



Issue 7, September 2007

www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk

Welcome to the September 2007 edition of the Ofcom Consumer Panel e-newsletter. We have redesigned the e-Newsletter to make it more immediate and user-friendly, giving you the highlights of our work. To find more information on the particular issues that interest you please click on the [weblinks](#) to go through to the relevant page of our website. The e-Newsletter will continue to be sent out quarterly and we hope you find it useful, and welcome any comments you may have.

Consumer Panel policy work

Digital Dividend Review

We have actively engaged with Ofcom on its Digital Dividend policy for over a year, and submitted a response to Ofcom's consultation in March. We will continue to engage with Ofcom on this policy over the next year as we think it is important that the spectrum released by digital switchover is used to deliver products and services that bring real quality and innovation to UK consumers, which try to meet the needs of UK citizens wherever and whoever they may be. Our advice note to Ofcom can be found at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/files/advice/ddr1.pdf

Children and the internet

On 28 June 2007 we published a qualitative research report that looked at the social effects the lack of internet access has on socially disadvantaged children and families. The Panel also commissioned a short film to explore the attitudes of children who have the internet at home and how they use it.

The research sits in the wider context of the Government's digital strategy, and we therefore launched it as part of a round table discussion with government policy-makers, and representatives of industry and the third sector who are involved in providing home internet access. The Consumer Panel will publish a report of this event on our website in the autumn. The report will summarise the themes and policy recommendations that emerged from this event.

The Children and the internet report is part of our broader agenda on digital inclusion and follows on from the attitudinal research undertaken last year into *Older People and Communications Technology*, which you can find at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/files/information/olderpeople/Older_people_and_communications_technology.pdf

The full Panel report on Children and the internet can be found at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/Children_and_the_internet.pdf and the news release is at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/news/280607.htm Our short film can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=anOqGXEOEDw

Consumers and the communications markets

On 30 May 2007, we published our third communications market survey. The survey provides an evidence base to help set the Panel's priorities. It covers people's experiences of fixed line and mobile telephony, the internet and digital TV communications markets.

The full survey report can be found at:

www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/Consumersmarket2007.pdf

Breakdowns of the survey, focusing on consumer segments in rural areas, low-income households, people with a disability, or people over 65, can be found at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/research-policy.htm#Consumers

Next Generation Access (NGA)

Following our February 2007 advice note on NGA and Next Generation Networks we have continued to work closely on these issues with Ofcom and others, including the Broadband Stakeholder Group. We think this is an important policy area due to the significant benefits that an NGA network would bring - felt by consumers, citizens and the UK as a whole. We will shortly be publishing a further advice note on our website. If you would like to be alerted to any updates to our website, please write to contact@ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk. Our February 2007 advice note can be found at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/files/advice/K2.pdf

Future of Radio

We submitted a response to Ofcom's consultation on the Future of Radio. The consultation concerned the future regulatory framework for FM and AM radio services, including the alignment of analogue and digital regulation of national and local commercial radio, such as ownership rules and localness requirements. The Panel supported much of the consultation's approach to the future of radio, and the way to boost community radio through simplified regulation.

You can find our June 2007 response to Ofcom's consultation on the Future of Radio in June 2007 at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/advice/documents/Z1.pdf

Telephone Preference Service (TPS)

We have raised concerns in the past about the effectiveness of the TPS scheme. Following an update on this issue from Ofcom, we expressed our views and concerns about the operation of the TPS - including enforcement and the handling of complaints. You can find our advice note at

www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/advice/documents/T9.pdf and we also wrote a

letter to Government on the same issues -

www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/advice/documents/T11_000.pdf

Quality of Service

As part of Ofcom's pre-consultation with stakeholders in advance of its Quality of Service (QoS) Review we submitted our views on Ofcom's QoS indicators that are published on the Topcomm and TopNetUK websites. Also, we recommended expanding the scope of QoS information to cover broadband service providers and to provide more information with regards to mobile operators, as well as the eventual integration of QoS data with price comparison information. Our advice note is at

www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/advice/documents/RevisedT8.pdf and Ofcom's response is at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/advice/documents/T10.pdf

Other Consumer Panel activities

Participation Broadcasting

Panel member Kate O'Rourke spoke at a Westminster Media Forum Keynote Seminar on Participation Broadcasting. Discussion looked at the lessons to be learned from the recent premium rate phone-in controversies. Kate O'Rourke suggested some ways in which consumers can be protected, avoiding detriment, and how confidence can be restored in the sector. Kate O'Rourke's speech is at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/ParticipationBroadcasting.pdf

The Consumer Interest Toolkit and the European Commission

The European Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Meglena Kuneva, invited Colette Bowe and Graham Mather to present the *Consumer Interest Toolkit* at a workshop in May 2007. Those in attendance were senior officials from the Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO). The workshop explored how the Toolkit, a methodology for taking into account the consumer interest within an organisation's decision and policy making structures and based loosely on an audit process, could be incorporated into the European Commission's (EC) own processes.

You can find a note about the meeting at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/Noteon31May2007DGSANCOToolkitmeeting.pdf and the full February 2006 Ofcom Consumer Panel publication *Capturing the consumer interest: A toolkit for regulators and government* is at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/capturing_the_consumer_interest.pdf

Consumer Panel Annual Report

The Panel's third annual report sets out its activities in the year 2006-2007. The report can be found at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/ConsumerPanelAnnualReport0607.pdf and the accompanying news release is at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/news/250607.htm

Consumer Forum on Communications (CFC)

So far this year, the CFC has met in January, March and June. The June 2007 meeting looked at HDTV and the Future of Radio. The next meeting will take place on 18 September, with discussions expected on non-core charges levied by telecoms operators and the 'switched-on' information campaign related to BT's 21st Century Network. The final meeting of the year takes place on 18 December.

Notes of this year's meetings can be found at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/CFC_20_March_2007.pdf www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/files/information/consumerforum/CFC_16_Jan_2007.pdf and www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/CFC_12_June_2007.pdf

Details of Consumer Panel meetings

The Consumer Panel meets monthly, except in August. You can find the agendas and minutes of past meetings at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/consumer-panel-agendas.htm and you can see what is coming up on the next Panel meeting agenda at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/lookingahead/

Forthcoming research

In the autumn the Consumer Panel will publish research in two areas. *Going Digital* is a qualitative study that explores the experiences of consumers as they convert to digital television. *Communications usage by Scottish small businesses* is a quantitative study that examines how small enterprises in Scotland currently use communications services, with a particular focus on businesses in rural areas which have less access to and less choice of service providers.

If you no longer wish to receive this e-newsletter, or if a colleague would like to be added to our e-newsletter distribution list, please write to contact@ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk.

The Ofcom Consumer Panel is the independent advisory body that advises Ofcom and other relevant bodies on consumer interests in telecommunications, broadcasting and spectrum markets. To find out more visit www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk.