

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 14 December 2023 at 10.30 am

Meeting held in hybrid format at Riverside House and via Microsoft Teams

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Rick Hill (Chair)

Kay Allen

Amanda Britain

Judith Clifton

Lenna Cumberbatch

Helen Froud

Michelle Goddard

Robert Hammond

Richard Spencer

Michael Wardlow

Richard Williams

Apologies

None

In attendance

The Panel's Executive Team

Ofcom colleagues

PA to assist Panel Member

Item
1. Welcome and introduction 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.
2. Declarations of Members' interests 2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.
3. Minutes of the meeting on 16 November 2023 and matters arising 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2023 were APPROVED following a minor amendment.



4. Chair's update

- 4.1 The Chair and National Members provided an overview of the Panel's recent activity and stakeholder engagement across the UK Nations.
- 4.2 Future Panel agenda items and research topics were discussed along with the desire to engage with the Panel's stakeholders and other consumer bodies on the topic of Online Safety.
- 4.3 The Panel was pleased to learn of the appointment of a Member for Wales who will commence their role in the New Year.
- 4.4 A meeting in the New Year will be arranged to focus on the Panel's three-year strategy.

5. Informal Discussion with Melanie Dawes and Lindsey Fussell

- 5.1 The Panel welcomed Dame Melanie Dawes, Ofcom CEO, and Lindsey Fussell, Group Director for Networks and Communications to the meeting, for an informal discussion about the way the Panel can continue to constructively challenge Ofcom under their expanded remit.

6. Supporting and promoting users' media literacy

- 6.1 The Panel received an update on how online service platforms should promote media literacy to consumers, citizens and micro-businesses via Ofcom's Best Practice Design Principles and were invited to respond to Ofcom's call for inputs.
- 6.2 The Panel was pleased to note Ofcom's focus on media literacy, however raised the importance of ensuring that platforms are aware of the underlying principles of the Equality Act 2010 (and relevant equality legislation in Northern Ireland).
- 6.3 Concerns were raised by the Panel on platforms' likelihood to hold themselves to account under the voluntary principles, and about Ofcom's ability to monitor, investigate and enforce against providers, without legislative backing.
- 6.4 The Panel welcomed Ofcom's recognition that its media literacy remit aims to empower consumers and citizens (and micro businesses) to flourish not just to be protected from harm.

7. Raising awareness of accessibility services across telecoms and broadcasting

- 7.1 The Panel received details from Ofcom on the forthcoming information campaign to raise awareness of regulated accessibility services in the communications sector. The Panel's views were welcomed by Ofcom on



their proposed approach.

- 7.2 The Panel was appreciative of the ongoing work by Ofcom to raise awareness and supported this work. However, they highlighted that communications providers would still need to ensure processes were in place to support consumers seeking the support that was being promoted. Examples given included ensuring that automated processes were adequate and not arduous to connect the consumer with the support they require and the handling of complex queries by trained, dedicated UK contact centre agents to remove cultural awareness barriers.
- 7.3 The Panel urged caution around the language used when communicating with consumers who have access requirements. They advised that using language such as ‘disabled’ could disengage some consumers with access requirements who do not self-identify as disabled. For example, people with learning difficulties or who have hearing loss due to ageing may benefit from some of the accessibility services being promoted by Ofcom, but may not read a leaflet that is targeted to ‘disabled people’. The Panel advised that it is more appropriate to promote the support of access requirements with accessibility services, than to make assumptions about a consumer’s need based on disability labels.
- 7.4 The Panel advised that in preference to the terminology ‘hard to reach consumers’, ‘underserved consumers’ could be used to describe consumers who are not yet receiving the support they require to access communications services and welcomed the use of multiple channels of communication to ensure that as many consumers as possible could receive information about accessibility services. The Panel also suggested Ofcom create an easy-speak version.
- 7.5 The Panel reiterated the need for a broader approach to their promotion of accessibility services, including targeting information to trusted third parties. For example, to provide information in an easy to access format to audiologists and physiotherapists, so that they can signpost the information at their point of contact with a consumer who may benefit from using accessibility services.

8. Enforcement update of Royal Mail

- 8.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on the current enforcement action upon Royal Mail.
- 8.2 The Panel was pleased to note a non-confidential explanation will be provided to consumers and open discussions are in play between Ofcom and Royal Mail.



9. Consumer Policy update

- 9.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom's consumer policy team on its key consumer priority areas.
- 9.2 The Panel was glad to note some prices for consumer services had decreased in real terms, but questioned whether consumers who require lower priced affordable communications facilities actually receive them. A more detailed update was requested.
- 9.3 The Panel requested an update on mobile roaming protections.
- 9.4 The Panel remain deeply concerned with the delays in delivering the shared rural network as households and microbusinesses within rural and remote communities face further detriment the longer an inadequate infrastructure exists. They advised that more encouragement needs to be provided to CPs to ensure they deliver appropriate reliable and resilient communication services and requested a progress update from the team.
- 9.5 The Panel raised concerns about consumer complaint volumes.

10. Social Model of Disability

- 10.1 The Panel received a presentation on the Social Model of Disability which focussed on why people and organisations find it difficult to assist those with access needs.
- 10.2 The Panel is an advocate of championing the social model of disability and agreed to continue to push industry to adopt a consistent approach in the way they identify, record and use data to empower and protect consumers with access requirements.
- 10.3 The Panel agreed that CPs must understand one person's access requirement could act as another's barrier and must note the importance of asking individuals the correct questions to ensure that each customer's communications experience is fair and accessible.

11. AOB

- 11.1 The Chair noted it was Rick Williams' last meeting and thanked him on behalf of the Panel and Executive team for his valuable contributions throughout his term as a Panel Member.