



FEBRUARY 2018 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

This past month the Panel have been sharing the key messages from our [Access Services Research](#). Panel Member for Scotland, Amanda Britain, attended the Advisory Committee for Scotland meeting, joined by Jenny Borritt, Panel Coordinator, to present the research to committee members. Jenny also accompanied Panel Chair, Jo Connell, to the Advisory Committee meeting in Wales to present the findings there and listen to attendees' feedback, and suggestions for next steps. If your organisation is interested in learning more about the research, or any aspect of the Panel's work, please [get in touch to set up a meeting](#).

Welcome to our new Panel Member

Jo Connell and the Panel have welcomed new Panel Member, Richard Williams. Richard is a highly experienced consultant and trainer with expertise in all areas of disability and its impact on individuals and organisations.

Richard is also a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, an Associate of both Business Disability International and the Business Disability Forum and is the Chair of Age UK Brighton and Hove.

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD draft Work Plan

Our [draft Work Plan](#) for 2018-19 is now open for consultation. We welcome any comments or suggestions by 5pm, 23 March 2018.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan, 2018-19

In our response to Ofcom's proposed key areas of work we reiterated our support of Ofcom's continued consumer focus, and in particular, the focus on vulnerable consumers/consumers who may find it more difficult to navigate the market.

However, we would like to see stronger links articulated between activities and actual outcomes for consumers.

In addition, we voiced our belief that nuisance calls deserve a higher priority on Ofcom's agenda than is implied in the Plan: nuisance calls remain of significant concern to many, including vulnerable consumers.

We would also like to see an item added to the work programme to show how Ofcom intends to encourage CPs to improve their customer service, complaints and access to ADR, holding them to account where necessary.

Lastly, we noted that following the Government's announcement that there will be a legal USO on broadband provision we trust that actions will be added to the work programme, setting out Ofcom's work to ensure that the broadband USO serves the consumers it is targeted at.

Our [response is here](#).

Response to Ofcom's consultation on proposed improvements to Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs)

We strongly support Ofcom's core aims in amending the EPG Code: to make it easier for people with limited or no useful vision to use EPGs and to make it easier for people with some useful vision to read the text of EPGs.

Our [recent research](#), "Access to broadcast and on-demand content: Time to Catch Up!" (October 2017) made a series of recommendations related to the accessibility of on-screen content and we believe that improvements to the accessibility of EPGs are long overdue. We stated in our response that based on industry action so far, this is unlikely to happen without regulatory intervention. Visually impaired people who want to access the same range of TV and on demand programmes as everyone else need the support of Ofcom to make sure this happens. We believe that the EPG changes must take place without delay: taking into account the flexibility that it has built into its amended proposals, we believe Ofcom should stand firm on these proposals and not enter into lengthy discussions with providers.

In our response we stated the Panel's view that it is necessary to retain an annual reporting requirement and to monitor implementation of improvements, checking that these are informed by user experience, and lastly, that we agreed that the wording of the Code should be amended to reflect the update in legislation from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to the Equality Act 2010 and section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Our [response is here](#).

Response to Citizens Advice's Consumer Work Plan Consultation

Citizens Advice's draft consumer work plan opens by asking the question: "Are consumer markets working as well as they used to?" In our response we urged Citizens Advice to not compare markets with those of the past: the consumer landscape is constantly evolving and policy makers and providers must look forward, not back, to keep pace with consumer needs and demands. We suggested a better question might be: "Are consumer markets working as well as they could be, today?".

Nonetheless we welcome the four themes outlined in the plan. We agree with Citizens Advice that it is vital that consumers and micro businesses are able to navigate the market and find the best products for them at a price they can afford. We would also encourage Citizens Advice to engage with other providers of consumer information in essential services.

We will continue to support Citizens Advice's work in post/parcels and look forward to working together as appropriate.

Our [response is here](#).

Response to the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's consultation on its draft work programme for 2018/2019

The Panel, in our response, welcomed the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI)'s ongoing work on behalf of Northern Ireland consumers and the insights gained through the Council's cross cutting work in regulated and unregulated markets. We limited our response to the programme of work to those aspects within the statutory remit of the Panel.

The Panel welcomes CCNI's continuing role as an advocate for NI Postal Consumers. The ongoing work outlined with the UK Consumer Protection Partnership (CPP), making parcel surcharging a priority project is most welcome.

In regard to the Council's plan to examine the standard of customer service offered by broadband and telecom providers in Northern Ireland, we drew attention to the Panel's upcoming qualitative study on complaint handling, which is in the final stages of completion. The research includes, though a boosted sample size, data from Northern Ireland consumers which the Panel would be pleased to share with the Council: we look forward to continuing to work closely in partnership on this and all mutual concerns. In both our areas of work, it is vital that we protect and promote the interests of citizens and the inactive, silent or more vulnerable consumer - as well as those who are more engaged.

Our [response is here](#).

Other news

Joint ICO Ofcom Action plan

Ofcom and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) have published the latest [update](#) to their joint action plan, first published in 2013.

The latest update highlights progress made during 2017. The update highlights 'blocking' measures that have been introduced by a number of communications providers, which help to stop large volumes of nuisance calls. Ofcom and the ICO have also used enforcement action with the aim of ensuring companies making nuisance calls are identified and punished and are collaborating with Government, domestic and international regulators, technical bodies, and law enforcement to help identify new ways of tackling the nuisance calls problem.

The update also sets out their joint priorities for 2018, which are the same as 2017, but with the additional note to identify opportunities to deter and punish those organisations and individuals responsible for nuisance calls through joint-working with other regulators and agencies.

[Read more](#) on Ofcom's website.

Moves to expand the fibre network

There has been a wave of activity in recent months aimed at improving the UK's fibre infrastructure. Vodafone announced in November that it is working with CityFibre to connect 1m homes to "full fibre" broadband, potentially rising to 5m by 2025 if successful. BT's network division, Openreach, this month announced it is raising its full-fibre target to 3m premises by 2020 and 10m by the next decade. TalkTalk, also this month, announced it is investing a total of £1.5bn, in partnership with a private investor, in order to connect 3m homes and businesses.

Virgin Media is already in the midst of a £3bn upgrade to provide FTTP services to 2m premises, slated for completion in 2019/20. Gigaclear aims to reach 150,000 rural properties by 2020. Hyperoptic aims to cover five million premises with full fibre by 2025, and KCOM aims to have full-fibre coverage across all of its network by March 2019, covering 200,000 premises in the Hull area.

Aiding this investment and activity, Ofcom has [announced a draft decision](#) to ensure BT makes its telegraph poles and underground tunnels open to rival providers, to enable them to build their own full-fibre networks.

According to Ofcom, this will change the business case for building new networks and could cut the upfront costs of laying fibre cables by 50%, as well as reduce the

digging time, meaning fibre could be installed in some streets in hours rather than days.

Ofcom said that Openreach will have to repair faulty infrastructure and clear blocked tunnels so providers can access them. Openreach must also ensure there is space on its telegraph poles for extra fibre cables connecting homes to a competitor's network, and it must release a 'digital map' of its duct and pole network, so competitors can plan where to lay fibre.

Ofcom has also cut the price that Openreach can charge telecoms companies for its basic superfast broadband service. Regulating this price will help BT's rivals to compete for customers, while several build their own full-fibre networks, as well as protecting consumers from high prices during this period.

In addition, Ofcom has also set a requirement for Openreach to improving repairs and installations. Ofcom said these new requirements must be met by 2020/21.

The Tech Partnership and Lloyds Banking Group survey on the Basic Digital Skills Framework

This survey, on the updated framework originally developed by Go ON UK, invites those with an interest in basic digital skills to give their thoughts on the level needed for today and the future. It is updated from the original to reflect the changes in technology that have taken place since.

The aim is to help more people access the numerous benefits of being online. Research from the [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index](#) highlights that having basic digital skills can save individuals an average of £744 a year, and provide them with easier access to work and education.

The Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) plan to use the updated Framework as the basis for developing new national standards for basic digital skills.

The survey is open until 20 March 2018. [To participate, click here.](#)

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