

Ofcom Consumer Panel Publishes Annual Report 2005-06

08 June 2006

The independent Ofcom Consumer Panel has published its second annual report. The Panel, the independent body established to advise on consumer interests in the communications market, has handled major strategic issues as well as working on more tactical regulatory issues. Its advice has been supported by a firm evidence base of consumer research. A firm evidence base of consumer research has supported its advice.

Colette Bowe, Chairman of the Ofcom Consumer Panel comments:

“It has been an important year for the Panel in terms of getting to the bottom of consumer concerns and issues. Our work this year has been dominated by two themes. We have focused on how consumers can really benefit from the changes in the rapidly developing market for communications and have deepened our understanding of how and why some people in our society, in particular older people, find this market a daunting place to be. The second major theme is how regulators, and Ofcom in particular, can understand and fully incorporate the consumer interest in policy making. “

Key areas of impact and activity include:

The Panel's ongoing commitment to research to generate evidence about consumer concerns and the state of consumer information in the communications marketplace. It has discussed the findings of its 2004-05 tracker research in workshops with Ofcom, industry and consumer groups. Age was found to be one of the most significant factors.

Pioneering thinking to help shape more consumer-focused regulation. This year the Panel created the Capturing the Consumer Interest toolkit and Ofcom has changed its approach in response to the toolkit. The Panel believes its work in this area is of relevance to other industries and to government. It shared its findings with an audience of senior representatives from regulators, Government, Parliament, consumer bodies and industry in 2006.

Following strong advice from the Panel, Ofcom gave greater prominence to its consumer policy work and made consumer protection one of its nine key priorities for the coming year.

The needs of socially isolated people through switchover has been a major area of work for the Panel. Its May 2005 research finding that one third of people had not heard of 'digital switchover' reinforced the strong need for Digital UK to run a major public information campaign. Digital UK has taken on board the Panel's recommendations and the Panel is supporting their regional work to see that practical support programmes are delivered.

The annual report provides detail of the range of themes the Panel has worked on during the last year and the stakeholders it has engaged with. It also covers the areas that will be of importance over the coming year. These include:

- In addition to its annual tracker research, the Panel will shortly issue its research into what attracts, deters and enables older people to use digital TV and the internet.

- The digital inclusion agenda – the Panel is, for example, seeking clarity about who is accountable for the success of digital switchover and its components and will make sure they are held responsible for its delivery.
- Broadening the consumer-focused regulation debate – The Panel will continue to discuss and champion this theme.
- The Panel will continue to seek refinements in the regulation of telecommunications to get better results for consumers.

Ends

Notes to 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.

For a copy of the annual report, please visit our website www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk or phone Julia Guasch on 020 7783 4031.

The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

Colette Bowe, Chairman

Ruth Evans, Deputy Chairman

Fiona Ballantyne

Roger Darlington

Simon Gibson

Graham Mather

Kevin McLaughlin

Jeremy Mitchell

Kate O'Rourke

Bob Twitchin

Allan Williams