



UTV Performance Review of 2024 and Statement of Programme Policy 2025

SECTION 1: ANNUAL REVIEW 2024

Content - News, current affairs and general programming

UTV's portfolio of local programmes offers a diverse range of top quality news, current affairs and other content including factual entertainment. UTV operates in an intensely competitive market, and is committed to maintaining the highest standards of output with a focus on the needs and preferences of the Northern Ireland audience. News and current affairs are at the heart of UTV output.

UTV Live at 6 is the market leader in Northern Ireland, with the share of the available audience at 6pm rising last year from an already very high base.

Tier 2 Arrangements:

We broadcast 208 half hours of news programmes a year for UTV audiences in Northern Ireland in line with our licence commitments. These include our flagship UTV Live at 6pm on weekdays and a range of bulletins for audiences during the early morning, lunchtime, the late evening and weekends. We also deliver 104 hours of current affairs and factual programmes each year. Outside of our licence we offer a full 'on demand' service including web content and streaming.

Significant change:

There was no significant change to the licence.

Innovation, Experiment and Creativity

Delivering accurate and impartial news remains central to the UTV offer, and innovations in technology have allowed the news team to work more flexibly and more efficiently.

In February 2024, we acquired two new lightweight drones as we expanded our fleet. They're a little easier to deploy and have given UTV different visual perspectives on stories on many occasions. Two of our camera operators were trained to use them and they have proved to get some exceptional coverage throughout 2024.

In June 2024, we recorded the UTV Election Debate in our studio. It was a big project for the team to adjust the news set to create a new set for another production, but the work really paid off and the set looked very well.

In September 2024, it was announced that ITV approved a £20 million investment package to reequip its regional studios and galleries. This is an exciting project for UTV to be involved in and will mean a renewal of our set, equip us with the latest production tools and it will be set to improve our efficiency and functionality. We will see this investment take shape and will be introduced in UTV in four years.

2024 also saw the introduction and development of the national and regional news rails on ITV's new streaming service, ITVM. UTV now brings exclusive content and the very best of its news and programmes to streaming audiences through its own rail on ITVM, offering viewers from across the UK access to our news and programmes. As well as the latest editions of our news and current affairs programmes the rail features extended interviews and bespoke extended features only available online.

On a local level, UTV has continued to invest in technology, including the rollout of mobile journalism kits to our On Screen Journalists to increase our video news gathering capacity. More mobile phone kits are due to be rolled out in 2025 to more on screen journalists who want the opportunity to use an additional camera.

UTV continued its digital ambitions in 2024. The strategy evolved as articles were promoted less by social media so we invested our time in video curation and sharing. UTV has also achieved 3 million downloads of podcasts/ vodcasts since its launch in December 2022.

Reporting

Major stories in 2024 which UTV covered extensively:

- **Stormont return**

The DUP ended its two-year boycott of Stormont in February after the party struck a deal with the government to address its concerns over post-Brexit trading arrangements. Michelle O'Neill became Northern Ireland's first nationalist First Minister.

- **Donaldson arrests**

In March, news broke of the arrest of former DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson for historic sexual offences against two children. His wife, Eleanor Donaldson also faces charges of aiding and abetting in connection with the alleged offences facing her husband.

- **Race riots**

About 20 police officers were injured and dozens of arrests were made linked to serious disorder in Belfast after an anti-immigration protest in early August. The unrest in the city and attacks on businesses came after misinformation on social media after the murder of three children in Southport.

- **Cervical smear scandal**

A review into cervical screening in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust concluded that eight women whose smear tests were misread by screeners went on to develop cancer, and a further eleven women required treatment. Two women later died. A special UTV News investigation uncovered serious failings which saw people wrongly given the 'all clear' and left with incurable disease.

PROGRAMME OFFER

UTV PRODUCTIONS

UTV's weekly political programme, **View from Stormont**, aired regularly on Monday nights analysing the political scene, providing viewers with an in-depth look at developments, including commentary from key players and voices in Northern Ireland.

UTV Life (weekly magazine programme) presented by Pamela Ballantine aired throughout the year, continuing mostly in its Friday 7pm slot.

Up Close (hard-hitting current affairs programme) was again produced throughout the year. Topics covered included Belfast's night time economy and the controversy surrounding the ownership of XL Bully dogs.

Hidden NI - the return of a six part series which uncovered some of the less well-known spots in Northern Ireland. Barbara McCann, Stewart Robson and Rita Fitzgerald travelled across Northern Ireland (and sometimes a little further) to explore hidden gems, and find out about places few knew existed.

Dogs with Jobs - a new UTV six part series which takes a behind the scenes look at the frontline workers of the canine world and how their owners dedicate their lives to working in partnership with dogs. From search and rescue dogs, guide dogs, assistance dogs and dogs undertaking vital conservation work, there are lots of amazing stories packed into this series.

Other programmes commissioned from local independent production companies:

Rare Breed – A Farming Year returned to UTV with a new series of 12 programmes produced by Strident Media. The series charts the agricultural year through the lives of farmers, with each episode capturing the highs and lows of a particular month.

Eamonn Mallie Face to Face with... produced by Mallie Productions, entered a 7th series on UTV. Each programme is a long form interview by the award-winning journalist Eamonn Mallie who talks one-to-one with some of the biggest names in the world of sport, drama and public life in Northern Ireland. The seven-part series saw Eamonn interview poet Michael Longley, Linda Ervine MBE and Olivia Nash amongst others.

Keepers of the Lough - following its successful launch in 2021, this series made a welcome return with six new episodes in 2024. Set on and around Strangford Lough, the series takes the viewer on a beautiful voyage of discovery at this enchanting part of the Northern Irish countryside, learning about its people and its habitat. It is produced by Green Inc and narrated by Patrick Kielty.

Westway Film Productions delivered twelve episodes of **Mahon's Way** in 2024. Veteran presenter Joe Mahon travelled the highways and byways of Northern Ireland, visiting interesting places, providing fresh insights across a wide range of subject matter, from flora

and fauna to historic buildings, areas of natural beauty and history. It was presented with all the usual enthusiasm and genuine enjoyment Joe brings.

Other programming

Election 2024 - UTV provided extensive coverage of the General Election in Northern Ireland.

There were also programmes to mark The Twelfth parades and celebrations, as well as a St Patrick's Day programme. **UTV at the Show** brought highlights of the Balmoral Show, showcasing the best of NI's agri-food industry.

Cultural and Other Diversity

UTV is committed to providing equality of opportunity, dignity and respect both on and off screen. The company continued its support for a number of major community events and organisations. Belfast Mela, NI's largest multi-cultural event held a series of outdoor events, with UTV reporter Paul Reilly hosting the kick-off carnival in Belfast city centre and the finale concert at Botanic Gardens.

A wealth of on air content was included in our news and non-news programmes representing our audiences in the content we make.

The UTV Diversity & Inclusion Panel continued to meet in 2024. Four meetings were held hosted by Vidar Hjordeng. Panellists got to see content and hear about company initiatives. The forum is excellent at giving valuable feedback on UTV's activities and output.

UTV's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion group continued to lead various activities and initiatives in 2024, comprising staff from different areas of the business, including the continuation of positive action placements.

Public Input

UTV is very proud of its range of programming and the interactivity enjoyed with audiences across all platforms via our social media accounts where audiences engage with our content daily.

Our social media presence increasingly allowed us to identify stories and contributions from our online audiences.

Promotion of Media Literacy

UTV appointed a News Trainee in October 2024. This was in line with other ITV nations and regions. The successful candidate got a nine month contract to learn all the skills necessary to work in our multi-media newsroom.

SECTION 2: STATEMENT OF PROGRAMME POLICY 2025

We look forward to providing our audience with the same high standards of news, current affairs and top quality local programming which reflects the people and issues of Northern Ireland in 2025.

News and current affairs remain at the heart of our output this year and we will continue to deliver a full service. Other programming will return with new series of familiar favourites and some brand new content is also planned.

Innovation, Experiment and Creativity

In 2025 ITV news will be rolling out new non news technology in UTV, ITV Cymru Wales and ITV Border. This will be greener technology - using fewer PCs and therefore less energy and air conditioning to drive the systems. This is a hugely exciting time for new technology in the production of current affairs programmes and will link ITV News to ITV Studios - sharing technology, resources and expertise.

PROGRAMME OFFER

News:

UTV Live will continue to deliver a market leading news service and will respond quickly to breaking lines following developments and will include exclusive reports and informed analysis. We will also provide relevant coverage of the most topical and popular events in Northern Ireland.

View from Stormont will continue to analyse the political scene, providing viewers with an in-depth look at developments, including commentary from key players and voices in Northern Ireland.

Current Affairs:

Up Close - the hard-hitting monthly current affairs programme is set to return in 2025, examining a range of issues affecting life in Northern Ireland

Other programmes:

Weekly magazine show **UTV Life** returns in 2025 bringing viewers a relaxed and conversational line-up. The studio-based series airing on regular Friday 7pm slot will continue to cover a diverse range of subjects centred on Northern Ireland's cultural life. It is presented by Pamela Ballantine with reporter Rita Fitzgerald bringing filmed items from all over NI.

UTV will also produce a fourth series of **Hidden NI**, where a team of three reporters will take the viewer to hidden gems in Northern Ireland to which members of the public wouldn't normally have access.

Eamonn Mallie Face to Face with... Award-winning journalist Eamonn Mallie returns for an eighth series, talking one-to-one to some of the biggest names in Northern Ireland. This series is produced by independent production company Mallie Productions

Keepers of the Lough will return for a fourth series. First aired in 2021 and set in Strangford Lough, the episodes take the viewer on a beautiful voyage of discovery around this enchanting part of Northern Ireland, learning about its people and the habitat. The series is once again narrated by Patrick Kielty and produced by independent production company Green Inc.

Westway Film Productions will produce ten programmes to be aired later in the year. **Mahon's Way** presenter Joe Mahon will take to the highways and byways of Northern Ireland again, with a promise of returning with another entertaining mix of people, places and fascinating stories.

Dogs with Jobs - this will be the return of a UTV-produced six-part series, looking at those special canines who do great things, from therapy to search and rescue, and everything in between.

Special programmes will include UTV at the Show, the Twelfth parades, St Patrick's Day celebrations, and a series of profiles looking at some of the leading lights of Northern Ireland.

Diversity & Inclusion:

We will continue to carry out a wide range of cultural and other diversity initiatives over the course of 2025.

We will also continue to meet with our Diversity Panel to further shape our story choice and programme making decisions to respond to the needs of all our audiences.

We'll continue with our outreach activities and initiatives in 2025 to include a partnership with the soul festival and the Rio Ferdinand Foundation. This will involve young people from a variety of diverse backgrounds being offered placements (some paid, others will do work experience).

ENDS
