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Dear Peter

REVIEW OF MUSIC FORMATS FOR LOCAL COMMERCIAL RADIO

I am writing to you in response to the current Ofcom review of music formats for local commercial radio stations. As a member of RadioCentre, the industry body for commercial radio, I can confirm that I have seen a copy of its submission to this consultation and support the approach that it outlines.

In recent years changes in technology and consumer behaviour have transformed the range and choice of music available to listeners. These changes, alongside the fact that music genres have become increasingly difficult to categorise, make it difficult to justify the current regime of music formats for local commercial radio.

While I appreciate that Ofcom has certain statutory duties relating to the character of service of radio stations, it is also recognised that there is significant flexibility in how it implements these requirements. This was acknowledged by the Minister Ed Vaizey MP in December 2013 when he announced that there would be a review to see if the format rules '*can be relaxed to give industry greater freedom to adapt to changing consumer tastes*'.

This announcement was broadly welcomed by the industry with the overwhelming view of commercial radio operators being that these rules should be simplified to enable radio stations to be as free as possible to choose the music they play.

Ofcom identifies three possible approaches to the regulation of music formats based on its interpretation of the legislation.

- Option 1 – no change to the current format regime for local commercial radio.
- Option 2 – simplifying some existing formats into 'mainstream popular music'.
- Option 3 – high-level formats defined by specialist music genre or audience profile.



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The way in which these options are currently framed means it is unlikely that they will provide the necessary freedom to allow radio stations to adapt to changing consumer tastes in a digital age (the original intent of the review). Instead they simply offer the prospect of relatively modest adjustments to the current regime.

However if Ofcom was to consider a variation of Option 2, so that there was a broader definition of 'mainstream popular music' and shorter specialist formats, it may be that this could provide a helpful way forward. Further details of this approach are outlined in RadioCentre's submission, but in effect it would mean that local commercial radio stations would have three options:

- Option A – Move to a mainstream popular music/ broad music definition
- Option B – Provide a simplified specialist music genre
- Option C – Make no change

In the long term it may be that the legislation governing this area still requires further amendment to reflect market changes and differences in consumer behaviour. However, in the meantime this approach could offer a greater degree of flexibility for stations to innovate and grow their business, while complying with the current statutory requirements on the range and diversity of music output on local commercial radio.

I hope that you find these observations helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dee Ford".

Dee Ford

**Group Managing Director, Radio**

**WE THINK  
POPULAR.**