

RTÉ Audience Council
Meeting held on Thursday 1st September 2011 at 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m. in RTÉ

Communique

Attendance: Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh (Chairperson); Gerry Ellis; Donal O'Grady; Robin O'Sullivan; Mary Stuart; Clare Watson; Rachel Holstead; Joe Little (RTÉ Board representative); Eburn Akpoveta; Paddy Richardson

Apologies: Deirdre Carroll; Gary Hastings; Bríd O'Brien

In Attendance: Beverly Hanly, Secretary to the RTÉ Audience Council
Noel Curran, Director General
Clare Duignan, Managing Director Radio

Eburn Akpoveta and Paddy Richardson were welcomed to their first meeting.

Communique 14 July 2011

The Communique was adopted and signed.

Matter Arising

Saorview: concerns expressed to the National Consumer Agency about mis-selling to vulnerable people was noted. The NCA are in ongoing contact with the Saorview office on this. The lack of subvention for the more vulnerable sections of society to facilitate the switchover was also raised and noted, while acknowledging this is a Government matter, not one for RTÉ.

Meeting with Director General, RTÉ

Noting that Section 96(17) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 requires the Director General to meet with the Council at least once in each year, the Chairperson welcomed Noel Curran to the meeting.

The issues raised during a wide ranging discussion included the challenges facing RTÉ and how the organisation can best position itself to meet these challenges over the next 3 years. The broadcasting sector is changing rapidly in terms of technology, viewing habits, competitiveness and commercial revenue and public funding are both under pressure.

The Director General pledged to support the Council in its work, particularly in relation to its statutory obligations. He stated he would wish to have an open dialogue with members and is available to meet them at any time if there are issues of concern arising.

The Council asked that it be kept informed of any key policy issues/developments under consideration and that it would have the opportunity to have an input, as appropriate, to the discussion.

On behalf of the members, the Chairperson thanked the Director General for his time and assured him of the Council's support.

Secretary's Report

The Secretary updated the Council on developments since the last meeting. Following on from the discussion at the last meeting, it was noted that (a) the ISL (Irish Sign Language) weekly weather forecast which commenced on 17th July has been very well received by the deaf community and (b) tests will be set up this Autumn on Audio Description standards on three episodes of Fair City. Other items noted included: the launches of the TV and Radio autumn schedules; the JNLR results; the national and international awards which RTÉ has participated in/been recipients of to date in 2011.

Members' Issues

At the last meeting, the Chairperson had asked members to prepare a list of practical proposals/suggestions for consideration at today's meeting, including suggestions as to how the Council might interact directly with sections of the RTÉ audience, within the terms set out in the statute. A list of priorities will now be drawn up for adoption at the next meeting following which it will be submitted to the Board of RTÉ.

A number of items were put forward for consideration at the meeting: accessibility; balance; young people; interaction with the RTÉ Board and BBCNI Audience Council; radio and TV programming as provided for in the Broadcasting Act 2009.

It is hoped that the Council can be involved in 2 or 3 public events during 2012 as well as participation by individual members in relevant local events. A protocol is to be drawn up in this regard.

One item of concern was raised viz the fact that the Environment Correspondent post is now vacant. A request was put that consideration be given to including it in another Correspondent's portfolio. It is an important area.

Meeting with Managing Director Radio

The Chairperson welcomed Clare Duignan to the meeting.

At the outset, the challenges facing the four channels were outlined, which include an aging population; a crowded marketplace; declining income; pressure on public funding and regulatory issues. The particular challenges facing each individual channel were then detailed. A wide ranging discussion followed.

It was noted that a new Radio Player will be introduced in the Autumn. It was noted that people who do not have the necessary updated software cannot access the RTÉ Player. This will be checked out in regard to the Radio Player and also the question of 'user testing' will be raised.

Reference was made to the suggestion about a media programme which the Council had submitted to RTÉ. It is to be hoped that an early response will be forthcoming.

Further sessions with Radio management will be arranged as required.

At the end, compliments were conveyed to Radio for the 'Doc on One' strand.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Council, thanked the MD Radio for attending what had been a worthwhile exchange.

Any Other Business

It is proposed that the Standing Orders adopted in September 2010 be reviewed at the next meeting to assess their efficacy.

A schedule of meetings for 2012 will be circulated in due course.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 27 October 2011 at 11.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. in RTÉ.

Signed: _____
Chairperson