

**Opening statement by Emma O’Kelly, Chair, Dublin Broadcasting branch on behalf of the National Union of Journalists.**

Cathaoirleach, we are grateful for the invitation to attend. I am Chair of the Dublin Broadcasting branch of the NUJ and an RTE employee. I am accompanied by Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary.

The voice of staff has been missing from discourse in this chamber: I want to give a sense of the anger and frustration of our members.

It is not possible to address the issues before you in isolation from the climate under which RTE has been forced to operate under for a long number of years and continues to operate under.

RTE has been starved of necessary funding for decades by successive governments.

When we spoke out over the summer it was in direct response to the immediate crisis, but the real wellspring was the deep frustration and powerlessness we have felt for years as a result of severe underfunding.

We struggled as best we could, striving to deliver quality output as budgets were slashed.

The NUJ fought around issues such as gender equality, and against excessive salaries and perks at the top, calling in 2019 for a cap on salaries, the abolition of the €25,000 executive car allowance and a review of employment contracts and contracts for service.

We look forward to publication of the two expert reports – they are already overdue, but we are very concerned at the insistence that funding decisions are being delayed while RTE continues to teeter on the brink of disaster.

The licence fee model is no longer fit for purpose. Public service media in this country urgently needs to be supported by a new sustainable and equitable funding model.

The level of funding needs to be adequate. Most Government and opposition politicians have over the summer months and since then expressed their strong support for public service broadcasting but without adequate funding words are hollow.

In relation to future plans for the organisation as outlined in the New Direction Strategic Vision document, staff are concerned that the organisation is being in effect held to ransom.

The deal seems to be that in return for some movement on funding RTE must cut its workforce by one fifth and outsource a significant proportion of the work currently done in house - by people in proper jobs - to the private sector.

400 jobs are to be suppressed: That’s 400 fewer full-time jobs in this wider creative sector for young people coming out of college.

We are concerned that those jobs will be replaced by mostly precarious short-term contracts in the private sector, where workers move from short-term contract to short-term contract with no rights to things like pensions, or holiday pay, or maternity leave. This is an environment that especially damages women.

We are fully supportive of a thriving, growing independent sector but we do not believe this should be achieved at the expense of jobs in RTE.

None of the governance failings or disgraceful excesses at RTE exposed since the summer had anything to do with the size of RTE, or with its ordinary staff.

The NUJ fears that this crisis is being used to drive through an entirely different agenda - the privatisation of large swathes of RTE.

This is something that we will oppose.

The use of bogus self-employment contracts is a stain on RTÉ's reputation.

The systematic misclassification of workers was an attempt to keep staff costs down, denying workers fundamental rights.

In recent year, chronic underfunding was a significant factor in the persistent denial of entitlements. Trade unions have long highlighted the need to tackle the systemic abuse of contracts for service across all sectors of the economy.

While trade unions have sought an industrial relations solution to the issue of bogus self-employment many workers in RTÉ are being forced to pursue legal options in the face of an obstinate employer.

Our issue with the strategic plan is that it seeks to do the wrong thing for the wrong reasons.

RTE is being driven further into the arms of the commercial sector, being forced to move further down the road of becoming a commissioning house.

We have learned nothing from Dee Forbes's first folly in shutting down Young People's Programmes and outsourcing the creation of all programming for young people.

Under the new DG we see plans to cut away a further one fifth of the organisation via the replacement of content currently made in house with material sourced from the private commercial sector.

That is not the way forward.