

Consumer Panel asks Ofcom to produce a code of practice to address broadband speed concerns

19 December 2007

The Consumer Panel, the independent voice for the consumer interest in communications markets, has asked Ofcom to take the lead in producing a mandatory code of practice for internet service providers (ISPs) to address consumer concerns about advertised broadband connection speeds.

Following discussions with the UK's six leading ISPs about why consumers often do not get the advertised broadband speeds that they think they are buying, Colette Bowe, Chairman of the Ofcom Consumer Panel, has written to Ofcom Chief Executive Ed Richards asking the regulator to take a lead on the issue:

"We would like to see Ofcom leading discussions with industry to produce an enforceable code of practice that would be mandatory for ISPs. This code would establish agreed processes to give the customer the best information during and after the sales process, and to give them flexibility to move freely to different packages that reflect the actual speeds with which their ISPs are able to provide them."

Colette Bowe has also asked Ofcom to make information publicly available to consumers on its website. "This information would help consumers understand the technical issues affecting their broadband speeds, and over which they have control. It would also provide quality of service information to assist in their decision over which ISP to opt for."

The code of practice should include a commitment from ISPs to:

- Inform consumers, during the sales process, about the theoretical maximum line speed they could expect
- Provide clear information upfront about the factors that can affect line speed
- Contact customers two weeks after installation to provide them with the actual line speed supported by their line
- If the actual line speed is significantly lower than the package they bought, consumers should have a penalty-free choice to move to a different package or, in certain circumstances, opt-out from their contract.

The Consumer Panel spoke with the ISPs in October because of widespread customer discontent about broadband speeds. The "up to" speeds advertised in broadband packages are very often significantly different from the actual, lower speeds experienced by many subscribers.

The Consumer Panel Chairman also wants the advertising of broadband speeds to be tightened up. "I will be requesting that Advertising Standards Authority, working with industry, considers how the range of factors affecting broadband speeds can be given much greater prominence in advertising material. We believe that clearer information in advertising of broadband speeds and the associated packages would greatly increase customer satisfaction.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

1. 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.

2. A copy of the letter to Ofcom Chief Executive Ed Richards is available in PDF format on the Consumer Panel website www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk

3. Consumer Panel Chairman Colette Bowe is available for interview on Tuesday December 18 from 2pm to 6pm.

4. 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

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