

# How to be a Participant

## What's in here?

This is a detailed description of the participant role in **Get the Picture** study groups, and includes

- some of the thinking behind **Get the Picture** learning programmes
- what is expected of participants in their individual and group work, including mutual support, as they work through the learning materials
- the role of the enabler in the group, and how to support them
- a suggested study routine and ways of preparing for discussions
- what to expect from group discussion.

The model for the role of participant described below has been developed and tested over a number of months with the help of participants in trials groups, who were extremely generous with their time in checking the effectiveness of the approach and study materials.

## Where do these notes fit in?

These notes are intended to help you as a participant in the **Get the Picture** film study programme. You have probably already read the *Programme Guide* for the Story of Film programme, and if you are an enabler, you should also have read the guidance notes *How to be an Enabler*. You should have the *Study Notes* for the five chapters in this segment of the programme to hand, but you should read this advice note first, before you turn to the *Study Notes* for the first chapter.

## Why are you giving me advice about this?

This film study programme is, as far as we know, unique in its approach. We're trying to set up self-managed study groups which will, in the spirit and tradition of the community cinema movement, find from within themselves the motivation and expertise to ensure a fulfilling learning experience for all participants. It's a highly ambitious aim, and **Get the Picture** is too small an organization to give you the hands-on support that would ensure a positive outcome. So we're doing what we can to set things up with the greatest possible chance of success, by describing in advance what we think will lead to that success.

## Why has the programme been developed?

We explained briefly in the *Programme Guide* how the **Get the Picture** film study programme has been created because adult informal education in film in the UK has all but disappeared in the last 10 years. Once upon a time you could more or less rely upon your local FE college to provide a 10-week programme at a reasonable cost, with a tutor showing films, and running discussions or seminars about them. These courses were informal in the sense that they provided no particular qualification, and were undertaken by adults who simply wanted to develop their knowledge and appreciation of film. That desire still exists, but is unsatisfied, and the lack is most keenly felt in film societies and community cinemas. You may be lucky enough to live in an area where a local university or the WEA has stepped into the breach, but for those who don't, we hope this programme helps.

## Who will become participants?

It's a fair assumption that the main thing which participants in this scheme will have clearly in common is that they are participants in this scheme. There won't be any standard-issue participants, any more than there are standard-issue film society members. Participants will of course share a desire to know and understand more about film, but beyond that, we anticipate a huge range of levels of starting knowledge, of educational experience, of ability to undertake self-managed study, of motivation, and of ability to talk about ideas. There will also be huge variations in the amount of time that individual participants will be able to commit to study. It should be clear that film study groups will only work if participants share a high degree of tolerance of all these differences between people, and of the differences between individual participants' needs in the learning process.

## What are the programme's aims?

The full aims are listed in the *Programme Guide*. By the time you have completed the segment of the programme you are embarking on, you should be seeing more in the films you are viewing, and you should be better able to think and talk about them. You should have a more detailed knowledge of the history of film, and you should have developed some new ways of learning about film, and of managing that learning.

## Where do responsibilities lie in the study group?

Your group can only function if one person - it may be you - has stepped forward to do the necessary work to make the experience happen. This person, the enabler, has responsibilities to **Get the Picture** (to report that your groups exists, and who is in it, to receive and distribute documents like this one), and to you (to schedule and chair meetings, to find accommodation, and so on).

But as a participant you have responsibilities to your enabler as well. It may be the first time they've ever done anything like it, and they may need your support and help. It may be that they try to bring to the task skills they've learned in the workplace, which doesn't necessarily always work, so they may need your advice. One thing is clear. If your group is not working too well, it's the responsibility of everyone in it, not just the enabler, to work out what to do. And remember, your enabler is also a participant like you, so they should be encouraged to contribute to the discussion.

## What should I expect from a study group discussion?

There are two things above all that you should expect to take away from each study group discussion. First, you will have gained some understanding of what you yourself think, by having to put it into words and explain it to other people. And second, you will know that there are other ways of looking at the issue under discussion. You may be lucky enough to have discovered that your viewpoint is not wholly right, and that you have had to change your mind. This is learning, and it is a powerful and exciting experience. The one thing to avoid doing at all costs yourself, and something you shouldn't expect from your fellow group-members, is any kind of competitive dimension to the discussion. If one person wants to win, everybody loses. For the group to work, you will have to say what you think, but for you to speak, others must listen, and then it's their turn to speak. A study group will work best if it functions like a team with a common goal, or a dance group, in which participants' respect and support for each other leads to the satisfying delivery of that common goal.

In a guided study programme like this where the emphasis is on learning, we recommend that refreshment breaks are carefully timed, and possibly left until the end of the discussion. To do this is to recognize the value of the time that all participants have given up to be there.

### How should I create a good study routine?

First, the group needs to set up an agreed schedule that gives everybody enough time to prepare for each discussion meeting. We think that for most groups, meetings need to be at minimum two weeks apart, and perhaps double that. Then you personally will need to set aside time for the following activities

- a personal review of what you want to get out of the study process. This will entail setting yourself some learning objectives (which may, but won't necessarily, be the same as those of the rest of the group)
- a careful reading of the relevant *Study Notes*
- a first viewing of the relevant chapter of *The Story of Film*
- reading and thinking about the topics your group has chosen to discuss
- a second viewing of the relevant chapter of *The Story of Film*
- preparation for the next discussion (including viewing the key films)
- individual activities, including online reading, viewing of YouTube clips, reading of background material etc.

We suggest you set aside at least one or two regular evenings devoted to your studies and preparation (especially if you need to negotiate for computer access). The important thing to focus on is that you should go to each discussion meeting, and go prepared. There's nothing more demotivating than finding that your group partners haven't bothered to do the work to make a discussion as vibrant and absorbing as it can and should be. It's a bit like finding out that other members of a book group haven't read the book.

As a participant your contribution to discussions will benefit the whole group, so if you can't get to a meeting, you should consider providing a contribution through your enabler.

### Summary - being a successful participant

A successful participant will

- think about what they want to achieve as part of their study group, including setting themselves some personal learning objectives
- do the agreed or suggested preparation for each discussion
- attend all discussions and meetings
- contribute and ensure others are encouraged to do likewise
- support the enabler and each other to aid the smooth running of the learning process
- listen to others as they would want to be listened to themselves
- reflect on their own learning against their objectives.

You can be assured that at our end we will be doing our best to make sure the experience of everyone in the **Get the Picture** film study programme is as good as it can be.