

# Note of the Ofcom Board held on 5 February 2025

Members were welcomed to the 321st meeting of the Ofcom Board. In addition to Board members, Martin Ballantyne (General Counsel), Veronica Branton (Corporation Secretary), Francesca Carter (Head of Governance), Jamie Mordue (Governance Manager) and Sharon Malley (Governance Manager) attended throughout.

## Declaration of members' interests

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1. No new interests were declared.

## Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024

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2. The minutes of the Ofcom Board meeting held on 11 December 2024 were approved as a correct record.

## Chair's report

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3. The Chair updated the Board on his activity, including meetings with counterparts at ITV and UKGI and progress on the appointment of the Chair of Channel 4.
4. The Board noted the report.

## Chief Executive's report

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5. The Chief Executive updated the Board on her activity, including Ofcom's letter to the Government on economic growth, the launch of the Illegal Harms Code and her visit to a Royal Mail delivery office. She noted that Ofcom had just welcomed employees from the Payment Services Authority as Ofcom took on these regulatory duties.
6. The Board discussed the Chief Executive's report, including Ofcom's current litigation, the ASA proposal to include 'brand advertising' in the scope of restrictions for advertising less healthy foods and the Government's response to the AI Opportunities Action Plan.
7. The Board noted the paper.

## Regulation and economic growth

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8. The Board discussed Ofcom's letter to Government on regulation and economic growth and noted the Government's plan to publish a "regulatory action plan" in March. The Board discussed the engagement with Government and officials to date and future opportunities to consider sustainability and growth. Ofcom's history of deregulation and adapting regulation to respond to tech and market developments was noted.
9. The Board noted the paper.

## Draft guidance on women and girls' online safety

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10. The Board discussed a paper on draft guidance on women and girls' online safety. The draft guidance provided good practice examples of where platforms could provide additional safeguards. It had been developed following close working with stakeholders and would be subject to consultation.
11. The Board discussed the consultation programme for the draft guidance and noted the importance of involving men's organisations as well as women's. There would be specific engagement in Scotland where the law differed from the rest of the UK. The language in the draft guidance should distinguish clearly between statutory obligations and guidance. Ofcom's report on how the guidance was being used should help consumers and advertisers understand different platforms' approaches to women and girls' safety online.
12. The Board noted the paper.

## Spectrum update (October 2024 to February 2025) and proposals for making use of the Upper 6 GHz band available

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13. The Board discussed a paper on work to enable greater use of wireless broadband. The Board noted the growth in space and satellite services.
14. The Board discussed the consultation on the future of the Upper 6 GHz band and noted the split between countries making the band available for Wi-fi and those supporting its use for mobile. The different approaches were discussed and Ofcom's view noted. The Board noted the geography of Scotland was different to the rest of the UK and it would be important to ensure Ofcom's position led to the best solution for the whole of the UK.
15. The Board noted the paper.

## Reflections of the new Network and Comms Group Director

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16. Natalie Black gave the Board her reflections on joining Ofcom as the new Group Director for Networks and Communications. She said she had found Ofcom's culture to be collaborative and welcoming of debate. The geopolitical changes that would face the regulated industries would be a new challenge for the team. Ofcom's credibility came from its expertise and it would be important to maintain this going forwards. The team needed to be prepared for disruption in the industry, including consolidation, cyber incidents and natural disasters that could affect resilience. Other areas for future focus included the future of connectivity, telecoms security work and reviewing the research and data collected by Ofcom to inform its market regulation activity.
17. The Board discussed the report and noted the financial challenges in the comms markets, with little money currently available for investment. Ofcom's role would be to drive performance through the approach to transparency and relations with investors, encouraging innovation and

bringing stakeholders together to reach solutions. Other challenges, such as potential deterioration of service levels and the difficulty of attracting talent, were discussed.

18. The Board noted the update.

## Mobile merger update

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19. The Board discussed a paper on the merger between Vodafone and Three. It was noted that, assuming the deal completed as expected, Ofcom would be involved in monitoring and enforcing the core Network Commitment on an ongoing basis.

20. The Board discussed the panel process and the implications of the decision for consumers and noted that it would be helpful to create a timeline that showed the benefits that consumers would see over the course of the next eight years.

21. The Board noted the paper.

## CCP/ACOD appointment

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22. The Board approved a recommendation being made to the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology for the appointment of a member of the Communications Consumer Panel/Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People.

## Standing items

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23. The Board noted the following standing items:

- Non-executive member updates
- Quarterly performance report
- Board work programme and publications schedule
- Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel of 14 November 2024, Communications Consumer Panel of 12 December 2024, Content Board of 19 November 2024, Advisory Committee for Scotland of 27 November 2024, Advisory Committee for England of 28 November 2024, Risk & Audit Committee of 04 December 2024 and Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland of 05 December 2024.

## Any other business

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24. The Board noted that a decision on the ownership of the Telegraph was still awaited. There was no other business.

## Date of the next meeting

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25. The next Board meeting would be held on 5 March 2025.