

News Release

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Consumer Panel Chair says promoting digital participation central to achievement of a more digital Britain in speech to Westminster eForum

Making the keynote address at the Westminster eForum Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that the plan laid out in the Digital Britain report to increase availability of digital services had the potential to be a significant step forward for consumers and citizens.

“But making services available is clearly not enough on its own,” she said, going on to focus on a part of the Digital Britain report that has received relatively little attention – the intention to develop a National Plan for Digital Participation, which is defined in the report as, “Increasing the reach, breadth and depth of digital technology use across all sections of society – to maximise digital participation and the economic and social benefits it can bring.”

“If Government is going to invest in making services available to everyone – the supply-side – then it makes sense to also think about how to help people get the most out of those services – the demand-side,” she explained.

She told delegates at the Forum that to achieve the most significant social and economic benefits, “Digital participation should mean not just getting people on-line, but helping them to get the most out of digital technologies, to deepen their engagement.

“In the Panel’s view, promoting digital participation and so enabling people to fulfil their potential, should start with identifying the full range of consumers’ and citizens’ needs.”

Anna Bradley explained that the Panel’s research, which informed the Digital Britain process, has identified four categories of need: to choose, to use, to understand and to create. “We conclude that in all the digital participation work we need to start by understanding people’s needs and what motivates them, not the things we want them to learn or to do,” she said. The Panel will shortly carry out further research to understand better the journeys that people make in getting connected and learning the benefits of being online.

The Consumer Panel Chair went on to highlight the need for, “initiatives that focus on the people who most need help – the six million people at risk of both social and digital exclusion. And addressing the needs of these people requires a particularly sympathetic and customised approach to delivery”.

Of these six million people, the ones who most need help are older people, people with disabilities and families on low incomes. Although research shows that 70% of people in the UK are online, only 41% of people with disabilities are, and only 34% of retired people are connected. There are also significant differences between socio-economic groups – among ABC1s 88 per cent are connected, whereas among C2DEs only 69 per cent are connected.

Anna Bradley also told the Forum that to implement digital participation it is vital that there is a strategic and co-ordinated approach, saying that, “We need clear and well-defined objectives, and intensified and scaled-up efforts to make sure that we achieve them.”

“It is my hope that digital participation will come to be seen as central to the achievement of a more inclusive, more creative, and more productive Digital Britain where everyone is better able to realise their potential,” she concluded.

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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 (Chair)
- 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 a copy of Anna Bradley’s speech go to: www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

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