Identifying and supporting both emerging and established talent – across TV, film and digital media – is a vital part of our role. This extends from on screen to off screen, as well as in-house at Channel 4.

Talent

**2019 ambitions**

1. In 2019, we will refresh and diversify on-screen talent, including several new, popular shows by a range of up-and-coming presenters.

2. We will continue to invest in developing new writers and directors, including through an ambitious new trainee director scheme in Documentaries and our 4 Writers scheme in Drama.

Nurturing talent ensures that our output stands out in a crowded market and bringing new faces to TV strengthens our appeal to younger audiences. This plays a particularly important role when global streamers invest mostly in established talent.

We are committed to ensuring that people from different backgrounds and walks of life can successfully pursue careers in the media industry, helping to foster the UK’s vibrant and innovative television and film sectors.

We invest significantly in talent and skills development initiatives within Channel 4 through our production partners, and by supporting cultural and educational institutions, to help people ‘get in’ and ‘get on’. From the earliest stages of the career ladder, through to working with talent as they progress during their careers, we work hard to develop long-lasting relationships with a shared success.

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683 young people attended C4 Pop Ups (+11%)

66% of our work experience cohort came from outside of London (+30%)

16 young people were funded through our Production Training Scheme
Talent
(continued)

From discovering and championing new talent to helping established talent move in new directions, Channel 4 is committed to forging long-term relationships with people on screen, off screen and in-house.

While familiar and well-loved faces were back on Channel 4 with a number of returning programmes, we also had a renewed focus on finding and developing fresh talent in 2018. The diversity of our output allows us to experiment with ideas and programmes, working with writers and indies to bring new ideas to life.

The year started very strongly, with acclaimed playwright and screenwriter Jack Thorne (National Treasure, Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, This Is England ‘86 and ‘90) returning to Channel 4 with a powerful and compelling new four-part serial drama, Kiri. We have a long history with Jack Thorne, having helped to launch his TV writing career with Shameless and Skins on Channel 4.

Set in Bristol, and telling the story of an abducted young black girl, Kiri was Channel 4’s highest-rating original drama ever and the second part of Jack Thorne’s Channel 4 trilogy examining the state of our nation (the first part, National Treasure, appeared in 2016).

Kiri is a good example of new and established talent working together. It was nine-year-old Felicia Mukasa’s first big role – she was spotted for the role when a casting director attended one of her drama classes – and starred alongside BAFTA and RTS award-winner Sarah Lancashire (Happy Valley, Coronation Street, Last Tango in Halifax).

We also made significant strides in championing and developing new and diverse talent in 2018. The Big Narstie Show (see case study, right), presented by Big Narstie and Mo Gilligan, was widely credited as ground-breaking – its share of young viewers was 68% above slot average and up 129% for BAME viewers.

Elijah Quashie’s TV career also began on Channel 4 in 2018 with Peng Life, a Factual Entertainment review show which saw Quashie and two friends test out some of the most deluxe experiences that money can buy – which attained a BAME share 81% above slot average.

Other new talents included Maya Jama and Alice Levine, who fronted our biggest young profile show, The Circle (see full case study on p59), as well as AJ Odudu, who featured in an authored programme about her personal journey to Nigeria to find a husband.

We also saw the fearless and taboo-breaking comedy The Bisexual land on our screens, written, directed by and starring Desiree Akhavan (see interview, p88), who appeared alongside Maxine Peake and Brian Gleeson.

Film4 Productions continued to support British talent in 2018, backing critically acclaimed and award-winning work from new and noted filmmakers, many of whom enjoy ongoing relationships with Film4. British-Irish filmmaker Martin McDonagh returned with the BAFTA and Oscar-winning Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, his third feature film that we have backed. Clio Barnard’s Dark River was her second film developed with and supported by Film4.

I Am Not A Witch’s writer and director Rungano Nyoni also won the prestigious 2018 BAFTA Award for Outstanding Debut. Our long-standing collaboration with Mike Leigh continued with Peterloo – the 11th film of his we have backed. And the critically acclaimed Widows continued the relationship between Film4 and Steve McQueen which has spanned all four of the director’s feature films.

I love Film4! After I made The Arbor, I was invited in by them and just asked what I wanted to do. I’ve been very nurtured and grown by Film4 – in a very thoughtful and caring way. Just brilliant.”

Clio Barnard, Director of Dark River
This is a show that you wouldn’t get anywhere else. It’s a breath of fresh air; it’s introducing you to two new presenters on your TV, a musician and a comedian. We’re not TV presenters. We’re just two guys giving the nation a really funny TV show.”

Mo Gilligan, *The Big Narstie Show*

A hit in 2018, *The Big Narstie Show* saw grime musician Big Narstie co-host the late night entertainment show alongside stand-up comedian Mo Gilligan, crystallising Channel 4’s commitment to bringing more diverse and emerging talent to a nationwide audience.

The anarchic studio series, from Expectation and Dice Productions Entertainment, featured a range of celebrity guests and musical performances alongside straight-talking segments on the news of the week, TV, showbiz, trends and laugh-out-loud sketches. Guests across the first series included Ed Sheeran, David Schwimmer, Thandie Newton, Richard Ayoade and Craig David.

Giving Big Narstie and Mo Gilligan their own show was a success with hard-to-reach audiences. It was 94% up on share of 16-24-year-old viewers, 129% up on share for BAME viewers and 144% up on share for black audiences.

*The Big Narstie Show* will return for a second series in 2019, and Mo Gilligan has also been commissioned for a new six-part comedy entertainment series of his own.
Q&A interview: Desiree Akhavan, writer and director, The Bisexual

Q Why did you take the concept of The Bisexual to Channel 4?
A Channel 4 has been the home of shows that have inspired me over the years: Peep Show, Smack the Pony, Catastrophe. It was clear from the moment I moved to the UK that Channel 4 was the only home for a series like this one, that takes huge risks and looks unlike anything else out there. I never felt censored by the network – the question was always: are we taking this as far as it can go?

Q Why did you want to write a story about bisexuality?
A I wanted to make this show because it was something I’d never seen before, a sex comedy from the perspective of a bisexual woman. I thought the subject matter lent itself well to the episodic format, where we could raise a lot of questions and introduce characters that represented various perspectives.

Q Do you feel that the storylines of bisexual people are under-represented on TV?
A Yes, definitely. I’ve never seen bisexuality at the forefront of the conversation.

Q The crew was female heavy; how important was it to have a cast and crew that was inclusive and diverse?
A It was always important to me that people making the show reflect the show itself, so it made sense that the makeup of the crew was predominantly female and queer.

Q What did you hope people would take away from the series?
A I made it to feel less alone and I hope that it does that for others. I also want to humanise a marginalised community that you rarely hear from. Mostly, I hope it makes you laugh and feel and question some of your own fears/prejudices.

Q Finally, what was your experience of working with Channel 4?
A It’s been an incredibly positive experience. I’ve found my collaborators at Channel 4 to be very smart, creative and generous.
unlike anything else
Talent at Channel 4

Uncovering hidden talent is about more than looking in different parts of the country. It means opening up opportunities to groups traditionally under-represented in the media industry and the wider jobs market. This is a core to our remit but it will also ensure our continued creative and commercial success.

Social mobility is at the heart of our talent strategy. This is divided into three strands: early outreach, ‘getting in’ and ‘getting on’. For these strands to work, it is essential both to raise awareness of opportunities among young people and then to ensure that they can use those opportunities to further their careers.

We published the findings of our social mobility research, conducted by Sam Friedman from the LSE, in 2018. This looked into the socioeconomic background of people working at Channel 4 and in the wider production industry (read more about the research on p77).

Over the last several years, we have run a number of industry-leading schemes tailored to early outreach. For the fourth consecutive year in 2018, Channel 4 ran a series of Pop Ups in cities across the UK – this is a national outreach programme of skills workshops and challenges, which enable us to delve deeper into a variety of communities across the UK, searching for hidden young talent and the ‘unusual suspects’, connecting with people who may not have considered a career in the media industry before.

This year’s Pop Ups were held in Dundee, Liverpool, Nottingham, Sunderland, Swansea and Wolverhampton. They focused on giving attendees tangible career advice and support in applying for roles within Channel 4.

For the first time, the Pop Ups also delivered two employability sessions, aimed at younger audiences recognised as being the furthest away from employment in their cities. A total of 683 young people attended our Pop Ups in 2018 – the highest number yet. Of these, 55% were from socially-mobile backgrounds (more than double our target), 19% of attendees identified as BAME, 19% as LGBT and 13% as disabled.

Our Work Experience Scheme provides training and hands-on experience of working in a team at Channel 4. This attracted 2,675 applications in 2018 and we offered 65 work placements across the year. Of these, 66% of places went to people from outside of London, who we supported financially during their placement. We also held a Work Experience Day in our Manchester office, which attracted 20 attendees who were considering a career in TV ad sales.

We also continued our partnership with the Royal Television Society, offering support and funded placements for talented engineering and computer science graduates from low-income backgrounds to consider a career in TV. In 2018, we ran a summer tour to invite students to visit Channel 4 for hands-on workshops helping them to understand how we use data and the role of cyber security in the work environment. We also gave a candidate an eight-week placement in our Data Analytics team.

The cornerstone of our ‘getting in’ strategy is our Apprenticeship Scheme. Apprentices spend 12-24 months attached to one of our departments in London, Manchester or Glasgow working on a range of in-depth projects that count towards their Level 3 or 4 qualification. In 2018, we welcomed seven young apprentices, out of a pool of 1,146 applicants.

We also funded 16 young people through our Production Training Scheme, a 12-month salaried training programme where we place trainees at independent production companies. Of these 16 places, 11 were with companies based in the Nations and Regions, in Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester and Plymouth. Of our trainees graduating in 2018, an impressive 94% are now working full-time in the industry, including at production companies such as Nine Lives, Firecrest Films and Lime Pictures.
Educational partners

We continued to support budding investigative journalists in 2018. We have now trained over 50 journalists through the Dispatches Investigative Journalism Training Scheme since we launched it in 2010, and these have come from a wide range of backgrounds.

The scheme offers an opportunity for people with solid professional experience to transfer their skills and experience to work in investigative broadcast journalism.

We have trained 16 advanced journalists on the senior scheme, which helps people to make the jump to produce and direct their own current affairs documentaries.

2018 saw the second cohort of graduates of the MA degree in Investigative Journalism, which we set up in partnership with De Montfort University in Leicester. Twenty graduates have passed through this MA in two years, many of whom have secured journalism jobs, including one, Hamza Syed, joining This American Life (one of the most prestigious shows on American public radio, and the makers of the podcast Serial).

TESTIMONIAL

“The TV industry is notoriously hard to get into. The Production Training Scheme is shaking up the TV industry by opening access for people from BAME, disabled, LGBTQ+ and under-represented backgrounds.

“The support that Channel 4 offers to trainees is incredible. There is a genuine interest in the development of our careers. It has given me a unique opportunity and I’ve come away with fantastic skills, advice, lessons and great industry connections – as well as my first TV credit!”

Yasmin Ali, Production Trainee in Leeds
170
mentees have been supported through the Commissioning Mentor Network

Professional development

Our off-screen talent is as important as who appears in front of the camera. Directors, producers, writers – all play their part in turning great ideas into brilliant original content.

Our commissioning teams work closely with independent production companies to source and cultivate diverse new talent. A number of schemes help us to identify and provide a platform for future talent, such as our Comedy Blaps (Comedy), First Cuts (Documentaries), Random Acts (Arts) and 4Screenwriting (Drama) – these schemes help new talent to flourish and discover a path to making great TV.

On the production side, our Commissioning Mentor Network focuses on identifying diverse rising stars. The network helps to elevate them to more senior posts in commissioning and production, both at Channel 4 and within the independent production community. This has created a pool of diverse talent: since launching in 2015, we have matched 170 mentees through the network. In 2018 alone, as well as managing existing members, we matched 49 new mentees, brought 20 new commissioners into the network and ran four induction sessions.

Our Creative Diversity team also runs a development programme, the Alpha Fund, to assist start-ups, BAME-led and regionally based companies, as well as projects with diverse content or talent attached. In 2018, over £385,000 was spent by our Creative Diversity team through this fund, supporting companies across the UK.

Through these bespoke talent initiatives, we continue to develop a strong pipeline of talent, supporting Channel 4’s success as well as that of the wider UK creative sector.