

## **Film Festivals & the Provision of Informal Education Opportunities**

The aim of this report is to provide a summarised overview of the informal education opportunities provided by film festivals in the UK.

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### **What do we mean by 'informal education'?**

All film festivals questioned viewed the primary aim of their organisation to provide audiences with the opportunity to view films that would normally be unavailable to them, and to participate in festival :film related events such as Masterclasses and Film-maker interviews.

There was some disagreement between festivals as to whether festival screenings in themselves should be considered as an 'informal, education opportunity'. Specialist film festivals such as the *Italian Film Festival*, *Black Pyramid Festival* and *Bite the Mango Festival*, considered their festivals to constitute an informal education opportunity because their events were specifically aimed at raising public awareness of a type of culture and its cinema. Other festivals with a more varied or international programme like the *London Film Festival* or the *Welsh International Film Festival*, felt that informal education opportunities were best offered, not in the film screenings themselves, but through the provision of additional events and/or information which enhanced the reception of the film. This took the form of:

- Programme notes, programme brochures and souvenir guide;
- Film-maker question-and-answer sessions;
- Formal interviews;
- Masterclasses;
- Special events (retrospectives, discussions, film quizzes).

Clearly, the informal education opportunities on offer can vary enormously between festivals. Any such provision is highly dependent on the profile and financial position of each festival. For example, the combination of an international reputation and a high level of sponsorship means that the London Film Festival is able to offer a comprehensive programme of screenings, supplemented by interviews, masterclasses and special events, with many high-profile guests of international reputation.

Conversely, the Chichester Film Festival, whilst offering a range of film screenings, has difficulty persuading film-makers with an international reputation to attend a relatively un-known festival in Sussex. Even were they to arouse the interest of big name personalities, such festivals do not have the resources to finance visits from 'big stars',

and as a result rely predominantly upon first-time (largely self-financing) filmmakers to attend the festival.

Whilst it is inevitable that film festivals will cite 'shoe-string' budgets as a reason for not offering educational events and activities, some festivals manage to operate on remarkably small budgets. The Festival of Fantastic Films, a specialist sci-fiction and horror festival that takes place annually in Manchester, operates on a minuscule budget (below £1000), without core subsidy or sponsorship. (The inclusion of the horror genre makes it very difficult for them to secure sponsorship). Similarly, the Chichester Film Festival offers an interesting and varied programme of screenings, with a total marketing budget of just £4000 which is spent entirely on the programme brochure - leaving no additional money for advertising. As a result, both festivals reach a regular core audience every year, but despite the desire to broaden their audiences, have no resources to target new audiences.

### **Audiences**

Not one of the festivals or media centres asked was able to provide detailed information about their audiences other than a broad 'guesstimate' of their age. On average, those questioned claimed that they had an attendance rate of 60% per screening or event. The age of the audience was thought to be broadly between 18-35.

Festivals largely fail to monitor their audiences due to constraints of time and money. The process of monitoring audiences requires manpower and therefore financial resources. Since even the biggest festivals operate on relatively tight budgets, audience profiling quickly becomes a low priority and is often ignored. Gill Henderson, of the London Film and Development Agency, points out that the organisation makes the provision of audience statistical and demographic information part of their funding criteria. Such data is however, rarely forthcoming until the threat of funding withdrawal.

If the FEWG is to fulfil its aim of widening audiences and deepening the appreciation of film, it needs to ensure that film festivals and media centres provide statistical data on their existing audiences. It is crucial that information about age, sex, ethnicity, geography, and occupation of existing audiences is collated and made readily available to the group. In addition, the FEWO and many festivals might find it useful to collect the following information:

- How many films/events do audiences attend during the festival?
- How far are audiences willing to travel to film screenings?
- What are audience expectations of film festivals?
- How does ticket price affect audience decision to attend?

One reason why festivals find it difficult to offer education opportunities, both formal and informal, is due to the lack of a dedicated education worker. In cases where there exists a dedicated education co-ordinator, it is often because the festival is affiliated to an arts centre with a dedicated education worker who assumes the responsibility of education work during the festival period.

The popularity of 'informal education events' during festival time is due to the availability of such events throughout the year. Organisations and festivals are able to build and sustain an core audience. This is clearly evident during the Shots in the Dark Festival, which is held at Broadway Media Centre in Nottingham. During this annual festival celebrating the crime and thriller genre, a range of screenings and events are offered, including a weekend school looking at Hitchcock, femme fatales, and movie masterclasses on a specific film, i.e. *Chinatown* with Michael Eaton.

Although when asked, they were not able to provide statistical information about their audience, I believe that the Shots in the Dark Festival, is able to attract large audiences because of the wide-ranging audiences that are built up through a year-long range of activities. Other festivals which also benefit from this trend include, the London Film Festival and the National Film Theatre, and the National Museum of Film and Photography and Bradford Film and Television Festival.

During the year the Broadway Media Centre offers a range of evening and weekend courses on a range of subjects from Bollywood movies to disabilities in film, as well as monthly film introductions with local lecturers and writers. Until the recent end of funding, the delivery of these education events was made possible by a dedicated education worker, whose post was funded by a unique collaboration with the local university. This post was part funded by Broadway and part funded by Nottingham University. There are advantages and disadvantages with this arrangement. Although it was advantageous to Broadway in that they had to raise only 50% of the funding, the person found it difficult to combine the workload of a full time education with taking a PhD.

Caroline Hennigan, Programmer at The Broadway Centre, believes that the aim of their programme is to provide both formal and informal education opportunities. She states that they would like to do more formal education work but that it simply is not possible on current levels of funding. At present, the organisation holds events with local schools- primarily linked to French and German language films. After a film screening, workshops are held which exploring themes that are raised by the film. The aim is to help students with the language they are studying whilst simultaneously nurturing an audience for foreign language films and for the type of cinema shown at the Broadway Centre. Although the audience for these events are GCSE and A level students, and are considered to be an formal education audience, they would like to explore ways in which they can deliver the workshops to their audience in a 'informal way' by doing more outreach work, which can strengthen their relationships with teachers on a long-term basis. However, they cannot pursue any ideas or develop initiatives until funding is secured for a full-time education worker.

### **3. Formal Education Opportunities and Vocational Training**

The provision of formal education varies between festivals and in most cases is dependant upon the availability of finances to pay for an education worker. Both the London Film Festival and the Foyle Film Festival in Derry, offer a comprehensive range

of education screenings and events. During the 1998 London Film Festival over 4000 students attended 15 events including screenings, special events, masterclasses and film-makers' visits to schools. The high attendance rate and success of these events is due to funding from the American Express Foundation and Local Education Authorities making it possible for the events to be free of charge to students and allowing for a temporary dedicated education officer.

Although the Birmingham International Film and Television Festival was unavailable for questioning, they have recently been awarded 'Arts for Everyone' money for education work for their 1999 Festival. This might be an interesting case study to follow in terms of the kind of education work they decide to offer, how they target their audiences and how their education events are received.

Although the aim of the group is principally to look at cultural informal education opportunities, it is important to look at vocational informal education and how this interacts with the cultural opportunities, rather than viewing them as separate entities. For example, the London Film and Development Agency offers vocational training and provides funding for film festivals including the Turkish Film Festival and the Raindance Festival.

Raindance Film Festival is an annual festival which screens new independent films. During the festival there are a number of weekend film schools led by experienced screen writers and directors. However, throughout the year Raindance holds a range of practical masterclasses and evening classes in a variety of topics including writing, directing and cinematography. They also offer courses in film business skills. The primary aim of this festival is to foster British film-making talent by providing people with the skills and equipment to make their own films. A year-long series of practical workshops culminates in the festival where new film-makers gain the rare opportunity to screen their films and to meet industry professionals such as distributors and financiers. It is an essential part of the film-making chain that is not featured in many UK film festival.

#### **4. Case Studies**

##### **a. The British Short Film Festival**

*What do they offer?* Over the period of a week, this festival offers a comprehensive programme of short films including documentaries, fiction, and pop promos. In addition, its informal education programme includes screenings and discussions, cinematography seminars hosted by Kodak, script writing seminars hosted by the BBC, Masterclasses, and conversations with critics.

*Audiences:* Audiences tend to be aged 17 - 30 with an interest in making films - predominantly young film-makers trying to get a 'foot in the door'. They do not have any detailed statistical information about their audience but say that they do market their festival to the 'widest possible audience'. They would be interested in broadening their audience by using different venues such as the NFT. However, they do not have the resources to pay for additional venues, and are restricted to using the UCI Empire by

whom they are sponsored. They cater for an audience that is interested in the short film as well as the regular West End film-going 'pop-corn munching' audiences. They make special effort in their marketing to stress that short films do have entertainment value. During this year's festival their short film programme was competing with major Hollywood films such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Godzilla*. However, during the afternoon screenings they regularly attracted audiences than these films.

*Model of Good Practice:* During the lead up to the festival they have a two internees from The American College in London (who sponsor the event). Students have the opportunity to learn about businesses and how a festival works. Their period of work ranges from one to three months.

### **b. Black Pyramid Film Festival, Bristol**

*What do they offer?* Black Pyramid Film Festival is an annual film festival celebrating black cinema from all over the world.

*Audiences:* Black Pyramid was started in 1993 by Watershed Media Centre with the specific aim of targeting Bristol's black community. When the festival started it failed to reach an black audiences. The major challenge was in encouraging black audiences to attend the Watershed Centre which was considered a 'white' venue. Over the period of five festivals, Black Pyramid have continually had to monitor and question their audiences and the wider ranging black community to increase their targeted black audience, which they have now managed to do. They have increased their audience by various methods. Like other festivals they also have difficulty in attracting International names. As an alternative, they try to feature strong black British film-making talent, and ask them to attend the festival. Like other festivals, they have found that they must hold events more than once a year, to maintain their audience. During June 1998, they held of weekend of events celebrating the 50 years of the arrival of SS Windrush. The event served as a pilot for the main festival in December and they were able to market the events to their audience on a one-to-one basis as well as, questioning them about what they would like to see. One of the main concerns of the public they noted was about the cost of the ticket, which their audiences felt was too high or not easily affordable. (The majority of their audiences were under 30 . Taking this into account, a festival ticket for all the events was offered at £18.00 (six events in total over five days) aimed at encouraging a younger audience and Bristol's significant student community.

*Model of Good Practice:* The first festival of events in 1993 was made possible by a black programming trainee-ship which funded by Watershed and the BFI. This trainee-ship was awarded to Femi Kolade, who went on to programme two festivals and advise, consult and participate in future festivals. Chris Burton, who currently programmes the Black Pyramid Festival, was also a trainee on the practical courses run during the year. Also, it is worth noting it takes time to develop audiences for new festival. Audience development cannot be undertaken within two years. It needs long term support and financial commitment as is evidenced by both Black Pyramid Festival and Bite the Mango Festivals. Cary Sawhney, programmer for the Bite the Mango has mentioned that he made sure that funders made a commitment to financing the Bite the Mango Festival

for a minimum of three years, to ensure that he had time to build on the programme and its audience.

### **c. The Welsh International Film Festival, Cardiff**

*What do they offer?* Festival Director Grant Vigden, considers informal education to be anything that adds value, in any way, to a screening. In their case this includes programme notes and lectures, festival catalogues, and an opportunity for film-makers and audiences to interact. This might take place in the form of film introductions, Q&A's and interviews.

*Audiences:* They are currently attracting an audience aged predominantly between 18-35. They have attracted a broad range of audiences for Welsh language films which have been highly popular. Audiences appreciate the opportunity of seeing films in the Welsh language. They are looking at how they can maintain audiences throughout the year and run events that give them an opportunity to remind people about the festival. When they were located in Aberystwyth they used to run a screening once a week at the local cinema on a Sunday afternoon which attracted an average audience of 150. This included a programme of art house material which was sometimes themed, i.e. Asian films, or French Films, or a Director's Chair. This was beneficial in that it helped to maintain the festival's profile during the year. However they do not have these screening in Cardiff as the Chapter Media Centre already has an established and converted audience. They have just held their first festival since relocating to Cardiff and are now beginning the process of assessing their festival, venue, format, programme of events, and audiences. Vidgen understands that they need to take significant steps with regards to audience development. The Cardiff area has a significant Jamaican and Somali community which is not yet catered for, as are facilities for deaf audiences.

*Model for Further Investigation:* They are now in the process of evaluating their festival and their audience. They are looking at developing a formal strategy for audience development. I recommend that the committee and FEWG should investigate further the Welsh Film Festival. It is particularly interesting case study since the organisation has moved location to Cardiff in order to change the profile of the event. The FEWG might find it interesting to follow the festival's development in the coming years and to monitor the way in which they develop their audience. There may be scope for a collaboration with the Festival and FEWG to see if any, or all, of the recommendations made by the Group can be put into practice by the Festival.

## **5. Recommendation**

Film Festivals are crucial to fulfilling the objectives outlined in The Bigger Picture, to:

- encourage an increase in cinema-going, especially among the non-core audience;
- encourage the audience to see a wider range of film
- increase the understanding and appreciation of the moving image in the audience of the future.

Surprising, none of the film festivals and media organisations can provide any detailed information about their audiences. I believe it is essential to have this information before any working group can make informed recommendation about audience development. It is also worth noting that none of the festivals have a current formal strategy for audience development. Each festivals approach to their audience is piece-meal, dictated by the achievements and successes on an annual basis.

I think that most festivals now are competing for the same audiences. They are also competing with the multiplexes who are now showing a more diverse and are now more likely to show

Only, the Black Pyramid Film Festival seems to have made an attempt to profile their audiences. Through a series of simple audience questionnaires they have managed to increase their audience. However, it important to the note that their audience development, however limited, was prompted by the fact that they were not reaching targeted audience. Low audience participation is not a problem that is being faced by the majority of festivals. Audience attendance for film festival is increasing very year.

My one and only recommendation to the Working Group is to make recommendations and support festivals on how they can effectively monitor their audiences. Perhaps, long term ambition might include a method that can be used by all the film festivals all over the country which can then provide a collaborated and coherent of audience attendance of film festivals in the UK.

In the course of my investigations I have spoken to the following people:

- Bradford Film Festival Emma Sanders
- Black Pyramid Film Festival, Bristol Chris Burton
- Chichester Film Festival Roger Gibson
- Bite the Mango Film Festival, Bradford Cary Sawhney
- The British Short Film Festival
- Italian Film Festival Euisa Maera
- London Film & Development Agency Gill Henderson
- Festival of Fantastic Films, Manchester Gill Lane-Young
- Welsh International Film Festival Grant Vigden
- Shots in the Dark, Crime & Thriller Festival Caroline Hennigan
- Edinburgh Film Festival Jennic Akinson
- Green Screen Environmental Festival Victoria Cliff-Hodges

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