



**CIRCLES RESPONSE TO THE BOYDEN AND SOUTHWOOD DRAFT REPORT  
"DEVELOPING THE INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO SECTOR"**

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## Origins of the Independent Sector

At the outset of the report the reader is informed the reason for the existence of the Independent film and video sector is due to the large amount of funds which became available in the late seventies. This suggests the sector exists because the funders allowed and wanted it to exist. It ignores this could only have occurred in conjunction with the large numbers of people who wanted to make it happen i.e. filmmakers, training workshops, facilities hires and distributors and the audiences who felt they were under represented or incorrectly represented in the media. So it was a two way thing whereby the ideas, motivation and demand existed alongside the availability of funds.

In what follows the report points to "a level of permitted incompetence.....a mutual collusion in an organisational culture of incompetence" ( pg:29, para:4.), inappropriate, inadequate equipment availability (see Access and Film and Video Equipment), condemnation of the material as inaccessible certainly in the classroom (pg:70, para:6.) and the inability to implement equal opportunities policies effectively (pg:34, para:6, Item 2.) It is worth noting here CIRCLES is able to identify all our user groups and has frequently done so in support of L.B.G.S. applications.).

In short an enormous put-down of the sector inaccurately describing its origins, severely criticising its method of working and loosely accusing it of never having amounted to anything.

All of the above may be strenuously refuted. The sector exists because the public demanded access to the media as audiences and creatively at a time when entry to media related professions was severely restricted and mainstream media narrow in what it was saying.

The sector, poorly funded for years has made enormous achievements in the output of high quality varied work, reaching and developing audiences and overturning the often elitist restrictive practices of television and film companies. The work produced in the past twenty years is extremely valuable high quality work. Valuable because it has enormous applications one of which is in schools, from infants to seniors to juniors. The CIRCLES catalogue is known widely throughout the education sector such as Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges studying film and as a means of Education/Training in other faculties, such as, Humanities and Social Sciences. For example, "Breaking Silence" dealing with sexual abuse of children. "Who's Calling Us Crazy" a package of work about women and mental health. "For Good" a film about the experience of one woman and disability. Further, the interest in the body of work distributed by CIRCLES is just as great in the classroom.

This is part of a general trend towards anti-racist, anti-sexist education positively representing groups who are often under or negatively represented. This takes place not only in the classroom but also through playgroups and youth groups. For example, CIRCLES recently sold a large number of tapes to

Uses In The Classroom. The Nature of Distribution.

Youth Clubs U.K. as a library resource for their organisation.  
When the consultants state:

"The problems that exist with using "independent" sector material in this setting [i.e. the classroom] are best summed up by one teacher who had worked closely with a range of materials:

" "The basic problem with independent film and video is that the kids are bound up in mainstream film and television. If you offer alternatives, the mist starts to descend over their eyes." "

They are not only grossly incorrect in their assertion they are also uncovering poor research. The statement appears as factual. However, the teacher is unnamed so is the teacher's field, school and age range taught. Further, no other teacher's opinions were sought. They do not appear in a matrix at the back. A few lines of totally unqualified "research" are used to overturn the far reaching and valuable applications of Independent film and video work in the Education sector and the report seeks to create the same impression of the Independent sector's work at large.

Regarding the consultants fuller analysis of **Distribution**, we read:

"Distribution.....is merely the physical delivery of the product to the viewer. Marketing makes the connection between the viewer and the product. Distribution organisations can even sub-contract the distribution element (e.g. COW with Glenbuck) leaving them free to concentrate on marketing." Pg:56, Para:8.

We hope we are not revealing anything the COW workers have not publicly expressed themselves when we say their arrangement with Glenbuck is one they can do nothing about at present, but, one they are extremely unhappy with. They have lost contact with the material and so contact with programmers and filmmakers. This prevents effective feedback through dialogue and reduces sales and hires since it is at this point when the distributor may advise, significantly develop a programme of screenings and promote titles. It is quite likely the workers at Glenbuck do not have the same commitment or familiarity with the material as those at COW and do not respond to enquiries in the most positive or helpful ways. The workers at COW are unable to monitor their user groups in their present arrangement with Glenbuck - so how can any effective marketing strategies be developed. The nature of a women's distributor is to reach the right audience, safeguarding the work and the filmmakers. We do not distribute our work to anyone who asks for it. Can the same be said of a distributor who will distribute anything as long as its "legal"? (Quote taken

## Implementing the Recommendations. Local Authorities.

from a Glenbuck representative at B.U.F.V.C. 1988). These do not represent teething problems in the sub-distribution of work. This approach to the work makes a mockery of the organisations which are critical of stereotypical images and passive consumption. The arrangement is quite clearly unworkable.

(It would be useful to know more about Glenbuck's turnover and subsidy, presently omitted from the report.)

At Friday's 7th. July meeting we were unequivocally informed the B.F.I. will be implementing the recommendations of the report. This also seemed to be the feeling of other funders present. It was established at the meeting there are wide ranging inaccuracies which refer to CIRCLES and other groups. Also, a significant part of CIRCLES income and resources are tied up in distributing films and videos for sale and hire through Local Authorities. This is to the extent that April, May and June have realised sales and hires totalling £1,200. It is a similar story for the work in demand by Health Authorities. At the time of writing precise figures are unavailable for sales and hires. Despite a lengthy description in the report of the "research" carried out on **Local Authorities**, this application of Independent work has been totally ignored.

To quote the consultants:

"Distribution is a major problem. Phil Blackburn, Head of Ealing's E.D.U. said: "Apart from one video to be commissioned on black women at work, I'm not convinced they're good value for money. They all too often just sit on the shelf." (pg:80, para:5.)

Not only is any mention of the large volume of sales and hires to local authority departments and local authority funded projects missed out, but, the implication is film and video is of questionable use anyway.

Later we read:

If "independent" practice were genuinely able to offer distribution and marketing expertise, especially around public awareness campaigning (racism, health, safety at work, etc.) then there would be a ready market in local authorities." (pg:81, para:7, Item 3.)

An example of contradictions in the report and a complete lack of understanding of the work already accomplished by the Independent sector in this area.

It is on the strength of research such as this the report's recommendations are based.

The report is presently unwieldy, often erratic and unclear in its emphasis, misleading, guilty of serious omission and inaccurate.

Implementing the Recommendations. CIRCLES Management Committee.

Can any funder realistically state their intention to commence immediate implementation of the report's recommendations, disregarding not only any notion of the consultation process but also the enormity of the contradictions and misrepresentation contained within the report?

At the 7th. July meeting funders frequently prefaced their remarks with: "There has been a 10 - 20 % drop in public funding of film and video in real terms in the past three years.....", or, "three quarters of our grants are tied up in revenue funding making it impossible to fund other projects that come along.....".

These observations are entirely distinct to assessing the Independent film and video sector classifying it as thoroughly dependent and passive, shaped and owing its very existence to funders, incompetent, irrelevant and basically a big mistake. If the latter set of assumptions are tied in with the former the result will be the devastation of the Independent film and video sector. What happens then if in two years time we have a change of Government that is favourable to Arts funding and prepared to release more money? The consultants seem to think if money is available the groups emerge. They may do, but the experience and achievements of the Independent film and video sector will be lost.

As was pointed out at the 7th. July meeting it is the sector which has produced the work, developed the audiences and the culture which is responsive to and demands this work. It has not happened overnight or by chance. the assumptions which call for massive cuts to film and video provision, not only because there is less money, but because they are deserved is destructive and shortsighted.

The report calls for many things in its analysis of the **working methods** of the sector. For example, job definitions. Currently, at CIRCLES we have job definitions for an Administrator, a Finance Worker, a Technical Administrator and we are concluding the areas of work to be covered by the fourth. It also calls for a more efficient management committee. The CIRCLES **management committee** comprises a graduate in marketing, a festivals organiser with the British Council, a film archivist with the B.F.I., film tutors and freelance filmmakers who play a crucial and efficient role in the organisation's development.

The report is around eighteen months out of date in alleging these things have not taken place in the Independent sector. It is six - nine months out of date in failing to see any change in public opinion regarding opposition to cuts in a whole range of areas and present Government policies.

The consultants want to transform the Independent sector so it becomes identical to its commercial counterpart. This is contrary to one of the main aims of the Independent sector which is to make film and videomaking accessible to ordinary people. This will be incompatible with any future commercial venture approaches.

## Training. Implications For The Future.

The experience of the past 10 -20 years has been the evolutionary development of the Independent sector through methods of working in conjunction with aims and values. The results have been the work produced and the development of a film and video culture. It will be a tragic mistake if all this is lost due to a set of misplaced assumptions.

When organisations such as CIRCLES have done so much to increase self-generated income the continued support of funders in the next few years is essential in allowing such groups to make the jump from mainly grant aid to becoming self supporting.

CIRCLES supports those areas in the report which call for **training in Management, Finance, Administration and Marketing** (pg:57, para:5, Item 2 and pg:86, para:6, Item 5.) Given adequate development in this direction CIRCLES will be able to produce "anything between 80 - 90%" of our own costs (pg:23, para:2).

Our concern is that the report does not place enough emphasis on providing training for existing distributors. Rather, it points to opening up other areas of networking and distributors and employing someone to co-ordinate the compilation of the Good Video Guide and the Film and Video Umbrella. This can only take place in conjunction with training provision for existing distributors. In its analysis and recommendations the report omits the enormous and clear involvement of current distributors with our users and in developing the market. The continued effect of omitting this can only be the misdirection and duplication of resources. The development of the film and video sector in this country must be interpreted in the light of reduced funding. However, it cannot be interpreted on the basis of the premisses in the report, which suggest the sector should be so radically altered it becomes unrecognisable. It is highly doubtful the Independent sector could be so transformed it would be assimilated into the commercial sector. More than this even if it were the work which currently characterises the sector, screened widely abroad and nationally, will no longer exist.

Changes CIRCLES Recommends For The Final Report.

#### CHANGES CIRCLES WISHES TO SEE MADE TO THE REPORT

CIRCLES wishes to see the following changes made to the report "Developing the Independent Film and Video Sector" before final publication. These are listed here in point order for ease of reference.

#### INACCURATE REFERENCES TO CIRCLES

1. "Of the 40 or so groups funded on an annual basis five are facing cuts to their funding or have had all or part of their funding withdrawn." pg. 20.

CIRCLES is included in note 1 relating to this statement, yet while our L.B.G.S. funding was threatened in '88-'89 we won the appeal.

2. "A further six groups are facing difficulties with continuing in their existing premises." pg. 20.

CIRCLES have no plans to move. Four corners are entirely happy with the arrangement and our lease is secure for the next four years even if Tower Hamlets should choose to sell the building, ensuring our rent will remain at its present level.

The point regarding premises is restated:

"Six groups are facing difficulties with their premises." pg:46. In note 12 CIRCLES is listed as one of them.

3. Table 9. Page 54. "Sales of "independent" distributors.

The figures for CIRCLES should read:

CIRCLES                      £19,500

4. "CHART 2: FILM AND VIDEO GROUPS - EMPLOYMENT" pg:103

CIRCLES has three part time workers and a fourth starts in September. Further, two of the part time workers work four days a week and two two days a week. That is, two are practically full-time. However, without making an effort to break labour down into hours the impression given is a much smaller labour pool than actually exists.

5. "Twelve groups claimed to be involved in screening activity." pg:58. CIRCLES is included in Note 15. We feel the sentence is derisory as it stands and "claimed" should be replaced with "are" if our organisation is referenced in this way.

6. "As far as we could identify only Ceddo seemed to have made any attempt to get their work taken up by a local education authority." pg:70.

Not true. CIRCLES has worked hard in this area.

7. "There are at least two cases where some form of merger might result in a stronger catalogue and increased turnover." pg:54, Para:4.

Please remove suggestions from the report of a merger between CIRCLES and COW. While discussions along these lines

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took place some months ago, no decisions were taken and these discussions are not taking place at present. Further, there is no move to re-activate them in the foreseeable future.

8. "Individual film and videomakers seem to have almost no voice in the debates around funding." Pg:21. Item 2. Please note CIRCLES operates a viewing committee fortnightly comprised largely of filmmakers, who select the work taken into distribution. Further, there are several filmmakers on our management committee. It would be most useful to see more detailed reports of what individual filmmakers and videomakers had to say in the final report. ( Pg:2, Para 1.)

### MISLEADING EXAMPLES

1. When making a point about a particular type of activity the consultants illustrate the point by giving an example of a group or organisation involved in that kind of activity. On the one hand this gives clarification to the reader but on the other it indirectly suggests those groups mentioned are the best in that line of activity and generally colours the landscape to the benefit of some groups and the detriment of others. We feel CIRCLES have been victims of this even though unintentionally. The two most striking examples of this are: "For the specialist and institutional markets, groups would go to Albany Video, Team Video or Concord Films." pg;54, para:2.

"For specialist material like video art or experimental film, a maker would go to London Video Access or the London Filmmakers co-op."

Without doubting the suitability in choosing any of the three distributors listed in the first example, it must be noted CIRCLES is one of the foremost suppliers of Independent material to specialist and institutional markets such as Education, Health and Local Authorities. This is an ideal place to include CIRCLES as an example.

With regard to the second, one of the prime reasons for setting up CIRCLES was to develop a worthy distributor of Experimental women's film. the consultants must realise this distinguishes CIRCLES from other distributors. It is surprising we are not included here and trust you will make alterations in both instances.

2. In the section under distribution a lot of information is given about Cinema of Women and the Albany. This is to the point where Albany's best selling title is cited. This gives a quite unbalanced picture since other distributor's were not asked to give their top moving titles or to break down their work in the way the Albany's is. We can only conclude this is because the consultants have a lot more information to hand about the Albany and COW from previous consultancies they have carried out. We feel it seriously disadvantages other



## Changes CIRCLES Recommends For The Final Report.

distributors if the information is put in this way. We propose it is removed, or, other distributors are asked similar follow up questions to be included in the final report. It should also be noted the Albany only deal in video whereas distributors such as CIRCLES distribute video and film.

### STATEMENTS TO TAKE OUT

1. "The problems that exist with using "independent" sector material in this setting [i.e. the classroom] are best summed up by one teacher who had worked closely with a range of materials:

""The basic problem with independent film and video is that the kids are bound up in mainstream film and television. If you offer alternatives, the mist starts to descend over their eyes."" pg:70, para:6.

2. "Distribution.....is merely the physical delivery of the product to the viewer. Marketing makes the connection between the viewer and the product. Distribution organisations can even sub-contract the distribution element (e.g. COW with Glenbuck) leaving them free to concentrate on marketing." Pg:56, Para:8.

3. "Distribution is a major problem. Phil Blackburn, Head of Ealing's E.D.U. said: "Apart from one video to be commissioned on black women at work, I'm not convinced they're good value for money. They all too often just sit on the shelf." (pg:80, para:5.)

4. If "independent" practice were genuinely able to offer distribution and marketing expertise, especially around public awareness campaigning (racism, health, safety at work, etc.) then there would be a ready market in local authorities." (pg:81, para:7, Item 3.)