



Policy proposal to JOC from Craol, the Community Radio Forum of Ireland, 20.10.2023

“A new media partnership between community media and the national broadcaster - from the national to the hyperlocal”

Executive Summary

Craol, the Community Radio Forum of Ireland offers the following proposals to assist the reform of public service media in this country.

- That the Public Service Broadcaster should confine its broadcast advertising to public service announcements.
- That the Public Service Broadcaster be funded primarily through a Finnish (Yle) style model of ‘public broadcasting taxation and supplemented by a levy on international streaming companies as in Denmark.
- That a percentage of this tax be set aside for the development of the national Community Media service.
- That the national Public Service Broadcaster be aligned with the Community Media sector to create a media system that is a trusted service from the national to the hyperlocal.

Introduction

Community Media offers

- Community ownership structure
- Good governance at its core regulated by the charity’s regulator
- Quality Public Service Media regulated by Coimisiún na Meán

- Trusted media brands in the heart of the community
- Local programming initiated and produced by citizens for
 - Social benefit
 - Enhanced participation in democracy
 - Protection against fake news and global hegemonies
 - Empowerment of marginalised communities and individuals

Community radio stations have been doing this for thirty years and have the experience and reach to do more if core funding is secured.

With the standing down of the RTE commercial executive a phase of restructuring has begun. It's possible that it may again revert to the current hybrid model unless we can devise an attractive alternative to move the national broadcaster away from dependence on commercial activity. While state advertising should be available to all media, the state broadcaster should be limited to availing of such state advertising as a second source of income.

The dramatic decline in the reliability of license fees and advertising has given the government an opportunity to consider new mechanisms which offer sustainability and security; facilitate editorial independence; are progressive (i.e., levied according to income) and provide value for public money. The Future of Media Commission recommended an "integrated taxation approach" which would see public service media objectives: "designated as a core expenditure item funded out of general taxation". In effect then, identified media funding would be voted upon as part of the annual Dáil estimates debate.

Main Submission

In terms of long-term funding, we propose that something like the Finnish model be considered.¹¹ Yle is the Finnish public service broadcaster owned by the State of Finland and Finnish citizens. Yle's operations are financed by an appropriation paid for by revenue from

¹¹ How is public service media funded across Europe? (RODDY FLYNN, DCU 2023)
<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2023/0703/1391565-public-service-media-funding-europe-ireland-rte/>

a designated, 'public broadcasting tax.' While Finland is not an ideal model for community media, nevertheless, this innovative taxation model is worth consideration. Despite having a population only slightly larger than Ireland, (Finland 5.5m) this tax generates over €500m annually for YLE, which consequently has no requirement for commercial revenues.

The Finnish model has been tried and found to be successful, both as a source of funding but also as a way to distance public service media from political interference. Giving responsibility for directing funding to an institution such as the regulator, Coimisiún na Meán would mean that it could be tasked with protecting public service content as a priority. This opens opportunities for community media to propose a new 'hybrid' by combining the provisions of a national, public service content creator with community media across the state. Currently there are 21 licensed community radio stations with a further 20 broadcasting on temporary licences. These cover 135,000 hours of annual output and in the past year enabled more than 100,000 citizens to go on air and have their say. Along with our colleagues in the Community Television Sector, we are developing our digital provisions and building local partnerships with the same aims as outlined above. These will cover the entire island, North and South and will provide quality public service content that is regulated, monitored and responsible directly to the people in the communities they serve.

We are proposing a new media partnership between the national broadcaster and community media. RTE or its successor can and should provide public service content on a national scale and community media can and does provide public service content in innovative and empowering ways at the most local level of the community. A properly funded community media sector ensures greater, and safer, plurality in media, it ensures that public service content can produce social benefit at the national level right down to the hyperlocal. Community Radio offers Solutions Journalism where the topics discussed are seeking an outcome with a Social Benefit.

Government should now consider a new 'hybrid' model where the national broadcaster and the community media sector proportionately share all public service advertising and the

new broadcasting tax. Community media must be recognised as a tool of communication for people in their communities which are run for the community, about the community and by the community. Community Radio brings communities together. With the advent of FoMC recommended Media Hubs in the heart of the Community, media creation and media literacy will be as commonplace as borrowing a book from the local library.

Community Media goes further than Public Service Broadcasting, with its trust and good governance, Community Media is using media as a tool to deliver community development. Community Media effects change in the communities it serves.

The greater good could be facilitated by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media facilitating the emergence of a **new national media service** that can finally bond the national and the community.

Given sufficient funding and supports, this realignment will include an approach where appropriate training, capacity building, good governance, ethos policy development, and adequate operational planning are prevalent across the entire spectrum of reformed public service media, from the national to the community. We could be world leaders in meeting and adapting to the new communications order. Community Media continues to be the starting point for media careers with our investment in schools and college broadcasting on our airwaves. We provide invaluable training, free of charge to all and our network of community digital hubs, centred on existing community radio stations will continue this work which facilitates people's participation in their own media and ultimately in the democratic life of the nation.

Such an Irish version would see the creation of an **independent, state funded body, under the remit of CnaM** to centrally coordinate media processes to ensure that from the national to the hyperlocal, the relative communications strengths, needs, and desired outcomes at each level are identified and, where necessary, financial support is planned, delivered, and reviewed in order to meet the identified information needs of citizens at each level of society.

Beyond an apparatus tax which is the TV License fee, there is a once in a century opportunity to level the playing field of media in Ireland. Through thoughtful and imaginative legislation, now is an opportune time to value from where and from whom media is created.

Additional funding sources for Irish media creation can be sourced from levies on market dominant video streamers. The legislation is in place to levy these market disruptors to help fund the creation of indigenous media for Ireland and for the diaspora. Denmark's proposed streaming tax would levy 2% on revenues with the country on the video on demand players.

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Craol welcomes the widening of funding sources and the opportunity to establish core funding schemes that are sustainable and will enrich Irish culture with the rollout of Community Media Hubs to all towns, cities and rural Ireland.

We are available to present these recommendations to the Committee should they be of interest to you and we invite you to meet with us in December in the Audio-Visual Room to experience at first hand the work we do and the future development of community media in Ireland with community media hubs demonstration.

Once again, we thank you for this opportunity to update you on our proposals for the future funding and governance of the providers of public service content in Ireland and we remind you that as a sector, community radio is already regulated by both CnaM and the Charities Regulator. Consequently, we have a sound track record in compliance and good governance for nearly thirty years and we look forward to continuing to serve communities professionally and as volunteers.

²² For more information on tax on Streaming in Denmark see:
<https://globaltaxnews.ey.com/news/2023-1060-denmark-proposes-cultural-levy-on-providers-of-on-demand-streaming-services>