

CONFIDENTIAL - MINUTES OF THE ARTISTS' FILMS SUB-COMMITTEE
POLICY MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 17 JANUARY 1977 IN THE VI FLOOR
COMMITTEE ROOM OF THE ARTS COUNCIL, 105 PICCADILLY, LONDON W1V 0AU

Present:	Professor Stuart Hood	Chairman
	Mr. David Curtis	Committee Member
	Mr. Simon Field	" "
	Mr. Tony Rayns	" "
	Ms. Caroline Tisdall	" "
	Ms. Laura Mulvey	" "
	Mr. Rodney Wilson	Film Officer
	Mr. Jonathan Harris	Assistant Film Officer
	Ms. Stephanie Featherstone	Secretary
	Mr. Peter Sainsbury	Head of BFI Production Board

a) Review of Criteria in Relationship to the
BFI Production Board

The Film Officer welcomed Mr. Sainsbury and opened the meeting by reminding the Committee that some years ago the Arts Council had examined its film-funding activities at a meeting with various other bodies, including the BFI Production Board.

It was decided that the Artists' Films Committee should find films that the BFI Production Board were unlikely to sponsor, i.e. avant-garde experimental artists' films.

Mr. Sainsbury said that in his opinion the BFI Production Board was no longer hostile to this kind of work and cited as examples films recently made with BFI funding by Peter Gidal and Malcolm le Grice.

The Film Officer then listed the differences between possible uses of BFI and Arts Council awards. The Arts Council awards were meant to cover basic material costs and equipment hire; unlike those made by the BFI they did not include fees, rental of premises or living expenses. This was partly for tax reasons and partly to do with copyrights, which remained with the film-makers.

Ms. Mulvey asked whether the film-makers supported by the Artists' Films Committee were mostly artisan film-makers; the Film Officer said that in the sense that there was a tendency for the film-makers to carry out most production aspects themselves, yes. However this was not concerned with craftsmanship as such but an aesthetic of the individual use of materials.

Mr. Sainsbury asked the Film Officer whether the Arts Council could define exactly what kind of films the Artists' Films Committee were likely to finance rather than wait for the BFI Production Board to speak first. The Film Officer replied that from previous experience he was sure that the BFI would not wel-

come the Arts Council taking this initiative; there had been complaints made in the past at the time the Council Centre of Enquiry into Film (The Attenborough Committee) was assessing the terms of reference of the Art Film Committee. Mr Sainsbury said that as it was really a question of delineating areas of work the Arts Council should be willing to approach the BFI via the DES. The Film Officer explained that he thought this was best done unofficially along the lines of the present meeting.

Mr Sainsbury asked whether the Arts Council had any rules restricting the number of times applicants could receive awards but the Film Officer told him that there was no maximum, although generally not more than once within one financial year. Mr Sainsbury said that the BFI did have an administrative guideline against the continuous support of an applicant as funds were limited.

Professor Hood said that it would seem the hazier the differences between the terms of reference for Arts Council applications and BFI Production Board applications the better, from the film-makers' point of view.

However, the Film Officer did not think it a good thing for there to be too much fluidity as this leads to both bodies receiving applications that have been rejected by the other. When Ms Tisdall asked if this mattered the Film Officer explained that under DES rulings no two government-funded bodies could support the same activities, which created considerable practical difficulties. The same did not apply if an individual submitted different projects for different kinds of films.

Mr Sainsbury asked why the Artists' Films Committee had been formed in 1972.

Mr Curtis said that it had been as a result of pressure from avant-garde film-makers and the Film Officer added that at that time a number of artists, particularly conceptual artists, were looking for support and pressurising the Art Film Committee and elsewhere.

The Film Officer said that in 1972 at a meeting with the BFI it had been decided that as a rough guideline films likely to be shown in cinemas (in intention if not in fact), were likely to come within the terms of reference of the BFI whereas films for galleries and exhibitions would be eligible for Arts Council support. Mr Rayns added that the Artists' Films Committee also began to sponsor work that was unlikely to be shown in conventional public venues because of technical requirements, such as multi-projection events. This area of activity was now known as expanded cinema. The Film Officer said that the distinction had been considered to be between narrative and non-narrative, a not very sophisticated but, at the time, workable demarcation.

Mr Sainsbury said that this distinction no longer applied as far as the present Production Board was concerned and that any application would be considered that met the requirements of the present guidelines. This would include film-makers who had

received support from the Artists' Films Committee. It was pointed out that the Artists' Films Committee gave materials only awards to a large number of individuals whilst the tendency with the Production Board was to support a few comparatively high budget films. The Films Officer said the number of film-makers whose work would be considered by both bodies was small. In addition, the difference in scale of financial support did define to an extent the nature of the work submitted.

Ms Mulvey pointed out that applications like those recently received from Stewart Mackinnon and Nigel Perkins were designed to provoke the BFI and the Artists' Films Committee into defining their terms of reference by accepting or rejecting them. The Film Officer said that in view of the larger amounts of money now involved he thought they should consider their reasoning very carefully. He reminded the Committee that all awards made by the Arts Council may now be subject to taxation as a direct result of a particularly high award attracting the attention of the Inland Revenue.

Professor Hood asked what would happen if the Artists's Films Committee gave someone a research or script award and the result was that the film in question would be too expensive for the Arts Council to fund. Mr Sainsbury said that this would in effect mean the Arts Council were funding test sequences for the BFI as applicants would then turn to them.

Mr Sainsbury suggested that perhaps the most practical step to be taken would be for greater co-operation between himself and the Film Officer in exchanging information about applications. The Committee were in agreement.

Mr Field again asked Mr Sainsbury about the BFI's policy with regard to awarding grants to applicants on more than one occasion. Mr Sainsbury replied that, whilst no applicant would be automatically rejected on a second application after a grant had been given once, funds were limited and therefore it was less likely that a second or further application would be successful.

The Film Officer summarised the problem by saying that what both the BFI and the Artists' Films Committee wished to avoid was a recent tendency of arranging an application and adjusting the budget to suit first one body then the other. This of course meant that neither application was likely to be an accurate reflection of the film to be made.

Professor Hood closed the discussion by repeating the suggestion made earlier that the Film Officer and Mr Sainsbury should liaise to avoid this happening. The policy of the Artists' Films Committee would continue in 1977/78 along the lines of that for 1976/77.

b) Capital Funding for Video Resource Centres
(London Video Arts and Aidanvision)

The Film Officer explained that he had met representatives from London Video Arts and Aidanvision.

He had told them the Artists' Films Committee was not in a position to give revenue grants. However, it was possible that there were aspects of the applications that could be considered for funding, such as exhibitions and catalogue compiling.

The applications were for funds to set up production, exhibition and distribution centres for video tapes.

Mr Curtis asked whether these applications would be better directed to the Committee responsible for Housing the Arts; the Film Officer said he would find out.

Mr Sainsbury said that the BFI had also received an application from London Video Arts but that it was unlikely they would be able to help.

Mr Field and Mr Curtis were both in favour of supporting the applications but the Film Officer pointed out that this would create a precedent and that careful consideration should be given as to whether the Committee wanted to become involved in this kind of funding. He explained to Ms Tisdall that whilst this would not entail contravening any of the Committee's rules it would necessitate provision being made in the annual budget, and there were indications that the Council would reject any recommendations for additional on-going commitments. Professor Hood and Mr Curtis were concerned about access and who would be able to use the centre; they did not want it to be exclusive. Mr Curtis suggested London Video Arts should contact the Co-op to discuss sharing their new premises.

Ms Tisdall was in favour of providing regular funding but Mr Field thought this would only be practicable if the Committee's annual budget was increased so that other areas already supported did not suffer.

It was agreed that in the first instance LVA would be informed that an application would be considered consisting of the tape distribution centre and catalogue aspects only.

There was no support for the Aid nvision application.

Mr Sainsbury then left the meeting.

c) The Rejection of a Research Application
by Stewart Mackinnon

The Film Officer reminded the Committee that the applicant had been rejected twice by the Artists' Films Committee. The second application had been for a research grant towards a film script. The Film Officer referred to the previous discussion with Mr Sainsbury and said that if a research grant had been given Stewart Mackinnon would most likely have applied to the BFI Production Board for funds to make the complete film. He had been dissatisfied with the reasons given by the Committee for both rejections and had asked for the opportunity to discuss the rejection.

Professor Hood said that he would have to convince the Committee

that what he wanted to make could be termed an artist's film.

Stewart Mackinnon then joined the meeting.

Professor Hood asked him to define the sort of film he hoped to produce after completing the research. Stewart Mackinnon said that after JUSTINE it had become obvious that The Film Work Group would have to investigate different sorts of finance. He thought all aspects of the making of a film, including research and script should be considered as film work. He was very interested in what happened at Suez and had tried to explain how he would deal with the subject in film in his first application. When this was rejected he decided that in future rather than spend time investigating and researching into a possible film he would investigate ways of raising money: he had chosen Scotland as the subject.

He was very upset to find that he seemed ineligible for support from either the BFI or the Arts Council. In answer to enquiries from the Committee he said that he was also unlikely to get money from commercial concerns; he had approached oil companies and the Highlands Development Board without success. He wanted to portray various aspects of Scottish culture and to investigate ways of doing this but it seemed his ideas of culture did not coincide with those of the Committee. He genuinely felt that his application came within the terms of reference of the Artists' Films Committee's Bursary scheme.

Professor Hood did not feel that he had given sufficient thought to the practicalities of how this research would be achieved. Ms Tisdall asked whether it was a requirement that research grants should produce concrete results and the Film Officer replied that it generally was. She asked Stewart Mackinnon if he hoped to have something concrete to show the Committee and he said that he did, mentioning several authorities on Scottish studies whom he hoped to consult.

In response to the question from Ms Mulvey, he said that he could not say whether his research bursary would be used to actually shoot any film.

The Film Officer explained that the Committee could not give bursaries for research that was likely to be the basis of an application to the BFI.

The Film Officer said that when the research bursary application was received it had been difficult to see how a film could be produced from it; Stewart Mackinnon said he had merely tried to approach the range of ideas available. The Film Officer added that in any case it might cause difficulties if the Arts Council of Great Britain gave him some money rather than the Scottish Arts Council; however, Stewart explained that he had approached them

and found that they did not fund documentaries so there would be no infringement. The Film Officer said that there would still be problems and the application would have to be routed through the S A C. Mr Mackinnon said that if the Arts Council supported him to a certain extent it would encourage commercial backers but the Film Officer thought this would create ethical problems. Stewart added that he would work out the final budget on completion of his research and that it did not have to be as large as the Committee seemed to fear.

Mr Field suggested he should have done some preliminary research in Scotland before applying for a bursary; after all he was now working in Newcastle so fares would not be extortionate; Stewart replied that he had got the job in Newcastle after making the application and that he did not need to travel initially as he knew the material was there; however, in order to cover all aspects he would need considerable resources. He was particularly fascinated by the great oral traditions in the Islands; however, Professor Hood thought he would experience considerable difficulties as he had admitted he did not speak Gaelic.

Stewart Mackinnon then left the meeting.

There was considerable discussion; the Committee did not feel that the project was really within their terms of reference and moreover did not think that Stewart had adequately explained exactly what he intended to do.

Professor Hood suggested that as he now had an income he should use some of this to produce an application based on more concrete material, and re-submit in perhaps a year's time.

d) Clarification of Nigel Perkins' Application
AROUND THE LAYING OF THE FIRST TRANS-ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH

Nigel Perkins joined the meeting and began by outlining the possible sources of film-funding in Britain as opposed to the Continent.

He was aware that films with high budgets were unlikely to be supported in difficult economic conditions and had therefore had to limit his scope accordingly. He thought he was more likely to get support from the Arts Council with a lower budget, accepting resultant limitations, than from the BFI who consider a larger budget. He also thought the Committee defined avant-garde film only in terms of structural film practice and this should be challenged. Professor Hood asked him to define his application, given that it was presumably not a straightforward documentary or it would not have been submitted to the Committee.

Nigel Perkins said that while it would contain certain historical details it would not be a documentary in the accepted sense of the word. He was concerned with de-structuring the conventional documentary form. Referring to the fact that his application did not include a script, he said that in his opinion other areas of

film production were just as important. He was particularly concerned to work on the problem of acting.

Ms Mulvey asked for assurances that this film would not experience the same difficulties with actors as seen in JUSTINE; Nigel Perkins explained that he felt the Film Work Group had learnt from JUSTINE and that these problems were now understood. His project would involve working on these problems particularly relating to the English theatre tradition of acting and this is what he wanted support for. The Committee could not understand why this kind of work could not be carried out with video at far less expense.

Nigel Perkins then left the meeting.

The Committee then discussed his application.

The Film Officer felt that Nigel Perkins had very limited knowledge of film outside his own particular sphere and the Committee in general did not feel he had been very articulate about his intentions. Ms Mulvey thought it might be difficult to justify not supporting the application when the Committee had given several awards to Phil Mulloy (who had been a member of the Film Work Group). Although his work was undoubtedly interesting he had never yet completed a film.

The Committee then discussed both applications.

Mr Rayns felt that Stewart Mackinnon had not provided the Committee with enough information to deserve a bursary; he found Nigel Perkins rather naive.

Professor Hood thought that Stewart Mackinnon should be encouraged to start his research in Edinburgh; Mr Rayns agreed. It was suggested that Stewart should be asked how much money he would need to begin in this way and told that any request would be considered sympathetically.

Professor Hood thought that Nigel Perkins was being realistic with his budget but the Film Officer did not agree; Professor Hood also thought Nigel Perkins' positive attitude towards future dealings with actors encouraging. Ms Mulvey thought that if the Committee did turn down Nigel Perkins' application they should do so carefully on grounds of content rather than concept.

It was agreed to reject the application.

The meeting then ended.