

**BBC Charter Review
UK Film Council Submission to
the Department for Culture,
Media and Sport**

4 April 2004

Overview

1. As part of the process of establishing a new charter of the BBC in 2007, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is undertaking a public consultation. As the strategic agency for film in the UK, the UK Film Council is making a submission the keynote of which is the integration of the Government's policy for film and its policy for public service broadcasting.
2. The DCMS's December 2003 document, *Review of the BBC's Royal Charter*, does mention film, but only in a relatively limited context that does not correspond to the full range of either the BBC's established and potential role in carrying forward UK film policy, or UK film policy itself.
3. In this submission, the UK Film Council wishes to set out the strong relationship between the goals set for the BBC and those of UK film policy.
4. This submission is informed by the strategic objectives established by the Government for the UK Film Council to:
 - a. Encourage the making of distinctive UK films
 - b. Ensure audiences throughout the UK have access to the full range of British and international cinema
 - c. Support appropriate skills training
 - d. Support the development of opportunities for all UK citizens to understand and appreciate film
 - e. Support the development of opportunities for access to cinema history and heritage
 - f. Promote social inclusion and celebrate diversity
 - g. Encourage excellence and innovation particularly through the use of new digital technologies
5. These UK Film Council objectives clearly go considerably beyond the line set out in Paragraph 12 of the consultation document that refers to:

“[the BBC's] patronage of the arts, *including film* [our emphasis] and sponsorship of the creative industries more widely, for example through its role as a major commissioner of new work.”
6. The UK Film Council suggests that as well as “art” and “new work”, in particular film also needs to be considered in terms of diversity and inclusion, and education and media literacy.
7. For the UK Film Council a commitment to diversity includes a commitment to ensuring that communities across the UK have the opportunity to learn about film and to participate in practical film-related initiatives. This is

perhaps best illustrated by the First Light project, which has completed its second year, which involves projects by young people from disadvantaged communities – people with disabilities, from geographically-remote and socially-deprived areas, refugees – to make films. When presenting the 2003 First Light Awards – given to the best of the 400 plus projects – the Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, threw down the challenge to the broadcasters (including the BBC), that this was precisely the kind of project in which they should be getting involved.

8. In the consultation document, education has devoted to it one bullet point (para.12). The DCMS is interested in what is valued regarding, for example:

“[the BBC’s] educational impact, for example through specialist educational programming on radio, television and online, including the forthcoming digital curriculum, broader genres (e.g. documentary, drama, entertainment, children’s programmes and religion) and through print media, at all levels – schools, further and higher education and lifelong learning.”

9. In the UK Film Council’s view, every aspect of the BBC’s educational activities listed here relates both to film specifically and to media literacy. In other words we would like to see a BBC education strategy that includes a clear commitment to film and media literacy.

The UKFC response

10. The UK Film Council wants to build an enduring partnership for film with the BBC based on shared objectives. These objectives extend beyond film production, as set out above. That said, the UK Film Council remains convinced that the current level of investment in new British films is inadequate for a public service broadcaster of the scale of the BBC.
11. The UK Film Council summarises the challenge for the BBC for film in the following terms:

How the BBC can help the UK film industry to compete successfully

12. The BBC should be intervening in three main ways: by investing in talent and ideas; by showcasing the full range of UK and world cinema and by using its unrivalled media presence to promote and encourage film-going. The UK Film Council has already drawn Government attention to the insufficient level of investment by the BBC in feature film and in the marginal presence it gives to UK films (and all but a narrow range of US movies) in its schedules; indeed, the range of films shown on the BBC is far narrower than that seen in UK cinemas. These points were forcefully taken up by the Culture Select Committee and endorsed by the UK Government in its response to that Committee’s report.

How the BBC can encourage the making of distinctive UK films

13. First and most importantly, the BBC should increase both the level of its equity investment in UK films and the acquisition prices it pays for UK films. The BBC does encourage the making of distinctive UK films, and has had a steady, if small, role as an equity investor in such films. But it could be doing much more given its power and centrality as a leading cultural institution and a programme-maker. In particular, the UK Film Council believes that there is an opportunity to collaborate with the BBC in developing popular yet distinctive UK films which could play on BBC1 at peak times.

How the BBC can ensure audiences throughout the UK have access to the full range of British and international cinema

14. The BBC has established a model with the creation of BBC4 in terms not only of scheduling a wide range of films but also supporting the distribution of those films in cinemas. But the level of its activity could be increased and it has little echo in the main radio and television services, and its very effective on-line content in support of film releases is almost completely confined to major Hollywood films. For the BBC to play this role to the full, it needs to carry through what it is doing with BBC4 to other parts of its services. It also needs to participate more fully and directly in the promotion of cinema-going and of specialised film. The BBC should, in particular, engage with and assist the development of the UK Film Council's Digital Screen Network.

How the BBC can support appropriate skills training

15. The BBC prides itself on being the largest provider of training in the UK audiovisual sector. It plays an active role in Skillset and supports the National Film and Television School. The UK Film Council, in launching its training strategy, *A Bigger Future*, threw down a challenge to the UK audiovisual sector to boost its commitment to training, for example, by contributing to the £10 million-a-year skills training fund established by the UK Film Council and Skillset. The BBC is expected to play a central role in the achievement of the objectives of this training strategy. The BBC could also play a crucial role through such training in contributing to the promotion of diversity across the UK film industry workforce. It is disappointing however that single plays, such as those programmed in the *Play for Today* slot, which had a critical role in developing new talent, have largely disappeared.

How the BBC can support the development of opportunities for all UK citizens to understand and appreciate film

16. The UK Film Council is keen to work in partnership with the BBC to help the Corporation develop ways of working not just with the UK Film Council itself but the British Film Institute, Film Education, Regional Screen Agencies, National screen agencies, educational institutions and other organisations in order to fulfil its role; this applies across the range of interventions that flow from UK film policy. On the programming side, Film 2004, although valuable for a mainstream audience could be

complemented by other programmes which deal with film in different ways for different audiences.

How the BBC can support the development of opportunities for access to cinema history and heritage

17. Access specifically to educational opportunities around history and heritage should be a function of the Digital Archive. The BBC should also lead on a progressive approach to rights management for legitimate educational use.

The promotion of social inclusion and the celebration of diversity

18. In the UK Film Council's view, the promotion of social inclusion and the celebration of diversity lie at the very heart of a public service broadcaster's mission. The BBC therefore needs to articulate through its film strategy how it is fostering and supporting these policy objectives.

The encouragement of excellence and innovation particularly through the use of new digital technologies

19. The BBC has demonstrated in recent years how effective it can be in driving the take-up of new technologies, notably in relation to digital radio, internet and digital terrestrial television. It is also contributing to the education of a generation of people confident in their use of the digital technologies. But this role requires greater connectedness with initiatives taking place across education and institutions throughout the UK; the example of First Light is cited above.

The BBC's openness, transparency and accessibility

20. The UK Film Council believes that the BBC should publish a film strategy and be transparent about the total amount of money which it commits to film-related activity across the Corporation as a whole.

Conclusions

21. In responding to the DCMS consultation document, the UK Film Council wishes to emphasise the distinctions between:

- a. The BBC's industrial role (as the UK's major audiovisual producer, exporter, exhibitor and employer)
- b. Its cultural role (as the most powerful "representative" in the audiovisual sphere of UK culture)
- c. Its educational role

22. The UK Film Council therefore sees the Charter Review process as an opportunity to encourage the BBC to articulate and implement across the three points set out above a clear strategy for film for the first time. There is a need to make sure that this strategy is transparent and meshes with Government strategy for film.

23. The UK Film Council has recently met with the BBC and agreed a range of potential areas of collaboration which will form the basis for the development of a structured partnership over the coming months.
24. The UK Film Council looks forward to the development of this partnership but it remains the UK Film Council's view that the BBC should re-consider its overall level of investment in new British films and that the BBC should extend the opportunities for investment in films in a way which delivers on the three points set out at 21 above.