

UTV PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF 2021

PROGRAMME REVIEW

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. In an intensely competitive market, UTV 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' continues to be a highly successful source of independent news, with share of audiences at 6pm rising last year from an already very high base.

The pandemic and restrictions in the early part of 2021 continued to dominate the headlines, and the way the company operated, but audiences received the same outstanding service of news, current affairs and other local programming.

Changes to schedule

The normal schedule of news throughout 2021, with adjustments to the duration of some shorter bulletins due to the EUROs football coverage, were maintained. All local programming halted during the pandemic in 2020 was reintroduced.

Innovation, Experiment and Creativity

Delivering accurate and impartial news was more important than ever and technological innovation allowed the team to work from home when necessary.

For most of 2021, numbers in offices were restricted.

Zoom remained a useful tool for conducting interviews with contributors when they could not be gathered in person.

As local programming was reintroduced, the same guidelines were followed. UTV Life, View from Stormont and Up Close made frequent use of Zoom for interviews and social distancing both in the studio and any face to face interviews were carried out safely.

UTV invested in high-end kits to support 'mobile journalism', with a number of reporters trained in their use allowing for a different type of news gathering that can be more reactive. These so-called 'MoJo' kits comprise microphones, stands, and gimbels, and are proving very effective in a 'grab and go' scenario for important stories.

In December, a more senior digital editor was recruited in recognition of the increased focus on this area of the business.

Reporting

The social and fiscal impacts of the pandemic were at the centre of coverage as well as the clear implications for the health service and people's wellbeing. Viewers appreciated more uplifting stories when they appeared in programmes.

There were however other major stories in 2021 which UTV covered extensively:

1. Violence at the Belfast interfaces sparked by loyalist protests over the Northern Ireland Protocol.
2. Ballymurphy inquest - a new inquest found 10 people killed at Ballymurphy were innocent. Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a public apology in the House of Commons. *(This report was shortlisted for a national RTS Journalism Award)*
3. Arlene Foster stood down as DUP Leader and First Minister, with the DUP fallout leading to three different party leaders in the space of a few months.

PROGRAMME OFFER

UTV's weekly political programme, **View from Stormont**, aired regularly on Monday nights with the focus continuing on the political response to, and policy decisions arising from, the pandemic.

UTV Life (weekly magazine programme) made a welcome return in 2021 having been postponed in March 2020. Zoom interviews and outdoor pre-recorded reports became the norm with guests being slowly welcomed back to the studio as restrictions eased towards the latter part of the year.

Up Close (hard-hitting current affairs programme) returned in 2021 with nine hour long programmes produced. Topics covered included the mother and baby home scandal; racism in Northern Ireland; and the divisions in Northern Ireland football.

Frontline - this was the second series of a UTV production which examined various professions and how they had to operate during the Troubles. The six episodes had a different focus each week, with among others the clergy, bus drivers, press photographers sharing their memories. The series was also full of clips from the rich UTV archive.

Other shows in the UTV schedule are made by the independent sector in Northern Ireland and these continued under strict safety measures:

Rare Breed – A Farming Year returned to UTV with a new series of 12 programmes in January 2021 produced by Strident Media (formerly Crawford McCann) throughout 2020. 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... aired between February and April. Each programme is a long form interview by the award-winning journalist Eamonn Mallie who takes one-to-one with some of the biggest names in the world of sport, drama and public life in Northern Ireland. In its fourth run, the eight-part series, produced by Mallie Productions, saw Eamonn interview, among others, world motorcycle champion Jonathan Rae; Derry Girls actress Tara Lynne O'Neill; and Eamonn Holmes.

Westway Film Productions produced a new 18 part series for UTV in 2021. Entitled **'Mahon's Way'**, 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.

Keepers of the Lough was a new observational documentary series focusing on Strangford Lough and the people who work out on the water or live around its edges. Made for UTV by independent production company Green Inc. and narrated by Patrick Kielty, the series followed a whole host of characters. The series highlighted the highs and lows of not only having to depend on the Northern Ireland weather, but also on the actions of others to survive, and indeed thrive, in this area of outstanding natural beauty.

'Enterprise - a track record' was a two-part documentary charting the history of the Enterprise train service. Produced by Visionworks Television, the programmes revealed the key role the Belfast to Dublin train route played in linking the two.

Other programming

As Northern Ireland emerged from the pandemic in the latter part of 2021, some of the key events in the calendar cancelled in 2020 took place. As such a special sports programme in advance of the Six Nations 2021 was made, and the The Twelfth Parades and celebrations were marked. There were also programmes on The Balmoral Show which took place in September instead of its usual May date.

Cultural and Other Diversity

UTV is committed to providing equality of opportunity, dignity and respect both on and off screen. Despite the challenges in 2021, 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 main Saturday afternoon concert in the city.

In 2021 some editorial content was devoted to issues affecting a number of groups in Northern Ireland's diverse population, not least an hour-long special for the Up Close brand. In Ali Fleming's film, she examined the issue of racism which has affected NI both past and present. The programme was nominated for a national RTS award.

Other news reports included a primary school in North Belfast celebrated for the way it welcomed newcomer families and a student who overcame learning disabilities to achieve academic success.

News Traineeship - In 2021 along with ITV Anglia and ITV Cymru Wales, UTV exclusively requested applications for the 2022 news trainee post from disabled people, which was part of ITV's drive to boost representation, in recognition that diversity and inclusion are so important to ITV as a company and its output. This was a clear commitment to creating an environment where everyone is included and feels they belong. The successful candidate started in January 2022.

Positive Action Placements - In the summer of 2021, UTV offered a training placement which limited applications from Black, Asian and minority ethnic background in recognition that individuals from those communities are currently underrepresented within the media. Two candidates were successful after an interview process and started in the autumn. During the placement both interns worked alongside journalists to gain experience of what it is like to work within the industry. This included identifying a story, carrying out research, writing a story and putting a bulletin together. The primary aim of the placement opportunity was to give them valuable experience of working in a busy newsroom setting. One intern has now moved on after securing a full time permanent position. The other intern is currently completing their finals at university and now considering going on to do her masters in journalism in the next academic year. She is also coming back to UTV in the summer.

The Diversity & Inclusion Panel continued to meet virtually in 2021. Four meetings were held hosted by Vidar Hjordeng. Panellists got to see news packages, hear about ITV initiatives and the forum is excellent at giving valuable feedback on UTV's activities and output.

Public Input

UTV is very proud of the range of programming and the interactivity enjoyed with audiences across all platforms. Facebook and Twitter activity continued to grow with the increased use of Facebook to communicate key news stories of the day, Twitter was increasingly used to provide updates to stories in between televised news, and individual reporters as well as the official UTV news sites increased their followers.

Promotion of Media Literacy

This activity was severely curtailed in 2021 due to ongoing health and safety restrictions in the office.

UTV appointed a News Trainee in October 2021. This is 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.

The positive action placements outlined above also helped promote media literacy.

UTV STATEMENT FOR 2022

Omicron was dominating life at the turn of 2022, and at that time, social distancing and resultant restrictions were the norm, and UTV continued to follow the relevant guidelines.

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 2022.

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

Innovation, Experiment and Creativity

We will continue with practices developed in 2021, as a result of having to think differently due to COVID 19. While there are many advantages of more remote working, a hybrid version is how most colleagues will operate, so they continue to develop, share ideas and maintain their wellbeing by collaborating in person, as well as enjoy greater flexibility.

PROGRAMME OFFER

News

UTV Live will continue to deliver a market leading news service and will respond quickly to breaking lines following political developments to 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 respond to the news events and provide viewers with in-depth political analysis and comment from key players in Northern Ireland.

Current Affairs

Up Close - the hard-hitting monthly current affairs programme is set to run in 2022, with the first programme covering the issue of online abuse and its damaging effects, followed by a second programme about domestic violence deaths during the pandemic. Ten programmes are planned for 2022.

Election 2022 - UTV will provide extensive coverage of the May Election. A Leaders Debate is planned as well as four special programmes dedicated to the results.

Other programmes

Weekly magazine show **UTV Life** returns in 2022 bringing viewers a relaxed and conversational line-up. The studio-based series will move to a new, regular slot on Fridays covering a diverse range of subjects centred on Northern Ireland's cultural life. Presenter Pamela Ballantine is back in the studio, with some face to face interviews and some via Zoom. Reporter Rita Fitzgerald will bring filmed items from all over NI.

UTV will also produce a new series called **HIDDEN NI**, where reporter Sara O'Kane takes the viewer to hidden gems in Northern Ireland to which members of the public wouldn't normally have access.

Rare Breed - A Farming Year returns to UTV in January 2022 with a new series of 12 programmes produced by Strident Media (formerly Crawford-McCann). The series charts the agricultural year through the lives of farmers working in a variety of enterprises, with each episode capturing the highs and lows of a month, including how the pandemic continued to affect this important sector in 2021.

Eamonn Mallie Face to Face with... Award-winning journalist Eamonn Mallie returns for a fifth series, talking one-to-one with some of the biggest names in the world of sport, drama and public life in Northern Ireland. In this six-part series, produced by Mallie Productions, Eamonn interviews, among others, Line of Duty star Adrian Dunbar, NI Ladies Football team captain Marissa Callaghan, and also Alastair Campbell and Tom Bradby both of whom have strong connections to and interests in Northern Ireland.

Westway Film Productions will produce 14 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.

ENDS
