

Sheffield Doc/Fest: the scientists are out there

Donald Davidson, Wellcome Trust Career Development Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, and **Jenny Houghton**, Wellcome Trust PhD Student at the University of Cambridge, talk about their experience of meeting documentary makers.

DD: I'm intrigued to see how film makers approach science, from selecting a topic to researching it to how they choose to portray the individuals and the subject matter, and I think there's an inherent tension between a scientist's need for detail and accuracy and a film maker's need for sensationalism. So I'd like to try and explore that.

JH: Well I'm really interested in the sort of interface between science, very academic research and the wider public and what they understand of it. And it's really interesting to meet the people who are involved in allowing that communication to happen. I mean as scientists we know nothing about that. So I'm interested to come and meet the documentary makers, I think, and find out how they do what they do and how we can help them with that.

DD: Well I'd like to hope at the end of this that I will have an understanding of how I, or my colleagues or institute, could approach film makers in the future as a mechanism for promoting our scientific discoveries and communicating our goals and our philosophies to a wider audience.

JH: And then of course it'll be fascinating to find out about what goes on in the world of documentary making and from a very personal perspective, it might give me sort of clues as to where I want to take my career.

DD: I found it very stimulating. It's probably not what I expected, to be quite frank, and I've had a strange mixture of interactions, some of which have been giving me real insights and others of which have made me realise that just as some of the media people probably don't understand my science, I really didn't know what they were talking about on the media side.

JH: A complete whirlwind: the number of people that you meet, and people from all sorts of different backgrounds – I mean it's not like everybody here was either a scientist or a film director, there's such a range of people that you meet. And you find out about a completely different world, something that you had no idea about beforehand and their trials and tribulations and your trials and tribulations and how you might be able to help each other. Absolutely brilliant.

DD: It's just started my creative processes going and particularly to revisit several old ideas I'd had about different ways in which you can present science or think about science or ways you can do things more creatively.

JH: It would be fantastic for more people to come here. The people that you meet, it opens your eyes to a completely different world and how much science can and needs to be part of that world and that can't happen without scientists coming to these things and meeting these people, so it's essential I think.

[End of transcript]