

Minutes of the 97th meeting of the Advisory Committee for Scotland

Hybrid meeting in person and virtually over Microsoft
Teams on 26 September 2024

Present

Elizabeth Partyka	Chair
Jess McBeath	Member
Ashe Hussain	Member
Cameron Speirs	Member
Caroline Di Stefano	Member

In attendance

Bob Downes	Ofcom Board Member Scotland (Online) – from Item 2
Maggie Cunningham	Content Board Member for Scotland (Online) – from Item 2
Helen Froud	Chair of Communications Consumer Panel
Glenn Preston	Ofcom Scotland Director
Stefan Webster	Ofcom Scotland
Ross Hamilton	Ofcom Scotland
David Bagshaw	Ofcom Scotland
Alex Boardman	Ofcom Scotland
Debbie Hughes	Ofcom Scotland

Dr Lynsay Shephard	University of Abertay (Items 2-3 only)
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Other Ofcom colleagues

Tour of the 5G Centre

1. The Advisory Committee visited the Scotland 5G Centre's Dundee hub to hear more about the work which the Centre undertakes to support innovation. The Committee was given a tour and an outdoor demonstration of an autonomous tractor by an Agri-Tech specialist from the James Hutton Institute and Scotland 5G Centre staff.

Presentation from Dr Lynsay Shepherd, Reader in Cybersecurity at the University of Abertay

2. Dr Lynsay Shepherd joined the meeting and provided an update on the research she had been leading relating to romance fraud and on some of the games that had been developed to help people recognise phishing/smishing scams. This was related to Ofcom's work implementing the Online Safety Act and its media literacy duties.
3. There had been a huge rise in cybersecurity issues since Covid19 with hackers impersonating public authorities such as hospitals and other health services. There was also increasing concern about how to promote 'romance security' to keep people safe online.

Welcome, introductions, conflicts, and apologies

4. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
5. It was NOTED that apologies had been received from Polly Tolley and Camille Seldon.
6. It was also NOTED that there were no conflicts of interest.

Minutes of the 96th meeting held on 5 June 2024

7. The minutes of the 95th meeting were APPROVED by the Committee. In the discussion of actions which arose from the June meeting, it was NOTED that:
 - Ofcom Scotland's Board member and Ofcom's Scotland Director are due to meet with Richard Lochhead MSP (Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade) on 29 October, in the absence of Mairi McAllan who is now on maternity leave. It was advised that much of the discussion will focus on Digital Connectivity, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Telecoms Access Review.
 - A response has been submitted by the Committee to Ofcom's Media Literacy Strategy, but it was decided not to submit a response to Ofcom's Protection of Children consultation as it was felt there was no particular Scottish angle.
 - The Chair thanked members for their help in updating their Strategy document. It was NOTED that they will review this again in March 2025.

Members' updates

8. A member advised that they had attended a Spectrum Policy Forum (SPF) meeting in July. It was advised that SPF is the cross-industry 'sounding board' to Government and Ofcom on future policy and approaches on spectrum. Its mission is to promote and maximise the benefits of radio spectrum for the UK.

9. It was advised that Private 5G had been used very successfully for the summer's Paris 2024 Olympic Games. It supported broadcasters and photojournalists at the opening ceremony as well as three of the key Paris stadiums and the sailing at Marseille.
10. It was also advised that there was a Connected Britain event on in September and that there was a keynote speech from Sir Chris Bryant – Minister of State for DSIT and DCMS. Sir Chris spoke about the importance of a connected Britain for economic growth and societal benefits and about fixing the foundations for society and economy. He highlighted the key opportunities to improve:
 - Basic digital infrastructure rollout
 - Govern better
 - Better lives
 - Need to safely and responsibly retire obsolete legacy systems
 - Connect everyone
 - Consider connecting or synergies between telecoms and space
 - To think about not-spots that have been a bit neglected. For e.g. connectivity on trains and in urban areas.
11. A member advised on two pieces of recent research. The WHO Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study found a small but increasing prevalence of problematic social media use. Another global piece of research found a gradual increase in myopia amongst children and young people, possibly associated with spending less time outdoors.
12. A member advised that the Scottish Government had been increasingly engaged in the issue of the protection of women and girls online and that the First Minister, John Swinney, was moving this up the agenda. It was advised that Ofcom's Online Safety team will present to the Committee on this at November's meeting.
13. A member advised that Royal Mail have made a huge investment of 250 vehicles in Scotland so that collections and deliveries were not impacted. Despite this, there had been dips in performance. An investigation was to be carried out to see why this is the case.
14. An Ofcom colleague advised that they are looking at setting up a session with personnel from Royal Mail to come and speak to the Advisory Committees for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in a joint session. The Ofcom Scotland Director suggested inviting the Communications Consumer Panel to join the session. This is to be organised ahead of Ofcom's Royal Mail's Call for Inputs document being published early in 2025.
15. A member highlighted the recent announcement of the appointment of STV's new Chief Executive, Rufus Ratcliffe, who would be taking over from Simon Pitts on 1 November. It was unlikely this appointment would result in a significant change in the strategic direction of the organisation.
16. It was also advised that Steve Carson's replacement as Director of BBC Scotland was still to be announced.
17. It was advised that a number of independent broadcasting companies in England were either closing or going into administration. There had been one closure in Scotland, Axis Studios, based in Glasgow, where it was understood 162 staff had been made redundant.

18. There was concern that the freelance industry was still struggling for work within the broadcasting industry and were having to leave the industry after being without work for 12-18 months. There was some evidence of freelancers having to get jobs in other sectors, but there has been no data collected to confirm how many and how this is affecting the sector.
19. It was advised that there had been a lot of film and dramas made in Scotland by big overseas production companies. There was some concern that this could have an impact on some of Scotland's bigger, established companies.
20. It was highlighted that the number of people getting their news online had increased.
21. The Chair confirmed that the Committee had responded to Ofcom's re-consultation on Channel 4's Licence Renewal (as had the screen agencies and production sector in the different parts of the UK). The prevailing view amongst the respondents was that Ofcom should increase Channel 4's Made out of England quota to 16% and not the proposed 12%.
22. It was NOTED that Screen Scotland recently hosted a successful event promoting its work and strategy with support for the direction of travel from the Scottish Government (this in the context of a proposed review of Creative Scotland).
23. It was advised that digital inclusion is a big focus for the UK Government and is being pushed up their political agenda. It was noted that Audit Scotland had recently published a [report on digital exclusion](#) which summaries key data points and evidence and included a section on social tariffs. The Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) Chair advised that Audit Scotland had recently presented to the CCP.
24. It was further noted that there were emerging concerns on digital exclusion amongst younger people. The data sets that had been seen were from England but pointed to low digital capability amongst school leavers with many seen as 'mobile natives' but lacking basic digital skills required for employment. A [Princes Trust report](#) provided a helpful summary. The committee agreed it was worth being cognisant of digital inclusion going up the agenda.

Director's Report / Public Policy update

25. The Ofcom Scotland Director presented their written report and highlighted a few key points to NOTE:
 - The Scottish Government's Programme for Government was recently published. A key area of interest for Ofcom was the proposed Misogyny Bill. Ofcom had not yet seen the legislation (beyond the draft Bill that had been previously published), but were anticipating engagement with the Scottish Government on the issue, particularly concerning Ofcom's work on Protecting Women and Girls Online.
 - The Scottish Government's review of the creative sector and Creative Scotland should not significantly impact any of Ofcom's work, as Ofcom primarily engage with Screen Scotland. However, as Screen Scotland is part of Creative Scotland, it is likely that they will be involved in some part of the overall review.
 - The riots that took place in parts of the UK over the Summer had resulted in significant engagement from Scotland's First Minister, largely around the issue of community cohesion, but also in respect of the role platforms played in the spread of mis and disinformation and the topic of illegal harms online. The Ofcom Scotland team was considering whether to engage directly with the FM on the matter and would update the committee at its next meeting.

- An Ofcom colleague provided an update on Project Gigabit. The Scottish Government had outlined five regional procurements coming from UK Government funding. The Scottish Government are only supporting building in 'white' premises (those with no gigabit infrastructure and where it is unlikely to have any deployed in the next three years).
 - On the Shared Rural Network; Three were the only MNO to miss the 30 June 2024 target for mobile coverage. However, they reported that they had met the target by the end of August. Looking forward, the SRN continued to be the subject of opposition from a range of nature and other related groups and organisations in Scotland. Decisions would also need to be taken by the new UK Government on the future shape of the programme. The Ofcom Scotland team would keep the committee updated on any developments.
 - A member asked how many responses the Channel 4 re-consultation received, and what positions were expressed regarding MoE quotas. An Ofcom colleague said that there were around 25 responses, and it was likely that the majority of these would be opposed to Channel 4's position. The Ofcom Scotland Director noted their understanding that most of the responses would draw from the same analysis commissioned by PACT and that the decision on the quota would be made in the coming weeks after all of the evidence had been fully considered.
 - Ofcom colleagues had recently met with Scottish Government Ministers Natalie Don-Innes and Siobhan Brown. There had been a welcome increase in engagement on online safety at ministerial level, and from civil servants in the Scottish Government, although it remained a subject that was split across several ministerial portfolios with no overall ownership.
 - Building on the ministerial meeting, Ofcom held a 'teach-in' event with Scottish Government officials on online safety at Ofcom offices, and this had had good attendance.
 - A member highlighted a concern that data was not being gathered to understand digital life in Scotland. In the ensuing discussion, there was general agreement this was a concern but it was also noted that there continued to be a drive to digitise public services.
 - A member asked if engagement with devolved nations continued to be seen as an important issue within Ofcom. The Ofcom Scotland Director noted that it had been necessary to prioritise engagement with the new UK Government in recent weeks as new relationships were established and Ofcom built its understanding of the UK Government's priorities in respect of Ofcom's regulated sectors. However, nations representation continued to be baked in to Ofcom's governance through Board members, Scotland members of the Content Board and CCP and the Advisory Committees. Executive level colleagues also viewed engagement in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as an important part of policy development in relation to Ofcom's policy priorities.
 - A member asked about Ofcom Scotland's preparation for a Holyrood election in 2025. The Ofcom Scotland Director reported that the Scotland Team had begun to consider its relationship with Scottish Labour (current MPs and MSPs), while maintaining a positive and constructive relationship with the Scottish Government. The Director had written to Ian Murray MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, to provide background on Ofcom and highlight our current priorities. An Ofcom colleague said that the Scotland Team would shortly be sending out a bulletin to MSPs which may generate further engagement across the political spectrum.
26. Moving to the Public Policy update, an Ofcom colleague highlighted a few key points noting:
- Ofcom has a statutory duty to take into account the UK government's strategic priorities. The Ofcom CEO has conducted meetings with multiple figures within the new UK Government over summer. Ofcom is particularly engaged with Chris Bryant, Minister in DSIT and DCMS,

regarding the PSTN switch-off. An Ofcom colleague also drew attention to a speech Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State at DCMS, gave at the RTS where she stressed the need for regional diversity.

- Bills of interest from the King's Speech concern cybersecurity and telecoms resilience (the function of data centres will be explored) and the potential for the creation of a statutory body on AI.
- Consumer changes coming into force will see a ban on inflation-linked phone contract rises mid-term, and the launch of one-touch switch.
- Ofcom will pay close attention to the CMA's verdict on the proposed merger of Vodafone and Three.

Connected Nations Scotland Report 2024

27. Ofcom colleagues provided an overview of this year's Connected Nations Report, highlighting the following points:
 - Reports will now be published twice a year, with the main publication brought forward to November;
 - There will be a reduction in the number of discretionary topics covered; and
 - The main topics and likely headlines to come from the upcoming report.
28. The Committee then asked the team questions around stakeholder events to promote the report, how to ensure the impact on individuals comes through in the report and if the report could bring together the number of different infrastructure programmes that exist.
29. There was also a discussion around the definition of a 'decent' broadband connection.

Public Service Media

30. Ofcom colleagues gave a presentation on the PSM review and outlined the questions that the review would be focusing on. They said that there is more focus on this review on the sustainable provision of PSM content and they are doing a deep dive on how audiences get accurate news. They outlined the timings of the review.
31. The Chair asked whether the review considers the future of PSM and how the system will survive the next decade. An Ofcom colleague responded that they are particularly looking at how young people consume PSM content.
32. A member said that some of the questions could be better worded in terms of the scoping of the report. An Ofcom colleague advised they are looking at the sustainability of the PSM system as a whole and not individual PSBs.
33. The Chair asked what stakeholder engagement was being planned with the public. An Ofcom colleague said they are actively looking for suggestions on how to do this. The Scotland Director outlined the Small Screen, Big Debate events that were conducted a few years ago. This was a useful model, but it was unlikely Ofcom would be resourced to deliver the same breadth/geographic scope of coverage for the current review. The Chair also suggested Young Scot as a good organisation to contact.
34. A member asked if we are beyond the tipping point in terms of PSM viewing. An Ofcom colleague said they are looking at the data on this. They said at a national level the fastest

growing thing is that people are watching on YouTube and other VSPs. This is particularly high among young people.

35. A member NOTED there is a big boost in podcasting but that commercial organisations are struggling because it is hard to monetise podcasts. They said that PSBs are at an advantage in this market as they have news departments as well as podcasts. An Ofcom colleague said they have recently met with one of the big podcasters to get their views.
36. The Chair said that the big challenge for PSBs is whether prominence is enough of an incentive for them to keep providing trusted and accurate news and content that reflects the whole of the UK. She said that people can say in surveys that news and local content is important, but then they don't watch it.

Consumer Panel/ACOD update

37. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' written paper and the Committee NOTED its content.
38. The Chair NOTED that the date of the next Consumer Hub meeting is 25 October and opened the invite to all members, if they wished to attend.

Ofcom Contact Centre Information

39. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' paper with Scotland's data and the Committee NOTED its content.
40. An Ofcom colleague advised that the team are still looking at alternative ways of providing this information to the Committee, but for now we will continue to produce it in its current format.

Draft ACS Annual Report 2024

41. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' written paper and the Committee NOTED its content.

Any Other Business

42. The Chair acknowledged that this was the last meeting for Maggie Cunningham, Content Board member for Scotland, with her term coming to an end at the end of September 2024. The Chair thanked her for all her advice, and input during the course of her term.
43. The Ofcom Scotland Director advised that the Chair for the Advisory Committee for Scotland, will be stepping down at the end of March 2025. It was NOTED that an e-mail will be sent to the members, w/c 30 September, to see if there's any expression of interest from the current members.
44. The Chair advised that the Committee intend to respond to Ofcom's Consultation on Transparency Reporting Guidance. It was NOTED that the deadline for submissions is 4 October 2024.

Date of the Next Meeting

45. The next scheduled Committee meeting would be held on 27 November 2024.

