



## APRIL 2016 BULLETIN

### Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD publish 2016/17 work plan

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Following a public consultation the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD have published their work plan for 2016/17.

Jo Connell, the Panel's Chair, thanked stakeholders for their comments on the Plan and explained that the work plan outlines the different ways in which Members engage with issues, explains how our priorities are chosen for the year and sets out the key areas that we intend to address. This year, the key areas of engagement are:

- Broadband/mobile coverage and quality of service
- Nuisance calls and ease of reporting
- Treating consumers fairly including customer service and complaints handling
- Digital engagement/detriment
- Postal services

In terms of research, we intend to focus on a new project in relation to access to broadcast and on-demand content. The delivery of audio-visual content has been transformed in recent years. We believe that, as far as practicable, everyone should have the opportunity to take advantage of these developments and have equivalent access to both broadcast and on demand content. We continue to be concerned about the provision of access services and will undertake a study into the delivery and usage of services, people's attitudes to these and the barriers that stand in the way of better provision.

You can read the full work plan [here](#).

## Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

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The Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD have continued to meet with communications providers and stakeholders to discuss a range of consumer issues with a particular focus on our recent [Inclusive Communications research](#).

This month, the Panel was represented at the Westminster e-forum seminar on spectrum policy as well as the UK Regulators Network's conference, and the Voice of the Listener and Viewer's spring conference which examined the future of public sector broadcasting.

### Consultation Responses

#### Response to PhonePayPlus' draft guidance consultation

The Panel and ACOD responded to PhonepayPlus' draft guidance consultation. The consultation comes after a widespread review by PhonepayPlus into its current Guidance. The five pieces of Guidance that have been amended or developed afresh relate to:

➤ **Advice services**

Our response highlighted that we believe that a requirement should be for such services to offer advice that is reliable, trustworthy and accurate and, following from that basic tenet, for users to be informed what qualifications/skills/experience operators have to enable them to provide this. We also suggested that consideration be given to making relevant information available in promotional material and at the beginning of the service.

➤ **Digital marketing and promotions**

We expressed our strong belief that it is a fundamental requirement that consumers are not misled by certain digital marketing techniques.

➤ **Enabling consumer spend control**

With regard to consumer spend control, we welcomed the proposed steps outlined in the guidance, in particular the reference to contacting a consumer if that user has reached a usage level or spend which is 50% higher than the modal average. We also supported the cessation of service or non-billing of consumers who have reached double the level of use of an average user until the user had acknowledged the usage/spend level to the provider directly.

➤ **Method of exit from a service**

Our response emphasised that exit methods must be clear, easy to complete, effective and unambiguous and provided strong support for the use of the 'STOP' command.

➤ **Subscription services**

We agreed that it is vital that consumers clearly understand the implications of signing up to a subscription service and are content to incur a future recurring charge before they are charged initially.

A copy of our full consultation response can be found [here](#).

## Response to DCMS' consultation on a new Broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO)

The Panel and ACOD also responded to DCMS' consultation on a new Broadband USO. Our response recognised the effort and investment that has been put into improving broadband coverage and speeds by providers, Government and Ofcom to date. However, whilst this is to be applauded, we highlighted that there are still large gaps in availability of a usable broadband service - which causes detriment to large numbers of people, including micro businesses.

We therefore welcomed DCMS's recognition that the introduction of a USO will give consumers and micro businesses the legal right to a 'safety net' of broadband provision which the Panel has long called for.

Our response however highlighted that whilst a technical broadband USO is vitally important, essential elements of a universal service should also include factors of access and availability alongside quality of service, transparent information, redress and consumer representation.

We also noted our belief that providers should be incentivised to encourage and support take-up. The Government's aim, we believe, should be that individuals are not just included, but are able and are encouraged to engage and participate fully; and that UK businesses are able to compete with overseas companies where those countries guarantee specified broadband speeds.

Whilst the consultation document stated all homes and businesses can now access basic broadband of 2Mbps, Ofcom's Connected Nations Report, December 2015, still showed up to 9% of rural UK receiving speeds of less than 2Mbps (up to 2% of the whole of the UK). We therefore welcomed initiatives such as the supply of satellite connectivity to those who would benefit from it. However, we stressed that it is vital that this scheme is widely publicised and that on-going costs are addressed for those who might encounter difficulty paying for the service.

Given the stated intentions behind the proposed USO, we also encouraged Government and Ofcom to think creatively about the way spectrum is licensed, to ensure that spectrum is utilised to best effect as a way of also delivering those intentions.

The full consultation response can be found [here](#).

## Ofcom's Media Use and Attitudes report published

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Ofcom's [Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report](#) this year highlights shifts in how people are engaging with online content and services, raising a number of important implications.

The report notes that:

- There has been a considerable rise (from 6% in 2014 to 16% in 2015) in the proportion of adults who only use smartphones or tablets to go online, and not a PC/laptop. In other words, these newer devices are not just supplementing PCs/laptops, but are starting to replace them. This move away from PCs and laptops and towards smartphones and tablets has the potential to make an impact in a number of areas including implications for usability, as the size of the device may hamper some types of use e.g. typing longer forms/documents.
- Smartphones are the preferred device for five out of nine online activities. Internet users are more likely to say that they use a smartphone (rather than any other device) for social media, listening to streamed music, watching short video clips, looking at news websites or apps, and surfing or browsing online. There are three activities which are more likely to be undertaken using a laptop/netbook: buying things online, watching TV programmes or films online on broadcasters' services, and completing government processes.
- A quarter (25%) of internet users agrees that they have ever given inaccurate or false details on some websites to protect their personal identity online. There is increasing polarity between different age groups in terms of communications activity. Whereas 25 years ago, all age groups shared just two common means of communication - landlines and letters - the landscape is now considerably more varied, and there is a risk that common means of communication that cut across demographics are becoming increasingly rare, with implications for social connectivity and information-sharing.
- Thirteen per cent of adults are non-users of the internet. Just under six in ten (58%) of all non-users are aged 65 and over, and more than two in five (42%) are in DE households. A third (33%) of non-users has asked someone else to use the internet on their behalf in the past 12 months. Non-users aged 16-64 are more likely than those aged 65+ to say they have made a proxy use of the internet in this way.
- One in ten (9%) of non-users say they will start to go online in the next year, while 80% say they will not become an internet user and 10% are unsure. When asked what they considered the main advantages of being online, 49% of non-users say that for them, there are no advantages in being online.

## UK mobile users only able to connect to 4G half of the time

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A new report published by Which? and independent mobile coverage analysts OpenSignal found that mobile customers in the UK were only able to access 4G 53% of the time on average across the four networks.

The latest data from the OpenSignal '[State of Mobile Networks: UK](#)' report, found that on average EE customers have the best 4G coverage with customers able to access a 4G signal 60.6% of the time. The report, which is accompanied by a [live interactive map service](#) on the best and worst areas for 2G, 3G and 4G signal in the UK, ranked Vodafone second with

their customers able to connect to a 4G signal 57% of the time. O2 came third and Three last with their customers able to access 4G signal 56% and 39.8% of the time respectively.

The report's findings are based on data collected from over 30,000 registered users of OpenSignal's mobile app which takes a background reading every 15 minutes to calculate the proportion of time users can access 4G.

When looking at 4G download speeds, Three was found to offer an average speed of 18.7Mbps, EE an average 17.8Mbps, O2 was third for 4G at 12.1Mbps and Vodafone the slowest at 11.8Mbps.

## Ofcom seeks views on designing the Broadband Universal Service Obligation

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In November 2015, the Government set out its intention to introduce a universal service obligation (USO) for broadband, giving everyone the right to request a decent broadband connection.

Ofcom has been commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to provide technical analysis and recommendations to support the design of the broadband USO.

The Regulator has published a [call for inputs](#) to help inform the design of a broadband USO; including seeking views on:

- appropriate download speeds, and other technical measures, necessary to deliver a 'decent' broadband connection;
- funding of the broadband USO;
- when, and on what basis, the USO should be reviewed; and
- designation of the universal service provider or providers.

The call for inputs is open until 22 June 2016.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has asked Ofcom for a report setting out evidence based-analysis and recommendations on the design of the USO by the end of this year.

## New BSL Guides on Using Next Generation Text Services

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Next Generation Text Service has produced a series of BSL video guides on how to use Next Generation Text on a range of platforms including Windows, Android and iOS. The guides are available on YouTube [here](#).

## Which? publishes Broadband customer satisfaction survey

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A new Which? broadband customer satisfaction survey has found the UK's biggest internet service providers are still failing on customer service with major providers occupying four of the bottom five slots.

The latest results, following a survey of 3,717 broadband users, show that TalkTalk (38%) and BT (47%) achieved the lowest customer scores due to poor customer service and lack of ease in contacting them. Virgin (54%) and Sky (50%) performed only slightly better.

The survey found that smaller internet service providers (ISPs) are leading the way in keeping their customers happy with Zen Internet and Utility Warehouse achieving first and second place. They scored 83% and 80% respectively, which is 15% higher than the next nearest competitor, Plusnet, who scored 65%.

Further details can be found [here](#).

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