



e-newsletter May 2009

Welcome

Welcome to the May 2009 issue of the Communications Consumer Panel e-newsletter. If you'd like to receive our monthly newsletter and you're not on our mailing list, it's easy to join – just go to our website at:

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Latest news...

Communications Consumer Panel tells Lord Carter that consumers are more than just 'the demand-side'

Initiatives such as the universal broadband commitment and media literacy action plan must be designed around the needs of consumers and citizens, the Communications Consumer Panel told a recent meeting of the Digital Britain (DB) Steering Group chaired by Lord Carter.

Following criticism that the Government had not focused enough on the views of consumers and citizens, Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that the Panel was "pleased to accept Lord Carter's invitation to discuss with the Steering Group how the Government can clearly link its Digital Britain initiatives to consumer and citizen needs".

The Panel spoke to Lord Carter about the need for:

- A universal broadband commitment that delivers the services and applications that everyone needs.
- Action on skills and confidence that reflects the full spectrum of consumer and citizen needs and is targeted at the groups that most need help.
- New content, especially more (and better) public services online, to help drive broadband take-up and take full advantage of digital technology.

Anna Bradley also said that the Panel would be publishing research on Wednesday 3 June that shows that in the not-too-distant future it will be essential for everyone to have broadband at home – not having it will be a real disadvantage:

"This research will further bolster the case for making broadband available to everyone and highlights the importance of a focus on the forty per cent of people who do not yet have broadband at home. This may be for any number of reasons, from affordability, through skills and confidence to just not seeing any benefit, but whatever the reasons, consumers and citizens believe that it is vital that the forty per cent do not miss out"

Read the presentation on the Panel's website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/Digital%20Britain%20presentation.pdf>

Priorities for the year ahead

Launching the Communications Consumer Panel's *Work Plan 2009/10*, Chair Anna Bradley said: "This sets out our priorities for the year ahead and reflects the comments made by stakeholders at an event held earlier in the year."

"Broadband will soon be an essential part of people's lives and being unable to use online services will put many people at a significant disadvantage. That's why over the coming year the Communications Consumer Panel will focus its energy on the 40 per cent of people who are not yet online at home."

Anna Bradley explained how the Panel will be examining the barriers to take-up, looking at availability, cost, concerns about security and misuse of personal data, lack of skills and easy-to-use equipment, and finding out what would inspire people to get online.

The Panel will be focusing on a number of issues, although the nature of the Panel's engagement will vary from issue to issue, ranging from significant and proactive to simply holding a watching brief.

Significant proactive engagement

- **Universal service** – influencing decisions about the services that should be available to everyone now and in the future so that they reflect the views of consumers and citizens.
- **Consumer and citizen empowerment** – influencing policy interventions so that they reflect, and are designed to meet, the full spectrum of consumers' and citizens' needs.
- **Trust and security** – highlighting concerns about security and misuse of personal data, and the potential for people to be deterred from going online or getting the most out of being online.

Limited proactive engagement

- **Mobile** – advising on mobile issues that matter to consumers and citizens, such as the absence of reliable coverage in significant parts of the UK. In relation to this area of work, we will be working closely with Consumer Focus so that we complement their work in the mobile sector and together address the issues that matter most to consumers and citizens.

- **Digital Inclusion Action Plan** – influencing the development and implementation of the Government’s Digital Inclusion Action Plan so that it focuses on the groups of consumers and citizens who most need help in getting online.

Monitoring with engagement as appropriate

- **Consumer protection** – monitoring, and influencing where appropriate, Ofcom’s policy and enforcement activities so that consumers and citizens are protected from harmful conduct.
- **Next-generation broadband** – monitoring, and influencing where appropriate, public policy and regulatory decisions about the rollout of next-generation broadband so that the interests of consumers and citizens are identified clearly and properly taken into account.

Watching brief

- **Digital switchover** – tracking developments as digital switchover progresses and highlighting any concerns that arise.
- **Broadband speeds** – observing how the voluntary code on fixed broadband speeds is implemented and raising any concerns about whether consumers are receiving appropriate information from providers.

Read the Panel’s Work Plan on the website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/about-us/panel-work-programme>

Advising Ofcom

What may go unseen as part of the everyday work of the Communications Consumer Panel is the way that the Panel is constantly engaged in advising Ofcom and holding the regulator to account.

Ofcom is asked to present at every monthly Panel meeting on a range of issues that affect consumers and citizens in the communications sector. For example, at its meeting in May the Panel advised Ofcom on its access and inclusion consultation, its approach to enforcement, its review of the scope of premium rate services regulation, the impact on consumers of BT’s rollout of its so-called 21st Century Network, a new Internet-Protocol (IP) network.

If you want to find out what the Panel and Ofcom have been talking about at Panel meetings, visit the website and look at the latest minutes:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/angenda-and-minutes/2008>

We will also be blogging about the issues that we cover at Panel meetings to provide an alternative to reading the formal minutes. You can find the Blog here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog>

Speaking at Parliamentary IT Committee meeting on mobile sector Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley tells industry to do more to address consumer concerns

Anna Bradley told a meeting of the Parliamentary IT Committee that although 94 per cent are satisfied with their mobile service the six per cent who aren't adds up to 2.5 million customers. She called on industry to do more to address consumer concerns:

"The Panel is not in favour of regulation for its own sake – we call for it only where we see it is necessary. So the question I always ask the mobile industry is, what are you willing and able to do to address areas of consumer detriment yourselves? Because the more you do, the less likely it is that organisations like the Consumer Panel will ask the regulator to step-in."

Anna Bradley highlighted mobile coverage, mobile number portability and the need for easier-to-understand tariffs as three of the issues that need to be addressed.

and in brief.....

BBC research highlights the challenge of making broadband available to all UK homes

The Communications Consumer Panel has welcomed recent BBC research into notspots. The BBC-commissioned survey found notspots are not limited to rural communities – many suburban areas and streets in major towns are unable to use online services such as downloading TV content that require a fast broadband connection.

Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley supported the Government's universal broadband commitment, but said that the BBC research highlighted "the level of the challenge faced by Government in delivering on its commitment to ensure that all homes in the UK can get a 2Mb/s broadband connection by 2012".

Broadband in rural areas

Minister for Rural Affairs Huw Irranca Davies and Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities Stuart Burgess both cited broadband as an essential service for rural areas at a recent event, Communications Consumer Panel Policy Adviser Dominic Ridley reports.

The Minister said that those who live in rural areas "don't expect something different – they expect the same and the same access to essential services." He also said that the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs was working closely with the Departments for Communities and Local Government and Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform, as well as the Commission for Rural Communities, to ensure rural areas of the UK do not fall behind in terms of broadband access.

Stuart Burgess argued that quality access to a broadband network is essential to a local economy in today's connected society.

The Panel ensures that rural needs taken into account when communications policy is developed. For example, we published a report earlier in the year that maps the current UK community schemes that are rolling-out next generation broadband networks. We are also looking at the issue of mobile phone coverage in the UK and what impact mobile coverage notspots have on people.

Read more on the Panel's Blog:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog>

New research....coming soon

Watch out for the publication on 3 June of the findings from our recent research revealing that in the not-too-distant future it will be essential for everyone to have broadband at home – not having it will be a real disadvantage. The panel research will further bolster the case for making broadband available to everyone.