

March 2019

# Television



**The age  
of angst**

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## From the CEO



The awards season is very much upon us. The RTS Television Journalism Awards are always keenly contested and this year was no exception.

I am thrilled that a record 580 guests attended the ceremony at the London Hilton in Park Lane. No wonder the stage was so crowded when Sky News, not for the first time, was announced News Channel of the Year.

Another mob of overjoyed journos and their producers descended to collect the prize for Daily News Programme of the Year. The category was won by *Channel 4 News*, a prolific winner on the night.

I'd like to say a huge thank you to all the juries who made this evening possible. And special thanks to jury Chair Sue English and to Mary

Nightingale, who made effortless work of presenting all 20 awards.

I had another wonderful evening thanks to the hospitality of the RTS's North East and Border Centre. Its awards ceremony was held in Gateshead and MC'd by Jason Cook, the South Shields comedian and *Hebburn* writer, who was brilliantly funny.

Norwich University of the Arts hosted RTS East's annual awards, which I also had the pleasure of attending. Congratulations to all the winners.

Our events programme continues with vigour. I am a huge fan of Sky Atlantic's *Save Me*. So it was fascinating to hear Stephen Graham talk about this show and some of the other highlights of his career at a joint RTS-Premier Communications event held last month.

We also organised an outstanding

RTS Futures event, which showcased the new drama *Flack*, on UKTV's W channel. The first episode was pre-viewed to much applause. This was followed by a Q&A session featuring *Flack* creator Oliver Lansley.

Full reports of both these evenings are in this edition of *Television*.

Female writing talent is to the fore in this issue. Caroline Frost's heartfelt piece takes the brilliant *Fleabag* as a starting point for an exploration of how angst is inspiring some truly great television.

And we have an interview with Lisa McGee, creator of the hilarious RTS award-nominated comedy *Derry Girls*.

Theresa Wise

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Hosted by Mary Nightingale and sponsored by GuestBooker, the awards were presented on 27 February at the London Hilton, Park Lane – the winners and nominees over six pages

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## National events

### RTS AWARDS

**Tuesday 19 March**

#### RTS Programme Awards 2019

In partnership with Audio Network  
Venue: Grosvenor House Hotel,  
86-90 Park Lane, London W1K 7TN

### RTS FUTURES

**Wednesday 3 April**

#### Pitching script to screen

With Shiny Button MDs Andy Brereton, James De Frond and Tom Davies, and Big Talk development producer Lara Singer.  
6:45pm for 7:00pm  
Venue: London Transport Museum, Covent Garden Piazza, London WC2E 7BB

### RTS SCREENING

**Thursday 25 April**

#### Our Planet screening and Q&A

See Netflix's new natural history *Our Planet*, followed by a Q&A with Keith Scholey and other members of the creative team.  
Venue: TBC

### RTS AGM

**Tuesday 25 June**

All RTS members welcome. 6pm  
Venue: RTS, 7th floor, Dorset Rise, London EC4Y 8EN

### RTS AWARDS

**Friday 28 June**

#### RTS Student Television Awards 2019

Sponsored by Motion Content Group  
Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT

### RTS CONFERENCE

**18-20 September**

#### RTS Cambridge Convention 2019

Venue: King's College CB2 1ST

### STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL

#### LECTURE 2019

**Tuesday 24 September**

#### Speaker Mark Thompson

Venue: University of Westminster, London W1W 7BY

### RTS MASTERCLASSES

**Tuesday 5 November** and

**Wednesday 6 November**

#### RTS Student Masterclasses

Venue: IET, 2 Savoy Place, London WC2R 0BL

### RTS AWARDS

**Monday 25 November**

#### RTS Craft & Design Awards 2019

London Hilton on Park Lane  
22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

## Local events

### DEVON AND CORNWALL

**Wednesday 27 March**

#### Student Television Awards 2019

6:00pm  
Venue: Jill Craigie Cinema, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AA  
■ Jane Hudson  
■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

### EAST

■ Nikki O'Donnell  
■ nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

### ISLE OF MAN

**Monday 25 March**

#### Brothers of Italy premiere

Fact-based drama *Brothers of Italy* was shot on the island in 2018 by Hoofprint Productions. 7:00pm  
Venue: Studio Theatre, Ballakermeen High School, St Catherine's Drive, Douglas IM1 4BE  
■ Michael Wilson  
■ michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org

### LONDON

**Wednesday 20 March**

#### Podcasting masterclass

With Josh Adley, from Wisebudah, in conversation with Olly Mann, host of *The Media Podcast*. 6:30pm for 7:00pm  
Venue: Atos, Midcity Place, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6EA  
**Wednesday 3 April**

#### Production focus: Timewasters

With: Daniel Lawrence Taylor, actor and writer; and George Kane, director, writer and editor. Chair: Justin Johnson, BFI lead

programmer. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Atos, Midcity Place, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6EA

■ Daniel Cherowbrier  
■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

### MIDLANDS

**Thursday 4 April**

#### Big Telly Quiz 2019

Venue: TBC

**Monday 7 October**

#### RTS Midlands Careers Fair

Venue: TBC

**Friday 29 November**

#### RTS Midlands Awards 2019

Venue: TBC  
■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585  
■ RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

### NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

■ Jill Graham  
■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

### NORTH WEST

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639  
■ RPinkney@rts.org.uk

### NORTHERN IRELAND

**Tuesday 26 March**

#### Student Television Awards 2019

Hosted by BBC NI *Newsline* presenter Jo Scott. Keynote speech by UTV's Eden Wilson. Held in partnership with Northern Ireland Screen. Sponsored by Stellify Media, Westway Films and Performance Film and Media Insurance.  
Venue: Black Box, 18-22 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA  
■ John Mitchell  
■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092  
■ byrnecc@iol.ie

### SCOTLAND

**Tuesday 16 April**

#### Student Television Awards 2019

The awards are supported by STV, which will film the awards ceremony and show the event and the winning films on its digital platform. 6:00pm  
Venue: Argyle Street Arches, 253 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8DL

**Wednesday 12 June**

#### RTS Scotland Television Awards 2019

Venue: The Old Fruitmarket, Candleriggs, Glasgow G1 1NQ  
■ April Chamberlain  
■ scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

### SOUTHERN

**April 2019, date TBC**

#### Meet the Professionals

Venue: Bournemouth University, precise venue TBC  
■ Stephanie Farmer  
■ SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

### THAMES VALLEY

**Wednesday 20 March**

#### AGM and 21st-century TV sport – a whole new ball game!

Speakers: Richard Bagnall, head of engineering, live operations and channels, IMG; and Charles Balchin, head of programmes and head of development, IMG.  
6:30pm for 7:00pm start  
Venue: Henley Rugby Club, Dry Leas, Marlow Road, Henley-on-Thames RG9 2JA  
■ Tony Orme  
■ RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

### WALES

■ Hywel William 07980 007841  
■ HWilliam@rts.org.uk

### WEST OF ENGLAND

**Sunday 24 March**

#### RTS West of England Awards 2019

Hosted by Susan Wokoma. Drinks reception 7:00pm, ceremony 8:00pm. In association with Evolutions Bristol  
Venue: Bristol Old Vic, King Street, Bristol BS1 4ED  
■ Belinda Biggam  
■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

### YORKSHIRE

**Friday 14 June**

#### RTS Yorkshire Centre Awards Ceremony

7:00pm  
Venue: The Queens Hotel, City Square, Leeds LS1 1PJ  
■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280  
■ lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk

# TV diary

Ian Katz has a night to remember at the RTS Television Journalism Awards – and celebrates a Channel 4 art-house hit



**S**urprise hit of the week is *100 Vaginas*, in which the artist Laura Dodsworth photographs the genitalia of 100 women and then talks to them about the images and how they feel about their bodies. It's a great film – bold and political and warm – but firmly at the art-house end of the channel's output. Everyone is delighted when it attracts an audience of more than 1 million.

The show's title has been the subject of some controversy. When I met Dodsworth at a party a few months earlier, she rebuked me about it, pointing out rather sternly that her photographs were of vulvas, not vaginas. I sheepishly explained that I didn't think *100 Vulvas* would bring an audience to the film. What did she suggest? "*My Beautiful C\*\*\**," she replied without hesitation, or the faintest hint of a smile.

■ For weeks now, my Twitter feed has been dominated by abuse from fans of Michael Jackson, enraged by the Channel 4/HBO film *Leaving Neverland*.

None of them has seen it yet, but many appear to be devoting much of their lives to marshalling "evidence" that proves the claims made by the two boys (now men) in the film cannot possibly be true. There have been menacing legal letters from the Jackson estate, too.

Already, there has been a lively debate about whether it will ever feel

OK to listen to Jackson's music again. At an event to launch the channel's 2019 slate, a few weeks back, this was suddenly rendered a more than academic question.

After watching a shocking clip in which James Safechuck describes how Jackson enacted a "marriage" ceremony with his 10-year-old self, the crowd of journalists stood in shocked near silence. Until, that is, the venue's ambient soundtrack was quietly restored. As the murmur of conversation rose again, an unmistakable refrain was audible just above it: "Billie Jean is not my lover...."

■ Another screening, this time for the new series of the joyous *Derry Girls*. I have a running joke with Saoirse-Monica Jackson (age 25) that we have acquired some cryogenic freezers to ensure that she and the other "girls" will be able to play 15-year-olds for the next 20 years.

Each time I make it she forces a small grin, possibly because she thinks I actually mean it, possibly because it's not remotely funny. I make a mental note: Don't Mention the Freezers.

■ This is the season of black tie, rubber chicken and fixed grimaces. Awards dos run chewing your own limbs off a close second in the list of things best avoided on a weekday night – unless, of course, you're winning.

Happily, Channel 4 cleans up at the RTS Television Journalism Awards,

with seven wins for *Channel 4 News* and another for *Dispatches' Myanmar's Killing Fields*.

*Channel 4 News's* Cambridge Analytica investigation is rewarded with a clutch of awards. I had an inkling of what a remarkable story it was when, during a meeting at a Hollywood studio last year, a senior executive burst into the office and declared: "I heard there was someone from Channel 4 here, and I just wanted to thank you for saving democracy!"

My favourite moment of the evening is when *Channel 4 News* investigations editor Job Rabkin, who led the Cambridge Analytica investigation, has to get special dispensation not to have his photo taken after receiving the award for International Coverage. He has to rush back to his table in time to collect the next award, this time for Home Coverage.

■ At the weekend I flip on Radio 4. It's *Weekend Woman's Hour* and I am delighted to find that they're talking about our *100 Vaginas* film. Except that the discussion seems to be mostly about why it was not more accurately titled *100 Vulvas*.

Laura Dodsworth generously suggests that the channel feared it might have been confused with a film about Swedish cars. The presenter is unimpressed. "It's just an indication of how far we still have to go," she concludes, wearily.

Ian Katz is director of programmes at Channel 4.



Pure

# The comedy of catharsis

## Screenwriting

As *Fleabag* returns, **Caroline Frost** unwraps the female angst that inspires so many funny shows today

“I promised myself that I wasn’t going to say anything rude but I have actually been wet dreaming about getting a Bafta for the whole of my life.” With typically cheeky verve, Phoebe Waller-Bridge accepted her Bafta for her performance in *Fleabag* back in 2017. Now, with the follow-up series on our screens, fans will be clamouring for more of her stunningly clever tightrope act.

On the one hand, there is the potty-mouthed taboo-busting of family meals laced with inappropriate comments, masturbation to inappropriate icons and anal sex with inappropriate men.

On the other, underneath all that bravado, the social alienation and

aching grief and guilt at past wrongs. But if Waller-Bridge, also an RTS award winner, is the British flag-bearer for this kind of witty female angst, she is by no means alone. Since 2012, when Lena Dunham dazzled audiences with *Girls*, her self-willed conception of

what comedy-drama led by women could look like, a whole bunch of young female writers have been inspired to explore their most flawed, Instagram-unworthy selves.

And their efforts are bearing multiple screen fruits. Besides *Fleabag*, we’ve recently seen Desiree Akhavan star in her self-penned *The Bisexual* on Channel 4, exploring a young woman’s sexual experimentation. While, on the same channel, *Pure* follows a young woman living with the chaos of a particular strand of OCD that involves constant intrusive sexual obsessions.

They will soon be joined on screen by *Narcissist in the Mirror*, which began, like *Fleabag*, as a one-woman stage play performed by its writer, in this

case, Rosie Fleeshman. A stream of consciousness from a competitive, over-thinking, underoccupied young woman that does exactly what it says on the tin, it has been optioned for a TV series by Lime Pictures.

So, if these young

it's totally OK to say who you are and what you want."

They agree, however, that this can have negative effects when it plays out on social media, especially when it comes to this

and wonders about the effect this must be having.

"It means we're always looking at our own identities, asking, 'Who am I? What groups do I identify with?' I don't think my parents ever had to do that. It's dangerous, really," she says. "You end up curating your identity, creating the best Instagram version of yourself. And life isn't like that, it's messier and dirtier." Which is where all this great writing comes in.

These shows have clearly hit a spot, but are they purely personal confessionals well told, or the overdue outpouring of a generation's collective angst?

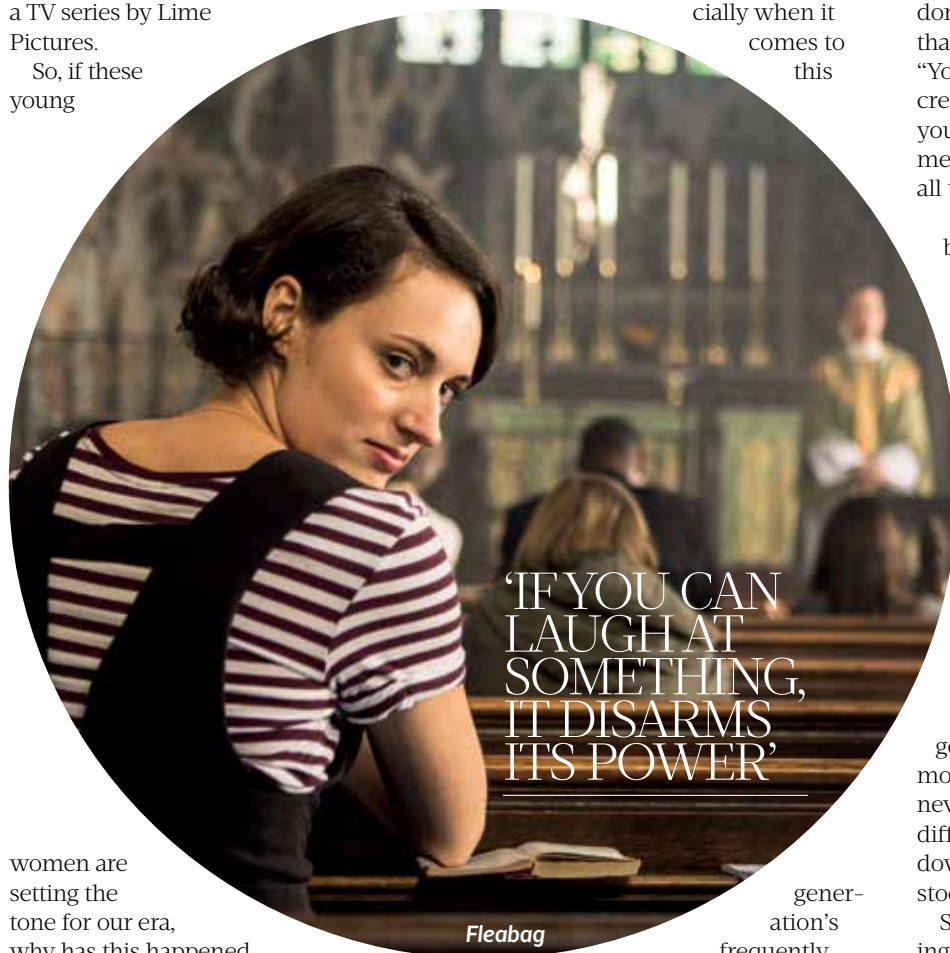
Clive Crump, a counsellor for a youth charity YCT, attests to the numbers of young women seeking help for anxiety and depression: "Feelings of loneliness [and] disconnection are common. Stress and burn-out are a big problem for young women in hardworking jobs and higher education, all driven by a desire for success and often self-generated pressure."

Psychotherapist Karin Peeters goes further and describes a common "existential loneliness": "They'd never call it that, they say they feel different, not fitting in... anxious, low, down, not good enough, misunderstood, overthinking."

Some counsellors believe that having more female protagonists on screen is helpful for young women, although they also advise caution. Peeters says, "A good consequence is that people feel less alone, they'll recognise themselves and feel validated in their feelings. [But] a negative consequence is that young women who are particularly vulnerable might take something so deeply to heart that it might make them feel worse."

Psychologist Karen Kwong is also positive: "They can teach us some lessons on how we all face challenges on a daily basis. These characters are more real than Daenerys (*Game of Thrones*) or Serena van der Woodsen (*Gossip Girl*)."

If that's the case, bearing in mind the terrible statistics for male mental health in this country, surely we need >



women are setting the tone for our era, why has this happened now?

Screenwriter Kirstie Swain, who adapted *Pure* for Drama Republic from the book by Rose Bretécher, credits those who came before, such as Dunham and Waller-Bridge, but also the solidarity of social media for helping to balance the playing field.

"We now have a platform to ask, 'Why are there no women in that show?'; and it starts with little things like that," she reflects. "Small voices can sound louder. Plus, you can connect with like-minded people. You can find your tribe."

Fleeshman agrees that there is strength in the numbers: "Women are making each other braver to write about this stuff. Other people [are] trying and succeeding, they're saying

pursuit of "significance" – and even for the writers themselves.

"We're all striving for purpose and, the bigger the planet gets, the more contact we make, the more insignificant we feel," says Fleeshman. "If you grow up as a baker in a small town, you're the town's best baker, but move to the city and it all changes. Social media amplifies that to a huge scale. You're swimming around in it, looking for meaning.

"Nobody ever feels good at anything, because it's so easy in a minute to find somebody, two years younger, doing something better than you."

Swain comments on the pressure put on young social-media users to create profiles for themselves online

generation's frequently self-destructive

*Fleabag*

BBC

## 'YOUNG WOMEN SPEAKING OPENLY AND HONESTLY STILL HAS THAT SHOCK FACTOR'

› to hear from young men, too. In words that I never thought I'd use, I ask Swain whether men's voices are in danger of being drowned out on screen?

Instead of screaming me down, she reflects on decades-old stereotypes: "Traditionally, men's shows are more action-minded. These shows we're making are very emotional and introspective.

"Traditionally, men haven't explored those subjects. But that doesn't mean they shouldn't. Interesting stories come from difficult places. Men are just as emotional as women, they just haven't had the chance to access it. I'd like to hear from them."

For years, male TV comedy has hovered around the *Men Behaving Badly* model, but we're seeing an increasing number of interesting evolutions. Aziz Ansari has collected Emmy honours for creating Netflix's *Master of None*, centred on his confused but reflective male character, Dev, and Kwong cites Rob Delaney's character in *Catastrophe* as "wonderfully portrayed and characterised – dark humour, angst and all".

For Fleeshman, the reason that we're noticing all these funny female voices is that "young women being outspoken, speaking openly and honestly, still has that shock factor".

It's true. One of the most distinctive things about this particular wave is the taboo subject matter, the stuff that was off limits until very recently.

For Swain, "It's not about shocking people. It's about telling stories that we haven't been able to tell before. It's only because we haven't heard it before that it seems shocking, but it's always been there."

*Catastrophe*, *Fleabag* and *Pure* all boast great performances and are strong for a number of reasons: the chemistry between Sharon Horgan and Delaney; Waller-Bridge's sardonic asides to



Sharon Horgan in *Catastrophe*

Channel 4

camera; and Marnie's priceless throw-away lines. But the real power of these shows lies in the juxtaposition between the gravity of some of the topics and the disarming wit with which they're handled. And many female writers have embraced this new field, blurring the lines between drama and comedy, to reveal big truths through deceptively light lines.

"There's nothing funny about trying to be like every other woman is supposed to be," says Fleeshman. "The fun comes in accepting my flaws, and all those other things I don't like about myself – my jealousy, my ugliness. When you accept yourself, you can take the piss out of yourself."

For Swain, comedy was a way into

*Pure*'s dark central concern, a serious and life-inhibiting condition that, she nevertheless realises, lends itself all too readily to humour.

"Comedy releases a tension. Mental health is a difficult thing to talk about – you pussyfoot around, not wanting to offend anyone," she says. "But if you can laugh around the subject, without making it the punchline, it's a way in.

"And if you can laugh at something it disarms its power. We could have made a bleak or really earnest show, but we wanted to find some joy in the pain, so it's not all doom and gloom. Laughter is what gives it hope." ■

*Caroline Frost is a former Chair of the Broadcasting Press Guild.*





RTS LONDON PRESENTS

## **Production focus: Timewasters**



**3 April**

6:30pm for 7:00pm at Atos, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6QS

With:

**Daniel Lawrence Taylor**, actor and writer

**George Kane**, director, writer and editor

Chair:

**Justin Johnson**, BFI lead programmer

Booking:

[rts.org.uk/event/production-focus-timewasters](https://rts.org.uk/event/production-focus-timewasters)



# Is Alexa too smart for our own good?

**S**mart speakers such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home accelerated their prodigious rate of adoption in the UK in the last quarter of 2018. Forecasts suggest that they will shortly be in a fifth of British homes.

But this trend of rising adoption could soon hit a wall. Surveys suggest that the majority of Britons fear that their privacy may be compromised if they invite voice-activated speakers into their homes.

The context is the omnipresent nature of voice interfaces on smart devices. The virtual assistants that power voice interfaces, such as Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa, are used by many Britons to operate their smartphones and tablets. Always at our sides, these devices are also frequently

## Voice control

**Alice Enders and Joseph Evans** ask if voice-activated speakers threaten the privacy of our homes

listening out for their wake word and, so far, without much of a consumer backlash over privacy. However, while most people find a “hands-free” option a useful way to operate these devices, smart speakers are in a class apart. Unlike the smartphone, they are a pointless purchase if you don't feel comfortable about using a voice assistant. The logic of a smart speaker is that it is left constantly on, the voice assistant primed to receive its wake word – “Alexa” in the case of Amazon's Echo.

This is not the same as an always-on device that records the chatter amid the clatter of dishes in the kitchen, say, to be stored on a server to haunt the user with dark secrets gained by eavesdropping. Even so, high-profile bugs and false positives, where conversations were recorded by mistake, have not helped allay the public's fears.

Currently, Amazon is far ahead of Google in the number of homes served by its speaker. At three times the price of Echo, Apple, meanwhile, has never sought to win over the mass of homes with its HomePod speaker. However, for privacy-conscious customers, its speaker is more suitable. It does much more of its processing within the device or on a paired iPhone, limiting the upload of conversations to the Cloud.

On the face of it, there seems to be no commercial advantage to a company such as Amazon in recording all conversations – they might only terminally confuse poor Alexa – instead of sticking to the plot of listening for wake words to record instructions, transmit them to the server and promptly fulfil them.

By pushing customer adoption of its platform, Amazon is looking to future-proof its business through data collection and by controlling a so-called discovery layer between customers and services.

Google has a similar objective for its low-priced smart speaker, Home – but Amazon Prime's 10 million UK homes give it a huge marketing advantage.

Google is interested in smart home devices (it bought the smart thermostat maker Nest), but a future income stream from Home is less obvious than for Amazon, since Google's core business is search advertising, rather than families buying goods and services.

Currently, data collected via Echo is probably Amazon's single most important benefit, because the data can be used for so many different ends. The company can learn more about customers' demographics, interests, habits and tastes from the following: the requests people make for information, such as "What is today's weather forecast?"; the times of day that they are at home; the number of people in a household; people's media preferences, including their favourite music and news choices; and personal contacts, if the user connects their phone to the speaker.

This data could eventually support a richer experience than just responding to instructions. Machine learning-based intelligence will extend beyond translating natural language and images to machine-readable information, and start to deliver recommendations, suggestions, reminders and notifications.

One again, data is the key driver for Google, as it can feed voice requests into its enormous data engine and so improve the effectiveness and targeting of its adverts.

Although the motivation is similar for

both companies, Google is, if anything, more exposed to customer suspicion simply because its status as a business driven by data is better understood by the public. It therefore needs to be unimpeachable on the privacy front. Scandals such as the early versions of the Home Mini recording without being woken up are exactly the sort of thing it needs to avoid.

## **'THE STRATEGIC GOAL OF THE SMART SPEAKER'S SUPPLIER IS TO BE THE GATEKEEPER TO THE HOME'**

Voice-activated speakers will be able to do more than respond to commands to magic up a radio station, answer a homework question, play this show or text that person. They will be capable of responding to more sophisticated instructions, such as: find me something to watch tonight, book me a table for lunch, or tell me what's going on in Parliament. In other words, Alexa and her cousins will be capable of making personalised decisions on our behalf.

The key strategic goal of the smart speaker's supplier is to be the gatekeeper to the home. The lower it prices its devices (such as speakers or tablets), the more people will buy them, giving Amazon a foothold in the home that is a gateway to its storefront, including for media. In this respect, Amazon treats its devices as wedges that open up the home to those of its services where it makes the real money.

To the extent that Echo owners ask Alexa to select or recommend video or audio content, Amazon gets to influence the process. Amazon could choose to prioritise its own original content or sell access to other content providers. We suspect that few Echo owners are currently asking Alexa for TV recommendations, but this is part of the long-term vision for voice user interfaces.

Third-party service providers and app developers promise a rich and varied suite of services to users. For the moment, though, Amazon is not charging third-party services for access to Echo users.

This makes sense for now: the aim is

to get the speaker into as many homes as possible and for it to be used as widely as possible. Eventually, affiliate fees from third parties should be a fairly flexible way for Amazon to extract value from its position between businesses and customers.

But, in the short term, data collection seems to be the primary commercial aim. Amazon's strength here is enhanced by the billing relationship it already has with every Echo owner via their Amazon accounts.

Amazon and Google have built these devices to gain entry to the home, and they compete against each other by offering low prices – to the benefit of purchasers. The revenue potential of a powerful platform position inside the home is only likely to be realised in the future. And it will require the user to be ever more intensively engaged with the device, to the point where it becomes used for many purposes. At that point, a user will be communicating a great deal of information about who they are and what they like to Alexa and Echo.

Consumers are increasingly aware that they are often the product, not the customer, in the online economy – they pick up on the steady stream of data breaches, hacks and scandals, and are understandably nervous about installing a connected microphone in their homes. The abuse of Facebook personal data by Cambridge Analytica is only the most prominent of these scandals.

Although Britons are not as touchy as Germans, say, when it comes to privacy, they are certainly more alert than US internet users, for whom Amazon first developed the Echo.

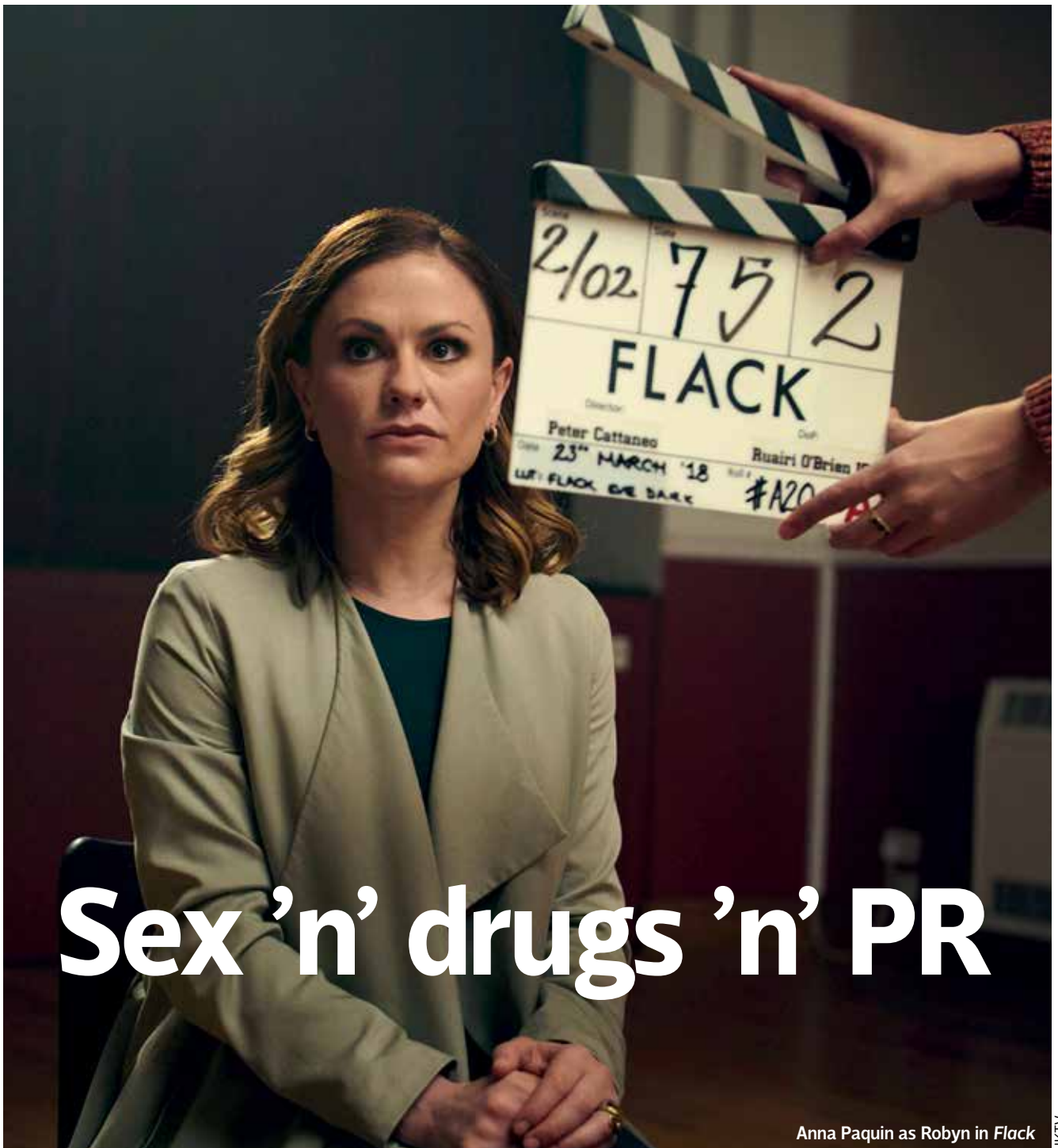
We don't expect the average Brit to acquire all things new and shiny just because they are labelled "smart". Amazon has a pressing need to build trust, because the present absence of trust is a barrier to Echo's success. The company does inform users on data policy, as part of its obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation that came into force in May 2018 – but compliance is in its early days.

Much remains to be clarified for potential owners of these devices. We expect the UK regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office, to contribute to reversing the climate of mistrust by pursuing compliance with core principles that apply to the gathering and processing of personal data. ■

*Alice Enders and Joseph Evans are analysts at Enders Analysis.*

## Content

*Flack*'s creator was determined to write a series about a complicated woman, hears **Steve Clarke**



# Sex 'n' drugs 'n' PR

Anna Paquin as Robyn in *Flack*

UKTV

**G**Q magazine described the new Anna Paquin drama, *Flack*, as “so terrible it might just be unmissable”. The verdict of the *Daily Telegraph*’s TV critic was “sharp and whizzy”, while the *Observer* hailed it as a “terrific and bitersweet comedy”, “in turns woefully tender and snort-funny”. Whatever you think of the female-skewing *Flack*, one thing is clear: it’s not a show to ignore.

This must be a huge relief to UKTV – *Flack* was made for its W channel – and to the writer of the programme, Oliver Lansley. He toiled for seven long years to get it on to TV, he revealed during an RTS Futures panel discussion that was preceded by a screening of episode 1.

By the way, the RTS audience loved the section they saw of what is unquestionably a highly entertaining, glossy, zeitgeisty series.

TV dramas featuring strong, complicated female characters are all the rage: just think of such era-defining pieces as *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*.

In *Flack*, Paquin plays Robyn, a smart, scheming, self-destructive PR (she snorts coke like Keith Richards once did), trying to pull herself together after her mother’s suicide. In the debut episode, she saves the reputation of a gay Premier League footballer who’s picked up a rent boy, and a sex-crazed TV chef.

The idea for *Flack* was conceived by Lansley as a response to several high-profile dramas based around complicated men – think Tony Soprano and Walter White.

Lansley told the RTS audience that he wanted to write a show featuring a complicated woman: “Five years ago, a book came out about the golden age of television called *Difficult Men*. It focused on showrunners and leading men such as Tony Soprano, Walter White and Don Draper.

“They were complex, male protagonists. I wanted to write a female character who could be on the cover of a book called *Difficult Women*.

“We’ve come on a lot since then but, at the time, if female characters were complicated they were often apologising for themselves or they were over-explained.

“By contrast, male characters do

what they do. They’d be mysterious and interesting because of it.”

Lansley’s setting for his show was the world of public relations, celebrity and media. “I thought it was quite a fun world to play in,” he said.

He had experienced this part of celebrity culture when, as an actor, he played the late DJ and TV presenter Kenny Everett, in a BBC Four biopic. Lansley was the focus of the film’s PR campaign.

“I was given this lovely lady PR. That was the first time I saw how it worked,” he recalled. “I was fascinated by it. We think of PR as *Ab Fab*, white wine and air kissing, but it always struck me as a more robust world than that.”

He added: “My reference for *Flack* was always *The Thick of It*, but with glossy magazines.”

Ironically, given its complex journey, the show got off to a racing start. Within six months of being commissioned by an unidentified British broadcaster, a pilot episode was in the can. So were six scripts.

But the show was then summarily dropped. At this stage, *Flack* was a half-hour comedy and none of the four stars cast in W’s series were yet cast – Paquin, Rebecca Benson, Sophie Okonedo and Lydia Wilson.

Subsequently, the series morphed into a one-hour drama before becoming the show that ended up on W – a 45-minute comedy drama (excluding commercial breaks) that premiered in February.

“I don’t think *Flack*’s gestation is typical,” said Mark Talbot, head of comedy development at producer Hat Trick. “It’s not the way that most shows get made.”

Hat Trick had taken the show to its US agents after the series was dropped in the UK. It was in the States that Anna Paquin got involved. More development work was undertaken, this time for a US company. Again, the programme was rejected.

Undaunted, its creators returned to the UK, where, eventually, it was successfully pitched to UKTV’s head of scripted, Pete Thornton. “He loved it and he had all six scripts to read, which worked in our favour,” said Talbot. “Although UKTV had come on board, we needed extra financing. ➤

## The notes: how to cope

Oliver Lansley described the experience of working with two channels and umpteen executive producers who constantly sent him notes on his scripts.

‘If every one was a knife in your side, you’d bleed to death very quickly,’ he said. ‘You have to be able to see through the notes to what helps the script.’

‘Sometimes, you’ll get a note and it’s not necessarily a great note, but it will identify something that needs changing.’

‘Early on in the process, there is this resistance and defensiveness against it.’

‘You think, “I’ve written this and this is how it’s going to be.” You’ve got to let go of that and use the notes to your advantage.’

‘You need to find that central line in yourself to go, “Yeah, OK, that can be better.” But you’ve got to pick your battles and be as objective about it as you can.’

‘You do have to get used to it because, if you want to write for telly, you are going to get a lot of notes.’

Yasmine Akram, also a writer on *Flack*, added: ‘It’s exactly that – don’t take it personally. If there’s a specific note on the dialogue, I’ll take it on...’

‘It’s a weird thing, as a comedy writer, you assume that people understand the musicality of comedy and that they’ll know how to use the joke.’

‘It’s weird to watch when an actor doesn’t get it.’

## ‘SOME BROADCASTERS MIGHT HAVE GONE, “OH NO, WE CAN’T DO DRUG TAKING”’

› We took it back to the US and pitched it to some American channels. Pop said yes.”

The green light was given in November 2017 – seven years after the lunch where the idea was first discussed. Filming commenced in January 2018.

“*Flack* felt spot on for W,” said Thornton, who had been at UKTV for only six months. “At the time, I was not thinking of making a drama, but W is aimed at career women, metropolitan thirtysomethings.

“Some broadcasters might have gone, ‘Oh no, we can’t do drug taking.’ For us, as long as it was justified and felt like it was properly integrated, we thought this was something that felt very real. People do talk like that and behave in that way some of the time,” he said to audience laughter.

“The hybrid version that we ended up with was perfect,” said Lansley. “The show embraces both the worlds of English and American celebrity. We jump between the two.”

He described the process of having the show rejected so many times by different broadcasters as “devastating”. “If you write, you develop a relationship with the characters you’ve created. To have this whole series sitting there was devastating. It’s very hard to carry around all these characters in your head.”

Ultimately, however, the longer *Flack* was worked on, the better it got. “Personally, I think we’ve ended up with the best version of both the earlier versions,” said Talbot. Lansley agreed: “We’ve made a much better show because of the journey we went on.” ■

**The RTS *Flack* screening and script writing Q&A was held at the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden on 19 February. The session was chaired by journalist Emma Cox and produced by UKTV’s Ali Laurie and Gem Pinkney.**



From left: Pete Thornton, Mark Talbot, Yasmine Akron and Oliver Lansley

Paul Hampartsourmian

## The treatment: hard graft

Pete Thornton, UKTV’s head of scripted, said: ‘Writing treatments is really hard. This is comedy drama but, particularly for comedy, a treatment is a hard ask.

‘You’re never going to set out your world in a couple of pages. The aim is to be informative, be brief and, at the same time, hilarious.’

He added: ‘Writing a treatment involves a hell of a lot of work and you’re normally paid 10% of your script fee for it, which is not very much.

‘There’s a paragraph on all the characters, an episode outline and, maybe, some examples of dialogue. It’s probably a week’s work.’

Oliver Lansley suggested that it was ‘really easy to write a treatment about a big idea. You can write it in a page...[But] the best shows are not based on one-line ideas. They’re much, much bigger. I hate treatments. I would rather write a script than a treatment and it would probably take me as long...

‘It’s always so reductive. If you describe a character in two lines they’re bound to sound awful...

‘A treatment is a document to make someone want to know more. If you go into a room and start telling a story and they want more of the story, you’ve got a good chance.’

## The pitch: time to tell your story

Mark Talbot, head of comedy development at Hat Trick, said: ‘When I go in and pitch a show, I always try and tell a story and explain why it’s relevant to what’s going on today. Talking about difficult women is a good way into a pitch.

‘If you’re an established writer who has written nine series of *Peep Show*, you can probably go in and pitch a show without any script or any treatment and they’re still likely to

commission you. But if you’re newer and haven’t had anything on TV, a channel will need to know that you can definitely write.

‘You’ll need to have a script. Channels will want a sample script and a treatment.

‘If you are newer, I would just write a script. That makes it easier for me to sell you.

‘If I think a script is brilliant, I’ll believe in it for seven years.’

# OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH WEST

As TV producers, we're facing more global competition than ever before. Whenever they wish, viewers can watch one of many programmes from around the world on Netflix or Amazon, rather than one of our shows. Or they can stream or download dozens of feature films available via their TV sets.

I genuinely believe that the best response to this difficult situation is to embrace the creativity of the whole country, and not just rely on London-based programme-makers.

Since the 1950s, British TV has been a national industry, engaging with diverse talent across the UK. This system created some of our very best shows, from *Coronation Street* to *Happy Valley*, and all of Russell T Davies's work, including his forthcoming series, *Years and Years*.

Over in France, you've only ever been able to work in TV if you live in Paris. I believe this is one reason that their TV industry is not world leading.

Here in the UK, Channel 4's creation of a new HQ in Leeds, plus two hubs in Bristol and Glasgow, comes as Ofcom is tightening the criteria for what counts as a production made outside of London. This signals the start of a new meritocratic and more diverse era.

Key to creating sustainable production centres is ensuring that there are strong talent bases of freelance programme-makers who can not only work in TV, but enjoy fulfilling careers outside London. That's why the networking sessions the RTS organises across the UK are so important.

The more communication there is between those who work in our industry, the more likely it is that companies in the nations and regions can

**Cat Lewis**  
proposes a  
strategy for  
building a vibrant  
production sector  
across the UK



Nine Lives

work together to keep their local talent employed, trained and promoted. And, together, they can create clever solutions to tackle any skills gaps.

Ofcom must ensure that its updated "made outside London" criteria encourage programmes made by operationally independent companies. These firms should use local talent at all levels of seniority so they are not reliant on London for post-production. Otherwise, there'll be no investment in facilities outside the capital.

Crucially, there has to be enough production in the nations and regions to keep everyone employed. As we are an informal, relationship-based business, Channel 4's decision to move commissioners outside London is hugely important.

Many of us hope that the BBC will soon do the same. When Caroline Thomson, the former head of operations at the BBC, created MediaCity, she very deliberately ensured that

commissioners were part of the mix. The work of North West-based independent production companies such as mine has been transformed by being in the same city as commissioners, albeit only for children's programmes and BBC Learning.

Through the anchor tenancy of the BBC, MediaCity is now one of the most successful regeneration projects in Europe. It employs more than 8,000 people, many more than worked there when the Manchester docks were at their peak.

This is why the Government is so keen for Channel 4 to help create similar success stories in Leeds, Bristol and Glasgow.

Public service broadcasters need to be much more strategic about what they commission from outside London. Production companies in the nations and regions need more returning series – but an economic report commissioned by Ofcom and published in December 2018 reveals that 86% of today's returning series are made in London.

More worryingly, in 2017, 75% of new series were commissioned from companies based in the capital.

Channel 4's decision to create a returning weekday live series broadcast from Leeds is excellent news. It promises an amazing opportunity to nurture the next generation of programme-makers in the north.

In an industry based on relationships, in which London plays such a dominant role, it's also a very good decision to put the opportunity out to tender. Tenders level the playing field and should be used more widely as a way in which PSBs can create more returning series in the nations and regions. ■

**Cat Lewis is Chair of the RTS in the North West and runs Nine Lives Media.**



# The Derry girl who created a comic gem

**P**eeek around the corner of Badgers Bar in Derry and you'll see the larger-than-life faces of Erin, Clare, Michelle, Orla and James plastered over the wall. As far as signs of a show's success go, they don't get much bigger than a five-metre-high mural.

From the moment the profane and brilliant *Derry Girls* burst on to our screens last year in a haze of teenage escapades, nostalgic music and 1990s artefacts – such as pastel printed wall-paper, Baby-G watches and armed soldiers on the streets – it captivated its audience.

The first episode drew in 2.5 million viewers and prompted a commission for the second series that is currently airing on Channel 4.

"It still hasn't sunk in," says writer and creator Lisa McGee. "It was supposed to be a niche comedy, but now, when I go round Derry with the cast,

## Screenwriting

Breakout comedy hits are rare, but **Lisa McGee** wrote one. She explains to **Shilpa Ganatra** how she did it

it's a shock how famous they are. They're stopped all the time. It's different even for me – I was in TK Maxx with my husband recently and someone stopped me and asked me if I wrote *Derry Girls*. It's very strange."

Straight-talking and focused, she is a Derry native who began her word-smith career writing for local theatre companies. Acquiring both an attachment at the National Theatre and an agent, she moved to London, where she is now based.

"In Derry, putting on plays in pubs doesn't earn you anything, so I did odd jobs when I could. When I moved to London and got my first writing project, that was me, I didn't need another job – but I was so lucky," she reflects. "Being able to write full time is so rare, and it's getting rarer, I understand from talking to younger writers.

"The National Theatre thing was so amazing. They just went, 'You don't need to worry about earning money, we're going to pay you and give you a space, and you have that time to get something written.'"

It was at this point that she wrote her first TV scripts. They included RTÉ's restaurant drama *Raw* and the recently revived play *Girls and Dolls*. From there, she turned her hand to episodes of *The White Queen*, *Being Human* and *Indian Summers*.

In 2013, Channel 4 premiered her own series, *London Irish*. Set in the capital, the show about a group of Irish



twentysomethings divided opinions. By contrast, *Derry Girls*, which she dreamt up when she was pregnant with her first child by writer/actor Tobias Beer, won rapturous reviews. It became Channel 4's biggest comedy launch since *Max and Paddy's Road to Nowhere* in 2004; the series now airs on Netflix in the US, where it has attracted a cult following.

Loosely based on McGee's childhood at a Derry convent school, in between the gags and the set-ups, the series highlighted the ubiquity of the Troubles in everyday life and, by extension, its normalcy.

Of course, Northern Ireland of yore wasn't all IRA bombs and angry men on TV, it was also aunts trying to get to the hair salon on time despite bomb scares and pupils having the hots for the soldiers doing checks on the school bus.

While the last season felt like a self-contained six-parter, its continuation sees the gang back together, and trying to chase boys (and girls) and causing headaches for their parents and teachers.

This time, the backdrop of the Troubles has evolved from tragic conflict to a desire for peace – even if the girls' version is desire for “a piece of fine Protestant arse”, as Michelle, the bolshie one, puts it.

“This year, I felt less worried about the jokes I was making because, last year, nobody batted an eyelid at things I thought were pushing it, such as the Orange Order episode,” says McGee. “This year, there's an equivalent Protestant gang of boys going through a similar time as the girls, so I could explore and not worry too much – because both sides of the community got it, and that made me feel a bit more confident.”

What doesn't change is their haplessness – an important point for McGee given the unrealistic characterisation of girls-next-door to date.

“Even in TV shows that I loved, I found the characters that were supposed to be losers were always way cooler than me. Like, I loved *My So-Called Life*, in which Claire Danes is supposed to be a teenage loser, but she looks like a fashion icon and she gets off with Jared Leto.

“I wanted my characters to be complete disasters because I think that's what most teenage girls feel like.”

Two of Channel 4's most successful comedies ever, *The Inbetweeners* and *Peep Show*, were edgy shows that extracted comedy gold from

excruciating situations. *Derry Girls* mines similar territory – with one big difference: the central characters are female.

Lately, both the number and quality of female-led comedies have improved. Women's roles have shifted from being predominantly nagging other halves or mums (the *Men Behaving Badly* model), to a smattering of awkwardly written lead females (Fox's *New Girl*) plus more believable shows, such as *Motherland* (written by Sharon Horgan and Graham Linehan), *Drifters* (by Jessica Knappett), *Fleabag* (Phoebe Waller-Bridge), *GameFace* (Roisin Conaty) and *Catastrophe* (another of Horgan's co-creations). But there's still a way to go, warns McGee.



*Derry Girls*

“TV hasn't quite caught up just yet – I think there needs to be a lot more content and choice,” she says. “We've picked out some examples but, if we were to talk about male-led shows, we could be here all day. That's the point that we need to get to, where there's lots of examples.”

She adds: “Everyone's now saying that it's a problem that there are no female writers, there's not enough female leads, and there's not enough female comedy.

“Eventually, people are going to have to put their money where their mouth is to challenge this. Channel 4 is very good about that.”

It doesn't help, however, that, after cancelling *Birds of a Feather* and *Bad Move*, ITV has dialed down the amount of original scripted comedy it commissions to zero. “That decision is disappointing,” remarks McGee. “Comedy is not something on the side; it's skill. I write drama as well, and comedy is different and very tough. The thing that I love about comedy is that people will re-watch it for years.

“Comedy usually works because you recognise something about your life, like in *The Royle Family*. There's an intimacy to comedy, and it's more than just being entertained. But it's also true that the family can watch comedy together and it's a shared experience.”

How does she feel the genre might progress in the years ahead?

“There might be more long-form comedies,” she says. “There are really interesting things happening with shows such as *Search Party* (shown in the UK on E4), where it's a comedy, but it's [also] a drama, slower and more twisty-turny.

“I think we're going to be looking at comedy being more multi-faceted, and [mixing with] other genres such as thrillers.”

Perhaps this vision is an insight into the shows McGee is currently developing. She's working on three dramas to balance out the comedy-heavy year she had writing series 2 of *Derry Girls*.

“After I write a comedy, I immediately want to write something dark because it's the opposite,” she explains. “So, I have three different ideas at three different stages, but *Derry Girls* has been a priority for me, so I've just been working on them in the background.”

With a third series of *Derry Girls* looking likely, the dramas may well have to wait a little longer. ■

Channel 4

# A new era for BBC Three



**B**BC Three is at a crucial point in its history. With a new controller, Fiona Campbell, a budget raised to £40m and a regular slot on BBC One on Mondays to Wednesdays, the corporation hopes that it can stem the tide of younger viewers washing up on the shores of Netflix and YouTube.

The BBC One decision was controversial, because it meant slicing 10 minutes off the *News at Ten* to make way for shows such as *Fleabag* and Stacey Dooley's *Glow Up*. Some journalists fumed, but the move was applauded by those who have been urging the BBC to do more for younger audiences.

Campbell, who comes from a news and factual background, acknowledges the annoyance expressed by some viewers but says that "now is the time to think about the global digital environment people can spend time with". Those rivals for attention include not just streamers but other options such as, "the Top Shop app, which I spend way too much time on".

The first female controller of BBC Three (Sam Bickley was acting controller in 2014) is firmly in touch with

## BBC Three

**Tara Conlan profiles the channel's new controller, Fiona Campbell, as the service raises its profile on BBC One**

the sensibilities of her channel's audience, says executive producer Adam Jessel. He worked with Campbell on the ground-breaking *Britain's Gay Footballers* and the BBC iPlayer box set *Unsolved*, when she was BBC Three head of documentaries and features.

"She's a dynamic, innovative thinker who's got all the credentials for the job and will make BBC Three a space for

itself in a really competitive environment," says Jessel.

"Fiona is what I'd call a 'real person' – someone with ideas and personality," adds

Simon Dickson, the former Channel 4 deputy head of documentaries and co-founder of *Hospital* producer Labell. "She'll find her feet quickly and usher in a new generation of shows that will sit nicely both on TV and online. The key will be commissioning factual programmes that combine audacity, insight and fun. She has a nose for those things and I'm sure she'll do a cracking job."

Brought up in Belfast, Campbell says she understands why some younger viewers feel disenfranchised by traditional broadcasters. Rather than dwelling on the decision to close BBC Three as a TV channel in 2016, she emphasises her belief that making shows that reflect viewers' own experiences and locality will help draw in Millennials.

She explains: "BBC Three has done well and garnered a lot of awards and a lot of talent. We don't want to let go of that [but the channel can also] be uniquely British and uniquely closer to that young audience than anyone else in this country, never mind the world.

“We can make content that’s really honed to their passions and life experiences in a way that other channels don’t... because they have commercial concerns.”

As a former BBC News digital director, she is interested in social media and consumption data. She highlights how *Abused by My Girlfriend* amassed

looked into the importance of local media for local identity and fuelling economic growth.

She got work experience on Italian TV journalist Gianfranco Funari’s show, which led to a piece on Roger Bolton’s *Right to Reply* and *The Money Programme*. Her next step was being hired for *Panorama* by the late Steve

location making things and I was more interested in being out there on location than in being in the spotlight. I’ve travelled the world, been to Kosovo, interviewed the Taliban, covered the Iraq War... [which] brings a totally different kind of dimension to your life.”

Campbell suggests that being taught by nuns at her primary and secondary schools shaped her, as “you learn to rebel against nuns from an early age”.

She deals with a stressful job and juggling being a mother by doing spin classes to loud music. Music, she thinks, is key to attracting younger viewers.

BBC Three has 1.4 million subscribers to its YouTube channel and an 8.5% reach among 16- to 34-year-olds. Campbell’s predecessor, Damian Kavanagh, set a target of increasing reach to that demographic to 10% by 2020.

Some wonder if she may get oversight of a TV channel, too, after Ofcom CEO Sharon White said last year that BBC Three was “probably” shut down “too early”, but that was “a decision for the BBC”.

Avalon co-founder Jon Thoday – who made a joint bid with Jimmy Mulville in 2015 to buy BBC Three’s TV incarnation before it closed – thinks that the corporation should hand over one of UKTV’s free-to-air channel slots.

“When I heard that the BBC was buying out Discovery... I thought it must have decided that channels were a good thing [and] it should give one of the slots to BBC Three,” said Thoday. “I think we were right [about not closing the TV channel] and it’s still a shame it did that. The BBC still needs to spend more money on younger audiences,” he said, because Netflix’s massive promotional spending cuts through to youngsters.

The latest young talent coming through on BBC Three is on show in the Tim Renkow comedy *Jerk*, female grime constructed reality series *Galdem Sugar*, and *Heartbreak Hotel*, which follows every move and message of 10 young Brits who travel round Greece together to heal their broken hearts.

Young programme-makers are very much on Campbell’s radar, who pays back the wisdom passed on to her by Hewlett by mentoring. “We’ve all got to spend a bit of time helping the next generation along and giving them career advice,” she says. “I’ve noticed some of them are quite stressed. The importance of supporting the next crowd coming through cannot be underestimated.” ■



All pictures: BBC

1.7 million viewers and a huge Twitter peak when it aired on TV after debuting on BBC Three online. The figures also revealed how the show won a lot of female, north-western and Scottish viewers.

Campbell thinks her BBC Three can “excel” by having “content that talks to people of mid and lower income of both sexes”. She wants to reflect “the reality of the younger experience”, adding that, “for women who are in relationships in this country and who don’t live in London or Manchester and perhaps have less money at their disposal, it’s bloody tough.

“I’m also interested in local. More than 30 members of BBC Three staff are in Birmingham, sitting alongside the English digital news journalists. I’m doing a lot of thinking about the role of BBC Three outside London, because then it’s closer to what’s happening, where people live.”

Although she chaired the 2016 Edinburgh International Television Festival, Campbell prefers to keep a low profile. She followed a “random” route into media. While doing a masters in international and regional development in Italy, she became interested in the sector as, “coming from Northern Ireland... where our GDP was so crap”, she

Hewlett, when he edited the current affairs flagship.

“Steve and Jane Corbin taught me so many things. Jane taught me the art of never taking no for an answer. Steve was an amazing editor,” she recalls. “All through my subsequent career, Steve was there to give advice and have a sense of humour and remind me not to take myself too seriously.

“I then learnt a lot by going to *Watchdog*, under Steve Anderson and Anne Robinson,” where she learnt to self-shoot and film undercover.

Her next move was to *Channel 4 News*, where she worked as a commissioning editor in a “very fun, supportive environment” under Dorothy Byrne. Subsequently, she returned to the BBC and rose to head of current affairs.

Navigating the BBC bureaucracy is not easy but Campbell has become so adept that one former colleague once did an impression of her by kicking in a door. Her explanation is that she has “a low boredom threshold, so I do tend to be, ‘Are we going to do this or are we not going to do this and, if we are, let’s just get on and do it now.’ That tends to be my attitude, probably because I shot film myself when working in digital... and a 24/7 news environment.”

“I spent a lot of my career on

# In a class of their own

## Writing

Kudos and the Royal Court Theatre are nurturing young dramatists from under-represented backgrounds, discovers **Steve Clarke**

**A**t a time when there is growing evidence that television is dominated by people at the upper end of the social scale, a new writing scheme hopes to break through the medium's so-called "class ceiling". With luck, it may also broaden the range of voices heard across TV drama.

"For some time, we at Kudos have been looking for a way to put our money where our mouth is in order to help tackle the 'class-ceiling', which is such a pervasive obstacle to the flourishing of new talent in our industry," says Martin Haines, Managing Director at Kudos, the production company behind such acclaimed dramas as *Broadchurch*, *Tin Star* and *Utopia*.

"There is a lot of excellent work to support diversity in writing," he says. "But, all too often, the structural barriers to success and the extent to which lack of opportunity and financial disadvantage play their part are overlooked.

"It is our belief that, in an overcrowded content marketplace and against the backdrop of an increasingly splintered society, it has never been more important to find and tell original and distinctive stories from parts of the UK not often seen on our screens."

Haines emphasises: "People who are successful in television, not just writers, but people who are in front of and behind the camera, tend to come from the same social backgrounds.

"They have pathways that are easier than for those people who live outside London and who come from social and economic backgrounds where a career

in television is not on their radar."

With this in mind, in collaboration with London's Royal Court Theatre, renowned for championing new talent, Kudos has set up a bursary scheme aimed at nurturing young writers from under-represented groups.

"We were thrilled that if we could join forces with the Royal Court and put it under a joint banner, we would be able to cast the net wide and use that public profile to unearth some gems," says Haines.

And so it has turned out. The joint Kudos Royal Court fellowship was launched last October. It was targeted at writers already establishing a writing career, but who perceived road

blocks to getting their work developed

and produced in theatre and television due to class, disability, education, ethnicity, gender identity, geography or other issues.

A month later a selection panel comprised of executives from Kudos and the Royal Court read hundreds of new scripts in order to choose the winners of the three bursaries. The scheme had been advertised in the trade press and on social media.

The eventual shortlist of 13 was given to Kudos creative chief, Karen Wilson, and the Royal Court's artistic director, Vicky Featherstone, who chose the three fellows – Rabiah Hussain, Lettie Precious and Ross Willis.

Hussain is a writer and poet. Her debut full-length play, *Spun*, premiered at the Arcola Theatre in July 2018 and



From left: Ross Willis, Lettie Precious and Rabiah Hussain

Kudos

## **‘RELATABLE, AUTHENTIC AND DEEPLY PERSONAL STORIES THAT GRABBED US BY THE THROAT’**

her short plays and monologues have been part of programmes with Theatre Absolute, The Bunker Theatre and Rada.

Precious is a playwright, poet, author and artist. Having quit nursing to concentrate on writing, Precious became active in the theatre industry, won the Best New Artist Award at Museum of the Mind in 2016, and became a published author in 2018.

Willis is a member of the Orange Tree Writers Collective, BBC Writers Room and a playwright on attachment at the Bristol Old Vic. He was the writer in residence at Theatr Clwyd and is an alumnus of Tamasha Playwrights and Soho Theatre Writers Lab, where he developed *Wonder Boy*, which was produced by Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

“Rabiah, Lettie and Ross stood out. Each of them delivered an incredibly strong piece of work that spoke to the judges and Vicky and Karen. They were very personal stories,” says Haines.

“They were relatable, authentic and deeply personal stories that grabbed us by the throat and demanded attention.

“The writing jumped off the page because it was so immediate and personal. That was exciting for us. It was why we wanted to do this scheme in the first place.”

The Kudos MD points out that today new writers who want to work in TV often face significant challenges. Overall, there’s more drama being transmitted, streamed or downloaded than ever before. But the kind of shows that were once available for rookie writers to cut their teeth on – long-running series such as ITV’s *The Bill* have long since disappeared.

Then there is the question of making ends meet. Writing can be a fickle and unremunerative job. Aspiring writers often find themselves holding down one or even two jobs, while trying to build a career as a writer.

Haines says: “It sounds remarkable

to people who don’t have to struggle in this way. If you’re a writer working at a day job or doing night work, working irregular hours on a zero hours contract, or you’re out of work and finding it difficult to feed yourself, it’s extremely difficult to think about taking your writing seriously and take it forward.”

The bursaries give each writer a sum roughly equivalent to the London living wage – £10,000 for six months – plus travel and accommodation support, and a tailor-made programme designed by Kudos and the Royal Court.

“The Kudos creative team, led by Karen Wilson and Sarah Stack, have devised a bespoke package of ‘experiences’ for each fellow, focusing on any gaps in their skills and on areas the fellows themselves are keen to develop in relation to television writing,” Haines explains.

“Lucy Davies [executive director at the Royal Court] and Vicky have done the same in relation to their theatre work. We hope the combination will act as an incubator to accelerate their massive potential.” In this context, it’s important to remember that many of television’s greatest writers, be it David Hare or Alan Bennett, have always switched between stage and screen.

The three are spending time with all departments at Kudos and the Royal Court, shadowing colleagues, observing rehearsals, attending first previews and visiting TV sets.

There will be opportunities to participate in monthly workshops run by leading creatives in theatre and TV, attend script meetings at the Royal Court and development meetings at

Kudos, and have time and space to develop their own projects.

All concerned were determined to make the scheme as unrestrictive as possible. “Often, you will get schemes or programmes like this which are a bit more prescriptive,” says Haines. “Production companies like to know there will be a script or two they can get their mitts on at the end of process.

“We want our approach to be different to that. The fellows take ownership of what they want to get out of it. Hopefully, at the end of six months they will have enjoyed working with us and we will be in a position to explore how that relationship will develop further.

“We want to create an enlightened space where people can find their feet and work out what it is that they want to do.”

So, ideally, in two or three years’ time, the three will be writing commissioned scripts? “Absolutely. We hope this will be a massive accelerator of their careers. We want them to come out feeling more confident and clearer about what they want to spend the next couple of years doing with their writing, be that in theatre or TV, or both. It’s the start of a relationship for all of us.”

What, then, of the future? Is the initiative a one-off or might it become something of a permanent fixture? “We will do it again if we find it’s been useful,” says Haines. “It would be our intention to run it again with the Royal Court if it goes well this time. We’re only in the first month of the first year. We need to see how it turns out. But, so far, so good.”

And maybe this unique collaboration between one of British TV’s best drama producers and London’s leading supporter of innovative stage writing will enrich TV drama in the years to come. It might even nurture the next James Graham, Kay Mellor or Sally Wainwright. ■



# True grit

Over the past couple of decades, Stephen Graham has become increasingly hard to avoid on both TV and film. The variety of roles he's taken on is extraordinary. He can play cops and robbers, modern and period drama, ordinary and larger-than-life characters. He is convincing in all of them.

Finally, at last year's RTS Programme Awards, Graham received the recognition he has been due for many years when he took the Actor award for his portrayal of the detective who investigated the murder of the Liverpool schoolboy Rhys Jones, in ITV's harrowing real-life drama *Little Boy Blue*. The judges described his performance as "unquestionably brilliant, showing extraordinary range and skill".

Graham looked back over a career that has taken in some of British TV's grittiest parts – and some meaty mobster roles across the Atlantic – at an RTS early-evening event in February. He was in conversation with Alice Feetham, his co-star in the Sky Atlantic thriller *Save Me*.

The award-winning actor, who was born in Kirkby, a satellite town of Liverpool, first trod the boards at primary

## Acting

### Matthew Bell enjoys an RTS event showcasing the career of the prolific British actor Stephen Graham

school, when he played Jim Hawkins in a version of *Treasure Island*. He was spotted by Andrew "Drew" Schofield, a local actor who played the title role in Alan Bleasdale's Channel 4 drama *Scully*, concerning a teenager who dreams about playing for Liverpool FC. Schofield was in the audience to watch his nephew perform in the play – the first of many pieces of "luck" that Graham said actors need at some point in their careers.

"Drew said to my mum and dad that he thought I had some talent and that they should look at getting me to the Everyman Youth Theatre [in Liverpool] – and that's what we did. It started from there," recalled Graham, who added: "Drew was the inspiration for me being an actor."

His first paid teenage acting job was

in *Children's Ward*, which was developed for ITV by Paul Abbott and Kay Mellor, then at the very start of their writing careers.

Other early TV appearances included ITV cop series *The Bill*. "It was great because it gave you on-the-job training – part of your apprenticeship. You can learn a lot from drama school, but you can learn much more when you're working," said Graham.

The actor went to drama school in London, but doubted whether it is a "necessity nowadays". "And, let's be completely honest, is it affordable for most people? I would love everybody to have the opportunity to go but, if I hadn't had a grant, I wouldn't have been able to go."

However, when asked by a member of the RTS audience whether he had a view on the advantages enjoyed by "Oxbridge/Eton-ite" actors over those from a working-class background, Graham responded: "No – everyone has got to make a living."

Although he talks broad Scouse, Graham made his name as the cockney boxing promoter Tommy in *Snatch*, Guy Ritchie's 2000 comedy crime flick (see box, page 26). "*Snatch* was a joy to do – it was a lot of fun," he said. "It did dramatically and drastically change my



Playing Melon in *Save Me*

Sky



Playing Combo in *This Is England '90*

Channel 4

## Stephen Graham on: making *This is England* with Shane Meadows

life – and all for the good. It gave me much broader opportunities and the chance to go for many different [parts].

“There was a part of me at the very beginning [that thought] this is me and [Liverpool] is where I’m from – and authenticity is beautiful. I’m very proud of where I come from.”

But he did not want to be typecast: “[I thought] learning to do different accents could hopefully open doors for me and give me different opportunities.” In fact, he is a virtuoso at accents, treating the RTS to impersonations of some of the acting greats he’s worked with, including Al Pacino and Robert De Niro.

Graham had a small part in Martin Scorsese’s 2002 movie *Gangs of New York*. Almost a decade later, he played Al Capone in Scorsese’s HBO series *Boardwalk Empire*. The actor, though, was adamant “that there was no conscious decision to [try and be] a success in America – that was never my objective.”

But working on the other side of the Atlantic was an opportunity that Graham “grabbed with both hands”. “For a young lad who grew up in Liverpool, who always wanted to be an actor, to be given the opportunity to play Al Capone was amazing,” he said. >

‘I love [Shane’s] way of working – it’s the drama school and Stanislavsky stuff, but it’s done practically, in a way you can all understand,’ said Graham. ‘You have a look at what’s on the page, as you do with every other director, but you’re creating a character from scratch.

‘You do the background – where he was born, where he went to school, who his mum was, who his dad was, what his favourite colour is.

‘That’s how Shane works. You spend about a week doing that. Then, you spend time creating scenarios and possibilities of what may happen.’

In Meadows’ film about skinhead culture in early-1980s Britain, Graham played Andrew ‘Combo’ Gascoigne. Portraying a racist skinhead was problematic for Graham. ‘I’m mixed race – my granddad was from Jamaica; my nanna was Swedish on my dad’s side of the family.

‘I didn’t want to tell Shane that I was mixed race at the beginning because I thought, if I tell him, he’s not going to give me the part. We did a day’s workshop and, because I really wanted this part, I went for it proper. Some of the language I used was painful, but it was authentic because I’d been on the other end of it.’

Eventually, Graham told Meadows about his heritage. ‘There was silence,’ he recalled. ‘And then he said, “That makes it really interesting.”’

Four years later, Meadows brought *This Is England* to Channel 4, taking the stories of the characters from the original film through the late 1980s and into 1990. ‘I thought it was going to be a one-off film and, to be honest, at first I was very sceptical about turning it into a TV series,’ he said.

For *This Is England '90*, Meadows used some of his trademark methods to help Graham get into character for the release of Combo from prison.

‘Shane set me an exercise. He took all my money off me, dressed me in [Combo’s] clothes, put the tattoos on my face that he’d got while he was in prison... and then he dropped me off in the middle of Sheffield,’ he recalled. ‘At that moment, I knew what it was like to feel invisible.

‘I could never have got that [feeling] from three years in drama school, but I got it from being on the streets... of Sheffield.... It was proper scary.

‘People were walking past me and completely ignoring me – I felt worthless. And that was the objective of the exercise – it was amazing.’



Paul Hampartsoumian

## Graham on: Guy Ritchie

The actor first worked with Guy Ritchie on his 1995 short film, *The Hard Case*, the director's calling card for his big-hit debut, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*.

He had accompanied a friend, who was auditioning for a tiny part in the short. 'Guy popped his head around the door and said [to me], "It's you next." I said no, because I'd just come with my mate. But he asked if I was an actor and he called me in.'

Handed the script, Graham explained that he was dyslexic and would need time to read it. Offered the chance to improvise instead, Graham grabbed the opportunity: 'We did a little bit of messing about and he said, "You've got the job and start on Monday."'

A few years later, when Ritchie was casting for his second feature, *Snatch*, 'He wasn't seeing anyone who wasn't a cockney,' said Graham. 'Apparently, he was watching something I had a little part in as a Scouse builder, but he was looking at this other lad to see if he wanted him for the role of Tommy. Then I popped up and he [obviously] remembered me.'

'I walked in [to the audition] and pretended I was a cockney. And he let me pretend I was a cockney. He asked me where I was from and I said Beckenham, because I lived in Beckenham, and Guy went, "No you're not – you're pure Scouse. I've worked with you before." But, anyway, I got the job.'

Almost two decades after the film's release, Graham said it 'gave me an opportunity to be a part of a successful film for the very first time. It was an amazing honour for me.'

➤ Back in the UK, it is gritty dramas – of the type he used to watch as a child – that pepper his career. "I was brought up on fantastic drama in this country, the likes of [Alan Bleasdale's] *Boys from the Blackstuff* and [the BBC's] *Play for Today*. I used to watch that kitchen-sink type of drama, which I used to adore, with my dad. I always wanted to do that kind of work."

British drama has given Graham some of his best roles, including the skinhead Andrew "Combo" Gascoigne in Shane Meadows' 2006 film *This Is England* and its later TV incarnation on Channel 4 (see box, page 25). "If I'm honest, that particular job was where I grew up as an actor. It really [helped me to] understand the [acting] process completely," he said. "I really learned how to dive into a character."

He was then nominated for the Actor prize at the 2010 RTS Programme Awards for his role as the alcoholic bookie, Shay, in Jimmy McGovern's RTS award-winning BBC One drama *The Street*.

Most recently, he has appeared in *Save Me*, which was created and written by its star, Lennie James. Graham plays troubled Fabio "Melon"

Melanzana, with Feetham cast as his much-younger wife, Bernie. He is also in the latest instalment of Jed Mercurio's police corruption thriller *Line of Duty*.

In keeping for a series known for guarding the secrets of its dizzying plot turns, nothing is known of his criminal character, John Corbett, other than the teaser released by the BBC. This shows the actor pulling off a black balaclava. Pressed for further details, Graham confirmed only that: "He wears a balaclava."

Later this year, Graham will star in Scorsese's latest film, *The Irishman*, playing a mobster in the company of De Niro, Pacino and Joe Pesci. He has also reunited with Meadows for Channel 4's *The Virtues*, in which he portrays a man with a troubled childhood.

Looking back over more than two decades in TV and cinema, Graham reflected: "This, to me, is not a job – I adore what I do." ■

**'In conversation with Stephen Graham' was organised jointly by the RTS and Premier Communications. It was held at Kings Place in central London on 18 February.**





# RTS Television Journalism Awards 2019

Hosted by **Mary Nightingale** and sponsored by GuestBooker, the awards were presented on 27 February at the London Hilton, Park Lane

The winners and nominees of all 20 awards are listed over the following five pages >



Al Jazeera

### Breaking News

**Zimbabwe: Robert Mugabe Steps Down**  
CNN International

‘A journalistic and technical triumph that caught the excitement of the moment but kept a cool head and ensured that tough questions about the future were asked as well.’

**Nominees:**

**Cabinet Brexit Deal**, Sky News  
**Zimbabwe**, BBC News Channel for BBC News

### Camera Operator of the Year

**Brice Lainé**

CNN International  
‘In an excellent field, Lainé’s work stood out for being shot through with humanity. His camerawork in the Antarctic was stunning and brave.’

**Nominees:**

**Darren Conway (DC)**, BBC News  
**Jack Garland – Newsnight**, BBC Two

### Current Affairs – Home

**The Fires That Foretold Grenfell**

Amos Pictures/BBC Current Affairs for BBC Two

‘Great research enabled the programme to be built around heart-breaking interviews with people who had lost loved ones in previous conflagrations... The result was a programme of importance and revelation.’

**Nominees:**

**Massacre at Ballymurphy**, Awen Media/Dartmouth Films/The Outsider Movie Company for Channel 4  
**Exposure – Prisons Uncovered: Out of Control?**, Clover Films for ITV

### Current Affairs – International Dispatches – Myanmar’s Killing Fields

Evan Williams Productions/Mongoose Productions for Channel 4

‘A compelling, forensic piece of film-making, with methodical reporting and raw testimony... riveting viewing.’

**Nominees:**

**This World – Japan’s Secret Shame**, True Vision Productions for BBC Two  
**BBC Africa Eye – Sweet Sweet Codeine**, BBC Africa Eye for BBC World Service

### Daily News Programme of the Year

**Channel 4 News**

ITN for Channel 4  
‘The programme demonstrated the greatest journalistic excellence throughout the year, with its ground-breaking investigations, high-impact journalism at home and abroad, and powerful interviews.’

**Nominees:**

**ITV News at Ten**, ITN for ITV  
**Newsnight**, BBC Two

### Interview of the Year

**Malaysia: Najib Speaks – 101 East**

Mary Anne Jolley for Al Jazeera English  
‘This interview stood out for its courage, tenacity and sheer unadulterated watchability. The forensic approach was compelling, her knowledge formidable and her ability to combine persistence with grace quite extraordinary.’

**Nominees:**

**Channel 4 News – Max Mosley**, ITN for Channel 4  
**ITV News – Sir Cliff Richard**, ITN for ITV

### Nations and Regions – Current Affairs

**Disclosure – Suffer the Children**

BBC Scotland for BBC One Scotland  
‘A standout investigation... that was both shocking and challenging [and showed sensitivity] in dealing with the victims, and the shame and pain they have lived with.’

**Nominees:**

**Spotlight – Brexit, Dark Money and the DUP**, BBC Northern Ireland  
**Wales Investigates – Gangs, Murder and Teenage Drug Runners**, BBC Wales for BBC One

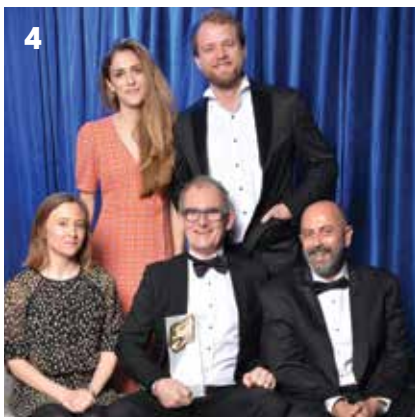
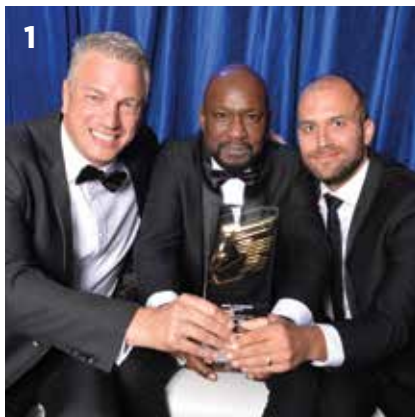
### Nations and Regions – News

**ITV News Central – Leicester Helicopter Crash – A City in Mourning**

ITV Central for ITV  
‘In an exceptionally strong field, [this] stood out for including some of the best writing, the tone of the presentation, for being well paced and edited, right down to the closing words.’

**Nominees:**

**ITV News Meridian – Gosport War Memorial Hospital**, ITV Meridian for ITV  
**ITV London News – Grenfell one year on**, ITN for ITV



All pictures: Richard Kendal

**1** Breaking News: Zimbabwe: Robert Mugabe Steps Down

**2** Camera Operator of the Year: Brice Lainé – CNN International

**3** Current Affairs – Home: The Fires That Foretold Grenfell

**4** Current Affairs – International: Dispatches – Myanmar’s Killing Fields

**5** Daily News Programme of the Year: Channel 4 News

**6** Interview of the Year: Malaysia: Najib Speaks – 101 East

**7** Nations and Regions Current Affairs: Disclosure – Suffer the Children

**8** Nations and Regions News: ITV News Central – Leicester Helicopter Crash – A City In Mourning

**9** Nations and Regions Presenter of the Year: Nina Hossain – ITV London News



Nations and Regions – News:  
ITV News Central – Leicester  
Helicopter Crash – A City  
in Mourning

### Nations and Regions Presenter of the Year

**Nina Hossain – ITV London News**

ITN for ITV

‘Her interviews are challenging, insightful and probing. She projects authority, sensitivity and charm as well as an outstanding ability to connect with the audience.’

#### Nominees:

**Lucy Meacock – Granada Reports**, ITV Granada for ITV

**Roger Johnson – BBC North West Tonight**, BBC North West for BBC One

### Network Presenter of the Year

**Emily Maitlis – Newsnight**

BBC Two

‘Exhibiting remarkable authority and self-possession on air, she has led the revival of her programme’s fortunes. She has even made it OK for an interviewer to be furious with an interviewee.’

#### Nominees:

**Krishnan Guru-Murthy – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

**Victoria Derbyshire – The Victoria Derbyshire Programme**, BBC Two

### News Channel of the Year

**Sky News**

‘The channel demonstrated its trademark excellence in breaking and continuous news, but also showed admirable strength in investigations, exclusives and special projects.’

#### Nominees:

**BBC News Channel**  
**CNN International**

### News Coverage – Home

**Data, Democracy and Dirty Tricks – Channel 4 News**

ITN for Channel 4

‘An exclusive story with real resonance that changed the agenda. It was brilliant journalism, with fantastic undercover reporting... and became one of the biggest stories of the year.’

#### Nominees:

**Out in the Cold – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

**Violent Britain – ITV News**, ITN for ITV

### News Coverage – International

**Data, Democracy and Dirty Tricks – Channel 4 News**

ITN for Channel 4

‘A global scoop that changed the way the world works [and] a meticulous undercover investigation.’

#### Nominees:

**China’s Hidden Camps – BBC News at Ten**, BBC News for BBC One

**Yemen**, BBC News for BBC One

### News Technology

**BBC Africa Eye – The Anatomy of a Killing**

BBC Africa Eye for BBC News

‘This harnessed new technology in a simple but stunning way to tell a very powerful story. Using only open source data and software, *BBC Africa Eye* pieced together a jigsaw of facts... to debunk the Cameroon government’s [account]. A superb piece of public-interest journalism.’

#### Nominees:

**Immersive Photojournalist Lewis Whyld’s 360° Drone Image Capture Technology**, CNN International

**Royal Wedding Who’s Who**, Sky News

### Scoop of the Year

**Cambridge Analytica Uncovered – Channel 4 News**

ITN for Channel 4

‘A profoundly important and significant piece of television, which exposed a serious abuse of democracy. Its initial impact was enormous – and its reverberations are still being felt.’

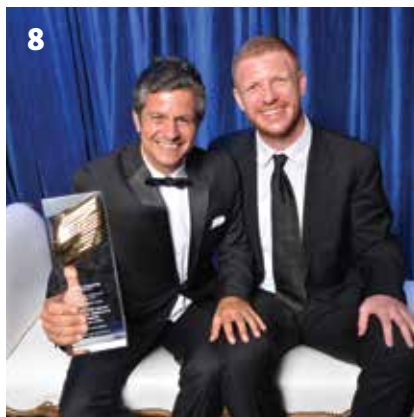
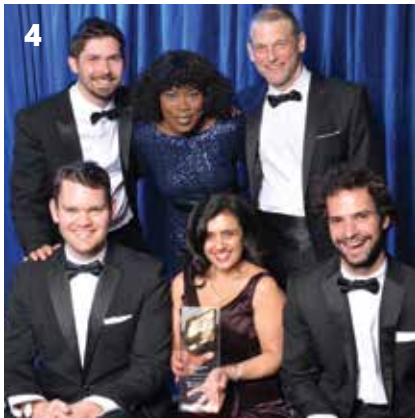
#### Nominees:

**The Disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi**, CNN International

**Westminster Bullying – Newsnight**, BBC Two



Host: Mary Nightingale



**1** Network Presenter of the Year:  
Emily Maitlis – *Newsnight*

**4** News Technology: *BBC Africa Eye – The Anatomy of a Killing*

**7** Television Journalist of the Year:  
Andy Davies – *Channel 4 News*

**2** News Channel of the Year:  
Sky News

**5** Scoop of the Year: *Cambridge Analytica Uncovered* – *Channel 4 News*

**8** Independent Award: *Riding 'The Death Train' to America's border*

**3** News Coverage – Home and News Coverage – International:  
*Data, Democracy and Dirty Tricks* – *Channel 4 News*

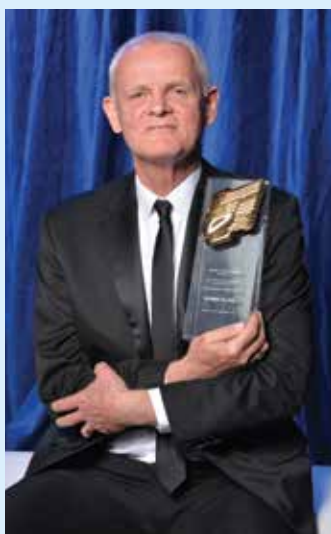
**6** Specialist Journalist of the Year:  
Chris Cook – *Newsnight*

**9** Young Talent of the Year: Anja Popp – *Channel 4 News*

All pictures: Richard Kendal

## Outstanding Achievement

### Robin Elias



Richard Kendal

‘There are many journalists working in newsrooms today who got their start in the business thanks to Robin Elias.

‘He’s retiring this year, after 38 years at ITN. Robin started as a copy taster on *ITV News* and ended up as acting editor. He edited *News at Ten* throughout the 1990s, with Trevor McDonald at the helm, including coverage of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and the 9/11 terror attacks.

‘As well as a stellar journalistic career, Elias was an early and passionate advocate of making newsrooms more diverse, by bringing in people who wouldn’t normally get a foot on the ladder of television journalism.

‘He is also one of the nicest people in TV news.’

See extended video highlights at: <https://bit.ly/2UsynAD>



Current Affairs – International:  
*Dispatches – Myanmar’s Killing Fields*

Channel 4

### Specialist Journalist of the Year

**Chris Cook – *Newsnight***

BBC Two

‘A terrier-like force of nature, Chris Cook built on years of forensic reporting in Whitehall and Westminster to expose a culture of bullying and harassment at the highest level of Parliament.’

**Nominees:**

**Michael Buchanan**, BBC News for BBC One

**Nima Elbagir**, CNN International

### Television Journalist of the Year

**Andy Davies – *Channel 4 News***

ITN for Channel 4

‘Not content with delivering a jaw-dropping exclusive that dominated the media for days on end, Andy Davies produced a succession of original and remarkable reports that told stories far beyond the normal news agenda. He did so with tenacity and grit, and compassion and modesty, too.’

**Nominees:**

**Clive Myrie**, BBC News for BBC One

**Orla Guerin**, BBC News for BBC One

### Independent Award

**Riding ‘*The Death Train*’ to America’s border – *Channel 4 News***

Pacha Films for Channel 4

‘Beautifully filmed with lovely narrative moments.... It showed powerfully, with real people, the impact of policy change, which is exactly what documentary journalism should be doing.’

**Nominees:**

**Panorama – *Can Violent Men***

**Change?**, Rogan Productions/BBC Panorama for BBC One

**Humam Husari – *ITV News***, ITN for ITV

### Young Talent of the Year

**Anja Popp – *Channel 4 News***

ITN for Channel 4

‘Her work has been quite extraordinary, both on and off camera.... Popp quite clearly has a massive career ahead of her.’

**Nominees:**

**Noel Phillips – *The Victoria Derbyshire Programme***, BBC Two

**Rishabh R Jain – *The Plight of the Rohingya***, The Associated Press ■

**RTS Futures** **Matthew Bell** learns how *Rugby Tonight* prepares when it takes the field for live transmission

**T**wo of the stars of BT Sport's *Rugby Tonight* took time out from rehearsals to offer advice to RTS Futures members taking a tour of the broadcaster's facilities in east London.

Working as an analyst, "your job is to tell the truth," said Austin Healey. "You've got to be honest if you're on television – people will spot a lie when they're at home watching."

After retiring from rugby more than a decade ago, Healey worked as a pundit for the BBC – and even hosted a short-lived ITV game show, *The Fuse* – before becoming a key member of BT Sport's rugby team, both as part of its live coverage and as a regular on *Rugby Tonight*. Hugely knowledgeable about the game, the former England international is known for his plain speaking and irreverent presenting style.

*Rugby Tonight* host Sarra Elgan has been working in TV sport for more than a decade. She is a rugby specialist who has also covered speedway for Sky Sports and football for CBBC.

Elgan offered encouragement to the RTS Futures members, particularly the women, that a career in broadcasting is more attainable than ever before. There are more opportunities now, she said, adding: "Years ago, when I started, you didn't see many women in sport."

RTS Futures visited BT



From left: Sarra Elgan and Austin Healey

Phil Lewis

## Feels like team spirit

Sport in early February at its HQ in the former 2012 Olympics International Broadcast Centre. As well as rugby, the broadcaster also covers Champions League and Premier League football, Australian cricket and women's tennis on its five sport channels.

"*Rugby Tonight* has stayed the course – it was there at the very beginning of BT Sport, in 2013," said *Rugby Tonight*'s executive producer, who is also the head of rugby at Sunset+Vine, Titus Hill. The production outfit produces 1,200 of hours of live coverage and magazine shows a year for BT Sport in a deal that runs to 2022.

Every Wednesday during the rugby union season, a production team of around

60 people strains every sinew to get the one-hour magazine show ready to go on air at 8:00pm.

A 12-hour day is the norm on a Wednesday, said Hill: "If you want to work in TV, you've got to be ready to work long days – you work until the job is done."

That week, the show included a discussion of the previous weekend's Six Nations action, a pre-recorded interview from England's training camp and the regular enthusiastic involvement of the amateur guest players – all in full kit – in the audience, who re-enacted key passages of play from matches.

*Rugby Tonight* is loose, almost anarchic, in style. In contrast to Sky's approach to sports

coverage, the show eschews high-end graphics and touch screens in favour of large blokes hitting tackle bags and – in that night's show – cross kicks aimed into a dustbin across the studio floor. It is, unapologetically, a fan's show, which is reflected in the make-up of the audience, who clearly knew their rucks from their mauls.

On the studio floor – Europe's biggest sports studio, no less – Donna Merritt was herding the audience from one item to another and constantly reminding them when to clap and holler.

"I'm the director's eyes and ears, and put in place on the floor what he or she wants from where they're sat in the gallery," she explained. "I ensure that shows run in order and to time."

Making TV, she said, is a team effort: "There is no one bigger than the show – you're all part of a team." ■

**THERE IS  
NO ONE  
BIGGER  
THAN THE  
SHOW**

## Salford offers tips and prizes

North West Centre

The University of Salford enjoyed a successful night at the North West Student Television Awards. Film-makers from the university won four of the main prizes – Animation, Comedy and Entertainment, News, and Short Feature – and another Salford student, Josh Davies, took home the Editing Craft award.

Manchester Metropolitan University students won the Drama and Camera awards, while the Factual award went to the University of Bolton. Manchester School of Art's Chelsea June Hicks won the Production Design award.

"It is so important to recognise the emerging talent in the industry," said Richard Frediani, Chair of the RTS North West Student Television Awards. "The winners and nominees this year demonstrated the exceptionally

high standard of work which continues to be produced across the North West."

The ceremony at the Lowry Theatre, Salford, in February was hosted by *Granada Reports* presenter Ann O'Connor and included an interview with Lucy Falton, who talked about playing Bethany Platt in *Coronation Street*.

Earlier in the day, RTS North West hosted an afternoon-long student media conference at the same venue. In the first session, "Spotlight on drama jobs", *Coronation Street* senior production manager Lee Rayner and Red Production Company script editor Laurie Kirkham offered insights into working in the genre.

They were followed by a panel from documentary-maker Title Role Productions, which discussed how to find



University of Bolton students won the Factual award

Claire Harrison

### RTS North West Student Television Awards winners

**Animation - Making a Meal of It** - Sean Jones, Cheryl Parker and Maria-Larisa Covaciu, University of Salford

**Comedy and Entertainment - Darryl Meets...** - Ellie Lightowler, University of Salford

**Drama - The Girlfriend Experience** - Harry James Coleman, Charlene Jones, Matt Towers, Benjamin Stott and Holly Chadwick, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Factual - A Question of Dignity** - Mark Scullion, Sharleigh Wood and

Nicolay Armanda, University of Bolton  
**News - A Testing Choice for Down's Syndrome** - Jennifer Smith, University of Salford

**Short Feature - Perception** - Samuel Hawkey, University of Salford

**Craft Skills - Camera - Near Wild Heaven** - Dan Thorburn, Dom Old, Maxwell Graham, Jonathan Bradshaw and Will Coldwell, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Craft Skills - Editing - Solace** - Josh Davies, University of Salford

**Craft Skills - Production Design Sound - Villifall** - Chelsea June Hicks, Manchester School of Art

## Universities divvy up awards between them

### RTS Yorkshire Student Television Awards winners

**Animation - The Animation** - Isaac Smith, University of York

**Drama - Argot** - Matteo Palmas, Millie Anderson, Willem Evans and Philip Schroeter, Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University

**Factual - The Swinging Life of Rochdale** - Joe Greenough and Holly Murphy, Leeds Trinity University

**News - At Arm's Length** - Teri Limongi, University of Sheffield

**Short Feature - Footfalls** - Hai Di Nguyen, Patrick Dunn, Ava Jenkinson and Massimiliano Borghesi, Northern Film School

**Craft Skills - Animation: Production Design - Fernweh** - Sarah McCarthy, Sheffield Hallam University

**Craft Skills - Animation: Sound**

**Tulip and Yannis** - Tobias Gavelle, Northern Film School

**Craft Skills - Drama: Camera - The Veil** - Sean Mackey, University of York

**Craft Skills - Production Design - Mater Mortem** - Maya Russell-Baines and Hope Phillips, Sheffield Hallam University

**Craft Skills - Factual: Camera and Sound - Resonance** - Oscar Whaley and Joe Georgiou, Sheffield Hallam University

**Craft Skills - News: Camera and Editing - Saunaman** - Andrew Burdett, University of Sheffield

**Craft Skills - Short Feature: Camera - Big Bad Wolf** - Owen Edwards and Darcy Farrant, University of York

**Craft Skills - Short Feature: Editor - Megan's Story** - Zoe Toase, York St John University

Yorkshire Centre

An audience of 250 saw the RTS Yorkshire Student Television Awards shared around the region's colleges at a ceremony held at Leeds College of Music in late February.

The University of York's Isaac Smith took home the Animation award for *The Animator*, which the judges praised as a "fantastic and entertaining short film that delivered everything it promised".

The Drama award went to a team from the Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University for *Argot*, an "imaginative and mature film with a brilliant central premise". Another group of

Northern Film School students won the Short Form prize for the "really impressive and evocative" *Footfalls*.

*The Swinging Life of Rochdale* – a film about a swingers club by Joe Greenough and Holly Murphy from Leeds Trinity University – took the Factual award. "The film gives unique access to a world we don't normally see and is filled with humour, warmth and great characters," said the judges.

The University of Sheffield's Teri Limongi won the News award for the "outstanding" *At Arm's Length*, about champion paraclimber Matthew Phillips.

"The awards once again demonstrated the burgeoning



programme contributors. The indie made Channel 5's *Manchester Terror Attack: In Their Own Words*, which won the Regional Story prize at last year's RTS North West Awards. When working with contributors, emphasised the panel, "be decent, upfront and transparent".

Tom Clarke from Manchester's Space Studios offered advice on how to bridge the gap between young people and employment, including apprenticeships. He also discussed opportunities at SharpFutures, a social enterprise that helps young people into employment in the creative sector. ITV's *Cold Feet* and Sky 1 street-racing drama *Curfew* are just two recent productions shot on Space Studios' stages.

The final session, on breaking into TV, covered a wide range of questions, from the technical aspects of production to CV writing. It was hosted by Margaret Burgin from ScreenSkills, the screen industries' skills body, and included panellists from the BBC Academy and factual indie Blakeway North.

**Matthew Bell**

talent within the region, with judges commending work for its originality, access and production values," said RTS Yorkshire Chair Fiona Thompson.

"It has been an evening of celebration, bringing students, graduates and staff from the region's higher education providers together to showcase their work."

Christine Talbot, co-anchor of ITV's regional news programme *Calendar* and the RTS Yorkshire Journalist of the Year in 2015, hosted the ceremony.

The Leeds-based indie Daisybeck Studios sponsored the RTS Yorkshire Student Television Awards.

**Matthew Bell**



# ITV walks to victory

**North East & the Border** Local comedian and writer Jason Cook hosted the RTS North East and the Border Awards, which attracted an audience of 400-plus – including *Vera* actors Brenda Blethyn and Kenny Doughty. The two stars of the ITV

cop show joined crime writer Ann Cleeves, whose books inspired the series, on stage to collect the RTS Judges' Award at the Hilton Newcastle-Gateshead in late February. Filming begins on *Vera*'s 10th season in Northumberland next month.

ITV Tyne Tees enjoyed success: *North East Tonight* received the News Programme award; weatherman Ross Hutchinson was named Presenter of the Year; and Tom Sheldrick took the award for Outstanding Journalism. ITV Tyne Tees and BBC North East & Cumbria were given special awards to mark 60 years of production.

ITV SignPost, which produces signed programmes for a range of broadcasters from studios in Gateshead, received the Centre Award from RTS CEO Theresa Wise. Giles Bowman from ITV SignPost was named Rising Star.

The BBC series about the lives of young people in care, *The Dumping Ground*, picked up two genre prizes: Drama and, for Kia Pegg, Drama Performance.

Dan Dewsbury's heart-warming documentary series for BBC Two about a former steel town, *The Mighty Redcar*, made by 72 Films, took the award for Broadcast Factual Production.

**Matthew Bell**

## RTS North East and the Border Awards winners

**Centre Award** - ITV SignPost

**Outstanding Contribution - Re:Production**

**Judges Award - Vera** - ITV Studios for ITV

**Drama - Long Form - The Dumping Ground** - CBBC

**Drama - Short Form - Blood Steel** - Cassini Films

**Drama Performance - Kia Pegg, The Dumping Ground** - CBBC

**Factual (Broadcast) - The Mighty Redcar** - 72 Films for BBC Two

**Factual (Non-broadcast) - Geordie Jazz Man** - Film Agogo

**News Programme - ITV News Tyne Tees**

**Outstanding Journalism - Tom Sheldrick** - ITV Tyne Tees

**Rising Star - Giles Bowman** - ITV SignPost

**Presenter of the Year - Ross Hutchinson** - ITV Tyne Tees

**Commercial - Shangri-La: A Festival of Chinese Flavours** - Third Aspect

**Photography - Chris Middis** - BBC North East & Cumbria

**Sound - The East Wing**

**Production Design - Patrick Bill, Vera** - ITV Studios for ITV

**Editing - Tom Strachan**

**Animation, Graphics and Titling - Arcus Animation Studios**

**Student Animation - The Boy and the Balloon** - Teeside University

**Student Comedy and Entertainment - Rebel Rebel** - University of Sunderland

**Student Drama - The Sycamore Gap** - Northumbria University

**Student Factual - NEPK - North East Parkour** - University of Sunderland

**Student News - Greek Unemployment** - University of Sunderland

**Student Short Form - Find Out** - Teeside University

**Craft Skills - Camera - It's Like Snowboarding but with Wheels** - University of Cumbria

**Craft Skills - Editing - NEPK - North East Parkour** - University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills - Production Design - Rebel Rebel** - Thomas Johnson, University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills - Sound - Flow - Freddie Gollins** - Newcastle University

**Craft Skills - Writing - The Sycamore Gap** - Lucy Rose Wilson-Green, Northumbria University

## Bristol hosts media law workshop

**West of England** Abbas Media Law's Clare Hoban and Paul Schaefer offered useful advice on filming access documentaries at a Bristol workshop organised by Bristol Media and RTS West of England in February.

The two lawyers looked at the contractual, legal and regulatory issues that can crop up in this genre of films that require access to institutions such as hospitals or communities – including data protection, defamation and advice on drafting access agreements. They also tackled other thorny issues, such as police requests for rushes and contributors withdrawing consent.

"We thoroughly enjoyed meeting the programme-makers. We left in no doubt that Bristol is a thriving TV production hub," said Hoban.

"Often, programme-makers have to head to London for this kind of expertise, so it's great to be able to offer workshops in Bristol," said Alli Nicholas, Bristol Media membership manager. A copyright workshop with Abbas Media Law is planned for May.

**Suzy Lambert**

# Tranter calls for funding



*A Discovery of Witches*

Sky

**Wales Centre** The Welsh Government should stop "throwing money" at short-term ventures by producers from outside Wales and instead invest in home-based companies. This was the hard-hitting message from Jane Tranter, who gave the RTS Cymru Wales annual lecture in February.

The co-founder of Cardiff-based indie Bad Wolf, which makes global productions such as the upcoming BBC series *His Dark Materials* and Sky 1's *A Discovery of Witches*, questioned the wisdom of Welsh Government policy to

offer better terms to external companies than to Wales-based producers.

Speaking to a 200-plus audience at Cardiff University's School for Journalism, Media and Culture, Tranter called for a joint strategy involving both industry and the Government to ensure the sustainability of production houses and supply-chain companies in Wales.

Referring to the Welsh Government's "economic multiplier" investment criteria, she said: "I'm not sure I know of any other studio or production company who would have

taken those terms, but we did. We decided to base ourselves in Wales, even though we could have had much better terms elsewhere.

"It does make you question whether it is right that, as a nation, we should be offering better terms and incentives to some of those productions who head across the Severn Bridge for a short time – film and then pack up and go – than we do to our home-grown industry?"

"[The] Government needs to stop throwing money at 'new' short-term ventures and should instead double-down and invest in the foundations we've all already built here.

"Bad Wolf is committed to Wales and if taking on more challenging terms... is what we need to do, we'll gladly do it. But in return, we need help in growing the workforce and training the next generation.

"My plea tonight would be for [the] Government to bring together a group of sensible people from the creative sector – indigenous and based in Wales – to sit around a table, to discuss future skill needs, to map out the training requirements over the next decade and to work out a bespoke package for delivering it."

**Huw Rossiter**

## Irish centre visits hit RTÉ dancing show

**Republic of Ireland** RTS Republic of Ireland made a second visit to the set of RTÉ's *Dancing with the Stars* at the Ardmore Film Factory in Bray, Co Wicklow, in February. The Irish version of the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, which is made by ShinAwiL, is in its third series.

A team of 120-150 people

is involved in the production of the two-hour live broadcast, which has been compared to producing a Eurovision Song Contest every week for 12 weeks.

During the tour, a huge construction team was putting together the set on the studio floor, which included a 270° video wall, as well as

platforms to hold an audience of 300.

The RTS centre first visited the production in March 2018.

■ A few days later, at RTÉ in Dublin, TV designer Patrick Molloy offered some revealing thoughts on the creative process. "Creativity generally involves crossing the boundaries of domains, which are

sometimes connected by adjacent areas of knowledge," he argued in a wide-ranging presentation.

Molloy worked in RTÉ's design department across all television genres. He also lectured in production design and art direction at IADT Dun Laoghaire.

**Charles Byrne**

## ONLINE at the RTS

■ The RTS Television Journalism Awards are a highlight in our calendar. This year, the digital team went backstage to interview the winners about their work. Our video with *Newsnight*'s Emily Maitlis, who was named Network Presenter of the Year, has had 120,000 views on Twitter alone. You can watch the extended highlights of the night at [www.rts.org.uk/TVJ2019Highlights](http://www.rts.org.uk/TVJ2019Highlights).

■ Ahead of the awards, Kate Holman met the nominees for the Young Talent of the Year award. It went to *Channel 4 News*'s Anja Popp, who has produced and reported a range of stories, including that of Lindy Louise Pring, who died while living rough in Cardiff. Popp spoke about how newsrooms benefit from having younger journalists and the responsibility she feels to the people she meets ([www.rts.org.uk/AnjaPopp](http://www.rts.org.uk/AnjaPopp)).

■ Associated Press journalist Rishabh R Jain, who has reported extensively on the Rohingya refugee crisis, was also nominated for the award. Jain, who is based on AP's South Asia desk in New Delhi, took several trips to Bangladesh to hear the stories of people who had been forced from their homes. He discusses his work at [www.rts.org.uk/RishabhRJain](http://www.rts.org.uk/RishabhRJain).

■ Fellow nominee Noel Phillips decided he wanted to become a journalist after seeing Sir Trevor McDonald on *News at Ten*. As a youngster, he would mute the TV, use Teletext as his autocue and pretend to host the news. Today, he is a reporter on BBC Two's *Victoria Derbyshire*, where he says it is important to show your human side to help interviewees open up. Find out more at [www.rts.org.uk/NoelPhillips](http://www.rts.org.uk/NoelPhillips).  
**Pippa Shawley**



BBC

# New channel to back youth

**Scotland Centre** Donalda MacKinnon pledged that the new BBC Scotland channel will “reflect modern Scotland”. The Director of BBC Scotland was giving RTS Scotland’s 2019 Campbell Swinton lecture, “Changing times for the BBC and PSB”, in February.

The Director of BBC Scotland was talking before the launch of BBC Scotland on 24 February. “Our new BBC Scotland service will create more than 900 hours of original content every year on a channel that will be confident and outward-looking and which will reflect modern Scotland,” said MacKinnon. She claimed this marked a “huge increase” on the current levels of content.

“The launch of our channel will shape the BBC in Scotland for the next generation. True to our public service values, my hope is that the channel will play a key

role in achieving a more creative, more distinctive, more personalised BBC in Scotland,” said MacKinnon.

Younger audiences are a major focus for the new channel. MacKinnon said there was a need in traditional broadcasting for “younger role models who looked and sounded like they lived in contemporary Scotland”.

The BBC’s Glasgow-based digital platform, The Social, which launched in December 2015, has given a voice to young film-makers in Scotland. MacKinnon said: “I would expect to see talent from The Social appearing on our new channel.”

She added: “If [the channel] doesn’t look, sound and act like its audience, [it] risks becoming irrelevant.”

Turning to news, MacKinnon discussed BBC Scotland’s new 60-minute programme, *The Nine*, which will be made at Pacific Quay

in Glasgow. She promised: news “with a distinctly Scottish prism. Robust news coverage from a Scottish public broadcaster is now more vital than ever. In a digital world, one increasingly filled with user-generated content, it can be difficult to determine what is true and what is not.”

MacKinnon joined the BBC in 1987 and became Director of BBC Scotland in late 2016, the first woman to hold the top BBC job in Scotland.

Last year, at the request of Director-General Tony Hall, she produced a report, “Making the BBC a great workplace for women”, whose 30-plus recommendations have been endorsed.

Turning to equality issues, MacKinnon said that the BBC has been looking at new ways of “finding the best talent” for the new channel “and making sure that, when hiring, managers think they’re looking through the window [and] not just actually looking in the mirror”.

The RTS lecture is given in honour of Scottish electrical engineer and television pioneer Alan Archibald Campbell Swinton. It was hosted by BBC Scotland at Pacific Quay.

**Matthew Bell**

# Record field for Bristol awards

**West of England**  
The universities of Gloucestershire and the West of England won two main awards each at the West of England Student Television Awards at Bristol's Everyman Cinema.

*Memories of Mother*, made by a team of students from the University of Gloucestershire, won the Factual award and was praised by the judges as a “brave” and “beautifully shot and edited” film.

Gloucestershire students dominated the Comedy and Entertainment category: a bittersweet love story, *Delicious Love*, won the prize, while the musical *Dearly Departed* was highly commended.

The University of the West of England notched up wins in Animation with Efa Blossie Mason’s “quirky, creative and funny” *Earthly Delights* and *Nose* in the Short Form category, which the judges



Comedy and Entertainment winner *Delicious Love*

described as “deceptively simple and very engaging”. Bath Spa University took

home the Drama prize with a horror film, *Figurehead*, which the judges said showed “a great understanding of genre rules and structures, and was well written and well acted”.

At the ceremony, Mike Gunton, creative director of the BBC’s Natural History Unit, spoke to students about how to use creative storytelling to engage audiences.

Gunton is the executive producer of the landmark documentary *Planet Earth II*.

RTS West of England received the most entries ever to its student awards this year. The Craft awards awarded are listed on the left.

**Matthew Bell**

## RTS West of England Student Television Awards winners

**Animation** - *Earthly Delights* - Efa Blossie-Mason, UWE

**Comedy and Entertainment**

*Delicious Love* - Alana Volavola, Macaulay Jones, Freddie Berman, Ben Holmes, Jade Elwood, Amey King, Kate Goulding, Kate Seninde, Jaffer Adams and Sophie Masterman, UoG

**Drama** - *Figurehead* - Rhys Ashton Tucker, Tommi Floor, George Cheshire, Jack Yeomans, Tyler Kerrick Blake, Macaulay Waran-Sanders, Bath Spa University

**Factual** - *Memories of Mother* - Joana Amado Simões, James Hargreaves, Tom Moreton, Emily Bracken, Mathilda Strahl, and Jade Leppä, UoG

**Short Form** - *Nose* - Kiki Nafiq, Izzy Mooney, Emma Lazenby, Jake Lucas, Poppy Young, Hugh Cowling and Laura Izzard, UWE

## Animation Craft Skills

**Achievement in Animation** - *Shipwrecked* - Sabrina Marengo, Manurinder Sandhu, Duncan Gilbertson, UWE

**Music** - *GoatHead* - Stylianos Tsioupros, UWE

**Production Design** - *Earthly Delights* - Efa Blossie-Mason, UWE

## Comedy and Entertainment Craft Skills

**Camera** - *Dearly Departed* - Elliot Howarth, UoG

**Editing** - *Delicious Love* - Sophie Masterman UoG

**Music** - *Dearly Departed* - Demi Mariner and Robbie Cavanagh, UoG - *Mansa Musa Riddim* - D-Red, UWE

**Production Design** - *Dearly Departed* - Montana Allaway-North, UoG - *Delicious Love* - Jade Elwood, UoG

## Drama Craft Skills

**Camera** - *Girl* - Jacob Crow-Mains, UWE - *Anamnesis* - James D Chanter, UoG

**Directing** - *Leah* - Louis Reeves, UoG

**Editing** - *Anamnesis* - Sophie Masterman, UoG

**Sound** - *Anamnesis* - Becky Millington, UoG

**Writing** - *Figurehead* - Tommi Floor, Bath Spa University

## Factual Craft Skills

**Camera** - *The Shell Line of Shingle Street* - Samuel Marino - Screenology - *Regina* - Jake Smith, UWE

**Camera and Lighting** - *The Appearance Score* - Mathis van den Berg, U of Bristol

**Editing** - *Memories of Mother* - Mathilda Strahl, UoG - *Cheer* - Will Evans, UoG

**Sound** - *Cheer* - Nikola Jurčáková, UoG

**Writing** - *Memories of Mother* - Joana Amado Simões, UoG

## Short Form Craft Skills

**Sound** - *51* - Emily Wiles, UWE

**Writing** - *Nose* - Izzy Mooney and Kiki Nafiq, UWE



Paul Hampartsoumian

Comedy and Entertainment winner *Chopsticks!!*

# London students tackle taboos

**London Centre**  
The winners of London’s Student Awards in February came from all parts of the capital. “The standard of entries for 2019 was very high – several jurors said that you could ‘broadcast that tomorrow’ about many of the films we watched,” said the Chair of the awards Aradhna Tayal.

“Many seized the opportunity to use their work as a means of challenging and addressing real-life taboo topics. The jurors were in agreement that the entries demonstrated the ways in which art can be both important and meaningful.”

Middlesex University’s Aeddán Sussex won the

The University of South Wales achieved a clean sweep of the student categories at the RTS Cymru Awards in early February.

The awards also saw the launch of two Industry Awards to recognise the work of individuals in behind-the-camera roles at the start of their television careers.

Both awards went to ITV Cymru Wales employees. Production specialist Ellis Clark received the Newcomer award, with the jury stating that he “had clearly mastered impressive skills in a very short time”.

Journalist Siân Thomas was presented with the Industry Breakthrough award, which is awarded to TV talent with a minimum of two years’ experience in the industry and at least one on-screen credit.

“The Newcomer and Industry Breakthrough awards celebrate the rising stars of the TV industry in Wales. We saw evidence of real passion, commitment and initiative, and I’m sure our winners have a bright future ahead of them,” said RTS Wales Chair Judith Winnan.

Capital FM South Wales breakfast presenters Matt Lissack and Polly James



## Wales backs talent

hosted the ceremony at the University of South Wales.

In the student categories, *Dogs in the Apocalypse* won the Animation award, while the Comedy and Entertainment prize went to *Keith Barry John. Faruq* won the Drama prize and *Mathew vs Pritchard* the Factual prize.

The awards jury also awarded four Craft awards, two of which – Cameo and Production Design – were won by Kerby Ng for his work on the drama, *A Table For*. The Sound prize went to Connor Law Twigg for *Maggie’s Farm*, while Vratislav Karas took the Editing award for *Mathew vs Pritchard*.

“It’s always such a thrill and an honour to celebrate the creativity and technical prowess of students in Wales. We are getting a glimpse of the film-makers and crafts people of tomorrow – the people who will shape television in

the future,” said Winnan.

The awards recognise work created by students attending higher education institutions and, for the first time, further education courses in Wales.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS Wales Student Television Awards winners

**Industry Award – Newcomer-** Ellis Clark • ITV Cymru Wales

**Industry Award – Breakthrough-** Siân Thomas • ITV Cymru Wales

**Student Awards**

**Animation-** *Dogs in the Apocalypse* • Eirian Davies, Benjamin Borrow and Kevin Macleod, University of South Wales

**Comedy and Entertainment-** *Keith Barry John* • Angus Martin, Yat Fung Leung and Jessica Hayes, USW

**Drama-** *Faruq* • Preston Kevan, Ben Warman, Paige Bickham and Holly Thomas, USW

**Factual-** *Mathew vs Pritchard* • Jake Hardy-Behrendt, Ethan Brooks, Vratislav Karas and Marketa Janouskova, USW

**Craft Skills – Camera and Production Design-** *A Table For* • Kerby Ng, USW

**Craft Skills – Editing-** *Mathew vs Pritchard* • Vratislav Karas, USW

**Craft Skills – Sound-** *Maggie’s Farm* • Connor Law Twigg, USW

Comedy and Entertainment category for the second year running, this time for *Chopsticks!!*. “The story-telling was excellent with a really nice twist at the end, which was sublime,” said the judges.

*Just Josie*, “a heart-warming, professional piece”, said the judges, won the Drama prize for University of Westminster students. Kingston University’s Matthew Armitage took the Animation award for *Brass*, which the judges commended for its “subversive” style and “unconventional narrative”. They also appreciated the “thoughtful

use of colours and excellent exploration of sound”.

Students from London Metropolitan University took home the Factual prize for *Waiting For Tomorrow*, a film about survivors of rape that offered “raw, powerful testimonies”.

The Short Form award went to Sam W Buffery for *I Love Tennis*. The London South Bank University student also won the Editing award. The other Craft Award winners are shown above.

Julia Hardy, the presenter of BBC Radio 1’s *The Gaming Show*, hosted the ceremony at

### RTS London Student Television Awards winners

**Animation-** *Brass* • Matthew Armitage, Kingston University

**Comedy and Entertainment-** *Chopsticks!!* • Aedden Sussex, Middlesex University

**Drama-** *Just Josie* • Georgina Rowlands, Ben Porra, Katia Shipulina, Lily-Evelina England, Nathalie Carraro and team, University of Westminster

**Factual-** *Waiting for Tomorrow* • Rachel Kaden, Lewis O’Loughlin, Luke Hallett and Thomas Brazier, London Metropolitan University

**Short Form-** *I Love Tennis* • Sam W

Buffery, London South Bank University

**Craft Skills – Camera-** *Paul Is Dead* • Harry Green, University of the Arts London

**Craft Skills – Editing-** *I Love Tennis* • Sam W Buffery, London South Bank University

**Craft Skills – Production Design-** *Chopsticks!!* • Jonathan Hayden Tang, Middlesex University

**Craft Skills – Sound-** *Feed Your Demons* • Nathan Da Conceicao, Mateo Donoghue and Liam Ilife, University of Westminster

**Craft Skills – Writing-** *Queen of the Forest* • Gabriela Sibilska, Goldsmiths, University of London

Channel 4. “We thank Channel 4 for its sponsorship and for offering us such an iconic venue for the evening. It is

greatly appreciated,” said RTS London Chair Daniel Cherowbrier.

**Matthew Bell**

# OFF MESSAGE

**T**he RTS Television Journalism Awards are always a thrilling occasion. Last month's ceremony was no exception. And what a night for Channel 4, triumphant in a record-breaking eight categories.

*Channel 4 News* deservedly won Scoop of the Year for its agenda-setting *Cambridge Analytica Uncovered* investigation. This was an example of public service investigative journalism at its very best. The victory was all the more sweet for coming at a time when this kind of reporting is threatened on several fronts.

■ **Some things never change.** Sky News, now owned by Comcast, was voted News Channel of the Year for the second year running and the 12th time overall, an extraordinary achievement.

Sky News's founders should be proud of what the station continues to achieve on an almost daily basis.

■ Other things do change, thankfully, as the night's host, ITN's Mary Nightingale, told the audience at the beginning of proceedings.

"Things have changed since I last hosted this event," she said. "I'm looking out at you all and I see a lot more women – and women with influence."

■ **Talking of influential women,** one of the night's most popular winners was *Newsnight*'s Emily Maitlis, who walked away with the Network Presenter of the Year prize.

An award for her steely interviewing style was long overdue. Now that

**Evan Davis is skilfully presenting Radio 4's *PM*, Emily's encounters with the powerful remain a good reason to stay up and watch the BBC Two current affairs flagship.**

**For those of you who missed the *Newsnight* presenter's cameo in the first episode of the new Alan Partridge series, do take a look soonest.**

■ Congratulations also to ITN's Nina Hossain, winner of the Nations and Regions Presenter prize for the second consecutive year.

The doughty Hossain, who once described being mugged on the way to work as "no big deal", is a stand-out news anchor and someone likely to win more awards to add to her growing tally.

■ **Staying with the topic of news,** *Off Message* was delighted to be invited to a press briefing arranged by the World Service's BBC Persian TV. The host was the redoubtable John Simpson.

Harassment of Iranian journalists employed by the service, especially women, continues to be a chronic and deeply worrying problem. People such as senior presenter Rana Rahimpour are daily subjected to online abuse.

Even more alarming, perhaps, is how the Iranian authorities harass the reporters' families by such tactics as confiscating their passports and freezing assets.

Tarik Kafala, controller of languages, said the situation latterly had become "very grave". As result, the BBC is appealing to the UN to apply pressure on Iran to stop what it claims is a campaign of intimidation.

Iran began targeting BBC Persian TV following the disputed 2009

presidential election, when Tehran accused foreign powers of interference. Tellingly, while the Iranian authorities accuse the BBC of telling lies, relatives of BBC journalists who work for the channel are regarded by locals as celebrities.

■ *Off Message* was intrigued to see the much-trailed BritBox finally firmed up. On the other side of the Atlantic, the North American version of the platform has, in two years, built an audience of 500,000 subscribers, each paying around £5 a month.

The UK edition of BritBox is promising original bespoke content, but the treasures in the BBC and ITV archives ought to be enough on their own to secure a loyal following for the service.

We wish BritBox well and look forward to discovering who will be appointed to run it.

■ **As every football fan knows,** these are exciting times to be a Norwich City fan. The team, owned by a certain celebrity TV chef, is riding high in the Championship.

It is not only the beautiful game that is putting the East Anglian capital on the map. A native of the city, Olivia Colman, is having an extraordinarily good run, even by her own high standards.

A recent Oscar winner for her mesmerising performance as Queen Anne in *The Favourite*, the actor is also lighting up screens playing alongside Phoebe Waller-Bridge in *Fleabag*.

To think, later this year, Colman will be seen cast as another British Queen, when Netflix's *The Crown* explores the Swinging Sixties and turbulent 1970s.



# RTS PATRONS

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