

Reference: 02176860

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

8 April 2026

Dear,

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning News channels and monitoring.

We received this request on 21 March 2026 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

Your request & our response

1. What are the Office of Communications legal duties and obligations in monitoring 'news channels'?

Ofcom is required under the Communications Act 2003 (as amended) ("the Act") and the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as amended) ("the 1996 Act") to draw up a code for television and radio, covering standards in programmes amongst other things. This Code is known as the Ofcom Broadcasting Code ("the Code").

It is based on current law that relates to broadcasting, for example, [section 319\(2\) of the Communications Act 2003](#) which requires Ofcom to set standards for the content of programmes best calculated to secure standards objectives, including:

- that news included in television and radio services is presented with due impartiality and that the impartiality requirements of section 320 are complied with; and,
- that news included in television and radio services is reported with due accuracy.

There is no legal obligation for Ofcom to proactively monitor news channels, or indeed any of its licensed broadcast services. Instead, we enforce broadcast standards through the complaints we receive, and in line with our published [complaints procedures](#), we review every complaint we receive to consider whether it raises potentially substantive issues under the Code which warrant investigation by Ofcom.

2. What is the legal definition of a 'news channel'?

'News channel' is not defined in legislation. In relation to Ofcom's regulation in relation to broadcast content and standards, Ofcom's approach to determining whether content constitutes 'news' or 'current affairs' is set out in our [decisions regarding five programmes broadcast on GB News, which were published on 18 March 2024](#).

As stated therein, given the fundamental importance of maintaining audience trust in broadcast news, and in view of the fact that programme genres and editorial techniques can change

significantly over time, no definition of “news” is included in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code. It is also important to note that Parliament did not define “news” in the Communications Act 2003, and it was clear that it was intended to be wide ranging and to apply to “news in whatever form” (section 319(8)). Therefore, Ofcom takes the approach of considering whether or not a programme, or a section of a programme, is news or current affairs (or both) depending on a number of factors, including its content and format. Factors that could lead us to classify content as news might include:

- a newsreader presenting directly to the audience;
- a running order or list of stories, often in short form;
- the use of reporters or correspondents to deliver packages or live reports; and/or
- a mix of video and reporter items.

Factors that could lead us to classify content as current affairs might include:

- a more long-form programme;
- the presence of extensive discussion, analysis or interviews with guests, often live; and
- long-form video reports.

Ofcom considers that a programme can be both a news and current affairs programme. In other words, a programme can contain a mix of both types of content. This approach reflects the modern media environment in which there are a range of rolling news channels and programme formats.

3. Which 'news channels' do you monitor?

Ofcom does not monitor news channels. From time to time we carry out specific monitoring of services selected, but we do not have a schedule for doing this work. All broadcasters are required to abide by the [conditions of their licence](#), which includes ensuring content complies with the Ofcom Broadcasting Code. Although Ofcom may launch investigations on its own initiative, the main tool we use to regulate broadcast content is through audience complaints we receive.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).