Panel newsletter

In short...

Scotland Panel member gives evidence to Scottish government broadband inquiry

Scotland member Fiona Ballantyne has given oral evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee's review of the broadband infrastructure. Read the full report in this issue...

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=6611&mode=pdf

Panel tells BEREC that broadband access is essential for all

Responding to the broadband promotion report the Panel said that broadband access for all is necessary to ensure that people can go online in a reliable and consistent way...

http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/digital-participation/response-to-berec-s-report-on-broadband-promotion

Concerns about trend for phone providers to use small print to raise fees

Panel concerns about the trend for some phone providers to use the contract small print in contracts to increase fees are part of the Ofcom review of General Condition 9...

CW/01082/01/12: Ofcom own-initiative monitoring and enforcement programme – GC9 (requirement to offer contracts with minimum terms).

BBC Radio Cumbria

Earlier this month, Panel Chair, Bob Warner, spoke on BBC Radio Cumbria about the need to improve mobile coverage to bring benefits for both consumers and small businesses...

DCMS launches industry-wide consultation on how to increase mobile coverage

The Government is canvassing the mobile industry's thoughts on how the £150m funding pot can be best used to increase mobile coverage across the UK...

http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/Mobile_Infrastructure_engagement_Rel_1_0.pdf

Safer Internet Day 2012 – Connecting Generations

Safer Internet Day 2012 is being celebrated worldwide on Tuesday, 7 February. This year the theme encourages users young and old to discover the digital world together safely...

www.saferinternet.org.uk

EU data protection bill proposes to give people the right to be forgotten

The European Commission has proposed reform of the EU's 1995 data protection rules to strengthen online privacy rights and boost Europe's digital economy...

http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/12/46&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

Panel work plan 2012/13

The Panel will soon publish its draft work plan for 2012/13. As part of the consultation, we will hold an event for stakeholders to discuss the draft Plan. More details to follow soon...

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Latest news…

Panel tells BEREC that broadband access is essential for all

In the Consumer Panel's response to BEREC's Broadband Promotion report it has highlighted that access is now essential for everyone. It says that this is necessary to ensure that people can go online in a reliable and consistent way. The Panel also makes it clear that safeguards are needed if the Universal Service Commitment is to be implemented in a way that meets the needs of consumers.

"In our response we address levels of take-up in the UK, the Panel's work on a consumer framework for digital participation and communications services for the future," Panel chair Bob Warner explained, adding: "A robust broadband infrastructure must be inclusive and aim to maximise digital participation."

Read the full submission here:
http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/digital-participation/response-to-berec-s-report-on-broadband-promotion

Some phone providers are using small print to raise fees

The Communications Consumer Panel has raised concerns about the trend for some communications providers to use the small print in contracts to increase fees. Therefore, plans by Ofcom to investigate General Condition 9 – the condition that relates to contracts between communications providers and consumers – have been welcomed by the Panel.

Panel Chair, Bob Warner, said the Panel fears that the price increases could be seen as sharp practice. "Even though these are commercial decisions for the operators, price changes within the life of a contract will be contrary to the expectations of most consumers. If operators believe that they must impose these charges, we would like to see them give consumers better information about the changes along with advice on how people can cancel their contracts if they wish."
CW/01082/01/12: Ofcom own-initiative monitoring and enforcement programme – GC9 (requirement to offer contracts with minimum terms).

DCMS launches industry-wide consultation on how to increase mobile coverage

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launched a consultation in January to canvas the mobile industry for ideas on how the Chancellor's £150m funding pot can be best used to increase mobile coverage across the UK.

The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) is being run by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) with the aim of: improving coverage and quality of mobile networks services for consumers and businesses that live and work in areas of the UK where existing coverage is poor or non-existent; and to extend coverage to 99% of the UK population. The consultation, which concludes on 10 February 2012, has been targeted at potential bidders for the MIP money.

DCMS plans to run a separate consultation with local authorities and the devolved nations' administrations. This will look at the involvement of communities, planning difficulties in finding suitable land for masts and how development priorities can inform how not-spots are prioritised.

The Government expects procurement to begin by spring 2012, and the project to be completed by 2015.
http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/Mobile_Infrastructure_engagement_Rel_1_0.pdf

Safer Internet Day 2012 – Connecting Generations

Safer Internet Day 2012 is being celebrated worldwide on Tuesday, 7 February. This year is an opportunity to encourage users young and old to discover the digital world together. An array of activity is taking place nationwide, co-ordinated by the UK Safer Internet Centre. Activities will focus

attention on empowering all generations to benefit safely from the opportunities that the internet offers.

For further information on national activities taking place for Safer Internet Day, please visit www.saferinternet.org.uk

Reports from the Nations

Wales
Broadband fast-forward for Wales
Welsh Liberal Democrat Eluned Parrott has called for better broadband access in all parts of Wales. Her motion on 18 January asked the Welsh Assembly Government to use £56.9 million of UK Government funding to tackle broadband not-spots as a matter of priority.

Responding to the debate, Business and Enterprise Minister Edwina Hart stressed that the Next Generation Programme aimed to give everyone in Wales access to broadband of at least 30Mbps by 2015.
http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=298

Ofcom takes draft annual plan to Wales
At a Cardiff meeting to discuss the Ofcom 2012/13 draft annual plan, the Consumer Panel's Kim Brook was among a group of key people representing consumers in Wales, which included the Welsh Government. Kim said that during the meeting, concern was expressed at the target for 4G mobile coverage in Ofcom's second consultation on the spectrum auction. The consultation refers to 98% of the UK population, and Kim noted that: "The meeting was concerned that this would translate into a much lower figure in Wales. It also felt that the £150m for building new masts was inadequate to provide the desired coverage in more remote areas."

Digital participation was also discussed in the light of figures that reveal that 40% of Welsh businesses do not have a website: "This highlights the need to emphasise digital participation for both consumers and small businesses."

Kim said that the Welsh Assembly Government reported back on progress on its broadband programme.

Scotland
Scotland Panel member gives evidence to Scottish government broadband inquiry
Scotland member Fiona Ballantyne has given oral evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee's review of the broadband infrastructure. She set out how consumers in Scotland were more disadvantaged than in other nations and regions of the UK.

Questioned by the committee's deputy convenor Jamie Hepburn about what the key barriers to take-up are, Fiona explained that lacking skills and knowledge were key, as was the number of people in Scotland who said that they had no need for the internet.

He went on to ask about the Panel's consumer framework for digital participation, and the new research for the Panel being conducted in Glasgow: "At a policy level," Fiona explained, "the framework enables policy-makers to see what is needed. At the front line, it enables people to adjust their services to help the groups that they work with and address the issues that they have."

Asked to clarify how "people might disadvantage their children if they do not have that connectivity", Fiona said that it was important to understand all the benefits of being online.
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=6611&mode=pdf

Digital participation in Scotland faces a big challenge
The Scottish Government's new report *Digital participation in Scotland: a review of the evidence* – notes that Scotland has a lower rate of digital participation compared with the rest of the UK. The

review draws on the Panel's research on the *Journey to Digital Participation* and found that, in general, younger people were more likely than others to cite cost as their reason for not using the internet while older people were more likely to mention reasons relating to lack of need or not knowing how to use a computer.

The report highlights that "there are real challenges in encouraging non-users to use the internet". The review quotes Scottish Household Survey figures which found that 38% of non-users said they would like to use the internet one day, while the majority (62%) said they would not. While three in ten (29%) thought it likely that they would 'ever' use the internet, 72% thought it was unlikely.
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/12/28095429/1

The journey to digital participation
http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/FINAL%20DP%20RESEARCH%20REPORT%202.pdf

Northern Ireland
Commitment to high speed rural broadband for NI
Northern Ireland Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Michelle O'Neill has highlighted that the upcoming Rural White Paper will be "designed to improve the quality of life for everyone in the countryside". This includes a commitment to contribute to the delivery of high-speed rural broadband provision. The minister intends to contribute to the delivery of high-speed rural Broadband provision both through the Rural Development Programme and by using DARD funds from her Tackling Poverty initiative.
http://www.rdc.org.uk/news/default.asp?ID=1117&itemId=4&topicId=&va=0

England
Panel member gives LSE lecture
Panel member Roger Darlington recently delivered a lecture to London School of Economics (LSE) MSc students on broadband policy. He gave the students an overview of access and take-up in the UK: "In Ofcom's latest *Consumer experience* reports both PC ownership and internet use at 78%. This indicates that everyone with a PC is now connected to the internet.

He concluded that this represented a plateau and that "something new will be needed to take net take-up beyond this level", and that this was the challenge to digital inclusion.

January Panel meeting
This month's Panel meeting included:

- Discussion around Digital UK's plans for switchover in London and the South East.
- Presentation by Ofcom and discussion about future work on communications services in the nations.
- A presentation by PhonepayPlus, including its response to the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) open letter on the proposed Communications Bill.
- Discussion on plans for the Panel's work plan for 2012/2013.

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