



An overview of the Panel’s recent activities

Chair’s highlights - Summer 2022

The Communications Consumer Panel is the statutory consumer panel for the communications sector. Panel Members are appointed by the Secretary of State and hold dual membership with the Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People. Find out more about the Panel and its Members on our website [here](#).

The Panel’s strategic plan - [click here to view](#)

We recently published our strategic plan for the forthcoming year, and we’d like to thank all stakeholders who have fed into our plan and shared insights from across the UK to help shape our thinking. Through our regular engagement with Ofcom, governments, industry and others, we will continue to highlight the interests of consumers, citizens and micro-businesses, feeding back what we’re hearing through our stakeholder networks and research and insights programme.

We’ve outlined below our main policy areas of focus for the forthcoming year.

<p>Affordability of communications services and consumer debt</p>	<p>We’re extremely concerned about the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on consumers, citizens and micro-businesses. We urge communications providers (CPs) to proactively seek to identify consumers with additional support requirements and promote available support to those who are struggling financially. Ofcom’s research recently found that consumer take-up of social tariffs in the communications sector is considerably low, so more needs to be done to alert people to available support. We recommend using a multitude of communications channels to help reach as many people as possible, including people who don’t regularly use the internet. We were pleased to hear that CPs have signed up to a number of commitments to help customers cope with the cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>We’ve also raised our concerns with Ofcom that recent changes to mobile roaming rules are likely to result in increased costs for consumers who travel abroad and/or live-in areas such as Northern Ireland where consumers commonly inadvertently roam onto a non-UK network - and have urged Ofcom to ensure that sufficient consumer protections are in place. Ofcom has published consumer information on the recent changes here.</p>
<p>Migration to VoIP</p>	<p>We urge Ofcom, government and industry to implement a coordinated consumer communications campaign to help raise awareness of the migration process. While we welcome BT’s</p>



	<p>announcement that it will halt the VoIP migration process for consumers who don't 'opt in', more needs to be done to raise consumer awareness and protect consumers. We are worried about the safety of people who rely on their landline in an emergency, particularly those who have additional support requirements such as telecare users and/or people who live-in rural areas with poor mobile connectivity.</p>
<p>Postal services</p>	<p>We believe that all consumers should have access to affordable and reliable postal services, regardless of geographical location. We are concerned that consumers living in rural areas are receiving a sub-standard service and have fed back to Royal Mail and Ofcom what we've heard from our stakeholders and research and insights programme.</p> <p>In addition, following Royal Mail's recent announcement that it will phase out non-barcode stamps, we've highlighted to Royal Mail the importance of ensuring that the swap out scheme does not exclude consumers with additional access needs and/or those who are digitally excluded.</p>

The Panel's research and insights programme - [click here to view our published research reports](#)

We commission independent research to identify and highlight areas of consumer harm in the communications sector and provide an evidence base to drive change for the benefit of consumers, citizens and micro-businesses. Our research and insights programme seeks to capture a wide range of voices from across the UK including those who have additional support requirements and/or are less digitally skilled or confident.

We will soon publish the findings from a number of ongoing research projects that explore areas of the communications sector where we believe consumers are at risk of harm. **Further information on the projects can be found below.**





- **Migration to VoIP** - we commissioned quantitative research to further understand consumers' requirements regarding migration to VoIP and telephony during power cuts. The research findings will complement our qualitative research published in 2021 on the [potential impacts of the migration on customers who have additional access requirements and/or are at risk of detriment](#).
- **Consumers with additional support requirements in the communications sector** - our research, both qualitative and quantitative, considered what the term 'vulnerability' means to consumers and any barriers consumers face when trying to seek support from CPs. Earlier this year, we shared our key research findings with the Panel's National Stakeholder Hubs ([a summary of our discussions can be found here](#)) and the Panel's Industry Forum.
- **Consumer perceptions of security and privacy of their online data** - we previously commissioned research looking into [consumers' perceptions of digital privacy](#) and we have commissioned a follow-up quantitative project to see how consumer's views have changed over five years.
- **Postal services in Northern Ireland** - we commissioned a quantitative project on consumers' experiences of postal services in Northern Ireland and any impacts of the EU exit on postal consumers.

Future research projects

We have also started scoping out research projects for the forthcoming year. Topics of focus include consumers' experiences of applying for social tariffs, the experiences of communications consumers living in rural areas and any detriment they face; how younger people navigate the communications market; and consumer's experiences of using smaller broadband providers.

Think piece: excellent customer service across the UK's regulated sectors

We have commissioned a specialist in customer service and consumer advocacy to write a cross-sectoral think-piece on what excellent customer service looks like in UK regulated sectors. This builds from on from our think-piece, published last year on Making Communications Services Inclusive and we look forward to sharing it with you.

The Panel's National Stakeholder Hubs - [click here to find out more](#)

The National Stakeholder Hubs - a series of roundtable discussions attended by a range of consumer, citizen and small business representatives - are held across each of the UK Nations and seek to strengthen the voices of UK consumers, citizens and micro-businesses in the communication sector. The themes of meetings are driven by current



issues affecting those using communications services, and we hold UK-wide Hubs, where we consider certain issues to be of mutual interest to all of the UK Nations.

We recently held a UK-wide National Stakeholder Hub on **digital privacy**, looking at how consumers, citizens and micro-businesses **stay safe online**. Ofcom's market research team attended the session and presented key findings from Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme such as how confident consumers feel participating online and the steps they take to protect themselves from potential harms such as scams and misinformation. Hub participants had an opportunity to discuss the findings and share the experiences of the consumers they represent.

We would like to thank all stakeholders who attended the session and contributed to our discussion. A summary of the discussion and the key points raised has been circulated to Ofcom and will be fed back to industry, governments through our channels of engagement. You can read the full summary on our website [here](#).

Upcoming Hubs for your calendars

In light of the cost-of-living crisis and increasing financial pressures on consumers, citizens and micro-businesses across the UK, our next Hub meetings in October will focus on the affordability of communications services and managing consumer debt. We would be particularly interested to hear the experiences of people applying for social tariffs, any barriers they faced and their understanding of what was on offer to them.

Please see below for the dates of upcoming Hubs.

- The Panel's Consumer Stakeholder Hub for Scotland - 7 October
- The Panel's Consumer Stakeholder Hub for Wales - 12 October
- The Panel's Consumer Stakeholder Hub for Northern Ireland - 18 October
- The Panel's Consumer Stakeholder Hub for England - 19 October

The Panel's UK Consumer Advocacy Hub

We meet on a quarterly basis with consumer advocacy organisations across the UK. The Panel's Consumer Advocacy Hub is chaired by the Panel and attended by Which?, Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland and Consumer Council for Northern Ireland - Consumer Scotland has also been invited to participate in future meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity to share and understand the key issues affecting consumers nationally and feed these into Ofcom and industry where appropriate.

The Panel's Industry Forum

We continue to facilitate discussion between CPs at the Panel's Industry Forum. The Industry Forum provides an opportunity for CPs to discuss issues of interest or concern under Chatham House rules to help them work together, learn from other sectors and



the Panel's suggestions, and drive-up standards.

These meetings continue to focus on **supporting consumers with additional service requirements**, an area where we have urged CPs to take greater steps to understand and consistently record the requirements of consumers across the communications sector. In March, the ICO attended the Forum to speak about data protection and recording vulnerability data. In June, representatives of the research agency that conducted the Panel's research presented and discussed the key findings from the Panel's research on support for consumers with additional support requirements in the communications sector.

The Panel's Annual Report 2021-22 - [click here to view](#)

We recently published our Annual Report 2021-22, which provides an overview of our activities over the last year and how our initiatives to help strengthen the consumer voice in the communications sector are making an impact.