

**£662m**

total content spend  
(-2%)

**£489m**

originated content  
investment (-4%)

**10.2%**

viewing share across  
the TV channel portfolio  
(-3%)

The Big Narstie Show

We are creators. Every day, our creative investments across a broad range of high-quality TV programmes, films and digital content deliver to our remit.

# Investing in content

We work with the best creative talent on and off screen, and from across the UK. We introduced a new creative strategy in 2018 to increase our distinctiveness and take more risks in order to find the best ideas and pioneer new programme ideas and formats.

This shines through our content in everything that we do – from creative, risk-taking documentaries that tackle controversial subjects, through to supercharging our comedy slate, developing dramas that reflect the realities of contemporary Britain, backing a range of critically acclaimed feature films, and much more. Our approach distinguishes us from other broadcasters.

## 2019 ambitions

- 1 — Our content will reflect the country and engage with the big issues, including through an increased Current Affairs commitment and more live programming, such as a new daily show hosted from Leeds.
- 2 — Film4 will continue to invest in both new and proven, quality filmmakers with a unique vision. Film4-backed films launching in 2019 include: Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Favourite*, Stephen Merchant's *Fighting With My Family*, Asif Kapadia's *Diego Maradona*, Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History of David Copperfield* and Sarah Gavron's latest feature film project.



**Investing  
in content**  
(continued)

Our ability to engage audiences and make an impact is dependent on great ideas being generated within a thriving and diverse production sector.



**A core part of our mission is to strengthen the independent production sector by supporting companies directly, commissioning impactful, distinctive content that draws in sizeable audiences and revenues that can, in turn, be reinvested into more great content.**

Investment in content across our services fell by 2% in 2018, reflecting our response to the weaker economy and our strategy to deliver a financial surplus following two years of planned deficits, in which we drew on our reserves to boost investment. Still, at £662 million, our total content budget was the third highest in our history. In addition, content investment on the main channel was protected – rising marginally by £4 million, to £548 million.

This enabled us to invest in a key plank of our new content strategy, increasing Channel 4’s distinctiveness by commissioning more innovative, risk-taking and challenging programmes, while continuing to seek scalable popular returners.

This is exemplified by our high-profile drama content, which delivered a mixture of new and returning programming to viewers throughout the year. *Kiri*, a drama written by the award-winning Jack Thorne and starring Sarah Lancashire, was our biggest drama success of 2018. Each episode was watched, on average, by 4.9 million people, however, in total it reached 9.3 million people, equivalent to 19% of the TV population. The four-part programme became our biggest originated drama series since our records began in 2002 – and the biggest-ever drama on All 4. Our existing stable of returning programmes continued to build on their success in 2018, with 16 of our biggest peak-time series increasing their audience volume, including *24 Hours in Police Custody* (+28%), *Escape To The Chateau* (+28%) and *Friday Night Dinner* (+24%).

## Dialling up the difference



Peng Life

There were many creative highlights in 2018, particularly the introduction of a raft of new programmes that dialled up the difference alongside our successful stable of key returning programmes. In a world where audiences are flooded with choice, our strategy was to stand out from the crowd.

We launched a number of innovative and highly distinctive programmes, including *The Big Narstie Show*, *Genderquake* and *The Circle* alongside format innovations such as *Peng Life* and *Married to a Paedophile*.

*The Circle* asked provocative questions about modern identity, how we portray ourselves and how we communicate through social media. With 106 cameras, it was the biggest fixed-rig, fast-turnaround show on British TV and was Channel 4's most popular new factual entertainment series for young viewers in 2018.

It became our youngest profiling show since 2012, with a 49% profile of 16-24-year-olds, and it was also the biggest new original commission launch on demand since 2012, with over ten million views.

We also took an unvarnished look into the British penal system in *Prison*, and explored the current UK housing crisis by following intrepid Liverpool homebuyers in *The £1 Houses: Britain's Cheapest Street*.

*Channel 4 News* delivered several agenda-setting stories across 2018, including the extraordinary undercover investigation into Cambridge Analytica, about the harvesting of the data of millions of people's Facebook profiles for political purposes. This story dominated headlines across the world and wiped \$36 billion off Facebook's value (see case study, p97). The programme also covered in depth the scandal of the Windrush generation; and continued coverage of Brexit, with Channel 4 running an updated Leave/Remain poll of the UK public and holding a live Brexit debate.



**The 'social experiment' has been one of the standout TV shows this year."**

**The Guardian**, on *The Circle*



The Circle

## Investing in content (continued)

### Comedy

**It was a bumper year for comedy on Channel 4, putting it at the heart of our schedules with great success.**

Our edgy, irreverent comedy has always been one of the defining flavours of the channel, from *Comic Strip Presents* on the very first night that Channel 4 launched in 1982, through to *The Ali G Show*, *Brass Eye*, *Father Ted*, *Peep Show*, *Green Wing*, *The IT Crowd*, *The Inbetweeners* and *Catastrophe*.

In 2018, we announced an additional £10 million investment in scripted comedy and comedy entertainment, a notoriously difficult genre in which to achieve success. We aim to make Channel 4 the unequivocal home of British comedy.

Lisa McGee's award-winning *Derry Girls* supercharged our comedy slate at the start of the year and became our most successful new comedy since 2004, delivering a 23% share for 16-34-year-olds, which was up 147% on the slot average. Created in the Nations and Regions, *Derry Girls* was an overnight sensation and became the biggest series ever in Northern Ireland on any channel since BARB records began.

We also saw the return of Sacha Baron-Cohen to Channel 4 with his unique political satire series *Who Is America?*, which also significantly outperformed the slot average for 16-34-year-olds.

Other new comedy shows that stood out in 2018 included Desiree Akhavan's unflinching exploration of modern sexuality, *The Bisexual*, as well as Jamie Demetriou's irresistible *Stath Lets Flats*, about Britain's least successful letting agent. These complemented a range of returning comedy series, including Will Sharpe's *Flowers*, featuring Olivia Colman and Julian Barratt, and the return of hit comedy soap opera *The Windsors* with a royal wedding special.



Derry Girls



## Q&A interview: with Lisa McGee, creator of *Derry Girls*

**Q Why has *Derry Girls* been such a success?**

**A** It's been massive. There has never been a comedy about Northern Ireland like this. It's always been quite dark, serious and political, so there has been a real response to having a programme showing the lighter side of things. Northern Irish people have never really seen themselves reflected in this way before!

It also shows young female characters who feel real and who are allowed to lead, be ruthless and awful. We don't often see young women portrayed like this, and one of the great things about Channel 4 is that they're not afraid of stuff like that.

**Q What has been your experience of working with Channel 4?**

**A** I've had a positive experience, and I have a good relationship with Channel 4. Particularly in Comedy: I feel like they are genuinely interested in hearing about places and characters that we don't see on TV that often, which have been ignored.

I've always felt supported and the most important thing, for me, is that they trust writers and their ideas. They know when not to interfere, which is what you really want as a writer – to have creative control of your work.

**Q Why did you take *Derry Girls* to Channel 4 and not another broadcaster?**

**A** I had done another comedy with Channel 4 previously, called *London Irish*, which was quite dark and ruffled a few feathers when it came out. It didn't land as well as *Derry Girls*, but I really loved how much Channel 4 had trusted me with it.

So I felt that Channel 4 was where I wanted to work – they trusted that I had something worth saying. It's a relationship that has existed for years. Plus, I like – and watch – the channel, which helps!

## Investing in content

(continued)



*The Favourite*



**If I could make movies with Film4 from here till the cows come home, that would be my preference. I cannot speak more highly of them – they are creative, local and have brilliant taste.”**

**Bart Layton**, Director of *American Animals*

## A strong year for film

**Film4 Productions continued to develop and invest in film in 2018, working with the most distinctive and innovative talent in the UK. It was a strong year for Film4, which worked with both new and established filmmakers, alongside partners ranging from cultural organisations such as the British Film Institute through independent producers to Hollywood studios.**

Film4's strategy is to back creative excellence and invest in British content and British filmmakers, enabling them to realise the vision they have for their films.

The year started with the UK release of British-Irish filmmaker Martin McDonagh's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, our fourth project with the director, following *Seven Psychopaths*, *In Bruges* and his Oscar-winning debut short *Six Shooter*. *Three Billboards* was a critical and commercial success, winning over 100 awards, including two Academy Awards and five BAFTAs, and grossing almost \$160 million at the global box office. This was our first film greenlit under Film4's expanded investment strategy, which allowed us to take a 50-50 stake alongside Fox Searchlight, and its success has enabled us to drive revenues back into the organisation. We were also delighted that Rungano Nyoni's *I Am Not A Witch* won the all-important Outstanding Debut at the BAFTAs.

In May, Pawel Pawlikowski was awarded Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival for his film, *Cold War*, and continued to pick up more awards throughout the year, including three Academy Award nominations and four BAFTA nominations in January 2019. The film was released in UK cinemas in August and became the first foreign language arthouse title of 2018 to reach £1 million at the box office.

Our fourth collaboration with Oscar-winner Steve McQueen, *Widows*, received rave reviews and was selected for the Opening Night Gala of the BFI London Film Festival.

*The Favourite* – Film4's third collaboration with Yorgos Lanthimos, following *The Lobster* and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* – received its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival, where it picked up the Silver Lion – Grand Jury Prize and the Best Actress award for Olivia Colman. The film, released in the UK in early 2019, also went on to win one Golden Globe for Olivia Colman as Best Actress and seven BAFTAs in 2019, including

Outstanding British Film of the Year, Leading Actress for Olivia Colman, Best Supporting Actress for Rachel Weisz and Best Original Screenplay. Colman was also crowned Best Actress at the 2019 Academy Awards.

Other Film4-backed films released in UK cinemas in 2018 included: Clio Barnard's *Dark River*, Andrew Haigh's *Lean on Pete*, Bart Layton's *American Animals*, Mike Leigh's *Peterloo*, Michael Pearce's *Beast* (which won an Outstanding Debut BAFTA for Pearce), and Lynne Ramsay's *You Were Never Really Here*.

Film4 has a strong slate for 2019, including both new and established filmmakers with distinctive stories that aim to resonate with UK and international audiences. In addition to Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Favourite*, other 2019 UK releases include Asif Kapadia's *Diego Maradona*, Stephen Merchant's *Fighting With My Family*, Chris Morris's *The Day Shall Come* and Sarah Gavron's latest feature film.

Films still in production include Coky Giedroyc's adaptation of Caitlin Moran's bestseller *How To Build a Girl*, Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, Justin Kurzel's *True History of the Kelly Gang* and Michael Winterbottom's *Greed* – as well as four features from first-time film directors.



*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*



**Film4 have been incredibly supportive all the way through my career. Long may that relationship continue."**

**Lenny Abrahamson**, Director of *The Little Stranger*