



e-newsletter December 2008

Welcome

Welcome to the first e-newsletter of the Communications Consumer Panel, which we will publish every month with the latest news on the Panel and on communications issues across the UK and Europe.

Join the mailing list or just log onto our website to read it:

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

New-look Communications Consumer Panel takes fresh approach to strategy and consumer policy

We launched the independent Communications Consumer Panel, formerly the Ofcom Consumer Panel, and new name on 17 November 2008. Our new name highlights a repositioning in the Panel's role. In addition to continuing to advise Ofcom, the Panel will advise more widely on consumers' interest, in particular other policy makers, regulators and industry.

Go to our new website for the latest news:

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

New Panel members

The new nine Communications Consumer Panel members bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience across the communications landscape, strategy and consumer policy. They are joining us at a really exciting time – when critical decisions about the delivery of next generation broadband in the UK and digital inclusion are being taken, and consumer activism and citizen issues are high on the political agenda together with convergence and digital switchover.

Previous members stood down from the Panel at the end of their terms, leaving behind a tremendous legacy and an invaluable contribution in establishing the name of the Consumer Panel firmly in the communications world.

The new Communications Consumer Panel members are:

- Fiona Ballantyne (member for Scotland)
- Louisa Bolch
- Anna Bradley, Chair
- Kim Brook (member for Wales)
- Colin Browne
- Roger Darlington (member for England)
- Maureen Edmondson (member for Northern Ireland)
- Leen Petre
- Damian Tambini
- Bob Warner
- Ruth Evans remains on the Panel until January as Deputy Chair.

For more information on Communications Consumer Panel members go to:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/panel-members/our-panel>

New Panel manager

We are also pleased to welcome Alistair Bridge as the Principal Advisor to the Communications Consumer Panel. He joins us from Ofcom's Strategy Team where he was responsible for a wide range of projects, including introducing a new approach to evaluating policy outcomes, improving the effectiveness of Ofcom's enforcement activities and leading Ofcom's engagement with the Government's Better Regulation Agenda. He also wrote the recent discussion paper *Citizens, Communications and Convergence*.

Alistair will manage the Panel's support team and is delighted to be taking up his new role: "I'm really looking forward to working with the members of the Panel to ensure that the voices of consumers and citizens are central to the debate about how communications policy should change as technology and markets continue to evolve."

Latest news...

95% of consumers covered by new broadband speeds voluntary code

The Communications Consumer Panel has welcomed the introduction of Ofcom's new voluntary code of practice for internet service providers (ISPs), which came into force on 5 December 2008. It gives consumers better information about broadband speeds, and should enable consumers to make more informed choices when choosing a provider. The code addresses the concerns that the Panel raised with Ofcom last year about the mismatch between the speeds that people think they are buying and what they actually get.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-releases/responding-to-the-introduction-etc>

Panel chair calls on industry to act in the consumer interest without waiting to be told

The Consumer Panel does not favour regulation for regulation's sake "we only call for it where we see it is necessary", Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley told the mobile industry at several recent events. She pointed to the 2.5 million consumers who have complained about services, highlighting the 8,000 customer complaints to Ofcom about mobile bills. She argued that it was in their interests to treat customers fairly but said she was not confident that industry would do all it could to address this consumer detriment.

Ofcom's review of the mobile market (Mobile sector Assessment) is a welcome and strategic approach, which Anna Bradley said: "Sets the scene for industry to take the moral high-ground and try to get some of this right first time going forward, seeking to avoid problems, rather than waiting for them to emerge, and paving the way forward for a more vibrant, but fairer marketplace."

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CTT%20speech%209%20October%20202008.pdf>

Panel warns of a 'digital chasm' if super-fast broadband is left to market forces alone

A market-led approach to the roll out of super-fast broadband, known as next generation access (NGA), would probably exclude 40% of the UK's population, Panel member Roger Darlington told the Next Gen 08 conference in Manchester. He said that "it matters enormously at both a technical and social level". He warned that if NGA roll out was left to market forces alone "today's digital divide could become for many a digital chasm". He spelt out how this would deny people access to many vital services and products such as telemedicine, local authority services and the ability to run a business.

The Panel, Roger Darlington said, believes that "We must debate these issues now...We see a case even now for introducing next generation broadband in those areas, which are at present struggling to obtain satisfactory performance levels of current generation broadband."

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Roger%20Darlington%20Next%20Gen%2008%20Conference.pdf>

Mailing list

If you have any comments about the newsletter or if you would like to be added or taken off the mailing list please click on this link:

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