



DECEMBER 2016 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

Panel Chair Jo Connell attended the Ofcom Nations Committee meeting and reported on the Panel's work this year. The Committee welcomed the Panel's input and its latest research report [Digital Footprints](#).

Jo, Panel members Craig Tillotson, Chris Holland and Executive Director Fiona Lennox met with the European Commission in a broad meeting that covered the Panel's views on the telecoms sector and its provision for consumers.

And finally, the Panel wishes everybody a peaceful festive season and a very happy New Year.

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

A key issue that the Panel has been pushing for progress on this year is the greater provision of access services on VoD - over 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.

As more and more content is available online we believe that we need to take steps to ensure equality of access for all consumers. We have been working with Action on Hearing Loss to resolve this. Like them, we believe that Ofcom should be given Code-making powers to ensure greater levels of access services in on-demand programming.

So we were delighted to hear Lord Ashton of Hyde, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport informed Peers during second reading of the Digital Economy Bill, that, "there will also be an amendment to enshrine a legal requirement for subtitles, signing and audio description to be available for on-demand services."

We look forward to more progress on the amendment at Committee stage and we are contacting Peers for their support.

Connected Nations 2016 - the Panel's response

Ofcom have issued the [Connected Nations report for 2016](#). The report is a 'state of the union' update on the coverage and performance of fixed broadband and mobile services that the UK's consumers and small businesses are receiving.

The report echoes many of the issues that the Panel has highlighted over the past year. The report states that: "The availability of superfast broadband has improved, but a significant number of homes and businesses are still at risk of digital exclusion. In 2015 around 8% of UK premises (2.4 million) were unable to receive broadband speeds faster than 10Mbit/s. Although this figure has since fallen to 5% of UK premises, this still means 1.4 million premises are being poorly served and may fall within a broadband universal service obligation." Furthermore, the report adds "If we also require a standard broadband service to deliver an upload speed of at least 1Mbit/s, then the number of UK premises that are poorly served increases to 2.6 million."

There has been a 6% increase in homes and small and medium-sized businesses able to receive superfast download speeds of 30Mbit/s or higher. However, the Panel is disappointed that SMEs experience poorer availability than residential consumers, and, although superfast coverage has improved in the Nations, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are still falling behind the UK as a whole.

For the first time, Connected Nations reports on fibre to the premise (FTTP) services, which are available to just under 2% of homes and small businesses (numbering 498,000). FTTP services can deliver ultrafast speeds but also tend to be more reliable and experience fewer faults than fully or partially copper-based networks. The Panel hopes that this figure will increase significantly, especially as Ofcom's CEO, Sharon White has previously voiced her view that 'fibre is the future'.

Jo Connell, our Panel Chair, responding to Connected Nations 2016 said: "Despite advances in superfast broadband and 4G, the Panel continues to be concerned that some people - especially in rural areas, the Nations and small businesses - are being left behind; unable to access usable download speeds or to consistently make and receive mobile phone calls. We hope that Connected Nations 2016 serves as a wake-up call - more must be done if we are to be truly connected nations."

The [full report can be accessed here](#).

Nuisance calls - Ofcom responds to Panel's call for free CLI

Ofcom has opened a consultation about changes it is proposing to the General Conditions of Entitlement - the regulatory rules that all communications providers must follow in order to operate in the UK.

The Panel is particularly pleased that Ofcom is proposing to change the General Condition relating to caller line identification (CLI) facilities - as we [have been strongly encouraging](#)

[the provision of free CLI](#). In particular, we have been urging communications providers to provide free CLI for consumers.

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. In addition, Ofcom further proposes that CLI delivery should not be separately charged for, that calls with malformed or invalid CLI should be blocked at network level, and that all displayed CLIs should be capable of receiving a return call.

Further details of Ofcom's review of the General Conditions can be [found here](#). The consultation closes 14 March 2017.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to Ofcom's consultation on promoting efficient use of geographic telephone numbers

In our response to this consultation, a review of the pilot scheme to charge communications providers (CPs) for certain geographic numbers, we stated our belief that Ofcom should help ensure that CPs operate consumer-friendly number recycling policies, protecting consumers from the distress caused by inheriting nuisance calls or calls from debt collection agencies intended for the previous holder of the number.

We note Ofcom's conclusion that overall, it believes that these proposals would benefit consumers by postponing the need for number supply measures which its research has shown that consumers dislike.

Our response [is here](#).

Other news

How deaf people use the phone & Next Generation Text Service

Some people who are deaf, with severe hearing loss or speech impairment can face significant barriers using the phone. Although the internet, texting and social media have improved communication, in many situations they can't replace the real time two-way communication of telephone calls.

The Panel and ACOD have been very interested in two pieces of research on the experience of deaf people in accessing telephony:

The [National Association for Deafened People](#) (NADP) asked deaf people about [their experience of using the phone](#)

BT carried out a customer satisfaction [survey of users of the relay service](#).

Text relay and since 2014, the Next Generation Text Service (NGTS) enable deaf people to make and receive calls through an operator who speaks to the hearing party and types their response. The NGT service is provided by BT, but all providers of fixed and mobile telephony are obliged to offer the service to their customers. An important feature of NGTS is the app, NGT Lite, so users can communicate without having to have a textphone - just by using a laptop, mobile or tablet.

The Panel has been very interested in the progress of the NGTS and is keen for communications providers to promote these valuable services.

NGT Lite is free to download from the [Google play store](#), the [Apple app store](#) and the [NGT Website](#).

Ofcom's consultation on proposed Annual Plan 2017/18

Ofcom are inviting responses from stakeholders to their proposed Annual Plan for 2017/18. They are also holding public meetings across the UK to hear people's views on the proposed Plan.

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

Details of both the consultation and the meetings can be found [on their website](#).

Ofcom launches broadband and mobile checker app

Ofcom has developed [a free app](#) to help you get the best from your internet connection.

It's a one-stop shop which will show you your broadband and mobile coverage, test your connections and suggest tips for improving performance.

The app runs on smartphones and tablets, is available in English and Welsh and can be downloaded from both the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store.

Designing the broadband universal service obligation - Ofcom's report to Government

Ofcom have published a document setting out their advice to Government on how to achieve a decent broadband connection for all - the broadband USO. They have set out a range of options for Government to decide which best meets its objectives.

Further information can be [found here](#).

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