



Aighneacht POBAL ar Dhara
Athbhreithniú Ofcom ar Sheirbhís
Craoltóireachta Poiblí

POBAL submission regarding Ofcom's Second
Public Service Broadcasting Review

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POBAL

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Programming Provision

The north of Ireland is the only place on these islands where there is no domestic legislation to protect the primary indigenous language. This leads to uncertainty about rights and the responsibilities of broadcasters to the Irish language. In turn this impacts on funding and status, broadcasting provision and sectoral development.

29% of people in Northern Ireland feel that *'provision of Irish language programming is important.'* (Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review, Section 9, point 32). According to the last (2001) Census figures, 10.4% of the population of NI speak or have a knowledge of the Irish language. POBAL feel that such a significant percentage of the population deserve to have programming provision in their chosen language, as proposed in POBAL's document, *Acht na Gaeilge T E/the Irish Language Act NI*.

POBAL proposed that *'The legislation will provide that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the (Westminster) Department for Culture, Media and Sport shall have the obligation to take resolute action to promote radio and television broadcasting in the Irish language...'* – the Irish Language Act NI, POBAL, 2006.

In October 2006, the St. Andrews Agreement contained a commitment by the UK government to enact Irish language legislation. This commitment must be fulfilled.

POBAL feel that there needs to be more secure provision for Irish language programming provision in the north of Ireland, on a par with Welsh language programming in Wales (S4C), and Scottish Gaelic programming in Scotland (Gaelic Digital Service). Ofcom's own reports highlighted the failure of the BBC to fulfil its own obligations regarding indigenous language programming.

In September 2007, POBAL wrote to the BBC Trust in response to their **Consultation on Minority Language Provision on BBC**, to say,

'It is incomprehensible to us that the BBC could use the provision made available on TG4, which is paid for entirely from the budget of the Irish government to create the appearance that the real disparity in terms of provision for Irish (17 hours of television broadcasting in 2006-7 / 196 hours Gaelic in Scotland / 524 hours Welsh in Wales) to cloud the issue of the intolerably poor service which Irish speakers receive from the BBC.'

POBAL went on to *'make the following recommendation in respect of television broadcasting in Irish: 80 hours in 2008-2009; 120 hours in 2010-2011; 150 hours in 2012-2013. Radio and online provision must also be increased at a similar level.'*

POBAL still believe that the former statement is correct, and that the latter recommendation is viable and should be implemented.

ILBF

The Irish Language Broadcast Fund, which was scheduled to cease in March 2009 has been granted an extra two years (£6 million) funding. The Fund produces at least 75 hours of Irish language film and television programming per year, for both TG4 and BBC NI, and currently employs over 400 people. While this extension in funding is initially welcomed, POBAL believe that the Fund should be made permanent, with a 25% increase.

Community Television

Community television, supported by the ILBF and other funders, has been producing Irish language programming for the past few years. NvTv specifically, has produced many high quality programmes which reflect the interest in the language and the Irish cultural identity in the north of Ireland.

RTÉ and TG4

POBAL believe that programming from the Republic of Ireland (specifically TG4) should be available to all households in the north of Ireland. However, more regional and local programming is needed, provided through RTÉ and TG4, and most importantly, through BBC NI and UTV. It is important to note as well that RTÉ and TG4 are paid for solely by the Irish government.

Radio

POBAL believe that there needs to be significant improvements in the provision of local and national radio broadcasting in the Irish language.

‘..there is only ½ an hour of (Irish language) programming on radio during the week and ... this goes out at roughly the same time as the Irish news programme on TG4.’ – POBAL response to BBC Review, BBCNI’s Indigenous Minority Language Services, Scales, Scope and Priorities - 2007

Raidió na Gaeltachta

Raidió na Gaeltachta provides an all-Ireland service, however, the station provides a localized and regional series of programmes, which focuses primarily on Gaeltacht regions and rarely focuses on Irish language issues in the north of Ireland.

Raidió Fáilte

Raidió Fáilte broadcasts only to some parts of Belfast and is available online. The Irish speaking community has shown that it can provide a professional, topical and modern day radio service to its listeners and POBAL believe that the station should be made available to all areas in the north of Ireland on the airways, and that funding should be increased to reflect this. This issue is not just about availability. It is about local input in Irish language programming from all parts of the north.

Cultural Broadcasting

Public Service Broadcasting has badly served the community’s cultural needs in respect of those who have an Irish identity in the north of Ireland. The validity of this identity is recognized in the Belfast Agreement – *‘It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation.’* (The Belfast Agreement, Annex B, Article 2), and there should be programming reflecting the Irish culture as part of mainstream television and radio broadcasting. This is not language programming and should not be paid for from any Irish language budget.

Proposed Models

The suggestion that Irish language broadcasting might be best served by Model 4 – Broad competitive funding – is not, in POBAL’s view, viable. Uncertainty already exists with current funding of the Irish

Language Broadcast Fund, and we believe that to further increase this uncertainty by adding the need to seek outside funding would be detrimental to Irish language broadcasting in the north of Ireland.

POBAL believe that the existing system in Wales and Scotland, where the BBC is responsible for national broadcasting and supplementary funding is provided by Westminster, is the best model for the north of Ireland, but that Irish language broadcasting must also be protected by domestic legislation.