

BRIEF A10(i)

THE MEDIA IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland provides a huge market for the media and communication opportunities as well as pressures for ministers. The troubles and recent political developments have acted as a magnet for journalists - both domestic and international, there is a huge appetite for news among the people of Northern Ireland and a large number of broadcasters/journalists make sure the issues are covered.

2. **BBC Northern Ireland:** The Belfast operation is one of the largest outside London. Radio: The agenda-setting programme of the day is **Good Morning Ulster** with presenters Seamus McKee, Barry Cowan and Wendy Austin. Format is very similar to the Today programme but the questioners are very knowledgeable and persistent on NI matters especially political. Lunchtime the main programme is **TalkBack** with its host David Dunseath. The tabloid, hard-hitting show with listener participation has swallowed up the straight news programme. **Evening Extra** covers the drive-home period. Television: The main regional news programme is now the early evening **Newsline** at 6.30pm nightly.

3. Major correspondents are the widely respected and award winning Dennis Murray - the BBC's Ireland correspondent - assisted by newly arrived David Eades and the NI Political Editor Stephen Grimason and his number two Mark Simpson.

4. BBC NI also carry a local version of Panorama the investigative **Spotlight** programme (Tues) and an in-depth political programme **Hearts and Minds** (Thurs).

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5. **UTV** has the largest viewing figures of any regional TV station. Its main news programme is the evening UTV Live at Six preceded by a more feature-style half-hour UTV Live. Political Editor is Ken Reid - respected and proud of his Number Ten contacts. Political Correspondent is Fearghal McKinney. UTV has its own weekly news documentary programme Insight (Tues).

6. **Downtown** - the widely listened to Independent radio station broadcasts regular news on the hour as well as breakfast and drive-time news-based shows. News editor is Harry Castles who is always keen to give ministers air time while they tend to use local freelancer Eamonn Mallie for political reports/opinion. Eamonn is the self-styled shop-steward of the Belfast-based press corps and will soon make himself known to ministers.

7. **RTE** (Radio Telefis Eireann) has a four-person bureau in Belfast covering both television and radio. Radio tends to reach a wider audience but as reception improves RTE's television news is becoming more widely watched and so influential.

8. **ITN** established a bureau several years ago - Reuters TV, GMTV, Sky are represented here as well.

9. Two morning papers **The Irish News** - (Nationalist) and the **News Letter** (ultra Unionist) and the Province-wide **Belfast Telegraph** (middle of the road) complete the daily scene.

10. **The Press Association** has an enhanced Irish media output. It has more than quadrupled its staffing in Belfast and Dublin in the past two years underlining the importance it attaches to political affairs here. PA is also responsible for the UTV Teletext pages. Ireland Editor is **Deric Henderson** with his number two **Ian Graham**; the newly appointed political team consists of **Rosie Cowan** and **Dan McGinn**.

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11. The resulting media corps is a highly-active group which never lets Ministers out of its sight for long. It means Ministers are in daily demand for interviews and government information is heavily used. Overall, journalists have taken a constructive approach to the peace process and political developments - especially the NI-based media - but there are issues such as compensation/victims and prisoner releases over which they have been ready to criticise government policy.

12. The appetite for news and the numerous outlets serves to underline the need to react rapidly and effectively to breaking stories/comment as well as media queries. The NIIS' developing media monitoring unit has enhanced our ability to carry out this role.

The Main Newspapers

The Belfast Telegraph (circulation 136,714: Editor Edmund Curran)

13. Describes itself as "The National Newspaper of Northern Ireland" it is widely read throughout Northern Ireland. A mid-day/mid-evening with ever-earlier copy times, it has taken a middle of the road approach which is generally supportive of an agreed political settlement. Sold in January 1996 by the Thomson Group to Trinity International Holdings. Political correspondents are Martina Purdy and Noel McAdam.

14. **The News Letter (circulation 33,233 (paid): Editor Geoff Martin) + 66,000 as freesheet.**

15. The UK's oldest newspaper and the traditional voice of Unionism. Now less hard-line under the editorship of Geoff Martin who has worked hard to breach the community divide often co-operating closely with the former editor of the Irish News Tom Collins especially in joint editorials over issues such as Drumcree.

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16. Has been very critical of the government on the issue of compensation for victims. Bought over by the Mirror Group, August 1996. Political correspondent is Mervyn Pauley.

The Irish News (circulation 44,443: Editor Noel Doran)

17. Long regarded as the Catholic/Nationalist voice of NI, it has in recent years steered away from raw Nationalism in a bid to woo Protestant readers. Political editor is Billy Graham.

Republic of Ireland Papers

18. Two Republic of Ireland papers circulate in the North, **The Irish Times (circulation 4,000: Northern Editor Deaglán de Bréadún)** is the weightiest Ireland's "Paper of Record" with every detail covered. Influential at senior levels.

19. **The Irish Independent (circulation 3,000: Northern Editor John Devine)** Fair proportion of feature and opinion pieces are syndicated from GB papers. Supports Fine Gael and a strong supporter of the Agreement. Ireland's largest-selling daily - heavy on Republic of Ireland business.

GB National Papers

20. Of the main national correspondents, two (**David McKittrick - The Independent and Liam Clarke - Sunday Times**) are long-term NI residents. (**Henry McDonald**, formerly BBC NI security correspondent, is a thorny reporter for the Observer **John Mullins (Guardian)**, **Toby Harnden (Daily Telegraph)**, **Chris Walker (Times)**) make up the Nationals' representation. McKittrick's is the doyen of the corp with a fistful of awards to his name including Journalist of the Year.

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21. The Mirror publishes once more in Northern Ireland under the local editorship of Craig MacKenzie. Its Northern Ireland edition gives a good deal of space to local stories.

22. On a Sunday the News of the World (Irish editor Alex Marunchek) has been very enthusiastic about taking minister's articles for the NI edition.

Sunday Papers

Sunday Life (circulation 98,612: Editor Martin Lindsay)

23. Previously Thomson-owned, now part of the Trinity Holdings stable, it has put on circulation steadily since launch in 1988. NI's version of the Sunday red-top tabloid, it is keen on security stories and more sensational items.

Sunday World (circulation 66,297: Northern Editor Jim McDowell)

24. The Sunday World is a widely circulated ROI tabloid and produces a special "northern" edition.

Weekly Newspapers

25. The 40 plus weekly newspapers offer are excellent outlets for government information especially where messages can be tailored for local readerships. All have solid circulations ranging from 3,000 to over 30,000. In most areas it is usual for there to be two locals - one representing each tradition. The weeklies are widely trusted, well read and eager for news events in their areas.

The Northern Ireland/Irish Lobby at Westminster

Des McCartan, London correspondent, Belfast Telegraph

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26. Over 20 years in post and the contacts to prove it. Incisive journalist. Not much gets past him and he is an insistent inquisitor at the Number Ten lobby briefings. Tends to believe that the NIO is less open than it should be.

Frank Millar, Irish Times

27. Unionist politician turned current affairs programme adviser turned journalist. Good Unionist contacts. Takes an intricately analytical and opinionated interest in NI politics.

Bernard Purcell, Irish Independent

28. Amiable, almost diffident, hardworking journalist with encyclopaedic contacts, especially with the Irish Government. Sensible correspondent, values contacts more than speculative scoops.

Aiden Hennigan, Cork Examiner

29. Affable senior figure, semi-retired. Mainly covers Parliamentary debates and is sometimes interviewed on Sky.

Brian O'Connell, RTE

30. Sound, straight TV/radio correspondent with no pretensions to stardom. Always willing to give NIO ministers air time.

Other Notable Journalists with an interest in Northern Ireland

31. Westminster-based lobby correspondents tends to dip and out of Northern Ireland affairs which can sometimes be a problem when individuals - wrongly - think a story is new and develop it out of proportion (can be a difficulty with lobby lunches). The lobby view as a body currently is that Northern Ireland is a "done story" which doesn't require their total attention. However there are a number who do have a particular interest in NI affairs and follow them regularly including **Colin Brown** of the Independent, **Nick**

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Watt, the former Times man in NI and now Guardian, **George Pasco-Watson** of the Sun, **Andy McSmith** of the Observer and **Des Fahy** (Independent Radio News).

32. London also has an extensive range of international reporters. Main interest in Northern Ireland affairs comes from the American and EU journalists. The Americans have their own group who are always interested in briefings from Ministers. The umbrella organisation for all foreign journalists is the Foreign Press Association who, again, can be offered Ministerial briefings which are usually very well attended. Both sets of journalists appreciate any extra care which Ministers can take to explain the Government's case directly to them.

33. One particular journalist to note is: **Kieran Baker** the amiable correspondent for CNN - the US's largest national TV network. A good contact and willing to take the wider view which is refreshing. Always an excellent conduit into the important American market.