



News Release

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Consumers need to know which services they will and will not get at broadband speed of 2Mb/s

The Government should make clear to citizens and consumers which services they will and will not have access to with a broadband speed of 2Mb/s, the Communications Consumer Panel says in its response to the Digital Britain Interim Report.

Anna Bradley, Communications Consumer Panel Chair, said: “We recognise that it may be too expensive to deliver a universal service commitment for broadband which meets everyone’s expectations, but this makes it all the more important that people are given a realistic understanding of what they will be able to access in the way of services.”

“In deciding on the minimum service level, the Communications Consumer Panel believes that the key factor should be the need to ensure that all consumers have a broadband connection that allows them to use the online services, including public services, that are necessary to participate fully in society.”

The Consumer Panel has said to the Government that before settling on a particular speed it should apply a ‘consumer test’ based on what consumers say are the services that should be available to everyone. The Panel highlighted its recent research (*No one should miss out*) that indicated that (among other things) consumers anticipate access to streamed video, which requires a reliable connection of at least 2Mb/s.

They also want to use services such as telemedicine that require similar upload and download speeds – something that is unlikely to be possible with current-generation broadband. So the Panel also welcomes the fact that the Government is exploring how public incentives could stimulate rollout of new super-fast broadband networks.

It is important as well to think not just about what consumers want and expect everyone to have access to now, but what they will want and expect in 2012. Otherwise, there is a risk that the universal service commitment becomes inadequate to meet consumers’ needs even before it has been fully implemented,” Anna Bradley commented. The Panel is doing some further

research to inform the final Digital Britain report by identifying more specifically which services consumers and citizens consider it will be essential for everyone to have access to in the near future.

“Rapid change in this market will also mean ‘future-proofing’ the commitment,” she added. “The Government should commit to reviewing the universal service commitment within a specified time frame.”

The Consumer Panel recommended two additional triggers for future reviews: if a re-application of the ‘consumer test’ shows that people can no longer use all the services that are considered necessary to participate in society; or if the current speed of the universal service commitment has become too far out of line with the average speed.

“The Consumer Panel welcomes the Government’s ambitious plans for Digital Britain. We look forward to a universal service commitment that makes available throughout the UK the online services that consumers expect everyone to be able to access, coupled with a comprehensive national plan that ensures people have the skills, knowledge and understanding to be able to take advantage of those services: to choose and use the services and products that meet their needs; to protect themselves and their families; and to get redress from providers where necessary. Delivering universal broadband and a plan to ensure that people use it to the full would be a substantial step forward,” Anna Bradley concluded.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

The Communications Consumer Panel was established to advise Ofcom on the consumer interest in the markets it regulates. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk for more information. The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

- Anna Bradley (Chairman)
- Fiona Ballantyne (member for Scotland)
- Louisa Bolch
- Kim Brook (member for Wales)
- Colin Browne
- Roger Darlington (member for England)
- Maureen Edmondson (member for Northern Ireland)
- Leen Petre
- Damian Tambini
- Bob Warner

For further information about Communications Consumer Panel members go to

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/about/>

- For a copy of our submission to the Digital Britain interim report go to our website <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Digital%20Britain.pdf>
- *No one should miss out: What consumers need to get the most out of digital communications* is available on our website at http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/No%20one%20should%20miss%20out_digital%20future%20research%20report.pdf

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