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**The Metro London Skills Cluster – FE Curriculum Partnerships Fund**

Call for pilot project proposals

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The **BFI's Metro London Skills Cluster (MLSC)** is one of the BFI’s national network of skills clusters1 supported by the National Lottery.It is led by **Film London** (the capital’s screen industries agency) working with the **National Film and Television School** (NFTS) and three other core partners - the **Association of Colleges** (AoC); **London Higher** (with **Middlesex University)** and the **Capital City College Group** (CCCG).

The MLSC area is London, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Surrey (Berkshire is covered by another skills cluster led by Resource Productions).

**The BFI Skills Clusters**

The BFI skills clusters were established through the BFI’s National Lottery Strategy, which is itself an integral part of *Screen Culture 2033*, the BFI’s 10-year vision for the UK screen sector.

Research commissioned or conducted by the BFI, ScreenSkills and other sector bodies between 2019 and 2022 highlighted the fact that an unprecedented boom in screen production in the UK during recent years had resulted in a critical skills shortage across all areas and levels of the screen industries. It also found that the screen sector workforce was not reflective of the UK population as a whole with specific groups being significantly underrepresented. By promoting and supporting partnership working between industry and education with a focus on regional development, the skills clusters are one of the vehicles via which the BFI is tackling these issues. There are currently seven skills clusters across the UK and the BFI is encouraging them to work collaboratively to address the challenges.

The *BFI Skills Review (2022)* commissioned by Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) focused on physical production in scripted film and high-end television and this informed the initial priorities for the skills dimension of the BFI’s new National LotteryStrategy*.* The primary focus was on equipping new entrants to the industry (especially those from underrepresented groups) with both employability and practical skills which would enable them to access a range of below-the-line roles2 and progress in their careers. Though these remain high priorities for the skills clusters (all except Sgil Cymru Cyf in Wales are now in their second year of operation), the focus of the activity has widened to embrace continuing professional development (CPD) for the existing workforce. This includes returners to the industry who have valuable skills and experience to contribute.

The impact of the industrial action in the US on the UK screen industries is still being felt. Production has significantly slowed due to this and other recent factors which resulted in a number of people being without work and becoming disillusioned with their career prospects in the sector. Despite this however, the skills and diversity challenges remain acute. New opportunities are being created by developments such as the UK Independent Film Tax Credit (IFTC ) which was announced in the 2024 spring budget and confirmed on 9 October, and specific areas such as High End TV (HETV) continue to grow. The skills clusters across the country are striving to bolster and elevate the skills base and to respond to evolving skills needs. This is a key element of the screen industries’ recovery.

**The Metro London Skills Cluster**

The MLSC area is home to major producers and studios including Elstree, Pinewood, Ealing, Twickenham, Shepperton, Leavesden, Longcross and Bovingdon. These studios are also the UK production centres for some of the biggest film and television companies in the world such as Warner Bros. Discovery, Disney, Netflix and Amazon. Due to the world class facilities and expertise it encompasses and the volume and range of screen production it attracts, the area offers the greatest opportunities in the UK. However, it also faces the most significant challenges in terms of building the capacity and skills which will enable the industry to grow, as well as in broadening the range and diversity of the workforce.

Over an initial period of three years from 2023, the MLSC is collaborating with industry, higher and further education institutions, and other training providers, to deliver an integrated programme of activities across London, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Surrey. These programmes aim to: raise the awareness of people seeking to work in the screen industries about the different roles and career pathways (including through taster sessions and short courses); equip them with employability and vocational skills; help to retain employees via an industry mentoring scheme; encourage HE and FE providers to tailor their curriculum more closely to the needs of screen sector employers; support the adaptation of skills gained outside the sector (e.g. in construction, design, hair & make-up fashion, accounting) for deployment in the screen industries; provide CPD (including trainer training) for both industry and education stakeholders. In line with the priorities of the BFI Skills Clusters, the focus of the MLSC is on below-the-line roles.

**Call for proposals from London FE colleges**

Film London and the AoC are aware that colleges are striving to explore as many avenues as possible to maximise the opportunities for their students. However, finding even a small amount of money to kickstart innovation can be challenging in an era of tight financial constraints.

Under the auspices of the Metro London Skills Cluster, Film London and the Association of Colleges (AoC) are now inviting proposals from London FE colleges for **innovative curriculum pilot projects** to be undertaken with screen industry partners. Grants of between **£10,000** and **£15,000** are available to support the project activity. (Colleges may bid as a consortium of two or more institutions for a larger pilot project and a grant of up to **£20,000**).The aim of the pilot projects is to provide an opportunity for colleges to develop their curriculum in order to better equip their students to meet screen industries skills needs. The outcomes will be shared with a range of MLSC stakeholders in order to drive forward change and good practice.

The pilot projects should: -

* **Focus on an identified below-the-line skills need** (including emergent/future needs) in the screen industries3: Applicant colleges will be required to justify the need and explain the way in which their training programme will help to address this, as well as how it will link to further training/career progression routes
* **Be a demonstrably new and additional activity for the college**: This could be for example, a new short course, supplementary units or modules for an existing course, a course which incorporates a training or work experience placement with the industry partner, a course to help students to adapt skills from other sectors which are needed by screen production, CPD for the screen sector workforce. Colleges are invited to make a case for their own innovative ideas
* **Not replace any existing college funding:** The MLSC grant must support completely new activity and related costs which could not currently be met by the college’s other funding
* **Include a minimum cash or in-kind match funding contribution of at least 15%** **of the total project costs** from the college, an industry partner or another stakeholder). Match funding can be cash or in-kind (e.g. use of venue or workshop/classroom space, staff time)
* **Involve at least one relevant industry partner in planning and or delivery**
* **Take account of groups which are currently underrepresented in the sector**, in terms of both recruitment and any special measures which might improve access
* **Be taken forward within the college beyond the project funding period:** Colleges will be required to explain how the activity will be integrated into forward planning, for e.g. through the college’s future Adult Skills Budget (ASB), other government funding, industry partnerships etc.

**The following costs are examples of what may be covered by the MLSC grant:**

-Staff time which is additional to core staff hours funded from other sources

-External venue hire to a maximum of 10% of the MLSC grant

-Small equipment (to a maximum of £1,000 in total)

-Specific operational costs (including materials) which can be clearly linked to the project

-General overheads to a maximum of 10% of the MLSC grant

**The following costs may not be covered by the MLSC grant:**

-Staff time which is already funded via the college’s core budget or other sources

-Equipment costing more than £1,000 in total

-Operational costs which are not specificially linked to the project (other than the 10%

general overheads costs)

-Costs relating to research (a case may be made for small surveys which support the development of the target curriculum)

-External evaluation

**Branding and dissemination**

Colleges receiving a grant from the Metro London Skills Cluster will be required to acknowledge the support of the MLSC (in accordance with the BFI Lottery brand guidelines which will be provided to successful applicants). They must also agree to sharing the outcomes of the pilot project with AoC member colleges and MLSC stakeholders, and (if required) to participate in Film London’s evaluation of the MLSC and the BFI’s external evaluation of the Skills Cluster Programme as a whole. The AoC and Film London will seek to organise a breakout session at the 2025 AoC conference as part of the dissemination.

**Duration of the pilot projects**

There is no minimum duration for a pilot project but project proposals should demonstrate how the time allocated for preparation, delivery and internal evaluation is appropriate to the project aims. The anticipated delivery period is February to June 2025 but applicant colleges may request a longer delivery period if this is better suited to the project.

**Assessment of Proposals**

The pilot project proposals will be assessed by a panel with representation from Film London, the AoC and screen industry representatives.

**Timetable**

Call for proposals published Week beginning 28 October 24

**Deadline for submission of proposals 6 December 24 (17.00)**

Grant awards announced 9 January 25

Contracts signed by 31 January 25

Delivery of pilot projects February to June 25

**Reporting**

Colleges in receipt of an FE Curriculum Partnerships grant will be asked to submit a brief update (progress and financial) at the mid-point of their projects and a final report. A proforma will be provided for both the update and the report.

**How to submit a proposal**

Please complete the **FE Curriculum Partnerships Fund Proposal form** (Word doc.) and the **Project Budget Proforma** (Excel doc.) and submit these by **17.00 on 6** **December 2024** to Diane Mullen, Skills Partnerships Consultant, Film London: [diane.mullen@filmlondon.org.uk](mailto:diane.mullen@filmlondon.org.uk)

**Any questions about the fund or the application process** should also be sent to Diane Mullen (as above).

**Information and resources**

Applicants may wish to refer to the BFI’s 10-year Strategy, **Screen Culture 2033**

https://blog.bfi.org.uk/

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**1BFI Skills Clusters** - <https://www.bfi.org.uk/get-funding-support/bfi-national-lottery-skills-clusters-fund>

**2Below-the-line** roles - Crew roles defined as ‘below-the-line’ make up the largest number of positions required for a production to operate smoothly and fulfil the vision of the creative team. These are the technical roles that are responsible for keeping operations on schedule; ensuring that equipment is fully functional; and making sure that the lights, set, props, and all other production aspects are ready for action. Examples include: Production Manager/Coordinator/Assistant; Production Designer; Editor; Assistant Director; Line Producer; Cimematographer; Art Director; Costume Designer; Hair & Make-up; Camera Operators and Grips; Lighting Technicians and Gaffers. Examples of **‘Above-the-Line’** roles include: Executive Producer; Director; Screenwriter; Casting Director

3 **Screen industries**: The film and TV (sometimes referred to as ‘physical’ production) and digital content production sectors (including animation, post-production, video games, visual effects (VFX), virtual production)