



Michael O' Keffe
Chief Executive Officer
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
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03 June 2021

Dear Michael,

I am writing to you regarding the report submitted by the BAI on the 2019 Annual Review of the Public Service Broadcasters as specified under Section 124(4) of the Broadcasting Act 2009.

I welcome the Review and thank the BAI and consultants, Mediatique, for providing a comprehensive analysis of the Public Service Broadcasters against their annual commitments and I note the level of achievement by the broadcasters in broadly achieving their targets.

Covid-19

While this review covers the 2019 period I want to commend the responsiveness of the PSBs as well as the BAI itself, to the Covid-19 restrictions. Initiatives such as the provision of educational content for school aged children through Home School Hub and Cúla4 ar Scoil were very well received. I was delighted to secure additional funding of €1.9m for TG4 in support of both the Cula4 ar Scoil initiative and to mitigate against losses in commercial income. I welcome that the broadcasters retained a high degree of trust by the public as a source of news. A reliable source of information is especially vital at a time when audiences require consistent and accurate reporting in relation to the pandemic.

Targets

I am pleased that both PSBs are continuing to expand engagement with nonlinear audiences on new platforms and services for 2020 and beyond which is beneficial to the overall provision of PSB content for all audiences. I agree that it is encouraging that the PSBs are seeking to adapt to the structural changes taking place in the market.

I recognise that they are looking at consumption metrics in response to the shift in consumption platforms including the development of a new “time spent” metric used by RTÉ this year in monitoring their performance commitments. It is essential that the PSBs continually engage with their audience to better determine how to best serve their needs and to assess the success of their offerings to their key audiences including platform

usage. This will provide important information in analysing changing audience usage patterns in future years. I note that RTÉ's performance in relation to content was lower than targeted particularly in relation to weekly reach of RTÉjr and audience perception metrics.

I also note the restructuring of the Annual Statement of Performance Commitments (ASPCs) for 2020 undertaken by TG4 which will give valuable targeted information on the areas of strategic importance for TG4, children's programming, development of the Irish language production sector and their global reach. I look forward to the reviewing the revised format in the coming year.

Irish Language

As Minister with responsibility for Media, the Gaeltacht and Culture, I note the high degree of success TG4 has achieved in the promotion and development of Irish Language and culture with 76% of those surveyed agreeing that they provide content "reflective of Irish society and culture." I concur with the report findings that the development initiatives by TG4 have been commendable, particularly in the area of women's sport and Gaelic Games and those in the delivery of additional content in the online and social media sphere. I also welcome TG4's success in achieving their targets on protecting investment in Irish language talent and their continued vital support of the independent production sector.

I also welcome the renewed partnership between RTÉ and TG4 for the delivery of Irish language broadcast hours between them on foot of the report from An Coimisinéir Teanga in 2019 and welcome the additional hours provided to TG4 by RTÉ as provided for in the Broadcasting Act 2009.

Younger Audiences

Both PSBs set ambitious targets towards youth audiences and I note the difficulty experienced by both PSBs in achieving the targets set. I recognise that TG4 set very ambitious targets and for younger audiences on non-linear platforms through Molscéal, its online youth audience BLOC and the extension of Cúla4 to YouTube Kids which followed their positive performance in 2018. It is disappointing for TG4 that they were not achieved given the increased strategic investment in programming and development for younger viewers in 2019.

RTÉjr has also experienced a fall for the fourth year in a row with weekly reach of just 10.7% of 4-7 year olds. While it is acknowledged that linear delivery of children's programming has been substituted by alternative platforms it remains the audience of the future and I would hope that the "digital first" strategic direction taken by RTÉ in its revised strategy for 2020-2024 can recapture this audience on their preferred platforms. I note the research commissioned by RTÉ in 2018 to better understand how to reach children and younger audiences has informed the development of their ASPCs for 2020

and I welcome the findings of the review that both PSBs are retaining ambitious targets for younger audiences as they expand PSB content to new platforms.

Funding

I welcome the acknowledgement in the report of the additional public funding that has been secured for public service broadcasting over the past three years.

I secured a further €3.5m in budget 2021 for TG4 which brings them up to the BAI recommended funding of €6m over 2017. I also welcome the performance of TG4 in generating commercial revenues exceeding the target set in 2019. This is notable in a challenging environment for broadcasters.

Since 2018, RTE has been allocated an additional €19.3m in public funding of the €30m recommended. I secured €8m in budget 2021 to facilitate the transfer of the NSO to the National Concert Hall, the precise saving to RTÉ will be determined on conclusion of the negotiations between RTÉ and the National Concert Hall.

I share your concern in relation to ongoing deficits being run by RTÉ. My officials are closely monitoring RTÉ's financial situation in conjunction with NewEra who reported to me recently on RTÉ's request for emergency funding in 2020. NewEra and my Department are continuing to engage with RTE on their financial situation and cost savings under the revised strategy.

Other Developments

The Commission on the Future of Media which is due to report in Q3 this year, is examining a sustainable funding model for the next decade as part of its remit and I welcome the BAI's engagement with the Commission in their important task.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge work of the BAI and the consultants for their analysis and recommendations, I can confirm that, in accordance with the provisions of Section 124 of the Broadcasting Act, a copy of the report, its recommendations and this letter of response will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine Martin, TD

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media