

A joined-up approach to digital regulation

The Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum (DRCF) today outlined its priorities for the coming year, marking a step-change in coordination of regulation across digital and online services.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the Office of Communications (Ofcom) formed the DRCF in July 2020. Building on the strong working relationships between these organisations, the forum was established to ensure a greater level of cooperation, given the unique challenges posed by regulation of online platforms.

Online services are playing an ever-more central role in our lives, and the digital landscape is developing at pace. There is a need for a more coherent, coordinated and clear regulatory approach – for the good of internet users and the companies who serve them.

Today's DRCF workplan for 2021/22 sets out a roadmap for how Ofcom, the CMA and the ICO will greatly increase the scope and scale of their co-operation. This will involve pooling expertise and resources, working more closely together on online regulatory matters of mutual importance, and reporting on results annually.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has been an observer member of the DRCF since the outset and will also join as a full member from April 2021.

Co-operation, coordination and a coherent regulatory approach

Since the DRCF was formed, there have been several major developments demanding regulator attention in the emerging landscape for digital and online.

For example, the UK Government confirmed that Ofcom will oversee and enforce a new duty of care for online harms. The UK Government also announced that a Digital Markets Unit (DMU) will be established in the CMA to oversee its new pro-competition regime. Additionally, this year, the ICO's new Age-Appropriate Design Code will come into effect.

To help us effectively prepare for these new responsibilities, our plan of work sets out how, through the DRCF, we will coordinate our regulatory approach in the coming year – focusing on 3 priority areas:

- **Responding strategically to industry and technological**

developments

We will launch joint projects on complex, cross-cutting issues. The CMA has already published new research on algorithms, showing how they can reduce competition in digital markets and harm consumers if they are misused. This research and any feedback on it will inform the future work of the DRCF. Other projects will include research into service design frameworks; artificial intelligence; digital advertising technologies and end-to-end encryption.

We will collectively build a more comprehensive view of industry trends and new innovations in digital technology to understand shared implications for regulation.

• Developing joined-up regulatory approaches

The nature of digital services means that different regulatory regimes will interlink and overlap. Where this occurs, we will develop approaches for ensuring a coherent regulatory approach.

Areas of focus this year will be on the interrelation between data protection and competition regulation, and the Age-Appropriate Design Code and the regulation of Video-Sharing Platforms and Online Harms.

• Building shared skills and capabilities

We will work together to build our collective technical and analytical capabilities. We will explore operational models to support more efficient skills and expertise sharing in the future. This might include, for example, building cross-regulator specialist teams.

We will continue to engage closely with other regulatory authorities with responsibilities for digital markets, who share some of the challenges set out in our plan of work.

Next steps

We invite comments and discussion on the DRCF's plan of work and priorities for the year ahead. These should be submitted to DRCF@ofcom.org.uk.

Looking ahead, additional measures might be needed to further strengthen digital regulatory cooperation. We are working with the UK Government on how this might be achieved.

Dame Melanie Dawes, Chief Executive, Ofcom said:

Online services are fundamental to how we interact with the world

around us. And we want to ensure that people continue to enjoy the many benefits that these innovative platforms and technologies offer, while having peace of mind that they're protected against the possible harms and risks.

As we ready ourselves to take on new responsibilities to regulate online safety, today's action plan sets out how, through the DRCF, we will strengthen our ties with the CMA and the ICO. Together we will drive a coherent approach to online regulation – for the good of internet users and the companies that serve them.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive, CMA said:

Technology plays a vital role in all our daily routines, whether by helping us to work, allowing us to stay connected to loved ones, or enabling us to spot a bargain online. We understand that the actions that we and other regulators take in the digital market have a real impact on people's lives.

That is why now, more than ever, we must work closely with other agencies – both domestically and internationally – to tackle these problems together and work with powerful tech firms to proactively shape their behaviour.

Elizabeth Denham, UK Information Commissioner, said:

Effective regulation supports digital innovation and economic development. It gives people trust and confidence to support innovation, safe in the knowledge there are checks and balances in place to protect them.

Through the DRCF we will be working closely with the CMA and Ofcom. Our workplan is a roadmap towards pragmatic, practical solutions to the challenges arising from our increasingly digital world. Practical cooperation between regulators will drive better outcomes for business and individuals.

Notes to editors

1. DRCF launch documents: [Ofcom DRCF launch document](#), [CMA DRCF launch document](#), [ICO blog on DRCF launch](#).
2. We intend to work closely with other domestic and international regulators as appropriate.