



## **BFI LAUNCHES NEW REPORT OPENING OUR EYES: HOW FILM CONTRIBUTES TO THE CULTURE OF THE UK**

**Public keen to see more British films made  
78% in favour of public funding for film  
Too few films represent diversity  
People more interested in films than religion and sport**

**Embargoed until 2.30pm, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

The **BFI** today announced the launch of **Opening our Eyes: how film contributes to the culture of the UK**. A new and evidence-based report on the British public's views on film, prepared for the BFI by Northern Alliance and Ipsos Media CT, the report provides in depth data on the films that really matter to them, why they watch them and the effect they have. The research gives us a democratic assessment of film in the UK, outside of expert, critical and industry polls. The report demonstrates how film moves and inspires the nation, how it excites the emotions and the intellect and how it influences the shape of our lives.

### **Cultural overview**

Film is central to the cultural life of the UK and one of the most powerful cultural mediums with an estimated 5 billion film viewings taking place each year. 84% of the population are interested in film, which is valued highly in comparison to other social and leisure interests including world news (81%), watching (52%) and playing sport (51%), politics (62%), pop and rock music (69%), restaurants (80%), pubs and clubs (53%), theatre (50%), literature (67%), the countryside (80%), museums (59%), art (46%), celebrities (32%) and more than twice as many people are more interested in film than religion (32%). Only news about the UK (88%) and television (88%) were rated as being of more interest.

Those with an interest in film have a higher than average interest and involvement in other arts, entertainments and the world in general. Half of respondents said they appreciate the artistic value of film and overall respondents place film on a par with literature and classical music.

Amanda Nevill, CEO BFI said *'This report proves that film is at the heart of our cultural life. Understanding, appreciating and assessing its cultural contribution is essential to a forward looking public policy and will guide our funding priorities for film. It gives us evidence of how powerful film is in today's society, reinforcing how important access to it is and the need to continue to develop new talent and keep our industry vibrant. Opening Our Eyes helps us better understand our society, our history, our place in the world, our humanity and, ultimately, ourselves.'*

### **Emotional responses**

Regardless of whether they are watching a blockbuster or low budget independent film, people are finding meaning and value in the experiences. Overall, *The King's Speech* was most frequently mentioned as having a personal effect on people, followed by *Schindler's List*, *Avatar*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Titanic* and *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Film provides a unique range of entertainment experiences with people citing escapism (68%), excitement (59%), emotional or moving (60%) and thought provoking (59%) as the most overwhelming reactions. Three quarters of

respondents think that film is a good way of making people think about difficult or sensitive issues and two thirds think that film is educational. 48% had seen films that encouraged them to find out more about the subject raised and 14% had been prompted into action related to a situation shown in the film, like joining a group or donating money.

### **Personal and social identity**

Many people responded that individual films have contributed to the development of their sense of self and how they think about society and their role within it. People aged 15 to 24 are most likely to find role models in films (11%). Respondents from minority ethnic groups were more likely than white respondents to say that a film had changed the way they think about certain things (40% compared with 29%), or inspired them to change something in their life (26% compared with 12%), or that the film had given them a role model to follow (15% compared with 6%). Interestingly, people from ethnic minorities are more avid consumers of film in cinemas or via digital platforms.

### **British films**

There is strong public support for British film in general (88%), with 78% people in support of public funding for British filmmaking through the National Lottery. Half of those asked said that they were more likely to watch a film if it was British – and 86% said that they had seen a British film in the past year. Over half felt there were too few British films shown in the UK (in cinemas, on television and on other media). Respondents appreciate the realistic, honest and true to life aspect of British films and the unique British sense of humour. UK-wide, 65% of the public are keen to see more British films made that are ‘true to life’. While blockbusters are the most watched type of film, cast and story was the most important factor in defining whether a film is British or not and people said that big budgets and special effects can make a film seem less British. At the same time people thought that British films were well-made (95%) and well-acted (94%).

People want to see films that are representative of all the Nations and Regions of the UK. 34% believe that there are too many films telling stories about rich and privileged people living in London and the Home Counties, and 40% think that there aren’t enough films that feature disabled people. People in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and northern England are most keen to see more films set in their part of the country.

### **How we’re watching film**

The majority of film viewing (57%) is on television, with 86% of people watching a film on TV at least once a month, 63% watching a film on DVD or Blu Ray, 29% seeing a film in a cinema, 23% downloading or streaming films from the internet and 11% watching a film on a mobile device at least monthly. The 3D experience is providing a new dimension to the cinema experience.

The findings demonstrate that the cultural contribution of film is increasing with the growth of digital access (broadband in the home and mobile) that is expanding the means and ways by which films are viewed. Also, the dominance of film viewing on television in the UK highlights the increasing cultural impact of broadcasters’ investment in and programming choices for film.

In support of the findings around British film the top ten British films most frequently mentioned (in order) as having a significant effect on society or attitudes in the UK are: *Trainspotting* (189 mentions), *The Full Monty* (102), *East is East* (82), *Billy Elliott* (52), *The King’s Speech* (45), *This is England* (36), *Cathy Come Home* (34), *Brassed Off* (32), *Slumdog Millionaire* (26) and *Kidulthood* (25).

The report was commissioned following the positive response from academics, educators, industry professionals and policy makers to the UK Film Council/BFI study, **Stories We Tell Ourselves: the cultural impact of UK film (1946–2006)**. **Opening our Eyes: how film contributes to the culture of the UK** was the result of qualitative and quantitative research undertaken in February 2011 with over 2000 respondents and is the largest of its kind to have been carried out to date.

-Ends -

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#### **ABOUT OPENING OUR EYES**

**Opening our Eyes: how film contributes to the culture of the UK** is available to download from

[www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingoureyes](http://www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingoureyes)

#### **BACKGROUND**

In 2008, the UK Film Council in partnership with the BFI commissioned a study of the cultural impact of UK films from 1946–2006. Published as *Stories we tell ourselves*,<sup>(1)</sup> this report reviewed half a century of British film and found that:

- Cultural impact occurs via censorship and notoriety, quotations in other media, zeitgeist moments and cumulatively changed perceptions.
- Films regarded by cultural commentators as culturally significant tend to challenge or satirise the status quo, while randomly selected UK films tend to be more reflective of the cultural assumptions of the day.
- Under-represented diverse communities, Nations and Regions of the UK now have better representation on screen.

Web-based indicators such as IMDb ratings, messages and numbers of YouTube clips may serve as proxy measures of cultural impact. New digital media have broadened the possibilities of cultural impact, making appreciation more democratic and disrupting the hierarchical modes of distribution of the past. Beginning in November 2009 with a seminar in London for the UK academic community, the study was presented to and debated with the public and film communities in Belfast, Bristol, Cardiff, Dublin, Edinburgh and York. It was also discussed at the 2010 San Sebastián Film Festival and at the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education in Brussels.

Participants were positive about the report and enthusiastic in discussing the ways in which the cultural value or impact of film is produced and communicated. But two persistent questions were: 'what about films from other countries?' and 'what do the people think?'<sup>(2)</sup> *Stories we tell ourselves* was deliberately an 'expert' view. Drawing on documentary evidence, cultural theory and film scholarship, it left unspoken the views of the British people, the ultimate funders and beneficiaries of UK film policy. What do the people think?

To find out, the UK Film Council and the BFI<sup>(3)</sup> commissioned the present piece of research in early 2011, a survey of the attitudes and opinions of the UK public on a range of questions related to the cultural contribution of film in the UK. By cultural contribution we mean both cultural impact in the sense used in *Stories we tell ourselves* (contributing to social and/or cultural change) and cultural value in the

sense of providing meaning, explanation and identity to society, social groups and individual citizens. The purpose was to find out how highly people value film – whether UK or internationally-made – and how they express the meaning film has for them.(4)

1 [http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/f/i/CIReport\\_010709.pdf](http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/f/i/CIReport_010709.pdf)

2 Barratt, J 2009, *The Cultural Impact of UK Film: Questions and Evidence – a Report of the Seminar held at Birkbeck College, 27 November 2009*, UK Film Council, page 22.

3 The project was transferred to the BFI on 1 April 2011, following the closure of the UK Film Council.

4 A copy of the brief can be found at [www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingyoureyes](http://www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingyoureyes)

## **THE STUDY TEAM**

The study was carried out for UK Film Council/ BFI by Northern Alliance in association with Ipsos MediaCT.

**Northern Alliance** is a Chartered Accountancy firm that provides accounting, tax, financial, management and business consulting services to private and public sector organisations and individuals, especially to those operating in the media, entertainment and creative industries. Northern Alliance staff and associates engaged in the report were Catherine O’Shea, Chris Chandler, Ian Christie, Mike Kelly and Sarah Beinart. **Ipsos** is one of the UK’s leading market research organisations, ranking fifth amongst global research companies. Its specialist division Ipsos MediaCT helps clients make connections in the digital age. It is a leader in providing research solutions for companies in the fast-moving and rapidly converging worlds of media, content, telecoms and technology. Its research activities include measurement of behaviour amongst consumers and advanced analytics for media audience data. Ipsos MediaCT personnel engaged in the study included Adam Sheridan, Eduardo Mena Bahos and Paul Maskell.

**The UK Film Council/BFI** steering group comprised Carol Comley, David Steele, Nigel Algar, Sarah Schafer-Peek and Sean Perkins. All the study team are grateful for the assistance provided by Bertrand Moullier of Narval Media and the other companies and individuals who provided advice and information during the stakeholder consultation, David Ettridge for his assistance in sourcing still images and to Mark Errington and Philip Metson of Radley Yeldar for their help in designing the published report. Grateful thanks are also given to all of the rights holders who directly or indirectly provided the images used in the report.

## **About the BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences