

UK Film Council
response to
Arts Council England's consultation paper
Achieving great art for everyone

April 2010

1. Introduction

The UK Film Council is the Government-backed lead agency for film in the UK, ensuring that the economic, cultural and educational aspects of film are effectively represented at home and abroad. The Board of Directors, appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, oversees the work of the UK Film Council and provides advice to the Government on film.

This submission, while including some general observations about *Achieving great art for everyone*, focuses on those aspects of the Arts Council England's paper that relate most strongly to screen media especially film and have a potential connection with the work of the UK Film Council in England. For this reason we have not responded to the broad, general questions asked at various points in the text of the document.

2. Executive summary

- The UK Film Council welcomes the Arts Council's commitment to a ten-year strategy.
- The paper's focus on high-level principles suggests that detailed comment from the perspective of the UK Film Council may be of greater value and relevance at a later stage of Arts Council England's consultation process.
- We believe the paper would benefit from even greater recognition of convergence between arts and art-forms.
- It would benefit from even greater exploration of the changing nature of audiences and their relationship with art and artists.
- There could be a more ambitious approach to working with other agencies including the UK Film Council to build on the successes of the last ten years and explore the relationship between the arts and the wider creative economy.

- We welcome the potential *Achieving great art for everyone* creates for closer partnership working between our two organisations.
- More attention could be given to the possibilities of partnerships with broadcasters and other media organisations, such as the proposed Project Canvas and the emerging idea of Digital Public Space, set out in the current BBC Strategy Review.
- An information knowledge sharing arrangement could be established to explore synergies between the Innovation Funds established by our two organisations.
- Our two organisations could also collaborate with regard to:
 - Visual artists wanting to work with the medium of feature film
 - The Cross Art-form Venues (CAVs) with cinema at their heart, so that they harness the benefits of new technologies
 - Regional priorities, so that the combined impact of Arts Council regional offices and the Regional Screen Agencies are maximised.
- Finally, more attention should be given to the role of archives in delivering the ambitions of the paper.

3. General comments

The UK Film Council welcomes this consultation paper, and the Arts Council's commitment to setting out key themes and priorities for its work over the next ten years.

We welcome its focus on excellence, its commitment to diversity, to education and to sustainability.

We welcome the potential it creates to extend and deepen the already valuable partnerships and collaborative approach that have been established between our two organisations.

We recognise that *Achieving great art for everyone* is one stage of a longer process. Given its role in setting out broad principles, rather than more specific strategic intentions or resource allocations, it may be of more value and relevance for us to comment at greater length and in more detail at a later stage in the consultation process.

Nevertheless, at a time when convergence between media and art forms is a prominent reality, we feel that a ten year strategy should include more substantial thinking as to the impact of convergence on the work of the various public agencies that exist in the cultural sphere, including Arts Council, the UK Film Council, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, other DCMS-funded agencies and the public service broadcasters. We would welcome closer relationships with hubs of creative excellence in other areas of the arts to encourage cross-fertilisation of creators and audiences.

The paper makes a clear distinction between artists and audiences and therefore underplays the extent to which audiences, in all areas of the arts but most particularly with screen-based media including film, are breaking down these old boundaries and exploring new ways of interacting with art and artists. Audiences are also increasingly active users of content and services – commenting on, sharing and remixing material in ways that they, rather than public institutions, determine. These developments have already had considerable impact on arts practice and are certain to grow in significance over the next ten years.

It follows that if the paper's ambition to see England "as a pre-eminent world centre for artistic excellence" is to be realised, a greater recognition of these changes between artist and audience made possible by developing technologies and shifting public expectations about culture, is of great importance.

We welcome the commitment, on page 12, to use the influence of the Arts Council to "increase arts engagement through the wider creative economy". Similar statements about advocacy appear throughout the paper. Public recognition of the importance of creativity and culture at individual, community and national level is of a different order to the perceptions of ten years ago. We think there is room in the paper for greater ambition in setting goals for what might be achieved over the next ten years.

4. Specific comments

Despite reference to the importance of digital in the paper we feel there should be more specific emphasis on the role of digital technologies in stimulating new art forms and opening up new ways in which the public can experience and engage with the arts.

In that context, we would welcome a clearer commitment to the value of partnership working, not just with the public service broadcasters, but with a wider range of public and commercial media bodies, whose closer collaboration could not only generate new developments in the arts but help to ensure that during an extended period of public expenditure restraint, resources are being used and areas of expertise leveraged in the most cost-effective way.

In the immediate future, Project Canvas, the proposed partnership between the BBC, ITV, C4, Five, BT, Talk Talk and Arqiva to build an open internet-connected TV platform (subject to BBC Trust approval), offers a particularly valuable opportunity to broaden and deepen engagement with arts content and applications. Collaborative services and tools will be key to building audiences and attracting users to Canvas – there is a clear opportunity for Arts Council and the UK Film Council to work together on developing such services and tools.

We believe there are possibilities for Arts Council and the UK Film Council to jointly develop a clear proposition for arts content and services on the Canvas platform – as well as examining the potential offered by other emerging digital platforms.

We also believe there are significant opportunities to access audiences and users in new ways by working with the BBC to develop its emerging idea of the Digital Public Space, as referenced in its consultation paper and its recognition of the need to “build a broader public space by working with other public cultural organisations to share and promote a wider range of content.”¹ The UK Film Council and the Arts Council should work

¹http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/strategic_review/strategic_review.pdf, page iv and various references to the “digital public space” throughout.

closely on developing thinking around the concept of the Digital Public Space, subject to its endorsement by the BBC Trust.

With both Arts Council and the UK Film Council establishing innovation funds and with the UK Film Council's stated intention to invest more in 'experimental' film possibly working with visual artists wanting to work with feature film in the future, thought needs to be given as to the areas where the health of the arts and creativity in England may be best served by partnership between the two organisations and where clearly defined separate purposes are more appropriate.

The forthcoming Film Innovation Fund is an opportunity for greater collaboration. The fund is focussed on new ways for film to reach audiences. There is a strong partnership remit to the fund, both across sectors (for example working closely with the Technology Strategy Board (TSB)) across the UK (partnering with national and regional like funds) and potentially Europe. The UK Film Council would very much like to enter into an information knowledge sharing arrangement with the equivalent activities in the Arts Council to enhance the effectiveness of all the funds working in this arena.

The UK Film Council also believes there is an opportunity for working in partnership to raise regional ambitions across England. We have already embarked on some joint initiatives with Arts Council and believe that we should discuss further ways of increasing impact and ensuring even better value for money.

Similar issues arise with regard to support for cultural and creative education, whether within the national curriculum or in more informal settings; support for the arts and creative industries at regional level throughout England; and in identifying appropriate strategies for the Cross Art-Form Venues or 'CAVs' that both our organisations fund. We recognise, however, that it may be the intention of Arts Council to address some of these more specific issues in the next stage of the consultation process.

Reflecting the changing landscape of both policy and practice, the UK Film Council and the Arts Council should ensure that they work closely together on developing firm proposals on broadening access to public content and services, most particularly in view of

possible broader legislative developments around the communications landscape which may lie ahead.

Given the low barriers to entry, we should also explore possible collaborations around social media services. Although the major services are run on a commercial basis, they offer wide and largely unexplored means of broadening engagement with the arts and culture.

A further issue is that of opening up greater access to archives. Given the unparalleled richness of the UK's publicly owned collections of art, artefacts, print and screen media, intensifying collaboration between the various public agencies that have responsibility for these archives is of real significance, in terms of widening and deepening public appreciation of the nation's cultural heritage and art.

We think more specific references could usefully be made to the changing nature of the audience relationship with art and artists (referenced above) in terms of user-generated content, as well as new ways of merging live and virtual experiences and the rising demand for personalisation in most areas of public consumption.

Finally, in the context of digital technologies is the widely acknowledged fact that, with a few prominent exceptions, publicly supported arts and cultural institution in England have been slow to embrace digital possibilities in a creative and imaginative way. They remain locked in a broadcasting paradigm of 'one to many' rather than recognising the creative power of sharing and social networking. If England is to be a pre-eminent centre for artistic excellence, then this needs to be addressed.