

## **Siinda Comments on the UK CMA Consultation on Fair Ranking Conduct Requirement (CR) February 2026**

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### **Executive Summary**

This submission responds to the CMA's proposed Fair Ranking Conduct Requirement (CR) from the perspective of Search and information providers, including aggregators and directories. Fair ranking is a structural condition for competition in search markets and must apply across the entire search results page (SERP), not only to isolated result blocks. Limiting obligations to specific sections risks allowing discrimination to shift to interface design, vertical integrations, or AI-generated features. AI Overviews and similar tools must be explicitly covered to prevent traffic diversion toward gatekeeper-controlled services. Non-discrimination should extend to indexing, crawling, linking practices, and review visibility. Transparency obligations must include meaningful notice of material changes and access to granular performance data. A complaints-led system should be complemented by proactive monitoring to address evidentiary asymmetries. Clear safeguards are also needed for manual exclusions from the index. Robust implementation of the CR is essential to preserve contestability, protect SMEs, and promote consumer choice.

### **Consultation questions**

#### **6.2 Do you agree with the proposed scope of the Fair Ranking CR?**

We support a broad scope for the Fair Ranking CR. Evidence from Siinda's September 2025 DMA analysis demonstrates that limiting equal treatment to individual result blocks (e.g. Local Pack) is insufficient and risks undermining the objective of non-discrimination across the search service as a whole. Distortions can arise not only through core organic ranking, but also through:

- Vertical integration (e.g. local, maps, reviews)
- Interface design and prominence
- Linking architecture

- Crawling and indexing decisions
- AI-generated answer boxes

We therefore recommend that the **CR apply across the entire search results page (SERP)**, including organic results, vertical blocks, paid listings, AI-generated features, review integration, and indexing practices. A narrower scope would create regulatory arbitrage opportunities and weaken effectiveness.

### **6.3 Do you have any views or evidence on the benefits or costs of the Fair Ranking CR?**

#### **Benefits**

Partial compliance risks entrenching dominance rather than restoring competitiveness . A robust Fair Ranking CR would protect downstream competition among aggregators and directories, support SME visibility, preserve user choice and diversity of information sources and promote innovation and contestability. Furthermore , it should help prevent the risks of traffic diversion through vertically integrated and AI-driven features which need to be subject to equal treatment obligations .

#### **Costs**

The proposed obligations (non-discrimination, transparency, neutral linking) reflect technical capacities already within gatekeepers' control. They do not constrain innovation in ranking systems, but rather prevent discriminatory application. In our view, the competition benefits materially outweigh compliance costs.

### **6.4 Do you have any views on the non-discrimination part of the Fair Ranking CR?**

#### **(a) Are the requirements sufficiently comprehensive?**

To be effective, the non-discrimination requirement must extend beyond traditional ranking to include:

- Equal treatment in indexing and crawling
- Neutral linking practices (e.g. avoiding default redirection to gatekeeper-controlled assets)
- Equal visibility of third-party reviews and ratings
- AI-generated features and summaries

#### **(b) Are there other factors which should be included in paragraph 4?**

Siinda recommends including:

- Explicit prohibition of self-preferencing in integrated vertical services
- Transparency regarding ranking methodology where the gatekeeper ranks professionals within aggregator-linked lists
- Safeguards to prevent disproportionate gatekeeper presence when acting as an aggregator. These measures reduce foreclosure risk and enhance objectivity.

## **6.5 Do you have views on the transparency part of the Fair Ranking CR?**

### **(a) What should the concept of a 'material change' cover?**

A material change should include:

- Introduction or expansion of AI Overviews, AI Mode, or similar features
- Changes to block prominence or layout
- Alterations to linking destinations
- Modifications to review inclusion criteria
- Changes affecting access to search performance data

AI-driven features must be subject to non-discriminatory ranking rules and visible source attribution .

### **(b) What are the advantages or risks of including your suggested changes?**

Advantages include:

- Reduced information asymmetry
- Earlier identification of distortive effects
- Improved ability for third parties to adapt

Risks can be mitigated through tiered transparency — public summaries combined with regulator-level detail.

## **6.6 Do you have views on the non-distortion and complaints part of the Fair Ranking CR?**

### **(a) What are your views on the proposed complaints-led process?**

A complaints-led process can target enforcement efficiently. However, the former Siinda paper highlights significant data opacity and evidentiary asymmetry . It references large-scale keyword monitoring methodologies (580,000 keywords across 2,000 localities) to assess SERP impact . This demonstrates that distortions are often systemic and require quantitative assessment.

We therefore recommend complementing complaints-led enforcement with:

- Mandatory provision of granular performance metrics (impressions, clicks, CTR, position) via secure APIs
- Independent SERP monitoring mechanisms
- Interim measures where credible harm is identified

### **(b) What factors should inform whether the materiality threshold has been reached?**

Materiality should consider:

- Sustained traffic loss beyond normal volatility
- Systemic displacement by proprietary or AI blocks
- Reduced visibility of third-party reviews
- Market-wide competitive effects

Quantitative monitoring methodologies referenced in the September paper provide a workable framework .

### **6.7 Do you have views on proposals for introducing a general complaints process covering manual exclusions from Google's search index?**

Manual exclusions or de-indexing decisions can be economically existential for search and directory providers.

Consistent with the transparency principles outlined in the September 2025 paper , a complaints process should include:

- Clear notification of reasons
- Access to relevant evidence
- Defined timelines for review
- Opportunity to respond
- Independent oversight

Without procedural safeguards, exclusion powers may chill competition.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As set out in the Siinda DMA September 2025 submission, partial or block-specific compliance risks entrenching dominance rather than restoring contestability.

An effective Fair Ranking CR should:

- Apply across the entire SERP
- Explicitly include AI-driven features
- Prohibit self-preferencing in ranking and linking
- Mandate meaningful transparency and data access
- Combine complaints-led enforcement with proactive monitoring

Such an approach would align with the CMA's objectives of promoting effective competition, protecting consumers, and ensuring open digital markets.

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