

13th March 2008



Press Release

Channel 4 launches £50 million public service digital media fund

Channel 4 is to kick start a wave of new investment in public service digital media for audiences around Britain, with the launch of a new £50 million creative fund.

The Four Innovation for the Public (4IP) fund was announced today at the launch of Channel 4's *Next on 4* strategic blueprint, which outlines the ambitious public role the Group believes it can fulfil in the fully digital media sector of the future.

The 4IP fund is planned for launch in July as a collaboration between Channel 4 and a series of development and media agencies from around the UK.

Birmingham has been confirmed as the first UK commissioning hub for 4IP in England and Wales through a partnership with regional screen agency, Screen WM and regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands.

Other provisional partners in discussions to commit funding to the scheme are Invest Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Screen, Scottish Enterprise, Yorkshire Forward and Screen Yorkshire and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts.

Channel 4 has committed up to £20 million to the 4IP fund on a pilot basis in the two years after launch. It will offer considerable help in kind, including cross-promotion, sales and administrative support.

Channel 4's commitment has attracted provisional equivalent funding commitments from partner agencies that increase the fund's value to up to £40 million. Negotiations are ongoing with a number of other potential partners and with 4IP intending to seek further third party financing for individual projects, the fund's value is intended to grow to at least £50 million.

Channel 4 will manage the fund and supply back office support. The intention is to work with the partner agencies to recruit digital media commissioning managers to be located across the UK, initially in Birmingham and in other cities yet to be decided.

4IP's editorial focus will be on working with the best talent, both individually and within digital production companies from around the UK, to deliver publicly valuable content and services on digital media platforms.

Within Channel 4, a new senior executive will be recruited to head 4IP and will report to Director of New Media and Technology, Jon Gisby. A steering group will be chaired by Chief Executive, Andy Duncan, and will involve Gisby as well as Director of TV and Content, Kevin Lygo, and Director of Nations and Regions, Stuart Cosgrove, who has led partnership and funding negotiations on Channel 4's behalf.

Channel 4 is today outlining a number of illustrative projects that it is currently developing or discussing. These include:

- Working with partners such as Bebo to look at ways in which news and current affairs can be re-invented for a social networking audience.
- Reinventing established PSB genres such as sport, comedy and drama to reach new audiences online, on demand and on the move. Channel 4 is partnering with governing bodies in 14 Olympic sports to bring hitherto unavailable sports content to informed communities through a 4Sport multi-platform initiative.
- Reinforcing Channel 4's educational role through learning resources such as School of Everything, an online service matching students and teachers across a range of subject matters, skills and specialities.
- Developing relationships within proven hotspots of games creativity in the UK, such as the Games Republic in Yorkshire and Interactive Tayside, where Channel 4 has a relationship with the innovative games development project, Dare to Be Digital, to explore how games technologies can be put to more dynamic public purpose.

Launching the 4IP fund, Duncan commented: "4IP sits at the heart of a wider strategic blueprint for Channel 4, which demonstrates how we can use digital media to deliver our unique creative remit with even greater impact. Digital technology transforms our audiences' ability to create, access and engage with our content, making it easier for us to identify the best new British creativity and bring it to a wider UK audience and catalyse a new generation of digital media production companies."

Gisby added: "Channel 4 has always prided itself on nurturing new talent within television and the 4IP fund will build on that tradition, investing in a new creative generation and encouraging them to push the boundaries on new platforms. Channel 4 has the right culture of experiment and partnership and, most crucially, the necessary scale to allow us to make an impactful public contribution in digital media."

Cosgrove concluded: "Extending our commissioning reach through 4IP represents a sea change for Channel 4 and a significant boost to our efforts to bolster an independent, creative production sector outside London. We are delighted to be working with such a strong array of funding partners to boost the digital skills base within the creative industries in cities around the UK."

The full text of *Next on 4* and footage of today's presentation is available at www.channel4.com/nexton4