

Ofcom Board minutes 2 April 2025

Publication minutes of the three-hundred and twenty-third meeting of the Ofcom Board held on 2 April 2025 at Riverside House, London SE1 9HA and via Microsoft Teams

Present

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Michael Grade | Chair |
| Tamara Ingram | Deputy Chair |
| Richard Allan | Non-Executive Member |
| Karen Baxter | Non-Executive Member |
| Natalie Black | Executive Member and Group Director, Networks & Communications |
| Melanie Dawes | Executive Member and Chief Executive |
| Angela Dean | Non-Executive Member |
| Bob Downes | Non-Executive Member |
| Will Harding | Non-Executive Member |
| Clive Jones | Non-Executive Member |

Apologies

| | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| Ben Verwaayen | Non-Executive Member |
|---------------|----------------------|

In attendance

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Martin Ballantyne | General Counsel |
| Veronica Branton | Corporation Secretary |
| Sharon Malley | Governance Manager |
| Melissa Tatton | Group Director Corporate (Item 5) |
| Jessica Hill | People, Culture and Workplace Director (Item 5) |
| Kate Davies | Public Policy Director (Item 6) |
| Oliver Griffiths | Group Director, Online Safety (Item 7) |
| Mark Bunting | Online Safety Strategy Delivery Director (Item 7) |
| Jon Higham | Online Safety Policy Development Director (Item 7) |
| Sheryl Wilson | Online Safety Policy Principal (Item 7) |
| Cristina Nicolotti Squires | Group Director, Broadcasting and Media (Item 8) (via Teams) |
| Alison Marsden | Director, Content Standards Licensing and Enforcement (Item 8) |
| Laura Rhea | Director, Standards and Audience Protection (Item 8) |
| Deirdre Gordon | Legal Director (Item 9) |
| Nuala Cosgrove | Legal Director (Item 9) |

| | Action |
|---|---------------|
| <p>Item 1: Welcome and declaration of members' interests</p> <p>1. No new declarations of interest were noted.</p> | |
| <p>Item 2: Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2025 – 322(25) and matters arising.</p> <p>2. The minutes of the Ofcom Board meeting held on 5 March 2025 were APPROVED as a correct record.</p> <p>3. A summary of progress against action points was NOTED.</p> | |
| <p>Item 3: Chair's report</p> <p>4. The Chair updated the Board on his recent activities, including progress with the appointment of a new Chair of Channel 4.</p> <p>5. The Board NOTED the verbal report.</p> | |
| <p>Item 4: Chief Executive's report – Board 24(25)</p> <p>6. Melanie Dawes presented paper 24(25) on her activities and updated the Board on the constructive conversations Ofcom had been holding with the Government on regulation and economic growth.</p> <p>7. The Board noted an update on the forthcoming Cyber Security and Resilience Bill and its potential impact for Ofcom, noting the relevant skills Ofcom had in house in this area.</p> <p>8. Melanie Dawes said the Plan of Work for 2025/26 had now been published alongside an abridged version of the Three-Year Business Plan. The Three-Year Business Plan would be refreshed following receipt of the funding settlement and would be brought to a future Board meeting.</p> <p>9. Online safety remained busy and on track, with the new Group Director now in post. The Board noted the engagement with Government on its priorities and the implementation of the operational phase of the online safety regime.</p> <p>10. The Board noted that technology was a thread running through much of Ofcom's work and that competencies for economic regulation applied across several sectors.</p> <p>11. Melanie Dawes updated the Board on the Telecoms Access Review and said Ofcom had updated analysts on the morning of the launch and that the consultation had been well received in the markets.</p> <p>12. Melanie Dawes updated the Board on her meetings with various international stakeholders and on her participation in the Anthropy conference in Cornwall.</p> <p>13. The Board NOTED the report.</p> | |
| <p>Item 5: 2025/26 Ofcom organisational priorities and objectives – Board 25(25)</p> <p>14. Melissa Tatton presented paper 25(25) on the proposed objectives and</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>priorities for Ofcom in 2025/26. She noted that a broader investment programme was being scoped to reflect the confirmed funding cap and this would be brought to the Board in July for approval.</p> <p>15. The objectives fell into three pillars: delivering outcomes for consumers through the delivery of the Plan of Work; investing in Ofcom for the future through programmes in agility and data, digital and AI and through development of Ofcom’s leadership layer; and creating a fantastic place to work together through continuing previous People initiatives. The Board discussed the pillars and noted that key measurables for assessing delivery would be approved at the April meeting of the People Committee.</p> <p>16. The Board discussed work on data. Melissa Tatton said that work to organise and manage stored data had been successful and that an internal audit on progress would be discussed at a future Risk and Audit Committee. Work to identify and embed best practice was underway.</p> <p>17. The work to improve efficiency was intended to increase and improve outputs, with teams looking at options to automate processes such as summarising consultation responses and licence applications. The proposal to bring in external expertise aimed to find best practice on the digital, data and AI programme and to make recommendations in relation to Ofcom’s resourcing and ways of working.</p> <p>18. The Board APPROVED the paper including the organisational priorities for the financial year 2025/26.</p> | |
| <p>Item 6: Economic growth and regulation – Board 26(25)</p> <p>19. Kate Davies presented paper 26(25) on economic growth and regulation. She said Ofcom’s position as a regulator that supported economic growth was generally well accepted. Ofcom had made five commitments to the Government on growth and was in the process of delivering these. There was also ongoing work to engage with Government on other areas of interest including regulatory performance.</p> <p>20. The Board discussed the possible introduction of performance measures that would be agreed with the Government and Ofcom’s role as an independent regulator. It would important that any performance measures did not hamper Ofcom’s independence.</p> <p>21. The Board noted that Ofcom’s engagement with Government and Parliament was increasing through more Select Committee appearances and MP correspondence.</p> <p>22. The Board discussed the Government’s aim to cut regulatory compliance costs for businesses by 25% and noted that this would be an aggregated objective, not a target for each individual regulator. Ofcom would look to contribute, for example through streamlining some processes for regulated industries. The Board noted that the main productivity gains for the economy as a whole would come from Ofcom work such as improving the communications networks for consumers and enabling use of spectrum.</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>23. The Board NOTED the paper.</p> | |
| <p>Item 7: Online Safety – plan for 2025/26 Board 27(25)</p> | |
| <p>24. Oliver Griffiths presented paper 27(25) on the Online Safety programme for 2025/26, noting that risk assessments for Illegal Harms were being received this week. The Board note that the Group was now moving into the operational stage of the regime – driving compliance and continuing to implement the final phases. An overview of the upcoming consultation on additional measures was provided.</p> <p>25. The Board discussed the Online Safety programme and noted risks around how services would respond to the regime and whether Ofcom would meet the expectations of stakeholders.</p> <p>26. The Board noted that Ofcom would be consulting in June on a small number of amendments to the Illegal Harms and Protection of Children codes. These would focus on the introduction of crisis response protocols, the use of hash-matching for non-consensual intimate images, the use of automated content moderation tools and options to protect children in relation to livestreaming.</p> <p>27. The Board noted the need for oversight of compliance by service providers and the need to demonstrate progress across all Ofcom’s regulatory objectives.</p> <p>28. The need to ensure colleagues working on online safety were monitored for wellbeing, given both the material they were exposed to and the heightened external environment, was noted. An internal audit on this issue was due in the next year.</p> <p>29. The Board noted the importance of ensuring that the programme was deliverable within the available resources and prioritising the most important activities, including taking targeted enforcement action.</p> <p>30. The Board considered the need to measure the success of the regime. The Board noted the processes in place to decide on priorities for enforcement.</p> <p>31. The Board APPROVED the Online Safety plan for 2025/26.</p> | |
| <p>Item 8: Content Board update: Review of Editorial Standards work and Work Programme 2025/26 – Board 28(25)</p> | |
| <p>32. Clive Jones presented paper 28(25) on the work of the Content Board. He said UK viewing habits were changing fundamentally and rapidly, with material shifts from watching channels to watching content. The UK production sector was struggling in the face of commissioning strength of streamers.</p> <p>33. The Board discussed the paper and noted the challenges of maintaining standards in the provision of distinctive British content and impartial news in the evolving media environment. The need to ensure consistent and effective governance of standards issues, and for the Content Board to reflect the new media environment, was considered</p> | |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| <p>34. The Board noted that governance structures and the way Ofcom worked would be a productive topic for discussion at the Board Strategy Day.</p> <p>35. The Board APPROVED the Content Board’s work programme for 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.</p> | Corp Sec |
| <p>Item 9: Annual litigation review – Board 29(25)</p> <p>36. Martin Ballantyne presented paper 29(25) on litigation over the previous year. He said it was difficult to predict how the next year would develop but the beginnings of enforcement under the online safety regime and the continued roll-out of that regime were examples which could generate legal issues.</p> <p>37. The Board discussed Ofcom’s options for recovering costs following successful litigation and noted the difficulties relating to entities based outside the UK.</p> <p>38. The Board discussed the recent GB News case relating to the interplay between rules 5.1 and 5.3 of the Broadcasting Code and noted that in light of the Court’s findings on the interpretation of the Code, Ofcom intended to consult on amendments to rule 5.3 of the Broadcasting Code, to clarify the position for all stakeholders.</p> <p>39. The Board noted two cases following Ofcom’s finding under the Competition Act that Royal Mail had abused its dominant market position. The potential impact of this would be discussed with Royal Mail in forthcoming engagement.</p> <p>40. The Board NOTED the paper.</p> | |
| <p>Item 10: Advisory Committee on Disinformation and Misinformation – Board 30(25)</p> <p>41. Richard Allan presented paper 30(25) on the proposals for establishing this new advisory committee as required by the Online Safety Act. This had been previously discussed by the Board and the paper aimed to address the matters that had been raised. The proposed membership of the committee was considered and it was noted this provided for a balanced membership.</p> <p>42. The Board noted that amendments to the draft terms of reference and the proposal to name the Committee as the Online Information Advisory Committee more accurately reflected the proposed work of the Committee.</p> <p>43. The Board APPROVED the appointment of candidates, the terms of reference and the name of the Committee as set out in the paper and the consequential changes to the Corporate Governance Framework.</p> | |
| <p>Item 11: National Advisory Committee for England – Board 31(25)</p> <p>44. The Board APPROVED the appointment to the National Advisory Committee for England of Andrew May, Kavya Sharma and Richard Bellamy for three-year terms, from 1 June 2025 until 31 May 2028, and a two-month extension of Paula Carter to 31 July 2025, to enable the transition to a new Chair.</p> | |
| <p>Item 12: DRCF workplan 2025/26 – Board 32(25)</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| 45. The Board NOTED the DRCF workplan 2025/26. | |
| Item 13: BBC Competition Assessments – provisional determinations – Board 33(25) | |
| 46. The Board NOTED the provisional conclusions of Ofcom’s Competition Assessments on proposals by the BBC for new radio stations and extended hours for an existing station. The Board discussed the position and likely reaction to it. | |
| Items 14-17: Standing items | |
| 47. The Board NOTED the following information items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-executive member updates – paper 34(25). • Monthly performance report – paper 35(25). • Board work programme – paper 36(25) and publication schedule – paper 37(25) • Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel of 12-13 February 2025 and the Risk and Audit Committee of 26 February 2025. | |
| Item 18: Items in the Diligent Board reading room | |
| 48. The Board NOTED the Communications Consumer Panel/Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People update. | |
| Item 19: Any other business | |
| 49. There was no other business. | |
| Item 20: Date of the next meeting | |
| 50. The next scheduled Board meeting would be held on 14 May 2025. | |
| 51. The meeting concluded at 12.38 pm. | |

Approved: _____
Chair