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Dear Colette

Nations and Regions

I refer to your note of the Consumer Panel's meeting of 15 June on Nations and Regions research published in April 2006 and sent to Ofcom as advice.

We published our statement on the policy implications arising from the research on 12 October¹. We note that Ofcom's analysis of the research is similar to that set out in the Panel's note.

The statement recognises that, as the Panel points out, the main policy findings from the research apply on a UK-wide basis but have varying levels of impact by nation and region due to different socio-economic and geographic characteristics. In particular we identify significant policy issues around:

- No or limited 2G mobile coverage in some rural areas
- The roll-out of competitive broadband services in rural areas and the lower take-up of internet and broadband services among older and lower-income consumers
- The availability and awareness of digital broadcasting services.

We explain in the statement that these issues will be taken forward in existing and new Ofcom work and projects:

- We are exploring with mobile providers and emergency authorities the possibilities for enabling consumers to make emergency calls by roaming on to other providers' networks when they are outside the coverage of their home network provider's

¹ <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/nations/statement/>

network. We will also explore the broader issues around how 2G mobile coverage in rural areas can be addressed.

- Ofcom has been working with ComReg, the Irish communications regulator, and with all of the mobile operators to address the problem of inadvertent roaming. A joint report was published on 10 October².
- A project on digital inclusion will explore issues around the availability, the barriers to take-up and the impact of the lack of communications services. This project will operate alongside our ongoing work on Media Literacy and our ongoing research programme.
- Geographic de-averaging is being taken forward as part of the digital inclusion and wholesale broadband access work.
- Ofcom will continue to provide support to Digital UK. This work will provide coverage predictions for DTT and will provide consumers with advice on alternatives where DTT is not available.

The statement also recognises the role played other stakeholders – for example, the national and regional government and industry in identifying and addressing gaps in broadband coverage and the UK Government’s Digital Strategy that seeks to address issues around digital inclusion. Ofcom is building relationships with these stakeholders and we are seeking to find areas where we can usefully work together within the terms of Ofcom’s remit.

We are grateful for your advice and are pleased that we share a common analysis of the issues raised by the research. We look forward to working with the Panel as we take forward these issues.

Yours sincerely



² http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2006/10/nr_20061010