

RTÉ

Key Actions and Changes

A Re-structured Current Affairs, New Journalism
Guidelines, Editorial Standards and Training

April 2012
RTÉ Director General

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Appendix 1. RTÉ Journalism Guidelines

Introduction

Over many years RTÉ has earned and retained the trust of its audiences through great programming and an adherence to very high editorial standards. Nowhere has this been more so than in Television Current Affairs, where time and again current affairs programming has made sense of the events shaping our daily lives and shone a light on some of the darkest aspects of Irish life.

The very serious editorial failures made in two important current affairs programmes in the past number of months, and their consequences, have rightly caused RTÉ to review and reflect on all of its editorial policy, practices and values. That process will continue for some time. These errors and failures of action have presented many challenges to many people in recent months, not least to those who were directly affected by them. But they have also caused concern and anger both within RTÉ and among our audience, the general public, whose trust in our organisation has been damaged.

I indicated a number of months ago that RTÉ must always be open and honest when we get things wrong. We will make mistakes. Programme-makers must be and will be supported in making challenging programming but the standards we set for ourselves as the national broadcaster must be very high as I know they are in so much of what we currently do.

We must learn what we can from mistakes we make and make changes if necessary. This is part of being accountable and is essential to public trust and public support.

The publication of these new structures and guidelines is, we hope, a step in the right direction in this regard. The range of measures in this document represents RTÉ's determination to make our journalism stronger, fairer and more transparent. Far from backing away from difficult investigative journalism, we are committing to enhance it, modernise it and make it more accessible across all our services.

These new measures will mean little unless they are embraced by all editorial staff, and acted upon in all the thousands of editorial decisions we make every day. They will only work if programme makers from the most junior to the highest level clearly understand and accept their responsibility and their role in rebuilding RTÉ's reputation for very high quality journalism.

Most of all though, it is through great programming that we will rebuild trust with our audiences. Because not alone do are audiences expect us to be accurate and fair, they also expect that we do not lose our nerve – that we continue to challenge, to probe and to ask the tough questions in the public interest.

I trust everyone will play their part.

Noel Curran
Director General, RTÉ

Key Actions and Changes

- RTÉ is re-structuring the editorial management of RTÉ Television Current Affairs.
- RTÉ will fill a number of senior editorial positions in the coming months: Managing Director RTÉ News and Current Affairs; Managing Editor RTÉ Television Current Affairs; Editor *Prime Time*; Editor *Frontline*; and Editor RTÉ Investigations Unit.
- RTÉ is creating a new Multimedia Investigations Unit within RTÉ Television Current Affairs. The new unit will produce special investigative documentary programmes and special reports for existing news and current affairs programmes on television and radio.
- RTÉ has decided to permanently stand down the *Prime Time Investigates* series strand.
- RTÉ has published new Journalism Guidelines for all editorial staff. All editorial staff will attend a training session on the new Guidelines.
- RTÉ has established a new Editorial Standards Board. The purpose of this board is to maintain and monitor content standards.
- RTÉ has a new process for dealing with significant editorial complaints.
- RTÉ commits to developing a new comprehensive multilayered training and development programme to strengthen RTÉ's journalism and ensure that RTÉ's editorial standards are maintained to a very high standard.

1. Personnel Changes

Resulting from the restructuring of RTÉ Television Current Affairs and other personnel changes the following posts will be filled in the coming months:

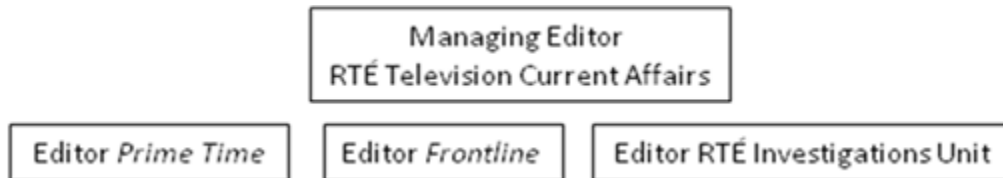
- **Managing Director RTÉ News and Current Affairs**
- **Managing Editor Television Current Affairs**
- **Editor RTÉ Investigations Unit**
- **Editor *Prime Time***
- **Editor *Frontline***

Both the Managing Director of RTÉ News and Current Affairs and Managing Editor Television Current Affairs roles will be filled following a competitive recruitment process open to both internal and external candidates.

No decision has yet been made on the selection process for the Editor roles, some may involve competition or some may be by appointment.

2. Re-structured RTÉ Television Current Affairs

The new editorial management structure in RTÉ Television Current Affairs is as follows:



This new structure marks a significant change for RTÉ Television Current Affairs. The changes are to ensure clarity in the editorial management chain and to allow an improved focus on journalism and editorial decision making at the programme level.

The changes give greater editorial responsibility to programme Editors. The Editors' of *Prime Time* and *Frontline* primary focus will be on editorial decision making in their respective programmes to ensure RTÉ continues to produce high quality current affairs reporting and programming.

The Managing Editor RTÉ Television Current Affairs replaces the existing Editor of Current Affairs position. He/she will be the senior editorial figure in RTÉ Television Current Affairs and will report directly to the Managing Director of RTÉ News and Current Affairs. The Managing Editor will act as the critical check and balance on key editorial decisions. He/she will also be responsible for budgets and key personnel decision and allocations. The Managing Editor will also join the RTÉ News and Current Affairs Board to ensure greater integration between News and Current Affairs.

RTÉ Investigations Unit

Investigative journalism is one of the main contributions of news media to society and is a key output priority for RTÉ. Recent controversies will not diminish our commitment to challenging investigative programming. To better position RTÉ for the future, RTÉ is reinventing its approach to investigative journalism through the establishment of a new multimedia RTÉ Investigations Unit.

Led by a new Editor and in line with the RTÉ's broader aims of developing distinctive rich multimedia content for television, radio and online, the new Investigations Unit will be responsible for managing and producing RTÉ's key investigative journalism output.

The new multimedia unit will sit within RTÉ Television Current Affairs but will have much closer relationships with other output areas than operated previously. It will produce special investigative long form programmes and special reports for existing news and current affairs programmes on television and radio. This output will be supported by an online resource that will provide a window on RTÉ's investigations. Where possible, this resource will showcase RTÉ's investigative journalism with additional information, methodology, research, sourcing, long form interviews, etc.

RTÉ has decided to stand down the *Prime Time Investigates* series strand. The investigative unit will be responsible for the production of a new strand of investigative documentaries, broadcast throughout the year rather than as a stand-alone series. The financial resources allocated to *Prime Time Investigates* will be allocated to the RTÉ Investigations Unit. Staff will be allocated to the RTÉ Investigations Unit on an assignment basis and will be drawn from across RTÉ's output divisions.

The new RTÉ Investigations Unit will aim to be a key centre of excellence for investigative journalism in Ireland. In time, the Unit will seek to develop strong links and appropriate partnerships with relevant third level institutions and courses and with Irish and international publications and broadcasters engaged in serious investigative journalism.

3. RTÉ Journalism Guidelines

RTÉ has now published new Journalism Guidelines (See Appendix 1). These new guidelines bring together and update all of RTÉ's Programme Standards and Guidelines that relate to journalism.

The new RTÉ Journalism Guidelines are informed by the *'Report on Editorial Processes and Risk Management Procedures in RTÉ Television Current Affairs'* completed by Professor John Horgan in December 2011 and by RTÉ's assessment of the mistakes made in both *Prime Time Investigates - A Mission to Prey* and in the *Frontline Presidential Debate* programmes.

To assist in the preparation of the new Guidelines, RTÉ sought the assistance of Stephen Whittle, former Controller Editorial Policy with the BBC and principal author of the BBC's Editorial guidelines.

These Guidelines apply primarily though not exclusively to News, Current Affairs and Factual Programming. Guidelines in regard to other programming such as Entertainment, Drama and Children's are due to be completed during the course of the year. In the meantime the 2008 Edition of the RTÉ Programme Standards and Guidelines apply.

The new RTÉ Journalism Guidelines are being introduced in an interim form pending the completion of the new BAI Code on Fairness, Objectivity & Impartiality in News and Current Affairs. In addition, following the conclusion of the BAI Investigation into the *Prime Time Investigates - A Mission to Prey* programme, should the BAI make any specific recommendations not contained within the new RTÉ Journalism Guidelines, then the Guidelines will be amended accordingly.

Once these processes have completed the Guidelines will be amended to reflect any changes in the regulatory codes. In the meantime, staff should pass on any comments or suggested amendments to the Head of Broadcast Compliance, Peter Feeney.

4. RTÉ Editorial Standards Board

RTÉ has established a new Editorial Standards Board. The purpose of this board is to maintain and monitor content standards. The Editorial Standards Board is independent of existing editorial lines within output divisions and its core functions include:

- Where a significant investigative programme is planned, the Board will function as a separate and additional resource which can be used to further assess and scrutinise the programme pre-broadcast. In such cases, production teams shall present a detailed report to the Editorial Standards Board at least 7 days in advance of scheduled transmission, to enable the Board to assess the quality of the report, the reliability of the evidence assembled in support of the claims being made and to determine whether the public interest is best served by the report being broadcast.
- To provide an independent assessment of the merits of formal and substantive complaints lodged against RTÉ programmes and output, in order to determine the RTÉ response to such complaints. (See Section 6 Accountability and Dealing With Mistakes)
- To carry out reviews of RTÉ Programmes and output, selected post-transmission, to ensure conformity with RTÉ's Programme Standards and Guidelines. The outcome of these reviews will be reported to the relevant Managing Directors.

The members of the RTÉ Editorial Standards Board are:

Michael Good, Managing Editor, RTÉ News

Jim Jennings, Head of RTÉ Radio 1

Steve Carson, Director of Programmes, RTÉ Television

Eleanor Bleahene, RTÉ Solicitors Office

Peter Feeney, Head of Broadcast Compliance (Secretary)

The composition of the Board may be changed at the discretion of the Director General.

5. Training and Development

Training on new RTÉ Journalism Guidelines

RTÉ has arranged that Steven Whittle former Controller Editorial Policy BBC and Peter Feeney, Head of Broadcast Compliance at RTE, will provide training on the new RTÉ Journalism Guidelines. The sessions will also include a short refresher on the use of social media by editorial staff. All staff in editorial roles must attend a training session.

The mandatory training sessions have been organised for late April/early May. They are for all editorial staff across Radio, Television, News and Current Affairs and Digital. Details of the dates and times will be communicated to staff shortly.

Editorial Staff Development

RTÉ must invest in its journalists and its journalism if it is to ensure that RTÉ's editorial standards are to be maintained to a very high standard.

It will take time to design and resource a comprehensive multilayered training and development programme for editorial staff that includes a clear recruitment and promotion strategy, dedicated training modules and routine rotation between key radio, TV and online editorial roles. We are committed to such a programme. This programme must be closely aligned with other major organisational change initiatives that are currently underway and should involve appropriate engagement with the NUJ, SIPTU and other staff and professional organisations, and potentially with external media training institutions.

Details of the programme will be announced in the coming months.

6. Accountability and Dealing with Mistakes

As a publicly funded public service broadcaster, RTÉ must be accountable for what we do and how we do it. When called upon, we must always be ready to explain and justify our editorial decisions and priorities.

While the initiatives within this document will significantly reduce the risk of RTÉ making serious editorial mistakes in the future, it is inevitable that mistakes will at times happen, given the scale and scope of our output. Procedures relating to how we should deal with mistakes are contained in the new RTÉ Journalism Guidelines but they are worth restating below.

Corrections, Clarifications and Apologies

No matter how carefully prepared programmes are, there will always be occasions when it will be necessary to return to a subject to clarify or correct what was broadcast.

Responding quickly and on our own initiative to openly correct mistakes is nearly always preferable to subsequently having to deal with a complaint.

Similarly every effort must be made to avoid repeating the mistake again in subsequent broadcasts, including online and on deferred broadcasts/repeats.

If the mistake is more substantial and the view is taken by the programme team that the public record needs amending, the programme or service responsible for the broadcast or publication of the inaccurate information will clarify matters as soon as feasible. If the clarification is sought by a third party and there is the possibility of any follow up that might compromise RTÉ's reputation, any proposed clarification must be scripted and cleared with editorial management in advance of broadcast.

If there is the possibility of any legal issues arising either from the original broadcast or the clarification, programme-makers must in the first instance consult their editorial managers. Legal advice must be sought before any agreement to broadcast a clarification is given. If it is decided to broadcast a clarification it must be scripted in advance and approved. If the matter is sufficiently serious to warrant it, the clarification should be recorded and not broadcast live.

If the original broadcast is of such a nature that a formal apology is required, the broadcast of the apology must be approved by editorial management, legal advice must be sought and the apology must be recorded in advance of broadcast, normally by the relevant Presentation Department. The broadcast of the apology needs to take account of the tone and manner of the voice of the person reading the clarification or apology.

Handling Complaints

RTÉ will always receive a large volume of complaints regarding its programming. All programme-makers are obliged to take complaints seriously and to respond in a professional and courteous manner.

RTÉ is committed to responding in a meaningful way to all complaints within four weeks. Responsibility for responding rests with the production team that has made the programme which resulted in a complaint being made.

All significant complaints made about RTÉ output are to be referred by production teams to relevant editorial managers and to the Head of Broadcasting Compliance, before any response is issued. The Head of Broadcasting Compliance, as secretary of the Editorial Standards Board is to identify any complaint which needs to be brought to the Board's attention. In the event that a complaint needs to be assessed by the Board, the production team shall ensure that all relevant information is provided directly to the Board to enable it to properly and fully assess the complaint. In the event that the Board's assessment is that the complaint should not be defended by RTÉ, this decision and the rationale is to be outlined to the relevant Managing Director.

Accountability to the BAI

RTE is also publicly accountable to the BAI and is required to observe its Code on Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs (which is reflected in these Guidelines) and honour its Right of Reply scheme. We cooperate openly and honestly with the Authority and abide by its determinations.