

22nd of November, 2018

A Chara,

I am writing in response to two articles recently published in The Times: “Gaeilge: too much and too costly” (16th of November) and “Obsession with Gaeilge leaves me speechless” (19th of November).

I must strongly contest the content in these articles, which were based on a ‘Peer-to-Peer Review on PSM Values July 2017 RTÉ’, produced by the European Broadcasting Union. The main finding of the review regarding RTÉ’s Irish language broadcasting policies stated that ‘[their funding] is too much, going in all directions, with a high cost in terms of time, people and money’.

Reviews and research on the Irish language are always welcome. However, this report was based in anecdotal evidence rather than in factual research. Statistically, there is, in fact, not enough time or money spent on Irish language broadcasting in general, nor are there enough people employed to fulfill their legal responsibility under the Broadcasting Act 2009.

According to the Meáin Ghaeilge RTÉ Action Plan 2015-2019, the total time allocated to Irish language programming on RTÉ television in 2013, amounted to only 15.5 hours across the whole year. This equates to about 0.1% of the broadcasting time across two stations. With regards the number of people dedicated to Irish-language broadcasting, the same Action Plan stated that “the reduction in staff numbers across RTÉ in recent years has been felt strongly in areas relating to Irish-language broadcasting, which has resulted in a reduction in the level of Irish-language competency throughout the organisation.’

To say that there is too much money being spent on this service is also unfair, especially in a European context. The Welsh language channel S4C, for example, received £84m (€95m) in their 2017/2018 budget - almost three times more than TG4, which received €36m here in 2017. Dee Forbes, Director-General of RTÉ herself voiced, at a session of the Public Accounts Committee in May, the fact that ‘we do not spend enough money on [Irish language content].’

TG4 Director General Alan Esslemont has spoken out on this issue, stating that €6m extra funding was needed over 5 years in order to maintain and develop the standard of programming being produced by TG4. The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland agreed, and recommended an increase of €6m per annum in public funding for TG4 before Budget 2019. These requests were not met.

This Peer-to-Peer Review should be looked at as an opinion as opposed to an analytical finding regarding Irish language broadcasting, and the European Broadcasting Union should not stand over this it. We would ask EBU review this research, and to follow up with correctly conducted research project regarding Irish language broadcasting rather than using conjecture, opinion and misinformation.

Is mise, le meas,

Julian de Spáinn,
Ard-Rúnaí Chonradh na Gaeilge