

Opening Statement by Prof. MacCraith

Go raibh maith agat a Chathaoirligh as ucht an cuireadh teacht chun ár smaointí a mhalairt leis an gCoiste inniú.

On behalf of the Future of Media Commission I would like to thank you for the invitation to have an exchange of views with you today on the future of the media and the work of the Commission.

I'm joined here today by some of my fellow members of the Commission:

- Sinéad Burke, who is the Director and Founder of Tilting the Lens and a member of the Council of State;
- Prof. Gillian Doyle, Professor of Media Economics in the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow;
- Siobhán Holliman, Deputy Editor of the Tuam Herald, joint Cathaoirleach of the Irish Executive Council of the NUJ, and a member of the Press Council;
- Mark Little, an entrepreneur and journalist, founder of Kinzen, and before that Storyful, and a previously a journalist with RTÉ; and
- Andrew Munro who is Secretary to the Commission.

Broadly, our terms of reference identify four important public services:

- To inform, educate and entertain the public in relation to Irish culture, identity, sport, language etc.;
- To ensure access to high quality, independent journalism
- To bring the nation and diaspora together at important moments;
- To ensure that the work of Irish creative talent reaches audiences in Ireland and further afield.

We have been asked:

- to identify the Irish experience in delivering the above aims, and the challenges created for the media by new global platforms and changing audience preferences in relation to how content is delivered;
- to examine whether current models are appropriate for the future; and
- to review best practice abroad.

Arising from that work, the Commission will propose:

- how public service aims should be delivered in Ireland over the next ten years;
- how this can support the cultural and creative sectors;
- how this work can be funded in a way that is sustainable, ensures independence, and delivers value for money.

We are also to make recommendations on RTE's role and financing, and on oversight and regulation having regard to our EU obligations.

Over the past months we have heard about the challenges facing public broadcasters and the independent sector. We researched the changing consumption patterns of the Irish public, and heard how journalists now operate in a multi-platform environment. Over 800 members of the public and organisations took the time to make a submission to our public consultation process. We held six online thematic dialogues that enabled a broad range of stakeholders, experts, and members of the public and the Commission to engage with each other. The importance to the public of the media is evident. The public really value the service provided to them by the media at national, local, and community level. As a source of high-quality journalism, the media are critically important to our functioning as a democracy and our cohesion as a society. The media reflect and support our culture, our language, our sport, our music and creativity; they help to define and refine our sense of ourselves as Irish and European.

At the heart of our considerations, however, has been the public. We have recognised the importance of seeing the public, not as a passive, monolithic audience, but as an actively engaged, diverse, and crucial part of the media ecosystem. The key challenge for the media is to meet the needs of the public as they would like them to be met, and to reflect on all platforms the diversity we see on our streets, in our rural communities, in our schools, and in our homes.

As I explained in my reply to the Chair's invitation, the Commission has not reached its conclusions, nor submitted its report to Government. The Commission is, therefore, not in a position to discuss its findings and conclusions.

I understand that the Committee is engaged in pre-legislative scrutiny of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill. The Commission has been briefed on the Bill and its provisions to transpose the revised AVMSD, establish the Media Commission and provide for online safety and other matters. Although the proposed legislation is of interest to the Commission, we are not, however, in a position to express a definitive view on it today. What we can say is that our recommendations for the future of media may have implications for legislation, and, where they do, we will endeavour to express them at a high level in terms of the underpinning principles and desired outcomes. The finer detail of the legislation will be a matter for legislators, parliamentary counsel, and departmental officials.

We will be happy, however, to speak about what we have heard and learned during our work, and about the themes and issues that are emerging from that. These include the importance of fostering quality journalism; independence; collaboration; innovation; equality, diversity, and inclusion; and platform-neutrality.

We are also very eager to hear the reflections of the members of the Committee, as elected public representatives on the future of the media as they will be of assistance to us as we formulate our findings