

RTÉ Statement on Supports for the Development of Regional Film and TV Production

Dermot Horan, Director of Acquisitions and Co-productions, RTÉ

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Cathaoirleach, Deputies, Senators, thank you for the invitation today to discuss the future development of regional film and television production.

RTÉ is committed to programming made in the regions. It forms part of our public service remit, serves our audiences, and has been called out as one of the four new key pillars in our new strategy framework.

We already have significant production bases for both television and radio in Cork, Limerick and Casla.

In recent years we have seen our spend with the independent sector grow outside of Dublin from 25% in 2021 to 41% in 2023, and our stated ambition is to grow our footprint significantly in the regions.

A key point to note is that films and TV series made in the regions work. They work with both Irish and international audiences. For feature films and drama series the location becomes a character in its own right. Recent examples of dramas commissioned by RTÉ in the regions include ***Obituary***, ***Smother***, ***Hidden Assets***, ***North Sea Connection*** and most recently ***Blackshore***.

These productions employ significant numbers of highly skilled people over long periods. A typical six-part drama series would film in a location for at least three months, and for that period may well be the biggest employer in the town. A recent example would be ***Obituary***, made by Galway based Magamedia and shot in Ballyshannon, which is currently in pre-production for a series 2.

Irish audiences want to see their entire country reflected in the programmes they watch, and international audiences love to see the unique backdrop which is rural Ireland. Irish dramas are now selling all over the world. ***Smother***, set in Lahinch, has been seen in over 160 countries, which means the beauty of the Burren and its unique landscape is being seen worldwide.

The regional Section 481 uplift and the WRAP fund have been used in the majority of cases of these regionally based dramas and were absolutely essential in putting the finance plans together. The Irish media sector has to compete with all sorts of other tax reliefs, and national and regional funds which are available to producers.

The recent UK budget announced enhanced tax support, The Independent Tax Credit, which offers at a rate of 53% of qualifying expenditure, which equates to around 40% in relief. This is well above the Irish rate and is from a country with a rich audiovisual heritage. This will put further pressure on both inward and indigenous productions, with a potential migration of production to Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK.

Feature films and drama series are very expensive to produce, and the more local funding which the producer can generate the easier it is to find the balance internationally. Thus, a long term established tax relief, enhanced for regionally based productions, together with support from Screen Ireland and broadcasters is essential in order to green light high-end programming. It will also give the production companies the best possible chance to retain the intellectual property rights in their product, which will allow those companies to grow, employ more staff and develop more programming, leading to a much more sustainable audiovisual sector in Ireland.

Over the coming weeks, RTÉ will be finalising its Statement of Strategy – greater levels of investment with the independent sector is a clear priority. Over the lifetime of the strategy, we hope to restore our investment to at least €70 million by 2029, depending on public funding being resolved.

As the members are aware, recent creations by Irish film makers, have attracted international recognition and acclaim. This is a sector that is poised for development and growth, and RTÉ is ready to play its role in this with our sectoral partners here today. It is therefore timely that due consideration is given as to what policy measures would enable its full potential be reached, and we look forward to the discussion ahead on how best to achieve that.