Minutes of the 81ˢᵗ meeting of the Advisory Committee for Scotland held virtually over Microsoft Teams on 8 September 2020

Present

Liz Leonard	Chair
Laura Anderson	Member
Carmel Teusner	Member
Stephen Speirs	Member
Elizabeth Partyka	Member
Jess McBeath	Member

In attendance

Maggie Cunningham	Content Board Member for Scotland
Amanda Britain	Consumer Panel Member for Scotland
Bob Downes	Ofcom Board Member for Scotland
Glenn Preston	Ofcom Scotland Director
Jonathan Ruff	Ofcom Scotland
Stefan Webster	Ofcom Scotland
Conor Corbett	Ofcom Scotland
Debbie Hughes	Ofcom Scotland
Emma McFadyen	Ofcom, Public Policy Team
Other Ofcom colleagues	
Colleagues from The Scotland 5G Centre (Sections 15-18)	

Welcome, introductions, conflicts and apologies
1.   The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced two new members; Elizabeth Partyka and Jess McBeath. David Connolly had offered his apologies.
Minutes of the 79ᵗʰ meeting held on 9 June 2020
2.   The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2020 were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair as an accurate record.
Members' updates – Oral
3.   There was a short discussion about the recent Consumer Communications Panel Hub meeting where the main focus was on scams and fraud. The key points were: • A member noted the proposal to close a number of Citizen Advice Bureaux in Glasgow and asked whether this was an issue that Ofcom had been engaged with. The Ofcom Scotland team noted their regular engagement with Citizen Advice Scotland policy colleagues and the information sharing agreement in place which drew from the evidence gathered by the Bureaux network. While Ofcom had no formal role in relation to decisions about individual Bureau closures, it was helpful to be aware this was happening given the potential impact on the CAB network's information gathering role.

- The Scottish Government Business Minister, Jamie Hepburn MSP, held a roundtable on 7 September and met with relevant Regulators and other interested bodies to feed into the forthcoming Scams Prevention Strategy.

- The Chair **NOTED** the update from CCP and asked for a presentation on the content of the research (which looked at scams and fraudulent activity and how communications services could be used to facilitate their spread) at the next ACS meeting in December.

4.   It was **NOTED** that the next CCP Hub would be on the 25 September on rural connectivity and the Chair asked a member to attend on the Committee's behalf.

5.   A member updated the Committee on the Broadcasting sector. It was **NOTED** that Ken MacQuarrie, the BBC's Director of Nations and Regions, and Margaret Ford, Chair of STV, are both stepping down from their respective roles at the end of the year.

6.   A short discussion followed and there were a few key points to **NOTE** in relation to the BBC:

- With the BBC Scotland Director and Director of Nations and Regions both standing down, there were some concerns about what this may mean for BBC ALBA and Gaelic broadcasting more generally given both had been strong champions of it.

- The focus of the new BBC DG was on digital platforms and his published introductory speech had noted the need for cuts with potential redundancies.

- The Committee would wish to keep a close eye on how the changes at the BBC would impact commissioning outside of London.

7.   The Chair provided the members with an update on Screen Scotland and Channel 4. It was **NOTED** that Screen Scotland were carrying out a survey of 50 indies in Scotland about the future of broadcasting post Covid and how might Screen Scotland best support them moving forward. Channel 4 had established a very fruitful partnership with Screen Scotland with a new joint daytime initiative being set-up with 5 indies in Scotland who would receive funding of £5K each, for development, with the possibility of one being commissioned as a pilot.

8.   The Board member highlighted that Ofcom colleagues had held a virtual roundtable session on diversity on the 7 September. The session was well attended with a diverse range of representatives from broadcasters, production companies, specialist recruiters and Screen Scotland and it been positive to use Ofcom's convening powers to kickstart a conversation about improving ethnic diversity in particular.

Director's Report / Public Policy update - Oral

9.   A member asked if there was any consumer updates following recent meetings with Scottish and UK government officials. A few key points were highlighted:

- Ofcom had agreed with DCMS at the start of the Covid pandemic that Consumers were to be treated fairly and not to be disconnected from their broadband, even if they were in debt. Ofcom had recently written to all the main providers to ensure they continued to keep treating consumers fairly and provided additional guidance relating to vulnerable consumers.

- Ofcom had been asked by the Scottish Government to be part of a new, formal working group called the Scottish Consumer Network. This body would exist in addition to the UK level Consumer Protection Partnership and would have a broad membership from a range of organisations.

- Ofcom's Scotland Director noted this had prompted some consideration within Ofcom about the range of different consumer focused networks and bodies across the UK and the extent to which Ofcom could and should be involved (ensuring it didn't fetter Ofcom's independence or statutory powers of intervention or enforcement). A mapping exercise was to be undertaken and this would be shared with ACS members.

- The members were advised that a report on Ofcom's Fairness Commitments (adopted by providers) was due to come out early next year. This would show how the various communication providers have been performing during the Covid pandemic and what impact this had on vulnerable consumers.

10.   The Chair invited a member to review the recent consultation from the Rural Economy for Connectivity on implications from Covid-19 and consider submitting a response on behalf of the Committee. The member would look at this with an Ofcom colleague. The deadline was 18 September.

11.   There was a brief discussion on video sharing platforms (VSPs) as it was **NOTED** that Ofcom had an ongoing consultation with responses due on the 24 September; this was focused on gathering evidence and information to support the development of the regulatory framework. The Committee agreed it would consider submitting a response subject to confirming what the other Advisory Committees intended to do.

Connected Nations Scotland Report update

12.   Ofcom colleagues gave an overview of the Connected Nations 2020 Report which was currently due to be published in mid-December. Key figures for both the UK wide and Scotland Reports were highlighted to the members.

13.   The key things to note were:

- The structure of the report will remain largely the same as last year but there will be more of a focus on security and resilience issues and the threat of cyber attacks.

- There will also be a section incorporated into the report on Covid-19 to see how mobile and fixed broadband networks have held up during the pandemic.

- Superfast broadband coverage continues to increase (albeit at a slower pace than in previous years) with growing numbers of consumers in largely urban areas having access to ultrafast and full fibre connections. However, there remains a small but significant group of consumers who are unable to get a decent broadband speed.

14.   During the ensuring discussion, a member suggested that Ofcom organise a virtual event on connectivity with SME's and this was **AGREED** by Ofcom colleagues.

The Scotland 5G Centre

15.   The CEO and Chair of the Scotland 5G Centre provided an update on the work of the Centre, which is a collaboration between the University of Glasgow, University of Strathclyde and Scottish Futures Trust.

16.   The presenters highlighted the benefits to Scotland of being at the forefront of 5G technology and focussed on their three priority areas – deploying infrastructure, promoting innovation and driving adoption of 5G services.

17.   Members were provided a summary of the four key ambitions of the centre:

- Invest and accelerate 4G and 5G infrastructure deployment to improve connectivity all over Scotland;

- Create a flagship 5G ecosystem for Scotland;

- Enable collaboration between supply and demand side businesses to make 5G solutions commercially viable; and

- Attract global investment to Scotland.

18.   Following the presentation, there was a short discussion on the technology involved, the challenges around rural deployment and how regulation could best work to support the development and deployment of 5G networks. The Chair closed the session by thanking the presenters for their time.

Post User Needs Project

19.   Ofcom colleagues gave an overview of their work on the Post Users Needs Project. The overall findings were that:

- The postal service is of both practical and emotional importance to users;

- There is a decline in letters being sent, with an increase in parcels being sent;

- Users tolerate stamp price increases of up to £1.

20.   A short discussion followed between members and Ofcom colleagues on the impact of the universal service obligation on Royal Mail's parcel deliveries. A Member emphasised the importance of doing a deep dive into both the postal services and other services offered to users in rural Scotland.

21.   The Chair acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the effort made by Ofcom colleagues to sample a large base size for rural Scotland. The Chair encouraged the Post User Needs Project team to engage with the Committee outside of Committee meetings in the future should they desire.

BBC Annual Report

22.   Ofcom colleagues responsible for producing the BBC Annual Report asked members for their input on areas that the Committee thinks the report should focus on.

23.   A Member commented on BBC Scotland's lack of executive and network commissioning power, stating that money spent on news output doesn't seem to translate to audience engagement.

24.   The Chair agreed with the above points. The Chair stated that there was a lack of engagement between Ofcom Advisory Committees for the Nations and senior leadership at the BBC (and in particular with the BBC's Scotland Committee). The Chair also commented on the reduction of BBC Scotland's budget and the impact this will have on new talent and the Scottish creative economy.

25.   Ofcom colleagues then responded to the members' comments and a discussion ensued on BBC Scotland funding and how BBC cuts affect the Scottish creative economy.

26.   It was decided that interested members and Ofcom colleagues working on the BBC Annual Report would have a further discussion on the topic in the near future.

Diversity issues

Next Generation NEDs

27.   Ofcom colleagues gave an overview of the Next Generations NEDs initiative which was part of the wider organisational change work that Ofcom was undertaking under the ONE Ofcom programme.

The Consumer Communications Panel and Ofcom were working together to widen the talent pipeline for non-executive Directors in the public sector.

28.   The members were advised that there will be a pilot with Ofcom joining other regulators in the UKRN to offer opportunities for existing UKRN regulatory colleagues and non-executives. There are 3 elements to the initiative:

- Provide opportunities for individuals to observe on a Panel or Committee and to shadow its work and gain mentoring from the existing non-execs within that body. They would receive wider support which will include advice from HR professionals and from the independent panel members who have wide experience of evaluating non-exec candidates applications and at interview. The aim is to invite speakers from DCMS and the Cabinet Office to give Next Gen NEDs insight into the wider NED recruitment process.

- Provide similar opportunities to existing non-execs to allow them to observe other committee panels.

- Have a Chair scheme which will be a programme for shadowing or mentoring for existing non execs who wish to consider a future Chair role.

29.   A short discussion followed the presentation with a discussion on how best to engage with organisations to reach underrepresented groups. The key points were:

- The benefit of this sort of approach to encourage & support younger people to this sort of role, as well as attracting applications from the BAME community and other groups.

- It was suggested for contact to be made with Changing the Chemistry and Public Appointments Committee Scotland, to help with this initiative. A member will provide a name for the latter.

- A member confirmed that Young Scot had launched a new programme called 'Young Scot Hive' which is all about getting young people involved with organisations in terms of system change and being influential in the organisations. A link was provided for contact to be made.

- The Chair suggested that this initiative might offer more opportunities if the placement was for 6 months for two young people rather than one person for a year, given the amount of engagement that the Committee has between meetings. This was **NOTED** by the team.

Diversity in Broadcasting

30.   An Ofcom colleague gave an overview of a Diversity in Broadcasting event that was held on 7 September. The event was well attended with around 40 people virtually joining the meeting on-line with some of the larger broadcasters attending; STV, BBC Scotland, Screen Scotland, Channel 4.

31.   A few points to highlight are:

- It was **AGREED** that more collaboration is needed to attract more diverse talent to broadcasting in Scotland.

- A connection between Boost Employability and Screen Scotland could prove to be valuable.

- Discussions to continue at the TV working group on Friday (11 Sept).

32.   Following the presentation, there was a short discussion on the challenges faced in the broadcasting sector on progression for people from a diverse background and concern about the lack of regional diversity data published in the BBC's Annual Report.

Content Board update 33.   Members had been provided with a 'For Information' written paper and the Committee **NOTED** its content.
Consumer Panel/ACOD update 34.   Members had been provided with a 'For Information' written paper and the Committee **NOTED** its content.
Ofcom Contact Centre Information 35.   Members had been provided with a 'For Information' paper with Scotland's data and the Committee **NOTED** its content.
Any Other Business 36.   There were no additional items raised by the Committee members.
Date of the Next Meeting 37.   The next scheduled Committee meeting would be held on 1 December 2020.

Approved: _____   **Date**: _____
                Chair
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