

Content Board minutes 191(24)

Publication Minutes of the one-hundred and ninety-first meeting of the Content Board held on 19 November 2024 at Riverside House, London SE1 9HA and via Microsoft Teams

Present

Clive Jones	Chair and Ofcom Board Member
Dekan Apajee	Non-Executive Member for England
Simon Bucks	Non-Executive Member
Bob Downes	Non-Executive Member and Ofcom Board Member (via Teams)
Will Harding	Non-Executive Member and Ofcom Board Member (via Teams)
Peter Horrocks	Non-Executive Member
Ali Marsden	Executive Member and Director, Content Standards Licensing and Enforcement
Maria McCann	Non-Executive Member for Northern Ireland
Ruth McElroy	Non-Executive Member for Wales
Stephen Nuttall	Non-Executive Member
Cristina Nicolotti Squires	Executive Member and Group Director, Broadcasting and Media Group
Kim Shillinglaw	Non-Executive Member

In attendance

David Edwards	Governance Manager
Siobhan Walsh	Director of Policy Development, Broadcasting and Media
Anthony Szyrak	Content Policy Director

Other colleagues attending for specific agenda items

Item 1: Welcome and introduction

1. The Chair welcomed Members and attendees. This was the last Content Board meeting for Stephen Nuttall (his appointment would conclude on 9 December 2024). The Chair thanked Stephen warmly for his valuable contribution to the work of the Content Board and Ofcom over the past six years.
2. The Chair flagged that interviews had taken place to allow the Ofcom Board to approve appointments to the Content Board with the expectation that new Members would attend the next meeting.

3. In the interval since the last Content Board meeting two Non-Executive appointments had been made to the Ofcom Board, Richard Allan from 1 November and Tamara Ingram, as Deputy Chair, from 1 December. Natalie Black had taken up her role as Ofcom Group Director, Networks and Communications and as an Executive member of the Ofcom Board.
4. Richard Allan would become the chair of the Advisory Committee to be set up under section 152 of the Online Safety Act 2023 and that Ofcom would establish shortly¹. Clive Jones commented that there could be some crossover between the new Committee and the Content Board and suggested that there could prove to be value in an individual being a member of both and this could be revisited if deemed appropriate.
5. In addition, since the last meeting, Ofcom had imposed statutory sanctions on GB News Limited for breaching impartiality requirements in the programme People's Forum: The Prime Minister, broadcast on 12 February 2024.

Item 2: Declaration of members' interests

6. No new interests were declared.

Item 3: Minutes of the meeting held 1 October 2024 and matters arising – Content Board minutes 190(24)

7. The minutes of the Content Board meeting held on 1 October 2024 were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair as an accurate record.
8. There were no actions outstanding.

Item 4: Chair's report

9. The Chair updated the Content Board on his activities. September 2024 Ofcom Board minutes had been circulated for information.
10. It was highlighted that the Ofcom Board had met twice since the last Content Board meeting, in October, coinciding with the Board's annual strategy day when the overarching theme had been "How Ofcom can maximise its impact to support economic growth", including engagement with external experts from telecoms, media and the investment community; and in November, when the Board met in Belfast and the visit included a Roundtable at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, and a stakeholder reception.
11. The November Ofcom Board meeting had included discussion of Ofcom's Public Service Media review (an item on today's Content Board agenda). Recognising Ofcom's advisory role, the Executive had been encouraged to be radical in its strategic thinking in response to the challenges facing PSM. It

¹ The Ofcom Board agreed on 2nd April 2025 that the Committee would be called the Online Information Advisory Committee.

would be for the Government to make decisions about any potential legislative change.

12. In response to a Member's query concerning the role of the new Ofcom Advisory Committee, the Chair suggested, and Members agreed, that Richard Allan be invited to meet the Content Board. In addition, the Terms of Reference for the new Committee would be shared with the Content Board.
13. Members **NOTED** the report.

Item 5: Broadcast and Media Group Policy and related teams' update – Paper CB 23(24)

14. Members had received a paper providing an update on key policy and project areas in the BMG and related teams. The paper was taken as read.
15. A number of points were highlighted/ discussed including:
 - Broadcast and Media Group: Work was in progress to review the systems, focus, structure and prioritisation of BMG resources.
 - Canada: Cristina Nicolotti Squires had attended the Public Broadcasters International conference, PBI24, in Ottawa in October, bringing together the leaders of PSBs from around the world. Cristina also met the Canadian media regulator CRTC, Canada's PSB CBC/ Radio Canada and the government department Heritage Canada (equivalent to the UK's DCMS).
 - Later in October, Cristina also attended the 60th European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) meeting in Cyprus and took part in discussion about the growing influence of AI on content generation and moderation.
 - Media Act 2024 implementation: Work was progressing well and the first of a number of consultations were due to be published in December. New duties around prominence were part of this work and which the Executive planned to discuss with the Content Board in due course.
 - The rationale for the limited types of devices specified by the Act, platforms in scope and, a related issue, future-proofing the regime.
 - News: There was a general discussion about the importance of accurate impartial news and what measures might support future sustainability. It was noted that Ofcom would shortly be hosting a making sense of media event (to coincide with publication of its report on adults' behaviour and attitudes to mis- and disinformation). These and related PSM themes, including Ofcom's role as a convener, the views of stakeholders and international dimensions, would be discussed at greater length at a future Content Board meeting.
 - Letter to the SoS: The Chief Executive had exchanged correspondence with the SoS about Ofcom actions in response to public disorder, following the horrific attack in Southport on 29 July 2024, referring in particular to online activity that provokes violence or stirs up hatred, and false communications intended to cause harm. Colleagues from Ofcom's Online Safety Group would brief Members further on these actions at the next Content Board meeting.
16. Members **NOTED** paper CB 23(24) and additional oral updates provided.

Item 6: How can and should S4C and Alba survive in the new world of internet broadcasting and how should they be funded? – Paper CB 24(24)

17. The Content Board was given an overview of Welsh, Gaelic, Ulster Scots and Irish language broadcasting in the UK, the existing funding mechanisms, challenges and Ofcom's regulatory duties.
18. Points highlighted and discussed included:
 - S4C was not a commercial PSB but had a key role in promoting and normalising the Welsh language in Wales, making prominence a priority for the broadcaster.
 - S4C public funding currently came from the BBC licence fee and it would be important for its voice to be heard in debates about the licence fee. Challenges included scale and sustainability.
 - S4C contributed to plurality, it maintained an in-house news service, and it sought also to reach non-Welsh speaking audiences in Wales, as language learners and through its coverage of major sporting events. S4C was also important in the creative economy in Wales.
 - MG ALBA's primary duty was to ensure that a wide and diverse range of high-quality media in Gaelic was available to people in Scotland and beyond, raising questions about the broad range of activity undertaken by the organisation.
 - Level of funding and the number of language speakers.
 - Whether it was more helpful to think about Welsh, Gaelic, Ulster Scots and Irish language issues together in terms of shared objectives, e.g. prominence and discoverability, rather than separately, whilst noting that there were also different underlying cultural and political dimensions to consider.
19. The Content Board **NOTED** paper CB 24(24)

Item 7: Public Service Media Review update – Paper CB 25(24)

20. Members were briefed on the findings of past performance and the Executive's view of the key future challenges for the provision of PSM, to be published in December. There was then a general conversation about challenges and early thoughts on how PSM might be strengthened and maintained.
21. A number of points were discussed, including genres and the wider ecology of PSM; the creative industries and issues such as education and skills development; the need to interrogate fully the purpose of PSM; the importance of innovation, prominence and the distribution of content, audience satisfaction, representation and the provision of local content.
22. The Executive would continue to engage with stakeholders in 2025, to gather views on key future challenges and further options for remedies to address them. The intention was to return to the Content Board to discuss remedies in the spring and publish the findings of the review in summer 2025. That might then lead to further work to modify regulation in Ofcom's remit.
23. Members **NOTED** paper CB 25(24)

Item 8: International Content Strategy – Paper CB 26(24)

24. In a context of changes in technology and consumer behaviours and concentration in digital markets, Ofcom’s international work includes activity to support delivery of the strategic priority to secure media that is trusted and valued. Priority areas of focus for Ofcom’s international engagement programme include: PSM, news and plurality in a digital environment; the intersection between the regulation of broadcasting and online safety; supporting the UK production sector; and peer support, i.e. close working with regulators in other countries.
25. Topics highlighted and discussed included:
- Potential learnings from the provision of minority language broadcasting in other jurisdictions, e.g. Spain and Canada, recognising that different cultural scenarios were a factor.
 - It was noted that whilst the Canadian government wished to introduce a 5% levy on the revenues of music and video streaming platforms, there was pushback from streamers.
 - Many countries were turning to legislation to regulate the big tech companies and there was best practice to be identified. In addition, Ofcom appeared to be well regarded internationally and able to act as an influencer and as a research resource.
 - Prevalence and attitudes towards cultural protectionism in different countries.
26. Members agreed that it would be useful to receive regular updates on Ofcom’s international work.
27. The Content Board **NOTED** paper CB 26(24).

Items 9-10: Information items

28. The Content Board NOTED the following information items:
- Minutes of the Ofcom Board of 25 September 2024.
 - Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel/ACOD of 19 September 2024.

Item 11: Any other business

29. There was no other business.

Item 12: Date of the next meeting

30. The next scheduled Content Board meeting would be held on Tuesday 21 January 2025.