

Audience Council

RTÉ

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### About the Audience Council

RTÉ, as a national Public Service Broadcaster, is dedicated to putting the audience first. It provides radio and television programmes, in Irish and English, which are of the highest quality, universally available, and which are independent and impartial in accordance with constitutional and statutory obligations.

The idea of an Audience Council was first discussed in RTÉ's application for a licence fee increase in November 2002:

*"The relationship between the audience and the broadcaster can be very uneven yet good communications between the two are vital for the ongoing development of a truly relevant service. RTÉ is committed to being open to its audience, welcoming all contact, listening to all views, and responding promptly and appropriately. To facilitate communication, and to enhance accountability, RTÉ has decided to establish an Audience Council."*

### Purpose

The public interest tests that RTÉ sets for itself include:

- Fairness
- Accuracy
- Impartiality
- Objectivity
- Independence from vested interests and freedom from political control or influence
- High quality schedules available to all (i.e. free-to-air)
- A significant proportion of programming originating in Ireland
- Schedules that include programming for minority groups and interests
- Schedules that respect the views of the audience and enhance their cultural expectations
- Programming that recognises regional interests and cultural diversity
- Programming that encourages understanding and tolerance
- Programming that is imaginative and original.

All of these tests are in the interest of the audience, and are open to comment and feedback by the audience; the Audience Council facilitates this communication and these topics form the basic agenda for each Council meeting.



## Structure and Composition

The Council acts as an advisory group to the RTÉ Authority.

Each Council has a life span of four years and elects a Chairperson annually from among its members. The first Council's term is from December 2003 to December 2007. The Council meets five times a year, including one meeting outside of Dublin. A designated Secretary is provided by RTÉ. The members of the Council participate on a voluntary basis being reimbursed vouched expenses only.

There are 22 members on the Audience Council: 11 representative members with a specialist interest in one or more of the key strands of programming; 10 individual members who have a general interest in broadcasting and the Chairperson of the Authority's Programme Sub-Committee is an ex-officio ordinary member of the Council. There are currently no vacancies on the Audience Council.

The following organisations were asked to nominate a representative to the Council:

- ▶ The Social Partners: IBEC, ICTU, IFA, and The Community & Voluntary Pillar
- ▶ The Arts Council
- ▶ Office of the Minister for Children (then The National Children's Office)
- ▶ The City and County Managers' Association
- ▶ The Equality Authority
- ▶ Foras na Gaeilge
- ▶ The Irish Council of Churches
- ▶ The Irish Sports Council.

The RTÉ Authority, with appropriate external advice and support, sought applications from members of the public who wished to be appointed as one of the ten individual members. There are two members from each of Ireland's EU constituency areas, and two from Northern Ireland. Advertisements inviting individuals interested in applying to join the Council went out on RTÉ Radio and Television and in the *RTÉ Guide*. The final composition of the Audience Council was, under section 21 of the *Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960*, as amended by section 5 of the *Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act, 1976*, subject to the consent of the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

## Interaction

The Audience Council interacts with:

- ▶ The general public via a variety of means including website, annual report
- ▶ The Authority via the ex-officio representation and occasional meetings
- ▶ The Director-General who attends at least one meeting of the Council annually and is available as appropriate
- ▶ RTÉ senior editorial management who attend meetings as necessary.

The Council has developed close links with the BBC NI Broadcasting Council. Two joint meetings have been held and areas of mutual interest have been identified for ongoing discussion.



## Members of the Audience Council (as of March 2007)

- ▶ Paul M. Kinsella, Chairman
- ▶ Sheena Walsh McMahon
- ▶ Anthony Kelly
- ▶ Des Sheridan
- ▶ Valerie Keegan
- ▶ Eddie Sheehy
- ▶ Eilís Boland
- ▶ Maolsheachlainn Ó Caollaí
- ▶ Maria Killian
- ▶ Alan McCormack
- ▶ Mary Gallagher MacBride
- ▶ Anne O'Donnell
- ▶ Niall Madigan
- ▶ Oliver Donohoe
- ▶ Pádraig McGinn
- ▶ Patrick O'Leary
- ▶ Mark Connolly
- ▶ Paul McDermott
- ▶ Ruth Gallagher
- ▶ Alison McCullagh
- ▶ Adrian Ó Donnabháin
- ▶ Stephanie O'Callaghan

