

The Ofcom Consumer Panel publishes Annual Report 2004-05

28 April 2005

The Ofcom Consumer Panel was established by Ofcom at the beginning of 2004 to advise on consumer interests in the communications market place. The Panel operates independently from Ofcom, setting its own agenda and making its views known publicly.

The Consumer Panel's first Annual Report describes the highlights of its first year. These include:

- a report to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on measures to protect the interests of the most vulnerable consumers during digital switchover;
- a major research project to generate evidence about consumer concerns and the state of consumer information in the communications marketplace, the results of which will be published early in May 2005;
- and engagement with Ofcom's Strategic Review of Telecommunications, during policy formation and in response to Ofcom's Phase 1 and 2 consultations.

The Ofcom Consumer Panel has been influential in ensuring that several Ofcom activities have addressed the issues and concerns of the widest range of consumers, states the Report. In particular:

- mis-selling of fixed-line telecoms services: the Panel recommended timely and stronger measures to protect consumers and advocated a mandatory code of practice;
- Number Translation Services: the Panel advised the Ofcom Board that proposed remedies to enable consumers to exercise informed choice were inadequate and Ofcom agreed to undertake further work;
- universal service in telecommunications: the Panel provided a detailed response to Ofcom's consultation and put down markers about wider issues arising from the nature and delivery of universal service;

The Consumer Panel has sought to build strong relationships with a range of stakeholders through a number of initiatives, including:

- co-ordinating a one-day academic research seminar on communications and consumers on low incomes and the regulatory implications;
- the Consumer Forum on Communications: the Panel agreed to host regular Forum meetings that bring together consumer and disability groups to debate, discuss and share information.

Looking ahead to 2005-06, the Annual Report states that the Ofcom Consumer Panel will share the results of its research and continue to advise Ofcom on issues relating to the Strategic Review of Telecommunications. In addition, it will follow up on the practical issues for consumers as identified in its report on digital switchover.

Colette Bowe, chairman of the Ofcom Consumer Panel said:

“This has been an eventful and productive first year for the Ofcom Consumer Panel. We have considered a number of issues that affect people in the communications market place and we have come to the conclusion that not all of these are about people as ‘consumers’. Of course, consumer issues are important but they are not the whole story.

“Questions have been raised with us by stakeholders, by the Government and by Ofcom, which are about access - or the lack of it - to communications that arise because of where people live or who they are. We call these ‘issues about people as citizens’.

“Our statutory remit clearly contemplates that we should be ready to handle such issues - as we have done in the work we did on the switchover to digital television. So, despite our name, we have cast our net wider than ‘consumer’ issues and have addressed a number of issues that are important to people as citizens. We will continue to interpret our brief in this way in the year ahead.”

Ends

Notes for Editors and CSEs

The Panel's eleven members appointed by Ofcom are:

Colette Bowe, Chairman

Ruth Evans, Deputy Chairman

Azeem Azhar

Fiona Ballantyne

Nainish Bapna

Roger Darlington

Simon Gibson

Graham Mather

Kevin McLaughlin

Kate O'Rourke

Bob Twitchin

The Annual Report 2004-05 can be found on the Panel's website. Please visit [the Consumer Panel website](#).