

Creative Forward Look

In common with every broadcaster, the 2020 that we planned and commissioned for was not the 2020 that we found ourselves in.

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games was meant to be the centrepiece of Channel 4's year. The great international climate conference, scheduled for November 2020 in Glasgow, meanwhile, was going to be the focus of a slate of programmes tackling the climate emergency from different angles. We thought we were commissioning shows for a nation emerging from the paralysis of the Brexit crisis – and ready to re-engage with new topics which had been crowded out of the national conversation.

scale, _____
noise
and fun



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Ian Katz



But, in a few short weeks, a virus changed everything. Quite apart from having a direct impact on almost every aspect of our lives and becoming – for a while – the single topic of overwhelming interest on the planet, the Covid-19 crisis cut a swathe through both TV production and the revenues of commercial broadcasters such as Channel 4.

It posed all commercial broadcasters with a twin headache: to replace hundreds of hours of lost production while, at the same time, making substantial savings. In short, doing much more with much less.

Yet, at the same time, the Covid-19 crisis has presented public service broadcasters with a historic challenge and opportunity to step up and help people navigate through these extraordinary times.

The need for high-quality, trusted journalism is never greater than at times of national crisis. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have regularly extended Channel 4 News and commissioned quick-turnaround current affairs and factual programmes to help keep our audiences well-informed and hold decision-makers to account.

As well as keeping audiences informed, we have tried to capture and, hopefully, lift the mood of the nation, connecting people and helping them get through months of uncertainty and isolation with a combination of useful advice, activities, cheering diversion and plain fun.

Working closely with our independent production partners to create resourceful and creative ideas, our strategy has been to give people a structure to their day and help them use their time stuck at home constructively. Under the banner of a 'Stay at Home Academy', our first slate of commissions responding to the crisis helped viewers negotiate the challenges of isolation and being stuck at home with family.

We also commissioned a range of new shows to help families keep active and happy throughout the day – from Grayson Perry leading the nation in a giant art project (Grayson's Art Club), giving viewers ideas for maintaining a healthy sex life during the lockdown (Sex Tips for Lockdown), Kirstie Allsopp sharing her home crafting ideas (Kirstie: Keep Crofting and Carry On), and of course Jamie Oliver helping the nation to cook from their store cupboard essentials (Jamie: Keep Cooking and Carry On).

A key moment of the year thus far was the launch of our new daily live show, *The Steph Show*. Steph McGovern presented the show from inside her own home in Yorkshire, at the start of the pandemic, to provide a "power hour of positivity" for viewers in an initial six-week run. The show has now returned, re-launching in September as *Steph's Packed Lunch* from a new studio in the heart of Leeds.

This hasn't been about serving up 'eat your peas' television. Our slate for 2020 has been designed to make the Great British public think and laugh in equal measure, as we navigate through the crisis of a generation.

The crisis has not made us shy away from broadcasting programmes about other important, contemporary issues. Throughout 2020, we have and are tackling other important topics. During the summer, in response to the killing of George Floyd in the US, we commissioned *Take Your Knee Off My Neck*, a series of powerful and original films by black film-makers exploring race in contemporary Britain, as well as *The Talk*, a poignant, funny and emotional film which explored how BAME parents prepare their children to face racism. And, building on 2019's celebration of Black History Month, in 2020 we have commissioned a number of additional films to celebrate the month, including *Black, British and Funny*, *Black Hair* and *Black Love*.

From adult literacy to racism in schools; the disappearance of public hair to the loneliness of older people; the climate crisis to the rise of Vladimir Putin – our approach is reflected in our three creative priorities: noise, scale and fun.

Noise

Despite the disruption created by the Covid-19 crisis, our 2020 creative slate has been peppered with shows that have something sharp to say about modern Britain.

Throughout the year, we have commissioned programmes that are designed to be as entertaining as they are thought-provoking. For example, *The White Cube* tackled Britain's staggeringly low adult literacy rates and exposed a yawning gap in British education. Presented by Sandi Toksvig, the empowering and uplifting two-part series offers a group of eight adults – aged from 22 to 66 years old – a life-changing opportunity to overcome the one thing that has always held them back.


Another bold new series, *The School That Tried To End Racism*, followed a British school's ground-breaking programme to combat prejudice by taking the controversial step of racially segregating 11-12-year-old pupils, and encouraging them to talk freely about their attitudes to race.

At the start of the year, timed to coincide with Veganuary, we broadcast a family of provocative programmes designed to stimulate debates about the way our food is produced. *Meat the Family* was a quintessential noisy Channel 4 show, challenging viewers to think about our attitude to eating meat. This was supported by hard-hitting authored documentary *Apocalypse Cow: How Meat Killed the Planet* from environmental campaigner George Monbiot, and the documentary *How to Steal Pigs and Influence People*, which followed a unique community of vegan influencers.

In any given year, Channel 4 always aims to air programmes that we can confidently say no other broadcaster would broadcast and *Adult Material* is a prime example. From award-winning writer Lucy Kirkwood, the new darkly comic drama series delves inside the modern porn industry from the perspective of a mum-of-three (played by Hayley Squires) who has been working in it her entire adult life.

The slate also has also included a number of revelatory documentaries that have got the nation talking. Nineteen years after Stuart Lubbock was found dead at Michael Barrymore's home, *Barrymore: The Body in the Pool* forensically explored the full story behind one of Britain's most high-profile unexplained deaths, re-engaging the public with a shocking failure of the justice system, and leading to the reopening of the police investigation of the case.

And we have also been getting up close with the male anatomy, in a penetrating new arts documentary, *Me and My Penis*, in which British artist and fine art photographer Ajamu took an uncompromising look at 21st century masculinity in all of its forms.



We have a slate that many will love, some will hate, but none will be able to ignore.

Scale

As a commercial broadcaster, it's vital that Channel 4 delivers audiences of scale as well as creative impact and we have commissioned a wide range of broad shows, across all genres, with scale at their heart, and designed to perform strongly across both linear and via streaming.

Our 2020 slate in the scripted area is both highly distinctive and compelling. We kicked off the year with *Deadwater Fell*, a dark crime thriller starring David Tennant and Cush Jumbo, described as "Broadchurch but more inescapable" by *The Guardian*. Baghdad Central, a brand new six-part crime thriller from BAFTA-nominated writer Stephen Butchard, was set in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and highly unusual in presenting a Middle Eastern story through the eyes of Middle Eastern characters.

A raft of stand-out new titles that we developed in 2019 – including *Snackmasters* and Joe Lycett's *Got Your Back* – also returned in 2020, as well as established hits such as *The Great British Bake Off*, *24 Hours in A&E* and *Gogglebox*. These have sat alongside programmes such as *Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins*, *Celebrity Gogglebox* and other successful Channel 4 brands that will be extending further.

From the searing four-part documentary tracing the disappearance of Peter Falconio, to showing the inner workings of one of Britain's biggest public landlords in *Council House Britain*, which takes an intimate look at the lives of thousands of tenants, and *The Bridge*, our new gripping entertainment event full of unforgettable twists this autumn, programmes with scale have been at the heart of our programming.

Fun

Building on our success in scripted comedy in the past few years – with titles such as *Derry Girls*, *Friday Night Dinner* and many more – we have continued to put fun at the heart of Channel 4 throughout 2020.

We have been scaling up new talent that we successfully launched in 2019, such as Jayde Adams, Mo'Nique and others, plus have launched more scripted comedy talents, such as Mae Martin in her semi-autobiographical sitcom *Feel Good*. The 2020 slate has also featured a number of returning comedy titles, such as *Friday Night Dinner* and the unmissable parody sitcom *The Windors*.

Fun does not only extend to scripted – it is threaded through all of our genres, from documentaries like *Best Western*, a comedic fly-on-the-wall documentary about one of Britain's oldest and largest hotel groups, to *Five Guys a Week*, which offers the ultimate test of romance, compatibility and stamina by providing one

singleton with five trial live-in boyfriends for a week – all at the same time. The inimitable Greg Davies is also returning to the channel in the form of *Taskmaster*, with Alex Horn. And, as a special festive animated treat this Christmas, we will also have Quentin Blake's *The Clown* on Channel 4.

And we have also been introducing new warm, entertaining factual formats, such as the riotous new crafting series *Keith Lemon's Fantastical Factory of Curious Craft*.

And much more

We will also continue to serve Channel 4 content to viewers in more diverse ways, from more box-sets on All 4 to exclusive commissioned documentaries and comedy content across our social channels. This is at the heart of our strategy to put our content where our audiences want to watch it.

In uncertain and challenging times, public service broadcasters like Channel 4 play a vital role in holding the nation together. Reflecting the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and helping our viewers through has been one of the biggest challenges public service broadcasters have ever faced – but we believe it is vital to keep serving our audiences with shows that help them both understand and withstand today's world.

We are hugely appreciative of the imagination and resilience of our colleagues in the production sector in helping us to find ways to tell these stories despite the huge challenges they have faced themselves. We believe that we can support them best by continuing to commission shows and develop brilliant new ones for the future.

Ian Katz Director of Programmes