**WWS Adaptations initiative - Zoom Q&A Session**

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| 00:00:05:22 | PHIL | Fantastic. Hi, everyone. Welcome. Great to have you online. Welcome to the Wattpad WEBTOON Studios Adaptations Initiative information session. My name's Phil Enchelmaier. I'm Content Director at Screen Queensland and very happy to be joined today by Sera Tabb, Head of Global Television at Wattpad WEBTOONS Studios, Jess Brinder, Director of International Business Development at Wattpad WEBTOON Studios, and Danni Xin, the Development Executive (TV) at Wattpad WEBTOON Studios.Of course, to begin today, I'd like to acknowledge the Turrbal and Jaggera peoples as the original custodians and original storytellers of the lands that I'm on and to pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and, also, I'd like to extend that respect to any First Nations peoples joining us online today and watching this in the future.So, just to chart where we're gonna be going in our time together this morning - I'll just go to the next slide - firstly, what even is this initiative? Why are we doing it?Then I'm gonna introduce you to the Wattpad WEBTOON Studios team, we'll go through the application process and the assessment process, and then the development process - so, what happens if you are selected for development.And, finally, we'll have Q&A time. So, please do put your questions in that Q&A Chat you should see on your screen as we go and at the end, we'll answer as many of those questions as we can.So, what is the Wattpad WEBTOON Adaptations initiative? So, this is the second iteration of the initiative. It was first launched as a collaboration between Screen Queensland and Wattpad in 2020 with two titles - 'The Bro Code' and 'How to Lose Weight and Survive the Apocalypse'. We had some fantastic adaptations done by Dom Morris and Siobhan Domingo, and both were optioned by leading local production companies.And, really, the aim of this is it's about connecting Queensland writers with amazing IP that they might not otherwise be able to access. So, what we want you to do, quite simply, is come up with a great 'take', a pitch on how to adapt one of three titles that we've selected, and, yeah, let us know how you're gonna turn that into a fantastic screen story.Just a couple of notes on what this is not. Let's just set expectations early on. Firstly, it isn't a guarantee that if you get selected and go through the whole process, that you'll attach a producer, although we do anticipate significant interest from producers and from the production community in Australia.What's it's definitely not is a guarantee that you'll attach a producer, be green-lit for further development and production, and that the whole pre-, production and post- process will be blissful and pain-free and that you'll have a huge critical and commercial hit.The development pathway, it's long and rocky and arduous, as hopefully we all know, but it's good to be reminded. What gets produced and put on screen is the tip of the iceberg of developed but unproduced shows which float in a sea of discarded scripts and pitch docs. But don't let that deter you.This is a fantastic initiative for a bunch of reasons. Why should you think about putting an application in? Well, there's two main advantages. One, there's a ready-made audience with these titles. So, here are the three titles - 'All Good Things' by Renee Racine-Kinnear, 'Apartment 239' by Elford Alley, and 'School Bus Graveyard' by Red, which is a webtoon. As you can see there, the reads, the number of reads on these titles is pretty astronomical, so 90,800 reads for 'All Good Things', 423,000 for 'Apartment 239' and 76.3 million reads for 'School Bus Graveyard', and counting. I should point out that... So, these numbers are updated from what's on the website, you might have noticed, and these are already wrong. They're already out of date. The numbers keep going up.So, there's definitely a very, very substantial audience of really engaged fans for these titles, which the team will talk about shortly.And it's the story that's... They're all stories that have been tried and tested and proven just in their narrative structure and scope and we know that they work as stories, which is a big part of the development process as well.So, I'm gonna hand over to the Wattpad WEBTOON Studios team, to Sera, Jess and Danni to introduce themselves, and talk a little bit about Wattpad WEBTOON Studios. Over to you. |
| 00:04:58:17 | SERA | Amazing. Well, thank you, Phil. We are so grateful to be here today and to be partnered with Screen Queensland yet again for another initiative after our success last time.So, the team today, which we've kind of briefly already introduced ourselves, I'm Sera, again. I manage all of Global Television and I'm really excited to be chatting with you.I think these titles that you can see highlighted here - 'The Kissing Booth', 'Light as a Feather', 'After We Fell' - are initial examples of success from the studio side.New things are that Wattpad and WEBTOON has now merged, so we are now one company under one roof. Many of you are probably already familiar with what a Wattpad title is and what a WEBTOON title is. Really, the shared kind of creative DNA between the platforms is all about the democratisation of storytelling, so what we do best is really connecting authors with a fan base with folks who create communities around these titles and then obviously spread the wealth globally. So, for us, these are examples of things that have been really popular that have been adapted, and any of the titles that we have shared with you that Phil just mentioned have the potential to be something like this.So, typically, the way that we work, Jess obviously being on our team from the International division and then Danni who sits under Global TV as well, we are a collaborative team that will be partnered with you in terms of adaptation with Screen Queensland. And what we hope to do is to find writers, obviously, to adapt each title, and then collaboratively shape the vision for where these titles go, how they're framed and then what the pathway is as well in terms of setting them up in the larger marketplace. |
| 00:06:51:03 | PHIL | Fantastic. If you have any questions for the Wattpad WEBTOON Studios team specifically, please do put them in the Chat.It's been a pleasure working with them so far and I'm, yeah, really excited about continuing on as we get stuck into these titles and looking at the fantastic takes and pitches that you come up. So, let's get onto that, shall we?A note about the application process. Firstly, access to titles - this is a bit of a housekeeping thing - just as a reminder, the Access to Titles form is not the application form. There are two separate forms on SmartyGrants, which, for those of you who might not know, that's the portal that we use for all of our initiatives, all of our applications across Screen Queensland, so you'll have to create an account on SmartyGrants. The link to the Access to Titles SmartyGrants form is on the Wattpad WEBTOON Studios Adaptations webpage on Screen Queensland's site, so go there if you... Once you fill in that form, what'll happen is you'll get pinged back with an email. That'll have a link and a password where you can download 'Apartment 239' and 'All Good Things' and there'll also be a link to 'School Bus Graveyard', which, as Sera mentioned, that's a WEBTOON and that lives online, obviously.Just a note on those three titles, if you're having a bit of a browse around Wattpad and WEBTOON sites, you might notice - for example, 'Apartment 239' - there are other stories in that world.Also, 'School Bus Graveyard', you might notice that's an ongoing, unfolding series. It's, you know, being... New episodes are being put out on a regular basis and more series planned. So, you might be wondering, "Well, how much of all of that should I be looking at in terms of what I focus on for my pitch?"So, what we'd like for 'Apartment 239' and 'All Good Things', just focus on the manuscript that you'll be able to download through that Access to Titles form. Only focus on that one, please.With 'School Bus Graveyard', you're free to use all of it, everything that you can access right now. It's up to you how much you choose to. You might decide, for example, that you only want to focus your pitch on season 1 of that webtoon. We're into season 2 already. Or you might do season 1 and half of season 2. It's up to you and we really just want to see your creative... Your best creative endeavours there in terms of what's gonna be the best way to adapt this title for screen.We recommend read all of the titles that appeal to you, but choose one title only to pitch a take on. It's not that you absolutely are forbidden from putting in applications for two or three separate titles. It's just that, between now and the closing date, it's not actually a really long time and so you're probably gonna be better off just focusing on one take, one application to put in.There are two main creative documents that you'll have to submit with that - your pitch doc, which I'll talk about shortly, and your script sample. Applications close 5pm, Friday 22 March and there will be no late submissions accepted.Let's talk through that pitch document and what we're looking for. So, it's up to 10 pages and, as you can see on screen, there's a bit of a rough guide how you might think about dividing up the required content. A logline and synopsis - about one page for both of those. Hopefully that's pretty self-explanatory.And then on a separate page, the take - how do you propose to adapt this original title for the screen? So, this should include your hook. There can be a bit of overlap with synopsis, of course, with this, but, really, this is where we're wanting to see your unique vision. We're wanting to see the individuality of your voice come to the fore here and your imagination about how to turn this from its current form into a screen story. It's a chance for you also to talk about not just why this story, but why you should write this story. I mean, not in terms of writing, "I should write this story because I am a great writer," etc, etc, but through the way that you structure your take, show us through that, "Oh, wow, this person has a really fantastic vision, a really interesting idea of how to turn this into a screen story."Then we get into the story itself. We're recommending three to four pages for this - probably no more than four, I'd suggest. Should be broken down into episode summaries for series or, if it's a feature adaptation you're proposing, an outline with a clear structure, for example, three-act structure, five-act structure - whatever it is. And this, like I said, should probably be the longest part of your pitch and something that's really worth putting a lot of time into.Then we want you to talk about the characters. Give us a brief summary of the main characters in your story world. Put some thought here into what's driving your characters through the story. So, we're not looking for reams on what's the protagonist's favourite ice-cream flavour or how they went on a backpacking holiday in Europe five years before the story starts. What we want you to tell us is who are they in relation to the drama that's unfolding in your story?What's their internal conflict and how is that manifesting in the external conflict, i.e. the plot?Then tone and style. Talk a little bit about that. What's the story world like? Are there any particular rules to the story? You can throw in some visual references here. I wouldn't suggest that you spend heaps and heaps of time on the visuals, but, you know, throw in a few just to give us a bit of a flavour for it tonally and stylistically.Then you could also talk about the themes. Why is this story important for you to tell now? You might have covered some of this in the take, and that's fine, but what we really want to see here is you've thought deeply, not just about what this story is about on a plot level, but what it's really about. What are the underlying thematic concerns that you're wrestling with? You know, how is this something that we can empathise with? How are the characters' journeys something that we can connect with? What kind of questions did this raise about the human condition?And then, finally on that, the audience and the potential market. This is kind of the most producer-y part of the application, to talk about where you think this lives, what kind of distributors or broadcasters might pick this up. Do please have a go at this. Some of you watching might be producers, so you'll be fine with this, but for those of you who aren't and who've never considered that kind of question, look, do your best attempt. We're certainly not gonna reject your application if you've done a brilliant application except for that one little bit, so, you know, that's partly where the whole point of this also is to then get something developed that's so appealing to producers that then the ones who can answer that question will come on board and help you.And then, finally, the team, so just give us your bio.You are allowed to apply as a writing team. If you are applying as a writing team, you must both be Queenslanders, just as a little note there.And, also, please keep it all in a readable font and size.And then the sample, the screenwriting sample. We're looking for a minimum of 30 pages for a single sample, so not multiple shorts of 10 pages each. What we want to see here is that you have the skills to write long-form content, so minimum, say, half-hour episodes.This sample can be any genre or form. It doesn't have to correlate to the genre of the take or the story that you're looking at adapting, and it should please not be from the Wattpad WEBTOON Studios story that you're applying with.So, we'd rather you don't attempt to hurriedly write 30 pages of a pilot episode for one of these three titles, for example. Just give us something, polish something up that you already have, that you've already written that's minimum 30 pages. We want to see that you can write and write well.And just a few things I want to ask that you keep in mind about story, both for the take, for the pitch, and for your script sample. Think about, "Does it have a strong story engine?" Not just, "This happens, then this happens and then this happens." Don't just tell us what it's about on plot terms. Tell us what it's really about. What's the underlying thematic driver?Do you have interesting and engaging characters? Interesting not because of quirks and mannerisms and irrelevant backstory, but interesting because of how they act in order to achieve their goals.And then how is this a screen story? So, is it dramatic storytelling - characters in conflicting action in pursuit of their goals? And is it visual storytelling - are you showing and not telling? Is information revealed on the cut? So, think about how does one scene throw to another?So, those are the kinds of things that we're going to be looking at as we assess your writing sample and your take.To talk about the development process a little, like I mentioned, applications close on March 22 and then, by April 19, we'll be announcing the three take submissions that are selected to progress to treatment stage.The treatment stage, we're gonna fund up to $15,000 per project, and that's gonna be dependent on the need of each project. The ballpark for this - $10,000 for a treatment and then $5,000 for, say, a script editor, a consultant, maybe for a pitch doc if we feel that that's appropriate at that stage.One of the advantages of this whole initiative is that we're gonna be funding you really well to do the work so that, you know, if you need to, for example, take a few days off work to be able to put the work into this, then if you're successfully funded through this, then you'll be able to do that. You'll have the time and the space.So, then two of the three projects developed to treatment stage will be selected to progress to script stage, and the selection there will be announced around July 12. And then script stage, we're funding up to $35,000 per project.Again, that's dependent on the need of each project, the amount of work required, the scope of the work.So, it could be that we're asking for multiple drafts, it could be that we say, "Hey, do a draft and do a writer's room plus some script editing work, plus some pitch docs." So, that's all to be negotiated, but, as I said, funding really well so that you have the time and the space to be able to do the best job that you can with this.And then after that, what comes next, what comes after this initiative is wrapped up. So, producers can already register their interest in the initiative. If you're a producer watching this, you can go to that Wattpad WEBTOON Studios Adaptations page on the Screen Queensland website, and there's a link there for producers to just fill out a brief form to say, "Yep, I'd like to stay across this as it develops."Then, as we get some treatments and scripts coming through, we will be liaising between producers and the funding recipients to discuss that approach, that networking, putting those treatments and scripts in front of producers and then hopefully getting them optioned. And once producers are engaged, from Screen Queensland's point of view, it effectively converts to a standard Development Investment process. Some of you who've been funded through our Development Investment, which used to be called the Ideas program, you'll know how this works, but, basically, once the producer's on board, we'll be saying, "Fantastic." We'll be cheering on from the wings and it'll be over to you to continue that process.So, that's it from me and we'd love to hear your questions. I'll just end the slide show there so I can see. Do we have any questions coming through, Claire? |
| 00:19:55:00 | CLAIRE | Not at the moment. So, if anyone has any questions, feel free to put them through. |
| 00:20:05:06 | PHIL | No?Here's a question. "How many people are recommended for a writing team? Only two?" Look, that's something we could talk about. The only thing to note with that is if you have more than two people in a team, it won't increase the level of funding that we have available, so that up to $15,000 and up to $35,000 is fixed.So, if you were a successful writing team, say, of five, just for argument's sake, we're not going to be able to increase the funding. It would have to be split between all the writers, so hopefully that answers that question.Here's another great question. "Is there an expectation that the script will be set in Australia or Canada or wherever the story's set?" I'm happy to answer this, but, Sera, we were talking about this just before. Did you want to speak to this a little bit? |
| 00:21:08:22 | SERA | Absolutely. So, I think we are really excited to see how people take the story itself, the lead characters, what we love about it, what we know the audience loves about it, and kind of have the creative freedom to lift it out of its current shell as it is in terms of setting.So, if someone is interested in localising it, for example, to a specific place in Australia, we are excited about that. I think that we want to give people the freedom and the creative licence to put themselves and their voice into these stories. Those feel like the best adaptations.In most cases, our authors understand and are really excited about the idea of their work being adapted and know that it won't be a one-to-one translation. There's a reason why it's being made in a different medium in a different way. So, I think we're interested and curious to see how you will re-interpret these.The guidelines that we usually tell people to stick to are, you know, audiences are really excited about, typically, the leads, right? If it's a matter of expanding an ensemble for TV, open to that.If it's a matter of adding plot or kind of manipulating what forms a pilot or, like, that first act of a feature, we understand that things will shift and I think always expect that they will, so the setting is part of that and you are encouraged to make adjustments. |
| 00:22:45:05 | PHIL | Thanks, Sera. So, yeah, absolutely. We don't want to be prescriptive about where you set it. Set it where you think is the best place for it to be set for your adaptation, so if you want to set it in Australia, that's fine. If you want to keep it in its current setting, you know, we're not gonna... That's fine too.But, yeah, just, really, we want to see your imaginations in full flight here, so... And, as the same person who asked that question also said, "Understanding that filming would be happening here." Yeah, if we set this up with an Australian producer, typically, that would be what happens. So, wherever you set it in the world, it would probably be looking at, "How can we film it here?" regardless of where it's set.Another question here. "From an industry standpoint, is there a preference for feature or TV?" Oh, that's a good question. I've got a thought on this, but, again, I'll throw to Wattpad WEBTOON on that one. |
| 00:23:48:20 | SERA | You're speaking to the TV side of the platform today with the exception of Jess, who absolutely crosses back and forth. So, I'll say I'm biased. I love TV, obviously. But it's really about what's best for the idea and your take for the idea.So, sometimes, reading things, you have two Wattpad stories to choose from and then one WEBTOON, which is a comic, the other two being novels. I think, sometimes, things that tend to feel close-ended naturally kind of fall into the feature category. That's part of, like, how we determine and find lanes for things, but we're always open to a new take.What we look for in TV is something that has a returnable engine, so a series engine that seems really propulsive, like it can go on for many, many seasons. I usually recommend that people stay away from limited series in general, just because they can be harder to set up in the current landscape, but, really, it should stem from your take and your rationale for why it has to be one or the other. |
| 00:24:51:07 | PHIL | Yeah, thanks, Sera. That answers it perfectly, I think. It sort of really comes down to what is best for the story."Can we work with a different individual on a different submission?" That's a really good question. I think, look, technically, yes, and, like I said earlier, technically, even if one individual wanted to submit three different applications, you know, that's fine, you can do that, but, again, it's just a matter of capacity for you, knowing that it's just over two months until you have to put this in and there's a lot of work to do to get your application ready.And, also, to note that what we would not be doing is funding the same writer across multiple different projects. So, you could apply for multiple different things or be on multiple applications, but it is highly, highly unlikely that we would be funding one writer who is across multiple projects purely because, when we get into this development process, it's gonna pretty fast and furious. There's gonna be pressure for a quick turnaround of submission materials and so it's partly just about saying, "You know what? Focus on one thing and do that to the best of your ability.""Is the original author involved in the selection process or expected to be a part of the development?" I'll hand to Wattpad WEBTOON for that. |
| 00:26:19:23 | SERA | Yeah, I think we always encourage those relationships to develop organically, so if it's something where, you know, we need the input from the original author, we're certainly open to that. I think at this stage in the process, it's really important to focus on your take and how you want to adapt it, and then that's a conversation that we can have later if it's merited and needed.But I think what you'll see in general as you look at the platforms is all of these authors for all three titles have been absolutely incredible in terms of building a fan base for these titles. They're people that have been releasing on a schedule that allows them to build a really, really strong fan base and that's... You know, we're all here because of them, so, you know, it's absolutely something that we want to honour, but at the same time, at this point in the process, think about it from your point of view and we'll see when we get there. |
| 00:27:25:02 | PHIL | Just kind of going back to that question of writers and writing teams, we've got a question here, "Can the second writer be overseas-based?" The answer to that is unfortunately no. This is to do with how our funding works and the restrictions around our funding, that it's a Queensland initiative. Screen Queensland, who are owned by the Queensland Government, so all of our funding has to go to Queenslanders.So, unfortunately, if you're in a writing team, the second writer can't be overseas or interstate. They'd have to be also a Queenslander.Some other questions. Here's a great question. "So, just to clarify, are we after live-action pictures specifically or are you open to animated takes if it fits the idea?" My view on this is, absolutely, whatever is the best for the idea. Obviously, 'School Bus Graveyard' is already in the, you know... It's the most obvious one that might fit the bill for animation, but, hey, if you can come up with an animated take that really, really works for 'All Good Things', go for it. But what do you think about that, Sera? |
| 00:28:40:18 | SERA | Yeah, I completely agree. Very open. I would say we tend to get more - I think this is probably obvious to most people - pitches that target WEBTOONS that are in the animated space, but just because something is visual in that way doesn't mean it has to be animated, so we'd just encourage people to think about why is the reason that it has to be animation and really be able to make a case for what sets it apart and what will make it unique within that market. |
| 00:29:19:21 | PHIL | This is an interesting note. I will... I won't mention the name of this producer unless they are happy for me to, but I've had a note here from a producer who's watching who said that they would already like to register their interest in one of the titles because they have market interest in it right now, so thank you for that. And there you go. So, already, we have interest from producers, so that, I mean, again, just proves the point.Another fantastic question here. "How much creative licence do we have in the adaptation?" My answer to that would be oodles. |
| 00:29:59:21 | SERA | Yeah, I completely agree. I think we're always open to a good take.There's rarely been a circumstance where we have heard a pitch or received materials where we feel like the writer that is right for the adaptation is diverting too far from the original IP. There's always special cases. But I think trust your instincts and you will know, you know, if a choice is leading you too far outside of what the original take is.It is such a huge asset for us that we have these fan bases that we can directly market to and we have examples of times, both in the TV and film space, where we were able to drive audience from the platform either to the theatre or to a streamer or broadcaster.So, we want it... We would never produce something that seemed so dissimilar from the original that it's not distinguishable. We want it to clearly be, like, an evolution of that idea, so I think that should be your guide.If it's something where you think it's all of a sudden so editorialised that you're not connecting it to the original idea, that would definitely be a problem 'cause we wanna be able to pull in that audience.But at the same time, the things we chatted about earlier, you know, being able to change the plot and setting and move those forward so that you can create something that has a lifespan in another medium, absolutely. We wanna see that. |
| 00:31:29:21 | PHIL | Yeah. I'll just wait and see if there's any other questions on that.One that comes to mind for me is just around... It sort of ties into that "How much creative licence do you have? How commercial should you be aiming with this?" We want you to, obviously, be thinking a little bit about the marketability of it. As Sera just said, you know, these are titles with fantastic inbuilt fan bases, an inbuilt market that they can go to that's ready-made and so, obviously, you wanna be mindful of that, but at this stage, what I'd be encouraging is, you know, do let your imagination run wild.As you're in the early stages, in the first few days of reading this material, absorbing it and coming up with your ideas for adaptation, my advice to writers would be just go as crazy as you want and then, if you need to, pull back a bit for the actual application.So, don't self-editorialise too early on in the process. That process will come inevitably, but just in the initial period where you're just feeling inspired by these stories...go for your life.I think that's all the questions we have. Of course, if there are further questions, obviously there'll be a fair few people who'll be watching this later on once we put it on our website, and if you have questions that weren't answered just now, please feel free to get in touch with us. You can email Screen Queensland at content@screenqld.com.au. That's content@screenqld.com.au. And we'll answer your questions as best we can.We do encourage you to thoroughly read through all of the guidelines, everything that's on the website as you go through this. Make sure that you're across all the information that's already there.And with that, I think we can draw the webinar to a close. So, thank you so much, Sera, Jess and Danni, for joining us. It's been a pleasure chatting with you. We really look forward to seeing some fantastic takes on these stories coming through in the next few months by 22 March, the closing date, and, yeah, all the best. Happy writing, and bye-bye for now. |