

Your response

The Community Media Association (CMA) welcomes Ofcom's work in planning spectrum to maximise access for community radio. We also strongly support the intention to complete the fourth round of licensing for analogue community radio in Q2 2019/20.

The CMA also commends Ofcom's plans to consult on a proposed licensing framework for small-scale DAB in Q1 2019/20 and we look forward to the first round of licensing SSDAB multiplexes and services from Q3 2019/2020 onwards.

The CMA requests that, in addition to the comprehensive proposed Annual Plan for 2019/20, Ofcom commits to undertake to commission research into the Community Radio Fund – in particular, research to demonstrate its impact and how community radio stations use grants from the Community Radio Fund to leverage access to other funding.

Increased support for the Community Radio Fund would assist to redress the imbalance that has arisen in community radio with the current Community Radio Fund, which has reduced in size since its launch with £500k per annum in 2005, while the number of channels has increased from the first 15 pilots to around 280 stations today.

A Community Radio Fund with around £10 million investment per annum would have a transformational impact on a community media sector which is already delivering substantial public value but whose full potential is not being realised. Experience with the Community Radio Fund so far indicates that such investment would leverage two or three times the level of support from other sources including other grants and sponsorship.

The CMA has received technical research from a number of sources which suggest that a review of analogue spectrum might yield evidence to support the notion that a greater number of radio stations could be licensed on AM and FM. The CMA would encourage Ofcom to review the research in the public domain and supplied to Ofcom to confirm that the analogue radio spectrum continues to be managed as efficiently as possible and that the maximum number of stations that can be licensed on analogue can be supported.

Indeed, a CMA member advocates for a short targeted national round of community radio licensing on low power AM (perhaps 10W EMRP or below to avoid the requirement for international coordination). Such a round would not attract as much attention as the FM rounds but would permit a small number of stations that are still seeking to get on air. There are possibly around 60 frequencies that have been identified nationally for low power AM use. Several countries, such as The Netherlands, have also now adopted a similar approach. The CMA would invite Ofcom to look further into opportunities for continuing to expanding capacity for analogue radio broadcasting as well as developing the case for small-scale digital radio broadcasting.