

Submission to The Future of Media Commission

Core

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Media have the power to influence the thinking of large numbers of people in society. That is why it is crucial to have a healthy, balanced and diverse media environment, with a strong bedrock of widely accessible public-interest content that achieves the following goals:

- **Protecting truth.** Through investigative journalism and a commitment to public-interest news, the media play a vital role in promoting transparency and accountability, reporting crimes, unearthing corruption and driving out fake news. This is so important in an age where the truth can so easily be distorted through social media posts and biased reporting.
- **Safeguarding democracy.** The media play an important role in maintaining a healthy, functioning democracy by informing, educating and mobilising the public; therefore, keeping them engaged in politics, social issues, the economy and the role of government.
- **Celebrating and promoting our evolving culture.** Media play a pivotal role in building a sense of community and highlighting the wonderful, and increasingly diverse, aspects of life in Ireland. These characteristics of who we are and how we live are precious and should be celebrated and encouraged.

These goals can only be achieved, in full, through a pluralistic media market, which includes well-resourced indigenous media that are focussed on servicing the needs of the Irish public. Most international media organisations are not focussed on these needs; instead, they provide a combination of broad-based entertainment that is usually designed to appeal to multi-market audiences and other content that is often tailored to users' specific bias, interest or ideology, where the priority is not on providing balance. These channels draw large audiences, which weakens the indigenous media's ability to earn advertising revenue that is needed to generate high-quality distinctive content of relevance to the Irish public. Ireland is disproportionately exposed to this effect because we are a small English-speaking country, which significantly amplifies the competitive impact of UK and US-based media organisations here.

To illustrate the extent of the funding issue, it is useful to look at what has happened over the last twenty years. In the year 2000, the total amount of advertising money invested in media in the Republic of Ireland was circa €630 million. Approximately 96% of this went to indigenous media. In 2020, the total market spend was circa €875 million,

with indigenous media's share falling to 49%*. Therefore, over the last two decades, the level of annual advertising support for the indigenous sector has fallen by €176M.

The prognosis for the future is concerning. Without government intervention, the number of indigenous outlets, and the range of what they cover, will continue to shrink. We should not allow commercial market forces to shape the media landscape in Ireland, because this will eventually lead to market failure, with the breadth and depth of public-interest content being significantly compromised.

So, what needs to be done? The Government should introduce a comprehensive set of measures that fully and sustainably addresses the problem for the long term. Great care and planning are required to achieve this, and any measures recommended by The Commission must be rigorously reviewed and tested to ensure they will have the desired effect.

In our view, the following measures are worthy of consideration. None of these are new ideas and have been recommended in other jurisdictions.

- Direct financial support for the production of public-interest news and culture-based content
- Removal of VAT on printed and online news media
- Measures to ensure that news media organisations receive fair compensation for content that is published on third-party digital platforms
- The establishment of a regulatory body with responsibility for overseeing online news quality
- The establishment of a media literacy strategy for children and adults to help people understand where 'news' comes from, who produces it and why, how to evaluate it and identify its credibility, and how to recognise and deal with deceptive and malicious online behaviours.

We welcome the appointment of The Commission to this task. Ireland needs to address these issues now to achieve the healthy and balanced media environment that is a basic requirement of a functioning democracy and a thriving and diverse culture. If we don't, we will look back in a decade's time and ask why we didn't act when there was time to do so.

*Source: Core. Indigenous media are defined as organisations where the product is shaped with an Irish audience in mind.