

Culture, Media and Sport Committee
House of Commons Committee Office
Millbank
London
SW1P 3JA

Culture, Media and Sport Committee
“Is there a British Film Industry?”

Submission from the National Council on Archives

The National Council on Archives (NCA) is a membership organization, which represents a broad spectrum of the archival community including user groups, professionals, national and regional bodies. It aims to provide a single voice for the archival community and to lobby on matters of common interest.

Summary of submission

Our interest in the Committee’s hearing concerns awareness of and access to moving image archives in the UK.

We are seeking to support and endorse the work of the Film Archive Forum (FAF). FAF was founded in 1987 and is the organization that represents the interests of the United Kingdom’s public sector moving image archives

We wish to highlight some concerns about the policy framework, sustainability and structural support given to moving image archives in the UK, which in themselves are inhibiting the very real potential of the material to touch people’s lives

We hope the Committee will take the opportunity to question the Film Council on those matters of policy and sustainability, and urge it to support the archiving of Britain’s film heritage for cultural, educational, social and economic reasons.

Awareness and access to moving image archives in the UK

Millions of people every year enjoy and appreciate the great richness of material held in moving image archives in the UK. They experience these collections through screenings in classrooms, community centres, universities, record offices, museums, libraries and, of course, on television, over the internet and in cinemas.

Innovative access to these archives supports government policy in the following areas:

- It supports the creative economy by providing a source of inspiration not just for our contemporary film and television industry but for individuals, schools and community groups;
- It supports social inclusion by fostering a sense of place and time, community identities and shared histories. It has particular strengths in expressing the voices of those sometimes missing from more official versions of history.
- It supports lifelong learning by providing the raw material from which new programmes and research can be developed. In this respect the very nature of moving image archives can help to foster new learning in audiences that may lack, through no fault of their own, the ability to interpret more traditional archival sources.

Perhaps the best way of demonstrating the power of this material to touch people's lives is to relay some of the feelings that users experience

"This draws back a curtain on a whole world of film which has been lost to me"
Visually impaired user

"Audio description opens doors for me, giving me access I would not otherwise have" Visually impaired user

"I can follow the thrust of the film much better" Hearing Impaired User

Quotes are from the North West Film Archive's "Can I hear that in Colour?" project that adapted films for use by visually impaired and hearing impaired users.

The achievements of the FAF (<http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/faf/faf.htm>)

The creation of innovative access to moving image archives in the UK is, of course, dependent upon a coherent policy framework and a sustainable structure. Since its foundation in 1987, FAF has been instrumental in fostering a network of British moving image archives, where none previously existed. FAF now represents all eleven national and regional moving image archives in the UK. FAF's achievements include:

- The establishment of a high standard of professionalism across its network which is reflected in its commitment to internationally agreed standards for the acquisition, care, preservation, and cataloguing of its material;
- A commitment to achieving the widest possible access to collections;
- Successfully campaigning for the development of a UK Audiovisual Archive Strategy (this work is currently underway and will be completed by September 2003)

In the last couple of years FAF has been campaigning vigorously for the establishment of a coherent policy framework to underpin the sector's future development.

Policy Framework, Sustainability and Structural Support – The Role of the Film Council

Policy and funding responsibility for the UK's regional film archives was taken over by the Film Council in 2000. The British Film Institute and Regional Arts Boards previously administered primary core funding.

In its policy document, *Film In England* (November 2000) the Film Council took two very important steps. Firstly, it acknowledged its role in leading policy development for "archives and collections" (*Film in England*, Film Council, 2000, pp. 63). Reassuringly, this specifically mentioned the whole gamut of professional archival processes required to look after and provide access to material. Secondly, the Film Council highlighted the cultural value of moving image archives and recognized the inherent problems they face in achieving sustainability and took responsibility for addressing those problems. It stated, "The Film Council wants to make additional investment, to assist these archives to achieve a better degree of organizational stability, to undertake sector development and to fully participate in establishing an integrated regional planning process." (*Film in England*, Film Council, 2000, pp. 22-3). The Film Council identified additional core funding of £250,000 for the English regional film archives from 2001-4.

The statements contained in *Film in England* marked a turning point for moving image archives in the UK. However, there are some concerns that the Film Council has yet to turn the statements it made regarding policy responsibility and funding streams into reality.

In terms of policy responsibility, there is no Board member with a special interest in, or knowledge of, moving image archives and the Council has yet to appoint a policy advisor at the executive level. Interestingly, despite invitation, The Film Council is not, as yet, a partner in the development of FAF's audiovisual archive strategy, which is being funded by Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Given the Film Council's previous positive statements, the NCA finds this disappointing.

In terms of funding, the Film Council has yet to make available all of the stated £250,000 to the regional film archives. In fact, the increase in core funding (after the first two years of the Film Council's 3 year Regional Investment Fund for England) is £144,356. The devolution of funding to the regional screen agencies also appears to have led to different patterns of funding. There has been no stated rationale for why increases to each regional film archive have varied from £2,000 to £20,000. The amount of funding received from the Film Council represents a very variable percentage of the total running costs of each regional film archive.

In the context of the Film Council's group turnover of £60 million in 2001-2, it receives excellent value for money from the revenue funding provided to the regional film archives. For example, in 2002, there were over 75,000 visitors to the South East Film and Video Archive's exhibition at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery and over 102,000 enjoyed North West Film Archive's footage

in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire through screenings, exhibitions and presentations.

We understand that the regional screen agencies are encouraging the English regional film archives to forward plan on the expectation of a tapering core fund from the Film Council. We understand in doing so the Film Council takes the view that its core funding represents temporary time limited assistance to enable the film archives to develop commercial income streams, using much the same arguments as for film production.

We would urge the Film Council to question the assumption that the same rule can be applied to film production and film archiving. The English FAF members earn from 3% to 28% of their income from commercial activities each year. Their ability to commercially exploit the material they hold is often hampered by the fact that they do not own the intellectual and property copyrights to that material. There are, in addition, very significant long term and unavoidable maintenance costs involved in caring for, and sustaining, archives to professional standards. As a comparison, and despite the fact that local authority archive services have increased income generation by 337% in the last ten years, a “typical” county record office (which operates without any regional responsibility) may receive annual core funding of £600,000. Film archives provide social benefits and we would suggest that it is unrealistic to expect commercial ventures to wholly subsidise those social benefits.

The *Hidden Treasures* conference organized by FAF, the British Library National Sound Archive and the NCA in October 2002 threw into sharp relief the contrast between the how highly the public value the material held by these archives and the fragility of the support base upon which they rest.

There is evidence that the lack of a secure funding base is widely affecting the ability of the regional film archives to reach their potential in the following ways:

- An inability to meet the demands of the public for film presentations and to contribute fully to the promotion of social inclusion and cultural diversity;
- An inability to meet the demands of collections management, care and preservation;
- An inability to plan beyond the short-term, with consequent problems for strategic planning, staff recruitment and retention.

Issues for the Film Council to consider

We would encourage the Committee to raise the following issues with the Film Council:

1. What plans the Film Council has to encourage awareness amongst policy makers and funders of the contribution that moving image archives can make towards supporting government policies?

2. How the Film Council expects to exercise its policy responsibility for moving image archives in the UK and what relationships with other agencies it will be seeking to foster in exercising that responsibility?
3. What advice and contribution the Film Council is looking for from other agencies and bodies within the archive sector to support its own policy making for moving image archives?
4. What plans the Film Council has to make available the committed £250,000 before the end of the current funding period in 2004 and what contribution to the sustainability of the regional film archives is envisaged beyond that period?
5. Does the Film Council have a view that regional film archives could become self-supporting through commercial income generation in the future and what evidence does it have to support its views on this issue? What contingency plans the Film Council has to support regional film archives if its plans for them to become self-supporting prove not to be achievable?

The NCA would be very happy to discuss the issues raised in this submission further. Please contact:

Katie Norgrove
Policy and Development Officer
The National Council on Archives
Tel: 020 8392 5376
Email: katie.norgrove@pro.gov.uk

We look forward to hearing the Committee's sessions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Kingsley', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Nick Kingsley
Chairman, The National Council on Archives