Certificate in Documentary Storytelling
Course Summary

The Certificate in Documentary Storytelling combines seminars, workshops, practical creative exercises, industry engagement and mentor-led development. The programme is designed to develop participants' understanding of documentary storytelling, strengthen their creative approaches and provide the knowledge and confidence to develop documentary ideas into meaningful projects.

Beginning with the foundations of documentary storytelling, participants will explore how real-life stories are discovered, researched, shaped and communicated through sound, image, voice and narrative. They will consider the creative choices involved in telling human stories, the relationship between filmmakers and contributors, and the ethical and practical responsibilities of documentary practice.

The programme then moves beyond storytelling fundamentals to explore collaboration, project development and the wider documentary industry. Participants will gain an understanding of how projects are positioned, resourced and presented, including developing budgets, schedules, audience engagement strategies, distribution plans and funding pitches.

In the latter part of the programme, participants will follow one of three development pathways, supported by industry mentors. These pathways allow participants to apply their learning according to their interests, experience and creative ambitions.

1. Documentary Storytelling

Participants will explore the fundamental elements of documentary storytelling, including documentary forms and approaches, narrative development, character, sound, image, voice and interviewing. They will consider how stories are researched and developed, how access to contributors and locations is established, and how creative decisions shape the way audiences experience real-life stories.

Practical exercises and individual creative assignments will encourage experimentation with different storytelling approaches and the development of a personal creative voice.

2. Creative Practice, Ethics and Collaboration

This element explores the responsibilities and relationships involved in documentary storytelling. Participants will consider ethical practice, duty of care, risk assessment, sustainable creativity and the importance of self-care when working with sensitive subjects and contributors.

They will also explore different models of creative collaboration, developing an understanding of how ideas can be shared, shaped and developed collectively. Practical sessions will introduce the processes of collaborative writing, creative decision-making and working effectively with others.

3. Project Development and Industry Practice

Participants will develop an understanding of the practical and professional considerations involved in taking a documentary idea forward. This includes research, project positioning, budgeting, scheduling, production resources, audience development, impact, distribution and fundraising.

They will explore how to identify and reach an audience, articulate the value and distinctiveness of a project, and communicate their creative vision through a compelling pitch. Industry professionals and external trainers will contribute insight into the expectations and opportunities within the documentary sector.

4. Individual Pathways and Mentorship

In the final stage of the programme, participants will choose one of three pathways, each supported by mentor-led individual and/or group sessions.

Route A - Project and Pitch Development

Participants develop a documentary project towards a detailed, funder-ready pitch. Mentorship will focus on story development, research, project positioning, production planning, budgeting, scheduling, resourcing, ethics, risk assessment and audience engagement. The aim is to bring the project to a level of readiness from which it can be taken forward to potential funders and industry partners.

Route B - Directing and Visual Storytelling

Participants explore their directing practice through the development of an individual taster or short film, where appropriate production and technical support is resourced independently. Mentorship will focus on the relationship between camera, sound and story, creative decision-making and the development of a visual approach. Work will be shared and discussed with mentors and peers, with feedback informing the development of the project.

Route C – Collaborative Storytelling

Participants work in pairs or teams to develop a taster or short film, sourcing appropriate production support for the project. Mentorship will focus on communication, creative collaboration, shared decision-making and the development of a collective storytelling approach. Participants will receive mentor and peer feedback on their creative work and its development.

All three pathways carry equal academic recognition and offer different ways of applying the knowledge, creative approaches and understanding developed throughout the programme.

Tutor Support and Mentorship

Throughout the programme, participants will benefit from guidance and input from tutors, documentary professionals and industry mentors. The early stages combine group teaching, practical exercises and opportunities for peer exchange. The project development stage provides more focused individual and/or group mentorship, shaped around the chosen pathway.

Mentorship will support participants in developing their creative ideas, strengthening their storytelling approaches and understanding the practical steps required to take their work forward.

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of documentary forms, approaches and storytelling principles.
- Research, identify and develop documentary stories, considering narrative, character, perspective and audience.
- Explore the creative use of sound, image, voice and interview as elements of documentary storytelling.
- Understand the relationship between filmmakers, contributors and the responsibilities involved in representing real-life stories.
- Apply ethical considerations, including duty of care, access, risk assessment and health and safety implications, to documentary project development.
- Understand the principles of creative collaboration and effective communication within documentary practice.
- Develop an understanding of project planning, budgeting, scheduling and production resourcing.

- Identify and articulate an intended audience and develop an understanding of impact and engagement
- Communicate a documentary idea and creative vision through a developed pitch or practical moving-image work, individually or collaboratively.

Pre-Requisites

The course is aimed at early-career and emerging documentary storytellers, filmmakers and creative practitioners who are interested in developing their understanding of documentary storytelling and taking their ideas forward.

Participants should have a demonstrable interest in documentary, a curiosity about real-life stories and a willingness to engage in creative exploration, research, discussion and practical exercises. Applicants are encouraged to bring an initial idea or area of interest connected to the course theme health, although the programme will support the development and refinement of ideas throughout. No advanced technical filming or editing experience is required. Participants choosing a pathway involving the creation of a filming taster or short film will need to consider how the necessary equipment, technical skills and production support can be accessed and resourced. The course will provide creative guidance and mentorship in developing these projects, rather than formal technical training in camera operation or editing.

Participants choosing the project and pitch development pathway will focus on developing their documentary idea towards a detailed, professionally presented project proposal.