

October 2022

Television



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From the CEO



Huge thanks to Priya Dogra and Warner Bros Discovery for supporting this year's RTS London Convention in so many ways.

The day overflowed with insights – there were superb interviews with UK media CEOs, explorations of the role open-source journalism now plays in world news, and a tour de force appearance by the Hollywood director Baz Luhrmann.

We heard, too, what the metaverse

will mean for broadcasters and how media companies can still deliver growth in challenging times. Many thanks to Gerhard Zeiler for his international keynote and to Michael Grade, making his first outing as Chair of Ofcom, for a defining speech in which he outlined Ofcom's approach to regulation of the internet.

I very much enjoyed the powerful films created for the Convention starring some of our own RTS Bursary Scholars. We were also treated to premieres of three joyously fresh short

films by young black film-makers.

Our members in the nations and regions delivered a vibrant array of awards and panel sessions over the past month, many of which are reported in this issue. And in London, industry doyen Peter Bazalgette discussed public service broadcasting's future in conversation with yours truly.

Theresa Wise

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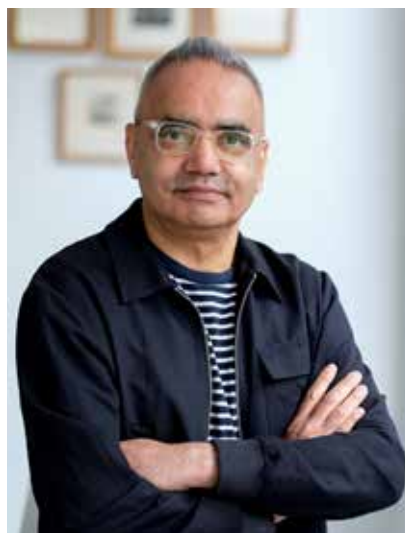
Seismic or small, change is all around us

With technology and human ingenuity,
we can make change work for you
and your business.

Let there be change

accenture

TV diary



Cardiff Productions

Fish out of water Narinder Minhas on how he learned to swim – and thrive – in a world full of sharks

In April, I was doing some online research. “Boil the ocean”, “jump the shark”, “blue ocean market”, I read. What are they talking about? Are they advocating moving offshore, I wondered? I was preparing to become CEO of Cardiff Productions, taking sole charge of the indie I co-founded in 2020, and wondering whether I should immerse myself in business books. So, I did what any telly person would do, and jumped on Google.

■ Do you know how many publications offer advice on the first 100 days in a new job? There are a lot, packed full of jargon. I browsed some: *Your First 100 Days*. *The New Leader’s 100 Day Action Plan*. And then *The Critical Role of Good Hair in Business Leadership*.

This was worrying as I hadn’t been to a barber since the start of the pandemic, instead relying on what I call my “Zoom haircut”, which I do myself. The front and sides are, if I say so myself, immaculate. But I’ve no idea what’s happening behind.

■ I came to two realisations. First, I don’t have time to read any of these books properly. And, second, I’m not sure I need. I’ve been in the industry for more than 30 years.

It was time to trust my experience and instincts.

Was winging it foolish? I didn’t think so. From desperately chasing Bill Clinton around the US for his first interview on British television, to having a programme injunctioned by the police on the night of transmission, and even receiving death threats for another difficult show, I’ve seen my fair share of drama in television.

By far the most important experience I’ve had is being an immigrant. Arriving in the UK as a child of working-class parents, wandering around the playground, unable to understand the language anyone spoke, instilled a sense of drive, fearlessness and empathy.

For most of my life, I’ve been a fish out of water, learning to swim around, creating opportunities in a world full of sharks. OK, enough of these fishy puns. What I decided to prioritise in my first 100 days wasn’t “boiling the ocean” or a flashy new haircut. It was our brand. At a time when so many indies chase the same slots, I felt that doubling down on our distinctive core values would be vital.

■ From our work, we know it is possible to be bold, diverse and popular. So, we’ve been focusing on enriching those brand values, thinking

about them at every step of the production process, from development to final execution. And, if need be, making those tough calls. Recently, I decided not to pursue a project that a broadcaster approached us about as it just didn’t fit our brand.

Our brand also means being bold and diverse when it comes to our staffing strategy. Making Cardiff Productions an exciting and inclusive place to work is key. The vast majority of our team are women. A significant proportion of our staff are Welsh speakers.

We’ve also made great strides in breaking down some of the class barriers in our industry and, over the coming year, we’ll have a big push on helping to improve racial diversity in Wales.

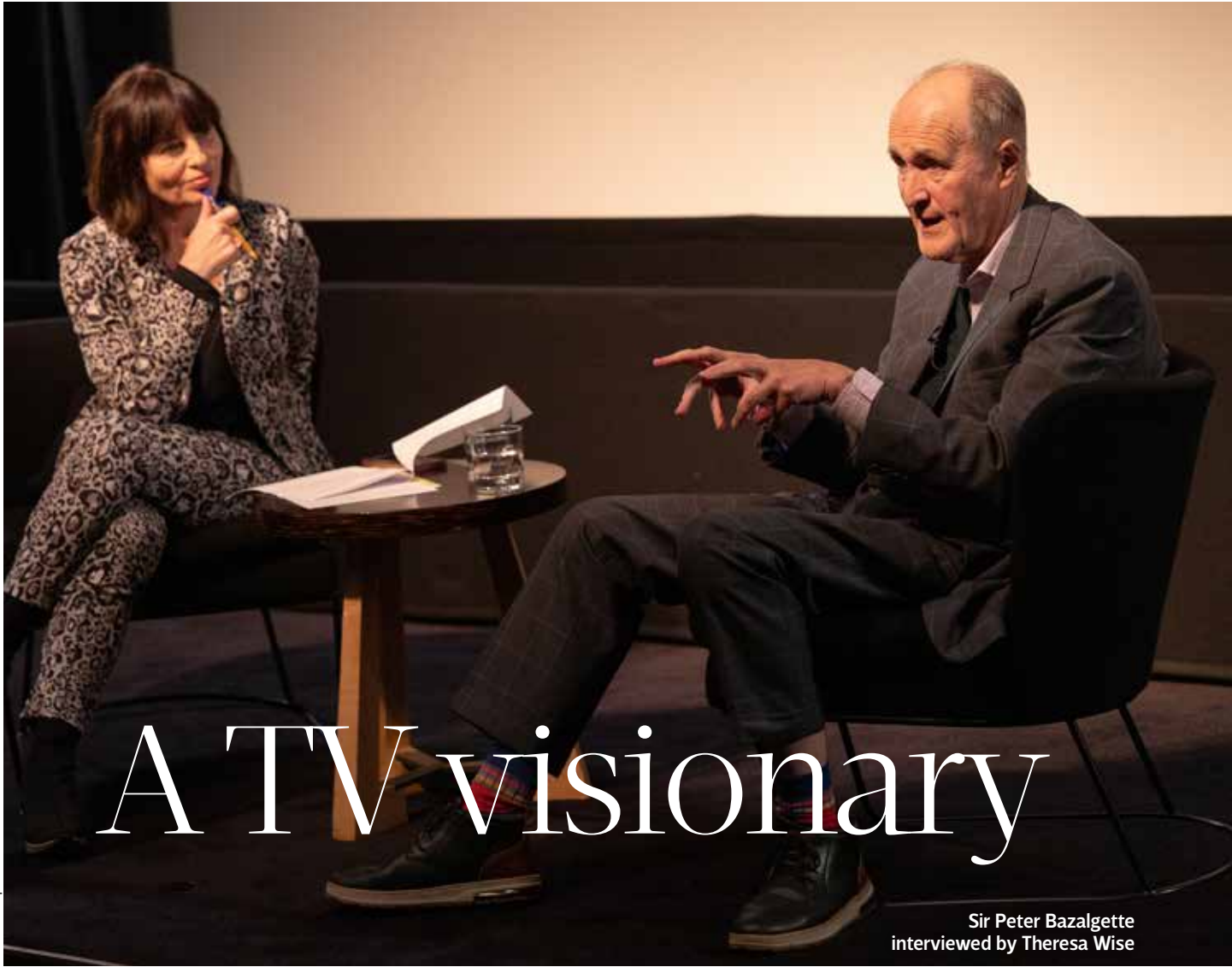
■ As for our output, *We Are Black and British* has just been nominated for a Grierson, as well as a Prix Europa. *Tan France: Beauty and the Bleach* has also been nominated for a Prix Europa and an Asian Media Award.

Our competitive walking series *Am Dro!*, now in its sixth season, has been nominated for a Bafta Cymru. Snapped up by the BBC as *Take a Hike!*, the English-language version, now in its second season, has been optioned in five European territories.

And we have more formats in the making. We’re also getting stuck into exciting upcoming projects, from high-end docs to returnable formats to “diverse” drama.

Our ambition is to create a sustainable superindie based in Cardiff. I’m just so glad my “Zoom haircut” hasn’t spoiled our chances of getting there.

Narinder Minhas is CEO, Cardiff Productions.



Paul Hampartsoumian

A TV visionary

Sir Peter Bazalgette
interviewed by Theresa Wise

Sir Peter Bazalgette – known simply as “Baz” to colleagues and so many others across the creative industries over which he has towered for the past four decades – recently stood down as Chair of ITV, marking the end of another chapter in his long career.

As a pioneering independent producer, he formed Bazal Productions, creating such innovative shows as *Ready Steady Cook* and *Changing Rooms*. He is a former Chair of the Arts Council and English National Opera and a former President of the RTS – and the man credited with bringing reality TV to the UK in the form of *Big Brother*, and, with *Food and Drink*, inventing the celebrity chef.

But in an evening hosted by the RTS, it was clear that Bazalgette’s eye is not on the past but the future of TV, specifically safeguarding the position of public

Peter Bazalgette identifies the threats to Britain’s public service media and suggests how the UK can harness its creativity

service broadcasters within that future.

Having previously defined public service media as “programmes made for us, by us, about us”, Bazalgette made clear his concerns for the future of PSBs, in both legislative and commercial terms. “Every year, the schedule gets slightly smaller in terms of the number of people watching it,” he began, citing the rise of BBC iPlayer, All 4 and the forthcoming streaming service ITVX. The idea of “being in broadcasting” was otiose.

“Now, they have to get those services carriage on about 40 different platforms, including Sky, Virgin, Amazon, Apple TV+, and they need to get them carriage and prominence on Samsung and LG connected TVs.

“All of those [operators] are run by foreign companies that don’t really care what the ecology of our broadcasting is. And they’re all operating via the internet, which is unregulated, and they can name their own terms.

“They might take an enormous amount of revenue from those services, and not share the data about who is watching – and if you don’t know or don’t have the data today, you’re dead.”

Bazalgette referenced the broadcasting white paper, published in March, which included government commitment to a law that, he explained, “in principle updates the 2003 Communications Act” – namely, protecting access, prominence and fair value.

Whereas the battle in 2003 centred on a channel's position on the electronic programme guide (EPG), Bazalgette described how, with so many platforms today, it is more likely to be a competition for eyeballs between traditional content, gaming and other products.

"I'm not knocking that, that's up to them, but you won't get prominence," he warned, hence the need for legislation to ensure prominence for the PSBs on those platforms.

However, he rued the inclusion in the white paper of the proposed sale of Channel 4, which meant that all the other issues were sidelined: "The prominence issue is the existential one, far more important than the Channel 4 privatisation, whatever your view, pro or anti – far more important."

He pointed out that ITV has to apply next year for a new PSB licence. "Why would it apply if it doesn't know what the terms are? Have we got the prominence, or have we not got the prominence? So that's the story and that's why I say it's the existential issue."

Bazalgette reflected on the need for "programmes made for us, about us, by us" to support cultural, social and political life in the UK. "A healthy national identity has to talk to itself; you need a national conversation, you need to examine things. While they have lower viewership now than they did 10 years ago, I think the soap operas do this: they examine social issues, things we care about, or we're not certain about, things we're angry about – and that's really important.

"You don't get that from internationally appealing programming, or programming that was made in another country. So it is important to have a healthy ecology that delivers these programmes and not just one that delivers the wonderful wealth of content that's also available to us on the international streamers."

Having considered the legislation required to protect the PSBs from this "existential threat", Bazalgette moved on to the financial challenges of creating the kind of content he was referring to.

"This is an issue for the whole of Europe," he said, citing the recent attempt, ultimately aborted, to merge France's TF1 and M6 channels. "If your future success depends on a streaming service, the key to a successful streaming service is, a) having a big enough origination budget to commission new >



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Regulation of the internet

'It's bloody difficult,' was Bazalgette's reply when he was asked if he thought politicians were dragging their feet on the Online Safety Bill. 'The internet is an industrial revolution, it's driven a coach and horses through all those norms, and it's a massive challenge to civil society and we've not yet.... We're only 15, 20 years into an industrial revolution, we haven't yet worked out how to do it.

'The truth is, they can pass any law they like, it doesn't make the internet easily regulated.'

As for the tensions between protecting free speech and effective legislation, Bazalgette said that the online giants needed to try to be responsible for the content that appears on their platforms.

'Up to very recently, they've been arguing, "Oh no, we're just a platform, stuff comes through, we're not editors, we're not publications, we don't have responsibility, we don't do that...." Well, it's sort of not true, is it, but they've got to learn how to do it, haven't they?'

Asked by an audience member at what stage a platform becomes a broadcaster, he replied that they could be easily differentiated: 'Either you're distributing other people's signals or you're not.'

For a streamer such as Netflix, he explained: 'It's not a platform, it's a distributor of its own signal. Platforms are the people who are aggregating different services: so Sky is a platform, Netflix is on Sky, but Netflix doesn't host other people, so that's the difference.'

‘IF YOU DON’T
HAVE THE
DATA TODAY,
YOU’RE DEAD’

The future of the BBC

Never mind the funding model, whether it’s voluntary subscription, an addition to council tax or direct taxation, the bigger question, according to Bazalgette, is why do we want the BBC?

His answer: ‘Because it’s such an extraordinary organisation, because it’s such a brilliant invention, because it’s our great calling card around the world and because it’s an amazing reservoir of talent.’

For Bazalgette, the key aspect of keeping the BBC publicly funded is its paradoxical remit in holding governments to account: ‘The idea you should have a compulsorily funded broadcasting body that has the specific remit of holding the government to account, seems to me to be one of the most sophisticated and laudable descriptions of a sophisticated liberal democracy....’

‘We have to defend these things, and that’s why it should have a funding mechanism that keeps it independent.’

Referring to BBC Director-General Tim Davie’s remarks at the RTS London Convention – that commercial revenues are dwarfed by licence-fee revenue, Bazalgette said that, whenever it enjoys commercial success, the BBC is accused of ‘being too commercial’.

He added: ‘Tim is preparing everyone to understand that there is a limit to what you can make – and will be allowed to make by competition authorities – and, therefore, he is reminding people that the hypothecated funding is still very important.’

‘He needs to make that argument and I think he has put it correctly.’



ITVX commission A *Spy Among Friends*

ITVX

› programmes (because that’s what sells subscriptions or gets eyeballs if it’s ad-supported) and, b) having a big enough catalogue to keep subscribers happy.

‘So the question is: how can European broadcasters, PSB or otherwise, compete with international streamers in the future? It’s probable that each country could have one or two successful streaming services like that, but probably not four or five. This suggests that, to meet the long-term commercial challenge, there needs to be consolidation.’

However, he said: ‘Consolidation between commercial broadcasters in the UK simply wouldn’t be possible at the moment because the media buyers would fight it all the way.’

Asked if a privatised Channel 4 could fit quite happily in the portfolio of, say, ITV, Bazalgette didn’t blink. ‘Well, it seems to me that is one possible consolidation, yes. How extraordinary you should mention it! But if you think I’m going to speculate on whether it will happen – or should happen – I would be tying the hands of my successors at ITV. Which I don’t intend to do.’

As an example of “when the regulator was unable to look at the road ahead”, Bazalgette recounted the story of the

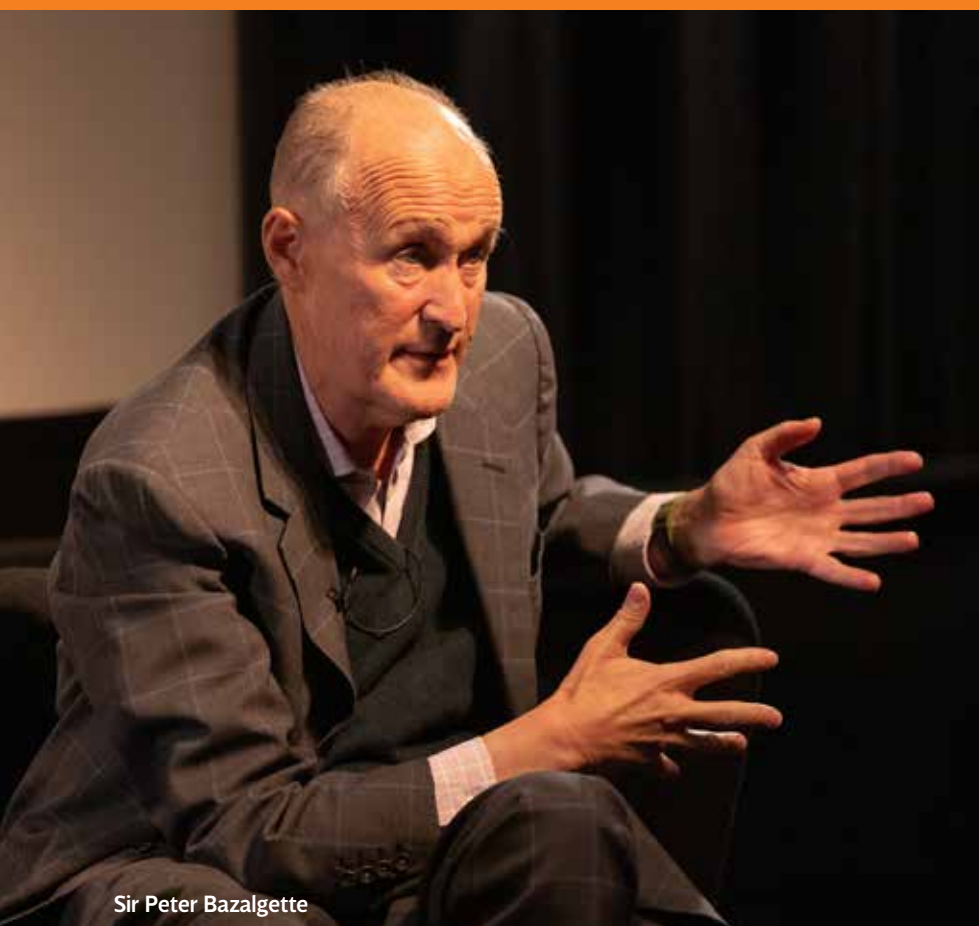
‘WHY DO WE
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dead-on-arrival Project Kangaroo. The regulator “made the worst decision a regulator has ever made, it stopped ITV, the BBC and Channel 4 setting up what was essentially a streaming service between them in 2009.

“That streaming service today would be worth billions and would be competing worldwide, but we were told we weren’t allowed to do it, because the regulators were looking backwards.

“They didn’t understand where the business was going. So I’m saying: let’s not do that again, let’s not tie our hands behind our back. How many people are listening, I’m not sure.”

Persuaded to look back briefly on his own pursuits with *Big Brother*, Bazalgette described the show, with notable understatement, as “innovative in a number of ways”. He specified: “A



Sir Peter Bazalgette

Paul Hampartsoumian

‘PRIVATISATION HAS BECOME A DANGEROUS DISTRACTION’

The future of Channel 4

‘Whatever the rights and wrongs, it wasn’t properly debated,’ said Bazalgette of the proposed sale of Channel 4. The arguments over the state-owned broadcaster have ‘become a dangerous distraction – and I think the Government should drop it,’ he added.

He praised Channel 4’s recent move away from London to centres in Bristol, Leeds and Glasgow.

Leading a DCMS review of the creative industries in 2017, he had suggested investing in geographical clusters. ‘We put £50m into nine creative clusters. They’re four years old now and cover AI, fashion, screen tech and video games, in different parts of the country.

‘I thought it would attract another £50m investment from the private sector – it’s attracted more than £200m. Whenever any of the public sector broadcasters clusters its talent, exciting things happen; more companies set up, more growth takes place. So, I think it would probably be quite good if Channel 4 pursues that idea.’

Remembering his own success at Channel 4 producing programmes such as *Deal or No Deal* and, of course, *Big Brother*, Bazalgette said he understood why the broadcaster needed to be pragmatic.

‘It has to keep a certain amount of share because it has to earn a living and so it has to bolster its schedule with things such as *Bake Off*,’ he said. ‘Also, it is buying sport at the moment because it has got a bit of a surplus... so I wouldn’t knock it, but I think it needs to keep an audience and it’s more and more difficult to do it.’

streaming of the channel, which [also showed] the edited version, the telephone, where you could vote, [which] linked different media together, in a visceral sort of way.”

He added that no new television genres had been created since then, with the innovation happening instead in the means of distribution, production and technology. He went on to consider the consequences of this for the workforce: “The BFI issued a report the other day that said 41% of the 16-year-olds polled did not know there was a career in the screen industries.

“Now, we have got every studio full, we’re short of carpenters, real-time game engineers, make-up artists. We’re short of every conceivable skill that you need to make a movie or TV drama, and we’ve not got the message over to schools that these career paths exist.”

Bazalgette also reflected on his role as Co-Chair of the Creative Industries Council, and his hopes for the creative sector to be taken more seriously by the Treasury. “As a country,” he said, “we over-inform on traditional sectors such as manufacturing in terms of data, and we under-inform on sectors like the creative industries.

“The definitions of R&D are not

appropriate to the creative industries, so we don’t qualify for some of the tax credits we could otherwise get. For instance, a lot of the R&D done in the television industry, such as when we’re developing TV shows, never appears in the Office for National Statistics [figures] on R&D. Which is ridiculous, but it shows how the country, the mechanisms of government, the statistical services, have not caught up with where the economy is going.”

At the end of an evening devoted to his vision of television’s future, Bazalgette was asked which TV show of the past he would like to have claimed as his own. “No question, no contest,” he answered immediately. “*Antiques Roadshow*. Completely brilliant show.”

Why so? “It’s a show that combines national identity, local identity, personal history, national history, craftsmanship, but also avarice. It’s an irresistible combination.” ■

Report by Caroline Frost. Sir Peter Bazalgette was in conversation with Theresa Wise, RTS CEO at the May Fair Hotel, central London, on 13 October. The producers were Steve Clarke and Sue Robertson.



Clive Myrie

Clive Myrie mounts a passionate defence of an organisation that he says helps define who we are as a nation

BBC journalist, *Mastermind* presenter and opera lover Clive Myrie didn't pull any punches as he defended his employer in this year's Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture, entitled "The BBC: Destroy at your peril".

Myrie, who joined the BBC in 1987 as a trainee local radio reporter, laid out his reasons why the licence fee was a better way of funding the corporation than subscription. He stressed the importance of a trusted, impartial news service and the BBC's universality at a time when notions of truth have become subjective and impartiality "a false God".

He spoke to a packed audience at the University of Westminster as the corporation waits to find out if Liz Truss's administration's attitude to the licence fee will be as harsh as her predecessor's.

"What I'm hoping to do is show that the corporation, in fulfilling its core purpose, sits at the very heart of our society – actually helping to keep this country together," Myrie said. "The BBC is a binding agent that unites us all, a kind of social glue. The corporation is actually, I believe, fundamental to who we are, and our idea of ourselves."

Myrie emphasised that the licence fee represents extraordinarily good value for money. For 44p a day, audiences receive a vast array of output encompassing drama, documentaries, sports, news and current affairs across radio, TV and the widely well-regarded BBC iPlayer.

He gave his lecture on the day Truss was declared the winner of the Tory leadership contest, but before the BBC won universal praise, even from some of its harshest critics, for its coverage of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II, the period of mourning and her state funeral.

The BBC's income for UK services is 30% lower in real terms than it was a decade ago. The latest licence-fee deal froze the fee at its present level for two years, meaning it will stay well below

Paul Hampartsoumian

The BBC Destroy it at your peril

the rate of inflation until at least April 2024. The previous culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, said she wanted to abolish the fee by 2027.

Respected by his peers – at the 2021 RTS Television Journalism Awards, he won both Television Journalist of the Year and Network Presenter of the Year – Myrie emphasised the value of accurate, impartial news reporting. “When it comes to the news division, the most important characteristic has to be trust,” he said.

Independent research by Survation on behalf of BBC Education showed that the corporation was the most trusted news source for young people among traditional broadcast and print media, and much more trusted than digital media such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

“Who knew? Young people may be glued to their smartphones and tablets for hours every day, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they trust what they see, unless it’s news provided by the BBC,” said Myrie. He added that acknowledging the BBC’s successes does not, however, mean ignoring public concerns about bias, impartiality or possible group think.

“The corporation is not and should not be above scrutiny. Indeed, it must be held to the highest standards, even when others are not,” he insisted.

Impartiality, or more correctly, due impartiality, seems to have become an analogue concept in a digital world, he suggested. “It sounds technical, bureaucratic, it sounds very BBC. I’m going to use a different word: fairness. Due impartiality is simply what’s fair.”

Myrie painted a bleak picture of what could happen to broadcast news when rules governing impartiality are relaxed. He reminded the audience that it was Ronald Reagan who in 1987 abolished the so-called fairness doctrine in the US, which insisted that broadcast news covered controversial topics in a balanced way.

“It led to the rise of talk radio, shock jocks, Fox News and MSNBC and the complete disaster that is the America media landscape of today,” said Myrie, who was the BBC’s Los Angeles correspondent from 1997 to 1999.

The news broadcaster punctuated his lecture with clips from his work as a foreign correspondent and news anchor, plus the 1980s promotional film *What does the BBC do for me?*, fronted by John Cleese, and the more

recent promo, *The BBC Is Something that Belongs to Every One of Us*.

There was also a clip of the former BBC Director-General Tony Hall speaking in 2020 about the crucial role the broadcaster played in the early months of the pandemic.

Myrie noted that, when the country had its back to the wall during the first lockdown, audiences for BBC News soared. “It was made clear to us in the newsroom, right at the start of the nightmare, and in no uncertain terms, that, whatever happened, the main



news would, and must always, go to air as scheduled.”

In those dark times, when many felt their lives were in suspended animation, the corporation’s role as a universally available public service broadcaster was lauded: it stepped in with virtual church services, local BBC radio stations partnered with volunteer groups to help co-ordinate support for the elderly, housebound and those at risk.

And, “perhaps most spectacularly”, the BBC delivered a 14-week initiative of educational programmes and lessons to every household in the country.

Subscription streaming services such as Netflix and Disney+ also prospered during lockdown as people were stuck at home and wanted entertaining. Latterly, the idea of scrapping the licence fee in favour of a voluntary subscription has once again gained traction.

“On the face of it, the subscription model might seem very attractive to the BBC’s critics such as the Tax Payers’ Alliance – and possibly even to

some within the BBC, if streamers are making Jacuzzi-loads of cash,” suggested Myrie.

If only things were that simple. “The market is now saturated – HBO Max, Hulu, Amazon Prime, Apple TV+. There are too many companies going after too few subscribers. Supply is exceeding demand,” claimed Myrie.

He relayed a conversation with London Business School deputy dean Oded Koenigsberg, who argued that subscription models were “appallingly inefficient” and described them as the “kiss of death” for those without sufficiently large customer bases. “Producing marquee, eye-popping television can be a bottomless money pit. While the cost of producing great content goes up, consumers end up paying less per unit of consumption.”

Showing examples of the BBC’s coverage of the Ukraine war, Myrie said simply, “Netflix ain’t doing that,” adding, “The BBC, along with my colleagues at Sky, Channel 4 and ITN, produce Ukraine coverage of a quality to rival any broadcaster on the planet.”

During a post-speech question and answer session, a US audience member drew a round of applause when he said he’d moved to London from New York “because of the BBC”, praising its programmes and the ability to create a “certain amount of community”.

Another member of the audience, Alison Maitland, pondered what she and others could do to support the BBC. One option proposed was for people to write to their MPs. “Getting in touch with your MP is not a bad idea,” Myrie acknowledged. But Andrew Edwards pointed out that the BBC newsman had failed to address the real issue: why various well-connected BBC board members hadn’t been able to capture the ear of government regarding the value of the BBC “since 1986”.

“It doesn’t matter how culturally rich and important an organisation is, [and whether it is] feeding the minds of young people or whatever – politically, if it ain’t in your camp, you ain’t gonna have it,” Myrie noted ruefully. ■

Report by Stuart Kemp. The Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture was given by Clive Myrie on 5 September. It was co-produced by the Royal Television Society and The Media Society, with proceeds from the event going to the Steve Hewlett Scholarship Fund.



RTS Student Masterclasses

3 November

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MD, Sunshine; former
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Chief international
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and interviewers
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OUR FRIEND IN THE SOUTH

Along with many others, I was there in August, camera poised, looking out into the ethereal purple sky as the incredible super-moon rose majestically above the Isle of Wight and cast its dazzling reflection far out along the calm waters of the South Coast.

I thought of it as the last hurrah to the hot, hot summer of 2022. And what a summer we had. There was a great deal to broadcast about. The Platinum Jubilee cheered us up as we picked up our flags and headed out into our post-Covid street parties.

Reporters across the South did their duty, ate their marmalade sandwiches and filmed the town criers calling everyone to attention. But the war in Ukraine was raging and the worst European drought in 500 years was on its way.

Refugees crossing the channel to our South Coast towns is a continuing story and we're all experiencing a worsening cost of living crisis.

And, of course, we marked the end of the Second Elizabethan Age.

But students across the South are getting to grips with a new life. Over the last few weeks, young people, desperate to get started on their media journeys, are filling up our classrooms and coffee bars.

As is usual in the first week or two, they look a little lost and apprehensive, but soon they will be enjoying lots of new experiences that will propel them into the exciting world of media production.

Some of the students will be RTS Bursary Scholars. To date, the scheme has supported 280 students

Stephanie Farmer welcomes a new intake of students who can build on a great film and TV-making tradition



Tom Stone

on a wide range of courses, offering vital financial help, industry mentors and free access to RTS events.

In recent years, many universities in our region, like my own in Bournemouth, have invested heavily in fantastic new TV studios, sound stages, cameras, post-production facilities, campus buildings and accommodation.

What, then, lies in store for these young people when they enter the industry? The South is a great place for production, going all the way back to the 1955 film *The Dam Busters*, to this year's *Star Wars Andor*. Both shot scenes in Dorset.

James Bond has dropped into Farnborough airport several times and, in 2013, West Bay had the *Broadchurch* effect. Now, Ricochet's *The Repair Shop*, filmed in the South Downs, is one of our best-loved TV shows.

Brighton continues to be a lively

production hub and is home to the RTS- and Bafta-award-winning Seventh Art Productions.

Maidstone Studio complex is a hive of activity, with companies such as Terrific TV delivering shows for CBeebies and Sky. We also have the long-standing Topical TV producing daytime shows and content for *The One Show*, alongside Woodcut Media's highly successful true-crime series *World's Most Evil Killers*.

There is a thriving animation scene in Bournemouth. Companies enjoying the sea view include Outpost VFX and LoveLove Films, which is currently developing a children's series with Aardman.

Many of these companies are reinforced by the exceptional graduates from our region. Business is booming and indies are reporting a shortage of production managers, co-ordinators, script supervisors and editors. The work is there – students need to be ready to go and grab it.

Many companies say it's more about attitude than experience. The students I talk to have been through a torrid time over the past few years, with an interrupted education and social life. They are eager to learn and get on with their lives. I believe that coping with Covid has, with our support, helped them build up a resilience they can use to their advantage.

There are plenty of stories in the South yet to be told, there are audiences waiting to hear them, and it's a wonderful place to study, live and work. ■

Stephanie Farmer is executive producer, RedBalloon Productions, at Bournemouth University, and Chair of RTS Southern Centre.

WORKING LIVES



Edward Watts on location making *Escape from Isis*

Channel 4

Documentary film-maker

Edward Watts is best known for two bold, powerful RTS Award-winning films, *Escape from Isis* and the Oscar-nominated *For Sama*, which both brought the horror of war in the Middle East to Channel 4 audiences.

What does the job involve?

A documentary film-maker is trying to capture the essence of real life in cinematic form.

What was your route into film-making?

I left university with a history degree and started as a runner for Roger Graef's company, Films of Record. He was a great man and it was an incredible place to work. I worked my way up from runner to researcher to assistant producer to finally getting a producer/director gig.

What was your first documentary?

A film for Channel 4's *Unreported World* about Japanese nationalists in 2006, *Japan: Red Sun Rising*.

How do you come up with ideas...?

There isn't a magic formula. Find a subject you're passionate about, get

on the ground and meet people. Pick up the phone, rather than reading articles and sending emails – calling people is so much better. They reveal things that aren't on the internet and allow you to get to the truth.

... and make a film?

A few years ago, you'd have an idea, shoot some stuff and use what you'd shot to raise more money to keep the project going. That has changed because of the money that's come into documentaries from the streamers.

It's amazing for film-makers, but there's a flip side – commissioners want to know the ending and that's anathema to a film-maker like me, where the very process of making a film is often how you discover what the story is.

What makes a good film-maker?

Emotional intelligence is so important – documentaries are at their greatest when they touch the heart. Waad al-Kateab, the woman I worked with on *For Sama*, was filming on basic cameras but she was like a smart bomb for the emotion of a scene and capturing it – that's what makes a great documentary

film-maker. You need to be passionate and bold about the story you're telling; too many people are worried about being accused of not being objective.

But don't film-makers have to be objective?

You need to be open and willing to change your mind, but when you look at Russia and Ukraine, for example, good and evil is at play. Syria is a particular passion of mine and there was no moral equivalence between the two sides in Aleppo – one side [the Syrian Government and Russia] was bombing civilians and using chemical weapons and the other wasn't.

Who do you work with on a shoot?

A fixer and driver – I do all the shooting and sound myself. Others prefer to work with crews, but I like the smallest team possible because it allows me to work in an unobtrusive way, capturing things I wouldn't get if people were more conscious of my presence.

What is a typical filming day like?

An early start – I'm obsessed with trying to film a sunrise – meet my

'COMMISSIONERS WANT TO KNOW THE ENDING AND THAT'S ANATHEMA TO A FILM-MAKER LIKE ME'

team, grab some food and jump into a vehicle. I always want to fill the day; if I haven't got access to our characters, I take shots of the environment.

What do you bring to work with you?

With *Escape from Isis*, my goal was to be self-sufficient. I had a backpack with the heavier equipment, such as lenses and tripods, and a bumbag for batteries – it was mobile, stripped-down film-making.

Are you conscious of risk?

I lost a colleague, Tim Hetherington, whom I'd worked with on *Unreported World*; he died in Libya. I think all of us who work on these types of documentaries are aware of the potential risks, but you're there to get a story and so there's no point in hiding in the hotel. I've now got one kid and another on the way and that's had a big impact on my film-making – I didn't feel able to go to Ukraine.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best is when you make a connection between an audience and a story that is so far out of their frame of reference. I want to show that people in, say, Syria or Ukraine have the same sense of humour or concerns – it's just that they're having to live in terrible circumstances. The worst? Pick one... documentary culture is tough; even when you get back from a shoot, there's still the edit, which can be intense and long.

Has film-making changed since you started?

It's a golden age – there's money now and a bigger audience; we're not scrabbling around on the margins of cinema any more. A documentary, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, just won the Golden Lion, the highest award for a film, at the Venice Film Festival. People are looking at documentary as an art form now, which is fantastic.

What advice do you have for someone wanting to make documentaries?

The most important thing is to

understand why you want to do it. People have a range of motivations: some people are attracted to the glamour that now seems to be circulating around documentary film-making, but a lot of people are motivated, I think, by a desire to shine a light on the troubles of the world, to make a difference or to make connections between people.

Have a clear sense of what you're trying to achieve – don't worry about getting work; worry about getting the right work to get where you want to be.

Do you have any practical tips?

I was self-taught. I went out with a camera, filming an event and then

It was shot on the most basic of cameras but the director, Hubert Sauper, captures the environmental catastrophe that's unfolding in Lake Victoria. It's made with such intelligence that it transcends the grainy footage.

For me, that's film-making: it's not how pretty the picture is, it's how it makes me feel. I love raw films such as *Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country*, *The Return to Homs* and *The Cove*.

What are you working on now?

A feature doc that I can't talk about, but I've also been trying to help film-makers in Ukraine by using my experience of working in conflict zones. Film-making is changing – it's



From left: Edward Watts, Waad al-Kateab and Hamza al-Kateab at Cannes, 2019

Alamy

trying to turn it into a mini-film. I took those raw pieces to more experienced film-makers and asked them what they thought – most people were happy to give me 30 minutes of their time.

Learning those basic skills is vital, given how competitive the field is. When I got my first break, I was told I could direct an *Unreported World*, but only if I could show that I could shoot.

What films do you admire?

A great film-maker has passion – they don't make a technically brilliant film that doesn't have a heart. I show *Darwin's Nightmare* to anyone I teach.

not necessarily about British guys like me flying out to foreign countries, it's more about empowering people who live there to tell their own stories. That's a really positive development.

What would you like to make a film about?

The climate. We need to tell stories that cut through. People know what's going on, but change isn't happening. I haven't got the answer yet. ■

Edward Watts was interviewed by Matthew Bell. The film-maker is represented by Casarotto Ramsay.



Convention Chair **Priya Dogra** lays out the critical challenges facing the TV industry

The fight for attention

Viewing habits, business models and technology continue to change but, as media companies compete for attention, great content remains the key to success. That was one of the key points made by Priya Dogra, President and Managing Director, EMEA, of Warner Bros Discovery, during her opening remarks at the RTS London Convention, which she chaired.

Over the past century, she said, film, TV and other media had been engaged in “a battle for people’s time and money, responding to challenges from new technologies and trying to create and secure the best content”.

The fight is now more intense than ever, she said, as streaming services compete with linear-TV channels for viewers and content. Other forms of entertainment are challenging TV’s supremacy, especially among young audiences. Entirely new technologies such as the metaverse have the potential to disrupt the industry further.

“Against this changing backdrop, many of the traditional labels that have long been used to define different parts of our industry no longer seem so relevant,” she said. “Most of us are seeking to engage consumers across multiple platforms and devices, and generating income from a variety of different sources.

“Warner Bros Discovery is a good example. We are, at heart, a business that invests in great storytelling of all kinds, both for ourselves and for our partners.

“We bring those stories to audiences in many different ways: cinemas, linear channels, streaming services and also through games, experiences and consumer products.”

The fight for attention is a complex one fought globally and locally across different media, she pointed out. Companies can be competitors and collaborators simultaneously.

“For regulators and politicians, the challenges are equally acute,” she said. “When the world is changing so fast, how can future regulation support a thriving creative economy and allow consumers to benefit from a wide choice of high-quality content?”

Audiences have embraced these opportunities and viewing habits have changed radically. But, she asked, is that choice creating more confusion and

Richard Kendal

frustration? And does competition necessarily mean lower prices? Many families are concerned about the cost of living crisis – what will this mean for the industry?

“Over recent years, increasing competition between services has driven a record spend on content,” she noted. “But the changing economic outlook has led to predictions [that we are reaching] peak TV and the beginning of an era of financial retrenchment.

“How should we respond to these challenges and what does a winning strategy look like in this environment?”

The future of the BBC licence fee, Channel 4 privatisation and the regulation of online harms “have profound implications for the whole industry, not just the organisations directly impacted”. However, while policy and regulation are important: “We should never forget that this is a creative industry, and that great content is the key to success in the fight for attention.

“Of course, television is not only about entertainment. Recent events remind us that fearless new reporting is vital to society and democracy.” A panel featuring CNN investigative journalists would later explore the impact of vital new techniques.

“While many of us associate the RTS with first-class conferences, it’s important to remember that it is an educational charity,” said Dogra. She drew attention to the RTS Bursary Scholars in the audience and highlighted the filmed interviews with some of the students that would be shown during the day.

In addition, she referred to three short films created for the Black Britain Unspoken initiative, a partnership between Warner Bros Discovery and Media Trust, that were to be premiered later in the day at the Convention. “These films aim to give an opportunity and voice to black film-makers who, as we know, continue to be under-represented across the director, writer and producer roles.”

The films, she said, by three “exceptional film-makers”, all in the audience – Richard Ampeh, Talisha “Tee Cee” Johnson and Sheila Kayuma – would be broadcast and streamed on Warner Bros Discovery channels in October as part of Black History Month. ■

Priya Dogra, President and MD, EMEA, at Warner Bros Discovery, chaired the RTS London Convention 2022.



RTS Bursary Scholars with Baz Luhrmann; the student films are covered on page 36



All pictures: Richard Kendal



Richard Kendall

Warner Bros Discovery's worldwide boss outside the US outlines why 'must-have' content is crucial for success

International keynote Gerhard Zeiler

Gerhard Zeiler is responsible for Warner Bros Discovery (WBD) businesses across 200 territories, and has strategic oversight for the group's brands and direct-to-consumer products outside the US.

Session chair Nina Hossain: Warner-Media and Discovery completed their merger just six months ago. What's your big vision for WBD?

Gerhard Zeiler: We're a content company. We are storytellers, and we tell stories in many ways. We have invested in the theatrical business; we tell stories in TV series, whether scripted or unscripted; we are in games; we tell animated stories; we tell sports stories, documentaries; and last, but not least, we tell news stories.

Without boasting – we are not bad at this storytelling. The 48 Emmys we got a couple of weeks ago are proof of it.

There are three factors in our vision. First, the breadth of how we tell stories, which I [have] just explained. But probably the most important for our success, are the relevance and the quality of the storytelling.

Hand in hand with this vision goes a distribution strategy. When you tell stories in so many ways, it makes sense that your distribution strategy is very broad.

Lastly, we are not a closed shop. Yes, we are proud that a lot of our content is watched and released on our own networks, but we also sell content [to other parties].

The new business combines many different brands and business models, especially in comparison with some of your peers. Is that a strength or a weakness?

It may seem complex but I call it diversity. We don't believe it makes sense to put all our content into one window. There are not many other companies that have as many global brands as we have. Think of Warner Bros, think of HBO, think of CNN, Discovery, Cartoon Network... they all have their own viewers; it makes sense to let viewers decide where they want to consume our products.

How difficult will it be to create a new tranche of powerful, successful brands?

We are happy with the brands we have. Where we will focus is probably more on the development of franchises.

Think of the world of *Harry Potter*, *Looney Tunes* or *Game of Thrones*. *House of the Dragon* is a spin-off of that [last one] and maybe there will be additional ones. That's what we focus on.

Where does local programming fit in to your vision?

I think there is one rule in our industry: if you want to be a successful global player, you have to have relevant local stories. The big hits will always be the likes of *Batman*, *Succession*, *House of the Dragon*, but in order to be a top-three player, you need to complement these big hits with locally relevant stories. Maybe not in every single market of the world, but in a lot of them.

How do you encourage the idea that, if a local audience is talking about [a show, the company should be] trying to get it out to a global audience?

Ninety-nine per cent of what we produce locally on the streaming side is automatically released in all regions where we have HBO Max, and it is the same with Discovery+. If something gets traction in the local market, we can do a lot of marketing on our own platform and the other networks we have in order to try to accelerate that. But you don't know beforehand whether it will be a success.

How important is the UK market to you right now?

We have invested for so many years in the UK. The UK is by far our biggest market outside the US in terms of revenue, people, employees and businesses. We have so many partnerships here. Our companies create content for Channel 4, we have a strong partnership with the BBC and, of course, the partnership with Sky, with a huge amount of co-production and also a deal where Sky is more or less the home for Warner Bros and HBO.

The partnership is great. But Stephen [van Rooyen, Sky's EVP and CEO for the UK and Europe] will not be mad at me when I say that one day – and I say this very carefully and vaguely – we will probably also want to have a streaming service outside Discovery+.

In terms of that partnership with Sky, how will it be affected by you forming a joint venture with Sky's rival, BT Sport?

Sky is part of this deal because there was a huge amount of negotiations until [all parts of] the deal were done. It was

before my time, but I heard it was a very complex transaction. I sent one of the people involved in negotiating this deal with Sky and BT to Asia because he just had to get away from the UK negotiations [audience laughter].

The good thing about our industry, which is different to some other digital businesses, [is that] the winner doesn't take it all. It's always good that there's competition.

In terms of governmental policy, what would make the UK more attractive to the company?

The UK is such a strong market for us that I don't think this will change a lot going forward. Would it be helpful if the Government knew that this indus-

digital right. The second is that, yes, the focus on global subs will still be there, but that is not the only key performance indicator.

It's also about revenue, and a path to profitability. Last, but not least, we have two streaming platforms, Discovery+ and HBO Max, and we will bring that together in the next year as one combined product, before we then launch in new markets.

This convention is about the fight for attention. As an industry leader, what's your perspective on that landscape?

It must have been around the time of the first internet bubble, in 1999 or 2000, that I first heard that [soon] "TV will be dead". TV is still not dead, and



Nina Hossain

Richard Kendal

try is a really important one for the whole economic situation in the country? I think so. But I leave it to people who are based here to tell the Government that story.

I never believed some of the announcements from the previous Government – and don't let me get into the details here – about future developments and the media in this country.

In terms of WBD, what does success from your point of view look like in five or 10 years from now?

We want to be a top-three media player, and I, personally, would be disappointed if the number three appears in front of our ranking. But this is only the headline – what real success means is different.

First of all, we have to, like everyone else, get the transition from linear to

won't die. Only how it is watched has changed, and it is shifting slowly.

The second thing is that we have had so many discussions in the past 20 or 30 years about who is the real king, is it content or is it distribution? I believe it's about content, distribution, product – no consumer wants to have to make 30 clicks in order to get to a product – and price. All that forms a package.

Last, but not least, the time when "nice to have" was enough is over. It is now "must have". If you deliver the "must-have" product, if you deliver the "must-have" content, you are a winner. ■

In Session One, 'International keynote: Gerhard Zeiler', the President, international, of Warner Bros Discovery was interviewed by ITN newscaster Nina Hossain. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.

Follow the eyeballs...



From left: Jan Koeppen, Ben McOwen Wilson, Priya Dogra, Stephen van Rooyen and Maria Kyriacou

Richard Kendall

... follow the money

Broadcasters no longer battle just each other in the bid for growth. With expanding options in leisure and home entertainment, and consumers reeling from the cost of living crisis, the competition has broadened. Now, it includes other leisure pursuits as much as traditional rivals.

This battle for consumer attention was the focus of the second convention session, “Follow the eyeballs, follow the money: winning in the attention economy”.

A panel of industry leaders – Jan Koeppen, The Walt Disney Company; Maria Kyriacou, Paramount International; Ben McOwen Wilson, Google Play; and Stephen van Rooyen, Sky – joined conference chair Priya Dogra, Warner Bros Discovery, to help the audience get a handle on the perils and possibilities in this new arena.

Dogra identified four aspects that needed addressing: the cost of living crisis; the opportunities provided by ad-supported services; changing consumer behaviour; and the rise of other entertainment platforms.

As consumers’ budgets are squeezed and their habits change, which business models can still deliver growth?

Cutting the cord on luxuries

As the UK enters a recession, “give up avocados and subscription services” is the financial advice most often doled out. It seems to be having an effect – stats from the Kantar Entertainment On-Demand panel in July showed that the number of UK homes with at least one SVoD service fell by 700,000 in the first half of 2022. They also revealed that, of those respondents planning to cancel an SVoD service, there was a 50% rise in those citing money as the main reason, compared with a year earlier.

For Kyriacou, who recently launched Paramount+, the picture was more positive. In the wider market, she said, “we are launching into a growth segment as far as we’re concerned. All predictions have SVoD’s share of

viewing increasing dramatically over the next few years. Launching into this market segment is absolutely the right thing for us to do, but we’re not complacent.

“We have to compete on the quality of our content,” she said, citing *Top Gun: Maverick*, *Star Trek* and *Yellowstone* among the service’s successes. “We’re complementing all of it with something slightly unique to us: the grounding that Channel 5 gives us in the UK industry. We’re using that connection to local creative markets to make sure that we have quite a sizeable slate of UK originals coming up. We’ve already announced 20.”

Paramount’s partnership with Sky, meanwhile, “meant that we had a ready audience from day one for our content, and that gives us a lot of confidence because we can see how they react.”

Van Rooyen felt that tightening purse strings meant consumers would be “more choiceful” about their spend, especially given the flexibility allowed in the current business model of SVoDs. “Whether we like to talk about it or not, allowing people to dip in and

out whenever they want is going to feed on this idea that people can trade in and trade out. Which creates a whole other set of problems for those who run the services.”

He added that Sky’s strategy was to bundle Paramount+ with Sky Cinema – “the most broadly distributed cinema service, certainly in this country, but probably anywhere” – in order to bring added value.

Koeppen, whose streaming service, Disney+, is one of the more mature SVoDs, also agreed that “powerful content” ensured a space for the service. He argued that “when the powerful content is there, as Gerhard Zeiler [of Warner Bros Discovery] said in the first session, people come to you. That’s borne out with the numbers.”

That didn’t necessarily mean local independent productions companies would be squeezed out – “Local stories pop”, said Van Rooyen, echoing another of Zeiler’s points. “I don’t think it’s a zero-sum game. I think it’s important that you have both *House of the Dragon* and *This England*, our story about Boris Johnson. The more you look at the data, the more you will identify that you need to invest in local productions.”

Koeppen noted: “We are seeing super-high-quality local content being produced on a budget that would have been unthinkable if you went back 10 or 15 years. It rivals Hollywood production standards.”

Overall, continued Koeppen, the direction of travel – “especially in the environment that might be coming our way” – was to offer more choice, which was why Disney, among others, was adding an ad tier to its service, starting in the US. “I think it’ll be great for consumers. They don’t all want the same thing.” Which brought the panel neatly to Dogra’s next topic.

The rise of ad-supported VoD

Netflix, Amazon Prime and ITV, as well as Disney, have announced the addition of ad-supported tiers to their services.

With YouTube long in the game of ad-supported streaming, Google’s McOwen Wilson was clear on how this was likely to play out: “People need to work out exactly where the sustainable business model is for each of them – and they’re each going to land in slightly different places.

“From our perspective, it’s not only about offering ad-supported services, it’s also been about innovating around formats that work on different services.

If someone’s watching on a tablet versus a mobile phone versus a TV screen, it won’t be the case that the ad formats or the ad load you see in three to five years’ time are going to be identical across those services. Consumers won’t bear it.

“If the stats of churn between services tells us anything, it is that, ultimately, the viewer is king. It’s not content, it’s not distribution, it’s the viewer who is king. The businesses [represented on this stage] that appear to respond best to that will be in slots one, two and three.”

This trend towards AVoD is likely to increase competition for advertising,

still the vast majority of viewing in this country. And of that [viewing], I think the Ofcom report said, 77% is live. It should never be underestimated. That is still the preference of the majority.

“At the same time, you have to adapt your business to where the growth is, and the growth is in AVoD. We’ve seen it for [streamers] My5 and Pluto – My5 has had three consecutive years now of double-digit growth. It’s still a smaller segment for us, but it’s growing faster.”

Koeppen pointed to Hulu in the US as an example of a successful, multi-billion-dollar, ad-supported service. “People pay slightly higher prices if they



while also benefiting the advertising industry as a whole. “For the advertisers, it’s probably a good thing to have more places to spend their money,” said Van Rooyen, noting that Sky was itself a large advertiser. “For [consumers] willing to bear the load of advertising, it’s a good thing because it gives them cheaper access tiers than they hitherto had.”

The impact on linear channels remains to be seen, but Kyriacou, whose company also owns Channel 5, insisted that linear-TV was still attractive to advertisers: “Everyone who has predicted the end of broadcast television has been very wrong, and will continue to be wrong. Broadcast TV is

don’t want to have ads, and pay a lower price if they want to have ads. It’s been incredibly successful. And, by the way, it hasn’t ruined the broadcast advertising business. It’s incredibly resilient, and Hulu has proved that they can co-exist.”

Changing consumer behaviour

As the SVoD landscape has evolved, some consumers have modified their expectations. In January, Accenture’s *Streaming’s Next Act* report confirmed that 54% of UK consumers found it frustrating trying to move between streaming services.

“It’s a terrible experience,” agreed Van Rooyen. “None of us should sugar-coat it. Big, lumbering, giant >

Numbers that demand attention

A selection of the statistics shared during this convention session

THE PROPORTION OF CUSTOMERS PLANNING TO CANCEL AN SVoD SERVICE CITING MONEY SAVING AS THE MAIN REASON IS **50% HIGHER** THAN A YEAR AGO

ALMOST THREE-QUARTERS OF PEOPLE WHO CANCELLED AN SVoD SERVICE THOUGHT THEY WOULD RESUBSCRIBE IN FUTURE

THE NUMBER OF UK HOMES WITH AT LEAST ONE SVoD SERVICE **FELL BY 700,000** IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2022

44% OF UK NETFLIX CUSTOMERS DO NOT MIND SEEING ADS IF IT MAKES THE SERVICE CHEAPER

SPEND ON IN-STREAM VIDEO ADVERTISING **GREW BY 75%** IN 2021 TO REACH **£2.2 BILLION**

54% OF UK CUSTOMERS CONSIDER THE PROCESS OF NAVIGATING BETWEEN DIFFERENT MEDIA SERVICES FRUSTRATING

IN THE US, **48%** OFTEN STRUGGLE TO DECIDE WHAT TO WATCH WHEN THEY OPEN A STREAMING SERVICE; **25%** WANT THE SERVICE TO DECIDE FOR THEM

HALF OF UK CUSTOMERS WOULD BE HAPPY TO SHARE MORE DATA IN EXCHANGE FOR MORE PERSONALISED RECOMMENDATIONS

15- TO 24-YEAR-OLD TIKTOK USERS SPEND AN AVERAGE OF **57 MINUTES** PER DAY ON TIKTOK, MORE THAN THEY SPEND WATCHING BROADCAST TV CONTENT

MORE THAN 40% OF US CONSUMERS SPEND MORE TIME WATCHING USER-GENERATED CONTENT THAN TV SHOWS AND MOVIES ON STREAMING SERVICES

75% OF UK CONSUMERS PLAY GAMES REGULARLY AND **55%** OF THEM SAY THAT GAMES HAVE TAKEN TIME AWAY FROM OTHER ENTERTAINMENT CHOICES

'YOU NEED TO INVEST IN LOCAL PRODUCTIONS'

Stephen van Rooyen



Richard Kendall

number of hours a user spends on Pluto is shocking... once you're there and you have found out how easy it is, you stay."

Rival entertainment platforms

In a world where consumers, especially younger ones, are spending so much of their time on social media and games, TV faces a tough battle for their attention. The *Deloitte Digital Media Trends Survey 2022*, published in April, reported that 75% of UK consumers play games regularly, and 55% of them say that games have taken them away from other entertainment choices.

So what were the panellists doing to engage those consumers spending time on the new platforms? "We've got about 6.5 million subscribers to our YouTube channels, and Nickelodeon has between 3 million and 4 million followers on TikTok," said Kyriacou. "[But] the monetisation inherently happens somewhere else, so bringing them back in is absolutely critical."

Sky and Disney also deliver content on YouTube, pointed out McOwen Wilson, because keeping content exclusive to one platform is no longer the draw it once was. He said that kids' channel Cocomelon, for example, had started on YouTube and was now also on BBC iPlayer, Netflix, and Amazon Prime. "Historically, it wouldn't make any sense at all. No TV licensing person in the world would have told you that this was possible. But, in 2022, this is the world we're looking at. For those consumers, seeing Cocomelon [on it] gives that service credibility. It gives them a sense that there is content there that they can watch and they can trust."

McOwen Wilson added there were opportunities for synergy when user-generated content covered franchises and brands relevant to broadcasters. "That's going to be critical, especially if, as Gerhard [Zeiler] said, you are trying to create fewer, bigger franchises." ■

Session Two, 'Follow the eyeballs, follow the money: winning in the attention economy', featured: Jan Koeppen, President, The Walt Disney Company, EMEA; Maria Kyriacou, President, Australia, Canada, Israel and UK, Paramount International; Ben McOwen Wilson, MD, Google Play, EMEA; and Stephen van Rooyen, EVP and CEO, UK and Europe, Sky. It was chaired by Priya Dogra, President and MD, EMEA, Warner Bros Discovery, and produced by Robert Fraser, Graham McWilliam and Helen Scott. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.

› companies all doing their own thing have left the consumer experience by the roadside."

Sky's answer, he continued, lay in "seamless aggregation" with Sky Q, Sky Glass and now Sky Stream, "which we are announcing the launch of today. It is the evolution of the Sky Glass platform from the TV to a puck. It fits in the palm of your hand and plugs into your TV.

"We think that the algorithms and user interface that we have created, and the ability to move more seamlessly between apps, gives customers the right answer in a world of abundant choice."

McOwen Wilson suggested later: "The quicker you do that, the more you reduce the [friction] for a consumer, the more likely it is that you're not going to be one of the services that gets churned off.

"Even if you don't think they have other choices in the world of television, their experiences on the internet are shaping their expectations of what a service or a screen needs to do for them."

Koeppen argued that this was an age-old problem that was more about expectation than increased choice. "Bruce Springsteen sang *57 Channels (and Nothin' On)* 30 years ago. There's lot of content and people have been complaining, and continue to complain.

People are actually good at finding content, yet they want it to be better.

"We're all advancing towards Stephen in one way – we obviously co-operate with Stephen on [aggregation]. Individual platforms, such as Google, certainly, and ours, and our competitors' make it ever easier to serve up the right content."

Arguably, a cyclical effect of the explosion of content choice is some consumers wanting a "lean-back" experience, where channels curate shows for them, even in the digital space.

"That's where Pluto has found tremendous success in the US, and is building it here," said Kyriacou. "It's based on the comfort of pre-existing shows and brands you already know. You don't have to search – you can have one show or one channel playing one thing after another.

"One thing we've noticed is that the

'IT'S NOT CONTENT, IT'S NOT DISTRIBUTION, IT'S THE VIEWER WHO IS KING'

Ben McOwen Wilson

Channel 4 Chief Executive
Alex Mahon explains
how the broadcaster
is protecting its unique
remit in uncertain times

Session chair Amol Rajan: Did you interpret the new culture secretary saying that she is re-examining the business case for privatisation as implying that she and Prime Minister Liz Truss are not as committed to privatisation as their predecessors?

Alex Mahon: We're in discussion with the DCMS about where they want to end up and what the options are. I imagine they'll look at the things that I like: facts, data and evidence. Then we'll see what the coming weeks and months hold as they think about that.

Lots of things in the legislative agenda are in the air compared with where we were in July, partly because the country is now having some more problems.

What has been the impact on the regulation of British media of having so many secretaries of state in the past five years?

We have really good civil servants in that department; they tend to be in their jobs for longer, and they do know the sector in detail – that does make a difference. And we have Ofcom and other stakeholders.

I don't think it's perfect that we have such rotation because it is hard for people to get to know all the broadcasters and other players in the industry. That said, they tend to do a really focused job and think about what the right answers are.

Even if privatisation doesn't happen, hasn't the whole process been good for you, as it has forced you to think about what you're for and make some quite useful changes?

I don't think you're wrong, but also it hasn't been easy. It's been volatile but, in a way, Channel 4 is at its best when our backs are against the wall. We've had our best results ever: we made £100m surplus last year, we had an amazing year with All 4. In that sense, volatility and ambiguity have perhaps made us perform better. But it would also be nice to know where we are.

Richard Kendall



In the hot seat Alex Mahon

One of the things that you proposed was a £100m joint venture with outside private financing, which would have been the first time that you allowed private financing into Channel 4. Are you still looking to create such a joint venture?

We had lots of ideas of how could we raise external capital, which was one of

the Government's questions in the consultation. When we have resolution to where we are, we'll look at all of those [ideas] again. It's hard for us to launch a lot of [them when] it's unclear, because, if we're bringing in external partners and external capital, they want to know you're in a fixed position for a bit of time.

If you did go down that route, isn't there potentially a tension between the intentions of a private investor and your public service remit?

Not in the way we structured it... they were a minority. So I don't think that would be a problem.

Last year, you had record revenues. [But] we are possibly in a recession and you are funded by advertising. How bad will it get for Channel 4?

On advertising, nobody knows yet. It's a pretty volatile market – I haven't checked since we came on stage what's happened to sterling. So that's hard to predict.

The other truth is that people want to watch things with ads in them because they're free. The previous panel [on winning in the "attention economy"] was about whether people would keep paying for lots of different SVoD services, or would start cutting back because they can't afford them. Whereas, it turns out that people still like free.

That's why broadcasters with advertiser-funded VoD will continue to do well, and it's why you see some of those SVoDs piling into an advertiser-funded tier.

How many years do you think it will be before a digital viewer is worth as much to Channel 4 as a linear viewer?

For us, someone watching on All 4 is worth the same as someone watching on linear television. It's completely different to what happened in print.

The questions for us are about how fast you manage that transition. It's not an easy linear equation – if you get one more person in VoD viewing, you don't get one less person in linear. So how you prioritise each of those services is a series of complex operational decisions.

If we look at release patterns, a year or two ago, everything was released as a box set on SVoD services. Now, we see them moving closer to broadcast, with weekly drops of shows to keep interest high. We see them moving into advertising, just like us. We see them moving into live sports, just like us. We are yet to see how the market will settle in terms of what we give to consumers and how we give it.

When Her Majesty The Queen died, what was your approach, creatively?

We did all the right things. Like the other broadcasters, we did the

announcement correctly, our news team was absolutely spectacular. We did make complex choices, like we put *Gogglebox* back on Friday night, which was actually really welcomed by the public. Those are the things that we have to consider, being an alternative.

We had to strip all the ads out. That's a really complex operational task. On the funeral day, we didn't put the funeral on; we put on a wonderful documentary about the coronation of the Queen, narrated by Laurence Olivier. There weren't a lot of people watching that, I must admit, but it was

and we go into schools. That's already up and running, and it's a massive success.

In our document, we suggested that we accelerate that even more, and play an even bigger role outside London. It does make an amazing difference if you can have a career in our industry without having to move to London.

The BBC now gathers and is soon to publish the socio-economic make-up of its staff. Would you be prepared to do the same?

Yes, and we are already at about 37% or



an important version of what the Channel 4 point of view was. Doing something that was respectful was the right place for us to be.

You're making a big push on skills through this initiative 4Skills, and you're looking to focus additional investment on young people from non-professional backgrounds. Can you explain what you're doing to help working-class kids?

4Skills, which we've already launched, reaches 15,000 young people a year. It is completely focused on people who would not otherwise be given a chance in the industry.

We're working with all kinds of young people, with all the sets of underrepresented people, with apprentices, with different agencies,

38% from working-class and intermediate [backgrounds]. We've got a big inclusion piece coming up.

The bigger difficulties are not necessarily about changing the numbers in an organisation. What you want is a place of work where you feel comfortable in not necessarily being the same as the people who came in before or are at the top echelons of the organisation. If you look at those surveys, the gap between who you really are and who you pretend to be at work is much bigger if you come from a working-class background. ■

In Session Three, 'UK keynote: Alex Mahon', the CEO of Channel 4, was interviewed by BBC journalist Amol Rajan. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.



Richard Kendal

The news evolution

‘**T**he work that we do... is really expensive, resource-heavy and time-heavy. Maybe we can pull together a really big investigation every two months, but we see the impact and the audiences – that’s what keeps CNN and other [news] organisations... investing in investigative work.’

Nima Elbagir, CNN’s chief international investigative correspondent, was extolling the virtue of combining old-fashioned journalism with forensic open-source investigative techniques to compile reports from the world’s trouble spots.

Typically, open-source material includes social media posts from, and footage shot by, eye-witnesses, which CNN then submits to a thorough process of verification. Was it filmed when

The RTS hears how an explosion of open-source material is transforming investigative journalism

and where it claims to have been shot? Does it show what it purports to show?

Using open-source footage, explained investigative producer Katie Polglase, “makes information public. If you know where to look, anyone can find it.”

Fellow investigative producer Gianluca Mezzofiore added: “The Ukraine war is a watershed for open source because it’s where we’ve [become] mainstream.... [News organisations] are starting to integrate open-source [material] into the core operation of the newsroom.”

Both Polglase and Mezzofiore are

based in the multinational news channel’s London bureau.

Earlier this year, CNN broadcast a report on the launch of Russian Smerch cluster rockets – each projectile unleashes 72 submunitions over an area the size of a football pitch – against Ukrainian civilians in Kharkiv. Such use of cluster bombs is banned by international treaty and any attack that indiscriminately targets civilians could be considered a war crime.

By analysing satellite imagery, harnessing social media video and making trajectory calculations, as well as carrying out traditional, on-the-ground journalism, the news organisation was able to identify the rocket artillery brigade that had launched the rockets from inside Russia. It found that the brigade reports directly to the same military leader – Colonel General Alexander

Zhuravlyov – who had overseen brutal attacks on Aleppo in Syria.

Following the CNN broadcast, revealed Elbagir, “Ukrainian prosecutors have opened an investigation into General Zhuravlyov in the hope that they will be able to issue an indictment”.

Senior producer Barbara Arvanitidis praised Polglase and Mezzofiore for their “extraordinary work” in pin-pointing which Russian artillery brigade had launched the rocket attacks. But, she added, “It was also so important to get out there to verify [the attacks], with our own eyes, to film it ourselves, and also to meet the people who had witnessed it... Being in the field is so important.”

The challenge for Arvanitidis when compiling upsetting reports is to “get an audience to sit and watch from start to finish... when it’s a story that’s being told so far away that people don’t necessarily feel they can relate [to it].

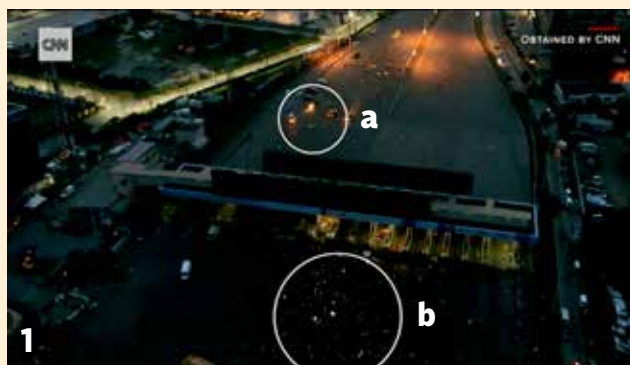
“It’s actually quite basic.... If you can make a connection... to basic human emotion, then you can get that viewer to sit and watch.... Engaging first on a very emotional, human level is important.

“The tools we now have are incredible, they’re mind-boggling, but the basics of storytelling remain... otherwise, no one would watch or it would be a [much] narrower audience. What I’m trying to do is to get my 17-year-old to watch, as well as my 77-year-old mother – when you have that sort of range, you’ve got to be able to make it relatable and get people engaged. The basics of narrative and storytelling are absolutely crucial.

“The broader the narrative is... the more people are going to watch... and more people are going to be upset and demand that their congressman or their MP makes change.”

Reporting on often horrific events takes its toll on journalists. But reward comes with the positive change reports can provoke. Elbagir said: “The fact is we can tangibly see that in some small way [our reports are] having an impact on people’s lives. It keeps you coming back.” ■

Session Four, ‘The news evolution’, featured: CNN senior producer Barbara Arvanitidis and CNN investigative producers Gianluca Mezzofiore and Katie Polglase. It was chaired by CNN chief investigative correspondent Nima Elbagir and produced by Barbara Arvanitidis and Jonathan Hawkins. Report by Matthew Bell.



1 CNN gained access to CCTV showing army vehicles arriving (a) at the Lekki toll gate to confront demonstrators (b) and then, (2), the showers of sparks (c) as soldiers opened fire. **3** Surviving witnesses filmed the bullet casings they picked up, which CNN traced (4) to batches bought by Nigeria.

All pictures: CNN

Nigeria: unravelling the Lekki toll gate massacre

CNN analysed hours of video filmed by protesters to prove that the Nigerian army fired live rounds into a crowd at the Lekki toll gate in October 2020, killing and wounding a disputed number of people.

“When this incident happened, we went online to see what footage was out there,” recalled Katie Polglase. “We then put out a call saying, “We’re investigating this, if you have anything... send it to us in any way you feel is safe and secure for you.”

The footage was verified as accurate, using metadata and geo-location to prove that it was filmed that night at the Lekki toll gate. Polglase added: “Rather than speaking to a handful of sources, we [had] hundreds of people sending us footage, meaning that the accuracy of the piece and our

understanding of what had happened that night was better.”

The CNN team also used more traditional investigative journalism, proving that the bullets fired by the army had been bought from Serbia by the Nigerian Government.

“Open source [reporting] does get you very far along but, in addition to that, there are still these good old-fashioned ways of doing things, talking to people, relying on sources, the cross-referencing of sources,” said Elbagir.

More than a year later, a government-appointed panel, which frequently referred to the CNN reporting, concluded that there had indeed been a ‘massacre’ of unarmed protesters, which contradicted previous official accounts of the incident.



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Three revealing films on under-appreciated aspects of the black experience premiered at the Convention

Talisha Johnson in
Too Autistic for Black

Discovery+

Black Britain Unspoken

Between the sessions, delegates watched a series of three short films, *Black Britain Unspoken*. Commissioned by Warner Bros Discovery and Media Trust, they tease out often-overlooked nuances of life experienced by black British people and are airing on Discovery+ over the course of October's Black History Month.

First up was *The Nod: Tell Me You Got Me*, an insightful exploration into the near-universal gesture recognised by black people who are otherwise unknown to each other.

Writer and director Richard Ampeh begins with street poetry to put the nod in context. Conjuring up the feeling of being ostracised walking through a non-black neighbourhood or the fear of black-on-black crime, he describes the release of tension when two strangers pass and “the feeling when we both catch a gaze/I look him dead in his face/He sees a king, I see a god/A subtle salute to my brother from another mother”.

One of several interviewees, DJ and presenter Trevor Nelson, teases: “It’s a secret, secret thing. We shouldn’t be talking about it. You’re messing with the mystique of it.”

The five-minute film looks at both

the nod – eye contact and a subtle head nod, often combined with a double-tap to the heart – and the sentiment behind the gesture. Kurtis Coleman, an HGV driver, recalls learning it from his grandad, who came to England from Jamaica in the 1960s: “When he was here, racism was rife. He told me, ‘Always connect with other black people when you see them on the road, because you never know, it might save you one day.’”

For many, it’s a unifying gesture in a country in which they find themselves a minority. “It’s made us realise the strength of community,” says student Ayomide Akande.

Autism is the subject of the second film, *Too Autistic for Black* by Talisha ‘Tee Cee’ Johnson. The short is presented as a poetic letter to autism: “They say you usually go for someone male, usually pale. But looks like you knew we were a match from the start,” recites Johnson.

The multifaceted difficulties facing autistic black people is movingly painted by interviewees wearing a range of brightly coloured T-shirts to represent the diversity of a condition that shapes life at school, in the workplace, and through friendships.

“People see my skin colour before they see my autism.... I just wish that

society would understand the cultural differences and the implications that come with it,” laments Lauren-Rochelle Fernandez, a consultant.

Melissa Simmonds, a campaigner for autism awareness, explains: “Too many black children receive late diagnoses because their behaviours are seen as aggressive instead of a communication difficulty. This leads to the school-to-prison pipeline.”

But the film ends on a positive note, with Johnson celebrating the strength of black autistic lives. “In true spectrum form, keep shining, headlining, black priding.”

In the final film, Sheila Kayuma’s *The Power of Plantain*, chefs Akwasi Brenya-Mensa and Victor Ofunime Okunowo discuss, celebrate and cook with the one ingredient that Brenya-Mensa describes as “synonymous with the black experience around the world”.

“I just want African food [to be accepted] as other cuisines have been,” says Okunowo. “You can go anywhere and find pizza. I want to be able to go anywhere and find plantain.” ■

The series *Black Britain Unspoken*, commissioned by Warner Bros Discovery and Media Trust, is available on Discovery+. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.

The BBC's
Director-General
identifies the key
challenges of
funding, political
impartiality and
social exclusion

Richard Kendall



In the hot seat Tim Davie

Session chair Amol Rajan: Is the licence fee the least bad option for funding the BBC?

Tim Davie: Yes.... If you believe in universal broadcasting... the licence fee, for all its problems, [has] enabled a few things: the BBC has been able to keep [to] its mission, it's kept us independent [and] impartial; and it provides a certainty of funding in the medium term....

[It's also] worked in terms of the UK creative industries and public service broadcasting.... One of the things that I think we all need to do is to get out and have a look at what's happening in media around the world.

Are you able to get young people to pay for the licence fee in sufficient numbers to ward off the argument that the

licence fee is no longer universal?

There's no doubt that we can deliver the vast majority of households paying for a licence fee because they get good value from it.... We took more in licence-fee income last year than we did the year before – by £50m.... The idea that there's some sort of major short-term crisis is nonsense – we still get 88% of adults using the BBC every week.

You got £3.8bn from the licence fee last year; that's 74% of BBC income. In the years ahead, will the proportion of funding that comes from the licence fee fall as commercial revenues grow?

Globally, without a doubt... but you're never going to be in a position where the commercial revenues in the UK offset a massive amount of the [licence fee].... The commercial arm, we've

grown... from £1bn revenue to £1.6bn... the profit on the back of that is a decent margin... but to subsidise and take over from the licence fee? Do the maths, as they say.

Are you currently looking at [any] potential closures of services or channels as a response to the budgetary pressure you are under?
We're always looking at it.

What are you looking at now?
I'm not going to tell you.

Let's go through a few of them.... Is Newsnight value for money?
Absolutely, the return on investment in proper current affairs is [at] the heart of the BBC.... Overall, I think the *Newsnight* journalism is value for money.

Is the World Service, which relies partly on the licence fee, going to take a bad hit?

It's a service that's growing; it's outstanding value for money... We currently spend between £250m and £300m of UK licence-fee payers' money on [World Service] language services. I think there is a question of who funds that, with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office currently putting in money. That balance is something I do think we should be looking at over time... I think there's a huge opportunity to keep growing the World Service; it's just: who funds it? [Two days after Davie spoke, the BBC announced almost 400 job losses in the World Service's foreign-language services.]

Isn't one of the problems with this industry at the moment that the old business models throw off a lot of cash but they don't grow very much?

Perfectly put... the issue for all of us is how do you manage that transition [from linear to digital] without two things happening. One is you become too small; you lack scale and focus... The other thing is how do you invest capital at such a level that you can succeed, while navigating that change and keeping hold of your current businesses – we're all in it; the BBC's no different.

What were your priorities [in covering the death of Queen Elizabeth II]?

There are broadly three things you've got to get right: the announcement... and that really is about flawless rehearsal... the second thing is what I call clutch control during an event like that and, finally, getting the ceremonials right and beautiful...

We had enormous decisions to make, do you put on *Strictly*, do you do satire?... I think the *Last Night of the Proms* was the most finely balanced [decision]... we were worried about broadcast trucks because... we had an enormous amount of ceremonials to cover, so I think that was a 50-50 call. I think we probably made the right decision [to cancel], but you could debate it either way.

Why have you made class the focus of your work on diversity?

I absolutely believe that good intent is not enough... We're full of good intent, we're full of initiatives and people wanting to make it work.

The only way I've seen it really work



The funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II

BBC

is when you change the nature of an organisation itself... I'm a big believer in targets; I don't think you should work at the BBC and earn decent money unless you're accountable....

We are one of the only organisations in the UK that has gone with a formally declared socio-economic diversity target.... In any organisation "group think" is an issue; I also think it's unfair; people should have opportunities.

We commissioned some original research in BBC current affairs on accent bias, and we found that, across the four main broadcasters – the BBC, Sky, ITV and Channel 4 – 70% of newsreaders spoke in the poshest accent [RP]... and that compares with just 10% of the population. Does that finding surprise you?

Not particularly. I'm beginning to do something about it.

Would you consider giving a big network presenting job to someone with a strong regional working-class accent?

Of course... I've pushed £700m in spending across the UK, outside the M25 – it's changing the BBC.

How has [BBC Board member and Theresa May's former communications director Sir] Robbie Gibb improved the BBC's impartiality?

He's one of a very high-quality board...

Frankly, there's a lot of nonsense talked about this... we absolutely are fighting for fair, balanced output, with due impartiality.

We should not know how [political editor of BBC News] Chris Mason or you vote – when you come to the BBC, you leave that at the door.

Now, we do take board members [from] all kinds of backgrounds, some of them have baggage. They have views... but they don't shape the output, they don't make the editorial calls. We do.

Are you concerned that so many presenters are leaving the BBC?

About 3% of our presenters [have] left voluntarily... but part of what we do at the BBC is grow talent... We'll always have a bit of renewal; we didn't look like we had a weak squad in our coverage of the Queen's [death]... There will be people moving in and out of the BBC – there always has been, it's a hyper-competitive market...

We've had a couple of [journalists] say, "I want to go and have my voice and share my views somewhere else", and [that's] no problem. ■

In Session Five, 'UK keynote: Tim Davie', the BBC Director-General was in conversation with BBC journalist Amol Rajan. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Matthew Bell.

From left: Mundi Vondi, Jatin Aythora, Vicki Dobbs Beck and Marc Cieslak (after his avatar has left)



Richard Kendal

A traveller's guide to the metaverse

Explaining the “metaverse” to an audience of largely non-techie media folk was a tough ask, but the chair of this session, BBC News technology correspondent Marc Cieslak, came up with a novel approach.

Cieslak was on stage in person and also on the large screen behind him as a 3D avatar, “a trimmer, younger looking virtual version” of the correspondent. The avatar explained that the metaverse is essentially immersive technology: “If we think of the current internet as something that we look at, the metaverse is the next version of the net that we’re inside, experiencing [it] as a 3D avatar.”

Currently, the best examples of the metaverse come from games such as *Fortnite*.

Should broadcasters and producers be making their output ever-more immersive and interactive?

The avatar continued: “The promise of the metaverse is twofold: it offers us increased immersion and engagement for audiences. Also, there are financial incentives for businesses: people will be – and already are – purchasing digital goods using real money. And there’s an enormous amount of data and insight to be gathered from users, customers or audiences.”

Back in the real world, Vicki Dobbs Beck, vice president of Lucasfilm, threw a spanner into the digital works:

“We don’t use the term metaverse a lot because it means different things to different people.” She preferred the phrase “next-generation storytelling”, which signified “connected, cross-platform” content.

“In a nutshell,” said Jatin Aythora, director of BBC Research & Development, the metaverse is a “virtual world”.

Mundi Vondi, CEO of Berlin-based Klang Games, added: “Everything we’ve seen in the metaverse has already been done in games.”

Dobbs Beck identified three themes to the metaverse: connected storytelling; immersive content, using virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) “to allow people to step inside our stories”; and community, which she predicted would become ever-more important.

“Community is going to be an absolutely essential part of the future... it

Bank models at the RTS



Richard Kendall

Queens of the Metaverse: virtual fashion meets real drag

Meta (formerly Facebook) held what it claims was the world's first metaverse drag show, *Queens of the Metaverse*, in London last month.

It featured real-life drag queens

wearing outfits enhanced by AR and VR. Three high-profile acts – Blu Hydrangea, Tia Kofi and Adam All – took to the runway to show off their metaverse-inspired outfits. These were then

enhanced and brought to digital life on screen.

One of these dresses was modelled at the RTS London Convention by a drag queen, while its designer, Nwora Emenike, spoke to Marc Cieslak.

Emenike described working on both a physical and digital dress as 'freeing'. First, he designed the dress using VR software; then he made the physical version.

'The initial challenge is the barrier to entry, which is having a VR headset, and then you need stable and strong internet – but after, there are literally no barriers,' he explained. 'I'm not the best drawer, but it's a great platform where you can have different creative ideas and create [using a digital] tool.'

'It is a new world and a boundless space – you can create anything that you want.'

Opportunities for digital fashion design are growing, said Emenike, and these are not just for the designers. Brands, he argued, could diversify: 'If you're quite a safe brand and you want to do something cool and young, a bit edgy, this is a new platform. It's a good space, too, for brands to sponsor creatives and designers.'

will be important for people to be able to experience some of these immersive story experiences together, and with people... they may have an affinity with but [whom] they don't know."

"We already build communities through our existing programming," added Aythora, pointing to shows such as the BBC's *Springwatch*. "There's definitely an opportunity for us to reach more audiences through these virtual worlds, where we are able to create communities around interest. At the moment, the physical world doesn't allow us to reach those mini-audiences globally, but the virtual world definitely opens up new opportunities."

Vondi added: "Everything we're building at Klang is about creating large communities.... One of the things we've been seeing in our research... is this crazy loneliness epidemic that we're heading into. So, if people are not able to find new friends and socialise in the real world, this might be an opportunity for people to find each other and connect."

The metaverse, said Dobbs Beck, has introduced "new storytelling canvases", adding: "You have to be willing to

experiment because it's like being at the beginning of television or film, when we're learning what is fun, compelling and has an emotional impact."

The BBC, said Aythora, has long experimented with VR and AR, but is now starting to explore how it can bring live events into virtual worlds, "where we can not only improve interaction but also give an immersive experience".

So much for the theory, but, asked Cieslak, is the metaverse "a goldmine opportunity or is this closer to a technological version of the emperor's new clothes"?

Vondi said there was already a huge trade in virtual goods and that this would grow. Virtual goods are simply non-physical objects, bought for use in, say, online gaming; a broader definition would also include digital books or music. "It's a continuous evolution – I don't think it will come as a shock to anyone.... It seeps in slowly over time; more and more of your purchases will be virtual over time," he predicted.

For the BBC, explained Aythora, the price of the AR and VR devices that enable people to enter virtual worlds is

an obstacle. He said: "We certainly believe in universality and it's important for us to be able to reach our audiences wherever they are. If these devices... become cheap and accessible, absolutely, yes.

"But at the moment, as we stand, it is not affordable for all to have those kinds of devices to experience these virtual worlds."

Asked to offer advice to broadcasters about how best to embrace the metaverse, Dobbs Beck said: "You have to have courage and be willing to take some risks and experiment to understand how it fits into your bigger portfolio and creative strategy."

Vondi added: "Really know what you are after. Be patient and expect it to take time and a lot of money to get there." ■

Session Six, 'A traveller's guide to the metaverse', featured: Jatin Aythora, director, BBC R&D; Vicki Dobbs Beck, VP of immersive content, Lucasfilm and ILMxLAB; and Mundi Vondi, CEO and co-founder, Klang Games. It was chaired by BBC News technology correspondent Marc Cieslak and produced by Nick Kwek. Report by Matthew Bell.



In the hot seat Carolyn McCall

ITV's CEO discusses advertising-supported streaming and digital-first production

Session chair Amol Rajan: I understand that ITV has a new product you are keen to talk about: what is ITVX that ITV Hub is not?

Carolyn McCall: ITV Hub was a catch-up service that was launched six or seven years ago with very basic technology. It was a very clunky user experience and it had about 9,000 hours of content. It was never really intended to be a destination....

Viewers' habits have shifted... there's no question that people are going to streaming services because there's a huge amount of content they can browse and pick from – they have choice. We had to do a big step change and launch this service sooner rather than later....

We think we will have more fresh content every week than any other provider.... We haven't tampered with our linear budgets, so we still have our

network budget, which is about £1.1bn. ITVX has a [dedicated budget of] about £160m [for] content, with another £40m going on technology and data. That £160m will go digital first... on ITVX first. It will run eventually on channels, but you won't be able to get it anywhere else and every week there'll be a fresh new drop.

How confident are you, or can you be, that ITVX will not cannibalise linear-TV viewing?

When I talk to shareholders, it's a question that comes up all the time.... We didn't take... money from the linear budgets... because they're all doing very well; every single channel is profitable.

We've got this fantastic ability to do both things. This is a free service, it's AVoD-led, which means we can monetise the advertising on ITVX. We have an ad platform that we invested

in four years ago, Videology. It now does highly personalised targeted advertising; the agencies love it and it's doing very well.

A lot of people say that some of your younger demographic have a loyalty to ITV built on the big events – *Love Island*, *Big Brother* when it comes back, football – and what you're trying to create now is sticky habitual behaviour so people binge watch other series.

The issue for Hub was... they'd come in for the whole of *Love Island*, then they'd disappear... as there was nothing else for them to watch. On ITVX, there's 15,000 hours-plus of content for free and therefore they will find loads of things [to watch].

There are four main revenue streams for ITV at the moment: linear advertising, digital advertising, digital

subscribers and your studios business. How will the balance between those four change over the next few years?

I think the subscriber business will remain at about 10% of our revenues... I think digital revenue will grow... Studios is 50% of our revenue; I'd also expect to see that grow, as Studios is a growth business – it's doing very well.

We might already be in a recession, and you are ad-funded. How badly are you going to be hit?

We're not only ad-funded... Studios does give us a bit of a cushion.... If, indeed, we are in recession, we all know the economy and advertising across the market are linked, so we will be looking at various scenarios. I'd also say that advertisers really do value TV advertising... through Covid, that really came to the fore... the rate of return on [TV] advertising is four times what it is in other media.

If your underlying figures, including revenues, were up the last year, why is your share price taking such a hit?

The share price of a lot of UK companies has taken a massive hit. It worries me; it's one of those things you can't control.... That's not to say we can't tell our story more compellingly – I think we have to.

But I do think there's this weird thing in the market, which is that even though some companies don't make a profit, they're valued at 15 times [their revenues] and companies that are making a lot of profit, such as ITV... are undervalued. I think it's because people have been forecasting the erosion of linear-TV for a very long time and that is built into the market and they just don't value it in the way they should.

What is your concern when it comes to the long-promised update to the 2003 Communications Act?

My biggest concern is that the media bill will not be given the urgency and priority it vitally needs.

Have you got a new presenter for Love Island?

Would you like the job?

I've got plenty of time on my hands; chat to Tim [Davie]. Have you got one?

Not yet.

Have you got a new presenter for Big Brother?

Not announced yet.

I'm around. Very disappointed to be overlooked in both cases.

You can't do everything.

What exactly did Holly [Willoughby] and Phil [Schofield] do wrong?

Honestly, nothing... they did have accreditation. They were sent by *This Morning* to do a piece for 20 September, which ran; they were [there] to do interviews with people inside and

A lot of people seem to think they should have queued up like members of the public... why has this become such a big story?

I don't know. I think sometimes that minority shrillness can become very, very loud and be picked up and become a story.

It's not about them. They're very popular, they mean very well, they do lots of good stuff... I'm hoping it will all



outside. They didn't displace anyone in the queue and, actually, they've been very misrepresented and that's why, unusually, we made a statement to say all of those things. It does show you how... misinformation spreads and it's really horrible for them.

But if they followed the rules, why has their reputation taken such a battering?

You tell me. Is it social media?

Something about them... really hit a nerve. Domino's Pizza tweeted: "Apologies to anyone waiting on their pizza, we've just received an order from Holly and Phil."

We talked to [Domino's]. We said to them, "What are you doing?!" We work with Domino's... and they said: "We think it's really funny, don't you?" And we said, "No!" They just thought it was funny; they didn't think of the impact they would have on how people might pick that up and start meme-ing it.

That's what happens with these things. They did not do anything wrong.

just pass. They're very professional ... and very good at what they do and *This Morning* does very well for us.

Have GB News and Talk TV affected your underlying business?

Actually, no. I think the more voices the better.

How big a problem is it for you if Netflix gets into advertising?

It is starting in November... the fact that Disney and Netflix are going to have an ad-lite tier is interesting, first, because it's about how powerful TV is – because their sell will be more like a TV-sell.

Second, they could expand the market [and] I think they could be complementary to our audience; they will extend reach on schedules.... None of that is a bad thing. ■

In Session Seven, 'UK keynote: Carolyn McCall, ITV's CEO was interviewed by BBC journalist Amol Rajan. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Tara Conlan.

Unscripted: TV's mainstay



Factual entertainment offers value for money but it is hard for new formats to break through

Richard Kendall

“Corporate subconscious bias” was tested by lawyer and presenter Rob Rinder in a session designed to challenge TV folk’s preconceptions about the world of global formats and discover what it takes to create a hit.

As Rinder put it: “There seems to be a general consensus that we should be investing in drama, that this is where the heart of commercial value is in television.

“But this panel [will] seek to demonstrate that there’s a global dominance elsewhere – and that’s in the popularity of unscripted television.”

Questions were posed to the panelists, Nataalka Znak, Clare Laycock, Gama Gbio and Kevin Lygo, while the audience voted via the RTS app.

The first question from media analyst Doug Wood was, “What is the most successful unscripted format ever made”, based on the number of

adaptations: *Got Talent*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *MasterChef* or *The X Factor*?

Wood pointed out that all four were made in the UK, “which shows the heritage of the UK unscripted format market”. Lygo was the only panellist to pick the correct answer: *Millionaire*.

The way a format is made is often what makes it sell well, explained Lygo: “If you take *The Masked Singer*... that was pitched to everyone and turned down, then came back to me. I thought, ‘Oh a singing competition with people dressed up in silly costumes is going to be sort of Christopher Biggins in Guildford panto’ – and then I was shown a clip of the Korean show and thought, ‘I get it!’.

“So, it’s the doing, not really the idea, that makes that particular show and I think that applies to lots of formats.”

According to Laycock, “To be successful, it has to work in all our key markets... something like *90 Day Fiancé* is a brilliant example of that. It’s taken

10 years of heritage and different spin-offs to get those mega-fans in.”

Gbio pointed out that most people did not set out thinking they were going to create a mega-hit format; that usually came afterwards.

Rinder noted that this is very much “a time of filling linear schedules with new versions of the old – reboots”. He asked Lygo – who was Channel 4’s director of television when the station axed *Big Brother*, the king of reality shows – why ITV had now decided to revive it.

The Lygo of today said: “We learned from *Love Island* that when these shows work, they’re incredibly important to a commercial broadcaster like ITV. *Love Island* paved the way for busting the myth recently that teenagers don’t watch television. Every night, there they are – watching a big old thing on ITV2. If Nataalka gets *Big Brother* right, it could do a similar job for us.”

Znak, who is executive producing *Big Brother*, responded: “I think it’s a hard

job to reboot such a popular show... TV has moved on since *Big Brother* was first on TV and we used to just love watching people eat their cornflakes. The trick is to keep the heart of it, but make it feel modern – it has to appeal.

“We’re having so many conversations with the hardcore fans telling us, ‘Don’t touch it, just do this, you’ve got to keep everything.’ I think the hardcore fans will watch it [but] I also need all the people who’ve never watched *Big Brother*. Those are the people we need to appeal to. It’ll be brilliant, though.”

Rinder admitted that he was a fan of *Beauty and the Geek*, which Discovery is

That’s why I almost never do a new entertainment show without a fully funded proper pilot, and sometimes more than one.” But he pointed out that new shows such as *Starstruck* and *The 1% Club* were returning.

Wood then asked which format had the most new adaptations in 2021: *Love Island*, *The Masked Singer*, *The Voice* or *I Can See Your Voice*? The answer was *The Masked Singer*, which was in 41 markets, signalling that the focus was shifting from Europe to Asia, added Wood.

Another ingredient of a successful format can be cost. Lygo said *Come Dine with Me* “is in a million countries”

biggest show of the four by volume, so more 16- to 34-year-olds would be watching it, but also noted that “*Love Island* will have the smallest proportion of viewers over 40 so, for a commercial broadcaster, there’s very little wastage for an advertiser.”

“Scripted grabs all the headlines”, said Wood, but “What proportion does unscripted account for: 50%, 70%, 80% or 90% of the total number of new TV series being launched this year in the UK?” Lygo answered – again correctly: “We can’t afford that much drama, so I go for 90%.”

Wood then asked: “Which territory



TV Globo

reviving, despite it feeling like an idea “that’s socially counterintuitive”.

Laycock emphasised how much things had changed since it was last on E4, in 2006, specifically: “... the rise of the geek; they didn’t used to be as cool as they are now. Today, they’re actually paying all our salaries.”

Rinder asked Gbio what the risks were with a reboot. She said it was tricky trying to balance “the hardcore fans” with “the new gen”, “finding that middle balance and the essence of the original format and what everyone loved about it, but also adding a layer on to make it more current”.

In response to Rinder asking if there were no new ideas, Lygo said: “We do continuously add new shows, but we’re also quite brutal. I have to admit, when they don’t work in one series, we’ll probably kill it.

“In the old days... because everything had higher ratings, you could give something time to breathe and adapt.

partly because “it is a very tasty show”, but also because it “is so unbelievably cheap” to make. “That’s the beauty of *Millionaire* – nobody usually wins the million and it’s just two people in seats. So the cost of a show would be a very mindful consideration if you’re thinking about global domination.”

Another element, said Gbio, is how much a show can “cut through” for a network.

“Some ask what’s going to make the papers and the news,” she explained, pointing out the success of dating show *FBoy Island*, which did well in the US and is now on BBC iPlayer.

Wood then asked the panellists and audience which was the highest-rated linear series for 16- to 34-year-olds last year: *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, *Line of Duty*, *The Great British Bake Off* or *Love Island*? The answer was *I’m a Celebrity*....

Lygo said he went for the jungle reality juggernaut because it was the

originated the largest volume of unscripted format movers: the UK, the Netherlands, South Korea or the US?”, to which all the panellists voted, correctly, for the UK.

Znak concluded that “the number of UK formats being sold” was still high, but things were far harder than in “the golden days, when you could get rich off formats – but it still works and people still buy interesting stuff.” ■

Session Eight, ‘Who wants to be a millionaire? Everything you always wanted to know about global formats’, featured: Gama Gbio, development producer – entertainment, Expectation; Clare Laycock, SVP, content and planning, Warner Bros Discovery UK; Kevin Lygo, MD, media and entertainment, ITV; Doug Wood, media analyst; and Natalka Znak, CEO, Remarkable TV Entertainment. It was chaired by broadcaster and barrister Rob Rinder and produced by Kat Hebden and Paul Moore. Report by Tara Conlan.

Now hear this



Renegade Pictures/RTS

Convention delegates got the chance to hear from the next generation of media consumers, media creators – and media leaders – about what the current industry leadership is getting right and wrong.

Four short films made by RTS Bursary Scholars presented sometimes uncomfortable responses to four questions: Is this an industry that makes you feel welcome? What do you watch and how do you watch it? Where do you get your news from – and do you trust it? What message do you want delegates to take away?

Florence Watson on workplace culture: “If someone is racist, homophobic, or ableist towards you, are you going to be able to say anything when our entire industry is built on contacts? It can be really hard to stick your neck out [if you are] scared of losing work or being seen as difficult.”

Jennifer Mawby on class diversity: “It’s hard, TV is quite a volatile career. The contract I’ve been put on is six months, and after that, I’ve no idea what will happen. I had to pack up and move to London. It’s really difficult if you come from a low-income background... to pay for a deposit and a month’s rent upfront.”

Ishavishali Chandrakumar (pictured) on ethnic diversity: “When I was on

The opinions of TV’s next generation should make veteran execs sit up and listen

this shoot... I didn’t realise [until everyone turned up] how undiverse the crew was. I don’t feel like it’s a racism thing. It’s simply because of who you know. I come from a working-class background; my parents have never had the opportunity to make contacts with people at the top of the chain... diversity is lacking simply because work comes from who you know.”

Ben Ledsham on watching TV: “I can’t remember when I last watched something on terrestrial TV live.”

Florence Watson on watching TV: “TikTok has replaced my YouTube addiction with an even more potent addiction.”

Isabelle Thompson on her news sources: “On Snapchat, you have Snap Maps. You can scroll through and see anyone, any story, around the world. So I click on Ukraine, and see all these live stories from people who are there, and they’re around my age. The amount of information that I get from that [is so much more than] what I am receiving on mainstream media.”

Lee Hodgetts on news sources: “I don’t tend to use social media for news – I don’t trust it as much. I stay away from Twitter. No news channel is 100% trustworthy; always take everything with a pinch of salt.”

Jennifer Mawby on her message for delegates: “You spend hours doing these applications and no one even replies. I’ve asked for feedback sometimes in interviews, and they say, ‘We’ll email you feedback’, and they never do. They don’t provide contact details for you to ask.”

Keoni D’Souza on his message for delegates: “There are efforts to make this a more inclusive and diverse industry. But I think it’s important not to get too complacent about it. Let’s not pat ourselves on the back just yet.”

Nicole Tomkins on her message for delegates: “People in the media are the most forward-thinking, creative bunch out there. And are really friendly... unless you catch them on a bad day and they’ve not had a coffee.”

Charlie McMorine on his message for delegates: “One thing that needs to change is this notion that, to work in television, you have to know someone already in television.” ■

The RTS Bursary Scholar films were produced by Zara Akester at Renegade Pictures. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.



Baz Luhrmann interviewed by Edith Bowman

Richard Kendal

Elvis: the gospel truth

Was the life of Elvis Presley the stuff of Shakespearean tragedy? Most emphatically it was, according to Baz Luhrmann, whose biopic *Elvis* this summer became the director's biggest grossing UK film. It features Austin Butler as the singer and Tom Hanks as his manipulative manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

Luhrmann, clad as if he had just walked off a Milan catwalk, brought some genuine Hollywood stardust to the RTS London Convention. Within 12 minutes of setting foot on stage he almost won a standing ovation from the RTS audience as he recounted the tragic life story of the world's first rock star, aka the King.

The director, camp, humorous and clearly enjoying being the centre of attention, told a potted version of

Director **Baz Luhrmann** explains how he set out to tell an epic story even bigger than the musical legend

Presley's rise and fall: a teenager raised as a dirt-poor white Southerner living in a black neighbourhood in Memphis, "absorbing black music, country music," then single-handedly inventing post-war teen rebellion and changing the lives of millions of people, including luminaries such as John Lennon.

"Elvis is the singing version of that. Oh my God, that becomes political, so the Colonel cuts his hair and makes him a family entertainer. Then he fights back and rebels again, goes back to Memphis. He's free, makes the best music of all time," Luhrmann continued with increasing fervour.

"Elvis is going to go round the world, it's going to be a happy ending. But he's caught in this trap – 'I can't get out because I love you too much' – in this golden cage. You're fired [he means the Colonel], he dies tragically. That is the perfect tragic American opera...

"You couldn't write that stuff. I mean, you couldn't, and I had to find a way of compressing it. I mean, whatever your version of God is, he's a great storyteller." Finally, the director, who was once an actor, drew breath as the audience applauded.

Luhrmann is also a great storyteller, feted for such movies as *Strictly Ballroom*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby*. Unlike Presley's parents, his were small-town business folk. His father owned a petrol station while his mum taught ballroom dancing and ran a dress shop.

He recalled growing up in a "tiny country town with about 11 houses" >



Warner Bros

Austin Butler as Elvis Presley

› in rural Australia. There, he was involved in running a small theatre and “did everything from ballroom dancing to commando training”.

Luhmann explained that he had only recently become aware that he was always “living with the currency of story and ideas... I was always making up stories, fantasy and all of that.

“Whether it was used to sell a perfume or to touch an audience or to convince in a nefarious way a whole nation to go marching into the nation next door, the power of story was something I was aware of at a young age.... I was quite a teller of lies.”

He added: “In a way, everything is fiction, even if you’re making documentary. If I did a documentary about Elvis and I had a billion cameras, I would still choose where to put the camera and that makes a difference. It’s someone telling [the story] and that goes for everything, including documentary. It’s someone’s point of view.”

Interviewer Edith Bowman asked how his storytelling had changed over the years, from his first feature film, *Strictly Ballroom*, to *Elvis*? “I try and avoid too much self-analysis because you can get in the way of yourself, but I will tell you that in that small country

‘THE POWER OF STORY WAS SOMETHING I WAS AWARE OF AT A YOUNG AGE... I WAS QUITE A TELLER OF LIES’

town, we had a theatre, and we were getting second-run movies.

“Yes, there were Elvis matinees. But we also had this one black-and-white television, and we had the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] and what was then considered junky, no one cares movies.... My diet was of old classic movies from that period.” *Citizen Kane* and *The Red Shoes* were namechecked.

Luhmann said the producers of what became *Strictly Ballroom* were reluctant to see him direct it. But the film succeeded after he ditched a script written by a professional writer and co-wrote the movie himself.

“Whether you like the films or not, it’s my language,” he said. “I don’t think

I could do some of the films I love... I could do it, a psychologically real film. But the way I tell movies is kind of the way I am.”

What was the catalyst for *Elvis*? “It wasn’t fandom. I was a fan, for sure, when I was a kid. When I was doing ballroom dancing, I used to say, ‘Play *Burning Love* because it’s sexy.’ He was present but I’ve always admired [him]. I’m not a Shakespearean scholar, but I’m a devoted fan of Shakespeare – the way he’d take a historical figure and explore a larger idea.”

The big idea that Luhmann wanted to explore in *Elvis* was America in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and that of “the grand salesman, where we’re moving towards this populism, where it’s all about someone putting a brand on something, at the same time as that other great American theme, the new.”

Bowman said that Luhmann always seemed to manage to give actors the opportunity to do something they hadn’t done before and also introduce audiences to extraordinary new talent.

She cited Austin Butler as a case in point, and Alton Mason, who plays Little Richard. As for Tom Hanks portraying a baddie, namely Presley’s infamous gambling-addicted manager,

the director said: “I can’t tell you how gargantuan the character of Colonel Tom Parker actually was.

“I had a privilege that no writer had. I had an office in the barn at Graceland for 18 months. All the stuff on Elvis is very well filed.... The Colonel used to tape himself a lot. I got to hear that... I thought I really need a great actor to step up to the size of his character.”

He told the RTS that hiring stars was “normally a two-month dance” and so the director had prepared himself for weeks of persuading Hanks to take the role. He recalled his first approach: “I haven’t written the script. I’m ready for round one so I can get him interested in round two – but after 15 minutes, he says, ‘If you want me, I’m your guy.’”

Luhrmann continued: “He wanted to run towards doing a role that was repugnant. He wanted to do a character that his fanbase would not like to see him do because he is America’s Dad...”

“The level of loathing of Tom Parker, the character in this movie, has something to do not only with Tom Hanks’ great representation of him. He manipulates and loves Elvis at the same time, which is why he is such a toxic character.” The director emphasised: “He really did love Elvis and he was also exploiting the hell out of him. Tom wanted to run towards that role, to do a repugnant character.”

In the case of Butler, casting him as Elvis was the opposite of typecasting. “One of the great joys of what I do, is that every actor has more strings to their bow than they’ll ever get to play in their lifetime, and that’s a great frustration for actors because once they do something really well...”

In this context he is proud of getting Australian actor Bill Hunter, who was known for playing policemen, to do comedy; he plays Australian Dancing Federation President Barry Fife in *Strictly Ballroom*.

When it comes to finding new talent, Luhrmann said it usually comes from the last place you’re looking for it – “It’s going to hit you in the back of the head” – and tends to be where investment has occurred, be it in opera or popular culture. He gave the example of the rise of South Korea as a creative powerhouse. And, he said, “In the Milan opera, they invested in training early and in the young and I mean the very young. Down the road that pays intense dividends.”

Presley’s former wife, Priscilla, wasn’t sure that “a skinny kid” such as

Butler could play the King but, when she saw a rough cut, she was totally convinced, telling Luhrmann: “Every breath, every move, if my husband was here, he’d say to Austin Butler, ‘Hot damn, you are me.’”

Luhrmann revealed that Butler had to be made a star – “or at least present in the culture” – before the film was released, which is “very hard to do”. TikTok proved pivotal in this respect, as did *GQ* magazine.

“I don’t do auditions, I do work-

no saint, but he was an extraordinary human being who was deeply, deeply spiritual. There’s a scene in the film, where, as a boy, Elvis is seen running with a group of kids to the gospel tent and the preacher grabs his hand.

“That scene was told to me verbatim by an 80-year-old African American man, Sam Bell, who passed away last year. I have it on video.... I came to understand something about Elvis that has never been identified before – that is, he was a deeply spiritual person.



Tom Hanks as Tom Parker

Warner Bros

shops, because the audition process is so demeaning,” explained Luhrmann. “Whoever walks in the room, I say to them, ‘My job is to get you the job.’ Not only that, whoever you are, I am going to work with you.... The first thing I say is, ‘How can we make this scene better?’”

“With Austin, when he walked into my house, he was already down Elvis Street a bit. I forgot to tell him he had the role for about a year [audience laughter] because I was preparing him to be flexible.... He was Elvis 24/7. Denzel Washington told me: ‘You are about to meet a young actor whose work ethic is unlike any work ethic you have ever seen.’”

“I thought he was just being nice, but I’ve never seen anyone.... He sings the whole first half of the movie as Elvis.”

The director added: “Elvis was

“Even when he could barely stand up, he would sing gospel till the sun came up. He was only at peace when he was singing gospel. That inner life of his was the bit that surprised me. That’s why I ran gospel all the way through the film.

“He never called himself the King. He said Fats Domino was the King. Having said that, he was American royalty. He was an important part of American culture in that period and he’s important now, but he was somewhat relegated to a corner and maligned for a lot of things that simply weren’t true.” ■

In Session Nine, ‘In conversation with Baz Luhrmann’, the writer and director was interviewed by broadcaster Edith Bowman. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Steve Clarke.

It's time to tone it down



In his first speech as Ofcom Chair, **Michael Grade** urges broadcast journalists to avoid being shrill and shocking

I am proud and privileged to speak to you now as the Chair of Ofcom at an important moment in its history. Ofcom is gearing up for a new challenge. Under the Government's Online Safety Bill, we will be given new powers to hold some of the world's biggest and most powerful tech companies to account.

Our research shows that people are increasingly concerned about harmful online content – for themselves, and for their children. There is an urgent need for sensible, balanced rules that protect users from serious harm.

These plans have not been without their critics, in Parliament and elsewhere. Some say Ofcom won't have an impact; that a regulator in the UK

cannot change the behaviour of global tech giants; or that the volume of online harm is just too great to tackle. Others say the Bill will have too much impact, stifling freedom of expression.

Let me respond, starting with free speech. After all, that is the heartbeat of the internet. At Ofcom, we have 20 years' experience of preserving it across broadcasting. Just look at the numbers. Last year, we assessed more than 11,000 pieces of TV and radio content. After taking account of freedom of expression, we found only 29 in breach of our rules.

What about the volume of harm? Clearly, we must be realistic. It would be impossible to attempt to assess content as we do in TV and radio. In the few minutes that I've been speaking, about 3,000 hours of video will have been uploaded to YouTube alone.

The Bill lays the burden on platforms to reduce harm. We want to shift their mindset. We need a new era of accountability, where companies have to prioritise trust and safety alongside clicks and profit. We know that many services take steps to protect their users. But these initiatives have not been sufficient to restore people's trust and confidence.

Over time, big tech firms must shift their regulatory responsibilities from the public policy departments – where they sit today – to the frontline staff responsible for designing and operating their products.

At the moment, I see the world of online regulation being accepted and well understood by those whose job it is to worry about such things – namely the policy and strategy teams.

But, like bankers who think their compliance department belongs to a galaxy far, far away, those who design and operate the tech platforms are not routinely touched by safety regulations. Under the planned laws, Ofcom will have powers to summon people with day-to-day responsibility for users' safety on the sites and apps themselves. This represents a very meaningful, overdue shift in the regulatory culture of big tech.

As the inquest into Molly Russell's tragic death reminds us, this is an urgent task. We have spent the last two years preparing. Ofcom is hiring expert minds from across the tech industry.

We've established a data innovation unit, and a tech hub in Manchester. We have published world-leading research about online harm and how it might

Richard Kendall

be addressed – from risk in algorithm design to the use of AI in content moderation. Just last week, we explored research models for assessing online harm. This autumn, we'll release studies on age protection, risks to children, hashing technology, online terrorism and hate speech. We will also publish our forensic analysis of the online response to the Buffalo shooting.

All that research is helping to form an expert evidence base. It will also help us anticipate change and respond to a fast-moving market.

Just think.... A couple of Christmases ago, as the Government was confirming the online safety plans to Parliament, two French entrepreneurs were launching BeReal. As you'll know, this platform lacks the conflict and curation of some other social media. Now it has topped Apple's app chart, as part of a cultural shift in how younger people want to use social media.

There are signs that users are tired of the endless pressures of self-presentation. Or maybe, like me, they're concerned by the tone of interaction and debate on social media.

I believe the tone of social discourse online reflects the polarisation of wider society. What were once civilised, legitimate debates about politics, society and culture are now escalated and characterised as culture wars. Traditionalist and progressive groups are locked in a seemingly endless struggle to impose their beliefs, their values, their vocabulary. Important but divisive issues – from Brexit to Covid restrictions or personal rights – have become angry battlefields of bitter division.

Now, I have had arguments all my life with politicians. I might confess to some of them even being heated. But when these important debates cross the line, when they are conducted with aggression, prejudice or a tone that borders on the hateful, we all stand to lose.

When they are debated instead with passion, but also with respect and an open mind, we can bring people together and find answers that help us move forward. I have learned, in debates in the House of Lords, that tone is everything. Politeness gets you a hearing; angry, intolerant argument gets you nowhere.

I care on a personal level about the need for tolerant debate. That matters to me not just as a citizen and parliamentarian, but also as someone who has sought to champion our world-class broadcasting sector. Because

'I CARE ON A PERSONAL LEVEL ABOUT THE NEED FOR TOLERANT DEBATE'

broadcasting has a unique ability to provide a fair, accurate and trustworthy platform for calm, considered voices, those views are more necessary than ever for a stable society and a strong democracy.

We need "due impartiality"; but we also need trust. In other words, perceptions of impartiality matter, too. And our latest research shows they could be stronger. Around six in 10 trust TV news



Chris Curtis

Richard Kendall

– a little higher for Sky News, at seven in 10. Why aren't all our broadcasters doing even better on this measure?

Impartiality is a hugely complex area. Ofcom's research shows that many factors influence people's perceptions here, including how strongly they feel about a given issue. We published some interesting research on impartiality this summer. It was based on BBC content, but the findings are relevant to all. When participants looked at a news report, their impressions of due impartiality were often based on signals around how it was presented, such as the presenter's tone.

Just as on social media, tone matters. We all want television – and, indeed, radio – journalists to do what they

do best: hold people to account, cross-examine their motives and test their views. I believe they can do all of this in a measured manner.

Of course, broadcasters need to find an audience for their content on social media. In trying to reach younger people, who watch seven times less linear-TV than over-65s, clicks might matter more than viewership.

But in the fight for attention, traditional broadcasters will never match social media's capacity for the shrill and the shocking. Nor should they try. Instead, we look to them for calm, forensic analysis and interrogation.

I hope this will be taken in the right way: as an observation from someone who cares deeply about our broadcasting industry, and who spent many decades in our public service broadcasting sector. I appreciate its values and its value.

How should we, as a nation, best arrange the PSB system to sustain its future over the next decade? Some aspects of PSB are currently up for debate. There are long-term questions to answer: BBC funding, Channel 4 ownership, and how legislation might level the playing field where PSBs compete with US streamers. These are matters for government and Parliament, not Ofcom.

But on one thing we can all agree: the creative industries sector is one of the great British success stories of the past 50 years. Our industry talent – from chippies to grips, screenwriters, designers, make-up, special effects, directors and actors – are in demand all over the world.

British viewers and listeners enjoy a rich and varied diet of British-made programmes. As Ofcom found last year in our review, *Small Screen: Big Debate*, the strength of our traditional broadcasters lies in their ability to do something US platforms often cannot: to appeal to people from all backgrounds, to reach and serve all parts of the UK. PSB is the place where culture meets commerce. We must never forget the cultural importance of its heritage.

And while the industry has more to do on diversity – most particularly behind the camera – on screen, we have made wonderful progress since I started in broadcasting.

For all these reasons, any proposed changes to our PSB arrangements must be tested against their potential impact on investment in our creative industries. Quite simply, these >



The 2022 Conservative leadership contest: Grade worried that the tone of interviews was sometimes too confrontational

Sky

QUESTION & ANSWER

Session chair Chris Curtis: You've talked a lot about the importance of tone and, in some cases, you think the tone of PSBs is letting them down. Are you thinking about particular topics or interviewing style?

Michael Grade: Mainly interviewing style. I heard one interview during the Conservative leadership campaign where somebody asked Rishi Sunak if he was slick and rich. I'm not quite sure that's appropriate...

It's not about bias, it's about tone and language. Some of the great interviewers don't have to be aggressive or overstate and use emotive language like 'liar' and so on in an interview. We need to understand and test, but we need to get the tone right.... It's not about impartiality. We live in a very confrontational society.

Our legal system is confrontational and so is our legal system. But there are rules and boundaries. I'd like to see us move much more towards civilised debate, which is not to say you shouldn't ask the most difficult questions. Absolutely. It's the tone in which you do it. I think tone is important.

You said in your speech: 'The achievements of the PSB ecosystem are a triumph and that any proposed changes must do nothing to put those achievements at risk and must be tested against their potential impact.' Does privatising Channel 4 fall under that description?

People know my personal views pre-Ofcom. This is now entirely a matter for the Government and Parliament. It's not a matter for Ofcom whatsoever. You can argue the Channel 4 case every which way. In the end it will be for Parliament to decide.

› achievements have been a triumph of public policy. We must do nothing to put them at risk. I am certain Parliament will have that in mind as it reviews the current arrangements.

US streamers have transformed and captured the UK market. Online platforms are reshaping the way we discover and consume content, providing unprecedented choice, but also making it harder for home content providers to compete.

We have been working with the Competition and Markets Authority on a new code of practice, including some basic rules on the relationship with publishers. The aim is to help ensure the trading relationship between big online platforms and publishers is fair and reasonable. This will complement our work on media plurality, where we consider the breadth of UK news providers.

In short, there is work to do – but I am optimistic for the future. The Government has heard our recommendations, and the Media Bill provides the opportunity to define a new future for public service broadcasting.

On my watch, Ofcom will strive to

maintain its reputation, above all, for political independence and for decisions and judgements based on evidence and research. And we will continue our work to promote growth, competition and investment, while ensuring that audiences are rewarded, and – especially during current times – that services remain affordable.

'PSB IS THE PLACE WHERE CULTURE MEETS COMMERCE'

No other country can match the talent, creativity and heritage of our broadcasting sector. To all of you who work in it, my message is that you can thrive by focusing on your strengths: making outstanding programmes for UK audiences and bringing calm impartiality to the national debate. In those respects, we have never needed you more.

Thank you for listening. I just hope I got the tone right. ■

This is an edited version of the speech given by Ofcom Chair Michael Grade in Session Ten, 'UK keynote: Michael Grade', which was followed by an interview with Broadcast editor Chris Curtis. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Steve Clarke.



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RTS
London

Ahead of the release of All 4's latest Walter Presents series, *Red Light*, RTS London

brought together the creators and leads, Carice van Houten and Halina Reijn, along with director Wouter Bouvijn to discuss the award-winning Dutch/Belgian drama.

Following the lives of three women and their relationships with Antwerp's red-light district, *Red Light* is the second outing of Van Houten and Reijn's production company, Man Up, the aim of which is to explore dark, often neglected, stories from a female perspective.

Key to the project was the portrayal of complex, realistic female characters. As *Game of Thrones* star Van Houten explained: "I wanted to portray that world in an [honourable] way... you can easily slip into some cliché of what we think a sex worker is [but] it is way more complex.... We encountered these kinds of women, too, when we researched it, who said to us: 'Don't portray us as weak, because we are not'"



Channel 4

Antwerp drama avoids clichés

This is reflected in Van Houten's character, the multi-faceted Sylvia, a prostitute and human trafficker, whom she describes as "a victim and perpetrator, a survivor... a broken, damaged woman, who's trapped in this very toxic cycle".

Reijn, who recently made

her English-language debut as director of comedy horror *Bodies Bodies Bodies*, explained: "It is about three women who are, in their own way, struggling with motherhood and the struggle to be free... they have to free themselves not just from their pimp, from their lives, but also from their

own thoughts and their expectations of what they should be as a woman."

Describing her character, Esther, an opera singer unaware of her husband's dalliance with Antwerp's red-light district, Reijn explained: "She needs to liberate herself from this idea that she has to become a mother and she has to be a star ... she meets a whole new world, and it liberates her." There was a "*Thelma & Louise* aspect" to it, she said.

The third woman, played by Maaïke Neuville, is Evi, a police officer who regrets having children, a topic that Van Houten described as "the biggest taboo ever".

Bouvijn, who recently directed Flemish-language crime series *The Twelve*, said the story dispels the glamorisation of the red-light district and exposes its darker side. To represent this visually, Bouvijn said: "We try to start with a kind of Disneyland world... but, as the series evolves, it gets darker and with less and less colour."

Francesca Bell

An Cailín Ciúin
(The Quiet Girl)



Break Out Pictures

Republic of Ireland *An Cailín Ciúin* (*The Quiet Girl*), the moving story of a girl from a poor family in rural Ireland during the 1980s, who is farmed out to relatives, swept the board at the Irish Film and TV awards in March and went on to win prizes at festivals around the world.

At an RTS Republic of Ireland event, director Colm Bairéad said he had fallen in love with Claire Keegan's novella *Foster*, on which it is based: "It had this profound emotional effect on me, [and I could see that] I could adapt this as an Irish-language film and do so with integrity."

Producer Cleona Ní Chruaíaoí said it took seven

months to cast the girl. "We auditioned hundreds, from Waterford to Kerry," she recalled, before extending the search. Auditions were cancelled due to the pandemic, but the production received an "unbelievable" tape from 11-year-old Dublin actor Catherine Clinch. "She was so composed in her performance. She had this ability not to over-emote or do the stage [school] acting that we'd seen a lot in auditions.... She looked the part as well."

An Cailín Ciúin was part-funded by Irish-language broadcaster TG4 and has shattered box-office records for an Irish-language film.

Matthew Bell

When Bob Warman and Nick Owen met at boarding school, little did they realise they would go on to have strikingly similar careers – and would both become legends of regional television.

The pair entertained an RTS Midlands audience in Birmingham by talking about their 67-year friendship. Owen described Warman, who retired from *Central News* in July, aged 75, as “the ultimate broadcaster”. He was one of ITV’s longest-serving news anchors, joining ATV in 1973.

They had both worked for the *Birmingham Post and Mail* and on the new Radio Birmingham. Warman presented Britain’s first breakfast television show, *Good Morning Calendar*, in 1977, while Owen fronted *Good Morning Britain* in the 1980s. Warman hosted Sky’s *The Price is Right* (and *ITV Telethons*) and Owen presented *Sporting Triangles*. Warman even appeared in *Crossroads*, and Owen played himself in *Doctors*.

It is as the anchors of the BBC and ITV’s regional news programmes in the West Midlands that the pair are best known. Owen still hosts *Midlands Today* on BBC One, but Warman told the RTS audience they were not competitive. He said: “We’ve never felt rivals, not at all.



Bob Warman



Bob Warman and Nick Owen

Roz Laws

The voice of ITV Birmingham

RTS Midlands Roz Laws hears local legends look back over 50 years in regional news

The programmes complement each other by being on at different times.”

Owen added: “Most nights, the biggest figures on BBC One are in that 6:30pm to 7:00pm slot. If you add up all the regions, it’s bigger than *EastEnders*. Regional news is still a real staple and I hope it will be for a long time.”

Walsall-born Warman first met Owen when they were aged eight, and unhappy boarders at Kingsland Grange school in Shrewsbury. “It was grim,” said Warman. “The food was disgusting, so much beetroot! Lots of kids were crying into their pillows.”

They lost touch after school, but met again as print journalists. Warman joined the *Walsall Observer*, much against the wishes of his schoolteacher father, after trying civil engineering for two years.

Of his early days on TV, Warman recalled: “It was so much fun at ATV. There were three bars and a social club – it swam with booze. It was such a buzzing and creative place, with great characters like [reporters] Chris Tarrant

and John Swallow. You were left to do your own thing and the best ideas came out of the bar, like *Tiswas*. Everything is done by committee these days and I’m not a huge fan of that.”

Memorable moments ranged from getting his dog on TV as Oscar the News-hound, to being one of the first on the scene of “utter chaos” at the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings.

He said: “The style of presenting has changed a lot. Now there’s double-headed presentation but, as a viewer, I want one person to tell me the story. And what do you do when the other person is talking? Where do you look? It’s uncomfortable and you look like you’ve had an aneurysm!”

“It’s difficult to come to terms with some of the changes. Now you are surrounded by people saying, ‘You can’t say that’. I once said, ‘knickerbocker glory’ and this young person said, ‘You shouldn’t have mentioned knickers’. It’s an ice-cream!”

“I don’t like Zoom interviews, the framing is all wrong and the sound is awful. But the genie is out of the bottle and once they discover a cheap way of doing something, it stays.

“I was shocked to hear the BBC continuity announcer saying the *Antiques Roadshow* was coming from Nottin’ham. Unbelievable! And young people drop their Ts.”

Owen replied, “I’m afraid we’re old farts”, to which Warman rejoined, “No, we’re old fars!”. ■

‘Bob and Nick: From school to screen’ was an RTS Midlands event held at the IET Austin Court in Birmingham on 7 September. It was produced by Sonia Matharu.

RTS
Yorkshire

Three hundred people filled the Queens Hotel in Leeds to see the late Kay Mellor's BBC One drama *The Syndicate* win the Drama prize at the RTS Yorkshire Television Awards in early October.

Her daughters, Yvonne Francas and Gaynor Faye, collected the award and assured the audience that they would be continuing their mother's work at Rollem Productions, which produced *The Syndicate*.

The Writer award was dedicated to Mellor and was won by Susan Everett for an episode of long-running BBC One drama *Silent Witness*. Early in her career, Everett had worked with Mellor, who died in May.

Sunetra Sarker took home the Actor prize for playing force-of-nature mother Kaneez Paracha in Channel 4's school drama *Ackley Bridge*, which is made by The Forge Entertainment. Tim Phillips won the Use of Music and Sound prize for his work on the series.

The Outstanding Contribution Award went to the founders of True North, Andrew Sheldon and Jess Fowle, who are stepping down after two decades at the helm of the Leeds indie. Their contribution to the Yorkshire independent sector was warmly recognised



The Syndicate

BBC

Kay Mellor remembered

by their peers in the audience.

Three True North programmes were honoured at the awards: Discovery show *Say Yes to the Dress Lancashire* won the Factual Entertainment category; Sky Crime's *Forensics: Catching the Killer* took the Low-cost Factual prize; and the Professional Excellence: Factual Post-production award went to a True North post team for BBC

Two's *Yorkshire Firefighters*.

The awards were hosted by Lisa Riley who plays Mandy Dingle in *Emmerdale*, in celebration of its 50th birthday. Later, the audience sang *Happy Birthday* to ITV's Yorkshire soap, led by Karen Blick (who plays Lydia Dingle).

Two of the three news awards went to *BBC Look North*: the News or Current Affairs Story category was won by

Politics North: The Post Office Scandal, and the News or Current Affairs Reporter prize by Anne-Marie Tasker. *ITV Calendar* secured the News Programme award.

The Presenter award was dedicated to the late broadcaster Harry Gration and was won by his *BBC Look North* colleague Amy Garcia, who paid him a warm tribute. *Look North* journalist Monika Plaha was named One to Watch.

Channel 5 documentary *The Yorkshire Ripper's New Victims*, which was made by ClockWork Films and Daisybeck Studios, took home two awards on the night: the Single Documentary and the Factual Production Professional Excellence awards.

There was a standing ovation for Julie Heselgrave when she collected the Hidden Hero award. The experienced production accountant has worked with many independent companies in the region. **Matthew Bell**

RTS Yorkshire Television Awards winners

Outstanding Contribution- Jess Fowle and Andrew Sheldon, *True North*

Drama- *The Syndicate*- Rollem Productions for BBC One

Actor- Sunetra Sarker, *Ackley Bridge*- The Forge Entertainment for Channel 4

Writer- Susan Everett, *Silent Witness*- BBC Studios for BBC One

Single Documentary- *The Yorkshire Ripper's New Victims*- ClockWork Films/ Daisybeck Studios for Channel 5

Factual Entertainment- *Say Yes to the Dress Lancashire*- True North for Discovery

Features- *Homemade: Leeds*, Josh Warrington- DAZN for DAZN

News Programme- *ITV Calendar*, *Climate Change Special*- ITV Yorkshire for ITV

News or Current Affairs Story- *Politics North: The Post Office Scandal*, *BBC Look North*- BBC Yorkshire and Lincolnshire for BBC One

News or Current Affairs Reporter- Anne-Marie Tasker, *BBC Look North*- BBC Yorkshire and Lincolnshire for BBC One

Presenter- Amy Garcia, *BBC Look North*- BBC Yorkshire for BBC One

One to Watch- Monika Plaha, *BBC Look North*- BBC Yorkshire and Lincolnshire for BBC One

Hidden Hero- Julie Heselgrave- Candour Productions

Animation- *Modern Slavery Awareness*- Fettle Animation for YouTube

Independent Spirit- *Air TV*

Low-cost Factual- *Forensics: Catching the Killer*- True North for Sky Crime

Use of Music and Sound- Tim Phillips, *Ackley Bridge*- The Forge Entertainment for Channel 4

Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Production- Duncan Foster, *Director, Emmerdale*- ITV Studios for ITV

Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Post-production- *Worzel Gummidge*- ITV Content Services for BFI

Professional Excellence: Factual Production- *The Yorkshire Ripper's New Victims*- ClockWork Films/ Daisybeck Studios for Channel 5

Professional Excellence: Factual Post-production- Olivia Kirk, Nick Thorp, James Routh and Jacky Burke, *True North Post*, *Yorkshire Firefighters*- Wise Owl Films for BBC Two

RTS West of England Television Awards winners

Sir Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award - David Olusoga

Scripted - *The Outlaws* - Big Talk Productions/Four Eyes Entertainment for BBC One

On-screen Talent, Performance - Gamba Cole, *The Outlaws* - Big Talk Productions/Four Eyes Entertainment for BBC One

On-screen Talent, Presenter - Jonnie Peacock, *Jonnie's Blade Camp* - One Tribe TV for Channel 4

Natural History - *The Year Earth Changed* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit for Apple TV+

Documentary - *9/11: Inside the President's War Room* - Wish/Art Films for BBC One and Apple TV+

Factual - *Unknown Amazon with Pedro Andrade* - Icon Films for Vice TV

Factual Entertainment and Features - *The Dog House* - Five Mile Films for Channel 4

News or Current Affairs Story - *Covid Testing* - BBC Points West

News or Current Affairs Journalist - Andrew Plant - BBC Points West

Flying Futures - Mel Parker - BBC Studios Natural History Unit

Animation - Robin Robin - Aardman for Netflix

Children's - Jojo & Gran Gran - BBC Children's/A Productions for CBeebies

Short Film - *Women Lifers: Pennsylvania's Women Serving Life Without Parole* - Tusko Films

Director - Alex Parkinson, *Lucy the Human Chimp* - Keo Films

Cinematography - Camera Team, *Antarctica* - BBC Earth

Sound - Joe Siddons, James Spooner and Paul Ackerman, *Moominvalley* - Picture Shop for Sky

VFX & Digital Creativity - Fred Tay, *Andy's Aquatic Adventures* - Doghouse for CBeebies

Editing - David Warner, *Eden: Untamed Planet* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit for BBC America

Grading - Adam Inglis and Tom Payne, *Nulight Studios, Earth at Night in Colour* - Offspring Films for Apple TV+



From left: Award winner David Olusoga with Lynn Barlow and Marvin Rees

Jon Craig

TV historian honoured

RTS West of England Historian and broadcaster David Olusoga received the Sir Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award for outstanding achievement in television at the RTS West of England Awards in early October.

Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees presented the silver cup to Olusoga, who presents the BBC Two documentary series *A House Through Time*. He was described as a “figurehead in the industry who has shone a light on the long-standing issues of poor representation within the

screen industries and who understands the power of film and TV to convey the most important stories of our times”.

Fresh from dancing a phenomenal tango on *Strictly Come Dancing*, actor and stand-up comedian Jayde Adams hosted the awards at the Bristol Old Vic in front of an audience that included actors Gamba Cole and Darren Boyd from Stephen Merchant’s BBC One comedy drama *The Outlaws*, and Tracy Ifeachor and Céline Buckens, who starred in another recent BBC drama, *Showtrial*.

The Outlaws won two prizes, the Scripted award and On-screen Talent, Performance for Cole for his portrayal of club doorman Christian. The judges described Bristol-born Cole’s performance as “undoubtedly a breakout role, effortless and authentic with real depth of character”.

Paralympic sprinter Jonnie Peacock triumphed in the On-screen Talent, Presenter category for his work on the One Tribe TV show for Channel 4, *Jonnie’s Blade*

Camp, in which he mentored five young amputees.

The Factual award went to *Unknown Amazon with Pedro Andrade* for Vice TV, which was made by Icon Films. Channel 4’s *The Dog House* (Five Mile Films) won in the Factual Entertainment and Features category, while Adam Wishart’s powerful documentary for BBC One and Apple TV+, *9/11: Inside the President’s War Room*, took home the Documentary prize.

BBC Points West notched up two wins in the news categories: News Story for its report on flawed Covid testing in the region and News Journalist for Andrew Plant.

RTS West of England Chair Lynn Barlow said: “The awards are a great reflection of how impressive our production companies and how amazing our production teams are. With bold ideas and some of the best talent in the UK, they continue to make programmes loved by audiences around the world.”

The RTS West of England Awards were held in association with Evolutions Bristol.

Matthew Bell



Jayde Adams hosted the awards

Jon Craig

RTS HQ event

At the end of the hugely successful first series of Northern Ireland-set thriller *Bloodlands*, James Nesbitt's character, DCI Tom Brannick, was revealed to be a murderer who will stop at nothing to hide his crimes.

Ahead of the new series on BBC One, Nesbitt explained at an RTS online event that his unmasking came as something of a relief: "It was quite freeing in a way, to tell you the truth, because the responsibility of holding the secret... in the first series was quite difficult... the tightrope I walked as Tom got very narrow at times."

Brannick killed first during the Troubles and is still covering his tracks almost 25 years later. Nesbitt recalled working with writer/director Paul Greengrass on the multi-award-winning *Bloody Sunday* two decades ago: "[He] used to say that, for a Northern Irish actor, tackling the Troubles is kind of their *King Lear*."

Nesbitt was drawn to what he described as a "cat and mouse, unusual thriller. It had the complexity of [Brannick's] character; someone... who, at his core, was the very good side of Northern Ireland... but who had to do some terrible things for what he thought was in the cause



Bloodlands (from left): Charlene McKenna, James Nesbitt and Victoria Smurfit

BBC

Nesbitt revels in bad boy role

of right and moving on."

For series 2, Victoria Smurfit has joined the cast – which also includes Charlene McKenna, Lorcan Cranitch, Lola Petticrew and Chris Walley – as Olivia Foyle, a widow who proves as duplicitous as Brannick.

Smurfit described her character as "Machiavellian",

adding: "At all times, whoever she's in a room with, she's lying to at least all of them.

"There's [been] real pieces of work in my life and I kind of collated all the gold diggers that I've met over the course of my few years on this planet and stole some of their little moves..."

"She knows how to mimic

what is expected of her as a delicate little grieving widow, but does she feel it? No!"

Series creator and writer Chris Brandon added: "[Brannick's] found somebody who loves the game as much as he does... There's this great duel, these two people antagonising each other, trying to charm each other, but also trying to rip each other off."

Bloodlands, which is produced by Jed Mercurio's HTM Television, averaged 8.2 million viewers across its first series. Mercurio, creator of *Line of Duty*, explained: "[We] support each writer's vision... [those] who have a voice and something to say. Chris is absolutely one of those writers who is very adept at writing thrillers but also at digging into the emotional and psychological layers of the characters he creates."

He added: "The two things you need to achieve with returning dramas are: hold on to your loyal audience and reward their loyalty; but also present something that is attractive and accessible to a new audience so you're able to grow a show."

The RTS event was chaired by Boyd Hilton from *Heat* magazine. *Bloodlands* is airing on BBC One.

Matthew Bell

Ex-BBC producer steps up in East

RTS East

Former BBC TV news producer Rachel Watson is the new Chair of RTS East, taking over from Tony Campbell.

"I met an RTS East Committee member at a networking event in Cambridge, who spoke passionately about the work they were doing in the region," recalled Watson.

"I knew the RTS through its annual awards, but I was less

aware of its work to support students and emerging talent – that's what persuaded me to join the committee."

Campbell, a former colleague at *BBC Look East*, "was instrumental in convincing me to become Chair. He told me I'd be well served by my organisational and deadline-busting skills honed through outputting a live news show!"

Looking forward to taking

up the reins, Watson said: "I want to continue the fantastic work done by Tony and the committee in putting on stellar events highlighting the vast range of TV output originating in our region."

She added: "I'm also keen to develop closer connections with our universities and colleges, and to increase our support for under-represented young people who are

looking to enter the industry or who are early in their careers. We have many training providers here in the East and we're so close to London; I'd like to showcase this region as a great place to find talent."

At *BBC Look East*, Watson won a BBC Ruby Award for her outside broadcast programming in the region and was a national champion for the BBC's 50:50 The Equality Project. She is now an associate lecturer in television production at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge.

Matthew Bell

The BBC's role as a democratising force was highlighted by its head of history, Robert Seatter, in the course of a fascinating whistle-stop tour of its first 100 years.

"Music is the perfect metaphor for what the BBC does," argued Seatter, pointing to the corporation's coverage of the Proms. "Through the power of radio [the BBC in 1927] makes it completely accessible... never before has such an elitist form been made available."

New entertainment, sport and current affairs programming in the 1940s and 1950s – and particularly the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, which saw cameras inside Westminster Abbey for the first time – continued the democratising process.

Turning to children's TV, he talked about *Blue Peter*, the world's longest-running TV show, which first aired in 1958. "It's democratising; if you don't have a garden, you have a garden on *Blue Peter*; if you don't have a pet, you have a pet on *Blue Peter*; if you can't travel the world, you can travel the world with *Blue Peter*." He showed, to the delight of the audience, the famous clip of a young elephant, Lulu, doing a poo on the studio floor.

The Open University,



BBC

The BBC: 100 not out

RTS London As the corporation prepares to celebrate its centenary this month, **Matthew Bell** learns more about its history

which came to BBC Two in 1971, *Play for Today*, *That's Life* and *EastEnders* were firmly rooted in the public service tradition, he argued. *EastEnders*, which made its debut in 1985, looked at "real social issues – domestic violence, HIV/Aids, race".

Now, he added, *Strictly Come Dancing* "does more

probably for diversity and inclusion than any factual programming".

Seatter, delivering his talk under a picture of Lord Reith, the BBC's first Director-General, was speaking ahead of the centenary on 18 October.

The exploration of the corporation's history and its archive (see below) are only

part of the BBC 100 project. "All the big brands will take on a centenary theme," said Seatter. "*Strictly* will dance its way through 100 years, *Doctor Who* will travel across 100 years and *Top Gear* will drive through 100 years... touching different audiences." New documentaries will cover areas such as politics, children's TV and comedy.

Reflecting the wishes of Director-General Tim Davie, "learning will be at the heart of the centenary", said Seatter. As well as opening up its archive for educational use, the BBC is running "Share your story", which sees BBC stars and staff visit students in schools across the UK during the year to inspire a new generation of storytellers. ■

The RTS London event 'BBC 100: History, celebration, inspiration' was held at Old Broadcasting House on 22 September. It was hosted by Lettija Lee and produced by Carol Owens.

Opening up the BBC's archive

Peter Rippon, executive editor of the BBC Archive, explained that there has been "a quiet revolution going on in the archive. Technology is completely changing... the speed and scale with which we can exploit it."

About 80% of the TV and radio archive is now digitised and it can be quickly trawled using machine-learning techniques that search for speech

or recognise an image. "We're finding stuff we didn't even know we had, and it's opening up whole new ways of telling stories," said Rippon.

As an illustration of its potential, he pointed to the promo for BBC 100, which includes hundreds of clips: "Previously, it would have taken months of painstaking research to find the content... now, because we can

search the archive for specific phrases, by specific people in specific genres, you can ascertain the time it takes."

As part of BBC 100, all the digitised broadcast archive has been made available free to schools and universities, while the new *Rewind* portal provides public access to more than 30,000 audio-visual recordings dating back to the late 1940s.

Trailblazing, game-changing television in the shape of new BBC One prime-time drama *Ralph & Katie* was showcased in October by RTS North West. The uplifting story of the trials and tribulations of a couple of newly-weds, who just happen to have Down's syndrome, is a spin-off from the BBC's successful drama *The A Word*.

"I pitched it as six 15-minute duologues for iPlayer," creator and show-runner Peter Bowker told a packed audience.

But "it was Piers [Wenger, BBC director of drama] who said, 'No. We want this to be an unapologetic, mainstream BBC One drama'... And [BBC executive producer] Lucy Richer... told us, 'It's the kind of breakthrough production that's necessary for the whole industry.'"

So, wanting people with disabilities behind the scenes as well as on screen, Bowker staffed a virtual writers' room with writers who were "already bubbling under, supremely talented.... I was the only non-disabled person in there, so we had an open dialogue about the writers' lived experience... which contributed to the show."

Director Jordan Hogg, who is himself disabled, said: "Nothing like this has ever been attempted before on this scale. TV is very set in its ways... but literally everything we had to do, we had to engineer differently."

Cherylee Houston of Triple C and DANC, described by the event host, BBC journalist Naga Munchetty, as a "trail-blazer when it comes to advising on best practice", consulted on how to create an accessible workplace.

"It's about taking away that fear... of working with us," said Houston. With "more than 1,440 deaf, disabled and neurodivergent creatives" registered with the Disabled



BBC

Trailblazing television

RTS North West Carole Solazzo hears how Peter Bowker's prime-time BBC drama, *Ralph & Katie*, was brought to the screen

Artists Networking Community, Houston was instrumental in "signposting crew" for the show.

Producer Jules Hussey said the production wasn't about "diversity, but inclusivity", and had insisted from the start that "everyone's opinion was valued.... Jordan and I engaged people who were really open to working in a thoroughly accessible fashion."

Yet the changes made were not enormous and benefited everyone. Hussey gave as an example the name tags that everyone wore, and easy-read paperwork, such as call sheets, where she and Hogg were given guidance by learning disability theatre group and consultants Access All Areas.

Hogg suggested that ordinary call sheets are "like looking at the Matrix", and Hussey reduced the content to "basically the only information anyone ever looks at: when's breakfast?; what are

we shooting?; when's lunch?; what time do we finish?"

"The writers and execs were incredibly flexible with our lead actors [Leon Harrop and Sarah Gordy, both of whom have Down's syndrome]," said Hussey. They worked with her and Hogg "to make scripts better... for us to get the best out of the story, and from Leon and Sarah".

When Munchetty opened up the discussion to questions from the floor, scriptwriter Genevieve Barr had advice for aspiring writers with disabilities in the audience. "Don't allow yourself to be defined by what you have or don't have," she said. "Define yourself by your discipline and your determination."

Another scriptwriter, Lizzie Watson, added: "Don't write what you think other people or channels want... Be true to your own story."

In response to another question, Bowker agreed that there's "more tolerance and

open-mindedness" from the viewing public towards shows featuring disabled people, but he said that TV should always be "ahead of that curve, not behind it".

"Television is hungry for new stories and new perspectives, but it doesn't know it... It's about activism... it's about people saying, 'I'm not going to wait to be asked. Here's my story – put it on telly.'"

Hogg concluded: "We've opened the door and been the pioneers. What we want now is more people to follow us."

"It's not difficult. The talent is there," Hussey added. "It's not about opening pockets, just opening minds."

They both agreed: "It starts with the commissioners." ■

'Ralph & Katie' was organised by Lynsey Hulme of Beautiful Productions, and held at Manchester's Science and Industry Museum, which is housing an exhibition on the North West's place in the 100-year-old BBC.

Factual producers in the West of England gathered at Bristol's Watershed in September to hear from Channel 5 commissioners Denise Seneviratne and Adrian Padmore.

Talking to RTS West of England Chair Lynn Barlow, the duo stressed the importance of knowing the Channel 5 audience and cited top factual shows such as *Dogs Behaving (Very) Badly*, which regularly reaches 1.8 million viewers, *The Yorkshire Vet* and *Our Yorkshire Farm*.

Barlow asked if the recent launch of streaming platform Paramount+ meant that Channel 5 was now "awash with money", to which Padmore replied: "We are more strategic about it – what's the show and is it worth it?"

It's well known that Channel 5 has a lean commissioning team and Seneviratne said: "We can commission and move on content quickly."



Denise Seneviratne and Adrian Padmore

Justin Yockney

Factual on 5 – what it wants

Padmore added that his quickest commission was the documentary *Who Killed Billie-Jo?*, as he liked the idea, which came with amazing access.

Currently, the team are looking for content for the

9:00pm prime-time slot, with a focus on formats. Seneviratne advised: "This could be a glimpse of a world you haven't seen." Padmore added: "Don't think too far away from your everyday life."

Seneviratne showed clips of a three-parter from October Films, *Ice Age: A Frozen World*, presented by Steve Backshall and Michaela Strachan. She said: "This is a first for us, so we'll see how it lands – it's how to make science palatable to a Channel 5 audience."

Discussing on-screen talent, Padmore showed a clip of Nick Knowles' *Big Railway Adventures*, which will air next year. "Nick has got an audience and feels right for the channel – we're giving him a global adventure," he said.

The audience saw a preview of *The Crash Detectives* from Mentorn, which makes *Traffic Cops*. This was a conversation that developed from *Traffic Cops* footage.

Padmore said: "As a viewer, you're right in there, seeing the moment of high adrenaline... starting to unpick what happened with the investigators."

Suzy Lambert

River City celebrates two decades on TV

RTS Scotland held a celebratory event, "*River City: Behind the Shieldinch scenes*", at BBC Scotland last month, to mark the 20th anniversary of the TV soap.

"Family, friendship, care, humour, Lenny Murdoch, Bob, Angus and opportunity" were just some of the words used by series producer Martin McCardie to describe what the show meant to Scotland.

BBC Drama commissioning executive Gaynor Holmes recalled its creation: "We decided to do an in-house show – we'd never done anything like it before. I think it was a combination of enthusiasm and wanting to

do something for us in Scotland. There [were] things that we just didn't know. Nobody told us not to build the set full-sized – those tenements are the size of real tenements and the size of your streets."

Remarking on how close the team are, McCardie said: "It's a very unusual situation to be in, to know the crew very well, to know editorial people very well, to know everybody in the building. I know their stories. Everyone who works on *River City* talks about the team of people, the crew, the actors – and you keep getting drawn back."

Series writer Jillian Mannion spoke about her Bafta-nominated storyline



Shieldinch: the set of the Scottish soap

BBC

involving dementia: "We had a character in the show, Isabel, who had dementia, and dementia obviously featured in lots of different soaps at the time, [so] we thought [about] what had not yet been explored.

"One thing that had [made] newspaper headlines was sexual consent with dementia. It was a great challenge and such a grey area as well because people with dementia

obviously still have wants and needs."

The soap has acted as a springboard for many young trainees starting out in the industry. McCardie said: "If you go to any crew in Scotland, there are loads of people who have graduated from *River City* in all areas. I'm proud it being a training ground [but] that doesn't mean people can't come back."

Beth Watt

The UPSIDE

One Baz strikes the perfect note while...

We all know Peter Bazalgette is a man of many hats in the media and cultural space. Baz's career has embraced programmes, public life and senior corporate roles. He is also an author.

At his farewell party, held at The Broadcaster pub and rooftop bar in London's White City to mark his exit as ITV's Chair earlier this month, those attending saw – or rather heard – another side to him.

In an impressive tenor, Baz sang word-perfect versions of several classic TV ads. For

once, even Kevin Lygo looked super impressed. Does yet another role beckon for Baz, perhaps as a contestant on ITV's prime-time hit, *The Masked Singer*? Or *The Voice*?

...another strikes the perfect pose

From one Baz to another: Baz Luhrmann, interviewed by broadcaster Edith Bowman at last month's RTS London Convention.

The charismatic director and erstwhile actor – and, it should not be forgotten, ballroom dancer – is one of Hollywood's most successful directors. His latest feature, *Elvis*, quickly became one of the most successful biopics of all time.

But Baz was delighted to take time out to chat to some of the RTS Bursary Scholars at the Convention and to

have his picture taken with them once his interview was over. It's not often that the TV talent of tomorrow gets to rub shoulders with Hollywood royalty.

The tiger who came to interview and...

Staying with the Convention, the BBC's ubiquitous Amol Rajan was wearing metaphorical boxing gloves as he interrogated domestic TV leaders Alex Mahon, Tim Davie and Carolyn McCall.

On the conference stage, Amol's sartorial style was even more standout. The *Today* presenter and future host of *University Challenge* eschewed a jacket or even a shirt in favour of an, eye-catching sweatshirt emblazoned with an arresting, stylised tiger, giving him maximum street cred.

Some might argue that his interviewing style is fierce enough already...

... the marketer who came to culture

Finally, readers will have noticed that, once again, we have a new culture secretary in Whitehall: Michelle Donelan is the 11th person to hold the post in 10 years.

Thankfully, she has a background in media, having started her career as a marketing assistant on *Marie Claire* and *That's Life!* magazines.

This was followed by marketing executive jobs at the History Channel and World Wrestling Entertainment, and a spell as a marketing freelancer.

How long she'll be in the job is anyone's guess but the UpSide wishes her well in her new post. ■

Do you need £5,000 for a history of television project?

The Shiers Trust can make a grant of up to £5,000 towards publishing work on any aspect of TV history

Grants will be given to assist in the completion of new or unfinished projects, work or literature specific to the objectives of the Trust.

George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is in its 22nd year.

Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by 31 March 2023 on the official application form. Applicants must read all the conditions

www.rts.org.uk/shiers-trust-award





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