keen to fly to Perth in WA to meet Pilkington. By coincidence the author is about to visit Sydney, so Olsen pays for her to stay another night so they can meet. That becomes impossible and Olsen drives her to the airport instead, talking all the way. She secures the rights and starts writing. The AFC agrees to pay A\$10,000 in development assistance on the basis of Olsen's first draft, providing she finds a script editor. She gets two rhapsodic responses from her nervous preliminary approaches and chooses *Road to Nhill* writer Alison Tilson.

July-October 1999: Olsen compiles a 'dream list' of directors, headed by Australian-born Phillip Noyce. 'I thought *Backroads* had energy and exuberance and treated Aborigines like people.' Olsen gets Noyce's LA telephone number from 'a friend of a friend' and immediately calls. It wakes him at 3am but he graciously invites her to send the script. She sends it in September and calls in October, when she is told he is busy on other projects.

November 1999: Noyce finds the script compelling. 'The movie starts as *Schindlers List*, the story of an evil and efficient system for not so much eliminating people as eliminating a culture,' said Noyce. 'It then turns into *The Fugitive* and becomes a chase movie with very unlikely heroines.' A meeting is arranged for when he returns to Australia for Christmas holidays. He sends five pages of script notes.

January-April 2000: Noyce and Olsen work on the script first in Australia, then by correspondence. ScreenWest provides more development money. In Australia, Noyce is staying at the Palm Beach holiday house owned by David Elfick, who produced Noyce's first feature *Newsfront*, and Jeremy Thomas, from London sales agent Hanway Films. Noyce gives both men the script. Noyce speaks with FFC Chief Executive Catriona Hughes, who says the FFC is likely to provide finance if a sales agent, local distributor and appropriate private investment are attached.

May-June 2000: Noyce's other projects stall. He rings Olsen and tells her if she fixes the ending he will shoot *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in 2000. Elfick joins as Executive Producer and a race to secure financing begins. Olsen invites John Winter on board as the third producer. The team signs on Hanway Films, which offers equity and an advance against world rights. 'Other domestic distributors could only see the negatives – that is, the history of black relations films in Australia' says Noyce.

July-September 2000: The FFC board agrees to co-finance the US\$5m project in a telephone conference. Pre-production begins. Christine King from Mullinars Casting Consultants begins an exhaustive search for the three young leads, eventually taking 10 weeks. The shoot begins in September in SA's Flinders Rangers, with the South Australian Film Corporation becoming an equity partner.

By Sandy George (a version of this story was first published in *Screen International* May 4-10 2001, no. 1307, p. 33)

Release and beyond: Christine Olsen's script is awarded the script writing award at the 2001 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. The film is awarded best film at the 2002 AFI awards and is distributed around the world, earning \$7.5 million at the Australian box office. It is also chosen as one of the top 10 films of 2002 by the prestigious American National Board of Review and receives an award of Special Recognition for Reflecting Freedom of Expression.

The development process

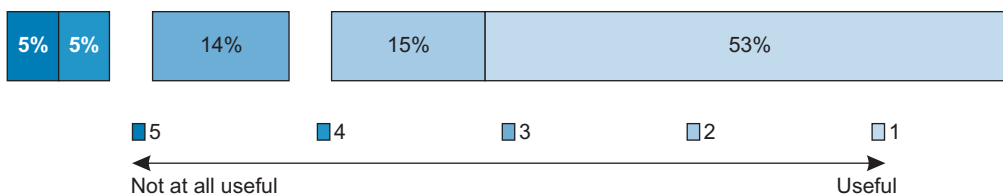
Script editing

Almost two-thirds of the films represented in the study (63 per cent) were reported to have used a script editor in the development process (most commonly just one or two editors). A number of filmmakers commented that script editing was undertaken unofficially by someone not in the role of script editor (usually a producer or director).

Where projects had used a script editor, around two-thirds (68 per cent) of respondents rated the editing process as useful. Non-producers and respondents working on non-government funded projects were considerably more positive about its usefulness (78 per cent and 80 per cent respectively giving a score of 1 or 2). When counted in terms of films rather than respondents, the script editing process was seen as 'useful' in 34 of the 43 films where at least one respondent said a script editor had been used.

Six respondents (10 per cent) rated script editing as not useful (giving a score of four or five) – one said that the requirement to have a script editor 'made the project fall apart in the first place ... [it was only restarted] when we were able to restart without one'.

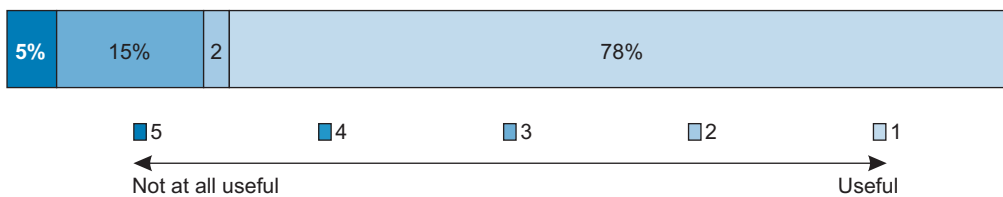
Usefulness of a script editor to the project (5 is not at all useful and 1 is very useful) (n=59 – those whose projects had used a script editor)



Script workshopping

Just on half of the films (49 per cent) were said to have had the script 'workshopped,' i.e. actors employed to assist with script development. Script workshopping was rated as even more useful than script editing, with the overwhelming majority (78 per cent) judging it very useful (only two per cent said it had not been useful). Again, non-producers were particularly happy with the results of

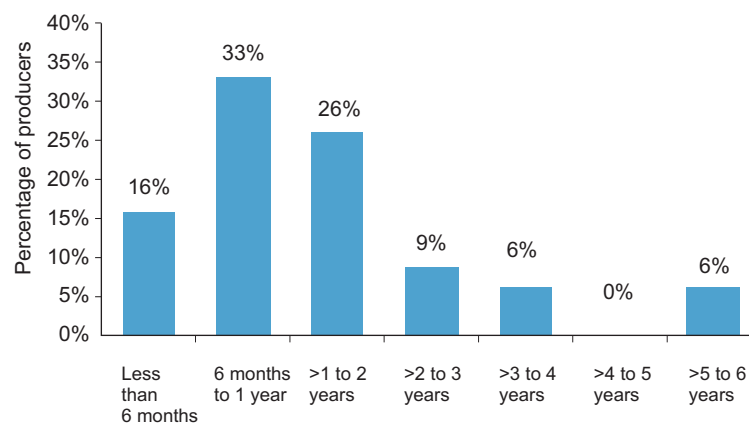
Usefulness of workshopping the script (5 is not at all useful and 1 is very useful) (n=41 – those whose projects had been workshopped)



Time to secure finance

On average, it took producers one year and eight months to fully finance the film, with around half (49 per cent) finding finance within a year and three out of four (75 per cent) within two years.

Time from the first attempt to find finance to fully finance the project (percentage of producers)



Case study: *Lantana*

Writer:
Andrew Bovell

Director:
Ray Lawrence

Producer:
Jan Chapman

1996: Writer Andrew Bovell's stage play *Speaking in Tongues* opens in Sydney. In the audience are producer Jan Chapman (*The Piano*) and director Ray Lawrence (*Bliss*). Lawrence tells Bovell he can see a film in the play. Chapman is not convinced. Lawrence commissions Bovell to write a treatment.

'The play was very theatrical, especially as you had the same actors playing different parts,' says Chapman. 'But when I read the treatment I saw there could be real psychological depth in the relationships.'

1997–1998: Chapman applies to the NSWFTO for script development funding and it subsequently pays for three drafts – in reality more than 10 are written – over three years, starting in 1998. 'We talked at least weekly and met every month or so,' says Chapman, referring to the trio. The play is restructured, and characters dropped, added and reinvented. A detective becomes pivotal but it remains an ensemble piece.

1999: Chapman sends the script to numerous US, UK and French sales companies. She expects a commitment from one plus presales to trigger FFC funds. She gets some of her best script responses ever and is perplexed by the companies' hesitation to commit.

Beyond International Managing Director Mikael Borglund takes on an executive producer role. He and Chapman meet with representatives of German film production fund MBP mid-year when they are in Australia. MBP agrees to provide development money, giving it first option on the film. Chapman is aware the finance still has to be raised and, with a March 2000 shoot date in mind, continues exploring options.

2000: MBP Medien AG, a public company associated with MBP, raises money through a private share placement, in which Beyond participates. The FFC board approves investment in April, with Beyond as sales agent and sharing local distribution with Palace. Chapman likes the fact that Palace has a cinema division and admires its handling of *Head On*. Regular Australian film supporter Fandango buys Italian rights during Cannes. The FFC's production and investment agreement is signed in June, with MBP agreeing to provide 60 per cent of the A\$6.5 million budget, but a cashflow delay pushes pre-production into September. Most of the cast are signed by then but a key actress pulls out late in planning. Barbara Hershey steps in just before shooting starts in late October.

By Sandy George (a version of this story was first published in *Screen International* Sept 21–27 2001, no. 1325, p. 25)

Release and beyond: *Lantana* opens the Sydney Film Festival in June 2001, and is voted most popular film in Melbourne's festival in August. It is selected for Telluride and San Sebastian, and as Toronto's closing night gala presentation. Palace Films and Beyond plan a 12-print release on October 4, expanding to 40 two weeks later. 'We sense it will initially feel like a specialised title but know it has broader potential through word of mouth and reviews,' says Palace general manager Tait Brady. The film goes on to make over \$12 million at the Australian box office. It is awarded seven AFI awards including best film and received a Special Mention for Excellence in Filmmaking at the 2001 US National Board of Review.

Ray Lawrence goes on to direct the Australian film *Jindabyne* and writer Andrew Bovell is working on a project in the US.

Development funding

Sources of development funding

Overall, 56 per cent of films were reported to have received government development funding. Most others did not apply for any funding; only a small minority (6 per cent) were reported to have made unsuccessful applications.

Four key factors were cited by respondents who had not sought government development funding:

- inadequate maximum funding per project;
- scarcity of funding making the application process too competitive;
- the timeframes involved in applying for finance;
- a perception of excessive bureaucracy.

Non-government sources of development funding were cited by 64 per cent of respondents – mainly the producer's, writer's or director's personal funds or personal loans (36 per cent) or from a production company (20 per cent). The AFC's 2000 Development Report warns that the need to use personal funds for film development places undue pressure on producers to extend development times and/or to go into production before a project is fully developed. Development funds from an overseas production company were cited by three respondents, overseas private sources by four, and an overseas distributor/sales agent by one.

Sources of development funding	no.	%
Use of government development funds (n=68 films)		
AFC only	8	12%
State + AFC	12	18%
State only	18	26%
<i>Total of films using government development funds</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>56%</i>
Applied and failed	4	6%
Applied and not used	1	1.5%
Did not apply	24	35%
Not stated	1	1.5%
Use of non-government development funds (n=107 respondents; multiple responses possible)		
Filmmaker's own funds / personal loans	39	36%
Australian production company	21	20%
Overseas production company	3	3%
Australian private sources (not own funds)	10	9%
Overseas private sources	4	4%
Australian distributor / sales agent	6	6%
Overseas distributor / sales agent	1	1%
Broadcaster (free-to-air or pay)	1	1%
Other (NIDA)	1	1%
<i>Total whose film used non-government development funds</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>64%</i>

Development funding

State government development funding

Half those who said government funding had been sought (53 per cent) had approached at least one state agency for development funding, with a handful (five respondents) approaching more than one.

48 respondents (46 per cent) reported receiving state government development funds, 26 (24 per cent) from a state agency only and 23 (22 per cent) from both the AFC and a state agency (the success rate for state agency applications in this study was 80 per cent across all types of development funding).

Usually a particular agency was approached because one of the film's creative personnel lived in that state (53 per cent of cases) or to take advantage of filming locations (47 per cent). Around a quarter (25 per cent) of those who had approached a state agency already had a relationship with that funding body, while 23 per cent approached the agency because of a particular program it offered.

n=57 (applied for state government funding – multiple reasons possible)	no.	%
One of the key creatives lived in that state	30	53%
Locations were available in that state	27	47%
Pre-existing relationship with funding body	14	25%
Funding body had an appropriate program for the film's needs	13	23%
Funding body can also invest in production	6	11%
AFC rejected an application	3	5%
Cheaper to film in that state	2	4%
Other (eg state body was 'more supportive')	6	11%

Commonwealth development funding

The main Commonwealth film development agency is the Australian Film Commission (AFC). Those who sought government development funding were just as likely to approach the AFC (56 per cent) as they were a state agency (53 per cent).

38 respondents (35 per cent) reported that their film had received AFC development funding – 14 per cent from the AFC only and 21 per cent from both the AFC and a state agency (AFC applicants in this study had an 84 per cent success rate, aggregated across all funding categories).

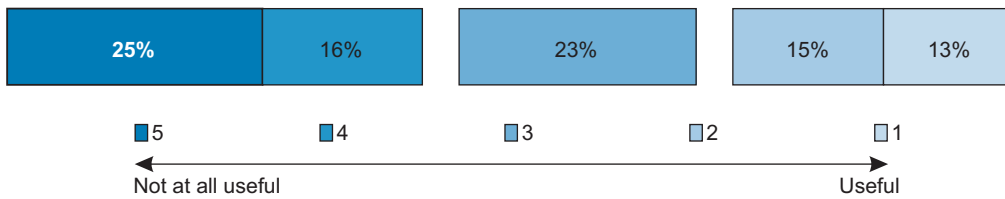
Overall, 78 per cent of respondents had received AFC funding of some kind during their career.

Adequacy of development funding

When asked to assess the adequacy of their project’s development budget, only 28 per cent of respondents thought it was adequate. Inadequate funding was more commonly reported by those without any government funding than those with government funding (49 per cent and 36 per cent respectively).

The 69 respondents who reported some degree of development funding inadequacy cited three main consequences – a longer development process (55 per cent), a loss of momentum (39 per cent) and a less than optimal shooting script (30 per cent).

How adequate would you say the development funding was? (5 is completely inadequate and 1 is completely adequate; n=107)



Note: The gaps around '3' indicate the proportion of respondents who were unsure about their answer.

	no.	%
Development budget adequate (rated 1 or 2)	30	28%
Development budget adequacy rated less than 2	69	65%
Not sure	8	7%
Effects of inadequate development budget (n=69; multiple responses possible)		
Slowed the development process	38	55%
Loss of momentum / stop-start	27	39%
Less than optimal shooting script	21	30%
Limited opportunities to trigger production funding	13	19%
Loss of key creatives	11	16%
Effects on morale / loss of confidence	10	14%
Other financial problems	9	13%
Necessary to work on other projects to find funding	5	7%
Other quality issues	3	4%
Other (eg project was 'rushed', development 'cut into pre-production time', 'difficulty securing cast and overseas lead because of constant delays')	7	10%
No effects	3	4%

Case study: *Chopper*

Writer/director:
Andrew Dominik

Producer:
Michele Bennett

1992: Director Andrew Dominik re-reads Mark 'Chopper' Read's autobiographical book, *From the Inside*, published from jail a year earlier, and considers adapting it to become his feature debut. Producer Michele Bennett, with whom Dominik has spent a year working on commercials and music videos, agrees a film could be commercially viable.

1993: Bennett meets with the book's publishers and eventually signs a one-year renewable option under her production company Cherub Pictures. Dominik writes to Read telling him of their plans but warning the film could be unflattering.

1994–1995: Intensive research begins using court transcripts, newspaper clippings and first-hand accounts from police, prison officers and criminals. Dominik writes the first draft, which resembles the book's funny anecdotal style. Dominik and Bennett meet with Mushroom Pictures representatives, whom they know through music video work. Three months later, a co-production arrangement is signed and development assistance provided. Bennett meets with the FFC. The second draft gets funding from Film Victoria. It is very different and darker than the first.

1996–1997: A new structure is established in the third draft and retained. Dominik and Bennett meet with Read for seven hours in prison, at Read's suggestion. Read chooses not to see the script, saying his interest is in what the filmmakers think of him. Casting begins.

Meetings occur with local sales agents. There are some negative reactions based on preconceptions about the real Chopper. Much hinges on finding a strong lead. Government development assistance is drying up without a local distributor attached. FFC discussions continue, particularly regarding the violence, which will earn an R rating. Detailed director's notes help the FFC understand the approach. Script assessments are sought from the US.

Palace makes an offer against Australian rights. Eric Bana – suggested by Read – tests for the lead role and is greeted enthusiastically. But Bana's tape fails to clinch a deal with Beyond or Southern Star.

November 1997 – March 1998: Producer Al Clark joins the team to allay concerns about the first timers. The director and producer continue to support themselves via commercials. Film Victoria rejects an application for production funding. The FFC gets one positive and one negative script assessment and backs off.

April–December 1998: Palace increases its offer to A\$250,000. Beyond agrees to commit at this level and Mushroom to cash flow the distribution guarantee. With a positive script assessment on the fifth draft, the FFC board agrees to provide most of the A\$3.3m budget. All other backers lift their support, including financing partner Mushroom and Beyond. Palace's guarantee is the highest ever for a local film.

January–June 1999: Rehearsals begin. Pre-production halts after three weeks because of legal complications but resumes three weeks later. An application to Film Victoria for top-up funding is rejected. Shooting begins on May 3.

By Sandy George (a version of this story was first published in *Screen International* Aug 11–17 2000, no. 1271, p. 17)

Release and beyond: Released in August 2000, *Chopper* goes on to make close to \$6 million at the Australian box office. The R-rated film is seen by an estimated 721,000 when it is released onto 138 screens – at the time the largest campaign for specialist distributor Palace. The film also screens at Sundance Film Festival. Eric Bana is awarded best actor at the 2000 AFI Awards (Andrew Dominik wins best director and Simon Lyndon the supporting actor award). Eric uses the role as launch pad for an international career, gaining significant supporting and leading roles in films such as *Black Hawk Down*, *The Hulk* and *Troy*. Andrew Dominik plans to direct a film in the US titled *The Demolished Man* in 2005.

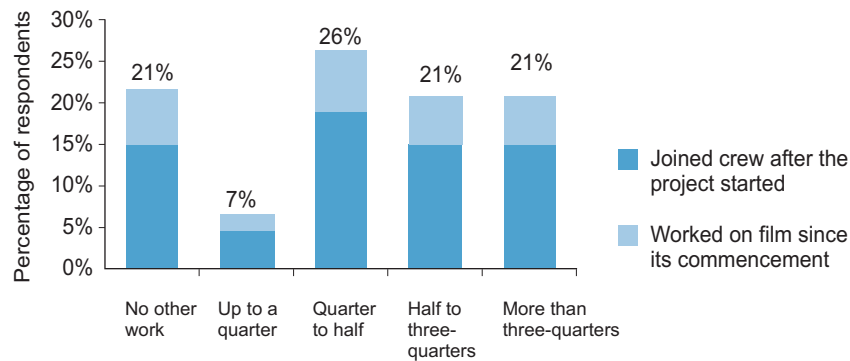
Other work during development

According to the AFC's 2000 Development Report, funding shortfalls regularly force filmmakers to 'interrupt the development process to support themselves and keep things moving'. This is reinforced by the current survey. Four in five respondents (79 per cent) undertook other work while their film was in development, with 42 per cent spending over half their time on this alternative work.

There was no difference in the pattern of responses to this question between those who had worked on the film since the beginning and those who had joined the team after the project had started. Nor was there any difference between producers and non-producers.

The two most common alternative sources of work were feature film script work or production (39 per cent) and TV programs (30 per cent). Those finding alternative work in TV programs were more likely to be non-producers and those working on government funded projects. 15 per cent of respondents had worked on television commercials (TVCs) during the development of the film in question (34 per cent of respondents said they had worked on TVCs at some stage in their career). 13 per cent reported taking work outside the industry.

Proportion of respondent's time spent on other work during development



	no.	%
Didn't do other work during development	23	21%
Did do other work during development	84	79%
What sort of work? (n = 84; multiple responses possible)		
Feature scripts and/or production	33	39%
TV programs	25	30%
TV commercials	13	15%
Production (unspecified)	10	12%
Non-feature or unspecified script-writing	9	11%
Direction (unspecified)	7	8%
Corporate videos	6	7%
Teaching	6	7%
Acting / performance	5	6%
Administration / executive work in the film industry	5	6%
Editing scripts	4	5%
Other industry work	9	11%
Non-industry work	11	13%

Case study: *Mullet*

Writer/director:
David Caesar

Producer:
Vincent Sheehan

1992–1994: David Caesar writes a short story after hearing his long-time ex-girlfriend is getting married. He wonders if he would go back to the country if his career stalled and remembers when feelings of self-importance prevented him getting on with people. He works all these ideas into a screenplay.

1995: Caesar asks his friend Vincent Sheehan to make *Mullet* his debut film as a producer. They both moved to Sydney from small towns and are interested in low-budget distinctly Australian cinema about ordinary people. Sheehan jumps on board after reading the script and secures second draft development funding from the AFC.

1996: The AFC provides further development funding, some to cover script readings and preliminary casting. Criminal elements are introduced to raise the story's stakes in response to certain distributors' admiration for the crime/comedy combination of Caesar's second feature *Idiot Box*.

Early 1997: The script is sent to most of Australia's limited potential industry investors. Sheehan aims to raise a budget of A\$2.5-3m, underpinned by the FFC. SBS Independent (SBSI) is enthusiastic but its involvement would deprive a local distributor of a television sale, a perennial problem.

Mid 1997: The NSW Film and Television Office (FTO) provides development money. Sheehan attends the Cannes Film Festival for the first time but fails to raise interest overseas. On his return he and Caesar thoroughly reassess the project. They return to their original low-budget philosophy, strip the genre elements from the script, and work out how to shoot it for about A\$1m using widescreen Super 35mm to capture the beautiful countryside.

1998: The FTO provides more script development money. SBSI offers a television presale and equity. Globe signs to release the film locally; they cannot provide a distribution guarantee but their strategy of launching via a country season appeals. Then Premium Movie Partnership (PMP) executive Marion Pilowsky, a long-time fan of Caesar, commits to a pay TV presale and equity.

January 1999: PMP's offer lapses because other projects find their budget shortfalls and *Mullet* doesn't. Caesar and Sheehan meet with Douglas Cummins from UK sales agent Axiom Films (*The Bank*, *The Boys*) in a Sydney hotel. Cummins thinks Caesar needs to give the script a stronger identity and sharper characters.

Dec 1999 – Jan 2000: PMP admires the script's progress and recommits at a high enough level to allow Sheehan to invite Axiom aboard without needing to provide an advance. The NSWFTO commits equity of more than its usual cap of 10 per cent of the budget as it encourages films to be shot in regional areas.

Feb–April 2000: Location office Film Illawarra, two hours south of Sydney, warmly embraces the film, particularly as the script was always set in that area.

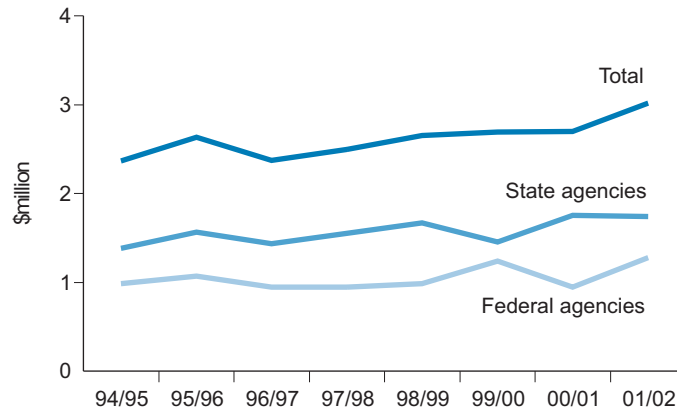
May–September 2000: The small crew begins shooting on May 29.

By Sandy George (a version of this story was first published in *Screen International* Mar 16–22 2001, no. 1300, p. 19)

Release and beyond: Globe plans for a June 28 release. The campaign tells audiences the film is something different from David Caesar, known via television appearances, and rings true about life outside the big cities. Axiom decides to include *Mullet* among its Cannes premieres. The film earns over a \$1 million at the Australian box office. Following *Mullet*, David Caesar continues his work in television and writes *Dirty Deeds*.

Government funding for feature development

For the eight years to June 2002, government film agencies spent an average of \$2.68 million annually on feature film project development, with federal agencies averaging \$1.11 million per year and state agencies \$1.57 million.



Source: AFC, from figures provided by each agency.

Note: Federal film agencies comprise Australian Children's Television Foundation, Australian Film Commission, Commercial Television Production Fund, Film Finance Corporation Australia, Film Australia (National Interest Program only), SBSI. State agencies comprise ACT Department of the Environment and Cultural Heritage (before 1996/97); Arts Tasmania, Screen Tasmania; Film Victoria from 2001/02; before this Cinemedia agencies; NSW Film and Television Office; Pacific Film and Television Commission; ScreenWest; and South Australian Film Corporation.

Films included in the survey

A Wreck A Tangle	The Man Who Sued God
Alexandra's Project	Me, Myself, I
Angst	Moloch**
Australian Rules	Monkey's Mask
The Bank	Moulin Rouge
Better than Sex	Mr Accident
Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns	Muggers
Black and White (Aust/UK)	Mullet
Blurred	My Mother Frank
Bootmen	Nigel**
Chopper	The Nugget
City Loop	The Pact
Crackerjack	Paradise Found (Aust/France)
Cracking On**	The Rage in Placid Lake* [28/08/03]
Dogwatch**	Rabbit-Proof Fence
Dope**	The Real Thing
The Finder	Risk
Garage Days	Sample People
Goddess of 1967	Selkie
The Hard Word	Serenades
He Died with a Felafel in His Hand	Snak
Hildegarde	Soft Fruit
The Honourable Wally Norman* [13/11/03]	Strange Fits of Passion
In a Savage Land	Subterano
In the Red	Take-away* [14/08/03]
Innocence	Tempe Tip
La Spagnola	The Tracker
Lantana	Trojan Warrior
Lets Get Skase	Visitors* [27/22/03]
Liquid Bridge	Walking on Water
Looking for Alibrandi	Willful
Lost Things**	Wog Boy
The Magic Pudding	Yolngu Boy
Mallboy	You Can't Stop the Murders

Notes: All films had been released when the survey was taken except

* released since survey [release date in brackets]

** not released as of April 2004

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