

## **FVU**

### **Questions posed by Morgan Quaintance Responses from Stephen Bode**

**According to Dan Ward's article FVU has received 1,337,963 pounds in the last six years from ACE, which breaks down to 379,321 pounds per year to commission five to six projects a year at an average of roughly 20,000. So that's about 120,000 on commissions. Are those numbers accurate and if so what's the other 259,321 a year spent on?**

Broadly, those figures are correct, but he has chosen to highlight *only* the income we receive from Arts Council England, and not from other sources. If he had looked at our annual accounts, which are available for all to access on the Charity Commission website, he might have noticed that we spend more on artistic costs each year than we do on overheads. The artistic projects that we initiate are a much more attractive proposition to other funders than paying for our overheads and ACE is one of very few funders who will support overheads, so naturally we use a larger proportion of the monies we receive from ACE to pay for these.

**For the Jerwood/film and video umbrella commission artists are given a production budget of 19 thousand pounds, and a fee of 6,000 pounds that is supposed to cover their work for ten months. Why does FVU think 6,000 is a realistic sum for ten months work?**

We do not contend that £6,000 is enough to cover an artist to work full time for 10 months, nor do we expect or require artists to work full time on the Jerwood/FVU Awards commission. We fully anticipate that artists will all be undertaking other work during the commissioning period. We publish the artist's fees from the outset in part so that when writing applications artists can scale the ambition of their proposals to the funds available to buy in their time, and for production costs. It should also be noted that we are always happy to divert monies from the production budget to buy in more of an artist's time, if that is what their proposal dictates. How the budget is spent is always an ongoing conversation with the artist, based on their priorities for the resulting work.

## **Do film and video umbrella have equipment or provide training for artists, if not why not?**

We are not an educational institution, so we don't offer training to artists. This is not to say that artists don't learn a great deal, and develop a range of differing skills, when they work with us. If we did start to offer training in editing or cinematography, it might be that artists' moving image began to look more homogenous, in a way that Dan Ward's article warns about. FVU aims to support the plurality of artists' practices and to be led by an artist's existing methodologies and ideas, trying to provide the additional resources required to build on those in ways that the artists want. Sometimes this does involve us paying for a specific bit of training that an artist requests. More often however it will involve them collaborating with a range of people with differing expertise, from which artists gain a variety of new knowledge. We are not sure its useful for an organisation like FVU to pre-empt what that expertise might be by providing specific training courses.

Regarding equipment, we maintain a stock of audio-visual presentation equipment that we use to exhibit our commissions, and we provide in-house expertise to support artists and galleries to present our commissions to a high standard. When not in use on our own commissions this AV equipment is available for hire, the income from which helps to support our overheads. It should be noted however, that this is still a loss-making activity for us. We would need a lot more kit and a lot more staff to run this as a profitable hire business, and then we would no longer be a commissioning body but an equipment hire company. This is part of the reason why we don't also have a substantial stock of cameras and sound-recording equipment. We are led by the artists and their specific ideas as to the kit that is employed on each commission.

**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 don't think we do push artists to work with industry professionals. There may be times where we feel that the artist we have commissioned could benefit from assistance in a specific area. If they are really struggling to find their way through an edit, we may encourage them to seek the advice of an editor, or simply get an outside opinion. If an artist has proposed a production with a large cast, which might be something new for them, we might encourage them to work with a camera person for the first time, so that they can focus on directing the cast to ensure they get the performances they want. We see this as guiding an artist to achieve their ambitions, as opposed to imposing a methodology.

Contrary to the highly selective and tendentious way Dan Ward chooses to represent our organisation (based on zero contact and various misleading and unsubstantiated assertions) we have absolutely no desire to make all artists conform to a feature-film production methodology, or ramp up the scale and ambition of commissions to adhere to some notional 'industry standard'. We always seek to preserve and foreground all the elements of a particular artist's practice that make them exceptional in the first place while offering an opportunity to expand or adjust their practice in directions that they express a desire to pursue, or that the particular work that they are proposing demands.

We would obviously encourage artists to learn and master as much as possible of the production process themselves. This could indeed help to make them more self-sufficient and go on to realise some works on their own. This know-how might also help them to be able to better collaborate with and direct other specialists in these areas, who at other moments it may be beneficial for them to be able to work with or delegate to.

We would however also argue that it disrespects the expertise of all of the many specialists who work in the various moving-image industries (and the many other knowledge sectors that artists seek to comment on or borrow from in different ways) to imagine that artists can be as skilled as they are in all of these areas at the same time, and perform all of these many roles at once on a film set. Film credits lists generally contain lots of names because it requires *all* of those people, and different skillsets to realise those productions.

**Do you see a distinction between artists film and video and mainstream short film and feature film work? If so how does FVU help to maintain that division?**

Yes, we do. And we believe that Film and Video Umbrella has consistently reflected and articulated that distinction in the course of our activities over more than thirty years. We have championed the distinctiveness of artists' practice over that time in contradistinction to any perception that it is somehow just a 'point of entry' to other more mainstream forms of film, such as a feature-length production. And we will continue to champion the artist's voice, in all its many modes of expression, as we move forward. While we would never discourage an artist from branching into mainstream film if this is what they want to do, we have never commissioned a feature film.