

Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland response to Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan 2018/19

ACNI welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan for 2018/19. We have had the opportunity to make verbal input during some of our discussions with the team. We are pleased to note that many of the items previously discussed are now included in the proposed plan.

We welcome the objectives common to all nations, especially regarding broadband coverage and mobile services.

ACNI is concerned about the potential delay in appointing an Ofcom Board Member for Northern Ireland and we call on Ofcom and government to ensure that Northern Ireland is not disadvantaged by this situation.

In terms of Brexit, ACNI welcomes the Northern Ireland objective of continuing to work with its regulatory counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. We also would like Ofcom to focus on ensuring that fixed-line all-island call rates and surcharge-free mobile roaming continue to be available for Northern Ireland consumers, as well as availability of Irish language channels and programming from the Republic of Ireland.

ACNI is disappointed that nuisance calls continue to be an issue for many consumers and the telecoms industry. We encourage Ofcom to consider scams in its work on nuisance calls; call for greater clarity on the respective responsibilities of the ICO and Ofcom; and recommend that clearer information is published on which organisations consumers can or should complain to.

We welcome Ofcom's proposed work to monitor BT's Commitments on the separation of Openreach and the assurance in Northern Ireland for the equivalent monitoring of BT Northern Ireland Networks.

We commend the work Ofcom has done already working with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and others in researching the area of parcel surcharging and the need for this to continue.

Ofcom's review of BBC Nations and Regions will be an important opportunity to validate the Northern Ireland specific regulatory conditions detailed in its operating licence. We welcome the chance to hear from audiences and to compare the BBC in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK's regions.

ACNI is disappointed that Ofcom's media literacy statutory duty is limited to a single paragraph in the proposed plan. In an age of fake news, calls for better regulation of internet companies (often coming out of fears about harm and vulnerable customers), promoting and measuring media literacy could be a powerful light for Ofcom to shine.

We welcome the work on the cost of calling Directory Enquiries and note with concern comments from the stakeholder event that the wholesale charges of these costs are often higher than the RRP incurred by customers.

We note Ofcom's work on EPG prominence and the issue raised at the stakeholder event by TG4 discoverability of Irish language content.

Finally, we reiterate comments from the stakeholder event in Belfast on Ofcom's role as a facilitator among interested parties to ensure the successful roll-out of faster broadband services across Northern Ireland.

Ends
7 January 2018