

# Television

October 2019

**RTS Cambridge 2019**

**CONTENT,  
CONSUMERS  
& EVERYTHING  
IN BETWEEN**

+ Mark Thompson and Jeff Pope

# RTS London Christmas Lecture



## David Abraham

CEO of Wonderhood Studios  
and former CEO of Channel 4

4 December

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Cavendish Conference Centre  
22 Duchess Mews, W1G 9DT

[www.rts.org.uk/london](http://www.rts.org.uk/london)

### From the CEO



What a truly engaging RTS Cambridge that was – one of the very best ever. Unusually, even the weather was on our side.

There are so many people to thank for conceiving and delivering Cambridge, but most of all I'd like to thank ITV's Carolyn McCall and her team, led by the matchless Emma Gormley. Emma and her co-executive producer, Helen Scott, did us proud.

Thanks, too, to all the keynote speakers, our brilliant panellists and

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# Television

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session producers, and the Cambridge planning committee, without whom none of this would have been possible.

*Television* contains reports of all 17 sessions, and we have a Cambridge-themed TV Diary from Freeview's Liz Reynolds. Videos of all the sessions, on our website, are proving popular. So, if you haven't done so already, do please take a look.

One of the big differences this year was that the conference involved real consumers in the debates. The Leeds-based People's Panel brought the voice of the viewers live to Cambridge.

Chaired by *Good Morning Britain*'s Ranvir Singh, this commendably inclusive panel introduced a fresh note to the discussions.

I was thrilled that many of the RTS bursary students attended on the last day. It was especially revealing to listen to Lorraine Kelly's interviews with our students during her own session on social mobility, "Blow the bloody doors off".

Kirsty Wark's headline-generating interview with Netflix's Reed Hastings was also remarkable. I think that was one of the very best interviews con-

ducted by the *Newsnight* anchor.

Moving on from Cambridge, this year's Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture was given by Mark Thompson.

This statesman-like address by the cerebral former BBC Director-General was extremely thoughtful, eloquent and set the agenda for UK and, indeed, global media policy.

Theresa Wise

- |  |  |
|--|--|
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# TV diary

There's no prorogation for **Liz Reynolds**,  
as one conference leads to another



**I**t's September. That means back to school. And not just for the kids.

With Edinburgh hangovers barely forgotten, and TV execs and politicians still reeling from Dorothy Byrne's outlandishly honest MacTaggart Lecture, conference season gets into full swing.

Not in Bournemouth but in Cambridge, courtesy of ITV, for the RTS biennial convention. There's no prorogation for us.

■ Turns out that last month's illuminating TV Diary from Neil Thompson provides the perfect segue into Piers and Susanna's triumphant turn at the three-day conference. Back from their summer sojourns, it feels like the team from *GMB* have literally been parachuted in.

Susanna is firmly at the helm of the opening afternoon. The next day, her sidekick, Piers, blows everyone away with carefully casual rhetorical hand grenades.

■ On a self-interested note, it's fantastic to see Freeview named as the most trusted UK TV brand in Edelman's research commissioned for the convention.

In an age when brands seem able to attract as much distrust as trust, it gives us all a warm feeling that the public values what I'd say is the essence of British TV's success – access to high-quality shows for everyone, regardless of geography or income.

■ With Cambridge bathed in warmer than normal autumnal sunshine, the relentlessly sunny Reed Hastings gives a much anticipated interview. He doesn't disappoint.

Kirsty Wark is in playful mood and the Hollywood mogul handles her questions with as much grace and humour as Tom Hanks in an episode of *The Graham Norton Show*.

Lenny Henry's impassioned and urgent appeal for change on diversity ends the convention on a serious note. Throughout, Baz's parish notices are a joy.

With more than a sprinkling of ITV showbiz (and some actual consumers) thrown in for good measure, Carolyn McCall's vision for a positive and provocative conference is realised.

■ No sooner am I back from Cambridge than it's off to Brighton for a quick spin at Labour's conference. The mood's tense and the MPs I talk to are generally despondent. By Tuesday, I'm back in London and we interrupt a board meeting to watch the Supreme Court's historic judgment.

Around our table, jaws drop when the unanimous ruling comes. I breathe a sigh of relief when we get confirmation later the same day that Gina Miller will take part in Freeview's annual conference in November. An unforgettable day.

■ Another week, another event. This time, the prestigious Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture, given by Mark Thompson. He pulls no punches. The former DG offers up a stark

view of the future for British media as a "cultural Airstrip One" without more robust and ambitious policy intervention. He asserts that "it is... of overwhelming importance that British audiences still get access to great news, drama, comedy [and] documentary made first and foremost for them and them alone".

From a Freeview point of view, I couldn't agree more. The lecture follows major success for British talent at the Emmys, led by the indomitable Phoebe Waller-Bridge. Congratulations to all the winners, on and off screen, and long life to the concept of "hot priests".

■ The month ends with the exciting announcement that BritBox will feature on Freeview's smart-TV service, Freeview Play, and with one final hotel room – this time in Manchester, where the mood is more colourful than the weather.

The Sky News party is packed with parliamentarians – one or two even dance. Damian Collins MP hosts a lively "in conversation with" culture secretary Nicky Morgan MP and we get some insight into her views on broadband roll-out, online harms and the value of PSB.

This was no ordinary September (now there's an understatement). And, as we hurtle towards half-term and a deal or no deal I'm ready for a break. Time to catch up on *Bake Off* and *Strictly* with the kids.

*Liz Reynolds is head of communications and external affairs at Freeview.*

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# Content, consumers and everything in between

**Carolyn McCall** argues that television has a bright future despite the blizzard of change

**‘S**hifting viewing habits, developments in technology and the rapidly evolving competitive landscape are having a fundamental impact on our industry,” argued RTS Convention Chair Carolyn McCall as she opened Cambridge 2019.

But amid the change and uncertainty, which included Britain’s future relationship with Europe and the rest of the world, McCall maintained that television had a bright future.

“[Viewers] are looking for creative, trusted producers and broadcasters to help them both navigate and understand the world in which we are living and, as importantly, to help them escape from it into other dramas,” she said. “Trust in TV news is remarkably high – higher than all other media and, of course, much more valued than the news provided by social media.

“In fact, in an era of fake news and misinformation, the importance of the news provided by public service broadcasters, in particular, has never been more important to our democracy.”

However, young people saw traditional TV bulletins as “for their mums and dads”, admitted McCall. ITV’s response, she revealed, is a new social media news service for teenagers, ▶



Richard Kendal

## The People's Panel get their say

Susanna Reid introduced a group of viewers from Leeds who made up the People's Panel: 'No one is more important than our audience. We totally rely on our viewers.'

The line-up, facilitated by GMB political editor Ranvir Singh included Sabrina, 36, Phil, 51, Sandi, 72, Josh, 20, Carrie, 49, Phillip, 34, Steven, 64, and Marie, 46.

Their tastes were wide-ranging. Grandmother and part-time charity worker Sandi likes to watch daytime TV and is a big fan of Piers Morgan. 'I know, if something has happened the day before, something is going to come out of his mouth to tell us all about it – his version and nobody else's.'

She added: 'I like outspoken presenters – Janet Street-Porter and Piers. They say what they think, probably what we'd like to say but aren't. It's never vulgar, it's honest.'

'Even disagreeing makes you feel you're engaging.'

At the other end of the age spectrum was university student Josh, who watches TV on his mobile. *Love Island* is among his favourite shows.

Disabled single mum Carrie enjoys



Richard Kendal

Ranvir Singh (right) chaired the People's Panel

documentaries and drama but thought that news and entertainment programmes lacked diversity: 'There's no newsreader in a wheelchair, there's no one with a prosthetic leg presenting *The X Factor*.'

Phillip likes *Peaky Blinders* and anything starring Ricky Gervais. 'On an evening, we usually watch a couple of hours. It's difficult deciding what to watch so we'll toss a coin to decide who gets to choose,' he said.

Steven prefers shows featuring fast cars. He and his partner live in separate homes. 'We have very different interests

– I like action programmes, she likes soaps and reality shows such as *Love Island*, which is not my cup of tea, but we both like natural history.'

Reality shows are top of school teacher Marie's viewing menu, especially *The Real Housewives of Cheshire*. 'I like to see the lifestyles of the rich and famous,' she said. Their glamour is far removed from her own life.

Sabrina enjoys binge-watching dramas, such as *Doctor Foster* and *Killing Eve*. 'I watch the ones I've heard about on social media,' she said. 'And I don't just watch the one, I carry on watching.'

## TV: you've never had it so good

'Our research tells us that viewers have never been happier,' said ITV director of audiences Neil Mortensen. 'They're excited about the way TV is going, as the balance of power shifts towards them....'

'Mainstream viewers are becoming less anchored in the schedule.... For some demographics, broadcast TV only represents half of their viewing and, for younger audiences, they watch less live TV year after year....'

'Fewer ads are seen in real time and, at the same time, platforms are multiplying and prominence diminishing.'

'So it's harder for a show to cut through and even harder for the ads

to [do so]. It can sometimes feel like there isn't much of a case for optimism, but we can safely say that television isn't facing an existential threat any time soon....'

'In the modern TV era, there have always been around four hours a day of TV viewing up for grabs. That hasn't changed much as TV continues to deliver on basic human needs in a simple, cost-effective and primary way.'

'The future will continue to throw up disruption, technological battles [and] economic battles. But, for the viewer, it is a creative battle. And that's something we should all be looking forward to with confidence.'

▶ *The Rundown*. The ITV CEO argued that viewers are increasingly watching shows when they want: 'Every month, 80% of UK households watch video-on-demand in one form or another.'

Nevertheless, she added, 'the 'linear familiar' is still going strong – with 84% of total broadcast viewing still taking place live. The challenge for all of us – in business, in government and in regulation – is to strike the right balance in what we do between these two worlds.'

In conversation with *Good Morning Britain* presenter Susanna Reid, McCall added more flesh to her speech, outlining how ITV was planning to respond to this changing TV landscape.

'All of us are dealing with challenging issues because it's a time of great change in the industry,' she said. 'If viewer habits are changing and you



Presenters Ant and Dec joined the discussion between ITV director of television Kevin Lygo (bottom left) and Susanna Reid

can see them unfolding in front of you, you have to respond to that.”

The CEO argued that the ITV model was not broken – but that the broadcaster would have to innovate to prosper: “The linear, free-to-air model is a really successful model, it’s ad-funded and it will last for a long time. But you have to think of how you diversify as well.” McCall identified in-house production company ITV Studios and the new BBC/ITV VoD service BritBox as two pillars of diversification.

She claimed that BritBox, which is due to launch before the end of the year, would be “distinctive”, offering “the breadth and depth of British-originated content” and representing “good value” at £5.99 a month.

“I am very optimistic about the future because the core of what we do is programmes, content and engagement – we create audiences all the time and we do that because we have such powerful content,” continued the ITV CEO. “We will always do advertising, but we will not just be doing linear advertising, we will also do more targeted advertising through technology.”

McCall admitted that attracting younger viewers is more of a challenge: “You have to work much, much harder on telly to reach [them] today”. But she pointed out that it wasn’t just *Love Island* that was pulling in a younger audience on ITV channels: “Over 50% of 16–24s watch *I’m a Celebrity*... – people wouldn’t expect that... When you get it right content-wise for them, they come.”

The ITV CEO added: “We don’t mind how they watch it.... If they’re going to watch our content on their mobiles, that’s fine.” ■

**Session One, ‘Content, consumers and everything in between’, featured: Carolyn McCall, CEO, ITV; Neil Mortensen, director of audiences, ITV; and Kevin Lygo, director of television, ITV. It was chaired by journalists and broadcasters Susanna Reid and Ranvir Singh, and produced by Neil Thompson, Sally Watson and Nick Caldon. Reports by Matthew Bell and Steve Clarke.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>



Richard Kendal

## Tried, tested and addictive

Discussing the strong ratings currently enjoyed by his channel, ITV director of television Kevin Lygo highlighted soaps, which ‘are easily overlooked’. He added: ‘If you don’t watch soap opera and catch a tiny bit of one, it does look appalling. But, if you watch it all the time, it’s the best thing in your life.’

‘I’m addicted to *Coronation Street*... and I haven’t missed an episode since the 1970s.’

Lygo stressed the importance of long-established shows to a broadcaster’s schedules. ‘A lot of our big entertainment shows have been running for years and years, and I don’t think they were ever designed to do that. Everyone who started those shows would be amazed that they’re still running and doing such huge numbers. It’s a testament to the programme-makers who reinvent them all the time.’

Mentioning *I’m a Celebrity*..., Britain’s *Got Talent* and *Strictly Come Dancing*, Lygo added: ‘It’s amazing that you still get 10 million people to come to these shows in the modern world when there’s so much choice.’

New shows, however, are often

culled before they have time to find their feet. ‘It’s harder – and it’s the great tension between producers and broadcasters – to give shows more time. The modern experience, I’m afraid, is more brutal than it ever used to be, because there is so much choice,’ admitted Lygo. ‘The hits are easy, the failures are easy – it’s the ones in between, where the producer is on his knees begging you for another series... that’s quite hard.’

Star ITV presenters Ant and Dec, beamed into the conference from the *Good Morning Britain* studio in London, offered their take on live TV.

‘You want to watch it then and there and don’t want to deal with catch-up [TV],’ said Anthony McPartlin.

‘You try to make it unmissable... and get the family together on the sofa to watch the TV and share that event,’ added Declan Donnelly.

With countless seasons of *I’m a Celebrity*..., *Saturday Night Takeaway* and Britain’s *Got Talent* under their belts, the duo are experts in live entertainment shows. ‘Time for a new one, guys,’ joked Lygo.

Young entrepreneurs and influencers analysed the importance of authenticity, social activism and new platforms such as TikTok to this generation

# The truth about Gen Z

Video-sharing platform TikTok was the word on everyone's lips leaving the second session, "Exploring Gen Z".

Many had not heard of the Chinese-owned social media sensation, but were keen to find out more in order to reach the elusive next generation of viewers. Many market researchers describe Generation Z as those born after 1997.

Defined by session chair Rob Chapman as the generation "for whom 9/11 wasn't a coming of age event", Gen Z were instead shaped by the recession of the last decade.

In one of the most talked-about events of the convention, the young panel tried to pinpoint what new audiences are looking for and what unites them in a fast-moving, connected world.

A short video laid out the parameters, namely that the boundaries between different types of content, such as advertising and entertainment, are blurring.

In the film, one of YouTube's biggest stars, Vikram Singh Barn – or Vikkstar-123, as he is better known to the 10 million subscribers across three channels who follow his work and that of his collaborators, the Sidemen – said starkly that he really enjoys "the creative and commercial freedom I have on YouTube".

He has worked with traditional media before but often found it "restrictive" creatively and "commercially... As it stands currently, there's little incentive for us to work with TV or traditional media."

With YouTube handling merchandise for its creators (those with more than 10,000 subscribers can sell merchandise under their videos) – and YouTube, Twitch and other social media giving fans the ability to donate to content creators in exchange for a shout out – it is no wonder that the major new talent often prefers online platforms to traditional TV.

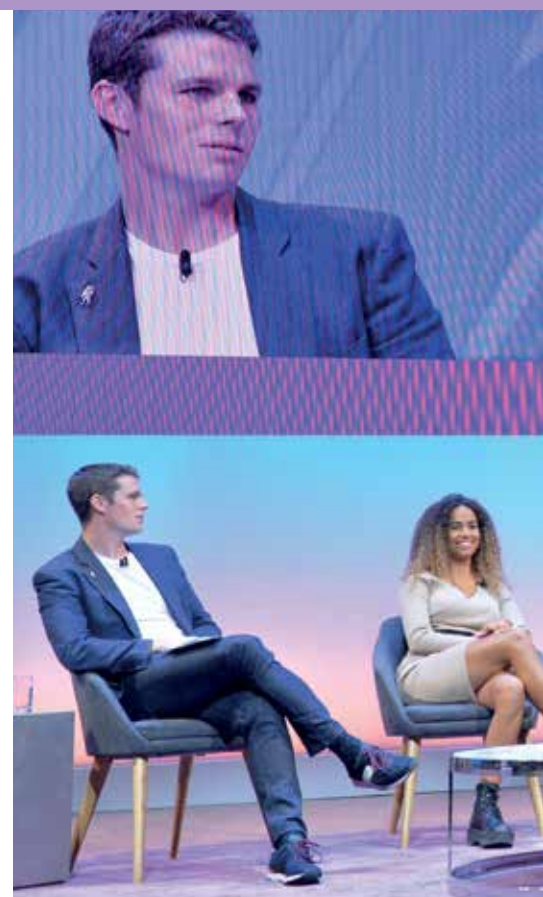
So what can TV do to compete for the young eyeballs it needs to survive? *Love Island* winner Amber Gill told the audience that traditional media have to realise that Gen Z's attention needs to be captured quickly.

Fanbytes CEO Timothy Armoo – whose company has worked on campaigns to engage youngsters for brands by the BBC and the government – said the new generation have longer attention spans than they are given credit for. "The idea that attention spans have reduced doesn't make sense in a world where people sit down and give all their attention to *Love Island* or a Netflix show. It's not attention spans that have reduced, it's interest spans," he said.

Paul Bojarski, CEO of interactive viewing technology company Scenic, pointed out that Gen Z "love to interact with each other".

YouTube star Caspar Lee – who has 7.5 million followers and has set up a talent management agency with fellow social media entrepreneur Joe Sugg – explained: "We have the tools to see exactly where we're losing the audience... and [know about] keeping an audience for as long as possible."

He pointed out that YouTube's "watch time" metric is used to



recommend popular content, which can then snowball into a viral video.

Lee explained: "Traditional broadcasters sometimes put video up on YouTube [but] they're not thinking about things such as Watch Time and wondering, 'Why are my videos not doing as well?'"

All the panellists called on TV producers to embrace TikTok. Recently, Armoo's company helped *The Washington Post* win around 500,000 followers on TikTok by "getting people in the office to create pranks and skits on their fellow employees.... Now... it is one of the most-followed news organisations.... Because it took this approach of not just going directly for the sell... it really obeyed the rules of the platform."

Armoo added: "The other thing about the Gen Z audience is [that] everyone basically wants to have their own TV show. When you post something on Insta, Chat or TikTok, fundamentally what you're posting out is what you'd post out if you had a film crew following you the whole time."

Gill said that one of the key things driving younger viewers is the idea that "it's important to look after the world and each other", adding that they are "very aware of the consequences" of their actions. Chapman said that "growing up in the recession has changed





From left: Rob Chapman, Amber Gill, Caspar Lee, Timothy Armoo and Paul Bojarski

**'YOU HAVE AN INSANE AMOUNT OF CONTENT... THAT IS JUST BEGGING TO BE SEEN'**

Richard Kendal

## ALL THE PANELLISTS CALLED ON TV PRODUCERS TO EMBRACE TIKTOK

their outlook... this generation feels the need to be part of the solution."

Taking an interest in what and how young viewers are watching is important, said Bojarski, who revealed that his research techniques include going on trains and buses at 3:00pm to see what schoolchildren are doing.

He said that this gives his company ideas about the kind of technologies and content to build, including using Scenic's Watch Together software, which has been used by companies such as BT Sport to allow conversations to happen on screens in the same place that programmes are viewed.

Authenticity is key to Gen Z, said Lee, adding that they like content that's "not too safe... and people who are real and authentic", even if "they fuck up".

*Love Island* is one of the few scheduled TV shows that cuts through to younger viewers, but "that's purely

because of the social media conversation that's going on... you want to be part of it," said Gill. "You want to be up-to-date with what's happening."

That prompted Lee to admit: "I didn't watch *Love Island* this year, but I know exactly who you are and who you've dated." Armoo added that, thanks to the social media a successful show generates, "You could actually create a TV show without creating the actual show."

Tapping into the social media culture that Gen Z is rooted in is important for anyone wanting to reach them, said Armoo. He explained that Fanbytes carried out a campaign for the Government to promote the national living wage to young ethnic-minority audiences by using influencers and memes. These included one of "a cat stealing a dog's food and the dog chasing it.... People saw that and identified with that meme as, 'this is like my employers stealing from me'."

Lee said some broadcasters understand how to work with the new platforms, citing *Good Morning Britain* and Sky News on YouTube.

He pointed out that some of these services, including YouTube, want to work with the BBC and ITV because "they still have that image of being the Wild West". And he suggested that

traditional broadcasters should hire staff who understand the new platforms.

The delivery mechanism had to be right, stressed Armoo, who addressed the audience: "You guys are so lucky, as you have an insane amount of content... that is just begging to be seen. [Make] sure the delivery mechanism is done in a way that feels natural to whatever platform you're using.... Just spend a bit of time on the platform and you get to understand [it]."

Gill advised using more behind-the-scenes footage – something echoed by one of the People's Panel contributors later, who said such content could be made even better by using virtual reality – and incorporating viewers' own storylines, as with Netflix show *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*.

And Lee concluded with this glimmer of hope for broadcasters: while the money to be made on YouTube is huge and talent feel that they have more editorial control on the platform, as he saw when his friend Joe Sugg was on *Strictly Come Dancing*, "there's still that prestige" associated with television. ■

**Session 2, 'A far off place, of which we know nothing – exploring Gen Z', featured: Timothy Armoo, CEO, Fanbytes; Paul Bojarski, CEO, Scenic; Amber Gill, *Love Island* winner 2019 and influencer; and Caspar Lee, vlogger and entrepreneur. It was chaired by the CEO and partner of Founders Intelligence, Rob Chapman, and produced by Sally Shelford and Victoria Kennedy. Report by Tara Conlan.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

Factual TV is in  
robust health  
despite the  
drama boom

# Running on empty

The Circle, Channel 4

**A**re we at peak unscripted content? Session chair Tim Davie noted that – while there was no short-age of good news for the genre (18 of the 20 top-performing original programmes on broadcast TV in the US that summer had been formatted entertainment) – there were worrying signs for the genre. The UK was still producing hit formats, but margins were declining and it was no longer the fastest growing market for original formats.

Davie asked each of his panellists – Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon, Studio Lambert CEO Stephen Lambert and Tim Hinks, Co-CEO of Expectation – to say whether it was game on or game over for unscripted.

Mahon was worried that new unscripted formats were failing to gain the international traction that their predecessors had achieved. She showed two slides that, she claimed, illustrated the scale of the problem and hinted at the causes.

The first was a list of significant formats that been sold to more than 45 territories over the past five decades. The last decade was represented

by just three shows, all launched in 2010: *Minute To Win It* (56 territories), *The Money Drop* (54) and *The Voice* (58).

But, pointed out the Channel 4 boss, the previous decade had generated double that number of blockbuster formats, all launched between 2001 and 2005: *Idol* (48), *Deal or No Deal* (83), *The X Factor* (46), *Strictly Come Dancing* (48), *MasterChef* (56) and *Got Talent* (68).

As for why recent formats seemed to be struggling, her second slide showed the relentless rise in US scripted commissions, to around 500 a year. In less than a decade, this had “doubled the amount of content in the market, driven by the online services and the SVoD streamers”.

The real question for Mahon was whether the market was simply congested thanks to “a massive rise in scripted” or was there “a reason that [unscripted formats] aren’t being invented that can go to the [previous] volume of places”?

Lambert – architect of *Gogglebox*, *Race Across the World* and *The Circle* – disagreed vehemently with Mahon’s diagnosis: “It takes many, many years to get to [being in 40-plus territories]... 2010 is not that long ago [and] many of

the formats that have been launched since then are [growing at] exactly the same [rate as older formats]; they’re building all the time.”

He reeled off some shows that had not made it onto Mahon’s slide: “*Gogglebox* is now at 38 territories; *Your Face Sounds Familiar* is at 39; *Anything Goes*, a French format, is at 25; *Married at First Sight*, which is huge in Australia, is now at 35.” It could take 10 or 15 years “before you see the real value in a format, and how many territories will embrace it”.

Lambert conceded only that broadcasters needed to “be very brave” because it could be “a huge gamble going for these big shows”. But, even then, he noted that many shows started off small, and many people had initially doubted that *MasterChef*, *Come Dine with Me* or *Gogglebox* could become huge successes.

Expectation’s Hinks was also positive and made the point that non-scripted was “definitely the slightly embarrassing step kid to the posh world of telly and the people who run it. It always has been, despite its extraordinary business model and how it shapes the lives of the people who watch it and how it provides extraordinary drama.”



He also emphasised how “the production values, the quality and sheer scale of some [recent] scripted content now... has raised everyone’s game”. He did not believe that the money going into scripted was a zero-sum game for unscripted producers, or for viewers. Choosing between *Game of Thrones* and a cookery competition “would seem to be an unfair fight, but it doesn’t need to be if those things are made brilliantly”.

Mahon responded by quoting ITV director of television Kevin Lygo, who “made the point in the first session that it’s really difficult to launch new things... [it’s preferable] to nurture an

complicated or more expensive to make. She namechecked *One Born Every Minute*, which “travels well, but is expensive”. On top of this, overseas broadcasters were increasingly “expanding [their] established brands... and there are fewer slots for fresh original content [that we can sell new formats into]”.

Lambert responded that it had always been “difficult to get those slots... the unscripted boom of the 2000s had to push out a lot of declining sitcoms. The sitcom vanished at almost the same speed as unscripted grew; sitcoms had stopped being funny.”

So what should unscripted producers

of global content that fits, and is relevant to, each country, at scale”.

*Love Island*, she pointed out, “is across social media all the time, and there’s a pacing and an episodic nature to it that makes you want to watch it. That’s harder to do when you’re going global.”

Netflix has not released its new hip-hop talent show *Rhythm and Flow* all in one go, but in batches of episodes across three weeks. “That will generate a lot of data for Netflix,” Lambert suggested. “With unscripted competition shows... part of the joy of watching them is the fact that everybody’s in sync on the conversation. The SVoDs’



From left: Tim Davie, Alex Mahon, Tim Hinks and Stephen Lambert

Richard Kendal

existing show and make it bigger.... When we make a decision to launch something new, such as *The Circle*, that’s a massive bet.... The success rates for new shows across the UK market last year was [around] 30%.”

Given that “people are watching more and more video and they’re looking for innovation all the time, you have to do two difficult things at the same time – make things that capture viewers’ imagination, and work out how to market them smarter”.

Referring to the earlier Generation Z session, she added: “Attention spans are shorter – you’ve got to market on social media for something to catch fire, to become talked about.”

Lambert accepted Mahon’s point that broadcasters were under pressure to “launch less and nurture more” but maintained that it had always been “difficult to sell a show, and difficult to launch one”. *Strictly Come Dancing*, he reminded the audience, had been rejected by “everyone many times over” – as had *Millionaire* and *Survivor*.

Sticking to her thesis that the market for unscripted shows had shifted since about 2010, Mahon said the shows that came later had, in general, been more

## ‘EVERYONE IS LAUNCHING LESS AND THEY’RE NURTURING [SHOWS] MORE’

be trying to push out of today’s schedule, queried Davie? Lambert declined to enter that minefield, noting only that established shows had tremendous inertia: “US broadcast TV is absolutely dominated in the unscripted space by very established brands. Every summer, the four networks attempt to launch a new one and pretty much every summer, 99% of them fail.”

Davie wondered if streamers could break a new unscripted show in the way that linear broadcasters had traditionally managed to do? Mahon said she saw no reason why Netflix could not be successful with a non-scripted format: “You can crack release patterns – that’s just a windowing question... for different countries on certain dates.” A bigger challenge was “to make a piece

strength is also their weakness – by releasing everything at once, people watch it at different times and it’s much harder to have that in-sync dialogue among the viewers.”

Lambert thought UK producers had nothing to worry about: “Due to the way in which our industry has grown up, buyers here have an extraordinary imperative to buy original ideas off paper. [This is] the opposite of many other countries – German [broadcasters] won’t buy a format until they can see the data.

“We have the amazing advantage of the English language. The goal in the format world is to create a format here and take it to America; if it works in the US, it is probably going to go everywhere. And it’s so much easier to sell an original format made here to the US because it’s in English.” ■

**Session Three: ‘Running on empty’ featured: Tim Hinks, Co-CEO, *Expectation*; Stephen Lambert, CEO, *Studio Lambert*; and Alex Mahon, CEO, *Channel 4*. It was chaired by Tim Davie, CEO, *BBC Studios* and produced by Diana Muir. Report by Gordon Jamieson.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

# Keynote: Sharon White

## The Ofcom CEO weighs up the regulator's hits and misses

In her third and final appearance at an RTS Cambridge Convention, the outgoing CEO of Ofcom, Sharon White, gave a candid insight into what she described as the regulator's tense relationship with the BBC, and reflected on why the TV industry had failed to improve its record on diversity.

She also provided some advice to today's teenagers hoping to secure a career in media. "When I look back at what I always regard as a slightly accidental career, so much of it is about confidence," recalled White, a Cambridge University graduate who went to a girls-only comprehensive in Leyton, east London.

"To have confidence and knock on the door, you've got to believe that someone is going to open the door. I'd encourage 17-year-olds to knock on the door because you'll be surprised at how many people will be willing you to success and will mentor you through."

She was speaking on the day that Ofcom published its third diversity report of her watch, "Diversity and equal opportunities in television". Its bleak conclusion was that "there has been no discernible change in the TV industry's diversity profile".

Women and disabled people remained under-represented; the proportion of women in the TV industry workforce had fallen to 45%, compared with 47% across the UK's working population. The proportion of women in senior management roles had not risen significantly, edging up from 41% to 42%.

At a senior level, minority ethnic representation remained low. Overall, the proportion of BAME people

working across the sector was stuck at 13%. On social class, those working in TV were twice as likely to have attended private school as the population as a whole. Only a minority of TV staff had working-class backgrounds, Ofcom found.

"Over the past three years, the dial hasn't shifted," admitted White, who had made the issue her defining mission when she was appointed. Where did she put the blame – on the broadcasters and production companies, or was she at fault, asked her interviewer, ITV's Julie Etchingham.

"Moving the dial on diversity is very much a collective effort," said the Ofcom chief, who, in January, takes over as Chair of John Lewis. "We're three years in.... All of this is going to take much more concerted leadership and effort."

She was still optimistic that, in two or three years' time, real change would occur. There had been no shortage of initiatives to boost diversity, including those for writers and directors, but the data indicated that there remained "a long way to go".

White added: "There should be a huge spur from producers and broadcasters – and yes, of course, the regulator – to get much broader representation."

Ofcom would now seek legislative powers to allow it to collect information from broadcasters on a wider range of diversity characteristics. And

it wanted them to include data relating to freelancers, who make up around half the overall workforce.

"It's a voluntary engagement," she pointed out. "Lots of broadcasters have been fantastic. But we'd love to get to the position where we're able to collect a much broader [range] of information on an obligatory basis."

White continued: "If we see diversity as some sort of tick-box exercise in political correctness, [done only] because, once a year, the regulator is going to produce a league table, we might as well shut up shop."

How was Ofcom itself doing on diversity? "At all levels of the organisation, including senior levels, we're doing well on gender, less well on ethnicity at senior levels, but starting to make some good progress. I [don't] see ourselves as the saints at the table.... All of us have got things to learn from each other."

Emphasising the importance of "authentic content" that reflected all of the UK, the CEO said that, outside London, many communities were convinced that what they saw on TV failed to reflect their lives. "We need content that is representative of the audience... it's a mind-set shift."

What had been learnt from Ofcom's diversity work that she'd like to hand on to her successor? "I think we have come on in terms of the conversation. Crucially, it's about concerted leadership that sees this as a core part of the business of running a successful broadcaster or production company."

Turning to the regulator's latest PSB survey, announced in July, she said that organisations such as the BBC and ITV were facing unprecedented pressure from global on-demand players. The Ofcom boss acknowledged that the regulator's last PSB report in 2015 had underestimated the "fundamental shift in viewing habits", and noted that "the smartphone generation [is now]

**'I AM NOT SURE  
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REGULATOR'**



Richard Kendal

completely bypassing PSB". PSB content was fantastic, she said, but hard questions needed to be asked about how it was marketed and distributed in a world where young people ignore TV channels. In this context, she praised the innovation represented by BritBox in making PSB content much more available online.

However, she was convinced that the survival of the PSBs required effective rules on prominence. Ofcom's own research showed that 12- to 15-year-olds were far more likely to recognise platforms such as YouTube and Netflix than they were the BBC. She, herself, believed there was a role for a levy on the online platforms to support core public service broadcasters.

Since April 2017, Ofcom has been responsible for regulating the BBC. White admitted that this had not always been easy, especially in relation to the regulator's protracted and fraught review of the corporation's ambitions for its iPlayer service.

"I think there's a fundamental tension in the relationship between Ofcom, as the first external regulator of the BBC, and the corporation," she said. "I am not sure it has quite come to terms with having an external regulator.

"The discussion we've had over the

iPlayer during the past 12 months is partly a reflection of this. I think, for the BBC, there is a sense that the world has changed dramatically, and that the competition is Netflix and Amazon."

The corporation was "regulated for the UK market" yet was very conscious that "it is a small player in the global market". "I feel very strongly that the BBC gets a huge amount of public money. Parliament sets very important goals for the BBC in terms of airing distinctive, quality content... ensuring that it does a great job, but not at the expense of other players in the UK market, whether that's ITV or Channel 4, is incredibly important."

What impact had regulating the BBC had on Ofcom? "Personally, I was always very cautious about taking on the BBC. Actually... I'm more positive about it now than when we started. We've got the ability to look across the whole of the broadcasting market.

"Whether we're looking at news, diversity or online competition, the BBC is central to that. Others can judge us, but I think that having the BBC as part of our broadcasting duties has made us a better regulator."

Ofcom's examination of BBC news and current affairs is due to be published later this autumn.

White said that audiences continued to regard PSB news as highly trusted. Even younger people use the BBC and ITV news to check the veracity of a story breaking on Twitter.

"But viewers do wonder if the BBC plays too safe," White noted. "They want to see more in-depth, edgy, bigger, bolder [coverage], particularly in current affairs. Is there too much Westminster bubble talking to Westminster bubble?"

Viewers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland thought that the BBC's national broadcast news lacked enough coverage of their nations. As for the corporation's online news, young people avoided using it. White opined that it was a less distinctive offering than BBC TV or radio news.

She added: "If you're from an ethnic-minority background, you're not feeling as engaged because the people on screen don't come from the same communities as you." ■

***In Session Four, Ofcom CEO Sharon White was interviewed by Tonight and News at Ten presenter Julie Etchingham. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Steve Clarke.***

***Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>***



In her first major speech since being appointed Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP called on broadcasters to “be as fleet-footed and as adaptable to change as their international competitors” such as Apple and Netflix.

She warned: “Those who do not pool their resources and talent will find it difficult to succeed in this new age.”

Nevertheless, Morgan applauded “the vibrant mix of broadcasters” in the UK, and said her Government was “determined to see a strong and successful future for our public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters alike”.

“People are watching what they want, where they want, when they want. No one can deny the benefits of an explosion of choice and a competitive market. But British broadcasters are central pillars of our public life and their benefits are too great for them to be cast off as victims of this revolution.”

The Secretary of State said that fake news – “disinformation, fuelled by hermetically sealed online echo chambers” – threatened the “foundations of truth that we all rely on.... We need to treasure and encourage the robust news and high-quality content and programmes that bring us together.” She congratulated the public service broadcasters for “working together, across traditional boundaries, including on exciting new platforms – just as they did with Freeview 17 years ago”. She highlighted the imminent launch of the BBC/ITV VoD service BritBox as a “fantastic example of this”.

The Secretary of State was also pleased that public service broadcasters were “increasingly working together with their commercial counterparts”, applauding Channel 4 and Sky for joining forces to show the final of the Cricket World Cup on free-to-air television in the summer.

“I am sure our PSBs and commercial broadcasters can continue to do more together in terms of producing content, working with advertisers and innovating to reach audiences of all ages,” she continued.

Turning to diversity, Morgan called on broadcasters to “represent the country they serve, both on and off screen”, adding: “I see it as fundamental to our success in the future as a



# Keynote: Nicky Morgan



nation. Representation is particularly important for our broadcasters. Not just because it is right and just, but because our broadcasters, I believe, are most effective, and most relevant, when they channel the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds that make the country great.

"I want to see all broadcasters working harder to promote diversity of all kinds, at all levels."

Morgan also called on broadcasters to take greater responsibility for the welfare of participants in their shows: "In the digital age, the spotlight can be intense for those who take part in popular shows. Viewers have easy access to participants via social media, and video clips can last for ever, meaning that fame can be an overwhelming experience for many people."

The Secretary of State recognised that regulators and the Government must support broadcasters as they adapt to the new TV landscape. "We need to make sure that regulations, some of which were developed in the analogue age, are fit for the new ways that people create and consume content," she said.

While linear-TV shows were subject to the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, programmes shown on most VoD services were not subject to the same standards, said Morgan: "This does not provide the clarity and consistency that consumers would expect.

"So, I am interested in considering how regulation should change to reflect a changing sector."

Morgan also called on Ofcom, which has begun its latest public service broadcasting review, "to think big", to ensure that broadcasters were able to "meet audiences' needs, find the best new talent and provide the critical mass of investment that is vital to drive success in UK television".

The Secretary of State pledged to "consider the issue of 'prominence'" on electronic programme guides for public service broadcasters. Ofcom is currently updating the rules that govern prominence.

Morgan promised to give "equal recognition to disabled and women's sports" in the listed events regime, the so-called sporting "crown jewels" that include the Olympics and FA Cup. Television rights for events on the list

must be offered to free-to-air broadcasters. Acknowledging the large audiences that watched this summer's Fifa Women's World Cup on the BBC, Morgan announced that she would consult on adding women's sporting events to the listed events regime.

"Where a men's event is listed, the women's equivalent would be, too," she said. She was also considering adding the Paralympics to the list.

With more than a nod to the divisive effects of Brexit, the culture secretary concluded her address to the RTS convention with the hope that TV "at a

time when it feels as if our society is getting more polarised and more tribal... can bring us together through creating moments of shared enjoyment and inspiration". ■

*In Session 5, 'Secretary of State keynote', the Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was interviewed by journalist and broadcaster Susanna Reid. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Matthew Bell.*

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Q Susanna Reid: Why is there not enough diversity in TV?**

**A Nicky Morgan:** In politics, I've found, you've got to go out and find the talent.... It's not enough to... launch a programme... you've actually got to go out and find people. In other sectors, such as financial services, there are issues around unconscious bias in who you are recruiting... it's much easier to recruit in your own image.

**Q Susanna Reid: Ofcom... wants more powers to collect data on diversity – will you be granting those?**

**A Nicky Morgan:** We're not planning to legislate at the moment... but I hear very much what Sharon [White, Ofcom Chief Executive] said [earlier at the RTS convention], we've discussed it... [but] legislation is challenging at the moment.

**Q Simon Albury, Chair of the Campaign for Broadcasting Equality: The [diversity] data, which is supplied by the broadcasters is poor, to inadequate to non-existent... Sharon [White] talked about extending the [diversity] characteristics, but we need to see an extension of the quality [of data].... Will you**

**give consideration to secondary legislation to improve the quality of the evidence?**

**A Nicky Morgan:** The short answer is yes, but legislation at the moment is [difficult] in the current parliamentary environment. In my experience, legislation is part of the answer, but there is nothing to stop broadcasters on a voluntary basis dramatically improving the quality of the data they supply.

**Q Susanna Reid: You made a very good point [in your speech] about [fake news] operating in "sealed online echo chambers, threatening the foundations of truth that we all rely on". Of course, that's a responsibility for broadcasters, but isn't it also responsibility for politicians?**

**One of the things that we hear so often on Good Morning Britain is that during the [Brexit] campaign, there were lies told on both sides, and those were lies coming from the mouths of politicians?**

**A Nicky Morgan:** You're right. Of course, politicians – all of us involved – [have] to accept that the past three and a half years have left the country more divided than people have seen at any point in living memory.... When this first phase [of Brexit] is brought to a conclusion, I think [we] will have to take a very long, hard look at ourselves, and at what happened and how we conduct campaigns.



# Keynote: David Zaslav

Discovery's dominance in factual TV will preserve it from the consolidation feeding frenzy, believes its CEO

**D**ocumenting the planet with the BBC, differentiating Discovery from Netflix and the other streamers – and taking Amazon on at its own retail game – were the three big themes expounded by Discovery's President and CEO, David Zaslav.

With Discovery now the second largest TV company in the US in terms of reach, Zaslav candidly laid out his company's ambitions. Whereas Amazon built its billions in retail and then

moved into TV, he said Discovery is doing the reverse. It has hired the brains behind Amazon's e-commerce platform Marketplace and around 150 product development and technology staff, after lessons were learnt from going direct to consumer during the building of Dplay and Eurosport Player.

Zaslav explained the thinking behind the move: "Netflix has 150 million people who pay and do nothing else.

"If we can aggregate millions of people who are watching but they're also buying a bicycle, a vacation or

food... We have a 'view and do' concept that, ultimately, from a multiple perspective, in terms of creating value, could be enormous."

Interestingly, "view and do" was ruled out for Netflix the following day by its Chair and CEO, Reed Hastings, but it was not the only differential that Zaslav said Discovery had created.

"We're at a very interesting time and we've chosen a path that's quite differentiated and we feel good about it... we need all of your help because it's really going to be about great content. But

we're a very different company than everybody else.

"If you're going to be in the general entertainment, scripted movie business, then you have to have a massive amount of content. You're trying to appeal to everyone; 750 million people here in Europe."

He went on: "There [are] eight great [streaming] companies; maybe, in the end there'll only be four [because] they're going to have to buy each other, because it's going to get so confusing. I do think there'll be more consolidation.

"There will be a few of those who are successful. That's not who we are. I think that gives us a unique advantage – we're out of that business."

He summed up his tactic as, "We're just going to lean aside and let those guys have their way with each other."

Asked by broadcaster Kate Silverton if Discovery might be bought, Zaslav said: "I hope not, because I love Discovery." A prime example of the battle going on between the big streamers, he said, was the reported \$600m paid by HBO Max for *The Big Bang Theory* and \$500m for *Seinfeld* by Netflix.

"Old series, massive cheques," was how Zaslav described it, adding to laughter: "You know what that says? 'Holy shit, we're in trouble, we don't have enough, what do the other seven guys have, go get it, I don't care what you need to pay for it. It's going to take us two to three years to develop something else – that exists, go get it'."

"That's not the business we're in. That's why I think we're going to be successful."

Zaslav said that Discovery Networks International President and CEO JB Perrette and he constantly discussed the content that people would watch and pay for before and above anyone else.

"That's why we bought all the golf in the world, outside of the US. That's why we own most of the cycling in the world – and our ambition is to own all of the cycling.

"That's why we now have the majority of the science, history and environmental content, along with all the great brands that [BBC Studios] and Discovery have created.

"They [the new streamers] have to continue to fight because they are splitting it eight ways, but we own almost all the food content in the world, almost all the home content in

## '[WE] GO INTO A COUNTRY LIKE CHINA AND SAY, "YOU WANT TO SEE GOLF, WE HAVE IT ALL"'

the world, we own all the golf content in the world. That is going to create massive value over time; to go into a country like China and say, 'You want to see golf, we have it all.'"

Recently, Discovery signed a deal with the BBC that will see the two broadcasters work together on new content but which also gives the US giant's new streaming platform the rights to all BBC natural history shows for the next 10 years outside the UK, Ireland and China, the streaming rights to hundreds of hours of archive BBC documentaries, collaborations on new content, and UKTV channels Good Food, Home and Really.

Explaining part of the reason for the deal, the environmentally-conscious Zaslav said: "I was blown away by the idea that *Blue Planet* talked about plastics in the ocean; and the reaction to that here in the UK gave rise to Theresa May changing the laws on plastics... that was the moment where I said we have to go all in.

"We've structured a very broad collaboration with the BBC, where we will own, outside of the UK, all the natural history and science history content for over-the-top [platforms] and... we're creating even more original content

## '[THE NEW STREAMERS] ARE SPLITTING [CONTENT] EIGHT WAYS, BUT WE OWN ALMOST ALL THE FOOD CONTENT IN THE WORLD'

together over the next 10-plus years. But our ambition is that we're going to document the planet together – maybe we could have a meaningful impact."

Zaslav went on to say that the UK – where Discovery also owns 50% of All3Media – "is hugely important to us... we're the largest international media company now". He said the UK's cultural bent and natural curiosity had helped Discovery become successful in Britain. He praised All3Media's CEO, Jane Turton, and the UK's "creative community", warning the audience, "Don't take it for granted."

He repeatedly returned to the idea of "storytelling" and "characters" and the need for ever more content. Zaslav explained that, to keep up with viewers' demands, presenters such as former tennis champion Chris Evert had been given iPhones to film short, behind-the-scenes extras or reflections for Eurosport Player.

A recent deal with Tiger Woods will pitch him in an international challenge with other golfers in a series called *Skins*. Furthermore, his caddy, best friend and others now film him to make even more content available for Discovery.

Another key series for Discovery is Steven Spielberg's documentary series *Why We Hate*, which was first discussed between the director and Zaslav five years ago.

"It was Steven's idea. I said to him, 'What is the story you want to tell? The story that, when you and I are gone and they come back and look and say, 'Who was Steven and what did he care about?', what is that story?' He thought about it for about two or three seconds and he said, 'Why we hate.'"

"Little did we know, five years ago, where we would be, not just here in the UK or in the US, but everywhere in the world. I felt like, for most of my life, things were getting better, [now] we find in the last five years that things are much more of a challenge and hate is much more on the rise.... We hope it begins a dialogue."

*In Session Six, 'International keynote', David Zaslav, President and CEO of Discovery, was interviewed by journalist and broadcaster Kate Silverton. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Tara Conlan.*

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>



# The rights stuff

**T**he rise of the television streamers and changing audience behaviour threaten to upset TV's traditional order, but this session surfed on a wave of optimism from producers and broadcasters alike.

The BBC has responded to the rise of subscription video-on-demand services by extending the iPlayer catch-up window from 30 days to one year.

BBC iPlayer chief Dan McGolpin defended the decision: "TV works in seasons... it means that things which are on a yearly cycle, such as *The Apprentice*, will be there." He claimed that audiences, months after transmission, can now be "substantial" – some 40% of *Killing Eve*'s audience came to the thriller after the original catch-up window.

"We need to recognise that [many of] our licence-fee payers are young and not watching broadcast TV in traditional ways," he added. "This model of [having] just a few episodes available for catch-up doesn't work any more."

Pact is currently negotiating a deal with the BBC for its independent producer members. All3Media CEO Jane Turton agreed that the catch-up window needed to be extended, but "only on the right terms" for producers: "If there is a sacrifice in value for the production community... that has to be made good with some changes in the terms of trade with the BBC."

Session chair Kirsty Wark came straight to the point, asking McGolpin: "Is there a danger that it looks like you are holding a gun to producers' heads?"

"We're absolutely not doing that," he replied. "[But] if our licence-fee payers... want to watch in a different way, we have to recognise that."

McGolpin added: "If you look at the

rights we're asking for, we're still asking for a lot less than if you go and do a deal with a global SVoD."

ITV Studios MD Julian Bellamy backed the BBC, but with a sting in the tail: "I completely understand where the BBC is coming from... we all want to support anything that strengthens the public service broadcasting ecology, but my first duty is to protect the interests of ITV Studios."

"We've had productive conversations with the BBC over the past few weeks and months, and we're getting to a place where we can see a way to make it work."

The growing number of SVoD players, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ and Apple TV+ – all of which are hungry for content – gives producers more outlets for their programmes.

"From the perspective of a studio, having more buyers makes it a wonderful time to be a producer," said

former ABC Studios executive vice-president Howard Davine. Historically, he explained, TV production was "heavily deficit-funded" in the US. "You would deficit-fund significant millions per episode for quite a long period of time, hoping to eventually get that hit, *CSI* or *The Big Bang Theory*, that would wash away all the losses and provide a significant profit margin to the company. Now you have the SVoD players, who give you the opportunity to do relatively large-budget programming for very little risk – in fact, no risk."

SVoDs, he added, "fund 100% of the cost of production", although producers have to give up some rights in return.

So, asked, Wark, "Is it springtime for producers?" Turton replied: "Yes, it's good... [SVoDs] have put a lot of money in, there's no doubt about that, but I think that, creatively, it's been very stimulating as well."

McGolpin, however, sounded a note of caution: "The Ofcom report ['Media nations: UK 2019'] said that SVoDs made something like 200-odd hours of [original] UK content last year, compared with the PSBs' 32,000, so I think we have to be a bit careful about saying that small indies are going to pitch loads of hours to SVoDs."

With the launch of Apple TV+ on 1 November, Wark reckoned there would be "eight big streamers" in the market: "Are they all sustainable?"



**'DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER AND RESILIENCE OF LINEAR BROADCASTERS'**





From left: Julian Bellamy, Howard Davine, Kirsty Wark, Jane Turton and Dan McGolpin

Richard Kendal

Davine argued that the key to success would be “how you differentiate yourself to the consumer”. Disney+, for example, will be “brand-focused”, he said, because “the Disney brand is probably the most iconic and powerful brand in the world in terms of entertainment”.

“None of us knows,” admitted Turton. “What we like as producers is that there are more buyers with big budgets coming looking for content.”

Who would be the winners and losers in this new TV landscape, asked Wark. “Do not underestimate the

power and resilience of traditional linear broadcasters,” said Bellamy. “This is a hits business and the winners will be defined by the hits they have and, in the end, that means that those [SVoD] players – [in fact] all the players – need to find ways to be the most attractive partner for producers.”

“We can all agree on one thing,” said Davine. “This has to be the most exciting time for us in the TV business.... As creators of content, these other platforms that keep growing are giving us opportunities to sell.”

“Uncertainty and opportunity are two sides of the same coin, and I think that’s the theme of this conference,” added McGolpin. “It’s an exciting time to be in TV.” ■

**Session Seven, ‘The rights stuff’, featured: Julian Bellamy, MD, ITV Studios; Howard Davine, former ABC Studios executive vice-president, ITV; Dan McGolpin, controller, programming and iPlayer, BBC; and Jane Turton, CEO, All3Media. It was chaired by the journalist, broadcaster and writer Kirsty Wark and produced by Alan Clements. Report by Matthew Bell.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Q Avery Katz, director, Taconic Capital Advisors: Are we at peak content today, especially [in] drama?**

**A Jane Turton:** There’s no evidence we’re at peak – the number of commissioned dramas has gone up again, year on year. It’s actually flat or going down in the UK from public service broadcasters, but elsewhere that’s being compensated for by money coming in from the SVoDs.... One could assume that, with the arrival of more players, there will be more, not fewer, series commissioned.

**A Howard Davine:** We are very much at risk of being at peak level, just because there is limited

supply of great talent – behind the camera, in front of the camera, executive talent.... Any increase beyond where we are currently will show in the quality – there’s a finite amount of the best and brightest.

**Q John McVay, CEO, Pact: Isn’t Dan morally embarrassed by [the BBC] requiring smaller producers to put their own [profit] margin in to make shows for the BBC... effectively working for nothing or less than nothing?**

**A Dan McGolpin:** The BBC works with more small producers than anybody else. No one has to accept a commission with the BBC.

**Q Kirsty Wark: You haven’t answered the question: does the BBC require people to make programmes for the BBC without taking any income at all?**

**A Dan McGolpin:** No.

**A John McVay:** The problem is, Dan, they do have to work for you. If you’ve gone into development and you’re a small producer, there is only one place that you can sell your programme because you can’t take it anywhere else because you’ve accepted development finance.

[Producers]... will have to take on debt and put the [profit] margin in to close the finance. The BBC requires more deficit financing than any other broadcaster in the UK.

**A Dan McGolpin:** We’re doing really exciting things with producers. We are happy to go on a commercial journey that a great many people can make money out of – [the BBC is] a force for good in the industry.

**A Bal Samra, group commercial director, BBC:** We work with about 250 indies – that is really important for us and we will continue to do that.

**W**hat a difference two years makes. In 2017, Sky was one of the crown jewels of the vast Murdoch media

empire, beloved by investors and publicly traded on the London Stock Exchange. Spool forward to 2019 and Sky is part of Comcast, the US cable conglomerate, which successfully outbid Disney to buy Europe's biggest pay-TV provider for a staggering \$39bn.

But Sky's plain-speaking CEO remains in situ. Jeremy Darroch succeeded James Murdoch in 2007, after joining the company as chief financial officer in 2004. He became Group CEO in 2014 following the acquisition of Sky Italia and Sky Deutschland.

Darroch told the RTS that he'd stayed on after the takeover because the pace of change had created a climate in the TV sector that had never been more exciting: "There will be challenges, of course, but the opportunities this presents are huge."

Having recently launched Sky Studios, and won unanimous acclaim for the Sky Atlantic drama *Chernobyl*, Darroch was enthusiastic as he outlined his strategy to *The Times's* deputy business editor, Graham Ruddick.

Being part of Comcast – which also owns NBCUniversal – gave Sky "great global potential", he said. The satellite behemoth might have a new owner but the business remains broadly the same. "That's because our new colleagues are very keen for us to take the lead. I can't speak highly enough of them," said the Sky CEO. "What you'll also see is an emerging set of big ideas. For instance, NBC's Peacock streaming service and global advertising project: [we will] take our AdSmart technology and combine it with some of the great initiatives NBCU has developed."

In Milan, Sky Italia is poised to move into the telecommunications business, "supercharged by the world-class technical capability of Comcast".

Darroch continued: "We bring a lot to the party. In many respects, the businesses that are being created today mimic what we've created at Sky. The idea of a fully integrated media company that combines everything from owned and acquired content, world-class consumer technology,



Being part of Comcast gives Sky great global potential, argues Sky's CEO

# Keynote: Jeremy Darroch

best-in-class customer service capability, a really strong brand and the ability to apply customer insight across the value chain to deliver competitive advantage is what Sky is all about.”

In the UK, Sky’s Now TV has helped to future-proof the business in the face of competition from online platforms. But with the imminent arrival of other, well-funded, direct-to-consumer services, further significant challenges are looming.

Said Darroch: “People are only just beginning to get their heads around what it actually takes to be successful... It is not only about your content and technology, but about the whole process of managing, operating and running a large-scale consumer business....

“All of the businesses I respect and admire are on the front foot.... They’re trying to figure it out. They’ve all got strong plans they’re trying to execute.... This is not a time for equivocation.”

Disney and, not surprisingly, Comcast and NBCU are among the businesses he admires.

So, too, are the Faangs. “Whatever your view of them, they are unbelievable businesses. Interestingly, they are businesses that have grabbed market share,” he argued. “They’ve created some new markets, but they’ve grabbed huge amounts of share from old, incumbent players by moving very quickly and by creating light, agile operating infrastructures and embracing new technology.”

How does Sky fit into all this? Did he expect to lose content and will he lose subscribers? Darroch predicted that the number of Sky subscriptions would continue to grow: “The opportunity to grow customers in all our core markets, broadly by expanding the business, is as strong today as it’s ever been.

“But that growth will come from different places.... We are building our relationship with each of the [Sky] households. Today, we have a deeper relationship with those households. As we do that and we deliver that well, we find the propensity for Sky customers to aggregate all of their services with Sky is very strong.”

As for content, a taste of what’s in store as the battle for streaming rights heats up came earlier in September. Netflix paid a reported \$500m for exclusive streaming rights to *Seinfeld*.



## ‘THE OPPORTUNITY TO GROW CUSTOMERS ... IS AS STRONG TODAY AS IT’S EVER BEEN’

Earlier, NBCU had grabbed back the US version of *The Office* from Netflix.

Darroch predicted that Sky would “seek to lose content and then we will do more of our own content”.

He continued: “I don’t think our overall content offering will be diminished at all, but it will be different in the future. Some of that will be driven by us.... Maybe others will seek to go by a different path. But there’s no reason why it can’t be better.”

In the future, Sky was likely to have fewer, deeper partnerships with third parties, including platforms, content owners, producers, writers and talent. He highlighted how Netflix had been successfully “fully integrated into the Sky user interface”.

Was there a similar deal Sky could do with Apple after Apple TV+ launches in November. “I don’t see why not. That’s not to say that we’re about to do a deal with Apple. We’ve got a really good template that’s worked well for both us and Netflix. We have great relationships with all the free-to-air broadcasters. We want those to get deeper as well.”

Having NBCU as a sister company will boost Sky’s already strong reputation for US shows. Alongside this is the

company’s ambition for Sky Studios to “develop European stories at a scale that’s never been seen before”.

How would his company achieve this? By a long-term commitment and building an infrastructure and teams that could deliver, said Darroch. “You need to create the right working environment. That’s particularly true now because content creators have never had more choice regarding who they work for.”

This was critical to attracting and retaining the right people. Two other factors were committing capital – “something we’re rather good at” – and an appetite for risk.

What has he learnt from *Chernobyl*? “I was a little unconvinced [about] a nuclear disaster [drama] but, when I read the first script, I got it immediately. You replicate that by backing people and ideas.

“You recognise what it is that you can bring, but allow people freedom to pursue what they want to pursue.... Then you put the full marketing weight of the business behind it when it transmits.”

How much will he pull back on Sky Sports to fund Sky Studios? “Pull back isn’t quite right. The sports market is changing a lot.... Around the world, sports as a subscription business isn’t growing. There’s not a huge amount of new demand that’s coming into it.

“We are very, very value-driven. Our ability to analyse the value of sport, and understand where it fits into our business... We’ll decide where that is at the right time. The good news is that we’ve got such a broad range of sport that runs across the year.

“Our ability not to do so much sport or to lose some rights doesn’t have that big effect on the business anymore.”

When Darroch joined Sky in 2004, 93% of subscribers took the top-tier package, which included sport.

“At the time,” he conceded, “we were very, very wedded to sport. I didn’t really like the look of that. Today, fewer than half of our customers take sport.” ■

**In Session Eight, Sky CEO Jeremy Darroch was interviewed by Graham Ruddick, deputy business editor, The Times. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Steve Clarke.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>



# Who you gonna trust?



‘Trust isn’t scientific, it’s instinctive, it comes from the gut, not from the brain,” Martin Lewis told the Cambridge audience, and he should know. The founder of MoneySavingExpert.com, consumer business warrior and the man who sued Facebook and won is also the most trusted man in Britain, according to Google.

And he explained to the packed hall of delegates: “Trust is not a function of your marketing departments, it’s a function of the decisions you make and of how you choose to operate and treat your viewers and stakeholders.”

Lewis noted that trust needn’t come from the impartiality and balance often touted by PSBs. Instead, he said: “It comes from honesty and transparency; I am the money-saving expert, I do what it says on the tin.

“A trusted broadcaster, in my view, is Fox News,” he went on. “It has an agenda and we know what it is. It appeals to a certain demographic who will trust it over everyone else. Fox knows and appeals to its audience.

“We can’t automatically assume trust is crucial to everything you do. If you want the news, of course you’ve got to trust it, but if you’re watching *Love Island*,

## How well are TV companies and their online rivals doing at winning and keeping public confidence?

what is trust in a produced reality? What you have to do as a broadcaster is decide: do I want to be trusted?”

Just one thing can make or break a fragile contract of trust. From the People’s Panel in Leeds, one long-time BBC viewer, pensioner Stephen, cited the Cliff Richard debacle as the reason he no longer switches on BBC News. He felt it had broken his faith in it: “The BBC hasn’t done itself any favours even though it is the best of them.”

Vikki Cook, Ofcom’s director of content media policy, expanded on research published by Edelman (see pages 26–27), revealing that trust in PSBs remains high. She said: “Consumers might use aggregators for speed, but they don’t trust them. Once they see a headline, most people will then seek out that news from a PSB and get that trusted source. This suggests that we are doing something right with our regulation.”

Where it gets harder to quantify trust is in the Wild West of less-regulated online services. Speaking from the People’s Panel, teenager Maria revealed that she never watches TV news: “I can’t find myself sitting there for half an hour watching it. I get it from my app. I get notifications with different headlines and if I find one interesting, I’ll research it online, read different articles, form an opinion.”

YouTube was slammed for posting conspiracy theory videos around the anniversary of 9/11, but Ben McOwen Wilson, its UK director, defended the need to constantly balance prudence with protection of free speech.

He explained: “On our platform, anyone can upload anything you can make a video of. Our role is to remove anything that breaches community guidelines, anything that is in breach of the law, or of our view around hate speech. We’ve removed Sandy Hook conspiracies which, in our view, were harmful and offensive.

“On conspiracy theories, where there is no actual harm, then they remain on our platform. There’s a knowledge panel, which will refer you out to encyclopedias.”

He added: “We must balance here the value that openness brings. It has





From left: Ben McOwen Wilson, Vikki Cook, Deborah Turness, Aasmah Mir, Martin Lewis and Ed Williams

Below: Martin Lewis

All pictures: Richard Kendal

obvious downsides, but the value that openness brings means that a guy who headlined at Glastonbury this year [Stormzy] was an unsigned artist on a platform for eight and a half years before a label signed him up. That openness has societal value, but it comes at a cost, and we are working incredibly hard to take care of those costs.”

He was quick to pass the baton back to other broadcasters, however, noting that YouTube’s appeal lay in “great content from authentic voices that look and sound more like them than any other platform that’s out there. That is something that, at the moment, television isn’t doing. It is giving them a voice and showing them the world [and it] resonates strongly with our younger viewers.

“Under-represented communities in the UK are feeling less and less connected to television and young people are watching less and less TV. If that clarion call is not heard, then I worry,” he said.

Fresh from his legal victory over Facebook’s posting of scam ads, Lewis took issue with those hiding behind “platform” status to avoid regulation, saying: “I have massive trust issues with any algorithm-based delivery services. When you publish an advert,

you’re a publisher and you should be legally liable like a publisher.”

This chimed with teacher Marie, speaking to the convention from the People’s Panel. She explained her concerns about children in her classroom accessing information and news via social media and various platforms. She said: “They’re believing the comments, and that’s affecting them. Children are not emotionally or mentally ready; they’re quite receptive, so it’s causing a lot of stress and anxiety.

“During the stab-bings in London, a little boy raised his hand and asked, ‘Am I going to get stabbed?’ The filtering is not there.”

Vikki Cook agreed it was a complex area, but asked: “How do you go about regulating online? We have enormous skill at regulating broadcasters. You simply cannot lift and shift that framework into an online world. You have to balance the most harmful content with freedom of expression. Will there have to be some form of regulation? Yes.”

Deborah Turness, President at NBC News International, explained how her company was having to evolve to accommodate younger viewers, including creating a news show on Snapchat that she said now has more than 20 million subscribers. She explained: “This is a reaction to the viewers’ changing needs. They need more transparency. They crave news organisations that will open up and let them in, share more of our processes, not just what we know but how we know it. The next generation of news products needs to address that.”

For Edelman’s UK CEO Ed Williams, a marriage of the values of the old and technology of the new was required.

“Our traditional broadcasters have to thrust forward in technology, putting as much time, effort and cash into development as they can to reach those younger audiences,” he said. “But it’s just as important to harness the support of government and regulators, to help British television to continue to appeal to all audiences, to continue to play its critical role at the heart of our nation.”

He defended those online platforms, such as YouTube, that have also had to

adapt as their platforms’ status has grown – and increasingly turned them into publishers with responsibilities for their audiences:

“The red mist comes down when people talk about YouTube and Google. It’s very clear that they are now taking [their responsibility] seriously. Some would say it’s way

too late, but they are taking it seriously.”

As all broadcasters, new and old, continue to evolve, they may well have

Martin Lewis’s words ringing in their ears. He finished his presentation with a call to arms:

“How trusted do you want to be? If you do want to be trusted, *always* do the right thing, don’t just be seen to be doing the right thing.

“And you have to do it from day one. If you want to be trusted, be trustworthy.” ■



**Session Nine, ‘Who you gonna trust?’, featured presentations from Martin Lewis, founder, MoneySavingExpert.com, and Ed Williams, CEO UK and EMEA vice-chair, Edelman. The panelists were: Vikki Cook, director, content media policy, Ofcom; Ben McOwen Wilson, MD, YouTube UK; and Deborah Turness, President, NBC News International. It was chaired by Aasmah Mir, TV and radio broadcaster, and produced by Martin Frizell and team. Report by Caroline Frost.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

Ed Williams shares Edelman's research findings that streamers are gaining ground on PSBs in the trust stakes

# Trust in numbers



**T**V's most valuable audience, the 16- to 25-year-olds with their whole viewing lives ahead of them, are largely ignoring traditional TV platforms in favour of YouTube and Netflix, according to data published by Edelman at RTS Cambridge.

The company's UK CEO, Ed Williams, revealed that, for 66% of younger viewers, YouTube and Netflix provide what he called "the protein and carbs" of their daily viewing diet, with side orders of BBC and ITV thrown in.

Worryingly for broadcasters, the statistics also reveal that PSB catch-up services have the smallest level of engagement across every age group except mature audiences, where they rate slightly above SVoDs and other online viewing services.

British PSBs continue to enjoy a high level of trust from viewers, but Netflix now matches them (chart 1). The streaming giant is considered as trustworthy as BBC and ITV, beaten only by Freeview.

Netflix also tops the scale on a perception of competence, securing second place following the BBC. This is probably due to its content and quality of user experience.

Within the category of trust, the Edelman data identifies four separate pillars: ability, integrity, dependability and purpose. This final one – articulated as "What would the world miss if this company didn't exist?" – is reportedly the hardest for companies to articulate, but Netflix scores highly here, too.

Interestingly, Williams added that in this respect Sky also scores well, seemingly boosted by its vocal campaigning on oceans and plastics, plus its support for cycling. He urged other broadcasters to follow its example.

The research shows that, with the arrival of so many competing SVoDs, consumers are starting to question their value for money. While three out of every ten people in the UK have at least three pay-TV or SVoD accounts, 61% are concerned over the rising costs of these services; and 42% are

actually using someone else's account to watch the content.

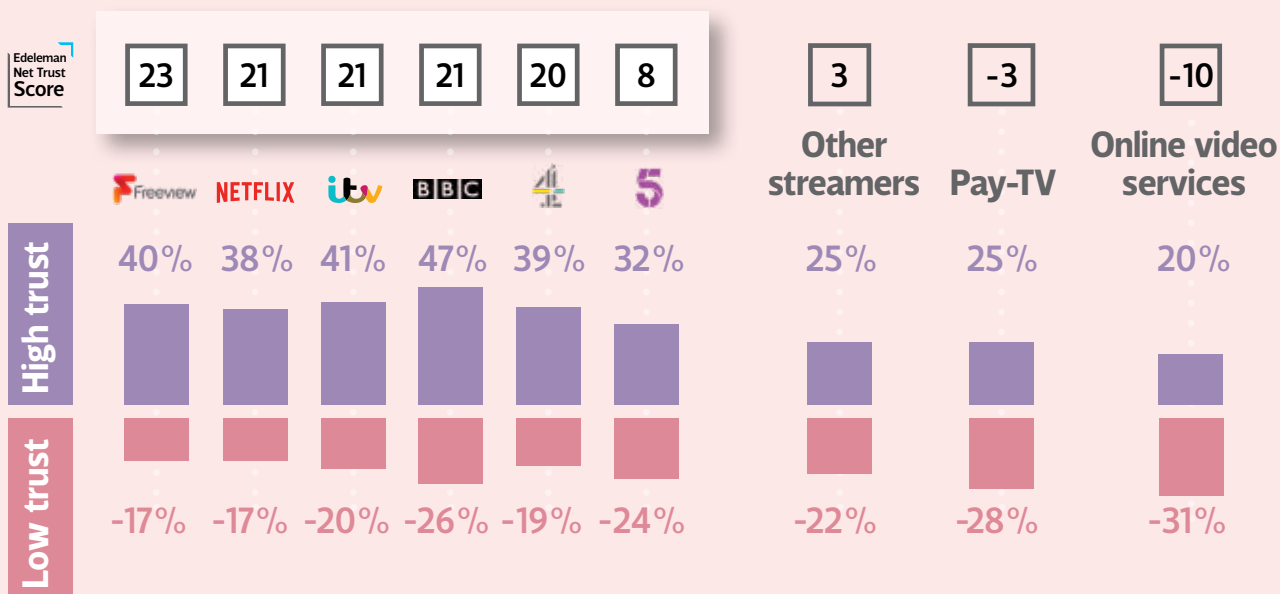
The data reveals that 2% of these viewers admit to using the account of an ex-partner. Williams pointed out that, while crackdowns may be necessary to avoid such loopholes being exploited, this may have a negative effect on the high trust scores outlined above.

There is confusion regarding the BBC licence fee. The data revealed that six out of 10 consumers fail to realise it pays for the iPlayer, while 25% think it goes towards making TV sets. The same number believe that TV programmes broadcast by Channel 4 and ITV are licence-fee funded; 65% think the licence should be free for the over-75s.

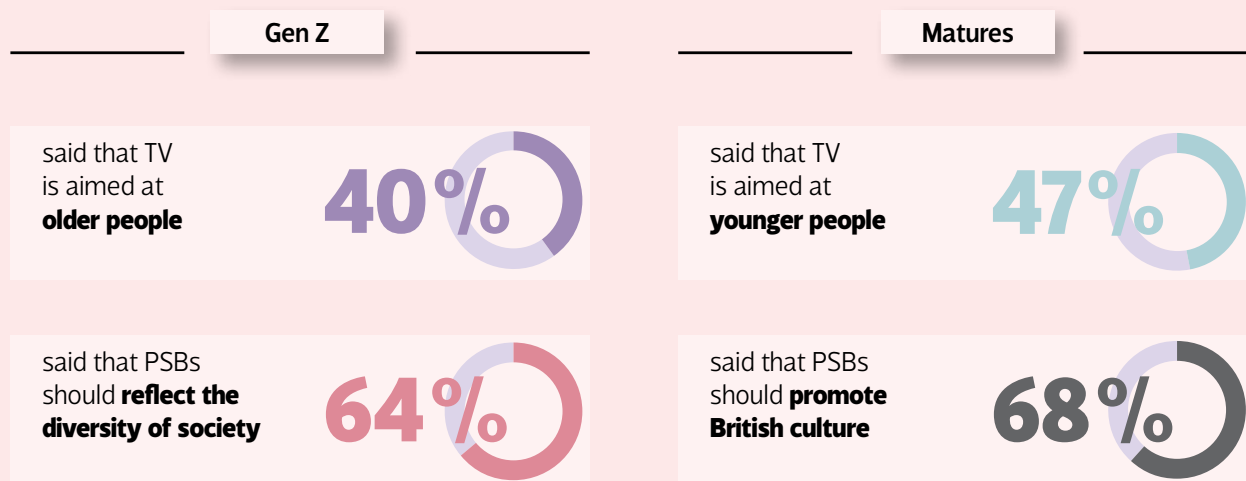
There is some good news for PSBs. TV news remains the most popular way to access news, but the majority of young people obtain most of their news from online devices; 45% of Generation Z consumers get their news from social media while older audiences stick to traditional sources.

Williams pointed out that the argument that younger audiences will

## 1 Netflix is now a member of the Trust Club (PSBs vs streamers)



## 2 PSBs are struggling to remain relevant to everyone, having to cater to diverse audiences



probably switch from one media source to another as they age cannot be taken for granted by broadcasters.

Overall, the data supports the growing feeling that traditional TV is struggling to remain relevant to young audiences. However, it also reveals a matching belief at the other end of the age table. While 40% of youngsters believe TV is something "older people do", 47% of mature viewers believe TV

to be aimed too much at younger people (chart 2). Clearly, the challenge to fulfil the PSBs' traditional role of providing something for everyone is become increasingly complicated.

*Ed Williams, CEO UK and EMEA vice-chair, Edelman, presented the research. Report by Caroline Frost.*

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

Source for charts: Edelman



# The world has gone nuts!

Piers Morgan tells Christine Lampard that's he's only one vegan sausage roll away from being sacked



**Q Christine Lampard:** Do you wake in the morning and decide what you want to rant about that day?

**A Piers Morgan:** I used to run a daily paper. And the whole point of it was that, every morning, if you're running a newsroom with 400 people, you have to get them going with your opinions.

So I think it was always in my DNA to be hugely opinionated about absolutely everything. I try to work myself into indignant rages on most subjects.

**Q Christine Lampard:** And you get on TV, put the call out and, actually, a lot of the time, people come back agreeing with you?

**A Piers Morgan:** Somebody described it to me as: 2,000 years ago we used to live in tribes, and you'd be with your tribe in your area. Then, very slowly and surely, we all met other tribes who looked different, spoke differently, had different opinions – and both tribes decided that the only possible way to resolve things was to kill each other. And that's where we've gone back to, driven by social media.

The radical nature of debate these days has got completely out of hand. We've got to somehow get back to a world where we can have proper debate again because, otherwise, where do we go?

We go to a place on Twitter after the referendum, or after Trump's election, and people go, "Well, how the fuck did that happen? Everyone on my Twitter feed agrees with me."

**Q Christine Lampard:** Do you think that the problem is down to the snowflake generation?

**A Piers Morgan:** As the father of four kids, I think we've gone ridiculously soft. We're breeding a generation who are encouraged to think that there's no such thing as a loss, but the real world is not like that.

What are we doing when our kids just win all the time, or think they do? They come 25th in a race and they get a medal – why? Kids get covered in cotton wool, come out the other end and say, "Hang on, the real world seems awful."

Well, it would do. If you have a show

and it gets cancelled, no one gives you a participation prize.

**Q Christine Lampard:** Social media has changed the landscape for young people – there are issues that weren't there before. Do we sound like old people when we say young ones have it so easy?

**A Piers Morgan:** Bullying used to happen at my school all the time, but when you got through the door of your home, you were safe. Now they can get to you through your phone, through your Instagram. It must raise anxiety levels.

On holiday with my kids, [I experienced] the nightmare of trying to post a picture with my sons – it had to go through 40 different forms of filter. It was ridiculous, trying to create a perfection that doesn't exist.

It's a very vain society we've grown now, where everyone has to look perfect; none of it's real and we've got to get back to reality.

**Q Christine Lampard:** Where do you stand on Trump as a person



Piers Morgan (left) and Christine Lampard

**Q Christine Lampard:** Do you think he listens to you?

**A Piers Morgan:** I know he does. He follows 33 human beings on Twitter and I'm one of them. I'm the only Brit he follows. He knows more about Arsenal and cricket than you could possibly imagine.

I did a column about trophy hunting, encouraged him to take action and, within three weeks, he had taken action to ban trophy hunting.

On guns, I interviewed him in Davos after the terrible massacre in Las Vegas. I said, "You're a logical person. Explain to me what purpose a bump fire stock serves other than turning legal weapons into illegal weapons," and he couldn't.

And, three weeks ago, Trump announced the ban on bump fire stocks. It's a small thing but it helps, and it's more than has been achieved on gun control in America than anything Obama did in eight years.

**Q Christine Lampard:** Are you raising your daughter differently from your boys in a society that has gone gender-neutral mad?

**A Piers Morgan:** I think you can be completely supportive of transgender rights and absolutely respectful of anyone who transitions – I can't think of anything tougher – but you've got to discuss things such as gender seriously. It has real repercussions.

Sam Smith last week made a huge deal of saying, "I'm now non-binary, gender neutral." OK, which category of awards are you going to be entering?

What happens to awards? If enough people are doing what he's doing, do we then have to abandon gender awards? Who wins or loses when that happens?

I think female actors and singers would get disadvantaged in that environment. Just like, at the moment, you have transgender former men competing in [women's] sport – it is grotesquely unfair.

**Q Christine Lampard:** Should big sporting events be shown on national TV, not just pay-to-view?

**A Piers Morgan:** We recently had the Cricket World Cup [final] on terrestrial, and you can see how good

it was for the national psyche that millions of us could share in it. It turns these guys into superstars, which encourages more people to play cricket.

Sky does an amazing job but very few watch it compared with terrestrial TV, and that filters down to schools and village teams.

Do we want cricket to end? If not, it's incumbent

on broadcasters to do deals where more stuff is put on free-to-air television.

**Q Christine Lampard:** How much longer are you going to be on TV?

**A Piers Morgan:** I am one vegan sausage-roll wrap from being fired. But being fired has always been a good career move for me.

I think people worry too much about being fired. We are all going to get fired at some stage.

The truth is, you have to embrace the highs and lows. It starts in schools. We have to teach the kids that it does not matter whether you win or lose – if you lose, it hurts, and it's got to hurt, so you get better.

At the moment, kids love losing because they get a nice medal. Stop giving the children medals, everyone!

**Q Christine Lampard:** Would you go into the jungle?

**A Piers Morgan:** Let me make this crystal clear: £5m is my required amount. You want to pay me that, Dame Carolyn, I'm on the plane. ■

*In Session Ten, journalist and broadcaster Piers Morgan was interviewed by presenter and broadcaster Christine Lampard. The producer was Emma Gormley. Report by Caroline Frost.*

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

and the UK's relationship with the United States?

**A Piers Morgan:** I wouldn't vote for Trump, he's not my politics – I just predicted that he was going to win. Also, I wasn't taken in by the Obama years in the way that my liberal friends were taken in. He was "Saint Barack" and now we have "the Devil Trump", and I say that neither is what the general populace perceive them to be.

I don't think Obama was that great, and I don't think Trump is as bad as liberals make him out to be. In fact, the over-demonisation of someone like Trump rallies his base. Right now, I would lay even money that Trump's going to get re-elected.

Same with Brexit here, you demonise the Brexit supporters, it just makes them stronger. If there were another referendum tomorrow, Leave would win by a mile.

No one can tell me 17.4 million people are stupid, racist idiots, but liberals have become so self-righteous...

OK, see how it goes in 2020, because I don't see a candidate yet who can beat Trump.

Richard Kendal

# Keynote: Alex Mahon

CEO Alex Mahon made a forthright defence of Channel 4's place within television's new ecosystem. She said that channels such as hers were "a vital counterweight to the growing concentration of power that is in the hands of just a few tech behemoths, [which] increasingly decide what we read, what we watch and what we listen to".

Mahon highlighted the importance of Channel 4's programmes, which added "piquancy to large domestic audiences". She said that they resonated "in a way that's important and big enough to be important to our whole society".

However, in today's TV, "the direction of travel is not local, it's about scale, it's about control... to be the biggest... getting content to work trans-territory, scaling it around the world with as little need to adapt it" as possible.

Now two years into her new role, the former CEO of Shine Group and Foundry said in her keynote speech at Cambridge that, from some angles, TV production seemed to be following the same model as the global food and drinks industry. It was prioritising "simplicity", and was exporting the "same recipe to lots of different markets".

"Don't get me wrong," she added, it was a "successful model" that had "funded a golden age of television." However, she went on, "as viewers, perhaps we should be wary of a future that is controlled by the biggest players in tech", with people consuming content on Android or via Alexa.

Mahon explained: "When it's something such as *Orange Is the New Black* or *When They See Us* or *Stranger Things*, it's great. When the streamers are good, they're very, very good." But, alongside those titles, she maintained, there was a "lot of the same", such as docu-series

## The Channel 4 CEO argues that PSBs need supportive regulation to protect local voices that reflect UK viewers' lives

*Drug Lords*. Her key concern was that "the television of our future will not, and is not being designed to, reflect Britain back to itself – to bring the nation together at particular moments, to inform and educate a particular society or to care about any kind of social cohesion".

She acknowledged that "people [in TV] tend to dismiss something that is local [as] quaint, a little bit retro" and assumed it "to be parochial", and lacking heft and relevance.

But, argued the Channel 4 boss, in many other areas of business, "the focus of growth is in fact on localism... universal meaning and universal fascination – a return to craft, to the atelier, the boutique... it doesn't depend on scale to succeed".

Such programmes grew because of their independence and "grass-roots" appeal, she said, and could be successful when they expanded their appeal, [exporting it] "beyond each locality" to "become general".

Mahon reminded the audience that, although "the direction of travel in

television is generally global", each territory was an aggregate of "a collection of multiple smaller landscapes.... Each one is relevant to itself and often to its neighbours; each containing something important not just to those within it but also universal."

To streamers, all of Britain was "just one of many locals", she insisted, but Channel 4 could give a national platform to "untold tales and unheard voices" and take new talent or new brands "from obscurity to national visibility", where – as in the case of *Black Mirror* and *Top Boy* – they were then snapped up by Netflix.

"The need for us is greater than ever," said Mahon, adding: "We are the youngest-skewing public service broadcaster in the world." But she acknowledged this meant being "more responsive" to the rapidly changing demands and fears of young audiences growing up in a period of economic and political instability, while being available "where they want".

Quizzed by John Hardie after her speech, the former ITN CEO voiced the concern of some that, in an age where rights were king, Channel 4's business model put it at a disadvantage. He said Ofcom had noted that the risks to the broadcaster's sustainability were growing, citing "the pincer" of global giants and the volatility of the advertising market as threats.

He also recalled how Channel 4 had helped to build brands such as *Black Mirror*, asking: "Even if those producers decide to leave you, having made them famous, shouldn't you be able to participate in the long-term wealth you've helped create?"

Mahon responded: "We have a rights deal with [producers body] Pact, and with indies and suppliers that we participate in, but just not at the same level as if we were producers. On the other hand, we're not weighed down

**'WE ARE THE  
YOUNGEST-  
SKEWING  
PUBLIC SERVICE  
BROADCASTER IN  
THE WORLD'**





## ‘[PROMINENCE IS] THE BIGGEST WIN WE CAN HAVE IN TERMS OF REGULATION’

the universal out of them”, then broadcasters risked irrelevancy.

Mahon agreed with Hardie that, “our job is to make sure the barriers to entry for new talent in the UK TV sector are low”, and companies should expound diversity. But she disagreed with his notion that Dorothy Byrne’s MacTaggart Lecture this summer, in which Channel 4’s head of news and current affairs described Boris Johnson as “a known liar”, meant that “Channel 4 was now back in the cross hairs of certain Tories”, saying: “I don’t think the ghost of privatisation is there, no.”

Mahon concluded that Channel 4 and the other PSBs could be “authentically local, powerfully national and genuinely international”, but needed support from the government and Ofcom to achieve things such as prominence on the new platforms.

“I’m asking for assistance to ensure that our framework is up to date for the digital age.

“The EPG [electronic programme guide] regime was developed 20 years ago and that’s the last time legislation was updated. At this stage, as broadcasters, we have no protection for how our content is sourced on an Amazon Fire Stick or Samsung smart TV, or on any other device you might use to bypass an EPG and access content. That’s the biggest win we can have in terms of regulation.

“If we wait three years or five years for that, we will have sleepwalked into an age where public service has declined in this country.” ■

***In Session Eleven, ‘Keynote – Alex Mahon’, the CEO of Channel 4 was interviewed by John Hardie, former ITN CEO and editor-in-chief. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Tara Conlan.***

**Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>**

Richard Kendall

with having to run the large production part of that.

“The main issue about diversification for us is about exposure to the advertising market; it’s not necessarily about rights ownership and... missing the profits of rights ownership.”

She said that public service broadcasting was more important than ever as a trusted source, arguing that, on YouTube, “viewing is fragmented and siloed, and the content is largely unfiltered and often of a different calibre.... It can sit alongside the misleading, the dishonest and, at times, the harmful.”

A prime example of how local mattered to viewers was Brexit, said Mahon – an issue not of great concern to global streamers, “given the low likely demand for that content outside the UK”, but of huge importance to PSBs, “as Brexit will shape the life of everyone in the UK, and the younger generation in particular”.

Referring to Channel 4’s drama *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, she said: “In this age of Brexit, there is much criticism of being inward-looking... but if you don’t reflect people’s lives to them by entering their own personal landscapes and drawing

# Mad Men vs Math Men

**T**he television industry has reached another inflection point – people have an infinite amount of choices, which means media companies and marketers are clamouring to find and to build scale,” said Linda Yaccarino, Chair of advertising and partnerships at NBCUniversal. “That scale allows marketers to reach more people and grow their businesses. “The need for scale is why we’ve seen so much consolidation across the media industry, including Sky joining Comcast NBCUniversal – and today you can’t achieve new scale without going global....

“At Comcast NBCUniversal... we put... people at the centre of our strategy; we build scale... towards a shared vision. [This] means doing every part of your business the right way.

“Most of the time, it’s pretty obvious: use data safely; act with integrity; activate your moral compass; have the common sense and the courage to choose what’s right, rather than what’s easy or fast....

“Our entire business always has been and always will be centred on consumers, audiences and viewers; in a word, people. It’s our responsibility to adapt and evolve, to give consumers the best possible experience. And when we engage and serve those consumers better, we also create better opportunities for our brands and our advertisers...

“Data is just a tool to make better decisions.... Just like an algorithm will never replace creativity, it should never replace our responsibility to people. In other words, data won’t kill advertising, bad decisions will.

“Data can tell you what to do; it can’t tell you how to do it. It’s up to us to choose the right path forward and put consumers first....

“I’ve had a front-row seat for two of the biggest mergers in media history – AOL [and] Time Warner [in 2001] and Comcast [and] NBCUniversal [in 2011].

“As we know, one of them went much better than the other.... Back in 2001, competing divisions and cultural differences disabled the two



Richard Kendal

companies from reaching their full potential. This partnership – Comcast NBCUniversal and Sky [2018] – has already been successful....

“Together, we’re building a new global news service to serve a global audience, and we’re leveraging Sky’s experience to help us build NBC’s new streaming platform, Peacock, to ensure we give consumers the best possible experience. We’re developing a new global advertising business, inviting brands in because marketers need global options that they know are strongest when they bring premium content together with people.” ■

*Session Twelve, ‘Mad Men vs Math Men – will data kill advertising?’, featured a keynote speech from Linda Yaccarino, Chair of advertising and partnerships, NBCUniversal. The session also featured: Philippa Brown, CEO, PHD; Rupert Ellwood, partner and head of marketing communications, Waitrose; and Nils Leonard, creative founder, Uncommon Creative Studios. It was chaired by John Gapper, chief business columnist and associate editor at the Financial Times, and produced by Sue Walton. Report by Matthew Bell.*

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>





Richard Kendal

## Long-term brand building depends on TV

*Financial Times* business columnist John Gapper introduced this session on the battle between data analytics and creativity in advertising with a question: 'Commentators such as me often sound the death knell for the entire industry, but is it smarter and more resilient than we think?'

Nils Leonard from creative agency Uncommon admitted that the advertising industry had been guilty of force-feeding people 'unbelievable amounts of shit'. He added: 'And I think the danger is that we're replicating that behaviour digitally – nothing's changed.'

Waitrose's marketing chief, Rupert Ellwood, argued that the word 'digital' was a misnomer: 'Everyone talks about 'digital' as something separate from 'marketing' but, for me, it is just marketing. It's an opportunity to connect with customers.'

The supermarket gathers data from the 7 million customers in its loyalty programme and 'we work with third parties [to] target those customers in an appropriate way. But it's done in service of them, in terms of helping them; it's not about a hard sell,' he said.

Ellwood added: 'We don't fall into the trap of annoying customers or over-loading them with information that they don't want.'

The supermarket uses social media 'influencers', although Ellwood preferred the term 'friends of Waitrose'. He continued: 'They're people who know us and love us; they just happen to have a lot of followers on Instagram.'

Above, from left: Nils Leonard, Rupert Ellwood, Philippa Brown and John Gapper

'Briefs from clients are [now] much more short-term in their nature,' said Philippa Brown, Chief Executive of planning and media buying agency PHD, rather than being about 'long-term brand-building, which, of course, TV is the number one at doing'.

She added: 'I wonder... [with] the pressure on people's businesses... that they don't want to hear [the advice], 'It might take a year, two years, to start shifting some of those behavioural metrics that

### **'TV IS THE MOST TRUSTED MEDIUM IN MY VIEW'**

will then build [your] brand and lead to sales. I think, nowadays, marketers are opting for easy answers.... I guess it's our role as media and creative agencies to challenge that thinking.'

Linda Yaccarino, Chair of advertising and partnerships at NBCUniversal, revealed that her company 'broke the billion-dollar mark this year in digitally native advertisers'.

She talked about the power TV still has to promote brands. 'There's a lot of talk today about using social media influencers... but the celebrities that are on television are actually mega-influencers,' said Yaccarino.

NBCUniversal works with US late-night host Jimmy Fallon, who, she said, had 'significant global appeal, with 20 million YouTube subscribers to his channel.... We entered into an agreement with him and T-Mobile, in the US one of the biggest wireless companies, to launch a massive campaign.

'[This does] all the things the YouTube influencers do, but it uses the massive scale that Jimmy Fallon and *The Tonight Show* have to push their products forward.'

'What does a good ad do for a company?' asked Gapper. For Uncommon's Leonard, the answer was that 'the best work [takes] a really ambitious client... to people in a way that's new, surprising, emotional, powerful and funny'.

Waitrose's Ellwood argued that TV advertising reigns supreme at building brands 'over a long period of time'. He added: 'It is hard to justify the spend, and I spend a lot of time internally educating people... but it is absolutely tried and tested – if you want to build a brand in the long term... you have to advertise on high-profile channels such as TV.'

PHD's Brown, who is also Chair of the Advertising Association, revealed that one of the key challenges in the industry was consumers' 'diminishing trust in advertising'. Specifically, people felt 'bombarded' by online advertising and anxious about the personal data the platforms held on them.

But, she continued, 'Trust is a real selling point for television – it is the most trusted medium in my view.'





# Keynote: Tony Hall

**E**arlier, the RTS convention had been told that, as a brand, Netflix today enjoyed the same high levels of public trust as the BBC. As for the TikTok-using, mobile-addicted members of Generation Z, the BBC looked to be completely under the radar.

Now it was the time for Tony Hall, the BBC's Director-General, to respond. He did so in a wide-ranging, troop-rallying speech, and argued that, in today's age of uncertainty, characterised by propaganda and disinformation, the BBC and public service broadcasting were more important than ever.

In this landscape, Hall insisted, opportunities abounded for the BBC. Trusted, accurate news and storytelling reflecting the lives of people in the UK were vital to inform and entertain British audiences. *Fleabag*, days later a multiple award-winner at the Emmys, was one show that exemplified the

In turbulent times, the BBC should play to its strengths in trusted news and national storytelling

best of home-grown creativity. "If – going forward – we get our storytelling right, and harness the power and potential of British creativity, then we can help ensure that the UK is well placed to take a lead in the next economic revolution," he said.

The UK was one of the world's most creative digital players. It had the power and potential to own and exploit an abundance of intellectual property.

Referring to what he called the second wave of digital disruption, as Disney and Apple prepare to launch their direct-to-consumer services, the BBC

leader highlighted the strength of the corporation's own range of content across TV, radio and online.

The iPlayer was changing from a catch-up service into a destination in its own right. "iPlayer is going to be total TV," predicted Hall. "It will offer the very best of the BBC – all in one place – playing to our strengths: our liveness, the breadth of our genres and storytelling, the fact that we're both local and global."

BBC News online was more popular for young audiences than either YouTube or Facebook for news, according to recent research by the Reuters Institute.

On the sensitive topic of diversity, the DG claimed that the BBC's 50:50 project had transformed the balance of male and female contributors across the BBC in a year. "Radio 2's on-air line-up is now radically different. Twenty per cent of our highest-profile presenters are from BAME backgrounds," he added.

But how does the corporation remain successful globally when faced by new competition, Hall asked rhetorically. "I believe we'll do it by doing something different: by being the best people to tell the stories of the UK to the world. And by telling the 'world's stories' to the world, but with a distinctively British set of values."

Perhaps the BBC's most important global role was in news, he argued. New investment by government in the World Service had boosted audiences by 13% in one year, but Hall hinted that more funds would be needed.

He wanted the BBC to help make the UK "a focal point for the fight-back against disinformation and propaganda". Deliberate disinformation threatened human life and the integrity of the democratic process. The corporation wanted to lead and support academic research on the impact of fake news.

Summing up, Hall namechecked



His Dark Materials

BBC

recent highlights: the launching of BBC Studios on the path to success, new investment in the UK nations, more money for children's content (including the launch of a new app), integrating the bulk of UKTV into BBC Studios, and the coming launch of BritBox (its online partnership with ITV).

On the vexed question of free television licences for the elderly, the DG said the BBC had spent a year carefully considering options for the over-75s. It had made a clear decision: "We have carried out the agreement we had with the then Conservative Government to the letter."

Finally, Hall stressed why it was vital for the BBC to be a place where the most talented people wanted to work, and do the work they would be remembered for. He said: "We start with a great advantage. People want to join an organisation that has a public purpose, a social purpose, and a clear mission." ■

*In Session Thirteen, Tony Hall, Director-General of the BBC, was interviewed by Beth Rigby, political editor of Sky News. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott. Report by Steve Clarke.*

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Q Beth Rigby:** What do you make of the fact that No 10 will not put forward the Prime Minister to appear on *Today*?

**A Tony Hall:** It is really important that people put themselves up... on Sky, Channel 4, ITV, as well as the BBC, for long-form interview...

I think those places where people in power can be quizzed at length, not just on the hop somewhere in a grabbed moment, are absolutely key and we should do everything we can to encourage politicians to come on.... We've got to make a song and dance and say you should come on these programmes..

**Q Beth Rigby:** How can you fulfil your part of the bargain to hold power to account if those in power dodge your shows?

**A Tony Hall:** I agree with you on the problem. We've decided that Andrew Neil is coming back on BBC Two once a week at 7:00pm.... The one place where you had a head-to-head, forensic examination of the policies that each candidate

[in the Conservative leadership campaign] was putting forward was under Andrew Neil.

I also think the point at which those seeking your vote meet the audience – the *Question Time* format – is really important, too.

**Q Beth Rigby:** Trust in news organisations is contested as never before. What does the BBC do regarding accusations of institutional bias?

**A Tony Hall:** Support your journalists.... Remind people of the values you stand for. Our newsrooms need to do more to explain what good journalism is and the pressures on journalism....

We've also got to stand back – there is so much passion and noise out there. Evidence-based journalism is how we operate.... That's getting even more difficult in a world where you see the polarisation of "I don't want to hear anything I disagree with"....

When I look at our data, people may not come to the BBC first, but they come to us to [check out] what's happening.

**Q Beth Rigby:** Dorothy Byrne asked in her MacTaggart Lecture if it was time to start using the L-word when broadcast

journalists are interviewing politicians. Is it?

**A Tony Hall:** Well briefed, policy-driven interviews, where people are held to account by people who know what they are doing, are absolutely essential.

Our job is also to say: "How can X argue that and Y argue that?" We should call those things out and do thorough things such as Reality Check.... In an era of misinformation and spin we need to do that more.

**Q Beth Rigby:** How would you feel if one of your presenters said to a politician being interviewed: "You're a liar"?

**A Tony Hall:** I wouldn't use the word "liar". I'd say, "Just hang on, this is not what you said [before]". Andrew Neil already does it., presenting people with the evidence of what is actually happening.

[Recall] what Andrew Marr said to Nigel Farage two or three months ago, when he said: "Hold on, here's what you said in the past, this is what you're saying now."

I go back to evidence-based journalism and thoroughly holding people to account. We need to do that more today than at any other time in our history, because there's just so much rubbish out there.

# Keynote: Reed Hastings



## Netflix's CEO explains why he is relaxed as he prepares to face competition from Apple and Disney

**A**t this year's Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture, former BBC Director-General Mark Thompson recounted a conversation he had had with Netflix CEO Reed Hastings in 2007, during discussions concerning the launch of the iPlayer. According to Thompson, Hastings told him: "I don't know why you're bothering, Mark, you'll never beat my algorithm. Why not just give us all your content instead?"

More than a decade later, the good news for Hastings is that he was on the money when it came to the power

of his algorithm. The company he co-founded is now worth \$115bn, with 150 million users worldwide.

The more challenging news is that Netflix no longer has the status of disruptive new kid on the block. After years of enjoying its unique position as leading provider of online TV content, the bingeing behemoth is preparing to face a catalogue of competition. At least eight rival SVoD providers are set to join the race for viewers, including Disney and Apple, whose deep pockets exceed those of Netflix.

If Hastings was feeling flustered, he showed no sign of it as he made his debut appearance at the RTS Cambridge

Convention, reflecting calmly on the new TV-scape. "It is fair to say that while we've been competing with many people over the last decade, it is a whole new world. Sometimes, you do your best work when you're really challenged."

Despite his interviewer Kirsty Wark's comment concerning so many new fingers in the pie – "If you're not eating, you're on the menu" – Hastings said he believed that competition for Netflix viewers lay elsewhere. "It's in other pursuits, gaming, YouTube, all the things people do to relax. In our most developed countries, we're about 10% of the time the TV is on.

"What am I scared of? That our



## ‘WE’RE TRYING TO GROW UP A LITTLE... SHARING DATA WITH PRODUCERS ABOUT HOW THE SHOWS DO’

employees will focus on competitors. What we have to focus on is how we please our members. It's up to us to take their money and convert it into shows that they want to watch."

Thereby lies another challenge. Some big gaps will soon appear in Netflix's catalogue, with the expiry of licences of some of its most popular shows, including the eternally popular *Friends*. Still, Hastings appeared unruffled.

"We've known this is coming. We're a little bit surprised it took this long," he smiled. "We've been preparing for this moment since 2012, by building up capacity with movies and TV shows, and we feel good about shifting our consumers' money. Instead of licensing shows, we'll be creating new shows."

"We've got seven seasons of *Orange Is the New Black*, we've got *Grace and Frankie*, we've done a *Seinfeld* deal [for a reported \$500m] that won't start until 2021. There are a lot of great shows that haven't been announced yet."

Hastings confirmed his ambitions to follow the success of Oscar-winner *Roma* with more cinema success. "We started strong in series, now we're trying to expand into film."

All of this will mean more choice for consumers, but also a new golden age for producers. Hastings said: "It's going to be unbelievable in the next couple of years, you'll get to bid your titles across multiple players to compete with Netflix, then we'll raise the bid, so it's going to be fantastic. Some day *The Crown* will look like a bargain."

It's not been cheap for Netflix so far. The company carries an estimated \$32bn of debt. Hastings' bemused reaction? "We're clearly paying too much for content."

Or they need more subscribers – up to another 100 million. Will the growth come from the Asian market? "The possibilities the internet brings for growing entertainment are phenomenal. We're producing all over the world."

One area firmly in his sights is the UK, where, he said: "What we're trying to do is have a set of shows that are provocative, diverse, interesting, novel, that we all talk about."

Hastings admitted that *Fleabag* is the one show he wished he had on Netflix (he was outbid by Amazon) and was keeping very quiet over any exclusive talent deals in the pipeline.

However, the UK is already Netflix's biggest centre for production outside the US, and it seemed its boss was unfazed by the prospect of writing some even fatter cheques for our finest talent over the coming year. "We had a good start. We look forward to doing a lot more, a very large increase in how much content is produced here in the UK. This year we spent a little over £400m. We won't be doubling that, but it'll be a big increase."

Hastings praised the UK's long and strong storytelling tradition, and a powerful and established production infrastructure. He stopped short, though, of seeking to purchase either facilities houses or production companies.

Apart from the company's long-term lease on Shepperton Studios, he stressed: "We're really about trying to find great stories, not locations and buildings. We're not in the acquisition business. We're trying to find boutique special things from all over the UK, individual talents and companies, with lots of expertise in markets around the world."

Netflix's increased presence in the UK brings with it more scrutiny of the company's approach to the PSBs. Are they friends or foes?

"A little bit of both," explained Hastings. "We push people to iPlayer and All 4, but we also make co-productions such as *Watership Down* and *Bodyguard*, which increases their budgets."

He was asked if he felt Netflix had too much power. He responded: "That can be a risk in society [but] we only win about 5% of TV viewing hours. We're definitely trying to be supportive of the iPlayer becoming popular, the same for All 4."

"Public broadcasters around the world are moving to the internet. The BBC started as a radio station, expanded to TV, and there's no reason it won't expand to iPlayer."

If PSBs are having to evolve, they're not alone, it seems. After Netflix's early years of playing poker with rival Blockbuster, the company is becoming more open in its dealings, its audience figures and its spending.

"We're trying to grow up a little," said Hastings. "We're trying to learn, sharing data with producers about how the shows do."

"*Top Boy* is number one on Netflix today. We're testing the Top 10 in the UK." As for sharing data externally, "I'd have Barb or Comscore extend their technology," he suggested. "Nobody wants to rely on us to provide our figures."

Other areas for change are dealing with different global cultures and embracing diversity. "Within Europe, there aren't too many tensions, in Asia we've had to make some adjustments, with respect for hierarchy and age. To give direct criticism is hard."

As for diversity, "It's a cultural shift, a huge responsibility, and we've got more female directors, female writers, and also below the line. We're very committed there, also on sexual orientation, race and nationality."

One thing that won't change soon is Netflix's original USP: dropping whole series to binge-view in one go. Despite Disney's planned weekly release schedule and his own company's occasional experiments with the likes of *Bandersnatch*, Hastings insisted: "Binge viewing is the essence of what viewers love about Netflix. We'll be sticking with that. We're always trying to please our members because that's how we grow." ■

**In Session Fourteen, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings was interviewed by Kirsty Wark, journalist, broadcaster and writer. The producer was Alan Clements. Report by Caroline Frost.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

Can streamers  
funded by  
subscriptions  
or ads coexist  
– or will one  
model come  
to dominate?



# You gotta have a stream

**W**ill the future of streaming be defined by SVoD (subscription video-on-demand)

or free, advertising-funded video-on-demand – or can they both prosper? Those were the big questions addressed by BritBox launch director Reemah Sakaan and Viacom International Media Networks chief David Lynn.

Speaking on the day that the “best of British” SVoD announced a deal with Channel 5, Sakaan was asked by session chair Wayne Garvie how she was going to “persuade my mum and dad to spend £5.99 a month on BritBox”?

She said, in the first instance, that it was important to show customers what they could expect to see, so advertising and marketing were key.

Sakaan explained: “We’ve got a fantastic armoury of rights... also lots of new things.” She would not talk budgets but said: “This isn’t a cheap

business to get into – it’s why it’s taken us a long time to get here, aside from our partnerships and the regulation we face. But we’re taking it really seriously and we’ve got brilliant content budgets, both for acquired [and] original programming... which takes quite a long time to build.”

Original programming would be coming on stream next year, said Sakaan, but was unlikely to be present “at launch”, which would feature a mix of catalogue shows, exclusives and premieres.

Garvie asked if she was worried about the move to put shows on iPlayer for a year. Sakaan replied: “It’s clear what we’re about – some of it is

much-loved classics from the past... multi-series box sets... then, things coming out of the commercial window, whether that’s 30 days for the commercial broadcasters [or] iPlayer’s new one-year [period].

“We think it makes loads of sense to close up that ecosystem. The most frustrating thing people talk to us about is: where does everything go?... It kind of disappears... [they] have to buy a single episode and download it.”

As Sakaan reported to ITV director of television Kevin Lygo, did it mean that ITV paid more for content to get the rights, asked Garvie. “We sit in a brilliant position to have conversations with producers and distributors about the full life cycle of a show. Of course, we pay market rates and for our usage. There are also huge benefits doing that deal upfront,” replied Sakaan.

Another new entrant to the UK market is Viacom’s advertiser-funded streamer Pluto TV, which offers free TV with the catchline: “No bills, no

**‘PEOPLE PERHAPS  
HAVE AN APPETITE  
FOR A LOT MORE  
SUBSCRIPTIONS’**



From left: Wayne Garvie,  
Reemah Sakaan and David Lynn

in that, first of all, it's live linear-TV. Second, it's advertising-based. Third, it has channel brands. So it's differentiated [from] what's happening in the rest of the market and is catching on in the US."

Lynn said that, when Viacom bought Pluto in January this year, it had an average of 12 million users. In six months, that had grown to a monthly average of 18 million. Explaining its success, he said: "We believe that curation of channel brands is something that's valued by the consumer."

Garvie described some of its current content, such as *Ireland's Greatest Robberies*, as "a bit McDonald's to Apple's Nobu".

Lynn said content for the UK version was still being worked on, but pointed out that, in the US, the service had 200 channels and 165 different content partners, and was planning to roll out internationally having already done deals with mobile and Fire TV. But there were no plans to make original shows.

Both Sakaan and Lynn agreed that channel brands were important to help viewers navigate the vast acreage of content, with an estimated 260 streaming services in the US alone.

Lynn explained the value of channel brands: "People find it difficult, despite all the algorithms, finding the next thing they want to watch on SVoD services. That's one of the advantages of our curated service on Pluto. We've done research on this: 83% of people are more likely to watch content if it [is] a channel brand... people are finding it difficult to judge what they should watch next."

There was a lot of "talk of aggregation and subscription fatigue" at the moment, but "sub-tigue" was not hitting BritBox in the US, claimed Sakaan, who said that "the second wave of subscribers coming into SVoD are more like the audiences we know".

Viewers these days were probably facing "more [of] an economic equation", she agreed, but calculated that, "if you took Netflix, Amazon, Now TV and BritBox, [and] even if you had Apple TV+ and Disney+, it would still collectively be half the price of a full-fat [pay-TV package]".

When Garvie pointed out that none of these services made money, "they are loss-makers", Sakaan countered: "BritBox in the US is 'washing its face' after two years, so absolutely not. These are long-term strategic plays."

But she admitted that there was "a lot of pressure on pricing and a lot of price inflation in the rights market".

Inevitably, there was churn in any subscription business, but Sakaan said BritBox was learning how to manage customer acquisition and retention.

Lynn said: "There are a lot of people moving into the industry at the moment and we'll see how that plays out.... I think that you're going to end up with several different types of service. People perhaps have an appetite for a lot more subscriptions than [has been] recognised before."

"Ultimately, it's about content and [especially] premium content, and that's why Viacom merging with CBS puts us in a strong position... in an increasingly competitive market. We have 750 series in production across the two companies at the moment."

Garvie said he suspected that, when the Cambridge session was originally designed, the idea was that "there was going to be a punch-up" between SVoD and ad-based VoD. But he thought he knew the answer he was going to get when he asked the pair: "Which is the better one, which is going to survive?"

Lynn responded first: "Both – I see it as market segmentation. You've got premium services, you've got mid-tier services and you're got free services." He pointed out that the birth of Sky didn't lead to the death of free TV.

Sakaan agreed: "Linear-TV, SVoD and AVoD will exist for a very long time." ■

**Session 15, 'You gotta have a stream', featured: Reemah Sakaan, group launch director, BritBox; and David Lynn, President and CEO, Viacom International Media Networks. It was chaired by Wayne Garvie, President, international production, Sony Pictures Television, and produced by Vivek Sharma. Report by Tara Conlan.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

contract.... Pluto TV brings back the linear-TV you love."

Garvie described it as "great for an old bloke like me... it's like a linear-TV experience, quite old-fashioned... [but] is it going to work for anyone under 50?"

However, Lynn revealed that it had "the lowest age profile of any service. More than 50% of the audience is aged 16 to 36 in the US market. It's easy to use, you download the app and it's streaming video from that moment."

Viacom has worked hard on the distribution and Lynn said it was now available on all connected TVs and mobile services. He added that Viacom was working with its satellite partners to make it part of their services.

"It's a lean-back experience," he explained, and a place that, particularly in the US, very few were playing in, making it, "the biggest in the free-viewing space".

He continued: "It's very differentiated from a lot of the other offerings in the marketplace.... Pluto is different

Richard Kendall



## What will it take to end working-class exclusion from positions of influence in the media, asks **Lorraine Kelly**

**V**eteran presenter Lorraine Kelly led a storming session on the challenge of social mobility in the TV industry, telling the Cambridge audience it was “a miracle I’m standing here talking to you”.

Thirty-five years after the Scottish presenter first appeared on our screens, she remembered: “My TV career was almost over before it began. Being working class when I started out meant a lot of doors in telly were firmly closed to me.”

Born and raised in the Gorbals, in Glasgow’s East End, the daughter of a TV repair man, Kelly gave up the chance to be the first in her family to go to university. Instead, she applied for a job on a newspaper. She got her first TV break in 1983 as a researcher at BBC Scotland.

Once she made it into the industry, she still found the career path for someone of her background heavy-going. She was constantly sent out to do vox pops, and recalled being told: “Punters will talk to you. You’re one of them.”

And one particular comment brought home to her the continuing class divide. When she was auditioned for a reporter’s job, she was told: “You’re never going to make it in television. Your accent is appalling.”

Instead, she made it on to the screen the following year as Scotland correspondent with ITV breakfast station TV-am. There, she credited her Australian boss (Bruce Gyngell) for being open-minded enough to give her a go: “Australians don’t care about class.”

She also cited one former news editor, a working-class Northerner, as “a champion of reporters who were working class, because he was himself, and he wanted to give us a hand up”.

She added: “I think that’s what we should all be doing.”

Despite her longevity in the industry, Kelly said her background had always made her feel on the outside looking



in, even to this day. Once, when she and her colleagues were apportioned responsibilities for a travel segment, “one got a trip on Concorde, one went to the Seychelles, and I got sent on a coach trip with old-age pensioners to Bavaria. It’s tough to shake that off.”

Producers’ prejudices extended to planning meetings, she said. “My audiences were referred to as Tracey Tower-block – so patronising. Not everyone has a car or a garden, not everyone can afford to go on holiday abroad, but I would never patronise my audience.”

With her star status long established, Kelly has clearly proved those early doubters wrong. “I’m proud of where I’m from, and I think it’s my best asset,”

she said. “Where I’m from has certainly helped me to be better at the sort of job I do.”

However, she stressed her concern that stories such as hers were few and far between, with the industry’s doors remaining closed to many.

During the session she introduced several students on the RTS bursary scheme, which supports young people from less well-off backgrounds.

Among them was Sarah, a mum from Northern Ireland living on benefits. She explained: “Your parents have a tendency to want you to go into an office job and make money, because that seems more logical.”

Determined to pursue her dream of

working in TV, Sarah found her path blocked by a lack of contacts. Instead she turned to waitressing jobs.

It was only with the help of the bursary initiative that she felt able to return to education: "I feel part of the family, I feel supported."

Sarah will be given a mentor in her second year of study. While her ultimate dream was to produce, she added: "I'd love to have as many strings as possible to my bow."

Another bursary student, Donald, from Stirling, said he suffered from a lack of role models in TV journalism because of his ethnic background.

With the exception of George Alagiah and Clive Myrie, he reflected, "there aren't really people who you can see who have worked their way in, not through the elitist university system."

"You need to change the theme to someone who encourages diversity, someone who encourages people from different backgrounds to want to get into the industry."

However, he added that gaining a RTS bursary had given him hope. "Before, journalism in television wasn't really an opportunity for me. Now, I see this industry as [more] welcoming, and hopefully getting more diverse. It's really positive."

Alan Clements, Managing Director of Black Pepper Media, took part in a similar panel at Cambridge two years ago. He was asked by Kelly if anything had changed. "We're slowly making progress, but it's nothing like enough," he replied. "We have to do something more structural to change things." And he referred to the London-weighted commissioning hubs. "We are never going to truly solve the social-mobility issue in this industry until we solve the geography issue."

"People follow the power and people follow the money. If the people who sign the cheques and all the role models are in London, then they can't possibly know the society that they're meant to be representing. So we have to do something much more revolutionary and fundamental."

Clements, who shares Glaswegian roots with Kelly, credited the four years he spent as a young man in the US for gaining the confidence he needed to start his own company. "It's a redemptive story for them: you go from the council estate to the Ivy League, and it shows the American dream is alive and well. I don't think we celebrate that in British culture."

Ofcom's director of content and media policy, Vikki Cook, told delegates that, while she welcomed aspirational targets across the industry, she was concerned by the prospect of more schemes designed to bring one or two new faces into an organisation.

She said: "I'm really keen that we don't get diversity fatigue. I want us to look at inclusion – it's about culture, it's about how to change this industry, so it really looks and sounds like the audiences it's broadcasting to."

She added: "I don't think there's a chief executive who's spoken at this conference who doesn't get it. You've got the entry level, where there's an awful lot of focus, and you have this frozen middle. That's what we need to thaw out quickly and focus on."

She agreed with Clements' point regarding spreading the power beyond the UK capital: "The focus has to be on

## 'WHERE I'M FROM HAS CERTAINLY HELPED ME TO BE BETTER AT THE SORT OF JOB I DO'



how we address a more inclusive culture. The geographical footprint is absolutely crucial."

Kelly mentioned the additional importance of mentoring, both for feedback and support, remembering the help she received. "It wasn't structured, there was just that fellow that helped you out, and that's what I try to do in my job. Don't pull the ladder [up behind you], help that person up."

Clements agreed: "It's about saying to every single senior person in the industry that they should mentor someone from a hard-to-reach background. If every single person made that commitment, it would make a massive difference."

**Session Sixteen, 'Blow the bloody doors off', featured Lorraine Kelly, journalist and broadcaster. The panellists were Alan Clements, Managing Director, Black Pepper Media, and Vikki Cook, director, content and media policy, Ofcom. The producer was Emma Gormley. Report by Caroline Frost.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

# Better television or better diversity?



Sir Lenny Henry

Richard Kendal

**A**sk a funny man to deliver a speech on a deeply serious topic and what do you get? Humour, unquestionably, but also passion and an emotionally raised temperature in the room.

Following his speech, in a Q&A with diversity campaigner and advertising executive Karen Blackett, Lenny Henry described the pace of change in the hiring of women and disabled and ethnic-minority people behind the screen as “glacial”. His point was reinforced by the findings of Ofcom’s latest diversity report, discussed in earlier Cambridge sessions.

There was spontaneous audience applause as the actor, comedian and diversity campaigner highlighted what he called the “two-season jinx” and how it haunted series starring black actors, such as ITV2’s *Timewasters* (see box).

Henry – whose autobiography, *Who Am I, Again?*, was published this month – had two main messages for RTS Cambridge: that diversity made television better and, perhaps surprisingly, he wanted all diversity schemes and initiatives scrapped.

Instead, that money could be spent on making shows that were genuinely diverse, such as the recent award-winning BBC Four series *Soon Gone: A Wind-*

*rush Chronicle*, in which he participated.

Emphasising that diversity and great TV were mutually inclusive, he identified the moral imperative for increasing diversity: “Society is shaped by the stories we tell ourselves and who tells those stories. Diversity creates a better society. And when I am giving evidence at the House of Lords, it’s the second thing I say. The first thing is: ‘Wake up, you old gits!’”

“I do not believe we have to choose between great television or great diversity. The fact is, diversity makes television better,” he insisted.

The facts spoke for themselves. A University of California study of



1,000 US cable and network programmes found that shows where ethnic minorities made up 31% to 40% of the cast had the highest ratings. Another study found that shows with greater ethnic diversity generated more Twitter and Facebook traffic.

Henry continued: "And it is not just about diversity in front of the camera. The same study also found that scripted dramas and comedies that employed more women and ethnic-minority writers also did better, both in terms of ratings and financial returns."

To prove how badly British TV was doing at increasing diversity, Henry quoted the following statistics: in the past four years the percentage of BAME people in the highest leadership positions had risen from 7.01% to only 7.14%, despite investment in leadership schemes.

Henry noted that, at BBC Studios, BAME representation had increased by 0.1% every year for the past couple of years. "I'm only citing BBC figures because it keeps the best statistics, but there is no reason to think that the other broadcasters have better figures," he said.

However, the BBC did have some real diversity successes, including its 50:50 project to increase the number of women contributors on screen.

However, according to Directors UK, only 13.6% of TV directors were women and, according to the BFI, only 0.3% of the film industry's workforce were disabled. No wonder audiences, especially those from marginalised groups, were deserting traditional broadcasters for Netflix and streaming services. "Have you seen *Narcos* [on Netflix]?" "That show is so diverse, the whitest thing in it is the cocaine."

To fix the issue, Henry called for a completely different approach and one that didn't involve "a bunch of training schemes with no jobs at the end. Or a Rooney Rule that increases the number of diverse candidates we interview but don't employ."

He said: "My suggestion is to take all the money, all the staff and all the time and effort we currently put into diversity and simply use it to increase the diversity of the programmes we commission."

When Channel 4 and the BBC wanted to increase the proportion of programmes they made outside London, they put their money where their mouth was and commissioned programmes out of London.

Similarly, when government wanted British TV to boost the amount of children's content it produced, ministers didn't tell Channel 4 or ITV to attend commissioning training schemes. The remedy was setting up a £57m contestable fund.

"Do you have any idea what that kind of money could do to increase BAME and disability diversity?" asked Henry. "So, let's just be honest. We've been talking about this long enough. We know what works. And we know what doesn't work."

"So let's stop going crazy – let's make diversity work once and for

all and make some brilliant television.

"It's like a pizza. What makes it awesome is the mixture, the combination of things on top. Different flavours, different colours, all complementing each other. So let's do that.

"We ordered our diversity pizza ages ago. It's time to deliver!" ■

**In Session Seventeen, Sir Lenny Henry was interviewed by Karen Blackett, UK country manager, WPP UK, and Chair, MediaCom, UK & Ireland. The producer was Verina Burt. Report by Steve Clarke.**

Watch the video at <https://bit.ly/35k2Ruz>

## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Q Karen Blackett:** You talked about scrapping all diversity training schemes. I disagree with that. In my day job at WPP, I talk about the genius of "the and": it's not one or the other, it's both. So, to your point, surely the training schemes and the mentoring schemes take time to effect change?

**A Lenny Henry:** I don't mind white, able-bodied, heterosexual men doing mentoring schemes and training. That's fine. But black people, women, and people with disabilities don't need another training course and another initiative. They just want another opportunity to show how brilliant they are at doing their job.

**Q Karen Blackett:** But if it was not about training them in

terms of their skillset, if it was a programme to help nurture their ideas and their ability to be elevated, would that be OK?

**A Lenny Henry:** Yes, if it's going to help elevate them to another position; and, acknowledging that they are good, but they [just] need a particular skillset to get to the next level. But not "You're just not good enough", because that's insulting.

**Q Karen Blackett:** There's a difference between pipeline, in terms of people who have no experience and getting them into the industry, and people in the middle who aren't progressing.

**A Lenny Henry:** Who aren't getting the nod... The nod is difficult. Who makes the decision about who gets the nod and who doesn't? – that's tricky if you're a minority or marginalised in the workplace.

It's almost like you've got to perform out of your skin in order to be noticed.

## The 'two-season jinx'

ITV2's *Timewasters* was recommissioned after series 1 but so far there's been no decision on a third series.

**Lenny Henry:** 'The thing about shows with black writers is that there's a one- or two-season jinx. What I've noticed is things such as *Dad's Army* and *Only Fools and Horses* get 16 years to get the content right, while people of colour have one or two goes.

'We only get one shot for our programme to have an impact and then it's dumped. That's something we need to change. Samuel Beckett said: "Fail, fail again and fail better."

'It's difficult, because I know there are no soft slots and I understand the financial thing, but I do think that new people need to be given the opportunity to show what they can do – and two seasons isn't enough.'

# OUR FRIEND IN THE MIDLANDS

Over recent weeks, many column inches have been written concerning the success of the Birmingham-inspired TV series *Peaky Blinders*.

Its move from BBC Two to BBC One has been seamless. More people watch it in the Midlands than anywhere else in the country.

*Peakys* has undoubtedly put Birmingham firmly back on the national and global map, but the city's reputation struggles to shake off some outdated prejudices.

It still appears in lists of the worst places to live in Britain, while the Brummie accent has often been voted as the worst in the country. To add insult to injury, the accent is often associated with being "a bit thick".

So you must be wondering what it is like for us West Midlanders, living in one of the worst places, with one of the worst accents. Is there anything good about Birmingham?

Where to start? The Commonwealth Games are on their way, HS2 is being built, big businesses such as HSBC are moving to Brum, and the city centre is largely unrecognisable – in a good way – thanks to recent redevelopment.

As the youngest city in Europe, with nearly 40% of the population under 25, and more diverse than any other English city outside London, broadcasters and producers ignore the power of Birmingham at their peril.

The TV industry is having a renaissance here. *Peakys* creator Steven Knight is opening new TV and film studios, the city has become BBC Three's second home, and BBC Bir-

From TV to games, the Birmingham area is making a splash on the global stage, explains  
**Caren Davies**



RTS Midlands

mingham is thriving as a base for digital skills and new talent. Some of the country's finest indies and programme-makers are Birmingham-based. To name a few, there's North One, Wonder, Full Fat and newly arrived Optomen. Hopefully, more will follow.

The entries for this year's RTS Midlands Awards are a testament to the great content that is being made across the patch.

And it's not just TV. Outside London, the West Midlands has the UK's biggest technology sector. "Silicon Spa" – the global hub for video games companies in Leamington Spa – is a huge stimulus for digital talent. There are 40 games companies in the area,

including Sega and Codemasters. The renowned Serious Games Institute is based at Coventry University.

Local universities are at the cutting edge of AI and VR research. Some of the greatest licensed games of all time have been made in the Midlands, including *Tomb Raider*, produced by Core Design in Derby. This Midlands industry has a worldwide reputation.

The West Midlands Combined Authority has recently announced a new screen industry body for the West Midlands, led by Ed Shedd, a Midlander who works for Deloitte. He has recruited a board of big hitters, including Steven Knight and Adil Ray.

The strategy is to bring together the creative industries in the region, building skills, networks and capacity. RTS Midlands will be working closely with Ed and the board.

So, yes, things in the UK's second city are pretty damn good. In part due to Midlanders' self-deprecation, we're not always very good at sharing how great things are. We need to shout more loudly.

Steven Knight has been an inspiration to Brummies everywhere. He's made no apologies for his roots. He's Brummie and proud. He's proved that these streets are paved with tales worth telling. As for the accent, Cillian Murphy's made it a bit more cool.

The day-to-day multiculturalism of the city often astounds visitors. For us, it's just what we do and who we are. But we still deserve to see even more of it on our screens.

This city has ambition and heart. What's more, we have hundreds of stories waiting to be told on TV, on radio and online.

**Caren Davies is Chair, RTS Midlands.**

## Steve Hewlett Lecture

**Mark Thompson** argues that policymakers need to rethink their attitude towards the BBC – or risk total US cultural dominance

**T**he UK is facing “a total loss of cultural sovereignty”, which risks leaving the country culturally impoverished unless action is taken to stop US giants such as Netflix from dominating the media landscape.

This was the frank message from Mark Thompson, the former Director-General of the BBC who, for seven years since 2012, has been engaged in a wholesale transformation of *The New York Times* from a print company into a digital-based global news operation with 5 million subscribers (see box on page 47).

In the third Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture, he warned that, while “no one wants to see the UK turn into a cultural Airstrip One, it’s a clear and present danger. With newspapers struggling and broadcasters outgunned, I fear only effective and salient government media policy stands between Britain and a total loss of cultural sovereignty.”

He argued that it was mistaken for broadcasters and media companies to think they can “cut themselves to a secure future”, despite all of the pressures they are under, because “it is a strategy that leads off the cliff”.

Thompson pointed out that “heavy investment in content is Netflix and Disney’s strategy. Distinctiveness is a no brainer if you truly believe you can succeed as a high-quality content provider of any kind. You can’t degrade your journalism and hope to keep your audience, let alone sell them subscriptions.”

He added: “Our culture comprises more than media... but I don’t think anyone would dispute the centrality of media – digital media, traditional ▶



Paul Hampartsoumian

# A question of sovereignty



## 'THE FUTURE IS BLEAK UNLESS [PLAYERS] PIVOT AWAY FROM... ADVERTISING TO SUBSCRIPTIONS'

› TV and radio, movies, newspapers and magazines, local and national – in most of our lives.

“But many of these categories... are under economic and audience threat from a process of digital disintegration and reinvention that is still accelerating, in many areas just getting going, and particularly from its globalising effects.”

Advertising-supported companies, including ITV and Channel 4, needed to drastically rethink their models, but he was gloomy about the prospects of any of them scaling up or becoming global forces. He supported Channel 4 and the BBC's moves outside of London as a means of more truly reflecting the Brexit-divided country.

The only UK media organisation with the potential to become a truly international force was the BBC. But it had been “hobbled by British policy making” over the past decade. This was preventing it from fulfilling its full potential, and being recognised by people around the world.

“British media has changed greatly since I moved to New York seven years ago.” But policymakers had “largely concentrated on tightening the funding pressure and other constraints on the BBC”.

He described the corporation's 2016 Charter, which imposed the cost of free licences for the over-75s on the BBC, as “disastrous”. “It was blatantly expedient and obviously flawed. At least, having agreed to give the BBC the freedom to reform the entitlement, [the government should] let it get on with it without hindrance.”

Instead, [the corporation] should have been unleashed and enabled to project a British cultural perspective through its creative talent – from programming to news – to audiences everywhere and not just in the troubled global hotspots.

“The BBC should be a winner as the only British media brand with true global recognition and potential, and with a huge international audience,” Thompson maintained. “Equally damaging has been the officious government and regulatory environment that has sought to stymie or limit digital transformation and innovation by the BBC as much as possible.”

He lamented the 2009 Competition Commission decision to block Project Kangaroo, a proposed BBC-led, UK-wide streaming service with a pay element to rival Netflix at the point that it was transforming from a DVD outfit into a streamer. As Director-General at that point, he had championed the move as the next step after the introduction of the BBC iPlayer. BritBox, launched by ITV and the BBC, had then taken “eight years – an eternity” – to surface.

“Please let's learn the lesson... and let them collaborate more freely with each other, and the BBC... can help with innovation and scale. Government media policy needs to change. Instead of a policy of ‘No, you can't, it's too dangerous’, it needs to turn into a policy of ‘Yes!’”

Thompson said the refusal to date “speaks to a peculiarly British approach to the BBC and media policy broadly, which is to talk global but act parochial. In our blinkered discourse about media, the more extravagant the talk of global opportunity, the more narrow and inward-facing the true world view.”

He stressed: “Policing the beach for litter is virtuous. But it's time to glance out to sea. That grey band on the horizon is a tsunami.... I enter this debate with experience of leading a large-scale response to the digital tsunami. Successful transformation is possible for legacy players who accept drastic change.” But it needed resources and scale. “We are unavoidably in a capital-intensive media period.

“The NYT now has 900 people

## 'BRITISH MEDIA POLICY [TENDS TO] TALK GLOBAL BUT ACT PAROCHIAL'

working in digital areas, in addition to journalists. Building an ark does not come cheap.”

Broadcasters were undergoing the same ominous early-stage audience loss that hit the West's newspapers years ago, particularly the flight of the young. “Radio will probably fare better [because] it's sticky and relatively cheap to make”.

He added: “I grew up in broadcasting being told that very few young people would ever listen to serious speech audio. It's rubbish to say that the young won't listen to serious speech.”

While it might be convenient to blame Google and Facebook for media's woes, and regulators had many searching questions about their business practices, “the true culprit is the internet, which allowed users to switch from old media distribution channels to digital. It robbed newspapers and is beginning to rob linear-TV of the ad-pricing power of the old methods. It can't be un-invented.” It had to be harnessed.

Quality was key to the global TV battle, too. The streamers were backing “the kind of distinctive, ambitious programming that used to be reserved for premium cable and satellite – HBO or Showtime, say – or, indeed, the BBC and Channel 4. So it's not reality shows and soaps, but *Fleabag* and *The Crown*. The best US linear-TV players are fighting back with the same: *The Terror*, *Chernobyl*, in some respects even *Game of Thrones*.”

Thompson suggested: “The good news is that the future of Britain's writers, actors, directors, producers, designers, crafts and best journalists looks better than ever. The production sector had a record £3bn in revenues last year...”

“But that's where good news largely runs out as media divides into global winners, probable survivors and the rest.” ■

*Mark Thompson's speech, 'A question of sovereignty: Brexit, digital disruption and the fate of British media', was the third Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture, a joint initiative by the Media Society and the RTS. It was delivered at Westminster University, London, on 24 September. The producer was John Mair. Report by Maggie Brown.*

# How *The New York Times* went digital



Mark Thompson said that 'a seemingly intractable set of threats faced *The New York Times* in late 2012', when he took over. Its website, launched a year earlier, might have been viewed as a market leader, with 600,000 subscribers, but print advertising, print subscribers and news-stand sales were all falling. After years of growth, digital advertising was going into reverse.

It was operating in an industry where two-thirds of US newspaper jobs had been lost since 2004, and one in five titles had closed amid frightening market conditions, but it possessed advantages and scale.

'We had strengths to build on, untapped global potential, heritage branding and a board/controlling family determined not to savage the newsroom,' he said. Despite this, it had not properly adapted its operations to the new digital

world. 'There is a difference between trying something digital and trying as if the company's life depended on it.'

Instead of cutting, 'we doubled down on distinctiveness, to be more valuable than anything available for nothing on the internet. A strategy of delivering, in return for a regular fee. It's a no brainer, if you truly believe you can succeed as a provider of high-quality content of any kind.' Research showed that readers valued the paper's mission, 'to seek out truth and help people understand the world'.

Thompson continued: 'A good slice of our investment has gone into building classic journalistic breadth and strength. Take investigations. You'll be familiar with some of the *Times*'s work in the field of investigations – Harvey Weinstein and Bill O'Reilly, Trump's taxes and so on – but what I want to stress is the sheer volume of original work that *The*

*New York Times* delivers every week, a scale of high-impact stories previously unheard of anywhere in digital, print or broadcasting.'

It also moulded itself to the lifestyle of the busy, more youthful subscribers it needed to recruit to thrive. 'From 2014, we focused most on mobile phones – that was where users were. Peak time for news use on mobile phones is 7:00am, so the whole circadian rhythm of the newsroom had to change.'

The operation also added items, to keep subscribers hooked: a morning mini crossword; cooking products; a breakthrough podcast, *The Daily*, which is now reaching 10 million listeners every month.

It remains a fight for survival: 'You have to throw everything and almost everyone into this fight. At any moment, we have multiple, simultaneous experiments running in the field. A generation of new leaders came in. We massively expanded training. Changes were quite painful: in some sections, the need for different expertise meant an 85% change in the workforce.'

The paper started taking international digital subscriptions seriously and Thompson said this was a growth area. 'Today, growth in digital revenue comfortably outstrips print losses. At the end of our most recent quarter, we had around 5 million total subscriptions, triple the highest achieved in the print era. We plan to double that again to 10 million by 2025.'

'This is very applicable to UK media. Digital advertising cannot support quality journalism on its own. The future is bleak unless others pivot away from dependence on advertising to subscriptions or other streams. That includes former digital darlings such as *HuffPost* and *BuzzFeed*.'

Thompson sounded a note of caution: 'So far, the only digital models in news likely to become viable in future are at the very top of the market, if your journalism is good enough to buy.' He thought the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* were among the UK newspapers that might be survivors.

'An effective digital media operation,' he said, 'is a massive undertaking. Ignorant leadership is deadly. No one can bluster or lobby their way out of this one.'

# Loud and proud

Anne Choma (left)  
and Sally Wainwright

**Matthew Bell** hears how Anne Lister's world was reconstructed for TV and why this complex character has wowed viewers

**G**entleman Jack wowed critics and audiences alike when it aired on BBC One earlier this year. This was a Sunday-night period drama with a difference – based on the diaries of early 19th-century landowner, industrialist and traveller Anne Lister, it revealed a woman determined to explore her lesbian sexuality.

Award-winning writer and RTS Fellow Sally Wainwright discussed how she brought *Gentleman Jack* – which has already been commissioned for a second series – to the screen at a packed Bristol Old Vic in late August.

She was joined on stage by series

consultant and author of *Gentleman Jack: The Real Anne Lister* Anne Choma, and folk duo O'Hooley & Tidow, the creators of the drama's closing song, who also played a live set.

"You make everything in good faith and to the best of your ability," said Wainwright. "All shows are made like that but you never know how they're going to be received. I've written things that have been complete turkeys, and it's heartbreaking because I've never made anything and not put my heart and soul into it." The writer needn't have worried. Only police corruption thriller *Line of Duty* has attracted more viewers for the BBC in its Sunday-night drama slot during the year.

Choma added: "The response has been heartwarming. And we felt that we did get it right for the LGBT community. The outpouring of emotion from around the world has been phenomenal!" The historian first studied Lister's life as a university student 25 years ago; she recalled "the impact Anne Lister had on me as a gay woman struggling with my sexuality and not having the confidence to voice what I was feeling".

Lister's diaries, partly written in code when they address the intimate details of her life, run to some 5 million words. "When I started to read them, it was life-changing. So, I can completely understand people's obsession now with Anne Lister, people who are



coming to her for the first time having watched *Gentleman Jack*.”

Wainwright – the writer behind two other Yorkshire-set BBC hits, *Happy Valley* and *Last Tango in Halifax* – first pitched a drama about the life of Lister in 2003. “Nobody was interested,” she recalled. “It was a hard pitch because my profile wasn’t particularly high. I’d done the [ITV drama *At Home with the Braithwaites*, which had been successful, but I wasn’t someone who could walk in and say: ‘This is what I’m doing next.’

“But Anne Lister was always there on the back burner – she never went away. After *Happy Valley*, which was very successful, Charlotte Moore, the controller of BBC One, asked me, ‘What do you want to do next?’ I said Anne Lister and she said, ‘Well, we’ll do that then.’ And then she said, ‘Who’s Anne Lister?’ It was a very easy pitch.”

With the drama green-lit and US channel HBO on board as co-producer, Wainwright started to write, but she couldn’t visualise an actor to play the lead role. “I couldn’t imagine anyone who could be Anne Lister – she was such a polymath, so clever and so mercurial,” she said. “It was an odd situation to be in because, when I write, I usually have someone in mind and it helps me to write if I can picture [a person].

“We looked at leading actresses in England who were [around] 40 and there were, like, three. We sent a script to them and they all wanted to do it.”

Suranne Jones, who had worked with Wainwright on *Coronation Street*, *Unforgotten* and *Scott & Bailey*, was one of the three approached. “You wouldn’t normally ask someone of Suranne’s stature to read; you’d just make an offer,” said Wainwright. “But we had to ask the [actors] to read because HBO weren’t as familiar with their work.”

“She did something extraordinary,” continued Wainwright. “I thought I’d seen everything she could do because I know her work. She instinctively got the character on a really deep, emotional, joyous level – she brought this joyous physicality to [the role] straight away.

On the shoot, Wainwright – who wrote all eight episodes and directed four – enjoyed a “huge” budget. “I’ve never worked with a budget of that scale before,” she said. Practically, this meant the crew could use equipment such as a Russian Arm, a remote-controlled, vehicle-mounted crane, which, when fitted with a camera, can track and film a moving object.

On *Gentleman Jack*, it was used to film



Belinda O’Hooley (left) and Heidi Tidow

Dee Robertson

## Gentleman Jack: the song

Wife-and-wife folk duo O’Hooley & Tidow wrote *Gentleman Jack* for their 2012 album *The Fragile* after hearing about Anne Lister from a friend. ‘She said she was this amazing, intelligent, outgoing woman who was really different for her time, and that she was the first modern lesbian. And, of course, our ears pricked up,’ recalled Heidi Tidow.

‘We filed [the idea] and, when we went away on a song-writing holiday, we started writing about her. It was the most amazing experience writing a song that we’ve ever had together because [Lister] is so interesting, complex and inspiring.’

‘It’s really our hit – although, in the folk world, that’s putting it loosely. We

always play it at our shows,’ said Belinda O’Hooley. ‘At the time [we wrote it], people just didn’t know about her, so it was fantastic to spread the word.

‘Little did we know that at our gig at Hebden Bridge, Sally Wainwright was going to come over to Heidi and, not just buy a CD, but ask us to use our song in her drama.

‘When [*Gentleman Jack*] hit the TV screens in Britain, it went completely off the scale. Our shop on our website exploded. We’ve spent the last few months stuffing envelopes [with CDs of the song] and all our shows have sold out. We’re so proud of Anne Lister and her story being told – it’s a fantastic show... and it’s great to be part of it.’

the open flyer carriage, driven at reckless speed by Lister at the start of the first episode. “It’s a very expensive piece of kit that you couldn’t normally afford,” explained Wainwright.

For modern, liberal audiences, Lister, an unashamed capitalist, is often easier to admire than like. She ran her estate with an eye on profit, exploiting its labour and coal reserves. “She’s complex. As Suranne says, she’s Marmite – you either love her or you just don’t care [for her],” said Wainwright.

“As a dramatist,” she continued, “the more complex people are, the more interesting they become. I embraced that side of her. She was a product of her time and it’s unfair to judge her by

our standards. If she were alive now... what would she be? Would she still have capitalist attitudes? She would. There’s nothing sentimental [about her].

“I found her so uplifting and inspirational [because] she had this absolute strength and knowledge of who she was, and this ferocious intelligence that went with [that] – you just couldn’t argue with her.” ■

**‘Gentleman Jack and extraordinary women’ was held at the Bristol Old Vic on 30 August. The event was chaired by the University of the West of England’s Dr Finn Mackay, produced by Indigo Network in collaboration with the Bristol Festival of Ideas and supported by the RTS.**

# 5G opens the door to 8K

IBC review

**Tim Dams** rounds up the talking points from this year's tech fest

**A**sk attendees of this year's IBC about what caught their eye at the giant Amsterdam tech fest, and only a few will cite new product launches.

Instead, they'll talk about the technology trends that were evident at the trade show, and about how they left the event with a far better understanding of the future direction of travel in the complex and ever-evolving world of broadcast technology.

At first, IBC feels a little overwhelming. This year, there were more than 56,000 attendees, as well as 1,700 exhibitors spread over 15 halls, each themed by technology. Then, there is its growing conference section, which had actor, director, producer and motion-capture specialist Andy Serkis delivering a stand-out keynote. Other speakers included Cécile Frot-Coutaz (YouTube), Shalini Govil-Pai (Android TV), Jane Turton (All3Media) and Max Amordeluso (Amazon Alexa).

New features this year included a day-long e-sports showcase, culminating in a packed-out e-sports demo played by two professional teams.

Out of all this, over the five-day event, a consensus gradually emerges on the most interesting and future-orientated trends. This year, the big talking points included: the rise of production for the 8K Ultra-HDTV standard; the growing impact on broadcasting of remote production and the 5G telecoms networks; and the efforts to improve diversity in broadcast tech.

The 8K standard (16 times the resolution of HDTV) was being mooted at IBC as a genuine option for acquisition and broadcast, even though many viewers are not even watching 4K on their TV sets. To date, demand for 8K

has largely been driven by the Japanese market, where broadcaster NHK started airing 8K content regularly at the beginning of the year. NHK also plans to showcase 8K during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

At IBC, BT Sport showed the potential of the technology by demonstrating one of the world's first live 8K sports broadcasts, of the Gallagher Premiership Rugby 7s tournament. The sports market is an early adopter of new technology, having used 4K to drive subscriptions and retention, so BT's decision to demonstrate 8K was significant.

BT Sport director of mobile strategy Matt Stagg says there was standing room only at BT's stand for the live broadcast: "The purpose of the demo was to learn about 8K productions and push the technology envelope, the same as was done for 4K." He adds that 8K is not ready to be launched in the near term but, "once the full ecosystem is available to scale, then we will see if we could work with it."

The fact that 8K broadcasts, with pin-sharp, super-high-definition images, can be sent direct to consumers over high-speed 5G networks is one of the reasons that the technology is moving from the realm of impractical to distinct possibility. At this year's French Tennis Open, for example, France Télévisions organised a demo of 8K content being distributed over a 5G experimental network from Orange.

As 5G promises data speeds as much as 100 times faster than 4G, it was itself a major focus at IBC. BT Sport and EE demonstrated how mobile providers will be able to offer guaranteed bandwidth over 5G in a stadium, which can often get flooded with data traffic when the public arrives.

It means directors will be able to use



untethered 5G "connected" cameras for event coverage, opening up a host of creative possibilities, says Tom Copeland, head of broadcast technology at sports producer Sunset+Vine. "It introduces the possibility of moving cameras to multiple positions, such as following the team buses or walking with fans from the stadium to the station, before taking up their match position, without the need for multiple cable drops."

Copeland also flags the growth of remote production in the outside broadcast (OB) market as a key focus at IBC: "I think this year was the first that remote production felt like it was the norm."

OB firm NEP, for example, was showcasing its latest innovation, the iOB (intelligent outside broadcast) unit, a mobile production control room that can be placed at almost any event where there is IP connectivity. The iOB can then link to one of NEP's production centres. This means that less kit and people have to be sent to cover an occasion. "Hopefully, they'll offer these savings to their customers while also reducing the stress on their equipment by having it travel less," says Copeland.





IBC keynote speaker  
Andy Serkis performing  
in *Dawn of the Planet  
of the Apes*

20th Century Fox

In the camera field, the big news at IBC was the launch of Sony's FX9 camera. Outside high-end drama, Sony's FS7 is still the dominant camera model in docs, factual and entertainment. The new FX9 has roughly the same basic "run and gun" style body as the FS7, but with some significant improvements – notably a full-frame 6K sensor and a better autofocus system.

"The Sony FX9 was probably the most talked-about product at IBC, and got quite a lot of people very excited," says Matt Marner, director of broadcast hire firm Video Europe, which bought 20 of the cameras at the show.

Marner says that Video Europe owns a substantial number of FS7s, but never seemed to have enough to meet demand. "The FX9 is an evolution of that camera, and then does more on top. In 2020, people will be wanting to use the FX9."

Meanwhile, Canon was demonstrating its new 5.9K full-frame C500 Mark II, announced a few days before the start of IBC. Barry Bassett, Managing Director of broadcast hire firm VMI, describes it as "a truly stunning

camera" that he thinks will challenge the Alexa Mini's position as a mainstay of high-end drama productions and commercials. "It's equivalent to the Alex Mini, only better, but for less than half the money."

Bassett also picks out the launch at IBC of new classic cinema lenses from Sigma, the Full-Frame Classic Art Prime Line. They are designed to recreate the aesthetic of film cameras from the 1950s to 1970s, responding to demand from directors of photography for lenses that lend "character" to the clean images captured by digital cameras.

Other tech that caught the eye included a lens scanner from Silicon Valley start-up Tracis, which checks for lens damage and provides a detailed report in under a minute. It promises to make it quick and easy for rental houses to certify the condition of a lens before and after rental, and should help resolve disputes with production companies if something does go wrong with a lens. "I thought it was a revolutionary, innovative product – probably the highlight of the show," says Marner.

In terms of new developments, David Klafkowski, CEO of leading post house The Farm Group, says "a standout moment" was a presentation by Eluv.io, whose new Content Fabric technology bills itself as a high-performance software network for improving the distribution of video to consumers.

"I won't pretend to completely understand the maths behind their solution but, unless I'm mistaken, it's a real game changer," says Klafkowski. "[Chief Executive] Michelle Munson is simply one of the cleverest people I've ever heard speak at IBC."

Klafkowski also makes a broader point about this year's IBC. There was a real emphasis by the organisers on improving diversity and sustainability in the industry.

"It's timely, as it only requires half an hour on the exhibition floor to see it's very white and very male," he says. He cites plenty of sessions in IBC's conference section tackling ways to improve gender, ethnic and LGBT+ diversity within the industry.

"More of this, please," says Klafkowski. ■



# Why crime pays for Jeff Pope

**Y**ou could be forgiven for thinking that Jeff Pope was obsessed by the macabre. Why else would he be drawn to such odious topics as the Moors murders, serial killer Fred West or Britain's last hangman, Albert Pierrepoint?

He puts it like this: "If drama is about conflict, which it is, you're looking for the extremes of conflict. Those areas are love, fate and, I would argue, crime."

"I am not a depressive person or ghoulish but it's the old journalist in me: there's a good story in it."

And, of course, Pope, screenwriter, producer, executive producer and self-proclaimed Proclaimers lookalike – it's the glasses and quiff – is almost as well known for his lighter work. This includes: ITV biopic *Cilla* (which he wrote); last year's award-winning *Stan & Ollie* movie (co-written with Steve Coogan); and BBC Two's *Cradle To Grave* (co-written with Danny Baker).

Crime, though, remains his main source of inspiration, as the RTS discovered during a recent early-evening event, "In conversation with Jeff Pope". In a wide-ranging interview covering his career, he made it clear that his apprenticeship as a cub reporter on the *Ealing Gazette* – reporting court hearings and doing police calls – gave him the skills that led to him becoming one of British TV's most prolific practitioners of fact-based drama.

"It's being professionally nosey," he said. "As a journalist, you take a lot of information and process it into a story with a beginning, a middle and an end."

His latest TV series, the highly praised *A Confession*, shown on ITV, is another chip off the old block – the story of a detective's mission to find a missing young woman. The investigation leads the policeman to a murderer and ends up destroying his career.

Pope's technique involves spending



## Jeff Pope on...

### Casting decisions

'Casting is a form of alchemy that sometimes doesn't bare too much scrutiny.'

### Casting Sheridan Smith as Charmian Brent in *Mrs Biggs*

'The part of Charmian hung on who played her. I didn't write it with Sheridan in mind... we had two full days of casting Charmian.'

'The casting director and the director let those auditioning for the part choose their scenes from the script. Most of them decided to go for a scene where they didn't have to show their entire hand because, if you really go for an emotional scene and you don't hit it.... Most of them played safe.'

'The last person on set on the second day was Sheridan. I was thinking she'd be too big [for the part], because she's had a lot of stage success.'

'She came in wearing quite a flamboyant outfit. She chose the death of the son scene (the Biggs's 10-year-old son, Nicholas, was killed in a car crash) and had no nerves whatsoever. It was so brilliant.'



A Confession

ITV

### Casting Martin Freeman as Steve Fulcher in *A Confession*

'I wrote *A Confession* with him in mind.... He has the ability to play someone you can relate to as a normal, average guy....'

'When we budget it, inevitably there's a gap [but], because Martin is an internationally recognised, saleable actor, that did help with the budget. 'I didn't cast Martin for cynical reasons. I cast him because I thought he was a brilliant actor and would be perfect to play Steve Fulcher, and that's how it should be.'

a lot of time with the story's protagonists, in this case erstwhile cop, Steve Fulcher, whom Pope spent many hours talking to.

He told the RTS: "My process is to go deeper and deeper into what actually happened. Therein lies the avoidance of cliché. We're all unique and tell stories in a slightly different way. That's the material. My job is finding the way through it."

It was 1983 when Pope quit the *Ealing Gazette* to join ITV station London Weekend Television as a researcher on the pioneering *Six O'Clock Show* – a less bland precursor of *The One Show*. "I have done fictional stuff but, even then, it was inspired by things that have happened," he recalled.

Making short, quirky films on such subjects as couples lingering "too long on goodbye kisses" in London car parks or a fish 'n' chip shop – "It was a brilliant discipline" – Pope quickly felt at home in TV.

At LWT, Pope was part of the team that created *Crime Monthly*, "a sexy *Crimewatch*", featuring the re-enactment of crime scenes. "I built it from the ground upwards," he said. This experience was to prove vital in his later role of writing and producing series based on real-life crimes.

Pope's first full-length TV drama was *Fool's Gold: The Story of the Brink's-Mat Robbery*, in which thieves stole gold bullion worth £26m from a trading estate near Heathrow – at the time, Britain's biggest ever robbery.

Asked to identify his favourite crime shows and writers, Pope mentioned Thames Television's influential *The Sweeney* and *Law and Order*, penned by GF Newman. He described *Law and Order* as "a brilliant series – the dialogue was magical. I still didn't quite trust that

I could do it. [As a writer], I was half putting my toe in the water.... I co-wrote *Fool's Gold* with [its director] Terry Winsor and I found it easy.

"People have different skills. I am not a frustrated actor or director. I love writing."

At LWT, he would bump into Cilla Black, then presenting *Blind Date*, in the lifts and was told stories of how the star had a lavatory designed by her husband, Bobby, installed in her dressing room. Decades later, after reading about her and Brian Epstein, the brilliant manager and impresario who helped set the 1960s ablaze with the

Beatles, he pitched *Cilla* to ITV's then-director of television, Peter Fincham.

"Nervously, I presented eight ideas to Peter, including one about the terrorist siege of a Tunisian petrochemical plant, but he immediately plumped for *Cilla*.... I remember reading that, when Epstein died, on his bed was a contract for Cilla

to present the *Cilla* TV show for the BBC. I always thought of her as a TV star, rather than a 1960s singer."

In the series, Sheridan Smith played Cilla – a role that won her a Bafta nomination. Earlier, Pope had cast Smith as Ronnie Biggs's wife, Charmian, in *Mrs Biggs*. "It remains one of the pieces I am most proud of," he said. Smith won a Bafta for the part, which she was given following a memorable audition (see box, right).

Female characters were particularly impressive in Pope's work, suggested his interviewer, Caroline Frost. Did women impress him? "Yes, they must do. I don't ever think of it like that. I'd like to think I was doing this way before #MeToo. >

IT'S THE  
PROXIMITY  
OF EVIL,  
NOT EVIL  
ITSELF,  
THAT  
INTERESTS  
ME



▶ “I suppose I am inspired by the female characters. I didn’t want to do Ronnie Biggs, I wanted to do Charmian because, in a way, Ronnie had it easy. She is the one I was inspired by....

“I saw a documentary about her and really liked her. I thought she was a very dignified, highly intelligent and articulate woman.”

Pope found a way into the story of serial killer Fred West and his wife, Rosemary (an accomplice in the majority of the 12 murders he was found guilty of), via social worker Janet Leach in *Appropriate Adult*; Pope executive produced the two-part ITV series which was written by Neil McKay.

“I remember coming across Janet and being intrigued by her story,” he said. “West was semi-literate and the police didn’t want him to say further down the line that he couldn’t read and write and therefore didn’t understand the interview process. They put

an appropriate adult in with him during their interviews.

“They normally put appropriate adults in with children. That’s why Janet – a housewife trained as a social worker – is there.

“We didn’t want to see any of the murders, or be on Fred’s shoulder, and I didn’t want to get into his head other than through how he interacted with Janet. It’s the proximity of evil, not evil itself, that interests me.”

With an A-list actor such as Dominic West playing the killer, how did Pope avoid glamorising people like him?

“It’s all to do with being as faithful and truthful and as fair as you can be. Obviously, that starts with the writing.... It’s not just the script... it’s everything – wardrobe, obviously the way it’s shot, make-up.

“What you’re trying to do is to not see them. When I worked on *The Six O’Clock Show*, a director told me ‘The

best direction is when you don’t notice it.’ That doesn’t mean that I don’t like films that are wonderfully stylish. That’s fine if it suits [the piece].”

But why did he want to produce a drama about the Wests? “What was fascinating was the closeness... Fred could have lived next door to me. He was an avuncular builder and handyman. Janet could have been my sister. She was the everywoman.”

Pope thinks that it is “cathartic” to shine his torch in dark places. One of his most critically acclaimed series was *Little Boy Blue*, the story of the murder of Rhys Jones, an 11-year-old who was shot in the back in Croxteth, Liverpool. “The process there was the same as it is on a lot of my projects, where I spend a lot of time going to see the people at the heart of the story, because your imagination can’t match the reality of the events they’ve experienced.”

He told the RTS that he held off



'MY PROCESS  
VERY OFTEN  
WILL BE TO  
START AT  
THE END  
AND... BUILD  
TOWARDS  
THAT'



Philomena

20th Century Fox

## Jeff Pope on...

### Facing writers' block

'There are periods when you are dry, which is scary: "I can't fucking write anything. What I'm doing is shit." Everyone goes through this. The only thing that keeps you going is knowing that you've been in that situation before and you found a way out of it. Not thinking about something helps. Confidence is a big part of writing.'

### Narrative strategies

'Appropriate Adult starts with the Wests' front garden being dug up. Stan & Ollie starts with a spat....'

'Stories start to tell themselves so there's a natural rhythm to where something happens.'

'You're building. My process very often will be to start at the end and to know where I'm heading and build towards that. In every story, there's the big thing and it tends not to be at the front.'

meeting Rhys's parents until it was confirmed that the show would be made. "Talking about their grief was part of the story," said Pope. "Their big thing is that there is no closure: there is a bleakness. The guilty verdict makes no difference."

"It's that thing about the truth – you shouldn't be frightened of the truth. I came across it time and time again. There are people who try to bend it and don't want you to tell the truth. But, by and large, normal people are not frightened by what has happened."

Pope's career, arguably, hit a new plateau with *Philomena*, co-written with Steve Coogan. Their script was nominated for an Oscar and won the Screenplay prize at the Venice Film Festival. In all, Coogan and Pope's script won five awards.

"The success of *Philomena* came to me when I was relatively mature. I knew what my strengths and weaknesses

were. I said to myself that the way through this is to take on work that you think you can do as well as anyone else.... I think the thing that I can do as well as anyone else is to tell true stories."

He added: "I always thought that I had to come up with the ideas. Steve Coogan came to me with *Philomena*. That told me something: there are people out there who also have great ideas."

"Success gets you meetings, but it still won't get something over the finishing line if it's not good enough, which is as it should be. You can't rest on your reputation. It has to be on the quality of the work."

Pope and Coogan were reunited for last year's much-feted movie *Stan & Ollie*. He had wanted to write a story based on Laurel and Hardy's sunset years for many years: "I'd read several books on them. Their lives were chaotic, they rowed endlessly – tempestuous lives of excess but, right in the

middle of it, love. They really did love each other."

"I fell in love with that story. I knew I wanted to tell the story of when they were old and sick. That's when their love was at its greatest because they needed one another so much. That's what I responded to."

As for casting Coogan as Stan Laurel, Pope said: "The truth is, I thought Steve was too obvious to play him... In my mind I resisted it until I woke up one day and thought, 'This is nonsense'.... I was worried that he would say, 'No, it's too obvious'."

"But he didn't. He instantly knew how to play it." ■

**'In conversation with Jeff Pope' was an RTS early-evening event held at Kings Place, London, on 29 August. The interviewer was journalist and broadcaster Caroline Frost. The producers were Caroline Frost, Jamie O'Neill and ITV.**

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C'mon Midffild!

S4C

## Festival airs TV classics

**RTS Cymru Wales** The RTS had a strong presence at the National Eisteddfod, the week-long Welsh-language arts and culture festival, which was held in early August in the historic town of Llanrwst, north Wales. For the third year running, RTS Cymru/Wales was a partner in the pop-up cinema "Sinemaes".

As part of the centre's 60th anniversary celebrations, it hosted a session on Welsh-language TV comedy. The six featured shows spanned the 30-plus years of S4C's existence.

They included some lesser-known titles such as *Newydd Bob Nos*, a comedy about an anarchic TV news studio, which was produced back-to-back in Welsh and in English (with the title *Night Beat News*), and the sketch show *Torri Gwynt*, which was produced by HTV Wales

(now ITV Cymru Wales) and featured the actor and musician Dewi "Pws" Morris, who was in the audience.

The audience voted for the programme they wanted to see shown in full at the end of the week. The winner was *C'mon Midffild!*, a popular comedy series about a dysfunctional village football team. First broadcast in 1988, it was written by Mei Jones and directed by Alun Ffred Jones and ran until 1994. A close contender was *Dim Byd fel Cân i Gymru*, a send-up of the annual Song for Wales competition run by S4C on St David's Day.

Former RTS Cymru/Wales Chair Tim Hartley, who introduced the session, said: "This was a fascinating look back at the wealth of comedic talent in the archive. It was particularly interesting to see the arc of development in the role and prominence of women.

Symbolically, perhaps, our final clip, *'Run Sbit*, about a lookalike agency, starred two women in central roles."

During the week, the centre screened the innovative film about Welsh poetry, *Dal: Yma/Nawr*, which was directed by Marc Evans. In partnership with the screen and sound archive of the National Library of Wales, it also showed a reel of archive Welsh-language commercials, which included what is believed to be the first use of cynghanedd, a form of strict-metre Welsh-language poetry, in a TV ad.

The other partners behind the Sinemaes cinema were: Bafta Cymru, Ffilm Cymru Wales, Film Hub Wales, Into Film Cymru, Welsh producers association TAC, the BFI Network and the screen and sound archive of the National Library of Wales.

**Hywel Wiliam**

## RTS events IN BRIEF

### North West launches awards

RTS North West announced the nominations – across 25 categories – for its programme awards at a launch party at the Lowry Theatre, Salford, in late September. *Granada Reports* entertainment correspondent Caroline Whitmore hosted the event, which was sponsored by Audio Network. The RTS North West Awards 2019 will be held at the Hilton Manchester Deansgate on 23 November and will be hosted by *Coronation Street* star Sally Lindsay.

### Belfast enjoys a busy September

RTS Northern Ireland members were given a tour of the BBC's Studio B in Belfast in early September. The studio is used daily to produce *BBC Newsline*, the corporation's regional TV news programme, *Final Score from NI* on a Saturday and political shows. Later that month, the RTS centre and media networking group Media Therapy hosted 'The big media quiz of the year' at Pug Uglys in Belfast, which was attended by around 50 people.

### NETB offers awards surgery

North East and the Border held a September networking event, which also passed on advice about how to enter the centre's programme awards next February. The event was held at Oceana Business Park in Wallsend, next door to the production offices of ITV crime drama *Vera*.



North West  
Centre

Lime Pictures' *Hollyoaks* has broken new ground with the far-right radicalisation of one of its best-loved characters.

Executive producer Bryan Kirkwood heralded the storyline as "a bold departure for *Hollyoaks* and for British soap... taking an unflinching look at how extremists prey on the vulnerable and the disenfranchised... and how Britain's communities are under threat from increasingly polarised views".

A capacity audience at the University of Salford watched a screening of the storyline's climactic week, at an event in mid-September organised by Lime and RTS North West, in association with Channel 4 and the campaign group Love Music Hate Racism.

BBC Radio 5 Live's Nihal Arthanayake, who hosted the panel discussion, asked Kirkwood about his decision to tackle this sensitive subject. "Real-world issues, where the viewers see themselves reflected on television, [are one of the] key ways in which the show engages with its audience," Kirkwood replied. The idea was "relevant – it mattered to our audience and it had never been told before".

Chief Superintendent Nik Adams – national



Channel 4

## C4 soap takes on the far right

co-ordinator of the government's counterterrorism strategy Prevent – revealed that "25% of our investigations are into far- and extreme-right-wing [groups]" and that "one in five Prevent referrals

[are] right-wing-related".

Kieron Richardson who plays Ste Hay, the white working-class lad groomed by extremists, confessed to being wary at the outset. "Would they think I was

racist in real life?" he said. "If we showed [the far right] in a bad light, would they come after us?"

Feedback initially was negative, but Rishi Nair (Sami Maalik in the soap) said: "We wanted it to be a hard watch – racism is hard." However, as the storyline progressed, social media comments became positive, "with people feeling their story was being represented, their voices being heard".

Harvey Virdi (Misbah Maalik) added: "How can we change [racism] if we don't talk about it?"

Writer Jayshree Patel highlighted another challenge: "The show airs at 6:30pm, so telling a story [involving] a terrorist attack and meeting pre-watershed requirements was difficult." She drew on her experience as a teacher to understand, although not justify, Ste's choices: "Ste is basically one of my kids.... [They feel] society's turned its back on them.... That's why they end up so vulnerable."

Can Ste be redeemed? No spoilers, but Kirkwood underlined *Hollyoaks*' values of love, and family and community rallying round. "Hope is all important [for our viewers]," he said.

**Carole Solazzo**

## Dublin says local drama trumps global

■ 'Producing drama for a global audience' drew a capacity audience to Dublin's Huckletree D2 workspace in September, with the panellists agreeing that local trumped global content.

Remaining 'local' in terms of story, themes and talent was key. In fact, Paul Marquess – MD of PGMTV and a veteran of soaps such as *Hollyoaks*

– argued that what worked was being 'very local'. He said: 'It is much harder to build a franchise with global appeal... but there is a huge appetite for quality English-speaking drama.' Marquess called for more locally produced drama in Dublin, adding: 'This is a cool place!'

Steve November – former ITV drama chief and now MD of

indie Further South Productions – argued that local storytelling will travel: 'Local goes global.'

The panel agreed that drama didn't need huge budgets. 'Passion and authenticity' were the primary requirements, said Katie Holly, MD of Blinder Films (producer of RTE comedy *The Savage Eye*).

She added that an unintended consequence of Ireland becoming a popular location for TV production was the increased demand for and pressure on local resources, which had led to local crews and venues becoming more

expensive. She suggested using a levy on the over-the-top streamers as a means of investing in homegrown drama.

Rebecca O'Flanagan – co-MD of Treasure Entertainment and producer of the award-winning drama *Viva* – highlighted the Danish model. It concentrates on making local drama, with local talent, for Danish audiences – but with meticulous long-term planning, which leads to international success.

Director Liz Gill (who made RTE's *Raw*) chaired the RTS Republic of Ireland event.

**Charles Byrne and Agnes Cogan**

**National event** **Matthew Bell** hears how History penetrated the world of spying

**N**ew espionage series *Damian Lewis: Spy Wars* received its premiere at a joint RTS and A+E Networks UK event in mid-September at the British Museum.

Having played a fictional spy in the John le Carré adaptation *Our Kind of Traitor* and a turncoat in long-running US thriller *Homeland*, Damian Lewis presents the eight-part series, which began its run on A+E Networks UK's History channel earlier this month.

The actor was initially reluctant when his brother, Gareth – one of the executive producers of *Damian Lewis: Spy Wars* – approached him. “I hadn’t done factual [before] and I don’t consider myself a presenter,” he said.

Lewis was speaking during a Q&A session, which followed the screening of an episode about the 2010 spy swap between Russia and the US that involved Sergei Skripal, a victim of last year’s Salisbury Novichok attack.

“But I enjoy the [spy] genre and I thought it was an opportunity to look behind these popular stories and see if we could unearth something a bit more intimate about the people themselves, and the ramifications on global politics of very personal decisions taken by individuals.”

*Damian Lewis: Spy Wars* – made by factual indie Alaska TV and Lewis’s new company Rookery Productions – was filmed in London,



## Undercover operations

*Damian Lewis: Spy Wars*

History

Moscow and Israel, and reveals the stories behind some of the biggest spy operations of the past four decades.

“We wanted to tell the stories from the point of view of the people who were in the room at the time, so that immediately excluded the much older stories, your Philbys and Macleans,” said series producer Johanna Woolford Gibbon.

The series uses dramatic reconstruction, archive footage, expert witnesses – including ex-CIA chief and US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

– and former spooks to tell its stories of treachery. “An awful lot of the time people said, ‘No, no, I can’t be involved – you cannot use my name, you cannot use my voice.’ And just by determination, we got through to these people; they [started] to trust us and then we had testimony,” said the producer.

Dan Korn, VP for programming at A+E Networks UK, argued that *Damian Lewis: Spy*

*Wars* was a perfect fit for History: “[We cover] events that really affect contemporary society and tell the story behind them.”

The Novichok attack was one such event. “It was an extraordinary spectacle to turn on the news in March last year and see people in bio-hazard suits making their way round Salisbury, and to realise that the Russian state had sponsored an assassination attempt on

Sergei Skripal,” said Korn.

“Spy craft is incredibly lo-fi, really,” said Lewis.

“There are

exotic phrases such as ‘dead drop’ and ‘brush pass’, but it literally means you walking into a supermarket with the same Sainsbury’s carrier bag as me and us leaving with each other’s bags – you’ve seen it in a thousand thriller movies.”

The series tries to take the viewer beyond simple spy craft and into the psychology of spying, and asks: what makes a spy? The caricature

of a British spy – think Kim Philby – is that of an ex-public school boy. Lewis famously went to Eton, so, asked a member of the audience, were the expensively schooled drawn to spying?

“If you’re sent away from home at the age of eight and are asked to cope emotionally with a new situation, there is a natural and instinctive compartmentalising of emotional life. I think that is very helpful to a covert life in espionage,” he replied.

But, leading a secret life can lead to a spy’s downfall: “After a sociopathic compartmentalisation of one’s life, often they feel the need to speak. I think it’s their ego, in the end, that gets the better of them. It’s increasingly loose talk that actually undoes them in the end.

“Of course, there’s a need for discretion and the ability to be covert as a spy, otherwise you’d be a crap spy – you’d be James Bond.” ■

**‘Damian Lewis: Spy Wars’ was chaired by journalist Caroline Frost and produced jointly by the RTS and A+E Networks UK.**

# NEWS



UKTV

Women on the Verge

## Glasgow hosts writers forum

**Scotland Centre** Three highly successful TV writers offered valuable advice on building a career in scriptwriting in September.

Lorna Martin, who won the inaugural Writer award at the RTS Scotland Awards in June, encouraged would-be writers in the audience to put pen to paper: "People want your story. There's so many production companies and they want content."

Martin (who wrote UKTV channel W and RTÉ2's *Women on the Verge*) added: "And send them a nice email."

Writer and actor Stuart Hepburn (BBC Scotland drama *River City*), who lectures in screenwriting at the University of Stirling, said: "You've got to be a storyteller who wants to tell a story – you've got to put your unique voice at the centre of that."

"You're dealing with people who read a lot of stuff. So, it's nothing to do with structure, it's nothing to do with a

character... Can you engage someone with a really interesting question, with your unique voice and say, 'Do you want to hear more?'"

Martin offered more tips: "Read lots of scripts, watch loads of TV and keep writing.... Write an idea that's quite small and cheap to make, because it's got a much better chance of being made."

Kim Millar (BBC One's *Casualty*) said: "Say it out loud. Someone once said to me, 'Speak the words and, if you don't think someone would say them, take them out.'"

"Keep it simple and learn to separate yourself from the actual work.... I think you can take criticism on board, but you have to think: that's the script, that's me and that's the product."

The event, "Let's talk: writing for TV", was chaired by Centre Chair April Chamberlain and held at the Glasgow Art Club.

**Gillian Gunn**

### National events

#### RTS SCREENING

**Tuesday 29 October**

**Britannia, season 2, and Q&A**

Q&A with key cast and creatives, including writers Jez Butterworth and Tom Butterworth and executive producer James Richardson.

Chair: Caroline Frost. Exclusive screening hosted by the RTS, Vertigo Films and Neal Street Productions. *Britannia* airs on Sky Atlantic on 7 November.

6:00pm for 6:30pm

Venue: Curzon Soho, 99 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1D 5DY

#### RTS MASTERCLASSES

**Tuesday 5 November** and

**Wednesday 6 November**

**RTS Student Masterclasses**

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

#### RTS AWARDS

**Monday 25 November**

**RTS Craft & Design**

**Awards 2019**

Sponsor: Gravity Media Group  
London Hilton on Park Lane  
22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

#### RTS FUTURES

**Wednesday 12 February 2020**

**RTS Futures Television**

**Careers Fair 2020**

10:00am–4:00pm

Venue: Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, London N1 0QH

### Local events

#### DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson

■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

#### EAST

**Wednesday 23 October**

**TV futures: virtually there... with Dr Nick Lodge**

Joint event with UEA and RTS East. 7:00pm for 7:30pm

Venue: TBC

#### Wednesday 6 November

**Breaking into broadcasting**

Join BBC Academy for a day-long bootcamp for young people aged 18+ looking to break into the TV industry. To book a free place, email your name and a brief overview of your experience and aspirations to RTSEast@rts.org.uk.

9:00am–4:00pm

Venue: Norwich University of the Arts, 4 Duke St, Norwich NR3 3AS

#### Monday 11 November

**Cambridge networking event**

5:00pm–7:00pm

Venue: The Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge School of Art, East Road, Cambridge CB1 1PT

#### Thursday 21 November

**The Galaxy Britain Built: The British talent behind Star Wars – screening and Q&A**

With David Whiteley and special guests. 7:00pm for 7:30pm

screening, followed by Q&A with legendary producer Robert Watts

Venue: The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich NR2 1TF

#### Wednesday 4 March 2020

**RTS East Awards 2020**

Venue: TBC

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ RTSEast@rts.org.uk

#### ISLE OF MAN

■ Michael Wilson

■ michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org

#### LONDON

**TikTok for broadcasters**

**Wednesday 23 October**

Edward Lindeman, TikTok European strategy manager and Ryan Martin, TikTok brand partnerships strategist. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Atos, Mid City Place, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6EA

#### Wednesday 6 November

**Production in your pocket**

With Deirdre Mulcahy, news camera operator, freelance producer and trainer.

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: TBC



# RTS EVENTS

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

## Wednesday 4 December

### Christmas Lecture:

**David Abraham**

6:30pm for 7:00pm

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

■ Phil Barnes

■ [rts@philipbarnes.com](mailto:rts@philipbarnes.com)

## MIDLANDS

### Friday 29 November

#### RTS Midlands Awards 2019

Venue: International Convention  
Centre, Broad Street,  
Birmingham B1 2EA

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ [RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk)

## NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

■ Jill Graham

■ [jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk)

## NORTH WEST

### Saturday 23 November

#### RTS North West Awards 2019

6:00pm for 6:15pm

Venue: Hilton Manchester  
Deansgate, 303 Deansgate,  
Manchester M3 4LQ

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ [RPinkney@rts.org.uk](mailto:RPinkney@rts.org.uk)

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Thursday 7 November

#### RTS NI Programme Awards 2019

7:00pm

Venue: The MAC, 10 Exchange  
Street West, Belfast BT1 2NJ

■ John Mitchell

■ [mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com](mailto:mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com)

## REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ [byrnecc@iol.ie](mailto:byrnecc@iol.ie)

## SCOTLAND

### Wednesday 6 November

#### Top tips from animated gurus

Joint event with Animated  
Women Scotland and RTS  
Scotland. 7:00pm panel  
discussion; 8:00pm-9:00pm  
networking

Venue: ECA, 74 Lauriston Place,  
Edinburgh EH3 9DF

## Wednesday 20 November

### RTS Scotland Awards 2020 launch

6:00pm

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

■ Cheryl Strong

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

## SOUTHERN

■ Stephanie Farmer

■ [SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk)

## THAMES VALLEY

### Friday 29 November

#### Thames Valley Winter Ball and Awards 2019

7:00pm-1:00am

Venue: Wokefield Estate, Good-  
boys Lane, Mortimer RG7 3AE

■ Tony Orme

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

## WALES

### Monday 28 October

#### In conversation with Russell T Davies

Host: Gethin Jones. 7:00pm

Venue: Royal Welsh College of  
Music and Drama, Cathays Park,  
Cardiff CF10 3ER

## Thursday 5 December

### Christmas quiz

Venue: TBC

■ Hywel William 07980 007841

■ [HWiliam@rts.org.uk](mailto:HWiliam@rts.org.uk)

## WEST OF ENGLAND

### Tuesday 12 November

#### RTS Futures Festival

The annual festival for emerging  
talent in the West of England

Venue: Bristol M Shed, Princes  
Wharf, Wapping Road, Bristol  
BS1 4RN

## Friday 6 December

### Christmas quiz

Venue: The Folk House, 40a Park  
Street, Bristol BS1 5JG

■ Suzy Lambert

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

## YORKSHIRE

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

■ [lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk](mailto:lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk)



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# RTS Masterclasses

## 5-6 November

■ RTS Student Programme  
Masterclasses: 5 November

■ RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses:  
6 November

Venue: IET London WC2R 0BL

BOOK YOUR PLACE:  
[www.rts.org.uk](http://www.rts.org.uk)

# OFF MESSAGE

Off Message is no stranger to the RTS Cambridge Convention. But few compare with last month's high-powered and star-studded talking shop, the 49th year of the event held by the banks of the Cam.

The weather was Indian summer perfect – non-stop sunshine made the ancient Fenland university capital look like it belonged in a Merchant Ivory movie.

Over three days, the speakers and panellists exceeded expectations. The 17 sessions – a Cambridge record, perhaps – segued seamlessly across the big issues and much more besides.

For star power, the conference began with a session featuring Ant and Dec, and ended on an emotional high, thanks to an impassioned Lenny Henry.

Not even a problem with the power supply at the convention centre on the Thursday morning could diminish the slick production masterminded by ITV's daytime guru, Emma Gormley.

■ **Live at Leeds** is regarded by fans as one of The Who's very best. After this vintage Cambridge, Live at Leeds takes on a whole new meaning.

Let's hear it for the People's Panel, the group of Leeds locals who provided a charismatic counterpoint to Cambridge's big beasts of the media jungle. Their comments on such

topics as trust in TV were shared live with delegates.

Next time *Gogglebox* needs some new faces it would be well advised to check out the People's Panel.

■ Could culture secretary Nicky Morgan soon be following in the illustrious footsteps of Ed Balls, Vince Cable and Anne Widdecombe?

At Cambridge, during her Q&A with the deceptively tenacious Susanna Reid, she was asked if she'd like to appear on – you guessed it – *Strictly Come Dancing*. The Secretary of State gamely answered that she'd love to be on the show.

But perhaps ITV will make a bid for Nicky first and sign her up for *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* As its CEO, Carolyn McCall, told delegates: "We think she'd be brilliant in the jungle." Who could possibly disagree?

■ **Talking of culture ministers, Sharon White reminded everyone at Cambridge that, during her time as CEO of Ofcom, DCMS secretaries of state have been more ephemeral than an Instagram post.**

In her four years at the regulator, no fewer than six politicians have held this important job. For the record, and in alphabetical order, that's Karen Bradley, Sajid Javid, Nick Hancock, Nicky Morgan, John Whittingdale and Jeremy Wright.

And, of course, three of these politicians are now riding high in Boris Johnson's Cabinet.

■ The BBC didn't miss a chance to tease the BBC One blockbuster *His Dark Materials*, with a sneak preview in the lead-in to Tony Hall's Cambridge speech. To say it looked epic would be an understatement. This co-production with HBO, scripted by the brilliant Jack Thorne, looks like must-watch TV. Bring it on.

■ **Thanks to the Edelman research presented by Ed Williams at Cambridge, we know that, as far as trust goes, Netflix is right up there with the BBC.**

During his presentation, Ed gave delegates an intriguing insight into his domestic life. He revealed that his son Felix's former nanny was still using the Williams's Netflix account – even though she's moved out and is living in Australia. At least Ed has empirical proof of Netflix's global appeal.

■ Following yet another compelling appearance from Discovery CEO David Zaslav at Cambridge, Off Message couldn't help wondering why he was wearing a hoodie underneath his jacket.

Maybe he'd heard about those bitterly cold east winds that can blow across King's Parade and was caught out – like the rest of us – by the Indian summer.

Or perhaps, as Baz speculated in his mischievous daily conference resumé, he'd joined a Benedictine order.

Now that would make an intriguing Discovery series.



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