

Climate Change

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I want to start by saying thank you.

18 months ago, RTÉ News began its biggest ever marketing campaign around something rather simple. The truth. It's our job to report facts. But it's also our job to report context – to help put the pieces of the jigsaw together.

Last summer, RTÉ News was criticised by some for failing to connect a series of specific weather events to climate change. Historically, linking any individual weather event to climate change has been complicated. But last summer, the shifting pattern of the jet stream meant a heatwave in North America, wildfires in the Russian Arctic and floods in Germany and Belgium were all connected.

And developments in climate attribution science meant that, by failing to join the dots – by not explaining that otherwise random weather events were connected – we missed the key piece of that jigsaw.

Everyone has a view on what RTÉ should – or should not do. And it's right that you do. Often in the online world, people have an absolute certainty in their own beliefs and want us to adopt theirs. But it's right that we are held to account. And when we get it wrong, it's important we say so.

RTÉ's journalists report the news with integrity and honesty. But however earnestly we strive for accuracy, that first draft of history is often flawed. But a poll commissioned by the US-based Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press showed that admitting – and correcting -- mistakes was the single attribute most likely to engender trust in the media.

So, thank you to those of you who told us we were wrong. And to those of you who continue to tell me that we're still not doing enough – or that which we are doing is insufficient. The reality is we won't ever be able to satisfy some of you. But in that moment last summer, I promised that we would double down on our coverage of climate change – and nine months on, I'm here to tell you that we are delivering on that promise.

And I'm grateful too to so many people who stepped forward and offered to help make us better. Some of the world's leading scientists, like Peter Thorne from Maynooth University who was one of the lead authors for the IPCC 5th Assessment Report ran a climate change reporting workshop for RTÉ's journalists – Dave Robbins who ran another. The EPA which has offered to open up the riches of their scientific research to assist our reporting.

At RTÉ, we've also made a number of changes. Reporting climate change is everyone's beat – but after focusing on the pandemic for two years as Science Correspondent, last summer, I announced that George Lee would lead our reporting and focus full time as Environment Correspondent. *Prime Time* has upped its coverage of climate issues – broadcasting from Glasgow during COP 26 at the end of last year, and last month broadcast the first of its quarterly climate specials. The *Six One News* and *Morning Ireland* were also presented from Glasgow, while COP26 was the launching pad for us to engage younger audiences in RTÉ's coverage of climate issues through TikTok. And we've created an online dashboard, showing you how Ireland was powered over the last 24 hours – breaking down the percentages coming from renewable sources, gas, coal and other sources. And importantly, showing where we need to get to, to meet our EU climate commitments.

The climate vertical online and on the app houses hundreds of stories from the past year. And we don't just limit ourselves to stories about Ireland. You can see how our European partners are reporting climate change – bringing a European perspective to our coverage.

We don't get everything right. And I recognise that there will be those for whom we will never do enough. So, amid the thanks, a plea: don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

We still have work to do. Science is changing all the time – and our reporting needs to continue to reflect that. But we've made a start. I'm clear about my commitment to getting this right. Public service journalism means RTÉ News has a responsibility to lead the conversation about the climate crisis, and the impact it is having. And that's precisely what we're doing.