

**PUBLICATION MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF
THE CONTENT BOARD HELD ON 26 MARCH 2024
CONNECTED MEETING HELD AT RIVERSIDE HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Present

Clive Jones	Chair
Dekan Apajee	Member for England
Simon Bucks	Member
Maggie Cunningham	Member for Scotland
Bob Downes	Member
Peter Horrocks	Member
Ali Marsden	Executive Member
Maria McCann	Member for Northern Ireland
Ruth McElroy	Member for Wales
Cristina Nicolotti Squires	Executive Member
Stephen Nuttall	Member
Kim Shillinglaw	Member

In attendance

David Edwards	Committee Secretary
Dan Maher	Principal, Programme Delivery and Operations, BMG
Other Ofcom colleagues attending for specific items	

Item 1: Welcome and introduction - oral

1. Clive Jones, the new Chair and attending his first Content Board meeting, welcomed all present. He introduced himself, briefly explained his background and invited Members to do the same, including Cristina Nicolotti Squires who was now an Executive Member of the Content Board (as part of her role as Ofcom’s Group Director, Broadcasting and Media Group).

Item 2: Members’ interests - oral

2. There were no new interests to declare.

Item 3: Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2024 and matters arising – Content Board minutes 186(23) and note of action points

3. The minutes of the Content Board meeting held on 23 January 2024 were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair as an accurate record.

4. A summary of progress against action points had been circulated. An outstanding action was to brief Members on Ofcom research on politicians as presenters, due to be published at the end of April. An ad hoc session would be arranged to allow Members to discuss the findings in advance of publication.

Item 4: Chair’s update – oral

5. December 2023 and February 2024 Ofcom Board minutes had been circulated for information. As the new member for Wales, Clive Jones had attended his first Ofcom Board meeting on 13 March 2024. Amongst other topics, there had been discussion of Channel 4 and the need to balance support for the out of London production sector against the need for

Channel 4 to retain flexibility. In turn, Content Board Members representing the Nations expressed concern that Ofcom's proposed relicensing of Channel 4 did not go far enough to ensure support for the production sectors in the Nations and regions and advised the Executive to consider this further, bearing in mind also stakeholder responses to the recent consultation. As a related point, another Content Board Member flagged the importance of taking a long-term view of the economic state of the production sector, risk and viability associated with spreading production across the UK and what this meant for the maintenance of centres of excellence.

6. The Content Board **NOTED** the report from the Chair.

Item 5: Broadcasting and Media Group and Online Safety Group Update – Paper CB 6(24)

7. Members had received an update paper on key policy and project areas in the Broadcasting and Media Group and the Online Safety Group. The paper was taken as read.

8. A number of points were highlighted/ discussed by Members:

- Reports in the media: That the BBC was proposing to carry advertising on some of its UK podcasts on third-party commercial platforms from late 2024; and the Government's recent announcement of plans to prevent foreign states owning UK newspapers (of relevance to Ofcom since currently it had duties under the Enterprise Act 2002).
- Standards investigations: Members noted the publication of recent high-profile decisions and exchanged views on a range of related issues including public scrutiny of Ofcom and how it communicated its decisions.

9. Members **NOTED** paper CB 6(24) and additional oral updates provided.

Item 6: BBC programme of work – Paper CB 7(24)

10. Members were taken through the main areas of Ofcom's BBC work programme, including BBC mid-term review implementation; ongoing monitoring of the BBC's delivery of its mission and public purposes; review of the BBC's proposed changes to its audio services, to BBC Scotland and to BBC Radio 3; editorial standards; and the local media review. The work programme included engagement with relevant stakeholders, audience research and market analysis. Members noted that Tim Davie, BBC Director General, would be making a speech¹ that morning to the Royal Television Society about the future of the BBC.

11. Points highlighted/ discussed by the Content Board included:

- Sustainability in relation to local media, its importance for local cohesion, access to public funding and partnership opportunities. It was noted that local news would feed into Ofcom's Public Service Media (PSM) review and a paper on the scope of the review was expected to come to the next Content Board meeting.
- The importance of strategic context and evidence based on research, knowing what audiences really wanted and how to respond.
- BritBox International, it was noted that BBC Studios had recently acquired ITV's shares making it a fully owned BBC subsidiary.
- Proposed changes to BBC news provision in Scotland, which would require regulatory approval, and whether audiences would be better served as a result.

12. Members **NOTED** paper CB 7(24).

Item 7: Beyond Broadcast – Paper CB 8(24)

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2024/a-bbc-for-the-future-tim-davie-director-general/>

13. Beyond Broadcast was an annual data-led research project run by Ofcom's Research and Intelligence team providing a wealth of data that detailed trends in audience behaviour and market dynamics in the audiovisual sector. Its purpose was to further Ofcom's understanding of the sector and the impact online video was having on traditional TV viewing and business models. An overview was provided on the latest viewing trends, with some findings highlighted.

14. It was noted, for example, that in 2023 broadcasters' share of total viewing had declined year-on-year across all age groups, although it remained higher than streaming alternatives for many audiences. SVOD was dominant amongst younger demographics, with older audience reliance on linear services beginning to dip (the pandemic had acted as a catalyst for older people to change their viewing habits). BBC broadcast channels were still watched most on average but for young people YouTube, Netflix and TikTok were the biggest draws. As SVOD gained traction, take-up of all traditional broadcast platforms declined, although the market for the former appeared to have plateaued/ matured and revenues had grown but driven by price rises. Inroads were being made into VOD advertising share by Netflix and this could impact the prospects for BVOD.

15. In discussion issues raised included the prospects for market consolidation; funding and the BBC licence fee; the role of linear services as shared experiences, bringing the nation together; decline in broadcast news consumption; growth in the number of FAST (free ad-supported streaming television) channels (650+ in the UK), although audiences remained very small; and value in sharing Beyond Broadcast data with external policy makers, e.g. in the Nations. Ofcom published an annual News Consumption research report and findings from the 2024 report would come to the Content Board due course.

16. Members **NOTED** paper CB 8(24).

Item 8: Online news research – Paper CB 9(24)

17. Members were briefed on the headline findings from Ofcom research² to examine how online intermediaries (OIs), especially social media, could influence today's news landscape and published the previous day. It was noted that Ofcom activity in the news space would be taken forward as part of the PSM review.

18. OIs controlled the position and ranking of news, which had a material effect on attention, engagement and recall of articles; influenced to some extent news produced and this was exacerbated by new forms of AI; and had significant market power throughout the news value chain. In terms of impact, people had limited understanding of how OIs affected their news diet and wanted more control. News on social media could lack a diversity of viewpoints and could expose people to material that was polarising or false.

19. Points highlighted/ discussed by Members included:

- Measure of how much time people spent consuming news via social media and its value for the platforms.
- What Ofcom could do to create a positive environment in the news space.
- Social media treatment of misinformation and disinformation, platform systems using AI, some light touch, and whether kitemarking was the approach to take in relation to PSM and reliable news sources.
- Regulatory levers, how they need to evolve to keep pace with rapid change in the online space and to address challenges in the coming years, with value in Ofcom thought leadership and further Content Board debate.
- The importance of media literacy and learnings from other jurisdictions.

20. Members **NOTED** paper CB 9(24) and additional oral briefing provided.

² [Understanding the impact of social media on online news - Ofcom](#)

Item 9: Information Items

21. The Content Board **NOTED** the following information items:
- Minutes of the Ofcom Board (meetings held on 13 December 2023 and 7 February 2024)
 - Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel (meetings held on 14 December 2023 and 7 February 2024)

Item 10: Any Other Business

22. It was noted that the Election Committee would convene in the afternoon and provide a teach-in for its members on Ofcom's role and procedures in elections.

Item 11: Date of the Next Meeting

23. The next scheduled Content Board meeting would be held on 30 April 2024.