

March 2020

# Television



James Graham on  
**The coughing major**



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## From the CEO



Last month's RTS Television Journalism Awards exceeded expectations. Sky News's Anna Botting was a warm and empathetic host –

huge thanks to her, and congratulations to all the nominees and winners.

Outside London, I recently attended two very different awards ceremonies, in Cardiff and Newcastle. Both spoke volumes about the depth of talent that exists in the nations and regions. The RTS Cymru Awards was a buzzy event and a fitting recognition of the extraordinary creativity that exists in Wales.

Later that week, at the glamorous,

black-tie RTS North East and the Border Awards – hosted by the hilarious Jason Cook, every inch a Tyne-sider – I experienced another aspect of the UK's screen-based innovation.

As Graeme Thompson points out in this edition, the North East is a region that is, perhaps, undervalued by our industry. We at the RTS are delighted to recognise what a wonderful place it is to work and are thrilled to provide a showcase for its talent.

Talking of the T-word, Seetha Kumar, CEO of ScreenSkills, talks passionately to *Television* about the importance of the UK's screen industries in nurturing the skills that are the foundation stone of our global success.

The T-word was also much to the fore at our recent packed early-evening event on Sky's wonderful blue-collar comedy, *Brassic*. Co-created by Joe Gilgun and Danny Brocklehurst, *Brassic* is an edgy show that engages with topical issues such as mental health. Don't miss our report inside.

I can't wait to see James Graham's three-part adaptation of his play *Quiz* for ITV. The subject of this month's cover story could be one of 2020's standout TV dramas.

Theresa Wise

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**Subscription rates**  
UK £115  
Overseas (surface) £146.11  
Overseas (airmail) £172.22  
Enquiries: publication@rts.org.uk

**Printing**  
ISSN 0308-454X  
Printer: FE Burman  
20 Crimscott Street  
London SE1 5TP

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POWERING  
GREATER  
CREATORS

# TV diary

## Newsnight editor Esmé Wren on a week to remember



**I**t was around this time 21 years ago that I first penned a letter to the then-*Newsnight* editor, Sian Kevill, begging her to consider my application for a work placement. Back then, I saw *Newsnight* as the brand that represented the highest form of accountability and one that could deliver change.

As a budding journalist, I was desperate to be a part of it. Fortunately, Sian took a chance on me, and here I am, decades later, as the programme's second female editor – still very much believing everything I first saw in the power of the brand but, more importantly, tasked with the challenge of securing its place in the future news landscape.

■ **The week starts as every other – a panic over resources and staffing. I'd normally be envious of colleagues who have managed to get away to Italy for a week of skiing over half-term. This time, the coronavirus means I am a little less so. With a senior member of staff having to self-isolate as a precaution, it comes down to us relying, as we do on so many occasions, on the goodwill of other members of the team to fill in the gaps.**

As luck would have it, the news agenda hits us with a story the programme has invested in heavily recently – Harvey Weinstein and the verdict on his trial.

As with the now-infamous Prince Andrew interview, the planning team

has done us proud by securing an exclusive line-up of guests. It was with *Newsnight* that Zelda Perkins broke her non-disclosure agreement, following much persuasion from presenter Emily Maitlis. Zelda agrees to return to the programme to share her views on the guilty verdict.

■ The following day brings publication of the inquiry into the Westminster sex scandal. This concludes that political institutions failed to respond to historical claims of child sexual abuse but, as expected, confirms that there is no evidence of an organised paedophile network at Westminster.

*Newsnight* does the only interview that day with the former Conservative MP Harvey Proctor, who won compensation from the Met last year after being falsely accused of child abuse in the disastrous Operation Midland investigation.

Tackling difficult subjects is at the core of why *Newsnight* has once again become essential, rather than optional, viewing. A programme that will take risks, test the boundaries of the narrative and conduct forensic interviews.

■ **And so to the RTS Television Journalism Awards. I am confident that our interview with Prince Andrew will get its due recognition. Never before had a member of the Royal Family faced an accountability interview, and certainly not one concerning his own sexual conduct.**

I reflect on the moment we

received the news that the Duke had finally agreed to the encounter. I knew then it could either be *Newsnight's* greatest moment, or, just as easily, its worst.

The stakes could not have been higher, but I had every confidence in the team's ability to rise to the occasion.

■ To see Emily recognised as Presenter of the Year for a second year running is a proud moment, followed by wins for both Interview of the Year and Scoop of the Year for the Andrew interview.

But, for me, the top prize is Daily News Programme of the Year. Without doubt, the Prince Andrew interview was a tremendous coup for the programme but it really was just the icing on the cake.

Over the past year, the programme has made a huge impact with its Brexit coverage, the investigation into unregulated children's homes, and compelling coverage from Hong Kong. To receive the award that captures all this brilliant work delivered by the whole team is the perfect way to secure *Newsnight* the recognition it so richly deserves, not least at this time of organisational change and cost-cutting.

■ **Have I achieved what I set out to do as editor of *Newsnight*, I ask myself? Not until we win again next year.**

*Esmé Wren is editor of Newsnight.*

# Ear candy



Bobby Berk

Bobby Berk

## Because I Watched

Everyone talks about the social power of TV – but the ways it can change us as individuals are often overlooked, says Kate Holman



Whether it's the spike in sales of canned gin and tonic or Google searches of priests – both inspired by season 2 of *Fleabag* – never underestimate TV's power to influence people's behaviour. Yet, sometimes, it is the smallest detail of a TV series that can effect a change in someone's life.

Joining Netflix's host of original podcasts, storytelling series *Because I Watched* looks back through the screen of the latest binge-watch and

into the lives of viewers at home.

Each episode tells a touching real-life story about how a specific Netflix series has had a lasting impact on someone's life.

It could be plucking up the courage to do stand-up comedy after being inspired by *Grace and Frankie's* Lily Tomlin or breaking down prejudices via diverse stories or people depicted on shows such as *Queer Eye*.

The fortnightly podcast turns the attention on the viewer, as a star from each of the chosen series narrates one fan's personal journey triggered by their favourite TV show.

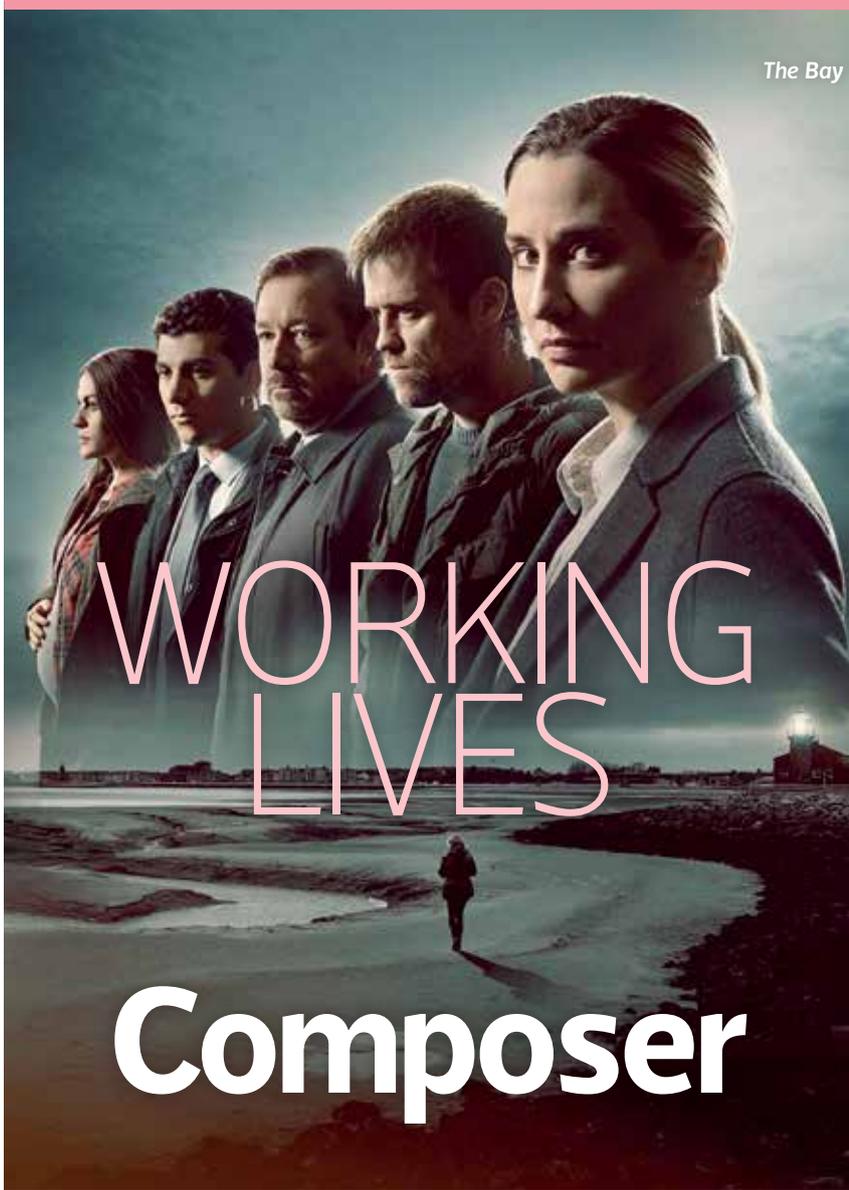
*Because I Watched* features familiar voices such as *Queer Eye's* Bobby Berk.

He details a mother's slow acceptance of same-sex parenting.

In another edition, Helena Bonham Carter recounts how *The Crown* (in series 3 she plays Princess Margaret) brought together two sisters living on opposite sides of the world.

Laugh and cry your way through the personal stories of acceptance, love, heartbreak, friendship and sisterhood from all over the world.

From crime dramas to comedies, the podcasts highlight the unexpected ways that TV impacts on our lives. Have a listen. You never know, it may encourage you to reflect on the ways your favourite show has made a lasting difference to your own life. ■



The Bay

# WORKING LIVES

## Composer

**S**amuel Sim won two RTS Craft & Design Awards in 2015 for his original score and title music for ITV period drama *Home Fires*, and another last year for the title music of *The Bay*. The judges described Sim's theme as "haunting and atmospheric", giving "a Nordic noir feel to Morecambe", the setting of the ITV crime drama.

### How would you describe your music?

My scores are eclectic – whether they are melodic, textual, percussive, orchestral or electronic depends on the subject matter of the programme. I'm trying to create a soundscape for people to get immersed in.

### What is your composing process?

I sketch out ideas after talking to the production or receiving a script – that time is crucial in understanding the

themes of a programme. I have four to six weeks to pull ideas together and then, when the episodes start coming through, I write the music for each episode in a week. A script gets you out of the blocks, but there's nothing like seeing some of the programme, even a rough cut, for inspiration.

### What do you compose on?

For an orchestral or chamber music piece, I sketch out ideas on the piano or paper. For an electronic score, I lean towards beats, synths, soundscapes and samples. If it's music for a Jane Austen period drama, I'm not going to go for Megadeath-style guitar, although you never know....

### Which instruments can you play?

I started to learn the violin at three and concert harp at six. I can blag my way through most string instruments, but my main instruments are the

harp, guitar and piano. I can't play any woodwind or brass instruments, but I write for them. TV and film composition allows me to bring the rock and classical worlds together.

### How did you get into composing?

I was mentored by Michael Kamen, the Grammy-award-winning American composer. He heard me perform in a psychedelic school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – I was playing electric guitar in a T Rex-style rock band and the concert harp for the dream sequences. At the end, he offered me a job. I learnt more from Michael than anyone else.

### And your TV break?

Working on a series of three-minute shorts for Channel 4, *Better than Sex* – they were covered in music. It was a fantastic calling card.

### How has the job changed?

When I started, there were far fewer music libraries and those that existed weren't up to scratch, so there were more opportunities to break into the industry.

Now, outfits such as Audio Network have great composers on their books, and productions can buy music quite cheaply. It's harder for young composers to get their foot in the door now. I tend to work on productions that want more "authored" music.

### And the best and worst of the job?

I get a huge thrill working with an orchestra at Abbey Road. We are so blessed in London, which has the best musicians in the world. People management, though, can be tricky. I've walked into a production and found a war going on between the producer and director – and both were briefing me separately.

### What's next?

I'm working on Sky's 10-part ancient Roman epic *Domina* and finishing the second series of *The Bay*.

### What are your future ambitions?

It's an interesting time for composition – the traditional idea of an orchestra playing themes and motifs has its place, but now you see more experimental music coming into mainstream TV and film. ■

*Composer Samuel Sim was interviewed by Matthew Bell.*

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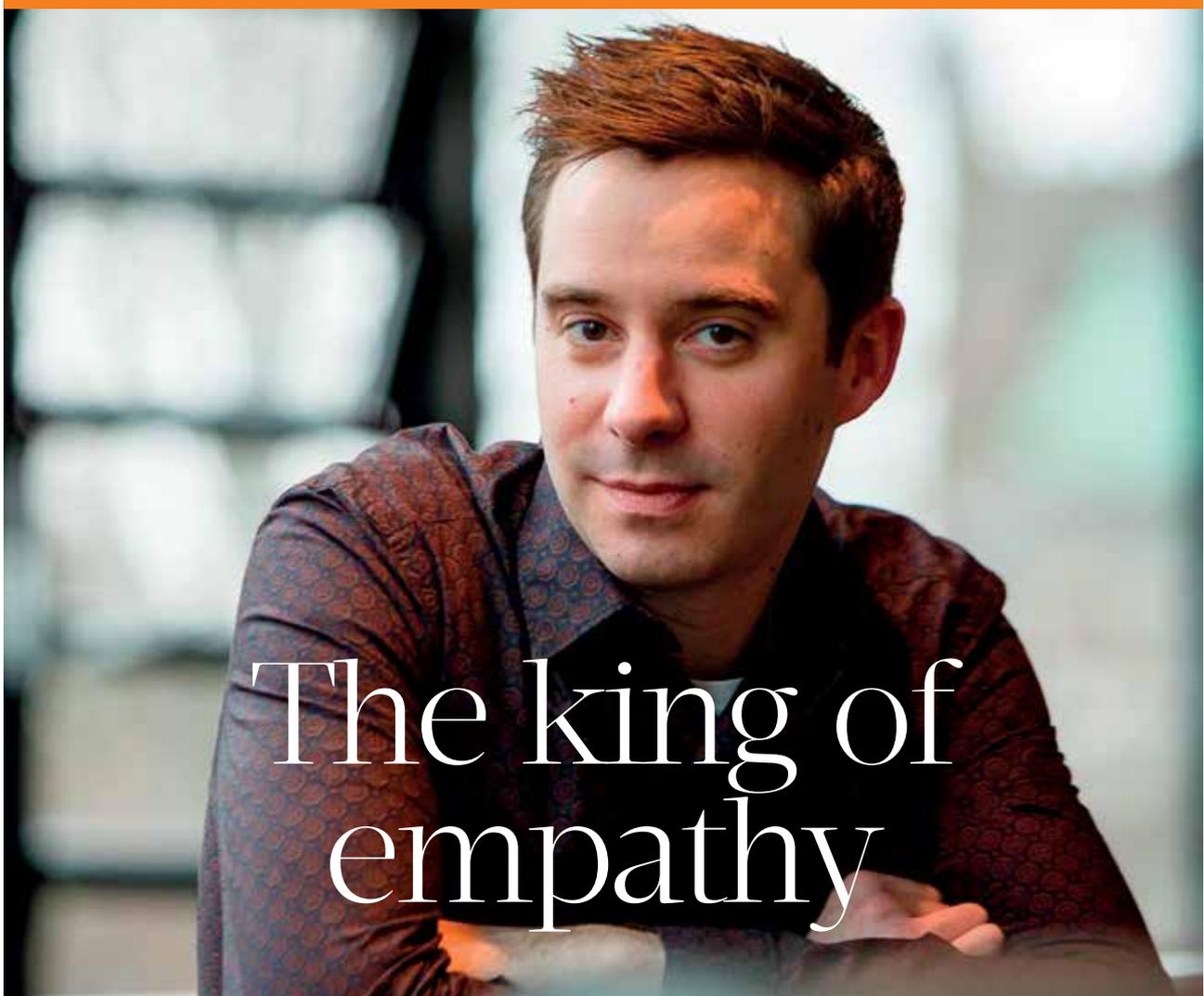
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# The king of empathy

**J**ames Graham was an undergraduate at Hull University when he became fascinated by daily press reports of the trial of a respectable home counties couple accused of cheating their way to the top prize in ITV's *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* At the time, *Millionaire* was one of the biggest shows on TV, achieving audiences of more than 8 million; at its peak, an incredible 19 million tuned into the programme.

"I couldn't believe the audacity of the crime," recalls Graham, his eyes brightening at the memory. "The idea that someone would try to pull off a bank heist in front of the cameras, in front of a TV audience, to steal £1m was just incredible. Like everyone else in the country, I thought they definitely did it."

Suffice to say, Major Charles Ingram (aka the Coughing Major, as the tabloids dubbed him) and his wife, Diana (sitting in the *Millionaire* audience, she and a family friend apparently alerted Ingram to the correct answers by

## Screenwriting

As his stage play *Quiz* is reimaged for TV, **James Graham** tells Steve Clarke how he makes his characters come alive

coughing discretely), were found guilty and given suspended prison sentences.

Spool forward to 2015. The stage career of the insanely prolific Graham has taken off. Thanks partly to *This House*, set in the Commons during the turbulent 1970s, when Labour struggled to govern, Graham has emerged as one of the most talked-about dramatists in the country. (*This House* would subsequently be voted the play of the decade.)

He is given a book by theatre producer William Village, *Bad Show: The*

*Quiz, the Cough, the Millionaire Major*, written by investigative journalists Bob Woffinden and James Plaskett, which casts doubt on the Ingrams' guilt. "The proposition of the book is that the story is not what we think it is," explains Graham. "It's much more complicated than that. Diving into the book, it was thrilling to have my preconceptions disrupted and altered with new evidence that I'd never even considered."

Graham is inspired to write the stage play *Quiz*, based on Woffinden and Plaskett's book. The play is a huge success, nominated for an Olivier Award, and eventually transfers from Chichester to the West End, in the course of which he adds new material.

Next month, Graham's three-part adaptation of *Quiz*, directed by the celebrated Stephen Frears, will be shown on ITV. It stars Matthew Macfadyen as Ingram, Michael Sheen as *Millionaire* presenter Chris Tarrant, Sian Clifford as Diana Ingram, and Mark Bonnar as Paul Smith, Chair of Celador Television, *Millionaire's* producer.

"I had a bit of imposter syndrome" >



Matthew Macfadyen plays Charles Ingram in *Quiz*

› when I first walked into Stephen Frears’s living room,” admits Graham, who looks younger than his 37 years. He is sitting in the London offices of Left Bank Pictures – *Quiz*’s producer – and, in his dressed-down way, could easily pass for a postgraduate student.

The idea of Graham suffering from imposter syndrome is truly baffling but it does speak volumes about his humility. His many other triumphs include RTS-award winner *Coalition*, the story of the machinations that led to the Cameron-Clegg Government in 2010, and, of course, *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, in which Benedict Cumberbatch plays a deeply troubled Dominic Cummings, then largely unknown outside the Westminster bubble.

He continues: “I was nervous at first because Stephen is such a screen legend and I know he is critically astute. I thought: he’s going to think I am a

complete fraud; he’s going to know way more about film-making, politics and culture than I do. But he was so generous about what I was trying to do.

“He asked very precise questions. He’s not one of these directors who gives prescriptive or inhibitive notes that limit you. He would ask questions that opened up possibilities.”

The idea of turning *Quiz* into a TV series came from Left Bank co-founder and CEO Andy Harries. “He came to see the stage show and instantly wanted to do it,” remembers Graham.

Getting Frears on board was something of a coup. He’d worked with Harries on the Oscar-winning film *The Queen*, starring Helen Mirren. *Quiz* is Frears’s first TV series since the award-winning *A Very English Scandal* featuring Hugh Grant as Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe.

How involved was the director in

Graham’s scripts? “Very involved,” he replies. “I’d only written one of the scripts when I first met him.

“When he read, that he instantly asked where the other scripts were. I told him I hadn’t written them yet, but I was trying very hard. He fed his thoughts into the first script, which had a knock-on effect on how I wrote the other episodes.”

It will be for the critics to judge how the TV series stands in relation to the stage versions of *Quiz*. What is clear is that Graham has jettisoned a lot of the original material from the versions shown in the theatre, including their potted history of British TV game shows.

In another departure from what audiences saw in the theatre, Graham has given roles to some of the TV executives mentioned in the play. Two of the key people who helped nurture *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*, ITV’s director of programmes, David Liddiment, and his



TV

entertainment commissioner, Claudia Rosencrantz, both appear in the series – played by Risteárd Cooper and Aisling Bea respectively.

What, then, attracted him to the story of an apparent crime committed on a TV game show? The subject matter seems far removed from the world of Westminster and Whitehall, where Graham so often sets his stories. Is there a connection between this and his other work, other than him having written it?

“I would still say that it’s political. I think everything is political, even if it doesn’t feature politicians and the corridors of power,” he says. “I was surprised when I felt so attracted to the idea of this story, but I think it was because it tapped into the anxiety that I was feeling at the time – and that we all currently feel – about truth and reality, and the threats to that in the post-Brexit,

post-Trump, internet/social-media world, where nothing feels quite trustworthy or stable any more.

“Here is a story about an alleged crime, where there are many different interpretations about how [the Ingrams] did it [and, indeed,] whether they did it.

“It was born out of the age when television, news and media were changing radically. Whether it was the advent of the 24-hour news cycle, the emergence of social media, or reality TV blending drama with truth and fact with fiction, I think it comes from the origins of what we’re dealing with today.”

He adds: “It’s really exciting both to return to a story I was obsessed with as a younger man, and to be given another institution – because I love institutions, whether it’s newspapers or Parliament or a referendum campaign – and for, in this case, television to be a vessel to explore all the nervousness I was feeling about truth.”

*Quiz* shares with his other writing the empathy and even-handedness towards his characters that is a defining characteristic of his work, perhaps the defining characteristic.

Graham has described the story that inspired *Quiz* as “the most British story in the history of the world”. Quizzes, particularly pub quizzes, are quintessentially British and, as Paul Smith likes to say, they feed into two defining national obsessions – drinking and always wanting to be right.

Is *Quiz* also a very British story because the British are – or perhaps were – famous for their sense of fair play? “That’s exactly what it is and it answers why we became utterly transfixed by this story 15 years ago – and why I hope an audience will be transfixed by it today. It tapped into something innately British about our sense of injustice when people don’t play by the rules. We are the nation of queuing, who invented cricket with its rules of fair play and good sportsmanship.

“But there is a less attractive side, the tabloid press and its impact on the justice system; its joy in building people up and seeing them come crashing down again. That’s part of tabloid culture, whether it’s Meghan Markle or anyone else.”

So, not so very far from *Ink*, Graham’s story of how Rupert Murdoch turned *The Sun* into Britain’s biggest tabloid, or *Brexit: The Uncivil War* and how both sides of the referendum campaign manipulated truth for their own ends.

In our polarised political culture, it is

heartening that someone like Graham might help to calm things down by trying, in his dramatised versions of recent events, to understand people whose views are diametrically opposed.

“I almost think that the most radical thing we could be doing at the moment is creating work that is empathetic and tolerant of different views and dissent,” he says. “I hope *Quiz* is a warm-hearted, charming version of that. It’s not the Brexit movie at all. It’s not going to divide people in a similar way, but it does pose a question: are they innocent or are they guilty? Does our justice system work or are there flaws in it?”

“Are we, as citizens, culpable for sometimes being whipped up as a mob in judging people by our emotions, rather than our brains? I think it does present big questions but, ultimately, in an entertaining story.”

Given the abuse Graham received for *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, does he ever regret portraying Cummings as a sympathetic, if maverick, figure?

“There’s a difference between being sympathetic and antipathetic. With *Brexit*, I was never going to please everybody. I didn’t think that I wouldn’t please anyone, but I knew I wouldn’t please everyone.

“As a writer, I don’t know how else to do it, how else to bring people to life, [how else] to get inside their head, to get under their skin, to try to understand what makes them tick.

“I have a – possibly flawed, possibly naive – theory that everyone thinks that what they’re doing is right and good, and we just happen to disagree with them. I think there is a small subsection of people in this world who are selfish and look out for themselves, but I don’t think that’s most people.

“Even though, for example, I voted remain and thought that Brexit would be a bad thing for our country, what would be the point in simply allowing my prejudices to cover up my writing?”

“It was a great privilege to actually go inside the head of someone who disagreed with me. I have to believe that Dominic Cummings thinks that Brexit will be a good thing for his country, his family and the people he loves.

“Reasonable people can disagree with that, but there is no point in simply presenting people as two-dimensional villains. It’s lazy writing, dramatically inert and politically unenticing. I don’t know how else to write, other than to imagine that what people think is positive and good.” ■

# Brexit The next phase

## Economics

How well prepared is the UK TV sector for Britain's departure from the EU? Kate Bulkley investigates

**G**etting clarity on what Brexit will mean for the UK audio-visual (AV) sector is, at this stage, a near impossibility. What is clear is that the past three years of Brexit politicking have been accompanied by a huge amount of contingency planning for a no-deal Brexit.

Add to that the continued strength of TV and film production in the UK, thanks largely to a skilled talent pool, UK tax breaks and significant investment from the likes of Disney, Netflix and Sky, and the consensus is that the sector is well placed to withstand any fallout from Britain leaving the EU.

There are issues that need to be ironed out, of course, particularly around talent and access to European markets for programme sales. With no-deal still on the cards, some advertisers still appear cautious about their spending, although that is being eclipsed by new worries over the economic impact of the Covid-19 virus.

Reassuringly, the long visibility of a

potential no-deal Brexit means that there are few unknown issues and, according to many executives in the creative industries, none with the potential to derail one of the most prominent drivers of the UK's economic performance.

Indeed, some in the sector are looking ahead to the potential benefits that an update to the UK's Communications Act 2003 could provide. A new act would not have to comply with the EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).

"There are arguments to say that, if we could tailor a better regime for the UK's media ecosystem, we could do even better," suggests a major broadcaster's senior policy expert.

A number of media companies, including Viacom, Discovery, the BBC and NBCUniversal, have already taken steps to deal with one of the bigger Brexit-related issues. They have either relocated their European broadcasting licences – and in some cases their HQs – from London to mainland Europe, or they have devised other ways to get

around the likelihood that, in time, their Ofcom licences to broadcast channels from the UK to continental Europe will become ineffective.

The number of channels based in the UK dropped by 5% in 2019 due to Brexit, according to the European Audiovisual Observatory.

EU rules on content portability is something else the TV business is taking in its stride. In a no-deal scenario, UK citizens will lose the ability to access their subscription content while travelling in mainland Europe.

If the UK falls out of the EU's content portability agreement, EU citizens travelling to the UK will be unable to watch their TV services in Britain. "Losing portability is not something we see as a big challenge to our business," said a senior broadcaster.

There are, however, concerns over the potential impact of UK content no longer qualifying under European programming quotas as "European works". Under existing rules, UK content competes on an equal footing with European content. But, post-Brexit,





## ‘WE NEED A SYSTEM THAT IS COST-EFFECTIVE, MANAGEABLE AND EASY TO UNDERSTAND’

there is a fear that UK content will be treated as “foreign acquired” content. That could make it more difficult to sell UK-produced shows in the EU.

“Our continental competitors are already making noises, asking why the UK should get benefits such as qualifying for these quotas when it is no longer part of Europe,” says John McVay, CEO of Pact, the independent producers organisation.

“It’s not an immediate issue,” he maintains, “but, given some of the comments by the French CNC [National Centre for Cinema and the Moving Image] and some others recently, they clearly think that punishing the UK is good for their own local production industries.”

Alice Enders of Enders Analysis thinks this loss of access is potentially the biggest issue for TV businesses based here if the UK fails to reach a trade deal with Brussels. “Our potential removal of the European works quotas in our law would nullify a condition of the Convention on Transfrontier TV legislation of 1989, and thus impair for

ever exports relating to quotas on the Continent.”

Today, EU countries account for about a third of British programming exports, according to Pact. But, even if the rules do change regarding quota qualification, it may still not reduce the volume of UK content sales to Europe.

Ultimately, buying decisions depend on the quality of the programmes. Broadcasters and platforms need quality content that can please audiences and advertisers. “European broadcasters will have to look to see if there are alternative sources capable of delivering the same levels of viewing,” says McVay.

Another issue concentrating minds in the event of no-deal is: will talent and production crews be able to move freely across the borders of EU states? At the very least, navigating any new visa rules will add administrative time and costs and mean more work for HR departments.

In an industry where budgets are tight, this could have a disproportionate impact on smaller indies and shows that require certain skills, for example, in special effects and animation. But McVay believes the sector will cope: “We need a system that is manageable, cost-effective and easy to understand. But production teams are used to coping with complex logistics and administration.”

That said, the British Government’s proposed points-based visa system is based on skill levels, educational qualifications and pay levels. These criteria are not best suited to the TV sector where, under present proposals, many of the required skills will not qualify. If the rules are not modified, it will take time to upskill the UK workforce.

Then there is the problem of the UK’s ability to attract talent. “A lot of value creation in the AV space involves people who are disruptive and innovative,” says Ingrid Silver, a media partner at law firm Reed Smith. “If you want to replicate the Silicon Valley environment, where talent flourishes,

you can’t do that with the proposed points system. Some kid with a great idea won’t qualify, so you would be losing a big opportunity.”

Another potential loss to producers concerns their access to European media funding schemes such as Creative Europe. It offers distribution benefits to producers of independent feature films and routes to development finance. UK animation and documentary makers have tapped these funds.

But Pact argues that they are a modest part of the low double digits of millions available across the TV and film sector. “Government will have to take a view on all the programmes that are part of the European club and on whether they will support these funds,” says McVay. “The corollary is: if we aren’t going to stay in these schemes, can the money that the UK has put into these European mechanisms come back to our AV sector, rather than going into roads or another part of the economy?”

An issue with particular consequences for online players is whether the UK, post-Brexit, maintains the EU’s copyright directive. This requires platforms to license content for private users, as opposed to the old rules where platforms were required to take action to remove content only after an infringement notice was filed by a copyright holder.

There is little visibility on this so far but, given Ofcom’s new role regulating online content to prevent harm, it is reasonable to assume that there will also be proactive policing for copyright breaches.

Ultimately, though, the UK is firmly established as the world’s second most important English-language content producer and exporter after the US. According to one senior broadcaster, the UK has more pressing domestic challenges, such as Ofcom’s PSB review, that are likely to have a bigger impact than Brexit. ■

# Working class and proud

Actor **Joe Gilgun**, who has bipolar disorder, reveals how his own life informs *Brassic*, the hit Sky One comedy he stars in

**B**rassic, Sky One's tale of Lancashire lads on the scam, brought the channel critical acclaim and its highest ratings for a comedy show in almost a decade last year. The madcap comedy with a sensitive side, which *The Guardian* called "a hilarious, warm, brutal melange", returns to our screens this month.

In advance of its second outing, a sold-out RTS early-evening event heard from writer Danny Brocklehurst, executive producer David Livingstone and actor Joe Gilgun, who brought his effervescent personality to the stage.

*Brassic* not only stars Gilgun, it is also based on stories from a difficult period in his life. But, as he was at pains to point out, it was never his intention to mine the misery of his experiences – the opposite, in fact: *Brassic* was intended to be a celebration of working-class life, warts and all.

"Any show that represents the working classes is fucking miserable. Some of the happiest people I know are working class; some of the smartest lads I know are working class," he said.

"I was sick to death of us being depicted as long-suffering. Sure, there's a bit of suffering that goes on and some of it is hand to mouth, but that's not to say we're all fucking miserable. That's a middle-class view of what it is to be working class."

*Brassic*, defined as broke, penniless, without means, boracic lint, skint, on the bones of yer arse, was created by Gilgun and Danny Brocklehurst, who wrote all but one episode of the first series. The latter, a journalist at the *Manchester Evening News* before he turned to screenwriting, has written RTS award-winning dramas such as *Clocking Off*, *Shameless* and *Come Home*.

"I've had a colourful past," admitted Gilgun. He was a child actor on *Coronation Street* for a few years in the mid-1990s but, when his role was written out of the soap, he "went off the bloody rails and got up to all kind of shit for many years".

It is the actor's experiences from this period of his life that run through *Brassic*. Gilgun returned to acting a decade later, building a career that took him from *Emmerdale*, to Shane Meadows' three *This is England* films, to E4 sci-fi comedy-drama *Misfits* and BBC Films' *Pride*, which tells the story of the gay and lesbian activists who supported the 1984-85 miners' strike.

On the set of the award-winning movie he met the actor Dominic West, who plays Vinnie's narcissistic doctor in *Brassic*. West encouraged the film's executive producer, Livingstone, to listen to Gilgun's "crazy stories". Despite being hindered by serious dyslexia, Gilgun wrote them down "on acres of wallpaper", recalled Livingstone.

Gilgun recalled Livingstone's reaction when the exec read them: "These are the ramblings of a fucking lunatic." The actor agreed: "They were the ramblings of a lunatic – we needed this bugger here [Brocklehurst] to [make sense of them]."

"Even though I was a fan of Joe from *Misfits*, a little bit of me thought, 'Oh God, an actor with ideas'," recalled Brocklehurst. "But we got on and I could see really clearly that the stories and ideas Joe had for the show were brilliant and funny. They were in a tone that I'd written in a long time ago [on Channel 4's *Shameless*] and I wanted to do again. I could see there was a show here that excited me, and I felt we could collaborate really well."

Sky One agreed and commissioned



Livingstone's company, Calamity Films (whose credits include *Pride*, *Judy* and *Last Christmas*) to make the show, the indie's first TV series.

Brocklehurst and Gilgun sent ideas back and forth via long WhatsApp messages – "podcasts, basically", said the writer, who added structure and writer's polish to the actor's stories.

"There was so much good stuff from Joe's life and great, funny ideas, but what you've got to do is shape it," said Brocklehurst. "We had to take that great source material and turn it into a series."

"It was such a strong starting point... but then, like with any series, you talk so much, come up with new ideas and embellish things, so it becomes its own new thing as you go down the road."

Throughout his life, Gilgun's dyslexia has made reading and writing difficult. "What I have got is bloody good ideas. I was made to feel bloody stupid and, for years, I believed that. Only in the last five or six years have I started to realise that I'm not," he said.



Joe Gilgun as Vinnie, second from right, in *Brassic*

Sky

These ideas, he added, are like a “big, tangled ball of wool; my head doesn’t work in a linear way at all. I have the ideas but I can’t put them together.”

Livingstone admitted to anxiety about whether *Brassic*’s mix of broad comedy and sensitivity would work on screen. “It isn’t something you see every day,” he said. But, the executive producer added: “It really held together – if it can make you cry and roar with laughter, then that’s a good spot to be in.”

“The tears, the sadness,” reckoned Gilgun, “ground the madness of the show. We didn’t want to make it too heavy, but a lot of the positive feedback came off the back of the poignant moments.”

Gilgun’s character, Vinnie, like the actor, has bipolar disorder. “Joe has been very public about his own bipolar, but we were worried at first about dealing with that in a comic environment,” said Brocklehurst.

However, after some thought, the writer decided, “as long as we’re

## ‘I WAS SICK TO DEATH OF US BEING DEPICTED AS LONG-SUFFERING’

truthful about it, we can be as funny as we like”.

“I have serious mental health problems,” said Gilgun. “I have these fucking meltdowns, like the shit you see on the [programme]. I get very frustrated and angry. When I go on a down... I’m pissed off; I can’t control how I feel. It doesn’t matter that you’ve got a nice flat. I don’t finish a day at work and go home, and everything goes away. I am bipolar – that’s me.

“The medicine Vinnie is on, I’m on. The shit Vinnie does, that’s the man I would have become if it wasn’t for

acting. [*Brassic*] is very, very personal to me. I knew my idea was a good one. I believed it would go on TV. I have other ideas – they will happen, absolutely they will. I believe in myself. For the first time in a lifetime, I know my own worth – I’m not dumb and I want more.”

For Gilgun, “the whole process has been honestly life-changing”. It took five years – from the actor telling stories to Dominic West on the set of *Pride* and scribbling down his ideas on wall-paper – for *Brassic* to reach the screen.

“It was exciting while it was happening but it went past in a blur and, before you know it, it’s on the fucking TV and it’s massive,” said Gilgun. “It’s difficult to put into words; it’s been a life-changing thing.” ■

**Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS early-evening event was held at H Club London on 30 January and chaired by television journalist and broadcaster Emma Bulimore. It was produced by the RTS, Sky and Premier Communications.**

# OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH EAST

**P**icture the scene: one of the North's most popular visitor attractions, nestling on the riverside site of a 7th-century priory, once home to the Venerable Bede, suddenly thrust into the media spotlight thanks to another noted chronicler of history – Boris Johnson.

Well, that was because, at the end of January, the National Glass Centre – part of the University of Sunderland – found itself hosting a symbolic “end of the EU era” Cabinet meeting. The site was closed to visitors as a fleet of government cars swept on to campus to deposit the PM and his senior team.

The cameras rolled as Johnson met staff and students and tried his hand at glass blowing before sitting down for Cabinet in a closed-off section of the café beside the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art.

Amid the photo opportunities, students mused on the PM's pledge to “level-up” spending to win round communities feeling left behind by successive metro-centric administrations.

The UK2070 Commission, led by Lord Kerslake – formerly the UK's most senior civil servant – has just published a report showing that the UK is now the most unequal large country in the developed world. Areas such as the North East have suffered most from decades of political and economic neglect.

Take television and the creative industries. Over the past 15 years, programme-makers and creatives here have seen production and commissioning increasingly focus on London, Manchester, Cardiff and Glasgow.

Which is why there's much excitement about the move of Channel 4

**Graeme Thompson**  
outlines what  
‘levelling up’ looks  
like from his  
perspective



Paul Hampartsoumian

to Leeds – raising hopes that a commissioning centre east of the Pennines might have an impact further up the A1.

The area between North Yorkshire and the Scottish Borders is home to more than 2 million people but accounts for less than 2% of television production in the UK.

According to screen agency Northern Film + Media there are more than 370 registered crew available, along with some 1,000 film-friendly locations – such as the Tees Barrage, which played a key role in the flight of George MacKay in the movie *1917*.

In reality, however, most local crew and production teams struggle to get TV and film work unless they are prepared to travel or lucky enough to be picked up by long-running shows such as ITV's *Vera*, Lime's *Geordie Shore* or CBBC's *The Dumping Ground*.

As a result, the 2020 RTS North East and Border Awards, held at the end of February, had as many non-broadcast and student categories as TV.

One of the biggest cheers of the night went to the team behind Tees Valley Screen, which picked up a prize for work in supporting talent, ambition and growth across the Middlesbrough area.

It builds on the talent pipeline produced by the region's six universities – Teesside, Sunderland, Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria and Cumbria. The institutions offer plenty of support, incubators and incentives to try and retain graduate talent – but the lure of bigger and brighter creative hubs can be irresistible.

It is a more positive story for creative tech in the region, which has grown 45% in the past five years, with a gross value added of around £3bn. It's the highest growth outside London – more than 200 new companies established in the North East last year, attracted by highly skilled creatives and relatively cheap running costs.

Computer games, visual effects, VR/AR and animation are thriving, with big name players such as Ubisoft, ZeroLight and Sage. And the BBC has announced plans to open a major tech innovation hub in Newcastle.

So, to answer the students' question, what would “levelling up” look like? Improved infrastructure, devolved decision-making, more emphasis on the quality-of-life advantages of working outside the capital, plus recognition from commissioners and investors that areas such as the North East need support to reach critical mass. Sounds like a vote winner to me. ■

**Graeme Thompson is Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sunderland and Chair of the RTS Education Committee.**



ScreenSkills

# Champion for TV talent

**I**t is the best of times: the television business is booming. It is the worst of times: there is a skill shortage, so wage costs are soaring. Yet shouldn't that make it the best of times again? Won't television be forced to find and train a new generation of programme-makers who won't all be white and middle class? This, I tell Seetha Kumar, the ambitious chief executive of ScreenSkills, is a battle she can win.

"You make it sound so simple," says Kumar. She is in her office close to Euston station where her skills-body charity works to ensure that film and television find the people to make the magic happen. She has been telling me how the industry needs to think through a new "skills pipeline", scrape the opacity from its gateways, end the biases that exclude and, before all that, nurture a "whole-child" approach in schools, where creativity and technical skills are meshed, rather than divided.

So she still thinks it could all go wrong? "No, I hope that you're right. I think we should win. There is a genuine economic and social purpose to effect change in our industry, and we

## The Billen profile

Andrew Billen hears how ScreenSkills CEO **Seetha Kumar** defied the BBC's 'glass cliff' to reach the top

have a moment in time to do it. I just think, as always – and I say this to people internally – anything worthwhile and challenging is never easy."

The difficulties in Kumar's own career in television, since she moved from India to London in her twenties, become a big, knotty strand in our interview. It was certainly not the best of times when, in 2015, Kumar, a former 20-year BBC staffer, was headhunted from the educational publisher Pearson to run what was then known as Creative Skillset.

It was, she says, "a perfect storm". The advent of multichannel, tax breaks, rising demand for high-end drama and the imminent arrival of the streamers had created a

production boom in television. At the same time, over the years, the BBC had less and less money for training, and, although people delivered homilies about "inclusion", it was never a "powerful driver" in recruitment.

And then there was Creative Skillset itself, set up by the screen industries back in 1992 as just plain Skillset. Under the post-1997 Labour governments, it had received consistent government funding. The David Cameron-led coalition replaced that with project funding and, by 2015, when Kumar arrived, even that had only two years left to run.

"We had a brilliant board, and the board wanted change," says Kumar, the first BAME woman to receive an RTS Fellowship, "but I genuinely wasn't entirely aware that (a) the project funding was going to end, or (b) that internally there was a problem that some of the contracts hadn't been paid for a period of time."

Contracts? "From the Government. There was a hiatus in payment."

The Government hadn't signed the cheques? "There was a hiatus, OK? I'm going to put it very politely."

So her first instinct was clearly to ▶

## Seetha, sequentially



ScreenSkills

**Seetha Kumar, CEO, ScreenSkills**

**Brought up** Mumbai and Delhi

**Lives** London; two children

**Educated** Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, studied modern Indian history

**Late 1980s** First jobs in TV in UK

**1996** Series producer and creative director, BBC Crime and Health, including editor of *Crimewatch UK*.

**2002** Head of life skills, BBC Factual and Learning

**2005** Executive editor of *Africa Lives* across the BBC

**2006** Launches BBC HD

**2008** Controller, BBC online.

**Watching** *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*

**Reading** Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy

**Podcasts** *The Catch and Kill* with Ronan Farrow; *Where Should We Begin?*

**Hobbies** Latin dance/dancing, theatre, reading, cinema, meditation

**They say** 'An outstanding senior executive and creative leader' – Donald Steel, former BBC head of press

**She says** 'It is a tough industry if you're not picked or sponsored. I had none of that. So I know.'

› resign? "Weirdly, I'm not a quitter. I had worked in big corporates most of my life, so this was a very different experience. When I first arrived, I was a bit like, 'OK, what's going on?'. I was shocked, I have to be honest."

The other problem was that Creative Skillset's canvas had become too broad. It was working in sectors such as advertising, publishing and fashion. Kumar rechristened it ScreenSkills and refocused it so that it targeted – well, screens. Throughout 2017, staff left and were not replaced but, at the end of the year, ScreenSkills won a £19.5m contract from the BFI and appointed a dynamic new head of film, Gareth Ellis-Unwin.

So all is well now? "It's not as simple as that. ScreenSkills got through the hump and we are rebuilding. I think it's got good industry support, brilliant skills councils and we can track exactly what we do. However, if we're going to change our industry seriously and get it to grow and stay growing, particularly in key hubs across the nation's regions, we need a 10-year plan for skills and talent – and I think we should lead it."

The funding facts are these. When Kumar arrived, the organisation was funded to the tune of £28m, the majority coming from government, with £5.3m from the BFI and £3.5m from industry. This year, the total is just £13.3m (£6.8m from industry; more than £5m from the BFI; and some cash from other sources, including from Arts Council England and, unusually, £500,000 from DCMS to run a specific creative careers programme, but that goes next year).

And on diversity? "I just think, across the piece, if you look at the research that Ofcom has done, that we are making very slow strides."

Is the industry racist? "I don't think the industry is racist. There are incidents where people have behaved in a racist way, they have bullied or behaved unpleasantly, but I would say it's unfair to say the industry is racist. It's not."

It just mirrors itself? It's attracted to what it recognises? "That's a human instinct."

There is now a consensus that the market, as well as justice, demands more opportunities for minorities, yet there is a disagreement over how those opportunities can be created. ScreenSkills identifies skills gaps, provides career information, mentors, trains, offers bursaries and even holds workshops on unconscious bias. At the RTS



Cambridge Convention last year, however, Sir Lenny Henry said it was time to scrap diversity schemes and initiatives. He argued, instead, for diversity tax breaks and contestable funds for diverse programming.

"Where I agreed with him is on the multitude of initiatives," she says. "But for me, the issue is really not to have a plethora of initiatives that will take you anywhere, but to link them back to pathways to where the needs are."

"I'll give you an example. In unscripted, we've been running a series-producer programme and, as of mid-March, we have probably more than 100 alumni. Their progression has been fantastic. Many of them are series producers, if not higher."

Kumar admits, however: "In my lifetime, even when I was at the BBC, I have seen what I call 'initiative-itis'. People want to do the right thing. They announce it. They get the press. My big question is: what happens to these people? And what's the return rate?"

She has two children, both grown-up (neither are in the industry) and was herself brought up in Bombay (she does not call it Mumbai). Her late father worked in government and was cautious about his daughter embarking on anything less than a very respectable career.



Blackmagic Design

Her mother did not work but was well educated and a big reader. She told Seetha something that determined her life: “Do what you love and what you believe in. Nothing else matters.”

After university in New Delhi and a short spell in print journalism, she arrived in London in the 1980s for what she describes as “family reasons”. One plus was that our television was much better than India’s.

“I found England, the UK, not a happy, friendly place. It was London in the mid-1980s. It was tough, so I hoovered up TV. TV was my best friend. I watched everything from *Sons and Daughters*, which was daytime stuff, to Granada’s *World in Action*. I thought it was fantastic.”

Television was less keen to hoover her up, however, and she doubts if she would have made it in had she not “so desperately wanted it”. “I applied for every job. I wrote endless letters. Nothing.”

Finally, she got work as a researcher on a programme an independent was making about India. Even that break made her angry: Brits felt they could become experts on India with a little help from a native, but not let an Indian work on a British show.

It was Alex Graham, founder of Wall to Wall, who spotted her tenacity and

recommended her to someone at the BBC. She was recruited for a programme on the Bhopal gas disaster, but it was a short-term contract and it was India again. Happily, the producer, Elizabeth Clough, promised it would lead to greater things and kept her promise. Kumar moved to *Taking Liberties*, the series that investigated miscarriages of justice.

Her BBC career thenceforth looks, at least on paper, spectacular. She was editor of *Crimewatch UK* and is credited with holding the team together when its presenter, Jill Dando, was murdered. In 2003, she ran the domestic abuse season *Hitting Home* and, two years later, executive-edited the award-winning, cross-media season *Africa Lives*.

She launched BBC HD and then switched, in 2008, to lead BBC Online, where she revolutionised the measurement of user consumption. She left the corporation, which she still loves, in 2010 as one reorganisation too many loomed. Pearson offered her a job that addressed her passion for education.

“But it was bumpy,” she says of her BBC decades. “It felt quite lonely. You could ask the same of somebody who was white whether they felt the same. Who knows? I just felt that personally. But I got a reputation for delivering. So sometimes things came my way

because they knew I would make sure it worked, whether it was HD or online.”

Despite the support of Lorraine Heggessey, Jane Lush and Mark Thompson, she could feel the lack of a sponsor.

“And also, sometimes, I think the BBC could have been braver in taking more risks with me. They gave me jobs that were what I call ‘glass cliff.’”

What does that mean? “It says you’re at the edge of the cliff and it’s glass, so it could crack.”

They wanted her to fail? “No, but the jobs had a high risk of failure. They did not want me to fail. If anything, I should take it as a compliment. The point is, as a person, as a creative, do you *only* want to do those [kinds of] jobs?”

And then there was the condescension. “I remember somebody saying to me once, ‘It’s quite extraordinary that you managed to achieve what you have when you have crossed the oceans and the divide.’ I just thought, ‘What the hell?’”

Who was that? “Somebody at the BBC. Someone senior.”

Patronising? “Really patronising, extraordinary comments. I remember someone else lecturing me about diversity, a white man, and I just said: ‘I’ve lived it.’ But I thought: ‘How dare you?’ However, at the end of the day, you’ve got a limited amount of energy; you use it positively or negatively. Negative energy never wins.”

She asks whether I would feel upset if I was told I had “come a long way”. I say I am not sure. “I guess it depends if you’d already fought every step of the way and felt quite bruised and raw. When I joined there weren’t many people who looked like me. I would say, to be fair to most people, some of it is also about how I felt because I was the outsider.”

Kumar left Pearson after three years, unconvinced of its strategic direction (she was right – profits have fallen as students have fled the printed word) but mainly because of the pull of television and her desire to be of use to it.

“I realised that, actually, I really, really, missed this world, which was a wonderful thing to know.”

I ask if she wore a sari after she came to London. She says she didn’t, partly because she wanted to fit in. Nowadays, the richness of her life is to feel British and Indian at the same time.

As to where her spiritual home is, there is no doubt in my mind: it’s television, and she wants it crowded with talent. ■



Noughts & Crosses

As Malorie Blackman's classic *Noughts & Crosses* finally makes it to TV, Imani Cottrell asks how the adaptors captured the spirit of a much-loved book

# The world turned upside down

**T**he TV adaptation of *Noughts and Crosses*, the first novel in Malorie Blackman's cult dystopian series for young adults, is one of the year's most hotly anticipated new dramas.

Airing this month on BBC One, the six-part series, made by Mammoth Screen, boasts an impressive cast, including Helen Baxendale, Ian Hart

and Paterson Joseph, and a cameo from Stormzy, who plays newspaper editor Kolawale.

Executive producer Preethi Mavahalli, whose credits include BBC Two's *NW*, describes it as "an alternate-world show", one in which white and black people are segregated, but the ruling class (the Crosses) is black and the white Noughts are subjugated.

At the heart of the narrative are

childhood friends who become lovers, Sephy (Masali Baduza) and Callum (Jack Rowan). Sephy is a Cross and the daughter of a prominent politician. Callum is a Nought, whose mother used to work as a nanny for Sephy.

When their friendship starts to change, the pair embark on a passionate but dangerous romance. Their bond is put to the test by the pervasive racism and violence.

Mavahalli describes the adaptation as a long time coming – it was top of her priority list when she joined Mammoth Screen eight years ago but was not green-lit until 2016.

“I read the books when they came out and was a massive fan of them,” she says. “That’s how it all started, just from being a fan, having a passion for the book and wanting to get it made.”

However, Blackman was initially resistant to the idea. “Eight years ago, TV drama entertainment was very different to what it is today, with its increased ambitions,” explains Mavahalli. But, once the author agreed to sell the rights, she notes that the BBC was on board straight away: “At the time, Ben Stephenson [who left the BBC five years ago] was in charge of drama and was a fan of the book. As soon as he knew we had the rights, he was very keen for us to develop it. From day one, the BBC has championed it.”

Finding the right tone for the show was crucial. “I think it’s always been a really bold and provocative premise. To really pull it off needed a lot of time and money,” argues Mavahalli. “Expectations from the audience get bigger and bigger and we needed to deliver on that.” The books also have a broad and vocal fan base, as well as being national curriculum recommended texts for English.

Director Koby Adom – whose short *Haircut* was longlisted for a Bafta – helped to create the world imagined by Blackman, and has directed three of the six episodes.

Having read the novels as a child, the story had personal resonance for him. “There’s a lot of things in the book which I think were magical, and informed me as a person, as a black man, growing up in London,” says Adom. “Reading the books and the scripts [written by Lydia Adetunji, Nathaniel Price and Rachel De-Lahay], it’s scary how accurate some of these presentations are.”

Mavahalli says that it was important to keep “the spirit of the book” but,

inevitably, changes had to be made for it to work on the small screen.

Although much of the series was shot in South Africa, the show is set in an alternate London, whose visual style was developed by Mavahalli and the team.

Adom recalls that he watched a lot of TV that could feed into his approach to the series. His research took in the

**‘WHAT’S TRAGIC IS THAT [THESE THEMES ARE] MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER’**

intricacies of Nigerian culture, costumes, village life – and even masks – which he wanted to inform the Cross world. A court scene shows these influences: “There is no jury, there are elders, and everyone is wearing African attire, rather than a judge in a wig and gown.”

For the love story between Sephy and Callum, Adom wanted to focus on the claustrophobic and suffocating nature of their relationship, but also on its warmth and intimacy. “It was about getting the nuances of the emotions, not just having nice visuals but visuals that apply to the story,” he says.

Mavahalli suggests that the couple’s relationship has a universality that goes beyond race and class: “Some people might connect with the story for very political reasons, because of the exploration of racism and injustice, but you could just watch it as two people who aren’t allowed to be together.”

She insists, however, that the series is not trying to convey an overtly political message: “The world we’ve created draws in post-slavery [conditions] in the civil rights movement in the US, apartheid in South Africa and British colonialism. It’s not about one specific experience of what is to be a minority or what it is to be oppressed.”

When she wrote the novels, almost

20 years ago, Blackman assumed that they would be irrelevant by the 2020s, and told Mavahalli this. “I think what’s tragic is that it’s more relevant than ever,” says the producer. “Divisions, prejudice and racism are big issues and talked about even more than they were 20 years ago.”

For Adom, directing such a large-scale project before he turned 30 was a big step: “As a black guy, I’ve never seen a director who looks remotely like me.... After doing it, I had this huge feeling of achievement and fulfilment.

“[The cast and crew] didn’t expect this guy to be standing there with his durag and his slippers,” he laughs. “I had to rise to the challenge and have a vision for them to latch on to. If you’re not confident, your vision can be squashed.

“You have to be really confident in yourself. That comes from my relationship with God. I focused on what I know I can do and let God do the rest. My faith drove me through all the obstacles and here we are, I’ve finished three episodes of TV for BBC One.”

As for Stormzy’s involvement, the rapper told Blackman that as soon as he heard *Noughts & Crosses* was being adapted for TV, he was eager to have a part.

“Stormzy’s passion is just unrelenting,” says Mavahalli. “He is a huge fan and, of course, we wanted him involved. We flew him out to Cape Town. Apart from us, nobody knew about it. He did the shoot and then we announced it.”

Mavahalli hopes the book’s many other fans agree that the production has done justice to Blackman’s story.

Adom says he would be pleased if the show not only entertains but also sparks conversation. “Personally, I don’t really see it in a racial sense. What I think *Noughts & Crosses* does is start to humanise people.”

With the novels so close to so many people’s hearts, the TV series inevitably carries a heavy load as it introduces fans, both new and old, to a world quite unlike their own, but one with love at its centre. ■

ITV's critically acclaimed drama *Flesh and Blood* marked a departure for the women who created it, hears the RTS

# A family affair



*Flesh and Blood*

If screenwriter Sarah Williams has proven anything to herself about the art of television storytelling by creating ITV's high profile *Flesh and Blood*, it's the truth of the well-worn phrase: it's not where you start, it's where you finish.

Four years ago, Williams began with a plan to write a character-based, family series focused on a group of troubled siblings. She came up with the concept following a conversation with Silverprint Pictures' creative director, Kate Bartlett.

The Silverpoint executive had always admired Williams's work and had asked her if she had any projects that they could develop together. Over time – and perhaps inevitably – the writer's original idea expanded. It changed direction, new characters were added – and, in due course, it surprised both women.

Finally, last month, *Flesh and Blood* emerged on ITV as part family drama, part thriller – a far cry from that initial Williams-Bartlett conversation.

The series opens with a mystery body being removed from a blood-soaked scene on a beach. Only then does it introduce a group of family members, each dealing with the new romance of their widowed mother, Vivien, and their own messy lives.

Nearing her 70th birthday, Vivien (Francesca Annis) has fallen in love with Mark (Stephen Rea), a retired surgeon. Her children's reaction to her new relationship ranges from wide-eyed shock to full support.

Against this backdrop, worries about money, infidelities and much more play out in the setting of a picturesque and highly stylised Kent coast. Rarely, if ever, have the country's famous white cliffs looked so sumptuous.

It was Williams's own family background that inspired *Flesh and Blood*. "I'm one of six children and have always been fascinated with sibling dynamics," she said at an RTS screening of the opening episode. "At the start, I wanted to get to the heart of that thing you have with your family, where you're full of love and support for them, but they can also wind you up and find your weak points. I thought that love/hate thing would be rich territory."

But focusing on the siblings soon proved to be inadequate for her story, so she added the lives of the parents. This produced plenty of complex and nuanced elements, but no plot and – even after many months – no scripts.

Williams admitted: "Eventually, Kate said to me, 'Well, what actually happens?' and I realised, 'Well, it does need a plot!'"

Suddenly, Williams – who had never written a thriller before – knew that she had to create something larger. That "something" was a crime.

"I needed a big event [in the story] and, although I don't think of myself as a natural thriller writer, I thought that if,

**'EVERY TIME SHE APPEARED, IT WAS GOLD DUST. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT WE NEEDED MORE MARY'**

at the very beginning, we knew something bad had happened, that would keep the viewer's mind spinning ahead."

To ease the narrative, she created another key character – a neighbour, Mary, played by Imelda Staunton. This was a lightbulb moment. "She only had a couple of scenes at the start, but every time she appeared it was gold dust. It was obvious that we needed more Mary."

She added: "Mary wasn't on one of my Post-it Notes when I started but, if you live in a remote place, you can't exist without a neighbour: you rely on them. And, the minute Mary crept into the story, she started growing."

The character enabled Williams to write some darkly witty moments. "You need to have light and shade in a script," she said. "I find it anxiety-making if I just feel the tension in a story going up and up. Along the way, I love a bit of light relief."

Williams continued: "The main plot is the crime, but family stories, especially concerning the siblings, were important to me. We didn't want the audience to feel like it was 'meanwhile, back with the siblings' when we switched to them. I didn't want the energy to drop when you cut around the family to get to the main plot."

Director Louise Hooper saw the script as "an essay on womanhood", but different to the often-used monochromatic style of the thriller genre. "I set a tone that was playful and mischievous, impish, full of energy and swagger. This series does not feel like

the gritty, dark murder that so often appears on TV," she said.

Filming for 10 weeks on a remarkably sunny Kent coast gave Hooper plenty of elements to move beyond the norm. "We didn't want a specific location, with a village or a town for the characters to go down to.

"Instead, they're in a kind of floating space, like a theatrical tableau. Most scenes are set around the sea, the shingle beach, the two houses and the blue sky. The idea was to film with lots of colour and energy."

*Flesh and Blood* is the first original script written by Sarah Williams to make it to TV. Previously, she has been best known for adaptations of novels, including *Poppy Shakespeare*, *Small Island* and *The Long Song*.

Her other credits include the well-regarded TV film *Wallis & Edward* and *Becoming Jane*, which she co-wrote. She started her career in television in 1991 as a researcher and documentary producer. Her career as a writer began over a decade later after she had worked as a drama producer.

"When I was a drama producer, from day one, I would meet a writer and I would think, 'I should be you'. I would give notes, but I wanted the writer to give their script to me and let me do it," she said.

As a screenwriter, though, Williams understands that hers is a craft that continually delivers the unexpected. "I really enjoyed writing the thriller part of *Flesh and Blood* because I've done a lot of adaptations and that means you generally have to stick with the book," she explained. "But this was my own script and I was let off the leash here.

"Plus, ITV's request for a four-parter was good for me. It forced me into developing a strong plot and, once that came, things moved faster. It took almost four years to write episode one, but two, three and four came quickly."

She is grateful that ITV decided to schedule the four episodes in prime-time over consecutive evenings, turning her drama into "event" television.

"In the end, ITV took a risk on my idea – even without any scripts – even when the idea didn't automatically fit into its genres," Williams reflected. "It knew that and still went with us." ■

**Report by Ross Biddiscombe. The screening of *Flesh and Blood*, followed by a Q&A session, was held at the Curzon Soho, London, on 20 February. It was a joint RTS/ITV production.**

The experts behind the true-crime series *Making a Monster* uncover the minds of mass murderers for an RTS audience

# What makes a serial killer?

**M**urderers – even serial killers – are made, not born. This is the thesis of new Crime+Investigation series *Making a Monster*, which offers a fresh take on the increasingly popular true-crime genre.

The series elicits the views of leading psychologists, interwoven with dramatic reconstructions, as it revisits the crimes of notorious killers, who include Rose West, Levi Bellfield and Aileen Wuornos.

“These cases have been talked about before. Often, in true-crime series, it’s the police investigators who are the contributors, but where do the police go when confronted by something like the horror of [Rose West’s house] 25 Cromwell Street?” said Dan Korn, VP for programming at A+E Networks UK, which runs the Crime+Investigation channel.

The police turn to forensic and criminal psychologists, some of whom – including the panellists at an RTS early-evening event in February – contributed to *Making a Monster*.

The erudite series began its eight-part run last month and is made by David Howard and Rik Hall for Wales-based indie Monster Films. It aims “to go beyond the shibboleths and stereotypes, and to treat the serial killer, to a certain extent, as a patient and to get inside that,” explained Korn.

*Sunday Times* Crime Club editor Karen Robinson interviewed the experts following the premiere of the series opener about the life of Gloucester mass murderer Rose West. It made for grim but illuminating viewing.

Criminal profiler Professor Paul Britton adopts a “very narrow definition” of “evil” in the context of serial killers. “For me, a person is truly evil if they come into the world with no deficits,” he said. “[This is a person] with a full cognitive, functioning background; their emotional development is normal. All of the things are as they would be for most people.

“Nevertheless, they find their pleasure is in harming, hurting, being cruel to other people.... That, for me, is true evil, where there is that clear choice. Most of the others behave in an evil way but, when you look, again and again you see the deficits.”

However, Britton added: “It is important to recognise that thousands of youngsters come from dysfunctional backgrounds and they do not all end up in this situation. Just because a youngster was offended against, does not mean that, in turn, they will then offend.”

The programme-makers secured the involvement of University of Leicester forensic psychologist Dr Julian Boon by assuring him that there “would be nothing salacious or gratuitous” in the series. *Making a Monster*, said Boon, “dispels the myth that there is something like a generic serial killer. Each one has to be painstakingly understood with

regard to their own individual circumstances and how that expresses itself in terms of criminal activity.”

Dr Samantha Lundrigan, an investigative criminal psychologist and specialist in geographic profiling at Anglia Ruskin University, said: “The series offered the opportunity to “take the [true-crime] genre in a different direction and get under the surface of these well-known offenders.

“I did ask myself at the beginning, ‘Is there any more that can be said about these people?’ My answer was yes, because [the series]... tries to understand the science underneath and look at some of those techniques, such as geographic profiling, that haven’t been looked at before.”

Lundrigan said that she “grew up on a diet of true-crime documentaries and books – it’s what took me into the field I’m in.... I always thought I’d be [*The Silence of the Lambs* character] Clarice Starling, but I’m still waiting.”

The psychologist confessed that she had been “disappointed” with some of the previous true-crime series she had been involved with: “[They were] salacious and graphic, sometimes unnecessarily so, focusing entirely on the crime of the offender and not giving a voice to the victim. This has been a different experience.”

Britton, who is a professor at Birmingham City University, noted that “there is so much that you still can’t say – the things that happened are so appalling”. He argued that TV programmes had to find a balance, and not “shock people so much that they are unable to... see in the life stories of these offenders [something] that alerts [viewers] to what may be going on

**‘YOU DON’T  
BRING IT HOME  
WITH YOU  
[BUT] YOU END  
UP SLIGHTLY  
DIMINISHED’**

From left: Karen Robinson,  
Dr Julian Boon, Dr Samantha  
Lundrigan and Prof Paul Britton



Paul Hampartsoumian

close to them". In particular, [people should consider]: "Is there a time when I should pick up the phone [to the police], even though I feel uncomfortable or embarrassed?"

Referring to Rose and Fred West's victims, he said: "There are other young women who haven't been found yet. If something can move it forward so that just a few more families know of their loved ones, I think it's worth it."

The Wests' crimes, suggested Robinson, were "particularly horrifying" because they happened in what appeared to teachers and social workers like a family home.

"For this couple, family life and criminal life were inextricably linked – you couldn't separate them," replied Lundrigan. "The house... looked quite normal but what was going on behind closed doors was unfathomable. If they had never got together, I'm sure [Rose] wouldn't have gone down this path." The psychologists agreed that serial killers were incapable of remorse for their crimes. "Unless they come up before the

parole board – which none of this lot [in the series] will," said Boon. "Remorse is not something they can genuinely get."

Britton expanded on this: "Most of them don't have the capacity to feel [remorse]. It's simply not there. Whether it was ever there, is an interesting question. And, if it ever was, then how it became lost is an interesting exercise and probably the subject of an entirely different programme."

Viewers can turn off the TV if the crimes are too egregious, but criminal psychologists are at risk of taking the horror of their work home with them.

"I am always aware of my environment, because I look at where crime happens," admitted Lundrigan. "I run a lot in the countryside... I wonder if, when people are running, they think about body disposal sites? I do. I'm always evaluating my environment."

"When you are involved in any of these cases, you don't bring it home with you – but you leave a bit of yourself behind," said Britton. "You end up slightly diminished by what you've

been involved in. I'm fortunate that this work is only a part of [what I do]. I'm an NHS clinician by origin, so [my job is] also helping people to get better, understanding what's wrong with them and being able to discharge people who are now better, rather than who are going off to spend the rest of their years in prison."

Looking back at *Making a Monster*, Britton believes that the series has avoided "giving a guidebook to potential serial killers in how not to be caught. That's important and I don't think we've fallen into that [trap]."

And, added Boon, the programme has also avoided romanticising the killers or their crimes: "You only have to look at the episode about Bellfield to realise just how unglamorous a figure he is... [The series] is not leaving people with any illusions to the contrary." ■

**Report by Matthew Bell. 'Making a Monster: Screening and Q&A' was held at the BFI in central London on 4 February, and produced by the RTS and A&E Networks UK.**

**T**oday's TV dramas require ever more complex storylines to attract and satisfy increasingly sophisticated audiences. Yet writers cannot make their thrillers too complicated, or confused audiences will switch off.

This writing dilemma has been successfully negotiated several times by Jack and Harry Williams. They have pulled off the delicate balancing act once again with the second series of the acclaimed ITV show *Liar*, which is co-produced by SundanceTV.

The Williams brothers knew that the very title of their six-part project would suggest a convoluted plot that questioned which characters were lying and who was telling the truth.

But the theme of constant lying can be both a blessing and a curse, according to Jack Williams. "Our story is about people hiding secrets from themselves, their spouses, their family – and I think that worked well in the first series," he said. "We definitely tried to do it again in the second series because, with people lying, you also have the expectation of them being found out. Of course, then other things happen."

Always at the back of their minds while writing is the need for clarity. "The story has to be clear to the viewer because we haven't done our jobs properly if they don't follow it," said Harry Williams during the Q&A session following an exclusive RTS screening of the first episode of series 2.

The brothers' confidence in negotiating the complexity issue is well-founded because, not only had they already jumped that hurdle in series 1, but they were also similarly effective in another of their thrillers, *The Missing*. This drama developed dual timelines and multiple plots, a structure that creates puzzles which they both enjoy solving.

"Our rule about structure is really just a case of how we tell the story in the best way," explained Harry Williams. "If you can tell it in one time line, then fine, we would do that. We're not attempting to be clever for the sake of it."

The first series of *Liar* centred on an allegation that surgeon Andrew Earlam (played by Ioan Gruffudd) raped teacher Laura Nielson (Joanne

Froggatt), but it was unclear who was telling the whole truth. The series ended with a shot of Earlam's dead body lying prostrate in a marsh. The new series picks up from there.

"We had to tell the *Liar* story in two timelines," said Jack Williams, "because it's important that you see what's happening to Laura in the present day and also how it happened. Every time we go back in time and see what Andrew did, it's a whole other level of intrigue."

Yet a second series – which took nine months to write – was not originally an automatic option. "We explored a lot of endings for series 1. But if we'd ended it with Andrew just going to prison, it would've been shit, so killing Andrew was the best way to end," said Harry Williams. "In the writing process, it

takes ages to look at every version of an ending but, finally, you have to be led by the story and, for *Liar*, we needed more time to tell everything."

The first series became a talking point because it was broadcast as reports were emerging about allegations of rape by Harvey Weinstein and his criminal treatment of women.

The programme, its writers and star Joanne Froggatt were caught up in questions from the tabloid press and the Twitterati concerning whether it was legitimate to have a storyline based on a woman being raped. But Froggatt was always adamant that the series was not using sexual assault gratuitously.

"No, that wasn't the case at all," she said. "When our first season aired, sexual assault against women was a

# Secrets and lies

Screenwriters **Jack and Harry Williams**, the creators of ITV's *Liar*, reveal the knack of keeping audiences hooked





*Liar* cast, from right: Joanne Froggatt, Ioan Gruffudd and Katherine Kelly

She explained that Jack and Harry Williams were very keen for their actors to be in control of these scenes. “We had a great team of people and I’m very fortunate to say that any intimacy scenes have always come from a place of respect, openness and discussion.

“Plus, Jack and Harry write so well for women, anyway. They were open about saying to Ioan and myself that we could change anything if it didn’t feel right or if we felt uncomfortable. The intention of Jack and Harry was never to show violence against women on screen, it wasn’t to be a salacious show. It was to raise questions in people’s minds and I’m really proud of that.”

For the other female star of the series, Katherine Kelly, there was a different kind of challenge: introducing a new central character into an already successful show. She said that she did a lot of the preparation for the part of the uncompromising Detective Inspector Karen Renton: “I didn’t want her just to be a narrator. She had to be an important and authentic part of the story, someone you believed was the only person who could solve the case.”

Kelly helped to decide that her character would show no favour to the rape victims or to any other character. “I discussed who she was with Jack and Harry, about her not being emotional, and her feeling that it would be unprofessional for her to have empathy or sympathy for these people. It was an interesting character to play, because you don’t see many cops brought in at this stage of a show when the audience already has sympathies for the characters.”

But neither Froggatt nor Kelly need worry about how to adapt their characters for a third series of *Liar* – the Williams brothers have absolutely no plans for that. “Yes, series 2 was about working out who killed Andrew, but it was also about getting more under the skin of the characters and finding out how they tick, going deeper into the story. But series 3? No, there’s a definitive, and very satisfying, ending to series 2, so that’s it, no more.” ■

**Report by Ross Biddiscombe. The RTS screening and Q&A of *Liar* was held at the Curzon Bloomsbury in central London on 27 February. The event was produced by the RTS in conjunction with IJPR.**

subject that seemed very taboo. Yes, sexual assault as a crime is what starts the thriller process in *Liar*, but audiences accept shows based on murder, child abduction, paedophilia, so why aren’t we talking about sexual assault as well? If we do that, then it becomes less of a taboo subject.”

She added: “The series made people look at themselves and question how they judge other people, especially those who’ve been in these awful situations that we haven’t experienced ourselves.

“Why is anyone then qualified to judge them? In my eyes, I’m not. That’s what hit home with people: the series had something to say in the background without hitting people over the head with it. That’s why I wanted to do the project to start with.”

Answering a question on the value of intimacy co-ordinators, Froggatt said: “Our first season aired two years ago, so the #MeToo movement hadn’t happened and there were no intimacy co-ordinators, but they do have them now and it’s a great idea.

“It’s as normal now as having a stunt co-ordinator. In the past, when I’ve had to do an intimate scene, I’ve always treated it like a fight scene because they’re similar. As actors, it’s our job to make these things look natural!”

She said that acting sex scenes was similar to choreography: “I have conversations with the other actor and the director, telling them that this is the way I want to do it. That’s how I’ve always done it myself. It’s about creating a safe space.”



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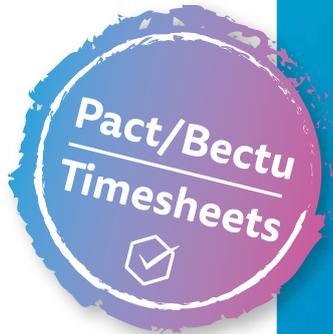
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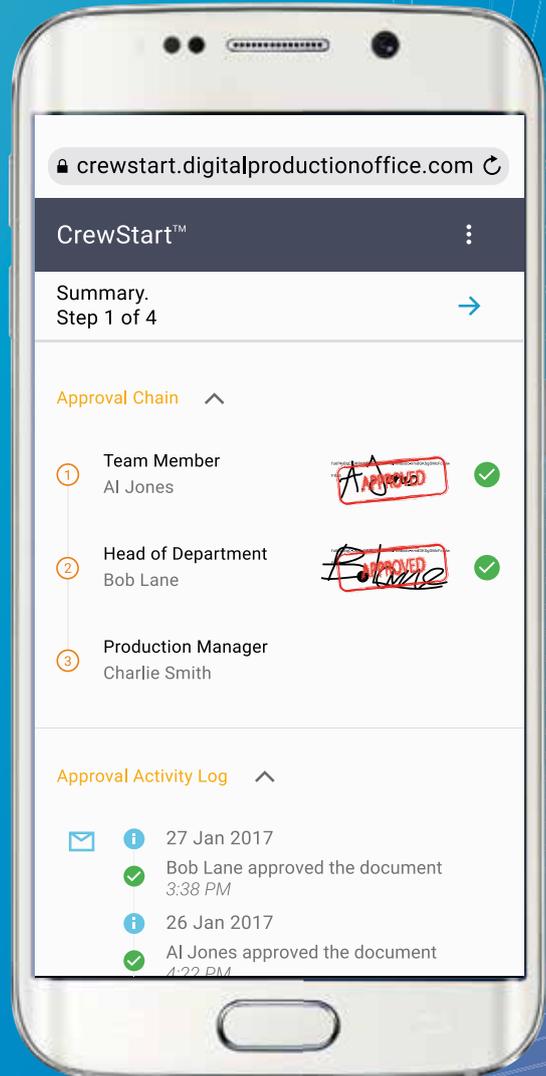
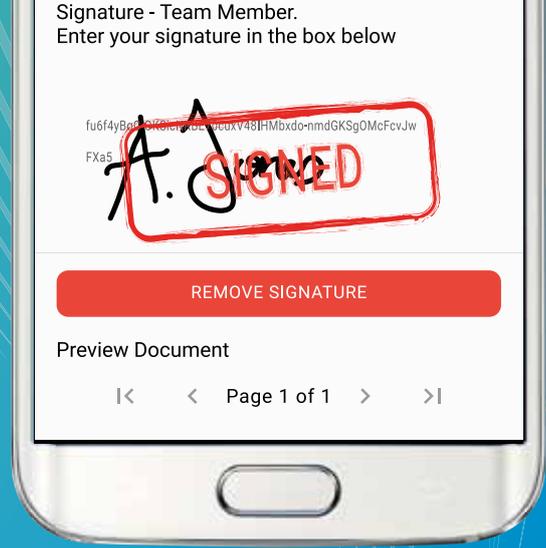
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# First steps in TV

The RTS Futures Television Careers Fair brought a bumper crowd to London



From left: Amanda Lyon, Voltage Television; Ria Hebden, presenter; Alex Wootton, ITV2; and Meera Thavasoathy, BBC

Paul Hampartsoumian

More than 40 broadcasters, production companies and industry bodies set up home for the day in the Business Design Centre, London, to dispense advice to 1,300 young people hoping to break into TV. A series of sessions – featuring expert panels from across the industry – cast light on television genres, skills and opportunities.

BBC continuing drama head of production Nikki Saunders revealed there was a huge number of entry-level jobs across her department, including runners, camera assistants and make-up artists.

BBC Studios makes 450 hours of continuing drama a year in Elstree (*EastEnders* and *Holby City*), Cardiff

(*Casualty* and *Pobol y Cwm*), Birmingham (*Doctors*, *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators*, *Father Brown* and its spin-off, *The Sister Boniface Mysteries*) and Dumbarton (*River City*).

“Starting as a runner is a really great way to build your career,” said Saunders. “It gives you the best insight into all the roles on a production.”

In the same panel session, Karlwyn Dove, a second assistant director on *Doctors*, argued that experience on the job trumped everything else. “You can leave university with a real arrogance that you can do everything,” he said. “That is not the case at all – the best place to learn is within the industry.

“You go in at entry level, ask questions, do things well and move on up.”

Saunders, one of the BBC continuing drama team interviewed by the presenter Rick Edwards, denied that

nepotism was a problem at the corporation. “It’s drummed into everyone at the BBC that it’s not allowed. The BBC runs a fair selection process.”

The “Wonder women” session saw successful female TV executives in conversation with presenter Ria Hebden. Voltage Television executive producer Amanda Lyon, who looks after BBC Two hit *Inside the Factory*, said: “I’ve never felt that I missed out on anything by being female.” But she noted that a gender split in TV persisted: women tended to work in producing jobs, men in technical roles: “I am determined that this should not continue. Women are highly technically competent and I would say to women: ‘Get a camera and shoot.’”

BBC news and current affairs director Meera Thavasoathy said progress was being made. “I’ve directed programmes where every technical person has been a woman and no one raised an eyebrow. When I started out, that wasn’t the case – these barriers can be broken down.”

The National Film and Television School’s head of digital effects, John Rowe, argued that there had never been a better time to be a compositor, 3D artist or colourist. Costs were falling and more TV productions were using visual effects, which were once the preserve of movies.

Rowe’s digital-effects course started 14 years ago; 90% of graduates have found work in the creative industries. Moreover, there is virtually a 50/50 split between men and women.

Pre-visualisation supervisor Richard Perry’s big break came on *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. He worked for 15 months to perfect a dragon. Since then, he explained, digital effects “have taken me all over the world for film and TV”.

Digital effects demand “an understanding of art and mathematics”, said Perry. He advised: “Watch lots of films – and pick them to pieces.”

The day’s other sessions were: “Get ready for your TV job”, run by Jude Winstanley, MD of theunitlist.com; and IMG Studios’ “Starting your career in sport TV”, chaired by head of production services Danielle Neville. ■

**Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Futures Television Careers Fair 2020 was held at the Business Design Centre, London, on 12 February, and sponsored by IMG Studios, the National Film and Television School and Grass Valley.**



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George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a

long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is now in its 20th year.

## **Application procedure**

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by Friday 27 March 2020 on the official application form.

**[www.rts.org.uk/  
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Newsnight

Hosted by **Anna Botting** and sponsored by Avid, the awards were presented on 26 February at the London Hilton, Park Lane

# RTS Television Journalism Awards 2020

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The winners and nominees of all 19 awards are listed over the following five pages >

BBC



Current Affairs  
– International:  
For Sama

Channel 4

## Judges' Award

### Political teams

5 News, BBC News, Channel 4 News, ITV News and Sky News



Richard Kendall

'The divisions of Brexit put unprecedented pressure on political journalists. Many suffered abuse and threats.

'Relations between the media and the political class are being increasingly challenged as politicians bypass journalists.

'Against this background, the judges decided that the RTS should recognise all the political teams across all the UK broadcasters for their important role as guardians of democracy.'

### Breaking News

#### **Hong Kong Protesters Storm Legislative Council**

CNN International

'A triumph of pre-planning, field production, and brilliant live reporting combined with exemplary use of technology.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Turkey's Incursion into Syria**, CNN International

**Hong Kong**, BBC News Channel

### Camera Operator of the Year

#### **Wang Xiqing – BBC News**

BBC One

'The winner [applied] outstanding film-making techniques to an unfolding and unexpected environment [and had the] bravery to tell the story despite real threats to personal security.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Ben Martin – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

**Mstyslav Chernov**, Associated Press

### Current Affairs – Home

#### **Spotlight on the Troubles:**

##### **A Secret History**

BBC NI for BBC Four and BBC One Northern Ireland

'Brilliant storytelling and wonderfully evocative film-making [with] stunning new revelations. A great piece of investigative journalism.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Panorama – Undercover Hospital Abuse Scandal**, BBC Panorama for BBC One

**Exposure – The Priory: Teenage**

**Mental Health Uncovered**, Hardcash Productions for ITV

### Current Affairs – International

#### **For Sama**

Channel 4 News/ITN Productions for Channel 4 and PBS Frontline

'An outstanding film. The film-maker told her story, combining the intimate with the macro, with breathtaking courage, stamina and determination.'

#### **Nominees:**

**This World – One Day in Gaza**, BBC Current Affairs London for BBC Two

**Exposure – Undercover: Inside China's Digital Gulag**, Hardcash Productions for ITV

### Daily News Programme of the Year

#### **Newsnight**

BBC Two

'The winner covered all the major news stories with consistent rigour and originality, as well as making headlines with a scoop. The programme made itself – once again – required viewing.'

#### **Nominees:**

**News at Ten**, ITN for ITV

**BBC News at Ten**, BBC News for BBC One

### Digital Award

#### **Why Are Transgender People Self-medicating?**

Sky News for Snapchat Discover and YouTube

'Revelatory journalism told through powerful case studies, [seen by] 1.55 million people, mostly under-35s.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Modern Masculinity – Men Need**

**Meaning and Responsibility**, The Guardian for The Guardian/YouTube

**Uncovered – Mexico Femicide**, ITN for Online



All pictures: Richard Kendal

**1** Breaking News: Hong Kong Protesters Storm Legislative Council

**2** Daily News Programme of the Year: Newsnight and Interview of the Year: The Prince Andrew Interview – Newsnight

**5** Digital Award: Why Are Transgender People Self-medicating?

**3** Current Affairs – Home: Spotlight on the Troubles: A Secret History

**4** Current Affairs – International: For Sama

**8** Nations and Regions News: BBC South East Today – Shoreham Special

**6** Specialist Journalist of the Year: Rohit Kachroo – ITV News

**7** Nations and Regions Current Affairs: Disclosure – Who Killed Emma?



Specialist Journalist of the Year:  
Rohit Kachroo – ITV News

## Interview of the Year

### ***The Prince Andrew Interview – Newsnight***

BBC Two

‘An unprecedented interview, demonstrating enterprise, thorough preparation and... fine journalistic skill, which had a huge impact.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Harry and Meghan: An African Journey – Duchess of Sussex**, ITN Productions and ITV News for ITV

**Andrew Neil interviews Boris Johnson**, BBC News for BBC One

## Nations and Regions Current Affairs

### ***Disclosure – Who Killed Emma?***

BBC Scotland for BBC One Scotland

‘A brilliant piece of investigation that was meticulously researched,... electrifying and chilling. A shining example of what exceptional journalism can achieve.’

#### **Nominees:**

**The Pub Bombings**, BBC Birmingham for BBC England

**Spotlight – Paisley in Paradise**, BBC Northern Ireland

## Nations and Regions News

### ***BBC South East Today – Shoreham Special***

BBC South East for BBC One

‘Exceptional investment in a great regional news story that was a technical triumph [and] featured a number of exclusives.’

#### **Nominees:**

**ITV News London – Domestic Abuse: The Crime Behind Closed Doors**, ITN for ITV

**BBC Look North (Yorkshire) – Floods November 2019**, BBC Yorkshire for BBC One

## Nations and Regions Presenter of the Year

### ***Riz Lateef***

BBC London for BBC One

‘A highly skilled regional presenter [whose] flexibility, sparkle and thought [went] into every piece [she was] doing and who conveyed authority.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Mark Carruthers – The View; Sunday Politics NI; Election 2019**, BBC Northern Ireland

**Tony Morris – ITV News – Granada Reports**, ITV News for ITV

## Network Presenter of the Year

### ***Emily Maitlis – Newsnight***

BBC Two

‘In a year of political chaos, her nose for nonsense led to bruising encounters with politicians and her interview with a member of the Royal Family will live on in history.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Tom Bradby – ITV News**, ITN for ITV

**Victoria Derbyshire – Victoria Derbyshire Programme**, BBC Two and BBC News Channel

## News Channel of the Year

### ***Sky News***

‘In a very hotly contested category, this channel... displayed the greatest range, enterprise and innovation.’

#### **Nominees:**

**BBC Newschannel**

**CNN International**

## News Coverage – Home

### ***The Death of Molly Russell***

BBC News for BBC One

‘Showed creativity, excellent script-writing and innovation.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Britain’s Hidden Children’s Homes – Newsnight**, BBC Two

**The Murder of Lyra McKee – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

## News Coverage – International

### ***The Missing Muslims of Xinjiang – BBC News at Ten***

BBC News for BBC One

‘The team secured great access in a challenging environment. Great storytelling and a global impact.’

#### **Nominees:**

**The Migrant Crisis: Death on the Channel – ITV News**, ITN for ITV

**Inside Syria – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

## News Technology

### ***First Lives from the Deep***

Sky News and Associated Press

‘At a time when climate change is our biggest story, the ability to present live, 300 metres below the Indian Ocean, brought new insights and perspectives on the damage being done to our seas.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Click 1000 – BBC Click**, BBC News

**Vote Coder**, BBC News



**1** Nations and Regions Presenter of the Year: Riz Lateef

**4** News Coverage – Home: The Death of Molly Russell

**7** Host: Anna Botting

**2** Network Presenter of the Year: Emily Maitlis

**5** News Technology: First Lives from the Deep

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

**3** Television Journalist of the Year: Nima Elbagir

**6** Scoop of the Year: The Prince Andrew Interview – Newsnight

**9** Young Talent of the Year: Martha Kelner

All pictures: Richard Kendal

## Outstanding Contribution

**Christiane Amanpour**



Richard Kendal

'A towering global figure in English-speaking broadcast journalism, a doyenne of international television presenters, Christiane Amanpour was born in London, raised in Tehran, and educated at a convent in Buckinghamshire before university in the US.

'She began her broadcast career while still an undergraduate. Over four decades, she has covered more or less every major conflict and interviewed pretty much anyone who is anyone. She is a committed campaigner for media freedom and journalist safety.'

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



News Coverage – International:  
The Missing Muslims of Xinjiang –  
BBC News at Ten

BBC

### Scoop of the Year

**The Prince Andrew Interview –  
Newsnight**  
BBC Two

'This world exclusive was making headlines even before it was broadcast... an amazing interview.'

#### Nominees:

**Undercover with the Clerics: Iraq's Secret Sex Trade**, BBC News Arabic for BBC News and BBC Two  
**Harry Dunn**, Sky News

### Specialist Journalist of the Year

**Rohit Kachroo – ITV News**  
ITN for ITV

'He has a fantastic portfolio of exclusives; in a fine field, Rohit's work stood out above all the others.'

#### Nominees:

**Alex Crawford**, Sky News  
**Dan Rivers – ITV News**, ITN for ITV

### Television Journalist of the Year

**Nima Elbagir**

CNN International

'A journalist who demonstrated an unmatched range of investigation, eye-witness reporting and courage, with sparkling writing.'

#### Nominees:

**Gabriel Gatehouse – Newsnight**, BBC Two  
**Stuart Ramsay**, Sky News

### Young Talent of the Year

**Martha Kelner**

Sky News

'She gets beneath the sports headlines to underlying issues and has built an enviable track record in breaking stories, pursued with skill and energy.'

#### Nominees:

**Ben Hunte**, BBC News for BBC One

**Yousra Elbagir – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4



Spotlight on the Troubles:  
A Secret History

## Diversity tour ends in Glasgow

Scotland and West of England

“The network speaks”, a forum hosted by the RTS in partnership with the Creative Diversity Network (CDN), visited Bristol in late January and Glasgow at the end of February.

RTS Scotland hosted the latter event at Channel 4’s new Glasgow Hub, the fourth and final event of a UK tour that also took in Leeds and Cardiff. The events offered a forum for the TV production community to come together and tackle the lack of diversity in the industry.

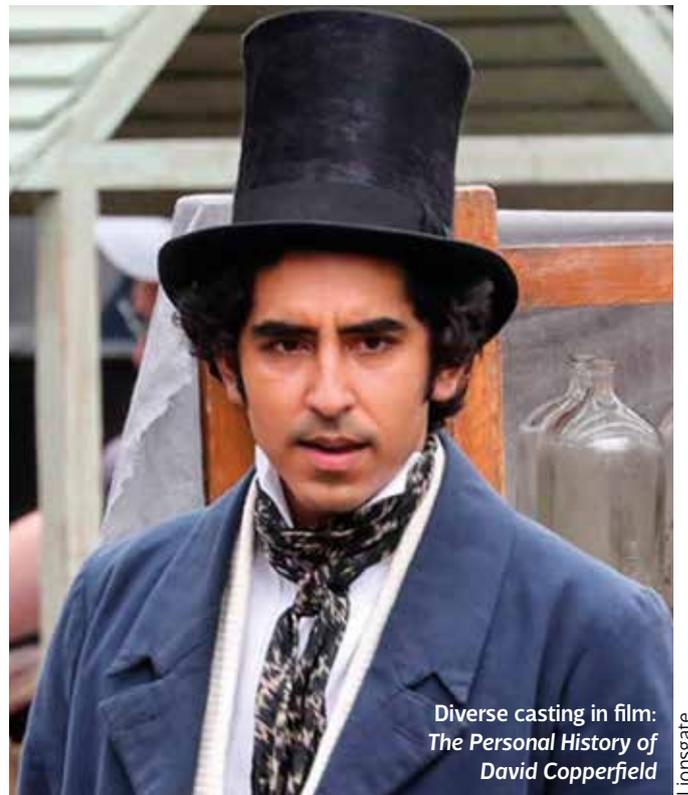
“We need to ensure we [the production community] have the best workforce. And, if you don’t have a diverse workforce, you don’t have the best workforce,” said Deborah Williams, CDN executive director.

Representatives from Scotland’s broadcasters and production companies took part in a discussion led by the performance poet and filmmaker Alison Smith, who is also access and engagement co-ordinator of the Scottish Queer International Film Festival.

RTS Scotland Committee member, Eric Joseph said: “The challenges facing the screen industry on ensuring they reflect and represent our society are complex, but can be overcome. This was a positive event with inspiring dialogue.”

A month earlier, production and post-production companies discussed diversity in the West of England.

The discussion was again led by Smith, who focused on how best to hire and



Diverse casting in film: *The Personal History of David Copperfield*

Lionsgate

retain diverse talent. CDN project manager Adam Hawley said: “It was an impressive show of intent from the production community in Bristol – expressing a real desire to improve industry

practice and do it by working together.” Findings from the series of “The network speaks” events will form the basis of a forthcoming report. **Donald Matheson and Suzy Lambert**

## RTS expands bursary scheme

■ The Society is broadening its bursary scheme in 2020, increasing opportunities for students across the UK.

Eligibility has been extended to include students taking Higher National Diplomas at level 5 or 6 in television, film production, journalism or related subjects for the Television Production and Journalism Bursary, and for relevant subjects such as computer science, engineering, maths or physics for the Technology Bursary.

This year, 40 bursaries are being offered across both

schemes, with STV matching its commitment last year and funding 10 of these bursaries. All3Media and the Steve Hewlett Memorial Fund are also contributing to the schemes.

The RTS bursary scheme has been running since 2014, and 75% of the production graduates – including Sky News camera operator/editor Dean Massey – are now working in the industry. His recent work includes covering President Trump’s impeachment and the Australian bush fires.

“It is fantastic to see great creative talent such as Dean entering the industry, and we look forward to continuing to grow our community of impressive students and graduates in 2020,” said Royal Television Society CEO Theresa Wise.

Massey said: “The RTS bursary scheme provided an invaluable opportunity to meet industry professionals and network. Without the scheme, it would have been difficult to afford to do work experience and make the contacts I have today.”

To date, the RTS bursary scheme has helped 162 students. “We continue to be extremely grateful for the support we receive from the industry through their generous funding and the individuals who offer their time as mentors,” said Wise.

STV CEO Simon Pitts added: “This scheme goes to the heart of STV’s diversity and inclusion aims to improve social mobility, encourage talent and provide real opportunities in areas where we need to reach new audiences to stay relevant.”

This year’s RTS bursary scheme is accepting applications until 30 June 2020.

**Matthew Bell**

## School kids learn about TV and film

Isle of Man Centre

RTS Isle of Man attended a careers exhibition in Ballakermeen High School, Douglas, in late January, talking to more than 40 students interested in working in television, both in front of and behind the camera.

Sam Bowers from RTS Futures and film-maker and lecturer Athena Mandis discussed the opportunities available to young people in the media industry.

Mandis teaches production and screenwriting at Queen Mary University of London.

She has made short films and documentaries, which have been screened at international film festivals.

She is currently in post-production with a documentary on the Greek diaspora of north London.

RTS East welcomed director Chloe Thomas to StoryLab in Cambridge in February.

Thomas has had a busy few years filming ITV period drama *Victoria* and *Harlots* for Hulu – as well as, more recently in Northern Ireland, Channel 5's new thriller *The Deceived*, written by Lisa McGee (*Derry Girls*).

The director discussed her career with Anglia Ruskin University senior lecturer and film-maker Hans Petch. As well as drama, she earlier worked in comedy (*Angelo's*, starring Sharon Horgan and Miranda Hart) and on the CBBC show *Horrible Histories*.

Thomas's passion for storytelling has underpinned everything. Sharp and insightful in conversation, the director discussed her enjoyment of filming large-scale dramas such as *Victoria* and working with the highly creative cinematographer Nicola Daley on the sumptuous *Harlots*, which tells the story of 18th-century sex workers in London.

She also talked about the



Harlots

Catherine Ashenden

## Thomas explains the director's art

challenges facing a new director brought on board an established series and how she has tried to make her own mark. As well as shooting TV dramas, Thomas has continued to make

innovative films, including the short *Keyed Alike*, a 360° virtual reality project produced by Alex Rühl and starring *Game of Thrones* actor Gemma Whelan.

**Shreepali Patel**

## Students meet the experts

More than 150 students from Bournemouth, Winchester and Solent universities attended the latest RTS Southern 'Meet the professionals' event in February.

Hosted at Bournemouth University and chaired by the centre's Gordon Cooper, the event boasted a panel of 15 professionals, ranging from senior executives to those at the start of their TV careers.

The latter included one recent graduate who is now a location camera operator

for Sky News and another forging a career as a production co-ordinator on large-scale dramas, including *Sanditon*.

After a panel discussion, students were able to network with and take advice from professionals working at top regional production companies such as Ricochet, Topical TV and Woodcut Media.

'It's heart-warming to hear the feedback that the event is mutually beneficial to students and professionals alike,' said RTS Southern Chair Stephanie Farmer.

'It's so rare for students to get so close to professionals in the industry. It's a joy to see them making the most of the opportunity.'

## Dublin takes to the sea

Sailor, explorer, entrepreneur and, latterly, newspaper publisher, Galwayman extraordinaire Enda O'Coineen held an RTS Republic of Ireland audience spellbound at its mid-February event.

O'Coineen took the audience through his amazing life: from rebellious school-days through adventures on the high seas to his risky rescue of an ailing news title, *The Sunday Business Post*.

He was the first Irish sailor to take part in the Vendée Globe, one of the most arduous events in sport – sailing solo around the world.

Last year, Peter Kelly



Enda O'Coineen

Enda O'Coineen

completed his documentary of this adventure, *Journey to the Edge*. O'Coineen illustrated his talk to the RTS with clips from the film.

**Agnes Cogan**

**London Centre** The BBC's new boss will face a baptism of fire, hears **Nick Radlo**

**W**hy on earth would you want to be DG?" was broadcaster

Roger Bolton's opening salvo as he took the chair of an RTS London discussion – "The future of the BBC: Notes for the next DG" – in February.

In a month that saw No 10 train its guns on the BBC, Bolton was pointing out how difficult the job has become. With Director-General Tony Hall leaving this summer, the search is on for a replacement.

There are serious issues to address for an incoming DG: the Government wants to decriminalise failure to pay the licence fee; the fallout from the BBC's decision to make over-75s not on benefits begin paying the licence fee again this year; and the decline in young people accessing BBC services.

Bolton was joined by: Alice Enders, director of research at Enders Analysis; David Elstein, former ITV, Sky and Channel 5 executive and now Chair of media platform OpenDemocracy; and Patrick Barwise, emeritus professor of management and marketing at the London Business School.

Bolton also asked what could happen under a new BBC Chair – due to be chosen by the Government in 2021 when the incumbent, Sir David Clementi, leaves.

"The new Director-General will be in post for only 12 months before s/he gets a new Chair, appointed by this Government, which will undoubtedly appoint a chair broadly in sympathy with what the Government finally decides it wants to do [with the BBC]. So what do you do



*Killing Eve: Attracted younger viewers*

BBC

and lose Radio 2' is not a good look. Make these guys realise they're playing with fire.

"Our collective task is to get the great British public to realise what is going on and what the consequences might be – and then there might be a massive backlash. They are taking a big political risk."

Elstein agreed there were different opinions within the Conservative party. Some wanted to break up the BBC because of its sheer scale; others felt it was too dominant in news or not entrepreneurial enough. But many wanted changes to the licence fee.

Barwise said new Voice of the Listener & Viewer research showed that the BBC's public funding was 25% lower than in 2010 – a £1bn shortfall, "which the BBC could have spent on investing in services for the young."

Decriminalisation of the licence fee could cost a further £200m – and if the BBC is forced to continue giving all over-75s a free TV licence, that would take a further £500m from its budget.

Barwise said it was time the BBC reviewed its funding: "Let's look at all the options – advertising, the German and Irish systems, subscription, mixed funding. The BBC should be much more confident about bringing its public in to debate the issues." ■

## 'Why would you want to be DG?'

as a new Director-General?" asked Bolton.

"You get ahead of the game! You're bold and you're brave in the one year that you have," said Enders.

"And then the new Chair comes in, disagrees entirely with what you want to do

– and you're fired," countered Bolton.

Barwise said not all Tory MPs were anti-BBC: "None of the measures suggested by 'sources at No 10' were in the manifesto. There was an immediate backlash from backbench MPs – 'Vote Tory

## The future is bigger and global

■ Journalist Nadine Dereza chaired an RTS London panel peering into the future of TV in early February. What did the experts see on the horizon?

IBC technology advisor Mark Smith predicted that 5G would boost the power of mobile networks to distribute media and entertainment content.

Deloitte media consultant Khalid Hayat forecast a future of cloud-based multi-platform,

high-speed networks, feeding a wide range of platforms and devices, with not just subscription video on demand (SVoD) but cheaper, ad-supported VoD at perhaps half the subscription rates.

Decipher's Nigel Walley argued that it was a good time to be a TV consumer. But he added that people wanted a simple way to aggregate their media choices and move

content between devices. The future will therefore belong to the bigger global tech companies who can create global platforms.

Futurologist Matthew Griffin, CEO of the 3iI Institute, spoke about how artificial intelligence, virtual reality and synthetic content could democratise production by giving everyone the tools to create content.

**Nick Radlo**

Yorkshire Centre

A bumper audience of 300-plus filled Leeds College of Music for the RTS Yorkshire Student Awards in February.

The main awards were shared around the region, with the University of Leeds winning the Comedy and Entertainment prize for Jinrun Han and David Oloko's film *Dad Joke Syndrome* and News for Katya Fowler's report on the dangers of consuming liquorice, *It Takes All Sorts*.

Leeds Art University won the Animation prize for Filipa Santos, Cara Jeal and Haraldur Pétursson's film *Not Alone*, while Sheffield Hallam University students Anastasia Shilovich, Amelia Blee and Peter Simison took Drama

## Full house welcomes film-makers in Leeds

with *Beneath My Skin*. The University of York triumphed in Factual with *The Curiosity of Edward Pratt*, made by Thomas Sandler, Oscar Godfrey and

Alex Gordon, and the Short Form award went to York St John University's Chris Healey for *Build*. University of York film *Bleed the Floor*, a comedy

short about a man with a severe case of facial bleeding, picked up two Craft Skills awards: Joe Luk for Camera-work and Thibs Lacombe for Production Design.

*BBC Look North* reporters Luxmy Gopal and Shirley Henry presented the awards, which were sponsored by Daisybeck Studios.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS Yorkshire Student Television Awards winners

**Animation** - *Not Alone* - Filipa Santos, Cara Jeal and Haraldur Pétursson, Leeds Arts University

**Comedy and Entertainment** - *Dad Joke Syndrome* - Jinrun Han and David Oloko, University of Leeds

**Drama** - *Beneath My Skin* - Anastasia Shilovich, Amelia Blee and Peter Simison, Sheffield Hallam University

**Factual** - *The Curiosity of Edward Pratt* - Thomas Sandler, Oscar Godfrey and Alex Gordon, University of York

**News** - *It Takes All Sorts* - Katya Fowler, University of Leeds

**Short Form** - *Build* - Chris Healey, York St John University

**Craft Skills - Camera** - *Bleed the Floor* - Joe Luk, University of York • **Beneath My Skin** - Amelia Blee, Sheffield Hallam University • **Elementa** - Alex Barker, York St John University

**Craft Skills - Editing** - *The Rapture and I* - Rae Thompson, Sheffield Hallam University • **The Dildo Makers** - Ina Emily Swann, University of Sheffield

**Craft Skills - Production Design** - *Bleed the Floor* - Thibs Lacombe, University of York

**Craft Skills - Sound** - *Look at the Moon* - Nik Robinson, University of Leeds

**Craft Skills - Writing** - *Cocobean* - Tanya Bittar Massally and Jack Denison, University of Leeds

## Bristol hit by Love Bugs

RTS West of England

The University of the West of England (UWE) scooped four of the five main categories at the RTS West of England Student Awards in February.

Harriett Bradbury won the Animation award for her funny, quirky film *Love Bugs*, while Pierre Niyongira's poetic journey into Senegal's rich culture, *Our City, Your Eyes*, was awarded the Short Form prize.

UWE students also won the Factual prize for *Building Bridges*, a film about the director's broken relationship with her mother, which "captivated" the judges, and the Comedy and Entertainment award for *Tipping Point*.

University of Gloucestershire students took the Drama award with *A Dead Canary*, a black-and-white fairytale about a young boy battling fantasy and reality

when he faces a tragedy in a Welsh coal mine. The judges described the film as "brilliant and heartbreaking".

The RTS centre also awarded craft awards at the ceremony, held at the Everyman Cinema in Bristol.



Harriett Bradbury won two awards for *Love Bugs*

Jon Craig

### RTS West of England Student Television Awards winners

**Animation** - *Love Bugs* - Harriett Bradbury, University of the West of England (UWE)

**Comedy and Entertainment** - *Tipping Point* - Timon Williams, Hollie Traynor, Stef De Backer and Holly Bond, UWE

**Drama** - *A Dead Canary* - James Davis, Elle Ralph, Charlotte Murphy, Rachel Neill and David Richards, University of Gloucestershire (UoG)

**Factual** - *Building Bridges* - Josephine Cressy, Guillermo Quintanilla-Pinto, Maximilian Wilson, Pierre Niyongira and Luke Denton, UWE

**Short Form** - *Our City, Your Eyes* - Pierre Niyongira, UWE

**Animation Craft Skills** - *Duty* - Annabelle Edwards-Xu, Camera, UoG • **Grit** - Matt Thomas, Sound, Production Design and Editing, UWE

**Love Bugs** - Harriett Bradbury, Writing, UWE

**Comedy and Entertainment Craft** - *Live Bait* - Rosie Sutton, Production Design; and Joana Amado Simoes, Sound, UoG • **Tipping Point** - Timon Williams, Writing, UWE

**Drama Craft Skills** - *Disco Dynamite* - Maddy Carson and Meggie Jenkins, Production Design; Jake Duncan, Camera; and Tom Voysey, Sound; UWE • **Brother** - Isabelle Soole, Camera; and Mitchell Brown, Writing; UWE • **Widow** - Gruff Jones and Harry Goldslade, Sound; Meggie Jenkins, Production Design; and Jordan Liddon, Editing; UWE • **Eris** - Valeri Lyanguzov, VFX, Bath Spa University • **Jana** - Tom Uppington and Cam Rutherford, Writing, Gloucestershire College • **A Dead Canary** - Rachel Neill, Production Design; Mitchell Ward and Thirza Alacaraz Stapleton, Sound; James Davis, Directing; James Davis, Writing; and David Richards, Editing; UoG

**Factual Craft Skills** - *Building Bridges* - Luke Denton, Sound; and Pierre Niyongira, Editing; UWE • **Sugar Coated** - Becky Barnes, Production Design, Bath Spa University • **Dressing in Drag** - Ashley Kenworthy, Camera; and Toby Spiers, Sound; UoG • **Intergalactic Empress Stah Power Girl** - Maya Belle, Camera and Jack Kelly, Sound, UoG • **Scratch** - Matt Hollis, Camera; and Gabriel Michael, Sound; UoG • **The Hive Show** - Oliver Walker and Kofi Skingley, Judges Commendation, UoG

**News Craft Skills** - *That Looks Dangerous* - Kofi Skingley, Commendation Certificate, UoG

**Short Form Craft Skills** - *Our City, Your Eyes* - Joel Douglas, Writing, UWE • **The Stage Door** - Madeleine Jo Carson, Production Design, UWE • **A Binding Oath** - Jake Duncan, Camera, UWE • **Nike Tekno Commercial** - Aleksandra Borissova, Editing, UoG • **The Burrowers** - Yaz Ellis, Camera, Screenology

Long-running CBBC drama *The Dumping Ground* pipped ITV drama *Vera* at the post to win the coveted Drama award at the RTS North East and the Border Awards in front of an audience of 400 guests in late February.

*Obsession*, made by TriHard Films, took home the Drama Short Form prize, with the film's star, Kim Tserkezie, winning the Best Drama Performance prize for her "agonisingly gripping performance" as a victim of domestic abuse.

Tees Valley Screen received the prestigious Centre Award in recognition of its sterling work in boosting the region's production presence and skills base. Recently, it brought Sam Mendes' First World War movie *1917* to film on the Tees Barrage. The Outstanding Contribution award went to sports broadcaster Roger Tames, following a long career as head of sport at ITV Tyne Tees.

Tyneside comedian Jason Cook – with the assistance of the voice of *Strictly Come Dancing*, Alan Dedicoat – hosted the ceremony at the Hilton Newcastle-Gateshead. Awards were presented by, among others, broadcasters Steph McGovern and Pam Royle, and the *Star Wars* location manager Mally Chung,



*The Dumping Ground*

BBC

## North East backs drama

who presented a trophy in memory of the media executive and former Border TV presenter John Myers, who died last year.

ITV Tyne Tees and BBC North East and Cumbria both enjoyed success on the night, with *ITV News Tyne Tees* winning the News Programme of the Year award and the BBC's Richard Moss named Presenter of the Year.

The BBC won the Current

Affairs prize for *Medomsley's Dark Secret: An Inside Out Special*, which revealed horrific abuse at the former County Durham detention centre.

The corporation's *Look North* also had reason to celebrate: Nisha Joshi won the new Sport prize; Chris Middis won the award for Editing; and reporter Emma Wass took home the Outstanding Journalism prize.

Danny Murphy, who was

born deaf, took home the Rising Star award for his role in the children's series *Mission Employable*, produced by ITV SignPost in Gateshead.

"These are such a fantastic celebration of the region's media and creative industries. The range of entries and outstanding quality demonstrate the incredible talent right here in the North East and Cumbria," said Graeme Thompson, who chaired the awards committee.

The RTS centre also presented student awards at the ceremony.

■ A few days before the awards, the centre held a masterclass at Tyneside Cinema on the role played by digital imaging technicians (DITs) in TV and film.

DITs work with directors of photography and are responsible for image quality, colour correction and managing workflow.

Presented by Caden Elliott, the event attracted an audience of students, lecturers, producers and enthusiasts.

### RTS North East and the Border Television Awards winners

**Centre Award** - *Tees Valley Screen*

**Outstanding Contribution** - *Roger Tames*

**Drama – Long Form** - *The Dumping Ground* - BBC Children's

**Drama – Short Form** - *Obsession* - Tri-Hard Films

**Acting Performance** - *Kim Tserkezie, Obsession* - Tri-Hard Films

**Comedy and Entertainment** - *We're Gannin' Oot Oot* - Roundhouse Pictures

**Broadcast Factual** - *Canny Cops* - Minnow Films

**Non-broadcast Factual** - *Irene's Ghost* - Forward Features/Tyke Films

**News Programme** - *ITV News Tyne Tees*

**Current Affairs** - *Medomsley's Dark Secret – an Inside Out Special* - BBC North East and Cumbria

**Outstanding Journalism** - *Emma Wass* - BBC North East and Cumbria

**Rising Star** - *Danny Murphy* - ITV SignPost

**Presenter of the Year** - *Richard Moss* - BBC North East and Cumbria

**Children's** - *My Life into the Sun* - MCC Media

**Sport** - *Nisha Joshi* - BBC North East and Cumbria

**Photography** - *Topher McGrillis* - Topher McGrillis Photography

**Animation Graphics and Titling** - *Ellie Land/Iain Cunningham* - Forward Features

**Editing** - *Chris Middis* - BBC NE and Cumbria

**Commercial** - *Watch This* - University of Sunderland

**Student Animation** - *Magnum O'Pup* - Teesside University

**Student Comedy and Entertainment** - *72* - University of Sunderland

**Student Drama** - *Quite by Chance* - University of Sunderland

**Student Factual** - *Two Monkeys* - University of Sunderland

**Student Short Form** - *Things We Wish We Could Say* - Teesside University

**Craft Skills – Camera** - *72* - Tee Tze Hou, University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills – Editing** - *Freedom* - Lukas Slapsys, University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills – Production Design** - *Quite by Chance* - Amy Murphy and Jerome Wardle, University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills – Sound** - *Beeboop* - Andreea Rosu, Alise Goldwater, Asya Alkooheji, Daniel Lucas and Dan Glass, Teesside University

**Craft Skills – Writing** - *Stake Out* - Chris Yarwood, Northumbria University

# Spare Parts bags Glasgow double

Scotland Centre

The University of Edinburgh took home four awards from the RTS Scotland Student Television Awards in early February.

Students from the university scooped the Animation award for *Margin of Terror* and the Comedy and Entertainment prize for *Flit*.

*The Lost Sock* won the Production Design award for Molly Simmons and the Sound prize for RTS bursary student Laura Wiggett.

*Spare Parts*, written by Paul Barrie, gave the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland two wins, in the Drama and Writing categories.

The ceremony was held at



The film-makers behind *Spare Parts*

Ben Gallacher

the Everyman Cinema, Glasgow, and was hosted by STV entertainment reporter Laura Boyd.

“Our industry depends upon the development of young people, their skill growing with their confidence, under the guidance of their tutors and mentors,” said awards Chair James Wilson. He added that this year’s films were “as strong as ever, and decisions were long argued and often very close”.

“Scotland is brimming with exciting creative talent,” said Simon Pitts, Chief Executive of STV, which sponsored the awards. “STV will be offering mentoring to the winners as they start their journey in this exciting and vibrant industry.”

Each of the nominated and winning films, plus highlights of the RTS Scotland Student Television Awards ceremony, are available on the STV Player (<https://player.stv.tv/summary/rts-student>).

**Matthew Bell**

## RTS Scotland Student Television Awards winners

**Animation** - *Margin of Terror* - Kieran McLister, University of Edinburgh

**Comedy and Entertainment** - *Flit* - Jack Allen, Elias Nader, Ina Morken, Laurence Jenkins and Carey Melanie Osborne, University of Edinburgh

**Drama** - *Spare Parts* - Paul Barrie, Victoria Jones, Martin MacLeod, Elettra Arnell,

Karo Pietilä, Astrid Hjerminnd and Ana Meljo, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

**Factual** - *Grime Scheme Scotland* - Daniel Greig, Julian Greenwood, Lawrence Hector, Neil Cunninghame, Jack Darer and Kieran Colquhoun, University of the West of Scotland

**Short Form** - *Tom Urie: Mental Health and Depression* - Cameron Thom, Ryan Price, Emma Cunningham, City of Glasgow College

**Craft Skills - Camera** - *Adam and the*

*Alphas* - Murray Leitch, University of Stirling

**Craft Skills - Editing** - *My Urban Fox Film* - Mikey Sneddon, Edinburgh Napier University

**Craft Skills - Production Design** - *The Lost Sock* - Molly Simmons, University of Edinburgh

**Craft Skills - Sound** - *The Lost Sock* - Laura Wiggett, University of Edinburgh

**Craft Skills - Writing** - *Spare Parts* - Paul Barrie, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

# Salford University enjoys hometown triumph

North West Centre

The University of Salford enjoyed a successful night at the RTS North West Student Television Awards in February, winning the Comedy and Entertainment, Drama, Factual and News categories.

Manchester Metropolitan University students took home the Animation prize with *Luz* and the University of Central Lancashire’s Jamie Walsh won the Short Form award with *Tia*.

*BBC Breakfast* presenter Sally Nugent presented the awards, which were held at the Lowry

Theatre in Salford. The special guest was former *Coronation Street* actor and co-star of new BBC One sitcom, *Scarborough*, Catherine Tyldesley.

Earlier in the day, RTS North West held its annual Student Media Conference at the Lowry Theatre.

The afternoon’s programme included a session with Lime Pictures’ *Hollyoaks* digital team, who explained how they use social platforms to drive engagement and build audiences.

Tania Basile, lead talent manager at BBC Children’s

and Education, offered advice on landing a job in television. At the end of the conference, there was a

networking session with TV industry professionals from across the North West region.

**Matthew Bell**

## RTS North West Student Television Awards winners

**Animation** - *Luz* - Maria Samaniego, Sasha Gallagher, Robert Lallement, Ollie Jones, Remi Rabillat and Tristan Pike, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Comedy and Entertainment** - *Upcycle It!* - Molly O'Donnell, University of Salford

**Drama** - *Fantopia* - Owen Siry, Aaron Smyth Wallace, Charlie Brookes, Lewis Evers, Sam Davies and Harriet Buckley, University of Salford

**Factual** - *Farm or Flight* - Dillon James, University of Salford

**News** - *A Roof Over Our Heads* - Pien

Meulenstein, University of Salford

**Short Form** - *Tia* - Jamie Walsh, University of Central Lancashire

**Craft Skills - Camera** - *Dead of Night* - Victoria Barrera Howarth, University of Salford

**Craft Skills - Editing** - *Penitence* - Joe Preston, Edge Hill University

**Craft Skills - Production Design** - *Zero Lives Left* - Rebecca Turner, Manchester Film School

**Craft Skills - Sound** - *Zero Lives Left* - Lorena Diaz Negrin, Manchester Film School

**Craft Skills - Writing** - *The Redefinition of Us* - Thandie Ndlovu, University of Bolton

Manchester Metropolitan University

RTS Cymru  
Wales

*In My Skin* won the new award for Best Drama at a sold-out RTS Cymru Wales Awards in late February.

The critically well-received standalone comedy-drama, based on writer Kayleigh Llewellyn's experiences of growing up in Cardiff and made by Expectation Entertainment, is returning for a four-part BBC Three series.

This year the industry categories were increased from two to five at the awards, allowing broadcasters and independent producers – who filled the venue, Cardiff's Cineworld – to submit entries.

ITV Cymru Wales programmes won two awards: *Code Blue*, which followed the work of a specialist crime unit, took the Factual award; and *Y Byd ar Bedwar* won the News and Current Affairs for its investigation on S4C into child abuse on Caldey Island, South Wales.

The judges praised *Y Byd ar Bedwar* as a “compelling and moving account of one man’s traumatic memory of being sexually abused... sensitively told, and presented with great empathy”.



## Wales expands awards

The Children's award went to Yeti Television for its CBBC programme *Going for Gold*, which followed the progress of two extraordinary young athletes.

Director Toby Cameron from Cardiff indie On-Par Productions received the Breakthrough award.

Cameron's documentary about the Tiger Bay Brawlers roller derby team, *Hell on Wheels*, came out of the BBC Cymru Wales New Directors Scheme and aired on BBC One Wales last year. The judges said it combined “polished storytelling and technical expertise... capturing frantic roller-skate action, spirited characters and touching personal interviews”.

“It's been a real privilege to celebrate the incredible talent here in Wales with these new industry awards,” said RTS Cymru Wales Chair Judith Winnan.

The awards, held in partnership with Whisper Cymru, were hosted by the television presenters Ruth

Wignall from ITV Cymru Wales and *Countryfile*'s Sean Fletcher.

RTS Cymru Wales also gave awards in four student categories. The University of South Wales won the Drama and Short Form prizes, while the Factual award went to Aberystwyth University and the Postgraduate prize to Bangor University.

“The standard of what we've seen tonight from students and the industry is just thrilling, and I very much hope we can grow these awards further with other industry categories to recognise more of the exciting work coming out of Wales,” said Winnan.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS Cymru Wales Television Awards winners

**Industry Award – Drama** - *In My Skin* - Expectation Entertainment for BBC Cymru Wales

**Industry Award – Factual** - *Code Blue* - MultiStory Cymru/ITV Wales for ITV

**Industry Award – Children's** - *Going for Gold* - Yeti Television for CBBC

**Industry Award – News and Current Affairs** - *Y Byd ar Bedwar* - Caldey

**Island Report** - ITV Cymru Wales for S4C  
**Industry Award – Breakthrough** - Toby Cameron

**Student – Drama** - *D.O.A.L (Department of Affordable Living)* - University of South Wales

**Student – Factual** - *Rutted Fields* - Aberystwyth University

**Student – Short Form** - *Stranded* - University of South Wales

**Student – Postgraduate** - *Searching for Happiness* - Bangor University



# NEWS



ITV

## Police pair make a splash in Bath

McDonald & Dodds

RTS West of England

“What would happen if you took two people who would not talk to each other on the street and threw them together?”

This was the premise for new ITV detective drama *McDonald & Dodds*, according to its creator, Robert Murphy. He was talking after an exclusive RTS West of England screening of the show in Bath at the end of February.

The series pairs Jason Watkins as the diffident Bath-born-and-bred DS Dodds and his ambitious boss, DCI McDonald, who has transferred from south London to further her career. She is played by Tala Gouveia.

“It was always going to be Bath. Cop shows are often set in stations. It was important for Dodds, as a different kind

of cop, to be out in the field,” said Murphy, who wrote both feature-length episodes, which aired on ITV in March.

“You want to root the thing in the place where you’re setting it, and Bath’s architecture feels like a world apart. It reflects the puzzles the detectives face in the show,” added the writer, who has also penned episodes of *Shetland* and *DCI Banks*.

Watkins, who recently played Prime Minister Harold Wilson in *The Crown*, used an accent coach to prepare for the part.

“Characters are amalgamations of people you know. I knew very quickly who he was. I relished the opportunity to play this guy who doesn’t speak very loudly, but you never quite know

where he is or what’s going to happen next,” he said.

Discussing Watkins’ co-star, Tala Gouveia, executive producer Damien Timmer said: “McDonald needed strength and funny bones. Tala had both that poise and the comedy.”

Turning to the long-term plans for the show, Timmer, a co-founder of Mammoth Screen, which made the series, said: “The thought was always that there would be legs for it. How many legs, we do not yet know.”

The event was chaired by Fiona Francombe, studio director of The Bottle Yard Studios in Bristol.

*McDonald & Dodds* was filmed at the studios and on location in the West Country. **Sophie Dymond**

## National events

### RTS AWARDS

Tuesday 17 March

#### RTS Programme Awards 2020

In partnership with Audio Network

Venue: Grosvenor House Hotel, London W1K 7TN

### RTS/WILDSCREEN JOINT EVENT

Tuesday 31 March

#### Natural history event

Venue: TBC (central London)

### RTS AWARDS

Friday 26 June

#### RTS Student Television Awards 2020

Sponsored by Motion Content Group

Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT

### RTS CONFERENCE

Tuesday 15 September

#### RTS London Conference 2020

Principal sponsor YouTube

Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT

### RTS LECTURE

Wednesday 23 September

#### RTS Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture 2020 by Emily Maitlis

Journalist, presenter and author Emily Maitlis will deliver this year’s Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture. The net proceeds from the event will go to the Steve Hewlett Scholarship Fund, which provides financial assistance to journalism and TV production students from low-income backgrounds. Post-lecture drinks reception sponsored by BBC Studios. 6:00pm for 6:30pm

Venue: The University of Westminster, 4-12 Little Titchfield Street, London W1W 7BY

# RTS EVENTS

Your guide to  
upcoming events.  
Book online at  
[www.rts.org.uk](http://www.rts.org.uk)

## Local events

### DEVON AND CORNWALL

**Wednesday 25 March**

#### RTS Devon and Cornwall Student Television Awards 2020

Drinks reception 6:00pm;  
awards presentation 6:30pm  
Venue: Jill Craigie Cinema, Uni-  
versity of Plymouth, Drake Circus,  
Plymouth PL4 8AA

■ Jane Hudson  
■ [RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk)

### EAST

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585  
■ [RTSEast@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSEast@rts.org.uk)

### ISLE OF MAN

■ Michael Wilson  
■ [michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org](mailto:michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org)

### LONDON

**Wednesday 18 March**

#### RTS London Student Television Awards 2020

Hosted by Sabrina Grant. 6:30pm  
for 7:00pm  
Venue: Channel 4, 126 Horseferry  
Road, London SW1P 2TX

**Wednesday 1 April**

#### How to survive in streaming

6:30 for 7:00pm  
Venue: Deloitte, 2 New Street  
Square, London EC4A 3BZ  
■ Phil Barnes  
■ [rts@philipbarnes.com](mailto:rts@philipbarnes.com)

### MIDLANDS

**Thursday 19 March**

#### RTS Midlands Student Television Awards 2020

Drinks reception 6:30pm;  
awards presentation 7:30pm  
Venue: BBC Birmingham, The  
Mailbox, Birmingham B1 1AY

**Wednesday 25 March**

#### Independent production company drop-in day

Refreshments provided  
Venue: Gas Street Social, The  
Mailbox, Wharfside Street,  
Birmingham B1 1RL

**Thursday 15 October**

#### RTS Midlands careers fair

Venue: Edgbaston Stadium,  
Birmingham B5 7QU

**Friday 27 November**

#### RTS Midlands Awards 2020

Venue: The International  
Convention Centre, Centenary  
Square, Birmingham B1 2EA

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585  
■ [RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk)

### NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

■ Joanna Makepeace  
■ [joanna.makepeace@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:joanna.makepeace@sunderland.ac.uk)

### NORTH WEST

**Thursday 26 March**

#### RTS North West Great Big Telly Quiz 2020

Featuring our fantastic  
accordionist George. Cost: £10  
per team of four to six, but free  
to RTS members. Sponsored by  
Dock 10. 6:30pm

Venue: Lowry Theatre, Salford  
Quays, MediaCity UK, Salford  
M50 3AH  
■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639  
■ [RPinkney@rts.org.uk](mailto:RPinkney@rts.org.uk)

### NORTHERN IRELAND

**Tuesday 24 March**

#### RTS NI Student Awards 2020

6:30pm for 7:00pm  
Venue: Black Box, Hill Street,  
Belfast BT1 2LA  
■ John Mitchell  
■ [mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com](mailto:mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com)

### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092  
■ [byrne.cd@iol.ie](mailto:byrne.cd@iol.ie)

### SCOTLAND

**Wednesday 6 May**

#### RTS Scotland Television Awards 2020 nominees party

6:00pm  
Venue: Glasgow Art Club,  
185 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4HU



**Wednesday 3 June 2020**

#### RTS Scotland Television Awards 2020

Presented by Karen Dunbar.  
Drinks reception 5:45pm;  
awards ceremony 7:00pm  
Venue: The Old Fruitmarket,  
87-101 Albion Street, Glasgow  
G1 1NQ

■ Cheryl Strong  
■ [RTSScotland@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSScotland@rts.org.uk)

### SOUTHERN

**Thursday 26 March**

#### Freelancers' fair TBC

Venue: The Vestry, 61 Commercial  
Road, Southampton SO15 1GG

**Thursday 26 March**

#### Working in journalism

Venue: Solent University (TBC)  
■ Stephanie Farmer  
■ [SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk)

### THAMES VALLEY

■ Tony Orme  
■ [RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk)

### WALES

■ Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841  
■ [HWiliam@rts.org.uk](mailto:HWiliam@rts.org.uk)

### WEST OF ENGLAND

**Sunday 29 March**

#### RTS West of England Awards 2020

Hosted by comedian, screen-  
writer and podcaster Deborah  
Frances-White and writer  
and actor Susan Wokoma.

Tickets £53 (£43 for RTS  
members) from the Bristol  
Old Vic Box Office on 0117 987  
7877. Nominee and VIP drinks  
reception from 6:30pm; general  
drinks reception from 7:00pm;  
ceremony from 8:00pm. DJ and  
bar until late.

Venue: Bristol Old Vic, King  
Street, Bristol BS1 4ED

■ Suzy Lambert  
■ [suzy.lambert@rts.org.uk](mailto:suzy.lambert@rts.org.uk)

### YORKSHIRE

**Wednesday 18 March**

#### Speed date your way into news and current affairs

A chance to pick the brains of  
some of the region's leading  
news and current affairs  
professionals for their advice  
and tips. Representatives from  
ITV Calendar, BBC Look North,  
and Channel 4 News plus  
award-winning independent  
producers such as True Vision  
Yorkshire, True North, and  
Screenhouse Productions.  
3:00pm-5:00pm

Venue: Left Bank Leeds,  
Cardigan Road, Leeds LS6 1LJ

**Friday 26 June**

#### RTS Yorkshire Awards 2020

Venue: The Queens Hotel, City  
Square, Leeds LS1 1PJ

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280  
■ [lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk](mailto:lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk)

# OFF MESSAGE

**N**ewsnight, by common consent on a roll since Sky's Esme Wren took the helm, had a great night at the RTS Television Journalism Awards, winning in four categories. Emily Maitlis's sensational and seminal Prince Andrew interview won Scoop of the Year and Interview of the Year. In the keenly contested category for Daily News Programme of the Year, competing against ITV's must-watch *News at Ten* and the BBC equivalent, the BBC Two current-affairs flagship triumphed.

Congratulations all round. Also, good to see the brilliant *Newsnight* reporter Gabriel Gatehouse nominated for Television Journalist of the Year.

■ No surprise, perhaps, that Sky News was voted News Channel of the Year – for the 14th time! That man John Ryley's sure touch shows no sign of waning despite this year being a tough one for him personally.

It has become something of an RTS Television Journalism Awards tradition for Ryley's gang to mob the stage. This year was no exception, as around 30 of Sky News's finest joined their editor to celebrate on the podium.

Imagine if each one of them had given a speech – we'd all have been there until breakfast.

■ It was a good night, too, for CNN. Not for the first time, the peerless Nima Elbagir walked away with an RTS trophy, this time for Television Journalist of the Year.

If you missed our cover story on Elbagir four years ago, when she won in the Specialist Journalist category, do check it out on the RTS website.

CNN chief international anchor Christiane Amanpour was presented with the Outstanding Contribution award for her “unparalleled contribution to broadcast journalism” and for being “a committed campaigner for media freedom and the safety of journalists”.

Accepting her award, the experienced Amanpour warned against political leaders' attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the press.

And congratulations, too, to Waad al-Kateab, the co-director of *For Sama*, which bagged yet another trophy following its recent Oscar nomination, this time in the Current Affairs – International category.

■ With Maitlis, Elbagir, and al-Kateab all winning, these awards were a milestone night for women journalists. The BBC's political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, emphasised this point as she accepted the Judges' Award, which was given collectively to all the main broadcasters' political teams.

The likes of Kuenssberg, ITV's Robert Peston and Sky's Beth Rigby worked around the clock during the past year to help us all make sense of the complexities of Brexit and December's tense general election.

“TV is magical, it's special. Political journalism matters so much,” underlined Kuenssberg. She saluted the many brave women whose work was celebrated at these awards, and pointed out the difference between

now and the first RTS awards she attended, back in 2001, in Newcastle, when men dominated the winners' lists.

■ Talking of which, Off Message was thrilled to see that this year's Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecturer will be none other than – yes, you guessed right – Emily Maitlis. As we know, Steve was a regular media commentator on *Newsnight*, so getting the programme's lead presenter to give a lecture in his honour makes perfect sense. One wonders how he would have commented on the current challenges faced by the BBC.

■ And, finally, Off Message makes no apologies for plugging this month's cover story, James Graham's reboot of his stage play *Quiz* for ITV.

The three-part adaptation is another triumph for head of drama Polly Hill, riding high after the success of the expertly cast *Flesh and Blood* and the thrilling *White House Farm*.

It was good to see James at the Journalism Awards. Back at his desk, he is developing several original dramas for TV. These include a series set in the Nottinghamshire village where he was brought up.

The project is inspired by a real-life story, but contains fictionalised characters. He's also working on a couple of ideas for TV based in the real world of Westminster politics, familiar terrain for him.

One of these is set in the fractious House of Commons during the last days of Theresa May's regime.

No shortage of drama, there, then.



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# RTS PROGRAMME AWARDS 2020

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