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for 24/7/89

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R W L Wilding CB
Review of Arts Funding Structure
105 Piccadilly
London W1V 0AU
Telephone 01-629 9495 ext. 249
Fax 01-355 4389

10 July 89

Personal and Confidential

Dear Sir,

I was grateful for your letter and paper of 3 May on the subject of this review. I should welcome a talk with you about it.

I enclose, for your personal and private information only, please, a paper put to me by the Arts Council people on this subject. I should welcome your thoughts on it when we meet.

When the RAAs are announced, you should know that I shall propose a much closer relationship with the Arts Council, with joint planning and budgeting for major clients and RAA Chairmen as members of ACGB. This must make BFI/RAA relationship

distinctive 'core' activities for each of the present funding agencies, the Arts Council, BFI and RAAs. However, in some fringe areas the current division is awkward and leads to poor accountability and a failure to maximise regional development potential. This paper argues for a single line of communication between central funding and the RAAs. This, we believe would greatly enhance their ability to perform.

2. Arts Council and BFI Core Activities

2.1 Arts Council

The Film, Video and Broadcasting department has four strands to its work:

a bit more distant and, I should have thought, more formal. We might consider two alternatives:

(a) BFI to do more under its own hand, eg. infrastructure, and Arts Council only to fund RAAs (including help for minor film/video makers);

(b) Arts Council to confine itself to promoting use of film, broadcasting, video to enlarge access to the arts. BFI to take whole responsibility for film as an art-form and cofund RAAs accordingly.

We will get in touch about a date.

Yours

Richard

Response to the Government Review of the Structure of Arts Funding by the Director, Department of Film, Video and Broadcasting and the FVO.

1. Introduction

1.1 We have been asked to comment on the present pattern of funding, with particular regard to the relationship between the Arts Council and the BFI.

1.2 The implicit question we recognise is 'can there be a single source for all national film funding?'

1.3 The simplest and most dramatic answer (which has been mooted on several occasions in the past), would be for the whole of the BFI to become a department of the Arts Council. The attractiveness of this idea is that it would bring together responsibility for film and the other arts, as they are frequently grouped within Arts Ministries etc abroad. As a separate Arts Council department, there would be no intrinsic difficulty in maintaining the BFI's objectives and responsibilities. However, we believe that the benefits to be derived would hardly compensate for the political storm such a move would now provoke: we believe the opportunity for this solution has passed.

1.4 The converse solution - for the incorporation of the activities of the Arts Council's department of Film, Video and Broadcasting within an enlarged BFI, would, in our view, be extremely prejudicial to the Council's policies. The Council's 3-year plan describes initiatives in the areas of audience-building and income-generation through involvement with broadcasting and education, which are likely to benefit every branch of the Council's work. Equally, it is our belief that the BFI would be unlikely to welcome a new department which existed to promote a 'special interest' such as the Arts (any more than they would welcome responsibility for the promotional film-making activities of English Heritage or the National Trust).

1.5 It is our view that there are clearly definable and distinctive 'core' activities for each of the present funding agencies, the Arts Council, BFI and RAAs. However, in some fringe areas the current division is awkward and leads to poor accountability and a failure to maximise regional development potential. This paper argues for a single line of communication between central funding and the RAAs. This, we believe would greatly enhance their ability to perform.

2. Arts Council and BFI Core Activities

2.1 Arts Council

The Film, Video and Broadcasting department has four strands to its work:

- * To advise Council on policy developments in broadcasting.
- * To make strategic interventions in the financing of arts programmes.
- * To promote the production of film and video works of art.
- * To improve the use of film and video as tools in the teaching of the arts.

2.2 From these core activities follow - without difficulty - the Council's active contribution to the debate about the future of arts broadcasting; the forging of links between arts organisations and programme makers; involvement in films sales, promotion and distribution; development of film/video exhibition in galleries; the use of arts films in education and a contribution to curriculum development.

2.3 The Council also has a responsibility to evaluate and assess the activities of the RAAs, which includes - to a currently ill-defined extent - their film activities.

2.4 BFI

The BFI has responsibility for:

- * Generally nurturing, promoting and supporting film and television culture.
- * Maintenance and development of the National Film Archive in all its forms.
- * Support of the National Film Theatre.
- * A lobbying and advocacy role in relation to film legislation in the UK and EEC.
- * Support of MOMI

From the above immediately follow - without controversy - the nurturing of the RFTs; intervention in film production through the Production Board (feature films and New Directors scheme); maintenance of a distribution library and programming services; involvement in education and publications.

More sophisticated arguments have to be advanced to support the BFI's involvement in the development of regional media centres, support of workshops, involvement in small-scale productions (non-cinema, non-broadcast) and training. It is in these areas, which the BFI has largely devolved to RAAs, that the greatest extent of overlap exists with other art-form interests (community arts, visual arts).

3. RAA Activities

3.1 The RAAs have a responsibility to:

- * Establish and support regional production resources (workshops and equipment pools).
- * To work in partnership with local authorities and LEAs to develop community productions and local exhibition resources.
- * To liaise with LEAs and training agencies re. the provision of training (vocational and non-vocational).
- * To develop the local media economy.

3.2 They are involved in, but currently not solely responsible for, the development of media centres and media development agencies. Projects of this scale are dependent upon substantial BFI investment and indeed sometimes constitute BFI initiatives, but are assessed within the framework of RAA Regional Plans. It is not unknown for the Arts Council and the BFI to hold contradictory views on such developments (viz Watershed), causing irreconcilable pressures to be exerted within an RAA.

4. Arts Council assessment of RAA's

4.1 The Arts Council's task of assessing RAA activities is complicated by the separate (part-) funding of RAA film activities by the BFI. The BFI contributes between 50 and 90% of RAA film allocations; in every case staff costs and overheads are met by the RAA, though some local authority funding may be channeled in this direction. Only recently has the BFI dropped its requirement that its contribution should be matched by RAAs from other funds. This has created potential for poor accountability. (What percentage of the total film budget is 'non-BFI'? What is it used for? Who assesses it?) It has often seemed that the Arts Council and the BFI funding of RAA's has led to parallel but separate (indeed sometimes hostile) policy developments and practices.

4.2 This lack of clarity is also reflected in the instructions sent to RAAs concerning the use of special funds. Some RAA's were able to use 'Glory of the Garden' development funds for film projects; the Arts Council's Incentive Funds were available to all RAA clients in the first announcement of the scheme, but film clients were excluded in the second.

4.3 The question of divided loyalties and accountability has implications even where the origin of the funding is not at issue. It is our view that many RAA film officers contribute less than fully to the wider cultural growth of their regions because they see their responsibilities narrowly focussed round BFI objectives. For example, there is, we believe, great potential for the non-broadcast film economy to expand through the creation of partnerships between film producers (individuals, small production units, workshops) and arts organisations, who require promotional and training tapes, archival records of their work, etc. This need was identified by research undertaken by the AC/Gulbenkian Video and the Arts project, but very little interest in the findings has been expressed by the RAAs. Equally, opportunities exist for RAAs to set up links between arts organisations, local producers and local broadcasters, paralleling at a regional level the initiatives of the Film, Video and Broadcasting department with national broadcasters (eg BBC and Channel 4). Again, with notable exceptions, the RAAs showed a remarkable lack of interest in the IBA/Arts Council 'Consultation Regional on Television and the Arts' which focussed on this issue.

4.4 If the Arts Council has cause for dissatisfaction in its

relationship with RAA film activities, so has the BFI. The move within many RAAs away from strict artform divisions in their organisational structures represents a 'threat' to the integrity of BFI devolved funds, and therefore to the pursuit of BFI objectives and to clear accountability.

5. A Possible Solution

5.1 We believe that the best means of achieving clearer objectives and greater accountability is for RAA film, video and broadcasting activities to be funded entirely from one national source. One can see the BFI's current enthusiasm for setting-up all-embracing media development agencies as stemming - at least in part - from the opportunity this presents to achieve BFI funding objectives entirely outside the framework of the RAAs (NW model). While supporting the idea of using independent agencies to do some development work, we are concerned about the evolution of a policy of 'separate development'. In our view the better solution would be to integrate film, video and broadcasting within RAA activities - as a full and equal partner - thereby strengthening links between film, video and broadcasting and other art forms, to their mutual economic and cultural advantage.

5.2 We therefore propose that the current responsibilities of the BFI's Funding and Development division should pass to the Arts Council's Planning Board; the opportunity being taken to devolve many individual clients to the regions. The film funding responsibilities of the 3 agencies would be as follows:

BFI

- * National Distribution and Exhibition
- * Feature Film Production (and Theatrical Shorts)

Arts Council

- * Assessment of RAAs
- * Production of Arts Documentaries
- * Production and Exhibition of Artists' Films

RAAs

- * Regional Production (including Workshops and Training)
- * Media Centres and Media Development Corporations
- * Links between Arts and Regional Broadcasters

6. Implications and Advantages

6.1 Looking at this in more detail:

The proposed re-division and devolution would allow both the Arts Council and the BFI to concentrate their funding directly around their 'core' activities.

The RAAs would acquire a distinctive role, gaining sole responsibility for the grass-root development of film culture, an ability to better-integrate film with other art forms within Regional Plans, and a clear accountability to their primary funder.

6.2 The Arts Council's Film, Video and Broadcasting department

would maintain its identity as the source of funding for arts-related film production. It would apply pressure to the RAAs to advance the development of Arts Broadcasting policies within their Regional Plans. The appointment of a national coordinator for television and the Arts might be considered. This post could be based within the Film, Video and Broadcasting department. The Arts Council's Planning Board would be responsible for assessing RAA film activities. A central development fund might be maintained - to be drawn upon by RAAs - for major film projects such as Media Centres. The Planning Board might also wish to consider the setting up of independent 'Development' agencies, working across RAA boundaries, given specific media development tasks.

Arts Council Incentive Funding would be extended to Film projects.

6.3 The British Film Institute's responsibility would focus unambiguously round Cinema and Television. It would continue the Production Board policy of investing in innovative feature films made for cinema and TV exhibition. It would concentrate its Housing the Cinema Fund on the restoration, maintenance and development of cinemas; (currently the fund is also used for equipment purchase and workshop funding). As a challenge /incentive-style fund, the Housing the Cinema would have a vital role to play in relation to the development of Regional plans. The BFI would expand its distribution and exhibition services, making available classics from the archive, investing in the import of important foreign films, offering programme advice and subsidy for touring film programmes as appropriate. It might also develop a much needed policy for film festivals. It would continue its valuable work in education.

6.4 The Regional Arts Associations would have the primary responsibility for creating the means of access to film and video production at local and regional level. They would seek to ensure the existence of workshops in all major centres of population. Some of these would be community-arts based in character and would be appropriately funded by local authorities; others would be educationally biased and would be largely LEA funded. Some would exist as centres for a wide range of independent production (on the model of the London Film-Makers Co-op or London Video Access), others might exist on the margins of the commercial industry (e.g. supported by Channels 3 & 5/Cable/DBS in the expectation of cheap programming).

The RAAs would be responsible for coordinating a diverse range of training opportunities, working with the appropriate agencies. They would maintain regional production budgets (having inherited the Regional Project Fund) and would seek to supplement these by negotiating arrangements with local broadcasters (as SWA and NA have done successfully).

They would work in tandem with the Department of Film, Video and Broadcasting on the creation of links between major arts clients and regional broadcasters.

7. Concluding Comments

7.1 Our proposal may seem radical but it is put forward in the belief that it would contribute to the objectives of the investigation by:

- * Creating greater integration of RAA policies towards film, video and broadcasting and the other arts.
- * Improving the lines of accountability from regional to national level.
- * Create the circumstances for a more dynamic RAA role in local and regional television, that will contribute to the arts economy and benefit arts organisations.

Rodney Wilson Director, Film, Video and Broadcasting
David Curtis Film and Video officer
June 1989