

September 2010

# Newsletter

COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSUMER  
PANEL



## Latest news...

### Culture Minister Ed Vaizey agrees to act on broadband speeds concerns

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey has said he supports the Panel's 'proactive stance' on broadband speeds concerns. The Minister said that the Coalition Government would be drafting a comprehensive broadband strategy in the autumn that would highlight concerns about broadband speeds.

Ed Vaizey was responding to Panel Chair Anna Bradley, who wrote to the Culture Minister in August to ask him to support action to compel internet service providers (ISPs) to advertise average or typical broadband speed information rather than 'up to' speeds. Recent Ofcom research shows that the difference between advertised and actual speeds is actually growing, and the Panel says this is not acceptable. Anna Bradley has advised the Minister that the best way to address the problem would be to give customers a discount or allow them to move provider if they are not getting the speeds they were led to expect.

You can read our letter to Ed Vaizey and his reply on our website: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/telecommunications/broadband>

### Talking net neutrality - is transparency enough?

There's been a great deal of talk in the media recently about net neutrality, and the buzz word in the UK debate is transparency. The Panel has added its expert voice to the debate in several ways this month - responses to Ofcom and EU consultations, keynote speeches to the Westminster eForum and the Broadband Stakeholders Group - and organising our own seminar.

The Panel's seminar was held in partnership with the LSE media think-tank Polis. Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley and Panel member Damian Tambini were joined on the platform by high level speakers Giuseppe Conte from the cabinet of Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner for the Digital Agenda and Zachary Katz, legal adviser to the Chairman of US regulator the Federal Communications Commission. They debated with an invited audience from industry, academia and consumer groups whether giving people information about how internet service providers (ISPs) manage internet traffic - coupled with rules on non-discrimination - is sufficient to meet consumers' and citizens' needs.

## In short...

### Coming up...

- Publication of research on the usability of mobile phones
- Response from mobile providers to the Panel's mobile coverage mystery shopping research

### Panel meetings...

To read minutes from Panel meetings go to: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/agenda-and-minutes/2010>

### Are you on our mailing list...

If you'd like to receive this newsletter monthly by email - just join our mailing list by emailing [contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk](mailto:contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk)

Anna Bradley put forward three proposals for policy makers to consider. First, industry should make a firm commitment to give consumers clear information about what they will be able to use their connection for. Anna pointed out that, “Promises about the types of services or applications that consumers will be able to use are much more empowering than overly-technical information about traffic management policies.”

Secondly, that we need to focus on the needs and expectations of citizens as well as consumers. For example, access to emerging online public services like e-health could be put at risk by a purely market-driven approach to net neutrality. To address this concern regulators should consider a minimum quality of service or ‘must carry’ obligation to guarantee access to public services.

Thirdly, Anna said that more research should be done to understand what consumers want and how they make purchasing and switching decisions, arguing that, “We need to have the debate based on a real understanding of the views and experiences of consumers and citizens. There won't be any easy answers, but this approach will allow us to really understand the nature of the problem.”

We will shortly be publishing a note of the Panel’s seminar, but in the meantime you can read Anna Bradley’s blog:  
<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog>

The Panel’s views on net neutrality are set out in full in its responses to Ofcom’s and the European Commission’s recent consultations:  
<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/internet/net-neutrality>

### **Consumers back Panel’s call for better information on broadband speeds**

The Panel has been very concerned for some time by the claims made by broadband providers about the speeds they can provide to consumers. So, Wales Panel member Kim Brook, writing in his blog, welcomed news that Virgin Media is making changes as a result of the findings in its ICM consumer research. The Panel has had discussions with both Ofcom and the Advertising Standards Authority to ensure the consumer perspective is taken into account and is urging other internet service providers to follow Virgin’s lead and move from ‘up to’ speeds to a more realistic measure of speeds that consumers are likely to receive.

To read Kim Brook’s blog in full go to:  
<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog>

### **BIS listens to Panel advice to fine silent call offenders**

The Panel welcomed the Department for Business Innovation and Skills’ (BIS) action on silent calls. The Consumer Panel had advised BIS to increase the amount Ofcom can fine persistent offenders to give better protection to consumers. Ofcom can now fine companies up to £2 million.

### **Don’t forget the Panel blog...**

Read about the latest news from Panel members by going to our home page and click on the blog at:  
[www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog)

For a copy of the Communications Consumer Panel response *Tackling abandoned and silent calls* go to our website:

[www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/telecommunications/silent-calls](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/telecommunications/silent-calls)

### **9 million face disadvantage unless Government understands consumer needs**

Speaking at the Westminster eForum debate earlier in September on the future of Digital Britain, Consumer Chair Anna Bradley made the stark prediction that the 9 million people in the UK who have never used the internet face serious disadvantage unless the Government understands how to encourage and support them to get online. She said that it is not just about getting online and having web skills: "People will need ongoing support to overcome the problems they will inevitably encounter."

Read the full speech here:

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

### **Not charging for appeals against notification for illegal file-sharing prosecution is welcome, but the process must be simple**

The Government's decision not to charge consumers who appeal against a notification alleging online copyright infringement is good news, writes Panel member Damian Tambini in his recent blog. Any system that accuses people of illegal online activity must be fair and clear, he says, and must be based on sound evidence of wrongdoing before any action is taken. The process must be simple and easy to access, and an independent third party should be available to advise consumers on the process.

To read Damian Tambini's blog in full go to:

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

### **September Panel meeting**

Discussion at the Panel's September meeting focused on a number of Ofcom reviews including:

- The review of wholesale local access (WLA) that will set the framework for the rollout of superfast broadband. The Panel advised Ofcom that the forthcoming statement should clearly articulate the expected outcomes for consumers in terms of coverage, choice, price and quality of service.
- An update from Ofcom on changes to the initial obligations code that will govern the new system for tackling online copyright infringement in response to the Panel's advice.
- Ofcom's review of non-geographic call services. Panel members welcomed Ofcom's review and called for the simplification of the current system based on a sound understanding of how consumers respond to information about numbering and the cost of calling non-geographic numbers.

You can download the full minutes of Panel meetings from our website at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/angenda-and-minutes/2010>