



Consumer representation in the UK communications sector

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Different models of consumer representation in the regulated sectors of the UK

- Sector-specific consumer body located inside the regulator
examples: telecommunications and financial services
- Sector-specific consumer body located outside the regulator
examples: transport and water
- General consumer body located outside the regulators
examples: posts and energy

The consumer body located in Ofcom – title

- Originally called Ofcom Consumer Panel
- Now called Communications Consumer Panel
- Name change
 - Signals our independence from Ofcom
 - Reflects stronger consumer focus in Ofcom itself
 - Indicates that we speak to other bodies

Relationship between Ofcom and the Consumer Panel

- Ofcom appoints members of the Panel BUT it does this in an open and transparent manner
- Ofcom employs Panel staff BUT the Panel Chairman makes the appointments
- Ofcom provides the Panel's budget BUT the Panel decides how this money will be spent
- The Panel is physically located in Ofcom BUT it is statutorily independent of the regulator
- Relationship governed by a Memorandum of Understanding
- The Panel has been described as “a critical friend” to Ofcom

How the members of the Consumer Panel are chosen

- The Panel Chairman is appointed by the Ofcom Board after an open recruitment process with an interview panel of Board members and independent members
- The other Panel members are effectively appointed by the Panel Chairman, but again after an open recruitment process with an interview panel comprised of the Panel Chairman, a couple of Ofcom members, and an independent member and subject to approval by the Ofcom Board
- All Panel members formally appointed by the relevant Government Ministers

How the Consumer Panel is composed

- The Communications Act 2003 requires the following membership structure:
 - Chairman
 - Member for England
 - Member for Scotland
 - Member for Wales
 - Member for Northern Ireland
- Other members (currently five) who must be able to advise on the interests of:
 - a) persons living in rural areas
 - b) persons living in urban areas
 - c) small businesses
 - d) disadvantaged persons, persons with low incomes, and persons with disabilities
 - e) the elderly

How the Consumer Panel is resourced

- Panel members time - between 2 and 4 days a month (Chairman 6)
- Panel staff - full time equivalent of four
- Panel budget - last financial year c £900,000

What the Consumer Panel does

- Our remit covers the sectors regulated by Ofcom, namely: telecommunications, broadcasting and spectrum (plus soon post) - with the exception of content issues (which are covered by a separate Content Board reporting to the Ofcom Main Board)
- Our role is to influence Ofcom, Government, the European Union, and service and equipment providers so that the communications interests of consumers and citizens are protected and promoted

How the Consumer Panel reaches its views

- Qualitative research
- Quantitative research
- Analysis of complaints data
- Discussions with Ofcom
- Discussions with stakeholders

How the Consumer Panel influences Ofcom

- Discussions with Ofcom staff at Panel's monthly meetings
- Discussions with Ofcom staff at ad-hoc meetings
- Private advice notes before Ofcom publishes a consultation document
- Public submissions when Ofcom publishes a consultation document
- Design and promotion of a Consumer Interest Toolkit for use by Ofcom

How the Consumer Panel influences other organisations

- Meetings with Government Ministers and officials
- Submissions to Government reviews
- Publication of research
- Media releases
- Calls to action

Some issues on which the Consumer Panel has been active (1): Telecommunications

- Consumer protection issues such as mis-selling
- Consumer empowerment issues such as information provision
- Access to broadband
- Broadband speeds
- Next generation access

Some issues on which the Consumer Panel has been active (2): Non- telecommunications

- Digital switchover - especially help for the hard to reach
- Digital dividend review - use of released spectrum
- Media literacy

Further information

Ofcom web site:

<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/>

Communications Consumer Panel web site and blog:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/>

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