

RTÉ AND COVID-19

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AND MEETING PUBLIC NEEDS

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Introduction

Conceived in 2019, the original aim of this project was to provide baseline knowledge about diversity and inclusion in RTÉ. In March 2020, the researchers were set to survey the diversity of RTÉ staff and guests and to analysis the diversity of participants across a selection of programmes. The knowledge gained would serve three goals: it would provide a basis to measure RTÉ's progress in meeting the commitments outlined in the 2018 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy¹; it would provide insights into the feasibility of collecting diversity data on a regular basis; and it would inform wider debates about diversity and inclusion in Irish media.

Covid-19 upended that plan. As public health measures brought major changes to staffing and scheduling, it was no longer possible to survey programme staff and guests. However, the pandemic presented a unique opportunity to assess RTÉ's public service role and the position of diversity and inclusion within that role. The crisis created a specific set of public needs as unreliable information circulated online, social gatherings were prohibited, in-person education was suspended, and the population at large was either at home or working on the frontlines. Of course, the crisis also heightened existing inequalities and raised questions about diversity and inclusion across Irish society.

In this context, we posed the following research questions:

- How did RTÉ perceive its role during the crisis and what challenges and opportunities arose for public service media?
- How is diversity and inclusion conceptualised and enacted within RTÉ?
- How diverse were the voices in programming during the crisis?

These questions were addressed by analysing RTÉ's response to the crisis between 01 March and 31 May 2020. Roughly, this covers the first wave of Covid-19: from the announcement of the first case in early March to the initial easing of lockdown measures in late May. Research data was gathered through interviews and content analysis. Interviews were conducted with ten RTÉ decision-makers to gain insights into their perceptions of diversity and inclusion and RTÉ's role during the crisis. The content analysis examined gender diversity across three Radio 1 programmes (*Brendan O'Connor*, *The Business*, and *Today*) and three RTÉ One programmes (*Claire Byrne Live*, *Ireland on Call*, and *The Late Late Show*). In addition, we gathered data about new and revised offerings across RTÉ's platforms during the time period.

¹ RTÉ (2018) *Diversity and Inclusion in RTÉ: Re-imagined For A New Generation*. Dublin: RTÉ.

To provide context for the research and its findings, the Background section summarises the key challenges facing public service media in Ireland and internationally. It outlines the difficulty of conceptualising and assessing diversity and inclusion in the media sector and it presents an overview of research studies that have investigated diversity in RTÉ and Irish media. This is followed by an overview of RTÉ's Diversity and Inclusion strategy and its implementation written by Zbyszek Zalinski, RTÉ's Diversity and Inclusion Lead.

The research findings are presented in three parts. The first, *Perspectives on diversity and inclusion*, outlines how the interviewees define diversity, the challenges they have encountered, and their plans for the future. The second part, *Diversity in programme content*, presents the results of the content analysis. It provides a breakdown of topics and programme participants including participant roles and occupations and the gender diversity of panels. Regrettably, given the inability to survey programme participants, the content analysis is largely restricted to gender diversity. The third part, *Perspectives on Covid-19*, presents the interviewees' assessment of RTÉ's role during the pandemic and the challenges and opportunities it created.

Key findings

The key findings are summarised as follows:

Perspectives on diversity and inclusion

- Interviewees described the importance of diversity and inclusion in three ways: RTÉ's duty to reflect the changing nature of Irish society; a practical need to engage younger and more diverse audiences; and a responsibility to champion diversity in Irish society.
- Regarding definitions of diversity, class was identified as a foundational and cross-cutting category that shapes social inequality. A number of interviewees also argued for a definition that includes diversity of perspectives.
- Increasing the diversity of RTÉ's workforce - in particular by hiring younger staff - was deemed essential for lasting change. RTÉ's inability to hire, due to its financial situation, was identified as a major obstacle to addressing diversity and inclusion.
- Interviewees outlined specific initiatives aimed at providing media training and development opportunities for under-represented groups, some of which were postponed due to the pandemic. Such initiatives, and the funding to run them, were considered essential to fostering a "talent-driven" approach to diversity.
- Interviewees were somewhat hesitant about the value of diversity quotas and monitoring if such measures are viewed in isolation from societal inequalities and wider actions to address diversity and inclusion. Some interviewees were in the process of developing contact lists to increase the diversity of contributors. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was cited as a potential challenge in this area.
- Regarding content, many interviewees placed emphasis on the need to mainstream and normalise diversity. They indicated that culture and lifestyle content and new formats such as podcasting afforded considerable opportunities to both represent diversity and engage diverse audiences. In contrast, interviewees noted that news and current affairs is more constrained by existing social inequalities, which limits the participants and spokespeople who are available for interviews.

Diversity in programme content

- More than 80 percent of the 963 items coded were about Covid-19. Of these, 18 percent introduced a diversity dimension to the discussion of the pandemic.
- There were 1921 appearances by programme participants and 1349 unique contributors (i.e. excluding repeat appearances).
- A 60:40 male-female gender split was broadly reflected on *Today*, *Brendan O'Connor*, and *The Late Late Show*. *Claire Byrne Live* and *Ireland on Call* came closest to gender parity with females representing 46 percent of participants on each programme. *The Business* had the widest disparity with females representing 36 percent of participants.
- Regarding items featuring more than one participant, the majority (69%) included both males and females. All-male items (21%) were more common than all-female items (10%).
- The most common participants roles were personal experience (28%), expert commentator (18%), discussion guest (15%), and spokesperson (14%). Women accounted for 47 percent of the participants providing personal experience, but only 36 percent of expert commentators.
- The most common participant occupations were media professional (20%), medical professional (14%), and business person (12%). Medical professionals accounted for 44 percent of expert commentators while media professionals accounted for 39 percent of discussion guests. Of these, 40 percent of all appearances by medical professionals were women and 41 percent of all appearances by media professionals were women.

Perspectives on Covid-19

- Interviewees expressed pride in RTÉ's capacity to deliver its services and provide new programming despite the organisational challenges presented by the pandemic. They described experiencing a pronounced sense of purpose that accentuated the core values of public service media: informing, educating, and entertaining.
- Almost all interviewees described news and current affairs as the central pillar or "heartbeat" of RTÉ. Yet, many noted that the pandemic provided an opportunity to demonstrate the value of RTÉ beyond news. Cited examples included an increased emphasis on arts and culture, the commissioning of new works by artists and documentarians, and a renewed focus on "slow TV" and content for young people.
- Overall, interviewees believed the pandemic highlighted the value of RTÉ for the public. As evidence for this, they cited the large increases in audience engagement, particularly among younger age-groups, and the Department of Health's tracking analysis, which reported consistently high levels of public trust in RTÉ as a news source.
- Positive public sentiment was broadly recognised as an opportunity for RTÉ. However, some wondered whether it would translate into a greater commitment to pay the licence fee and whether it would prompt the government to address RTÉ's financial difficulties.
- Many interviewees highlighted the collaborations and partnerships undertaken during the pandemic and suggested these initiatives could have a lasting impact by challenging the division between commercial and public media.
- Similarly, commissioning played a significant role in RTÉ's output. Arts commissioning provided a financial boost to artists who were unable to perform for live audiences while documentary and lifestyle commissioning provided an archival snapshot of life in lockdown.
- However, there was a concern about the long-breaks in TV production and the consequent gaps in the schedule for 2021. Findings ways to address this was considered essential to maintaining positive public attitudes towards RTÉ.

Background

Covid-19 emerged at a critical time for Public Service Media (PSM). In an age of ubiquitous and seemingly free online content, many have questioned whether the public service model remains relevant. In common with PSM across Europe, RTÉ is modelled on the Reithian mission to inform, educate, and entertain. This concept has held sway for the past century and its core democratic and social function is formally recognised at international and European levels. All EU Member States are asked to “guarantee at least one comprehensive wide-ranging service comprising information, education, culture, and entertainment”². In return, PSM are expected to justify their regulatory and financial privileges by fulfilling public obligations and subjecting their services to public value tests.

PSM face distinct market and financial pressures. Digital media offer audiences endless choice and consumption habits are adapting to new devices, platforms, and services. Most notable is the rise of on-demand services such as Netflix. Operating in a regulatory grey area, these services bypass regulatory obligations within the Irish market while reducing the commercial revenue of national media and increasing audience expectations about the provision of high-quality, expensive productions³.

Market changes have also had a negative impact on advertising revenues. In common with PSM across Europe, RTÉ faces declining funding streams⁴. A comparative analysis of 17 European countries finds that public funding is comparatively low in Ireland’s dual-funding model⁵. The study indicates that when public service media have higher levels of public income they achieve higher market shares, stronger relevance as an information source, and greater trust in their independence from external constraints.

Unsurprisingly, market changes have intensified debates about the future remit, relevance, and value of PSM. In Europe, some governments actively oppose public service media. The UK government, for example, has threatened to withdraw licence-fee funding for the BBC, the world’s largest and likely most-respected PSM⁶. Less pointedly, many

² Council of Europe (2009) *Recommendation 1878 (2009) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the funding of public service broadcasting*. 25 June. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

³ Mediatique (2019) *BAI Annual Review of Performance and Public Funding of Public Service Broadcasters 2018*. November. London: Mediatique.

⁴ Ramsey P (2018) Ireland: In Search of Reform for Public Service Media Funding. In: Herzog C, et al. (eds) *Transparency and Funding of Public Service Media*. Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 77–90.

⁵ Saurwein F, Eberwein T and Karmasin M (2019) Public Service Media in Europe: Exploring the Relationship between Funding and Audience Performance. *Javnost - The Public* 26(3): 291–308.

⁶ Shipman T (2020) [No 10 tells BBC licence fee will be scrapped](#). *The Times*, 16 February.

argue that the concept of PSM and its funding need to be reimagined for the 21st Century, and in ways that prioritise public participation in decision-making⁷.

In many ways, the pandemic reinforced the relevance of PSM. The nature of the national emergency necessitated a means of communicating public health advice to a mass audience while the proliferation of rumours and false information underscored the need for reliable and trusted sources of news. Of course, commercial media outlets also fulfilled these functions, but they typically lack the organisational capacity and resources to take on new roles or expand their provisions. For example, in common with other PSM during Covid-19⁸, RTÉ developed collaborations with the education sector to deliver novel programming in response to public needs.

Throughout Spring 2020, Europeans turned to PSM news in record numbers⁹. In Ireland, at the beginning of May, 89 percent of the adult population relied on RTÉ as their main media source for Covid-19 news¹⁰. Most notable were the large increases in youth audiences for news and current affairs. The number of 15-34 year olds watching the RTÉ *Nine O'Clock News* increased 126 percent on the previous year¹¹. An increase in young people relying on television as their main source of news was also identified in the 2021 Reuters Digital News Report¹². The same report found that RTÉ is the most trusted news source in Ireland with 78 percent of survey respondents saying they trusted the service.

It remains to be seen whether these changes will be sustained post-pandemic and what influence they will have on debates about the future of RTÉ. The Future of Media Commission is exploring these issues and, during a month-long public consultation, it received more than 800 submissions from stakeholders and, notably, members of the public. Many of these addressed issues of diversity and wider questions about the role of media and RTÉ specifically. The Future of Media Commission is due to report its recommendations later this year and these will inform the development of the new Media Commission, which is set to replace the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). Whatever the outcome, there is no doubt that diversity and inclusion will be to the fore in any discussion of what PSM should be.

⁷ Hind D (2012) *The Return of the Public*. London; New York: Verso Books.

⁸ <https://en.unesco.org/news/learning-through-radio-and-television-time-covid-19>

⁹ European Broadcasting Union '*COVID-19 crisis: PSM audience performance*', 16 April 2020.

¹⁰ Department of Health '*Amárach Public Opinion Tracker*', 04 May 2020.

¹¹ RTÉ '*Public turn to RTÉ in record numbers for news, information and entertainment*', 05 June 2020.

¹² Murrell, C., K. Park, D. Robbins, and D. Wheatley (2021). *Reuters Digital News Report: Ireland 2021*, Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

Diversity and inclusion

The PSM model is fundamentally rooted in concepts of national identity and nation states. On this basis, RTÉ's vision is to "champion Irish culture by captivating audiences with trusted, engaging and challenging content; celebrating our country's rich diversity; and cultivating Ireland's talent"¹³. However, the unifying mission inherent to the original PSM model needs to contend with the fact that contemporary societies are characterised by a diversity of cultures, nationalities, and identities.

At the time of the 2016 Census, there were 535,475 non-Irish nationals living here with the largest groups originating from Poland, the UK, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, and Brazil. After English, Polish is now the country's most-commonly spoken language. Beyond migration, the state has become more inclusive - officially at least - through the formal recognition of new rights and identities. These include recognition of: gender self-identification (2015), same-sex marriage (2015), Travellers' ethnic minority status (2017); and Irish Sign Language (ISL) as an official language of the state (2017).

In Ireland and elsewhere, campaigners have drawn attention to the lack of diversity across the media and cultural industries. Women on Air was established in 2010 to campaign for greater gender diversity in broadcast media. Launched in 2021, the Women on Air media database¹⁴ supports media in identifying women from different backgrounds who are available to participate as experts, contributors, and commentators. In its submission to the Future of Media Commission¹⁵, Women on Air called for compulsory quotas for broadcast media and public service media specifically. It recommends an initial target of 40 percent female representation that builds towards a target of equal gender representations. In their submissions to the Future of Media Commission, the Equality Expert Group called for regular gender equality monitoring while Project Open Opportunity identified opportunities to increase diversity in the media workforce through training and education initiatives.

This activism is filtering up to regulatory decision-makers. One of the strategic objectives listed in the BAI Strategy Statement 2021-2023¹⁶ is to "foster a media landscape that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society". Irish media are expected to achieve greater diversity "in terms of content, those involved in its production, and in on-air presentation". The BAI Gender Action Plan is exploring the possibility of

¹³ <https://about.rte.ie/visions/>

¹⁴ <https://womenonair.ie/media-database/>

¹⁵ <https://futureofmediacommission.ie/public-consultation-2/>

¹⁶ Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (2021) *BAI Strategy Statement 2021-2023*. Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

developing a data collection framework for gender diversity and is expected to generate “quantifiable increases in female representation on and off air”¹⁷. To assess progress, the BAI will pilot a framework for the ongoing collection of data on diversity.

Assessing quantifiable progress on diversity and inclusion faces conceptual and methodological difficulties. In the US, the development of a diversity agenda focused heavily on ethnic diversity. Since then, the concept has broadened to include other intersecting categories such as gender, class, sexuality, and disability. More recently, under the rubric of sustainability, Irish broadcasters are encouraged to be inclusive by using “the power of programming to shine a light on social injustices and promote a fairer world”¹⁸.

For its part, RTÉ’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategy highlights four diversity categories as a focus of specific commitments: **disability, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality**. Although it should be noted that the strategy does acknowledge an understanding of diversity that extends beyond these four categories.

On-air diversity

The provision of programming and services for or about minority groups is one way in which PSM reflect the diversity of society. This is broadly acknowledged in the 2009 Broadcasting Act, which set down obligations for serving the Irish-language community and providing access for those with disabilities, the deaf community in particular. Obligations in this area have been refined in the BAI’s updated Access Rules (2019)¹⁹. However, there are no specific obligations regarding other groups. This remains true for Travellers despite the formal recognition of their ethnic minority status in 2017²⁰.

Existing studies of on-air diversity in Ireland have primarily focused on ethnicity and gender. A number of studies have examined representations of migration in the context of a changing society. A 2010 study observed that RTÉ had reached a point where ‘first-wave programming’ - i.e. programmes that introduced Irish audiences to new migrants - was no longer relevant²¹. Around this time, broadcasters across Europe were turning away from multicultural programming (aimed at or about minority groups) and towards the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (2020) *Sustainability Roadmap for the Irish Broadcasting Sector*. Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

¹⁹ <https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-publishes-updated-access-rules/>

²⁰ Flynn R (2020) *Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Country report: Ireland*. Florence: European University Institute.

²¹ Titley G, Kerr A and King O’Riain R (2010) *Broadcasting - in the new Ireland. Project Report*. Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

integration of diversity into mainstream formats²². In 2013, the Irish analysis for the EU project MEDIVA found that while RTÉ surpassed other Irish media in offering space to migrant voices, the level of coverage devoted to migrants remained low relative to the size of the migrant population.

Regarding gender diversity, many studies have focussed on news and current affairs programming. Ireland is included in The Global Media Monitoring Project, an ongoing international study of gender in news media. The 2015 report found that women represented 33 percent of news sources across Irish media. Considering the aggregate findings from the UK and Ireland, the authors found that while women were present in the news, their contributions were “often confined to the realm of the private as they speak as citizens rather than experts”²³.

A similar conclusion was drawn from the 2015 Hearing Women’s Voices study²⁴, which examined the representation of male and female voices in current affairs programming across three radio stations: RTÉ Radio 1, Newstalk, and Today FM. Male voices accounted for 72 percent of broadcasting time with the lowest disparity on RTÉ Radio 1 where males represented 63 percent of broadcasting time in contrast to 82 percent on Newstalk and 70 percent on Today FM. Considering the gender breakdown of participant roles on RTÉ Radio 1, men accounted for 78 percent of the time devoted to expert voices and 72 percent of the time allocated to discussion guests.

There are no recent studies that broadly investigate representations of disability. Research undertaken in 1995 concluded that Irish media representations of disability were defined by the attitudes and prejudices of non-disabled people resulting in highly sentimental and sympathetic portrayals²⁵. In 2009, research undertaken by the National Disability Authority in collaboration with the BAI²⁶ found that 20 percent of Irish radio and television programmes made some reference to disability, either by featuring a person with a disability or by including a spoken reference to disability. People with disabilities were more likely to be present in drama, comedy, and lifestyle programming. Notably, the prevalence

²² Titley G (2014) After the end of multiculturalism: Public service media and integrationist imaginaries for the governance of difference. *Global Media and Communication* 10(3): 247–260.

²³ Ross K, Boyle K, Carter C, et al. (2018) Women, Men and News: It’s life, Jim, but not as we know it. *Journalism Studies* 19(6): 824–845.

²⁴ Walsh K, Suiter J and O’Connor O (2015) *Hearing Women’s Voices?* Dublin: National Women’s Council of Ireland and Dublin City University.

²⁵ McBride S (1995) *The Media and People with Disabilities*. Dublin: Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

²⁶ National Disability Authority (2009) *The Representation and Portrayal of People with Disabilities in Irish Broadcasting*. Dublin: National Disability Authority.

of disability representations in these genres was attributed to imported programmes rather than Irish made content.

The National Disability Authority study adopted a broad definition of disability and found that depression was the most commonly represented form of disability, followed by representations of autism and addiction. In contrast, a 2008 study examined RTÉ Radio 1's *Outside the Box*, a weekly radio magazine for people with disability. It identified a tendency to focus on medical aspects of disability, which was primarily defined as a physical phenomenon. Nevertheless, the programme was characterised as a space in which people with disabilities could provide "rich accounts of their experience"²⁷.

Regarding sexuality, historical analyses often point to RTÉ television, in conjunction with activism, as the catalyst for changing attitudes²⁸. In the 1980s, the increased visibility of LGBTQ+ perspectives "was the product of sympathetic decision-makers and producers within RTÉ, who were canvassed and lobbied by activists within the Irish gay civil rights movements"²⁹.

Considering the past five years, Kerrigan presents a nuanced analysis of LGBTQ+ representations across different genres of RTÉ programming³⁰. He observes that RTÉ has mainstreamed LGBTQ+ representations in entertainment and lifestyle programming. This mainstreaming, he argues, mirrors the strategy of the 2015 Marriage Equality campaign insofar as it avoids "alienating majority audiences" by emphasising a common humanity "rather than the particularities of their LGBTQ sexual identity". At the same time, through documentary formats, RTÉ representations "are beginning to uncover the complexities, difficulties and challenges of being LGBTQ in modern Ireland". Focusing on trans representations, Kerrigan contrasts how documentary formats enable trans people to speak for themselves while the confrontational mode of television debates tends to pit health experts against outspoken figures. This analysis underscores the importance of contextualising diversity representations within their genre and productions contexts; context that is often lacking in purely quantitative measurements.

²⁷ O'Malley MP (2008) Voices of disability on the radio. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 43(s1): 18–29.

²⁸ Ryan, P (2012) *Asking Angela McNamara: An Intimate History of Irish Lives*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

²⁹ Kerrigan P and Vanlee F (2020) Public service broadcasting and the emergence of LGBT+ visibility: A comparative perspective on Ireland and Flanders. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*: 136754942093589

³⁰ Kerrigan P (2021) After Marriage: The Assimilation, Representation, and Diversification of LGBTQ Lives on Irish Television. *Television & New Media* 22(1): 47–64.

Measuring on-air diversity

Collecting and monitoring diversity data is a prerequisite for promoting change and holding media accountable. Nevertheless, one difficulty for research in this area is that measuring on-air diversity is not straightforward. First, there are clear problems with attempts to infer diversity characteristics from on-air representations. While it has been relatively uncontroversial to infer the gender of people represented in the media, it is not possible to compile accurate data about other diversity characteristics without self-reported data from programme participants.

Second, the choices broadcasters make about who to include are not entirely free. The BBC's 50/50 project makes an important distinction between contributors the broadcaster is free to choose (e.g. a guest on a panel show) and contributors that are determined by the topic or external actors (e.g. a government minister or spokesperson). In addition, choices about who to include are shaped by societal inequalities. During Covid-19, for example, international studies highlighted the lack of visibility for women in news media³¹. This has partially been attributed to that fact that men occupy the majority of senior public health roles and to the increased pressures on women who still undertake the bulk of caring work in the family³².

Third, as a quantitative exercise, measuring on-air diversity often reveals little about the nuance or quality of diversity representations in the media. Moreover, there is a danger that simplistic measurement essentialises people and obscures the diversity within specific groups. After all, people may be grouped by certain characteristics, such as gender or sexuality, but they are not reducible to them³³.

Fourth, broadcasters argue that measuring on-air diversity obscures the wider diversity of media practices because it discounts the diversity of production teams and the role of decision-makers in shaping content. In other words, it is necessary to also assess workforce diversity, which is discussed in the next section.

Workforce diversity

The extent to which media - and PSM in particular - reflect the diversity of society is not simply a matter of diverse representations in programming. It also concerns routes of entry to media careers and the diversity of decision-makers at various levels. European

³¹ Kassova L (2020) *The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News*. London: AKAS.

³² Milford Morse M and Anderson G (2020) [The Shadow Pandemic: How the COVID-19 Crisis is Exacerbating Gender Inequality](#). UN Foundation.

³³ Titley G, Kerr A and King O'Riain R (2010) *Broadcasting - in the new Ireland. Project Report*. Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

policymakers increasingly frame diversity as a business issue, rather than a purely social one, by arguing that organisations benefit from the wider skill set of a diverse workforce³⁴. Campaigns to increase the representation of women on boards are a prominent example of this. Regarding media specifically, increased diversity at a senior level is considered important because “the attitudes which determine how seriously diversity is taken reflect the dominant make-up of management in the industry”³⁵.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are many barriers to entering media work. Writing in 2010, Colum Kenny argued that Irish media employers maintained a belief that non-Irish workers “are unlikely to be as well informed as Irish citizens are about Irish affairs and the conviction that in broadcasting their foreign accents will be alienating or difficult to understand for many citizens”³⁶. A 2013 review of Irish broadcasting found that neither RTÉ nor TV3 (now Virgin Media) had a dedicated diversity officer and neither provided outreach schemes to mentor media workers from a non-Irish background³⁷. Six years later, the 2019 appointment of a Diversity and Inclusion Lead in RTÉ was the first of its kind in Irish broadcasting.

Unsurprisingly, previous studies have highlighted the importance of improving access for underrepresented groups³⁸. At the organisational level, interventions in this area have been defined for their emphasis on empowering individuals or transforming workplace practices and culture. Training and mentoring schemes are examples of empowering interventions that aim to equip individuals from underrepresented groups with media skills, experiences, and networks. In contrast, transforming interventions, such as unconscious bias training, aim to “change sector practices and processes in ways that make gender, ethnicity, class, or physical ability less relevant for accessing opportunity”³⁹. Unsurprisingly, it is transforming interventions that have the power to effect the greatest levels of change.

According to a review of more than 800 US organisations over three decades, diversity awareness training does little to change behaviour and attitudes. In contrast,

³⁴ Cullen P and Murphy MP (2018) Leading the debate for the business case for gender equality, perilous for whom?: Leading debate for the BCGE. *Gender, Work & Organization* 25(2): 110–126.

³⁵ Turner G (2020) Dealing with diversity: Australian television, homogeneity and indigeneity. *Media International Australia* 174(1): 20–28.

³⁶ Kenny C (2010) Finding a voice or fitting in? Migrants and media in the new Ireland. *Media, Culture & Society* 32(2): 311–322. P.313.

³⁷ Rogers J, O’Boyle N, Preston P, et al. (2014) The significance of small differences: Cultural diversity and broadcasting in Ireland. *European Journal of Communication* 29(4): 399–415.

³⁸ Titley G, Kerr A and King O’Riain R (2010) *Broadcasting - in the new Ireland. Project Report*. Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

³⁹ Newsinger J and Eikhof DR (2020) Explicit and Implicit Diversity Policy in the UK Film and Television Industries. *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 17(1): 47–69. P.55

improvements in workplace culture stem from activities that promote direct engagement with underrepresented groups such as collaborative projects and mentorship schemes. The authors conclude that introducing social accountability through diversity task forces or diversity managers is essential to ensuring “employees are committed to building an inclusive environment while appealing to people who otherwise would not be interested in diversity projects”⁴⁰.

Of course, increasing the diversity of the media workforce is not only a matter of organisational policies and practices. It is also fundamentally entwined with wider educational, social, and economic inequities. In the UK, for example, economic barriers around housing and the cost of living limit the workforce for London-based media⁴¹. Similar circumstances apply to Dublin. Working classes, ethnic minorities, and the disabled are largely absent from Irish journalism, indicating structural barriers to entry⁴². A lack of diversity in media education within third level institutions may partly account for this. Yet, internationally, women graduate with journalism and media degrees at a higher rate than men and still find themselves underrepresented in the media workforce⁴³ with women accounting for only a third of all media professionals⁴⁴.

Collecting diversity data is clearly necessary to understand the diversity of the media workforce and for measuring change over time⁴⁵. An original, pre-pandemic, aim of this project was to collect diversity data about RTÉ employees. As Irish media have no obligation to collect diversity data about their staff, the study would have provided a baseline measure of diversity and provided insights on the feasibility of a larger initiative.

In the UK, public funding for the media and arts sectors is increasingly tied to diversity and inclusion. This creates an important financial incentive to fulfil stated commitments. Moreover, UK broadcasters are required to provide employee data on three characteristics - gender, ethnicity, and disability - and requested to report on age, sexual orientation, religious belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment. In practice, however,

⁴⁰ Dobbin F and Kalev A (2016) Why Diversity Programs Fail. Harvard Business Review.

⁴¹ Boyle R (2018) Television Talent in the Twenty-First Century. In: Boyle R (ed.) *The Talent Industry: Television, Cultural Intermediaries and New Digital Pathways*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 159–173.

⁴² Flynn R (2016) *Media Pluralism Monitor 2016: Country report: Ireland*. Florence: European University Institute.

⁴³ Rubio Marin R, Menezes Queiro B and Haraldsson A (2019) *Women, Leadership and the Media*. STG Policy Briefs, 2019/05. Florence: European University Institute.

⁴⁴ O'Brien A (2019) *Women, Inequality and Media Work*. London ; New York: Routledge.

⁴⁵ The Equality Expert Group (2021). [The Underrepresentation of Women in Media](#): Submission on to The Future of Media Commission.

there are large information gaps as many employees have declined to disclose their data⁴⁶. Meanwhile, many trade unions have asked members to boycott the Diamond project, an industry-wide diversity monitoring system, due to concerns about the transparency of the reporting. As the UK experience indicates, efforts to monitor diversity and inclusion require the trust and confidence of workers within the sector.

In the following section, RTÉ's Diversity and Inclusion Lead Zbyszek Zalinski outlines how RTÉ is implementing its 2018 Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

⁴⁶ Ofcom (2019) *Diversity and equal opportunities in television: Monitoring report on the UK-based broadcasting industry*. 8 September. London: Ofcom.

Diversity and Inclusion at RTÉ

By Dr Zbyszek Zalinski, RTÉ Diversity and Inclusion Lead

This section outlines RTÉ's approach to Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) since the publication of the D&I strategy in October 2018. This strategy was the product of an intensive period of work by an internal steering group. It recognises that a clear and complete approach to D&I is foundational to realising RTÉ's mission ("to enrich Irish life with content that challenges, educates and entertains") and to executing RTÉ's vision ("to champion Irish culture by captivating audiences with trusted, engaging and challenging content; celebrating our country's rich diversity; and cultivating Ireland's talent").

The strategy is underpinned by four key principles - authenticity, inclusivity, fairness, and equality - and includes four broad commitments, which are tied to medium-term (2018-2022) and long-term (2030) goals. Overall, it marks a new approach to D&I by setting commitments for both on-air and off-air diversity and by emphasising the need to embed diversity in the workforce and workplace practices as well as content representations.

By participating in this DCU-led research project, RTÉ hoped to gain robust knowledge about the diversity of its workforce and onscreen representations. Although Covid-19 made it impossible to implement the original study, the results of the revised research will contribute to the advancement of RTÉ's D&I commitments.

D&I Commitments

- Represent and reflect the voice and diversity of Ireland.
- Engage and educate our workforce.
- Fully integrate D&I into workplace policies and practices.
- Act as a leader in championing D&I and promoting strategies to address inequities in the creative and media industries.

Cooperating with researchers is just one of many D&I actions undertaken since the launch of the strategy. Following a recruitment process, I was appointed Diversity and Inclusion Lead in early 2019. The aim of this role is to drive the D&I agenda across RTÉ by working with people across the organisation – including the Director of Human Resources and other members of the RTÉ Executive Board - and reporting to the Director General. Of course, the advancement of D&I is not reducible to an individual role. Rather, as the D&I strategy makes clear, there is a collective, organisational responsibility to initiate and implement changes.

Over the past two years, a number of initiatives have sought to engage and educate the RTÉ workforce on different aspects of D&I. An online training module on Diversity and Inclusion Awareness was launched in 2018 for all employees, people managers, and leaders. It is also included in the on-boarding process for new employees. In collaboration with Screen Producers Ireland, unconscious bias workshops have been organised for content producers and hiring managers receive training on inclusive hiring practices with an emphasis on the difference between “culture fit” and “culture add”.

To initiate an organisation-wide conversation about D&I practices, a series of workshops and meetings have engaged producers, executive producers, editors, and genre heads across radio, TV, and online. Such workshops provide a key opportunity to encourage programme-makers to seek out new voices and faces by connecting them with underrepresented communities and associated organisations. As part of the *New Voices, New Perspectives* project, a series of brainstorming sessions focussed on helping programme makers find new contributors from underrepresented communities.

A central part of this is bringing underrepresented voices into the heart of RTÉ through talks and events. For example, events have focussed on raising awareness about disability, neurodiversity, autism, dyslexia, and the importance of LGBTQ+ allyship. A 2019 event in collaboration with Beyond Representation championed women of colour who are breaking new ground in Irish media, arts, and business. In the second half of 2020, the DiversiTea initiative was launched to facilitate virtual conversations between RTÉ staff and people from all over the world who have made Ireland their home. The conversations - hosted by Graham Clifford from the Together Ireland Community Integration initiative - included participants who moved to Ireland from 15 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America.

D&I at RTÉ does not and cannot operate in a vacuum. For example, engaging with representative groups is central to RTÉ's Access Services, which includes the provision of subtitles, audio-descriptions, and Irish Sign Language (ISL). The Head of Access manages these relationships, engagement and related RTÉ policy and strategy. As Head of Access, Kevin Burns convenes an annual meeting with a number of representative groups, which is supplemented with off-site visits and feedback sessions around key issues. In other instances, RTÉ builds on and responds to initiatives in wider society, as outlined in the case study below.

Another significant development is the creation and work of the Diversity in Content group. It brings together senior leaders from across the organisation working with the Director General and the D&I Lead to review, discuss and progress all RTÉ's efforts when it comes to diversity and inclusion in our content. The group is also joined by a HR representative.

Gathering diversity data and the best and most appropriate solutions to do so, are among the core questions discussed by the Diversity in Content group. The 50:50 project is an initiative being implemented across Radio, TV and online. RTÉ is an external partner to the 50:50 Equality Project: an "initiative, born in the BBC's London newsroom, [which] uses a methodology that is rooted in data, creativity, practicality and passion to fundamentally shift representation within the media." It is "a voluntary, self-monitoring system," and it has been adopted by a number of teams in radio, TV and online to look at the gender diversity in our content. With the 50:50 project already part of the workflow for a number of teams, we are looking forward to more teams joining in the second half of 2021. The project follows on RTÉ's participation in 20x20, a campaign to drive greater levels of representation and participation of women in sport. Gender diversity data continues to be monitored in this area and the experience proved instructive in terms of the more recent 50:50 project.

The above highlights some of the actions undertaken by RTÉ to date. As there is insufficient scope to highlight every initiative, the following case study of RTÉ Sport's partnership with the 20x20 campaign is presented as an illustrative example.



For the past two years, RTÉ has been the media partner for the 20x20 campaign, which is promoting a cultural shift in perceptions of girls and women in sport. As part of this collaboration, RTÉ Sport has set targets in four areas:

Content	20% target for TV content, 20% year-on-year increase in TV sports news, stories online, and social content ⁴⁷
Expert Opinion	20% target for female experts on sports coverage across TV and radio
Journalists	20% target for female presenters on sports coverage across TV, TV news, and radio
Media Leadership	develop a measurement tool; grow awareness; education initiatives, succession planning and training

Experts and journalists: RTÉ Sport compiled a database of female pundits and partnered with Women on Air to provide training and mentorship for female GAA pundits. Lisa Fallon became the first female soccer pundit to feature in coverage of the Irish men's team and the Champions League and the first female co-commentator on League of Ireland coverage. Fiona Coghlan became the first female co-commentator to cover the Men's Rugby World Cup.

Sports coverage: In 2018, a mini-documentary, 'We run the world', about female athletes was commissioned for RTÉ Player. Work on this documentary helped secure the rights for the 2018 Women's Hockey World Cup, which became an unforgettable moment in the history of Irish sport. In 2019, RTÉ Sport aired 23 live games in the Women's Soccer World Cup and shared the full championships with TG4. This was accompanied by a dedicated Women's World Cup website featuring live blogs and almost 150 articles.

⁴⁷ From 2020 baseline; radio baseline to follow in 2021

RTÉ Sport secured rights to home-games for the Irish team's Euro 2020 qualifying campaign and – due to rights challenges – some of the away games. The Women's Champions League was shown live on Irish TV for the first time in 2020. The Liberty All-Ireland Camogie Junior Final aired on live TV in 2019 and the AIB All-Ireland Camogie Club Finals was shown on RTÉ Player in 2020. On radio, there was a full live commentary for the All-Ireland Camogie and All-Ireland ladies semi-finals and finals.

More broadly, there is now a daily focus on women's sports events at editorial meetings for sports news while RTÉ Player has provided coverage of minority sports including the 2019 European Swimming Championships and underage games including the semi-finals and Final of the UEFA Women's U19 Soccer Championships.

Method

The study has two components: interviews with ten RTÉ decision-makers and a content analysis of select programming. These methods were applied concurrently.

The time period for analysis ran from 01 March to 31 May. Roughly, this covers the period from the first confirmed case of Covid-19 in the Republic of Ireland (29th February) to the first phase of lockdown easing (May 18th-June 2nd). During this time, all schools were closed from March 12th, a stay-at-home order was issued on March 28th, and these restrictions on movement were extended on May 1st.

Interviews

To gather insights from decision-makers regarding the role of RTÉ during the crisis and their perspectives on diversity and inclusion, ten interviews were conducted. Interviews were semi-structured to ensure the same topics were raised in each interview while allowing for flexibility in terms of the varying work areas and levels of decision-making represented by the interviewees.

Interview questions focussed on three areas. First, perceptions of public needs and the role of RTÉ during the crisis as well as the challenges and opportunities they experienced during the pandemic. Second, perceptions of diversity and inclusion including how they conceptualise it, the obstacles they perceive, and the actions they think are required. Third, perceptions of RTÉ's future post-pandemic and the long-term outlook for PSM in Ireland.

Interviewees

Person	Position
Ailbhe Conneely	Social Affairs and Religion Correspondent
Rory Coveney	Director of Strategy, RTÉ Executive Board member
Dan Healy	Head of RTÉ 2fm
Suzanne Kelly	Head of Children's and Young Peoples
Elizabeth Laragy	Producer at RTÉ Radio 1
Neil Leyden	Head of RTE.ie
Jane Murphy	Series producer of The Late Late Show
Niamh O'Connor	Deputy Director of Content
Jon Williams	MD of News and Current Affairs, RTÉ Executive Board member
Peter Woods	Head of RTÉ Radio 1

Content analysis

This component focussed on a select group of radio and television programmes. The analysis examined six programmes that are broadcast live on radio and television. The choice of programmes incorporates RTÉ radio and television and reflects different content genres including news and current affairs, lifestyle, business, and entertainment. With the exception of *Ireland on Call*, a special series in response to the pandemic, all of the monitored programmes are part of the regular schedule.

Analysed Programmes

	Programme	Presenter(s)	Episodes
Radio	Today	Sean O'Rourke; Sarah McInerny; Damien O'Reilly	61
	Brendan O'Connor	Brendan O'Connor; Sarah McInerny	27
	The Business	Richard Curran	13
TV	Claire Byrne Live	Claire Byrne, Sarah McInerny	11
	Ireland on Call	Katie Hannon and Brendan Courtney	13
	The Late Late Show	Ryan Tubridy; Miriam O'Callaghan	13

Each thematic segment within a broadcast was treated as a discrete item and 17 pieces of information were coded about each item and the people who participated in the item (excluding the presenter). The item topic, participant role, and participant occupation were coded from fixed lists derived from the Global Media Monitoring Project. The given name and title/description of each contributor was also recorded. In addition, the coder evaluated whether each item was about Covid-19 and whether the item addressed issues relating to the four diversity categories: disability, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. For example, this includes items highlighting the impact of the pandemic on gender roles, migrant communities, or disability services. A brief description of each reference was recorded.

Codebook summary

Segment details	Topic details	Contributor details
Programme	Main topic*	Name
Episode	Covid-19 topic Y/N	Title (if given)
Date	- gender dimension Y/N	Gender
Duration	- ethnicity dimension Y/N	Contributor Role*
Vox-Pop Y/N	- disability dimension Y/N	Occupation*
	- sexuality dimension Y/N	
	Topic description	
*predefined list – see appendix		

There are several limitations that should be noted: The content analysis is limited to just six programmes which were all broadcast live on RTÉ Radio 1 and RTÉ One. Other RTÉ

stations were excluded. Participant diversity is limited to gender. Without corresponding survey data, it was not feasible to make accurate and consistent judgments about the ethnicity, sexuality, or disability characteristics of participants. In addition, when assessing the inclusion of diversity perspectives in item content, the study only considers the four categories mentioned above. Other important diversity characteristics - such as age and socio-economic status - are excluded. Consequently, the results of the content analysis do not offer a full reflection of diversity within the analysed programmes or across RTÉ's overall output.

To supplement the above, the researchers sought to identify the range of new or revised provisions that addressed public needs. This was achieved by reviewing schedules, press releases, and seeking records from division heads. However, as there are no centralised records of this information, it is difficult to present a comprehensive picture of all new provisions.

Perspectives on diversity and inclusion

The role of D&I in RTÉ

The interviewees articulated three interrelated arguments for why diversity and inclusion is important for RTÉ. The first concerns RTÉ's duty to "mirror" the changes in Irish society by reflecting "the Ireland of today and not the Ireland of twenty years ago". A second view defined diversity as a practical, business need because if RTÉ does not reflect the diversity of Irish society it will "ultimately lose relevance, which loses audiences, which loses money".

A third argument identifies a responsibility to champion diversity in Irish society. Almost all interviewees cited the adage "if you can't see it, you can't be it" and pointed to the lack of equal opportunity in Irish society generally and in the media sector specifically. In this context, some interviewees defined a responsibility to make under-represented communities more visible: "it's not like [minorities] need to be parachuted in, but they need to be given a leg up" through training, development and outreach.

In conceptualising diversity and the challenges RTÉ needs to overcome, almost all interviewees emphasised the concept of social opportunity. In particular, they identified class as a cross-cutting category that underpins social inequality. As one interviewee observed, class "ought to be the starting point for all diversity because it's about opportunity." At the same time, other interviewees also noted that the concept of diversity should include diversity of perspectives and opportunities to hear them.

Regarding ethnicity, some interviewees suggested that, in the past, programme makers assumed that Irish people only wanted to watch Irish people, but now audiences are demanding to see diversity.

"the audience has forced us to change. They're demanding to see diversity"

Regarding RTÉ's progress on diversity and inclusion, interviewees pointed to the influence of Director General Dee Forbes and the appointment of Zbyszek Zalinski as Diversity and Inclusion Lead as two factors that ensure "every part of editorial are aware of [diversity] and of keeping it on their agendas". Some interviewees cited the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 as an awareness-raising moment that highlighted "subtle things that we could do" to reflect diversity such as the selection of photographs and the need to engage directly with communities.

The push for gender equality was also highlighted as a model for what needs to happen in other areas. As one interviewee suggested “if we don't have a woman on a panel, it'll be raised on social media, so perhaps it's now time for it to be raised if there's a lack of [other] diversity.”

The fact that RTÉ itself does not reflect Irish society was recognised as a major challenge. Some interviewees characterised RTÉ's history of hiring as people “coming across the bridge from UCD”. While increasing diversity within RTÉ was commonly cited as a goal, many interviewees expressed frustration with the “lack of new blood” and the inability to hire due to RTÉ's financial situation.

Aside from economics, the nature of the Irish media market was also cited as a factor. In contrast to larger markets where there is a regular turnover of staff moving between media organisations, there is little turnover within RTÉ. As a result, the profile of RTÉ staff tends towards an older, middle-class demographic. Many interviewees argued that introducing new voices to production roles is essential to implement change: by having “different voices around the table “different questions get asked”.

Interviewees also placed emphasis on the need to nurture new talent by “bringing people through the ranks”. Some interviewees described internship programmes for under-represented groups that were postponed due to the pandemic. Other described localised training provisions “to bring in researchers and potential producers from various communities”.

On-air diversity

The emphasis on bringing people through the ranks was also an important consideration for improving on-air diversity. Interviewees identified a need to develop structures and opportunities to harness talent from diverse communities. Training and development is important because, as one interviewee commented, “you can't just pluck somebody from the sky and put them on a live show”. Nevertheless, interviewees variously underscored the need to actively look for talent among under-represented communities and to insist on diverse casting when working with independent production companies.

In tandem with the idea of nurturing talent, interviewees highlighted a need to develop relationships with under-represented communities. Some described a previous naivety that assumed minorities will “be open to us ... just because we've decided we want to be diverse”. Other interviewees cited engagement with communities as a bulwark against tokenistic representations. For example, in reference to the Black Lives Matter protests in

2020, some interviewees indicated that there was a danger of jumping on the bandwagon without “reading and watching and listening to people from the community”.

In terms of increasing the diversity of programme contributors, interviewees acknowledged internal and external limitations. Internally, they described a natural tendency to rely on familiar voices: “it’s about getting out of the loop of comfort where it’s the same voices all the time.” Externally, interviewees noted that the inequalities of wider society limit the availability of diverse voices for news and commentary: “if I need to get the person who is the spokesperson for whatever organisation, there are fewer people of colour or different backgrounds in those roles.” Similarly, interviewees pointed to the under-representation of women in politics and in senior public health roles during Covid-19 and the lack of women working as senior correspondents in national newspapers.

Interviewees highlighted the complexity of defining the diversity of contributors and a tendency to focus on what’s visible. For example, a lack of ethnic diversity is easily identified on television: “just by looking at the television, it is clear that we are failing to accurately get to a significant number of non-white contributors”. In contrast, most diversity characteristics are hidden on radio.

In terms of increasing the diversity of contributors, interviewees argued that the inclusion of diverse voices needs to be mainstream rather than niche.

“just by looking at the television, it is clear that we are failing to accurately get to a significant number of non-white contributors”

Interviewees noted that some minority groups rarely appear in news and current affairs to speak about issues unrelated to the identity of their communities. Other interviewees suggested there is still “a lot of tip-toeing” around issues of Irish and ethnic identity. On this basis, interviewees defined their ambitions to mainstream and normalise diverse representations. They described plans to expand contact lists and develop databases to include new voices from a range of backgrounds and perspectives whereby the pool of programme contributors is broadened and contributors are invited to speak with expertise on issues unrelated to their identity.

While expressing a commitment to diversity, interviewees were somewhat hesitant about the value of diversity quotas and monitoring without also considering the wider context of societal inequality and wider actions taken to address diversity. Regarding quotas, there was a concern that they would encourage a ‘tick the box’ approach to the selection of contributors. Others felt quotas run counter to the nature of production because “certain

programmes require certain people". As an alternative, interviewees felt there was an onus on programme makers to push for diversity in their own work and in the work they do with the independent sector.

Interviewees cited arts and culture, lifestyle, and children's programming as areas that have shown progress in mainstreaming diversity and inclusion. In particular, lifestyle and arts content were upheld as a way to embrace diversity without veering into activism. For example, one interviewee discussed the benefit of lifestyle and documentary content for addressing transgender issues because those formats "just let [transgender individuals] tell their story". Other interviewees also highlighted new formats like podcasting and short form video as platforms that have "opened up opportunities" for engaging younger, more diverse audiences

While the aims of monitoring were recognised, as one interviewee noted: "I don't need to actively monitor [diversity] to know that it doesn't happen very often." As a centralised contributor database would potentially present "significant GDPR issues", most interviewees described a more informal process of developing diverse contact lists. Nevertheless, they also pointed to the value of databases developed by other organisations such as Women on Air.

Diversity in programme content

Items and topics

For each programme, the unit of analysis was individual items or segments that focus on a specific topic. In total, 963 items were coded across the six programmes. The duration of items ranged from less than sixty seconds to ten minutes. Items addressing any aspect of Covid-19 were coded as Covid-19 items.

Unsurprisingly, Covid-19 dominated coverage between March and June. It was the main topic on each programme, representing 83 percent of all items.

Items by programme

Programme	All Items	Covid-19 Items	% Covid-19
Brendan O'Connor	98	83	85%
The Business	76	56	74%
Today	553	441	80%
Claire Byrne Live	58	55	95%
Ireland on Call	91	91	100%
The Late Late Show	87	77	89%
Total	963	803	83%

Each item was coded against a pre-defined list of topics drawn from the Global Media Monitoring Project. These topics indicate thematic variants in the coverage of Covid-19: from disasters (e.g. the crisis in Italy) to the impact of the pandemic on the arts and the economy. Notably, only five percent of items concerned national politics.

Items by topic (n=963)

Topic	#	%
Disasters	196	20%
Health	169	18%
General Interest	138	14%
Culture, Arts, Media	100	10%
Economy & Business	94	10%
Human Interest	71	7%
Politics: national	50	5%
Politics: international	33	3%
All other categories	112	12%

Covid-19 items with a diversity dimension (n=803)

Of the 803 items about Covid-19, 18 percent introduced a diversity dimension to the discussion. As noted, diversity here is limited to just four categories.

	#	%
Disability	73	9%
Ethnicity	21	3%
Gender	46	6%
Sexuality	5	1%
Total	145	18%

Examples include items about access to disability services, the increase in domestic violence, and the role of migrant workers in frontline services. Issues relating to disability were more salient than the other diversity categories. This is unsurprising given the noted concerns about the impact of the pandemic on the provision of healthcare and social services as well as the impact on mental health.

Covid-19 items with a diversity dimension

	# items	Gender	Ethnicity	Disability	Sexuality
Brendan O'Connor	83	6%	6%	13%	2%
The Business	56	4%	-	4%	2%
Today	441	6%	3%	9%	1%
Claire Byrne Live	55	2%	-	2%	-
Ireland on Call	91	7%	1%	13%	-
The Late Late Show	77	6%	-	8%	1%

Programme participants

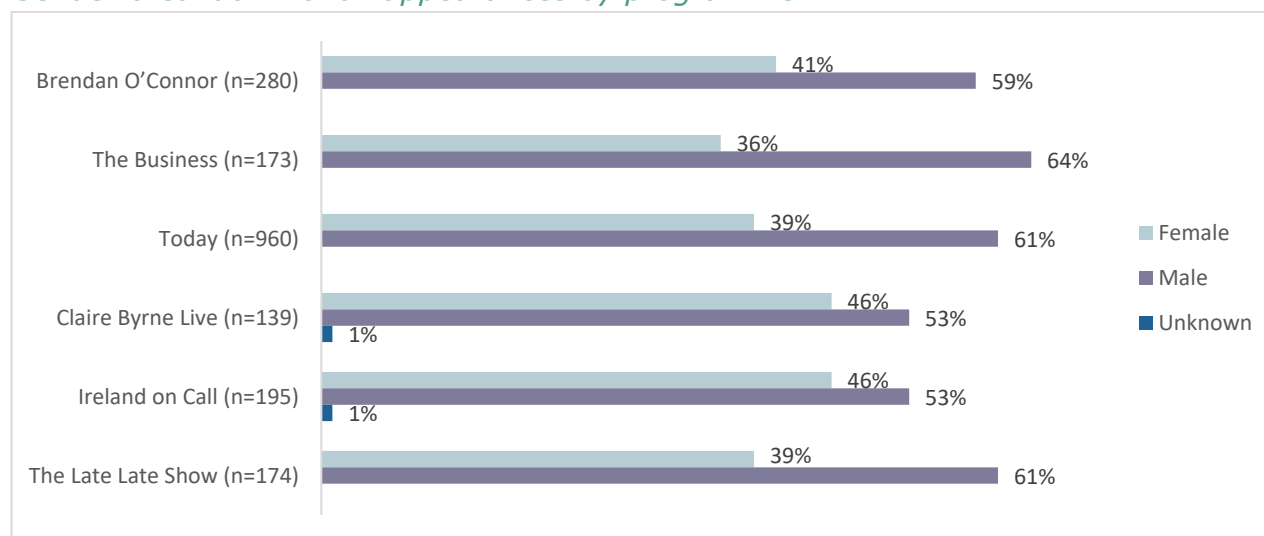
Programme participants are defined as all those who appeared or spoke within an item, apart from the programme presenters. Across all items, there were 1921 appearances by programme participants and 1349 unique contributors (i.e. excluding repeat appearances). Across all appearances, the gender ratio was 60 percent male to 40 percent female. This ratio broadly remains when repeat appearances are excluded and when vox-pop participants are excluded, which indicates that the 60:40 ratio reflects substantial contributions by participants.

Breakdown of participants

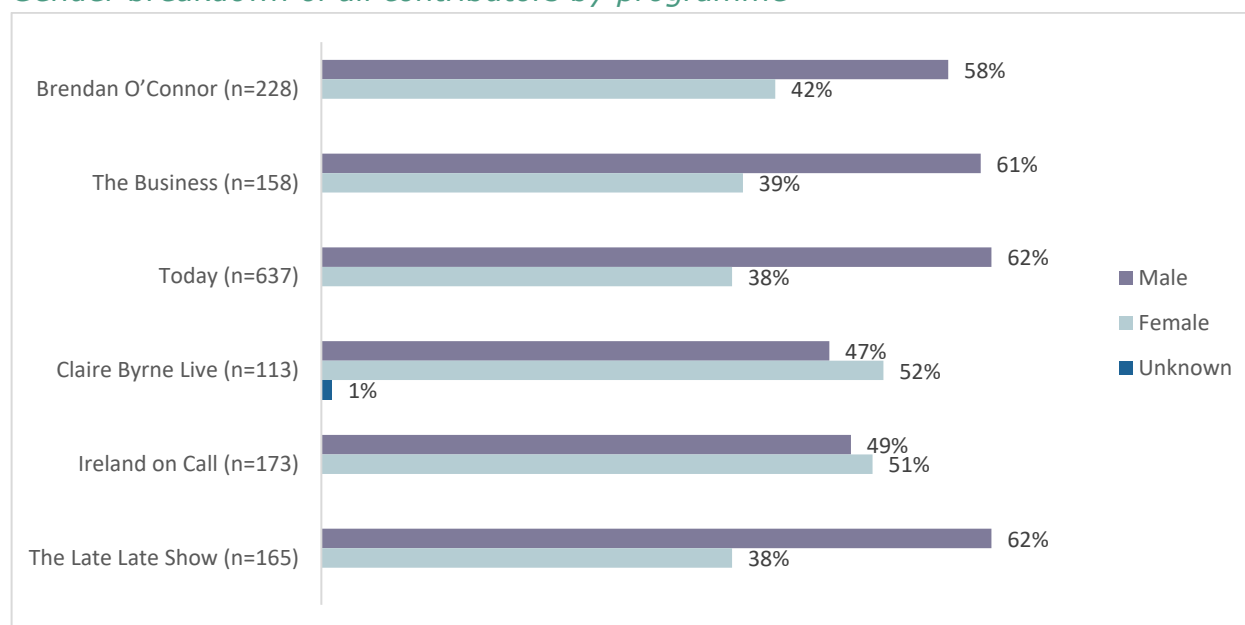
	Total	Male	Female
Appearances	1921	60%	40%
Unique contributors	1349	58%	42%
Unique contributors excl. vox-pops	1096	58%	42%

At the level of individual programmes, male participants outnumbered females on all programmes. The 60:40 gender split was broadly reflected in *Today*, *Brendan O'Connor* and *The Late Late Show*. *Claire Byrne Live* and *Ireland on Call* came closest to gender parity with females representing 46 percent of participants on each programme. *The Business* had the widest disparity with females representing 36 percent of participants.

Gender breakdown of all appearances by programme



Gender breakdown of all contributors by programme



The majority of items (69%) with more than one participant included both males and females. This was true for all programmes. However, it must be noted that some programmes - most notably, the *Brendan O'Connor* programme - frequently featured large panels with five males and only one female. In general, all-male items (21%) were more common than all-female items (10%).

Items with more than one participant

Programme	All Male	All Female	Mixed
Brendan O'Connor	6	2	50
The Business	9	2	27
Today	56	25	141
Claire Byrne Live	3	5	21
Ireland on Call	7	7	37
The Late Late Show	8	2	23
Total	89	43	299
%	21%	10%	69%

There were nine items with four or more participants that were either all-male or all-female. In some cases, they may be considered stereotypical such as an all-male panel discussing sports and the Cheltenham Festival. In other instances, these single gender panels were somewhat atypical such as the six women discussing mask manufacturing on *Ireland on Call*. In the table below, *The Late Late Show* items featuring single-gender musical acts have been excluded.

Items with four or more participants that were all-male or all-female

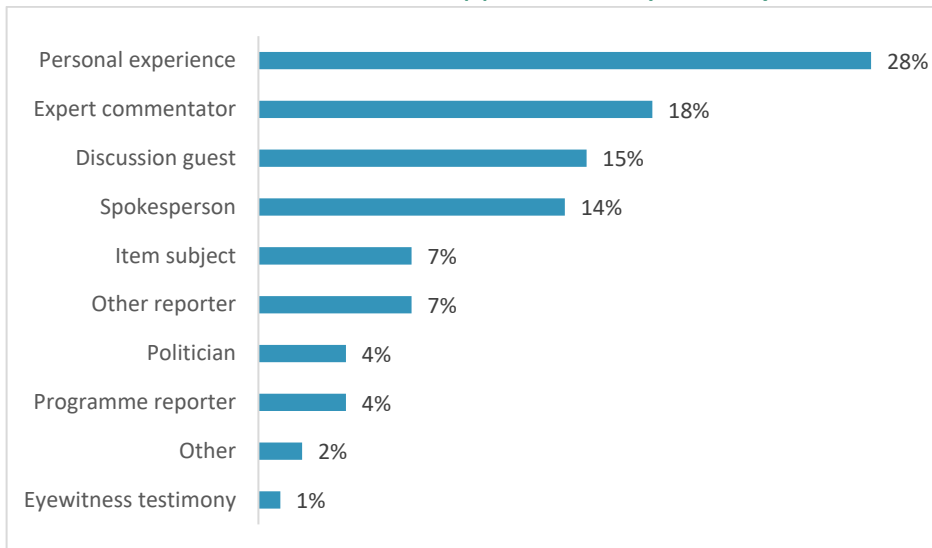
Programme	All Male	All Female	# Participants	Item
Brendan O'Connor		y	4	Returning to work in healthcare
Claire Byrne Live		y	4	Experiences of lockdown
Ireland on Call		y	4	Fundraising for Hospice
Ireland on Call		y	6	Mask manufacturing
The Business	y		5	Containers From China
The Business	y		4	Cheltenham Festival
The Business	y		4	Courier services
Today	y		4	Coronavirus
Today	y		4	Impact on sports

Participants roles

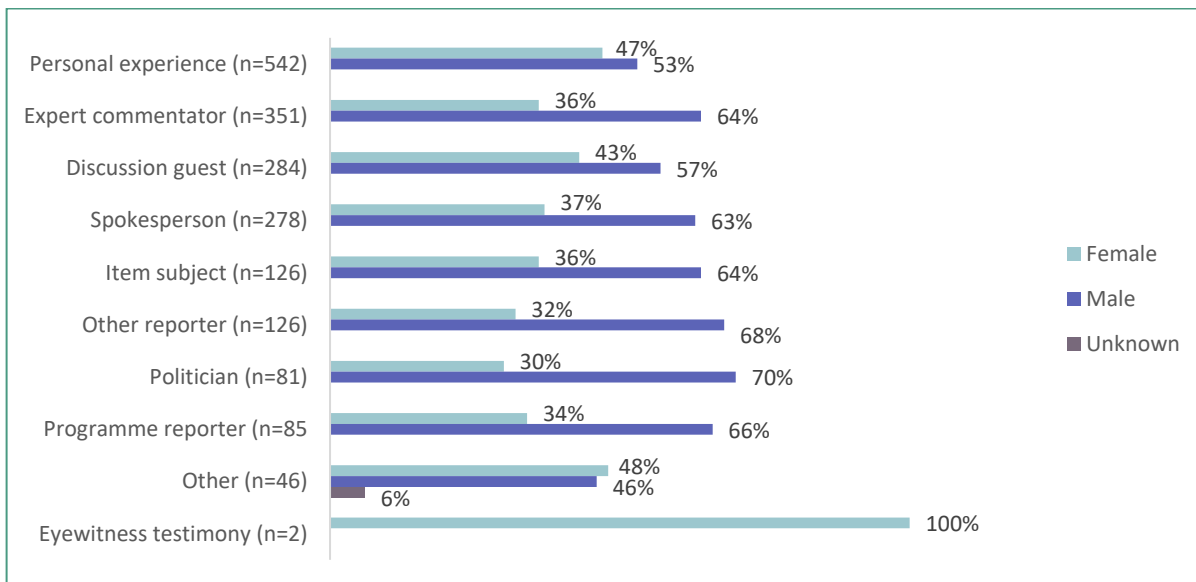
Across all appearances, the most common participants' roles were personal experience (28%), expert commentator (18%), discussion guest (15%), and spokesperson (14%).

Males outnumbered females in almost all programme roles. However, within the most prominent category, personal experience, the split between males and females only slightly favours males. More notable is the difference in the expert commentator category where women accounted for only 36 percent of participants.

Breakdown of roles across all appearances (n=1921)



Gender breakdown of roles



Unsurprisingly, doctors and health specialists made up the bulk of expert commentators. As men occupy the majority of senior public health roles, this may partially explain the under-representation of women in the expert commentator role.

Those invited to participate as discussion guests are primarily media professionals. Significantly, the media have greater freedom to choose discussion guests – in contrast to expert officials and spokespersons – and the ratio of males to females in this category is closer than the other categories with women representing 43 percent of all discussion guests.

Most common occupation by role

Personal Experience (n=542)	
Business person, executive	15%
Occupation not Stated	13%
Celebrity/artist	12%
Health/childcare/social worker	7%
Other occupations	53%

Expert commentator (n=351)	
Doctor, health specialist	44%
Academic expert, teacher	27%
Business person, executive	10%
Celebrity/artist	6%
Media professional	4%
Other occupations	9%

Discussion guest (n=284)	
Media professional	39%
Business person, executive	13%
Academic expert, teacher	12%
Government, politician	9%
Doctor, health specialist	7%
Other occupations	20%

Spokesperson (n=278)	
Activist or civil society worker	37%
Business person, executive	22%
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	19%
Government employee, public servant	6%
Health/childcare/social worker	3%
Other occupations	13%

Across all appearances, media professionals are the most salient followed by doctors and health specialists and business people. Considering the overall gender breakdown of participants' occupations, it is notable that women only outnumber men in job categories connected to caring and the family. Women represented 72 percent of the healthcare and childcare care workers and 80 percent of the homemakers. Women were also more likely to feature in items where their occupations were not stated (58%).

Participant occupations across all appearances

	Total	Male	Female	Unknown
Media professional	383	59%	41%	
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	262	60%	40%	
Business person, executive	235	69%	31%	
Celebrity/artist	191	62%	38%	
Activist or civil society worker	153	54%	46%	
Academic expert, teacher	149	69%	31%	
Government, politician, spokesperson	115	69%	31%	
Occupation not stated	93	39%	58%	3%
Health/childcare/social worker	54	26%	72%	2%
Homemaker	35	20%	80%	
Police, military	30	77%	23%	
Sportsperson	28	71%	29%	
Tradesperson, labourer	25	68%	32%	
Office or service worker	22	45%	55%	
Retired person/pensioner	22	41%	59%	
Government employee, public servant	20	65%	35%	
Religious figure	20	80%	20%	
Legal professional	19	84%	16%	
Student, pupil, schoolchild	18	50%	50%	
Agriculture, mining, fishing, forestry	11	73%	27%	
Science/technology professional	9	67%	33%	
Villager or resident	7	43%	57%	
Other	14	71%	29%	
Remaining categories	6	50%	50%	

Most common occupations by programme

Brendan O'Connor	#	Male	Female
Media professional	90	58%	42%
Celebrity/artist	53	53%	47%
Academic expert, teacher	32	78%	22%
Business person, executive	31	68%	32%
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	23	70%	30%
Activist or civil society worker	12	50%	50%

<u>The Business</u>	#	Male	Female
Business person, executive	66	70%	30%
Media professional	38	58%	42%
Celebrity/artist	14	79%	21%
Academic expert, teacher	13	69%	31%
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	6	33%	67%

<u>Today</u>	#	Male	Female
Media professional	224	60%	40%
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	144	55%	45%
Business person, executive	109	72%	28%
Activist or civil society worker	103	52%	48%
Government, politician, spokesperson	90	68%	32%
Academic expert, teacher	85	68%	32%
Celebrity/artist	38	53%	47%

<u>Claire Byrne Live</u>	#	Male	Female
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	33	61%	39%
Media professional	21	52%	48%
Business person, executive	12	42%	58%
Celebrity/artist	12	67%	33%
Academic expert, teacher	11	82%	18%
Health/childcare/social worker	10*	20%	70%

<u>Ireland on Call</u>	#	Male	Female
Not Stated	46*	37%	61%
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	41	80%	20%
Business person, executive	15	67%	33%
Activist or civil society worker	13	69%	31%
Health/childcare/social worker	12	25%	75%
Police, military	10	70%	30%

<u>The Late Late Show</u>	#	Male	Female
Celebrity/artist	73	70%	30%
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	15	53%	47%
Activist or civil society worker	14	50%	50%
Sportsperson	9	89%	11%
Homemaker	8	25%	75%
Student, pupil, schoolchild	8	38%	62%

*gender of some participants undetermined

Perspectives on Covid-19

Affirming the value of PSM

All interviewees credited the pandemic with reinforcing the value of PSM both for RTÉ staff, the public, and the political system. They described experiencing a pronounced sense of purpose that accentuated the core values of PSM: informing, educating, and entertaining. Across various divisions, the pandemic was described as an opportunity to focus on “the fundamentals of what we should be doing”.

In particular, interviewees expressed pride in the fact that many audiences re-engaged with RTÉ during the pandemic.

“The pandemic underscored the role of public service and reaffirmed RTÉ’s enduring value to audiences”

They cited large increases in audiences across RTÉ divisions including a sharp rise in youth audiences for news. In some cases, the level of audience engagement was unexpected. As radio consumption is strongly aligned to commuting and “the rhythms of people’s lives”, there was initial concern that the lockdown would bring a fall-off in listeners across the schedule. In contrast, interviewees noted an increase in younger and Irish overseas listeners. Such positive audience figures were described as a “blunt indication of whether or not we were being relevant”.

For News and Current Affairs in particular, RTÉ’s large audience share was taken as an indication of public trust. Interviewees cited the Department of Health’s tracking analysis of public sentiment, which found that throughout the pandemic 80-90 percent of the public trusted RTÉ as a news source. This trust was defined as the expectation that RTÉ will “ask the right questions” and give “the right information”. They also noted that the prevalence of rumours and false information on social media left people looking for a “safe harbour” of trusted information. News was credited as the main driver of traffic to RTÉ.ie, which doubled during the pandemic, and brought knock-on effects in exposing people to other types of content including arts, lifestyle, and entertainment.

On a practical level, interviewees expressed pride in RTÉ’s capacity to keep programmes on air while also delivering new programmes and services. They cited the technical and logistical challenges that had to be overcome to comply with public health measures and support remote working. For example, one interviewee noted that remote working was especially isolating for younger staff who were living in rented accommodation. Such

considerations along with the demands of live broadcasting influenced decisions about which teams and divisions would work remotely.

In common with other media, these challenges were compounded by the decline in revenue during the pandemic. In this regard, some interviewees wondered whether the positive public sentiment towards RTÉ would translate into a greater commitment to pay the licence fee and whether advertisers would recognise the enduring value of traditional media like radio. Ultimately, interviewees were somewhat cautious about the future implications. While the pandemic appeared to emphasise the value of PSM, they noted the need for a political commitment to address RTÉ's financial difficulties.

RTE's roles during the pandemic

Almost all interviewees described News and Current Affairs as the central pillar of RTÉ. In the context of a national emergency, the public need for reliable news and information was greatly heightened. Against a backdrop of scientific uncertainty, interviewees described a dual role for news: disseminating the public health message to help the public stay safe and "asking the right questions" to hold people to account.

For example, the situation in nursing homes was highlighted as an area where the official response needed to be questioned on behalf of the public. Yet, while BBC reporters were given access to UK nursing homes, Irish journalists did not have the same level of access initially.

"People were looking for a safe harbour of trusted news content and they came to RTÉ"

As the pandemic evolved, interviewees described "a conscious effort ... to talk to people who felt they were being isolated" and to explore how the pandemic "hit some a lot harder than others". Interviewees highlighted the enduring relevance of Radio 1's *Liveline* - "Ireland's first social media" - as an avenue for public discussion.

Negotiating public fear was another noted role. Regarding news coverage, interviewees described a need to directly address people's fears and to actively seek out positive aspects of the pandemic by highlighting how communities were coming together.

Beyond news, interviewees described their role as a balance between informing and entertaining the public. For example, *The Late Late Show* played a prominent role in RTÉ's response to the crisis. The initial aim was to reduce fear and help people implement public health advice through physical demonstrations of handwashing and the Covid-19 test

procedure. To do so, the team consulted with public health experts and behavioural psychologists.

Arts and entertainment was defined as part of RTÉ’s mission to keep people’s “imagination alive” during the pandemic. Some interviewees argued that the crisis refocused attention on the role of RTÉ in “underpinning of Irish culture” and reminded the public about the value of the arts as a means to “articulate and make some sense of what we were going through”.

Although the pandemic had a devastating financial impact on the arts and culture sector, it also provided an opportunity for new audiences to engage with the arts. Online platforms, in particular, experienced a boost in arts audiences. There were more than half a million unique visitors to RTE.ie/Culture in May 2020, an 82 percent increase on the previous year. More than one million viewers worldwide watched *Other Voices: Courage*, which streamed on RTÉ.ie, Facebook, and YouTube.

Many interviewees noted RTÉ’s role in facilitating collaborations with other organisations. These were highlighted as activities that underscore public service and may have a lasting impact. Over nine shows *The Late Late Show* partnered with Irish artists and musicians to raise more than €6 million for Irish charities and communities⁴⁸. Charities were selected to highlight the impact of the lockdown on different groups. For example, Women's Aid were included to highlight the increased pressure on victims of domestic violence.

Some interviews pointed to collaborations that challenged the division between commercial and public media. For instance, the Shine Your Light collaboration with local radio stations was upheld as an example of how commercial and public media could work together.



In April, the Shine Your Light campaign asked people to join together in a moment of solidarity. The poetry and performances by Irish artists were broadcast simultaneously across RTÉ and independent radio stations, a first in Irish broadcasting.

⁴⁸ Throughout 2020 and into 2021 viewers of *The Late Late Show* raised more than €20 million for Irish charities.

Finally, interviewees emphasised RTÉ's role in commissioning content and working with the independent production sector. For example, RTÉ commissioned *Lockdown Letters*, a series of short films reflecting on people's experiences during the pandemic. Such commissioning had an archival value in providing a "snapshot of where people were in these extraordinary times" and offered a boost to Irish filmmakers and artists "who were all on the ground financially".

The independent production sector was central to new Covid-19 focussed programmes such as Home School Hub and Ireland on Call. On March 30th, RTÉ launched *Home School Hub* in collaboration with the independent production company Macalla Teo and with support from the Faculty of Education at MIC, University of Limerick' the Department of Education; and the Professional Development Service for Teachers. Working with education experts was an integral part of this effort to create "slow TV" and "go back to basics" for families across Ireland who might not have access to broadband and were struggling with online learning.

Overall, interviewees perceived an opportunity to build on the successes achieved during the pandemic. However, there was a concern about "gaps in the schedule" due to long-breaks in TV production. Moreover, commissioning was deemed "very risky" because it's not clear how long the pandemic will last and, consequently, what kind of content is appropriate. There was also a concern about the need to commission content that can be delivered quickly and the implications that might have on quality.

New Provisions

Below is a selection of new provisions addressing public needs between March and June 2020. This list was derived from press releases published during that period. As such, it is not an exhaustive list as it does not capture all the new offerings developed in responses to the crisis. New provisions included newly commissioned programmes, re-licensed content, and collaborations with other organisations.

Much of the content examines different aspects of the pandemic including news and analysis (e.g. *Lessons from Wuhan*), health and well-being (e.g. *Operation Transformation: Keeping Well Apart*), community responses (e.g. *Ireland on Call*), documentary records of daily life (e.g. *Lockdown Letters*), and memorials to the dead (e.g. *Ireland Remembers*). Provisions relating to education (e.g. *Home School Hub*) and religion (e.g. daily mass and faith messages) addressed the suspension of in-class education and religious gatherings. Meanwhile, entertainment provisions included new music programmes filling the void of live sports, arts collaborations, and a number of dramas,

comedy series, TV shows, classic films, and classic sports, which were provided through acquired rights and re-licencing.

Content provided to meet public needs, March-June 2020

New Provisions	Channel	Content
#RTELoveOurMammies (Mother's Day)	Various	Social
#RTEVirtualParade (St Patrick's Day)	Various	Social
#BloomwithRTÉ (Bloom Festival)	Various	Social
Cook-in with Mark Moriarty	RTÉ One	TV series
Create Don't Contaminate	RTÉ 2FM	Campaign
Daily mass and faith messages	RTÉ News Now	Religious service
Dear Ireland	RTÉ Culture	Theatre
Des' Island Discs	RTÉ Radio 1	Music
Feel Good Week	RTÉ 2FM	Campaign
Home School Hub	RTÉ2	Education
Home School Hub Extra	RTÉ2	Education
How Do You Do?	RTÉ Player	Crafts
Ireland on Call	RTÉ One	TV series
Ireland Remembers	RTÉ One, RTÉ.ie, RTÉ Radio 1	Memorial
ISPC / CHILDLINE	RTÉ 2FM	Live Music Event
Kevin Paints	RTÉ Player	Arts
Lessons from Wuhan	RTÉ Player	News /Current Affairs
Live Concerts	RTÉ 2FM	Music
Lockdown Letters	RTÉ One	Documentary
Love in Isolation	RTÉ Player	Lifestyle
Marty in the Shed	RTÉ Player	Entertainment
MayDay: 24 hours in Ireland's Lockdown	RTÉ One	Documentary
One World: Together at Home	RTÉ2, RTÉ 2FM, RTÉ Player	Music simulcast
Operation Transformation: Keeping Well Apart	RTÉ One	TV series
Other Voices Courage	RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ.ie	Arts
Owen Colgan Around the Fire	RTÉ Player	Comedy
Pandemic	RTÉ Radio 1	Podcast
RTÉ Gold simulcasts	RTÉ Gold, RTÉ Radio 1	Music
RTÉ Sport Classics	RTÉ2, RTÉ Player	Sport
RTE.ie commissioned articles	RTÉ.ie	Various

Shine your light	Various	Campaign
The Big House Quiz	RTÉ Player	Entertainment
The Classic Rock Hour with John Kenny	RTÉ Radio 1	Music
The Leap of Faith (extended season)	RTÉ Radio 1	Religion
With You In Sprit	RTÉ Radio 1	Religion
You OK?	RTÉ 2FM	Podcast

Re-Licenced/Acquired Rights	Channel	Content
Classic Films	RTÉ One	Entertainment
Boxsets of classic US TV (e.g. ER, Fraiser)	RTÉ Player	Entertainment
Irish comedy (e.g. Derry Girls, Kilnaskully)	RTÉ Player	Comedy
Irish drama (e.g. Pure Mule, Love/Hate)	RTÉ Player	Drama
Max Richter's Sleep	RTÉ lyric fm	Arts
Normal People	RTÉ One, RTÉ Player	Drama
One World: Together at Home	RTÉ2, RTÉ Player, 2FM	Music
Shakespeare plays	RTÉ2, RTÉ Player	Arts/education

Conclusion

Writing about the Irish broadcasting sector in 2010, Tarlach McGonagle made the following observations:

There is generally a large measure of goodwill towards the policy goal of promoting cultural diversity ... though, there would appear to be a lack of expertise (of successful strategies) and capacity (in terms of both human and financial resources). There would also appear to be a lack of experience of action plans specifically geared towards cultural diversity⁴⁹.

Ten years on from that assessment, RTÉ has made some significant progress in defining and promoting a strategic vision for diversity and inclusion. The appointment of a Diversity and Inclusion Lead and the launch of a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy were both important developments as is the new commitment to monitoring the diversity of content. Based on the interviewees' descriptions, it is clear that diversity and inclusion are taken seriously by RTÉ decision-makers. Interviewees articulated a nuanced understanding of diversity and the myriad of social inequalities that deny or limit opportunities for certain communities. Almost all cited the mantra "if you can't see it you can't be it" when describing RTÉ's need to both champion and reflect the diversity of Irish society.

Moreover, interviewees pointed to specific actions they have implemented or are about to implement. These include concrete actions such as the provision of internship schemes for underrepresented groups to more informal actions such as building relationships with underrepresented communities. Many of the actions described were focused on embedding change over the medium and the long term. There was a clear sense from the interviewees that any meaningful progress on diversity and inclusion will take time and commitment as well as collaboration with under-represented communities and the campaigners who are developing diversity initiatives such as Women on Air.

Regarding gender diversity, it is notable that some programmes came close to gender parity in their selection of guests, despite the lack of women in senior public roles during the Covid-19 crisis. While all-male items were more common than all-female ones, the vast majority were mixed. Of course, merely counting the number of participants and their gender says little about the depth of their participation.

Finding appropriate ways to monitor and measure diversity and inclusion remains a challenge. It is necessary to develop robust and appropriate measurement techniques that

⁴⁹ McGonagle T (2010) *Promoting cultural diversity in the Irish broadcasting sector: an assessment of international standards and best practices with a view to their operationalisation in an Irish context*. Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

enable benchmarking and a transparent evaluation of RTÉ's progress on its diversity commitments. Moreover, it would seem important to go beyond merely measuring on-air and off-air diversity to also include an assessment of the other ways in which workplace culture is becoming more open to diversity and inclusion such as the number of people participating in diversity initiatives or the number of divisions that have implemented mentorship or internship schemes. While these may not yield immediate results, they will play an important role in generating change.

Regarding capacity, RTÉ's financial situation presents a significant obstacle. Without adequate financing, there is limited scope to provide training programmes or, at the most basic level, to hire new staff. In this context, it may be beneficial for the new media regulator to provide funding for media training and development with the specific aim of serving under-represented groups. Similarly, the media regulator can play a lead role in identifying mechanisms to increase access to careers in media if a statutory requirement is included in legislation. Currently, the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2020 does not make significant provisions for advancing diversity and inclusion.

The Future of Media Commission will make its recommendations on these issues in 2021. Notably, the public consultations and "thematic dialogues" that took place as part of the Future of Media Commission placed considerable emphasis on matters of diversity across the entire media sector and genres of media. A consistent theme across these contributions was the need to rethink how PSM will continue to serve public needs and reflect the diversity of Irish society amid the inevitable social and technological change that will continue to transform the media sector.

Financing is also pivotal to the wider discussion on the future of RTÉ and PSM. If the pandemic highlighted the enduring relevance of public service media, it also heightened the need to address RTÉ's precarious finances and to reimagine the role of PSM for the digital age. The loss of revenue through licence fee evasion, declining licence fee receipts, and declining advertising is clearly not sustainable and it is impossible to isolate issues like diversity and inclusion from the financial viability of PSM and media generally.

Codebook - predefined categories

Main topic	Contributor Role	Contributor Occupation
Crime, violence	Discussion guest	Academic expert, lecturer, teacher
Culture, media	Expert commentator	Activist, civil society/NGO/trade union
Disasters	Eyewitness testimony	Agriculture, mining, fishing, forestry
Economy, business	Item subject	Business person, executive, stock broker
Education	Other reporter	Celebrity, personality, artist, arts
Environment	Personal experience	Child, young person
General interest	Politician	Doctor, dentist, health specialist
Health	Popular/public opinion	Government employee, public servant
Human interest	Programme reporter	Government politician, spokesperson
Legal affairs	Spokesperson	Health worker, social/childcare worker
Politics: international		Homemaker, parent
Politics: national		Lawyer, judge, magistrate, legal advocate
Religion		Media professional, journalist, film-maker
Science, technology		Office/ service/non-management worker
Social affairs		Police, military, fire office
Sport		Religious figure
War, conflict		Retired person, pensioner
Other		Science/ technology professional
		Sportsperson, athlete, coach
		Student, pupil, schoolchild
		Tradesperson, artisan, labourer
		Unemployed
		Villager or resident
		Not stated
		Other

Source: Global Media Monitoring Project