

FUTURE ROLE OF A TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE (based on the Radio Research Advisory Committee -RRAC)
[Title TBD]

Preface

(Whatever the name of a 'potential technology advisory committee' (e.g. Advisory Committee on Electronic Communications (ACEC), here after in this document it will be referred to as the "committee".)

Issue

Consideration needs to be given to the future role of a technical advisory committee under Ofcom.

Recommendation

2 That the Ofcom Management Board endorse the proposed role and way forward outlined below.

Summarised as follows:

That a committee be set up (based on RRAC) to act in an advisory role on technology issues and report to Ofcom. (This would include the widening of its scope to cover all electronic communications.)

Timing

3 Routine. However it should be noted that Peter Kiddle OBE (Chairman of RRAC) and external members have contracts (with RA) until December 03. The role of this committee will need to be confirmed before the process for appointing committee members can be initiated [and should be agreed by October 2003].

Background

4 The RRAC is an advisory committee established in response to recommendations made in RA's 2000 Research Review (and it replaced the National Radio Propagation Committee (NRPC)). It has an independent chairman, Peter Kiddle OBE, and its members serve on the committee as experts in their own right; they do not represent specific affiliations. RA fields two Directors as members (Mike Goddard and Barry Maxwell) to reflect RA policy and Government interests and provides secretariat support from its Engineering Research Unit (ERU) staff. There are also "Corresponding Members", a potentially wider group of interested parties (industry and academics) who are encouraged to input comments reflecting their own specific interests. Summaries of RRAC terms of reference are at Annex A.

PRELIMINARY DRAFT- IN CONFIDENCE

5 Peter Kiddle has chaired the advisory committee since 2000 and reports to RA's Chief Executive. There are 9 Members and 2 RA Directors. The RRAC meets four times a year, including visits to other research establishments to raise awareness of other radio-research projects. The RRAC published a report in 2001 with a research strategy and produces an annual review of progress. In addition an annual Open Forum is held (in November) to provide an opportunity for wider participation.

6 The RRAC chairman is paid a retainer fee of £5,000 p.a. and members have been paid a stipend of £500 per meeting and they can claim travel expenses. Members serve for a period of two years and currently have been offered extensions until December 2003.

Needs (benefits and constraints)

- 7 The benefits of an advisory committee to Ofcom:
- Independent (top-level) view and continuity of strategic advice (This may be a national forum for discussing and advising on technology and research)
 - Ability to keep abreast of technology trends and market situation
 - Independent assessment and evaluation of research
 - Flexible and responsive in terms of scope and advice in new technology & electronic communications areas (and inexpensive!)
 - Networking with industry/research community
 - 'Portal' for exchange of information and ideas and 'constructive criticism'
- 8 The penalties of not having independent advisory role include:
- Lack of independent assessment/advice (collective wisdom?!)
 - Reduced expertise and poor links to industry/academia
 - No mechanisms to "drive change" or react to market factors,
 - Less accountability

Proposals for a committee

9 Given that RRAC do not currently advise Ministers, the simplest option is for such a committee to report to Ofcom in much the same way as RRAC currently reports to the Agency. However, unlike the Spectrum Management Advisory Group (SMAG), there is an opportunity for the terms of reference for RRAC to be expanded to include the research requirements of the other regulators (ITC, Ofcom, Radio Authority) that form Ofcom.

10 The current radio-related technology requirements are managed within the Radiocommunications Agency, Engineering and Research Unit (RA3/ERU) and this links to other executives in the Agency (e.g. RA1 & RA2).

PRELIMINARY DRAFT- IN CONFIDENCE

It is worthwhile noting that the Independent Television Commission (ITC) has a comparable technology unit, and has already been represented on the RRAC. Oftel have indicated a 'nil return' in an Ofcom partner survey on research activity. However, in the future Oftel may have some interest in the wider research-related (networks and systems) activities. It is also assumed that the Radio Authority may have a similar indirect interest. The Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) has only audience and market research interests.

11 It is proposed to scope the committee to advise on top-level strategic aspects of **technology** relating to electronic communications.

How would this fit into the Ofcom Structure ?

12 A technical advisory committee would probably fit under the 'Research and Strategy' turret (operational area) and the secretariat would probably also fit under this area. It will be important to ensure that there is suitable Ofcom representation on such a committee (e.g. covering Research and Strategy, Regulatory Policy, and Scarce Resources). Ofcom will need to consider the membership of the advisory committee. It would be sensible to review the existing memberships prior to the establishment of Ofcom and to review the terms and conditions of members.

The Way Ahead

13 The following is a preliminary timetable for the required processes:

ACTIVITY	TIMING
Management Board Approval	Q4 2002/03
Submission to Ofcom Chairman and Board	Q1 2003/04
Confirmation of roles to RRAC	Q1 2003/04
RA to consult other regulators re: enhanced terms of reference for RRAC	Q1 2003/04
Process for re-appointing RRAC Chairman initiated	Q1 2003/04
New RRAC Chairman approved	Q2 2003/04
Terms of Reference and Conditions of members to be reviewed	Q2 2003/04
Membership of RRAC reviewed	Q3 2003/04
Re-appointment of members	Q3 2003/04
Start of new organisations	Q3 2003/04

PRELIMINARY DRAFT- IN CONFIDENCE

Consultation

13 [The chairman of RRAC has had informal discussions with the chairman of Ofcom. This option is fully supported by RRAC committee and RA management board?]

Radio Research Advisory Committee (RRAC)

Terms of Reference

The Radio Research Advisory Committee (RRAC) provides a National forum for the Radiocommunications Agency to formulate its research strategy and provide advice on technical research related issues. It has an independent chairman, two RA directors and committee members serve as experts in their own right. The RRAC provides top-level advice on a research strategy including technical research aspects of the radio research programme, Spectrum Efficiency Scheme (SES), and related policy issues to the RA. In particular RRAC advises on:

- i. the formulation of Agency policy in relation to the (technical) research programme which is in support of UK spectrum strategy, and
- ii. the strategic mix of research topics and policy objectives to be pursued for the UK (and links to relevant international fora), and
- iii. the Spectrum Efficiency Scheme (SES) research element

(Notes: Members currently are requested to serve for a period of two years. In December 2002, all current members were offered a one year extension to serve until December 2003.)