



9 November 2009

Colette Bowe  
Chairman  
Ofcom  
Riverside House  
2a Southwark Bridge Road  
London  
SE1 9HA

Dear Colette,

**Ofcom priorities for 2010/11**

I said that I would write to you to set out the Communications Consumer Panel's views on the issues that Ofcom should focus on as a matter of priority during the coming financial year 2010/11.

First, the Panel would like to highlight an issue that it would like Ofcom to scope in preparation for the future – **consumer expectations of the internet**. Our research shows that soon it will be essential for everyone to have access to the internet at home, but we do not yet know what consumers expect of that access – what content, what freedoms and what protections they anticipate. These expectations should be central to debates about both digital participation and the role of regulation and self-regulation. Policy makers will have to decide where consumer expectations need to be moderated or better informed, and where they need to be met and, if so, how.

The Panel is acutely conscious of the fact that many of the internet-related issues that may be important to consumers are not within Ofcom's remit. But as the converged regulator with a consumer and citizen focus, Ofcom is in a unique position to examine these issues in a joined-up way, starting with consumers and citizens and identifying the issues that will need to be considered by governments, regulators and service and content providers.

Secondly, there are three areas involving consumer protection and empowerment about which the Panel has been talking to Ofcom colleagues and which we would like to see featured in their own right in next year's Annual Plan:

- **Complaints-handling** – work to improve Alternative Dispute Resolution has identified a need to take a more strategic look at how communications providers handle complaints. The Panel is particularly concerned that access to good complaints handling and resolution appears to depend more on a consumer's confidence in pursuing his or her complaint than on its justice or personal impact. This clearly disadvantages less knowledgeable and less articulate consumers.

- **Switching** – following work to strengthen the rules on mis-selling, Ofcom has begun working with industry to develop a more unified switching process for communications services for implementation in the medium-term. This is enormously important for consumers, who are increasingly purchasing bundles and who might otherwise be overwhelmed by the difficulty of switching, particularly if they are considering switching away from a bundle of services.
- **Consumer decision- making and the role of information** – following the decision not to continue with the provision of quality of service information via Topcomm, the Panel thinks it is important for Ofcom to step back from considering how to provide information to consumers for specific purposes and take a more strategic view of the value and use of information in real consumer decision-making. We anticipate that behavioural economics and other approaches could help to develop a better understanding of consumer decision-making, which could then inform Ofcom’s decisions in a range of different contexts. In doing such work, it might help to model decision-making in a few case study contexts. One suggestion might be to look at how consumers use the information provided on bills about issues such as how to complain.

Finally, there are four areas that Ofcom is addressing already which have been, and will continue to be, of major interest to the Panel and where we anticipate that work will continue in the next financial year:

- **universal service** – including the universal broadband commitment, next-generation broadband and how to address the ‘Final Third’, Ofcom’s review of the current universal service obligation and the longer-term EU review of universal service;
- **digital inclusion and participation;**
- **making consumers and citizens central to Ofcom’s policy-making processes** – including the Panel’s Consumer Interest Toolkit Review and Ofcom’s work to produce consolidated and streamlined guidance on how to develop regulatory policy; and
- **mobile coverage.**

The Panel will be discussing its own Work Plan for 2010/11 at its meeting in December. We look forward to contributing our further views on Ofcom’s Annual Plan 2010/11 in the light of our own agreed priorities.

As the year goes on, we will share with the Board and Ofcom colleagues our developing views in each of the areas that we have highlighted – and any new ones that arise from our research and our engagement with other organisations that represent consumers and citizens.

We look to working with you over the coming year.

Yours sincerely,



**Anna Bradley**  
Chair