

RTÉ Longwave

1. Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), has since 2004 transmitted its most popular radio station, RTÉ Radio 1, on Longwave 252kHz. RTÉ is planning the shutdown of this service by June 2019 for cost related reasons. This shutdown was originally announced by RTÉ in September 2014 to take place in October 2014 and faced resistance, in particular from those advocating for older members of the Irish community in Britain, who rely very heavily on the current Longwave service.
2. Ultimately, any decision concerning RTÉ services is an operational matter for RTÉ. However, since the intention to end the service was announced in 2014, this Department has been working to ensure that the views of Irish community in Britain, in particular older members of the community, have been included in the decision-making process. In 2015, this Department funded research to ensure data was available about the extent of the importance of the RTÉ Longwave service to the Irish in Britain.
3. The research, commissioned by *Irish in Britain*, the umbrella organisation for Irish communities across Britain, and carried out by the Social Policy Research Centre of Middlesex University, surveyed 3200 respondents and found that just over 70% of listeners to RTÉ Longwave services in Britain are aged over 60, that a similar number of listeners were born in Ireland and that just over 60% are retired. For the majority of listeners, RTÉ radio is seen as a ‘lifeline’ to Ireland – with 76% of respondents stating that the service ‘maintains a link with Ireland’ and 79% of respondents indicating that it ‘brings me news from Ireland’.
4. A Consultative Group of key stakeholders (chaired by this Department) and composed of representatives of RTE, Irish community representatives (including *Irish in Britain*, and members of the Emigrant Services Advisory Committee) and this Department was established to look at this issue. This Group recommended in March 2017 that RTÉ establish a replacement service on DAB+ digital radio. In April 2017, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Climate Action and the Minister of State for Diaspora Affairs wrote jointly to the UK Minister for Digital Media and Culture concerning the deregulation of commercial radio in the UK, welcoming the

possibility that Ofcom may have more flexibility to license overseas radio stations carried on DAB+.

5. There has been some domestic political attention to this issue. In February 2017 this issue was the subject of a Commencement Matter in the Seanad (put down by Senator Billy Lawless), and there was considerable activity on this dossier earlier this year. However, it would seem that the March 2017 recommendation has landed well with organisations representing older members of the Irish community in Britain, and there is, contingent on a digital replacement service, general acceptance in the community that the closure will go ahead.

6. There is some continued dissatisfaction from a highly active but extremely small number of radio broadcast technology enthusiasts resident in Ireland. However, these individuals' views do not appear to be representative of the older Irish community in Britain. This Department has committed to funding of the transmission on DAB+, once established, under the Government of Ireland Emigrant Support Programme, to a max of €50,000 per annum until such time as Longwave transmission ends, as well as to supporting a digital awareness campaign targeted at older members of the Irish community in Britain.

Irish Abroad Unit

20 June 2017