

London Film and Video Development Agency The role of LFDVA in the cultural independent film and video sector

These notes formed the basis of a presentation to the Board of the LFDVA on April 1, 1998. In part they represented a valedictory intervention from Steve McIntyre then in the process of leaving the Agency. They are inescapably a personal document and, while these views and the 'style' they suggest have materially informed the way in which Steve has steered the LFDVA over the past five years, they of course do not represent official LFDVA policy.

1. The LFDVA is overwhelmingly a development agency and, at the risk of stating the obvious, has taken its developmental responsibilities very seriously over the past five years. It does not see itself, nor has it ever seen itself as primarily a funding body - giving out grants and monitoring the outputs and financial probity of those organisations in receipt of grants. While that has been a substantial part of its work, grant giving is a means to an end, and that end is cultural development not fuelling, for its own sake, an always revenue hungry subsidised sector.

There are a number of corollaries to this developmental agenda:

- the LFDVA needs to be directly entrepreneurial - while in some cases activities are best discharged through other bodies, in many cases things are most appropriately undertaken by the LFDVA itself. Thus, the LFDVA has been an active developmental partner in the Lux Centre; within the rubric of the London Production Fund, it has produced work directly for television as well as grant aiding other productions; it has bid for and secured a range of funding from European funds - New Voices, Pathways, Lumiere, the East London Film Funds and others; it has bid directly for Lottery funds; it has worked up a range of non-commercial franchise proposals.
- the in-house developments needs to link to the operations and aspirations of the cultural independent sector in London. The LFDVA has always been assiduous about working in partnership - for instance with LEA, LFMC and VET on the Lux Centre; with Black Coral, VET and other on New Voices; and so on.
- as a developmental agency, the LFDVA needs to be opportunistic and seek developments where they are possible - it cannot be precious about what kinds of new initiatives it secures.
- cultural activity in London happens in a huge number of sites - the LFDVA must not restrict its constituency and its partnerships to those organisations which, often for historical reason, happen to have been or currently are in receipt of grant aid.
- revenue funding is the bluntest possible funding tool. This is not to say that for certain cultural organisations, ongoing financial support is not necessary for those organisations to continue to prosecute their cultural goals. It does mean, however, that revenue funding ought not to be given

because organisations are somehow seen to be essentially worthy (because they are part of a self-defined "sector". Rather ongoing revenue funding must be to secure defined ongoing cultural outcomes [here, I must admit that the LFVDA has not been as effective as it might have been in determining these outcomes and establishing working service level agreements].

- as a development agency, the LFVDA must retain the greatest possible financial flexibility.
- there is no such thing as "the sector" or even "the independent sector" - cultural activity is enjoyed in a wide range of contexts and the LFVDA needs to be alert to all of them.
- there is no such thing as revenue "clients". This hateful and unhelpful term is one of the reasons why the arts funding system is such a mess. The funder is the client not the recipient - the funder, effectively, is 'buying' cultural services from a cultural 'service provider'. While this way of looking at things smacks rather excessively of the market excesses of Thatcherism, it nonetheless carries an essential truth.

2. The driving principle of the LFVDA ought to be some kind of "principled opportunism" and the entrepreneurial and developmental energy needs to be steered by a clear cultural agenda. This is a complex and often somewhat intangible area but one which needs to be at the forefront always of our minds. In a curious way, these cultural issues are more complex in London than other parts of the country. In regional arts boards, it is possible to fall back on regional agendas (developing non-metropolitan work, training local, etc.). Whatever the merits or demerits of these arguments (and personally I find them thin and unconvincing), they have no purchase in London. The LFVDA, therefore, needs continually to interrogate its operations and funding practice in the light of overall, authentically cultural ambitions.

3. London is a region and London is the centre of the nation. It will always be necessary to negotiate this dialectic with the BFI and other national agencies

4. The LFVDA, for reasons which are nothing to do with us, remains an anomaly in the overall arts funding system and has constantly hit up against the monumental solipsism of the Arts Council of England which charmingly defines the arts funding system as what it happens to fund and to do!

5. The need for growth has never been greater. As the BFI and Arts Council stumble through their own fundamental reviews, and as the Lottery degenerates into the chaos it always promised to be, it is urgent that the LFVDA builds a plural funding and operational base. At the risk of appearing to be over-dramatic, there is a crisis in the cultural film and video sector caused by crises at the BFI and Arts Council (included ACE Lottery activity). High up this list of LFVDA priorities for the next 12 months is endeavouring to steer through these issues.

6. The LFVDA needs to remain fleet of foot and alert to new opportunities - it should resist any bureaucratic sclerosis.

7. Culture cannot always be counted and quantified. While, under certain circumstances, number crunching around outputs and performance indicators is valuable, it ought not to dominate every circumstance. The need for broadly defined cultural spaces has never been more urgent.

8. The LFVDA, I believe, has a good reputation as entrepreneurial and developmental organisation. It has achieved this by not being afraid to step on toes, to take hard decisions and to not always court favour. This must continue.

Steve McIntyre 20/6/98