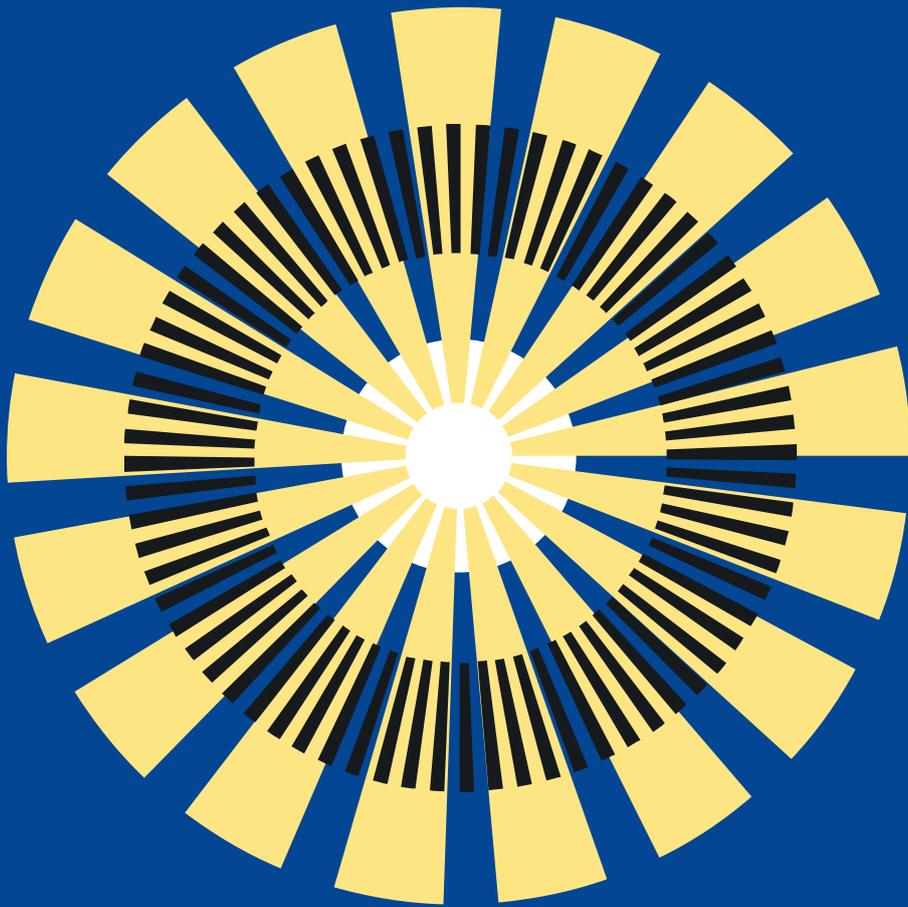


October 2021

Television

Broadcast Britain



RTS CAMBRIDGE CONVENTION 2021



Image: Barbara Blake-Hannah, the first black female reporter on British television, who worked on Thames Television's *Today*, in 1968
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George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is now in its 21st year.

Application procedure

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From the CEO



This was always going to be a very special Cambridge Convention, marking, as it did, our first gathering as a sector since the March 2020 lockdown. Yet Cambridge 2021 exceeded expectations and, weeks later, its impact is still being felt. So, first of all, I'd like to thank the brilliant Ben McOwen Wilson for being such an accomplished Cambridge Chair and for helping to organise the Convention in record time. Ben was also a deeply knowledgeable and empathetic session chair. It was also

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Editor
Steve Clarke
smclarke_333@hotmail.com
News editor and writer
Matthew Bell
bell127@btinternet.com

**Production, design
and advertising**
Gordon Jamieson
gordon.jamieson.01@gmail.com



marvellous to hear from Gareth Southgate and the Clintons.

It was so good to have Ofcom's Melanie Dawes, BBC Chair Richard Sharp and Sky CEO Dana Strong all make their Cambridge debuts. Thanks to them and to all the speakers.

Huge thanks to Helen Scott for her peerless editorial brain. She always delivers. I'm grateful, too, to all the session producers, especially to Sue Robertson and Martin Scott, who jointly produced seven sessions.

I'd also like to thank all the panellists and the chairs, and our hilarious

after-dinner speaker, Omid Djalili. It's invidious to single out sessions, but I believe this was the first time that Cambridge had ever devoted entire sessions to disability and to workplace bullying. These topics are certain to remain at the forefront of industry debate in the months ahead.

This bumper edition of *Television* reports on all 20 sessions, plus the video contributions by writers and other creatives on what Britishness means to them.

I was delighted to see the RTS Bursary Scholars at Cambridge. Thank

you to the bursary scheme's ambassador, BBC journalist Ashley John-Baptiste, for speaking to the students at a special dinner.

With our autumn programme already under way, we have reports from physical RTS awards ceremonies in Bristol and Leeds. I hope to see many more of you again soon.

Theresa Wise

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Sub-editor
Sarah Bancroft
smbancroft@me.com
Photographer
Richard Kendal
mail@richardkendal.com

Royal Television Society
3 Dorset Rise
London EC4Y 8EN
T: 020 7822 2810
E: info@rts.org.uk
W: www.rts.org.uk

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 YouTube Originals

THE
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KACHINGWE

MIGUEL

AMANDA
SEALES

NCUTI
GATWA

LEIGH-ANNE
PINNOCK

JIDENNA

MARSAI
MARTIN

NIKO
OMILANA

WATCH NOW

TV diary



I still experience that “back to school” feeling in September, even though my daughters have long since finished their education. This year, it’s magnified as life starts returning to some kind of normal after months of Covid constraints.

I’ll be going to my first industry event for nearly two years, the RTS Convention in Cambridge. I’ve missed the buzz and energy of being in the same room with people, so I am feeling quite exhilarated.

My social life is ramping up, too. At the first party I go to, everyone ends up crowded around the TV to watch Emma Raducanu win the US Open.

■ Thanks to Channel 4, the match was available free to air, yet – once again, the threat of privatisation is hanging over the organisation. Along with many others, I’m concerned about the repercussions this may have.

At The Grierson Trust, we’re putting in a submission to the DCMS consultation focusing on the positive impact Channel 4 has on the documentary genre, not just through innovation and the range of docs it commissions, but also via its commitment to new talent and backing for smaller, out-of-London indies and diversity.

The deadline of 14 September is at our busiest time as we’re in the middle of judging for this year’s Grierson Awards. We’ve got two special awards to decide on – the coveted Trustees’ Award and our new Hero of the Year, which celebrates someone who works tirelessly behind the scenes but rarely gets recognition.

There are a few strong contenders and passions run high but, eventually,

Lorraine Heggessey enjoys being out and about again – but a missed train reminds her that Zoom has its compensations

we agree on two standout winners. Next day, I’m off to Cambridge.

■ Infuriatingly, the Addison Lee I’d pre-booked fails to turn up and I dash to the Tube instead – the very thing I’d been trying to avoid as I don’t fancy being rammed in a train with maskless, rush-hour passengers.

I miss my train at King’s Cross by one minute, but bump into Warner Bros chief Polly Cochrane, who’d had the same experience. I’d forgotten what this kind of stress is like. Zoom definitely has some advantages.

■ Channel 4 dominates the chatter at Cambridge, not least because, first, Oliver Dowden and, then, John Whittingdale are reshuffled. What does it mean now that the drivers of this proposal have gone?

Can we read anything into the fact that Nadine Dorries’s most public

involvement with broadcasting to date has been an appearance on *I’m a Celebrity...?*

■ On day two, I chair a discussion on the impact SVoDs are having on the sector. Representatives from Netflix and leading producers All3Media, Voltage and BBC Studios are on stage.

Everyone welcomes the opportunities the streamers have brought to the UK, even though indies are having to adapt their business model as they tend to lose all rights. Most are still heavily reliant on commissions from the PSBs, but a shift is starting to occur.

■ Back to London and various meetings with companies in Channel 4’s Growth Fund. We’ve got a portfolio of 15 indies now; eight are out of London, five have ethnically diverse leadership, and six have female founders. It’s another way Channel 4 puts its profits back into the sector. I love working with such a range of talented creative people and using my experience to help them flourish.

■ The following week, I’m on a Media Society panel discussing Channel 4 again. Sky’s former COO Andrew Griffith MP was going to put the case for privatisation, but he’s just been appointed as the Prime Minister’s PPS so can’t take part, and David Elstein takes his place.

I’m somewhat cheered up by the fact that David is very pessimistic about the chances of the privatisation going ahead after the changes at DCMS. We can but hope...

Lorraine Heggessey is Chair of The Grierson Trust and an external advisor to the Channel 4 Growth Fund.

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WORKING LIVES

Director of photography

BBC

Vigil

Director of photography **Matt Gray** won an RTS Craft & Design Award for his cinematography on BBC One's harrowing child sex abuse drama *Three Girls*. Showing admirable versatility, he is also responsible for the visual look of the same channel's hit submarine thriller *Vigil*.

What does the job involve?

Working closely with the director, production designer and all the creative team to create the visual world and help "frame" the point of view of the story to engage the audience.

Sometimes that can be a dynamic world such as *Vigil*; at other times it can be utilising a more sensitive visual aesthetic to create an emotional engagement, as with *Three Girls*.

When filming starts, my camera crew and I have to bring the visual look we've discussed into reality. My

role doesn't extend to the edit suite, but I rejoin the project for the colour grading, working with a colourist.

What is the balance between technical know-how and artistic flair?

You need creativity and an artistic eye, but you also have to be a bit of a geek. The learning curve of a cinematographer or director of photography (DoP) is all about grappling with the technicalities of lighting, colour temperatures and lenses, but there comes a point when this becomes second nature.

What were your visual influences for *Vigil*?

The script took me back to 1990s action films such as *The Hunt for Red October* and *Crimson Tide*. I also looked at *Alien* and other confined dramas, where the vessel itself becomes a character.

How did you become a DoP?

I went to a comprehensive school in Torquay, where I enjoyed drama. I then went on to the local technical college where I took a BTEC which involved photography and art. I got into Newport Film School, where I met like-minded people and fell in love with film-making. I landed a job at Magpie Film Productions in Birmingham and began as a cameraman in news and then documentaries, which was an amazing grounding, not only in the technical aspects of the job, but also in how to tell human stories. For me, it's all about the narrative – I always wanted to be a storyteller.

Do you have a favourite documentary?

A programme I worked on for the BBC with documentary film-maker >

› Chris Morris about the Aberfan disaster, *An American in Aberfan*.

How did you break into drama?

I shot a short film with the director Tom Vaughan and through that met producer Christine Langan who was then working at Granada Television. I started working on some of their dramas: the first was the 2000 David Nicholls romantic comedy *I Saw You*, directed by Tom, and then I went on to do *Cold Feet*.

What dramas are you most proud of?

I've worked with so many talented directors. I really enjoyed working with Marc Munden on *The Mark of Cain*, John Alexander on *White Heat* and Philippa Lowthorpe on *Three Girls*. *Liar* and the first series of *Broadchurch*, too, with James Strong.

What do you bring to work with you?

I have a little viewfinder to frame shots, a digital light meter, which fits on top of my phone, and an iPad with all my visual references and script notes.

Are there any tricks of the trade you can share with us?

Listening doesn't feel like a cinematographer's tool but I like a quiet, calm set so I can listen. You can learn so much from listening to a director giving a note to an actor, or from a performer delivering a line. I also don't watch any television when I'm filming, so I can keep the story that we're telling in my head. If I do, the danger is that you can start to doubt some of your choices.



Three Girls

BBC

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The joy of working with talented people is the best part; the worst are the long hours of the work.

How has the job changed since you started?

The ambition of dramas is bigger – something like *Vigil* has to sit within a modern media landscape where the streamers are spending millions and millions on series.

What that money can buy you, as well as increased production value and a more expensive cast, is more time and the chance as a DoP to let your imagination fly.

What advice would you give to someone who has decided that they

want to become a cinematographer?

The first thing I say to my trainees is to produce work – make films. There are two journeys you go on: one is actually getting into the industry; the other is an internal journey, which is about developing your eye and your voice.

You don't want to reach the point when your voice can be heard, and you open your mouth and find nothing comes out. You have to decide what it is you like visually and hone your storytelling skills – they need to be nurtured.

Which cinematographers do you admire?

I'm a big fan of Vittorio Storaro's work on films such as *Apocalypse Now* – I love his use of colour. I've been following [Coen brothers collaborator] Roger Deakins' work for years – he's a good template for someone who wants to visually and emotionally engage with an audience.

Dutch cinematographer Robby Müller is another, but they are three among many that I like.

Are there any new genres you'd like to work in?

I enjoy watching science fiction so I'd like to try that – I really liked Danny Boyle's film *Sunshine*. But I was given a great piece of advice years ago, which was to work with good people on good projects. That's always guided me in choosing projects. ■

Matt Gray BSC was interviewed by Matthew Bell. The cinematographer is represented by Casarotto Ramsay.



The Mark of Cain

Film4



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Broadcast Britain

Reshaping Britishness on the global stage



RTS

In a stirring session that set the scene for the 2021 RTS Cambridge Convention, the event's Chair, Ben McOwen Wilson, encouraged his audience to face up to the biggest challenges to the British television ecosystem. These included the audience shift to digital, the power of the streamers and the problems of how to represent Britishness accurately on the screen, both to UK audiences and overseas.

First, he reflected on the unique difficulties the industry had faced over the past 18 months – including production limitations, budget impacts and the audience's need to be informed, entertained and educated in new ways. He paid tribute to the creativity and invention we have all seen in response to the pandemic.

As YouTube's Managing Director, UK and Ireland, McOwen Wilson was swift to point out that such creativity stretched far beyond the reach of traditional television, citing such success stories on his own platform as: Joe Wicks's daily fitness videos, which reached millions each morning during the first lockdown; Jay's Virtual Pub Quiz, which has gone out live every Thursday evening since March 2020; and National Theatre at Home.

'Embrace change,' urges RTS Convention Chair Ben McOwen Wilson

McOwen Wilson told his Cambridge audience: "I'm incredibly proud of how the UK's YouTube creators responded. National Theatre at Home's high-quality streamed performances reached a bigger audience in the six weeks they ran than they had in 10 years of National Theatre Live."

Speaking a few days after Emma Raducanu's triumph at the US Open, watched by a Saturday-night audience of 9.2 million on Channel 4, McOwen Wilson remarked that live viewing remained a key and highly valued audience offering. Nevertheless, he said, all those weeks of national lockdown had only accelerated the continuing shift to online and on-demand viewing. He noted that "PSB channels enjoyed a brief respite, reaching 2014 levels for a couple of months [but,] across the course of 2020, it was only the 55-plus audiences that experienced any meaningful turnaround to the decade-long trend.

"And, when looking at time spent, under-35s now prefer non-traditional

sources such as YouTube, Netflix and Amazon, or their games consoles, almost two to one, compared with traditional TV sources in all of their guises [see chart 1 on page 11]. Even when looking at the total population, SVoD and YouTube account for almost a third of all viewing on our television sets, quite aside from time spent with these services on mobiles or tablets."

On the subject of streamers, and with new platforms HBO Max, Paramount+ and Peacock shortly to arrive on our shores, McOwen Wilson mentioned a catalogue of challenges they bring to the British industry, including increased content costs and the issue of securing and retaining talent, as well as more competition.

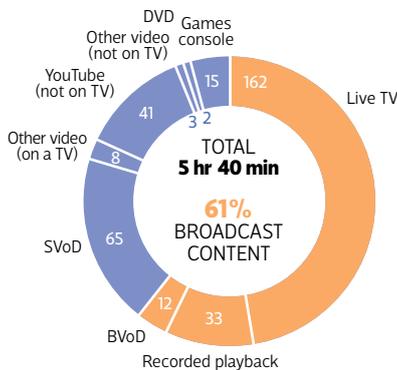
He added, however, that these deep-pocketed players were also responsible for many UK-produced shows: "Their massive efforts at UK secondary rights acquisitions and stellar, and often lucrative, productions mean that Amazon's 5,000 hours of UK-produced shows and Netflix's 3,000 hours sit comfortably alongside the 7,000 that BritBox has, or the 9,000 that all of the iPlayer accounts for." (See chart 2 on page 11.)

With the question of the privatisation of Channel 4 looming over this

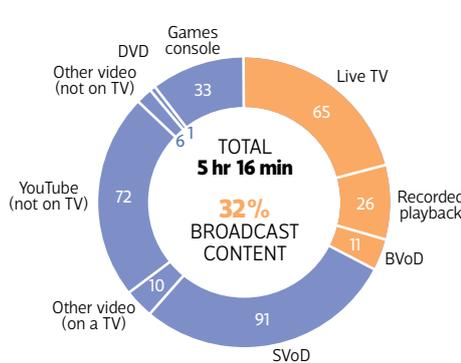
1 How we watch: younger vs older audiences

Average daily minutes of viewing

All individuals, all devices, 2020



16-34s, all devices, 2020



Source: Ofcom Media Nations: UK 2021

year's Convention, McOwen Wilson encouraged all participants to take a broad view on the topic: "We should not allow a single issue to define this debate, nor allow it to become insular and parochial – our challenges are global."

He sought to assure his audience of the benefits of regulation: "The UK success has been that of the ecosystem, one that has been preserved through careful pruning and shaping of regulation around the UK's PSB system."

And he cited the introduction of the codes of practice in the 2003 Communications Act to make way for terms of trade, "without which, the production sector we see today would never have flourished".

Demonstrating how the only constant is change, McOwen Wilson looked back on his own two decades in the industry, from first attending the RTS Convention in 1999 when, he remembered, "I heard culture secretary Chris Smith set out his vision for a neat transition from analogue to digital".

And he recounted his time working at ITV in the noughties, sitting down with Ashley Highfield, then the BBC's director of future media and technology, and sketching out on "the back of a napkin at Soho House" plans for Kangaroo, a joint venture for on-demand collaboration between BBC, ITV and Channel 4, "at a time when the iPhone hadn't been released, and Netflix was probably still sending out DVDs".

Regarding the theme of this year's Convention, "Broadcast Britain: Reshaping Britishness on the global stage", McOwen Wilson identified three main threads of thought – Britishness, representation in our talent

and the positivity of opportunity. The first, he suggested, was a huge opportunity to explore what Britishness meant in 2021 and its value to audiences at home and abroad.

However, he said, broadcasters were all found wanting when it came to representation, including his own platform, YouTube: "You must first understand and accept how well or badly we are all doing at delivering to British audiences."

"None of us is delivering to the audience that represents our country. None of us is doing well on any dimension of diversity. Collectively, we must shift that for our audiences and for our talent behind and in front of the camera."

Talent and the potential for creativity, he pointed out, had never been broader. "Anyone with talent today, with a creative idea and a broadband connection, can build themselves an audience to rival that of many of our major channels."

"We must ensure that representation and equality of opportunity is baked in for all, or we will miss the opportunity to work with that talent."

All of these changes and challenges represented an opportunity, he argued: "We can build an ecosystem that can thrive for the next decade and beyond."

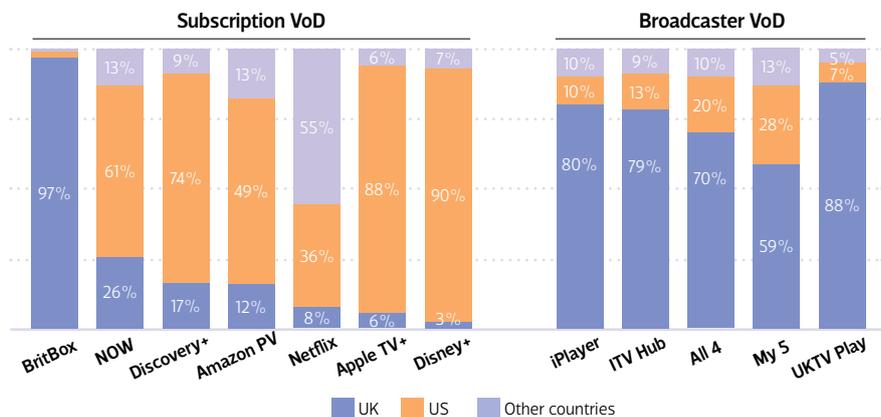
"Within that [we need]: the continued cultivation and success of our independent sector; a decisive shift led by those in this room to a more inclusive industry, which will enable new voices from every different background and community in the UK to be heard; and, finally, the embracing of technology and platforms as a means to reach new domestic and global audiences and tell stories in new and exciting ways."

Finally, tying all his thoughts together, McOwen Wilson urged the creatives and commissioners in the room to embrace change: "My message is not about rejecting linear – it is about embracing the non-linear, accepting that this is consumers' choice that improves their lives and adds to their entertainment, education and information experiences."

"Seeing online as a headwind to be beaten leaves the glass half-empty and getting emptier. On-demand is a consumer-driven tailwind, one that we have known was coming for well over a decade and one that we must be sure our industry and our UK ecosystem can take full advantage of. We are leaders, we must err on the side of leadership." ■

Session One: 'Broadcast Britain' was presented by Ben McOwen Wilson, YouTube Managing Director, UK and Ireland, and regional director, EMEA, and produced by Helen Scott. Report by Caroline Frost.

2 Streamers vs UK TV: programme origin



Source: Ofcom Media Nations: UK 2021, based on Ampere Analysis data July 2021



RTS

Keynote: Robert Kyncl

Only a few days before Robert Kyncl sat down for his international keynote session at this year's RTS Convention, he was on the red carpet in New York for that most exclusive of affairs, the annual Met Gala, presided over militarily by Anna Wintour.

It is testament to the cultural significance of YouTube's chief business officer that the *Vogue* supremo invited Kyncl to fill a whole table at the Gala with his own guests, mostly super-successful content creators on YouTube.

And it is testament to his vision that the combined fan following of his table that evening, including names such as creator/actor Addison Rae and beauty vlogger NikkieTutorials, added up to more than 40 million subscribers.

"We bring all types of creators to the Met, an incredibly diverse group of accomplished people," Kyncl explained and, for sure, he has a large number of potential guests to choose from

YouTube's chief business officer tells the RTS how his platform supports 30,000 jobs in the UK

– 2 million, to be precise. That is the number of "partners" being paid by YouTube to create content for its platform, just one of the jaw-dropping statistics revealed by Kyncl.

"In the past three years, we've paid out \$30bn to partners – £1.7bn in the UK over the last year, creating approximately 30,000 jobs. We're roughly neck and neck with Netflix in revenue and we're growing faster. When you think about our payouts, we're now the largest content licensor in the world."

Having been in his role for 11 years, Kyncl is a big champion of the user creatives who comprise 50% of YouTube's entire offering. He often shares their content across his own social

media and, in Cambridge, he explained why he considered them a complement, not a competitor, to traditional television: "It's not only new talent but new formats that are arriving. It's wonderful to see new channels – science lectures, pub quizzes, exercise videos – so many different forms of content that are difficult to pack into a 24-hour live stream on television. It's something that is augmenting television programming."

Kyncl had special praise, too, for his British partners' ability to reach overseas audiences via YouTube: "On average, 55% of any new channel is exported overseas. In the UK, it's actually 75%. The UK has historically been very good at exporting its culture all around the world."

The rewards for those who find big audiences anywhere are generous, he revealed. "Of all our revenue, we pay more than half to creators." In addition, he has identified at least nine other ways for creators to make money,

including individual subscriptions to channels and even exposure to rival platforms. “They can build their audiences, start making money from that, then figure out other ways, sell products either on YouTube or other platforms, or make TV programmes with other broadcasters. I look on it all as brand building. No one is exclusive to anyone.”

Freedom, it seems, is Kyncl’s watchword in all things – understandable when his childhood in Communist-run Czechoslovakia is factored in. He recounted a telling anecdote to explain his approach: “When I was in high school, we used to listen to Voice of America on a transistor radio and the Czech Government would scramble the frequency so we couldn’t really hear it.

“It was really poor quality, but that was the only way we’d get any news from outside the Eastern Bloc. It was completely different to what we would read in the newspapers.

“Censorship and all of these words – people throw them around without truly understanding what they mean. For me, it’s personal. I’ve lived it, I know the other side and so I value openness quite a lot.”

That principle has fuelled Kyncl’s work since he arrived at YouTube over a decade ago from Netflix, where, in 2007, he helped move the streamer online from its previous incarnation of a company that stuffed DVDs into envelopes.

“I could see how unfigured it was back then,” he remembered of his arrival at his present company. “Everything I’d done before was about subscriptions, and YouTube was the opposite of that. It’s global, it’s open, with all the challenges that come with that. For me, it was the mountain to climb that was attractive.”

That mountain’s first big obstacle was persuading owners of intellectual property – who were used to sweeping YouTube and other platforms for pirate content – that collaborating with the upstart would be in their favour.

Just as Steve Jobs managed with iTunes, so Kyncl was able to square this circle, something he looked back on at Cambridge: “Back in 2007-08, we were consumed by other people’s videos and nobody could figure out what to do about it. We had lots of lawsuits against us at that time. The first thing we had to do was figure out some way to get people to pay and send the revenue to the contract holders, and to convince

companies to start using it. We basically went from being sued while people worked out how to block us, to not being blocked, and being monetised instead.”

Kyncl’s time at YouTube has seen it evolve from a platform full of grainy home videos to something far more substantial – offering content on everything from movies and music to politics and knitting demonstrations – almost anything a consumer could possibly want.

But if openness has been Kyncl’s fuel, it has also been tested throughout his

would have been very irresponsible for us to create a brand new policy in 48 hours. But because we’d done so much work over the years, this was much easier.”

He said that, as of April 2021, the amount of “violative content” viewed on the platform was at a new low of 0.16%. His focus was on making sure that percentage continued to decrease.

More generally, in terms of curating those millions of content creators, Kyncl summed up YouTube’s set of policies as “Remove, reduce, praise and reward”.



time at YouTube, and never more so than in the past 18 months, when his platform has been the chosen channel for many users to share content on false Covid cures and pandemic conspiracy theories, and encouraging their subscribers to destroy 5G masts.

For Kyncl, a robust, considered framework for company guidelines on content removal has been key. He said: “Content moderation is something we’ve worked on for a very long time, over a decade. It’s just got a lot more attention over the past five years, and more so in the last two years.

“Since last February, we’ve removed over 1 million videos over false cures and claims [that Covid is a] hoax. This is a living, breathing organism, so you have to constantly look out for the new ways that people are getting into the system.

“I spoke about openness, but we need a set of policies that allows you to make these decisions in a principled way, rather than in a subjective way. It

He clarified this: “Removing means removing the posters of violative content immediately. Reducing means lessening the status of someone who is a frequent offender but whose content is acceptable. We won’t remove them but we won’t give them any help at all.”

What does “praise” look like? Kyncl explained: “We work with news publishers to make sure we’re praising content from organisations that are fact-checking, reputable and useful. We make sure they’re raised to the top. We’re pushing authoritative content, precisely the opposite of those we reduce.”

As for “reward”, that didn’t need explaining. Presumably, we’ll see those lucky few at next year’s Met Gala. ■

Session Two: ‘International keynote: Robert Kyncl’. YouTube’s chief business officer was interviewed by Ranvir Singh, presenter and political editor, Good Morning Britain. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Caroline Frost.



Keynote: Dana Strong

Richard Kendall

After 30 years of investment as the centrepiece of Rupert Murdoch's media empire, it was no wonder there was a battle of suitably high drama when Sky Group went on sale in 2018 – nor that it went to Comcast for the tidy sum of \$39bn (£28.5bn).

Three years on, former Comcast executive Dana Strong is Sky's new CEO, replacing Jeremy Darroch after his 13-year tenure.

In her first public interview since taking up the role in January, she outlined her priorities for the years ahead: continuing with product and service innovations; more aggregation to "make it much easier for customers to actually find content regardless of the source"; and, critically, investing in original content.

This year, Sky is doubling the number of original films and shows it airs to 125, "and we're growing that investment so that Sky will be one of the largest investors and producers of British content in the country", said Strong.

The drive for more original output would also bolster SkyShowtime, the platform that will package content from Comcast and ViacomCBS

Sky's CEO explains why partnerships and aggregation are key to maintaining a strong subscriber offering

portfolio brands, which include NBC-Universal, Universal Pictures, Peacock, Paramount+ Originals, Showtime, Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon. "It is allowing us to expand to more than 20 countries [across Europe] that we haven't been to previously. The brands work well together, the content works well together. It's a great indication of working as a partner in order to do better for your customers."

It is also an example of how Comcast's global scale and deep pockets are helping Sky move forward. The US conglomerate defines itself as "shaping the future at the intersection of media and technology", a mission statement that demonstrates another benefit to Sky, said Strong: "What we've been able to do is partner with their thousands of software engineers and share product innovation across the two entities.

"One example would be the voice platform, where customers don't have to use the remote control – you can just speak into it. Voice requires billions of utterances to train it – it's one of those technologies that, the more you use it, the better it gets. So having global platforms for these elements makes the user experience all the better."

A further boon is that all of Comcast's companies can draw on data from their collective 57 million customers, allowing early detection of trends, and highlighting differences or similarities across territories. Another major advantage of being part of Comcast is "the making of content across the jurisdictions – being able to attract top talent because of scale, and also in the global distribution. The benefit for us is making a British story and being able to distribute that to the US with our colleagues across the pond."

Session chair Beth Rigby of Sky News drew attention to a looming threat to this rosy picture, noting that, for 16- to 34-year-olds, only 38% of their viewing was of traditional broadcasters. In order to stay relevant, Strong said that British producers had to lean on their core strengths: storytelling and a robust infrastructure.

Echoing a consensus that ran throughout the RTS Convention, she said: “There’s something that the world writ large enjoys about watching British storytelling. If we remember that this is one of our core strengths, and continue to make unique British content, I think that the sector is going to continue to flourish.”

The UK’s film and TV infrastructure helps the country to position itself as a global leader, and has been boosted by the expansion of Shepperton, Sunset Studios’ planned £700m complex in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, “and, of course, we’re investing hundreds of millions into Elstree”, added Strong.

with is that our industry is incredibly resilient and adaptable. Despite all of the rumours about our demise and what you read in the press, all of the big brands are still standing and growing – viewership is going up. So it has given me a lot of confidence that we’re going to continue as a leader and as a creative force that will go on evolving to where the consumer takes us.”

Strong is one of only seven female CEOs in the UK at FTSE 100 level. “It doesn’t surprise me but it is disappointing,” she told the audience. “If you think about the positives in our industry, we have a lot of female leadership right now, with Carolyn McCall

going to flourish and I think the others will struggle.”

In relation to this year’s discussions about the TV industry’s failure to include disabled people, Strong acknowledged that “there is no doubt that we can all do better – we have to challenge ourselves to do better. Creating an environment and culture where multiple contexts and diverse backgrounds can be heard is one of my core jobs as a leader.”

As well as setting a diversity target of having 20% black and ethnic-minority employees by 2025, Sky also participates in The Valuable 500, a grouping of blue-chip companies with



Dana Strong (left) and Beth Rigby

“A lot of that is down to the fact that the talent here is very robust. Some of the best indies are here – Endemol, All3Media, Fremantle. It’s a very healthy market, which is why we at Comcast see this as an imperative market in which to invest in creative content.”

Strong’s 20-year media career spans a broad range of countries, with key executive roles at Austar United Communications in Australia, UPC Ireland (now Virgin Media Ireland) and Liberty Global across Europe. Following a period in the UK as President and COO of Virgin Media, she returned to the US for three years as the President of consumer services for Comcast Cable, which primed her nicely for her current role.

“I felt like I was in the epicentre of the change that was happening in our sector,” she said. “What I came away

‘COMPANIES THAT DON’T ADAPT AND EMBRACE DIVERSITY WILL NOT SUCCEED’

running ITV, Alex Mahon running Channel 4, my appointment, Jane Turton at All3Media and a lot of CFOs of the female gender. We are making progress but there’s so much more progress we have to make.

“I come back to my fundamental belief, which is that companies that don’t adapt and embrace diversity are not going to succeed. Those of us that are embracing this concept and making real change, I think we’re

a commitment to disability inclusivity.

As part of this, Sky was selected (as was the BBC) as one of 13 “iconic leaders” to co-fund, co-build and co-test programmes and solutions “partially because of the work we’ve done in making our platform easy to use in order to help that community”, said Strong. “As technology developers, an important focus area and responsibility is to actually make sure we’re thinking about development with diversity in mind. So there’s a lot of progress to be made ahead of us, but I’m glad we’re talking about it.” ■

Session Three: ‘International keynote: Dana Strong’. Sky CEO Dana Strong was in conversation with Sky News political editor Beth Rigby. The session was produced by Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.



What would the break-up of UK plc mean for broadcasters – and how should their newsrooms cover the debates right now?

This disunited kingdom

The threat to UK television from US streamers is growing, but there is also danger closer to home – the potential break-up of the country and a subsequent loss of “Britishness”. If independence movements flourish and the UK starts to fragment, how should broadcasters and producers respond?

Election polling guru John Curtice set the scene for this session via video link. “The UK state now seems to be under more threat than ever,” he said. Scotland is edging towards another independence referendum and the next Northern Ireland Assembly election could produce a Sinn Féin First Minister.

Even in Wales, he added, “there is now at least much more talk about independence” and “a more nationalist

England is now also less happy about the advantages that the rest of the UK enjoys”.

Curtice suggested that broadcasters would have to increasingly consider the nature of their news and cultural coverage if the UK started to break up. There could also be regulatory issues to address. He asked: “How should the broadcasters, who are meant to be impartial, negotiate these potentially choppy waters?”

Channel 4 boss Alex Mahon said the broadcaster’s move out of London – it now has offices in Bristol, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow, and will spend 50% of its budget outside the capital – meant it had “people with a different

perspective making decisions... that starts to allow us to represent better across the UK”.

John Whiston said ITV “had regionalism in its blood”. He added: “I’ve made 600 hours of television in the past two years, and the furthest south I’ve been is Macclesfield.

“The further away you go from London, the more popular the channel is – and that’s not the same for the BBC and Channel 4.”

Whiston added that the Covid-19 pandemic had changed the nature of commissioning: “You don’t have to be in the room to get a commission these days. I’ve spent the last two years on Zoom and it’s worked perfectly well. [The pandemic has been] a real force for regionalisation.”

Rhodri Talfan Davies, the corporation’s director of nations, claimed “the BBC has been adapting to the changing nature of the UK for the best part of a quarter of a century”. It had decentralised and now employed 8,500 people outside the M25.

Turning to the challenges of covering a second independence referendum in Scotland, Davies said the key would be to display “journalistic self-confidence. Any vote of this sort

of binary nature is going to be colossally polarising.”

If Scotland were to become independent, there would be significant regulatory issues, said the media consultant Chris Banatvala. “There is so much architecture around broadcasting and it is a very ‘regulated



John Curtice

you wouldn’t even have known the pandemic was going on.... The public service broadcasters were a force for unity.

“That’s problematic in a way for the nations because they’re actually, if they’re going to get a referendum,... more about disunity than unity.”

Kirsty Wark, who chaired the session, asked Davies whether he accepted the argument that the different responses of the devolved regions to Covid-19 were designed “to stoke disunity”?

“No, I don’t,” he replied. “To simply assume that the only motivation on Covid restrictions in the devolved nations was to piss off London, I think that’s...”

Whiston interjected: “I didn’t say it was the only motivation, but I think

“Representation” was also important for Whiston: “People want to be represented on a big stage.”

The ITV real-life crime drama *The Pembroke Murders*, he said, pulled in an audience of 12.5 million – “a huge reach for a drama. We’ve done that right across Britain: we make *Shetland* for the BBC in [Scotland]; we’ve done *Vera* in the North East.”

Wrapping up the session, Wark asked Banatvala whether he thought the streamers would think the RTS session “incredibly parochial, given how little young people watch anything other than streamers”.

“Yes,” he replied. But “people always want to watch programmes about themselves and their own region. I don’t think [British broadcasters are]



John Whiston



Rhodri Talfan Davies



Alex Mahon



Chris Banatvala

environment’ – that [could] takes years [to sort out].”

Whiston said: “ITV won’t take a side on whether Scotland should be independent or not, but what it will do is warn, ‘If you fragment the nation too much, then who’s going to pay for these programmes?’

“We’re actually victims of our success because people expect much more localism... much more globalisation, so we’ve created this very, very rich TV environment but, going forward, it’s quite hard to see how it’s going to be paid for.”

Mahon accepted there was a “decreasing sense of Britishness” among young people, but added: “I don’t think we see a demand from the audience to only see content from smaller and smaller areas. They want a diversity of perspectives... and a range of content.”

During the pandemic, argued Whiston, the public service broadcasters had acted in the national interest. “We stayed on air with daytime, with the soaps and with news – people needed the public service broadcasters at that time to reflect what was going on... if you’d watched a streamer at that time,

it perhaps was at the back of some people’s minds.”

Curtice, in his final contribution to the session, turned to Welsh independence: “The big question for Wales is, ‘How much time should be addressed to what, at the moment, still looks a relatively remote possibility – is it important to cover it... or is it, in fact, still premature?’

“It might be interesting for the chattering classes in Cardiff and Aberystwyth, but perhaps it’s not yet [a debate] for national broadcasting within Wales.”

Davies replied that, while support for independence had grown, “it’s not yet a high-ranking issue. When we look at the election results, we don’t see it as a primary driver of the vote, much beyond Plaid Cymru.”

Summing up, Mahon argued: “People want representation, they want recognition and they want opportunity. People want to know what’s going on in their region, but they don’t necessarily want regional parochialism in smaller and smaller places – that is what we saw in the pandemic; they wanted to know what was going on in the whole country.”



Kirsty Wark

All pictures: RTS

doomed... people aged 16–25 or even older... will watch anything as long as it’s good – it’s as simple as that. That might involve parts of the UK; it might not.” ■

Session Four: ‘This disunited kingdom’
The contributors were: Chris Banatvala, consultant; John Curtice, professor of politics at the University of Strathclyde; Alex Mahon, Chief Executive, Channel 4; Rhodri Talfan Davies, director of nations, BBC; and John Whiston, Managing Director for continuing drama and head of ITV in the North, ITV Studios. It was chaired by the journalist and broadcaster Kirsty Wark and produced by Alan Clements. Report by Matthew Bell.

In an age driven by social media, where, “for most people, affirmation is more satisfying than information”, the BBC’s ability to provide free access to accurate, impartial news is essential to combating the harmful effects of fake news.

That was the core of ex-Goldman Sachs banker Richard Sharp’s argument in favour of impartial public service news as he gave his first RTS speech as BBC Chair since being appointed in February.

“If disinformation is the disease running through our societies, impartial news can be the vaccine,” he added. His elegant, erudite address was enlivened by literary references to Milton, Swift and Orwell, whose statue by the British sculptor Martin Jennings stands outside Broadcasting House.

Sharp said the Orwell quote on the wall beside the work of art encapsulated the BBC’s commitment to information over affirmation: “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear”.

Reporting without fear or favour is fundamental to the reach, trust and respect the BBC enjoys in the UK and overseas. This is why the BBC Board and the Director-General, Tim Davie, “have identified impartiality as our first priority”.

“Impartiality, candidly, is a prerequisite for the existence of the BBC. And it must be seen as a journey not a destination – something we must prove again every day,” insisted the Chair, looking fit and tanned in shirtsleeves.

He continued: “Getting this right is about more than safeguarding the future of a cherished institution that continues to have a critical role to play at the heart of British national life.

“It also offers the BBC a chance to define itself globally as a pre-eminent purveyor of facts in the disinformation age. At a time when news provision has become a key weapon in the battle for global influence, the BBC World Service has historically been one of the jewels in the UK’s crown.

“Our opportunity in the digital age is bigger than ever to deliver information across the globe as a good in itself, and as an opportunity to drive UK values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law worldwide.”

The BBC Chair sees impartial news as a vaccine to beat an epidemic of dangerous disinformation

Keynote: Richard Sharp



Richard Kendall

Covid showed that the dangers of disinformation had never been clearer – and, as the BBC had demonstrated, the demand for high-quality information had never been higher.

“UK audiences in their millions have turned to traditional sources for news they can trust,” Sharp said. “Fact-checking services have been critical in helping to debunk dangerous myths.

“And many platforms are now collaborating closely with trusted news brands such as ours to flag up falsehoods in real time.”

He added: “The presence of impartial sources in our daily news diet will become increasingly valuable.... News that is independent of commercial or political interest... that has an obligation to consider events from all sides and offer the context and analysis [will] help audiences make up their own minds.”

There were urgent questions to be answered about the future media world we want to live in: “We need to rethink the regulatory environment in this country – and replace a Communications Act that pre-dates Facebook with one that can deliver on a clear vision.

“But we also need to look at where the digital world comes up against the fundamental rights, freedoms and privacies we sign up to as societies and individuals.

“Does the principle of media freedom need to be redefined and re-enshrined for the digital age?

“Do we need to claim our personal data as a human right, rather than an asset to be bought and sold?

“Now is the time to put in place the rights, protections and education that will safeguard – not just our media environment – but the stability of our societies and democracies long into the future.”

Following his speech, Sharp was questioned by the former *Newsnight* journalist Stephanie Flanders, now Bloomberg’s senior executive editor for economics. She noted that he hadn’t mentioned the licence fee. This led Sharp to point out that the BBC cost licence-fee payers a mere 44p a day per household.

This represented “fantastic value” for a service spanning TV, radio, websites, the World Service, children’s, iPlayer, Sounds “and a morning argument with

‘WE SHOULD CHERISH THE BBC AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR THE NATION’



Stephanie Flanders

Richard Kendall

your radio”. Moreover: “The BBC contributes to fighting media poverty. There’s so much money in the system because of what people pay for Sky, Netflix and Amazon Prime.

“There needs to be a national utility that delivers insight, education, children’s and these other assets at a price people can afford – and we can do so because it’s imposed.

“For individuals and the world, I happen to think it’s a good thing. The question is: does the Government think that too?... We should cherish the BBC as a competitive advantage for the nation as a whole.”

How much would he worry if the next licence-fee settlement was below the rate of inflation? “There’d be a hole in my budget. Media inflation is running at about 9%. It is an issue. Tim [Davie] and his team have taken enormous cost out of the BBC already. The low-hanging fruit has gone. There would be serious consequences to a poorly funded BBC.”

On the question of the BBC’s independence from government, how

possible was it to maintain this when we’ve been told that every time BBC officials visited the last culture secretary, he began the meeting by reminding them that the Government enjoyed an 80-seat majority, probed Flanders.

“It goes to: ‘Do we have integrity as an organisation?’ If you give up your integrity, you don’t have a right to exist. I’m very proud of the fact that, on the day I was having a discussion with the Prime Minister, Laura Kuenssberg broadcast her interview with Dominic Cummings.

“We take our editorial decisions independently and manage the editorial process objectively.”

While both Sky’s CEO, Dana Strong, and ITV’s CEO, Carolyn McCall, side-stepped questions regarding Channel 4’s possible privatisation, the BBC Chair was more forthcoming as he appeared to endorse selling the broadcaster.

Sharp said: “Channel 4 was developed to bring a differentiated voice at a time when we didn’t have that open access to all the different voices that we have now. It [privatisation] is a little local issue – this group [the industry leaders attending Cambridge] should be concerned about Britain’s place in the world as an industry that should be strong globally. Who owns Channel 4 will fit into the strategy of one of the big players, or not?”

He continued: “In a world that is moving so quickly off linear, that is timestamped in terms of its presence, it doesn’t mean that [Channel 4] can’t make a lot of money from advertising, but I can certainly understand why it may need to now fit in with the strategies of some of the other players.”

Sharp added: “There will be a consequence of Channel 4 being privatised but that is part of some of the bigger trends which are more consequential to the BBC than this.”

Finally, in the context of impartiality, would the Chair want Andrew Neil back at the BBC? “I enjoy watching him. Whether he fits into the BBC is a matter for Tim Davie.” ■

Session Five: ‘UK keynote: Richard Sharp’. The BBC Chair was interviewed by Bloomberg’s Stephanie Flanders. The session was produced by Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Steve Clarke.



Richard Kendal

Keynote: Carolyn McCall

The pandemic has accelerated ITV's transition from advertising-supported broadcaster to diversified digital media business

For ITV, the pandemic forced the company to do some hard thinking. Advertising revenue fell off a cliff in the second quarter of 2020, programme budgets were slashed, and senior executives took voluntary pay cuts.

“Commercially, we were very worried about our cash situation in the first three or four months of the pandemic,” CEO Carolyn McCall told her interviewer, BBC News’s Dharshini David. “We took some dramatically difficult decisions in the first three weeks of the pandemic because we had to preserve our cash.”

Eighteen months later, ITV has emerged stronger from the crisis, according to its CEO. ITV’s digital transformation was accelerated by the crisis, and the pandemic showed how resilient the company could be as it rapidly learnt to work remotely.

“People worked hard through some very testing times. From the moment lockdown hit, our daytime shows and our national and regional news programmes were not off air for a minute,” added the CEO. “Audiences wanted and needed what they provided. Our daytime programmes were a pick-me-up and helped to reassure people.” ITV had proved that it was “robust, resilient and trusted”.

The advertising market has now recovered. In June, the network registered record-breaking ad revenues on the back of England’s success in the Euros. But ITV still needs to prove to sceptical City analysts that the business is strong enough to compete effectively in a world where US streamers call so many of the shots.

McCall emphasised: “It was a very tough period but, as we went through it, we realised we could accelerate some of the changes we had been planning. We created the media and entertainment division and ramped up our communication. We did a lot on diversity and inclusion.... We were able to take decisions on ITV Hub because all our tech teams could work normally at home.”

McCall told David that ITV’s business was no longer primarily reliant on linear advertising revenue, following the group’s investment in digital advertising, the continued growth of ITV Studios’ domestic and global activities, and the

development of digital businesses such as BritBox, ITV Hub and Hub+.

“We have a diversity of business models,” she explained. “Probably 50% of our funding now comes from advertising and part of that is coming from digital, not linear. The other 50% is Studios, including interactive and other things we’re doing. How we make money had to change.”

She added: “We’re already an advertising leader. We have to remain that because it’s so hard to make profit.”

The partnership with ad-tech platform Amobee enables ITV to sell targeted, personalised advertising via Hub. “That is transformational,” said McCall. “We’re taking significantly more money from AVoD than we were three years ago. That is a new stream for us.”

Looking at the broader picture, McCall, the former EasyJet leader headhunted to run ITV four years ago, acknowledged that, when she arrived at ITV, the broadcaster was “doing very well financially”. A lot of money had been invested in production and that side of the company’s activities was growing.

However, she noted that technology, data analytics and the capabilities that lie behind those areas lacked investment. ITV’s online catch-up service, Hub, trailed behind the BBC’s iPlayer.

“There was therefore a lot of work to do,” said McCall, who added: “You can see the macro changes all around you. The streamers are very much part of that. We have to innovate and develop. For us technology is a great disruptor but it’s also a great opportunity and enabler. We weren’t taking advantage of any of that.”

ITV would continue to deliver mass audiences but developing Hub and understanding users alongside viewers involved developing a different mindset. Studios would continue to expand because it was “another pillar of profit for us”, designed to complement the ad-funded businesses. It was important, too, for ITV to establish itself in direct-to-consumer, hence the UK launch of BritBox in November 2019; the service had around 555,000 UK subscribers, McCall told the RTS. “[It] was an amazing leap forward for all of the UK PSBs to be able to agree to do BritBox.”

She promised “an aggressive” BritBox roll-out in many other countries following recent launches in Australia

and South Africa. “We’re now in phase two of that as we become more sophisticated in growing our direct-to-consumer businesses.... Also, if you’re not available on any [particular] platform and not doing that well, you get left behind.”

ITV’s unique advantage in such a competitive landscape was the “enormous amount of content” it owned. “In terms of our windowing strategy,



we’re going to do much more. We’ve done some windowing but not enough of it. Going forward, that will change quite dramatically.”

As for ITV’s relationship with the streamers, McCall said that they were customers as well as rivals. Like them, ITV Studios was a global business: *Love Island*, which ITV created, is produced in 17 countries while *The Voice*, another ITV property, is made in 70 countries.

“Our relationship with the streamers is very straightforward. They like a lot of what we do, and they commission us to make it. We do that successfully.”

Throughout the Convention, attempting to define Britishness was a recurring theme. How did the ITV CEO define this most elusive and potentially toxic term? “Globally, Britishness means high-quality British content originated in Britain – stories originated in Britain that most of the time feature British talent. There is a lot of demand for British content.”

Domestically, ITV was content to remain a commercial PSB provided new communications legislation provided the right terms, particularly on giving PSBs prominence in the digital space.

Was the Government good at

listening, hearing and acting, pressed David? “DCMS are good at listening. I’ve yet to see evidence of the acting... It’s all to play for. They’ve got so much information from all of us about the change. They can see it happening in front of their eyes. They value the PSBs. Throughout lockdown the PSBs were a lifeline for people, providing accurate, trusted news. I do think the Government valued that.”

Inevitably, McCall was asked about ITV as a potential buyer for Channel 4 should ministers decide to privatise the state-owned operator. As the person who “trimmed the fat” from EasyJet, the opportunity to streamline Channel 4 was obvious, suggested David.

“It’s incredibly important that Channel 4’s remit remains because it works in an ecology of public service broadcasting,” replied McCall, who declined to be drawn further or whether a potential bid was on the horizon.

The ITV CEO is a keen tennis player. She had enjoyed watching Emma Raducanu’s stunning victory at the US Open. “I watched it on Prime,” McCall said pointedly to howls of laughter from the audience. Millions of people had enjoyed the match on Channel 4.

She revealed that ITV had been outbid by Horseferry Road for the tennis tournament: “We have to make a return. We really wanted it, [but] we had to make money, that’s our model.”

Regarding the future, McCall expressed cautious optimism over the state of the UK TV ad market: “There’s definitely a bounce back. At the moment, it’s very buoyant, which is fantastic. I hope that will last but we don’t yet know how the winter will pan out and we don’t know what will happen next year.

“There remains uncertainty. I am fine with uncertainty because we have a robust business. We have a more resilient business now than when we went into lockdown. We can absorb the uncertainty.

“We just have to keep moving ahead and maintain our momentum. In three years, we’ve achieved an awful lot.” ■

Session Six: ‘UK keynote: Carolyn McCall’
The ITV CEO was interviewed by Dharshini David, senior correspondent and presenter, BBC News. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Steve Clarke.

The Clintons' move into TV production aims to provide a global platform for gutsy women



Richard Kendall

Keynote:

Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chelsea Clinton

In one of the most eagerly anticipated Cambridge sessions, Hillary Rodham Clinton and her daughter, Chelsea, laid out the aims behind their new production company, Hidden Light.

The Clintons, who appeared at the Convention via video link from the US, also gave an insight into how being the subject of television for so long affects the way they make their own shows.

Their move into TV was prompted by the launch in late 2019 of *The Book of Gutsy Women*, in which the former Secretary of State and her daughter offered portraits of inspiring women, including activist Edith Windsor and author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Following its publication, the pair were approached by Sam Branson, son

of Richard Branson, with whom they set up Hidden Light as a global production company. Their first commissioning idea was a TV version of *Gutsy Women*, with Hillary and Chelsea interviewing inspiring women, which was picked up by Apple TV+.

Hillary told interviewer Mary Beard that, under the terms of their contract with Apple, she could not reveal yet whom they had spoken with but “I can guarantee there’ll be some names you know and some you’ll be glad you got to know.... I think it’s going to be both surprising, entertaining, inspiring and exciting.”

She continued: “The *Gutsy Women* production is a combination of conversation [and] action. So, without spilling any secrets, which Apple would not

be happy about, we’ve done some incredible things.”

Some of those things sounded physically challenging, as Chelsea interjected: “Sometimes, my mum [would be] like, ‘Chelsea would love to do that! And I would love to just sit right here and cheer her on!’ And I was, like, ‘You should come.’ And my mum was, like, ‘I’m good.’”

Laughing, Hillary explained: “When you see the series, you’ll understand.”

Beard said: “I’m... waiting to see Chelsea waterboarding over a waterfall or something... we’ll obviously have to wait and see.”

Hillary went on to explain how they came up with the name Hidden Light: “We really do want to cast a light on those who are often overlooked or [are]

forgotten characters, to try and demonstrate that there are hope and resilience and gutsiness in the darkest of times and places.

“We believe passionately in bringing these stories to light. For too long... attention has been paid primarily to the loudest voices in the room. Yet, flying under the radar, there are generations of change-makers in every place across the globe who have been making a difference – and that’s who we’re going to celebrate.”

Chelsea revealed that when she wrote her second children’s book, *She Persisted*, about aspirational women, she was struck by how many people said, “Don’t you think the pendulum has swung too far? You really think we need more stories about girls? Do you think boys are going to read those stories?”

“I was so aghast. I said... most books are centred on boys and written by men, so there hasn’t been an overcorrection.” That led her and her mother to think, “We’ve still got a lot of work to do” – which they thought could be best done “through storytelling”.

Based in London, New York and Los Angeles and led by CEO Johnny Webb and Executive Chair Roma Khanna, Hidden Light has already optioned other books. These include, Hillary revealed, the Maisie Dobbs series of novels by Jacqueline Winspear, which she and Chelsea have enjoyed reading over the years.

Beard asked what Hidden Light would add to the TV landscape and whether it could be accused by some of being a bit worthy? Hillary said that while some of the stories would be worthy, “some are fun, some are entertaining, some are informative”.

She added that the company had just launched its first series, a four-parter fronted by YouTuber Patricia Bright called *If I Could Tell You Just One Thing*, for YouTube Originals: “It’s fun, it’s glossy; it’s also poignant and insightful”.

The stories include those of Baroness Floella Benjamin standing up to racism and the comic Katherine Ryan opening up on being a single mum.

Hillary also gave the example of Hidden Light’s adaptation of Gayle Tzemach Lemmon’s *The Daughters of Kobani*, which they are in the early stages of producing: “This is the unforgettable story of an all-female militia who took on Isis in northern Syria and won. We’re working closely with the Kurdish creative community, so our film brings the story to light in the



Mary Beard

Richard Kendal

most authentic way possible.” She said it was a “compelling, incredibly engrossing story”, which she hoped would spark interest from audiences and make them become more curious. The pair also said they wanted to make content that families could watch together.

Chelsea explained: “I do think we’ve often not had that enough as a goal in TV and in movies.... Things are often just for very mature audiences or just for kids and we want to break down those silos.... We want to have common conversations about common content and experiences; hopefully, Hidden Light can facilitate that.”

Beard reflected that “it used to be the case” that many actors went into politics but now the “trend is the other way.... Do you think TV is going to be a good way for getting your message across... is it going to be a better platform?”

Hillary described TV as “an inevitable and invaluable platform in today’s world”, adding that a lot of content is “often repetitive and not particularly creative or informative even”.

Beard asked how their own experiences as the subject of television coloured how they make their own shows: “People have been peering at you, and at you, too, Chelsea, in ways you didn’t particularly want. Does it make you reflect a bit back on those experiences of being the camera fodder or have you left that behind?”

“I never want anyone to feel awkward or to feel as if there’s any a hidden agenda,” said Chelsea. “Despite us

being called Hidden Light, we’re very candid, transparent, inclusive [about] what we hope to do... and I think that’s partly because I haven’t always felt that way when I’ve been the subject.”

Hillary agreed, saying about *Gutsy Women*: “I think all of my experience has probably made me a more effective person in front of the camera for this project.”

She expanded: “I’ve had a lot of, shall we say, difficult moments with the press over my very long public political career. If I had known more then [of] what I know now, I might, frankly, have been more effective in dealing with some of the moments I found myself in. It’s never fun to have a ‘gotcha’ moment or have someone misrepresent you or make up something about you, which I’ve had a lot of experience with.

“I think I’d have been a little more understanding and even willing to figure out a different approach, rather than throwing up my hands and saying, ‘What do you expect? That’s just the way they are.’

“I think I might have been more successful in dealing with whatever came my way.” ■

Session Seven: ‘Global leaders keynote: Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chelsea Clinton’. The Clintons were in conversation with Mary Beard, professor of classics, Cambridge University. The producers were Helen Scott, Siobhan Sinnerton and Johnny Webb. Report by Tara Conlan.

Premier League football tops sport streamer DAZN's wish list

Iwould love to see that on DAZN [in the UK]," revealed the Group Chairman, Kevin Mayer, one of the star speakers at the RTS Convention.

"This is a huge market and [football] is an incredibly popular sport – it's a high-quality experience for sports fans. Of course we'd want that."

He added: "Football rights in major territories in Europe is [DAZN's] centre of gravity."

Earlier this year, the rights to the Premier League – in response to the disruption caused by the pandemic – were rolled over, remaining in the clutches of Sky, BT Sport, Amazon Prime and, for highlights only, the BBC. "Certainly, we want to have a chance to be at the table in the future," said Mayer.

Jake Kanter, media correspondent of *The Times*, who was chairing the Cambridge session, suggested that one way of getting to the negotiating table would be to buy BT Sport.

"Possibly. I can't really comment on that; I know there have been rumours," replied Mayer. "We would love to have EPL ultimately... there's many paths to get there. Whatever route makes the most sense. BT Sport is a great business; it has a lot of rights that are fabulous: EPL, Champions League, rugby."

DAZN is frequently dubbed the "Netflix of sport", a moniker Mayer finds flattering. "There are worse things to be called than the Netflix of anything. It's been a massive success... I don't mind being compared to Netflix at all."

During a wide-ranging discussion with Kanter, the American business executive looked back over a career that has taken in some of the biggest hitters of the entertainment industry.

As a child, Mayer had wanted to become a "naval aviator and an astronaut", but was stymied by his poor eyesight. A degree in engineering was followed by an MBA and a stint in consultancy, before he joined Disney in the mid-1990s.

"It was becoming very obvious that



Richard Kendall

Keynote: Kevin Mayer

technology was going to have a very substantial impact on how an entertainment product was created and delivered. That was my way in, at first as a technologist, primarily," he recalled.

Mayer rose through the ranks at Disney and, for some time, was in charge of mergers and acquisitions. These included Pixar, Lucasfilm, Marvel Entertainment and 21st Century

Fox. "By and large, when we deployed real big capital, they all worked pretty spectacularly," said Mayer.

Discussing the 21st Century Fox deal, he commented: "Rupert's a tough deal guy."

Was Murdoch "the toughest [negotiator] you experienced during your time at Disney," Kanter wanted to know. "Yuh. He's really smart and I really

grew to like him. I got to know him really well. He drove a hard bargain.”

Mayer took most satisfaction from the Marvel deal, which was the “best in terms of its value as a multiple of the purchase price.... It was very difficult to anticipate the degree of success that Marvel has had across the cinematic universe. We knew that this was the plan but we had no idea that it would be as successful as it was.”

Mayer spent more than two decades at Disney in two stints; in contrast, his tenure as CEO at TikTok lasted just three months, dominated by Donald Trump’s threat to ban the social media app in an attempt to force a sale of its US operations, and his claim that data was being harvested in the US and used by Beijing.

“It was a long three months but it was fun, and energising, too. TikTok is an amazing product,” enthused Mayer.

His three months were dogged by problems: one month into the job and TikTok was banned in India, following a Chinese attack on a disputed border. “That created a lot of havoc and a lot of geopolitical difficulties... and it started to reverberate. Trump was very close to [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi.”

Next, continued Mayer, some Tik-Tokers “signed up for a Trump rally to take up a lot of the space but they had no intention of going. He went to this rally thinking it was sold out... so he was embarrassed by that”.

Kanter asked: “Should we be worried that TikTok is taking our data and giving it to China?”

“They might get the latest dance moves,” replied Mayer, laughing. “I’m not all that concerned about it. I’ll leave it up to the government officials.”

Mayer quickly moved on to another venture, raising \$300m of capital and founding a Spac (special purpose acquisition company) with former Disney colleague Tom Staggs and private equity firm Blackstone.

The yet-to-be-named venture has already snapped up actor Reese Witherspoon’s media company, Hello Sunshine, reportedly for an eye-watering \$900m. “I do think that [Reese] has her finger on the pulse of what her audience wants. Brands are only meaningful when they attach emotionally to a certain audience... I love what she’s doing.

“We’re trying to serve global audiences in a way that’s built for the future. It will be a little different from a

traditional media company; it will be built for the next generation.”

Mayer revealed that in his short time at TikTok he learned that “the bond between creators and their followers is very emotional and very deep, and it can be mined for a lot of commercial opportunity. I like the idea of taking television and movie product and



Richard Kendall

‘FOOTBALL RIGHTS IN MAJOR TERRITORIES IN EUROPE ARE [DAZN’S] CENTRE OF GRAVITY’

extending that relationship into social media, and trying to engender new revenue streams.”

Hello Sunshine is only one part of the jigsaw, said Mayer. “We’re going to bring in other category-defining businesses and brands that will fill out a whole spectrum of audience.

“We are looking across the world at all opportunities.”

At the close of a session replete with insights into the international nature of modern media, Mayer offered support for a hard-pressed, homegrown UK institution: “The BBC is an integral part of the brand of Britain. The journalistic integrity is beyond reproach and, in this day and age, that’s super important. I would argue that it is a national treasure and should be treated that way.” ■

Session Eight: ‘Global leaders keynote: Kevin Mayer’. The Chair of DAZN Group was in conversation with Jake Kanter, media correspondent of The Times. The session was produced by Helen Scott. Report by Matthew Bell.

Keynote: Alex Mahon

The Channel 4 CEO lays out the case against privatisation and argues that her channel is prospering without a new investor

The decision on whether to privatise Channel 4 should be based on “data and evidence” and not, by implication, on ideology, Alex Mahon told the audience gathered in Cambridge. The broadcaster’s CEO was speaking shortly before Government minister John Whittingdale – a last-minute stand-in for his reshuffled colleague Oliver Dowden – was due to address the RTS Convention.

Mahon’s appearance in Cambridge came a day after the consultation on Channel 4’s future closed. The Government is considering changes to the channel’s operating model, including its ownership, remit and obligations. Its preferred option is privatisation, which it claims will safeguard the broadcaster’s future in an increasingly competitive media landscape.

Mahon – who referred to her tenure at Channel 4 as a “not-as-easy-as-I-thought-it-might-be job” – accepted that it was entirely right and proper that the Government should examine the status of Channel 4 periodically, adding that “there were areas of agreement with the Government. We want Channel 4 to be protected for the future and stronger for the future. That’s a shared objective with the Government...”

“I don’t want Channel 4 to stand still – none of us do. In fact, I’d argue we’re moving faster than plenty of other broadcasters in the world.”

Channel 4 and the Government parted ways, however, over proposed privatisation: “There is no data and no evidence, as yet, that Channel 4 would be more able to sustain its mission and

remit, its delivery of social impact, and support of the indies and the creative community in 10 years if it was in private hands.”

Mahon argued that much of Channel 4’s current programming wouldn’t be commercially sustainable if the broadcaster were privatised. This included its much-praised coverage of the Paralympics “at the scale we do it at”, and its coup in landing the rights to

show British tennis player Emma Raducanu’s remarkable triumph in the women’s final at the US Open.

In a last-minute deal, Channel 4 paid Amazon Prime a seven-figure sum and was amply rewarded by huge ratings, with audiences peaking at 9.2 million for the final. Of Raducanu, Mahon joked: “She’s young, she’s diverse, she’s fighting against the odds – sometimes that feels like being Channel 4.”

Richard Kendal



'THIS IS NOT A BUSINESS THAT IS IN TROUBLE... WE'RE IN REALLY GOOD SHAPE'

Mahon identified shows that a private-sector broadcaster would not have been able to make, including Russell T Davies's award-winning drama *It's a Sin*, set during the Aids crisis in the 1980s, which had been "rejected by every commercial broadcaster".

Channel 4's recent *Black to Front* day, which championed black talent both on and off camera, was another initiative that wouldn't have made it to screen. "It is now obvious to everyone that there is talent out there," she said.

Mahon also said that "shows which put public purpose and social impact at their heart" wouldn't get made because "they're not necessarily profitable right away".

She added: "You wouldn't break new talent.... The streamers go and get established talent; they leave it to people like us to go and break them.

"And you certainly wouldn't put loads of money and loads of offices and loads of jobs all over the UK outside of London, and support the creative sectors in all those areas."

Offering evidence that Channel 4 was not "standing still", Mahon highlighted the broadcaster's advances in digital services. "The biggest transition by far for us, and for any broadcaster that is advertiser-funded, is to move to digital. The audience is all viewing streaming; people want to watch stuff when they want to watch it, where they want to watch it."

Mahon claimed Channel 4 was rapidly turning digital: "Our revenues will grow 19% this year – this is not a business that's in trouble. Our digital revenues will grow 32% this year. We're in really good shape."



Richard Kendal

Since it was launched almost 40 years ago, Channel 4 – which is not allowed to make its own content – has become a linchpin for UK producers, in particular, start-ups and small indies.

"We earn about £1bn a year, we spend about £1bn a year – the vast majority of that money is spent on small businesses across the UK," said Mahon, who added that the "impact [of privatisation] would be felt in the independent community.

"Part of our job is to build the creative economy and the creative clusters across the UK and that means we take pitches from everybody.... It's the nurturing of the small and the medium that brings new voices into the industry."

Mahon also claimed that the broadcaster's focus on regional production – exemplified by its Leeds HQ and creative hubs in Bristol and Glasgow – would be put at risk.

The Channel 4 chief was positive about the broadcaster's prospects, assuming it was allowed to retain its current operating model: "We're financially sustainable.... Advertising is having a massive resurgence, television is doing very well!"

Channel 4's priorities would be to

"continue to switch to digital, keeping us as the young people's broadcaster – that's what we're really successful at – and then making sure we partner with people.... We've always been too small to do everything on our own." The US Open deal with Amazon Prime was a shining example of the latter, said Mahon.

Sky News breakfast anchor Gillian Joseph, who was interviewing Mahon at the Convention, suggested that Channel 4 could find itself squeezed out by the rise and rise of the US streaming giants. "There's definitely space [for us] because people are spending more on media and viewing more media. They're not easy competition, they're not easy competition for any of us, but we've all been competing with them successfully," replied Mahon.

"There is a particular appetite in the UK for British content, for British brands... [and] for strong public service media – and that will continue." ■

Session Nine: 'UK Keynote: Alex Mahon'
The Channel 4 CEO was in conversation with Sky News presenter Gillian Joseph. The session was produced by Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Matthew Bell.

On a day of high drama in Westminster, John Whittingdale steps up to outline the Government's plans for the UK's creative sector

Keynote: Secretary of State

Culture secretaries tend to come and go with some frequency – but not hours before they are due to address the RTS Cambridge Convention.

On the first day of the Convention, Oliver Dowden was shifted sideways in Boris Johnson's cabinet reshuffle and replaced by former Health and Social Care minister and *I'm a Celebrity...* contestant Nadine Dorries.

The minister for media and data, John Whittingdale, generously answered a last-minute call to appear by video link to read Dowden's speech and answer questions from the Convention floor.

Whittingdale was culture secretary as recently as 2016, yet the new incumbent, the Johnson loyalist Dorries, is the sixth person to fill the post since his departure. Underlining the cut-throat nature of politics, Whittingdale – who told the Convention that he was “looking forward to working with Nadine” – was sacked the following day.

Addressing the RTS audience, Whittingdale restated the Government's intention to privatise Channel 4, just one day after the consultation on the broadcaster's future closed: “Standing still is not an option. In fact, it would be an act of self-harm.”

He argued that, “at some point”, the broadcaster would not have “the money to invest in technology and programming – and it won't be able to compete with the streaming giants”.

That cash, he said, should come from the private sector, not the taxpayer: “It's our strong position – as a point of principle – that the borrowing of a commercial TV channel should not be underwritten by a granny in Stockport or in Southend.”

Whittingdale said the Government would “ensure that Channel 4 remains subject to proper public service obligations”. These were “bound to include” a commitment to independent news and current affairs, commissioning indies and representing the entire nation.

He added: “The Government does not subscribe to the false binary choice between public service content and privatisation. We can have both.”

Many industry bodies, including the producers association Pact, have argued that a privatised Channel 4 would imperil the future of many small indies. However, Whittingdale insisted: “There is no way this Government will ever compromise our independent production industry.”

Elsewhere in his speech, the minister revealed that the upcoming white paper would “expand the remit of PSBs, with a requirement for them to produce ‘distinctively British’ content”.

He noted that “keeping the British spirit and identity alive” was a challenge, given the deep pockets of the global streaming services.

Taking a swipe at some of the output of the streamers, Whittingdale added: “Some of them look like they’ve been cleverly generated by a streaming algorithm to maximise their target audience globally.”

“Britishness” was a “nebulous subject”, he admitted, but “we all know it when we see it on our screens”.

“Who we are has been defined by television,” continued Whittingdale, name-checking classic British shows such as *Only Fools and Horses*, *Coronation Street* and *The Great British Bake Off*.

“We want to make sure that British-made content is, in fact, distinctively ‘British’. Now, I’m not talking about waving union flags and a picture of the Queen in every scene. I’m talking about continuing to make the programmes that are ours, and only ours, that could only have been made in the UK.

“Take *Derry Girls* – a show that addresses the Troubles and the rise and fall of Take That with equal passion. It could only have been made here. Likewise, what other country in the world would have come up with a concept as bonkers but brilliant as *Gogglebox*? *Fleabag* isn’t *Fleabag* without its British sarcasm and its self-deprecation.”

Public service broadcasters, however, needed protection if they were to “keep their place at the heart of television”, said Whittingdale, who announced that the Government would “make it a legal requirement” that major online platforms carried PSB content and ensured it was easy to find.

He added: “In a world of fake news and disinformation, [PSBs] are a trusted source of content and information. And they play a crucial role in bringing the nation together in times of crisis and celebration, whether it’s a national Covid press conference or a royal wedding.” ■

Session Ten: ‘UK keynote: Secretary of State’. The presentation was given by John Whittingdale MP, who was in conversation with Convention Chair Ben McOwen Wilson. The session was produced by Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Matthew Bell.

John Whittingdale on...

... Channel 4’s financial health

‘Uniquely among the public service broadcasters, [it] is completely dependent on a single source of revenue, which is advertising.

‘As more and more content becomes available and choice becomes greater... the pressure on advertising revenues is going to increase... We feel it is right to examine what needs to be done to sustain Channel 4 in the long term – and that it is best to do that now rather than to wait for the crisis to happen.’



John Whittingdale

RTS

... C4’s programming diversity

‘Channel 4’s unique remit in delivering very different content and appealing to minority audiences, in being a risky, edgy broadcaster... is part of the attraction of Channel 4.

‘I don’t believe that anyone is going to want to acquire Channel 4 and then throw away the thing that is most successful at winning audiences. The

Channel 4 brand is something that... any acquirer would want to preserve... We will ensure that the remit of Channel 4 continues and... we may even enhance or strengthen it.

‘In our mind, Channel 4 needs to continue to make the kind of programming that it has been so successful at over the past 40 years.’

... What ‘Britishness’ means for TV

‘Britishness is quite hard to quantify but that’s something we will talk to Ofcom [about] – how precisely an obligation will work... The job of the public service broadcasters is to

produce programming that appeals to British audiences. If we can sell them around the world, that’s fantastic, but the first and primary audience needs to be Britain.’

... Independent producers

‘When Channel 4 was set up... the independent production sector didn’t exist. It was set up to provide the catalyst, which was hugely successful, to grow the production sector.

‘We’re now at a point where some of those independent production companies are actually bigger than Channel 4... But Channel 4 still has a

role in supporting smaller independent production companies and start-ups...

‘The remit will continue and, therefore, we will see Channel 4 continuing to commission from the independent sector – whether or not it’s allowed an in-house production facility of its own [is] something that we haven’t reached a decision on yet.’

... The BBC

‘I’m a huge supporter and want to see [it] continue as the centrepiece of public service broadcasting in this country,

in state ownership... We will have a debate about the best means of funding [it] at the end of the Charter.’



Richard Kendall

Keynote: Tim Davie

The Director-General talks up the BBC's value for money and impact in the creative sector

If the surprise appointment of the new culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, an outspoken critic of the BBC, had ruined Tim Davie's day, he wasn't letting on during what was his first RTS Cambridge appearance since succeeding Tony Hall as Director-General a year previously.

Throughout a 30-minute grilling by ITN's newish CEO, Deborah Turness, the former head of BBC Studios presented a glass-half-full view of life running an institution that often appears embattled as it is attacked by the *Daily Mail* or Westminster.

For the ebullient Davie, it all felt like water off a duck's back. On the question of Dorries taking over DCMS – she has described the BBC as “outdated” and “bloated” – Davie said he was “looking forward to meeting her and getting stuck in”.

Did her appointment tell him anything regarding the Government's intentions over the licence fee? “It's

too early to draw any conclusions. We're on 10 culture secretaries in 10 years,” said Davie. “The key thing I found is that we need a really serious, grown-up dialogue with government to talk about what we want to do with this industry, and the BBC's place in it.”

The DG continued: “There is a very strong case for investment in the BBC [the past year had seen 1,200 jobs lost on the public service side of the corporation]. There's a lot of jeopardy for us now. Politicians' decisions are going to shape the industry.... We need to have a dialogue at a slightly different level. That's why I really appreciate this conference.”

Had the appointment of Jess Brammar – known for her anti-Brexit tweets – as executive editor of the BBC's news channels confirmed the suspicions of those who are sceptical of the BBC's political impartiality? “We're on dangerous territory if previous political positions and tweets rule you out from

BBC jobs. We are hiring people from all walks of life, and from a wide spectrum of media,” he replied.

“My expectation as leader of the organisation is for anyone joining our organisation to leave their politics at the door...

“What I don’t want to do is [end up in a place where] we’re not in a position to hire the best people. When you come to the BBC – and I’ve made this very clear – you deliver impartial coverage.”

Could Andrew Neil return to the BBC? “He’s an outstanding talent. I am sure he will get a good gig.”

What, then, did it feel like leading the BBC? When Davie started the job, a source was quoted in *The Sunday Times* saying, “Every day you open Pandora’s box and more bad stuff comes out.”

Was that true? “No. You don’t choose it for a quiet life. Rarely is there 24 hours without something coming up that could absorb your day.

“At the end of the day, we’re in a market and I happen to be a huge advocate of this rather wonderful blend of private money and public intervention. It’s not a coincidence that the UK creative industries are one of our crowning jewels economically and culturally.”

He added: “Sometimes it’s difficult in this job because there’s so much noise.” It was vital to be driven by audiences and household behaviour, which is what Davie said he focused on instead of “the industry stuff”.

The new DG had arrived in the hot seat with four key priorities – a renewed commitment to impartiality, a focus on high-impact content, a determination to extract more from online, and to build the BBC’s commercial income.

He told the RTS that these objectives were all served by ensuring that the corporation’s services were valued by every UK household. “It’s not enough for people to think the BBC is a good thing for the country. They’ve got to feel they’re getting good value,” Davie said.

On impartial news, he was pleased with how the BBC had covered the regional and local elections in May, and of how “we navigated the Covid crisis”.

“As for high-impact content, we’ve had some rather good things going on,” he noted. “Eighty-nine per cent of the UK population uses the BBC each

week, for around 18 hours on average; iPlayer has had an excellent year while Sounds has grown at reasonable scale.

“Commercially, we’re doing OK. It’s been a tough year but, so far, BBC Studios has hit all its numbers. I’m very ambitious about where that business could go.”

But with the BBC having reduced its Olympics coverage after being outbid by Discovery, and losing top talent such as Phoebe Waller-Bridge to



Richard Kendall

Amazon, wouldn’t there come a tipping point where the value to users wasn’t there any more because you didn’t have the scale and the funds to deliver it? “No,” he insisted. “That’s not inevitable. I do think it requires a clear focus on what you’re trying to do.

“We push money out across the UK because that’s one of the things that differentiates us.” He welcomed MP John Whittingdale’s idea that UK PSBs should be obliged to make “distinctly British shows”, while observing that the Britishness narrative could be problematic when it got into “fun and games with flag-waving”.

“We’re great storytellers in the UK, we know it,” said Davie. “We tell stories. We have an incredible heritage that is globally recognised. We should focus on what we do differently and what we do better. [But] it is important that there isn’t a lack of global ambition.”

Culturally, the threat to the BBC came when “we’re not soaking up

those [British] ideas and talent. When you see a *Normal People*... You can write all the strategy documents in the world but when you see something like *Normal People*, you know you’ve got something great.”

But wasn’t there a terrifying truth staring down at all of us – by 2030, the top three US streamers would be spending £200bn a year on content? Where did that leave the BBC?

“Scale is a factor,” conceded Davie, “but it is not the only factor... we’ve got enough scale to compete if we make the right choices. Part of that is constructing partnerships and ensuring that we have access to capital. Ideas should not be constrained by the ability to fund them.

“As a nation, we’re very strong editorially. That gives us incredible power.”

When regulators cancelled Project Kangaroo, was it a sliding-door moment for the BBC and other PSBs? “It’s a moment we look back on with regret, but I don’t think the game is over.”

BritBox, Davie said, was a profitable, growing business gaining relative scale, having recently launched in Australia and South Africa. This offered real opportunity, as did BBC Studios’ distribution business, which was worth “half a billion odd”.

“At some point, what’s your ambition, to flip into direct-to-consumer?” teased Davie. “There are opportunities potentially in terms of subscription news services in the US. I’ve got other ideas around that. But you’ve got to be clear about who your partners are and what’s really going to work.”

Going forward, a creative ambition was a major priority: “We’ve got one life, let’s have some fun... I want people to take more risks in the right way... If you work at the BBC, surely you want to look back and think, ‘I’ve had the most amazing creative period’.

“I suspect we won’t remember the policy Zoom calls, but we will remember the work. I am going to be unrelenting in getting everyone to dial up their creative energies at the BBC.” ■

Session Eleven: ‘UK keynote: Tim Davie’. The BBC Director-General was in conversation with Deborah Turness, CEO of ITN. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Steve Clarke.



Keynote: Lutz Schueler

Speaking 100 days after Virgin and O2 merged, the new group's CEO, Lutz Schueler, said all the talk over the past few years may have been about content being king but, post-pandemic, it is time to crown connectivity, too.

"Connectivity was always important but I think we lost a bit of our importance because everybody was talking more about the content or the value on top of our networks. I think now, after the pandemic, we have a second chance in life and we want to grab that," said the German veteran who helms Telefónica and Liberty Global's cable and mobile joint-venture.

Having stitched together broadband and mobile services before, at the Telefónica O2-owned German broadband provider HanseNet, Schueler has experience of combining mobile networks with cable, and says that Virgin Media O2 is "a power couple and the coolest gig to run in Europe for sure.

"We are maybe in the honeymoon

The CEO of the newly merged Virgin and O2 communications giant argues that he is a friend to everyone at Cambridge: producers and broadcasters all need better broadband

phase but came very well... out of the blocks.... Timing is everything... our networks have kept the country connected during the pandemic."

Schueler said the capacity used during the pandemic "more than doubled, basically overnight", and, with so many people now working from home, there are opportunities in "the B2B sector, helping companies to find the right environment in which people can work together while still at home".

His interviewer, *Financial Times* business columnist John Gapper, noted that Virgin Media O2 had a "limited footprint" and that, as rivals such as BT knew well, it was a "hugely expensive business" to put in more cable infrastructure.

"We've publicly committed [to] spending £10bn over the next five years," replied Schueler. "We've increased the speed of our existing network very quickly, so more than 10 million households are able to surf at 1Gb speed.

"We will have our entire network on 1Gb by the end of this year – that means close to 16 million homes. We announced 60 days after our merger that we will update our cable network to fibre. The benefit of that is you come very quickly from 1Gb to 10Gb speed."

Schueler explained that the company is expanding its network "at a pace of 400,000 homes a year", so to upgrade the whole UK would take 20 years.

"I'm retired in 20 years [and] I'm a very impatient person, so we are looking for ways to get the funding... for

an additional 7 to 9 million homes.”

Gapper asked if 5G would be very different for consumers and content providers. “If we’re all honest, speed for the consumer is already sufficient,” Schueler replied, but stressed that response times from the network would be faster and more applications could be built in.

Gapper pointed out that, in the US, Comcast did not stop at infrastructure

haggling about retransmission deals – they resolved that with a three-year deal, which Schueler revealed had been extended.

“We’re all moving to an all-IP world [with] advanced advertising [and] getting the data from the customer back to production. There’s so much stuff we can do together [so why] go back and haggle about retransmission fees; why waste our lives?”

“I don’t know about your family but, in my family, it’s a complete mess, right... in terms of how we manage the apps. We don’t have the answer [but] we’ve started to package Disney+ with our offers; we had huge success out of that.

“Can we help our customers who have seamless connectivity also get seamless access to content, and work with our content partners in a way that both screens are considered the right



From left: Lutz Schueler and John Gapper

Richard Kendall

but moved into content; might Schueler do that? “Our clear strategy is a superior viewing experience.... We think we have the best connectivity in the country... then we have all the content the customer wants on that platform. I don’t think we need exclusive content. Never say never but, for my agenda, I would say no.”

“So you’re not just a frenemy, you’re a friend to people in this room?” asked Gapper. “I think so. We’re an aggregator working together with all of you... negotiating deals, sometimes haggling. We need the content, you guys need the platform – you need superior connectivity for your customers.”

He continued: “The next thing to come, and we’ve all joined forces here, is using the customer data and using only IP [internet protocol]. We have a lot of mobile customer relationships... We have more than 47 million connections now, more than half of the country – let’s use that together.”

In 2018, Virgin and ITV were

‘OUR NETWORKS HAVE KEPT THE COUNTRY CONNECTED DURING THE PANDEMIC’

He insisted: “Let’s innovate together. If we don’t... we will die. If we innovate together, we will create value [then] we will also compete internationally.”

With the rise of TikTok, was there still a real opportunity in mobile content, asked Gapper. “We believe in convergence. You see on the connectivity side that people want seamless connectivity,” said Schueler, adding that consumers still differentiated between content on the big screen and on the small screen – “particularly in the way they purchase content”.

way? That would be fantastic. Am I sitting here with all the answers? No.”

Schueler also said Virgin Media O2 would soon be launching its “first IPTV offering, targeting the younger segment more”.

When asked what regulatory structure he would like to see, Schueler reminded Gapper that the Government’s subsidy plan to have 1Gb broadband in 100% of the UK by 2025 was toned down at the end of last year to 85%: “We will deliver more than 50% by the end of this year, so that thing is not solved.

“Huge investments are needed. Ofcom needs to keep looking [out] for the consumer but also to make sure we have an investment-friendly environment... it’s a balancing act.” ■

Session Twelve: ‘Global leaders keynote: Lutz Schueler: The CEO of Virgin Media O2 was in conversation with John Gapper, business columnist of the Financial Times. The session was produced by Helen Scott. Report by Tara Conlan.



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From left:
Naga Munchetty,
Marianna Spring,
Matthew Price
and Deborah
Turness

Richard Kendal

Fake news: The broadcasters' dilemma

The infiltration of fake news in today's society isn't just a scourge for those in the newsrooms – it affects the authority of whole media brands

on one side and the public's well-being on the other. Since the term "fake news" was made Collins Dictionary's word of the year in 2017, it has only become a bigger issue.

To prove how convincing fake news can be, attendees at this session were put to the test. Chair Naga Munchetty showed a series of viral images, with the audience deciding if they were real or fake using the poll function on the RTS Cambridge app.

While you'd have to get up earlier than even the breakfast presenter to fool the majority of the room, the point was made: it's easy to be duped, whether it's the image itself or the context that's been modified. It's why, in this divided age, when misleading information is used to sway public opinion, stamping out fake news is high on the agenda.

How does TV news cope in an age of disinformation?

"It's a very serious problem but this is journalism that we must do," said Deborah Turness, CEO of ITN. "We cannot back away and not go there, because disinformation is the greatest threat to modern democracy and it is our job. The comparison to a war zone is very real."

The increase in fake news has come hand in hand with the ability of ordinary phone users to manipulate images and videos – and publish the results on public platforms. Yet our brains are hardwired to believe what we see.

Questioning the reality in front of our eyes "isn't something that we're particularly good at because it didn't use to be necessary", explained Hany Farid, a professor at the School of Information, University of California, via a video link. "But now we're being asked to reason about the world in a

very different way than what our visual system evolved to do."

Now that fake news has entered the realm of mainstream platforms, the onus is on the individual to choose which pieces they believe.

When that happens, it is more likely they will believe information that fits their belief system, which helps to further divide already divided societies.

"In the US, we see greater social division, and that social divide plays into everything in society," said Turness. "We saw images of what happened in the Capitol, which is perhaps the greatest example of where that misinformation leads, and the lack of social cohesion, which is, in part, created by the media."

The media played a role by being seen to reflect society mainly on the east and west coast of the US, "so there isn't a sense of understanding or listening to a large portion of the population," said Turness. "They therefore turn to fake news, to the echo chamber that affirms them, >

Duty of care on the frontline

'Thank goodness the news industry got involved in training for going into hostile environments over the past two decades,' said Sky News's Matthew Price. 'Now, we need just as much work to go into training the people who are working in newsrooms. If you're going into the darkest places on the internet, everyone needs to be equipped psychologically for that.'

Requiring the same care as journalists working in war zones, those who have to research extreme content, or face online hate from trolls or criminals, are calling for an updated, contemporary form of resilience training and support.

Abuse and threats disproportionately affect women and ethnic minorities. Seventy-three per cent of women journalists surveyed last year by Unesco had experienced online violence (this figure was 88% for Jewish female journalists and 81% for black female journalists), and 20% had been attacked or abused offline in connection with online violence they had experienced.

The BBC's Marianna Spring, for example, said she found herself 'very, very regularly targeted with death threats, rape threats, really vile abuse on social media'. Even those covering innocuous health or breakfast TV beats – such as session chair Naga Munchetty – have faced online threats.

Thankfully, action is being taken both at a broadcaster and a national level. In March, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport published its National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists.

This draws together a number of initiatives such as enhancing the criminal justice system's response to crimes against journalists and working with social media platforms to combat online abuse.

The aim is to provide a more robust defence for those whose job puts them in the frontline of the information wars.

'SOME PEOPLE TURN TO... THE ECHO CHAMBER THAT AFFIRMS THEM BECAUSE THEY DON'T FEEL UNDERSTOOD BY MAINSTREAM MEDIA'

› because they don't feel understood by the mainstream media."

To counter the growing issue of fake news, ITN created the first fake-news-busting site in *Channel 4 News's* FactCheck, in 2005. Sky News data specialist Matthew Price explained that the channel used data journalists to provide visual context to stories, and forensic journalists to investigate real versus fake news.

Fellow panellist Marianna Spring investigates the human cost of misinformation, straddling the BBC's fact-checking brands that include BBC Monitoring, BBC News Reality Check and BBC Trending.

Spring offered the story of Patricia Chandler as a case study of thorough fact checking. Last year, a picture of Chandler with giant sores on her feet went viral when anti-vaxxers took information from a GoFundMe page that a relative of Chandler's had set up and claimed the sores were caused by her involvement in a vaccine trial.

Spring was tasked with investigating the story. Even the first step of seeking out Chandler was tricky, as she had changed her name online to hide from anti-vaxxers "and everyone in Texas, where she's from, appears to be called Patricia".

When Spring eventually found Chandler, she told her side of the story and gave Spring permission to speak to her doctor and those running the vaccine trials – who confirmed she had been given the placebo and not the vaccine. It couldn't, therefore, have been responsible for the sores, which were most likely a reaction to another drug she was taking.

"Verifying these kinds of stories is so complicated because they involve medical records or personal details," said Spring. "Often, people are unwittingly exploited by anti-vaccine activists, who will misappropriate their stories. We've seen that happen a lot, which is worlds apart from the legitimate medical, professional or political debates we might have about vaccines or side effects."

Yet, when debunking stories, there was inevitably a concern about amplification. "Which pieces of fake news do you choose to debunk," asked Turness, "because you might actually be giving them more oxygen. FactCheck is careful about that – it only tackles the stories that have already been widely shared, and really need debunking."

"There's a danger in some of the work that Facebook is doing; sometimes, when it is debunking something that hasn't actually had many shares or likes, you're perpetuating the story."

Another weapon in the fight against fake news was maintaining the authority of traditional media – which meant even the smallest story had to be accurate. "It's still about journalism, and it's still about checking," said Price. "If you continue to keep that at the heart of everything that you do, while it doesn't tackle the misinformation that is out there, it does make sure that what we as journalists are putting out is correct."

"If we're putting out stuff that isn't true or isn't all it's reported to be, then we undermine our own journalism, and we add fuel to the fire for people who say you can't trust us."

In terms of demonstrating authority,

Pre-bunking false content

In an effort to combat fake news, a new device of 'pre-bunking' is being developed by Sander van der Linden at the Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab.

'The idea is that, if you're debunking something, it's often too little, too late, and you can't scale fact checking to the same level as misinformation. Pre-bunking is pre-emptively refuting false content through a process we call psychological inoculation,' he explained.

Continuing with the vaccine metaphor, it 'injects' the public with a weakened dose of the fake news virus to build up intellectual antibodies against it. It is being trialled by the Cabinet Office of the World Health Organisation, and the United Nations, plus social media companies such as Facebook and Google. It was also tested by the Department of Homeland Security during the 2020 US presidential election.

It comes in the form of *Go Viral!* – a five-minute online video game or 'disinformation simulator' – which microdoses the user in matters of fake news. 'People can create their own conspiracy theory so that they understand the techniques that are being used to manipulate them. So, when they're hit with [fake news], we've found that people have become more resilient, because now they have the intellectual antibodies,' he said.

Studies show that *Go Viral!* players were 19% more likely to spot fake news after playing it.

The game is likely to have long-term efficacy, too, as it targets the methods of manipulation (the 'DNA' of fake news) rather than specific conspiracy theories, making it effective against future variants of the fake news. Van der Linden said: 'We don't tell people what to believe. We tell them the manipulation technique so that they can identify it for themselves. So now, when people see different conspiracies, they understand what they're dealing with.'



Anti-lockdown demonstration, Edinburgh

Jane Barlow/PA

there was a move towards increasing transparency around news reporting and explicitly highlighting the steps that news teams take to ensure their reports are robust. "I think it's absolutely crucial that, as journalists, as television-makers, as content-makers, we start to show our workings," said Price. "Because, if we can show the way in which we get to the conclusions we arrive at, then we can start to rebuild trust [in broadcast news]."

The final lesson was the importance of repeating facts, especially those with a public interest element, to make sure they were widely understood. "Those of us here are news junkies. I imagine most of us in this room believe that vaccines are safe because we've taken in that news. But many people don't take in the news in the way we do, so we shouldn't be afraid to repeat what

we know to be true and why we know it to be true."

While the first releases of fake news caught many in the media unaware, there is an ever-growing bank of experience to deal with further outbreaks. As newsrooms have known for decades, information is power. ■

Session Thirteen, 'Fake news: The broadcasters' dilemma', featured: Sander van der Linden, professor of social psychology in society and director of the Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab, University of Cambridge; Marianna Spring, specialist disinformation and social media reporter, BBC; Matthew Price, editor, Data and Forensics Unit, Sky News; and Deborah Turness, CEO, ITN. The session was chaired by the journalist and presenter Naga Munchetty, and produced by Stuart Denman. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.



From left: Kirsty Wark, Fraser Nelson, Alex Mahon and Maria Kyriacou

Richard Kendal

PSB: fit for the future?

Footage of John Cleese’s famous all-star 1985 BBC licence fee advert – in which he adapts the “What have the Romans ever done for us?” scene from *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* to show how much the corporation provides – kicked off this session on public service broadcasting. Former BBC Director-General and *New York Times* CEO Mark Thompson said many of the reasons that Cleese listed for paying the licence fee still felt “very true today”.

But in a lively, engaged debate, chair Kirsty Wark drew out the challenges facing the public service broadcasters over the next decade.

Thompson said there were two key issues: the arrival of competition from global streamers and the legacy effect of Alan Peacock’s 1986 report into financing the BBC, which lingered in the minds of ministers.

Despite John Whittingdale’s keynote speech at the RTS Convention the previous day, which talked about “extending the remit of the public broadcasters to ensure Britishness”, Thompson feared that the Government wanted “the ends of public service broadcasting but isn’t willing to wish the means”.

How radically do public service broadcasters need to transform themselves in order to retain their traditional values?

‘STREAMERS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THERE’S THIS CASH GEYSER... AVAILABLE IN SUBSCRIPTIONS’

He went on to argue that, in the same way as the NHS was recognised as essential, so is the BBC in terms of airing “accurate, impartial information of every kind, as well as educational and great British entertainment. British stories for British audiences – that’s a real need at home and also potentially a world-beating growth industry for the UK, and it projects the UK around the world.”

Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon said that, while the quality of content on streamers “is outstanding..., it’s not British content from a British perspective.

“That doesn’t have to mean it’s parochial, it can be global, but it does have to be made from here by people from here who have that point of view and perspective on the world. That’s always hard to define but I think that, if we lost it, we’d be in a very, very dangerous position as a nation.”

With the debate about the potential privatisation of Channel 4 swirling, ViacomCBS Networks’ Maria Kyriacou offered Channel 5 as a “real-world example” of a foreign-owned, UK public service broadcaster. She pointed out that, since being acquired by the US global streamer in 2014, “we’ve increased our investment in

original production – up 40% in prime-time. Now, over 80% of our prime-time hours are original content.”

She added: “We’ve exceeded all aspects of our PSB remit, including out of London... we see that as a route for our future.”

Spectator editor Fraser Nelson argued: “There are so many things the market can do well, in fact a lot better than the BBC.” He suggested that the cost per episode of BBC drama would be a “pale imitation” of streamers’ due to the economies of scale for a global operator. “I don’t think BBC drama is bad, I just don’t think anyone who relies on the taxpayer for funding is going to be able to come near these global giants, who are accessing this new stream of revenue from subscriptions.”

BBC director of policy Clare Sumner disagreed: “We’re not a pale imitation. We had 6.1 billion streams to iPlayer last year.”

Mahon said the strong UK PSB ecology meant that “the question is how can we do more globally with that and stop freaking out that Netflix has got all the money in the world. We still have programming that is really valuable in terms of global exports and which people really want to watch.”

Nelson said he was not anti-BBC but thought it would “be forever stymied if it’s relying on politicians to decide how much money it’s going to get. That is not a very sustainable situation, especially when the streamers have demonstrated there’s this cash geyser that is available in subscriptions.”

Claire Enders, from Enders Analysis, countered that around 35% of the population – many of whom are older and poorer – “have no wish to subscribe to anything” and that losing the licence fee would damage “the universality of experiences that are accessible to all”.

Thompson thought that the 10-year BBC Charter, “which was meant to insulate the BBC from political interference and from constant noise, is clearly breaking down – and that’s a bad thing. Governments shouldn’t be endlessly re-examining and reopening everything, because it... is dangerous to the political independence of the broadcasters.”

Looking to the future of PSBs, Wark said a key component could be “Kangaroo 2”, the idea of a single, global British PSB streaming service that was



Mark Thompson

Reuters

being discussed again. The first version was blocked by competition authorities in 2009 – a decision many thought allowed US streamers to gain a huge advantage in the market.

Thompson was BBC Director-General at the time but thought: “With current public policy where it is, [it] would be rejected again. In common with many European countries, the British authorities think small and think local.” By comparison, US regulators “think global”.

Although British shows appeared on streaming platforms, “the original production brands... disappear in the wash and people assume [a programme is made by] Netflix or Amazon. So, in the end, it’s bad for the British. We’re in danger of becoming wholesalers of talent to the world.”

Sumner said the blocking of Kangaroo was “a huge regulatory mistake” and that “one of the challenges for us is regulation... recognising we’re in a global digital marketplace”.

Kyriacou pointed out that what “we’ve learnt... is you do better commercially if you deliver British content

to British audiences, because that’s what they want to watch. We’re taking that learning across as we commission for [new SVoD service] Paramount+.”

Asked about Channel 4’s ambitions, Mahon said: “Tim [Davie] already knows, because we’re in discussions with him, that we are grubby and available for partnering... there’s value in us doing things together – but watch this space.”

Big Talk Productions CEO Kenton Allen told the panel that, although Amazon Prime’s *Lord of the Rings* was bringing in half a billion pounds and Sky and others were opening or building studios, he couldn’t find enough production staff: “I don’t know who’s going to make all these shows, but I do know the public service broadcasters are fundamental to training the next generation of behind-the-camera talent.”

Allen added that the US streamers all say they want *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*, but they “were all sent them and they didn’t take them because they weren’t hits. So the public service broadcasters’ job is to grow this new talent [and give] them the space to experiment.”

He said talent wanted to be on global platforms, so “our job is to finance those shows to the best of our ability” with sophisticated co-production deals, such as on Big Talk’s *The Offenders*, where “20% of the money comes from the BBC, and the rest of it comes from Amazon and tax credits”.

Mahon agreed, adding that, when talent was established, it often went somewhere else but came back, as shown in Channel 4’s acclaimed care-home drama *Help*, “because the work’s so good, so it’s not always about budget”.

According to Thompson, the “central puzzle” for public service broadcasters was, “where’s the capital going to come from to transform the industry?”. Without it, the broadcasters would “end up landlocked as broadcasters, essentially, and landlocked in the UK”. ■

‘THE PSBs’ JOB IS TO GROW NEW TALENT [AND GIVE] IT THE SPACE TO EXPERIMENT’

Session Fourteen: ‘Public service broadcasting: Facing failure or facing the future?’ featured Mark Thompson, CEO, Ancestry.com; Maria Kyriacou, President of ViacomCBS Networks for UK, Australia and Israel; Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon; and Fraser Nelson, editor of The Spectator. The session was chaired by the broadcaster Kirsty Wark and produced by Adam Cumiskey. Report by Tara Conlan.



Keynote: Melanie Dawes

Ofcom's CEO emphasised that the regulator's independence is vital to the health of broadcasting and democracy alike

Richard Kendall

At a time when many observers fear decisions on broadcasting matters, from the size (or existence) of the BBC licence fee to the possible privatisation of Channel 4, will be politically motivated, Ofcom Chief Executive Melanie Dawes was keen to stress her organisation's independence – regardless of who is finally appointed Chair of the regulator or who had just been made culture secretary.

“The moment you walk into Ofcom, that independence is such an important part of our DNA,” she insisted. “Whoever our new Chair is, it's a decision for government. We are an independent regulator.

“When Ofcom is making decisions on areas where Parliament has given us that role, for example TV complaints,

in making those regulatory decisions that have an impact on companies or consumers, we are scrupulously independent. Everything we do is based on evidence and consultation. It can be challenged in courts and has to stand up to a really high threshold of fact-based, clear decision-making.

“The decisions we're making are about freedom of speech, and that raises really important democratic questions about people's fundamental rights to freedom of expression and how we weigh those against the need to uphold standards in broadcasting, so, on those decisions in particular, I think an independent regulator is especially important.”

Talking of TV complaints and freedom of speech, Dawes addressed the recent controversy over Piers Morgan's comments on *Good Morning Britain*, the

day after ITV aired Oprah Winfrey's interview with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. When Morgan voiced his disbelief at some of the Duchess's claims over her mental health, a record number of viewers – 58,000 – complained to Ofcom.

Dawes defended the decision to clear ITV of breaching broadcasting regulations, while saying that it was a “finely balanced” decision: “We were critical of Piers Morgan, and some of the things he said were deemed to be harmful as well as offensive, but, at the same time, he had a robust challenge from some of his co-presenters and that didn't happen by accident.

“ITV designed the programme that way so that challenge was there. The decision was about whether ITV was in breach of broadcasting codes: no. But we were pretty critical of Piers's comments.

'WE ALWAYS HAVE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO'

"More generally, we do always have freedom of expression at the heart of what we do. Sometimes, people aren't going to like our decisions but it is important that a broadcaster is entitled to transmit a range of views and opinions. It's all about how that's done, context and how the programme is put together."

With most of her time in this role coinciding with the Covid crisis, Dawes reflected on the fresh appreciation for public service broadcasters felt by viewers across the UK. She said: "I wouldn't have planned to arrive at Ofcom two weeks before lockdown, but you do get to see what this industry and sector is about. Our broadcasters had a great year – all-time highs in viewing figures in March and April, time and trust in news on UK TV on the rise. Viewers and listeners have really seen the value in PSBs."

But she joined others at the Convention who had highlighted the shift from linear viewing habits to digital throughout that same period, and the challenges that posed for the industry as a whole: "No other country has the ecology of public service media content and organisations that the UK has. The institutions, their brands, the trust built in those institutions over many years, will carry us forward a long way, but we have to be alive to the fact that younger viewers aren't as engaged in mainstream products. How do we cater to them?"

Interviewing Dawes, BBC journalist Clive Myrie compared the amount of UK-made original TV production per year – in total, the PSBs contributed 32,000 hours, against just 210 hours available on streaming platforms. He asked how this kind of commitment to British-based creatives could possibly be maintained when budget cuts to his own organisation had amounted to 25% since 2010.

Dawes, while pointing out that the licence fee remains a matter for negotiation between the BBC and the Government, with no Ofcom involvement, agreed that the BBC's remit was an exceptional one: "[It] is unique in serving everyone as far as possible. Most broadcasters can choose, the BBC has to serve everyone, and have the scale and range to do that.



Clive Myrie

Richard Kendall

"Clearly, funding matters, but the BBC would agree that the challenge to meet viewers' expectations is there, regardless of the funding."

Pressed on how the BBC could continue to deliver value for money to the licence payer while weathering those cuts, she replied: "The BBC has delivered very significant efficiencies that has allowed it to maintain content, despite having a tighter budget. All public-sector organisations have to accept that their budgets are set by government – that's how it works".

For Dawes, Ofcom's duty in this regard was to "be clear about the remit going into the second half of the Charter renewal. We do point out that this requires some choices and, at some point, the BBC has to make those choices".

The domestic issue hanging over this year's Convention was the privatisation of Channel 4. With the Government's consultation process just closed, Dawes once again took a diplomatic overview: "The first question the Government needs to ask and answer

is: what is Channel 4 for? What does the remit need to be?"

"Our report this summer was very clear that Channel 4 is delivering against a remit that is difficult, very important and very forward-looking about serving the viewers of tomorrow. We are definitely clear about some of those facts.

"Actually, ministers have been clear that they think Channel 4 is delivering very well against the remit, as well. There's not really a debate about that.

"As we look forward, there are a number of options, and Ofcom may well be asked for advice on some of these and we need to be ready to inform.

"The Government has said it's looking forward and asking questions about sustainability. That's the question it is asking and I think it's a fair question. But it is early days."

Dawes was far less equivocal about the need for improvements in diversity and representation across the television industry. Acknowledging that Ofcom has its own work to do in meeting diversity targets, she echoed similar calls from other Convention speakers on the need to address these issues, and urgently.

"Ofcom publishes its report in a few weeks, and this will be a five-year review. We've seen some improvements but they're not enough. We've got nearly double the amount of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in radio but we haven't seen the same progress in TV. In fact, Project Diamond data suggests that we're falling back in off-screen representation.

"More and more people are leaving the industry, and, if you leave, you're more likely to be disabled and more likely to be a woman."

Finally, she included the even-less-addressed factor of social class, telling the audience: "If you work in TV, you're twice as likely to have been to private school. Class cuts through a lot of these issues and is something very hard to measure but something we have to pay a lot of attention to." ■

Session Fifteen: 'UK keynote: Melanie Dawes'. Ofcom's CEO was interviewed by BBC journalist Clive Myrie. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Caroline Frost.



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Screenwriter Jack Thorne's deeply affecting MacTaggart lecture in August left the UK TV industry painfully aware of its failings over the employment and representation of disabled people. The RTS Cambridge session "Twenty per cent" – the proportion of the UK population who are disabled – was therefore particularly timely.

Referring to calculations by the Creative Diversity Network, based on the broadcasters' stated targets, Thorne said it would take until 2041 for TV's disabled workforce to reflect the make-up of the UK. Until then, disabled people faced barriers, disadvantages and ill treatment on a systemic basis in the UK TV sector.

According to the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, eight in 10 disabled people in the TV industry said their careers had been adversely affected because of their disability. One in two found practical issues, such as their inability to drive or use certain equipment, a barrier to their progression.

Disabled people are the most under-represented in TV. What will it take to improve representation and inclusion?

This highly charged Cambridge session conveyed the experience of what it was like being a disabled person in TV, and suggested ways to improve the situation. Chair Sinéad Burke, founder of the disability consultancy Tilting the Lens, questioned why it took a lecture by Thorne – who has a lived experience of disability, but does not identify as disabled – for the industry to listen.

"I applaud and admire Jack and I'm grateful to him, but what does it say about this industry that you make commitments and find resources not when disabled creatives speak about

the challenges, but when someone speaks about our challenges for us," she wondered. "What hope is there that the pathways you are building are truly accessible and equitable? Why would we apply when the invitation was crafted about us and for us, not with us? We need to rebuild."

Panellist Alicia Dalrymple, a junior production manager, discussed the negative consequences of exhausting work schedules imposed with little concern about wellbeing. "Unfortunately, I've been in companies where wellbeing in production wasn't filtered down through management, which took a toll on the whole production, and not just on me with my disability," she said.

David Proud, an actor, writer and director who has worked on *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and *Marcella*, recalled his experience as a wheelchair user. "Only this year, I started talking about the things I've had to go through, like crawling to toilets on set, and naked auditions so they can see my scars.

"I've never talked about it, because ▶

The invisible disabilities

The disadvantages that come with having a physical disability are also present for those with a mental disability – and, because it’s invisible, they can often be more insidious.

Being mindful of mental health is relevant to those with temporary or permanent mental disabilities, as well as those with physical disabilities whose wellbeing suffers as a result.

‘Everyone thinks about disability, and they’re all obsessed with physical health. My mental health has suffered more during my 15 years [in the industry] than my physical health,’ said David Proud.

Alicia Dalrymple advocates for wellbeing within television production. Existing initiatives include mental health first-aiders and companies that offer external counselling, ‘but even the access to external counselling is not as easy as you’d think it would be’, she said.

Her solutions were to remove barriers so that anyone who needed counselling to do their job effectively could access it, and, critically, to make sure that leadership filtered down the importance of wellbeing at work.

Practical solutions also helped. ‘There might be instances where you have anxiety or sensory overload, and [the affected person] might have to take a breather, and sometimes it’s even about knowing that a room is accessible for someone to do that.’

She continued: ‘It can happen to anyone. A lot of people during Covid have said how much they haven’t coped; it’s also people who live with that their entire lives. And 55% of people in film and TV have contemplated suicide. So it needs to be filtered down. There’s nothing wrong with having a work/life balance.’

› I didn’t want to be trouble. I think every disabled artist out there carries this baggage. And I’m considered one of the lucky ones in terms of a career, so I dread to think what people who haven’t been so lucky have experienced.’

Briony May Williams, who came to national attention as a contestant in *The Great British Bake Off* in 2018 and now co-presents *Food Unwrapped*, highlighted the power of TV in reflecting the disabled experience. ‘Growing up, I never identified as disabled. I was born in 1984 and it was a dirty, dirty

Briony May Williams



word so my mum wouldn’t use it.

‘So when I went on *Bake Off* and they started talking about me being disabled, I was very uncomfortable. But *Bake Off* has helped me embrace that term, and embrace my disability, and be proud of it. I was the first disabled person in the *Bake Off* tent.

‘Now, I get messages from people with young children who have hands like mine or missing limbs, saying, ‘I’m so glad you were a part of *Bake Off* because now I know my kids are going to be OK’. It’s so powerful. Now I say, ‘Yeah, I am disabled’. I’m proud of it, and it doesn’t have to be a dirty word.’

While having on-screen representation not only helps to foster empathy and understanding, it also helps ‘so that those children who are marginalised and othered feel that they belong,’ said Burke.

While there was clear merit in listening to those affected by visible and invisible disabilities, Proud pointed out

that the onus should not be on disabled people to advocate for equality.

For him, ‘it’s an energy thing. I have enough energy to do the job that I’m trying to do – not fight to get the job, and then do the job.’

‘It’s an unfair burden on disabled artists to have to educate people while they’re also working. That burden isn’t there for non-disabled artists, it should not be there for us.’

Burke said that, as a society, we had become very good at asking people questions in some domains: ‘We do

Alicia Dalrymple



really well in asking people if they’re vegetarian or vegan, and we accommodate for those things.

‘Why do we not ask – not just disabled people but everyone around – if they have any access requirements? We need to become comfortable because, if the onus is always on disabled people to ask for what we need, the gesture is charitable rather than rooted in rights.’

A comprehensive approach was required, said Burke: ‘Accessibility must be embedded in our digital tools, our hiring practices, and our corporate office refurbishments, in our production budgets, and in our marketing strategies.’

‘We should not have an awards ceremony celebrating the best of British film and television in a building that is inaccessible, or photographs that are taken at the top of a flight of stairs. We should have deaf interpreters on stage with actors and directors, and a ramp to the podium that can be used by everyone.’

Sinéad Burke
and David Proud



Richard Kendal

“It is too late to think about accessibility when disabled talent has already reached the overall echelons of the industry, because who *didn't* make it due to the systemic barriers that we created?”

For all under-represented groups, positive discrimination was a helpful but imperfect solution as it was an end-stage fix for a broken system, she added. Early intervention required more resources and took longer to see results, but it could solve the problem at the roots.

“In my quest for inclusion, I’m not asking you to place disabled people in roles that they are unqualified for,” Burke told the Convention. “I’m asking you to acknowledge that the merit system by which we measure success is not designed for everyone to thrive.

“We do not just need programmes that create opportunities for disabled talent, but we need scholarships and bursaries that give access to education, and we need educational campaigns that encourage children and teenagers to believe that this is an industry that they can be a part of.”

Accessibility for the TV-watching public was another area of concern for Burke. On-demand services had provided a helpful platform to expand accessible offerings, and the streamers had been leading the way. “Apple TV+ has excellent audio descriptions. Netflix continues to invest in excellent

captioning,” said Burke. “But even with these innovations, non-disabled people are prioritised because accessibility is not automatic, it is hidden in the settings.”

As was so often the case, making content accessible wasn’t only for the benefit of disabled audiences, Burke argued. It also allowed greater flexibility for everyone, potentially increasing a programme’s popularity. Captioning content, for example, enabled a show to be followed in a noisy room, or on public transport even when the viewer had forgotten their headphones.

It was also a more tenable option for those without English as a first language. Similarly, accounting for mental health needs helped those with permanent impairments as well as those suffering from temporary problems. Many who live with insomnia or stress fell into these categories, as did those whose mental health had been affected by Covid (see box on page 44).

To make a lasting impact, Proud said that appointing disabled people to senior positions would have the most impact. “I honestly think that, without that, nothing will change,” he said. “Trickle-down economics arguably doesn’t work, but trickle-down diversity does.”

He asked that commissioners who turned down a disabled-led project should consider their reasons carefully. “I know it’s a taste thing and I know

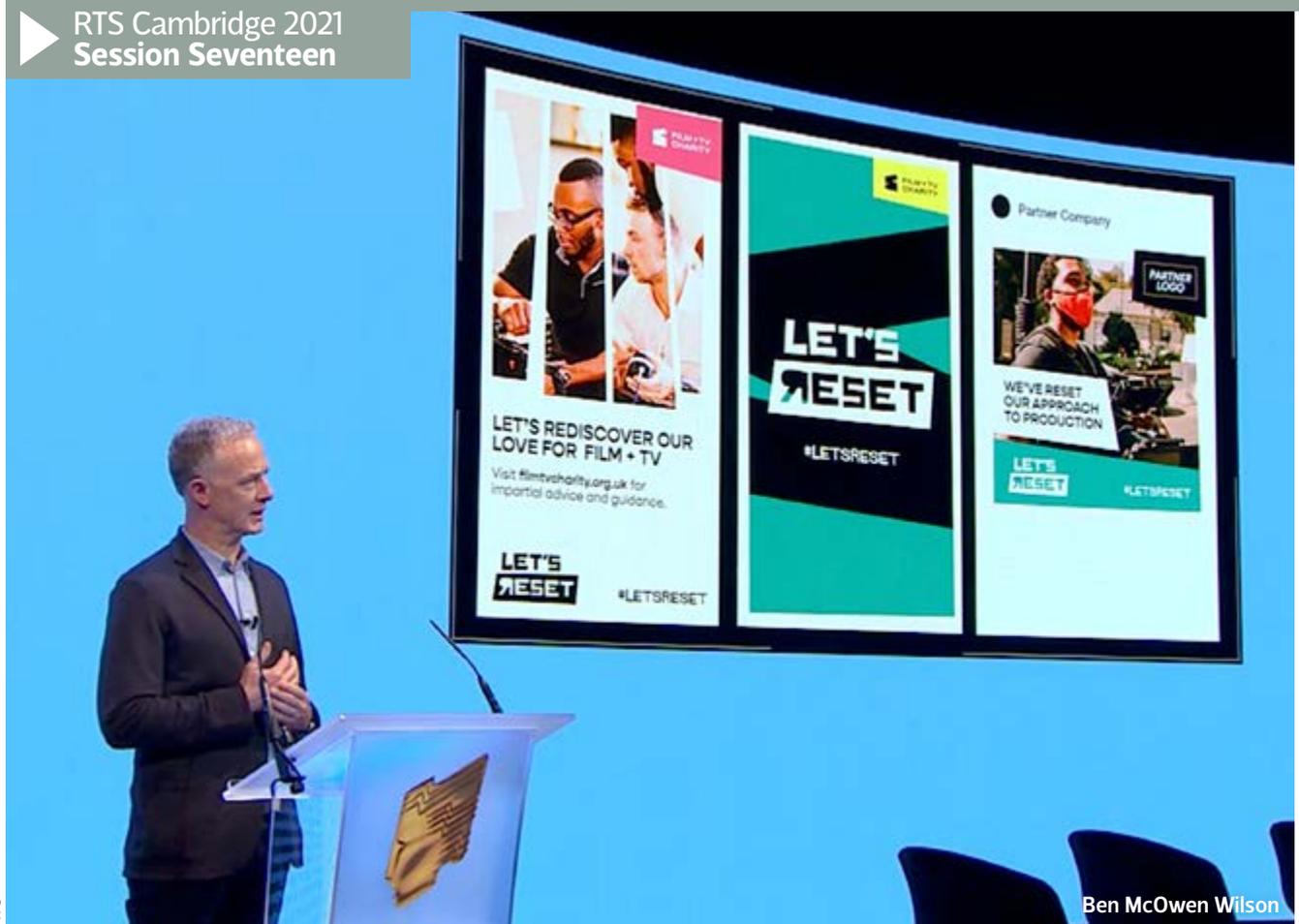
you don’t like accountability, but even just having your colleague check it all and go, ‘Would I make that same decision?’, could challenge your perceptions on how you feel about the project.”

Change appears to be on the horizon. After Thorne laid down the gauntlet, the BBC and Netflix announced a five-year UK initiative to co-produce shows involving more on- and off-screen disabled talent.

And across RTS Cambridge, improving accessibility was a hot topic – for example, in her session, Dana Strong, CEO of Sky, highlighted Sky’s involvement as a pathfinder in The Valuable 500 organisation.

In her closing comments, Burke, who wanted to know why so few people had bothered to attend this session, explained in no uncertain terms that the onus was on each individual to become conscious of their contribution. “Be a force for change,” she said. “Arm yourself with two questions. Is this accessible? And who is not in the room? Because those questions free us from the passivity that we feel.” ■

Session Sixteen: ‘Twenty per cent’. The panellists were: Alicia Dalrymple, junior production manager; David Proud, actor, writer and director; and Briony May Williams, presenter. It was chaired by Sinéad Burke, founder and CEO, *Tilting the Lens*, and produced by Sam Tatlow and Chris Ward. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.



Ben McOwen Wilson

TV's toxic workplaces

Bullying is twice as prevalent in TV as in other industries. What must be done to stamp it out?

Session Seventeen, 'Toxic', was presented by Ben McOwen Wilson. The film Toxic was produced by Brian Hill, Managing Director of Century Films. Report by Caroline Frost.

Fun, glamour, creativity and lucrative rewards... working in TV looks like the stuff many people's dreams are made of. Unfortunately, for a huge number of professionals across the industry, the reality can be very bleak indeed.

Presenting research collated for this year's Convention, Chair Ben McOwen Wilson revealed that a horrifying 56% of interviewees reported having experienced some form of bullying at work in TV and film (compared with the UK average of 29% across all fields). The numbers are even worse for freelancers, disabled employees and people of colour, he said, and rise to a depressing 67% for women.

Four out of 10 women in the industry reported experience of sexual harassment. McOwen Wilson said it was clear that inappropriate and harmful behaviours, long deemed unacceptable in other workplaces, remained

entrenched and normalised in the business of making television.

He warned that, if this wasn't addressed, the industry as a whole was at risk of damaging the talent pipeline, and compromising the urgent need to improve diversity and representation.

He introduced *Toxic*, a film based on four individual testimonies of bullying and its effects, based on accounts provided by more than 40 people across the industry, including producers, directors, commissioning editors, assistant producers and researchers.

To protect their anonymity, these testimonies were arranged into a script and played by actors, but the reality of bullying and its effects were palpable on screen (testimonies on pages 47-48).

Afterwards, McOwen Wilson returned to the stage to encourage fellow executives to learn more about and then implement a strategy such as the four-point anti-bullying plan created by The Film + TV Charity (see page 47). ■

The countermeasures

The Film + TV Charity has created a four-point anti-bullying plan

1 Share the sources of support

The Film + TV Charity has a dedicated bullying advice service (Bullying Pathway) available through the Film and TV Support Line (0800 054 00 00), which can help someone work through their options.

2 Know what bullying and harassment is

ScreenSkills offers a free, 30-minute module to help you recognise and address these traits in yourself and others. Encourage your workforce, from the top down, to complete this training and make it relevant for your workplace.

3 Have an anti-bullying policy

Set out expectations of behaviour, how to report and how you'll handle issues if they arise. They should be shared proactively and be easy to find. Make sure all your suppliers also have one in place.

4 Join the conversation

Explore how we can create a healthier working culture, where we all do our best to look after ourselves and each other, especially those under our supervision.



Getty Images

The testimonies



Century Films

Witness A

“I was in a relationship with a man older than me, also in the business. He was a bully. I ended it, he was livid and, some time after that, I went for an interview, and I was told, ‘You can’t have this job because I’m friends with your ex.’

“I was contacted by a production company to direct a series, and they needed a sign-off from the commissioning editor. When my name came up, the commissioning editor

said, ‘Isn’t she the person that went out with X?’

“The next day I was taken out to dinner by the head of the production company. He was embarrassed and told me that the commissioning editor had said very personal things about me. He wouldn’t say what they were but they couldn’t give me the job.

“At the same broadcaster, a different commissioning editor was keen [to hire me] but she didn’t really know me so she asked around her colleagues. She got an email from the person who had said nasty things about me previously. It said, ‘If you hire this woman, you will be making a rod for your own back. I’ve worked with her – she was a complete nightmare.’ It was a lie. I’d only met him once for about 10 minutes years ago.

“A trade organisation set up a meeting with the person who’d been slandering me. He admitted he’d sent the email but claimed it was a case of mistaken identity. I asked

them who they were mistaking me with, but he couldn’t answer. I told him, ‘I’d like you to know how this felt for me professionally and personally.’

“There’s a system that let’s this happen. Basically, it is not a very professional industry – short-term contracts, no management training, rampant egos. And the people at the top won’t intervene to deal with it as long as the bullies deliver. Ratings are more important than the welfare of the workers.

“I meet up with other female directors socially and every single one of us is labelled difficult. It’s OK to have opinions, but you’ve got to be submissive, too. The industry is just very sexist, even today, and I think that makes women easy targets for bullying.

“You get better work from a happier workforce, but still the tyranny of fear prevails. Now, I just try to avoid working with fuckwits.” >

The testimonies



Century Films

Witness B

“I woke up at two in the morning, my heart was thumping: have I got it right? What’s she going to say? I opened Google Docs and there she was. She’s giving me notes as I write and her tone is critical, cross, scath-

ing, even at 2:00am. I feel hunted.

“Later, I’m with my two young children and we’re just brushing our teeth and my phone starts ringing and it’s her. I feel sick, and my children look at me and go, ‘What is it, Mummy?’ and I realise I’m crying.

“We’re all so worried about our next job, that you have to be nice to the bully in the hope that you get a reference. The worst thing is that, sometimes when it happens, you think: ‘I deserve this. I’ve been found out.’

“You feel shame because you actually start to believe that you are being treated badly because you are

an awful person, or you are bad at your job. You think, ‘OK, 10 jobs have gone well but this bully knows the truth about me: I’m useless.’

“Since that last experience, I haven’t really worked properly. I just can’t face feeling like that again. I feel a shame about it – that the bully won.

“There is one company that is infamous for keeping its staff a little bit intimidated – they’d probably say: ‘on their toes’. There is this myth in the industry that, if you are scared, well, you work harder. And if you are working from home, like during lockdown, well, they will have to scare you more.”

Witness C

“I’d never worked on a reality TV show before. There was this blame culture that started with the exec producer. I saw several directors getting sacked for no reason.

“My experience was death by a thousand cuts, months of mental torture, which made me question myself, my mental strength, leading to paranoia, anxiety.

“Naively, I thought that if I mentioned it to the exec producer, we could sort it out. I was summoned



Century Films

to a meeting and the producer attacked me, blamed me for all of the problems. I’m not very good at

confrontational situations. I was told I needed to change my behaviour, and a decision would be made. I was almost in tears.

“I could have just left but I was a new dad at the time and needed the income. Having said that, looking back now, I should have just quit and got a job in a supermarket.

“This bad behaviour went all the way up to the creative director of the company, so it was clear they wanted this toxic environment.”

Witness D

“This was my first real job in television. I joined a team with one director and two APs. I was a researcher. Before long, the director really praised me, gave me loads of compliments, which made me feel awkward.

“I got on really well with the DoP but the director didn’t like this, he said I was flirting and it was disgusting to see. It was ridiculous, we were both in long-term relationships and I was trying to get pregnant at the time, but the director demanded he be copied in all correspondence.

“I got a call to go to Devon on a shoot but I couldn’t as I didn’t feel very well. He started to get angry, insisted that I go. I didn’t want to

talk to him about my personal life, but he was getting so angry, I told him I thought I was having a miscarriage. Next day, I got a text from him saying, ‘I didn’t sleep all night, I need to see you this evening.’

“I met him in the pub. He sits down, starts to cry. ‘You tell me you’re having a baby, where does that leave me?’ He’s sobbing. Everyone’s looking at us.

“The director started to gaslight me and I didn’t understand. Excessive praise – of course, all of my success was due to him and the way he’d supported me. All of this was said with such conviction I started to doubt myself. I lost weight, felt sick all of the time.



Century Films

When he told me I made things up to cover for my own mistakes, I believed him.

“I mentioned how he’d behaved to the commissioning editor and she shrugged it off, and said, ‘But he makes brilliant programmes.’ Like that’s a justification for torturing people.”



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The post-Covid boom is fuelled by the streamers but beset by inflation and labour shortages



From left: Brandon Riegg, Ralph Lee, Lorraine Heggessey, Sanjay Singhal and Jane Turton

Production's coming home?

Richard Kendal

Demand was “greater than ever” but “there is a skills shortage”, costs were rising by at least 10% per year and there had been no increase in tariffs, was All3Media CEO Jane Turton’s sober assessment of the state of TV production in the UK.

The big question for BBC Studios CEO of production Ralph Lee was whether the rising costs and wage bills were a long-term inflationary trend or a short-term effect of the pandemic and of “still [being] in the middle of trying to get the shows delivered”.

Lee reported that BBC Studios had made seven dramas this year but some projects could not get off the ground as “there just weren’t the skills” available; one of the delayed productions was a six-part comedy for BBC Wales.

Voltage TV co-founder Sanjay Singhal revealed that the thirst for talent meant

some directors were now asking for a “per-episode” fee, which he had never experienced before in the UK. “Demand is outstripping supply and that’s creating the inflationary pressure... people are more risk averse, so they want proven talent in order to make these shows. What I’ve suddenly started seeing is rates going up.”

Singhal added that contributors to documentaries, even minor ones, now wanted “some of the back end.... They argue that it’s going to end up on SVoDs, and they want some of it.”

Nodding towards fellow panellist Brandon Riegg, from Netflix, Singhal said in jest: “More money coming into the system is a good thing but, in the short term, it creates a gap and our job is to try and fill the gap... and take as much money as possible from Brandon and his colleagues and try to find ways to fill the gaps they’re creating.”

Riegg acknowledged that there was

“a gap in terms of the talent pool... and the availability versus the demand”. He said it was “incumbent” on Netflix and the public service broadcasters to train more people. He noted that Netflix was supporting the Unscripted TV Skills Fund and, in the streamer’s Grow Creative UK initiative, “to invest continuously in the UK”.

The Netflix VP said “the ultimate goal” should be “to have a larger pool of talent”, which “pays it back into the ecosystem”.

Lee reminded the audience that “we should welcome this work” from the streamers, and applauded Disney, Amazon, Apple and Netflix for bringing their ambition to the UK: “If they’d taken everything to Canada, we’d be having a conference about how we get them to come and invest here.”

Singhal said this “land grab” was more of an issue for broadcasters than indies, “putting questions on PSBs”. He

added that, if he were a PSB commissioner, he would ask what else his broadcaster could offer producers to compete with streamers; if he couldn't match the budgets, was it "speed of response" that became his USP?

"That'd be nice!" exclaimed session chair Lorraine Heggessey.

Singhal continued. "You can't spend 10 months developing an idea for one of the terrestrial channels then have them say no."

Riegg replied: "We really don't believe our commissioning is competing with the public service broadcasters; I think it's complementary. A lot of what we do is not necessarily things that the public service broadcasters would commission themselves."

It currently felt "truly a golden age of television, and the beneficiaries are viewers and the producers out here". Netflix had upped its production here because of the country's long tradition of "innovation and creativity", he said. "We've done a lot of co-productions with public service broadcasters."

Heggessey asked what was special that "you get from the UK that you don't get anywhere else". Riegg said the UK offered "a much longer history of making this type of programming... so the innovation we've seen has been more pronounced here". He gave *Too Hot to Handle* and *Sunderland 'Til I Die* as examples, and said UK producers brought a "care and thoughtfulness" to storytelling, with innovation and creativity "front and centre".

"It's not just that we're cheap?" asked Heggessey. "No... the size of a budget doesn't dictate how successful or popular a show is. We try not to overpay.... We have certain shows, from a scale perspective, we want... to be big, global swings, and we pay appropriately. Then we have shows that are less costly that we're equally fond of," explained Riegg.

Heggessey wondered if the larger budgets and full funding that streamers offered in exchange for rights were worth it.

Turton explained: "This is not new... it's a pre-terms-of-trade thing. The British market used to look like that, it then became a cable thing... and actually now it's an SVoD thing where, typically, Brandon and his peer group will pretty much take an assignment of all rights...."

"[It's] slightly different in unscripted formats... but in scripted... anything that travels as a tape you tend to say



Sunderland 'Til I Die

Netflix

goodbye to the tape as you deliver it to the SVoD platform."

Turton said the answer was obvious – producers wanted a portfolio of deals: "We sit there going... 'We like a Channel 4 deal, we like a BBC One commission, BBC Two, ITV, whatever, deal' because we can retain the rights. But, in return, they tend not to fully fund and, by the way, the terms of trade cut both ways.

"We don't have to take the deal. We've got to be a bit grown-up about this and accept there are different models out there and [that] it's complex – complexity is a good thing if you're competent."

Although Netflix's investment in bricks and mortar studios suggested that it was in the UK for the long haul, would it go elsewhere if the sector did not get "skilled up" quickly, Heggessey asked Riegg. He assured her that his team did "not make decisions dictated by geography", but went to where the best ideas were.

He added that some of the company's productions were "delaying

until the director, producer or crew is available... there's too much talent out here and too many great ideas coming on a consistent basis from the UK community [for us to] abandon you."

Turton concluded that although margins were being squeezed and "we've got proper Covid costs..., we are strong and will get through".

She rallied the audience by saying the industry had to work together more to get through the skills shortage: "We've tended to be a bit disparate since the demise of the big ITV and BBC training days; now is the time to get our heads around that." ■

Session Eighteen: 'Production's coming home?'. The session was chaired by Lorraine Heggessey, Chair of the Grierson Trust and external advisor to the Channel 4 Growth Fund, and featured: Ralph Lee, CEO, production, BBC Studios; Brandon Riegg, VP, unscripted and documentary series, Netflix; Sanjay Singhal, CEO, Voltage TV; and Jane Turton, CEO, All3Media. It was produced by Michael Hedley. Report by Tara Conlan.

With HBO Max preparing to enter much of Europe, the company's content chief is keeping his options open on a UK distribution deal

HBO Max, which launched in the US in May 2020, is set to roll out across Europe. The streaming service is scheduled to arrive in the Nordics and Spain this month, with other European countries to follow in the first quarter of 2022. But the UK is not included, because HBO content – including big-hitters such as *Succession*, *Gangs of London* and *The White Lotus* – is distributed exclusively via Sky until 2025.

“We’ll see what happens at that point, but it’s been a great way for us to get HBO programming in the UK – it’s been a very happy collaboration,” said chief content officer Casey Bloys over Zoom to the RTS Convention.

Pressed on the likelihood of the relationship ending, he remained diplomatic, saying, “Everyone’s trying to figure out what makes sense locally, and what makes sense by market. How’s that for a non-answer?”

HBO also has licensing deals until 2025 in France, Germany and Italy. There are benefits of HBO distributing its shows direct to market: aside from the financial gains, Bloys acknowledged that it could allow the company to tap directly into its audience, generating improved data about viewer habits, something that is critical in today’s world of personalised content.

“We’ve only been operating for a year-plus so far, so we’re still figuring out the best way to use the data,” said Bloys. “But any time you’ve got a direct



Richard Kendal

Keynote: Casey Bloys

relationship with a group of consumers [you get] really important and telling signs of what types of show bring people in and what keeps them.

“We’ve always been a creative-driven company, not a data-driven company and I don’t see that changing. However, I do think it would help to get a better sense of how people are using your service, what kinds of shows they’re watching, and for how long and what they respond to. It’s

harder to do [this] when it’s a wholesale relationship.”

As HBO Max expands into Europe, the plan is to commission local programming in each territory. “In many cases, it does better than programming that we’re providing from the US. So there’s not going to be any territory where there is no local programming,” he said. “Also, if we get European programming that works in the US, that’s a real benefit to us. Audiences, because

of streaming, are more open to foreign-language shows than they were two or three years ago.”

Two shows that demonstrated this for Bloys were *30 Coins* from Spain and *Beartown* from Sweden, both of which exceeded expectations by finding enthusiastic audiences outside of the

which collaborated with British producers, would soon want to have total control of the shows. Was HBO’s goal to become sole producer and owner of its content?

“One thing I know, for me, personally, creatively, is that you have an incredibly vibrant television community in the

programming there for the past five. Last year, his remit expanded to include HBO Max. He explained that HBO’s cable package was still “viable” and would continue alongside the streaming service. But “what everyone is trying to do is prepare for the future”.

HBO Max brings together content from a number of different sources, including third parties such as Comedy Central and Studio Ghibli, together with HBO’s parent company Warner Bros, which, of course, owns major assets such as *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

HBO’s own impressive back catalogue includes such gems as *Game of Thrones*, *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*. Added to that will be movies from HBO Films and Cinemax, plus a wealth of original programming.

Already announced are *The Peacemaker*, the spin-off series from DC Comics’ recent movie *The Suicide Squad*, and *House of the Dragon*, the long-mooted *Game of Thrones* prequel.

This drive on original programmes will help fine tune the service. As well as territory-specific commissions, the platform has its sights on “a more sustained cadence of female programming”, explained Bloys, following on from *Big Little Lies* and *The Undoing*, plus more adult animation to appeal to young males.

As a package, these rich sources provide “a really attractive offering for somebody who is choosing to get their entertainment this way, as opposed to through cable”, he said.

Gapper noted that the service had been criticised for bringing together a clash of brands, but Bloys suggested that a broad choice was in keeping with audience expectations: “When you think about HBO historically, distributed through cable bundles, we were always next to other channels that weren’t doing what we were doing, and that was OK.

“I think that people who enjoy watching HBO enjoy watching other kinds of programming. The biggest goal here is to preserve what we’re able to do on HBO in a future where digital distribution is key.” ■

Session Nineteen: ‘Global leaders keynote: Casey Bloys: The chief content officer for HBO and HBO Max was interviewed by John Gapper, business columnist of the Financial Times. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.



House of the Dragon, HBO’s prequel to Game of Thrones

HBO

countries where they were made. But the trick was to view these as bonus opportunities, rather than baking it into the commissioning process.

“Generally speaking, everyone in this room knows that dramas can travel, reality shows tend to travel, but comedies can be a little trickier because they’re so based on cultural nuance, so we haven’t had a whole lot of success in translating those,” said Bloys. “But I don’t think it can be the number one priority to think about. I don’t think the way to programme successfully [is] making one show to appeal to the entire world all at once.”

Latterly, HBO’s successes have often come from co-productions; key examples are the UK-based *It’s a Sin* and *I May Destroy You*.

Session chair John Gapper recalled ex-BBC Director-General Mark Thompson’s prediction that well-funded US partners such Netflix,

‘I CAN’T SEE A SCENARIO WHERE WE DON’T WORK WITH PRODUCERS AND TALENT FROM THE UK’

UK, so I know I’m going to want to continue to work with producers and writers and directors from the UK,” Bloys replied.

“What that looks like on a platform basis, I think that’s something all companies are trying to figure out. But one thing I do know is that I can’t see a scenario where we don’t work with producers and talent from the UK.”

Rising up the ranks of HBO over 17 years, Bloys has overseen all

Britain's write stuff

Five creatives offer reflections on what Britishness means for them and their work



RTS

Frank Cottrell-Boyce
Screenwriter and children's author

I [only] think a lot about Britishness when I'm working as a screenwriter.

"Film has to work globally. When you are working for a studio, you run across a set of values that are supposed to be universal, but which Britain is often to one side of – in a good way, a way that I like.

"The film philosophy is about affirmation, simplicity, hugging, learning, about a journey.

"I think it is quite possible to write a British film in which no one takes a journey, no one learns anything and no one hugs anyone. There is something good about that ability to abide with contradiction.

"In other countries where I have lived, people tend to celebrate victories and moments of greatness, whereas one thing that makes me hopeful about Britain is that, traditionally, we have often celebrated defeats. We know a lot more about Dunkirk than, say, Plassey.

"That ability to be ambivalent is where my hope lies: that is where we can learn to curate our troubled past, live with it and move forward.

"What worries me about Britain is that the opposite seems to be happening a lot of the time... the Second World War is changing its definition and becoming some sort of weird origin myth, and we have forgotten the complications and the troubles of that period.

"Well, I hope we haven't forgotten. As a writer, your job is to remind people of what has been forgotten and to tell other stories, particularly stories that contain contradictions.

"There is a wonderful phrase in *The Whitsun Weddings* by Philip Larkin that gives a beautiful definition of nationhood – a "frail travelling coincidence" – that, I think, describes the best a nation can be. Past and present, posh and poor, all our different communities are contained in this moment. That is something to be joyful about."



RTS

Munya Chawawa
Comedian, satirist and creator

Britain is so fascinating. There are some real strong points to being British: we can boast the likes of David Attenborough, Postman Pat and Peppa Pig – all global icons.

"There is a very meticulously crafted

image, where we are very prim and proper. I find British awkwardness very funny, especially abroad.

"As a satirist, my job is to analyse the more contentious aspects of society, some of its darker side, the things that are less desirable, that we are not so proud of, and to dissect those.

"Especially in the light of the Euros finals, Brexit, the constant back and forth to do with immigration from certain politicians... we need to expand our definition of what being British means. I was born in Derby but to a lot of people I would not be British – I get the, 'But where are you really from? Which bit of Africa?'

"We need to expand our definition to include people from all over who are quintessentially British.

"At the end of the Euros, we had this idea that 'if you get it wrong, you were never really British anyway'.

"And if you do get it right, 'Of course you should be getting it right, because you are a cog in the machine and you've got to earn your place here'. That is unfair. For many people, to be British you [still] need to be white.

"I can walk out on the street and see a variety of colours and creeds and know that we are all 100% comfortable and at home in Britain, and can say we are British and leave a pause and, if no one chimes in with, 'Yeah, but where are you really from?'; that is the moment when I will take full pride in saying, 'I am British'.

"But at the moment, we are not quite there."

**'WE NEED TO
EXPAND OUR
DEFINITION OF
WHAT BEING
BRITISH MEANS'**



RTS

Sathnam Sanghera

Journalist and author

Apologising when someone stamps on your foot – that epitomises what it means to be British. It’s an obsession with the crap weather; it’s moaning about that crap weather; it’s ending emails with, ‘No worries if not’; it’s Jeremy Clarkson; it’s Lenny Henry; it’s the BBC; it’s about electing politicians who went to Eton and Oxbridge.

“Another defining feature, for me, is that it is multicultural – there have been brown people in Britain going back centuries: Queen Elizabeth I complained that there were too many black people in London [in 1601].

“I think we need to own this racial diversity because, fundamentally, we had a racially diverse, multicultural empire. Which is why we have a racially diverse, multicultural society today.

“Another defining thing about British people is the way we travel, which goes back to our history. Two things you can guarantee, going anywhere on planet Earth: you will meet a Sikh taxi driver and a British ex-pat (not an immigrant, mind, an ex-pat).

“During the empire, we could impose the way we travelled on other peoples. We, generally, still do not learn their languages, we expect them to learn English; nor, generally, do we eat their food, we expect to eat British food.

“When I travel as a British person, I say I miss *The Archers* (though it is easy enough to listen to it). What I really miss is moaning about missing *The Archers* with other people, I miss people knowing where Wolverhampton is, and I miss British Asian people complaining about the weather even more than white British people – like my mother. That is a sign of true integration.”



RTS

Jackie Kay

Poet, playwright and novelist

I have always found the term Britishness a bit problematic. For some reason, the term Britishness becomes synonymous with Englishness.

“It is an unhappy equation: it is less than the sum of its parts. Yet the parts of Britain, or Britishness, that you’d like to celebrate are more than the sum of our parts: they are all sorts of wonderful things like the NHS, fighting against racism, having a sense of human rights and personal dignity.

“I’d struggle to find a Scottish person who would say, ‘I’m British’, in the same

‘IT IS AN UNHAPPY EQUATION: IT IS LESS THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS’

way as they say, ‘I’m Scottish’. I always think of Scotland as a wee country that looks out to the world, that is able to be internationalist at the same time as having a sense of its own national identity... it is a country that still sees itself as European. It is open-armed, it is inclusive, it is many voices, many dialects and many languages.

“We want to embrace the idea of Britain, of being brilliant, of Team GB, and of being fair and [having] a great sense of solidarity and camaraderie. Yet, at the moment, we have a Britain that is very divided – divided in opinion, in wealth, in politics.

“It is a Britain that is fractured and that many people in Scotland want to leave.”



RTS

Vanessa Kingori

Publishing director, *British Vogue*

The best of Britishness, to me, is about a wicked sense of humour. Our sense of humour is, arguably, the best in the world, as is our use of sarcasm. It is why we have brilliant advertising campaigns created here.

“It is a lot to do with bonding through complaining, especially about the weather. If someone asks how you are, you never really say how you are, but you also don’t reply in too jolly a way – you say things like, ‘Can’t complain’ or ‘Apart from my leg...’

“There is something self-deprecating about British humour and the British sensibility. It is about a debilitating type of politeness – I’ve seen Brits form a queue in other countries where there was never a chance of it working.

“In media and publishing, Britain has quite a long way to go in terms of inclusivity. I think we have made great strides in the past few years, especially the last four years or so. I’m proud to have been a part of that. And that has had a snowball effect and been aligned to some other changes going on elsewhere.

“But we have a long way to go to really have true inclusion and move away from tokenism. That is, tokenism on the screen, on covers, in magazines, in hires – having that one person from the LGBT+ community or that one black or brown or disabled person is not what true inclusion is about.

“When we start to see people from marginalised groups in leadership roles alongside their more traditional peers, that is when we will know that we have really changed things.

“It is really about leadership, not the tokenistic hires – that is the big frontier.” ■

Gareth Southgate explains why being a macho boss is anathema to managing the England men's team

Gareth Southgate

In conversation with Clare Balding

Richard Kendall

In recent years, few, if any, leaders in the UK have made such an impact as Gareth Southgate, the first manager of the England men's football team to reach the final of an international competition since 1966.

Introducing him at Cambridge, Clare Balding described Southgate as one of the great leaders, not just in sports but in any field, including business, politics and science: "He leads with dignity, empathy and with patience – qualities that aren't often associated with men's football." The strength of applause that greeted his appearance on the Convention stage said it all.

The audience was shown a clip of the documentary he made for YouTube prior to this year's Euros tournament, *Raise Your Game*, where he was joined by YouTube creators such as Chris MD, SV2, Yung Filly and StuntPegg.

Together, they explored how issues including mental health and wellbeing, racial inclusion and gender inequality,

were being addressed in football.

These themes resurfaced in a compelling, 30-minute conversation in which this deceptively low-key man seemed to radiate a Zen-like calm.

But first, how had he got to be the leader he is today? Who were his influences? Southgate, in chronological order, listed his parents and some of the football club managers he encountered as a player during a distinguished career that saw him win the First Division as captain of Crystal Palace, together with 57 England caps.

"What I've learnt over time is that there is more than one way of doing this," he told the RTS. "For me, the most important thing is to be authentic to myself and the way I am as a person. People will either come with us or they won't."

He added: "The way that I manage is probably a little bit more acceptable than it might have been in the past, certainly in our sport.... We've moved from a time in our lives when the boss

was the boss. In whatever industry it was, he banged the desk, he shouted, and you jumped. You were fearful of losing your job. It wasn't a culture of, 'We're all trying to work together to achieve a common goal!'"

Recalling how, overnight, he went from being a player at Middlesbrough to managing the club he said it was telling to see how the power dynamic shifted as people started to treat him differently.

The England manager, whose speech avoids the clichés of so many football leaders, emphasised how, off the pitch, he and the players and their staff had achieved a cultural change. Wearing the England shirt was now no longer regarded as something full of jeopardy. Southgate was appointed the England manager in 2016, leading to a revival in the team's fortunes that saw the national side reach the 2018 World Cup semi-final.

Unfortunately, England's remarkable achievement in reaching the finals of

the Euros this summer would be remembered as much for the racist abuse of the three failed penalty takers as for the team's dramatically improving performances as the tournament progressed. How did he deal with that situation?

"I'd lived through missing a penalty in a major tournament [the semi-final of Euro 1996], so I knew that element. It never crossed my mind that the three boys who missed were black or of mixed heritage. But, very quickly, when I got back to the dressing room our media comms team explained the scenario.

"Players were talking to their families about what had happened inside and outside the stadium. From this incredible month, where it felt like we'd brought people together... players who'd given so much were being abused. We were seeing the very worst of our country, having been so close to a moment where probably none of that would have happened.... To see our country in that light when the rest of the world was looking at us said to me: 'We've got a lot of work to do.'"

On the plus side, "the counter reaction and the wave of support" for the three penalty takers "was heartening".

How much did he have to help his young players to find their voice? "They're all different. That sounds obvious but, when I grew up playing, every manager wanted to treat every player the same. That's not realistic.

"Everyone who's a boss knows that every person who works for you has their own story, their own background, their own preferences for how they want to be treated, what they want to achieve. We have a range of lads who don't want any profile off the field, who keep themselves to themselves, to guys that are comfortable and able to speak from a position of strength and are confident in the messaging they give."

Southgate cited players such as Marcus Rashford, whose successful anti-poverty campaigns, such as extending free school meals during school holidays at the height of the pandemic, made such a difference. "We've encouraged that, but I think those boys would have done it anyway," he said.

Powerful characters they may be, but it was important to weave every individual into a team prepared – as the England team required during the Euros – to sacrifice themselves for the group. "We had 26 players in the



Clare Balding

Richard Kendall

summer, so every time I named a team, 60% of the squad were unhappy," noted Southgate. "If those who aren't selected choose to go in a certain direction with their emotions, we've got no chance of succeeding as a group."

He continued: "Every time you make a decision with a team, the rest of the team are looking at how that decision plays out.... If I say to the team, 'We want you to play with freedom and, if you make mistakes, no problem', and [then] I'm like Basil Fawlty on the touchline, bouncing up and down with my head in my hands, I've got 11 subs behind me and the first thing they'll be saying afterwards in the dressing room is, 'You'll never believe what the manager was doing!'"

As England manager, Southgate spends only a limited amount of time with his players, who spend most of their time playing for their clubs. It's important, nevertheless, for him to know what is going on in their lives. Then he is able identify which, if any,

players are experiencing difficulties that could affect their wellbeing.

He recalled visiting the horse-racing trainer Aidan O'Brien, who told him that, before he saw his horses every morning, he always said good morning to all the stable lads, all of whom he knew by name. "He said that, 'if they're in a bad frame of mind, the feedback they give me about the horse might not be accurate'. I thought that was fascinating.

"When you've worked with a player long enough, you can tell when something is wrong.... To be able to get the best out of each player, the more information we have, the better."

When he needs support, who counsels him? "I do have people who I would speak with. There's a psychologist who works with the team. But that dynamic is a little bit more difficult because, indirectly, I'm his boss. I can't necessarily open up to him about all the things that are going on because a lot of that is confidential."

He recalled how, as part of a course >



Gareth Southgate talking with RTS Bursary Scholars after the Convention

Richard Kendal

run by UK Sport, he had worked with a female life coach. This had given him a different perspective. Having conversations with peers such as Dave Brailsford and Eddie Jones, respectively cycling and rugby coaches, was also helpful.

Balding was intrigued that the life coach he'd worked with was a woman. This led her to ask where he thought the UK was in terms of having more women involved across different areas of football – as players, back-room staff, referees and commentators.

“Nowadays, I meet dads who proudly tell me their daughters play football. Five years ago, that didn't happen,” said Southgate. “The profile of the national game has come from the Lionesses.... It's far more acceptable, if that's the right word, for girls to play now.

“That's different to where we are in terms of diversity of staff within the game. We haven't got that right with my team. We've got some women who work with the team. We have a fabulous exercise therapist, Suzanne [Scott], who brings a calmness and a different energy to the group.

“She'll do a lot of the Pilates work or warm-ups with the players. They obviously behave differently around her. She's older than they are. She's got a different manner. When you're in the intensity of competition that

‘THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO BE AUTHENTIC TO MYSELF’

we are, to have somebody of that nature around is important.

“We did have Pippa [Grange], head of psychology, for two years but she's gone on to another project. We have Emily [Webb], who's our team manager, responsible for everything logistical. But we've got a staff of 40, so we're nowhere near where we should be.”

In terms of England's future, as he contemplated next year's World Cup, Southgate explained that his objective was sustainable success: “We were 15th in the world [rankings]. Today, we've gone up to third. We've had a consistency of performance.... We know that those near misses and what feels like failures at the time are part of the journey to success. We've just seen that [with Emma Raducanu's win] in the US Open on the back of Wimbledon.

“There's the football part and there's the continuing growth of the team. What they stand for and what they feel is important. Of course, we had to pick ourselves up, not only for three World

Cup qualifiers [this] month, but we had to go to Hungary, where we were fearful that some of our players could be racially abused, and they were.

“With the national team, there is more at stake than just the football and we recognise that. The most heartening thing for me, has been the people who have come up to me celebrating their feeling of connection to the team, who are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Afro-Caribbean.

“The change in that over the last 18 months has been remarkable. I didn't realise how disconnected we were, particularly from those communities. That's what this group of players has done. They've been relatable to.

“If we're talking about media, how have we got that message across? Very often, they've used their own [social media] channels.

“It hasn't just been sit-down interviews with print journalists who, frankly, are 90% white guys over 50. That is the reality of the environment we used to operate in. Nowadays, the team put their own content out every day, so people get a different insight into the players' personalities.” ■

Session Twenty: Gareth Southgate OBE, England manager, was in conversation with broadcaster and author Clare Balding. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Steve Clarke.



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OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH WEST

Cameron Roach finds inspiration in one of the great ITV companies as we grapple with how to define Britishness



Lewis Valentine

It felt good to be in a room full of people at the RTS Cambridge Convention last month: great sessions and speakers, brilliantly curated by Ben McOwen Wilson of YouTube. Of course, there was much drama when John Whittingdale stepped in for outgoing culture secretary Oliver Dowden, but this was a great way of demonstrating to the UK broadcasting industry that the Government knows better than most what constitutes great drama.

It has been widely documented that Whittingdale's speech name-checked several shows, including *Only Fools and Horses* and *The Great British Bake Off*, viewed as distinctly British. The Convention perhaps demonstrated what a blunt instrument this is and, more importantly, showed how subjective this can be.

A number of the sessions articulated this well. There was great discussion on national identity, but I was struck by the clear and certain interpretations of identity from Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Jackie Kay and, of course, the wisdom of Gareth Southgate.

Frank's reflections referenced Philip Larkin's poem *The Whitsun Weddings*. In doing so, he underlined that national identity is ever-evolving and that we need to be interested in others and excited by their experiences. To repeat, national identity is not a static thing.

I believe this spirit is something that underlay the emergence and success of Granada Television, which led to a creative wave that encouraged and inspired teams to reach for excellence and reflect their community and the world around them across all genres.

There is much we can learn from the foundation and enterprise of Granada, especially as competition and uncertainty in our sector grows. It's important to look back and reflect on where we have been so we can navigate a way forward.

Indeed, we can find confidence and pride in knowing how our sector previously grew and innovated. Granada emerged with the arrival of Independent Television in 1955. Like today, this was a competitive, unpredictable, yet exciting, era. The Manchester-based company provided distinctly British programmes that often asked difficult and sometimes provocative questions.

The first drama broadcast by Granada was John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. This was an important choice. It demonstrated that controversy speaks to a wide audience and can be

a potent ingredient in entertainment. *The Observer* review stated that "Mr Osborne's scream of rage, frustration and bitterness, the most discussed play for years, made tremendous television.... His tough, savage prose crackled and popped until I thought the television set would catch fire under its scorching urgency."

This was taking clever playwriting broadcast to a mass audience – something that Granada alumnus Russell T Davies does to this day. Indeed, I think *The Observer's* review that I quoted could equally be applied to *It's a Sin*.

Granada would go on to be a distinctly British and innovative brand, responsible for a catalogue of definitive titles and talent, respected and admired internationally. Many speak of Granada as a beacon for nurturing individual creativity and opportunity. This was as true of its famed investigative journalism in the often brilliant *World in Action*, as it was for its drama, which ranged from *Coronation Street* to *Cracker*.

Granada's story is one of the most inspiring stories in broadcasting history. It found its Britishness in looking forward, being innovative and, most importantly, listening and reflecting the world around it in a true and vital way, and constantly backing new generations of creatives.

As an industry we must do this, too, so that we can deliver the audiences of the future. The words of Sidney Bernstein, founding father of Granada, often echo in my mind, "I think that what Manchester sees today, London will see eventually". ■

Cameron Roach is founder of Manchester-based Rope Ladder Fiction and Chair of RTS North West.



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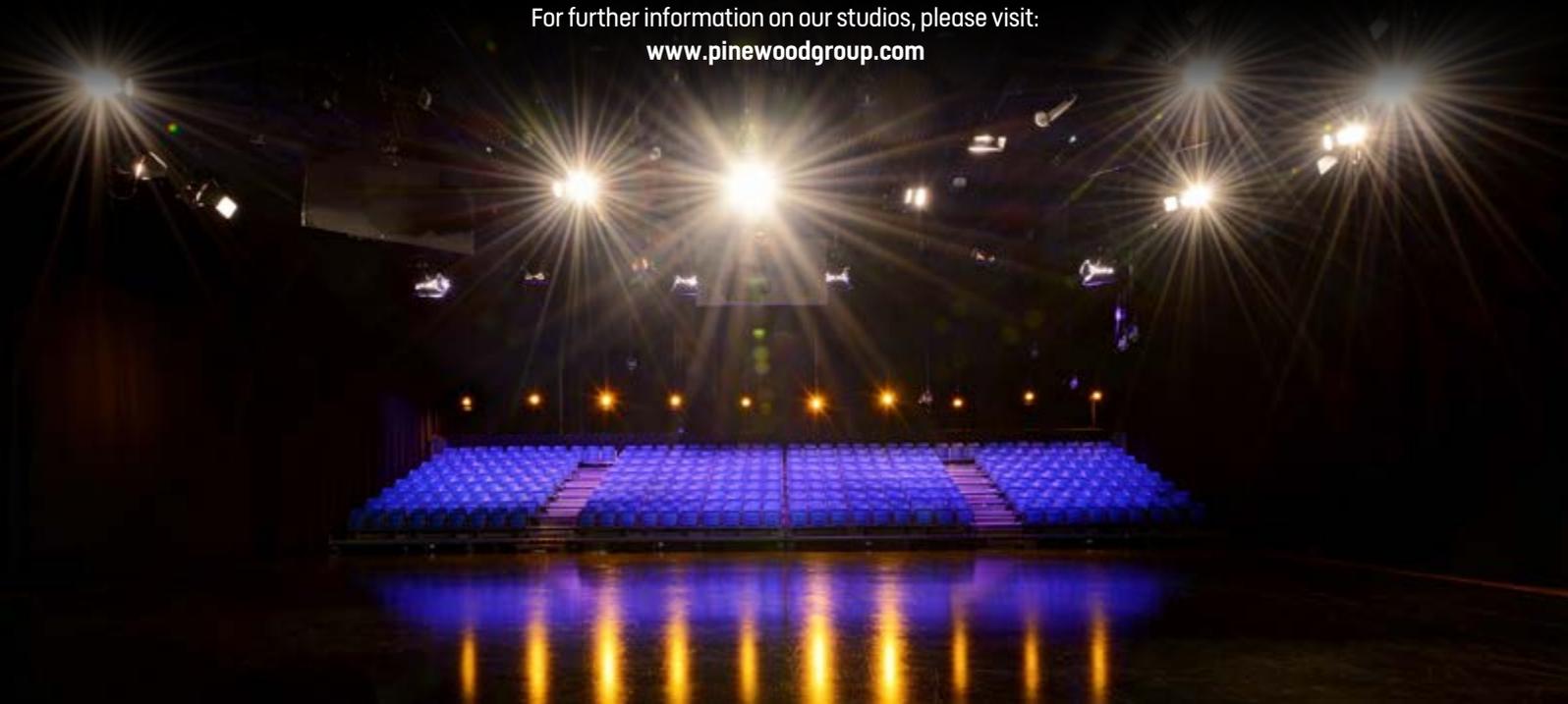
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RTS Futures A lively session in early September saw a panel of social media breakout stars discuss their careers and the lure of TV.

Big Narstie, host of his own successful Channel 4 show, was in particularly voluble form, joining the RTS Futures Zoom event from a car wash. Pinpointing the reasons for his success, he said: "I was in the right place at the right time", adding that his "personality is just me", and the same on- or off-screen.

Big Narstie argued that he and his fellow panellists were "freaks of nature", unconventional talents that TV didn't usually embrace.

The reason for his success, first in music and then on TV, he continued, was "because it was an escape from the life I was living. I didn't need the financial rewards... it was keeping me sane, giving me some cleanness in my soul, where everything else was so contaminated."

Comedian Man Like Haks, who has appeared on *The Big Narstie Show*, was working as a carpenter and plumber when he began posting short videos



Channel 4

Social media aids TV ascent

on Instagram from his van. "I enjoyed the job but didn't enjoy having no freedom and being told what to do," he recalled. His social media audience grew, enabling him

to leave his day job. "People started showing love and sharing my stuff," he added.

Stevo the Madman, another *Big Narstie Show* guest, said that being "the class clown"

had been a "hindrance" until he discovered Snapchat, which gave him an outlet for his comedy: "I found a niche, which was myself, really. I lived a funny life, whether it be my kids, friends or the people surrounding me. It was about producing relatable moments throughout the day."

Remel London, who presents shows on Sky Arts and Capital Xtra, said she felt "underrated", adding: "There does seem to be a fear to put dark-skinned women on the TV screen. It is a hard road. You have to be yourself, you have to believe in yourself and you have to love this, otherwise, trust me, you wouldn't still be here."

Despite her degree in broadcast journalism, London said it was her social media presence that had advanced her career: "My YouTube shows, Twitter and Instagram got me in front of most of the broadcasters, commissioners and producers."

E4 digital executive Navi Lamba asked the questions at the RTS Futures event.

Matthew Bell

The mix 'n' match 'slashies'

RTS Futures At a second Futures event in September, a varied panel discussed the rise of the 'slashie' – people forging a TV career via multiple avenues.

Helen Simmons started out as a producer, before embracing writing: "I'm glad I took my time coming to writing because it allowed me to read a lot and to learn." Now, Simmons has her own production company, Erebus Pictures, and splits her time equally

between writing and producing.

For Kim Tserkezie, who played Penny Pocket in children's series *Balamory*, 'acting was my absolute passion... but, as a disabled actor, I found the roles coming my way were really pitiful, awful, stereotypical portrayals of disabled people.

'The way forward for me was to try and create those roles myself – that's how I moved into writing and producing.'

Sonny Hanley has worked for ITV across two decades in

a wide range of roles; currently, his day job is controller of content services, but he also co-chairs ITV Embrace, the broadcaster's BAME network.

When he first joined ITV, Hanley was a production co-ordinator by day and an edit assistant by night. 'I was doing two jobs, but it didn't feel like work – it felt exciting,' he said.

'Being a "slashie"... helped me in my career; the next move up was easier because I knew a bit more than the next person.'

Dr Ranj Singh is a doctor and TV medical expert, appearing on ITV's *This Morning*. As a junior doctor, Singh felt he 'needed something to shake things up a little bit'.

He answered a BBC ad for an adviser on young people's health. 'My name got passed around and more things started to crop up,' he recalled.

TV scratched his 'creative itch' and now, a decade or so later, Singh is a regular face on TV as well as an NHS clinician. 'My motto has been, "Have a go and see what happens".'

Channel 4 News journalist Ed Gove chaired the event.

Matthew Bell

Take Us Home: Leeds United



Amazon Prime Video

Leeds doc nabs double

RTS Yorkshire BBC Three series *My Left Nut* scored a hat trick of wins at the RTS Yorkshire Awards at the end of last month.

The coming-of-age comedy drama, made by Kay Mellor's company, Rollem Productions, took home the prestigious Drama, Writer and Actor categories.

Michael Patrick and Oisín Kearney won the Writer prize for a series that is based on Patrick's own teenage years. Nathan Quinn-O'Rawe took the Actor award for playing 15-year old Mick, who discovers he has a swelling on his left testicle.

This Week on the Farm presenter Helen Skelton hosted the ceremony at the Queens Hotel, Leeds, which was attended by more than 350 people.

"After an unprecedented year, we had an equally unprecedented number of entries for our 17th annual awards," said RTS Yorkshire

Chair Fiona Thompson. "The real pleasure of the evening was experiencing the joy of a regional community coming together for the first time since 2019. The room was filled with love and friendship and the buzz was electric."

The awards, she added, "reflect the vibrancy of... a region that punches above its weight".

Amazon Prime Video's *Take Us Home: Leeds United*, which is made by The City Talking, notched up two wins, for Documentary Series and Use of Music and Sound (Lee Hicken, Ellen Smith, Giuseppe De Luca and Stacey Hicken Smith).

There were multiple winners of the RTS Yorkshire Outstanding Contribution

Award: *BBC Look North* reporter Cathy Killick; key talent from *ITV Calendar*, Christine Talbot, Gaynor Barnes, John Shires, Nick Collins and Nigel Rowe; and Channel 5 director of programmes Ben Frow.

Regional news programme *BBC Look North* notched up awards in the One to Watch category, which was won by reporter Lizzy Steel and for Presenter (Peter Levy).

ITV Calendar's Emma Wilkinson took the News or Current Affairs Reporter prize, with the ITV regional show also winning the News Programme Award for its tribute to the late World Cup winner – and her grandfather – Jack Charlton.

News or Current Affairs Story award went to Candour Productions' *Stacey Dooley and the Lockdown Babies*, which was made for BBC One's *Panorama*.

Leeds-based Candour Productions also won the Independent Spirit prize and the Professional Excellence: Factual Post-production award for Channel 4 documentary *A Day in the Life of Coronavirus Britain*.

Air TV, Candour, Channel 4, Channel 5, Daisybeck, The Other Planet and True North were the main sponsors of the awards.

Matthew Bell

RTS Yorkshire Television Awards winners

Outstanding Contribution - Cathy Killick, *BBC Look North – Yorkshire*; Christine Talbot, Gaynor Barnes, John Shires, Nick Collins, Nigel Rowe, *ITV Calendar*; and Ben Frow, director of programmes, Channel 5

Drama - *My Left Nut* - Rollem Productions for BBC Three/BBC One

Actor - Nathan Quinn-O'Rawe, *My Left Nut* - Rollem Productions for BBC Three/BBC One

Writer - Michael Patrick and Oisín Kearney, *My Left Nut* - Rollem Productions for BBC Three/BBC One

Documentary Series - *Take Us Home: Leeds United* - The City Talking for Amazon Prime Video

Single Documentary - Rob Burrow: *My Year with MND* - BBC Breakfast and BBC Sport for BBC

Factual Entertainment - *The Pets Factor* - True North for CBBC

Features - Darcey Bussell's *Wild Coasts of Scotland* - True North for More 4

News Programme - *ITV Calendar*, Jack Charlton Tribute - ITV Yorkshire for ITV

News or Current Affairs Story - *Stacey Dooley and the Lockdown Babies* - Candour Productions for BBC One

News or Current Affairs Reporter - Emma Wilkinson, *ITV Calendar* - ITV Yorkshire for ITV

One to Watch - Lizzy Steel - BBC Look North – Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

Presenter - Peter Levy - *BBC Look North – Yorkshire and Lincolnshire* for BBC One

Animation - *Resilient* - Katy Perry - Kettu Studios and Hound Content for YouTube

Independent Spirit - Candour Productions

Low-cost Factual - *The Highland Vet – Series 1* - Daisybeck Studios/Motion Content Group for 5Select

Use of Music and Sound - Lee Hicken, Ellen Smith, Giuseppe De Luca and Stacey Hicken Smith, *Take Us Home: Leeds United* - The City Talking for Amazon Prime Video

Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Production - *All Creatures Great and Small* - Playground Television UK for Channel 5

Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Post-production - *The 39 Steps (1935)* - ITV Content Delivery for BritBox

Professional Excellence: Factual Production - Mark Stokes, *The Yorkshire Dales and The Lakes Through the Seasons* - True North for More4

Professional Excellence: Factual Post-production - *A Day in the Life of Coronavirus Britain* - Candour Productions for Channel 4



Jon Craig

RTS West of England Television Awards winners

- Sir Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award**-Laura and Harry Marshall, Icon Films
- Scripted**-*The Trial of Christine Keeler*-Ecosse Films and Great Meadow Productions for BBC One
- On-screen Talent**-Nadiya Hussain, *Nadiya's American Adventure*-BBC Studios for BBC One
- Natural History**-*Earth at Night in Colour*-Offspring Films for Apple TV+
- Documentary**-*Locked In: Breaking the Silence*-Marble Films for BBC Four
- Factual**-*Saving Britain's Pubs with Tom Kerridge*-Bone Soup Productions for BBC Two
- Factual Entertainment and Features**-*War on Plastic: The Fight Goes On*-Keo Films for BBC One
- News or Current Affairs Story**-*Monumental: Bristol After Colston*, BBC Inside Out-BBC
- News or Current Affairs Journalist**-Fiona Lamdin, BBC Points West-BBC
- Children's & Animation**-*The Monster at the End of This Story*-A Productions and Sesame Workshop
- Director**-Xavier Alford, *Locked In: Breaking the Silence*-Marble Films for BBC Four
- Cinematography**-Camera team, *Earth at Night in Colour*-Offspring Films for Apple TV+
- Sound**-Chris Domaille, James Burchill and The Films at 59 Foley Team, *The Hidden Kingdoms of China*-Brian Leith Productions
- Composer**-William Goodchild, *Tibet: Roof of the World*-IFA Media
- VFX & Digital Creativity**-Fred Toy, Adam Oldroyd, Adam Lincoln and Josue Sanchez, *Andy's Aquatic Adventures*-Doghouse Post Production for BBC Studios NHU
- Editing**-Colette Hodges, *Locked In: Breaking the Silence*-Marble Films for BBC Four
- Grading**-Adam Inglis, Nulight Studios and Tom Payne, *Earth at Night in Colour*-Offspring Films for Apple TV+

RTS returns to the stage

West of England Documentaries led the way at the RTS West of England Awards, with *Locked In: Breaking the Silence* and *Earth at Night in Colour* both collecting three awards each.

Locked In: Breaking the Silence won both the Documentary and Director awards for film-maker Xavier Alford who has a life-changing illness. The BBC Four Storyville film, which the judges described as “powerful, poignant and brave”, confronts Alford’s fears as he discusses his illness with family and fellow patients.

Colette Hodges received the Editing award for the film.

Children’s TV presenters Andy Day and Naomi Wilkinson hosted the awards at Bristol Old Vic in front of an

audience of more than 300. Guests at the late-September ceremony included writer and campaigner Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and presenter Sarah Beeny.

Offspring Films also scooped three awards for Apple TV+ series *Earth at Night in Colour*, a spectacular look at animals’ nocturnal lives narrated by the actor Tom Hiddleston. It won the prestigious Natural History award plus the Cinematography and Grading categories.

Laura and Harry Marshall and their Bristol indie, Icon Films, were awarded the Sir Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award, RTS West of England’s special award for an outstanding and enduring contribution to television in the region.

Jeremy Wade, who fronted

Icon’s hit series *River Monsters*, presented the award, praising the production company for being “one of the most successful indies in terms of international profile, sales and merchandise”.

He added: “Perhaps more importantly, Icon has placed a big emphasis on fostering and growing new talent.”

RTS West of England Chair Lynn Barlow said: “It was really special to be able to hold this year’s awards, in person, at the Old Vic – so many of our winners were made during the pandemic, against the odds, proving just how much world-beating creative talent we have in the region.

“And, what would we all have done without the TV over the past year?”

The Factual award went to Bone Soup Productions’ BBC Two series *Saving Britain’s Pubs with Tom Kerridge*, while Keo Films’ *War on Plastic: The Fight Goes On* (BBC One) scooped the Factual Entertainment and Features prize.

The Scripted award went to the much-lauded BBC One drama *The Trial of Christine Keeler*, which was made by Ecosse Films and Great Meadow.

The RTS West of England Awards were held in association with Evolutions Bristol.

Matthew Bell

Geoff Hill

1969–2021

■ Tributes have been paid to a man often described as “a journalist’s journalist”, Geoff Hill, editor of *ITV News*, who has died from leukaemia, aged 52.

It was typical of Geoff’s energy and resilience that, until the very end, he was still campaigning for the charity Cure Leukaemia. He was diagnosed with the disease four years ago.

ITN CEO Deborah Turness said Geoff “led from the front, with guts and raw energy. His enthusiasm was limitless because he just loved his job.

“He came to work every day with a big smile on his face. He was a force of nature and loved nothing more than to be at the heart of the barely controlled chaos of a breaking news story. He was fizzing with ideas, a human dynamo always ready for action.”

News at Ten presenter Tom

Bradby said he was “an incredibly talented, driven and immensely supportive boss”.

Another ITV presenter, Charlene White, echoed the sentiments of many of her ITN colleagues when she said: “Geoff was a one-of-a-kind boss. There was something about his south-east London swagger that put him head and shoulders above the others.”

Geoff, who, in 2016 was behind ITV’s decision to be the first to declare that the Brexiteers had won the EU referendum, took charge of *ITV News* in 2013. Two years later, it won an unprecedented clean sweep at the RTS Television Journalism Awards, taking the News Coverage – Home and International, Network Presenter of the Year and Daily News Programme of the Year prizes.

He described running the



Geoff Hill

ITN

ITV newsroom as “the greatest honour of my career”, as he oversaw the reinvention of both *News at Ten* and the *ITV Evening News*; each dropped their double-anchor format.

Geoff also spearheaded an overhaul of *ITV News*’s digital activities and, crucially, addressed the company’s gender pay gap and lack of on-screen diversity.

As part of these changes, he poached Robert Peston and Allegra Stratton from the BBC. The former became political editor, the latter national editor.

Geoff was born in Croydon, the eldest of three children to Robin and Pauline Hill (née Lambe), a lawyer and nurse, respectively. He was educated at Colfe’s School in Greenwich and at the University of Kent, where he read politics and government.

His first job in journalism was on his local turf, working at *Southwark News*, but he was

determined to work in TV news. After landing a job at London News Network, he rose rapidly through the ranks.

A stint as news editor at *GMTV* (the predecessor to *ITV Good Morning Britain*) was followed by junior news editor in the main *ITV* newsroom before he was quickly promoted to foreign news editor and programme editor of *News at Ten*.

There was also a spell editing *Channel 5 News*. There, he forged a close working relationship with its then-owner Richard Desmond, not always regarded as the most emollient of bosses. He also ran an ITN fledgling sports news station and was director of coverage, EMEA, at London-based *CNN International*.

Geoff is survived by his wife, Natalie, and his three children by two previous marriages, Emily, Olivia and Alfie.

Steve Clarke

Drama exec to head RTS in the North West

RTS North West

Former Sky head of drama Cameron Roach is the new Chair of the Society’s North West Centre.

‘I’m incredibly honoured,’ said Roach. ‘The North West has a long history of exceptional programme-making and enabling the next generation of talent – and the RTS has always celebrated and supported both.’

Theresa Wise, CEO of the RTS, said: ‘As the UK production sector returns to

full swing, the work of our regional centres is central to supporting the work of our wonderful television community.’

Roach’s drama career began as a script editor on *Casualty*. He went on to work on many of the best TV dramas of the past couple of decades, producing *Life on Mars* and commissioning *Chernobyl*. He succeeds Richard Frediani, editor of *BBC Breakfast*.

Matthew Bell



T rue crime docs have long been a TV staple but, argued an RTS panel last month, the genre is undergoing a golden age. “There is an enduring appetite for crime,” said Jo Clinton-Davis, ITV’s controller of popular factual. “Each story is a drama in its own right.”

Helen Tonge, MD of Manchester indie Title Role Productions, which made *Crimes That Shook Britain* for the Crime+Investigation channel, reckoned that “to feel empathy for the victims or family is inherent to our human nature.

“The bar is being lifted... they are more like dramas, the storytelling is getting more exciting, and I think generally there’s a dark fascination... with understanding [crime].”

Former detective Peter Bleksley, “The Chief” in Channel 4 reality series *Hunted*, had consulted the genre’s audience before the event, asking his large social media following why they loved true crime. From their replies, he identified “three Ps”: “people”, a fascination with the victim, their family, the perpetrator, detective or psychologist; the “process” of capturing the criminal; and “procedure”, the prosecution in court and sentencing.

Bleksley was currently enjoying ITV factual drama *Manhunt: The Night Stalker*, whose “earthiness and human touch” – two of the touchstones of true crime docs – stood in “stark contrast to the very clichéd dramatisations we see where the lead detective has an alcohol problem or is in a very gloomy marriage”.

Dr Sohom Das, consultant psychiatrist and contributor to Crime+Investigation’s *Murdertown* with Anita Rani, said that, from childhood, people had a “fascination



Manhunt: The Night Stalker

ITV

The real life of crime

National event

Docs are embracing the techniques of the best dramas as the true crime genre booms. **Matthew Bell** reports

with good versus evil. We’re the goodies because we’re the law-abiding citizens, so we want to know about the bad-dies, what makes them tick.

“We’ve all had that thought, ‘I could kill that person... but the vast majority of people would never go that far because we’ve got these social, emotional and ethical barriers.... It fascinates us to learn more about what makes people go past those barriers and commit these crimes.”

But is there a danger that true crime shows glorify or, worse, encourage offending? “The vast majority of people are sensible enough to enjoy the lurid and the sensational aspects without glorifying the perpetrators,” said Das.

“Having said that, there is a small subset of society which is vulnerable, so, for example,

people with learning difficulties or... extreme [narcissists]... I don’t think true crime is ever going to be the one factor that pushes them over the edge.”

Bleksley argued that true crime producers had a duty to respect the victims and their families: “The victims’ stories must always be front and centre of any storytelling... this is increasingly becoming the case across all of the true crime genre.”

Tonge added: “Sometimes, you do have to tell certain elements of a story, which could be upsetting to the families, but you can’t shy away from those.... You have to sit down with them and have difficult conversations.”

ITV’s Clinton-Davis added that programme-makers had to avoid sensationalism: “It’s

all about authenticity... you don’t need to, and shouldn’t, sensationalise [crime].

“It’s incredibly important that you get the victims’ families’ buy-in. Often, they want the film made – it’s a moment for them of catharsis, explanation or tribute.”

What next for true crime? “I sincerely hope it’s unsolved major crimes,” said Bleksley. “It will increase the likelihood of some justice being delivered at some point.

“At the end of the day, this genre will thrive because a sense of justice is central to being a human being.” ■

‘Why we love true crime on television’ was held on 21 September. It was chaired by Boyd Hilton of Heat magazine and produced by Dan Korn, Tessa Matchett and Sarah Booth.

RTS London Arrow Pictures' moving film *Children of 9/11: Our Story* was the subject of a recent "production focus". One hundred and five expectant fathers died in the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the documentary, which is available on All4, follows the lives of six of their children.

"I've been responsible for eight or nine 9/11 films... all of them were about the day itself. I wanted to do something different for the 20th anniversary... looking forward," said Arrow Pictures creative director John Smithson. The idea crystallised into a look at the lives of children growing up with "the loss of a father they never knew".

The production team got in touch with around 80 children and eventually settled on six. "We wanted to represent the wide impact of 9/11 on the world," explained executive producer Lucie Ridout.

The pandemic changed the way the doc was shot. Originally, it was going to be observational but, with crews unable to travel, the now-teenage children were encouraged to make video diaries. "They gave us some amazing stuff, with an



Channel 4

In the shadow of 9/11

intimacy we would never have got with a film crew," recalled the director, Liz Mermin, a London-based New Yorker.

She also shot some footage remotely. "I would appear on screens in their [home] and we would have profound conversations that I don't think many of them had had before."

When she was finally able to meet the contributors in person, a relationship had

developed already: "We'd been on a bit of an emotional journey, so we were able to... get an intimacy and a naturalness that we wouldn't have had if we'd just flown in without doing all this other work."

The film was a three-way commission from PBS in the US, ARTE France and Channel 4. "These partnerships allow us to tell stories that might not otherwise [get told]," said Bill Gardner, VP,

programming and development at PBS.

"I've worked on many copros and they can be a complete and utter nightmare," added Smithson. But this experience was positive: "It's a win-win because Channel 4, PBS and ARTE are getting a very high-quality, well-made film and sharing the costs."

The RTS London event was chaired by Aradhna Tayal.

Matthew Bell

The UPSIDE

Leadership that values new talent

So generous of Gareth Southgate to spend time with the RTS Bursary Scholars immediately after his compelling Cambridge conversation with Clare Balding.

He was asked about his own approach to social media. The England manager told the students that he

mainly ignored the likes of Facebook and Twitter. But he added that social media was useful for keeping an eye on the mood of his players.

Southgate also had some valuable advice for the students – to believe in themselves. Equally, emotional intelligence and empathy were important tools to develop. Wise words.

Show toxic bullies the red light

One of the most powerful and resonant sessions at Cambridge was "Toxic", in which

actors voiced the experiences of those who had experienced workplace bullying.

With surveys suggesting that 86% of TV workers have experienced or witnessed abuse of this kind, it's good to see the arrival of a bullying and harassment app, entitled Call It!. Users are asked to anonymously answer three questions every day for the duration of a project.

The chief one is: "How were you treated at work today?" A traffic-light system presents three options: green if they were treated well; orange for OK; red if they were treated badly.

Politics discards a competent minister

Finally, a fond farewell to John Whittingdale, removed from his broadcasting brief the day after he had so gallantly stood in for Oliver Dowden to read the Secretary of State's Cambridge Convention speech; Dowden was moved sideways in the Government reshuffle hours before he was due to appear.

You might not agree with everything he says, but few can deny that Whittingdale has a deep knowledge of, and love for, broadcasting.

We shall miss him. ■



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