

Course outline: Diploma in Factual Development and Production

Module 1: The Factual Commissioners

Understanding the different needs of factual commissioners is fundamental to the successful development and production of factual programmes. In this module we're going to review the factual output of some of the biggest commissioners of factual programmes to discover what 'makes' a factual programme on the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 etc. *How are they different?* We'll discuss current trends in factual programming in the UK and US with reference to notable series; see how recent innovations in factual programming have been informed by other genre, advances in technology and the rise of the SVODs; weigh the importance of factual programmes in the inter-channel battle for audiences and review their scheduling and the ratings they achieve. This module will feature contributions from channel commissioners who can account for the sensibilities of their channels/audiences. We'll also look at the online opportunities for factual content; see how producers have successfully embraced its potential and discuss the creative and commercial challenges it poses for traditional producers/broadcasters. At the end of this module, students should be able to deconstruct the key 'signatures' of factual programmes on each of the featured channels – an insight that will prove invaluable when they come to explore the development of programme ideas for these channels in the next module...

Module 2: Developing and Pitching Factual Programmes

Where do ideas come from, and how best to develop them and present them to commissioners? In this module we're going to review the process of developing, pitching and ultimately selling factual programmes to broadcasters. We'll explore different ways of generating and formatting programme ideas through a series of brainstorming workshops which lay bare the creative process; learn how to research and write programme proposals; weigh the importance of taster tapes and other supporting materials; discuss the contribution onscreen talent can make to the development process and explore how to successfully pitch your ideas to commissioners. At the end of this module, students will have devised, developed and created a programme proposal and pitched to a senior industry figure.

Module 3: Pre-Production

In this module we begin to plot the transition from script to screen. We'll review the various commercial arrangements that producers and broadcasters enter into and the programme tariffs that attach to different types of factual programme and slots. We'll deconstruct budgets and production

schedules from produced series and review the varied paperwork that documents the production of a factual programme (call sheets, shooting scripts, risk assessments, access and location agreements, release forms, shot logs etc.). These sessions will provide students with invaluable insights into the commercial aspects of factual programme production and the legal and editorial obligations of the producer.

Module 4: Directing and Producing Factual Programmes

In this module, we'll consider the practical challenges of directing and producing different kinds of factual programmes, including observational documentary, factual formats, fixed rig, reality, factual drama with reference to executive producers, producers and directors working with these forms. This module will provide students with many valuable insights into the practical aspects of factual production.

Module 5: Post-Production, Delivery and Distribution

Here we consider how to write commentary, how to source and clear archive and music rights for use, how to ensure your programme is compliant and how to work with a distributor to exploit your programme post transmission. As we'll see, the producer's relationship with his/her programme is only just beginning - television is a global business and producer's entrepreneurship and commercial nous is as important as the producer's creativity.

Module 6: Pitching Factual Programmes to Discovery (Graduation Project):

This final module sees students create their own programme proposal specifically for one of the Discovery channels and then pitch it to a senior Discovery commissioner(s). To prepare, students will receive an up-to-date briefing from a senior Discovery executive and hear from producers who have successfully pitched and produced shows for the channel. What insights do they have into the tastes and sensibilities of the Discovery commissioning team that our students should be aware of? Group tutorials provide an opportunity for students to hone their ideas, presentations and pitching skills before their final pitch. One student pitched show will be 'optioned', securing £5,000 of development funding to be conducted under the supervision of a Discovery executive producer.