

# MAKING IT REAL

## A POLICY PROGRAMME FOR UK DOCUMENTARY FILM

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and Andrew Spicer



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a new policy programme for the UK documentary film sector. Based on the extensive consultation that followed our previous report, *Keeping It Real: Towards a Documentary Film Policy for the UK (2020)* – itself based on the largest ever survey of feature documentary filmmakers in the UK – the programme consists of seven sections of detailed proposals which, if enacted, will have a transformative and long-term impact on the sector’s cultural and economic contribution to the UK screen industries.

That such an intervention is needed is beyond dispute. Partly because of the ways in which the sector has evolved over the past two decades, UK documentary film has fallen through the cracks in both film and television policy. As a result, as evidenced in *Keeping It Real*, the sector is chronically under-funded, under-valued and rarely understood by those operating outside or on the margins of the field. The lack of an overarching policy framework is also a major contributing factor to the lack of diversity, coordination, structure and transparency in the sector. Addressing these challenges requires both structural transformation and detailed, coordinated and ambitious interventions across the value chain.

**Section 1, ‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)’**, contains the explicit DEI recommendations in the programme. It consists of nine recommendations ranging from the creation of a diverse crew database and the development of distinct diversity targets for the nations and regions to ways of addressing more underlying problems, such as toxic work cultures and institutional whiteness. However, we urge policymakers to read the entire report through a DEI lens. Under-representation in the screen industries is a systemic problem that cannot be addressed solely by standalone diversity initiatives, important though these are. Systemic problems ultimately require systemic changes. Therefore, building a more diverse, equal and inclusive sector depends upon these explicit DEI recommendations being implemented as part of the wider programme of proposals to, for example, increase funding and enhance transparency and coordination across the industry.

**Section 2, ‘Sector development’**, sets out a new organisational infrastructure for the sector that consists of a Documentary Film Council comprised of representatives from ten sub-groups: Doc Producers UK (DPUK), which represents producers in the sector and is being set-up at the time of writing; a Directors’ Group that we anticipate will be part of Directors UK; the UK Doc Group, which consists of organisations dedicated to or active in the documentary sector, and which was convened in March 2020, partly in response to the coronavirus epidemic; and seven working groups:

Broadcast Documentary; Distribution and Exhibition; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Mental Health and Wellbeing; Documentary Tax Relief; and Training, Education and Research. Section 2 also includes recommendations targeted at various sector priorities that were identified during the consultation. These will require coordination at Council level and include the commissioning of an economic valuation of the sector, raising its cultural status, addressing the mental health crisis among documentary filmmakers and enhancing support across the nations and regions.

**Section 3, 'Training, education and research'** includes a range of recommendations designed to address gaps in provision and improve the coordination of support for different roles and career stages in different part of the country. It also outlines plans to develop the sector's relationship with Higher Education Institutions. Key recommendations here include auditing training provision across the sector; enhancing producers' abilities to develop international co-productions and access private investment; extending mentoring programmes for early- and mid-career workers; and collating a living document, to be shared by organisations across the sector, that includes essential information and advice for new and emerging talent. This section also includes a range of recommendations for further research on the documentary film industry, including proposals for more granular data on documentary in the BFI's *Statistical Yearbooks* as well as research on audiences, consumption habits and nonfiction policy frameworks overseas.

**Section 4, 'Funding and production'**, proposes a range of measures designed to boost production funding across various parts of the industry. It also aims to address some of the structural problems that make the documentary industry such an inhospitable environment in which to build a career. This section includes relatively straightforward recommendations – such as increasing the proportion of BFI production funds allocated to documentary (from just 8.6 per cent to between 20–25 per cent) and ring-fencing funds for documentary in Creative Europe replacement funding – to more complex and ambitious proposals such as a 2 per cent levy on SVOD revenues and the introduction of a Documentary Tax Relief. This section also proposes a range of measures to enhance best practice among funders, such as the institution of a Fair Pay Charter; making previously successful grant applications publicly available; instituting minimum levels of feedback; and participating in the Documentary Core Application Project, a US initiative designed to standardise grant applications and reduce the unpaid labour time required to complete them.

**Section 5, 'Broadcast'**, focuses on broadcasters' relationships with documentary filmmakers. We recognise that these are exceptionally challenging times for UK Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) and, while this section includes a range of proposals for increasing broadcasters'

funding for documentary film, we accept that these will be difficult to enact in the short-term. However, PSBs do have a critical role to play in creating a healthy independent UK documentary sector and it is therefore essential these recommendations stay on the agenda. These include increasing Storyville's budget to a level commensurate with its competitors in Europe; developing Channel 4 and Film 4's involvement in the sector, including the return of a series to match Storyville; and reviewing the contribution that commercial broadcasters can make to UK independent film. In addition to funding, this section also identifies a range of opportunities to develop relationships between national and international broadcasters and the documentary film sector.

**Section 6, 'Distribution and exhibition'**, sets out a range of recommendations designed to foster a more symbiotic relationship between distributors, exhibitors and their colleagues in the production sector. Key to this section are proposals designed to address the disparity between funds for production and funds for distribution and exhibition – a major contributing factor to the oversaturation of the market and the inability of distributors and exhibitors to adequately support production. We suggest that only with dedicated funds will it be possible to ensure a more balanced relationship between production, distribution and exhibition, and that funds for documentary should thus be ring-fenced in budgets for both BFI FAN and Audience Development funds. Section 6 also includes a range of recommendations beyond funding, from enhancing coordination among exhibitors, developing documentary's role in the BFI's Film Audience Network and increasing public access to festival circuit films, to reviewing release systems, maximising opportunities for UK films in the international market and developing incentive schemes to encourage bolder approaches to documentary programming.

**Section 7, 'Screen heritage'**, addresses the range of issues revealed in consultation regarding the access to and use of archive material on the part of producers, directors, editors and curators. These issues raise urgent political and aesthetic questions as well as practical and economic ones because they limit access to the UK's screen history and the way in which it is used in the present. Recommendations in this section include the development of clearer and more equitable methods of accessing screen heritage, such as a scaled rate card and a code of practice for fair use – something which has proved beneficial to US filmmakers but does not exist in the UK at present – as well as proposals to ensure filmmakers are better equipped to work with archival material and to understand the costs involved.



# INTRODUCTION

This report sets out a programme of policy recommendations designed to help foster an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous documentary film sector in the UK. It builds on the preliminary recommendations published as part of *Keeping It Real: Towards A Documentary Film Policy for the UK* in June 2020, a report that presented the findings of the largest survey ever conducted of UK feature documentary producers and directors, which was launched at Doc/Fest in 2019. The 70-page report presented a wide range of findings that spanned issues including diversity and inclusion, income and experience, budgets and financing, training and education needs, mental health and wellbeing, and was illustrated with case-studies of 12 producers and directors working in the field today.

The findings in *Keeping It Real* provided evidence for what many in the sector already knew: that UK documentary is chronically under-funded, under-valued and rarely understood even by executives in the wider screen industries; that it lacks diversity, coordination, structure and transparency; and that the form is culturally marginalised by a system so oriented towards fiction and drama that documentary's existence as a unique and coherent ecosystem is barely recognised. With a view to addressing these rather dire conditions, the report included a series of preliminary recommendations based on its findings. Those recommendations then formed the basis for the 7-week consultation that took place following the report's publication.

This document represents the revised and expanded programme of proposals that are the result of that consultation process. The consultation consisted of a series of events – including a panel of producers, directors and researchers at Sheffield Doc/Fest; a series of 12 themed focus groups with 60 representatives from all facets of the industry;<sup>1</sup> and a meeting of commissioners representing broadcasters in the UK, Europe and US – several private conversations with freelancers and institutional stakeholders across the sector, and many individual submissions of written feedback. Throughout, participants were invited to reflect on the preliminary recommendations, identify any omissions or additions, and to discuss how best to implement the wide-ranging changes that are needed across the sector.

The enormous collective expertise generated by the consultation was recorded, analysed and translated by the UK Feature Docs research team into the programme of recommendations below, drafts of which have been discussed with stakeholders and amended where appropriate. Many recommendations in *Keeping It Real* were unanimously welcomed and have been carried over with little or no changes. Others have been



*African Apocalypse*  
(dir. Rob Lemkin, 2020)  
© Voulet Film Company Ltd

amended and some are entirely new, having emerged from the consultation. In particular, the **'Screen Heritage'** and **'Distribution and Exhibition'** sections are based on a combination of data from the consultation as well as a series of interviews that were conducted in parallel to the survey of producers and directors on which *Keeping It Real* was based. As noted in the original report, this work was beyond the scope of that publication and so it appears here for the first time.

The programme consists of seven interrelated sections: **1) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); 2) Sector development; 3) Training, education and research; 4) Funding and production; 5) Broadcast; 6) Exhibition and distribution** and **7) Screen heritage**. At the heart of the recommendations is a new organisational structure – a documentary council comprised of a range of task-based and sector-specific groups outlined in detail in **section 2** – that is designed to facilitate effective coordination across the different sub-sectors of the industry and to provide an effective means through which the rest of the recommendations in the programme can be analysed, refined and implemented.

We should note that none of the proposals presented here are intended to be read as fixed or final directions. Policy change – particularly that which ultimately seeks system change – takes time and is a collaborative and iterative process. This policy programme is intended to provide a platform to help the documentary community take that process to the next stage, and we fully expect the recommendations detailed here to evolve accordingly. Furthermore, we also appreciate that instituting the kinds of changes suggested in this document will require hard work and commitment on the part of those involved, many of whom are freelancers who should be paid for their part in this process. With the approval of those in the documentary community with whom we have worked so far, we intend to apply for further funds from the UK Research and Innovation Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to help support this process.

Finally, readers will note that, despite the comprehensiveness of the rest of the programme, there is no section dedicated to COVID-19. This may seem odd, particularly at a time when the pandemic is such a dominant and destructive feature of daily life, not least for those in the screen industries. The coronavirus has been an inescapable background to this work, all of which, from the publication of *Keeping It Real* onwards, has taken place during the pandemic. But the virus is not the focus here. Right now, all the immediate resources and attention of government and the screen industries – via the Screen Sector Task Force – are necessarily focused on dealing with the crisis. Our role, and that of the many stakeholders who have contributed to this process, is resolutely more forward-facing and longer-term: to conceive and develop a policy programme that will build a renewed documentary sector that thrives across all platforms at home and abroad, and which maximises its cultural and economic value for the film and television industries and society at large.

The *Keeping It Real* report and this follow-up report are key outputs from the UK Feature Docs research project, which is funded by the AHRC, one of the seven research councils that form part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). To find out more about the project or to get in touch, please visit <https://ukfd.org.uk/>.

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)

Arguably the key message from the consultation was that structural, systemic changes are required if the sector is to begin to address its significant problems with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). This necessarily means going beyond standalone 'diversity' initiatives instituted by individual organisations. DEI principles must be part of all proposals for policy change, not just those explicitly designed to address DEI issues. This means understanding that even – or perhaps especially – those proposals for change that are not explicitly framed as DEI policy are implicitly and fundamentally about diversity, equality and inclusion. For example, proposals to increase funding in the sector, while not typically framed as diversity policy, have major implications for diversity, equality and inclusion because – in a context of chronic under-funding – only those with independent financial means can sustain careers.

All kinds of exclusion spring from these economic conditions because of the intersection of class with race, gender and other kinds of identity-based discrimination. In this sense, systemic change is a DEI initiative. We therefore stress that the entire programme of proposals outlined in this document should be understood in the broad context of DEI, not just those DEI proposals explicitly framed as such in this section of the report. Indeed, we would argue that the urgent need to address the deep-seated, multi-dimensional nature of inequity and exclusion in the documentary sector should be at the heart of lobbying efforts for the kind of wide-ranging, structural interventions detailed throughout this report.

#### **A note on terminology**

The consultation demonstrated widespread concern with the inadequacy of the term ‘diversity’ as a way of talking about under-represented identity groups. Equally problematic when used either as a catch-all term for excluded identity categories (such as age, class, caring responsibilities, disability, gender or sexuality), or as a synonym for race – which effaces both differences between distinct racial identities as well as non-racial identity categories and how these overlap with other key factors, such as geography – ‘diversity’ was felt to be an inadequate way of grasping the complex, intersectional reality of people’s lives. Furthermore, the discourse of diversity in the creative industries often fails to connect with the more fundamental concepts of equity and inclusivity and thus struggles to articulate the root causes of inequality and exclusion in the industry. As noted in Chow (2018), for example, a diverse group is not necessarily an equal one. For these reasons, it was felt that new or revised terminology was needed. ‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion’ (DEI) is preferred among some organisations and activist groups for the way in which it encourages more nuanced thinking about these interrelated but different concepts and is the wording we use in this text. More recently, the Documentary Producers Alliance in the US used the phrase, ‘Anti-racist and Structural Equality’ in its resource guide on this issue (DPA 2020). Clearly, this language is evolving, and we suggest that part of the work of the documentary DEI working group focuses on terminology.

## 1.1 CONVENE A DEI WORKING GROUP

As part of our wider recommendations regarding the organisational structure of the sector ([see 2.1, below](#)), we suggest that a documentary DEI working group should be convened to take this work forward as it sees fit: liaising with the relevant individuals and organisations, monitoring progress and ensuring the rest of the sector is kept informed of developments. As noted in [section 2](#) below, a clear remit and terms of reference will be essential for each of the proposed working groups. The DEI group in particular will need to ensure effective structures of communication between it and the rest of the sector given that so many organisations are working on this issue.

The formation and composition of this working group is of critical importance partly because DEI is such a complex, multidimensional problem that it requires a coordinated response across the sector. However, opinions were divided regarding whose responsibility it is to address the problem. Clearly, it should not be the sole responsibility of already excluded groups to address exclusion and inequality in the documentary sector, and yet any drive to increase participation and equality is unlikely to be successful if it is led by those who are already in positions of power. We would argue that the DEI working group should be led by those with the lived experience of discrimination and exclusion, but that the group must also include senior figures across sector. The concept of allyship will therefore be crucial to ensure those more powerful individuals and organisations represented in the DEI working group use their privilege to support those without it. A clear remit and terms of reference document will thus be critical for the group, as it will be for the other working groups and organisational structures suggested below. Finally, it is essential that any freelance workers involved in this and the other working groups are paid for their time. Securing funding to support this and the other organisational initiatives proposed in this document should therefore be a priority among sector support organisations.

## 1.2 DIVERSIFY THE ‘GATE-KEEPERS’

A key theme in the consultation was the lack of diversity at senior levels in the industry, be it in commissioning or other high-level management roles. It is essential that all those who currently hold these positions take responsibility for exploring ways through which people from under-represented groups can gain access to positions of seniority and power within the industry. Organisations should establish clear aims to achieve this, and personal and organisational equity plans can be valuable tools here. See the templates developed in the US by the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance and recommended in the Anti-Racist and Structural Equality Resource Guide of the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA 2020, 4).

### 1.3 ENHANCE SUPPORT BEYOND ENTRY-LEVEL

There was a widespread feeling that existing schemes focus on providing entry-level access (something that future research on existing initiatives could confirm) but fail to support individuals beyond that. As a result, only those with sufficient financial and social capital are able to sustain careers and progress to more senior positions. To ensure those from under-represented groups can attain positions of seniority and power in the long-term, explicit DEI initiatives should target workers beyond entry-level. Organisations should ensure targeted follow-on support exists for participants already on entry-level schemes, and focus on developing support for mid-career workers in consultation with under-represented groups (see 3.4).

### 1.4 BUILD A DIVERSE DOCUMENTARY CREW DATABASE

A crew database that sought to increase the visibility of diverse talent in the industry would help commissioners and filmmakers avoid falling back on word-of-mouth and their personal address books when under pressure to crew a project. Despite large, commercial databases such as The Knowledge and Production Base and grassroots initiatives for different sectors, such as Bristol Editors Network, the Natural History Network or Shooting People, there is currently no comprehensive crew database for UK documentary. Precedents in the US from which such an initiative could draw include the Asian American Documentary Network (A-Doc) Crew Database, the Brown Girls Doc Mafia Members list and Cast and Crew of Color (see DPA 2020, 4). Such an initiative could potentially be co-funded by a range of sector support organisations and membership fees.

### 1.5 IMPLEMENT DISTINCT DIVERSITY TARGETS FOR THE NATIONS AND REGIONS

Consultation participants emphasised that diversity looks very different across the nations and regions of the UK. Therefore, standards and targets should be proportional to the setting and context of the production. The recent *Race and Ethnicity in the UK Film Industry* report suggested that fiction films set in London should aim for a minimum Race/Ethnicity target of 30 per cent, and that the BFI should explore 'Proportional Diversity' targets for producers outside London (Nwonka 2020, 20). We recommend that the DEI working group liaise with the author of that report and the BFI to explore appropriate options for the documentary sector.

## 1.6 CREATE A BFI DIVERSITY STANDARDS LIAISON ROLE

*Race and Ethnicity in the UK Film Industry* also recommends that the BFI create a Diversity Standards Liaison role to support filmmakers to improve representation in their productions and ensure the standards are being met. We wholeheartedly endorse this recommendation and suggest that, should such a role be created, the post-holder has expertise across both fiction and documentary.

## 1.7 CULTURE CHANGE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

There is a culture within the feature documentary community in which filmmakers are expected to be extraordinarily passionate about their films, and to make significant sacrifices in order to get their films made. This is understandable but has consequences for DEI in the sector because those with the least resources or who experience various forms of discrimination are least able to make those sacrifices. We therefore suggest that, alongside the need to improve the cultural profile of documentary in the screen industries more broadly ([see 2.2](#)), work is also done to address this culture of work within the feature docs sector itself.

This kind of culture change requires effort at both personal and organisational levels. At the organisational level, collective statements and collaborative working are powerful ways to send a message of culture change throughout the industry. An international initiative led by the key funders – along the lines of the Safe + Secure initiative (2019) and *Independent Documentary: Filming in the Time of Corona* (2020) – targeting toxic work cultures, long hours and other unspoken barriers to participation in the documentary sector would make a major contribution to addressing this problem.

**“THERE IS A CULTURE WITHIN THE FEATURE DOCUMENTARY COMMUNITY IN WHICH FILMMAKERS ARE EXPECTED TO BE EXTRAORDINARILY PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR FILMS, AND TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT SACRIFICES IN ORDER TO GET THEIR FILMS MADE.”**



## 1.8 ADDRESS INSTITUTIONAL WHITENESS

Many consultation participants commented on a culture of institutional whiteness – where ‘whiteness’ functions as a discourse, or an invisible but pervasive norm – which permeates the feature docs sector (and the creative industries more broadly). This culture is perhaps especially notable in the documentary industry given the colonial heritage of the form in the West: an ethnographic practice that explores otherness from the normative and normalising perspective of whiteness. Jemma Desai’s research and phenomenological accounts in *This Work is Not For Us* (2020) demonstrate both a frustration at the ineffectiveness of policies and diversity schemes to-date, and a need to move beyond data, statistics and schemes to consider the overarching structures and discourse, as well as the lived and embodied experiences of “creative workers embodied in difference”. As she notes, diversity schemes or recruitment practices that seek to place under-represented bodies in workplaces governed by white, straight and able-bodied norms will ultimately fail unless the myriad hierarchies, assumptions and received wisdom of whiteness are addressed. She writes:

**“MORE RADICAL, MEANINGFUL, CHANGE THAT TRULY INCLUDES IN AN EQUITABLE MANNER MIGHT NOT BE AS EASY. IT WILL REQUIRE NOTICING THE THING WHICH HAS BECOME INVISIBLE THROUGH ITS UBIQUITY. IT WILL REQUIRE NOTICING HOW WHITENESS FEELS AND LANDS IN DIFFERENT BODIES AND IT WILL REQUIRE AN IMPORTANT UNLEARNING OF THE RELIANCE TO IMMEDIATELY PROMISE A ‘NEW DAY’.”**

**DESAI 2020, 56**

This work is slower and more intangible which is partly why the quicker wins of more easily intelligible diversity initiatives are often prioritised. However, an interrogation of institutional whiteness in every organisation and institution, of every scale, is necessary in order to effectively and fundamentally redress the sector’s DEI issues.



## 1.9 COLLATE AND EVALUATE EXPLICIT DEI INITIATIVES IN THE SECTOR

A range of initiatives exist that aim to address explicitly diversity, equity and inclusion in the documentary sector. However, these are spread across a wide range of institutions and organisations, and there is little coordination between them. Moreover, as noted in recent research on the screen industries more broadly, there is a distinct absence of evaluation of these initiatives (Newsinger and Eikhof 2020, 52-8). There is therefore a risk that these schemes provide a *sense* of DEI issues being addressed when this may not be the case. Rather than generate more data documenting inequality and exclusion in the sector, we suggest future research focuses on collating existing initiatives in one place and evaluating them for their effectiveness and their respective strengths and weaknesses. Part of this evaluative work should include tracing user journeys over the long term – talking to those who have “made it” and finding out what was critical to their success.

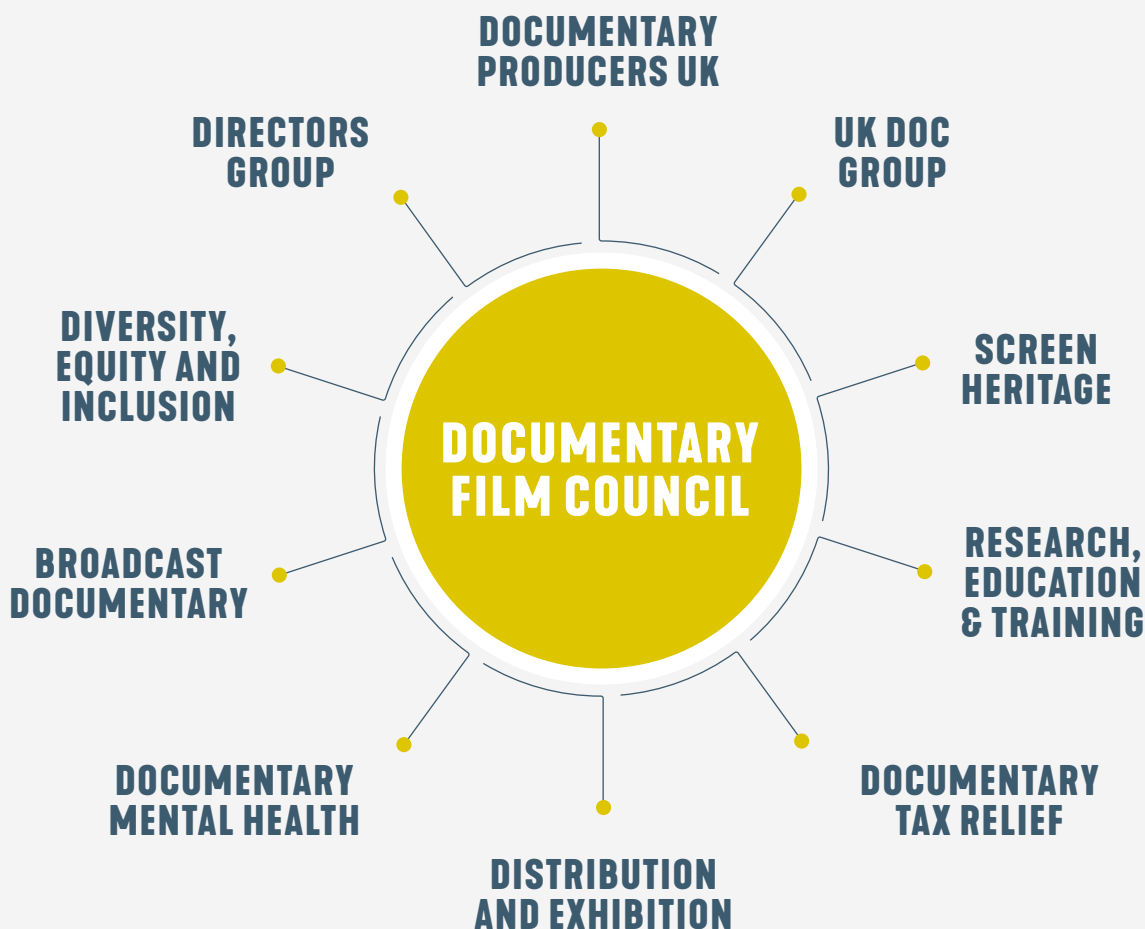
*Dispossession:*  
*The Great Housing Swindle*  
(dir. Paul Sng, 2017)  
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## SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

This section of the report focuses on recommendations for a new organisational structure for the feature docs sector. Comprising a Documentary Film Council made up of representatives from various sub-groups, this new suggested structure will enhance communication, coordination and collaboration across the sector and boost its collective lobbying power. Moreover, it will provide the organisational framework necessary to address those recommendations that require longer-term development and attention. This section also details some of the key priorities identified in the consultation – such as raising the profile of documentary within the screen industries – that will require coordination at Council level. It also includes recommendations designed to address the mental health crisis in the documentary sector, and an overview of the range of suggestions regarding a new large-scale event (conference, market, showcase) in the calendar of UK documentary.

## 2.1 INSTITUTE A NEW ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE SECTOR

We outline our recommendations for a new organisational structure below. As noted, this consists of a Documentary Film Council comprised of representatives from various sub-groups, including established or emergent organisations such as the UK Doc Group and Documentary Producers UK, and a series of seven working groups. Transparency, inclusivity and a clear remit and terms of reference for each group will be of utmost importance in developing this new structure and ensuring everyone involved in it understands their role and how that relates to the whole. We therefore suggest that drafting a brief Terms of Reference document (which outlines the group's working arrangements, purpose and organisational structure) should be among the first priorities for each group and the Council as a whole, and that each group's Terms of Reference should outline how it intends to ensure it is open and inclusive. Because several groups will be working on the same issues from different perspectives – such as addressing diversity issues or improving the cultural profile of documentary – it is essential to establish effective structures for collaboration, cooperation and information-sharing at the outset.



### Documentary Film Council

We propose this sector-wide body meets on a quarterly or biannual basis and includes representatives from Documentary Producers UK (DPUK), the Directors' Group, the UK Doc Group and the various working groups in the sector (see below). The aim of the Council is to ensure coordination and information-sharing across the sector; foster collaboration; avoid the duplication of labour; and to help set collective, mutually agreed priorities and agendas for sector development. Convenors will be required to help establish the Council and draft its Terms of Reference, and subsequently to organise meetings and minutes. We suggest that responsibility for this convenor role could be shared, and should be rotated every six months or annually.

### UK Doc Group

The UK Doc Group was established in March 2020, partly in response to the coronavirus epidemic. It consists of all the major documentary-specific institutions in the UK as well as relevant screen sector bodies such as the British Council, Directors UK and ScreenSkills. For reasons outlined in more detail in [section 6](#), the BFI Film Audience Network (FAN), the exhibition support network, is not currently in this group but should be. From our point of view, the Doc Group should continue to be convened by Doc Society and meet once a month, if that pace can be sustained, with each meeting chaired by a different member organisation.

### Documentary Producers UK (DPUK)

Documentary Producers UK is being set-up at the time of writing. It is a membership-based organisation that aims to represent the interests of independent non-fiction producers within the industry, to offer peer support among producers and promote sustainable industry standards and practices.

### Directors' Group

A dedicated documentary directors' group does not exist at present in the UK, but the directors that contributed to *Keeping It Real* and to the consultation expressed a strong need for one. This would also make sense given that DPUK is soon to provide the equivalent group for producers. This group could be a sub-group within Directors UK or an independent entity, though given the representation of the former in the UK Doc Group, a Directors UK sub-group would seem to be the most sensible suggestion. Much like DPUK, the aims for the Directors' Group would include representing the interests of independent documentary directors in the UK, creating a forum for discussion and peer support, and developing collective approaches to key issues such as pay and conditions in the sector.

### Working Groups

As noted in the relevant sections below, working groups will be essential to drive progress on various issues. These should be chaired by named individual/s who are paid for their time and responsible for keeping track of developments and feeding back to the Documentary Film Council and other groups as appropriate. We suggest that there is an initial need for seven working groups to be convened around the following issues, listed here in alphabetical order (see the corresponding recommendations for more detail on each group):

- 1 Broadcast Documentary (5.1)
- 2 Distribution and Exhibition (6.1)
- 3 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (1.1)
- 4 Documentary Mental Health and Wellbeing (2.3.2)
- 5 Documentary Tax Relief (4.11.1)
- 6 Training, Education and Research (3.1)
- 7 Screen Heritage (7.1)

## 2.2 RAISE THE CULTURAL STATUS OF FEATURE DOCUMENTARY

Raising the cultural status of feature documentary was widely felt to be a priority across the sector. As noted in *Keeping It Real*, there is a significant lack of understanding regarding the existence of the feature docs sector as a distinct part of the UK's film and television industries, with its own ecosystem and network of international relationships. This is rarely understood by those operating outside or at the margins of the field, and even among some film funders, agencies and broadcasters there is an implicit reluctance to accept documentary as a legitimate mode of feature filmmaking.

The low cultural status and profile of feature documentary is therefore a major underlying problem that has significant implications for any wider project to address the overall health and sustainability of the sector. Raising the status of documentary will involve ensuring that the cultural, social and economic benefits of a thriving feature-length documentary film sector are more clearly captured, articulated and understood, and will require the sector to be effectively lobbied for and included in wider screen industry conversations and decision-making processes. This will clearly be a long-term and multifaceted process in which all the sub-groups proposed in 2.1 above have a role to play. For that reason, we suggest that this is best coordinated at Council level. A range of ideas for raising the profile of feature docs were proposed during the consultation. We present these below as an initial suggested agenda:

- ▶ Collate evidence that captures more accurately the economic value of the feature docs sector. This is a key means of articulating the value of the sector in a way that government and other policymakers understand and is part of the wider need for further research on the feature docs sector (see 3.5). Because many documentaries generate revenue beyond the box-office, it is important that research includes other revenue streams alongside box-office sales, and that it captures export figures and income from private sources, educational and corporate sales. Research and consultancy organisations such as Ampere Analysis, Nordicity, Olsberg SPI or Oxford Economics are best placed to carry out this work.
- ▶ Encourage and support sector-wide 'documentary champions': prominent figures from different parts of the feature docs community who could play a valuable role in terms of representing and advocating for the sector, developing clear arguments as to its social and cultural value and promoting documentary film culture. It was noted that filmmakers' storytelling expertise could be useful here, but programmers, producers and critics could all play a role.
- ▶ Make a clear distinction between feature-length documentary films and factual television. There is evidently no shortage of (often outstanding) factual television and factual entertainment on UK television. However, this masks the distinct lack of support for longer-form, creative and independent work. Consultation participants felt that making this distinction clearer – not least to ensure Ofcom can effectively regulate the sector (see 5.10) – was felt to be a key part of the wider project of raising feature docs' status in the screen industries.
- ▶ Build better relationships with cinema programmers and work with them to explore ways of increasing the presence of documentaries in cinemas (see 6.8 and 6.9).
- ▶ Work with the BFI to develop its understanding and engagement with feature docs beyond the BFI Doc Society Fund. This could include, for example, BFI representatives attending and advocating for documentary at key events, such as the London Film Festival and other international film festivals; providing press and media support; and including documentary makers more in their international delegations. One unintended result of the BFI distributing documentary funding via Doc Society is ambiguity regarding the boundaries of Doc Society's role, such that it is sometimes seen as being responsible for everything to do with documentary and the BFI. This is not the case: Doc Society has neither the remit nor the resources to perform this role on behalf of the entire documentary community. We would therefore encourage sub-groups to liaise with one another and the Documentary Film Council with regards to opening additional channels of communication with the BFI as and when required.



- ▶ Work with relevant departments in broadcasters; with the film departments of the BBC and Channel 4 (BBC Film and Film4); and with regional agencies and institutions to ensure better understanding and engagement with the feature docs sector across the screen industries (see 4.3 and 5.2).
- ▶ Encourage all organisations across the screen sector to shoulder some of the responsibility for building a stronger UK documentary culture by ensuring that dedicated documentary expertise exists in-house, that all staff understand the value and specific needs of the documentary form and that it is not viewed only as a pathway to fiction.
- ▶ Liaise more effectively with the press and media, enabling and inviting them to embrace documentary and to create opportunities for new writers who are more documentary literate.

*Solidarity* (dir Lucy Parker, 2019) © City Projects

**“ENCOURAGE ALL ORGANISATIONS ACROSS THE SCREEN SECTOR TO SHOULDER SOME OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BUILDING A STRONGER UK DOCUMENTARY CULTURE BY ENSURING THAT DEDICATED DOCUMENTARY EXPERTISE EXISTS IN-HOUSE.”**



## 2.3 ADDRESS THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS WITHIN THE DOCUMENTARY COMMUNITY

In addition to a demanding, precarious and intensely competitive work culture that requires long hours for little pay, documentary filmmakers also often work with distressing content and/or vulnerable people in traumatic or even dangerous situations. The stress that comes with being responsible for representing these peoples' lives on screen significantly compounds these pressures. Consequently, as evidenced in recent research by the Film and TV Charity – and supported by findings in both *Keeping It Real* and a Dart Centre report in 2019 (Rees 2019) – there is a mental health crisis in the screen industries that is especially pronounced among documentary filmmakers (Wilkes, Carey and Florisson 2020, 40).

In October 2020, the Film and TV Charity launched the Whole Picture Programme: a two-year project supported by the BFI, backed by the UK's leading mental health charity, Mind, and funded by the Film and TV Charity and a range of UK and international broadcasters, production companies, streamers and studios. The Programme's structure consists of the Film and TV Taskforce on Mental Health (convened earlier in 2020), a steering group and several working groups. By 2022 it aims to have developed a range of services and resources, including a toolkit for mentally-healthy productions; enhanced professional and peer support for freelancers; and training guides, services and resources to counter bullying and improve behaviour across the industry.

### 2.3.1 INTEGRATE THE DOCUMENTARY COMMUNITY INTO THE WHOLE PICTURE PROGRAMME

We welcome the development of the Whole Picture Programme. However, the extent to which the Whole Picture Programme includes the documentary sector is unclear. We therefore suggest the following:

The UK Doc Group, DPUK and the Film and TV Taskforce on Mental Health liaise with one another as a matter of urgency to ensure the documentary community is properly included in the Whole Picture Programme. Clearly, mental health is an issue for the whole sector and this work should include the other sub-groups suggested in 2.1 above. However, with the UK Doc Group and DPUK already established, this is the most effective means of ensuring the documentary sector is included in the Whole Picture Programme as soon as possible, and that the unique challenges facing the community are considered. Other measures to ensure the feature docs sector is adequately represented within the Whole Picture Programme include:

- ▶ Ensuring that the sector has dedicated representatives on both the Film and TV Taskforce on Mental Health and the Whole Picture Steering Group.
- ▶ Creating a dedicated nonfiction working group within the Whole Picture working group structure (this should include representatives from both the feature documentary and factual television sectors).
- ▶ Consulting with DPUK as the representative body of UK documentary producers, and the Directors' Group if and when it is established.
- ▶ Consulting with Film in Mind, the only dedicated therapy service for filmmakers in the UK. With approximately ninety per cent of Film in Mind's clients being documentary filmmakers, there is a wealth of sector-specific expertise there that should be drawn upon as part of the Whole Picture Programme.
- ▶ Sharing updates with and inviting the participation of other members of the Documentary Film Council, if and when that body comes into being.

### **2.3.2 CONVENE A DOCUMENTARY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORKING GROUP**

Consultation participants expressed a need for a dedicated Mental Health and Wellbeing group for the feature docs sector, and so we include this recommendation here alongside the suggestion above that a similar working group be included as part of the Whole Picture project. In practice, it may make sense to have one group that works across both the Whole Picture Project and the feature docs sector, but that should be up to those members of the feature docs community involved and the Whole Picture Project organisers.

A key task for this group is the development of an industry-wide clinical supervision model that is specifically designed to support filmmakers during the filmmaking process, similar to the therapists' model of supervision that is currently in practice. This is something that is underway at Film in Mind, which is also developing a training model to supervise therapists who wish to work with filmmakers. This is essential to increase the number of therapists working in the field, to afford clients a choice of therapist (an essential therapeutic principle), and to ensure those therapists working in the field can benefit from expert peer support and supervision themselves.

### 2.3.3 INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION IN BUDGETS

While the Whole Picture Programme's specific recommendations and resources are being developed, the UK Doc Group can act now by ensuring funders in the sector start encouraging the practice of including budget-lines for the therapeutic needs of directors, producers and editors. This was unanimously welcomed at the consultation but is practiced at present by only a handful of filmmakers. Because many filmmakers do not always acknowledge or appreciate the importance of self-care as part of their practice, or because limited budgets render self-care impossible, funders should take responsibility for ensuring mental health is prioritised as standard.

### 2.4 COORDINATE SUPPORT ACROSS LONDON, THE NATIONS AND THE REGIONS

As well as, and partly because of, the lack of structure and coherence in the sector there is insufficient knowledge-sharing and training, networking opportunities and support for filmmakers outside London. The proposed sector council and working groups should improve the structure and coherence of the sector and provide a framework for it to come together to explore what a more coordinated strategy would look like in terms of ensuring parity of provision, effective communication and transparency in decision-making. As part of this work, further research should be undertaken to clarify exactly what provision is available where across the nations and regions of the UK, both in terms of organisational support and in terms of dedicated documentary funding (see 3.1, 3.5 and 4.3).

### 2.5 EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL FOR A DEDICATED DOCUMENTARY MARKET, CONFERENCE AND/OR SHOWCASING EVENT

In *Keeping It Real* we noted several respondents' suggestion that an additional event could be an exciting means of raising the profile of UK feature docs both at home and internationally. There was a mixed response to this idea during the consultation. Some participants felt that it could be a drain on already scant resources and time, while others felt there are important gaps that such an event could address – showcasing UK feature docs and talent; supporting emerging UK filmmakers and creating a platform for more experimental work.

Clearly, in order to avoid a new industry event becoming a drain on time and finances, there must be a clear rationale for it to exist in addition to the existing events calendar (largely focused around Sheffield and Open City Docs).



We suggest the Documentary Film Council is the most appropriate forum for exploring this proposal. Via the consultation, several suggestions were made as to the form this event could take:

- ▶ A public showcase of UK documentary and/or a market to take place in Autumn/Winter. An emphasis on emerging and/or experimental filmmakers at such an event would help develop the next generation of filmmakers, programmers and curators (see 3.3) and ensure that creativity and innovation are at the heart of UK documentary culture (see 4.8).
- ▶ An increased UK documentary presence at London Film Festival. Consultation participants felt that a standalone day at a non-documentary specific event may carve out more space for documentary within the wider film landscape.
- ▶ An increased UK presence at Sheffield Doc/Fest. This was suggested as both an additional market alongside Doc/Fest's existing activities, separate from MeetMarket (which is international in focus), or as a spotlight on UK Feature Docs via masterclasses and special events.
- ▶ A virtual market, talent showcase, conference or networking initiative. Participants emphasised the various ways in which online events help level the playing field in terms of the inclusivity of those who would otherwise face geographical or financial barriers to participation.
- ▶ An itinerant event that toured London as well as the nations and regions of the UK.

Whatever the shape of this event, the exhibition sector was eager that it should include a networking opportunity for exhibitors to share strategies and plan how they can work more collectively around UK feature docs.

MeetMarket at  
Sheffield Doc/Fest  
(image credit: David Chang)

## TRAINING, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

This section proposes a range of recommendations designed to ensure that training, education and research are better coordinated and that known gaps in provision – for different roles and career stages as well as in different parts of the country – are addressed. There is a widespread perception that ScreenSkills, the skills charity for the UK screen industries, focuses predominantly on crew training rather than producers’ skills, and that support for both new talent and career development beyond entry-level is under-developed. The sector’s relationship with Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) is also limited. Consultation participants felt that universities could do more to prepare graduates for the realities of the business, and that there are significant opportunities for better partnerships between HEIs and organisations in the feature docs sector.

Addressing these issues can also play a role in remedying the sector's significant diversity issues. Training and education are not going to 'fix' diversity – and overly focusing on these areas suggests that it is marginalised people who need to upskill rather than the industry which needs to address systemic issues. Yet training and education do have a role to play – without them, key areas of the industry will remain opaque and inaccessible, and existing networks and monopolies of knowledge will remain available to only the privileged few. This section also outlines crucial topics in need of further research and data collection. Again, these are essential in order to apprehend and articulate the sector's needs and thus to ensure a more sustainable and diverse feature docs community.

### 3.1 CONVENE A TRAINING, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH WORKING GROUP

We suggest that a Training, Education and Research working group should be convened to coordinate efforts to identify gaps in provision in these areas across the UK. This working group should be composed of education and training leads in sector support organisations, including ScreenSkills; filmmakers (including producers) with experience and interest in this area, and representatives from HEIs. It should work closely with the DEI working group as well as the Exhibition and Distribution working group, as so much emerging talent provision is based around the film festival infrastructure. As a starting point, we suggest the following should be among the list of priorities for this group:

- ▶ An audit of existing documentary-focused training and education provision offered by both screen sector bodies and HEIs across the nations and regions of the UK ([see also 3.5](#)).
- ▶ Liaising with emerging filmmakers in the sector. Most consultation participants from the production sector were established producers and directors or senior executives from the various funders, broadcasters and agencies involved. Further consultation with emerging filmmakers should be conducted to fully understand their needs and to ensure that any new initiatives are clearly aligned with the people they are intended to serve ([see 3.3](#)).
- ▶ Liaising with relevant parties to ensure any potential increase in funding in the sector ([see section 4](#)) considers contributing to training, education and career support. As outlined below, this should be focused on regional activity, sustained support for under-represented filmmakers, developing producers' skills and support for new and emerging talent.
- ▶ All training programmes should ensure recruitment is representative of the region in which the training takes place, in terms of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and disability.

### 3.2 ENHANCE PRODUCERS' SKILLS

Consultation participants outlined the following needs for producer-specific support:

- ▶ Working internationally: promoting greater understanding of how co-productions work ([see 4.10](#)); providing bursaries to enable (new/diverse/regional) producers to visit international markets both online and offline (at present UK filmmakers are under-represented in the international markets).
- ▶ Funders making available previously successful funding applications from which future applicants can learn ([see 4.4](#)).
- ▶ Expanding access to Producers Labs (normally available only to funded projects). These could potentially take place online.
- ▶ Incorporating the following into formal producer training:
  - More structured knowledge-sharing, networking and mentorship programmes.
  - A focus on 'business basics': Special Purpose Vehicles, dedicated bank accounts, coded expenses, contracts, clearance forms etc.
  - How to access private equity and investment ([see 4.3](#)). This is the second most common source of funding for feature doc filmmakers but is viewed by many as opaque and inaccessible (Presence et al 2020, 38). It is therefore essential that training providers equip established and emerging producers with the skills and knowledge required to access private investment.

### 3.3 SUPPORT NEW AND EMERGING TALENT

- ▶ Participants expressed a need to equip new entrants with business and entrepreneurial skills – including developing international co-productions ([see 4.10](#)) and accessing the Film Tax Relief ([see 4.11](#)) and private investment (see above) – and with creative and craft skills. The working group should liaise with skills providers to help enhance provision in this regard.
- ▶ While entry-level training schemes are key, they should be created in tandem with schemes that extend beyond entry-level ([see 1.3](#) and [3.4](#)) to provide pathways through the industry. Schemes should be coordinated and connected across the sector – [see 1.9](#) – to ensure continuing and cohesive support.

## “TRAINING PROVIDERS SHOULD EXPLORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF TARGETED FOLLOW-ON SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS ALREADY ON ENTRY-LEVEL SCHEMES, WITH A FOCUS ON SUPPORTING THOSE FROM UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS.”

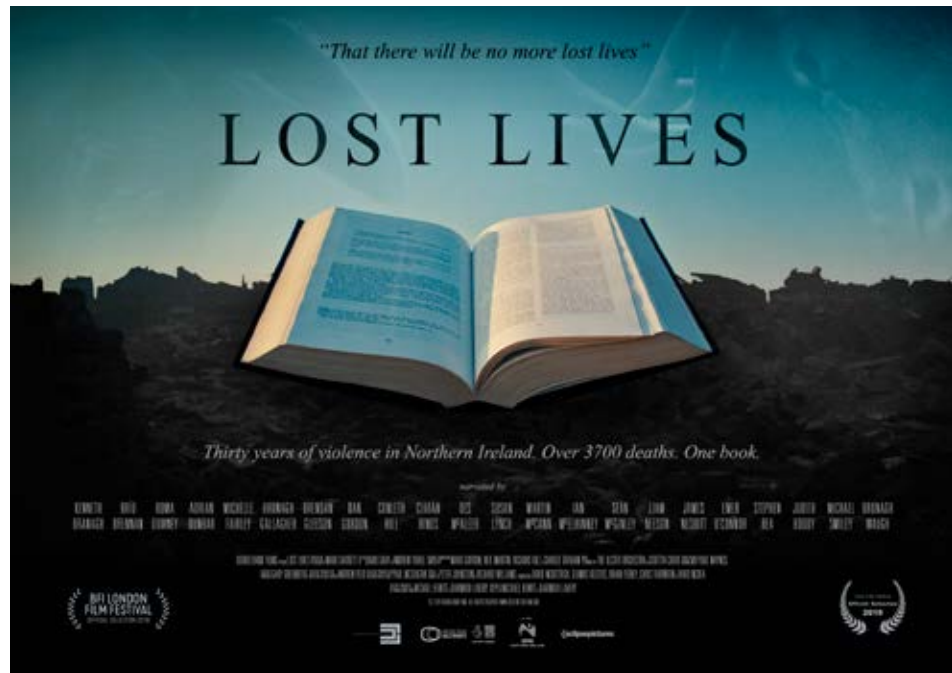
- ▶ Similarly, sector organisations should work together to ensure coordinated year-round provision of support for new and emerging talent. Given that many events for new talent take place at film festivals, this work could be coordinated by a partnership between members of Training, Education and Research working group, the UK Doc Group and the Exhibition and Distribution working group. Supporting new talent could also be a focus of the proposed additional market or conference (see 2.5).
- ▶ Collate a ‘Feature Doc 101 Crib Sheet’: a first-stop shop for new and emerging filmmakers that can be shared by all organisations in the sector. This would include information on the realities of the industry; key organisations and networks; and essential information and advice on budgets, the Film Tax Relief (see 4.11.2), security, insurance, marketing and distribution. This could draw on Doc Society’s existing ‘Resources’ page and be a living document shared and promoted by all sector-lead organisations.

### 3.4 DEVELOP SUPPORT BEYOND ENTRY-LEVEL

- ▶ Training providers should explore the development of targeted follow-on support for participants already on entry-level schemes, with a focus on supporting those from under-represented groups (see 1.3).
- ▶ Providers should explore ways of tracking user journeys and should consult with mid-career-onwards practitioners to ensure the schemes offer suitable and effective interventions.
- ▶ Mentoring was noted as highly beneficial for both mentor and mentee and is an important source of support and inspiration for practitioners at every point of their career. Wherever possible, training providers should consider extending and formalising mentoring provision for early- and mid-career filmmakers. It was also suggested that mentors could be sourced from beyond the nonfiction sector or even the screen industries, allowing filmmakers to gather transferable skills and experience from other business sectors and industries.



*Lost Lives* (dirs. Dermot Lavery, Michael Hewitt, 2019) © DoubleBand Films



### 3.5 BUILD CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE DOCUMENTARY COMMUNITY AND HEIs

- ▶ Several consultation participants expressed a desire to forge closer relationships with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and noted that graduates are often inadequately prepared for the challenging reality of forging careers in the sector. We strongly encourage organisations working in the sector to build relationships with their local HEIs, and to liaise with both the Training, Education and Research working group so that this can feed into the recommended audit of training provision noted above. These relationships should also be shared with the Doc Group, to encourage best practice in this respect.
- ▶ Film festivals are particularly keen to work with HEIs and have a lot to offer in terms of exposing new talent to the realities of the industry, its processes and culture, and preparing students to develop post-graduate careers. We strongly support the development of closer relationships between film festivals and HEIs and suggest that any successful partnerships be shared with and feed into the Training, Education and Research working group and the Exhibition and Distribution working group.
- ▶ We also recommend that the Training, Education and Research working group liaise with HEIs to encourage taught courses to do more to engage with the industry and cover the structure and operation of the nonfiction film business. However, universities are and should remain more than just industry service providers. Any increase in industry engagement must not come at the expense of developing documentary film literacy, rigorous critical thinking and an understanding of history and theory, which should remain at the core of university-level study.

### 3.6 FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE NON-FICTION FILM INDUSTRY

*Keeping It Real* and the consultation for this report revealed a significant need for more regular and granular data to be produced on the feature docs sector.<sup>2</sup> One way to achieve this is for the Training, Education and Research working group to liaise with the BFI's Research and Statistics Unit to ensure an increased range and scope of data on documentary is included in its annual *Statistical Yearbook*. Released annually since 2002, the yearbooks are an immensely valuable source of information, not least because of their regularity, but at present the data on docs tends to focus on box-office and the number of documentaries released in cinemas. Additional data on documentary could include the following:

- ▶ Documentary-specific data in the sections on industry employment (including the gender of writers and directors) and the UK film economy (including import and export data and information on leading production and distribution companies).
- ▶ Data on documentary projects that apply for the Film Tax Relief (FTR), including what proportion of applications are for documentary projects, the proportion of UK spend associated with documentary projects that qualify for the FTR and the UK spend as a percentage of the total budget (this information is already provided for the different screen sector tax reliefs available – film, high-end television, animation, children's television and video games – but the breakdown of data on the FTR does not distinguish between fiction and documentary at present).
- ▶ Data on the proportion of funds allocated to documentary from different sources to production, distribution and exhibition activities. If possible, this should include regional variation in both funding and organisational support across the different sectors (see 2.4 and 6.2).

Several consultation participants also emphasised a need for further research in the following areas:

- ▶ Audiences' relationship to documentary and their associated consumption habits across a range of media.
- ▶ The economic value of the feature documentary sector (see 2.2).
- ▶ An evaluation of existing DEI initiatives in the sector and the extent of their effectiveness (see 1.9).
- ▶ Policy frameworks for non-fiction film industries overseas and pathways for instituting best-practice in the UK.

## FUNDING AND PRODUCTION

Chronic under-funding is the central problem in UK independent documentary production and is directly related to several other problems in the sector, including its shockingly low levels of diversity. Without a significant increase in funding, it is simply not possible to address any of the myriad problems facing UK independent documentary production or to develop the sector in any meaningful way. This section and the next propose a range of measures designed not only to boost production funding across various parts of the documentary industry – development, broadcast, co-production, feature docs – but also to address some of the structural problems that make the documentary industry such an inhospitable environment in which to work. As with many other recommendations in this report, we have included a range of measures, some of which are relatively easy to achieve, while others are much more ambitious and longer-term.

## 4.1 INCREASE THE PROPORTION OF LOTTERY FUNDS RING-FENCED FOR DOCUMENTARY

The £1.8m allocated to BFI Doc Society in 2020/21 represents only 8.6 per cent of a total BFI production budget of £20.9m.<sup>3</sup> We recommend that the BFI increase the proportion of lottery funds to between 20–25 per cent of the total funds available.<sup>4</sup> At the current rates, this would increase support for production to between £4,180,000 (20 per cent) and £5,225,000 (25 per cent).

It should also be noted that there are currently no funds ring-fenced for documentary distribution and exhibition. This disparity in support for production – even at current levels – compared to zero ring-fenced support for distribution and exhibition is a key contributing factor to the oversaturation of the market and the subsequent inability of the distribution and exhibition sectors to adequately support production. Therefore, as discussed in more detail in recommendation 6.2, any increase in funds ring-fenced for production should be matched by a proportionate increase in funds ring-fenced for distribution and exhibition. At the suggested ratio of 20–25 per cent of the total funds available, this would see funds ring-fenced for documentary audiences increase to between £1,832,000 (20 per cent) and £2,290,000 (25 per cent).

## 4.2 INCREASE PRODUCTION BUDGETS OR DECREASE THE NUMBER OF FILMS BEING FUNDED

Workers across every sub-sector of the feature docs industry are conscious of the range of problems that stem from too many films being funded with inadequate budgets. This is not just a problem for the documentary sector and is understandable: filmmakers are desperate for funding and funders want to support as many films as possible. However, until this problem is addressed, producers and directors will continue to bear the financial burden and risk involved in filmmaking, inequality and exclusion will remain rampant in UK documentary, and distributors and exhibitors will continue to be unable to support the volume of films in production. Crudely speaking, there are two options to address the issue: 1) increase production budgets or 2) decrease the number of films being funded. In practice, a combination of the two approaches is required. As noted above, a significant increase in overall production funds is urgently required. If and when this happens, funders can review the number of films that are supported.

### 4.3 INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FUNDERS IN THE SECTOR

Consultation participants emphasised that not only is the level of funding too low, but that available funds are concentrated among too few, mainly London-based funders. Participants raised serious concerns about the multiple, interrelated consequences of such a limited range of funders on the diversity of the sector – from the prevalence of middle/upper-class, white, able-bodied individuals, based in London or the South-East, among both filmmakers and decision-makers, to a lack of regional participation and the suppression of alternative voices, perspectives and documentary film forms.

As outlined below, the consultation explored several ways in which the scarcity of funders in the sector could be addressed. We welcome these ideas and recommend they be discussed by the relevant groups identified in 2.1, and that the outcome of those discussions be considered by the Documentary Film Council. However, we also note that increasing the number of funders could result in a more complex system that is harder for filmmakers to navigate and for the sector overall to coordinate at national and regional levels.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we suggest that any aim to increase the plurality of funders in the sector also considers how those funders should coordinate with one another.

- ▶ Expanding the remit of the regional BFI NETWORK Film Hubs and Partners to include documentary. At present, the Talent Executives in the regional hubs cater for fiction and animation but not documentary, responsibility for which sits within Doc Society's remit. Ensuring that documentary filmmakers in the regions could approach their regional Talent Executives would increase the presence of funders outside London. However, it was also noted that as Talent Executives are effectively BFI representatives, this would extend the regional representation of the BFI rather than expand the number of funders in the sector per se.
- ▶ Ring-fencing funds for documentary within national and regional screen agencies. It was noted that while Screen Scotland and SDI cater for Scotland, Film Cymru and Northern Ireland Screen currently have no documentary-specific funds.
- ▶ Upskilling the sector in how to pitch and work with foundations and private investors. This was the second most common source of funding – after filmmakers' own funds – among respondents to the UK Feature Docs survey (Presence et al 2020, 39), but many producers find this sector opaque and inaccessible. Greater support and training for producers seeking private investment from sources outside the screen industries would help make access to this vital funding stream more equal (see 3.2, 3.3).

- ▶ Exploring options for embedding funds within festivals such as Docs Ireland (Belfast), Open City Documentary Festival (London) and Sheffield Doc/Fest.
- ▶ Exploring options for developing partnership funds with the regional bases of Channel 4 and the BBC.
- ▶ Placing funds for more experimental nonfiction with Arts Council or LUX, or at least developing partnerships between these organisations and existing documentary funders and commissioners.

#### 4.4 REVIEW BEST PRACTICE IN FUNDING PROCESSES

Several consultation participants – including those in the funders focus groups – emphasised the need for funders to review their processes to ensure best-practice across the sector. Recommendations included the following:

- ▶ Funders should review their decision-making processes with a view to enhancing transparency about how decisions are made and how the outcome of those decisions are disseminated across the sector.
- ▶ Funders should review their feedback processes and endeavour to institute minimum standards of required feedback for both pitches and applications.
- ▶ Previously successful applications should be made readily available, on a redacted basis where necessary, and subject to the filmmakers' consent. This would enable emerging filmmakers to learn the language and structure of funding applications much faster and to understand what a successful application looks like. It would also assist with transparency in the sector, helping other filmmakers to understand the reasons why funded projects were successful (see 3.2).
- ▶ Funders should consider implementing diversity pledges to ensure more diverse applicants are funded, quickly. There is evidence this has worked in various contexts. In Sweden, the Swedish Film Institute set and successfully met a four year target aimed at equal gender funding: 50 per cent of all films funded are written, directed and/or produced by women (Anastasia Naum 2017). In the advertising sector, Free the Work, and preceding initiative Free the Bid, responded to the ad industry's hiring inequalities. The Free the Bid pledge prompted brands and their agencies to include at least one woman among the three directors bidding for every commercial job. These commitments led to measurable increases in the number of women creators considered and hired for major ads. Free the Work now aims to work with more industries to increase recruitment from under-represented backgrounds (Free the Work n.d.).

## “MANY FILMMAKERS FEEL THAT THE DEMANDS OF DOCUMENTARY FUNDING APPLICATIONS OFTEN OUTWEIGH THE AMOUNT OF MONEY ON OFFER.”

- ▶ More UK funders should participate in the Documentary Core Application Project, a joint project initiated in 2016 by the International Documentary Association and the Sundance Institute to standardise grant applications in the documentary sector. More UK funders participating in this scheme would significantly reduce the substantial and unpaid labour time filmmakers currently spend revising funding applications to meet the requirements of different schemes. At present, Doc Society is the only UK funder participating in the scheme.
- ▶ Many filmmakers feel that the demands of documentary funding applications often outweigh the amount of money on offer. Funders are therefore also encouraged to review their application processes to ensure that the demands of the application and the associated terms and conditions are proportionate to the amount of funding on offer.
- ▶ Funders (and the lawyers with whom they work) should explore how to avoid the use of business models, contractual templates and paper trails derived from the fiction film industry, which together create significant challenges for UK documentary producers. For example, while the practice of ‘closing finance’ (securing all financial documentation before funds are released) makes sense for scripted films, which have specific schedules and budgets, it is much harder for documentary projects to plan in the same way. Consequently, many documentary producers are forced into cash-flowing shoots with no contractual protection.
- ▶ Directors, producers and distributors should be involved in funders’ decision-making processes (on distributors’ involvement, [see 6.3](#)). At the Danish Film Institute (DFI), for example, applications are assessed by a five-person panel comprised of two members of the DFI and three representatives from the industry that are elected for a two-year period by Danish Film Directors, the Danish Producers Association and the Association of Danish Film Distributors (Sørensen and Redvall 2020, 7).
- ▶ We also recommend that funders review diversity among their senior staff ([see 1.2](#)) and work towards standardising mental health provision in budgets ([see 2.3.3](#)).

## 4.5 INSTITUTE A FAIR PAY CHARTER

A key issue noted in the consultation was the practice of filmmakers surrendering their fees or submitting under-costed budgets in order to access production funds. This practice occurs because of the scarcity of funding in the sector more broadly, and because documentary funds are often (officially or unofficially) capped, which means that producers simply cannot access budgets that allow for everyone to be remunerated properly.

To counter this practice, which only economically privileged filmmakers can sustain, it was suggested that funders should collectively produce and sign a group charter or statement in which they make a commitment not to participate in films that are not budgeted adequately. An explicit message to the filmmaking community that funders will not accept budgets for films that do not adequately provide for the filmmakers was felt to be a useful and necessary part of the culture change needed to address this practice.

## 4.6 RING-FENCE FUNDS FOR DOCUMENTARY IN CREATIVE EUROPE REPLACEMENT FUNDING

The UK government's decision not to seek participation in the next Creative Europe MEDIA programme will have a significant and detrimental impact on the feature docs sector as on the creative industries more broadly. The EU's Creative Europe fund was a critical part of the financial package of many UK feature docs and the loss of access to MEDIA training schemes, networking initiatives, and distribution and exhibition support is a major blow to the sector overall. It is therefore essential that any replacement funding negotiated by the BFI for the screen sector includes a proportion ring-fenced for documentary production, distribution and exhibition ([see 6.1, 6.2](#)).

## 4.7 LEVY A VIDEO TAX ON SVOD TURNOVER

Several consultation participants suggested developing a video tax on international Subscription Video-On-Demand services (SVODs) and other streaming platforms, many of which operate in the UK but are financially registered abroad and pay little UK tax. The suggested levy acknowledges the increasingly significant role of SVODs in the UK screen industries and ensures that a modest proportion of their revenue is used to stimulate and support the indigenous production sector and the health and wellbeing of its workforce. The levy would be an extension of the Digital Services tax, a 2 per cent tax on revenues from tech giants operating in Britain, particularly those in social media, e-commerce and search engine provision, that was introduced on 1 April 2020.<sup>6</sup>



We propose that eligible SVODs should pay a 2 per cent video tax on their turnover, as currently happens in France (Scott 2019). According to a report prepared by Ampere Analysis for Ofcom, the market in the UK is currently dominated by seven major services: from the five largest ‘traditional’ UK broadcasters (BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, ITV and Sky); and the two largest international SVOD platforms, Amazon and Netflix. This report estimated that, in 2018, Amazon and Netflix’s combined revenue was £1.1bn (Ampere Analysis 2019, 7–8). A 2 per cent tax on this would generate £22m that could be used to support indigenous screen production. The number of SVOD subscribers, and concurrent market revenue, is expected to double from 2019 to 2024 (Easton 2020), so even a minor tax on this income stream would provide a major boost for UK screen industries.

Were this levy to be instituted, a proportion of it should be ring-fenced to support independent documentary. In line with our recommendations on National Lottery funding (see 4.1), this figure should be between 20 and 25 per cent. Working to the 2018 figures, this would generate between £4.4m and £5.5m for the documentary sector (and between £17.6m and £16.5m for the fiction sector). Up-to-date figures would yield significantly more.

## 4.8 ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR MORE INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL FILM

The UK documentary sector is widely regarded as risk averse. This partly derives from the intense competition for very scarce funding, which stifles creativity and innovation and impacts on the UK’s global standing in the field. In order to support greater experimentation and innovation in the documentary sector, consultation participants recommended the following:

- ▶ Subsidies should be introduced for festivals and exhibitors that show more experimental work. This would support programmers to be bolder in their selections, something that is hard to do when they must absorb the financial impact of more experimental programmes themselves.

Funding such an initiative would be challenging but is potentially achievable via a partnership between key organisations such as the Arts Council, LUX and BFI FAN. Existing subsidy schemes on which such an initiative could be based include the Europa Cinemas network, which provides operational and financial support to cinemas that allocate part of their programme to non-national European films, or the Film Hub South West’s Cinema Incentive Scheme, in which cinemas earn financial rewards for showing a minimum amount of British, independent and specialised film. Exploring the potential of such a subsidy scheme should be part of the agenda for the Distribution and Exhibition working group.

- ▶ The potential for a VOD platform for British and/or international experimental work should be explored. This would reduce the tendency of experimental work to ‘live and die’ in the festival space and help maximise its opportunities to reach a wider international audience.
- ▶ Funders should encourage risk-taking and experimentation in terms of content, style and aesthetics. Issue-driven, social impact films, while important, should not necessarily take priority over other kinds of nonfiction filmmaking (see 4.3 in terms of diversifying funders and developing partnerships with LUX and Arts Council England).
- ▶ A new documentary showcase or market, should it come into being (see 2.5), should include a focus on innovative and experimental work and aim to include curators and commissioners from this sector on its delegate list.

## 4.9 ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT

The lack of available development funding is a major problem in the feature documentary industry. It also constitutes a major barrier to participation, especially for working-class filmmakers who cannot afford to spend months developing projects unpaid. We suggest the following:

- ▶ Where possible, funders should ring-fence dedicated development funds and – as was stressed by consultation participants – support projects based on research, rather than ‘the perfect pitch’.
- ▶ The BFI Vision Awards scheme is an immensely valuable intervention for those who receive it because it provides slate development funding that enables producers to develop projects of their choosing. Of the 20 recipients of the 2019 Awards, three work in documentary (15 per cent). We also welcome the BFI NETWORK’s recently launched Insight: The New Producer Programme, of which three out of twelve producers selected work in documentary (25 per cent). We hope these numbers will grow and suggest that a target of 20–25 per is an appropriate proportion to ensure the future development of the sector.

## 4.10 STRENGTHEN UK PRODUCERS’ POSITION AS INTERNATIONAL CO-PRODUCTION PARTNERS

UK producers’ position in the international market is weak, partly as a result of the limited contribution they can make to co-productions. Wherever possible, existing and additional production funds should be made eligible for international co-productions to ensure UK producers are more attractive co-production partners.



*Becoming Animal*  
 (dirs. Emma Davie and Peter  
 Mettler, 2018) © maximage  
 and SDI Productions

## 4.11 INTRODUCE A DOCUMENTARY TAX RELIEF

Given the comparatively small budgets for documentary relative to the other recipients of UK screen sector tax reliefs – namely fiction film, high-end television, animation, children’s television and video games – a dedicated tax relief for theatrical nonfiction films would be a low-cost way of addressing the funding crisis in the sector. While it would require an ambitious effort to galvanise a dedicated tax relief, the UK’s successful use of tax relief for other culturally vital screen sectors – the Animation Tax Relief (2013) and the Children’s Television Tax Relief (2015) – demonstrates the potential of such interventions to boost production and help these sectors develop ‘green shoots’ (BFI 2018, 18–20). The precedents of the animation and children’s television tax reliefs, and the lobbying efforts required to achieve them, may also provide a blueprint for how the documentary sector could approach this work – which we recommend is led by the Documentary Tax Relief working group (see 4.11.1 below). We see no reason why documentary should not receive dedicated tax relief support like these other sectors, particularly given the chronic under-funding evidenced in *Keeping It Real*, and suggest that lobbying for a Documentary Tax Relief should be a priority for the sector.

#### 4.11.1 CONVENE A DOCUMENTARY TAX RELIEF WORKING GROUP

We recommend that a Documentary Tax Relief working group be convened to coordinate lobbying efforts, as well as organise around tax relief education (see 4.11.2 below). The following factors should be considered by them as part of lobbying efforts for the documentary tax relief:

- ▶ Arguments for tax relief must come from a wide-ranging group that represents several sub-sectors and organisations in the documentary community. Because of the complex nature of tax relief and the long-term nature of the negotiation process, we suggest that a Documentary Tax Relief working group be formed to develop this proposal and liaise with the BFI and DCMS (see 2.1).
- ▶ Once formed, liaising with those involved with the development of previous tax reliefs should be a priority. See members of the steering group listed in the BFI report, *Screen Business: How screen sector tax reliefs power economic growth across the UK* (2018, 5).
- ▶ Smaller projects and companies should be subject to a fast-track process. This would ensure accessing the relief is not overly burdensome to those who lack the administrative support of larger projects and producers.
- ▶ The percentage of total spend required to be spent in the UK – and/or the points required to access it – should be lowered for documentary projects, to encourage UK documentary makers to work internationally.

#### 4.11.2 EDUCATE DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS ABOUT THE FILM TAX RELIEF

Many problems with regards to the existing Film Tax Relief (FTR) stem from a lack of understanding – on behalf of both filmmakers and accountants – about how the FTR works and how to access it. We suggest that the Documentary Tax Relief working group liaise with the UK Doc Group and the BFI Certification department to explore how to improve knowledge about the tax relief among the documentary community. Better information and support for filmmakers, in the form of guides (see below), webinars and/or helplines, is key to enabling filmmakers to make an informed decision about whether claiming FTR makes sense for their production, as well as making the process of applying more transparent and accessible.

Guidance on accessing the relief should thus be a key feature in the proposed 'Feature Doc 101 Crib Sheet' (see 3.3). This should include the following:

- ▶ Typical fees filmmakers can expect to pay (from £1,500–£5,000 depending on the complexity of the claim). Fees should typically be lower for documentaries than fiction films, particularly since documentary projects will often file for interim tax relief as well as when the film is completed, which makes the application process more straightforward.
- ▶ A list of accountants with expertise in accessing UK creative sector tax reliefs. We appreciate that it can be difficult for sector support organisations to make recommendations that could result in commercial gain for other companies, but this is a necessary step to ensure filmmakers receive the best service available.
- ▶ Information on projects only need an accountants' report if they accrue their points for the Cultural Test in Sections C (Cultural Hubs) and D (Cultural Practitioners). Therefore, if possible, it is preferable to secure the required 18 points in Sections A (Cultural Content) and B (Cultural Contribution).
- ▶ Information on cash-flowing the tax relief. If the filmmakers cash-flow their tax credit, they are effectively equity financiers of their project and should recoup alongside other equity financiers.
- ▶ Identify good practice with regards to future tax relief applications, such as establishing the Film Production Company (FPC) that will be making the claim as soon as possible in the production process. Many documentaries, particularly those that are filmed over a period of several years, encounter difficulties with accessing the tax relief because of the rule that prevents principal photography from beginning before the FPC is established (footage that predates the FPC can be licensed to the company as archive material in order to become eligible for the FTR, but this is somewhat complicated and best avoided).
- ▶ Because directors frequently don't pay themselves while making the film, they often cannot claim the relief on those costs. In the long-term, filmmakers would be better off lending the money to the FPC and having the company pay them (through PAYE – dividends do not count as pay), which would then make those costs eligible for the tax relief provided they have been paid within four months of the claim.

# BROADCAST

We recognise that this is an extremely challenging moment for UK Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs). The pandemic has wrought havoc in the television industry and created serious problems for broadcasters already significantly weakened by competition from streamers on the one hand and antagonistic government policy on the other. Since 2010, the BBC has been gradually defunded via the license fee freeze and the removal of government support for over-75s, and now faces proposals to decriminalise license-fee evasion. Channel 4, meanwhile, faces significant financial problems as a result of its near total dependence on television advertising – an already declining market that nose-dived when the pandemic hit – and the renewed threat of privatisation (Farber 2020). As well as the potential privatisation of Channel 4, the government is now also considering removing the public service obligations on ITV and Channel 5 (Woods and Williams 2020).

In this immediate context, it is obviously unrealistic to expect more funding from PSBs in the short-term. However, in the longer term, the fact remains that a healthy independent documentary sector in the UK will require greater involvement and support from UK PSBs. As a key public service genre alongside news, arts and children's programming, long-form documentary is needed now more than ever. It is therefore critical that some of the longer-term aims regarding increased funding for documentary from PSBs stay on the agenda.

Furthermore, recent successes such as *The Underdog vs The State* (dir. Sam Soko, 2020) and *The Australian Dream* (dir. Daniel Gordon, 2019) on BBC Storyville, or *For Sama* (dirs. Waad Al-Kateab, Edward Watt, 2019) on Channel 4, evidence the potential of feature docs to attract large audiences with essential stories – *For Sama* grossed \$1.4m worldwide and reached 445,000 viewers when it aired in the UK in October 2019. Indeed, Netflix has made this abundantly clear by making documentaries a cornerstone of its programming, acquiring several Storyvilles and funding films produced by UK talent, such as Joanna Natasagara's *The Edge of Democracy* (dir. Petra Costa, 2019).

The recommendations below focus on ways in which PSBs can review and enhance their support for the independent UK documentary sector over the long-term. While funding is clearly a major concern in addressing PSBs' relationship with the documentary sector, so too is the development of better working relationships and communication structures between the sector, the various departments and executives at PSBs and the regulator, Ofcom. With the right interventions, broadcasters can play a critical role in transforming the UK feature docs sector into a thriving international success.

**“ IT IS OBVIOUSLY UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT MORE FUNDING FROM PSBs IN THE SHORT-TERM. HOWEVER, IN THE LONGER TERM, THE FACT REMAINS THAT A HEALTHY INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY SECTOR IN THE UK WILL REQUIRE GREATER INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT FROM UK PSBs. ”**

## 5.1 CONVENE A BROADCAST DOCUMENTARY WORKING GROUP

Developing the relationship between PSBs and the independent documentary sector is an urgent but long-term project that will require an appropriate organisational structure. A working group comprised of stakeholders from the documentary community should thus be convened to carry out this work and take responsibility for its coordination.

## 5.2 IMPROVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PSBs AND THE FEATURE DOCS SECTOR

As noted in 2.2, there is significant scope to develop more effective working relationships between PSBs and stakeholders in the feature docs sector, to foster greater mutual understanding between the two sectors, and to identify opportunities for collaboration. We suggest that these fundamental aims should be high on the agenda of the Broadcast Documentary working group. The consultation raised the following ideas as a starting point:

- ▶ The Broadcast Documentary working group should explore ways to develop a forum for discussion and exchange between Ofcom, PSBs and members of the Documentary Film Council.
- ▶ Stakeholders in the feature docs sector should explore ways to create more opportunities for senior staff at PSBs to attend and engage with feature docs events and film festivals.
- ▶ PSBs should be encouraged to approach commissioning of feature docs differently from other kinds of more predictable television forms, and to be open to more flexible terms, particularly with regards to rights. Consultation participants commented on instances where PSBs require full rights for a long duration, sometimes years, but the content is not always used or included on online players for the whole time.

## 5.2 INCREASE BBC STORYVILLE'S BUDGET

The BBC should increase significantly the budget of its flagship feature doc strand, Storyville. After almost three decades at the height of the international documentary circuit, the Storyville brand carries enormous respect and prestige around the world. Yet its current budget – less than a million pounds per annum at the time of writing – is not adequate to sustain that reputation. By way of comparison, during the consultation ARTE France reported a dedicated feature docs budget of approximately £4.4m.



### 5.3 DEVELOP CHANNEL 4'S INVOLVEMENT IN FEATURE DOCS

Channel 4 has been largely absent from the UK's feature docs sector since the cancellation of True Stories (1993–2012). Any successful project to enhance UK PSBs' support for feature docs must include Channel 4. We therefore recommend that the working group convene conversations with Danny Horan, Channel 4's Head of Factual, and Ollie Madden, Film4's Head of Creative, to explore how Channel 4's involvement with feature docs could be developed, including the return of a dedicated series to match Storyville.

### 5.4 FACILITATE CO-PRODUCTION BETWEEN THE FILM INDUSTRY AND PSBs OVERSEAS

All UK PSBs should be encouraged to explore opportunities to develop co-productions with their counterparts in the film sector. There was a widespread perception among consultation participants that broadcasters are currently much more focused on co-productions with streamers.<sup>7</sup> Working more collaboratively with organisations such as the BFI and the other organisations represented in the UK Doc Group would be more beneficial to all parties.

Similarly, there is also considerable scope for UK PSBs to develop more regular and formal partnerships with international PSBs. Among those we spoke to in the consultation, there was considerable appetite for this at PSBs including ITVS' Independent Lens, POV and Frontline in the US and ARTE France, ARD/NDR (Germany) and SVT (Sweden) in Europe. The existing 'TV Documentary' group within the European Broadcasting Union, currently chaired by Axel Arnö of SVT, could be a useful forum through which to develop these partnerships.

### 5.5 REVIEW AND ENHANCE PSBs' COMMITMENT TO TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Consultation participants stressed the loss of scaffolded career progression in the nonfiction television industry over the past twenty years and argued that this is a significant barrier to the development of diversity among the top talent in the sector. Thus, with reference to 1.3 ('Enhance support beyond entry level'), we suggest that nonfiction commissioning editors and departments across all PSBs review the ways in which the filmmakers with whom they work can progress towards longer and more challenging formats and ultimately feature films and series.



## 5.6 REGULATE COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE FILM INDUSTRY

Like the BBC and Channel 4, the UK's commercial PSBs – ITV and Channel 5 – receive prominence on viewers' Electronic Programming Guides (EPGs) in return for meeting their public service remit. We support commercial PSBs' privileged position on the EPG. However, we suggest that their commitment to public service should be strengthened by expanding their remit to include support for UK film. We note the 2014 Film Policy Review Panel recommendations that BskyB, ITV and Channel 5 should invest £20m, £10 and £5m respectively in original feature film production (DCMS 2014, 17) – recommendations the government encouraged and accepted at the time. The working group should revisit these arguments with members of the Panel and look to develop similar proposals – which include a proportion of funds ring-fenced for feature documentary – in collaboration with Ofcom, BBC Film, Film4 and the broadcasters in question.

*Bank Job* (dirs. Hilary Powell and Daniel Edelstyn, 2020)  
© Dartmouth Films and Optimistic Productions

## 5.7 INCLUDE FEATURE DOCS ON BRITBOX

Britbox, the streaming service launched by the BBC and ITV in November 2019, should include and give prominence to feature-length documentaries. Since the publication of *Keeping It Real*, the service has renamed its ‘Doc & Lifestyle’ strand ‘Documentaries’, but this still consists almost exclusively of classic series such as *First Tuesday* (ITV, 1983–93) and *Seven Up* (ITV, 1964–), presenter-led factual television and natural history films. At the time of writing, only a single feature doc is included on the service: *Bros: After the Screaming Stops* (dirs. Joe Pealman and David Soutar, 2018).

## 5.8 DEDICATE RESOURCE TO MARKETING AND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

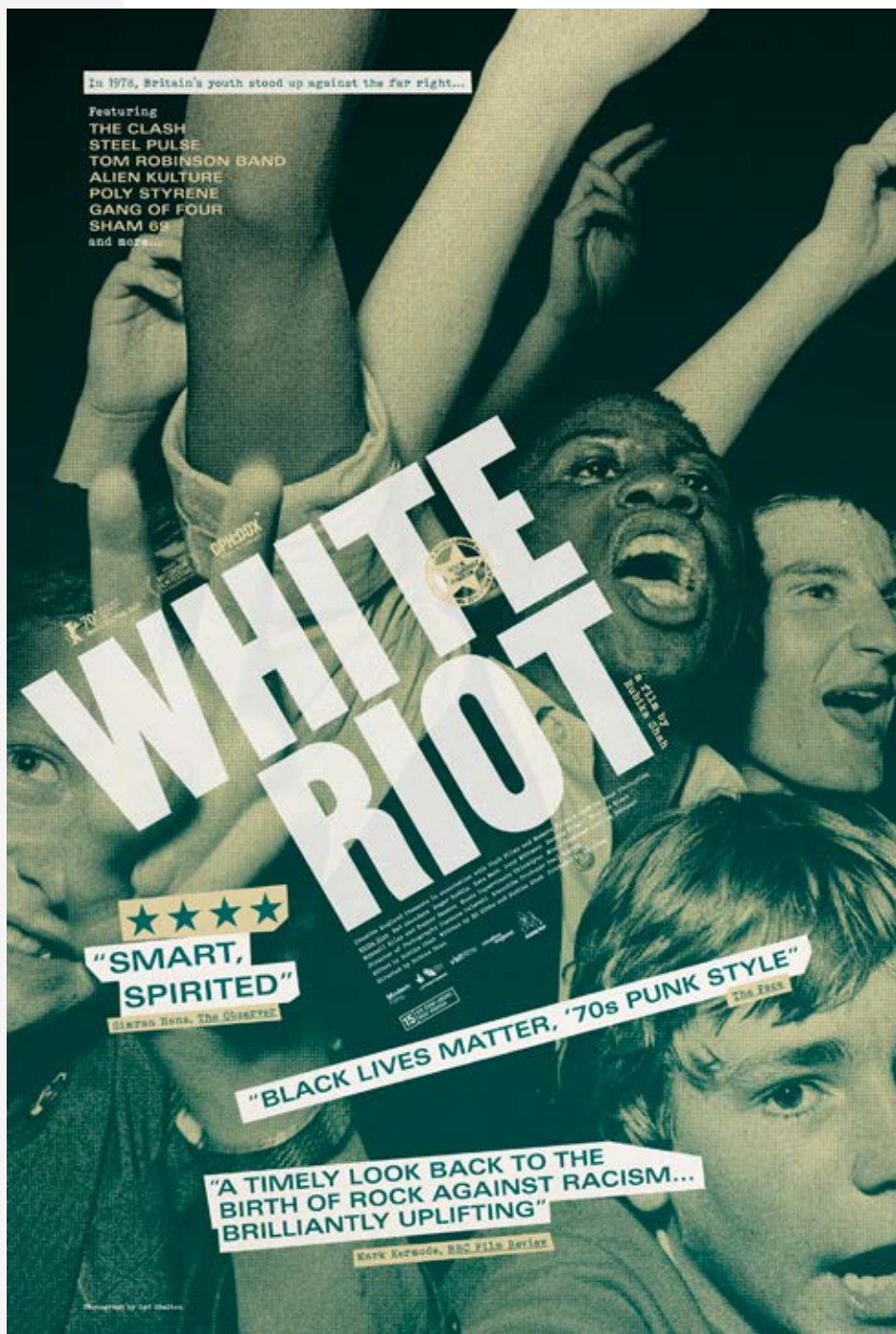
There is a widespread perception that feature-length documentaries are inadequately marketed by PSBs that habitually under-estimate the audience demand for these films. Indeed, as noted above, the widespread appeal of documentary is evident from its success on SVOD platforms, which have capitalised on the opportunity to cater to a market under-served by PSBs. We therefore recommend that the working group convene conversations with broadcasters to explore how feature-length documentaries can be better promoted on their respective channels and On-Demand platforms and to share best-practice in this area.

## 5.9 INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FEATURE DOCS AIRED ON UK PSBs

UK distributors emphasised that while they successfully work with non-English language documentaries in the international market, they struggle to sell these films to UK PSBs. There is therefore an opportunity for broadcasters to provide audiences with a wider range of international documentaries and to support UK distributors by screening more of their foreign language titles. We suggest that the working group liaise with broadcasters’ acquisitions teams, distributors and Ofcom with a view to PSBs making a greater commitment to showing foreign-language feature docs.

## 5.10 REVIEW OFCOM’S OVERSIGHT OF PSBs’ RELATIONSHIP WITH DOCUMENTARY

Few of the recommendations outlined in this section are likely to be implemented or sustained in the longer term without Ofcom’s intervention



*White Riot* (dir. Rubika Shah, 2020) © Smoking Bear  
 Photo by Syd Shelton,  
 courtesy of Modern Films

and oversight. As we have suggested above, we therefore recommend that the working group liaises with Ofcom to develop the relevant proposals and that, where necessary, clearer targets, incentives and penalties are used to help ensure the proposals become a reality. As noted in 2.2, making a clear distinction between feature-length documentary and factual television will be key to Ofcom’s effective regulation of the sector.

## DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION

Production, distribution and exhibition exist in a symbiotic relationship: to thrive, each sub-sector requires the cooperation and support of the others across the value chain. However, in the documentary industry at present, there is a significant lack of coordination, integration and understanding between and even within these interdependent sectors. Exhibitors face immense financial pressure and competition for limited screens, and feel their role is under-valued within the wider ecosystem. Both distributors and exhibitors argue that they are inadequately funded compared to the production sector – although this is difficult to assess because, unlike production, no funding is currently ring-fenced for documentary distribution or exhibition. Combined with several specific challenges in both distribution and exhibition, this disparity means that distributors and exhibitors alike are ill-equipped to deal with levels of production that have resulted in an oversaturated market.

Increased funding for distribution and exhibition, combined with greater coordination both among exhibitors and distributors, and between the exhibition, distribution and production sectors, would ultimately benefit the entire documentary community. It would enable a more strategic approach to building documentary audiences, create optimum conditions for films released theatrically and those released on digital platforms and thus provide the best chance for the full range of documentaries being produced to maximise their audiences at home and abroad.

Based on the consultation and interviews with stakeholders in documentary distribution and exhibition, we suggest the following eleven recommendations. With the current crisis in the exhibition sector, it is clear that many (though by no means all) of the recommendations below are now medium- to long-term aims, and those involved will have to decide where to put their energies first. Nevertheless, these are the changes that emerged from the consultation and which are ultimately required before this part of the industry can thrive.

## **6.1 CONVENE A DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION WORKING GROUP**

Because of the shared objectives and need for collaboration across the two sectors, we recommend that a joint Distribution and Exhibition working group be convened to develop this work in the longer term. The group should consist of programmers, curators and audience development leads from the range of cinemas, film festivals and exhibition organisations active in documentary exhibition alongside representatives from UK-based documentary distributors (such as Dogwoof, Together Films, Anti-Worlds, Journeyman, Modern Films, Peccadillo and Verve Pictures).

The group should liaise with organisations including the BFI, BFI Doc Society, BFI FAN and the UK Cinema Association (UKCA), and should initiate conversations with relevant departments and commissioners at UK PSBs, including the commercial PSBs – ITV and Channel 5 – as well as the BBC and Channel 4. As with the other working groups, the Distribution and Exhibition working group should also be represented on the Documentary Film Council to ensure effective communication and coordination with the rest of the sector. Priorities for the working group should be decided by its members, though we suggest the following should be high on the agenda:

- ▶ Lobbying for dedicated funds ring-fenced for documentary distribution and exhibition, and for a more proportionate balance of funds between production, distribution and exhibition.
- ▶ Convening discussions with other members of the Documentary Film Council regarding the need to support the theatrical distribution of fewer films with more money, enabling those films that are released to have greater impact in the marketplace.
- ▶ Contributing to wider lobbying efforts to ensure Creative Europe replacement funding includes support for documentary distribution and exhibition as well as production (see 4.6).
- ▶ Lobbying for longer-term funding of cinemas to facilitate local and regional audience development.
- ▶ Establishing a national documentary exhibitors' mailing list to improve communication and coordination and facilitate sharing of knowledge and best practice.
- ▶ Liaising with BFI FAN to explore how the network could better support and connect with the documentary sector.

## 6.2 RING-FENCE FUNDS FOR DOCUMENTARY EXHIBITION AND DISTRIBUTION

Consultation participants emphasised the need for a more balanced relationship between funds for production and funds for distribution and exhibition. The disparity that exists at present – though currently unquantified – is a key contributing factor to the oversaturation of the market and the inability of the distribution and exhibition sectors to adequately support production. Under the BFI's current five-year plan, BFI2022, £9.2m per year is allocated to support exhibition and distribution activities under the 'Future Audiences' strategic priority. This includes £3m per year for the Film Audience Network – the regional network of 8 Film Hubs – and £6.2m per year for the Audience Development Fund, which supports national film festivals, film distribution and touring programmes (BFI 2017, 28). While some of this money supports documentary projects, there are no funds specifically dedicated to documentary distribution or exhibition. As a result, given the overwhelmingly fiction-oriented nature of the UK film industry, it is safe to assume that the vast majority of these funds are spent in support of fiction films, festivals and projects.

We therefore suggest that the Distribution and Exhibition working group engage in talks with the BFI to ensure funds for documentary are ring-fenced in future budgets for both FAN and the Audience Development Fund. Specifying the actual proportion of funds to be ring-fenced is a complicated task and should be arrived at as a result of the talks. Nevertheless, as a starting point, it may be useful to note that if 20–25 per cent were ringfenced (as is recommended in [4.1](#)), funds allocated to documentary distribution and exhibition would be between £1,832,000 (20 per cent) and £2,290,000 (25 per cent). Regardless of the actual figure, we stress that only with dedicated funds for documentary distribution and exhibition will it be possible to ensure a properly balanced relationship between production, distribution and exhibition.

### **6.3 INVOLVE DISTRIBUTORS IN PRODUCTION FUNDING AWARDS**

Involving distributors in production funding awards could help forge more effective working relationships across each stage of the production-distribution-exhibition value chain. It would also enable distributors to consider international opportunities at an earlier stage, enhancing UK documentaries' performance in the global market ([see 6.11, below](#)). [See 4.4](#) for an example of how distributors (and producers and directors) are incorporated into decision-making at the Danish Film Institute.

### **6.4 PROVIDE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR EXHIBITORS TO PROGRAMME DOCUMENTARY**

One use of ring-fenced funds for exhibition and distribution could be to provide incentives for exhibitors to include documentary films in their schedules. As noted in [recommendation 4.8](#) with regards to supporting more experimental and innovative films, this could be modelled on existing incentive schemes such as Film Hub South West's Cinema Incentive Scheme or the Europa Cinemas initiative.

### **6.5 EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR LONGER-TERM FUNDING OF CINEMAS**

Consultation participants and interviewees were adamant that the short term-ism of current project-based funding, such as that allocated by both the Audience Fund and regional Film Hubs, is prohibitive to the long-term project of audience development.



Longer-term investments provided directly to cinemas would allow cinemas to plan interventions based on their unique local and regional contexts and to invest strategically in developing more diverse audiences for both documentary and other kinds of cultural film.

## 6.6 DEVELOP PUBLIC ACCESS TO DOCUMENTARIES FROM THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT

Documentary film festivals are a key component of the exhibition sector, showcasing the most contemporary, experimental and innovative work from the UK and across the world. Yet much of this work is rarely seen outside of the festival circuit. Increasing public awareness of and access to the range of documentary cinema in the festival circuit could be a valuable means of building audiences for a more diverse range of documentary cinema and of contributing to the wider aim of enhancing documentary's cultural profile. Consultation participants suggested that this could take the form of a designated online documentary platform, or that stakeholders might devise a strategy that utilised a range of existing platforms and media.

## 6.7 ESTABLISH A DOC EXHIBITORS FORUM OR MAILING LIST

Exhibitors felt they could be better connected with regards to coordinating documentary exhibition and expressed a need for more formal and informal opportunities to communicate and share knowledge and expertise. Establishing a documentary exhibitors' mailing list would be a quick, significant and cost-free way of facilitating this, and should be created by members of the working group at the earliest opportunity. Such a mailing list could be used to, for example:

- ▶ Share and promote forthcoming films with particular cultural significance or audience potential.
- ▶ Coordinate national Q&A tours and other events.
- ▶ Develop release strategies for films that premiere online or which have other non-standard release models.
- ▶ Share promotional resources and ideas with other cinemas and exhibition organisations.
- ▶ Enable documentary specific exhibitors, such as Doc/Fest, Open City and Bertha DocHouse, to share curatorial recommendations or examples of best practice.

## 6.8 EXPLORE HOW BFI FAN CAN ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR THE DOCUMENTARY COMMUNITY

As a unique infrastructure for UK exhibition, the BFI Film Audience Network could also play a key role in helping exhibitors to coordinate and work more effectively with documentary at both national and regional level. This could include the following:

### 6.8.1 National initiatives

- ▶ Ensuring documentaries are included in forums and events such as Screening Days and Slate Days.
- ▶ Exploring how BFI FAN/Film Hubs' Project funding could better support audience development for documentary.
- ▶ Exploring how FAN's New Releases scheme could be expanded to specifically include documentary.
- ▶ Making provision for FAN programmers to meet and discuss working more collectively to support documentary.
- ▶ Working with Multiplexes and Boutique cinemas to incentivise and encourage the screening of feature docs, potentially in collaboration with the UKCA.
- ▶ Exploring the possibility of a nationwide tour of UK documentary, working with the sector to raise the profile and awareness of documentary among young audiences in particular.
- ▶ Increasing support for documentary Q&A events: exhibitors emphasised that Q&As work particularly well with documentaries because unlike fiction, in which celebrity status is often the main draw, documentary Q&As are much more subject-orientated. Thus, documentary Q&As often include not just talent from the film but local figures, charities or activists, which makes the conversation relevant and tangible to local audiences. This means that even without 'star power', Q&A sessions can enable smaller docs to perform significantly better and to engage audiences who may not normally attend but who have a special interest in the film's topic.

### 6.8.2 Regional initiatives

- ▶ Developing documentary audiences outside London by ensuring more documentaries are available in suburbs, towns and villages, which do not have access to the same range of content that is available in more metropolitan areas (Jones 2020, 30). This could be done by working more with Boutique and Chain cinemas (see below), as well as with community cinemas, and by offering bespoke interventions and support to regional independent cinemas.
- ▶ Focusing on building young audiences. Jones (2020, 30) found that young people often gained the most from the experience of watching documentaries but were less likely than older people to watch them. Focusing on young people also coheres with BFI FAN's strategic priority to target people under 30.
- ▶ Exploring the potential of working with Boutique and Chain cinemas (who have greater screen capacity) and extending Picturehouse's exemption of documentary from the 16-week holdback across Cineworld and other chains.

## 6.9 PARTNER WITH DIVERSE PROGRAMMING TALENT

Ensuring diverse voices are involved in engaging diverse audiences is a prerequisite of effective DEI practice in the exhibition sector. Cinemas rarely have the funds to expand their staff teams, which means the most accessible avenue to diversifying programming (and therefore audiences) is through engagement, partnerships and freelance expertise. Working with freelance curators and exhibition groups – and paying them fairly for their time – is critical to nurturing a new wave of cinema curators. Bristol's Watershed cinema and its work with the Black curators' group, Come the Revolution, is a good example of best practice here.

## 6.10 MODERNISE RELEASE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

Exhibitors and distributors are still largely obliged to work with an outdated release model that clearly delineates between television and cinema releases. Consultation participants and interviewees were adamant that this delineation no longer exists in the minds of either filmmakers or audiences. We therefore suggest that the exhibition and distribution working group reviews these structures in consultation with the wider sector and works towards updating them. This could include:



*The Confession*  
 (dir. Ashish Ghadiali, 2017)  
 © Rogan Productions

- ▶ Working more closely with PSBs and SVODs to develop ways of collaborating on simultaneous releases to mutual benefit.
- ▶ Developing release strategies for films that premiere online: many films that would have had a theatrical run before debuting in other windows are now going straight to streaming platforms, yet skipping the theatrical window is detrimental for filmmakers and audiences as well as cinemas. Developing a theatrical strategy for films that premiere online would help address this problem.
- ▶ Liaising with Comscore and other stakeholders to represent documentary revenue more accurately in reporting. Box-office income is still the primary way of measuring a film's 'success' but does not include income from digital downloads, streaming platforms or non-theatrical licenses. Partly because of the lack of broadcast and theatrical support and partly because some films are better suited to non-theatrical distribution, documentary distributors are particularly adept at exploiting non-theatrical licensing. Distributors in the consultation emphasised that documentaries often generate sizeable six-figure returns from private and corporate screenings, but that this income is not reported. Better recognition of this key ancillary revenue stream would provide a more accurate – and significantly higher – representation of the economic value of many documentary films.

## 6.11 DEVELOP UK DOCUMENTARIES' PERFORMANCE IN THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Distributors perceive the international market to be much more vibrant and open to documentary films than the UK domestic market and argue that UK filmmakers are missing opportunities to exploit their films' international value. Several ideas were proposed to help improve UK documentaries' performance in the international market.

- ▶ Explore ways to involve distributors at an earlier stage in the production process to identify and develop international strategies for relevant projects ([see 6.3, above](#)).
- ▶ Ensure documentary distributors are included in plans, already underway at the BFI, to enhance support for distributors working with UK films internationally.
- ▶ Research Scandinavian and other international support models and examples of good practice and explore how similar schemes could be implemented in the UK. For example:
  - The Swedish Film Institute provides funding of between £4,000 and £52,000 towards the P&A costs of a Swedish film's release in other territories (Swedish Film Institute, 2018).
  - The Nordisk Film Fond funds VOD or cinema distribution support, including marketing or dubbing, for Nordic films to be released in other Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland or Iceland) e.g. a Swedish film to be released in Norway (Nordisk Film and TV Fond, n.d.).
  - Funds for creating different language versions or DCPs.
  - Festival support packages in which, when a film achieves a certain amount of submissions, it qualifies for funding to support the next stage of its release.

# SCREEN HERITAGE

The consultation pointed to a range of issues concerning the access to and use of archive material on the part of directors, producers, editors and programmers/curators. These problems are political and aesthetic as well as practical and economic because they condition who can access and engage with the UK's screen heritage – which itself embodies histories and ideologies of class, colonialism, sexism and so on – and who cannot. The recommendations in this section outline a clearer and fairer method of organising and accessing Screen Heritage, including a code of practice for fair use and scaled rate card. These measures aim to ensure both that the costs of accessing archive are more appropriate, and that filmmakers are better equipped to understand the costs involved as well as how best to approach working with archive materials. We recommend that the Screen Heritage working group (see below) leads on the development and implementation of these recommendations.



*The Reason I Jump*  
(dir. Jerry Rothwell, 2020)  
© MetFilm

## 7.1 CONVENE A SCREEN HERITAGE WORKING GROUP

A Screen Heritage working group should be convened to provide the organisational framework necessary for developing this work in the longer term. The group should be comprised of academics, archivists and filmmakers and should liaise with organisations including the BFI, Learning on Screen, Film Archives UK, Archives for Education and FOCAL, the international federation of audio-visual archives. A representative from the Screen Heritage working group should also be included in both the UK Doc Group and the emergent Documentary Producers UK (DPUK).

## 7.2 DEVELOP A CODE OF PRACTICE FOR FAIR USE

In the UK – far more than in the US – there is ambiguity regarding copyright exceptions and what constitutes ‘fair use’. Sector bodies can play a role here by endorsing a code of practice regarding what is considered fair in the context of reusing protected materials. In the US, this played a major role in guiding decision-making in the courts and helped establish a set of fair use precedents that do not exist at present in the UK. To develop this code, the Screen Heritage working group should convene a series of focus groups with filmmakers, archives and lawyers to develop a code that is considered fair by all stakeholders, is compliant with copyright law, and which the sector can rely on in future.

### 7.3 DEVELOP A SCALED RATE CARD AND EDUCATE FILMMAKERS ABOUT ARCHIVE COSTS

Access to archive is prohibitively expensive to all but the most well-resourced projects. This has significant consequences for equality and diversity because less privileged filmmakers are unable to access and explore the archive.

A scaled rate card in which independently financed productions, those with clear public service value or productions with home territory broadcaster involvement could secure discounted access from FOCAL members would result in more equitable access to screen heritage and help producers understand how much their archive use was likely to cost.

We also recommend that budgets for film and exhibition projects requiring archive footage should be developed with an archive producer at the outset to avoid unrealistic expectations regarding the time, costs and rights requirements surrounding archive use.

### 7.4 IMPROVE ACCESS TO ARCHIVE MATERIALS

Archives and sector support organisations could increase awareness and encourage better working practices by developing creative projects in which filmmakers were given access to small parts of their archive. The BBC/BFI 'Listen to Britain' project (2017) was a valuable, but all too rare, example of this kind of project. In particular, these projects should explore how to provide routes into archives for filmmakers from diverse backgrounds, including working class people, people of colour, queer and disabled filmmakers. Film festivals should also aim to provide increased space in their programmes to events promoting access to and use of archive material.

**“ IN THE UK – FAR MORE THAN IN THE US – THERE IS AMBIGUITY REGARDING COPYRIGHT EXCEPTIONS AND WHAT CONSTITUTES ‘FAIR USE’. SECTOR BODIES CAN PLAY A ROLE HERE BY ENDORSING A CODE OF PRACTICE REGARDING WHAT IS CONSIDERED FAIR IN THE CONTEXT OF REUSING PROTECTED MATERIALS. ”**



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# ENDNOTES

**1** The focus groups took place simultaneously and were organised around the following issues and sub-sectors: diversity (2 groups); funders, agencies and broadcasters (2 groups); producers (2 groups); directors (2 groups); distribution and sales (1 group); exhibition (1 group); festivals (1 group); and archives (1 group).

**2** The Whickers' annual Cost of Docs reports (2016– ) provide a valuable exception in this regard. The fourth edition, which looks specifically at the changing landscape for documentary makers in the UK and internationally, is available here: <https://www.whickerawards.com/cost-of-docs-report-2020/>.

**3** Because the £1.8m awarded to Doc Society includes funding for training and support as well as development and production funds, it is important that the comparative figure for fiction films does, too. The £20.9m cited above has been arrived at by combining the annual BFI Production Fund (£15.9m) with the annual budgets allocated to the 'Development Fund' and the 'Talent Development and iFeatures' funds (£2.5m respectively). It is important to note, however, that while the majority of these funds will be spent on fiction projects, they are not exclusively for fiction filmmakers per se. Although the 'Talent Development and iFeatures' fund is reserved largely for fiction (because the proportion of talent development and short film funds that goes to Doc Society comes from the Production Fund), many of the BFI's training and development schemes funded through this budget are 'genre agnostic' and as such open to both fiction and documentary filmmakers alike. In addition, the Production fund supports animated short films and hybrid works that can include documentary content.

**4** We suggest 20–25 per cent because this figure broadly relates to genres of production. Between 2015 and 2017, for example, documentaries comprised 25.2 per cent of all films produced in the UK (BFI 2018, 164). Between 2016 and 2018, that figure was 22.7 per cent (BFI 2019 177).

**5** The history of the UK Film Council (UKFC, 2000–11) is instructive here. The UKFC was created partly as a result of the Film Policy Review Group’s recommendation in its 1998 report, *A Bigger Picture*, that the structures of UK film funding should be streamlined. Thus, the range of bodies with film funding responsibilities in the late 1990s – including the film production arm of the BFI; British Screen; the Film Commission; and the Arts Council – were ultimately incorporated into the single new body of the UKFC. This move was ‘intended to bring coherence and make oversight of a sector characterised by multiple constituencies of interest more straightforward’ (Doyle et al 2015, 46). When the UKFC was abruptly shut down in 2011, its duties were transferred to the BFI, hence the latter’s current status as the lead body for UK film. However, while there is value in the simplicity of having a single institution with national responsibility for film culture, production, audience development and so on, this clearly risks the consolidation of funding and decision-making power in too few hands. Indeed, as Doyle et al also note, not everyone agreed that consolidation was required or productive when the UKFC was formed. According to Simon Perry, CEO of British Screen from 1991–2000: ‘the worst thing is that there ... was a pluralism and a very effective British way of working that got lost’ (53). Similarly, others felt that a ‘fragmented structure of support suited British producers because it avoided the creative agenda that a single power base may have’ (43). With regards to making changes in the documentary sector, policymakers should be wary of this history, and of the need to strike a careful balance between pluralism and coherence.

**6** Taxing turnover rather than profit means that SVODs are taxed on the advertising and sponsorship revenues broadcast on their websites and on the price paid by UK consumers to access their audiovisual content, not that content itself.

**7** This does not include Storyville which, unlike the rest of the BBC, does not partner with streamers.

“We really welcome the publication of *Making It Real*. Last year’s report, *Keeping It Real*, provided an essential review of the state of the independent documentary sector in the UK. *Making It Real* is the next step in establishing appropriate and practical policy priorities to create a sustainable sector, which already makes a major contribution to the cultural and economic life of the UK. *Making It Real* provides the agenda for future discussions across the whole of the feature documentary sector.”

**CHRISTO HIRD, DOCUMENTARY PRODUCERS UK**

“It’s so exciting to read such a detailed and comprehensive set of policy proposals for the UK feature doc sector. We have known for years that there are unique challenges to this work but now we have this great roadmap that points to some ways forward. Doc Society prides itself on being “the friend of the filmmaker” and recognises that, as the largest funder of UK feature documentary, we have a unique role to play in creating a more equitable and better funded landscape for all. We can’t wait to get started on making these proposals a reality and look forward to continuing the great conversations already started with the doc community, the BFI and other sector organisations. Kudos to UWE’s UK Feature Docs team for bringing this together and big thanks to all the filmmakers who contributed their experiences.”

**SANDRA WHIPHAM, DOC SOCIETY**



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