BAFTA Television Lecture: Lenny Henry

17 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

JW: Good evening. I’m John Willis, I’m the Chairman of BAFTA. It is my pleasure to welcome you all this evening for one of the high spots of the BAFTA calendar, the annual Television lecture, this year given by Lenny Henry, CBE.

[Applause]

That’s the first time anyone’s applauded one of my speeches, so thank you, much appreciated. Nearly forty years ago Lenny made his television debut when he won New Faces with his impression of Stevie Wonder. Indeed I can say without any fear of contradiction that he is the first winner of New Faces to give BAFTA’s annual lecture. I can’t swear that there hasn’t been someone who’s been on the Black and White Minstrels who’ve given the lecture. Since then he’s been one of the giants of British television with a string of successful and iconic shows including Tiswas, The Comic Strip, Chef, The Lenny Henry Show, and Hope And Glory. Latterly, he’s emerged as a wonderful, serious stage actor as anyone who saw his powerful Othello will acknowledge. He’s also been a key figure in Comic Relief from its birth. His lecture is entitled ‘A Part Of This Industry’ and will be his special perspective on the critical issue of ethnic diversity, or lack of, in our industry. After the lecture Lenny will be interviewed by Baroness Oona King, Channel 4’s Diversity Executive, and also take questions from the floor. We’re live-streaming the lecture on BAFTA Guru, our learning website, and tomorrow you can join Lenny for a live Q&A on Twitter at 1.15pm. But now, without further ado, please welcome tonight’s BAFTA lecturer, Lenny Henry.

[Applause]

LH: Thank you, thank you. My Lords, Ladies, gathered members of the media and my fellow members of BAFTA. My name, as John said, is Lenny Henry - I’m an actor, writer, comedian and producer. In 2008 I was asked to make a speech at the Royal Television Society. My talk covered the history of ethnic minorities in British Television, the story of my own personal journey in the business, and I put forward some suggestions as to how we might make the representation of ethnic minorities a little fairer. At the talk’s conclusion I said, “I hope that things will now change and that I don’t have to come back and repeat myself in another five or six years time.”

Yeah. It’s good to be back people.

I’d just like to give you the background on how this second speech came about. Last year, I watched the BAFTA Awards on TV, and the next evening I went along to the Sony Radio Awards. There I was, going up the red carpet looking forward to a glass of Prosecco and a miniature sausage roll, when this journalist stuck a microphone in my face and asked if I thought the BAFTAs were “a bit vanilla.”

And I went into this riff - like I was in my pajamas at home, in a gallows humour style about how they had Chewitel Ejiofor and Sanjeev Bhaskar and David Harewood presenting awards, but there were no Blacks or Asians collecting prizes because it seemed to me there hadn’t been any significant Black or Asian projects made that year. We hadn’t been given the opportunity to write or make or be in anything so we weren’t winning anything. I ran my mouth off, basically, said something like it’s gonna be a brand new show, ‘It’ll Be All White On The Night’. And this was before I’d had the Prosecco.

Next day it was in all the papers, I was getting phone calls, I had to ring BAFTA and say, “BAFTA, I love you guys. No, I think you do a great job. No please don’t stop sending the free movies. I’ve got a deal with the newsagent on the corner. If we could figure out how to stop that caption ‘Property of Bafta” appearing every ten minutes we’d be billionaires.” That, Ladies and Gentlemen, was my call to action. BAFTA, it's all your fault. You are to blame.

So, once again, I’m here today to make a speech about diversity in the British Film and TV industry. I also want to make some observations about my own journey in the business so far, and weigh in with some ideas on how we could and should change things for the future. For those of you who don’t know, and by the way, how many people here weren’t alive in 1975? [Murmurs from audience] Dear God. Back then I got my TV break, as John Willis said, via a show called New Faces. It had an audience of about 16million people every week; it launched people like Victoria Wood. It was kind of like a Britain’s got Talent for comedians and variety performers, but without Simon Cowell.

So before I begin, let’s look back at what happened since my speech in 2008. Well some broadcasters ‘took action’. They have launched or re-launched various initiatives and training programmes. They created new training schemes for ‘the yout’ from underprivileged backgrounds to enter the industry. They’ve run senior mentoring schemes to ‘help people from diverse backgrounds’ break through the glass ceiling. They’ve even invested in extra monitoring of the problem.

Now I love trainee schemes. I love mentoring. Haven’t you watched every Hollywood buddy police movie? The young whippersnapper cop is teamed up with the older, wiser, white-haired mentor who’s seen it all, done it all and shoots three gangsters every time he goes for coffee and a bagel. We love mentors. I’ve had many over the years. Now there’s been Robin Nash, Jim Moir, Paul Jackson, Geoff Posner, Peter Bennett-Jones, Robert Luff… These people all helped to shape my career at various stages of my life and I’m deeply grateful to them, from my heart I really am. Although where those guys were when I was in the Black and White Minstrels for five years, I’ll never know.

I also love increased monitoring, as that’s how I can tell you the stats and figures that reveal that since my last speech in 2008, despite all those mentoring and training programmes, despite these easy to roll-out solutions, the fact is the situation has deteriorated, badly. Between 2006 and 2012, the number of BAME’s working in the UK TV industry has declined by 30.9%. Creative Skillset conducted a census that shows quite clearly that Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation in the creative industries in 2012 was just 5.4% - its lowest point since they started taking the census. That’s an appalling percentage - more so because the majority of our industry is still based in and around London, right here, where there’s a BAME population of 40%.

Want some more evidence? Here’s another rocket-propelled statistical grenade for you. In the last three years the total number of BAME people in the industry has fallen by 2,000 while the industry as a whole has grown by over 4,000. Or to put it another way - for every black and Asian person who lost their job, more than two white people were employed.

And since 2008 I’ve noticed another worrying trend. Our most talented BAME actors are increasingly frustrated, and they have to go to America to succeed. You know who I’m talking about. David Oyelowo in The Help and The Butler. Idris Elba in Long Walk To Freedom, Prometheus and The Wire. Thandie Newton in Crash, Mission: Impossible. Chewitel Ejiofor in 12 Years A Slave; he was good in American Gangster too. David Harewood in Homeland. Lennie James in The Walking Dead and Jericho. Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Ladies and Gentlemen, our first Black British female Oscar nominee for Secrets & Lies had to go stateside to find work in Without A Trace. Archie Panjabi of course in The Good Wife. All achieved a measure of success here but were frustrated at the lack of opportunity in the UK.

This kind of exodus, this kind of exodus has been happening for a while. I’m going to read an excerpt from a letter now. It refers to the lack of opportunity and prejudice towards minority actors in Britain, and the impetus to go where one is wanted as opposed to the alternative. So, forgive me as I read this.

It says, “I at present enjoy a popularity equal to that of Mr. Edmund Kean in his heyday in England. I have more offers of engagement than I can possibly attend to or fulfill and on the terms of my own dictation, therefore I need not tell you that I have not the slightest idea of returning to England for at least two years, if then, should God spare my life. I have already had five offers from Parisian theatres. Here an actor is estimated according to his ability, and they the artistes are gentlemen generally, and received and treated as such by the public.” This letter was written on March 11th by the black classical actor Ira Aldridge… in 1853. Imagine if he’d had to cope with whoever casts Midsomer Murders. He’d have topped himself.

Black British Oscar-winning filmmaker Steve McQueen –damn, that sounded good, I’m gonna say that again. Black British Oscar… and BAFTA-winning filmmaker, Steve McQueen, director of 12 Years A Slave, has had huge success in the UK and the states with that film and Shame and Hunger. He has been fortunate to have had the backing of Film4, and I’m delighted he has chosen to return to the UK to direct a TV series set in West London, which is good news for us, both as a viewing public and as a workforce who want to be involved with something that just might compete with other high-end drama come BAFTA time.

My point is, we are often told that BAME don’t have the marquee value or star power to drive a feature or long-running series. That’s what we’re told. These performers have demonstrated that this is no longer the case. I don’t want to be too much of a downer – there’s been some change. Idris Elba came back, didn’t he, to make Luther. Yeah boy. A crime series set in a London like metropolis. Idris plays the title role - an intellectual, troubled, maverick cop who has no black friends or family. [Audience laughter] Not at all, none. Have you seen this? He never has any black mates. You never see him talking to his Uncle Festus or whatever his name is? He’s never down Jerk City having a curry, goat and rice with his bredrens. You never see Luther with black people, what’s going on? And he never changes his clothes, what’s that all about? It’s a great show.

Corrie’s BAME presence has increased in the last few years too, but let’s face it, they had to do something didn’t they? For far too long Coronation Street was the only street in the north of England with a corner shop owned by a white family. Indian families’ would be watching at home going, “these people, they’ve taken all our jobs. You can’t go in a post office these days without seeing a white face behind the counter. Something has to change!”

Even Emmerdale had Will Jonson, right on Will, playing Dominic Andrews. He was on Emmerdale Farm, check it out man. A black mechanic and single father, Dominic Andrews has had to cope with school bullying, one night stands, drug deals, teenage pregnancy, abortion and gunshot wounds… and that was just in his first episode.

But we shouldn’t just look at onscreen portrayal, we should check out what’s happening behind the camera. Now a black former-BBC executive, who’s recently formed his own consultancy company playfully describes the workforce behind the camera as ‘the makers and the pickers’. The makers, whether employees of the broadcaster or indies, pitch their ideas to the pickers who decide what gets made, which writers are in vogue, which actors get cast in the lead role, and which presenters front the show. When it comes to the makers I’ve found BAME representation patchy at best in production, and as far as craft is concerned – you know, cameras, lights, sound, studio crews, costume, makeup etc. - I rarely if ever see a black or Asian face. But when it comes to the pickers, the channel controllers and heads of commissioning who oversee budgets and make the key decisions, here’s what it looks like.

[Pictures on-screen]

How can this be in 2014, and what can we do about it?

Let’s look at TV. Here’s a selection of popular dramas and comedies in recent years. This is what’s going on in the UK. Southcliffe. Yeah, I enjoyed that, that guy shooting people in that West Country village. Of course if it had been in The Ends people would have shot back, right? Broadchurch – mixed race boyfriend of sister of deceased, thank you very much for putting that in there, so there was somebody in there. The Fall was set in Northern Ireland which is rarely seen on TV, Northern Ireland drama, so I guess that was cool. Miranda. I like Miranda, there she is. Mrs Brown’s Boys. The Irish, an ethnic minority? A transvestite, I guess, so that’s a… Discuss. The evolution of BAME involvement in British TV seems to lurch one step forward and two steps back - a bit like John Sergeant on Strictly Come Dancing, except he had a job at the end of it.

Meanwhile on the other side of the Atlantic - this is what’s going down. Scandal. “hold it down.” Grey’s Anatomy. Boardwalk Empire. Breaking Bad. Parks and Recreation. True Blood, “Sookie. Sookie.” New Girl. Elementary, which is their version of Sherlock, I guess. Has the Korean actress Lucy Liu from Kill Bill and Charlie’s Angels playing Doctor Watson. Ooh, very bold decision. There’s as much chance of that happening here - as seeing Charles Saatchi and Nigella Lawson on Mr and Mrs, isn’t there? Could you imagine that here? That’s never gonna happen. So how come Americans manage this almost seamless integration in front of the cameras, whilst here in the UK we find it so difficult?

It’s because they really invest and nurture BAME talent behind the scenes. It’s no coincidence that the Head of Casting at ABC/ Disney who produces Grey’s Anatomy, Scandal and Modern Family is Keli Lee, an Asian-American woman with a vested interest in promoting minority talent. Or that African-American writers like Shonda Rimes are able to write such brilliant three-dimensional characters; whatever race, creed, or colour. Or gender.

Talking of America, it was fifty years ago that Martin Luther King Jnr. made a speech about how America needed to keep to the promise that it made in the Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal, a promise that America was breaking at the time. In that speech Martin Luther King “Had a Dream”. He dreamt that one day America would fulfill its promise. He dreamt that sons of former slaves and slave owners would sit around a table together. He dreamt that his children would be judged not by the colour of their skin but by their character. That black boys and black girls would join hands with white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. You all know the speech. I don’t need to go on. It was his way of holding America to account.

Here in the UK we have the BBC and they too have promises in their Charter. Not quite the Declaration of Independence but promises all the same. The BBC Charter promises to “represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities.” They’ve made a pledge to the people of the UK - the license-fee payers - that they will represent them. Well, BAME’s are an integral part of Great Britain’s communities, we deserve to be represented too.

And Just like Martin Luther King Jnr., I want to hold our leaders to account. But I don’t just have a dream Ladies and Gentlemen, I have a screen. I have a screen where great programmes are produced by the multi-cultural many, as opposed to the mono-cultural elite. I have a screen. I have a screen where the actors of the future are cast not by the colour of their skin, but by their talent alone. I have a screen. I have a screen where the stories in our cinemas and on our TVs will reflect the wealth and variety of experience of all our communities, not just some. I have a screen today, can I get a hallelujah?

Audience: Hallelujah.

LH: Now, the thing is… White people down here, “hallelujah. Right on, Simon, right on.” The thing is, we won’t achieve this screen by launching yet another round of training and mentoring initiatives. We need a different solution. So I’ve looked around and tried to find things that have worked in the past, and the answer is right here, in the UK.

Back in 2003, the BBC realised it had a problem, a representational problem. The nations and regions were not getting a look in. According to the BBC’s Annual Report only 3.7% of core programming budget was being spent in Scotland, despite Scotland having around 9% of the UK population. If you looked at the network programmes the BBC produced, 91% of them were being made in and around London. 91%.

So the BBC decided that if it was going to keep its promise in the charter things needed to change. Now, they didn’t change things by going to local schools in Glasgow and setting up new entrants schemes for the ‘yout dem’. They didn’t give all their staff in Wales mentors - although that could make a good buddy movie, note to self. And finally, they didn’t think they could solve the problem just by increasing monitoring.

No. What they did was structural. First they said they would spend 50% of their money outside of the M25; and for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland they went further, promising them that the proportion of programme spend in each nation, would at least match that nation’s percentage of the UK population. They set firm targets and even set quotas of a minimum amount of programmes they were going to commission from each nation and region. And the result, like Sally Berkow’s alleged drinks bill, is spectacular.

Since 2003 there’s been a massive increase of programmes made outside the M25. There has been a 400% increase in the number of network programmes produced in the English regions. By 2016 over half of network spend will be made out of London. In just two years time the amount of network spend in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should accurately reflect the size of the population there. Now that’s an amazing turnaround in increasing regional diversity. It has completely revolutionised the broadcasting landscape. But I think there is another part of the charter promise to be fulfilled. The promise was to represent the UK’s nations, regions and communities. The BBC has kept its promise for the nations and regions but what about communities? More precisely, the BAME communities?

I think they can keep this promise by taking exactly the same approach they took to increasing the output of nations and regions. And that means ring-fencing money specifically for BAME productions. For the nations and regions they set quotas, but I know people don’t like the word ‘quota’, so lets say ‘ring-fenced money’. Okay, ring-fenced money. If license fee-payers’ money isn’t spent, it will be clear in the Annual Report for each channel. But you know what, I’ve got a feeling people would quickly discover good programmes to spend the money on. But that’s also why it involves appointing a couple of ‘pickers and deciders’, specific commissioners to hunt out internal and external BAME productions to commission.

But what is a BAME production I hear you ask yourself. I’m gonna tell you. Currently Ofcom has three criteria to decide if a production qualifies as coming from the nations or the regions, okay. First, the production company must have a substantive business and production based in the UK outside the M25. Second, at least 70% of the production budget must be spent in the UK outside the M25. And third, at least 50% of the production talent (i.e. not on-screen talent) by cost must have their usual place of employment in the UK outside the M25. A production needs to meet two out of the three to qualify. I believe these criteria can be easily adapted to define a BAME production in the following ways:

A: At least 50% of the production talent (i.e. not on-screen talent) by cost must be Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic. The production staff will be self-declaring about their ethnicity - self-declaration is a common principle in both police, health and other government monitoring of BAME statistics.  
  
B: The production company must be 30% BAME controlled, and/or 30% of senior personnel involved in the production in question must be BAME.  
  
And C: At least 50% of on screen talent by cost must be Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic.  
  
Productions should meet two of these three to qualify.  
  
Now there are more details and copies of this proposal which you'll receive on your way out for you to analyse and hopefully build on. This proposal has been months in the making, drafted by myself and a number of key BAME industry figures, talent drawn from both sides of the camera. We believe everyone stands to gain from this proposal. Everyone. Both culturally and commercially, and if they don’t like it we’re happy to consider their alternatives.

But let’s not just focus on the BBC. This is a problem and solution that relates to the entire industry. All of us. All the major broadcasters have made a promise to BAME people. They’ve signed up to the Creative Diversity Pledge. All except for Channel 5, but let’s not go there. The Creative Diversity Network made a pledge in 2009 in which people signed up to:

· Recruit fairly and from as wide a base as possible and encouraging industry entrants and production staff from diverse backgrounds.

· Encourage diversity in output.

· Encourage diversity at senior decision-making levels.

Like the BBC, the other broadcasters have not been that good at keeping their promises to the BAME communities, but like the BBC, they have kept their promises to represent the nations and regions. Last year half of all Channel 4’s programmes were produced out of London. Half. And Channel 4 spent two fifths of all its money outside London. This isn’t just Shameless or Hollyoaks, this was achieved after Ofcom set specific targets for Channel 4 to meet its license requirement, targets that it has hugely exceeded now.

So what’s the point of all this then? Does this screen, your screen really matter? I put it to you Ladies and Gentlemen, that it does. For many people around the world, the perception of the United Kingdom is determined by our TV exports. Whenever I’m in America, New York or somewhere, and I tell them I’m on TV, they say, “Are you the new Jazz singer in Downton Abbey?” I say, “no, I’m one of the servants working so far below stairs, by the time I get to the house the show’s finished.”

Team GB’s global image should be a fair and honest reflection of our society, not a fictionalised version of who we are. It’s a misrepresentation not to include BAME as major contributors in the television and film industry. There is a wealth of talent to be tapped. There are writers, producers, executive producers, directors, script editors, skilled technicians who just want to work. When it comes down to it, all we’re asking - is for the broadcasters to keep the promises they have already made to Britain’s communities, either through their charters, license agreements, or when they made the CDN pledge. Right now it feels there are no consequences when promises are not kept. That’s why I’m delighted that the Culture Secretary, Ed Vaizey, has taken such an interest in this area and has promised to make them accountable for delivering on these pledges. Good work, and not before time.

For myself, well I love collaborating, working with new writers and new writing, and I look forward to the challenge of making new high-end drama and comedy to rival the best that’s out there. A bold claim I know, but I did three jaegerbombs and a packet of wine gums before I came on, so you’ll have to excuse me.

Let me leave you now with this quote. It’s from the 3rd of February 2005. Nelson Mandela [coughs], Nelson Mandela, how soon they forget, Nelson Mandela said these words about taking action on world poverty, but this could easily apply to all of us involved in making this great industry more diverse. He said, “Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that generation. Let your greatness blossom.” So why don’t we do that? Every chairman or controller or commissioner or exec in this room? Every H.O.D, production manager and casting director. Every agent. You have it within your power to effect a radical change upon this appalling situation. Let your greatness blossom, and lets just see how great our generation can be.

Thank you very much for listening, good night.

[Applause]

OK: Oh that’s so exciting. That has excited me. I mean, seriously, I know all the ladies probably say that to you, but…

LH: A bit inappropriate, Oona.

OK: But I’ve been working in this area a very long time and so I have to take part of the blame, I have to take part of the blame, but I also share your screen dream. I absolutely share your screen dream. And I just mentioned earlier, you started off, you mentioned the exodus. And just to sort of frame this debate I just wondered why you think it is, you know the reasons behind ethnic minority, BAME. Does everyone know what BAME stands for? I know it’s a bit obvious, but I go to lots of meetings and people don’t even explain enough.

LH: Bame? What do you mean bame? Why are you spelling it?

OK: No, it’s barmy.

LH: They should just call us vex.

OK: Yeah, vex, that would work.

LH: I represent all the vex people. 2,000 of us have gone now, what the hell?  
  
OK: Yeah exodus, or worse really isn’t it. So, the, I nearly forgot what BAME stands for then. The Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic. Right, so, ethic minorities…  
  
LH: It just used to be black people.  
  
OK: I know but we have to be, we have to diversify.  
  
LH: We have to include more people.  
  
OK: Yeah, we have to be more inclusive, come on. All of that, anyway, so, I wondered do you think that ethnic minorities don’t have enough opportunities in this country, that they feel they’ve got to go to America. Is that either due to a conspiracy within the broadcasting industry, or is it incompetency. And by incompetency I mean a lack of imagination, creative imagination, in terms of colourblind casting, that sort of thing. You know, do commissioners, and there are some commissioners here today, we love you, do they wake up in the morning and think ‘How do we get black people’…

LH: I should have had a calendar to figure out when this question’s going to end.

OK: I know, I know, I know, I know. Well you can’t, with a politician.

LH: Day 49.

OK: With a politician, with a politician you’re not going to get a quick question.

LH: Damn this is a long question.

OK: Of course you’re not going to get.

LH: I might have to send out for a Big Mac.

OK: We’ve got 25 minutes, we’ve got 25 minutes before the roving mics come, alright. So, do you think it is conspiracy, or do you think, do you think, do you think that, do you think that this question will ever end? What do you think? What do you think?

LH: Well, I know quite a lot of the people who’ve gone to America and it’s not incompetency and it’s not conspiracy, it’s just an absence. It’s an absence of script, it’s an issue of, of course rainbow casting, that’s an issue I know. People say we want the best actor; we just want the best actor you know. Lennie James in Line of Duty, for instance. But it feels to me like there isn’t enough effort made to include, and I think that the more people can be included in general casting for parts, the better it will be. I mean I just read a script by Russell T Davies where he very specifically said I want this type of person for this part, I want this type of person for this part, and I think if more writers do that, that will go some way to answering those questions.

David Harewood rang me before this to wish me good luck and just said, “I’m in America making a film, there’s no money but at least I’m working you know.” He’s gone, he’s very disappointed with the fact that the offers aren’t coming in, even after two years on Homeland he still has to… He comes back here and there’s nothing to do. I worked with Marianne Jean-Baptiste shortly after Secrets & Lies, Oscar-nominated, and she said “you know what, I’ve come home and there’s nothing, so I’m off.” And she’s been in Without A Trace for yonks now. And she came back to do The Amen Corner, it was great to see her, but then she’s gone back. It’s difficult, it’s very difficult if you’re an ethnic minority actor in this country. You’re waiting and waiting and waiting. Of course there’s work in the subs, and right on for Casualty and Holby and for Doctor Who. When Russell T Davies was running Doctor Who I rang up and said there’s too many black people in the show. Russell, why are there all of these black people in the show? But in high-end drama and comedy there is a paucity and we must try and do something about it.

OK: And do you think that one way to do something about that is to get the pickers more diverse?

LH: Well yeah, I mean, I had a 30-year period where I never met anybody who looked like me or you in a meeting, ever. I’d go to meetings in boardrooms all over London and never see another Black or Asian person. Not many women, and it was weird. And because it was the norm I got, you know… For me it this is about other people, I’m speaking on behalf of people. The 2,000 people who have left because there’s no work, that’s who I’m speaking on behalf of. I’ve been very blessed. My mommy, “Len, you blessed you know. Them bless you, look how the BBC look after you.” So I feel I’ve been blessed, but I’m speaking on the behalf of people who’ve had to leave. The 5.4% of people who have no work, you know it’s awful. So you know, that’s what I’m here for, and I think it’s something that can be done if there are more pickers and deciders who are people of colour. I think it will change things.

OK: You mentioned the CDN, the Creative Diversity Networks’ 2009 diversity pledge, which I think is a really important thing to underline. I think it’s great that you mentioned that because so many production companies have signed up to it. Why do you think they’re not really applying it?

LH: Because it’s like turning around this massive, three million-foot oil tanker, isn’t it? Anything big that is something, the status quo, takes a long time to change. Look how long it took them to dot the I’s and cross the T’s on the civil rights paper. It just takes a long time to change these things. It would be fantastic if this were to happen in my lifetime. I would love to be not dead and see change happen. It would be good, wouldn’t it?

OK: That can be the take home strapline. You would like to be not dead.

LH: I would like to be not dead and see some change happen in our industry. Because it seems to me the more pickers and deciders who are people of colour, the more you might see an openness to the kind of things that get chosen to be made. You know Shakespeare said we want to hold a mirror up to society, we need to start don’t we?

OK: Yeah we do need to start. What’s really interesting is where we start, because you also mentioned this point about there have been lots of initiatives.

LH: There’s been lots.

OK: There have been loads of initiatives, and you know the broadcasters do some really fantastic initiatives. What has really been brought home to me since you did the BAFTA…

LH: The RTS one? That was the BAFTA one.

OK: Yeah, sorry, that was the BAFTA one. No, when you were talking about the BAFTAs and then you went to the Sony Awards, what has come home to me is that the initiatives, although they are excellent, aren’t actually resulting in a game change.

LH: Well it’s kind of tap dancing, isn’t it? It’s kind of plate-spinning whilst nothing happens. It’s fine to have initiatives and training schemes. It’s like ‘hey look over here we’re doing this’, and then it means that the status quo can continue. And I think that’s, it sort of becomes a sort of block to stop somebody actually doing something. The thing is, people just want to work. Those 2,000 people who left the industry just want a job. They don’t want to necessarily go on a training course, because a lot of people they have trained, they are, they can do their job. They don’t need to go on another training scheme, they just want to work. So entry-level training schemes are great, but what abut the people who are trained and know how to do those jobs? What about those execs who have had to, there have been loads who have gone to America. You know ,Tony Dennis, gone, you know Barbara Amiel, working in Canada, you know Pat Young, went to America, came back, went away again. You know people go because there’s nothing going on here, and there should be more going on here. We’re such a rich, vibrant, multicultural, multiethnic culture in this country, and we should reflect that.

OK: Well I’m sure we’re gonna be asked by the audience, well I say that, maybe the audience is going to ask about what the CDN, which is basically the body of broadcasters.

LH: The Creative Diversity Network.

OK: Yeah, the Creative Diversity Network, what are they actually going to do now?

LH: Well Tanya Mukherjee’s talked about this Silvermouse thing, you know about this, it’s the monitoring thing isn’t it?

OK: Yep, it’s all about the monitoring. I couldn’t go on maternity leave until we’d made another small little baby step forward with the monitoring. Because to my mind if you can show people, for example, how many black writers were there of British TV programmes last year? I think that is a huge thing, when people actually see the truth they will be very shocked, and commissioners will be very shocked.

LH: How does it, how will it work? It’s self-declaring isn’t it? They have to…

OK: Don’t you interview me, I’m interviewing you. What’s that about? I’m flipping it back. As I was saying…

LH: Damn, you saw through my ploy.

OK: We’ll come onto that, I’m sure we’ll come onto that. But did it surprise you that the Minister for Culture, Ed Vaizey, Ed are you in the house tonight? Do we get a little, did you not turn up?

LH: Is Ed here? He left early.

OK: No you did. Oh Ed will be in so much trouble. Well you see politicians do that, they listen then they run, don’t they? I was gonna do that but I thought it’d be rude. Anyway, well, does it surprise you…

LH: You were doing this bit.

OK: Does it surprise you that he has really taken notice of what you’re doing?

LH: Well the thing is Ed Vaizey is a fan of theatre; he goes to the theatre a lot, he watches telly a lot. And he came to see Fences when I was at the Duchess Theatre and he said “why aren’t there more black people in the audience?” He said “I noticed this at The National, there aren’t any black people, and why don’t they go to the theatre. Why aren’t they here?” And I said what are you asking me for? You’re the Culture Minister, why don’t you investigate Ed? And then when we started talking about this I wrote him a letter and said you should get amongst this because this is what you’re supposed to be doing. And he took a, he’s taken an interest and I’m really glad that he’s taken an interest because he’s part of holding people to account. And he’s very keen on the monitoring. And we’re very keen on, the people that I’ve been talking to who are industry professionals, people behind the camera and in front of the camera. You know a speech like this just doesn’t happen; it just doesn’t fall out of your head. I’ve sought advice on how, you know I’ve talked to everybody about what to say here and they all said that it’s really important that Ed takes an interest in this and pushes from the government side, otherwise nothing will happen. So perhaps this is the new element of this, is that somebody in government actually is keen for something to change. And when you have that, you might have Jenga.

OK: I don’t know what that means, but yeah he really, really is keen for it to change, which I have to say makes a bit of a difference. To be honest it does make a bit of a difference. We’re going to go to Q&A in a minute but I just want to say a little thing about Lenny here. To my mind what you’ve done is genuinely extraordinary because it’s about leadership, because for too long we haven’t have anyone from the BAME community themselves getting up and saying this is what needs to change and we’re not just going to be the vex people in the corner screaming, but here’s a plan, here’s something you can do. But like you say, go away, come up with better proposals if you’ve got better proposals, but do something because it’s got to change and the time is now for it to change. And I think for the leadership role Lenny has played just can we give him another big round of applause.

[Applause]

LH: But as I say, I’ve, you could say well Lenny’s done very well and he’s had a career and things. I’m not speaking for myself, I’m speaking for those 2,000 people who are no longer working in the industry because there’s nothing for them to do. I’m speaking on their behalf, and I’m speaking on behalf of all of those BAME professionals who just want to have a voice, who just want to say “we wanna work, and can we start soon please?”

OK: Before the next six years comes around. The seven year itch, right, okay. Do we have some questions from the audience? Lots of questions. We’ll start at the very, very back. The person furthest away and then we’ll come down.

Question: Jane Bonham-Carter. That terrible image that came up right at the beginning, Lenny, of all those white people who are commissioning. What I was interested in, because I used to work in the industry is how many women there were now. Now when I was working that would have been all men, so all I can say is if we really, really pursue what you are so brilliantly telling us we should, I think we can achieve it. And also can I agree with Oona, because I sit on the same group as her, that Ed Vaizey, who I think didn’t think he was invited tonight, anyway he is really, really behind this, so as you say having a politician really behind this does help. But you know, women are sort of getting there, so I think BAME we can be optimistic is what I hope if we really pursue it.

OK: Okay, thank you Jane. What we’re going to do is we’re going to take three at a time and then ask you for your reflections on that if that’s alright. So if we can just go to the next one there, and then everyone who’s got their hands up will be seen to. And then the gentleman right at the back, so then this lady here and the gentleman at the back.

Question: Hello, Tara Conlan, Media Guardian. Slightly technical question I’m afraid. Your really interesting proposal, I just wondered, have you discussed it with Ofcom and how it might be implemented please?

LH: Not yet. This is a draft plan by all of us, and as I say it will be on the BAFTA website tomorrow, and there are proposals at the back of the room for you to take away. This is all very much at the beginning of the process. I am meeting with the DG tomorrow and I will be seeing Ofcom at a point in the near future, so this is all baby steps which I hope to make soon.

OK: And the gentleman at the very back of the room.

Question: I wanted to ask, I was wondering the extent to which the opportunities which exist to people in front of the camera and behind the camera are actually going to be driven by the people who sit in front of the laptop and are writing the very content that we would actually give these opportunities for people to act them out. So again it’s not necessarily about just creating stuff that are ethnically driven characters, but actually characters who give the opportunity for BAME.

OK: I think I’ll let you off answering that because I think that was a comment as much as anything else. Is that right sir, is that alright to take that as a comment? Is that a comment?

Q: No, it was genuinely a question.

LH: What was the question then?

OK: What was the question? I didn’t quite get the question.

Q: Whether a real impetus is that opportunities start with the writers and the creation of the content that gives the opportunities to people in front and behind the camera?

LH: Yeah, well if people who are picking and making decisions about these things are developing with a more inclusive frame of mind then of course things will naturally be developed like that. I mean I mentioned Russell T Davies and the way he writes his scripts, it’s very clear that he wants there to be a particular demographic that reflects the BAME population of this country and beyond. So I think if you’re bing developed by a multiethnic development team, you will end up making product that does hold a mirror up to our society.

OK: Jane had mentioned women but I think that was genuinely a comment and one about that we can be optimistic.

LH: I think that we can be learn… Women in Film and Television is a great lobby, I went to their thing at the end of last year and I think that we can learn a lot from how they’ve organised themselves and how they network. I think BAMEs, or the vexed as I like to call them, I think we don’t network as much and we’re not quite so disposed to the whole networking thing, and it’s something we need to learn from Women in Film and Television. It would be great if the Women in Film and Television were more diverse in a way, but that’s another…

OK: And also there’ll be a lot of people from the disability lobby wondering why we haven’t included that. I mean we could…

LH: Well I can only wave one flag at this particular thing.

OK: Right, okay, so can we have, we’re going to try and go for three in a row. Okay, let’s see if we can do that. So the gentleman there, and then the gentleman on that row before…

Question: Do you think BAME talent has just given up on the UK? Given up trying to get to executive jobs, especially?

OK: Okay, so what about BAME talent giving up on the UK? Then the gentleman down here.

LH: I love these, I feel like I’m on Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? £100 question, go on son.

Question: In the course of you speaking to different channels and different people in the industry, which genres do you feel have the most to gain or are willing to change in terms of BAME talent on screen and off screen? I think you’ve mentioned drama and comedy being your first port of call, but factual and other dramas, is that something that would be on your radar or…

OK: Okay, and then the lady, that yeah, thank you.

Question: Can I just ask you about the idea of BME productions, because I’m not sure I’m entirely comfortable with that. I think that we’re a community, but we’re not a segregated community, and I think what was most powerful about the pictures that you showed us from America is that BME actors are just being used in big hit productions and not separately.

LH: Okay, that’s good. BAME talent giving up on the UK. Well I mentioned David Harewood earlier on and there are various other people, they’re giving up on the UK because there tends to be as far as execs are concerned the glass ceiling. You know there’s a moment in one’s career when it just seems to stop and they don’t go forward. Now there was an initiative that a former-BBC executive told me about where women in film and TV were cherry-picked at the BBC. People like Jane Lush and Jane Root and Lorraine Heggessey. There was a definite effort…

OK: Caroline Thomson.

LH: Caroline Thomson. There was a definite effort on the BBC higher-ups radar to gather this small group of people together and give them access to controlling and boardrooms and exec decision things. They got to shadow basically all the muckety mucks and to see how the business works. And now they run television, well I know shadow is a weird thing, but it would be great if there were some kind of commissioning initiative where executives could do the same thing from the BAME talent pool so they can see how to green light and how to commission and all that stuff. It needs to happen, and soon.

OK: So then what about genres, which would have the most to gain?

LH: Well I’m waving the flag for high-end drama and comedy because I just don’t see it in those things. I watch lots of telly and I don’t see it in this country very much, and I think that we have to push against that door until it becomes open. I think factual, you know Danny Cohen was here and showed a fantastic five-minute clip of the diversity of what the BBC had been doing, but it was mainly factual and news you know. When you watch I don’t know Midsomer and Downton Abbey and Cranford and Lark Rise To Candleford and Miranda, and when you watch these programmes you rarely see a black or Asian face, and I think that’s where the big change needs to happen.

OK: But doesn’t your proposal include, or specifically highlights drama and current affairs, doesn’t it?

LH: Drama and comedy, and current affairs I guess, but mostly drama and high-end comedy. High-end drama and comedy, sorry.

OK: Okay, BAME productions. That’s a really interesting point about you know, don’t want to be segregated at the black sections.

LH: I agree with you, we want to be at the grown-ups table. And if we go for this kind of BAME metaphorical region thing, you only need to satisfy two of the criteria. So if you had a black producer and 50% of your cast were BAME, or 52% of your behind the camera talent was BAME, you could make any programme you want. So you could make Scandal or Downton Abbey or Lark Rise To Candleford, as long as you satisfy two of the criteria. So I absolutely think that it’s possible to make any programme you want as long as you satisfy two of those criteria. And why wouldn’t you want to do that? You don’t want to be stuck in a ghetto.

OK: Okay, no to ghettos. Let’s come down the front here please. We’ll have the lady here and then these two fine gentlemen.

Question: Hi. A question for BAFTA really. I didn’t get to see all of the photographs, but I did count 31. They were evenly divided between men and women, and I saw one black person. Could it be possible to put more black people visibly in BAFTA, because the old adage if you don’t see you can’t be. I think it would be really great if we could see more ethnically diverse photographs within this building. Is that possible?

OK: Okay, well you don’t necessarily have to answer that.

LH: Well I had my picture taken earlier so… That’s two!

OK: Okay, we’re going to take two questions down here, we’ll start with you and…

Question: Thank you. There’s a key issue that I’m sort of, I’m feeling is a bit washed over at the moment, and that’s of accountability. We pay license fees, that’s our side of the agreement, they make promises, that’s their side of the agreement. But I think if we, by the way also this three point plan that worked for regional initiatives is fantastic and I look forward to reading more about that in your proposal. But if we fail to see the increase in the accurate representation of the BAME people on and off screen, what action can we take?

OK: Okay.

LH: You can do what we’re doing, which is you can lobby you know. You do pay your license fee, you can write, you can show up at things and argue, which is what people tend to do. I was at the Diversify meeting here a few weeks ago and people just got up and showed up to argue, which is a good thing. That’s how things change.

OK: And one of them is sitting right next to you.

LH: One of them is sitting right next to you and he’s about to say something now. Go on Simon.

OK: Yeah, come on.

Question: This has got to be a question, first I’d like to preface it by saying I think you’ve hit the nail on the head and it’s a pity to talk about anything else than money, because money changes things. And what you have said tonight is put the money there, put the criteria there, and there will be change. But why don’t you extend it beyond the genres you’ve mentioned? When I was asked on the Today show to talk about diversity I walked in, I found there wasn’t a single black or minority ethnic person in the vast production office. It was white.

LH: But it was radio so we don’t care.

Q: And the same is probably true of television news, we don’t know. But my question is this, when you go and see the Director General tomorrow, I can’t see, and I’ve worked in the business side of television, it takes time to change budgets, but it can all be done for the next budgeting round, so will you ask Tony Hall if there’s any reason he can’t…

LH: Is that who it is?

Q: It’s who he was this morning, I don’t know who it is tomorrow. But will you ask him if there’s any reason your proposal cannot be adopted for the next budget round, that’s what needs to happen.

OK: Okay, thanks for that Simon.

{Applause]

LH: See, I knew that was going to be the case. I think if they link diversity to some money then things are going to start popping. And I think that because Ed Vaizey is involved, he’s very keen to put pressure and hold people to account about this issue. So that it has teeth, so that it’s not just this issue of being gummed to death over and over again, every five years. He wants something to change and I think people are listening which is great.

OK: And you remember that meeting that Ed Vaizey had a few weeks ago, he said the main thing he took away from it was teeth. That’s what’s required, and you know that’s what has to happen in structural terms, and that’s what you’re talking about, how to change the structure. Right, sorry, accountability, is your question…

Q: Well, I just wanted to say you know we can talk, we can debate, but what I mean is from where we’re standing here. You know, you just said gummed to death, you know I don’t want to feel like I’m in a condition where I’m just gumming to death my issues over and over again.

LH: Sorry for that. Sorry for that phrase.

Q: It’s right, because we can keep talking, we can keep talking but there are clear facts and there’s a clear relationship where we are, that we undertake, which is to do with license fees, we pay our license fees…

LH: I think this monitoring thing that CDN want to do which is called Silvermouse I think, which will tell you basically the makeup of the staff of hopefully every production that’s happening on British television where they have to declare their ethnicity. This will go some way to drilling down the Skillset figures and say exactly who is working on what production, and when they can do that, when they’ve got the real figures, then you’ve got to see some change because it will be shaming the devil.

OK: And when you say clear facts, the really incredible thing at the moment is we don’t have clear facts. On this we don’t have a benchmark. We can’t tell you in a years time if we’ve got better or if we’ve got worse. Those figures, those are a snapshot that’s one day over every other year. It’s not about being able to say whether we have improved over 24 months, so that’s why it is actually really important to be really boring and get the monitoring in place. Because it’s about being able to tell the truth of what’s actually going on.

LH: And there’s going to be a pilot scheme, isn’t there?

OK: Yeah, there is going to be a pilot scheme.

LH: When does that start?

OK: I said to Lenny, the thing for me that’s so important to come out of this is just to hold everyone to account. And so yes, the CDN have said we’re going to get the first pilot scheme out before the summer. I’ve said that here, hold me to account, before the summer. Summer, you know when I worked in Downing Street summer sometimes lasted till December, but we’ll try and make it summer. Sir, we’re going to go up towards the back please over there, and then Roger I will come to you.

Question: Thank you very much Lenny for the talk. How accurate do you think the statistics are? You just mentioned, I mean when I used to work at the BBC I thought most of the black or Asian faces worked in the canteen or were the cleaners, and I wondered if they were, or security, and I wondered if they were included in the statistics.

LH: That’s the problem with statistics, you can fiddle around with them can’t you? But this is Skillset, who are brilliant by the way, and I think that this snapshot has fuelled this debate, that you know to say that we’ve fell from 7.4 to 5.3 in the last three years, that’s a really damning statistic. To fall, to decline by 30.9% in a time when industry employment has gone up, to fall thousands. You know these are really crunchy, powerful figures to play with, and even though they’re, even though they can be a bit nebulas, they’re enough to trigger this debate and I’m really glad that Skillset did this work, it’s been extraordinary response.

OK: And that’s the point that statistics, the actual truth of what’s happening out there will trigger debate. I mean what happened in the last two years was that in the satellite and cable part of the sector, that employment of BAME people went down, and also in indies it went down. At the broadcast level there was a tiny increase, but the broadcasters I feel have responsibility to shoulder, to make most of the change happen here, because they’re the really big beast here that can do that, and that’s why we need to have really in-depth figures showing who the commissioning departments are. That would be really incredible to see across the TV industry what are the exact stats on that. So anyway, I get a bit boring and techy about it but I think it’s really important.

LH: But you know, when you look at the picture that we had up there, that is an extraordinary document that.

OK: Okay, so I said, I made a promise, I’ve broken it already. It was Roger, yes, at the back please, the gentleman at the back. Yeah, Roger Graef, Films of Record, because he does amazing productions, that’s why.

Question: Lenny, I was listening to your very important talk, I was reminded of our struggles in the 80s when we set up Channel 4 and had the remit to represent minorities that were not represented on the screen. And I can remember an Edinburgh session about this stuff, and about Mind Your Language, in which I suggested to Alasdair Milne who was getting a hard time at that point from all of us, what about black weather forecaster and newsreaders and so on, and he said “I don’t think the country’s ready for that.” And I said don’t you think, and he said “I don’t think it’s the BBC’s job to take the lead and go ahead of the country on that.” That was in the 80s. But Channel 4 did, and we had Black Bag and we had various other things that were like that, but they didn’t take, they didn’t actually change the culture. There wasn’t a critical mass that shifted, and I was very distressed by that, and having made a lot of films about race I ended up as an advisor to the Met on race and have been for 14 years. And we find like pushing a boulder up a hill that each time they tick a box of diversity, they say we’re all for it and nothing changes, and the numbers of black policemen are going down. And so the same problem about recruitment and retention and so all that stuff, I think, I was just speaking to an American who moved here a long time ago, I think Brits declare themselves tolerant and they never examine that question at all. They never test it against what actually happens.

[Applause]

OK: Roger, can you give the microphone to the lady behind you please. No, behind you. Oh Lucy, you nicked it anyway didn’t you. Oh go on then.

Question: Hello. So I’m trying to ask a question, not make a point, but I will make a point in response to what Roger said, which was there was ring-fence money back in the 80s, there was and it was got rid of. Both at the BBC and at Channel 4, they had departments that were rig-fenced. So I think the idea that how has it all happened, well it happened because the very thing that Lenny is proposing happens again was removed, and I think that we shouldn’t underestimate how significant that was in the statistics going down. And the other thing I think to say that since the RTS speech Lenny that we worked on together, one thing that has happened is the growth of the power and the size of the unregulated indie part of the industry. So we now have huge, incredibly wealthy, incredibly powerful indies who aren’t responsible to anybody in terms of accountability, and I just hope Lenny that you know, and I’m sure that we’d all get behind you in what you’re suggesting, that actually it’s not just the broadcasters who are of course left wanting, and the spend should be in the hands of more diverse people, but it’s also how are we going to have leverage against these huge, powerful indies who I suspect are probably responsible for a lot of the decline in diversity in the industry.

OK: Thank you Lucy. Can we go back up there, there was a lady that I promised. Yeah, up there. Thank you, that’s right.

Question: Hi. The primary thing I would just like to say is there seems to be with BAME a grounded interest in training, and every so often, every five years, a scheme comes up. But you’ve got to, if you’re going to train people you have to be able to make sure that there’s employment for them, or they are employed. So you have that investment, you place an investment in them, and then you make sure that you give them jobs. And one of the problems I think is the fact that if you have, people tend to employ who they know. I’ve been in the business as a freelance editor for 30 years. Lenny, you and I have worked together in the past, so if people know you that’s who they end up employing, and that’s something that has to change. So unless you have some kind of quota system, you’re not going to be able to ensure that you have the diversity within crew. Do you see what I mean?

LH: I do see what you mean.

Q: So you can say oh we’re going to do this, we’re going to do that, but people, you know this is a business where, and there are lots of people who are BAME, I know them myself, I’m one of them myself who actually can do it. And we’re out there, we’re working, we’re training, we’re making films, but people also have to be able to do it as well, and that’s a key thing. And the only way to ensure, and they can do it, and the only way to ensure that they get a chance to do it is to have some kind of quota system.

OK: Okay, can I just take a couple more points here. Quotas, I’ve written down quotas. You can answer quotas. Does anyone else have a question on quotas?

LH: They don’t like quotas, we don’t like the word quotas.

OK: Yeah okay. The lady there is saying she has a question on quotas, in the middle. There we go, down here, and then I’m going to come down to the front. There are a lot of people indicating, so I’d be really grateful if we could get through a few more people here that would be great.

Question: Hi, I’m Beryl Richards, I’m from, Vice Chair of Directors UK. I’m a director, and what I wanted to, we’ve been looking at, we’ve got a lot of data in our organisation, we’ve been looking specifically at women so far and a real drop in women directors, only about 8% in drama. So we’re also going to look at black and ethnic minority area, we’re coming onto it quite soon, but we’ve, what we’ve felt having met people and talked to them about the you know why this might be such a low number, or what’s going on, in a way I feel because the industry’s so complacent I think the only way of breaking it really is some sort of version of quotas. And so I’m interested in what you’re saying about the ring fencing, and I wonder whether something like, have you thought about whether that could be connected to management targets amongst the pickers.

LH: Well that is, I think that’s a really good… I mean the thing about quotas is they’ve got to do it, whereas with ring fenced money if we do it and we don’t, if you had to make, if you had ring fenced money to make eight programmes and you only made seven programmes you don’t have to make five good ones and three crap ones. You could just make the five good ones. But if you have a quota you’ve got to make all eight, so you don’t want to end up having to do something because they’ve told you to do it, and I think that…

Q: In the way that you have management targets for all sorts of things, you then put diversity into that and put that up the agenda of those management targets and then you can monitor...

LH: I think that’s obvious but…

OK: But it is done, it’s just not done enough. I mean for instance for managers in parts of Channel 4 to get any sort of business-related bonus they have to fulfill some diversity targets. So it’s about how you really make them count, and how you can make them… I mean accountability is through their pay packet. You’d think that was quite a good way to go. Can I please, I’ve got people whose arms are about to drop off here, there are quite a few here. Can I just get through some more questions. Lenny can you hear, listen, no okay fine. Just take in these questions and then answer the ones that you are interested in, okay. We’ll start down here, bottom-left.

LH: I’m pointing to this lady here.

OK: Alright, sorry, we’re starting there, then we’re going bottom-left. And then we’re coming here.

LH: In the green.

OK: If people could say their names and try and be brief if at all possible please.

Question: Yes, my name’s Carol Russell and I’m a writer. My question is to do with, what does accountability look like? So if we’re monitoring I think that’s great because I think it’s really important. All we have is anecdotal evidence of who’s working and who isn’t. But what I would be really interested to know is how do we hold people accountable when we find that there is nobody doing any work.

LH: I think that if governments say that people have got to be accountable, then they have to do it. I think there ought to be a law where they have to do it.

Q: But what does it look like?

LH: It might look like Ed Vaizey.

OK: But people have, oh look he’s arrived. Did you miss his speech Ed? Oh you have had it in private though quite a few times.

LH: Were you following it on Twitter?

Ed Vaizey: It’s complicated.

OK: It’s complicated, you see there’s a politicians answer. But you’re here. This is the minister who has taken more interest in this specific issue than any other minister to date so we’re glad you made it.

[Applause]

LH: The whole thing, what it will look like is some kind of legislation that says they have to do it, and once they have to do it that’s it.

OK: I was just going to say, he is a different type of minister, he runs on black people time, so welcome Ed.

LH: What was that? I don’t know why she said that. I was on time. The white guy was late. I was on time.

Question: Hi, Jane Mote. I’m from LondonLive, launching in two weeks time and I was very shocked and surprised that when I was recruiting people to the news and current affairs roles that the BME candidates were almost invariably on worse salaries, worse contracts and they were more qualified than most of the other candidates coming forward. So it’s not just about getting people in, it’s actually about treating them with respect and giving them training and support. And I also think in terms of the numbers game, we have to make sure that people are properly encouraged to apply for jobs, and that people understand what the benefits are as employers. I think there’s huge commercial benefit in reflecting society on screen, and I know that that will be proved to be true, but for some reason, public service employers don’t see that. And so they do need to know what the recompense is, what the damage is if they don’t start to do that. And in terms of the amount of skills, yeah just to say that the amount of BME talent in Britain has gone up phenomenally in the media industry, you just have to look online, and those people like Samuel Bender who’s here today should be on television, and they will be soon.

OK: Thank you for that. We’re going to come to Marcus here please.

Question: I’m Marcus Rider, I’m Head of Current Affairs in BBC Scotland, so I was very interested in the regional aspect. One point I just wanted to make before I ask the question is when it comes to accountability, if the money isn’t spent in Scotland, then the controller or the commissioner doesn’t have the money, so the actual accountability is actually within the structure. They lose the money that was meant to go for the production. So if you don’t commission a regional production when you’re meant to, you lose the money. So I would have thought that if you’re taking the regional model, and I know this from my own experience, so I would have thought if you’re adapting the regional model, if it’s not spent on a BAME production the commissioner loses the money. There’s no better form of accountability for a commissioner or a controller to lose the money. It’s as simple as that.

LH: To not have the money. This is what we were saying about, once you link diversity to money then things start popping I think.

OK: Okay, we’re going to go to the gentleman…

LH: Is that Burt Caesar? Do you want to go to Burt?

OK: We’ll come to Burt, we’ll go to the gentleman behind him there and then we’ll go to Burt.

Question: Hi, John Thompson, I’m a film producer. Are we not missing the point, because endemically in society, if you look at the government it was criticised as being mainly a cabinet made of Etonians, so therefore we have a basically engrained prejudice within society. And if you looked at that list I imagine you showed of 100 commissioners, how many of them are Oxbridge? So therefore you’ve got to break the paradigm. Basically they’re just employing the same old people. I imagine you and I Len are probably the only two Yam Yams in the room.

LH: Yes, I am from Dudley. I went to Bluecott Secondary Modern and I could tell you that before I came on stage and John Willis was talking about me, I would not have dreamed that I would be making a speech at BAFTA. It’s an extraordinary thing and I know it’s a massive responsibility and I take it very seriously. Yes there is a status quo, and it’s about collaboration, it’s not just about overthrowing and taking over, it’s about collaboration and getting people to see your side of things too. And it’s, I keep saying this, once again it’s reflecting society as it is, like we did in the Olympics you know. Weren’t we proud?

OK: Okay, I’m going to stop being so collaborative now because we’ve got a lot of people that still want, people are starting to wave hands manically. Right so, yes, Marcus.

Question: Lenny, I speak as one of the vexed, or the BAMEs, and while I endorse everything you say and I’m really glad you give amplification to stuff that’s been repeated for in my experience decades about numbers, quotas, the old phrases; diversity, inclusivity etc. I wonder if the battle is not going to be constantly Sisyphean.

LH: I beg your pardon.

Q: I use the word deliberately. Pushing that boulder up the hill it never gets to be further. Because we keep talking about the contemporary and the society, and the real battlefront has to be about history. Is it to do with the fact that the people who run our institutions have no sense of identification with our lives and stories. They don’t see the history of this country, the past as being mongrel. You go back to the crusades, you go back to links to Africa, the East India Company; all of the foundations for this country make it a very mongrelised place. People somehow can’t accept that, and if we talk just in terms of the contemporary it’s going to be all about shifting numbers, little charitable moves here and there, but the fundamental changes won’t come until this thing about identity has been confronted. Maybe it needs to start outside of our business, in education, in politics, I don’t know. I’ll throw it as a question to you. What do you think sir?

OK: But can you not answer it right now.

LH: I’m not even sure I could imagine it in the future. I’m trying to work that out.

OK: Okay, people madly waving their arms. We’re going to take, could we have a quick-fire round. How about we try that. You get quick-fire comments. Starting now please, off you go.

Question: Could I just pick up on that question about education, because I think we’re starting at the wrong place. I work in Tower Hamlets with children and schools and governorship. 85% of our children in schools in the east end are BAME children. That is being taken out of the curriculum; the arts, drama and creativity is being taken out of the curriculum. We’re losing the pioneers of tomorrow. Isn’t that where we should be starting?

LH: Do not answer, wait a minute. There’s a lady behind-right. Thank you, right arts and then the lady behind. I’m going to try and get to everyone here. Yes.

Question: Hi. I wanted to ask, how are we going to ensure that not just diverse workers but we also have diverse stories being told? Because we’ve had Top Boy, yeah we had Top Boy, we’ve always had those stories, how are we going to make sure that we have diverse stories coming through?

OK: Okay, hang on, yeah. So let’s go to the back we’re going to go to Simone there. Thank you, then the gentleman behind, then the lady in front.

Question: Hi, Simone from The TV Collective. I just want to know Lenny, why now? Do you think that there’s a real opportunity for change in terms of the proposal that you’re putting forward, and how can we support to make sure it happens?

OK: Okay, the lady, you’re waving so much, I shouldn’t do it because you’re waving so much, but I will, and then the gentleman at the back.

LH: This is great. I probably wouldn’t do it like this, but I like what you’re doing.

Question: Hello, thank you. I’m Dona Croll, I’m an actor. It just, hello, hello darling. It just occurs to me, it just occurs to me we’re all sitting here, what we’re talking about really is culture and art and how we perceive ourselves in the world. And I wonder why it is that in every other area of the arts black people are doing really well, but this particular form of storytelling, having people in your front rooms, can’t seem to progress in the same way that the writers, the painters, I mean don’t even start about the musicians. Why is it that this particular art form is so stymied?

OK: Okay, and then, poor Lenny, he’s going to get a list like this, wait a second. The gentleman at the very top.

LH: I wish I knew the answers to some of these. I’ll be trying to find this out myself.

Question: Just a quick question. In the process of your research, did you find anything more about the social and economic backgrounds of the people in the industry, ethnic minority or otherwise? And sort of underrepresentation or overrepresentation in that aspect, and how that may relate to race as well?

OK: Okay.

LH: The answer’s no to that. No to that. Yes. No. Okay.

OK: Okay, can I that, right, we’re gonna hear Pat Young at the back there, Pat.

Question: Just a quick question. I wonder if there’s any link between the shift of money out of London and the collapse in numbers of BAME employed. I entered the career at London Weekend Television doing a two-hour special on Brixton ten years after the riots, and that was a regional programme, it just went out in London. ITV has lost its regional structure, so you don’t get the LWTs dealing with London the way it did in the 80s.

LH: Do you mean the opt-out stuff?

Q: Ywah, the opt-outs. ITV has lost not just the opt-outs, but that structure which meant LWT to make its money had to talk to London, and London is very, very differently diverse to the rest of the country. One of my challenges, running network production, is you can get to an average number quite easily in terms of portrayal, but it doesn’t reflect the reality of London and maybe Birmingham and Manchester and Leeds, and yet it’s too much for other parts of the country where there are no black people.

LH: Where is that? Midsomer!

Q: So I just wonder whether there isn’t something to be said for looking at the regional structure within ITV and the BBC, and making a bigger play there.

OK: Okay, can I just, I just want to see. This is the last chance, so just let me see how many people I haven’t called.

LH: You can’t have more questions, there’s loads of questions.

OK: Okay, you don’t even have to answer these Lenny, just let people have their say. So I can see five people, that’s all I’m calling and that’s that, okay. So I can see one two three four five six, sorry six, okay and that’s that, no one else. So we’ll start down here.

LH: You’ll have to help me with this. Do you want me to write some down?

OK: No, I’ll keep writing them if that’s all right.

Question: Fiona Bartels-Ellis, Head of Diversity, British Council. When you talk about Ed Vaizey’s teeth, what are those teeth?

OK: Okay.

LH: You do that.

OK: Ed can say what his teeth are.

LH: He’s showing them to me now. He’s like this.

OK: He’s like Mutley at the front. Okay, let’s heat what the other five remaining questions are please. I’ve made a promise, I’m going to try and stick to it. Yes.

Question: I just wanted to say that we’re talking as if…

LH: Use the mic.

Q: Yes, okay. No, I want to say that we’re talking as if this has never happened before, but there was a time briefly, I worked at the BBC in Birmingham in the 70s. I’m half-Asian, I was a producer, I was a picker. I went up to what was then English Regions drama and the brief was to reflect English Regions drama. I looked out of the window and I said to the Head of Drama, there are an awful lot of Indians and black people out there; we have to reflect their life because that’s what we’re here to do. And he said, fair enough, get on with it. And I think that…

LH: Who’s that guy?

Q: David Rose.

LH: David Rose? Is he dead, is he alive?

Q: He’s alive, very much alive.

LH: Where’s he working? British Rail now? Where’s he when we need him?

Q: Well you need him, you need him.

LH: Was he black or Asian or white?

Q: No, I was the Asian person who said that there are Asians out there, and because he listened to me, so you only need one person…

LH: To listen.

Q: To listen. In all these initiatives, in all these things, one person says ‘yes, that’s right, this is part of our society, get the writer in, commission him, put it on television.’

LH: Well that’s a picker you see. That guy was a picker. So when there’s somebody, to answer a lot of these questions, when there’s somebody in charge who just says look, you know what, this is what we’re gonna do, suddenly things change.

Q: That’s what I mean. In all these initiatives, in all these statistics, one person stands up and says I’m commissioning you to do a high-end drama, takes the risk. If it’s a success others will follow, and you won’t need quite so many statistics to back it up because it’ll just become part of the landscape of TV.

OK: Now there’s just four people left to speak. Thank you, that was an important point. Ooh, you’ve just slipped in, you weren’t on the four. Gone on then, make it less than 20 seconds.

Question: Yes, I’d just like to know what your thoughts are on monitoring and accountability specifically related to casting? I’m working with the Equity ethnic minority members, and that’s something we really want to try and push through but we’ve been met by a lot of resistance.

LH: What are you trying to push through?

Q: Monitoring, actual monitoring, getting the stats for casting but I know that’s quite a difficult area because…

OK: Do you mean how many people turn up at a casting session, or how many people are actually being cast?

Q: How many people turn up at castings, how many people are cast, what their ethnic background is? Who is cast? Who is actually seen?

LH: How would you get that feedback though?

Q: Well that’s what we want. We’re…

OK: I’ve given you the chance to air it, I’ve given you the chance to air it now wait a second, I’ve promised three other people at the back and then it’s a free for all. No, then it’s over. But the lady right at the very back with your hand up. Yeah, come in from the other side. Sorry I can’t actually see you but I can just see a hand.

LH: This is like my house on a Sunday.

Question: In our postmodern and almost post-cultural society there’s a word that we do not mention, and that is racism. And the importance, and where, and the depth of that word in terms of our history and how it impacts, whether it’s historical memory, how that impacts on the choices people make. And it is important, we’re talking about America and we’re talking about the UK. In America they acknowledge their history with all the complexities that it has. We do have a similar history here and we ignore the word racism and the impact of it at our peril. We can discuss as much as we like, we need to factor that in and its impact in the choices that people make, what they see, the stories, the history. Thank you.

OK: Thank you for that.

[Applause]

Question: Hello, hey. I’m Luti, I run a small production company. I just wanted to make two comments. One was, there’s lots of comparisons to America, but isn’t there fundamental big difference in the demographics of BME people there. And secondly, as an employer of hundreds of crew, I really struggle to find any black Steadicam operators, gaffers, they simply like rarely exist. And there seems to be a cultural issue there where…

LH: Where are you looking for those guys? Where are you looking for your staff, your crew?

Q: Well, it’s a trickle down. You ask the DoP, hey who’s your gaffer, who’s your focus puller and you get the cores.

LH: Who’s your DoP?

Q: Aaron Reid, he’s a good DoP.

OK: Simone, are you about to chip in on this point now? Because there’s one more person then this show is done. So Simone.

Question: The TV Collective is a kind of support group or kind of organisation, online resource.

LH: Give him your card!

Q: I will, I definitely will. I’ll give him the lowdown. But yeah, we kind of support a membership of about 55,000 now and between them you will find camera people, you will find sound people, you will find all of them.

LH: And a Steadicam guy.

Q: Yeah, Steadicam guy. We’re all here and we’re all waiting to work so you just, you need to kind of connect and network.

OK: And the last question, right at the back, the very last question.

LH: Or statement. Or long, dark comment where there’s no answer.

Question: It will not be long, and it will not be narrow. It will just be to the point. Right, so, I would love to see the statistics on what the commissioning editors do for writers, because I’m not so sure what they think when they commission writing. And good drama is good drama, doesn’t matter who writes it. I’ve been to school her, I’ve been to University here and I can write, and that’s what it counts. Any statistics on that? Anything on that?

OK: There are snapshots on it, but that’s what we’re trying to get out to you by the summer we hope to have the first pilot which hopefully will include that. It will include producers, directors, writers are really important. You mentioned Tanya Mukherjee who’s in the room somewhere, yes, working on this as well, yes there she is, and that’s what we’re trying to do. We’re trying to get you those statistics because we believe if those statistics are out there the truth will shame people so much. Change will have to come. Now Lenny, this is your night, these are your 54,000 questions, are there any that you would like to just pick up on, a few perhaps here or there?

LH: Why now, and what can we do to help was a good one I thought. Why now is because I’ve reacted basically to the Skillset figures and I wanted to do something to help. I wanted to help represent all of those people who have left the industry, who have no jobs, who feel that they are not of any use any more to the industry. That’s a terrible indictment on our society, on the work we’re doing. We need to say to those people that we can help them, we’re gonna try and maybe ease them back if we can into the work force. We also do need more executives. We do need to try and smash through the glass ceiling. So I don’t just think it’s entry-level training initiatives and schemes, I think it’s to do with the boardroom too and I think we really need to push on that. And what I’ve noticed as well, I know I talked about the BBC and ITV and stuff, but what I’ve noticed is a real willingness from all of these people to talk. They want to talk, and I think that because it’s connected to Ed Vaizey and what he’s trying to do with it as well, they’re inclined to listen. They’re trying their best to talk and I think there’s a need and a desire to change, but I think there’s a fear tied up in it too. So we need to remove the fear and say look we’re all in the same boat, we all want to do the same things, let’s push forward. And I’ve noticed that there’s, that the door is slightly more open than it used to be, so perhaps this is the best time to push forward.

As far as education and the arts concerned, I really for that lady who was talking about 85% of the kids in Tower Hamlets and arts being cut. The Arts Council need to not, need to stop doing that, and I think that, but I do think the training schemes are to do with mid-level and executive-level will help to bring those kids into our industry.

Burt’s question was too long. Social and economic background I’m not doing a PHD, unfortunately. I think you’re right. The thing Pat about London where 40% of BAME live in London and yet the figure is so small in terms of people involved, I think you’re probably right about the move to the regions affecting everything. But I think, well there’s Birmingham and there’s Manchester and there’s Liverpool too you know, there’s other areas where there’s a high incidence of BAME population, it’s not just London. But I do think, Jazzy B said to me, “when a man come to England and then come to London and don’t go anywhere else.” You know talk about London, I want to come to London. So yes, obviously London’s important, but this is all ongoing and these are the first steps. What you can do to help is to help us lobby and to keep writing, to keep complaining, to keep being vexed. This is what gets things to move forward. But complain and be vexed to the right people. And also we’ve got to network. We’ve got to start talking to each other; otherwise this will just be harder. If we don’t start talking to each other we’re all going to be shouting on our own in the wilderness and that’s no good. We need to get together, meet up, discuss our strategy, move forward. And as I said before, this hasn’t come together just because of me and just because of a kind of selfish, self-aggrandising wish to put myself out there because I, like I say I’ve been very lucky. I’ve had a very good career and I’ve done lots of things and I want to do more things in the future with the BBC, ITV, Channel4, everybody. But I’m speaking on behalf of the 2,000 and I think that’s a good thing and a good place to be.

OK: And you also said Lenny that people want to listen right now, I really think that’s true. There are some very senior people here tonight. The most senior commissioner at ITV is here, Peter Fincham, thank you for coming here tonight. Most people don’t want to necessarily give up their evening to sit and be berated, and I don’t think that’s what’s happened here this evening. Exactly, nobody has, because it is about constructive engagement of how we go forward. So Lenny, the one thing I wanted to come out of this, we talked about accountability. Would you agree to give a speech, not in six or seven years, but to come back here in 18 months and ask those of us that are working on the Creative Diversity Network what have we actually achieved, what have we delivered, and let us put our necks on the line. Will you do that?

LH: Yeah sure. I just need to talk to my manager who’s having a heart attack at the back. Yes, I think 18 months is a very crunchy and decent parameter, because it means that CDN can get amongst it. It means that Ed Vaizey can push some of these things through. And it means that we as a people can get together and decide on whether we want this screen or not. Do we want this screen my people? Do we want this screen my people?

Audience: Yes.

LH: Well in which case we have to decide to work together and push forward as opposed to work cyclically and push sideways.

OK: So he has a screen, he has a dream. He’s been amazing, can everyone give the biggest round of applause to Lenny Henry.