

6. April and May 2024 Ofcom Board minutes had been circulated for information. The Chair highlighted that the May Board meeting had included discussion about the Content Board's remit. Now that there was more clarity on the scope of the Online Safety Act 2023, the Ofcom Board had agreed that existing Ofcom governance mechanisms were sufficient and there would not be a need to appoint an individual to the Content Board with expertise in online safety. Going forward, Clive Jones, Bob Downes and Will Harding (members of both the Content Board and the Ofcom Board) would keep the role of the Content Board under review and in due course discuss whether any changes were required to its Terms of Reference. The Chair further highlighted that at the June Ofcom Board meeting there had been discussion of Channel 4 re-licensing and the Executive's proposals for re-consulting on Made Outside England quotas.

7. Picking up on online issues, Members discussed the importance of news as a counter to mis- and disinformation; possible overlap between the role of the Content Board and the Misinformation and Disinformation Committee that would be established to advise the Ofcom Board and to be in place when illegal harms duties came into force later in the year/early 2025; the need to bridge issues that extend to the work of the Executive in both the Online Safety (OSG) and the Broadcasting and Media Groups (BMG); and the importance of media literacy work, also an element of Ofcom's PSM review.

8. The Chair flagged that he proposed to include due impartiality as a themed discussion topic at the next meeting of the Content Board. He planned to consult with Members on other detailed/ deep dive topics for future meetings, in the expectation that such discussions could assist Ofcom to shape UK media and policy decisions, perhaps like a "think tank".

9. The Content Board **NOTED** the report from the Chair.

Item 6: Broadcasting and Media Group Update – Paper CB 14(24)

10. Members had received a paper providing an update on key policy and project areas in the BMG and related teams. The paper was taken as read.

11. A number of points were highlighted/ discussed including:

- Standards: The General Election period had so far been broadly comparable to 2019 in terms of complaint levels. The highest number had been about televised debates.
- A team was meeting regularly to assess and prioritise election complaints.
- In the context of the General Election, the update paper had touched on mis- and disinformation and foreign interference and the BMG would engage with the OSG on this topic (the General Election period providing a learning opportunity).
- Applications for judicial review of Ofcom decisions.
- Discussion, procedures and best practice in decision making in the context of the statutory framework for broadcast standards, and which could be discussed at the next meeting with colleagues from the Legal Group.
- The Executive had attended a meeting of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee and rules on election coverage had featured in that discussion.
- Media Act 2024: It was noted that Treasury funding had been agreed to allow Ofcom to proceed with its implementation programme. The plan was to publish a Roadmap to Regulation in the Autumn.
- Economic growth: This was expected to be an important theme for the incoming government and a Member urged serious thinking from Ofcom on the creative industries, on PSM and beyond, and on how the sector could help to drive growth.

10. Members **NOTED** paper CB 14(24) and additional oral updates provided.

Item 7: News debrief 2024 – Paper CB 15(24)

12. Members were provided with an overview of news consumption in the UK, with a particular focus on online news and based on data sources including Ofcom’s 2023/24 news consumption survey, 2023 PSM tracker data, media plurality research and Barb viewing data. A report and charts were expected to be published in September.

13. A number of detailed points were highlighted/ discussed by the Content Board. These included:

- The availability of additional data, e.g. from organisations like Reuters or NewsGuard.
- Socio-economic group analysis of the data (further detail to be provided outside the meeting).
- The importance of context in news consumption and its absence from social media; increasing consumption of clips; the role of online intermediaries and the extent to which quality news was *not* being consumed.
- Whether podcasts were the future of news; a need to regulate across platforms; and potential value in digital kitemarking for quality news providers.
- The ability of platforms, as sources of information, to become news services, i.e. by virtue of the services that they provide.
- Issues of sustainability and the financial challenges for news providers.
- It should not be taken for granted that the big tech companies were unconcerned about democratic deficits arising from/lack of news consumption.
- Media literacy, education and the need for citizens to know where to find quality news, although for major breaking news stories the PSBs were still the go-to source to get the facts.
- News consumption findings would help inform future thematic discussions at Content Board meetings.

14. Members **NOTED** paper CB 15(24)

Item 8: Media Nations 2024 – Paper CB 16(24)

15. Media Nations is one of Ofcom’s key annual research and data publications, covering media consumption and industry trends, with a particular focus on TV, video, radio, and audio. The 2024 edition would be published at the end of July.

16. A number of points were highlighted/ discussed by the Content Board, including:
- Ofcom’s report would contain industry data on spend and revenues and, whilst there were challenges, currently there appeared to be no imminent or drastic financial setbacks for the main broadcasters in the sector.
 - A Member queried the difference between production sector revenues (Pact data), which were down 10% year on year, and PSB first-run UK-originated spend (data submitted to Ofcom by the broadcasters themselves) which was down 5.3% year on year.
 - A request was also made for long-term trend data, including for inward investment.
 - Further queries were raised about presentation of ad spend figures, specifically about the inclusion of online ad spend, and about a discrepancy between Ofcom’s

figures for overall commercial radio revenues, up 2% in 2023, and figures from Radiocentre, which showed a decline.

- The Executive would respond to these queries by providing Members with further information outside the meeting.
- The Chair stressed the importance of research of this kind in raising wider awareness and knowledge about the media sector, including its positive value in discussions with government and stakeholders.

17. Members **NOTED** paper CB 16(24)

Item 9: Highlights from Ofcom’s Editorial Standards Work, January to July 2024 (including the General Election) – Paper CB 17(24)

18. On a six-monthly basis Members reviewed a paper on key themes and lessons from editorial standards work for onward transmission to the Ofcom Board. As an annex, Members had also received a paper on Ofcom’s regulatory approach to the General Election (submitted to the Ofcom Board in May).

19. Points highlighted/ discussed by the Content Board included:

- Lessons from high volumes of complaints related to the conflict in Israel and Gaza. Compliance with the Broadcasting Code had remained high and, so far, only one case had warranted further investigation under the Code.
- The latter suggested that previous activity by the Executive to inform and educate broadcasters about compliance may have played a role in this but there was no room for complacency.
- Team agility and adaptability had been effective, and well-being taken seriously to protect teams. A new Ofcom-wide colleague safeguarding policy relating to work with distressing content and material had been launched.
- Technology and data used as aids to agility, including a new and more efficient content recording system. Members suggested that the paper for the Ofcom Board include a strategic snapshot on resources and a flavour of efficiencies gained using new tools.
- The time taken to complete investigations, which could sometimes be lengthy, but also the importance of due process, including the ‘BBC first’ system, and procedural fairness.
- The standards complaints system/ process appeared to be working well and it would be useful to identify successes for any read across to future work on online mis- and disinformation.

20. The Executive would take account of the discussion when finalising the paper for submission to the Ofcom Board.

Item 10: Information Items

21. The Content Board **NOTED** the following information items:

- Minutes of the Ofcom Board (meetings held on 17 April and 22 May 2024)
- Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel (meeting held on 17 April 2024)

Item 11: Any Other Business

21. There was no other business.

Item 12: Date of the Next Meeting

22. The next scheduled Content Board meeting would be held on 1 October 2024.