

# Public Media Ireland: a New PSM Organisation for a New Country

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Dr Phil Ramsey  
Dr Roddy Flynn  
Dr Stephen Baker  
Dr Dawn Wheatley



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## Summary of Recommendations

- **R1** – A new Ireland will require a democratic media fit for the purpose of building a resilient and sustainable democracy
- **R2** – Public Service Media (PSM) provision in a new Ireland should be built on the six key values set out by the European Broadcasting Union
- **R3** – PSM provision in a new Ireland should reflect a much broader view of Irishness and diversity: not merely “multicultural” but “intercultural”
- **R4** – A new PSM organisation – Public Media Ireland – should be established in a new Ireland
- **R5** – Public Media Ireland should be decentralised and embrace wider participation
- **R6** – Journalism is intrinsic to any democratic society
- **R7** – A unified journalistic approach is a realistic target, with an alignment of journalistic values, norms, and traditions
- **R8** – Public Media Ireland should take a broad understanding of public service creative and cultural output
- **R9** – Current financial incentives for production should be maintained, with existing infrastructures and employment opportunities enhanced
- **R10** – PSM should be well funded, non-commercial and sustainable
- **R11** – The Finnish model for funding PSM should be considered to fund Public Media Ireland
- **R12** – A fully independent and democratic form of governance should be put in place
- **R13** – Governance arrangements should have a role provided for elected trade union representatives, and the use of active Audience Councils

## Introduction

**Speaking on a podcast in June 2024, the author Colm Tóibín was discussing the prospects for a United Ireland with the British broadcaster, Jane Garvey. In an extended passage on how reunification would work in practice, Tóibín asked: “are people in Northern Ireland really going to abandon the NHS? Are they going to abandon the BBC? Like – is the BBC going to close in Belfast?”<sup>1</sup>**

Similarly, in 2019, Mike Nesbitt MLA, an Ulster Unionist politician, asked how daily life would be different in a reunified Ireland: “When I open my bedroom curtains, what would be different? Would the mailbox be green? Are the police officers Garda? Is the Irish Army billeted in Palace Barracks? Does BBC Radio Ulster even exist anymore? Am I cut off from my roots?”<sup>2</sup>

In the debates about how governance in Ireland would be reshaped in the event of reunification, many other areas will predominate: such as healthcare, education, and the economy. Yet while media may come further down the list of priorities, we suggest through this report that it is not too early to start thinking about the subject. Indeed, we argue that the role that media would play in democratic and cultural terms in a new Ireland is of crucial importance.

Specifically, considering what would happen to Public Service Media in a reunified Ireland is one question that will need answering should this eventually occur. In this report, we begin at that point, and ask:

- What would happen to the existing Public Service Media organisations in the event of the reunification of Ireland?  
.....
- Would BBC Northern Ireland simply be subsumed into RTÉ, taking on its staff and its assets, or would a completely new Public Service Media organisation be created?  
.....
- Or would Public Service Media survive in a reunified Ireland at all?

Whether reunification takes place in the medium term, long term, or indeed not at all, it is worth thinking creatively through approaches to media on an all-island basis. There are already many ways in which media flows North and South – both formally and informally through flows of content, funding and people. Ireland’s Future of Media Commission recommended in 2022 that research should commence on “developing the all-island media economy and on maximising collaboration between Public Service Media and Public Service Content Providers on an all-island basis”, and discussions are continuing on how this could be further developed.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in November 2025, Coimisiún na Meán – the Irish media regulator – announced a new €14m Shared Island Media Fund, with strands to support cross-border journalism and ‘Shared Island Shared Stories’, in order to foster all-island media development.<sup>4</sup>

A report like this can only cover so much ground, so there are areas we do not have space to include. Moreover, this is only the beginning of a conversation. A new Public Service Media organisation could only come about following extensive negotiations, factoring in complicated legal deliberations and consultation with all parts of the media sector – in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. And that’s before you get to asking the audience what kind of media provision they might want.

Yet one question is at the crux of our discussion here: if you started with something close to a blank piece of paper, what kind of PSM organisation would you create for a new Ireland? In response to this, we propose a new PSM for a new country: Public Media Ireland.

# Context

## 1. What is Public Service Media for?

**1.1** Democracy and national cultures are inconceivable without mass forms of communication, where educated citizens require media literacy to understand and scrutinise the news and information that circulates in the public sphere;

**1.2** During the early part of the Twentieth Century, Public Service Broadcasting emerged. This was the case in the Republic of Ireland (ROI),<sup>5</sup> Northern Ireland (NI), and elsewhere around Europe, where broadcasting was bound to a public service ethos – in order to fulfil a social purpose, and in return for government allocation of public funding (mainly through licence fees);

**1.3** As such, public broadcasters such as the BBC were expected to ‘educate, inform and entertain’ – in a manner that would help enfranchise the public and represent the nation. More recently, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, in autumn 2020, RTÉ promised it would offer “entertainment, information, education and escapism”<sup>6</sup> to a nation under lockdown, as Public Service Media organisations around Europe reached audiences in massive numbers throughout the pandemic;<sup>7</sup>

**1.4** The term Public Service Broadcasting is often replaced by Public Service Media (PSM) – reflecting the fact that public broadcasters now rely heavily on the Internet to deliver on their mission. The Public Media Alliance, a non-profit association of international public service media organisations, defines<sup>8</sup> PSM as:

*“Publicly owned multi-platform media organisations that provide relevant, credible and impartial news, entertainment, and education to their audiences. PSM are essential for informed and effective democracies to survive and thrive, and should be accessible and accountable to all citizens.”*

**1.5** This definition serves as a very useful introduction to why we still believe that flourishing democracies require public

media provision. Indeed, it is PSM’s distinct and valuable contribution to society which sets public media apart from what is solely provided by the market. And this is even more crucial in the eventuality a new country would be formed, which, with a contested past, may well be fragile in its early stages;

**1.6** The European Broadcasting Union’s six ‘key values’<sup>9</sup> of PSM helpfully illuminate the principles that public media is built upon – and will be inherent to whatever form of public media provision emerges in a new Ireland: (i) Universality; (ii) Independence; (iii) Excellence; (iv) Diversity; (v) Accountability; (vi) Innovation. These values provide a useful framework for setting out principles for how it can be reimagined. Of course, PSM is not flawless – on the contrary, most expressions of PSM around Europe are replete with various failings, contradictions, or elements of poor delivery;

**1.7** In this report we cannot solve every issue related to PSM, or propose a new PSM that would fix every media or democratic ill in a new Ireland. However, national democracies are not a given just waiting to be discovered: they are made – and the media can play an important role in that. They require a democratic media fit for the purpose of building a resilient, sustainable democracy. As has always been the case with the media, questions of ownership, regulation and funding are at the heart of the matter. This report is a response to those questions.

**R1** **A new Ireland will require a democratic media fit for the purpose of building a resilient and sustainable democracy.**

**R2** **PSM provision in a new Ireland should be built on the six key values set out by the European Broadcasting Union.**

## 2. A ‘new Ireland’ – the prospect of a new country

**2.1** Irish reunification is not a foregone conclusion. It could take place in the medium term, the long term, or indeed not at all. However, arguments in its favour have gathered apace since the UK left the European Union in 2020. While polls suggest that there is no majority as yet for Irish unity, support for it is growing;<sup>10</sup> while in NI, for the first time, Sinn Féin holds the office of the First Minister;

**2.2** One topic for discussion that has animated debate around reunification relates to issues around what flag the state would have, and what anthem it would use.<sup>11</sup> To this you can add the naming of almost every organisation, with many questions coming down to a core issue: would ROI institutions remain, with their NI counterparts grafted into them? Or would new institutions be built? This is central to the topic at hand;

**2.3** Debate also focuses around the question of how to create a space in which Nationalist and Unionist identities can be reconciled. For example, how can one maintain a meaningful respect for Loyalist and Unionist identities in a post-Union context? How might the model of Consociationalism in the Good Friday Agreement continue to apply? And what compromises might proponents for reunification realistically be willing to make?<sup>12</sup> These are very real and critical questions. We might also ask whether the prospect of a reunified Ireland also offers an opportunity to re-examine (or even reset) the Irish/British, Nationalist/Unionist, Loyalist/Republican binaries which have dominated thinking about identity on the island of Ireland;

**2.4** In a reunified Ireland, cultural questions would also have to take account of the changing demography of Ireland, especially in relation to ethnicity: in particular, the 2022 ROI census reflected the increasingly diverse nature of Irish society. Prior to the 1990s, it could reasonably be said that the ROI was remarkably ethnically homogenous: largely White and Catholic. As of 2025, however, some 20% of those resident in the ROI were born outside the country;

**2.5** When it comes to broadcasting, in their early years both the BBC and RTÉ were both more or less overtly engaged in a cultural project of nation-building. Today, it can be argued that RTÉ has been somewhat slow to reflect the changing make-up of Irish society beyond various work force interventions (as outlined in its Diversity and Inclusion Charter).<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the BBC in NI has been required to be focussed on the endless debate over which community it is accused of being partial towards, on a near daily basis;

**2.6** RTÉ, TG4 and BBC services are already available on both sides of the border, ensuring an existing all-island familiarity with each entity. The Good Friday Agreement sought to make TG4 widely accessible in NI, while a later Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Irish governments (signed in 2010) established protocols for access to television services to follow the introduction of digital terrestrial television;

**2.7** The establishment of a new PSM organisation in an all-Ireland context offers an opportunity to reconsider the cultural mission of PSM to reflect a changed population, both culturally and ethnically. This allows for it to be not merely “multicultural” (i.e. acknowledging the existence of a diversity of cultures), but “intercultural”: actively embracing and celebrating that difference and understanding it as fundamentally constitutive of a reunified Ireland in the Twenty-First Century;

**2.7.1** This is not to suggest that such old binary divisions will dissolve away, magically diluted by the emphasis on a much wider set of identities: such a suggestion would be naïve. But their significance may be diminished by becoming part of a much broader conversation regarding the ethnicities and identities sharing the island of Ireland.

**R3** **Public Media Ireland should reflect a much broader view of Irishness and diversity: not merely “multicultural” but “intercultural”.**

## Potential directions

### 3. Options for PSM provision in a new Ireland

**3.1** What would happen to the existing PSM organisations in the event of the reunification? No one can say with certainty, but in this section we map out the five different options that we envisage – before arriving at our preferred option. They are: (A) Status Quo; (B) Subsumption; (C) New Provision; (D) Marketisation; (E) Some combination of options A-C (see table on p.9 - Options for PSM provision in a new Ireland);

**3.2** We suggest that option (A) Status Quo, is most likely a non-starter. Audiences in NI, as it stands today, would most likely end up outside of the current UK TV Licence framework in a reunified Ireland. We say *most likely* as it is not possible to be certain how the BBC would approach the reunification of Ireland, and how its legal position would be set out – in relation to its assets, and funding. But currently TV licences that fund the BBC are not levied anywhere outside of the UK.<sup>14</sup> That said, we do not think it is likely that audiences in NI, as it stands today, would lose access to existing BBC Network provision – both on radio and television;

**3.3** On Option (B), Subsumption, would BBC Northern Ireland simply be folded into RTÉ? This is a similar question arising across the wider debate around how a reunified Ireland would work: would the current ROI institutions simply subsume their Northern counterparts?<sup>15</sup> Or would new institutions instead be set up (with new names, logos etc.)? [See Section 2 - A 'new Ireland' – the prospect of a new country]. We argue that achieving buy-in and support from the two main communities within NI will be more easily won if institutions are created afresh, rather than simply grafting on Northern parts to their Southern counterparts. Moreover, the persistent governance issues that RTÉ has faced in recent years means that a new start is preferable.

As such we do not think RTÉ is the right organisation – in its current form – to become the main PSM organisation following reunification;

**3.4** Instead we argue for Option (C) New Provision, and suggest the establishment of a new PSM organisation, drawing on – as its starting point – the assets, infrastructure and people of RTÉ and BBC Northern Ireland. We tentatively call this organisation *Public Media Ireland*;

**3.4.1** This concept is similar to what might have happened to the BBC in Scotland had the independence referendum been passed in 2014. In the run up to the vote, the Scottish government's white paper suggested that a new Scottish Broadcasting Service (SBS), would "initially be founded on the staff and assets of BBC Scotland, and will broadcast on TV, radio and online"<sup>16</sup> – and that it would form a joint-venture with the BBC, with the SBS supplying it with similar levels of content. The SBS plan argued for a new organisation which still would have worked quite closely with the BBC, and contained quite a lot of detail. Famously, the Scottish National Party promised voters that they would still get access to "*EastEnders, Dr Who, and Strictly Come Dancing*" in an independent nation, a country which never arrived;

**3.5** This option would protect existing jobs, and pension provisions (already defined in law): the staff of RTÉ and BBC Northern Ireland are what make these organisations what they are, and is what their successes are built on. This option would also use the existing infrastructure, built up over multiple decades – not least allowing for the current buildings and land owned by the broadcasters to be a starting point. Further to this, we suggest that TG4 remains operating as it currently does;

**3.6** We do not envisage Public Media Ireland to be a monolithic institution in the way we see some PSM organisations operating today. Indeed, a Twenty-First Century PSM should be decentralised and embrace wider participation: for example, it would be interesting to see how Public Media Ireland could cooperate with, and further strengthen, the work of TG4, in continuing the existing rich tradition of Irish language provision. Moreover, the current Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund and Irish Language Broadcast Fund, administered by Northern Ireland Screen, play an important role in supporting language programming. And as we note above, with the current changing demographics in Ireland, additional language provision will also need built on;

**3.7** NI currently has three other commercial broadcasters operating with a public service remit: UTV (owned by ITV plc), Channel 4 and Channel 5. How might these organisations interact and co-operate with Public Media Ireland? And finally, but not exhaustively, what about radio? There is already a large and vital provision of audio content delivered by RTÉ and BBC Northern Ireland (in addition to provision from other stations). Through the establishment of Public Media Ireland, radio can be protected, but also reimagined – in line with wider trends in podcasting, and non-linear audio provision – with vital, live radio services that communities rely on still delivered;

**3.8** Considering option (D) Marketisation, as is clear from this report, we believe in publicly funded media provision, and do not believe a solely private model of provision can achieve the aims of PSM (This is discussed in more detail in Section 5 on Funding). However, in a new Ireland there could be calls for a completely deregulated media market, with little or no public provision, something which could happen across other sectors also;

**3.9** That said, Option (E) Combination, also has merit – whereby an all-island platform could be established – an *iPlayer Ireland*, for argument's sake – with content contributed from existing institutions (where users could select their geographical location to choose content). In the end, if reunification ever occurs, all options will need reconsidered at that point. As such, we are considering these options in early 2026, but cannot predict what social, political and economic conditions will be like in the years hence.

**R4** **A new PSM organisation – Public Media Ireland – should be established in a new Ireland.**

**R5** **Public Media Ireland should be decentralised and embrace wider participation.**

## Options for PSM provision in a new Ireland – considerations and questions

Option	PSM Provision	Considerations	Questions
A – Status Quo	RTÉ remains as the main PSM organisation; BBC NI remains in some form	It is currently unclear how BBC NI could remain, as Northern audiences would be outside of the current UK TV Licence framework.	Might the BBC maintain a larger presence in Belfast than would be the case elsewhere, but funded from existing UK licence fees, or even through the BBC World Service?
B – Subsumption	RTÉ subsumes BBC NI, and remains as the main PSM organisation	It is not clear what the legal ramifications of this are – but is similar to the legal considerations that would need to take place across other sectors.	Would current ROI institutions subsume their NI counterparts? Or would new institutions instead be set up (with new names, logos etc.)?
C – New Provision	A new PSM organisation is established	A new organisation would be set up, drawing on, as its starting point, the assets, infrastructure and people of RTÉ and BBC Northern Ireland.	Could this be similar to what was proposed for a post independence Scotland in 2014 – the <i>Scottish Broadcasting Service</i> ?
D – Marketisation	There is no PSM provision in a new Ireland	PSM cannot be taken as a given – there could be calls in a new Ireland for a completely deregulated media market, with little or no public provision.	Could this be similar to what may happen across other sectors, where the establishment of a new Ireland prompts calls for marketisation?
E – Combination	Combination of options A-C emerges	This might mean multiple different institutions, with some new ones established, with some existing ones retained.	Could there be a combination option where an all-island platform is established – an <i>iPlayer Ireland</i> – with content contributed from existing institutions, and where users can select their geographical location to choose content?

# Content considerations

## 4. Journalism in a new country

**4.1** Journalism – in terms of production and output – should be a core component of Public Media Ireland. While not the sole output (see Section 5 - Content: scripted and non-scripted), we believe it important to:

- a)** Recognise the distinct role of journalism as a practice within PSM organisations;
- b)** Recognise that journalism – with a relatively wide understanding of the practice – is intrinsic to any democratic society.

**4.2** While there may have been clashes of values and media traditions evident in other reunification contexts, on the island of Ireland three significant key commonalities should be first noted which suggest that (in theory) a unified journalistic approach is a realistic target:

- a)** Strong culture of PSM and the associated journalistic outputs;
- b)** Familiarity with established regulatory norms and standards among commercial and PSM;
- c)** Common values among journalists.

**4.3** These are somewhat on-the-ground considerations that point to a relative alignment of journalistic values, norms, and traditions. Such a cohesive starting position should not be taken for granted, but may be only part of the challenge in designing novel journalistic institution(s) fit for the contemporary media landscape, and with a strong and effective public service ethos that resonates with both journalists and audiences;

**4.4** In terms of a vision for public service journalism, we make explicit the following three positions:

- a)** Public service journalism is not limited to work produced by broadcasters;
- b)** Public service journalism can be produced within commercial news organisations;

**c)** Public service journalism is not the remit of only a single or limited number of organisations in a given jurisdiction.

**4.5** It is, therefore, our belief that public service journalism can, in theory, be produced by any organisation or individual. The mechanics around funding structures inevitably become more complicated the wider the net is cast. But it remains an important starting principle that PSM in a reunified Ireland would not necessarily replicate the dominant RTÉ/BBC model whereby the overwhelming proportion of public funding for journalism is provided to these organisations;

**4.5.1** And yet, as we outline below, Public Media Ireland – and the journalism it produces – will need a funding level that is reflective of PMI delivering ‘critical public infrastructure’<sup>17</sup> in a reunified Ireland;

**4.6** Who creates journalistic content beyond “the daily news”?

**a)** As noted above, the proposal is that public service journalism content should not necessarily be the remit of one dominant media institution. Nevertheless, for logistical reasons, it may be most appropriate for one institution to exist to be the central administration for news. A national headquarters would be required as a centralised space to manage coverage of national affairs, and to contain the necessary large studios, etc, but should be in an accessible place.

**b)** In such a structure, geographic spread is crucial – and we speculate that ten journalism hubs could spread around the island eg. Belfast, Derry, Enniskillen, Newry, Athlone, Galway, Limerick, Dublin, Waterford and Cork. These will produce cross-platform content that will be sourced by journalists based in, and with contributors from these areas.

**4.7** Journalism produced by any organisation or individual which receives statutory funding should adhere to a set of standards and codes of conduct. As outlined at the beginning of this section, this is already in place – albeit in different forms in the ROI and NI – so does not require significant cultural shift. However, this would require refining to ensure a clear, fair set of guidelines and principles are in place;

**4.8** Beyond this, given the challenges around audience trust, it is essential that the journalism providers – particularly if there is one “primary” news-providing institution – lead by example and follow best-practice values and guidelines in the journalism sector. The following guiding standards, adapted from The Trust Project<sup>18</sup>, are a useful outline of values for which to potentially strive:

- a)** Transparency on core elements (eg. funding, mission statement, ethics guides being accessible);
- b)** Clarity on journalists’ background and expertise (information and biographies of journalists and access to their other work);
- c)** Clarity on the type of work and its origins (clear labelling between fact/opinion/analysis);
- d)** References and sources made available within reporting (clear information about information origin and linking to source documents);
- e)** Clarity on methods and process (how was information gathered, why was the story a priority);
- f)** Locally sourced where possible (valuing on-the-ground reporting, input from communities);
- g)** Diverse voices (within the organisation/s and creators, and in the output);
- h)** Actionable feedback structure (facilitate meaningful feedback and input from audiences to comments on/shape coverage, where appropriate).

**R6** **Journalism is intrinsic to any democratic society.**

**R7** **A unified journalistic approach is a realistic target, with an alignment of journalistic values, norms, and traditions.**

## 5 Content: scripted and non-scripted

**5.1** Complementing journalism and news activity with creative and cultural content is another important strand of PSM output and activity. We envisage a broad remit in terms of the inclusion of drama, music and entertainment material, activities and initiatives. For example, soap operas have played an important role in Irish social history, such as the emergence of LGBT identities on screen, and can function as a means through which audiences are exposed to characters and experiences that differ from their own;

**5.2** Apart from work directly funded by PSMs, both ROI and NI have strong histories in TV and film production (where in the ROI it is eg. assisted by the Section 481 tax incentive and Screen Ireland funding, and where in NI it is assisted eg. through tax incentives and direct financial support from Northern Ireland Screen). Continued support of that kind would be crucial to help sustain the production industry in both regions, minimise disruption, and maintain strong formal recognition of the important social role of creative and cultural production. However, reunification would also reorganise these existing structures eg. there would be one taxation approach island-wide;

**5.3** As we note above, in November 2025 Coimisiún na Meán announced a €14m Shared Island Media Fund. It will mean the Sound & Vision fund will have a 'Shared Island Shared Stories' strand to it, that "will fund programming that supports a shared future, promotes cultural exchange and celebrates the diverse heritage of the island".<sup>19</sup> Such initiatives show that under the current constitutional conditions, there is clear evidence of development of media production on a North-South basis;

**5.4** How a reunified Ireland would deal with global platform providers (Subscription Video on Demand [SVoD]) services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video would be closely aligned to the kind of media system that is designed. A new Ireland would give new opportunities for asking key questions: what (additional) regulatory conditions should the country impose on them, perhaps by way of levies, in order to better support PSM? How might regulation bring SVoDs more into line with the purposes of PSM? What lessons can be learned from the UK, where new prominence legislation has been brought in to try to secure visibility for the PSMs on electronic programming guides/Smart TVs?;

**5.5** Furthermore, highlighting the need and value of diverse producers and contributors should be fore-fronted, facilitating creative practice and content that best reflects the population of the modern reunified Ireland, showcasing perspectives that are both historically rooted and new to the island.

**R8** **Public Media Ireland should take a broad understanding of public service creative and cultural output.**

**R9** **Current financial incentives for production should be maintained, with existing infrastructures and employment opportunities enhanced.**

# Financial and governing structures

## 6 Funding

**6.1** When imagining a new PSM organisation, setting the necessary funding levels is difficult. We begin however with the following principles, and later arrive at the model we think best fulfils those principles. We argue PSM funding should be:

- a)** Well funded – taking funding above current levels;
- b)** Non-commercial – where advertising revenues are not relied on;
- c)** Sustainable – where PSM can plan for the long-term, with a degree of certainty.

**6.2** It is important to make the case for public funding for media in the first place. Here we concur with the Future of Media Commission report which argues, “The intrinsic value of Public Service Content should be recognised as a ‘merit good’ that delivers valued benefits to society and the democratic system and, as such, represents critical public infrastructure”;<sup>20</sup>

**6.3** While the market can and does provide much beneficial media content in both ROI and NI, market failure arguments – that PSM should only provide what the market does not – are flawed. They fail to recognise media as an intrinsically different kind of good;

**6.4** Any new PSM being setup to serve a reunified Ireland would face massive challenges on funding under the current terms. The main reasons for this are:

**6.4.1** RTÉ has been in a dire financial state, and has only returned a more sustainable footing due to direct public funding – with €48m provided in 2024. [It is worth noting RTÉ increased its commercial income between 2023 and 2024].<sup>21</sup> And there remains very high licence fee evasion rates in the ROI, estimated to be as high as 19% in 2023;<sup>22</sup>

**6.4.2** The TV licence which funds the BBC in the UK is perhaps in terminal decline. Evasion has also dramatically increased across the UK, to 10.31% in 2022-23.<sup>23</sup> Below-inflation licence fee settlements for the BBC mean public funding for the Corporation fell 38% between 2010 and 2024;<sup>24</sup>

**6.5** In both jurisdictions, alternatives to the licence fee have been addressed,<sup>25</sup> albeit more extensively in the ROI, when the Government’s Statement of Common Purpose (2011) stated that it would consider the change to a “household-based Public Broadcasting Charge”;<sup>26</sup>

**6.6** The Future of Media Commission suggested direct exchequer funding<sup>27</sup>, but the Irish Government instead committed to an “overhauled” television licence funding model (“...in order to maintain a direct link between media and the public they serve, and to minimise the risk of actual or perceived political interference in media independence...”).<sup>28</sup> There are some things to admire about a direct taxation model; however, more straitened times may lead to cutbacks, and the threat of political interference always looms large;

**6.7** Instead, we suggest that the Finnish model could be applied. In place since January 2013,<sup>29</sup> the PSM Yle is financed on the following basis:

- a)** Individuals pay 2.5% of their “total earned income and capital income” above €14,000, but the maximum payment is €163 per year;
- b)** Organisations with taxable incomes above €50,000 pay €140 “+ 0.35 per cent for the portion exceeding” €50,000, with a maximum annual tax rate of €3,000.

The Future of Media Commission noted that to pay the maximum, the organisation would need to “earn €867,142 or more in taxable income in that tax year”.<sup>30</sup> In Finland, this Yle tax currently generates €529.6m from a population of 5.5m people;<sup>31</sup>

**6.8** The Future of Media Commission notes the ROI’s Department of Finance ruled out the possible implementation of a Finnish-style model, as (i) in its view, Ireland already had progressive taxation; (ii) implementing it would “add further complexity to the tax code”; and that (iii) it had “long been resistant to the hypothecation of tax revenues”,<sup>32</sup>

**6.9** Modelled projections were provided by the Department of Finance to the Future of Media Commission in order to test the idea of taxation based-funding. These figures showed that raising a nominal amount of €300m would only involve very small adjustments to the current Irish taxation system on both the 20% and 40% rates.<sup>33</sup> It is important to note here that these projections were for the ROI only, and that the nominal amount needed in 2026 would be higher. In the event of the reunification of Ireland some 830,000 employees from NI would be included within an island-wide workforce, though the nominal amount would also be higher to allow for the larger overall population of the country (the current cumulative income of the BBC in NI and RTÉ is ~£434m (€493m)).<sup>34</sup>

**R10 PSM should be well funded, non-commercial and sustainable.**

**R11 The Finnish model for funding PSM should be considered to fund Public Media Ireland.**

## 7 Governance

**7.1** Under the existing conditions, both the ROI and NI have seen governance problems at their main PSM organisations. In the ROI, while TG4 has not suffered any damage, RTÉ's entire governance framework was thrown into chaos in mid-2023, when details of the 'payments scandal' emerged. In the UK, there have been many more governance scandals in recent years in PSM than we have the space to outline here, but range from BBC Chairman Richard Sharp having to resign in 2023 over previously undisclosed connections he had to the Prime Minister who appointed him, Boris Johnson<sup>35</sup>; to the events of November 2025 which saw the BBC's Director-General and CEO of BBC News and Current Affairs resigning on the same day;

**7.2** In both the ROI and the UK, PSM organisations are functionally independent from government. However, given that both RTÉ and the BBC operate under financial settlements set by the government of the day, and under governance structures with Boards (mainly government appointed, in the case of the BBC, partly in the case of RTÉ) and Chairs – appointed by Ministers, their independence is perhaps less at an arms-length than might otherwise be the case;

**7.3** Various interventions in both the ROI and the UK have tried to map out how governance of PSM could become more democratic. In the UK, the Media Reform Coalition (MRC) has argued that the BBC's governance could be reformulated, to include a "BBC Board directly elected by its audiences"<sup>36</sup>. In the MRC's model, newly-established Citizen Media Assemblies would also play a role in a more democratically-shaped media system. In Ireland, the use of Audience Councils is one way to do this. RTÉ's Audience Council is enshrined in statute; it is formally in place to "advises the RTÉ Board on specific issues relating to RTÉ's public service remit and audience needs"<sup>37</sup>, and is in turn addressed by members of the board;

**7.4** Media and creative industries are often notoriously bad employers. Despite utopian descriptions of work in the creative sector, employment within it is marked by insecurity, inequality and exploitation. Precarity has had a detrimental impact upon skills retention and development in the sector and has the potential to stymie genuine creativity. It also leads to workers feeling ambivalent about the work they do, experiencing victimisation, anger and anxiety;

**7.5** Alternatively, we might regard the people who work in the sector as a valuable democratic resource, with an important regulatory function in an era when government regulation is regarded with some public suspicion. We should ensure that workers have access to free and independent association through trades unions or professional bodies and that elected trade union or worker representatives should sit on regional and national boards. Workplace democracy is entirely appropriate for a public service body and network with a key role in making and sustaining a national democracy;

**7.6** To capture these points, in governance terms we therefore envisage Public Media Ireland having:

- a)** A Chair, Director-General and Board appointed by the legislature in the reunified Ireland, rather than the Government – with a space for elected trade union representatives on the board;
- b)** An enhanced role for whichever media regulator is in place in a reunified Ireland;
- c)** Active Audience Councils, with impactful powers set out in legislation – with a clear remit and genuine pathway for impacting on the strategic direction of Public Media Ireland.

**R12** **A fully independent and democratic form of governance should be put in place.**

**R13** **Governance arrangements should have a role provided for elected trade union representatives, and the use of active Audience Councils.**

## Conclusion – Unexplored questions

**No report of this length, or written at this stage in the process, can even hope to be exhaustive. As we write in early 2026, we are most aware that it could be a number of years away before these questions become live. In addition, there are issues that we have not had the space to consider here – some of which relate directly to broadcasting, and some to culture more generally. These include, but are not limited to:**

- a)** How would media regulation operate? Currently there are two media regulators on the island of Ireland, with, Coimisiún na Meán in the ROI, and Ofcom in NI – with similar scope over media content and online harms (albeit Ofcom's remit is much wider, taking in telecommunications and postal affairs);
- b)** How might the range of screen agencies, trade associations and trades unions related to film and television respond to reunification (noting that some already operate on a North-South Basis)? These include, but are not limited to: Screen

Producers Ireland; Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland; Northern Ireland Screen; Audiovisual Ireland; Royal Television Society; Irish Film & Television Academy; Irish Film Institute; British Film Institute; Film Hub NI; PACT; National Union of Journalists; Bectu; SIPTU; Screen Guilds of Ireland; Animation Ireland;

- c)** What about the Arts? The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (ROI) in the ROI, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (NI) are currently distinct organisations;
- d)** And are there clues within existing institutions as to the Ireland that might emerge? Many organisations, including major sporting bodies, and of course all of the main Christian Church denominations, are already operating on an all-Ireland basis. Is it wrong to jump to conclusions that the reunification of Ireland completely rewrites the script?

As we wrote at the outset, this is the beginning of a conversation, and certainly not the end.

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**Dr Phil Ramsey**  
Ulster University  
pt.ramsey@ulster.ac.uk

**Dr Roddy Flynn**  
Dublin City University  
roderick.flynn@dcu.ie

**Dr Stephen Baker**  
Ulster University  
sj.baker@ulster.ac.uk

**Dr Dawn Wheatley**  
Dublin City University  
dawn.wheatley@dcu.ie

This research report is published with the intention of facilitating feedback on the work, and to feed into future reports. The views or opinions expressed within this report are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of Ulster University or Dublin City University

Responses can be submitted through:  
<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/W8UCT3VwrO>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Tragically alone in the sumptuous booth of love (with Colm Tóibín)', Off Air... with Jane and Fi, 2 June 2024, Available from: <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/tragically-alone-in-the-sumptuous-booth-of-love/id1648663774?i=1000657830944> [Accessed: 09/01/2025]. Our project began before Tóibín's comment: see Ramsey, P (2024) 'Public Service Media on a Shared Island: Ireland as a shared media system?' Invited panellist, 'The Future of Film on a Shared Island', Irish Screen Studies Seminar, Ulster University, 8 May 2024. <https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/activities/public-service-media-on-a-shared-island-ireland-as-a-shared-media-2>

<sup>2</sup> Mike Nesbitt's submission to: Unionist Fears & Concerns of a United Ireland, The Need to Protect the Peace Process & Build a Vision for a Shared Island & A United People, Senator Mark Daly, 2019, pp.16-17. Available from: [https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/govir1/Daly\\_2019-07-18\\_Unionist-Concerns.pdf](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/govir1/Daly_2019-07-18_Unionist-Concerns.pdf) [Accessed: 07/10/2025].

<sup>3</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.5. 'Imagining an All Island Media Landscape', Belfast Media Festival, 13 November 2024. Available from: <https://www.belfastmediafestival.co.uk/schedules/imagining-an-all-island-media-landscape/> [Accessed: 09/01/2025]; See comments from Denis Murphy in 'Audiovisual Cultural Policy in Ireland - Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland - New Reads - Oct 2024', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdiFebQJqSg> [Accessed: 13/10/2025].

<sup>4</sup> Coimisiún na Meán (2025) Shared Island Media Fund of €14m announced. Available from: <https://www.cnam.ie/shared-island-media-fund-of-e14m-announced/> [Accessed: 19/11/2025].

<sup>5</sup> For historical accuracy, the Republic of Ireland does not come into being until 1949, whereas the earliest forerunner of RTÉ, 2RN, had been broadcasting since 1926.

<sup>6</sup> RTÉ (2020) RTÉ Entertainment, Information, Education And Escapism For All The Family During Level 5 Restrictions #AtHomeWithRTÉ. Available from: <https://about.rte.ie/2020/10/22/rte-entertainment-information-education-and-escapism-for-all-the-family-during-level-5-restrictions-athomewithrte/> [Accessed: 07/01/2025].

<sup>7</sup> EBU (2020) COVID-19 REPORT Public Service Media: Supporting Society Through Coronavirus. Available from: [https://ebu-reports.cdn.prismic.io/ebu-reports/fea30549-b542-4368-9892-cede720394a7\\_EBU\\_COVID-19\\_REPORT\\_2020\\_EN.pdf](https://ebu-reports.cdn.prismic.io/ebu-reports/fea30549-b542-4368-9892-cede720394a7_EBU_COVID-19_REPORT_2020_EN.pdf) [Accessed: 07/01/2025].

<sup>8</sup> Public Media Alliance (2024) What is PSM? Available from: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/about-us/what-is-psm/> [Accessed: 09/01/2025].

<sup>9</sup> European Broadcasting Union (2012) Public Service Values: Editorial Principles and Guidelines. Available from: [https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Public\\_Service\\_Values.pdf?site=ebu](https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Public_Service_Values.pdf?site=ebu) [Accessed: 08/01/2025].

<sup>10</sup> Leahy, P. (2025) Support for Irish unification growing in Northern Ireland, poll finds. The Irish Times, 7 February 2025. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2025/02/07/support-for-irish-unification-grows-but-unity-vote-would-be-soundly-defeated-in-north-poll-shows/> [accessed 7 October 2025].

<sup>11</sup> Garry, J., O'Leary, B. and Pow, J. (2023) United Ireland: Southern voters open to discussion on flags and anthem. The Irish Times, 9 December 2023. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/12/09/united-ireland-southern-voters-open-to-discussion-on-flags-and-anthem/> [accessed 8 September 2025].

<sup>12</sup> Manley, J. (2024) Gerry Adams says Irish flag and anthem should be 'on the table' during unity negotiations. The Irish News. Available from: <https://www.irishnews.com/news/politics/gerry-adams-says-irish-flag-and-anthem-should-be-on-the-table-during-unity-negotiations-R7MOWQZ34FEAHJDIDXQDVWCAVI/> [Accessed: 04/11/2024].

<sup>13</sup> RTÉ (2018) Diversity and Inclusion in RTÉ: Re-imagined For A New Generation. Available from: <https://about.rte.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/rte-diversity-and-inclusion-charter-2018.pdf> [Accessed: 06/11/2025]. The gender pay gap at RTÉ also stands at more than 10%. See: RTÉ (2024) Gender Pay Gap Report 2024. Available from: <https://about.rte.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/RTE-Gender-Pay-Gap-Report-2024-PDF.pdf> [Accessed: 06/11/2025].

<sup>14</sup> To be absolutely precise, audiences in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not part of the UK, but they pay TV licences and are included within most parts of the regime for TV licensing purposes (though different arrangements for free TV licences apply in "Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey and Sark"). Available from: <https://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/easy-read/if-you-live-in-the-channel-islands-or-isle-of-man> [Accessed: 03/10/2025].

## Notes

<sup>15</sup> In *For and Against a United Ireland* (O'Toole and McBride, 2025), it is queried whether RTÉ might subsume the BBC's operations in NI.

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2013) *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

<sup>17</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.4.

<sup>18</sup> The Trust Project. Available from: <https://thetrustproject.org/> [Accessed: 09/01/2025].

<sup>19</sup> Coimisiún na Meán (2025) Shared Island Media Fund of €14m announced. Available from: <https://www.cnam.ie/shared-island-media-fund-of-e14m-announced/> [Accessed: 19/11/2025].

<sup>20</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.4.

<sup>21</sup> RTÉ (2024) Annual Report & Group Financial Statements 2024. <https://about.rte.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/RTE-Annual-Report-2024-English.pdf> [Accessed: 06/11/2025].

<sup>22</sup> Kierans, J. (2024) 'TV Licence fee evasion rate likely to be 19pc for 2023, says Catherine Martin', Irish Independent. Available from: <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/tv-licence-fee-evasion-rate-likely-to-be-19pc-for-2023-says-catherine-martin/a836548637.html> [Accessed: 09/10/2024].

"The Technical Working Group was set up by Government in September 2022 to examine reform and enhancement of the TV licence". DTCAGSM (2024) Minister Martin announces Government agreement on funding of RTÉ and Public Service Media. Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/8b877-minister-martin-announces-government-agreement-on-funding-of-rte-and-public-service-media/> [Accessed: 09/10/2024].

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons Library (2024) Research Briefing: TV Licence Fee Statistics. Available from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8101/CBP-8101.pdf> [Accessed: 11/10/2024], p.13.

<sup>24</sup> Voice of the Listener and the Viewer (2024) VLV Report into BBC Funding: 2010/11 – 2023/24. Available from: <https://vlg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/VLV-Report-into-BBC-public-funding-Revised-November-2024.pdf> [Accessed: 11/11/2025].

<sup>25</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission; House of Commons Library (2024) The future of the BBC licence fee. Available from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10050/CBP-10050.pdf> [Accessed: 11/10/2024].

<sup>26</sup> Department of the Taoiseach (2011). Statement of Common Purpose.

<sup>27</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.142.

<sup>28</sup> DTCAGSM (2023) Future of Media Commission Report. Implementation Strategy & Action Plan. Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/255468/5750c114-5961-4848-857e-2a02ef65063e.pdf> [Accessed: 15/10/2024], p.14

<sup>29</sup> Österlund-Karinkanta, M. (2016) The tax-based funding of the Finnish public service broadcaster Yle. Available from: <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680789a98> [Accessed: 15/10/2024].

<sup>30</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.131.

<sup>31</sup> Yle (2024) About Yle. Yle Finances. Available from: <https://yle.fi/aihe/about-yle/finances> [Accessed: 15/10/2024]; European Commission (2024) Finland: Political, social and economic background and trends.

<sup>32</sup> The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.133.

<sup>33</sup> The full costings laid out in the FOMC are as follows: "These costings indicate that to raise a notional target of €300 million in a full year would theoretically entail an adjustment of 0.45% on the lower 20% rate of income tax, or just under 1% on the higher 40% rate of income tax." The Future of Media Commission (2022) Report of the Future of Media Commission, p.133.

<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to arrive at this figure precisely, as while figures are published for income and expenditure for the BBC in NI (~£100m), the total 'value' NI audiences get is much higher than this figure as they benefit from billions of pounds worth of BBC network content. Currency conversion on 17/11/2025;

<sup>35</sup> Seddon, S. (2023) Richard Sharp: BBC chairman resigns over report into appointment. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65323077> [Accessed: 17/10/2024].

<sup>36</sup> Media Reform Coalition (2024) Media Manifesto 2024. Available from: <https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Media-Manifesto-2024.pdf> [Accessed: 17/10/2024].

<sup>37</sup> RTÉ (2024) Audience Council. Available from: <https://about.rte.ie/inside-rte-2/audience-council/> [Accessed: 17/10/2024].



