INVESTMENT IN HIGH QUALITY CONTENT
Channel 4’s primary function is to deliver its public service remit. Central to that remit is our investment in a broad range of high quality TV programmes, films and digital content.

Investing in content

- £675m total content spend (3%)
- £510m originated content investment (+2%)

10.5% viewing share across the TV channel portfolio
73% of the main channel peak time schedule devoted to first run originations (1pt)

Our approach to creativity distinguishes us from other broadcasters. We take more risks and we nurture and harness the best creative talent on and off screen, and from across the UK, 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 dramas that reflect the realities of contemporary Britain, to backing feature films with great potential, and much more.

Our ability to engage audiences and make an impact is dependent on great ideas being generated within a thriving and diverse production sector. Therefore, a core part of our mission is to strengthen the production sector both by supporting companies directly and by commissioning impactful, distinctive content that draws in sizeable audiences and revenues that can in turn be reinvested into more great content.

In 2017, despite a challenging advertising market, we increased our investment in new content. This enabled us to continue to deliver world class programmes across all genres and continue to support the UK production sector.

2018 ambitions

- 2018 will be a strong year for our scripted content, with a combination of returning titles, such as Humans and No Offence, alongside big new ambitious drama series. These include The First, created by Beau Willimon, about the first human mission to Mars, and Kiri, a four-part drama set in Bristol about the abduction of a child, written by Jack Thorne and starring Sarah Lancashire.
- Film4 will continue to invest in proven, quality filmmakers with a unique vision. Film4-backed films launching in 2018 include Martin McDonagh’s BAFTA and Oscar-winning Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, Lynne Ramsay’s You Were Never Really Here, and John Cameron Mitchell’s How To Talk To Girls At Parties.
In 2017, Channel 4 protected its investment in the creative economy, despite a challenging economic backdrop, with the advertising market declining 3% year-on-year. We spent a total of £675 million on content, with a record £510 million spent on originated content.

Reflecting Britain’s cultural diversity is central to all that we do at Channel 4, and we continued to showcase this diversity in many of our most popular hits, including Educating Greater Manchester, First Dates and Gogglebox. Successful new shows included Ackley Bridge (see case study on page 37), Lego Masters and Loaded, as well as the much-awaited transfer of The Great British Bake Off to its new home on Channel 4. Amongst a number of high quality acquisitions, The Handmaid’s Tale was one of the most acclaimed shows of the year globally.

2017 was a year of many creative highlights, with returning and new programmes that stood out in an increasingly congested broadcasting landscape, which is a threat to Channel 4, as an incumbent. As a result, we maintained a strong lead over our public service broadcasting competitors on all of our key remit measures, and the public’s perception of Channel 4 remains strong.

Our investment in quality content ensures that we can both deliver our remit as well as attract large, engaged audiences. This is exemplified by our high-profile sports content, which delivered distinctive programming to viewers throughout the year. It peaked during a sensational summer of sport which featured the 2017 British Formula 1 Grand Prix, the London 2017 World Para Athletics Championships and the UEFA Women’s EURO 2017 football championships.
A strong year for drama

Channel 4 is the home of innovative, high-profile drama. Taking on new work from the best-established and emerging writers, our drama slate offered a surprising, thought-provoking and entertaining alternative to the programmes shown on other channels and platforms.

Our dramas encourage audiences to look at the world through a different lens. This year, alongside our continuing series Hollyoaks and No Offence, we created a new hit in the shape of youth-focused Ackley Bridge, a new school-based series set in a multicultural academy in Yorkshire – our first 8pm drama since The Mill, in 2014. Other highlights included Philip K. Dick’s Electric Dreams, an ambitious Amazon co-production that saw the stories of Philip K. Dick adapted by some of the UK and the US’s most exciting talent, including Steve Buscemi, Sidse Babett Knudsen, Richard Madden, Bryan Cranston and Tuppence Middleton. Other highlights included Loaded, an original comedy-drama by Jon Brown; and Born to Kill, a haunting psychological thriller about family and psychopathy set in a rural British town.

We also launched one of the freshest and most talked-about programmes of 2017, The End of the F***ing World, one of our most ‘binge-watched’ programmes of the year, which was co-produced with Netflix and stunt-launched on Channel 4 and All 4.

Authorship is at the heart of our drama, and we are always searching for new, original voices in writing and filmmaking. In 2017, we continued to run a number of talent development programmes, including 4Stories, 4Screenwriting, The Channel 4 Playwright Scheme and The Channel 4 and Northumbria University Writing for TV Awards – read more about our talent initiatives on page 41.

“Channel 4 is the essential broadcaster, which runs the dramas and documentaries that others run from.”

Nick Cohen
Standpoint (September 2017)

The State

A compelling, fictional story based on extensive research, The State, which aired in August 2017, is a powerful four part drama that follows the experience of four young British men and women who leave their lives in the UK behind to join Isis.

Written and directed by Golden Globe and BAFTA Award winner Peter Kosminsky, and produced by Archery Pictures, the drama is a prime example of Channel 4 investing in distinctive, high quality content.

The State was always going to be a controversial drama and one intended to stimulate debate. Independent research found that three quarters of viewers believe that this is the sort of programme Channel 4 should be showing.

The programme was a success with the public, reaching a total of 5.5 million viewers, or 9.2% of the TV population. It was particularly successful at attracting BAME viewers, who were up by 134% against the slot average.

Although it proved a difficult watch for many, a notable eight out of ten viewers polled by research agency Other Lines agreed that it was good to see controversial yet important issues – such as modern extremism – being confronted and explored through a mainstream drama in a way that they hadn’t seen before on TV. 65% of viewers also said that the drama made them think about the process of radicalisation in a different way (rising to 69% with younger viewers).
Trump: An American Dream

One year on from the US election, a major four part specialist factual series, Trump: An American Dream, charted President Donald Trump’s long rise to power across five decades as a businessman, developer and media star before reaching the White House.

Commissioned by Channel 4 and co-produced with Netflix, Trump: An American Dream was made by UK indie producer 72 Films, as an epic exploration of one of modern America’s most extraordinary lives.

Through the eye witness testimony of 50 friends and enemies, and with a treasure trove of rare and revelatory archive, the series helped viewers to better comprehend the Trump phenomenon and stimulated debate on a range of issues surrounding his rise to power.

This documentary series is a good example of the co-production model, with the external financing enabling us to produce a more substantial and in-depth documentary than we otherwise would have been able to.

The four episodes captured the attention of UK audiences, attracting 6.4 million viewers across the series, before being released by Netflix outside of the UK.

“A well-made account of an unusual ascent.”

The Telegraph

Co-productions

2017 saw a rise in the number of programmes that were co-produced with partners, a key part of our content strategy as budgets in genres such as drama are rising.

Co-productions enable us to work with on-demand platforms and distributors – such as Netflix, Hulu, all3media and FremantleMedia – to make innovative, world-class content together. In each of our co-productions, we ensure we retain editorial control over these programmes which, after premiering on Channel 4, may move on to SVOD services, or other platforms in the UK and sold internationally by distributors.

A growing number of scripted and non-scripted genres tap into this innovative model, including Drama (Philip K. Dick’s Electric Dreams, co-produced with Sony Pictures Television and Left Bank Pictures, and The End of the F***ing World, co-produced with Netflix) and Documentaries (Trump: An American Dream, co-produced with Netflix).

This trend towards co-productions illustrates the appeal of Channel 4’s distinctive editorial input and taste: our co-production partners are investing in our expertise, knowledge and network of talented writers, producers and actors. For platforms looking to appeal to similar demographics to our audiences, Channel 4’s taste palate and experience is attractive. For us, these partnerships enable us to bring larger-scale and ambitious productions to our audiences.
Investment in film

Our investment in film continued in 2017 with a bold and diverse slate of films. As a vital supporter of British film, Film4 has a strong track record of working with the most distinctive and innovative talent in the UK, developing and co-financing many award-winning films, including past Academy Award-winners such as Lenny Abrahamson’s Room, Asif Kapadia’s Amy, Steve McQueen’s 12 Years a Slave, Phyllida Lloyd’s The Iron Lady, and Danny Boyle’s Slumdog Millionaire among others.

Film4’s investment strategy, which was expanded in 2016, now allows us to take a bigger financial stake in films such as Martin McDonagh’s Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (released in the UK in early 2018), which was co-financed on an equal basis with Fox Searchlight and looks set to do excellent international business.

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

Film4-backed films released in UK cinemas in 2017 include: Ang Lee’s Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk, Ben Wheatley’s Free Fire, Rungano Nyoni’s I Am Not A Witch, Danny Boyle’s T2 Trainspotting, Yorgos Lanthimos’s The Killing of a Sacred Deer and Adam Smith’s Trespass Against Us.

Film4 has a strong slate for 2018, including both new and established filmmakers with distinctive stories that aim to resonate with UK and international audiences. Upcoming titles include Martin McDonagh’s Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, Clio Barnard’s Dark River, Andrew Haigh’s Lean on Pete, Stephen Merchant’s Fighting With My Family and Lynne Ramsay’s You Were Never Really Here. Films still in production include Mike Leigh’s Peterloo, Steve McQueen’s Widows and Lenny Abrahamson’s forthcoming adaptation of Sarah Waters’ acclaimed wartime ghost story The Little Stranger.

“Film4 is known as a home for high quality commercial and critically successful titles and is a major developer of talent.”

Deadline