



## SEPTEMBER / 2016 BULLETIN

### Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

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Panel Chair Jo Connell, along with Panel member Chris Holland and team members Fiona Lennox and Jenny Borritt, visited BT's Vulnerability Centre in Doncaster this month where they were briefed on BT's consumer strategy and met the contact centre advisers who deal directly with queries from people in vulnerable circumstances.

Chris Holland also attended the Ofcom Advisory Committee for England; discussion focused amongst other subjects on the Broadband USO, where Chris emphasised the Panel's opinion that any USO should be linked to a digital participation programme. He also highlighted, particularly with micro businesses and the creative industries in mind, the importance of the USO including upload, as well as download, speeds.

In addition, Chris attended a Westminster eForum keynote seminar which discussed consumer law and alternative dispute resolution. In our view the ADR process requires a number of improvements to ensure that it delivers for consumers and we are pushing for tangible progress on this issue.

Panel member Rick Hill attended the Consumer Forum for Communications meeting on 15 September.

### The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

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#### **Response to consumer switching - further proposals to reform switching of mobile services**

The Panel has been significantly concerned about the issue of mobile notice periods and so we very much welcomed Ofcom's consultation on further proposals to reform switching of mobile communications services. In addition to removing technical barriers to switching,

we stated that there should be no financial disincentive for the consumer and no unjustified enrichment for providers, as a result of a consumer's decision to switch. We firmly believe that the switching process should be considered holistically; notice periods are an important part of this and should not be handled separately. We are pleased to see that Ofcom's proposed action builds on our recommendation that notice period charges should cease from the point at which the losing provider deactivates the old service: a consumer should not have to pay twice for a service - and for a service that they no longer receive.

Our response is [here](#).

## Other news

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Three reports published this month highlight the link between poverty or social exclusion and suffering digital detriment. This is an issue of major concern to the Panel as the Government moves closer to "Digital by default" and we will be continuing to draw attention to this issue in the coming months.

### **UK poverty: Causes, costs and solutions**

The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has published a report looking at how to solve UK poverty, which echoes many of the Panel's statements in regard to digital participation. It maintains that though accessing the internet is problematic for a small proportion of people in poverty, the digital skills shortage is a major problem. It also reinforces our research, [Bridging the Gap](#), in finding that a lack of interest in being online by some members of society is a major issue and that a digital by default society must address the fact that the majority of people aged over 75 do not use the internet.

The Foundation argue that basic digital skills should be regarded as a core capability alongside literacy and numeracy, and calls for basic digital skills to be included as part of the basic skills programme - with a target set to meet all basic skills needs by 2030.

Many more ideas and recommendations are contained in the report, which can be [found here](#).

### **Paying more to be poor**

[Citizens Advice Scotland](#) have also issued a report on poverty, this one focused on the poverty premium (when those on a low income pay more for goods and services due to

their weaker position in consumer markets) in energy, telecommunications and finance in Scotland. Their research found that 18% of low income respondents did not use the internet, landlines or cable or satellite television compared to less than 1% of high earners.

Low income consumers were also less likely to have switched telecoms suppliers, with 31% saying they had done so in the last three years compared to 39% on a high income. Overall, 38% of those with internet access switched suppliers in the past three years, compared to 26% that lacked such access.

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

## **Digital Participation and Social Justice in Scotland**

The final report is from [Carnegie UK Trust](#), examining the links between digital exclusion and other forms of social exclusion. [Digital Participation and Social Justice in Scotland](#) identifies who is most likely to be digitally excluded and draws on detailed statistical analysis, carried out by Ipsos MORI, to examine the key drivers of this exclusion - including working status, housing tenure, age, qualifications, active lifestyles and mental health.

You [can download the report from here](#).

The Trust noted that it is often those who could gain the most from internet access who are the least likely to be connected - a concern that the Panel has raised on numerous occasions - our views on this can be found in [our consultation response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's call for evidence in relation to Digital Skills](#).

## **Building Gigabit Britain**

Earlier this month, [INCA, the Independent Networks Cooperative Association](#) published its [Building Gigabit Britain](#) report, outlining its view of the Government measures required to facilitate the wide-scale deployment of FTTP, the infrastructure it maintains is essential to ensure the UK remains digitally competitive.

In the report INCA states that the Government should be aiming for 80% of businesses and homes to have pure fibre connection by 2026 and develop regulation that encourages both competition and continued private sector investment. It also calls for the suspension of all business rates on new fibre assets, for the next ten years, and joins the calls for an

overhaul of advertising guidelines to provide customers with clarity in regard to connectivity quality.

Read the [report here](#).

## **UKRN price comparison website report**

The [UK Regulators Network \(UKRN\)](#) has published the results of its study of price comparison websites (PCWs). It looks at how consumers engage with the market of PCWs; what benefits there are for customers and for competition; what potential risks could undermine the effectiveness of the sites; and what regulatory powers can be applied to address these potential risks. Using case studies from the three regulators that led the work - the Financial Conduct Authority, Ofgem and Ofcom - the report also draws upon existing research and data. Amongst other aims, UKRN hope it will be a valuable reference tool for consumer groups, particularly where it draws attention to potential inconsistencies of service levels between firms.

The [report is here](#).

## **Global Disability Innovation Hub**

The Global Disability Innovation Hub opened on National Paralympic Day, 6 September. The Hub aims to bring together the world's best academics, disability experts, designers, and communities to improve the lives of disabled people across the world through technology, co-design and innovation.

The Hub will be based at the new UCL East campus at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and has a website [www.disabilityinnovation.com](http://www.disabilityinnovation.com), which is calling on people to join the GDI online community and share ideas and innovations from across the world;

The inaugural GDI Hub Summit will be held in London on 13th and 14th July 2017.

## **Nuisance calls**

Following our campaigning last year on the issue of nuisance calls we were delighted by the [ICO](#) (Information Commissioner's Office) announcement that it has fined nuisance marketing firms the equivalent of nearly £10,000 a day in 2016.

Unwanted calls, texts and emails can be reported via the ICO's [online reporting tools](#) or by calling 0303 123 1113.

On the subject of nuisance calls we are pleased to announce that Panel member Mairi Macleod has been invited to join the Scottish Government's Short Life Commission on Nuisance Calls; the first meeting is to be held in November 2016.

## **Mobile research app for Android**

The Ofcom mobile coverage research app has launched this month. Android mobile users can join a nationwide panel of volunteers who will help gather valuable information about mobile coverage, reliability of voice calls, mobile broadband performance and users' experiences and habits.

The app has a page on the Ofcom website [here](#) and the app is available to download from the Google Play Store.

If you have any queries, please email [mobileresearch.app@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:mobileresearch.app@ofcom.org.uk)

## **Advances in accessibility**

Windows, iOS and Android platforms come with unique accessibility settings and built-in assistive services that many people with disabilities rely on. [This blog](#) outlines the enhancements Office 365 have introduced to ensure people with vision impairments can work using built-in accessibility settings. These include making the Office ribbon items much easier for someone with reduced contrast sensitivity to work with and several enhancements for VoiceOver users in Skype for Business on iOS and Outlook for iOS. Also, in the latest version of the PowerPoint app on iOS, there is support for multiple audio tracks so users can hear audio descriptions if they are included in videos within a slideshow.

Many more accessibility enhancements are apparently coming soon, and new elements launching in the coming months as part of Office 365, such as SharePoint mobile apps, are being designed in line with the principles of inclusive design and will be accessible and usable with screen readers from day one.

You can help improve the accessibility of Microsoft products, via the [Microsoft Accessibility forum](#) and keep up-to-date on accessibility enhancements in Microsoft

products, by following [@MSFTEnable](#) on Twitter, going to the [Accessibility Blog](#) and or watching the [accessibility video series on Microsoft Mechanics](#).

Apple has made some accessibility enhancements - such as adding wheelchair specific optimizations to Apple Watch – but iOS 10, macOS Sierra, tvOS 10 and watchOS 3 also have many other improvements to assist users with motor, vision, hearing, and learning impairments. In iOS 10 there is an accessibility feature called Magnifier that lets you use the camera as a magnifying glass with a custom UI. New this year is support for Switch Control on Apple TV. Another recent new accessibility feature from Apple is Dwell Control, which brings support to macOS for hardware that uses a headband or eye movements to track input from users with limited mobility. To assist with colour blindness, Apple this year has expanded iOS, macOS, and tvOS colour adjustments including adding the ability to tint the entire display a certain colour. iOS 10 also supports teletypewriter software.

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