

Your response

Question	Your response
<p>Do you have any comments on our proposals?</p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We work to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity.</p> <p>The proposed Plan of Work 2022/2023 features a number of positive proposals and ideas which the Electoral Commission are keen to engage with Ofcom on.</p> <p>We are particularly encouraged by the proposals to grow Ofcom’s collaboration with other regulators and wider partners.</p> <p>We welcome Ofcom’s continuing involvement in the group of regulators and standards bodies that we have convened to consider relevant regulatory issues arising from elections and referendums.</p> <p>Throughout the 2021 election campaign period, representatives from seven regulators, including the Electoral Commission and Ofcom, met regularly to update on the issues each organisation was observing from their public queries, complaints, or media and monitoring work. This initiative built on a regulators’ forum that we have co-ordinated since 2016, and is one we will continue to develop.</p> <p>This joined-up working focused on live issues which played out in public and in the media. The regular liaison complemented a public awareness campaign and online information hub by featured on the Commission’s website which signposted members of the public to relevant regulator partners. Both initiatives helped us consider patterns in public enquiries and how to signpost members of the public if there was a more appropriate regulator to consider their query. This kind of cross-regulator working appears frequently in the proposed Plan of Work and we welcome the opportunity to grow this type of collaboration with Ofcom.</p>

Outside our existing cross-regulator collaboration, we see important links between Ofcom's new online safety role, outlined from page 22 of the Plan of Work onwards, and the Commission's role in overseeing elections and regulating political finance. In particular, there will be further scope for Ofcom and the Electoral Commission to work together following the passage of the Online Safety Bill.

The proposed new duty on social media companies to 'protect content of democratic importance', and wider proposals in the Bill to reduce online harm, carry clear implications for the conduct of political debate online, particularly during the campaign period in the run up to elections. The Commission will continue to work with social media companies and Ofcom on the UK's developing "Online Safety" agenda. We would expect to liaise with both the UK Government and Ofcom as you develop parts of the framework that relate to elections, improving transparency and online campaigning. We understand that the online safety regime will be set out in both primary legislation prepared by DCMS and in codes prepared by the regulator. We stand ready to work with both the DCMS and Ofcom as best fits your respective roles in that process.

The [Elections Bill](#) is currently before the UK Parliament and will create new legal requirements for certain kinds of political adverts and campaign material to be labelled with an "imprint" which identifies who is promoting them. It will apply to electronic formats, including websites and mobile applications. There would be benefit to comparing approaches as each of the Electoral Commission and Ofcom prepare for new regimes that regulate the online space, and therefore involve some of the same stakeholders.

This digital imprints regime proposed in the Elections Bill is based on similar well-established law for election campaigning in a printed format. The UK Government's proposals will also place duties on social media and technology companies that host material that does not comply with these labelling requirements. The Electoral Commission and police will share enforcement responsibilities, depending on the focus of the campaign materials. The new digital imprints regime is expected to come into force in the coming years after the Elections Bill is passed, and possibly to a similar timeframe as the online safety framework.