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Research on Use of the Irish Language on Radio – Phase 3

John Walsh

National University of Ireland, Galway

1. Introduction

This research report is the result of the third phase of an investigation into the use of the Irish language on all of Ireland's licensed radio services with the exception of stations broadcasting exclusively in Irish. It was funded by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and conducted by the National University of Ireland, Galway in 2020.

The first two phases of the study aimed to investigate how legislative provisions and regulatory guidance about the Irish language were reflected in radio programming. Successive Broadcasting Acts since the late 1980s have contained provisions requiring that the Irish language must be considered during the licensing process. Furthermore, the BAI and its predecessor organisations have consistently included the promotion of Irish language programming in their strategic plans over the past 30 years.

The earlier phases of the study were conducted in collaboration with Dr Rosemary Day of Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick and based on a total of 57 stations. Phase 1 covered Irish language and bilingual output in 2017 and Phase 2 analysed programming from 2018. The methodology was quantitative and based on analysis of published schedules, surveys completed by station managers and follow-up contact by phone or email to clarify information.

Dr Walsh and Dr Day were invited twice in 2018 by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands, to present their findings (Oireachtas Éireann, 2018a & 2018b; Tuairisc.ie, 2018). The study also generated interest among public,

independent and community radio stations and was covered in both Irish- and English-language media. Earlier reports were published at <https://audioresearchcentre.wordpress.com/research/>.

In the course of communications with station managers in the first two earlier phases, information came to light about perceptions of Irish speakers and obstacles to developing additional Irish language programming. Some stations explained how they had made great efforts in relation to Irish but were often frustrated about the issue. Problems identified included a lack of central support for or co-ordination of Irish language programming and uncertainty about where to access Irish-speaking presenters or contributors. Furthermore, it seemed that stations lacked knowledge about diversity within the audience who consider themselves ‘Irish speakers’ where competence can range from the limited to the fully fluent. It was clear that further qualitative research was required to tease out these opinions further in order better to identify the potential obstacles to developing Irish language output with a view to finding solutions to the weak provision at the moment.

Therefore, this report focuses on the views of station managers and representatives on the obstacles to and opportunities regarding Irish language radio programming in the future. It emphasises their opinions and perceptions of Irish language broadcasting in terms of requirements, current output and future opportunities for development. It also presents case studies of best practice covering long-standing individual Irish-language programmes on national commercial, local commercial and community radio stations. The study does not examine the licensing process in detail and does not comprise interviews with the BAI’s Contracts Awards Committee or an examination of its work. Therefore, references to the licensing process are based on the perceptions of broadcasters only. It was beyond the scope of this project to examine the work of the Contracts Awards Committee but it would be useful to conduct research on this topic in the future.

The results of this study are relevant to a number of stakeholders within the media and Irish language sectors. Firstly, the report provides valuable information to stations themselves and encourages discussion about the topic among them. It is of benefit to their representative organisations Independent Broadcasters of Ireland and the Community Radio Forum of Ireland (CRAOL) and provides additional baseline data to state or voluntary organisations promoting Irish such as Foras na Gaeilge, Conradh na Gaeilge, Glór na nGael, Oireachtas na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Furthermore, the research is relevant to the work of the Broadcasting

Authority of Ireland, in particular its Authority, its statutory committees and the BAI/Foras na Gaeilge Irish Language Advisory Committee.

The author wishes to thank the following for their assistance: representatives of all stations interviewed; Stiofán Seoighe and Maitiú de Hál for transcription; Lisa Ní Choistealbha of Independent Broadcasters of Ireland and Mary Lennon of CRAOL for assistance with interviews; Fionnuala Murphy and Stephanie Comey of the BAI for assistance with queries.

2. Legislative framework

The BAI and its predecessor bodies have operated under various broadcasting acts since 1988. The Broadcasting Act of 2009 is the most relevant, over-arching legislation. It contains specific provisions on the Irish language both linked to the duties of the Authority itself and to the duties of broadcasters. The most significant and specific requirements are placed on public broadcasters (RTÉ and TG4) but proposed Irish language programming is also listed among the criteria to be evaluated when assessing applications for independent radio licences, both commercial and community.

The composition of the BAI itself, its statutory committees and its objectives are covered in Articles 9 and 25 of the Act (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009). In article 9 (1), matters related to the development of the Irish language and Gaeltacht affairs are listed among the areas of expertise required of members of the Authority or its committees. Article 25 (2) (h) on the objectives of the BAI states that the Authority and its statutory committees ‘will promote and stimulate the development of Irish language programming and broadcasting services’. Article 154 (1) of the Act specifies that the Authority will submit a scheme to the Minister to support programmes in a number of areas including the Irish language. The current version of this scheme is entitled ‘Sound and Vision 4’. According to Article 155 (1), the objective of the scheme is to ‘develop high quality programmes based on Irish culture, heritage and experience’ including programmes in the Irish language. Article 156 (2) provides that 7 per cent of net receipts from television licence fees will be paid through the scheme to be managed and developed by the BAI.

Articles 66, 67 and 69 of the Act cover independent broadcasters. The Irish language element of the licensing of radio services is dealt with in Article 66. Sub-section 2 (d) states that the BAI’s Contract Awards Committee will have regard to ‘the quantity, quality, range and type

of programmes in the Irish language’ when making a decision about a licence. Sub-section 3 specifies that the Committee ‘shall have particular regard to the continuance and advancement as a spoken language of the Irish language’ when making a decision on a licence for an area which includes a Gaeltacht district.

Any breaches of the contractual obligations are the concern of a statutory committee of the BAI known as the Compliance Committee. Article 28 relates to the duties of the Compliance Committee to ensure that a broadcaster complies with the terms of its licence. The amount of programming in Irish agreed in the station’s contract is included in those provisions and is monitored by the BAI. Although the provision of programmes in Irish is loosely defined in the legislation, nonetheless it remains a statutory requirement that applies to all licensed stations.

The Act deals separately with public service broadcasters RTÉ and TG4. In article 82 (1), ‘matters pertaining to the development of the Irish language’ and ‘Gaeltacht affairs’ are listed as areas of expertise required when members of the RTÉ board are being appointed. Article 102 (2) (b) provides that the RTÉ annual statement ‘about performance commitments’ will address Irish language programming. The Act places significant duties on RTÉ regarding Irish language programming. Article 114 (2) (a) commits the broadcaster to ensuring that its programmes reflect the various traits that make up Irish culture and that it will ‘have special regard for the elements which distinguish that culture and in particular for the Irish language’. Article 114 (3) states that RTÉ will broadcast a comprehensive range of programmes in Irish and English, including news and current affairs programmes (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009). In 2018, An Coimisinéir Teanga (the language commissioner) found that RTÉ was in breach of this section of the Broadcasting Act because it was not broadcasting enough Irish on television (An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2019: 16-20).

3. Regulatory framework

The most recent *Strategy Statement* by the BAI covers the period 2021-2024. Under theme 1, ‘Promoting Diversity and Plurality’, Irish is mentioned in strategic objective 4 which is to ‘Foster and promote quality programming in the Irish language’ (BAI, 2021: 8). The following is listed as an outcome of that objective: ‘Quality Irish language content, including news and current affairs and content for youth audiences, is available on a variety of media’ (BAI, 2021: 9) and the related key performance indicator is ‘BAI initiatives under its Irish

Language Action Plan result in quantifiable increases in quality Irish language programming over the Strategy period’ (BAI, 2021:9).

The *BAI Irish Language Action Plan* was published in 2019. It states that the BAI Authority has a central role in relation to promoting Irish language content across the broadcasting landscape. The plan commits to developing this aim through five key objectives:

1. Supporting, developing and promoting Irish language programming and stations through Licensing and Broadcasting Fund initiatives;
2. Fostering Irish language partnerships;
3. Supporting research;
4. Collecting data;
5. Enhancing accountability processes, including compliance monitoring and reporting (BAI, 2019: 3).

An Irish Language Advisory Committee was established under the second objective above. The Committee is a discussion forum and its aim is to develop initiatives that will increase the amount of Irish on broadcast media. Membership comprises representatives of the BAI, Foras na Gaeilge, Irish language organisations, broadcasters (two representatives each from IBI and CRAOL) and producers (BAI/Foras na Gaeilge, 2019: 1).

The *Broadcasting Services Strategy* of 2018 also contains objectives about Irish that it aims ‘to encourage the development of Irish language initiatives across the broadcasting sector’ (BAI, 2018: 14). The BAI says that it ‘is open to exploring other service types, including niche and Irish language radio services’ (ibid: 15) and that its licensing plans will promote diversity and pluralism including in the Irish language (ibid: 16).

General guidance about Irish language content has been given over the years to stations during licence application or renewal processes. Past and present applicants for commercial or community licences are asked to make a statement about the amount and type of programmes they intend to broadcast (a) in Irish and (b) bilingually (e.g. BAI, 2015: 20). In the absence of detailed information about or quotas for Irish language content in the legislation, the BAI says that unless requested it does not give specific guidance about the amount or type of Irish language programming on any station. Applicants are asked to provide detailed proposals for their proposed Irish language programming. It advised that Irish programming proposals are assessed having regard to the format of the service, franchise area and target audience (Murphy, 2020).

The BAI operates a matrix work structure in which staff work across various areas within the organisation. The Irish language team comprises four staff members who lead and implement the BAI's Irish language work activities, including Irish language governance requirements under the Irish Language Scheme and initiatives under the *BAI Irish Language Action Plan*. The BAI website lists those staff members with fluency in Irish who are happy to correspond through the medium of Irish, respond to queries in Irish, or related to Irish, and there is a dedicated email address teanga@bai.ie for Irish language matters (Murphy, 2020).

Under the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2018) adopted by the European Union, Ireland is now working towards a new regulatory regime for on-demand audiovisual media services providing content in Ireland. Enactment of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2020 would also lead to amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009, most notably the proposal to dissolve the BAI and replace it with a new Media Commission. This will have major implications for all aspects of the future regulation of the media, including Irish language content (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2020). In this context, the Future of Media Commission was set up in September 2020 to examine the future development of the Irish media landscape and is due to report in mid-2021 (<https://futureofmediacommission.ie/>).

As discussed above, RTÉ has specific statutory responsibilities to broadcast Irish language material and, along with independent broadcasters, is regulated by the BAI under the terms of the 2009 Act. In 2015, RTÉ published a five-year action plan, *Meáin Ghaeilge RTÉ*, with the aim of increasing its Irish language output. The first stated aim was to extend Irish throughout the schedules of all RTÉ services:

We will increase the amount of Irish heard on radio, with more Irish language and bilingual programming on RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ 2fm and RTÉ lyric fm. RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta will have a particular focus on growing its audience through inclusively [sic], and on ensuring relevancy as media consumption patterns change (RTÉ, 2015: 4).

Specific aims regarding the development of Irish on all radio services were outlined in the plan and RTÉ also committed to developing a new youth radio service in Irish (RTÉ, 2015: 10).

4. Other research

This report is the third phase of research on the use of the Irish language on the state's full-time AM/FM radio stations broadcasting predominantly in English, i.e. other than RTÉ Raidió

na Gaeltachta and Raidió na Life. Phases 1 and 2 of the research analysed stations' schedules as advertised on their websites, according to the following categories of information:

- a) type of station;
- b) hours and minutes per week broadcast in Irish;
- c) programme title;
- d) language content (in Irish or bilingual);
- e) time of broadcast;
- f) additional information, i.e. is the material original or syndicated;
- g) total output.

Station were then contacted individually and asked to confirm the initial analysis of schedules. Programmes reported as being entirely in Irish were weighted at 1.0. If a station reported a programme as 'bilingual', it was included in the hours and minutes of Irish language content but weighted at 0.5. This estimate was necessary because although managers were asked to outline the percentage of Irish/English in a bilingual programme, most did not provide this information. The 2018 report (Phase 2) found that Irish language or bilingual programming accounted for only 03:12 hours per week on average, including repeats. In the case of stations broadcasting 24 hours a day (the majority) the amounts to approximately 2 per cent of programming. The results were not much better for stations whose franchise areas included Gaeltacht regions, despite stronger provisions in the Broadcasting Act related to the licensing process for such stations. Output on RTÉ radio services other than Raidió na Gaeltachta was also weak and often fell below the provision of commercial or community stations. There was wide diversity in the returns with some stations broadcasting virtually no Irish and others providing relatively large output (Walsh, Day & Fogarty, 2018).

In 2019, the Joint Oireachtas Committee for the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and Islands published a report about the challenges associated with Irish language broadcasting. As stated above, the Joint Committee invited Dr Walsh and Dr Day twice to present their research. The report made a number of recommendations including that Irish language provisions in the Broadcasting Act be strengthened, that the BAI develop active policies with commercial stations in order to foster greater understanding of the needs of the Irish-speaking audience and that broadcasters create their own Irish programming and transmit it during peak hours (Oireachtas Éireann, 2019).

Other relevant research conducted during the period of this research was the initiative by Irish language body Oireachtas na Gaeilge to develop Aerthonnta, the portal for Irish language programming on radio stations broadcasting in English (www.aerthonnta.ie). This was

established originally under the name Cogar in the 1990s by Irish language umbrella body Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge and co-ordinated from 2014 to 2019 by Raidió na Life. The website is now being developed by Oireachtas na Gaeilge as a central resource portal for Irish language radio broadcasters and for station managers. Aerthonnta has since its inception been supported by the BAI. Recently, Oireachtas na Gaeilge conducted a survey of radio station management, broadcasters and co-ordinating bodies IBI and CRAOL to assess awareness of the Aerthonnta service and information has been gathered about individual stations' experience of Irish language programming. The intention is to create a directory of Irish language broadcasters, offer support with Irish language terminology and provide information about Irish speakers in stations' franchise areas based on census returns. There will also be links to other useful materials and resources (Nic Dhonnchadha, 2020).

In 2019, the BAI initiated its own research on Irish language broadcasting on foot of a commitment in the *BAI Irish Language Action Plan* which pledges to build 'a comprehensive picture of Irish language programme provision within the broadcasting sector' (BAI, 2019: 5). The Authority said that it wished 'to gain a more complete picture of the range and type of Irish language programming that is currently available to Irish audiences' (BAI, 2020: 1) than that revealed in the standard compliance monitoring process. In the research, all radio and television broadcasters (including all-Irish or mostly Irish services such as Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4) were contacted by the BAI and requested to provide data about and recordings of Irish language and bilingual programming during a one-week period in October 2019. During that week, 43,136 minutes (718.93 hours) of Irish or bilingual programmes were broadcast, an average of 102.7 hours per day. The percentage of overall output represented by Irish programmes was not given. The vast majority of output (87%) was on radio and the remaining 13% on television (BAI, 2020: 4).

5. Methodology

The two previous phases of this research used a quantitative methodology involving a survey of Irish-language output of all radio stations, according to the parameters of the study. When initial contact with stations in earlier phases did not lead to results, follow-up telephone calls were made to managers to request that they respond to questions. Issues with provision of Irish language programming arose spontaneously during these calls but were beyond the scope of the study at the time. Therefore, it was decided that any future phase of the project would be

qualitative in nature, in order to gain a deeper understanding of radio managers' views about Irish language programming.

It was not possible within the budgetary and time constraints of Phase 3 of the research to conduct qualitative research with every radio station in Ireland. Instead, samples of various types of radio station were chosen in order to capture as broad as possible a range of opinions as possible. This was done according to a number of criteria:

- **Geography:** national, regional, local and neighbourhood stations.
- **Sector:** public, commercial and community stations.
- **Language:** stations whose franchise area does and does not contain a Gaeltacht district.

Fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with station managers and began in January 2020 following initial consultation with the representative bodies Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI) and the Community Radio Forum of Ireland (CRAOL). About a third of the interviews were conducted before the arrival of Covid-19. This created an unprecedented crisis for the radio sector as stations struggled to switch to remote operation and advertising revenues plummeted. There was no option but to suspend the research until the situation improved. In July, interviews resumed using virtual platforms or written correspondence but it proved problematic to find local commercial stations outside Gaeltacht counties that were willing to take part. The final spread of stations was as follows:

- **Geography:** national (RTÉ, Newstalk), regional (iRadio), local (anonymous, Ocean FM, Galway Bay FM, Radio Kerry, Highland Radio), neighbourhood (Flirt FM,¹ Athlone Community Radio, NEAR FM).
- **Sector:** public (RTÉ), commercial (Newstalk, iRadio, anonymous, Ocean FM, Galway Bay FM, Radio Kerry, Highland Radio), community (Flirt FM, Athlone Community Radio, NEAR FM).
- **Language:** commercial local stations with Gaeltacht in franchise area (Galway Bay FM, Radio Kerry, Highland Radio, Ocean FM, iRadio).

It was initially intended to do individual interviews with representatives of all RTÉ stations (Radio 1, 2FM, Lyric FM) but instead questions were answered by the Group Head of Irish

¹ The author is a volunteer broadcaster with Flirt FM but has no involvement with Irish-language programming.

Language, Niamh Ní Churnáin. At RTÉ's request, questions were submitted and written responses were provided in place of an interview.

In keeping with ethics requirements, all participants were given an outline of the project and its aims and asked to give their consent to be interviewed. They were also given the option of being named and their stations identified or being interviewed anonymously in which case their station would not be identified. Of the 11 interviews with station managers, only one requested anonymity.

Case-studies of individual Irish language programmes were also conducted, focusing on one programme each on a national (Newstalk), local (Radio Kerry) and community station (NEAR FM). Four people were interviewed for the case-studies, three presenters and a producer. In total, five interviews were conducted in Irish and 10 in English. All interviews were transcribed and coded to identify salient themes, which are presented in the next section.

6. Findings

The main themes emerging from the data are the following:

- Current Irish language output of individual stations.
- Legislative and regulatory framework and requirements about Irish.
- Broadcasters' understanding of their Irish language audience.
- Challenges to providing and maintaining Irish language programmes.
- Partnerships, collaboration and opportunities for future development.

Findings about RTÉ are presented first as it has the most significant statutory obligations in relation to Irish and because of its size and dominance in the market. The themes are then explored in the case of each category of independent station: (a) commercial radio whose franchise area does not include the Gaeltacht (b) commercial radio whose franchise area includes the Gaeltacht and (c) community radio.

6.1 RTÉ

6.1.1 Irish language output

RTÉ said that all of the station's continuity announcements on radio and television are presented bilingually. Following a review in 2019, the broadcaster adopted a more focused approach based on certain periods to ensure that Irish is on the air at peak times in the schedule.

With the exception of RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, the total countable weekly output of Irish language programming on RTÉ radio is 6 hours and 8 minutes. This represents an increase from 4 hours and 15 minutes in the 2018 survey. The output is broken down as follows:

- RTÉ Radio 1 – 2 hours and 8 minutes
- RTÉ 2fm – 3 hours and 40 minutes
- RTÉ Lyric FM – 20 minutes

RTÉ also provided several additional examples of occasional use of Irish across its schedule on speech, music and arts programmes. In terms of reviewing Irish language output on services broadcasting primarily in English, it suggested that this be calculated on an annual rather than weekly basis.

RTÉ's Irish language plan *Meáin Ghaeilge RTÉ* (2015) contained a commitment to develop an Irish language youth service. In response to a question about lack of progress on this point, RTÉ said that a proposal to split the FM band was assessed but that such an option was deemed unworkable. Discussions are continuing to ascertain the requirements for establishing a dedicated youth service. A sub-committee of the Irish Language Advisory Committee of the BAI discussed the matter in 2020 but no decision was made.

6.1.2 Legislative and regulatory framework

In response to a question that output in Irish on the above RTÉ stations is very low, RTÉ said that it satisfied the requirements of articles 114 (a), 114 (g), 112 (2) (a) and 114 (3) (a) of the Broadcasting Act with the 'comprehensive service' it provided through RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta.

6.1.3 Understanding of audience

Asked about RTÉ Radio's understanding of its Irish language audience, the organisation said that every radio programme broadcast aimed to attract the largest possible number of listeners, regardless of the level of Irish among the audience. It said that Radio 1 and 2FM had their own distinctive branding and that this applied to Irish language programmes also. Radio 1 was aimed at older listeners who would often have a better standard of Irish although this was not always the case. 2FM was aimed at younger listeners using more music and shorter speech segments and the same applied to Irish language programmes. RTÉ said that the Irish used in the Nuacht was 'rich and of a high standard' as would be expected from RTÉ and that there was no difference between bulletins broadcast on Radio 1 and 2FM.

6.1.4 Challenges

RTÉ said it was very challenging to provide Irish language radio programming. The greatest challenge related to the demand of the audience for programmes that are completely in Irish without the option of providing subtitles as on television. RTÉ also referred to a lack of staff at various levels who are fluent in Irish and a lack of independent radio production companies that could provide high-quality material in Irish. To address this problem, RTÉ was working in conjunction with RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta in order to provide most Irish language content on RTÉ Radio 1. The broadcaster said it plans to conduct a survey among all staff to identify staff who can work easily in both languages or could be upskilled in Irish.

6.1.5 Partnerships and collaboration

RTÉ would welcome support for training and funding opportunities for independent companies to allow them upskill and provide Irish language material for radio. This would increase the diversity of material being commissioned and broadcast. RTÉ said that it would also welcome customised courses that would allow staff to develop their skills in making Irish language radio material. RTÉ was investigating partnerships with Gaeltacht companies and higher education institutions to develop courses aimed at assisting independent production companies to provide national radio material in Irish.

RTÉ said the greatest opportunity was its influential platform, any use of which would increase the visibility of Irish at a national level. The broadcaster also said that it provides a range of training opportunities including Irish classes to staff. In relation to future plans, RTÉ said that it constantly strives to find ways of increasing bilingualism across its services in an accessible way. Further information was not available due to changes in the management structure in the three RTÉ radio stations relevant to this study.

6.2 Commercial radio not serving Gaeltacht

The stations featured in this section are the national broadcaster Newstalk and an anonymised station. Despite efforts, it was not possible to obtain an interview with another station in this category.

6.2.1 Irish language output

Newstalk is a news and speech station broadcasting on a quasi-national licence since 2006. The station currently broadcasts 2 hours of Irish language output per week, consisting of the speech programme ‘Splanc’. ‘Splanc’ has been on the air since 2004 and currently occupies the Friday night slot from 10pm to midnight. The programme is also made available in advance as a

podcast (for further information, see the case study in Section 7). The station increases output in Irish during the annual Seachtain na Gaeilge. It previously broadcast Irish-language inserts during the day but these were discontinued due to problems with sourcing appropriate content and people to create the material. Newstalk also said that there was no demand for such inserts from the audience and that it agreed with the BAI to invest more resources in ‘Splanc’ instead. The station did not accept that this amounted to a diminution in Irish language content. The weekly Newstalk output in Irish has not changed since this research project began in 2017.

Details of Irish output of the commercial station cannot be provided in order to protect anonymity, but it was at the lower end of the spectrum in terms of length. The programming is provided by freelancers rather than station staff and broadcast during off-peak hours.

6.2.2 Legislative and regulatory framework

Stations’ understandings of the legislative and regulatory framework were also explored in order to ascertain how they understood their duties to provide Irish language programmes. Newstalk said that Irish language content was not subject to specific discussion but covered in the general regular review process by the BAI. It said that there has been no change in the station’s commitment to Irish during the term of its licence, but that the BAI was understanding of the challenges involved.

The unnamed commercial station said that its output in Irish was decided by its Programme Policy Statement rather than a specific statutory requirement. Not all statutory requirements would be understood in depth by broadcasters and it relied on the BAI for guidance in that regard. The station said that it suggests what level of Irish language it thinks will work with listeners and that the BAI accepts that suggestion.

The anonymised station was critical of the requirement to broadcast programming in Irish. It said it was difficult to fit Irish into the schedule of a commercial station in an urban area and that it would be commercial suicide to broadcast too much Irish. It said that audiences in urban areas are fickle and that stations cannot rely on the loyalty that exists in rural areas. The unnamed station accepted that if there was no requirement, Irish would not be catered for, but the answer was to create more dedicated Irish-language media. It was in favour of the proposal for a national Irish-language youth station as a way of creating more exposure to Irish but believed that Irish language organisations would not be as interested if such a station was to be operated commercially. The unnamed station said its job was to run a business in a very competitive market and that the ‘Irish language lobby’ did not understanding the ‘heavy lifting’

involved. It criticised Irish language organisations for failing to understand that it does not suit every station to broadcast material in Irish and believed that the ‘Irish language lobby’ had enough media of its own already.

6.2.3 Understanding of audience

Newstalk said that the target listeners of ‘Splanc’ were fluent speakers of Irish and those who were bilingual. It added that there was awareness of the programme among Irish speakers and a clear audience for it. However, the presenters had made efforts to make it more accessible to all listeners and that it was not impossible for people with more limited Irish to understand.

The commercial station did not comment on the target audience for its limited programmes in Irish, instead criticising the requirement to broadcast material in Irish in the first place.

6.2.4 Challenges

Newstalk said it never had issues with presenters of ‘Splanc’ but faced many challenges related to production over the years. It said there was a lack of qualified people with a mix of skills including Irish. The station was lucky with the current arrangement as a staff member fluent in Irish was working as producer of ‘Splanc’ (see case study in Section 7). Newstalk said that some additional staff were capable of speaking Irish but were in other roles and unavailable at the time of the research.

For the anonymised commercial station, the greatest challenge was the risk that additional programming in Irish would create for its business model and advertising revenue.

6.2.5 Partnerships and collaboration

Asked about what external partnerships or supports might benefit its Irish-language output, Newstalk said that a programme such as ‘Splanc’ would have to be produced in-house given the station’s style and listenership. It said that there was room for more co-operation with Irish language groups and added that there could be better communication between such groups and the radio sector. As an example, Newstalk said it found out by accident in summer 2020 that a survey was being conducted by Aerthonnta. In terms of sharing material with other stations, Newstalk said that it would consider a request to syndicate Nuacht if asked.

When asked about partnerships or support, the unnamed commercial station said that there was no funding available for Irish language programming. However, it said there was a contradiction between such funding being provided and the fact that audiences do not want material in Irish. The anonymous station felt that there needed to be more understanding of

what audiences wanted to hear. Even if there was external funding, it would still be very concerned about listenership figures and did not believe that there was any point in investing considerably in off-peak hours.

6.3 Commercial radio serving Gaeltacht

The stations discussed in this section were those serving the three main Gaeltacht counties, Kerry (Radio Kerry), Donegal (Highland Radio and Ocean FM) and Galway (Galway Bay FM). As a large regional station covering 15 counties, iRadio's franchise area includes the Gaeltacht in Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Meath.

6.3.1 Irish language output

There are two Gaeltacht areas in Co. Kerry, Corca Dhuibhne on the Dingle Peninsula and Uíbh Ráthach on the Iveragh Peninsula. The Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht is among the strongest Irish-speaking areas of the country.

Radio Kerry has held the Co. Kerry licence since 1990 followed legalisation of independent radio in Ireland. The station's current output amounts to one hour completely in Irish and 4 hours of bilingual programming per week. The bilingual programming is mostly in English, averaging 70% English and 30% Irish. The station is also open to the casual use of Irish across its schedule or the discussion of Irish in English although presenters would not habitually use Irish on air. Radio Kerry does not broadcast a Nuacht service although it had one in the early days.

There are several Gaeltacht areas in Co. Donegal, stretching from Ros Goill and Fánaid in the northeast to Gleann Cholm Cille in the southwest. The area around Gaoth Dobhair is among the strongest Irish-speaking areas of Ireland.

Highland Radio began broadcasting in 1990. Its franchise area currently covers most of Co. Donegal apart from the southwest. Highland Radio reported that the station broadcasts 2 hours and 15 minutes completely in Irish each week including Nuacht and also has 2 hours of bilingual programming which is 50% Irish and 50% English. Occasional use is made of Irish on a GAA programme and Highland Radio encourages casual use across the schedule. Mass in Irish is broadcast once a month and 40% of station promos and jingles are in Irish. Highland Radio reported that there has been an increase in output because one Irish language programme was doubled in length due to demand.

Ocean FM's franchise area includes southwest Donegal which is also in the Gaeltacht. Licensed in 2003, the station broadcasts 2 hours of bilingual programmes per week and approximately 5 minutes per day in short Irish-language inserts. This has remained constant over time. There is occasional collaboration with local schools leading to additional Irish language material, some of which has won awards from PPI and IMRO. Ocean FM said that there was a need for material to be listenable and attractive. There had been no complaints about lack of Irish programming apart from an intervention from Catherine Connolly TD during an interview on the station. Deputy Connolly was referring to an earlier phase of this report.

Galway has the largest Gaeltacht in the country stretching from the outskirts of Galway City and covering Connemara and the Aran Islands. There is a large number of habitual Irish speakers living in the region. Galway City has been recognised since the foundation of the state as having a particular status in relation to Irish and in 2016, Galway City Council declared the city to be bilingual.

Galway Bay FM was awarded the local licence as Radio West in 1989. The station broadcasts one hour of Irish per week and bilingual stings during the day. There was a Nuacht service in the early days but that fell by the wayside. Galway Bay FM said that it was committed to providing more Irish on the station and that the current offering was tokenistic. It said also that the station should have opt-out programming for the Gaeltacht. Galway Bay FM would welcome additional input such as podcasts in Irish which they could host on their website. JNLR figures for the Irish language programme were fairly healthy.

iRadio is a regional radio station broadcasting to the northwest, midlands and northeast. Formerly two separate stations for the northwest and northeast, the service was merged in 2011 but maintained some separate programming. Since 2019 under its new licence it has operated as a single service covering 15 counties, including the Gaeltacht areas of Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Meath.

iRadio has the highest amount of Irish language programming of any station included in this project, a total of 36 hours 30 minutes per week. This consists mostly of overnight programming from 0100-0600, Monday to Friday, with 'short, sharp links in Irish', according to the station. A new programme entirely in Irish 'Aon Scéal' has recently begun on Saturday and Sunday mornings from 0800-1000 and the evening slot from 1800-2100 is bilingual. Occasional use is made of Irish on 'The Lift' which airs from 1500-1800. iRadio recognised

that there is a higher percentage of Irish speakers than average in the northwest region and described its commitment to Irish as ‘a cultural thing’ and ‘giving the west and northwest a tip of the hat’. It described the Irish language as the station’s ‘tribe’ and said that iRadio comfortably fills its Irish language quota. However, the station added that it has to be cautious due to commercial considerations and that impact on listenership drove the decision to have bilingual programming between 1800-2100 each day.

6.3.2 Legislative and regulatory framework

With regarding to the licensing process and the amount of Irish language programming, Radio Kerry said that provision was based on precedent and had remained constant over the previous 30 years. The station had never been approached by the BAI about doing more or less.

Ocean FM said that there was no guidance from the BAI about the required amount of Irish language content and that it was decided by what existed previously. The decision was arbitrary and there was no quota. No such quota was required because in its view, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta catered for fluent speakers and a requirement to broadcast more Irish on Ocean FM could damage listenership.

Galway Bay FM said that the Programme Policy Statement defined the amount of Irish, that there was no specific guidance and that it was up to the station to decide. It said that Galway Bay FM well exceeded the 20% news and current affairs quota and suggested one quota of 25% covering all public service content including Irish language programming.

iRadio said that Irish language programming was based on what they had done under previous licences. The station had a positive outlook about Irish language programming and said that it was attempting to normalise Irish but that it also had to be careful not to exclude anyone or take commercial risks.

6.3.3 Understanding of audience

When asked why it did not broadcast more Irish given the two Gaeltacht areas in the county, Radio Kerry said that it would like to do more for the Gaeltacht but that proposals for new shows are presented regularly, such as one for a Polish programme. The station had a full-service licence and therefore had to cater for everyone and not any specific group. It could not ‘super-serve’ any part of the audience as it could not risk alienating any part of it. Radio Kerry said that ‘Caint Chiarraí’ was aimed at fluent speakers of Irish. Ideally, it would like to have material for beginners but that would involve removing something else from the schedule.

Highland Radio said that its programmes catered mostly for fluent speakers in the Gaeltacht. It felt that Irish language output was less formal and more diverse than that of RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta. Highland's Irish language presenters were well-known on the ground in the Gaeltacht and were well-received. The bilingual programmes were aimed at learners or those with less Irish and were proving popular with listeners.

Ocean FM said that its programming was aimed deliberately at non-fluent speakers. RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta was for fluent speakers and was 'preaching to the converted'. Ocean FM felt that there was a need to avoid antagonism over Irish. When asked about more programming given the fact that southwest Donegal is a Gaeltacht area, it said that there was demand for many types of new programmes and referred to a recent request for one in Arabic.

Galway Bay FM said that the dedicated Irish language programme was aimed at the fluent or native speaker but was also understandable to learners and newcomers.

iRadio said that the station's target audience was 15-44 years but that Irish language programming was aimed at those in their early 20s, people who had recently learned Irish at school whether or not they were using it in their daily lives. iRadio said it positioned itself to sound national so there was no specific targeting of Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht.

6.3.4 Challenges

For Radio Kerry, the greatest challenges to maintaining Irish language programming were resources and time. The station did not have resources to pay for additional material such as podcasts, which would be time-consuming to produce and manage. It was also challenging to increase Irish language output given the tight schedule and not easy to make space for everything. Radio Kerry expressed disappointment at poor interest in Irish language programming funded by the Sound and Vision scheme, saying that applicants did not generally mention Irish.

For Highland Radio, content and quality were the greatest challenges. There had never been an issue finding good presenters but the difficulty was sourcing enough relevant people to take part in programmes and be interviewed.

Ocean FM said that time and effort were required to sustain Irish language programmes. It said it was difficult to find suitable presenters. Another issue was that the station had never fully got to grips with what it wanted to do with Irish.

Galway Bay FM said it had proven very difficult over the years to find and keep presenters. It also felt that there was a shortage of people competent to broadcast in Irish.

For iRadio, the greatest challenge was making their programmes accessible to all and not alienating listeners. Another challenge was finding broadcasters who can speak Irish but iRadio said that Irish speakers would always be prioritised and that it would be easier for them to get opportunities at the station.

6.3.5 Partnerships and collaboration

Radio Kerry said that it would welcome greater collaboration with Irish language organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge, in the form of external packages or inserts in Irish. It stressed the need for local content and was not in favour of syndicated programmes.

Highland Radio agreed that any external support would need to be suitable for the station. It would not favour a syndicated programme either unless it was in Ulster dialect. The station spoke of existing co-operation with Irish language organisations such as Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Ocean FM said that there could be a greater role for the BAI in supporting stations with Irish language content but did not specify what this should entail.

Galway Bay FM spoke of good partnerships with local Irish language organisations Gaillimh le Gaeilge and Conradh na Gaeilge as well as with the National University of Ireland, Galway. It would welcome more engagement from the BAI on supporting stations with Irish but added that the sector needs to collaborate as an industry and that there was a role for the IBI also. An Irish Language Officer role such as that which existed in the BAI could be subsumed under IBI. Galway Bay FM was strongly in favour of syndicated national programmes in Irish at good timeslots and would welcome a syndicated Nuacht service from Newstalk.

iRadio said that there was no real acknowledgement of Irish language media from the outside and no funding streams. The failure to develop DAB in Ireland was another obstacle. In an ideal world, it could put an all-Irish station on DAB but the technical infrastructure did not exist. iRadio said it would be very open to a funding initiative involving schools, colleges and radio stations.

6.4 Community radio

Three community stations were included in the study: Flirt FM (Galway City), NEAR FM (northeast Dublin) and Athlone Community Radio (Athlone).

6.4.1 Irish language output

Flirt FM is one of three full-time campus community radio stations in Ireland. It was established in 1995 and broadcasts 6 days a week from the National University of Ireland, Galway. It describes itself as Galway's student and alternative radio station. Flirt FM said that the station currently provides 5-6 hours of Irish per week, slightly more than its Programme Policy Statement. These are broadcast in a primetime slot at 1pm each day and consist mostly of original material but there are occasional repeats from Raidió na Life. In terms of feedback, listeners to programmes are often very passive but there can be good traction on individual shows' Mixcloud pages, particularly if the material is unusual and not available elsewhere.

Athlone Community Radio received its first 10-year licence in 2011. It broadcasts to the town of Athlone every day. It had a dedicated hour-long weekly Irish language programme for many years but when the volunteers left, the station had to rely on material from Raidió na Life. It now has one Irish language programme per month with Raidió na Life material on the other three weeks. There is also occasional programming in Irish, such as its 2019 Christmas special. Its Seachtain na Gaeilge programme, based on a collaboration with local secondary school Our Lady's Bower, was nominated for an Oireachtas na Gaeilge media award. It has also had bilingual programmes in the Sound and Vision-funded series 'Lions and Leprechauns'. The station said the aim was to encourage local production and not recycle outside material.

NEAR FM (North East Access Radio) grew out of a pirate station in the Dublin suburb of Coolock which was on the air in the 1980s. It was licenced under a community licence in 1995. NEAR FM broadcasts 24 hours a day to northeast Dublin. The station broadcasts one 30-minute Irish language programme 'Ar Muin na Muice' every evening, with a repeat the following morning. The programme has been on the air for approximately 20 years. Occasionally the station uses programmes from Raidió na Life to fill gaps. Some Irish is heard on other programmes, e.g. traditional music shows. Recently a half-hour documentary programme in Irish, 'Fuiseog is Fuaim', was funded by Sound and Vision.

6.4.2 Legislative and regulatory framework

Flirt FM said that the BAI had given the impression that Irish language content could be repeated again and again but that it did not share that approach. It said that its Programme Policy Statement in relation to Irish was aspirational and based on what the station felt it could do at a minimum because anything less would be tokenistic. Flirt FM said that there was

preferential treatment for Irish language content and that volunteers were told about this. Presenters with ideas for Irish language programmes can ‘skip the queue for the 1pm slot’.

Athlone Community Radio said that the station intended to keep to its original commitment to Irish, i.e. one hour per week, in its new licence application. It was not wise to promise what it could not deliver so the aim was to maintain the level of Irish but with original content rather than programmes from Raidió na Life.

NEAR FM said that the percentage of Irish language content was based on its previous experience. The station felt that it was not too ambitious to broadcast half an hour each day but that they were open to doing more. NEAR FM felt that there were problems with Sound and Vision when it came to Irish language programmes because if Irish speakers at a station were to produce a documentary over a year, that could mean the end of regular Irish programmes. It also questioned the requirement for ‘high quality’ material in terms of content and language, pointing out that NEAR FM was based in north Dublin and not the Connemara Gaeltacht. A broader definition of high quality content and language would allow more Irish to be broadcast on NEAR FM.

6.4.3 Understanding of audience

Flirt FM had a clear sense of there being two audiences for Irish language programming, one consisting of fluent/native speakers and the other of learners or the general listener with limited ability in Irish. It pointed to ‘Clár Acadaimh’, made by NUI Galway students based in the Gaeltacht, as an example of programming catering for fluent listeners or those interested in Gaeltacht news. Flirt FM mentioned ‘Rogha Bhride’ as an example of a show that had moved from fully in Irish to a more bilingual format because of its international listenership.

Perhaps reflecting their geographical locations far from any Gaeltacht district, neither Athlone Community Radio nor NEAR FM emphasised distinct categories within Irish language audiences. Athlone Community Radio focused on the station’s existing collaboration with local schools which yields Irish language content. NEAR FM stressed the difference between the position of Irish in the station’s catchment area and in the Gaeltacht and said that the same standard of Irish did not apply. It also spoke of ongoing collaboration with local Gaelscoileanna.

6.4.4 Challenges

The issue of finding and keeping volunteers was a common challenge identified by all community stations. Such is the nature of the student population that Flirt FM sees a huge

turnover of volunteers each year and key people in any genre of programming, including Irish, frequently leave the station. The specific challenge with Irish was that it was already a subset of a fluid group and Irish-speaking students tended to be talented and in high demand for other activities. Flirt FM was also aware that Irish-speaking volunteers, being less common, could find themselves working alone on programmes. It always made an effort to welcome them to the station to ensure that they did not feel lonely there.

Athlone Community Radio said that keeping volunteers of any kind was the station's biggest challenge. It added that it had been very challenging to find replacement volunteers when those responsible for the Irish show had left. When it lost those volunteers, the station said that there was no external contact or support point to which it could turn for help. The station welcomed an initiative by Aerthonnta to develop an intranet site with information about Irish-speaking volunteers or teachers. Athlone Community Radio also commented on people's fears of speaking Irish, saying that many felt uncomfortable or thought that their Irish was not good enough.

NEAR FM said that it had lost Irish-speaking volunteers to Raidió na Life, as it was sometimes easier for an Irish speaker to go to the station where Irish was the working language on and off air. As an Irish speaker himself, station co-ordinator Ciarán Murray said he always made an effort to welcome other Irish speakers to NEAR FM because he knew that they often felt isolated. Although there were other Irish speakers among the volunteers, they often preferred to broadcast in English. NEAR FM said that there were issues with resources and time and cited the example of the work involved in making Irish-language podcasts available.

6.4.5 Partnerships and collaboration

For community stations, existing partnerships were important but more support was needed. Flirt FM said that 'Clár Acadaimh' was an important example of collaboration and it would welcome deeper links with journalism and Irish language courses on campus. CRAOL had helped fill gaps in programming by facilitating the sharing of Irish language content between stations. Frameworks and policies in relation to Irish were very useful but more resources were required. Because of the importance of social media, Flirt FM would welcome support with creating Irish-language short-form content for sharing online. It would value a local support person who could help staff with this and other Irish language queries.

Athlone Community Radio would welcome greater collaboration among stations to exchange Irish language programmes. Notwithstanding its difficulties with regular Irish language

programming, it stressed good relationships with local schools that gave Irish some presence on air through the ‘Classmates’ series. The station added that it had no problems with programmes in other languages and pointed to the success of the weekly ‘Foreign Language Programme’.

NEAR FM said that the station had connections with people involved in the local ‘ciorcal comhrá’ (Irish language conversation circle) and that the relationship sometimes worked well. It stressed the opportunities to develop partnerships with Gaelscoileanna in the area. Further training was required for Irish-speaking volunteers, the BAI’s Irish Language Officer should be reinstated and there was a need for funding for regular Irish language programmes. It was necessary to create links between Irish speakers across the sector so that people could be in touch with each other.

7. Case-studies

Phase 2 of this study suggested preparing case studies of Irish language programmes as examples of best practice. As RTÉ relies heavily on material from RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta for Irish language output, it was decided to focus on the independent commercial and community sectors only. Furthermore, a decision was made to focus on stations which had a long tradition of Irish language programming and which could have been expected to build up an audience over time and become part of the station’s identity. Given the time and resource constraints, it also proved more efficient to focus on Irish language programmes on stations already featured in the main part of the report, as permission of management would be required to include them. Therefore, the programmes chosen were ‘Splanc’ on Newstalk (national commercial), ‘Caint Chiarraí’ on Radio Kerry (local commercial) and ‘Ar Muin na Muice’ on NEAR FM (community). This spread of stations also includes a programme serving a Gaeltacht county.

7.1 ‘Splanc’

Splanc is a weekly Irish language programme broadcast every Friday from 10pm to midnight on Newstalk. The programme has won awards from IMRO and Oireachtas na Gaeilge for Irish language broadcasting. For this case study, presenter Cuán Ó Flatharta and producer Jess Kelly were interviewed.

Cuán Ó Flatharta said that the programme had been part of the Newstalk schedule since 2008 and had a number of presenters over the years. He has been involved since 2018. Ó Flatharta

said that the team has full editorial freedom in shaping the programme due to its magazine format. Their aim is to discuss everyday matters but in Irish and they want all sorts of people to listen to the programme including those committed to Irish, learners, people from the Gaeltacht and those raised with Irish:

What we wanted was to put out a high quality programme every week that would happen to be in Irish. So, you might be talking about the big news stories or music or food or sport. The most important thing is that a high quality programme is broadcast every week and that it is through Irish.

Asked if Splanc specifically covered stories related to the Irish language, Ó Flatharta replied that it depended on their importance and topicality with the audience:

And the most important thing to us, if we think it's an important story, if it's topical and that we should cover it, or that we can put a different spin on it. Maybe to debate it properly, to analyse the stories. I don't think we avoid stories deliberately but we ask ourselves is this something that we should be covering? We do proper editing. We have a production meeting. We discuss that regularly but I don't think that we ever deliberately avoid something but as I say if it's in the public eye and it's worth discussing. For instance, last week on the programme we discussed dyslexia and Gaelscoileanna because it was important. That's a story we felt was worth discussing, that's linked to the Irish language.

Asked about the specific audience for the programme, Ó Flatharta emphasised that it was aimed at Irish speakers but that they were a bit more relaxed about prescriptive use of Irish than RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta:

Regarding the listeners, I suppose it's interesting to those who have Irish. But we'd like to think for anyone who is interesting in Irish or learning it again, that there's something there for them. We try to cover a broad range. You might understand a word here and there. So, it's not that it's aimed at native speakers. It's not that we're too hard on ourselves if we forget an Irish word and we throw in an English word here and there.

Ó Flatharta said that Newstalk management had been very supportive since Jess Kelly joined as producer in 2019. He felt that the station had a better understanding of the programme in recent times and promoted it across the schedule and on social media. The decision to make the programme available as a podcast had also helped:

That question again about who listens to it, I suppose there's a broader range listening to it because it's available as a podcast. The biggest thing we get back is that they like the subjects we discuss, that they're hearing about films or maybe books or perhaps something they haven't heard for a while.

Asked about external supports or partnerships, Ó Flatharta believed that deeper links could be formed with schools and Irish language organisations:

For instance Leaving Cert students while they're doing oral exams and teachers, it would be great if they said to their students, listen to 'Splanc'. Maybe the Irish language organisations, Conradh na Gaeilge perhaps. I don't know. I suppose they have their own aims as well and I wouldn't like to speak on their behalf. What would be good would be if more people knew about us.

Producer Jess Kelly said that she had volunteered to produce 'Splanc' after Newstalk experienced difficulties finding a radio producer with fluent Irish. Although she intended to fill a gap on a short-term basis, she now describes the work as 'a passion project'. Kelly had attended a Gaelscoil in her youth but was out of practice using Irish. Since becoming involved in 'Splanc', she has improved her language ability again. Given Kelly's background in research on other shows, she also saw the potential to develop 'Splanc' and drew up a vision of what she could do with it:

My real goal with 'Splanc' was to make it the Pat Kenny show *as Gaeilge*. That was my vision and that is the line I say to Cuán all the time. I don't want it to be a programme about the Irish language. I don't want it to be a show that focuses on issues that only impact only *Gaeilgeoirí*, in sort of quotation marks. I want it to be a current affairs style magazine show that just happens to be in Irish. That was sort of the top line and that involved ensuring that we are covering news topics in a comprehensive way that you are allowed to do by being on just once a week but also building in weekly and monthly slots. So we have a book club, we have regular tech inserts, we have a weekly sports slot. There are a whole host of different bits and pieces that we have brought in over time. But my goal and the key thing is not to be a niche programme.

Kelly said that there was a deliberate decision to broaden the focus to issues other than Irish when she took over:

It was just because I didn't want us to become pigeonholed. I want to be clear. It is not that we don't do those stories anymore, it is just that we have broadened our scope. We still do cover them. On this week's show for example, we are looking at the impact Covid-19 is having on the Gaeltacht areas. So, we still do it, but that's not our total focus. It was a deliberate move to broaden our spectrum of topics on our show. As someone who has grown up in Dublin and has learned Irish through the education system, some of the content that is out there, in my opinion, about the Irish language, is too twee and too narrow. I didn't want to have to listen to topics that I wasn't really interested in, just so I could hear some content about Irish. I wanted to make a show that I was excited to listen to and thankfully, that's what we have done to date.

Kelly said that Splanc had grown its audience by making the programme 'podcast first', meaning that it goes live as a podcast at midday on Friday and is broadcast that evening. She said that listeners tended to be professionals in their 30s, both fluent Irish speakers and those wishing to improve their Irish. The programme attempts to cater for both:

By the nature of the programme, it is fully in Irish and Cuán has fantastic Irish, so yes, catering to those with good to excellent Irish. But we are very conscious of item

selection, that is something that, when we are deciding what we put in to the programme, we are conscious of. If we are talking about something that is utterly obscure, or that could be quite academic or quite dense, we do throw in the English terminology. Cuán is very good at saying in Irish and then saying it in English, so that we are not excluding anyone that is trying to follow along. While that is not the primary focus of the show, it is definitely something that I myself am conscious of, as someone who has returned to the language.

Kelly spoke in positive terms about the support of Newstalk management for ‘Splanc’, saying that the programme had gained an increased budget and was frequently promoted by the station on social media and by other presenters. She expressed frustration at perceptions that Newstalk was hostile to the Irish language due to the outspoken views of presenters such as Ivan Yates. In terms of external relationships, Kelly mentioned existing links with the Irish language business group Borradh and organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge. Kelly was also critical of Irish language media awards because of their requirement that programming be about ‘dul chun cinn na Gaeilge’ rather than good radio that happens to be in Irish.

The way I look upon is that my job is to make good radio. It doesn’t matter if it is in English, Irish, French or whatever. I would love for it to be normalised a bit more and I think that there is more than one benefit of having a show *as Gaeilge*. Obviously, it would be great if more people could speak the language and use the language, but I don’t think that should be the sole focus of awards or any recognition that they get.

7.2 ‘Caint Chiarraí’

Before the pandemic, Radio Kerry broadcast one full Irish language programme a week, ‘Caint Chiarraí’ on Sunday night from 8-9pm. Following the outbreak of Covid-19, due to financial considerations and health and safety measures, Radio Kerry suspended live programmes from 8pm and therefore ‘Caint Chiarraí’ has not been broadcast since March 2020. The station hopes to reinstate it and other evening specialist programming in 2021.

Presenter and producer Amy Ní Riada was interviewed for this case study. ‘Caint Chiarraí’ is a long-standing part of the Radio Kerry schedule and Ní Riada got involved in 2018. She described the show as a magazine programme in a conversational, informal style:

The main aim of the programme is to share the news of the week in Irish in a simple, easy dialect, when Mam turns on the radio, when the young lad at secondary school puts it on, that he can understand it. I don’t mind if you’re from the Gaeltacht or Killarney. Usually, I try to start a conversation with the listener ... The programme isn’t about hard news, it’s a magazine I suppose and I have well-known names on it.

Ní Riada did not make a clear distinction between listeners in the Gaeltacht areas of Kerry and those who had learned Irish, saying that the show catered for both:

I suppose when I go the Pop-Up Gaeltacht or a conversation class, that it's aimed at learners. But that said, we have a lot of support from people in the Gaeltacht and it's the people of the Gaeltacht who send in texts and emails, you know? It's open to everyone, I think.

Spontaneous interactions with listeners are restricted by the fact that the programme was often pre-recorded rather than live. Listenership is about 500 per programme, according to JNLR surveys. Although low, Ní Riada said that this had more than doubled in the period since she took over. She was aware anecdotally of stronger listenership in her home town of Castleisland and in Killarney, but thought that the timeslot was a problem. General manager Fiona Stack said that 'Caint Chiarraí' was promoted by the station on social media but Ní Riada felt that it needed a stronger online presence. This was difficult because she was doing all aspects of the programme herself:

We're not strong on social media at all and, I suppose, I'm doing everything on my own, doing the editing and everything on my own. So, I suppose I have to do more on that side, you know? I have to be more active on that side. I'm happy with the support up to now but from time to time it's hard to do everything on my own.

Ní Riada praised the support of Radio Kerry in terms of studio facilities and recording equipment, which she said was available whenever she wished to use it. She said that 'Caint Chiarraí' was available as a podcast on the station's website. Ní Riada said that she would welcome any external support and raised the possibility of sponsorship for the programme:

I suppose Foras na Gaeilge or whatever organisation would be welcome to come in and give me some sponsorship or help. I suppose, I'm new to this. This is the first programme I ever had. So, I suppose, because there aren't other Irish speakers in Radio Kerry, it's a bit difficult to contact them.

7.3 'Ar Muin na Muice'

NEAR FM broadcasts a daily 30-minute Irish language programme, 'Ar Muin na Muice' at 5.30pm with a repeat at 9.30am the following day. The programme has been in the station's schedule for approximately 20 years. At the time of the research, the slot was being filled with a programme from Raidió na Life three days a week with NEAR FM presenters on Wednesday and Friday. The Friday presenter, Antaine Mac Mathúna, was interviewed for this case study.

Mac Mathúna returned to learning Irish as an adult and was encouraged to get involved in radio when he met a NEAR FM manager at Irish classes:

Do you know, I'm a new learner really, I went back to learn Irish and I met Ciarán [Murray], the manager of this station at one of the classes in Conradh na Gaeilge and

we were talking and he was doing the programme at the time and he said ‘would you like to try it?’ And at first the equipment was kind of challenging but bit by bit, that was it. I love music and I like messing around with the equipment and the Irish language of course.

Mac Mathúna described ‘Ar Muin na Muice’ as a magazine programme featuring a daily interview and music. He focuses in particular on musical events around Dublin including the traditional singing club An Góilín:

It’s really a magazine programme, half an hour, music and I do an interview, let’s say eight minutes, ten minutes usually with someone from the area, from one of the conversation circles or anything that’s happening in the city that week. I have phone interviews usually. Sometimes people come in. I emphasise any music that’s happening in the city or the area, a music session or anything around the city really, An Góilín.

Among the challenges identified by Mac Mathúna was nervousness among guests that their Irish was inadequate. Some Irish-speaking presenters have fallen away over the years and they are difficult to replace:

Sometimes there are people and they say ‘my Irish isn’t good enough, I’m nervous, I wasn’t ever on the radio’ and things like that but if I don’t find someone I do more music maybe. There was a time there used to be three or four of us but now there’s only one other person on Wednesday so there are two of us, but from time to time we expect one or two others. I’d love to have a live person every day, that’s the aim but do you know it’s not easy to find people.

He said there were opportunities to deepen links with Gaelscoil students in the area, and spoke positively about previous experience with schoolchildren who got involved in production or made their own programme. This would be a good way of providing extra support for the programme:

Do you know I’m so long doing the thing that I’m used to being on my own? I do my own work, it would be great if I had a researcher. I had a boy working with me on work experience from one of the Gaelscoileanna in the area. That’s another thing, I’d love to open it up to the Irish speakers, he was very good. I’d love to do that, especially transition year, I was thinking of that. I did that with Scoil Chaitríona years ago and a group came into the studio, they were very good, again in transition year. They did their own programme and they really enjoyed it.

For Mac Mathúna, involvement in NEAR FM has supported him greatly with learning Irish:

Do you know, it helps because with live radio, you have to be comfortable with the language because you have to be live and in the moment for half an hour. So really it’s an aim or a challenge every Friday to be ready.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

This final section presents the report's conclusions and makes policy recommendations.

8.1 Conclusions

- Irish language output among the stations sampled remains generally low and is broadcast mostly at off-peak hours. There remains considerable variation in the amount of Irish language output, even among the small sample of stations examined. Despite the distinction made in the legislation, there is no appreciable difference in output between stations serving the Gaeltacht and those with no Gaeltacht district in their franchise area. Although the licensing process was not examined in detail for this study, based on current output it is difficult to see how the Contract Awards Committee of the BAI has 'particular regard to the continuance and advancement as a spoken language of the Irish language' (Article 66 (3) of the Broadcasting Act 2009) when making a decision on a licence for an area which includes a Gaeltacht. This is a matter of concern from a language policy perspective.
- Despite low output in most cases, some stations have succeeded in building and maintaining successful Irish language programmes over a long period. Some such programmes are available as podcasts, boosting their potential reach beyond the linear audience. There is also evidence of positive and pro-active engagement by management with Irish language programming in some stations, particularly those that have won Irish language broadcasting awards.
- The BAI says that unless requested, it does not give specific guidance to radio stations about the amount of Irish language programming and indeed stations reported that this was the case. Broadcasters consulted for this study repeated commitments made in previous Programme Policy Statements when making licence applications and said that these are accepted by the regulator. This situation leads to large variation in the amount of Irish across the radio sector with some stations offering only minimal programming and others broadcasting a relatively high output.
- Irish language programming is seen as a financial risk for commercial radio with some broadcasters resistant to any increase in output or opposed even to minimal amounts of Irish. RTÉ also identified the challenge of maintaining audiences for fully Irish-language content.
- All independent stations need greater support and advice on Irish language broadcasting but are generally unaware of the existence of the Irish language team at the BAI. Particular

support is required with finding presenters and production staff who can work on Irish language programming. The challenge is particularly acute for community radio due to its voluntary nature. There was no single view on where external support should come from but options mentioned included reinstating the Irish Language Officer role within the BAI and targeted funding for regular Irish language broadcasting.

- Independent stations would welcome external partnerships and closer collaboration with Irish language organisations to assist them with programming and content. Strengthening links with local schools including Gaelscoileanna was highlighted by several stations. Training was identified as a priority by both RTÉ and the community radio sector.
- Lack of resources and time were commonly cited obstacles to developing Irish language material. Some independent stations identified a need for greater collaboration with Irish language programming. Although community radio can use material from Raidió na Life to fill gaps, no such option exists for commercial radio. However, a balance must be struck between syndication/programme exchange and maintaining local content.
- There was generally a poor understanding of differentiated Irish language audiences, even in stations serving the Gaeltacht where there are much higher numbers of fluent speakers and therefore specific Irish language audiences with distinct requirements.
- Many stations identified opportunities for development, particular in relation to podcasting, educational initiatives, additional online content and social media.

8.2 Recommendations

- The development of the Aerthonnta initiative is very welcome and has the potential, if adequately resourced, to address many of the challenges raised by the radio sector in relation to Irish language broadcasting. Consideration should be given to the creation of a full-time post in Oireachtas na Gaeilge to ensure the project's long-term sustainability. This post could be jointly-funded by the BAI and Foras na Gaeilge. Given its existing work in this area, it would also be appropriate for Oireachtas na Gaeilge to be given formal responsibility for media in its capacity as a lead organisation funded by Foras na Gaeilge.
- As regulator, the BAI (or a future Media Commission) should articulate more clearly the role of its Irish language team in supporting radio stations as many are not aware of it. Training and work placement opportunities specifically targeted at Irish language broadcasting could be developed by the regulator, possibly in association with third-level institutions. The development of independent Irish language production companies should

also be encouraged. Another opportunity would be a scheme to foster links between Irish language broadcasting and schools, a common theme raised by many stations. The regulator could also take a more proactive role in promoting greater awareness among stations of differentiation within the broad category of ‘Irish speakers’, which encompasses both learners and fluent speakers. There is a risk that much existing Irish language content falls between these two stools.

- Both RTÉ and the community sector benefit from existing mechanisms to share content but this does not apply to the commercial sector. Notwithstanding concerns about station format or dialects of Irish, the possibilities of sharing existing programmes or creating new syndicated content should be explored. As a basic public service broadcasting requirement, the possibility of a syndicated Nuacht service for commercial radio should also be examined. Irish language organisations should consider providing their own inserts that could augment existing programmes. This could be a valuable opportunity for them to promote their activities locally.
- Once the crisis of Covid-19 has passed, broadcasters should consider seeking sponsorship for Irish language programming or content. This could apply across the sector but may be particularly relevant in commercial stations where there is more concern about profit margins.
- There is evidence that stations that have achieved Irish language media awards have a more positive disposition to the language. The regulator should work proactively with such successful stations to sustain and develop their Irish language output and encourage others to follow suit.
- The Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2020 includes a proposal to introduce a levy on on-demand audiovisual services in order to fund the production of audiovisual content in Ireland, in response to the revised EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive. Part of this levy could be used to fund the creation of original Irish language media content across all platforms including radio. This could allow radio stations to produce additional material and make it available digitally to ensure as large as possible an audience beyond linear listenership. High-quality and innovative Irish language media content in both sound and audiovisual formats has the potential to play an important role in developing the language and needs to form part of an Irish language digital media strategy.
- As the new Bill proposes to dissolve the BAI, this will require amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009. From a language policy perspective, the most pressing issue at

present is the weak and uneven provision of Irish language radio programming in the first place due to the vagueness of Article 66 (2) (d) of the existing act. The new Bill provides an opportunity to strengthen legislative requirements for more Irish language audiovisual content that would apply to radio as well as other platforms in the converged media landscape. It also creates an opportunity to revise Article 66 (3) to ensure that radio stations serving Gaeltacht areas carry more Irish language content in the future. All radio stations, whether public, commercial or community, should produce their own Irish language for broadcast and on digital platforms. At a minimum, this should mean one original programme per week fully in Irish with stations serving Gaeltacht areas exceeding this baseline. The failure to develop DAB to date has impeded the promotion of diversity, including Irish language programming, on Irish radio. This can also be dealt with in the new law, creating additional opportunities for Irish-language content.

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Healy, Paula. Manager, Flirt FM.

Kelly, Jess. Producer, Newstalk.

Mac Mathúna, Antaine. Presenter, NEAR FM.

McGroarty, Linda. Programming Co-ordinator, Highland Radio.

Monahan, Patricia. Managing Editor, Newstalk

Murray, Ciarán. Co-ordinator, NEAR FM.

Ní Churnáin, Niamh. Group Head of Irish, RTÉ.

Ní Riada, Amy. Presenter, Radio Kerry.

Ó Flatharta, Cuán. Presenter, Newstalk.

Stack, Fiona. Programme Controller, Radio Kerry.

Appendix: Question Protocol

The following is the Question Protocol used for interviews with station representatives. This list is not prescriptive because a semi-structured approach to interviews was adopted.

1. What is the current Irish language/bilingual output of your station? This can cover regular output and occasional additional material, for instance for Seachtain na Gaeilge.
2. What is your understanding of the legislative and regulatory framework in relation to Irish? How is your Irish language content decided?
3. How do you understand your audience for Irish language programming? How does your output cater for (a) fluent/native speakers and (b) learners?
4. What are the challenges to providing and maintaining Irish language programmes on your station?
5. Would you benefit from additional partnerships or extra support from outside organisations, for instance the BAI or Irish language bodies?
6. What are the opportunities for the future development of Irish on your station?