

# ***ANALYSIS OF RTÉ LONG WAVE RADIO IN BRITAIN***

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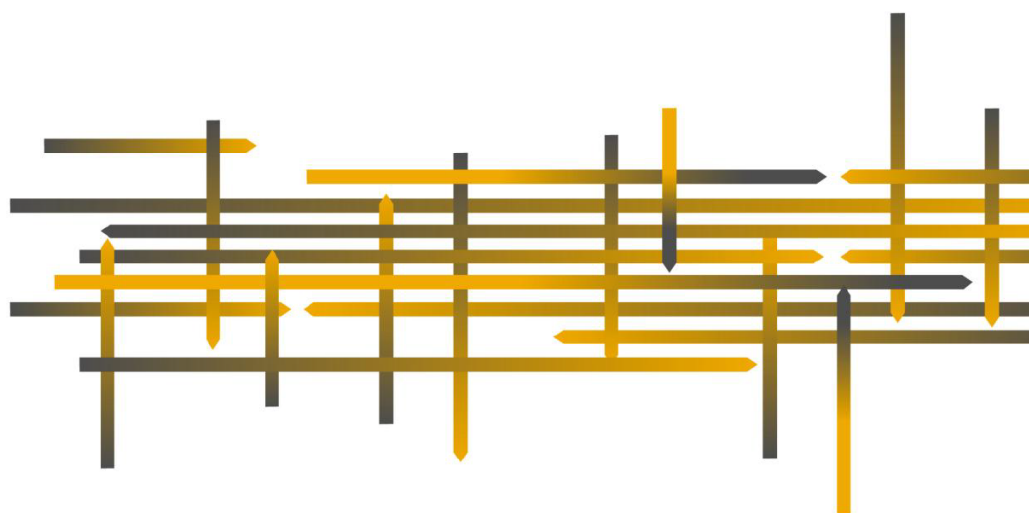
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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AN ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁLA NA hÉIREANN  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE OF IRELAND



## **Summary**

3,191 people completed the RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave Listenership Survey. 72% of those who responded were over 60, while 68% of respondents were born in Ireland and 62% were retired.

For the majority of respondents Longwave was seen as a 'lifeline' to Ireland – helping them to maintain 'a sense of Irishness' and to keep up with events 'back home'.

The majority of listeners in the focus groups preferred the familiar, analogue service – as opposed to digital platforms, computers, laptops and smartphones. That said, the majority of longwave listeners in the survey own a television, computer or laptop but were less likely to own a smartphone, tablet or a DAB digital radio. The majority of respondents to the survey had never used digital devices to listen to any radio station and they felt they would need help to access digital platforms. The older age groups (60 years and over) were less confident in accessing digital radio platforms.

This research was carried out by the Social Policy Research Centre at Middlesex University in partnership with Irish in Britain organisation. It was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Ireland.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research has been funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Ireland. The work was carried out by the Social Policy Research Centre at Middlesex University, in partnership with the organisation Irish in Britain. The work was commissioned by a Steering Group with members from the Irish Embassy in London, The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, RTÉ, Irish in Britain and the Irish community in Britain.

We would like to thank the Irish community in Britain who participated in the survey, the Irish community and voluntary sector and to all the community group participants who gave so generously of their time to share their views and experiences of the RTÉ Longwave service in Britain.

In addition we are grateful to Simon McCarthy from Coventry Irish Society, Deirdre Quill from Leeds Irish Health & Homes, Noelette Hanley from Luton Irish Forum and Maureen Morrison from St. Michael's Irish Centre for recruiting community group members for the focus group discussions.

This research would not have been possible without the support and advice of colleagues at Irish in Britain, in particular Michael Bourke and (formerly) Jennie McShannon.

We wish to acknowledge the input of our colleagues at the Social Policy Research Centre, especially Afyah Ahmed and Liliya Alijeva for assisting with the postal and telephone survey, data entry and the community focus groups.

The **Social Policy Research Centre** (SPRC) at Middlesex University, set up 1990, is a dynamic research centre with a proven track record of delivering projects on time and on budget. The centre draws together a range of staff with expertise in social policy, migration, health, care, welfare and service provision, education, the needs of families, women, children, religion, culture and identity. To view reports from our recent research projects visit our web page: [www.sprc.info](http://www.sprc.info)

**Irish in Britain** is the keystone of the community — making a difference to the lives and experience of Irish people across Britain. We promise to place the needs and aspirations of the Irish community in Britain at the heart of what we do; we will lead, champion and celebrate the different experiences of our vibrant community. [www.irishinbritain.org](http://www.irishinbritain.org)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since 2004 Ireland's national public service broadcaster, RTÉ, transmitted its most popular radio station, RTÉ Radio 1 on Longwave 252kHz. This service has significant reach into the island of Britain. In September 2014, RTÉ announced the closure of its longwave service.

Following a public response from the Irish community in Britain, RTÉ postponed plans to shut down the Longwave service. After further consultation, a decision was taken by RTÉ in December 2014 to defer the Longwave shutdown until 2017. In the interim, the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade of Ireland and the Minister for Diaspora Affairs identified that the Irish Government would be funding research into the current level of listenership amongst the Irish community in Britain:

*"Since the initial announcement by RTÉ, it became clear that there is a lack of data on who listens to RTÉ radio in Britain and how they access it. I have agreed that my Department will work with RTÉ and fund research to deliver a better picture of need to inform a solution acceptable to all" (Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan TD, 19 December 2014)*

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Ireland requested the organisation Irish in Britain to oversee this time limited research and, following an open tendering process, the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at Middlesex University was commissioned to conduct the present study on the reach and value of RTÉ Radio 1 on Longwave among the Irish community in Britain and the potential impact of closure on cohorts within the community.

In line with the mandate of Irish in Britain, the SPRC was specifically commissioned to look at RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave listenership in England, Scotland and Wales only. In response to queries received, it was agreed that if individuals in Northern Ireland wished to complete the survey then their responses would be forwarded directly to the Steering Group.

This study on RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave listenership among the Irish community in Britain is the first of its kind and the findings from the research are intended to inform a decision on the future of the service.

## **AIMS OF THE STUDY**

Focusing on listeners in Britain who tune to RTÉ Radio 1 via Longwave 252kHz radio, the current research project aimed to gain insight into:

- Frequency and timing of listening to the service;
- Attitudes to the service and its content;

- Benefits and/or perceived weaknesses of the service;
- Potential alternative platforms for listening to the service;
- Preferred methods of communication in respect of the service

## **CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH**

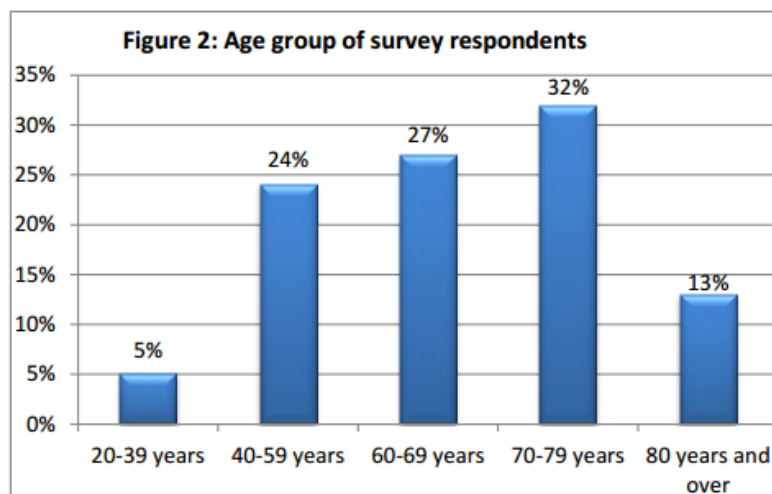
A range of research techniques were employed to undertake this study and to gauge the breadth and depth of Irish radio listenership in Britain. To begin with, a survey was conducted to obtain listeners' attitudes to the Longwave service, how the service was accessed and the impact of changes to the mode of delivery. The survey could be completed via a postal questionnaire, over the telephone or online. Listeners were invited to participate in the survey mainly through RTÉ longwave radio services but also in Irish newspapers in Britain and through the network of Irish community groups across the country. Irish community groups were also encouraged to complete and submit the questionnaire online via a group submission, thereby enabling the views of vulnerable community members to be heard. In addition, focus groups were conducted with community groups in different locations across the country where the Irish community is heavily concentrated, encouraging participants to discuss their use of the Longwave service, the role it plays in their lives, how they currently access this provision and their ability to access alternative radio platforms.

A more detailed account of the research methods employed in this study is given in the appendix.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **RTÉ Longwave Audience in Britain**

1. 3,191 individuals completed the RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave Listenership Survey, the first of its kind in Britain.
2. 77% were listeners responding to an invitation on the Longwave service.
3. Almost two thirds of the survey respondents (61%) were male.
4. The age profile of the survey respondents shows that participants predominantly belonged to the older age groups: 70-79 years (32%), 60-69 years (27%) and 40-59 years (24%) (Figure 2).

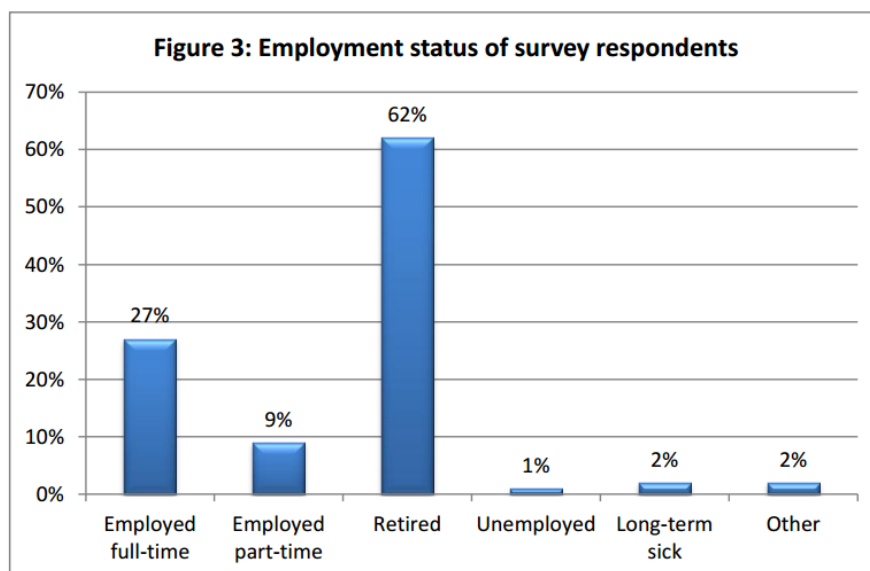


5. More than two-thirds of respondents were born on the island of Ireland and of these, 98% defined their ethnicity as 'Irish'. Of those not born in Ireland, 21% self-identified as 'Irish' and 39% as 'Irish descent or heritage' (Table 2).

**Table 2: Whether born in Ireland and perceived ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Born in Ireland	Born outside of Ireland	Total
Irish	98%	21%	73%
Mixed Irish and another ethnicity	1%	10%	4%
Irish Traveller	0%	0%	0%
Irish descent/heritage	0%	39%	13%
Other	1%	31%	10%
Total no. of respondents	2049	956	3005

6. 62% of respondents are retired and 27% are employed fulltime.

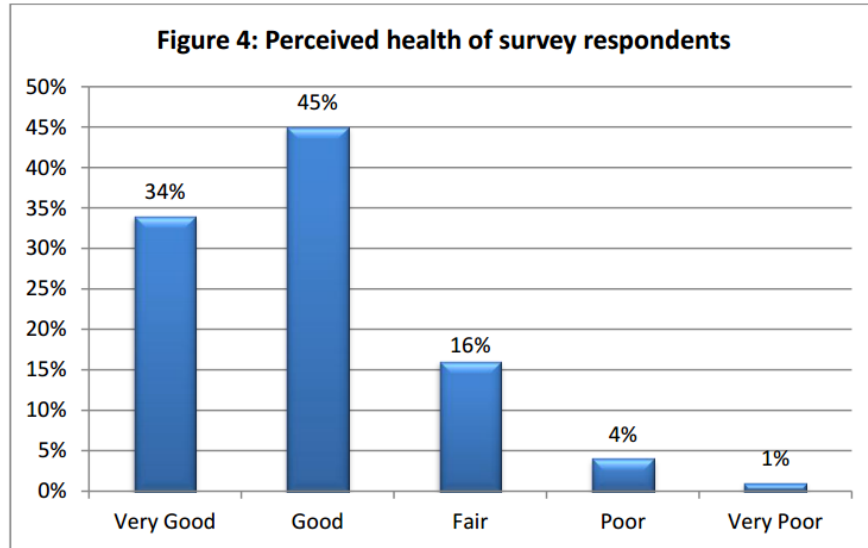


7. The majority of survey respondents lived in North West England (34%), followed by London and the South East (22%) and the Midlands (18%).

**Table 3: Region where survey respondents live**

Region that live in	Frequency	%
Scotland	231	7%
Wales	175	6%
North East England	274	9%
North West England	1,052	34%
Midlands	569	18%
London and the South East	680	22%
South West England	155	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,136</b>	<b>100%</b>

8. Most of the survey respondents are in good health but one in five reported their health as being no better than "fair" (Figure 4). 22% of survey listeners have mobility problems (Table 5), 33% live alone (Table 6).



**Table 5: Health issues**

Whether suffer from any of the following health issues:	Response	% of respondents
Mobility problems / arthritis	679	22%
Reduced vision	589	19%
Reduced hearing	427	14%
Memory loss	87	3%
Other health issues	681	22%
I do not have any health issues	1,413	47%

Multiple response table

**Table 6: Who live with**

Who live with	Frequency	% of respondents
Spouse / partner	1,823	58%
Living alone	1,023	33%
Children	448	14%
Other relatives	121	4%
Friends / housemates	88	3%
Homeless	1	0%

Multiple response table



9. 41% of listeners use or attend Irish organisations in the UK, principally for social/cultural activities and to maintain a link with Ireland (Table 7 & 8).

**Table 7: Use of Irish organisations**

Attend or use Irish organisations in the UK	Frequency	%
Yes	1,264	41%
No	1,846	59%
Total	3,110	100%

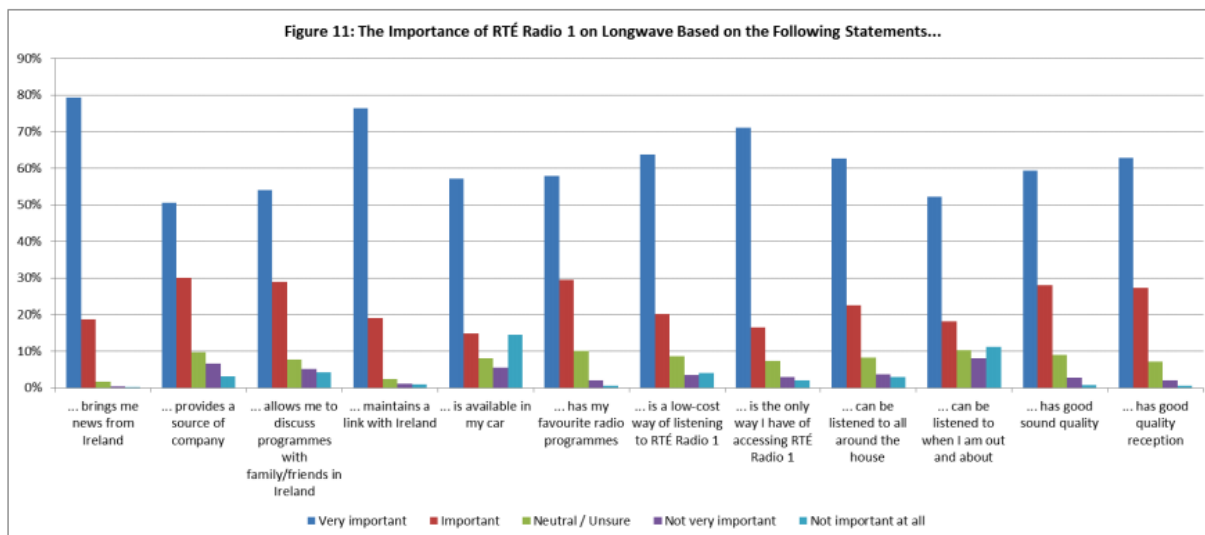
**Table 8: Reasons for using Irish organisations in the UK**

Reasons for using Irish organisations in the UK	Frequency	%
Help in accessing services	153	12%
Social / cultural activities	946	76%
Link with Ireland	925	74%
Health care	63	5%
Other	110	9%
Total no. of respondents	1,246	100%

Multiple response table

### What Listeners Value about RTÉ Radio 1 on Longwave

10. Participants in this study primarily listened to Longwave to maintain a sense of Irishness and a link with Ireland and to keep up to date with news and current affairs 'back home' (Figure 11).



11. RTÉ Radio 1 on Longwave was seen as a 'lifeline' for the majority of respondents

12. In stressing the value of "an indigenous Irish radio station" to the lives of Irish communities in Britain, particularly in terms of their link with 'home', some participants referenced their remittance contributions back to Ireland in the 1950s

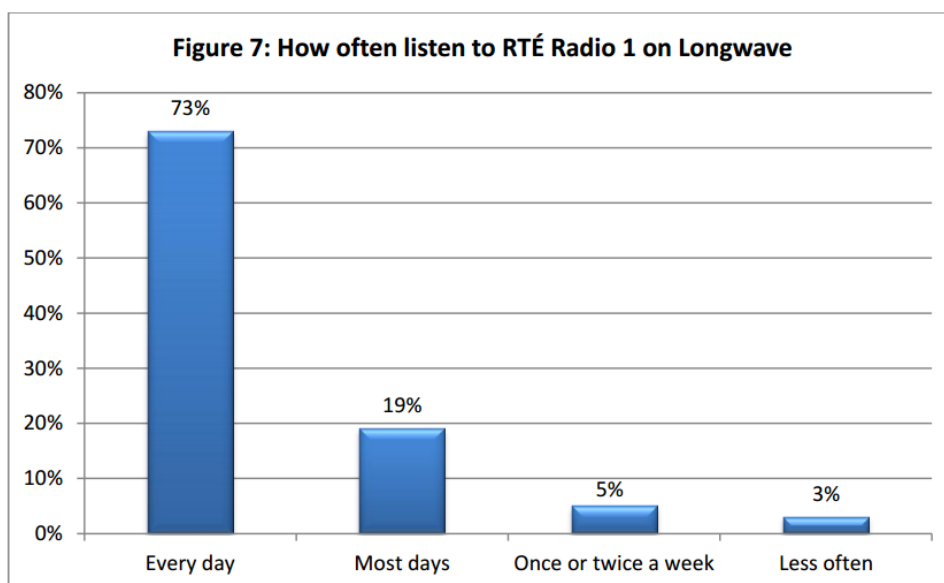
### When and how they listen

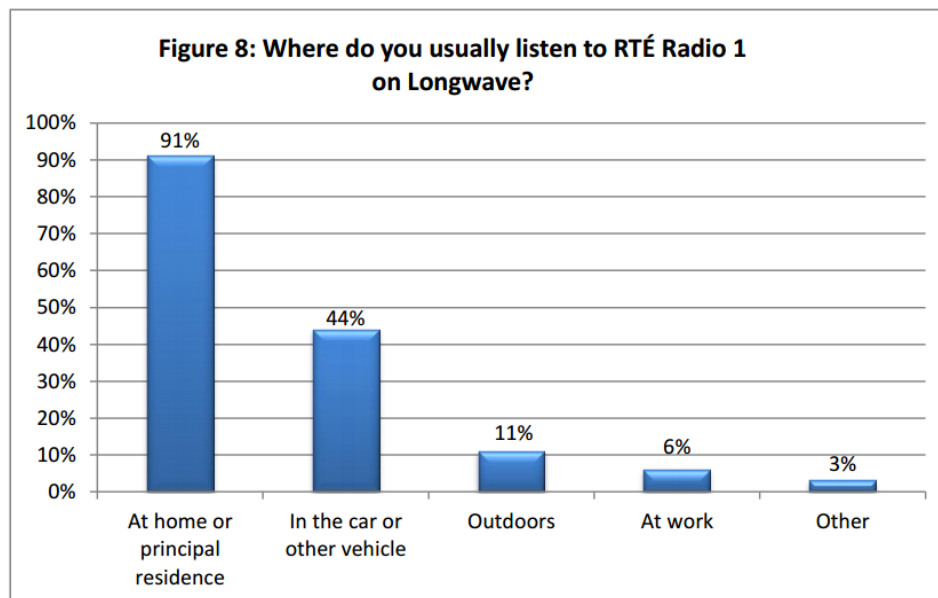
13. 92% of respondents listen "every day" or "most days" (Figure 7). Listening is strongest during the day (Table 11) and at home, though almost half of the survey respondents (44%) also listen in the car or other vehicle (Figure 8).

**Table 11: Timing of RTÉ Longwave listenership**

Timing of listening to RTÉ Longwave	Frequency	% of respondents
Morning (between 6am - 9am)	1,976	64%
Mid-morning (between 9am - 11.59am)	1,811	59%
Early afternoon (between 12pm - 3pm)	1,861	60%
Late afternoon (between 3pm - 6pm)	1,616	52%
Evening (6pm - 9pm)	1,284	42%
Night (9pm - 11.59pm)	1,034	33%
During the night (12am - 6am)	477	15%

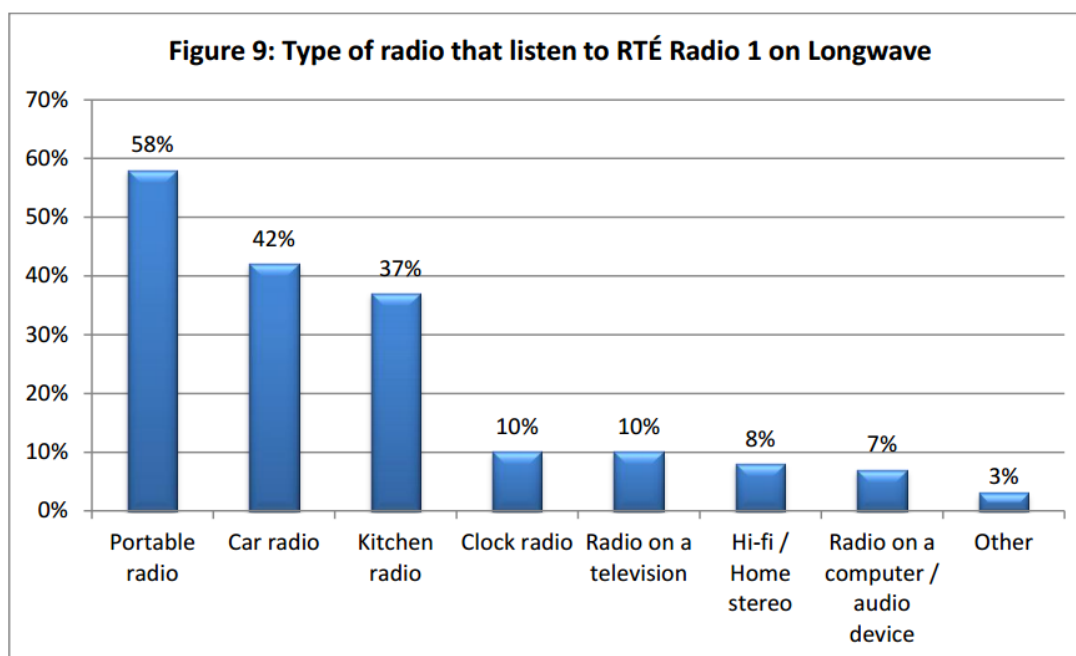
Multiple response table





Multiple response table

14. Portable, car or kitchen radios were typically used by Longwave listeners of RTÉ Radio 1, whereas digital devices were much less likely to be used (Figure 9).

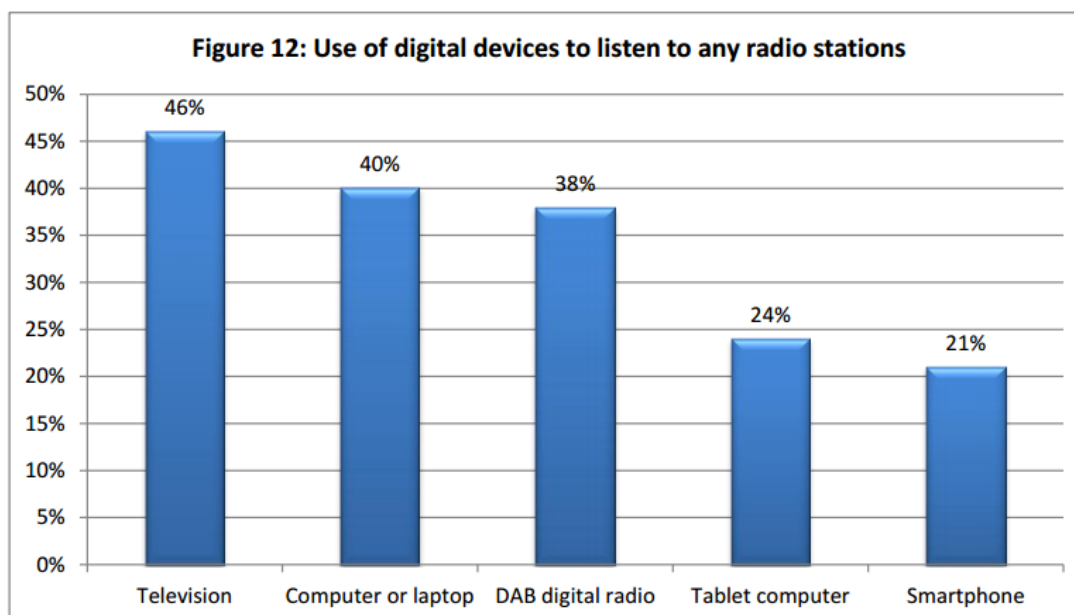


### Radio as the Preferred Medium

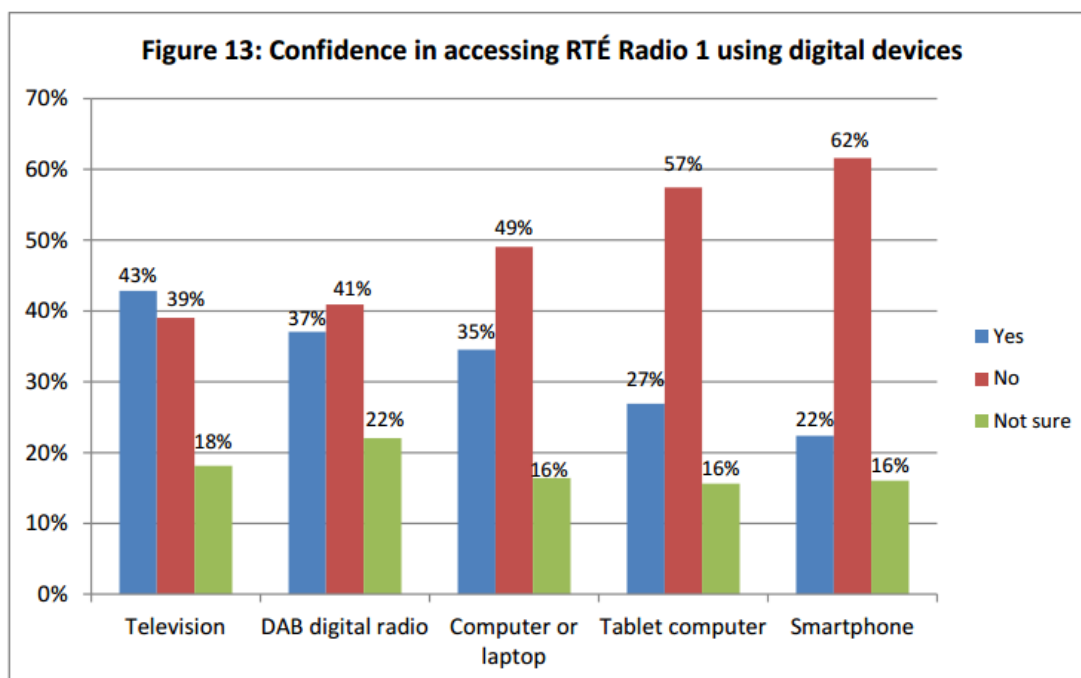
15. Focus group discussions and open-ended survey responses revealed that analogue radio was a preferred medium with a quality and sound that was perceived as more relaxing, informal and personable.
16. Community group participants contrasted the accessible format of 'ordinary' analogue radios and the less accessible format of certain digital radio platforms (e.g. a computer or laptop) for vulnerable groups such as the isolated elderly and people suffering with dementia. This issue was also raised in some of the group submissions.

### Engaging with Digital Radio Platforms

17. Suggestions for the future of RTÉ Radio 1 services were divided between retaining the Longwave service (majority view) or being somewhat willing to engage with specific digital platforms, such as DAB radio.
18. The majority of Longwave listeners owned a television and a computer or laptop, but were less likely to own mobile devices such as a smartphone or a tablet.
19. 46% of survey respondents had used a TV to access any radio station, 40% a computer or laptop, 38% a DAB digital radio, with comparatively lower figures for mobile devices (Figure 12).



20. Over half of the survey respondents stated that they did not feel confident to access RTÉ Radio 1 services using a smartphone or a tablet computer. However, there was greater confidence in TV, DAB digital Radio and home computers (Figure 13).
21. In arguing the case to keep RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave, a majority of participant responses disputed cost as a reason to close the service and questioned the cost-effectiveness of introducing digital radio platforms.



### Access to Digital Radio Platforms

22. The majority of survey listeners felt that they would need help on how to access digital radio platforms, although 68% did not know anyone who could help them with this (Table 13 & 14).

**Table 13: Need help to access digital radio platforms**

Whether need help on how to access digital radio platforms	Frequency	%
Yes	1,863	61%
No	1,204	39%
Total	3,067	100%

**Table 14: Whether know anyone to help with accessing digital platforms**

Do you know anyone who may be able to help you with accessing digital platforms?	Frequency	%
Yes	576	32%
No	1,218	68%
Total	1,794	100%

23. Open-ended survey responses revealed that elderly listeners were not necessarily IT literate and that they did not want to change their listening habits and engage with digital platforms. Some respondents who were familiar with new technology identified disadvantages in listening to the radio via a digital delivery.
24. The Irish community groups also expressed uncertainty about the extent to which their service users/members could obtain support from alternative sources in accessing digital platforms.
25. Focus group participants perceived the computer or laptop and the internet as less user-friendly, more time-consuming and inconvenient to start up and not portable to take around the house or travel in the car. The analogy used by some of the participants in switching from the Longwave service that they are used to, to a digital platform that they are not used to, is like "switching from a kettle to a pan to boil water and make tea", the outcome is the same but it is a longer process to reach.
26. Lack of confidence in using digital technology and transferability of knowledge and skills as well as the issue of affordability was evident amongst elderly and more vulnerable groups.
27. There was some uncertainty among focus group participants about the range of digital radio devices as well as the accessibility of a digital delivery. For instance, both survey respondents and focus group participants reported that they were unable to listen to RTÉ Radio 1 via DAB digital radio, suggesting their willingness to engage with this type of digital platform. Of importance, Luton had not received RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave for more than a year.
28. The ease and accessibility (and possibility affordability) of different digital platforms had led participants in the Luton focus group to express their willingness to use DAB digital radio but not other digital devices (e.g. computer or laptop, Sky or Virgin TV).

## **INDICATIVE CONCLUSIONS FOR STEERING GROUP**

The findings from this large-scale RTÉ longwave listenership survey, the group submissions and focus group discussions raise a number of possibilities but also some challenges in trying to find a 'happy medium' between analogue radio platforms and a proposed digital-only switchover.

We ask that the Steering Group, and/or relevant members, consider the following in partnership with the Irish community and voluntary sector across Britain:

### **Short to medium term:**

- The timing of the closure
- Improving coverage of the service
- Ongoing consultation between Steering Group parties and the Irish community in Britain.
- The impact of the closure on isolated listeners, particularly those who have specific health needs such as dementia.

### **Medium to Long Term:**

- Concrete, accessible alternatives to Longwave
- Clear communication to, and engagement with the Longwave audience and the Irish community and voluntary sector regarding those alternatives
- Help schemes with attendant resources where required

ENDS



## APPENDIX

### RESEARCH METHODS

The research project employed a range of data collection tools, both quantitative and qualitative. Adopting a mixed methods approach was seen as important to gauge the breadth and depth of Irish radio listenership in Britain.

In addressing the key aims of this study, the following research tools were employed:

1. A **survey** - the initial phase of the project employed a short, user-friendly questionnaire, designed in collaboration with a consultative group of key stakeholders. The questionnaire focused on the key research aims and comprised questions on the use of the RTÉ longwave service, attitudes to service content, benefits and perceived weaknesses of current provision, how the service is accessed and the impact of any change in mode of delivery/platforms. Before being administered the questionnaire was piloted among a small sample of Irish community group members to ensure clarity and ease of use.

The research team also took the opportunity to ask respondents if they were members of any Irish organisations/clubs to gauge a general understanding of their engagement with the Irish community in Britain. This entailed the addition of a few short questions.

The survey was administered in a range of ways to ensure a maximum response rate:

(a) An online questionnaire was employed using specialist online survey software, Qualtrics, which is a technique that the research team has used on other projects<sup>1</sup>, where the data can be easily analysed and the results can be quickly produced. At the same time, however, the research team was aware of the limitations of this method of data collection – while it is efficient and cost effective, this form of technology is not appropriate for all users, particularly the elderly cohort who are less inclined to engage with digital technology. This was of particular importance as we were informed beforehand that listenership of Longwave radio came predominantly from among the older Irish cohort.

(b) A postal questionnaire with reply stamped-addressed envelopes was employed to ensure that the survey had maximum reach. We have used a postal survey on previous

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe, Ryan, D'Angelo, Kaye and Lorinc (2013-18), EU Seventh Framework Programme.

projects involving Irish migrants<sup>2</sup>. Although, this method of data collection is slower and more expensive (paper and postage costs), we nevertheless felt it would be more appropriate for an older age group.

(c) A telephone survey was conducted in this study - given the age profile of many of the listeners of RTÉ Longwave radio and that some of these listeners may have physical disabilities (e.g. visual impairment, arthritis), there was also the option to complete the survey over the phone with a member of the research team. Listeners who required a copy of the postal questionnaire or to request a call back could call a special phone number which the researchers had specifically set up.

Between 28th September and 1st November 2015, the online, postal and telephone surveys were advertised widely, mainly via RTÉ longwave radio services but also in Irish newspapers in Britain, for example, Irish Post and Irish World, and through the network of Irish community groups across the country.

2. **Group submissions** - to ensure maximum inclusivity, Irish community groups were also encouraged to complete and submit the questionnaire online. Group submissions (via an organisational representative) were considered to be important since vulnerable groups may not be able to fill out a questionnaire on their own, yet their voices should still be heard. Hence, the group survey method was seen as a way to capture these perspectives and ensure that no group was overlooked in the outreach process. A modified questionnaire was devised based on the individual version but tailored towards eliciting the views of organisations. Despite this, these submissions were subsequently treated individually and were not weighted by group membership size.
3. **Focus groups** – in partnership with Irish in Britain we arranged four focus groups with community groups in different sites across the country where the Irish community is heavily concentrated, in this case, Coventry, Leeds, Liverpool and Luton. Employing focus groups enabled listeners to RTÉ longwave radio to come together and discuss their use of the service, the role it plays in their lives and the various technical issues relating to how they access this provision.

It should be noted that the recruitment of Irish community groups offered greater diversity than geographical locations, since one of the focus groups comprised a mix of older and younger Irish members, another of the focus groups included more vulnerable elderly Irish

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<sup>2</sup> 'Depression in Irish migrants living in London: case-control study', Ryan, Leavey, Golden, Blizard and King (2006), The British Journal of Psychiatry, 188(6), 560-6.

and another focus group involved participants who were unable to access the RTÉ longwave signal in the locality.

The research project and research tools received ethical approval from Middlesex University's Ethics Committee, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants.

Data from the survey, group submissions and focus groups were analysed using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data analytical techniques were used to interpret the individual and group survey data whilst a qualitative thematic approach was employed to undertake analysis of the focus group discussions. Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations and further actions have been proposed.

### ***LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY***

The questionnaire was designed in collaboration with a consultative group of stakeholders and then piloted. At this stage of the research, the lack of availability of DAB digital radio to access RTÉ Radio 1 in Britain was not identified and, hence, survey questions relating to the use of this device to access the service would have been phrased differently. This issue surfaced following analysis of the open-ended survey responses and during the focus group discussions.

In the initial phase of the research, e.g. dissemination of the survey, the research team was inundated with an unexpected volume of calls from listeners, namely 3,282 calls, and this impacted on the second phase of the research, e.g. conducting community focus groups within an already limited time frame. As a result, it was not possible to reschedule a focus group discussion with Irish community group members in London.

The focus group locations were not chosen by the research team but by the organisation Irish in Britain. Thus, the issue of Luton participants being unable to access a strong enough signal to listen to RTÉ Radio 1 Longwave was only made known to the research team during the focus group discussion