

LAW FIRM PARTNERS

In the spotlight: Latham media star Lisbeth Savill on her new role supporting the UK indie film scene

By Joseph Evans

Given the demands placed on most City partners, it is often surprising that they have the time for anything else. Alongside her role as deputy chair of the British Film Institute (BFI), Latham & Watkins partner Lisbeth Savill has also now been appointed to a new body looking into the health of the UK film industry.

Her role on the Commission on UK Independent Film, which was launched by the BFI earlier this summer, is the latest film industry appointment for Savill, who acted as co-executive producer on 2011 Oscar winner *The King's Speech* and has advised on a number of other major films including *An Education* and *Cold Mountain*.

She joined Latham in 2014 after two years spent launching a London media practice for US firm O'Melveny & Myers, before which she spent more than 20 years at legacy Olswang. In recent years she has also spent seven years on the board of Film London and served as the sole lawyer on the



Latham & Watkins partner Lisbeth Savill

Government-commissioned Film Policy Review, which was set up to make recommendations for the future of the film industry.

Savill says: "It's a whole new world almost every day now. The Commission on UK Independent Film is looking at how the industry in this country can find and develop audiences for independent films - films that are not Hollywood blockbusters. Specifically, the Commission has been charged with looking at the state

of British independent film and how it is faring in today's ever-changing landscape.

"Film attendance in cinemas is relatively robust, but the major studios are mostly focused on popcorn-type films."

The box office market share for UK independent films was just 7.4% last year, the lowest level in three years, with *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie* leading the field with UK box office takings of £16m.

"Indie film is an incubator for UK talent," she says. "It bears emphasising in today's political environment that creative talent is an important national resource, and we are seeking to protect it. We are meeting over the summer and early autumn and will be hearing from representatives from all parts of the industry, from production, distribution and exhibition."

Savill attributes her knowledge of the movie landscape to nearly three decades working as a film-focused lawyer.

"I bring a combination of legal and business objectivity and passion for the industry. Personally, I really do love films that are not the studio norms, such as foreign language films, but I am also a lawyer and well aware of commercial pressures and industry norms. People know that I understand the moving parts of the industry."

Earlier this summer, Savill brought her experience to bear on the AIM listing of Film Finances Inc (FFI), which provides completion guarantees to film financiers and distributors. Savill describes FFI as a "key element" in independent filmmaking - "the glue between the world of banking and the world of filmmaking".

"FFI could have used a number of firms in London, but it was

our combination of deep industry expertise with our capital markets practice - led on this matter by [London capital markets partner] Claire Keast-Butler - that was a key differentiator for FFI. The team acted as a bridge between the way FFI works in the industry and the requirements of the capital markets."

Liberum Capital, which served as nominated adviser, sole bookrunner and broker on the listing, was advised by City firm Rosenblatt.

Since its 2014 launch with a six-partner O'Melveny team, Latham's London entertainment, sports and media practice has built on the US firm's global platform.

"Today, we have expertise in Los Angeles, London, Chicago and Beijing. The practice has traditionally generated business off the back of its established industry connections. Combining this expertise with Latham's global platform has created a myriad of exciting opportunities, particularly with companies that have content at their core."

When asked whether her name will be appearing in the credits of any more movies, she laughs.

"I have never cared about credits, but *The King's Speech* was fairly unique," she says. "I knew pulling together the financing was going to be very time consuming,

but I also knew from the day that the producers came to me that the film had something special about it.

"We will keep our hand in working on independent film; however, it was never the only work I did and I have found that being at Latham I have continued to build on and expand the range of work I do, which is both challenging and professionally satisfying."