

A/11
-6 JAN 1989

MEMORANDUM

To: Wilf Stevenson
Barrie Ellis-Jones

From: Irene Whitehead
Date: 5 January 1989

THE BFI AND THE REGIONAL ARTS ASSOCIATIONS - BRIEFING NOTE

The BFI's involvement with the RAAs commenced in 1971/2 with a modest grant to Northern Arts; by 1979 the Institute was spending £238,450 on 12 English RAAs and the Welsh Arts Council; in 1988/89, the total has risen to £1,436,310, an increase which partially reflects the BFI's prioritisation of regional activities but which is also explained by the passing over of monies made available to the Institute at the occasion of the abolition of the GLC and the Metropolitan authorities.

Attached, please find a list of current grants to RAAs and the WAC. The differentials in funding are primarily due to historical factors e.g. Northern Arts, the largest recipient with £366,350, was the first to employ a full-time Film Officer and was a significant beneficiary of abolition monies - South East Arts (£33,450), in a non-Metropolitan area, engaged its Film Officer in 1979 etc. It is true to say, however, that the differences in funding levels do point to qualitative differences in performance. The BFI, to the commencement of its 3-year funding package chose not to follow the ACGB line of giving each RAA the same percentage uplift but rather awarded increases according to merit. Regions were judged on their ability to devise and implement an effective and coherent film, video and tv policy for their area of benefit, and bids were made against an overall programme of work, monitored and assessed by Funding and Development Division throughout the year. So, East Midlands Arts, with its policy to create an exhibition infrastructure, its co-ordinated training programme and attention to equal opportunity concerns has fared well - the Welsh Arts Council, on the other hand, still trails behind many of the English RAAs on a current grant of £51,000.

Another tenet of the ACGB - that of the desirability of geographical spread - has not been embraced by the BFI, which has always preferred to see the relatively small amounts at its disposal concentrated in areas of maximum usage and placed with influential activists, rather than spread thinly. So, for example, we ceased to fund Lincolnshire and Humberside in 1983/4 because of its lack of core infrastructural agencies.

CONSULTATION AND CO-OPERATION

Because of the developmental needs of film and video in the 70s and 80s, and the fact that the BFI is, itself, a direct funder of exhibition venues and, since abolition of London workshops and distributors with a broadly national remit, contact and consultation with both the Directors and Film

Officers of RAAs has been very high and sustained.

1. Formally - F & D officer attendance at Executive, F & GP, Film and Video Panel etc. meetings organised by the RAAs; to 1988 at the annual RAA interviews, latterly via consultative meetings.
2. Informally - to discuss mutually funded projects, capital and Development budget applications, to make common cause to increase funding from local authorities, private sector etc.

Response to this high level of communication has been variable: some RAAs welcome the input of the national body charged with responsibility for film and video, others consider the BFI too "interventionist" and would prefer a more arm's length approach. Over the past few years, certain RAAs have called for the "devolution" of direct funding from the BFI to exhibition venues in their region, but this has, and will be strongly resisted.

Given that we are about to enter a period of RAA review, to which the BFI will be asked to give evidence, it is worth identifying the advantages and disadvantages of promoting regional film and video activities through the RAAs.

ADVANTAGES

1. **Financial:** For many years, the BFI adopted a "matching" principle of RAA funding which had a beneficial effect on the emergent culture. Whilst this principle is no longer an absolute condition of grant (because of abolition) it still means that the (approx) £1m provided by the BFI is augmented regionally by a further (approx) £1m. from local sources.
2. **Officer cover and local contacts:** The presence of film/video officers (or their approximates) in the English RAAs (even in LHA) means that, in addition to the work force of F & D, there are 12 people plus support staff operative throughout England monitoring, assessing and developing film and video projects. Ideally, this should mean that the RAAs should be best placed to read the political pulse of their local authorities and be informed of the most productive private sector sources to approach for developmental funding. Sometimes this does, indeed, happen e.g. SWA link with TSW, NA with Newcastle City Council etc.

DISADVANTAGES

1. **The ACGB Connection:** The strong link with the ACGB artforms and monies maintains an attitude to funding and subsidy appropriate to those artforms but inappropriate to film, video and tv e.g. concern for "access" has very different implications in the media than in performing arts. This means that there is a constant tension in RAAs as to how to relate to the differences in needs of f/v and the BFI, and those of the other arts and the ACGB. In this scenario, the Institute's power to affect change is minimal.

2. **Structure:** The sheer size of most RAA's Executive Committees, usually designed to meet the needs of local authorities' representation, means that the concerns of the BFI are rarely voiced, and thus, its ability to gain purchase is small. Also, several RAAs still cling to their outmoded panel systems, mainly composed of revenue clients, which slow down decision making processes, impede officer flexibility and act against the notion of an RAA as a developmental agency. Even those RAAs which have restructured their advisory system still feel obliged to retain some referral elements.
3. **Officer Quality:** This is true of organisations other than RAAs but particularly important in their case - that the quality of film and video work in a region is often dependent on the quality of the Film Officer to initiate and develop activity. Pro-active officers are few and far between.

I hope this information is sufficient to provide you with some background prior to any meetings with Richard Wilding, in which, I trust, officers of F & D will be involved. If there is anything further you need at this stage, please let me know.



Irene Whitehead

REGIONAL ARTS ASSOCIATION BUDGET 1988/89

	£
EASTERN ARTS	66,670
EAST MIDLANDS ARTS	85,565
GREATER LONDON ARTS	314,800
MERYSIDE ARTS	132,775
NORTHERN ARTS	366,350
NORTH WEST ARTS	64,300
SOUTHERN ARTS	74,500
SOUTH EAST ARTS	33,450
SOUTH WEST ARTS	53,400
WELSH ARTS COUNCIL	51,000
WEST MIDLANDS ARTS	105,000
YORKSHIRE ARTS	88,500
LINCOLNSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE ARTS	-
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	1,436,310