



News & Current Affairs Independent Commercial Television Scheme

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This document contains information regarding the
News & Current Affairs Independent
Commercial Television Scheme including:

- a) The Scheme's objectives;
- b) The parameters of the Scheme; and
- c) How the Scheme will be run.

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Coimisiún na Meán

Coimisiún na Meán ("An Coimisiún"), Ireland's commission for regulating broadcasters and online media, and supporting media development and funding schemes, was established further to the provisions of the Broadcasting and Other Media Regulation Acts 2009 & 2022.

An Coimisiún is committed to ensuring a thriving, diverse, safe online and media landscape. This means having a mix of different voices, opinions, sources of news and protecting children and all of us from harmful content.

An Coimisiún, further to its Media Funding function, develops and operates funding schemes to support the development of content for Irish audiences that reflects and shapes Irish society.

In response to a request from the Minister for Communications, Culture and Sport, Mr. Patrick O'Donovan, T.D., and to further achieve these objectives, Coimisiún na Meán is implementing a funding initiative **to support Independent Commercial Television**. Funding of up to a total of c. €3 million is available.



1. Introduction

Coimisiún na Meán is Ireland's commission for regulating broadcasters and online media and supporting media development and funding schemes. In this context, An Coimisiún operates funding initiatives that support the media sector.

In this context, this Scheme is being established to support the creation of additional news and current affairs content by independent commercial television that will strengthen the plurality of, and access to, trusted content by Irish audiences, facilitating better informed public discourse and contributing to a healthy democracy.

This document sets out the key elements of the Scheme in terms of the role of An Coimisiún, the objectives, scope, available funding, and the operational processes. An Coimisiún will publish supporting documentation for potential applicants on any funding rounds.

2. Role of An Coimisiún

An Coimisiún is responsible for the management of the Scheme, including corporate governance and the disbursement of the funds. The level of funding is €3m, and the funding allocated covers both the administration of any scheme or schemes and funding grants.

2.1 Legislative Context for the Scheme

2.1.1 Establishment of the Scheme

Section 7(5)(b) of the Broadcasting and Other Media Regulation Acts 2009 & 2022 empowers the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport to enter arrangements with An Coimisiún to set up schemes to *'stimulate the provision of high quality, diverse and innovative news and comment on current affairs'*.

In this context, An Coimisiún will prepare and submit to the Minister a scheme for the granting of funds to support the production of new public service content.

This funding support is primarily for increased television coverage on news and current affairs, including the delivery of trusted public service content that enhances the plurality of, and access to, trusted content for Irish audiences, facilitating informed public discourse and contributing to a healthy democracy.

The Scheme will be implemented in accordance with the rules and procedures for Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI).

2.1.2 Scheme Objectives

The objectives of the Scheme are as follows:

Enhance Plurality and Diversity of Content: Offer independent commercial television the opportunity to enhance its capacity to deliver additional high-quality public service content that augments the public's understanding of public affairs matters and enhances both the range of sources and the diversity of public service content for audiences, including in the Irish language.

Safeguarding and Enhancing Democracy: Provide independent commercial television the opportunity to focus resources on tackling issues critical to, and supportive of, a healthy democracy,



including public affairs and disinformation/misinformation. It offers support to facilitate the increase in the availability of high-quality, trusted public service content that informs and educates viewers, so they know about key issues and events that impact their lives and enhances public discourse.

2.2 An Coimisiún's approach to the implementation of Funding Schemes

In implementing any funding scheme, An Coimisiún adopts a broadly strategic approach to the implementation of such schemes based on the following priorities:

- 1 Establish structures that focus on the primary objectives of the legislation and ensure the effective distribution of funding;
- 2 Build strong links and establish mechanisms for dialogue with the media sector and with other public sector agencies in order to gauge trends in media and in relevant areas, and inform such decisions as the number and structure of schemes;
- 3 Maintain flexibility within the structures of schemes to ensure the efficient administration and management of the fund in order to respond effectively to the needs of the media sector and to ensure that the objectives of the schemes are realised.

There are core values that underpin An Coimisiún's approach to the task of operating a scheme. An Coimisiún obligates to be:

- Fair – in our processes, procedures, and decisions.
- Independent – operating as an impartial regulator.
- Expert – by informing ourselves through engagement, research, and a commitment to professional learning.
- Accountable – in our decisions, our governance, and our resources.

3 About the Scheme

3.1 Public Service Content

The Scheme will support public service content in audio-visual programme format that informs and educates viewers, and that empowers a democratic society.

3.2 Subject Matter

The Scheme offers funding support for the creation of additional high-quality public service content that supports the public's right to know and be informed on public affairs and issues that affect them and their communities, and any such matters that safeguard healthy democracy, including media literacy initiatives. Funding is available for the production of such television news and current affairs content only, including in the Irish language.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria

Applications to the Scheme may only be submitted by a television programme service contractor¹ and the applicant is obligated to provide:

¹ Broadcasting Act 2009 as amended, Section 70.



a) Public Service Content.

An Coimisiún will expect an applicant to demonstrate a track record of, and a commitment to, the creation of news and current affairs television programme content that is in the public interest.

b) Freely available to the Irish public

All funded content must be made freely available.

c) Access

The content funded under this funding scheme will be publicly available and will be accessible to all. The guidance documentation for a funding round will include details on the obligations for accessibility of funded content across all platforms.

3.4 Purpose of Funding

The main objective of this funding initiative is to provide funding for independent commercial television to enhance the delivery of trusted public service content for their audiences and to bolster their strategies for supporting a healthy democracy, which could include media literacy activities and tackling disinformation and misinformation. Funding is therefore available for costs directly related to, and that support the achievement of, the project. Examples of eligible costs include:

- Staff & Salary costs for workers hired and/or assigned to the delivery of the projects/activities (excluding any funding received from other sources that cover staff and salary costs).
- Associated administrative costs (excluding any funding received from other sources that cover administration & overhead costs).
- Associated utilities/running costs (excluding any funding received from other sources that cover administration & overhead costs).
- Project delivery costs.
- Relevant studio space costs.
- Station communications and promotions for awareness of the station's activities relating to the funded project and/or activities.
- Training and development and mentoring costs.
- Travel and expenses for participants involved in the project/s.

Funding will not be available to finance:

- Activities not directly related to the creation of the funding public service content.
- The purchase of equipment or premises (capital costs)
- Depreciation.



In general, An Coimisiún will allocate grants under the Scheme that represent up to 95% of the eligible costs of the proposed public service content and directly associated production, editorial and overhead costs.

Guidance documentation will be published for each funding round and will include detailed information on the grant award levels and budget templates setting out the permitted costs under the Scheme.

3.5 Obligations under EU State Aid Rules

An Coimisiún must operate the funding scheme in accordance with the requirements of EU State Aid Rules and are applying the SGEI Decision (2012/21/EU). The compliance requirements include full transparency, such as the publication of funding awards on Coimisiún na Meán's website and inclusion of the Scheme in a report submitted to the European Commission every two years. The Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment are the lead on this report and the Department will coordinate the return of information from An Coimisiún in this respect.

Further to Article 8 of the SGEI Decision, An Coimisiún must retain all required information regarding a funding award for both the funding period and subsequently, for ten (10) years afterwards to ensure that the EC can inspect a grant or grants to *determine whether the compensation granted is compatible* with the SGEI Decision.

3.6 Funding Rounds

An Coimisiún will allocate funding using a contestable funding rounds system. Applicants will be permitted to seek up to 95% of the total eligible costs.

3.7 Acknowledgement of Funding

Applicants in receipt of funding from An Coimisiún are contractually required to formally acknowledge this support in a format acceptable to An Coimisiún. An Coimisiún reserves the right to issue guidelines to applicants specifying precise requirements in this regard.

4 Application, Assessment and Awards

The primary concern for An Coimisiún is that the application, assessment, and award processes are transparent, equitable and verifiable. An Coimisiún has agreed and operated broad principles in respect of these processes across funding schemes as outlined below. An Coimisiún will make information in relation to the processes and procedures for making applications, the assessment process, contracting and disbursement publicly available.

4.1 The Application Process

An Coimisiún will publish information on upcoming funding activities and will include: details on how to make submissions, eligibility information, application timeframes, details of assessment criteria and other supplementary information as deemed appropriate.

4.2 The Assessment Process

The assessment process for the Scheme consists of the following four potential phases:



4.2.1 Preliminary Evaluation

The purpose of the preliminary evaluation is to ensure that an applicant is eligible for funding under the scheme. The focus here is to ensure that the minimum criteria have been met and all required documentation has been submitted. Any applications which do not pass the preliminary evaluation stage are disqualified and are not subject to further consideration.

4.2.2 Qualitative Assessment

Each application is assessed on its own merits in the context of the assessment criteria, which are set out in An Coimisiún's guidance documentation published to inform and support potential applicants when making a submission to the Scheme.

4.2.3 Strategic Assessment

In instances where there are more qualifying applications than funds available, An Coimisiún will have a second evaluation phase. This will focus on achieving a balance in the overall package of funded projects in the context of the scheme objectives. The recommendations from the qualitative phase will also be considered here. Final recommendations are then submitted to the Commissioners for ratification.

4.2.4 Formal Ratification

The final stage sees Coimisiún na Meán ratifying the overall package of applications recommended for funding, and this includes regard to fulfilling the objectives of the funding round.

4.3 The Award Process

Where An Coimisiún has approved an application for funding, the following steps apply:

- i. An Coimisiún informs the applicant of the decision, setting out any condition(s) attaching to the offer.
- ii. An Coimisiún will make public a list of the funding offers ratified by the Commissioners.
- iii. The successful applicant must confirm his/her acceptance of the offer of funding and any condition(s) attached thereto by An Coimisiún.
- iv. A successful applicant is required to enter into a contractual agreement with An Coimisiún, on terms to be specified by An Coimisiún. Such terms include a schedule relating to the drawdown of funds by an applicant.

Funds are administered by An Coimisiún in accordance with the terms of the contractual agreement. For this scheme, the term of the funding contract should not exceed a period of twelve months.

Where An Coimisiún has rejected an application for funding, applicants are notified individually and provided with information on the performance of their application in the assessment process.

An Coimisiún will develop a standardised points system to inform the evaluation of applications, and the feedback provided to an applicant.

5 Review of the Scheme

An Coimisiún will review the effectiveness and impact of the Scheme on the completion of the funded projects.

