Dear Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for inviting us to give evidence to the Committee on July 9th. During the session there were a number of areas where we said we would follow up in writing so I wanted to come back to you on those points. This includes the questions which you sent over to us in writing following the evidence session, as well as a number of further points where I said we would provide more information. I also just wanted to clarify a couple of further points around the specific details of the protocols and processes we have in place, in particular on *The Circle*.

Before responding on the specifics, I wanted to make some more overarching comments about the inquiry into Reality TV. In light of recent events, we welcome the Committee’s decision to investigate how this particular type of programming and the associated contributor care works. As we discussed during our session, there is, however, an important balance to be struck to ensure we are able to cover a wide range of topics and feature a broad mix of contributors in our programmes. This is particularly the case for Channel 4 as we deliver our remit to champion diversity, tackle difficult and taboo subjects, present alternative views and stimulate debate.

As I hope was clear in our evidence, the burden of responsibility on us to ensure all contributors receive the care they need is extremely high, and as such we have extensive, detailed protocols in place wherever contributors are involved in our programmes. These protocols are tailored to each programme and its associated risks, and are kept under regular review.

As the Committee considers its response to the inquiry, it is important that the focus is placed on the needs of contributors rather than on taste judgments about particular programmes or topics. Steps to ensure that high quality contributor care is consistently delivered must at the same time enable broadcasters to continue to commission programmes that shine a light on life in modern Britain (sometimes unvarnished) and give voice to unheard, and, at times, vulnerable people. It would be a great loss to the cultural and social contribution of British public service broadcasting were our ability to do this diminished.

**Benefits Street**

**Question - Clive Efford:** *We have seen reports that people who were on “Benefits Street” received death threats. What support was given to them?*

Love Productions, the producers of Benefits Street, have confirmed that there were no specific death threats reported to them. However, there were unpleasant, abusive tweets where people said they were going to visit the street and behave indiscriminately violently. To their knowledge no-one specific was mentioned and should they have been the production company would have encouraged the contributor in question to report this to the police. In response to this online abuse, as a precaution, the production company started showing subsequent episodes to West Midlands Police ahead of transmission so that they were aware of the content and could make any arrangements in advance if necessary. If
contributors felt threatened the production company also arranged for them to stay in a hotel, or facilitated them moving to a family member’s house for a few days until they felt happy to return home.

As we touched upon in the evidence session, Ofcom investigated complaints about Benefits Street and none were upheld. Indeed, Ofcom specifically praised the contributor care protocols that we had in place at the time surrounding protection of under-18s, stating that “in many respects, the due care provided by Channel 4 in this case demonstrated best practice and the fact that the children’s welfare was at the heart of the production”.

**Sex Tape**

**Question - Chair:** What is the genesis of a programme like “Sex Tape”? ...Is Channel 4’s response saying, “We would like to look at relationships in a way we have not looked at before or other broadcasters have not done. There is this format that exists in another country; we will bring that in because we think that would work”? Or, in that case, is the company coming to you saying, “We have got this. Do you want it at Channel 4?”

The Sex Tape format was brought to our commissioners by STV who had optioned it from Israeli company Armoza. They proposed bringing the format to Channel 4 in a development meeting, and then sent the Israeli tape to Channel 4 for the commissioning team to see. Having done so we thought it was an interesting and innovative way to explore relationships and decided to take the idea forward. The format is also in production in a number of other countries.

**The balance between different types of programming over time**

**Question - Paul Farrelly:** Having got the impression that there is so much of this on Channel 4, and since you have three different categories that you put these programmes into, I would be very interested to put my first impressions into context. Do you have any data on the hours of programming over time so we can see whether the percentage of programming devoted to these sorts of programmes is the same as previously or whether it has increased, and make a judgment on how you are fulfilling your remit?...If you can give us some data over the last 10 years—"

The data Channel 4 collects on the volume and proportion of programming falling under different genres is done according to defined categories which we report to Ofcom. These include Factual Entertainment, Current Affairs, Leisure, Factual, News, Sport, Drama, Entertainment and Feature Films and all programmes are formally tagged under one of these categories in an automated system. Whilst we have data on these wider categories we do not therefore have specific data under the groupings I talked about in terms of reality, constructed popular factual and observational documentaries.

These types of programme may cut across a number of Ofcom genre categories depending on their format and focus, but generally ‘reality’ and ‘constructed popular factual’ programmes come under the ‘factual entertainment’ category. This includes a range of what might be considered more narrowly ‘reality’ shows like Big Brother, The Circle, SAS: Who Dares Wins, Hunted and The Island; as well as ‘constructed popular factual’ shows like First Dates and The Undateables; and a number of other shows touched upon by the committee, including The Great British Bake Off, Naked Attraction, Ramsay’s Kitchen Nightmares and Undercover Boss. However, this category would also include programmes that are neither reality nor constructed popular factual, such as Jamie and Jimmy’s Friday Night Feast, Travel Man and Fatberg Autopsy: Secrets of the Sewers.
As we do not collect data broken down by the three categories I mentioned, we have therefore looked at the data under this wider category of factual entertainment as the closest proxy for the question as asked. When we looked at data for the main channel over the last 10 years we found that the proportion of factual entertainment programmes, both during peak hours and across the full schedule, has shown a slight decline. In 2009 factual entertainment programmes made up 10.8% of our peak programming and 11.9% of programme hours. In 2018 they made up 10.7% of peak programming hours and 10.8% of all programming hours.

In contrast, our proportion of current affairs programmes increased over that period in both peak time and across the schedule. From 2.5% of the schedule in 2009 to 3.5% in 2018 and from 7% to 11% in peak time.

Our spend on originated content across our portfolio has also increased by 31% over that period, from £373m in to £489m in 2018. That increase means we are now spending over £100m more on original content for UK audiences, delivering on our role in both stimulating the UK production industry and delivering exciting new content for UK audiences.

In any event, for the purposes of this inquiry, the key focus is the appropriate level of contributor care that is provided, regardless of the specific genre categorisation or the PSB merits of any particular programme.

**Married at First Sight**

**Question - Jo Stevens:** I have just a couple of questions about reality TV. First of all, I do not think we have yet talked about “Married at First Sight”. I understand the idea behind the show is to see whether science is better than we are at determining our ideal partner. I was interested in what type of science is used in this programme. Is any AI used?

*Married at First Sight* has featured a number of different experts who bring different approaches to matching contributors, and the matching process has evolved over different series. All contributors will complete a long online questionnaire (500 questions) as well as an ‘attraction test’ which they complete with the production company. The experts then analyse the results to generate the most appropriate match.

These experts use a range of scientific and psychological tests. On series 2, for example, biological anthropologist Dr Jake Dunn introduced the testing of hair strands and saliva to measures testosterone and cortisol levels which indicate people’s response to stress. Other experts including clinical psychologist Dr. Joseph Cilona and sociologist and relationship expert Dr. Pepper Schwartz use more straightforward science based questionnaires to assess compatibility. These tests are combined to assess which contributors will work well as a team.

Gert Martin Held, an academic from the University of Copenhagen combines data from the questionnaire and Attraction Test and uses an algorithm that he has patented (and which is used by other dating companies and industry) to create a psychological/matching profile. His assessment includes data indicating how well-matched a pairing are in terms of their IQ.

None of the means of matching contributors used to date have involved the use of AI.

**The ‘Undateables’ Training**

*Brendan O’Hara:* ...who provides the training? Have they come trained or do they come from “Ramsay’s Kitchen Nightmares” and get trained on the production of “The
Undateables”? ...What training would they get on the job when they are employed by the production company? What specific training would they get to be a care bear?

Although there is a designated Care Bear, the entire casting and filming team play a duty of care role and are allocated one-to-one relationships with contributors/dates at various stages of production. The team includes the following:

- A Casting Producer employed specifically to provide disability training for the team. That casting producer:
  - Is trained in Safe Guarding, Managing Challenging Behaviour, Makaton sign language, Mental Health, Autism & Disability Awareness
  - Has completed an NHS accredited course in Advanced Communication Skills
  - Has a CPCAB Certificate in Counselling skills
  - Has experience of working with various charities and disability organisations including the Teenage Cancer Trust, Anthony Nolan, the Phoenix NHS Trust and Haringey Council, Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities, Complex Needs and Autism
  - Has extensive experience working with disabled contributors and people with various health needs on TV including Cut Up Kids, a BBC Three documentary about self-harm that won a Mind Media Award
  - Has the lived experience of having an autistic brother

- An assistant producer designated as the Care Bear whose role is to support contributors all year round, not just during production. The current Care Bear had autism training in a previous role and grew up in a family of nurses. A full 2 week handover with the previous Care Bear (who had worked on the previous 5 series) was put in place to ensure continuity of support to past and present contributors.

- A casting producer who previously received mental health training from a trained psychologist on the BBC Trauma course.

- A casting researcher who is a fully qualified nurse. During her 5 years in the NHS she also worked in mental health wards.

- A casting assistant producer who worked in Camp America with disabled children and adults providing one-to-one care. Over the years, both parents and brother have also fulfilled professional roles within the disabled space.

- A professional chaperone who has extensive experience of working as a professional chaperone in film, TV and theatre since 2013. They are registered and licensed by Surrey County Council, and previously worked as a behaviour support assistant for Surrey County Council specialising in helping children and young adults with autism and Asperger’s. They also worked as a chaperone trainer for Surrey County Council.

Given the specific needs of the contributors to this programme, we believe that a general mental health awareness training course would not provide the Care Bear or other production team members dealing with/looking after contributors with the tools to support them properly. Instead, training is tailored as follows:

- Before having any contact with potential contributors, the casting team and the Care Bear receive one-to-one individual disability training from the casting producer referred to above including:
  - Disability Awareness - During the first week of production the team are asked to watch a list of research documentaries, programmes, readings, websites and social media. Learning outcomes include:
    - Introducing a basic understanding of Autism, Learning Difficulties and other disabilities such as Downs Syndrome.
- Knowledge of current affairs, debate, big names and campaigns from within the disability and Autism Communities.
- Understanding of how the language of disability changes.
  - Communication Skills - The team are taught language skills for speaking to people with Autism and Learning Disabilities. Learning outcomes include:
    - Basic knowledge of talking to people with Autism
    - Talking to people who have limited or no verbal skills
    - Simplifying language and using body language effectively
    - Effective ways to manage expectations
    - Managing conversations safely
    - What to do in an emergency
  - Note Taking Skills - the team are taught why collecting relevant information - on parents, carers, where the contributor lives – and appropriate note taking is essential to ensure duty of care for everyone.
- The whole casting team receives training from the National Autistic Society
- When preparing psych reports before, during and after filming, the psychologist includes detailed recommendations and advice on steps to take for each contributor to ensure that they are properly supported. That guidance is shared with the shoot teams so that they are fully briefed on how best to support contributors.
- Going forward this training will be supplemented by an additional half day training session for the entire production team conducted by the programme psychologist, who has worked on all 11 series.

With regards to the specific question about Ramsay’s *Kitchen Nightmares*, we can confirm that neither the Care Bear or any of The Undateables team who work with contributors have previously worked on Ramsay’s *Kitchen Nightmares*.

**Naked Attraction**

**Question - Ian C. Lucas:** What feedback have you had from the contestants on “Naked Attraction” about their involvement in the show?

Across the 4 series of Naked Attraction that have now been broadcast we have featured 392 Contributors. The feedback from contributors appearing on the show has been predominantly very positive – particularly in relation to contributors’ increased level of confidence or body positivity after their episode aired– with a very minimal amount of negative feedback.

The production company’s logs show that less than 5% of contributors have registered any negative feedback after transmission. These reasons are summarised below:

- A large proportion of this negative feedback was from people who were disappointed with the person they were matched with and complained that they were not attracted to their picker.
- Some were unhappy with the comments they received on social media. These people were offered a conversation with the psych and offered advice and support in applying the social media guidelines they had been given.
- A small number of contributors were unhappy with how they looked on television. These contributors were offered a conversation with the psych and the production company followed up with them over the following weeks.

This high level of contributor satisfaction is due to the rigorous application and contributor care protocols in place to minimise any potential issues. A summary of the post-transmission contributor care is provided for your information as an appendix.
Key pre-transmission measures include:

- All contributors going through DBS checks and psych assessments (by a psychotherapist who is also HCPC registered as an occupational therapist) along with in depth auditions.
- Encouraging all contributors to speak to employers and family before appearing on the show, with on camera agreements filmed where they acknowledge this.
- Always ensuring there is an adequate ‘cooling off period’ for each contributor, where they can fully consider their participation in the programme.
- On camera briefings on the day of filming where contributors are told that they do not have to participate and reminded that there are standbys so they are not letting anyone down if they decide not to partake.
- Shooting ‘spare’ rounds so that, should an issue arise with a contributor after filming which meant it was no longer in that contributor’s best interests to transmit the episode, there is the flexibility not to do so.

In a small number of cases contributors contacted the production company post filming but pre-transmission with significant personal issues that affected their feelings about featuring in the programme. After discussions with the Channel 4 and the programme psychotherapist it was decided not to transmit the episodes in question and such any issues were resolved. Channel 4 has also stopped repeating an episode due to a change in a contributor’s personal circumstances where it was agreed that it was in that person’s best interests to no longer repeat it.

**Pitching of shows /Channel 4’s ‘line’**

**Question - Jo Stevens:** You cannot give me an example of what you have said no to, and you cannot tell me what proportion of ideas pitched to you for reality TV you say no to? I am trying to get a sense of whether you actually do draw a line... If you have any information, and if you discuss it with colleagues, it would be helpful to know.

Having reviewed the data Channel 4 collects, it is not possible to provide details of ideas we have not commissioned, as we do not keep any data on the quantity, genre or type of ideas that we choose not to pursue. A huge number of ideas are ‘pitched’ to our commissioners on a near daily basis, and it is those that are commissioned, and end up on screen, that are important to Channel 4. Anecdotally, we can say however that on occasion ideas that come to us will be rejected because the proposed involvement of contributors would not be workable within our guidelines and protocols. However, we do not keep a log of these given the large numbers involved and that, in effect, they do not get advanced sufficiently far to warrant doing so.

**Other specific questions for follow up**

**Geography of Commercial Growth Fund investments**

Ian Lucas asked where the companies listed in our annual report that have received support from our Commercial Growth Fund are based. The Commercial Growth Fund was launched in 2015 and invests in high-growth digital consumer businesses, offering media airtime in exchange for equity. Nine of the fourteen businesses that our Commercial Growth Fund has invested in to date are UK headquartered, and five are based internationally. With the exception of Crowdcube, all of the UK businesses are headquartered in London, but we have two deals in the pipeline with companies headquartered in the regions and hope to announce these imminently. Crowdcube is based in Exeter, and interestingly supports SME fundraising across the UK, of which a large proportion are based outside of London. Part of the appeal of
the Crowdcube investment was as a means of exploring ways to advancing fundraising opportunities for early stage businesses, particularly outside of London.

**Other points of clarification**

**The Circle Protocols**

The Committee have been provided with a summary of the contributor care protocol for *The Circle* and this should provide a definitive overview of the latest protocols. As the protocols for the new series were going through a process of development and review during the lead up to the evidence session, and as *The Circle* is our flagship reality show, I wanted to clarify a couple of points we discussed and ensure I had provided you with the most up to date information.

In particular:

- The protocol for *The Circle* only requires one reference from a friend or family member, although production may end up talking to more than one family member or friend in the course of casting.
- I have had clarification that GP referrals are used instead of, rather than in addition to, medical screening.
- The plan to arrange a meeting between those taking part in series two and a previous contributor has now been removed from the welfare document. Studio Lambert concluded that it would be inappropriate to involve a non-professional in briefing a contributor, that the secretive nature of contestants entering the show meant this could not happen at a point which gave a meaningful cooling off period for the contributor, and that on further reflection the one-sided experience of a contributor would not be an appropriate guide to the workings of the show.
- Mental Health First Aid training is focussed on members of the production team who have direct contact with and responsibility for the contributors. The Casting Execs will attend a two day Mental First Aid Course. Show Execs, Production Execs, Welfare Team, Floor Producers will attend a 1 Day Mental health in the Workplace course and Gallery producers will attend a briefing from the onsite psychotherapist about welfare and signs of distress.

**Accredited mental health professionals**

In the evidence session I said that all of our mental health professionals were HCPC registered, in response to a question about what psychological support we make available to contributors. I would like to clarify that all of our psychologists are HCPC accredited and our psychiatrists are GMC-registered and members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. There is no mandatory accreditation required for psychotherapists, but the vast majority of those we use are accredited with one of the key bodies associated with the profession, which include the UK Council of Psychotherapists, the British Psychoanalytical Council and the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies. We have, on occasion, used a professional who was not registered if they have considerable clinical experience and particular expertise relevant and appropriate for that particular role. We decide which types or types of professional are most appropriate for each individual show on a case by case basis and with consideration of the contributors involved, and we only ever use qualified professionals with extensive relevant professional experience.
Appendix 1: Summary of Naked Attraction post filming contributor care

THE DAY AFTER FILMING
- Every contributor is called by a member of the casting team to check they were happy with their experience in the studio.
- Those contributors who have been flagged by the psych as someone who may benefit from a follow up psych call are offered this.

ONGOING CASTING CARE
- Once all filming has been completed all contributors are given a contact at Studio Lambert that they can get in touch with if they have any questions. There is also a casting mobile that the contributors can call at all times during production.
- All contributors will be sent the Social Media Guidelines and offered support and advice on how to deal with the social media response.

CONTRIBUTOR VIEWINGS
- Where a psych has recommended a pre-transmission viewing, this will be offered before the programme airs as a one to one session with a senior member of the casting team. The Casting Producer / Casting Executive or Production Manager will arrange the viewings
- For anyone who has a concern or issue during their viewing, the production company will again offer the opportunity to speak to an independent psychologist
- Should any other contributor request an advance viewing of their episode it is considered it on a case by case basis
- The results of the contributor viewings may be discussed with Channel 4’s Commissioning Editor and Programme Lawyer on a case by case basis

PRE AND POST TRANSMISSION CALLS
- All contributors are sent details of programme and trail transmission dates, along with Channel 4 guidance notes on managing any social media response.
- Prior to transmission every contributor will receive a phone call to notify them that the show is going to be broadcast, to remind them of what may happen on social media and how to prepare for this and to reiterate that they are welcome to call a member of the production team at any point.
- After broadcast every contributor will receive a phone call to see how they feel about their involvement in the series. Those contributors whom the psych has flagged to the production company will again be offered the opportunity to speak to the psych. If there are any other contributors the production company feels might benefit from speaking to the psych they will also be offered this.
- The production team will then liaise with the psych and follow any advice they give.

I hope this addresses your questions, if we can be of any further assistance please do let us know.

Yours sincerely

Alex Mahon
Chief Executive, Channel 4