

8th January, 2021.



By email to: info@futureofmediacommission.ie

Professor Brian MacCraith,
Chair,
The Future of Media Commission.

Oifig an Uachtaráin

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Re: The Future of Media Commission - Public Consultation

Dear Brian,

I welcome the opportunity afforded to UCC to forward our submission to you as Chair of the Future of Media Commission, with regard to the role of universities in public service broadcasting.

The relevance and awareness of public service broadcasting in Ireland has been heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborations with higher education-based experts are increasingly prevalent on every current affairs and news programme. During this time, the public appreciation of the role of RTÉ has increased, not least as a source of trusted information and news, source of companionship (particularly radio), as well as a source of shared entertainment and culture.

This daily evident relevance is paralleled by the success of RTÉ Brainstorm, which provides an easy accessible platform for domain experts to share their insights with the public, whereby it secures over 1 million page impressions a month on RTÉ.ie - bringing academic thinking and research to a wider new audience.

UCC

UCC has deepened its collaboration with RTÉ significantly in recent years through highly successful joint film and content development initiatives, mainly in the form of co-production of historical documentaries and the development of web content around topics related to the documentaries.

Most of these collaborations have their origins in the Atlas series of books produced by Cork University Press, emanating primarily from our College of Arts, Celtic Studies, and Social Sciences.

Documentary Projects - RTÉ and UCC - Revolution and Famine joint projects - hugely impactful amplification of UCC's primary research - blue chip documentary series.

Having co-produced two highly acclaimed documentaries: The Irish Revolution (2019), and The Hunger (2020), the latter also involving the prestigious European broadcaster ARTE, UCC is working again with RTÉ on a new documentary series on the Irish Civil War, for broadcast in 2022. We are also working with RTÉ and the Office of Public Works to produce a documentary on the Skellig Islands, for 2022, which is inspired by our forthcoming CUP book on the Skelligs (2021).

The relevance of such collaborations has wide ranging benefits, beyond those immediately evident to both partners. We are very pleased that RTÉ has agreed in principle to co-produce two further documentaries with UCC namely, *The Story of Irish Sport*, and *The Victorian Internet*, both scheduled for delivery in 2023 and both of which are based on books in progress at CUP which will be published in advance of the films.

In March 2020, we were pleased to grant RTÉ inaugural broadcast rights for *The Great Book of Ireland* (2019), a UCC production which was publicised widely by RTÉ.

Online Resources

UCC, in particular via our Department of Geography and the School of History, is active in supporting the following publicly accessible websites, located on RTÉ's digital domain and supported by funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media:

- The Irish Revolution website (available);
- The Great Famine website (available);
- The Irish Civil War website (in planning).

All are closely associated with the documentaries and the relevant Atlas series of books, providing information and latest research by acknowledged experts in the relevant fields; the content is closely reviewed and edited by UCC experts. We are not aware of any other academic institution nationally that is currently working with RTÉ in the production of these kinds of websites.

Future Developments

We have ongoing discussions with RTÉ regarding significant potential for further documentary and online projects around scientific topics which have public appeal, from our centres of scholarly research excellence.

With all the above in mind, it may be timely for the approach of ARTE - the European culture channel - and its ARTE Education subsidiary to be further investigated for possible development of equivalency here. Examples of the potential for such collaborations are evident: UCC Professor John Cryan worked with ARTE in 2018 on the production of a documentary (broadcast 2019) on the association between diet and mental health, <https://youtu.be/0vj47QaL8Y0?t=2607> and as stated, more recently ARTE were involved with our documentary on the Great Hunger.

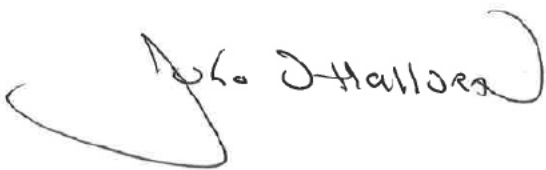
It is clear that broadcasters globally, public service broadcasters especially, are moving away from conventional produce and play programming by establishing rich repositories of online content to complement their broadcast activity. RTÉ is no exception, and our collaborations with them reflect this trend.

There is considerable potential for universities to fulfil their public engagement mission by continuing to collaborate with RTÉ in the production of documentaries which can showcase the scholarly expertise which resides within the higher education sector.

Moreover, we can also help RTÉ in its new mission to develop attractive online content around complex historical, social, and scientific issues for public consumption by providing that content along with academic validation. There is a real synergy here, and UCC holds strong relevance nationally and internationally, thanks to its successes to date with RTÉ, and at the international level with ARTE. We are committed to further embedding and enhancing our collaborations of relevance, for mutual and reciprocal benefit.

I look forward to opportunities to discuss this potential further with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John O'Halloran', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Professor John O'Halloran,
Interim President.