

**Strictly Private and Confidential - Not to be
copied or circulated.**

**Review Report – FAO: Eimear Cusack,
Director of Human Resources, Rté.**

March 2nd, 2022

**Miriam Maher
Resolve Ireland**

Table of Contents

1. Review Timeline	3
2. Background to the Review	3
3. Central Themes	3
4. Conclusions	10
5. Recommendations	12
Appendix One: HR Email	13
Appendix Two: Review invite email	14

1. Review Timeline

I was appointed as an external independent party by Eimear Cusack (EC), Director of Human Resources for R  t   in November 2021. My role was to undertake a review of the nature of the culture and working relationships within the Current Affairs (CA) Unit of R  t  .

The scope of the review process was agreed between R  t   and Resolve Ireland. The review was then communicated by email to all the employees within the Current Affairs Unit by EC on November 10th, 2021. **See Appendix One for text of email sent.**

I sent an email invite to all employees identified by R  t   to me as members of the Current Affairs Unit on November 15th, 2021. **See Appendix Two for text of email sent.**

Between November 22nd, 2021, and December 16th, 2021, I met with forty-five members of the CA unit. This represented an eighty eight percent participation rate from those invited to meet with me. I kept summary notes from each meeting held. These were not shared with the participants or with R  t   and were kept for the purposes of informing this review only.

2. Background to the Review

The decision to instigate this review was taken in conjunction with the widespread focus by R  t   on raising awareness amongst employees of the dignity at work standards required by all those working with the organisation. The aim of this review was to get feedback, through these confidential meetings, of people's perceptions and experiences of their working environment. It is important to note this focus. This was not an investigation process. Individual perceptions provided were accepted at face value and no one was asked to provide proof in support of the comments made. The very high participation rate ensured that the feedback gathered can be considered as representative of viewpoints provided from all levels and all areas of CA.

3. Central Themes

In my meetings with each participant, I asked for their perspectives of their workplace environment under these headings:

- a) Communications
- b) Teamwork
- c) Standards of dignity and respect
- d) Problem resolution/support
- e) What's working well
- f) What could be improved/changed

From my review of all information gathered through these meetings, I have summarised the feedback received using the above headings.

a) Communications

Perceptions about the nature of communications within CA tended to be influenced by the area the person worked in. The three different programme areas; Claire Byrne Live (CBL), Prime Time (PT) and Rte Investigates (RTI) are all structured and run very differently. There are also some people with CA that work in specialised roles or across the three areas.

Many of those that I spoke with commented on how ineffective they considered the communications within CA. They noted the irony of this given the function of the unit itself.

Communications with CBL are perceived as functioning at a very high level. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] CBL appears to operate quite separately to the rest of CA, with little or no overlap with PT and some interactions with RTI. Pre-Covid, All in CA shared the same office space.

PT, has the biggest group of employees within CA. Unlike CBL which has one programme to air each week, PT, with the delivery of two programmes to air each week, has a different working week. There are a few structured meetings; the overall meeting on Mondays of each week, followed by programme meetings on Tuesday and Thursday for each show. These meetings moved by necessity online with the onset of Covid. Many spoke about the online aspect bringing some structure and focus to those meetings, which was broadly viewed as a positive.

However, many others spoke about the Monday meeting not necessarily being truly open, with little in the way of reflective look back about areas of improvement needed. Efforts have been made to encourage ideas and pitches by providing a dedicated email for those suggestions to be sent to. However, the response levels to emails were often considered to be slow.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

RTI, due to the entirely different nature of its working structure, communicates very differently again. People work in pairs of producer/reporter for the investigations they are assigned on. These investigations could take up to a year in some cases. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Overall, it was felt that there was a silo effect within CA for communications, between the areas, and at times, within the areas.

There is no doubt that the impact of Covid over the last two years has had its effect on the nature of communications within CA. Those that ended up working remotely throughout have felt the impact most in terms of being kept fully in the loop. Extensive use of messaging through WhatsApp has been effective on many levels for the fast-paced movement of the environment they work in. However, the lack of face-to-face interactions has negatively impacted in ensuring the full message or intent of the message has been delivered.

[REDACTED]

CA has a high level of people who have been with Rte a long time. This appears not to be unique to the CA unit. There was a widely expressed viewpoint that a job with CA is a highly coveted one, with little to match it elsewhere in Irish television. Once someone starts in CA, they tend to stay long term. Those that have moved to CA in more recent years and who had experienced other workplaces had more varied perspectives on the nature of the communications within CA. Often they viewed it as a vast improvement on other workplaces.

Across the feedback received many talked about a lack of clarity regarding promotional opportunities and a lack of career direction. Some recent appointments or changes were perceived as being communicated unclearly. Also, the process of some appointments was deemed not to be transparent. There was a belief expressed by several people that some roles were developed for a person already identified as opposed to being a truly open competition process.

b) Teamwork

When it comes to teamwork and its place within CA, the feedback was unanimous. Teamwork is regarded as essential for the work they do. Without teamwork, the programmes don't go to air. The requirement to get the programme to air, and to do whatever it takes to make that happen was accepted by everyone. Teamwork, particularly teamwork on the ground, was perceived as very good and very effective.

The drive to get to the programmes to air, no matter what, appears to be a key motivator for everyone to pull together as a team.

Within PT and RTI, the effectiveness of teamwork amongst the producer/reporter pairings was raised as a recurring issue. It was viewed as a somewhat systemic problem. Past difficulties in some pairings appear to have resulted in a situation where Editors are unable to successfully get some people to work with each other again and therefore choices are limited or forced, leading to friction in some pairings. Notwithstanding that, the programmes get delivered.

Movement within CA was noted as being quite limited or difficult to achieve. This was believed to be influenced in part by the longevity of many in their roles. The greatest likelihood of movement seems to be by reporters or producers between RTI and PT and vice versa. However, some legacy issues around some past pairings seems to affect mobility choices, both for the reporters or producers involved and for the editorial management in seeking movement of staff.

CA is made up of people working a range of specialised functions. The background of the prevailing management structure was perceived as being dominated by those from a journalistic background. This was felt to influence their focus on functions within CA. It was a frequent comment that the wider production needs, outside of the journalistic aspects, were not given the same focus as the story being delivered.

c) Standards of dignity and respect

On a day-to-day level and, in the main, across the CA unit, most felt that there are no significant issues for them regarding the standards of dignity and respect in place within CA. Many spoke of past workplaces or historical experiences which they said were not a feature of the current workplace or working environment. While all accepted and noted that they operate in a robust and very fast-paced environment, they broadly felt that they were treated with dignity and respect by those they work alongside.

[REDACTED]

It was pointed out to me that many, if not all, of those that work in CA started their career as freelance workers. They then often joined R te on rolling fixed term contracts before permanency was eventually achieved. There appears to have been a wide variety in forms of contacts put in place leading to some perceptions of inequity and unfair application of terms and conditions.

As mentioned before, there seems to be a degree of opaqueness around the promotional opportunities and appointments made. Certainty of position, contract renewal status and future career opportunities was not a commonly held viewpoint, the opposite seems to be the case. This context was given as the basis for many people's reluctance to speak openly, outside of the assured anonymity of this review process, about the concerns raised in the following paragraphs.

A significantly high proportion of those that I spoke with, which as previously noted, was already a very high proportion of those within CA, spoke about a fear of consequence for speaking up on these matters.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. There is a yearly review exercise for those within the salary scale applicable for their roles. This needs to be completed to ensure the person gets the next incremental increase. Once the role holder reaches the top of their salary scale, there are no further efforts made to have any form of annual review process.

[REDACTED]

As in all workplaces, issues will and often do arise within the various areas and groupings across CA. However, the resolution of issues mentioned was often seen as best achieved at a very local level between the parties themselves instead of relying on escalating the matter.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It appeared that legacy issues remain for some who said they had sought to have concerns dealt with in the past. Consequently, there was very limited trust expressed in pursuing this avenue. The strong union involvement in staff matters is evident. A common point of feedback was that if issues weren't dealt with immediately and locally, they often ended up being escalated through the union and processes became protracted and formalised from there on in.

In the main, those who have joined in very recent years or who are younger and male, were far less likely to have any concerns or any awareness about issues in CA that might require management support or resolution in general. The newer members of CA have had far less visibility and integration due to the Covid. The younger male members of CA quite often would identify the gender aspect as a reason for them not having any issues.

A recurring theme was the perception that role changes and key decisions are made behind the scenes with a lack of transparency demonstrated. This appears to have added to the generally held viewpoints about the reasons for the departure of some high-profile leavers from CA in recent years.

Women in CA are not perceived as having access to or having received the same number of opportunities as men. It was commented that women often left because of not feeling valued or respected. It should be noted that this observation about a gender imbalance in terms of opportunities was made by both men and women. It was said that the rationale behind decisions made over moves, assignments and promotions was often unclear. This would not help establish or clarify the basis for these decisions.

e) What's working well

It was very clear and evident through my meetings with everyone; the extraordinarily high level of passion and dedication expressed by all towards their roles and the role of the CA unit within Rte. People spoke about the privilege they felt for being in their positions and having the opportunity and scope to make the programmes that they do. They frequently talked about the importance of the programmes produced, often on sensitive and key public interest topics.

Aside from contract issues raised and mentioned above, Rte is widely considered to be a benevolent and supportive employer especially when it comes to time off needed for any family or health reasons. Time off in lieu (TOIL) is provided after the completion of high-pressured programmes, allowing time to decompress from the stress and strains associated with the near immersion in some pieces of investigative work. Pay and conditions are considered by most to be competitive and better than could be achieved anywhere else in Ireland for this type of work.

The aftereffects of the Fr. Reynolds Programme and the defamation that occurred then is still being felt amongst those working in CA. The importance of good strong editorial guidance was fully acknowledged by all, and this is felt to be very much in place.

The progression of the digital content aspect, while not without its challenges, was seen as an important part of keeping CA relevant for a more diverse viewership. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

f) What could be improved/changed

Suggestions for changes or improvement mainly centered around methods of communication. It was not so much about operations, but more around defining and then communicating the scope of roles, opportunities for movement, performance feedback and a greater transparency overall in terms of decisions being made.

Although the option for TOIL after an intensive period of programme making was appreciated, it also had the effect of delaying, or not making possible, debriefing about the effects of the programme. A structured debriefing process was suggested as desirable.

The advent of digital content and the responsibility to produce this content along with the 'to air' piece was referenced by a few as a bone of contention. While this appears to have been discussed extensively, the varying opinions expressed on the matter suggest that there is still room for further clarity or a definitive stance on the matter to be set out.

The right to disconnect outside of working hours was raised a few times. The working environment was so impacted by the Covid pandemic that this may have blurred lines. But it was flagged enough times to suggest that communications should be timed with this in mind. The need for a greater diversity in makeup of CA at all levels, especially in terms of gender, was noted by several people. As noted above, this was commented on across the board by women and men.

The management structure is very person specific in terms of what is considered effective and ineffective currently for people management approaches. To aid clarity on roles and impact, a strong statement or follow through on who holds decision making authority was suggested in this regard.

4. Conclusions

As stated at the start, all the accounts given to me were taken on the basis that these were the opinions of those involved, with no one required to prove themselves. The value of conducting this exercise, taking a 'temperature check', was to ascertain the overall perceptions in place,

whether they be factually correct or incorrect. A working culture is made up of a series of beliefs and experiences.

Like every workplace in Ireland, the significant impact of the Covid pandemic has left its mark in Current Affairs. I am not overlooking the timing of when I conducted these meetings for the review. These were conducted in the weeks between late November and mid-December 2021 when there was a palatable air of fatigue country wide. I was speaking with a group of people who had reached the end of a very tough second year of the pandemic. Their resilience was undoubtedly at a very low ebb. I am taking all that into account in the conclusions I have noted below.

CA is a complex working environment made up of highly trained professionals. The people that I spoke with were, nearly without exception, grateful for the opportunity to work there. They hold vocational outlooks about their work and its role as part of Rte public broadcasting service. They are a highly articulate, vocal group, well able to provide clear viewpoints on their perspectives of their working environments. By their own descriptions, they would not be regarded as shrinking violets or push overs.

Yes, despite this and despite their proven ability to make excellent investigative news programmes on matters of key social importance, the widespread expressions of distrust and significant unease about openly speaking about some of the issues noted are very concerning. Equally, the very strongly expressed belief that corporate support would not truly be available to address these issues, or that nothing would change regardless of what is reported from this review, was striking.

Putting a review like this in place sets expectations of a meaningful follow up. From conducting forty-five, at times lengthy, conversations, I am aware that these people placed their trust in the process as it was set up and communicated to them. Engagement in this review was voluntary. While a lot of very personal and specific details were provided to me, because of the necessity to anonymise the information for this report I cannot cover the myriad of issues and concerns raised by all parties. The aim of this feedback report is to give a sense of the overall themes and issues that emerged.

There was a definite sense that a lot of people in CA had reached a point of feeling defeated by the current situation. Some of this could have been the timing of the conversations as noted above. Or it could be that if nothing appears to change in follow up to this review, the beliefs expressed will be further compounded and entrenched.

Those in CA get their programmes to air, no matter what. The working environment itself appeared to be under a lot of strain. Some of this is no doubt due to more recent issues surrounding the fatigue of working nonstop through the pandemic and staying on air. The broader issues raised around communications, areas for improvement etc are issues that tend to feature in a lot of working environments that are fast moving while working to fixed

deadlines. [REDACTED]

5. Recommendations

Given the feedback received, I suggest that certain areas might be addressed to avoid ambiguity and aid transparency of approach on all matters.

There is a need to have a structured mechanism of feedback put in place, separate from pay and conditions-based discussions. Absolute clarity over the most appropriate reporting line manager is recommended to ensure anyone not clearly under the scope or remit of one area does not get left out of the loop.

Bearing in mind the feedback received about promotions and career opportunities, I suggest that Rté take every opportunity to communicate clearly about all recruitment processes. It would be important that management of CA support complete transparency in these processes. On a wider note, the decision makers involved in any proposed changes to roles, or appointments to new roles, should be clearly identified.

This report is now submitted to Rté for their consideration as agreed at the outset of this process. The courtesy and cooperation of all participants is acknowledged with thanks.

Miriam Maher
Resolve Ireland
March 2nd, 2022

Appendix One

Internal Communication from Human Resources to Members of Current Affairs Division. Sent on November 10th, 2021, on an individual basis.

Dear

I hope are keeping well.

One of our core values as an organisation is that we treat each other with respect at all times. Right now, we are rolling out training and awareness sessions in support of our Dignity at Work Policy and a core objective is to ensure a collegial and respectful working environment for everyone.

As this rollout takes place, it's important we understand our working environments better, and to that end we have engaged with an external independent party (Miriam Maher, from Resolve Ireland) to carry out a confidential temperature check of various areas across the organisation.

This process will focus on what you have to say about your working environment across a range of topics, including communication, teamwork, standards of dignity and respect, problem resolution and support. We want to understand what's working well within your area and where there are opportunities for improvement and/or change.

Over the coming weeks Miriam will be inviting you and colleagues in your area to meet with her on a one-to-one basis. These meetings will be confidential and solely intended for the purpose of understanding more about the dynamics of your division from your perspective.

Miriam will then prepare a report for submission to myself. While she may comment on themes or general issues mentioned, no individual participant will be identified and all views expressed will be anonymised and aggregated to further guarantee confidentiality.

These meetings will take place either in-person or online, depending on individual preferences, and are anticipated to last approximately one hour each. Notes from the meetings will be retained on a no-names basis and only used to inform the final report, but will not otherwise be shared with RTÉ.

The outcome of the process will be shared with you.

This process will be entirely confidential to HR, the independent reviewer, and the employees who are involved in the review process. Please note that while the confidential one-to-one meetings with Miriam are optional, we encourage everyone to participate, as the more feedback received by Miriam, the greater value to be gained by this process. Your participation is important.

Appendix Two

Invite sent by me to all those identified by Human Resources as part of the Current Affairs Division. Sent on November 15th, 2021.

Good afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am contacting you on foot of the message sent to you last week by Eimear Cusack, the HR Director for RTÉ.

As outlined by Eimear, I have been engaged to carry out an external independent review for RTÉ based on a confidential temperature check of your working environment.

So, I'm now inviting you to meet with me for a 1:1. These meetings, conducted on a strictly confidential basis, will inform the report issued at the end of the review.

The information gathered through these meetings will be anonymised for use in my report, no individual participant will be identified, and the report will contain comments on general themes and feedback only.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you in the coming weeks. We can meet online, via MS Teams, or in a face2face setting, depending on your preference.

Your participation is optional, however, the more people that participate, the better sense I will get overall of how your working environment is for everyone in it.

I would like to start these meetings next week, from Monday, November 22nd. So, in order to help me schedule the meetings to fit your availability and meeting format preference, I'd really appreciate it if you would reply to me, confirming if you:

- a) wish to meet with me and*
- b) what your preference is for how we meet – online or face2face. **

Looking forward to hearing from you,

All the best

Miriam

*** Shortly after this email was sent, the Covid 19 situation in Ireland sharply deteriorated. Consequently, Rte were no longer able to support the option for a face2face meeting. Therefore, all meetings for this review were held online via MS Teams.**