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Cultural Commission Consultation Phase 1

Dear James Boyle

Having worked in the cultural arena in Germany as well as Scotland for roundabout twenty years now, and having spent most of my time working with film and in cinema, my contribution will not unsurprisingly focus on film and moving images.

I am convinced that a vision for the cultural future of Scotland cannot be complete without quite radically rethinking and reshaping the issue of nationwide access to high quality film and moving images.

A vision: access to high quality film and moving images from all over the world, for all ages, at all times, all over Scotland will be a guaranteed right for every person in Scotland. The moving image is an immensely powerful medium, which helps to shape the way that we see and understand the world. It also represents a growing and central part of Scotland's creative industries. Great cinema informs, inspires and challenges, as well as entertains, its audience. Film and popular moving image culture penetrates Scotland more deeply than any other form of artistic endeavour. Moving images that both mirror and create desires and conflicts at the heart of Scottish life are the most influential form of communication that we have today.

I envisage a network of larger and smaller "Centres of Cinematic Excellence" covering the country from the Borders to Highlands and Islands. The basic organisational principle would be that of de-centralised partnerships to ensure provision for the needs of the local community. In order to continually improve standards, increase provision, ensure better access and getting best value for money these centres would be co-ordinated on a national scale by a lead body with adequate resources both human and financial; an arms-length institution that works bottom up not top down in partnership with the network of providers; a body that funds, facilitates and supports (but must not be allowed to exert an "administration overkill").

An example: a Children's Film Festival could take films to every corner of the country on the basis of a "national touring infrastructure", thus maximising effects of funding, programming efforts, visiting talent, educational activities, marketing and publicity work.

The example of the Edinburgh International Film Festival shows the importance of a keynote event in regards to the marketing and publicity of high quality film in a high quality environment. Similar publicity effects can be achieved with similar keynote events, all of them ultimately contributing to changing current popular (mis)perceptions about threshold barriers for film and eventually other art forms.

The Children's Film Festival may also best illustrate how a combination of keynote events, year-long programming work, educational activities (both formal and informal) and long-term audience development can be linked up and thus create potentially long-lasting positive effects for the whole of Scotland. What more could cultural facilities wish for than reaching its future audience in large numbers and from the youngest possible age onward! And what could grow out of it all when this work is further linked with efforts from Community Centres, Formal and Informal Education bodies, Creative and Digital Media Industries, etc: integrated high quality innovative moving image centres which are both cinemas and proactive development hubs for moving image culture (the aforementioned "Centres of Cinematic Excellence" in the best possible sense of the word); this even in the form of income-generating venues, exhibiting its own locally made product to a national and international audience (e.g. films made by kids shown in a cinema specially designed for kids) next to works from around the globe; open to all forms of pro-active artistic engagement for all people, reaching all people because threshold barriers are kept as low as possible.

This would ensure the audience's rights of access to film culture while maximising resources through partnerships which address diversity, learning, social inclusion and creativity.

Education in the word's widest meaning plays a crucial part. The UK Film Council's Strategy for the Moving Image quite rightly states "Film and moving images are the single most important source of education, information and culture in the world today". Film and moving images engage the audience and encourage a wider understanding of the world we live in.

Using film viewing and intuitive filmmaking achieves positive outcomes in the support of pupils' learning (achievement and attainment/ improved literacy; framework for learning/ learning styles, teaching skills; inclusion and equality/ language, culture; values and citizenship/ values, society and identity; learning for life/ creativity, presentational skills).

Teachers believe that moving image education empowers pupils and fosters creativity, as it accommodates different learning and teaching styles. Some teachers noted that students who had difficulties in expressing themselves verbally or in written exercises readily took to film. Film is seen as a particularly powerful technique to encourage discussion of sensitive topics such as racism or areas of personal development such as identity and culture. When students become actively involved in technology productions they develop learning skills, communication skills, and visual analysis skills, all of which are applied to real-life learning within the classroom curriculum. Students participate in all stages of the production process, which proves to be motivating for the students and allows the teacher and students to work personally and collaboratively. There is evidence of how and why feature films are effective instructional tools, particularly when teaching concepts of human development to students. Moving Image Education and Media Awareness therefore need to be embedded in the Scottish curriculum.

Films help to dramatise and frame issues, generate discussion, and provide links with personal experience. In short: the importance of the role of pro-active engagement with film and moving images in providing a starting point to maximise the creative potential of all people in Scotland cannot be overstated.

I hope my comments will prove helpful in the consultation process and ultimately the shaping of Scotland's (not just) cultural and creative future.

Very best regards

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