

Strengthening the consumer voice in the communications sector

To effect real change in the communications sector, there needs to be much greater collaboration between appropriate consumer bodies, who can bring to bear a range of vital expertise and evidence. This can be achieved through a variety of means, enabling a stronger voice for the Nations and resulting in greater input into Government thinking and policy development. We at the Communications Consumer Panel (the Panel) would welcome your views on our proposals by 13 May 2019:

Greater interaction between the Panel and consumer groups and with the devolved nations

- *Consumer Hubs*
- *Nation-specific Hubs*
- *Establishing a network of Memorandums of Understanding*

Strengthening the Panel's ability to influence industry

- *Industry Forum*

Researching ways to better inform consumers, increasing the Panel's research outputs on communications consumer matters and supporting public campaigns

- *Consumer Information*
- *Research programme*
- *Focused, direct engagement with consumers*

Exploring how the Panel could better support Governmental thinking, and especially the DCMS telecoms consumer policy team

As outlined in our [response to the Modernising Consumer Markets Green Paper](#), to strengthen the consumer voice across the UK we believe that a Hub should be established with a core membership of consumer bodies from across the UK to meet together quarterly. This body would ensure that the voices of consumers in more vulnerable circumstances are clearly heard by the Regulator.

Nation-specific Hubs

A separate network of Nation-specific Hubs would specifically strengthen the consumer voice across the UK by ensuring input from across the Nations into communications sector advocacy. Panel Members representing the Nations are ideally placed to convene, quarterly, a wide range of stakeholder representatives in their respective Nations.

➤ Establishing a network of Memorandums of Understanding

We propose that a network of Memorandums of Understanding are established or renewed between the relevant bodies and include consumer advocacy bodies across the UK Nations such as CCNI and CA Scotland.

➤ Strengthening the Panel's ability to influence industry: Industry Forum

We propose establishing a quarterly Forum to engage Communications Providers to highlight issues, debate solutions and disseminate successful approaches and best practice.

➤ Consumer Information

We strongly believe that the Panel can expand its role in facilitating the provision of useful and meaningful information to consumers. This is about thinking creatively about how to make the smartest use of existing sources of data.

To improve the profile and impact of such sources of information and Ofcom's Accreditation Scheme, we suggest that the Panel explores how to best use them, working together with stakeholders such as Which? to ensure that we build on their experience and success of schemes such as the Trusted Traders Scheme. This would enable ongoing dialogue and form the basis of recommendations to Ofcom.

➤ Research programme

Undertaking a small number of additional pieces of research a year would not only offer insight and serve to facilitate discussion about the issues affecting consumers but also provide robust evidence to inform the work of consumer organisations such as CA, Which?, CAS and CCNI and charities who are working directly with consumers.

➤ Focused, direct engagement with consumers

We propose a meeting between Panel Members and consumers in addition to using a meeting of the Industry Forum to ensure constructive discussions between senior industry representatives and customers of their service.

➤ Exploring how the Panel could better support Governmental thinking

The Hubs and Forum outlined above would form a valuable channel of information allowing Governments and policy makers to get real insight into consumers' experiences. To make best use of this information and data, the Panel Executive would produce a regular report on issues facing consumers in the sector. This report will be of benefit to a range of stakeholders including DCMS, devolved Governments and Ofcom.

Please send your views to contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk by 13 May 2019.