

**Statement by Minister Martin to JOC on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media-  
Tuesday, 27 February 2024**

A Chathaoirligh, agus a bhalla an Choiste,

Tá mé buíoch as an deis seo cur síos a dhéanamh ar chúrsaí a bhaineann le rialachas agus maoiniú do RTÉ, agus le todhchaí na heagraíochta. Táim tiomanta mar Aire na Meán athbhreithniú agus athnuachan a dhéanamh ar chóras an cheadúnais teilifíse.

Chairperson, and members of the Committee,

I welcome the opportunity to speak to you today in relation to a number of matters relating to the governance of RTÉ and the future funding of public service media.

While it has been said before, I believe that any discussion on public service media must acknowledge the very important place which the media holds in our society.

This is evidenced by the significant public debate and discourse around RTÉ and indeed, the detailed investigations which this committee has undertaken over the past eight months.

As Minister for Media, I will not be deflected from the priority of delivering reform. I am determined that this will be the Government that decides on a sustainable funding model for public service media. In an increasingly turbulent world, public service broadcasting is an essential pillar of our democracy. It is a trusted source of objective fact-checked news, as well as a crucial forum for celebrating and promoting our distinct culture, sports and way of life. It must, and it will be, supported.

I would like to first address the question of the reform of RTÉ. While there have been a number of reports published into a variety of specific issues related to RTÉ since last June, what was ultimately required was a wider and higher level review of the organisation. This needed to encompass the governance framework which was in place, the organisational culture or cultures which prevailed, how contractors were engaged, and wider HR and employment policies. It was also important that any such reviews were completely impartial and independent. It was for this reason that the Government established the two Expert Advisory Committees.

In order to bring about meaningful change, these committees were tasked, not only with reviewing what had happened and why, but also to bring forward recommendations to chart a new way forward. While I had hoped to have the reports by the end of this month, I have now been advised, that some final review processes need to be completed before the Committees are in a position to submit their reports to me. The Review of Governance and Culture will shortly undergo the necessary fact-checking processes to ensure that fair procedures have been followed. It is expected that these processes will take at least three weeks. The Review of Contractor Fees, HR and Other Matters will be finalised earlier. On that basis, and in light of their complementary nature, I expect that both Reviews will be submitted to me during March.

I have consistently stated that, while Government is continuing to discuss the most appropriate basis on which to support public service media into the future, a final decision on this cannot be taken until the two Expert Advisory Committees' Reviews have been considered by Government and published.

Let me reiterate that I am fully committed to bringing forward reform of the TV licence so that the necessary funding support for public service media can be put on a sustainable footing. While funding for RTÉ is a significant element of the public funding model, this will also continue to support valuable schemes such as Sound and Vision. More importantly, it will enable a widening of the scope of supports so that public service content produced by a range of media platforms and outlets including local newspapers can be supported through new Media Fund Schemes.

I am committed to supporting the objectives of a reformed, transformed RTÉ as set out in the organisation's Strategic Vision. Ultimately a new funding model will not just safeguard a necessary pillar of our democratic society, that of public service media, but it will also provide for greater stability for RTÉ, and its staff, and for the many other valued workers in other media, and in the independent sector who provide public service content. This is the core principle which underpins my work. And allied to that is the need for maximum transparency and openness in all operations but particularly as regards funding.

Which brings me to the events of last week. Following the publication of the report by McCann Fitzgerald into previous voluntary exit schemes in RTÉ, the Director General appeared before this committee and referred to more recent exits of other senior members of staff during his tenure.

As the Committee will be aware, the DG had stated that it was not possible to provide the detailed information sought due to legal constraints. Having consistently called for maximum transparency on these issues, I asked the DG to seek updated legal advice on the disclosure of key details with regard to the most recent severance payments to a number of senior executives from RTÉ. While the legal advice is clear that neither data protection law nor confidentiality clauses cannot be breached, I still believe that maximum possible transparency is required into these matters so that we can continue the process of rebuilding trust in RTÉ as one of our public service broadcasters.

I met with the former RTÉ Chair and DG on Monday of last week to seek an update on this matter. During the course of that meeting, I raised media reports which referred to possible Board and Chair involvement in the approval of severance packages to key senior executives last year.

It was of utmost importance to me to ascertain accurate information in relation to this as I was not aware of the Board's role, specifically the approval of the package in question by its Remuneration Committee; and I had not received any formal correspondence relating to such an important matter.

I was told by the then Chair that there was no formal approval role for the Board in these two specific recent exit packages. Later that day, I outlined this position to the media at a press event in Government Buildings.

Ahead of a subsequent meeting with the former Chair and DG on Wednesday of last week, I received a letter from RTE outlining the updated legal advice it had received around whether it could disclose the full details of the recent severance packages.

One paragraph referenced Board involvement "where relevant" in termination payments. In light of this, I again sought confirmation on this issue from the former Chair, and again received confirmation that there was no Board involvement whatsoever in respect of the severance packages agreed for Richard Collins or Rory Coveney. The then Chair also pointed out that a new process requiring Board approval would apply going forward.

Subsequently, on Thursday, the former Chair contacted Departmental officials to say that she had inadvertently given me incorrect information and that the severance package for the former CFO of RTE had in fact been approved on October 10<sup>th</sup> by the RTE Board's Remuneration Committee of which she was also Chair.

The failure to provide accurate and timely information gave me considerable cause for concern. Regrettably, this was not the first time that the then Chair had failed to give me a clear account of her and the Board's work at RTE. My relationship, as Media Minister, is through the Chair. This relationship is fundamental to the development of a positive and productive future for the organisation.

And confidence in the reliability of communications between both is absolutely critical, particularly at such a sensitive time in the broadcaster's history.

As I viewed this as an important matter, I believed it merited a formal and direct approach. I sought to meet with her on Friday last to address the issues directly and openly, to seek clarification on the matter and to ensure this would not reoccur. I am willing to elaborate further on the events of last Thursday at this Committee.

I know there has been much discussion around my appearance on Prime Time last Thursday night. I would like to point out that I had agreed to this interview two days earlier. It was a good opportunity to give my views on the updated legal advice on exit payments, and to discuss the future funding of public service media.

Clearly, I would much prefer if I could have had that meeting with Siún Ní Raghallaigh on Friday and I do regret that she chose to resign rather than have that discussion.

I would like to put it on the record again the significant contribution which Ms Ní Raghallaigh has made over the past 15 months. Her commitment to transforming RTÉ was obvious and I want to offer genuine thanks for her hard work.

My focus turns now to the appointment of a new Chair that can continue the important work of reform and rebuilding trust I will be progressing this matter with Government colleagues as soon as possible. I will also be meeting the RTÉ Board in the coming days.

I look forward to engaging positively and constructively with them to ensure our collective objective is progressed and we ensure a vibrant, stable, sustainable national broadcaster that future generations of Irish people need and deserve.

Go raibh míle maith agat as éisteacht liom agus cuirfidh mé fáilte roimh aon cheisteanna uaibh anois.

**ENDS.**