

April 2022

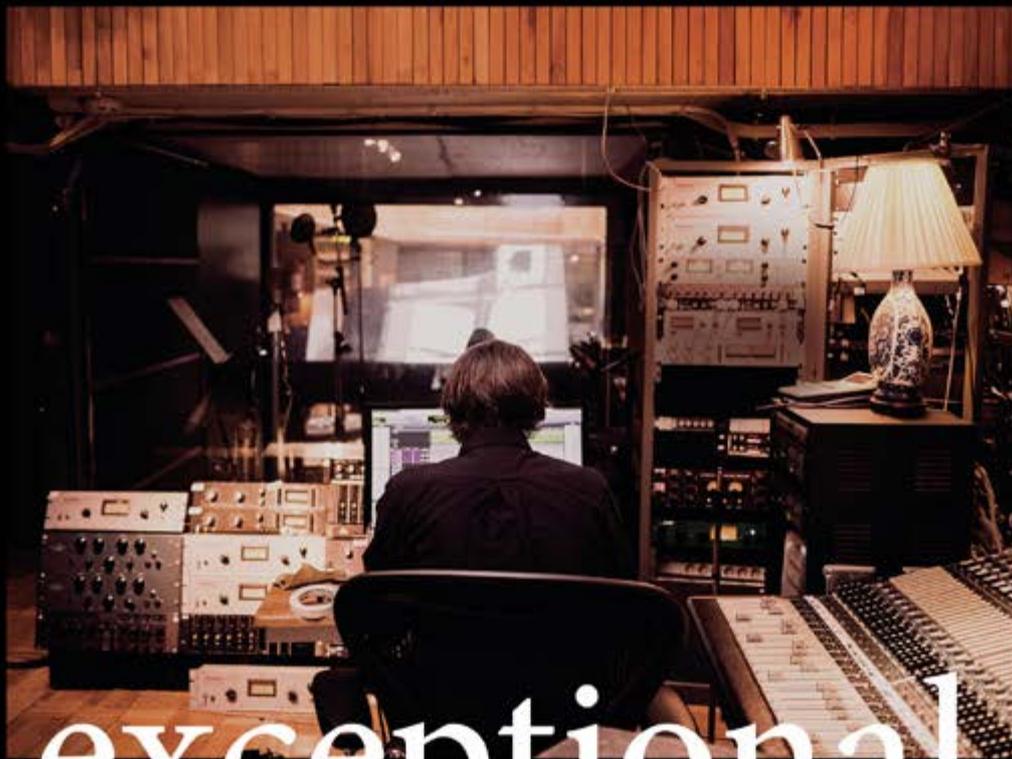
Television



Disabled representation

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From the CEO



The topic of disability across both television and film is quite rightly front and centre of many diversity and inclusivity debates. One of the

people responsible for this is the prolific screenwriter Jack Thorne, who was deservedly presented with the RTS's Outstanding Contribution to British Television award at last month's RTS Programme Awards.

Jack co-wrote, with Genevieve Barr, the recent much-praised BBC film *Then Barbara Met Alan* and was one of the panellists at an important RTS Futures' discussion, "Disability and the TV industry: All change?"; the subject of this month's cover story.

We know that, during the pandemic, life has got harder for disabled people.

Meanwhile, CDN's latest Project Diamond data, published last month, highlighted a fall in the number of contributions by disabled people working as director, producer/director and producer over the past three years. Thankfully, the content sector is starting to learn how to make workspaces more welcoming for disabled people.

Our cherished *Strictly Come Dancing* (another RTS Programme Awards 2022 winner) has celebrated the achievements of deaf people. And this year's surprise Oscar winner, the wonderful *Coda*, tells the touching story of Ruby, the only hearing person in a close-knit family of four.

Channel 4 has traditionally been ahead of the curve in television's portrayal of disabled people's lives and attainments, thanks to its pioneering coverage of the Paralympics

and shows such as *The Last Leg*. It now finds itself in the spotlight for another reason – the Government's desire to privatise it. Inside, Claire Enders weighs up what a privatised channel might look like.

Ukraine continues to dominate the news agenda. The bravery of news-gathering teams there defies belief. Caroline Frost reports on the steps news organisations take to ensure that news professionals don't damage their mental health in pursuit of the facts.

On a lighter note, don't miss *Newsround* presenter Shanequa Paris's TV Diary as the CBBC flagship celebrates 50 years of reporting news to children.

Theresa Wise

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TV diary

It's 9:00am, my phone rings. "Hey, Shanequa, can you do a report about dog poo?" Yes, this is my life at CBBC *Newsround*. But it's one of the reasons why I love it so much. I'm starting this week by putting on my pink glitter wellies and heading to my local park in Manchester to find as much dog poo as possible, to highlight the rise of mess in public places and speak to some kids who aren't happy about it.

Sorry if you're eating your breakfast right now but, funnily enough, kids aren't grossed out by things like this, and I think that's what makes *Newsround* so special. The team reports on things that matter to children and, after 50 years, only a few things have changed in how *Newsround* operates.

■ Since 1972, when John Craven brought us what was missing from TV – news for children – we've been sharing the news with the most important people in the world. As we reach *Newsround's* 50th birthday, we're still going strong.

It's been a manic week at NR HQ, with big preparations for the anniversary. I'm swapping my wellies for heels to speak to *The One Show*. It's so refreshing to be able to brag about this job because the team works really hard to inform and entertain children – and makes it look so effortless.

■ I had the pleasure of speaking to past presenters, such as Lizo Mzimba and John Craven, this week. John said one thing that has never changed since his first bulletin is that we keep it short, simple and interesting.



BBC

As *Newsround* celebrates its 50th birthday, Shanequa Paris meets a *Strictly* star, encounters a women's basketball team and reports on sexism

With so many tragedies and scary things happening in the world, presenting the news for children can be difficult. But we endeavour to reassure kids and offer lots of advice on what to do if they are upset by the news – and, most importantly, highlight the positives in a sad story.

■ Covering the crisis in Ukraine has been a challenge. Not only are we reporting on a war but it's to an audience who have not lived long enough to experience something tragic like this close to home.

Our way of tackling this is to always support children and not focus on the bad news but highlight how many heroes there are.

Some of the *Newsround* team travelled to the Polish border and my fellow presenter Jenny Lawrence spoke to some amazing children who were helping Ukrainian kids with food, toys and translation.

■ When you think about it, children can be the most curious set of people. If you tell a child that the sky is blue, chances are that they'll ask you why, and your answer will probably make them ask why again.

When a young girl asked me why she didn't see any women playing basketball on the telly, I went to find out why, which saw me on a two-hour train journey to meet the London Lions women's team to get an answer. You might be surprised about the things kids want to know about, so I encourage you to ask your kids, nieces or nephews what they care about.

■ Then it's time to have a chat on CBBC with *Strictly Come Dancing* star Rhys Stephenson and feed off his energy to introduce a *Newsround* special, "Let's talk about sexism", for the lovely viewers eating their after-school cereal.

Now, sitting here scrolling through my Instagram, I feel privileged to be a part of such a groundbreaking programme. Being able to share the news sporting my afro puff or cornrows to the most inquisitive audience is heart-warming.

I'm raising a glass of Prosecco to wish *Newsround* a Happy 50th Birthday and hopefully many more!

Shanequa Paris is a presenter on the BBC's Newsround.

COMFORT CLASSIC



The Wire

Now TV

Twenty years ago this June, a series described by its creator, David Simon, as a “novel for television”, premiered on HBO in the US. Simon had shrewdly pitched *The Wire* to the cable network as a cop show; its title refers to the use of electronic surveillance to catch drug dealers. His writing partner, Ed Burns, was an ex-Baltimore cop; Simon had worked for the *Baltimore Sun* as a police reporter. They knew their subject.

But *The Wire* is more than a police procedural. In 60 episodes over five series, it lays bare the limitations of Baltimore’s institutions: City Hall; the police department; the education

Matthew Bell salutes the US series inspired by 19th-century epics yet ahead of its time with its mostly black cast

system; the dockers’ union; and the local newspaper. Both Simon and Burns had much to say about the city’s endemic drug crime and the racism, corruption and poverty that fuelled it.

The thread that runs through this discourse on a malfunctioning city is the age-old cops and robbers’ story;

in this case, the Baltimore Police’s attempt to bring the city’s drug dealers – and the Barksdale empire in particular – to justice.

It took mainstream British audiences until March 2009 (FX channel had earlier broadcast it to tiny audiences) to discover what the fuss was about – by which time, the series had ended in the US. When they did, despite BBC Two’s late-night scheduling of the show and its unavailability on iPlayer, viewers embraced it.

There were a few surprises. *The Wire* had a predominately black cast, almost unheard of two decades ago, but one that accurately reflected Baltimore’s population. Among the unknowns and

barely knowns were real-life Baltimore figures – including ex-cons – and a surprising number of actors from this side of the pond.

Dominic West, in his first major role, played a wayward Irish-American cop, Jimmy McNulty; the more established Aidan Gillen was local politician Tommy Carcetti; and Idris Elba, Stringer Bell, was a gang boss trying to legitimise his business.

A couple of years ago I interviewed Elba, who had moved to the US around the turn of the millennium to find meatier roles than he'd had in *The Bill* or *Silent Witness*. He recalled: "I was absolutely broke. It was time to pack up and come home. But luckily *The Wire* came along." His accent was note perfect. During the auditions Simon failed to spot his East London inflection.

The villains and the dispossessed were as central to the series as the cops. Stick-up man Omar Little, played by the late Michael K Williams, specialised in robbing dealers. No less a figure than Barack Obama was just one of many viewers drawn to him: "He's a fascinating character – a gay gangster who only robs drug dealers, and then gives back, sort of a Robin Hood. And he's the toughest, baddest guy on the show."

Homeless heroin addict and police snitch Bubbles, played by Andre Royo, was another who added to the humanity of a show that always gave the downtrodden dignity.

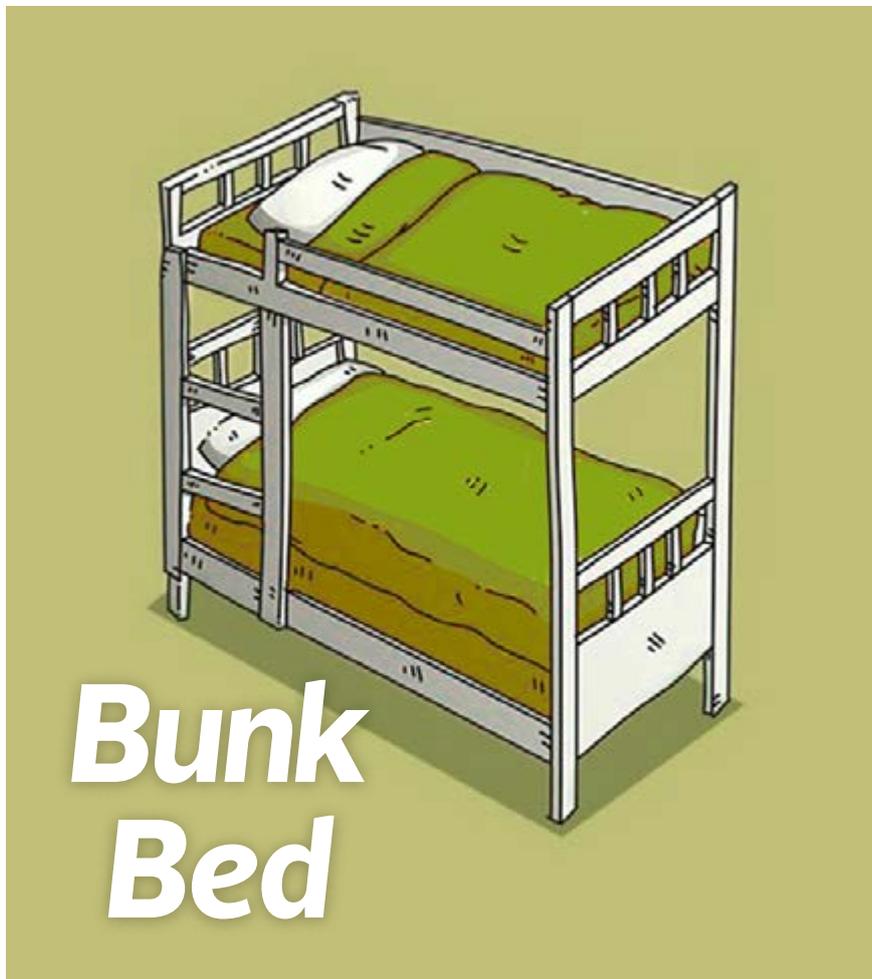
Audiences for *The Wire* on HBO were disappointing, perhaps put off by the show's languid pacing and complex plot, or maybe Simon's extravagant ambition. "Our model when we started doing *The Wire* wasn't other television shows. The standard we were looking at was Balzac's Paris or Dickens's London, or Tolstoy's Moscow," he once said.

Simon has suggested that a largely black cast and heavy use of slang could have limited its mass audience appeal but, as Royo noted, "For the [black] middle-class and the urban communities – this is our story. This is our *Sopranos*, this is our *Six Feet Under*."

Awards were also thin on the ground. The series never won a Prime-time Emmy. Critics, though, embraced it from day one. And, last year, in a BBC poll of 200-plus TV experts from 43 different countries, *The Wire* emerged as the clear winner – the greatest TV series of the 21st century. ■

The Wire is available on Amazon Prime Video and Now TV.

Ear candy



I'm no psychiatrist but if it's all getting a bit too much, allow me to prescribe you some of Peter Curran and Patrick Marber's platonic pillow talk. It probably sounds strange, but there's no better way to put the brakes on your own racing thoughts than to listen to two grown men lying in a bunk bed, rambling on about life and death and everything in between.

That's the basis of their podcast, *Bunk Bed*, which first aired on BBC Radio 4 in 2014 and has just finished its ninth series. There's no structure, only what they describe as a "stream of semi-consciousness," which gives rise to any number of random thoughts, often silly but sometimes quite profound.

To give you an idea of how the conversation pans out, at the start of

episode 5 of series 9, Curran complains about his sore back, specifically his coccyx. He recalls a time when people referred to it as a "vestigial tail", which sparks long speculation on life with tails.

What shapes would theirs take? "I like to believe I'd have had a long, slinky, ironic tail, but I suspect I'd have a little stumpy sort of tail that could barely wag," says Marber. "Yours would look like a platypus."

Would they be used as a portable tripod to rest your legs? Or kept in zip-up pockets to protect them from the elements?

Just when you think they've exhausted that train of thought, after a long pause and a rustle of the covers, "I think the male nipple is the next to go of useless things," Marber ruminates ruefully. And on we go. ■

Harry Bennett

WORKING LIVES

Head of production

Sky
Britannia

Sandra Shuttleworth of Vertigo Films scored an early success with the much-loved British film *Bend It Like Beckham*. Currently, when she's not working on swords and sorcery drama *Britannia*, the head of production can be found reliving the music of her youth on upcoming Sky drama *A Town Called Malice*.

What does the job involve?

Ultimately, my job is to plan ahead, working closely with the producers, key stakeholders at Vertigo and the broadcaster, from programme development to delivery, making sure the financials, compliance and the right creatives are in place to bring the creative vision to fruition.

A key part of the job is attaching series producers, line producers, casting directors and international service producers who are never afraid to push boundaries and strive to elevate the creative vision (needless to say, safely on budget and on schedule).

What was your route into production management?

I came at it from a different angle, starting as a runner at Rushes motion

control studio and training as a camera assistant and clapper loader back in the 1990s. I was one of only five female camera assistants in the country, and this stood me in good stead for a career in production – not being intimidated by technical equipment and getting a rounded understanding of all the different crew and their roles on the floor.

I was really lucky to meet a production manager who worked in feature films and gave me an opportunity as a production secretary on a movie. I worked my way up through production management, mainly on films, to become a head of production.

What was the first film you worked on?

A British drama, *Elephant Juice*. Several films later, I was production manager on *Bend It Like Beckham* – we had an amazing, diverse crew and cast, and it was so much fun to work on. Sixteen years later, I worked with Gurinder Chadha again, as head of production on ITV period drama *Beecham House* and her latest film, *Blinded by the Light*.

What makes a good head of production?

Being calm under pressure, good

communication, working collaboratively, being able to multitask and prioritise efficiently, and keeping abreast of industry standards and regulations. And a good sense of humour.

What are the biggest challenges of the job?

Marrying editorial ambition and budget is the standard challenge across all productions. A more recent challenge is crewing productions. The UK film and TV industry is booming, with a huge amount of content being commissioned and produced here. However, there is a real shortage of experienced crew. Added to that, there are restrictions to training new crew caused by Covid-19 protocols.

Which people do you work with closely on a production?

Vertigo Films' executive producers James Richardson, Allan Niblo and Jane Moore, who are not afraid to take business risks and do things differently. I also work very closely with the series producer, line producer, financial controller and production lawyer. I'm also the conduit between the production and the broadcaster, keeping them



Blinded by the Light

Entertainment One

updated on the schedule, cost reports and raising any production red flags.

So, you are under pressure from all directions?

It's part and parcel of the job – you do get pushed from pillar to post at times. But we are all working for a common goal – to create the most ambitious show that we can all be proud of.

What do you bring to work with you?

A sense of humour and a spreadsheet. I liken a production to pulling together a circus or multiple circuses simultaneously, but on a global level. I have the privilege of working with so many incredibly skilled individuals from across the planet to bring the creative ambition to fruition, but this does require military-level planning, communication and organisation.

What does a typical working day look like?

I have a slate of projects, all at different stages, usually one in development or early pre-production, one filming and one in post-production.

Those in early pre-production require planning, budgeting, scheduling

and feasibility studies, before we start sourcing the key production talent, deciding where we film the project and looking for tax rebates.

For those shows in production and in post, I regularly liaise with my teams and am available to deal with problems as and when they arise.

Is the job different outside the UK?

At Raw TV, I worked all over the world – the US, Canada, Africa, Europe and the Far East. The skills are transferable but there are differences: one of the most important in the US is having to work with unions such as the IATSE, the Writers Guild of America and Screen Actors Guild. The film and TV industry in India is also unionised – there are at least three times the crew per production in India as in the UK.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best is the day you lock the budget and finance is closed, preferably before you start filming. The next is the day the series producer and the line producer start. Recently, the worst has been dealing with schedule changes due to Covid-related incidents.

What show are you most proud of working on?

Miracle Landing on the Hudson because of the logistics involved. We got a decommissioned 737, which had been stripped of its parts, and built the biggest tank and green screen in Europe just for this shoot. We ended up craning the plane into the tank and then sunk it with 150 people inside in a safe, controlled environment.

Are there any tricks of the trade you can share with us?

Joined-up conversations, staying close to the creatives, knowing what's going on and sharing information. It's all about teamwork.

How has the job changed since you started?

The TV industry is far busier now – there is such an appetite for content. There is also an industry drive to look after your crew; everyone works long hours and under pressure, which has been exacerbated by Covid.

At Vertigo, we strive to look after our crews' wellbeing: we have an HR consultant attached to our shows and we employ a wellbeing company that is available to all cast and crew.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to break into production management?

It's an exciting time to work in our growing industry. It does require a lot of hard work, commitment and passion, but you can certainly move up through the ranks faster than before.

ScreenSkills offers fantastic opportunities and training to learn about production; working as a runner gives you a real sense of how the industry works. If you've got organisational skills from another sector, they are transferable to TV and film.

What TV series would you love to work on?

Vertigo is currently filming a crime thriller set in the 1980s, *A Town Called Malice*, created and written by Nick Love for Sky. It's an explosive gangster family drama set on the Costa del Sol, strongly driven by a banging 1980s soundtrack and with an unexpected kick-arse twist. I grew up in the 1980s and loved everything about the era apart from shoulder pads. ■

Sandra Shuttleworth was interviewed by Matthew Bell.



Then Barbara Met Alan stars Ruth Madeley and Arthur Hughes

BBC

Primetime for disability

Watching two disabled people make love on prime-time terrestrial TV is something many disability campaigners thought they'd never see. But last month, in BBC Two's widely praised drama *Then Barbara Met Alan*, we witnessed the eponymous Barbara and Alan enjoy being intimate in a scene that may well go down as one of the most powerful and moving moments of TV drama in 2022.

Then Barbara Met Alan is a rollicking, neo-punk love story – Barbara is a comedian and Alan is a musician – interlaced with another story, the battle for disability rights. This is a little-known piece of history that failed to achieve the cultural cut-through of, say, Roy Jenkins' social reforms of the 1960s, including gay rights, which may tell us something about common social attitudes to the disabled.

As the BBC screens *Then Barbara Met Alan*, RTS Futures considers if life is improving for TV's disabled workforce

Barbara Lisicki and Alan Holdsworth were the founders of disability activism group DAN. The campaign for basic rights for the disabled led to the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, which, as the film highlights, was only the beginning of changes in the law that would eventually improve millions of disabled people's lives. This belated piece of legislation had to be fought hard for.

The film recounts the exhilarating story of how disability rights campaigners took to the streets (and the TV studios – an early target was *ITV Television 90* and *92*, which the protesters

who went on to found DAN in 1993 regarded as utterly patronising). They were claiming the right to do what most of us take for granted: things such as being able to get on to a bus or use a public toilet, never mind disabled access at restaurants and venues.

The film was co-written by Genevieve Barr and Jack Thorne, the prolific screenwriter and disability advocate and recent winner of the Single Drama prize at the RTS Programme Awards for his Covid drama *Help*.

Thorne told an RTS Futures event, "Disability and the TV industry: All change?" that *Then Barbara Met Alan*'s high profile was another sign of an improved attitude and working conditions for disabled people who work in television.

He was asked by session chair Jordan Jarrett-Bryan, who works as a sports reporter for *Channel 4 News*, whether the TV industry was somewhere that harnessed, developed and enabled

disabled talent to flourish and have a thriving career.

“It didn’t used to be those things. The hope is it’s changing,” said the screenwriter. “It feels like it’s changing. Over the past year, we’ve seen an enormous amount of progress from all the broadcasters... ScreenSkills is training accessibility co-ordinators who will be on set. That will make a huge difference. [But] more than any of that, it’s the attitude that is changing.”

The BBC’s handling of *Then Barbara Met Alan* illustrated his point. Director-General Tim Davie had hosted a screening, the film was given a 9:00pm slot on BBC Two and followed by a marketing blitz to encourage audiences to seek the programme out on iPlayer.

Thorne told the RTS this was in complete contrast to his two previous TV dramas that dealt with disability themes. They were pushed to the margins of the schedules: “It was like wading through glue. It was impossible to get any attention for them...”

“Hopefully, the attention given to *Then Barbara Met Alan* is part of a change in getting disabled stories told by disabled people on screen. That means that people who are coming into the industry are coming into an industry that has an appetite for their work.”

Significantly, many of the production staff on the film were themselves disabled. Co-director Amit Sharma was asked what it was like working on a show with so many disabled people. “I’ve done large-scale theatre with disabled people in the UK and internationally, with audiences of 6,000 people, so coming off a set where so many people identified as deaf, disabled and neurodiverse felt really natural,” he said. “We created a culture on set where people felt safe. They started to declare their impairments... Everyone wanted to learn about sign language... We worked hard to make a joyful atmosphere. It was buzzing.”

Jarrett-Bryan asked panellist Ally Castle, Channel 4’s creative diversity and disability lead, if she could tell that *Then Barbara Met Alan* was made by disabled people and not just about >



Jack Thorne

Richard Kendall

Thorne demands support for talent

Accepting his award for Outstanding Contribution to Television at the RTS Programme Awards 2022, Jack Thorne paid tribute to some of the disabled writers who’ve been marginalised by the TV sector.

He said: ‘Thank you very much. This is entirely overwhelming and I am hugely grateful. I love writing telly.

‘I think it’s the greatest job in the world and I can’t believe I get paid to do it. I can’t believe I get paid to make it. And making it with so many beautiful people has been the thrill of my life.

‘But I’m here because I got help. I got help from a huge number of people. And I started writing a list of all those people, and it got really long.

‘And, I thought I won’t read that, but what I thought I would read is a list of people who I think do need help and that is the disabled writers in our community who have been excluded historically, by the inequalities of television, and so I’m going to read them out and these people are tremendous talents.

‘And I hope and I pray that they’re going to get the opportunities I’ve had, and they are: Lettie Precious, Amy Trigg, Laurence Clark, Josh Merritt, Tim Renkow, Rosie Jones, Sophie Woolley, David Proud, Jamie Hale, Adam Fenton, Jackie Hagan, Lizzie Watson, Tom Wentworth, Charlie Swinbourne, Mat Fraser, Annalisa Dinnella, Matilda Ibini, Billy Mager, Ruth Madeley and Genevieve Barr.’

Recognition for wider *Strictly* casting policy

The 2021 season of BBC One’s *Strictly Come Dancing* was given the Judges’ Award at the RTS Programme Awards 2022. The judges highlighted its inclusive casting policy.

In this series, *EastEnders* star Rose Ayling-Ellis (pictured) became the first disabled contestant in the show’s 19-season history to win the glitterball



BBC

trophy. Ayling-Ellis was also the first deaf competitor to appear on *Strictly*, and thrilled audiences with her skill, grace and determination.

› them? “Absolutely,” she replied. “The tone of it was just right. It captured the real chaos of that movement, which was needed to get it noticed. The lack of concern about using the C-word was a beautiful thing.”

Nichola Garde runs the BBC’s Elevate scheme, which aims to remove some of the barriers, attitudinal as well as physical and cultural, that

producer Caroline O’Neill agreed. She is also co-director of Deaf and Disabled People in TV (DDPTV). She told the RTS that people with power needed to exert their influence if change for the better was to continue.

“If you’re a senior person in the industry, you have a responsibility to bring people in and not just a white disabled person,” she said “It’s harder

pioneering. Think of its coverage of the Paralympics and shows such as *The Last Leg*. However, Ally Castle struck a cautious note when she said, “So often, I still feel we’re in that space where we’re hiring disabled people despite them being disabled.

“But our message at Channel 4 is that you should hire people because they are disabled. This whole ‘I don’t



make working in TV challenging for deaf, disabled and neurodiverse people. Of *Then Barbara Met Alan* she said that, “although it was amazing to be working with on-screen disabled talent, the real shift for them was working with off-screen disabled and non-disabled talent. Creating a safe space where everybody could learn from each other and have some fun was so important.”

While the situation in the production space may be improving for disabled people, television still has a mountain to climb in appointing more disabled men and women to senior industry roles. Michael Grade, Ofcom’s next Chair, acknowledged there was a problem when he was interviewed last month by the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee. Grade said it would be a priority for him to have more disabled people on company boards.

Series director and executive

‘IF YOU ARE A DISABLED PERSON, YOU ARE HELD BACK IN YOUR CAREER’

to be more diverse but if we don’t take more responsibility, we can’t change the shape of the industry. We can’t just talk a good game about it, we have to action it.”

O’Neill added: “I’ve been in the industry for a long time, [and] we’ve not been allowed to prosper as others have. If you’re a disabled person, you’re held back in your career. People like to cast in their own, white, male mould.”

It is widely acknowledged that Channel 4’s commitment to disabled representation on screen has been

see colour, I don’t see disability’ is not very helpful because then you can’t make the right adjustments to understand where this talent is coming from.

“We say: hire disabled talent because they are not only going to help you connect with your audience – on paper, 20% of whom are disabled – but they bring with them so many skills and life experiences...”

“I want disabled people to be proud of being disabled and to say: ‘This is what I am bringing to your production.’ We want our indies and our broadcasters to recognise all the great value that they bring.”

And more shows of the quality and vigour of *Then Barbara Met Alan*, please. ■

Report by Steve Clarke. ‘Disability and the TV industry: All change?’ was an RTS Futures event held on 22 March. The producer was Gaby Hornsby, TV lead for sustainability at the BBC.

OUR FRIEND IN SCOTLAND

Scotland's screen sector is buzzing. The daily lives of ordinary Glaswegians have recently been interrupted by the roar of *Batgirl's* Bat Bike and ticker-tape parades, as Glasgow's 19th-century Victorian architecture doubles for the far-flung or imaginary cities of Moscow, New York and Gotham.

COP26 arrived in Glasgow last year, with great hopes of a groundbreaking climate deal and an equally dazzling array of A-list talent.

The east of Scotland has recently played host to a range of high-end drama, too. Neil Gaiman and Amazon Studios shot *Good Omens* and *Anansi Boys* in Edinburgh, with David Tennant and Michael Sheen exciting locals and providing Scottish tabloid fodder. Netflix's supernatural thriller *The Rig*, starring Martin Compston, filmed in Leith, and ITV's *Karen Pirie* in St Andrews.

New shows are exciting and hugely valuable, but returning series are critical to training and retaining talent and a healthy production sector. Sony's StarzPlay drama *Outlander* has been a mainstay of Scottish drama production in the central belt for seven series. ITV Studios' *Shetland* has six series in the bag.

So, the future is bright, then? Yes, it could be, but continued growth and success depends on what comes next. The future depends on a sustainable, thriving screen ecosystem, including a solid infrastructure, a talent pipeline and a strong foundation of original home-grown content alongside the incoming productions.

When they roll into town, the epic scale of high-end shows is dazzling

Stephen O'Donnell enjoys the glamour of A-listers filming in Scotland but warns this activity must be underpinned by local production



STV

and attracts headlines. The value of this activity to the Scottish economy is significant. But Scotland's screen industry is much more than headline-grabbing glamour.

Its foundations are in the public service broadcasters, in hard-working indies, the post-production houses, facilities companies and local crews.

Ensuring we have world-leading facilities is essential but so is nurturing talent. The boom in production following the Covid shutdown in 2021 identified some key skills shortages: production managers, VFX and edit assistance, to name a few.

The response to these skills gaps has been as rapid as it has been impressive. Glasgow's new Kelvin Hall Studio will be completed this autumn. It will not only provide a hub for the Scottish screen sector but add

another much-needed entertainment studio and gallery alongside the drama stage that was home to STV Studios and Channel 4's prison drama *Screw* in 2021.

The studio complex is funded by Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government and will be operated by BBC Studioworks.

Of late, the PSBs have devolved both their footprint and commissioning power to the nations and regions. This has been great news for Scotland. Both the BBC Scotland channel and Channel 4's new Glasgow HQ have provided a huge shot in the arm for Scottish indies and will go some way to plugging the talent drain south.

The future of the public service media is the hot topic, with funding of the BBC and privatisation of Channel 4 polarising opinion. It's easy to get lost in the details but the success of the Scottish screen sector relies on a sustainable and diverse ecosystem.

For public service media to thrive, we need a new regulatory framework that offers protection as well as support, and stimulus measures to ensure nations and regions production across all genres continues to grow.

We need a sustainable future where PSBs can coexist and, importantly, thrive alongside global streamers. The success of the sector relies on continued opportunities to nurture new talent, regardless of their background, enabling them to forge a career in television in the nations and regions – where *Batgirl*, local drama production and the STV weatherman all have their place. ■

Stephen O'Donnell is Chair of RTS Scotland and director of programme strategy and marketing at STV.

Privatisation gets the green light



Channel 4's national headquarters in Leeds

Channel 4

In a string of tweets, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Nadine Dorries, announced on 4 April 2022 the privatisation of Channel 4. This policy will be part of a media bill to be announced in next month's Queen's Speech. When that bill reaches the top of the agenda, it will eventually kick off a legislative process via the House of Commons and the House of Lords designed to end the creation of Margaret Thatcher's Government 40 years ago this November.

Channel 4 doesn't cost the taxpayer a penny: it is self-funding, with 90% of its income coming from advertising. The broadcaster's primary features that could be scrubbed by the Government's

Claire Enders weighs the arguments for selling off Channel 4, which turns 40 this September

media bill or via the legislative process, include: the remit to serve young and diverse audiences; occupying a niche relative to mass-market ITV; its status as a 100% commissioner of content; and being a not-for-profit company.

Due to the last of these, Channel 4 reinvests its revenues – around £1bn in 2021 – net of irreducible in-house costs,

into the UK's creative economy, firmly planted in the private sector.

In addition, its Ofcom licence ends in 2024, and the channel's sale would require a new licence of sufficient term to justify a purchase. The plan appears to be to provide a licence to 2034, so the buyer would own a business that ends in a decade.

Dorries, however, indicated in her tweets that Channel 4's status as a public service broadcaster would continue. This implies a continued obligation to provide news and current affairs, and continued platform prominence on the EPG.

Finally, due to Ofcom's terms of trade, Channel 4 owns no intellectual property, which is vested in the

independent production companies from which it commissions; the terms of trade apply equally to other broadcasters, with minimum quotas for the independent production sector applying to each under their Ofcom licences.

This brief summary of the principal features of Channel 4's current shape serves to underline the many uncertainties – apart from the brand – over what will actually be up for sale when the Government sets out its stall for potential bidders, possibly by early 2024. Any buyer would also need to establish forecasts for likely advertising revenues and costs over its tenure of the next Ofcom licence.

consideration is absent in a tie-up between Channel 4 and a smaller broadcaster, such as Channel 5 or Discovery, but applies to pay-TV giant Sky. In addition to combining TV ad sales houses, trade buyers would also be able to extract synergies from their catalogues and content licensing deals, their digital delivery technologies, and consolidated back-office functions.

Interest in buying Channel 4 could extend to non-trade buyers, such as an investment vehicle. It's obvious that a non-trade buyer would not be able to offer synergies to Channel 4, which would impact on its investment case, an important consideration for the

recently finalised the purchase of film and TV studio MGM following regulatory clearance in the EU and US.

There are prominent voices – among them Sir David Attenborough and Armando Iannucci – that oppose the sale of Channel 4 on the grounds that a private buyer would never commission the innovative content the company has successfully brought to UK TV audiences. This is the unique value that they wish to protect. Those voices deserve to be heard.

From a commercial perspective, Enders Analysis is confident a buyer will be found for Channel 4. We estimate the price the Government could command for it sits between £600m and £1.5bn, with the figure of £1bn being batted about the media. Dorries intends to use the proceeds of the sale to “level up” the creative economy in the UK's regions.

Levelling up is a job that Channel 4 has done exceptionally well over the close to 40 years of its existence. It has worked with independent production companies and nurtured many micro-enterprises all over the UK, including in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and in many communities.

In a recent report by Ernst & Young, commissioned by Channel 4, the broadcaster was estimated to have contributed £992m to the UK economy in 2019, including £274m to the regional economy. Many MPs will find that businesses in their constituencies rely upon Channel 4's current regional quotas and will defend their continuation.

So why sell it? Because HM Treasury will obtain a cheque from the sale to spend on its “red wall” projects, while Channel 4 will continue to serve TV audiences. But it is simple logic that a buyer from the private sector will expect to make a profit, sufficient to repay the interest and capital borrowed, instead of returning all revenues to the creative economy as Channel 4 has done to date.

With the same multipliers used by Ernst & Young, this drop of spend would result in a reduced flow through the economy of upwards of £120m per year, eroding the Treasury's proceeds from the sale within five to 12 years of the channel's sale. ■

Claire Enders is the founder of Enders Analysis.



Channel 4's London office

Channel 4

Right now, the economic environment is rapidly becoming recessive due to the cost-of-living crisis impacting households' discretionary spending; going forwards, this will certainly impair the scale of TV advertising.

Much speculation has centred on the possible future owner of Channel 4. Might a buyer come from within the broadcasting sector? Fellow advertising-supported broadcaster ITV is a front runner. Were ITV to buy Channel 4, the new entity would account for the sale of about 70% of TV ads. As a result, it would, at the behest of advertisers, likely attract scrutiny from the Competition and Markets Authority.

They won't want to pay more for TV ads because of a merger. This

Government in relation to a buyer from within the sector.

Netflix and Amazon are also outside the broadcasting sector but would appear to be ruled out by Dorries' assertion that the sale of Channel 4 would allow it to be better able to compete with these SVoD companies – even though we do not see them as occupying the same market space. In any event, SVoD companies appear less likely as buyers, having perennial direct-to-consumer businesses delivering content over the internet that do not rely on time-bound Ofcom licences.

However, these companies display a strong interest in owning and operating intellectual property – which Channel 4 cannot offer. Amazon



My Dad Wrote a Porno

Acast

How podcasts stole the TV star

When BBC journalists Jon Sopel and Emily Maitlis announced they were following in the footsteps of Andrew Marr to join LBC and Classic FM owner Global and make a podcast, it left many people asking why – and wondering whether we have reached “peak podcast”.

According to the most recent figures from Enders Analysis, podcast listening has almost doubled over the past four years – in an average week, just over 17% of the UK population listen to a podcast.

Spotify has overtaken Apple in the UK as the largest provider, with around a 42% reach compared with 29% for Apple. A couple of years ago, Spotify made the strategic decision to diversify beyond music into spoken content; its biggest star, the controversial Joe Rogan, now pulls in around 11 million listeners globally per episode.

Tara Conlan charts the rise and rise of the audio format

YouTube and BBC Sounds are just behind – YouTube is more popular with the under-35s, while Sounds reaches more over-35s – followed by Amazon Music, which upped its ante by acquiring the independent podcast network Wondery in December 2020.

Audio storytelling is becoming big business, with advertisers realising the potential of allying themselves with exclusive talent to target young, affluent listeners. PwC estimates that podcast advertising expenditure will reach almost £75m in the UK in 2024.

TV is increasingly hoovering up podcasts, attracted by their proven IP and fan base: Chris and Rosie Ramsey have landed a BBC chat show drawing on their *Shagged, Married, Annoyed* podcast; and Amazon turned Gimlet

Media’s thriller *Homecoming* into a drama starring Julia Roberts.

Matt Hill, co-founder of the British Podcast Awards and whose company, Rethink Audio, makes podcasts such as Fearnie Cotton’s *Happy Place* and *The Retrospectors*, says: “The thing about podcasting generally is that it’s about new formats.

“Over the last 100 years or so, audio has been about radio – and radio replaces like for like. However, in podcasting, you’re reinventing the wheel: every time, you start from scratch.... So it’s a very exciting time for entrepreneurs to create new formats. A podcast can be [used as] a proof of audience.”

The sector took off in 2004, with the creation of a programme called iPodder, which enabled internet radio shows to be downloaded to Apple iPods.

Ricky Gervais was an early pioneer, turning his XFM show in 2005 into the world’s most downloaded podcast, *The Ricky Gervais Show*.

The modern megacast era began in

2014, with investigative true crime series *Serial*, hosted by Sarah Koenig.

But now that anyone can make a podcast, discoverability has become a big issue. According to the podcasting search engine Listen Notes, there are at least 2,814,865 podcasts in the world. Spotify alone claims to offer 2.9 million titles. Hiring proven talent, such as Maitlis and Soper, helps publishers cut through the noise to listeners.

What talent gets from the deal is more freedom, creative control and, they hope, more money.

One of the most famous UK breakout podcasts is *My Dad Wrote a Porno*. Launched in 2015, it features Jamie Morton reading from his dad's amateur pornographic novel and commenting on it with university friends Alice Levine and James Cooper. Downloaded more than 280 million times, it also stars celebrity fans such as Michael Sheen, Emma Thompson and George Ezra.

Former Radio 1 DJ Levine explains why podcasting appealed to the trio: "TV and radio didn't offer us what we needed, which was complete creative control – we had a vision and we knew we could deliver it more successfully independently. We were our own production house of three.

"At the time, I worked at the BBC so we could have taken it down that route. In fact, the BBC did make us an offer later, but we just knew we would have to water it down and be more hands off."

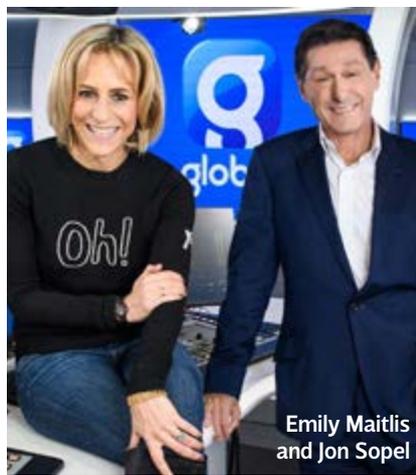
Levine – who now co-hosts Wondery's *British Scandal* podcast – adds: "The initial appeal was a space to launch a great idea without huge start-up costs or traditional broadcast backing. [Podcasts] also offer an informality and intimacy that is unique. You really feel part of a club."

Her co-host, writer and *Spitting Image* impressionist Matt Forde explains the appeal: "You can be so much more creative and make the thing you actually want to make, instead of adapting it for a commissioner. Obviously, you need standards, so editorial guidance is still important and helps improve a show. It's not about being completely unleashed for the sake of it, because that can have downsides if you're not careful."

The rise of smartphones, connected cars and smart speakers has helped podcasting. And, as Wondery's head of international, Declan Moore, says: "We are in an on-demand world where consumers have become accustomed to, and seek out, on-demand movies

and TV shows, order on-demand food and take on-demand transportation in increasing numbers." He is in no doubt that younger listeners consume the most podcasts, because they "have been able to feel close to their favourite personalities/creators through social-media follows and posts. They then have an opportunity to hear them directly in their ears as if they were eavesdropping on a conversation."

However, Enders analyst Tom Standen-Jewell is concerned that UK platforms are putting too much effort into competing with each other and thus losing out to the big global companies, in much the same way that the demise of Project Kangaroo allowed Netflix to beat BBC iPlayer to worldwide streaming dominance.



Emily Maitlis and Jon Soper

Global

He warns: "I think it would be sensible if BBC Sounds were to be the home to all UK speech podcasts; that would present a viable competitor. What you have now, however, is a situation in which they're all starting up their own platforms.

"I heard it described the other day as: they are all bricks, and individually they're a bit useless – but if they could join together they could make a decent wall against Spotify and Amazon."

In February, the BBC said its Sounds app delivered 364 million plays of all content across radio, podcasts and music mixes – its most popular quarter since it launched in 2018.

Radio 4 commissioning editor for digital and podcasts Rhian Roberts thinks we are nowhere near "peak podcast": "I can't imagine human beings running out of stories to tell. On BBC Sounds, we're using audio to give listeners even more ways to enjoy their favourite BBC TV shows, such as *Line of Duty*, *Killing Eve* and *Peaky Blinders*

through podcasts and soundtracks."

She says presenters have told her that they "feel more themselves, presenting podcasts. I guess, when you join a radio station, that station has its own tone of voice, and you take that on board. You can't help it, no matter how much encouragement you're given to be yourself. With a podcast, if you're the host, you really can create your own world on more or less your own terms. And there can be a more direct relationship with the audience, too."

On hit BBC podcast *Battersea Poltergeist*, listeners contribute their own thoughts and theories, which creates a community, says host Danny Robins: "One of the nicest things subscribers tell me is that they feel like I'm their friend."

He says podcasts "still have a cool cachet" and feel "very liberating, having spent a lot of my career having to fit a certain kind of format or mould... there's the freedom to tell a story in whatever way you choose."

Encouragingly, smaller companies are still making a mark in podcasting. The New Books Network (NBN) is a public education platform that claims close to 5 million downloads a month. Founder and historian Marshall Poe has grown the service by word of mouth, with the aim of it making it an "audio Wikipedia" and prefers to call it "narrowcasting". He explains: "The world is made up of a zillion tiny 'communities of interest.' Prior to... podcasting... there was no way to economically provide relevant content for these smallish communities."

Former BBC journalist Owen Bennett-Jones, who hosts *The Future of...* podcast on the platform, adds: "NBN is unusual in that its main motivation is public education [and] it gets loads of downloads, too."

Standen-Jewell believes we "could be on the cusp of a golden age" of podcasting and that Maitlis and Soper's move to Global – along with their *Americast* producer Dino Sofos – shows they "can see the growth coming" in terms of advertising money and listenership.

"The key thing about the move for Global, Maitlis and Soper is that I think they feel they can address an international audience with their podcast; podcasts can scale up on an international level because they are through [the internet] rather than broadcast, so I think they see big potential, especially in the US." ■



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Journalists under fire

An RTS event hears how TV reporters and editorial teams are meeting the challenges of covering the war in Ukraine



Evgeniy Maloletka/Associated Press/iStockPhoto.com

As the Ukraine conflict again demonstrates, war reporting requires brave, experienced, and knowledgeable reporters and crews in the field, alongside exacting judgments and guidance from editorial and production teams back in the UK.

Channel 5 News presenter and erstwhile war reporter Sian Williams, who hosted the RTS discussion “The fog of war: Ukraine – broadcasters on the front line”, pointed out that, in the first three weeks of the war, five journalists had been killed and 35 injured.

Two of those hurt were from Sky News. Their team, including reporter Stuart Ramsay, were ambushed and shot by Russian fighters on the road to Kyiv. They are now at home recuperating, said Sky’s director of news, Jonathan Levy. “Andrii [Lytvynenko], the local producer, is in Lviv, of course. He’s with his girlfriend and family but the four-strong Sky team is back and doing OK. But it was clearly a very difficult and harrowing experience for them.

“As it turned out, they were the fortunate ones. People have had similar experiences since, who have been less fortunate. They’re very conscious of that, as we all are.”

Hind Hassan, a correspondent for Vice News who is covering the war, was only too aware of the dangers. She joined the panel live from Ukraine while travelling by van from Kharkiv to a safer location. “It’s been difficult, definitely,” she said. “There have been moments of quiet, but there were a few days where there was an increase in air strikes on the city and you could hear ingoing and outgoing fire, and we were very close to some of those strikes. We are the lucky ones who get to leave the city and go somewhere safe, hopefully. You know that there are many people who don’t have that privilege.”

While luck plays a part in keeping war reporting teams safe, it was the Sky team’s collective experience that helped them survive the attack and informed “everything, from where to put themselves in the car in that particular situation to how to extract themselves, to get away from the situation, and all the subsequent responses”, said Levy.

Editors are conscious that they need to ensure there is a range of experience in the teams to help train newer >

› staff. “Everyone who is going to do this kind of work is going to do it for the first time at some point,” explained Levy. “The idea is to put them with people who have more experience, from whom they can learn, and that the overall blend of the team is the correct one and a safe one.”

As Williams reminded everyone, this terrifying European war comes after two years of a global pandemic, which had already stretched the resources of news teams and tested their mental health. Covid had also had a direct impact on some of the coverage.

BBC diplomatic correspondent Paul Adams began reporting from Ukraine before the war broke out. He caught Covid just as the situation escalated: “I was on the floor physically, and I realised just how vulnerable mentally that makes you. You are much more prey to fear and anxiety when you’re tired than you are when you’re fit and well.”

In this situation, he had to balance the responsibility of self-isolation with personal safety. “After the first night of sleeping down in the bunker but trying to keep away from the others because I was still testing positive, I actually returned to my room,” he said. “But I thought, ‘If I do start hearing things go bang in the middle of the night, I’ll go down to the bunker with everyone else.’”

One of the challenges for broadcasters such as the BBC is to stay impartial. Western reporting paints Russia as the “bad guys” – but that’s justified, said Adams. “You have to get back to the fundamental truth that this was an unprovoked assault on a democratic country,” he said. “I can’t think of a conflict I’ve covered that felt less grey.”

The editor of *ITV News*, ITN’s Rachel Corp, agreed: “You can remain impartial but one thing we’ve talked about is that we shouldn’t lose our empathy when it comes to Russians who have been killed,” she said. “Holding on to your compassion through it all still makes it OK to be mostly telling the story of the horror that Ukrainians are going through.”

Adams said: “I’m assuming that is why none of our organisations have shown the live press conferences with Russian prisoners of war who have been paraded by the Ukrainians for political purposes, because they were willing to say that they were conscripts and that they didn’t know why they were fighting.”

This war follows the current media trend, with much of it being played out



Hind Hassan

Vice News

on social media. User-generated content posted on platforms such as Telegram is accepted as a valuable tool in war reporting, with fact-checking teams employed to verify material.

“I remember when I was in the newsroom at Sky during the Arab Spring,” said Hassan, “videos came through that were sometimes automatically tweeted out by people, and it would transpire later that the video was from a different place or even another country. But we’ve learnt a lot and come a long way [since then].”

For Corp’s verification unit at ITN, checking footage often involves running it past the team in the field, who have on-the-ground knowledge of locations and timelines. Geolocating is important: it also verifies the age of the footage. It is vital to cross-reference footage with other user-generated content and run information past fact-checking organisations such as Bellingcat and the Centre for Information Resilience.

As for the impact on people’s mental health of having to view graphic footage of the war, research suggests that those who watch disturbing images are at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder.

“We had it with Syria and with the Arab Spring, but I think there’s an intensity and a volume of [troubling raw footage] now and it’s relentless,” said Corp. She encouraged her staff to take breaks and to avoid footage they were uncomfortable with, and to lead by example. “The cumulative effect of these [images] makes me cry when I see them.... It’s about discussing with colleagues that it’s OK to take a break, to flag it if they’re struggling with it. Our mental health support is for them as well – it’s not just for the people who have been in Kharkiv or Mariupol. There’s nothing good about being desensitised to it.”

Williams offered advice from psychologists, such as looking at footage on fast forward or watching the visuals but not the audio. This helps to create



RTS

Diversifying the newsroom

Some British coverage of the war in Ukraine has drawn accusations of being western-centric, and of giving the impression that war in a 'civilised nation' is more shocking than wars in, for example, Afghanistan, Yemen or Syria.

When BBC News aired an interview with Ukraine's former deputy prosecutor general, David Sakvardze, he remained unchallenged when he discussed the tragedy of 'European people with blue eyes and blond hair being killed every day'.

Taking a fair and rigorous stance to any topic requires conscious thought, and it helps to have a diverse newsroom where a spread of viewpoints is already ingrained.

'There are a lot of incredible, incredible journalists who are working on this. I have to say that first,' said Hind Hassan of Vice News. '[But] of course it is frustrating when you hear certain things being repeated. At that point [you need to recognise] that there is some form of institutional problem that we have to deal with. The reality we have to face is that journalism remains an elitist industry.'

A diverse newsroom shouldn't only have a mix of genders, ages and ethnicities, but also classes and regions. From Hull herself, Hassan understands the power of representation: 'From watching Channel 4, Sky News or the BBC, I've seen changes and it makes me smile when I hear somebody with a regional accent talking.'

'It is definitely something that is getting better, but there is a long way to go in order for us to be able to really represent the stories we're seeing.'

a distance. Another technique is to make the window smaller on the screen – Corp said she sometimes views footage with her hand held in front of the screen.

For those reporting from the war zone, there are tried and tested approaches to mental health support (see page 22), such as TRiM (trauma risk management). 'I was TRiM trained about 15 years ago when I was at the BBC,' recalled Williams, who reported from Bosnia in the 1990s. 'Then, it was quite hard to get journalists to come forward after they'd returned from something difficult.'

'I think the conversation around mental health and resilience levels has changed fundamentally since then. Designed by a military psychiatrist, the debriefing – and certainly my own research with journalists in mental health shows that this processing with people who understand, who are often there with you – is one of the first steps towards being able to deal with it subsequently.'

Adams' recent experience confirmed this. He described how, after he and his six-person team left Kyiv, they were told to stay in Romania, where a mental health professional would join them. 'In the van that night, I think we all thought, 'to hell with that. We want to get home quickly now'. We all tumbled into bed at about 4:00am, woke up the following day and thought, 'Yeah, we're going to stay here. This is a good idea. We're together. We have lots to talk about.'

'The idea [is that] if you stay together, have that decompression, peace and quiet, and the ability to chat it through, you're off to a good start.'

Take-up of aftercare has traditionally been lower than it perhaps should be because a typical trauma response is avoidance. Also, freelancers and those at the start of their careers are less likely to seek help, for fear of it harming their prospects or because they feel support isn't available to them.

To counter this, news teams are now more proactive in delivering aftercare. Levy said: 'We've slightly changed the emphasis and, when people come back, they get contacted by a specialist in trauma who has that initial conversation with them, and then a follow-up. You don't have to seek it out, it comes to you.'

He added: 'We're all learning the whole time, both as individual organisations and collectively about how we can make operating in these types of places safer.'

'What's common is that all our organisations think it's absolutely vital to be there on the ground and witness these stories and report on them if we can, and to work out how to do that in as safe a way as possible.' ■

Report by Shilpa Ganatra. 'The fog of war: Ukraine – broadcasters on the front line' was an RTS event held on 17 March. The producers were Sue Robertson and Steve Clarke.



BBC correspondent Quentin Sommerville in Kharkiv, Ukraine

BBC

First aid for the mind

News organisations go to great lengths to protect the mental health of the teams they send to conflicts such as Ukraine. **Caroline Frost** reports

There are different kinds of fear," says Quentin Sommerville, the BBC's Middle East correspondent. "There's the risk of getting kidnapped, the threat of roadside bombs and, here in Ukraine, the danger from shelling."

Anyone who's tuned in to Sommerville's compelling TV and radio news reports from some of the most volatile areas of this conflict will realise that he

is not exaggerating the threat to himself and members of his production crew. A fortnight ago, he was filming a piece to camera in the eastern city of Kharkiv, when Russian rockets began to fall, and the camera rolled as the team dashed for shelter.

While the work of Sommerville, his crew and the hundreds of other journalists dispatched to Ukraine is crucial in telling the full military, political and people's story of this war, the personal

toll on these professionals' mental health is not something any broadcaster carries lightly. Whether it's preparing teams for deployment abroad, managing their welfare overseas or debriefing them on the return home, news organisations across the industry have developed an increasingly sophisticated system for protecting their staff's mental health.

At the centre of the preparation for all staff who may be deployed to a war zone is HEFAT (hostile environment and first aid training). This lasts an initial five days, with a mandatory three-day refresher course every three years.

These courses provide a mixture of security and medical information, theory and practical exercises. They include sessions on planning, conflict management, dealing with hostile crowds and checkpoints, all the way through to ballistic awareness, psychological trauma awareness and hostage survival.

For Andy Brown, a camera operator and editor for Sky News who has just returned from Ukraine after three weeks working with correspondent Nick Martin, the value of HEFAT only became truly apparent out in the field. He explains: "Throughout the course, there's a certain kind of gallows humour – they give the villages fake names that sound dangerous with scenarios that are bound to go wrong. You know it's a fantasy world with a pub lunch.

"It's only when you're facing something in real life, you're at a checkpoint in Ukraine, with a teenager pointing a gun at you, that you thank your lucky stars you've done that course. It equips you like muscle memory. You know the right things to say, to do and, most importantly, when to shut your mouth."

Sommerville agrees that HEFAT and its follow-up refreshers are essential for giving confidence when reporting from the front line. "I'm about to do my fifth course. The medical training is very good. It's easy to forget how to do a proper tourniquet."

Managers are tasked with checking that their staff are psychologically prepared for anything they might face. A BBC mental health specialist refers to the BBC's mantra that deployments into hostile regions are always

voluntary, and the HEFAT course is one tool for the organisation to ensure that staff are aware of the challenges ahead and are thus deploying with a level of “informed consent”.

Sky News is equally vigilant. Brown describes how emails regularly arrived from managers, asking for any volunteers to go to Ukraine. “As soon as I said yes, my boss rang me up, wanting to have a conversation to make sure I knew exactly what was involved – how mentally taxing it would be, that we’d be on standby 24/7 for air raid sirens.

“We live in a secure bubble in the UK, and they need to know you’re psychologically prepared to visit a place where the worst things that can happen are actually happening. Then, your kit arrives nearer to departure, and it includes a bag of medical supplies and bullet-proof vests. That’s when you think, this is really happening.”

The high level of concern and support continues once staff are posted. HEFAT includes a catalogue of resources that can be accessed remotely, including support for medical needs, counselling and 24-hour emergency needs, including psychological trauma.

Additionally, the BBC runs specific courses for managers to highlight the importance of checking in with staff. The corporation’s mental health specialist adds: “Hostile environments are exceptionally demanding, with staff under pressure to provide good material who often neglect their health needs.

“There is a level of competitiveness and professional pride that can prevent staff from holding up their hands to say, ‘I’m finding things tough’. So we make sure managers engage and communicate well, to make sure it’s a safe space to admit if you’re finding work difficult.”

Of course, everyone is different, and Brown favours a more hands-off approach than some others, something his manager was able to accommodate. “He asked me how often I’d like to be checked up on, and I opted for once a week. During that chat, he asked, ‘How are you?’. I’d say, ‘Fine’, and then we’d pause. That pause can be the most important moment, because in it comes the truth. If my manager had felt

anxious with anything he heard in that moment, he would have pulled me out immediately, but fortunately I always said enough to keep him happy.”

Brown, who has previously worked in Iraq and the Western Sahara, agrees people can have blind spots. “It’s far

contacted by TRiM (trauma risk management) professionals and assessed for wellbeing. Managers are also trained to look for reactions and when to engage and explore whether staff should seek further specialist support.

The BBC’s mental health specialist



Burying civilian casualties in Bucha, Ukraine

Washington Post

easier to recognise fatigue in someone else than it is in yourself. Everywhere you look, there are stories, and you can get wrapped up in it all and forget about yourself. It’s up to all of us to keep an eye on one another and to say, ‘Let’s go and have a chat.’

“You can’t spend that long being permanently on edge, it will break you, so you have to have gallows humour and somewhere to escape. Dangerous situations create bonds like no other.”

For Sommerville, who has been reporting from hostile regions since 2008, looking after himself while covering a conflict boils down to a straightforward, deliberately practical approach: “Focus on the work and don’t let your imagination run away with you. Take a deep, relaxing breath before checkpoints and smile.”

No one believes that the challenges of this kind of journalism come to an end with the flight home. The BBC is encouraging all staff returning from Ukraine to take a couple of days off to catch up on sleep and decompress, even before returning home to “normal” life.

All those returning are individually

adds: “It’s normal to be impacted by stories about human suffering. Most journalists go into the profession because they care and want to make a difference, so why wouldn’t they have emotional responses?”

“We also acknowledge the impact of moral injury and vicarious trauma – impacting those staff not in Ukraine but talking to contributors, editing material, those finding the content harrowing and distressing.”

Andy Brown had a chat with his manager immediately on landing back in the UK – “it’s a very human need to debrief” – then took a week off.

He agrees it takes a few days to adjust to reality, particularly as he was still running an app he used in Ukraine to monitor air raids. “I was walking to a coffee shop when the app went off in my pocket. It snapped me right back, I started searching for cover until I caught myself. I clicked on the app, pressed mute and, with that, my work was done, for a while at least.”

For Sommerville, debriefing is simple: “Fresh air, family and Frank the dog. Delete Twitter and turn off work email. Sleep.” ■

Everyone's a winner



Here We Flo organic tampons advert March 2022

Sky

Advertising-supported on-demand TV is the coming thing. Industry insiders are convinced it is the key to maintaining subscriptions at their current high levels. Despite many viewers' aversion to ads, the belief is that people will put up with them in return for lower monthly fees.

Broadcasters certainly think so, if recent announcements are any guide. In early March, ITV announced the launch of ITViX – a platform that integrates advertising- and subscription-funded video-on-demand (AVoD and SVoD) – to replace ITV Hub. Viewers can choose to watch content for free in an advertising-funded tier or pay for a subscription service to watch ad-free.

In the same month, Disney+ revealed that it would be introducing in late 2022 an advert-supported subscription as an alternative to its ad-free service in the US, with plans to expand internationally in 2023.

Even Netflix – previously an arch opponent of adverts – refuses to rule

The RTS learns why streaming services that carry adverts are gaining traction

out adopting a lower-cost, ad-funded subscription model.

At a well-attended RTS event in central London, “Is AVoD the new SVoD?”, Katie Coteman, vice-president for advertising and partnerships at Discovery, revealed details of a new ad-supported tier for its streaming service, Discovery+, in the UK.

Coteman said: “You can either pay ‘full fat’ and get all our entertainment and sports content for £6.99 [per month] or, [for] a few ads... you can pay £3.99 and get access to our entertainment pack. We recognise that people are at their limit when it comes to the stacking of products.”

She added, during research, “three-quarter of our subscribers said that they wouldn't mind a few ads to

pay less, so we are giving them what they asked for – and converting all of our entertainment subscribers into ad-light subscribers.”

Sport, though, including Eurosport's exhaustive coverage of cycling, tennis and the Olympics, will remain a premium SVoD product.

A member of the audience cut to the chase by asking Coteman: “Do you make more money from a £3.99 subscriber taking ads or from a £6.99 SVoD subscriber?”

She replied, with welcome honesty: “In the US, our ad-light subscribers are more valuable to us... but not everyone wants it; it's not a one size fits all – you can't have only an ad-light SVoD service because lots of people couldn't think of anything worse than watching an ad.”

Dave Castell, general manager of inventory and partnerships, EMEA at media buying platform The Trade Desk, said TV was at a “crossroads”. He explained: “Brits are watching more high-quality video-on-demand than ever before... But, at the same time, we're seeing... subscription fatigue, so

consumers are reaching a limit of how many paid subscriptions they want on the go.”

Castell added: “[We] found that about half of people wouldn’t spend more than £10 a month on streaming services, limiting them to a grand total of one subscription-funded streaming service.”

Deloitte predicts that at least 150 million paid subscriptions to streaming video services will be cancelled worldwide this year.

But in countries such as the UK, any decline would be from an all-time high. Barb recently reported that the number of UK households with access to an SVoD service had risen above 19 million for the first time.

Castell, however, identified a positive trend for AVoD services: “Brits’ appetite for ad-funded streaming services... [has] grown – our research has found that two out of every five people would prefer a subsidised service, potentially offset by ads.”

Television, he reminded the RTS audience, “sits at the centre of almost every big campaign and team – that’s still the case in most media agencies... Great TV ads can stay with you for ever and, more than that, they’re trusted [by viewers].”

The panel discussed the decline in audiences for traditional linear-TV and the challenges this posed for advertising, although Dan Fahy, Paramount’s SVP for streaming, UK, pointed out that “linear, for the homes it’s in, is still a very healthy business”, and that Channel 5, a Paramount Global company, “is having its best... months ever in its history this year”.

Nevertheless, said Fahy, 3 million UK homes “don’t have a traditional TV connection – they don’t have Freeview, cable or satellite”, and a further 10 million viewers could be categorised as “VoD first”.

He explained that My5 (Channel 5’s VoD service) and Pluto TV – an example of free advertiser-supported TV (Fast) that features “unblockable and non-stoppable ads” (surely an advertiser’s dream come true?) – are spearheading Paramount’s drive into AVoD.

“Part of our big push into AVoD through Pluto and My5 is recognising [that non-linear viewers] want a varied TV mix – and that’s not going to be satisfied purely by SVoD services.”

And, pointed out Discovery’s Coteman, “The decline in linear-TV is particularly obvious among the younger and more upmarket viewers

‘ADVERTISING IS ALWAYS GOING TO BE NEEDED TO HELP FUND THE PROGRAMMING THAT’S MADE’

whom advertisers are prepared to pay more for.”

Tom Harris, connections manager, UK and Ireland, at AB InBev, whose brands include Budweiser and Stella Artois, admitted that declining linear-TV audiences presented a challenge to the ad industry: “Look at 16-34 consumption of TV – it is an indication of where it’s going. Only 55% of their viewing is traditional... there’s a huge amount now that’s on-demand, that is either SVoD or AVoD, or other forms of video such as YouTube – that’s only going to continue to [grow].”

He added: “TV is just such a fantastic medium for return on investment and trust – consumers trust brands that are on TV more than any other medium.

“Although you can get reach quite cheaply from... social media, it’s a very different type of experience... it’s a two- or three-second view. [With TV,] you’ve got 20-30 seconds to tell a story and that really does something different: you can create a connection with your audience and [get] the brand across.”

Harris argued that AVoD could help give advertisers the big audiences offered by linear-TV. He pointed to ITVX and Disney+’s new ad-supported subscription services as evidence “that, at the end of the day, advertising is always going to be needed to help fund the programming that’s made”.

Viewers, he argued, were not resistant to ads: “Consumers realise there’s no such thing as a free lunch and advertising traditionally always paved the way for the content they’re watching.”

He argued that consumers positively like adverts that are targeted at them personally: “It makes the experience better for consumers... as long as it’s not creepy and calling you by your name... What we don’t want is crap advertising that’s not suited to us.”

Harris concluded: “On an AVoD [platform], if the experience can replicate the best of SVoD, then why wouldn’t you go to an advertising platform to watch your content? It’s not a barrier... it’s a small price to pay in terms of time spent [watching] advertising for quality stuff. The continuation of the shift to AVoD is a good thing for advertisers and a good thing for consumers’ wallets.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. ‘Is AVoD the new SVoD?’ was held on 15 March in central London. It was chaired by Gideon Spanier, UK editor-in-chief of Campaign, and produced by Kate Bulkley and Julie McKeen.

Jargon buster

VoD video on-demand: recorded content streamed over the internet (which distinguishes it from real-time ‘live streaming’ of content)

SVoD Subscription video-on-demand

AVoD Advertising video-on-demand

BVoD Broadcaster video-on-demand

CTV Connected-TV: a TV set connected to the internet, or ‘smart TV’

HVoD Hybrid video-on-demand; also known as ‘ad-light’ TV or ‘ad-supported’ TV

Fast Free advertiser-supported TV

OTT Over-the-top: streaming any content over the internet (avoiding satellite or cable) to a tablet, smartphone, laptop or smart TV



RTS NATIONAL EVENT

ONCE UPON A TRUE CRIME

Exclusive first look at Crime+Investigation's new documentary series

20 April

6:30pm for 6:45pm start

Venue: British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB

Two of the UK's best-known crime writers, **Mark Billingham** and **Douglas Skelton**, discuss their works and the real-life cases that inspired them with **Dan Korn**, VP Programming for A+E Networks, and event chair **Caroline Frost**



Douglas Skelton



Mark Billingham

Booking: rts.org.uk

(tickets are £15 but free for RTS full members)

CRIME+
INVESTIGATION

Callum Scott Howells
– *It's a Sin*, Actor (Male)

RTS Programme Awards 2022

Hosted by **Tom Allen**, the awards were presented on 29 March at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London, in partnership with Audio Network

audionetwork 

Channel 4

Actor (Female)

Gabrielle Creevy – *In My Skin*

Expectation for BBC

The judges described this performance as ‘really very special. The actor’s skilfully nuanced work in this piece was quite exceptional.’

Nominees:

▶ **Sharlene Whyte – *Stephen***, HTM Television for ITV

▶ **Keeley Hawes – *It’s a Sin***, Red Production Company, a StudioCanal Company, for Channel 4 in association with HBO Max

Actor (Male)

Callum Scott Howells – *It’s a Sin*

Red Production Company, a StudioCanal Company, for Channel 4 in association with HBO Max

‘A really fine performance of profound tenderness and subtlety – a performance that lives long in the mind.’

Nominees:

▶ **Tahar Rahim – *The Serpent***, Mammoth Screen for BBC in association with Netflix

▶ **Olly Alexander – *It’s a Sin***, Red Production Company, a StudioCanal Company, for Channel 4 in association with HBO Max

Arts

Lady Boss: *The Jackie Collins Story*

Passion Pictures for BBC

‘Real honesty, great depth and it felt like a genuine appointment to view.’

Nominees:

▶ **African Apocalypse**, Inside Out Films and Lemkino Pictures for BBC

▶ **Freddie Mercury: *The Final Act***, Rogan Productions for BBC

Breakthrough Award

Adjani Salmon – *Dreaming Whilst Black*

Big Deal Films for BBC

‘A performance that supported the writing really deftly... a performer whose work is charismatic and charming... a star in the making.’

Nominees:

▶ **Callum Scott Howells – *It’s a Sin***, Red Production Company, a StudioCanal Company, for Channel 4 in association with HBO Max

▶ **Anjana Vasan – *We Are Lady Parts***, Working Title Television, which is a part of Universal International Studios, for Channel 4



Gabrielle Creevy
– *In My Skin*,
Actor (Female)



Tom Allen, Host

Paul Hampartsoumian



Lady Boss: *The Jackie
Collins Story*, Arts

BBC

BBC



The Lateish Show with
Mo Gilligan Comedy
Entertainment

Channel 4



Adjani Salmon –
Dreaming Whilst Black,
Breakthrough Award

BBC



It's a Sin, Limited Series,
Actor (Male) and Writer – Drama

Richard Kendall

Children's Programme

The Rubbish World of Dave Spud

The Illuminated Film Company for CITV
'Original, surprising, modern and unpatronising. It has a fresh approach that really appeals to its audience.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Newsround: Let's Talk About Periods**, BBC
- ▶ **The World According to Grandpa**, Saffron Cherry Productions for Milkshake! Channel 5

Comedy Entertainment

The Lateish Show with Mo Gilligan

Expectation and Momo G for Channel 4
'The show has a real sense of occasion, and is full of brilliantly entertaining format beats.'

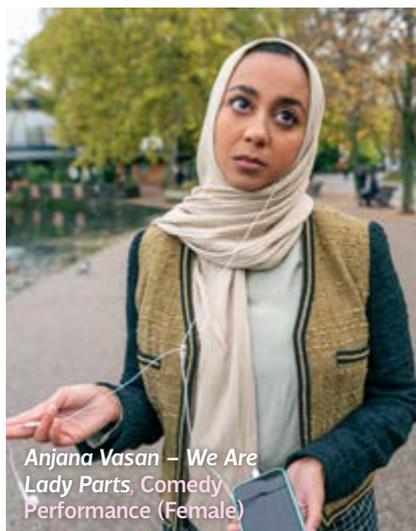
Nominees:

- ▶ **The Graham Norton Show**, So Television for BBC
- ▶ **The Last Leg**, Open Mike Productions for Channel 4



Samson Kayo – Bloods,
Comedy Performance (Male)

BSkyB



Anjana Vasan – We Are Lady Parts,
Comedy Performance (Female)

Channel 4

Comedy Performance (Female)

Anjana Vasan – We Are Lady Parts

Working Title Television, which is a part of Universal International Studios, for Channel 4

'Original, authentic and very funny. Her performance was full of little touches that made the script even funnier.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Sophie Willan – Alma's Not Normal**, Expectation for BBC
- ▶ **Katy Wix – Stath Lets Flats**, Roughcut Television for Channel 4

Comedy Performance (Male)

Samson Kayo – Bloods

Roughcut Television in association with Sky Studios for Sky One

'A performance of real heart, warmth and originality.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Nick Mohammed – Intelligence**, Expectation for Sky One
- ▶ **Adeel Akhtar – Back to Life**, Two Brothers Pictures for BBC



The Rubbish World of Dave Spud,
Children's Programme

CITV

Daytime Programme

The Great House Giveaway

Chwarel for Channel 4

'Offered a refreshing new take and felt like a relevant, welcome addition to the daytime schedule.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Expert Witness**, Rare TV for BBC
- ▶ **Richard Osman's House of Games**, Remarkable TV for BBC



Strictly Come Dancing 2021, Judges' Award

BBC

Judges' Award

Strictly Come Dancing 2021

'This year, the recipient of this prestigious honour is a television series that broke new ground. That's an extraordinary achievement in itself, given that it is by far the most popular entertainment show on British television, and now in its 19th season. In the series last autumn, *Strictly Come Dancing's* producers created two new

milestones – both of them as a consequence of the inclusive casting policy that's become one of the show's many defining hallmarks.

'*Strictly's* first deaf contestant appeared in 2021 – Rose Ayling-Ellis, of course, and the nation was enchanted by her. Rose's silent dance with her partner, Giovanni Pernice, was a genuine moment of landmark television: we looked on in awe at her skill, grace and determination. In dancing her way to becoming the first ever disabled winner of the glitterball trophy, Rose demonstrated

just what's possible when the barriers to opportunity are removed – and talent is allowed to flourish and shine.

'Similarly, the casting of the show's first male dance couple in John Whaite and Johannes Radebe, coming a year after the first same-sex couple in Nicola Adams and Katya Jones, showed just how hard the producers strive to keep *Strictly Come Dancing* fresh, modern and, ultimately, reflective of its vast, diverse and appreciative audience.

'What a tremendous series it was.'



The Big Breakfast, Entertainment and Entertainment Performance

Channel 4

Documentary Series

9/11: One Day in America

72 Films for National Geographic/Hulu
‘An exceptional series, amazingly well produced and with exceptional storytelling.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Undercover Police: Hunting Paedophiles**, BBC Studios for Channel 4
- ▶ **Liverpool Narcos**, Blast! Films and Sky Studios for Sky Documentaries

Drama Series

In My Skin

Expectation for BBC

‘You felt like you were there with them – a piece that was moving, powerful and authentic.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Manhunt The Night Stalker**, Buffalo Pictures for ITV
- ▶ **Unforgotten**, Mainstreet Pictures for ITV

Entertainment

The Big Breakfast

Lifted Entertainment for Channel 4

‘Both joyful and timely, with a special chemistry all of its own.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Big Zuu’s Big Eats**, Boom for Dave
- ▶ **The Masked Singer**, Bandicoot Scotland for ITV

Entertainment Performance

AJ Odudu and Mo Gilligan –

The Big Breakfast

Lifted Entertainment for Channel 4

‘Playful and generous, funny and warm.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Rosie Jones – Trip Hazard**, Studio 71 for Channel 4
- ▶ **Victoria Coren Mitchell – Only Connect**, RDF Television West and Parasol for BBC

Formatted Popular Factual

The Dog House

Five Mile Films for Channel 4

‘A great format that is incredibly well cast and includes a bit of stealthy learning along the way.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **The Repair Shop**, Ricochet for BBC
- ▶ **The Rap Game UK**, Naked, a Fremantle label, for BBC



In My Skin, Drama Series

BBC



The Great House Giveaway, Daytime Programme

Channel 4



The Dog House, Formatted Popular Factual

Channel 4



9/11: One Day in America, Documentary Series

Richard Kendal



Uprising, History

Richard Kendal

History

Uprising

Rogan Productions, Lammas Park and Turbine Studios for BBC

'A landmark piece: impactful, intelligent, and a piece of contemporary history told with real skill.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **9/11: Life Under Attack**, Brook Lapping for ITV in association with France Télévisions, the History Channel and VPRO
- ▶ **9/11: Inside the President's War Room**, Wish/Art Films for BBC and Apple TV+

Limited Series

It's a Sin

Red Production Company, a StudioCanal Company, for Channel 4 in association with HBO Max

'A devastating story grippingly told... a triumph of distinctive writing, great production and fine performances.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Time**, BBC Studios for BBC
- ▶ **Stephen**, HTM Television for ITV

Live Event

The Earthshot Prize 2021

BBC Studios for BBC

'Technically stunning, totally engaging, and a compelling narrative.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **The Funeral of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh**, BBC Studios for BBC
- ▶ **YouTube Pride 2021**, JA Films for YouTube Originals

Presenter

Munya Chawawa –

Race Around Britain

Expectation and Munz Made It for YouTube Originals

'Skilfully unpacks serious points with a light and mischievous touch, making tricky subject matter really accessible.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Steph McGovern – Steph's Packed Lunch**, Expectation North and Can Can Productions for Channel 4
- ▶ **Joe Lycett – Joe Lycett vs the Oil Giant**, Rumpus Media for Channel 4

RTS Network of the Year

BBC One

BBC

'Impressive because of its sheer quality... it is quite simply, the best in class.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **ITV**
- ▶ **Sky Arts**



BBC



YouTube



BBC

Outstanding Contribution to British Television 2022

Jack Thorne

‘It was just 15 years ago that Jack made his first foray into television, writing an episode of *Shameless* for Channel 4, followed by numerous episodes of the teenage drama *Skins*.

‘He began collaborating with Shane Meadows on *This Is England* in 2010. It was raw and visceral, showing the bleakness and boredom of provincial life in the second half of Thatcher’s decade – while at the same time celebrating the infectious spirit of belonging to a teenage tribe.

‘The real events of Operation Yewtree inspired him to write *National Treasure* in 2016, where Robbie Coltrane gave a tour-de-force performance as a once-celebrated TV comedian now accused of sexual assault. In 2018, he collaborated again with Meadows, on *The Virtues*, starring Stephen Graham. Incredibly, in the same year, he also brought to the screen both *The Accident* for Channel 4 and a major Sunday-night series for BBC One, Philip Pullman’s opus *His Dark Materials*.

‘In 2021, with the pandemic raging, Jack Thorne wrote *Help*. It was a blistering piece... not only confronting the challenge of living with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease, but a scorching indictment of the reality unfolding in Britain’s care homes as Covid ripped through them.

‘Last August, Jack gave the MacTaggart Lecture at Edinburgh and addressed how disabled people have been woefully let down by television. He spoke of how, as an industry, we’ve abjectly failed to tell disabled stories and employ disabled talent.

‘In his MacTaggart, Jack said that watching Alan Bleasdale’s drama *Boys from the Blackstuff* was the most important cultural event of his life. Jack’s own writing is part of the same great tradition: he writes human stories about the issues that stalk the times we live through with a passion, an intensity and a searing honesty that makes his work so compelling, relevant and vital.’



Jack Thorne

Richard Kendall



The Virtues

Channel 4



This Is England '86

Channel 4



National Treasure

Channel 4

Science and Natural History

David Harewood – Why Is Covid Killing People of Colour?

Twenty Twenty for BBC

‘This was broad, expansive and intelligent – and a different approach to science programme-making.’

Nominees:

▶ **Horizon Special: The Vaccine**,

Wingspan Productions for BBC

▶ **Baby Surgeons: Delivering Miracles**,

Wonderhood Studios for Channel 4

Scripted Comedy

Alma’s Not Normal

Expectation for BBC

‘It’s laugh-out-loud funny but, at times, profound and heartbreaking, with wonderful writing throughout.’

Nominees:

▶ **Bloods**, Roughcut Television in association with Sky Studios for Sky One

▶ **We Are Lady Parts**, Working Title Television, which is a part of Universal International Studios, for Channel 4

Single Documentary

Rape: Who’s on Trial?

Hardcash Productions for Channel 4

‘An extraordinary programme... affecting, memorable and powerful – a truly admirable achievement in storytelling.’

Nominees:

▶ **The Return: Life After Isis**, Alba Sotorra Productions and MetFilm for Sky Documentaries

▶ **Grenfell: The Untold Story**, BBC Studios for Channel 4

Single Drama

Help

The Forge Entertainment and One Shoe Films for Channel 4

‘A beautiful, poignant piece of work with exquisite performances at its heart.’

Nominees:

▶ **Death of England: Face to Face**,

National Theatre in association with Sabel Productions and Cuba Pictures for Sky Arts

▶ **Romeo and Juliet**, National Theatre in association with Sabel Productions and Cuba Pictures for Sky Arts

Soap and Continuing Drama

Hollyoaks

Lime Pictures for Channel 4

‘Hollyoaks constantly finds new story areas and fresh, relevant narratives. It continues to be loved by its large and loyal audience.’

Nominees:

▶ **Coronation Street**, ITV Studios for ITV

▶ **Casualty**, BBC Studios for BBC



Channel 4

Hollyoaks, Soap and Continuing Drama



BBC

Why Is Covid Killing People of Colour?, Science and Natural History



BBC

Alma’s Not Normal, Scripted Comedy



BBC

Unable to collect his award in 2020 due to the pandemic, Graham Norton was honoured at this year's awards ceremony

Outstanding Contribution to British Television 2020

Graham Norton

'This performer has become more than any other the face of entertainment on BBC One.

Graham Norton grew up in West Cork in Ireland and moved to London in the late 1980s to train as an actor. His ability to make people laugh with his infectious sense of irreverence was already evident. He made his Edinburgh Fringe debut in 1991, with *Mother Teresa of Calcutta's Farewell Tour*. In his show, he appeared as the sainted nun reciting the words of Madonna's song *Like a Virgin*.

In 1996, he was cast in Channel 4's breakout comedy *Father Ted*, as the young Father Noel Furlong, and television began to sit up and take notice of his comedic talents. He was one of the first faces to make

an impact on the new Channel 5, where he hosted the panel show *Bring Me the Head of Light Entertainment*.

It was here, when standing in one night for Jack Docherty, Graham demonstrated that, more than anything, he was a talk-show host just waiting for a talk show. So *Graham Norton* debuted the following year on Channel 4. He was the perfect host for a talk show – welcoming, unstuffy and, above all, funny.

'Word spread through the talent community – Graham's show was a blast to be a guest on, and it became a hot ticket. So hot that, in 2002, Graham switched to a nightly show called *V Graham Norton*.

'For the last couple of decades Graham has made the BBC his television home, where he seamlessly transitioned from late-night Channel 4 comedian to the prime-time ringmaster of the nation's biggest entertainment events.

'He established himself as Mr Saturday Night when he hosted Andrew Lloyd Webber's search for the next generation of stage stars with *How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?*, *Any Dream Will Do* and *I'd Do Anything!* and did the same for Cameron Mackintosh with *Over the Rainbow* and then again with Take That for *Let It Shine*.

'Sir Terry Wogan announced in

2008 that he was stepping down as the UK's voice of *The Eurovision Song Contest* – Graham's time had come. Receiving the *Eurovision* microphone from Sir Terry after his 35 years of being synonymous with the event may have daunted any other broadcaster – but it's a true mark of Graham's talent that he quickly and completely made *Eurovision* his own. After Sir Terry died in 2015, Graham was the natural choice to take up the baton on the other event with which he was so closely involved, the *Children in Need* telethon.

'Alongside the Saturday night successes and his adventures with RuPaul on BBC Three, one constant has been the hit with which Graham is most strongly associated, his Friday-night talk show. Superbly produced, fantastically booked, but, more than anything, brilliantly hosted, it's Graham in his natural habitat, surrounded by star names he disarmingly persuades to park their egos at the door for an unrestrained hour of laughs. Now in its 15th year, the show feels as fresh as ever, the perfect Friday-night treat.

'It works because at its heart the show mirrors Graham's own personality: warm, cheeky, mischievous – but at the same time, gracious, kind and fun. And always very, very funny.'

Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

Gary Neville – Sky Sports Premier League

Sky Sports

‘A broadcaster that consistently performs at the very highest level with detailed, knowledgeable insight and analysis.’

Nominees:

▶ **Emma Hayes – Uefa Euro 2020**, ITV Sport for ITV

▶ **Gabby Logan – London Marathon**, BBC Sport for BBC

Sports Programme

Tokyo 2020 Olympics

BBC Sport for BBC

‘A production of huge scale but with consummate production values, and rich diversity throughout both the action and analysis.’

Nominees:

▶ **The Hundred**, Sky Sports for Sky Sports Cricket

▶ **The Paralympics: Tokyo 2020**, Whisper for Channel 4

Writer – Comedy

Nida Manzoor – We Are Lady Parts

Working Title Television, which is a part of Universal International Studios, for Channel 4

‘Unpredictable, subverted stereotypes and kept you laughing throughout.’

Nominees:

▶ **Mae Martin and Joe Hampson – Feel Good**, Objective Fiction for Netflix

▶ **Holly Walsh, Helen Serafinowicz and Barunka O’Shaughnessy – Motherland**, Merman Television and Twofour for BBC

Writer – Drama

Russell T Davies – It’s a Sin

Red Production Company, a StudioCanal Company, for Channel 4 in association with HBO Max

‘This was writing at its most powerful – full of rage, joy, sadness, fun and humanity.’

Nominees:

▶ **Richard Warlow – The Serpent**, Mammoth Screen for BBC in association with Netflix

▶ **Jack Thorne – Help**, The Forge Entertainment and One Shoe Films for Channel 4



Help, Single Drama

Channel 4



Rape: Who’s on Trial?, Single Documentary

Channel 4



Sky Sports Premier League, Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

Richard Kendall



We Are Lady Parts, Writer – Comedy

Channel 4



Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Sports Programme

BBC



Watch the full video of the RTS Programme Awards 2022 at: bit.ly/RTS-prog22

Returning formats are the holy grail of factual entertainment, treasured by their production companies, broadcasters and audiences.

Scotland makes many of these long runners, including *Homes Under the Hammer*, *Antiques Road Trip* and *Love It or List It*. And, at an RTS Scotland event – chaired by Martel Maxwell, a presenter on *Homes Under the Hammer*, now in its 25th series – the people who make and commission these formats revealed why they work.

“They’re not easy but when you get them, they’re amazingly rewarding for us as producers and for commissioners,” said Andrew Jackson, co-creative director at Raise the Roof Productions, which makes *Love It or List It*, now in its eighth series.

According to Craig Hunter, creative director of factual at STV Studios (maker of *Antiques Road Trip* and its celebrity version, which have clocked up almost 700 episodes), “creating a recognisable brand” is key. “It’s about giving your series a look and a feel that gives it a real tone and point of difference from everything else that’s out there.”

But Jo Street, head of daytime and features at Channel 4, admitted: “You can have every ingredient” but series don’t necessarily succeed. “We did the *Great Cookbook Challenge*: we had Jamie Oliver, we had brilliant casting, we had a brilliant format – and the audience didn’t gravitate to that show.

“First series are really tricky because everyone’s still learning.... Everything is so crowded – there’s so much choice. And I think sometimes broadcasters are too quick to go, ‘Well, it’s not done massive volume, so



Martel Maxwell presenting *Homes Under the Hammer*

BBC

TV’s home bankers

RTS Scotland How do you find a series that returns year after year? **Matthew Bell** discovers the secrets of TV’s long runners

it’s not going to come back.”

Find and back talent, was Jackson’s argument: “When Kirstie Allsopp and Phil Spencer first landed on Channel 4 in *Location, Location, Location*, very few people watched them... but [then-factual entertainment chief] Ben Frow thought, ‘Actually, these guys are quite interesting – let’s give them another try... Lo and behold, 22 years later they’re still on the channel.’”

How important is a title? “[It] grabs an audience, but a good title is not going to keep you there for 60 minutes to watch a show that’s not watchable,” said Lion TV’s Mat Marsters, exec producer of *Homes Under the Hammer*.

Street disagreed: “I think a title’s bloody important, and [becoming] more and more important because it’s sometimes the only thing at your

disposal to attract someone to click on the EPG and watch the bloody thing.

“I totally agree with you [Mat], it won’t make you stay, but we need people to sample it – and then, hopefully, the editorial’s strong enough to keep them.

“[You need] titles that tell you what you’re going to get and then a format that gives you what you’re promised.”

Caroline McCaw, a researcher who has worked on *Love It or List It*, pinpointed casting: “People are so important – you can have a great format, but it’s very much the talent and your contributors that sell it to the audience.

“These formats and programmes, they’re kind of a story in themselves, and you want your contributors to be the hero of that story – they need to be people that the

audience want to see succeed, they want to root for them.”

And, added Jackson, a show needs a “reveal... you need something to build to, otherwise [viewers] will drift away.”

So what were the panelists’ favourite returners? For Street, it was *MasterChef*, a “masterclass of a format”; Hunter and Jackson plumped for *Dragon’s Den*. The latter also named *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* – “It works because it’s celebrities having a miserable time.”

McCaw went for relative newcomer *Interior Design Masters with Alan Carr*, while Marsters chose *Repair Shop*, a “national treasure”. He added: “We’re all kicking ourselves that we didn’t [come up with] that.” ■

‘The holy grail of TV: Returning formats’ was held on 31 March.

Queens Uni lands prizes

RTS Northern Ireland Queen's University Belfast took home the principal prizes from the RTS Northern Ireland Student Awards in late March. The Drama award went to *Roots*, the story of an insecure black student who tries to straighten her natural afro hair to fit in with a predominantly white Belfast. *Defining Street Food* was awarded the Factual prize

A Highly Commended award was given to another Queen's University film, *Made in the Emerald Isle*.

UTV journalist Stewart Robson hosted the ceremony at the Black Box, Belfast, with Tessa Fleming speaking about her career journey, from jour-



BBC

Tessa Fleming

nalism college to presenting on BBC Northern Ireland, as she gave the Joe McKinney Memorial Keynote Speech.

RTS Northern Ireland Chair Fiona Campbell said: "The judges were hugely impressed by the creativity and imagination shown in this year's entries."

RTS Northern Ireland Student Television Awards winners

Drama - *Roots* - Claire Mulligan, Elen Nahapetyan, Jasmin Walls, Bethany Colvin and Rachel Madden, Queen's University Belfast

Factual - *Defining Street Food* - Samuel Robinson, Ryan Elliman and Toby James, Queen's University Belfast

Craft Skills: Camera - *Kokoro* - Oisín Lavery and Peter Johnston, Ulster University Magee Campus



Animation winner: Alison Loke

Jon Craig

Glos and UWE share spoils

RTS West of England The University of the West of England (UWE) and the University of Gloucestershire split the main prizes between them at the RTS West of England Student Television Awards in mid-March.

Kopi Girl by UWE's Alison Loke landed the Animation award. The judges thought

her film "a touching, personal and intimate story shot in a unique style and with some lovely storytelling".

UWE also triumphed in the Factual category with *Eden*, "a unique piece of filmmaking, engaging and visually beautiful, with an amazing story at its core".

A team from the University

of Gloucestershire took home the Drama prize with *Signed, Marlo*, "a genuinely moving film, with excellent writing and a strong narrative".

Afterlove scooped the Comedy and Entertainment category, winning the judge's support for a film that was "creative, clever and different, with an original plot line and an imaginative script".

The Everyman Cinema in Bristol hosted the ceremony, which featured a speech from Levi Jouavel, the presenter of BBC Three's daily news bulletin, *The Catch Up*. She offered an insight into working in TV, plus tips on how to break into the industry. These included coming up with ideas and seeking as many opportunities as possible.

"Every year, the strength of the entries from our student community gets stronger," said RTS West of England Chair Lynn Barlow. "This year, it was really exciting to see them bounce back so strongly, after so much disruption to their courses. Our judges were really keen to award craft awards, too – to acknowledge the contribution of the production teams behind many of the nominated films."

Matthew Bell

RTS West of England Student Television Awards winners

Animation - *Kopi Girl* - Alison Loke, UWE

Comedy and Entertainment - *Afterlove* - Liz Cartwright, Izzy Macmillan, Auke De Vries, Charlotte Curtis, Jacob Seymour-Self, Eleri Povall-Jones and Elliott Cox, University of Gloucestershire

Drama - *Signed, Marlo* - Izzy Macmillan, Liz Cartwright, Tom Glover, Tom Allen, Jacob Seymour-Self, Nick Martin and AW Garner, University of Gloucestershire

Factual - *Eden* - Charlie Bush, Patrick Whinder-Montague, Barney Jones, Sam Schoettner and Maryam Bahaari, UWE

Craft Skills: Animation

■ **Model Making**

■ **The Big Top** - Ruby Black, Lilly Goodwin, Cleo Parker and Julia Henauer, UWE

■ **Production Design - *Flotsam and Jetsam*** - Felix Surplus, UWE

■ **Sound - *The Alan Ankles Experience*** - Tom Jacobs, UWE

■ **Visual Design - *A Miraculous Midnight*** - Hazel Boxall, UWE

■ **Writing - *The Lonely Dandelion*** - Julia Vaccina, UWE

Craft Skills: Comedy and Entertainment

■ **Camerawork - *Clamped*** - Sam Fabian Miller, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Directing - *Clamped*** - Amy Barnes, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Editing - *Mystery Match*** - Sophie Ratcliffe, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Performance - *Afterlove*** - Kelsey Cooke, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Clamped** - Rosa Samuels, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Producing - *The Street Walker*** - Izzy Hart, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Production Design - *Afterlove*** - Charlotte Curtis, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Craft Skills: Drama**

■ **Camerawork - *Tomorrow's Dawn*** - Josh Stone, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Cinematography - *Kitty Jay*** - Sam Fabian Miller, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Costume and Make Up - *Darling Sons and Kitty Jay*** - Macie Dell, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Producing - *Kitty Jay*** - Liam Pym, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Production Design - *Blip*** - Britta Mer-irand, University of Gloucestershire

■ **Sound - *Angels of Somme*** - Harry Murphy and Louis Walker, UWE

■ **Visual Effects - *Codename: Obsidian*** - Hayden Weaver, Screenology

■ **Writing - *Signed, Marlo*** - Izzy Macmillan and Liz Cartwright, University of Gloucestershire

Craft Skills: Factual

■ **Camerawork - *Eden*** - Barney Jones, UWE

■ **Directing - *Fighting Chance*** - Bethany Andrews, Bath Spa University

■ **Directing and Writing - *Brown Wolfe*** - Megan Wolfe, UWE

■ **Original Music - *Eden*** - Ethan Harper, UWE

■ **Producing - *The Changes That We Can Make*** - Oliver Davies, UWE

■ **Sound - *Fighting Chance*** - Team, Bath Spa University

RTS Republic of Ireland

The RTS returned to Studio 4 at RTÉ in Dublin for the first time in two years for the centre's Student Awards ceremony last month.

The National Film School at the Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology triumphed in three of the four main categories.

Fall of the Ibis King, made by Mikai Geronimo, Josh O'Caomh and team, won the Animation award, and was described by the judges as a "richly textured melodrama, operatic in its themes of jealousy and murder".

The Comedy and Entertainment prize went to Reuben Harvey's film *Flash_Thunder93*, a "story told with deadpan humour about two storm worshippers, with pitch-perfect dialogue and a complex soundtrack".

This Town Still Talks About You by Matthew McGuigan and team took the Drama award. The judges called it "a beautifully atmospheric piece, shot in bleak, black-and-white, 'Nordic' style. Strong performances and a nuanced script address the complexities of Irish family relationships."

National Film School goes nap



National Film School

Kate Breen, Adam Daly and team from Dundalk Institute of Technology won the Factual prize with *Bullet Casings in the Graveyard* – "traditional in format, with a very strong story, well

put together and well told". In the Craft Skills categories, Ciara Rigney won the Camerawork award for the second year running.

Some of the biggest names in Ireland's TV industry

presented the awards: RTÉ Director-General Dee Forbes; TG4 Ard-Stiúirthóir Alan Esslemont; and Bill Malone, director of content at Virgin Media TV Ireland.

Agnes Cogan, Chair of the awards jury and RTS Republic of Ireland, said: "Despite the limitations and restrictions of the lockdown, this year's contenders have risen to the challenge with glorious results – the standards were as high as ever in the history of the competition – or higher."

Matthew Bell

RTS Republic of Ireland Student Television Awards winners

Animation - *Fall of the Ibis King* - Mikai Geronimo, Josh O'Caomh and team, National Film School

Comedy and Entertainment - *Flash_Thunder93* - Reuben Harvey, National Film School

Drama - *This Town Still Talks About You* - Matthew McGuigan and team, National Film School

Factual - *Bullet Casings in the Graveyard* - Kate Breen, Adam Daly and team, Dundalk Institute of Technology

Craft Skills: Camerawork - *This Town Still Talks About You* - Ciara Rigney, National Film School

Craft Skills: Editing - *Unravels* - Chloe O'Reilly, Dundalk Institute of Technology

Craft Skills: Sound - *Flash_Thunder93* - Luke O'Shaughnessy and Jack Doyle, National Film School

Orange scores hat-trick in Brum

RTS Midlands

Elena Ruiz Aman won three awards at the RTS Midlands Student Television Awards in late March, including the prestigious Sir Lenny Henry Award for outstanding work.

The Nottingham Trent University student also triumphed in the Animation and Craft Skills: Sound categories with her film *Orange*.

The awards, which were selected by a panel of industry professionals including Henry, were hosted by broadcaster and actor Mim Shaikh and BBC Asian Network DJ

Jasmine Takhar at the IET in Birmingham.

The Drama prize went to Staffordshire University student Duncan Stephens for *Not Quite There Yet*, and the University of Worcester's Harpal Bobby and Kiran Aujila triumphed in the Factual category with *A Change in Kismet*.

Nottingham Trent notched up five awards in total, also winning the Craft Skills: Camera and Writing prizes.

"The Midlands is experiencing something of a renaissance as a centre for broadcasting talent, and

these awards reflect the range of creativity and talent of young people based in the region," said RTS Midlands Chair Kully Khalia.

He added: "The judges

were truly impressed by the inspiring standard of work."

The awards ceremony followed an afternoon of masterclasses (see page 41).

Matthew Bell

RTS Midlands Student Television Awards winners

Sir Lenny Henry Award - *Orange* - Elena Ruiz Aman, Nottingham Trent University

Animation - *Orange* - Elena Ruiz Aman, Nottingham Trent University

Drama - *Not Quite There Yet* - Duncan Stephens, Staffordshire University

Factual - *A Change in Kismet* - Harpal Bobby and Kiran Aujila, University of Worcester

Craft Skills: Camera - *The Grey Shore* - Samuel Hyde, Leonardo Cordoba and Fin Burbridge, Nottingham Trent University

Craft Skills: Editing - *Because of Covid* - Adrian Bajireanu, Coventry University

Craft Skills: Production Design - *Filha Da Terra* - Edmundo Inácio and Artur Monteiro, Coventry University

Craft Skills: Sound - *Orange* - Elena Ruiz Aman, Nottingham Trent University

Craft Skills: Writing - *Alone Together* - Connor McCay, Nottingham Trent University

RTS Thames Valley

Late last month, the Society's specialist creative technology centre, RTS Thames Valley, presented its 2022 awards at a ceremony hosted by Buckinghamshire New University in High Wycombe.

These awards "recognise the convergence of our technical and creative communities", said the centre's Vice-Chair, Stephen Stewart, "celebrating individuals and organisations who have made a real difference over the past 12, extraordinary months". The ceremony was held in-person at the university and also live-streamed.

The Production Award, recognising excellence in the use of creative technology to support the production of TV content, went to Kimberley Rowell, an executive producer and news editor at BBC Three and BBC News. According to the judges, "the winner's projects really hold power to account, giving a voice to the voiceless".

NEP UK commercial director Richard Lancaster received the Creative Technology



Lammie Veracruz receives her award from Stephen Stewart

Beth Martin

RTS Thames Valley Television Awards winners

- Special Recognition Award - KitPlus
- Creative Technology Award - Richard Lancaster - NEP UK
- Innovation Award - NDI 5
- Production Award - Kimberley Rowell - BBC Three and BBC News
- Unsung Hero - Lammie Veracruz - Mirriad

events and broadcast experiences that continually wow the audience", said the judges.

The Innovation Award went to NDI 5, a new product that "empowers content creators to continue to push the boundaries of traditional storytelling with future-proofed technology".

Lammie Veracruz, creative specialist at Mirriad advertising, received the Unsung Hero Award, recognising "team players going over and above their job description".

The RTS centre's Special Recognition Award went to KitPlus, "an organisation that, for nearly 20 years, has played an important part in informing the industry on the latest technology developments".

Matthew Bell

Veracruz is tech 'unsung hero'

Award, made for excellence in the development, operation or promotion of creative media technology. During his

career, which has included covering Wimbledon tennis and royal weddings, Lancaster has created "exceptional

The future is virtual

RTS Thames Valley

Immediately before the awards ceremony, the RTS centre hosted an event 'The future of broadcast is virtual', featuring Florian Gallier, Mo-Sys product manager for remote production and image robotics, and Gideon Ferber, broadcast product director at Disguise.

'Virtual production is not new - it's been used since the mid-1990s in the broadcast industry... What is new is that everything can be done in real-time on a consumer-grade computer, and this is really changing things,' said Gallier.

It can be cheaper than building conventional sets and there

are environmental benefits, added Gallier, 'when we are travelling less and shipping less equipment, we are also reducing our carbon footprint'.

Recent examples of sets augmented virtually include: *Strictly Come Dancing* during the Covid-19 pandemic, when audiences were absent; and the BBC's coverage of the Tokyo Olympics and Beijing Winter Olympics, which were based (with travel curtailed by the pandemic) in Salford.

Ferber, apologising in advance for the comment, noted that the pandemic was 'probably the best thing that has happened to virtual production. It expedited every single project that was on



BBC

the table - everything that we planned for three or five years, happened within six months, 12 at the most.'

LED video walls have become very popular over the past two years and have advantages for presenters and actors over green-screen technology. 'You can see everything you need to interact with,' explained Ferber.

So, were green screens on the way out? 'Over time, as LED walls become more accessible budget-wise, I think we'll see a big growth in their use.'

'I don't think green screen will completely disappear,' said Gallier. 'Green screen is cheaper and, for a lot of shots, it's easier to use.'

Matthew Bell

‘Crashing trucks, being set on fire, falling down stairs and getting punched in the face by Tom Hardy – it’s all in a day’s work for Justin Pearson. It was no wonder the young audience at the RTS Midlands masterclass was rapt as the stuntman recalled his career, including that time hard man Hardy connected with his nose. It happened on the set of *Legend*, where Hardy played both the Kray twins and got into a fight in a pub with Pearson playing a gangster.

“Tom was supposed to throw a stunt punch but mistimed it and hit me straight in the face,” he told host Jasmine Takhar. “Fortunately, the knuckleduster he was holding was rubber and painted gold, but I had a bloody nose and tears streaming down my face. Tom was really apologetic.

“We have a great safety record for stunts in the UK but things can go wrong. I received second-degree burns while shooting the cover of my autobiography, *Rolling with the Punches*. The wind blew the flames round and I didn’t have enough fire retardant gel on my face.”

Pearson, from Shropshire, has appeared in everything from *Skyfall* and *Star Wars* to *Wonder Woman* and *Harry Potter*. His TV dramas include *The Crown*, *Game of Thrones*, *Spooks* and *Peaky Blinders* – and crashing 10 vehicles on Sky’s *Curfew*, including rolling a truck into a lake.

Pearson specialises in horse work, having worked in his family’s stables and been in a medieval jousting team as a teenager. He has fallen off horses almost 1,000 times but says his favourite stunt was riding furiously through Greenwich while shooting at Johnny Depp for *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*.

“Falling off horses and bikes and crashing vehicles takes its toll on your body, which is



Star-studded panel: Nikita Kanda, Mim Shaikh, Jasmine Takhar, and Hayley Sparkes

Lensi Photography

Midlands masterclass

RTS Midlands Students learnt about how to break into TV – and the work of a Hollywood stuntman. **Roz Laws** reports

why I don’t do hard-knock stunts any more. For the past five years, I’ve also worked as a stunt co-ordinator, doing risk assessments, costing and planning,” he said. “Stunt work is a great job, which has taken me around the world, although it is 5% adrenaline

BBC One’s *We Are England*, and BBC England commissioner Aisling O’Connor, who showed a clip of new BBC Three commission *Brickies*, about young northern bricklayers.

O’Connor said: “It’s great when someone pitches us

masterclass featured broadcasters Nikita Kanda, Jasmine Takhar, Mim Shaikh and Hayley Sparkes. They talked about the importance of creating your own content, networking – and not giving up and working for free.

Sparkes, who presents beauty slots on *This Morning*, said: “Katie Piper’s manager asked me to join her on stage at the Ideal Home Show, but there was no budget.

“I did it because it was a new skill and I wanted to meet inspirational Katie. Someone in the audience was responsible for hiring hosts for the Ideal Home Show, liked what I did and gave me years of work. So a positive mindset is everything.

“I don’t like working for free if you’re being taken advantage of, but always look at the bigger picture – you never know what it could lead to.” ■

The masterclasses were held on 31 March at IET Austin Court in Birmingham and produced by Jenny Wilkes.



Stuntman Justin Pearson

Lensi Photography

and 95% waiting around for something to happen.”

The RTS Midlands event preceded its Student Television Awards ceremony (see report on page 39) and included two expert panels with advice for graduates. “How to get your work commissioned” featured Sarah Trigg, executive producer of

something really surprising, as we see the same ideas over and over again.

“When a taster tape for *Brickies* dropped into my inbox, it was a world I hadn’t seen before. I haven’t seen female bricklayers and I didn’t know they got paid by the brick and are so well paid.”

The “How to get on in TV”

How to break into gaming

RTS NI Futures RTS Northern Ireland Futures and BBC Digital Cities came together at the end of last month to host “Games and the media”, which featured a panel of young gamers discussing their jobs and offering tips on how to break into games journalism.

Jordan Middler, a staff writer at *VGC (Video Games Chronicle)*, advised would-be journalists to do some research: “Get on Twitter, follow editors on sites... see what people are talking about.

“No editor at a games site is going to ask to see your degree – if you can write, you can write. You need to find small sites that are willing to... work with new writers.”

Stacey Henley, editor-in-chief at *The Gamer*, agreed: “Jordan and I are outnumbered by people who don’t have degrees... literally nobody cares... Pitch everywhere you can, learn everything you can.”

Skills are transferable, argued Rachel Macpherson, who now works in PR for Neon Hive, a specialist games agency, having previously worked as a digital journalist. “If you want to work as a brand manager or in the business side of games, having skills in admin or operations is a great transferable skill,” she said.

Macpherson added: “Get to know people – go to events... Chat to folk about the games you’re passionate about.”

The event was hosted by Odhrán Johnson, co-founder of *Gaming Sandbox*, which specialises in writing about indie games and developers.

Matthew Bell

RTS Southern At the end of March, RTS Southern hosted its popular “Meet the professionals” event at Bournemouth University, with more than 200 students from Bournemouth, Solent and Winchester universities and the Arts University Bournemouth attending.

A panel of 13 professionals from different career stages – first jobs, mid-career and exec producers – took questions from Southern committee member and host Gordon Cooper. Students were then able to network with the professionals.

The professionals’ roles ranged from archive researcher to edit assistant, production co-ordinator, production manager and music producer at companies such as Sky, ITV Studios, The Farm, Moonbug, Woodcut Media and the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Alison Martin, currently a development exec at Topical TV, explained to the students how programme ideas are developed. Her credits include *The One Show* and *Katie Price: My Crazy Life*.

Cooper said: “Networking plays such a big role in the development of media



Precious Mahaga: head of music, Agile Films

Gordon Cooper

Students get help from pros

careers and it was great to see how much the students valued the opportunity, once again, to talk openly and enthusiastically with so many professionals in one place.”

RTS Southern Chair Stephanie Farmer said: “There was

such a great buzz at this event. We bring a wide selection of professionals to the students and this clearly pays off. In the past, these events have given students contacts for work experience and employment.”

Society launches Innovation bursary

RTS Bursaries This year’s RTS bursary schemes, launched last month, include a new Digital Innovation award.

It replaces the Technology bursary and has been designed to meet the growing demand for much-sought-after digital skills in the industry. It supports individuals who are interested in working at the intersection of technology and entertainment.

“Our bursary programmes continue to grow every year, supporting individuals from lower-income backgrounds.

It is important for us to adapt to current industry needs and highlight to prospective students the fantastic opportunities in our industry,” said Theresa Wise, CEO of the RTS.

For 2022, the RTS hopes to award up to 30 scholarships to individuals studying television production, journalism or related subjects, with an additional 10 scholarships for the Digital Innovation bursary.

The RTS launched its bursary schemes in 2014 and, since then, more than

240 scholars and alumni have benefited from the initiative. Donations to support the scheme from STV, All3Media, Disney and YouView have enabled the scheme to flourish.

The awards support students about to start their studies, or in the first year of a degree or HND level five or six.

The RTS is accepting applications until 15 July. For more information on eligibility go to: rts.org.uk/education-and-training-pages/bursaries

Matthew Bell

When people enter a profession such as law, medicine or teaching, there's always a very clear direction of travel... In TV... it can be hard to navigate your path."

This is how Cameron Roach, RTS North West Chair, summarised the idea behind the centre's "Student networking day" in his welcoming speech. The event covered all the bases for graduates aiming to break into and succeed in the industry.

First up was a panel discussion on soft skills. Ruth Mills, talent scheme producer at The Network, voiced one of the frustrations sometimes experienced by new entrants: "You've learnt how to shoot, how to light, or to do sound, or edit... and you think, 'Why am I making the tea?'"

But, as BBC Studios talent exec Beena Khetani pointed out, "[While you're doing that,] you're listening... watching, learning... asking questions... and it makes people see you as someone who is willing."

"And people who ask questions stand out," said Pam Cavannagh, joint-creative director of Purple Productions. Soft skills are key behind the camera, too. Cavannagh added: "Our favourite PDs [producer-directors] aren't necessarily the best shooters. They're the people who can get the magic, the best moments out of contributors."

"If you're not naturally a people person, it might sound really daunting," suggested Multistory Media producer Claire Judge. "But, actually, it's just about being able to get on with people, and being interested in what they've got to say." Khetani agreed: "It's the same [skillset you use] when you're chatting to your mates."

So use those soft skills to grab every opportunity



A long and winding road

North West At Media City, Salford, **Carole Solazzo** hears some invaluable advice on how to navigate a career in TV

was the advice from Martin Bruce, content editor on BBC One's *Morning Live*.

Bruce recounted how winning a competition run by his local radio station got him invited into the studio. "I told the producer this was what I really wanted to get into – 'I love radio and television.' The producer said, 'I'm doing a student show, do you want to be part of it?'"... He then threw me on air and, suddenly, I'm doing a two-hour student show." Over time, Bruce moved into TV.

"Overnight success" was one of the myths busted by the second panel. Yasmin Ali, story researcher at Wall to Wall, started her "winding road" into television working in call centres and children's tutoring.

But this helped her "stand out from other applicants because I had experience of

talking to people... managing personalities". She also gained valuable transferrable skills that she still uses today.

Ben Ledsham, floor runner and trainee assistant director at ITV Studios, is proof that

industry connections aren't essential. He met a producer while on a panel in Manchester. They chatted, "started exchanging

emails and, a few weeks later, she asked if I wanted to be part of a production".

Sean Wise, an editor at The Garden, suggested getting names off company websites and LinkedIn to personalise cover emails and letters. Then "use them to say why you specifically will be better [than other applicants] for that particular company".

Laurie Kirkham, head of development at Leopard Pictures, advised contacting

"companies who make the shows you really love. You're making it easy for yourself, because... you can already talk passionately about [their] shows".

Finally, the panel addressed "imposter syndrome". According to BBC Children's script editor Luke Frost, everyone suffers from it: "You have this feeling that everyone else knows what they're doing... and I'd have to pretend... You very quickly learn that... no one minds if you ask for help."

Students also got the chance to network with industry professionals, and to participate in workshops on creating and pitching stories, virtual studio production techniques, CVs and interview skills, and breaking into factual production. ■

'The RTS North West Student Networking Day' was held on 30 March at Dock10, MediaCity, Salford, and produced by Nancy Porter of the University of Salford.

RTS
Yorkshire

In what is probably a TV first, an Israeli sitcom has been relocated to Hull. *Hullraisers* – a laugh-out-loud six-parter about the messy but joyful lives of three working-class women – was previewed by its writers, executive producer and one of its lead actors at a joint RTS Yorkshire/Channel 4 event earlier this month.

Executive producer Hannah Farrell, creative director at series producer Fable Pictures, said: “We became obsessed with *Little Mom* – those characters are just extraordinary. They exist in a world that feels universal in terms of... dating, friendship and parenting. We wanted to take the heart of that and make something... that was ultimately born and bred in Hull!”

Hull-bred Lucy Beaumont (co-star of *Meet the Richardsons*) wrote the pilot, with Anne Marie O’Connor (*Trolled*) and Caroline Moran (*Raised by Wolves*) forming the series writing team.

“It’s set on a street I lived on,” explained Beaumont. “It’s still got the spirit of the



Channel 4

From Israel to Hull with laughs

original [*Little Mom*] but it’s very different.”

Moran added: “There’s a similar feeling coming from Wolverhampton, [which I do,] as there is coming from Hull. They’re often places that are

the punchlines of jokes... but they’re actually where a lot of cool people live, and there’s a lot of pride and creativity. It was great to be able to bring that to screen.”

O’Connor, a native of

Bradford, added, laughing: “I think we are the only three working-class female comedy writers in the country.”

Hullraisers stars Taj Atwal (*Line of Duty*), Sinead Matthews (*The Crown*) and Leah Brotherhood (*Zombozi*). The latter, another Hull native, explained the appeal of the series: “It’s not, ‘It’s grim up North’. Yes, it can be grim up North, but we still have a good time.... There’s such a strong community spirit in these cities that we’re all from and... I think we’ve been successful in getting that across.

“I want [viewers] to feel joyful about these somewhat forgotten cities and put Hull on the map.”

Beaumont added: “I’m from stand-up so, for me, it’s ‘funny or die’... I have a real issue with comedy that doesn’t make people laugh.... For me, it was so important that it was actually funny.”

O’Connor added: “I want people, obviously, to laugh, but also to see themselves in it.”

Hullraisers begins its run on Channel 4 on 12 April, with all episodes available on All 4. **Matthew Bell**

The UPSIDE

Just like the Oscars, but less violent

There are slaps – and there are mock slaps. Fortunately, at last month’s RTS Programme Awards we were treated to the latter when, at the start of proceedings, AJ Odudu ran up to the stage and appeared to strike host Tom Allen.

“Oh my God, AJ, oh my God – I’m the one who’s lost their hair, don’t hit me,” joked Tom, who is as bald as

a billiard ball. “I’ve got to look my best for tomorrow, I’ve got an audition for *GI Jane 2*,” he added, alluding to Will Smith’s headline-hitting Oscars’ attack on Chris Rock.

Prize-giving ceremonies don’t get off to a better start than this.

C4 losing its mojo would be a sin

Tellingly, Channel 4 was the ceremony’s runaway winner, carrying off 13 gongs. Among its prize-winning shows were *The Lateish Show with Mo Gilligan*, *We Are Lady Parts*, *The Dog House* and, of course, *It’s a Sin*.

Russell T Davies’s poignant story of gay life in the 1980s

deservedly won a hat-trick of awards, including the Writer – Drama prize. He used his acceptance speech to warn of the dangers of the Government privatising Channel 4. Psychic or what?

Wright rides out to write her sequel

The Upside wishes Sky’s Sarah Wright huge success in her new career as an executive coach and a writer. She is leaving after 13 years, latterly as group director of acquisitions and director of Sky Cinema.

She will be much missed, not least at MipTV and Mipcom, and the LA Screenings.

NFTS gains more of Sophie Turner Laing

Congratulations to Sophie Turner Laing, ex-CEO of Endemol Shine and MD of Sky, for becoming the first female Chair of the UK’s National Film and Television School (NFTS). She succeeds Patrick McKenna, who will leave in August, having held the post since 2013.

Sophie ran Endemol Shine 2014-2020. Before Sky, she worked in acquisitions at the BBC. In 2018, she was awarded an OBE for her services to media. Sophie has been involved with the NFTS for several years and has served on its Board of Governors. ■



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Who's who at the RTS	<p>Patron HRH The Prince of Wales</p> <p>Vice-Presidents David Abraham Dawn Airey Sir David Attenborough OM CH CVO CBE FRS Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE Mike Darcey Gary Davey Greg Dyke Lord Hall of Birkenhead Lorraine Heggessey Armando Iannucci OBE Ian Jones Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE David Lynn Ken MacQuarrie Sir Trevor McDonald OBE Gavin Patterson Trevor Phillips OBE Stewart Purvis CBE Sir Howard Stringer</p>	<p>Chair of RTS Trustees Jane Turton</p> <p>Honorary Secretary David Lowen</p> <p>Honorary Treasurer Mike Green</p> <p>BOARD OF TRUSTEES Lynn Barlow Julian Bellamy Mike Green Yasmina Hadded David Lowen Jane Millichip Simon Pitts Sinéad Rocks Sarah Rose Jane Turton Rob Woodward</p> <p>EXECUTIVE Chief Executive Theresa Wise</p> <p>Bursaries Manager Anne Dawson</p>	<p>CENTRES COUNCIL Lynn Barlow Phil Barnes Fiona Campbell Tony Campbell Agnes Cogan Stephanie Farmer Lisa Holdsworth Kully Khaila Tim Marshall Will Nicholson Stephen O'Donnell Jon Quayle Cameron Roach Siobhan Robbie-James Edward Russell</p> <p>SPECIALIST GROUP CHAIRS Archives Dale Grayson</p> <p>Diversity Angela Ferreira</p> <p>Early Evening Events Heather Jones</p>	<p>Education Graeme Thompson</p> <p>RTS Futures Alex Wootten</p> <p>RTS Technology Bursaries Simon Pitts</p> <p>AWARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS Awards & Fellowship Policy David Lowen</p> <p>Craft & Design Awards Ade Rawcliffe</p> <p>Programme Awards Kenton Allen</p> <p>Student Television Awards Sinéad Rocks</p> <p>Television Journalism Awards Simon Bucks</p>
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