



## **OVERVIEW**

Submission by Learning Waves to the Future of Media Commission

**8<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

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## Learning Waves Submission to Future of Media Commission

8<sup>th</sup> January 2021

The following is a submission by Learning Waves, the training body for the Independent Commercial Radio Sector in Ireland, to the Future of Media Commission.

### Section 1 - About Learning Waves

Learning Waves is the training body for the Independent Commercial Radio Sector in Ireland. The network was established in 2004 following an industry wide training needs analysis which was supported by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) between 2000-2002. Funding was secured in 2004 from Skillnet Ireland for a 9-month period and the network, through its innovative approach to training, has continued to receive Skillnet Ireland support since 2004. The funding from Skillnet Ireland is matched by member organization through an annual membership fee. Training is provided across a range of disciplines to national, regional, multi-city and local radio stations across Ireland. The network represents 34 Independent Commercial Radio stations across Ireland and together with commercial sales houses, IRS+, Media Central and Urban Media the network supports the members in the areas of learning and development and networking. In addition to this, the network works in partnership with the BAI, Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI), Media Literacy Ireland and IAPI.

Since its inception the network has invested €4.5 million in the training and development of staff across the sector resulting in the delivery of 27,229 training days to over 7,105 individuals (figures as of December 2020). This funding comes from Skillnet Ireland, the network members, all of who pay an annual membership fee to Learning Waves, and the BAI.

In addition to the funding secured from Skillnet Ireland, the network has been in receipt of Sectoral Development Funding from the (BAI) since 2009 as it assists the BAI in their role under Section 26.2 of the 2009 Broadcasting Act – ***‘to co-operate with other bodies, including representative bodies within the broadcasting sector, to promote training activities in areas of skills shortages in the broadcasting sector’.***

The network continually delivers on its targets and offers significant value for money in terms of the services it provides to the industry. In addition to training those working in the sector, the network also actively encourages new talent into the industry through the design and delivery of bespoke training programmes for new talent.

The network structure comprises of a Board of Directors and Sub-Committees who work with the Project Manager to design and deliver training and networking opportunities for the sector. The Board of Directors and members of the Sub-Committees give their time voluntarily to the network. The network has in place a clear structure for the appointment and rotation of board members, all of which is reviewed at the AGM.

The Board of Directors of Learning Waves includes :

- Mr. Martin Howard, General Manager, Shannonside/Nothern Sound, Chairperson of Learning Waves
- Ms. Patricia Monahan, Station Editor, Newstalk, Vice Chairperson of Learning Waves
- Ms. Maria McKenzie, National Sales Director, iRadio, Secretary of Learning Waves
- Mr. Michael Crawley, CEO, LMFM, Treasurer of Learning Waves
- Ms. Fiona Stack, General Manager, Radio Kerry, Director

- Ms. Bernadette Prendergast, Head of News, Galway Bay FM, Director
- Ms. Trish Lavery, Assistant Group Head of News, Communicorp, Director
- Ms. Ciara O'Connor, CEO, East Coast FM, Director
- Ms. Lena Murphy, Financial Controller, WLR FM & Beat 102-103, Director
- Mr. Nick Karkazis, Assistant Programme Director, Spin 103.8. Director
- Ms. Joanne Carroll, Director of People and Culture, Communicorp, Director
- Ms. Fionnuala Rabbitt, Managing Director, Highland Radio, Director

The network is co-ordinated by Project Manager, Teresa Hanratty, who has been in the position since the inception of the network. Additional part-time administration staff supports the Project Manager on an annual basis.

## Section 2 - Rationale for Submission

Learning Waves is making this submission to the Future of Media Commission for the following reasons :

1. To highlight the work and value of the network in the Media Landscape in Ireland
2. To ensure that the contribution made by the network to the Media Landscape is considered by the Commission in its recommendations on the Future of the Media in Ireland
3. To allow the Commission to understand the value and importance of training and development of all staff in ensuring that we have a sector that serves the needs of its audiences, at all times and on all platforms
4. To highlight to the Commission the pro-active nature of the Independent Commercial radio sector in Ireland in establishing this network, no such network exists outside of Ireland in the Independent Media Sector
5. To show that such a network can yield benefits across many of the media sectors in Ireland
6. To ask the Commission to consider the future funding of some of networks activities and funding for the sector

The public service contribution that commercial radio stations play in communities and around the country through their local news service maintains the fabric of rural society. Radio stations are a trusted source of news and information, providing companionship to people and opportunities for brands to get their message across to multiple audiences.

It is well known that Irish people love listening to the radio, indeed 3 in 4 adults listen to Ireland's local radio stations. During the lockdown we all spent more time at home, which impacted our listening, viewing and surfing habits considerably. (Amarach Research Oct 2020).

2020 is the year that we have all had to face up to stark new realities. In the communications industry, everything we thought we knew about media – from patterns of consumer behaviour to planning and buying policies – can now be consigned to the past. It's hard to see how they remain relevant following the seismic changes of the past number of months.

As we move into 2021, the Independent Commercial Radio Sector is operating in a world of new priorities for engagement with consumers. However, amidst the turmoil, what will remain constant is the notion of Staying Local. This is amplified by many factors including ongoing advice to restrict the numbers of people we meet and the fact that working from home has become the norm for many.

A highly trusted source of “always on” information that provided an important connection for homes with their local and national communities, local radio really proved its mettle since Lockdown and beyond. As a digitally adept, agile and responsive medium, both on-air or online, it became an important bridge between brands and the audiences they target. However, even though this contribution is often celebrated, the challenges facing commercial radio stations cannot go unnoticed. The sector has faced many challenges since 2009 but the challenges faced by the sector since the onset of Covid 19 have been the most severe the sector has seen in its 31-year existence.

The significant decline in commercial revenue has seen many radio stations have to reduce staff numbers during a time when audiences have needed more trusted information and advice than ever before.

In response to the requirement for more information during the pandemic, stations across the sector worked with Learning Waves to design and develop new online training programmes to respond to the sectors needs during the pandemic.

### **Section 3 – Value of Learning Waves**

Learning Waves has since 2004 provided the Independent Commercial Radio Sector with :

- Access to high quality training programmes designed to continually upskill staff across the sector in all areas of radio, i.e. management, sales, broadcasting, production
- Opportunities to network, share ideas and to develop best practices across the sector
- Platforms through which ideas can be shared, challenges explored and opportunities exploited
- Opportunities for members to recruit new talent from programmes designed specifically for graduates
- Collaboration opportunities with other industry stakeholders, e.g. IBI, IAPI, Media Literacy Ireland and the BAI to host industry wide events such as Radio Days Ireland 2018 and 2020
- Opportunities to access worldwide experts across all disciplines in the sector
- Unique learning opportunities by partnering with other broadcasting organisations e.g. exchange programme with BBC Radio Belfast in 2014 and 2015
- Opportunities to recruit and train young journalists through the development and roll out of the first Journalism Graduate Programme in the sector
- Access to younger audiences and content from younger people through the development and roll out of its TY Media Week Programme
- Affordable high-quality training and networking events that no one station on its own would be in a position to fund. On average Learning Waves can deliver training at less than a quarter of the industry training rates

**In summary, the establishment of Learning Waves has enabled all independent radio stations to benefit from networking opportunities and economies of scale by pooling their knowledge and experience.**

#### **3.1 Current Provisions to Support the Sector**

##### **Core Training Programmes**

Learning Waves, in conjunction with the board, sub committees and member organisations designs and delivers training and learning interventions to meet the needs of the sector on an on-going basis.

In 2020, the network began its activities by rolling out series of training sessions in relation to Election 2020. Specifically, these sessions looked at the Legal Aspects of covering Election 2020 and the General Count Process. In February 2020, the network collaborated with IBI to bring Radio Days Ireland 2020 to Dublin. Following on from the successful collaboration to bring Radio Days Ireland 2018 to Dublin, the network in association with IBI and sponsor organisations IMRO, the BAI and Skillnet Ireland, brought over 50 speakers to Dublin to meet with over 200 delegates from across the media landscape in Ireland.

In March 2020, the organisation pivoted immediately and successfully to deliver training programmes online to meet the immediate and ongoing needs of the sector. Such programmes included :

- HR and Employment Law Updates during Covid 19
- Broadcasting remotely – a Technical Approach
- Mobile Journalism Certificate
- Digital Marketing for Radio Certificate
- Social Media Diploma for Radio
- Managing Remote Teams
- Remote Worker Effectiveness
- Introduction to Diversity and Inclusion
- Communicating Effectively
- Customer Relationship Management during Covid19
- Sales Presentation Skills
- Presenting using Zoom
- Broadcast Law Updates
- Copyright – Clear before you Publish
- Data Protection Updates
- The Future of Sports Rights post Covid19
- Data Analysis
- Sourcing, Creating and Publishing Content

The above programmes have ensured that the sector has remained viable during the pandemic and that public debate is continually informed through independent journalism albeit under significant financial pressure. The content provided by the sector during the pandemic and ongoing reflects and promote the lives, language, art, sport, music, culture, traditions, and identities of Irish people at home and around the world.

It is therefore critical that this sector is supported going forward to allow it to continue to provide the high-quality trusted content that audiences demand and need. Maintaining funding for Learning Waves underpins the ongoing development of skills across the sector to meet the ongoing and changing audience requirements.

### **3.2 Innovative Programmes – Recruitment of New Talent**

#### **3.2.1 Journalism Graduate Programme**

**‘Broadcasting has enormous potential to open windows on the world, to open awareness of news and emerging ideas and to open minds’.**

In an age where fake news can often inform public debate as much as hard facts, audiences deserve trusted sources of information, with balanced, evidence-based opinion and comment. The content produced by Independent stations ensures that this is the case. Against this backdrop, there is now more than ever a need to ensure that local audiences are provided with local content that is reliable, relevant and trustworthy.

Not only has the digital environment impacted content, it has impacted recruitment and the need to recruit quality journalists has never been greater in the Independent Commercial Radio Sector.

The development of a Bursary for Young Journalists by Learning Waves in 2019 was seen by the sector as one of the most efficient ways to support traditional media organisations in recruiting quality journalists. In 2019, with the support of the BAI and Skillnet Ireland, the network developed the Journalism Graduate Programme. Under this programme 5 graduates were placed in 5 different radio stations across the country for a period of 5 months. Graduates were placed in National, Regional, Local and Youth focused radio stations. During the programme, graduates were paid €800 per month which was paid by the station and the funding received from the BAI to support the programme. In addition to this, the graduates embarked on a training programme during their placement. The programme was completed in March 2020. Below is an update on the current status of the 5 graduates who participated in the programme :

- 2 have been retained in a full-time capacity in the radio stations they were placed in
- 1 is currently working on a freelance basis with the station they were placed in and is currently undertaking a Diploma in Social Media and Media Law with Kings Inns College through Learning Waves
- 1 is studying for a Masters in Digital Media in the UK. They had been retained in the station they were working in until Covid19
- 1 has moved to working in the video editing area following their placement

A full report on the effectiveness of the programme is available at request from Learning Waves.

Below is some of the feedback from the participants and stations on the programme :

*"I was thrilled to be one of the five graduates that were placed in five different radio stations across Ireland. Working at Cork's RedFM gave me a lot of invaluable experience with the Learning Waves Journalism Graduate Programme. Working at a busy news and sports desk and working as part of a team as a broadcast assistant for The Neil Prendeville Show which is the number one talk show in Cork gave me a great taste of what life is like working in a radio station and the industry". Emma Hill, Corks Red FM*

*"I can't say enough good things about the Learning Waves Graduate Programme. It's had a transformative impact on me. Having finished college in May I was unsure if I would ever pursue a career in journalism. I was unsure where to start and I was apprehensive about entering the industry given how few jobs there are for graduates. For the final two years of college I became really interested in radio, so I was delighted to get a place on the programme". Paul Hyland, Galway Bay FM*

*"It is a great way to find new talent. We would definitely sign up again. The BAI support is very welcome and I would hope the BAI would continue to support the Programme. It would also be worth looking at whether the number of graduates could be increased from 5 to 10" – Diarmuid O'Leary (Red FM)*

*"It's a great project. It opens up people to us as we are always looking for people for part-time and shift work. It can be hard to get these people with all the required skills" – Lana O'Connor (Red FM)*

*"The Programme was excellent. There is a challenge in getting people interested in radio and this is a huge advantage in recruiting new talent" – Susan Murphy (Clare FM)*

The network has made a submission to the BAI for Journalism Graduate Programme for 2021 which would see 10 graduates recruited across the sector. It is anticipated that the network will be made aware of the success or not of this application by end of January 2021.



### 3.2.2 360 Broadcast Bootcamp Programme

Learning Waves Broadcasting Bootcamp Programme has been in operation since 2015. It is a 3-week bootcamp followed by a 2-week station placement in which participants get to present a radio programme. The participants research, produce and present the content for the programme. A number of participants from this programme have successfully secured placement across the sector in the following roles :

- Assistant News Editor
- Senior Producer
- Digital Content Editor
- Researcher/Producer
- Head of Engineering

In 2020, Learning Waves delivered the programme online and it was delivered over a 10-week period. The programme is due for completion at the end of January 2021. It is hoped that the network can continue working with this group in 2021 and organise work placements for them once Covid19 restrictions are eased.

The Bootcamp Programme is Learning Waves flagship programme for the recruitment of new talent across all disciplines in the sector.

### 3.2.3 TY Media Week

In a changing technological, media and social environment, the need for Media Literacy has never been more important. Media Literacy is the key to empowering people with the skills and knowledge to understand how the media works in this changing environment. It will allow people to interrogate the accuracy of information, to counter unfair and inaccurate representation, to challenge extremist views and, ultimately to make better informed media choices. Against this backdrop and in line with the BAI Media Literacy policy, Learning Waves believes that Media Literacy is of vital importance in terms of the future of the radio industry and its listeners.

As such, the network developed a TY Media Week Programme and in 2019, Learning Waves was successful in securing funding from the Sound and Vision Fund to roll out a TY Media Week programme across 15 radio stations in Ireland. The programme was rolled out from September 2019 to March 2020 and 13 radio stations took part, resulting in 191 TY students producing 22 hours of content which was broadcast across the sector. 2 stations could not complete the programme due to Covid19.

***Some quotes from the students who participated in the TY Media Week 2019/2020 :***

*"I have a totally different perception of radio now and I have a whole lot of respect for presenters"*

*"It really has been an unparalleled experience".*

*"I wasn't expecting the week to be as good as it was, it as in depth, I learned a lot about Libel and Defamation, about behind the scenes operations, documentaries and there is so much involved that I didn't even think about".*

Due to Covid19, Learning Waves did not apply for funding in 2020 due to the restrictions. The network has developed a series of webinars that TY students can access from December 2020 to January 2021. In this webinars, the network is engaging with 120 TY students across all counties of Ireland. It is envisaged that the network will apply for Sound and Vision funding in 2021 for the further roll out of the TY Media Week for the academic year 2021/2022. The programme has been hugely successful in increasing the awareness of how the media works among this demographic and in providing stations with content from younger audiences.

## Section 4 – The Future

As all media sectors navigate the current pandemic, it is now more important than ever that such organisations are supported fairly and adequately to fulfil their role in informing, entertaining and educating the Irish Public.

The Independent Commercial Radio Sector, since its establishment in 1989, has been educating, informing and entertaining the Irish Public through an array of on-air and more recently online content. The content provided is high quality, impartial, independent and reports of matters of local, regional, national, European and International importance.

In 2004, the sector through collaboration, established Learning Waves to support it in the upskilling of staff to ensure it continually achieved the above. The sector sets itself high standards in terms of content both on-air and online.

The sector is now operating in a world where fake news can often inform public debate as much as hard facts, audiences deserve trusted sources of information, with balanced, evidence-based opinion and comment. The content produced by Independent stations ensures that this is the case.

It is in this regard that Learning Waves is asking the Future of Media Commission to consider :

- The vital role Learning Waves makes in ensuring the content produced by the Independent Commercial Radio Sector continually meets audiences needs, anywhere, anytime and on any platform,
- How the new Media Commission will support the network financially to fulfil its remit
- How the network can be further supported in the continual recruitment and training of new talent into the sector,
- Providing support for programmes run by the network that engage with younger audiences to educate them on the media, how and why content is created to assist them in becoming media literate,
- Providing support to the Independent Commercial Radio Sector through :
  - Fair and equitable distribution of licence/broadcasting levies to all those media organisations who are fulfilling a Public Service remit
  - Examination of the Sound and Vision Application Process to ensure it is 'fit for purpose' in a new media landscape and that it reflects the different media sector needs.

Thank you for taking the time to review the submission. It has been prepared by :

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