

BROADCAST

Indie chiefs: broadcaster Covid response a 'mixed bag'

By [Max Goldbart](#) | 25 August 2020

C4 accused of slow payments as Avalon, Matisse, Proper Content & True North bosses assess impact of pandemic

The response to Covid-19 from broadcasters has been a "mixed bag", according to a group of indie bosses, with Channel 4 coming in for particular criticism.

Speaking on an Edinburgh Television Festival panel entitled Who Would Be an Indie Boss?, Dragonfly and The Garden founder Nick Curwin accused C4 of being slow to pay indies on too many occasions since the lockdown, causing "enormous stress [and] affecting livelihoods".



Nick Curwin

"Although C4 is in a precarious position, part of its remit is to look after the creative sector," said Curwin, who is chairman of indie consultancy Matisse.

"I'm seeing lots of examples of C4 being even slower with cash-flowing projects and paying on time than in the past and it upsets me. It has a responsibility to the sector and shouldn't be cynical. The business affairs side needs to look at this harder."

Proper Content founder David Dehaney described indies as being in the “squeezed middle” since Covid-19 took hold, with broadcasters expecting them to have enough money to both part-fund their shows and help freelancers.

He said late payments have a “huge knock-on effect”.

“You are relying on quite sizeable payments for cashflow and when that doesn’t happen, it’s stressful,” said Dehaney.

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Along with Dehaney, Avalon chief executive Laura Kennedy said the broadcasters’ response to coronavirus has worsened as the crisis has worn on.

“At the outset it felt like a collaborative spirit, but the response has been more mixed lately,” she said.

Kennedy included the US networks in her analysis, claiming that some have been “extremely responsive” while others have “not been willing to help out” with the additional costs incurred due to stringent Covid-19 protocols.

Laura Kennedy

Kennedy, [who joined Avalon from Lionsgate late last year](#), said she had “never been more grateful for our business model” than since lockdown. When production was paused, the outfit was able to rely on its other departments, such as its distribution arm and talent agency.

“Having diversity has provided stability that allows us to invest in talent,” she said.

True North founder Jess Fowle cited the indie’s in-house post-production facility as a boon during Covid.

The Leeds-based indie has kept CBBC series The Pets Factor and C4’s A New Life In The Sun going throughout lockdown, she added.

“Being self-sufficient and retaining rights remains a really important part of what we do,” said Fowle.

Awakening

Dehaney, who founded The School That Tried to End Racism indie Proper Content in 2016, welcomed the broadcasters' diversity pledges in the wake of the death of George Floyd.

But he sounded a note of caution.

David Dehaney

“There has been an awakening and suddenly lots of broadcasters are very interested in what we've got to say,” he explained. “You don't feel you need to educate everyone about what racism or bias looks like and it feels like everyone is having this awakening that lots of us are living.

“Having said that, let's see what the future holds.”