

# EARLY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

Delivered in partnership with

**FILM HUB NORTH**  
Showroom and HOME

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# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>WHAT IS BFI NETWORK EARLY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CAN I APPLY?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>WHAT CAN I APPLY FOR?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>HOW DO I MAKE AN APPLICATION?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>WHAT HAPPENS TO MY APPLICATION?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>FEEDBACK</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>RESUBMISSION</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>BFI LOTTERY FUNDING GENERAL CONDITIONS</b>	<b>20</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to BFI NETWORK. We invest National Lottery funds in original filmmaking from adventurous storytellers, with a focus on projects which respond to our core objectives which are to support:

- the early careers of ambitious filmmakers;
- filmmaking that takes risks on talent, form and content;
- work with cultural relevance or progressive ideas;
- work that recognises the quality of difference – in perspective, in talent, in recruitment;
- work from filmmakers based throughout the nation, not just in traditional industry centres.

BFI NETWORK is a collaboration between the BFI, national film organisations and leading cultural venues around the UK, including the five English Film Hubs of the BFI Film Audience Network. The partners are:

PLACE	PARTNER
England: Film Hub North	Showroom Sheffield and HOME Manchester
England: Film Hub Midlands	Broadway Nottingham & Flatpack Projects, Birmingham
England: Film Hub London	Film London
England: Film Hub South East	Independent Cinema Office
England: Film Hub South West	Watershed, Bristol
Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Screen
Scotland (in partnership with Screen Scotland)	Scottish Film Talent Network
Wales	Ffilm Cymru Wales
UK-wide Documentary Partner	Doc Society

The BFI NETWORK Early Development fund supports projects with writers based in England and is run in partnership with the five English Film Hubs. The Hubs employ BFI NETWORK Talent Executives who review applications and work with filmmakers on the delivery of funded projects. This England-wide partnership means that more voices in more places can contribute to distinctive, original storytelling.

# WHAT IS BFI NETWORK EARLY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING?

Early development is the first step in the BFI's support for live action and animated fiction projects from new feature writers. It supports people at the very beginning of their development process, prior to having the first draft of a script, to produce **an initial treatment and related materials**.

Successful applicants will receive a grant from the BFI together with oversight from a BFI NETWORK Talent Executive to support them in creating the documents. The Talent Executives provide creative input and feedback on the initial treatments and related work, and can assist projects in other ways: from connecting people with potential collaborators, to enabling them to consider how their ideas might impact with audiences. This support aims to propel your project towards its next stage of development and enable you to create the most effective materials to take out to other funders and pitch for further finance.

## WHAT SORT OF WORK CAN BE SUPPORTED?

The Early Development fund supports the costs of:

- writing time for an **initial treatment** document of up to ten pages;
- creating **visual materials** – a slide deck, mood board etc;
- **research** that contributes to developing your project idea;
- where applicable, **producer and director time** that contributes to your early development documents and research.

If you've already got a first or later draft of a feature script, or have a treatment you are happy with, then you should look at different funding options for the stage of development you are at: see [Other sources of support](#) below.

The fund is intended to stimulate new ideas and stories for feature length fiction films. It therefore doesn't support projects that have already attracted other investment, or adaptations of existing material by other writers: this includes biopics requiring the use of copyrighted material. It is fine for writers to seek funding for feature adaptations of their own work, including work developed for the stage, providing they hold the rights required to do so.

## WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT THIS FUNDING?

For other types of feature development support, it is usual for funding to be provided by a financier to a production company. This company then obtains all rights including copyright from their writer, in return for writer fees under the terms of a writer agreement. Instead, BFI NETWORK Early Development support aims to get you to the stage where you or your team have a sufficiently developed initial idea that you can successfully pitch to production companies and financiers. We won't therefore ask you to give away any of your rights in the idea to us or to a production company, and won't want you to enter into a writer agreement or similar contract.

That said, if at a later stage, and once you have a production company on board, you become eligible to apply to the main [BFI Development Fund](#), the usual conditions for development funding will then kick in, but we will guide you through the process if you reach this point.

## OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

- If you live in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, contact the [BFI NETWORK partner in your nation](#) to find out more about their funding for new filmmakers.
- If you're looking for documentary funding, you should go to the BFI Documentary Fund delivered by Doc Society, [here](#).
- If you are based in England and looking to produce a short film, there are separate guidelines available [here](#).
- If you are looking for funding for first draft screenplay onwards, you should consult the [BFI Development Fund](#) guidelines.
- For professional development opportunities please visit the [Funding Finder](#) on the BFI NETWORK website.



# CAN I APPLY?



Image: V

This fund is aimed at new feature writers based in England who have not yet written a feature film script that has been produced and received UK distribution. They will however have previously written one or more short films that have been produced, or have realised comparable work in another creative medium. This work will have received some industry recognition in the form of being showcased on a major platform in its field (e.g. festival, professional theatre, selection on a significant online outlet). Established writers in media other than film are welcome to apply.

If your project has a producer attached and you feel ready to seek first draft funding, you should look at the [BFI Development Fund](#) or alternative sources of support which might suit you better.

Each member of the core team involved in the project (writer and producer / director as applicable) will need to be able to demonstrate a creative track record as part of the application. This may be in film, television, theatre or another art form. All core team members need to be over 18 and not in full-time education.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE APPLYING?

If you are a team of more than one person, you will need to select one team member to complete the application form and be the lead contact. We will still consider the application as being submitted by the team, and make any award to this team. Applications cannot be made by companies or other organisations. It is fine for an individual to apply who is also working in a separate capacity for a production company.

## BFI DIVERSITY STANDARDS

Before applying you should read the [BFI Diversity Standards](#), a set of measures that prompt you to consider how your project can contribute to creating a more inclusive UK film industry. You'll be asked to respond to the Standards in your application.

## CHECKLIST BEFORE YOU APPLY

Please check that you meet the below criteria, and any other specifications made in these Guidelines, before submitting your application:

I'm seeking funding for a 'single project' work of fiction in live action or animation which will be at least 60 minutes in length

The writer, or at least one of the co-writers, of the project is / are resident in England<sup>1</sup>

The writer(s) of the project has not / have not written a fiction feature film that has been produced and received UK distribution

Each member of the project's core team (writer and producer / director as applicable) has a creative track record as described above and I can demonstrate this in the application

Each member of the project's core team (writer and producer / director as applicable) is aged 18 or over and not in full-time education

The story idea is capable of qualifying for certification as British through:

- i. One of the Cultural Tests<sup>2</sup>;
- ii. One of the UK's official co-production treaties; or
- iii. The European Convention on Co-Production

The project will be wholly original to me and my team and is not based on anyone else's pre-existing work

I believe that the story idea would be capable of obtaining a BBFC certificate which is no more restrictive than BBFC '18'

If a producer is attached to the application, this producer will complete and submit the application, putting their name as the lead contact

I have considered how the project will address the BFI Diversity Standards

### Speculative Submissions

We can only make awards to projects that have been submitted to us through the online application process. This means that we cannot accept, or read, informal submissions such as feature ideas or other materials submitted by any means other than the online application portal.

<sup>1</sup> It is fine for the remaining members of the core team (writer/director/producer) to be resident in other parts of the UK.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that your own assessment of your project as being capable of qualifying for certification does not mean that it will necessarily pass. Full guidance on British certification can be found on the BFI website at: [bfi.org.uk/film-industry/british-certification-tax-relief](https://www.bfi.org.uk/film-industry/british-certification-tax-relief)



# WHAT CAN I APPLY FOR?

When you fill in the application form you'll be asked to include a brief budget. There are specific costs that can be included in this ('eligible costs'), some of which are capped at a certain level. These are:

- up to £1,000 writer fee;
- up to £500 producer fee;
- the creation of visual materials where there are specific costs incurred;
- reasonable research and travel costs - these may include travel or accommodation, the costs of accessing materials or archives, subsistence while travelling or other relevant expenses.
- a director fee, if your project has a separate director attached. You will need to describe the level of input your director would have during early development in order to justify including this fee. In some cases we may decide not to support this element of your budget.
- costs associated with any personal access needs during the early development work. We define such needs as specific support required by people who are disabled or have a physical or mental health condition, which have an actual cash cost. For example: a BSL interpreter to work with a writer, director or producer; additional transport or accommodation costs for disabled team members; or a personal assistant for a team member with a learning disability or mental health condition to assist during project work;

While the writer and producer fee lines are capped at the levels shown above, there is no specific cap to the research and travel, access needs, visual materials or director fee lines (and therefore no formal cap to the overall amount you can request). You should request the actual amount you need and provide detail to justify this amount.

If there is more than one person fulfilling the same role on your project – e.g. you have two writers or co-producers – they would need to split the capped amount for this type of cost, and cannot request a double allocation.

We can't support the following items:

- payments to option the rights to adapt pre-existing, published works for the screen (such a project would be ineligible);
- script development costs or any work beyond initial treatment stage;
- general overheads or subsistence;
- legal fees or costs of preparing writer agreements or similar;
- director retainer fee (i.e. a fee that only retains their attachment to the project, where the director is not contributing directly to your early development materials);
- production costs, including for pilot material;
- costs that you have already incurred on your project prior to any potential award we may make;
- other items not described as eligible costs above.



# HOW DO I MAKE AN APPLICATION?

Applications for this funding are open once per year in the spring for a six-week application period. Details of the annual application window will be published on the [BFI NETWORK](#) website where you can also make an application.

When first using the online application portal you will be asked to create an account: this means you can save and review your applications before submission. You will be able to access all your previous and in-progress applications at any point by logging into [your account](#). If you need support in completing the application form please contact us on [bfinetwork@bfi.org.uk](mailto:bfinetwork@bfi.org.uk)

## EQUALITY MONITORING FORM

On starting an application you'll be asked to complete an Equality Monitoring Form, which opens up in a separate window. This collects data to help measure how effective the BFI is in attracting a diverse range of applicants. It requests information about the writer, director and producer (as applicable) on your project. When filling it in, you can select 'prefer not to say' if you'd rather not share the information requested.

## PROJECT AND TEAM

These sections ask you:

- for a description of your project idea. This will include telling us about your narrative (story, world, characters) and why you want to tell this story. The more you can give us a strong, compelling sense of your idea, the better. If you prefer you can submit a video answer rather than a written statement.
- for CV summaries for your writer, producer and director as applicable.
- how your project responds to the [BFI Diversity Standards](#), e.g. how it might address industry under-representation in relation to disability, gender, race, age, sexual orientation and / or socio-economic status. The information you provide for this answer may be anonymised and used to help inform future funding decisions, research and strategy.

## FINANCE

Here you should state the total amount you are seeking from the BFI, and in the Budget section break this cost down into line items corresponding to the eligible costs (as described in [What can I apply for?](#) above) that you would incur in early development.

## SUPPORTING MATERIALS

This section will ask you to provide detail on previous creative work from your core team members, such as short films, writing samples or visual art work. You can provide links to the work in this section, or alternatively, you can attach samples of previous work to the application at the Attachments section.

You can also provide links to any materials expressing your ideas for the project you are seeking funding for.

## ATTACHMENTS

At the end of the form you can also attach any other materials relevant to the project, if you've not provided links in the previous section.

# WHAT HAPPENS TO MY APPLICATION?

Once you have submitted your application, you'll receive a confirmation within 14 days of submission that it has been received and a unique reference number will be assigned to the application.

## A. ELIGIBILITY

We will check that your application is eligible for funding, using the criteria identified in [Can I Apply?](#) above. Incomplete applications will be considered ineligible so please ensure that you complete all sections of the application form with the information requested.

If your application is ineligible, we will send you an email to inform you of this. If you then realise you've made an error on your application which has rendered it ineligible, please tell us at this point, as we may still be able to assess it.

## B. ASSESSMENT

Your application will be assessed against the following criteria:

- its potential contribution to meeting the [stated objectives of the BFI Film Fund](#);
- the creative strengths of the proposal;
- the strengths of the project team;
- the likely career progression benefit for new filmmakers;
- how the story will connect with audiences;
- the impact your project could have in addressing the BFI Diversity Standards;
- the overall balance of projects receiving support, to ensure variety in the work being funded.

The assessment will also take into account how you have managed any previous BFI funding you may have received.



The Talent Executive in your writer's region will lead on making recommendations for funding to the BFI and will be your main point of contact. They may contact you to discuss your project, including to suggest you make revisions to your application prior to a final decision being made. You might be asked for further information, or to a meeting – this doesn't mean any commitment has been made to fund your project, but will help the Executive gather the information needed to make a decision.

All Early Development applications will also be reviewed by a representative from our independent pool of readers and industry consultants. In this way every application to the Early Development Fund will be reviewed at least twice.

The individuals involved in the independent pool will be required to maintain confidentiality regarding the application contents and agree not to retain application materials following their review.

### **Lottery Finance Committee Consideration**

Following assessment of each application, funding recommendations will be made to the BFI Lottery Finance Committee. This is the final stage of the funding decision process.

All applicants will be informed in writing of the decision on their application. If your application is declined, all supporting materials will be deleted from your submission in line with our record retention policy.

The decision of BFI NETWORK as to whether it wishes to support your application is final. There are circumstances in which a project can be re-submitted for support as a new application – please see [Resubmission](#) below.

## C. TIMELINE SUMMARY

STAGE	TIMELINE
Email acknowledgment of your application	Within two weeks of submission
Decision to progress or decline your application	We aim to take a final decision on your application within 12 weeks of the closing date for applications.

If we request additional materials from you, the amount of time it takes for you to supply these may have an impact on our ability to take a funding decision within the timeframes outlined above.

# FEEDBACK

We are only able to support a small percentage of the applications received and unfortunately have to say no far more often than we are able to say yes. When you make your application, you will be able to opt in or out of receiving feedback in the event that the application is declined. Feedback is given in the spirit of constructive comment and owing to the high level of applications we receive we will not be able to enter into dialogue about the project and its further development.

Some of the reasons we decline applications are:

- the project was not eligible for funding;
- it did not align with our [stated objectives](#) for this funding;
- we felt the material was too familiar or derivative;
- there was insufficient engagement with the BFI Diversity Standards.

We welcome constructive feedback from you on our application process, so we can continue to improve: please send any feedback to [bfinetwork@bfi.org.uk](mailto:bfinetwork@bfi.org.uk)

# RESUBMISSION



Image: Pink Suede Shoes

No resubmissions can be made to the NETWORK Early Development Fund for projects that it declines unless there is a substantial and significant change in elements. This is usually a significant rewrite of the material, or a different writer/ producer coming on board.

If you meet this criteria, you will need to contact your regional Talent Executive who may be able to invite a new application from you for the project, which can be submitted when the Fund re-opens. In any new application, please ensure that you clearly identify the revised elements of the project.

# SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

If your application is successful, you will be made an **offer of funding** as set out below. Following this, a Talent Executive will provide creative input and oversight of your project and will be your main point of contact as you complete your early development work. You may be invited to take part in some training and professional development events as part of your Early Development award.

You will be required to enter into an agreement with the BFI that sets out the terms and conditions of our funding. These conditions will include the following:

- 1** You will need to promise that the work being funded is wholly original to you and your team and that you are not using any other person's work (and therefore infringing someone else's copyright).
- 2** Unlike standard development funding, the BFI will not ask for a share of copyright in your project as a condition of this funding. We will however ask that the rights in the story idea are shared equally between all members of your team. You will not be asked to enter into a standard writer agreement at this point.
- 3** If at a later point, your project comes to us for standard development funding then we will help move you onto our standard terms of funding.
- 4** The award takes the form of a non-recoupable grant. If you are later successful in bringing this project through for [BFI Development Fund](#) support, a condition of that award would be that this earlier advance becomes repayable.
- 5** If you apply as a team of more than one person, you will need to nominate one person to whom we'll pay the award and provide us with the relevant bank account details.
- 6** The offer of funding will include a delivery date by which you should finish work on your development materials and submit them to the Talent Executive. They will provide comments and ask you to submit a revised, final version; this will also be delivered to the BFI. You will need to complete the development work by specified dates or the funding will have to be repaid. The final delivery date is generally three months following our offer of funding. If due to access support needs you require a longer period to complete the work, please let us know before we issue your funding agreement.



- 7** Development funding will be paid in stages (cashflowed), with the final payment subject to delivery to us of your initial treatment (including any related documents) in their final form. Any underspend on the award will be retained by, or reimbursed to, the BFI.
- 8** The support provided by BFI NETWORK is only possible because of the National Lottery. We ask the filmmakers we fund to do everything they can to acknowledge the National Lottery as the source of this funding. This includes displaying the National Lottery logo on your early development documents; in film credits if your film later goes into production; related marketing materials, press releases and on the front pages of project and organisational websites. We ask beneficiaries to actively acknowledge and spread the word about their project being made possible by money raised by National Lottery players, whenever they can. This includes mentioning the National Lottery, at a minimum, on press releases, on print and marketing materials, online including through social media, and when speaking to the industry and the wider public about the project.
- 9** You will be required to deliver against the undertakings made by you in relation to the BFI Diversity Standards. Failure to deliver against those undertakings without good cause may affect your ability to receive future project funding from the BFI.
- 10** You will be required to submit an Equality Monitoring Report at the end of the project. This will request information on the contributors to your project and where applicable will be used to measure success against the BFI Diversity Standards.
- 11** The agreement will include standard termination provisions.

# BFI LOTTERY FUNDING GENERAL CONDITIONS

- 1** The information in these guidelines can change. The law and Government regulations on distributing National Lottery funds may also change. The BFI therefore reserves the right to review this funding scheme and/or change its policies, procedures and assessment criteria.
- 2** The application form does not necessarily cover all the information the BFI uses to decide which applications to fund. The BFI can ask applicants for extra information.
- 3** All applications are made at the applicant's own risk. The BFI will not be liable for loss, damage or costs arising directly or indirectly from:
  - the application process;
  - the BFI's decision not to provide an award to an applicant; or
  - dealing with the application.
- 4** Please check your application form carefully. The BFI will not process applications which are incomplete or which do not comply with these guidelines.
- 5** The BFI's decisions on applications are final.
- 6** The BFI will not pay any funding until it has received a fully executed copy of the funding agreement and any conditions precedent to that agreement have been satisfied or waived by the BFI.
- 7** The BFI will publicise information on the number of applications it receives and the awards made. This information will include the name of the successful applicant, award amount, project name and project details.
- 8** The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to request certain information held by the BFI. This includes information held in relation to applications to the BFI's National Lottery funding programmes or schemes. Therefore if you choose to apply to the BFI you should be aware that the information you supply, either in whole or in part, may be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act.
- 9** Sometimes the BFI's Governors or members of staff may be involved in some way with applicants. This interest has to be declared in applications from such applicants. The relevant Governor or staff member will not be involved in assessing the application or the decision to make an award. Applicants are advised not to try to influence the success of their application by approaching a Governor or staff member.

**10** It is important that applicants carefully check the information given in the application form. The BFI Standard Terms and Conditions entitle it to withhold or reclaim an award in the following circumstances:

- if the application was filled in dishonestly or with incorrect or misleading information about the organisation or the project whether deliberately or accidentally; and
- if the award recipient acts dishonestly or negligently to the disadvantage of the project.

The BFI will follow up cases of suspected fraud and will pass information to the police.

**11** The BFI requires that any measures taken by applicants to address under-representation are fully in compliance with the Equality Act 2010 – see more at [equalityhumanrights.com](http://equalityhumanrights.com)

**12** Complaints and Appeals: The BFI's decision is final. Inevitably applications will be turned down and applicants may be disappointed by this result. Formal appeals against the final decision will not be considered unless the applicant has good cause to believe that the procedures for processing the application were not adhered to, or applied in such a way as to prejudice the outcome of the application. A copy of the BFI's Complaints and Appeals procedure can be obtained on request from the BFI's Communications Office.

**13** Recognition of the National Lottery:

The BFI distributes 'good cause' National Lottery Funding. We ask all of our partners and award recipients to increase the visibility of the National Lottery by:

- promoting and proudly displaying the National Lottery logo; and
- warmly and energetically finding ways to get all beneficiaries to spread the word.

It is therefore an important condition of BFI funding that the source of the funding (being the National Lottery) is prominently acknowledged through conspicuous use of the BFI/National Lottery lock up logo and through agreed verbal and written acknowledgement. Also that partners and beneficiaries take frequent opportunities to highlight not just the fact of the funding but why it is funded and therefore the good work that is possible through the National Lottery.