

## **Ofcom's independent Consumer Panel says BT access review puts consumer issues in second place**

22 September 2005

The Ofcom Consumer Panel today expressed concern that consumer issues are not being tackled in the latest phase of the regulator's review of how the telecoms market operates. The Panel – the independent body set up to advise Ofcom on consumer interests – said that Ofcom's plans to announce its consumer strategy separately later this year demonstrates that consumers are not being put at the heart of Ofcom's work on telecoms.

In responding to Ofcom's announcement, the Panel highlights three key areas which Ofcom has failed to address:

- the creation of a clear set of time-specific performance indicators by which the success of Ofcom's regulatory approach can be assessed in terms of delivery to the consumer;
- the need for an independent consumer champion on the new Equality of Access Board;
- the appointment of an independent adjudicator to resolve quickly any practical difficulties or differences in the implementation of the agreement.

Colette Bowe, Chairman of the Ofcom Consumer Panel commented:

"We said earlier this summer that Ofcom's proposals, if they secure real equality of access, have the potential to deliver better and cheaper products and services. But we know that the devil will be in the detail. Consumer issues coming out of the Telecoms Review are only going to be addressed by Ofcom at a later stage. This lack of consumer focus at this stage is a real disappointment. As consumers and as citizens, we all have a right to know what the benchmarks of success will be in this process and Ofcom has failed to deliver on this and – more importantly – to let us know what it will do if the process does not work."

Colette Bowe continued:

"This latest announcement does not reflect our recommendations that the new Equality of Access Board needs to include a strong consumer champion and to be independently overseen. The point of the entire review was to create a healthier telecoms market for consumers and we have consistently highlighted this to Ofcom. We need to know what consumers get out of this review now, not at a later date. The Panel will keep pressing until equality of access to the network delivers real benefit for all consumers."

Ends

### NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

The Ofcom 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.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) for more information about the Panel as well as a copy of the UK consumer research.

This press notice relates to today's press notices issued by BT and Ofcom.

This year the Ofcom Consumer Panel published the UK's largest piece of consumer research to date into what concerns UK consumers have in the communications market and what their understanding of it is. The research highlights much confusion amongst consumers about the benefits of new technologies and difficulty in comparing tariffs and services. The research can be found on our website [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk)

Colette Bowe, Chairman of the Consumer Panel, is available for interviews. The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

Colette Bowe, Chairman  
Ruth Evans, Deputy Chairman  
Azeem Azhar  
Fiona Ballantyne  
Roger Darlington  
Simon Gibson  
Graham Mather  
Kevin McLaughlin  
Kate O'Rourke  
Bob Twitchin

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