

Consumer Panel asks Ofcom to step in to resolve Virgin and BSkyB dispute 14 March 2007

The Consumer Panel, the independent voice for the consumer interest in communications, has requested Ofcom to use its influence and facilitate a speedy resolution to the Virgin and BSkyB dispute because consumers are being disadvantaged, and are finding it difficult “to get what they want - and are paying for”. Writing to Ofcom Chief Executive Ed Richards, Consumer Panel Chairman Colette Bowe expresses concern that consumers are being disadvantaged, and requests Ofcom “to use your influence as the regulator of this market to facilitate an early resolution of this dispute in the interests of consumers”.

She highlights that this is “the latest of a series of disputes between operators in this sector. The Panel is now concerned that problems for consumers are developing in this market that are not easy for consumers to resolve themselves directly – and which are therefore generating serious consumer detriment”.

Over three million Virgin customers have been left without access to Sky programmes for several weeks because of the dispute. In theory consumers have the option of switching to a different distribution channel but it’s a complex and time-consuming operation. In the meantime, consumers are being denied access to some programmes, and can do very little about it.

“We are concerned, therefore, that there are, right at this moment, consumers who are being disadvantaged and who will find it difficult to use the normal mechanisms available in other market places to get what they want – and are paying for,” Colette Bowe writes.

Ends

Notes to editors

The 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.

For a copy of the Consumer Panel letter to Ofcom Chief Executive Ed Richards go to www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk or ring Julia Guasch on 020 7783 4027.

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