



APRIL 2017 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

Panel Chair Jo Connell, and Panel member Chris Holland, have held the latest in the Panel's meetings with communication providers this month, discussing the findings of our Digital Footprints research with EE and Vodafone.

Representatives of the Panel attended an event, jointly hosted by [Which?](#) and [Ofcom](#) at which Sharon White, Chief Executive of Ofcom, gave a speech outlining her round-up of the past two years and her visions for the near future. Alex Neill, Managing Director of Which? Home Services, welcomed Ofcom's refocusing on consumers. Sharon White quoted from Ofcom's [Comparing Service Quality](#) report (see below) and said a cultural change is needed within the telecoms sector in order for consumers to build trust in their providers. She noted that consumers do not currently make switching decisions based on customer service, but said Ofcom wanted to change that.

Bob Twitchin attended the [Business Disability Forum](#)'s 2017 conference: '[Disability-smart suppliers and partners](#)', held on 11th April in London. The event was opened by Diane Lightfoot, the Forum's new CEO, who welcomed the keynote speaker, Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work. The conference focused on equipping HR, recruitment, diversity & inclusion and technology leaders with practical insights and best practice to help their procurement colleagues secure more disability-smart outcomes. The idea being that whatever inclusive policies and procedures organisations have in place for staffing, and service provision to disabled people, these will only deliver if the organisations work with their suppliers on the inclusion of disabled people.

Chris Holland attended the [Voice of the Listener and Viewer](#) conference, which was held under the theme, "How to ensure the citizen dividend in a digital age: public service broadcasting in a digital age." Session topics include: public service broadcasting and fake news; public trust; BBC regulation and accountability.

Ofcom's first Comparing Service Quality report

Ofcom has released its first '[Comparing Service Quality](#)' report, and produced an [online tool](#) to help phone and broadband customers compare the performance of the providers of these services in regard to answering customer calls, handling complaints, and reliability of their services. Ofcom hopes the findings will incentivise providers to improve their service quality and fix recurring problems.

The data draws on a combination of consumer research and complaints figures, as well as statistics obtained directly from providers that have not been published before. In the case of mobile the report reveals:

- More than 1 in 12 mobile customers are dissatisfied with their mobile reception - increasing to 1 in 5 in rural areas.
- 28% of mobile customers cannot get a decent 4G signal indoors from all providers - limiting their choice.
- 2 in 5 mobile data connections made by 4G customers were on 3G or even 2G connections

Satisfaction with complaint handling varies dramatically across mobile providers: 74% of Tesco Mobile customers are happy with this compared to only 46% of Vodafone.

The broadband statistics reveal that one in twenty installations took more than 30 days and 1 in 13 customers felt they had a reason to complain about the service they received.

And on landline and broadband customer service, the average time to pick up a sales call is 1 min 19 secs but for support it is just short of 4 minutes: 10% of callers hang up before ever getting through. The worst offender, Plusnet, recorded an average of 7 minutes 27 secs to pick up a call.

These are issues we have raised with the industry and Ofcom and we will continue to highlight poor service such as this. Publishing this data is something the Panel has called for, and we hope to see the providers assist too, by sharing more data in future.

Other news

Digital Economy Bill passed

In one of the last pieces of legislation passed by this Parliament, the Digital Economy Bill (DEB) received Royal Assent on Thursday 27th April. This DEB contains a number of reforms that the Panel have been supportive of, including the broadband USO, which will give consumers a guaranteed universal right to a decent broadband connection; a provision to ensure that on-demand television is accessible to people with disabilities; plus mobile bill capping, enabling consumers to request a limit on their mobile phone spend, and help them control their costs.

Vulnerability and debt guide

A new guide came out this month which looks at the way debt collection agencies identify, understand and support people in vulnerable circumstances. Authored by [Personal Finance Research Centre, University of Bristol](#); [Money Advice Trust](#); and [Plymouth Focus Advice Centre](#), and funded by the [Finance & Leasing Association](#) and [The UK Cards Association](#), the report makes recommendations for organisations working with indebted customers in vulnerable situations. The guide describes strategies to help staff deal with vulnerabilities, such as serious or terminal illness, bereavement, addiction, and mental health issues.

There is also guidance on developing training programmes and working with partner agencies - 21 case studies illustrate the difference that appropriate handling can make to a customer in need of extra support.

[Read 'Vulnerability: a guide for debt collection'](#)

Ofcom opens review of alternative dispute resolution schemes

Ofcom has begun a review of the 'alternative dispute resolution' schemes that it approves.

Alternative dispute resolution offers important protection to consumers who have a complaint about their communications provider. The process allows people to escalate their complaint to an independent body, if they remain unhappy after eight weeks - or sooner, if they have reached deadlock with their provider.

Under its powers in the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom currently approves two dispute resolution schemes - Ombudsman Services: Communications, and CISAS. All communications providers must be a member of one of these schemes.

Ofcom is seeking views from stakeholders on the performance of the schemes, such as their accessibility, effectiveness and fairness.

Ofcom's [consultation](#) is open until 12 May 2017.

Products and services to be made more accessible for disabled persons in the EU

Key products and services, like phones and TV equipment, ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines, PCs and operating systems, consumer banking services, e-books, transport and e-commerce will have to be made more accessible to people with disabilities, under draft EU rules, although microbusinesses (those employing under 10 people and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed €2 million) would be exempt.

The accessibility requirements would also cover the “built environment” where the service is provided, including transport infrastructure, but would only apply to products and services placed on the EU market after the directive takes effect. EU ministers in the Council still need to agree a general approach before Parliament’s negotiators can begin talks with them on the final shape of the legislation. MEPs agreed to base the requirements for accessibility on functionality, rather than on technical specifications. This means the EAA will say what needs to be accessible in terms of “functional performance requirements” but will not impose detailed technical solutions as to how to make it accessible, thus allowing for innovation.

[Read the press release here.](#)

ONS assisted digital service test

The [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) is testing an assisted digital service on the Isle of Wight, as part of the 2017 Census Test, ahead of the 2021 Census. 8,000 households will be invited to take part and help will be available at libraries for those that need it.

The assisted digital service test will be running until 19 May, and will collect information about how many people want to use assisted digital support, what they need help with and feedback on their experience.

[Learn more here.](#)

People with dementia to receive devices to block nuisance calls

The Panel was pleased to hear that the government is to fund call-blocking devices to protect people with dementia and vulnerable people from nuisance phone calls, although only around 1,500 people will be given the gadgets under the initial funding. About £300,000 of the budget will be spent on the devices themselves, with the remaining funds allocated to management of the service and raising public awareness of scam calls.

[Read the press release here.](#)

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