

## **GREATER LONDON ARTS**

### **Developing the Independent Film and Video Sector in London**

#### **1 Background**

In September 1988 GLA, in association with the British Film Institute and the London Boroughs Grants Committee, commissioned consultants Boyden Southwood with Comedia to undertake an audit of film and video provision in the region and to identify strategic development options for funders in the light of diminishing public subsidy.

The brief required consultants to draw up a 'map' of equipment, services and work in the Independent Film and Video Sector and to look at film and video provision within the Education and Commercial sectors and within local authorities to identify where there was duplication or gaps and to make recommendations as to how existing resources across all sectors could be maximised and developed.

The brief excluded production as this is an activity funded separately by the regional and national funders on a one-off or commission basis and for which a separate policy is being drawn up. Instead consultants were asked to focus on the means of production, including 'access' to equipment and training, and support structures, including distribution and marketing.

The consultancy was overseen by a small steering group comprising representatives of the 3 funders concerned. This in turn reported to a wider grouping, The Joint Funders Strategy Group, comprising the BFI, GLA, LBGS, ILEA, the Arts Council and Channel 4, which met regularly to discuss the various stages of the consultancy and make recommendations on the report.

A draft report was presented in early June and circulated widely amongst the independent sector, including all London-based groups, funders, representatives within the industry, education bodies and local authorities. Responses were solicited and various meetings were held to discuss the report and its implications for all concerned. Many responses, both critical and laudatory, were received by GLA, many of which were incorporated by the consultants in their final report.

The final report was received in mid October 1989. At a meeting on 1.11.89 the Joint Funders Strategy Group accepted the report as a broad framework within which individual funders could collaborate and develop specific strategies.

#### **2 Summary of the Report**

##### **2.1 Audit of Resources within the Independent Film and Video Sector**

The report gives a detailed background context to the sector and its funding, tracing its various origins in the political film movement and avant garde practices of the '60s and '70s, the community arts and video movements of the '70s and 80s and the newer groups working around issues of representation such as the Black film workshops and women's

video groups. Many of these were developed or given a new lease of life in the mid '80s due to funding from the GLC and the newly emerged Channel 4.

Most of the groups had adopted a philosophy first coined in the late '70s of 'Integrated Practice' whereby the activities of production, exhibition, training and education and sometimes distribution were located in and carried out by each group. In the early '80s this Integrated Practice was given recognition by the film union, the ACTT, who, with a number of film workshops around the country, formulated 'the Workshop Declaration' which was signed by relevant groups and their funders (including Channel 4) and the ACTT. Participating workshops were 'franchised' by the union to carry out their film and video activities as an integrated practice. Franchise-status imposed certain limitations on these workshops, including their legal framework and staffing/management structures, minimum numbers of 'workers' and minimum rates of pay.

Not all London-based organisations wanted or were able to become franchised. Some gave up their franchise status when loss of GLC and Channel 4 funding meant they were unable to maintain pay and staffing levels (eg Four Corners Film Workshop, Albany Video etc.). The result by 1989 was a 'two class' system of well-funded but mainly production-led franchised workshops (of which there are three in London) and the rest: non-franchised groups and workshops, all under-funded and struggling to do the same activities. All sought validation as an alternative to the mainstream (usually specialist-skills orientated) industry through giving access to those traditionally excluded and through operating 'integrated practice'.

The report concludes that the sector itself, as represented by the funded groups and workshops, is unfocused and lacks a strategic purpose. The sector also lacks a sound economic base as the growth of funding in the mid '80s, aimed at creating an alternative infrastructure or 'parallel industry', had instead created dependency on grant-aid. The report further concludes that a 'parallel industry' did not and could not exist in a hostile funding climate. External circumstances had also changed the definition of the Independent Sector (ie through the emergence of commercially-based independent production companies - the 'independents' who will benefit from the 25% quota in broadcasting) whilst changes in production and distribution technologies and the shake-up in broadcasting made the aspiration for a parallel industry not only economically unviable, but culturally undesirable as well.

The report looks at Independent Film and Video Practices affecting the provision of 'access' to equipment and training, production, exhibition and distribution. Rather than try and fund 'an integrated practice' amongst all groups, it suggests that funders should assess and develop those activities that are relevant to a future strategy, collaborate with other agencies including local authorities and the education sector and 'buy in' where necessary from the commercial sector. The following is a summary of findings across the funded groups with recommendations within each area of activity.

### 2.1.1 Working Practices

Between them funded groups provide 85 full-time and 70 part-time jobs. Income thresholds varied enormously but few have a turnover in excess of £100,000 and over half derive over 75% of their income from grant-aid. The report concludes that original grant funding was spread too thinly amongst too many groups. It also makes the following points:

- there is often an unwillingness to increase earned income or operate a mixed economy although many could generate higher levels of income
- few have managerial, financial or marketing skills (and wages are often too low to attract or keep these skills)
- there is a disproportionate number of 'film/video workers' with few support staff to carry out management functions to support the film/video work
- many groups are overstretched and trying to do too many things (often at the request of funders or to chase funding) with a result that they sometimes achieve little success in any one activity
- there is a general lack of performance indicators and self-monitoring, particularly in the area of employment practice with a result that there is often a level of permitted incompetence
- Amongst some groups there was a lack of clarity around their legal status and internal structures (eg fuzzy notions of collectives and co-ops) which in turn induced poor working practices
- Many management committee members lack necessary financial, legal and management skills to carry out their responsibilities. MCs tend to be sector-representative and often recruited on an Equal Opportunities basis (often to counter the EO imbalance amongst staff) and have unclear roles. Few are given induction or training.
- There is generally a lack of planning amongst most groups (annual applications for funding, often to 3 or more funders, encourages this), as a result there is a capital and equipment crises and many groups are in unsuitable premises for their activities and need to relocate.
- Many groups lack clarity in their objectives and tend to be funding-led.

#### Recommendations:

- to ensure survival in the new funding climate funders need to

tackle the low level of skills in the sector, in particular finance, management and marketing

- internal structures need to be re-examined - fuzzy historic notions of collectives and co-operatives should not be tolerated. Groups should specify where and how management functions are carried out. In relation to skilled personnel, pay differentials should be encouraged on the basis of skills and responsibility.

### 2.1.2 Equal Opportunities

In relation to the industry the sector comes out well both in terms of recruitment of personnel and users as many women, lesbians and gays and Black people get their first foothold in film and video through the workshops. However they lack proper avenues of advancement through structured training in all areas. As successful implementation of an Equal Opportunities Policy is integral to good employment practice and management, groups need to have proper structures within which to create clear objectives and then monitor them.

#### Recommendations

- Funders need to give detailed guidelines so that both groups and funders are addressing a common agenda.

### 2.1.3 Access

- This is defined too widely by both funders and groups and needs to be more clearly targeted. At present there is confusion over the term 'access' and who it is aimed at as anomalies exist in the use of access at subsidised rates. The key task is to prioritise who needs access to what equipment and then decide through which delivery points.
- Much of the provision is aimed at targeted groups and this should be made more explicit to funded groups and monitored by them on that basis.
- Proper London-wide provision of access will only become possible if equipment and resources outside of the sector are opened up for wider use - ie within local authorities, education and the private sector.
- Premises also need to be attractive for groups to operate successfully in a mixed economy and also be physically accessible - to transport facilities and those with disabilities.

#### Recommendations:

- Access is a costly and time-intensive way of familiarising people with equipment. As a catch-all criteria for funding it should be abolished. Low level production equipment is often cheaper and better maintained within the commercial sector (ie through high street rental shops). Funding for familiarisation should be at a local level and tied to training. (see section 2.3.2)

Executive Committee is asked to:

- 1) Agree the report 'Developing the Independent Film and Video Sector in London' summarised above as a suitable framework within which to develop more detailed strategies for GLA and its funding partners
- 2) Thank Russell Southwood and his colleagues for his professionalism and work put into the report
- 3) Agree the three major objectives and strategy proposed for GLA to develop over the next few years
- 4) Instruct officers to ensure that staffing and budgetary implications are included as part of the overall process of developing funding guidelines and budgets for 1990/01 onwards
- 5) Instruct officers to look at redrawing the Film and Video strategy in line with GLA's new Strategy for the arts 1990-1995.

F.S.  
19.1.1990

## Developing the Independent Film and Video Sector in London

### Appendix 1

Timetable for implementation for implementation of stage one: Joint Funders Strategy

Oct/Nov 89	Joint Funders visits (GLA, LBGS, BFI + borough) to <u>all</u> funded groups to discuss implementation and if/how their main activity might fit into new structure and different patterns of funding.
Dec	Reports circulated to all members of Joint Funders Strategy Group
Dec/Jan 90	Joint Funders Strategy Group: A series of focused meetings to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Equipment resource centres and training</li><li>- Exhibition, distribution and marketing</li><li>- Production</li><li>- A Media Development Agency for London</li></ul>
Jan 1990	Agree structure for regional equipment resource centres inc main activity focus and sub-regional remit
Nov/Jan 90	Division of F&V Training portfolio between GLA and LBGS (across annual, contract, development and project support) ie split between production-based cultural/artistic training (GLA) and technical skills-based vocational training (LBGS)
31 Jan 90	deadline for annual applications - NB revenue support organisations to include business plans with applications, others to be contract funded
Jan/Feb	Agree structure for regional provision of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- marketing support and audience development</li><li>- production support</li><li>- training and development of accreditation for short courses</li></ul>

31 March	Deadline for Development Applications and contract support for training programmes (NB this will include some groups, mostly Black groups, previously funded by LBGs)
April	Prepare guidelines for one-off schemes (Exhibition/Marketing, Training/education)
April/May	Assessment of all annual applications
end May	Officer reports and funding recommendations for Annual, Contract and Development Support
June	Executive decision on the above for implementing new structure on 1 July.