

25 March 2004

Lord Currie
Chairman, Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London
SE1 9HA

Response from the Consumer Panel to the Ofcom consultation on its Annual Plan for 2004/5

I am writing following the second meeting of the Panel to give you a formal response to your proposed Annual Plan for 2004/5.

The Panel has been grateful for presentations on Ofcom plans at its two meetings from Stephen Carter, Ed Richards and Geoff Delamere, respectively.

As you know, the Panel is proposing to commission a major piece of research into the concerns, and also the state of knowledge, of consumers in the communications market place. On present plans, this research will be commissioned in May of this year, and its output will drive the Panel's work in the year to come.

Ahead of that, however, we have already determined some provisional priorities for our work. These will include:

- the proposed digital switchover;
- the development of the telecoms market, including new ways of carrying voice messages via the Internet and other developments related to the more widespread availability of broadband;
- spectrum availability and pricing; and
- access issues arising from consideration of public service broadcasting.

These are in addition to the work we will undertake to inform ourselves on the needs of consumers in particular parts of the UK, and in particular groups in

our society. These will be as follows (this list also shows which Panel members will be responsible for which specific topics):

- Representing the interests of people who live in Scotland: Fiona Ballantyne
- Northern Ireland: Kevin McLaughlin
- Wales: Simon Gibson
- England: Roger Darlington
- Older people: Colette Bowe
- Disabled people: Bob Twitchin
- People on low incomes: Ruth Evans
- People living in rural areas: Simon Gibson and Kevin McLaughlin
- People living in urban areas : Kate O'Rourke
- Small businesses: Nainish Bapna and Fiona Ballantyne

In addition, the Panel has decided to give continuous attention, in the same way, to identifying the specific interests and concerns of:

- Young people: Azeem Azhar
- Ethnic groups: Nainish Bapna

The Panel has studied the Ofcom proposed plan for 2004/5, and believes that the work Ofcom is proposing to carry out will reflect at many points the issues that the Panel has already identified as being issues of consumer concern.

As the year goes on, we will share with your board and with Ofcom colleagues our developing views on the consumer interest in each of these important areas – and any new ones that arise either from our consumer research, or from our other work with consumer stakeholders.

We look forward to working with you on these important issues.

COLETTE BOWE