

## Your response

Question	Your response
<p><b>Question 1: Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Work Plan for 2025/26?</b></p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>The FCS welcomes the opportunity to comment on Ofcom's proposed Plan of Work 2025/26.</p> <p>Ofcom has a key part to play to ensure that the UK telecoms market remains competitive, and that both consumer and business customers are adequately protected. The FCS broadly welcomes the Work Plan and agrees that the primary areas of focus remain relevant and appropriate. However, we continue to be concerned that the needs of business customers and business communication providers (CPs), particularly resellers, are not adequately addressed and urge Ofcom to appoint a business lead/champion with responsibility for promoting the UK Government's growth agenda. There also needs to be a more detailed understanding of the business market, particularly the complex supply chain, so that the implications of regulation on the whole market are better understood.</p> <p>It is unfortunate that the workplan has been published before the Government's Statement of Strategic Priorities (SSP) for telecommunications, the management of radio spectrum and postal services has been issued and consulted upon. Clearly, Ofcom needs to have its plan of work in place before the new financial year, however it will be important that there is opportunity to revisit the Plan of Work following the publication of the SSPs as this may impact the strategic direction in some areas.</p> <p>The Work Plan is well structured and clear, however, given the increasing convergence in the communications market it is important that Ofcom's work is not stove-piped and there needs to be safeguards to ensure that there is adequate thinking across work areas. An example is the emergence of satellite technology and artificial intelligence (AI).</p> <p><b>In relation to Priority area 1 – Internet we can rely on -</b> we have the following comments to make:</p> <p>We are pleased that Ofcom recognises the importance of competition. para 2.6 of the consultation gives the outcomes Ofcom is working to achieve, including: <i>Efficient</i></p>

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	<p><i>and sustainable markets where competition delivers choice, value and high quality services.</i></p> <p>The business market plays a vital part in stimulating investment across the UK economy and the importance of small businesses to the UK economy must not be underestimated. FCS members provide innovative solutions to tens of thousands of businesses which drive economic growth throughout the UK and need a competitive and supportive telecoms market in order to flourish.</p> <p>Whilst it is right that Ofcom focuses on outcomes for consumers, the FCS believes that there should also be a focus on outcomes for business customers, and indeed the many smaller CPs and resellers that provide services to them. One of the successes of regulatory intervention over the last two decades has been the proliferation of providers in the small business market which has driven innovation and price competition to the benefit of business and retail customers, and of the wider UK economy.</p> <p>The FCS is, therefore, very disappointed with the lack of proposed focus in the Work Plan in areas that matter to businesses and business providers. <b>The FCS believes that Ofcom should appoint a business lead/champion with responsibility for promoting the UK Government's growth agenda.</b> There also needs to be a more detailed understanding of the business market, particularly the complex supply chain, so that the implications of regulation on the whole market are better understood.</p> <p>Indeed, Ofcom has a duty to have regard to statutory guidance published by the UK Government setting out how regulators in scope of the growth duty can better support sustainable economic growth through the decisions they take and through the way they regulate. It is difficult to see how this duty is discharged without a business champion and without a specific focus in the Ofcom Plan or Work as to how growth is being fostered.</p> <p>Given the way the Telecommunications market is currently regulated, the work on the market reviews Telecoms Access Review (TAR), Wholesale Voice Market Review (WVMR) and Wholesale A2P SMS Termination Review are welcome and required. However, the FCS believes that further work is needed to address growing convergence in the industry. For example, the FCS believes that access to mobile networks on an 'equality of</p>

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	<p>access' basis, needs to be established. Ofcom should also consider looking at IP infrastructure, rather than the traditional silos that the current regulatory regime addresses. Regulation is needed to address both the physical infrastructure providers and the application providers, and the FCS believes that urgent work is needed to understand and address the new market realities that are shaping the industry.</p> <p>Additionally, the FCS is concerned that the current Work Plan ignores the very important 'reseller' market and would very much like to discuss member concerns in this area with Ofcom. There has been a much needed strengthening of consumer protection but most of the regulation has been focused at the retail level, with a lack of corresponding obligation at the wholesale level. This in turn has implications for resellers, who, unlike vertically integrated providers, are fully exposed to the additional costs of regulatory changes.</p> <p>There are several specific issues we believe should be included in the Ofcom Work Plan to ensure that there is sufficient regulatory and industry focus. Whilst these are business focused, there is significant cross-over between the residential and small business market and they can also have detrimental knock-on effects to their consumer customers.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Business switching is an important area to encourage growth. The removal of Cancel Other and NOT+ as a result of consumer switching needs to be understood and mitigated and there needs to be focus in the work plan on some of the underlying enablers to help competition flourish. Specifically, improvements to the Number Porting process for business customers need to be addressed urgently, as without changes in this area, effective Business Switching will be difficult to achieve.</li> <li>2. Linked to Business Switching is the difficulty of switching wholesale provider and this is causing issues throughout the complex supply chain. These issues can disadvantage both business and consumer customers, as retail providers can be limited in both their commercial and product offerings.</li> </ol>

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	<p>3. The FCS was also disappointed to see no mention of the Common Telephone Numbering Database (CDB) in the Work Plan. NICC has already specified a CDB definition, but further work is required before implementation. The NICC Task Group is currently looking to develop an agreed UK process to ensure the data held by CPs is consistent. Inclusion of the CDB in the Ofcom Work Plan would provide the area with much needed focus and attention.</p> <p>4. Battery Back-Up is another pan-industry issue which would benefit from specific focus in the Work Plan. Network resilience is a key issue and is included in the Work Plan, and the FCS would like to see specific focus on battery and power back-up. The FCS believes that there should be standardisation across the industry and that infrastructure providers are best placed to deliver solutions efficiently. Requirements at the infrastructure level would help competition, reduce barriers to entry and help to reduce e-waste, leading to a more sustainable industry solution.</p> <p>Finally, Ofcom states that it will be horizon scanning and the FCS believes that Ofcom needs to consider how best to regulate in a fully IP environment.</p> <p><b>In relation to priority area 4 – Enabling wireless services in the wider economy</b></p> <p>The FCS supports Ofcom’s proposals. In particular, the FCS strongly supports a Sharing Policy, as alluded to in 2.31, as it may permit the introduction of narrow band, highly protected operational radio communications systems. The FCS therefore welcomes this aspect of the Work Plan.</p>

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