

DOCUMENTARY LIVES HERE:

FIVE YEARS OF THE

BFI DOC SOCIETY FUND

2018-2023



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Since 2018, Doc Society has been the BFI's delegate partner administering National Lottery funding for independent UK documentary filmmaking.



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# WELCOME

**Doc Society, a non-profit founded in 2005 to enable independent documentary globally, thrives on being a supportive friend to filmmakers. We believe that documentaries enrich lives; so often a flashlight in the dark, they can expand the way we think of the world around us and our ways of seeing. We have always operated outside of institutions in order to protect that position. Independence is foundational. As a cultural force that also has commercial value, independent documentary matters and deserves distinct funding and editorial independence in order to flourish. When Doc Society sought to become the BFI's documentary partner in 2017, applying for National Lottery 'good cause' funding, we centred this independence-first approach. We were also motivated by our commitment to a broad church of documentary storytellers, and our wish to continue to help them to locate the resources and partners to make their best work and deliver them to audiences who need to see them most. Alongside this, three guiding pillars informed our approach:**

- Creative ambition
- Local diversity
- Radical collaboration



Inspired by the field, upon becoming the BFI's delegate partner, we worked hard to optimise the full potential of the funding available for the BFI Doc Society Fund. Made of Truth quickly became a space where emerging talent and storytellers working on documentary shorts converge to expand the form. This commitment to creative development brought new and exciting partnerships into the documentary field.

The Features Fund prioritises creative vision, collaboration, growth in form and is a space for independent first time feature and more established directors and storytellers. Films supported by the Fund solidified creative partnerships that have enabled them to be shown at global festivals and reach theatrical, broadcast and community audiences.

**Across the film slate, film teams have been awarded numerous times, recognised for their creative vision and unique approaches to storytelling.**

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The growth in profile across the Fund has also energised the documentary field and we are proud that principles of non-extractivism are embedded in all of the work that we have been able to support.

Underpinning our core film funding activity, our Support Programme grew beyond expectation, becoming an invaluable set of initiatives for documentary creatives throughout the U.K. The programme brought together storytellers, mentors and field builders, distributors and commissioners to reimagine how we can share the tools of creative practice via inspiring national workshops and events. Our transformative annual Creative Lab, which was a cornerstone of our ambition in 2017, centres creative practice.

In the last four and a half years, where we have been able to support 61 features and 50 shorts, innovation has been central to our commitment to getting support to where it is needed most. We heard the SOS signalled by producers nationally during the pandemic, and were able to support productions at crisis point. Ripple Effect was born out of a wish to support documentary film champions creating networks and supportive infrastructure to those working tirelessly to bring documentaries to underserved audiences throughout the country. Importantly, it also afforded a space for us to redistribute power, move together on principles of trust and local expertise and innovate funding models that could also serve to build sustainable futures for documentaries throughout the U.K. Our BFI colleagues walked with us as we worked to make all of this a reality and we are grateful to them for their support and collaboration as we pushed the boundaries.

This Fund Review presents a survey of all that we have been able to achieve in collaboration with the countless directors, producers and field builders we have had the incredible opportunity to partner with. Together we have built a framework from which the sector can continue to grow. We have shifted the field and created a space for truly independent documentary filmmaking. As we look toward the future, being bold is our starting position.

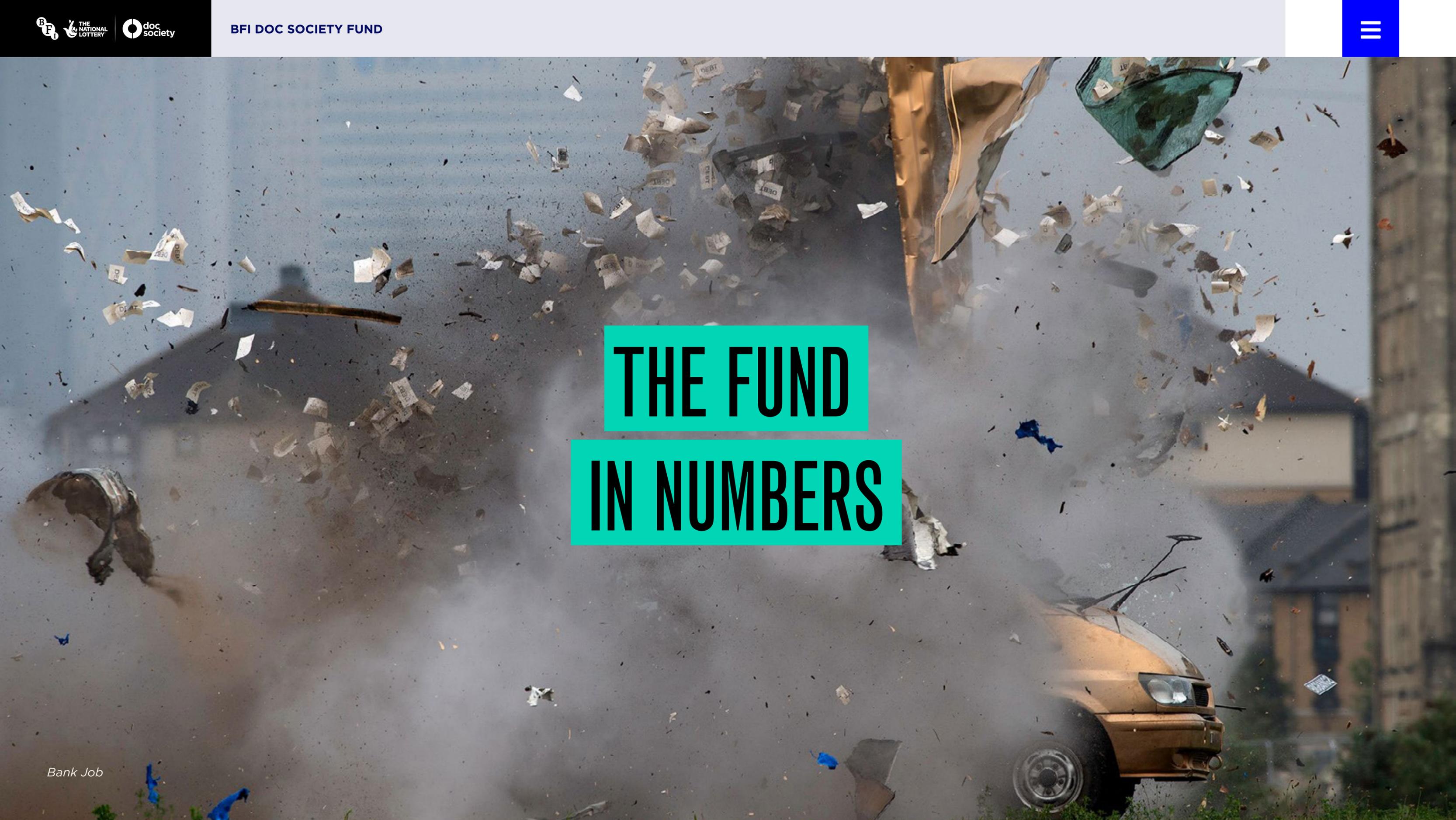


Representation matters, who is making our documentaries and sustainable careers for all of our storytellers matters, and making our funding models work for an inclusive documentary field matters and not least, a healthy distribution landscape able to help independent documentary films to reach audiences matters. True freedom of creative expression liberates all of us who encounter a form that is always pushing at boundaries. Challenging all our ways of seeing continues to be what the world needs. It is in this space that dedicated funding for independent documentaries continues to be vital. We invite you to reflect together with us on the Fund because as an organisation here to support independent UK documentarians, we have a future to create together. Meeting the challenge together is what we do best.

**Shanida Scotland**

Director and Head of Film, Doc Society

March 2023



# THE FUND IN NUMBERS

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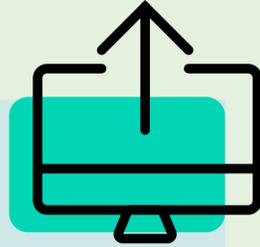
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# THE FUND IN NUMBERS

Number of applications:

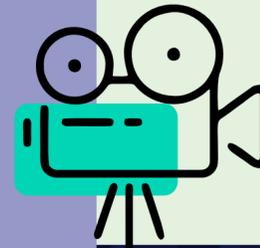


Features—1,390

Shorts—1,191

Number of features funded:

61



+ 19

COVID SOS Awards



Number of shorts funded

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# THE FUND IN NUMBERS

**Total features funding**  
**£4,710,092**

**Total shorts funding**  
**£967,357**



## Leverage

For every £1 of BFI National Lottery funding we invest, £4 more is invested by other funders



## International co-productions

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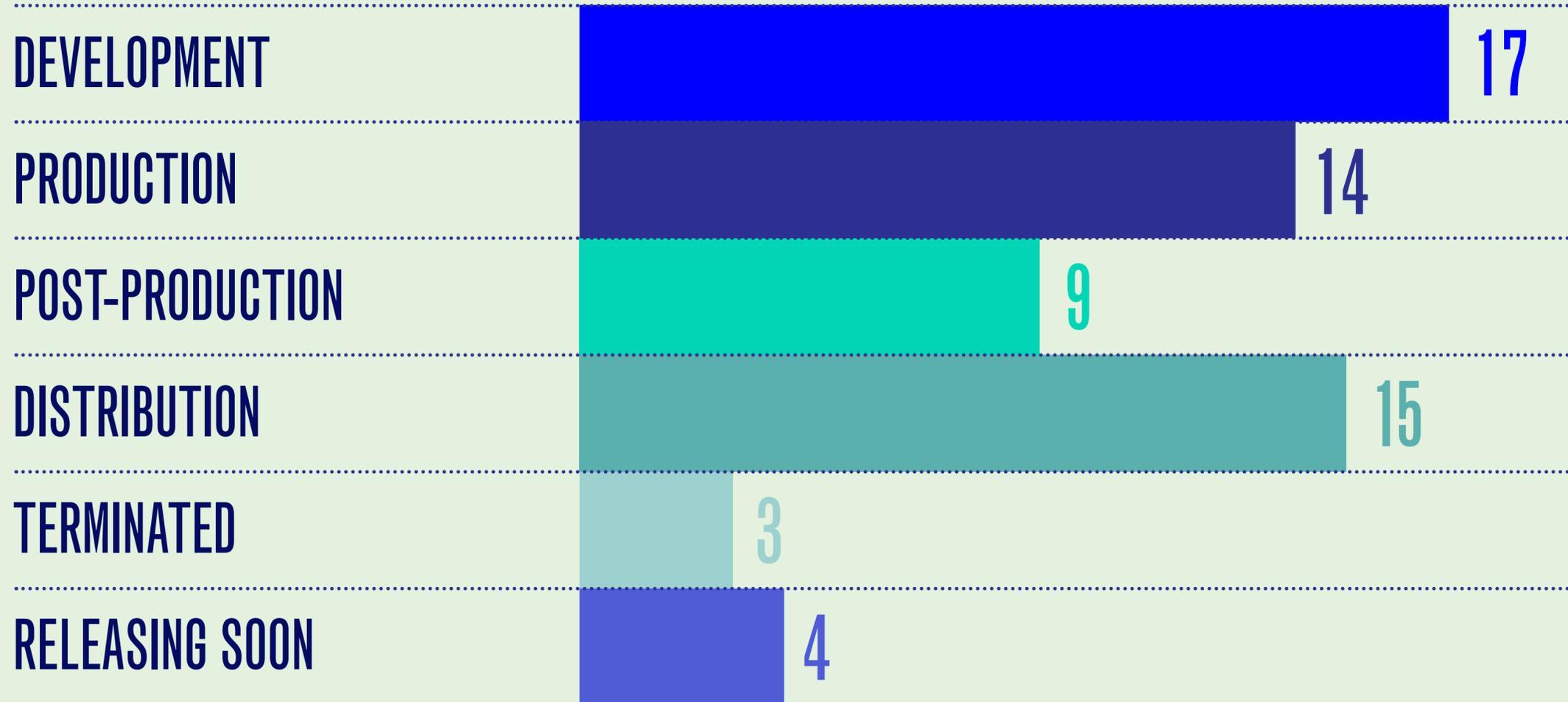
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# STATUS OF FUNDED FEATURES

## The Progress of Projects as of April 2023

*61 films total*



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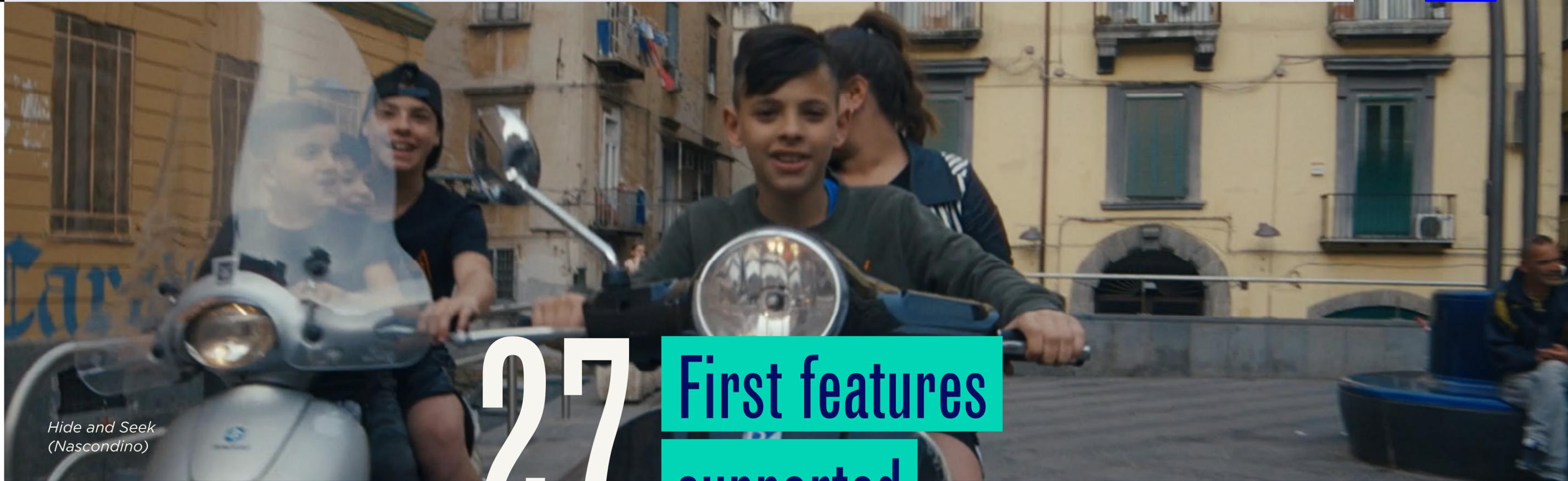
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Hide and Seek  
(Nascondino)

# 27 First features supported

- Includes co-directed first features
- Equivalent to **44% of the slate**





# FEATURES FUND

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# BFI DOC SOCIETY FEATURES FUND

**The BFI Doc Society Fund has distributed £5.7 million to UK independent documentary films. The Fund supports creative and hybrid feature documentaries with bold cultural and social ambitions, and short films by diverse, emerging voices from all over the UK.**

In our role as a national funder, our ambition since 2018 has been to support a wide range of filmmakers, creative approaches and subject matters, enabling a rich diversity of storytelling and building an ecosystem for UK documentary where all stages of documentary making could be supported. We're incredibly proud of all our grantees who have succeeded despite incredibly challenging conditions.



**Following completion, our features have had world premieres at leading international festivals (incl. IDFA, CPH:Dox, Tribeca and Sundance) and UK festivals (incl. Sheffield Doc/Fest, BFI London Film Festival and Glasgow Film Festival).**

**They have secured nominations and wins across major awards and festival competitions (incl. BAFTA, BIFA, The Grierson Awards) and have reached audiences through broadcast partnerships with BBC, Sky and Paramount.**



# BFI DOC SOCIETY: FEATURES FUND

## FILM DIRECTORY

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# 2018-22 FEATURES: WHO HAVE WE FUNDED?

## FEMALE / NON BINARY

84% KEY CREATIVES

47% Directors

BFI Target 50%

## ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

48% KEY CREATIVES

34% Directors

BFI Target 20%

18% BLACK

11% Directors

## LGBTQIA+

25% KEY CREATIVES

15% Directors

BFI Target 10%

## D/DEAF AND DISABLED

25% KEY CREATIVES

15% Directors

BFI Target 12%

## NORTHERN IRELAND, SCOTLAND, WALES AND ENGLISH REGIONS

56% KEY CREATIVES

41% Directors

BFI strategic priority, although does not have a set target

The % of **KEY CREATIVES** (which includes directors, producers and writers) shown here is out of a total 61 features supported.

The % of directors shown here is out of 74 directors supported in total.

Our targets are set by the BFI. For more information about the BFI KPI's [click through here.](#)

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# NATIONS & REGIONS

**56% of features**

include a key creative from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales or the English regions.

Northern Ireland

Wales

England—South West

Scotland

England—North

England—Midlands

England—South East

Including:

Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, York, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford, Peterborough, Bristol, Gloucester, Hastings, Brighton, Margate, Caernarfon



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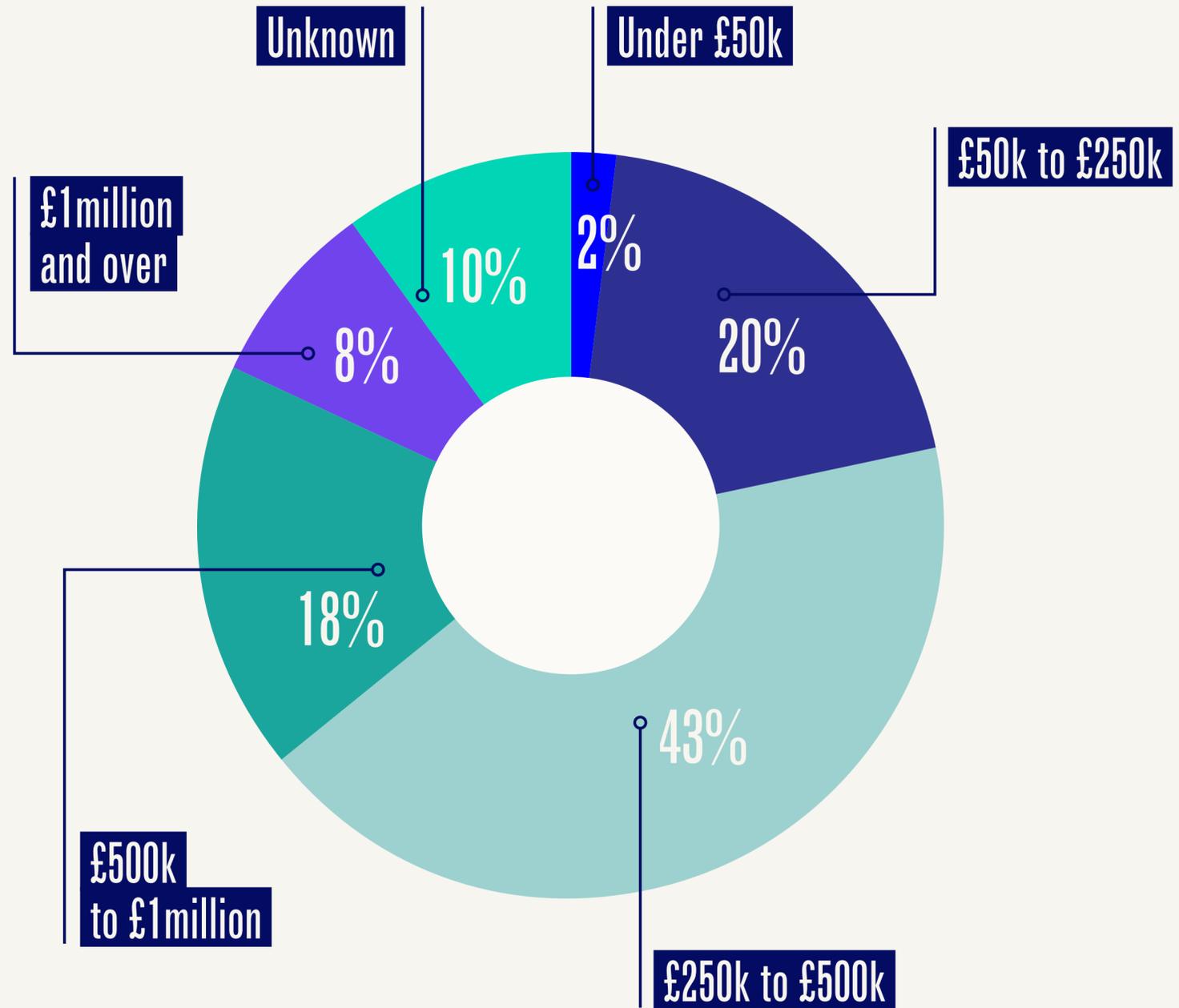
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# BUDGET AND AWARD SIZES

## Total budget of films supported

The figures show the different budget bands of films we have supported - how much the films cost to make. The % figure shows the proportion of films on our slate supported that sit inside that budget band. The "Unknown" category reflects the fact that some films have not finalised their budget at the time of publication.

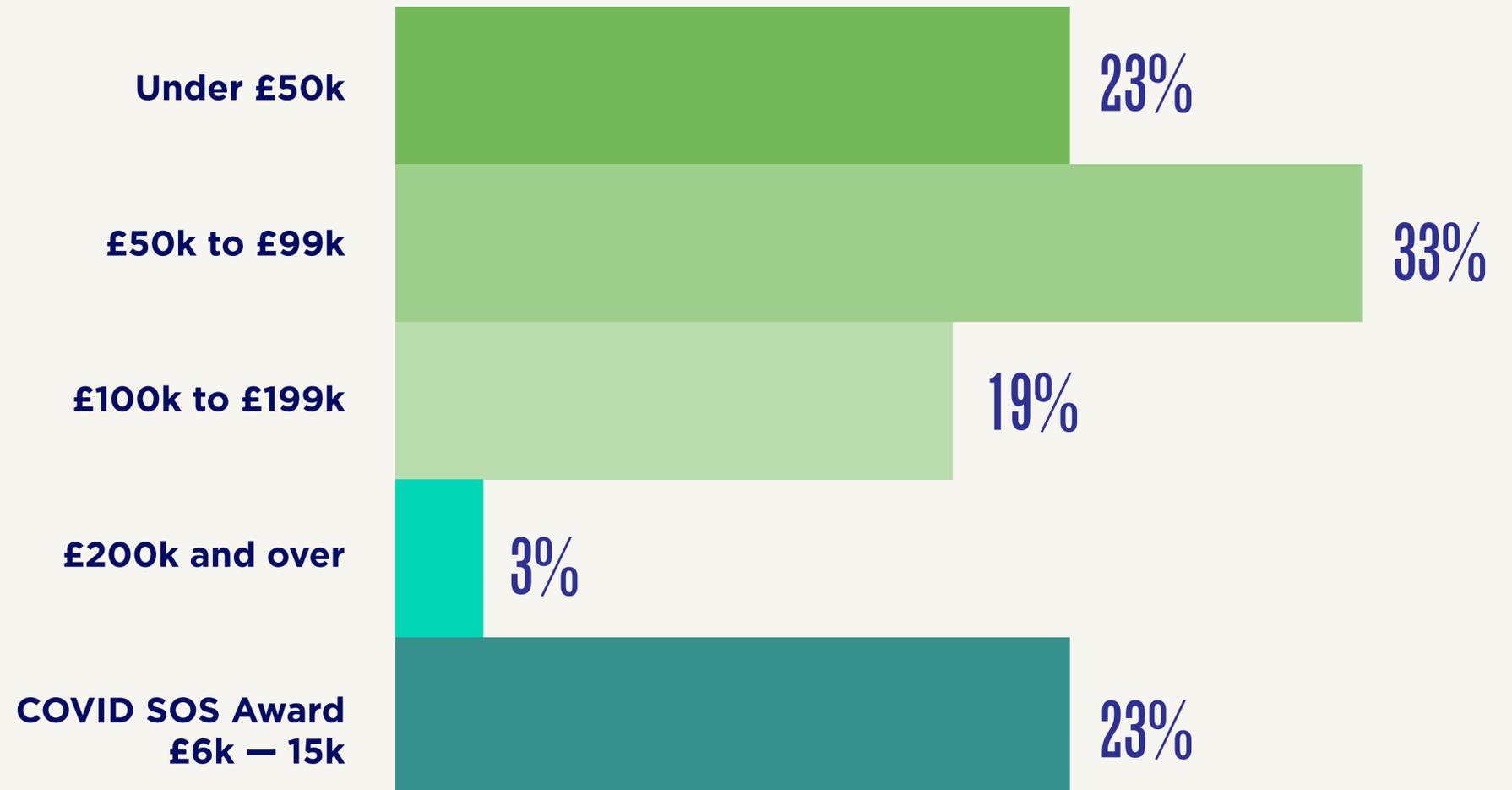


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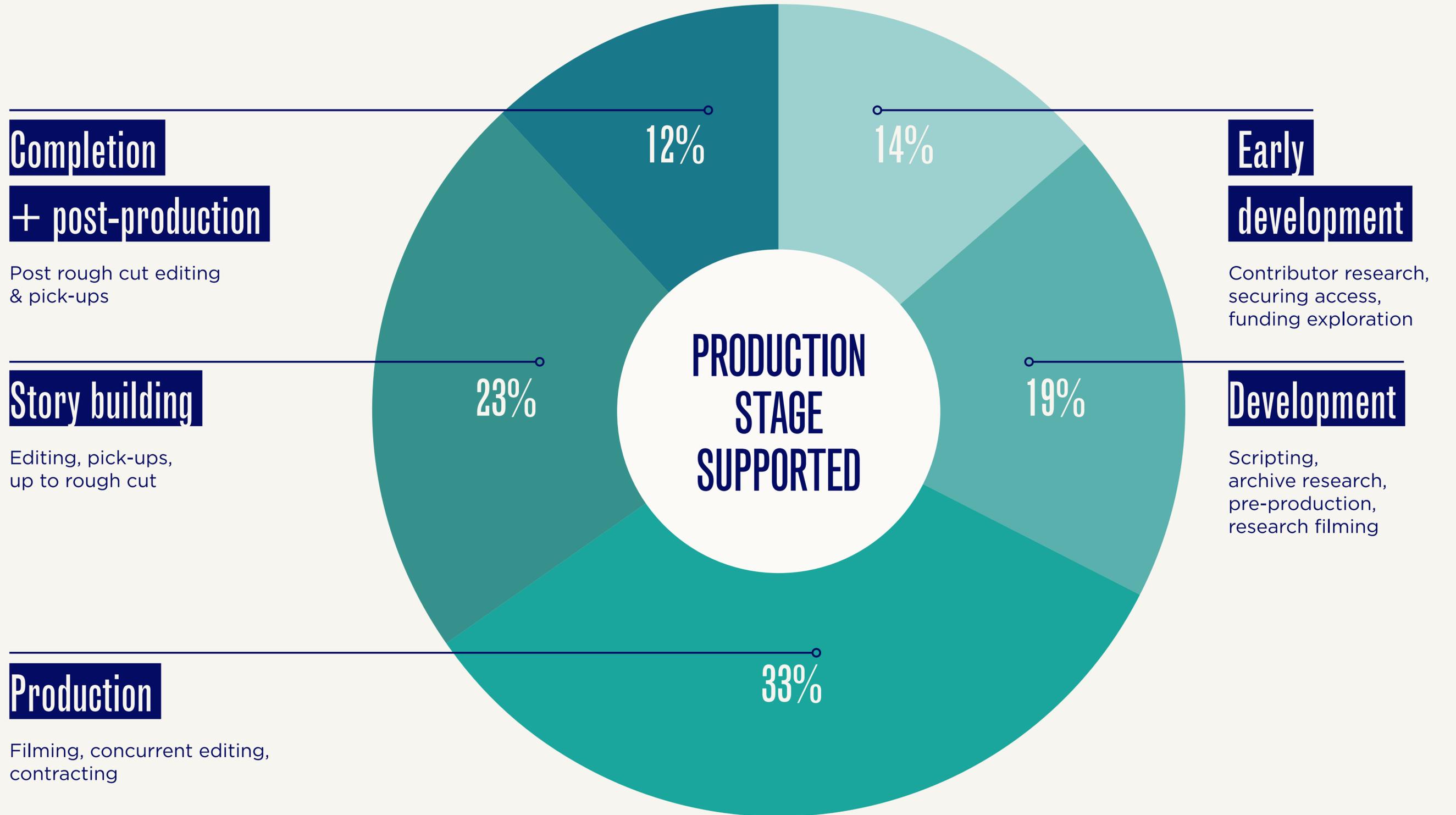
# BUDGET AND AWARD SIZES

## Funding Award Sizes

The figures show the value or size of the BFI National Lottery awards made — how much Lottery money the films received — and the percentage of awarded films that have received an award of that value or within that band across the slate.



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# WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

“A HARROWING BUT HUGELY IMPORTANT FILM”

Daily Express on *African Apocalypse*

“SWEET AND FUNNY BUT ALSO HUMBLE AND UNFILTERED”

@Film\_Carnage on *A Bunch of Amateurs*

“A BRILLIANT, BUT SERIOUS, COMIC CAPER WITH ALL THE STYLE AND PANACHE OF THE ITALIAN JOB — AND THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE BEST IN BRITISH SOCIAL ACTIVISM”

Modern Times Review on *Bank Job*

“A DEEPLY PERSONAL AND UTTERLY FASCINATING DOCUMENTARY”

Upcoming on Screen on *The Wolf Suit*

“LIFE AFFIRMING STORY OF A DEVASTATING ILLNESS”

The Guardian on *Locked In*

Bank Job



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“COMPASSIONATE AND LIFE AFFIRMING”

The Observer on *Hermit of Treig*

“THE PERFECT TRIBUTE TO PUNK’S FORGOTTEN QUEEN”

NME on *Polystyrene: I Am a Cliché*

“A BOLD RE-EXAMINATION... AND A SEARING CRITIQUE OF THE SEXIST AND CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH THAT LED TO HER RETREAT FROM PUBLIC LIFE.”

IndieWire on *Nothing Compares*

“FIORE EXPERTLY COMBINES OBSERVATIONS ON WILDLY DIFFERENT SCALES... TO REACH A KIND OF ECSTATIC TRUTH THAT IS AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT IS HEART WRENCHING”

Cineuropa on *Hide & Seek (Nascondino)*



*Poly Styrene: I am a Cliché*





# MADE OF TRUTH SHORTS

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# MADE OF TRUTH SHORTS

Our funding for shorts supports new and emerging voices of UK documentary with up to £20,000 grants to fund their films. Made of Truth is in partnership with BFI NETWORK and the Fund supports all forms of creative nonfiction shorts. We believe that short documentaries have a particular ability to experiment with filmmaking language and form, and offers a unique space for creative risk-taking.

All our funding comes with one to one exec support and we take a whole team approach, supporting emerging producers and editors as well as providing training opportunities through our partnership with The Grierson Trust.



Across four years the fund has awarded 50 short films, including BAFTA, Grierson and Emmy award winners. They have screened at international festivals including Sundance, London, IDFA, Sheffield, TIFF amongst others and been distributed and exhibited by Guardian Docs, Nat Geo, POV & the V&A.



# BFI DOC SOCIETY: MADE OF TRUTH FILM DIRECTORY

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# 2018-22 SHORTS: WHO HAVE WE FUNDED?

## FEMALE / NON BINARY

98% KEY CREATIVES

59% Directors

BFI Target 50%

## ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

50% KEY CREATIVES

43% Directors

BFI Target 20%

28% BLACK

26% Directors

## LGBTQI+

40% KEY CREATIVES

26% Directors

BFI Target 10%

## D/DEAF AND DISABLED

26% KEY CREATIVES

19% Directors

BFI Target 12%

## NORTHERN IRELAND, SCOTLAND, WALES AND ENGLISH REGIONS

42% KEY CREATIVES

Directors N/A

BFI Target N/A

The % of **KEY CREATIVES** (which includes directors, producers and writers) shown here is out of a total 50 shorts supported.

The % of directors shown here is out of 58 directors supported in total.

Our targets are set by the BFI. For more information about the BFI KPI's [click through here.](#)

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# NATIONS & REGIONS

**42% of shorts** include a key creative from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales or the English regions.

Northern Ireland



Scotland

England—North

England—Midlands

England—South East

Wales

England—South West

Including:  
 Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, Coventry, Stoke, Gloucester, Newcastle, Cumbria, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Bath, Somerset, Cornwall, Margate, Kent

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# OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE BFI

Doc Society responded to a call for partners in 2017 and was successfully appointed to run the UK's documentary funds on behalf of the BFI. Doc Society is one of several BFI delegate partners, who distribute National Lottery funding to filmmakers, with any recoupment flowing back to the BFI for distribution via further National Lottery funding awards.

We have a number of formal mechanisms to manage our relationship: mid term review meetings, feedback on annual strategic plan, application guidelines approvals, committee meetings for project approvals, quarterly reporting on activity, KPIs and finances. BFI Business Affairs also checks on collection agreements & recoupment terms.

In addition we maintain a close relationship with BFI NETWORK, and meet regularly with other teams about deliverables, press and our slate.

Doc Society will always strive to embed our mission and values in everything we do, and how we do it. We are committed to radical collaboration, transparency and accountability and always always being the friend of the filmmaker.

**We are committed to radical collaboration, transparency and accountability and always always being the friend of the filmmaker.**



Maisie



Somalinimo

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# DECISION MAKING

Doc Society is committed to transparency and accountability and recognise that filmmakers need to know who makes funding decisions and how they are arrived at.

*Men Who Sing*



For both the shorts and the features we publish the application guidelines on our website which are as detailed and transparent as possible. These are reviewed every round by Doc Society and BFI ahead of the “go live” date. All applications are read by two external readers, Katie Speight and Nadia Denton (see Team) and shortlisted for review by peer experts from within the field. This is followed by more internal discussion, and a further shortlist, who are invited for interview. Proposed decisions are discussed and agreed by the BFI Film Fund Team (Lizzie Francke, Alice Cabanas and James Weddup) at a Fund Committee meeting.

Films are assessed on their creative vision and the perceived ability of the team to deliver that vision. Criteria include strength of story and characters and the cultural and social resonance and ambitions of the film. We are primarily interested in stories that push the boundaries of non-fiction filmmaking, with an emphasis on distinctiveness of voice and perspective. Assessment also takes into account: how the film sits in the mix of other films that the Fund has already supported, given our commitment to regionality and diversity, whether the financing plans are reasonable and appropriate for the film, and if applicable, how any previous BFI Doc Society Fund funding has been managed.

Doc Society does not have the resources to provide detailed feedback on every application, but we have taken on board the request for more feedback and have created a set of criteria we apply to decide who we can give feedback to, which includes: longlisted projects; those who have applied more than once; those we have met at forums, festivals and are in conversation with; current and past grantees. In the last round in 2022 we gave feedback to 40 projects out of a total of 131 applications.

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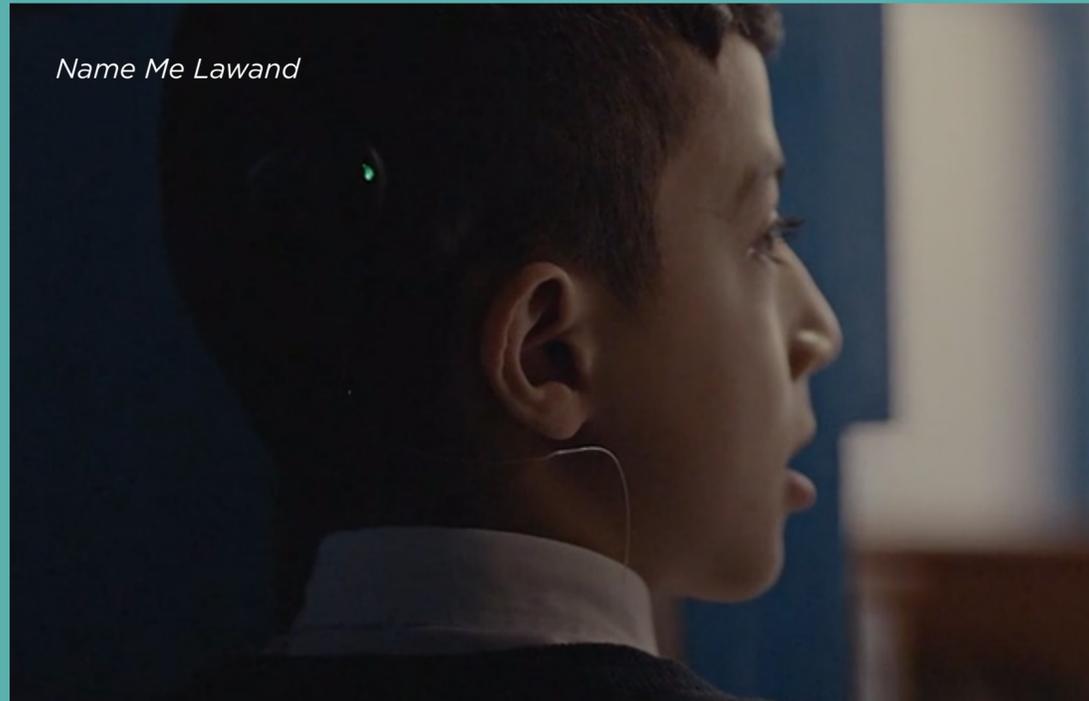
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# PEER REVIEW — OUR APPROACH

Peer review is a vital element of our Fund grantee selection process as we work toward our mission to find excellent films, and create opportunities for talent whose voices need to be heard, with stories that ignite interest on the world stage.

As part of our selection process we invite a UK and international peer review panel of three to four industry peers to read and comment on short-listed projects. Our peer reviewers have expertise across the sector and include commissioning editors, filmmakers, festival professionals, sales, acquisition and distribution, producers and international funders. This ensures that the final selections reflect our aims to develop storytellers from all parts of the UK and all communities, making bold films that take risks on form and content, where the more commercial sector cannot.



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# PEER REVIEW — REVIEWERS

We are delighted to have worked with the following peer reviewers:

Andy Caley

Anita Reher

Anna Parker

Anthony Alleyne

Bradley Quirk

Caroline Cooper Charles

Charlie Phillips

Chi Thai

Chloe Trayner

Cintia Gil

Derren Lawford

Gavin Humphries

Grace Shutti

Hannah McGill

Heidi Fleisher

Isabel Moura Mendes

Jacqueline Edenbrow

Jay Davidson

Jo Duncombe

Jonathan Ali

Karen Alexander

Keith Fulton

Leah Giblin

Luke Brawley

Meroë Candy

Mia Bays

Miranda Fleming

Nadia Denton

Natalie Difford

Nikki Heyman

Opal Bennett

Orlando Von Eisendel

Orwa Nyrabia

Patrick Hurley

Penny Woolcock

Rachel Wexler

Rowan Woods

Samah Ali

Sarah Dawson

Toni Bell

Yvonne Ibazebo

Zara Meerza

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# BFI KPIs

We are guided by the same KPIs as the BFI.

By 2022 we aimed to achieve the following targets among our employees and within the filmmakers we support:

- A 50-50 GENDER BALANCE
- 20% TARGET FOR THOSE IDENTIFYING AS BELONGING TO AN UNDER-REPRESENTED ETHNIC GROUP
- 10% TARGET FOR THOSE IDENTIFYING AS LGBTQIA+
- 12% TARGET FOR THOSE IDENTIFYING AS D/DEAF AND DISABLED

## The BFI says...

We have chosen these targets based on proportionality of working age population.

We will measure social inclusion in the future. This is contingent on our wider work with other leading cultural institutions looking at a more developed, shared definition about what we mean by social inclusion.

Targets are not the same as quotas – quotas can unintentionally induce people to ‘positively’ discriminate, which is unlawful.



Fashion Reimagined

As you will see in the **statistics section** we have also recorded regional representation and new talent as meaningful ways of looking at who we support. Having been asked by Black filmmakers for greater transparency, BFI Doc Society also share specific statistics on Black filmmaking talent.



# FIELD BUILDING

BFI Doc Society filmmaker  
1-2-1s at Open City  
Documentary Festival 2019  
*Photo: Harriet Brown*

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# THE DOCUMENTARY FIELD

**For independent documentary to grow we need a thriving ecosystem supportive of the films we support, and documentary film champions throughout the country. Being the BFI's delegate partner has happily given us the platform and infrastructure to grow and support the UK documentary sector in a wider way.**

## We have:

- Contributed to the establishment of the Documentary Film Council, the UK documentary sector's new co-ordinating body
- Encouraged the creation and development of DPUK, an organisation of independent documentary producers that advocates for a sustainable, equitable, supportive and well resourced independent documentary field in the UK. We liaise regularly over producer concerns.
- Established the UK Doc Group in 2019 to better co-ordinate amongst UK doc sector colleagues.
- Supported the work of Dr Steve Presence at the Feature Docs Project at University of West of England, facilitating a survey of UK documentary filmmakers and contributing to the **policy reports** and recommendations that came out of that research.
- Ensured independent documentary has a voice at the table on screen sector taskforces, and the creation of the Global Screen Fund.
- As part of the BFI Doc Society Fund specifically, we launched a new fund from our own Covid-19 pandemic underspend, Ripple Effect, dedicated to strengthening grassroots documentary work nationally.

**In addition we have worked to improve the terms of trade for feature doc makers within the parameters of National Lottery funding including: rights ownership, final cut terms, payment schedules and third party finance.**

**Our priority is to empower producers when they are financing their projects, enabling producers to leverage our finance as far as possible.**

**We continue to listen and learn from our global colleagues and support efforts to make the documentary field more equitable and sustainable for everyone.**



*If the Streets Were on Fire*

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# FILMMAKER SUPPORT

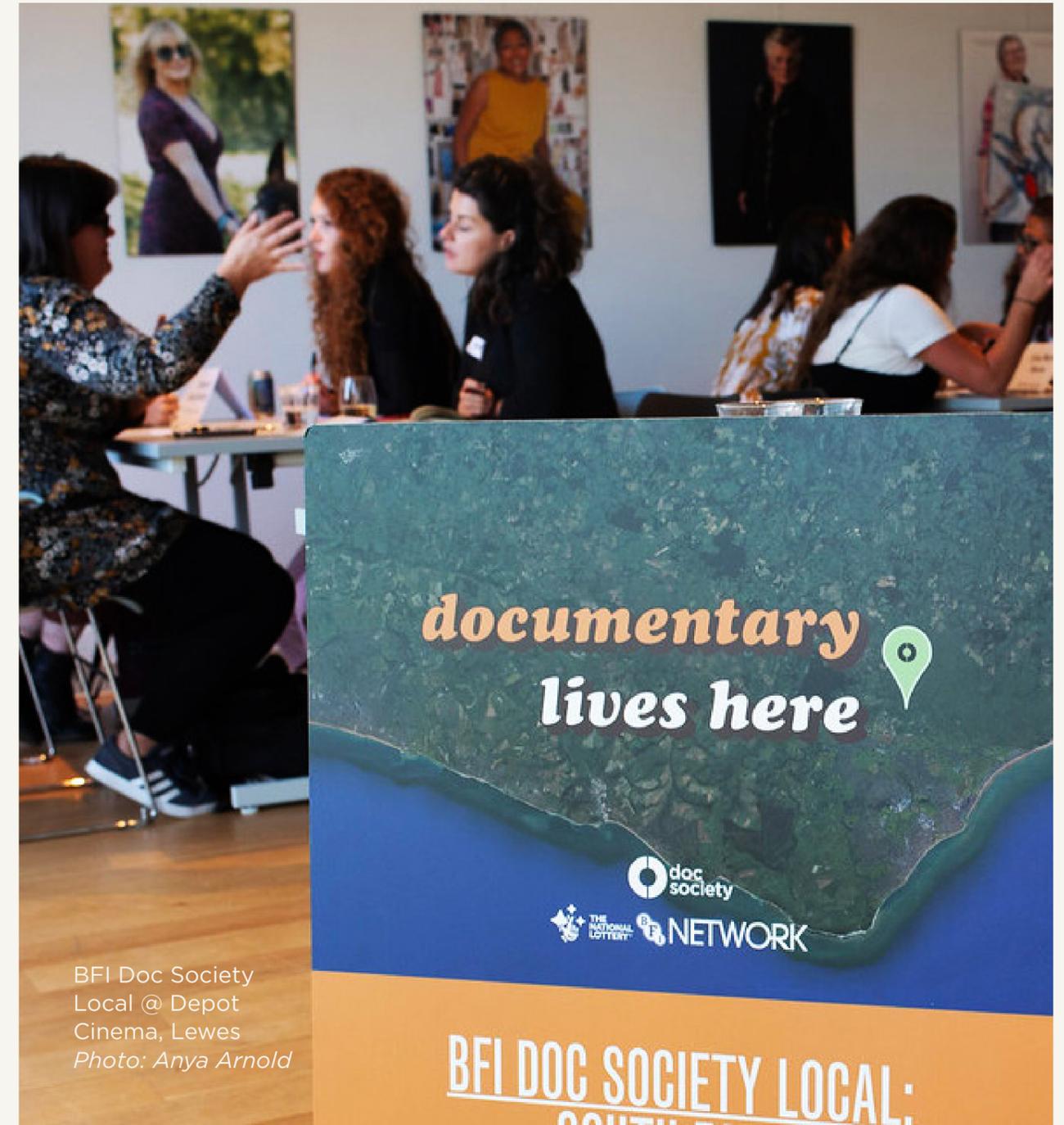
**Our support programme for filmmakers has focused on bespoke professional and creative development support for grantees of the fund as well as a broad range of open access events across the UK.**

For grantees we provide opportunities to attend immersive labs, skills training (in partnership with the Grierson Trust) and bursaries for festival attendance.

Our talent development activities are intended to open up documentary opportunity and creative practice for new and emerging documentary talent (and the ‘doc-curious’) from across the UK (in partnership with BFI NETWORK). Collaborations with festivals and curated roadshow events across the English regions and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have helped the fund team connect with filmmakers where they are and build pathways between storytellers and funding opportunities.

A building block of the support programme has been to foster international connections vital to the documentary ecosystem and (in partnership with BFI International) we have led UK delegations to CPH:DOX (both digitally during the pandemic and in-person)

Doc Society loves to connect people; high quality, nurturing, filmmaker lab programmes are at the heart of all that we do – we know that it takes a village to make every film. It is our role to listen to and respond to the needs of documentary filmmakers and to reflect this in how we offer support and advocacy.



BFI Doc Society Local @ Depot Cinema, Lewes  
Photo: Anya Arnold

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# FILMMAKER LABS

At the Producers Lab we curated a series of vital, participatory conversations around how we can weather the pandemic by sharing ideas, identifying resources and new strategies. The idea was to have a frank and forward-focused discussion about how producers, facing upheaval in their practise and the overturning of industry norms, might discover and embrace new possibilities.

The residential Creative Lab, in partnership with Creative Scotland, is the first doc focussed creative intervention of this kind in the UK and allows projects at critical creative turning points to dive deep into their projects with their whole team (including editors and writers) with the input of top notch mentors, and leave with a renewed clarity of vision and purpose.

Creative Lab cohort in Scotland, 2022



Doc Society Labs offer the opportunity to participate in professional and creative development and be in community with storytellers from around the world.

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Mentors from the Creative Lab 2019

A special shout out to our cohort of wonderful mentors who have been so generous with their energy and insight over the last three editions:

- [Claire Ferguson](#)  
Director & Editor
- [Cinzia Baldessari](#)  
Editor
- [David Charap](#)  
Editor
- [David Wilson](#)  
Co-founder/director, [True/False Film Festival](#) and Producer
- [Fiona Otway](#)  
Editor, Media Maker
- [Jamie Katakay](#)  
Editor
- [Marilyn Milgrom](#)  
Script Consultant
- [Ollie Huddleston](#)  
Editor
- [Ricardo Acosta](#)  
Editor

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“THE CONVERSATION AROUND (PHILANTHROPIC) FUNDING WAS MOST USEFUL TO ME, AS IT’S A WHOLLY NEW REMIT I HAVEN’T EXPLORED OR TRULY UNDERSTOOD.”

“THE WAY DOC SOC AS A TEAM RAN THIS WAS JOYOUS, WARM, OPEN AND THEY HELD THE SPACE WONDERFULLY.”

“It was the most amazing, energising and incredible experience overall - WOW. Immersive, supportive, creative, challenging, rigorous, so thoughtfully curated and above all incredibly kind. I felt safe and valued, which doesn’t always happen in lab environments.”

“I so appreciated the boldness of the mentors and how they really challenged us to think differently, in a safe and supported way.”

“It was all joyously challenging... for us, we enjoy being challenged now to improve the project.”

“Great to see the way our collective input inspires, improves and affects the filmmakers and the stories”

LOVE THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT BETWEEN FILMMAKERS.

“Just the ability to spend time with a cohort of creative people for a prolonged period was itself incredibly nourishing and much needed; and I’ve since set-up calls with a few fellow producers from the Lab, so thanks for that!”



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# ROADSHOWS

In partnership with BFI NETWORK, the Fund has delivered 10 participatory and accessible roadshows (named “Doc Society Locals”), reaching 1400 creatives in regions across the UK in person and online. Roadshows served to provide a much needed focal point and opportunity for documentary storytellers of all levels to make valuable connections with their peers and key sector representatives. Hosted by the BFI Doc Society team in force, the highlights of these community building events included creative case studies of BFI Doc Society Fund grantee projects, commissioner spotlights and dedicated one-to-one opportunities.

We pivoted to a virtual setting for the 7th BFI Doc Society Local in August 2020 and took the focus to filmmakers in the South West of England (whilst keeping the door open for any other filmmakers wishing to join from across the UK).

We worked with our regular Good Pitch technical team (Swooshed) to deliver a participatory virtual model of the roadshow that provided high production values, graphics and audience interaction. We also included closed captions and BSL interpretation throughout for wider accessibility. All of the sessions are available online [here](#).



BFI Doc Society Wales  
@ Chapter Cardiff  
Photo: Claire Cousin

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# CONNECTING WITH DOCUMENTARY TALENT ACROSS THE UK



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“IT’S BEEN REALLY ENLIGHTENING!”

“I DON’T THINK I’VE BEEN TO A BETTER ONLINE EVENT, EVER!”

“THIS EVENT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THIS MONTH. I REALLY WANT TO COMPLIMENT THE FLOW AND PANELS FEATURED TODAY.”

“THE ONE 2 ONES WERE PARTICULARLY GREAT AND AN UNEXPECTED ADDITION. THANK YOU SO MUCH.”

“100% IT WAS SO HELPFUL AND VERY WELL ORGANISED. VERY IMPRESSED.”

“VERY COMPREHENSIVE AND ILLUMINATING.”



Roadshow attendee feedback

BFI Doc Society Local @ HOME, Manchester  
Photo: Chris Payne

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# PARTNERSHIPS

**Radical collaboration is at the heart of everything we do at Doc Society, and we have always looked to partner in this way with like minded creative organisations and festivals globally.**

In the UK we are proud to have worked particularly closely with The Grierson Trust on training for our annual Made of Truth shorts grantees through their Doc Lab scheme.

We also have an official partnership with Into Film, the UK's leading charity for film in education, via Doc Society's schools programme, Doc Academy, and are always looking for ways our shorts and features can reach new young audiences and inspire active and empathetic young citizens.

Through our funding of features and shorts we partner with a large range of broadcasters, funders, film boards, sales agents and distributors.

We work in close partnership with festivals UK wide to showcase shorts supported by the fund, connect with and provide access for documentary filmmakers where they are and reach new audiences. Partner festivals include Sheffield Doc/Fest, BFI London Film Festival, Aesthetica, Open City Documentary Festival, Bolton Film Festival, Folkestone Documentary Film Festival, Leeds International Film Festival, North East International Film Festival.

Partnerships fostered with projects supported by the Ripple Effect fund underpins our philosophy of radical collaboration. Communities and networks driving forward the documentary ecosystem on their own terms.

# SPOTLIGHT ON...

## FWD-Doc

Lindsey Dryden and the FWD-Doc team, in partnership with the BFI Doc Society Fund, created an Engagement Pack aimed at filmmakers, commissioners, funders, buyers, decision-makers, business affairs and exhibitors.

This disabled-led resource offers empowering and practical information and best practice examples, focused on the crucial topic of engagement: engagement with disabled colleagues and expertise, and engagement with audiences.

This complements **[A Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility: Changing the Narrative of Disability in Documentary Film](#)**

Taking the working practices used on the documentary *Crip Camp*, the Toolkit summarises those learnings and offers them up to the UK film industry as a leading practice example.

***“I think we are all looking for this day in which people with disabilities are in films not because of their disability but because we are a part of society, and part of the fabric of life. That’s the world I’m really shooting for us to see.”***

—  
Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*.

Read more and download both resources here:



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# RIPPLE EFFECT

**In 2021, having identified Covid-19 pandemic related savings in our support programme, the BFI Doc Society Fund initiated the Ripple Effect Fund, which aimed to make an impact on the non-fiction sector from the ground up.** Ripple Effect was developed to push funds and support out from the centre, toward those who are building inclusivity, capacity and legacy in support of the documentary sector across the country.

Inspired by community-led networks and initiatives that have taken the lead on issues of equity and power imbalance within the documentary landscape (such as FWD-Doc, Brown Girl Docs Mafia), the fund intended to amplify the work of grassroots nonfiction champions & distribute power to those working at the heart of their communities. **This presented an opportunity to deliberately move toward models of funding that support sustainable local initiatives and peer learning that have the potential to ignite and deliver long lasting impact for the field.**

We were grateful to receive feedback and insights in consultation with colleagues from BFI NETWORK, BFI Film Audience Network, Ffilm Cymru Wales, Northern Ireland Screen, Screen Scotland + Scottish Documentary Institute and the Film & TV Charity to develop the fund.



Refugee Documentary Film Network (Free Lens Collective)

Awarding almost **£200,000** to **10 organisations across the UK**, the fund has enabled and empowered existing communities and networks to foster supportive and inclusive spaces for independent U.K. documentary makers and audiences at a grassroots level.

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Huge credit to the community organisers forging these new paths for documentary filmmakers across the UK.

**Real Black Documentary Retreat**  
[Reel Black Filmmakers Group - Cherish Oteka, Lyttanya Shannon, Cassie Quarless](#)

**Boomflix Network**  
[Dr Mena Fombo](#)

**Creative Collective Doc Lab**  
[Resource Productions](#)

**Doc2Doc**  
[Cables & Cameras](#)

**Docs North East**  
[Amber Film & Photography Collective](#)

**Documentality**  
[Film in Mind](#)

**Other Cinemas 2021/22**  
[Other Cinemas](#)

**Refugee Documentary Film Network**  
[Free Lens Collective](#)

**Testimonies**  
[Aya Films & We Are Parable](#)

**Wales Documentary Support Network**  
[Wheesht Films & Screen Alliance for Wales](#)

North East Documentary Network, (Amber Film & Photography Collective)



Documentary requires a thriving ecosystem in order to survive

Testimonies in Bristol, Aya Films & We Are Parable (image by Seph Group)



# INNOVATION

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# INNOVATION

“We bring people together to unleash the transformational power of documentary film. We stand in solidarity with filmmakers and work to unite them with new friends and allies, building new models globally. **We aim to innovate, share and innovate again.**”

The Doc Society Mission Statement commits us to innovation. Within our delegation we have devised and delivered these new initiatives:

## GREEN DOCUMENTARY PROTOCOL

Many filmmakers are increasingly asking themselves what they can do to minimise their environmental footprint as they make & distribute films to audiences far and wide. As citizens, every one of us has an opportunity to play our part in driving change and protecting our planet. But as filmmakers, we have a responsibility to not only tell stories to inspire audiences to live sustainably, but to ensure we reduce the environmental footprint of our productions too.

While the BAFTA Albert tool remains the gold standard for fiction and high end TV, we wanted to create a guide that was tailored to the needs of the documentary community.

[Green Documentary Protocol →](#)

## COVID SOS FUND

In June 2020 we launched the BFI Doc Society Production SOS Fund as a rapid lifeline specifically for UK feature projects interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This corresponded with the BFI Film Fund’s own Production Continuation Fund launched earlier in the month. This fund offered non-recoupable grants of up to £15K.

19 feature documentary projects were selected for funding, providing almost £254k of National Lottery support for productions.

[COVID SOS Fund →](#)

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## EDIT NETWORK

Unlike any other genre, documentaries are made in the cutting room. Often underfunded as they are moving towards completion, docs – and their directors and editors – can find themselves overwhelmed with possibilities.

With the Edit Network programme we have been able to support grantee films with high level editorial support from experienced consulting editors, as well as diversify the editor pool with the allocation of resources towards ethnically diverse editing talent in assistant editor positions.

## AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

The Fund – via our Support Programme – has initiated a pilot Brainstrust project for grantees whose films have particular audience engagement goals.

The pilot funds engagement strategies which help meet the particular distribution challenges of documentary films in the UK landscape, while also reaching & engaging key communities.



Shy Radicals

*A Bunch of Amateurs*

# DISTRIBUTION & AUDIENCES

The BFI Doc Society Fund has 15 films in distribution and 4 releasing soon.



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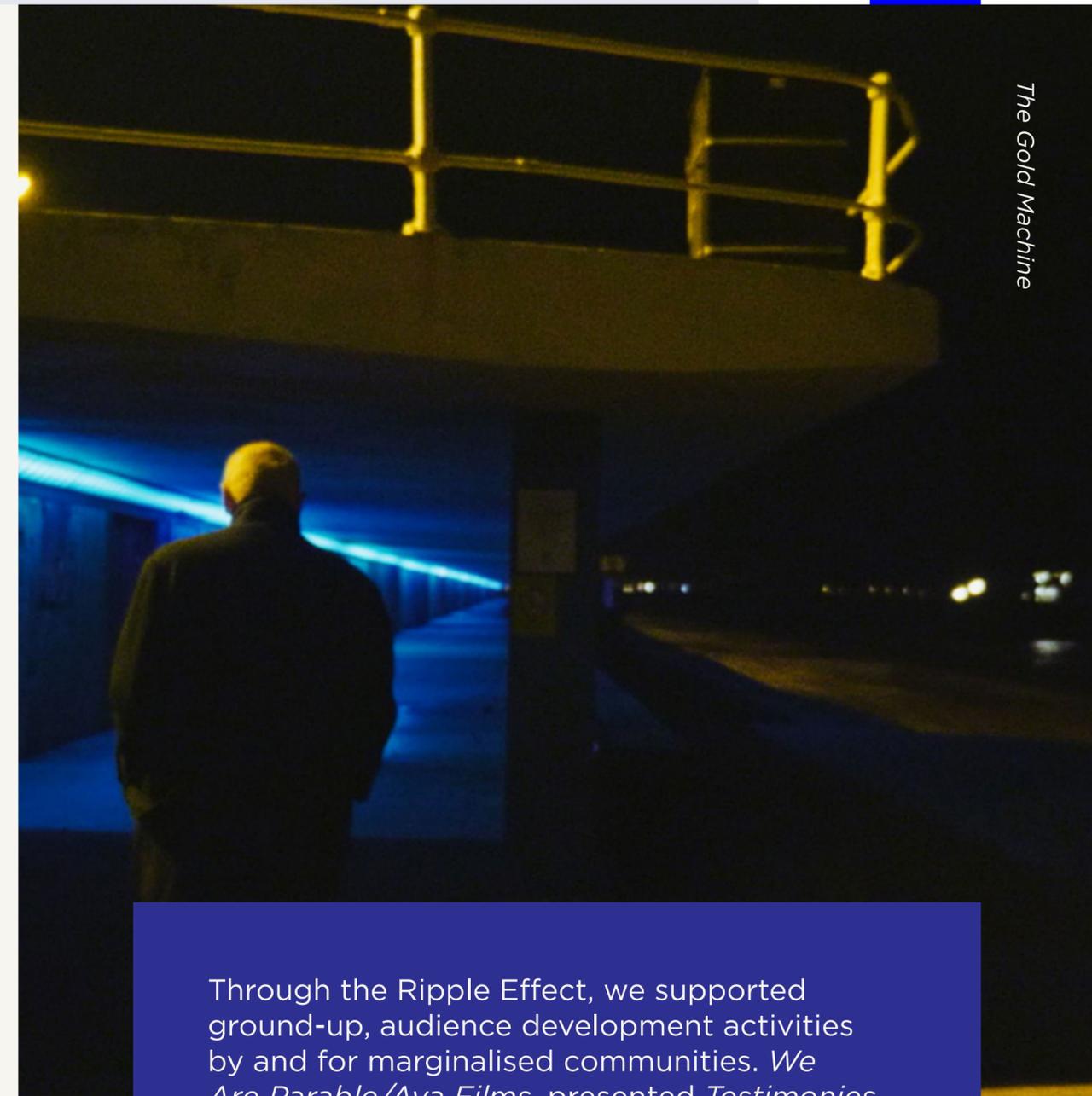
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# DISTRIBUTION & AUDIENCES

Enabling and facilitating the pathway between independent documentaries and audiences is a key priority for Doc Society. We help filmmakers reach their goals and establish partnerships to deliver groundbreaking social impact campaigns and other dynamic audience engagement strategies.

Our Brainstrust pilot project is working with the film teams behind *Rebellion*, *A Bunch of Amateurs*, *Maisie*, *A Story of Bones* and *If the Streets Were on Fire* to identify key audiences and strategies to reach them.

We work closely with our Made of Truth cohort on tailored plans to reach audiences and festivals and online, including brokering partnerships with UK festivals where we curate showcases to reach audiences UK wide .



The Gold Machine

Through the Ripple Effect, we supported ground-up, audience development activities by and for marginalised communities. *We Are Parable/Aya Films*, presented *Testimonies*, a nationwide programme of documentary screenings, conversations and networking celebrating work of Black UK women and nonbinary documentary filmmakers. *Refugee Documentary Film Network* included documentary screenings for people seeking asylum and refugees in Glasgow.

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IN DISTRIBUTION



MAYA  
Aljazeera Witness



AFRICAN APOCALYPSE  
BFI Player



LOCKED IN  
BBC iPlayer



BANK JOB  
Curzon Home Cinema



MEN WHO SING  
Curzon Home Cinema



MAISIE  
BFI Player



POLYSTYRENE:  
I AM A CLICHÉ  
Modern Films



THE HERMIT  
OF TREIG  
BBC iPlayer



REBELLION  
Netflix



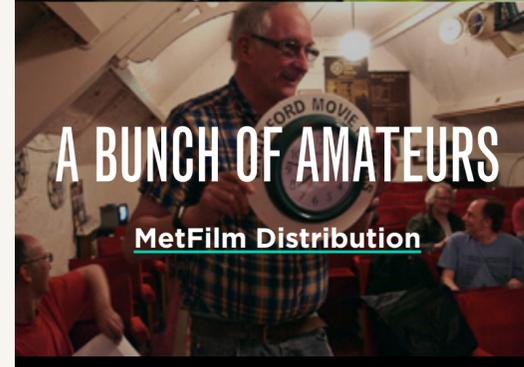
KANAVAL  
iPlayer



THE GOLD MACHINE  
Dartmouth Films



NOTHING COMPARES  
Paramount Pictures



A BUNCH OF AMATEURS  
MetFilm Distribution



A STORY OF BONES



FASHION REIMAGINED  
MetFilm Distribution

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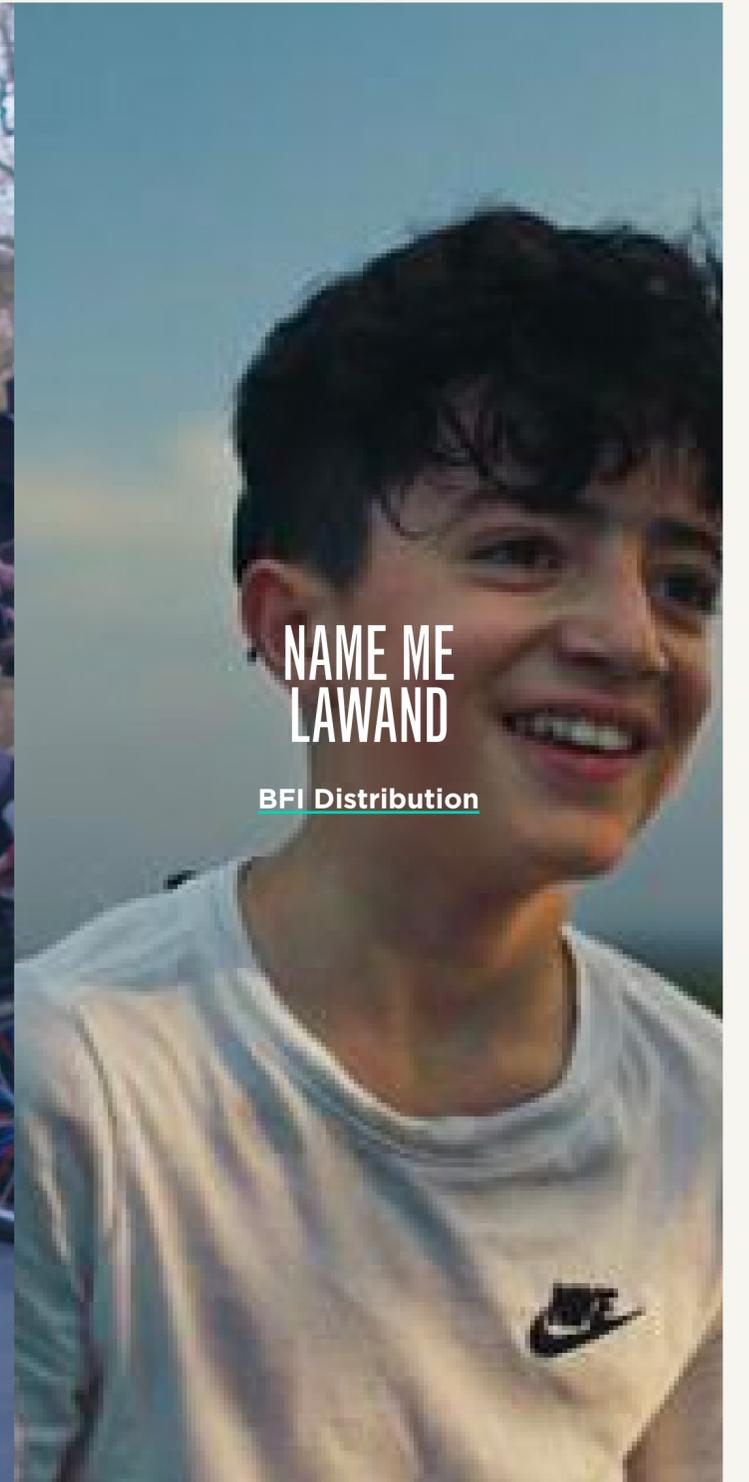
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RELEASING SOON IN THE UK



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# DISTRIBUTION CASE STUDY

## AFRICAN APOCALYPSE

**Director and Writer:**  
Rob Lemkin

**Featured narrator  
and Co-Writer:**  
Femi Nylander

**Producers:**  
Geoff Arbourne  
David Upshal

British Nigerian activist, Femi Nylander, brings attention to the forgotten victims of colonial atrocity, in *African Apocalypse*. Nylander uncovers the the shocking reality of Joseph Conrad's seminal work, *Heart of Darkness*, following the trail of a 19th century French colonial military commander who burned his way across Africa. Tens of thousands were massacred in the name of imperial domination. With communities still devastated by a century old atrocity speaking out for the first time, Nylander begins to question his own sense of belonging.

After an online premiere at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2020 the film embarked on an online UK tour facilitated by Priscilla Igwe of [The New Black Film Collective](#). Regional speakers and moderators were matched to regional screening venues and included **Academics** (e.g. Prof. Kehinde Andrews, Prof. Lez Henry), **Community Leaders** (e.g. Toyin Agbetu, Glenroy Watson) **Historians** (e.g. Paul Obinna, Prof. Robert Beckford) **Activists** (e.g. Aleema Gray, Lee Jasper, Eunice Olumide MBE) as well as the filmmakers. A discussion guide was created to accompany the screenings.

In October 2021 the film was screened as part of a three part webinar in collaboration with the New School, New York featuring clips from the film and a panel discussion with eminent experts. This coincided with the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice and reparation presenting his report to the UN General Assembly. The report includes submissions by Hausa communities in Niger following their collaboration on the film.

In Spring 2022 Rob and Femi conducted a screening tour to Niger, coinciding with the release of the Hausa language version on Arewa 24, a Hausa TV network which oversaw the Hausa language version. The film was seen by 7.4million people in Niger and Nigeria over 10 broadcasts in Spring 2022.

In July 2022 the UK premiere of the Hausa language version of the film was screened at the Arnolfini in Bristol followed by a panel discussion and there are plans to screen the film at other former slave ports in the UK.

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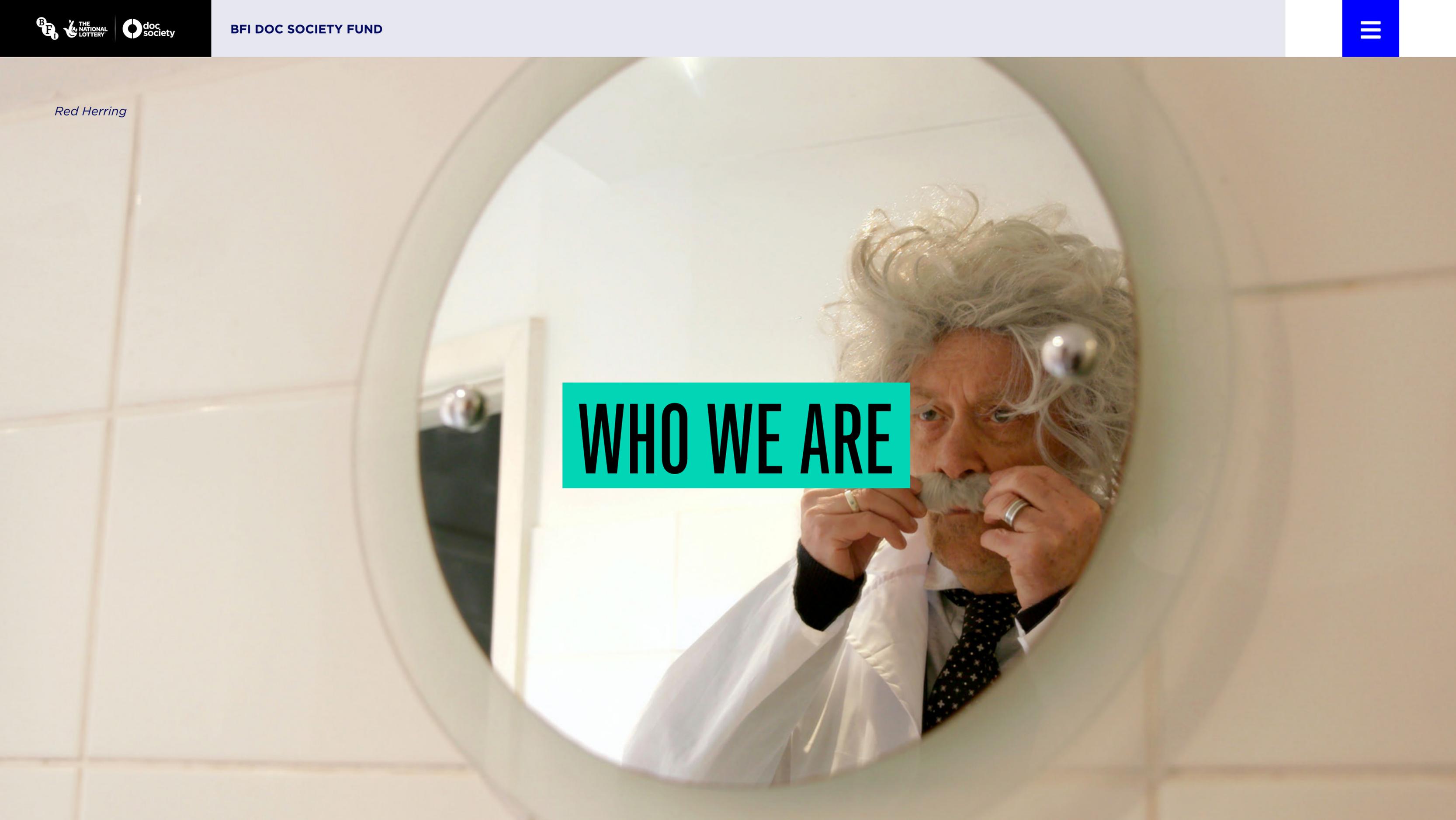
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**44 AWARDS**  
**17 AWARD WINNING DOCS**

HAMPTONS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL • BAFTA TV AWARDS • EMMY AWARD  
• GRIERSON AWARDS • IDFA • NTS WEST OF ENGLAND AWARDS • ENCOUNTERS  
FILM FESTIVAL • AESTHETICA SHORT FILM FESTIVAL • GLASGOW FILM FESTIVAL  
• BAFTA FILM AWARDS • LEEDS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL • DOCS  
BARCELONA • AEGEAN FILM FESTIVAL • SHEFFIELD DOC FEST • DOCUMENTARY  
EDGE FESTIVAL • MOSCOW INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL DOKER  
• CITY OF ANGEL'S WOMENS FILM FESTIVAL • VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM  
FESTIVAL • BAFTA CYMRU • LONDON FILM FESTIVAL • FOLKESTONE DOC FEST •  
AESTHETICA SHORT FILM FESTIVAL • BELFAST FILM FESTIVAL • SCOTTISH BAFTA  
• WHISTLER FILM FESTIVAL • BIFA • HAINAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL •  
CINEMA EYE AWARD • SANTA BARBARA FILM FESTIVAL • DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL DCU DOCUMENTARY AWARD • THESSOLONIKI

*Red Herring*

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# TEAM WORKING ON THE FUND

It's really important that filmmakers we interact with understand who we are as people and what we bring to the fund as individuals as well as our professional experience.

For reasons of space we have not included our bios here but [please click through here](#) to read more about us.



## HANNAH BUSH BAILEY

**BFI Doc Society Film & Production Executive**  
She/Her/Hers

Hannah execs across the Made of Truth short film fund and a handful of features. She works closely with film teams across all stages of their production reviewing, budgets and schedules and offering support to the film team and execs.



## SUZANNE ALIZART

**BFI Doc Society Film Fund Business Affairs Executive**  
She/Her/Hers

Suzanne leads on contracting the Fund awards and provides support to the film teams as they secure their budgets and develop release strategies with sales agents and distributors. She also liaises with the BFI about collection agreements and recoupment schedules.

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# TEAM WORKING ON THE FUND



## FIONA FLETCHER

**BFI Doc Society Programme  
Support Manager**  
She/Her/Hers

As Support Programme Manager for the BFI Doc Society Fund, Fiona devises a raft of year-round talent development, training, creative lab and event activity for UK documentary filmmakers and fund grantees, including the regional roadshows delivered as part of BFI NETWORK.



## SHANIDA SCOTLAND

**Doc Society Director & Head of Film**  
She/Her/Hers

Shanida shares joint responsibility for the strategic direction of the fund and also exec produces some of the films on the fund. As Head of Film, Shanida's strategic role across all of Doc Society's funds helps deepen opportunities for the global grantee cohort and ensures our UK funding aligns with and responds to the needs of the documentary sector globally.



## KIT COLBOURNE

**BFI Doc Society Production  
Coordinator**  
They/Them/Theirs

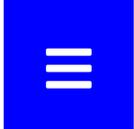
Kit provides key administrative and production support across our film slate, application processes and support programme.



## SANDRA WHIPHAM

**Doc Society Director**  
She/Her/Hers

Sandra has joint responsibility for the strategic direction of the fund and also manages the day to day running and operations. She also executive produces some of the films on the slate.



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## NADIA DENTON

**Impact Producer, Film Curator and Author**  
She/Her/Hers

Nadia reads and assesses every single documentary feature and shorts submission as an editorial consultant on the BFI Doc Society Fund, and prepares the longlist of up to 40 projects for discussion.



## KATIE SPEIGHT

**Freelance Editorial Consultant**  
She/Her/Hers

Katie reads and assesses every single documentary feature and shorts submission as an editorial consultant on the BFI Doc Society Fund, and prepares the longlist of up to 40 projects for discussion.

# AND PREVIOUSLY WORKING ACROSS THE FUND...



## LISA MARIE RUSSO

**BFI Doc Society Fund Consultant  
Executive Producer**  
She/Her/Hers



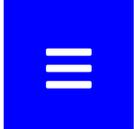
## KATE MOORE

**Event Producer  
and Contracts Manager**  
She/Her/Hers



## CHRISTINE HOWARD

**BFI Doc Society Business  
Affairs Executive**  
She/Her/Hers



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## LYNN NWOKORIE

**Film Fund Officer & Freelance Editorial Consultant**  
She/Her/Hers



## LIZZIE FRANCKE

**Editor-at-large**  
She/Her/Hers

Lizzie is our editorial point person at the BFI and makes up the BFI Fund Committee which agrees funding decisions.

# INTERNAL BFI FUND TEAM...



## JAMES WEDDUP

**Senior Manager - Operations, Partners & Projects**  
He/Him/His

James oversees the BFI funding relationship with Doc Society and makes up the BFI Fund Committee which agrees funding decisions.



## MIA BAYS

**BFI Film Fund Director**  
She/Her/Hers

Mia is across all of the work of the BFI Doc Society Fund as Director of the BFI Film Fund.



## ALICE CABANAS

**Head of BFI NETWORK**  
She/Her/Hers

Alice Cabanas leads on BFI NETWORK's activities UK wide (our support programme is delivered as part of BFI Network). Alice also sits on the fund committee meeting for Made of Truth which agrees funding decisions.

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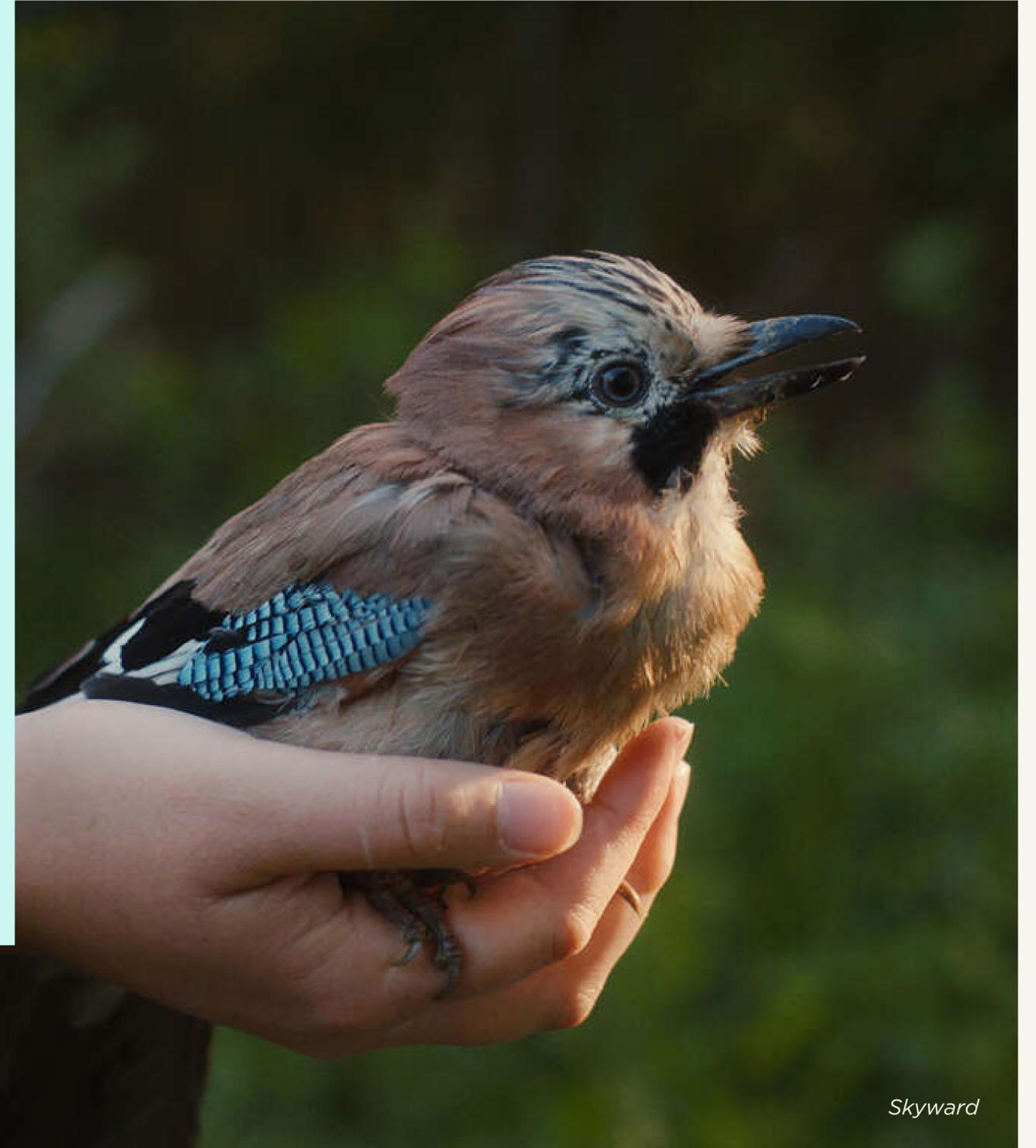
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## HOW WE EXEC PRODUCE

It's a Doc Society tradition that all films we fund have two executive producers from the organisation - a "lead" and a "second". This reflects the fact that filmmaking is a team sport — it takes a village! — and ensures diversity of perspective. It also provides a safety backstop during hairy legal moments and is part of our accountability practice.



Skyward

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# ABOUT DOC SOCIETY

**Doc Society is a non-profit founded in the UK in 2005, committed to enabling great documentary films and connecting them to audiences globally. As an art form, we believe that documentary has a near unrivalled capacity to inspire, educate and change people's understanding of their lives and societies.**

**We bring people together to unleash the transformational power of independent documentary film. We support artist-driven films with social purpose and help to create a more connected and sustainable media ecosystem globally. A commitment to anti-racism, economic & climate justice is embedded in and informs all we do and is mandated into our mission.**

Doc Society is supported by the Ford Foundation, as well as other American and European foundations across our programmes. At the very centre lies our regranting portfolios, supporting hundreds of award winning documentary films all over the world with development, production and distribution funds. To date we have helped to fund more than 450 award winning documentary films including: *CITIZENFOUR*, *An Insignificant Man*, *Hale County This Morning*, *This Evening*, *Edge Of Democracy*, *The Look Of Silence*, *The White Helmets*, *Whose Streets*, *Virunga*, *Softie*, *Roll Red Roll* and *The Silence of Others* - distributing over \$18million to artists and storytellers around the world.

In 2020, The Climate Story Unit was established to strengthen Doc Society's work in the climate change field, supporting storytellers changing the narrative of the climate crisis. Over the past 18 months we have regranting \$1.6 million in production and impact grants to 25 climate storytelling projects. This includes multiple formats from feature docs, animation, web series and podcasts set across geographies spanning from Latin America to Sub Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia. Prioritising climate storytelling with narratives that are aligned with local climate movement goals and which have the potential to connect with unengaged, ignored and marginalised audiences.

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Outside of direct support of artists, our best known programme is **Good Pitch**, a global initiative that brings together filmmakers with leading change makers around urgent social issues, deepening connections to civil society and campaigners through impact-focused storytelling. Since 2007, over 40 Good Pitch events have been held in 15 countries. Similarly, **Climate Story Lab**, inspired by the learnings of Good Pitch, was launched in 2019 to accelerate the potential of climate storytelling and climate justice narratives - connecting local storytellers to regional climate advocacy communities. So far Labs have been hosted in India, US, UK, Kenya, Germany, Mexico, Amazonia, the Middle East and Southern Africa.

Key to Doc Society's philosophy is that we help build new models, aiming to innovate, share freely and innovate again. We do this through R&D projects that often grow into something bigger such as the podcast **Mothers of Invention** about women driving powerful solutions to climate change all over the world. Another example is **Climate Reframe**, launched in 2020 which highlights BAME voices in the climate space, connecting them with each other and platforms them to mainstream media.

We disseminate new ideas and best practices back into the field through free resources including the Impact Field Guide which is available in seven languages and has 110k+ users globally. The COVID Protocol in collaboration with doc partners including Sundance + Field Of Vision. Safe & Secure translations are complete in Spanish and Portuguese thanks to Ambulante and DocSP. We also supported a brand new Disability and Inclusion toolkit in collaboration with FWD-Doc in partnership with Netflix and have written a Green Documentary Protocol to help independent filmmakers minimise the carbon footprint of their productions.

Through training via our **Impact Labs**, we upskill individuals to work as Impact Producers to maximise a film's potential for social change. We have also helped grow the **Global Impact Producers network** (or known as GIPA). A collective which grew organically out of our programme of Impact Labs into today's community of over 400 filmmakers and impact practitioners, representing 40+ countries.



Climate Story Lab  
New York 2019



# MEET THE FILMMAKERS

*Kanaval: A People's History of Haiti in Six Chapters*

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# REBELLION

Interview with:



Elena Sánchez Bellot  
Director



Maia Kenworthy  
Director



Kat Mansoor  
Producer

Interview by:  
Ali Catterall

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**‘Tell the Truth’ demands the logo on the side of Extinction Rebellion’s pink yacht, surreally parked in the middle of Oxford Circus; and it’s a maxim Rebellion’s debut feature directors have taken to heart. Exploring the inner-workings of the climate action group that embraced civil disobedience to try and bring about political change, this isn’t an uncritical celebration but a clear-eyed investigation into the tensions within a diverse community politicking for change. Their roving cameras capture the initial ecstasy of direct-action demonstrations, the subsequent authoritarian clampdowns – and the all-but inevitable recriminations that follow. “We had to show some humility,” says co-director Maia Kenworthy. “That was really important.”**

### **This is a direct-access documentary: how did you get into XR on the ground level?**

*Elena:* We met XR really early on when no one kind of knew about them, including people who’d never done this before; nurses, teachers, accountants, students, showing up to nonviolent direct-action trainings. We felt really strongly that we wanted to follow them. Obviously, when you bring so many people together, you’re going to get lots of different visions and strategies. And six months after we met them, they blew up. It then felt like there was this whole other layer of the story that was unlocked, and we decided to keep following them.

### **How did you earn their trust?**

*Maia:* It was really a case of showing up a lot – and reassuring people we weren’t going to be selling the story to the press. We weren’t interested in a quick angle; we were there to document what was happening, and wanted it on record. Essentially, we felt a bit like historians, and I think they started to see us like

that as well, and trusted us. We’d be in their houses, having lots of conversations over dinner. There were also times when you realised they weren’t in a good place, that it wasn’t a good moment to film, and we should just have a heart to heart instead. Lots of them became friends too. Maybe ‘therapists’ is a better word!

*Elena:* The more we got to know them, the easier it was. The sort of trust that allows you to have the scenes you see in the film comes about through time, and building relationships, with effort and consistency.

### **How were you able to stay so discreet during some incredibly intimate situations?**

*Maia:* We had a very small camera, the Panasonic GH5, which was so unobtrusive our interviewees sometimes forgot we were filming. It also has the most incredible in-built image stabilisation, so whether you’re running along filming a protest, or a sit-down interview, you don’t need a tripod because it’s so steady. It’s really good for observational stuff.

### **What advice would you give to first-time filmmakers?**

*Kat Mansoor (producer):* That it will be hard. And it’s going to be hard the second and third time. But maybe you’ll learn a bit more, and command a bit more of what’s important to you at that point.

### **What have you learned about filmmaking through this experience?**

*Maia:* That filmmaking is not a linear process. You can’t plan it out perfectly. It’s an evolving thing, goes in different directions, and you have to be willing to ride it a bit, and go down that twisted route!

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# A STORY OF BONES



Interview with:



Dominic de Vere  
Director



Joseph Curran  
Director

Interview by:

K Biswas

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***A Story of Bones* is a modern-day tale of the ‘Black Atlantic’, intertwining the histories of the UK, Africa, and America, and celebrating the power of remembrance and cultural struggle to spark political change.**

**On Saint Helena - a British overseas territory in the South Atlantic, home to four thousand inhabitants - a mass grave holding the remains of thousands of formerly enslaved Africans is unearthed in Rupert’s Valley during the construction of a UK Government-funded airport. Annina Van Neel, Chief Environmental Officer of the building project, takes it upon herself to lead a campaign for an official burial of 325 human skeletons which had been disturbed, and temporarily kept in a wing of the island’s prison known as the ‘Pipe Store’.**

**The reluctance of authorities to deliver on their promises and a reticence among islanders to rock the boat leave her feeling increasingly isolated. She reaches out to US-based advocate and activist Peggy King Jorde, who 30 years earlier worked on the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York, and together they fight for global recognition of the site - the largest known physical trace of the transatlantic slave trade on earth.**

***A Story of Bones* wrestles with the continuing legacies of slavery and empire, preaching the values of memorialising history, and fostering solidarity across borders.**

**What went through your minds at the beginning of the film-making process, witnessing Annina’s story and the island’s wider struggles?**

After arriving on Saint Helena in 2015, our initial plans to document the island’s airport project shifted once we met Annina and began learning the history of Rupert’s Valley. At an early stage, once we had first filmed with Annina, we remember feeling we had inadvertently stumbled across an incredibly important story. From then on, we had an enormous sense of responsibility to make a film adequately reflecting the significance of the site.

**Your film swiftly moves from depicting a ‘community’ story towards a more global one, with the introduction of Peggy and a broader movement for racial justice. How did you go about developing your themes and building trust with the film’s newer participants?**

The film’s themes grew and developed over the years of documenting Annina’s work. As she began to piece together her own feelings around the site in Rupert’s Valley, she started to look beyond the island and came across Peggy’s critical work on the African Burial Ground in New York. The first time Peggy and Annina meet is documented in the film when they hug as though they have known each other for decades. It was crucial for us to listen and learn, with trust slowly built through hundreds of hours of off-camera conversations discussing the site, the history and the broader movement of racial justice, which created a very close bond between us, Annina and Peggy.

**As *A Story of Bones* came to fruition, you received support from Doc Society and others. How have these partnerships helped you better understand the film industry and navigate your way around?**

It is difficult to understate the significance of our partners in making this film. It’s been nearly a decade with so many challenging moments, but Doc Society and Archer’s Mark (our two main partners) fully supported us through long shooting periods over many years for a story that was continually developing, even with no real sense of a resolution on the

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horizon. And through Doc Society's networks, we've met an array of amazing filmmakers whose advice, support and allyship have helped us navigate the British Documentary scene.

**The film continues to have an impact with audiences across the world, facing a reckoning with the history of slavery and empire. What do you hope can be achieved through your film being viewed by the widest possible audience?**

We hope the film is able to communicate how important the act of remembering is - how that can be a radical and powerful process in and of itself. For a British audience specifically, we hope that the film can open up necessary conversations around the country's colonial history and create meaningful change. We're also in the process of developing an impact campaign with very specific political and educational goals.

**From your experiences as first-time filmmakers, what have you learnt and do you have any advice for those wishing to embark on a career in documentaries?**

Back in 2015, we made a series of decisions that to many people would make very little sense, but we believed that by moving to one of the remotest locations on earth for nine months, we'd have an opportunity to make the kind of film we'd spent years talking about. And it's often said, you shouldn't work with your best friends and you shouldn't put all your eggs in one basket - but we did both those things. A quote that someone told us early in the film-making process, still feels very relevant: "If you end up with the story you started with, you weren't listening along the way."



*Directors Joseph Curran and Dominic de Vere with protagonist Annina van Neel in St. Helena*

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# THE BLACK COP



Interview with:



Cherish Oteka  
Director

Interview by:  
Xuanlin Tham

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**Cherish Oteka's BAFTA award-winning *The Black Cop* invites ex-police officer Gamal 'G' Turawa to tell his life story on his own terms. With a steady empathy, it weaves archive materials, dramatic reenactments, and G's words into an intimate portrait of his time as a Black police officer – exploring internalised racism and homophobia, the history of British policing, and his journey towards vulnerability. The film was commissioned by the BFI Doc Society Made of Truth fund, which was “transformational”, Oteka shares. “An opportunity to tell a story that otherwise wouldn't have been told.”**

**Could you tell us about your journey as a filmmaker, leading up to the Made of Truth commission?**

In 2017, I left my full-time job working in the business side of TV to pursue filmmaking. It was really challenging: as a Black, working class, queer, trans filmmaker, there's loads of barriers in the industry. I came across G at a workshop for LGBTQ+ people of color, and we built a relationship. I was pitching that story in TV spaces for a long time, but it wasn't viewed as reaching broad enough audiences. Made of Truth was a real lifeline. There wasn't pressure to reach broad audiences; it's just about empowering filmmakers.

**Could you tell us about the collaborative relationship between you and G in *The Black Cop*?**

It came off the back of a friendship – me making a connection with an older Black LGBTQ+ person. He knew what I did, and said he was interested in making a film. Over the four year journey, we reevaluated the situation: what is he interested in sharing? What's off limits? In a friendship, you share intimate and personal things, but making this film was about holding space and being a blank canvas, knowing he's trusting me to tell his story.

**How did making *The Black Cop* inform the development of your first feature documentary?**

*The Black Cop* was my first time navigating filmmaking in an independent space; Made of Truth was my first opportunity to tell a story with complete creative license. It helped me develop my voice as a filmmaker in a way I hadn't before. There's still a lot of unknowns, with this being my first 90-minute film, and my first film about a subject as opposed to a singular narrative or character – but I'm bringing that experience to this new project.

**Why were you drawn to documentary filmmaking?**

Thinking about early influences: as a kid, I was really struck by the Oprah show, and how Oprah was able to hold space for people to share their stories and vulnerabilities. In my later teens, I came across *Paris is Burning* and *The Aggressors* (about masculine presenting lesbians in New York) at an important time in my journey of identity; it set off a lightbulb about how important representation is in shaping our view of ourselves. Those are some influences behind my interest in filmmaking.

**What stories do are important to you as a filmmaker?**

I'm perhaps more likely to be commissioned telling a story about identity, but while I'm interested in reclaiming identity, I'm not just interested in the trauma of being a marginalised group. I'm definitely pushing back against that at the moment. Most importantly, I'm interested in everyday people going on tremendous journeys: the fundamental parts of being human, but through lenses we don't usually get to hear those stories from.

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# KANAVAL:

## A HISTORY OF HAITI IN SIX CHAPTERS

Interview with:



Leah Gordon  
Co-Director and  
Co-Producer



Eddie Hutton-Mills  
Co-Director



Natasha Dack Ojumu  
Producer

Interview by:

Lynn Nwokorie hosted the filmmakers of *Kanaval: A History of Haiti in Six Chapters* in the first of a series of BFI Doc Society Creative Documentary Masterclasses. This is an excerpt transcribed by Lynn from their conversation. To watch the recording of the masterclass in full, please see [docsociety.org/bfi-doc](https://docsociety.org/bfi-doc)

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**In every facet of *Kanaval: The History of The People of Haiti in Six Chapters*; from the music, to the extravagant masks, the dazzling costumes and magnificent street pantomimes, is the revisualisation of the people of Jacmel and the history of Haiti. Underlying this rapturous experience is the heartbeat of collaboration. With rich archive that punctuates vibrant storytelling and boundless depths of visual artistry and luscious editing, *Kanaval* is not just a gorgeous portrait of a people by Leah Gordon and Eddie Hutton Mills but is the fruits of a close partnership with the people of Jacmel. This is the collaborative spirit many filmmakers hope to harness. *Kanaval* achieves this in spades with a film that continues to astound long after the beats of the omnipresent drums fade and the credits roll. *Kanaval* had its world premiere at this year's BFI London Film Festival and was released in cinemas on 6th November. It is also available on [BBC iPlayer](#).**

**What was your connection to Haiti and the people of Jacmel?**

*Leah Gordon (co-director)* - I have history of being amongst left-leaning Revolutionary Socialist parties. I heard that Haiti had a revolution which was never in part of the wider discourse of history, I really really wanted to go and find out more about this silent history. I got there in the 90s and was immediately seduced - the culture is so rich and the history feels so alive there in a way that isn't in Britain. I learnt more about global politics in my time in Haiti than I ever would have from any history book and that has kept me coming back again and again.

*Eddie Hutton Mills (co-director)* - As a Black person, Haiti holds a special place in my heart. It's always been in my consciousness because of the only successful Black revolution. I'm from Ghana and have travelled extensively through West Africa and Haiti is seen as one of the most African of the Caribbean Islands. A lot of the culture,

the spirituality and even the food has travelled over to Haiti and so there is an incredibly strong link. When I first visited, it felt like arriving in Accra or Lagos. It felt like coming home, it really did.

**How did these connections inform the collaborative mindset on the film with the community and each other?**

*Natasha Dack-Ojumu (producer)* - Filmmaking is hard. Independent filmmaking even harder. There's never enough money to go round but obstacles can also present new opportunities. When we received development funding from BFI Doc Society, Covid hit. Alongside that, the president was assassinated, kidnappings had increased exponentially and there was an earthquake. Production was delayed and we lost crew who had to take work elsewhere. But in all this unknowing, unpredictable time, we learnt to adapt to that all by relying on local organisations including the local film school whom we ended up partnering with. We ended up with a proper Haitian British crew.

**The film feels like Leah's photography work given life. How important was that creative consistency including sound, cinematography and narration, especially when faced with such big external factors as previously mentioned?**

*Leah* - Upon reflection, the delays we experienced was actually a gift. We were forced to have a skeleton crew on the ground during production and what they created was an absolute gift. I think it made our relationship with the contributors far more reciprocal and symbiotic.

*Eddie* - Yes definitely, Leah had formed such good relationships and trust over decades of photographing and interviewing in Jacmel. It felt like being around old friends. We build a real and honest intimacy with people which is essential in telling someone else's history. I also think being part of a majority Black crew - which was very important to us from the beginning- meant we felt more a part of the community rather than observers. By giving our contributors absolute freedom in how they expressed themselves, I believe this informed the language of the film, the tone, the cinematography, the sound and the narration.

# THANKS FOR READING.

We want to hear from you and welcome feedback.

Please email [hello@docsociety.org](mailto:hello@docsociety.org)



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