

## UTV PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF 2020

### PROGRAMME REVIEW

#### **Content - News, current affairs and general programming**

UTV's portfolio of local programmes offers a diverse range of top quality news, current affairs and non-news content. In an intensely competitive market, UTV is committed to maintaining the highest standards of output with a focus on the needs and preferences of the Northern Ireland audience. News and current affairs are at the heart of UTV output. UTV Live continues to be a highly successful source of independent news, with share of audiences at 6pm rising last year from an already high base. The programme also won the RTS award for News Programme of the Year 2020.

At the start of the year we were looking forward to providing our audience with the same outstanding service of news, current affairs and other local programming.

The pandemic and following government restrictions had a significant impact on our plans. The focus for UTV from March was to remain on air and online, providing as much of a service as possible, prioritising news.

#### **Changes to schedule**

We managed to maintain the normal schedule of news throughout 2020, with adjustments to the duration of some shorter bulletins. A few other regular programmes were halted but we were able to deliver a large part of our usual output.

#### **Innovation, Experiment and Creativity**

Continuing a service - which has a strong news and current affairs base - was crucial at a time when accurate and impartial information was so important to the people of Northern Ireland.

From the outset, UTV stepped up in very challenging circumstances, finding a new, Covid-secure way of operating. This involved massively reducing the number of people in our offices to a skeleton staff needed to transmit the programmes, while supporting other staff to plan and construct news items from home. We limited the amount of travelling away from home by asking contributors to film pictures, for example of homeschooling, and then we conducted interviews via Zoom. Journalists and crews still reported from the scene when necessary but this could be vastly reduced given the measures in place.

**Daily Stormont briefings** – UTV also streamed the daily Stormont press conferences focusing on the pandemic which featured the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, Health Minister and their government officials, as well as other Stormont ministers. Along with our in depth expert analysis on the 6pm news programme, viewers were able to get a comprehensive picture of fast moving events directly affecting their lives and livelihoods.

## Reporting

While much work was done from home, on other stories UTV was very much still on the frontline. We were trusted to film in Antrim ICU and a Covid ward under pressure. Families have told us their stories of loss and business of their struggle to survive.

We kept uplifting stories in the show too, which our audience has appreciated and featured the ways in which communities have come together. We had a huge response to our 'Rainbows' segment at the close of the evening news, which ran for the duration of the Clap for Carers campaign. We received hundreds of drawings from viewers' children in support of key workers every day.

### **There were however other major stories in 2020 which UTV covered extensively**

January 2020 - power sharing returned to Stormont.

Brexit - we continued to focus throughout 2020 on the Withdrawal Agreement negotiations surrounding Brexit, culminating in detailed analysis and coverage of the final agreement on the NI Protocol in December 2020.

The death of the prominent Northern Ireland politician and Nobel Peace Prize winner John Hume's death was covered in a half-hour outside broadcast news special from Derry on the day of his death on UTV Live, and an hour-long documentary in August.

## PROGRAMME OFFER

Our weekly political programme, **View from Stormont**, continued throughout the pandemic but dropped to a shorter length for a few months. The programme's focus shifted from the day to day workings of Stormont to the political response to, and policy decisions arising from, the pandemic.

To ensure continuity of service of the news programme in particular, we suspended production of non-news programmes **UTV Life** (weekly magazine programme) and **Up Close** (hard-hitting current affairs programme) with both returning in 2021.

Other shows in the UTV schedule are made by the independent sector in Northern Ireland and these continued under strict safety measures. Below is a summary:-

**Rare Breed – A Farming Year** returned to UTV with a new series of 12 programmes in January 2020 produced by Crawford McCann throughout 2019. The series charts the agricultural year through the lives of farmers, with each episode capturing the highs and lows of a particular month.

**Eamonn Mallie Face to Face with.....** aired in January, filmed in 2019. Award-winning journalist Eamonn Mallie returned for a third series, talking one-to-one with some of the biggest names in the world of sport, drama and public life in Northern Ireland. In this eight-part series, produced by Mallie Productions, Eamonn interviewed, among others, the rugby legend Stephen Ferris, Fr. Brian D'Arcy, and Derry Girls creator Lisa Magee.

**Taste of Success** – aired February 2020, filmed in 2019. Bushmills-born world-renowned chef Clare Smyth was the focus of a half hour programme charting her career. She trained with Gordon Ramsay (who featured in the show) and cooked for Harry and Meghan's wedding. She now runs her own award-winning restaurant in Kensington London.

Westway Film Productions produced two series for UTV in 2020:

**Ulster Giants** returned for a third series in July with presenter Joe Mahon exploring the greats of civil engineering in Northern Ireland in an eight part series. He along with various experts visited bridges, tunnels, canals, viaducts, harbours, windmills, railways, roads, lakes and peatlands – to hear fascinating stories of how our 'Ulster Giants' were built. Five episodes which were completed pre-Covid, aired in July, with the remaining three episodes filmed during the pandemic following strict guidelines, airing at the end of 2020.

**Lough Foyle** was a television travelogue series featuring the history, natural environment and cultural heritage of the Foyle catchment area, with particular emphasis on Ulster-Scots elements of the hinterland. This eight-part series aired in October.

We also produced one current affairs **Up Close** programme pre-Covid, as well as a special programme on the Renewable Heat Incentive inquiry.

### **Other programming**

Because major events in Northern Ireland were cancelled given the pandemic, there were no one-off programmes in 2020 to mark these, including **St Patrick's Day** parades in March; the **Balmoral Show**; the **Twelfth** parades and celebrations around Northern Ireland; **The Spirit of NI Awards**.

### **Cultural and Other Diversity**

UTV is committed to providing equality of opportunity, dignity and respect both on and off screen. Despite the challenges in 2020, UTV continued its support for a number of major community events and organisations. Belfast Mela NI's largest multi-cultural event, which like many others, went on line, had UTV reporter Paul Reilly pre-recording segments for their week of activities. We also hosted a Meet the Media event for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations via Zoom.

On **View from Stormont** in mid-November we ran a special feature with four young people giving powerful testimonies on what it's like being black in Northern Ireland as well as covering the Black Lives Matters protests for the news. We also produced an 'in conversation with' special for Black History Month with 20-year-old Angel Arutura who spoke in a half hour interview online about the struggles she faced growing up in Northern Ireland. A section of this was also shown in the news programme.

### **Public Input**

UTV is very proud of the range of our programming and the interactivity we enjoy with our audiences across all platforms. Facebook and Twitter activity continued to grow with the increased use of Facebook to communicate shortened key news stories of the day, in

addition to the daily Stormont briefings. Twitter was increasingly used to provide updates to stories in between televised news, and individual reporters as well as the official UTV news sites increased their followers.

### **Promotion of Media Literacy**

*This activity was severely curtailed in 2020.*

We hosted a group of HND Broadcast Journalism students in February 2020, with talks from key reporters and production specialists as well as a tour of the studios and the chance to try delivering the weather forecast.

UTV appointed a News Trainee in October 2020. This is in line with other ITV nations and regions. The successful candidate got a nine month contract to learn all the skills necessary to work in our multi-media newsroom.

## **UTV STATEMENT FOR 2021**

For the foreseeable future, social distancing will continue to be a part of how society and business are expected to work and UTV will continue to follow the relevant guidelines. For the months ahead that's likely to mean a continuation of how we've been working and bringing the news to the public. Any changes we make will happen gradually in a measured way, in line with government guidance.

We look forward to providing our audience with the same high standards of news, current affairs and top quality local programming which reflects the people and issues of Northern Ireland in 2021.

News will remain at the heart of our output this year and we will continue to deliver news and current affairs, with the return of series and programmes that were postponed due to the pandemic.

### **Innovation, Experiment and Creativity**

We will continue with all the good practices developed in 2020, as a result of having to think differently due to COVID 19. Remote working for the news teams is now the norm and this will be kept under review as restrictions ease, to ensure best practice.

## **PROGRAMME OFFER**

### **News**

**UTV Live at Six** will continue to deliver a market leading news service and will respond quickly to breaking news following political developments to include exclusive reports and informed analysis.

We will also provide relevant coverage of the most topical and popular events in Northern Ireland.

**View from Stormont** will continue to respond to the news events and provide viewers with in-depth political analysis and comment from key players in Northern Ireland.

### **Current Affairs**

**Up Close** – the hard-hitting monthly current affairs programme returns in 2021, with the first programme covering one Belfast woman's battle with Leukaemia and her dying wish to see more people join the stem cell donor register.

### **Other programmes**

Weekly magazine show **UTV Life** returns in 2020 in a new Thursday night slot, bringing viewers a relaxed and conversational line-up. The studio-based series reflects life and topical events across Northern Ireland. Presenter Pamela Ballantine is back in the studio, carrying out all interviews via Zoom, and reporter Rita and team bring filmed items from all over NI, following strict guidelines.

In February, **UTV Life in the Big Apple** will air. Filmed in and around New York pre-pandemic, the two special shows see Pamela talking to famous New Yorkers with roots and links to Northern Ireland from the worlds of drama, music and sports.

**Rare Breed - A Farming Year** returns to UTV in January 2021 with a new series of 12 programmes produced by Strident Media (formerly Crawford McCann). The series charts the agricultural year through the lives of farmers working in a variety of enterprises, with each episode capturing the highs and lows of each month, including how the pandemic affected this important sector.

**Eamonn Mallie Face to Face with .....**Award-winning journalist Eamonn Mallie returns for a fourth series, talking one-to-one with some of the biggest names in the world of sport, drama and public life in Northern Ireland. In this six-part series, produced by Mallie Productions, Eamonn interviews, among others, former Irish president Mary McAleese, World motorbike champion Jonathan Rea, and Irish civil rights leader and former politician Bernadette Devlin McAliskey.

**UTV Six Nations Preview** – This UTV Production is a one hour special airing in early February as a warm up to the Six Nations rugby championship, with interviews and analysis about teams from key players past and present, including Rory Best and Willie John McBride.

**Frontline 2** is a continuation of the first series which aired in 2019. Produced in-house by UTV, and using footage from UTV's rich archive library, the series looks back at the Troubles and the vital frontline workers who helped to keep Northern Ireland functioning during that turbulent period. Key people interviewed will give first hand accounts of their jobs and how they played their part in keeping life moving. This series includes firefighters and bus drivers, and will air in April.

Westway Film Productions will produce 18 programmes to be aired later in the year. Called **Mahon's Way**, presenter Joe Mahon will take to the highways and byways of Northern Ireland again, with a promise of returning with another entertaining mix of people, places and fascinating stories.

**Enterprise** is planned for the end of the year depending on filming restrictions – this four part series will be an observational documentary that will capture life on board the Belfast to Dublin train. We'll follow staff and passengers and get to meet the characters on the cross border trip. We'll also go behind the scenes to find out what it takes to keep the Enterprise on track.