

Minutes of the 99th meeting of the Advisory Committee for Scotland

**Hybrid meeting in person and virtually over Microsoft
Teams on 25 February 2025**

Present

Elizabeth Partyka	Chair
Jess McBeath	Member
Ashe Hussain	Member
Polly Tolley	Member
Cameron Speirs	Member
Caroline Di Stefano	Member

In attendance

Bob Downes	Ofcom Board Member Scotland
Helen Froud	Chair of Communications Consumer Panel – up to Agenda 7
Peter MacMahon	Content Board Member for Scotland
Sital Patel	Ofcom's Next Generation NED Observer (Online)
Glenn Preston	Ofcom Scotland Director
Stefan Webster	Ofcom Scotland
Ross Hamilton	Ofcom Scotland
Lyndsey Scott	Ofcom Scotland
Alex Boardman	Ofcom Scotland
Debbie Hughes	Ofcom Scotland
Audrey Palmer	Ofcom Scotland Observing (Online)

Other Ofcom colleagues

Welcome, introductions, conflicts, and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Peter MacMahon, the new Content Board Member for Scotland, and Sital Patel, who will be sitting in on Advisory Committee meetings as an observer for the next 12 months under Ofcom's Next Generation NED initiative.
2. It was NOTED that there were no apologies, and it was NOTED that there were no conflicts of interest.

Minutes of the 98th meeting held on 27 November 2024

3. The minutes of the 98th meeting were APPROVED by the Committee. In the discussion of actions which arose from the November meeting, it was NOTED that:
 - The Scottish Government will host their Digital Connectivity roundtable (delivering connectivity to rural and remote places) at Ofcom's Scotland office. This will be held later in the year in May or June and members will be invited to join.
 - An event is to be organised with Ofcom's Online Safety and Media Literacy teams on the research being carried out on the guidance of protecting women and girls. This is to bring together Scotland's data and identify any unique trends or patterns in Scotland.

Members' updates

4. A member advised that they were seeing increased interest in Online Safety and that the subject was becoming a higher priority for Scottish ministers, with a focus on the issue of violence against women and girls, and at events such as a recent Digital Youth Conference.
5. They also advised that they are continuing to see incremental changes of parental controls with apps and games but highlighted that there is still much more to be done to protect children.
6. A member noted the recent coverage around regional production and the concerns that had been expressed about the proportion of Scotland based staff working on productions that were being allocated as 'Scottish' under Ofcom's guidance.
7. It was NOTED that the members will respond to Ofcom's Revised Guidance for Public Service Broadcasters on Commissioning Codes of Practice Consultation by the 10 March deadline.
8. It was advised that Screen Scotland and the BBC were going to be putting together a scheme to develop producers in comedy, which had been welcomed as there was a gap in this genre.
9. It was also advised that young people were increasingly using YouTube and not Google to search for their content and also using YouTube on their TVs. There was concern how this will affect the future of the broadcasting sector.
10. A member advised that they had presented to David Willis, Ofcom's Spectrum Group Director and to Ofcom Scotland's Board member in early January under one of their DSIT projects at BBC Scotland, Pacific Quay. They are one of their partners using telecoms for their media broadcast and production. There then followed a visit to the University of Strathclyde.
11. It was advised that Ofcom have an upcoming Consultation on 6G, and it was NOTED that the closing date for responses was 8 May. It was NOTED that there may not be any Scottish context for the Committee to respond on.
12. A member advised that members of the Committee and the Ofcom Scotland team had recently met with Royal Mail regarding the future of the Universal Postal Service and related issues.

13. It was NOTED that members of the Communications Consumer Panel had met with Royal Mail separately and that Ofcom's new Network & Communications Group Director would potentially meet with Royal Mail in Scotland in the next few weeks. It was NOTED that a colleague from the Ofcom Scotland team would meet with the ACS' post expert in advance of that to seek advice on possible areas of focus in a Scottish context.
14. A member advised there had not been much change in relation to consumer protection in fraudulent scams following the Online Safety Act. There are different types of scams with some being more sophisticated.
15. The Chair advised that the Edinburgh Festival has announced its Townhall meetings for August 2025.
16. It was advised that Screen Scotland are continuing to engage directly with the BBC following their research into local production and quotas. There is a meeting being planned. It was also suggested that it would be useful for Scotland's Stakeholders to consider more collaboration and to be seen as working together so that the local and national content can be kept to the fore, and that Scotland can be seen as a good place to do business.
17. It was NOTED that there were 3 new Advisory Committee Chairs for 3 of the Nations.

Director's Report / Public Policy update

18. The Ofcom Scotland Director presented their report and highlighted a few key points to NOTE:
- The Scottish budget was expected to complete its final parliamentary hurdle on the 25 February and pass.
 - The R100 programme continued to be on track to complete by 2028.
 - Creative Scotland received an increase in their budget of £20M for 2025 and £20M for 2026 and 2027. This will give them stability in financing their competitive multi-year funding programme for artists and cultural organisations.
 - Screen Scotland are expecting to receive £2M funding with a commitment to ongoing support.
 - A meeting with Scottish Government and Scottish Futures Trust officials was held on Wednesday 19 February to discuss Ofcom's mobile coverage checker. There is a commitment in Ofcom's Plan of Work to develop a new, more accurate checker over the summer.
 - Cristina Nicolotti-Squires, Ofcom's Broadcast & Media Group Director and Vikki Cook, Director of Content Media Policy, had recently met with Angus Roberson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. This followed extensive media coverage on the issue of regional productions. The Ofcom Scotland Director and Ofcom's Broadcast & Media Group Director were due to give evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Culture committee on 27 March on this and a range of associated topics (including regulation of the BBC).
 - Colleagues from the Ofcom Scotland team met with Scottish Government's new National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategy Group on 11 December 2024, where there was some discussion around implementation of the Online Safety Act. The Scottish Government had also announced the creation of an internal task force to ensure more join up within government to help tackle online safety issues as they relate to children and young people.
19. Moving to the Public Policy update, a colleague from the Public Policy team highlighted a few key points noting:

- The draft Guidance on the Protection of Women and Girls online was published on 25 February and there was debate in the House of Lords on 24 February.
- The AI Safety Institute has changed its name and is now called the AI Security Institute.
- There had been some news coverage relating to discussions about the UK Government potentially looking to reduce the number of masts under the Shared Rural Network (SRN) Scheme.

Public Service Media Review

20. Ofcom Colleagues ran through the challenges identified in the backward-looking document published in December and sought ideas from the committee about potential remedies to such challenges.

21. A member asked if the Review recognised the challenge that the costs of producing content for PSBs has significantly increased. An Ofcom Colleague said the Review did identify this to be a challenge, but that it was not clear production costs had risen above inflation.

22. A member advised that the primary focus of the Review should be prominence in the digital world. This was true given both existing prominence in the linear sphere, and heightened competition with digital content.

23. A member asked how the Review considered the underlying questions of whether, and if so, why, the UK values PSM. An Ofcom Colleague cited a robust evidence base showing a number of important aspects of PSM content that audiences value, most especially trusted news, and quality content for children.

24. Members discussed the changing landscape of local news, and the ways in which a decline in PSM provided local news creates a gap that is not yet filled by any alternative.

25. A member asked whether STV News online could fulfil license obligations concerning first-run news. An Ofcom Colleague said this was an expected change in the Media Act.

26. A member raised the challenge of financing news sustainably given it has a social, but not a monetary, value. An Ofcom Colleague confirmed that different funding arrangements would be explored in the PSM Review, with the exception of the BBC, which will remain a question for the UK Government and UK Parliament.

27. A member asked whether PSBs would be advantaged by greater collaboration with each other, and if so, whether Ofcom could play a facilitatory role in bringing PSBs together. Ofcom Colleagues said this would likely be part of the PSM Review, but that there are significant challenges here given the sizes of the respective PSBs, and divergent strategies they each have, specifically with regards to digitisation.

28. A member commented that PSBs could do more to appeal to younger audiences and build the loyalty that older generations feel towards PSBs. In particular, the member suggests the BBC could do more to improve user experience, following approaches from the streamers.

Future Development of the Postal USO – Consultation

29. Ofcom colleagues provided a summary of Ofcom's consultation proposals and the view that they would align the USO with the user needs of postal users. The team highlighted the key changes that are:

- Second class letters to be delivered on alternative weekdays, with no Saturday deliveries;

- A reset of Quality of service targets; and
- Access obligations and additional regulation of new Royal Mail products.

30. A member asked about Royal Mail's use of pilot sites and Ofcom's role in the selection of those sites. The member was keen to stress that the chosen sites in Scotland should not be considered to be representative of Scotland given their focus on Glasgow and densely populated areas. Ofcom colleagues confirmed there was no formal role for Ofcom in the process of selecting the sites.

31. A member then asked about the role of the backstop requirements, with Ofcom colleagues confirming that all targets on Royal Mail will be binding, backed up by the potential of enforcement action.

32. There was a wider discussion around user needs and the lived experience of those who live in rural parts of Scotland where there is often more of a concern around reliability rather than frequency when it comes to deliveries.

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34. Ofcom colleagues also confirmed that the proposals were designed with the future direction of travel for letter volumes in mind.

35. The Chair confirmed that the ACS would be submitting a formal response to the consultation.

Scotland Team's Strategic Priorities for 2025/26

36. A Scotland Team member gave a presentation to the Committee on the Ofcom Scotland team's proposed strategy, outlining its interaction with the proposed Plan of Work 2025/26 and Three-Year plan, and the team's contribution to Ofcom's vision across four strategic pillars.

37. A member asked regarding the team's engagement with the Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum (DRCF) in terms of data and information sharing, and to gain Scottish consumer and citizen insight on strategic priorities such as online scams and fraud. A Scotland team member outlined the engagement with the DRCF and the broader UK regulators in Scotland network. There was agreement that this engagement and wider data opportunities could be reflected more explicitly in the strategy. It was also agreed that a future session with the DRCF could be arranged for the Committee.

38. A member commented that it would be important for the Scotland Team to be alive to broader reputational challenges that will face Ofcom as the Online Safety Act starts to be enforced.

39. A member reflected on the compounding effect of various communications challenges on some communities, and the reflection of this in terms of digital inclusion in the strategy. Another member reflected the influencing role which Ofcom had in this space, although understood that its regulatory responsibilities only stretched so far. A Scotland team member outlined the cross-cutting nature of digital inclusion across Ofcom's regulatory remit and highlighted that this had accordingly been reflected in the strategy.

40. A member said that additional data from Ofcom on the impact on Scottish consumers and communities would be helpful, especially in a single repository. A Scotland team member

highlighted some of the data that was already collected and released through various publications, but further consideration will be given to how this could be consolidated through consultation with Ofcom's Strategy and Research team.

41. A member enquired if it would be possible to have a reference guide for the Committee as to key Government and political figures. The Scotland Director undertook to look into this with colleagues and how this could be placed on Diligent.

42. A member advised that in the broadcasting sector in particular, it will be important to allow time to be reactive to developments as they emerge.

43. A member reflected on the importance of collaboration for Scotland's broadcasting and production sector. They said that given the increased interest in Ofcom's role and responsibilities in this space, it may have the opportunity to convene organisations. A Scotland team member said that this would need to be on areas of common priority, and the Scotland Director added issues such as the Public Service Media review and Future of TV distribution work may provide opportunities in this respect.

Draft ACS Annual Report 2024

44. The members advised that they are happy with the Report which gives a clear and concise overview of the work they have done over the last 12 months, and which also highlights the impact of the responses they have made to Consultations.

45. A member asked if the Report could be sent to Ofcom's Board, Chief Executive and the other Advisory Committee Chairs, and if this could be published on Ofcom's website. The Ofcom Scotland Director advised that the team would liaise with the Governance Team to see if this can be published.

Making Sense of Media

46. An Ofcom Colleague from MSOM presented MSOM's annual plan for 24/25 and how it fits into their 3-year plan. They highlight MSOM is focused on 'Research Evidence and Evaluation', ensuring by 2027 that the evidence base is sufficient. They also highlight the ongoing research work on online misogyny and mis/disinformation in 2025. MSOM will publish their 'Summer statement' on media literacy in Q2/Q3 2025, which will 'join the dots' across Ofcom's work, platforms' work and third-party organisations. They mentioned another priority is people and partnerships – focused on media literacy interventions for people. Funding has been awarded to organisations who are trialling different approaches across the country.

47. A member asked about scope – questioning online platforms leadership on this issue and the contrast between a more localised approach MSOM take to on-the-ground people-focused projects. An Ofcom colleague noted MSOM takes multiple lenses to the issue of media literacy. They do engage with online platforms in different ways, for example, through the mis/disinformation advisory committee. Local intervention is important because of the issue of disenfranchisement, and this could often be an avenue for mis/disinformation to take hold.

48. A member asked who the target audience of MSOM strategy is. It was noted that the goals are focused on engaging the public, whilst online platforms also remain a large part of strategy. An Ofcom colleague also noted the strategy is designed to expand the way MSOM engages through multiple avenues.

49. A member asked about MSOM's engagement with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. An Ofcom colleague highlighted that it was a goal to re-engage with these stakeholders as part of the development of this work. A Scotland team member added that there were already avenues for dialogue, but media literacy had not recently been a topic raised by the Scottish Government.

Communications Consumer Panel/ACOD update

50. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' written paper and the Committee NOTED its content.

51. It was advised that a paper had been submitted to Ofcom's Board for approval to appoint a new Scotland member and it was advised that there were 4 new members in total.

52. It was also advised that one of the CCP meetings had recently taken place at Ofcom's office in Wales. It was hoped future meetings could take place at other national Ofcom offices.

Ofcom Contact Centre Information

53. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' paper with Scotland's data and the Committee NOTED its content. There was a short discussion on the contents of the Report, and it was NOTED that reflections would be made after the Summer.

Any Other Business

54. The Ofcom Scotland Director highlighted that this was the Chair's last meeting. They thanked them for all their advice, support and contribution over the last few years as a member and Chair of the Committee.

Date of the Next Meeting

55. The next scheduled Committee meeting would be on 12 June 2025.