



Office of the Director of  
**Telecommunications  
Regulation**

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

Response to request for comments  
From the Forum on Broadcasting -  
2002

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**Oifig an Stiúirthóra Rialála Teileachumarsáide**

**Office of the Director of Telecommunications Regulation**

Abbey Court, Irish Life Centre

Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

Tel. +353 1 804 9600 Fax. +353 1 804 9680 E-mail [info@odtr.ie](mailto:info@odtr.ie)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The ODTR would like to take this opportunity to welcome the establishment of the Forum on Broadcasting at a challenging, yet an exciting time for the Communications Industry. In this submission I have taken the opportunity to briefly describe the current role of the Office in licensing broadcasting services, to detail how this role will change with the new EU legislative Framework and to indicate some of the new opportunities that we think exist or will emerge for the provision of Irish public “broadcasting” services.

## **THE CURRENT POSITION**

Currently, broadcasting services in Ireland are distributed via networks licensed either directly or indirectly by the ODTR. RTE operates under a licence granted for its television and radio transmitters and equipment associated with the services that come under the RTE Authority. Similarly, for the independent sector, licences have been issued to the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland in respect of services which it has authorised. This Office has also issued a number of distribution licences for the provision of cable, MMDS and Deflector systems. In the future we hope to be in a position to issue licences for national Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and regional DTT which would afford viewers more choice and the possibility of access to services tailored to meet the needs of more localised communities. The existing platforms underpin the delivery of Irish broadcasting services with the cable and MMDS platforms also having specific mandated “must carry” obligations (which are no longer regulated by this Office but now come under the jurisdiction of the BCI).

## **THE FUTURE**

A major feature of the new EU Directives is the extension of the scope of the framework to all electronic communications networks and services. This means that from July 2003, television distribution will be subject to the same regulatory framework as, for example, voice telephony. The task for the ODTR is to ensure that the transition from separate licences with individual and unique conditions to a scheme of general authorisations is managed in a manner which

fully addresses all aspects of the new EU framework and causes as little disruption as possible. Where the use of radio frequency is involved, it will still be necessary for the ODTR to grant rights on an individual basis and spectrum will continue to be allocated for specific purposes, e.g. mobile or broadcasting. However, the conditions would also be standardised as far as possible.

The significance and opportunity for Broadcasters and Programme Makers is that new distribution platforms will be available, such as xDSL, for the distribution of content. For consumers the opportunity could therefore exist to access not only home grown entertainment but also Irish educational material and information via there TV, PC or indeed their mobile phone. This is an important opportunity for Irish Broadcasters but also for the cultural, democratic and economic welfare of the country as a whole.

## **NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

Next generation applications are emerging in many areas including government, education, entertainment, medicine, and business. In general, video applications are more demanding in terms of bandwidth than audio/voice applications. Consumers both business and residential, tend to be more interested in the benefits and advantages that new applications can bring, rather than in the technology itself and that is the opportunity for Irish broadcasters and programme makers. Content can now be easily produced or modified so that it is available in a variety of forms on a number of platforms which can in some case not only entertain, educate or inform but also generate ancillary income.

In addition, many mass market applications are developing which do not need particularly high capacities. Government departments and public bodies are helping encourage the use and development of electronic services by adopting new applications for their own use. The European Commission has asked for countries to support e-government systems in order to encourage an 'information society'. Typically this has been implemented through publishing information on the Internet such as official forms.

In Ireland the Reach agency has been set up to develop this concept<sup>1</sup>. The Revenue Commissioners<sup>2</sup> for example, have an effective on-line service which works well using narrowband (i.e. dial-up Internet) connections. Other, recent home grown developments like [www.skool.ie](http://www.skool.ie) provide a unique and important service for children as well as their parents and teachers.

There is also a wide range of potential public service applications which could require larger capacity connections, such as e-learning or tele-education. Users could participate in enhanced educational programmes at home, utilising interactive video tutorials and presentations that may become increasingly popular as appropriate access becomes available. The ultimate challenge is that home grown Irish services are available on all of the networks, which entertain, educate and inform and in certain cases generate e-commerce. The current concept of 'licensed programme services – distinct TV channels – will become less distinct with the advent of this broader range of services.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.reach.ie](http://www.reach.ie)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.revenue.ie/>