SUPERDIVERSITY: TELEVISION'S NEWEST REALITY

Trevor Phillips

Foreword: The Crystal Box

Twenty- six years ago, the independent producer Samir Shah and I became the first programme makers to deliver a national network series aimed at minority audiences with the express intention of treating them as British viewers. Prior to November 1982, and the launch of Channel 4, most programmes aimed at minority viewers had treated them as aliens, focusing either on teaching viewers the English language or "British" ways; or else on informing them about affairs "back home". The industry itself had no senior minority professionals. It was a crystal box populated by male, white professionals insulated from the world in which they sat, largely oblivious to the changing landscape around them.

Eastern Eye and *Black On Black*, two weekly magazine programmes commissioned by Channel 4 set out to open the box. They aimed to chronicle the lives of minority Britons, partly for the benefit of those communities; but also for what we described as the "over-the-shoulder" audience - largely white viewers who wanted to know more about the preoccupations of these "strangers" in their midst.

The programmes were pioneers. They helped to establish Channel 4 as the leading force in UK media in understanding and addressing Britain's growing ethnic diversity. The fact that they were able to break the mould was facilitated by the unique mission and structure of the new Channel 4.

At the heart of the mission was a commitment to give voice to groups of people largely missing from "mainstream" TV. That commitment was typified by the ethnic minority programmes which were for many years part of the genetic code of Channel 4. The innovative commissioning structure of Channel 4 encouraged minority talents to flourish in a way that had not been possible before. Many people hoped and expected that this would be the start of a process through which the crystal box that the television industry inhabited would finally be cracked just enough to admit a change of air.

Since that time both Britain and television have undergone profound changes.

Attitudes to race have advanced dramatically. Today, it would seem risible to address these audiences in the way we did then, because no-one regards Black and Asian Britons as strangers any longer. Research for the former Commission for Racial Equality showed that more than eight out of ten people reject the association of Britishness with any particular race or colour. Now, Britons of all colours share tastes and attitudes historically associated with one racial group or another - in food, in music and in social and political attitudes. Broadly speaking, the public no longer thinks of people who are not white automatically as aliens. And to make the old attitudes seem even more anachronistic, the largest wave of new migrants is European and mostly white.

Television too has been transformed. There are now hundreds of digital channels available to view. Subscription, pay TV and broadband have all multiplied the options available to viewers. In Britain, the industry itself is increasingly dominated by substantial, consolidated production companies who are for the first time able to negotiate with broadcasters from a position of strength.

This multiplicity of platforms and channels has provided new opportunities to showcase a diversity of ethnicities amongst artists, performers and presenters, to the degree that my former colleague, Samir Shah, now a non-executive director of the BBC, was moved to point out in his recent Royal Television Society Fleming Lecture that :

> *"The......tick box approach to equal opportunities has led to an inauthentic representation of who we are: a world of deracinated coloured people flickering across our screens – to the irritation of many viewers and the embarrassment of the very people such actions are meant to appease."*

He was of course widely misreported, with his remarks taken out of context. In fact he was mainly pointing out that though the faces on the screen had

literally changed complexion there was still in fact too little diversity amongst those who call the shots in the TV (and media) industries. In his lecture he stated baldly the views of some leading industry figures and drew his own conclusion:

> *"Clive Jones, a driving force behind the Cultural Diversity Network, said this year that "we haven't fulfilled all our aims". It was 7 years ago that Greg Dyke made his hideously white remark about the BBC's make up.*
>
> *And only this month, Jon Snow remarked "although we've become much more multicultural on air we're still fairly monocultural behind the screen".......Despite 30 years of trying, the upper reaches of our industry, the positions of real creative power in British broadcasting, are still controlled by a metropolitan, largely liberal, white, middle class, cultural elite – and, until recently, largely male and largely Oxbridge."*

I agree wholeheartedly with Samir Shah's analysis. The questions that Channel 4's Chief Executive, Andy Duncan asked me to investigate naturally flow from that analysis.

Should it matter to broadcasters and producers that we have a more diverse population; and if it should, what should we do about it?

The answer to the first question is not self-evident. There is a traditional current of opinion that objects to any differentiation in the treatment of people living in Britain by race or culture. I strongly believe that we should never allow our cultural differences to become more important than our shared values. However, a democracy that fails to recognise its own diversity, will not afford respect to minority groups and opinions. In practice, such a society is not worthy of being called a democracy at all. And cultural organisations that fail to acknowledge that people's preferences and tastes are heavily influenced by, for example, their family history, their faith and their ethnicity are inviting oblivion.

In a rapidly changing society striking the right balance between the assertion of what we share and the recognition of what we do not is essential. This is partly the role of politics; but in my view cultural institutions, the media in particular, can play a major role in providing a society with that awareness of its own diversity, in a way which is not divisive and fragmenting.

Though the BBC's size and reach gives it the greatest impact in the media industry, our society's diversity probably matters more to Channel 4 than any other broadcaster. It is at the heart of Channel 4's historic remit and central to its vision of public service broadcasting as expressed in its recent mission statement *Next On 4.* It is the historic leader in giving voice to minority cultures. And it has a record of sustained innovation in the area. That is why its role is so distinctive and significant.

Naturally, some people will see this report as a response to the furore that followed the series of *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2007. But it is about much more than that. In fact the task of responding to that series of events was admirably carried out by Channel 4's own Board Director Tony Hall, with the assistance of, amongst others, Rabinder Singh QC.

This report cannot ignore that controversy, but it deals with issues that lie deeper than this one incident. It asks a different, more forward looking question: not what Channel 4 should have done to manage the crisis in January 2007 - but what should Channel 4 be doing to regain its position as a leader and innovator in responding to diversity? And what should Channel 4, and other broadcasters, be doing in future to meet the challenge of serving a public very different both in composition and sensibility than the audiences that I faced as a producer in the early 1980s? Finally, what should we expect from the independent production companies that dominate much of the industry's creative output, and are responsible for a great many of its employment opportunities?

The research conducted by Channel 4 to inform this work, and published alongside this report shows that ethnic minority viewers remain dissatisfied to some extent with the range of mainstream offerings by the major broadcasters and producers. This will come as no surprise either to broadcasters or to producers; insofar as the industry places the issue of serving a diverse audience on its agenda its actions have principally been concerned with the employment of minority staff, and the offerings to minority audiences.

However, I believe that the most significant change in the landscape has been a more subtle factor - a shift in the attitudes of majority viewers. They are increasingly unwilling to accept at face value a depiction of society which undervalues or misrepresents the place of minorities; in this respect, their attitudes now more closely resemble those of black and Asian viewers. Diversity is no longer solely a minority concern.

This is an unprecedented challenge for all broadcasters. For the BBC it poses a difficult question of whether it truly adds public value by reflecting change in our society quickly and thoroughly enough; for commercial broadcasters whether they can retain the loyalty of viewers and listeners if the world they describe varies sharply from the world experienced by the audience.

As an experienced programme maker and TV executive, with some expertise in the area of race equality, I was asked to consider whether Channel 4 and other broadcasters had responded adequately to the new landscape facing them in a multiethnic, multicultural Britain.

With the aid of the substantial programme of qualitative research commissioned by Channel 4, and a series of consultative meetings and interviews with industry figures I have tried to answer these important and difficult questions; and based on the analysis presented here I have tried to propose some practical solutions for the whole industry.

I fully expect some of my conclusions to be challenged and most of my proposals to be contested.

But one thing is certain: the TV industry needs to look at itself afresh, both in the light of the changing composition of its audiences and against the background of new ways of delivering content to those viewers.

This report is expressly designed to provide a framework for those who care about the role of television in our society to debate how best it achieves that end. It also carries some lessons for many other organisations who hope to serve the public.

The report is written from a personal, independent point of view, and does not represent the views of anyone other than myself. However, I hope that some of its conclusions will contribute to the Ofcom Review into the future of public service broadcasting. I would like the industry's leaders and the government to acknowledge that promoting and assuring diversity in both employment and output should be an integral part of the role of any public service broadcaster - and that arrangements most be made to ensure that this role is adequately and consistently funded.

I would particularly like to thank Paula Carter, Channel 4's Viewers' Editor for her support in this project; and her colleagues Julian Bellamy, Janey Walker and Ade Rawcliffe for their unflagging enthusiasm, intelligent criticisms and personal commitment.

The report's analysis has been compiled using extensive qualitative research commissioned by Channel 4 which is being published simultaneously under the title *Race Representation and the Media;* a series of opinion former workshops conducted independently by my own colleagues at Equate; and short telephone interviews by me with some key industry figures.

Like so many minority programme makers, I owe to Channel 4 my own early break in the medium that I have worked in all my life. The crystal box opened for a moment, let in a few of us who did not fit the standard profile,

and then closed - leaving many in our newly diverse society feeling that they remain on the outside looking in. This report is a small contribution to making sure that the mission of which I was an early part lives again in a new era of British broadcasting.

Trevor Phillips

Executive Summary

The six objectives which we set out below are specifically designed to provide benchmarks for action by broadcasters and producers.

Diversity in Content

The Channel 4 research demonstrates that there are many ways in which viewers feel television fails to meet their expectations or reflect their lives: their distrust of political correctness and tokenism; their sense that British television is too parochial and lacking an internationalist outlook; their sense that some genres fail to reflect diversity, for example quiz shows and lifestyle shows. Broadcasters should also now actively be considering what future contribution might be made to the encouragement of diversity in output by their new media developments.

Diversity in People

The media industry as a whole remains at some remove from the general population in its ethnic and faith make-up. The picture in front of the camera has improved; but behind the mike and in the executive layers of the industry little has changed from twenty-five years ago.

Television, as far we can tell from work done by CDN and others remains "hideously white" where it matters. Overall employment trends have not helped, in that there are fewer jobs and reducing access to the best posts for new entrants. Television will provide a more accurate reflection of the diversity of society only when it has access to talent that reflects that diversity. That means identifying writers, presenters and commissioning editors as well as actors and artists.

Diversity In Decision Making

There are too few non-white figures amongst the ranks of the decision makers. If the industry is to give everyone else confidence that it is serious, those who run it should collectively start to look a little more like those who pay their wages.

Diversity has to become part of the institutional culture of all broadcast organisations, in their online and new media commissioning as much as in television. Equally, it should be seen to be the responsibility of production companies as well as broadcasters, including those who make commercials.

Diversity In Audiences

Broadcasters and producers have to develop a new respect and understanding of their audience in a superdiverse society.

This does not mean content quotas or crude political correctness, simply that they must demonstrate that they believe in the good sense and fairmindedness of their audience. They should be ready to meet the audiences' expectations of the responsibility that sits on programme makers to safeguard freedom of expression, but not to allow it to be abused. TV companies have every right to offend; but they have no obligation to insult. And where they are able to they must demonstrate a responsible reaction to offensive content.

However, it is evident that the media industry has not yet even defined the right questions, much less found the answers that allow it to deal with the issues of language, for example, with consistency and confidence. We need a new debate, organised through one of the recognised industry bodies, to arrive at a consensus that we can all share and act upon.

As audiences become more sophisticated broadcasters and producers need to collect and analyse data that gives them accurate information about who those viewers are, and what they want and expect – and what their viewers think of them.

A Whole Team Approach

The trend in many companies has been to give the responsibility for assuring greater diversity to one part of the business, typically a senior Human Resources manager. However if the industry is to change it needs to address content and audiences as much as it does employment, involving those who generate sponsorship and finance for broadcasters, such as the sales team. Companies should be ready to use rewards packages to incentivise staff who produce the best results in line with the six objectives set out here.

Quality Before Quantity

Viewers consulted in the Channel 4 research for this report were clear that they do not expect quotas of ethnic minority actors or presenters. Nor do those who work in the industry. Viewers want a fair reflection of the world as they experience it, and they want it to be delivered by the most capable and creative individuals available. Those who work in the industry do not want to be asked to engage inferior talents when superior creative and technical personnel can and will do the work. However, the achievement of credible representation remains patchy and in some genres, quite elusive. Viewers regard the authority and prominence of an ethnic minority character or presenter as being as significant as the number of non-white people in a production. In short, one authoritative lead character who is black eclipses any number of walk-ons. This should be recognised and valued in consideration of progress.

The Diversity Fund

Quotas, codes and new institutions will not help. We already have a surfeit of bodies dedicated to cheerleading for diversity. What we need is a mechanism to bend resources and action in the direction of making things happen. I believe the best way to do this is to use the industry's own market mechanism, the commissioning process, and to tilt the playing field decisively in favour of rewarding diversity. That is why I am proposing a new industry-wide Diversity Fund, to be resourced by a new levy on production.

Key Recommendations

Leadership

Channel 4 should make a decisive effort to re-establish its reputation as the market leader in the arena of serving and chronicling a diverse new Britain; this should be central to its claim for a future role as a public service broadcaster.

Data

The principal broadcasters should consider with BARB and other data providers new ways of enhancing audience data so as better to understand viewing patterns and appreciation segmented ethnicity and religious affinity; and as regards on-screen representation of different ethnic groups that the Cultural Diversity Network should organise a seminar to consider whether effective ways might be found to monitor output periodically for both quantity and "quality".

New Media

Broadcasters should consider further how they can use their new media platforms more effectively to ensure diversity.

Other Broadcasters

Other commercial and subscription TV companies should work to establish parallel standards to those for public service broadcasters; and advertising bodies should consider instituting similar standards.

Decision-Making

All major media players, including the top 20 independent production companies should agree to a voluntary code of monitoring of diversity of senior decision-makers in the industry, with results to be published annually.

Incentives

Key budget holders and controllers of airtime should have reward packages influenced by success against the six objectives; PACT should issue guidance to parallel this for independent production companies.

The Diversity Fund

Broadcasters and producers should aim, by the start of 2010 to establish the Diversity Fund based on a levy of all sizeable productions, but initially the levy should apply only to returning commissions.

1. **Introduction**

Britain is historically a tolerant society, with little extensive censorship. But sensitivity to racial differences is by no means a new phenomenon to television. The BBC published advice to writers and producers as early as 1948, the same year that the SS *Windrush* brought the first large group of post war Caribbean immigrants to Britain. The "BBC Variety Programmes Policy Guide" told programme makers the following:

"Do not refer to the Chinese as 'Chinamen', 'Chinks', 'Yellow bellies' etc

Do not refer to Negroes as 'Niggers'"

The guide did, however qualify this advice by saying that *"'Nigger Minstrels' is allowed".*

In any diverse society the task of helping different kinds of people to understand and to get on with each other is shared amongst many institutions - schools, workplaces, voluntary and civic organisations as well as various branches of government. They set some of the informal rules of conventional behaviour and establish boundaries, for example in the use of language.

Few institutions are as powerful in this respect as the broadcast media. They have a unique role in modern Britain of helping to create a sense of community. Rarely has it been more vital. Research by You Gov and Ipsos MORI for the Commission for Racial Equality has shown that a majority of people in the UK rarely meet their ethnic minority fellow- citizens and neighbours.

It is not fanciful to suppose that the regular presence of figures such as Sir Trevor MacDonald, Krishnan Guru-Murthy, Moira Stuart, the cast of *Goodness Gracious Me,* and Ian Wright on TV screens has had the effect of

"introducing" many Britons to ethnic minority groups in a positive way. It is striking to compare our record with say that of France, where despite the fact that there is a minority population of comparable size, TV has only recently seen its first regular non-white news presenter.

Who we see regularly on TV matters. So does what they do. In our consultations it emerged that many thought that the positive social and cultural effect of programmes such as *Goodness Gracious Me* and much of Lenny Henry's career (*Three of A kind, The Lenny Henry Show, Chef*) has been to engage majority audiences, particularly young people, with characters from minority communities. This is important. In an increasingly socially fragmented society, television serves a vital purpose in preserving social solidarity.

Crucially it provides the opportunity for people of one cultural ethnic background to gain an insight into the lives of others. YouGov research conducted in 2006 for the then Commission for Racial Equality showed that 55% of those questioned could not name more than two people amongst their circle of friends from a different race or faith background to themselves. A GfK NOP survey in 2007 for its successor, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, showed that 68% of respondents had neither been in the home of someone of a different ethnicity, nor received someone of a different background in their own homes socially during the previous twelve months.

This social segregation is reinforced by trends such as the effect of school choice, which, however valuable in its own right has led to families choosing schools with a preponderance of their own ethnicity; as a result schools in England and Wales are typically more segregated than the areas in which they are set.[1]

---

[1] **CMPO Working Paper Series No. 03/092**
School segregation in multi-ethnic England
Simon Burgess, Ron Johnston and Deborah Wilson

Against this background it is increasingly through television that British people understand each other across the lines of ethnic and religious difference. The reverse is also true: the broadcast media may also increase our propensity to misunderstand each other. In 2005, riots broke out between Asian and African Caribbean communities in Birmingham, following unfounded and emotive reports from a local pirate radio station that a young African-Caribbean woman had been sexually assaulted by a group of Asian men. The reports were carried as allegations by mainstream media, but never confirmed; however, they served to inflame tensions which had already built up, principally for economic reasons, between the two communities.

<u>Do We Need To Censor TV?</u>

Does this mean that we should consider some kind of censorship to manage the broadcaster or producer's power to influence behaviour and attitudes? In my view emphatically not. In practice all experience shows that the greatest losers from the introduction of censorship are minority voices; it is no accident that most of the earliest uses of the laws against incitement to racial hatred in the UK were against what were then called "black militants"; a similar phenomenon has occurred recently in the use of anti-extremist measures against Muslim groups.

The opinions of those to whom we spoke in our research were also unequivocally against censorship even if this might lead to offence and hurt amongst some groups of people. In fact, the best defence against such abuse of the power of the media to offend is surely its own core values of balance and accuracy. In reality if what is being reported is true, and is placed in context, the response should always be to listen carefully to the message before rushing to gag the messenger.

However, this does not mean that the media should not bear responsibility for its own conduct. At a moment when the industry and government are debating the value of public service broadcasting, the question of the degree

to which broadcasters promote, or fail to enhance good relations between ethnic and cultural groups is vital. The evidence is that it is essential for some fresh thinking in this area.

Later sections of this report set out many of the positive efforts to meet these new challenges. But first, it is right briefly to recall the way that the industry has tried to meet it in the past; and why it has become an urgent issue for consideration.

2. Recognising Diversity

Prior to the launch of Channel 4, the positive efforts of British TV to acknowledge ethnic and cultural diversity fell into three categories.

First the strong contribution of nations and regions, through the BBC's regional structure and ITV's regional programming. The latter, in particular, is now all but vestigial; but neither of these is the subject of this report except to demonstrate in the sense that it is not novel for broadcasters to want to, and be able to, address particular audiences defined by their subcultures.

Second, from the 1960s onwards, with the presence of new minority groups, the BBC in particular provided programming aimed at familiarising immigrant audiences with the English language and with the British way of life. The titles alone reveal their intent: *Aap Ka Haq (Know Your Rights)* and *Naya Zindagi Naya Jeevan* (*New Life New Land*).

Third, in the 1970s, writers and producers made an effort to exploit the creative potential of racial and ethnic difference, particularly through comedy. At its worst, this gave us *the Black and White Minstrel Show,* and the humour of Bernard Manning. More creditably - though we would not for a moment consider these acceptable today - *Mind Your Language* and *Till Death Us Do Part* were genuine efforts on the part of writers, producers and casts to "normalise" subjects which had been taboo.

The advent of the London Minorities Unit at London Weekend Television, in 1979, signalled a change of direction. John Birt, whose brainchild the Unit was, and its Editor Jane Hewland, consciously set out to break racial difference out of the TV ghetto, whilst avoiding the crass, and sometimes offensive characterisation of some entertainment offerings, with the programme *Skin,* a current affairs series. The motto of these programmes was that they should be *for* minority viewers; but that they should also be *about* minority communities, offering a window into "closed" worlds for that

part of the majority audience that was curious. Second, Birt and Hewland deliberately staffed the programmes with a majority black and Asian staff.

<u>The Impact of Channel 4</u>

Birt and others successfully argued that such an initiative should be at the core of Channel 4's remit when it came into being in 1982. So it was hardly surprising that most of the output designed to meet that part of the remit came from the LWT team led by myself and Samir Shah. The key programmes were the magazine programmes *Black On Black* and *Eastern Eye.* In later years these programmes for Channel 4 were succeeded by other series such as *Diverse Reports and Devil's Advocate.* The developments in factual programmes were paralleled in the entertainment sphere with programmes such as *No Problem!* and later, *Desmond's.*
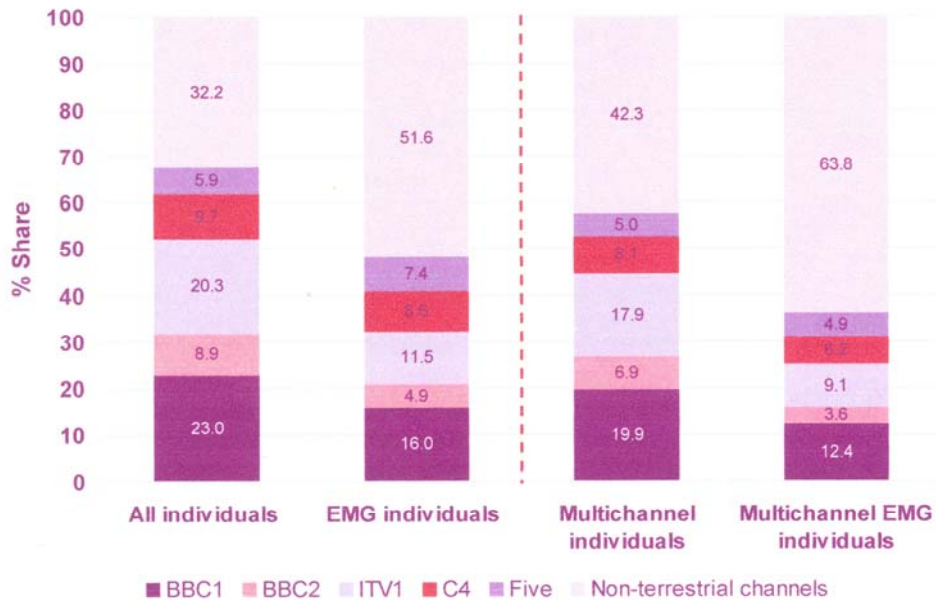
The BBC in particular sought to emulate this kind of development with offerings such as *Ebony.*

In recent years, the drive to satisfy minority audience tastes has found new expression with the advent of successful digital channels targeted at minority audiences, such as Star, BET and recently the launch of Brit Asia.

Ofcom research, based on BARB data from 2006 shows that this has had a significant impact on the minority audiences (though our own research shows that the effect is not uniform amongst different minority groups). Ethnic minority viewers watched slightly less TV than the average (3hrs 16 mins each day compared to the national average of 3 hr 37 minutes). But as shown in fig. 1 slightly more than half of their daily consumption was accounted for by non-terrestrial channels (51.6%) , compared to just under one-third of the national average.(32.2%).

Almost two-thirds (63.8%) of viewing by minority groups in multichannel households was of non-terrestrial channels, compared to just two-fifths (42.3%) of viewing amongst all individuals.

Figure 1

100
90
80   32.2
70   51.6
60   5.9   42.3
50   9.7   63.8
      20.3   7.4   5.0
40   8.5   4.9
30   8.9   11.5   17.9   9.2
20   4.9   6.9   9.1
10   23.0   16.0   19.9   3.6
0   12.4

% Share

All individuals   EMG individuals   Multichannel   Multichannel EMG
                                        individuals   individuals

■ BBC1 ■ BBC2 ■ ITV1 ■ C4 ■ Five □ Non-terrestrial channels

Source: BARB, Oct 2005 – Sept 2006

There is also evidence of some preferential shift to use of new platforms - broadband, internet, mobile - amongst minority viewers, though this probably reflects less any dissatisfaction with content, and more the propensity amongst groups with a younger age profile to be early adopters of new technology.

However, though these trends are significant what still matters most is what happens where most of us still gather to watch: mainstream terrestrial channels.

Which Programmes Made A Difference?

The most significant change shown up by the research conducted for Channel 4 is that the effort to reflect ethnic and cultural diversity has adopted a more "integrated" form in the shape of series which feature non-white stars but which are clearly aimed at a crossover audience.

Examples of the crossover genre which appear to have made the greatest impact include imported American programmes such as "Heroes" and "Lost"; some soaps and "gritty" dramas such as *The Bill, Casualty,* and *Holby City*; some children's programming; and much news and current affairs. *Goodness Gracious Me, The Kumars and Channel 4 News* were all cited strongly as programmes which for one reason or another featured a disproportionate number of non-white principals, but were clearly of appeal to a crossover audience. Dramas like *Hustle,* which featured a leading character who is African Caribbean also made an impact on viewers.

However, perhaps the most interesting and successful efforts to reflect modern, multicultural and multiethnic Britain have emerged with the strength of two genres, one old and one very new.

The reinvention of the talent show - *X Factor, Strictly Come Dancing, The Choir, The Apprentice* - has offered a wave of new opportunities for people of all backgrounds to appear on TV on equal terms, without overt reference to their racial ethnic backgrounds. In short, we are increasingly seeing minority Britons on TV defined by their capabilities (or absence thereof) rather than their skin colour.

The other, newer genre has been the (usually misnamed) "reality" genre. At their most egregious, these programmes can remind us that other people's unpleasantness or vacuousness transcends their race, and that every group contains people with whom we'd prefer not to share the planet. At their best however, they give us a glimpse of lives that we would not otherwise experience in any other way. Programmes such as *Who Do you Think You Are?* and *Wife Swap* fall into this category.

<u>Celebrity Big Brother</u>

It was against this background that the controversy around racist remarks made by a contestant in the January 2007 series of *Celebrity Big Brother* arose. It is not the purpose of this report to rake over the particularities of that incident, which have in my view been extensively debated and satisfactorily addressed by Channel 4. However, the research conducted for this report shows a number of key points for all broadcasters.

First, that the offence caused was not particular to minority viewers, nor was it about the use of racist epithets. There is no appetite amongst viewers for censorship; in fact if anything, most viewers felt that since the views expressed correspond to real views expressed by real people in their real world, to suppress them would have made a mockery of the idea of "reality" TV. I strongly agree with this view. At the final "Race In The Media" Awards staged by the then Commission for Racial Equality, in 2006, I argued that:

For a very long time black or Asian folk only figured in the media particularly in news factual or drama when we were exceptional – exceptionally talented, exceptionally brave, or more often exceptionally starving, exceptionally oppressed, exceptionally criminal or exceptionally dumb. .... most people's idea of what a black or Asian or Chinese or Gypsy person is really like is almost entirely based on what they read, hear and see in the media.

It's hard to tell you just how powerful these stereotypes can be. Unless you've seen it first hand you can have no idea how baffled the British public can be when confronted with an Asian family which does not own a corner shop; or a black man with a university degree and no convictions; or a Chinese woman who doesn't do kung fu......But so-called reality TV, whatever you think of it, has given many British people a chance to encounter people from other ethnic groups in a way they would never do in their own everyday lives. ....

.....Most encouragingly, according to the man behind Big Brother, Peter Bazalgette, the evidence is that the voters do not line up in any way - that is

to say they seem completely uninfluenced by issues of race and ethnicity in deciding who they want to chuck out or keep in.

Second, from Channel 4's research there was no appreciable difference in sentiment between viewers of different ethnicities. What is most interesting here is that contrary to what might have happened in the past, white viewers were as concerned about the incident as were non-white viewers.

Third, the response from viewers was in many ways particular to Channel 4, because of the inordinately high expectations of the Channel in this area. That is not to say that a similar incident on, say, ITV or BBC 2 would not have provoked comment; but given Channel 4's status as the broadcaster most trusted to understand and to respond effectively to issues involving racial sensibilities it clearly came as a shock to the Channel's audience that it failed to live up to their high expectations.

And finally what was most significant was *what* viewers were concerned about. Their principal objection was about Channel 4's *handling* of the incident: too slow to intervene, and undermining of Channel 4's history as the British broadcaster with the strongest track record in the recognition of and response to diversity.

Channel 4's reputation was evidently affected by the incident. However it is my view that no leading broadcaster would have dealt with it any more effectively. The underlying problems here are not peculiar to Channel 4; they are industry wide. In essence, though strenuous efforts have been made over the past twenty-five years to address the issues of race and representation, the entire industry still suffers from key deficits in personnel, capacity and will.

To be precise - the media industry's decision makers are too uniformly white and male; it has no levers to ensure that the oft-expressed wish for change ever takes place; and as the sector becomes ever more competitive its leadership remains complacent, content to push the issue of how best to

respond to changes in our demographic and social landscape to the back of its mind.

The research conducted for Channel 4 shows clearly however that the industry would be unwise to continue averting its gaze from this issue. There are two principal reasons; one, the way in which Britain is changing objectively in a demographic sense; and second, and even more importantly, the manner in which viewers' expectations have altered over the past generation. The next chapter addresses these two questions.

3. **What Viewers Want**

Nothing matters more to media professionals than knowing who watches, listens and reads their products. Audiences today are routinely segmented in a variety of ways, for purposes of sales, research and consultation. For example, we know in minute detail the gender, class, age, geographical location, and often, the purchasing habits of our consumers.

In recent years there has been increased attention accorded to the ethnic composition of TV audiences. However, the collection and publication of data is nowhere near as sophisticated and thorough as it is in other dimensions of analysis. Yet, for many of those who consume media products, an important aspect of their choice is determined by their racial or ethnic identity. For an industry that increasingly depends on minute-by-minute feedback on its' audiences' size and reaction to its products, the paucity of information as to the ethnic and faith composition of those who consume its products looks utterly anachronistic. Television is in danger of missing one of the most significant demographic and social sea-changes occurring in our society. Much of this is due to a new kind of migration which is in creating what those in the know now describe as "superdiversity" or "hyperdiversity".

Superdiversity

In today's era of globalization, the speed, scale and impact of the movement of capital is now paralleled by the movement of people across the planet. 227 million pass through our airports, 30 million people staying to visit, study or work. Globally, the UN reckons that some 200 million people live and work outside the country of their birth.

Immigration has become one of today's litmus test political issues, because it so clearly reflects the rapidity of change in our world. Until about two decades ago, we used to worry about single groups of immigrants, usually

from the old empire, distinguished principally by the fact that they were mostly dark-skinned, spoke English and thought of themselves as British people moving to their mother country. They arrived in discrete waves, one after the other. The signature wave would be the Windrush migrants like my own parents - stereotypically imagined as Caribbean nurses and later Indian corner shop owners.

In today's post-imperial, post Cold War world, we face migration that comes from all corners, in all colours and speaking many languages. *And they are all arriving at the same time.* The signature migrants now are the Polish plumber and the Filipino nanny.

You could say we have moved from serial and imperial immigration to parallel and polyglot migration.

And it all happens much faster than before. Half of all current migrants arrived in the UK in the last generation and a third in the last decade. Today, one in four babies born in Britain has a foreign parent. Latest figures from the Office for National Statistics tell us that our population will increase to 65m by 2015 and to 71m by 2030, largely driven by immigration. The House of Commons science and technology select committee has gone further, saying that by 2030 the number could be 83m. It's worth saying that we have never before hit the estimates - but the trend is unmistakable.

It is not only the volume but also the diversity of immigration that is significant. That is why even the 17 ethnic Census categories used in 2001 now look pretty crude, when we consider that a single category - African - covers Birmingham born sons of Somali herdsmen and Ghanaian barristers, another Polish electricians and South African doctors - unless of course the doctors are not white in which case they belong to yet another category.

Take the impact on one British city, Birmingham. At the time of the 2001 Census, just over 70% of the population was White, which included those of Irish heritage and the catch-all 'White Other' category. 19.5% was counted as British Asian, just over 6% Black or Black British, just under 3% as mixed race, and 0.5% as Chinese. 16.5% of Birmingham's population at the last Census was born outside the United Kingdom. These figures compare to a national percentage of around 9% ethnic minority, expected to rise to 11% by the end of the next decade; and the Birmingham numbers are probably an underestimate.

However, the most significant point about Birmingham is that it expects within the next two decades to become a city in which the majority of its citizens come from ethnic minority groups. This will occur on some estimates by 2010, on others by 2024. "Brum" may well become Britain's first "minority-majority" city - one in which no one ethnic group holds the demographic majority. Leicester's leaders say that they hope to be first - a point worth remarking on if only to note that for some, the possession of diversity is regarded as a prize; how far we have come in just one generation!

These majority-minority cities are the urban societies of the future. The term majority-minority has come into usage in reference to the fact that the historical majority – that is, the white population – is becoming, in mathematical terms, a minority in some places. But this black/white duality is hugely out of date. In most majority-minority cities, it isn't the binary difference that matters - it is the *range* of groups present that actually has the greatest impact on policy making. That is why they may be better described as "plural" cities - with a mix of groups sharing influence.

Should Superdiversity Matter to the Media?

Why does this apparently fine distinction make any difference to what the media does; in particular in editorial terms?

In cultural terms, what it means is that Birmingham and cities like it are places in which the cultural dominance of any one group will become a feature of the past; and that all institutions which serve the city's people - especially those who want to attract their attention - will have to deal with a radically different sensibility amongst <u>all</u> its residents, not just its ethnic minority groups.

People from all backgrounds, even if they still tend to cluster in different parts of the city, will inevitably come to know more about each others' tastes and traditions. They will borrow and adopt the habits unfamiliar to their parents and grandparents; amongst young people we can already see the adoption of a street language heavily based on African-Caribbean and South Asian family cultures.

Media companies will therefore increasingly face an audience that is, in today's terms unpredictable and unfamiliar.

This is very different from the past where the presumption was that within a generation, newcomers would adopt the habits of the settled communities and, to all intents and purposes, simply disappear from the landscape. That will not happen.

There is one further factor that means that cultural differences which might have, in the past, disappeared within a generation may not now do so; and for that modern means of communication is itself responsible.

Modern communications mean that migrants will never again have to lose touch with the land of their heritage. The average length of stay - which used to be over 20 years is falling rapidly as Polish and other migrants commute from Wolverhampton to Warsaw. And indeed it is the very ease with which people and funds move that makes this new type of migration so much part of our new world.

Migration has changed the complexion, sound, and culture of our society and is changing it faster every year.

The great danger for media companies is that currently they know too little about the phenomenon of superdiversity and its effects on their businesses. The media sector certainly has no collective tools to understand the complex reaction to what it produces from the very different groups who now make up the audience. BARB data does provide some indicators, but its categories are still broad and its samples too small to provide reliable predictors to audience size and appreciation.

So in order to get some idea of how television in general, and Channel 4's products in particular were regarded in this superdiverse audience, Channel 4 commissioned a piece of large-scale qualitative research.

The Audience's Opinion

The research terms of reference were to "…seek public views from different groups on how broadcasters in general and Channel 4 in particular should address issues around diversity on screen, on-air and online, and how Channel 4 should deliver its remit in a digital multi-channel age."

How the research was conducted

Research was conducted amongst seven identified groups of the population – White British, Indian, Black Caribbean, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Eastern European, Black African and Mixed Race.

Sessions were run with single ethnic groups with moderators from the same ethnic background as the group, and with older groups in the Asian community convened on a single sex basis. Amongst under-25's the groups were 'triads' of three friends each. In addition, six in-depth conversations with held with individuals from different communities. For each ethnic group one session was held with older respondents and one with younger, with the exception of the white British group, where two sessions were held

for each age group. All the groups were recruited in England with a mix of rural and urban catchments areas and all participants had been resident in the UK for at least three years.

The detailed findings are being published simultaneously with this report. But for convenience I would like to summarise the principal lessons here.

1. Britain is multi-cultural – but not integrated

There was broad agreement across all the groups that Britain is now a multicultural society and that 'multi-cultural' implied categories other than simply ethnic divisions – for example lesbian, gays and bisexual people; disabled people; students. But all felt multi-cultural to be a politically loaded term and that however multi-cultural Britain might be it was not integrated between and within the broad community categorisations. A young Indian woman said "Come into our college and you will be shocked. All the Hindus and Gujaratis sit in the canteen. All the white people sit in the vending machine area. All the Sikhs sit around the corner and the Muslims stay in the study centre".

2. Representation on television

When groups were asked about the way in which multi-cultural Britain is represented on television, two major themes emerged. The first was that different communities have radically different views of how well broadcasters do represent the national community. Most whites felt broadcasters were doing a satisfactory job, most non-white ethnic groups felt they were not and most eastern Europeans had no expectation of being represented at all.

The second theme was on the issue of representation itself. There was no clear consensus of what was meant by 'representation' or what constituted good representation, because it meant different things to different communities. But broadcasters were not felt to be sensitive to these different perceptions.

Most ethnic minority participants felt the media had a responsibility to reflect Britain's diversity across all genres and was failing to do so in three main ways: by relying on tokenistic and stereotyped representation of characters; by representing extreme and exaggerated characters; and by failing to reflect the realities of contemporary ethnic minority culture.

All these shortcomings were attributed to some extent to the perceived lack of a representative ethnic power base within UK media. A young Bangladeshi man commented "I would like to see Asians in higher level jobs like producing. They should be involved in the decision-making. It is good to have Asian presenters but they are being told what to do." Groups from minority communities were concerned that inaccurate and extreme portrayals gave white viewers a false impression of their community.

This is, in my view a striking finding: that audiences now link what they see to who is producing the programmes. If this is the case, it means that the importance of ensuring that those who make the key creative decisions in television *as a group* are more diverse than they have historically been.

Within these broad criticisms more nuanced responses emerged. All the ethnic minority groups wanted more programmes with an international outlook; they felt British television was much too parochial. All were concerned with the quality, not just the quantity of on-screen representation. And whereas south Asians wanted to see television representing all cultures, races and faiths in UK society, the black community placed more emphasis on having 'black' shows. An Indian woman said, "We would like to see a more realistic view of Asians. A lot of Asians are professionals and educated and we don't just work in corner shops." A Black Caribbean woman said "I might see Trevor McDonald at 10pm but on a daily basis you don't get to see your own people and, if you do, they don't play good roles."

One explanation for the difference here is that Asian viewers have more access to specialist digital offerings than African Caribbean viewers, a

finding that would be consistent with their preference for non-terrestrial channels reported below.

3. Representation must be about quality as much as quantity

There was extensive discussion of how the quality of representation might be improved which led to observations such as the need to have minority actors in lead roles, the need for scripts that would allow characters to reflect the dual identity that many members of minority communities felt; the need for more realistic story lines; and (a widely voiced criticism) the need to show more ethnic minority programmes in peak time.

Examples of what were felt to be good programmes were cited across all genres but the most satisfactory were felt to be US dramas, older comedy programmes (such as 'Desmonds'), current affairs and documentaries, audience debates, children's programming, reality shows and some of the grittier long running dramas. It was noticeable that US programming was consistently cited as producing rich and genuinely multicultural drama and comedy.

4. How is Channel 4 perceived?

When they were invited to discuss Channel 4's approach, there was general agreement across all the groups that Channel 4 was the most modern and 'edgy' of all the public service broadcasters and that, in consequence, audience expectations of a committed and sensitive approach to diverse representation were higher than for other channels. This was especially true amongst ethnic minority groups. But Channel 4 was not seen to be delivering to those expectations and it was clear that its reputation had been affected by the events during the Celebrity Big Brother series of 2007.

The response of all groups to the CBB incident was that freedom of speech should be upheld but that broadcasters needed to have clear strategies for dealing with such events. They felt broadcasters should warn viewers if offensive views were likely to be aired and should seek to have them

presented in a debate format, where they could be challenged and interrogated.

5. Emerging Themes and Questions

- Britain is acknowledged to be a multicultural society, but not an integrated society. The fact that old programmes were frequently cited as amongst the most representative (for example, Desmonds, which was last produced in the 1990s) suggests that viewers believe television continues to have an important role in explaining communities to each other, and that role is not being fulfilled. How should broadcasters fulfil that role in a society of increasing diversity and social change?

- There was a sharp disparity between white viewers' perceptions of how well broadcasters represented diversity and the views of every other ethnic group. How should broadcasters monitor and respond to these different perceptions?

- Different groups have different expectations and understandings of what is meant by good representation of Britain's diversity. But there is a consensus view that representation must be about more than numbers; it must include quality of representation, in terms of honest and realistic portrayal of contemporary lives, including the diversity of views and attitudes within communities, rather than dealing in stereotypes. This, in turn, depends upon – and is widely seen to depend upon – broadcasters having creative and commissioning staff at senior levels from the various minority communities. How will broadcasters address this issue, and let their viewers know they are doing so?

- Truly representative television was described as programming across a range of genres with both multi-ethnic casting (for example, Heroes) and shows dedicated to the lives of a particular minority community (for example Kumars, Desmonds). As well as particular programmes, some genres were felt to be more or less representative than others. For example, programmes aimed at teenagers were seen to be less diverse than children's television; general knowledge quiz shows were seen to be biased towards the interests and knowledge of white British; there was little Asian representation in sports presenting and minorities were largely absent from health and lifestyle programming. Conversely imported drama series from the US were seen to be consistently rich in presenting a diverse multicultural society. What should, broadcasters be doing to track these perceptions and address them? What can be learnt from the creative process and casting of American drama?

To answer some of these questions we need to look at what opportunities and strategies British broadcasters and producers already have in place.

4. What has the Industry Tried, And How Successful Has It Been?

This report cannot set out an exhaustive list of the initiatives that have been tried by various players to increase diversity over the past twenty-five years. The point here is simply to demonstrate that far from being inactive, the industry has made positive efforts. The important question is why they have failed to make more difference to the outcomes.

<u>Changing The Workforce</u>

One stream of initiatives has concentrated on trying to diversify the workforce, through training programmes, internships, and work placements. These initiatives have included schemes sponsored by Skillset, PACT and individual companies. The BBC alone is reported to have sponsored over a hundred different such schemes. Channel 4 and several ITV companies have run various programmes to train junior staff both directly and through supplier companies.

This approach has undoubtedly offered opportunities for people to get into the media sector at some level. However it is hard to imagine how, in the long term this will lead to substantive long-term change. To start with, the industry is not expanding at the rate it was twenty-five years ago; there are fewer jobs available for newcomers anyway.

Second the production and facilities sectors of the media industry, which used to pride themselves on being craft-led labour markets, with long-term prospects for skilled and professional workers is now more distinctive for its use of short-term, low-paid contracts - colloquially described by producers as "near-slave labour ". Here the emerging super-indies bear a special responsibility, a matter to which I return in my recommendations.

Changing The Content

A second stream of initiatives has focused on changing the content of what it produced. The logic here is that more diverse content will both appeal to more diverse audiences and also encourage the recruitment of a more diverse range of staff. These initiatives have a long history stretching back to the London Minorities Unit described above, and its successors. Latterly, the innovative "Move On Up" series of day-long events, instigated by BECTU, has allowed minority producers to pitch directly to senior executives. More substantively, previous licence conditions on Channel 4 have provided for a certain number of hours of "multicultural" programming (initially 150) each year, which the Channel tried to satisfy through a multicultural programming department with its own Commissioning Editor.

Such deliberate commissioning initiatives have produced distinctive programmes which according to our survey respondents, made an impact, including, for example The *Kumars,* and in Channel 4's case*, Desmond's.* Interestingly, however, the casting of Freema Agyemang as one of Dr Who's sidekicks ("Martha Jones") and Adrian Lester as the lead in *Hustle* ("Mickey Stone") had just as much impact with minority viewers, and I would guess, more with other viewers.

The deliberate strategy by Trouble TV to target black and black "wannabe" young viewers also paid dividends in establishing the channel's distinctive credentials in a crowded market.

Finally, the broadcasters have set up the Cultural Diversity Network, as a ginger group to keep the issues of diversity to the forefront of the industry's mind. Initially part of the CDN's brief was to establish a register of talent from ethnic minority backgrounds, but in practice the industry has yet to take advantage of this idea to any great extent. This is disappointing. However, the CDN's practice of an annual stock-take with the CEOs of all the major producers and broadcasters is a welcome way of calling senior people to account for their performance.

Why Aren't Things Better?

Yet, taken together, these strategies seem to have had limited success. In general activity tends to rest on there being a particularly active company leader who is ready to take a sustained interest in the cause of diversity, such as John Birt at LWT, Greg Dyke at the BBC and Clive Jones in ITV. But depending on the enthusiasm of individuals does not constitute a strategy; and as many of the opinion formers we consulted pointed out there are many reasons why even the clout of a senior individual may not make much difference.

First, even where producers gain access to commissioning executives, the scheduling of programmes aimed at boosting diversity often diminished their impact; a 1am slot may showcase programmes to the committed but it is unlikely to grow a wide, diverse audience.

Second, the consolidation of the production and facilities businesses has steadily reduced the scope of broadcasters to commission from a wide and diverse range of suppliers. There is no conspicuous evidence of most of the new breed of "superindies" who set the pace for the industry over exerting themselves to address their own lack of diversity, though there are some notable exceptions which rather prove the rule - the programme roster claimed by Wall To Wall and Shed, for example has many examples of better than average diversity in casting and creative roles.

Third, though digital channels may - for a while - target minority audiences, it is clearly an unpromising strategy in an increasingly competitive multichannel environment.

Finally, though the content of the output may vary there is little concrete evidence that it will change the composition of the workforce that is commissioning or producing the programmes.

In particular, as has been pointed out by many senior industry figures, most recently by Samir Shah and Lenny Henry, neither of the employment-led nor

the content-led strategies have changed the composition of the cohort of key decision-makers in the media. They remain overwhelmingly male and white. They also, it is thought, typically come from middle-class backgrounds, with a high level of education, normally including a spell at one of a narrow range of leading universities. The latter, capability-based exclusivity could possibly be justified; the former, based purely on biology cannot.

In essence, though the industry has not ignored the problem of its own absence of diversity and the impact this has had on its own output, it has failed to find a strategic way of making a difference.

<u>What Channel 4 Has Already Done</u>

In the context of polishing its Public Service credentials with the publication of Next On 4, Channel 4 has launched a series of internal initiatives which I believe will make some difference to its own practice. These include:

- Establishing a new Head of Diversity at senior executive level, who will lead Channel 4's diversity strategy across all the organisation's activities.

- The appointment of a commissioning editor with responsibilities for commissioning multicultural programmes in the heart of peak-time.

- A ring-fenced £2million fund to commission more multicultural programmes for the 9pm and 10pm slot on the core channel.

- Doubling funding for the existing diversity placement scheme within commissioning and rolling out a similar scheme across all departments within Channel 4.

- Extending Channel 4's Researcher Training Programme which funds 18 placements per year in independent production for researchers from minority groups and broadening the reach of the scheme to include other trainee production roles as well as researchers.

Each of these proposals is welcome and will in my view make a contribution. However the scale of change that is needed can never be delivered by a single broadcaster or production company. And the levers of change have to be systemic and institutional rather than dependent on the recruitment of a key individual or the enthusiasm of a committed CEO.

I believe that if the industry genuinely wants to break out of the crystal box where white decision-makers look out at a world radically different from the one they inhabit professionally, two things need to take place.

First the whole industry has to work together, based on a commitment to some common principles of action. And second there needs to be a systemic reform of the way that the industry does its business that institutionalises a tendency towards greater diversity in both output and in employment.

The following two chapters address the question of how we break out of the crystal box. How in practice do we make things different, and what will make them stay different?

5. **The Objectives of Action**

Channel 4's research suggests a number of objectives as necessary parameters for any action taken to make television and other media more representative of our diverse society. For broadcasters such as Channel 4, these objectives must include openness and a commitment to serious action. But the objectives which we set out below are specifically designed to provide benchmarks for action by broadcasters and producers.

The six objectives we propose concern:

- Diversity in Content
- Diversity in People
- Diversity in Decision Making
- Diversity in the Audience
- A Whole Team Approach
- Quality before Quantity

I then discuss a proposal to help achieve these six objectives.

Diversity in Content

The Channel 4 research demonstrates that there are many ways in which viewers feel television fails to meet their expectations or reflect their lives:- their distrust of political correctness and tokenism, their sense that British television is too parochial and lacking an internationalist outlook; their sense that some genres fail to reflect diversity, for example quiz shows and lifestyle shows. If it is true, as seems to be the case, that much of our understanding of each others' cultures and lifestyles is framed by representation on television, that puts a significant responsibility on television to avoid stereotypes or extreme, narrow and two-dimensional portrayal of individual and the communities from which they come.

Broadcasters should also now actively be considering what future contribution might be made to the encouragement of diversity in output by their new media developments.

Diversity in People

The media industry as a whole remains at some remove from the general population in its ethnic and faith make-up. The picture in front of the camera has improved; but behind the mike and in the executive layers of the industry little has changed from twenty-five years ago.

Television, as far we can tell from work done by CDN and others remains "hideously white" where it matters. Overall employment trends have not helped, in that there are fewer jobs and reducing access to the best posts for new entrants. Television will provide a more accurate reflection of the diversity of society only when it has access to talent that reflects that diversity. That means identifying writers, presenters and commissioning editors as well as actors and artists.

It is clear from our work that audiences, both minority and majority, clearly recognise that output is affected by the composition of the creative team - and they can detect it whether this involves a dodgily constituted Asian family in a soap opera, or as one former BBC executive told us, the shock realisation that during the early part of the 1990s no black person had appeared in *Crimewatch* except as a suspect. Significantly, once the programme output was being monitored for diversity the picture changed materially.

Diversity In Decision Making

Few of our opinion formers agreed on how many key decision makers there are in TV. Some suggest as few as a dozen; others as many as 300. But what they all agree is that there are precious few non-white figures amongst the ranks of the decision makers. If the industry is to give everyone else

confidence that it is serious those who run it should collectively start to look a little more like those who pay their wages.

If a better reflection of diversity is to be integrated in to the day to day working of British media, and if that change is to be sufficiently embedded in the culture of British media to bring about permanent difference, it cannot be left to a few specialists to monitor and cajole colleagues; it needs to be part of the normal working processes of the organisation. It therefore needs to be integrated into the strategic thinking at the top of every media organisation and disseminated downwards through senior managers and on through their departments. Nor should it be seen to be simply an issue for the main public service channels; it should become part of the institutional culture of all broadcast organisations, in their online and new media commissioning as much as in television. Equally, it should be seen to be the responsibility of production companies as well as broadcasters, including those who make commercials.

Diversity In Audiences

Broadcasters and producers have to develop a new respect and understanding of their audience in a superdiverse society.

This does not mean content quotas or stupefying political correctness, simply that they must demonstrate that they believe in the good sense and fairmindedness of their audience. They should be ready to meet the audiences' expectations of the responsibility that sits on programme makers to safeguard freedom of expression, but not to allow it to be abused. In short, creative cultural organisations such as TV companies have every right to offend; but they have no obligation to insult. And where they are able to demonstrate a responsible reaction to offensive content they should do so, by for example providing a balanced editorial context or by any other appropriate intervention.

Viewers can readily distinguish between censorship, which by and large they do not want, and responsible and transparent editorial standards, which they do want. As the traditional approaches to media regulation crumble in the multi-channel, multi-platform, environment, viewers expect broadcasters to 'hold the ring' for debate and to avoid the mistake of either 'nanny-ing' viewers on one hand or, on the other, abandoning any serious commitment to the setting and maintaining of standards which are then communicated clearly to audiences.

However, it is evident that the media industry has not yet even defined the right questions, much less found the answers that allow it to deal with the issues of language, for example, with consistency and confidence. We need a new debate, organised though one of the recognised industry bodies, such as the Royal Television Society to arrive at a consensus that we can all share and act upon.

There is another aspect to the principle of respect for viewers: broadcasters and producers need to know who their audiences are in even more detail than they currently do.

As audiences become more sophisticated in their understanding of media and more adventurous in exercising choice, they are becoming more aware of how media is made and marketed – many of them are making their own media for the online world. It has become a common place for media executives to tell each other at conferences that viewers are now in control. If that is the case, they should be treated with respect and intelligence. That, in turn, requires broadcasters to collect and analyse data that gives them accurate information about who those viewers are, and what they want and expect – and what their viewers think of them.

A Whole Team Approach

The trend in many companies has been to give the responsibility for assuring greater diversity to one part of the business, typically a senior

Human Resources manager. However if the industry is to change it needs to address content and audiences as much as it does employment. It needs to consider output before it worries about procedures. And in a business where few products ever see the light of day without the involvement of an entire team it is essential that everyone plays a part - including and especially the revenue generating parts of the business: for producers, for example, those who generate sponsorship and finance, for broadcasters, the sales team. Companies should be ready to use rewards packages to incentivise staff who produce the best results in line with the six objectives set out here.

Quality Before Quantity

Viewers consulted in the Channel 4 research for this report were clear that they do not expect quotas of ethnic minority actors or presenters. Nor do those who work in the industry. Viewers want a fair reflection of the world as they experience it, and they want it to be delivered by the most capable and creative individuals available. Those who work in the industry do not want to be asked to engage inferior talents when superior creative and technical personnel can and will do the work. However, the achievement of credible representation remains patchy and in some genres, quite elusive. One key finding from our research shows that viewers regard the authority and prominence of an ethnic minority character or presenter as being as significant as the number of non-white people in a production. In short, one authoritative lead character who is black eclipses any number of walk-ons. This should be recognised and valued in consideration of progress.

These six objectives are proposed for debate, and I hope adoption by the industry as a whole, as a way of guiding collective action to increase diversity in output and employment. This might be done through discussion organised through the good offices of the Cultural Diversity Network representing the broadcasters and PACT, representing the producers jointly. I would expect this process to involve other interested parties including trades unions, advertisers' representatives and training organisations.

But a concerted drive will need both funding and a lever to engage all bodies in the industry. I believe that the idea of quotas, codes and new institutions will not help. We already have a surfeit of bodies dedicated to cheerleading for diversity. What we need is a mechanism to bend resources and action in the direction of making things happen. I believe the best way to do this is to use the industry's own market mechanism, the commissioning process, and to tilt the playing field decisively in favour of rewarding diversity. That is why I am proposing the establishment of a new industry-wide Diversity Fund.

The Diversity Fund : Diversity Should Pay Dividends

At the heart of the debate about public service broadcasting being conducted under the auspices of Ofcom lies one simple question: what should British citizens expect from broadcasters to whom they have vouchsafed public resource, whether this is in the form of cash (e.g. the licence fee) or spectrum, say.

The argument of this report has been that at least one thing they should expect is the recognition of our society's growing and changing composition. But this cannot be a task for broadcasters alone. That recognition depends heavily on the positive cooperation of those who provide content for the system, the producers. The ten companies at the top of Broadcast's 2008 Indie Survey probably have as great an impact collectively on these issues as does the BBC; and certainly more impact than does Channel 4, which though it can influence the producers, is still in practice a small broadcaster dependent on its suppliers.[2] So they too have to be a part of the solution.

I propose that the industry has to take a collective decision to put resources into activities which favour diversity and to withdraw resources from those which do not.

---

[2] The top ten producers in order of turnover are : IMG Media (£221.7m);All3Media UK(£202.5m);Endemol UK (160m) ; Shine(£146m);Hit Entertainment (£142.7m);Talkback Thames (£140m); TWI (£116.6m); RDF Media Group(£99.3m);Tiger Aspect (£76.9m);Shed Media (£71.8m)

In particular the process of commissioning programmes should reward those who are ready to make a difference in relation to any of the first six objectives; and the industry as a whole should make a commitment to increasing ethnic and religious diversity in all its output and its employment, and should take steps to ensure that the playing field is tilted to achieve this objective.

In order to achieve this, I propose the establishment of an industry wide diversity fund, held and administered jointly by the CDN and PACT, with the objective of funding programmes to meet the six objectives above. These might include training, content development, shadowing schemes, or any other programme that would encourage and deliver greater diversity.

The fund would be resourced by a levy on all commissioning budgets above a certain size, on companies above a certain turnover. However, companies would be able to reclaim their levy if they could show the broadcaster that through their own internal activities they were contributing to, say, at least four of the six objectives. The essential principle is that everyone in the industry would be asked to make a contribution either in production finance foregone, or in kind. The levy should apply equally to internal production houses such as BBC and ITV Productions.

I would expect, from initial soundings that the majority of companies would be able to offer robust justification for reclaiming their levy; but some may simply consider it in their interest to contribute to a central fund. Our initial calculations suggest a fund of about £3 - 5m each year, based on a total commissioning budget across all broadcasters of between £1 - 1.5bn, and assuming that over two thirds of productions will either successfully reclaim the levy or are too small to qualify. This should be ample for the purposes envisaged.

The objective here would be to avoid punishing small companies or asking producers (who might be working on their own, for example) to meet standards they cannot possibly achieve. The levy would be set at a level that

would provide CDN and PACT with enough funds to support a reasonable range of programmes and to support broadcasters in monitoring the delivery of the objectives by companies who had successfully reclaimed their levy.

Such a proposal could only be set in train after extensive and detailed discussion within the industry. I propose that initially it would apply only to returning commissions where a) there is greater certainty and confidence about the task involved and b) the production is disproportionately likely to be in the hands of a sizeable production company with the administrative resources to manage the system.

6. A Programme for action: Seven Proposals

Based on the research and analysis, my recommendations to Channel 4 and to the industry as a whole are as follows:

Leadership

1. Channel 4 should be held to its commitment, voiced in Next On 4, to re-establish its reputation as the market leader in the arena of serving and chronicling a diverse new Britain; this will be central to its claim for a future role as a public service broadcaster.

Data

2. That the principal broadcasters should consider with BARB and other data providers new ways of enhancing audience data so as better to understand viewing patterns and appreciation segmented ethnicity and religious affinity; and as regards on-screen representation different ethnic groups that the CDN should organise a seminar to consider whether effective ways might be found to monitor output periodically for both quantity and "quality".

New Media

3. That broadcasters should consider further how they can use their new media platforms more effectively to ensure diversity.

Other Broadcasters

4. That other commercial and subscription TV companies should work to establish parallel standards to those for public service broadcasters; and that advertising bodies should consider instituting similar standards.

Decision-Making

5. That all major media players, including the top 20 independent production companies should agree to voluntary code of monitoring of

diversity of senior decision-makers in the industry, with results to be published annually.

Incentives

6. That key budget holders and controllers of airtime should have reward packages influenced by success against the six objectives; that PACT should issue guidance to parallel this for independent production companies.

The Diversity Fund

7. That broadcasters and producers should aim, by the start of 2010 establish the Diversity Fund based on a levy of all sizeable productions, but that initially the levy should apply only to returning commissions.

7. Conclusion

This report is one contribution to a debate that has rumbled on for more than five decades in TV, yet has never been satisfactorily addressed in any period. The industry promises itself that things will improve next year, or next decade. They do get better, but not fast enough to keep up with the changes in our society. Frequently, as in the case of Channel 4 in 2007 and the BBC at other times, attention focuses on the failings of one organisation or another.

But the truth is that this is a collective problem for the media industry, and for television in particular: how can the bearers of our national story ensure that they are truly hearing and reflecting that story - and how can they be sure that they are giving the chance for all to participate in its telling?

At present we do not have the tools, nor have we demonstrated the will. We have a chance at a time of huge change in the industry to show that will and make the change.

By 2012, the media industry will have accomplished its biggest task – digital switchover - since the launch of Channel 4. Surely by that time it would be reasonable to suppose that it would have set in place the machinery to meet the six objectives I have set out with confidence and consistency? The target that the industry should set itself is that by the year 2012, it should be able to revisit this issue and answer the questions that Andy Duncan put to me - *should it matter to broadcasters and producers that we have a more diverse population; and if should what should we do about it?* - more positively. Success would mean that the whole industry will answer yes to the first part; and that rather than answering the second part with hopes it will be able to respond with evidence of real achievements in increased diversity of employment and output.

Trevor Phillips

16.07.08