

Ofcom boss faces questions

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2007-11-20

Ed Richards the Chief Executive of the broadcasting regulator Ofcom is speaking at a POLIS event at the Hong Kong Theatre, LSE on Wednesday November 21st at 6.30pm. It's free and open to the public and there will be a chance to ask questions. There are a lot of questions to ask.

Ofcom is blessed or cursed with living in interesting times. It was established to unify various bits of broadcasting and telecoms regulation with the implication that it would be reducing the red tape on all those shiny new media enterprises.

But with the Internet, convergence and liberalisation has come a whole new set of problems that any self-respecting (or self-aggrandising) regulator will feel obliged to address.

In a previous [post](#) I applauded Ofcom's defence of Channel 4's investigative journalism against a complaint brought via West Midlands Police. But as one commentor pointed out, why was Ofcom judging the journalism at all?

The [Guardian](#)'s media commentator Emily [Bell](#) wrote this week that Ofcom's role is confused and under assault:

"...there is actually a greater need, or more importantly perceived need, for regulation. I am sure there are elements of Ofcom which will relish this expansionist opportunity, but it was certainly not the spirit in which it was established. There has always been a tension within the regulator between those who are purist regulators of the "ain't broke don't fix it" school, and those who are wedded to the misapprehension that the regulator is a well-paid thinktank."

Emily Bell points out that the European Commissioner thinks Ofcom is too close to the telecomms industry while MPs on the DCMS select committee are unimpressed by Ofcom's plans for a Public Service Provider to dole out public subsidy in the post-analogue age.

Today Ofcom publish a fascinating [report](#) (OK, it's rather dry – but the data is good) on the consumer experience of broadcasting and telecomms. It shows that with Broadband bundling of services the different sectors are merging. People now buy their telly and their phone and their Internet services from the same person.

This seems to justify Ofcom's existence. But what Ofcom actually does in this new world is still very open to debate. Join that debate in the Hong Kong Theatre at the LSE on Wednesday at 6.30pm on November 21st. Details of the event from polis@lse.ac.uk or at www.lse.ac.uk/polis

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