



Research and Policymaking for Film – A Symposium

26 October 2011

NESTA, 1 Plough Place, London EC4A 1DE

Report of the Day

Welcome

Carol Comley, British Film Institute (BFI); Keith Randle, University of Hertfordshire.

Keith Randle welcomed delegates on behalf of the University of Hertfordshire and noted that this was a unique event in that it had such strong representation both from the academic world, as well as from the industry and policy side.

For **Keith** the event could not be more timely; it is a moment of change both for the UK film industry, as well as for researchers, presenting a unique opportunity to both sides to engage with each other more consistently and discuss where potential opportunities lie.

“The BFI wants to be understood and valued as a knowledge based institution, that knowledge not just being about film as film-text, but also about the film industry, and it has development potential in this area.”

Carol Comley, BFI

Carol Comley welcomed delegates on behalf of the BFI. She emphasized the strong importance of research to the BFI, pointing towards the BFI’s long history of research and research partnerships. Nevertheless, she observed that successful examples of sector-university collaborations had been rare to date. A possible explanation for the limited engagement might be that the Higher Education sector is steered by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), whereas the industry is steered by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

She briefly outlined her current work with colleagues at the DCMS on the Film Policy Review, and with the BFI on developing the strategic plan for the next five years, starting April 2012. In this context she highlighted the “patchy evidence base” with respect to the film industry, with a lack of robust evidence potentially leading to sub-optimal policy outcomes.

Carol indicated concern that there had been overall very little engagement from academics with the current policy review and not enough recommendations to strengthen the evidence base. While the transition of the Research and Statistics Unit from the recently closed UK Film Council to the BFI will help the BFI shape its film industry research role, she expressed her wish to see further quality research emerge from the event. Specifically, **Carol** hoped the process started by the event would result in:

- Concrete proposals on what are the research questions for the next period
- A better understanding of how the policy sector and academics can work better together
- Strategies for how knowledge can be shared more effectively
- Strategies for how the impact of joint endeavours can be maximised

Session 1 – The context

Moderator: Richard Miller, Available Light Advisory.

Neil Watson, independent consultant; Keith Randle, University of Hertfordshire.

“Success rates for winning funding are low, and are getting lower.”

Keith Randle, University of Hertfordshire

Keith Randle gave an overview of the contextual background in which university research is currently operating, looking across the funding landscape and the priorities of different research funders.

Universities currently rely on a dual support system that consists of seven research councils (three of them perhaps more relevant to film) and the higher education funding councils (HEFCs). The European Union (EU) is also a major source of research funding. The focus of the research councils is “excellence with impact”, which is measured through output (largely peer-reviewed journals) and impact (the scope and reach of the research). **Keith** explained that grant funding was highly competitive, with success rates of winning a grant being low and getting lower – e.g. for the European Social Research Council (ESRC), 12% for open competitions, 16% for targeted research streams.

Universities also receive core research funding from government, the amount for each institution being decided on a broadly five year cycle via (in 2014) the Research Excellence Framework.

Smaller funding sources were identified in a large range of institutions such as the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust, the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as well as private sector sources

Neil Watson showed the audience a short clip about British film from 1985, the start of the modern era of British film policy. Neil provided a comprehensive review of film policy from 1909 to the present, highlighting major legislation such as the Eady Levy, the Film Act, the first film tax relief and John Major’s decision to make lottery money available for film.

Neil explained that government influences the film industry through three levers: competition policy, regulation and funding.

While the funding landscape had received the most attention from researchers, Neil stressed that the other areas were equally important. He highlighted particularly the importance of regulation, Intellectual Property (IP) review, digital copyright exchange, the Hargreaves report, orphaned works legislation – all of which were becoming ever more important in the digital age. Another area worthy of research is competition policy, particularly in the context of the EU.

Questions and Answers

Given the dismal success figures for research funding, **Jim Barratt**, Bigger Picture Research, wanted to know whether collaborative research proposals had a higher chance of being successful. **Jonathan Breckon**, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), clarified that there is no bias to collaboration.

“There is a lot of interesting research that would never come to the attention of policymakers and industry [...], there is a body of work, but there is no efficient way to collect and connect it together at the moment.”

Finola Kerrigan, Kings College London

Terry Illott, Cass Business School, prompted the academics in the room to provide a short overview of the current state of play of academic research into the film industry. **Andy Pratt**, Kings College, explained that there was a range of research activities, but that there was not one list or a register that listed all research in the area. The closest that exists to such a register is the BFI’s Moving Image Academic Research Registry – however it relies on academics’ self-registration. **Robin MacPherson**, Screen Academy Scotland, and **Finola Kerrigan**, Kings College London, added that there was also a problem of definition, as academic disciplinary boundaries often resulted in little exchange between communities of researchers.

“There has been nowhere enough crossover and cross-fertilization (between policy and academics), which is, I think, really one of the important things that could come out of today.”

Neil Watson

Richard Miller asked **Neil Watson** if there ever had been a time when policymakers and academics had worked closely together. Neil noted that the lack of evidence-based policymaking for film is striking in the UK, and that there was a real need to build the research base. He cited the example of the Digital Economy Act, where a small interest group was able to influence major legislation through ‘lobbynomics’, in the absence of evidence.

Session 2 – Opportunities and challenges of collaboration

Moderator: *Jim Barratt, Bigger Picture Research.*

Panellists: *Hasan Bakhshi, National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA); Jonathan Breckon, AHRC; Rob Cheek, independent consultant; John Hill, Royal Holloway.*

Jim Barratt opened the session with a number of questions, including how policymakers, researchers and professionals can work together more effectively for mutual benefit; and what academic research can bring to the partnership. He noted that policymaking and scholarly research often operate on different time scales, with academic work typically operating at a slower pace, while policy requires answers to questions yesterday.

“There is a tension between a policy agenda that is already set, and in which researchers are called for to provide the evidence, versus academic research that might enter into dialogue with policy, challenge its assumptions and provide different kinds of evidence.”

John Hill, Royal Holloway

John Hill started by locating the reasons that there has been very little cross-fertilization between policy and academia so far. He argued that because policy is ultimately driven by politics and ideological goals, there is a tension between policy and researchers, who prefer to critically examine existing policy as opposite to being hired hands for a set agenda.

A second big issue is logistics, particularly a lack of understanding on the side of policymakers and government institutions that academics operate within longer-term timeframes. **John** gave the example of a grant application to the AHRC that requires about three months to prepare and then takes about 30 weeks to be assessed. In contrast, the UK Film Council issued tenders with a three-week response deadline, a window which is too short for most academics.

Finally, **John** observed that a lot of industrial policy for film in Britain is in essence “cultural policy that dare not speak its name”. As a consequence, policy discourse limits itself to how the British film industry could be made more competitive. This fails to see that film is more complex and that the debate could be enriched with cross-disciplinary research involving sociology, psychology and cultural studies alongside economics.

Jonathan Breckon identified a lack of empathy on both sides as a major obstacle, with civil servants often not being able to get under the skin of academics and vice versa. Also there have been cases where research findings have been blocked by politicians. There are opportunities as well as obstacles. The development of people is an example, and there are fellowships where academics can spend some time working in and gaining knowledge of funding bodies (not currently with the BFI however). Furthermore, AHRC has co-funded films so is contributing to film and talent directly as well as through research.

“There is a very strong case for experimental development. We know that longitudinal datasets [...] are lacking. [...] The data that we use for policy and research must be fit for purpose.”

Hasan Bakhshi, NESTA

Hasan Bakhshi, who in his role at NESTA has read as much published research on the film industry as possible, confirmed that there is indeed “shockingly little on the industry”. He particularly pointed towards the dearth of applied research, experimental development studies, as well as longitudinal datasets. He advocated action research methods and would welcome more multidisciplinary research.

“The focus should be on embedding academics into the social network of the film industry.”

Rob Cheek, independent consultant

Rob Cheek provided a short introduction to his Master’s dissertation on the Skillset Film Business Academy, which was at Cass Business School in the late 2000s – an example of a policy intervention involving academic partnership. He raised the problem of qualitative data in film research; often reports end up as a mere collection of better and worse informed personal views that cannot be backed up with quantitative data. He advocated that the best way to bridge the cultural divide between industry and academia was to start with relationship building through smaller projects, instead of focusing only on quick delivery or transactions. This would help in building relationships and building trust between the two sides.

Questions and Answers

Jim Barratt questioned the panel whether a more formalised mechanism for collaboration such as a knowledge transfer partnership could help bridge the divide between academics and the industry.

Jonathan Breckon agreed and also put forward the idea of fellowships as a useful model to gain insight into the respective partner’s domain. He gave the example of the DCMS policy fellowship, available to early career researchers.

Hasan Bakhshi acknowledged that there was a difference in time horizons between academia and policymakers’ expectations, but that this was not inevitable. There should be a change in culture that enables academics to get involved also in the short term. He provided a recent example from NESTA in which it had successfully facilitated collaboration between arts and cultural organisation, technology companies and academics in a short period of time.¹ He restated his belief that it was possible to bring the best of both worlds together, to produce practical research that delivers solutions to businesses, and is at the same time rated as the highest quality peer-reviewed research. In his view, dedicated

¹ NESTA Digital R&D Fund for Arts and Culture.

funding streams for film businesses to work with academics on such practical R&D projects should be a priority.

In the ensuing discussion **Ian Christie**, Birkbeck College, identified a further problem in the increasing specialisation of early career researchers who are being pushed to become experts in very narrow fields. As a result new academics are often specialists who lack the range of experiences necessary to address the complexity presented by the film industry.

Andy Pratt, Kings College London, commented that, especially in the economic field, research on the film industry is not a mainstream topic and is not necessarily seen as the cutting edge of the subject – making it a niche area. Academics progress in their career through peer-reviewed research, collaborating too much with policymakers on advocacy could therefore even be “a kiss of death” for academic careers.

Angus Finney, Film London, felt that in the discussion so far the notion of evidence base had been too strongly focused on quantitative data, whilst understanding companies and strategies in the sector was inextricably linked to qualitative data. Also raw data are more useful than statistics. If raw data are made available then researchers can carry out their own analyses and draw their own conclusions and inferences.

Finally **Richard Phillips**, Manchester Business School, stressed the role of “action research” (exploratory research into unknown areas) as a research method that can produce highly satisfying practical results for industry, but is typically difficult to publish in an academic journal.

Hasan Bakhshi concurred, but expressed his confidence that if the research question was interesting and the methodology robust, then mainstream journals would be prepared to publish film industry studies.

Session 3 – Examples of Collaboration

Moderator: *Maud Mansfield, independent consultant.*

Panellists: *Ian Christie, Birkbeck College; Tamsyn Dent, Bournemouth University; Susan Rogers, screenwriter and independent consultant; David Steele, economic and policy consultant.*

Maud Mansfield introduced the panellists.

David Steele began by putting forward what he sees as a key strength academics bring to collaboration: an encyclopaedic knowledge of their field, including an understanding of cutting edge theory, resulting in informed work that also eliminates the need for costly literature research at the beginning of a project. He provided a short introduction to two related collaborations between the UK Film Council and academics regarding the cultural contribution of film (*Opening our eyes*², and *Stories we tell ourselves*³)

Ian Christie provided an account of the *Opening our eyes* project. Commenting on the process, he highlighted how crucial a diverse team was for the successful delivery of the project. A major obstacle for the project was the lack of a British national film database – Ian clearly expressed his astonishment that such a database still doesn't exist – a clear mandate for the BFI.

"It would be so helpful to tell them [new entrants] some truth about that industry they want to get into, but we didn't have anything... real."

Susan Rogers

Susan Rogers shared some of the insights from her research work on the commissioning process of British scriptwriters. A key obstacle she encountered in her research was dealing with professionals who had significant constraints in giving up time to participate in research.

The [practical research] wasn't something that would have been considered for academic funding.

Susan Rogers

Tamsyn Dent, who is currently working on a PhD on gender and employment in the creative industries in collaboration with Skillset, briefly discussed problems around academic timeframes, and the way these were addressed in her research (helped by the will on both sides for the collaboration to work, and having two supervisors, one from Bournemouth University and one from Skillset), such as providing Skillset with interim reports and not just

² *Opening Our Eyes: How film contributes to the culture of the UK*, Northern Alliance and Ipsos MediaCT, BFI July 2011. Available at <http://www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingoureyes/>

³ *Stories we tell ourselves: The cultural impact of UK Film 1946-2006*, Narval Media, Birkbeck College, Media Consulting Group, UK Film Council June 2009. Available at <http://industry.bfi.org.uk/culturalimpact>

a final report after four years. However, the collaboration would have benefitted from more preparation regarding its management from both sides.

“I do think that meaningful research in the audiovisual field increasingly needs a multiplicity of skills and disciplines [...] the problem is that the style of funding we have at the moment [...] is to a single principal investigator who is in one discipline in one institution.”

Ian Christie

Ian Christie raised another concern around the way research funding is currently awarded – namely mainly to a principal investigator who comes from a distinct discipline. This system does not encourage the type of research he delivered for *Opening our eyes*, which required a broad research base. A salient question is therefore how the building of multi-discipline academic research alliances and teams can be facilitated.

Coming back to the earlier example of responding to government tenders within a three-week period, Ian reversed the question and asked what academics might expect of government departments, and whether they would be willing to engage in longer term research projects.

Questions and Answers

The first question was from **Maud Mansfield** to **Ian Christie**. She referred to the *Opening our eyes* project and asked Ian if he saw any future industry and academic collaboration as purely cultural.

Ian replied that *Opening our eyes* was about cultural value and there are different ways of understanding value. Film has been undervalued in the history of arts. The impact of film goes beyond the impact of the box office.

Richard Paterson, BFI, mentioned that there was some overlap between *Opening our eyes* and another study done some time ago, and also that class had not been examined in the *Opening our eyes* report.

“The value of this type of consultancy work is that it allows you to rip into these questions [...] having the money to do some large-scale fieldwork [...] provides data and material for further analysis.”

Ian Christie

Ian Christie agreed but said there is a limit to what can be included in a 100-page report, but that the data are available and he hopes that they will be further analysed.

John Hill, Royal Holloway, commented that ‘slow’ academic research can often provide more depth and detail. He wondered whether organisations such as the BFI can be persuaded of the value of longer-term research.

David Steele answered that the possibility to engage in such longer-term research projects was strongly related to how research departments in public organisations are funded themselves. If they have a discretionary budget they are likely to engage in longer-term research because they want to grow the knowledge base. If they don't have a discretionary budget, winning internal resources for an individual project can prove a major obstacle.

Hasan Bakhshi, NESTA, self-critically suggested that NESTA, but also the BFI, should be more creative when commissioning research in the future to enable more academic participation. This could include more flexibility in time horizons, and potentially incentivising multi-disciplinary approaches.

Session 4 – Making use of industry data

Moderator: Paul McDonald, University of Nottingham.

Panellists: Phil Clapp, Cinema Exhibitors' Association; Sean Perkins, BFI; Richard Phillips, Manchester Business School; Michael Pokorny, Westminster Business School.

"The film industry is both data rich and knowledge rich. But who holds that knowledge and how closely and jealously it's guarded is an issue."

Phil Clapp, Cinema Exhibitors Association

Phil Clapp was the first speaker of this session and he spoke on the industry generation and use of data. Production, distribution and exhibition sectors all generate a lot of internal data, much of which is used to make investment decisions. In exhibition, the most common decision to be made is whether to keep showing a film or to take it off the screen and replace with a new film. The circuits have developed a very sophisticated model to help in this decision. Among the independent exhibitors, the decisions are taken based on the exhibitors' knowledge of the audience which has been built up over a long time.

Exhibitors have increasingly more sophisticated knowledge of their audiences and this has been built up making use of IT and data from, for example, loyalty cards. Knowledge of trends, demographics, and likes and dislikes of the audience, is increasingly driving the targeting of marketing of films. Producers and distributors have similar scale and detail of data and information.

Much of the data is confidential due to commercial sensitivity, but there is a huge amount of data which, if treated suitably (e.g. anonymised and/or given time to lose its immediate sensitivity etc) could be made more widely available and more widely used. This is not from altruism from the industry, but from recognition that it is necessary for policymakers to have as detailed knowledge as possible of an industry if they are to support it. This hit home when the future of the Research and Statistics Unit (RSU) was in doubt. Unusually for the industry, all parts came together to support the RSU. This was a reflection of the industry's recognition of the quality of the work of the RSU and also the value the industry saw in having a 'one-stop shop' of objective coherent outputs across all parts of the industry.

One thing which has become apparent from discussion with the government and the BFI is that there is much more information which the industry could provide. We need discussions on how the industry can provide government with these data in a more appropriate and usable way than at present. Having policymakers and academics involved in the issue of industry providing data adds legitimacy to the process as it helps to remove any perception of lobbying by industry.

Trade bodies in the industry often have students asking for data to be used in projects. These students are almost always media studies or film studies students. If the industry wants to be taken seriously as an economic powerhouse as well as a cultural industry, it should broaden its range across a wider set of academic disciplines.

Phil's final point was that one thing which should come out of the Film Policy Review is recognition of the need for the best possible evidence base on which to make policy decisions. Also there is a need to see a route map as to how policy makers, academics and the industry can work together to build a database of statistics and research, which map out the industry in a coherent and compelling way.

Sean Perkins started by saying that he was pleased that there was a discussion between industry and academia on, and acknowledgement of, the need for data on which to base policy decisions. It is the RSU's wish to make as much data as freely available as possible to help policymakers and decision-makers within the industry. The RSU had previously operated a 'push' model of providing information (i.e. by publishing the Statistical Yearbook and other reports) but would like to move to a 'pull' model where outputs are defined more by users. However, there are confidentiality and licensing issues to consider. Currently and in the recent past most of RSU's budget has been spent on the purchase of data, and so there has not been much scope for commissioning original research. RSU has become a generator of statistics and **Sean** would like to put the 'Research' back into RSU. Over the past few years RSU has built up a large database of films and there is scope for using this to carry out, for example, longitudinal analyses.

There are however, major gaps in the RSU's data, due to lack of availability (including industry's unwillingness to supply them) and expense. Examples of these gaps are:

- Data on international markets
- Detailed information on digital markets
- Information on finances and the profitability of films (**Sean** suggested that provision of such data could be a condition of receiving public funding or tax relief)

Data on the digital markets would not only provide information on the value chain but also could potentially be a rich source of information on consumption of films and audience interaction. Information on the film value chain is of interest to potential investors in film, and to obtain such information the performance of films has to be monitored over all platforms. This can be difficult without a unique identifier for the film. RSU will be looking at pursuing the adoption of International Standard Audiovisual Numbers (ISAN) for film, to facilitate the tracking of films over all platforms.

There is also a need for new metrics to measure the impact of films. We need to understand how demand is created and how creativity is stimulated by consumption, and so we need new metrics to measure the impact of film in a multi-disciplinary sense, not just to measure the economic impact of film.

Richard Phillips spoke about data needs for investors in film. They need to know what they want to know before they can decide what data are necessary. They need to have information on likely outcomes of different scenarios ('what if' data) in order to make investment decisions. They also need information on different investment models that allows them to make decisions on the best way to get returns on investments ('how to' data).

An important point is that in order to make the best investment decisions, raw data are more useful than the statistics used for policy decision making. The investors can then use these raw data in a more flexible way and build up their own models.

Michael Pokorny made the point (illustrated by his graph of production costs against estimated profits) that while profit for individual films was not predictable, the aggregate profitability of the industry (and here particularly the profitability of US major releases) had increased consistently over the last decade. Individual investors need information to assess individual film investment opportunities, but policymakers should look at overall profit and loss. Major studios assess success over a number of films, accepting that not every film will be profitable, and policymakers should take the same approach.

In order to help both individual investors and policymakers, filmmakers should be open about which films make profits and which make losses. This information exists, and should be made available, to help investors and to inform policy decisions, and assess the success of the policies.

Questions and Answers

“We have to make a distinction between the tactical use of data for business and investment purposes and the importance from a public policy point of view of getting aggregate data over time, because that is the only way we can evaluate the success of film policy as opposed to the success of films.”

Robin MacPherson, Screen Academy Scotland

Robin MacPherson, Screen Academy Scotland, commented that aggregate data are needed to evaluate the success of film policy. This needs data on the relative performance of films with different levels of public funding and so we need data on who invested in films. Also when looking at film policy we need international data. Is anyone looking at establishing consistency on longitudinal data internationally to allow these research questions to be asked?

Sean Perkins replied that the RSU along with the European Audiovisual Observatory had taken the lead in establishing EFARN (the European Film Agencies Research Network) to look at these international issues (baseline consistency, transparency) and ways of sharing best practice and data. The network has had successes such as the adoption of consistent methodologies across Europe, using in particular the RSU Yearbook and CNC (France’s national film support body, Centre national du cinéma et de l’image animée) publications as templates. There is now a consistent set of metrics across Europe. The next steps are to look at best ways of analysing these metrics and progressing towards pan European cooperation in order to look at the performance of films internationally.

Nick Redfern asked once we have the data who is responsible for promoting statistical literacy so that the best use can be made of them? Media studies students do not have these skills and it is likely that filmmakers and policymakers do not have the necessary skills

to make best use of the data.

Richard Phillips replied that promoting statistical skills in filmmakers and policymakers is perhaps not the best way forward. They can get other people to carry out the statistical analyses but then make use of the results.

Robin MacPherson then commented that film studies is not the only discipline interested in these data. There are still a lot of myths prevalent in film policy about what constitutes success. Policymakers need to be literate in fundamental concepts of analysing data.

Terry Ilott summed up the session by saying that raw data can often be of more use than aggregated data, and that they are often out of date. Educating people in the use of data can inform policy. Better understanding of data will lead to a better understanding of the industry. Academics and others in the industry should have the means to assess the impact of policies and challenge policymakers to make changes if policies are not working.

Session 5 – Digging into the audience agenda – film context and consumption

Moderator: Terry Illott, Cass Business School

Panellists: Martin Barker, Aberystwyth University; Pete Buckingham, BFI; Adam Cooper, Film: 21st Century Literacy; Finola Kerrigan, King's College London.

Finola Kerrigan was the first speaker for this session. Her first point was that we need to know how films are consumed. Some of this can be answered by market research but we are not interested simply in what is consumed but why, where and with whom films are watched, and so more sophisticated analyses are required.

Film consumption is usually a collective rather than individual activity, and so social aspects of film consumption need to be investigated, in order to contribute to answering the above questions, but also to see how the social aspects of film watching affect future film consumption. Some work has been done on how non-professional pundits (people who watch films then discuss them on-line) influence consumption of films, but more work is needed.

Filmmakers should make good films and then persuade people to watch them, and good information on audiences and audience behaviour can be used in the marketing of films. For big films the size of the audience mainly depends on the amount of advertising, but for smaller films the audience depends on how the films are described. In order to produce the best description, information is needed which provides understanding of the consumer.

Martin Barker had been looking at the audience experience, and asked if this, as well as the economic aspects of the industry, is something policy makers should take into account. As part of his research **Martin** had been talking to the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) and his points echoed the points made earlier in the day about the different objectives of, and conflicts between, academic research and research to answer particular policy questions. In the discussions with the BBFC the two sides had been starting from different places. The BBFC was interested in consequences and what would be the effect of cuts, whereas Martin was interested in identifying how research could be used to answer the question.

Martin's final question was about the end product of research. Is it valuable if the findings are interesting but any recommendations for change arising from the research cannot be implemented? He believes that it is possible to find common ground between academic researchers and policy makers who want quick answers to specific questions, but it will take time to develop relationships.

Pete Buckingham asked why do people go to see films and how do they choose where to see them. **Pete** had done some research eight years ago, using a market research firm to look at the emotional reason rather than the economic reason for seeing a particular film. He then asked how things have changed since then, and how do we use research to increase

admissions? How can we use research to influence and change audience behaviour?

Pete considered the best way to do this would be to look at methods (from experts outside as well as within the film industry) on changing behaviour rather than carry out similar research to that he had carried out eight years before.

Adam Cooper began by stating his organisation's ethos was that everyone should be able to engage with the media. He then went on to describe the findings of some research he had been involved in which looked at the effect of using film as a teaching aid. The main findings he mentioned were:

- Film intervention in schools creates demand for films
- Teachers who use film in school say it motivates young people
- Film has been successfully used as a teaching aid in many subject areas
- Using film helps relationships between teachers and pupils
- Using film helps in other aspects of pupil performance

Adam went on to say that it would be interesting to know if the increased demand for film stimulated by using film in school is a short-term effect or if it could be sustained. He finished by saying that there is scope for looking at the raw data in more detail, supporting the point made in the data session that access to raw data is often more useful than being presented with statistics.

Questions and Answers

Ian Christie, Birkbeck College, made the comment that little work is being carried out on alternative content (AC). This offers very high levels of customer satisfaction but the film industry is not fully embracing AC.

Martin Barker agreed with **Ian**. Audiences have said that the AC experience was better than they had been expecting. New experiences are emerging and more audience research needs to be carried out. Independent exhibitors are still not convinced of the benefits of showing AC.

Robin MacPherson, Screen Academy Scotland, said more work needs to be done to find out what films people are watching at home.

Pete Buckingham and **Finola Kerrigan** supported this view. **Pete** made the point that we have DVD sales and rental data but still do not know what is being watched in homes. **Finola** would like to research into what people are watching at home but had never been able to obtain funding for it.

Ian Christie pointed out that there is some information on home consumption of film in the *Opening our Eyes* report.

Hasan Bakhshi, NESTA, returned to the issue of alternative content and pointed out that the

big challenge in research into AC is the issue of benchmarking and development of new metrics for research into AC audiences. For example NESTA had done some work comparing theatre audiences and AC cinema audiences and the theatre audiences had higher expectations than the AC cinema audiences.

Angus Finney, Film London, raised the point about the impact on audiences of Internet advertising. Distributors are now typically spending 25% of a film's advertising budget on Internet advertising, up from 5% two years ago.

Pete Buckingham replied that this goes back to his earlier point about how people make decisions about which films to watch. **Pete** had done some work looking at Internet conversations on particular films. It is possible to monitor and even try to influence the conversations but, so far, there has not been enough research to provide rigorous results on the impact of Internet advertising.

Session 6 – Digging into the talent agenda – people and production

Moderator: Keith Randle, University of Hertfordshire.

Panellists: Doris Eikhof, University of Stirling; Rosalind Gill, King's College London; Dan Wilks, Skillset; Debbie Williams, EM Media.

“People in the industry are very focused on the immediate and the individual. They see little intrinsic value in providing data for the benefit of the wider industry.”

Dan Wilks, Skillset

Keith Randle introduced the session. In the film industry, work is project-based and generally freelance, so there is a lot of interest in questions around recruitment, training, career development and in associated questions around diversity and inclusion. The aim of the session was to examine how research can help understand and address these issues.

Dan Wilks identified the key challenges in using research to inform interventions that can help those in the industry build a career and continue their professional development. Research can address these issues but it is not easy. Skillset has been researching across the film industry for the last ten years, and has had some successes but many challenges remain. An example of Skillset's research is the film production workforce survey, which was first carried out in 2005 and most recently in 2010. A particular difficulty in conducting this survey has been that 89% of the workforce is freelance and hence difficult to access. They are not office-based and cannot be accessed through employers. It is difficult to get past the 'gatekeepers' who prefer people to be working on producing a film rather than answering a survey.

Another problem is that people in the industry tend to be focused on the immediate and also on the individual so they see little value in spending time and effort to provide information intended to benefit the wider industry. There is also a need to balance requirements of Skillset stakeholders and realistic outputs from the survey. It is unrealistic to expect a good response to a survey in which the questionnaire takes two hours to complete, but some stakeholders think they should be trying to collect that amount of information.

As one way of addressing these challenges Skillset is seeking to improve its brand to have better recognition among the film production workforce. Skillset also works in film distribution and exhibition and research into the workforces of these sectors share some of the problems of research into the production workforce but they also have their own unique challenges.

Doris Eikhof outlined one theme of her research which concerns the way responsibility for undertaking and funding talent development frequently lies with the individual – it is up to the individual to sort out his or her own training. This obviously raises questions about resources available to individuals.

Doris added that **Dan** had well described the issues in reaching people in the industry. What

research can address is looking at creative careers over time and how people use resources to develop their careers. These resources can be finance, social contacts and how they use knowledge as a resource and what we can gain from understanding how that is developed throughout a career. People in creative industries need two skills:

- Creative skills
- Business skills (marketing yourself)

There are different times in a career in the creative industries when marketing oneself is necessary. Students do not want to engage with this but when they start working they realise they need to. However, when they are working they also need to keep up with creative developments in their fields so it is difficult to take time to build up marketing skills. In order to address this, there are programmes which can be developed between research and industry bodies, for example apprenticeship schemes that look at what creative students could do in businesses and how they could learn the (business) ropes.

Another idea (which might not work in film but could work in other creative industries) is to let the creative person concentrate on the creative part of his/her job but let business graduates do the business part of the work for them. Looking at careers in general there are a lot of business graduates who go into corporate world but when they hit their mid-life crisis they then try to sign up for, for example, a creative writing course, because they want to do something creative.

Could the people in creative industries who need business skills and the business graduates who want to do something more creative be matched up somehow? Understanding how creative people go through the phases where they need business skills and at what point business graduates could help, could be a worthwhile joint project between academia and industry.

“In developing talent our philosophy has been ‘what works for the people we are working with’. There isn’t a one size fits all. We have tried to develop an interdependent community of interest rather than finding the latest fad that the industry will love this year.”

Debbie Williams, EM Media

Debbie Williams described EM Media’s approach to talent development. Creativity is essential for people working in the film industry but there should be some economic reward for it. There is a problem in the industry, however, with loss of talent. EM Media has been trying to find out what works for the talent they have been working with, recognizing that no one size fits all for talent development.

Over the last ten years, EM Media has formed long-term relationships with talent and provided advice and support, including brokering partnerships with other people and other companies. The brokerage role is much undervalued as making those connections is a vital part of networking within the industry.

On the role of research, what is of interest is the interplay between innovation and intervention or leaving well alone. There are three angles to this:

- New relationship with talent – this will be how it needs to be, rather than fitting it into the existing way of working
- What is the cost and value which comes from the choice of intervention or leaving well alone – the value can be economic value or other value
- Looking at combinations of mechanisms of working and environment (locally occurring factors) – what works in one place might not work in another

There is a need to recognise that career progression for creative individuals does not follow a straight line (does not follow the ‘ladder of opportunity’). What would be useful is research which challenges conventional wisdom and looks at the best fit between opportunities and mechanisms for engaging with talent, rather than assuming that talent should necessarily fit in with existing methods.

“There’s a paradox at the heart of the film industry which is that it’s an incredibly interesting, dynamic and progressive industry and yet it is riven by inequalities.”

Rosalind Gill, Kings College London

Rosalind Gill responded to a question on inequalities. Women make up less than a third of the workforce in the industry, and they are concentrated in particular parts of the industry, for example wardrobe. There are very few female directors and screenwriters. There are also other inequalities in the industry which relate to age, ethnicity and class. Good data are available which can give a snapshot of who is working in the industry at a particular time. What academic research can contribute is to look into the inequalities in the industry and at the processes leading to them.

Research has shown the informality of the industry. Hansard’s law states that the more informal an industry is, the ‘clubbier’ is its atmosphere, and the lower the proportion of women in the industry. Other factors contributing to the low proportion of women in the industry are the irregular career progression and the ‘feast or famine’ type of working practices where periods of intensive work are followed by periods of no work. Gender inequality in the film industry is ‘unmanageable’ because current legislation does not adequately cover the industry because of its informality and the high proportion of freelance workers.

Attitudes within the industry do not help address inequalities. There is a myth in the industry that it is egalitarian and so to even discuss inequalities is to challenge this myth. There is also an attachment to the idea of the meritocratic nature of the industry so that anyone will get on if he or she is good enough. These ideas make structural absences, or patterns of absence, of particular groups difficult to talk about. There is also a perception among women in the industry that discussing gender inequalities will actively damage careers. These perceptions need to be challenged and the first step to addressing inequalities is to start speaking about them.

Questions and answers

“Perhaps we just have to accept that to have five film directors we need to train 50 [...], why do we assume that somehow it is possible to game the system and train exactly the right number of directors, producers or screenwriters to fill the available slots?”

Robin MacPherson, Screen Academy Scotland

Pete Buckingham, BFI, referred to a presentation from the Danish Film Institute which said something like from 200 first time directors only ten will go on to make another film. The implication was that this is a bad thing. But is this the case? No one has ever asked what we are hoping to achieve from training new talent? Is there any research or thinking around this?

Doris replied that one problem with higher education is that we are producing graduates who do not match up with the labour market demand. This is not specific to the creative industries, but because a lot of degrees in creative industries areas are new there is a lack of data to show where these graduates go. There is a suggestion that people in the creative industries do not have creative industries degrees, and that those with such degrees go to work in other areas, mainly hospitality and retail. **Doris** said that a lot more research needs to be done in this area.

Robin MacPherson, Screen Academy Scotland, said that one of his research interests is looking at what works in small countries, and evidence suggests that the proportion of successful films is the same everywhere and the same over time. The same is true for talent. The probability of a director making more than one film is the same wherever you go. Is it reasonable to assume it is possible to train just the right number of directors, writers etc.? Maybe it is necessary to oversupply for attrition, in order to achieve the few that are considered to be successful.

Dan Wilks responded asking if that is the way it is and it can't be changed, or is current training not good enough? That is an issue that Skillset is looking at. Evidence suggests that there are skills gaps even in areas where there is a supply of graduates, so somewhere there is a mis-match between the two elements.

“The increase over the last twenty years in the proportion of films made by first time directors is the result of TV funding of feature films, subsidising feature films, using subsidies to promote young talent and having schemes that emphasize new, young talent. These are deliberate policy initiatives. What is needed in this area is some serious research about what's been the impact of these policies.”

Terry Illott, Cass Business School

Terry Illott, Cass Business School, disagreed with **Robin**. He said that this is an area which is crying out for research because it is an area where public policymakers like to get involved. He cited research by a former student that showed that over twenty years one third of first time directors made a second film, and of those one third made a third film and so on. Of the 1760 first time directors at the start of the study only 25 went on to make five films. In

1988 about 15% of films were made by first time directors, but by 2008 it was more than 80%. This is not a matter of attrition, it is a result of deliberate policy initiatives which have been introduced over the last 20 years. What is needed is some serious research into the impact of these policies.

Debbie Williams supported Terry's opinion, and added that there is nothing being done at present looking at career progression.

David Steele mentioned the persistence of inequality statistics, for example the BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) statistics, which have remained low in the film industry for at least the last decade and asked if the point has been reached where some positive intervention needs to happen.

Kate Oakley, City University London, added that there is little research looking at what the mechanisms of inequality are.

Dan Wilks responded to **David's** point and said that positive discrimination is something that has been adopted to some extent for some of the courses funded by Skillset. However, whether it could be adopted more widely by the industry is up for debate.

Session 7 – Digging into the economic agenda – economic processes and policy

Moderator: Andy Pratt, Kings College, London.

Panellists: Angus Finney, Film London; Joe Lampel, Cass Business School; John Newbigin, Creative England; John Sedgwick, London Metropolitan University.

“If you are serious about research you have to be serious about money. The Creative Industries Unit at DCMS has never been properly resourced. In the constrained times we live in, we need to think about bringing together consortia to jointly fund and build solid research ideas.”

John Newbigin, Creative England

The session discussed economic processes and policy, and was introduced by **Andy Pratt**. In film the relationships between process and policy are complex, and academics and the industry approach things from different perspectives.

“We’ve got a really great group of academics and interesting practitioners here, and it begs a huge question about who’s going to lead us out of this room in terms of impact [...], we need to pay attention to the leadership and the challenge, perhaps for the BFI, and it isn’t just about resources, it’s about political motivation.”

Angus Finney, Film London

Angus Finney emphasised the importance of sustainability in the industry and academic research could be done which can help understand what went wrong when film companies fail. **Angus** has been studying value chain modelling and how it works in film. Along the film value chain the creators of a project are far from the end user. Also the industry works in silos – production is different from distribution, exhibition etc. For those working in distribution the objectives are very different from those of an SME trying to create a project. More research in the film value chain could be very fruitful.

Other areas where **Angus** considered that further research could usefully be carried out were:

- The role of the entrepreneur.
- The structuring of finance for films.
- The relationship between public policy and public finance and private finance.
- Risk management in the business-to-business value chain.
- The study of change and restructuring of the value chain.

Angus’s last point was that the symposium had been a very useful meeting of academia and industry, but there needs to be a leader of the research (perhaps the BFI) if collaboration between academia and industry is to have any real impact.

Joe Lampel spoke about the process of the film industry and the ways in which it could be understood strategically.

“One thing that has enlightened my understanding of the film industry is looking at new venture creation in other areas. The same issues are faced in other areas as are faced in the film industry, the only difference is that they don’t do it for the glory.”

Joe Lampel, Cass Business School

Joe said that a lot is known about some parts of the process but not enough about others. Business academics are interested in the film industry, which is not very different from other industries. It has some interesting peculiarities but lots of similarities with other industries. Not enough work has been done on comparing film with other industries. Good models exist for predicting box office but, while these are useful for academic publication, they are less useful for business because the factors are so obvious. Little is known about the business of film development. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence but this is not enough and the reliability of these anecdotes is uncertain.

The rates of success and failure in the film industry are not much different from other industries. What is different in the film industry is the way risk is processed. In researching the film industry more sociologists are needed. A lot of economic model building has been done but there is not much understanding of the processes. The film industry needs to look at the way other industries approach new ventures, and it needs to learn from how other industries build their systems.

Joe’s final point was that more research is needed which looks at how the performance of films feeds back into the development of:

- Future finance of films
- Future development of talent
- Future entrepreneurial opportunities in the industry.

“What is the proper long-term relationship between higher education institutions and the way creative industries evolve? It is of particular interest to us in this country because we are in danger of turning the higher education sector into a complete handmaiden of the labour market [...], not enough research is being done looking at what really informs creativity and growth in the creative industries.”

John Newbigin, Creative England

John Newbigin spoke about ‘the issues about the role of education in relation to industry and about the regional agenda.’ He began with three points:

- The first was from the *Staying Ahead*⁴ report from 2007, in which one of the key findings was that an important driver of innovation and progress in creative industries is to make demand more demanding. All public policy interventions are on supply side not on demand side. No policy work has been done on this.
- As his second point **John** asked what is the proper relationship between universities and creative clusters? What is the proper long-term relationship

⁴ Staying ahead: The economic performance of the UK’s creative industries, The Work Foundation, NESTA, July 2007. Available at <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports/176/Staying-Ahead-The-economic-performance-of-the-UK39s-creative-industries-overview>

between a higher education institution and the way the creative industries evolve? Academia should stand at a distance from the labour market. What is needed is research to look at what really informs creativity and growth in the creative industries.

- The third point picked up on comments made earlier in the day about alternative content. There are interesting synergies at the local level between production distribution and exhibition where locally made films are being seen locally and the marketing is being driven by social media. No one is doing research into this. New economic models should be developed which are built on the fact that cinema is moving from a mainstream experience to something more bespoke.

John then returned to the issue of who will lead collaborative research. The US film industry has an incredible depth of data and has had for many years. The UK does not have this history of abundance of data but the UK Film Council's setting up of the Research and Statistics Unit was very important. **John** said that when Creative England was set up he would have liked it to have joint ownership of the RSU along with the BFI, but that had not been possible as the funds were not available.

John's last comment was that if an organisation is serious about research it needs to be serious about funding. DCMS's Creative Industries Unit has never been properly resourced. Consortia need to be formed to build and jointly fund solid research. There is enthusiasm for this among potential collaborators, such as AHRC, NESTA, the Design Council and universities. This consortium approach is a practical proposition.

John Sedgwick spoke about what can be learned from economic history that will help in setting up collaborative research in the film industry.

There is a perception that the film industry is an industry of extreme risk, and that the prevalent perception in filmmaking is that 'no one knows anything'. However, **John** and his colleagues have looked at this over time and concluded that some people must know something. Successful filmmaking is not random.

The distribution of revenues from films is very skewed. This has always been the case. High risk films are those with low and medium opening weekend box office takings. Better models need to be developed to model what makes a film successful.

Questions and answers

Finola Kerrigan, Kings College London, commented that research has been done looking at social media in areas other than films, but the results are transferrable. This research could be applied to film and new research should not seek to 'reinvent the wheel'.

Neil Watson made an observation about the film value chain and public policy. Millions of pounds of public and private money have been spent on analysing the film industry in the last few years, but a lot of the data, particularly on profitability, are unavailable as the

companies do not want to release them. The same is true of data on piracy. The UK Film Council was never able to get at the true underlying data to do proper research. Is there any possibility of cooperation so that the public policy bodies and academics can get these data from regulatory bodies such as OFCOM (the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries)?

Angus Finney replied that what is needed is to lobby the EU to get their policymakers on board. It is important for researchers to make EU policymakers aware of any research being carried out, as their support in this area is crucial.

Joe Lampel commented that in order for researchers to successfully negotiate with regulatory bodies both sides must recognise each other's needs.

A last comment was made on **John Newbiggin's** point about creative clusters. A huge amount of action research is being carried out in the regions. A lot of small scale projects are happening. What needs to be done is for the models being developed out there to be made visible and to be used.

Round up

The summarisers of the last three panels presented the main areas, arising from their sessions, of promising future collaboration.

Terry Illott was the first to speak and the areas which he considered could be taken further were:

- All publicly funded projects should have a research component as a condition of the funding. This is something the BFI could pursue.
- There is much scope for research in the audience field, especially on the audience for digital content.
- There is a culture gap and many misunderstandings between academia and policymakers. In order to close the culture gap greater familiarity needs to be gained by working together. It would it be useful to have a lobby group to take this forward.
- Insufficient funds are currently available for research. If 2.5% of all public money spent on film went on research that would be around £8.6 million per year. The BFI should seek to get that money for research. Realistically the BFI is the only organisation in a position to do this. They should take the lead in discussion and dissemination of research so that we do not have the situation where a lot of research is happening but few people are aware of it. There is also a role for research agendas, and the BFI should to lead on this.

Keith Randle said there is a real desire by academia and the film industry to exchange views and to debate. This needs to be followed up with suggestions on how to further the cooperation and where it might lead.

Andy Pratt said that as well as looking at new research, there is value in pulling together the information people are already collating, and pulling together locally generated initiatives to complement some of the top down initiatives. A lot of research for policy purposes is necessarily quick research but the long view is also important in order to get insights into complexities of the issues. There is also need for a brokerage role. There are many people with vested interests and specialised interests and ways need to be found for them to keep communicating with each other.

The final summing up was by **Richard Miller**:

“Today has been about starting conversations. The day has been very full because we wanted to make reference to many different elements of this relationship. We hope and believe, however, that further conversations will follow elsewhere.”

Richard Miller, Available Light Advisory