

BFI FUNDING & DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

BFI Policies and Priorities for Development -
A Consultative Document

1. Over the last several years there has been a dramatic increase in local authority funding of media activities, led by the Greater London Council and the Metropolitan Councils. Since the end of the 1970's the increase has been by some 10,000%. What lies behind this staggering figure is the almost total negligence of media activities by local authorities in the 1970s. By 1985, however, the GLC and Metropolitan Councils were spending some £2,500,000, or about 5.4% of their total arts expenditure on film and video.
2. The abolition of the GLC and the Metropolitan Councils would, if implemented, drastically interrupt this trajectory and generate a rush of requests for mainly financial support from the BFI and the RAAs. Other factors affecting the patterns of local authority spending such as rate-capping can only further disrupt this development.
3. *Not much hope here.* Business sponsorship of the arts may eventually alleviate some of these problems, but it is unlikely to solve them in the foreseeable future. Consequently, the F & D Division will be faced with a vastly increased demand on its resources, both from direct applicants and from RAAs. A priority must therefore be to continue to negotiate with local authorities to ensure that the maximum support possible is given to these activities post abolition.

4. Compounded with the likely effects of abolition are changes which have taken place as a result of BFI funding distribution, exhibition, education and production activities over the last decade, interrelated with and partly determined by new developments within the media industries and socio-political changes within Britain as a whole. The BFI recognises the need to reassess its work and to re-think its policy in the light of this changing situation. The present paper is intended to initiate a wide-ranging consultative process with the objective of arriving at an understood definition of the problems and possibilities presented by these changes and a pertinent policy framework to meet the challenge they pose.
5. Within the public agencies which fund media activity, two distinct currents can be identified. Whilst these are differences of emphasis rather than wholly divergent directions, they nevertheless have important implications for policy.
6. One current is associated with local authority funding priorities, the other with national and regional institutions devoted specifically to the arts.
7. The local authority current tends to emphasise quantitative criteria, aiming to create media provision for communities in order to achieve the enfranchisement of a range of representative voices not readily accommodated within the existing media institutions of broadcast TV and the film industry. Local authorities tend to give priority to initiatives providing communities with access to the media and providing services to the maximum number of people. In this sense, quantitative considerations override questions of "quality". Indeed, the two may even be equated.

8. The second current could be characterised as interventionist in the sense that it is more concerned with the cultural aspects of media activities. Of course, questions of quantity are addressed as part of the inescapable economic conditions within which cultural work must proceed. But the emphasis will be on achievable cultural "quality" within these conditions. 'Quality' in this sense is to be understood as an emphasis on educative dimensions, on the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of cultural forms obtainable through public debate, through challenging forms of presentation, by stimulating and by directing attention to areas of cultural work that function as dynamos, energising the processes of renewal and innovation.
9. Putting it perhaps crudely, one tendency seeks to make media provision for the maximum number of people and concerns itself with cultural criteria in that context; the other tendency is concerned to sustain and develop the liveliest and most challenging areas of media culture and seeks to involve the maximum number of people in that process.
10. In practice, these two currents have tended to complement each other since they existed in a salutary and productive tension within the many collaborative ventures between the BFI, the RAAs and local authorities. If the proposed abolition of the GLC and Metropolitan Counties goes ahead, the balance achieved over the last decade will be disrupted and new, no doubt at times, painful, adjustments will have to be made.

11. As a national institute concerned primarily with promoting knowledge and understanding of film and television, one of the BFI's main tasks is to foster discussion and debate in this area, supporting this with the materials and resources necessary to sustain and help develop those activities and organisations most likely to enhance and invigorate the national media cultures.
12. It is our view that such a policy requires us to redefine our commitment to the notion of integrated practice. In the past, this has tended to be interpreted as a requirement of each individual organisation, however small, underfunded and understaffed, to engage in exhibition, production, distribution and education - clearly an impossible task for the vast majority of funded organisations. The major industrial institutions which produce and disseminate film and television culture do operate a de-facto integrated practice in that their activities involve a strategic intervention in all four areas. This requires the BFI to direct its investment funding towards those organisations which conceive their cultural work as decisively shaped by the interdependence of these four sectors and which devise their strategies in terms of a considered, mainly qualitative, intervention into that set of interconnected processes.

13. Underpinning this notion of integrated practice is the fundamental recognition that any activity [exhibition, education, production, distribution or any combination of them] is likely to be most effective within the culture as a whole if it proceeds on the basis of analytical appraisal of its position and function within the structures of film and TV culture in this country. The second, equally essential requirement would then be the formulation of practicable policies and modes of operation designed to stimulate the liveliest, best informed and most challenging film and TV culture achievable.
14. In terms of integrated activity the BFI is inflecting its funding towards the principle of investment in a regenerative film and television culture, rather than the more traditional notion of subsidy. Subsidy carries the connotation of keeping in existence marginal pockets of cultural activity within an overall industrial context with which they have little relationship and over which they have little influence.
15. Investment suggests an effective contribution to the development of a viable infrastructure of a specifically British film and television culture. A strategy based on investment works towards the creation of a changing and innovative future, while subsidy tends towards the ever more embattled defense of the status quo.

16. In the present circumstances the identification of 'centres of energy' whose concerns and practices are most likely to re-generate the culture and to open up productive new perspectives must be seen as a priority. 'Centres of energy' might be seen as being organisations which work from a recognition that 'British national culture' is far from homogeneous, but rather consists of a number of diverse component cultures and social groupings. Such a recognition would aim to commit those elements of audio visual culture allied to the BFI and its policies to a sustained critical exploration of received notions of social, cultural and national identity. This would necessarily include an emphasis on questions of gender and race both in terms of discriminatory practices and of representation within the forms of film, video and television. Affirmative action will clearly be required in these areas. Essential to such a strategy are notions of innovation and change together with the need for a constant review of existing definitions and practices and of their effectiveness.
17. Such are the general policy terms in which the BFI's F & D Division sees its role and the priorities it would seek to operate in order to achieve the Institute's aims. The requirement now is for specific strategies and criteria which are able to positively engage with the cultural and economic factors already shaping the late 1980's and promising to lay out the terrain for the 1990s. This may only be achieved through extensive consultation with our funding partners. The success of these strategies will be measured by the permanence, visibility and cultural effectiveness of the organisations and activities in which we will be investing.

Appendix

PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE FOR A CONSULTATION PROCESS OCCASIONED BY THE PROPOSED ABOLITION OF THE GLC/MCCs

As is by now well known, in the event of the abolition of the GLC/MCCs in 1986, the Government will provide the BFI with the sum of £2.5m. for film and video activities.

The Institute has publicly acknowledged that this sum is inadequate to cope with likely demands from organisations currently funded by the GLC/MCCs to a level currently estimated at £2.5m. The Institute continues to press the case to Government for realistic levels of funding. It recognises, however, that the very enormity of the problem necessitates early and sustained action to ensure that proper information is gathered and an effective consultation process is undertaken.

The following represents the Funding and Development's provisional timetable (which may have to be altered according to circumstance) for that consultation process, the object of which is to arrive at the maintenance of an infrastructure for media activities and a strategy for survival in the event of abolition.

1. F & D officers are currently engaged in a re-assessment of current funding policy in the attempt to produce a document which will characterise that which is distinctive within that policy and to identify broad areas of media activities which the Institute would see itself funding, should the proposed abolition take place. It is anticipated that this consultative document will be prepared by mid June.
2. In June and July, the F & D Division sees its priority as consulting with film and video funding bodies - the affected Regional Arts Associations, Arts Council of G.B., Channel 4 - and the two major representative organisations - IFVA and ACTT. Each consultative meeting will elicit comment on the BFI's policy document, invite specification of the organisation's funding policy, collect up-dates on financial information and lists of affected organisations and examine proposals for the routing of funds post-proposed abolition. As well as the above-mentioned bodies, the policy document will also be passed through the BFI's internal mechanisms, and will go to the Regional Consultative Committee and the Regional Production Fund.
3. Throughout the period of this schedule the Institute will be in discussion with other funding agencies concerning their intentions.

4. In the light of these preliminary consultations, the F & D document will be re-drafted to provide a package of funding criteria understood by the funding bodies to facilitate applications from affected organisations. It is anticipated that this re-draft will go to the BFI's National Conference in September 1985. Further consultation with affected bodies is, clearly, desirable and may take the form of individual or public meetings - time and the need for decisive action being the main limitations.
5. The policy and strategy paper, amended through the foregoing processes of consultation, will be presented to BFI Governors in October.
6. If the Bill is enacted, the BFI will invite specific affected organisations representing identified areas of media work to make application for funding in November/December. A period of assessment and negotiations with other potential funding agencies will follow and the Institute will aim to make its funding decisions by March 1986.