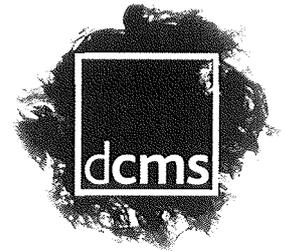


CMS 188254/DC



department for
culture, media
and sport

Pat Rabbitte TD
Minister for Communications, Energy and
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Department of Communications, Energy and
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Adelaide Road
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11 October 2011

IRISH LANGUAGE SERVICES IN N NORTHERN IRELAND

As you know, the Good Friday Agreement included, amongst other things, a commitment by the UK Government to achieve the widespread availability of Teilifís na Gaeilge (TG4) throughout Northern Ireland. This commitment was further reinforced by a Memorandum of Understanding between both Governments signed on 1 February 2010.

Following on from these agreements, it was agreed that the best way of discharging the undertakings in respect of the availability of Irish language broadcasting in Northern Ireland would be to build a seventh, low-power TV multiplex to carry not just TG4 but also RTÉ 1 and 2 (and, once the mux has been established, consideration will be given to including RTÉ radio services as well). The new mux would be run by a not-for-profit Joint Venture (JV) comprising RTÉ and TG4. The procurement of the necessary equipment and services to establish the mux will be undertaken taken by the JV.

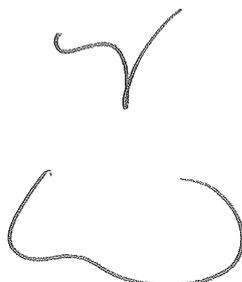
Ofcom have confirmed that, once the JV is formed, they will award it a broadcasting licence and have circulated a draft licence for comment.

In addition, the UK Government has confirmed that it will enter into a contract with the JV to meet the TG4's costs (which are expected to be a third of the total costs). Our officials are currently working up a funding agreement.

In view of the possible state aid implications, we have provided the Commission with a draft notification concerning this funding. The Commissions have responded that the aid would appear to meet the criteria necessary for the aid to be considered aid for services of general economic interest and, as such, compatible with the Common Market and exempt from the obligation of prior notification (in other words, consistent with Commission Decision of 28 November 2005 (2005/842/EC)). We have subsequently satisfied ourselves that the aid does meet the criteria set out in this decision. In addition, the fact that this approach was suggested by the Commission itself further assures us that this is the correct analysis. That being the case, there is no aid to notify and consequently there will be no formal confirmation from the Commission. It will, of course, be important for us to ensure in due course that the necessary contractual arrangements are put in place to ensure compliance with this decision.

As switchover in both countries is now a little over a year away, we hope that the procurement process for the 7th multiplex can begin very soon. In this respect, we were very encouraged to learn of RTE's willingness to start the procurement process by the end of the month regardless of whether the JV has been formed. This is very welcome news.

I am copying this letter to Owen Patterson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and will place a copy on my Departmental website.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'E' followed by a 'V' and a flourish.

Ed Vaizey MP
Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries