



APRIL 2015 BULLETIN

Panel hosts roundtables on micro businesses' experience of communications

Last year, the Panel commissioned [research](#) (PDF) among micro businesses to investigate their use and experience of communications services. The research highlighted that, in order to maximise the opportunities presented by communications services, there is a need for action and greater support in three key areas:

- Government, in association with Ofcom, the industry and communications providers, should focus on supplying improved speeds and coverage for both fast broadband and mobile voice and data.
- Communications providers should consider offering tailored communications service packages for micro businesses, facilitating access to robust services and business grade support levels.
- Government, Ofcom, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, chambers of commerce, trade associations and communications providers should review the information and advice they offer about the benefits of investing in communications, tailored to the needs and time restraints of micro businesses.

Throughout this month, the Panel has been meeting with stakeholders across the UK to present relevant research findings, including Ofcom's research on the [SME experience of communications services](#) (PDF), and the Panel's associated recommendations. We intend to arrange meetings with communications providers in the forthcoming months to discuss the recommendations.

Ofcom announces stakeholder forum on Strategic Review of Digital Communications

Further to the news in last month's bulletin about Ofcom's announcement that it is undertaking a strategic review of digital communications, Ofcom is holding a stakeholder forum on Monday 11 May 2015 to outline the scope of its Review.

Stakeholders with an interest in the digital communications sector are encouraged to attend the session, which will offer Ofcom an opportunity to gather views on the review and shape the discussion document it intends to publish in the summer.

The review will consider a range of issues in the sector. Ofcom anticipates that it will focus on three aspects in particular:

- ensuring the right incentives for private-sector investment, which can help to deliver availability and quality of service;
- maintaining strong competition and tackling obstacles or bottlenecks that might be holding the sector back; and
- identifying whether there is scope for deregulation in some areas.

This forum forms the first in a series of stakeholder meetings which Ofcom is holding as part of its engagement plan for the Strategic Review of Digital Communications. Further details and how to RSVP can be found [here](#). Additional information on the Strategic Review and Ofcom's stakeholder engagement plans can be found [here](#).

Ofcom expects to conclude the review's second phase by outlining initial conclusions around the end of the year. A [press release](#) and further details can be found on the Ofcom website.

Lloyds Bank publishes second UK Digital Index

Lloyds Bank's second annual [UK Digital Index](#), which tracks digital adoption among small to medium sized businesses (SMEs), reveals that there are still over a million (23%) of SMEs that lack basic digital skills. When looking at the charity sector, this increases significantly, with 58% of charities lacking basic digital skills.

The Index, in association with Accenture and digital skills charity [Go ON UK](#), tracks the level of digital adoption of SMEs and charities, for example running a website, using e-commerce, maintaining a social media presence or using online banking tools.

In the first year of comparison the Index shows that there has been slow but positive progress in digital adoption among all organisations in the past year with an overall rise in the UK Index score by two points to 102.

However, the report also highlights that some SMEs and charities still do not understand the benefits of digital technology and that a 'digital blind-spot' remains, potentially jeopardising their success. One-quarter (25%) of all organisations surveyed believe digital is 'irrelevant' to them.

SMEs with a high level of digital skills are a third more likely to report an increase in turnover in the past two years compared with those firms that are the least digitally able. For charities it is double.

A press release providing an overview of the research findings can be found [here](#).

Ofcom publishes latest Television Access Report

Ofcom's [Television Access Services Report 2014](#) published this month has found that all 72 domestic channels that are required to provide access services - subtitles, signing and audio description - met or exceeded their targets.

Under the 2003 Communications Act, TV broadcasters are required to deliver a certain proportion of their programmes with subtitles, signing and audio description (AD) to make sure people with hearing and visual impairments can understand and enjoy programmes.

The BBC must subtitle 100 per cent of its programmes, audio describe 10 per cent and provide sign language on 5 per cent. Channel 4 and ITV, STV and UTV must all subtitle at least 90 per cent of broadcasts.

The report noted that a number of broadcasters had voluntarily committed to delivering 20% audio description on all or most of their channels, even though the statutory obligation is only to deliver 10% - less for channels that are less than five years old.

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