



SUMMER 2016 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

Panel Chair Jo Connell recently attended the 2016 [Tech4Good awards](#). Now in its sixth year, the awards, organised by national charity [AbilityNet](#) and supported by BT, celebrate technological innovations that make the world a better place and award prizes in a range of categories. Jo, along with Panel Executive Director Fiona Lennox, also attended our latest meeting with fellow consumer panels; the [Legal Services Consumer Panel](#), the [Financial Services Consumer Panel](#) and the [Civil Aviation Authority Consumer Panel](#) where discussion centred on the Better Markets Bill. Jo and Fiona also met with [Citizens Advice \(CA\)](#), where amongst other topics there was a discussion regarding research into personal data and consumer protection - details of CA's recent publication on this can be found below.

Panel member Chris Holland attended a discussion session that looked at automatic compensation and quality of service reporting, organised by the [Consumer Forum for Communications](#). Despite the complex issues to be resolved to enable automatic compensation, the Panel hopes it can be introduced in a way that is straightforward and equitable for all consumers. In terms of quality of service reporting information needs to be useful, timely and accessible for consumers. In addition, Chris voiced the Panel's opinion that it should include Alternative Dispute Resolution data also.

The Panel was also represented at the [Age Action Alliance Money Matters working group](#) meeting. The Money Matters Group brings together a range of organisations from across the financial, voluntary and statutory sectors, and looks at some of the issues older people are facing around financial inclusion.

Finally, we are delighted that the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has approved an extension of Panel member Mairi Macleod's term of

office until 31 March 2017. Mairi's expertise will be invaluable as the Panel develops its new research into access to broadcast and on-demand content.

Our annual report is out

The Panel and ACOD's annual report for 2015/16 is [available on our website](#).

Commenting on the report, Panel Chair Jo Connell said: *"We have seen real progress this past year across a number of areas including: changes to consumer service; provision for more vulnerable consumers; better consumer information; and moves to place the consumer and citizen voice even closer to the heart of policy making. Collaboration, constructive challenge and clarity of purpose remain central to our approach."*

[Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD Annual Report 2015/16](#)

NHS Widening Digital Participation report

The Panel was represented at a [Tinder Foundation](#) event marking the publication of a report on the NHS Widening Digital Participation programme, co-ordinated by Tinder Foundation, which ran from September 2013 to March 2016. The initiative aimed to improve the digital skills and digital health literacy of groups most affected by health inequalities, by using local community networks to support the use of expert online content. The programme supported people in some of the hardest to reach communities in the UK and targeted the most vulnerable patients - the heaviest users of NHS services and those also most likely to be amongst Britain's 12.6 million digitally excluded. As a result of the Widening Digital Participation programme, 59% of learners reported feeling more confident to use online tools to manage their health and 65% felt more informed. Learn more about the project on the [dedicated website](#) or read [the report](#).

Guide to publicising services available to disabled people

Following advice from the Panel, Ofcom has published [a guide for communications providers](#), to ensure that services available to disabled customers, such as text relay, third-party bill management, priority fault repair and emergency SMS, are widely publicised.

Ofcom stated that it expects providers to have clear, accurate information about these services that can be easily found on their websites. Providers should also ensure that their front-line staff are able to respond effectively and efficiently to any enquiries about these services over the phone.

Ofcom's guide includes examples of good practice in this area, which includes having a champion or sponsor at a senior level within the organisation with overall responsibility for accessibility issues.

Ofcom's website provides [information on services for disabled people](#), along with [frequently asked questions](#).

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to GDS' Technology Group Technology Code of Practice

In our response the Panel and ACOD welcomed the draft code and the strong section on accessibility: we believe following accessibility guidance should be a standard element of technology projects and development.

However we also stressed that consumers and citizens who are not - or in some cases not yet - digitally engaged, should not be forgotten. Along with assisted digital support, there should still be an analogue provision that works, so that people can still use public services effectively and are able to find out about healthcare, jobs, courses and ways to improve their own lives.

The [Code of Practice can be viewed here](#) and our [response is here](#).

Ofcom's consultation on improving spectrum access for consumers in the 5GHz band

The consultation document highlights the importance of maintaining a consistently high speed and good experience through Wi-Fi as broadband speeds to the home improve. The Panel supported Ofcom's proactive proposals to open up an additional 'sub-band' within the 5 GHz frequency range for Wi-Fi as soon as possible and support the proposals set out in the consultation document. Any costs to consumers from interference as a result should, in our opinion, be borne by industry.

Our [response is here.](#)

Response to Ofcom's call for inputs into Automatic Compensation

We believe that automatic compensation offers a real opportunity for Ofcom to put safeguards in place to genuinely protect and empower consumers and help build trust in the market. Automatic compensation should be exactly that - automatic. Consumers should not be required to check if they are entitled to compensation or complete complicated forms, or go through a lengthy process, to apply for it.

We consider Ofcom's proposals, to publish service quality performance data and to introduce automatic compensation, necessary measures to protect consumers and allow them to make informed choices so that communications markets work better for them.

We believe that in some circumstances financial compensation alone may not be sufficient for a consumer's, or micro business owner's circumstances. Other types of reparation may include allowing the automatic termination of a consumer's contract or automatic access to other connectivity options, such as tethering via a mobile phone, or being supplied with a dongle.

We hope that automatic compensation will serve consumers well, and provide an incentive for communication providers to make a step change in the way that they deal problems that consumers experience.

Our [response is here.](#)

Response to Ofcom's Review of Royal Mail

Having previously responded to Ofcom's 2015 Discussion Document, the Panel were pleased to contribute to Ofcom's Review of Royal Mail Regulation

In doing so we reiterated that we strongly encourage Ofcom to emphasise to Royal Mail that it could and would take action on pricing if necessary in the future. We agree with the removal of the requirement on Royal Mail to notify price decreases, but strongly support the retention of the requirement for consumers to be given advance warning of

changes in terms, particularly price increases. Increases can have a disproportionate impact on some vulnerable consumers (e.g. older people and those on low incomes) as well as micro businesses. Furthermore, the Panel supports the proposal to retain a cap on the price of Second Class stamps for letters and parcels up to 2kg so vulnerable consumers can access a basic universal service.

Royal Mail's financial position should be maintained and strengthened through cost efficiencies rather than price rises, however we recommend that Ofcom requires Royal Mail to publish a plan to set out how it intends to secure its more ambitious efficiency gains.

We support the proposal that Ofcom continues to monitor the postal market and retains the right to intervene. We consider it vital that Ofcom commits to a review of postal users' needs within the five year period to 2022, and this should include representation of micro businesses, older people and people living in multiple occupancy dwellings, as well as people in harder-to-reach locations (rural areas or high rise buildings).

Our [response is here](#).

Other news

Strengthening Openreach's independence

In February 2016, Ofcom published its initial conclusions from its Strategic Review of Digital Communications, which included a series of actions. One of those actions was to increase Openreach's independence from BT so it is more responsive to all of its customers.

Ofcom have now launched a consultation on its proposal and BT's proposal to reorganise Openreach.

The consultation, which closes on 4 October 2016, [can be found here](#).

Broadband providers launch “Fix Britain’s Internet” campaign

A number of the UK’s biggest broadband providers have launched a campaign to get businesses to give their views on the future of Openreach.

TalkTalk, Sky, Vodafone and the Federation of Communication Services (FCS) have launched “Fix Britain’s Internet”, aimed at encouraging UK businesses to contribute during Ofcom’s Openreach consultation.

Consumer switching - further proposals to reform switching of mobile services

It is important for consumers to be able to switch providers quickly and easily, in order for them to exercise their choice and take advantage of competition in the communications sector.

The effect of notice periods within the switching process is that many consumers end up paying for two services at the same time. Ofcom intends to enhance the mobile switching process reforms proposed in their March 2016 Consultation, with an additional proposal to address this issue.

The [consultation can be found here](#).

Cross Platform Switching Consultation

On the subject of switching, but this switching for landline, broadband and pay TV services - Ofcom have called for [input on another consultation](#), the closing date of which is 21 October 2016.

The consultation is on [proposals to help customers of landline, broadband and pay TV services switch from one network to another with greater ease and confidence](#). Ofcom is consulting on two alternative options. Its preferred option, which is shared by the Panel, is to place responsibility for the coordination of the switch entirely in the hands of a customer’s new provider.

One of the Panel's recommendations to Ofcom when we reviewed their consultation process was for them to produce plain English versions of consumer consultations and we are delighted that they have done so for this process.

The [consultation can be found here](#), and the [plain English summary version here](#).

Accessibility of on demand programme services

Ofcom has opened a consultation on its proposals to alter the way it collects and publishes data on how accessible On Demand Programme Services ("ODPS") are for people with hearing and/or sight impairments. It also sets out Ofcom's plans more generally for meeting its duty to encourage providers of ODPS to ensure their services are progressively made more accessible to people with hearing and/or sight impairments

The [consultation can be found here](#).

BBC launches subtitles for live channels on BBC iPlayer in world-first

The BBC has begun trialling subtitles for live channels on BBC iPlayer, a first for any major video on-demand service. Until now subtitles have only been available for on-demand programmes.

The trial will allow deaf and hearing-impaired viewers to watch more BBC TV programmes wherever and whenever they want. The BBC will test and improve the feature over the coming months before it is rolled out to BBC iPlayer's app for mobiles and tablets - and over time to Connected TVs.

Fairness and flexibility: Making personal data work for everyone

A [new report out](#) from Citizens Advice puts forward new approaches and practical solutions for developing a fairer and more responsive data ecosystem. Drawing directly from newly commissioned qualitative research with consumers, it looks at how they would like their data to be handled and managed, what currently worries them, and what could build more trust.

'Misleading' broadband speed adverts ignore rural areas

The Local Government Association (LGA), which represents more than 370 councils in England and Wales, has stated that 'up to' download speeds, which can be advertised legally, are misleading and do not reflect the reality of broadband service received across the country, particularly rural areas, where speeds fall well below 2Mbps during busy periods of the day.

The LGA is calling for broadband providers to switch to advertising average speeds, as opposed to 'up to' speeds, and to use upload speed as a key measure of performance alongside download speed. A reliable upload speed is a growing requirement for rural and small businesses which utilise cloud services, video conferencing and send large data files.

Carnegie Library Lab project snapshot

The evaluation of the first phase of the Carnegie Library Lab programme, aimed at enhancing innovation and leadership in the public library sector, has been published.

The project snapshot looks at a number of initiatives such as 'Rub-a-dub-hub': a virtual learning environment for parents of preschool children to boost children's literacy and 'Commons are Forever': a project to encourage members of the community to discover and use copyright-free works while educating them on copyright laws and their digital rights.

[Learn more here.](#)

Beware of 'upgrade' fraud

Action Fraud have received reports of fraudsters posing as mobile phone providers and offering fake upgrades as a way of stealing personal data. Having gained personal information the fraudsters then pose as the phone owner, order a new handset and intercept or redirect that delivery, using the replacement phone as authentication for other purchases in the victim's name.

Action Fraud's advice is to never provide personal information to a third party from an unsolicited communication and to verify the legitimacy of the call by checking the number.

Learn more on the [Action Fraud website](#).

How deaf people use the phone survey extended

The UK Council on Deafness, through its subgroup DAC (Deaf Access to Communications), is carrying out a survey to assess how deaf people are using the telephone and in particular their experience with Next Generation Text Relay. The survey has been extended until the end of August.

They need as many deaf people as possible to complete the survey so please share or otherwise spread the word, and if you do know deaf people who are not online but do use the telephone or would if the appropriate service was available, then please offer a print out of the survey for them to complete.

More [info is available on their Facebook page](#) and [the survey is here](#).

Programme for rural community hubs in mobile coverage ‘not-spots’

Vodafone is offering up to 100 community hubs 3G mobile coverage and internet access. The Community Indoor Sure Signal (CISS) programme is [calling for applications](#) from rural community centres, such as independent or community run pubs and shops, village halls, scout huts, doctors’ surgeries or visitor centres, that do not have reliable mobile coverage, to apply for the programme. Coverage will bring both 3G voice and data ensuring both employees and visitors at the community hubs will be able to make both calls and use data on their Vodafone mobile phones or tablets. The application process will be open until 1 September 2016 with the first selected communities being announced in the autumn.

Interesting thoughts on accessibility

We have seen some interesting blogs on accessibility this month, from designing accessible websites, from designers with particular accessibility issues themselves, to a review of assistive technology. The first comes from [Chris Moore at gov.uk](#) and looks at issues facing deaf and blind users but makes some great recommendations for accessible design practice as a whole. The second article comes from an agency, [Slash/Leeds](#), and looks at [accessibility issues faced by autistic users and how to counteract them](#).

Lastly, on a different note, David Banes has collated [a list of free and low cost assistive technology](#).

Follow us on Twitter

Follow the Panel's news on Twitter @NewsCCP