

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

FUNDING FOR FILM AND VIDEO IN LONDON

a discussion document

1. At its meeting in March 1991, the Governing Body of the BFI agreed that the Institute should - in consultation with other interested parties - explore the possibility of setting up a new independent film and video development agency for London as an alternative to funding the London Arts Board when that body succeeds Greater London Arts in September 1991. This paper examines the current situation in London and the kind of role such an agency might play in the funding and development of a film and video infrastructure for the Capital.

GENERAL CONTEXT

2. The current organisational crisis at GLA and the withdrawal of film and video funding by the London Boroughs Grants Unit over the past three years seriously threaten to de-stabilise film and video funding policy in London. The decision by the Arts Council to incorporate the new London Arts Board into its own structure as a "sub-committee" until 1993, while possibly only an interim measure, would have a major drawback as a longer term solution in that it would effectively leave London without an arts funding agency having any real sense of autonomy.
3. The BFI believes that in the light of these developments the time has come for fresh thinking and new ideas about the most appropriate form and structure for the funding of film and video in London, and to look again at traditional areas of activity and funding mechanisms. Much turns on the familiar problem of London defined as an arts region, comparable to other arts/geographical regions, and the relation of London-based national (funding) bodies within that configuration. In our view, it does not make sense to try comparing London with other regions in this way, or to ignore the fact that London is the hub of the film and television industries, requiring policies and strategies different from other parts of the country.
4. A central tenet of the GLA approach has been to see itself driven primarily by "social welfare" criteria, eg creating opportunities of access for as many representative groups and activities as possible. However, a more challenging approach would go further and develop a strategy which not only addressed the need for greater democratic access to

film and video facilities and opportunities, but which also did so in full recognition of the industrial base of moving image culture. This would enable a more productive relationship to develop between various grant-aided constituencies and major initiatives which centre around the changes currently taking place throughout the media industry. Other areas for a more innovative approach include training, and the opportunities provided by a British Screen Commission.

POST-GLA OPTIONS

5. It has been suggested that the BFI, with its knowledge of London's current funding portfolio and its position in relationship to both the grant-aided sector and the media industry, could itself both direct-fund London organisations and establish an in-house development agency.
6. However, we ourselves do not believe this would be the right approach. In the short term it will be necessary for us to handle some of the funding directly, but we do not believe that this would provide a viable long-term solution because, as noted above, we believe it is essential to establish an fundamentally autonomous and democratically accountable organisation to take the place of GLA. We believe that this is important in itself and that not to do so would fly in the face of the moves towards devolution and decentralisation currently informing the changes to the structure of arts funding.
7. We believe that an alternative and more satisfactory approach worth exploring would be the establishment of a Film and Video Development Agency for London to bridge the gap between the (grant-aided) independent film and video sector and the media industry at large. Such a body could also provide precisely the sort of mechanism needed to stimulate a range of co-ordinated activity around key industry issues in the capital region, though it is unlikely that a London FVDA would emerge as a "voice" for the commercial sector. It would obviously represent mainly the interests of the cultural sector and have as its priority the need to pursue programmes and strategies geared to increasing the numbers of genuinely innovative activities in the area of exhibition, production, education and training.
8. The BFI therefore intends to consult widely (see TIMETABLE below) on this possibility and on the most appropriate role for a such an FVDA for London. Clearly, the Institute has had experience of similar institutions (Birmingham MDA, Sheffield Media development policies etc.) but we feel that the unique nature of London makes simple replication of a "model" undesirable.

The role and responsibilities of the FVDA might include the following:

- to fund, under contract from the BFI, strategically important activities in the independent sector across the range of film and video activities.
- to play an important "brokerage" role between the media industries and service providers. Given the sheer density of practitioners and services in the Greater London region, this kind of work could prove to be extremely demanding but nonetheless vital and effective. A London FVDA would of course have to engage more actively in areas of "mainstream industry", while at the same time representing the interests of the independent non-commercial sector.
- to undertake a thorough analysis of the capital region's audio-visual economy not only to assist in developing a regional strategy, but also to put in place a comprehensive database of London-wide resources for exploitation (as a service).
- to consider the need to raise private sector finance to augment the money available from the BFI.
- to provide the focus for a London Screen Commission.
- to engage with low-budget funding in a way complementary to that of the Arts Council, BFI, Channel 4 and other funders.

TIMETABLE

9. We envisage a consultative period running from May to September, during which time:

- The BFI will guarantee the funding of current GLA annual support clients for 1991/92, the first 50% of grant aid being administered and monitored by GLA. We will also write to all clients to explain the situation and solicit views and comments.
- We will additionally write to all project-grant clients to explain the situation and solicit views and comments.
- A thorough review of GLA's film and video client base will be undertaken by the BFI in conjunction with GLA's Film Officer, to assess current strategy and to devise a comprehensive framework in terms of both funding and future strategic development for London.

- Advice will be sought from a wide range of relevant representative or consultative bodies including the Regional Consultative Committee, CORAA Film Officers, the Association of Black Workshops, and the Network of Workshops.
- We will also consult other interested bodies including trade associations, the ACTT, regional broadcasters, and regional exhibitors both on the proposal itself and on the possible scope and nature of such an FVDA.
- Draft budgets will be drawn up for the putative organisation together with a draft Memorandum and Articles of Association and suggestions concerning the role and composition of the Board.

10. In the light of these consultations, and assuming that the proposal commanded widespread support, it would then be put to the BFI Governing Body for consideration and final decision.

11. The BFI invites comments on the above proposal which should be addressed to:

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