

SEPTEMBER 2017 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

We are pleased to announce the appointment of our new Panel member for Scotland, [Amanda Britain](#). Amanda takes on the role following Mairi Macleod's completion of her term.

Amanda has experience spanning research, public services, and organisational change in Scotland. In all roles, she has championed the interests of people who are socially or economically excluded. She is currently supporting Scotland's National Technology Enabled Care Programme, is an advisor with Life Changes Trust dementia programme, and an associate with Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Jo Connell, Panel Chair, met with [Citizens Advice](#) (CA) to discuss current priorities, including where areas of synergy and difference existed within the two organisations' workplans, looking in detail at shared good practice and how best to serve the needs of vulnerable consumers. Other subjects of discussion included the Panel's Digital Footprints research, switching, the Citizen Advice's work on the Loyalty Penalty, mobile phone debt. In particular, Jo raised mobile handset charging: a focus of concern for the Panel. Separately, Jo and Jenny Borritt also met with CA to discuss postal services.

Panel member Chris Holland attended the Ofcom Adults' Media Use Event, where the digital literacy gap was an important theme: for the Panel this is of particular concern in the context of consumers who may be vulnerable. Two other issues that we have been focused on this year were also prominent themes: privacy and trust.

Chris, accompanied by Jo and Jenny met, [CommsADR](#), to discuss the ADR (alternative dispute resolution) services landscape in regulated and non-regulated sectors and the way their scheme operates.

Jo and Jenny met with the [Committees of Advertising Practice \(CAP and BCAP\)](#) last month, with regard to advertising aimed at vulnerable consumers. CAP had requested the Panel's input, particularly for an insight into the impact on older consumers.

And in Belfast, Panel member Rick Hill attended Ofcom's [Communications Market Northern Ireland](#) event.

Panel Chair Jo Connell, Panel Member Chris Holland, Executive Director Fiona Lennox and Panel Coordinator Jenny Borritt also met with the [DCMS](#) recently in the latest of a regular series of meetings to address issues of mutual interest.

Progress on nuisance calls, vulnerable consumers and customer service

We were very pleased this month when Ofcom has [announced plans](#) to modify the rules which apply to all UK communications providers, including putting into practice some key improvements the Panel have been calling for in regard to nuisance calls, complaints, billing, debt collection, disabled people and vulnerable customers.

The changes to the 'General Conditions of Entitlement', which come into force from 1 October 2018, strengthen regulation to protect consumers. In particular, free CLI (caller line identification) has been a [key goal for the Panel this year](#), and we have worked closely with Ofcom on the requirement for vulnerable consumer guidelines and to improve the process for complaints.

The new conditions will see Ofcom:

- ban providers from charging for caller display facilities, which can help people to screen nuisance calls. Telephone numbers displayed will need to be valid, dialable and uniquely identify the caller. Providers will also need to identify and block calls with an invalid or non-dialable number - a feature of many nuisance calls.
- introduce a new requirement for all communications providers to have clear, effective policies and procedures for identifying vulnerable customers.
- extend the requirement, for communications providers to offer disabled users access to priority fault repair, third party bill management and accessible bills, to broadband, from only landline and mobile services.
- strengthen the complaints handling rules to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly and effectively, and consumers are kept informed about the progress of their complaint, with faster access to dispute resolution services in cases where they reach deadlock with their provider;
- require broadband and mobile providers to have fair and transparent debt-collection and disconnection practices in place.
- extend current rules on billing accuracy to include broadband.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to Ofcom's call for inputs on helping consumers to engage in communications markets

Ofcom recently opened a consultation with regard to helping consumers engage more in the market. In [our response](#) we suggested perhaps the question should be: 'how do we help consumers to engage and to protect the interests of those who choose not to?' Whilst we broadly welcome the consultation, understanding these latter consumers - who can often include disabled and older consumers - is crucial and we would like to see greater emphasis and focus on this area. In our response we have encouraged Ofcom to engage with disabled users and their representatives.

We are pleased that Ofcom is including SMEs in its remit. In particular, micro businesses (those employing 10 people or less) are often on domestic contracts and do not have the resources to invest in researching the best deal. encourage Ofcom to engage with disabled users and their representatives; we also welcome Ofcom's proposals to require communication providers to highlight contract ends in advance and provide clear advice on what new deals are available, as well as how to switch.

Read more about [Ofcom's initiative](#) and [our response to the call for inputs](#).

Other news

Ofcom's decision regarding switching

In addition to opening the above consultation, Ofcom recently published their [decision](#) not to make changes to the process for switching communications services between Openreach, KCOM, Virgin Media and Sky. Ofcom have decided to investigate other aspects of the consumer experience, aside from switching.

700MHz band clearance underway in Scotland

Ofcom is clearing the 700MHz band of spectrum for mobile broadband use in response to consumers' increasing demand for mobile data. Ofcom believe that access to the 700 MHz band will also enable mobile operators to improve data speeds in rural areas, and do so more cheaply. Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and Programme Making and Special Events (PMSE) services across the UK are consequently moving off the band and there will be some short-term inconvenience for DTT viewers. The 700MHz band clearance began in the Shetland Islands in July and is now in progress in the north of Scotland. From February next year, it will extend to the Midlands, East Anglia and parts of southern England, including Greater London. Transmitters will be updated across the UK until mid-2020 and viewers will need to retune when this takes place in their area. Ofcom estimates 14-20m homes will need to retune their TV equipment; 100,000 -160,000 homes may need to replace their aerial; 40,000 - 110,000 may need to have their

aerial realigned and a small number of households may need to change TV platform.

Ofcom is responsible for administering the funding to make the necessary transmitter changes, but the Government is responsible for communications and support for viewers affected. [More information](#) can be obtained from Digital UK.

Carnegie UK Trust publishes analysis of impact of Brexit for digital customers

[Brexit: implications for digital citizens and consumers](#) looks at: the regulation of the digital sector and telecommunications market; mobile roaming; data privacy and protection; digital innovation; state aid; the labour force; and consumption of digital products and services. It considers both risks and opportunities for digital citizens and consumers in the UK.

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