

March 2011

# Panel newsletter

COMMUNICATIONS  
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PANEL



## Latest news...

### Anna Bradley concludes term as Panel Chair

After more than three years as Chair of the Communications Consumer Panel, Anna Bradley has reached the end of her term and she will shortly be handing over to Bob Warner as Chair, subject to his appointment receiving Ministerial approval. These changes are part of the planned move from an independent Panel based at Ofcom to a cross-sectoral consumer body that it is proposed will be based at Citizens Advice. Four other members of the Panel completed their terms in October 2010.

The remaining five Panel members will continue to represent consumers and citizens in the communications sector while also discussing whether, and how, the Panel's work will be integrated into the new consumer advocacy proposals.

As she came to the end of her term as Panel Chair, Anna Bradley said:

"I'm really proud of what the Panel has achieved over the last three years. Among the highlights, we raised the issue of mobile coverage, pushed it up Ofcom's agenda and forced mobile operators and retailers to improve their coverage cancellation policies. We championed the need to align switching processes across all services. We helped to secure the Government's commitment to universal broadband by showing, through our consumer research, that it would soon be essential for people to have broadband at home. We also worked with consumers to identify the full range of things that they need in order to get online and get the most out of the internet - this framework became the cornerstone of the Government's national plan to boost internet take-up.

I would like to thank my fellow Panel members and the Panel's advisory team for their hard work and enthusiastic commitment. I am pleased that the Panel will continue to champion consumers' interests with Ofcom, Government and industry, while decisions are made about the future of consumer advocacy. A strong, independent consumer advocate is vital in ensuring that regulators and policy makers address the issues that matter to consumers and

## In short...

### Watch this space...

- The Panel's latest research project into how much consumers really know about how their personal data is used will be published in May 2011.
- Consumer Panel member Bob Warner takes over as Chair from 11 April 2011.
- There have been some changes to the Consumer Panel team that take effect from 1 April 2011: Panel Policy Manager Alistair Bridge moves to the Consumer Group at Ofcom, and is replaced by Fiona Lennox from the Ofcom Media Literacy Team; Senior Policy Adviser Emily Keaney moves to the Ofcom Research team; and Panel Secretary Nicola Ebdon leaves the organisation to be replaced by David Edwards.

citizens. As well as addressing issues of current concern the advocate needs to anticipate the issues that will emerge in the future and try to ensure problems are avoided as new policy is implemented. In a sector that is as important and fast-moving as communications, looking to the future is critical,” Anna Bradley concluded.

### Consumers need to know what the trade-offs are before handing over their personal data online

The majority of consumers are concerned about online privacy and they need to know what benefits they are trading their personal information for, Panel member Bob Warner said in a speech to the Westminster Media Forum. He said that the Panel’s latest research project into how online personal data is collected and used is uncovering worrying findings.

“The key gap seems to be in consumers’ understanding of what their personal data is used for. Without this knowledge they can’t make informed choices between on the one hand, withholding their data and protecting their privacy, and on the other hand, sharing their data and receiving benefits,” he explained. He went on to call on companies to tell consumers what benefits can result from sharing data, but to “tell them in a straightforward way”.

The Panel’s research into online privacy will be published shortly.

You can read the text of Bob’s speech on the Panel’s website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/220311WMF%20new%20privacy%20Bob%20Warners%20Speech.pdf>

### Robust information on traffic management policies is a welcome move, Panel says

“More comparable and robust information about traffic management policies is a welcome step forward,” Panel Chair Anna Bradley said in response to the publication of a voluntary industry code by the Broadband Stakeholder Group. The code aims to improve the transparency of traffic management policies that apply to broadband services. She said that the information will make it possible to track how these policies change as the market develops, adding: “We can then decide whether we need a minimum level of service to guarantee reliable access to essential services, including public services such as monitoring older and disabled people’s health.” In the meantime, the Panel has said it would like to see ISPs working with Ofcom to investigate how a minimum level of service could be implemented.

You can read the press release on the Panel’s website:

[http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/150311%20BSG%20Comm](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/150311%20BSG%20Comment%20ISPs%20Traffic%20Mngt%20Minimum.pdf)  
[ent%20ISPs%20Traffic%20Mngt%20Minimum.pdf](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/150311%20BSG%20Comment%20ISPs%20Traffic%20Mngt%20Minimum.pdf)

### The future of m-commerce is in the hands of consumers

The future for mobile commerce lies in the hands of consumers - how they behave and the decisions they make, Panel member Bob

#### Panel meetings...

To read minutes from previous meetings go to: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/angenda-and-minutes/2011>

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Warner told the Westminster Media Forum. He explained that we need to understand who these consumers are, and “the first thing to say is that in the future a lot more of them are likely to be older”. This ageing, over-65 group would account for 23% of all the UK’s population by 2034, he said, adding that “many will also have some kind of disability”.

He told the Forum that mobile had the potential to play a key role in getting people online, but that “work is needed to convince older and disabled users”. Some of the real barriers, he explained, are about their ability to use mobiles, and addressing this challenge also made good business sense. He went on to say:

“The Panel’s new research on mobile usability shows that this is not a niche issue - everyone likes a mobile that easier to use. This means that the business case for increasing usability is much larger than people might otherwise assume.”

The Panel is taking a proactive approach by working with Ofcom to connect with retailers, operators, manufacturers and the voluntary sector to come up with ways of making it easier for consumers to find mobiles that are easy for them to use.

Bob Warner’s Westminster Media Forum speech is on the Consumer Panel website [www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk)

### March Panel meeting

This month’s meeting looked at the following issues:

- The Panel discussed the findings of its research on online personal data and considered the implications. The research findings will be set out in the Panel’s forthcoming report. This will develop the themes set out in Bob Warner’s recent speech to the Westminster Media Forum.
- The Panel also talked to Ofcom about their ongoing work on fixed-line and mobile broadband speeds. Members noted that: average broadband speeds had continued to increase but there remained a continuing differential between ‘up to’ and typical speeds; actual speeds could sometimes be lower for some services advertised as high speed than for some more standard packages; and Ofcom’s research showed consumer dissatisfaction with the continued use of advertising based on ‘up to’ speeds, a view shared by the Panel.

