

Press Release

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Consumer Panel brings together international speakers to debate net neutrality from the consumer point of view

Speaking today at the seminar on net neutrality organised by the Communications Consumer Panel and the London School of Economics' media think tank Polis, Panel Chair Anna Bradley will question whether consumers and citizens are being properly represented in the net neutrality debate, and will ask whether giving people information about how internet service providers (ISPs) manage internet traffic is really the answer.

Joining Anna Bradley and Panel member Damian Tambini, high level speakers include Giuseppe Conte from the cabinet of the Vice-President of the European Commission, Zachary Katz, legal adviser to the Chairman of US regulator the Federal Communications Commission and Ofcom's International Director Alex Blowers.

Addressing the audience of industry, consumer groups, and academics, Anna Bradley will argue:

“Ofcom, the communications regulator, is focusing on transparency - how we can ensure that consumers have the right information about the traffic management policies employed by internet service providers. But this information is complicated and difficult for even the most tech-savvy consumers to understand. A focus on transparency also assumes that consumers will find it easy to switch provider to find a package that better meets their needs. We are not convinced that consumers will find this an easy process.”

The Panel Chair will go on to caution against the danger of focusing only on the needs of consumers, pointing out that net neutrality is a citizen issue too:

“The government has stressed the importance of broadband to UK citizens, and there are ambitious plans to move more and more public services online. So net neutrality is not only an issue of consumer choice. We also have to ensure that traffic management policies do not reduce the quality or experience of using online public services.”

The Panel Chair will put three proposals to policy makers:

“Industry must make a firm commitment to giving consumers clear information that enables them to make the right choices. We should consider a ‘must carry’ obligation to enable citizens to access online public services. But, above all, there needs to be more research into what people want and how they really behave.”

The Communications Consumer Panel will use the seminar to inform its responses to both Ofcom and the European Commission's consultations on net neutrality, due to close later this month. A summary of the seminar discussion will also be published on its website.

Ends

CONTACTS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Communications Consumer Panel was established to advise Ofcom on the consumer interest in the markets it regulates. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk for more information.

The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

- Anna Bradley (Chair)
- Fiona Ballantyne (member for Scotland)
- Louisa Bolch
- Kim Brook (member for Wales)
- Colin Browne
- Roger Darlington (member for England)
- Maureen Edmondson (member for Northern Ireland)
- Leen Petre
- Damian Tambini
- Bob Warner

POLIS is a joint initiative of LSE's Department of Media and Communications and the London College of Communication. Visit www.polismedia.org for more information.