Press Release

Strictly embargoed until 00.01 31 May 2012

Digital divide risks becoming a gulf unless public policy strikes a better balance between broadband roll out and online support, says Panel

There is a serious risk that public policy underestimates the challenge of supporting people to get and stay online, Communications Consumer Panel Chair Bob Warner said today, launching new research into digital participation.

Speaking at today's opening plenary of the Go ON: ND2012 conference, Bob Warner said: "There is an increasing drive for public and commercial services to be online, but about 11 million people (22% of adults) in the UK still do not use the internet at home – and in some areas around the UK this percentage is far higher, as it is in the most deprived areas of Glasgow. This means that a significant minority of people risk being excluded from online benefits and services. That's why we are calling for clear targets to assess the progress being made in supporting people to get and stay online. The Panel also wants to see the Government strike a better balance between funding for broadband infrastructure and supporting people online. Sustainable growth for the future can only be achieved if broadband is used by most consumers and businesses."

The Panel's report *Bridging the Gap: **Sustaining online engagement*** explores people's digital needs and highlights solutions to support more people online. The research identifies key barriers that create resistance to people using the internet, and drivers that encourage them towards it. Some consumer responses included:

- Lapsed user, female 70s: "I like going down to the post office. It gets me out and about and meeting people. I don't want to stay indoors and stare at a computer screen."
- Proxy user, male 50s: "I know you can get cheaper car insurance online. But I prefer the phone, so I get my son to find some good quotes for me and then I ring them up."
- Narrow user, female 20s: "You know, by the time you've got the computer turned on and up and running, I could have done it all on the phone in half the time."
- New user, female 60s: "I sit and press the buttons and keep pressing them until it works."

Bob Warner said that the research has implications for funding, growth and policy: "The distance is increasing between consumers who are online, with access to new services and faster broadband, and people who remain anchored in the offline world. Unless fundamental

action is taken now to give people the skills to exploit the advantages of the internet, the digital divide risks becoming a digital gulf," he concluded.

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NOTES TO EDITORS
The Communications Consumer Panel encourages Ofcom, Government, industry and others to look at issues through the eyes of consumers and citizens and protects and promotes their interests. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk for more information.

Bridging the Gap: **Sustaining online engagement** is available from the Consumer Panel website at: www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

The Panel commissioned Futuresight to conduct new research to consolidate stakeholders' experiences and learning in supporting online participation among low participation groups, and to gather information about supporting people to take the next steps online. The aim was to understand more about the digital participation journey.

A total of 48 consumers (12 per digital engagement segment) were selected randomly from 14 urban, suburban and rural locations across the UK. The consumer groups represented in the research were: lapsed users; proxy users; narrow users; and new users. A second consumer study was conducted in Glasgow where 14 individual in-depth interviews were conducted among offline consumers living mainly in Glasgow East.

To provide a detailed understanding of the digital participation journey in terms of policy and delivery 44 interviews were conducted that included: 24 senior stakeholders; and 20 frontline practitioners and digital champions.
http://www.futuresight.co.uk/

About 11 million people (22% of adults) in the UK still do not use the internet at home. Source: Ofcom and ONS Annual Population Survey, Oct 2010-Sep 2011.

For information about the 7th National Digital Conference go to: http://www.nd2012.co.uk/