

Channel 4  
**Factual Entertainment Briefing**  
13 August 2007

**Introduction**

**Andrew Mackenzie**

**I. Reason for the Briefing**

Thank you for coming. The reason we wanted to have a briefing today was because we believe it is a good time. We have a nice message to send out: the doors are open again. We are commissioning again. I know that parts of this year have been quite bleak. The message that it has been a tough six months has been sent to us quite vociferously.

However, it is changing. This is partly due to the economic situation and partly because of the musical chairs that has been occurring between the BBC and Channel 4. This led to a slowdown. The effect of that was not pretty.

It has now reached the other end of the spectrum. We are about to kick the ball back into your court. We are asking you to give us your ideas because we have many slots to fill for next year. That is why we wanted the briefing today.

Firstly, I will state a few random commissioning bingo words. We will then show a video. Dominique Walker will tell you all about 9 o'clock. Ruby Kuraishe will tell you all about E4. I am going to talk about some of the other areas.

**II. Restructuring**

We have restructured, as a department, partly because we have shifted what we do and partly because people have come and gone. On the editorial side, the biggest shift is that we no longer look after *Big Brother*. We also no longer look after Sunday night. The reason those have been moved away from us is specifically so that we can cater for what is perhaps the channel's greatest need: a new creative vision in the mid-week; at 9pm, at 10pm and at 11pm.

We are now a small, beautifully-formed boutique department that will largely cater for 9pm, 10pm and 11pm primarily only a Tuesday and Wednesday. We need to provide approximately five series for the 2008 schedule at 9pm. We need to provide approximately four three-part series for 10pm. We need to provide 12 one-off programmes for 11pm. We also have a swathe of programmes to do for E4. There is much to be done.

We want to give you as many details as we can today. We will probably miss much out so please do ask us questions.

The key things to say about the re-shifting of commissioning editors is that we felt that perhaps it was not clear what different commissioning editors were doing within the Factual Entertainment department in its previous structure. Therefore, we have designed a structure where it is very clear.

### **III. The New Structure**

I will continue commissioning. Dominique Walker will look after 9pm series. We are bringing in a commissioning editor to look after the 10pm and 11pm series. Ruby Kuraishe will continue to look after E4. She will also try to broaden our base and introduce younger companies who perhaps have not broken into our department before. It is one of the things that I tried to do in the 11pm slot and I believe we had some success there. Ruby will continue with this. If you have yet to break into our department, please contact Ruby.

### **IV. The Video**

#### **1. Introduction**

I am now going to show you a video. This is a rough and ready tape. We have tried to put on the tape some stuff that you have not yet seen. This is stuff that we think we will be able to show you a clip of and then talk about in more detail as it illustrates a broader point.

The first two clips are offline. You will see some things that you have seen before, but we hope that this mostly will be an indication of the kind of direction we hope to go.

#### **2. Quotes from the Video**

‘This is Channel 4’s Factual Entertainment.’

‘Have you ever felt like walking out and just saying, “Fuck everyone”?’

‘Now I am a marriage counsellor.’

‘We are now on her private property.’

‘How did you get over the gate?’ ‘I leapt over.’

‘You are just disgusting. You need to repent. You need to turn to Jesus Christ because he will forgive your sins.’

‘I think it is going to be somewhere like North Australia or maybe South Africa.’ ‘Maybe to the desert.’ ‘A beach would be good.’

‘Oh shit.’

‘I don’t know whether I can be there.’ ‘How can you be positive about a dump?’

‘It’s raining. It’s raining hard.’

‘It takes twice as long if I don’t get any help, but when I ask for help and people don’t want to help, then why should I?’

'Don't talk to me. Eat your food.' 'Don't fucking tell me what to do.' 'Why? Or what? Or what?' 'Because I'm asking you not to.' 'What are you going to do?' 'Don't be so aggressive.' 'Don't talk to me like I'm a kid.'

'Eight wealthy British business leaders are embarking on a mission to see if big business can tackle poverty in a way that they can't.' 'It's not nice. I mean, they're walking around with no shoes. There's blood everywhere.' 'They are eight bosses used to having their own way, trying to work together.' 'Can we please clear the air here because we really have to?' 'Yes. We can clear the air.' 'I can't work with you two.' 'Will their brash business methods clash with local culture?' 'Tell them every time they ask for more money we reduce the money.' 'We have an expression for that in England. It's called "bollocks".'

'Having sex for the first time is one of the most significant moments in our lives. But what if that all important first time passes you by? What if you remain a virgin? For male virgins who have lost all hope, there is one place that can help.' 'Yes, I say huh.' 'Aquarian creates more love in the world.' 'Yes, yes.' 'You have to be very experienced about sex.' 'It's working with sexuality that appeals to me. It is so beautiful.' 'This film follows one man as he takes a unique course that he hopes will change his life forever.' 'I'd never do anything like this, not in a million years. I'd be like, "No way. I can't get involved with that."'. 'I think James needs a long way to go before losing his virginity.'

'Each year in Britain, more than 100,000 building jobs go horribly wrong.' 'At 3pm there should be tea on the table and you call the boys in.' 'You are a bully. You lie.' 'At well to do Hampstead, the Green-Harridges[?] are having an extension. Their builders should have completed the job in 12 weeks. Seven months on and he's still not finished.' 'I'm angry with him. They cannot get away with murder.' 'The two sides are locked in a bitter dispute.' 'I worked for Her Majesty the Queen and she would never ever say that to me.' 'But now we are sending in a mediator to try to pull the warring sides apart.' 'We are doing our best to reach a compromise.' 'Yes, but you see he wants £4,000.' 'They are straight at each other's throats.'

'Four miles of queues to clear still.' '20 minutes. We have had after a couple of lane closures from earlier...' 'Slow traffic northbound.' 'Britain's love of the motorcar is choking our roads, making us fat, and polluting the air we breathe. Every year it gets worse and no one dares to say stop. But one woman is prepared to do the unthinkable and try to get drivers out of their cars. She has chosen one town, Marlowe, and given herself one month to end their traffic nightmare. But getting middle England out of its motors is not going to be easy.' 'You try and cross that road between half past eight and nine o'clock you have no chance.' 'Just stay and tell me because it's silly to walk out without telling me what you wanted it to be about.' 'There is no way that you are going to persuade them to do it.' 'But as the town is about to discover, she is not a woman who takes no for an answer.'

'[Singing] She was my woman. And as she deceived me I watched and went out of my mind.' 'Oh! What happens when you sing that song? You can't compare the two, can you, really?' 'No.' 'Tom, Barry. Delilah. No effort at all. No effort needed. No thought needed for Delilah.' 'Barry Gibb is out and Tom Jones is in. Jo says I have the voice. Now all I have to do is get the hair, so it is back to Susan's salon. Surely with the right wig she could make me Tom. I know that I can pull this off. I can see it now. "Tonight, Matthew, I Justin Lee Collins am going to be Tom Jones." Do you not think I look like Rory McGrath?'

[Tape ends]

## 9pm

### Dominique Walker

#### I. Commissioning Needs

For 2008, I need to commission four to five three- or four-part series for the 9pm slot and I have not commissioned any. It is a slightly scary time. However, for you, it is incredibly exciting.

We need one series for the first part of 2008. Therefore, if you have any great ideas, talk to me outside and I will commission it very quickly as there are only a few months to go.

The main message to give is that, in our new Factual Entertainment department, we are looking for much bigger entertainment-skewed propositions. One of the key messages is for people not to think of us purely as the department of formats. I believe that is one of the things we have tried to hard to get across on the video. We are the department that produced *Wife Swap*, *Brat Camp* and *Supernanny*. *Wife Swap* is now in its 10<sup>th</sup> series, for example.

#### II. The New Generation of Series

We want the new generation of series. We have been saying this to the independents for a long time, but we mean it more than ever now. I will first pick up on the two 9pm programmes shown on the video that most illustrate what we are looking for. It is difficult to stand here and say what we are looking for. Many of you meet us face to face and it is always the things that we do not know that we are looking for that we most want.

The programmes that have made it through in the six months include *Millionaires' Mission* and *Dumped*. Those two programmes are interesting to look at in terms of what they have in common. There is room for more of this sort of thing.

They both have a huge concept top-line proposition in common. That is really difficult to come across: a simple idea at the top to be played out over three or four episodes in a documentary style. However, I believe that that is the way forward for our department and is the sort of programme that we are looking for.

##### 1. Dumped

The programme is very easy to understand. For example, what happens when you take 10 people and put them on Britain's largest rubbish dump? You do not know what it will happen or look like, but you know that you will be entertained and will learn much about how much we waste, what that looks like and what can be done to prevent it. Therefore, although there is an absolute purpose underlying the programme, in its first form, you wonder what it will look like.

##### 2. Millionaires' Mission

It is a similar experience with *Millionaires' Mission*. In this series, eight business leaders who are known for thinking outside the box are put into a remote area of Uganda in a small farming valley where tourists never tread. The business leaders try to solve the problems that they find there.

We had no idea what would happen. As you watch the series, you learn an incredible amount about how difficult it is to deliver sustainable aid, as well as enjoying the 'fish out of water' entertainment.

These two are great examples of what 9pm future series will be like.

### 3. Territories

We are often asked about the territories we are interested in. That is one of the hardest questions for us to answer. If someone had asked me if I wanted a 9pm series about delivering sustainable aid in Africa, I would have said no. It would not sound like factual entertainment. However, the series does shed light on that, despite it not being the overriding reason to watch.

Similarly, with *Dumped*, we had been dissuading offers of formats or ideas around the environment. We felt that it was not an area that we could do. BBC2 had done it quite a lot and we did not feel that it would work on Channel 4. Suddenly, *Dumped* comes along and receives a green light immediately.

It is fair to say that there is a feeling in the department that we have been swimming in some of the same waters as the documentaries department for some time. Areas such as divorce or children failing in school, which are darker areas, will not be the same areas that we will commission in 2008.

### 4. Broader Appeal

Because we have been swimming in the same waters as everyone else, there are huge areas that we have completely missed. In some ways, the BBC has been much cleverer about finding those broader appeal territories and exploiting them. We would like to offer programmes that have much broader appeal. If BBC2 look at British geography, for example as they do with *Coast*, what could Channel 4 look at?

### 5. The 'F' Word

The nearest example on Channel 4 is *The 'F' Word*. *The 'F' Word* takes the huge area of food and makes it feel as though it is Channel 4. Gordon owns the territory. It is absolutely a 9pm treatment of something that had previously been the domain of daytime television. The studio format was reinvented. The magazine show was reinvented. The series was made to feel different and reflective of a Channel 4 series. It works. I wonder if there are other broader areas that we could do that with for the 9pm series.

## III. Contribution and Participation

I would really like to hear many questions at the end. Some of you are familiar faces, but there are many of you who are not. Please ask me questions and make me fill in the details.

The next generation of commissions from this department will not necessarily come from the same people as before. The things that have come to us, that we have been excited about, often come from unexpected sources. *Dumped* is being made by a production company who have not done anything for Channel 4 before.

*Millionaires' Mission* was produced by a completely new production company. It was one of their first commissions.

I want to give out the message loudly and clearly that we are not talking to just three or four people who we want to commission. It is open to all of you. No one should feel intimidated about putting their ideas across. We are looking for fresh ideas and fresh people.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Participant 1**

Both of the two programmes that you mentioned have large overriding themes: poverty and the environment. How important is that theme? Is it necessary to have a theme or would you consider having something that was purely entertainment?

### **Dominique Walker**

If I have five series next year, all of them will probably have some kind of underlying purpose. We always need that. However, the top line thought should be that the programme should be entertaining. Equally, I would not commission anything that felt as though it had the social purpose but did not have the entertainment. They are equally important.

The entertainment needs to be written larger than before. Previously we had started with the social purpose and considered how we would inject entertainment into it. Now the top-line proposition must be bolder and bigger. It still requires the purpose though in order to be made and watched.

### **Participant 2**

Do I see the spectral hand of co-production hovering over a couple of those series? There are some American voices in *Millionaires' Mission* and perhaps in *Dumped*. Are you co-producing those series with other channels?

### **Dominique Walker**

No. In *Millionaires' Mission* there is one woman who was born in Canada, but has lived in England for 10 years. We put her in because she was obsessed about her Gucci handbag. Annoyingly, she never mentioned it once she arrived in Uganda. She actually got stuck into camping and living rough in Africa, whereas we thought she would be the one who would complain about not having make up and so on.

It is not an overriding thing for us. We are happy to finance the right ideas.

### **Participant 3**

How important are new on-screen talent next year?

### **Dominique Walker**

Very important. I will leave that question for Andrew to answer though. I am not saying that we would not have new on-screen talent at 9pm. Indeed, the woman who stopped traffic is a new face for Channel 4 and that will play at 9pm.

Overall, as a channel, and particularly in our department, we are aware that we need new faces. It is not my overriding need, with the 9pm slot, but it is for 10pm.

### **Participant 4**

What is your feeling about experts or teams of experts?

**Dominique Walker**

I did not used to like experts, but having seen the show about builders, it felt different. The feeling of the expert walking up the garden path, opening the door, finding a problem, putting everyone through their paces, and leaving having sorted out the problem within two weeks did not appeal to me.

We have become cynical. It is difficult to make things feel fresh. Although I will never say 'never', the bar is really high for expert-driven ideas. I think we need to be more imaginative about how we make transformation. As we all know, transformation through conflict is a great way to make television. It is a great way to drive narrative. However, we need to be more imaginative about how we make that happen. Putting in an expert is simply not good enough now.

**Participant 5**

If the idea was right, would you be looking to commission more than three or four parts for a series or is that a scheduling need?

**Dominique Walker**

No. It is quite hard to get more than four hours out of a top-line proposition. They are big ideas, such as the idea to take a group of millionaires to Africa or to see what happens when a group of people are put on a rubbish dump. However, when you break it down editorially to what happens in each episode, something major has to happen within each one-hour episode.

There is a feeling that the schedulers are telling us what to do, but it is absolutely not like that. They have to make the schedule work, but we can go to them and say that we need to have an extra episode. The viewer does not count how many episodes have been on and say, 'Well this feels a little long.'

Sometimes it works better for us when there are five or six episodes as you can put more marketing behind it and people can find it. The problem is that it is difficult to find ideas that are big enough to sustain entertainment over five or six episodes.

**Participant 6**

[Inaudible]

**Dominique Walker**

I was talking about formats which are episodic and where the same thing happens every week, but in a different place; the traditional format, in the way that *Wife Swap* or *Supermanny* is. I would not do a straight observational-documentary out of my department because I would expect Angus to do it out of the documentaries department. Perhaps if there was access to someone who felt that they were right for Factual Entertainment, but it probably would need an element of construction to make it feel broad enough to work as a Factual Entertainment proposition.

I think it would need some construction. I do not mean that it would have format beats that are in every episode, where a viewer almost has the expectation that that hits then and this is what happens in part three. I feel really tired of that as a viewer and I think that viewers do also. I am less inclined to commission that type of thing. I want instead to have a clever and simple top-line proposition that will then play out.

## 10pm

### Andrew Mackenzie

#### I. Commissioning Needs

##### 1. Authors

Julian said two quite clear things about 10pm. Firstly, where are the authors on Channel 4?

If you looked at BBC2's launch a few weeks ago, they announced six or seven faces. They are all household names, from Heston Blumenthal to Neil Oliver. It felt quite a rich launch because they had so many names that carried weight to the stories. Julian's point is that we do not have them and that Factual Entertainment is a department that should be developing them.

We have Jamie Oliver, Jo Frost, Justin Lee Collins, for example, but we do not have many others. We need to work on that. We need your help with that.

##### 2. One-Offs

We have a reputation for doing some quite distinctive one-offs, such as *Fat Pets*, *Bring Back Dallas*, and *Virgin School*. They are simply that: one-offs. There is no residual impact or benefit to the channel for those one-offs. Over two million people watched *Virgin School* at 10pm. It was a real success. They did not come back the following week because there was not another one. Perhaps we should have done more; perhaps we should have done a series of similar programming.

##### 3. Five Three-Part Series

We are attempting to address this next year. We have been given more money and slots at 10pm. We have approximately 15 slots. We aim to break that up into five three-part series. We can make those cohesive series in a number of different ways. One of the ways will be to place authors on them.

##### 4. Justin Lee Collins

The only one that is commissioned so far is Justin Lee Collins. We did a pilot called *The Convention Crasher* where Justin does a sort of *Celebrity Faking It* meets *Louis' Weird Weekends*. He goes to the World Celebrity Impersonators Convention in Miami. He pretends to be Tom Jones and tries to win the competition. At the same time, he meets seven Bill Clintons, three Marilyn Monroes, and a whole array of American lunatics.

We are doing three more of those. It will probably be the most entertainment-skewed end of what we would hope to achieve at 10pm. I think we need another Justin, but we also need a more journalistically-sound Justin. We probably need a young Mark Thomas or a young Michael Moore. We need somebody who can attack a subject with the same level of wit as Justin, but perhaps with more subversive and journalistic insight.

## II. Subject Matter

### 1. Spirit, Mischief and Subversive Wit

I do not know what the subjects are. I wish that I did. I can talk about a spirit of the show that I have seen on other channels. Some of the mischief strands on BBC3 are a good style note for us. I thought the *Booze Bird* film was a good film. The show *Hoax* - about reality television - was good.

I thought *Power to the People* on BBC2 was something that we would not want to do. There are elements of Simon Dickson's film with Noreena Hertz which have the right spirit. The film shows how Hertz tries to get the Premiership footballers to pay a day's wages towards nurses. It addressed the issue of the wealth gap in our society and questioned what we can do about it.

We need more mischief and subversive wit in those strands. We are investigating and developing a number of filmmakers as they step in front of the camera. That may be a way forward for on-screen authorship. We are looking at the normal laminated sheet of comedians who are suggested at this time.

### 2. Immersive Quests

There must be other people around though. There must be journalists who can do immersive quests, such as Nicky Taylor's *Booze Bird*. I do not think that there are many other of those mischiefs that we would consider. They must be a large and simple challenge in order to appear on Channel 4 at primetime.

### 3. Making the Series Coherent

There are other ways that we can make the series coherent. They do not all have to be authored. We could take a subject. We could take a light format. For example, Betty did a two-part series last year called *The Diary Of...* We are looking to do that again. *The Diary of a Mail Order Bride*. *The Diary of a Mistress*. It brings a light cohesive style to a film that will give us a series of three episodes.

## Questions and Answers

### Participant 7

Are these hour-long shows or half-hour shows?

#### Andrew Mackenzie

They are hour-long shows.

### Participant 8

What is the key to finding what works for 9pm and what works for 10pm?

#### Andrew Mackenzie

Scale and ambition. As Dominique said, the key issue with the 9pm slot is that we have to be more overtly entertaining. The emotion that I feel when I sit down at 9pm, when I have done all my tasks, is that I want to be entertained. I want to be entertained with purpose. I do not want to sit

down to a piece of homework. That may be where we have slipped up in the past. At 10pm, you can afford to be more subversive and witty. That is the slight difference.

### **Participant 9**

Will there be seasons?

#### **Andrew Mackenzie**

I think we would if we found the right thing. I have not found it yet. Last year we did 30 films at 11pm. In 2008, we are only doing 12. There are two reasons. Firstly, we are moving that money into primetime. Secondly, this year it did not work as well as last year.

In ratings terms, Channel 4 is down across the board, as is everybody. That affects 11pm because there is a natural inheritance. Each of the seasons that we commissioned last year cost approximately £300,000-£400,000, and they are not exactly reaping the rewards that they had done last year. For example, the series about the penis and so on.

We need to address that. Julian's answer is to give us more slots at 10pm. Much of the stuff that we did commission for 11pm this year actually ended up at 10pm. *Virgin School* had been commissioned for 11pm, for example.

If there are seasons, it is sometimes about who you are talking to at the time as to how this gets transmitted. We try to transmit it as soon as we have the germ of an idea. Do not feel that you have to come with three. Come with the germ of a good idea and we can work with it.

### **Participant 10**

Is it true that, at 10pm, you would not do three films that follow on from each other in one series? They will be self-contained?

#### **Andrew Mackenzie**

Yes. They will be self-contained. That is a distinct difference, yes, whereas *The Woman Who Stopped Traffic* is in three parts. It is at 9pm because it is a campaign that builds and builds. They are related, as opposed to a series of self-contained episodes.

## **E4**

### **Ruby Kuraishe**

#### **I. Overview**

I am sure you all know that E4 is primarily Channel 4's naughty little sister. With Angela Jain at the helm she is set to get even naughtier. *Skins* and *Fonejacker* are the big successes of this year, but there is still plenty of room for Factual Entertainment.

*Chantelle - Living the Dream*, *Princess Nicky*, and *Stop Treating Me Like a Kid* have all been memorable hits for E4 viewers. We would like some more.

Looking ahead, there is room for two to three series for next year, and possibly even one six-episode series before the end of this year. This means that you will have to come and see me soon. Think cheeky and irreverent. We are not as achingly teen as MTV, nor are we as pink as

Living. Think who or what is hot right now. We have had some great faces showcased on *Big Mouth* this year. What more can we do with them? Are they Andrew's authors for Channel 4 perhaps? Think funny but still clever. I am still like a child. I still want to know the 'why'.

If you have an idea, please come and see me. If you think you have an idea that could play out before the end of this year, come and see me soon.

## Closing Remarks

**Andrew Mackenzie**

### **I. Closing Remarks**

#### **1. Open for Business**

I really want to emphasise that the ball is in your court. We are open for business and time is pressing. It is fair to say that when Julian came in he did a brutal assessment of Channel 4 that only an outsider could have done. It is also fair to say that Factual Entertainment was underperforming. If you look at the Factual Entertainment hits that he had during his time at BBC3, such as *Baby Borrowers*, *The Filthy Rich and Homeless*, and *Kill It, Cook It, Eat It*. There were a number that were generated in his time.

There is one returnable Factual Entertainment format from this year to the next year. It is *The Secret Millionaire* and it came from the Documentaries department. That is not great.

We have been given licence to fill our boots in these three slots of 9pm, 10pm and 11pm. It is an incredibly exciting time. We want to make overtly entertaining, humorous, comic films with a great sense of purpose.

Our scale and ambition is increased to ideas such as *Dumped* where we are doing things that we previously did not think possible. It is wonderful to get an idea where your first emotion is: can we really do that? I know it is a cliché, but we do not get enough of those ideas. When we do get them, it is a wonderful feeling.

#### **2. 9pm**

Please come to us with the 9pm ideas, even if you do not feel it is your home territory.

#### **3. 10pm**

The key phrase for the 10pm slots is subversive wit and authorship. Please maintain those in all your 10pm thoughts.

#### **4. 11pm**

The 11pm slot is where we have the singular signature. It is to go to the place where no other channel will go. It is fair to say that we are nearer the dark side of pornography than we are 'wank week' at the moment, in terms of sentiments. Finding a sense of purpose in the current climate and being able to defend everything we do while pushing the limits is absolutely important.

## 5. E4

As you heard from Ruby, E4 is massively open for business. You can go to a number of commissioning editors for E4. We have two to three series that Factual Entertainment will produce. We will commission you for E4 in the same way that we will for Channel 4. Ruby is a great point of contact because she lives and breathes the channel and knows it better than anyone.

Thank you very much for coming.

**This Full Transcript was produced by Ubiquis ☎ +44 (0) 20 7269 0370**