

South East Audiovisual Archive Mapping and Strategy Project

Executive Summary

Section 1: Purpose

To gain a better understanding of the nature of this sector and the prospects for development, the mapping and strategy project set up by SEMLAC (South East Museum Library and Archive Council) set out to:

- research, assess, develop, consult and produce a regional map of audiovisual archives and collections in the South East.
- analyse, guide and frame the mapping data which will be used in consultation to inform a regional development strategy.

Section 2: National Context Key Factors Influencing A Development Strategy for the South East

The work on a development strategy for audiovisual archives and collections has been based upon the guiding principle of ensuring the preservation and accessibility of the region's audiovisual heritage. In the course of the research for this report and the extrapolation of strategic themes, we have identified a number of key factors influencing the possibilities and options for development, particularly:

- ***The absence, to date, of a coherent policy framework and a sustainable structure for publicly funded audiovisual archives in the UK*** and the need to define national, regional and local responsibilities in relation to each other.
- ***The policy initiatives which are currently underway and which could have significant outcomes for regional development:*** the Archives Task Force; the UK Audiovisual Archives Strategic Framework; the UK Film Council's consultations, 'Three Years On' and the forthcoming, 'Towards a National Film Heritage Strategy for the Regional Investment Fund for England'; the DCMS Film industry Select Committee recommendation of a leadership role for the British Film Institute for the whole sector.
- ***The low level of core funding for audiovisual archives*** and collections compared with 'traditional' archives and with other heritage and cultural activity, ***which contrasts with the value and importance placed upon audiovisual material by stakeholders*** as a highly accessible source of inspiration and entertainment and ***as a powerful tool in the promotion of social inclusion and lifelong learning.***
- ***The need to ensure that preservation is regarded as a vital part of access and inclusion in a context*** where material is still at risk and where many non-specialist archives and collections lack both the expertise and the resources to address such concerns.

Section 3 and 4: The audiovisual archive sector in the South East

Summary of Provision

Currently the South East has two specialist bodies, the South East Film and Video Archive (SEFVA) and the Wessex Film and Sound Archive (WFSA), which provide coverage of about two thirds of the region. Additionally, there is

some well established local authority audiovisual archive provision in Portsmouth, Southampton and Oxford; a range of audiovisual collections in museums, galleries, libraries, record offices and Higher Education; and a variety of collections and archives held at local and community level. The Mapping Survey directory, separately published, contains entries for some 228 collections.

Mapping Survey Summary of Key Findings

Composition and extent of collections

- There is a ***broad spread of AV material*** held in collections across the South East: 81% hold video footage; 79% sound; 46% film and 34% hold AV footage on other AV and multimedia formats.
- Footage is held ***right across the spectrum of possible formats***, but the most typical formats are: VHS (91% of those holding video); tape cassette (91% of those holding sound); 16mm (54% of those holding film); CD-ROM (83% of those holding other AV formats).
- ***Only 18% of organisations undertake surveys to locate and collect material, although 90% accept AV material if it is offered to them.***
- ***Over 80% also hold material which supplements the AV collection.***

Preservation and Conservation

- ***Only about half of the sample (53%) has access to specialist advice on the preservation and conservation of audiovisual archives.***
- ***27% of all respondents have no preservation copies of their material at all***, while only 28% have complete coverage.
- ***Only around a quarter of organisations believe that their storage accommodation meets archival standards, and a further 14% don't know.***
- ***17% of the sample state that their collection contains decaying or 'at risk' material***, though 13% don't know – the single most regularly identified 'at risk item' is nitrate film.
- ***Over 70% of collections held by respondents have not been digitised at all***, only (6%) have digitised all their collections.

Access and Inclusion

- ***Almost a quarter (23%) of the AV collections are not accessible to the public and over half (58%) are accessible only by appointment.***
- ***Just over half the sample has either catalogued all (28%) or the majority of their collections (24%); however, one fifth has no cataloguing system for their collection.***
- ***Almost one quarter (24%) of the organisations never receive enquiries from the public***

- The majority of organisations receive few inquiries and of those which do, almost three quarters (74%) get less than 50 a year.
- ***The AV collections are used by a wide range of users, with no one group dominating: individuals (66%), students (50%), special interest groups (43%) and broadcasters/the media (38%).***
- ***Over half (56%) of the organisations do not collect any information about their users;*** of those that do 74% collect information on all users.
- ***The information that is collected on users is primarily confined to numbers (86%), purpose of use (76%), and the category of the user 57% (e.g. individuals, students etc.).***
- ***Demographics of users are very rarely captured*** – e.g. age (7%), gender (5%) and ethnicity (2%).

Capacity and skills

- ***Over a quarter of all organisations have no paid employees at all, of the remainder, 65% have between one and five paid employees.***
- Of those organisations with paid staff, 40% have staff that are all full-time, though 21% are staffed entirely by part-timers.
- 62% of the collections operate with no support from volunteers, but 23% of the organisations have between 2-10 volunteers.
- In terms of training, a small majority of organisations train staff in archival work (57%), but this small majority is reversed for AV archival work, as 58% do not receive training.

Funding and development

- ***The organisations in the sample are in receipt of funds from various sources, but the most typical is local authority funding (53%), this is followed by University/College funding (36%), ‘other’ sources (28%), and the Heritage Lottery Fund (15%).***
- ***Over two thirds of the collections (68%) have no income generating services.***

Section 5: Strategic Themes

5.1. Advocacy, strategy and leadership

Aim: To forge a unified voice for the South East audiovisual archives sector; to raise its profile, and to advocate its unique contribution to the social, economic and cultural life of the region and beyond.

5.2. Creative Partnerships

Aim: to develop the audiovisual archives sector and improve service delivery and accessibility by working in partnership with stakeholders.

5.3. Learning

Aim: To develop the contribution of the region's audiovisual archives sector to a learning society.

5.4. Access and inclusion

Aim: To extend participation and access for all through an inclusive approach to development in regional audiovisual archives.

5.5 Knowledge management

Aim: To ensure the activities of audiovisual archives contribute to the development of the South East as knowledge and information based society

5.6. Skills and capacity

Aim: To engage individuals, employers and partnerships in building audiovisual archive skills and creativity to meet cultural and economic requirements.

5.7. Research and information

Aim: To contribute to the development of regional research and information programmes in support of high quality, sustainable development.

5.8. Stewardship and standards

Aim: To promote standards and excellence in the preservation, management and use of the audiovisual archives and collections.

5.9. Investment and development

Aim: To maximise access to resources and funding for audiovisual archives and collections in the region.

Section 6: Development Options – Preferred Option

This review of current provision and development options suggests that the most effective and efficient way to deliver such a planned, region-wide strategy would be through a South East Regional Audiovisual Archive Service (SEAVAS). This would combine SEFVA and WFSA as a centre of expertise (co-sited) within an appropriate organisational framework, maximising the value of existing assets to support a wider network of regional, local and community collections, explored in conjunction with other partners. In addition, small grants programme, linked to and supported by the wider objectives of the regional service, should be created to encourage the preservation of, and access to, audiovisual collections in non-specialist repositories and in local and community based archives.

To achieve such service provision a substantial uplift in income will be required. The cost of a new region-wide service is estimated at £370K (SEFVA and WFSA currently have a combined annual turnover of £144K). The capital cost of additional purpose-built archive storage to accommodate material from the whole region is estimated at around £500K. New income streams and income-generating activities will be crucial, however, at the moment, the low level of core funding is a brake on development possibilities. The SEAVAS proposal has to be based upon a partnership approach to core

funding with national and regional funding/enabling bodies and will require further work, especially a business plan. The compelling case for such investment must be based upon the unique contribution audiovisual material and collections, imaginatively prepared and presented, can make to the key agendas of access, inclusion and education. It is a case which rests upon the huge power of sounds and images to involve and engage people, offering the prospect of a more direct, less mediated experience, fostering a sense of place, time and community identity and contributing new dimensions to the learning process.

Section 7: Strategic Objectives and Recommendations

7.1 Advocacy, strategy and leadership

- Develop the profile and visibility of South East audiovisual archives and collections through advocacy that demonstrates their contribution to the key agendas of access, inclusion and education.
- Use the Steering Group discussion paper, (Creative Partnerships and Imaginative Solutions' as the 'vision statement' for audiovisual archival development in the region.
- Work towards the establishment of a coherent voice for the sector through the creation of a South East Audiovisual Archives Service (SEAVAS)
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of regional funding bodies and agencies towards the sector, particularly SEMLAC, Screen South and SEEDA.
- Work towards the development of a coherent policy framework and a sustainable structure for publicly funded audiovisual archives in the UK by contributing to the current policy debates.
- Promote a broader definition of 'records', extending beyond local government records to include audiovisual material in respect of the proposals developed by the National Archives for new records and archives legislation.

7.2 Creative Partnerships

- Adopt a partnership approach to development.
- Develop innovative approaches to widening access to audiovisual collections by re-defining the role, function and appeal of such material.
- Develop a partnership with the BBC to aid its commitment to increasing public access to its own archives.
- Work with partners to help develop networks which engage with the audiovisual and digital arts, such as the Southern Oral History Exchange.

7.3 Learning

- Further develop the sector's close relationships with the formal and informal education by promoting the unique contribution audiovisual material can make to a learning culture.

- In particular, seek to select and design content for the needs of different users, such as National Curriculum students, lifelong learners and community groups.
- Aim to collaborate with organisations and projects with a commitment to online learning agendas in order to enhance the process of digitising collections.

7.4 Access and inclusion

- Develop and promote an inclusive perception of audiovisual archives and collections based on the widespread use and availability of such materials in a variety of contexts.
- As in 'Learning' above, seek to select and design content for the needs of different users.
- Work with other partners and organisations to tackle social exclusion.
- Develop the online provision of materials and services as a priority.
- Developing the SEAVAS structure should include testing the application of the PSQG Standard for Access to Archives.

7.5 Knowledge management

- Promote the role of audiovisual collections in the region's knowledge economy by developing further the 'sector-specific' networks and research the relevance of audiovisual collections to the that knowledge economy.

7.6 Skills and capacity

- Establish links with the SSC's and with regional training and development bodies.
- Further develop links with those bodies in the region's audiovisual sector.
- Provide financial support for specific, targeted programmes of training and development related to audiovisual archives and collections.
- Explore the training and development needs of the proposed SEAVAS model.
- Work with partners to further develop the profile of the audiovisual archives and collections sector workforce and assess regional training needs.

7.7 Research and information

- Collaborate with partners at national, regional and local levels in current and future research and policy development initiatives.
- Assess the research and information needs associated with the development of the SEAVAS model.
- Develop and maintain the Mapping Study database as a source of reliable information.
- Commission research into users and non-users of audiovisual archives, particularly that which investigates and provides evidence about the different contexts in which viewing and listening occur.

7.8 Stewardship and standards

- Seek clarification and agreement with partners on roles and responsibilities in funding the preservation of audiovisual material as part of the commitment to access.
- Ensure that any future SEAVAS undertakes to assess the preservation needs of the South East region, including new storage accommodation.
- Increase access to and information about South East collections which the mapping survey has identified as inaccessible by developing a grants programme.
- Work towards a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to collection development at regional level.

7.9 Investment and development

- Seek the advice and support of SEEDA in developing a business plan for the creation of SEAVAS.
- Further develop the partnership approach to core funding with national and regional funding/enabling bodies through the consultations surrounding current policy initiatives. In particular, discuss with Screen South how the audiovisual archival needs of the region will be best represented in future discussions with the UK Film Council and explore with the Arts Council how the objectives of the strategy mesh with their own.
- When available, review the recommendations of the Screen South/SEEDA feasibility study of a web portal for regional moving image material in line with this strategy.
- Pursue project funding for online content development, which enables the creation of packages for different user groups.

Section 8. Conclusion

Audiovisual material is widely regarded as a highly accessible source of inspiration, entertainment and education, a view that will be further enhanced by the increasing utilisation of digital technologies which open up new production and distribution opportunities.

However, despite the centrality of the audiovisual experience in the cultural landscape there is currently no coherent policy framework and sustainable structure for publicly funded audiovisual archives in the UK.

Beyond the main national collecting bodies, the funds currently provided for audiovisual archives at regional and local level are extremely small.

To break the cycle of under-funding and under-development requires action at national and regional levels. In turn, there is a need for a South East Audiovisual Archives Development Strategy which contributes to this evolving policy agenda but which is not hamstrung by the attempt to mesh with the various and changing timetables involved in these processes.

This review of current provision and development options suggests that the most effective and efficient way to deliver such a planned, region-wide

strategy would be through a regional audiovisual archive service. This would combine SEFVA and WFSA as a centre of expertise (co-sited) within an appropriate organisational framework, maximising the value of existing assets to support a wider network of regional, local and community collections. At its heart would be a commitment to working with partners at national, regional and levels in the museum, library and archive domains, in the formal and informal education sectors and in the broadcasting and television industries, to save and share the region's audiovisual heritage.