Independent
Broadcasters of Ireland

The Future of Public Service Broadcasting on Independent Radio

The protection of journalism and the impact on the democratic process

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1. INTRODUCTION

News and current affairs are the driving force of independent radio in Ireland, engaging communities in the local democratic process and giving voice to many who would otherwise not be heard on the national broadcaster.

The production of news and current affairs is expensive with a variety of specialised roles required. The growth of digital media has changed the dynamic in newsrooms with even more content being required each and every hour. Despite this, independent radio receives no funding from the licence fee for the production of news and current affairs, the backbone of public service broadcasting.

The growth of online media and how this news is financed and controlled is having a negative impact on quality local journalism.

The funding model for the entire radio sector needs radical and immediate reform. Despite its crucial role in Irish society and the strict regulation, the broken advertising model and the changing dynamic has forced local radio bosses to cut back on basic resources in newsrooms which is having a direct impact on the quality of journalism being produced.

The very existence of independent radio in Ireland is under threat. Unless local journalism is protected and a strategy to invest for its future is implemented then the independent radio sector will not be able to fulfil the public service mandate it is required to do under legislation

This report sets out to highlight the challenges facing the production of news and current affairs in the Independent sector, the need to protect local journalism and the requirement of Government to act urgently to address the funding crisis.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF IRELAND'S RADIO NETWORK

The Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI) represents 34 independent radio stations throughout Ireland. The mission of the IBI is to promote a strong and vibrant radio sector which reflects the preferences and needs of the listening public. Within its membership there exists a broad collection of radio stations – significant diversity in ownership, target audience, location and franchise area. These independent broadcasters make a significant contribution to the Irish economy and to the democratic, social and cultural life of the country.

UNESCO's definition of public service broadcasting reads as follows:

> *Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through PSB, citizens are informed, educated and also entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.*

All broadcasters in Ireland, both state-funded and independent, are also commercial broadcasters in that commercial revenue from advertising and sponsorship is required to ensure adequate operational funding is available. IBI has however long advanced the case that Independent stations are also public service broadcasters.

The 1988 Broadcasting Act set out the framework for the development of independent radio in Ireland. Central to the development of the new sector was the obligation on all independent radio broadcasters that 20% of content comprise "news and current affairs".

The independent sector fully accepted this requirement and through imaginative and creative programming developed a country wide independent radio service which has become the primary source of radio listening for 70% of the Irish public on a daily basis. This is achieved through

- localised programming that reflects the lives of the communities it serves;
- responds to the needs and interests of those communities;
- provides a forum for news, information, local sports coverage, discussion, debate and interaction that is not replicated in any other media format in this country.

Regardless of the ownership of the companies providing the service, the facts are undeniable. Independent radio

- is providing a service to the public that is widely used;
- performs a vital role in society; and
- has become an integral part of local identity in every county in the country.

Under Section 39 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 independent radio stations must ensure that not less than 20% of their broadcasting time is given to news and current affairs. Stations are also obliged to:

- Broadcast programmes in the Irish language and relating to Irish culture

- Create opportunities for new talent in music, drama and entertainment
- Provide a diversity of services catering for a wider range of tastes including minority interests
- Provide free airtime for matters of public interest i.e. Election, Referendum
- Serve local communities or communities of interest
- Making the airwaves available to the State and ensuring continuity of service on occasions of national emergency – a vital link in times of severe weather as witnessed last year

Many independent radio stations provide in excess of 40% of air time to public service programming. In doing so they fulfill a key public service remit to communities, groups and organisations who would otherwise not have access to a media platform.

The State Broadcaster will never be able to replicate the services provided by independent radio in Ireland as indeed the independent broadcasters could never replicate the programming provided by RTÉ. The independent radio sector provides a unique localised service to this country and the two national stations, Newstalk and Today FM provide a vital counterbalance to the editorial monolith of RTÉ.

The protection and development of journalism is at the heart of calls to set up a public service broadcasting fund for independent radio stations. Unless funding through the State is made available, the trusted independent service that is the cornerstone of local democracy will face the terminal decline.

The Television Licence Fee

In 2015, Dr Kevin Rafter, Head of the School of Communications at DCU, published a report for the Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI) on the Television Licence Fee. The Report made a number of conclusions in relation to the funding of public service broadcasting:

1. The vast majority of monies from the TV licence fee – 87% - are allocated to RTE and TG4;
2. Ireland now (2015) has a variety of stations producing and transmitting programming that can be classified as public service content;
3. The case for funding public service content on independent stations is strongest in respect of news and current affairs.

The Rafter report came on the back of calls in 2014 by the IBI that the then Government introduce a funding system for public service broadcasting (PSB) in Ireland. Five years on and the introduction of a PSB fund remains unresolved yet the cost of news and current affairs public service content has increased dramatically.

The delivery of news and current affairs has also changed significantly over the last five years. In addition to competing for share of a radio audience, independent stations now compete for the public's time with the unregulated digital and social media platforms. The required output of a radio station is now across on air and online. Broadcast journalists have become multimedia content creators. The level of content required from a typical hour has grown exponentially however human and financial resources have remained the same.

Independent news and current affairs programming is at the heart of democratic engagement in Ireland, providing people with the information they need to contribute and to shape their communities. The role of local newsrooms informing, contributing and improving communities is vitally important in the digital age of fake news and disinformation in informed and engaging citizens to ensure a healthy democracy.

Funding public service broadcasting, including news and current affairs needs a major overhaul. It is no longer sustainable for independent radio stations to fund news and current affairs through an already broken advertising model. Google and Facebook currently have more than 25% share of all the advertising spend in Ireland and their scale allows them to severely undercut traditional media prices despite being free of regulation. To exasperate this situation, RTE takes approximately €180m of the licence fee and around €24m of the radio advertising revenue.

In response to the changes in advertising, independent radio stations have

- Pared down its basic functions of public service broadcasting content from e.g. reporting court cases, attending local council meetings and covering local sporting fixtures;
- Newsrooms are losing experienced staff who are departing media for more secure and better paid jobs in other sectors;
- Faced significant challenges in attracting new talent to broadcast journalism.

Independent radio and local radio in particular are the catalyst for giving voice to community activism, political engagement and promotion of local culture and events. The importance of independent radio to the audience can be seen clearly in the fact that over 70% of the Irish population tune in independent radio stations on a daily basis and it is the most trusted source of news and information .
The challenge for independent radio is therefore not about trust or audience figures. The challenge is around funding the high cost of news and current affairs content that it is obliged to provide under the Broadcasting Act.

The UK Experience

In the UK the independent radio sector is undergoing significant change in the production of news and current affairs. Recent regulatory changes have permitted stations to reduce the minimum amount of local programming on local radio stations and in addition local content does not have to be produced in the local radio franchise area.

The UK Government commissioned an independent report on the future of the news industry. The Cairncross Review reported that the "long-term sustainability of democracy" is under threat. The Cairncross Review which was published in February 2019, predicts that local news coverage will disappear unless the UK government provides direct financial support to local news providers.

Two weeks after the publication of the Cairncross Review, the UK radio group, Global Radio, announced programming cuts to many of its regional and local stations in the UK. The radio network is set to replace over 40 local breakfast shows across its Capital, Smooth and Heart networks with just three nationwide programmes to remain and will close 10 of its 24 dedicated local radio studios – in Brighton, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Exeter, Gloucester, Kendal, Kent, Lancaster, Norwich and Swindon. Up to 100 jobs are expected to disappear with presenters and journalists losing out. These changes are a result of the new regulations introduced last year by the UK broadcasting regulator, Ofcom. The regulations allow radio station owners to reduce the minimum amount of local programming on local radio stations from seven hours a day to just three. Ofcom also removed a requirement on stations to produce their own local breakfast show. In return, Ofcom, seeks radio stations to produce an "enhanced local news service", defined as meaning the inclusion of hourly news bulletins throughout the day featuring at least one "fully formed local news story" relevant to local listeners.

> *"There is no longer any local commercial radio of note in the UK, they are just local transmitters for national brands"*
> John Myers, UK radio industry veteran, former CEO of the Guardian Media Group and independent media consultant

In 2009, John Myers was commissioned to take charge of a Government led report into the future of local commercial radio. At the time Myers predicted that unless urgent action was taken by the then UK government, local radio would face "death by a thousand cuts".
Ten years on and Myers believes the "horse has bolted" and local radio in the UK is dead.

> *"Changes in the UK around deregulation have resulted in the terminal decline of local radio. Stations are required to do three hours of 'local' content, but they do not have to be situated in the local area to do this. In effect, local news content can be produced by desk-based journalists hundreds of miles away from listeners. All you have to do is mention place name and this is now viewed as a local news bulletin. For example, a news bulletin can report the headline 'Beyonce appearing in Newcastle, we will speak to fans" and that is now viewed as a news bulletin".*
> John Myers

The apparently terminal decline of truly local commercial radio in the UK should be an urgent wake-up call to the Irish Government here.

Solutions for Ireland

There are a number of proposals in the public domain on how to create a sustainable funding model for public service broadcasting in the Independent radio sector. Successive Governments have acknowledged the important public service role of independent radio however little has been done on a practical level:

- In 2016, then Taoiseach Enda Kenny committed to scrapping the current Broadcasting Levy on broadcasters. This has not happened;
- In 2017, former Communications Minister Denis Naughten drafted legislation to reduce the broadcasting levy by 50%. Both Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and then Communications Minister Naughten promised that all stages of the legislative process would be passed by the end of 2018 to ensure broadcasters would not be hit with a levy bill in 2019. This has not happened;
- The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Change and Environment made a number of recommendations as part of the 2017 Report on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting. To date, there is no indication of whether these recommendations will be translated into legislation;

Additionally, in February 2019 Dáil Éireann passed a motion supporting the provision of television fee funding for public service content on independent radio stations. The motion, tabled by Fianna Fáil Communications Spokesperson Timmy Dooley TD contained the following provisions:

- Recognition of the public service contribution of independent radio stations;
- Establishment of a fund to enhance and protect public service content broadcast on independent radio stations;
- Reduction of the Broadcasting Levy paid by independent radio stations to fund the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI).

The Dáil debate had contributions from over 30 TDs as well as Minister for Communications Richard Bruton. Speaker after speaker highlighted the value of independent radio stations to Irish culture, identity, democracy and politics, some of the comments are included in this document. Regardless of the funding model, there are five key principles that must be adapted into order to create an ecosystem that will allow Independent radio's public service remit to survive. These are:

1. The protection of journalism is core to a thriving democracy and a failure to ensure it is adequately funded will have a negative impact of the democratic process;
2. A failure to fund news and current affairs will have a negative impact on democracy and signal the death knell of local independent journalism. The Irish Government needs to recognise that the profession is in crisis and it has a duty on behalf of the taxpayer to ensure indigenous Irish journalism is adequately funded, ensure it is protected in order to protect the democratic fabric of the country. The funding of journalism cannot be at the behest of the wider market economy.
3. The continued funding of news and current affairs output cannot be at the mercy of the advertising market, a market that is broken for radio and where 80% of the revenues go to digital media giants;
4. Local journalism needs to remain accessible to local communities, produced in these communities and not outsourced;
5. Radio stations need to invest in staff to ensure experience is retained and they can continue to provide a trusted, quality news service. An experience deficit is now evident in many newsrooms. Radio stations need to attract, train and develop new talent. In the current media landscape journalism is not seen as an attractive and secure career and this is impacting negatively on the quality of debate, diversity and impact.

There can be no doubt, if something is not put in place urgently to support the production of news and current affairs on independent radio it will disappear completely. We should not be surprised at the detrimental impact it will have on the democratic fabric of Ireland's society.

3. THE TRUE VALUE OF LOCAL INDEPENDENT NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

"Truth is at the heart of liberal democracy. Protect one, and you safeguard the other. Disregard one, and you imperil the other.
Prof Stephan Lewandowsky, Professor of Cognitive Science at the University of Bristol

Trust is the cornerstone of radio in Ireland. In research published in February by the European Commission, radio is the most trusted medium in Ireland. The Eurobarometer study of EU citizens shows that 68% of Irish people trust radio ahead of TV (62%), press (47%) and social media (25%).

Radio	68%
TV	62%
Press	47%
Social Media	25%

The Eurobarometer study backs up the findings of the 2018 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, which placed radio as the number one choice for Irish people sourcing news. Independent radio has a leading role to play in retaining the credibility and trust levels of the Irish public.

In the background of increasing debate and worry about 'fake news', a recent survey by the global public relations company Edelman revealed that only 35% of the Irish public trust the media with them now being the least trusted institution globally. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018 found that more than half (57%) of Irish news consumers say they are concerned about "fake news". In relation to addressing disinformation, 63% of Irish consumers said it was the Government's responsibility to do more.

> *"Independent radio is the gatekeeper of local democracy. If we don't do something about funding news and current affairs, this important role will cease to exist"*
> Albert Fitzgerald, Managing Director, Midlands 103

The Irish public is concerned about the integrity of its news and the impact that it is having on society. In this context it is worrying that consumers in Ireland and worldwide have limited understanding of how news appears in their social media feeds with only 28% of those surveyed stating they understood the role of 'algorithms' (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018). Internationally, only 27% were aware of the role of algorithms and 73% either did not know the answer or assumed that social media companies employ journalists.

Social media and digital content were heralded to be the greatest changes in how we engage with news and information. while they have undoubtedly opened up the communication chain, the subsequent impact on journalism has not been without its downside. Where once journalism was the bastion of research and investigation, it has been replaced with click bait headlines and misinformation. We have lots of 'content creators' but fewer and fewer journalists. We, as a society, create our opinions, ideas and political ideologies on the "facts" we receive however in the digital world 'truth' and 'trust' have more than one meaning. Failure to invest in journalism creates a vacuum where extremism finds a home.

Dr Roderick Flynn of the School of Communications at Dublin City University believes journalism in the midst of an unprecedented crisis:

> *"The critical function of journalism cannot be sustained at its current level. If you are going to have a healthy functioning democracy then that watchdog function of journalism should not be left to the vagaries of whether the market can fund it. Investigative journalism costs money and takes time and consideration to create. These stories need to be told".*

This is where the role and value of independent media become apparent. Recent research from the US shows that audiences do not just want local news outlets to be watchdogs, they want them to be a "good neighbour" too. Poynter's 2018 Media Trust Survey identified that trust in local media is considerably higher than that for national media. Blending watchdog reporting with community engagement can give newsrooms a foundation to build on.

Young adults growing up in a digital environment have not experienced a world of only being exposed to traditional trusted news brands. Brands that are led by trusted, credible journalists and news editors, where news is produced as a public service offering critical information to democracy and not a media sales pitch dominated by algorithms. We all know how prevalent misinformation is in digital media where social media companies have facilitated fake news and the posting of inappropriate, harmful and illegal content without fear of being reprimanded by the authorities.

Dr Roderick Flynn believes politicians are not in tune with the crisis:

> *"There is a strange view in Government that the only way to fund public service broadcasting is through the market economy. Politicians need to realise the radio market is broken so the free market economics argument no longer stands".*

In February of this year the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee in the British House of Commons published its final report on Disinformation and 'Fake News'. Damian Collins MP, Chair of the DCMS Committee said:

> *"Democracy is at risk from the malicious and relentless targeting of citizens with disinformation...delivered through the major social media platforms we use every day".*

Media in Ireland is at a crossroads. The chase for clicks fundamentally undermines the Fourth Estate and it must address the increasing lack of trust by the public or lose it forever.

4. THE VIABILITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

a. Public service broadcasting in Ireland is at a crossroads. It requires urgent political action.

> *"News costs money to produce and news needs to be created and managed by experienced people. Inexperience is a big issue across the sector. We are seeing more and more people leaving the sector for better paid communications jobs in PR and the public sector. This experience drain is not good for the future stability of the sector."*
> Fiona Stack, General Manager, Radio Kerry

The single largest cost line in a radio station is wages and within this, news and current affairs is the most labour intensive. Journalists, producers and researchers as well as administrative and technical staff account for the largest share of every station's budget. Radio stations have not been in a position to invest in the staffing of newsrooms over the previous five years. Indeed, in the majority of local newsroom staffing numbers have remained the same for the past decade.

With the continued competition from digital media, independent broadcasters have been forced to increase their content output across a number of different platforms including audio, social media, website and video. There is an expectation from the audience that all these content platforms deliver a consistently high standard of output regardless of staffing challenges. Any reduction in quality will result in a drop off in audience figures with a knock-on effect on advertising revenues.

The role of a radio broadcast journalist is no longer confined to the recording audio clips and filing a story for the hourly news bulletin. Today when a broadcast journalist covers a story they are required to record and edit audio, write an article for the website, record and edit video on mobile phone for social media channels, take pictures, post content on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube; and in many stations also read the hourly news bulletin. They are content creators and headline journalists, not having the time to fully research and produce in depth stories. This increased workload is delivered with staff doing two roles in the newsroom. In a number of stations the Head of News is also the Producer of the mid-morning show. Two of the most important and pressurised jobs in a station carried out by one person.

For reasons of viability, radio stations have made decisions to cut back on crucial local content, which is a valuable facet of the fabric of local democracy. These cuts impact on reporters attending court cases and local council meetings, spending time in the community highlighting campaigns and reporting on local sports and cultural events. To ensure Ireland has a strong independent journalism sector, journalists need to be given the time, resources and freedom to comprehensively report. Staff who are overstretched do not have the ability to deliver the best journalism.

Staff recruitment and retention has become an acute challenge in the independent radio sector. Job security and pay are significant factors in attracting talent and retaining staff. The retention issues were highlighted in particular in 2018 when a remarkable number of senior journalists left the journalism profession for better paid, secure roles in public relations companies, public sector positions and ministerial advisory roles in Government. This is a trend that is continuing in

> *"We do not attend court cases as we can't free a resource for a full day or days as we need them to be back at base to read as well as report."*
> Liam Dwyer, General Manager, South East Radio

2019 with a number of high-profile journalists have left the profession.

Starting salaries for graduates in digital media companies are on average 15% higher than in radio and this salary inflation is set to continue as the advertising market continues to migrate to digital. Journalism is becoming an unattractive profession and this is impacting negatively on the quality of debate, diversity and impact. Failure to attract the best and brightest minds into journalism will have a detrimental impact on the democratic process itself. Government needs to accept the profession is in crisis and it has a duty on behalf of the taxpayer to ensure indigenous Irish journalism is adequately funded to protect the fabric of the country.

> *"At Beat we are now considering taking a networked wire service at the weekends as we cannot source staff. We have prided ourselves in always offering diversity of voice and point of difference to ensure news is relevant to a youth audience and we believe we have been successful at this. Having no live news at the weekends is something I wouldn't have considered before but we are at a crisis"*
> Gabrielle Cummins, CEO, Beat102103

5. SOUND AND VISION

A programming fund was officially announced by then Minister for Communications, Dermot Ahern in May 2003. The launch of the Scheme was the culmination of many years work, in which the members of the IBI were instrumental in lobbying for its introduction. The aim of the Scheme was to ensure that independent broadcasters were in a position to provide high quality programming, which could otherwise not be produced due to a lack of available financial resources.

The programming funding scheme was hailed at the time as a vehicle which would allow independent radio broadcasters to compete on a more level platform with RTÉ. It was expected that it would give programme makers within the independent broadcasting sector the opportunity to expand the range and type of programming they could produce without causing undue financial and operational burdens to the management and owners of the stations.

Unfortunately, as we fast forward from the initial announcement the high hopes that were held for the Fund have been well and truly dashed. The reality is a scheme that is too restrictive in its application, too onerous in its execution and that does not work for independent radio broadcasters.

Sound and Vision does not fund live speech broadcasting which constitutes in excess of 90% of the output of independent radio stations. Due to the high levels of bureaucracy, the onerous application process and the long lead-in times the fund does not work for independent radio stations who operate in a fast paced, live environment.

6. STATE AID

The question of whether licence fee monies can be made available to independent broadcasters and whether this constitutes state-aid has been repeatedly thrown into discussions since the future of public service broadcasting conversations began. Posing a question but without actually providing an answer has become the norm and to date no concrete answers have been provided.

The use of television licence fee and/or exchequer funding for independent broadcasters has already been introduced in other EU countries including Denmark, France and the UK. The issue of state aid did not provide a stumbling block in these countries and there is no reason why Ireland should be any different. There are a number of legal avenues to support the validity of this type of scheme under EU law.

1. Such a proposed scheme comes within the four Altmark principles and thus does not amount to state aid at all. The Altmark principles are

   a. the recipient must have public service obligations which require compensation and must be clearly defined;

   b. the parameters on the basis of which compensation is calculated must be established in advance in an objective and transparent manner;

   c. the compensation cannot exceed what is necessary to cover all or part of the costs incurred in the discharge of the public service obligations, taking into account a reasonable profit; and

   d. when the company is not chosen through public procurement, the level of compensation must not exceed the costs that a typical, well-run and adequately equipped undertaking would incur so as to meet the necessary public service requirements.

2. Such a proposed scheme could be exempt because the scheme pursues objectives that are in the public interest and would not adversely affect trading conditions to such an extent that would be contrary to the common market. The scheme would need to be notified to the European Commission for clearance but it has a track record in clearing aid to radio stations under this exemption;

There are further conversations to be had to reach a final, agreed and acceptable position on the question of state-aid and Government should be open and willing to seek such a solution rather than using it as a stumbling block.

7. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING ON INDEPENDENT RADIO

> *"It seems to me very unlikely that legacy media in print and radio could continue to provide the basic information function for a basic democracy. We need a fund for news and current affairs to support the democratic role of local media"*
> Dr. Roderick Flynn, DCU School of Communications

While many stakeholders acknowledge the need to reform the public service broadcasting there are differing views as to how it needs to be reformed. At present there are two models which have been proposed.

1. Proposal by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Change & Environment. This proposal was made in 2017
2. Proposal by the IBI to establish a Public Service Broadcasting Fund.

The details of both proposals are:

1. Proposal by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Change & Environment.

In 2017 the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Change & Environment published a Report on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting. The committee concluded that

> *"The provision of balanced, impartial, well-resourced and independent public broadcasting services is fundamental to our democratic society, particularly with the advent of "fake news. However, the need for authoritative, impartial, indigenous, trusted and reputable public service media in Ireland has increasing importance in a global media environment dominated by international media and content. However, traditional broadcasters are under increasing pressure from both domestic and foreign operators with competing demands on increasingly limited financial resources...the current funding model is not fit for purpose..."*

The Committee recommended that the Minister establish

- A new scheme to assist radio stations in the provision of local news and current affairs programmes. The scheme envisaged would be administered by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI).
- The current Sound & Vision Scheme be amended to allow funding for a wider category of broadcasting.

The Committee members also identified and emphasised a number of consequences if no action is taken to reform the funding model for public service broadcasting, as follows:

- Irish-owned media will be negatively impacted as the funding raised from the licence fee, from the exchequer and from traditional commercial sources (i.e. advertising revenue including digital) comes under increasing competitive pressure and becomes increasingly unpredictable pressure making the model itself unsustainable;
- Ireland's capacity to provide indigenous programming including 'home-grown' comedy and drama, and current affairs will be reduced, potentially irrevocably;
- There will be an increased risk of losing essential services / diminution of existing services to the detriment of the viewing public and to the provision of high quality public service programming and quality journalism;
- There will be an erosion / loss of public confidence and reputational damage to the existing public service broadcasters;
- There will be a dilution in cultural distinctive programming;
- That the public service broadcasters will become increasingly irrelevant and 'outpaced' as other options for consumers proliferate, including video on-demand / online streaming and bespoke TV services;
- There will be an increased threat on Irish-based employment as a result of growing commercialisation of public service broadcasters leading to an overreliance on international / imported content, which is of lower quality as perceived by audiences.

The following are the short term and long-term / structural changes recommended by all stakeholders, treated thematically.

> *"The loss of high quality, independently sourced news from the independent radio sector would represent a loss to the democratic dialogue at both national and regional level across communities throughout the country"*
> Timmy Dooley, Fianna Fail spokesperson on Communications

EXTRACTS FROM INDEPENDENT RADIO STATIONS, PRIVATE MEMBERS MOTION, DÁIL ÉIREANN, 28 FEBRUARY 2019

Independent local radio....captures the life and soul of the area to which it broadcasts, from sport to news and current affairs to carrying special information about weather events right through to the deaths, which form an important part of the information citizens of that particular jurisdiction require daily

Timmy Dooley T.D., Fianna Fáil

If RTÉ needs a huge subsidy to provide public service broadcasting, how is it presumed that much smaller stations can operate without a subsidy? Therefore, I agree that the levy should be scrapped and that part of the public funding for public services should go to local stations providing these vital services to local communities throughout the country.

Eamon Ó Cuív T.D., Fianna Fáil

Local radio stations serve a clear public purpose, especially in the context of their morning news programmes and the amount of information they disseminate regarding community activities and cultural and sporting events.

Jan O'Sullivan T.D., Labour

83% of the population listen to radio daily. Radio stations, whether national or local, make an enormous contribution to the lives of individuals and communities, and we should work very hard to make sure that this valuable service continues in every way

Minister Patrick O'Donovan TD, Fine Gael

Local radio stations are the information lifeline for audiences and citizens. They are also the lifeline for politicians, providing platforms on which to discuss important public issues.

Minister for Communications Richard Bruton, Fine Gael

Local radio does it all. Local events are only covered by local radio and not by the national stations. The time has come to recognise and fund the invaluable help local radio stations provide in all parts of the country.

Michael Fitzmaurice T.D., Independent

The place of public service broadcasting needs to be maintained and supported because it forms an essential part of our media into the future. Local independent radio is an important part of that media landscape. It accounts for the majority of radio listeners every weekday across the State and it provides an important service to communities around the State. It can be the main source of news and a vital vehicle to keeping local communities connected.

Brian Stanley T.D., Sinn Féin

"Morning Ireland" is Ireland's most popular radio show with 450,000 listeners, but at the same time hundreds of thousands of people across the country are tuning into local radio stations for the same news service. These stations get no funding or relief from the State currently to help them to provide the same service. This must change quickly to ensure the survival of the industry.

Tony McLoughlin TD, Fine Gael

8. PROPOSAL BY IBI

> *"We need a fund that allows us to produce more local content and take up issues on behalf of the listener. In Wexford, for example, the whole issue of mental health and access to psychiatric care is huge issue but we don't have the adequate resources to campaign on behalf of the listener"*
> Eamon Buttle, South East Radio

A Public Service Broadcasting Fund as proposed by the IBI would seek to nurture and develop achieve the following:

- Diversity – reflecting the local, regional and national characteristics of the country
- Broad based and accessible – ensuring that access to broadcast media is not confined to small numbers or a privileged group
- Reflect local identity and addressing local concerns
- Empower democracy and facilitate democratic engagement – providing a forum for debate and discussion on local issues. Encouraging participation and providing an outlet for expression and a place for democratic accountability whether during local, national or European elections or through coverage of the activities of Local Authorities – coverage that simply cannot be replicated on a national basis
- Provide information and coverage of issues; events and personalities that will never impact on a national agenda3, but which are of huge significance to local audiences
- An alternative view – in tune with the local and defined areas to which radio stations broadcast to and reflecting individual points of view
- Ensure that content and culture is not sacrificed in a race to the bottom and a headlong drive for efficiencies in order to maintain viability in a shrinking market
- Where radio operators are rewarded for investing in quality programming that services the public good; provides employment and is based on solid public service broadcasting principles
- News, sport and information programming is encouraged and is seen as a key driver of business success rather than an onerous cost that must be minimised at every possible opportunity

Objectives of the Fund
The core objectives of the PSB Fund are:

- To ensure that the Irish listening public is served by a vibrant indigenous Irish broadcasting sector;
- To allow independent radio stations to deliver diversity in content, programming and information to its listeners;
- To allow independent radio stations offer high quality and innovative indigenous content to the audience;
- To maintain plurality of content and opinion on the Irish airwaves;
- To increase the quality of public service broadcasting provided by independent radio stations to the public at national, regional and local level.

The implementation of such a new fund would mark a new beginning in local, regional and national independent broadcasting. It will would release stations from some of the commercial pressure that is driving decision making and allow the sector to pursue a broader agenda that would benefit the local and national economy.

In his response to the Fianna Fáil Private Members Motion discussed in Dáil Eireann in February 2019, which featured earlier in this report, the Minister for Communications and Climate Change Richard Bruton committed to bringing measures to Cabinet for approval. Speaking on KCLR 96FM in March 2019, Minister Bruton said:

> *"The issue of extending funding for new uses in the independent broadcasting sector, that is something I would like to do but we'll have to be careful to make sure it complies with State aid. To have an intelligent debate about some of the issues we are discussing you need an organ, you need a place where that debate can happen in a proper way with the time to discuss it, to assess the evidence. Local broadcasting is supporting that, it is not available on national media and it never will be. So at a time when you get social media, fake news and all the rest it is important we have community based broadcasting that can take these issues and develop solutions".*

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt that the funding model for the entire radio sector needs radical and immediate reform. The broken advertising model and the changing dynamic has forced local radio bosses to cut back on basic resources in newsrooms which is having a direct impact on the quality of journalism being produced.

The very existence of independent radio in Ireland is under threat. Unless there is a protection of local journalism and a strategy to invest for its future then the independent radio sector will not be able to fulfil the public service mandate it is required to do under legislation Failure to address the current funding crisis will force stations to further cut back on providing local journalism. This will have a negative impact on the local democratic process.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Change and Environment's recommendation that the Minister establish a new scheme to assist radio stations in the provision of local news and current affairs programmes has not advanced.

Regardless of the funding model, there are five key principles that must be adopted into order to create an ecosystem that will allow Independent radio's public service remit to survive:

1. The protection of journalism is core to a thriving democracy and a failure to ensure it is adequately funded will have a negative impact on the democratic process;
2. A failure to fund news and current affairs will signal the death knell of local independent journalist. The Government needs to accept the profession is in crisis and it has a duty to ensure indigenous Irish journalism is adequately funded to ensure it is protected and it protects the democratic fabric of the country;
3. The continued funding of news and current affairs output cannot be at the mercy of the advertising market, a market that is broken for radio and where a growing majority of the advertising revenues go to digital media giants;
4. Local journalism needs to remain accessible to local communities and produced in these communities and not outsourced;
5. Radio stations need to invest in staff to ensure experience is retained and they can continue to provide a trusted, quality news service. An experience deficit is now evident in many newsrooms. There is an immediate need to attract, train and develop new talent. In the current media landscape journalism is not seen as an attractive and secure career which is impacting negatively on the quality

There can be no doubt, if a new funding model is not put in place urgently to support the news and current affairs outputs from independent local radio, this vital service will disappear and result in a detrimental impact on the very democratic fabric of Ireland's society.

A public service broadcasting fund needs to be established urgently. Independent radio doesn't only fulfil a remit to provide Public Service Broadcasting, it is Public Service Broadcasting.

"We are concerned about the future of news and current affairs. Core journalism is being impacted negatively and over time is in danger of being squeezed out of the independent sector. This goes to the heart of the local democratic process"
John Purcell, CEO of KCLR 96FM and IBI Chairman

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