

Your response

Question	Your response
Question 1: Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Work Plan for 2025/26?	Confidential? – N

Please complete this form in full and return to planofwork@ofcom.org.uk

I wish to make the following points related to Ofcom's Plan of Work 2025-2026.

The Highlands and Islands region I represent is perhaps the most challenged in communications due to its mountainous terrain, its separation of settlements, its dispersed and low population.

Many of the communities and households I represent are **significantly disadvantaged socially and economically because of the lack of communications infrastructure across principally, fibre optic and mobile phone coverage**. This arises because of inadequate investment by providers into services, even when there is government help available to support investment. Increasingly, households and businesses are needing to opt for satellite connections to be able to enhance mobile coverage through wifi-calling and to receive any form of reliable broadband connection with any workable bandwidth for basic modern applications. **Constituents being forced to opt for satellite are significantly disadvantaged economically, often paying up to three times the average monthly cost of a fixed of 4G/5G broadband connection as well as having to pay significant up-front costs for installation running to several hundred pounds.**

Ofcom needs to prioritise not only accurate data collection on acceptable broadband and mobile coverage, but to take firmer regulatory action with providers who appear to spend minimally on maintaining infrastructure or on new investment, supported by tougher regulatory standards.

Ofcom should have a zero-tolerance policy toward inadequate meeting of standards. Further, a policy framework which defines acceptable as reaching a fixed proportion of the population disadvantages regions like the Highlands and Islands where a disproportionately large proportion of the residual population beyond the acceptable standard reside. **Ofcom needs to develop finer grained measures that examine both the continuous failures in service to the most disadvantaged areas, and the rate of improvement in service in those areas.**

The impact of communication failures can bring significant economic disadvantage to households and businesses. For example, though itself not an Ofcom responsibility, the communications technology for the connection of smart meters is. At present many consumers and businesses in this region, even if they can get a smart meter, cannot connect to the WAN long-range radio system. This problem often sits alongside, no, intermittent, or poor mobile coverage. This renders potential solutions to the broadcast frequency problem through the use of 4G unworkable too. It would only be by satellite broadband connection in such circumstances that could provide an answer, but this is currently not allowed. **Ofcom should prioritise the communications challenges around smart meter connections by working closely with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to secure the use of satellite and 4G alternatives to the connecting to the necessary broadcast frequency.** Such action would bring the communication regulators support to assist meet other national priorities for net zero.

In addition, there are still significant numbers of settlements, some quite close to major urban conurbations that still cannot get fixed fibre connections and with no apparent means to get such. **Ofcom needs to provide for an active and better reporting system to positively encourage reporting of such issues. This could be done by a specific campaign inviting denied consumers to alert Ofcom to the issues they face and to get a better feel for the scale of the challenge.**

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