

## **Ofcom Consumer Panel expresses strong concern about the digital switchover process.**

12 July 2006

The Ofcom Consumer Panel said today that it has serious concerns about how digital switchover is being managed. The Consumer Panel is calling for fundamental changes in the way the process is being handled.

The Consumer Panel is also expressing strong concerns that people who are socially isolated, and therefore at risk of not being able to manage to switch over, are not being adequately targeted as part of the planned help scheme.

Research by the Consumer Panel demonstrates that many people rely on family and friends to inform them about new technologies. Their advice to the Culture Media and Sport Secretary, Tessa Jowell, has concluded that people who are socially isolated will be most at risk during the switch to digital.

Colette Bowe, Consumer Panel Chairman said:

“Both the Panel and the DCMS Select Committee believe that the needs of socially isolated households are in danger of not being met. We are calling on the Government to rethink its programme of support for vulnerable households which is poorly targeted and inadequate in scope.”

The Consumer Panel says that it does not believe that Digital UK is adequately funded to handle the scale of the work required successfully to carry out switchover. This delivery problem is made worse by the confusion about who is ultimately responsible for making the whole process work. There is a complex multi-organisation arrangement for oversight, management and delivery of digital switchover. Overall accountability for switchover remaining divided between two government departments. The Consumer Panel believes this limits the effectiveness of processes for delivering the switchover.

The Consumer Panel is particularly concerned about the impact of this lack of clarity in accountability on: the provision of assistance to consumers who will need extra help to manage switchover; the provision of usable equipment and the quality of advice and work from retailers and installers.

Colette Bowe commented:

“The Panel believes that there should be a clear single line of management responsibility and accountability which makes it clear who is ultimately responsible for the entire digital switchover programme. The Government’s view that it sees ‘no reason now to change the current arrangements’ in spite of the DCMS Select Committee’s recent recommendation for change adds to our concerns.”

Ends

Notes to editors

The Ofcom Consumer Panel was established under the Communications Act 2003 to advise Ofcom and other bodies on consumer and citizen interests in the markets it regulates (telecommunications, broadcasting and spectrum markets but excluding content issues). The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Colette Bowe is

the Panel's Chairman. Visit [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) for more information about the Panel.

Where merited, the Consumer Panel provides formal written advice to Ofcom. This is published on our website alongside Ofcom's responses as soon as Ofcom has published the policies to which they refer. The advice to Ofcom and its response on this matter can be found at [Information Centre](#)

Ofcom has published their report Digital Switchover: an audit of viewers' priorities today. It can be found at <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/tv/reports/dsoind/vieweraudit/> alongside the Panel's advice on the development of this work.

The Panel published its research into consumers' experiences of communications markets in June. Consumers and the communications market:2006 can be found at [consumer\\_panel\\_report06.pdf](#)

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