

29/03/04

Ofcom Consumer Panel announces priorities for its work

The Ofcom Consumer Panel – the independent body set up to advise Ofcom on consumer interests in the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors - today issued a Statement of Intent, outlining the Panel's initial thinking on its priorities and plans for working.

Colette Bowe, Chairman of the Panel, said:

“We will be basing our advice to Ofcom on evidence reflecting people's real-life experience of everything in the communications market place, from mobile phones to digital television. Ahead of getting results from the big consumer research programme we are embarking on, we have decided to concentrate at this stage on a number of topics that we believe will be important for consumers. These include:

- Planning for the switchover to digital television
- Telecoms, including availability of broadband, and voice services over the internet (Voice over IP)
- Spectrum availability
- Consumer access issues arising from the Ofcom Public Service Broadcasting Review

The kind of tests that will determine what we get involved in will be: is an issue really important for consumers – including small firms? How are the most vulnerable people in our society affected? We will be working closely with other consumer bodies to get the priorities right.”

Key areas covered in the Consumer Panel's Statement of Intent include:

1. The Panel's method of working

Advice to Ofcom will be based on evidence. To achieve this, the Panel will develop a major programme of research which looks at consumer concerns and the level of consumer information available in the marketplace.

2. The Panel's principles for setting priorities

The Panel will identify issues based on the following principles: Has the issue been identified by consumers as a relevant concern? Is there evidence of a real risk of consumer detriment? Can the Panel add value and find a practical solution? Will it address the concerns of vulnerable groups?

3. The Panel's view of its role in relation to Ofcom

The Panel's primary – although not only – role is to advise Ofcom. However, it should not be Ofcom's sole source of consumer advice. The Panel's method of working with Ofcom is set out in a Memorandum of Understanding - available on its website www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk

4. The initial work programme

Panel members have been assigned ongoing responsibilities (derived from its statutory role) for the following areas:

- Representing the interests of people living in each of the Nations
- Older people
- Disabled people
- People on low incomes
- People living in rural areas
- People living in urban areas
- Small businesses
- Young people
- Ethnic minorities.

5. The Panel's plan for its first public report

The Panel had its first meeting in February this year and will produce its first public report in July.

Ends

Notes to the editors and CSEs

1. The Consumer Panel is the independent advisory body set up under section 16 (2) of the Communications Act 2003 to advise Ofcom on the consumer interests in broadcasting and telecommunications.

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

2. The Statement of Intent is available on www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk.

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