



JUNE 2017 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

This month Mairi Macleod, Bob Twitchin and Jenny Borritt attended a roundtable on subtitling, held by Ofcom and attended by representatives of deaf viewers, along with subtitle providers and academic researchers. It looked at the main areas of fluctuating quality (latency, speed and accuracy) and sought to elicit areas of focus for the audience group (as well as any trade-offs) to inform Ofcom's discussions with broadcasters. Participants generally felt that the most important issue to tackle first was latency. Other topics included the effect of varying standards of equipment and the need for accessibility to be built in at the design stage of any new technology. Attendees also put forward suggestions on a portal that deaf viewers and broadcasters could use to contribute feedback and information respectively.

Jenny met with the Korea Blind Union, a group made up of researchers and audio description writers, who visited Ofcom and the Panel/ACOD, among other UK organisations, to understand how they can improve TV access services for the consumers they represent.

Jenny also attended an expert workshop on citizen/consumer engagement with policy-making for the Internet of Things at the British Computer Society, organised jointly with the Institution of Engineering and Technology. Attendees were consumer representatives and academics. The presentations and discussion looked at issues such as consumer knowledge of their data journey and value, including the issue of children's data; the ownership of data in a chain of providers; vulnerable consumers and the use of sensitive personal data; device behaviour and liability (including the possibility of harm through hacking); the need for a commonly-recognised standard and for cross-sector collaboration. A report containing key points for consideration by policy makers, will follow.

Rick Hill represented the Panel at the Communications Consumer Forum this month where he reported on our current areas of engagement and our annual plan 2017/18. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the cost of some directory enquiry services and also the termination charges faced by some consumers when moving home.

And finally, wearing her ACOD hat, Jenny attended the Ofcom's Disability & Wellbeing Group meeting. The group aims to raise awareness within Ofcom, of issues faced by disabled colleagues, prospective colleagues and visitors; work to improve the experience of working for Ofcom for disabled colleagues; and promote the mental wellbeing of all colleagues.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to the call for inputs into Ofcom's automatic compensation consultation

The introduction of a simple to use, practical to implement, automatic compensation scheme for consumers who experience either delayed provision for landline or broadband services; a delayed repair; or missed appointments, is welcomed by the Panel. However, whilst we appreciate that it is important to get a scheme established and that there must be a starting point, the amounts of compensation proposed seem to be on the low side in the context of the harm experienced by consumers. We do welcome the fact that Ofcom has recognised that this initial scheme should be kept under review, and have recommended these amounts are reviewed. We also recommend that communication providers better promote their complaints and redress processes, making it clear that consumers are not restricted from applying for a higher level of compensation where more harm is experienced.

Additionally, whilst we recognise that broadband speeds are being handled under the voluntary Code and we will be contributing to the revision of the Code, we recommend that Ofcom does not rule out looking at poor broadband speeds as a candidate for automatic compensation in future. Furthermore, in the case of mobile telephony we do not believe that the current rules offer sufficient protection from the harm that has been identified and highlighted in the consultation document. There are rules about porting, billing and delayed PAC (and in some circumstances Ofcom has powers to fine communications providers that fail to meet published standards) however, fining a communications provider does not necessarily guarantee that those who were harmed are duly compensated, and it does not guarantee that compensation happens without effort on the part of the consumer. We have proposed that amendments should be made where other types of consumer harm that can be objectively measured are identified, and previously identified sources of harm should be reconsidered where existing protections are not enough. We will also be responding to Ofcom's consultation on mobile switching.

Our response on automatic compensation is [here](#).

Other news

Ofcom release latest complaints figures

Ofcom has published its [report](#) on the number of consumer complaints it has received in regard to telecoms and pay-TV providers.

The latest report covers the three-month period from January to March 2017 (Q1), and includes complaints made about providers of landline telephone, home broadband, pay-monthly mobile and pay-TV services. Complaints figures are presented per 100,000 customers.

Complaints about landline telephone services increased between Q4 2016 and Q1 2017, while pay-monthly mobile complaints fell. Broadband and pay-TV complaints remained stable during this period.

Vodafone has remained at the top of complaints for mobile, garnering significantly more complaints than any other provider: 17 per 100,000 as compared to the next closest figure which was 8 per 100,000. Tesco mobile has consistently received the lowest number of complaints.

BT has received the most complaints in the broadband category for four consecutive quarters: Sky has received the lowest for five consecutive quarters. Broadband is the sector with the highest level of complaints, for BT this was 34 per 100,000.

Sky also received the lowest number of complaints in the landline category for the same period and has continued to receive the lowest number for pay-TV too.

For the seventh consecutive quarter BT received the most complaints in regard to Pay TV also.

Talk Talk's landline service received the highest volume of complaints, but there was little between the five companies who received the most complaints.

Ofcom hopes that publishing this data will help people make informed choices when choosing a provider as well as encourage providers to improve customer service.

[Read more about the report](#)

Ofcom releases Adult Media Use research and report

Ofcom chose to focus on what it termed 'social seniors' when it released its latest [Adults' Media Use and Attitudes report](#). Though the news that record numbers of older people are embracing technology, with a quarter of over-75s using tablet

computers and half using social media, the study echoed our [Digital Footprints report](#) (released earlier this year) and concluded that older internet users lack confidence online, and that this is particularly pronounced when managing personal data. And of great concern to the Panel is that Ofcom found that more than 50% of over-75s don't go online and 86% have no plans to - this should not be forgotten when moving to 'digital by default'.

BT launches next generation phone kiosks

The first of BT's LinkUK next-generation phone booths was switched on in London this month. It enables users to have ad-supported free 1GBps internet access and free UK phone calls. The plan is to replace more existing payphones with these LinkUK units in London and other major cities throughout the country this year. They also have rapid mobile charging and local information.

UK election

Following the outcome of the general election, Matthew Hancock MP has been re-appointed as Minister of State for Digital, meaning his portfolio includes digital, broadcasting, internet and telecoms. Margot James MP has been re-appointed as Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility, which includes postal affairs and Royal Mail.

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