

**Roy Ackerman - Creative Director Diverse Production**  
**OFCOM submission**

I am writing because of the issues raised in the PSB review, notably the threats to Channel Four funding summarised in the Executive Summary, Para 1.18 and subsequent sections. I am contributing as an independent producer who is concerned about the sustainability of the vital contribution that PSB makes to the national culture.

Channel Four is vital to the preservation of lively public service content in the UK. It is the competition that keeps the BBC on its toes, innovating and in touch. For 25 years, it has been vital in stimulating creativity from the BBC – as the BBC too is under pressure for viewers this will continue to be necessary - especially in new platforms. It's clear that the BBC – for all its strengths cannot connect with the same hard-to-reach key demographics.

Diverse have been at the forefront of PSB for the last 25 years, always insisting that the programmes we make offer content that is smart, engaging and contemporary. As the company's creative director engaged in initiating and producing many of our PSB programmes, I appreciated OFCOM's PSB review; I think that identifying of the public's need for plurality in PSB provision was a major step forward in the discussion.

I have been talking to many of the major partners in the PSB debate and am convinced that Channel Four is not overstating the funding issues it faces; its distinctive PSB content is genuinely under threat. If that trend continues, I believe that the major losers will be the viewers. Channel Four will be forced to concentrate almost entirely on commercial output and its unique risk-taking innovative PSB content will become unsustainable. This would bring effectively to an end one of the most creative initiatives that the world's media has seen – something that makes the overall ecology of British media the envy of consumers and producers the world over.

We cannot ignore that Channel Four has challenges in bringing its PSB offering into the digital and new media era. Its web provision has – for many reasons – fallen behind in the PSB sphere and it needs to be the magnet for creativity in games and online experiences, just as it was for the new wave of independent television producers in the 1980s. It created an industry then, it must do so again. It must also continue and enhance its commitment to major campaigning series – particularly in contemporary social areas and culture, where it has established a leading role with series such as *Ballet Changed My Life* and *Lost for Words*. Diversity – on screen, in commissioning and behind the camera – should now be a primary way it underpins its original remit to reflect minority views and excluded communities. The need is there, more than ever, if we are to contribute to the building of civil peaceful society.

Channel Four has always been the place where Diverse has taken its big strategic public service projects - from *Ballet Changed My Life* and *Operatunity* to *Young Black Farmers* and *Last Chance Kids* and the forthcoming *Monteagle Maths* and *The Harmony Orchestra*. These are projects which engage with the real world, with young people, with real issues and offering sustainable legacy. They had a tone and an edge and an ability to bring in partners that the BBC is unable to match. The BBC is too

much at the centre to cause the perfect positive storm. We go to Channel Four when we want to reach the young and the progressive, the excluded and alienated, people looking for new ideas and new forms. If it becomes another, albeit smart and youthful, commercial broadcaster we will all have a long time to regret the loss.

The creative industries have always benefited from Channel Four's business and creative culture. Now that we are all moving to multi-platform production, we welcome the emergence of the Next on 4 and 4iP initiatives. We want to see public provision on the web but we see it as vital to harness online initiatives to a television channel as it is the interplay between these very different platforms that will bring attention to the material and the maximisation of benefit to the consumer.

Case studies like our *Last Chance Kids* and *Ballet Changed My Life* projects show that television can truly be the catalyst for social change. Initiatives like these not only offer stimulus for debate and the transformation of individual lives but also can act as pilots for new best practice models around the country. Years after the cameras left the location and the aura around the transmission had died down, a self-sustaining organisation (The Leaps and Bounds Trust) is building on the work for which we were the catalyst. It is rolling out the personal-development-plus-culture model into a series of projects around the country. Last Chance Kids was the heart of a hugely influential national Lost For Words literacy campaign which is up for an RTS Education Award and is being discussed in government.

We should be discussing more of these joined-up campaigns – and we at Diverse are about to launch two. Through Channel Four's Arts Commissioner, we are going to address class and ethnic tension through classical music in the Harmony Project; and in Education the A-Vibe multi-platform extravaganza is aimed at tackling gang crime by an innovative range of overlapping offerings on web, mobile, television and grass-roots workshops. Indeed perhaps the next frontier is to critique the hundreds of millions spent on progressive government campaigns and ask whether public service and public spending should work together more creatively.

I am more than willing to engage in the ongoing PSB funding debate if I can be of further use.