

Your response

Question	Your response
<p>Question 1: Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Work Plan for 2025/26?</p>	<p>(Not confidential).</p> <p>It would appear that Ofcom's Plan of Work ignores the licencing of new Community Radio services on FM despite acknowledging the importance of renewing FM licences for existing community stations. Whilst the rollout of SSDAB is a significantly important step in providing new community stations with a platform to broadcast on (whilst optimising use of the spectrum and providing listeners with increased choice), this strategic focus, in isolation, is in our opinion flawed and discriminatory. It may result in many communities being denied the opportunity to launch a station despite there being overwhelming support to do so, whilst others are able to launch without undue barriers in SSDAB areas. Whether or not Ofcom acknowledges that the build out of SSDAB may not be viable in some areas of the UK, the net result remains the same - some communities will never experience the rich benefits of community broadcasting whilst there is a dogged determination to focus solely on SSDAB. And this is particularly discriminatory to communities unable to be served by SSDAB when an alternative low cost platform is readily available in the form of FM broadcasting.</p> <p>As winning applicants in the SSDAB round for Llandudno and Betws-y-Coed (under the joint bid "Sound Bay"), it became apparent under consultancy that to have proceeded building the infrastructure would have been financially reckless. The topography of the area required multiple, high cost transmission sites and coupled with little appetite from potential service providers (small population/low revenue potential), the build out was not viable. In areas where SSDAB is not viable or available, we believe there has to be an approach to enable community stations to establish and broadcast. Currently Bayside has little option other than to broadcast on the North West Wales Mux at relatively high cost and this may not be sustainable in the longer term, potentially depriving a deserving community in Conwy County the opportunity to experience the same benefits and support that other communities enjoy.</p>

Question	Your response
	<p>We feel Ofcom should include the advertising of Community Radio licences on FM into its Plan of Work as a matter of importance.</p> <p>Furthermore, in Wales there have been numerous reports from the Welsh Government and UK Government, highlighting a lack of community radio stations versus other parts of the UK . It may be argued Ofcom policy is significantly contributing to this deficit as SSDAB is not available in many rural areas and new FM licences are not being advertised. Wales has been experiencing a cultural deficit for many years with Welsh language output and locally produced content becoming rarer. Furthermore, the Media Bill has further meant that commercial stations have little incentive to create local content or reflect on local communities, culture or voices.</p> <p>In the report <i>Broadcasting in Wales: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2022-23</i> it was recommended that Ofcom resume offering FM licences, particularly targeting local and community radio stations.</p>

Please complete this form in full and return to planofwork@ofcom.org.uk