

JULY 2017 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

Panel Chair Jo Connell and Executive Director Fiona Lennox met Baroness Hayter and the Chairs of other Consumer Panels, at the House of Lords this month to share best practice and discuss issues of mutual concern.

Panel member Craig Tillotson attended the Westminster eForum 5G event earlier in July. Discussion mainly focused on the increasing consumer demand for data. However, in the Panel's view there needs to be a recognition that demand will one day be satiated and that there exists an issue with the building of capacity, and the use of more spectrum, for increasingly low economic value activities. Provider Three suggested that ongoing demand will be driven by 8K HD Video; and commented that their priority is more capacity for existing users, not rural build out. Arqiva and Digital UK made the point that existing users of spectrum should be protected, especially digital terrestrial television (DTT) users, as the shift to Internet Protocol television (*IPTV*) was overstated, as 90% consumption is still over DTT. In regard to the issue of increasing rural coverage; Nominet suggested dynamic spectrum sharing (not just white-spaces) should be considered in rural areas, whilst Ofcom raised the possibility of Neutral Host Networks for in-building and rural coverage.

Also this month, Panel member Chris Holland attended Ofcom's BBC performance diversity stakeholder event - the BBC intends to increase its focus on diversity and inclusion; and Jo Connell and Jenny Borrirt attended the [Tech4Good awards](#) at the BT Centre. The annual awards celebrate and raise awareness of innovations in technology that provide a benefit to society. The full list of winners is listed [here](#).

Jenny Borrirt attended RICA's 2017 research exchange. The exchange brought together stakeholders from a diverse range of industries with an interest in promoting the rights of older and disabled people. This year's event included presentations from British Gas on its policies regarding customers in vulnerable situations and the workshop-based research using RICA's consumer research panel, which had given British Gas insights into making bills and communications more accessible for people in vulnerable situations.

RICA reported on its pilot research project into the use of mainstream technology to potentially improve the everyday lives of three of its participants. The pilot

participants tested an Amazon Echo, an Apple smartwatch and a Hive motion sensor; RICA plans to conduct a further, longer term study in the near future.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to CAP and BCAP's consultation on speed claims in broadband advertising

In our response to the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP and BCAP) we voiced our support for the removal of the term “up to” from broadband advertising - we have long called for its replacement with an indicative estimate labelled “at least”. The Panel believe that more realistic advertising should pave the way to fairer, proportionate billing.

We also recommended that broadband providers are obliged to give real-life examples of broadband speeds and use in their advertising, so that consumers are able to understand what a certain speed measurement actually means. We noted that some broadband providers already proactively provide this information, which gives a useful gauge to consumers, in understanding what speeds they actually require to meet their needs and/or grow their business - instead of their paying extra to secure a higher speed bracket than they may need, just in case. We are also contributing to Ofcom's work with broadband providers on their voluntary Codes of Practice regarding broadband speeds in order to ensure that consumers are protected from unfair practices and confusing or misleading claims.

Our response is [here](#).

Response to Ofcom's consultation on proposals to reform switching of mobile communications services.

We support Ofcom's proposals to introduce an Auto-Switch process for mobile customers - though we are disappointed that the opportunity for a gaining provider led (GPL) process across all communications services has not been taken. We fully support Ofcom's proposal to remove notice periods and to require providers to provide transparent consumer guidance about the switching process. However, in our response we urged Ofcom to act promptly, to give residential and business customers certainty and transparency in engaging with communications providers, and allow them to benefit from a competitive communications market. In addition, given the length of time and fair warning that providers have had of Ofcom's line of thought - and the fact that Ofcom has updated its conclusions, selecting Auto-Switch as a less onerous option than a 'one-stop'/GPL process - we added in our response that we expect communications providers to comply with Ofcom's requirements within 18 months of Ofcom's Autumn statement.

Our response is [here](#).

Other news

Customer care and complaint handling research

The [Phone-paid Services Authority](#) (PSA) has published [research](#), commissioned from Futuresight, into customer care and complaint handling in the phone-paid services market, and assesses how complaint handling can be improved to meet consumers' expectations.

The research found billshock is the main trigger for people to make a complaint, and that around half of complainants report a satisfactory resolution to their complaint. The research also found variances in the effort and success rate of complaints according to the issue raised.

The findings will be used to improve post-purchase experience for users of phone-paid services.

A summary of the report and further information is available in the PSA's [blog post here](#). The full report is available [here](#).

Helping consumers to engage in communications markets

Ofcom has announced a new initiative which aims to make it easier for communications customers to shop around and to help people to take full advantage of deals on phone, broadband and pay-TV services.

This means helping people identify and secure the best deals for their needs and budgets - whether by agreeing a new deal with their current provider, or finding an alternative one with a different provider.

Ofcom is seeking views from interested parties about how they can further empower consumers and help them to better engage in communications markets, and has published a [call for inputs](#) outlining three potential reasons why some people fail to shop around, and possible measures to address them.

Responses are invited by Friday 15th September 2017.

Separately, they also published their [decision](#) not to make changes to the process for switching communications services between Openreach, KCOM, Virgin Media and Sky.

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