



Annual Report

APRIL 2021 - MARCH 2022



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Introduction

The ICO has continued its mission in 2021-2022 to develop an open, challenging and thriving film sector through our broad range of activities including our largest ever programming network; vital professional training opportunities; our immensely-popular Screening Days events; a growing Film Hub South East network; cultural distribution and our innovative online events platform The Cinema of Ideas; our important advice, information and consultancy service; talent development through BFI NETWORK South East and much more.



Dorothy Wilson

Chair of Trustees, Independent Cinema Office

I'm pleased to introduce this report on the Independent Cinema Office's work in the last year. It was another year of enormous challenges to everyone working in the sector, as well as for cinema audiences who felt acutely the loss of in-person screenings and the pleasure of discussing with others the films seen and those anticipated.

However, as the UK began to emerge from the difficult period of the pandemic, hope for the future has been increasingly palpable with cinemas re-opening, new films being completed and released and new commissions coming forward. Though nearly all cinemas have now re-opened, and audiences are returning with increasing confidence and an appetite for independent film, there remains much to be done in re-establishing relationships with audiences to reach pre-pandemic levels. In meeting that challenge, the ICO's support to the sector has never been more vital.

New opportunities stemming from COVID-19, such as simultaneous hybrid

in-person and online screenings are, as we hoped, giving cinemas opportunities and technical ability to build new and more diverse audiences. The growth of virtual and blended performances has been encouraging and we hope many more people will find screenings which entice them via whatever means are most appropriate to their circumstances. The independent cinema sector has never been so needed.

We have learned many things during COVID-19—about production, distribution, education and nurturing talent throughout the industry during the period of the pandemic and our future plans include building new models of training and support, communications and opportunities for showcasing new work in both national and international settings. As those plans develop, we especially recognise and prioritise the importance of looking after each other and the mental health of people working in the sector for whom the pandemic and its impacts have been so harshly testing.



Catharine Des Forges
Director, Independent Cinema Office

In this, our 19th year, we are as passionate as ever about ensuring everyone in the UK has access to the life-changing power of cinema, and we continue to grow and develop as a key resource and champion for the independent film sector.

The last two years have posed significant challenges to all of us but as we establish a different way of being, it's important to recognise some of the positive changes we have seen taking root.

Last year we launched our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan and this year it's been tremendously heartening to begin translating it into action. We've made major changes towards more equitable recruitment for ourselves and, via our influential industry jobs board. Our staff and board participated in unconscious bias training, we met and often exceeded our diverse programming targets and we renewed our drive to make our events and training as inclusive and accessible as possible. A transformed approach to board recruitment has led to our welcoming six new trustees, all of whom bring a diverse range of professional experience, backgrounds and ages to the ICO. We know we have a lot more work to do and this is just the beginning. We also couldn't have done any of it without the support of our

critical friends, external collaborators and partners who all were generous with their time and expertise in showing us the way.

We've started to foster a real sense of openness to new ideas and outside voices over the last year. The Screening Days Advisory Group has given us valuable fresh perspectives on our long-running event series. Open Calls have successfully brought new, emerging voices to Screening Days sessions and external curation to our new online screenings platform, The Cinema of Ideas. We've also benefited from the insight and commitment of alumni from our Film Exhibition, Distribution and Sales (FEDS) trainee scheme on the FEDS Co-Creation Committee in planning and delivering the ongoing traineeships.

Going first virtual, then hybrid with ICO Screening Days showed that we could revolutionise the way we deliver these events, and we saw in action how transformative it could be to ensure that everyone could attend, no matter their circumstances. We've also made many other areas of our activity more approachable and transparent by introducing pre-application online information sessions, open to all on Zoom.

We've started to foster a real sense of openness to new ideas and outside voices over the last year.

With over 30 clients working with ICO Programming, the importance and impact of our network continues to grow, with our team helping independent cinemas across the UK build ambitious and wide-ranging programmes that inspire their existing audiences to return and generate new audiences for the future. Our training offering continues to develop with our highly successful Online Learning Platform and successful in-person programmes like FEDS and Women's Leadership helping to increase equitable opportunity in the industry.

It didn't feel feasible to deliver a touring programme with any sense of certainty this year; instead, we switched tack and created an online screening platform, The Cinema of Ideas, providing independent cinema partners with an additional virtual screen to present specialist film content and accompanying discussions. Focusing on amplifying different stories and with collaboration at its heart, our programme has held an extraordinary range of events this year, with (some) highlights including a landmark programme celebrating the work of the trailblazing auteur Fronza Woods, emerging curators presenting work on Nepali women filmmakers, darning workshops in solidarity with garment workers as part of the programme 'Stitched Up', 'The Gaze', a collection of work by Black British directors of the 1990s from the revived Black Film Bulletin and much, much more.

Some things will return, others we will leave behind but there's a lot that we'll continue to do differently as we step forward with exhibitors and our many other partners into our 'new normal.' Thank you for being there with us.

Programming

The ICO Programming Network has grown to 30 clients, benefitting from the expertise of our team of programmers, helping re-establish their audiences after the pandemic and give them the confidence to diversify their programme to include more culturally important and life-enhancing films from around the world.

This year, the ICO has programmed in partnership with 29 client cinemas and one major regional film festival



Paris, 13th District, courtesy of Curzon Film

The ICO's Programming Network

This year, the ICO has programmed in partnership with 29 client cinemas and one major regional film festival, becoming one of the UK's biggest indie cinema networks. Collaboration with each cinema takes the form of a peer-to-peer conversation, starting with a shared understanding of what the cinema's programme and audiences can be and leading to mutually beneficial outcomes of an increased range of films and audiences.

The ICO offers a 'programme advice and film booking' service and it's worth looking behind the terminology to understand its real value. The ICO

programming team has over 50 years of combined experience in programming across cinemas and film festivals of all types and sizes. Our advice is always as informed as possible, sharing details of release plans, a film's critical reception and other industry intelligence. Regular contact with distributors enables us to give client cinemas early access to release information, special events and advance screenings, and in making bookings, we also act as a consistent intermediary between cinemas and film distributors. Over time, the ICO has developed a clear model for booking terms for its network of cinemas, whilst preserving the individual integrity of each venue.

The outlook for cinemas and especially independent cinemas is positive, with audiences returning on an upward trajectory.



Review of the year

The past year has been one of the most challenging periods ever for cinemas. At the ICO, our overarching programming goal has always been to drive audiences to be more adventurous, but as the world continued to navigate changing pandemic conditions, this goal has taken on new meaning. Venues were forced to close and this, together with stay-at-home orders, gave film streaming platforms a clear run at building their audiences.

When cinemas reopened in summer 2021, they did so with reduced seat numbers to ensure adequate social distancing, with box office staff behind screens, enhanced cleaning regimes and many other measures which made them safer places to visit – but also made them feel less like the cinemas that we know and love, sterile rather than warm and buzzy, and offering a detached rather than a shared viewing experience. These in-venue changes, the increased competition from streamers, a hesitant audience and distributors holding back films until the market returned to full capacity presented extremely challenging circumstances for cinemas; and for the first few months after reopening, independent cinemas had

to draw on years of working with niche audiences and making the best use of limited resources to perform relatively well even as the commercial cinema sector struggled.

By autumn 2021, short-term trends and longer-term shifts in the industry were beginning to have an impact on all aspects of cinema programming. The most notable change was a reduction in the theatrical 'window' for film releases from the US studios. In the past, cinemas could generally play a film for 16 weeks before it became available non-theatrically. This has now been reduced to six weeks for a blockbuster and four weeks for a standard film, a change that potentially limits the theatrical life of every film and brings cinemas into closer competition with streaming platforms. The impact has already been keenly felt by many independent cinemas, especially those that screen films 'off-date' in the later part of the theatrical release period. These cinemas now aim to include key films in their programmes at an earlier stage of the release – after three weeks rather than five – in order to show them before audiences can watch them on a streaming platform at home.

As cinemas worked their way through initial reopening and into the late summer and autumn period, in which many returned to full-capacity operation, the independent cinema sector saw a gradual increase in audiences from 50% to 70% of pre-pandemic levels. This staggered return of audiences led to some distributors hesitating to fix release dates for films, with many waiting for the market to approach previous levels before launching their films. Consequently, the release schedule has been much reduced, with far fewer films opening each week compared to 2019-20; and greater instability in the release schedule, with many titles moved from one release date to another at short notice or indefinitely postponed.

Cinemas have responded to this volatility by adopting more flexible approaches to their programme planning, some shortening the lead times to announce their new programmes only a few days before the first film and others promoting only a couple of weeks of forward programming at a time. Many independent cinemas have moved away from printed programmes altogether, relying instead on more regular engagement with audiences through websites, email and social media.

The reduction in the number of films released since May 2021, to supply roughly the same number of cinemas and screens as existed pre-pandemic, has also led to other subtle market shifts. Commercial multiplexes have experimented by showing more traditional arthouse films where there has been a shortage of commercial titles to fill their abundant screen capacity. And many 'crossover' films that previously would have opened in a selection of commercial and independent cinemas are now opening as saturation releases, showing in every first-run cinema.

These new patterns of releasing, together with an audience base which is at a substantially lower level than pre-pandemic, have led to large disparities

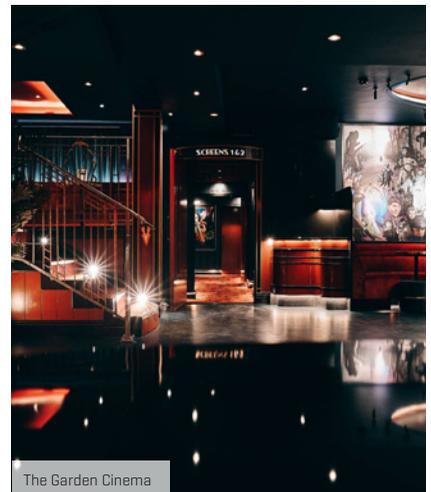
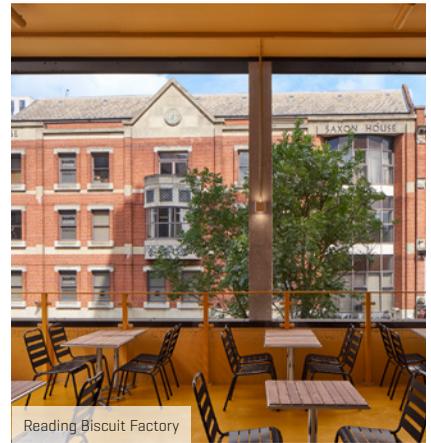
in the box office performance of individual films. This year we have seen huge opening weekends and lifetime grosses for a handful of blockbusters – with *No Time to Die* and *Spider-Man: No Way Home* both edging towards £100 million – whilst the vast majority of releases remain well below pre-pandemic box office levels. The overall picture is, therefore, more polarised than ever before, with a very small proportion of new releases now accounting for over 90% of the total UK box office.

Overall, the effect of these shifts has been to bring cinemas into closer competition with each other; and into new competition with streaming platforms.

In the final quarter of the year, the ICO's client cinemas were operating to approximately 80% of pre-pandemic admissions levels, and after two years of disruption, the outlook for cinemas and especially independent cinemas is positive, with audiences returning on an upward trajectory. Nonetheless, the cinemas that build back most successfully and thrive will be those that can absorb these changes with a degree of programming flexibility, enabling them to continue to provide audiences with a distinctive and rewarding big screen experience.

The ICO programming team has supported client cinemas to navigate this turbulent period. We have continued to provide programme access to a wider range of films regardless of the scale of release or release window and consistently added value with industry intelligence and commissioned research to gauge audience sentiment, guiding our sites as the landscape changed month by month.

The impact of our work is best illustrated in the growth of our network over the past year. The ICO now collaborates with 30 clients, our highest to date.



Towner Eastbourne Credit, Marc Atkins



Broadway, Nottingham

New venues in 2021-22

- Warwick Arts Centre,
- Cinemarsh, New Romney
- Reading Biscuit Factory

Full list of ICO client venues in 2021-22

1. Barn Cinema, Dartington
2. Borderlines Film Festival 2022 Edition
3. Broadway, Nottingham
4. Buxton Pavilion Arts
5. Catford Mews
6. Chapter, Cardiff
7. Chichester Cinema at New Park
8. Cinemarsh, New Romney
9. Depot, Lewes
10. Forum, Northampton
11. Hebden Bridge Picture House
12. Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds
13. Kiln Theatre, Kilburn
14. Ludlow Assembly Rooms
15. Malvern Theatres
16. Northampton Filmhouse
17. Northern Light Cinema, Wirksworth
18. Phoenix, Leicester
19. QUAD, Derby
20. Reading Biscuit Factory
21. Royston Picture Palace
22. Saffron Screen, Saffron Walden
23. Showroom, Sheffield
24. South Mill Arts, Bishops Stortford
25. Stoke Film Theatre
26. The Garden Cinema, London
27. Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne (reopening in May 2022)
28. Warwick Arts Centre
29. Watershed, Bristol
30. Wellington Orbit



Flee, courtesy of Curzon Film



Another Round, courtesy of STUDIOCANAL



Petite Maman, courtesy of MUBI



The Worst Person in the World, courtesy of MUBI

Successes across the ICO Programming Network

In a challenging year, ICO client cinemas continued to make vital contributions to creating an increasingly promising landscape for independent film. Even in a market where crossover titles are playing more widely than ever as multiplexes face a lack of blockbuster availability, our sites have frequently pushed through the noise to become top performers across several key films.

The achievements of ICO client sites include promising grosses for major crossover films (such as *Belfast*, *The Duke* and *West Side Story*) as well as competitive performance across titles with strong young audience appeal (including *The French Dispatch*, *Licorice Pizza* and *The Green Knight*).

Whilst there is something of a gap between international titles that manage to push through and those that don't, our independent cinema network has played a key role in keeping a culture of international film alive in the UK.

Where success stories like *Parallel Mothers*, *Another Round* and *Petite Maman* are perhaps less frequent than they were pre-pandemic, support from our cinemas across these titles is slowly but surely building audiences for the long term. Half of the top eight foreign-language titles for 2021-22 were released in the final quarter of the year – *Titane*, *Parallel Mothers*, *Flee* and *The Worst Person in the World* – with the latter creeping into the chart after just one week of release. Though it crosses into the next financial year, the total gross box office suggests it will be the second foreign-language title of 2022 to cross £1 million, painting a hopeful picture for the future.

We continue to work closely with UK independent distributors to help them raise the profile of their releases, create strong word of mouth and ultimately, find audiences for their films, helping to fuel the ongoing release of independent films and support a thriving independent cinema sector.



Boiling Point, courtesy of Vertigo Releasing

CASE STUDY

Boiling Point

The ICO programming team identified *Boiling Point* as a key film for independent cinemas in January 2022. Initially slated for November/December, its release date shifted a few times before settling on 7th January. Usually a crowded release corridor, January 2022 was thinned out by films changing date – either moving forward to 2021 or being pushed back to April 2022 to avoid then-peaking coronavirus cases. However, this left room for a quality British indie like *Boiling Point* to make an impact.

We recognised the key selling points that would help it appeal to wide audiences. The feature-length version of Philip Barantini's BIFA-nominated short film of the same name, *Boiling Point* was already generating some industry buzz. Shot entirely in a single take and led by acclaimed British actor Stephen Graham, these elements – along with its tight script and thrilling premise – created a runaway hit.

Despite opting for a day-and-date release strategy, *Boiling Point* had a strong run and to date has grossed over half a million pounds. ICO sites alone grossed £70,000 – around 14% of the film's total box office – and were amongst the top performers nationally. The Watershed in Bristol was the 5th highest-grossing cinema, holding the film for an impressive six-week run, with the Broadway in Nottingham placing 8th and the Showroom in Sheffield 14th. *Boiling Point* was available for premium VOD on-date on all major platforms, where it also found great success, and overall it's a great example of how a combined theatrical and digital release can work positively.



As a day-and-date digital release with no circuit support, the cinemas programmed by the Independent Cinema Office were key to both the visibility and the commercial success of Boiling Point.

– Michael Wailes, Vertigo Releasing



Drive My Car, courtesy of Modern Films



Venues programmed by the Independent Cinema Office played a considerable role in Drive My Car's growing success during its theatrical release and in granting the film exceptional longevity. They were an almost weekly presence throughout the film's 22-week-long sustained run with many of them also bringing the film back at the height of the awards season and after the film's success at the BAFTAs and Oscars® respectively.

Drive My Car was also included in Borderlines Film Festival's 2022 programme and played across multiple venues, further demonstrating the ICO's belief in the film's relevance and its commitment in bringing it to UK audiences.

- Rachele Parietti, Modern Films

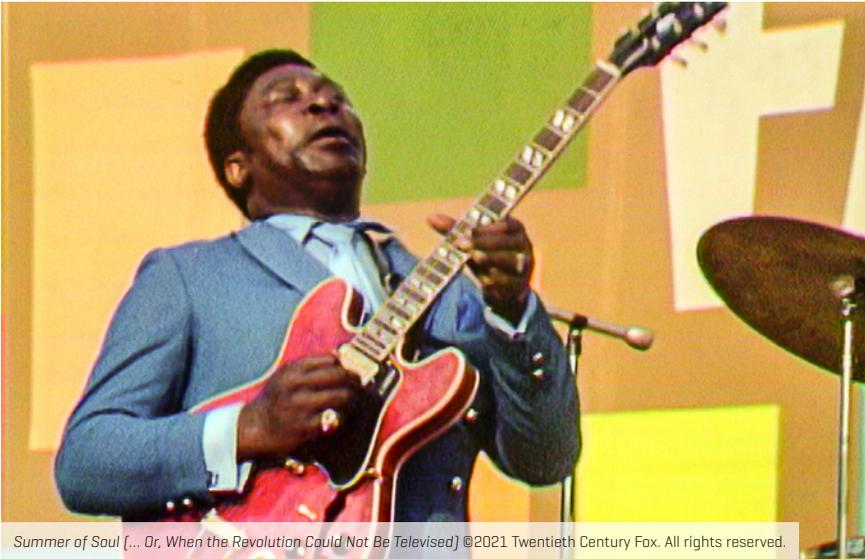
CASE STUDY

Drive My Car

The ICO programming team tracked Ryusuke Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car* from its Cannes premiere in 2021, where it competed for the Palme d'Or and won three awards including Best Screenplay. Even though the film launched with strong accolades, a three-hour-long foreign-language title could still be seen as a niche proposition, but we recognised its potential as a strong arthouse title that was sure to be critically praised. We also thought its universal themes of love, loss, connection and peace would resonate with UK audiences, and work well in a lot of our client cinemas.

The ICO began supporting *Drive My Car* ahead of its November 2021 release, previewing the film as part

of BFI London Film Festival's satellite screenings at several of our client cinemas, and subsequently supporting the film with on and off-date bookings across our network. With four ICO venues appearing in the top 30 grossing sites for the film, our cinemas also contributed £17,815 of the film's total £290,050 box office total. As the pandemic saw arthouse audiences returning to cinemas more slowly than those of blockbuster and crossover films, what was particularly interesting and positive to see with this film was the longevity of its relevance. Boosted by both awards nominations and wins, including the 2022 Oscar for Best International Feature, *Drive My Car* returned to many of our client cinemas in February, March and beyond for return second-run screenings.



Summer of Soul [... Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised] ©2021 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved.



We were extremely grateful for the fantastic support offered by the ICO on Summer of Soul from day one, in terms of both strong on-date support and subsequent regional follow-ons, to ensure that this extraordinary cultural story enjoyed the big screen presence it deserved.

With such strong initial support, this saw Watershed Bristol and Broadway Nottingham as the fourth and sixth highest-grossing cinemas respectively in week one, whilst the likes of Depot Lewes and Showroom Sheffield played continuously from the release date for six weeks (and similarly joined the top ten week-one venues).

Overall, ICO's programming and cinema support contributed over 10% of the film's £500k+ UK and Irish box office to date, on its way to becoming the highest-grossing documentary since summer 2019 - and ultimate BAFTA and Oscar awards success!

– Andy Waller, The Walt Disney Company

CASE STUDY

Summer of Soul (...Or, When The Revolution Could Not Be Televised)

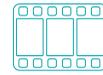
After *Summer of Soul's* world premiere at Sundance in January of 2021, where it won the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award in the documentary categories, the programming team kept a close eye on this debut from director Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, which they thought would resonate with UK audiences. After the pandemic saw people separated and venues closed through the majority of 2020, we assessed that a film about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival – celebrating music, and people coming together, as well as an extraordinary moment in Black cultural history – would be something audiences would be hungry to see, so we were keen to work closely with Disney on their 16th July 2021 release.

Though we thought it would resonate, we were very pleasantly surprised to see *Summer of Soul* completely exceed our expectations. After buzz built around the film following its preview screenings as part of Sheffield DocFest – in which many of our venues played the film as part of a UK-wide live satellite event – *Summer of Soul* went on to run for as long as six weeks at both Depot Lewes and Showroom Sheffield. It also made comebacks at many venues, playing for four separate times at Broadway Nottingham. As cinemas had only reopened in May, there was a perfect storm of a real appetite for communal experience combined with the fact films about music always seem to resonate strongly during summer, which saw the film perform incredibly well.

Top-performing titles at ICO sites

Film	Admissions	Gross Box Office
No Time To Die	60,776	£470,435
Belfast	38,559	£278,454
The French Dispatch	26,207	£194,579
The Duke	23,733	£139,645
West Side Story (2021)	21,537	£153,408
Dune	16,576	£115,605
Nomadland	15,247	£112,999
Licorice Pizza	15,054	£109,278
Parallel Mothers	14,835	£105,321
Death on the Nile	13,923	£98,109

ICO Programming Network



674

FILMS SHOWN



£4,397,516

GROSS BOX OFFICE



680,643

TOTAL ADMISSIONS



Licorice Pizza, courtesy of Universal Pictures



West Side Story ©2021 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved



Belfast, courtesy of Universal Pictures



Being able to work with the ICO since our reopening has been invaluable. Our audience is made up of a strong student population as we are on campus, as well as of a loyal local community. The ICO were able to understand our vision and has assisted us in bringing a wider range of stories and voices to our audience. The ICO's long-standing relationship with distributors has also been a huge help at a time when the slate is ever-shifting, to help us secure titles at sometimes short notice.

- Melissa Gueneau, Cinema & Screen Producer

CASE STUDY

New ICO client cinema: Warwick Arts Centre

There's strength in a wider network and we can do bolder work when new network partners join us. So we were delighted to have three new cinemas join us in 2021/22: Warwick Arts Centre, Reading Biscuit Factory and Cinemarsh. Here, we look at Warwick Arts Centre and see how being part of the ICO programming network helped them navigate reopening a cinema during the pandemic and expand the ambition of their programme.

A multi-arts venue based at the University of Warwick in Coventry, Warwick Arts Centre reopened in October 2021 after being included in the 20:20 project, part of a wider University of Warwick campus redevelopment and a new 'Arts & Cultural Quarter' for the university. As well as updating the 40-year-old building, the venue wanted to expand its activity and increase the number of screens from one to three newly-built cinemas. After a four-year closure to realise this expansion, we are thrilled to have them on board as one of ICO's most recent client venues.

Warwick Arts Centre previously served its audience a varied film programme; however, the limited

cinema space meant being selective with film choices whilst also necessitating playing films after their release date. A key factor in building additional screens was to allow the development of a more diverse film programme to appeal to the widest possible audience. This additional space has also enabled Warwick to support titles on release, offering audiences the earliest opportunity to see high-profile and independent releases. With the additional screens, they were also able to book event cinema, showing a range of live theatre, opera and dance.

As a mixed arts venue, Warwick Arts Centre also houses a concert hall, two theatre spaces, an art gallery and flexible community spaces. The ICO partners with a range of mixed arts venues and we believe that having a cinema in this type of setting allows the venue a broader engagement with audiences who are also invested in different art forms. Consequently, we encourage all mixed arts venues like Warwick Arts Centre to promote film as an art form in its own right, affording it a similar programme space and comparable curatorial and marketing resources to the others they showcase.

Since becoming a client venue in October 2021, the ICO has supported the reopening of Warwick's cinemas – facilitating everything from their initial set-up with distributors to their expansion to three screens. With the uncertainty of the last two years, we have also been able to advise on ongoing changes in the sector and release calendar that have presented challenges not just to new venues but also to existing ICO client sites.

Since opening in Autumn 2021, Warwick has been able to offer an eclectic and varied cinema programme, showcasing new blockbuster, independent and arthouse releases as well as family titles catering to a wide age range. Offering a broad range of films has enabled the venue to access the most diverse possible audience whilst being able to determine the type of films that perform well for them across the board. Based on a university campus, Warwick Arts Centre is also keen to build its student audience with a competitive ticket offer for people under the age of 26. Over the course of this partnership, we hope to see the programme become increasingly ambitious and accessible as they discover more about their local audience and establish themselves as a three-screen cinema.

Top-performing non-English language titles at ICO sites

Film	Admissions	Gross Box Office
Parallel Mothers	14,835	£105,321
Another Round	5,682	£41,230
Petite Maman	5,455	£38,773
The Worst Person in the World	4,084	£17,539
Flee	3,526	£21,370
Titane	2,854	£19,807
Minari	2,754	£19,215
Lamb	2,232	£14,930
Master Cheng	1,860	£6,493
Paris, 13th District	1,841	£8,242



Film Hub South East

Film Hub South East's membership has grown by an impressive 36% over the course of the year. The Hub has been a key source of support as cinemas reopened, both dispersing project funding through its streamlined Film Exhibition Fund as well as supporting members with bespoke training, programming advice, events and programme opportunities.

Film Hub South East Membership



61

NEW MEMBERS
IN 2021-22



231

MEMBERS
IN TOTAL



36%

GROWTH IN MEMBERSHIP
SINCE APRIL 2021



David has helped us gain a better understanding of the steps we could take to improve our relationship with and growth of Deaf and hearing-impaired audiences. The discussions probably went further than we had hoped for in terms of broadening our horizons for having more themed events or even a festival. It's given us a lot of food for thought.

— Claire Somerville, Chief Executive,
Babylon ARTS

Supporting Members

Since 2018, the ICO has been the Film Hub Lead Organisation for the South East, responsible for administering funds from the National Lottery to support a stronger and more connected approach to growing audiences for British and international cinema throughout the region.

To help exhibitors in our region navigate an extremely challenging year, we supported members in accessing financial aid. This included a review service for applications to the BFI's Culture Recovery Fund, which over three rounds saw 28 venues from the South East submit successful applications, resulting in over £4m in funding for the region.

Despite the ongoing difficulties faced by our sector, 2021-22 has seen a growth in our membership with a new, broad range of organisations joining our network and increasing opportunities for audiences to access great cinema wherever they live. We now have 231 members, including cinemas, film festivals, film societies and local groups creating real impact in their

communities and widening choice for audiences across the South East.

Beyond financial support, another of our key commitments this year has been to help our members care for their audiences. The COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity for us to work with exhibitors to ask deeper questions about our commitment to disabled audience members as they faced much more difficult and complex barriers in returning to the cinema.

Our online event Challenging Barriers and Championing Access for Disabled Cinema Audiences encouraged exhibitors across the South East to go beyond compliance, centring the social model of disability to ensure decisions across organisations are taken considerately and inclusively. Following the event, we provided four venues with a bespoke consultancy, ranging from venue audits and written reports to training for front of house staff, to encourage real change for venues and audiences throughout our region.

Similarly, in terms of bespoke support, this year we piloted a new approach to supporting organisations – using resources, skills and expertise not just from the Film Hub South East team but also from colleagues working across BFI NETWORK and the Venue Education Fund to build capacity and sustainability and develop additional activity for these organisations to generate new audiences.

Throughout the year, we have organised a series of online training and discussion events based on feedback from member surveys. These have included 'Audience Development Through Social Media', 'Innovative Programming' and the opportunity to share best practices and successful strategies.

FHSE's Film Exhibition Fund



25

APPROVED PROJECTS



£133,130

AWARDED



Gulbenkian Arts Centre

Film Exhibition Fund

Recognising the extremely challenging situation exhibitors were facing, we developed one key strategic fund, the Film Exhibition Fund, to help support exhibitors to remain sustainable in this period and resume their cultural film programming and audience development activities.

We funded 25 projects at 23 organisations, totalling £133,130 in support to develop programmes of independent British and international film and engage a broad and diverse audience.

Programming Group

Our Film Hub South East Programming Group helps and encourages venues in the South East to diversify their programmes and show more 'specialist' films—British independent, foreign language, documentary, archive and artists' cinema.

Members of the Programming Group continue to meet approx. four to five times a year to hear programming presentations on the latest independent releases, watch previews of titles and share their successes and challenges around programming and growing audiences. This year we sought to open up the programming group to welcome more participants to share their experiences and build a community of theatrical exhibitors in the South East.

We identified and invited 60 possible venues in the South East to participate in the new format Programming Group, with the ambition of attracting approximately 15-20 new members.

The first meeting of the group was held on the 8th of September, and those attending included: Corn Exchange Wallingford; Gulbenkian; Kino-Teatr Ltd; Chelmsford City Theatres and Picture House Cinema; Towner Art Gallery; The Cinema at Campus West; Ipswich Film Theatre; The Riverside Theatre & Restaurant; The Theatre, Chipping Norton; Norden Farm Centre for the Arts; Broadway Cinema and Theatre; and South Hill Park Arts Centre.

Wartime in the South East



18

BOOKINGS



2,077

ADMISSIONS



Wartime in the South East. Credit, *Air Raid Practice* - Knoll School Hove, c. 1940, Courtesy of Screen Archive South East

Screen Heritage

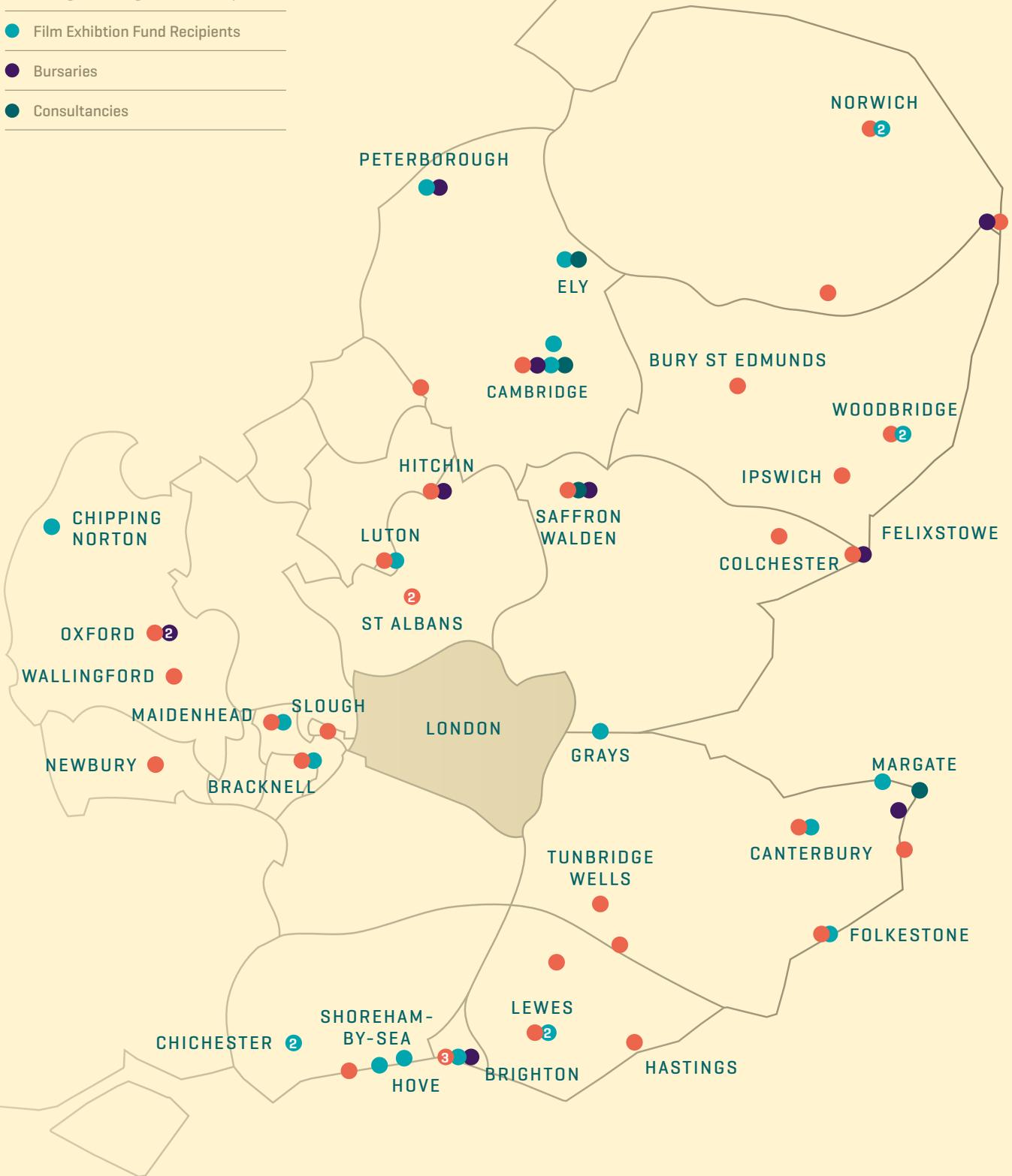
Created to celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE Day but postponed due to the pandemic, we released *Wartime in the South East* for venues to screen during this year's Poppy Appeal. Designed to play before features, this short film encompasses footage from across the region during the wartime period and features a newly-commissioned score by silent film musician Stephen Horne. Providing a simple and cost-effective way to book and show screen heritage material, and strong central support from Film Hub South East utilising proven audience engagement strategies, the film reached thousands of audiences across a range of organisations including cinemas, day centres, museums, community groups and village halls.



Wartime in the South East. Credit, *A.R.P (Air Raid Precautions)*, dir. John Clague, 1940. Courtesy of Screen Archive South East

Film Hub South East's Geographical Impact

- Young Film Programmer Groups
- Film Exhibition Fund Recipients
- Bursaries
- Consultancies



Young Film Programmers' Network South East

A free-to-join network supported by the BFI's Venue Education Fund of over 30 groups across the region benefitting from resources and support in developing a passion for film in the next generation of cinema audiences and industry professionals.



Our Young Film Programmers Network, with funding from the BFI's Venue Education Fund, works with organisations to develop film-based initiatives aimed at young people. Since it was established in 2018, 37 venues across the region have joined. The network continues to grow while existing groups focus on building sustainability for the long term.

While many members follow the format of a 'traditional' Young Film Programmers' Group, meeting regularly to increase their knowledge of independent film and learn through experience by programming, marketing and presenting their own regular screenings and events, others adapt their approach to suit their own objectives and capacity. There is no 'right' model.

The Network is based on a free-to-join membership model, connecting facilitators for advice and training through a range of resources and bespoke support including start-up training sessions for venue staff, a comprehensive resource pack, monthly networking sessions and access to our extensive video resource and training archive. Members can also apply for a range of financial support including facilitator fees, travel bursaries, staff training costs and alumni support.

The South East is a diverse region and we encourage autonomy, diversity and

creativity across membership venues.

We nurture venues to take a risk on young audience development while providing a safety net of tailor-made programmes, resources and support where needed.

All member groups have access to Network opportunities for the young people themselves including:

- Our online monthly BFI Film Academy Labs offering insight and professional advice from guest speakers across the film industry, most of which are hosted by young film programmers themselves
- Focused training and networking workshops designed to increase expertise and confidence for young people to deliver their own events
- Creative Development Programme (Jan-Mar 2022) – an industry-led course for aspiring young writers, directors and producers
- Online Training Course – a structured learning programme featuring videos, information, resources and links
- Network opportunities – contributing written articles, hosting Q&As with industry talent, and undertaking a paid internship are just some of the ways to get more involved.
- Wider opportunities – sharing information about regional courses and national events, with travel bursaries available to aid attendance



Open House Film Club would not exist without the YFP Network and, in particular, the Network Manager. As four young adults who wanted to watch, share and talk about films without having to travel super far for super money (see: London), her support has been invaluable and she remains a constant source of advice, guidance and mentorship. So far, we have run three screenings at different venues across St Albans with over 200 audience members! As part of our Network membership, I also participated in the interviewer skills training and went on to host one of the Network's online events.

– Amy Cresswell, Open House Film Club

BFI NETWORK

South East

BFI NETWORK South East has provided access to expertise and National Lottery funding to over 59 filmmakers across the region through the Short Film and Early Development Funds and has provided access to expert advice and support to many more. Additionally, this year BFI NETWORK South East organised an extensive range of training and networking events and Short Hand, a highly-successful new podcast.



Behind the scenes of *Bingo Queens*, courtesy of Tuli Litvak

Supporting emerging talent

BFI NETWORK South East provides support for new and emerging filmmakers across the region with the support of National Lottery funding. Our activity includes delivery of the Short Film Fund, wherein we support the production costs of short films being made by directors in the region and the Early Development Fund, providing financial support to new and emerging writers with the creation of development materials for a feature script. Alongside this, we advise regional filmmakers on their creative development, run programmes and labs that facilitate skills development and hold events across the region to foster collaboration.

Through all this work, we aim to help filmmaking talent from the South East gain a national and international platform and create a regional filmmaking community.

Training & Networking

In the past year, BFI NETWORK South East has committed to offering more support to our funded teams as there has been a higher number of productions taking place due to the delays and impact of COVID-19.

As part of our committed BFI NETWORK support training, we set up two workshops for newly commissioned directors across BFI NETWORK, led by director Pete Travis.

These online workshops helped the directors build their skills and confidence with actors, helping them elicit great performances from their cast. In these 'hands-on' workshops the directors developed a range of practical approaches to create trust, harness an actor's imagination and unlock their

creativity. The sessions were attended by 28 BFI NETWORK directors.

On top of this, all our newly-commissioned writers/directors have been offered and attended at least one session with Script Editor Laura Tunbridge. These sessions have been vital in ensuring a high level of production across our slate.

In response to the needs of filmmakers who have struggled to find a producer, we ran two Connect and Collab events in partnership with Film Hub Midlands and Film Hub South West. These events have resulted in a high number of writers and directors pitching and connecting with producers who have gone on to apply for and receive funding.



Development Programmes

As in the previous two years, we've continued with our commitment to developing producers in the region. This year, we ran our Producers Development Programme and partnered with the UK Producers' Roundtable for the second time with an emphasis on supporting producers at an emerging stage of their careers. Overall, we supported 12 producers over three days covering script editing, pitching, working relationships, meetings with potential funders, programming short films, short film festival strategy and distribution and how to take your film from script to the first day of production.

Our Short Film Development Programme remains popular with talent across the region, having received over 150 applications. The third iteration of the programme was led by Script Editor Jessica Jones and we supported 13 writers over four months to develop their initial idea into a fully developed script.

Short Hand podcast

This year we introduced a new 10 episode podcast in line with the funding application periods, designed to give listeners an overview of the short filmmaking process from development to edit.

We discussed topics such as; how to come up with compelling short film ideas, how to disseminate a vision as the director, where to find and develop relationships with producers, how to put together and stick to a budget, best practice for the casting process and how to hire an inclusive and like-minded crew, working with a cinematographer, how to elicit good performances from actors, creating a physically and mentally safe environment on set and how to edit for emotional clarity.

Our speakers spanned regions and backgrounds and we heard from talented, award-winning filmmakers such as Harry Lighton, Ella Jones, Edem Kelman, Nadia Latif, Fateme Ahmadi, Romola Garai,

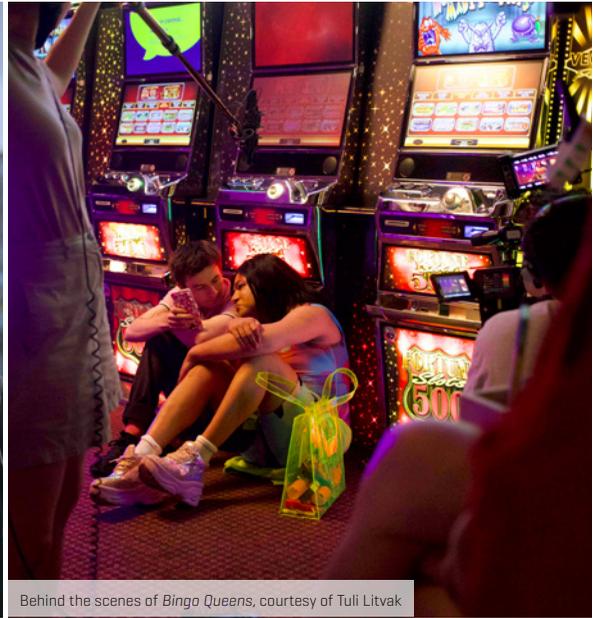
Stella Corradi and Renee Zhan, as well as respected industry professionals such as casting director Hannah Marie Williams; producers Katie Sinclair, Cheri Darbon, Helen Simmons and Loran Dunn; Film4 Development Executive Alice Whittemore; script editor Jess Jones and lecturer and screenwriter Lucy Brydon.

So far the podcast has had 4k+ downloads and has been featured as high as number four in Apple's UK Film Interview Podcast charts.

We've continued to work closely with partners across the region including Bute Street, Carousel, Marlborough Productions, Screen Suffolk, Norfolk Screen and Screen South as well as festivals across the region including Watersprite and Cambridge Film Festivals.



Octopus, courtesy of Fig Films



Behind the scenes of Bingo Queens, courtesy of Tuli Litvak

Filmmakers supported

In total, so far, we have funded 59 filmmakers across the South East as part of the BFI NETWORK Short Film and Early Development Funds. We continue to build on our strong reputation for identifying emerging talent with little or no previous filmmaking experience as well as supporting a wide and diverse range of voices.

We are attracting more people to apply for the funds and exceeding our inclusion targets. We have seen an increase from 18% of short film awards being given to disabled talent in 2020-21 to 27% in 2021-22 and, through our outreach, have received more applications from trans and non-binary filmmakers which has led to three commissioned films in the last year.

Our completed films have enjoyed a lot of festival success and award nominations across 2021-22. *The Last Days*, written and directed by Dipo Baruwa-Etti, has been selected at 14 festivals so far across the UK and the US. Other recently completed projects *Octopus* and *Bingo Queens* were selected for BFI Flare in 2022 and *I am good at karate* has been selected for International Short Film Festival Oberhausen.

Increase from 18% of short film awards being given to disabled talent in 2020-21 to 27% in 2021-22

Screening Days

The UK's largest events for exhibitors, our five Screening Days in 2021-22 showed 68 carefully curated upcoming titles and programmed a wide range of keynotes, sessions and workshops. This year we welcomed a record 1,182 delegates from 375 organisations.

The Screening Days Programme

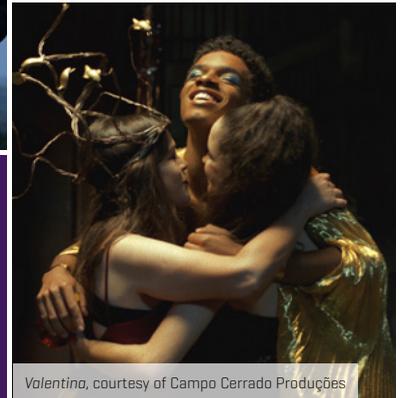
68 FILMS
SHOWN ACROSS
5 EVENTS



Ali & Ava, courtesy of Altitude

51
COUNTRIES

42
FOREIGN LANGUAGE
FILMS



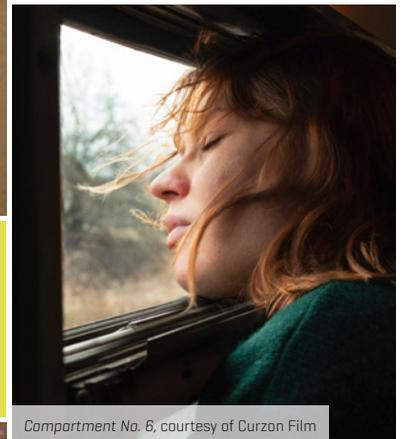
Valentina, courtesy of Campo Cerrado Produções

33
LANGUAGES



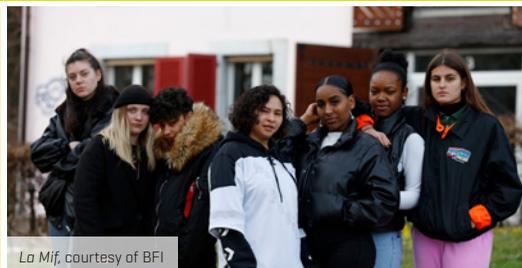
Wheelchair Wendy, courtesy of Shaina Ghuraya

24
ETHNICALLY DIVERSE FILMMAKERS



Compartment No. 6, courtesy of Curzon Film

31
FILMS BY
WOMEN



La Mif, courtesy of BFI

16
BRITISH FILMS

Screening Days Delegates



1,182

REGISTRATIONS



177

NEW DELEGATES



718

UNIQUE
DELEGATES



375

ORGANISATIONS



708

ATTENDED ONLINE



475

ATTENDED
IN-PERSON

Screening Days is the ICO's flagship event series and the UK's biggest cinema conference programme. We offer exhibitors across the UK the chance to see the best world cinema and British independent titles months in advance of release, so they have the opportunity to make informed decisions on how these films can meet all their possible audiences. Rather than relying on advance marketing or distributor pitches, seeing the films in a focused context helps cinemas, festivals and film societies create event strategies and audience development plans.

Besides being one of the few opportunities for cinemas across the country to come together and share successes and challenges, Screening Days is also a platform for best practice and innovative thinking in exhibition. We host three specialised events on topics we want to see at the top of cinemas' agendas: inclusion and diversity, developing young audiences and showing more material from archives.

Hybridity

Turning crisis into opportunity, we took the enforced distance between our colleagues to redress how we approach the event. Even though Screening Days has always been the more affordable option when compared with international film festival travel, we know some people struggle to afford multiple days away from paid work, as well as transport and accommodation costs. Having seen our digital-only events massively swell in attendance, we decided to pioneer a hybrid working model, with digital events mixed with in-person events that are then live-streamed to online participants. Roughly 50% of our participants now join us online.

Our team worked hard to secure titles from distributors for availability both in-person and on our digital platform Eventive, meaning that 90% of the programme at our March 2022 event was available for online participants. With in-person participants also able

to supplement their viewing online, we have seen delegates of the event double their viewing. Undoubtedly this is leading to more discovery of a broader range of titles, with our March event racking up a whopping four months of viewing by attendees across three days! We see the future of our Screening Days events as being hybrid – a genuine breakthrough from the pandemic – and will continue to seek ways to attempt parity of experience however people choose to join us.



Hit the Road, courtesy of Picturehouse Entertainment



Kummatty, courtesy of Cineteca di Bologna

Inclusivity

While delivering the event digitally allows us to include many new people in the event, there are genuine benefits to attending in-person and we want as many people as possible to be able to access them. Our ambition is for Screening Days to open up the world of film exhibition to people at all levels and all working models, to come together and share the best of their approaches and be honest about finding solutions to shared challenges. We aim to encourage more attendance from freelancers, precarious workers and junior members of staff in cinemas, so their voices are included in shaping our sector. We pioneered new, affordable pricing models for the events this year, and offered no-strings-attached funding to attendees for transport, accommodation, caring and digital access, thanks to the generous support of our sponsor.

We also continued to hold ourselves to our quota for what we show on our screens, with a minimum of 30% of titles in our programmes from Black, Asian or ethnically diverse or disabled directors (or anyone at the intersection of these groups). In reality, this acts as a minimum bar, with some events exceeding 50% by people from these groups, rejecting the biases of mainstream distribution that lag far behind these results.

We have also begun to seek films outside of UK distribution, with titles such as Filipino director Isabel Sandoval's sensual trans drama *Lingua Franca*, Mohawk-Canadian director Tracey Deer's exploration of a First Nations uprising, *Beans* and the new restoration of Govindan Aravindan's *Kummatty* (1979), a classic of Indian Parallel Cinema. Finally, we host our *Introducing...* series of short film programmes at our November and March events, which give space to emerging diverse filmmakers.

Going digital also allowed us to open the event to participants who are D/deaf, Hard of Hearing and other people who make use of captions. Working with access specialists Matchbox Cine, we commissioned new captions for over 40 features and dozens of shorts in our programmes, which were available to participants, but also returned to distributors following the event for use in future distribution. Captions are often outside of the budgets of independent distributors, but we hope to see inclusion in Screening Days as an assurance that films will have captions in general release, meaning more captioned screenings and more audience development with D/deaf audiences.

Screening Days has significant influence and power within our sector, and we see major benefits in sharing our platform, and opening up who is able to contribute beyond our core staff. To this end, we have created a three-person advisory board to act as critical friends for a year at a time, steering both the programme and the underlying strategy of the events. In 2021-22, we welcomed critic, writer and organiser So Mayer (Raising Films, Club des Femmes), film curator and programmer Jonathan Ali (The Twelve30 Collective) and Cinema Access Coordinator Midnight Memphis (Beacon Films, Star and Shadow Cinema). The group's contributions helped us not only directly shape more than five programmes with their programming input, but were also instrumental in introducing Easy Read applications for our open calls (useful for neurodivergent applicants), helped shaped easier routes to join the event and helped us with our captioning offer.

We also held open calls for session ideas for all three of our specialised events, bringing in ideas that were off the radar of our team but made a major contribution to the programme, giving a national stage to groups and ideas that might otherwise have stayed on the margins.



Delivered in an honest, frank and relevant way. I made some great new connections and reconnected with some old ones. Thank you for bringing this great programme together.

- Young Audiences Screening Days Delegate



Young Audiences Screening Days

How can we make visiting independent cinemas a regular habit for 16-30-year-olds, how can we make sure they are engaging with films from around the world when they visit our spaces and how can we give them an authentic voice as staff and volunteers? These were the questions at the heart of our virtual Young Audiences event this year.

In our sessions programme, 'Young people on boards' explored best practice for bringing young people on to film exhibition boards with Bristol's

Rising Arts Agency; 'What we learned about young audiences from online screenings' looked at innovation around online engagement with young people during COVID-19; and 'Jobs that work for young people' with Fair Museum Jobs highlighted best practice for hiring young people and supporting them with fair recruitment methods. Our screening programme included Prano Bailey-Bond's British debut horror *Censor*, Egyptian coming-of-age drama *Souad* and Polish social media parable *Sweat*.



Mädchen in Uniform, courtesy of BFI



Some great films I would not have discovered without you.

– Archive Screening Days Delegate

Archive Screening Days

Archive Screening Days exists to broaden access to the entirety of film history, to help connect regional, national and international archives with exhibitors and to talk about ways we can use film to tell stories from the past. At this year's event, we gave special focus to non-traditional archives and on how archives can meet with their communities in meaningful ways. Our keynote was delivered by Onyeka Igwe, a member of the Turner Prize-nominated BOSS Collective, who spoke on how to connect with, recontextualise, challenge and interpret the problematic aspects of archives.

We were delighted to host sessions from archive activist film collective Invisible Women on the politics of the archive; from academic and filmmaker Ed Webb-Ingall on UK AIDS activist films; a superb example of community archiving and exhibition from the Borders Film Archive

in Dumfries; and for those starting out in this practice, an introductory session on archive programming and what venues are looking for in potential curators and archive film packages.

Highlights of the screening programme included *Maangamizi: The Ancient One* (2001), a key work of Tanzanian cinema that is rarely (if ever) shown in the UK, contextualised with an online session with Dar es Salaam's Ajabu Ajabu collective on the work they have done to reintroduce the film to Tanzanian audiences. Finally, we took advantage of the BFI Southbank's technical capacity to screen two films from 35mm: Charlie Shackleton's *The Afterlight* (2021), a brand new meditation on the afterlife actors attain in film and Don Weis's Technicolor musical *I Love Melvin* (1953).



Inclusion and Diversity Screening Days

In planning Inclusion and Diversity Screening Days, we reflected closely on the events of 2020, especially the murder of George Floyd and the resurgent Black Lives Matter movement, to ask searching questions as to how our venues can truly be a welcoming space for all, whether as audience members, staff, board members or volunteers.

Our event began with an inspirational talk by Ashley Clark, Curatorial Director of the Criterion Collection, on his journey to becoming a curator and how to use curation to open people's minds to films outside their comfort zone. Two sessions from our open calls brought crucial perspectives to the programme: 'Audience Development for BESEA Audiences' examined the often-overlooked and marginalised British East and South-East Asian audience, sharing findings from data-driven research and

demonstrating how to engage more authentically with the BESEA community, from programming and screening label MilkTea; while 'The Power of the Short Film', chaired by Isra Al Kassi of T A P E Collective, looked at the benefits and practicalities of programming short films to bring more diverse work to audiences.

To promote practical change, we also held four closed-door workshops to gather workers in programming, marketing, operations and access work to listen to provocations from experts in the field and plot routes to tangible change.



Excellent arrangements and COVID-19 safeguards. The programme is always good and this year it was superb.

- Inclusion and Diversity Screening Days Delegate

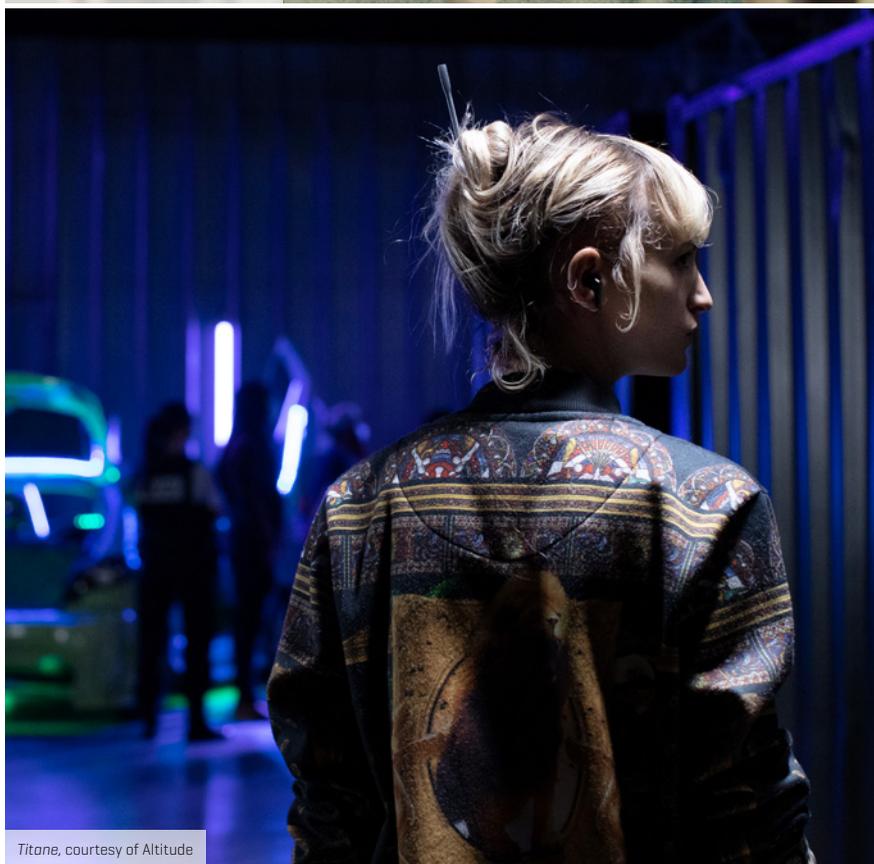
Screening Days Top 10 2021 - 22

Scored by delegates at November
and March Screening Days

Film	Score %
1 <i>Compartment No. 6</i>	84.9
2 <i>Everything Went Fine</i>	79.4
3 <i>Prayers for the Stolen</i>	77.1
4 <i>Parallel Mothers</i>	76.7
5 <i>Lingui, the Sacred Bonds</i>	75.4
6 <i>Happening</i>	75.3
7 <i>Titane</i>	75.0
8 <i>Small Body</i>	73.4
9 <i>The Outfit</i>	73.0
10 <i>Master Cheng</i>	72.9



Small Body, courtesy of Other Parties



Titane, courtesy of Altitude



Master Cheng, courtesy of Parkland Entertainment



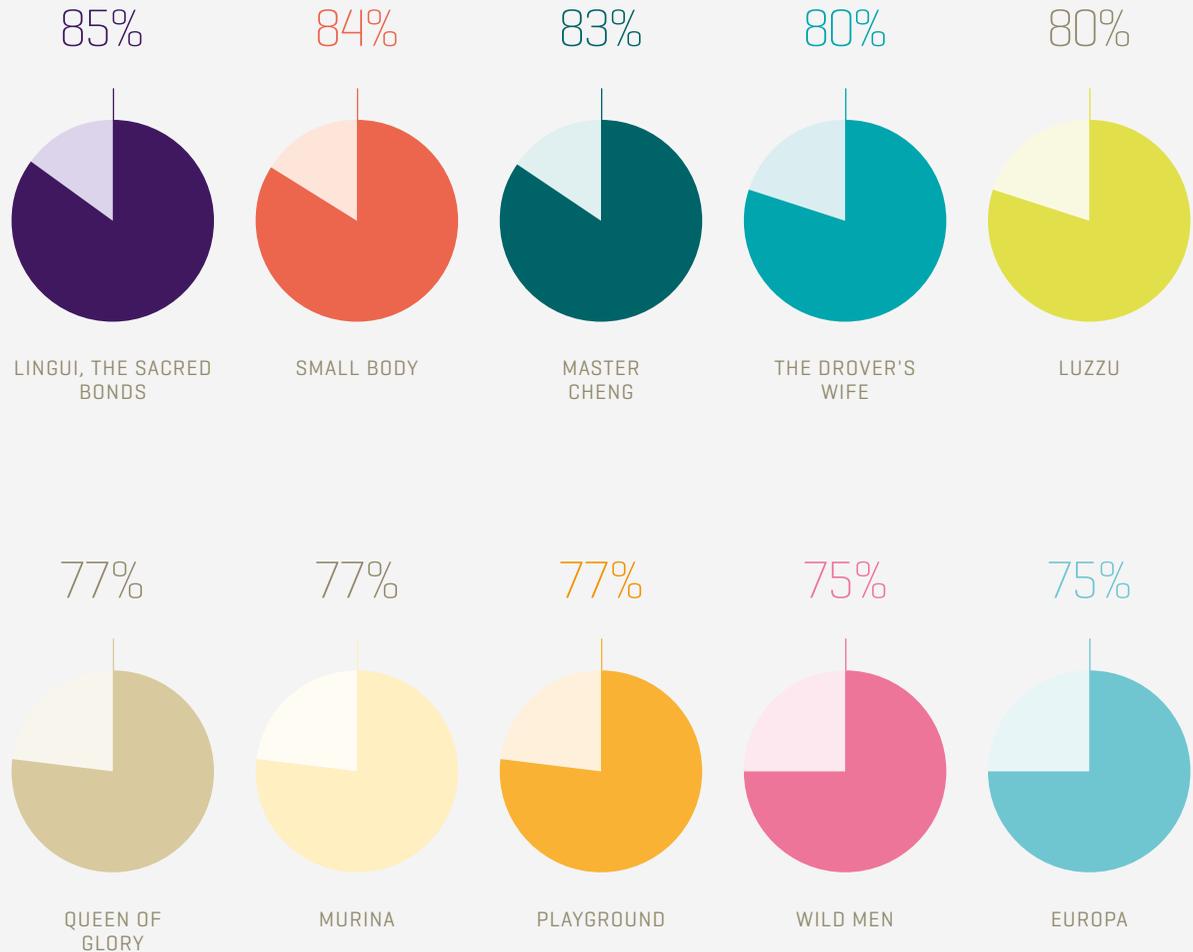
Lingui, the Sacred Bonds, courtesy of MUBI



Parallel Mothers, courtesy of Pathé

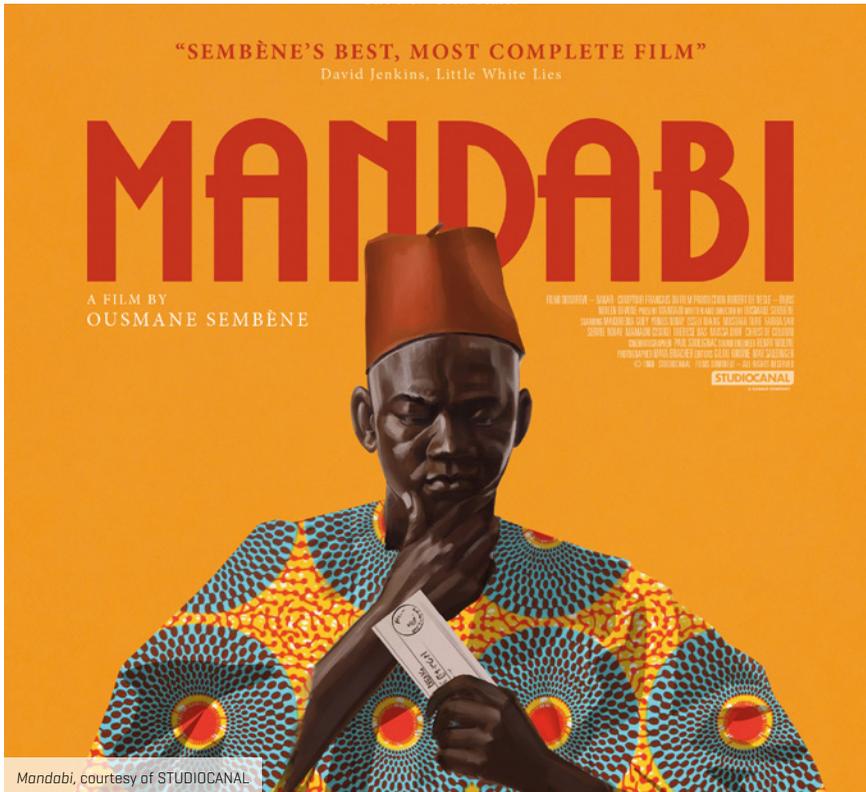
Did watching these films at Screening Days make you reconsider programming them?

Yes, I wouldn't have programmed it, but now will:



Distribution

ICO's distribution exists to give UK audiences the chance to see life-changing cinema that is otherwise unavailable commercially. We want to broaden cinema-goers' minds beyond the established canon and the type of work regularly shown in cinemas, taking them to places off the traditional cinema map.



"Really pleased I got to see the new 4K restoration of Ousmane Sembène's Mandabi, the godfather of African cinema delivers a sharp satire on the tragedy of greed and the long shadow of colonialist pasts"

- Owen Van Spall - Audience Member

"Really stoked that Mandabi is in cinemas right now and you can walk somewhere cool like @riocinema and see a movie from 1960s Senegal on the big screen - more please!"

- Katy B - Audience Member

Mandabi

Ousmane Sembène's work triangulates exactly with what we want our distribution projects to contribute: culturally significant, seldom seen, but beloved where it has been. Sembène, often described as the 'father of African cinema' was not merely one of the first black filmmakers to make films on the continent, he also radically recentred who cinema was about and for, and where it could emerge from. As Sembène himself said, "Let's be clear. Europe is not my centre. Europe is the outskirts."

Yet as influential a role as Sembène played, his films have been hard to play in UK cinemas and only previously available in poor digital copies, so we were delighted to learn that our partners at STUDIOCANAL had produced a sumptuous 4K restoration of *Mandabi* that truly conveyed the vibrancy of Sembène's vision of his native Senegal.

We were keen to situate Sembène's work in the context in which he created it as it resonated with so many ongoing global challenges. Dealing with the reality of post-independence decolonisation, this story of a man receiving a money order from France and the bureaucratic labyrinth he enters continues to be a sharp-eyed social critique.

With less than ten African titles released to UK screens in the last five years, a thoughtful and unconventional distribution strategy was essential to reach audiences. We were also releasing during concerning times for cinemas, with the pandemic shrouding cinema opening and uncertain levels of attendance. With these challenges in mind, we launched the film's release with an online discussion led by Africa in Motion Festival Director Liz Chege, with world expert on African cinema

and Sembène specialist Dr Aboubakar Sanogo and microfinance entrepreneur Ivan Mbowa. Within a few days, this discussion was edited, captioned and available for free for cinemas to use as a post-screening Q&A, acknowledging the realities of the cost of a live Q&A for cinemas functioning in a pandemic.

As part of introducing Sembène to a new audience who have been excluded from seeing his work, we launched a major publicity campaign with features in *Sight & Sound*, BBC Inside Cinema, *Little White Lies* and many more publications. This work is crucial in raising the profile of these films in release and encouraging deeper engagement than marketing materials can achieve.

Training

Our innovative training courses offer film exhibition professionals a chance for development opportunities that are designed specifically for the sector. As the industry reopened after the pandemic, ICO training has been there to help chart a path towards a highly-skilled, financially sustainable and inclusive future for cinema.



Through our training courses, the ICO aims to develop a sector that has been notoriously under-resourced to become more financially sustainable, more inclusive and representative of the audiences we seek to attract and more innovative and effective in the way we attract those audiences.

This year we have continued to provide professional development and training opportunities online and have appreciated being able to re-establish face-to-face in-person training. Our in-person training provides an inimitable immersive training experience and concrete networking opportunities that develop into tangible working partnerships over time. Our longer-term training opportunities like FEDS and Women's Leadership were able to utilise the holistic benefits of both in-person training and the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of online training, and

this is a model we will continue to use going forward.

This year we have also been thinking in more depth about our inclusivity aims for training and professional development courses and for the first time offered instalment plans for paying course fees to those who needed that flexibility in order to take part. This was a risky endeavour for us as a small charity, but by taking on this increased financial risk we hope we have further enabled our courses to enrich the career possibilities and prospects for a wider range of people.

We believe we have provided essential support to the sector in the last 12 months and as ever, would like to extend thanks to our key funders – the BFI and the BFI Film Audience Network, Creative Europe, ScreenSkills and the British Council – for making this possible.



ICO Independent Cinema Office

**Think a career in cinema isn't for you?
Think again.**

FEDS Traineeships offer 10 months of paid training at a major cinema or film festival. The scheme aims to help make the cinema sector's workforce more reflective of UK society. Applications from Black, Asian, ethnically diverse people and those who consider themselves disabled will be prioritised.

Apply by **10 February 2022** at independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/feds2022



FEDS has such a great success record and is actively achieving what others in the industry just talk about. I feel it's the most important work I've been a part of and can't recommend it highly enough.

- FEDS Line Manager

Film Exhibition, Distribution & Sales (FEDS) Traineeships

The FEDS training scheme recruits new entrants to roles in film exhibition to help make the industry workforce more reflective of UK society. Due to a demonstrable lack of representation in the sector, we prioritise applications from people who are Black, Asian or ethnically diverse and those who identify as disabled. Over 80% of past trainees have continued working in film exhibition, an important marker of the success of the programme.

Our FEDS training programme has continuously evolved since we first started it in 2015, responding to feedback from trainees and the organisations we work with, as well as regularly returning to the critical question we posed to ourselves: "How can we keep these talented individuals successfully working

in our sector?" The way that we answer that question is increasingly informed by the commitment and insight of our FEDS Co-Creation Committee, made up of previous participants, who are helping us in an ongoing collaboration to design an effective and truly inclusive programme.

We delayed the 2020 FEDS Traineeships due to the pandemic, with the postponed placements starting in June 2021 and running until March 2022 at the Barbican, HOME, the ICO, Phoenix Cinema and Arts Centre and Tyneside Cinema. Trainees are paid the Living Wage and receive on-the-job training in their organisations alongside regular industry training sessions covering everything from exhibitor/distributor relationships to the importance of film festivals. Trainees

undertook professional career coaching and were matched with a buddy from the FEDS alumni group to help them navigate the intricacies of an industry reliant on professional networks and connections.

In early 2022 we launched our recruitment drive for new FEDS trainees to undertake placements at Belfast Film Festival, BFI, Broadway Nottingham, Depot Lewes, Falkirk Community Trust (Hippodrome Silent Film Festival) and Flatpack Festival. We received over 430 applications and interviews took place in March 2022. Placements will run from May 2022 until February 2023.

Our FEDS training programme and alumni work is supported by the BFI Audience Fund.

Since 2015 our FEDS exhibition trainees have been based at:





Women's Leadership

The 2021-22 edition of our well-established Women's Leadership course ran from November 2021 to April 2022. Funded by the BFI Film Audience Network, it supported 10 ambitious women from across the UK's film exhibition sector with one-to-one coaching, skills development workshops and high-level networking opportunities. The course was delivered as a mix of online and in-person training with speakers and mentors including Hilary Carty, Executive Director of Clore Leadership and Amanda Nevill, former CEO, BFI. The course content included sessions on positive leadership, emotional resilience, personal branding and leadership strengths, and influencing and building your network.



Excellent range of speakers from lots of different backgrounds gave a 360-degree view of leadership across the industries. This, coupled with a more academic/theoretical approach from the trainer was highly impactful.

- Women's Leadership Participant 2021-22

Online Learning Platform

The year 2021-22 saw the development of two new Online Learning Courses – *How to Start Screening Films* and *Front of House Workers Guide*. We created these courses to fill two different but equally distinct gaps in our current online training offer.

How to Start Screening Films is intended as an entry-level course for people who have an interest in screening films within their local community but don't know where to start. This is one of the most popular topics that we are approached about through the ICO's Advice and Info service, highlighting the need for a structured introduction to making a start in film exhibition at a grassroots level.

The *Front of House Workers Guide* is one of the ICO's first forays into providing training for front of house staff in

independent cinemas across the country. The course is intended as training that any venue can access and provide for new members of their front of house team as and when they join and covers topics such as 'How to deal with difficult customers' and 'Checking your biases and understanding how to welcome people from all backgrounds'.

Both courses are due to launch on the ICO's Online Learning Platform by summer 2022.

Outside these two new courses, our Online Learning Platform continued to attract new students this year, with 187 new students enrolling and taking the total number of course enrolments up to 1,560 overall.



Health & Safety
Reassurance

What are audiences saying?



"It will be some time before I **feel comfortable** in busy situations again."

"Whilst culture is important, family safety is more important so I will **need to feel safe and confident before I book** for any indoor event."

"The level of COVID cases in the local area would influence how comfortable I would be attending indoor events. **Venues with good ventilation**, refreshing air on a frequent basis would be my preference."

indigo

29

Reopening: 5 Reassurances for Cinema Audiences

Reopening: Five Reassurances for Cinema Audiences

Following our collaboration with Indigo Ltd on the Cultural Restart Audience & Visitor Tracker - to check-in with cinema audiences over the course of the pandemic, we were pleased to partner with them to share the findings and their newly-developed Five Reassurances model, to support cinemas in rebuilding audience confidence post-pandemic using the latest audience research data.

The free online seminar in July 2021 presented the five key areas of reassurance: Health and Safety, Access, Financial, Social and Brand. These practical responses to the data showed participants the most up-to-date audience opinions on mask-wearing and socially distanced seating and case studies of how cinemas had successfully used the ideas to structure an audience-friendly reopening.

Data-Driven Film Exhibition

With the support of ScreenSkills, we delivered a new training course, Data-Driven Film Exhibition, that built on the success of our popular Data-Driven Marketing course to take a wider look at how exhibitors can use data to build sustainable strategies for their activity in areas including programming, marketing, access and inclusion.

The first section of the course was a three-part programme, attended by 25 film exhibition professionals and featuring the sessions 'Using Data for Audience Development' (delivered by Katy Raines, Indigo), 'DATA X Diversity - Informed Access & Inclusion' (panel

discussion led by Toki Allison, Film Hub Wales) and 'Data-Driven Programming' (led by Delphine Lievens, Bohemia Media). The second section of the course gave participants the chance to take up subsidised bespoke consultancies with the team at Indigo Ltd, led by Katy Raines, to focus specifically on an issue that they hoped to overcome.

The programme will culminate in a sector forum, open to all film exhibition professionals, that will not only highlight new work being done in the field, but also draw on the consultancies that have taken place as a part of the course, with a focus on specific case studies.



Iris Barry and John Abbott
Founded the Film Library at Museum of
Modern Art, NY in 1935



Henri Langlois, founded 'Cinematheque Francais' (with
Georges Franju), 1936, and the 'Musée du Cinéma –
Henri Langlois' in 1972



Programming artists' moving image work George Clark

Core Skills for Cinemas

From October to November 2021, the second round of our popular webinar series provided practical accessible learning on key areas for development for many cinemas. The topics were:

- **Starting and developing a membership scheme**
Presented by Maurane Ramon, Clients and Communications Manager, Thrive
- **Why email marketing is important**
Presented by Katie Moffat, Head of Sector Engagement for Europe, Substrakt
- **Programming artists' moving image work**
Presented by George Clark, Artist, Curator & Writer

In each session, industry experts shared their experiences, offering guidance and illustrative case studies with lessons that could be easily adapted for use in venues of all sizes.

Governance Next

Governance – the systems organisations use to direct themselves and take responsibility for the work they do – is at the heart of every healthy film organisation. At its best, good governance supports cinemas in doing ambitious, challenging work where everybody's voice is heard and can contribute to the direction of the organisation. If governance is mismanaged, the worst-case scenarios are financial ruin, toxic workplaces and genuine threats to public safety. Yet it's often an area that only a select group of people get to contribute to, which can further marginalise people whose voices are needed for a healthy sector.

We wanted to broaden access to knowledge about governance, so we produced a five-part, free-to-attend workshop series on key governance topics, partnering with the National Centre for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the recognised leader in this area. We aimed to support grassroots

organisations on their journey, many of which needed guidance on how to best set up as legal entities. Topics covered included those focused on organisations starting their journey: introducing governance, how a grassroots organisation should be set up as a legal entity, what a board does and how to understand the financial responsibilities of a board and how they connect with the wider governance role. We also covered sessions on how to optimise existing structures such as how to get staff and boards working together effectively and how to recruit a board to supercharge your organisation. Additionally, we offered nine organisations from across the UK the chance to attend three bespoke coaching sessions with NCVO to look intensively at their specific governance challenges.

Advice & Info

The ICO is a key resource for the industry offering a range of professional guides and an active blog offering examples of best practices and news right across the industry. Our free advice service answered over 1090 enquiries from exhibitors of all sizes and at every level of experience across the UK.



The New Black Film Collective presents Looking for Love at Leytonstone Loves Film & Barbican. Featured in Patrice Robinson's blog on Community Cinema. Photo Credit, Robin Sinha

One of our key ongoing activities at the ICO is our free and impartial advisory service, available to the public via email, telephone, and our website. Each week, we answer a wide range of enquiries on topics as varied as how to set up an outdoor screening, find the rightsholders for a list of esoteric repertory films, improve a cinema's accessibility or environmental sustainability, or work towards launching a brand-new venue.

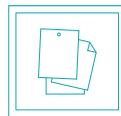
Following on from an unprecedented 2020-21 – in which we became a central provider of advice and connections with potential avenues of support relating to the COVID-19 pandemic – this year's enquiries saw a move towards (something approaching) a new normal.

Ahead of reopening in May 2021, exhibitors of all kinds sought advice on COVID-19 protocols and how best to communicate a twin message of welcome and safety to in-venue audiences to ensure people felt both able and inspired to return. Conversely, many other enquiries related to starting (or continuing) a hybrid screening offer for audiences who preferred to continue watching from home amidst ongoing pandemic circumstances.



2,222

TOTAL GUIDE
DOWNLOADS



721

TOTAL JOBS
POSTED



1,090

NUMBER OF
ENQUIRIES



194,809

ADVICE & SUPPORT
TOTAL PAGEVIEWS

TOP 5 BLOGS

1

ICO's Best of 2021

2

Community Cinema: Handing film back to the people

3

Island Hearts, Desert Hearts: Travelling with Tove & Tooti

4

How to Support Ukrainian Filmmakers

5

Borderlines 2021: Finding success in the online space

ICO Blog

COVID-19, and the past few years in general, gave us at the ICO – as well as the wider sector at large – the opportunity to review and rethink how we could best support the industry. Subsequently, we continued to focus our blog strategy on change and renewal, questioning industry practices and trying to find new ways of supporting film exhibition workers, highlighting antiracism work in the arts, and encouraging greater accessibility, diversity and inclusivity across the sector.

Posts explored topics including how to advocate for freelancers in film exhibition; find success with online film festivals; work towards an inclusive cinema culture; join a young film programmers' group during the pandemic; build a dementia-friendly film community; develop diverse audiences for specialised

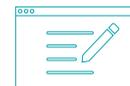
film; add young people to your board; and the importance of descriptive subtitling for audiences.

Other pieces tied in with our Cinema of Ideas screenings and events, with guest curators bringing important but relatively little-known filmmakers and topic areas to the fore, including 'The Gaze', a collection of short films by trailblazing British filmmakers from the African-Caribbean diaspora curated by the Black Film Bulletin; 'Stitched Up! Protest and the Garment Industry', a season exploring what western dependence on fast fashion means for garment workers around the world; and 'Hamro Katha', a programme showcasing Nepali female filmmakers. More recently, we've published posts on the plight of Ukrainian film professionals amidst the ongoing conflict with Russia.



40

TOTAL NUMBER OF BLOGS



21,042

TOTAL BLOG PAGE VIEWS

TOP 5 GUIDES

1

Good governance guide for exhibitors

2

Green Cinema Toolkit

3

The Continuing Impact of Covid-19

4

Marketing for Independent Cinemas

5

Outdoor Screening Guides

Guides & Jobs Board

On our website, we wrote and published in-depth downloadable guides on programming, cinema audio and fundraising – key for cinemas and exhibitors looking to improve their venue's film and technical offer and boost their sustainability as the pandemic recedes. These resources are now available online alongside our existing array of guides.

Another important area of work this year was reconceiving our jobs posting policy. The ICO's jobs board is the biggest source for recruitment in our part of the sector. We've hosted thousands of job ads over the last fifteen years, have over 5,000 subscribers to our daily jobs newsletter and receive 100,000 hits per year on our jobs pages. We recognise that the jobs we post may influence what is considered a 'good job' in film exhibition and independent distribution. Inspired by the leadership of Fair Museum Jobs in this area, we wanted to ensure our jobs policy

would actively help create fairer working practices in film and aid employers in finding the best candidates for their roles.

Our new policy is designed to ensure that the jobs we post are fairer and, more widely, to show how more thoughtful recruitment practices can be a form of audience communication for arts organisations, enabling them to forge connections with people and groups who might previously not have felt welcomed by them.

As well as our internal policy, we shared broader practical guidance on our website that we hope will help arts organisations with limited staff, encouraging them to reconsider their recruitment practices, and how they can best evince care and support to potential applicants. Overall, we hope our policy encourages recruiters across the industry to think about what kind of industry we are making, and who has a chance to join it.

Consultancy

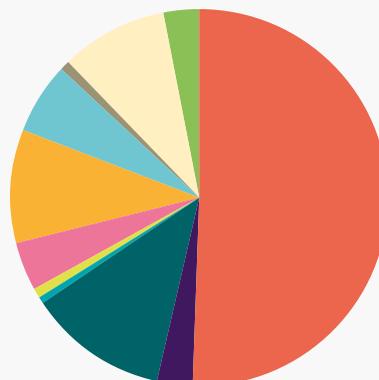
Our consultancy service exists for organisations that are either starting out or find themselves at a significant crossroads. We are proud to have boosted venues, festivals and community screens to new levels of achievement and to have played a part in establishing new venues for audiences nationwide.

In 2021-22, we delivered a feasibility study for a major new independent cinema for London; provided business development guidance for a touring film festival; advised a regional independent cinema on their young audience offer; and helped another regional independent cinema reach out to local Indian audiences.

Jobs advertised on the ICO jobs board

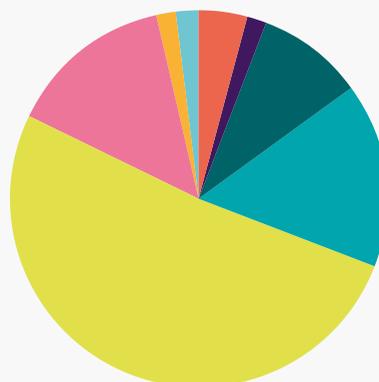
Jobs by region

London	369
Midlands	23
North	84
Northern Ireland	3
Republic of Ireland	5
South West	32
South East	73
Scotland	41
Wales	5
Remote Working	67
Multiple Locations	23



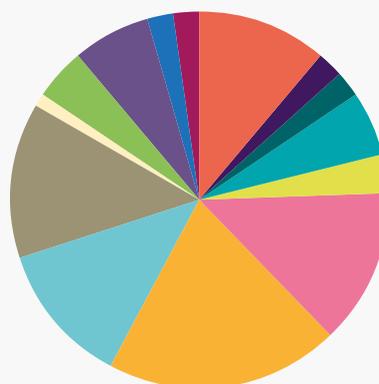
Jobs by salary band

Unpaid	33
Expenses	11
Fixed-fee	78
£15,000 - £20,000	137
£20,000 - £30,000	442
£30,000 - £40,000	121
£40,000 - £50,000	18
£50,000+	13



Jobs by function

Administration	71
Trustees	17
Cinema/Festival Director	11
Education & Audience Development	33
Events	22
Festival	83
Front of House	128
HR	2
Management	82
Marketing & Comms	88
Press & Sales	8
Programming & Curation	29
Projection & Technical	42
Sponsorship & Development	18
Volunteer, training, work placements	11



Cinema of Ideas

A new virtual platform dedicated to amplifying different stories through collaboration, discussion and film. The Cinema of Ideas offers an innovative financial risk-free way of broadening our partner cinemas' programming and allowing access to specialist films and events to audiences across the UK and beyond.



The Penguin Who Couldn't Swim, courtesy of Tom Rourke

A new collaborative platform

Planning ahead, while cinemas were still closed because of the pandemic, we decided that it wasn't feasible to deliver a traditional ICO film tour focusing on under-seen films of cultural value for national audiences. In place of this, we instead developed and delivered a new online platform called The Cinema of Ideas (TCOI). Revitalising the name given to an ICO podcast titled 'The Cinema of Ideas' from 2006-07, this innovative revenue-sharing digital cinema space allowed independent cinemas to enrich their monthly film programmes through an extra virtual screen at no financial risk.

The project has enabled us to reach international and national online audiences in new and significant ways, allowing us to amplify voices, screen media and cinema histories that individual cinemas would have struggled to deliver to their audiences. For our partner cinemas, this was an important

way of broadening their programme at a time that many cinemas were compelled to rely more on commercial releases and crossover titles as they reopened in order to generate revenue and encourage audiences to return.

Functionality

We screened films and live-streamed Zoom webinars via the online platform Eventive. Continuing our long-standing collaboration with design studio Modern Activity, we created new TCOI branding and designed a website to accommodate the various outputs of the project including the events, new writing, and trailer and event recordings. We worked closely and continuously with our partner venues on the best ways of integrating the TCOI platform onto their respective websites so their online audiences could access our programme of films and events.

The Cinema of Ideas Partner Venues

- Barn Cinema, Dartington
- Chapter, Cardiff
- HOME, Manchester
- Kinokulture, Oswestry
- Northampton Filmhouse
- QUAD, Derby
- The Place, Bedford
- Warwick Arts Centre
- Wellington Orbit

2,205
VIEWERS

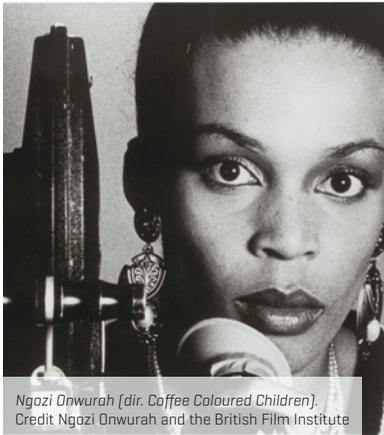


Come Over for a Drink, Kanchii, courtesy of Sikuma Rai

13
LIVE EVENTS

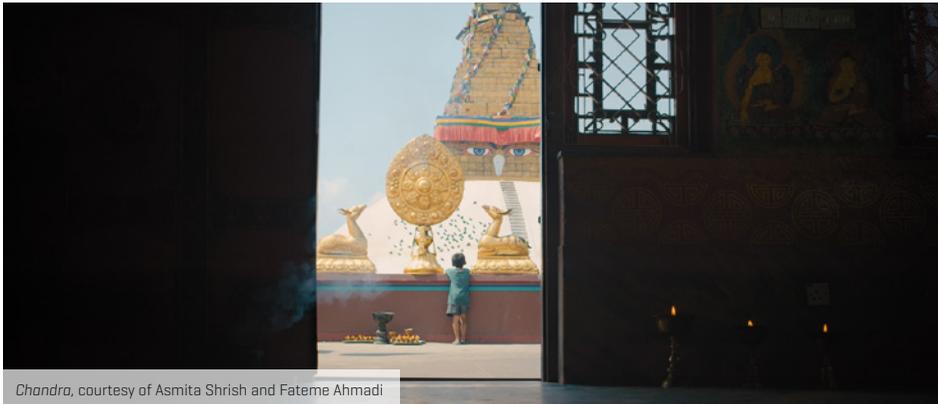


Stitch, courtesy of Slobhán Smith



Ngozi Onwurah (dir. Coffee Coloured Children),
Credit Ngozi Onwurah and the British Film Institute

11
FILMS FROM WOMEN
FILMMAKERS



Chandra, courtesy of Asmita Shrish and Fateme Ahmadi

33
FILMS SHOWN

17
FILMS FROM ETHNICALLY
DIVERSE FILMMAKERS



The Pajama Game, courtesy of the authors' heirs and assignees - all rights reserved.

17
BRITISH FILMS

ico THE CINEMA
OF IDEAS



Killing Time, courtesy of Women Make Movies



Travels with Tove, courtesy of Kanerva Cederström



Bird, courtesy of LUX

Programme

TCOI programming remit set out to bring underappreciated strands of film and cinema heritage directly to audiences and to create a welcoming public forum for vibrant critical debate on the engagement and experiences of moving image culture. From May 2021 to May 2022 we curated screenings and live and pre-recorded events and discussions that reflected national and global conversations and concerns, with a particular focus on issues around race, disability, gender, sexuality and class. In addition, where possible, we commissioned a new piece of writing to contextualise each event, thereby adding critical value and legacy to the programming work.

We programmed TCOI as a virtual cinematheque space, which meant that every month we offered audiences something new and different. In May and July, we presented two pre-launch events, a preview of Ousmane Sembène's *Mandabi* (1968) with a panel discussion. On 11th June, we theatrically released the film in cinemas and gave venues booking the film the option to show an

abridged version of TCOI recorded panel discussion. To complement the release of the biopic *Tove* (2021), July saw a special focus on Tove Jansson and the Super 8 filmmaking collaboration with her life partner, the artist and professor Tuulikki Pietelä. We presented a UK premiere of *Travels With Tove* (1993) and a panel discussion that featured actor and writer Ellie Kendrick reading extracts from Tove Jansson's fiction.

Continuing our collaboration with Museum of London curator/ PhD researcher Aleema Gray, in August we officially launched the Cinema of Ideas platform. Aleema curated *Archival Resistance: Rastafari Women in Britain*, with a focus on the moving, living and visual archives of Rastafari women in Britain, spotlighting the work of filmmaker D. Elmina Davis and her film *Omega Rising: Women of Rastafari* (1988) which we presented on The Cinema of Ideas. Subsequently, the Criterion Channel acquired streaming rights to stream the film on their platform for a 'Reggae on Film' season, curated by Ashley Clark.

October saw the initiation of TCOI industry-focused events with a live-streamed, in-depth conversation between Simon Ward (ICO trustee) and Tony Rayns (film programmer, critic, writer, and filmmaker). This event was the launch of a new series of free events, in which we have invited film programmers, filmmakers and cultural producers onto the platform to share their insights and reflections on working in cultural film exhibition. 'In Conversation: Tony Rayns' was so successful that we immediately organised a follow-up event, 'In Conversation: Tony Rayns' Part 2, which we hosted in January, and we're planning Part 3 later in 2022. Other free industry talks in this season included Ashley Clark (Curatorial Director of the Criterion Collection) in conversation with Charlotte Cook (Co-Creator and Executive Producer of *Field of Vision*) and curator, filmmaker and lecturer George Clark in conversation with Catharine Des Forges and Selina Robertson (ICO) on the 'ICO Essentials: The Secret Masterpieces of Cinema' exhibition histories from 2008.



Icarus [After Amelia], courtesy of LUX



Imagination, courtesy of Jemima Hughes

Other highlights of TCOI included forefronting the work of women filmmakers and creatives past and present. We presented the online premiere of film artist Margaret Salmon's latest work, *Icarus (After Amelia)* (2021) together with Salmon's short film *Bird* (2016), hosting Margaret and film curator/writer Laura Guy in conversation to explore both films' themes and resonances. *Fronza Woods: Two Essential Short Films* offered UK audiences the chance to see her work for the first time, together with a newly filmed interview with Fronza by the filmmaker Nadia Latif. Following the success of this event, we are in discussion with Women Make Movies to sub-release new restorations by the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures of Woods' films into cinemas in 2022, with the aim of bringing Fronza to the UK to present her films in person.

We collaborated with the film critic and historian Pamela Hutchinson to present a two-part film season titled 'Working-Class Heroines of the 1980s', which included rare screenings of Mai Zetterling's *Scrubbers* (1982) and *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985). In addition, Pamela wrote an engaging essay about the season and *Scrubbers* titled 'Women's pictures of the 1980s: Scrubbers and the spirit of resilience'. We closed the calendar year with the online premiere of Lizzie Thynne's new film *Independent Miss Craigie* (2020) on British documentary

pioneer Jill Craigie. Lizzie joined filmmaker Penny Woolcock and Ros Cranston (Curator of Non-Fiction Film and Television, BFI Archive) for a lively discussion on Craigie's career and the ethics and politics of women's film history. Following this, we worked with Lizzie to organise a mini in-cinema tour of the film at select ICO client cinemas and other independent venues.

We also presented 'Black Film Bulletin x The Gaze', a three-day takeover of the platform in January by the Black Film Bulletin curators, which included a selection of landmark shorts from the African diaspora, new writing and a live discussion between Dr June Givanni and Jennifer G. Robinson. Building on the written interview BFB gave to Catharine Des Forges in 2020 for the ICO blog, this was a welcome continuation of our collaboration with them.

Projectionism (2022), a new film by artist-filmmaker Sarah Wood, was commissioned by TCOI to celebrate how cinema connects us even during times of social isolation. An open call invited participants to volunteer memories of cinema to create a multivoiced script, edited to narrate a visual landscape constructed from archive film. The film, which will now have its premiere on the platform in the coming months is a vital project that explores the possibilities of artistic collaboration.

Emerging Curators

We worked with the FEDS 2021-22 cohort to curate a film season and discussion titled 'Hamra Katha: Showcasing the Work of Nepali Women'. There is a dynamic, emerging network of young women filmmakers working in Kathmandu focused on gender, representation and changing the film industry in Nepal, and we were able to tap into their filmmaking and activism thanks to the contacts and outreach of one of our FEDS trainees, Aagya Pradhan, whose initial idea inspired the season.

After a wide call for submissions that resulted in 83 applications, in October we confirmed our two Emerging Curators commissions for TCOI. 'Stitched Up! Protest and the Garment Industry', curated by Jo Reid and 'Visibly Animated: short films and talk on disability representation and accessibility in animation', curated by Louise M. Milsom. Both programmes were equally impressive, selecting films, inviting panel experts that included award-winning disability rights activist Dr Amy Kavanagh and Ruth Ogier from War on Want, as well as tapping into (non-film) audiences we would have not had access to otherwise. Highlights included Jo Reid's live darning workshop and her commission of a new piece of textile art from embroidery artist Kirsty Wyllie, as well as disabled and deaf animation director Jemima Hughes' informative talk about her film practice.



Made in Bangladesh, courtesy of PYRAMIDE INTERNATIONAL



Omega Rising Women of Rastafari, courtesy of Monika Baker



Cousin, courtesy of Adam Elliot



Independent Miss Craigie, courtesy of Lizzie Thynne



Stronger, courtesy of Belmaya Nepali

New Trustees & Changing Recruitment Practices

This year, the ICO has transformed the way it recruits both staff and trustees to ensure that we continue to progress towards being an organisation that both reflects the diversity of UK society and benefits from a wider range of skills and experience from both inside and outside the film exhibition industry.



Our Board of Trustees

Dorothy Wilson (Chair), Independent Consultant, Coach and Producer

Ayo Akingbade, Artist & Filmmaker

Sudha Bhuchar, Actress/Playwright, Co-Founder of Tamasha Theatre Company & Artistic Director Bhuchar Boulevard

Thea Burrows, Independent Film Producer

Julian Connerty, Partner, Signature Litigation LLP

Harry Kalfayan, Content Editor, Little Dot Studios and Programme Advisor, Sheffield DocFest

Susan Lovell, Head of Culture Development and Programmes, Managing Director Group, BBC

Will Massa, former BFI Curator of Contemporary Fiction & Senior Programme Manager, British Council Film

Eleanor McGrath, Programme Manager (Arts, Culture and Heritage), Fidelity International

Emily McDonald, Non-theatrical Rights & Licensing Expert

Ameet Parekh, Qualified Accountant & Charity Finance Specialist

George Sawtell, Treasury Director, Survitec Group

Simon Ward, Owner, Palace Cinema, Broadstairs

Trustee Recruitment

In line with our commitments to diversify our board and bring a wider range of perspectives to our organisation, we embarked on a new approach to trustee recruitment. First, we spoke to a number of different organisations who had undertaken the same kind of commitment successfully; had conversations with organisations who specialise in the recruitment, retention and support of young Trustees; and our Director undertook a Clore course on governance in this area with speakers ranging from CEOs to trustees and consultants.

We then rewrote our board recruitment pack, changing our policy to enable potential candidates to apply via a short video rather than our application form if preferred. We held three open Zoom meetings at which prospective candidates could meet our Director and current Trustees and ask questions.

We interrogated where we should advertise and how we could communicate the opportunity most widely.

We proceeded with recruitment and achieved a 325% increase in applications from a much wider range of people in terms of age, geography, lived experience, ethnicity and disability. Applications were shortlisted by two Trustees and the Director and we interviewed 14 candidates by Zoom.

At the same time, we looked again at our board induction policies and revised those, ensuring that prospective Trustees will have a 'buddy' both on the board and within ICO staff, and will be supported properly with training and one-to-one support. At the end of the process, we asked six applicants to join the Board as Trustees and after the induction, we are delighted that they formally joined us in March.



At the Independent Cinema Office we are an equal opportunity employer and we believe that a diverse workforce leads to an organisation that is more creative, innovative and gets better results, we want our workforce to represent the diversity of the people and communities in the UK and we want to see these reflected on our screens. We also want our workforce to be one where different experiences, expertise and perspectives are valued and where everyone is encouraged to grow and develop. We particularly welcome applications from Black, Asian, ethnically diverse, and disabled candidates as they are underrepresented within the ICO.

- ICO

Changing Recruitment Practices

We want the ICO workforce to be reflective of UK society; to help make access to the film exhibition workforce equitable and inclusive and so that we benefit from having staff with a wider set of skills, backgrounds and lived experience than is currently the case.

In consultation with our freelance HR Advisor, we've made significant changes to our recruitment information to try and make the process of applying for a position at the ICO as transparent and fair as possible.

Our new recruitment packs include information on how the recruitment process works, what will be asked of applicants, how applicants will be shortlisted, what feedback they will receive and the timelines we are working to.

New job descriptions and person specifications focus on transferable skills

and competencies rather than sector-based experience, and we have removed requirements for a university degree unless specifically necessary. We also created a revised application form, removing barriers and requests for information that might be discriminatory; for example, the year qualifications were taken and previous salaries. We provide a point of contact for applicants if they have questions and clearly state that we are looking for different types of experience and not to be put off if they don't come from a film background.

We publicise the pay scales of all jobs at the ICO in the recruitment pack (as well as in our internal staff handbook) and operate a 'name anonymous' recruitment process, which means applicants' names and personal details are not visible to the recruitment panel during the shortlisting process.



About the Independent Cinema Office

The Independent Cinema Office (ICO) was founded in 2003 with a vision of giving everyone the opportunity to see life-changing cinema on the big screen. The ICO is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We are based in London but our work is national with a goal to help create an open, thriving and challenging film culture everywhere in the UK. Our work wouldn't be possible without the help and support from our partners including funders, distributors, cultural organisations, our clients, and most especially cinemas. Launched with three members of staff and £120,000, the ICO now employs 22 members of staff and has an annual turnover of £1.5 million. The ICO is committed to a film industry that is inclusive and reflective of everyone in society. We are working towards this goal with all our activities, as well as our own staffing and structure, and have adapted our working patterns and delivery of activities to function effectively during the pandemic.

Our funders & partners

The ICO is proud to partner with a variety of national and international agencies and funders to deliver our ambitious programmes. The BFI has supported the ICO since its inception and is now a major funder of programming, information and training services to the independent exhibition sector through a range of activities. We run Film Hub South East, one of eight national hubs in the BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) tasked with supporting audience development across the UK. Our other major partners are Creative Europe and the British Council (who support our portfolio of activities supporting European film festivals), ScreenSkills (who support our professional development projects) and Arts Council England (who support our artists' moving image projects).

Our Staff and Trustee Demographics

As part of our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#), the ICO has committed to collecting and publishing demographic data on its staff and trustees to show whether we are making progress on becoming an organisation that truly reflects the diversity of UK society.

The latest figures, collected in May 2022, are [available on our website](#) along with further updates on our specific commitments in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plan.

To hear more from the ICO,
[sign up to our mailing list](#)



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Supported by

