

Your response

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

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Ofcom 2025/26 Plan of work

UK Community Radio Network (UKCRN) Response

Public - Non-Confidential

The UK Community Radio Network is the national sector body that works to represent, support, and help develop Ofcom licenced Community Radio across the UK.

We would like to thank Ofcom for their continued support of the Community Radio Sector, their work dealing day to day with Community Radio stations fielding their questions and supporting where they can, supporting licence renewals, coverage improvements, and the processing of SSDAB and C-DSP applications.

Also your work in the past year consulting on the future development of Key Commitments and on holding licences to account on behalf of their communities, we realise there is a large body of work to now review and update every station Key Commitments in line with new policies and also to re-issue licences following the implementation of impending Community Radio Order, we hope this is a speedy and straightforward process with stations, and we look forward to supporting stations, and Ofcom in that work.

We would also like to thank Ofcom for their continued working relationship with us as a stakeholder organisation, our regular meetings, and being an organisation that you signpost stations to those who require additional advice and support.

We support Ofcom plan in relation to Voice Assistants and look forward to working with the Ofcom, the sector and other stakeholders on the rollout of the list and what this element of the legislation and its rollout means for Community Radio stations.

For the Ofcom annual plan 2025/26 we would like to push for more work and activity in the following areas that we believe will greater support, and help the development and sustainability of Community Radio.

Small Scale DAB: We continue to support the rollout of SSDAB, and look forward to the completion of Rounds 6, 7, and 8, We believe that while interest and takeup are slowing it still has the benefit of serving a lot of areas and communities across the country. We believe that Ofcom should be able to complete sound 8 before the end of 2025, freeing up some capacity for other work across broadcast radio, we also believe that there should be a period of reflection on SSDAB and enable the last few

rounds to launch prior to any comprehensive work on the further development of SSDAB. The development and rollout of SSDAB has taken a long time, and we believe other areas should take priority next which would better serve Community Radio.

Next steps for Analogue Community Radio: We wish to continue to lobby for the future development and licencing of Analogue Community Radio. At the start of 2025, we conducted a short survey with the sector to engage with individuals, stations, and organisations who are looking to launch a Community Radio station on AM or FM. (As reported in RadioToday <https://radiotoday.co.uk/2025/01/ukcrn-to-push-for-more-am-and-fm-frequencies-for-community-radio-services/>)

We had 30 responses which would show a good level of demand that Ofcom should consider in its remit to make the best use of the spectrum especially to serve communities who are underserved by other broadcasters. Especially if a more formal expression of interest process was conducted by Ofcom to fully gauge the interest for communities to be served by analogue licences.

72% are already broadcasting online or via existing SSDAB multiplexes, with 80% already established as a not-for-profit with a healthy level of volunteers already in place to deliver a good level of local programming, with 90% already having a reasonable amount of funding secure or confidence to secure funding enough to launch on analogue radio.

The responses for those who are already on SSDAB as to why they would still want an analogue licence varied but included;

- The cost of SSDAB, either being unsustainable or unstainable at a level required if the only means of broadcast as opposed to lower quality if part of dual broadcast alongside analogue.
- Coverage of SSDAB, both on how wide actual receivable coverage is opposed to that which could be achieved via analogue radio, and also penetration into houses and businesses opposed to analogue radio.
- Accessibility across a variety of factors and demographics, from age factors (eg older generation finding analogue simpler) to affordability and engagement with low-income / deprived communities.

There were also a few responses that highlighted that their area is currently underserved by SSDAB and in some cases may never be served by SSDAB.

The majority of those who engaged with the survey report that there is no existing Community Radio station for the area they wish to cover, or in some instances, there is an existing station but is licenced to serve another community of interest, or there was a station but has closed down or ceased broadcasting in the past few years.

From the thoughts of those who engaged with the survey, and from discussions with the wider sector we believe that there is still a sustainable audience and longevity of viability for analogue Community Radio, for existing stations, and to support the launch of new analogue services.

We believe further and more detailed research needs to be conducted into listening habits and preferences for community radio audiences, and believe the current data for the industry (delivered by Rajar) does not fully measure the true picture of radio consumption behaviours. Especially for local radio audiences, without being too critical of Rajar which was designed to measure and serve much larger audiences on a macro basis, we believe that due to it not fully measuring Ofcom licenced Community Radio (only 1 station is officially part of Rajar) and due to the high number of DAB/Digital only services we believe this could be understating the true measurement of analogue audiences, especially in consideration with what limited other research or anecdotal evidence of support for analogue there is.

As such we strongly believe that in this proposed period for this plan of work, Ofcom should undertake some limited and specific work on the licencing of new analogue Community Radio Services, especially if SSDAB round 8 is concluded prior to the end of this period. The activity could include but is not limited to:

- Limited licence rounds for areas in which an existing analogue licence has been surrendered or revoked in the past five years.
- Limited licence rounds for areas in which an existing or current analogue Community Radio licence is not currently broadcasting (and without a viable plan to re-establish broadcasting) or in significant breach of their licence and as such not serving their community.
- An expression of interest/consultation on the demand and support for further analogue Community Radio services, especially giving the opportunity to ask for evidence for underserved communities or for communities that want such a service.
- A published plan and timescale on general approach and rollout of widespread licencing to start in the 2026/27 period.

