



FILM RESEARCH IN REF IMPACT CASE STUDIES

HOW FILM AS RESEARCH OUTPUTS FEATURED IN REF 2014 AND WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED TO CREATE STRONG CASES FOR 2021

SUMMARY

The use of film in impact case studies was widespread in REF 2014, appearing in all but two of the units of assessment (UoAs). Despite this prevalence there are few clear examples of strong underpinning research in film that then led to strong impact in a case study. Instead there are a variety of uses of film that stand out. Many of the impact case studies use film for research dissemination, sometimes researchers provide content for films from their research, and in a number of cases film archives are created or brought into the public domain. In this review, we are focusing on the smaller subset of case studies which do include filmmaking as underpinning research, to draw out ways in which filmmaking research can have impact and how it is successfully presented. Despite the small numbers there are clear lessons to be learned about how to create and tell strong impact stories from filmmaking research.

Research in filmmaking lends itself well to creating beneficial impacts on society. It does this by generating creative outputs, by challenging societal norms, by raising awareness or by creating educational tools and resources. This case study is designed to help filmmaking researchers make the most of opportunities for impact development and recognition by identifying good practice

This case study relies on the content of the REF 2014 case study database to provide insights into what worked and what didn't. A total of 1,347 REF case studies mention film or video, nearly 20% of the total, and by far the majority refer to contribution to filmmaking in a creative or technical sense. The ways in which filmmaking features are hugely diverse, ranging across 34 of the 36 UoAs. They vary from film used to support the conservation of fungi (Agriculture, Veterinary, and Food Science, UoA 06), using bi-sensors to improve the capture, filming, and transmission of thrilling experiences (Computer Science and Informatics, UoA 11) through to work on underexposed film archives such as the General Post Office Film archive that has now been given UNESCO protection (History, UoA 30).

DRILLING DOWN INTO THESE CASES, WE FOUND FIVE KEY WAYS IN WHICH FILM CONTRIBUTES TO IMPACT

1. Making a film of the research as dissemination, which then leads to impact
2. Advising makers of a film or video about content informed by research, which then leads to impact
3. A non-academic filmmaker making a film informed by a researcher's work
4. Novel aspects of filmmaking (technical or creative) influencing practice
5. Filmmaking as underpinning research which goes on to have impact on organisations or individuals

For the first four ways, film is usually used as part of the pathway to impact; the research has been completed and a film is made to apply the research or to otherwise move it into the public domain. There are differences of emphasis for those case studies which feature film as underpinning research (type 5), partly as the filmmaking begins earlier in the research cycle. Although a film can fall into more than one category, these are the case studies we will concentrate on in the following analysis.

THE ARBOR

Year: 2009

Duration: 94 mins

Director/s: Clio Barnard

Cost: £567,000

Funding source: The Arbor was commissioned and produced by Artangel and financed by Artangel and the UK Film Council.

Distribution: Theatrical release, DVD, UK television broadcast.

Synopsis: The Arbor is the powerful true story of Bradford playwright Andrea Dunbar and her troubled relationship with her daughter Lorraine.

Case study: www.bit.do/the_arbor



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Impact: *The Arbor* case study gives a strong account of impact on policymakers and NGOs by providing a new perspective on deprivation. It has impact on participants in the film and the local community, who were able to reflect on their own circumstances with new perspectives. And on the UK film industry in terms of new approaches, investment and employment. Finally, it benefits the cultural life of the UK, demonstrated through impact on audiences and critical acclaim. There is a good account of the film in terms of 'practice as research', and the different types of impact are clearly signposted with associated evidence referenced clearly. The narrative successfully weaves in quotes, as both evidence and to strengthen the story, as well as providing evidence of critical reception, social impact, and comments from high profile individuals.

WHAT WORKED WELL

THOSE CASES THAT DID WELL, IN HIGH SCORING UNITS, INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF IMPACT:

IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Several case studies took a participatory approach. This worked well to achieve impact when the participants were part of a clearly defined group or groups, and the filmmaking process enhanced their self expression or sense of belonging (for example made 'creative and coherent audio-visual sense of their lives' www.bit.do/scottish_selfportrait) or where participants could see that the film changed perceptions or challenged stereotypes. To be well-regarded in terms of impact, these cases also had to demonstrate how far they had changed perceptions or challenged prejudice in the general population, specific target groups, or communities associated with the participants, as impact on a small number of participants alone, was rarely enough for a case to be scored highly.

DEMONSTRATING INHERENT VALUE

Some case studies relied on the inherent value within a film to achieve impact on audiences. This was rarely the only element of impact claimed, but where the film was highly regarded by critical audiences and had a wide viewership, some narratives successfully made the case that the inherent value of the topic, timeliness, structure, or methodology of the film demonstrated impact on its audiences through the viewing experience alone. These narratives included evidence of very good critical reception, audience reaction from social media or interviews, and high audience figures. However even films that were critically acclaimed (such as *I am Breathing* or *The Arbor*) called on other impact achievements to build their case such as changing attitudes, opening up new areas of filmmaking, and economic outcomes.

PITFALLS TO BEWARE

IT IS CLEAR THAT NOT ALL CASE STUDIES FEATURING FILM AS UNDERPINNING RESEARCH SCORED HIGHLY, THERE ARE SOME COMMON FEATURES OF THOSE THAT WERE NOT ASSESSED STRONGLY

UNDERPINNING RESEARCH

Some lower-scoring case studies were not clear about the research component within the filmmaking. If there is doubt that the filmmaking contains research or that the research may not be of at least 2* quality, then the assessors may disqualify or potentially mark down the case study. Where links between underpinning research and impact are not made clear that can also lead to a lower score.

IMPACT NOT DISSEMINATION

The definition of impact in the REF is 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' and so it can be helpful to consider the question 'what changed?' when identifying impact. If the change cannot be described, then the impact may be limited or the case may not score highly. Some cases describe activities rather than outcomes, such as dissemination of a film, describing screenings or detailing sales, without indicating what effect the film had on its audiences. Conducting research into audience response might be a way to mitigate this shortcoming.

WEAK EVIDENCE

As well as relying on dissemination, some case studies assumed inherent value to their film without providing any evidence to support it. To claim that a film adds value, for example, to the cultural life of the UK, evidence would be needed of supporting views from critics, awards, or at least audience feedback from surveys, testimonials or social media etc. Claiming a benefit without evidence to support it is likely to result in a lower score.

I AM BREATHING

Year: 2013 **Duration:** 72 mins

Directors: Emma Davie, Morag McKinnon

Cost: £302,000

Funding source: Creative Scotland, Danish Film Institute, Wellcome Trust, Channel 4, YLE, DR, MND Association, UK Film Council, University of Edinburgh.

Distribution: TV: Channel 4, DR Denmark, YLE Finland, VPRO Holland, UR Sweden, VRT Belgium, HSCC Israel, Estonian TV, Canal+ Poland, Baltic TV.

Non-Theatrical: Global Screening Day in 50 countries 21/06/13

Educational & DVD: USA, Canada, UK Distrify (2013) (World-wide) (all media) (digital)

Synopsis: A documentary follows the last months of Neil Platt, a young father with terminal motor neuron disease (MND)

Case study: www.bit.do/i_am_breathing



Impact: An emotionally powerful film which demonstrates inherent value through film awards and positive publicity, reviews and commentary. However much of the impact comes from an alliance with the Motor Neurone Disease Association (MND) to drive awareness of the disease, through coordinated global screenings on national MND awareness day. In addition, there is evidence of changed attitudes towards the disease from practitioners such as medical and scientific staff and students and how the film renewed commitment towards their work.

BUILDING A GOOD CASE

THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE

To have a good impact story to tell from filmmaking research, it is important to articulate how the filmmaking embodies research, link the underpinning research to impact, have examples of change to document, and evidence each claim made. However, ticking all the boxes is not necessarily enough; these elements need to build into a compelling and coherent narrative. This might include quoting from relevant evidence in the text, rather than just saying it exists, providing contextual information about the topic of the film, as well as telling an engaging story which indicates to assessors why this is something they should consider has value.

USE EVIDENCE WELL

Aim to provide corroboration for each claim of benefit you make and look to evidence impact on direct beneficiaries, such as audiences or non-academic partners including commissioners or funders. Also include indirect beneficiaries, such as the wider community. Including quotes from personal testimony is useful, whether from audience members or partner organisations, as they can speak specifically to the impact you are claiming and may be able to provide corroboration of links between research and impact. Other sorts of useful evidence include published reports by partner organisations referencing your contribution to their work, web pages or social media data, but ensure you are using evidence that shows the effect of the activity not just proof of the activity itself. The nature of impact may change over time and this can influence the types of evidence that are selected.

INSIGHTS FROM REF PANEL 36

"Because filmmaking seeks to make an intervention into the public realm, it is often in a position to make a powerful case for impact. In making this case, however, a submission needs to bear in mind two things: first, that it also needs to make the case that this piece of filmmaking practice can be assessed as a piece of research; and second, that it has not only been disseminated in the public realm but that this dissemination has effected change of some kind."

KEY FINDINGS

- Demonstrate the research element in your films and a clear link to the impact. Don't rely on descriptions of your motivation, future plans or overlong descriptions of the content of the film. Focus on research questions, identification and application of methods and locating your practice firmly in an academic context.
- As far as possible provide indicators of quality. This can include awards or grants, or even selection for film festivals, where you can demonstrate some form of peer review. Critical acclaim can also be used selectively, especially from respected sources.
- Explain why the subject of the film matters, for example it could be a particularly timely or socially relevant topic. Also, who it matters too, especially if you have worked closely with organisations or partners who have benefitted. Use third party corroboration to support your claims, for example quotes from collaborators, media or commissioners.
- When describing impact, ensure you indicate what has changed. Although audience figures, the number of festival screenings, downloads or online views can be useful to indicate reach, you also need to demonstrate the effect of that activity. This might mean providing quotes from people affected by or benefitting from your work from post-viewing discussions, online comments, social media or specific interviews with key people, to collect this information.