

May 2015

Television



Has TV eaten itself?



RTS STUDENT TELEVISION AWARDS 2014

5 JUNE

1:00pm
BFI Southbank,
London SE1 8XT

Hosted by Romesh Ranganathan.
Nominated films and highlights of the
awards ceremony will be broadcast by Sky

www.rts.org.uk



From the CEO



The general election has dominated the national news agenda for much of the year. This month, the RTS hosts a debate in which two of television's most experienced anchor men give an insider's view of what really happened in the political arena.

Jeremy Paxman and Alastair Stewart are in conversation with Steve Hewlett at a not-to-be missed Leg-ends' Lunch on 19 May. For more details, please go to our website.

I am delighted to say that registration is now open for the biennial RTS Cambridge Convention, chaired by BBC Director-General Tony Hall.

The dates of this year's conference

are 16-18 September. I am very proud to say that we have assembled a world-class line-up of speakers.

They include: Michael Lombardo, President of Programming at HBO; Sharon White, CEO of Ofcom; David Abraham, CEO at Channel 4; Viacom President and CEO Philippe Dauman; Josh Sapan, President and CEO of AMC Networks; and David Zaslav, President and CEO of Discovery Communications.

Next month sees the 20th RTS Student Awards. I am thrilled that comedian Romesh Ranganathan will host the event at BFI Southbank in London on 5 June.

In an exciting move, the work of this year's nominees and highlights of the ceremony will be shown on Sky TV.

I'd like to thank everyone who made the recent, sold-out RTS Futures evening, "I made it in... digital", such a success. A full report starts on page 23.

Are you a fan of *Episodes*, *Googlebox* or *WIA*? Well, who isn't? This month's cover story by Stefan Stern takes a perceptive look at how television can't stop making TV about TV. It's a must-read.

So, too, is Richard Sambrook's TV Diary, which provides some incisive and timely analysis of the election coverage.

Theresa Wise

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Cover picture: BBC

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National events

RTS LEGENDS

Tuesday 19 May

General election 2015: Did TV come to the aid of the party?

Jeremy Paxman and Alastair Stewart OBE in conversation. Just days after the conclusion of the election, two of television's leading interviewers will share their insiders' views of exactly what happened. Tickets are £69.60 inc VAT (£58+£11.60 VAT) per person and are inclusive of service but exclusive of alcoholic beverages. 12:30pm for 1:00pm
Venue: London Hilton on Park Lane, London W1K 1BE
■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS AWARDS

Friday 5 June

RTS Student Television Awards 2014

Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT
■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS FUTURES

Monday 8 June

How to be the best... researcher

6:30pm
Venue: 110 Rochester Row, London SW1P 1JP
■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS FUTURES

Thursday 16 July

Summer party

Organised jointly by RTS Futures and Guardian Edinburgh International Television Festival Talent Schemes. 6:30pm
Venue: Design Museum, 28 Shad Thames, London SE1 2YD
■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS CONVENTION

16-18 September

RTS Cambridge Convention 2015

Venue: West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge CB3 9DP and King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST
■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Monday 28 September

In conversation with Mike Darcey, Chief Executive Officer, News UK

6:30pm for 6:45pm
Venue: The Hospital Club, 24 Endell Street, London WC2H 9HQ



Demis Hassabis

JOINT PUBLIC LECTURE

Wednesday 4 November

Joint RTS/IET public lecture with Demis Hassabis

Demis Hassabis is founder of Deep Mind and an artificial intelligence researcher, neuroscientist and computer game designer. 6:30pm for 6:45pm
Venue: TBC

Local events

BRISTOL

Thursday 11 June

Student Showcase screenings

1:00pm-5:00pm
In conversation with Burrell Durrant HiFi
6:00pm-7:00pm
Venue for both: Watershed Cinema 3, 1 Canon's Road, Harbourside Bristol BS1 5TX

Tuesday 14 July

AGM

Venue: TBC
■ Belinda Biggam
■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

DEVON & CORNWALL

■ Contact TBC

EAST ANGLIA

■ Contact TBC

LONDON

Tuesday 19 May

The Jane Mercer Memorial Lecture: Moving images

Given by Raye Farr. Organised jointly by RTS London and Focal International. 6:30pm for 7:00pm
Venue: Cavendish Conference Centre, 22 Duchess Mews, London W1G 9DT
■ Daniel Cherowbrier
■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

May to June

Education workshops in secondary schools

These will give students in years 8 and 9 an insight into jobs in the TV industry. ■ 17 May SCA Academy, Walsall

RTS industry update roadshows

■ 21 May BBC Nottingham ■ 4 June University of Birmingham. Both 11:45-14:00, including lunch
■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585
■ jayne@ijmmedia.co.uk

NORTH EAST & THE BORDER

19-20 May

Young People's Video Festival

Venue: University of Sunderland
■ Jill Graham
■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tuesday 9 June

Technology tour

Organised by RTS NI Futures and hosted by BBC Northern Ireland. This visit to BBC Blackstaff will tour the New Technology Presentations and Vision department. Camera and audio supervisors will showcase many aspects of BBC Northern Ireland television production. 18:30pm-21:00pm. Register at: www.eventbrite.co.uk
Venue: BBC Blackstaff House, Bruce Street, Belfast BT2 7GX
■ John Mitchell
■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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

SCOTLAND

Wednesday 20 May

Annual Awards

6:30pm. Tickets are free if you join the RTS by direct debit during April, otherwise: members, £24 inc VAT plus booking fee; non-members, £48 plus booking fee. Online booking at Eventbrite
Venue: Oran Mor, Glasgow G12 8QX
■ James Wilson 07899 761167
■ james.wilson@cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk

SOUTHERN

■ Gordon Cooper
■ gordonjcooper@gmail.com



THAMES VALLEY

Wednesday 1 July

Summer BBQ – Drone fest

6:30pm-8:30pm approx
Venue: Pincents Manor, Calcot, Reading RG31 4UQ
■ Penny Westlake
■ info@rtstvc.org.uk

WALES

Thursday 18 June

AGM

Venue: TBC
■ Hywel William 07980 007841
■ hywel@aim.uk.com

YORKSHIRE

Friday 19 June

Annual Awards

Venue: Royal Armories, Leeds LS10 1LT
■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280
■ lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk

TV diary

Richard Sambrook reflects on an election campaign like no other – and hails a new approach to political interviewing pioneered by Evan Davis



Watching an election campaign from an academic perch is very different to organising coverage in the newsroom. My university colleagues are no less engaged, but they stand outside the media-political bubble and are usually better informed.

This can make some of their questions more challenging than those of presenters, correspondents or politicians. They seem to think opinion should be based on rigorous research and evidence. Quaint notion.

■ We have had a team researching media coverage of the campaign that has been published in *The Guardian* each week.

Headlines so far: the BBC offers more policy coverage than other channels; politicians spend more time attacking each other than outlining policy. And, at one stage, Sky and the BBC feature Conservative voices speaking for longer than they do other parties. Is that fair, given that a government should be held to account on its record? Or unfair, given the context of an election campaign? Essays in by Friday, please.

■ The leaders' debates again become the highlight of what, at the time of writing, seems an otherwise stale-mated campaign. Nicola Sturgeon is this year's Nick Clegg.

In spite of the tortuous negotiations and dysfunctional formats, they pro-

vide electricity – both heat and light.

The group hug of mutual support between the three women leaders at the end of the BBC's "no Cameron" programme is revealing – with Ed Miliband and Nigel Farage left uncomfortably on either side.

Perhaps a new kind of politics is possible if more women rise to the top.

■ For me, the one-on-one interviews between leaders and Evan Davis on the BBC are the most informative moments. Nothing beats polite but persistent questioning – or allowing space for a serious response – to gauge a politician's mettle. It is Evan's forte as he consolidates a new approach to political interviewing.

Most people I speak to agree that the campaign is too controlled to be compelling. Social media has, so far, not provided the colour that many predicted.

Tight party discipline prevents gaffes. With no one dropping their guard, the Twitter feeds become an anodyne repetition of the day's message.

■ Never mind 140 characters – many leaders are hoping that a single word can make a mark. For the Conservatives, it is "security", the Lib Dems, "anchor", and the SNP, "progressive". It feels a little bit as if WIA's Siobhan Sharpe of Perfect Curve has been at work. Is she behind Miliband's "Hell, yeah!" going viral?

■ There are rumours of two parallel campaigns running. One in the media-political bubble of leaders'

debates and photo opportunities and the other in a ground war on the doorstep, where it is suggested that Labour has invested more heavily.

■ This campaign offers no less colour than previous years. Early days are dominated by Joey Essex – whose charm is as great as his knowledge of politics is minimal. Does he hold the key to reaching young, disengaged voters? Or is Russell Brand a better conduit? It's a strange world where politicians queue up to be patronised (sometimes in all senses) by celebrities.

■ Ukip in Bristol adopts a candidate who was previously a pornographer. He had been interviewed (read "doorstepped") by my son for a student documentary, which is suddenly discovered and linked to by BBC Online, Vice News and websites around the world.

Online viewing figures soar. It's an early lesson in the power of the news agenda as Sambrook Jnr applies for a postgrad course in TV journalism. Not at his father's institution, of course, but one run by yet another BBC alumnus. It's hard to escape us in higher education these days.

■ STOP PRESS: Polling day has revealed all – but if the real picture was obscured by the battle of sound bites and polling errors (as in 1992), we can expect lengthy post-mortems.

Richard Sambrook is Professor of Journalism and Director of the Centre for Journalism at Cardiff University and a former Director of BBC Global News.

TV's narcissistic tendency

Telly on telly

From *WIA* to *Gogglebox*, TV shows about telly are everywhere. **Stefan Stern** provides a guide to some of the best and asks what they tell us about television's view of itself

Will television eat itself? A flat screen might be easier to get down than a cathode-ray tube, and cause less indigestion – but, still, it doesn't really sound like a sensible diet.

All trades and professions are fascinated with themselves and like nothing more than talking endlessly about their own work. The TV industry is no different. In its case, making telly about telly is proving increasingly irresistible.

We are all a bit too wised-up to dream about "the magic of television" any more. The schedules struggle to hold our attention.

But offered a glimpse behind the scenes or, better still, an irreverent or satirical view of the industry, then viewers do turn up in decent numbers. The cameras swing around and show us what we have not seen before.

In trendy, aesthetic terms, this practice is called "reflexivity": plays about plays, films about films and, now, TV about TV.

If you are trying to be profound, you could argue that reflexivity betrays doubts about the validity or usefulness of the original medium, and that there is scepticism as to its continued relevance or effectiveness.

It could just be, of course, that people are simply having a laugh. Whatever the reason behind this "narcissistic tendency", there is a lot of it about.

There are at least five sub-categories of this tendency that are worth considering in a little more depth.

Sitcoms about TV

When you turn the cameras around on what happens in the TV studio, there is fun to be had. Currently being repeated on London Live is *Drop the Dead Donkey*, a big hit from the 1990s. This was one of the first shows in recent times to shine a light on the nonsense of TV "grammar" and convention.

It also made fun, rightly, of some of

We all just knew, or at least suspected, that the BBC was a vast, bureaucratic, jargon-filled monster, permanently on the brink of scandal or (comic) chaos, but it has been delightful having it more or less confirmed by this programme. It has also been clever of the BBC to broadcast it. Everyone loves an Auntie who can laugh at herself.

Is it possible that these shows can be *too* knowing, too "incestuous"? Audience figures suggest not. Perhaps viewers are now so "media literate" and sophisticated that they can handle all the industry references and do not find the insider chat and jargon self-indulgent.

But it could also be that the shelf life of shows such as these will inevitably be limited. Unless you work in television, the joke will wear off. And not even the Head of Values can do anything about that.

TV news satire

A crucial subset of telly about telly is the newsroom parody. Starting as a radio show (*On the Hour*), *The Day Today* emerged in 1994 as a blistering take down of news gone mad, with a liberal dash of Graphics Hell.

Stalwarts included Rebecca Front's crazed US TV reporter who apparently could speak for minutes on end without ever taking a breath, and the peerless Chris Morris, who out-Paxmanned Paxman and all other presenters.

Unfortunately, in his absence, life has imitated art and, these days, there are a

IN CHRIS MORRIS'S ABSENCE,
LIFE HAS IMITATED ART AND,
THESE DAYS, THERE ARE A
FEW MORRIS-LIKE NEWS
ANCHORS ON OUR SCREEN

the feeble amateur dramatics that TV news reporters can go in for. Not just about television, this show mocked journalism itself: the hyperbole, the inaccuracy, the dubious morality, the fiddled expenses, the egos.

And while there was topicality – news-related gags were dropped in late by the writers Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin – the show was also a classic workplace comedy. It was an added bonus that some monstrous TV folk were involved.

More recently, an even more knowing and dry take on telly has been offered in shows such as *Episodes*, *Extras* and, of course, *WIA*, which recently returned for a second series.



The ever-more bizarre conference furniture of W1A

BBC

few Morris-like news anchors on our screens.

Less satirical, and more romantic, was Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom*, which lasted for three series (2012-14), entertaining many but provoking many, as well. It was all a bit too good to be true.

Sketch shows

Another traditional vehicle is the show that nods to, or parodies, other telly. In Britain, *Morecambe and Wise* popularised the idea that you could take a news-reader and put her in a fancy frock for a dance routine. *Not the Nine O'Clock News*, *French and Saunders* and *Dead Ringers* all featured skits or spoof episodes.

There is a risk of being too clever for your own good, however.

Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones once made fun of *The Two Ronnies*, causing offence to their targets. But, arguably, repeats of *The Two Ronnies'* best work will still be being shown long after *Alas Smith and Jones* has been forgotten.

Some clip shows also provide introspective TV fun. *Harry Hill's TV Burp* (light-heartedly) and *Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe* (more abrasively) both do that.

TV chat show and showbiz comedy

The behind-the-scenes elements of the TV industry, mocked in sitcoms such

as *Episodes*, have been explored in more bitter-sweet detail by character comedies such as *The Larry Sanders Show* and *I'm Alan Partridge*.

Here, there is an acknowledgment that the industry can be a hard, unforgiving place, where cynicism and dishonesty can make or destroy careers. "No flipping!" Larry (Garry Shandling) used to implore his viewers – slightly despairingly.

We knew that he knew that we would. It was a dark and brilliant show. The hapless sidekick, Hank Kingsley (Jeffrey Tambor), was a remarkably subtle and moving character.

More oblique views of the TV industry have been offered in Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and in *Harry and Paul's Story of the Twos*, which aired last year to mark 50 years of BBC Two.

In these shows we are, flatteringly enough, in on the joke, without actually having to work in the industry ourselves.

Gogglebox

Lastly, this is perhaps the most enjoyable (and certainly the newest) category of the lot: watching people watching telly. *Gogglebox* took an image from the popular sitcom *The Royle Family* – that of the family gathered around the TV in time for some communal viewing,

for example of a sweepstake based on the valuations offered on *Antiques Roadshow* – and just left the camera running.

Gogglebox is a simple idea, a bit like a happier version of the telescreens imagined by George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. They (or We) are looking in on Us (or Them), but only out of curiosity and for amusement, not sinister surveillance.

Sceptics will point out that *Gogglebox* merely confirms "observation theory": that pointing a camera at people is bound to cause them to change their behaviour.

Whatever the programme's biggest fans may claim about the naturalness and spontaneity of the comments, it seems unlikely that participants ever really forget that they are *on the telly themselves*.

No matter: it really is harmless fun for most of the family – and revealing stuff, too. We all have our favourites from the show: the Scouse pensioner Leon and the blunt, chirpy Geordie lass Scarlett Moffatt (and, yes, she has an agent, by the looks of it) being mine.

Inevitably, wags have pointed out that what we now need is a new format: a programme in which we get to see people who are watching *Gogglebox* to hear their comments on the comments being made by the people watching telly...

Ben Frow is not as other directors of programmes. They tend to be sober, jargon-ridden and cautious – at least when speaking to me. They talk of “passion” but rarely show it: steady as the ratings sink or, occasionally, rise. Frow is funny, camp and outspoken, easily bruised and easily enthused.

He was obviously not what Richard Desmond, the *Daily Express* publisher and, for four years, owner of Channel 5, was expecting either, when he summoned him for a job interview in 2012.

“His opening words to me were, ‘Fuck me, you’re short.’ I said: ‘Not that short.’ And he said: ‘And you’re a poof-ter, too.’ And I said: ‘I’m a short poof-ter and I’m very good at my job.’

“And I just thought, ‘You know what? That’s great. I know exactly how I have to perform.’ There is no room for vulnerability with Richard.”

He even says he misses his old boss. Frow is dressed in a black designer suit. For the time being, despite Viacom’s takeover of Channel 5 last year, his office remains at Desmond’s Northern & Shell headquarters.

I am almost as interested in how Frow, a former costume designer who boasts of having rinsed Judy Finnigan’s tights on *This Morning*, got on as head of features under Tim Gardam at Channel 4 in the early 2000s.

Now principal of an Oxford college, Gardam may be the most ascetic intellectual ever to have reached the heights of television. Frow commissioned for him *Property Ladder* and *Death of a Porn Star*.

“I loved Tim. He is probably the greatest mentor of my entire career,” he says. “They used to call him pointy head because he’s so clever. And I am so un-clever but really instinctive. We had this very bizarre meeting in the middle.”

It all suggests to me that Frow is much easier to work with than he thinks he is and that, despite his protests to the contrary, he can play the “political nice game”.

That said, if you are Frow’s boss, as Paul Dunthorne, Channel 5’s Chief Operating Officer, is now, you need to be prepared for the occasional onslaught.

“I did shout at my boss a couple of



The Billen Profile

Ben Frow is bringing real passion to Channel 5. **Andrew Billen** discovers a TV executive like no other

Easily bruised, easily enthused

weeks ago, yes. In fact, I shouted a few times. About once a year I have an hour where I vent. And I said, 'Thank-you for that. I'll see you again in another year.'

"I sort of store up a year's worth of anxiety and frustration, and, God love him, he sits there and looks at me and just takes it all."

As an emotional man, Frow was prepared for volatility when Viacom bought Channel 5 in May 2014.

The transition has, however, turned out to be painless. The new owner has bought into Frow's vision much as Desmond had, but with the bonus of wanting to put in money rather than take it out.

No one, he says, is giving him an extra £100m to spend, but money is around for big buys such as *Gotham* or to back a hunch that will enhance "ratings, revenue or reputation".

On the day he took over from Jeff Ford, Frow addressed staff and told them that the station was positioned somewhere between C4 and ITV2.

"Psychologically, we had to make a decision. Did we want to be a really big digital channel and compete with the E4s and the ITV2s, and so on, or did we want to be one of the big five?"

"And I said, 'Let's be one of the big five. You know, we are one of the big five. We just need to up our game a little bit.'"

An early indication of that was his commissioning of *Suspects*, an own-grown police procedural to sit among Channel 5's many crime imports.

He has scheduled history programmes, disguising the Plantagenets as *Britain's Bloodiest Dynasty*, and plenty of "benefits" documentary series, such as *On Benefits and Proud*. Frow says that this is a subject that "resonates" with his viewers, although he thinks it may be time to pull back.

He admits ratings are challenged when one or other version of *Big Brother* is not running. Hardest to get right are the "grunt" programmes: returnable, reliable show such as *The Dog Rescuers*, *The Nightmare Neighbour Next Door*, *Britain's Horror Homes* and *GPs: Behind Closed Doors*.

Despite the decline in availability of the American bankers *CSI* and *NCIS*, Channel 5 was last year the only major UK commercial channel whose ratings

did not decline. ABC1 and 16-34 audiences actually grew. The year started with the channel's best ever January and February. The station is, he says, "competitive", "funny", "self-deprecating", "opportunistic" and "very cheeky".

With Viacom – the owner of MTV, Comedy Central and Nickelodeon – comes opportunity. The reality show *10,000 BC*, in which Brits tried to survive in the "stone age" – beset with productions problems, incidentally – was aired on Channel 5 with a spin-off, *Meet the Stoners*, airing on MTV. The arrangement worked, says Frow, better for his channel than it did for MTV.

He is working on a two-year strategy with Jill Offman at Comedy Central to bring scripted comedy back to Channel 5 eight years on from *Angelo's*, the sitcom set in a greasy spoon.

A comprehensive rebrand this autumn will, he hopes, allow reputation to catch up with content. Says Frow: "The content is good, the ratings are good, the story is good – and yet people still have a misperception of Channel 5, that it's a bit shit. And I'm really fed up with that."

Although he says that having a £3m drama budget would freak him, grease-paint is in his veins. His grandfather was Bernard Miles, who built the Mermaid Theatre.

One of his sisters, Jo, is a stage manager, the other, Dido, an actress on *Doctors* (both use Miles as their professional surnames).

His mother, Sally, Bernard's daughter, died of motor neurone disease in 1986. His father, Gerald, who died 10 years ago, was a writer and author, who worked with Hinge and Bracket and wrote a history of pantomime.

They sent their son to St Paul's Cathedral School, which he hated "every single day" because he was neither academic nor posh, although he made friends with Simon Russell Beale, with whom he put on plays that required them both to drag up.

Failing the exam to City of London School, he was sent to a comprehensive in north London, where he was, conversely, bullied for having an accent that was too refined.

"I remember being in the playground and thinking, 'I have to make a dec- >

THE CONTENT IS GOOD, THE RATINGS ARE GOOD, THE STORY IS GOOD – AND YET PEOPLE STILL HAVE A MISPERCEPTION OF CHANNEL 5, THAT IT'S A BIT SHIT

How now, Ben Frow?



Channel 5

Ben Frow, Director of Programmes, Channel 5

Born London, 14 July 1961

Parents Gerald Frow, writer, and Sally Miles, daughter of character actor Bernard Miles

Brought up London and Steeple Bumpstead, Essex

Education St Paul's Cathedral School; Woodberry Down Comprehensive, north London; London College of Fashion (studied theatre costume)

Civil partner Nigel Boyd

First job National Theatre costume department

1990 Dresser for Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan on *This Morning*

1995 Senior Producer, GMTV

1997 Executive Producer, BBC

1998 Editor of Leisure Programmes, Channel 4

2003 Head of Features and Factual Entertainment, Channel 4

2004 Controller of Features and Entertainment, Channel 5

2007 Director of Programming, TV3 in Dublin

2013 Director of Programmes, Channel 5

Hits *Nigella Bites*, *Property Ladder*, *How Clean Is Your House*

Misses *From House To Home* (C4), *Britain's Biggest Primary School* (C5)

Faith Buddhist. 'I chant for a tax rebate from the tax man'

Hobbies An animal lover; owns a Westie-Retriever cross called Dorothy Parker

Watching *24 Hours in A&E* and *Bake Off*. And *Poldark* because his partner does. 'We go: "That bodice is so badly made"'

› ision here. I either put on a cockney accent and merge in or I stay true to who I am.' And I decided to stay true to who I am."

He left school, "wearing pink from head to toe", with an A-level in stage design to tend costumes at the National Theatre ("The first thing I ever did was alter a skirt for Peggy Mount"), studied costume making at the London College of Fashion for a year, went to the Bristol Old Vic and then found work at *This Morning*.

For a year, he made Finnigan a suit every afternoon from two and half metres of fabric that he would buy at lunchtime, sewing as the journalists set up the next day's programme, absorbing their news values.

For a spell, he was on camera, demonstrating clothes-making, but he decided he was not "pretty enough or confident" to be a presenter. "So I decided to go behind the camera, where you have the power."

He moved in 1995 to GMTV and then to the BBC in Manchester, where he worked on *Wipeout* and *Wogan's Web*, before arriving at Channel 4 in 1998 as Editor of Leisure Programmes, rising to Head of Features and Factual Entertainment.

He spotted Nigella Lawson when she was a guest on *Nigel Slater's Real Food* but it took him a year to get her on screen in her own show, *Nigella Bites*. Objectors said that she was a woman, posh and from London.

"And I said: 'She is a woman. She's curvy. She's had tragedy and difficulties in her life. No woman will resent Nigella. They will just love her.' And I was so proud of that show. It was my first real, pure commission."

Other cookery programmes, including *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, followed and a spate of property porn shows.

Frow left for his first stint at Channel 5 in 2004 after Kevin Lygo made the reverse move. "I don't think I was Kevin Lygo's type of person. But I didn't feel I *had* to leave. I had done a really good job and I was ready for a new challenge."

As Controller of Features and Entertainment at 5, he developed programmes such as *The Farm* and *The*

Hotel Inspector, but left in a clear-out of staff in 2007.

He joined TV3 in Ireland as Director or Programming – "I wanted to prove that I was good and they shouldn't have got rid of me. I do bear grudges.

"The first year was tough, the years two, three and four were fantastic and year five was bloody. It was simply gruesome."

I DID SHOUT AT MY BOSS A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO, YES. IN FACT, I SHOUTED A FEW TIMES

A change of personnel had made it "pretty clear" that his time was up. The reason that he no longer burns scented candles in his office is that he never again wants to mistake a workspace for home.

The day his resignation was announced in October 2012, he got the call from Channel 5, which was saying goodbye to Jeff Ford. Coincidentally, Ford

would then take Frow's old job at TV3.

Frow lives in north London with his civil partner, Nigel Boyd. They met at the National in 1990 but Boyd, a movie costumer, returned from 18 years in the US only last year – "We had never really lived together before."

How's it going? "It's challenging. I wish I had a two-bedroom flat."

Surely a man of his distinction should live somewhere bigger? "I made some mistakes."

In property? "Yes – for all my property programmes."

Every day, he goes past the house of his opposite number at Channel 4, Jay Hunt, who famously took exception to claims that Channel 5 had beaten Channel 4 in the ratings.

"It is like a knife in my heart," he confesses. "It is the house that I want to live in."

There is nothing personal in this. Both feeling that life is too short for feuds, he and Channel 4's Chief Creative Officer lunched recently.

"We both talked about the jobs we were in. We have to wiggle our finger in the air and ask, 'What is coming down? What do people want? What is the country thinking about? What are viewers going to be engaged with in nine months' time?'"

And, in that sense, Ben Frow is exactly like every director of programmes: someone with an awful lot resting on his finger's best guesses.

In the eye of the storm



BBC

When Tony Hall needed someone to investigate Jeremy Clarkson's attack on his producer, he looked north and summoned Ken MacQuarrie, the calm and reserved Director of BBC Scotland.

As an experienced member of the Editorial Standards Committee, MacQuarrie was an obvious choice. His terse report sealed Clarkson's exit. What the *Top Gear* presenter made of the enigmatic Scot, his polar opposite, remains the stuff of speculation.

MacQuarrie was also a safe choice: it was he who delivered the *Newsnight* inquiry, after the programme wrongly accused Lord McAlpine in 2012 of abusing care-home boys.

Even so, some outsiders thought it odd to summon an executive from Scotland to sort out problems in London. "Imagine the furore the other way

Profile

Maggie Brown profiles Ken MacQuarrie, the tactful Director of BBC Scotland who needs to keep the peace as the SNP surges

around. It couldn't happen," opined one Scottish media observer.

But for *Observer* media columnist Peter Preston, the overriding factor was that: "He's an extremely solid citizen... an honest broker."

Preston knows MacQuarrie, a 62-year-old BBC lifer, from his work at the International Press Institute, where he is an effective vice-chair, with an organised back office, delivering on his promises.

To BBC executives, the corporation politics are simple: MacQuarrie poses no threat to the London-based hierarchy that includes Danny Cohen, Director of Television.

Last autumn, rumours of MacQuarrie's retirement swept Scotland's Pacific Quay HQ following the BBC's lacklustre Scottish referendum coverage – but then abated.

The Clarkson inquiry was a public sign of the respect in which he is held inside the BBC, despite the protesters camped outside Pacific Quay, angry at what they saw as biased coverage.

Former Controller of BBC Scotland Patrick Chalmers says that when MacQuarrie joined in 1975: "He was very much of the Gaelic crofting tradition, a chubby Gael from the Isle of Mull, a bit scruffy, often the tie not done up properly. He's very quiet, very thoughtful, diffident, acute, not the brash BBC producer image at all!"

Those who know him or work with him add comments such as: "He's an >

[MACQUARRIE IS] GNOMIC, VERY GUARDED, A DIPLOMAT, WHO KEEPS HIS VIEWS TO HIMSELF

› intelligent man, very well rounded”; “very straightforward”; “emoting is not his way”; and “gnomic, very guarded, a diplomat, who keeps his views to himself”.

Another opined: “Hard to speak to. He stutters and stumbles. Actually, very clever, thinking so deeply, as if he has been in a philosophy class.”

Given that Scotland is being swept by “nationalist fervour”, he will need all of his ability to think deeply in the months ahead. The BBC in Scotland, with an SNP Government in power, seems almost overwhelmed by the party’s popular surge and the constant complaints about coverage.

“We turn on our TV in Scotland only to hear about another country’s politics, views, music, culture and sport,” said one online response under a report on the SNP’s general election manifesto.

While supporting the licence fee, the SNP manifesto went further than the Smith Commission, by seeking power over Scottish broadcasting.

MacQuarrie is not a fancy public speaker. There is a sparse trail of utterances, headed by a speech to RTS Scotland in April 2013, when he looked forward to the 2014 referendum.

“What will happen to BBC Scotland should the country vote for independence?” he asked. “I choose not to travel that path,” he then answered.

A speech given in October 2014, after the referendum, conceded there would be “much work to do over the next two years” but gave no details.

Critics say this apparent refusal to engage has created a gap in the public presence of BBC Scotland. “Fair comment,” concurs John McCormick, the personable BBC Scotland Controller who preceded MacQuarrie.

But MacQuarrie was feisty in countering disputed academic research in March 2014. This claimed to detect pro-Union bias in the BBC’s output, compared with STV’s, in the run-up to the referendum. “Our desire is to provide the most impartial coverage we can possibly,” he insisted to Scotland’s Education and Culture committee.

MacQuarrie is also the first Director (the title changed from controller in 2009) of BBC Scotland with no experience of working elsewhere.

Chalmers says of the appointment: “It did slightly surprise me... so narrowly focused.” McCormick, however, disagrees: to build a stellar career in Scotland is “a badge of honour”.

MacQuarrie, who declined to be interviewed for this article, also sits on the BBC Executive Team and the Online Direction Group.

He is married, has three grown-up children, lives in south Glasgow and enjoys sailing, walking and visiting his house in Tobermory. No one has seen him in a kilt— if he were to wear one, it would, presumably, be in the red and green of Clan MacQuarrie.

After Edinburgh University and teacher training college, he joined the BBC and specialised in producing award-winning Gaelic programmes.

Lesley Riddoch, broadcaster and contemporary, says: “He used to be quite a radical in the days when John Birt came up to give his seminars in the canteen about the internal market. He was quite able to be openly critical.”

By 1992, he became both Head of Gaelic and Head of BBC Scotland’s Features and Children’s department.

“It was the key to Kenny’s career, it went tremendously well,” says McCormick. “His teams would do anything for him.”

Riddoch, now a prominent Yes supporter, notes: “He just disappeared. He focused on being a manager. There was a sea change”.

MacQuarrie was appointed Head of Broadcast in 1996, responsible for all Scottish output.

In 1998–99, Birt, supported by Tony Blair, fought off a plan to introduce a Scottish *Six O’Clock News*. MacQuarrie kept his views to himself and, a year later, he became Head of Programmes for BBC Scotland. Although there were later moves for trials of a BBC Scotland-run *News at Six* and *News at Ten*, the plans were quietly dropped.

In 2004, MacQuarrie defeated Blair Jenkins (later Chief Executive of the

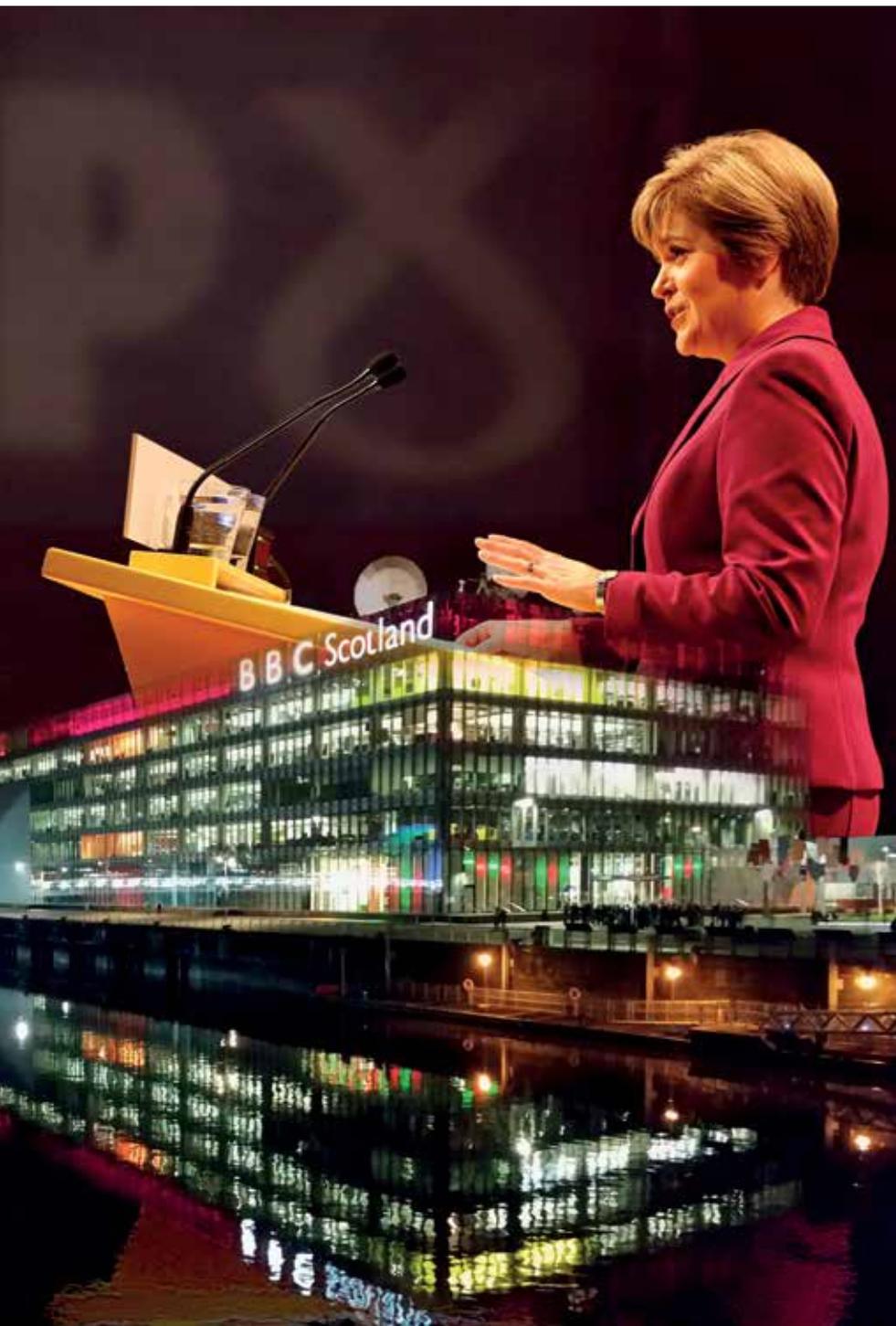


WE TURN ON OUR TV IN SCOTLAND ONLY TO HEAR ABOUT ANOTHER COUNTRY’S POLITICS, VIEWS, MUSIC, CULTURE AND SPORT

2014 Yes campaign) and Colin Cameron, then BBC Controller of Network Programming outside London, to become Controller of BBC Scotland.

His early initiatives included cutting staff jobs by 13% and the obligatory radical restructuring to “reduce hierarchy”. He warned: “We must produce even better programmes and services on an ever-more-efficient basis.”

Many BBC Scotland journalists contested these cuts. They were also critical of MacQuarrie’s appointment, in



Murdo Macleod

2011, of John Boothman as Head of News and Current Affairs. Boothman's partner was Susan Deacon, a former Labour health minister. This stoked fears of party affiliation in a febrile climate.

On the other hand, in 2008, MacQuarrie oversaw the launch of BBC Alba, a lively broadcasting service for the country's 58,000 Gaelic-speaking community. It is subtitled and even non-Gaelic speakers praise it.

He also delivered on the long-awaited

promise of reception for BBC radio listeners along the entire length of the arterial A9 road.

Since his appointment as Controller, MacQuarrie has paid keen attention to ratings, seeing them as a vital weapon for fighting in London for BBC Scotland's budget. In 2013-14, for the first time, BBC One's audience share in Scotland was slightly ahead of the rest of the UK: 21.2%, compared with 21.0%.

Last year, he proudly announced that nearly 11% of the BBC's total net-

work spend was in Scotland, ahead of the target of 8.6% by 2016.

But the transfer of network productions, such as *Question Time* – the so-called “lift and shift” policy – has fierce critics. “What Ken didn't get, is that we wanted an indigenous industry in Scotland,” fumes Riddoch.

Last month, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon accused the BBC of short changing Scots football teams and fans. She pointed out that it spent only £1m of £68m on Premier League highlights for *Match of the Day* on Scottish teams.

The SNP general election manifesto argued for a substantial role in renegotiating the BBC Charter.

BBC Scotland was seen to be slow in adapting its coverage as the debate about independence intensified, and STV suddenly smartened up with a ratings success, *Scotland Tonight*, at 10:30pm. BBC Scotland introduced *Scotland 2014* (and, currently, *Scotland 2015*) opposite it; the *Scottish Newsnight* compromise (a separate Scottish segment at 11:00pm) was abandoned.

The big question that MacQuarrie has steered clear of is: how do you see BBC Scotland evolving in the future?

Scotland's sense of itself is supported by having its own, distinctive institutions, from its education and legal systems to an established parliament – and 56 SNP MPs sitting in the UK Parliament. Whether the country achieves independence or merely greater autonomy, BBC Scotland cannot expect to be unaffected.

A source close to MacQuarrie says: “It's a hell of a problem, the aggressive behaviour by Alex Salmond... being shouted at by him.

“The SNP thinks BBC Scotland is in the pockets of the BBC in London. The idea of a Scottish Broadcasting Corporation is rubbish, but no one can say it.”

MacQuarrie has been silent about the BBC's future, argues this source, because, “he can't stand up and say anything, because everything he says is distorted, everything is challenged.

“He has to keep quiet. I sometimes wonder how he stands it. He must have had other offers.”

Blurred signals from Brussels

Ross Biggam, Director General of the Association of Commercial Television in Europe (ACT), believes you need a degree in Kremlinology to work out exactly what the European Commission is trying to do with its plans for a Digital Single Market (DSM).

The Commission has faced concerted opposition from the film and television industries – not least the ACT, which represents the interests of commercial broadcasters in 37 countries – over what are seen as attempts to end, or erode, geo-blocking of content across the EU.

This would prevent rights owners negotiating traditional, territory-by-territory deals.

Biggam's point was illustrated at a Brussels press conference on 6 May, when a Commission Vice-President, Andrus Ansip, who is the lead commissioner responsible for creating the DSM, tried to explain the latest proposals.

Ansip, an Estonian who has expressed hatred of geographical blocking of programming because it prevents him watching Estonian football in Brussels, claimed: "We don't want to destroy the system based on territoriality."

But then he added: "I am not supporting absolute territorial exclusivity."

Matters became more curious when Roberto Viola, Deputy Director-General of the EU's communications directorate, DG Connect, explained, "territoriality is like cholesterol, there is good and bad".

Warming to his theme, Viola argued that preventing portability of services and accessing of content across frontiers were examples of bad cholesterol that must be tackled.

Biggam and his colleagues in the European television industry will be left scratching their heads for some time about the Commission's specific legislative proposals. They are not expected to be published until December.

At stake is a comprehensive plan to create a single online market, which

Regulation

Content owners are sceptical about the EU's plans for a Digital Single Market. They want to protect the status quo on selling rights.

Raymond Snoddy reports

could be of great economic benefit to an EU population of more than 500 million. It covers everything from cyber crime and protection of intellectual property to improving cross-border parcel delivery, which would boost e-commerce.

The Commission says that the information and communications technology sector has accounted for only 30% of the growth of Europe's gross domestic product in recent years, compared with 55% in the US.

Removing barriers to a DSM in Europe, commissioners argue, could close that gap with the US and create up to £250bn of economic growth.

However, the European audio-visual industries, from broadcasters and film producers to screenwriters and sports

rights owners, remain unconvinced. They are, at best, wary of – and possibly still hostile to – the Commission's plans. They will try to block any attempt by the Commission to impose compulsory pan-European licensing of content.

"If there's one thing guaranteed to unite the Anglo-Saxon audio-visual industry, it's the European Commission," says John McVay, Chief Executive of the UK's independent producers' organisation, Pact, who chairs an all-industry action group on geo-blocking.

"This is clearly an ideological position by the Commission on the false premise that, if you create a single digital market in Europe, somehow this will generate huge multinational tech companies that can take on the Americans at their own game," adds McVay.

The danger, maintains the Pact executive, is that if anyone were to license a high-value programme to a video-on-demand service in France, for instance, it would then have to be made available across the EU.

There can be little doubt of the Commission's ambition. A leaked draft made clear that it would propose measures aimed at allowing "full portability of legally acquired content".

This strategy document also promised to facilitate "access to legally paid-for, cross-border services (for instance, allowing a resident of one member state to access online content currently available only to residents of another member state) while safeguarding the value of rights in the audio-visual sector".

The Commission's formal proposals published on 6 May reflected some of the concerns expressed by broadcasters – at least in the language used.

The Commission said it recognised the importance of territorial rights but promised to end "unjustified geo-blocking" – the word "unjustified" appears to be a late addition.

It also promised a review of the 1993 Satellite and Cable Directive to see whether its scope needed to be enlarged to cover broadcasters' online transmissions.

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Estonia tackles England in their Euro 2016 qualifier

Reuters/Ints Kalhins

The Commission made it clear that it still wants wider online access to works across the EU and to ensure that users who buy films, music or articles at home can also enjoy them while travelling across Europe.

McVay remains unconvinced: merely “recognising” the importance of territorial rights doesn’t amount to a commitment. And who would define what is “unjustifiable” geo-blocking, he asks.

“I think these are the usual bureaucratic warm words that mean nothing and can be interpreted in a number of ways,” he continues. “At the heart of what they want is to remove geo-blocking, which removes territoriality at a stroke. I don’t think they have moved on that at all.”

The Pact-led campaign will go on, and will be supported by ACT, which says it will be watching the Commission like a hawk.

The broadcasters’ case against the DSM is that, however carefully the Commissioners’ words are chosen, their initiative would have a number of unintended, negative – but wholly predictable – consequences for owners of high-value content in sport, film and TV drama and entertainment.

First, owners selling on a pan-European basis would find that smaller national platforms would be unable to pay. Second, online rights would be snapped up by large international players, such as Netflix or large mobile or cable companies.

Third, content could simply be withheld from online distribution until exclusive, lucrative national broadcast windows have expired – resulting in less content and less choice than there is now.

Fourth, there would be a risk that smaller markets and minority languages could be marginalised – ironically, the very opposite of what Ansip, the Estonian commissioner, is trying to achieve.

The UK’s Premier League, in particular, is said to be “spitting bricks” about the likely negative effect of Commission plans on the value of its TV rights deals across Europe. Having to offer a pan-European contract could lead to a levelling down of the value it derives from selling those rights in the UK – by far its biggest market.

Biggam says ACT members are worried about the unintended consequences, “particularly the difficulty of

financing big shows across different territories”.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which represents public service broadcasters, will also be watching carefully to see what finally emerges from the Commission.

Jacques Lovell, an EBU Brussels specialist, commented before the May announcement: “We think the whole licensing process and the possibility for the user and the rights holder to negotiate should remain at the very heart of how we use works.”

He added: “Rather than banning geo-blocking, which would hurt the whole industry, we should be looking at modernising existing licensing solutions.”

Sky declined to comment but is part of the broadcasting opposition to the Commission’s geo-blocking plans.

The satellite broadcaster believes portability is possible, with technical safeguards to protect geographical exclusivity.

Although the Commission is determined to take rapid action, there is a long way to go before implementation.

The lobbying will now really get under way before the plans go to the European Council and European Parliament and on to member states – a two-year process.

Earlier, Downing Street caused pandemonium by warmly welcoming the Commission’s overall plans for a digital single market, despite the opposition of the film and television industry.

Cynics saw it as an attempt to curry favour with the Commission in advance of attempts to re-negotiate UK membership.

The game is on and the outcome is uncertain. The likelihood is that some sort of portability will be introduced. This might allow people going on holiday to access their TV subscriptions for a limited time in another EU country.

Undoubtedly, there will be a sustained battle to prevent the Commission overturning the traditional sale of rights, country-by-country, in Europe.

Estonian football may not be on Andrus Ansip’s television screen in Brussels any time soon.

Cinema

As her unit marks its 25th anniversary, Head of BBC Films **Christine Langan** tells **Steve Clarke** that the corporation is more serious than ever about backing British movies

Everyone knows that BBC drama is either near or at the top of its game. But what of BBC Films, the broadcaster's infinitely poorer and sometimes neglected cousin?

For the past six years, BBC Films has been led by Christine Langan, a one-time Granada script editor who went on to win acclaim within ITV and beyond.

Langan produced the hugely influential drama series *Cold Feet*, a show envied by the BBC. Her reputation for identifying high-quality content was enhanced further when she produced two award-winning films that told us insightful things about New Labour: *The Deal* and the Oscar-nominated *The Queen*. Both were scripted by the matchless Peter Morgan.

Nowadays, she is overseeing a BBC Films that is punching above its weight more than ever. Remarkably, the outfit will be involved in the release of 15 movies this year. Each of them is partly funded by her total editorial budget of around £9.6m. She also pays for script development.

Latterly, some of the UK's most successful films have reached the silver screen thanks to her. Think of *Saving Mr Banks*, *Philomena* and *Quartet*, all strong performers globally and at home, or *Mrs Brown's Boys D'Movie* and *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa*, big domestic box-office hits.

In return for the investment, the productions receive exclusive TV premieres on BBC TV channels following their cinema showcase.

Earlier this year, BBC Films, which marks its 25th anniversary this month, was given a special Bafta award for its outstanding contribution to British cinema.



BBC

Why film is a good fit for the BBC

This was the same award that went to Film4's Tessa Ross in 2013. Coincidentally, Langan once worked for Ross.

Langan is softly spoken and eternally affable, but not easily deterred. Her

golden smile might crack even Vladimir Putin's iciness.

"Nowadays, there aren't enough really good executives working at broadcasters," says her former Granada

boss Andy Harries, CEO of Left Bank Pictures. "A lot of them have left to become independents, but Christine is one of the best. The BBC is incredibly lucky to have her.

"She is a proper, proper producer, a great enabler. Christine never raises her voice but she is absolutely undaunted. Who else at the BBC can handle Harvey Weinstein? She should be given a bigger role."

For now, Langan, who joined BBC Films in 2006 to work as an executive producer for her predecessor, David Thompson, appears more than content with her lot.

Both Director-General Tony Hall and Director of Television Danny Cohen are genuinely engaged by BBC Films, she stresses. She no longer feels she is sometimes working in "a vacuum".

"We have never been so absorbed into the family of the BBC," insists Langan. "Under Mark [Thompson], it just wasn't a priority, but Tony is the kind of DG who, from day one, has taken a very specific interest in every area of what the BBC does."

Hall has even managed to fit in a set visit to one of Langan's productions, a location trip to *A Little Chaos*, a period drama starring Alan Rickman as Louis XIV

Nevertheless, some film people see Langan as fighting an uphill battle against widespread ignorance in the BBC about the movie business.

"The hardest thing about Christine's job is that hardly anyone else at the BBC understands a thing about feature films," opines a seasoned observer of the film business.

Inevitably, money remains tight. Since 2010, Langan's budget has been slashed by £1m. She points out that Film4's editorial budget is around 50% bigger than that of BBC Films.

"We make the money go a very long way, but I could do with more... We need to explore other forms of funding, such as Worldwide..."

Later in our conversation, she adds: "I would like the funding to be greater. I am not talking about five times as much but 50% more would be such a sea change and make a huge difference to what we can do."

As part of the Delivering Quality First review, BBC Films' overhead was reduced. The department used to employ 17 people. Now it is down to

13. No one can rule out further cuts when the next licence fee is set.

Indeed, sceptics have questioned whether the BBC should be in such a risky, financially complex and precarious activity as film-making at all.

"That would be a very



BBC

CHRISTINE NEVER RAISES HER VOICE BUT SHE IS ABSOLUTELY UNDAUNTED. WHO ELSE AT THE BBC CAN HANDLE HARVEY WEINSTEIN?

reasonable, understandable question," offers Langan. "I have no qualms whatsoever in suggesting that we are providing transparent value for money for our viewers.

"Once we take delivery of a film for the channels, all in all, we've probably paid less for a very high-quality production lasting 90 minutes to two hours, often containing the best of British talent, than a piece of peak-time TV drama. And we can repeat those movies for free. We get great terms."

The films that she commissions are strong on period drama, literary fiction and comedy. Some, of course, such as the new *Horrible Histories*-inspired *Bill* (a comedy adventure based on "Shakespeare's lost years"), are derived from the hit BBC TV series.

This month saw the release of a new version of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, starring Carey Mulligan. Upcoming is

Armando Iannucci's take on *David Copperfield* and Ricky Gervais's David Brent film, *Life on the Road*.

Three feature-length documentaries are also being made. Their subjects are the record-breaking jockey AP McCoy, the enigmatic singer Grace Jones and the youngest-ever Royal Ballet star, Sergei Polunin.

"If it is hard to define BBC Films, it is because it is many things," suggests Langan.

"There are a lot of true stories in what we do, brave stories of what it is to be human.

What it is to push yourself hard and survive. At the end of the day, we're just looking for compelling stories."

Can she single out any movies made on her watch that she is particularly proud of? "It's an invidious thing to have to do because I am very attached to all of them. You have different feelings around different genres, obviously.

"I always find *In the Loop* subversive and entertaining. I adore *Philomena*, which I think shows us at our best."

Why? "When Gaby Tana [the producer] talked to me about it, it seemed to me that Steve Coogan wanted to produce this story with her.

"The more we talked, the more apparent it was that he should write it. I think I helped to encourage him. He didn't feel able to write it alone. He wanted a partner and I introduced him to [screenwriter] Jeff Pope.

"That became a very strong collaboration. I hope that's the kind of thing that BBC Films can do – make introductions and be a creative hub and put people together."

She continues: "I think we probably had a similar feeling around *Philomena* to that around *The Queen* [both were directed by Stephen Frears]. That it was quite special. And, in its own way, it did make waves. The Irish authorities ended up opening records previously closed to the public. People reached out and found relatives that they needed to know about."

Langan acknowledges that "hits are very hard to pull off. You need everything to align. You just keep plugging away. There are films that haven't performed very well at the box office, but where I've had personal feedback that is very encouraging."

She accepts that there is a case for BBC Films doing more challenging movies: "I would like to find edgier >



BBC

› projects. That is an area for us to work on, but it is a full complement. There is a lot to find and fund.”

Is it true that horror films are a no-go zone for BBC Films? “Psychological thrillers are great news,” she says. “I am all ears for that kind of thing. We’ve just got a very low-budget film written and directed by David Farr [a writer on *Spooks*]; really chilling, creepy and zeitgeisty.

“It is all about the quality of ideas. If it is a violent heist and the characters are a bit stereotyped, then I am not that interested.

“Horror tends to be a very commercial genre that is well taken care of elsewhere.”

Among the recent box-office also-rans were a version of *Great Expectations*, directed by Mike Newell, and another Dickens-inspired movie, *The Invisible Woman*, focused on the life of the novelist’s mistress, Nelly Ternan.

While critics loved last year’s feel-good feast that was *Pride*, a story of how the gay community raised money to support the 1984-85 miners’ strike, it didn’t draw in cinema audiences across the UK.

Says Langan: “I don’t know how to say this delicately, but I think some of the audience thought, ‘It’s a gay film, so it’s not for me.’ I guess the fact that it was called *Pride* made that pretty plain. Once they see the film, audiences love it.

“Outside London and the South East, it was quite hard to get them in.

I will be interested to see how it does on TV. It could do really well.”

Langan comes from a blue-collar, Irish immigrant family. She was raised in Tottenham, north London.

Despite going to Cambridge (courtesy of a grammar school education), gaining a foothold in broadcasting was difficult.

“I couldn’t find a way in. I mistakenly ended up working for a business writing company because they’d said something about corporate video scripts.”

She then got a job as a copywriter at an ad agency. “At the same time, I was trying continually to get into film,” Langan recalls. “That’s what I loved. But I didn’t have any contacts and I didn’t want to be a runner.”

Gradually, her facility as a word-smith led to work assessing film scripts. Her first break was being employed by film-funding body British Screen as Tessa Ross’s assistant.

“It was brilliant working for her. The British film industry wasn’t as big or as successful as it is now. She was funding development.

“Tessa was very generous in letting me read things and having me sit in on meetings.”

Script editing for Granada in Manchester (initially for daytime soap *Families*) came next. Langan had found her niche.

Her aptitude for working with writers has helped drive her career forward. Coincidentally, perhaps,

Langan’s partner is the TV script-writer Christian Spurrier. His credits include *Spooks* and *Silent Witness*.

“Writers are sometimes abused,” says Langan. “Or they are paranoid. They are very sensitive people who do a very difficult job. They need to be sensitive to come up with the goods.

“Sometimes, in film, they can be slightly eclipsed by the needs of production or the director, or they don’t see eye to eye. So there are often things that you have to resolve or finesse.”

She admits that her job requires endless diplomacy: “At times, that is tiring. It’s part and parcel of the business. I would say that I am working for a very fair-minded organisation. I am not here to be Cruella de Vil. It’s not the ferociously aggressive, cutting edge of the commercial world. The BBC is a bigger project than that.”

What, then, of Film4’s apparently higher profile? There is no sense that she is envious of Film4’s success and carefully acquired reputation for risk taking

“Channel 4 has brilliant marketing,” Langan acknowledges. “There is a Film4 television channel. That automatically puts you in a different place.

“It’s a smaller bull’s eye, in a way, because it’s about provocation and edge and purely film-makers.

“Tessa’s MO was all about bringing film-makers on at all costs. We want to bring film-makers on but we are also very mindful of BBC TV audiences.”



Interview

Michael Jackson has been an innovative indie and CEO of Channel 4. He also ran channels at the BBC and Universal. He still fervently supports committed programme-makers, hears **Steve Clarke**

Nutopia

From Macclesfield to Manhattan

Michael Jackson's stellar career encapsulates much of the creative history of TV during the past 30 years. He was an innovative independent producer back in the 1980s, reinvented BBC Two in the 1990s, and went on to run Channel 4. There, he launched *Queer as Folk*, *Ali G* and *Big Brother*, before crossing the Atlantic to work for the legendary mogul Barry Diller.

Today, still based in New York, his career has swung full circle. Jackson is once again working as a producer.

There was little in his family background to suggest he'd become one of the most influential TV executives of his generation – apart from being

a true child of the television age. Interviewed last month at the University of Westminster (he was a student there in the 1970s, when it was known as the Polytechnic of Central London), Jackson recalled his childhood in provincial Macclesfield.

He emphasised how television had given him a cultural lifeline at a time, in the 1960s, when there was “a sense of culture being rationed”. At the age of 12, Jackson was reputedly determined to forge a media career.

There may have been just two TV channels, but Jackson was struck by the relatively new medium's unprecedented ability to entertain and stimulate: “The world I was brought up in was a very boring place. People didn't go on foreign holidays. [But] TV had an extraordinary kinetic power... I

was fascinated by TV. I watched the 1960s unfold on television...

“I remember being disappointed that the funeral of JFK resulted in *Blue Peter* being cancelled.”

Jackson loved American shows such as *Batman* and *The Monkees*. When BBC Two began in 1964, the new service helped to widen his cultural horizons.

“As I got older, I loved things such as *Late Night Line-Up*, *World Cinema* and *Man Alive*. It was definitely the most sophisticated culture in my life.”

His course in media studies at the Polytechnic of Central London forced Jackson to “think about the world and be critical about it... Given that most of my working life I've been an editor of one kind or another, that's where I learnt my skills. >

▶ “The practical side showed me how difficult it was to hone things and to create meaning”

On graduating, he worked first as a lobbyist for a group campaigning to launch Channel 4 – earning £30 a week. One of the objectives was to prevent the upstart becoming a channel owned by the BBC.

Because he lacked an Oxbridge degree, Jackson figured the best way to get on in TV was to become an independent producer. Channel 4’s launch in 1982 provided him with an opportunity.

He never thought about joining the BBC or, by implication, ITV, because the established networks seemed to operate for the benefit of “a charmed circle”.

“In those days, getting a job on *The South Bank Show* was very prestigious. They used to get 2,000 applications for one researcher’s job,” said Jackson.

“There were very few jobs in TV because there was just ITV and the BBC... TV felt very glamorous and far away. It was not something you were likely to be a part of.”

His first show for Channel 4 was one of its early hits, the documentary series *The Sixties*, followed by *Open the Box*, which looked at how we interact with TV. Next up was *The Media Show*, edited by Jackson.

“You could rent an office in Soho, sit around with a few like-minded people and invent something from scratch,” he said. “It turned out that you didn’t need a studio, endless people and a film library. You could do it all yourself.”

In 1988, Jackson was persuaded to join the BBC as the founding editor of *The Late Show*, hailed as a new kind of late-night show that defied genres.

Out of *The Late Show* came *Later with Jools Holland*, still a staple of the BBC Two schedule more than 20 years later.

“I was very resistant to doing *The Late Show*,” recalled Jackson. “It sounded too dangerous but, of course, turned out to be an incredible experience...”

“Sometimes, it was a magazine programme. Sometimes, it was a documentary. As we said at the time, it was very postmodern... You could have an idea in the bath and go in and make it happen.”

In 1991, Jackson was promoted to Head of Music and Arts. Aged 33, he was the youngest head of department in the corporation’s history.

Two years later, he succeeded Alan Yentob as Controller of BBC Two.

“That is the best job in television,” Jackson opined. “You don’t have to

manage anybody. For me, it was about being able to express my own interests and tastes.

“You’re not under the whip of having to get big audiences. I loved the whole scheduler thing, controlling the time and space of television... That doesn’t matter any more in the age of the iPlayer.”

Under his leadership, BBC Two’s flagship shows included the award-winning documentary *The Death of Yugoslavia*, produced by Norma Percy, and dramas such as *This Life*, produced by Tony Garnett’s World Productions, and Peter Flannery’s state-of-the-nation, nine-part serial, *Our Friends in the North*.

The latter came to be regarded as one of the defining TV dramas of the 1990s; it famously involved “many more than seven years of development hell”, according to Jackson.

Briefly, he ran BBC One, a job he enjoyed far less than being in charge of BBC Two because he had to win big audiences. “It is much more a technical exercise,” he said. “And it is really hard finding shows that, in those days, 18 million people wanted to watch.”

Was it fun working for John Birt, the BBC Director-General who, more than two decades later, still divides opinion? “Yes, it was fun. Other than in current affairs, where John had terrible taste, he had really good judgement about

I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANY GOOD AS DIRECTOR- GENERAL. THE THING THAT MOTIVATES ME IS BEING AN EDITOR

programmes. His taste and instinct were exactly mine.

“It’s a thing about John that is not sufficiently recognised. He really promoted imaginative television.”

Did Jackson regret leaving the BBC to become CEO at Channel 4? “I loved working at the BBC. Once you knew how to press the levers, it was just like working at a Hollywood studio.

“You were working at a building called the Television Centre. You were really at the centre. It’s no accident that



there is no building called Television Centre now because TV is not central in the way it was then.”

On several occasions, Michael Jackson’s name was linked to the BBC director-general’s job. Prior to Tony Hall’s appointment, journalists speculated that Jackson was in the running.

The truth could not be more different. “I wouldn’t have been any good as director-general,” Jackson admitted. “The thing that motivates me is being an editor. My aversion to being director-general was that I wouldn’t have been very interested in programme strategy... The DG is editor-in-chief when someone screws up but, perhaps, not often enough in a positive way.”

Being in charge of Channel 4 involved a different set of challenges to working at the BBC. Because of his work lobbying for the station and producing for it, he had a “sentimental attachment” to the broadcaster.

Looking back on Channel 4, Jackson said it was “incredible” how successful it had become and how it had changed since Jeremy Isaacs launched the network.

Flush with money, Jackson was able to invest in comedy, entertainment and, controversially, expensive US shows such as *Ally McBeal*, *Sex and the City* and *The West Wing*.

One priority was *The 11 O’Clock Show*, inspired by Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*. “It was much more about wanking than political satire,” Jackson observed. “But out of it came Ali G and all sorts



This Life



Our Friends in the North

All pictures: BBC

of other talented people who went on to do amazing things.”

What was he most proud of during his time at Channel 4, which culminated in winning 11 Baftas in 2001? “I’d say *Queer as Folk*. It was very much of its moment and allowed an important writer [Russell T Davies] to tell you about his world. It wasn’t a problem drama. It was proudly a reflection of what it was like.”

Always obsessed by American culture, Jackson accepted Barry Diller’s offer of a job, initially as President and CEO of USA Entertainment.

After such a stimulating career, often at the cutting edge of British TV, working across the Atlantic was a bit of a comedown.

“Actually, the work itself didn’t turn out to be very interesting,” he said. “Running American cable channels... They’re very dependent on a few big drama commissions. It was fine, but what was utterly fascinating was the social anthropology of being part of American television.”

He added: “It is, as they say, high school with money... and incredibly dull and insular... Everybody is continually looking over their shoulder at people who are thinking exactly the same thing.”

But Jackson stayed in the US and helped Diller develop content for the digital space.

He is now an American citizen working as a producer. Jackson’s projects include a TV version of Edward St

Aubyn’s Patrick Melrose novels, scripted by David Nicholls. He is also an executive producer on the BBC’s keenly anticipated remake of *Civilisation*, a co-production with Jane Root’s *Nutopia*; Jackson worked with Root at the beginning of his career and the two are old friends.

He spends most of his time in New York but he is intimately connected with British television. He supports an increase in the BBC licence fee (see box). While there is much that he admires in American TV, his native land remains, in his opinion, a cultural and creative hub that produces singular shows.

“I don’t watch television channels much, I watch TV programmes. I watch a lot of BBC shows on the iPlayer,” said Jackson. “I like the richness and diversity, still, of specialist factual, which is something that America, by and large, isn’t interested in.”

“The thing that I would most wish for at the BBC would be to take BBC Four and turn it into a low-budget version of what Channel 4 used to be.”

“I look at what, say, Adam Curtis and Louis Theroux do... I’d like to see much more of that.”

He added: “You can’t beat the conviction of a good programme-maker. That is one of the things that Tony Hall wants to do with *Civilisation*.”

Michael Jackson was interviewed by academic John Mair on 27 April at the University of Westminster.

Why the licence fee should rise

There ‘is an argument to be had about the licence fee increasing’, believes Michael Jackson.

The BBC’s ‘critical weight of programming’, he said, ‘cannot be seen anywhere else in the world’.

This was particularly true of factual shows. ‘If the BBC wasn’t there, you wouldn’t see those programmes,’ he argued.

Jackson warned that the BBC may be forced to ‘start dismembering itself’ if the licence fee remains frozen and it continues to suffer from top-slicing.

He suggested that the BBC should be more aggressive in defending itself in the face of potential cuts: ‘I do not think it is for the BBC to argue for its own dismemberment. The BBC should be arguing for the sustenance of what it has.’

‘Politicians may find that dismembering the BBC turns out not to be a very popular policy.’

Jackson highlighted the importance of the BBC to the UK’s creative economy: ‘[Through Sky,] Rupert Murdoch has benefited greatly from the BBC. If you take out a pillar [such as the BBC], the whole structure will topple.’

OUR FRIEND IN THE WEST

Last week, I was standing in a fly-fishing shop in a small town in Montana telling the owner I worked for the BBC Natural History Unit. “Oh, so you’re from Bristol,” was his reply.

OK, he was a wildlife fan and did then ask if David Attenborough was my neighbour, but it does illustrate that Bristol and the NHU’s reputation go far and wide.

I joined in my late twenties to work on the Attenborough blockbuster *The Trials of Life*. I thought I’d stay for the three years it took to make the series and then move on.

But I discovered, as so many others have, that Bristol and the NHU create an enormous gravitational pull.

The ingenuity of the camera technology, the producers and cinematographers in delivering astonishing, beautiful and insightful stories is legendary.

In fact, it’s become part of the story itself. The 10-minute, behind-the-scenes segments that have become regular features of our blue-chip documentaries are as popular as the main shows.

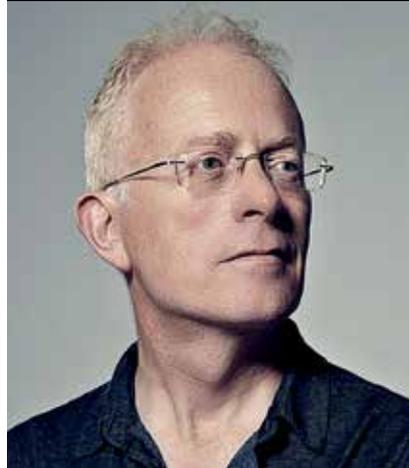
You know that something has become part of the TV landscape when sketch shows start to parody you.

My trip to Montana was partly innovation-focused. It involved developing the next iteration of drone-filming technology.

The NHU’s next big “landmark” documentary, *One Planet*, will be big on immersive imagery. Flying cameras close to our subjects while they are on the move will be one way to achieve this.

Closer to home, *Springwatch* typifies innovation of a different kind. The “Watches” now run almost year round,

Mike Gunton
discovers that
even in America’s
Midwest the
Bristol-based
NHU is part of the
culture



Charlie Surbey/Wired

with *Autumnwatch* and *Winterwatch*. Through companion digital output, they have pioneered the creation of huge online communities that enjoy extraordinary interactivity and a whole digital life beyond the TV.

As I write, we are stoking up the digital and social media ahead of our *Shark* series, which will go out on election night. It might draw some interesting parallels.

If it has half the impact of our recent pufferfish story from *Life Story* (19 million views on Facebook), I’ll be more than happy.

So why has all this innovation (not forgetting children’s and radio)

happened in Bristol? I think it’s that gravitational pull. It keeps talent bound together in remarkable, possibly unique, ways. The NHU can feel like a college campus at times, where everyone knows everyone else.

That, combined with the relative security of the in-house production guarantee, could generate a sense of insularity, even complacency. But the opposite seems to be the case.

So how important is it for the BBC or for Bristol that the NHU continues as a centre of innovation?

Can it remain a global leader? I think the answer to both questions is that it must.

New technologies to bring new insights and new ways of telling stories on digital platforms need to be married with the confidence to commit to ambitious, long-term projects. This, in turn, will continue to have a significant ripple effect across the creative universe that is Bristol.

The gravitational pull of the NHU extends across the city. Beyond our HQ in Whiteladies Road are dozens of post-production and graphics houses.

There is an ever-increasing number of indies, both big and small.

It is this very concentration of experience (the combined expertise must be more than a thousand years) – the exchange of knowledge and the common purpose – that generates innovation far greater than the sum of the parts.

It may, of course, be possible to recreate the strength and success of the NHU elsewhere. But this is the team that has, for nearly 60 years, pushed creative boundaries and flown the flag for the natural world. I think that would be a hard act to follow.

Mike Gunton is Creative Director of the BBC Natural History Unit.

Fleur De Force (left)
and Steve Bartlett



Paul Hampartsoumian

The age of the smart show

RTS Futures assembled a panel of pioneers for its sold-out event at London's Hospital Club in late April, "I made it in... digital". An enthusiastic, youthful audience was eager to learn from their experiences of working at the cutting edge of new media. It learnt, perhaps surprisingly, that television – the dancing dad at an aching hip party – still has a big role to play in the digital age.

The digital arena is vast – and expanding rapidly. YouTube, the big daddy of new media, claims that more than 1 billion people watch its content, while Instagram and Twitter both have around 300 million monthly users.

Newer services – including six-second video clip platform Vine and photo-messaging app Snapchat – are hugely popular with kids.

It may be a crowded marketplace, but plenty of people are finding the

RTS Futures

A group of digital pioneers explains how TV is evolving in an online content world dominated by YouTube. **Matthew Bell** logs on

space to sell their wares. Traditional TV, though, is not necessarily their first port of call.

"The beauty of now is that, to make a television show, you don't have to be on television and you don't have to wait for a break – you can start doing it straight away," argued Twitter's UK Head of Broadcast Partnerships, Dan Biddle.

He added that TV is no longer even the ultimate goal of many players in

the digital and social-media worlds. Success could be "fan fiction that turns into massive book sales or making videos that becomes a nice business on its own without needing to be on television".

Kat Hebden, Managing Director of FremantleMedia UK's new digital division, Shotglass Media, reckoned that the digital and traditional broadcasting worlds are coming together.

"The differences are getting less and less," she said. "Most of my team who create content have worked in broadcasting in one way or another at some point – it's a huge industry and you can learn a lot. We don't see [TV and digital] as different platforms any more."

Hebden produces digital brand extensions, including YouTube content, apps and social media, for top TV shows, such as *The X Factor*, *Take Me Out* and *The Apprentice*.

She also creates content for football channels such as Blue Moon Rising >

What you need to succeed

Dan Biddle, Twitter: 'A sense of adventure and experimentation... Go the extra mile... Even if your role now is not necessarily what you want to do, what you do online is visible... you can build yourself, not just as a brand, but as a commodity and as an individual.'

'There are certain skills you need to have and you don't want to be called out in a high-pressure environment... but there's a thing called the internet, which happens to be full of videos that will teach you how to do stuff.'



Paul Hampartsoumian

Fleur De Force, vlogger: 'Learn as you go along... If something doesn't do well, you can take it down and change direction. I didn't have any training in anything I do now.'

Kat Hebden, Shotglass Media: 'We often hire on personality, not [a person's] skills set. You can learn the skills... TV is hierarchical in terms of the way you work your way up, whereas digital is more open.'

Steve Bartlett, Social Chain: '[When hiring,] the two big things for me are [a person's] attitude and their "why" – we ask everyone why they want to join Social Chain... Their "why" is a really good indicator of how they're going to respond in certain situations.'

› (Manchester City) and Full Time Devils (Manchester United), as well as Vice's YouTube food channel, Munchies.

There are still differences in the content shown by the two media, and also in the way that content is created.

'[In digital], you can set up a website, make a video and, if it doesn't get many views, you can delete the video and do it again,' said Biddle.

Before joining Twitter, he spent seven years at the BBC where he worked on the social-media campaign for the Bafta-winning BBC Two series *The Virtual Revolution*.

'[In TV,] you spend nine months making a television production, which has got a massive budget, and you need eyeballs on that – overnights matter,' said Biddle. 'You may have a confident commissioner or channel controller who says, 'I think this has got legs', but there's still a massive pressure that is perhaps less in digital.' This pressure, he added, will grow as digital productions become better funded.

With budgets currently considerably lower in the digital world than in traditional TV, Hebden said she has to be more 'creatively and commercially innovative in terms of content'. Shotglass's parent, TV producer Fremantle-Media, 'has a big development team that spends a lot of time on ideas'.

She added: 'I take a project and start developing stuff straight away. We launch channels and then, if one's not working, we launch another channel and see whether it gets traction and an audience. If it does, we bring brands on board and work out where we can take it – it's a different model.'

Digital media is able to react almost instantly to audience demand. Beauty and fashion vlogger Fleur De Force said that her content strongly reflected audience feedback, both good and bad.

'If you make something that's not great, you know it [immediately],' she explained, adding that she was able to

get new content online in as little as three hours.

'I never thought about this as a career when I started six years ago. At that time, YouTube wasn't what it is now. I started because I was passionate

about the content,' said the vlogger.

De Force's YouTube hair and make-up tutorials, product reviews and fashion videos attract up to 5 million views a month.

She's written a book, is launching a make-up line and has worked as "a brand ambassador"

for Sainsbury's and Starbucks.

The final member of the Futures panel, Steve Bartlett, dropped out of university after attending just one lecture. He developed a social-network website for students and now, at the age of 22, runs his own new-media company, Social Chain.

Its owners claim that Social Chain, an "influencer marketing agency", promoting consumer brands on Twitter, is already a multi million-pound business.

'We own hundreds of Twitter accounts and we can start trends – it takes us 20 minutes to become the number-one trend on Twitter,' explained Bartlett.

The early days were tough: 'I had no money. There were times when I was sleeping on a bench and shoplifting.'

'Especially at the start, you have to take that hit to your personal life; you have to make sacrifices. I didn't see my friends, couldn't buy anything or eat well, but I did it because I loved it and eventually it paid off.'

Ironically, it could be said that social-media outfits such as Twitter are sus-

tained by old-school media institutions – in particular, television.

'I don't think you can underestimate the power of television,' said Biddle. 'It is still massive: 40% of tweets in prime-time are about TV and that is a massive driver of conversation.'

'Brands are increasingly using their

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT FOR A BREAK [ONLINE] – YOU CAN START DOING [VIDEOS] STRAIGHT AWAY

WHEN BRANDS TRY TOO HARD, IT'S ALMOST AS BAD AS NOT TRYING AT ALL. WE SEE A LOT OF 'COOL DAD SYNDROME'



Paul Hampartsoumian

WE OWN HUNDREDS OF TWITTER ACCOUNTS... IT TAKES US 20 MINUTES TO BECOME THE NUMBER-ONE TREND ON TWITTER

The digital dos and don'ts

Fleur De Force, vlogger: 'Do listen to what your audience has to say when you're thinking about future content... they're the best people to tell you new directions to go in.'

'Don't watch other people's content and think that's the way to do it. There's no set way of doing things. The great thing about YouTube is that you can... do whatever you want in your own way..'

'In terms of building an audience, do have a schedule, so people know when to come back to you... and do engage with the community that you want to access.'

Steve Bartlett, Social Chain: 'Don't try too hard to be in the [Twitter] conversation. A lot of brands hear they have to be on Twitter because that's where the kids are at – when brands try too hard, it's almost as bad as not trying at all.'

'We see a lot of "cool dad syndrome"... Don't be afraid of taking risks. The big pay-offs, in terms of our business, come when we take risks.'

'Don't fall into the trap of thinking that a trend on Twitter is inherently valuable – it's not... a trend on Twitter is a by-product of people talking; it's not of value itself.'

media spend on Twitter amplification, as opposed to banner ads or more traditional media advertising. Brands fund commercial broadcasters so the more that they engage in digital audiences, the more broadcasters will have to do that as well," reckoned Hebden.

Social media activity is visible, pointed out Biddle: "You can see how people are reacting live to what you put out there. For most TV shows, such as *The Apprentice*, say, the TV is only the first screen for one hour a week."

Broadcasters increasingly have to think about extending the lives of their shows beyond the initial TV exposure, whether that is on YouTube or social media. "Smart shows," Biddle added, "are delivering everywhere."

Looking forward to the digital world of 2020, Biddle argued that "distribution and devices will probably change more than platforms".

He predicted that YouTube would continue to grow, but not necessarily at the expense of television: "Quality TV, such as *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad* and *Poldark* – those aren't going anywhere; they're here to stay."

"People will still want big TV events and high-quality drama, but the way they consume that content will be different," said Hebden.

In the digital world, she continued,

"our content is like a conversation – our audiences tell us if they don't like it immediately. We don't have a commissioning hierarchy, neither do we have those [bigger] budgets."

"I think how we create content will change to keep up with how we're consuming it."

The panel agreed that YouTube's position as the dominant online video platform was unlikely to be challenged in the near future.

"There will still be influential people making content on YouTube," said De Force. "It will be interesting to see how the audiences of [content] creators change over time – if they grow up with them, if they outgrow them."

The content creators, too, the vlogger argued will have to move with the times: "Can you change and develop your content as you get older, given the online audience is young?"

"As with traditional media, people come and go, and it will be interesting to see who stays and how they adapt to remain relevant."

The RTS Futures event 'I made it in... digital' was held on 27 April at The Hospital Club in central London. It was chaired by BBC Radio 1 DJ and TV presenter Alice Levine and produced by Emily Gale, Sasha Breslau and James Longman.

Software is the new hardware



iZotope

Audio post-production software from iZotope

The NAB trade show, held every April in Las Vegas, used to bill itself as *the* place to see kit manufacturers parade their newest wares to broadcasters and producers. Headline-grabbing black boxes that perform cool, new tricks are, however, increasingly rare.

Today's production and post-production tools tend, instead, to be software. They are, therefore, open to incremental and regular upgrades, and not tied to the cycle of trade shows.

Even the hardware is designed to evolve with tweaks to the central chip set, rather than a wholesale redesign.

Generally, this is good news for buyers, since the use of commodity computing systems pushes down the cost of their initial investment. It can be handy for manufacturers, too, since they need to design only one product and switch on the appropriate functions for purchasers who buy more than the entry-level set of features.

Cameras are among the last bastions of dedicated hardware, but should now, perhaps, be thought of as platforms. Many of the announcements at NAB 2015 underlined that camera owners can now invest in a single body for use

NAB review

Adrian Pennington surveys the latest tech trends on display at NAB in Las Vegas

today, then buy optional licences to keep pace with future developments. This is especially the case with the shift from HDTV to Ultra-HDTV production.

Grass Valley introduced the LDX 86 Universe camera, which is aimed at customers who, for now, want to record in HD but who want, at some point, to transition to shoot in Ultra-HD. As a further incentive, the camera can shoot at six times the normal HD frame rate for slow-motion replays.

"It democratises extreme slow-motion and 4K production," argues Michael Cronk, Grass Valley's Senior Vice-President of Strategic Marketing. "Our customers don't have to make a choice [between cameras], as they can have all of them with one investment."

Sony's new HDC-4300 camera epitomises the software licensing approach.

Users can buy weekly, monthly or permanent licences to unlock either or both of the camera's HD slow-motion and Ultra-HD capture features.

The bottom dropped out of the market for money-spinning post-production software some time ago. But Avid's announcement that it will give away copies of its editing program Media Composer First was still eye-catching.

Twenty years ago, the company's flagship product cost £25,000. Now, with dedicated hardware no longer required to run it, Avid is using a free version to entice new users to its platform. The company hopes it can then persuade some of them to upgrade to ISIS, its hardware-based storage and collaboration environment – which has a starter price of £12,200.

"I don't see Media Composer First as a tool that will be used commercially at the expense of Media Composer, due to its limitations, but rather as a 'training tool' to introduce the next generation to Avid," says Richard Moss, Managing Director of post-production company Gorilla Group.

The fully featured Media Composer software requires subscribers to pay £35.75 per month, or to buy a permanent licence.

Ultra-HDTV The next generation: 8K

Ultra-HDTV broadcasts are still in the future, yet manufacturers are working on its second generation. The first generation, 4K, has four times the resolution of HDTV and is currently available only as a video-on-demand format.

The second generation of Ultra-HDTV is 8K. With pictures 8,000 pixels wide, it has four times the resolution of 4K and 16 times that of HD. LG, Panasonic, Samsung and Sharp introduced prototype 8K television sets at the Consumer Electronics Show in January.

Japanese broadcaster NHK plans to start 8K broadcasting in time for the 2020 Olympics.

Several (mainly Japanese) vendors are preparing 8K cameras. Among them is Ikegami, which has worked with NHK over the past decade on an 8K studio camera. The latest version is a tenth the size of the 2002 debut model.

Owners of Sony's F65 cinema camera have had the potential to shoot in 8K since the camera's launch in 2011 – if they bought the necessary firmware upgrade.

US manufacturer Red will have an 8K sensor ready to fit its new camera module, Weapon, by the end of the year, at a cost of \$69,000.

Post-production tools capable of manipulating the mammoth data



Panasonic

streams that 8K images require are also coming to market – although this is currently as much about brand positioning by manufacturers such as Quantel, with its Pablo Rio colour-correction system, as it is about fulfilling user demand.

Cameras Outside broadcasters gear up for Ultra-HD

The first generation of Ultra-HD cameras was too 'cinematic' for outside broadcast (OB) use, because they employed a single sensor, rather than three. OB units have been demanding three sensors so that they can use their existing stock of lenses and capture pictures with a greater depth of field, in which both foreground and background objects are in focus.

Hitachi, Ikegami and Sony have joined last year's pioneer, Grass Valley, in offering such cameras. This is despite Sony having spent the past few years trying to convince the market that single Super 35mm sensor cameras – originally designed for cinema – were suitable for Ultra-HD sports.



Sony
Sony HDC-4300

'For our customers, 4K is not a mainstream production format today,' concedes Sony's Head of Business Development for 3D, 4K & Sports, Mark Grinyer. 'So their investment to produce Ultra-HD must be secured over their HD productions.'

Therefore, Sony's new HDC-4300

camera is an HDTV unit that doubles as a 4K one. Future software options (see main article, left) for the camera will include the ability to shoot a wider colour range and to transmit pictures via a single IP (internet protocol) cable.

US broadcasters CBS, Fox Sports and NBC Sports will be buying HDC-4300s.

'The really valuable thing about 4K is that the camera positions [at sports venues] don't need to change from HD,' says Jamie Hindhaugh, Chief Operating Officer of BT Sport. 'With the next evolution of equipment there is a real opportunity to capture in 4K and down-res to HD, which does give you an enhanced look on screen.'

Drones Lighter payloads pack more pixels



DJI Phantom 3

The special area that NAB set aside for drones was among the show's busiest and noisiest (drones' engines are so loud that it is impractical to use them for capturing audio).

Market leader DJI added the Phantom 3

Professional drone to its range. This comes with a 4K camera, a location-aware sensor for indoor shooting and an auto pilot for take-off and landing to help inexperienced pilots.

Weight is the big issue with drones. Anything weighing more than 7kg is restricted from flying over urban areas in the UK. Most models can only pack enough batteries to fly for seven to 15 minutes. So anything that reduces the payload will make drones more usable for live broadcast.

Blackmagic Design unveiled a Micro model of its digital Super 16mm Cinema Camera. 'It's a true digital film camera

because it has a wide 13 stops of dynamic range,' says CEO Grant Petty. 'This is a big improvement in image quality over action-cams, so you can get all those high-energy shots without the consumer look.'

UK firm Vislink has built a tiny transmitter to stream HDTV images from GoPro cameras, which are aimed squarely at sports enthusiasts. Branded HeroCast and marketed by GoPro as the lightest such box around, the €7,000 unit has already been used live by the National Hockey League and ESPN X Games.

It does, however, require users to purchase a special frequency licence to operate it.



RTS

This month, we announced the names of some of the industry heavyweights from both sides of the Atlantic who will speak at the RTS Cambridge Convention. The announcement boosted traffic to rts.org.uk, but there was much else to enjoy on the news section of the site...

Our ever-eager bursary recipients have just sent us their video diaries, documenting their first two terms studying with the support of the Society.

You can find them on the website and on YouTube. I was impressed by the sheer enthusiasm with which they are pursuing their studies, which really comes across in their short videos.

Applications for this year's bursaries for technology and TV production courses close on 1 June. Visit: j.mp/TVbursary for more.

We're fortunate to have YouTube as one of our International Patrons, and we've just moved all of our online videos to the platform. The RTS YouTube channel has been jazzed up, and has all kinds of great videos, from features to How To guides. Search for Royal Television Society on YouTube to see for yourself.

The cream of the UK's television production students will be recognised at the BFI on 5 June, and the digital team will be tweeting, 'gramming and Periscopeing all the way to the bar.

It's not just us, though: Sky has confirmed that it will broadcast proceedings. The winning students' efforts will go out on Sky 1 or Sky 2, plus highlights of the ceremony.

Tim Dickens is RTS Digital Editor.

► Do you have a news or feature idea for the RTS website? Let Tim know on 020 7822 2836 or tdickens@rts.org.uk.

FROM THE DIGITAL EDITOR

Soap secrets, breakfast TV rivalry and the enduring appeal of war stories are all tackled in RTS online features this month, says **Tim Dickens**



ITV

The recipe for breakfast success

Last month *Good Morning Britain* celebrated its first year of entertaining the muesli-munching masses on ITV.

But despite the star signing of Susanna Reid (pictured above) joining the team from the Beeb, the show has fallen well short of the share enjoyed by *BBC Breakfast*. Bex Stewart explores the history of a bitter TV rivalry going on over the breakfast table.

► j.mp/breakfastTV



Behind the Scenes at Emmerdale

For the latest in our series that takes viewers into the heart of well-known productions, multimedia producer Bex Stewart headed north for a look at one of Britain's favourite soaps.

Shooting both on location in the village and in the Leeds studios, the 10-minute film gives an exclusive insight into what it takes to write a drama script, gives tips from the director and plenty of gossip from the Dales.

► j.mp/EmmerdaleBTS



What makes a good political interview?

Whether you were gripped or bored stiff by the election, the digital team thought it was time to look at the art of the hard-hitting TV interview. We

spoke to ITN's Alastair Stewart ahead of his RTS Legends Lunch on 19 May, as well as *The Media Show's* Steve Hewlett and the Chair of the RTS Television Journalism Awards, Stewart Purvis.

► j.mp/RTSelection



Why is the Second World War so popular on television?

This month is the 70th anniversary of VE Day and there's no shortage of WWII-themed dramas and docs. Pippa Shawley speaks to history guy Dan Snow, *Home Fires* Executive Producer Catherine Oldfield and Yesterday's Adrian Wills about the enduring appeal of the war across the genres.

► j.mp/WW2telly



Tips in 60 Seconds: Lucy Lumsden

Our favourite weekly tips video for April came from Lucy Lumsden, Sky's head of all things funny. She took a minute out from commissioning to tell us how we should pitch scripted comedy to people like her.

Get an expert producer attached early on, she says. She'll look at anything, but it has to be a fresh voice. Oh, and try to make her laugh...

► j.mp/ComedyTips

How to get the best job in TV



Think big, write big, shoot big and do the best you can, whatever you are doing, was the advice that drama supremo Kay Mellor OBE gave students at a one-day RTS event, "How to get the best job in TV".

The day's four panel sessions at York St John University were organised jointly by the Yorkshire and North East and the Border centres. They attracted 140 students from 10 universities across Cumbria, the North East and Yorkshire. The day was modelled on the "Getting inside the media" event held by the RTS in London last October.

Mellor and drama producer Emily Feller from Red Production Company shared the drama panel, which was chaired by Carolyn Reynolds.

Quizzed by students about where her ideas came from, Mellor recalled a pitching session at the BBC, where she had talked about three properly researched ideas. On the way out of the door, she mentioned that she had just been reading about lottery winners in the *Metro* newspaper and how "that could be interesting".

"By the time I got back to Leeds, it was greenlit and I had to start thinking of characters and storylines and locations," said Mellor.

When asked how she knew if an idea had "legs" she advised: "Try pitching it to a friend. If you run out of steam, it probably hasn't."

One Show Production Executive Nick Todd, Topical Strand Producer Hardeep Giani and researcher Arif Mahmood gave students the inside track on how the team behind the BBC One series worked, and the talents needed to make it in TV.

"Have ideas that work for the show you are working on, and don't sit in a corner, get your ideas put forward," advised Todd.

Giani said there were three tests for getting a film commissioned: was it a story that had to be told; was the subject part of the national conversation; and did the film have good action in it?

The Sky News session featured anchor Martin Stanford and Neil Dunwoodie, Editor, Digital, on a Skype link from London, where he was about to start Sky's election rehearsal.

Dunwoodie was asked what attributes he expected from prospective Sky journalists – in addition to being able to demonstrate good journalism skills and a National Council for the Training of Journalists qualification.

He replied: "They must be able to film and edit on their mobile, work across all media, including digital platforms, and understand social media."

Stanford added that using an iPhone to film and edit reports, and even to broad-

cast live via an app, was now commonplace.

The final session featured a team from Leeds-based indie True North, who let students in on the secrets of making factual entertainment, factual and children's programmes.

Researcher Zara Hobson told students they had to get contacts and then work them by keeping in touch.

She advised talking to people directly. "At first, I was terrified when I was told to pick up the phone and talk to lots of people, but it's the best way to explain what you are doing," she said.

Head of Production Carol McKenzie outlined opportunities in production management and in post-production.

Creative Director Andrew Sheldon said that, although getting in to TV required charm, tenacity and a lot of very hard work, once in, young professionals could have a very satisfying career.

"It will take you places you'd never get to go otherwise," said Sheldon. "I think it's the best job in the world."

Helen Scott

Midlands teachers get the media message

In early March, Midlands Centre held an event at Birmingham University for schools and colleges, bringing them together with leading arts and media organisations from the region.

At the 'Meet the media' seminar, representatives from the Writers' Guild, Into Film and Arts Connect West Midlands, as well as the RTS, discussed the schemes and

support available to young people who want to learn about the media.

Hannah McConville, Programme Co-ordinator at Into Film, revealed that films were available for showing at schools and colleges. She said that the film education charity also ran competitions and schemes for youngsters.

Rebecca Hardy, Film and Digital Programme Devel-

oper at Arts Connect, shared details of its events and the support it offered young people in the West Midlands.

William Gallagher, the regional representative of the Writers' Guild, offered an insight into his work, both as a writer and a speaker at schools, where he regularly had the opportunity to encourage young people to write.

Dorothy Hobson

Tribute to Connemara cult director

■ Brian Reddin discussed his award-winning documentary about cult film-maker Roger Corman's time in Ireland, *It Came from Connemara!!*, at a Republic of Ireland Centre event at the end of March.

The B-movie legend opened a studio outside Galway in the 1990s, taking advantage of tax breaks to



Brian Reddin

make ultra-low-budget films using Irish crews and actors.

Reddin's documentary, which he produced and directed, features an interview with Corman and clips from his Irish films, as well as behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with many of the cast and crew who worked at the Concorde Anois Teo studios.

Dublin-born Reddin worked on RTÉ series *Scratch Saturday* before going on to present the long-running series *The Last Picture Show*. In 2006, he set up Dearg Films, which made *It Came From Connemara!!* with funding from TG4 and BAI.

The documentary premiered at the Galway Film Fleadh last July and was then screened at the Raindance Film Festival in London.

"This was a most enjoyable presentation by Brian with many visual and audio inserts, which helped the attentive audience feel the atmosphere of this unique time in Irish film production," said RoI Centre Chair Charles Byrne.

Belfast students fill Black Box with talent

More than 80 guests attended the second RTS Northern Ireland Student Television Awards, which were held at the Belfast arts venue The Black Box at the end of March.

Students from Belfast Metropolitan College snapped up two awards. Conal Tutin and Joel Spence took the Drama category with *Tout*, while the Factual award went to Frankie Price and Conor Shearer for *White Heat*.

The Comedy and Entertainment award was won by Naomi Doherty for *Classroom Coliseum*; the Open award was taken by Richard Parke for *Say Something*. Both students are at Northern Regional College.

The award ceremony was hosted by UTV newsreader and Belfast Metropolitan College lecturer Aidan Browne. *UTV Live* reporter Judith Hill was the guest speaker and Minister for Learning and Employment Stephen Farry MLA presented the awards.

"The creative media



From left: Award winner Naomi Doherty with Kieran Doherty (Stellify Media) and Dr Stephen Farry MLA

industry is of growing importance to Northern Ireland and we need to encourage and develop the creative talent of our students to achieve further success in this economically important sector," said Farry.

The awards were supported by the Arts Council's Creative Industries Innovation Fund.

"This event highlighted the importance of mutual co-operation and effective working relations between the creative and education sectors for successful and

sustained growth," said Lorraine McDowell, Director of Operations, Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

"Winning an RTS NI Student Television Award will give media students in Northern Ireland a real profile in the industry as well as a recognised accolade to put on their CV," added Michael Wilson, Chair of RTS Northern Ireland Centre. "I am overwhelmed to see such support for the annual awards ceremony."

Matthew Bell

UTV shows how to make news

■ Sixteen aspiring journalists and technical crew were given a taste of life on both sides of the camera, writing for, and filming, short news pieces at UTV Studios in mid-March.

The RTS Northern Ireland Futures workshop "How to make the news" was run by industry professionals *UTV Live* reporter Judith Hill and News Editor Chris Hagan and broadcast engineer John

Mitchell. The day-long course also included a tour of UTV's Belfast TV studios and radio station U105.

The event received praise from the attendees. "The workshop was professional, a valuable experience and fun – both RTS Futures and UTV were incredibly welcoming," said Niamh McGovern from Queen's University Belfast.

"It certainly added to my

technical understanding. John has a wonderful way of sharing his knowledge with a group," said David Kennedy of the Northern Ireland Film School.

"A fantastic introduction to the world of television reporting, both on and off camera – highly recommended," reckoned Shane Hannon from University College Dublin.

Orla Sharpe

Awards follow advice

Students from the University of South Wales dominated the principality's RTS Student Television Awards, which were held at the end of March as part of the week-long Zoom International Film Festival 2015.

Before the awards were presented, Wales Centre assembled a seasoned panel for its careers event, "What next? Breaking into the media". Four television pros described how they had started in the industry to the mainly young festival audience at Bridgend College.

The panellists were: Zoe Rushton, Talent Manager at BBC Cymru Wales; Roger Burnell, founder of youth broadcast training scheme It's My Shout; and independent producers Peter Edwards (Barefoot Rascals) and Paul Islwyn Thomas (Bulb Films).

They also discussed recent infrastructure developments in South Wales, including the BBC's Drama Village in Cardiff Bay, the new Pinewood Studios near Newport and the set of historical drama *Da Vinci's Demons* in a former Swansea factory, which are all providing significant opportunities.

The speakers concluded that flexibility, enthusiasm, an ability to get on with people and work as part of a team were key attributes for any new entrant to the industry.

Later the same day, Bridgend College's Sony Theatre was the venue for the Zoom Awards. The films screened during the evening provided ample proof of the emerging talent among film-makers in Wales, particularly in some of the youngest categories.

The evening ended with the presentation of the RTS Wales Student Television Awards 2014. Although only



Drama winners Athena O'Connor-Lindsey (left) and Luke Tucker

two universities took part this year, the jury was impressed by the high standard of entries across all genres. Many of the productions had mustered significant amounts of crowdsourced funding.

Students from the University of South Wales scooped all the awards. *Porters*, made by James Dougan, Max Cutting and Dan Ridgeon, took the Factual prize. It impressed the jury with its "degree of access... and extensive research".

The Entertainment category was won by *The Bullet Catch* from Catherine Attwood, Yuan Huang, Xanthe Young and team – "a charming story about an incompetent magician and his talented assistant".

Drama winner *A Mermaid's*

Tail, by George Dallimore, Athena O'Connor-Lindsey, Luke Tucker and Lorna Truman, was judged to be "very moving... beautifully shot and edited with some well-crafted camera work".

James Carlisle's *Cut from the Same Cloth* took the Animation award and "featured beautiful, smooth animation, with engaging characters".

No entries were received for the new Open category, but the jurors decided to make the award to a film originally entered in the Entertainment category, *Vice Versa – Creation* (by Natasha Hawthornthwaite, Rhodri Carter and Dan Ridgeon). The jury said it was "an original and highly accomplished production, with a simple, but effective, format".

Hywel Wiliam

Media pros head south to schmooze

■ A presentation from Director of BBC England Peter Salmon opened Southern Centre's sixth annual "Meet the Professionals" event at Bournemouth University in mid-March, which was attended by 250 of the region's production students.

Salmon claimed that there had never been a better time to enter the creative industries. He discussed TV's "digital arms race" to secure talent who love what they do and can communicate it with passion – particularly when it comes to creating compelling content for young people who see the world through their smartphone or tablet.

Four panellists offered advice on how to stand out from the crowd when applying for jobs and how to avoid being exploited as unpaid interns. The speakers were: Director of ITV, Factual, Richard Klein; Channel 4 Head of Documentaries Nick Mirsky; Woodcut Media CEO and documentary producer Kate Beal; and Shine International Director of Acquisitions Georgia Brown.

The discussion was followed by an informal networking session, at which the panellists were joined by 15 other professionals from companies such as Topical Television, Lion Television and Shift 4, as well as recent graduates and freelancers, including three BBC apprentices.

The students' feedback included: "Great idea – I learned so much in such a short time"; "It gave me so much more confidence to approach people in the industry"; and "I've just made a great contact for my next work experience".

Gordon Cooper

Beryl Hockley 1925-2015

Those of us who worked at BBC Wales in the 1980s have fond memories of our Engineer-in-Charge (Operations), Harry Hockley, who was also the first Chairman of the RTS Wales Centre.

We also knew that Harry's wife had worked at the BBC during the "Ally Pally" days. But Beryl Hockley, who has died at the age of 90, had a very special claim to fame.

Amid great excitement at Alexandra Palace on 7 June

1946, the BBC's television service was on standby to resume broadcasting after the Second World War.

This was echoed in a newspaper headline of the time, which proclaimed: "Beryl to turn on television – 20,000 are waiting". Beryl was the vision mixer who faded up the very first pictures on British television after the war. She is much missed by her two daughters and their families.

Mari Griffith



Welsh TV sorted out over coffee

Wales Centre is organising a number of "coffee shop" debates with the Institute of Welsh Affairs to discuss broadcasting issues in Wales.

At the first event in March, at Aberystwyth University, representatives from broadcasting, academia, the Welsh Language Society and independent producers examined the pressing challenges of reach, impact and funding.

One consequence of the BBC's Delivering Quality First initiative has been a 17% fall in the corporation's English-language TV output for Wales since 2009 and a significant narrowing of genres.

S4C also faces cuts of 36% in real terms.

More positively, the new Channel 3 licence for Wales keeps the same broadcasting commitments as before.

With BBC Charter renewal on the horizon and the end of the current operating agreement between the BBC Trust and S4C in 2016-17, the meeting looked at the relationship between the two public service broadcasters.

There was discussion of how the present mix of

broadcasters served Wales via TV, radio and online platforms, and whether new players could emerge. The Welsh Language Society proposed a new, multimedia content provider for Wales in a paper tabled at the meeting.

There was also speculation about the continuing roles of

the BBC Trust and the Audience Council for Wales, given that the Culture, Media and Sport Committee has recommended scrapping the Trust.

The prospect of separate funding arrangements for Wales was discussed, possibly through top-slicing the licence fee, which might

permit the creation of a contestable production fund.

The meeting considered the gatekeeper role of smart-TV manufacturers and whether the BBC's iPlayer could provide sufficient prominence for alternative local TV content.

Tim Hartley

RTS tours ITV Cymru

In late February, Wales Centre members visited the new ITV Cymru Wales HQ in Cardiff Bay. Huw Rossiter, ITV Cymru Wales' Public Affairs Manager, took them around the facilities, including the news studio and post-production suites.

Rossiter, who is an RTS Wales Committee member, explained that, following the renewal of ITV's licences at the end of 2014, 'there is now a specific Channel 3 licence for Wales, granted by Ofcom, which runs to 2024. This is good news as we will still be providing four hours of news and an hour and a half of



other programmes per week, including current affairs specifically for viewers in Wales.'

He stressed the importance of ITV's supply of shows, on commercial terms, to S4C, which includes the Welsh broadcaster's current affairs series, *Y Byd ar Bedwar*. ITV Wales continues to make a range of other programmes,

including *My Grandfather Dylan*, transmitted by ITV in the week of the centenary of poet Dylan Thomas' birth, and *The Mountain*, a series about people working on Snowdon.

Members also took the opportunity to view the live broadcast of evening news programme *Wales at Six*.

Hywel Wiliam

Get in, get on, and get paid



Passion, grit, graft, reliability, brilliance and confidence are just some of the qualities needed to get in and get on in TV, according to the panel of experts assembled for a London Centre event that drew a capacity crowd in mid-March.

Consultant and London Centre Chair Kristin Mason asked the panel how the young hopefuls in the audience could make an impression in a highly competitive industry.

Employers wanted people with passion, argued Shu Richmond, who has worked as an executive producer on shows such as ITV's *This Morning* and is also the founder of the consultancy So You Want to Work in TV.

"I almost don't care what your qualifications are, but if you come in with the right attitude, then you're halfway there," she said.

Confidence – or, rather, the lack of it – puts off employers. "People can smell a lack of confidence," added Richmond. "They think that if you're not confident about yourself and your abilities to do [the job], why should they be?"

Jude Winstanley has climbed the TV ladder, step by step. Skipping university, she worked as a runner on game shows, including *Supermarket Sweep*, for three years before becoming a production secretary and then a production co-ordinator.

As a production manager, she has worked on shows

such as BBC Four's *American Nomads*. Winstanley also founded the online jobs board The Unit List.

"People start to trust you and you get a reputation for being reliable," said Winstanley. "Your name is then passed around because you're seen as a safe pair of hands – that's the reputation you want in this industry."

Winstanley urged new entrants to take responsibility for their careers. "Nobody else is looking after you," she said. "Always ask, if you want something."

Suzie Marsh, who is currently Series Producer of BBC One's *The National Lottery Live*, took a media degree before landing a job as a runner on BBC One science show *Tomorrow's World*.

A stint on *This Morning* brought Marsh to live television, which is where she has remained for most of her career. When applying for jobs, she said: "Do your research. Watch [the show], look into what [a company] has done, have an opinion and an idea."

Richmond agreed. "Come up with ideas – shows such as *This Morning* eat up ideas," she said. "You're proving that you're interested, that you've done some work and that you understand what the show does."

"Networking is very important," she continued. "Once you've worked with certain people, you'll find yourself working with them again. You have to make contacts and *keep in contact*."

"Speak to people you've worked with every couple of months, telling them what you're doing, even if you're not looking for a job," added Marsh.

Channel 4 Head of People Services Kathy Poole was a latecomer to TV, having spent most of her working life in consultancy and at British Airways. "It's never too late to get into telly," she said.

Poole reckoned people needed three qualities to get in and on in telly. "First, you've got to be really, really good – you've got to go the extra mile and you've got to do it time and time again," she said.

"Grit" is the second must-have: "It's not easy. I've made huge mistakes and you've got to get back on your feet and back into work – it happens to everybody and you have to accept that this is part of life."

Finally, Poole advised: "Make sure you challenge yourself."

"Getting in and getting on" was produced by Terry Marsh and held at ITV London Studios on 18 March.

Matthew Bell

OFF MESSAGE

As the surprise Conservative victory sinks in, broadcasters are left pondering what might have been, had three-way leaders' debates been agreed by Downing Street.

Audience figures for the debates that we got were down on the galvanising 2010 clashes. Five years ago, upwards of 8 million tuned in to see Brown, Cameron and Clegg chew the political fat live on TV.

This time around, ratings were roughly half what they were during that "I agree with Nick" election.

Still, the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky News did their best in difficult circumstances.

And what we did have helped to bring life to a hideously long campaign that was rarely engrossing.

We live in an era dominated by GAFA – that's Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, in case you wondered – but, at times such as general elections, TV remains the default medium.

■ For Off Message, one of April's highlights was joining a trip to Salford's MediaCity UK organised by the BBC for the Broadcasting Press Guild.

On a perfect sunny spring day, Salford looked less like a drab scene from Lowry than a piece of southern California painted by Hockney.

The best part of the day was eavesdropping on a rehearsal by the mighty BBC Philharmonic.

The orchestra's exquisite rendering of Barber's Violin Concerto was enough to move the most committed of BBC naysayers.

■ Elsewhere in this month's *Television*, readers can catch up on Michael Jackson's career path, as he returns to making programmes.

One nugget excluded from the report for reasons of space was the following revelation. Jackson recalled that, in the same week in 1997 that he was offered the job of CEO at Channel 4, ITV invited him to come and work for it as Director at the Network Centre.

"I remember it being a very stressful week," said Jackson, not known for wearing his heart on his sleeve.

Readers will have to judge themselves whether he made the right decision.

■ Staying with ITV, in a recent *Financial Times* interview, CEO Adam Crozier was quoted as saying he believes the broadcaster's transformation is only "40%" complete.

Moreover, digital represents ITV's next focus, while it simultaneously invests more in content.

With *Downton Abbey* bowing out later this year, ITV's development teams may need extra funding as they attempt to discover the next signature show.

Or will John de Mol come to the rescue, now that Talpa is an ITV-owned company?

■ So much for Channel 5 taking on even more of a mid-Atlantic flavour under the ownership of Viacom.

The station is to be congratulated for its deal to show League football in a prime-time, Saturday-night slot.

Rivals should be on their guard: soccer is not only about the Premier League. For a start, there are a lot more goals in the Championship.

■ For those of you who missed Paul Abbott's new Channel 4 comedy-drama, *No Offence*, do watch it on catch-up. If the opening episode is typical, Abbott is back on top form – fantastic lines and a real fresh feel from the *Shameless* maestro.

Joanna Scanlan's performance as DI Vivienne Deering is certain to have awards juries salivating.

Hot on the heels of her role in the idiosyncratic BBC Four comedy *Puppy Love*, which she co-wrote, Scanlan is one class act.

■ And, finally, on the subject of drama, Off Message congratulates Polly Hill, the new Controller of BBC Drama Commissioning.

With such successes as *Wolf Hall*, *Ripper Street* and *Poldark* behind her, Hill is a very strong appointment.

Let's hope that she continues to have enough money to do her job to the highest possible standards.



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HAPPY VALLEY — OR — HOUSE OF CARDS

Television in 2020
the challenges for content,
creativity and business models



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