

BCI Research Policy



Broadcasting Commission of Ireland
Coimisiún Craolacháin na hÉireann

1. Background

This document outlines the context, rationale and structure of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland's (BCI) *Research Policy*.

Since its inception, the BCI has conducted a range of research activities in support of its work, and in keeping with its regulatory remit. Recent BCI research is available directly at <http://www.bci.ie> or by request from the Research Officer.

The *Broadcasting Act, 2001* formalised the research function and expanded the Commission's remit in this area, setting out the crucial role of research in assisting the Commission anticipate change and assess the continued relevance of BCI practice and procedure in an evolving broadcasting sector.

Under its *Strategic Plan 2004-2008*, the Commission is committed to the formulation of a research policy. This document – the *BCI Research Policy* – aims to meet the Commission's commitment in this regard, and provide a framework within which the BCI plans, implements and reviews its research activities, in support of its statutory, policy and operational objectives.

2. Rationale

The BCI's research function plays a vital role in supporting the sector and the needs of viewers and listeners. It provides culturally-specific information, particular to Ireland, but applicable to developments occurring in a wider European context. The Commission's research provides up-to-date information on trends unfolding in Ireland and abroad, assists the Commission in anticipating change, and tests the continuing relevance or otherwise of BCI policies and practices. It provides a context for public and stakeholders' understanding of the work of the BCI. Crucially, it may also perform a role where the broadcasting sector may not have the time, resources or skills to undertake research.

A key aspect of this work is to enable the Commission to act with an authoritative voice in respect of broadcasting matters and, in particular, to contribute to the debates on Government and public policy broadcasting issues on an ongoing basis.

Finally, it is the Commission's intention that research will underpin *all* of its policy deliberations and activities, with a view to delivering informed, evidence-based decision-making arising from its statutory functions.

3. Policy Framework

The framework for this *Policy* is outlined and structured under the following headings:

Regulatory Context; Legislative Context and BCI Strategic Plan.

i. Regulatory Context

Guiding regulatory principles, such as those set out by the Council of Europe and by the Irish Government in its document *Regulating Better*, underpin the BCI's approach to policy development, including the development of this *Research Policy*.

The Council of Europe asserts that the primary task of a regulatory body is to function smoothly by establishing a climate of dialogue, openness and trust in its dealings with stakeholders, while *Regulating Better*, lists six principles of better regulation; transparency, necessity, proportionality, effectiveness, accountability and consistency. The BCI endorses these core values – evidenced by the manner in which the Commission undertakes its work.

These key principles are applied to the BCI's *Research Policy* as follows:

- **Diversity of programming services for the public**
 - Research is vital in enabling the BCI to fulfil its aim of creating a broadcasting sector which offers the public a diverse range of programming from a variety of sources.
- **Flexibility and consistency**
 - The key driver of BCI research is the Commission's need to be informed about, and capable of responding appropriately to, technological, market, industry, audience and social developments in a timely and adequate manner.
- **Adequate regulation based on current conditions**
 - Supporting a facilitative approach to regulation, BCI research activities enable the Board and Executive to keep abreast of current regulatory conditions and national and international regulatory developments.
- **Openness and dialogue**
 - Meaningful and structured consultation and research with the broadcasting sector, the public and stakeholders is central to BCI activities. The effective dissemination of information and findings enables a clear understanding of the rationale for policy and operational decisions. Consultation and dialogue also ensure that the Commission can respond in an appropriate and timely manner to stakeholder needs. Finally, this openness to feedback and input enables the research agenda to be updated regularly to reflect important emerging issues.

■ Clear decision-making

- The BCI's research policy and activities support informed and evidence-based decision-making. Comparative approaches to research and information-gathering facilitate decisions being taken with reference to national, European and international developments.

ii. Legislative Context

The *Radio and Television Act, 1988*, **Section 4 (8)** states that: "The Commission shall have all such powers as are necessary for or incidental to the performance of its functions under this Act ..."

Building upon this, the *Broadcasting Act, 2001* (Sections 11, 19 and 40) outlines a detailed role for research as follows:

■ *Section 11, Additional Functions of the Commission*

- (2) In performing the function conferred on it by this section or the functions conferred on it by the Act of 1988, the Commission shall endeavour to ensure that the number and categories of broadcasting services made available in the State by virtue of this Act of the Act of 1988 best serve the needs of the people of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind their languages and traditions and their religious, ethical and cultural diversity.
- (3) The Commission shall have all such powers as are necessary for or incidental to the performance of its functions under this section.

■ *Section 19, Codes and Rules*

- (7) In preparing a code under paragraph (c) of subsection (1) the Commission shall have regard to -
 - (a) any research which it considers appropriate (including research under *subsection (8)*) conducted with respect to the effect of activities referred to in that paragraph on children, and
- (8) The Commission may, for the purpose of performing its functions under *paragraph (c) of subsection (1)*, conduct, or cause to be conducted, research with respect to the effect of activities referred to in that paragraph on children.

■ *Section 40, Assessment of Community Needs in Respect of Broadcasting*

The Commission may, on its own initiative or at the request of a community group or organisation, carry out an assessment of the needs of a community in respect of broadcasting and such an assessment shall include an ascertainment of the extent to which production facilities, training and resources are available to the community to enable the community to best serve its interests in respect of those needs.

The recent development of the *General Scheme for the Broadcasting Bill, 2006* envisages a number of research functions for the proposed Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). Head 25 of the *General Scheme* outlines the functions of the BAI, with subsections (2) (a), (b), (c) and (g) outlining the role of research, including specific reference to the importance of media literacy initiatives as follows:

- *Head 25, 2 (a)*
To collect and disseminate information on the broadcasting sector in Ireland
- *Head 25, 2 (b)*
To monitor developments in broadcasting internationally
- *Head 25, 2 (c)*
To initiate, organise and facilitate research relating to broadcasting matters
- *Head 25, 2 (g)*
To bring about, or to encourage others to bring about, a better public understanding of -
 - (i) the nature and characteristics of material published by means of broadcast and related electronic media,
 - (ii) the processes by which such material is selected, or made available, for publication by broadcast and related electronic media and,
 - (iii) the available systems by which access to material published by means of the broadcast and related electronic media is or can be regulated.

With a view to ensuring a smooth transition to the new areas of responsibility, this *Research Policy* reflects the changes proposed. It may be reviewed or updated as appropriate to reflect the definitive legislative position, when new broadcasting legislation takes effect.

iii. BCI Strategic Plan

In its *Strategic Plan 2004-2008*, the Commission makes a number of research commitments. Firstly, to develop a research policy, with reference to the organisation's corporate strategy, policy objectives, resource availability, and the information needs of the BCI and its stakeholders.

An assurance is also given to improve the BCI's ability to monitor broadcasting and other related developments on an on-going basis through research. Furthermore, the role of developing formal links with researchers in other regulatory bodies, sourcing information relevant to the transition to single content regulation and monitoring technological developments that may impact on the role of the BCI is outlined in the *Strategic Plan*.

Finally, the use of varied methodologies and approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, is provided for, clearly recognising the importance of ascertaining listener and viewer needs and reflecting these needs in policy and operational developments.

4. Policy Provisions

i. Aims

Informed by the legislative and regulatory context, in keeping with the Commission's Strategic Plan and recognising the research requirements of the BCI, the aims of the *Research Policy* are threefold.

Firstly, the *Research Policy* provides the framework within which the Commission plans, undertakes and implements its research activities, in support of its statutory, policy and operational objectives and in a manner comparable with other European regulators.

Secondly, the *Policy* aims to support all staff in delivering the best possible standard of service to the Commission's stakeholders.

Finally, the *Policy* aims to assist the BCI in consolidating its position with the general public and broadcasting sector, as a regulator who acts fairly, in the interests of all and on the basis of relevant information. To this end, the Commission seeks to undertake research in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including those in the broadcasting sector, experts, and the public through an inclusive approach to research and the use of appropriate consultation mechanisms.

ii. Objectives

This *Policy* provides the context within which the BCI develops and implements its research activities, as well as providing a benchmark for reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of its work.

The objectives are:

- To support the Commission in fulfilling its research-specific statutory functions and to facilitate policy development in pursuit of its broader statutory functions
- To ensure informed, transparent, evidence-based decision-making across all areas of the Commission's work, thereby engendering trust in the BCI, its processes and procedures
- To assist the BCI in responding to the diverse and varied interests, preferences and needs of viewers and listeners in Ireland

- To further develop the BCI as a leading source of information and understanding on broadcasting and related matters at national, European and international level
- To provide a framework within which the BCI measures the effectiveness of its policies, operations and work processes
- To ensure timely, adequate and appropriate responses to developments in broadcasting
- To provide culturally-specific information particular to Ireland but relevant in the wider European context
- To provide up-to-date information on trends in Ireland and abroad
- To assist the BCI in anticipating change and in testing the continued relevance of the Commission's policies and procedures in light of any developments
- To enhance the BCI's ability to adapt to regulatory, commercial and technological changes in the broadcasting sector

iii. Policy Implementation

Development of Research Agenda

The Commission's research agenda serves both internal and external audiences, including the Board and staff of the BCI, the broadcasting sector, other stakeholders and the public. The Commission's research activities will be planned and delivered with the interests of viewers and listeners in mind, with particular attention paid to the needs of specific audiences. Through the research it undertakes, the BCI aims to inform debate on broadcasting-related matters, with a view to facilitating informed, evidence-based decision-making.

A number of criteria will inform the ongoing development of the BCI's research agenda. In particular, the Commission will consider the extent to which proposed research:

- Promotes diversity and plurality of services and content available in broadcast media
- Serves the needs of key audiences
- Reflects legislative obligations and developments
- Is consistent with the BCI's policy and workplan priorities
- Reflects regulatory trends and developments at national, European and international levels
- Meets the needs of identified stakeholders

- Fulfils the Commission's statutory and policy objectives and meet the needs of the BCI's information/resource functions
- Improves the BCI's capacity to monitor and keep abreast of developments and best practice in broadcasting and regulation, both at home and abroad
- Reflects the levels of staffing and financial resources available to the BCI

Research Process

The Commission will utilise the full range of research methodologies available (both qualitative and quantitative) to identify research needs, and to develop and implement its research agenda. This includes piloting and developing innovative approaches, alongside the use of traditional and established methods. The BCI will also investigate the necessity for, and appropriateness of, a system of bursaries in support of external research. All research conducted by the BCI will acknowledge standards set by internationally recognised research bodies.

As part of ongoing work, the BCI is open to exploring the potential for the development of mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative strategies with relevant industry networks, regulatory bodies, media organisations, third level institutions and international research institutions. Furthermore, the important role of consultation and the meaningful inclusion of the public and key stakeholders is reflected as appropriate in all elements of BCI research.

By consolidating existing working partnerships and creating new links with statutory, non-statutory and academic organisations, the Commission also aims to increase its research profile and promote the "value added" to the public through the undertaking of research and consultation. Through this increased awareness, greater public participation in the BCI's consultative processes can be achieved, further reflecting the importance placed on inclusive and meaningful participation by the organisation.

Finally, as part of its commitment to exploring effective consultation mechanisms, research projects proposed under this *Policy* will examine alternative and supplementary ways to engage and target both general and specific populations in information-gathering and consultation.

Statement of Commitments

In order to maximise the value created from its research activities, the Commission is committed to:

- Formulating an annual plan of activities/priorities based on the criteria set out above, and in keeping with its organisational workplan and available resources
- Providing the necessary resources (both staffing and financial) to support this area of work
- Evaluating policy development and implementation, as well as the operational aspects of its work
- Publishing and disseminating its research appropriately and as widely as possible
- Establishing appropriate links with relevant bodies
- Engaging in the systematic collection and analysis of relevant data
- Seeking out new and innovative ways for engaging with stakeholders
- Ensuring the integration of the BCI's research activities into the formal knowledge management processes of the organisation
- Reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of the BCI's *Research Policy*, and its strategic research activities on a regular and designated basis, in order that it may adapt to changing needs and in accordance with national and international best practice

