

Communications Consumer Panel response to the House of Lords Select Committee inquiry into the Government's superfast broadband strategy

Summary

- The Panel believes that everyone should have access to a good level of broadband service so that consumers and small and medium-sized businesses (or SMEs) in all parts of the UK have equal opportunity to carry out essential online activities in a reliable and consistent way. A robust broadband infrastructure must be inclusive and aim to maximise digital participation;
- The Panel has developed a *Consumer Framework for Digital Participation* that brings together all the different elements that are needed to provide the help and support that people need to get online, stay on-line and get the most value and benefit from the internet;
- 20% of UK adults say they do not use the internet at all. The most frequent reason for not getting the internet at home relates to a perceived lack of need. 16% of respondents from the Federation of Small Businesses report that they don't use current generation broadband - 27% of those respondents reported that they had no business need;
- The drive to attain greater speeds must be complemented by work to convince people who are currently offline of the benefits of going online and to enable them to gain the necessary skills;
- There are a number of important safeguards required if the Universal Service Commitment (USC) is to be implemented in a way that meets the needs of consumers;
- There is particular concern for SMEs that fall within the 10% likely to be unable to access speeds significantly greater than 2MB and that 2MB may be insufficient for consumers in future as new, bandwidth hungry, services become the norm;
- Around 5% of residential UK broadband connections had a headline speed over 24Mbit/s in November 2011. Enders Analysis estimate that only 15% of households with a broadband connection would be willing to pay an additional £5 a month for higher connection speeds;
- Value for money and concurrency were the most important reasons for consumers choosing their current super-fast broadband service. New services will drive uptake but this also requires empowered consumers. People will need to understand what these new services offer and their potential to improve their lives compared to current generation broadband;
- The Panel's current research looks at how people in low digital participation groups across the UK can get the most out of being online and how they might increase their breadth of usage. This will specifically look at the issue of low uptake in areas of Glasgow.
- In-home hardware and set-up will also affect the speed experienced by the end-user;
- Enabling consumers to make an informed choice between the packages and service offered by different providers, and making it easier to switch between them, encourages competition and investment; and
- Effective mobile coverage is essential for growth in rural communities and businesses.