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**Training for Documentary Directors**

Guide for those providing training in the Irish Screen Industry for documentary directors.

sdgi.ie

*In Summer 2021 The Documentary Alliance of the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland (SDGI) undertook a review of training for documentary directors in consultation with its members. SDGI puts forward here a summary of its findings which are a number of strategic and practical initiatives to support training for Irish documentary directors. This document is aimed to assist those providing training in the Irish audio-visual sector in their intention to support high quality, creative documentary production.*

**UNIQUE TALENT**

Irish documentary directors create powerful documentaries that are enjoyed locally and by audiences all over the world. The documentary director has a unique mix of creative, technical, production and interpersonal skills that are unique to this career alone. The stories they create play a key role in the shaping of Irish national identity ranging from personal stories to complex societal issues.

Each director approaches their story in a different way and therefore uses different skills, for example, some directors use cameras and work sound themselves, while others use crew, some directors work with writers while others work in real time, some use re-enactments and others point and shoot. Many have a short production timeline while other directors can shoot over many years and have a long development or editing period. In the SDGI consultation with members almost all members were involved in production and finance at some level and a majority of directors produce their projects.

**TAILORED TRAINING**

In consultation with SDGI members, a lack of support in the development of the career of the documentary director was identified. Outside of working on the job, many documentary directors had not advanced career skills or participated in training in their field as training was not tailored to their specific career development needs. Documentary training for directors was thought of as not evolved much in last 10 years and remains generic. For effective training of documentary directors, SDGI recommends more specific training. Standard screen skills courses may overlap but overall are not suited to documentary directors.

Retraining and upskilling documentary directors must be a critical focus. Today the documentary industry is transforming production and distribution and there are opportunities for access to new markets and new technologies and SDGI recommends for strategic, long term upskilling of documentary directors.

**DISTINCT AREAS**

Training for documentary directors can be defined in areas in film and episodics and also by level of experience. We recommend new approaches to upskilling, creative learning, and career development, including production revitalisation and training and career transitions as well as initiatives for experienced learners and non-traditional methods be considered. We also recommend considering a course over period of a 12 months that works with the entire lifecycle of a documentary in depth.

**PRIORITY STRANDS**

**International Co-Production**  
Training focused on the business of international co-production for documentary directors working in production including; new partnerships, investment and funding, marketing strategies, pitching initiatives, market trends and analysis, business adaptability and current opportunities.

**The Structure of Documentary**

Training focused on the structure of documentary storytelling including; how to crack a great story structure, cracking story arcs, the different ways structure can evolve from the initial idea right through to the edit, finding story in the edit, planning in extreme detail from the outset, storyboards, working without narration and with narration, working with writer attached to documentary.

**Self-Shooting**   
Training focused on the skill of self-shooting for documentary directors including; framing, handheld operating, tripod operating, shooting sequences, focus and depth of field, lenses, exposure control, recording sound, uncontrolled and controlled action, shooting interviews, cards and media uploading.

**Music for Documentary**

Training focused on the skill of using music for documentary directors including; working with composers, when to get a composer involved in a project, commissioning a composer, working with composer’s library, exploring different approaches in how music is used in documentary, not using music, when to use commercial tracks, best way to use library tracks, working with having a very clear music palette from the outset versus figuring out music in the edit, influence of the editor in music, pitfalls of licenced music, the benefits of using music supervisor, communicating vision to composer, selecting sample music, identifying musical tone, remote collaboration, software.

**Recording Sound for Documentary**

Training focused on the skill of recording sound for documentary directors including; basics of sound terminology, learning to recognise good quality sound, understanding equipment, choosing best microphone and recorder for scene, interview set up, outdoor set up, recording live events, microphone position, reading sound recording levels, planning for sound, importing the audio to computer, file formats.

**MORE FUTURE TRAINING**

**Inspiration from Documentary Directors**   
Training focused on the art of making documentary for directors including; exploring the creative process behind film and episodic documentaries, storytelling, writing, production, post-production, cinematography, conversations with documentary directors looking at their creative process and careers.

**Ethics in Documentary Directing**

Training focused on the ethics of documentary making for directors including;how to seek the truth and report it, how to minimize harm, how to act independently, accountability, transparency, how to treat subjects with dignity and respect, how to honour the trust of the audience, how to avoid creating drama or conflict, create awareness of director’s own privilege and potential gender, racial or LGBTQ+ bias.

**The Future of Documentary**   
Training focused on the Future of Documentary for directors including; forecasts how directors will imagine, create, deliver, experience and engage with documentaries in the future, how to train directors of today to prepare and cultivate industry for future in documentary, game or other media integration, distribution.

**Best Practice with Editors**

Training focused on the skill of working with editors for documentary directors including; communicating vision to editors, planning and managing the edit, how to select footage, organising footage, editing interviews, structure, music, effective criticism, common problems, how to get your edit back when going in different direction, working with narration, defining arch of story, managing conflict with differences of opinion, software, remote editing.

**The Documentary Business**  
Training focused on the process making documentary for directors including; the trends driving change in the documentary landscape, changes in broadcasters, platforms, distribution, freedom of speech, monopolies, audience trends for documentaries, keeping a business going, sustaining a career, access and diversity in documentary storytelling.

**Making Series Documentary**

Training focused on the skill of making series documentary storytelling for directors including; how to crack a great story structure, cracking story arcs, how to divide the story for different episode lengths, the different ways structure can evolve from the initial idea right through to the edit, finding story in the edit, planning in extreme detail from the outset, storyboards, working without narration and with narration, working with writer attached.

**Working with a Writer or Story Editor**

Training focused on the structure of documentary storytelling with a writer or story editor including; how to find a writer or story editor to work with, how to work best with a writer/story editor, how to communicate your vision, planning structure and writing dialogue, planning the edit.

**Collaborative Documentary Funding**

Training focused on the alternative methods of documentary for directors including; exploring global partnerships, sponsorship, cross-cultural initiatives, community initiatives and how to fund and correctly and ethically execute projects with different interest groups.

**Building Trust with Subjects**

Training focused on the skill of working with your subjects for documentary directors including; when to know you have found a person you can work with, how to approach your subject, building trust with your characters, timing of working, ethics, transparency with subjects, legal requirements, consent, managing conflict.

**Best Practice with Composers**

Training focused on the skill of working with composers for documentary directors including; communicating vision to composer, selecting sample music, identifying musical tone, remote collaboration, software, common problems.

**Visual Storytelling for Documentary**

Training focused on the structure of experimental documentary making including; visual storytelling, creative techniques, working with characters, dialogue, character development, use of music, visual effects.

**Writing Narrative for Documentary**

Training focused on using narration in documentary storytelling including; when to use narration, when to write narration, narrative pitfalls, narration planning, casting voiceover, recording.

**Legal Work for Making Documentaries**

Training focused on the skill of legal issues for documentary directors including; legal updates, clearance for interviews, live events, life rights, archive, music clearance, maintaining rights, photography stills, art, events, life rights, summary of types of contracts needed, best practice.

**Marketing for Documentary Making**

Training focused on the skill of marketing documentary for directors including; exploration of innovative marketing strategies for documentaries that work, cutting-edge marketing, building an audience, festivals, advertising, sponsorship, engaging with community of subject, working with PR company, social media, event based marketing strategies, interaction with audience.

**Sports Documentary**

Training focused on the art of making sports documentary for directors including; working with subjects, structure, coverage, finding the story planning shoot, planning edit, storyboards, narration, script.

**Documentary Development**

Training focused on the skill of developing projects for documentary directors including; Research, development budgets, shooting pilots, when/if to shoot, test interviews, writing synopses, storyboards, look books/ sizzle reel, development notes, and developing pitches and ideas.

Note: Please contact the Documentary Alliance of the SDGI if you need more information on a specific course outlined in this guide.