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# KEEPING IT REAL

## TOWARDS A DOCUMENTARY FILM POLICY FOR THE UK

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UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

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

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This report and the survey on which it is based are part of the UK Feature Docs research project, which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. To find out more about the project or to get in touch with us, please visit **https://ukfd.org.uk/.**

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# PREFACE

**Coronavirus hit the UK as the text of this report was being finalised. With a reported 93 per cent of the UK's film and television freelancers out of work as a result of the virus (Rosser 2020), in some ways it feels odd to be publishing a report about the contexts and concerns of a pre-COVID-19 world.**

Yet the virus will pass, and the world's film and television industries will be rebuilt. As that work is carried out, detailed records of conditions before the virus will be essential, not only as benchmarks with which to measure the impact of COVID-19, but as evidence of the myriad problems that pre-dated it – many of which will have been exacerbated by the coronavirus.

As this report demonstrates, conditions in the UK's feature docs sector were extremely tough for the majority of those working in the field even before the virus hit. Of course, life is extremely difficult for much of the industry right now, and it is not our intention to argue that the feature docs sector is more or less important than any other part of the screen industries. However, we do wish to emphasise that the feature docs sector is a *distinct* element of the film and television industries – despite the many characteristics (and problems) it also shares with them. The singular existence of the feature docs sector – its status as a unique and coherent ecosystem – is rarely understood by those operating outside or on the margins of the field. Too often, feature docs are seen either as part of the independent film industry on the one hand, or as a breakout element of the television industry on the other. As a result, and as evidenced in the report, the feature docs sector has been significantly under-supported by both film and television policy alike. Clearly, the problems identified here will persist in a post-COVID-19 world. As the industry is rebuilt in a post-virus environment and some of the damage is undone, there will also be opportunities to make the world anew, and to address or ameliorate some of the problems of old. We hope this report contributes to that process for the feature docs sector and look forward to continuing the feature docs policy debate in 2020 and beyond.

*Into the Inferno* (dir. Werner Herzog, 2016) © Spring Films, Matter of Fact Media

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a survey of UK feature documentary producers and directors that was conducted in the summer of 2019 under the auspices of the UK Feature Docs research project, an AHRC-funded study of the UK's feature-length documentary film sector. Since 2001, when just four documentaries were released in cinemas (O'Sullivan 2017, 135), the feature docs sector has grown significantly, and is now a distinct part of the UK's wider film and television landscape. By 2018, 110 feature docs were released theatrically, and documentaries now comprise more than a quarter of all films made in the UK (BFI 2019, 36). Dedicated, world-class organisations exist to serve the feature docs sector across finance, production, distribution and exhibition and every year films such as *A Northern Soul*, *For Sama*, *Seahorse*, *The Edge of Democracy* or *The Dirty War on the NHS* – to name but a few – captivate audiences and shape the national conversation. Indeed, with print journalism in decline and populism on the rise, the feature-length documentary is a vital means through which complex and challenging subjects can be explored in depth and can play a critical role in informing audiences' understanding of the world. And yet, despite the enormous cultural and social value of these films, most feature docs do not make money – a key issue to which we will return.

Beyond these headline statistics, published data on the UK feature docs sector is scarce – a situation which is also true of nonfiction industries elsewhere, though this is changing as other countries move to develop dedicated nonfiction film policies.[1] In the UK, partly because of this lack of data, conditions in the feature docs sector are often not recognised and the unique challenges involved in making feature-length documentary films can be poorly understood by those outside the sector. As a result, feature docs are frequently forced to adapt to models of funding, production, distribution and exhibition that have evolved to support independent fiction films. Yet despite many similarities between the fiction and nonfiction film industries, several key differences – many of which stem from documentary's unique relationship with the real world – render industrial frameworks designed to support fiction inappropriate for documentary-makers. In light of this problem, the survey and this report were designed to help evidence the challenges and concerns of feature-documentary filmmakers and to kick-start a conversation in the UK about the need for a bespoke nonfiction film policy.

The report is comprised of 9 sections. This introduction presents the key findings, a summary of our recommendations (outlined in full in section 9), information about the research design and methodology, as well as a timeline of some key dates in the evolution of the feature docs sector in the UK. Section 2 focuses on our findings with regards to diversity and inclusion across age, class, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and caring responsibilities. Section 3, 'Geography and place', presents data on the geographical location of survey respondents alongside qualitative data on their views about working in the feature docs sector in London and in the nations and regions. Section 4 explores respondents' various roles in the industry – though the survey was targeted explicitly at producers and directors, many respondents perform multiple roles on their projects. We also explore correlations between those roles and respondents' industry experience, education, income, gender and class. Section 5 focuses on budgets and financing. It explores the different budget bands at which people in the feature docs sector are working, their sources of finance, the frequency of personal investment in the sector as well as respondents' thoughts on accessing the UK Film Tax Relief for feature doc projects. Sections 6 and 7 explore respondents' views on training needs and policy interventions respectively, while section 8 presents an overview of respondents' qualitative responses organised into key themes addressing the sector overall. Finally, section 9 presents our suggested recommendations in full.

## 1.1 KEY FINDINGS

The ten key findings from this report are as follows:

1 The feature docs sector suffers from a chronic lack of public funding across the board. Documentary receives less than 10 per cent of Lottery funds for film, and there is widespread feeling that broadcasters' support for the sector is inadequate. BBC *Storyville* – the last remaining slot for feature documentary on UK television – is significantly underfunded compared to many of its European counterparts. Channel 4 is largely absent and ITV a 'lost cause'. Development funding is particularly lacking, as are funds that make British producers attractive co-production partners.

2 Existing production funds are concentrated in too few organisations – the urgent need for more funding is matched by the need to increase the plurality of funders in the sector.

3 Budgets for feature documentaries are very low: 84 per cent of respondents worked on films with budgets of less than £500,000 – and 40 per cent on films with less than £100,000. Only 4 per cent worked on films with budgets over £1m.

4 Personal funds are by far the most common source of funding for feature docs: 43 per cent of respondents had invested their own money in their films, with 18 per cent investing £20,000 or more.

5 After personal funds and foundations/private investors, tax relief is the most common source of funding. However, filmmakers' experiences of accessing the Film Tax Relief differs significantly; even experienced filmmakers find the process complex, expensive and 'based on a template for narrative fiction'.

6 The feature docs sector has a significant diversity problem. A huge majority (91 per cent) of survey respondents were middle class and a large majority (65 per cent) were based in London and the South East. Women, people of colour and people with disabilities are significantly under-represented.

7 The under-funding of the feature docs sector is a significant contributing factor to its diversity problem, because only those with independent financial means are typically able to sustain careers as filmmakers. This has particular consequences for ethnic as well as class diversity, with people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups more likely to be from low-income backgrounds (IRR 2015).

8 Respondents expressed widespread concern about documentary's low status as a mode of filmmaking, which suggests there is a need to address its cultural profile within the industry.

9 There was an overwhelming feeling among survey respondents that the sector lacks structure and coherence, with insufficient knowledge-sharing, few networking opportunities and irregular support outside London.

10 There are several issues in the sector that are related to training and education. Respondents emphasised the need for training in business and marketing skills; conceptual and crafts skills; for coping with the ethical challenges involved in nonfiction filmmaking; and for comprehensive training provision outside London. The results also suggest that there is a disconnect between higher education providers and sector specific skills providers.

## 1.2 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

**We present our 15 recommendations in full in section 9. The following is a shortened summary.**

## DIVERSITY

**1 Prioritise evaluating interventions over data collection**

- Addressing inequality in the sector should be a priority for the proposed sector steering group (recommendation 2). As part of this work, rather than produce more research evidencing the lack of diversity in the sector, we suggest it would be useful to collate existing initiatives across the feature docs sector and to make them available in one place. We also suggest that these initiatives should be evaluated for their effectiveness, and their respective strengths and weaknesses – something noted as lacking in recent research in this area (Newsinger and Eikhof 2020).

*Thank You For The Rain* (dir. Julia Dahr, 2017) © Banyak Films

## SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

**2 Convene a sector steering group or coordinating body**

- Sector coordination and information-sharing could be significantly improved by a steering group, network or sector council comprised of representatives from different parts of the industry. Such a group would be a key means of lobbying policymakers for increased support for the sector and of addressing the myriad other needs identified in this report.

**3 Improve the cultural profile of feature docs within the industry**

- Improving the cultural profile of feature docs within the industry should be a priority. This is clearly a challenging and long-term process, which we suggest would be most effectively coordinated by the sector steering group recommended above.
- We also suggest that screen sector institutions shoulder some of the responsibility for building a stronger cultural profile for feature docs, ensuring dedicated knowledge and expertise exists in-house in their organisations.

**4 Coordinate support for nonfiction filmmakers across London, the nations and regions**

- We suggest that organisations across the sector explore how the structure and coherence of the sector across the UK could be improved and discuss 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, both in terms of infrastructural or organisational support and in terms of dedicated feature doc production funding.

**5 Support for filmmakers' mental health**

- Stress and anxiety are especially acute among documentary filmmakers, who – as well as being freelance, precarious workers – often work with

vulnerable people in traumatic or even dangerous situations. We recommend that the sector coordinates with the Film+TV Charity's mental health taskforce to explore potential improvements in this area.

### 6 Training, education and research

- Filmmakers emphasised the need for training in business and entrepreneurship as well as in creative and craft skills. We recommend that sector-lead organisations liaise with ScreenSkills to explore how to better address these needs.
- Higher Education providers should work more closely with the sector-lead organisations to prepare graduates for the challenges of working in the industry. However, universities must remain more than industry service-providers. It is essential, therefore, that a closer working relationship with industry does not jeopardise universities' role in cultivating film literacy, critical thinking and a deep understanding of film history, form and craft.
- Given that foundations and private investors are the second most common source of funding for feature doc makers, it is crucial that training providers prepare filmmakers to tap into this increasingly important funding stream.
- There is a need for more regular and granular data to be produced on the feature docs sector. We recommend liaising with the BFI's Research and Statistics Unit to explore how the range and scope of data on documentary can be increased in its *Statistical Yearbook*.

### 7 Explore the potential for a dedicated documentary market and conference

- An annual documentary marketplace and/or conference, in addition to markets at existing documentary festivals, could be an exciting means of raising the profile of the feature docs sector on the international stage. We therefore suggest that sector stakeholders and organisations come together to consider this possibility, potentially as part of, or in collaboration with, BFI London Film Festival's industry strand.

## FUNDING

### 8 Increase the proportion of Lottery funds ring-fenced for documentary

- We recommend that the BFI increase the proportion of Lottery funds ring-fenced for documentary to between 20–25 per cent of the total £20.9m available. This would see the BFI Doc Society Fund increase from £1.8m (9.1 per cent) to between £4.1m (20 per cent) and £5.2m (25 per cent).

### 9 Diversify funders and strengthen the place of documentary within BFI NETWORK

- We suggest that steps be taken to increase the plurality of funders operating in the sector, and welcome discussions on what that might look like. BFI NETWORK appears to provide an effective, nationwide funding structure for emerging fiction and animation filmmakers. We suggest Doc Society and the regional NETWORK executives explore how documentary funds could be distributed more effectively across the nations and regions of the UK.

### 10 Increase Public Service Broadcasters' support for feature documentary

- The BBC should significantly increase the budget of *Storyville* to a level commensurate with its competitors overseas – an increase that would see *Storyville*'s budget increase several times over.
- Channel 4 should have a dedicated series to match *Storyville*. This would enhance the channel's support for the sector to a level that better reflects its remit and position as the UK's publicly-owned, commercially-funded PSB and further increase and diversify production funding.
- Ofcom should strengthen the UK's commercial PSBs – ITV and Channel 5 – commitment to public service content by expanding their remit to include support for 'specialised'[2] film in general, with dedicated budgets for feature docs in particular.

*The Act of Killing* (dir. Joshua Oppenheimer, 2013) © Final Cut for Real, Spring Films

**11 Ring-fence funds for documentary in Creative Europe replacement funding**

- Any replacement funding negotiated by the BFI to replace the loss of funds as a result of the UK government's decision not to seek participation in the next Creative Europe MEDIA programme should include ring-fenced funds for documentary.

**12 Encourage support for innovation and experimentation**

- Funders should encourage risk-taking and experimentation in terms of content, style and aesthetics. While recommendations for distribution and exhibition are not detailed here, it is worth noting that a holistic approach is as important for experimental films as for other kinds of independent film, and that exhibitors need financial support to take risks with documentary film programming in order to develop the audience for it.

**13 Enhance support for development**

- Where possible, funders should ring-fence dedicated development funds and support projects based on research, rather than 'the perfect pitch'.
- The BFI Vision Awards and BFI NETWORK's new scheme, Insight: The New Producer Programme, are immensely valuable. We hope the numbers of documentary producers on these schemes will grow and suggest that a target of one-third documentary producers is an appropriate proportion to ensure the future development of the sector.

**14 Strengthen UK producers' position as international co-production partners**

- Wherever possible, existing and additional production funds should be made eligible for international co-productions to ensure UK producers are attractive co-production partners.

**15 Introduce amendments to the UK Film Tax Relief (FTR) for documentary**

- Tax relief should be increased to 50 per cent of the budget of qualifying documentary projects.
- If the producer cash-flows the tax credit, they are effectively an equity financier and should be entitled to recoup alongside other equity financiers.
- The percentage of total spend required to be spent in the UK should be lowered for documentary projects.
- The total points required to qualify for the FTR should be lowered for documentary projects.
- Because documentary producers and directors often commence photography prior to establishing a Film Production Company (FPC), it should be made clear in the FTR guidelines that if the footage is licensed as archive material, the costs (of filming prior to establishing an FPC) are eligible as UK costs for purposes of calculating the FTR.
- Documentary projects should not be subject to the same audit fees as fiction films, particularly since documentary projects will often file for interim tax relief as well as when the film is completed.

## 1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The UK Feature Docs survey focused exclusively on UK-based producers and directors that had worked on at least one feature doc project (with 'feature length' defined as films of 69-minutes or more that were designed for theatrical release as well as broadcast). By focusing exclusively on producers and directors, we were able to isolate the production sector and gain a depth and granularity of response that would have been impossible had the survey also sought responses from personnel working in commissioning, distribution, sales and exhibition. Because these sectors are considerably smaller than the production sector, they are better analysed using other research methods, such as interviews, focus groups or sector-specific surveys (work which is ongoing as part of the wider UK Feature Docs research project).

The survey was designed to build upon existing data on the UK documentary sector provided by two key publications. The British Film Institute's *Statistical Yearbook*, released annually since 2002, is a key source for headline statistics, but provides little information beyond the numbers of films released, aggregate box office and the performance of documentary as a category of 'specialised' film. The Whickers' *Cost of Docs* reports, based on an annual survey conducted since 2016, provide much more detailed information on the nonfiction sector as a whole but include responses from a wide variety industry personnel working on all kinds of productions across Europe and beyond.

The UK Feature Docs Survey was carried out in partnership with Doc Society, which provided detailed feedback on the survey design, conducted an extensive outreach campaign to promote the survey and offered expert feedback on our analysis. We also consulted with several other organisations in the sector, including The Grierson Trust, the Scottish Documentary Institute, Sheffield Doc/Fest and The Whickers, as well as the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) in the US. None of these organisations had access to the raw survey data or sought to influence the findings or recommendations in this report, which remain those of the research team alone.

Thanks to Doc Society's outreach campaign, the survey secured a high response rate: exactly 200 people undertook the survey, all of whom completed it (the survey had a 100 per cent response rate) thoroughly, providing detailed responses to qualitative questions throughout. The survey was open for just over eleven weeks, from 6 June to 23 August 2019, and consisted of fifty-one questions. The first set of questions focused on sector demographics, including factors such as caring responsibilities, educational experience and geographical location. Subsequent sections solicited detailed information on particular projects and funders, as well as respondents' perspectives on the state of the sector, career stage, income levels and employment status. The final sections focused on training and education in the sector and opportunities for policy intervention.

> "IF THE PRODUCER CASH-FLOWS THE TAX CREDIT, THEY ARE EFFECTIVELY AN EQUITY FINANCIER AND SHOULD BE ENTITLED TO RECOUP ALONGSIDE OTHER EQUITY FINANCIERS."

Celebrating winning an Emmy® for *Trans In America: Texas Strong* © Little By Little Films

We specifically did not ask questions about topics that are sufficiently covered elsewhere, such as in the *Cost of Docs* reports. For example, valuable data on unpaid labour time – such as the fact that documentary workers feel they are paid for just 35 per cent of the actual time they work – was published in their 2019 report (p. 11). Other questions – such as levels of industry experience or proportions of personal income spent on film projects – were designed to provide benchmarks with which our data can be compared with documentary industries overseas. We have included comparative data – such as figures from the latest CMSI report (Borum Chattoo and Harder 2018) below. We used the BFI's Diversity Standards, introduced in 2018, for our demographic questions because these are slowly becoming the industry standard. Though this created some minor compatibility issues with other data sets – the BFI uses slightly different age classes to The Whickers and CMSI reports, for instance – we have merged some of our data, where relevant, to address this.

Finally, where there is a risk of identification through class disclosure or small observations (less than 5 per cent of respondents), we have applied standardised statistical disclosure control methods (including rounding-up, cell suppression and combined demographics) to protect the confidentiality of participants. As a result, the reader may notice that some tables do not total 100 per cent or that some values are not provided. Where we asked participants to respond to a range for questions such as 'What is your film's budget?', we calculated a mean estimate using the mid-point of the definite ranges and the starting pointing on the indefinite ranges. So, for example, for £0–£99,999, we used £50,000, and for options such as 'Over £1million', we used £1,000,000.

## 1.4 TIMELINE

Over the past two decades, the feature docs sector has evolved into a distinct part of the UK's wider film and television industries. Organisations dedicated to feature docs exist across finance, production, distribution and exhibition, and yet still the sector is overlooked or obscured by its relationship with the independent film sector on the one hand, and the television industry on the other. For this reason, we thought it useful to include in this report a brief timeline of some key points in the development of the feature docs sector.

We have included some of the more significant and/or higher-grossing titles in the timeline because they provide convenient markers for the development of the sector and the consolidation of nonfiction as a theatrical form. However, it is important to stress that the high-grossing titles are to some extent misleading: the vast majority of feature documentaries do not make money. Indeed, while documentary is the largest genre in terms of the numbers of film produced (more than one quarter of the total films made in 2015–17) (BFI 2018, 164), it is also among the lowest earning, with a total share of the gross box office of just 0.6 per cent in 2018 (BFI 2019, 36) (Figure 1).

The timeline demonstrates how the feature docs sector emerged from the television industry partly as a result of de-regulatory legislation – first the 1990 Broadcast Act and later the 2003 Communications Act – which pressured public service broadcasters to operate in a more commercial manner. Departments, slots and budgets that supported longer-form documentary – such as Channel 4's Independent Film and Video department (1982–2004) or the BBC's *Modern Times* (1995–2000) – were gradually closed down, and independent organisations were established that sought to replace broadcasters' declining support with patchwork financing from around the world. The 'jigsaw' finance model was and remains standard practice in the independent fiction film business, but for documentary makers used to having their films fully financed by broadcasters, this was a brave new world. As part of this shift, charities and foundations became a major target for documentary film finance, as UK filmmakers looked to their counterparts in the US where – without the UK's strong public service tradition – foundation money had long been a major source of nonfiction film funding.

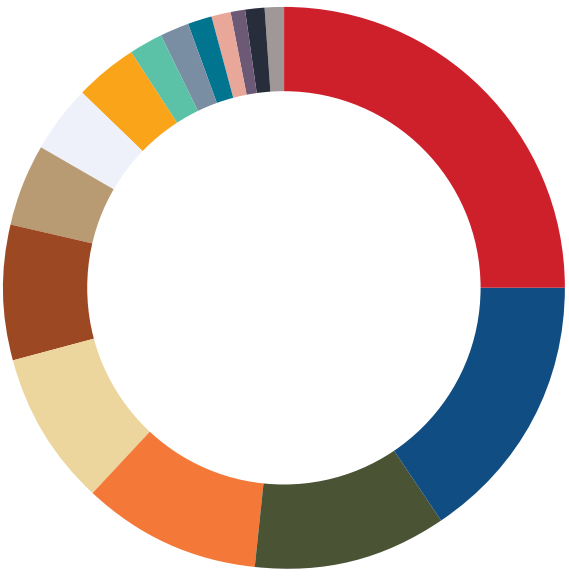


**FIGURE 1** Genre of film production 2015–17 (% of films) (BFI 2018, 164)

# KEY DATES AND EVENTS

## 1990

- The Broadcast Act makes Channel 4 sell its own advertising (forcing it into competition with other broadcasters); requires the BBC to source 25 per cent of its production from the independent sector; and auctions licenses for ITV franchises and reduces broadcasters' obligations to support PSB genres, including documentary.

## 1993

- Staff at the BBC Bristol's Documentary Unit decide to establish a documentary film festival to celebrate the form and its history. After failing to secure backing for the event in Bristol, the first festival takes place in Sheffield in 1994, as Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival.

## 1997

- *Fine Cut*, the BBC's feature doc strand founded and run by André Singer in 1992, is rebranded as *Storyville*. Nick Fraser, who took over from Singer as commissioning editor in 1995, runs the strand for the next 17 years.
- At ITV, *Network First* (1994–1997) – itself a replacement for two of ITV's main documentary series, *First Tuesday* and *Viewpoint* (1983–1993) – is cancelled.

## 1998

- Granada's long-running *World In Action* series is cancelled after 35 years (1963–1998).

## 2000

- *Modern Times* (1995–2000), the BBC's contemporary British documentary strand, is cancelled.

## 2001

- 4 documentaries are released in UK and Ireland cinemas.

## 2002

- *Bowling for Columbine* (dir. Michael Moore) becomes an international box-office hit – one of the first feature docs to do so.

## 2003

- The Communications Act enables independent producers to retain the rights to their programmes and sell to overseas markets. Broadcasters' obligations to show PSB content is further reduced, conglomeration rules are relaxed, and foreign ownership of UK media companies is permitted for the first time.
- *Touching the Void* (dir. Kevin McDonald, UK) is released.

## 2004

- Independent Film and Video, one of the last departments left over from Channel 4's experimental early years, is wound down.
- *Super Size Me* (dir. Morgan Spurlock) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (dir. Michael Moore) are released. The latter grosses £6.5m and becomes the highest-grossing non-concert documentary of all time.

## 2005

- BRITDOC is launched. *March of the Penguins* (dir. Luc Jacquet) is released.
- BRITDOC hosts a film festival in July. Entitled 'Wake up and smell the coffee', the festival emphasises the changing state of the UK documentary industry: 'only yesterday British broadcasters fully funded most documentaries, but tomorrow we will need to work globally …'.
- Heather Croall becomes director of Sheffield Doc/Fest. She significantly expands the event, moves the festival from November to June and introduces the MeetMarket pitching forum. Croall leaves Doc/Fest in 2015.

## 2006

- Following the success of *Black Gold* (dirs. Nick and Marc Francis), its distributor, Dogwoof, becomes the first distributor in the world to specialise in documentaries. *An Inconvenient Truth* (dir. Davis Guggenheim) is released and breaks documentary box-office records around the world.

## 2007

- 36 documentaries are released in cinemas.
- Netflix introduces a streaming service in the US.

## 2008

- *Man on Wire* (dir. James Marsh) is released.

## 2009

- Tony Tabatznik founds the Bertha Foundation to fund documentaries 'as a tool for social impact'. Bertha supports BRITDOC, DocHouse and Dogwoof.
- *The End of the Line* (dir. Rupert Murray) is released.
- Picturehouse adds Picturehouse Docs, a dedicated documentary strand, to its programming.
- *Age of Stupid* (dir. Franny Armstrong) is released and demonstrates potential of crowd-funding, having raised £450,000 for production and £180,000 for a 'green carpet' premiere.

## 2010

- Open City Documentary Festival is founded in London and quickly becomes the UK's second major documentary film festival.

## 2011

- Picturehouse moves into distribution with Picturehouse Entertainment, and subsequently releases many successful documentaries, including *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (dir. Werner Herzog, 2011), *The Imposter* (dir. Bart Layton, 2012), and *20,000 Days on Earth* (dirs. Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, 2014).

## 2012

- *True Stories* (1993–2012), Channel 4's last feature-length documentary strand, is cancelled.
- Netflix begins its expansion into Europe, launching in the UK and Ireland.

## 2013

- BFI announces in February the launch of two annual pitching sessions for its production fund, one at Doc/Fest and a second later in the year in London.

## 2014

- Altitude Film Distribution releases its first film, the Oscar-winning *20 Feet from Stardom* (dir. Morgan Neville, 2013) – and goes on to handle several commercially successful UK feature docs, including *Amy* (dir. Asif Kapadia, 2015), *My Scientology Movie* (dir. John Dower, 2015), *Whitney* (dir. Kevin Macdonald, 2018) and *Diego Maradona* (dir. Asif Kapadia, 2019).

## 2015

- 117 documentaries are released in cinemas. BFI and BBC collaborate on a 10-day, event-led, day and date release for *A Syrian Love Story* (dir. Sean McAllister), culminating in a BBC1 broadcast which attracts 1.5m viewers.

## 2016

- Nick Fraser steps down after 17 years as commissioning editor of BBC *Storyville*.

## 2017

- Kate Townsend leaves *Storyville* for Netflix in June.
- Mandy Chang is appointed *Storyville*'s new commissioning editor in August.
- BRITDOC wins the tender to distribute BFI funds ring-fenced for documentary, changes its name to Doc Society.

## 2018

- 110 documentaries are released in cinemas. Dogwoof releases the highest-grossing documentaries of 2018 and 2019, with *Free Solo* (dirs. Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin) and *Apollo 11* (dir. Todd Douglas Miller) respectively.

## 2019

- *Knock Down the House* (dir. Rachel Lears) is sold to Netflix for $10m at Sundance, breaking records for the most money ever paid for a non-fiction film.

# 2 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE FEATURE DOCS SECTOR

Surveys can be rather blunt instruments with which to explore diversity issues because of their vulnerability to self-selection bias: surveys inevitably reflect those who responded to the survey rather than the entirety of a given population. That said, survey data can provide useful indications of particular trends and characteristics. In this section we present our findings on the following diversity categories: age, class, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, caring responsibilities and geographical location. Overall, our data suggests that, like much of the rest of the creative industries, the feature docs sector has a significant problem with diversity.

## 2.1 AGE

As shown in Table 1, a combined 80 per cent of respondents were in the 35–over 60 age categories.

The age distribution of the participants showed an under-representation of filmmakers in the younger age classes when compared to both the UK labour force population more generally and the *Cost of Docs* and CMSI reports. These findings are to be expected, given that our survey targeted producers and directors working on feature docs, a premium format that most producers and directors make towards the middle and end of their careers.

**FIGURE 2** Age distribution of UKFD survey participants

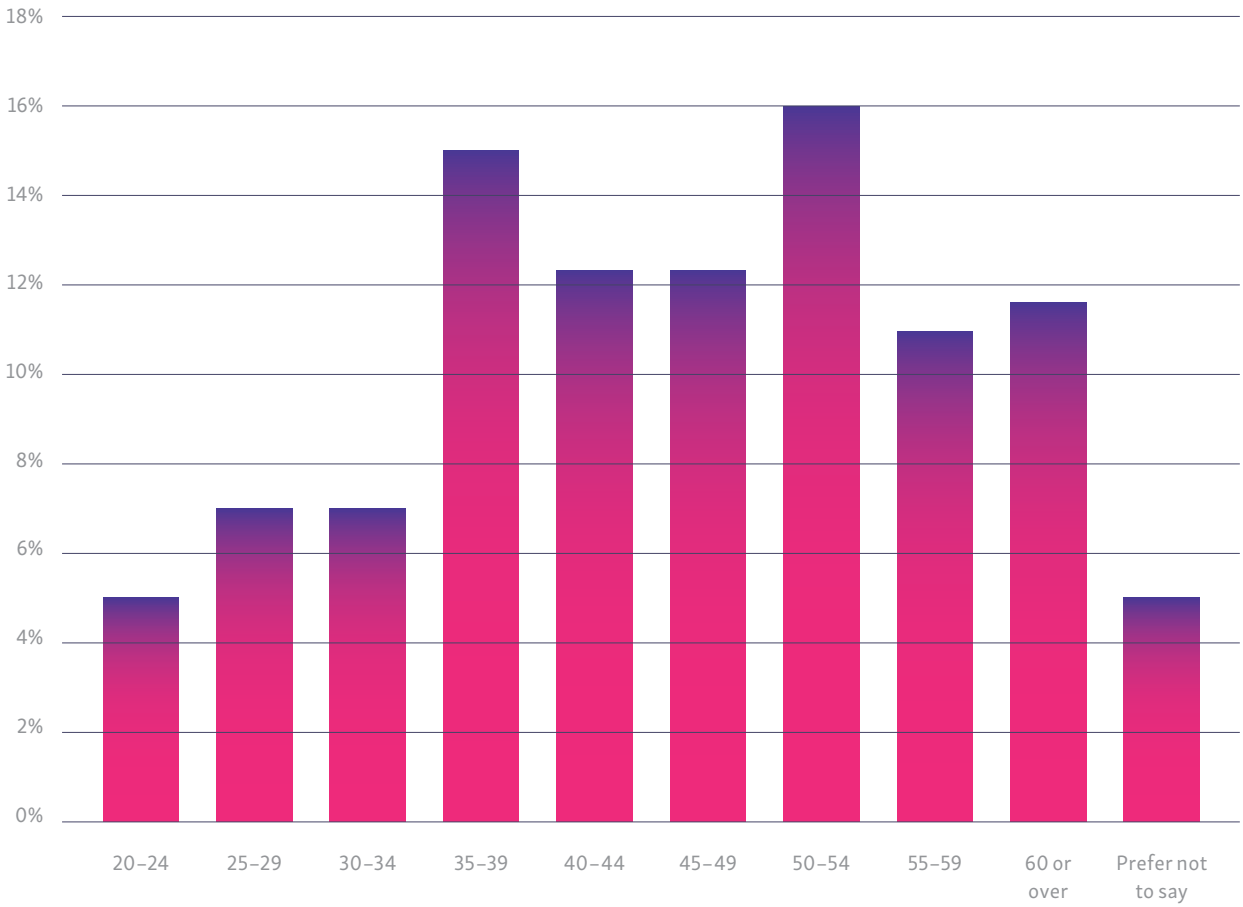


TABLE 1 Age range across comparative datasets

| Age Range (years) | UK Feature Docs (UKFD) survey *N=200* | Labour force population (ONS, 2019 estimates) | The Cost of Docs report – UK[3] (2018) *N=132* | CMSI report, USA (2018), *N=550* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <19 | <5% | 11% | 9% | 2% |
| 20–24 | | | | |
| 25–29 | <15% | 23% | 42% | 23% |
| 30–34 | | | | |
| 35–39 | 41% | 33% | 30% | 38% |
| 40–44 | | | | |
| 45–49 | | | 12% | |
| 50–54 | 39% | 32% | | 38% |
| 55–59 | | | 5% | |
| 60 or over | | | | |
| Prefer not to say | <5% | N/A | 2% | N/A |

## 2.2 CLASS

Social class is a major, if contested, social category that shapes workforce participation and advancement in several respects. Partly because it is more complex to measure than age or gender, class is also not one of the nine characteristics protected under the 2010 Equalities Act, and has therefore not been subject to as much discussion and research as gender, age and ethnicity – though this is starting to change (CAMEo 2018, 38–9; Randle et al 2015).

To avoid self-identification bias, we calculated respondents' social class using information provided about their parents' occupation; their level of education; the type of school they attended and their individual income. Using these variables, weightings were applied to provide an overall score which then allocated each respondent into a social class using the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) system, an occupation-based system and the UK standard since 2001. To enable a meaningful analysis, we have used the three-class variation of this system shown in Table 2.

A very large majority – 91 per cent – of the UKFD sample was middle class. 38 per cent of the sample were located in the NS-SEC category 1 (described here as upper middle class), 53 per cent in categories 2–4 (lower middle class), and just 9 per cent in categories 5–8 (working class) (Figure 3). This is marginally higher than the proportion of working-class people in the creative industries more generally, which is even lower, at 7.9 per cent (DCMS 2015, 24). We also analysed the combined demographic of class and income (discussed in section 4.4, below), and found a clear correlation between class and earnings from feature docs, with middle class filmmakers earning substantially more of their income from feature docs (38 per cent), compared to those from working class backgrounds (12.5 per cent).

| | NS-SEC categories | The three-class variation used in this survey |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations | Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations (upper middle class) |
| | 1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations | |
| | 1.2 Higher professional occupations | |
| 2 | Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations | Intermediate occupations (lower middle class) |
| 3 | Intermediate occupations | |
| 4 | Small employers and own account workers | |
| 5 | Lower supervisory and technical occupations | Routine and manual occupations (working class) |
| 6 | Semi-routine occupations | |
| 7 | Routine occupations | |
| 8 | Never worked and long-term unemployed | |

**TABLE 2** NS-SEC classification system and three-class variation

It has never been the case that the British working class was exclusively white (Snoussi and Monpelat 2019), but it is worth noting that class discrimination also has particular consequences for ethnic as well as class diversity, because people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups are statistically more likely to be from low-income backgrounds (IRR 2015). The overwhelmingly middle-class composition of the feature docs community is a major part of the sector's lack of diversity.

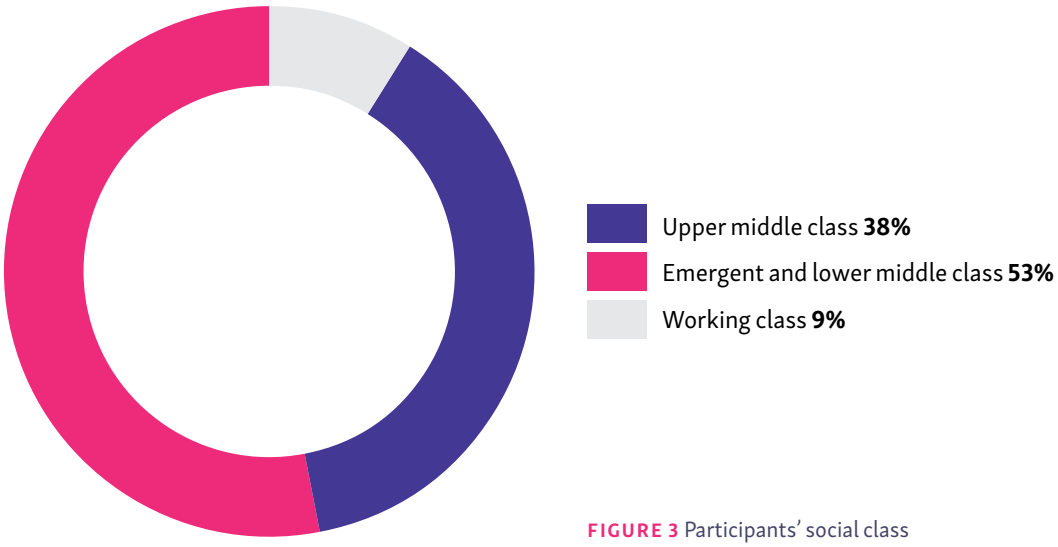



**FIGURE 3** Participants' social class

# CASE STUDY
# JOANNA NATASEGARA, VIOLET FILMS

Following an MSc in Human Rights from the London School of Economics, Joanna Natasegara was hired by a filmmaker to help navigate the complex U.N. system and naturally gravitated towards the role of producer, enjoying its multifaceted nature and the ability to have an effect in all departments. She went on to produce and direct at Spirit Level Films where she produced the BBC *Storyville* feature, *The Ministry of Truth* (dir. Richard Symons, 2007) and documentary series, *The Price of Kings* (dirs. Richard Symons and Joanna Natasegara, 2012).

In 2013, driven to maximise films' potential for social change, Joanna founded the production company Violet Films. Keeping impact and contributors' needs at the forefront, her work at the company has spanned a variety of geo-political and personal narratives. Organisations like the BFI, Bertha DocHouse and Doc Society (formerly BRITDOC) have remained her port of call as they offer numerous opportunities for UK filmmakers. A BRITDOC course led her to strategise and run the award-winning impact campaign for *No Fire Zone* (dir. Callum Macrae, 2013), and the BRITDOC Foundation introduced her to director Orlando von Einsiedel (now a regular collaborator), with whom she first worked as an impact producer and producer on *Virunga* (dir. Orlando von Einsiedel 2014).

Nominated for both BAFTA and Academy awards, *Virunga* won over 50 international awards, including an Emmy and a Peabody. Running a massive multi-year impact campaign, Natasegara also secured worldwide distribution for the film as a Netflix Original, attracting actor/activist Leonardo di Caprio to serve as the film's Executive Producer. *Virunga*'s impact ultimately encouraged British oil company, Soco, to abandon its oil exploration efforts in the park. Violet Films ran *Virunga's* communications office for over six years and Natasegara remains a Trustee of the Virunga Foundation which has gone on to establish a wide ranging and ambitious development programme for eastern Congo.

In 2016, Natasegara collaborated with von Einsiedel to produce the Academy Award-winning Netflix Original short, *The White Helmets*, which significantly raised the profile of first responders in war-stricken Aleppo, and on the BIFA-winning BBC/BFI/Netflix feature doc,

*Evelyn* (2018), which charted the von Einsidel family's personal struggle with the loss of their brother and inspired a nationwide campaign to walk and talk, encouraging dialogue and support around the subject of suicide.

A regular collaborator with Netflix, Natasegara believes in the platform's ability to enable filmmakers to speak truth to power and democratise access to unheard stories, delivering them to millions worldwide. Continuing to work closely with Netflix, Academy Award-nominated *The Edge of Democracy* (dir. Petra Costa, 2019) gave unprecedented access to the inside workings of the Brazilian political class during its most turbulent years. Focusing on the war on drugs in the Philippines, *The Nightcrawlers* (dir. Alexander A Mora, 2019), premieres on National Geographic this year. In addition to her ongoing love of documentary, Joanna has several scripted projects in development with major broadcasters.

▶ www.violet-films.com

*Virunga* (dir. Orlando von Einsiedel, 2014) © Violet Films, Grain Media

## 2.3 DISABILITY

7 per cent of respondents identified as having a disability, 85 per cent identified as able-bodied and 8 per cent chose not to answer this question (Figure 4). This suggests that people with disabilities are under-represented in the feature docs sector when compared to the wider population, in which 19 per cent of working age adults have disabilities (DWP 2018, 7). Almost 90 per cent of workers in the creative industries are able-bodied (DCMS 2018, 12), while the proportion of workers with disabilities in the audio-visual industry has been as low as 0.8 per cent (Randle and Hardy 2017, 448). However, the proportion of respondents declining to report on this issue presents a problem for understanding the sector.

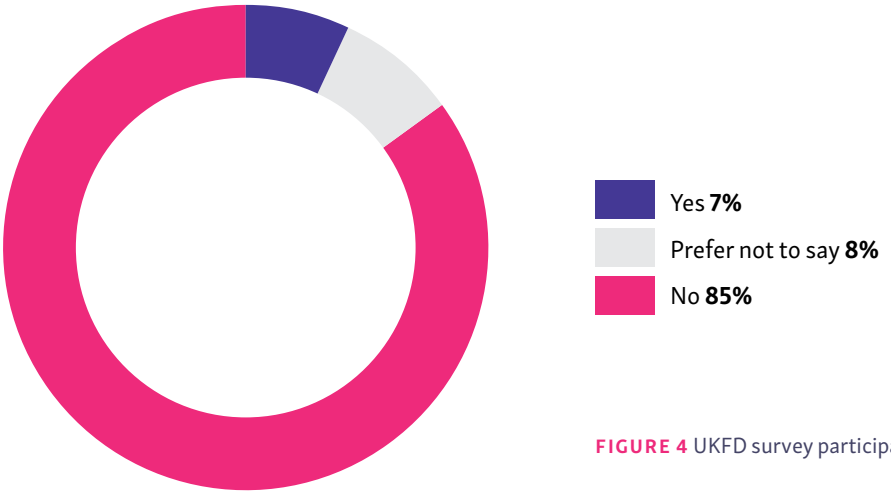
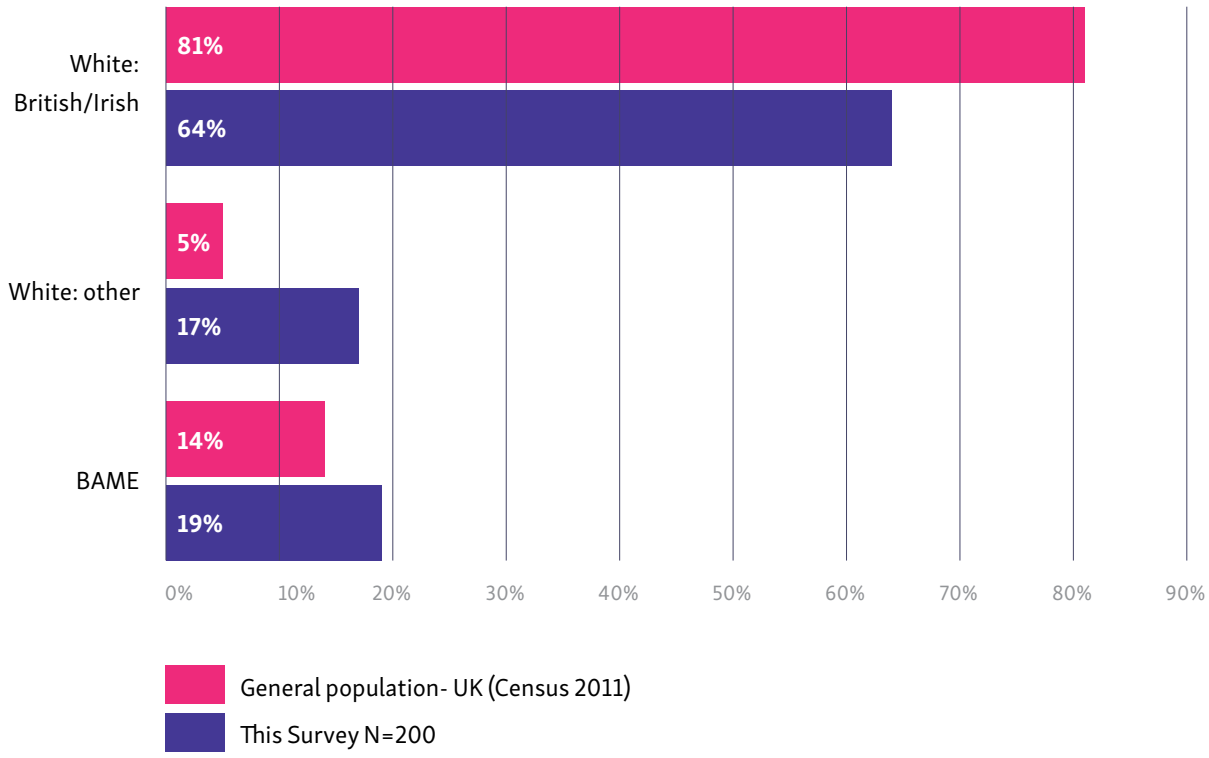



**FIGURE 4** UKFD survey participants: 'Do you have a disability?'

## 2.4 ETHNICITY

The majority of respondents – 81.1 per cent – reported their ethnicity as White British/Irish or White-Other, and a total of 18.9 per cent of respondents reported as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) persons. Of those BAME respondents, over half (55 per cent) were based in London – the UK's most ethnically diverse region by far, in which 40.2 per cent of residents identify as BAME. In fact, almost two thirds (65 per cent) of all respondents were London-based (see section 3, below). Therefore, while the comparisons with the national population appear to suggest that the feature docs sector is relatively ethnically diverse, these figures are based on a largely London-based dataset, and so indicate the opposite: the feature docs sector is disproportionately White, especially outside the capital. Indeed, in the UK, in every single nation and region outside London, BAME respondents numbered less than five people. The cosmopolitan nature of this London-skewing dataset also explains why the proportion of White-Other respondents (17 per cent) is so much higher than the general population (5 per cent). Of course, the under-representation of BAME workers is an issue across the film and television industries, and is arguably even worse when looking at the industries overall – a study in 2015 found that just 3.5 per cent of all UK film and television directors were BAME, for example (Directors UK 2015, 4).

**FIGURE 5** Ethnicity of responses to UKFD survey and general population



## 2.5 SEXUALITY

As shown in Table 3, approximately 70 per cent of respondents reported their sexuality as heterosexual, a lower proportion than the 93.7 per cent of heterosexual people in the UK general population, according to the 2015 Office for National Statistics' Annual Population Survey. Representation in our survey of bisexual (6 per cent), gay or lesbian (6 per cent) and self-described sexualities (less than 5 per cent) was also higher than in the general population. However, while this suggests that the feature docs sector is a diverse when it comes to sexuality, approximately 20 per cent of respondents declined to answer this question (the largest proportion that declined to answer of all questions asked in the survey). The strong aversion to answering this question is understandable, and this is one of the reasons why sexuality in the creative industries in an under-researched area (CAMEo 2018, 19). However, it should be noted that sexuality is a protected characteristic and that addressing the under-representation of such protected characteristics (as well as other characteristics that are not 'protected', such as class) depends upon accurate data gathering and reporting.[4]

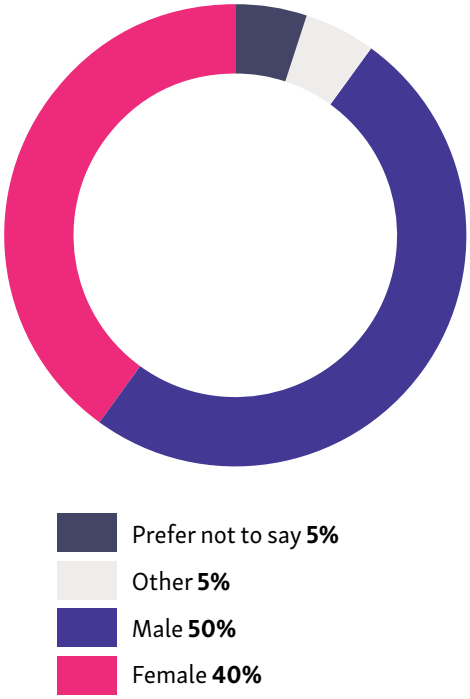
| Sexuality | UKFD survey | Annual population survey (2015) |
|---|---|---|
| Bisexual | 6% | 0.6% |
| Gay or Lesbian | 6% | 1.1% |
| Straight | 70% | 93.7% |
| Self-described | <5% | 0.4% |
| Prefer not to say | 20% | 4.1% |

**TABLE 3** Respondents' sexuality

## 2.6 GENDER

As shown in Figure 6, 50 per cent of all respondents identified as male, 40 per cent as female and less than 5 per cent selected the 'other' and 'prefer not to say' categories respectively.[5]

**FIGURE 6** Respondents' gender

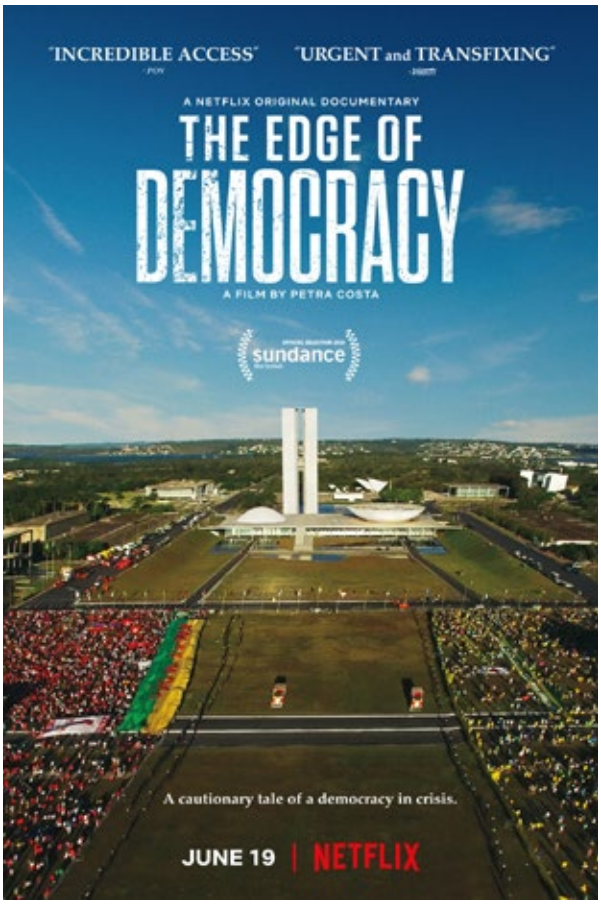



While these figures seem to suggest that the feature docs sector is approaching parity when it comes to the male and female producers and directors working in the sector, inequalities appear when one begins to break this data down in terms of role (producer or director), income and budget. Moreover, as shown below, when our survey data is situated alongside research based on production data – which shows that female directors account for only around 20 to 25 per cent of all feature docs that get made – our findings suggest that although women are active in the sector in almost even numbers as men, they are facing significant discrimination when it comes to getting opportunities to actually make work.

Our data suggests that women are more likely to produce than direct in the feature docs sector. Of our female respondents, 56 per cent were producers and 44 per cent were directors. Among male respondents, 39 per cent were producers and 61 per cent were directors. Allowing that there were more male than female respondents in the survey to begin with, we can say that men are significantly more likely to direct feature docs than women. Given the crucial role and higher status of the director in shaping the form and content of the films that get made, increasing the number of female directors in the sector is clearly a major concern when it comes to addressing gender inequality.

Our data also showed that women make less money than men from their feature docs projects. The estimated mean income for the women in our dataset was £33,488, almost £3,000 less than the estimated mean income for men (£36,261). Furthermore, twice the number of women than men reported making no money at all from feature docs (see also section 4.4, below).

Table 4 shows the breakdown of gender and budgets across the two roles. Male and female directors are fairly evenly represented in each budget band, with men slightly over-represented in films with budgets of less than £100,000 and




*The Edge of Democracy* (dir. Petra Costa, 2019) © Busca Vida Filmes

**TABLE 4** Breakdown of producer and director roles by gender and budget band

| | Director | | Producer | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| £0 to 99,999 | 44% | 50% | 24% | 23% |
| £100,000 to 299,999 | 31% | 25% | 16% | 43% |
| £300,000 to 499,999 | 13% | 13% | 29% | 13% |
| £500,000 to 699,999 | 3% | 5% | 5% | 7% |
| £700,000 to 999,999 | 6% | 5% | 16% | 10% |
| £1m> | 3% | 2% | 11% | 3% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

*The White Helmets* (dir. Orlando von Einsiedel, 2016) © Violet Films, Grain Media

women slightly over-represented in films with budgets between £100,000 and £499,000. There is greater disparity when it comes to producing, with women significantly under-represented in the £100,000 to £299,000 budget band, but then over-represented in the £300,000 to 499,999 and £700,000 to 999,999 bands, as well as on films with budgets of £1m or more. Although our data cannot help us prove that this is women producing male-directed films, this is corroborated by both anecdotal evidence from several sector organisations – including Doc Society, The Whickers and the Scottish Documentary Institute (SDI) – as well as several feature doc producers we interviewed, who claimed it is 'much easier' to finance feature docs with male directors, and that budgets accepted for male-directed films are significantly higher than for those with female directors.

We stress again here that surveys can be relatively blunt instruments when it comes to exploring diversity issues because they are vulnerable to self-selection bias: datasets are based on those individuals that decided to respond rather than the entire target population. Therefore, it is helpful to compare our data with studies of gender inequality based on actual production data.

Overall, these studies show that although men and women enter the industry via degree courses and film schools in roughly equal numbers, women direct far fewer films, direct films with lower budgets, struggle to make second, third and (especially) fourth films, and have shorter careers. For example, in *Cut Out of the Picture*, a report commissioned by Directors UK, Stephen Follows and Alexis Kreager found that female directors accounted for less than a quarter of all feature docs made between 2005 and 2014 (Follows and Kreager 2016, 70). *Equality Matters*, a report published by Creative Scotland in 2017, found that women represented just 20 per cent of all feature docs it funded between 2010 and 2016. Recent research in television shows that the situation is little better: female directors accounted for just 26 per cent of all single documentaries broadcast between 2013 and 2016 (Directors UK 2018, 8; Ostrowska 2019, 75). Overall, the evidence that significant gender inequalities persist in the feature docs sector is clear. (It is worth noting, however, that the situation is even worse in the fiction sector, in which female directors represented just 13 per cent of all films made between 2003–2015 (Cobb et al 2016), and just 3.3 per cent of all big budget films (Follows and Kreager 2016, 18)).

## 2.7 CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Discussing caring responsibilities alongside gender is problematic because of the way in which it reinforces the automatic association between women and childcare. However, it is also important to acknowledge the role that parenting plays in perpetuating inequalities, and that this still disproportionately impacts on women. As Natalie Wreyford has argued, 'it is difficult to talk about women and work without talking about childcare. The same is not true of men and work and this is still one of the most obvious difficulties to be managed by working women, even those who choose not to have children' (2013, 1).

As shown in Figure 7, 57 per cent of respondents reported they had no caring responsibilities (an additional 7 per cent declined to answer this question). While percentages are even higher in the film industry overall – in which 81 per cent of workers have no dependent children (Wing Fai et al 2015, 53) – recent research on the television sector found that incompatibility with parenting was the 'overwhelmingly dominant' factor for women leaving the industry (Percival 2020, 414).

Our findings suggest that caring is also major barrier to participation in the feature docs sector.

Perhaps more surprising is that the proportion of men and women who reported having primary care for a child was almost equal (25 per cent of men; 26 per cent of women). Of course, many men do care for children, but we know that the majority of childcare is still undertaken by women. The apparent parity here is most likely explained by what Kate Oakley (2013) has described as 'absentee workers': those that are unable to maintain careers in the creative industries because of factors such as gender, ethnicity or class. In other words, those women who would otherwise be working in the feature docs sector were unavailable to complete the survey and help provide a more accurate statistic about female workers and childcare because they were busy caring for their children! This interpretation is also supported by the fact that the median age for both male and female respondents to the UKFD survey was 45–49 years old. This is beyond the usual child-bearing age for women, which is typically between their late 20s and early 40s – an age at which women are 'haemorrhaging from the industry', as Wing Fai et al put it (2015, 53).

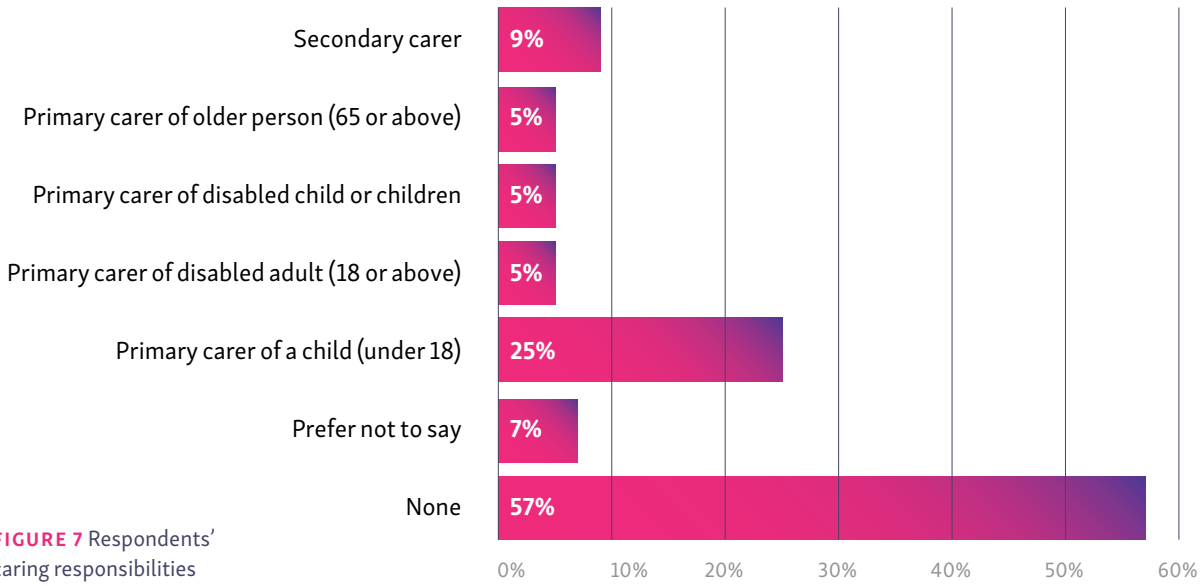



**FIGURE 7** Respondents' caring responsibilities

# CASE STUDY
# ANDREW KÖTTING

Andrew Kötting is an artist and filmmaker and Professor of Time-Based Media at the University for the Creative Arts. He studied fine art at the Slade (1987–89) and made numerous short films in the 1980s and '90s before his first feature film, *Gallivant* (1996), a first-person experimental travelogue, made in collaboration with his 85-year-old grandmother Gladys and 7-year-old daughter Eden. Since then his films include a trilogy of fiction features: *This Filthy Earth* (2001), *Ivul* (2009) and *Lek And The Dogs* (2017), as well as the feature documentaries, *In The Wake Of A Deadad* (2004), *Louyre: This Our Still Life* (2011), *Swandown* (2012), *By Our Selves* (2015), *Edith Walks* (2016) and *The Whalebone Box* (2020).

Having made work for a range of funders, including BBC Films, BFI, Film Four and the Arts Council, Kötting now tends to fund his work himself, which he pays for from his teaching. *The Whalebone Box* is another experimental journey-based work that explores the mysteries of a box made of whalebone that washed up on a beach in the Outer Hebrides almost thirty years ago. The film cost £8,000 and was funded by Kötting and his friend and long-time collaborator, Iain Sinclair.

We put it to him that he might have something to say about the various obstacles and challenges involved in making feature documentaries. By way of reply, in true Kötting style, he offered this partial Alphabetarium of Kötting:

**F is for funny ha-ha and funny peculiar and F is for (self) Funding and a British cultural machine that feels self-satisfyingly well-oiled enough without the larky sparkers running amok with their crazy rants. F is for at best, from the film fund end, these works being tolerated, often with embarrassment, like a loud relative on the gin at a funeral. But F is also for a celebration of these outrider visions, Barbarian deviations that somehow get in when the perimeter fence is left open. Bums-on-seats is not the only ambition and like the cockroach after the blast, perhaps the justice comes through the struggle they've been through. And F is for the fact that they might survive as testament to other ways of telling.**

**G is for Gallivant. The first proper long one and the desire and faith to explore family and autobiography. The littoral truths of an island perambulated in a shaggy circuit and activated by family across three generations. What must be mused upon however is the democracy of looking and G is for the giving-it-out-or-not does not determine the making.**

**H is for structuralist, post structuralist, essayist, non-sequiturist, modernist, post-modernist, late-modernist and hyper-modernist, actionist, narrativist, anti-narrativist, implied narrativist and thus Hybrid.**

**I is for imagination. The more you imagine, the more difficult it is to find words for what you're imagining. So set to work on making stuff and thereafter stuff happens.**

*The Whalebone Box* (dir. Andrew Kötting, 2020) © HOME Artist Film

**J is for Jarman. Proof positive and evidence of a commitment to the experiment with the moving image outside of the industrialised pantomime, no matter what the weather.**

**K is for Kötting and those umlauts and krauts and K is for kindness.**

**L is for language, lingo, gramlot, verbiage: formulation of the current in relation to the historical. Words as a new strain of image-making and a respect for place, personality and people.**

**M is for makingdo and makingitupasyougoalong. Hands on and haptic. Turn the lack-of and the inadequate to advantage and celebrate the difficulties whilst mining the deep strains of popular experience and folk memory.**

**N is for never a finite narrative, neither one thing nor another but nomadic. N is for keeping innovative production alive whether it be from the outskirts or from the centre of experience.**

**O is for nothing and the power of the nonsensical.**

**P is for placing contemporary art practice and polemical discourse within a historical context and P is for politics but less the megaphone, more the hope of 'politics' in which something is done rather than said.**

**Q is for Queer as Folk. People being the bedrock of life and landscape and from which grow flowers and trees and ideas. Climb into bed with them and not just for money.**

**R is for reverse engineering and often having to make something of/from nothing and R is for the reason we live; to think to feel and to make. Somehow. Anyhow.**

# 3 GEOGRAPHY AND PLACE

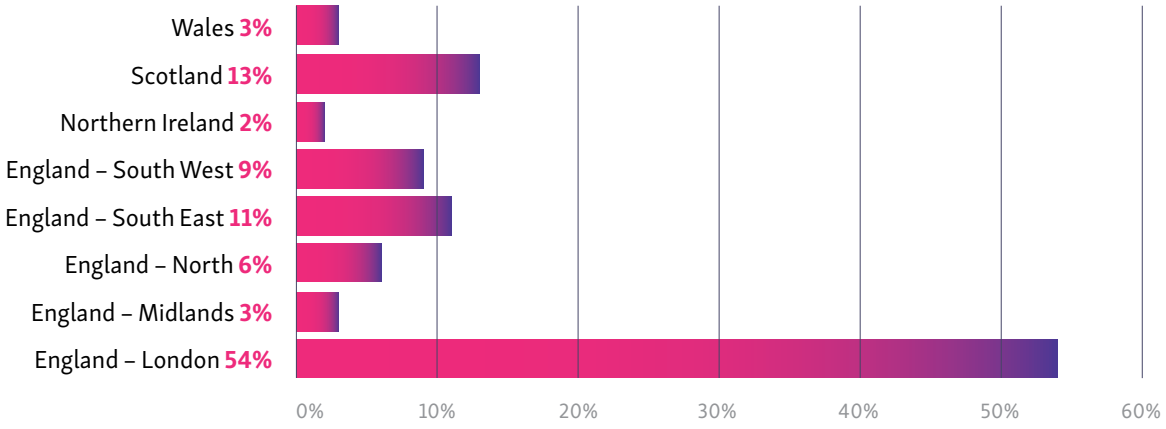
As shown in Figure 8, a substantial majority of our respondents were based in London and the South East (65 per cent), with few responses from the Midlands (3 per cent), the North of England (6 per cent), Wales (3 per cent) and Northern Ireland (2 per cent). However, the South West of England and Scotland were better represented, with 11 and 13 percent of respondents respectively. This suggests a disparity in provision across the UK that was supported by respondents' qualitative data, discussed below.

## 3.1 WORKING IN LONDON

As one might expect, respondents echoed many of the well-documented advantages and limitations derived from the concentration of the UK's media industries in London.[6] Being in London makes it easier to meet and network with commissioners, talent and other industry stakeholders, and to secure the freelance employment that underpins fiction and nonfiction filmmaking alike (freelancers comprise 91 per cent of the workforce in film production and 52 per cent in television production (Creative Skillset 2016, 5). Although some respondents felt that the benefit of a London base was declining due to 'increased connectivity' across the country, the vast majority acknowledged the 'huge professional and social advantages of being based in London'. Indeed, as the emphasis on the 'social' here suggests, some respondents noted how these advantages were often informal, while those outside London were conscious of the networking disadvantages derived from not being able to attend casual or evening events.[7]

In terms of London's limitations, by far the most common complaint from London-based filmmakers was that their location excluded them from accessing regional funds, and the view that there are more production funds available outside the capital was common. Yet, while many respondents noted the absence of designated funds for those based in the capital, Film London did – until recently – offer feature film funding to documentary makers via its 'Microwave' scheme and via the Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN) production fund. That said, while these schemes were not limited exclusively to fiction filmmakers, this was not at all clear from their various web pages which, at the time of writing, give a distinct impression of being heavily fiction-orientated (all stills and cited films are drama productions; 'documentary' is not mentioned once). However, Film London has been criticised for the limited sums it provides, for capping producers fees at £5000 (for often more than a year's work), and for imposing

**FIGURE 8** Location of respondents



*Seahorse: The Dad Who Gave Birth*
(dir. Jeanie Finlay, 2019)
© Glimmer Films, Grain Media

unnecessarily harsh contractual obligations on the filmmakers with which it works (Ward 2019, 21–22). This no doubt stems from problems concerning levels of funding in general than from particular issues with Film London but is worth noting in the context of Londoners' perception of their funding landscape.

In any case, Microwave and Film London's short film fund, 'London Calling' (which was also open to documentary projects, despite appearing equally fiction-oriented) have both now come to an end. Microwave is due to 'reboot and relaunch' at some point in the future, and London Calling was incorporated into BFI NETWORK upon its launch in 2018. BFI NETWORK is a collaboration between the BFI, the national film organisations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the five English 'Film Hubs' of the BFI Film Audience Network, and is designed to provide short film and development funding to emerging filmmakers across the UK. However, in the English regions outside London, the NETWORK scheme only funds drama and animation projects because, when the scheme launched, Doc Society became the UK-wide documentary partner. While this transfer of responsibility did at least create a dedicated fund for short form documentary, it also further consolidated national funds within a London-based funder. At the same time, funds previously reserved for London-based filmmakers became available (in principle, at least) to all UK filmmakers. Moreover, creating several regional production funds that specifically exclude documentary (at the same time as inviting all emerging UK documentary makers to apply to a single London-based fund) is also likely to exacerbate the perception that documentary is somehow less important than fiction – an issue identified by respondents throughout our survey.

Aside from problems with production funds, London's high cost-of-living was also noted as a significant problem, particularly for early-career filmmakers. As one respondent put it, 'I make very little money and have no financial backing, so why should [access to] money be harder just because I am based in London, where it is also incredibly expensive to live?' One respondent even noted how this has given rise to many London-based filmmakers using parents' or friends' regional addresses to access regional funding schemes. One producer had moved to London to access its advantages, but noticed these advantages less now that that they work mostly on international co-productions that 'bypass London'.

Other London-based respondents registered a sense of saturation in the capital and emphasised that, while there were advantages to being part of London's 'large talent pool' and 'hive of creativity', this also meant there was greater competition. Another producer argued that London's status as an industrial hub was 'detrimental to making smaller films', because the 'huge industry here … bulldozes anyone who isn't commercially driven'. This division in the feature docs sector – smaller indie projects being dominated by bigger, more commercial ones – is analogous to that in independent fiction community, which suffers from UK skills, resources and infrastructure being dominated by US/UK studio-backed films, with little room left for smaller, independent production (Canning 2015).

## 3.2 WORKING IN THE NATIONS AND REGIONS

Many of the advantages and disadvantages of being based in the regions were the inverse of those identified about living in the capital, with regional respondents noting cheaper living costs, higher quality of life, and out-of-London funding, for instance. Sometimes, regional filmmakers were able to tap into both national and regional funds. For example, a Welsh filmmaker living in the South West noted they were able to apply for Welsh commissions as well as English regional funds. However, the majority of respondents based outside London felt that being 'a long way from the commissioners' was 'only slightly compensated by regional quotas', which of course can take other forms than just production finance (such as training or mentoring schemes, for example).

Overall, respondents gave the impression that there are significant inconsistencies in the provision of resources in different regions. Indeed, one respondent, who moved regularly to accommodate their partner's work, explicitly noted the discrepancy in different regions and how hard it was to accommodate 'new conditions in each area'. Filmmakers in Scotland, for example, generally felt well resourced, with Screen Scotland and SDI cited as having done significant work to improve conditions for nonfiction filmmakers. By contrast, respondents in the South West and North East, for instance, complained that 'opportunities are very rare unless you are prepared to travel'. Another respondent in the North argued that while Media City UK has boosted the film and television industries in the region, the fact that it is 'mainly geared towards TV not doc film' masks a paucity of opportunities for those working in feature documentary. While respondents in Northern Ireland noted that Northern Ireland Screen is 'supportive', they argued that it was harder for them to access UK and EU funds because of their location, and that they felt 'cut off' as a result. The especially low response rates from the Midlands, the North, Wales and Northern Ireland indicates significant disparity in provision in the different nations and regions of the UK and suggests the nonfiction communities in these areas are particularly in need of targeted support.

Regional producers and directors were quick to draw attention to the high quality of the talent outside London and to emphasise the high level of creativity in their areas. However, they also noted that resources and decision-making power were too often concentrated in too few places, resulting in a lack of diversity in the kinds of film that get commissioned. Like Doc Society (see below), SDI was criticised in some quarters here, with one respondent going as far as to say that 'the documentary genre in Scotland is controlled by the Scottish Documentary Institute'. SDI was also criticised for operating as both a production company and a support organisation, a conflict-of-interest which, it was claimed, 'effectively blocks all other documentary makers from view'. However, SDI's production arm (SDI Productions) is currently in the process of being wound down, which will hopefully alleviate some of these concerns.

Regional filmmakers also complained that some London-based talent and commissioners considered regional filmmakers to be 'less cosmopolitan', or even less skilled, than those in the capital – findings that have been corroborated in other research (Spicer and Presence 2017). Travel and accommodation costs to meet London-based commissioners were noted as a major problem for regional filmmakers, with train travel – high rail fares and poor service – often singled out as a particular issue. One filmmaker based in the South East was currently experiencing five-hour travel times to attend the London-based edit of their latest project. Indeed, several filmmakers in the South East noted that, while they were too far from London to benefit from any of the capital's advantages, their proximity to London meant that their problems were overlooked.

# CASE STUDY
# JEANIE FINLAY, GLIMMER FILMS

PHOTOGRAPH Jo Irvine

Jeanie Finlay is among the most prolific feature doc directors in the UK. She has made eight feature documentaries to-date – including *Goth Cruise* (2008), *SOUND IT OUT* (2011), *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* (2013), *Panto!* (2014) and *Orion: The Man Who Would be King* (2015) – and is currently in production on her ninth.

In 2019, Finlay released two documentaries that illustrate two different modes of feature doc production. *Seahorse: The Dad Who Gave Birth* is an intimate portrait of a transgender man, Freddy McConnell, and his efforts to give birth to his own child. The film was financed by a patchwork of domestic funding sources – including BBC Two, the UK tax credit, *The Guardian* and The Wellcome Trust – and was produced by Grain Media in association with Finlay's own company, Glimmer Films. In this way, the film typifies the production model of an original and innovative medium-budget feature doc. By contrast, *Game of Thrones: The Last Watch* – a film exploring the production of *Game of Thrones*' final series – was made with a budget of more than £1m and was financed by HBO and Northern Ireland Screen. As such, *The Last Watch* represents the high-end of the feature doc market: a fully-funded film by a major US broadcaster that addresses a topic with mass market appeal (albeit one that retains the empathy and sensitivity that marks Finlay's other work).

Unusually, all Finlay's films to-date have been feature-length – she rarely makes shorter-form work – and she co-produces all the films she makes through Glimmer Films. This helps ensure she has an informed involvement in the overall project:

> **"Being a co-producer means you have a much better understanding of what's actually going on. You see the budget and you can make creative choices based on how to cut your cloth."**

She also emphasises the importance of being involved in the marketing and distribution of the film – something that's much easier to do as a co-producer on the project:

> **"It's all the work: the DVD is the film, the poster is the film, the marketing message is the film, the hashtag, the Twitter account, the social media, it's all the film. Many more people may see your trailer than will ever watch your film so it has to represent the story you're telling."**

Finlay is also unusual in that she is one of the few successful feature doc directors who does not live and work in London. She's based in Nottingham, and produces all her work from Broadway, Nottingham's independent cinema and media centre. She emphasises the much better quality of life in Nottingham compared to London and that her regional base presents no problems in terms of making films. However, she also acknowledges that the 'massively London-centric' nature of the business does present challenges, particularly in terms of travel time and expense, and that this can be exasperating. Like other regional producers, she notes the frustration 'when people want to have meetings in London last minute and then change them when you're on the train on the way down'. Yet for Finlay, the key problems in the sector are the paucity of production funding, which is 'more problematic than ever', and with the cultural status of documentary in relation to fiction: 'I get asked a lot by people, "When are you going to make a real film? When are you going to make a proper film?"'.

▶ www.jeaniefinlay.com

# 4 ROLES, INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE, INDUSTRY EDUCATION AND INCOME

## 4.1 INDUSTRY ROLES AND FREELANCE LABOUR

Our survey was targeted explicitly at UK-based producers and directors working in the feature docs sector. As shown in Figure 9, 54 per cent of respondents were directors and 38 per cent were producers, with a further 8 per cent of respondents selecting 'other' (all were indicating additional roles, such as writer, editor, curator or executive producer). When explicitly asked if they performed multiple roles on their projects, more than 30 per cent of respondents said they did one additional role, while a quarter (25 per cent) of respondents did two additional roles. That a combined 63 per cent of respondents perform one or more role on their projects is another indication of an under-resourced sector.

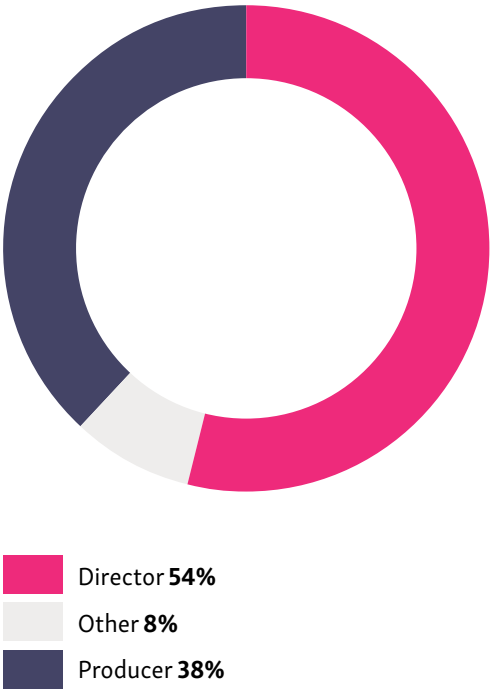



**FIGURE 9** Participants' primary role in the industry

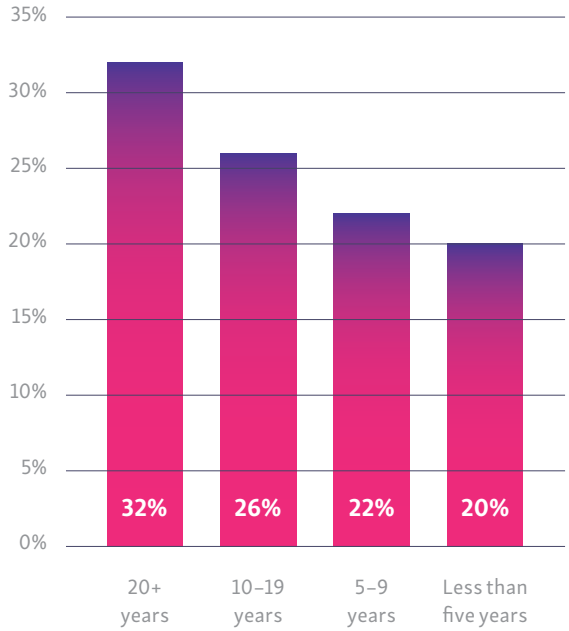

**FIGURE 10** Are you freelance or part of a larger company?

A large majority of respondents reported that they were freelance (76 per cent), compared to the 24 per cent who said they were part of a company structure (Figure 10). This is less than the 89 per cent of freelance workers in film production more broadly (see section 3.1, above). However, it should be noted that the survey did not allow for more fine-grained distinctions among freelancers, such as freelance contract workers that are PAYE, or sole traders (single individuals who operate as companies), but who nevertheless face many of the same pressures as freelance workers. We may therefore expect the actual number of workers who effectively operate as freelancers in the feature docs sector to be higher. Many respondents certainly emphasised the stress involved in freelance employment: from precarious income and stop-start schedules to long hours, unpaid work and an inability to plan or take time off – issues that are now well-documented elsewhere (Gross et al 2018, Genders 2019).

## 4.2 INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

As shown in Figure 11, 32 per cent of respondents had spent twenty years or more working in the documentary field. The career length of the rest of the respondents slowly declined, with the smallest group (20 per cent) having worked in the industry for less than five years. This suggests that, as might be expected, the majority of those working in the feature docs sector are relatively experienced workers, and have survived in the industry long enough to make a career out of it.

**FIGURE 11** Length of time working in the documentary field




*A Northern Soul*
(dir. Sean McAllister, 2018), © 10Ft Films

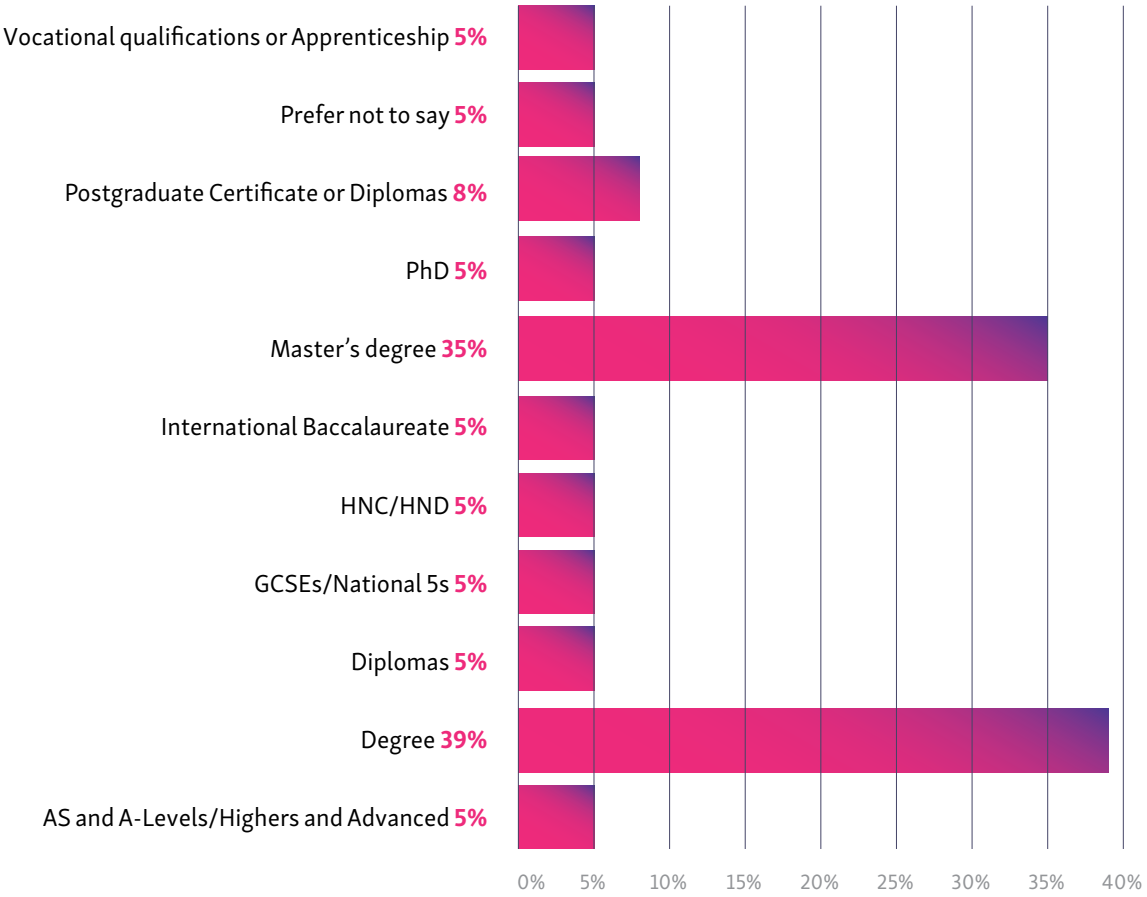
## 4.3 INDUSTRY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As shown in Figure 12, a combined 74 per cent of respondents were educated to Degree (39 per cent) or Masters (35 per cent) level.

However, as shown in Figure 13, when asked what job-specific training they had received, the majority (144) of respondents said they had learned 'on the job' and/or were 'self-taught' (109). Others had received job-specific training from short courses on documentary (47) or from a related graduate and postgraduate qualification (32 and 36 respectively).[8] Those that selected 'other' emphasised courses run by various industry associations and initiatives, such as the BBC's graduate trainee schemes, European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs (EAVE) and Women in Film and Television (WFTV).

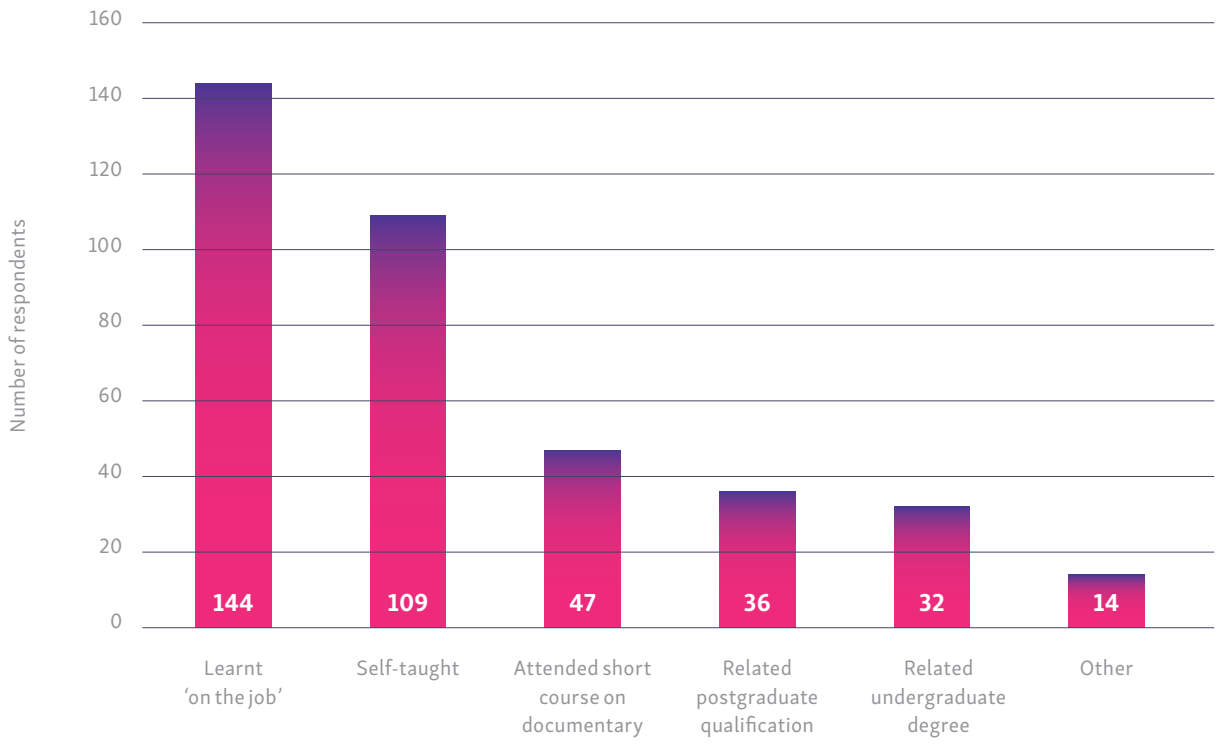
The disparity between respondents' formal education and their source of job-specific training suggests there is a significant disconnect between the two fields. However, recent research in this field has shown that, while some recent graduates can be critical of the theoretical or academic elements of their degree courses for not providing practical skills, workers that manage to sustain careers in the industry subsequently place more value on the critical-thinking and evaluative skills gained at university (O'Brien and Kerrigan 2020). Therefore, we would caution against universities becoming too focused on equipping students with industry-specific skills.

**FIGURE 12** Respondents' highest educational qualification



*Even When I Fall* (dirs. Sky Neal and Kate McLarnon, 2017) © Hakawati

**FIGURE 13** Respondents' job-specific training to-date



## 4.4 INCOME

In our survey, the medium reported income was in the £25,001 to £35,000 range (Figure 14), and the estimated mean income was £32,867.[9]

This is slightly higher than the median income for the UK, which in 2018–19 was £29,400 (ONS, 2019). Comparisons with documentary filmmakers' incomes in the US and Europe are challenging because of a limited range of data and because our survey was specifically targeting the feature docs sector, rather than the nonfiction film industry overall. However, the 2016 CMSI report suggested documentary filmmakers' income in the US was around £10,000 more per year, with an estimated mean of $66,447 (£43,191, using a 2016 conversion rate) (Borum Chattoo 2016, 7). This was slightly higher than the US median personal income in the US, which in 2016 was $32,542 (£21,938) (US Census Bureau 2017). Were we to survey nonfiction filmmakers more broadly, we would expect incomes would increase to be commensurate with the US study, given the inclusion of salaried production workers in the broadcast sector.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a correlation between experience and income, with those at a more advanced career stage (10–19 years' experience) earning the highest salaries – an estimated mean of £42,596. The estimated mean for those with 20+ years' experience was slightly lower, at £36,230. This is probably because people are coming to the end of their careers and are therefore working less.

Only 13 respondents (6.5 per cent) sourced all their income from feature doc projects (Figure 15). A large majority, 85 respondents (42 per cent), earned only 1–25 per cent of their total income from documentaries, with 41 (21 per cent) earning nothing at all. Clearly, for the vast majority of those working in the sector, feature documentary-making is not a sustainable career option in and of itself, and must be supplemented with other forms of income.

Figure 16 shows the most common kinds of work respondents' carry-out in addition to their feature doc projects. By far the most common was freelancing on other projects and 'corporate filmmaking jobs' – selected by a combined total of 153 respondents – followed by teaching and academic work (53 respondents).

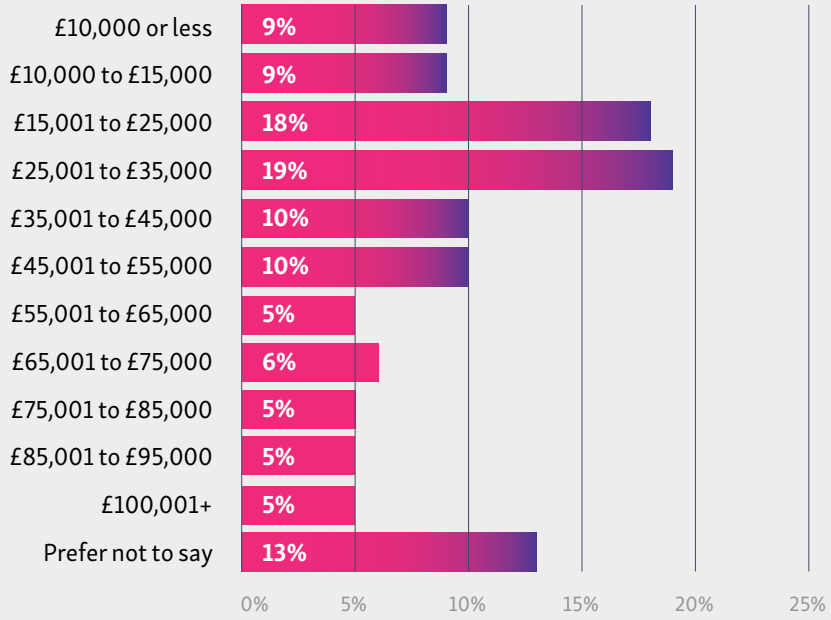
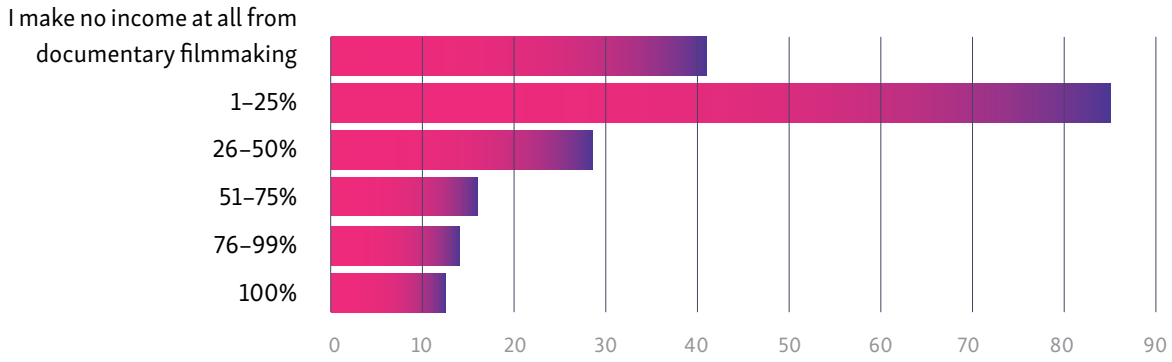



**FIGURE 14** Participants' annual income

**FIGURE 15** Respondents' income from feature doc projects




Responses to the 'other' option, such as 'property' and even 'playing the stock market', tended to indicate the middle-class status of most respondents in the dataset.

We also found correlations between income and identity categories, with the clearest correlations being between income and respondents' class and gender identities. As noted above, women made less money than men from their feature docs projects. The estimated mean income for the women in our dataset was £33,488, almost £3000 less than the estimated mean income for men (£36,26), and twice the number of women than men reported making no money at all from feature docs.

In terms of class, middle-class respondents made significantly more money from feature docs projects than working-class respondents: those in the NS-SEC bands 1–4 – the upper and lower middle class – earned 38 per cent of their income from feature documentary projects, compared with just 12.5 per cent of working-class filmmakers. These correlations indicate the complex ways in which class- and gender-based discrimination operates. It should also be noted that, while hard to evidence, these identity categories intersect with others such as race, ability and sexuality, which further compounds barriers to participation.

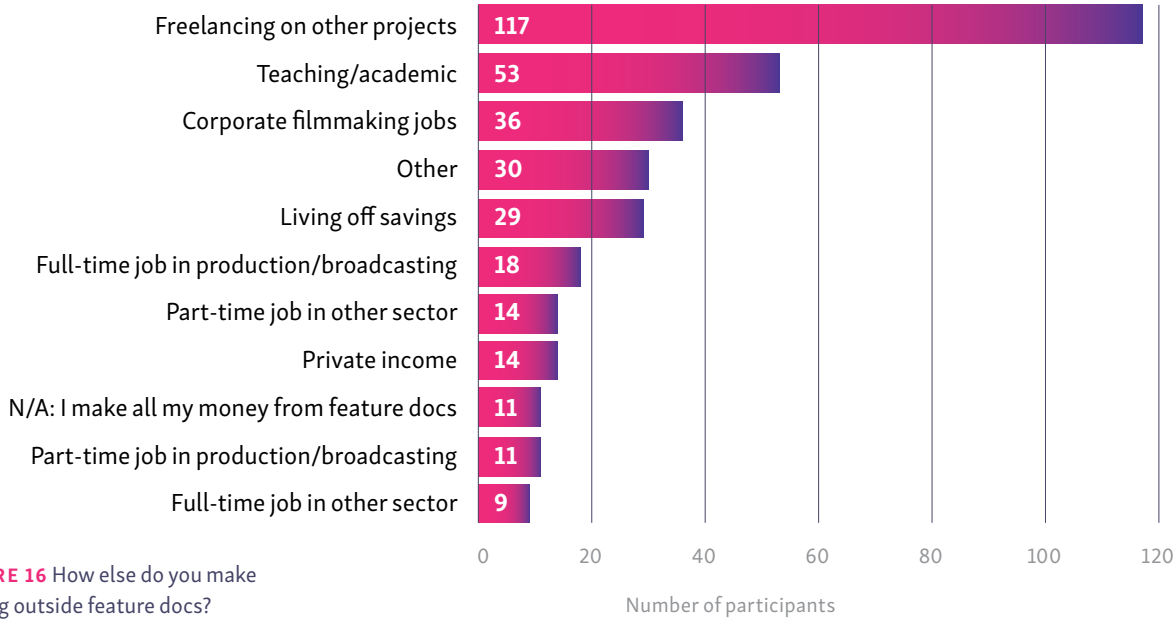



**FIGURE 16** How else do you make a living outside feature docs?

# CASE STUDY
# ELHUM SHAKERIFAR, HAKAWATI

Elhum Shakerifar has been making films for ten years and came to filmmaking from an unusual journey through Persian literature, photography, anthropology and many years working in a community centre with young refugees separated from their families. During that time, she began fundraising for *The Runner* (dir. Saeed Taji Farouky, 2013), a film about a long-distance runner from the Western Sahara, and slowly assumed the many other roles of producer. She reflects that in many ways, the subject matter of this first experience reflects the process of making independent documentaries:

> **"Every film presents its own distinct struggles – emotionally, creatively, financially, strategically – and is, in the end, a long-distance run."**

Shakerifar's productions have been widely broadcast, and have screened at festivals including the Berlinale, IDFA and Rotterdam. Her first credit was Sean McAllister's *The Reluctant Revolutionary*, which opened the Panorama Dokumente in 2012. She has gone on to produce two further films with McAllister – *A Syrian Love Story* (2015), for which they were both BAFTA-nominated for Outstanding Debut. Shakerifar's self-distribution of this title garnered such high visibility that it was named *The Guardian*'s #3 Best Film of the Year. More recently, Shakerifar produced McAllister's 2018 *A Northern Soul* for BFI/BBC2, which opened Sheffield Doc/Fest in 2018.

Shakerifar set up Hakawati in 2017 with the aim of producing, as well as curating and distributing, films that hold the art of storytelling at their core. Hakawati is committed to giving platforms to quieter voices and unique – often minority – perspectives in relation to a dominant whole. Making creatively bold films with integrity, representation and reframing narratives is at the heart of what they do. The company's projects all derive from the central tenet that a good story is in the telling, and that after all, 'we are the stories we tell'.

As an employee of her company, Hakawati, Shakerifar's own income is regular but she is fairly frugal by necessity. Shakerifar describes herself as 'in many ways the company's main "asset"', ensuring the company's overall income is regular through a combination of work. Alongside the less predictable income of producing, Shakerifar also curates (notably for London Film Festival, advising on films from MENA and Iran), consults and lectures.

Recent Hakawati productions include the award-winning documentaries, *Almost Heaven* (dir. Carol Salter, 2017), *Of Love & Law* (dir. Hikaru Toda, 2017) and *ISLAND* (dir. Steven Eastwood, 2017) as well as its multi-screen installation sister piece, *The Interval and the Instant,* which has been hailed as a game changer in giving an image to death and dying. Hakawati's curatorial work has included *Poetry in Motion: Contemporary Iranian Cinema* (2019) and *Shubbak: Festival of Contemporary Arab Culture* (2017, 2019, and forthcoming 2021).

Elhum was a recipient of the BFI Vision Award 2017 and named a Producer on the Rise in *Screen International*'s 2018 #Brit50 list. Hakawati has forthcoming projects in various stages of production with BBC Films, BFI, The Wellcome Trust and is working with a number of exciting, emerging voices.

▶ **www.hakawati.co.uk**

# 5 FINANCING FEATURE DOCS: BUDGETS, PERSONAL INVESTMENT AND FUNDERS

## 5.1 BUDGETS

The most common budget band at which UKFD survey respondents were working was £0–99,999 (40 per cent), followed by £100–299,999 (27 per cent) and £300–499,999 (16 per cent). Taken together, 43 per cent of respondents were working in the £100–499,999 budget range. Only eight respondents were working with budgets of £1m or more. Compared with the fiction sector, the budgets with which feature doc filmmakers work are minute. However, as one would expect, feature doc filmmakers work with substantially larger budgets than most nonfiction filmmakers (almost 60 per cent of filmmakers surveyed in the *Cost of Docs* report work with budgets of less than £100,000, for example).

*Ping Pong* (dir. Hugh Hartford, 2012) © Banyak Films


**FIGURE 17** Budget bands of respondents' feature doc projects

## 5.2 FUNDING

Figure 18 shows the most common sources of funding – ranked according to frequency – that respondents used to finance their feature doc projects.

44 per cent of respondents cited personal funds as a funding source. That filmmakers' personal funds are by far the most common source of funding in the feature docs sector is a damning indication of the paucity of production funds available.[10]

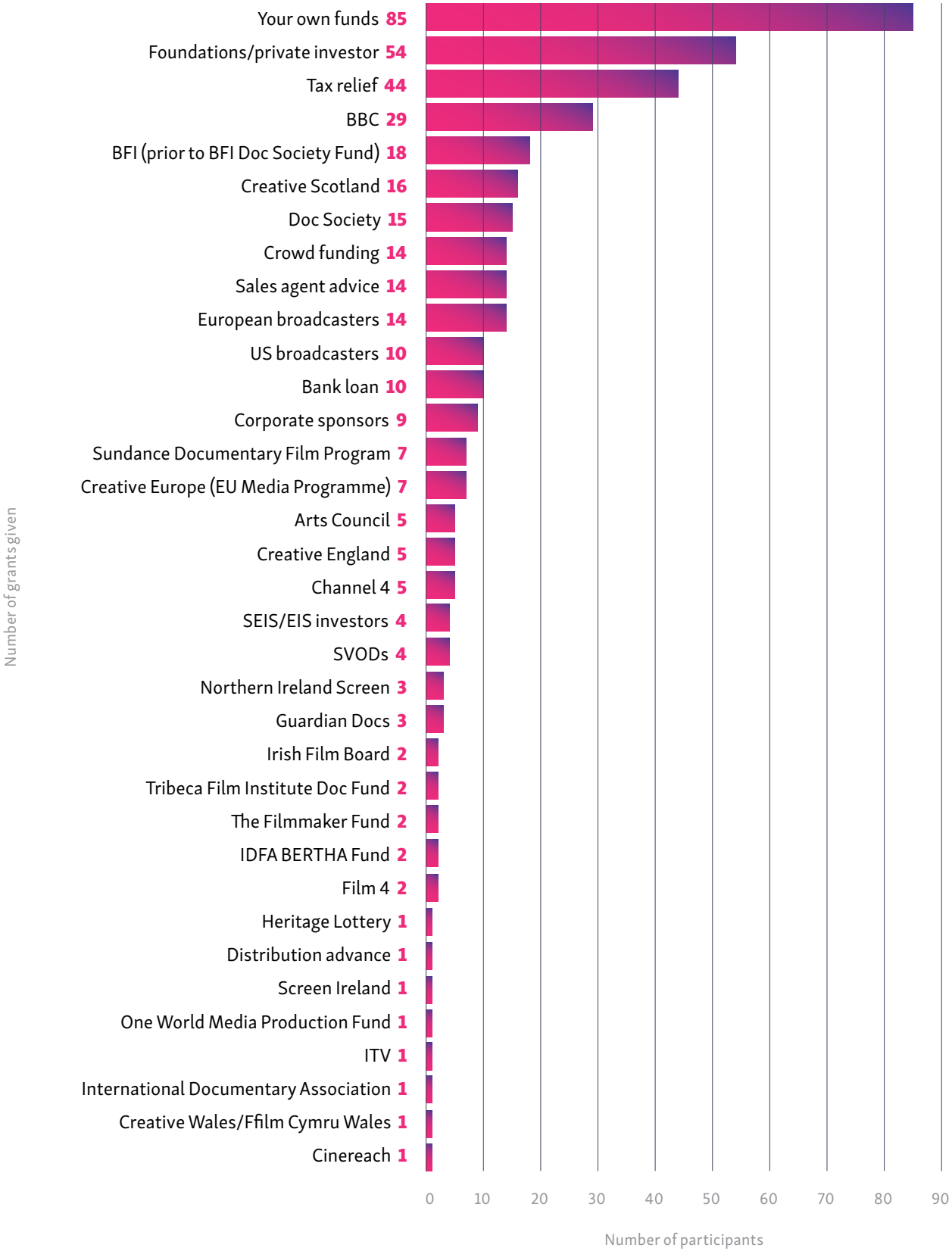
Foundations and private investors were the second most common source of funding. That filmmakers' personal funds and private investors are represented with such frequency also reflects the sector's significant problems with socio-economic diversity. Because so many feature doc projects depend on personal funds – respondents reported investing anything from £1000 to £20,000 – this constitutes a clear structural barrier to participation for those without that kind of economic privilege. Moreover, those with private incomes will also tend to have better access to other sources of private wealth – a field which producer/director Lindsey Dryden describes as 'opaque and inaccessible' in the UK in comparison to its US equivalent (see the case study of Little by Little Films in section 8, below). Tax relief – which we discuss in detail below – was the third most common source, though almost half as many respondents cited this as personal funds.

Of the public funders, the BBC was the most represented, cited by 29 respondents. Several parts of the BBC were cited as sources – including BBC2, BBC Arts, BBC Wales – but *Storyville* was the most common, with eleven projects represented, followed by BBC Scotland with 7. The BFI (distributing National Lottery funds) were listed twice to reflect the change in 2017 when Doc Society became responsible for distributing that section of the Film Fund ring-fenced for documentary. In total, the BFI was cited 23 times (18 times as Film Fund and 15 times as BFI Doc Society Fund). Creative Scotland was well represented, cited by 16 respondents. Crowd-funding, sales agent advance and European broadcasters were each cited 14 times (a range of broadcasters was cited, with ARTE marginally the most common). US broadcasters were cited 10 times, with ITVS and PBS marginally most common). Creative Europe and the Sundance Documentary Film Program were both mentioned 7 times.

As the graph demonstrates, a range of sources were cited just a handful of times. Perhaps most significant here is that both Channel 4 and ITV feature in this part of the graph. Channel 4 with only 5 citations (Film4 with 2) and ITV with just one.

> "THAT FILMMAKERS' PERSONAL FUNDS ARE BY FAR THE MOST COMMON SOURCE OF FUNDING IN THE SECTOR IS A DAMNING INDICATION OF THE PAUCITY OF PRODUCTION FUNDS AVAILABLE, AND CONSTITUTES A CLEAR BARRIER TO ENTRY FOR THOSE WITHOUT THAT KIND OF ECONOMIC PRIVILEGE."

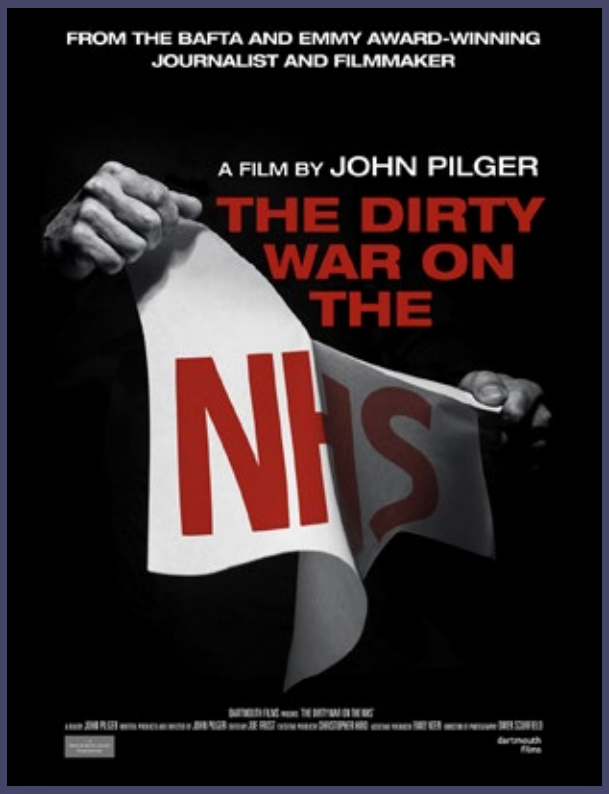
**FIGURE 18** Sources of funding for respondents' feature doc projects ranked according to frequency



# CASE STUDY
# CHRISTOPHER HIRD, DARTMOUTH FILMS

After a career as a journalist and then a factual television producer with Fulcrum TV, which he ran for almost twenty years, Christopher Hird set-up Dartmouth Films in 2007 to focus on feature documentaries.

Based in London, Dartmouth has established a reputation for backing new and emerging filmmakers with bold ideas, and for producing and distributing politically- and socially-engaged feature docs on international and domestic issues. Hird's first success in this area was as executive producer of *Black Gold* (dir. Nick and Marc Francis, 2006) and Dartmouth's first major feature was *The End of the Line* (dir. Rupert Murray, 2009). More recent titles have included *A Cambodian Spring* (dir. Christopher Kelly, 2016), *The Ballymurphy Precedent* (dir. Callum Macrae, 2018), *Children of the Snow Land* (dirs. Zara Balfour and Marcus Stephenson, 2018), *The Ponds* (dirs. Patrick McLennan and Samuel Smith, 2019) and *The Atom* (dir. Vicki Lesley). The company also produces




*The Dirty War on the National Health Service* (dir. John Pilger, 2019) © Dartmouth Films

John Pilger's documentaries, of which the most recent was *The Dirty War on the National Health Service* (2020).

The company's business model is partly based on balancing the mix of projects on its slate – which usually consists of around ten projects at various stages of development, production or distribution. As Hird puts it:

> **"We aim to have a mix of work: some productions which carry no financial risk and include a profit margin; some productions where we will be relying on future sales income to meet the costs and some films where we receive a fee from other producers – these carry no risk but have limited reward potential. We also distribute films for other producers, generally on a service basis, though sometimes the deal has a revenue share built in if certain targets are reached."**

Hird argues that 'the key for independent documentary makers is to find their paying audience', and emphasises that because audiences can also help to fund films, some of the most effective partnerships in the feature doc business are with the civil society organisations to which a given film's target audience are connected.

▶ www.dartmouthfilms.com

## 5.3 ACCESSING THE UK FILM TAX RELIEF

The Film Tax Relief (FTR) is the foundation of UK film policy and the by far the largest source of public funding for film production: in 2017/18, 86 per cent of the total investment in film production came from the FTR, some £469m (BFI 2019, 3). However, our data suggests that feature doc filmmakers' understanding of the FTR and the procedures involved in accessing it is uneven. While some reported that the process was 'relatively straightforward' and even 'easy to access' – often noting the support of their accountants – others admitted they were 'unaware of the process' and struggled as a result, seemingly without accountants' support. However, it should be noted that several respondents emphasised that the accessibility of the FTR changes significantly from project to project, and many experienced producers and directors found the process to be time-consuming and unnecessarily complex given the nature of many documentary projects as compared to fiction films. (Unlike fiction, for example, documentary projects are often self-funded, filmed over a period of several years even in development and are often highly unpredictable by virtue of their real-life subjects and subject matter).

Indeed, complaints that the FTR application process was based on 'a template for narrative fiction' were common, and many respondents suggested that there should be an application pathway 'tailored specifically for documentary'. A major barrier for documentary filmmakers seeking to access the FTR is the rule that principal photography must not have begun before the application is made. As one director explained: 'We often start filming during the early R&D stage, and the nature of this type of filmmaking is driven by the content. We often can't wait, nor pause for financing as real lives are real lives'. The principal photography rule is a hindrance for established and emerging filmmakers alike. One early-career survey respondent reported that they 'were ineligible because principle photography took place before had even set up our production company'. Elsewhere, more experienced filmmakers also noted that this rule had created a culture in which documentary applicants feel obligated to obscure the actual date when filming began.

Another difficulty noted by some respondents was accumulating points for the proportion of the documentary 'set in the UK or another EEA [European Economic Area] State' (BFI 2019). This is obviously clearly difficult for British filmmakers making feature docs about international affairs, and several filmmakers noted that they had been prevented from accessing the FTR for this reason.

Other criticisms of the tax credit related to the costs involved in accessing it. One respondent reported that they were charged a fee of £10,000 to access an FTR of £30,000, a loss of one-third of the benefit. Combined with the complexity of the application process, this can sometimes discourage producers from applying altogether. As one producer put it: 'The time and energy it takes is not worth it on micro-budget films'. As noted already, producers felt that the fee structure was set-up for fiction films, and stressed the need for documentaries to be handled more carefully: 'Surely there could be a set of legal and auditing norms established for documentaries that mean we are not expected to pay fees that fiction films, with higher budgets, can cope with?'. Similarly, another producer argued, 'British certifications for docs at a certain budget level should be made simpler, budget templates are tricky to match to project budgets, and the work for a small budget is just as much as for a big project – it shouldn't be the same process for £20k as for £1m'.

# 6 TRAINING NEEDS

Responses to these questions ranged from broad-based answers that focused on the development of documentary as a narrative art form to ones that identified specific training needs. There was a persistent call for additional financing that would address the specific needs of feature doc filmmakers, recognising that documentaries often take years to produce, during which filmmakers are working with real-life subjects under changing conditions and juggling multiple sources of finance. Several respondents stressed that there was little point in providing training unless 'there is a real ecosystem of funding available' and emphasised that too little funds were concentrated in in too few organisations. There was also a widely perceived need for help with ethical and diversity issues.

## 6.1 THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Respondents who focused on the creative process, on making feature docs, wanted advice on how to 'develop ideas into strong treatments'. This was predicated on the understanding that 'artist/filmmaker development is very important' and that this core need should not be overlooked in the provision of training. One respondent felt that 'having a strong creative agenda' was the key to success; another that creatives should be 'protected' by the provision of funding and training that would cover the cost of project development and recognise that it takes time to nurture a project. Another reply identified a key weakness in many films as the neglect of narrative structure: 'most films that fail are not structured correctly', which also suggests that the provision of training should not be entirely skills-based and should have broad conceptual and visual scope.

## 6.2 BUSINESS AND MARKETING

However, the responses also strongly indicated that this focus on the aesthetic and creative aspects of documentary filmmaking should not be at the expense of neglecting to train documentarists in understanding how sector financing worked. Several respondents thought it was important to teach 'real-world business and financial scenarios', how to market and promote a feature doc to festival organisers, commissioners, sales agents and distributors and also how to reach an audience. It was therefore important, several felt, that the 'realities' of making feature docs ought to feature more strongly in Higher Education curricula, which should prepare graduates for the long, slow process of realising a project – the 'long run' as one respondent phrased it. This training should include the teaching of 'fundraising skills' because even the best conceived project needed 'to reach the right backers and commissioners'. Part of the training to work effectively in this sector, therefore, would be to help filmmakers create a 'micro business plan' that would be bespoke to each project and through that to assist documentary feature filmmakers in how to 'create a sustainable income'. This would include training in preparing budgets, in website development and on producing skills in general including budgeting, scheduling and marketing. Overall, as one respondent put it, 'producing skills' was the 'area that really needed supporting'.

There were considerable differences in how respondents thought such training might be provided. Several thought it was best conducted by those within the industry who had experience and knowledge, which they could pass on to those new to the industry through mentoring or 'exec support' and that one of Doc Society's roles should be in bringing those two constituencies together. Another respondent praised what they referred to as the 'integrated project-based training' approach adopted by organisations such as EsoDoc and Discovery Campus, in which participants take part in a series of workshops over a 12- or 18-month period that focus on successive elements in the production process (story and treatment, budgets and finance, pitch preparation and so on).

# CASE STUDY
# HENRY SINGER, SANDPAPER FILMS

Henry Singer is one of Britain's most critically acclaimed documentary directors. He has won or been nominated for every major British documentary award – including the BAFTA, Royal Television Society, Grierson and Broadcast awards as well as an international Emmy – and his films have been screened at festivals around the world.

Among his prize-winning feature-length films are *The Falling Man* (2006), about a photograph of someone who jumped or fell from the World Trade Center on 9/11, *The Untold Story of Baby P* (2014), about the tabloid aftermath of the death of seventeenth-month-old toddler in London in 2008, *The Blood of the Rose* (2009), about the brutal murder of the filmmaker and conservationist Joan Root in Kenya, and *The Trial of Ratko Mladic* (dirs. Henry Singer and Rob Miller, 2018), about the Bosnian Serb general convicted of genocide and other war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

The Mladic film took six years to make and was financed by five foundations, one film institute and the UK tax credit scheme, co-produced by three broadcasters

and pre-sold to nine others, and only broke even after further television sales – an example of the challenge of making an independent film that neither qualifies for a full broadcast commission nor is popular enough for cinema financing.

▶ www.sandpaperfilms.com

*The Trial of Ratko Mladic* (dir. Henry Singer, 2018) © Sandpaper Films

# CASE STUDY RACHEL WEXLER AND JEZ LEWIS, BUNGALOW TOWN

Based in rural Suffolk, Bungalow Town make highly individual and compelling documentaries for worldwide audiences. They have made 14 feature documentaries and several shorter films working with many talented, established and also emerging filmmakers from the UK, North America and Japan.

Bungalow Town was set up in late 2004 by partners Jez Lewis and Rachel Wexler. Jez was working with Nick Broomfield at that time on his drama documentary *Ghosts* (2006) and the feature documentary, *His Big White Self* (2006). Rachel had been working with several documentary filmmakers as a line producer and producer and both Jez and Rachel were keen to explore working independently as filmmakers.

Bungalow Town's first project was *Philip and His Seven Wives* (dir. Marc Issacs, 2005) which Rachel developed with filmmaker Marc Isaacs. The film was funded by BBC *Storyville* and followed an extraordinary family headed up by a self-styled Hebrew king. The film was made with a very small team and was self-distributed. Bungalow Town went on to work with Marc Isaacs on several BBC *Storyville*-funded documentaries and those relationships continue today.

Feature-length documentaries are challenging projects to fund and distribute so Rachel and Jez approach each film in a bespoke way, utilising their years of experience and contacts to maximise the creative and financial potential of each unique film. Often the projects are in development (and self-funded) for several years before going into production. This is hugely challenging for the filmmakers and the producers so very hard decisions have to be made along the way.

Bungalow Town seeks to explore universal, human themes through a complex, specific and real-life prism. Its work so far spans a wider array of stories, subjects and characters, including Jez's childhood friends dying from suicide and drug overdose in *Shed Your Tears and Walk Away* (dir. Jez Lewis, 2009), the Afghan cricket team in their quest to get to the global stage in *Out of the Ashes* (dirs. Timothy Albone, Lucy Martens, Leslie Knott, 2010), a renowned brain surgeon's journey to save lives in the Ukraine in *The English Surgeon* (dir. Geoffrey Smith, 2009), and a devastating train crash in Japan in *Brakeless* (dir. Kyoko Miyake, 2014),

Rachel and Jez have produced documentaries in collaboration with over 20 different broadcasters worldwide including the BBC, NHK in Japan, and PBS in the US. Bungalow Town films have exhibited at many film festivals including Sheffield Doc/Fest, Edinburgh, London, Sundance, Karlovy Vary, Hotdocs, Krakow, Fullframe, Silverdocs and IDFA. They have also been distributed on every available platform worldwide including on the big screen. Bungalow Town films have won dozens of awards, including a Grierson, an Emmy and two Peabodys. Current projects include a film about women Sumo wrestlers in Japan, a film about corruption and small-town politics in Atlantic City and a confidential conservation film.

▶ **www.bungalow-town.com**

*Brakeless* (dir. Kyoko Miyake, 2014)
@ Bungalow Town Productions

*The Pacemakers* (dir. Selah Hennessy, 2017) © Bungalow Town Productions

Another respondent argued that the European Creative Media programme was the model to be followed here, especially as it encouraged co-production which was a fact of life for most filmmakers. Several respondents felt there should be more encouragement for UK-European co-productions, while others argued that the training currently available was polarised between 'shallow, one-off events (workshops, Q&As, panels etc.)' and 1–2 year 'full-on courses' and that there should be provision in the middle ground: courses lasting 10–20 weeks and delivered at weekends or in the evenings.

## 6.3 PRECARITY AND ETHICS

Respondents stressed the need to prepare new recruits for the arduous nature of trying to make a living in a sector so starved of resources. Therefore, training should enable those about to enter the industry to be fully aware of the difficulties to be faced and of the need to weigh-up whether this was a viable career path. In this regard it was vital, one respondent thought, to provide a route for those who might think that documentary-making was a 'very white middle-class luxury'. Such a route would provide access to networks, mentors, and training in technical skills that would 'inspire confidence in their ability' to succeed. However, several respondents argued that diversifying entrants to feature doc filmmaking could only come if the training provision was free. This, they argued, should be part of a broader recognition that the sector is composed predominantly of freelancers who 'never have time or resources to access training schemes because of costs and time availability' – that is, all their time is spent working to survive.

These problems were felt to be compounded by the metropolitan bias of the industry and the sense that opportunities outside London were limited, as discussed in section 3, above. One respondent wondered what mentoring and networking opportunities were available for filmmakers based in the North of England, for example, while another succinctly summarised the issue as follows: 'training should be more geographically devolved to support greater diversity/empower production capacity and develop expertise in areas across the UK'.

The need for training in how to deal with ethical issues was felt by several respondents as a necessity in a sector that had to deal routinely with 'complex real-world situations when you're intervening with people's real lives'. They went on: 'I feel this is often overlooked and the industry has a huge responsibility to those they work with.' This training in ethical issues also needed to encompass 'legal and compliance necessities' as well as 'what to do if bullied or abused'. Ethical training thus has two interconnected but separate functions: to help protect the subjects of a documentary and to protect the filmmakers themselves.

# 7 POLICY INTERVENTIONS

The overwhelming response to this question – underlined in the 'Perspectives' section of this report, below – was a plea for more funding in this sector. Feature doc production was felt to be poorly recognised as a distinct arena of filmmaking, one separate from television documentary on the one hand – 'feature docs are not the same as TV docs!' – and from independent filmmaking on the other. At a general level, respondents felt there needed to be a 'greater celebration' of the feature documentary sector and that it should be better acknowledged as 'a vital part of the cultural sphere'. It was felt that a higher cultural profile and status would be an important part of persuading policymakers at all levels to increase the level of funding in this sector. One older respondent emphasised that policymakers needed to better understand the damaging effects on the 'craft and traditions of documentary storytelling' that resulted from the end of in-house production and with it the dismantling of the 'previous "master/apprentice" system'. In addition to the effect this has had on the provision of training needs discussed in the previous section, this absence necessitates the creation of new networks to support feature doc filmmakers, ones which will 'nurture, promote skills and share best practice' across creatives who generally lack professional organisations and are mainly freelance.

*The Square* (dir. Jehane Noujaim, 2014)
© Noujaim Films, Roast Beef Productions

In addition to increasing overall levels of funding and access to funding, a high number of respondents thought that 'seed funding' was particularly necessary in the developmental or pre-production phase. Many respondents felt that this was the stage when projects were at their most vulnerable and needed careful nurturing. Several felt that policymakers should recognise this early, nascent stage as one that requires funding rather than what appeared to many as the conventional understanding that feature doc filmmakers funded this stage themselves before they were ready to 'pitch' a more formulated and shaped proposal to funders: 'Most of us spend months or longer developing projects, sometimes multiple projects, entirely unpaid . . . The fees for the time we spend in production do not in any way cover this.' Support at this early, developmental, stage would, several respondents argued, improve diversity within the sector by providing funding for those without 'access to private incomes, trust funds etc.' One respondent contended that projects change during development and that this should be understood by policymakers who should support projects that evince a 'strong area of interest and research, rather than the perfect pitch'. One respondent summed this need up as 'how do we develop an idea without becoming homeless?'

A key aspect of enhanced funding provision would be development funding 'for film-makers from disadvantaged backgrounds in allowing them to access the right equipment . . . and more help understanding funding structures and legal issues'. However, the need for better and more widely available advice to help feature doc filmmakers understand the 'labyrinthine and opaque' funding schemes available was a comment made by several respondents more generally: 'funding awareness' as one respondent phrased it. At its most general, this advice should encompass 'understanding financial models, reporting and sources of funding;

# CASE STUDY
# MIKE LERNER, ROAST BEEF PRODUCTIONS

Roast Beef Productions is a London-based production company set-up in 2007 by Oscar-nominated filmmaker Mike Lerner and director Martin Herring. The company specialises in non-fiction for cinema, television and online.

Lerner has been making films since 1988 with a focus on humanising complex geo-political stories for global audiences. He founded Roast Beef after a career in television. His credits include *Hell and Back Again* (dir. Danfung Dennis, 2011), *The Square* (dir. Jehane Noujaim, 2014), *Pussy Riot: a Punk Prayer* (dirs. Maxim Pozdorovkin, Mike Lerner, 2013), *The Russian Woodpecker* (dir. Chad Gracia, 2015) and *The Great Hack* (dirs. Karim Amer, Jehane Noujaim, 2019).

In 2018, Lerner produced *The Kleptocrats*, a film about the theft of $3.5 billion from a Malaysian government fund – one of the world's most significant financial crimes. The film took 2–3 years to make and, subsequent to Roast Beef developing it, was fully-funded privately and with a distributor advance from Dogwoof and the UK film tax credit. The film's revenues were generated from the sale of domestic and international broadcast licenses alongside theatrical box office.

Lerner is positive about digital platforms like Amazon and Netflix, citing the beneficial effects they have had on markets for both feature documentary and foreign language films:

> **"More players in the market is good news … longer films and shorter films can find a place on these networks that find good audiences and have good resources … the value of the work goes up because there's more demand for it … The more people who might take your work, the more competition there is, the greater value you can hopefully extract from that."**


While Lerner is excited about the future of the feature documentary industry, he feels documentary could be better recognised and supported by UK broadcast and distribution and would like to see it valued at home as much as it is on the international market. Lerner comments, 'I hope we can find a way to prove the incredible cultural and economic value of feature documentaries, a form that the UK is particularly good at creating, to both the state and national life of the country'.

Roast Beef has several feature documentaries and series currently in production including *The Last Nazi Hunters* (completed 2020), *Liberace* (completed 2020) and *Hold Me Right* (completed 2020).

▶ www.roastbeeftv.com

Director Kim Longinotto with the cast of *Salma* (dir. Kim Longinotto, 2013)
© Channel 4 Television Corporation

support in creating a sustainable business model, protecting filmmakers and producers' rights and recoupment in their own work … and [how to] retain the IP in our own creative endeavours'.

Closely related to this plea was for policymakers to be prepared to fund more 'risk-taking, experimental documentaries', ones that fell outside the 'narrow categories' that usually attracted support. Funders and policymakers, it was argued, should be 'more open to alternative methods of production and creative experimentation' and it should not be the role of funding bodies 'to determine the validity of the art and the aesthetics of what is being produced'. Another respondent contended that an explicit move to increase diversity in terms of the formal and aesthetic range of funded films would encourage producers and production companies to diversify their outputs and not play safe. This would, it was argued, increase sustainability because it would broaden the range and diversity of productions that companies or individuals felt able to undertake. They recognised that 'no company can live from feature docs alone' but that having access to development funds would 'make us more savvy as producers and [help us] to build better companies [with more varied portfolios]'. This response was embedded in a more general argument that policymakers should aim to support companies by encouraging co-operation 'through funding incentives' because it was felt that 'there are too many single producer companies trying to go it alone'. This should be extended, several respondents felt, to encouraging international co-productions. One thought that funding levels should be higher because the 'market prospects for feature docs are high … Therefore, film funds must support and encourage ambitious cinematic projects and provide proper financial support to make great projects happen. This can't be possible with funding under £100k.'

A high number of respondents thought one key task for policymakers was to influence the commissioning practices of public service broadcasters (PSBs), to persuade them to be 'less risk-adverse' and more adventurous and diverse in the projects they were prepared to fund. There was a widespread view that PSBs could do much more to help the feature docs sector, which suffered from 'very limited support' from these organisations. Several respondents argued that policymakers should encourage the BBC to 'expand its *Storyville* brand' and that the corporation's current support was 'confined to a small corner of BBC4' and controlled by 'unaccountable gatekeepers'. Alongside persuading the BBC to enhance its provision and opportunities, policymakers should encourage Channel 4 to invest more in this sector. (Sadly, that respondent thought ITV was a 'lost cause').

One respondent bluntly stated that 'policymakers should regulate broadcasters to ensure more feature docs were shown on television'. In addition, the newer subscription-based platforms, the SVODS, were thought to provide an alternative to theatrical distribution and exhibition and therefore policy makers should try to encourage those organisations to fund an increased number of doc features, in particular across a more diverse range of subjects, approaches and budget levels; as one respondent commented, 'many indie projects don't even need a budget of £200k'. One respondent thought that although the rise of feature-length docs on SVODs has in part compensated for reduced opportunities on the PSBs, 'the financial and training input from SVODs is shockingly low' and that policymakers should insist on more involvement from those platforms.

Several respondents emphasised a need for broader changes to the way documentary is handled across the sector, arguing that more needed to be done

# CASE STUDY
# KIM LONGINOTTO

Kim Longinotto made her first two films at England's National Film School where she studied camera and directing: *Pride of Place* (1976), a critical look at the boarding school she attended, and *Theatre Girls* (1978), which documented a homeless women's hostel.

A prolific and multi-award-winning filmmaker, Longinotto is known for stories that feature inspiring women and girls at their core. Often from the global south, these women – 'ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances' – resist oppressive structures in different ways. In *The Day I Will Never Forget* (2003), young Kenyan girls challenged the tradition of female circumcision. *Pink Saris* (2010) showed women standing up to rapists in India. And in *Dreamcatcher* (2015), for which Longinotto won Best Director at Sundance, a former prostitute helps at-risk youths and women break the cycle of violence and sexual exploitation in their own lives.

Until recently, Longinotto's films were funded by TV – first Channel 4, then BBC. Longinotto comments on her long-term relationships with TV commissioners: 'I would work with the same Commissioning Editors over and over again – Alan Bookbinder, Alan Fountain, Hamish Mykura, Waldemar Januszczak, Peter Dale'. However, support from television for making feature documentaries is no longer forthcoming:

> **"Channel 4 used to be very good at funding documentaries but their emphasis now seems to be on reality TV shows. For the first time since I started getting funded by TV, my last three films have been funded by grants and US-based funders, e.g. 'Impact Partners', not TV. The film I'm making at the moment is self-funded."**

Longinotto's documentaries cost around £175,000 to make, for 10 weeks of filming with minimal crew and swift editing. As *The Guardian* reported, when she asked the BBC for money to make *Dreamcatcher* she was originally turned down. Her producer, Teddy Leifer, raised $175,000 from Impact Partners and paid them back almost immediately when, after the film's premiere at Sundance, it was picked up by US cable network, Showtime.

Following *Dreamcatcher*'s international success, the BBC bought it for more than the filmmakers had originally asked and the film had its UK debut on BBC4's *Storyville* slot. Longinotto comments on the situation: 'There should be a fully-funded documentary strand on television … fund *Storyville* properly. They get bloody good films, but they should be able to originate them and have a proper budget'.

Longinotto's most recent film, *Shooting the Mafia* (2019) premiered at Sundance and Berlin and secured theatrical distribution in the USA (Cohen Media), Australia, Italy, Sweden, Slovenia, Germany, Spain and France. She is currently finishing a film about a Jamaican-born musician now based in the UK. It is the first film that she has completely self-financed: 'I can't find anyone to fund it. So I bought sound and camera equipment and I've been making the film completely independently with a good friend. The only bit we're going to have to raise money for is to pay the editor'.

to encourage feature docs across the value chain of production, distribution and exhibition – '[exhibitors should] schedule more documentary screenings, even matinee performances with talks'. Others argued that policymakers should 'encourage distributors and sales agents to advance payments [and increase] pre-sale deals', and even launch 'an international, London-based documentary market/conference'.

Others suggested smaller, more specific amendments to current policy. Alongside greater understanding of how the tax credit system operated, respondents thought it should be reworked 'to allow UK citizens working abroad to qualify as core spend'. One respondent thought the UK needed a funding system 'similar to the US 501(c) fiscal sponsorship scheme' and that the UK needs 'loan finance secured against future income in the same way there is loan finance secured against ITV licences and tax credits'. A handful of respondents specifically mentioned the issue of equity funding since EIS production funding was withdrawn by HMRC in March 2018. One recommended changing its operation 'so smaller production companies can access these incentives to develop a slate on a project-by-project basis'. Referencing the levy on box-office receipts that helped fund British film production from 1957 to 1984, this respondent also recommended 'some Eady-type levy mechanism, or French-style support' for feature doc filmmakers alongside 'proper budgets from broadcasters'.

Several respondents thought Doc Society should receive substantially increased production funding from the BFI, in addition to funds for distribution support. That said, while there was praise for the support received from Doc Society, some respondents also felt that its allocation of funds could be more transparent, and complained of a 'closed shop' with 'two out of the three main UK funders effectively being the same body with the same biases/preferences', which stifles diversity. As another respondent put it: 'more people [should be] involved in making decisions about how those funds are distributed'.

## 7.1 EFFECTIVE MODELS, PARTNERSHIPS AND EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

We also asked respondents to identify examples of effective models, partnerships or best practice in the sector that could be scaled-up or emulated elsewhere. Replies to this question ranged from the very general to the highly specific. Overall though, and in keeping with the responses to previous questions, respondents prefaced their contributions here by underlining that the feature docs community is under-supported in general – a 'Cinderella sector', not recognised as important by its bigger sibling: drama. One commented that the 'fiction sector' was 'much more open to up-and-coming talent' and that commissioners and sales agents were much more 'geared-up' to tracking and encouraging emerging fiction filmmakers rather than aspiring documentarists. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, respondents first looked to nonfiction industries overseas when identifying more positive ideas and approaches. For example, the struggles of feature doc filmmakers in the UK were contrasted with the support received by their counterparts in North America or in Europe, with Denmark being singled-out for special praise. It was generally felt that Danish support and funding mechanisms were more transparent than in the UK where the situation, in one respondent's view, was again described as 'confusing and opaque'.

Because levels of support for documentary are perceived to be higher overseas, it was no surprise that there was widespread backing for international co-productions as most in need of encouragement from UK policymakers. Creative Europe programmes were praised for offering holistic support for co-production, from training and collaboration through to presenting projects at 'various pitching forums partnered with key markets'. This support enabled filmmakers to meet and collaborate both with other international producers and directors as well as various broadcasters, distributors and sales agents.

Because of this, one respondent called for a 'government funded version of Creative Europe for the UK, post-Brexit'.

Respondents also identified positive qualities of the UK landscape, however. Doc Society, Ffilm Cymru Wales, and the SDI – alongside criticisms noted elsewhere in this report – were all acknowledged as important community builders, with SDI particularly commended for its 'grass roots support and an open-door policy'. The BFI NETWORK's Film Hub North received fulsome praise as an example of fostering networking and partnerships, and there was support in general for more 'hub working' and the development of regional 'clusters of excellence' around the existing BFI NETWORK structure. Respondents also looked to international examples here, including Sweden's Film i Väst, which had funding of sufficient scale to offer effective support. The creative labs pioneered by the Sundance Documentary Film Program were cited by several respondents as highly effective, especially in encouraging risk-taking documentaries.

Some respondents saw public-private partnerships as a potentially key collaboration but felt that at the moment there was 'very little incentive for private individuals or companies to come into contact with documentary filmmakers'. However, one respondent thought her company had managed to combine 'innovative storytelling on subjects that matter to all globally' with 'prestigious and experienced business partners that share our company's vision' and which wished to help them expand. Another respondent felt that 'targeted private equity investment in documentaries along the lines encouraged in North America' should be facilitated and supported by policymakers. Of course, there is a risk here – discussed below – of such private investment dictating or prioritising particular kinds of films, narratives and voices over others.

Christopher Hird expresses similar sentiments in his case-study above, albeit with a focus on the third sector. Arguing that the key for feature doc filmmakers is 'to find their paying audience', he suggests that 'one of the best ways of doing this is through civil society organisations to which the target audience is connected. These are the most effective partnerships.' As an example of how this could work, another respondent praised at length the Documentary Australia Foundation as a not-for-profit organisation designed to support filmmakers and their projects, ensuring that important stories are told and seen. 'They provide approved projects with access to DGR [Deductible Gift Recipients: a status awarded to non-profit organisations allowing their donors to claim tax deductions], allowing independent filmmakers to access philanthropic funding and enabling donors to tax-effectively support the issues they care about. It is empowering for filmmakers as they can target funders who have shared interests/agendas.'

*The Great Hack* (dirs. Karim Amer, Jehane Noujaim, 2019) © Noujaim Films

# 8 PERSPECTIVES ON THE FEATURE DOCS SECTOR

We have grouped respondents' most salient concerns under the following headings: 1) An under-funded sector; 2) An under-valued sector; 3) A risk-averse sector; 4) A sector that lacks coherence, co-ordination, structure and transparency; 5) A sector that lacks diversity; 6) A missed opportunity. We discuss each in turn below.

## 8.1 AN UNDER-FUNDED SECTOR

The overwhelmingly dominant observation was the inadequacy of available production funds. As one respondent put it: 'the amount of public money invested in documentary in the UK is a scandal'. Funding is so limited that a majority of respondents shared the view that – for cultural and creative feature docs, at least – it is 'near impossible to finance properly'. The changes to the SEIS (Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme) in March 2018 were also noted as a factor making it even harder to raise finance for certain feature documentaries. This chronic lack of funding available to feature doc filmmakers was resented across the sector, regardless of status or experience – some of the most high-profile figures in the industry were as vocal as their less senior colleagues on this issue. All felt starved of opportunities and support to the extent that some have decided to relocate abroad or leave the sector altogether.

Several drew attention to the disparity between the fiction and documentary sectors with the former being privileged and foregrounded, the latter largely ignored; 'we are invisible' stated one respondent. As noted, the burden of initial development being placed on the filmmaker herself rather than the funders is a major problem. Many respondents observed a polarisation between relatively well-funded commercial docs and a paucity of support for lower-budget independent or experimental projects: 'The industry has split: there are a small number of producers making feature docs with enormous budgets, but the space for smaller/mid-budget films has vanished'. Thus, respondents often argued that the so-called 'golden age' for documentaries only applied to very particular kinds of more commercial work. By contrast, one established director argued that:

> **"…for the kinds of films that I have traditionally made for television, public service films, and my one feature doc, it is not a golden age. It is not sustainable to do this. I only managed to because I made television documentaries – all very difficult, feature-length ones – at the same time. I will never repeat that experience."**

Similarly, another respected producer argued that there are 'two parallel industries running now – the high-end celebrity filmmaker / celebrity subject world, and then the smaller work made by piecing together tiny sources of funding. There is a "golden age" if the first industry is considered. Otherwise it feels it is very much getting harder.' Several filmmakers alluded to the negative social and cultural impact of certain films becoming harder to produce – that the UK feature docs sector was becoming less global and more insular as a result: 'it very much depends on the kinds of films you want to make. Some films are extremely difficult, and getting harder: e.g. non-Northern hemisphere stories, anything in a foreign language etc. I can earn a living, but not necessarily through the films I most want to make'.

## 8.2 AN UNDER-VALUED SECTOR

Several producers emphasised that the paucity of funds is compounded by a lack of understanding of the particular challenges involved in making documentaries – especially the long-term nature of the production process, which often takes several years. 'My last one took seven years to complete and raised around $400,000 [£307,630], but I saw little more than $50,000 [£38,453] from it', said one director. Another well-known director of television singles reported that: 'the feature doc that I just finished took six years [and] nearly killed me financially …

# CASE STUDY
# JOHN BATTSEK, VENTURELAND

John Battsek co-founded Passion Pictures Films in 1997, going on to conceive and produce the Oscar-winning documentary *One Day in September* (dir. Kevin MacDonald, 1999). The film examined the murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics and set the bar for Battsek operating in the 'big film zone'. This was further consolidated by a string of high-profile releases over the following twenty-plus years.

As one of a handful of UK-based producers who specialise in large-scale, and US-broadcaster-backed, documentaries – alongside the likes of On the Corner (led by Asif Kapadia and James Gay-Rees) and Lightbox (led by Simon Chinn) – Battsek is able to 'go for big ideas' as well as big budgets.

Battsek gravitates towards documentaries that have broad appeal and wide-ranging subject matter, with credits including Academy Award-winning *Searching for Sugarman* (dir. Malik Bendjelloul, 2012), Peabody Award-winning *Listen To Me Marlon* (dir. Stevan Riley, 2015), BAFTA Award-winning *Hillsborough* (dir. Daniel Gordon, 2016) and Academy Award-Nominated *Winter On Fire* (dir. Evgeny Afineevsky, 2015).

Whatever the subject, Battsek is drawn to big stories and cinematic films where the vital ingredient is a story's ability to be greater than the sum of its parts. He commented: 'Always required is a core story that can engage a documentary audience …The magic ingredient is the ability to then broaden the appeal of that story to encompass as much of the marketplace and the wider audience as possible'.


John Battsek with the cast of *Andy Murray: Resurfacing* (dir. Olivia Cappuccini, 2019) © Passion Pictures

In 2020 Battsek departed Passion Pictures to set up Ventureland with long-time collaborators Kerstin Emhoff and Ali Brown. Battsek and Emhoff have previously worked on a number of feature documentaries including *Sergio* (dir. Greg Barker, 2009), *The Final Year* (dir. Greg Barker, 2017), *Manhunt* (dir. Greg Barker, 2013) and *The Tillman Story* (dir. Amir Bar-Lev, 2010).

Battsek frequently works with US-based companies such as Showtime, Netflix, National Geographic, Amazon and HBO and acknowledges that a significant amount of documentary finance comes from the US marketplace. Despite this, Battsek stresses the talent of UK filmmakers and producers, 'a culture of interested, interesting, driven, intelligent, producers and directors who want to make this work', as the 'big strength of this country'. However, he feels the lack of UK-based funds and broadcast outlets for feature docs pose significant challenges for the sector.

▶ venture.land


Even though we came close to breaking even, my co-director and I worked hundreds of hours for free – sweat equity. I won't make this kind of independent film again'. Another producer emphasised a similar story:

> **"With restrictions on budgets, fewer finance options (especially for development) and a growing insistence [by funders] on seeing the final film before committing, it just is harder and harder to make independent films, particularly docs. Producers tend to be the last to get paid. I can only do what I do because I am supported by my partner."**

These factors, combined with a sense that these problems are little understood outside of the feature docs sector, explain the general feeling among many producers and directors working in the field that they are overlooked. This resonates with what many expressed as the low status of documentary in the UK, and contrasts with the high esteem with which documentary is viewed in many European countries. In the UK, one respondent argued, 'the value of a strong and varied documentary eco-system' – that is, one that supports a diverse range of filmmakers to explore variety of topics in a myriad of forms – 'is not fully understood'. Several respondents emphasised that documentary films are 'a public service' but that more needs to be done to make that argument: 'the central problem with UK documentaries is a failure to acknowledge that most do not make what would be regarded as conventional commercial returns. The funding, commissioning and acquisition environment does not recognise this'. Being understood as a public service – a cultural good rather than a commercial enterprise – would thus help make the argument for the much-needed increase in cultural subsidy.

## 8.3 A RISK-AVERSE SECTOR

Because the cultural value of the sector is not recognised, respondents argued that funders – particularly the PSBs and the BFI – are very wary of funding productions that are risky or experimental. It was contended that they tend to play safe and fund productions that conform to existing models and have known audiences: 'Artistic quality (uniqueness of script and quality of cinematic photography) don't appear to be given a high value, rather shock or sameness (within a theme) seem to be perceived of higher value'. Several respondents argued that public funders should be expected to take more risks than their commercial counterparts, because if they do not fund more challenging productions, either in subject matter or aesthetically, the whole sector becomes 'more homogenised'.

*The Final Year* (dir. Greg Barker, 2017) © Motto Pictures, Passion Pictures, Prettybird


*Searching for Sugarman* (dir. Malik Bendjelloul, 2012) © Red Box Films, Passion Pictures

## 8.4 A SECTOR THAT LACKS COHERENCE, CO-ORDINATION, STRUCTURE AND TRANSPARENCY

One respondent summed up this common feeling by stating: 'the feature doc industry is ad hoc and has no effective structure'. Many considered that the funding mechanisms were confusing, difficult to access and lacked transparency or accountability. A high number complained of the lack of feedback on applications that may have taken several months to prepare. There was also felt to be a lack of networking opportunities and other support mechanisms and virtually no training provision. One thought that there should be a central hub or database through which creatives and financiers can share information, experience and knowledge.

Moreover, several respondents also argued that this general paucity of funding had resulted in the concentration of decision-making power in too few organisations. The funding landscape was frequently described as a 'closed shop' and a 'closed world'. While noting the 'great work' done by both SDI and Doc Society, both organisations were cited as examples of funders with too much control over production finance. As one filmmaker bluntly put it, 'they shouldn't be the only ones making the decisions on what films get made. What if they don't like you for whatever reason?' Many Scottish filmmakers also noted a conflict of interest with SDI operating as a production company in addition to its role as an institute.

Funders were also criticised for a lack of 'even the most basic' transparency in decision-making: 'Doc Society funds are an example. It is very difficult to discuss with decision makers and meet in open fora. Transparency is a real concern'. Furthermore, while many directors noted the widespread existence of self-exploitation in the sector, others argued that they were actively exploited by production companies. Being paid only upon delivery of the final film, with no fees for development or compensation for over-runs, were both noted as commonplace practices.

Regional discrepancies were deemed a consequence of poor sector coordination. Some London-based respondents felt regions had more funding opportunities, whereas several other respondents argued that these had declined; as one established feature doc director put it, 'everything is based around London … regional funds have been decimated'. This strongly suggests a need for more coherence and clarity in terms of an overall strategic vision of where the sector might be heading.

# CASE STUDY
# DANIEL GORDON, VERYMUCHSO

Daniel Gordon was born in Sheffield, studied History and Politics at Sheffield University, wrote two books on Sheffield Wednesday and lives and works there now. He established his production company, VeryMuchSo, in 2001. Speaking of his hometown, Gordon says:

> **"It's very grounding being in Sheffield. If you work in London there is a terrible tendency of being in a bubble, even in Manchester you're still living in a bubble. Sheffield generally is an inspirational place to live, there's so much on the doorstep creatively and in the city."**

Entirely self-taught, Gordon's career as a director developed rapidly. Having secured a job at Sky Sports aged 23, he successfully pitched and made a documentary series called *Tales from the Premiership* – 15 episodes that covered the 30 clubs that had then played in the Premier League – which screened just after World Cup '98 finished. He then moved to Chrysalis TV for a couple of years before leaving in 2001 to raise the money to make his first feature doc, *The Game of Their Lives* (2002).

*The Game of their Lives* took Gordon to North Korea for the first of what would be 21 visits. Gaining unprecedented access from the North Korean government to interview its 1966 World Cup team's surviving members, the film was released to international acclaim, winning the UK RTS award for Best Sports Documentary. Despite filming in one of the most difficult-to-access countries in the world, Gordon describes an almost cottage-industry-like production process: 'most of my funding came from friends and family within Sheffield. I did everything from my home office which was just a terrace house in Sheffield. Then I edited it in London and I finished it with a good friend of mine who was then based in Dublin'.

Gordon went on to make two more films in North Korea, *A State of Mind* (2004) and *Crossing the Line* (2006), but is perhaps best known for *Hillsborough*, the definitive BAFTA-winning 2016 documentary about the 1989 disaster. The film was a co-production between American sports network ESPN and the BBC. It took over two years to make and was embargoed for a further two years in the UK (despite screening in the US) while a new inquest was in process. When it was finally broadcast on TV, there was a huge response on social media.

Speaking of the documentary industry, Gordon says that while filmmaking is a collaborative process, the role of director is often quite isolated: 'most directors don't meet each other … I don't think they get around and talk to each other about their experiences … It's very rare that you ask for advice or you talk about stuff or share anything, which I think is a shame because it could be much more productive if it was different'.

Gordon's latest documentary, *The Australian Dream*, opened the Melbourne Film Festival in August 2019 where it won the Audience Award. As well as grossing in excess of AUS$1.1million at box office, the film has won eight further awards, including Audience Awards at the Philadelphia and Hawaii Film Festivals, and the prestigious AACTA Award in Australia. *The Australian Dream* was due for UK cinema release in March 2020, distributed by Dogwoof, but was postponed due to COVID-19.

▶ www.verymuchso.co.uk


*The Australian Dream* (dir. Dan Gordon, 2019) © Passion Pictures, VeryMuchSo

## 8.5 A SECTOR THAT LACKS DIVERSITY

As shown in section 2, the feature docs sector has a significant diversity problem. It is almost exclusively middle-class, largely London-based and white, with women, people of colour, people with disabilities and people with caring responsibilities significantly under-represented. The intersection of identity categories with economic conditions in the sector is a key reason for its lack of diversity. Because the sector is chronically under-funded and poorly structured, careers are very difficult to sustain and those working in the industry often live a precarious existence. Therefore, the feature docs industry – in the production sector, at least – tends to be populated by those who can access some form of private money. According to one respondent's judgement, 'it is a worse time than ever for those on regular incomes, without elite backgrounds'. Others put it equally starkly: 'basically, unless you are posh, it's a nightmare'. This economic context has particular consequences for ethnic as well as class diversity, because people from BAME groups are more likely to be from lower-income backgrounds (IRR 2015).

Many respondents emphasised how the lack of diversity was impacting on the kinds of films being made – 'the stories being told are fewer, narrower, and we are discovering less about the world' – and stressed that this was also connected to institutional changes. While it was recognised that 'a much bigger gulf' had developed between feature-length documentaries and 'commissioned TV', it was also noted that the squeeze on budgets and shooting schedules in television had knock-on effects for diversity in the premium, feature doc space:

> **"Directors in TV have much less creative autonomy, shorter editing time and lower wages than 20 years ago. It takes huge investment of time and capital to establish oneself as a feature documentary director, which is why the field is overwhelmingly privileged. The lack of diverse voices is problematic. Directors are still, overwhelmingly, from privileged backgrounds."**

# CASE STUDY
# LINDSEY DRYDEN, LITTLE BY LITTLE FILMS

Lindsey Dryden is an Emmy®-winning producer, director and writer. Her work has screened at festivals including Sundance and SXSW, received theatrical release in the UK and US and been broadcast on Netflix, Independent Lens, BBC and Channel 4.

In 2011, Dryden launched Little By Little Films to create authentic films by and about underrepresented voices, particularly LGBTQ folks, women and disabled people. Recent work includes *Unrest* (2017), which won a Special Jury Award at Sundance, and the ACLU documentary series *Trans In America*, which screened at SXSW 2019 and won two Webbys and an Emmy® for Outstanding Short Documentary.

Addressing industry conditions in the UK, Dryden reflects on how a lack of funding, particularly for development and the long timelines needed for high-quality feature docs, means only those with private sources of income can develop projects to a fundable level. She asks, "Who can afford to work for free, and for how long? Do we want a British industry in which only the economically privileged can tell documentary stories?" Moreover, Dryden describes the private finance/philanthropy field in the UK as inaccessible when compared with the US' network of passionate documentary philanthropists and donors. Dryden argues that the lack of UK broadcast outlets is also a key part of this problem:

> **"The closure of More 4's True Stories and Wonderland was a big loss. Now, funders that documentarians manage to attract often seek the up-front guarantee of traditional TV-sized audiences which no longer exist, so some British docs are doomed to fail. Meanwhile, newer documentarians who have made more than two feature docs face limited pipelines for progression; often it's familiar filmmakers who made their name before these closures (or had a lucrative pre-documentary career, or have access to family finance) that attract funding support today."**

These conditions, she argues, lead to a "systematic exclusion of underrepresented voices, particularly those without economic privilege, and to unhealthy, unsustainable working environments."

To navigate these conditions, Dryden works often with US productions, "where the industry feels encouraging and energetic, and there is investment in new voices". She only works with collaborators with whom she can co-create ethical and sustainable working environments, offers pro bono mentoring hours to underrepresented emerging filmmakers, and is part of a community of passionate and innovative creative colleagues. Despite the difficult conditions in the British sector, Dryden is committed to working to improve it:

> **"We need brilliant stories more than ever, and collaborating with brilliant colleagues on a powerful and beautifully-made film is what keeps me working in this challenging landscape. My goal is to make surprising, inspiring, provocative, nuanced and artistic work, by and about voices we hear from too rarely. There is so much potential in these voices, and much to be hopeful about. The UK industry does not make it easy but we're determined not to be excluded from the privilege of telling stories."**

▶ www.lblfilms.com


Director Jennifer Brea, Producer Lindsey Dryden and host Anna Bogutskaya discuss *Unrest* (2017) at BFI Southbank © Laura Palmer

## 8.6 A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

There was a strong underlying current in respondents' views of a missed opportunity. Several thought that the UK was failing to react to the opportunities that are already there because the feature doc sector has developed so rapidly and is enjoying such a high profile internationally: 'We are in the golden age of docs. The film festivals are full of wonderful films. Yet hardly any appear on UK public television and there is very little UK funding for docs'. Another opined: 'Feature docs are very high status in some instances and there appears to be a growing appetite from audiences – seen via the platforms – but this isn't matched by support from government, broadcasters or other organisations.'

Rather than exploiting the new opportunities, many long-standing producers and directors emphasised how much harder the funding landscape had become over the course of their careers – with one esteemed director noting that funders' emphasis on supporting new talent obscures challenges for those further on in their careers: 'Everyone assumes it gets easier but when you're established the struggle is just as hard'. Several respondents returned to the current lack of support from PSBs. As one producer put it: 'the funding model is broken: there is very little opportunity to get a UK broadcaster on-board a feature production, [yet] much of the funding requires a UK broadcaster'. Channel 4 was criticised in particular. As Kim Longinotto puts it in her case-study in this report: 'Channel 4 used to be very good at funding documentaries. The emphasis now seems to be on reality shows … For the first time since I started getting funded by TV [in the 1980s], my last three films have been funded by grants, not TV. The film I'm making at the moment is self-funded'.

# 9 RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This section presents 15 preliminary recommendations based on the findings in this report. We have organised the recommendations under three headings – 'Diversity', 'Sector development' and 'Funding' – though of course these overlap. While many of our funding recommendations are concerned with increasing production funds in the sector, this is not primarily intended to increase the number of films that get made but to improve conditions for those who work in the sector – which will in turn have consequences for diversity. Higher levels of funding, distributed via more funding streams, will ease the precarious conditions in the sector and result in a more sustainable industry that is accessible to people from all backgrounds, and which is therefore more diverse in terms of both films and filmmakers.

We stress that these recommendations are provisional, and are intended to provide a basis for discussions with filmmakers and other stakeholders across the sector during the 7-week consultation period that will follow the publication of this report. During this time, feedback will be solicited from across the sector via a range of methods, including a dedicated event at Doc/Fest in June, a series of focus groups with filmmakers and other stakeholders, conversations with sector-lead organisations and written feedback submitted via the UK Feature Docs website. Following the consultation period, stakeholder responses will be integrated into a set of sector-endorsed policy proposals that can in turn be used as the basis for future discussions with policymakers.

Finally, we should note that, in keeping with the focus of the survey and its findings, we have focused on finance and production over distribution and exhibition. A coherent policy framework should, of course, ensure that production is properly harnessed to distribution and exhibition. Discussions with distributors, sales agents and exhibitors are ongoing as part of the UK Feature Docs project. If you would like to be involved these, do get in touch with us at www.ukfd.org.uk.

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


*Night Will Fall*
(dir. André Singer, 2014)
© Spring Films

## DIVERSITY

**1 Prioritise evaluating interventions over data collection**

We recognise that sector-lead organisations are already working extremely hard to address this problem via a range of measures. For example, all Doc Society's short and feature awards adhere to the BFI's Diversity Standards and Doc Society makes considerable efforts to reach filmmakers beyond London via thrice yearly roadshow events. The SDI – along with Screen Scotland – is doing valuable work to evidence and address gender inequality, including its 50/50+ Women Direct campaign, launched in November 2019. The Grierson Trust, meanwhile, also monitors and targets under-represented groups across its outreach work and DocLab schemes and from 2020 is updating the criteria for the Grierson Awards to encompass diversity and inclusion practices. However, as Stephen Follows and Alexis Kreager note in their *Cut Out of the Picture* report, there is a danger that citing best practice conveys the message that inequalities are 'in hand' or solved (2016, 99).

- We therefore stress that the evidence presented in this report demonstrates unequivocally that inequality remains a significant issue in the feature docs sector. This is not the place to suggest any detailed proposals or amendments to existing work in this area. Instead, we recommend that addressing inequality in the sector should be a priority for the proposed sector steering group (see recommendation 2). As part of this work, rather than producing more research evidencing the lack of diversity in the sector, we suggest that it would be useful to collate existing initiatives across the feature docs sector and to make them available in one place.
- We also suggest that these initiatives should be evaluated for their effectiveness, and their respective strengths and weaknesses – something noted as lacking in recent research in this area. For example, the authors of the BFI's evidence review of workforce diversity in the screen sector (CAMEo 2018) recently published a paper in which they note the absence of any systematic evaluation of existing diversity initiatives across the UK screen industries (Newsinger and Eikhof 2020, 52–8). We therefore suggest that evaluation of diversity initiatives should be the priority for future work in this field.

## SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

### 2 Convene a sector steering group or coordinating body

- Sector coordination and information-sharing could be significantly improved by a steering group, network or sector council comprised of representatives from different parts of the industry. As well as the leading documentary-specific organisations mentioned throughout this report – such as BBC *Storyville*, Doc Society, Guardian Documentaries, SDI, Doc/Fest, Open City Docs, The Whickers and others – members of this group could include, for example, BAFTA, British Council, Bertha DocHouse, Directors UK, London Film Festival, Northern Ireland Screen and Screen Skills.

  Such a group would be a key means of lobbying policymakers for increased support for the sector and of addressing the myriad other needs identified in this report.

### 3 Improve the cultural profile of feature docs within the industry

Improving the cultural profile of feature docs within the industry should be a priority. The evidence suggests that there is a significant lack of understanding with regards to how and why the feature docs sector operates as a distinct part of the film and television industries – particularly among those film funders, agencies and broadcasters that may not work with nonfiction directly. Indeed, this is sometimes accompanied by a reluctance to even accept documentary as a legitimate mode of feature filmmaking.

- Raising the profile of the sector within the industry would involve ensuring that the cultural, social and economic benefits of a thriving feature-length documentary film sector are more clearly articulated, and that the sector is effectively lobbied for and included in wider industry conversations and decision-making. This is clearly a challenging and multifaceted process, but would have significant impact in the longer term. Given the overarching and long-term nature of the task, it would be most effectively coordinated by the sector steering group recommended above.
- However, we also suggest that wider screen sector agencies and institutions shoulder some of the responsibility for building a stronger cultural profile for UK feature docs. This should include ensuring that knowledge and resource dedicated to documentary exists in-house at organisations across the screen sector.

### 4 Coordinate support for nonfiction filmmakers across London, the nations and regions

- The evidence suggests that the sector lacks structure and coherence, and that there is insufficient knowledge-sharing, networking opportunities and support for filmmakers outside London. We therefore recommend that organisations across the sector come together to explore how the structure and coherence of the sector across the UK could be improved, and to discuss what a more coordinated strategy would look like in terms of ensuring parity of provision, effective communication and transparency in decision-making. Again, a steering group would be an appropriate means of facilitating this.
- 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 feature doc production funding.

### 5 Support for filmmakers' mental health

- Our data supports recent research by the Film+TV Charity that there is a mental health crisis in the film and television industries. Stress and anxiety are arguably especially acute among documentary filmmakers, who – as well as being freelance, precarious workers – often work with vulnerable people in traumatic or even dangerous situations. Again, there are examples of best practice here – such as SDI's partnership with filmmaker-specific therapy service, Film in Mind – though sector-wide coordination and provision could be improved. We recommend that the sector coordinates with the Film+TV Charity's mental health taskforce to explore potential improvements in this area.

*Maya* (dir. Jamshid Mohaddadi and Anson Hartford, coming soon) © Banyak Films

### 6 Training, education and research

- Alongside an emphasis on the need for more funds, documentary filmmakers expressed a need for training in terms of both practical business and entrepreneurial skills (including the development of international co-productions and accessing tax relief) and in creative and craft skills. Sector-lead organisations should liaise with ScreenSkills to explore how to address these needs.
- Higher Education providers should work more closely with the sector-lead organisations to prepare graduates for the challenges of working in the industry. However, universities must remain more than industry service-providers. It is essential, therefore that a closer working relationship with industry does not jeopardise universities' role in cultivating film literacy, critical thinking and a deep understanding of film history, form and craft.
- Given that foundations and private investors are the second most common source of funding for feature doc makers, it is crucial that training providers prepare filmmakers to tap into this increasingly important funding stream.
- There is a need for more regular and granular data to be produced on the feature docs sector. One way in which to achieve this is for the sector to liaise with the BFI's Research and Statistics Unit to ensure increased range and scope of data on documentary is included in its *Statistical Yearbook*. The yearbooks are immensely valuable sources of information, particularly because published annually, but current data tends to focus on box-office and numbers of releases. It would be useful to have additional data on the proportion of funds allocated to documentary from different sources across production, distribution and exhibition, for example, and 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 of leading production and distribution companies).

### 7 Explore the potential for a dedicated documentary market and conference

- We were intrigued by our respondents' suggestion that there should be an annual documentary marketplace and/or conference, in addition to markets at existing documentary festivals. This could be an exciting means of raising the profile of the feature docs sector on the international stage. We therefore suggest that sector stakeholders and organisations come together to consider this possibility, potentially as part of, or in collaboration with, BFI London Film Festival's industry strand.

## FUNDING

### 8 Increase the proportion of Lottery funds ring-fenced for documentary

- Filmmakers' overwhelming emphasis was that current production funds in the sector are insufficient. One of the most direct routes to address this is for the BFI to increase the proportion of Lottery funds ring-fenced for documentary activity under the BFI Doc Society Fund. In 2020/21, the BFI awarded Doc Society £1.8m (9.1 per cent) out of total of £20.9m.[11]

  We recommend increasing the proportion of Lottery funds ring-fenced for documentary to between 20–25 per cent of the total funds available. This would see the BFI Doc Society Fund increase to between £4,180,000 (20 per cent) and £5,225,000 (25 per cent).

### 9 Diversify funders and strengthen ties with the BFI NETWORK

- Filmmakers were concerned not only at the low level of funding but also that available funds were concentrated in too few organisations. We therefore suggest that steps be taken to increase the plurality of funders operating in the sector, and welcome discussions on what that might look like. BFI NETWORK appears to provide an effective, nationwide funding structure for emerging fiction and animation filmmakers and has dedicated talent executives in the regions. The BFI Doc Society shorts scheme, Made of Truth, and their regional roadshow and support activity, is part of the BFI NETWORK offerings. From our perspective, this structure would benefit from additional resources for production and training targeted at documentary filmmakers. We therefore suggest that Doc Society and the regional NETWORK executives work together to identify additional funding opportunities for filmmakers in the UK regions.

### 10 Increase Public Service Broadcasters' support for feature documentary

Increased support from the UK's public service broadcasters (PSBs) is essential if the funding landscape for feature docs is to improve. We recognise that these are challenging and complex times for PSBs everywhere, with the market evolving rapidly and the growth of new platforms and on-demand services disrupting business models and splintering audiences. Declining global advertising revenues are a substantial problem for Channel 4 in particular, while the BBC has been significantly weakened[12] by the Conservative government's decision in 2010 to freeze the license fee and by its 2015 decision that the BBC must bear the cost of the licence fee for over 75s (costs borne by the Department for Work and Pensions since 2001).

Yet the fundamental values of public service broadcasting – to provide high quality, original, innovative and thought-provoking media that is free at the point of use – are more important than ever. With high-quality print journalism in decline and insular politics on the rise, the feature-length documentary is a vital means through which difficult, complex or challenging subjects can be explored in depth, and can play a critical role in informing audiences' understanding of the world. The market alone – which by definition prioritises the commercial end of the spectrum – cannot support this kind of content.

Thus, alongside news, arts and children's programming, documentary is a critical public service genre. Of course, there is no shortage of factual and factual entertainment programmes on television (many of which are outstanding), yet support for feature docs is scarce to say the least. Isolated broadcasts – BBC2's screening of *Gun No. 6* (dir. James Newton, 2018) or ITV's showing of John Pilger's work – are not enough to sustain the sector.

We therefore suggest the following recommendations:

- The BBC should significantly increase the budget of its flagship feature doc strand, *Storyville*. The *Storyville* brand still carries enormous respect and prestige around the world, but its budget – currently less than a million pounds per annum – is not adequate to sustain the reputation it has spent many years building. For *Storyville* to maintain its reputation as one of the world's leading feature documentary strands on television, it requires a budget much greater than its current size. *Storyville*'s competitors not only include SVODs and pay TV – which recently made significant financial commitments to feature docs – but also other European PSBs such as WDR and NDR in Germany, Arte France and SVT in Sweden, whose overall budgets are much more substantial.
- Channel 4 should have a dedicated series to match *Storyville*. This would enhance the channel's support for the sector to a level that better reflects its remit and position as the UK's publicly-owned, commercially-funded PSB, and further increase and diversify production funding in the sector.
- Britbox, the new streaming service launched by the BBC and ITV in November 2019, should represent feature-length documentaries. The service does include a category entitled 'Doc & Lifestyle', but this consists almost exclusively of natural history and presenter-led factual television; no feature docs are on the platform at the time of writing.
- 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.[13] However, we suggest that their commitment to public service should be strengthened by expanding their remit to include support for 'specialised' film in general, with dedicated budgets for feature docs in particular. In this regard, we note the 2014 Film Policy Review Panel recommendations that BskyB, ITV and Channel 5 be made to invest £20m, £10 and £5m respectively in original feature film production and suggest sector lead organisations lobby for similar proposals (DCMS 2014, 17).
- Ofcom should use its powers to intervene directly to ensure these changes take place. Without this kind of intervention, these changes are unlikely to occur or to be sustained in the longer term. We welcome Ofcom's 'Small Screen: Big Debate' consultation on the challenges facing PSBs and suggest that tighter regulation of SVODs' operations in the UK will be a key part of ensuring a robust and resilient PSB sector for the future.

### 11 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. The loss of access to MEDIA programme training schemes, networking initiatives, and distribution and exhibition support also constitutes a major blow to the sector. It is therefore essential that any replacement funding negotiated by the BFI for the screen sector includes a proportion ring-fenced for documentary.

### 12 Encourage support for innovation and experimentation

- 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. Although recommendations for distribution and exhibition are not detailed here, it is worth noting that a holistic approach is as important for experimental films as for other kinds of independent film, and that exhibitors need financial support to take risks with documentary film programming in order to develop the audience for it.

*Last Breath* (dirs. Richard da Costa and Alex Parkinson, 2019), © Met Film

### 13 Enhance support for development

- The lack of available development funding is a major problem in the sector. It also constitutes a key barrier to participation – especially for working-class filmmakers who cannot afford to spend months developing projects unpaid. Where possible, funders should ringfence dedicated development funds and support projects based on research, rather than 'the perfect pitch'.
- The BFI Vision Awards scheme is an immensely valuable intervention for those that 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 one-third documentary producers is an appropriate proportion to ensure the future development of the sector.

### 14 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 attractive co-production partners.

### 15 Introduce amendments to the UK Film Tax Relief (FTR) for documentary

Because budgets for feature-length documentaries are so much smaller than budgets for fiction films, revising the means through which documentary filmmakers access the tax relief is a relatively low-cost way of supporting the sector. Our suggestions for amendments to the FTR for nonfiction include the following:

- Tax relief should be increased to 50 per cent of the budget of qualifying productions.
- If the producer cash-flows the tax credit, they are effectively an equity financier and should be entitled to recoup alongside other equity financiers.
- The percentage of total spend required to be spent in the UK should be lowered for documentary projects.
- The total points required to qualify for the FTR should be lowered for documentary projects.
- In documentary, the producer/director often commence shooting prior to establishing a Film Production Company (FPC). It should be made clear in the FTR guidelines that if the footage is licensed as archive material, the costs (of filming prior to establishing an FPC) are then eligible as UK costs for purposes of calculating the FTR.
- Documentary projects should not be subject to the same audit fees as fiction films, particularly since documentary projects will often file for interim tax relief as well as when the film is completed.

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# ENDNOTES

1 For example, the newly incorporated Documentary Association of Europe recently announced its intention to conduct data-gathering projects on documentary industries in Europe (Brigid O'Shea cited in Ravindran 2020). The Documentary Organization of Canada has released intermittent reports of documentary production since 2013 and recently noted that, given increasing audiences and the cultural importance of nonfiction cinema, it is 'timely to examine the policy frameworks that support independent documentary' (De Rosa and Burgess 2019, 9). For industry data on the sector in the US, see Borum Chattoo (2016) and Borum Chattoo and Brown (2019).

2 'Specialised' is the BFI's preferred term for films that 'do not sit easily within a mainstream and highly commercial genre' – and is roughly analogous to equally problematic descriptors such as 'independent' or 'cultural' film (BFI 2019, 41).

3 Both the *Cost of Docs* and the CMSI reports use different age-range increments, so we have merged some of rows to achieve commensurability.

4 The straight and 'prefer not to say' groups have been rounded to prevent participant confidentiality.

5 These latter gender classes have been rounded to protect participant confidentiality. As a result, as much as ten per cent of the sample has been excluded from this section of the report because they do not identify as male or female or because they did not answer this question.

6 For further analysis of issues facing London-based film and television workers, see, for example, Gornostaeva (2009). For analyses of issues facing workers and companies in the regions, see Spicer and Presence (2017 and 2016), Johns (2016) and Genders (2019).

7 See Lee (2011) for an analysis of networking in the television industry, and its function as both a mode of finding work and a mechanism of exclusion.

8 The number of responses exceeds the total number of respondents here because this was a multiple-choice, multiple-answer question.

9 As elsewhere, to avoid disclosure yet still visually display a value we used 5 per cent in classes which are 5 per cent or less.

10 To clarify, these statistics do not include funds filmmakers have received through the Film Tax Relief, which was listed as one of the options in this question alongside 'Your own funds'. All funds represented here are therefore the personal funds of the filmmakers in question.

11 The BFI's five-year Financial Plan is available here: **https://www.bfi.org.uk/2022/financial_plan.html**. 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. Though 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.

12 The licence fee settlement alone has meant that the BBC has had 24 per cent less to spend on public services than if it had risen since 2010 (BBC 2020, 1), while covering the cost of the licence fee for over 75s has been estimated at £650–750m, approaching 20 per cent of the BBC's licence fee income (Harvey 2015). Proposals by the current Conservative government to de-criminalise payment of the licence fee are estimated to cost the BBC a further £300m.

13 While PSBs receive prominence on EPGs when viewers are watching linear television, we note that there are currently no rules regarding the prominence of PSB content on connected devices or in other online environments. We therefore welcome Ofcom's recent, wide-ranging proposals for a new framework to ensure the future prominence of PSB channels and content across video-on demand players, connected TVs and digital video recorders (Ofcom 2019).

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