

# Documentary Film Council Open Assembly 2024: Summary Findings

02/07/2024

## Introduction

This document is a summary of the DFC Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Open Assembly that took place at Sheffield DocFest on Saturday June 15, 2024. This was the DFC's second Open Assembly and its first AGM, marking the end of our first year of operation. As with the Assembly/launch event last year, this year's assembly was very well-attended and buzzing with excitement following the election of the DFC's first Board of Trustees in the Spring. Check out [this video](#) for some highlights of the event.

The event was split into two distinct parts, the AGM took place first and was followed by the Assembly. We've summarised both below and have written up the feedback from participants. This is what we'll use to help steer our work this year, so thank you to everyone who contributed with such enthusiastic, thoughtful and encouraging ideas. Onwards!

### The AGM

The AGM was facilitated by the DFC's Chairperson, Roisín Geraghty. After a presentation on the year's activities by the DFC's Joint Acting CEOs (Emily Copley and Steve Presence), Members voted unanimously to approve the [Trustees Annual Report](#) and the Unaudited Financial Statement.<sup>1</sup> The Interim Board was thanked for its service and the newly elected Board of Trustees were welcomed to the stage. Two Trustees, Andy Mundy-Castle (Doc Hearts) and Sandra Whipman (Doc Society) gave short speeches (see highlight reel) and the AGM concluded with a brief Q+A session with the CEOs.

### The Assembly

The Assembly part of the event was facilitated by Elhum Shakerifar (Producer, Curator & Writer, Hakawati) and Flore Cosquer (Director of the Scottish Documentary Institute; DFC Trustee). This focused on the formation of DFC sub-groups, which was one of the priorities foregrounded by the Council's membership last year. The Assembly comprised two exercises: 'The Dreamer' invited

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<sup>1</sup> The DFC's year-one income was below the £250k threshold that requires an audit but this must still be approved by members.

participants to imagine what kinds of group they would like to be part of (i.e. based on geography; topic; or profession), what that group would do and how it would contribute to the documentary film culture and community in their region. The second exercise, 'The Pragmatist', asked participants to think concretely about what these groups should be called (branches, chapters etc), how they should be organised (who calls meetings, who liaises with the DFC's leadership team etc) and what kind of resources the groups would need.

## Participant feedback

Feedback was collected via large sheets from each table and smaller individual feedback forms, and included general feedback on the DFC and what its priorities should be as well as on the specific issue of forming members' sub groups. The first thing to note is the overwhelming positivity for the DFC initiative and the event in general, with lots of comments regarding the good work done so far - particularly given that the DFC is operating on a voluntary basis - and urging everyone to 'keep going!'. People felt 'excited by the possibilities of what the DFC could achieve' and reiterated the need for the organisation and what it's designed to do: 'build, connect and foster links between orgs and filmmakers in UK doc sector', 'bridge building', 'keeping a place at the table', 'lobbying for wider recognition' and so on.

However, there were also some notes of caution, as well as calls for action on more specific issues (many of which we're working on). Some stressed the importance of building a more diverse membership - noting that the room felt very white and able-bodied.<sup>2</sup> Others suggested more could be done to bring new people up-to-speed with the organisation and its goals, noting the amount of work required to build a better UK documentary sector can feel overwhelming. Regarding specific suggestions along those lines, participants emphasised the importance of establishing connections with Pact and the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), called on the DFC to pressure for the UK to rejoin Creative Europe's MEDIA programme, to demand 15% of BFI production funding, and to push broadcasters 'to support the DFC and generate more opportunities for documentary on British television'. Prioritising the focus of our policy work for this year will be a key task for the new board. There were also calls for an online 'platform for comms' - we're working on this and will be launching a [Discourse](#) platform for DFC members in the 2024-25 cycle.

Regarding feedback on the formation of DFC members' groups, participants were conscious that 'group facilitation is very difficult' because of the challenges involved in providing 'leadership and frameworks' from the centre while enabling groups to develop organically and in response to the different needs in different places. There were also differing opinions on whether the sub groups should be issue-based or organised around particular tasks. For example, one table called for a group focused on welcoming new members and orienting them to the DFC and its goals, while others felt that groups based on 'neurodiversity and disability' or on 'links with Higher Education and graduate filmmakers' were needed. Many participants emphasised the importance of meet-ups

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<sup>2</sup> There was also some confusion about the accessibility of the venue (Channing Hall), which is accessible despite the wrought-iron spiral staircase that suggests otherwise: <https://www.room-hallhiresheffieldcitycentre.org.uk/accessibility>.

being in-person (because it can be hard to build meaningful connections online) and that the priority should be on developing regional groups outside London.

In terms of existing models or structures we could look to for inspiration and ideas, participants suggested the Lux Critical Forum, Ethereum in France, the Mountaineering Council and Greenpeace. Participants also recommended developing a buddy system and / or ambassador roles across the country, and suggested looking at the model of 'integrated practice' advocated by British independent filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s.

Finally, there were also a range of responses to the prompt regarding what DFC groups should be called: assemblies; chapters; choirs; circles; clubs; collaborations; collectives; communities; crews; DFC North, DFC South etc; fractions (focused on crafts skills); hubs; InFocus (on mental health); kernels; labs; locals; networks; nests; Special Interest Groups; swells; uplifts.