



BFI

**Response to
Digital Britain – Interim Report**

12 March 2009

INTRODUCTION

The BFI welcomes the timely and urgent interventions signalled by the publication of the interim report of Digital Britain. It speaks to our own digital plans that will help us significantly increase audiences for the content and knowledge that we generate every day and, equally importantly, the richness of film and television collections cared for in the BFI National Archive.

In particular this response addresses the contribution the BFI would expect to make to this strategy as a publicly funded body.

The issues the BFI would like to see considered in the Digital Britain final report are:

- Rights - implementation of the recommendations of the Gowers Review and introduction of a simpler system which balances the need for easy public access and compensating rights owners
- Infrastructure - investment in an infrastructure that would will allow the BFI to unlock much greater public value from activities which are already invested in by the public purse. Conversely, Digital Britain also carries with it the imperative that to unlock this additional value, core revenue investment must be maintained
- Education - the adoption of film both as a teaching tool and compelling education resource across the curriculum, and the teaching of film 'grammar' as an entitlement for every school child
- Archives
 - recognition of the real value and public demand for content currently 'sleeping' in national archives. Sustaining the critical investment needed to continue the *Screen Heritage UK Strategy*¹ to unlock this further
 - addressing the future of the television heritage in the BFI National Archive after analogue switch off

1. *see Appendix*

WHY WE THINK FILM IS IMPORTANT IN DIGITAL BRITAIN

“Something as powerful as film should be celebrated and understood.” Anthony Minghella

Film has never been so important. Most of the information we need to navigate modern life comes through the moving image. To be literate in today’s society means to understand the language of film and television, to be able to ‘read’ and ‘write’ in a medium other than print.

Film is a social phenomenon – everyone is uploading or downloading; we live in a YouTube society. Film is probably the most powerful tool we have to engage with the young; it is the most powerful vehicle for the promotion of social cohesion. And it is a huge economic driver - Britain is arguably the third most important centre in the world for film and the BFI’s role in supporting, inspiring and championing creativity through providing access to the broadest diversity of cinema from across the world is increasingly vital. We are helping stimulate a Creative Britain.

The BFI is the nation’s cultural agency for film, in the same way that the National Gallery is for paintings or the British Library for print. We are grant-in-aid funded by DCMS through the UK Film Council, with an additional £1 million levy coming from commercial terrestrial broadcasters to fund the national television archive. A further 55% of our total funding is self generated income.

Our mission is to ensure that everyone has access to the broadest choice of film culture, no matter where they live or how they want to access it. Our primary aims lie in preserving and curating the nation’s film heritage; generating new knowledge through an exciting, innovative and accessible cultural programme; and reaching new audiences by inspiring and motivating people to seek out film culture.

We know there is huge public demand for cultural film:

- Some 12,000 prints a year are loaned out by the BFI National Archive to support the programmes of 800 venues across the UK and overseas;
- tens of millions of people have over the past five years enjoyed hours of material from the Archive through co-productions with TV broadcasters;
- BFI Screenonline - the story of British film and television shown through hundreds of hours of archive footage - free in every school, university and public library
- through its free education and teaching packages enabling film to be taught in the classroom the BFI has reached 5,000 schools and 2 million children;
- 1,000 hours of material has been digitised for free public access in BFI Mediatheques on the South Bank, in the BFI Library and at the mixed arts centre Quad in Derby, with more venues to follow;
- 2 million people a year enjoy films from the archive on the BFI’s YouTube channel;
- every year 300,000 DVD of BFI films are sold;
- also every year 600,000 people watch a film from the BFI National Archive in a cinema, village hall, arts centre or film society;
- over 1 million people flock to BFI Southbank, BFI Imax or the BFI London Film Festival each year to see a choice of over 3,000 different films from across the world and from every era since the earliest days of cinema

But this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Digital technology has the potential to revolutionise the way the BFI can deliver its mission and we are totally committed to further exploring the ever greater impact of digital technology in the work, enjoyment and lives of the people of Britain. Digital Britain brings us a step closer to achieving this.

Our forward strategy, as presented to Government, positions the BFI as a digital hub within a wider network of sectoral cultural partnership for the distribution and exchange of knowledge, learning and

cultural programmes. This envisages a National Film Centre - a modern fit-for-purpose hub which values the virtual visitor as much as the actual visitor coming through the door.

We enthusiastically support the Government's determination to ensure global competitiveness for the UK in these sectors. The BFI is widely recognised as a world class organisation which has been the pioneer across a range of initiatives over many years, particularly in the archival and educational spheres and we look forward to continue playing this role as the impact of technologies continues to reshape organisational models and the cultures of the moving image.

Our interests have significant overlap with those mapped in the Digital Britain interim report and we have taken this opportunity to comment on a number of the themes and Action Points where this has been invited.

We would welcome further discussions with the Digital Britain team.

INTERIM REPORT – SPECIFIC RESPONSE

Digital Networks: Actions 1 – 6

Next generation and Mobile Networks

The BFI believes urgent action is needed to ensure the roll out of the digital infrastructure - the next generation fixed networks - so we are pleased that this is seen as a priority in the Interim Report.

Investment in infrastructure has the power to add public value to existing activities and to unlock value in new areas. Without this investment that public value is lost. Indeed, without it the BFI will not be able to deliver its remit in the long term.

Actions 7 – 9

Digital Television and Radio Networks

We support this series of actions in so far as they help build towards a Digital Britain, but we ask that the final report acknowledges the need for consideration as to how the BFI can continue to archive the nation's TV output beyond digital switchover.

The issue here is that currently the BFI's national television archive is funded by a levy on ITV, Channel 4 and Five. It is not clear in the current climate what will happen after digital switch-over, the risk being that without continued investment in collecting, the nation's ongoing television heritage will be lost for future generations.

We would ask that the BFI is included in discussions from the earliest possible stages to ensure that provisions are made for archiving Britain's TV heritage in a post-analogue world.

Digital Content: Action 10

Economics of Digital Content

The BFI is pleased to see the focus on investment in new content, which is something the BFI generates every day through Education, Festivals, *Sight & Sound* and its cultural programme. We see the huge value potential of this content and how it can be made widely available through digital distribution.

We would urge, however, that equal importance should be considered for the publicly-owned content in the BFI National Archive.

The BFI believes that today this is more important than ever as film and the moving image is society's chosen medium and a powerful vehicle for social cohesion. We are experiencing ever-growing demand for this archive content that we are not equipped to meet.

In 2003 the Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee report recognised the potential value in the UK's film and television archives and recommended that "the BFI should take the lead within the UK film and TV archive community and champion the whole sector...an over-arching national strategy promoting both good curatorship and increasing accessibility should be vigorously pursued."

Following the last Comprehensive Spending Review, £25m in funding was awarded for the project to begin and the BFI has now established a Programme Office to deliver the *Screen Heritage UK* project, on behalf of the UK Film Council. The aim of the project is to begin to realise the huge potential of both the BFI's own and the numerous other regional collections, so that a rich and diverse source of public service content can be made available to UK citizens.

It is in this context that we would argue for continued investment in the *Screen Heritage UK* strategy after the next Comprehensive Spending Review so that the value is not lost.

Furthermore, we believe that this investment has the real (as yet untested) potential in the longer term to unlock commercial revenue streams that can be reinvested back into the UK's cultural heritage.

Actions 11 - 13

Rights and Distribution:

The BFI has responded to David Lammy's recent review of copyright (*Developing a Copyright Agenda for the 21st Century*) and has reiterated the importance of implementing the Gowers recommendations on the extensions to the exceptions for archives and education in order to facilitate our work in preservation, access and providing educational services. The Government accepted all the Gowers' Reviews recommendations when it was published in 2007 and their implementation is long overdue. We are particularly keen to see the issue of orphan works addressed urgently.

Rights remain a critical aspect of the work of the BFI and we fully support the need for a balance between the need to compensate creative workers and investors for use of their work and the needs of the citizens and society to be able to access this material in the furtherance of knowledge generation.

In principle, the notion of creating a Rights Agency to manage this area as proposed by the Interim Report is an interesting one to interrogate further and we look forward to being part of that discussion.

Action 14

The provision of Original UK Content

We refer to Action 10.

Action 15

Terms of Trade

The BFI agrees there would be value in testing these terms of trade in the new multi-platform digital environment.

Action 16

Second Public Service Organisation

The notion of a second public service organisation fit for purpose for the twenty first century is important. The BFI responded positively to the earlier suggestion of this when it was first proposed by OFCOM as a Public Service Publisher. We believe any proposed structure needs to address regional output as a priority, with a remit which maintains the spirit of ITV's existing regional legacy.

We believe that the BFI, as one of a raft of cultural archive holding bodies, has the ability to deliver public service content - we have the assets for which we know there is ever growing demand.

With broadband comes the opportunity to expand mass public access to culture beyond traditional broadcasting, enabling creative talent and publicly owned cultural institutions to better connect their existing work with audiences in ways that were simply not possible in the analogue age.

We note with interest the statement in the interim report that says BBC Partnerships “are a potentially helpful step but the challenge remains to secure such plurality of output at scale and in the medium term and beyond. Other options must remain on the table, including exploring the value of any surplus in the licence fee pre or post switchover and top-slicing.”

We look forward to contributing to further discussion around the issue of the funding of public service content in the future.

Universal Connectivity – Actions 17 – 19

Network Universal Connectivity:

We support the extension of the Universal Service obligation to providing a minimum internet connection speed throughout the UK, but we believe that a much greater capability than 2MB should be the ambition.

We call for this to be looked at in a wider context of fiscal and other incentives.

Action 20

Role of the BBC

The BFI has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the BBC to work together to improve access to our respective archive collections to secure maximum public value from material which has been preserved over many years from the public purse. We are working with the BBC to explore how their innovative technologies can assist in making the BFI National Archive more accessible across multiple platforms, while the BBC is seeking to gain from the BFI’s skills in preservation, conservation and interpretation of moving image material. We each envisage an ever closer working relationship across a range of activities which will feed in to the realisation of the vision of a Digital Britain.

Action 21

Public Service Delivery Plan

The BFI has a longstanding commitment to enabling the widest access to its collections through digital and online services on all platforms.

We draw attention to an access prototype that the BFI has developed - the BFI Mediatheque - which allows free access for the public to rights-restricted material in an engaging and educational environment, but critically in a way that does not undermine the commercial value of those rights owners.

Equipping everyone to benefit from Digital Britain - Action 22

Media and Digital Literacy

Our experiences and anecdotal evidence suggest that to embed the moving image at the heart of Education would be welcomed by every child in the land - we would be speaking to them in a language they already understand.

In 21st century society, learning how to read the film 'sentence' is, we believe, a fundamental right and just as important as learning to read and write.

For this reason, the priority for media literacy needs to have education at its heart. Issues of technical capability or 'censorship' are too narrow a discussion and in the interim report eclipse what is an important opportunity.

The BFI has been a world-leading pioneer in developing media literacy and media education programmes for more than forty years. We strongly believe that to help underpin the creation of a sustainable Digital Britain then literacy must move beyond just the written word and embrace the critical, cultural and creative understanding of film and television, alongside reading and writing. This would include providing rights-cleared material for students to download and creatively repurpose.

The BFI is an active member in the Media Literacy Task Force alongside the UK Film Council, Ofcom and others, and we welcome the support offered by the Interim Report for this work.

**Response submitted by the BFI
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Appendix

In October 2007 the DCMS announced a £25 million investment in support of a Strategy for UK Screen Heritage. The Strategy was drawn up by the UK Film Heritage Group in consultation with a wide group of stakeholders including the BBC and the regional film archives around the UK. It is now being taken forward as a programme of projects under the title '*Screen Heritage UK*'.

The BFI has established a Programme Office to deliver Screen Heritage UK on behalf of the UK Film Council. The vision of this £25m initiative is that: "*The public are entitled to access, learn about and enjoy their rich screen heritage wherever they live and wherever the materials are held.*"

The business case for this strategy identifies a preferred way forward for the programme constituting investment in the following four strands:

1. **Securing the National Collection:** Capital works to extend and improve BFI storage facilities with appropriate conditions to safeguard the collection.
2. **Revitalising the Regions:** Nomination of key collections in the English Regions, leading to improved plans for their preservation and access.
3. **Delivering Digital Access:** Extending online access to the Nation's screen heritage, through collection cross-searching and digitisation.
4. **Demonstrating Educational Value:** Identifying, developing and evaluating effective use of screen heritage material within learning environments.