

CREATIVE FORWARD LOOK

IAN KATZ
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES

Channel 4 occupies a unique space in the UK public service broadcasting landscape. Our statutory remit requires us to deliver high quality, innovative content that challenges the status quo.

As the broadcaster Anthony Smith once put it, the channel's task is to be "an imp in the mechanism", offering an alternative and distinctive voice in British life and championing diversity in all of its forms. And through this, we support a thriving production sector across the whole of the UK.

It has been a privilege for me to join a broadcaster whose unique combination of innovation, risk-taking and élan I have admired for decades. In a world of ever multiplying – and increasingly international – content providers, Channel 4's deeply held values, distinctive take on the world and relentlessly challenging sensibility have never been more important or relevant.

I have inherited an outstanding team and strong programming schedule, as well as robust relationships with existing partners across the creative industries. Together, this enables us to support creativity, innovation and risk taking in ways that other broadcasters cannot. Our slate of programmes in 2017 showcased a diverse and innovative UK and 2018 will see us continue to offer a rich and eclectic mix within our schedule, across all of our genres. Our creative strategy will major on two key themes, and we will continue to strive to address underserved audiences and, in particular, younger viewers.

Gender and sexuality

Our first major theme of the year will be the crackling debate around gender and sexuality. Over the last five years, gender fluidity has exploded into public consciousness. Throughout 2018, across our schedule, we will explore the shifting territory of gender identity in contemporary Britain.

In particular, we'll investigate the emerging generational gap in how Britain thinks about this important topic. How has the idea of what it is to be a man or woman changed? How are feminists finding themselves in conflict with the trans rights movement? When should a child be allowed to embark on changing their own gender? There is a fault line opening underneath our society around this topic and it has yet to be tackled by mainstream broadcasters.

Over the year, we will be approaching the topic across the full Channel 4 register of genres and channels, from hard-hitting polemics to intimate observational documentaries and populist entertainment programmes that explore the issues in a highly accessible way.

This theme will launch in the first half of 2018 with our new Factual Entertainment series *Genderquake*, which will bring together ten young people who embody a mix of gender identities to explore their views and challenge their – and the wider public's – preconceptions.

Throughout the year, we will continue to explore the theme through a number of programmes, including a live debate, a polemic programme looking at what age it might be appropriate for children to change gender, a longitudinal series that follows eight individuals through their transition, and a new comedy series, *The Bisexual*, which offers a raw and unapologetic take on bisexuality.

Technology and society

The second major theme we will explore in 2018 is the interface between technology and society. After a 25-year love affair with the digital revolution, based on a widely shared assumption that technology was making the world a better place, the last year has seen a growing disillusionment with technology across a range of fronts.

From the weaponising of technology to subvert democratic processes to the monopolistic behaviour of the largest tech companies, from concerns over whether tech firms are paying their fair share of tax to the effects of social networks on children, the West has been waking up with a 'digital hangover'. Later in the year, Channel 4 will reflect upon this widespread sense that it's time for a reset of society's relationship with technology.

Our programmes addressing the topic will include a new reality show called *The Hive*, a prime-time programme that will explore the impact of social media on the way we construct our identities and engage with others, as well as several films from our Specialist Factual team, which will take a deep dive into the topic.

Diverse slate

Outside of these key themes, we will also develop a larger slate of live programmes in 2018 and beyond. At their core, these new live formats will promote and stage public debate and create informal environments to discuss the issues of the day in. They will be designed to appeal directly to a range of audiences, with an emphasis on young people from all backgrounds, across all of the UK.

Injecting the schedule with more live programmes will allow the channel to be more responsive and they enable us to speak to issues and events in a more immediate fashion.



At the same time, we have built on our success from the past several years and we have a strong slate of new, ambitious scripted series coming out in 2018. Scripted highlights in 2018 include *Kiri*, the second series in Jack Thorne's trilogy of British-based drama for Channel 4; *Jerusalem*, a six-part epic portrait of post-war Britain; *Chimerica*, an adaptation of Lucy Kirkwood's Olivier Award-winning stage play; and *The First*, a drama written by *House of Cards* creator Beau Willimon set in the near future about the first human mission to Mars. These new series will complement our hit existing series, such as *No Offence*, *Humans* and *Ackley Bridge*, which will all return in 2018.

Our factual slate will continue to go through a period of renewal this year, allowing us to experiment with new titles and tweak existing brands. We have seen some erosion in viewing of some of our established factual entertainment titles, so we will work hard in 2018 to renew and keep them fresh, as well as bringing in new scaleable and returnable factual programmes to complete our factual offer.

As Britain's alternative public service broadcaster, we will also retain our existing investment in News and Current Affairs. Through programmes such as our daily *Channel 4 News* and our wider slate of Current Affairs programming, which includes *Dispatches*, *Unreported World* and one-off films, we can continue to hold those in power to account and offer alternative voices and perspectives from across the UK and further afield.

Our 2018 creative budget is designed to build on our creative success and enables us to continue to invest in our next cycle of programme innovation. Our main objective – to deliver our public service remit – is underpinned by a robust strategy to maintain a strong share of TV viewing and ensure we remain commercially sustainable.

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