



Submission to the

Future of Media Commission

by the

Students and staff of the

journalism degree programmes

in the School of Communications,

Dublin City University

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Section 1

Introduction

This submission to the Irish Government's Future of Media Commission is the outcome of a collaboration between the staff and students on the two journalism degree programmes at the School of Communications at Dublin City University. Undergraduate and postgraduate students partnered with academic staff to examine a number of thematic areas related to the media sector. The selection of the thematic areas was informed by the interests of the students, as well as by the research expertise of the academic staff.

Both students and staff believe it is appropriate for DCU, as the foremost institution of journalism education in the State, to contribute to the debate about the future of the media sector in Ireland. We also believe it is appropriate - indeed, vital - that DCU's journalism students, who will form the next generation of journalism practitioners, have their voices heard.

1.1 Context of DCU's submission

In September, 2020, the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, announced the establishment of a Commission on the future of the media in Ireland. The Commission's terms of reference require it to examine the challenges faced by media organisations and practitioners, including challenges around funding sources, new technology, and audience behaviour.

Between January and April, 2021, the Commission presented six online "thematic dialogues", featuring invited industry, activist, and industry speakers, to examine different aspects of the challenges facing the sector. There was a welcome diversity in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity among the various panel members. It is fair to say that there was an emphasis on public service media, and how it should be funded, and a relative neglect of commercial and print media, in the thematic dialogues.

The Future of Media Commission is carrying out its work in parallel with preparations for a new Media Commission, which is expected to be established as a new media regulatory body, incorporating and extending functions now exercised by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

The establishment of the Future of Media Commission was initially focused on the question of how to address the funding challenges faced by Public Service Media institutions (despite the fact that this question had been recently explored in some depth by the Oireachtas Communications Committee). The expansion of the remit to consider the challenges faced by all media, public and private, legacy and online acknowledges that some of the long-held underlying assumptions regarding the relation between funding models, the diversity and pluralism of voices and outlets, and editorial independence may no longer hold.

1.2 Submissions by other media organisations

The Commission has received 101 submissions (excluding this one), many of them from media organisations and bodies, including the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the National Union of Journalists, the Irish Times Ltd, DMG (publishers of the Irish Daily Mail), Newsbrands Ireland (a representative group of national print newspaper publishers), Local Ireland (a group representing local news outlets), and various magazines and other media bodies. Submissions were also received from political parties, movie and TV producers, religious organisations, and individuals.

The submissions from media companies focused on three broad areas: the dominance of the advertising market by tech companies Facebook and Google; the imposition of VAT on newspaper sales, and the perceived unfairness of the defamation law in Ireland. Many media submissions emphasised the value of a vibrant, sustainable, and diverse media sector to the proper functioning of a healthy democracy and society, while arguing that diminishing advertising and circulation revenues were imperilling the sector, while increasing the precarity of those employed in it. Submissions typically focussed on problems currently experienced by the media sector and proposed actions to address them. Less attention was given to the long-term sustainability of journalism and the need for innovation in a media market that is subject to rapid technological change.

1.3 Summary of DCU's submission

In addition to the executive summary which follows this section, it is intended to provide here a brief outline of the contents of our submission.

- In **section 3**, we provide a brief history of DCU's contribution to journalism education, journalism research, journalism history, and the contribution of DCU alumni to the media sector in Ireland and internationally.
- In **section 4**, we examine the roles journalism, and individual journalists, are expected to play in society. We consider the watchdog role, the public accountability role, among others, and argue that journalism plays a key role in amplifying marginalised voices, and in holding the powerful to account. We also argue that today's DCU students have particular skills and experiences that make them particularly suited to navigating the digital and platformised media environment.
- In **section 5**, we assess the Irish media in terms of its accommodation of diversity in social class, gender, and ethnicity, and argue that an increased emphasis on diversity is necessary to produce a media sector that is respectful and representative of difference.
- In **section 6**, we examine the concept of sustainability as it relates to the media sector, arguing that economic resilience is a key element of sustainability, and that the media need to do more to cover sustainability-related topics.
- In **section 7**, we present a broad survey of how other countries fund and support public service journalism, and local journalism as well.

1.4 Authorship of DCU submission

This submission was written by a collaborative team of journalism students and academics in the School of Communications at DCU led by Dr Dave Robbins, and comprising: Dr Dawn Wheatley, Prof Colleen Murrell, Dr Declan Fahy, Dr Eileen Culloty, Dr Roderick Flynn, Paul McNamara (academic staff), Aoibhín Meghan, David Wilson, Jamie McCarron, Sam Starkey, David O'Sullivan, Kinga Piotrowska, Patrick O'Donoghue, Emma Kilcawley, Sadhbh Cox, Thomas Hamilton, and Alex Doyle (journalism students).

Section 2

Executive summary

- DCU has a long history of journalism education in Ireland going back almost 40 years
- The university's journalism students and staff have an important contribution to make to the debate over the future of the Irish media sector
- A sustainable media sector is important for the proper functioning of a healthy democracy and society
- Good journalism can uncover wrong-doing, and give a voice to marginalised sections of society
- But the media sector is under threat from advertising revenue lost to Facebook and Google, and from declining circulation revenues, and employment in the sector is increasingly poorly paid and precarious
- Ensuring the financial viability of the media must be a priority for government
- The current cohort of journalism students is well placed to create innovative journalism content that can attract new audiences on new apps and platforms
- Irish media have a diversity problem, in terms of gender, social class, and ethnicity. There is also an over-reliance on a narrow range of sources in news coverage
- Funding support for the media could be made contingent on increased diversity in newsrooms, and on increasing the range of sources quoted in news content
- There are plentiful examples of media funding models from around the world, both in terms of support for public service journalism, and for local and regional journalism
- Ireland needs to devise a creative taxation policy to ensure that tech companies pay content creators for their work
- To fund public service broadcasting, the licence fee could be paid in monthly installments, or paid alongside electricity bills
- Ireland could follow the example of Australia, in giving short-term grants to local and regional media (particularly Irish-language media), or implement longer-term subsidies to the media, as in the French example.
- Ireland could introduce tax deductible news subscriptions as in France and boost its media literacy initiatives, as in Australia.
- Ireland could extend charitable status to struggling local news outlets, as is being considered in Britain. It can also subsidise office spaces for these organisations.
- This will all contribute to a diverse media landscape building on the role of public interest media.

Section 3

Journalism Education at Dublin City University

Authors: Dr Declan Fahy, programme chair, BA in Journalism, and Paul McNamara, programme chair, MA in Journalism

3.1 History of journalism education at NIHE & DCU

Dublin City University was the first third level institution in Ireland to offer degrees in journalism at graduate (MA) level and at undergraduate (BA) level. The former programme has been running for almost 40 years and the latter for almost 30 years. The institution has offered professional journalism education from its origins as Dublin's National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE), founded in 1980, which enrolled its first students in its Graduate Diploma in Journalism in 1982. When NIHE was awarded university status in 1989, it changed its name to DCU and expanded its journalism offerings. The postgraduate diploma was upgraded to a MA in Journalism in 1990. The postgraduate degree is a conversion programme, which provides education and training primarily for students with a degree in any discipline other than journalism who want to pursue a career in the profession. In 1992, the university created a BA in Journalism, an honours degree that allows undergraduate students not only to acquire a wide range of vocational and technical skills, but also offers modules giving them substantial knowledge and expertise in the theoretical and critical aspects of journalism and communications. The MA is a full-time one-year degree. The BA is a three-year full-time degree. The postgraduate and undergraduate degrees are housed in The School of Communications, which is embedded in the larger Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. As well as engaging in journalism education, faculty and students (up to doctoral level in the school) conduct critical research into the history, practices, roles, and impacts of journalism on culture and society. The School has the country's only Chair in Journalism. The QS World University Rankings for 2021 showed that DCU maintained its position as Ireland's top university for Communication and Media Studies – and ranked it among the top 150 universities in the world in that subject area.

3.2 Role of DCU journalism alumni

As a consequence of its long history of professional journalism education, DCU has seen its graduates working in Ireland's leading media organisations including RTÉ, The Irish Times, The Irish Independent, Virgin Media Television, Newstalk, The Journal.ie, The Herald, The Irish Daily Mail, The Irish Daily Mail on Sunday, The Irish Sun, The Irish Mirror, and The Times Ireland and The Sunday Times Ireland. Graduates have also worked in senior editorial positions in new media organisations including The Currency and Storyful. Moreover, DCU has graduates working in many of the most senior positions in Irish journalism and in news organisations around the world. A sample includes editor of The Irish Independent; the group head of news at Independent News and Media; editor at The Herald;

deputy editor at The Journal.ie; head of news and sport at Virgin Media Television; news editor with The Sunday Times Ireland; the Berlin, Beijing, Brussels, and Africa correspondents of The Irish Times; health editor of The Irish Times; environment and science editor of The Irish Times; Washington correspondent of RTÉ; presenter on RTÉ's "Six One" news; presenter on RTÉ's "Prime Time"; multiple group business editors at INM; group legal editor at INM; and Brussels and Moscow correspondents for The Irish Independent. Other senior editorial positions held by graduates include Northern Ireland correspondent for The Observer; South America correspondent for The Guardian; Middle East Correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald; Capital markets correspondent for The Financial Times; and Beijing bureau chief for the Hollywood Reporter. DCU journalism graduates have also held the editor's position at The Irish Times and The Sunday Tribune. In addition, across regional, national and international outlets, graduates of the programmes work as news reporters, feature writers, sub-editors and producers. The majority of our graduates find jobs in journalism. Others pursue careers in related sectors such as NGOs, corporate and political communication, advocacy for commercial, voluntary and public organisations, consultancy, academia, public administration, research, information and public relations.

3.3 The role of INTRA placements

DCU has had close working relationships with Irish national media for four decades and expects these to continue in the future. A central feature of both degrees has been the university's Integrated Training (INTRA) internship programme. In this programme, undergraduate and postgraduate students undertake an eight-week work placement at a media organisation in Ireland (and sometimes abroad) as a formal part of their education. The programme has allowed students at the start of their careers to gain valuable industry experience. It is a way also for media organisations to recruit talented journalists. The programme depends for its success on a sustainable industry that can invest the time and energy needed to develop promising early-career journalists. Although the economic climate remains difficult for the news industry, applications to both journalism degrees remain strong. The BA in Journalism has a class cohort each year of approximately 40 students. The CAO points for the three-year BA in Journalism in 2021 was 429. The points for the degree have remained above 400 since 2013. The demand for the MA in Journalism has remained high and it has a class cohort each year of approximately 25 students.

3.4 DCU's contribution to academic research in journalism

DCU also has a rich history of journalism scholarship, and the academic staff of the School of Communications publish widely in the academic journals devoted to journalism practice, journalism theory, and journalism education. School members also author book-length works in journalism history and critical journalism studies. This interface between research-active staff and journalism students is a key element in the university's success in journalism education. DCU also hosts the EU [Media Pluralism Monitor](#), and contributes research on

Ireland to the [Worlds of Journalism](#) project. The [DCU Institute of Future Media, Democracy and Society](#) is also based in the School of Communications: it conducts multiple national and international research projects, including the annual [Reuters Digital News Report](#) (Ireland) and the EU-funded project [Jolt: Harnessing Digital and Data Technologies for Journalism](#).

Section 4

The role of journalism in society

Authors: Dr David Robbins, and Dr Roderick Flynn (academic staff), Kinga Piotrowska, Shauna Burdis (BA in Journalism), and Patrick O'Donoghue (MA in Journalism)

4.1 Overview of normative roles

Journalism and journalists play an important role in the functioning of a healthy society. There is a wealth of scholarship concerning these roles and functions, and the norms that influence the work of reporters and editors. Journalism is generally founded on the idea of publishing verified information in a timely manner – this element of verification is what distinguishes it from rumour or online disinformation. The flow of accurate information is part of a key role for journalism: informing the public regarding events and issues that affect or concern them (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2014).

Helping to ensure that citizens are well informed, and can therefore make their social and political decisions based on accurate information, is a key function of journalism. The profession is also important in holding power to account, in making sure public office holders act ethically and lawfully.

Journalism also serves as a public sphere, in which ideas and policy options can be debated and contested, and where voices that might otherwise be marginalised can be heard. A related concept of journalism's societal role is that it does not simply inform the public, but engages it and enables its members to participate in the democratic process more fully.

Individual journalists see themselves as performing one or more of the profession's normative roles: the conduit role (conveying accurate information to the public, sometimes called "service journalism"), the watchdog role (warning society of impending dangers), and the investigative role (uncovering wrongdoing on the part of individuals, corporations, or governments).

In the age of digital media, these roles have expanded to encompass those of curator, convenor, civic educator, policy broker, and public intellectual (Fahy 2017; Robbins & Wheatley 2021).

The existence of an independent, diverse, economically sustainable news media is therefore vital in a healthy society, and the government should ensure that the conditions exist to allow a diverse media sector to perform its functions.

4.2 The 'marketplace of ideas' model

The guaranteed existence of spaces where a variety of ideas and perspectives can find public expression and contend for supremacy has been critical in legitimising the operation

of western liberal democracies. If these spaces do not exist then there is no space for citizens to offer or withhold informed consent regarding the state's actions (as some normative theories of democracy require). With the arrival of universal suffrage in the early 20th century, the mass media became a key element of these spaces as the scale of political participation made it impossible for all citizens to simultaneously participate in face-to-face debate.

The question of how the media's capacity to perform this role might be safeguarded has traditionally been answered by referring to the "free marketplace of ideas" model. Drawing from classic liberal economic theory, the model assumed that the market could act as a guarantor of communicative freedom: citizen-consumers would choose to pay for media content which served their informational needs and reflected their ideological outlook. If a given ideological perspective (as expressed through a media outlet) was incapable of winning audiences sufficient to achieve market viability then its lack of popularity meant that it was not worthy of serious consideration within a democratic polity.

The appeal of the free marketplace of ideas model lay in the manner in which it shielded free expression from any reliance on state financial support and (thus potentially) state influence. And, given its influence within democratic polities, public knowledge and understanding of the actions of the state were particularly important. To conduct objective and impartial scrutiny of the state seemed to require that media outlets were not financially (or otherwise) beholden to that state. Digital media have greatly expanded the marketplace of ideas by allowing politicians and other actors to bypass the scrutiny of the media and communicate directly with the public (Fisher et al. 2019) raising concerns about echo-chambers and "dark" political advertising.

4.3 The 'commercialisation' of the media

The marketplace of ideas model has always been vulnerable on at least one count: although media outlets might evade state influence, their reliance on (and integration into) the market instead raised questions as to how objective and impartial such media outlets could be about the market as an organisational framework for capitalist societies. This objection becomes all the more significant when one considers the history of media commercialisation. In this context "commercialisation" means more than simply that media are reliant on market revenues.

This has been the case since the arrival of the first daily papers in the early 18th century. Rather "commercialisation" refers to the process (commencing in the last quarter of the 19th century) whereby commercial media became increasingly reliant on corporate revenues rather than direct funding from their audiences. In other words, advertising came to account for the bulk (and in some cases – notably commercial broadcasting - the entirety) of commercial media revenues. In large part it is the dependency on advertising revenue that leaves the news media struggling in the digital environment and vulnerable to media capture and media control (Schiffen 2018)

4.4 The commodification of audiences

As a consequence audiences were instrumentalised so that their primary value was no longer their paying for media content. Rather audiences became commodities which could be sold to corporate advertisers. This somewhat undermined the marketplace of ideas model which assumed that market forces would encourage media outlets to seek out and give expression to all and any commercially viable ideologies. Since the advertisers were primarily interested in only a section of the population (younger, more affluent consumers), commercial media outlets tended to concentrate their efforts on delivering informational content (be it news, current affairs or entertainment) for those particular audiences. In sum, even in the abstract, there is reason to question whether a purely market-based system could ever have fully addressed the informational needs of the citizenry as a whole. Precisely this reasoning was cited as a rationale for the decision of European states to augment existing market-based print media with public-service-oriented state-funded broadcasting institutions from the 1920s onwards.

4.5 Key readings

Fahy, D. (2017). Objectivity, False Balance, and Advocacy in News Coverage of Climate Change. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science (Issue June, pp. 1–37).

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.345>

Fisher, C., Culloty, E., Lee, J. Y., & Park, S. (2019). Regaining Control Citizens who follow politicians on social media and their perceptions of journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 7(2), 230–250.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: what newspeople should know and the public should expect*. Three Rivers Press.

Robbins, D., & Wheatley, D. (2021). Complexity, objectivity, and shifting roles: Environmental correspondents march to a changing beat. *Journalism Practice*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1910981>

Schiffrin, A. (2018). *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*. Centre for International Media.

4.6 The agenda-setting power of journalism

One of journalism's key purposes lies in determining the issues that shape the national conversation and that are planted at the forefront of the public consciousness. The news cycle and agenda, if sufficiently responsive, can be thought of as a reflection of the issues that are designated as being most worthy of society's collective attention.

The journalism we read has a symbiotic/synergistic relationship with what we - as a people - think and how we act. Journalism also has the capacity to turn community issues into broader issues of collective social concern by identifying commonalities between stories and themes that arise in multiple individual instances/stories across time.

Examples of journalism that have focused society's concentration on particular issues include coverage of threats to Dublin's tradition of inner city horse culture, and the trend for gentrification and "social cleansing" in the inner city, published by the Dublin Inquirer; the privatisation of housing provision and the marginalisation of the role of local authorities in delivering social homes, by the Business Post; the potential for the creation of a two-tier society in the rollout of Covid 19 vaccinations, by the Irish Daily Mail, and the work done to hold corporate elites to account by the Currency.ie in lifting the lid on the Davy stockbroking scandal.

The above are potential lenses or frames of interpretation that a reader may apply to the social issues concerned having read the stories that were run by these publications. While they may already have been on the radar of some citizens, by amplifying these issues other citizens may begin to share these same frames of interpretation once the stories are brought to a larger audience. This can result in a change in public mood/opinion/societal demands and can have an impact at the level of political decision-making. In this sense, the media can build momentum around these issues and push them forward until they are confronted head on by those with the power to address them.

Journalism can also highlight events, or aspects of society that would otherwise go unnoticed, or spotlight the plight of vulnerable groups. Examples of these kinds of stories which shine a light into darkened corners of society include an exposé on the precarity of PhD students surviving on paltry scholarships (Noteworthy.ie), and the plight of Grafton Street flower sellers (Independent.ie) or the testimonies of those with experience of living in Direct Provision centres (irishtimes.com). These stories highlight the ways in which the media can place the voices of minority or marginalised voices on the centre stage of civil discourse. This has the effect of deepening our collective understanding of how society has changed, what diverse experiences it is formed by and expanding empathy for the 'other'. It prevents alienation of certain social groups by attributing value to a range of perspectives.

4.7 Student journalists and the norms of Journalism

The professional roles of journalism are principal to the production of objective, independent and transparent reporting. The purpose of journalism is to provide society and its citizens with the information they need to make proactive decisions about their lives, community, society and their government through transparent and trustworthy news reports and articles that align with the ideals of journalism.

The rapidly changing media landscape is proving to be both positive and negative for young journalists entering the professional journalism field. Often, the journalistic norms and ideals that the industry prides itself on, is proving harder to pinpoint and uphold in the fast 24/7 rapid news culture. "A newspaper's role is to find out fresh information on matters of public interest and to relay it as quickly and accurately as possible to readers in an honest and balanced way" (Randall, 2016 p.31). However, it is more important now than ever, for young journalists to continue applying the journalistic ideals of transparency, unbiased and objective reporting and to keep these norms sacred in the changing industry.

Through these norms, journalists must ensure the public has access to independent, impartial and quality journalism at a local, national and international level. Ensuring transparency is consistently practised is vital to the reputation of the news organisation and should be of utmost importance in an age of rapidly spreading misinformation and disinformation.

4.8 The role of journalism in countering disinformation

In an age of “post truth”, the professional norms of journalism are essential, as readers can feel secure that they are consuming their news from a trustworthy source that upholds the elements of journalism. This was evident throughout the Covid-19 pandemic when audiences turned to news media - and public service media in particular - in record numbers to obtain reliable information (EBU 2020; Department of Health 2020). In Ireland, a committed group of activists have exploited public fears about the coronavirus while false claims and rumours circulated widely online. Aside from providing reliable information Irish journalists played a leading role in exposing disinformation activists and fact-checking the false claims circulating on social media. There are promising signs of news media collaborations to counter disinformation. For example, representatives from all media sectors - public and commercial; broadcast, print, and online - are collaborating on Media Literacy Ireland’s [Be Media Smart](#) campaign.

Despite the key role that journalists play in exposing and countering disinformation, research indicates that attitudes towards disinformation appear to be closely entwined with their attitudes towards journalism. In an analysis of audience perspectives in four countries (Finland, Spain, UK, and US), Nielsen and Graves (2017) found that people perceived the differences between fake news and mainstream news in terms of degrees. When asked to provide examples of fake news, they cited poor journalism, propaganda, and advertising more frequently than fake stories in the guise of news reports. Many studies have affirmed a growing distrust of news media along with a decline in perceptions of news media quality and increased cynicism about journalism (Tsang 2020). Media cynicism is also encouraged by actors on the right and left including elite actors who denigrate professional journalism as ‘fake news’.

As such, journalists and news media are in a difficult position: they are on the frontlines of countering disinformation while being subject to attacks on their integrity and a general misunderstanding of their democratic roles. Research suggests that a vibrant media system may be key to building national resilience to disinformation. Humprecht et al. (2020) analysed eighteen countries across Europe and North America in terms of characteristics that limit resilience to disinformation within the media environment (e.g. low trust in news, weak public service media); the political environment (e.g. populism, social polarisation); and the economic environment (e.g. large advertising markets, high social media use). Based on these characteristics, Canada along with Northern and Western European countries appeared to have a much higher resilience than Southern Europe. The US emerged as an outlier as “its peculiar contextual conditions make it a unique case” (Humprecht et al. 2020: 508). This perspective potentially shifts the focus from protecting vulnerable audiences to improving and reinforcing the democratic qualities of the political and media systems.

New media platforms like social media have proven to be both positive and negative in the production of trustworthy journalism. Most trained journalists are aware of the importance of upholding the journalistic norms on all platforms where journalism is relevant. However, it is the practice of citizen journalists and those who are less equipped with the elements of journalism that enables the spread of false information. Although professional journalism understands the main priority of transparent reporting, it still must uphold the norms of

journalism on more casual social media platforms and apps like Twitter, Facebook and TikTok. Interacting with their social media following is a positive attribute for journalists, but they must ensure all information they put out into the social media sphere is verified and follows the elements of journalism.

Big tech companies like Facebook and Google must be held accountable for their involvement in the rapid spread of fake news, misinformation and disinformation, as more screening is needed to prevent false or misleading information from continuing to cause massive disruption in society. Multinational tech companies and social media giants are continuously sidestepping accountability. The fake news 'infodemic' is still very present in society and on all social media platforms. Journalists have a responsibility to combat the spread of false information through the norms of journalism. They should use social media and their following on the platforms to combat fake news by using fact checks to challenge fake news stories.

Although clickbait is not considered fake news or misinformation, it is still the manipulation of readers by media organisations and companies to secure funding through 'clicks'. This could be considered as misleading and distrustful, but not to the extent of fake news which is deliberately spread online to cause societal issues. The use of carefully selected images on articles to ensure 'clicks' could also be categorised as clickbait as it often represents cynical manipulation by news organisations. Thus, if audiences need to gain media literacy skills to recognise quality journalism, the news media also need to find ways to earn and maintain public trust (Culloty and Suiter 2021).

Culloty, E., & Suiter, J. (2021). *Disinformation and manipulation in digital media: Information pathologies*. Routledge.

4.9 The social media smarts of the new generation of journalists

Over the past decade, student journalists have honed their online skills alongside the rapid growth of social media platforms. Student journalists receive technical training on the spread of fake news on social media and how to combat it. Ultimately, due to their focused and up-to-date skills, student journalists are coming into the workforce with a fresh perspective on the industry. Therefore, student journalists have an educated ability to tackle fake news, connect with society through social media and they should be supported in doing this.

Arguably, younger journalists may be more active on social media platforms than older generations of journalists, and so they are better equipped, and more active on social media. Younger journalists tend to have a stronger social media presence and a more reliable connection with their followers on platforms like Twitter, and this unique edge should be better recognised and researched.

Due to their extensive social media presence and fluency in the area, many student journalists are aware of the latest trends and they come across hundreds of possible stories from new sources on platforms like Twitter. For example they might discover a human interest story about an individual's awful experience with the mental health facility in their university or a story about somebody's battle with addiction, while completing a bachelor's

degree. Social media know no limits when it comes to connecting with the everyday citizen and their stories because ultimately journalism is about telling people's stories.

The latest and currently most popular social media platform, TikTok, has also been the source of a lot of subsequent articles. As journalists use TikTok as a source to examine the spread of the latest trends - like 'what I eat in a day' - and the effects this is having on young impressionable teens. Student journalists who use current social media at a rapid pace have a new perspective, as they are aware and up to date with current trends.

Therefore, as student journalists are present online and move with the trends, they have the ability to use their platforms to respond to fake news, and to publicly fact check false information.

4.10 The perspectives of young journalists are needed in newsrooms

Social media platforms and tools can be a huge opportunity for media organisations to produce content that is more targeted towards a younger audience. More investment in social media platforms is key to the creation of storytelling techniques that appeal to younger people. For example, joining TikTok and making short, catchy videos, news stories or summing up news of the day can be a great way to get a younger audience involved in current affairs. In the US the TikTok demographic shows 60% are between the ages of 16-24 and 26% are between the ages of 25-44. Not only can it attract a younger and broader audience it can be a reliable but fun source that they go to. News organisations need to be present on these sites and develop and engage the younger audience in order to keep up to date and keep them informed with reliable and transparent information. For example, getting younger journalists in the newsroom to find creative ways to tell news stories such as a TikTok one that can be found [here](#). As Anderson et al. (2014, p.42) argue "the only way to get the journalism we need in the current environment is to take advantage of new possibilities." Funding should also be made available for journalism internships as new graduates bring a fresh outlook and social media literacy to newsrooms.

Section 5

Journalism and sustainability

Authors: Dr David Robbins (academic staff), Thomas Hamilton (BA in Journalism, 3rd year), Alex Doyle (BA in Journalism, 1st year)

5.1 Introduction

Sustainability has been defined as “meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Bruntland 1987). It is often described as having three pillars: environmental, economic, and social. In business studies, aiming for sustainability in these three domains is called the “triple bottom line”. Thinking around what constitutes sustainable development was further developed with the publication of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The SDGs comprise 17 principles which should guide human economic, environmental, and social activity.

Taking the media as a business, it is clear that the media is obliged to consider sustainability in the same way as any other commercial sector. The media will come under pressure from regulators, investors, consumers, and its own staff to become more sustainable, and to measure, report - and reduce - its environmental impact.

Regarding the social aspect of sustainability, the media has work to do to become more inclusive and diverse, both in terms of gender and ethnicity in its own workforce, and in terms of the voices and perspectives that are allowed access to representation in the media.

The economic sustainability of the media sector is a key issue for the industry. Other sections of this submission focus on various funding models, the role of advertising, subscriptions, and other revenue strategies. But it is important to note that the notion of sustainability includes the idea of economic sustainability - that to be properly sustainable, the media sector needs to be financially resilient and to provide secure and adequately remunerated employment for its members.

Of course, the media is not comparable to other businesses in several important ways: the role the media plays in society is of a different order of importance to most enterprises. The media sector has a considerable impact on sustainability above and beyond more narrow concerns about the sustainability of the sector itself. In terms of its coverage, the media can influence perceptions of - and engagement with - sustainability in society as a whole.

In its choice of topics, sources, framings, and even its choice of words and imagery, the media can promote public support for the sustainability agenda. Thus the media can advance its own sustainability and aim to improve its own “triple bottom line”, but it can also use its collective voice to report on sustainability-related topics, and increase public awareness and engagement.

5.2 Economic sustainability

Resilience - The media sector needs to be resilient. This means to be reactionary and adaptable when required, in instances such as a change in how the public consume media as technology continues to advance and the public's consumption habits change. This includes finding innovative ways to make revenue from technological advances and ensuring the media do not get 'left behind' in this era. It also needs to be resilient in that it can robustly counter the rise of 'false news' stories, as well as dis-information and mis-information by being the place for the public to turn to, that's trusted to verify and subsequently set the record straight about false information in the public sphere. It should be editorially free and independent from influence outside of the newsroom, whether that be politicians, companies, lobbying groups and advertising agencies.

Precarity - The media sector is changing; the closures of regional and local newspapers due to funding issues, such as the decline in advertising and drop in newspaper sales has led to redundancies. This impacts on important local news, such as local governmental issues, being covered and brought to the attention of the public. The reduction in staff in newsrooms has led to journalists having a bigger workload, often undertaking additional roles and responsibilities, all within the same job title. The current situation has meant journalists have left the industry, to work in neighbouring industries, such as public relations and special advisory roles in governments.

Employment - As previously mentioned, funding issues extend all the way down to employment. The media sector cannot become a contributor to the 'gig economy'. The gig economy can be defined as a sector with its workforce predominately on short-term contracts and/or freelancing. This type of employment cannot be sustained indefinitely. Journalists cannot be expected to live week-to-week and depend on every pay cheque, while waiting for a call to be assigned work; they need job security. The media sector must offer permanent jobs, with all of the statutory entitlements that come with such employment, in order to entice those either entering the media sector or already involved, to stay in the industry.

Funding - The current TV licence system is out of date. It was introduced during a time where smartphones, laptops and social media did not exist. Currently, a person can access our public service media content on the RTÉ Player, on a platform that is not a television, and watch RTÉ content that a licence payer could also be watching. A new licence fee system must be introduced, to reflect technological advances, changes to viewing habits, and ultimately reflect modern day society. With newspaper sales declining, the media will struggle to rely solely on advertising to keep afloat. The lines between editorial and advertorial content are blurring. Perhaps we should look further afield to Australia and consider the introduction of a charge on social media companies where news content is shared, which would add a new revenue stream for media organisations. While the online subscription model is being introduced in more publications, this may not be able to sustain an entire organisation completely. It could also result in readers who are not prepared or simply unable to pay for such subscription unable to access news. Perhaps instead of month-long subscriptions, a pay-as-you-go model would work better.

Media Law - The current Defamation Act is one of the strictest, in the context of other countries. With this in mind, journalists and their organisations are left vulnerable to litigation. Awards in defamation cases can be disproportionate and there is no set limit for which a jury can award damages. This has the potential to force an organisation into liquidation. The cost of defending a defamation action can be extortionate. The possibility of litigation action being threatened could mean a story of public interest may not be published, which in turn damages our democracy. The current Act must be reformed.

5.3 Importance of media coverage of sustainability

The agenda-setting role of the media means the sector provides strong cues to citizens as to what they prioritise. A common practice of the Irish media in the reporting of climate and sustainability issues is to frame climate issues in terms of other criteria that their readership/audience might have an easier time understanding. Audiences learn how to respond to climate and sustainability issues based on how the media frames such issues in their reporting.

Pressing issues related to the climate and biodiversity emergencies need to be covered by the media. Due to the nature of commonly-taught news values, pressing issues related to the climate and biodiversity emergencies can be left out of the news cycle. News coverage of climate change issues tends to only occur when some sort of large, undeniable effect of climate change can be seen, such as an extreme weather event.

Events such as these are more suited to the news-values that media outlets tend to adhere to, they are destructive and dramatic forces that have a clear effect on their audience. They provide the media with a clearly outlined “news-hook” that most other climate issue lack.

Coverage of these issues tends to be political and policy-focused. As many Irish publications lack the resources to have professional climate correspondents, stories can’t be pursued on the basis of them being about climate change or sustainability alone. These stories therefore need to be framed in relation to other topics that the publication and the readership of said publication might be more familiar with, such as economics or politics.

Due to the aforementioned agenda-setting function of the news, the readership of a publication that frames climate stories from a political or policy-focused angle, will learn to think of the issue of climate change through these frames. While policy and political action will be a key factor in reducing the climate impact of corporations and households, the public is losing out by only having the issue presented in these narrow ideological-frameworks. There are gaps in coverage when it comes to biodiversity, and clean tech

Section 6

Diversity in Irish Media

Authors: Dr Dawn Wheatley (academic staff), Sadbh Cox (MA in Journalism), Emma Kilcawley Hemani (BA in Journalism)

6.1 Introduction

The notion of “diversity” has gained heightened mainstream traction over the past decade as many around the world, especially in developed Western contexts, gained a fresh and much-needed awareness around issues of racial and social justice. Yet such an aspiration from media perspectives – including unheard voices, sharing untold stories, and providing a platform to those who are different to us in whatever way – has long been at the core of public interest journalism. Journalism students in DCU are often recommended to read Kovach & Rosentiel’s *The Elements of Journalism* as a guiding post about what we should expect from our news media. They argue that:

“[Journalism’s] first loyalty is to citizens ... Commitment to citizens also means journalism should seek to present a representative picture of constituent groups in society. Ignoring certain citizens has the effect of disenfranchising them.”¹

Many stakeholders with direct experience have already made submissions and we urge the Commission to consider those advocating on behalf of particular groups who often feel poorly or underrepresented in media; we do not speak on their behalf. For example, contributions from the Irish Traveller Movement, the National Disability Authority, Independent Living Movement Ireland, Women on Air, and Project Open Opportunity should be considered. We would also like to acknowledge that, although there are sometimes distinct categories around diversity, its intersectional nature leads to overlaps, especially in terms of access to media opportunities.

A recent report about diversity in European newsrooms published in late 2020 argued that shifts in newsrooms must come from the top managerial and editorial level embracing and pushing it, otherwise there will be little institutional change: “Very often, diversity is treated as a ‘nice-to-have’ issue rather than a ‘must-have’ for newsrooms and journalism schools.”² The authors of that report spoke to editors and managers in the UK, Sweden and Germany; they identified three overarching reasons why newsrooms have struggled to become diverse, which may have some relevance to the Irish industry:

1. The desire for diverse talent is often superseded by the need for digital talent;

¹ The Elements of Journalism

<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/elements-journalism/>.

² Are Journalists Today’s Coal Miners? The Struggle for Talent and Diversity in Modern Newsrooms – A Study on Journalists in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Authors: Alexandra Borchardt, Julia Lück, Sabine Kieslich, Tanjev Schultz, Felix M. Simon

2. Journalism is a sector in which, historically, a lack of talent - and lack of diversity - was never perceived as a serious problem;
3. In some smaller or regional outlets, attracting diverse applications “takes a back seat to the challenge of attracting any talent at all”.

These are all serious problems and speak to both the structural and social dimensions of contemporary newsrooms. Furthermore, although the well-documented economic struggles facing newsrooms cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, neither are they a sufficient excuse for failing to expand newsroom demographics.

6.2 Male/female journalists

Overall, Ireland’s population is 50.4% female (CSO 2020) but that is not represented in the country’s media coverage. This is not unique to Ireland, of course, and unfortunately falls in line with broader challenges which are well-documented regarding how women appear in the news around the world. The recent Global Media Monitoring Project 2020 found on average, 37% of journalists and only 28% of news subjects/sources were female in Ireland. In a 2016 study, Rafter & Dunne noted that “Irish journalism is a male-dominated profession. Our survey indicates that 62% of journalists in Ireland are men while 38% are women. There has been a very slight improvement in the gender balance from 1997 when the male/female ratio was 70:30.”³ Whether this trajectory of improvement has continued is unclear [forthcoming Worlds of Journalism carried out from researchers within DCU’s School of Communications in 2021/2022 will establish the current state of play]. Regardless, it is important to explore potential reasons for gender imbalance in newsrooms or what might lead to drop-off.

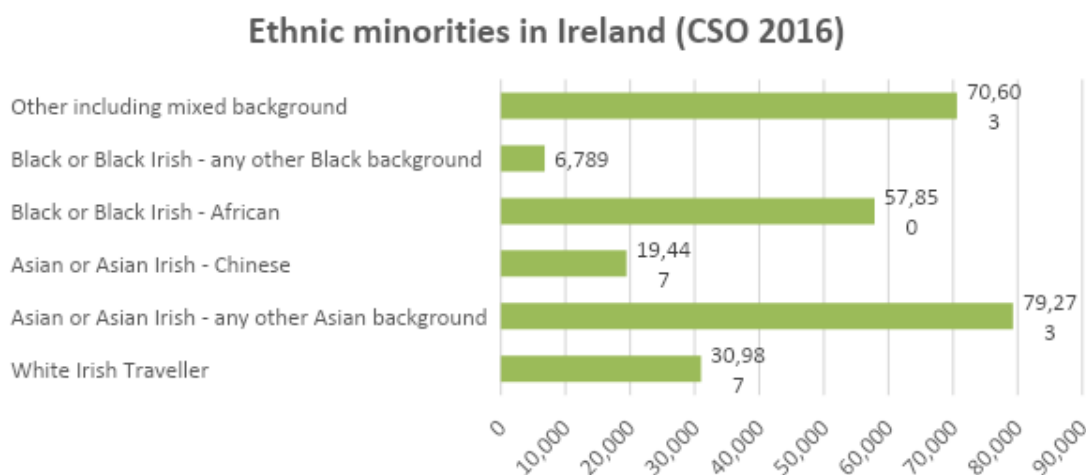
Based on DCU statistics, we know that the problem right now is not that women and girls do not want to become journalists or that gender is a barrier to access: for example in DCU, this year’s Masters and Bachelors students break down as 46% male, 54% female based on registration figures of 137 students. This 2020-2021 snapshot may not be representative of previous decades, but suggests that gender-related barriers to accessing courses is not a significant problem. However, once students graduate and enter the workforce, other factors associated with the contemporary media industry should be considered. The broader economic landscape against which journalism is positioned is often associated with early-career internships or freelance work, but this lack of security is increasingly ever-present given the upheaval in the industry since the turn of the century and digital transition. For women, increasingly precarious working conditions are inherently tied to poor structural supports such as maternity leave, or other requirements for those with caring responsibilities who we know are disproportionately female⁴. For this reason, journalism may become an increasingly unappealing career prospect for women who require additional structural support to balance their professional and family lives. Of course, the repercussions of these trends in labour conditions are not limited to impacting women, but there are some areas in which females will face personal and physical challenges not experienced by males.

³ The Irish Journalist Today. Kevin Rafter & Stephen Dunne (2016).
<https://osf.io/g8hrx/?action=download&version=1>

⁴ Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland, Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission 2019.
<https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/caring-and-unpaid-work-in-ireland/>

6.3 Race and ethnicity

According to the 2016 census data (due to be updated following the 2022 Census), Ireland's ethnic population is still predominantly white Irish (84%); with white Irish Traveller comprising less than 1%, and 'other white' background (eg Polish) comprising 10%. Other, non-white ethnicities comprise 5% of the population, and the minorities are outlined in Figure 1. However, while this might appear like a relatively small percentage, it translates to almost 235,000 individuals from a non-White background living in Ireland who should never be dismissed as an insignificant minority: as mentioned, journalism should include sharing diverse opinions and experiences.



However, the challenge for journalism organisations is to ensure that this cohort – and the hugely diverse experiences and values within this broad category – are present, visible, and influential in editorial and reporting roles. DCU School of Communications student Tommy Hamzat, (who has contributed to the Future of Media Commission already through a public submission on Project Open Opportunity and an appearance at one of the Commission's hearings), should be highlighted here and will be mentioned again later. Hamzat has compiled a comprehensive overview of some of the problems, potential solutions and benefits around a more diverse Irish media which, crucially, extends beyond race, but brings forward a more holistic understanding of inclusivity and representation.

There are unfortunately scant studies which have systematically captured racial diversity among those working in the Irish media, and this is something which should be addressed: only by capturing the current state of play through media monitoring can we truly assess the situation. The upcoming Worlds of Journalism (2021-2022), which surveys professional journalists in Ireland, will gather a snapshot of this data which will prove useful. In terms of content, the Pass the Mic initiative in Scotland (<https://passthemicscotland.wordpress.com/>) is an example of a project which studies and attempts to address the issue of too few women of colour as experts in the news. Sex and gender is a relatively straightforward code to capture, but additional diversity-focused research must be mindful of the sensitivity around

race and ethnic background: it's crucial not to make assumptions around people based on their appearance or what we think is their background, whether they are journalists or contributors. This is also an issue when attempting to record socio-economic background, another pillar of diversity efforts, further outlined below.

6.4 Socio-economic backgrounds

In 2017, a report by the National Council for the Training of Journalists stated that “journalism has shifted to a greater degree of social exclusivity than any other profession”.⁵ In 2016, the census registered more than 3600 journalists, newspaper and periodical editors⁶. In the past, a formal journalism qualification was not necessary to pursue a job in the industry. Now, over 80% of journalists have either an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, according to a survey of Irish journalists in 2016 by Rafter and Dunne⁷. Social class has become an increasingly important factor in whether a person pursues a career in journalism. The barriers to journalism start with barriers to education. Students from ‘disadvantaged’ areas account for just 10% of total students enrolled in higher education, with 20% coming from affluent areas⁸. According to 2020 data, 37% of full-time students are in receipt of a SUSI grant, and that increases to half of all 18 and 19 year olds in higher and further education⁹. While Ireland operates a free-fees scheme for third-level education, the student contribution is still unattainable for young people. Given the low number of working-class students attending university in general, the number of those students choosing journalism is even lower. The Sutton Trust, a charity working to address low social mobility in the UK, found that half of the UK’s top journalists attended fee paying schools in 2015¹⁰ pointing to the middle-class nature of much of journalism. The connections between third-level courses and journalism are at the crux of the issue: diverse paths of entry to industry should be considered and opportunities provided to students, such as through open days, work experiences programmes, outreach programmes and apprenticeships: it seems likely that a reliance on third-level graduates may not hugely alter the demographics of who makes the news.

After the education hurdle, a study in the UK¹¹ has shown that young people entering journalism are likely to need financial support from their families in order to succeed. This means that those without parents working in high paying jobs are less likely to stay in the journalism industry, and this is particularly pertinent amid the growth of internships and

⁵ Diversity in Journalism, Mark Spilsbury for the NCTJ, 2017

<https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/DIVERSITY%20JOURNALISM%204WEB.pdf>

⁶ Census 2016 - ‘Population aged 15 Years and Over at Work 2011 - 2016’ - Census 2016 <https://data.cso.ie>

⁷ (The Irish Journalist Today, Kevin Rafter & Stephen Dunne, 2016 - Source:

<https://osf.io/g8hrx/?action=download&version=1>).

⁸ Higher Education Authority, 2020 -

<https://hea.ie/2020/12/07/new-hea-data-provides-in-depth-insight-into-the-socio-economic-profile-of-our-universities-and-institutes-of-technology/>

⁹ Social Impact Assessment Series Student Grant Scheme (SUSI Grants) – Rinku Phulphagar and Fiona Kane, IGEE Unit and Education Vote, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. October 2020.

<https://assets.gov.ie/89959/44f8fb30-c3ee-415c-bb8a-6f74fc50b693.pdf>

¹⁰ Diversity in Journalism, National Council for the Training of Journalists, Mark Spilsbury, 2017 -

<https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/DIVERSITY%20JOURNALISM%204WEB.pdf>

¹¹ Journalists at Work Survey, 2012 - https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/jaw_final_higher_2.pdf

precarious employment more broadly. The National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) in the UK noted in 2017:

“Journalism students are more likely to be working as journalists six months after graduation if they are male, do not have a disability, are white (or more specifically, not black), went to a privately funded school, are from higher social economic backgrounds and are not from a low HE participation neighbourhood.”¹²

This becomes problematic because, in addition to the financial concerns, Kevin Rafter and Stephen Dunne have identified the issue of “class group think”. As a majority of journalists have specialised in a degree in journalism or communications, this in turn affects what is determined ‘news’. The danger of a ‘qualification-only’ industry means that many will be excluded from journalism. The impact of this can be seen in media representations of wealth. The lifestyle of the upper class is portrayed in a positive light rather than focusing on the injustices of the lower class. When the lower class do feature, they are often portrayed in a negative light, as people benefiting from welfare and causing trouble. An example of this is the recent coverage of two women who refused mandatory hotel quarantine in Dublin, who were quickly dubbed “the Dubai Two” and focused on their access to the lone mother’s payment. In contrast, those at the heart of the Davy Stockbrokers scandal received no catchy nickname imbued with connotations of the “Peru Two” drug smugglers. While both examples hold people to account for their actions, the way the stories are framed speaks to the background of those writing them, as well as potentially gendered dimensions.

6.5 Online abuse

Another factor worth raising is also the pressures and public attacks with which journalists must grapple, which have become more invasive via social media platforms and/or comments sections on websites. A recent panel at City University London¹³ highlighted how some journalists had left the industry due to this abuse, and female and minority journalists are often particularly susceptible to abuse online¹⁴. It is also worth highlighting the conviction in November 2019, in the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court, of a man who harassed six female journalists in Ireland via abusive online messages. The judge in that case said that, although the internet had wonderful advantages, what the court had heard in this case was “the dark side which allows a man sitting in his house to inflict huge amounts of trauma on six women”¹⁵. In this instance, the man was jailed for three years, and such convictions are welcome, but it is one of the few instances of tangible repercussions for the abuse journalists receive online via their public profile: more is needed. And crucially, this is not limited to

¹² “Diversity in Journalism”, Report for the National Council for the Training of Journalists Mark Spilsbury (2017) <https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/DIVERSITY%20JOURNALISM%204WEB.pdf>

¹³ <https://pressgazette.co.uk/journalists-mental-health-abuse-newsroom/>

¹⁴

<https://theconversation.com/online-attacks-on-female-journalists-are-increasingly-spilling-into-the-real-world-news-research-150791>

¹⁵

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/circuit-court/man-who-harassed-six-female-writers-and-journalists-online-is-jailed-1.4083166>

women and is a risk for all journalists, especially those from minority backgrounds, gender identities, disabilities; simply anything that can set anyone apart.

6.6 Recommendations/suggestions to increase diversity and inclusivity

Companies could implement on-the-job training to those new to journalism who may not have formal qualifications. While it is important to receive education about journalism, this could be achieved differently for those who cannot put themselves through third-level education. In the age of social media, it is easy for anyone to report on news or share their opinions: in these cases a bit of training could be beneficial. Some of these accessibility points were highlighted in Hamzat's report/submission, and we would like to repeat them here and support the "Project Open Access" scheme which Hamzat has proposed, and again, we point towards the Project Open Opportunity submission. The goal outlined there is to tackle both behind-the-scenes and front-of-camera, and we would argue this is also applicable to any kind of newsroom regardless of the format. The initiatives include: work experience programs, talent days, apprenticeships, outreach programs (successful in companies such as Channel4, BBC, ITV and Sky), paid internships. These will help with expanding the talent pool beyond third-level graduates.

- Within the formal third-level sector, education should be more accessible for those from working-class backgrounds. This could include scholarships, other ways into college that are not so expensive, extended grants, reduction of university fees. Lack of resources should not be a barrier into a career.
- Within the newsroom, the recent study into the UK, Germany and Sweden mentioned earlier made an important recommendation which is worth highlighting here, regarding how the "diverse" hires are pigeon-holed, or not:

*"Just as female journalists shouldn't be automatically selected for gender, family and women's issues, the Syrian journalist shouldn't be confined to writing about refugees, nor should the journalist who is a Muslim need to write only about Islamist extremism. Bringing in diverse talent is crucial and needed when particular issues crop up, but they should be given diverse paths to develop and not be confined to certain topics."*¹⁶.

We reinforce this goal as something valuable for which to strive.

- That same report also points out the need to broaden the pool of applicants for jobs, but "it is not enough to hope that this will happen automatically". They say the moves for inclusivity should be built around professionalised recruitment that "actively seeks diversity", which may involve thinking strategically about the wording and placement of job adverts, as well as the composition of interview panels, how roles are defined, and special access schemes. This point about actively targeting your desired demographic is also effectively captured by Leon Mann, founder of Black Collective of Media in Sport in the UK, who advises companies to be more strategic in their job hunts:

¹⁶ Are Journalists Today's Coal Miners? The Struggle for Talent and Diversity in Modern Newsrooms – A Study on Journalists in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Authors: Alexandra Borchardt, Julia Lück, Sabine Kieslich, Tanjev Schultz, Felix M. Simon. P63

“Use social media to advertise jobs and allow candidates to be more creative in an electronic application form – attaching YouTube clips or online links; students and aspiring journalists are reading different content to your 50-year-old media executives. The traditional long application form can marginalise people who don’t already have connections and experience in the media industry, significantly impacting your pool of potential recruits”.¹⁷

- Regarding recruitment, Harry Roche from Mencap, also points out that for those with learning disabilities, all they need are “reasonable adjustments” to work: *“These are small changes that can make a big difference. It can include giving people with a learning disability more time, clearer information and better communication. So, if you are interviewing someone with a learning disability, avoid jargon, speak clearly and use everyday words.”* Appropriate adjustments should also be factored in for those with physical disabilities, with necessary accommodations being made for accessibility requirements, working from home, and additional supports in the office. These should also be visible and considered prior to hiring an applicant, rather than making individuals have to fight or lobby for such adjustments.¹⁸
- In terms of output, regular auditing and media-monitoring of news content across a range of platforms would help to capture both diversity of journalists as well as sources/contributors to the news. This requires funding opportunities for researchers to regularly and systematically carry out this work: with appropriate supports, the work could be carried out by journalism students, thus also drawing their attention to the issue and making them more aware of it as they *before* entering the workforce.
- An effort to capture the ethnicity and socio-demographic backgrounds of journalism students would also be useful. This will raise privacy/data issues and must be done consensually, via opt-in surveys with all appropriate ethics and data management clearance. However, as it stands, we only have gender data which is not sufficient to assess the diversity situation more broadly. Furthermore, students with disabilities may not register their disabilities with the university so are also not always captured on registration systems and furthermore, such personal information is not readily available.

6.7 Conclusion

It is overly simplistic to suggest that more women in the newsroom means more women as subjects or sources in the news, nor can that logic be applied to any minority group in the newsroom. Furthermore, we know that the dominant cultures and values entrenched in newsrooms cannot be easily overturned, and it is possible that newcomers, regardless of their background, find it easier to simply adapt and conform. As one study into female journalists in Portugal puts it, “in journalism, we are all men”¹⁹. This is reinforced by the

¹⁷ “Diversity in Journalism” report by ResponseSource:

<https://www.vuelio.com/uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Diversity-in-journalism.pdf> p4,

¹⁸ We again point to the Future of Media submissions made by the National Disability Authority and Independent Living Movement to consider their recommendations about accessibility.

¹⁹ “In Journalism, We Are All Men” - Material voices in the production of gender meanings. Paula Lobo, Maria João Silveirinha, Marisa Torres da Silva & Filipa Subtil
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1111161?journalCode=rjos20>

authors of the “Are Journalists Today’s Coal Miners?” report, who argues that “minorities tend to adapt to spoken and unspoken expectations within a newsroom about what makes a great topic, great journalism and a great product... diversity has to reach a certain threshold to make minorities feel comfortable and give them real influence over a newsroom’s decisions.”²⁰ It is, therefore, important that we understand the complexities around the need for, and desired outcomes, of including various gendered, ethnic, socio-economic, religious, and disabled perspectives.

In considering who appears in news content as a source, at the core of the issue is journalists’ long-held reliance on “official” sources as contributors to stories. This is problematic for many reasons, but journalists will always be drawn to, and somewhat reliant, on those in positions of power. Until there are more changes to the make-up of political institutions and other official sources which dominate news coverage, a fundamental change in day-to-day content will likely be much harder and slower to achieve. Yet that does not mean change is not possible: the challenge for newsrooms in 2021 and onwards is to ensure they actively and consciously seek out the voices and experiences which are too often, and too easily, overlooked.

²⁰ Are Journalists Today’s Coal Miners? The Struggle for Talent and Diversity in Modern Newsrooms – A Study on Journalists in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Authors: Alexandra Borchardt, Julia Lück, Sabine Kieslich, Tanjev Schultz, Felix M. Simon. P64.

Section 7

The development of the Irish media sector

Author: Dr Roderick Flynn

7.1 Introduction

The state of the Irish media market in 2021 is the result of a confluence of historical, political, economic, linguistic and even demographic factors. The long history of imperialism meant that the newly independent Irish Free State in 1922 was not only de facto largely Anglophone but was already part of the larger UK media market. UK-based newspapers competed with locally-based titles for sales from the foundation of the state. The adoption of localisation strategies by some UK print titles from the late 1980s onwards (lead by the collaboration of the UK Express Newspapers with Independent News and Media on the Irish Daily Star from 1988) saw UK-based titles account for 1 in 4 Daily and 1 in 3 Sunday newspaper sales in Ireland by the start of the 21st century. Similarly, the first radio broadcasts heard in Ireland came not from 2RN (precursor to RTE) but from the BBC (via a Belfast relay) which also transmitted the first television signals routinely available in Ireland from 1936. This would subsequently (1955) be augmented by the launch of Independent Television in the UK.

7.2 The influence of competition from UK media

As a small media market (Ireland's population hovered around 3 million people for most of the 20th century), Ireland has been subject to intense competition for audiences since the foundation of the state. That the UK was a much larger media market ensured that UK media outlets enjoyed much greater economies of scale relative to their Irish counterparts. Thus, for example, UK newspapers have long been able to set Irish cover prices significantly below the average cost of Irish titles. (Of course, demand for news and current affairs content is not exclusively or even primarily driven by price. Irish titles survived price competition because audiences place much higher value on news and current affairs content relevant to their geographical setting. And, until the adoption of localisation strategies, UK-based titles could not compete on this basis).

7.3 Origins of dual funding model for RTÉ

In broadcasting, the manner in which the various incarnations of RTE have been funded further complicated matters. From the launch of 2RN in 1926 the Department of Finance was reluctant to allow the station to become a drain on the Exchequer. Nonetheless, it was evident that the small domestic market meant that broadcast licence revenues alone could never hope to cover the cost of providing a national radio service. Thus it was decided to augment the licence fee by directing revenues from duties on the sale of imported radios to

2RN. And, in contrast to the BBC, the most proximate model for 2RN, the state decided to permit advertising on the national broadcasting service. When Irish television began in the wake of the 1960 Broadcasting Act the ongoing insistence that the service should be self-sustaining resulted in the adoption of an overtly populist schedule, reliant on imported content (especially US fiction). Thus a commercial outlook has been an element of even RTE's DNA since its inception.

Happily for RTE, the financial impact of competition in broadcasting was relatively minor until the late 1980s. Though the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 were available to homes on the eastern seaboard via terrestrial transmission and further afield via cable systems, they did not sell advertising space to Irish advertisers. Thus RTE had a near-monopoly on broadcast advertising revenues until the late 1980s (the operation of pirate radio stations notwithstanding).

7.4 Broadcasting diversifies, but competition for revenue increases

However, the 1988 Radio and Television Act licenced 24 local radio stations, 1 national radio broadcaster and 1 national television broadcaster. All were privately-owned and all were entirely reliant on commercial income. If the national commercial stations took some time to find their feet (the first national radio licensee Century Radio closed after 2 years in 1992 while TV3, the precursor to Virgin Media Television did not go on air until 1998) local radio proved immediately popular and began to eat away at RTE's advertising revenues. (As a group local commercial stations account for more than half of radio listening in Ireland.) The subsequent arrival of Today FM predecessor (Radio Ireland) in 1996 and Newstalk 106 (albeit initially limited to urban markets) and, on television, of not just TG4 (1996) and TV3 (1998) but also City Channel in 2005 and Channel 6 in 2006 hugely increased the level of competition in the broadcast advertising market.

However, by the end of the 1990s, such competition for broadcast advertising revenues intensified as overseas-based channels began offering local opt-outs, allowing Irish advertisers to purchase ad-time targeted at the Irish market. By 2013 there were 36 such channels offering opt-outs in Ireland (and this has subsequently expanded to approximately 45). Even if the individual audience shares of such channels is tiny, they cumulatively eat into the revenues available to Irish-based broadcasters (while usually offering little to no content overtly addressing an Irish audience).

In sum, by the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the economic footing on which Irish media relied to sustain their informational functions was already subject to increasing competition. To a large extent, however, the significance of this was disguised by the still buoyant stage of the late Celtic Tiger economy which ensured that even if the market/revenue shares of individual media outlets was declining in relative terms, absolute income continued to increase (not least on the back of property advertising). The near-bankruptcy of the economy in 2008, however, exposed these structural weaknesses.

7.5 Double-whammy: the impact of Brexit and Covid

The subsequent impacts associated with Brexit uncertainty and the Covid pandemic have hardly improved matters. Circulation of printed newspapers collapsed: daily sales fell from 690,000 in early 2007 to 352,000 by the start of 2018. Sundays fell from 1.22m to 524,000 over the same period. (Notably, most Irish publications have withdrawn from Audit Bureau of Circulation certification since 2018, reflecting the perception that print sales no longer properly reflect readership.) The drop in circulation had a concomitant impact on press advertising revenues (since the former are based on the former). Indecon's 2013 analysis of the Irish advertising market for the Department of Communications suggested that the value of the Irish newspaper advertising market in 2008 was €705m. Core Advertising estimates for 2020 (combining print and digital newspaper advertising revenues) suggest this has dropped to €100m. This had a demonstrable impact on viability and marginal titles (e.g. the Sunday Tribune and the Irish Star on Sunday) closed while others (e.g. the Evening Herald) were relaunched as morning dailies in a bid to find new markets.

Broadcasters have not experienced the same drops in levels of consumption. Indeed average hours of listening/viewing have remained broadly unchanged since 2008 (although all broadcasters are finding it increasingly difficult to secure younger audiences which appear to be shifting their finite time budgets online). Nonetheless both the radio and television markets have seen their revenues decline substantially since 2008. Accessing reliable long-term time series data in this regard is difficult. Nonetheless Medialive (citing IAPI BASE Adspend /AdDynamix Nielsen Media Research) estimate the value of the radio advertising market in 2008 at €150m. Estimates from Core Advertising for 2020 suggest this had fallen to €102.4m. The same sources suggest that the value of television advertising fell from €371m to €190.3m in the same period.

Again, although reliable data for the value of the advertising industry as a whole is hard to access, it is clear that it has contracted since 2008. Again, Indecon's 2013 report cited an estimate of €1.2bn for the sector as a whole while Core suggest that the sector as a whole (across all media) was worth €903m in 2020. Even a quick glance at these figures makes it clear that in relative terms the value of print, radio and broadcast advertising between 2008 and 2020 has declined much faster than the value of the market as a whole. This discrepancy is accounted for by the massive increase in the value of online advertising (which in turn is dominated by a handful of platform giants). Indecon suggest that just €12m was spent on "interaction" advertising in 2008. Estimates for 2020 vary enormously from IAB's €726m to Core's much more conservative €477.6m. Either way, it is clear that much of the decline in legacy media advertising markets can be accounted for by a shift online. Some of this online spend has gone to the digital arms of legacy media. (The Irish Times submission to the Commission cites IAB Ireland figures suggesting that 8% of online advertising revenues go to news publishers.) But the vast bulk goes to online giants. Core suggest that Facebook and Google alone accounted for 84.4% of the online advertising market in Ireland in 2020 (or 44.6% of ALL Irish advertising in 2020).

It goes without saying that online platforms cannot, for the most part, (Amazon Prime aside) be regarded as content producers. They are certainly not in the business of producing news and current affairs journalism although in the region of 50% news/current affairs content

online is access via such platforms (rather than by direct visits to news media outlets websites). The implications of all this are evident. The news-for-advertising quid pro quo, always problematic, seems profoundly damaged.

Section 8

How Other Countries Fund Media

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8.1 Introduction

This document is divided into four sections:

- Taxing the big tech companies
- Resourcing public service broadcasters
- Helping local and regional media
- The role of public interest media

This section of the Future of Media report addresses how other countries fund their media. Under each of the four sections, we make recommendations for policies which the Irish government could introduce to help media organisations. Proposals include reclassifying tech companies into new tax groups, reimagining how the licence fee should be charged and redefining the relationship between the public and media.

8.2 Taxing the big tech companies

8.2.1 Australia

The Irish government could follow the Australian example and pursue the big tech companies for financial contributions to the media via competition law. In Australia, the digital advertising market is worth 2.9 billion euros and the media have in recent years lost out massively to the big tech companies, which account for [80 percent](#) of the digital advertising spend.

On the advice of the Australian competition watchdog, the ACCC, the government decided to take on the tech companies through competition law – pushing through a ‘News Media Bargaining Code’ to force the tech companies to pay the media for use of their content.

After brinkmanship on the side of Facebook, which temporarily removed news access to Australian users of its product in February 2021, it has, along with Google, agreed to financial deals with media companies.

8.2.2 France

Tax authorities in France have begun ‘[demanding](#)’ millions of euros from US technology companies, like Facebook and Amazon. Under a [digital service tax](#) (a tax that other governments are considering), tech companies may begin to pay their fair share. Because of low-tax jurisdictions, like Ireland, some argue that companies are paying too little tax on profits. France [went forward with this policy](#) without other European countries, and enacted its own local tax.

8.2.3 European Union

In April 2019, The European Union issued a new policy [directive](#) on [copyright legislation](#) and related rights in the Digital Single Market. This is the first major reform in nearly 20 years. This [digital strategy](#) is intended to meet the challenges of 'rapid technological developments', the emergence of 'new business models' and 'new actors.' The Directive seeks to benefit a variety of players in the digital environment, including internet users, researchers, universities and journalists.

Article 17 addresses the [complexity](#) of the online content market, and its intent is to recalibrate the EU's digital economy to ensure that rights holders are fairly remunerated. Essentially, this directive puts an end to the free reproduction and repurposing of copyrighted material, and ensures that creators are compensated for their third party-use of work. Member states are required to transpose this legislation into domestic law by 7 June 2021.

8.2.4 Brazil

The Irish Government could follow Brazil's example by redefining the tech companies as 'media companies.' [CENP](#), a Brazilian agency which sets the commercial rules for the advertising market, approved defining companies like Google and Facebook as media companies. Previously, [Facebook and Google were defined as 'tech companies'](#) rather than 'media companies', exempting them from responsibility for the content that users post.

In a resolution CENP lists "Internet-Search, Internet-Social, Internet-Video, Internet-Audio, Internet Display and Others" along with magazines and newspapers as "Disclosure or Communication Vehicles." - By [this definition](#), the vehicles would include Google, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram as media companies.

8.2.5 USA

As most of the tech/media companies have their global headquarters in the US, the US is in a unique position to determine how to tax these companies. In response to the unilateral action taken by France, the US objected to those actions as [discriminatory](#) towards US firms. In June 2020, the [US pulled out of negotiations](#) with European countries on an international digital tax.

8.2.6 Recommendations:

- Ireland should ensure big tech companies pay their fair share through a change in policy. It is unlikely that Ireland will want to increase taxes, as Ireland is known for having very low corporate tax. To tax Facebook or Google, Ireland may have to get more creative.
- Pursuing this tax through competition law, like in Australia, could ensure revenue from advertising is distributed more fairly. An alternative is rebadging 'tech companies' into 'media companies,' as was seen in Brazil. However, this may lead to unintended complications with these platforms.

- The Irish government has an opportunity, when transposing the EU copyright directive into law, to ensure that content creators are compensated fairly for their work.

8.3 Resourcing public service broadcasters

At the moment the high number of people who evade the Irish TV licence fee is costing RTE [€50m in lost fees annually](#).

8.3.1 Norway

In 2020 the public broadcaster NRK moved from being 94% funded by a mandatory TV licence to being funded as part of the national budget, with the money coming from income taxpayers. [The fees will depend on a household's income](#), with the highest being €300 and the lowest being €170 per year. This new funding model is linked to NRK ensuring it provides Sami, children's and cultural content.

8.3.2 Finland

Since 2013, the [Finnish Broadcasting Company](#) (YLE) has been financed through a direct tax known as the "YLE tax." Unemployed people don't pay anything but otherwise the fee is based on one's income. The rate is worked out at 0.68 percent of an individual's income, to a maximum amount of €140.

8.3.3 Sweden

Sweden stopped its licence fee arrangement in 2019, due to the fact that between 11 and 15 percent of the population were found to have a television but were not paying the licence fee. The funding for public television is now compulsory, whether or not you own a television, and is worked out alongside your income tax. The tax will amount to one percent of a person's taxable interest but is capped at €128.

8.3.4 Denmark

Denmark is in the middle of [phasing out its TV licence](#) in favour of funding for public service television coming from general taxation. This changeover is meant to take four years from 2019 though to 2022. The announcement of this change in 2019 was accompanied by a 20 percent budget cut for the main broadcaster, DR.

8.3.5 Italy

The Irish government could follow the example of Italy and automatically charge the licence fee along with people's electricity bills.

8.3.6 Germany

In Germany, every household has to pay a licence fee of €17.50 a month, whether people watch the public service broadcast channels (ARD and ZDF) or not. [€8 billion](#) is collected annually from 45 million homes. Research shows that public media reaches 94% of German homes weekly.

8.3.7 Spain

In Spain, access to information has been a part of the constitution since 1978. This means the government must provide a national TV and radio service. The state provides half the funding of RTVE (the national public broadcaster) out of general revenue. The other half comes from taxing telephone companies, private TV broadcasters and Pay-TV stations.

8.3.8 Australia

Australia scrapped its TV licence fee back in 1974. Public service media (ABC and SBS) have since been paid for through direct public taxation, with the government deciding how much is given to the broadcasters when the government grant is renegotiated every three years. In 2021 ABC and SBS are three years into [an 'indexation freeze'](#) on any growth in their budgets. The indexation freeze is part of ongoing cuts that have affected the services: jobs and programmes have been lost.

8.3.9 USA

Philanthropy plays a major role in funding media organisations that are not commercial. 'Philanthro-journalism' fills a gap in mainstream media coverage, where private donors fund journalism. Nonprofits, like [ProPublica](#) are supported by dozens of foundations. Or, a single foundation may provide the bulk of support, like the [Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#) which supports science reporting like RadioLab. These examples, however, do not operate as public service media.

The closest entities to public service media in the US are [PBS](#) and [NPR](#). They are both non-profit organisations which, like other US media organisations, rely on [subsidies](#) like free broadcasting licences provided by the government and financial support from donors. Without significant philanthropic assistance these 'public interest journalism' companies would not exist.

8.3.10 Switzerland

In 2017 the Swiss public media [received about CHF 1.2 billion from the licence fee](#). (€1.09 billion) Taxpayers paid about CHF 451 (€390) annually. [78%](#) of the SRG SSR (Swiss Broadcasting Corporation) revenue is from licence fees and 22% comes from commercial activities.

In 2018 SRG SSR reorganized itself to save about CHF 100 million (€91 million) after a public referendum vote decided against cutting its public funding. In April 2019 cost cutting measures resulted in the loss of 40 jobs.

8.3.11 Recommendations:

- Ireland could follow the precedent set by other countries in the European Union, like Italy or Germany, to fund public service broadcasters in a different fashion. The licence fee could be paid in monthly installments in order to make it easier to pay. It could also be paid alongside electricity bills. Doing this could minimize the large amount of money being lost by public media organizations annually.
- The amount paid each month could be based on annual salaries, like in Finland. There, the rate is worked out at 0.68 percent of an individual's income, to a maximum amount of €140. Unemployed people do not pay the fee. Having the licence fee based on salary and establishing it as a monthly payment will make it easier for households of all socio-economic groups to pay.
- Alternatively a version based on the Swedish model could be implemented. In 2019 between 11-15% of the Swedish population weren't paying their licence fees, in a similar fashion to what's happening in Ireland today. Sweden decided to make the funding for public television compulsory whether or not you own a television, and base it on your income tax. Like in Finland, the fee is capped (at €128) and amounts to 1% of a person's taxable income.

8.4 Helping local and regional media

8.4.1 Australia

In June 2020, following “a catastrophic ad revenue fall,” the federal government put [€30m into funding regional news services](#) for 12 months. This money funded 107 companies including 92 publishers, 13 radio broadcasters and five television companies.

8.4.2 European Union

In November 2020 the European Union announced it would fund media freedom and investigative journalism projects with grants of up to [€3,900,000](#). Another project (same link) was set up as a rapid response mechanism for violations of press and media freedom. It will provide practical help to journalists who are under threat and make violations public.

8.4.3 France

In France, media outlets receive more subsidies than elsewhere in Europe. The London Institute for Media Strategies estimated there was nearly €114 million in subsidies for French print and online news media, with another €103 million in postal and tax breaks.

8.4.4 Switzerland

Some Swiss media outlets lost up to [95% of their advertising revenue](#) during the pandemic. According to the European Journalism Observatory, there was a significant rise in media consumption in Switzerland. Television news made up 80% of the market share at the height of the crisis. French-language Daily Le Temps saw the number of visitors on their website triple. However, they are unable to monetize this.

The decentralized nature of Swiss media means the effects of the pandemic are being felt keenly. According to [Reporters Without Borders](#), the Swiss authorities are aware of the need to provide the media with financial aid but have encountered ideological resistance in federal parliament.

8.4.5 UK

The British public relies heavily on news media for information on the virus. According to the Reuters Institute, the three [most widely used brands are](#) BBC News (both offline and online), ITV (primarily offline) and the Guardian (primarily online)

Philanthropic support is a growing revenue stream for the Guardian. It received [£9 million](#) between April 2020 and April 2021. This has allowed it to refund ongoing projects and start several new ones.

After the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, the [BBC froze management pay as well as its hiring scheme](#). It also delayed annual staff pay negotiations for six months.

The British licence fee generates £3.7 billion for the BBC, but the commercial arm (BBC Studios) took a significant revenue hit.

8.4.6 Recommendations:

- Ireland could follow the example of Australia, in giving short-term grants to local and regional media (particularly as Gaelige, the Irish language).
- Alternatively, it could go for longer-term subsidies to the media, as in the French example.

8.5 The role of public interest media

The money recouped from some of the above measures (taxing big tech companies and helping local and regional media) should be ploughed back into media companies that will help foster journalism conducted in the public interest. This journalism should seek to investigate powerful institutions of government, the judiciary and areas such as policing, finance, sport and entertainment to inform the public of issues that affect them in their everyday lives. Public interest journalism helps to inform a country's citizens and seeks to engage them in issues pertinent to the proper functioning of democracy.

8.5.1 Australia

In Australia in 2017 the government convened the 'Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism' which accepted submissions from the public and stakeholders. This was similar to the 'Future of Media Commission' here in Ireland.

The committee made eight recommendations, including:

- To fund the ABC and SBS (PSMs) adequately
- To roll out media literacy curricula in schools
- To build a framework for extending 'deductible gift recipient status' (DGR) to not-for-profit news media organisations
- To make all news media subscriptions tax deductible
- To arrange a complete review of Australian defamation laws

8.5.2 UK

A UK charity named the 'Public Interest News Foundation' was [launched in September 2020](#) and asked for money to support journalism that benefits the public. It sought money from companies such as Google and Facebook, along with wealthy philanthropists, charitable trusts and members of the public.

British Ministers [rejected the recommendation](#) by the British equivalent of the Future of Media Commission that state funding should be used to support public-interest journalism in the United Kingdom. They said government intervention would damage press freedom. Dame Frances Cairncross, who led the official review of the future for public-interest journalism, suggested the government should found a new Institute for Public Interest News to coordinate between publishers, broadcasters and online platforms to ensure quality reporting. This was rejected.

The government [rejected proposals to extend charitable status](#) to many struggling local news outlets. This was done on the grounds that it would prevent them from supporting political parties, would stop them becoming 'for-profit' and it was argued that much journalism does not work "only for the public benefit."

Ministers have limited their help towards local British newspapers to giving a €1739 discount on business rates for office spaces. All of these decisions were made two months before the virus upended the economy. It remains to be seen whether this stance will be revisited after analyzing the effects of the coronavirus on public-interest media.

8.5.3 France

A [tax credits scheme](#) is currently being tested in France. MPs have voted to grant a tax credit to anyone taking out a subscription to a current affairs newspaper or magazine. A one-off deduction of up to €50 will be provided to households of first-time subscribers.

8.5.4 Brazil

In Brazil, public interest media is under threat. Since 2016, public media in Brazil (television, radio and a news agency) has [shifted from being a public broadcaster](#) to becoming a more state-controlled, restricted 'media agency.' The Empresa Brasil de Comunicação ([EBC](#)) had to agree in 2016 to be restructured. This began in 2017 by removing the board of trustees. Under President Jair Bolsonaro, the EBC will be dismantled and approximately 2,000 employees will be relocated to other public service roles.

8.5.5 Recommendations:

- Ireland could introduce tax deductible news subscriptions as in France and boost its media literacy initiatives, as in Australia. A 2016 [report](#) found that, in the last decade, the overall number of not-for-profit media organizations has increased significantly in the US, the UK, and Australia, but no increase was found in Canada and Ireland. In Ireland, charity and tax laws impede the development of non-profit news.
- Like in Australia, Ireland should review defamation laws. Educating children on media literacy at a young age helps public media inform a new generation of citizens and engage them in issues of democracy.
- A review of defamation law can help to combat the chilling effect on public media in Ireland which is harmful to democracy.
- Making news subscriptions tax deductible is also something being trialed in France and can be emulated in Ireland.
- Ireland could extend charitable status to struggling local news outlets, as is being considered in Britain. It can also subsidise office spaces for these organisations. This will all contribute to a diverse media landscape building on the role of public interest media.