



e-newsletter April 2010

Latest news...

What you said about our newsletter

Last month we asked you to tell us what you thought about our e-newsletter and we'd like to thank everyone who filled in our online survey. This is what you said:

- What you value most is information about the Panel's original research, policy positions and consultation responses.
- You think that we are getting the length of articles in the e-newsletter right, but you would also like to have some shorter items with links to further information on the Panel's website. We will look to provide more of this in the future.
- You would like to hear news from us via the e-newsletter and website updates, and are not so interested in the Panel blog or social networking tools.
- On the whole you think that the newsletter is accessible. However, some of you gave suggestions as to improvements to its design and colouring. We are working on an improved newsletter at the moment and will take your suggestions on board.

If you haven't yet responded there's still time. We would like to hear your views about the newsletter, so just click here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6H7B3TW>

Panel publishes Work Plan for 2010

The Communications Consumer Panel has launched its Work Plan for 2010/11 following a three-week public consultation. Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley thanked the people who responded to the consultation, which she said was a key element in how the Panel will be targeting its work and action in the coming year. The Work Plan has identified six areas that it will focus on and will keep under review key consumer concerns that might need Panel intervention such as broadband speeds and switching processes. The six work areas are:

- Digital participation and inclusion
- Mobile coverage
- Processes for making and evaluating regulation
- Consumer protection and empowerment
- Consumer engagement with the internet
- Universal service

Work is already underway on a number of projects that feature in the Work Plan. An issue that has gripped the media, music world and politicians has been how the Government handles illegal file-sharing. The Panel is taking an active role, and will be helping to ensure that proper consumer safeguards are built into the code of

practice and appeals body that will govern the new system tackling illegal file-sharing.

We have also had concerns about the usability of mobile phones, particularly for people with disabilities. So, working with consumers we are looking at how phones could be made easier to use.

The Panel is working closely with Broadband Delivery UK, the group set up to implement the Government's Universal Service Commitment (USC). Our eight consumer principles will help to ensure that consumers' needs are at the heart of the process. You can read the principles on the Panel's website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/digital-inclusion/universal-service-commitment>

You can read the Work Plan on our website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/100430%20Work%20plan%20final%20final%20version.pdf>

We have also summarised the responses to the consultation and explained how we have addressed them:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Work%20Plan%20summary%20of%20responses.pdf>

Latest on broadband speeds – Panel says consumers should have right to cancel contract in the Code

The Consumer Panel says that consumers should have the right to cancel their contract if their internet service provider (ISP) cannot provide them with the speeds they were led to expect. Speeds can vary throughout the day, but where consumers are getting speeds that are dramatically different from the maximum speeds quoted the Panel believes that they are being misled. The Panel has called on Ofcom to address this in reviewing the industry's code of practice.

You can read the Panel's press release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Final%20bb%20speeds%20release.pdf>

Panel asks Ofcom for a single switching process

The Panel has welcomed Ofcom's decision to make the process of switching mobile provider easier for consumers. The Communications Consumer Panel has always argued that consumers should be able to switch mobile provider and retain their original phone number in a switching process that is quick and easy. The Panel is also asking Ofcom to develop a more unified process for switching all communications services including mobile phones. Ofcom had been consulting on reducing the time that it takes consumers to retain their mobile number when switching provider – known as mobile number portability (MNP). You can read Ofcom's announcement here:

<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consumer/2010/04/faster-mobile-number-switching-2/>

April Panel meeting

In a topical and packed agenda Panel members discussed switching, illegal file-sharing and net neutrality following presentations by Ofcom. The Age UK Chief Executive Tom Wright also came to talk to the Panel.

Panel members discussed Ofcom's approach net neutrality stressing the need to look at the issue through the eyes of consumers and citizens, focusing on the risks and opportunities. Updating the Panel on illegal file-sharing, Ofcom explained that it would be developing a draft code of practice for consultation from May. In the following discussion Ofcom was asked to provide early sight of the code for Panel input.

The Panel was pleased with Ofcom's progress on improving switching processes, having long called for more unified switching processes to reflect the fact that many consumers now buy bundles of communications services. The Panel will return to this issue as Ofcom develops its thinking further.

Breaking down inter-generational barriers, the challenge of getting older people online and making it affordable were the focus for Tom Wright's presentation – all issues at the heart of the Panel's digital participation research project. The Panel and Age UK will continue to talk about how to resolve these issues and develop a joint approach.

The Panel also discussed Project Canvas - the scheme to develop an enhanced Freeview set-top box that will use internet connectivity to give a greater choice of content - and the Ofcom Spectrum Advisory Board (OSAB) had a wide-ranging discussion with the Panel, focusing in particular on developments in wireless technologies.

Coming up in the May issue....

There will be lots more news to catch up on in the May 2010 issue:

- We'll be publishing our Digital Participation framework that features in the Government's National Plan for Digital Participation.
- Also our annual report will be published. This highlights the impact that the Panel has had over the last year in a number of key areas such as switching processes, mobile coverage and complaints handling.
- The Consumer Panel will be responding to the EU consultation on universal service. Look at our website to read the response.

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www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk