

NEWS & COMMENT

THE VOICE OF THE IRISH COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN SINCE 1987

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Ireland's new face(s)

Being Irish has always been a multi-generational affair; now more than ever before with the Irish family expanding to include people from many different countries, races and cultures.

It is a far cry from when many Irish people of mixed racial parentage suffered blatant discrimination and racism that would never be openly condoned or tolerated today.

Of course, it still exists but like so many other undesirable practices of old it has largely been forced underground.

Or so one would certainly think from the various citizenship ceremonies that have been held in Dublin since 2011.

Those people – often with third level or university educations – are the lucky ones.

But there is a generation, in some cases two generations, of people who have been less fortunate in seeking a new start in Ireland and they are among the people who have been held in the discredited and repugnant 'direct provision' while their asylum claims are processed.

What is galling is the private operators of these centres have earned at least €1 billion from the Irish government since their inception.

A cogent argument can be made that if many of these people had been allowed to work they, in turn, could have contributed a great deal more to the Irish economy than has been sucked out of public funds in paying the operators of the direct provision centres. After all, if any country should have an enlightened approach to immigration, it really should be Ireland.

Like supermarkets and push polls, public consultations often exist to give the illusion of choice, box-ticking exercises to legitimise a pre-ordained outcome. It is certainly to be hoped that the forthcoming consultation on RTE's endangered LW service does not fall into this category. The frequent complaints into us here about LW service outages – by really quite dedicated and motivated listeners who may, or may not, be in the minority – suggests that RTE is quite determined to get its way even if its original economic justification may no longer hold water.

On this page former RTE engineer Enda O'Kane even argues it would be cheaper and better value to spend the money earmarked for consultants on moving up a couple of inches along the dial to a disused frequency.

GUEST COMMENT:

'RTE Radio's reasons for switching off LW are just unsound'

vRTE is switching off LW 252 from early next year even though this octogenarian link to Ireland for the best part of a century still works well and continues to serve an extended diaspora of as many as five million Irish, of whom 100,000 of those listeners are Irish pensioners.

These people want to continue listening to RTE on their kitchen radios and in their cars – not by internet, over smart phones or via satellite TV. And they are not alone.

In 1998 RTE sold LW252 but then bought it back for €2M when the original purchaser went into receivership. The decision to buy it back was as because of public demand and campaigning.

Today RTE says it wants to transfer audiences onto digital platforms and that is why it is closing it down for technical and economic reasons.

But LW 252 can broadcast both analogue and digital transmissions simultaneously. Despite this RTE is heavily invested in Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) which requires building a costly new network of many masts. Even though LW can serve the whole island of Ireland and beyond from this single 252 mast which is only a RTE claims the infrastructure needs replacing but LW 252 is only a quarter way through its life.

Attempts through the Freedom of Information (FOI) to find out the most recent power usage and costs have been refused but official power usage figures for the years 2005 and 2011 show costs fell from €621,000 to €187,000 respectively in those six years, because of new technology. The Medium Wave transmitter served more than thirty years (1975-2008) but the LW 252 mast

is newer and more reliable digital technology.

Perhaps RTE have another reason to switch it off. Rental of masts to third

party users earned €26m for the semi-state, licensee financed broadcaster according to its 2013 annual report. One can't help

wondering if it is RTE's plan to hand it over to mobile phone networks.

Despite citing financial reasons and playing the poor mouth, an Béal Bocht, RTE spent significant sums of money attempting to launch on the UK's Digital 2 with a claimed 97 per cent coverage. Premier Christian Radio paid in excess of €650,000 for much more limited coverage back in 2009. One must ask why did RTE bid unless it thought there was a significant and viable audience for RTE in the UK. The other excuse given for closure is interference in and around London from Radio Algiers' powerful new LW transmitter serving the Algerian diaspora across Europe. An immediate and cost effective solution would be to move from 252 to the vacant and available channel, almost next door, so to speak, on 261kHz. Switching off LW252 will also 'cut off' listeners in Northern Ireland where FM reception of RTE radio is patchy.

These are all ways by which RTE can ensure an inexpensive, good value, high quality services to its Irish listeners overseas, primarily in the UK. RTE is obliged by statute to do all it can to ensure a radio service for the Irish communities overseas, nowhere more so than its biggest diaspora, the Irish community in Britain.

Enda O'Kane, of Irish Overseas Broadcasting (Research) is a retired former RTE engineer who had, for many years, technical responsibility for transmissions, including outside broadcasts of major sporting events, between the UK and Ireland. His Twitter handle is @EndaOKane. See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G071QourOfo> and <http://savertelongwaveraudio.com/longwave-transmission-samples/>



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