

Content Board minutes 192(25)

Publication Minutes of the one-hundred and ninety-second meeting of the Content Board held on 21 January 2025 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
Peter MacMahon	Non-Executive Member for Scotland
Ali Marsden	Executive Member and Director, Standards and Audience Protection
Maria McCann	Non-Executive Member for Northern Ireland
Ruth McElroy	Non-Executive Member for Wales
Yolisa Phahle	Non-Executive Member
Kim Shillinglaw	Non-Executive Member

In attendance

David Edwards	Governance Manager
Siobhan Walsh	Director of Policy Development, Broadcasting and Media
Anthony Szykaruk	Content Policy Director
Chinmay Parikh	FCA/ Next-Generation NED observer
Other colleagues attending for specific agenda items	

Item 1: Welcome and introduction

1. The Chair welcomed Members and attendees, in particular Peter MacMahon and Yolisa Phahle, who were attending their first meeting as Members of the Content Board, and a colleague taking part in the Next Gen NEDs scheme who would be observing Content Board meetings during 2025. Apologies had been received from Cristina Nicolotti Squires.
2. Members noted that Ruth McElroy had been reappointed, her term extended until February 2028. In addition to the two new Members, as part of the recruitment process, a third individual had been identified to join the Content Board later in the year when the next vacancy falls due.

Item 2: Declaration of members' interests

3. No new interests were declared.
4. The Chair flagged that as part Ofcom's annual governance review a paper would go to the Ofcom Board shortly. As part of this year's exercise, the Content Board's Code of Conduct had been revisited resulting in some changes to be approved by the Ofcom Board. The revised Code of Conduct would be copied to Members in due course.

Item 3: Minutes of the meeting held 19 November 2024 and matters arising – Content Board minutes 191(24)

5. The minutes of the Content Board meeting held on 19 November 2024 were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair as an accurate record.
6. There were no actions outstanding.

Item 4: Chair's report

7. The Chair updated the Content Board on his activities and Members noted that he would shortly be meeting the First Minister of Wales, in Cardiff and in the company of Ofcom's Chief Executive.
8. October and November 2024 Ofcom Board minutes had been circulated for information. The Ofcom Board had met three times since the last Content Board meeting and its December meeting had included discussion on the [future of the universal postal service and proposals for reform](#) (to be published shortly) and Ofcom's [Age Assurance and Children's Access statement](#) (published earlier in January 2025). Other issues on the Board's radar included the review of Public Service Media (PSM) and the Government's growth agenda.
9. Members **NOTED** the report.

Item 5: Broadcast and Media Group Policy and related teams' update – Paper CB 1(25)

10. 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.
11. A number of points were highlighted/ discussed including:
 - Reports in the media: These included pressure from big US Tech companies to roll back the regulation of online platforms and it was noted that the chief executives of Ofcom and other regulators had met recently with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss proposals to support growth in their sectors.
 - PSM Review: The Executive would be seeking a wide-ranging conversation with the Content Board about the Review. (Note: A 'standalone session' on the Review took place in the interval between this Content Board meeting and the next). The Chair commented that it would be important for Ofcom's Nations Advisory Committees to engage with the Review.

- Revision of procedures: A [consultation on revising the General procedures for investigating breaches of broadcast licences](#) had been published in December. Proposals included a new and more detailed administrative priorities framework to make it transparent how Ofcom would prioritise cases which relate to the greatest potential for harm to audiences and aid consistency of decision-making.
- Designation of additional EPGs: It was noted that a Statutory Instrument would be required to implement changes and this was expected to be delayed and follow a wider DCMS announcement on media/ TV regulation.
- Localness: Local analogue commercial radio licensees were no longer required to make some programmes locally but provision of local news and information would remain a requirement. It was noted that Bauer (and Global shortly) had already ceased providing locally-made programmes on its network brands. A Member flagged that reduced local media could have a negative impact on both diversity and broadcasting career opportunities for young people.

12. Members **NOTED** paper CB 1(25) and additional oral updates provided.

Item 6: Disinformation and Misinformation Committee and Ofcom actions post the summer riots

13. In November 2024 the Ofcom Board approved the Executive's approach to establish an Advisory Committee on Misinformation and Disinformation, a requirement under Section 152 of the Online Safety Act 2024. The Committee would provide advice to Ofcom on how providers of regulated services should deal with online mis/disinformation; on Ofcom's transparency powers as they relate to mis/disinformation; and Ofcom's media literacy duties to counter online mis/disinformation.
14. Richard Allan, who joined the Ofcom Board in November, would chair the Committee and a process was underway to recruit expert members. The Committee was expected to hold its first meeting in April. Richard was present to discuss the role of the Committee, including his thinking about scope, the mapping of priorities and ways of working, including advice notes as an output of the Committee.
15. Clive Jones flagged Ofcom's Election Committee (membership being a subset of Content Board members plus some Executive colleagues) and, with potential mis/ disinformation being a concern, he suggested future dialogue with Richard on elections. On a related point, Members noted that broadcasting election rules place restrictions on broadcasters when polls open and discussed whether, for example, broadcasters should be allowed to report instances of election mis/disinformation in news reports when polls are open, subject to other relevant rules.
16. Members noted that the Government had ordered a public inquiry into the Southport attack that took place on 22 July 2024. Related to its aftermath, i.e. the public order disturbances last summer, colleagues from Ofcom's Online Safety Group were present to provide an update on Ofcom actions following online activity to provoke violence or stir up hatred and false communications intended to cause harm. Ofcom's main focus had been on the illegal aspects of material shared online and to ensure that platforms had systems in place to

deal with this. Another aspect of Ofcom's work in this area was its supervision and outreach function to help platforms to understand their duties.

17. Returning to his earlier point about future dialogue, the Chair proposed to talk to Richard Allan in due course about liaison between the Content Board and his Committee and to avoid overlap. The Chair also encouraged Members to email him about any issues they felt could benefit from joint working, media literacy being one example.

Item 7: How does the regulator ensure trusted, impartial and accurate news in an era when audiences are now getting their news on social media?

18. Members engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about trusted, impartial and accurate news. The Executive introduced this by posing questions about trust, what it was, what audiences trusted and whether that was changing, and what Ofcom should focus on when thinking about trust. It was noted that surveys suggested trust in the media in the UK has declined in recent years and that online news sources were now used more widely than any other, including TV.
19. In response a number of points were highlighted/ discussed including:
- The related issues of news provision and its consumption (or lack of).
 - Increased news consumption in times of crisis or emergency.
 - Reliance on published data and survey limitations that reveal news delivery mechanisms but not what was being consumed on online platforms.
 - Young people drifting away from news and whether they would return to it as they became older.
20. Some insights on fake news based on behavioural research were shared with the Content Board. These included the complex psychological reasons why people engaged with fake news; the effectiveness of media literacy interventions to help people spot fake news; and the impact of misinformation on specific attitudes or behaviours.
21. Topics highlighted and discussed included:
- The insufficiency of debunking conspiracy theories without also providing an alternative explanation.
 - Kitemarking/ labelling trusted news sources.
 - Use of algorithms to ensure that reliable news sources were available.
 - Achieving trust by making a range of perspectives available.
 - Practical considerations included potential actions for online platforms to improve trust; what more the PSMs could do; and what could be done with audiences.
22. The Chair commented that today's discussion had sought to raise awareness of news issues and to contribute to thinking as part of Ofcom's PSM review. He further suggested that the behavioural research presented earlier could be of interest to the new Advisory Committee on Misinformation and Disinformation and that the Executive reach out accordingly.

Item 8: Content Board Work Programme 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 – for onward submission to the Board

23. The Content Board 2024/25 work programme was reviewed by Members prior to submission to, and approval by, the Ofcom Board. 24. Suggested refinements included: • Work to develop understanding of the BBC's online strategy and technology development (including its AI strategy). • Highlighting the importance of media literacy (whilst noting that other bodies had a role to play, e.g. the Department for Education and their counterparts in the devolved administrations). 25. The Content Board NOTED paper CB 2(25).
Items 9-10: Information items 26. The Content Board NOTED the following information items: • Minutes of the Ofcom Board of 16 October and 13 November 2024. • Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel/ACOD of 17 October and 14 November 2024.
Item 11: Any other business 27. There was no other business.
Item 12: Date of the next meeting 28. The next scheduled Content Board meeting would be held on Tuesday 18 March 2025.