Technology Ireland Response to Future of Media Commission - Public Consultation

About Technology Ireland:

Technology Ireland is an Association within Ibec, which represents the ICT, Digital and Software Technology Sector. The Association is a pro-active membership organisation with over 200-member companies located throughout Ireland. We advocate on behalf of Ireland's indigenous and foreign direct investment (FDI) technology companies to Government and policy makers.

Summary of Technology Ireland Position:

Technology Ireland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Future of Media Commission - Public Consultation. Ireland has been served well by a strong tradition of high quality public service content and it is important that such content continues to be supported and encouraged and made as widely available as possible both to Irish audiences at home and to the wider international diaspora. Thankfully, new technologies have made such ambitions ever more achievable.

Technology Ireland recognises that adapting to the digital environment has been challenging for some public service media and content providers. This is, however, a necessary transition and one which provides many opportunities. The Future of Media Commission in its recommendations to government should encourage and support public service media and content providers to embrace new technology to expand their audiences and to develop new income streams. To do so however, content providers must be supported with appropriate tools and training.

We also recognise the need for appropriate governance and regulation of public service content providers, but we would caution that such regulation should be evidence-based and should not impinge on or contradict existing regulations, already in place for online carriers.

Technology Ireland welcomes the clear definitions of 'Public Service Media' and 'Public Service Content Providers' provided by the Future of Media Commission and would like to respond to the suggested discussion points as follows:

Response to Question 1. How should Government develop and support the concept and role of public service media and what should its role in relation to public service content in the wider media be?

Supporting a healthy public service media operating in a wider media ecosystem, which may also provide public service content, is always a delicate balancing act, which requires appropriate state backing but ideally minimum state interference. The establishment of the Future of Media Commission is a welcome first step and statement of intent in this regard.

The provision and consumption of public service media and content has changed dramatically in the last ten years with the growth and increased popularity of online content. The impact of the internet is certainly not the first paradigm shift in provision and consumption of content. The introductions of the printing press, radio, television, cable and satellite all produced upheaval and change. These far-reaching advances all provoked prophecies of doom, which were ultimately proved false as society adapted to the new technologies over time and continued to thrive.

The government should support public service media and content by ensuring that providers are adequately resourced and skilled to take full advantage of the new technologies. In addition, some commercial operators provide assistance, for example by providing training to support independent journalism. They also provide distribution for public service content which extends reach and engages new audiences in cost-effective ways and allows consumers to easily access and share content. This increased reach can provide new sources of funding for the creation and distribution of further public service content.

The need for subsidies is likely to remain and they can be provided, where appropriate to support Irish language, culture and sport. The criteria for deciding on the level of support should be no different than with more traditional media outlets, but again support must be given to organisations to allow them to maximise opportunities for exposure. The advent of online media also provides the possibility for more direct support to grass roots organisations and opens up new outlets. Effectively any organisation can now become a "broadcaster" allowing for example an Irish language theatre production to be streamed nationwide (even internationally to a wider diaspora) without necessarily depending on the support of a traditional broadcasting partner. Of course, partnerships with traditional broadcasting companies and the sharing of expertise could all form part of a healthy and thriving public service ecosystem. The new technologies provide new opportunities and capacity and in turn demand new ways of thinking and operating.

Response to Question 2. How should public service media be financed sustainably?

As mentioned above, new technologies and new audiences also provide new ways of monetising content including public service content. Revenue from this can be fed back and added to traditional

revenue sources such as licensing to fund the creation of subsequent content. To maximise these opportunities public service media providers must be innovative and imaginative and embrace new technologies and new outlet opportunities, rather than adopt a defensive or sheltered position.

The shift in advertising towards big tech is sometimes overstated and even more commonly misunderstood. The rapid growth of internet-based businesses has significantly increased the supply of ad inventory and with it competition for advertisers' spend. This has impacted public service content outlets, as it has other traditional media. However, many traditional media providers have found new ways to monetise their content online, whether through paywalls, innovative offerings of services to the local community, or selling their own ads online for example. Just as public service broadcasters successfully transitioned some of their advertising activities from radio to television in previous decades and radio has continued to adapt and thrive, the same transition is being made today online and should be supported and encouraged.

Any move to impose a form of digital charge or tax would be counterproductive as it would discourage technology companies from providing outlets for public service media, many of which enjoy the use of free sites allowing them to access wider audiences. The cost of such a levy would also likely be borne by advertisers - including small businesses for whom digital advertising is the most affordable method available to them to reach customers and find new markets. Such a move would also be contrary to Ireland's general position regarding digital tax, which is that no unilateral actions should be taken and that any changes should be agreed internationally through the OECD.

Response to Question 3. How should media be governed and regulated?

Technology Ireland has always and continues to support on-line safety in particular with regard to protection of children and also suppression of terrorist content online. There are many regulations already in place to support these important objectives and Technology Ireland is continuing to work with our members at a national and international level to ensure that future regulations provide adequate and meaningful protection, while not impacting on legitimate freedom of expression or imposing unrealistic technological demands.

In making its recommendations to government, the Future of Media Commission must be careful not to overlap or contradict existing regulations. Digital platforms are already subject to a complex range of laws and statutory regulation. Further regulation has been proposed at European level in the recent proposals for a Digital Services Act and Digital Market Act. Where matters concern competition in digital markets, this is already under the remit of the CCPC and should remain so. In addition, the imminent implementation of the new AVMS Directive through the Online Safety & Media Regulation Bill will create new obligations for digital services and video sharing platforms. In its recommendations the commission should focus its attention with regard to governance and regulation on the providers of public service content not on the carriers of that content, whether traditional or online. We welcome Government's commitment to maintaining the legal principles which separate the regulation of content from that of intermediaries engaged in its carriage and distribution.

Conclusion

Technology Ireland is strongly supportive of the work of the Future of Media Commission and wishes it well in its consideration of how to maintain and enhance the provision of high-quality public service content. We hope that our suggestions in this submission are useful to this process.

We recognise that this consultation is only the first part of an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. Technology Ireland and its members remain committed to supporting and valuing the work of the Media Commission and look forward to participating in future discussions.