

# **Aighneacht faoi na meáin Ghaeilge chuig an gCoimisiún um Thodhchaí na Meán**

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## **Réamhrá**

Tá sé d'aidhm ag an reachtaíocht chraolacháin atá i bhfeidhm le blianta fada áit agus spás a chruthú don Ghaeilge i dtírdhreach na meán cumarsáide in Éirinn. Leagtar na príomhdhualgais ar na craoltóirí seirbhíse poiblí RTÉ agus TG4 agus tá sainseirbhísí poiblí raidió agus teilifíse ann a chraolann i nGaeilge amháin nó den chuid is mó. Chomh maith leis sin, tá forálacha eile san Acht Craolacháin 2009 a bhfuil sé d'aidhm acu a chinntiú go gcuirfear méid áirithe Gaeilge san áireamh ar gach seirbhís chraolta sa tír a fhaigheann ceadúnas. Léiríonn taighde atá déanta agamsa agus an Dr Rosemary Day, Ollscoil Luimnigh, áfach, go bhfuil an teanga an-imeallach i ngnáthmheáin chumarsáide na tíre, taobh amuigh de na craoltóirí Gaeilge RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, Raidió na Life agus TG4. Tá sé sin amhlaidh in ainneoin na bhforálacha in achtanna éagsúla craolacháin le 30 bliain anuas a raibh sé d'aidhm acu a chinntiú nach ndéanfaí dearmad iomlán ar an nGaeilge ar gháthsheirbhísí Béarla na hÉireann.

Tá cothú na héagsúlachta agus an iolrachais, le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge mar chuid de, ar cheann d'aidhmeanna straitéiseacha Údarás Craolacháin na hÉireann ach léiríonn ár dtaighde nach bhfuiltear á chur seo i gcrích sna meáin chraolta. San aighneacht seo, leagfaidh mé amach an chreat reachtúil agus rialála i dtaca leis an nGaeilge sna meáin atá i bhfeidhm faoi láthair agus pléifidh mé an taighde atá déanta agamsa agus ag Rosemary Day faoin gceist seo in earnáil an raidió. Pléifear chomh maith an taighde eile atá ar siúl againn faoi Raidió na Life agus déanfar moltaí maidir le treisiú na Gaeilge sna meáin chumarsáide amach anseo.

Ag teacht lenár dtaighde go dtí seo, cuirfear béim láidir ar sheirbhísí raidió/fuaime san aighneacht ach aithním nach féidir labhairt ar aon mheán chumarsáide ina aonar níos mó in aois seo na coinbhéirseachta. Tá mórathruithe ag teacht mar thoradh ar an Treoir um Sheirbhísí Meán Ciosamhairc de chuid an Aontais Eorpaigh agus tá sé i gceist go ngearrfar táille ar sheirbhísí sruthaithe idirnáisiúnta chun íoc as ábhar ciosamhairc Éireannach ar ardchaighdeán. Tá sé riachtanach go mbeidh áit lárnach ag an nGaeilge sa chomhthéacs claochlaithe sin atá amach romhainn.

## **Creat reachtúil**

Tá an tÚdarás Craolacháin agus a réamhtheachta, an Coimisiún um Raidió agus Teilifís Neamhspleách, ag feidhmiú faoi achtanna éagsúla craolacháin ó 1988. Is é an tAcht Craolacháin 2009 an reachtaíocht uileghabhálach is mó a bhaineann le hábhar faoi láthair. Cuimsítear san Acht sin forálacha sonracha faoin nGaeilge a bhaineann le dualgais an Údaráis féin agus le dualgais na gcráoltóirí. Leagtar na ceanglais is suntasaí ar na craoltóirí poiblí (RTÉ agus TG4) ach tá an Ghaeilge i measc na gcritéar a ndéanfar measúnú orthu nuair a bheifear ag measúnú iarratais ar cheadúnas do sheirbhís raidió neamhspleách.

Tá comhdhéanamh an Údaráis Craolacháin féin, na coistí reachtúla a thagann faoina scáth agus a chuid cuspóirí clúdaithe in Ailt a 9 agus a 25 den Acht (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009). In Alt 9 (1), tá forbairt na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta i measc na réimsí saineolais a mbítear ag súil leo ó chomhaltaí an Údaráis agus na gcoistí reachtúla. In Alt 25 (2) (h) faoi chuspóirí an Údaráis, scríobhtar go ndéanfaidh an tÚdarás agus na coistí ‘forbairt clár agus seirbhísí craolacháin Gaeilge a chur chun cinn agus a spreagadh’. Faoi alt 154 (1) den Acht, cuirfidh an tÚdarás scéim faoi bhráid an Aire chun tacú le cláracha i réimsí éagsúla lena n-áirítear an Ghaeilge. ‘Fís agus Fuaim’ a thugtar ar an scéim sin. Dar le hAlt 155 (1), cuimsíonn cuspóirí na scéime ‘clár ardchaighdeán a fhorbairt a bheith bunaithe ar chultúr, oidhreacht agus taithí na hÉireann’ agus beidh cláracha Gaeilge san áireamh ansin. Faoi Alt 156 (2), foráiltear go n-íocfar 7 faoin gcéad de ghlanfháltais i leith táillí ceadúnais teilifíse tríd an scéim sin agus go ndéanfaidh an tÚdarás forbairt agus bainistiú uirthi.

Pléitear na craoltóirí neamhspleácha in Ailt 66, 67 agus 69. Baineann Alt 66 le ról na Gaeilge sa phróiseas chun ceadúnais a bhronnadh ar sheirbhísí raidió. Cuirtear in iúl in Alt 66 (2) (d) go mbeidh ‘aird’ ag an gCoiste um Dheonú Conarthaí ar ‘líon, cáilíocht, réimse agus cineál na gclár Gaeilge agus méid na gclár a bhaineann le cultúr na hÉireann a bheartaítear a sholáthar’ nuair a bheidh cinneadh á dhéanamh aige faoi cheadúnas. Cuirtear in iúl in Alt 66 (3) go mbeidh ‘aird ar leith aige ar bhuanú agus cur chun cinn na Gaeilge mar theanga labhartha’ nuair a bheidh cinneadh á dhéanamh aige faoi cheadúnas i gcás ceantair a bhfuil limistéar Gaeltachta san áireamh ann.

Déantar plé ar leith san Acht ar chraoltóirí seirbhíse poiblí na hÉireann, RTÉ agus TG4. In Alt 82 (1), tá ‘nithe a bhaineann le forbairt na Gaeilge’ agus ‘gnóthaí sóisialta, oideachais nó pobail nó gnóthaí Gaeltachta’ i measc na réimsí saineolais a mbeifear ag súil leo nuair a bheidh comhalta bhord RTÉ á gceapadh. In Alt 102 (2) (b) cuirtear in iúl go bpléifear an

Ghaeilge, i measc ceisteanna eile, i ráiteas bliantúil RTÉ ‘i dtaobh gealltanais feidhmíochta’. Leagann an tAcht dualgais shuntasacha i dtaobh cláracha Gaeilge ar RTÉ. Faoi Alt 114 (2) (a) scríobhtar go léireoidh RTÉ cultúr uile na hÉireann agus go mbeidh ‘aird ar leith aige ar na hairíonna a shainíonn an cultúr sin agus go háirithe ar an nGaeilge’. Faoi Alt 114 (3), cuirtear in iúl go gcrálfadh RTÉ réimse leathan cláracha i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla, nuacht agus cúrsaí reatha san áireamh (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009).

Cé nach mbaineann sé go sonrach leis cúrsaí na meán, tá impleachtaí ag Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 don cheist seo chomh maith. Ritheadh an t-acht sin mar thoradh ar an *Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030* agus bhí sé mar aidhm aige tús a chur le ‘próiseas pleanála teanga’ sa Gaeltacht agus i mbailte eile ar fud na tíre chun cur le labhairt na Gaeilge sna ceantair sin (Rialtas na hÉireann, 2010). Faoi Acht, caithfidh ceantair áirithe pleananna teanga a chur le chéile ina mbeadh spriocanna maidir le neartú na Gaeilge (Oireachtas Éireann, 2012). Is féidir úsáid a bhaint as na meán chumarsáide (go háirithe an raidió/podchraoltaí áitiúla) chun tacú leis an bpleanáil teanga sin.

### **Creat rialála**

Clúdaíonn an *Ráiteas Straitéise* is déanaí ón Údarás Craolacháin an tréimhse 2017-2019. San áireamh ann tá cuspóir chun cláracha ardchaighdeán i nGaeilge a chothú agus a chur chun cinn. D’fhoilsigh an tÚdarás *Plean Gníomhaíochta don Ghaeilge* in 2019 agus deirtear ann go bhfuil ról sonrach aige i gcur chun cinn ábhair Ghaeilge sa tírdhreach meán trí chéile. Chun é sin a bhaint amach, luaitear cúig chuspóir sa plean, ina measc cothú cláracha/stáisiún Gaeilge trí thionscnaimh éagsúla, comhpháirtíochtaí Gaeilge a chur chun cinn, taighde a fhoilsiú, eolas a bhailiú agus monatóireacht a fheabhsú (ÚCÉ, 2019: 3). Faoi bPlean sin, bunaíodh Coiste Comhairleach Gaeilge ar a bhfuil ionadaithe ó chraoltóirí, léiritheoirí, Foras na Gaeilge, eagraíochtaí Gaeilge agus an tÚdarás féin.

Sa *Straitéis um Sheirbhísí Craolacháin* a foilsíodh in 2018, fógraítear gurb é seo ceann de chuspóirí an Údaráis: ‘Cláir Ghaeilge d’ardchaighdeán a chothú agus a chur chun cinn agus forbairt tionscnaimh Ghaeilge a spreagadh ar fud na hearnála craolacháin’ (ÚCÉ, 2018: 14). Deir an tÚdarás chomh maith go bhfuil sé ‘sásta cineálacha eile seirbhísí, seirbhísí nideoige raidió agus seirbhísí trí mheán na Gaeilge ina measc ... a iniúchadh’ (ibid: 5 15) agus go gcuirfidh a chuid pleananna ceadúnúcháin le héagsúlacht agus le hiolrachas, ábhar trí Ghaeilge san áireamh (ibid: 16).

Le blianta fada, tugann an tÚdarás treoir ghinearálta faoi chláracha Gaeilge do stáisiúin agus iad i mbun iarratais ar cheadúnas. Iarrtar ar iarrthóirí ar cheadúnais phobail nó tráchtála ráiteas a dhéanamh faoi líon agus cineál na gcláracha a chraolfaidh siad i nGaeilge nó go dátheangach ach ní thugtar aon treoir chinnte faoi íosmhéid uaireanta an chloig, rud a fhágann go bhfuil éagsúlacht an-mhór sa soláthar Gaeilge ar stáisiúin éagsúla.

Sa Bhille nua um Shábháilteacht Ar Líne agus Rialáil na Méan a foilsíodh roimh Nollaig 2020, moltar go scorfaí an tÚdarás agus go gcuirfí Coimisiún nua ina áit. Beidh impleachtaí aige seo do go leor gnéithe d’obair an Údaráis, craoltóireacht na Gaeilge ina measc (An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus na Meán, 2020).

Mar chraoltóir seirbhíse poiblí, tá dualgais reachtúla ar RTÉ i leith na Gaeilge le fada an lá agus, ar aon dul leis na craoltóirí neamhspleácha, déanann an tÚdarás Craolacháin rialáil orthu faoi théarmaí an Achta Craolacháin 2009. In 2015, d’fhoilsigh RTÉ plean cúig bliana, *Meáin Ghaeilge RTÉ*, chun cur lena aschur Gaeilge. Baineann an chéad aidhm sa phlean le leathnú na Gaeilge trí sheirbhísí uile an chraoltóra:

Cuirfear leis an méid Gaeilge a chloistear ar an raidió, beidh níos mó cláracha Gaeilge agus ábhar dátheangach ar RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ 2fm agus RTÉ lyric fm. Cuirfidh RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta béim faoi leith ar an lucht éisteachta a fhairsingiú trí uilechuimsitheacht agus ábharthacht a chinntiú de réir mar a thagann athrú ar nósanna éisteachta raidió (RTÉ, 2015: 4).

Déantar cur síos ar aidhmeanna sonracha faoi fhorbairt na Gaeilge ar na seirbhísí raidió uile sa phlean agus chomh maith leis sin, geallann RTÉ go ndéanfaidh sé forbairt ar sheirbhís nua raidió don óige (RTÉ, 2015: 10). Ní dhearnadh aon dul chun cinn ar an gceist sin ó shin.

### **Taighde ar úsáid na Gaeilge ar an raidió**

Go dtí seo (Eanáir 2021), foilsíodh dhá chéim den taighde a rinne mé féin agus an Dr Rosemary Day ar úsáid na Gaeilge ar stáisiúin raidió nach stáisiúin Ghaeilge iad, i.e. seachas RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta agus Raidió na Life. I gcéimeanna 1 agus 2 den taighde a foilsíodh, rinneadh anailís ar sceidil stáisiún mar a fógraíodh ar a suíomhanna idirlín, de réir na gcatagóirí seo a leanas:

- a) Cineál stáisiúin;
- b) Uaireanta agus nóiméid i nGaeilge gach seachtain;
- c) Teideal an chláir;
- d) Úsáid teanga (Gaeilge nó dátheangach);
- e) Am craolta;
- f) Eolas breise, i.e. an bunábhar atá ann nó cláracha roinnte;

g) Aschur iomlán.

Rinneadh teagmháil leis na stáisiúin ansin agus iarradh orthu an anailís ar na sceidil a dhearbhu. Tugadh ualú 1.0 do chláracha a bhí i nGaeilge ar fad agus ualú 0.5 do chlár má dúirt stáisiún gur chlár dátheangach é. Fuarthas amach i gCéim 2 gurb ionann na cláracha Gaeilge nó dátheangacha agus 03:12 uair in aghaidh na seachtaine ar an mean, athchraoltaí san áireamh. I gcás na stáisiún a chraolann 24 uaire an chloig in aghaidh an lae (an chuid is mó acu), is ionann é seo agus timpeall 2 faoin gcéad den aschur iomlán, céatadán an-íseal ar fad. Ní raibh na torthaí mórán níos fearr i gcás stáisiún a bhfuil limistéar Gaeltachta ina gceantar feidhme, in ainneoin na bhforálacha breise san Acht Craolacháin faoi sin. Bhí aschur íseal ar stáisiúin RTÉ (seachas Raidió na Gaeltachta) chomh maith agus ba mhinic é faoi bhun na n-uaireanta a chraolann stáisiúin tráchtála nó phobail. Bhí éagsúlacht mhór sna figiúirí ó líon réasúnta ard uaireanta ar roinnt stáisiún go dtí fíorbheagán ar stáisiúin eile (Walsh, Day & Fogarty, 2018). Tá torthaí iomlána an taighde ar fáil ag: <https://audioresearchcentre.wordpress.com/research/>. Foilseofar Céim 3 in 2021.

### **Taighde ar Raidió na Life**

Tá taighde déanta agamsa agus ag an Dr Day ar an stáisiún lán-Ghaeilge Raidió na Life chomh maith. Rinneamar scagadh ar thuiscint rannpháirtithe ar aidhmeanna an stáisiúin agus ar na spreagthaí a bhí ag na saorálaithe le páirt a ghlacadh sa raidió pobail in aois seo na meán sóisialta. Bunaíodh Raidió na Life in 1993 chun seirbhís raidió a sholáthar don phobal labhartha Gaeilge i mBaile Átha Cliath, comhthéacs teangeolaíoch ina bhfuil an Béarla chun tosaigh. Bhí sé d'aidhm ag an stáisiún spiorad pobail a chothú i measc na ndaoine sin agus tuilleadh misnigh a thabhairt dóibh as a dteanga féin. Trí ghrúpaí fócais leis na craoltóirí deonacha, rinneamar scrúdú ar spreagthaí a bhí acu agus ar a dtuiscint ar aidhmeanna Raidió na Life. Ba léir go raibh an stáisiún thar a bheith tábhachtach dóibh mar mhol sóisialta agus lárphointe teagmhála eatarthu féin agus lena lucht éisteachta a raibh caidreamh láidir acu leis. Ní raibh tuiscint an-domhain acu ar aidhmeanna bunaidh an stáisiúin agus níor fhéach siad orthu féin mar ghíomhaithe Gaeilge, ach ní raibh amhras ar bith orainn ach gur éirigh leo líonraí sóisialta, cultúrtha agus teanga a thógáil trí chraoltóireacht agus trí úsáid na meán sóisialta ar a gcuid cláracha. Bhain siad an-taitneamh as an rannpháirtíocht shóisialta sin agus spreagadh iad le leanúint ar aghaidh mar chraoltóirí deonacha. Dar linne, ba fhianaise é sin ar rath Raidió na Life tar éis dóibh 27 mbliana a chaitheamh ar an aer agus go raibh aidhmeanna an stáisiúin á gcur i gcrích go hindíreach ag na craoltóirí (Day & Walsh, 2020).

## Moltaí

Bunaithe ar an taighde thuas, ba mhaith liom na moltaí seo a leanas a dhéanamh maidir le neartú chraoltóireacht na Gaeilge amach anseo. Measaim go bhfuil a leithéid de dhíth má tá an ghné riachtanach seo den éagsúlacht agus den iolrachas le cosaint i dtírdhreach na meán cumarsáide in Éirinn amach anseo:

1. Is gá Straitéis do na Meáin Dhigiteacha Ghaeilge a fhorbairt chun an earnáil seo a fhorbairt go córasach amach anseo. Ba cheart go dtitfeadh an cúram sin ar Fhoras na Gaeilge i gcomhair le heagraíochtaí Gaeilge, le craoltóirí, leis na meáin dhigiteacha agus leis an Údarás Craolacháin/Coimisiún nua.
2. Is gá na forálacha san Acht Craolacháin 2009 faoin nGaeilge agus an earnáil raidió agus teilifíse neamhspleách a leasú ionas go mbeidh níos mó den teanga le clos agus le feiceáil ar mheáin chumarsáide na hÉireann. San áireamh anseo tá an earnáil phobail, an earnáil tráchtála agus RTÉ. Ba cheart go mbeadh ar gach craoltóir a fhaigheann ceadúnas ar a laghad bunchlár Gaeilge amháin dá chuid féin a chraoladh/a scaipeadh go ditigeach.
3. Ba cheart don Údarás Craolacháin/Coimisiún comhpháirtíochtaí a fhorbairt le hinstiúidí oideachais (dara agus tríú leibhéal, le béim ar leith ar Ghaelscoileanna/scoileanna Gaeltachta) agus le heagraíochtaí Gaeilge chun oiliúint i scileanna sna meáin a fhorbairt trí mheán na Gaeilge. Mar chuid de sin, ba cheart inniúlacht ar na meáin a chothú trí Ghaeilge, ag tógáil ar obair Media Literacy Ireland.
4. Ba cheart mol digiteach do na meáin Ghaeilge a chruthú mar lárphointe teagmhála ina bhféadfaí ábhar ardchaighdeán meáin i nGaeilge a chruthú agus a scaipeadh. D'fhéadfaí Raidió na Life a fhorbairt ar an mbealach seo, rud a láidreodh tábhacht na seirbhíse sin i dtírdhreach na meán cumarsáide Gaeilge in Éirinn. Tríd an *Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge*, d'fhéadfaí moil dhigiteacha eile a chruthú don Ghaeilge in áiteanna ina bhfuil an phleanáil teanga ar siúl.
5. Ba cheart na moil dhigiteacha sin a mhaoiniú trí bhuiséad na pleanála teanga sa Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúr, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus na Meán agus tríd an tobhach ar ollchomhlachtaí idirnáisiúnta cumarsáide atá molta sa Bhille nua um Shábháilteacht ar Líne agus Rialáil na Meán 2020.

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**6 Eanáir 2021**

# **Submission on the Irish language media to the Future of Media Commission**

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## **Introduction**

The broadcasting legislation in force for many years aims to create a place and space for the Irish language in the media landscape in Ireland. The main duties are imposed on the public service broadcasters RTÉ and TG4 and there are specialist public radio and television services which broadcast in Irish only or mainly in Irish. In addition, the Broadcasting Act 2009 contains other provisions which aim to ensure that a certain amount of Irish is included on all broadcast services in the country which obtain a licence. However, research carried out by myself and Dr Rosemary Day, University of Limerick, shows that the language is very marginalised in the country's mainstream media, outside of the Irish language broadcasters RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, Raidió na Life and TG4. This is despite the provisions of various broadcasting acts over the past 30 years which have aimed to ensure that the Irish language is not completely forgotten on the normal English language services of Ireland.

Promoting diversity and pluralism, including the promotion of the Irish language, is one of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's strategic aims but our research shows that this is not being achieved in the broadcast media. In this submission, I will set out the legislative and regulatory framework for the Irish language in the media currently in place and discuss the research that Rosemary Day and I have done on this issue in the radio sector. The other research we are carrying out on Raidió na Life will also be discussed and recommendations will be made regarding the strengthening of the Irish language in the media in the future.

In line with our research to date, the submission will place a strong emphasis on radio/audio services, but I recognise that in this age of convergence it is no longer possible to speak of any communication medium individually. The European Union Audio-visual Media Services Directive is introducing major changes and it is intended that international streaming services will be charged for high quality Irish audio-visual content. It is essential that the Irish language has a central place in that future transformational context.

## **Statutory framework**

The Broadcasting Authority and its predecessor, the Independent Radio and Television Commission, have been operating under various broadcasting acts since 1988. The Broadcasting Act 2009 is currently the most comprehensive and relevant legislation. That Act contains specific provisions about the Irish language which relate to the duties of the Authority itself and to the duties of the broadcasters. The most significant requirements are imposed on public service broadcasters (RTÉ and TG4) but the Irish language is one of the criteria to be assessed when assessing applications for a license for an independent radio service.

Sections 9 and 25 of the Act (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009) cover the composition of the Broadcasting Authority itself, the statutory committees under its aegis and its objectives. In Section 9 (1), the development of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht is among the areas of expertise expected of the members of the Authority and the statutory committees. Section 25 (2) (h) on the Authority's objectives states that the Authority and the committees shall 'promote and encourage the development of Irish language broadcasting programs and services'. Under section 154 (1) of the Act, the Authority will submit a scheme to the Minister to support programs in various areas including the Irish language. This scheme is called 'Vision and Sound'. According to Section 155 (1) of the Act, the objectives of the scheme include 'the development of high-quality programs based on Irish culture, heritage and experience' and will include Irish language programming. Section 156 (2) provides for 7 per cent of net television licence fee receipts to be paid through that scheme and will be developed and managed by the Authority.

The independent broadcasters are discussed in Sections 66, 67 and 69. Section 66 deals with the role of the Irish language in the process of granting licenses for radio services. Section 66 (2) (d) states that the Contract Awards Committee will have 'regard' for 'the number, quality, range and type of Irish language programs and the volume of programs relating to Irish culture proposed to be provided' when deciding on a licence. Section 66 states (3) that it will 'pay particular attention to the preservation and promotion of Irish as a spoken language' when deciding on a licence for an area which includes a Gaeltacht area.

The Act deals specifically with Irish public service broadcasters, RTÉ and TG4. In Section 82 (1), 'matters relating to the development of the Irish language' and 'social, educational or community or Gaeltacht affairs' are among the areas of expertise that will be expected when an RTÉ board member is appointed. Section 102 (2) (b) indicates that the Irish language will

be discussed among other issues, in RTÉ's annual statement 'on performance commitments'. The Act imposes significant obligations on Irish language programming on RTÉ. Under Section 114 (2) (a) it is written that RTÉ will reflect the whole of Irish culture and will 'pay particular attention to the defining characteristics of that culture and in particular to the Irish language'. Section 114 (3) states that RTÉ will broadcast a wide range of programs in Irish and English, including news and current affairs (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009).

Although not specifically related to the media, the Gaeltacht Act 2012 also has implications for this issue. That act was passed as a result of the *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and aimed to initiate a 'language planning process' in the Gaeltacht and other towns throughout the country to increase the use of Irish in those areas (Government of Ireland, 2010). Under the Act, certain areas are required to compile language plans which include targets for the strengthening of the Irish language (Oireachtas Éireann, 2012). The media (especially local radio/podcasts) can be used to support this language planning.

### **Regulatory framework**

The latest *Strategy Statement* from the Broadcasting Authority covers the period 2017-2019. It includes an objective to foster and promote high quality programming in Irish. The Authority published the *Action Plan for the Irish Language* in 2019 and it states that it has a specific role to play in the promotion of Irish language content in the media landscape as a whole.

To achieve this, the plan states five objectives, including the promotion of Irish language programs/stations through various initiatives, promoting Irish language partnerships, publishing research, gathering information and improving monitoring (BIA, 2019: 3). Under that Plan, an Irish Language Advisory Committee was established comprising representatives from broadcasters, producers, Foras na Gaeilge, Irish language organisations and the Authority itself.

In the *Broadcasting Services Strategy* published in 2018, it was announced that one of the Authority's objectives is to: 'Foster and promote high quality Irish language programming and encourage the development of Irish language initiatives across the broadcasting sector' (BIA, 2018: 14). The Authority also states that it is 'willing to explore other types of services, including niche radio services and services through the medium of Irish ...' (ibid: 5 15) and that its licensing plans contribute to diversity and pluralism, including content through Irish (ibid: 16).

For many years, the Authority has provided general guidance on Irish language programming for stations when applying for a licence. Applicants for community or commercial licences are asked to comment on the number and type of programs they will broadcast in Irish or bilingually, but no definitive guidance is given on minimum hours, which means that the Irish language provision varies greatly on various stations.

The new Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill published before Christmas 2020 recommends the dissolution of the Authority and its replacement by a new Commission. This will have implications for many aspects of the Authority's work, including Irish language broadcasting (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2020).

As a public service broadcaster, RTÉ has long had statutory obligations in relation to the Irish language and, in common with the independent broadcasters, is regulated by the Broadcasting Authority under the terms of the Broadcasting Act 2009. In 2015, RTÉ published a five-year plan, *RTÉ Irish Language Media*, to increase its Irish language output. The first aim of the plan is to expand the Irish language through all the broadcaster's services:

The amount of Irish heard on the radio will be increased, there will be more Irish language programming and bilingual content on RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ 2fm and RTÉ lyric fm. RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta will place particular emphasis on broadening the audience by ensuring inclusion and relevance as radio listening habits change (RTÉ, 2015: 4).

The plan outlines specific aims for the development of the Irish language on all radio services and in addition, RTÉ undertakes to develop a new youth radio service (RTÉ, 2015: 10). No progress has been made on that issue since then.

### **Research on the use of the Irish language on radio**

To date (January 2021), two phases of research conducted by myself and Dr Rosemary Day have been published on the use of the Irish language on non-Irish language radio stations, i.e. those other than RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta and Raidió na Life. In phases 1 and 2 of the published research, station schedules were analysed as advertised on their websites, according to the following categories:

- a) Station type;
- b) Hours and minutes in the Irish language each week;
- c) Title of program;

- d) Language use (the Irish language or bilingual);
- e) Broadcast time;
- f) Additional information, i.e. existing source material or shared programs;
- g) Total output.

The stations were then contacted and asked to confirm the analysis of the schedules. Programs that were entirely in Irish were given a weighting of 1.0 and 0.5 for a program if a station said it was a bilingual program. It was found in Phase 2 that the Irish or bilingual programs were equivalent to 03:12 hours per week on average, including repeats. For stations which broadcast 24 hours a day (most of them), this equates to approximately 2 percent of total output, a very low percentage over all. The results were not much better for stations with a Gaeltacht area in their functional area, despite the additional provisions in the Broadcasting Act for that. RTÉ stations (excluding Raidió na Gaeltachta) also had low output and were often below the hours broadcast by commercial or community stations. Figures varied widely from sometimes relatively high numbers on some stations to very few on others (Walsh, Day & Fogarty, 2018). The full results of the research are available at: <https://audioresearchcentre.wordpress.com/research/>. Phase 3 will be published in 2021.

### **Research on Raidió na Life**

Dr Day and I have also researched the all-Irish station Raidió na Life. We screened participants' understanding of the station's aims and the volunteers' motivations for participating in community radio in this age of social media. Raidió na Life was established in 1993 to provide a radio service to the Irish-speaking community in Dublin, a linguistic context in which English dominates. The station aimed to instil a spirit of community among these people and to give them more courage in the use of their own language. Through focus groups with the volunteer broadcasters, we examined their motivations and their understanding of the aims of Raidió na Life. It was clear that the station was extremely important to them as a social hub and a focal point between themselves and its listeners with whom they had a strong relationship. They did not have a very deep understanding of the station's original aims and did not see themselves as Irish language activists, but we had no doubt that they succeeded in building social, cultural and linguistic networks through broadcasting and the use of social media on their programs. They really enjoyed the social involvement and were encouraged to continue as volunteer broadcasters. In our view, this was a testament to the success of Raidió na Life after 27 years on air and the indirect achievement of the station's aims by the broadcasters (Day & Walsh, 2020).

## Recommendations

Based on the above research, I would like to make the following recommendations for the future strengthening of Irish language broadcasting. I believe that this is necessary if this essential element of diversity and plurality is to be protected in the media landscape of Ireland in the future:

1. It is necessary to develop a Strategy for Irish Language Digital Media in order to develop this sector systematically in the future. This should fall to Foras na Gaeilge in conjunction with Irish language organisations, broadcasters, digital media and the Broadcasting Authority/new Broadcasting Commission.
2. The provisions of the Broadcasting Act 2009 on the Irish language and the independent radio and television sector need to be amended so that more of the language is heard and seen in the Irish media. These include the community sector, the commercial sector and RTÉ. Every licensed broadcaster should be required to broadcast/digitally distribute one of its own original Irish language programs.
3. The Broadcasting Authority/Commission should develop partnerships with educational institutions (second and third level, with particular emphasis on Gaelscoileanna/Gaeltacht schools) and with Irish language organisations to develop media skills training in the Irish language. As part of this, media competence should be fostered through Irish, building on the work of Media Literacy Ireland.
4. A digital hub for Irish language media should be created as a central point of contact where high-quality Irish language media content can be created and distributed. Raidió na Life could be developed in this way, which would strengthen the importance of that service in the Irish language media landscape in Ireland. Through the *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language*, other digital hubs could be created for the Irish language in areas where language planning is taking place.
5. These digital hubs should be funded through the language planning budget of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and the Media and through the levy on major international communications companies proposed in the new Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2020.

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**6 January 2021**