

Public Consultation on Licensing Community Radio



A Summary

Issued: Tuesday 17th February 2004
Closing date for responses: Tuesday 20th April 2004



Summary

What is Ofcom?

We are the communications industry regulator. We have wide-ranging responsibilities across all of the UK's communications markets including radio and TV, telecommunications and wireless services.

Our actions affect people and organisations across the UK. As a result, it is very important that we make our decisions at the right time and in the right way. These decisions must be based on evidence and they need to take account of the views of people who have an interest in the outcome.

Consultation plays an important part in achieving this. It allows people who could be affected by, or are concerned about, a particular issue to give us their views before we make a final decision.

We have started to consult people on the proposed way a new tier of radio – community radio – is set up and licensed. We now want to hear from people who have views on this

Why we are involved in setting up community radio

Basically, it's our job. As the communications regulator for the UK, we are responsible for setting up the licensing and regulatory process for community radio.

This booklet is just one of the ways we are consulting people and asking for the views of those who may have an interest in this issue – and on the proposals which are set out briefly in the pages that follow.

We believe that community radio can provide a valuable community resource. We think this consultation will be of interest to members of the public, consumer organisations, the community radio sector, the commercial radio industry and, in particular, those thinking of applying for a community radio licence.

However community radio licensing might affect you, we want to hear your views before we make a final decision. So, we are asking for responses by **20th April 2004**.

You can find the details of exactly how you can share your opinions and views at the back of this booklet.

What exactly is community radio?

Community radio already exists – and is very popular – in many countries. In the UK it will be set up as a totally new type of radio that will focus on:

- improving society rather than being provided for commercial reasons;
- serving a particular community such as a neighbourhood or a group of people who share the same interests or characteristics;
- providing a service which is not run for profit; and
- offering its community opportunities to take part in the station.

Community radio offers a new and exciting way for local communities to communicate and come together. It will become a third tier of radio in the UK and aims to add to the rich mix of services that the BBC and the commercial radio sector already provide.

At Ofcom we're pleased to be a part of this new development. But before introducing this new radio system, we

want to make sure that we hear from as many people as possible who will be affected by it. We would like as wide a range of views as possible on how to make these new community radio licences available to those who are interested – throughout the UK.

What are the possible benefits of community radio?

Community radio can enrich the area it serves and has many possible benefits.

For example, it can:

- provide opportunities for training and work experience;
- contribute to local education;
- support those services that are dedicated to tackling social exclusion (barriers such as poverty that prevent some people from taking part in society); or
- provide a voice to people, such as minority groups, who do not normally have access, or only limited access, to the media.

Why do I need to get involved now?

The Government is currently consulting on the legal framework for introducing community radio.

This legal framework has been set out in the draft 'Community Radio Order', which you can get from www.culture.gov.uk

If you don't agree with it, or have any issues you would like to raise about the Government's draft framework, you can simply contact:

Rachel Stratton
Commercial Broadcasting and Media
Markets Branch
Department for Culture, Media and
Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH.

Phone: 020 7211 6447
email:Rachel.Stratton@culture.gsi.gov.uk

Please make sure she receives your comments by 20th April 2004.

We would like to introduce community radio as soon as possible and so would like to hear your views on the following proposals.

What we are proposing

Frequencies

We propose that community radio stations will normally broadcast on the FM radio band.

We believe that services should cover an area with a radius of up to five kilometres.

In rural areas, where possible, we may allow a larger radius of coverage.

If a larger coverage area is needed elsewhere, in most cases the AM radio band will carry the service.

Community radio will use frequencies which would not provide a large enough coverage area to support commercial services. We will look for frequencies from throughout the FM waveband.

We believe that most cities or towns or, as an alternative, those places in between, will have access to the frequencies for one or two community radio services from the non-BBC bands. Using the BBC bands may double the number of opportunities.

Applying for a licence

People from anywhere in the UK will be able to apply for a licence.

We will not specify where a service should be. The people applying should identify the neighbourhood or community they want to serve.

The licensing timetable should be clear and follow the same pattern each year.

We propose a period of 12 weeks each year when we will invite applications.

The framework for community radio comes from the Government's draft Community Radio Order. We propose to produce an application form that asks for information relating to the conditions in the order.

The filled-in application form will provide the main source of information for us. We do not propose to interview anyone applying for a licence.

Possible effect on commercial radio

The Government has said that we must take account of the effect that community radio licensing might have on commercial radio services.

We propose to invite commercial stations to view all community radio applications on our website. We will offer them the opportunity to write to us if they believe any service will have a negative effect on their service. We will then investigate and carefully consider any claims.

The draft Community Radio Order allows us to decide how much income community stations can receive from selling advertising and sponsorship. We want views on whether we should set a general limit (such as 50%) or whether the limit should vary, with services being assessed individually.

Assessing and awarding licences

We hope to invite applications for community radio licences for the first time in June 2004.

People applying will then have 12 weeks to send us their applications. This should allow us to award licences from October onwards.

However, we may review this timetable. We are not able to advertise licences until the Community Radio Order becomes law.

If we receive a large number of applications, we may need to decide which ones to look at first. We will announce our priorities after the closing date for applications.

We are proposing that the same committee that decides on commercial radio licence awards will make the decisions.

Regulating services

Where necessary, we want to regulate stations as little as possible.

As part of its licence, each service will have a list of commitments which come from its application promises. This will set out:

- its commitment to benefit local people;
- what the station will sound like;
- how the community can get involved; and
- any limit on selling advertising and sponsorship.

Each year, every station will send us a short report on their achievements and their progress on the targets they set themselves.

Two to three years after the first stations start broadcasting, we would like to carry out some audience research. We want to find out what the target communities think about their station and how much effect they believe it has had on their area and social well being.

What we think of this opportunity

We are pleased to be given the job of introducing this new type of radio service to the UK and are keen to start offering licences as soon as we can.

We want to encourage solid growth in this new sector and we aim to attract a wide range of applicants.

The success of community radio will be measured by its effect on the communities it serves. We are committed to developing vibrant and distinctive radio services that are an essential community resource in the areas they serve.

How you can give us your views

We want to hear your views before we make any final decisions on the issues discussed in this leaflet. So, we are asking for responses by 20 April 2004.

The consultation is being led by Soo Williams from our Radio Planning and Licensing Team. You can contact her as follows.

By email:
susan.williams@ofcom.org.uk

In writing:
Soo Williams
Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

By fax (marked 'Community Radio Consultation'): 020 7981 3333

By phone: 020 7783 4319

We can answer any questions about the consultation or take your views by phone.

If you have any general questions about or comments on our consultation processes, please call our consultation helpdesk on 020 7981 3003.

We have a number of questions that we would like your views on. The questions are set out in the full consultation document, which you can get from our website at www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/current/com_radio/

You can also get printed copies from the Ofcom Contact Centre.

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London SE1 9HA

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020 7981 3040

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We look forward to hearing your views.

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