

FLAMIN

Questions posed by Morgan Quaintance
Responses from Maggie Ellis and Adrian Wooton

According to Dan Ward's article Film London has received £965,712 pounds in the last three years from ACE, which breaks down to £321,904 pounds per year to commission two to three projects a year at an average of roughly £30,000. So that's about £100,000 on three commissions and the Jarman Award at 10k. Are those numbers accurate and if so what's the other £221,901 a year spent on?

The ACE grant that Dan Ward outlines is correct, as is the approximate number outlined for FLAMIN Productions and the Jarman Award winner prize figure. However, there are two key pieces of information missing here:

1. this is the ACE investment alone and the figures do not include the additional match funding that we bring from partnerships, both through in-kind and cash support.
2. Film London, through FLAMIN, delivers a whole package of programmes and activity beyond the funding of FLAMIN Productions commissions and the Jarman Award prize money outlined in the report. These include:
 - a) The annual Jarman Award, supported by the Jarman estate. Following the selection process, the six shortlisted artists are interviewed for a curated programme which travels to up 12 venues in the UK, It also travels internationally and a series of associated events are presented at the Whitechapel Gallery across a weekend. The annual Award announcement has been held at Whitechapel Gallery, one of our partners, and this year, the 12th of the award, will take place at the Barbican. All artists are paid for their participation in the events and for inclusion of their work in the tour.
 - b) Random Acts: Over the past 10 years we have had a partnership with Channel 4 and through this have worked with Jarman Award artists to produce films with a running time of 3-4 minutes for their Random Acts strand, each with budgets of £4,000.
 - c) FLAMIN Fellowship: a development programme for six early career artists. Now in its second year, this is a bespoke programme and each artist receives finance that can be used for development or put towards production.
 - d) FLAMIN Productions: ambitious productions by artists who already have a profile in the art world and are at a later stage in their career to those selected for the Fellowship. The awards go specifically to the artists and they retain all rights.
 - e) In addition we run small ongoing projects, one-off projects and events and allocate funds to staffing, overheads, and marketing and communication costs to support all of our events, activities and artists.

Ward's text highlights how film and video production is mostly weighted towards London. Do you think it is important to discourage this capital city-

centricity? If so why are all the artists nominated for the Jarman Award this year, London-based?

Film London's remit is to support film-making in the Capital. London has very real needs and challenges of its own. London's creative communities continue to be affected by shortages of space for artists, spiralling costs of living and workspace, all of which represent a significant threat to London's creative and cultural spaces. The national political drive to divert decreasing public funding to regions and nations affects London's pool of diverse talent and London has always had a huge concentration of artists compared to the rest of the country, with the number living in London far outweighing those living outside the capital.

However we would also like to see a wide spread of artists practise across the regions, as clearly a range of approaches from different geographies is vital to the sector. (We also set aside travel bursaries for artists we work with that live outside London.)

The Jarman Award is open to nominations for artists based anywhere in the UK. However the panel make their shortlist selection on the basis of the published criteria and don't have a quota allocated to London and non-London. Each year the weighting varies. This year, based on the criteria and quality of applications, it is true that the shortlist is London-based but it is not typical of the Jarman Award as across the last six years, 12 of the 44 shortlisted artists/duos were from out of London.

Do Film London have equipment or provide practical training for artists (using cameras, post-production skills and so on), if not why not?

We help to source facilities and provide access and we work with an experienced production advisor who also helps with this. Similarly, Film London supports filmmakers in post-production in developing partnerships and accessing deals with facilities and post houses. We pay people from outside of the organisation to give advice to artists on specific areas of their productions that might need specialist advice and this can often be technical advice that might take more of a hands-on training format. Sometimes we suggest people to deliver this and sometimes the artists already know who they would like to work with. We have provision in our FLAMIN Productions and Fellowship budgets for this - all mentors and invited specialists are paid.

Film London does not hold any production or post-production equipment (other than some specialist archive equipment that is associated with London Screen Archives work). We have never had the resources to take this on due to maintenance, ongoing technical support and storage costs. We have occasionally considered purchasing a particular item that could be shared, but the practitioners that we work with have such varied needs and approaches so it would be difficult to meet all requirements. Many artists and film-makers that we work with have their own equipment, or work with collaborators who have their own preferred equipment. Some productions that we support hire equipment (and this would be part of the production budget). Along with working with people with technical expertise in particular roles, this is vital for artists who are interested in achieving particular effects as although some areas of film production have become more accessible through technological advances, others have become more specialist and expensive.

We do not regularly provide technical training courses. We have in the past run some short courses in partnership with training providers, however these were quite expensive to deliver and we felt that other organisations were already providing these services and were better placed to do so. We are set up to provide different support and advice and clearly there has to be some plurality in the provision for artists' practice.

Does the emphasis on pushing artists to work with industry professionals and not on developing self-sufficiency ultimately de-skill artists? Does it make them reliant on perhaps animators, editors, camera people, graders and sound recordists to do work that they could feasibly do themselves?

We pride ourselves on working positively and collaboratively with artists to develop both their skills and their careers, carefully finding the right approach to suit each artist. Some artists prefer to work with others who have different skills and abilities as they want to achieve particular effects. Others prefer to take on more roles themselves and their work is entirely suited to this and we fully support that. Rather than a de-skilling, many artists we work with have developed particular areas of strong technical expertise and excellence (and often take this skill to work on commercial productions and on other artists' works) but they generally do not have the time to develop this in every area. We make introductions to people who might be appropriate to their needs. Not all artists choose to work in isolation and often need support, technically and creatively, with their productions. We are sensitive to their needs and always consider the introduction to any other skilled individuals in full agreement with them.

Do you see a distinction between artists' film and video and mainstream short film and feature film work in terms of content and approach? If so, what is it?

We feel that it is very difficult to generalise about the content of artists' work. However we think it is worth noting here that whilst Film London's Arts Council funding for FLAMIN is specifically ring-fenced for individuals who situate themselves within the visual arts, Film London is also funded to support and work with talent across a wide range of schemes including shorts, features, animation and games.

With regards to artists, every approach is different but we feel there can be a distinction in terms of the starting point of the work and the subsequent production processes. Artists tend to be lead by an idea or a concept as a starting point, whereas an industry film tends to be lead by a narrative/story. We are also aware of where artists want their work to be shown and which sector they want to engage with.

Ward's text asserts that screen agencies like Flamin are pushing artists away from experimentation and towards commercial professionalisation. Could you explain why Flamin is doing this? Or if you disagree, how Flamin is not doing it?

It is firstly worth clarifying here that FLAMIN (Film London Artists' Moving Image Network) is not a screen agency, rather a small department within Film London, which is the screen agency.

We are not clear about exactly what is meant by these terms, but we certainly don't agree that FLAMIN is pushing artists into a way of working that they are uncomfortable with.

We also disagree that that artists who choose to utilise film industry conventions and processes cannot be described as working experimentally.

Whilst we can offer artists access to and information on people, processes, organisations, conventions of the film industry (e.g. our New Approaches course was designed for artists who wanted to make feature films for industry contexts), we do not, through FLAMIN, push artists that we are commissioning to adopt this approach.

We work with artists who take a broad range of approaches, from those whose ambition is to make long form work to others who are making shorter productions. Each artist has a different ambition. Some would like to see their work in cinemas and screening spaces – and there is an important history of artists work being screened in auditoriums and cinemas. Others are making multi screen installations for galleries. We believe in a plurality of practise and not, in any way, being a one-track road.