

## **Creative England Round Table**

### **The East Midlands – Nottingham, 28 February 2011**

On the 28 February 2011 John Newbigin (JN), Chair Creative England welcomed an invited panel of East Midlands film stakeholders representing areas of academia, film production, archive, exhibition to a round table discussion about Creative England, its set up and its priorities in relation to film 2011/2012 as laid out in its consultation document:

<http://www.creativeengland.co.uk/>

Creative England currently proposes a restructure of the current screen agency network into Creative England, operating from three hubs in Birmingham, Bristol, and Manchester creating “super regions” utilising a hub and spoke model with agencies providing a service to the super region.

Its three core priorities for film are:

1. Developing Creative Talent
2. Nurturing Film Culture
3. Helping to maximise Inward Investment

The following is a summarised account of key points discussed in the Nottingham meeting. The full transcript is available upon request.

EM Media’s response to the Creative England consultation will be submitted ahead of the deadline.

### **History**

In July 2010 the Government announced its plans to abolish the UK Film Council (UKFC) as part of its comprehensive spending review, spearheading a series of changes to be made to the current film support structure across England. It was announced by Government on 29 November 2010 that the British Film Institute (BFI) would take over duties previously administered by the UKFC and would become the Government-backed strategic body for film in the UK. The annual “Grant in Aid” finance previously awarded to Regional Screen Agencies (RSAs) from the UKFC would be reduced by at least 15%. As a consequence the seven remaining independent RSAs – delegate Lottery distributing bodies of the UKFC would reconfigure themselves into a new entity “Creative England” (CE) which would work in partnership with the BFI and Film London to deliver out-of-London Lottery-funded support for film.

### **Introduction**

JN welcomed all attendees and following introductions gave an update on CE set up and planning. JN explained that the BFI and DCMS are currently reorganising and that there is to be a BFI-led film policy review coming out later in the year, which would involve consultation with CE, and as such the CE story was still unfolding. The only certainty was less finance hence the need to reprioritise and focus. JN explained that the purpose of the meeting was for attendees to ask questions and discuss how CE might evolve over the year as it will be a year of transition given the BFI is still developing its increased role and that the film policy review is due. JN explained he wanted to get implications of the short term priorities and get a sense of what CE should be focussing on.

Debbie Williams (DW), Chief Executive EM Media, outlined EM Media’s perspective stating its role was to get the best possible outcome for the filmmaking community it is here to serve. She acknowledged that there is a significant filmmaking community in this part of the country and EM Media’s aim is to build upon achievements to date so that everyone

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transitions to a positive place rather than one that creates more difficulties whether in terms of accessing finance, advice, guidance or expertise.

#### **Origins of Creative England**

JN reported that the Government and Culture Minister Ed Vaizey in particular, had been very supportive of RSAs and their broader digital activity. He reported that Government's view was that eight agencies in the current financial climate was unsustainable, particularly if there were significant cut backs in funding – and that a maximum of three would be better. At that time JN as current chair of Screen England (the network of RSAs) addressed with the screen agencies how to best restructure eight independent agencies. On the 29 November 2010 Culture Minister Ed Vaizey announced the creation of Creative England indicating it would work from three territories – North, Central, South and would be set up following a period of industry consultation.

#### **Creative England Options**

JN explained several options were considered by the chairs and chief executives of the eight screen agencies including a single unified body, a North / South split, a North / Central / South split and an East / West split. JN said that there was a majority in favour for North / Central / South (with the exception of EM Media and Screen Yorkshire. As such, Creative England was proposed as a three hub structure with Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol hosting the three Creative England hubs. Creative England would be a joint venture of these hubs. This is the plan that was presented to Government. JN outlined the need to present something as opposed to nothing in order to secure finance and stated the plan, if it was proven not to work could change.

DW clarified EM Media's position in relation to the formation of Creative England stating EM Media did not support the three named hub proposal and that there had been two clear conditions to EM Media's acceptance. DW also reported that the Chair of the Board of EM Media had not been invited to attend a decision-making meeting since July 2010.

JN said that where areas of specialism existed such as in the East Midlands they ought to be able to serve the whole country and this would be an obvious place to start if there was a centre of support for film production that wasn't just restricted to the East Midlands. Similarly, the PBQ Network seems to be a model of a network that could be replicated across the country as a powerful way of dealing with film education and audience development. The resource, capacity and expertise that is currently available in the East Midlands should be available England-wide. That is the ambition that can be delivered by Creative England. DW replied that if this is now the case this was to be welcomed.

#### **Current state of play (as at 28 February 2011)**

JN said that the intention was for Creative England to be up and running by 1 April 2011, as this was the timescale set by Government. However a year of transition had been agreed with the UKFC/BFI ensuring continuity of service for clients and allowing Creative England to fully consult with industry on its priorities. JN said that Creative England had submitted an £8m regional growth fund bid which, if successful would replace money many screen agencies had received through regional development agencies and the European regional development funds. The bid was written from the three proposed hubs but if successful the money would not be for them but for all the regions. However, at present the only finance on the table was the Grant in Aid the UKFC would have allocated the screen agencies, if it had remained in existence, less a 15% cut imposed by the Comprehensive Spending Review

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(CSR). Lottery for film is expected to increase when the government introduces a bill to change the way Lottery funds are distributed. Hence CE is only consulting on film related activity in the year ahead.

#### **Relationship with BFI**

JN said that the relationship of CE to the BFI should be as strategic partners, not a subsidiary of the Film Council in the way the RSAs were presented.

BFI wants its working groups to include Creative England when it leads the national review of film policy and regional representation. 2011 is a transition year. The first two quarters of the year will be business as usual with finance coming directly to the RSAs from the BFI.

#### **Key Questions and Concerns**

##### **1. Location of the hubs – rationale for selection including cost basis and track record**

JN was asked to explain the basis and rationale for selecting three hubs in Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol. Attendees felt the lack of mention of Nottingham, East Midlands and the Eastern region meant the plan presented as a hostile takeover with no recognition of the strong and committed film industry here.

JN acknowledged the concern at the lack of representation within the plan. The three agencies in those cities formed the plan with a majority consensus from the other screen agencies and presented it to Government.

Cost comparisons were not considered but JN was keen to stress that the RSAs within those three identified cities alone were not Creative North, Central, South. A hub would purely be an administrative base and didn't preclude Nottingham with its film track record from being a film centre of excellence.

JN said the purpose of CE is to see if it can build on the centres of excellence and develop where there is professional expertise and make it available across the country more systematically, albeit with fewer resources. The current Creative England plan was intended as a starting point from which people can respond.

Concerns were raised about adding cost and overhead to the existing network with the formation of Creative England. JN said each hub would be responsible for an area of activity therefore there would be no duplication of activity. The question was raised why three hubs and why not one single body. JN replied that what happens in the North is arguably different to what goes on in the South – there is no one size fits all approach.

JN said he was committed to delivering the Creative England process but it may be necessary to revisit some decisions. The decision has been made but can be unmade if needs to.

JN said there had not been a piece of work undertaken to assess the contribution of each RSA but that type of research would be good for the BFI to pick up.

##### **2. Make-up of the hubs - Equal access, hub and spoke, Centres of Excellence**

JN explained that the hubs should be the admin centres, not the locations of activity. They should be the core admin functions needed to make the network work. A cost basis cannot be the guiding principle in the location decision. JN said that the centre of excellence is here (Nottingham) so if working for wider areas the solution needs to ensure fairness. There

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should be a joined up talent strategy, the “escalator” as many have referred to it, but all is still to be decided.

Clarification was sought on how a hub and spoke model would operate without losing intrinsic local on-the-ground knowledge and without incurring a postcode lottery or increased layers of admin and red tape. For example would an application to a spoke then have to be approved by Creative Central and then Creative England? If one region had a better hub and spoke system, how could fairness across the country be ensured?

JN said a lot was still to be worked out but it is clear that eight individual agencies with eight separate teams could not be sustained and that CE would have to ensure that finance is available across the country.

JN said it would be the role of the hubs to determine the spokes which is why negotiation between the regions is so important.

#### **3. Creative Central**

It was pointed out that a company called Creative Central had been incorporated in December 2010 by the director of Screen WM thereby demonstrating that Screen WM would be Creative Central. JN stated he was unaware of the company incorporation and was keen to stress that wasn't the case and that he would broker a meeting between EMM and Screen West Midlands in order to shape the formation of the Central territory ensuring the Creative Central team had expertise, knowledge and experience. DW was keen to stress that there should be a consistent, coherent view across the country, and that it is not working on a territorial basis.

JN said that Creative Central would be a new, separate company with a properly constituted board that properly represents the region and that another new company would be set up if it need be.

#### **4. The Eastern side of England**

Everyone around the table felt concerned about the lack of Eastern representation within the current Creative England plan feeling a side of the country had been excluded, a view compounded by the fact that the current interim shadow board of Creative England comprised the chairs of the boards of the three “hub” agencies – Screen WM, South West Screen and Vision and Media.

#### **5. The current situation in the East of England**

JN reported that the UKFC had convened a recent meeting at which it was agreed that EM Media and Screen South will split the Eastern region between them, with EM Media taking responsibility for distributing Lottery and GiA and Screen South working with Film Link to help deliver Locations support, to ensure that organisations and companies in the Eastern region will not be disadvantaged.

#### **6. Governance and transparency**

Questions were asked around the governance of CE – for example, how can Creative Central be responsible to Creative England when it is one of the owners of Creative England?

JN explained that Creative England would have the overall authority on film from its contract with BFI, so Creative Central would be answerable and financially accountable to Creative

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England. A clear funding agreement between CE and the hubs would have to be in place so that they are answerable to Creative England in how they manage their services. There was concern expressed that the Nolan principles hadn't been referenced within the Creative England draft strategy nor had they been considered within the set up of Creative England. Given the agencies' public remit transparency in all dealings was considered to be of utmost importance.

**7. Creative England Board membership**

JN explained that the current Creative England board comprising the chief executive and chairs of the three screen agencies in Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester was a non-decision making board and a new board would be recruited in due course. The Chair of the board of Screen South had also been invited onto the board to represent other interests. The lack of representation on the board from the Eastern-based agencies was of concern to attendees. JN reiterated that no decisions are made by the shadow board. Decisions relating to Creative England would need to be ratified by the full group of RSA Chairs. It was his view that the Chairs will be brought together when there is a consensus, or if there is no prospect of a consensus.

JN suggested that in the longer term each region would be represented on the CE Board along with the Chair of CE and a number of non executive directors. It had not yet been resolved how a board recruitment process would work.

**8. Relationship with Arts Council England**

There was an appreciation that a Memorandum of Understanding needs to be developed so that everyone is clear where responsibilities start and stop. Likewise with Film London regarding inward investment. JN reported ACE had put together a Creative Industries unit to be run by Tom Fleming.

**9. Creative England priorities**

It was felt that the priorities were not new and were commonsensical and reinforce a general approach – as such everyone signs up to them. The concern expressed was that the priorities are only as good as those who execute them. Therefore, when addressing the priorities of Creative England you have to address the structural issues also. JN said that with many agencies restructuring Creative England is trying to figure out who the key teams are and as such this should be allowed to be a transition year while the structure is sorted out.

**10. Timescales**

JN explained that the first six months of the 2011 financial year will be a transition period into Creative England with Screen Agencies making financial decisions with finance from the BFI. The intention is to have a fully integrated CE up and running by 1 October 2011 with a properly bottomed out and fully functioning structure in place by 1 April 2012.

**11. Next Steps**

DW thanked JN for the discussion and for taking on board the comments and strength of feeling in the room. She urged everyone to complete the consultation and looked forward to progressing the plans for Creative Central.

JN was undertaking meetings across England and would consider all views.

JN would chair a meeting between Screen West Midlands and EM Media to progress the Central territory.

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JN clarified that CE is dealing with five key themes:

1. Talent identification and development
2. Small Company growth
3. Access to finance
4. Access to markets
5. Cultural development – audience development and film education citing the work of the PBQ network as being really exciting.

**JN stressed that there is an opportunity with the restricted public finance to create something that really does deliver screen industry support across England efficiently.**

**The Creative England consultation closes on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011.**

**Have your say here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/creativeenglandfilmconsultation>**