

Behind the scenes in television

RTE

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Behind the scenes in a television station can be a very exciting place to work. RTÉ Television provides a medium for a wide range of output spanning arts, drama, education, entertainment, factual, lifestyle, music, news and current affairs, religious, sport and young people's programmes.



Types of Programmes

Some of RTÉ's home-produced programmes are made in-house, while others are commissioned from the independent production sector. Programmes are either transmitted live or pre-recorded, the key difference being that pre-recorded programmes can be edited whereas with live programmes there is no room for mistakes once the camera starts rolling.

Production Process

Most programmes go through the following three stages before reaching our screens: pre-production; set-up and technical rehearsal; and full dress rehearsal. Pre-recorded programmes go through an additional stage called post-production.

Pre-Production

Some key decisions are made at this stage: what the programme is setting out to achieve, how long it will be, what format it will take and the number of people necessary to make it. A budget is allocated and the producer, along with the rest of the team, decides what resources will be required in terms of studios, cameras, lighting, design and graphics, costumes and props, and administrative tasks such as copyright clearance, which is the obtaining of permission from external sources for the use of their material.



Set-up and Technical Rehearsal At this point the set is physically built by the Carpentry Shop and installed by the Staging Department. The initial lighting plan is implemented and any props secured. The producer writes a detailed technical script which sets out exactly what s/he wants in terms of camera positions, lights, what the presenter is doing and what needs to be heard for each individual shot. The sound crew do a complete layout of the studio and the sound mixing is done on the studio floor for the artists and audience to hear.

Full Dress Rehearsal

For pre-recorded programmes, the full dress rehearsal gives the production team a chance to run through the programme "as live". Many pre-recorded programmes are made this way, i.e. in one complete take, and then any mistakes made or camera shots that the producer isn't happy with can be re-recorded at the end. Because studio time is expensive and there are deadlines to be met, there is a block of time allocated and everything must be done within it. A short daily programme, for example, may have the whole week recorded in one day. Rehearsals continue until all involved in the production are happy with the performances. During the full dress rehearsal, the studio floor is a hive of activity and although each individual has a job to do, teamwork is vital in order to make the production a success.

The Production Team

The Floor Manager runs the programme at studio level ensuring the artists are standing by and the dressing rooms are suitable. The smooth running of the show depends on their skill as a communicator with the team, the performers and the audience. The safety conditions in studio are also the responsibility of the floor manager.

The Lighting Director controls the amount of light that enters a camera so that each image broadcast has the right amount of contrast. If someone is wearing a bright white shirt, the camera needs to be adjusted when it switches to someone wearing a dark shirt. The way lighting is used has an important effect on the programme, making it seem more upbeat for perhaps a variety show, or creating a subdued atmosphere for a current affairs programme.

The Sound Supervisor ensures that the sound being broadcast is perfect. S/he balances the output of various microphones around the studio to achieve this. S/he mixes all the sounds together until they are satisfied. That is why the sound supervisor's desk is often called the mixing desk.

The Camera Operators are the people responsible for getting the best-quality images from studios. It is a skilled job and one which is particularly important in areas such as entertainment, drama and sport.

The Presenter is usually involved in the research of the show because if they are well-informed then their performance in front of the camera will be more professional. If there is more than one presenter, it is essential that there is good chemistry between them which comes across on screen. Image is also very important since the popularity of a programme can often depend on how well the presenter's personality is projected on screen.

The Make-up Artist looks after all of the people who work in front of the camera who must wear make-up under strong lighting. The make-up artist must also be able to, for example, 'age' someone and have a thorough knowledge of period styles, including wigs.

The Wardrobe Department will focus on the presenter, and will consult with the producer regarding what people will wear on the night. They will work in harmony with the set and lighting designers. The wardrobe team also has a good knowledge of period clothing and contemporary styles.



There are a series of control rooms overlooking the studio. The producer, director, vision mixer, broadcast co-ordinator, and caption operator sit in the production control room, which is the nerve centre of the operation.

The Producer has overall responsibility for the programme. S/he sits facing a bank of television screens in the production box, each of which provides a different picture of what's going on. S/he stays in touch with everyone on the studio floor via microphones in the production box and headphones worn by the floor manager, camera and sound operators, and lighting staff.

The Director controls the visual elements of the transmission, working closely with the producer to select the most effective camera shots that will go out on air.

The Vision Mixer, under the direction of the producer, controls which shots from which cameras are recorded onto the master tape, when exactly a cut is made from one camera to another and when a pre-recorded piece is inserted. The vision mixer also listens to the director calling the camera shots and s/he operates the vision control desk that selects these shots for transmission.



The Broadcast Co-ordinator (BCO) is very much the facilitator of the group. The BCO ensures that everyone has accurate information and is informed of any changes in the script. Every part of the show is timed exactly and it is the responsibility of the BCO to see that the script is adhered to. S/he also looks after the administration of the recording on a step-by-step basis, "counting in" each individual section of the programme so that cues are taken at the right time.

The support staff to the control areas include a *caption operator*, who supplies the programme titles to the vision mixer; a *graphic designer*; and sometimes a 'runner' who does everything from getting coffee to delivering tapes around the station.

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Post Production

This is the editing stage. The technology involved in editing for television is constantly evolving with the digital age making the process easier and at the same time more accurate and flexible. The producer decides what stays in and what is cut in the editing suite. This is also the stage at which subtitles are added to pre-recorded programmes by RTÉ's subtitling team.

Once the editing process is complete, the finished product goes to RTÉ's Presentation Directors who are responsible for getting RTÉ's programmes on air. Programmes are played out from the Presentation Studios to the main RTÉ transmitter. They are then received on televisions around the nation and, through satellite technology, around the world. All the programmes that RTÉ broadcasts are stored by the Libraries and Archives Department for future use.

