

# Channel 4 Education Briefing 1 June 2006

## Overview of Department

**Janey Walker**  
Head of Education

### **I. Overview**

We want to commission programmes that are ambitious, authentic, and not patronising. That is worth emphasising with the 14-19 audience, who are quick to notice if you are talking down to them. We are going to stick with the focus on 14-19 year olds. There will be changes compared to the last year that will take a while to come through. The headline change in 2007 is that we want to focus on two key seasons a year. It is difficult to get across what you are doing if you have a scatter-gun approach to it. *Cold Turkey* showed us the benefits of having big events that can run across peak time and the morning schedules and we would be aiming for at least one of those a year. We are looking at more long-running series and whether there are education spin-offs from our peak time series.

### **II. Area of Delivery**

When you look at our morning programmes, we need to make it more like a digital channel because you cannot publicise lots of individual programmes. The conundrum for Channel 4 is that we transmit our programmes for 14-19 year olds in the morning when we know they are not watching television. That will change radically soon; there is currently a revolution in video on demand and broadband that we will take advantage of. We also have to make the message about what we are trying to do and which subject areas we are focusing on clearer. The area of delivery is important, but content is the key thing.

The quality of some of the 14-19 output this year has been fantastic. We want to build on that and make sure that what we are doing feels like Channel 4, has Channel 4's energy and ability to engage, and has great educational content.

### **III. New Media**

In new media, our ambitions are similar. *Breaking the News* and *Not Forgotten* are the two most striking things we have done and if we could do two things like that each year that would be a huge achievement.

Please send all proposals to Deborah using the online system.

# Commissioning Requirements

**Deborah Ward**

**Commissioning Editor Education,**

## **I. Overall Picture**

We have £6 million, and I need to commission 60 hours. With our 14-19 audience, we are trying to play back to them their world and embellish that with information about the transitions they are going through. Channel 4's average audience member is 45 years of age, but from a marketing point of view, we think in terms of 16-35. That audience is undergoing transitions also and there are programmes like *Supernanny*, *Location, Location, Location*, and *A Place in the Sun* as well as politics, science, and history programmes to cater to them. For our 14-19 audience, we want to make that type of programming, but for a younger audience. Transitions continues to be our overarching strategic outlook.

Within that, there are three subject areas. One is the 'rites of passage/teen angst' area – the sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll part of teenage life. The second area is 'What next?' That includes education, career, and training. The third area is 'opening up of the wider world' where we would put science, history or philosophy.

## **II. Structure of Commissioning**

We will commission 40 of the 60 hours into longer-running series – anything from 5-20 half hours as long as the subject is strong enough. For example, we have a current series called *Teen Tycoons*, which fits into our 'what next' area and has long-term potential. Also, *Make Me a Grown-Up*, a 14-19 version of *10 Years Younger*, and *Gay to Z*, which deals with gay issues.

### **1. Long Series**

We will spend about £60-80,000 an hour on those longer-running series, and be looking to commission some of those series by the end of this month. We will be having a gay season and a 'media unmasked/behind the scenes of television' season for the autumn next year. They are quite full already but there are gaps for some 5-10 minute shorts. By autumn, I will be commissioning the seasons for 2008, which are not yet decided; you can inform those subject matters with your ideas. The gay season was linked with the civil ceremonies; there was a feeling that that must change the world for young people. We wanted to talk less about gay sex and more about gay relationships. With 'media unmasked' we felt that we had some territory there – Channel 4 being squarely in the creative industry. Apart from the longer-running series, we are looking for an event like *Cold Turkey*, which played in the mornings and evenings and followed three people going through a heroin detox. We will spend between £100-140,000 per hour on them.

### **2. Sex, Science, and Philosophy.**

Apart from the seasons, we feel that Channel 4 and sex education should be one. We did one series this year – *Let's Talk Sex* – but it is a huge topic area and we will look for new material as long as it is original. The *Life Skills* will continue, but we would like to commission one series or

set of three one-offs on a bigger subject such as science or philosophy, the latter of which is something Channel 4 feels it may have something to say to the younger audience about.

### 3. Spin-offs

There might be an opportunity for a spin-off from a features idea or a long-running series you are involved with. For example, there might be a more teen-centric spin-off from a show like *The Unteachables*. Think about whether there is something you might talk to us about when you are doing work for another channel.

### 4. Drama

In addition to £6 million, 60 hours, transitions, long-running, sex, philosophy, and science, we have another ring-fenced piece of budget of £1.5 million for drama. We have to come up with ideas that can play in the mornings and possibly elsewhere.

### 5. Regions

We will be commissioning 60% of programmes from the regions.

## III. Commissions for 2005/06

[Video clip of *Dog Trainers*]

Programmes like *Brat Camp* deal with an extreme experience, but we also look for all-teen experiences. We commission some programmes dealing with the broken end of society, but it is difficult to commission much because it does not touch the 'every teen' experience. That is why *Underdogs* is great; it reflects a broad range of teen experience, has a clear intention, keeps its sense of humour, and is a fantastically visual series.

[Video clip of *Cold Turkey* from *Firefly*]

This was more serious in tone. There were three people who went through a five-day detox, and led to a debate about addiction withdrawal. It aired live in the morning and post-11 o'clock Monday-Thursday.

*Young Black Farmers* is a universal idea that works well. Wilfred claims to be the only black farmer in the UK and set up a black farmer's scholarship because he believes that if young people stay in urban communities they will never escape and create a ghetto. It throws up a lot of issues about racial identity.

[Video clip of *Young Black Farmers*]

The last clip is a one-off hour by ZKK showing tonally how we would like to get into discussions about sex.

[Video clip]

**Antonia Hinds**  
**Deputy Commissioning Editor, Education**

## **I. New Directors Scheme**

I will talk to you about a new director scheme we launched at Channel 4 Education last year. We felt Channel 4 Education was a place to nurture new talent in Channel 4 so we commissioned eight half-hour documentaries under the title *My Crazy Life*.

[Video Clip]

Each of the films in the series touches on a different element of teenage life, from the fate of asylum seekers when they turn 18 to the search for the next Mr England. Channel 4 has run a number of new talent schemes in the past. This time, we decided to have a scheme where directors did not have to bring their own ideas because not all directors are good at coming up with ideas or have the right ideas at the right time. By giving the ideas, we had the widest scope to find the best new talent in the industry. This meant a rigorous, long, and arduous interview CV process. Search for new talent is an important issue in the industry; there are many people who want to direct – it is a matter of finding those who can. We have created an opportunity for eight people to break through and we have achieved some great results.

One of the most successful films in the series is Tanya Winston's documentary about teen protestor Laurie Pycroft. Instead of making a conventional documentary about the rights and wrongs of animal rights, we made a wry documentary about Laurie becoming a teen media sensation.

[Video clip]

The series transmits next Monday.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Participant**

Can you tell us more about the gay and 'media unmasked' seasons? Also, what is the upper age limit to focus on in pieces about people, like the Laurie Pycroft documentary?

### **Janey Walker**

I am not sure there is an upper limit. It is about transitions and 'what I what to be', so 14-19 year olds still want to know about people older than themselves. It depends on the series and the contributor's role. The average age of the average *Friends* viewer is in the teens.

### **Deborah Ward**

The big event in the gay season is *My Big Gay Prom*. We are setting up a gay prom, like teenagers have at the end of year 11. There are five half-hours of *Gay to Z*, which is a magazine series that allows us to touch on lots of stories and issues. We have an authored documentary by Qboy, who

is a white rapper considered brave for coming out as gay in the world of rap but who believes that is nothing compared to the perceived phenomena of more and more teenagers coming out at school aged 15.

In 'media unmasked' there are six one-hours behind the scenes of television and a couple other series around the workings of television.

Teen Tribes research is a huge piece of research originally for advertising and sales to show how funky Channel 4 is, but it is actually a fresh piece of insight into the tribes that exist. This research may help you brainstorm. We look at what are the common areas between tribes especially.

## Tribes Research

**Richard Helyar**

**Brand Insight Manager, Research and Insight**

This piece of research was designed to explore youth culture and its groups, which we call tribes, in their own words. We wanted to describe them in their own language. This work has come from talking with teenagers, online forums, focus groups, talking to journalists, magazine editors and people in marketing. We pooled it together to produce a user guide to youth tribes.

### **I. The Three Groups**

We think there are three overarching groups you will fall into: 'Townies', 'Indy-kids', and 'Trendies'. Broadly speaking, townies are the core of the British young population. Music will take you over to indy-kids and fashion will take you to the trendy zone. The colour, depth and diversity is at the next level down. These tribes have a critical mass, look, share common values, share media, and have music and fashion that they own. We have compiled a website which contains all this information as well as video, vox pops, pictures of their bedrooms, media diaries, the brands they use, the music they are into etc.

Some of them you will know; 'Goths', 'Chavs', 'Street Rats', who are extreme Chavs, 'Mic Massives' who are creative and passionate about making music, 'Myspacers' and 'New Techies' who are passionate about technology and building sites, etc.

Of the three groups, we think 'Trendies' has the most potential to grow. Fashion is so accessible now with Topshop and Primark. Indy kids will remain the most influential. Guitar music is still one of the biggest influences to kids as a whole, but we think there will be a better racial mix there. The chav tribe will probably split into two. Some will go into another area and others will remain proud chavs. 'New Techies' will continue to grow. They are often a gateway to other things because they are sought after by others in the classroom. We are seeing bling and conspicuous displays of wealth decrease. We will have to keep a close eye on the Myspace community.

### **II. Future Trends**

It is a dynamic, fractured picture; tribes do not stay the same for very long. Going forward, we see people clustering around cores – environment is the big one, but also human rights or tuition fees, and you may have heard of 'Freegans' who eat what they find in bins. With the Olympics, sport, health, and organic food may become more influential. 'Blitz-chic kids' is interesting: fashion now

goes back to the 1930s-50s. There are 'Folkies', who react to over-commercialised festivals such as 'V'. Punk is due for a return. 'Aim High Society' is the resurgence of 'proud to be posh' – people reclaiming the middle and upper class.

The website has some thoughts on what glues these tribes together. Some brands can do that too, such as McDonalds, Topshop, PlayStation or iPod. It was clear when we talked about television that it still plays an important role, as is the Internet, which is massively influential. Television is distinct because it is not as divisive as the Internet. Nine out of 10 16-24 year olds talk about stuff they saw on TV, which is far higher than any other medium. [www.uktribes.com](http://www.uktribes.com) is the website.

### **Janey Walker**

Deborah has given you a clear outline of what she is looking for and a deadline. The proposals should start pouring in over the next two or three weeks before the 2007 slots start disappearing.