

JANUARY 2017 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

Panel Chair Jo Connell, accompanied by Executive Director Fiona Lennox and fellow Panel members Craig Tillotson and Chris Holland, met with the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) this month regarding consumer representation in the communications sector.

Member for Wales, Rhys Evans, attended the Ofcom Mobile Phone Summit in Cardiff this month with Guto Bebb, Parliamentary Under Secretary (Wales Office). The summit was also attended by representatives of the mobile network operators (MNOs) and offered members of the public the chance to directly question the operators. Consumer expectations have changed dramatically in the last 10 - 20 years; but in Wales the provision hasn't improved in tandem with those expectations, for example, Wales lags far behind the rest of the UK for data coverage. Much of the focus was on pushing for change in planning laws - the Welsh Government said it's looking at whether these need to change - however Rhys voiced the Panel's view that MNOs would focus efforts on areas deemed commercially viable so this would not completely resolve the issue.

This month has seen the first of Ofcom's public events aimed at getting feedback on its proposed Annual Plan. The Panel attended the meeting in London where consumers and stakeholders asked questions about Next Generation Text Relay; realistic and diverse representation on the BBC; the timetable for switching; the testing of devices affected by spectrum band changes and the Royal Mail's parcel pricing. Panel member Mairi Mcleod attended the meeting in Scotland, which included a targeted presentation on the Connected Nations report. There was a discussion format to the meeting and some interesting consumer issues raised including; the need for intervention in rural areas to avoid an increase in the digital divide; a possible danger of the convergence of broadcasting and telecoms resulting in a lack of awareness of how content is regulated; and what difference access to data, i.e. via 4G, is making to citizens and consumers.

The Panel also took part in a workshop organised by the [Competitions and Markets Authority](#) as part of its study into digital comparison tools (DCTs). We made the point that these tools should be accessible to all, transparent and offer meaningful information.

And finally, Panel member Chris Holland took part in an excellent event organised by ESAN ([Essential Services Access Network](#)) at the end of last year which tackled the question: 'How can the consumer voice be better heard in the regulation of essential services?' The [final paper](#) from the event is now available from ESAN's website. There is also a chance to watch videos of the speakers from the event, including [this one of Chris explaining the role of the Panel](#).

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD vacancy - member representing Scotland

Can you represent Scotland on the Communications Consumer Panel, and act as a member of the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People? We have a vacancy for a new Panel member: more details and how to apply can be [found on our website](#).

Access Services for VOD - update on the Digital Economy Bill amendment

We have been working with Action on Hearing Loss to improve video on demand (VOD) accessibility for people with hearing loss by supporting their Subtitle it! campaign and their amendment to the Digital Economy Bill. 80% of on-demand providers don't offer any subtitles. Yet, more than 11 million people in the UK have hearing loss - that's 1 in 6 of us.

We were extremely pleased that, following Matt Hancock MP tweet '*Delighted to confirm that our #DigitalEconomyBill will require On-demand TV to have subtitles*', the amendment has [now been published](#) (see p.13) The Bill entered the Committee stage in the House of Lords on 31 January.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to Ofcom's consultation on its proposed Disability Action Plan for Northern Ireland

We believe it is vital that Ofcom sets a high standard and leads by example when encouraging the promotion of diversity, equality and equality of opportunity in its stakeholders.

We have previously engaged with Ofcom on this issue, in particular sharing the results of our independent qualitative research, '[Inclusive Communications](#)', highlighting measures that communications providers can take to provide better customer service for their disabled consumers and flagging issues that present barriers for the participation of some disabled people in the telecoms sector. In our [response to this consultation](#) we highlighted the recommendations again.

We support Ofcom's Disability Action Plan for Northern Ireland and will continue to actively engage in, and advise on, policies affecting disabled consumers and citizens in Northern Ireland. We welcome the attention that the Plan gives to details such as recruitment to Ofcom and its Advisory Committees, training and employee awareness, listening to and engaging with disabled consumers and citizens and representative organisations, and accessibility of services. Our response can be [found here](#).

Libraries Taskforce report

[Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021](#) has been published by the Libraries Taskforce. As well as the full document, the Taskforce has produced a 4 page summary brochure that can also be found [online](#). Having contributed to this consultation, and consistently advocated libraries as an important route for online access and a potential bridge of the digital divide, the Panel fully supports the proposed 'Libraries First' approach to service provision.

Other news

EE fined £2.7m for overcharging customers

EE has been fined £2,700,000 by Ofcom for overcharging tens of thousands of customers. The penalty is the result of an investigation which found that the company broke a fundamental billing rule on two separate occasions.

First, EE customers who called the company's '150' customer services number while roaming within the EU were incorrectly charged as if they had called the United States. Second, despite making it free to call or text the '150' number from within the EU from 18 November 2015, EE continued to bill 7,674 customers up until 11 January 2016.

Ofcom recognises that the majority of customers have now been refunded. However, EE was unable to identify at least 6,905 customers, who were more than £60,000 out of pocket in total. EE has made a donation of just under £62,000 to charity in lieu of the payments owed to these customers. However, in addition to today's fine, Ofcom is requiring EE to make further attempts to trace and refund every customer who was overcharged.

Implementing the Accessible Information Standard in a digital NHS

[AbilityNet](#) is hosting a workshop in London, on 28 February, to consider the role that digital technology plays in the [NHS Accessible Information Standard](#).

Many disabled people find that communicating with large institutions like the NHS can be difficult and frustrating. First published in 2015, The Accessible Information Standard (AIS) was created to ensure that disabled people have a better experience when accessing information from the NHS and adult social care providers. NHS England is currently reviewing the implementation of the AIS.

[Ahead of the consultation, which closes 10 March 2017](#), [AbilityNet](#) are bringing together patient groups, NHS practitioners and the digital accessibility community for a half-day, interactive event to:

- Understand where digital accessibility fits within patient communications
- Share the results of disabled user-testing on the technology used by GPs and the lessons learned
- Learn first-hand from disabled people's experiences and identify best practice for the design and delivery of digital communications that meet the AIS.

In the final session a panel of expert speakers will provide the opportunity for a detailed discussion on the AIS.

Numbers are strictly limited so please [contact AbilityNet](#) if you would like to attend.

Ofcom consultation and final public event regarding proposed Annual Plan

Ofcom are inviting responses from stakeholders to their proposed Annual Plan for 2017/18. The final public meeting - to hear people's views on the proposed Plan - will be held in Wales on 7 February 2017.

The closing date for consultation responses to the proposed Annual Plan is 7 February 2017.

Details can be found [on Ofcom's website](#).

Update on Nuisance Calls

Nuisance calls are a key priority in the [Panel's 2016/17 Work Plan](#). Last month we reported that the Panel were pleased that Ofcom are proposing that Communication Providers offer CLI facilities unless they can demonstrate that it is not technically feasible or economically viable for them to do so, and that where they provide them, they should not separately charge for them. Number blocking is

also a useful tool in the fight against nuisance calls. Talk Talk and Vodafone already provide this service and this month BT have begun offering BT Call Protect, a free service to block unwanted phone calls available to BT customers upon request. BT Call Protect works by filtering out calls from a blacklist of numbers that BT has created from network diagnostics, as well as from a blacklist of numbers that each individual subscriber to the service can create. BT says its blacklist will consist of "rogue numbers" - typically those that make enormous numbers of calls. Customers can add a number by dialling 1572 after receiving the call or by going online.

As with all call blocker services BT's does not guarantee an end to nuisance calls and the Panel believe it is best to combine the use of such a service with other strategies, such as registering with the Telephone Preference Service and opting out of receiving marketing information. BT's new service, as well as other similar services, makes the Panel's call for the free provision of CLI even more pertinent. . The Ofcom site has [helpful guidance](#) on ways people can protect themselves from nuisance calls and texts.

Telstra switches off 2G

Australian telecoms company Telstra switched off its 2G network in December, urging any remaining customers still using 2G to upgrade their device to one that supports 3G or 4G technology. It warned anyone with a 2G-dependent life-critical device, such as a health monitor, that it would no longer work following the switch-off, and that they should contact their supplier immediately. Telstra stated that 2G accounted for less than 1% of its total network traffic.

Click-Away Pound Survey 2016

Click-Away Pound is a research survey that explores the online shopping experience of people with disabilities and highlights the cost to business of ignoring disabled shoppers. The latest survey was published in December.

In the UK, around 6.1 million internet users have impairments that affect the way they use the Internet, and those 6.1 million people will spend £16.55 billion online this year.

The survey reveals that over 80% of these customers will not necessarily spend their money on the website with the cheapest products, but one that has the fewest barriers to purchasing: 71% of will click away from websites that do not cater for their access needs.

* Those customers who click away have an estimated spending power of £11.75 billion in the UK alone, around 10% of the total UK online spend in 2016.

* 82% of customers with access needs say they would spend more if websites were more accessible.

[Read the report here.](#)

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