East of England
All Party Parliamentary Group
Co-Chairs: Jess Asato MP & Pam Cox MP
Vice-Chairs: Blake Stephenson MP & Marie Goldman MP

NON-VERBATIM MINUTE

Stimulating Growth of the Film & Television Industry in the East of England

Held Tuesday 16th June in Room C, 1 Parliament Street, Westminster

- **Jess Asato MP and Co-Chair, East of England APPG,** welcomed attendees and noted that the meeting was examining an area not always at the centre of the APPG's work, which had often focused more heavily on transport, housing and related infrastructure issues. She said it was important, however, to give proper attention to the creative industries and to the contribution they already made, and could make more fully, to the East of England's economy.

- She explained that the purpose of the session was to explore how further growth in the film and television industry across the East of England could help unlock a vibrant but still under-recognised part of the regional economy. In particular, she said the discussion would consider the sector's potential to generate economic growth and to create opportunities in the region for talented young people.

How the growth of the film and television industry in the East of England would unlock the vibrant, creative industry in an untapped area of the country, generate economic growth and create opportunities in the region for talented young people

- **Jamie Hall, Head of Scripted, BBC Studios,** said he was speaking in a personal capacity and began by reflecting on his own path into the industry. Having grown up in Norfolk without family connections to film or television and having left school with no qualifications, he said the sector had nonetheless given him a highly rewarding career. He explained that this personal experience had shaped his desire to widen access for others from the East of England.

- He said that, through his involvement with Speakers for Schools, he had chosen specifically to speak to schools in the East of England. The response from pupils, he said, had been strikingly positive, with many showing strong enthusiasm for careers in the screen industries. At the same time, he had been struck by their frustration that there were so few opportunities to pursue those ambitions within the region itself.

- Jamie said this had prompted him to begin working with others, including Claire Chapman, Debbie Gray and Chris Bird, to consider how a sustainable media industry could be built in the East of England. He argued that this was not a marginal issue, but part of a wider national success story. Referring to the scale of the UK's creative industries, he said the sector already made a major contribution to the economy and represented an area in which the UK had genuine international strength.

- However, he said that the benefits of that success were not being shared evenly, and that too many young people in the East of England still had no realistic route into the industry without leaving the region. He argued that this needed to change, both to create high-value employment locally and to ensure that the region was more fully represented culturally on screen.

- He explained that initial work had already begun, including a submission to the BBC Charter review and engagement with the BBC and with screen agencies in the North East, in order to understand how investment and capacity had been built there. He stressed, however, that this should not be seen simply as an issue for the BBC to resolve. In his view, there was a broader opportunity for public and private investment to work together to create a sustainable screen sector in the East of England. He said the meeting was intended as part of the early effort to define both the challenges and the scale of that opportunity.

- **Debbie Gray Founder and Managing Director, Genesius Pictures** said she had spent more than two decades working in film and had founded Genesius Pictures in 2013. Over that period, she had produced around 17 feature films and had remained based in Norfolk, while also devoting significant time to mentoring and supporting people seeking to enter the industry.

- She said a recurring frustration had been the lack of support for a sustainable screen industry in the East of England. In her view, the region had considerable creative talent and strong educational institutions, including well-regarded writing and creative courses, but too many people were ultimately forced to leave in order to build careers elsewhere. She described this as a continuing drain of talent from the region, with many ending up in London or relocating to better-established production centres in the North East or North West.

- Debbie welcomed the opportunity to contribute to a more coordinated effort to strengthen the sector in the East of England. She noted that, together with others in the region, she had for some time been trying to draw attention to both the challenges and the opportunities involved.

- Drawing on recent production experience, she referred to a film she had made in Norwich starring Emma Thompson and to more recent filming in the area by other producers. In both cases, she said, there had been efforts to recruit locally, but the lack of an established regional production base meant that many staff still had to be brought in from elsewhere. For Debbie, this illustrated the central issue: the East of England had the potential to host more screen production, but without investment and support to build local capacity, producers would continue to rely on talent and crews from outside the region.

- **Claire Chapman Managing Director, Norfolk Screen** explained that Norfolk Screen had been established as the county's official film office, with support from Norfolk County Council, in order to promote Norfolk as a film-friendly destination and provide a clearer point of contact for productions looking to work in the region. She said that, for many years, there had been no obvious route for producers seeking to film in Norfolk unless they already had personal contacts, and that creating a more formal structure had helped attract more interest and build stronger relationships with the industry.

- Norfolk Screen had initially been set up on a voluntary basis and had later received council funding, which had enabled it to develop its website and professionalise its offer. As a result, the organisation has supported a growing number of productions interested in filming in the county.

- However, Claire said two major challenges remained. The first was the limited availability of local crew and talent. While Norfolk Screen could help producers secure locations and practical support, it could not yet offer the depth of workforce needed to sustain larger-scale production, because many skilled people were not based in the region or were forced to find work elsewhere.

- The second issue was the lack of financial incentives. Claire said that many productions were attracted to Norfolk because of what the region could offer on screen, but in practice often needed some degree of incentive to make filming in the area commercially viable. She gave the example that, over the previous two and a half years, Norfolk Screen had received seven enquiries from productions wishing to shoot in Norfolk. Together, those productions had sought around £2.7 million in support, but the estimated lost value to the region from not securing them was approximately £31 million.

- Claire argued that the region therefore needed not only one-off successes, but a more consistent pipeline of production. Without a reliable base of work over several years, she said, people could not realistically build careers or family lives in the East of England screen sector. In her view, sustained production activity would be essential if the region was to retain talent and develop a stable industry of its own.

- **Chris Bird, CEO, Hawkshead AI,** said his own route into the industry closely mirrored Jamie Hall's. Having grown up in Great Yarmouth, he had not assumed that a career in the creative industries would be open to him while living in a coastal town in Norfolk. Although he had ultimately entered the sector after university, he said that, when returning to speak to young people in the region, he remained conscious that many still faced the same basic problem: if they wanted a sustained career in film and television, they would most likely have to leave.

- He said the aim should be to reverse that pattern by creating an ecosystem in the East of England capable of attracting investment, infrastructure and long-term opportunity. In his view, the region needed not only isolated productions but a self-reinforcing cycle of activity that could support careers and allow talented young people to remain in the area.
- Chris argued that one of the first steps was to build a stronger collective voice for the East of England screen sector. Drawing on his experience in senior roles within the industry, he said it had often been easy for major organisations to overlook the East because the region lacked the coordinated advocacy seen elsewhere. Bringing together producers, local leaders and parliamentarians in a more organised way would be an important part of changing that.
- He also outlined work under way to assess the economic case for investment in the region. He said his company had begun a detailed economic evaluation, drawing in part on previous research by Pact on the value of public investment in screen production across different parts of the UK. He noted that, while tens of millions of pounds of public support were already directed to other regions, the East of England currently received none of that funding. On the basis of early analysis, he suggested that even a relatively modest level of support for the East, comparable on a per capita basis to the lowest-funded region elsewhere, could unlock substantial production spending

and wider spillover benefits across hospitality, tourism, technology and research and development.

- In Chris's view, that initial investment could help create the conditions for a more durable industry, including studio space, stronger production companies and clearer career pathways. Once those foundations were in place, he argued, the region would be better positioned to sustain its own growth and retain more of its creative talent. He said the next step would be to complete this work and return with a more specific request for support in securing the investment needed.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Funding, incentives and the regional gap

- A central discussion point was how public support for screen production operated elsewhere in the UK and why the East of England had so little access to comparable backing. Chris Curley of PACT explained that public investment in other nations and regions was typically justified on economic rather than purely cultural grounds, with support designed to attract productions, grow local businesses and retain spending in the area. PACT's recent work on the economic returns generated by regional screen investment showed that, while significant public funding was available in other parts of the UK, none of this currently reached the East of England. The discussion suggested this had created a postcode lottery within England, with producers in some regions able to access structured support while those in the East remained at a disadvantage.

- Several speakers returned to the practical effect of this imbalance. Jamie Hall noted that production decisions were often being driven less by where a story ought naturally to be made and more by where finance was available. As a result, productions set in the East of England were frequently being shot elsewhere. Others working in the industry echoed this point, observing that this was not simply frustrating in cultural terms, but meant employment, spending and long-term investment were also being lost to other parts of the country.

The need for a stronger regional voice

- A related theme was the relative invisibility of the East of England within national screen policy and funding discussions. Chris Bird argued that the region had too often been easy to overlook because it lacked the coordinated advocacy and institutional presence seen elsewhere. Contributors generally agreed that one of the first requirements was therefore to establish a clearer and more unified case for the region, supported by stronger evidence and more consistent engagement with decision-makers.

- There was also discussion about what geographic footprint such an effort should have. Claire Chapman noted the group's initial focus had been on Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridge, reflecting the places most actively involved in the current work. However, others, including representatives from Hertfordshire and Cambridge, suggested that any future strategy might need to think more broadly about the East of England as a set of connected but distinct clusters, some of which faced similar structural barriers even where they already had a degree of industry presence.

Infrastructure, ecosystem and long-term sustainability

- A further discussion point was the difference between attracting occasional productions and building a sustainable industry. Several contributors stressed the region did not simply need isolated projects, but a functioning ecosystem capable of supporting careers over time. This included production companies, crew, training pathways, studio and post-production infrastructure, and the wider commercial conditions that would enable people to stay in the East.
- Jamie Hall pointed to examples from elsewhere in the UK where long-running productions had created the stability needed for freelancers and production staff to base themselves permanently in a region. The wider point was that, without a reliable flow of work, people could not realistically build a life in the East of England screen sector. Chris Bird similarly argued that the goal should be to create a self-reinforcing cycle in which early investment would generate more production, stronger companies, better infrastructure and greater confidence to remain.

Talent retention and entry routes for young people

- There was strong agreement that the East of England was rich in creative talent, but that the absence of a local industry meant too many people still had to leave in order to build careers. This point was reinforced by a number of participants who had grown up in the region and had themselves entered the industry only by moving elsewhere. It was also reflected in the experiences of those still based in the East, who described the difficulty of securing work experience, local placements or practical routes into the sector.

- Helen Serafinowicz, speaking as a writer and producer based in Norwich, said she had ideas for projects rooted in Norfolk and the surrounding area, but lacked access to development support that would allow those ideas to progress locally. Chloe Thomas, a freelance director based in Cambridge, similarly described the difficulty of offering work experience or practical opportunities in the region when productions and employers were concentrated elsewhere. These examples reinforced the broader argument that the issue was not a shortage of ambition or ideas, but the absence of the funding, structures and continuity needed to turn local talent into local careers.

Development funding and intellectual property

- Alongside production incentives, discussion also highlighted the importance of early-stage development funding. It was argued that, if the East of England wanted more content genuinely rooted in the region, it would need support not only to attract inward investment but also to help creators develop original ideas and retain intellectual property. Contributors noted that creating television and film projects was often a long and expensive process, and that many promising ideas stalled before they could reach commissioners or investors.

- This led to a broader point about ownership and long-term value. Developing IP in the region was seen not just as a creative issue but as an economic one, since ownership could generate ongoing returns and help anchor future production activity locally. The discussion suggested that a regional strategy should therefore consider both ends of the pipeline: attracting productions from outside, and supporting regionally based creators to originate and grow work of their own.

The role of universities, research and innovation

- There was substantial discussion about the role universities and higher education institutions could play, though views differed on where that contribution would be most useful. One line of argument stressed the importance of universities in training, collaboration and supporting students into the industry. Another cautioned against treating film and television primarily as a university-led or cultural initiative, arguing instead that the sector needed to be understood first and foremost as a commercial industry.
- A more developed consensus emerged around the idea that universities could play a particularly valuable role in research, innovation and skills partnerships, especially where these connected to wider regional strengths such as gaming, technology, AI, immersive content and research and development. Representatives from higher education highlighted their willingness to engage more actively, while others pointed to models elsewhere in which universities had supported not only teaching but also wider industrial development. The overall sense was that universities should form part of the regional ecosystem, but not substitute for the need for a commercially grounded screen strategy.

Local authority and partnership models

- The discussion also explored whether, in the absence of devolved structures, more could be done through local authorities, business partnerships and other regional bodies. Jeremy Newmark outlined work in Hertfordshire to assemble alternative funding and partnership arrangements, bringing together councils, business support structures and private-sector partners to create a more investable environment for the screen industries. He argued that, while the East lacked the public funding advantages enjoyed by combined authorities and devolved administrations, there were still lessons to be learned from local collaboration and ecosystem-building.

- Jess Asato MP reflected that the current policy environment made the case for devolution more compelling, but also asked whether interim approaches could be pursued through county, district and business-led partnerships. In response, contributors suggested some support and investment routes might exist, but that they were not yet visible, coherent or easy for the screen sector to access. That reinforced the case for a clearer front door and stronger regional coordination.

Conclusions and next steps: Jess Asato MP, Co-Chair, EE APPG

- In closing, Jess Asato MP thanked speakers and attendees for a valuable discussion and said the meeting had made a strong case that the film and television industry in the East of England should be seen not as a niche cultural issue, but as a serious economic opportunity for the region. She noted that the discussion had underlined both the scale of the untapped potential and the extent to which the East continued to be overlooked in current funding and support structures.

- There was agreement that the APPG should now follow up in writing to Lisa Nandy MP (DCMS Secretary) and Steve Reed MP (MHCLG Secretary), drawing together the evidence presented during the meeting and setting out the case for stronger support for the screen sector in the East of England. It was suggested that this correspondence should include the economic arguments discussed, the challenges around talent loss and underinvestment, and the need to ensure the region was not left behind as future devolution and investment arrangements developed. In addition to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, it was suggested that relevant ministers with responsibility for regional growth and local government should also be included, reflecting the fact that the issue sat across culture, economic development and devolution.

- Jess said APPG officers would prepare a draft letter for parliamentary colleagues to review and sign. She encouraged participants to remain in contact and continue sharing ideas and evidence, noting that the discussion had shown there was a strong basis for continued work in this area. The meeting ended with a sense that this should be the start of a more sustained effort to secure recognition and support for the screen industries in the East of England.

ATTENDEES

Parliamentarians	Role
Jess Asato MP	Co-Chair, East of England APPG Member of Parliament for Lowestoft
James Wild MP	Shadow Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury Member of Parliament for North West Norfolk
Danel Zeichner MP	Member of Parliament for Cambridge
Adrian Ramsay MP	Member of Parliament for Waveney Valley
Jack Manners	Office of Alice Macdonald MP, Member of Parliament for Norwich North

Name	Role	Organisation
Chris Bird	CEO	Hawkshead AI
Debbie Gray	Founder and Managing Director	Genesius Pictures
Jamie Hall	Head of Scripted	BBC Studios
Adam Thorp	Director of Policy and Corporate Services	Local Government East
Ben Martin	Director of Regeneration & Growth	Watford Borough Council
Professor Catherine Lee MBE	Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean for the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, Education and Social Sciences	Anglia Ruskin University
Charlie Gauvain	Managing Director	Eye Film
Chloë Thomas	Director	One Glove Production
Chris Curley	Head of Nations and Regions	PACT
Claire Chapman	Managing Director	Norfolk Screen
Dinah Lord	Co-Founder and Managing Director	Caravan Media
Helen Serafinowicz	Writer and Producer	
Cllr Jeremy Newmark	Leader	Hertsmere Borough Council
Louis O'Halloran	Account Director	Inflect
Steve Barwick	Director	East of England APPG

Disclaimer: Please note that these are non-verbatim meeting notes. They have been prepared using a combination of contemporaneous notes and an AI-driven transcript, and have been edited for clarity, structure and concision. They should be understood as an interpretation and summary of the discussion, and participants should not be taken to have expressed themselves in precisely the terms recorded here