

Sir Chris Bryant MP
By email

Dame Melanie Dawes
Chief Executive
Email: ChiefExecutive@ofcom.org.uk

13th May 2025

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter of 8th May which followed our meeting on mobile coverage reporting.

As we have discussed, and as Ofcom set out in our Plan of Work for 2025-26, we are clear that the information provided in our current web-checker too often does not reflect the lived experience of mobile coverage for consumers. We understand the frustration this causes – indeed we will be publishing our latest research on customer service in telecoms before the end of May which will once again highlight the problem. This is why last year we decided to undertake a significant programme of work to improve Ofcom's web-checker, a new version of which will be rolled out in the second half of June.

Ofcom uses predictions of signal strength, provided by the four mobile network operators (MNOs), to determine whether coverage is likely to be available in any given area. The current web-checker provides a view of mobile signal based on thresholds that were introduced 10 years ago, at a time when consumer's data demands and expectations of mobile networks were much less. This means that when the web-checker currently shows a good signal strength, it is predicting whether consumers are likely to get a connection outdoors for basic, but important, services such as voice and texts, but not necessarily whether they may be able to stream or use more data-hungry digital services online.

When we roll out the improvements to the checker, we will be keeping data against the current signal strength threshold so that information on connectivity for basic services is still available. But alongside this we will be adding a second set of predictions against a new higher threshold to reflect the signal now needed to support services people often want to use over their mobile signal such as video streaming and downloading of video-rich content. We have used crowdsourced data to understand what consumers experience at each signal strength and to inform where we set this higher threshold.

In addition, we are increasing the granularity of the web-checker. The MNOs have previously provided predicted signal strength for each spectrum band for each 100m x 100m square in the UK. We will now be showing coverage in 50m x 50m squares. Users will be able to search by postcode and by provider, and will be shown coverage predictions on a map of their chosen postcode area.

It is important to emphasise that there is no threshold at which coverage and connectivity can be guaranteed 100% of the time, nor at which predicted coverage data will be 100% accurate. A stronger signal should usually result in a better connection. But other factors such as congestion on the network, signal interference from nearby users and buildings or trees, and even the type and age of handset will affect whether that connection is reliable and/or can be used for more demanding services.

Our final enhancement to the checker is therefore to add a further stream of information based on locally crowdsourced data which reflects people's experiences on the ground. This means that the web-checker will now show a performance score for each of the MNOs in the consumer's postcode district. The score is derived from the percentage of times a successful connection achieved 5 Mbit/s for each MNO.

In addition to improving the data available in the web-checker, we are also making sure, helped by rigorous user testing, that the updated web-checker is easy to understand and presents the information people need in a clear and accessible way.

We will deliver these updates to the web-checker in the second half of June. We are confident that the improved data will help consumers to make a more informed choice about which mobile operator is best for them.

The launch of the improved tool is just the first step in an ongoing programme to ensure that consumers have the best possible data to reflect their real-world experience of mobile coverage. We are working with the industry to drive further improvements in what they make available. We are also exploring other forms of crowdsourced data and other controlled measurement that we could incorporate into our web-checker over time.

I am grateful to you for championing this issue and I look forward to continuing to work closely with you and your team on it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Melanie Dawes', written in a cursive style.

MELANIE DAWES