Dear Mr Martin

Public Audit Committee – Audit, Accountability and the Further Devolution of Powers

I refer to the email from Gary Cocker, Assistant Clerk to your committee of 26 June regarding the outcome of your committee’s consideration of the audit and accountability arrangements that should accompany the further devolution of powers. In particular, the committee is seeking clarification on the "potential for Ofcom’s activity to impact differently across the UK" and "how it reassures itself that such differences do not exist".

We welcome the opportunity to offer clarification on this point. We had confined our initial input to areas of financial reporting and governance rather than operational and regulatory matters as this felt most pertinent to the parameters of the inquiry. As highlighted in our response Ofcom has an office in Glasgow and, more recently, has opened an office in Edinburgh to support our activities in Scotland. We also have an Advisory Committee for Scotland which works across the breadth of our activities with the remit to represent the interests and opinions of citizens and consumers in Scotland. There are also representative members for Scotland on our Content Board and Communications Consumer Panel.

Ofcom regulates on a UK-wide basis except in areas where there are explicit requirements to do otherwise (such as the regional television production quotas relating to STV). But we are very much aware of differences in availability of key communications infrastructure. Your issues paper mentions broadband as a specific area where there may be regional variations, and this is indeed the case. Our most recent bespoke report for Scotland – the Communications Market Report (see http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr15/scotland/) shows that Scotland has below the UK average availability of super-fast broadband. Our analysis of the availability of communications services (http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/economic-geography/) details the reasons for these variations which are largely a factor of challenging geography and low population density.
We are committed to working with governments, at UK, Scottish and local levels who fund intervention campaigns to increase availability beyond commercial roll-out, to whom we can provide essential data and highlight potential solutions, particularly for rural areas (eg. 4G mobile broadband). Indeed, in respect of the 4G auction, we determined that an indoor premises coverage obligation of 95% in each of the UK nations should apply to one auction lot to ensure the widespread availability of the service. This obligation is part of the licence requirements of O2 (who won the lot with the coverage obligation) and is required to be fulfilled by the end of 2017. Ofcom is tracking and reporting on progress towards this outcome.

Ofcom is required by statute to conduct impact assessments in the course of carrying out its functions. This can be for a number of reasons including if a proposed activity is likely to have a significant impact on the general public in the UK or in a part of the UK.

Broadband and mobile coverage can be checked at a postcode level through our interactive maps available on our website at [http://maps.ofcom.org.uk/](http://maps.ofcom.org.uk/). The most recent update of our mobile coverage maps also offers consumers the ability to feedback on coverage in the areas they live and work to help validate the information to ensure it is as accurate as possible.

We would welcome an opportunity to explain more about our remit and work and how we ensure that we have as wide an understanding as possible of connectivity issues and the experiences of consumers and small businesses in the nations. We have offered to appear in front of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee (and the Education and Culture Committee in respect of our broadcasting regulation functions) and I'd be pleased to extend this offer to your own committee.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Sharon White