

# THE FUTURE OF MEDIA IN IRELAND

SUBMISSION FROM

UPLIFT, A PEOPLE POWERED COMMUNITY



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JANUARY 2021

# INTRODUCTION

*The quality of our media matters. Democracy doesn't function properly without a well functioning public media that is universally accessible for all and that is trustworthy, credible and independent.*

The media, especially public service media, forms a 'social glue' that helps shape our understanding of the world around us.

Without doubt the digital revolution has changed the rules of the game and unregulated social media corporations now have unprecedented influence over our daily lives.

The rise in disinformation is dramatically distorting how we access, interpret and understand important events and information. The Covid19 pandemic has driven home the importance of trusted and accessible sources of information that we need to be safe and understand what is happening in the world around us.

Public service media should play a vital role in reflecting the diversity of our society and our communities and not shy away from difficult and challenging issues, while upholding the highest standards in relation to human rights and equality.

A crucial function of public service media is holding decision makers accountable. To do this effectively independence is key. When there is too much control over appointments, funding allocations and when the social ecosystems of journalists and decision makers overlap too much, independence and perspective is diluted



Finally quality public service media requires resourcing. The steady erosion of public funding is detrimental to quality journalism and standards and pushes towards greater commercialisation and dumbing down of news and information. This is a significant choice and challenge for us all. The role of public taxation is core to this challenge and as can be seen in this submission needs to be underpinned by the principles of equality, universality, transparency.



# ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION



872 Uplift members contributed to the formation of this report by completing a digital survey sent during the week of 4th January 2021. Members were invited to share their views in the context of the public consultation on the 'Future of Media in Ireland'.

*For further information, contact  
Siobhán O'Donoghue, Executive Director*

**Uplift is Ireland's largest campaigning organisation representing over 340,000 people on the island of Ireland. We take action together to create what we cannot do on our own – a society, economy and democracy that serves all of us, and the planet we love.**

# ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

The Uplift community believes that public service media provides an important role in upholding and strengthening democracy.

A majority of our members are concerned about how disinformation and so called 'fake news' has become prevalent on social media platforms and the struggle to critically assess information that is flowing faster, across multiple channels.

The second most important role of public service media identified was the need for informative, balanced, ethical journalism. This is seen as a huge challenge in the context of a deregulated social media world and is closely related to the role of addressing disinformation.

Climate change, racism, income inequality were particular areas of concern. It is the view of Uplift that so called 'balanced' reporting and coverage does not equate with providing a platform for climate deniers, racists, misogynists, transphobes etc.

There is clearly a desire for hard-hitting journalism and commentary that is informative, balanced, transparent, ethical and respected for its integrity. There was a particular view expressed by many, that RTE is too biased and influenced by 'elite' and 'insider' decision makers.

**98% OF UPLIFT MEMBERS BELIEVE BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IS VERY IMPORTANT TO DEMOCRACY.**

In upholding the crucial role it plays in holding decision makers accountable and 'sense making', protecting its independence and integrity are viewed as crucial.

The role of public media in challenging us about our ideas & assumptions was also identified as important.

We recognise that this is challenging, causes tension, however is ultimately an important part of the creation of a critical, informed population that can grapple with complex and challenging issues.

*'we need easy access to reliable sources of information at local, national and international level as a counter to questionable information on social media.'* Niall



# CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

*'its hard to make out what is true - and not true" Fia*



In this section we explore members' views in relation to the challenges facing public service media. A number of specific challenges were offered as suggestions with the option to add additional challenges.

The graph below shows that Uplift members believe the top challenge faced by public service media is the news and media being influenced by political and business interests.

This was also reflected in the comments provided by members and is directly related to RTE being seen to be too close to politicians, PR community and thus unlikely to hold decision makers accountable."

*I feel RTE are influenced by their own beliefs and friendships with political figures. They are in no way impartial when it comes to debates. You can clearly see they're disgusted by certain people and parties when debating and including the news."Flan*

**There are many challenges facing public service media in Ireland. What challenges do you think need to be addressed the most?**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
1 Political & powerful business interests influence the news & media we see	43%	25%	15%	9%	6%	1%	2.14
2 Social media platforms have too much control & influence over what news & media content we see	28%	24%	20%	13%	11%	4%	2.67
3 Profit-driven media prioritises entertainment over news & informed debate	10%	26%	28%	18%	15%	3%	3.09
4 Funding cuts making it impossible for journalists & producers to do their work	6%	13%	19%	31%	27%	4%	3.7
5 Traditional ways of funding public service media are no longer working	7%	10%	14%	26%	37%	6%	3.93
6 Other	5%	2%	3%	3%	4%	83%	5.47

# CHALLENGES



*Community radio is inclusive by promoting opinions and voices such as immigrants and women;*

*- is best positioned to be more active in support of marginalised groups, including older people and social action groups;*

*- provides access, ranging from physical access, to a welcoming environment, to offering training and mentoring to enable people to broadcast their concerns and aspirations;*

*- gives airtime to less-popular topics such as minority sports, arts and music;*

*- provides a space for the expression of social, political and cultural ideas;*

*- supports community development actions, facilitates advocacy, and promotes diverse dialogue, including in the Irish language.*

*Community Radio Ireland: CRAOL*

A majority of members are also concerned that social media platforms have too much influence and control over what news and media content we see.

Social media is not regulated in the same way mainstream media is and their huge concern is that these platforms distort, inflame and cause corrosive division which is harming society.

Members are also concerned with profit driven media that prioritises entertainment over news and informed content. This is seen as reflective of the increasing commercialisation of media and the struggle for some media outlets to survive and for others to drive up profits.

The problems of funding quality media and decline in traditional forms of funding is also a concern, but less so than other challenges previously mentioned.

There was a concern expressed about the challenges facing regional media outlets with some going out of business. "These outlets support small communities and are also where journalists learn their craft. They also employ lots of people and help local businesses to advertise, therefore support local businesses."

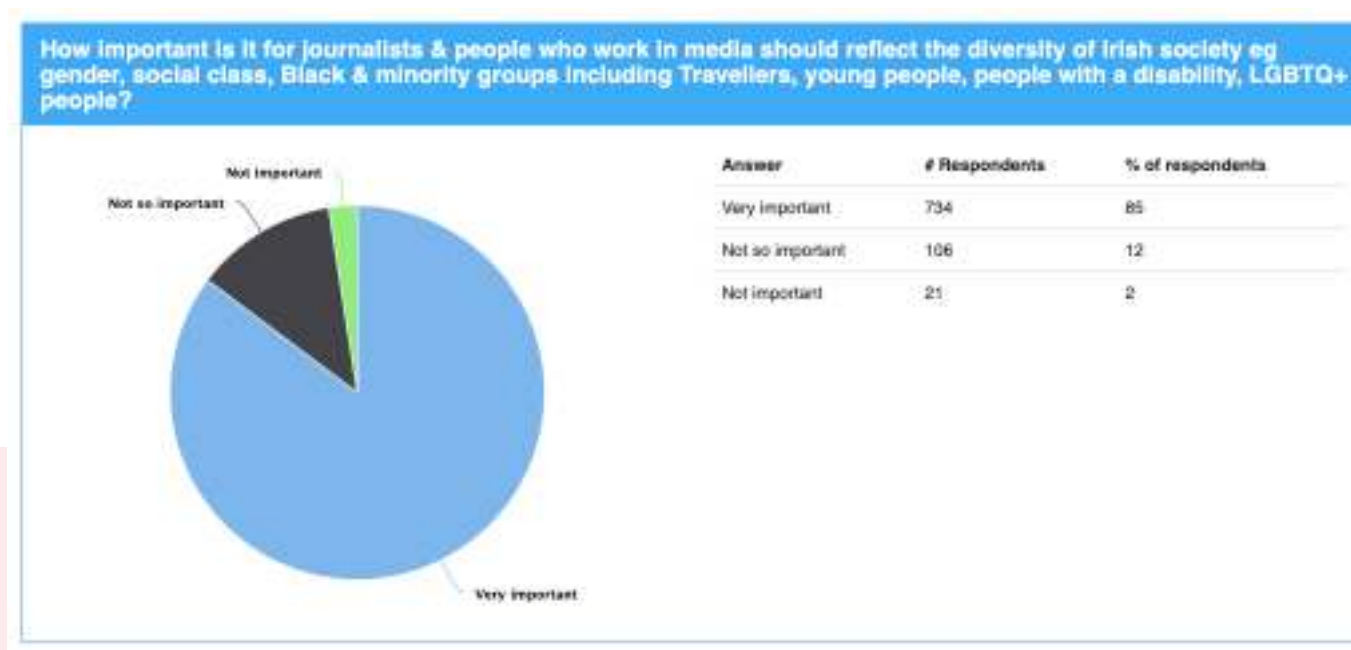
Likewise, in the absence of public funding, community radio stations are challenged to operate and meet their full potential, despite their proven track-record in supporting participation, dialogue, public education and learning opportunities for people and communities frequently ignored by mainstream media.



# REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSE VOICES & COMMUNITIES

"Minority voices and dialogues are being marginalised within Ireland's media, with those communities becoming increasingly disillusioned and disconnected from mainstream media.

This goes far beyond diversity of people appearing on our screens in newsrooms and programmes, but is also reflected in the content prioritised across the board, the lack of different perspectives and ideas. Too often minority voices are presented and as a 'social or cultural issue'.



"we have huge racial bias, particularly against Black Irish people, Travellers, the LGBTQ+ Community, and especially against Asylum Seekers and Refugees. Much more education opportunities on, for example, Black Irish history, is needed at every level of society, from crèche onwards, to give a more balanced POV, one of inclusion of everybody in our society. Truthful historic education leads to building a stronger, more authentic future. Effective journalism can help hugely in that education process." Tina

"Many of the people we see went to the same colleges, come from the same area, know the same people etc. Need more diverse routes into media careers i.e. funded training programs for people in working class areas, funding for grad programs within new colleges/media programs etc. Need different voices in media and driving media." Les

"People with disabilities are marginalised and our voices aren't being heard - we're not being represented at all adequately." Des

# SUSTAINING PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

*"The platforms need to be taxed anyway, so part of the tax bill can go directly to publicly owned news outlets."*

*Aisling*

*"A problem with public funding, as the BBC well knows, is that the management of public media organisations can be very open to political influence due to the threat of funding being restricted – so just as private funding can be used to "carry a message" so can public funding." David*

*FAIR wages for all workers in the sector rather than astronomical for "names". Luke*

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*90% of Uplift members who participated in this submission process believe that everyone in Ireland should have access to publicly-funded content across all platforms – TV, radio, digital.*

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"Public service media requires stable financial support that is not vulnerable to party politics, as well as being resilient in times of crisis.

90% of Uplift members who participated in this submission process believe that everyone in Ireland should have access to publicly-funded content across all platforms – TV, radio, digital. There are different views on the extent to which this happens and how it is financed.

Quality journalism and media content is resource and time heavy. 75% of members agree strongly that public service media should not be dependent on advertising revenue but primarily supported through fair general & digital taxation.



# SUSTAINING PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

*"Freedom of interest is vital in the public interest." Sara*

*"Public service media should provide content of the highest standard which represents the society and culture of the country which it is serving. It's purpose is not to be a competitor of the independent media channels. Ann*

*"Social media companies should be held to publishing standards" Arron*

*"we should pay for it through taxes and funding from investment and advertising" Luka*

There was a diverse range of views in relation to how taxation should be organised. On general there was agreement that taxation should be progressive, and that 'those with the most should pay the most.' Several respondents linked taxation with the high earnings some public media presenters earn in RTE.

There was a strong perception among participants that political influence is implicitly being exerted on the content of public service journalism via threats to restrict or withdraw funding, selection of key appointments and limited access to politicians.

76% of respondents support more secure & diverse funding streams to fund public media including taxing digital platforms and corporations subscription services.

There is widespread recognition that tech platforms and social media have dramatically altered how we consume information and how it has changed the traditional business model of mainstream media as well as public broadcasting. This requires innovative state responses that must include a more diverse tax base that puts the burden on the companies that generate huge profits on the back of publicly funded content, skills, investment.

78% of members believe that public funding should not be allocated to media companies focused on a for profit & serving commercial interests and a majority want to see more funding for innovative, thought provoking content.

Members also want to see greater investment to be made in independently-produced, quality programming that is made in Ireland and that creates jobs. This also includes training and supporting all content providers, especially those from backgrounds that are underrepresented in the media.

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# REGULATING PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

*81% want rules to stop digital & social media companies spreading disinformation & hate speech.*

*83% believe all appointments to positions involved in public service media should be independent of politicians & state influence.*

*79% believe that media public funding should be required to be more inclusive and representative of women and minority communities.*

*82% want a limit on media concentration*

Tackling the control social media and tech companies have over our daily lives and the extent to which they contribute to polarisation in society, undermining of journalism and distortion of the truth is the key concern of Uplift members.

Ireland has one of the highest levels of media concentration. While social media platforms are viewed as the single biggest threat we face, it is also the case that media corporations also have massive influence over us.

Members believe that all media operating in Ireland & particularly media that receives public funding should be required to be more inclusive and representative of women and minority communities.

*"News media in Ireland should not all rest in the hands of one or two people, making huge profits from their conglomerates. I believe we need more transparent governance and fairer regulations around the media in general" Tom*



# Uplift

## A People Powered Community

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POWERED  
CHANGE

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