

The UK Film Council and the 'Cultural Diversity' Agenda

Abstract

From May 2000 until its demise in 2011, the UK Film Council (UKFC) was the main film funding body in the United Kingdom. While many critics have analysed the economic successes and failures of individual films that it funded over this period, little has been written about its influence on the UK film industry more broadly. Of the handful of articles that have addressed this area, the question of the diversity of the UK film industry, and the UKFC's alleged failure to make it more accessible, is a consistent theme, supported by damning data from Creative Skillset and the UKFC's own reports, which suggest that in many areas the industry is even less diverse now than it was when the UKFC was first established.

Yet despite this evidence, there has until now been no engagement with the views of the staff actually making funding decisions at the UKFC. This paper attempts to redress this oversight, by augmenting existing data with interviews from former leading figures in the UKFC's script development and diversity departments, to present a richer picture of the issues surrounding UK film funding and the 'cultural diversity' agenda. In so doing, I seek to unpick some of the common critiques levelled at the UKFC's record on diversity, and explore why the numerous measures that it put in place failed to significantly change the composition of the UK film industry.

Keywords: UK Film Council; British Film Institute; Film Policy; Cultural Diversity; Script Development; Institutional Racism.

The UK Film Council and the 'Cultural Diversity' Agenda

In 2003, Creative Skillset published its first complete survey of audiovisual labour and, while not solely about the film industry, its findings are an important indicator of the diversity (or, more precisely, lack of diversity) of the sector in the early twenty-first century. The evidence depicted an industry that was as exclusive as its numerous critics had been suggesting for years, especially so within the context of a production base that was predominantly located within multicultural Greater London. Its key findings identified a number of structural inequalities that were at odds with the prevailing socio-economic trends of the decade; in an increasingly ageing population, older people were less likely to find employment, with 61% of the workforce under 35, compared to 47% across all UK industries (Creative Skillset 2003: 23); despite enhancements across the UK to make workplaces more accessible and working practices more flexible, only 3% recorded themselves as having a disability, compared to 13% of UK workers as a whole (Creative Skillset 2003: 24); and only 6% were minority ethnic, compared to 11% of UK employees and 38% of people employed in London (Creative Skillset 2003: 25).

Despite this being the largest published survey of its kind at the time, the vast barriers to entry that it depicted were already widely known across the industry, if rarely acknowledged. In fact, the then recently established quango entrusted with the administration of all public money for film production, the UK Film Council (UKFC), had already begun putting measures in place to tackle these obstacles, and had appointed its first Head of Diversity in 2002. Yet by the time of the UKFC's demise in 2011, little appeared to have changed, and in some cases, seemed to be even worse. Creative Skillset's survey for that year showed that the proportion of minority ethnic staff working in film production had declined to 5.3% (from a high of 10.3% in 2009; Creative Skillset 2012: 17) and that people with disabilities still accounted for only 1.5% of the sector (Creative Skillset 2012: 20). The following year, data

from the British Film Institute (BFI) also identified that only 13.4% of screenwriters were female (BFI 2013a: 234) and that the proportion of female directors (7.8%) was the lowest since recording began in 2007 (BFI 2013a: 235).

Similar problems of exclusion have been identified across the creative sector (Eikhof & Warhurst 2013; Gill 2014; Warwick Commission 2015; O'Brien et al 2016), and in specific studies of radio (Gill 1993), television (Collins and Murrioni, 1996), new media (Gill 2002) and the acting profession (Friedman et al 2016). However, despite John Hill's pioneering work on cultural capital and social exclusion (Hill 2004) and reports commissioned by the UKFC (Pollard et al 2004; Bhavnani 2007; Randle 2007; Rogers 2007; UKFC 2003, 2006, 2011a), academic studies relating specifically to diversity in the UK film industry have, until recently, been sparse, with work on the sector's lack of female employment (Wreyford 2013; Wreyford 2015), and structural racism (Nwonka 2015) emerging only in the last few years. The conclusions of these recent studies are typified by Clive James Nwonka's assessment that 'many, if not most of the initiatives launched by the sector from the 2000s have reflected a plethora of benign interventions that failed to reach and remedy the heart of the problems of exclusion.' (Nwonka 2015: 14). While Nwonka's conclusion is persuasive, to date there has been little investigation into what the UKFC's diversity procedures were, and what decision-making processes lay behind them, despite several pieces that focus specifically on the UKFC's actions and legacy (Steele 2004; Dickinson & Harvey 2005a, 2005b; Magor & Schlesinger 2009; Doyle 2014; Doyle et al 2015; Kelly 2015). The Creative Skillset data is of course representative of all areas of the film industry, from pre-production through to distribution, however, as the UKFC was primarily a feature film funding body, its main area of influence was on the types of scripts selected for support, and the writers whose ideas were developed. Therefore, this article attempts to place agency back at the heart of a debate that has been dominated by statistics, by interviewing some of the key

decision-makers at the UKFC's three main production funds. I begin by briefly outlining the development of the UKFC's diversity initiatives and locating them within the broader rhetoric of the 'cultural diversity' agenda. Then, by quoting extensively from my interviews with UKFC executives, I address these arguments in an attempt to provide a richer analysis of the processes, structures and pressures that led to this apparent lack of diversity in the industry. Finally, I will suggest areas for further study that may help to identify and reduce these inequalities in future.

The Origins of the UKFC's Diversity Initiatives

The UKFC appointed Marcia Williams as its first Head of Diversity in November 2002, but questions of 'diversity' had been at the heart of its remit since its inauguration (Kelly 2015). By the time of Williams' appointment, UKFC policy had become part of a wider cultural and political discourse that had gained currency after the Labour Party's 1997 electoral victory and the subsequent publication of Sir William MacPherson's report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, from which the term 'institutional racism' emerged (MacPherson 1999). Nwonka argues that MacPherson was the 'key catalyst in developing the diversity agenda as a distinctive political strategy', most significantly by introducing Equality Impact Assessments for all public bodies, which enshrined in law the promotion of equality of opportunity of all staff (Nwonka 2015: 3-4). MacPherson's analysis of the structural barriers at the Metropolitan Police found itself echoed two years later in Greg Dyke's assessment of the BBC as 'hideously white' (Hill 2001), bringing Macpherson's critique (albeit not explicitly expressed in those terms) to bear on the cultural arena and establishing the foundation for the development of several 'cultural diversity' initiatives in the early twenty first century. In locating the roots of racism and, more broadly, social exclusion as embedded within institutional structures rather than individual actions, both MacPherson and Dyke were articulating in mainstream public discourse positions first theorised

by academics such as Stuart Hall (1981), who situated exclusion as part of an ongoing political struggle. While a detailed examination of the development and nuances of this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that Dyke's intervention, while instrumental in the subsequent adoption of the 'diversity agenda' at a number of cultural institutions, marked a subtle shift away from the overtly political concept put forward by Hall and his contemporaries, towards a new inflection which proposed that 'hideous whiteness' was not just detrimental to society, but more importantly, was bad for business (in Dyke's case, the cultural and commercial objectives of the BBC).

This line of thought was consistent with the overriding New Labour agenda of the period, which across all cultural policy sought to conflate the artistic and the economic benefits of a more diverse creative workforce and therefore align 'social inclusion' with 'business imperative' (Hill 2004: 9). This approach was not new - the 1994 Commission of the European Communities Green Paper, *Audio-Visual Policy in the European Union*, specified that the European audiovisual industry 'must be competitive in an open world market' (Collins & Murrioni 1996: 121), and as part of a range of interventions, it proposed the financial support of 'a maximum number of programmes, to give as many talented people as possible a chance, with the aim of increasing diversity' (Collins & Murrioni 1996: 121). However, as Collins and Murrioni point out, this measure would likely benefit people who had already entered the industry, and would do little to break down barriers to access (Collins and Murrion 1996: 122). Despite this, the parlous state of the British film industry in the mid-nineties made this approach very persuasive, with the belief that an increase in volume of production would naturally lead to greater diversity in both employment and output.

This shift in focus was exemplified by the wider reconfiguration of UK film financing during the Blair administration, which sought to shift the balance of

support from direct public subsidy towards an extended system of tax reliefs in which the 'market' and cultural objectives could coincide. To be eligible for these incentives, films had to qualify as 'British' as part of Schedule 1 of the 1985 Films Act,ⁱ determined by the registration of the production company as within the UK or the EU, along with a commitment that at least 75 per cent of the total labour costs were payable to Commonwealth or EU member state citizens.ⁱⁱ However, a comparative analysis by the European Audiovisual Observatory found that of the eight largest film producing countries in Europe, the UK was the only one in which its eligibility criteria were 'only of economic nature', with no additional cultural component (Gyory 2000). This apparent lack of a non-economic criterion was not of immediate concern to the DCMS, which by 2003 had begun to moot the possibility of widening the definition of a 'British' film in order to make existing tax reliefs available to a greater variety of international investors (Petley 2004: 131), an approach to fiscal incentives that was the logical extension of much of the government's early initiatives to help attract inward investment, primarily from the US (Magor & Schlesinger 2009: 16). Therefore, whereas government intervention in film policy had traditionally sought to withstand American cultural hegemony, instead, as Margaret Dickinson and Sylvia Harvey have noted, it seemed that the objective of the UK's film tax relief in this period was to 'enable the British industry to compete, not against Hollywood, but against potential rivals for Hollywood investment (Dickinson & Harvey 2005b: 427).' This strategy posed obvious additional challenges to establishing a more diverse film culture, with the potential for Hollywood majors to squeeze out investment and resources that could potentially have been directed to a wider range of British productions.

The government sought to mitigate these risks when, in light of some high profile examples of investors allegedly abusing the system (Magor & Schlesinger 2009: 20), it strengthened the eligibility criteria for Schedule 1 tax relief in January 2007. From that point onwards, Schedule 1 films were for the

first time required to pass a 'cultural' test, which placed emphasis on the uniquely 'British' qualities of a production, as opposed to the purely economic concerns levied by the former 'expenditure' test (DCMS 2012b). As Andrew Higson notes, this decision implied that the Treasury 'saw value in supporting *culturally* British films, rather than simply *industrially* British films' (Higson 2010: 52-53), and provided more favourable conditions for the UKFC's diversity initiatives, with the DCMS stating explicitly in its guidelines for producers that 'the diversity of Britain is a celebrated feature of British culture and a key determinant of a culturally "British" film is the communication of this element of our society' (Higson 2010: 61). Within this wider political context, it quickly becomes evident that the UKFC's tentative first steps towards a coordinated diversity policy were imbued with the prevailing logic of New Labour, and would evolve in tandem with the development of the government's cultural agenda. This relationship can be witnessed first in the UKFC's 'Diversity in Film' group established by Williams in 2003, which asserted that 'diverse teams are more likely to be innovative and creative than those that are not' (UKFC 2003: 2), with the implication that greater innovation and creativity would lead to greater returns at the box office, ensuring that the promotion of diversity had at its heart an economic imperative that was equally as important (if not more important) as its cultural imperative (Newsinger 2012: 142). By the time the DCMS' cultural test had been established, the UKFC was taking a leading role in the Diversity Professionals' Forum, which advised institutions to align their diversity and equality programmes with their core strategic objectives, to 'benefit from the business opportunities diversity offers' (Shapiro and Allison 2007: 5). This gradual modification of the 'cultural diversity' agenda towards a more mercantile interpretation was an attempt at taking an inherently political topic and refashioning it into a more palatable form, which did not explicitly challenge the hegemonic structures that led to these barriers. Therefore, what one sees in the wake of MacPherson is a significant modification of the

thinking around exclusion, that reduced the overtly political dimension established in the 1980s, and sought to replace it with a notion of equality expressed as 'underrepresentation', rather than 'discrimination'. For Nwonka, this

implies that the absence of ethnic minority groups in the film sector is simply an outcome, a condition that organically presents itself. For these reasons, the language and policy combine to ascribe a naturalistic slant to exclusions that are structurally created (Nwonka 2015: 10).

This depoliticisation was compounded by the conclusions of the Labour government's Film Policy Review Group report, *A Bigger Picture* (chaired by Stewart Till, who would eventually replace Alan Parker as Chairman of the UKFC), which explicitly stated the desire 'to create a self-sustaining commercial film industry' (DCMS 1998: 4). This approach, founded upon the fear of the industry's inability to compete commercially with Hollywood (Doyle 2014: 131; Tunstall & Machin 1999: 129), ensured that the UKFC was established with a fundamental economic commitment to create a 'sustainable British film industry' (Parker 2002), which, its critics argue, made it complicit in this ideological shift, as its approach to diversity was always couched in the language of what could be proven to be commercially viable.

This argument leads to a number of important questions about the composition of the UKFC, its institutional environment and the barriers embedded within its systems and processes, but while these topics are integral to an understanding of equality, this dominant line of argument has led to the reduction in importance (and often negation) of human agency, and the reluctance of scholars to record the accounts of those individuals who were actively involved in decision-making at cultural institutions. As Karim Murji argues in his analysis of 'institutional racism', the weakness of the

structural approach is that 'it can be read as implying that no prejudiced or racist individuals are required to produce institutionally racist outcomes' (Murji 2007: 849). Murji acknowledges that this is often 'taken to be a virtue of the idea' (Murji 2007: 849), as by negating agency, the intentions of individuals are rendered of lesser importance than the structures they operate within, shifting the focus from rooting out 'bad' people to changing institutional practices as a whole. But Murji points to Essed, who argues that by making this distinction, one severs 'rules, regulations and procedures from the people who make and enact them, as if [the dichotomy between individuals and institutions] concerned qualitatively different racism rather than different positions and relations through which racism operates' (Essed 1991: 36). The prevalence of this approach has produced an incomplete account of several of these organisations, with the UKFC being a particular target, not least because the data made available by Creative Skillset and the UKFC's own reports appear to be conclusive. While these accounts clearly point to structural inadequacies in the UK film industry that have led to a very insular trade, ignorance of the activities being undertaken by individuals has not helped to inspire a deeper understanding of the issues or how situations may be changed.

Therefore, the method I have applied to this study is to gather the accounts of those staff who made decisions that had a direct impact on the diversity of the UKFC's film productions, to provide a fuller account than that offered by Creative Skillset's statistics. The Creative Skillset data is of course representative of all roles in the industry, from runner through to editor, however, the various diversity initiatives and reports produced by the UKFC had at their core a focus on the types of stories, characters and 'above the line' roles of writer, director and producer rather than the 'below the line' composition of the industry as a whole. Despite making smaller interventions in distribution and exhibition, the UKFC was primarily a film production finance organisation, and its greatest sphere of influence was over the types of films

that it chose to invest in. Therefore, the approach of this article is to address the approach to diversity at the script development stage, where decisions about what films the organisation would fund began.

Approaches to Diversity at the UKFC

Access to production financing at the UKFC was channeled via three main production streams; the Premiere Fund (for films with wide-ranging commercial potential) managed initially by Robert Jones until he was succeeded by Sally Caplan in 2005; the Development Fund (intended to develop films for additional production funding either via the Premiere Fund or external sources) managed by Jenny Borgars until 2007 when she was succeeded by Tanya Seghatchian; and finally the New Cinema Fund (for lower-budgeted non-mainstream productions) managed by Paul Trijbits until 2006 when he was succeeded by Lenny Crooks. The process for all three funds began with a script submission, which was reviewed by executives at script development stage. For this article, I have interviewed female executives for the Premiere Fund and Development Fund, and the first Head of the New Cinema Fund, Paul Trijbits. As can be seen, there was a reasonable amount of diversity amongst the key staff, with two female fund heads (from 2005 onwards), and at the level of the individual funds there were also efforts to make them equally representative, with female executives at the Premiere and Development Funds (one of whom was black). At the New Cinema Fund, Trijbits hired three development executives, an Asian man, a white woman, and a black man, arguing that 'In terms of the three execs we were as broad as you could be...and this included one regional exec' (Trijbits 2014). Sitting at the same level as the fund heads, as part of the UKFC board, was Marcia Williams, appointed Head of Diversity in 2003, who was the only non-white person at the senior executive level. Mary Fitzpatrick, who managed this role from 2010 until its demise, also agreed to be interviewed for this piece. Fitzpatrick's role is of particular interest as not only did she have enormous influence over the decision-making process, explaining that productions 'couldn't go through without me agreeing or...agreeing that it was

interesting but that I couldn't influence it in any way' (Fitzpatrick 2015), but also as she was not linked to one specific production fund, her responsibilities have been neglected in all existing accounts of the UKFC's development process.

Each interviewee acknowledged that when they first arrived at the UKFC, it quickly became apparent that there were major barriers to a more diverse series of projects, and that little had been done previously to address this. Moreover, this issue was causing widespread resentment across the filmmaking community, to the extent that many filmmakers were at that time reluctant to engage with the UKFC at all. As Trijbits recalls, 'one of the things that was quite clear was that the diversity of the films funded by the public purse in the previous ten years was woefully poor' (Trijbits 2014), and he described a number of 'quite disturbing' open church meetings, in which there was an unexpected level of 'bile and anger' in the room (Trijbits 2014):

I remember one particular session we did very early on at the National Film Theatre, in which I brought the head of the Independent Feature Project in New York, Michele Byrd, who is black, and she said she had never been at an event ever in which the anger was so frustrating (sic) and potentially such a fundamental block to any progress...[the attendees] couldn't get beyond the anger from the last event'. (Trijbits 2014)

In addition, any rejection made by the UKFC further entrenched this perception that there was an institutional barrier, and generated further resentment. The Premiere Fund development executive described an incident that was indicative of this presumption that the UKFC had an inherent institutional bias that excluded non-white writers:

They gave [a script] to me to read from a black point of view as it was a script about black people, and it was awful...I was probably harsher than some of my white colleagues because they were trying to be PC about it, but it didn't tell my story as a black person...We had a full team meeting and this person got really irate and he said, "Can I talk to you afterwards?"...We went for a coffee and he said, "I don't understand these people, they don't get it", and I told him that the script was awful...And he said, "What? You're not black anyway, you don't know about the black experience." So he switched on me and said, "For you to even have a job here, you're not black enough". (Premiere Fund executive 2014)

The anger described above was the culmination of many years of exclusion from the main UK film funders, but also was generated from frustration about what was perceived to be a general denial of access to work in the industry. This view was supported by a major study into minority ethnic-led companies in the independent production sector, which found that 42% of companies surveyed had no employees from minority backgrounds at all (Pollard *et al* 2004: xii). In addition, concern was expressed that they were being pigeonholed into making projects for a narrowly-defined 'minority' audience, as this was their only route into funding from the main commissioners (Pollard *et al* 2004: 67-71), a criticism that had previously been raised by the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Television Union (BECTU)'s report on *Ethnic Minority Employment in Film and Television* in 2000 (Pollard *et al* 2004: 11). Therefore, the UKFC's Premiere Fund was under particular scrutiny, being as this was its finance stream for higher-profile, commercial productions, an area that traditionally had been seen to be exclusive. As the Development Fund executive I interviewed acknowledged, 'If you wanted to make a commercial film, even if it was low budget, then it

was directed to the Premiere Fund' (Development Fund executive 2014). However, in order to be eligible for the higher levels of funding presented by the Premiere Fund, the fate of a production depended on the definition of what was a 'commercial' film. The problem with this was that at the time, 'It was harder to recognise "diverse" films as having commercial potential...[funding decisions] were based on in-built assumptions about what makes money, not necessarily on actual market research' (Development Fund executive 2014). The criticism from filmmakers was that this led to an in-built ghettoisation in the funding system, in which 'diversity' projects (with a few notable exceptions) were directed into the New Cinema Fund, locked out of the Premiere and the Development Funds. The Development Fund executive described to me an example of a black man with whom she had contact with over a period of several months, who was sent to her at the Development Fund after his proposal had been rejected by the Premiere Fund:

It was frustrating for him and for me, he couldn't understand why the Premiere Fund did not want to make his film, and because it didn't want to, the Development Fund wasn't interested in putting money into developing it...Therefore I was wasting my time on a project that was not going to be funded, and he was wasting his time on something that was not going to go anywhere. We were not really sure what the assumption was, how I was supposed to help him. As far as I know he has not made a film, so it didn't lead to anything. (Development Fund executive 2014)

It quickly became apparent to the Development Fund team that this lack of access was an issue that went beyond race, and that the three main funding programmes were not attracting a diverse range of talent. It had established a scheme called '25 Words or Less', in which writers could pitch their feature film ideas in under 25 words, but there were hardly any applications from

women, and the UKFC's statistics department confirmed that the number of women applying to all UKFC schemes was no more than 20-25 per cent (Development Fund executive 2014). After being refused the opportunity to develop a scheme that was targeted exclusively to female applicants, the Development Fund executive commissioned some research into why women were not applying to the UKFC's various funding opportunities. The Institute for Employment Studies completed a report that emphasised increasing awareness of the problem throughout the industry and suggested areas for further research (UKFC 2006), but as the Development Fund executive concedes, it was flawed in that 'it wasn't interrogated very closely and anything that was said, was said from within the context of people who had succeeded' (Development Fund executive 2014).

While the Development Fund executive appeared to have identified barriers inherent in the UKFC's funding structure, the Premiere Fund executive offered a slightly different interpretation, arguing that 'most films focusing on minority subjects tended to be sent [to the New Cinema Fund] as they tended to be smaller scale...it wasn't designed that way, they just *naturally* fell into that bracket' (My italics; Premiere Fund executive, 2014). While it appears to be absurd to group applications from women into the category 'minority subjects', the evidence above suggests that at the UKFC's inception, both minority ethnic and female writers were deliberately composing scripts for a lower budget and at a smaller scale, targeting the New Cinema Fund based on the perception that their work would not merit the definition of a 'commercial' film. It appears that by separating out the Premiere Fund from the New Cinema and Development Funds, there was an inherent flaw in the structure of the UKFC's production schemes, which while not necessarily creating an actual barrier to entry, certainly encouraged some writers to target the smaller fund.

However, even at the New Cinema Fund, Trijbits' had come to the conclusion that his department would have to become more proactive in seeking out a

diverse range of stories and filmmakers, due to the aforementioned antipathy towards public film funding that he had witnessed. He was also conscious that the traditional approach to developing new filmmakers, by funding short film schemes (which the UKFC supported alongside its feature film schemes), would take a great deal of time to bear fruit, and that the filmmakers that completed them might not have ever been ready to produce a feature film (Trijbits 2014). Trijbits sought to address this to alleviate the antipathy felt towards the UKFC, so that a more constructive dialogue could be had, deciding that

the only way to do something was to, as quickly as we could, find any way to make a number of films made either by black or Asian filmmakers or on black and Asian subjects, and then we could have a debate about them and whether they were good or bad or different or whatever, instead of taking the hypothetical why it hasn't happened... (Trijbits 2014)

The films produced by this initiative included *Anita and Me* (Metin Hüseyin, 2002), *One Love* (Rick Elgood & Don Letts, 2003), *Bullet Boy* (Saul Dibb, 2004) and Amma Asante's *A Way of Life* (2004), which she had written but was encouraged and supported to direct as well. In Trijbits' view, these productions meant that, at the very least, the UKFC did not 'have to go back and say yes it is true, we've only made one film in the last ten years' (Trijbits, 2014), a strategy that Marcia Williams would later categorise as 'closing reputational gap' when assessing the UKFC's approach to diversity in its early years (Williams 2009). The danger with this strategy was that of the films produced, if the quality was not of a sufficient standard then they could have further entrenched the notion that these films were not commercial propositions because of the nature of their content, rather than their quality (or lack of). Certainly, of the films Trijbits initially put into production, only Asante's *A Way of Life* was a critical triumph, and none of them could have

been regarded as major commercial successes, although these risks were deemed to be outweighed by the benefits of investing in them, and to this day they represent the most consistent and sustained attempt by a UK funding body to produce commercially-oriented British films about minority ethnic characters.

While it is debatable as to what effect these productions had on both the perception of the UK film industry and on the UKFC's relationship with minority ethnic filmmakers, by 2006 only '4% of the 106 awards provided through the UKFC's New Cinema Fund and 8% of the 409 Development Fund Awards went to minority ethnic individuals and groups' (Nwonka 2015: 8). It is tempting therefore to suggest that the barriers to inclusion were so entrenched that the initiatives undertaken by Trijbits made little difference. However, what is striking from the interviews I have conducted is the general view that there was in fact no impediment to talent at the UKFC, regardless of any individual's background. As Fitzpatrick explains, 'I put loads of stuff out to be read and nobody knows the colour of the person who has written the script, it's just a blind script that goes out to a reader...so you can't have a fairer system than that' (Fitzpatrick 2015). Other interviewees also were adamant that there was never a project that they believed was good enough to receive funding which subsequently did not get through the development process. Instead, there was a general consensus that those scripts that failed did so purely because they were not as good as the other scripts that were eventually chosen in their place. For example, the Premiere Fund executive argues that

the majority of the scripts that came through were rubbish...if you take that into consideration, it doesn't matter where it has come from or who has made it, the chances of that being diverse was nigh on impossible... There are not many good directors, good writers out there, so when you bring diversity

into the mix it is an even smaller percentage. (Premiere Fund executive 2014)

She explicitly refuted the idea that there were structural obstacles to filmmakers navigating the UKFC's funding programmes, arguing that the reason that certain ideas did not succeed 'was not an institutional barrier to scripts because they were from non-established sources, it's just that there weren't many good ones' (Mitchell 2014). When I put this point to Fitzpatrick, she agreed that 'Everybody who puts their idea in thinks it's fabulous, so when it's rejected the claim is made that it was rejected because it was a "black" story, which was never the case' (Fitzpatrick 2015). However, she expanded on this line of argument with a point about what she regards as a 'very privileged industry', stating that

if you can support yourself financially to work away at your idea for five years to perfect it, and make it fabulous, then if it is a good idea you've got more of a chance. If you don't have that ability and you have to work five days a week and try and do whatever it is you have to do at the weekend, your starting point is different. It doesn't lessen your passion, but your opportunities are not the same, and that's the depressing reality...people kind of forget that because they get caught up in the data and think this is really terrible black people don't get anywhere...well actually, nobody really gets anywhere in the film industry, it's a tiny handful of people. (Fitzpatrick 2015)

All my interviewees were in agreement that, as Fitzpatrick suggests, the biggest barrier to talent of any description is the time that it takes to develop a

film, most of it currently under-funded in the UK (and hence, unpaid, from a writer's perspective). As the Premiere Fund executive argued,

It is easy for groups of producers and writers to feel disenfranchised when they get together in their creative bubble, but the reality is that even the Mike Leighs of the world may go six or seven years between making films, as one idea after another is turned down. Once the first feature is made, that is not a ticket to a lasting career – the next idea, the next script has to be just as good' (Premiere Fund executive 2014).

Because of this, when a script from a new writer came through, it was much more difficult to produce than one that was from an established figure or topic. According to the Development Fund executive,

if we found a script that was good, that came from an outside source, it would be the most terrifying thing that could happen, because you could see this uphill battle. I've got a writer who nobody knows, a producer who has never done anything before. It's a good script, but the currency is contacts, trust, experience...and the uphill struggle pushing that on and trying to make people excited about it, was virtually impossible'. (Development Fund executive 2014)

Her account is consistent with the findings of a number of the studies mentioned at the start of this article, which attest to the media's preference for returning to tried and tested collaborators for projects, an approach that O'Brien et al categorise as 'in effect, a form of cultural matching rather than a meritocratic exercise' (O'Brien et al 2016: 119), and these practices were not confined solely to the UKFC. Even once a script had passed internal approval,

external barriers would often be put in place, most notably from distributors who were making judgements about whether the film would return a profit and who often would say 'there isn't a market for this' (Development Fund executive 2014). This conclusion is supported by Doyle, who argues that the obsession with 'sustainability' led to a distribution-led policy at the UKFC that placed the decisions over what films were produced under the control of the distributors, and ultimately led to a narrow conception of what would attract a mass audience (Doyle 2014: 136-137). In an attempt to counter this, Fitzpatrick commissioned a wide-ranging report into 'diverse' audiences, which sought to provide evidence for the large and varied audience base for 'diverse' productions, and emphasise their commercial potential to distributors. Fitzpatrick was especially interested in the views of older women and how they saw themselves reflected in the film industry in the UK, both on and off-screen, intending to 'hopefully inform the film industry that older women are very keen cinema goers but they don't just want to see themselves as batty women in leotards doing the cancan' (Fitzpatrick 2015). The research found that 67% of those surveyed felt that the portrayal of diversity had become more 'authentic' over the past ten years (UKFC 2011: 55-56), suggesting that while the nature of the workforce might have not diversified, this did not necessarily translate to the content of the films themselves, and that instead there had been a shift towards greater representation of all facets of 'Britishness' on screen. Despite the many negative conclusions that can be drawn from the UKFC's diversity record, this report forms an ironically optimistic coda to its interventions over its brief existence.

Conclusion

The starting point for this article, and any fair assessment of the UKFC's record on diversity, is the damningly negative data from Creative Skillset that depicted an industry in which there were few opportunities and little change. Of course, the UKFC was not responsible for all of these inequalities, and was

not able to reverse them in isolation. But as the national body for film production, it was incumbent upon the institution to remove barriers to the projects that it was directly involved in supporting, and all of the available evidence suggests that it could have performed significantly better in this regard. Despite this, most of my interviewees believed that much good work had been done and that progress had been made during the UKFC's existence. Fitzpatrick argues that she is 'proud of what we did', and that

there is no reason to be downhearted or despondent because the data didn't really shift, because inside that data I know that a lot of people got opportunities...you only have to look at Amma Asante and other diverse filmmakers who have had opportunities because the UKFC supported them...
(Fitzpatrick 2015)

This article has been precisely about looking 'inside' the data, and offering an insight into the opinions of the people making these decisions. Each interviewee was passionate about the role that the UKFC played in supporting talent in all its forms, and even the respondent who was most critical of the UKFC was eager to stress that 'Certainly from the fund heads down everyone had their hearts in the right place...they made mistakes because of the pressures they were under, not because they were bad people, or didn't care or didn't feel that it was important' (Development Fund executive 2014).

The data presented in this account clearly shows that the 'diversity agenda' was embedded throughout the script development process, and that the UKFC was successful in producing several films that would not have been made without its support. However, criticism of the failure of its 'benign interventions' (Nwonka: 2015: 14), while demonstrably correct based on the available data, have been limited by their lack of engagement with the staff who were employed to enact these interventions. By interviewing key

members of this team, this article has sought to identify where some of these initiatives failed, and to suggest how this can be rectified in future iterations of UK film policy. First, it is clear from the interviews recorded here that the structure of the UKFC's three main production funds led 'diverse' scripts to be directed to the lower budget, less 'commercial' New Cinema Fund, rather than the more prestigious Production Fund. Doyle et al (2015) argue that while the establishment of the Premiere and Development funds 'signalled a marked shift in the emphasis of film support towards fostering a more business-minded and market-led approach to new production', the New Cinema Fund demonstrated a commitment to the 'wider and more culturally based remit surrounding public support for film' (Doyle et al 2015: 55-56). However, under this structure, the 'cultural diversity' agenda which led to interventions like the New Cinema Fund actually diminished the commercial viability of these films, whereas a single unified production fund would have better enabled these ideas to have been pitched at a higher scale and budget than the initial structure allowed. The three individual funds were in fact merged into one entity managed by Tanya Seghatchian in 2010, but as the UKFC was wound down less than a year later, it was not established for long enough to make a fair assessment of its achievements.

Second, the UKFC's failure to tackle the endemic problem of privilege throughout the industry provided the main barrier to entry and the unifying factor across all aspects of exclusion. Until there is better data about those people who are *not* successfully finding roles in the industry or receiving funding, the problems of exclusion will remain difficult to solve. It should be incumbent upon the BFI to publish the data from unsuccessful applications, and be open to questions regarding discrepancies in the types of people receiving funding. More fundamentally, class as an area of data collection and as a policy driver is long overdue, and a recognition of social and economic background as an area of diversity (thus also capturing working class white men, who often feel excluded from these initiatives despite facing many similar barriers) is fundamental to any measures to make the industry more

diverse. One of the reasons for this lack of data is what Doyle et al (2015) identify as a lack of wider public engagement with film policy (as opposed to broadcasting, which provokes regular discussion), which leads to a world 'dominated by insiders' (Doyle et al 2015). Greater transparency from the public film funding bodies would help to foster wider involvement in these discussions and start to develop the quality of the debate.

Since the UKFC's demise, the BFI has sought to remedy some of the problems of exclusion with its 'Three Ticks' system, which linked production funding to meeting at least two 'diversity' criteria (including 'diverse lead characters', paid internships and minimum percentage figures for crew, amongst other areas). While this is a welcome development, it remains to be seen whether this will be any more successful than the UKFC's efforts. What is already clear, is that the BFI's approach, in line with current government policy, is a continuation of the cultural diversity agenda that was established in the New Labour era (Chaney 2014: 9), with the BFI's 'Diversity Guidelines for Production' highlighting how diversity 'is not only good for creativity, it's also good for jobs, supports economic growth, taps into underserved audiences and makes for good business sense' (BFI 2013b: 2). It revised its criteria in 2015, introducing more rigorous 'diversity standards' which require a larger number of options to be met to reach a minimum benchmark, with two out of four standards achieved in order to be eligible for funding (BFI 2015). However, the first sentence of the new document maintains that 'Diversity is not just about doing what's right: it's good for creativity, supports economic growth, taps into under-served audiences and makes good business sense' (BFI 2015: 2).

The announcement of the BFI's 2017-2022 strategy, continues in this vein, repeating the mantra (almost word for word) of the last two strategy documents that 'Diversity is good for creativity, supports economic growth, taps into under-served audiences and makes good business sense' (BFI 2017: 4). The final conclusion of this paper is that the responses gathered in

this article highlight the failings of this 'cultural diversity' agenda, which conflated equality with commercialisation. The evidence presented here suggests that while claims of economic benefits may help to make film policy initiatives more palatable to distributors and the general public, it is debatable as to whether they lead to measures that tackle any of the endemic problems of exclusion present throughout the British film industry.

Notes

ⁱ In line with amendments to this act which came into force on 27 August 1999.

ⁱⁱ The employment of one non-Commonwealth or EU member state citizen could be deducted from this figure, or two if one of these persons was an actor and the total labour spend on Commonwealth or EU member state citizens was at or above 80 per cent.

References

- Bhavnani, Reena (2007), *Barriers to Diversity in Film: A Research Review*, London: UKFC.
- British Film Institute (2013a), *2013 Statistical Yearbook*, London: BFI.
- British Film Institute (2013b), *BFI Film Fund Diversity Guidelines for Production*, London: BFI.
- British Film Institute (2015), *BFI Diversity Standards*, London: BFI.
- British Film Institute (2017), *BFI 2022: Supporting UK Film*, London: BFI.
- Chaney, Paul (2014), 'Parties Promises and Politics: Exploring Manifesto Discourse on Arts Policy in Westminster, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Elections 1945–2011', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21: 5, pp. 611-630.
- Creative Skillset (2003), *Workforce Survey 2003*, London: Creative Skillset.
- Creative Skillset (2009), *Employment Census of the Creative Media Industries 2009*, London: Creative Skillset.
- Creative Skillset (2012), *Employment Census of the Creative Media Industries 2012*, London: Creative Skillset
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (1998), *A Bigger Picture: The Report of the Film Policy Review Group*, London: DCMS.
- Dickinson, Margaret, & Harvey, Sylvia (2005a), 'Public Policy and Public Funding for Film: Some Recent Developments in the UK', *Screen*, 46: 1, pp. 87-96.
- Dickinson, Margaret, & Harvey, Sylvia (2005b), 'Film Policy in the United Kingdom: New Labour at the Movies', *The Political Quarterly*, 76: 3, pp. 420-429.
- Doyle, Gillian (2014), 'Film Support and the Challenge of "Sustainability": On Wing Design, Wax and Feathers, and Bolts from the Blue', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 11: 2-3, pp. 129-151.
- Doyle, Gillian, Schlesinger, Philip, Boyle, Raymond & Kelly, Lisa (2015), *The Rise and Fall of the UK Film Council*, Edinburgh: EUP.
- Eikhof, Doris & Warhurst, Chris (2013), 'The Promised Land? Why Social Inequalities are Systemic in the Creative Industries', *Employee Relations*, 35: 5, pp. 495–508.
- Essed, Philomena (1991), *Understanding Everyday Racism*, London: Sage.
- Fitzpatrick, Mary (2015), Interview with the author, 30 June.
- Friedman, Sam, O'Brien, Dave & Lauriston, Daniel (2016), "'Like Skydiving Without a Parachute": How Class Origin Shapes Occupational Trajectories in British Acting', *Sociology*, Advance online publication, doi:10.1177/0038038516629917
- Gill, Rosalind & Parker, Ian (1993), *Justifying Injustice: Broadcasters' Accounts of Inequality in Radio*, London: Routledge.
- Gill, Rosalind (2002), 'Cool, Creative and Egalitarian? Exploring Gender in Project-Based New Media Work in Europe', *Information, Communication and Society*, 5: 1, pp. 70-89.

-
- Gill, Rosalind (2014), 'Unspeakable Inequalities: Postfeminism, Entrepreneurial Subjectivity and the Repudiation of Sexism Among Cultural Workers', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 21: 4, pp. 509-528..
- Gyory, Michel (2000), *Making and Distributing Films in Europe: The Problem of Nationality*, European Audiovisual Observatory,
http://www.obs.coe.int/online_publication/reports/natfilm.html (4 January 2014).
- Hall, Stuart (1981), 'The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media', in Bridges, George and Brunt, Rosalind (eds.), *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 28-52.
- Higson, Andrew (2010), *Film England*, London: IB Tauris.
- Hill, Amelia (2001), 'Dyke: BBC Is "Hideously White"', *The Guardian* 7 January,
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/jan/07/uknews.theobserver1> (30 July 2015).
- Hill, John (2004), 'UK Film Policy, Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion', *Cultural Trends*, 13 (2): 50, pp. 29-40.
- Kelly, Lisa (2015), 'Professionalising the British Film Industry: the UK Film Council and Public Support for Film Production', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1-16.
- Macpherson, Sir William (1999), *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, London: The Stationery Office.
- Magor, Maggie, & Schlesinger, Phillip (2009), "For This Relief Much Thanks": Taxation, Film Policy and the UK Government', *Screen*, 50: 3, pp. 299-317.
- Malik, Sarita (2013), "'Creative Diversity": UK Public Service Broadcasting After Multiculturalism', *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, 11:3, pp. 227-241.
- Narval Media, Birkbeck College & Media Consulting Group (2009), *Stories we Tell Ourselves: The Cultural Impact of UK Film 1946-2006*, London: UKFC.
- Newsinger, Jack (2012), 'British Film Policy in an Age of Austerity', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 9: 1, pp. 133-144.
- Northern Alliance & Ipsos MediaCT (2011), *Opening Our Eyes: How Film Contributes to the Culture of the UK*, London: BFI.
- Nwonka, Clive James (2015), 'Diversity Pie: Rethinking Social Exclusion and Diversity Policy in the British Film Industry', *Journal of Media Practice*, 16:1, pp. 1-18.
- O'Brien, Dave, Lauriston, Daniel, Miles, Andrew, Friedman, Sam (2016), 'Are Creative Industries Meritocratic? An Analysis of the 2014 British Labour Force Survey', *Cultural Trends*, 25: 2, pp. 116-131.
- Parker, Sir Alan (2002), *Building a Sustainable UK Film Industry*, London: UKFC.
- Petley, Julian (2004), 'Is There a British Film Industry?', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 1:1, pp. 129-136.
- Pollard, Emma, Sheppard, Elaine, Tamkin, Penny, & Barkworth, Robert (2004), *Researching the Independent Production Sector: A Focus on Minority Ethnic Led Companies*, London: UKFC.
- Randle, Keith (2007), *Creating Difference: Overcoming Barriers to Diversity in UK Film and Television Employment*, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire.
- Rogers, Susan (2007), *Writing British Films – Who Writes British Films and How They Are Recruited*, London: UKFC.

-
- Shapiro, Gillian & Allison, Melanie (2007), *Reframing Diversity: Board Executives and Senior Diversity Professionals Working Together for Strategic Impact*, London: Diversity Professionals Forum.
- Steele, David (2004), 'Developing the Evidence Base for UK Film Strategy: The Research Process at the UK Film Council', *Cultural Trends*, 13 (4): 52, pp. 5-21.
- Trijbits, Paul (2014), Interview with the author, 17 October.
- Tunstall, Jeremy & Machin, David (1999), *The Anglo-American Media Connection*, Oxford: OUP.
- UK Film Council (2003), *Success Through Diversity and Inclusion*, London: UKFC.
- UK Film Council (2006), *Scoping Study Into the Lack of Women Screenwriters in the UK*, London: UKFC.
- UK Film Council (2011a), *Portrayal vs. Betrayal: An Investigation of Diverse and Mainstream UK Film Audiences*, London: UKFC.
- UK Film Council Development Fund Executive (2014), Interview with the author, 18 September.
- UK Film Council Research and Statistics Unit (2011b), *Film Production in the UK – Full Year 2010 Report*, London: UKFC.
- UK Film Council Premiere Fund Executive (2014), Interview with the author, 6 November.
- Warwick Commission (2015), *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, Warwick: WG Baird.
- Williams, Marcia (2009), *UKFC Diversity Update*, Unpublished Presentation to UKFC Board.
- Wreyford, Natalie (2013), 'The Real Cost of Childcare: Motherhood and Project-Based Creative Labour in the UK Film Industry', *Studies in the Maternal*, 5:2, pp. 1-22.
- Wreyford, Natalie (2015), 'Birds of a Feather: Informal Recruitment Practices and Gendered Outcomes for Screenwriting Work in the UK Film Industry', *The Sociological Review*, 63: S1, pp. 84-96.