

## **Question 11: do you agree with our proposals for accommodating Five, S4C, TG4 and GDS on Multiplex 2?:**

Yes

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is a Department of Education-sponsored council responsible for the provision of advice pertaining to the development and provision of Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta supports the proposals outlined in this section of consultation report.

The Irish-speaking and Irish-Medium Education community in the north of Ireland is currently entirely dependent on the Public Service role of the BBC for broadcasting in Irish. As with the other indigenous languages, the commercial non-profitability of minority-language broadcasting has always resulted in the Irish language being ignored by independent broadcasters. The amount of TV broadcast time provided in Irish by the BBC is extremely small, and in the absence of alternatives, the Irish-speaking population has not had access to Irish-language TV. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, therefore, welcomes the proposals outlined in Paragraphs 6.24-6.26, which will make Irish language broadcasts more available to the Irish-speaking population of Northern Ireland.

It is also important to note, that through these proposals, Irish in Northern Ireland will be treated with a degree of parity with Gaelic and Welsh, by the UK government, something that has not hitherto been the case in respect of funding, facilities and allocated broadcasting time through the BBC.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta believes that children in Irish-medium schools, in particular, will benefit from these proposals, through gaining access to Irish television broadcasts on TG4. Access to TV broadcasts is particularly important in terms of minority language maintenance and acquisition.

In addition the increased availability of Irish language broadcasting from TG4 will increase the potential for employment in TV and broadcasting for students in Irish-medium schools through increasing audiences in Northern Ireland. There is potential for increased employment opportunities both in TG4 and in other companies supplying TG4.

The proposals will also provide added value returns on tax payers' investments in the Irish-Language Broadcasting Fund in Northern Ireland.

### **International Agreements**

The UK Government has a duty towards the Irish language enshrined in a number of international agreements. The role of Government in supporting the Irish language is reflected in the Belfast Agreement. Specifically, the UK government undertook in the Belfast Agreement to provide increased and improved access to TG4 in NI. It has failed to do this in the intervening years. The British Government is a signatory to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages since 2001. It has agreed, in this, to provide a better level of public service television for Irish speakers in NI. It is four years since the UK Government ratified the European Charter and as yet the

Government has failed to meet this commitment. In 2004, the International Committee of Experts, appointed by the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages, criticised the provision of public service television in Irish and recommended that a significant increase in provision should be made. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has also supported this recommendation. In this context, the proposals contained in this consultation will go some way to facilitating the UK Government to meet its international commitments in respect of Irish-language broadcasting, by making TG4 more accessible to the Irish-speaking population.

#### The Irish-medium Education System

At present, the BBC makes little provision for the Irish-medium education system in its educational broadcasting, despite the fact that Irish-Medium Education is part of mainstream education in NI. These proposals will enhance the potential of Irish-medium schools in NI to augment the educational opportunities of Irish-medium pupils through access to TG4 broadcasts, currently only available to a very small proportion of the Irish-speaking community of NI.