

## Content Sampling

Ofcom is required to protect the interests of radio listeners, as both citizens and consumers. One way in which we do this is to include within each licence certain conditions. These ensure that the essential character of the service remains true to what was originally proposed at the time of licence application.

Each commercial radio station has as part of its licence a 'Format', which outlines what the essential ethos of the service should be (the type of output, and/or the audience at which it is aimed), and details any specific expectations of that service (such as how much of the output should be produced and presented from within the area being served; what specific type(s) of music should be played; how much speech should be broadcast).

Each community radio licensee agrees with Ofcom a set of 'key commitments' which include (as set out in the community radio legislation) certain social gain (community benefit) objectives. Community radio content sampling reports give an account of the delivery of a station's on-air objectives.

Since the needs of the audience will vary from one locality to another, each Format or set of key commitments is different. The conditions, commercial or otherwise in which different stations operate can also vary greatly, and this too may be reflected in the Format or objectives.

Ofcom considers whether an individual station is meeting its Format requirements by listening to that station's output – a process which we refer to as 'content sampling'. The sampling of a particular station may be prompted by a complaint concerning a broadcast-related issue, or may be entirely routine (a 'spot check').

In the event that the sampling reveals a problem, Ofcom will take whatever course of action is most appropriate. In some circumstances, a brief dialogue with the station may be all that is required. **In other cases a more formal approach might be appropriate.** If problems are not rectified swiftly, or are sufficiently serious in their own right, Ofcom will then make the decision as to what (if any) further action should be taken against the station. This may involve a fine or other sanctions.