

May 2019

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From the CEO



Two powerful RTS events – in London and Bristol – show how the influence of television can be harnessed to alert people to the dangers of climate change and the need for conservation.

Our cover story is devoted to Netflix's first natural history series, *Our Planet*, which is narrated by the great Sir David Attenborough.

Steve Clarke also discovers how this inspiring series is using an innovative social media campaign to promote a sustainable future for the Earth.

We talk to three talented British

writers in this month's issue – Russell T Davies, Sally Wainwright and Stefan Golaszewski – whose work returns to television this month.

Russell brings us the dystopian drama *Years and Years*; Sally, a tale of Victorian sexual rebellion in *Gentleman Jack*; and Stefan offers viewers another chunk – sadly the final one – of his RTS award-winning comedy, *Mum*.

News and current affairs are also a big part of this month's mix. Andrew Billen talks to Sky's new political editor Beth Rigby, whose no-nonsense approach is proving highly effective, while Channel 4's Dorothy Byrne offers some trenchant thoughts on the

benefits of increasing workplace diversity in her genre.

We report on Dave's new laugh-out-loud comedy about south London pizza delivery drivers, *Sliced*, which brings the hugely talented Samson Kayo back to our screens – this time as both actor and writer.

Finally, Tara Conlan considers the prospects for Dave and the other UKTV channels in the wake of the BBC buying out Discovery's share of their joint venture.

Theresa Wise

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Cover: Netflix

National events

RTS AGM

Tuesday 25 June

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

RTS AWARDS

Friday 28 June

RTS Student Television Awards 2019

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

RTS CAMBRIDGE CONVENTION 2019

18-20 September

Content, consumers and everything in between

Principal sponsor: ITV. Confirmed speakers include: Jeremy Darroch, CEO, Sky; Tony Hall, Director-General, BBC; Alex Mahon, CEO, Channel 4; Sharon White, CEO, Ofcom; Rt Hon Jeremy Wright MP, Secretary of State, DCMS; and David Zaslav, President and CEO, Discovery. Chaired by Carolyn McCall, CEO, ITV.
Venue: King's College CB2 1ST

STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2019

Tuesday 24 September

Speaker Mark Thompson

Mark Thompson is President and CEO of the New York Times, and a former Director-General of the BBC. Post-lecture drinks reception sponsored by BBC Studios. 6:00pm for 6:30pm
Venue: University of Westminster, London W1W 7BY

RTS MASTERCLASSES

Tuesday 5 November and

Wednesday 6 November

RTS Student Masterclasses

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

RTS AWARDS

Monday 25 November

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2019

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

Local events

DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson

■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

■ Jayne Greene

■ rtseast@rts.org.uk

ISLE OF MAN

■ Michael Wilson

■ michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org

LONDON

Wednesday 5 June

Summer quiz 2019

Hosted by Harriet Brain. Build a team of up to eight people. 6:30pm for 7:00pm
Venue: TBC

Wednesday 4 December

Christmas Lecture: David Abraham

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Cavendish Conference Centre, 22 Duchess Mews, London W1G 9DT

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Thursday 6 June

From Birmingham to Hollywood: In conversation with David Harewood

In conversation with Samantha Meah. David will talk about growing up in Birmingham, his career over the past 30 years and his BBC documentary *David Harewood: My Psychosis and Me*. Sponsored by Film Birmingham. Media partner: BBC WM. 6:45pm for 7:00pm

Venue: The Banqueting Suite, The Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

Monday 7 October

RTS Midlands Careers Fair

Venue: TBC

Friday 29 November

RTS Midlands Awards 2019

Venue: ICC, Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2EA

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

Tuesday 28 May

AGM

6:00pm

Venue: Digital Lounge, The Tyneside Cinema, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6QG

■ Jill Graham

■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

Wednesday 19 June

Judge Rinder

More details TBA

Venue: Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ

Thursday 26 September

Awards launch party

Details TBA

Venue: Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ RPinkney@rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ John Mitchell

■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ byrne@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

Wednesday 12 June

RTS Scotland Television Awards 2019

Hosted by STV presenter Jennifer Reoch and comedian Des Clarke. From 5:45pm. Ceremony starts 7:15pm

Venue: The Old Fruitmarket, Candleriggs, Glasgow G1 1NQ

■ April Chamberlain

■ scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

■ Stephanie Farmer

■ SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

Wednesday 12 June

Advances in compression

Seminar presentation by V-Nova Book to reserve a place.

6:30pm-9:00pm

Venue: V-Nova, 1 Sheldon Square, London W2 6TT

■ Tony Orme

■ RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

WALES

Thursday 6 June

Beyond tokenism – Cardiff

Joint event with the Creative Diversity Network and RTS Wales. If you wish to attend, please respond to: projects@creativediversitynetwork.com. 2:30pm-5:00pm

Venue: Chapter Arts Centre, Market Road, Cardiff CF5 1QE

■ Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841

■ HWiliam@rts.org.uk

WEST OF ENGLAND

Monday 3 June

Last Breath screening and Q&A

Joint event with The Farm.

Speakers: Alex Parkinson, director, producer, writer, DoP; Richard de Costa, producer, director; and Sam Rogers, editor. Hosted by Kate Beetham, Plimsoll Productions. 6:00pm for 6:10pm

Venue: Everyman, 44 Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2NH

Tuesday 2 July

AGM

Venue TBC

■ Belinda Biggam

■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

YORKSHIRE

Friday 14 June

RTS Yorkshire Centre Awards

Deadline for booking: noon

31 May. 6:45pm-12:30am

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

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

■ lisa@allnewwordproductions.co.uk

TV diary

Graeme Thompson takes a tour of *Game of Thrones* locations in Northern Ireland – and becomes Westeros's latest victim

To Belfast for the weekend, staying at a *Titanic*-themed hotel next door to the studios where HBO films *Game of Thrones*. The charred battlements visible above the lot are a clue to how the final episodes play out.

Over eight seasons, *Game of Thrones* has spent more than €320m in Northern Ireland. In addition to the *Titanic* Studios, there's another studio in Belfast Harbour filming a *Superman* spin-off.

Millions more pour in to the local economy thanks to tourism. We find the lure of the *Game of Thrones* location tour irresistible. Our gossipy coach driver regales us with insights into the filming and helpfully screens the locations to be visited as they appear in the show.

■ We're dropping in on about a dozen of the more than 60 locations used by the franchise over 10 years. Lots of them are on the majestic Antrim coastline, as it stretches towards the Giant's Causeway.

These places are the backdrop to unspeakable acts of on-screen violence. We creep into the caves at Cushendun, where Melisandre gave eye-watering birth to the shadow monster and peer down into the harbour at Carnlough, where Arya crawled out of its freezing depths after a vicious stabbing.

In keeping with the theme, I endure an ungainly fall on our way down a cliff en route to Dragonstone in heavy rain and hobble back to the

coach, having painfully twisted my knee. Westeros has claimed another casualty.

■ To London to chair the RTS Education Committee. We have a lovely group of enthusiastically engaged colleagues from production companies and broadcasters.

We spend the first few minutes hearing some of the many success stories of graduates who've completed their degrees with support from our bursaries. Kyle's now at *A Question of Sport*, Adam's at *The Garden* and Maxine has joined Moonage Pictures.

Florence, another of our bursary scheme graduates, has joined our committee and talks of her new job as a script editor at Lime Pictures in Liverpool. Being an RTS bursary student has, in her words, been life-changing.

■ The scheme is aimed at students from households with an income of less than £25,000, usually from areas underrepresented in the TV business. Thanks to supporters such as All3-Media and STV, we will be meeting in August to select another 35 recipients of our production and broadcast journalism bursaries and our technical bursaries.

It's not just about the financial support: each student gets an industry mentor and help in securing placements. Our energetic co-ordinator, Anne Dawson, is trying to source low-cost accommodation for students coming to London to do their placements.

It's a real blocker for many students.

The BBC's move to Salford and Channel 4's commitment to Leeds is good news for career prospects beyond the capital. But it is still the case that the majority of work-experience opportunities are in London. Which might as well as be another country for many of our students.

■ Back in Sunderland, I am sitting in on a session with seven students who are being mentored by legendary film producer David Puttnam.

Lord Puttnam was Chancellor of the university for a decade and has maintained close ties. Today, he is in his studio in the West of Ireland talking to the group via a broadcast video link.

He leads the Puttnam Scholars through a lively discussion about climate change, the politics of protest, Brexit, the music of Ennio Morricone and the work of Ridley Scott.

The mentoring is done individually and with the group over a period of five months. Sessions have included a discourse on the power of music in storytelling. There's been a memorable tea in the House of Lords.

The scholars are making a film, which David will see when he visits the campus in June. Their theme is kindness and compassion in a post-Brexit Britain. "My generation has made such a hash of things," he tells them. "You have to do better."

Graeme Thompson is pro vice-chancellor at the University of Sunderland and Chair of the RTS Education Committee.

■ For more on the production legacy of *Game of Thrones*, see page 21.

Netflix's first natural history series, narrated by David Attenborough, impresses Steve Clarke



Netflix

Global ambitions

Shocking scenes of walruses jammed together “out of desperation” on an ice-depleted beach, a consequence of climate change, have emerged as the defining image of Netflix’s high-profile natural history documentary, *Our Planet*.

The series is narrated by Sir David Attenborough, and he launched the programme at Davos, where he was interviewed by the Duke of Cambridge before an audience of global decision-makers. “We are now so numerous and so powerful that we can destroy whole ecosystems without even noticing it,” said Attenborough.

A subsequent glitzy London premiere at the Natural History Museum was attended by HRH Prince Charles, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke of Sussex, David Beckham and singer Ellie Goulding.

The landmark series started streaming on 5 April, and was recently

revealed as Netflix’s most popular show in the UK that month, ahead of such youth-friendly dramas as *The Perfect Date* and *Riverdale*.

The walruses sequence was described as “the most powerful I’ve ever shot” by award-winning natural history cinematographer Jamie McPherson. He was speaking at a joint RTS and Wildscreen event in which the episode featuring the walruses, *Frozen Worlds*, was screened.

“The sequence has become a symbol of climate change,” added Keith Scholey, series producer of the eight-part *Our Planet*, which involved filming 3,500 hours of material in 50 countries with more than 600 crew members. “There is shock but also the revelation that everyone thinks we’ve got to do something about it.”

With the impact of London’s Extinction Rebellion protesters still reverberating – hours before the RTS screening, demonstrators had glued themselves to the London Stock Exchange – the

timing of the event could not have been more appropriate.

Scholey, one of the world’s most experienced wildlife film-makers, told a crowded auditorium how he had reacted on first seeing the rushes of the stranded walruses, which was filmed in north-east Russia.

“There’s a palpable excitement when you know you’ve filmed something that is important,” he said. “I was shell shocked when I first saw it. I am still shell shocked.”

Around 100,000 of the creatures that once survived happily on the Russian ice are seen densely packed together on a shingle beach. Russian biologist Anatoly Kochnev had alerted the film-makers to the walruses’ plight.

Viewers then see some of the walruses trapped on top of an 80-metre cliff. A few manage to work out how to get safety back down to the shore. The majority end up killing themselves as they tumble down the cliff.

“It’s tragic, heart-breaking and

shocking," said Sophie Lanfear, producer of *Frozen Worlds*,

She prepared for the episode by watching every documentary about the natural history of the North Pole and Antarctica that she could get her hands on: "We're all so passionate about conservation. It was my first film. I've done a lot of work at the Poles.... After watching all these documentaries, I realised that the important message of our time was to differentiate between sea ice and land ice."

The first section of *Frozen Worlds* explains how sea ice works and its vital role in supporting an abundance of life. With sea ice disappearing rapidly due to climate change, the impact is not restricted to walruses and polar bears, but extends to the entire planetary ecosystem.

"These frozen worlds, these ice worlds, are protecting us from climate change," said Lanfear. "If we lose those, we stand to lose not just these magnificent animals but a lot more. That was the narrative I wanted to tell."

In another sequence, we learn how krill stocks are declining in the polar regions, which is likely to have severe consequences for the humpback whales that feed on them.

Our Planet, in common with Attenborough's recent BBC One film, *Climate Change – the Facts*, pulls no punches on the climate crisis – but it also sets out to wrap its ecological message in an entertaining production.

Four years in the making, including two years of shooting, Scholey was determined that *Our Planet* should not mince its words about the environmental crisis. He and his one-time colleague at the BBC Natural History Unit, Alastair Fothergill, set up Silverback Films in 2012.

"We always wanted to make another big landmark show (among the duo's credits are *Blue Planet* and *Planet Earth*), but we were so aware of the destruction of nature that we thought it was inappropriate to make one that didn't tackle the issues of our modern world head on," said Scholey. "If we were going to tackle the environmental issues we needed to make sure we had our facts right, so from the word go we teamed up with the World Wildlife Fund.

"Every two years, it does the *Living Planet Report* – basically an audit of what's going on in the world. That formed the factual spine of what became *Our Planet*."

The series is complemented by an



remarkable that overnight you can broadcast to nearly all the countries in the world. It's been fascinating....

"With normal TV, the launch is everything but Netflix is quite relaxed about the launch. Its attitude is: 'We'll have a look at it after a month but we'll really judge something after six months.'

Securing the services of Attenborough was a coup for the streamer. As Scholey observed: "When David started out, you had to broadcast live, there was not even tape. He'd be seen by about 20,000 people in Surrey; now, he's going to an audience of hundreds of millions globally."

The great man has always been intrigued by advances in broadcast technology. He worked with Sky because it provided an opportunity to present programmes produced in 3D. Similarly, Sir David was keen to narrate *Our Planet* thanks to its high technical specification.

"He was excited by the fact that this is, I think, the first series available in 4K and high dynamic range," said Scholey. "High dynamic range is the interesting bit. The range of colours is spellbinding."

Having been a natural history filmmaker for more than 30 years, Scholey is well aware that flying around the world to capture astonishing pictures comes at a cost to the environment that he and his colleagues passionately want to protect.

Silverback Films is affiliated to the Albert environmental production certification scheme. It aims to ensure that all UK screen content is made in a way "that benefits individuals, industry organisations and the planet."

The production team was mindful of its environment impact. "We offset our carbon," Scholey said. "We try to do what is right. At the end of the day, the equation we have to consider is: 'Is the environmental cost of making the film worth bringing the story back?'

"On that basis, I am happy with what we've done but it is a judgement call.

"There is no doubt that film-making is an expensive business that comes at a cost to the environment." ■

The Our Planet screening and Q&A was held at 30 Euston Square, London, on 25 April. The discussion was moderated by Lynn Barlow, RTS West of England Chair. The producers were Wildscreen director Lucie Muir, Festival co-ordinator Molly Gibney and the RTS's Jamie O'Neill.

Cutting-edge conservation

Our Planet 2

Steve Clarke learns how the documentary's social media campaign aims to change hearts and minds



Is social media the environmentalist movement's secret weapon? Could it put us all on the path to a pollution-free, sustainable future in which biodiversity thrives and climate change is pegged back?

It sounds like an eco-warrior manifesto penned by the remarkable Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg. But this is, in a nutshell, the ambitious hope driving an extensive portfolio of shareable, bespoke films made for digital distribution. They have been created by Silverback Films to accompany its landmark, eight-part Netflix natural history series, *Our Planet*, narrated by Sir David Attenborough.

The so-called "social media halo" was devised by Silverback and its partner on the documentary, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Promoting *Our*

Planet earlier this year, Silverback co-founder Alastair Fothergill explained: "This series was always going to go a step further than traditional blue-chip series had gone. Some episodes go very far. The *Coastal Seas* episode shows humanity causing problems – and provides solutions – but other episodes do less of that. The halo was always going to do the heavy lifting."

By exploiting the power of the internet, this content could eventually be watched by 1 billion people worldwide. This ambition puts the live TV audience for the England vs Croatia World Cup semi-final last year – 26.5 million people – in context, let alone that for *Line of Duty*.

The films are being translated into French, Spanish, German and Portuguese, with the WWF's network

officers in other countries given the opportunity to translate them into their own languages.

A packed RTS audience in Bristol got a taste of what *Our Planet*'s social media halo will look like as it propagates across Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

"The whole campaign is about building momentum," explained Amy Anderson, WWF producer/director and one of the evening's three panellists.

The West Country capital is synonymous with wildlife television thanks to the presence of the BBC's Natural History Unit. But it's a racing certainty that nothing quite like this has been made by Bristol's production community before.

Event host and RTS West of England Chair Lynn Barlow described the initiative as a unique partnership in broadcasting that could help change human



'THIS CONTENT COULD EVENTUALLY BE WATCHED BY 1 BILLION PEOPLE WORLDWIDE'

shortest films. Make the tone too proselytising and a potential audience might be put off, especially in such an information-rich age when short-attention spans are a fact of life.

"For Colin Butfield, who headed up the *Our Planet* team, the project and its halo were an opportunity to reach new audiences through mass communications tools. That was his vision for this project," said Anderson.

Dan Huertas, director and producer at Silverback Films, suggested that "this is bit of a first. A global channel and a global charity saw the power they could potentially tap into."

"Series such as *Blue Planet* have been criticised for not going into enough detail on the solutions, and for painting a very rosy picture of the planet. That's partly because they are created to allow you to escape and appreciate the beauty of the planet."

Our Planet doesn't flinch from graphically depicting how climate change is affecting natural habitats. Even non-Netflix subscribers know the fate of the Russian walruses stranded on ice-depleted rocks (see page 6) after video of the unfortunate mammals went viral.

Several of the videos shown to the RTS highlighted the frightening acceleration of species loss. Two illustrated the impact of deforestation on orangutans – 100 of whom are estimated to die every week due to human activity.

Over the past 40 years their habitat has declined by 75%. The world is losing nearly 15 million hectares of tropical forest each year, and *Our Planet* notes that jungles capture and store more carbon than any other land habitat.

The panellists stressed that the halo aims to offer solutions to the environmental problems mankind is responsible for without being didactic.

"People have to know there is a solution out there," said Huertas. "With these particular two films, we hope to create conversations and dialogue around palm-oil production."

He continued: "An example of how we're cascading our conversations on social media via Twitter is [where we] explain why palm oil can be farmed sustainably and get the message across in an engaging way."

"It's counter-intuitive that palm oil production can help jungles but, provided it's grown sustainably, it can."

Another halo film shows an upbeat, Latino anthropomorphic frog resembling a chirpy character from a Disney

movie. Once more, the purpose is to draw attention to the loss of biodiversity.

"Audiences will come to this content in different ways," said Jon Clay, director and producer at Silverback. "Most people are driven to ask questions about what they can do. Having a clear message is vital."

As the halo was just gearing up, he hoped that the social media campaign would have longevity: "If we put out everything now, when the series is new, it would just disappear into white noise."

"Our plan is to put certain content out on certain channels with certain partnerships through the year. As the *Our Planet* brand grows, we're hoping this will feed more interest coming to us."

"Our ambition is that *Our Planet* stands for more than a TV series on Netflix, that *Our Planet* stands for a way of thinking and a shift towards sustainability as more people get involved in the campaign."

Netflix has been praised for its hands-off attitude to film-makers. How much influence did the company have on the halo? "If it was just a Netflix project, we would have had some battles," said Clay. "It would have wanted to promote certain things that point heavily to the series. But having the WWF as a partner, it has believed in the equality of the partnership."

The last word should go to Attenborough, who recently celebrated his 93rd birthday. In one of the clips shown to the RTS he struck a frank but passionately optimistic tone as he told our fossil-fuel-addicted societies to mend their ways.

"There's never been a better opportunity to take control," he said. "The plan is obvious. Stop doing the damaging stuff. Roll out the new green tech and systems as they arrive."

"Stabilise the human population as low as we fairly can. Keep hold of the natural wealth we have currently got, and in 80 years' time we'll be past the worse of it."

"More than that, we'll have built a world of eternal energy, clean air and water, a stable, healthy world that we can benefit from forever."

With words like these delivered by a broadcasting legend, the *Our Planet* halo looks destined to shine brightly. ■

The RTS West of England event 'Our Planet – Creating a social media campaign' was held at the Watershed, Bristol, on 2 May. It was chaired by Lynn Barlow and produced by Suzy Lambert.

behaviour, as we seek to combat climate change and restore biodiversity.

While there is nothing new in deploying social media to enhance the impact of a TV show, or to provide additional footage, the scope and ambition of *Our Planet*'s halo seems unprecedented. So, too, does its campaigning edge.

Most of the clips shown to the RTS have yet to be released, even though Netflix launched *Our Planet* globally on 5 April. By the end of April, an estimated 25 million households had seen the series.

The idea is to drip-feed the videos during the rest of the year on a thematic basis – or simply in response to whatever environmental stories happen to be hitting the headlines at the time.

Much thought and time is given over to devising and executing even the



A tale for our times

Some 20 years in the making, Sally's Wainwright's new television drama, *Gentleman Jack*, was originally rejected by every broadcaster she took it to. The story of an openly gay woman who farmed in 19th-century rural Yorkshire was considered a non-starter by TV networks. Starting this month, the topic is getting eight hours of BBC One Sunday-night primetime.

It's common for writers to describe their latest work as a "passion project" – often industry-accepted shorthand for what they hope is infectious enthusiasm for their new offering.

But in the case of Wainwright and *Gentleman Jack*, it doesn't really do justice to her efforts to bring the extraordinary true-life tale of Anne Lister to the screen.

For a start, Lister's diary, on which Wainwright has based her eight hours of drama, is a weighty tome, running to 4 million words. It covers every aspect of her singular life in the early 19th century as a traveller, mountaineer, diarist and female landowner of the imposing Shibden Hall in Yorkshire.

Drama

Sally Wainwright persuades Caroline Frost that *Gentleman Jack* is a zeitgeist heroine

A fair part of it is even written in code, where the subject matter runs into matters of the heart and mattress. It is spread over 27 volumes, 300 pages apiece, and now sits under Unesco-protected vigilance in the Halifax Library. Intriguingly, it's only been in the public domain since the late 1980s, when the first pages were published.

"I've been working on it for 20 years, and I feel like a novice," Wainwright says. "Very few people have even read it in full. Maxine Peake's earlier BBC drama (a single drama in 2010) sort of skirted through, but you can't really do it justice in 90 minutes. It's vast, labyrinthine and inaccessible. It's actually quite an emotional experience just seeing the real pages."

Add to this the fact that Wainwright used to run along the corridors of Shibden Hall on regular visits as a child, and you can begin to guess at the strength of the connection she feels to the ancient house and its headstrong inhabitant.

"I do feel very passionately," she laughs. "She's my biggest heroine, and, for me to bring it to screen, I feel very privileged. I just hope that people get to like her."

What's not to like? From the first episode, actually filmed in Shibden, we meet Lister, played by Suranne Jones with a wonderful glint in her eye. When she's not winding up her sister, aunt and father – jealous, doting and bewildered, respectively – she's climbing hills, riding horses or inspecting the work of her tenants.

And that's before you get to all the women – because, in case she wasn't already provocative enough in her lifestyle choices, Lister was also an out-and-proud lesbian, long before Queen Victoria doubted their existence.

Lister was determined to find herself some proper loving, which she did in the arms of her neighbour Anne

Walker. Clearly, this is a story for our time, if not Lister's.

"I initially pitched it in the early 2000s," remembers Wainwright. "Nobody was interested. I was quite young, and 20 years ago we weren't having the same conversations we are now about gender."

"We can be so articulate and open with our children now, they're not growing up in a world where you have to be hidden away if you're not dead straight. If I'd got this made 20 years ago, it would have been a niche drama, tucked away in the schedules somewhere. I wouldn't have got to grips with the diary, I wouldn't have got Suranne Jones, so I can't regret what's happened. We couldn't do her more justice than we're doing now."

Executive producer Phil Collinson is quite clear that only Sally Wainwright could have brought off this mighty project. "She's peeled back Anne's character, got underneath, and mined the strength in the middle of her character. Plus she's made it very funny, which period drama often forgets to do.

"You can laugh out loud at this brilliant family. You have actors Gemma Whelan, Gemma Jones and Timothy West in these extraordinary scenes at the dinner table, where the family gets to be really dysfunctional. There are universal things in this story, things that audiences can completely relate to."

For *Gentleman Jack*, the BBC partnered with HBO; the show has already thrilled critics in the US. Wainwright said both partners were equally willing to trust her and support her editorial decisions for a prime-time drama built around a lesbian relationship.

"It was my choice, not foisted on me, to make the story family-orientated," says Wainwright, who also directed the drama. "I like entertaining people, I don't want to preach, so that was my guiding light, and there's nothing more entertaining than a dysfunctional family."

"I didn't want gratuitous sex scenes. Anne was a great lesbian lover and we should celebrate that. She said herself, 'I know how to please a lady, and I did,' so I wanted to reflect that, but you can get that across

without being gratuitous at all. If a female director can't do that, who can?"

"There's one sex scene that's quite fruity, but it lasts about three seconds. All the others are incredibly delicately constructed and shot. The tabloids have grabbed some screen shots and gone on about the sex, which is a bit sickening after we tried so hard to do it delicately, but what can you do?"

Collinson calls it "a 360° look at a complicated, difficult relationship", adding: "I can't think of another show in the UK that puts a gay couple right in the middle of it, and celebrates that relationship, at 9:00pm on a Sunday."

Is it that commissioners are becoming braver, or has the world changed? "A bit of both," he decides. "It's just less scandalous to tell a story like this. We've just had *The Favourite* becoming a big-screen hit. There are still fights to be had, but it's definitely more on the agenda, plus women

are being written for better than ever before.

"There are some great male characters in this, but at its core it's strong women. And that's quite a new thing, bonkers as it sounds. But it makes better viewing for everybody, I think."

After a string of awards and hits to her name, Wainwright has inevitably been courted by some deep-pocketed producers on the other side of the Atlantic, particularly after *Happy Valley* won a whole new audience on Netflix. But it seems we won't be losing her any time soon.

"I've always wanted to write dramas that are about my world, which is why I've gravitated to West Yorkshire and Halifax. Telly is becoming more global, but you still have to set your show somewhere specific, and I set my shows where I know what I'm talking about, where I speak the same language that people speak."

A few months ago, Wainwright referred in a *Radio Times* interview to the long battle she felt she had to fight in order to be taken seriously as a creative woman in an industry she believes simply "trusts men more".

Now, with the likes of *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve* joining her own huge catalogue of hits, she acknowledges things are improving. However, she reminds us: "It's interesting, we mention those shows, but they're just individual names. It's an ongoing process.

"You still just see so many more men's names in the credits, or, if you trawl through Netflix on the thumbnails, you see so many more male faces. It's like turning the tanker around. If we let our guard down for a second, it will stop." ■



Suranne Jones in *Gentleman Jack*

BBC



Rex Features

At the top of his game

On the eve of the 2016 US presidential election, when Donald Trump was getting his first inkling that he would be elected to the world's highest political office, Russell T Davies was texting the controller of BBC drama about an idea they had long been discussing. "I wrote to Piers Wenger and said, 'If he wins tomorrow, it's time I write this show now' – and he said yes," recalls Davies.

This project was the BBC One epic *Years and Years*. The series imagines a near-future, towards the end of Trump's second term, when he is threatening war with China, people are means tested before they're allowed to enter the affluent London quarter of Kensington and a ruthless populist called Vivienne Rook (Emma Thompson) is riding to political prominence. Nearly as bad, the price of coffee, I noticed, is £12 a cup.

It's told from the perspective of the Manchester-based Lyons family, a likeable bunch impacted by these and other seismic political and societal changes. They include Daniel (Russell Tovey), who works with refugees, his brother, Stephen (Rory Kinnear), and

Screenwriting

Russell T Davies tells Ben Dowell how he was inspired to write his near-future dystopian drama, *Years and Years*

his wife, Celeste (T'Nia Miller), whose phone-obsessed teenage daughter, Bethany, wants to transition (a term which means something very different in *Years and Years*).

The show is packed with the kind of bold ambition we have come to expect from this whip-smart, jolly writer who has brought back both Jesus (*The Second Coming*) and *Doctor Who*, written the seminal drama depicting modern British gay life (*Queer as Folk*), and the story of a gay man who has a straight affair (*Bob & Rose*). But Davies insists that his new work's geopolitical themes should not surprise us.

"I'm known as a science fiction writer and for *Queer as Folk* and stuff like that," he says. "But, actually, I'm a

very political writer. I always have been. Every single year, in *Doctor Who*, I either killed or deposed a prime minister. In series 1, I blew up Downing Street with a missile. Everyone sat there and laughed and thought what a really fun adventure. And I was, like, have you seen what I have just done on BBC One?

"And, actually, in something like *Queer as Folk*, if you're writing about the lives of gay men, you're actually making massive political statements. I kind of engage with [politics] by not writing crime – I don't write crime – but I write about ordinary people engaging with the world. That's a political act. That's what politics is. This show is just putting it more centre stage than normal."

And then he laughs that big laugh of his. "I'm always kicking up a fuss about something. It's very rare to get a drama out of me that's just two people having a nice time. It's a long-winded way of me saying: I'm worried about the world. In a sense, I always have been."

It would also not be surprising to find Davies feeling low for other, non-geopolitical reasons. We were speaking six months after the death of his husband, Andrew, after a long illness – something that he and I have



Years and Years

"It can take a year to write something, it can take a year to get made and sometimes they can sit on a shelf for a year. And so, by the time you get to the screen, there's not much of the real world left in it. Even soap operas are sometimes six months behind in the plotting. That's what I wanted to shift, to get 'now' on screen. We were working so fast. We stopped shooting in March and now we're getting on air in May. That's very fast."

Given that there is little doubt about where he stands on the great political questions of our day, I wonder what he will say to those commentators who will inevitably complain that *Years and Years* comes from a typical left-leaning, liberal BBC perspective?

"I am absolutely happily left wing," he says, "but it's my job to write right-wing people well. I am not talking about Vivienne Rook – she's an outlier, the worst of the left wing and the right wing put together."

But where are the conservative voices in TV drama? Obviously, there's nothing stopping people with other views getting their laptops out. But is enough effort being made so that they are heard in mainstream drama – or, indeed, comedy – where a liberal/left consensus also seems to reign?

"I think it's very significant that right-wing voices, clearly, are not that creative," he chortles. "They're fundamentally fucked...."

Davies is not keen on Twitter, either, which he believes has become "the dominant voice of Western society" and is accorded a misplaced sense of respect "simply because it is typed out".

"Our brains and intelligence and communication were not designed for all information to be passed through the written word," he says.

Perhaps he imagines himself like another *Years and Years* character, Fran Baxter, who makes a living telling verbal stories (literally) by a campfire, proselytising "the shape of stories and the need for them". Is that him? Telling stories as the world burns?

He laughs, too modest to agree entirely, but conceding the point.

"One isn't better than the other, I'm just saying that both exist," he says before delivering that laugh again. "I love my job. Yes, budgets are hard and deadlines are hard."

"But here I am, telling stories for a living. It's not easy to get anything made. How lucky am I? And I'm only just beginning..." ■

IT'S MY JOB TO WRITE RIGHT-WING PEOPLE WELL'

carpet and take me to Anglesey. Husbands and wives, they split up and there are changes in their relationship. But families always stay together. In my conversations with the BBC, in advance, we agreed there was no point writing this if it was going to be bleak.

"The end of episode 1 is bleak. I loved to see the early reviews saying it's 'terrifying'. I have never had a drama described as terrifying before, that's new...."

For Davies, most terrifying of all are the imagined future events in Trump's America. The need to keep up with events across the Atlantic necessitated speed during the production. He considered, then ruled out as implausible, writing in a third Trump term in the White House – only to later hear it being discussed. ("Only he would think of doing something that mad," says Davies.)

"Drama is so slow," mulls the writer.

discussed in private but which he now feels able to discuss publicly.

"I am all right," he says with a deep sigh. "We're just past the six-month mark, which is odd. It's when everyone expects you to be all right and it's not. What do you do? You just keep going. All you can do is keep on going and it's exactly what he'd want me to do. Life is very strange. Every day."

He and Andrew, he says, never discussed rearing children. Not because he wouldn't want to bring infants into this terrible future he's now imagining. It was simply to do with the fact that gay men raising children wasn't an issue for men of his generation. "When we were 18, 19, 20, it wasn't remotely possible... We did discuss it later but neither of us ever wanted it at all. You may as well ask me, 'am I going to live on the moon?", he says, chuckling again.

But the family dynamic within *Years and Years*, and the jokes and kindnesses the Lyons clan show one another, are both warm and plausible, as well as being a crucial source of comfort in the piece. Does that point to a glimmer of optimism in the Davies world view?

"I could murder someone and my family would hide me," he laughs again. "They would wrap me up in a

Mum's the word



If anyone ever doubted that comedy and tragedy go hand in hand, look no further than the much-garlanded BBC Two sitcom, *Mum*, starring Lesley Manville as Cathy, a late-middle-aged mother coming to terms with the death of her husband.

Making a TV audience laugh is among the most difficult skills for any screenwriter to learn, but to make them laugh one minute and almost cry a few moments later is the hallmark of a very special talent.

That is precisely what makes *Mum* such rewarding viewing and, ultimately, why the programme's creator, Stefan Golaszewski, is such a gifted writer. The show has been quietly pleasing audiences since it launched on BBC Two in 2016.

As RTS and Bafta awards juries have realised, *Mum* is an acutely observed, throat-catching story rooted in the lived experiences of ordinary British people.

Comedy

Steve Clarke discovers unexpected literary influences on the award-winning comedies of writer **Stefan Golaszewski**

The big themes of sex, love, death, mourning, bereavement, class and ageing are all treated with a tenderness and humour that has assured *Mum*, produced by Big Talk, of a devoted following during two seasons. The third and final series started on 15 May.

The ensemble cast, led by Manville as Cathy and Peter Mullan as her old flame, Michael, are all brilliant, too. One of the many extraordinary things about the show is Golaszewski's ability to

write such credible female characters.

Not just Cathy, but her putative daughter-in-law, Kelly, and super snob Pauline, her brother's new partner.

How does he bring such authenticity to these women? "Things like age, gender – add to that race, religion, sexuality or whatever, these identity badges," says Golaszewski. "If you think of them as just circumstances and then, for the moment, dismiss them and consider the emotions and situations that the individual is going through and load on to them the appropriate identities, that's how I write the character."

It is not a simple answer, but perhaps typical of the writer, who is a shy, thoughtful, driven man. He adds: "Cathy is a woman with a kindness and a thought for others who also happens to have lived for 60-odd years and happens to be a woman. So you feed all those things into the character."

"But the thing I always focus on is the individual at the centre of it and

Left: Lesley Manville as Cathy in *Mum*.

Right: Stefan Golaszewski

the thing she desires and the ways in which those desires are thwarted.”

Is his own mum like that? “Not particularly. My mum is very kind and generous and very loving. I think motherhood itself, as an enterprise, requires so much loss of self. That seems to be the only way to cope with how hard it is to be a mother, from what I’ve observed.

“It’s very hard to talk about that as a man without sounding patronising, but that loss of self seems to be an essential component of becoming a mother. I suppose that is the essential problem that Cathy has – the loss of self and how, across the three series, she can find that self again.”

In many ways, *Mum* builds on some of the great archetypes of British sitcom – and then gently adds a few extra, excruciating emotional layers. In Pauline, there are echoes of characters like *Keeping Up Appearances*’ Hyacinth or *The Good Life*’s Margo.

As for Kelly, who can’t help but keep putting her foot in her mouth, Golaszewski puts it like this: “I don’t like the phrase ‘dumb blonde’, but she might be perceived as that. You go into why is she like that? I don’t think people are stupid.... So why is she like this?

“Why does she say the wrong thing? She’s scared. What is she scared of? Why doesn’t she believe in herself? So you dig into that a bit....

“In series 3, Kelly becomes one of the wisest characters. In series 1, she’s had an unpleasant history of relationships but, through the affirmation that Cathy and Jason (Cathy’s son) give her, she is able to figure out how to be herself and not this shell of a person trying to do a bad impression of her mum or trying to survive under her mum’s arrows.”

Mum is, in fact, the second sitcom written by Stefan Golaszewski, who is 38 and whose love of words was obvious when he first started writing stories at school in his native Essex. His paternal grandfather was a Polish immigrant who fled to the UK at the end of the Second World War. On his mother’s side there is Irish blood. This might help explain his prowess with words.

After writing and performing with the Footlights at Cambridge (he read English at Churchill College) and doing



Richard Kendall

‘LOSS OF SELF SEEMS TO BE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF BECOMING A MOTHER’

comedy at the Edinburgh fringe, Golaszewski continued to follow the traditional path of generations of funny people by finally getting a show commissioned by Radio 4.

The only difference was that he wasn’t middle class. He says that he originally got involved with Footlights out of perversity. “I was told that Footlights was full of posh idiots,” he recalls. “So, me being angry and 19 and not posh, I thought I’d go along and annoy the posh idiots.

“And it wasn’t full of posh idiots. I think I still annoyed them, but they asked me back. They continued to ask me back. I thought: maybe I’ll stop trying to annoy the posh idiots and see how this goes.”

But the breakthrough didn’t come until he was 28, when BBC Three hired him to write *Him & Her*, the flat-sharing sitcom that centred on the amorous adventures of twentysomethings Becky and Steve.

The show got some rave reviews.

More importantly, it gave Golaszewski the opportunity to learn to write TV comedy on the job. “I was very lucky to be 28 and be given a sitcom on BBC Three that no one saw and then to be trusted by Kenton Allen at Big Talk and be guided by Richard Laxton [the director of *Him & Her*, who also directed season 1 of *Mum*]. And for my writing to be made a better version of itself rather than to be more normative.

“Writing *Him & Her*, I did about a series a year for four years. I was on set a lot of the time and in the edit. That is a lot of writing very quickly, so it was like a crash course. That really helped.”

As does his complete immersion in his work. He also writes for the stage and directed seasons 2 and 3 of *Mum*. “I think about writing all the time. I am obsessed with it and I am obsessed with the craft of it, everything to do with it. I’ll think about it at 3am when I go for a wee. It’s an ever-present journey.”

What, then, are his influences – apart from the obvious ones such as comedy classics *Keeping Up Appearances*, *Ever Decreasing Circles* and *The Good Life*? It would seem they are impressively eclectic and, unusually, encompass Chaucer and some of the great 19th-century English storytellers.

Of the author of *The Canterbury Tales*, he says: “What I found fascinating about him is the simplicity of what he wrote and the depth that he achieved in his writing style – total simplicity. But by nuance, context and irony, the hugeness that he could bring.”

These traits are all evident in *Mum*. So, too, is what Stefan Golaszewski says about the likes of George Eliot (*Middlemarch* is his favourite novel) and Thackeray: “What is lovely about some of those Victorian novelists is the warmth and kindness of the narrative voice. They’re quite unfashionable, because they talk to the reader. I find that lovely. There is so much empathy in those books.”

He adds: “I’d say that, more than anything else, in its style *Mum* is more influenced by books. What’s wonderful about a good book is the deep humanity and the care for everyone in the book and the love of the narrative for the characters and the understanding of them. That’s what I wanted to achieve.” ■

A watershed in online regulation?

In May 2018, the Government announced that, later that year, it would publish a white paper “that will cover the full range of online harms”. In September 2018, with no publication date yet in sight, the *Financial Times* reported that ministers were grappling with how to force technology companies to take more responsibility for online content.

Government intervention was said to be part of an international trend. Germany had introduced fines for platforms that failed to remove hate speech within 24 hours, but the UK would be the first in Europe to go further.

A joint letter, signed by the heads of the BBC, Sky, ITV, Channel 4 and BT, had argued for independent regulatory oversight of content posted on social media platforms. However, the *FT* reported that “Stewart Purvis, a former Ofcom official, said he has yet to see a workable proposal for increasing oversight of social media companies”.

A year on, we finally have the white paper and I, for one, think the time has been well spent by the DCMS and Home Office on proposals that could indeed be workable. But the focus has now shifted to whether their plan will have unintended consequences that will limit freedom of speech.

The 98-page white paper “Online harms” goes further than any previous British administration has dared to tread. That “this is a complex and novel area for public policy” is an elegant understatement.

Politicians who once seemed in awe of the tech companies now threaten to “disrupt the business activities of a non-compliant company”, even one based outside the UK.

The global giants could be fined or banned and their directors held criminally liable. The days when the tech giants could say they were “mere conduits” for the material they distributed seem long gone.

The political momentum for change became unstoppable the month before

Policy

Stewart Purvis
welcomes the
recent white paper
on online harm but
warns of unintended
consequences

publication, after what the white paper calls “a co-ordinated cross-platform effort to generate maximum reach of footage of the attack” on mosques in New Zealand, when the gunman live-streamed his shooting on Facebook Live.

The document is full of good reasons why something has to be done. No fewer than 23 “online harms in scope” are listed. Child exploitation and distributing terrorist content top the list.

But many of the harms on the list are already illegal and no new offences are created. Specifically, as Paul Herbert of Goodman Derrick has pointed out, the Government has decided against creating any new offences for hosting illegal or harmful content, which he says would have been a “radical challenge”. No bloggers will go to jail unless it is for something that is already illegal.

Instead, the white paper targets companies such as Facebook, Snapchat and YouTube, which allow users to share or discover user-generated content or interact with each other online. They would have a new statutory duty of care to take more responsibility for the safety of their users and tackle harm caused by content or activity on their services.

A new independent regulator, mostly funded by industry, would enforce it. This approach has been generally welcomed. The tech companies are no longer pushing back against new legal obligations as forcefully as they used

to, in public at least. Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg told Congress in April 2018 that he would welcome regulation, but with the rider that it had to be the right regulation.

The public debate about what the right regulation for the UK is has been mostly about the possibility of unintended consequences. Comparisons with North Korean-style censorship have been littered around rather carelessly, but the Society of Editors (SoE) has correctly focused on the potential weak spot in the Government’s ideas. “Where the white paper moves into areas concerning the spread of misinformation – so called fake news – we should all be concerned,” says the SoE and asks: “Who will decide what is fake news?”

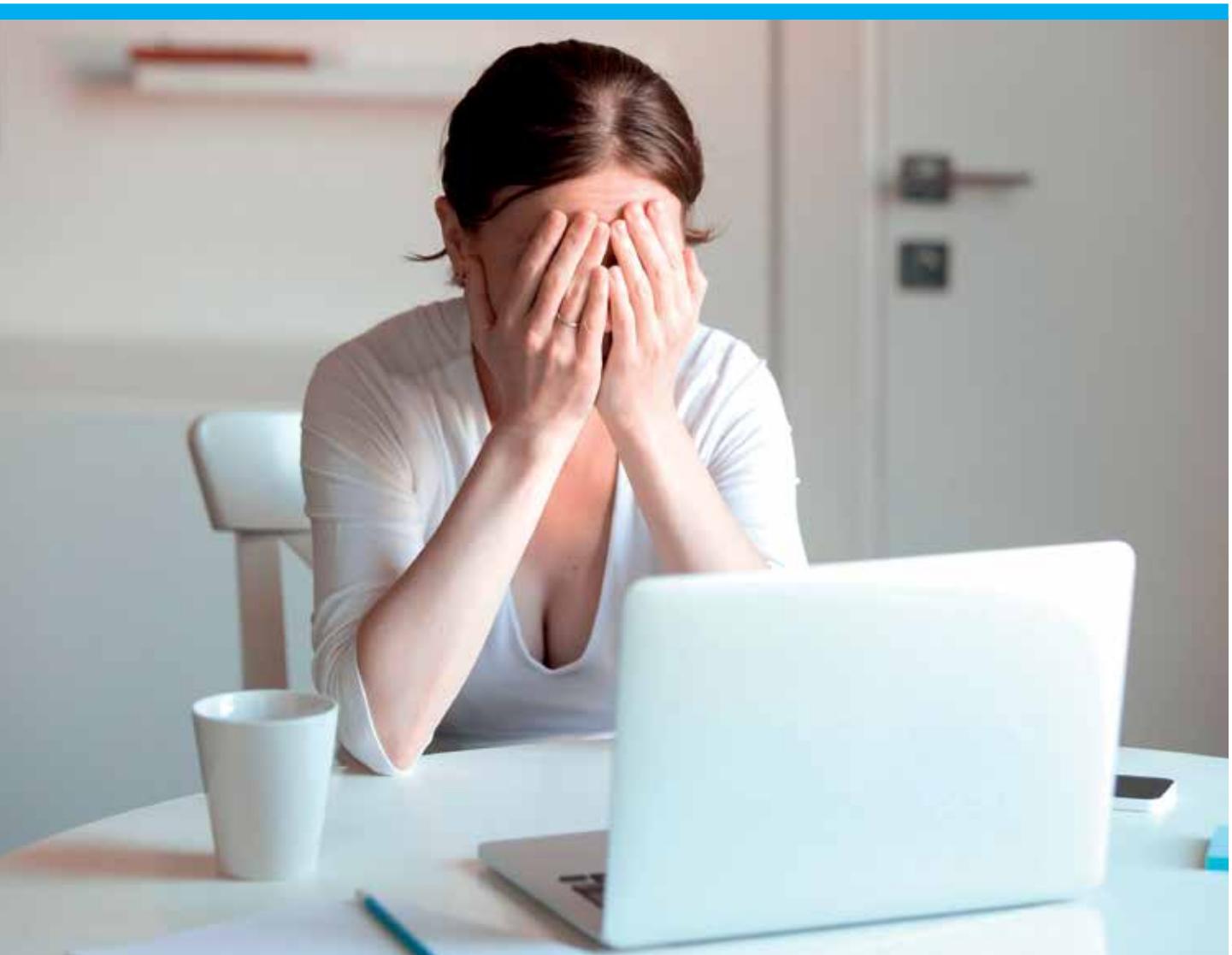
In his reply, the DCMS Secretary of State, Jeremy Wright, accepted that the breadth of the proposals means that they will affect “organisations of all sizes, including social media platforms, file-hosting sites, public discussion forums, messaging services and search engines”.

But, seeking to reassure the older media, he said, “Journalistic or editorial content will not be affected by the regulatory framework.”

The proposed new independent regulator “will not be responsible for policing truth and accuracy online”. Where services are “already well regulated”, by bodies such as the press self-regulators Ipsos and Impress, Wright has said “we will not duplicate those efforts”.

In Whitehall’s mind, the news world seems to divide between the “real journalism” that comes from what we used to call Fleet Street and the “fake journalism” emanating from the Internet Research Agency of 55 Savushkina Street, St Petersburg.

If only life was so simple. The world has moved on from the days when only journalists did journalism. In the white paper there are moments when you wonder if the drafters understand



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how journalists and non-journalists alike use social media to distribute news and opinion, and how comment sections on sites can be as important as the original “journalistic” article.

For an example of the simplistic approach, take paragraph 4 of the section of the white paper’s executive summary headed “The problem”. It says: “Social media platforms use algorithms, which can lead to ‘echo chambers’ or ‘filter bubbles’, where a user is presented with only one type of content instead of seeing a range of voices and opinions. This can promote disinformation by ensuring that users do not see rebuttals or other sources that may disagree.”

What about the thousands of single-minded and occasionally bloody-minded partisan voices offering independent commentary that are an essential part of the internet. They do not seek to offer a balanced view of the world and readers would not expect a right to reply. This paragraph almost sounds like an echo from last

‘THIS IS A COMPLEX AND NOVEL AREA FOR PUBLIC POLICY’

year’s recommendation from the otherwise well-informed DCMS Committee that the Government should use the Ofcom rules on impartiality to set standards for online content.

To offset any concerns about possible government restrictions on “freedom of expression online” and “a free, open and secure internet”, there are reassurances in the white paper that seek to go beyond fine words.

The independent regulator – either Ofcom or a new body – will be told to focus on protecting users from the most harmful content, “not judging what is true or not”. If the regulator is to be Ofcom, we can be sure its experience in broadcasting will be valuable

in making the expected “difficult judgement calls”.

Ian Murray, executive director of the SoE, says he welcomed the reassurance from the DCMS, “but we must be ever-vigilant of the laws of unintended consequences and what some politicians or a future government may do to use online-harms legislation to restrict freedom of speech”.

There is now a consultation period until 1 July, and vigilance will, indeed, be needed to ensure that, when legislation is finally presented to Parliament, the unintended, the unanticipated and the unforeseen do not flow from what is otherwise a sensible, practical and important law. ■

Stewart Purvis was Ofcom partner for content and standards 2007-10. During that time, he chaired the Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Party and was a member of the Government’s UK Council for Child Internet Safety. He is now a non-executive director of Channel 4 and writes here in a personal capacity.



A blaze of red lipstick

Beth Rigby is the stand-out political broadcaster of our times. This is despite the former print journalist having been on our screens for only three years. No one asks the acute, no-nonsense yet empathetic questions like the new political editor of Sky News. And no one does it in her accent.

She drops so many Gs that Rigby dreads party conferences in Birmin'ham. We worked together on the *Times*, where she was a scoop-winning media editor – and when I saw her first steps on Sky News I knew, as her bosses obviously did, that a star had been born.

She stands out visually, too. Accompanying her jet black hair and pale face, her blazing red lipstick is as potent an emblem of showbiz-meets-seriousness as Robin Day's scarlet bow tie.

"You try," she explains, "to have something that makes you distinguishable from other people. So Nick Robinson had his glasses and Andy Marr has his ears and Laura Kuenssberg has her

The Billen profile

Andrew Billen meets Sky's new political editor, Beth Rigby, whose demotic style is lighting up Westminster

really bright, sharp coats, and I, apparently, have my red lipstick. Actually, I used to wear bright lipstick all the time but in a number of different colours. There was orange and purple, whereas now it's just red. It's actually really helped. It gives you a signifier."

We are in the café in the basement of 4 Millbank, from where Sky, like the BBC, runs its Westminster operation. It is our second attempt at a rendezvous. The first, in an Islington brasserie not far from her home, was thwarted by Gavin Williamson's firing as Defence

Secretary the day before. It was local election day and Rigby should have been chilling before a long night of results coverage, but her editor wanted her to chase him. She was mortified by her no-show. I understood entirely.

And, although she did not persuade Williamson to go on air, she did find him. Their conversation resulted in one of the more unusual enquiries Theresa May faced the following day. "Passing on", she said, a question from Williamson, she asked if the PM would be giving him a copy of the Huawei leak report that resulted in his exit. In fact, she asked three times. May three times failed to reply.

Later that black Friday, she and May were in Aberdeen at a Scottish Conservative conference. Rigby had another question that you can't imagine her rivals phrasing in quite the same way. May had lost her defence secretary and now 1,300 local councillors: "Are you feelin' a bit upset?" It was colloquial, compassionate and also, somehow, funny.

She says she thinks very hard about how to frame questions that will elicit something from the PM other than a stock response from her mental “Rolodex”. “The best question I ever asked her, the one that got the best answer, was at the conference celebrating the 100-year anniversary of the women’s vote. I threw her an underarm ball and I said, ‘What advice would you give to your younger self?’ And she gave this really expansive answer and, at the end of it, there was this sort of spontaneous round of applause because she’d answered it as a woman with emotion and feeling. It cut through.”

Yet this is also the woman who, in January, buttonholed Boris Johnson after a late-evening Brexit vote and told him – after “a reality check” landed on her phone about Europe’s unwillingness to renegotiate the Northern Ireland backstop – that his “lot” were “deluded”. “It’s not happening. It’s not happening,” she told him. Boris blanched.

She addresses us, the viewer, with similar plain speaking. She has a first from Cambridge, so knows the art of precis, but still she will ring her father in Norfolk to check that he, and his “mates at the Feathers, who all watch Sky”, got the point she was making. “We get so [tangled up] in the weeds of the incremental developments in Westminster that what the viewer needs me to do is say, ‘There’s loads of noise but I’m going to zoom out and tell you three things you need to know’.”

She is amazed by the Prime Minister’s stamina, but some are amazed at hers. Like Kuenssberg, she works Mondays to Thursdays, but these are 12-hour days. They start with a bus journey to Westminster, during which she tackles her domestic admin, and, as I have witnessed, politics may not always conclude on a Thursday night after a two-way on *Sky News at Ten*.

A minister recently told her that he was taking Diazepam because anxiety was stopping him sleeping.

Does she ever lose sleep over Brexit? “No. I never lose sleep over it. Honestly, I mean, the only time I didn’t sleep was when I lost my mum, and when I was really heavily pregnant with my second child. I had insomnia. That was awful.”

Her mother, a headteacher, died of lung cancer, aged 62, 12 years ago, and



she mourns the loss of that close friendship. Then, in 2016, her older brother, Alex, died of thymic carcinoma at the age she is now, 42.

“That was awful. Well, it still is, because we’re all still living through that. They had just had a little baby, his second child, and I know that makes it even more tragic but, actually, the fact that she was there and was a tiny baby meant we all just had to get on with it.”

He had been diagnosed in the April and died in August. She remembers speaking to him at the end of a long, exciting Sky News day, reporting on Boris Johnson’s withdrawal from the Tory leadership race. The news from Alex was bleak: the chemo had not worked. “I don’t know. It gives you a different perspective. Nothing is that big a deal. And you’ve got to just go for it.”

She was born in Essex but brought up in Buckinghamshire. Her father was a businessman, whose own father was a plumber.

She excelled at Beaconsfield High School, where she debated and danced (perhaps early indications of an inclination to perform). Winning a place at Cambridge, she studied social and political science.

She considered training as a barrister, entering politics (perhaps in a think tank) or a career as an academic... “And then there was journalism.” In the end, she plumped for it, although, as a trainee on the *Financial Times*, she worked part-time for a

while on its foreign desk while doing an MA in Latin American studies at London University.

“I kind of got that out of my system. I realised I could not write 100-page dissertations as a job,” she recalls. Thirteen years with the *FT* followed, initially reporting on hedge funds. She entered the lobby in 2010 as the paper’s chief political correspondent.

Back then, there were only two women journalists of her seniority in the lobby. “You look now, nine years later, and you’ve got Heather Stewart at the *Guardian*, you’ve got Pippa Crear at the *Mirror*, you’ve got me and Laura on TV.”

Her former politics boss at Sky, Esme Wren, is now editor of *Newshight*. “And introduced an all-women line-up of presenters. It’s changing.” That said, this former women’s officer at university is a member of the lobby’s woman’s group at Westminster, run by Kuenssberg.

“Television is a bit different from print. In print, men can be 80% of your correspondents. Who cares? No one. But on television, we’re all jigsaw pieces that fit into a brand.”

In 2015, when she sought to widen her press experience by defecting to the *Times*, she told her husband, Angelo, that her media beat would be full-on. (Indeed it was, as it included breaking Robert Peston’s defection to ITV, the Kids Company scandal, and the freedom of information wrangle with the Government.) A graphic designer whom she met at a northern soul night, Angelo is 18 years her senior and was by then a freelancer and less in love with his career.

“I said, ‘I’ve got to make a bit of an impression and I’m going to have to throw myself into it. So, if you don’t mind not working, that would be easier for me.’ And he was like, ‘That’s fine.’” So, while she does the school run in the mornings and tries never to miss a parents’ evening, much of the daily burden of bringing up their nine-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter falls to him.

The approach to join Sky as senior political correspondent came from Wren and led to a meeting with head of Sky News John Ryley. “It was hard, because I hadn’t been at the *Times* for



Beth's bio

Beth Rigby, political editor of Sky News

Age 42. Lives in Stoke Newington, north-east London.

Married To former graphic designer Angelo; one son, one daughter, both at a local primary school

Born Essex, daughter of a businessman father and headteacher mother

Grew up Buckinghamshire

Education: Beaconsfield High School, Cambridge University, first in social and political science; MA from Centre for Latin American Studies, London University

1998 Joins the *Financial Times* as a trainee

2001 Hedge fund correspondent

2004 Retail correspondent

2008 Consumer industries editor

2010 Chief political correspondent

2012 Deputy political editor

2014 Moves to the *Times* as media editor

2016 Joins Sky News as senior political editor

2018 Deputy political editor

2019 Succeeds Faisal Islam as Sky political editor

Watching no time for box sets but follows *Game of Thrones*

Reading: Another casualty of work, but read *War and Peace* on holiday: 'It was great.'

Relaxing: 'I run down the paths along the river Lea and its canals near my home.'

Mentor: 'My mum, Edith, who was a head teacher and a wonderful person. She was my mentor and my hero.'

very long and I was genuinely enjoying it, but I thought, 'Yes, I am coming over."

At first, viewers reacted mainly to her accent. "Some people thought I was putting it on. Some people didn't think I should be on television if I couldn't talk properly. I was really upset. I remember someone in Parliament, who I knew, went, 'You're really right for telly, but can you just stop dropping your Gs?'"

"I did talk to Jonathon Levy [Sky's head of newsgathering and operations] about it because I was upset, and he asked, 'Well, what do you want to do?' And I said, 'I don't know, really'"

In the end, she did nothing and declined media training. These days, she reads three words of a hostile tweet and mutes the tweeter. "But one person said, 'You need electrocution lessons', which I found absolutely hilarious. I re-tweeted that one."

Once she reaches Millbank, her first appearance of the day is usually on *All Out Politics*, anchored by Adam Boulton, who did 25 years as Sky's first political editor. Last year, during the Tory conference, a video was leaked of Boulton swearing at her off-air ("Sit down there. Stop f***ing around."). He later apologised, but I wonder how relations are now. She says it was all a bit of miscommunication.

"Actually, he has been really supportive and really good to me and has

given me great counsel and gives me loads of advice. We talk about stories and he gives me ideas and he phones me up with things he's heard."

There is no doubt, however, that Rigby is a break from the usual model of public schoolboy political editors (Boulton's alma mater echoed to the chimes of Big Ben). Confronted by her questions, Westminster's prevaricators and wafflers, euphemisers and half-truth tellers, sound even more out of touch.

Their hegemony, she believes, is on the wane: "You're seeing a pattern now, where people are cutting through because they are authentic, if you like. Some go on television with the lines to take – 'Here's your briefing note, off you go' – and they make no impact whatsoever. Then, you have a group of politicians who don't quite do that. And it doesn't mean being really disloyal to the leadership, it just means that you are trying to be genuine and answer questions.

"Jess Phillips does that. Lisa Nandy does that. She is not disloyal to Jeremy Corbyn, but she will say what she thinks – and she makes people think. Anna Soubry did it for the Conservative side. I think Johnny Mercer does it. Tom Tugendhat does it to an extent. I think Jacob Rees-Mogg does it."

And on politics's other side, Beth Rigby does it, too. She stands out and she cuts through. ■

OUR FRIEND IN BELFAST

So *Game of Thrones* is coming to an end and the world is quite rightly in mourning. But I'm not. Not just because I'm the only person in Belfast who hasn't seen a single episode, or the only person in Belfast who hasn't been an extra in an episode.

But because it means the amazing crew will finally be available for other work. That will be the enduring legacy of *Game of Thrones* and the hard work of everyone at NIScreen.

Northern Ireland now sits among the greats when it comes to world-class talent. And they're not just renowned for being the best in the business, they're also renowned for being the nicest, which, when you consider the business we are in, is quite the achievement!

The biggest achievement in my mind, however, is tangential. Convincing people to come to Belfast to make a show got an awful lot easier once *Game of Thrones* arrived.

There's no underplaying the effects *Game of Thrones* had on the Northern Ireland production sector. Countless articles have been written by people far smarter than me outlining the many economic benefits.

I can only speak for my own experience. Everything is better now. Everything. And I don't just mean we're getting more work. There's an energy here that didn't exist before.

A-list movie stars drink in the city's bars and its content sector is buzzing.
Kieran Doherty hails the *Game of Thrones* legacy



Stellify Media

There's a real sense of positivity. For crying out loud, there are A-List movie stars drinking in the Cathedral Quarter. Actual movie stars!

That's not to say everything is rosy in the garden. It's still ridiculously difficult to land the big commissions. But they're difficult to land because they're big, not because we can't deliver them.

When we were commissioned by Netflix last year to make *Flinch*, it did not flinch at the idea of making it in Northern Ireland. That's the *Game of Thrones* effect. Beforehand, there may

have been talk regarding a lack of talent in Northern Ireland. Not any more. No one questions our ability to get the job done.

And people only have to visit here for a few days to fall in love with the place. It takes a while for Londoners to get used to random taxi drivers talking to them. Or random people in the shops talking to them.

Or just people in general talking to them. We're a very friendly place. Everyone knows everyone else. It's impossible to resist. You just have to embrace it.

We used to be considered a centre of excellence for documentaries, due in no small part to our own particular history. Now, it's documentaries and high-end drama. That's quite a thing, considering how small we are, geographically.

There may not be that many of us but we punch above our weight. I say "we". My side of the business isn't docs or high-end drama, it's formats. When *Game of Thrones* came to Northern Ireland it transformed the drama genre. We haven't yet had the equivalent long-running super successful format from Northern Ireland.

Only time will tell if we managed it with *Flinch*. But, either way, we know someone from here will come up with it, eventually. That's the *Game of Thrones* effect. ■

Kieran Doherty is Joint Managing Director of Belfast-based Stellify Media.

The Beeb bets big on UKTV

Contestants on UKTV channel Dave's hit show *Taskmaster* have to think laterally and creatively as a series of challenges are thrown at them.

Much like the BBC had to in 2017 when Discovery's acquisition of UKTV's co-owner Scripps triggered a clause that gave BBC Studios the option to buy out Discovery. The problem was that it lacked the cash to do so.

To add to the BBC's dilemma, the clause also gave Discovery the chance to buy the corporation out of UKTV. Potentially, this would have affected the British media ecology – and the programme licence agreement BBC Studios (BBCS) has with UKTV.

The agreement that commits the multichannel broadcaster to take a certain number of BBC shows is negotiated every couple of years and is worth around £50m. A Discovery-owned UKTV would probably have driven a harder bargain.

With all that to overcome, negotiations between the BBC and Discovery were lengthy. They included failed attempts to stage a buyout with ITV or Channel 4.

A deal was finally announced in March – the biggest commercial acquisition in the BBC's history – which gives BBCS full control of UKTV, although three of UKTV's 10 free-to-air and pay channels go to Discovery: Good Food, Home and Really. Discovery also gets payments totalling £173m and content partnerships.

These include an exclusive, 10-year deal for natural history rights to content such as *Blue Planet* outside of the UK, Ireland and China for Discovery's new streaming service.

So what does this mean for the future of UKTV? Will it become for the BBC, as one analyst warned, "another *Lonely Planet*", or will it help the BBC win the game of rights it is playing against Netflix and Amazon and the independent production community?

BBC

Tara Conlan asks who is likely to gain most from the BBC's record-breaking purchase of Discovery's stake in UKTV

And what effect will the deal have on BritBox, the BBC's "best of British content" streaming joint venture with ITV?

After humble beginnings as a Gold service based on BBC and ITV hits, UKTV has come a long way. Under its last CEO, Darren Childs, the company moved successfully into adventurous, original commissions. Among the most notable are *Taskmaster*, PR drama *Flack* and the forthcoming Martin Compston drama *Traces*, which will air on Alibi.

BBCS should take full control of UKTV by the beginning of June. The company's 270 or so staff, based in West London and a small outpost in Leeds, are wondering what the effects will be. The transaction includes the high-tech HQ in Hammersmith. Will they will be moving into BBC Studios' home and are job cuts inevitable?

Some insiders say that, in time, some back-office jobs will go. As one source with knowledge of the deal puts it: "There will probably be a reorganisation

after TUPE [Transfer of Undertakings] rules that protect employees] and things like that have happened."

With the loss of the Good Food, Home and Really channels to Discovery, analysis by Enders predicts that "UKTV's portfolio will drop from 9.5% of total UK adult commercial impacts to 7.5% (based on 2018 data) if all else remains equal, thereby shrinking in size by 21%. There will be few, if any, repercussions in the TV advertising market."

Enders senior TV research analyst Tom Harrington says the "channels split makes sense. The bigger question is how it works for the BBC in terms of content flow. UKTV likes to make a big point about the success of its original shows. It's true they have been successful, but the backbone is still the archival content. How much of the stuff will be going on BritBox?

"UKTV currently has a content agreement where the BBC can withhold certain things, such as *Doctor Who*, and can sell them to other parties. UKTV can't select that. [If] it adds more to what UKTV can't select, that could weaken the channels. BBC Studios also has a new box-set deal with Sky.

"It's confusing. There are different factions [within the BBC group] who have competing interests. You have iPlayer, too, [which is] trying to put on more box sets and make them available for longer.

"How does that work with BritBox? It all plays into what the future of UKTV is going to look like."

He adds: "Legacy media businesses have to straddle digital and terrestrial at the same time. That's difficult. Then, you have pay-TV and free. It's not a criticism: they have to work in different areas and you get these... twisted knots of strategies that don't work together."

UKTV spends £150m a year on content. The budget is fluid between commissions and acquisitions. Concerns were raised by independent producers, including Avalon and Hat Trick

'THE TAKEOVER COMES AMID A TUSSLE BETWEEN INDIES AND THE BBC OVER SECONDARY RIGHTS'



W show Emma Willis: *Delivering Babies*

being channelled into buying out Discovery?"

The BBC argues that it needs more control over rights – which is boosted by owning UKTV – to assist in its fight against the streamers. But one programme-maker retorts that this risks a “fire sale overnight” if “producers can’t utilise the secondary rights window”.

BBC sources suggest that UKTV’s commissioning budgets will rise. They point out that BBCS has not used licence-fee funds but instead deployed its existing borrowing facility to fund the acquisition.

They insist that the requirement to fund free licences for the over-75s and implement cuts worth £800m at the same time as the global tech giants are pushing up programme-making costs means the corporation has to do something to secure its future.

However, some observers question why the BBC is buying a bigger stake in the linear-TV market at a time when streaming is eating away at it.

They argue that Discovery has come out best from the deal, with a 10-year SVoD arrangement and a programming supply agreement thought to be worth around £300m over that period. The US company also gets hundreds of hours of BBC factual archive content.

For the corporation, there is a co-funding development team at BBCS to make factual content for Discovery. This may make up some of the shortfall as Amazon and Netflix have become more selective about co-productions.

Having been co-owned by a US company and BBCS has not been without some bumps along the way for UKTV. So it is possible that the takeover may bring UKTV some strategic stability. During 2016, five directors of the parent company, UKTV Media Holdings, resigned. One of those was Marcus Arthur, BBCS President of UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand – who is the new CEO of UKTV and also sits on the board of BBCS.

That has raised eyebrows about a potential conflict of interest.

Arthur is not yet in post but tells *Television*: “I’m really excited about BBC Studios’ future with UKTV. Its success has been built on innovative original commissioning and brilliant BBC shows. It’s jam-packed with talent and bright ideas. The fact that we are securing its future is great news for audiences and programme-makers alike.”

Let’s hope that this optimism turns out to be well founded. ■

UKTV

(makers of *Taskmaster* and the new Dave hit *Hypothetical*, respectively), that commissions from independents in which BBCS has a stake might be prioritised.

A significant proportion of the £250m or so that BBCS returns to the public service wing of the corporation comes from UKTV dividends. Insiders say that it is keen to continue this by commissioning from across the independent sector and not only from those companies it part owns.

But the takeover comes amid a tussle between independent producers and the BBC over the secondary rights

market. This was prompted by the BBC asking Ofcom to allow iPlayer to keep shows for up to 12 months so that it can compete effectively with Netflix and Amazon.

At the time, the BBC argued that UKTV Play was an iPlayer rival. How those services will work together under the new regime is anybody’s guess.

There are other worries from the content sector. One producer says: “Our big concern is that we’re seeing a lot of activity around the commercial side of the BBC at a time when the budgets for public service broadcasting are being squeezed [so]... why is money

When laughter tops the menu



Over the past few years, UKTV channel Dave has notched up an impressive series of hits with home-grown comedies such as *Taskmaster* and *Dave Gorman: Modern Life is Goodish*.

Now it has high hopes for *Sliced*, a sitcom based on Samson Kayo's crazy experiences as a South London pizza delivery driver, launched this month.

Kayo, who made his name in *Time-wasters* and *Famalam*, stars with *White Gold*'s Theo Barklem-Biggs as hapless drivers Joshua and Ricky. They deliver pizza to their larger-than-life customers on the estates of Peckham. Kayo wrote the three-part series with the show's producer, Phil Bowker.

Kayo, Bowker and Barklem-Biggs were part of a panel at an RTS Futures event in early May, which screened the first episode of *Sliced*, followed by a discussion with some of the talent

Comedy

Matthew Bell enjoys a piece of *Sliced*, Dave's new pizza-delivery sitcom, at an RTS Futures event

behind the show. "I've been doing comedy for quite a while and I'd never seen [lives like mine] depicted on telly [until] I saw Michaela Coel's *Chewing Gum*. It inspired me to tell my own story," said Kayo.

The actor had worked on *The Javone Prince Show* with Bowker, who encouraged him to write material. "He taught me how to write. I had loads of ideas, but I didn't know about structure," said Kayo. "Phil asked me to think of an

idea [for a series] and I came up with *Sliced* because I've lived that life. We kept it very authentic to south-east London, not making it look dangerous and scary, but showing its light side."

Phil Bowker is steeped in comedy as a producer (*Ruddy Hell! It's Harry and Paul* and *Pulling*) and, latterly, as a writer (*PhoneShop* and *The Javone Prince Show*).

"Samson would come to my house and I'd cook for him – I was like his nan," said Bowker, a Liverpudlian and 20 years older than Kayo. "It was a lovely experience. We'd just chat and he'd tell me mad things. We'd then go away and write a draft [script] and work on it."

When UKTV director of commissioning Richard Watsham saw the eight-minute taster tape for what would become *Sliced*, he was bowled over. "It was unlike anything else we were getting sent," he said. "It really stood out. First, because it was really funny, and – not just because you're

sitting here – we thought you [Kayo] were quite good. Joshua is the most loveable character.”

Sliced features newcomers, up-and-coming actors such as Theo Barklem-Biggs and Weruche Opia, and the seasoned star of *Quadrophenia*, Phil Daniels.

“We’re looking for raw talent. If you’re right for a role, you’re right – it doesn’t matter where you come from,” said casting director Sally Broome, who worked on *PhoneShop* and *The Javone Prince Show*. She offered Wesley Bozonga his first TV role as an angry teenager in *Sliced*.

Barklem-Biggs enjoyed working with new talent on the sitcom. “It keeps things fresh and they always bring something a bit more interesting, which I envy in a way. But [Wesley] was also like a pro because he was ad-libbing. He was on it – I remember being quite blown away.”

Even for established talent, acting can be a precarious profession. “I’ve known Samson for eight years and he had me in mind for [the role of Ricky], which was flattering. I’m very grateful for that, because it meant I didn’t have to audition. It had been a hard year – I was doing unskilled labouring, getting all the worst jobs on a construction site,” recalled Barklem-Biggs.

Weruche Opia (*Bad Education* and *Inside No 9*), who plays pizza worker Naomi in *Sliced*, had been working on the stage. When the play’s run finished, she struggled to land a new job. “I was auditioning like crazy and getting really close to stuff,” she recalled. “That’s the reality of [acting] – there are peaks and there are really dark times. Persistence is key.”

“As actors, we base our worth on getting work but... there are lots of elements that go into casting, so not getting a role doesn’t mean you aren’t good.”

Sometimes, however, everything clicks. “I read the script and thought it was hilarious,” said Opia. “Phil left after Weruche’s audition,” recalled Kayo. “He said, ‘Right, that’s [Naomi cast], I’m off.’” ■

The RTS Futures event ‘Sliced: screening and Q&A’ was held at the London Transport Museum on 8 May. It was produced by Ali Laurie and Gem Pinkney, and chaired by Sam Homewood from Love Island Aftersun.

Assistance for new talent

UKTV and Film London’s Equal Access Network have launched the All Voices initiative to boost the employment of under-represented groups in the TV industry. For up to 12 months, those selected for the scheme – from new entrants to mid-level professionals to returners to the industry – will work in paid roles on UKTV original productions, helping them to increase their experience and build contacts in TV.

‘We weren’t doing enough at UKTV to get a mixture of different people making shows,’ admitted director of commissioning Richard Watsham. ‘At the end of their 12 months [on the scheme], people will, hopefully, have three or four things on their CVs, which then gives them a decent opportunity to get work elsewhere.’



Weruche Opia

David Mumeni, who plays pizza takeaway manager Mario in *Sliced*, founded Open Door, which helps young people who lack financial support gain a place at the UK’s leading drama schools.

‘We offer one-to-one tuition with actors or directors who, perhaps, are from a similar background,’ he explained. ‘They get workshops, working with movement directors such as Polly Bennett, who helped Rami Malek win an Oscar for playing Freddie Mercury; they get into the theatre for free; and there’s a hardship fund.’

He continued: ‘[We’re] levelling the playing field, [helping people] to catch up on cultural experience.’ Open Door aims to build confidence ‘so, when they enter those [audition] rooms, they feel that they deserve to be there’.

Paul Hampartsoumian

How they started... and kept at it

Theo Barklem-Biggs went to the Brit School from the age of 14: ‘At 18, I got an agent, after doing a showcase, and I got a recall for *The Bill*. I decided not to go on a lads’ holiday to Benicàssim and it paid off – I got [the role].’

Phil Bowker performed stand-up as a teenager before training as a comedy producer for BBC Radio: ‘It was full of Oxbridge people – they were so super-smart, but then you get over that and realise... you can make people laugh.’

Sally Broome started as a receptionist at a casting studio, met a casting director and did her apprenticeship with her: ‘I worked with Armando Iannucci, Steve Coogan and other comedy greats.’

Samson Kayo made his debut in Aml Ameen’s 2011 short film *Drink, Drugs*

and KFC: ‘That was the first time I’d been in the realm of actors – from that moment on I knew this was what I wanted to do.’

David Mumeni studied at the Drama Centre London: ‘I wasn’t one of those actors who just [took off] but, slowly, slowly, [it happened].’

Weruche Opia studied drama at the University of the West of England and then at the Identity School of Acting: ‘There’s been ups and downs since then – it’s not been plain sailing.’

Richard Watsham began as a runner and ‘people were just shouting in my face all day long’. He persisted on the theory that, ‘If I do enough shit jobs for long enough, eventually, other people will have given up on telly.’

At her very first *World in Action* meeting as a young researcher, Dorothy Byrne experienced a feeling she couldn't quite put her finger on. Until she realised that it was "the feeling I got if I accidentally wandered into the gents' toilets – I shouldn't be here!"

Being a rare woman in a man's world in the early 1980s didn't deter her, however, and Byrne has now worked in investigative broadcast journalism for nigh on four decades.

News and current affairs supremo at Channel 4 for the past 16 years, she started out at ITV as a producer on *World in Action* and *The Big Story*, moving to Channel 4 in 1998. Films commissioned by Byrne have won numerous Emmys, Baftas and RTS awards, and last year at the RTS Television Journalism Awards she received the Outstanding Contribution Award.

Blunt, entertaining and impassioned, Byrne discussed some of the challenges she's met head on – and those still to be fought – at an RTS North West event in late April.

She started her career as she meant to go on. Byrne's idea for her first *World in Action* was dismissed "by one senior man, [who] told her that marital rape wasn't a story". Another suggested that it was a subject "more suited to morning TV". And a third said: "You can only make it if there is corroboration from other witnesses and medical evidence."

So Byrne pushed "for permission to ring a 'real' lawyer, not a 'fireside' lawyer" and, after he came out in her favour, she was allowed to go ahead.

She has continued to fight for women's issues to be given equal weight and broadcast time. "People think that stories have to be a 'news' story," she said, "but wickedness that's been going on for decades is still wickedness, and we should expose it."

She added: "We hold power to account and, at our best, we investigate wickedness so it can no longer damage society and individuals. We should be really proud of what we do."

Byrne recently commissioned successful films about breastfeeding and the formula milk scandal. "Individual women, particularly working-class women... get blamed for the fact that they don't breastfeed, but they don't get the help and support they need.



Still shaking things up

News and current affairs

Blunt and entertaining, **Dorothy Byrne** is clear that more diversity is the key to outstanding current affairs, reports **Carole Solazzo**

And they're still relentlessly flogged formula milk," she said.

A desire to increase the diversity of the voices heard on TV partly informs Byrne's commitment to covering foreign stories, despite higher costs and lower audiences. To make programmes more economically, she often works with foreign organisations. "We've won a lot of awards for our foreign coverage, so, if we go to broadcasters in other countries, they will often... come in with us," she said.

And she is just as forward thinking when it comes to using non-TV platforms. "The young woman who filmed for us in a hospital in east Aleppo had half a billion [Facebook] views in one year for the films that she made."

Channel 4 also releases special cut-downs of *Unreported World* on social media network *LadBible*. The channel doesn't make money from this partnership, but using the site gives it the potential of reaching many millions of young viewers. On YouTube, Byrne added, "our *Unreported World* channel is approaching 1 million subscribers".

The news executive is passionate about reaching out to the next generation, both viewers and programme-makers. After showing a clip of the multi-award-winning documentary *Syria: Children on the Frontline*, she revealed that it had been the young photographer's first full-length film. He had previously made two short films in Aleppo for *Channel 4 News*. "I looked at them and thought, 'He's got such an eye and such sensitivity, he could make a whole film,'" she said.

Byrne brought ITN on board to provide "an experienced producer and executive producer to work with him. What counts in journalism is the story, the idea, the access – you don't need to have made 15 *Storyvilles*."

Turning to investigative journalism, she noted that "a major trend is international teams of journalists working together to take on highly complex financial institutions. I see an appetite to take on much bigger international companies and it's one of the reasons I feel very positive." ■

Dorothy Byrne: the future of investigative news journalism' was an RTS North West event held at the University of Salford on 29 April. It was hosted by Jim Hancock, former political editor of BBC North West, and produced by Rachel Pinkney.

Byrne on... Diversity in television

'What shocked me, having come from Scotland and the North [Byrne was born in Scotland and educated in Blackpool and Manchester] was [that] at Channel 4 everybody was so incredibly posh... loads of them had been to Westminster School.'

Byrne believes strongly that '[getting] working-class people in to TV is a major issue', and she has set out to start redressing the balance with an MA in investigative journalism at De Montfort University, Leicester, developed by Channel 4, which takes half of its students from diverse backgrounds.

She spoke about bringing more jobs to the North of England. 'Channel 4 is moving 300 people to Leeds,' she said. 'We need a major rebalancing of where the jobs are and that will improve coverage. If the vast majority are living in Chiswick, you get a Chiswick view.'

One of the four commissioners in her

department will move to Glasgow, and she plans to commission more programmes from Leeds and Manchester. 'Fifty per cent of all our output has to be out of London. I've said to companies, "If you don't move out of London, I can't commission you any more"'

To audience laughter, she added, 'And really move out of London. Not pretend to move out of London to your holiday home. What will [bring about] change is pressure both from within the industry and from the public. There are a lot more women [in TV] now. A lot of what I've said tonight [happened] because women got positions of power.'

'We changed [our] coverage of subjects about women and society, and our whole way of looking at what a story is. And we have an enormous job to do that for all groups in our society. Pressurising our broadcasters on a daily basis is absolutely essential.'

Byrne on... Covering Brexit

'The issue about Brexit isn't a remainder versus a Brexiter attitude. It's that we [all journalists]... spent too long saying, "This is what one side says, this is what the other side says" in a desperate attempt to prove that we were duly impartial.'

Being duly impartial is a big part of what we must be, but an even bigger part is telling people the truth. Brexit journalism [hasn't been] daring enough

about saying our job isn't just to follow other people's agendas, it's about trying to identify... the really important things that people need to know about.'

[Hearing both sides out, then saying] what we've done is... investigated the facts and found out these completely different things, which neither [group] is saying. It was our duty to seek out other truths that neither side wanted to tell us.'

Byrne on... Getting your first break

'Be pushy. I went to 10 top people in TV journalism... and got each of them to nominate three young people who they thought were successful,' Byrne said. '[One] came from a normal background [in the North]. He found out where [chief correspondent] Alex

Thomson was staying on holiday, and walked up and down the beach.. for two or three hours until he found him.

'He went up to Alex and said: "I really want to be a journalist. Can I have some work experience on *Channel 4 News*?"'

'And that bloke is doing really well now.'

Can £57m reverse a decade of decline?

In March 2018, CBeebies pulled off a spectacular staging of *The Tempest*, a pacy version that preserved all the best “O brave new world” lines, while gripping its audience of under-sevens.

They rippled with spontaneous laughter as Caliban and Trinculo, the comic jester, sparred. Then sat in hushed, wide-eyed amazement as Ariel performed magic. Prospero was played with solemnity by Patrick Robinson, the Lamda- and Royal Shakespeare Company-trained actor, best known to millions for *Casualty*, who helped transform *The Tempest* into a family television show appealing to both tots and grandparents.

He was balanced by Captain Swashbuckle, a CBeebies entertainment character, acting as William Shakespeare’s helper, and presenter Justin Fletcher.

CBeebies had worked its passage towards this triumph with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* two years previously. It adopted the slogan, “CBeebies loves Shakespeare”, and demonstrated that public service broadcasting can enthrall very young audiences on modest funding.

This helps to explain why the RTS Programme Awards recently named CBeebies Channel of the Year.

Despite this celebration of CBeebies’ good works, there has been a 40% decline in original British children’s programming over the past decade. The malaise has been spreading since 2003, after transmission quotas were removed, and restrictions on the advertising of fizzy sugary drinks and junk food in 2006 hit funding for commercial PSBs. This was compounded by the 2008 recession.

More recently, however, the Government has rallied to the children’s TV cause: tax breaks for children’s programmes were introduced in 2014; Ofcom was handed new powers to impose mandatory quotas on commercial PSBs in 2017; and the producers’

Children’s TV

A new fund, aimed at reinvigorating kids’ TV, launched in April. **Maggie Brown** investigates

organisation Pact has campaigned on the issue.

Ofcom’s 2018 report, “Children and Parents: media use and attitudes”, which showed that children were moving en masse to the unregulated YouTube, also made a big impact.

The Government’s latest response is the new Young Audiences Content Fund (YACF), an initiative designed to encourage the commercial PSBs – ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – “back to the table”, as well as bolstering S4C and BBC Alba, and injecting variety into a mix currently dominated by cartoons.

A pilot three-year scheme was launched quietly on 1 April. A modest staff of seven, divided between Manchester and Leeds, is headed by the respected and energetic ex-BBC Children’s executive Jackie Edwards, who started work on 25 February.

The fund will finance up to 50% of each qualifying project, provided it has secured a free-to-air broadcast commission. Promising a 12-week response to applications, YACF is run under the aegis of the BFI, with deputy chief executive Ben Roberts taking a close interest.

The controversial part is the fund’s source: £57m of licence-fee money diverted from the BBC’s 2006 settlement for digital switchover (plus £3m for audio). This “top slicing” to fund children’s television initially raised hackles: The Voice of the Listener & Viewer said it was “not a very good idea”. The BBC remains tight-lipped on the development. Disney declines to comment.

Anna Home, Chair of the Children’s Media Foundation, which fruitlessly campaigned for a subsidy solution that did not “rob Peter to pay Paul”, is keeping a watchful eye on the YACF stakeholder committee. “The broadcasters have stepped up, the will is there to make it happen, give it a go. It is good for the BBC to have some competition,” she said.

Successive culture secretaries, including John Whittingdale and Karen

Young Audience Content Fund

Four objectives and...

- Supports the creation of high-quality content for audiences up to age 18
- Contributes to funding programmes shown on TV and online platforms that have public service values
- Supports content that reflects the experiences of children and young people growing up in the UK today
- Covers entertainment, education, factual, fiction and drama, arts, culture and religion

... four criteria for funding

- Informs our understanding of the world
- Stimulates knowledge and learning
- Reflects the UK’s cultural identity
- Represents diversity and alternative viewpoints

For more information

<https://bit.ly/2JGyNkx>



Classic ITV kids series *The Worst Witch*

Bradley, have backed the principle of a contestable children's fund: Bradley ordered a consultation/policy paper on the matter at the close of 2017, just before she left the job.

Margot James, minister for the digital and creative industries, said last June that "more needs to be done to protect children from online harm". The fund, she said, was "just one part of a broader Government effort to stimulate the children's TV market".

Aside from the DCMS, political pressure has been coming from the House of Lords. One of the leading figures here has been Floella Benjamin, a tireless lobbyist for children's TV.

Of her decision to take on the project, Jackie Edwards, previously head of acquisitions and independent animation at CBBC, says "It was no small decision – I loved the BBC, but it was an irresistible opportunity. The decline over 10 years was quite devastating. Here was an opportunity to try and put it right in some ways, a new big bold idea."

The fund has been designed with deliberately flexible rules (see box). "As this is a pilot, we can change things," noted Edwards. Five per cent has been set aside for new content in Welsh and Gaelic. Another 5% will be for developing new talent. These projects don't need to have a broadcaster attached, and Edwards hopes to fish in the BFI's nationwide network for the latter.

YACF's funds do not stretch to the creation of any new platforms. So winning the support of existing broadcasters has been crucial: the pilot's decisions will "inevitably be led by broadcaster commissioners", says Edwards. A priority is making the biggest impacts on audiences, and the hope is to find breakthrough hits.

Eligibility for the cash depends on a project receiving a commitment to broadcast from an Ofcom-licensed and free-to-air platform for the first transmission. European-owned subsidiaries can apply if they have UK operations. But the scheme is openly aimed at ITV,

Channel 4 and Channel 5. Any content that receives funding needs to be easily found in the broadcasters' linear schedules and VoD sites.

"Netflix doesn't need this money," Edwards points out. She expects a "quite good even spread of spending across the age groups, up to 18. There is a lot of interest in different genres".

YACF does not expect to own intellectual property. The attached broadcaster will be expected to buy a licence from the producer.

At a first public discussion on 11 April, Paul Mortimer, the head of ITV digital channels, including CITV, noted that the channel "had not had drama for some time and maybe it could get back to some. We have one project with [the fund] and we have more ideas going forward. The door to me is open".

At the same event, Sarah Lazenby, Channel 4's head of features and formats, said that it would be "nice to dig deeper" into its remit to cater for 16- to 18-year-olds.

S4C's children's content commissioner, Sioned Wyn Roberts, hoped to obtain funding for a teen drama and/or a comedy for 6- to 12-year-olds, while BBC Alba commissioner Bill Macleod, argued that "there is a great gap in live action. This is a fantastic opportunity."

The broadcasters, meanwhile, are holding their cards close to their chests. Lime Pictures, which supplies *Hollyoaks* to Channel 4 and *Free Rein* to Netflix, says: "We are very much interested and have already had positive discussions with ITV and Channel 4." The producer has a variety of pilots in development.

Another player interested in shaping the YACF's spending priorities is the International Broadcasting Trust. In its recent report "The challenge of children's television", the organisation lamented the lack of access to truthful programming for children about the wider world.

Many questions remain. How will the fund fit with the lengthy timescales of television production, especially for scripted shows? And is it too little, too late?

Edwards, hoarse from explaining the pilot to callers by the time we talk, is in *Blue Peter* can-do mode. Her rallying cry is: "Let's deliver something to be noticed." She senses that there could be life after the pilot, provided that the £57m challenge works.

One thing, though: perhaps it needs a better name? ■

Conservatoire reaps awards



Scotland
Centre

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland enjoyed a successful night at RTS Scotland's Student Television Awards at the end of April. Students from the Glasgow-based arts academy took home the Drama award for *What Separates Us from the Beasts* and triumphed in four of the Craft Skills categories, including the new Writing prize, which was won by Robin Boreham for *Incoming Tide*.

The University of Glasgow entered the awards for the first time and took the Short Form prize for *War Museum*. The remaining awards were won by Edinburgh College of Art (Animation), Glasgow Clyde College (Comedy and Entertainment) and Craft

Skills – Editing) and the University of Stirling (Factual).

"The judges were greatly impressed by the high standard and ambition of this year's submissions," said James Wilson, the Chair of RTS Scotland's Student Television Awards.

The ceremony was hosted by STV News entertainment reporter Laura Boyd and by comedy duo Link and Lorne at the Argyle Street Arches in Glasgow.

Simon Pitts, CEO of STV, which sponsored the awards, said: "It's a hugely exciting time for Scotland's creative industries. By supporting new talent we can ensure that Scotland remains at the forefront of creativity."

"Beyond tonight, my colleagues at STV will offer mentoring for the winners to support their entry into this vibrant industry."

All the films nominated for the awards are available – as well as highlights from the ceremony – on STV player (<https://player.stv.tv/categories/new-talent/>).

Matthew Bell

their broadcast counterparts, he said, adding that, because the internet model does not "scale" to the same degree, broadcast television productions offer a much richer viewing experience.

Balchin spoke about how e-sports, or video-game tournaments, are gaining ground, with many traditional sports production providers now taking a keen interest. The e-sports market is forecast to be worth \$1.4bn worldwide by 2020, he said.

Tony Orme

RTS Scotland Student Television Awards winners

Animation • *Cleaning in Progress* • Grant Holden, Edinburgh College of Art
Comedy and Entertainment • *Maroon* by Rob Auton • Kenneth Maguire, John Perivolaris and Katrina McDermott, Glasgow Clyde College
Drama • *What Separates Us from the Beasts* • Edward Kondracki, Sedona May Tubbs, Kieran Howe, JP Pezet, John Dew

and Robin Boreham, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Factual • *The Bad Guy* • Cory Thomas, Laura Buchanan, Giulia Veronelli, Marco Di Gioia and Danny Flynn, University of Stirling

Short Form • *War Museum* • Xavier Weiss, Angelo Perdikou, JuEunhae Knox, Greig King, Vincent Jozajitis, Alex Hodgson and Stephen Packe, University of Glasgow

Craft Skills – Camera • *Coalescence* • Johnstone Macpherson-Stewart, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Craft Skills – Editing • *The Last Sip* •

Martin Waldie and Christy Kail, Glasgow Clyde College

Craft Skills – Production Design •

Threnody • Paul Barrie, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Craft Skills – Sound • *Coalescence* • Karo Pietilä, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Craft Skills – Writing • *Incoming Tide* •

Robin Boreham, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Thames Valley

Talking to a packed RTS Thames Valley event at Henley Rugby Club in March, Richard Bagnall and Charles Balchin from global sports outfit IMG revealed how technology is driving state-of-the-art television production.

Diving deep into the technology, IMG Media head of engineering Richard Bagnall gave a description of how IP (internet protocol) has changed the face of outside broadcasts, with SDI (serial digital interface) circuits

Sport's hi-tech future

being enhanced by IT communication. As well as providing a fully uncompressed service to traditional broadcasters, Bagnall demonstrated how OTT (over-the-top) internet delivery was being achieved.

Balchin, who is head of programmes at IMG Productions, discussed the analysis tools now available to sports presenters. He said that

remote minicams and drones have added significantly to production values, although he warned that they could be over-used.

While the internet has brought sport on mobile devices to millions, Balchin expressed his fear that production quality could be eroded in the process. Internet-delivery-only productions tend to be much cheaper than

How does a background in TV drama prepare you as a director for making the transition to feature films? This was just one of the questions put to director David Jackson by RTS East's Fiona Ryder, following a screening of his impressive debut feature, *Winterlong*, at the Arts Picturehouse, Cambridge, in late April.

Jackson, who received his first big break from Nicola Shindler at Red Production Company, where he directed the RTS award-winning series *Clocking Off*, said he owed everything to TV drama.

"Television was my training ground. I'd made a couple of BFI shorts before that, but I didn't know anything, really. The reality of shooting upwards of seven pages [of script] a day under intense scrutiny while negotiating a large professional crew was a wake-up call. I learnt that, not only do you have to be good, but you have to be fast, too," he said.

Jackson turned his TV drama experience to his advantage by shooting



Nox Films

Film poaches director

Winterlong in just 18 days, with no pick-ups. The film, evocatively shot in and around Hastings, East Sussex, was praised by the *Guardian*'s film critic, Peter Bradshaw, as "sumptuously shot" and "technically assured".

The director cast some notable TV actors he had worked with previously,

including Doon Mackichan (*Smack the Pony*, *Plebs*), Ian Puleston-Davies (*Tin Star*, *Coronation Street*), and, notably, Francis Magee (*Game of Thrones* and *Witless*).

Magee's tremendous central performance as a solitary, though charming, poacher who must take on new responsibilities when

his estranged teenage son is left on the doorstep of his remote caravan home, has been widely acclaimed by critics.

Winterlong premiered at the 2018 Edinburgh International Film Festival, earning a nomination for the Michael Powell Award for Best British Feature Film.

Belfast boost for TV crafts

RTS Futures Northern Ireland, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast, ran a successful season of film and TV crafts and skills workshops over four days in early April.

The first event, "Sketchy business: making it in animation", brought together a panel hosted by the university's Dr Helen Haswell and featured three experts from Belfast animation house JAM Media: visual effects supervisor and director Niall

Mooney; animator Jessica Patterson; and animation director Simon Kelleghan. They discussed how to get your foot in the door, as well as giving practical advice, including how best to structure a showreel.

"The ultimate presenter's panel" was hosted by RTS Futures NI's Vice-Chair and University of Ulster student Conor Finn and included BBC Radio Ulster's Vinny Hurrell, UTV Live host Paul Clark and Cool FM's Pete Snodden. The

latter was "working in a radio station for free for two years, making tea and hoping someone would call in sick", before landing his first job.

"Capturing the Seven Kingdoms", featuring Helen Sloan, the on-set stills photographer of *Game of Thrones*, pulled in the largest audience of the week, who saw unseen stills from the HBO series.

"Zero-budget film-making: a how-to guide" ended the series of workshops, which were hosted by Queen's

University Belfast in its own production studio.

Film-makers Dr Thomas Scott and Steve Earley, from Belfast Metropolitan College, were joined by actor Frank Cannon and offered advice on how to make the most of micro-budgets and working with unpaid actors.

"We are so pleased with the success of the film and TV crafts and skills season. We took a risk by running such niche, specialised workshops but it paid off, and it's always so encouraging to see so many enthusiastic, passionate young people who want to learn," said RTS Futures NI Chair Stacey Burns.

RTS events IN BRIEF

Bursary graduate offers Sky view

'Meet the professionals' was held at Bournemouth University in March. Now in its 10th year, this event has become a Southern Centre institution.

Some 200 production-based students from universities across the region met media professionals to discuss TV production, opportunities in the industry and career development.

One of the professionals offering advice was Dean Massey, who, in 2014, was part of the first cohort of students to receive an RTS Bursary. A graduate of Southampton Solent University's Television and Video Production course, Massey now works for Sky News as a camera operator/editor.

The RTS Southern event never fails to win approval from students and professionals alike, and many working contacts are made there.

BBC Radio repeats Brum quiz triumph

Midlands Today presenter Nick Owen hosted the second RTS Midlands 'Big telly quiz' in early April at the Cube in Birmingham. Twenty-three teams battled it out for the trophy, facing 10 tough rounds of questions, including one about the host.

A team from the BBC, the Radio Brainwaves, triumphed – repeating their victory in last year's inaugural quiz.

RTS Midlands Chair Caren Davies said: 'Another brilliant night was had by all and we really put the teams' TV knowledge to the test. Teams from ITV News Central, the BBC and indies from the region entered, and, in Nick, we had a fantastic and funny host.'

North
West
Centre

Carole Solazzo reports from two RTS events in Salford that show television is in rude health in the region



Julie Ettingham

conversation with McDonald, illustrated how these ingredients were combined when *Tonight* burst on to Britain's TV screens with "scoop interviews" of the five men accused of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Groundbreaking techniques, such as using footage from police cameras hidden in the flat of one of the men and giving the accused air-time under the close scrutiny of Martin Bashir, enabled *Tonight* to put the case before the public.

Tonight helped to expose the institutional racism rampant at the time in the Metropolitan Police.

In 2003, when a clearly uncomfortable George W Bush cut short McDonald's questioning in favour of showing him around the White House, the *Tonight* anchor decided to keep the cameras rolling and allowed British viewers to see behind the public face of the then-US President. Similar methods were used in *Living with Michael Jackson*, a show that Ettingham revealed "sold to 134 countries".

In another innovative move, described by McDonald, *Tonight* sat Tony Blair down in front of "people who had been intimately connected [with the Iraq war] and held Blair responsible". Ettingham reflected that this was quintessential *Tonight*: "Not only do we ask the questions our audience want asked, but it can be equally effective to have our audience there [asking those questions]."

Jermey, Ettingham and McDonald all praised the off-screen talent, with Jermey acknowledging "the care and dedication all the skilled programme-makers have put into the show". ■

Tonight marks 20 years on TV

Covering stories and people – "from Michael Jackson and [Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? contestant] the 'Coughing Major' to top politicians and the lowest criminals" – claimed current host Julie Ettingham – has helped to make *Tonight* "Britain's most-watched weekly current affairs programme".

Many of the show's team, past and present, together with some of its legions of fans, packed the Lowry's Compass Room in early April to celebrate – alongside *Tonight's* first presenter, Sir Trevor McDonald – the show's 20th anniversary.

ITV news chief Michael Jermey outlined "the alchemy that makes the show so successful". *Tonight*, which has always been made in the North West, "had never been part of the 'London bubble'", he argued. "Its roots [are] in the ITV heartland."

Setting the show apart, Jermey suggested, were "its instinctive understanding of the questions that interest our viewers and the desire to put people at the heart of our story-telling. [It unites] the great tradition of ITV current affairs, so strong in the old Granada, with a strong news organisation [ITN]."

Ettingham, in



ONLINE at the RTS

■ As an educational charity, the Royal Television Society offers lots of opportunities to those working in television – and to those who want to get in. From our bursaries and internships to masterclasses and careers fairs, there's a lot going on. That's why we've relaunched the Education & Training section of the RTS website. From signing up to mentor a bursary student to finding out how to write a CV, there's lots of information for everyone at all levels in the industry (www.rts.org.uk/Education).

How to get into TV: this part of the Education & Training section is full of information for those in the earliest stages of their careers. It includes an ever-growing list of job roles available in the industry, plus advice on how to get work experience, how to prepare for an interview and how to survive as a freelancer (www.rts.org.uk/WorkInTV).

Masterclasses: hear from industry experts, including BBC News journalist Clive Myrie, editor Pia Di Ciaula and writer Sally Wainwright, as they discuss their careers and offer advice to those hoping to follow in their footsteps. Taken from the RTS Student Masterclasses, which are held every November, the areas covered include craft skills, comedy and factual entertainment (www.rts.org.uk/Masterclasses).

Training schemes: our list of entry-level training schemes is one of the most-visited pages on our website, but you can also find information here about mid-level training and apprenticeships (www.rts.org.uk/TrainingSchemes).

Pippa Shawley

Through the keyhole

LA Productions' new drama *Clink* takes viewers into the tough environment of a women's prison, tackling contemporary issues such as female genital mutilation.

Clink began its run on Channel 5's young-adult channel, 5 Star, last month.

At a screening of the first two episodes at the Lowry in April, executive producer and LA founder Colin McKeown spoke of the "importance of research and authenticity".

Head of development Justine Potter described how, aided by charities, the Liverpool indie was able to speak to "former prison officers, prisoners, governors and even managers of mother and baby units". The drama was therefore "informed by, and faithful to, those inmates, procedures and stories".

LA head of production and the producer of *Clink*, Donna Molloy, was proud that the show "shines a light" on women in prison, adding that "the system doesn't

work [for female offenders]". Potter echoed this view: "When men go to prison, women look after the children. But when women go to prison, whole families are decimated."

The project was a response to a request from Channel 5 commissioning executive Sebastian Cardwell for a "women's prison drama". The production process was facilitated, McKeown said, by Cardwell's "demanding but trusting" attitude.

"The journey from conception to delivery [took] a mere 10 months," continued

'ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CAMERA, MOST OF THE TEAM WERE WOMEN'

McKeown – and just 10 weeks to shoot the 10-part series. Katherine Rose Morley, who plays newbie Chloe, said that the rapid shooting schedule meant the actors had "to let that day go and get on with the next one".

McKeown thought this

"tight, yet effective, turn-around [was] one of the fastest on record" and, for this, Molloy praised the "quality of the talent" behind the camera, as well as the "amazing cast".

Unusually in television, said Molloy, most of "this incredibly supportive team" on both sides of the camera were women. McKeown added that LA Productions has set out "to create more opportunities for women in the industry [and] *Clink* was the perfect vehicle".

Developing talent is also part of the indie's ethos. Gillian Kearney, who starred in LA's BBC One daytime drama *Moving On* in 2013, made her directorial debut on *Clink*.

Clink was shot almost exclusively in Huyton, Liverpool, and at a Territorial Army barracks at in a nearby medical centre.

Mckeown was proud that "every aspect of the show was produced in-house and screams the North West, specifically Liverpool". ■

OFF MESSAGE

It's that man again. Who else but the brilliant Jed Mercurio. Not content with creating and writing 2018's most popular TV drama, *Bodyguard*, he's gone and done it again.

Clocking up 9.6 million overnight viewers for BBC One, series 5 of *Line of Duty* is the most-watched series of the year. This is a considerable achievement for the screenwriter, the TV equivalent of Manchester City winning the Premier League two years running.

In the streaming era, that figure, and a 44.1% audience share, represent the kind of popularity that speaks to the resilience of linear broadcasting.

Line of Duty's stunning success, like *Bodyguard*'s, is also a reason for ITV to be cheerful. Both shows were made by World Productions, which, of course, comes under the ITV Studios umbrella.

■ We all know that making natural history programmes requires patience and is very labour intensive.

Just how much time it takes to obtain material such as *Our Planet*'s shocking footage of stranded Russian walruses was made clear at the RTS's recent screening of the documentary.

Series producer Keith Scholey revealed that the shooting ratio for *Our Planet* was 1,000:1, a figure that would have been impossible in pre-

digital days due to storage costs. Or, to put it another way, the screen time for the series equates to 10 crew days for every minute of the show.

■ Caroline Frost divulged a novel approach to maintaining good mental health at the Society's early-evening event this month on promoting wellbeing in the TV industry.

The Broadcasting Press Guild's TV chair asked a serious question – "At what point does a stressed-out day become something approaching a more serious mental health issue?" – and then offered a solution from her childhood. "We've all had a bad day. My mum used to say, 'Go and do a press-up.' Just the one, as if that was going to make a difference."

Stranger still, one of the panellists, Julia Lamb, from mental health charity Mind, had the same memory: "My mum used to say that about the press-up as well – I'm wondering if we are distantly related."

■ **Off Message wishes the very best of luck to Darren Childs, the new Chief Executive of Premiership rugby. He begins work in his latest role next month.**

During an eventful eight years leading UKTV, the former BBC Worldwide exec successfully transformed the company into a multichannel powerhouse. Revenues grew by 66%

and he oversaw a portfolio of hit original commissions. *Dynamo: Magician Impossible*, *Taskmaster*, *Flack* and now *Sliced* are some of the commissioned shows that succeeded under Darren's watch.

His management skills helped to create an enviable working culture. This was reflected in the fact that UKTV was the first TV broadcaster to be listed in the *Sunday Times* Top 100 Companies to Work For.

■ And, finally, a fond and heartfelt adieu to perhaps the greatest TV political interviewer of them all, the matchless Brian Walden.

Those who worked with him at LWT, including executives John Birt and David Cox, need no reminding that behind Walden's prowess as a Westminster interlocutor was a regime of meticulous planning.

Around 1 million viewers regularly made a Sunday lunchtime ITV date to watch Walden's relentless questioning of the day's political giants.

To paraphrase Birt, 30 minutes with Walden was a real heavyweight bout that only the best – such as Margaret Thatcher – were up to.

Incidentally, the erstwhile Labour MP also liked nothing better than to talk at length – as Off Message discovered during a highly entertaining afternoon in the company of the great man.



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