

Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London
SE1 9HA

Consultation Response

Which? response to the Ofcom consultation on Ofcom's Plan of Work 2025/26
Submission date: 29/01/2025

Summary

Which? welcomes this opportunity to respond to this consultation on Ofcom's Plan of Work 2025/26. We broadly agree with the areas Ofcom has identified in the plan. This submission focuses on areas where we would like to see greater emphasis or clarity from Ofcom. Issues include internet coverage, pricing and affordability, customer service ADR, digital inclusion and tackling online fraud.

Full response

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Ofcom Plan of Work 2025/26. Our response primarily relates to the priority area of 'internet and post we can rely on' but we also refer to the 'we live a safer life online' priority area.

We broadly agree with the outcomes that Ofcom is seeking to achieve in relation to internet connectivity, these include:

- Availability of high-quality networks and services where they are needed.
- Reliable and secure networks that people can depend on.
- Efficient and sustainable markets where competition delivers choice, value and high quality services.
- Consumers are treated fairly at every stage of the customer journey, regardless of their circumstances.

We agree that these are appropriate outcomes. However, we would like to see greater clarity on how the identified activities will be sufficient for achieving these outcomes. In particular, we are uncertain how Ofcom will ensure that customers are treated fairly throughout the customer journey when work to monitor progress on the fairness commitments appears to have slowed. The most recent progress report to assess how well providers were meeting

the commitments was published in 2021¹. Alongside the fairness commitments, Ofcom has sought voluntary commitments from communication providers on issues such as broadband social tariffs, the broadband speeds code of practice and the automatic compensation scheme. In the context of the workplan, we would welcome details from Ofcom on how it plans to monitor these initiatives going forward.

We also welcome the work Ofcom is undertaking in relation to the transition of legacy networks including the transition to IP based digital landlines and the decommissioning of 2G and 3G mobile networks. We would welcome further details on how Ofcom is monitoring communication providers and ensuring that providers have robust processes for customer complaints during the landline migration process.

We also take an interest in the work of Ofcom to establish a new regulatory framework for investment in fixed-line broadband through the Telecoms Access Review 2026-2031. We hope that Ofcom prioritises fostering effective competition and expanding consumer choice as key objectives of this review.

Internet Coverage

Ensuring access to high quality coverage options across both mobile and fixed networks is essential for consumers. We welcome initiatives for Ofcom to improve the accuracy of mobile coverage information which is essential for consumers to accurately compare deals and make informed choices. We hope that Ofcom continues to improve the methodology used to predict mobile coverage, so consumers can be confident in the credibility and reliability of the Ofcom mobile coverage tool.

We note from the Connected Nations Report that a high number of resilience issues have been identified with UK networks². In that report, Ofcom states that outages above the reporting threshold impacted 24m customers and resulted in approximately 235m customer hours of lost service³. Research from Uswitch also finds that outages in the last twelve months have hit record levels⁴. We welcome the updated guidance Ofcom published on network resilience but would welcome further detail on the steps the regulator is taking to ensure that network outages incidents are minimised as far as possible.

The same report also highlights that take up of broadband at speeds of at least 30 Mbit/s had passed 75%. This suggests that the threshold for the Government to instruct Ofcom to review the broadband Universal Service Obligation has been met. Although the workplan references a review of the Postal USO, it does not mention a review of the broadband USO. We encourage Ofcom and DSIT to outline its proposals and timelines for this review.

¹ Ofcom (2021) [Fairness for customers commitments: progress review](#)

² Ofcom (2024) [Connected Nations](#)

³ Ofcom (2024) [Connected Nations](#)

⁴ U switch (2024) [Down and Out\(age\): Internet outages rise 73% in a year and cost to the economy hits £1.6bn](#)

Pricing and affordability

We welcomed the decision by Ofcom to ban inflation linked mid-contract price rises. Which? strongly advocated for the introduction of new rules requiring providers to set out the value of in-contract price increases in pounds and pence.

Although we welcome these changes it is disappointing that in some instances providers have used them as an opportunity to impose even steeper price rises on customers. We are also concerned if price rises disproportionately impact customers on cheaper tariffs relative to more expensive packages. This is especially salient as customers on the lowest incomes will spend nearly four times more of their disposable income on fixed broadband compared to an average household⁵.

Which? analysis of broadband packages found that an equal absolute increase across tariffs resulted in notable variation in the relative level of price rises. Vodafone, for example, has among the highest relative increases when comparing the cheapest tariff⁶ (£22) and the most expensive (£65). An increase of £3 to the core subscription price represents a 13.6% increase for the cheapest package but a 4.6% increase for the most expensive package. We also see the same trend across mobile. A £1.80 increase with O2 on a 24 month, sim-only, 3GB Classic tariff (£15) represents a 12% increase whereas the same price rise applied to the Unlimited data, Ultimate tariff (£44.49) represents a smaller 4% increase⁷. Ofcom should continue to monitor pricing practices and be prepared to act if there is persistent evidence that the impact of these new rules have a disproportionate effect on consumers on cheaper tariffs. We note that price rises applied in this way appear to be in tension with Ofcom's fairness for customers commitments.

We also note that in the broadband market, several providers coalesced around the same level of price increase, despite their different price points within the market. Vodafone, Plusnet and Talk Talk customers will all see £3 increases to their monthly bills—the same level as market leader BT. The similarity in price rises across competing providers raises questions about the effectiveness of competition in the market. We would welcome clarity from Ofcom on how it views this practice considering the outcome to deliver 'efficient and sustainable markets where competition delivers choice, value and high quality services.'⁸

Additionally, we are also concerned where some legacy bundled contracts remain under the old price rise structure and consumers continue to experience price increases on a handset tied to an inflation-linked index. Although these consumers may be able to switch to a new contract, consumers in vulnerable circumstances may be less likely to engage with the

⁵ Ofcom (2024) [Affordability of communications services](#)

⁶ Not including social tariffs

⁷ Prices accessed via provider websites on Jan 10th 2025

⁸ Ofcom (2025) '[Consultation Plan of Work](#)'

market and access a better deal. Again, we would appreciate clarity from Ofcom on whether this is an issue being monitored and whether the regulator is considering action in this area.

Customer Service

The recent CMA Consumer Detriment Survey found that 24% of consumers experienced consumer detriment in relation to internet provision. This reflects a high amount of detriment relative to other market sectors surveyed⁹ and accords with our own research that found broadband is among the worst performing sectors for customer service.¹⁰

Ofcom plays an important transparency role by publishing data on customer complaints and publishing an annual 'comparing customer service report'. However, we believe that Ofcom could play a more active role in improving customer service standards across broadband and mobile markets. In the energy and financial services sectors, the FCA and Ofgem have focussed on securing better outcomes for consumers through the Consumer Duty and the Consumer Confidence Programme. Although it is too early to say whether these approaches are delivering better customer service outcomes, Ofcom should consider the experience of other sector regulators to improve customer service standards. This experience may suggest relevant ways in which Ofcom could raise customer service standards within broadband and mobile markets.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in telecoms

We welcome that Ofcom has launched a formal consultation of [ADR in the telecoms sector](#)¹¹. We support the proposals to reduce the time consumers wait before accessing ADR and strengthening key performance indicators. Ofcom has also indicated that it will continue to approve both the Communications Ombudsman and CISAS schemes. We understand that both schemes have met the criteria necessary to be approved by Ofcom as ADR providers. We are of the view that a single mandatory ombudsman service is preferable for consumers, especially within key economic sectors. We note that maintaining two ADR providers does enable choice for providers, but it does not create choice for the consumer.

Digital inclusion

The Minister for Telecoms and Data Protection has indicated that digital inclusion is a key priority and DSIT is undertaking extensive work in this area¹². The importance of action was highlighted in the recent Blueprint for Modern Digital Government. However, digital inclusion is not featured explicitly within Ofcom's workplan. Ofcom plays an important role in tracking the affordability of communications services, advocating for providers to do more to raise

⁹ CMA (2024) Consumer Detriment Survey

¹⁰ Which? (2024) '[Broadband: Where is customer service going wrong?](#)'

¹¹ Ofcom (2025) [Consultation: Review of ADR in the telecoms sector](#)

¹² Which? (2024) [Evidence Submission on Digital Inclusion](#).

awareness in relation to social tariffs and undertaking research on digital inclusion. Given that digital inclusion is a priority for DSIT, and is likely to feature in the SSP, it would be welcome to understand whether Ofcom plans to undertake any additional activity in this area.

Tackling Fraud

We support the activity that Ofcom has outlined with respect to the ‘We live a safer life online’ priority area. We recognise that gaining parliamentary approval for the Illegal Content Code of Practice and the Protection of Children Codes of Practice are important implementation milestones.

However, it is disappointing that the workplan doesn’t reference how Ofcom plans to use the Online Safety Act to tackle online fraud. Considering that the draft Statement of Strategic Priorities for Online Safety included an ambition for a ‘material reduction in online fraud within in scope services’¹³ Ofcom should outline how it intends to deliver on this ambition. This should include strengthening existing fraud measures within the Illegal Harms Code of Practice and the wider Online Safety Act and accelerating the timetable for the implementation of the Fraudulent Advertising Code of Practice to ensure that tangible progress is made as a priority.

About Which?

Which? is the UK’s consumer champion, here to make life simpler, fairer and safer for everyone. Our research gets to the heart of consumer issues, our advice is impartial, and our rigorous product tests lead to expert recommendations. We’re the independent consumer voice that works with politicians and lawmakers, investigates, holds businesses to account and makes change happen. As an organisation we’re not for profit and all for making consumers more powerful.



January 2025

¹³ DSIT (2024) [‘Draft Statement of Strategic Priorities for online safety.’](#)