**Summary of insights from the National Stakeholder Hubs for**

**England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – November 2024**

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| **About us:** The Communications Consumer Panel’s role as a critical friend to Ofcom and other decision-makers in the communications sector requires Members to actively listen to the ‘voices’ of consumers, citizens and micro-businesses across the UK. One way that Members do this is by running a ‘Hub’ meeting in each Nation, roughly once a quarter. |

**Paving the way for more inclusive research**

This quarter’s Hubs enabled us to listen to views from a range of stakeholders about making research projects more inclusive.

Our research, conducted by Magenta, was jointly commissioned with Ofcom, with the aim of building inclusivity into the design, operation and reporting of research projects. Our project **focussed on** **disability and long-term conditions, with the aim of learning how we can design, carry out and report research to be inclusive**.

We want the findings of the research to be useful not just to the Panel and Ofcom, but also to other organisations commissioning research.

The project's findings can be viewed [here](https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/research-and-reports/paving-the-way-to-inclusivity-), or on Ofcom’s website [here](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/equity-and-diversity/inclusive-research/). The main research report entitled [‘Paving the Way for More Inclusive Research’](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/diversity-and-inclusion/2024/paving-the-way-for-inclusive-research-main-report.pdf?v=373725) is available, along with shorter versions making the findings easier to share. In addition, a British Sign Language (BSL) video summarising the findings can also be accessed.

During our Hubs sessions, in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, representatives from Magenta presented their key findings, and we listened to stakeholders’ reflections on the research, to build in additional insights to be recorded in this report. It is our intention that this report is shared alongside the Magenta research findings and recommendations, as an evolving guide to better practice.

In advance of the Hubs, we posed two questions to participants:

* Have you received any questions or comments in connection with the people, communities and microbusinesses you represent in completing or compiling research, both good and/or bad?
* What changes would you like industry/organisations/agencies to apply within their research planning, fieldwork and reporting of future research?

**Hub participants’ reflections on the research**

Overall, our findings resonated with attendees. Additionally, they engaged in valuable and engaging discussions, sharing an appetite to build and share better practice, inclusive of the communities and individuals they represent.

**A summary of the key points of discussion can be found below:**

* The over-riding point taken from the discussions was that inclusivity should be carefully thought about in every aspect of research from the initial idea or design stage right through to publication. Time needed to be built into each research project to ensure that this was done.
* Although budget restraints remain a considerable factor in scoping research, care, communication and impact analysis must be an integral part of the process. A clear understanding of what is needed, how to explain it to those taking part in the research, and listening to what participants could benefit from to make the process possible for them, is vital.
* Research findings should be available in many different formats, particularly so that participants themselves could access the findings and recommendations. These may include large print, braille, British Sign Language (BSL) Easy Read, Easy Speak, or another format that suits individual needs. If an organisation is unsure of what format would work best, then these questions of format should be posed to recipients.
* From recruitment through to reporting, the ability to present material in the Welsh language for people whose first language is Welsh is essential, where aiming to listen to the voice of Welsh consumers.
* Comments were raised on the use of the term ‘vulnerable’ which is commonly used by Communications Providers, regulators and the Government. Participants discussed the idea of using the term ‘susceptible to risk, as any individual can be susceptible to risk via a multitude of factors.
* Another suggestion, as a way to avoid labelling consumers as ‘vulnerable’ was to focus on their access needs and describe them as ‘people with access needs\*’ (\*note: the Panel has previously recommended using this term, or even ‘access requirements’ in place of ‘vulnerable’ as meeting these needs is the solution that prevents the consumer from becoming vulnerable).
* Further comments were raised on the terminology of ‘vulnerable’. It should not be defined as a static circumstance but instead be recognised as a fluctuating condition.
* One stakeholder provided personal life experience when completing research for an organisation where access needs were not met. In this instance, the participant had educated the well-meaning researchers.
* Continuous learning is essential to ensure agencies/organisations identify all access needs from the individual during the initial point of contact.
* Other participants suggested the research should be designed around individuals’ lived experience and these factors should be acknowledged as persons’ own realities, without assumptions being made or people with similar conditions being artificially grouped together.
* It is essential to recognise the diversity within each of the disabled communities, and time should be taken to ask everyone their preferred use of language, and whether they have accessibility requirements. It is essential these points are factored throughout all future contact.
* Stakeholders were pleased the research offered both an online and offline recruitment and participation process. Not only would this have assisted with people with disabilities or long-term conditions but also help individuals with differing degrees of digital inclusion and exclusion.
* Some participants confirmed that individuals' perception of themselves as ‘disabled’ may differ according to lived experience, including the impact of ageing and of progressing from not disabled, to disabled.
* Stakeholders highlighted the need to explain the good intent behind language used. Language used can resonate differently from one individual to the next. Researchers may make mistakes, but explaining what they are trying to do may prevent offence - and as featured in our research, participants advised asking individuals their preferred terminology.
* Participants discussed best practise in the use of alt text in graphics and diagrams (suggestions are provided below).
* Feedback was received from carers organisations, who highlighted that this research project focussed on good practice in respect of individuals who had the agency to communicate for themselves. Provision should be made in research for carers to take part to facilitate the input of individuals who are not able to communicate independently with researchers and require an assistant or carer to communicate on their behalf. Carers should be compensated for their time, particularly if they are unpaid carers.
* The Equality Act 2010 does not apply to Northern Ireland, although many of its requirements are enacted through different legislation which captures the unique demographics of this part of the UK.
* Participants also highlighted that disabled people did not want to take part in research that would make them feel part of a ‘tick box exercise’ - it should be recognised that disability is only one part of an individual’s identity and that barriers to accessing services may be multi-faceted. Those commissioning and reporting on research should not make assumptions that disability is an overwhelming factor for an individual in every situation they face.
* Discussions were had around the person-centred approach to disability i.e. the social model rather than the use of the medical model of disability. Participants welcomed the use of the social model – putting the onus on barriers in society rather than the disability being the barrier.
* That said, it was recognised by participants that the use of the social model of disability could be considered restrictive at times, when benchmarking against previous research, or when looking beyond medical and social factors.
* Participants discussed the complexities of ascertaining the costs involved in using the social model of disability in framing research.
* Comments were raised concerning the Government Statistical Service (GSS) approach which does not allow for a disabled person or person with disabilities to self-identify.
* Overall, participants endorsed adherence to the findings and recommendations raised in this research project and for those commissioning research to look at ways of plugging the gaps in their knowledge to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and long-term conditions, including individuals who are not able to advocate for themselves.
* Participants were pleased that this research project had been commissioned and that it continues to raise the bar for better practice to make research more inclusive and more useful in influencing change on behalf of disabled people and people with long-term conditions.
* Participants wished to share the research and findings widely among their contacts and stakeholders and looked forward to continuing the debate and further influencing positive action.

**Stakeholders who took part in our National Hubs are listed below:**

* **Good Things Foundation**
* **Magenta**
* **Mind**
* **National Association of Deafened People**
* **National Farmers Union**
* **Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service**
* **Ofcom**
* **Ofcom’s Advisory Committees**
* **Older People’s Commissioner for Wales**
* **Research Institute for Disabled People**
* **Rural Services Network (England)**
* **Scottish Rural Action**
* **SCVO**
* **Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland**
* **Supporting Communities - Wales**
* **The Alliance Scotland**
* **Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People**
* **Age UK**
* **Carers Wales**
* **Citizens Advice**
* **Citizens Advice Cymru**
* **Communications Consumer Panel**
* **Competition and Markets Authority**
* **Consumer Council for Northern Ireland**
* **Consumer Scotland**
* **Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)**
* **Department of Agriculture (NI)**
* **Department of Finance (NI)**
* **Digital Communities Wales**
* **Digital Poverty Alliance**
* **Disability Action (NI)**
* **Farmers Union Wales**
* **Federation of Small Businesses**

**For links to research and insights shared by participants across the Hubs – please see below:**

* [Doing a basic accessibility check if you cannot do a detailed one - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/doing-a-basic-accessibility-check-if-you-cant-do-a-detailed-one/doing-a-basic-accessibility-check-if-you-cant-do-a-detailed-one)
* [Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities](https://support.microsoft.com/en-gb/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d#bkmk_whileyouwork_win)
* [Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities](https://support.microsoft.com/en-gb/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25)
* [Word and PowerPoint Accessibility Evaluation Guide](https://webaim.org/resources/evaloffice/)
* [Colour Contrast Checker tool](https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/)
* [Publishing accessible documents](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents)
* [Learn how to write alt text | RNIB](https://www.rnib.org.uk/campaign-with-us/alt-text-campaign/how-can-i-write-alt-text/)
* [How to write alt-text for image accessibility - Scope for business](https://business.scope.org.uk/how-to-write-better-alt-text-descriptions-for-accessibility/)
* [Our work in the Welsh language - Ofcom](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/structure-and-leadership/welsh-language/)
* [Our annual reports to the Welsh Language Commissioner - Ofcom](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/structure-and-leadership/welsh-language-reports/)
* [Closure of high street banks: Impact on local communities](https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/closure-of-high-street-banks-impact-on-local-communities/)
* [State of Caring survey | Carers UK](https://www.carersuk.org/policy-and-research/state-of-caring-survey/#:~:text=The%20State%20of%20Caring%202024,their%20mental%20health%20and%20wellbeing.) – published October 2024
* [Health, Disability and the Energy Crisis | Consumer Scotland](https://consumer.scot/publications/health-disability-and-the-energy-crisis/) – published June 2023
* [Disabled consumers and energy costs - interim findings | Consumer Scotland](https://consumer.scot/publications/disabled-consumers-and-energy-costs-interim-findings/) – published April 2024
* [Linking Cyber and Accessibility - Lead Scotland](https://www.lead.org.uk/2022/06/09/cyber-project/)
* [FSB | Barriers to small firms’ access to finance could hold back UK economic recovery, new report warns](https://www.fsb.org.uk/resources-page/barriers-to-small-firms-access-to-finance-could-hold-back-uk-economic-recovery-new-report-warns.html) – published December 2022
* [FSB | Danske Bank branch closure announcement is a blow to businesses and consumers](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsb.org.uk%2Fresources-page%2Fdanske-bank-branch-closure-announcement-is-a-blow-to-businesses-and-consumers.html&data=05%7C02%7CEmma.Balaam%40ofcom.org.uk%7Cca9f88238b9d434135ee08dd088a694b%7C0af648de310c40688ae4f9418bae24cc%7C0%7C0%7C638676112778831902%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=2Ay8qBlf115OJmic%2FBKhyUBafw4GSIrSZe55DXF%2B%2B8k%3D&reserved=0) – published February 2024

**For ease, please find below the links to our jointly commissioned research with Ofcom.**

* [Paving the Way to Inclusivity - Communications Consumer Panel](https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/research-and-reports/paving-the-way-to-inclusivity-)
* [Inclusive Research - Ofcom](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/equity-and-diversity/inclusive-research/)
* [Methodology Appendix](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/diversity-and-inclusion/2024/paving-the-way-for-inclusive-research-methodology-appendix.pdf?v=373508)

**Our thanks**

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Nas, Jo and Eve from Magenta for presenting the research at each of our National Stakeholder Hubs.

Additionally, we wish to thank Richard Spencer, our Member for England (between 2018 and 2024), for playing a key role in developing our Hub sessions to listen to the voice of consumers in England.

**For more information on previous discussions across the Panel’s National Hubs and who took part – please visit the Panel’s website** [**here**](https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/stakeholder-engagement/the-panels-national-hubs)**.**

**Next National Stakeholder Hub Date**

Our next Hub session will incorporate all four Nations. Our next **All-UK National Stakeholder Hub will take place on 5 February 2025.**

The agenda will focus on learning what plans our stakeholders have for their ‘Year Ahead’ and we look forward to sharing ours.