

## **RTÉ Opening Statement**

### **Kevin Bakhurst, Director General, RTÉ**

Chair, Deputies, Senators – thank you for the invitation to be with you today. I appreciate that this is a special sitting of the Committee ahead of the formal beginning of the new Dáil session. I think that speaks to your level of commitment to the importance of the future of public service media in Ireland.

As I said when we last were in with you, the serious lapses in standards that were uncovered in RTÉ precipitated the most devastating blows to the reputation of the organisation in its almost 100 year history. I want to assure you again that since I took office in July, both I and the new leadership team, working with staff across the organisation, have been working to do all that we can to begin the urgent reforms required to restore trust and confidence in RTÉ.

I can say with certainty that the lapses which were uncovered are not reflective of the overall standards of governance and integrity within the organisation. Staff in RTÉ are capable, diligent and highly skilled. While a range of significant governance gaps have been identified, and which we are committed to addressing, there remains a vital sense of public service purpose within RTÉ. I am confident that sense of shared purpose will help drive the changes that we must make.

By way of assurance of how resolved I am to drive change, I can share with you some of the reforms that are already in hand.

I have now been in the job for just over eight weeks. During that period, I have moved decisively and quickly to address some of the clear procedural and oversight failings within the organisation.

Firstly, on decision making. As you know, I have appointed a new interim leadership team. Key decisions now come to that leadership team, not least decisions regarding top presenter contracts.

On transparency, we are operating with full transparency to the Board, and we have issued the scoping documents for a new Register of Commercial Interests and a Register of External Activities, both of which will be key to maintaining standards of impartiality.

For our people, we have issued the first of our staff surveys, and a new staff consultation body will be set up later this month.

On finances, we are managing finances carefully and working to cut costs in the face of declining revenue from the TV Licence.

And we are committed to the many reviews in place. In addition to the review of the Voluntary Exit packages, the leadership team and colleagues from across RTÉ have been working tirelessly to provide extensive documents to the Committees, to the Department and New Era, to Mazars and to the two Expert Committees reviewing RTÉ.

I am determined that the organisation will be transformed so that the public, Government and our partners can have full confidence in RTÉ, and its management. Crucially, I can confirm that RTÉ hopes to provide an outline framework for strategic reform in October, with a commitment to delivering a full strategic reform and transformation plan by the end of the year.

I would caution, however, that all of these reforms will be undermined if the question mark over the funding of public service media in this country is not properly resolved. The TV Licence system, its supporting legislation, and the associated collection methods are no longer fit to support the provision of public service media to the people of Ireland. The current crisis has made the problem even more acute, and jeopardises the future of public media, and RTÉ, and the viability of Ireland's audio-visual sector.

As I alluded to earlier, in parallel with the creation of a more rigorous governance framework, we are working on a new transformation strategy for RTÉ. It will require real and radical change if we are to continue to deliver great public service content to audiences. RTÉ must reflect the whole of Ireland better, to all audiences, on the devices and platforms they choose to use. While we are working at speed, we need to get this right. We have a responsibility to audiences, to the Oireachtas, and to the hard-working and talented staff at RTÉ to build a trusted public service media organisation that can sit at the heart of Irish life for years to come. We must rebuild an RTÉ that is trusted and enjoyed, one that's relevant and loved, and one that brings the country together for important national moments and events. Public service content, value for money, and trust, will be at the heart of a transformed RTÉ.

This is a critical moment for public service media in this country. From the original radio broadcast in 1926 to now, RTÉ has been working to give voice to Ireland, to share our nationhood, to bring the moments and the issues that matter to the country. We have a choice: we can work together to reform and reshape RTÉ for the next 100 years, or we can accept its failure and demise. The latter is something that I, and I believe you, cannot accept.

The recent launch of the new season on RTÉ had many highlights. We announced over 30 hours of brand-new Irish drama, as well as a range of content examining the Climate Crisis. We announced 126 hours of new children's content. We confirmed that RTÉ will deliver the widest range of free-to-air sports including the Rugby World Cup, UEFA Nations League and AIB All-Ireland Club Championships. The new season demonstrated that, 100 years on, RTÉ remains firmly focused on our core purpose of delivering a broad range of unique Irish content that serves the Irish public.

As we work to bring this dark chapter to a conclusion, I very much hope that RTÉ and the Houses of the Oireachtas can work together to restore faith in one of Ireland's most important national institutions.