

14 April 2004

Switch-off of 192/153 legacy numbers

There has been limited time available to consider this issue and so I have been unable to consult with the rest of the Consumer Panel. What follows is therefore my own immediate reflection on the 192/153 network message switch-off.

Firstly, it seems an oddly fragmented approach to consider the network message switch-off in isolation from the wider DQ consumer awareness issues. We understand that research is currently being conducted on awareness of the change, new numbers, pricing and use of new services and that results are due towards the end of this month. The results of this research should surely be an invaluable factor in Ofcom's decision-making, highlighting the true state of consumer understanding and enabling decisions to be made from a credible evidence base.

Secondly, there appears minimal attention paid to the information needs of consumers in the paper forwarded. The implied assumption that it is predominantly consumer inertia that is preventing 100% use of new 118 XXX services without recognition of the role that information paucity or consumer confusion may be playing is unhelpful and does little to remedy a perception that the information needs of consumers take second-place to the convenience of industry.

Should we be surprised that consumers who dial 192/153 to find a number, who are then faced with calling a freephone number to get a DQ number simply don't bother? On what basis can we assume that the reason they don't call is sudden recollection of a 118 number?

I am therefore arguing that taking a decision on switching off the network message in advance of a full understanding of consumer awareness of the DQ market and without giving appropriate consideration to a strategy to ensure consumers have appropriate information appears both premature and ill-advised.

You will, I know, draw these views to the attention of the Policy Executive when they meet and I would of course welcome your comments in advance of the next Consumer Panel meeting on 26 April.

Colette Bowe
Chairman, Consumer Panel