

Creative England Consultation

Response from EM Media

About EM Media

EM Media is the Regional Screen Agency for the East Midlands, one of an original network of nine independent screen agencies which since 2001 has been charged with the development of the film, games, TV and interactive industries. Since the demise of Screen East, EM Media, on the basis of our strong track record in film and the strength and robustness of our management and administrative systems, was selected by the UK Film Council to deliver a financial programme of support, EM Media East, into the East of England.

EM Media secures finance (public and private) nurtures talent and invests in success. EM Media champions the creative sector's contribution to the economy whilst setting a ground-breaking and progressive agenda. For almost a decade, EM Media has been supporting unique and distinctive talent from its Nottingham base and has delivered transformational change in the reputation and impact of East Midlands' filmmaking as well as the region's digital infrastructure. EM Media's innovative approach to investment, service delivery and industry brokerage has delivered creative excellence and unprecedented economic growth of the creative sector. These are bold statements which are evidenced by the following results:

Headline achievements:

- EM Media is a proven test-bed for new, emerging and in-transition film talent and amongst the screen agencies our achievements in film are unrivalled.
- We have successfully backed the production of 42 films – more than half by first-time directors with the most recent productions due to reach the market in 2011; which means that all of the films backed by EM Media will have reached their target audience. No other screen agency has thus far matched this achievement.
- We have an active slate of 45 excellent film projects in development (at various stages on route to production) and a track record of converting nearly 1 in 4 film development investments into production investments - an innovation given the industry norm is 1 in 8.
- Additionally we have invested in over 100 high quality short films; a further testament to our pipeline of film talent 'coming through the ranks'.

- To date, EM Media-backed projects have been awarded 8 BAFTAs – seven of these are for films including *This Is England* and *Control* and one a TV BAFTA for Samantha Morton's *The Unloved*, co-financed with Channel 4.
- Other accolades achieved include 10 British Independent Film Awards, 3 Michael Powell Awards and over 30 International Film Festival Prizes.
- EM Media's activity has generated £180m economic benefit for the local economy which is directly attributable.

Also:

- Our investment in the games sector has brought 9 new games to market across multiple platforms.
- We have invested in 21 TV and interactive projects.
- We possess a unique and effective approach to talent development – a tailored and flexible service responsive to the development needs of the individual; a service which challenges, supports, raises and realises ambition.
- We can demonstrate clear investment and deal-making expertise.
- Our first EMMI investment fund we designed in-house.
- The State aid notification process used in-house expertise to establish a European precedent.
- The fund had the dual aims of investment and returns alongside sector development.
- The EMMI 2 evaluation is about to be published and evidences a GVA impact of £10 for every £1 invested.
- Our key in-house skills are in all aspects of film including:
 - Innovative investment and returns practices.
 - Talent spotting and development through to supporting first and second time feature filmmakers - clearly our area of specialism.
 - Proven product to market and industry brokerage strategies.
 - Cultural Infrastructure development – we have developed a unique, self-sustaining consortium and network of 27 venues across the East Midlands which is ripe for expansion.
 - Ground breaking film education work within formal education, as part of the 21st Century film programme.
 - Inward Investment - our proactive Location service coupled with vital local knowledge attracts and supports a range of productions filming across the region.

And:

- In relation to the creative content sector more broadly our key in-house skills are in the areas of:
 - Investment readiness activity
 - A full range of business support activity
 - Investment in R&D and prototype development
 - Investment and returns practices
 - Product development
 - Product to market and industry brokerage strategies

Unique Specialist Knowledge

- State aid
- Film legals and contracting
- Investment returns strategies
- Creative excellence and economic growth year on year.

It is clear that the East Midlands is a key if not ‘the’ out of London film talent hub.

General comments on the consultation document

The stated intention of the document from the outset of the Chairman’s introduction is to “build on the work of the Regional Screen Agencies.” EM Media welcomes this statement however must point out that the document nowhere states which practice it intends to build on. The lack of an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the RSAs is a clear and noticeable gap rendering some statements empty; well intentioned but assertions nonetheless as they are not backed by evidence.

Further, the document could be strengthened by a formal needs analysis (audit) of independent creative businesses otherwise Creative England is unable to demonstrate it is responding to actual need.

The introduction asserts the need to reduce duplication of resources and functions. In and of itself, this is to be welcomed, particularly if each agency is a stand-alone operation. However, the duplication referred to only exists if the assumption that all RSAs are the same is correct. EM Media’s experience, and indeed clients’ experiences demonstrate that RSAs are not identical, nor do they all cost the same to run. Their functions differ, as do their chosen modus

operandi. In fact, the need most commonly heard from clients is not for a reduction in scope of activity (which any concentration will result in) but for an increase in consistency of practice between agencies and locations. EM Media suggests that this can be achieved in film by examining working practices and establishing minimum standards, which in turn will lead to a structure best suited to deliver the best possible services.

The use of the term 'hub' is used inconsistently in the document referring both to a specific city based 'agency,' which without the appropriate evidence base to back up a spurious selection process, will remain contentious and, additionally to a 'wider territory,' which by definition welcomes discussion and input. In the writing of the document Creative England has created an unhelpful and unnecessary East/West divide which if allowed to continue, will have a damaging effect on wider territory relationships. We recommend in the strongest terms that Creative England re-thinks this decision as a matter of urgency, to promote a fairer treatment and regard for the country as a whole and in order to become a more credible representative of the sector, England-wide.

The constitutions of and relationships between Creative England and the proposed three additional hub companies may not conform to the requirements under the Lottery Act if Creative England and/or the hubs intend to distribute Lottery as (a) delegate distributor(s) of the BFI. The proposed structure will need to be tested against the operating requirements of the Lottery Act.

Consultation questions

1. Do you agree that the strategic priorities are the right ones?

Given the generic nature of these objectives they are hard to argue with in the sense that these are currently shared by the RSAs, BFI, Skillset and Film London and are a reflection of current rather than future priorities. That said, we agree that these should remain the priorities at least in the short term until the BFI's national review of film has been completed and in the absence of a greater vision for the growth and development of the film and wider creative sector.

2. What comments do you have on the aims and objectives attached to each priority?

In general terms these are poorly crafted, unimaginative and more akin to activities than strategic, progressive aims and objectives. We recognise however that the timeframe for delivery has a limiting effect on ambition.

3. How can Creative England best build upon the work of the Regional Screen Agencies in supporting these priorities?

In order to effectively build on the work of the RSAs first an objective analysis of the successful and less successful creative, financial, managerial and strategic practices of all of the RSAs needs to be undertaken. EM Media was surprised and disappointed that no such evidence base was produced in support of this document. The lack of evidence severely undermines the credibility of this document and the ability for it to achieve buy-in England-wide.

For sound decision-making to take place that is widely respected, it must be objective and clearly rooted in evidence.

4. What are the key challenges, in addition to funding?

The key challenges include continuity of service, legitimacy and integration with other public sector support.

Continuity of service in support for film is critical to the success of the regions. Relationships understood to underpin talent development, or infrastructure growth will not wait for Creative England to establish itself before taking place: local authorities, Arts Council England, NESTA and others, in addition to the BFI, will set the course of investment and strategic decisions in the absence of informed views about film in the regions at operational level. It is of critical importance that Creative England's ability to represent and connect with the regions of England be confirmed as part of a sensible planning timescale: autumn 2011 is around the corner, and while decisions and structures are put in place, those relationships are at risk. The opportunity of this timescale is to present a continuous and consistent service from all RSAs and to begin to deliver an integrated operation across the country; whilst a suitable, legitimate structure to take forward agreed collective priorities is formed.

Unfortunately, as it stands the document presents a skewing of resource towards the West side of England which is deeply unhelpful and not necessarily matching or

reflecting the known centres of excellence Creative England is purporting to be building on. Given that this Creative England plan is a plan for film, the lack of reference to the most prolific filmmaking community outside of London in the East Midlands is noticeable by its absence. An explanation for this glaring omission would be welcomed. By way of comparison, the feature film investment successes of EM Media, (42 to date) outnumber those of the RSAs based in Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol added together.

Further to the letter submitted to Creative England signed by the Board of EM Media together with key international talent, EM Media hereby renews its offer to play a key role at the heart of Creative England. We clearly have a tremendous contribution to make evidenced by our creative and economic achievements to date.

5. How can Creative England best ensure that these priorities are delivered in a way that meets the needs of all the English Regions?

Meeting the needs of all of the English Regions relies on engaging constructively with all of the English Regions. There is no need or reason to exclude agencies from the East side of England in Creative England's decision-making; indeed decision-making would be enhanced as a result of drawing on expertise and knowledge from this part of the country, clearly absent at present.

In order to meet development needs it is vital to understand what they are. And to understand and respond to needs they must first be clearly identified and articulated. The empirical research so necessary in needs identification is absent, or yet to be undertaken. No further strategic priorities should be announced until such a study has been undertaken.

In relation to delivery against priorities (functions) these will not be answerable through the creation of a structure (form): it is Creative England's working practices which will ensure delivery, not its structure. The know-how to reach out to clients consistently across the piece is not found in hubs and spokes but more in a flexible operation, located appropriately according to need.

The current proposition is a weak hybrid sitting uneasily between on the one hand, a single organisation able to set the tone and levels of service England-wide and the current arrangement of independent organisations lacking cohesion and a mechanism to achieve consistency of tone and service delivery.

Regardless of the public purpose of Creative England, the current proposition fails to take into account the best interests of the clients and their preferred level of granularity in interactions, or the best interests of the public financiers, who require clear lines of accountability, measurable outcomes and consistency of high quality creative and managerial practices to justify investment.

Summary

There is a clear sense that the 'cart has been put before the horse' in this document. Usually, in planning terms, strategic aims and objectives stem from a carefully honed vision and clear mission. Both are absent in this document which compounds its issue of credibility; not helped by the lack of a clearly articulated contextual analysis and a lack of underpinning evidence. Without these essential pieces of work, the document claims much and evidences little, creating difficulties in buy-in particularly from the East side of the country, for obvious reasons.

The evident bias towards the West side of the country, a decision which appears not to be backed up by the real evidence of agency performance leaves Creative England open to accusations of unfounded bias and not delivering on its stated intention of building on the successes of the RSAs. The current Creative England arrangements do not bear out this intention and Creative England would be well advised to revisit the decisions it has made to date within the context of Nolan, the Lottery Act, the UK Film Council audit of the robustness of RSA systems and procedures and, objective evidence which should be independently commissioned to underpin its decisions.

Given that it is evident that innovation and excellence in relation to film is far more prevalent on the East side of the country than on the West, and given that film priorities and finance are the focus of this document and the set-up of Creative England, the decision on the proposed location of the 'hubs' if we accept them to mean individual agencies rather than the wider territories, is unfathomable.

Debbie Williams
Chief Executive, EM Media
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