

Ofcom's independent Consumer Panel launches toolkit to help regulators and government put consumers at the heart of regulation

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The Ofcom Consumer Panel today launched a toolkit to help Ofcom and other regulators assess whether they have identified and addressed consumer interests in forming and implementing policy. The toolkit covers a series of questions that regulators can ask themselves to ensure that consumers are appropriately considered throughout a particular project or by the organisation as a whole.

Colette Bowe, Chairman of the Ofcom Consumer Panel, commented:

"It can be extremely difficult to define exactly what the consumer interest is. This toolkit has been developed to help regulators across all sectors ensure that the consumer's voice is heard as clearly as the voice of well resourced and powerful industries. This is the real test of whether regulators are making a genuine difference to consumers.

She continued:

"This new evaluative review of consumer-focused regulation has already helped Ofcom to re-address the balance and shape its consumer policy and we believe it will be of value to other economic regulators' work. We will be sharing this approach across a wide range of UK industries."

Ed Humpherson, Director of Regulation, National Audit Office, speaking at the launch said:

"The National Audit Office welcomes this new approach. It is crucial that the interests of consumers are at the forefront of regulation. This toolkit can ensure that regulators continue to place the consumer interest at the heart of their work. Its importance goes beyond the communications industry and is of relevance to a very wide variety of regulators in the UK and elsewhere."

The Panel piloted the consumer interest toolkit with Ofcom looking at two different areas of policy - mis-selling to consumers and the telecoms strategic review. This highlighted that whilst the regulator has processes in place to incorporate the consumer interest in policy making, this is not always consistent across all areas of work. As a result, Ofcom is developing a framework to ensure that the consumer interest is appropriately taken into account in planning, projects and communications. Ofcom Chief Executive Stephen Carter said:

"Consumer protection and enforcement will be one of our priorities for the coming year. The Consumer Panel has helped provide useful focus on this important area of our work."

The toolkit framework is based on defining, evidencing and communicating the consumer interest throughout the development of new policy. The launch today will be attended by an audience of senior representatives from regulators, Government, Parliament, consumer bodies and industry who will be discussing the toolkit's impact on their own sector.

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 for more information about the Panel as well as a copy of the UK consumer research.

The consumer interest study is available at www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk or call 020 7981 4027 for a hard copy. PWC was commissioned to undertake the research after a competitive tender.

The Ofcom Consumer Panel is holding a conference on 2nd February 2006 to discuss the toolkit with key regulators and policy makers.

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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