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## **Which? response to Ofcom's consultation: 'Making switching easier and more reliable for consumers: proposals to reform landline, broadband and pay TV switching between different platforms.'**

### **Summary**

Which? welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's consultation on its proposals to reform landline, broadband and pay TV switching between different platforms. We have responded to a number of the issues raised by Ofcom in its consultation document and have identified the key consultation questions to which our comments are most relevant. In summary:

- The evidence presented by Ofcom clearly points to there being material problems with the current cross-platform switching arrangements for triple play services.
- The availability of easy and reliable switching processes for consumers should be treated as a hygiene factor.
- Which? strongly supports Ofcom's assessment that the introduction of a gaining provider led process should be the preferred approach.
- The benefits of the enhanced 'cease and re-provide' option are clearly inferior to those of a gaining provider led process: the option would do less to address existing problems such as loss of service, double paying, and confusion about the switching process.

### **Problems with the existing cross-platform switching arrangements (Q1–3)**

Ofcom sets out how existing cross-platform switching arrangements create a number of process-related difficulties for consumers that have chosen to switch, and can deter some consumers from switching. The evidence presented clearly points to there being material problems with the current switching arrangements, with, for example, 58% of switchers - when prompted - saying they experienced at least one process-related difficulty. Meanwhile

79% of consumers who had considered switching, decided against it due to similar process-related concerns.

These problems stem from the absence of an effective cross-platform switching process, with a consumer that is wishing to switch currently being required to contact their existing supplier - usually by phone - to cancel their service, and separately having to contact their new provider to arrange the start of the new service. As Ofcom highlights, the process of contacting and cancelling the old service can be time consuming and difficult. Furthermore, difficulties coordinating the switch can result in consumers facing some loss of service or double paying.

As Ofcom recognises, problems also arise when consumers do not understand the switching process that applies to them. Figure 3 in the consultation document illustrates the various different arrangements consumers can face in relation to triple play services, and Ofcom notes qualitative research showing that 'not knowing what to do to switch' was also a factor in the decisions of around a third of consumers who considered switching but decided not to.

The availability of easy and reliable switching processes for consumers should be treated as a hygiene factor: a fundamental requirement needed for a market to deliver good outcomes for consumers. We would urge Ofcom to press ahead with its work to remove barriers to switching, and to simplify and harmonise switching arrangements across the communications sector.

#### **An enhanced cease and re-provide ('EC&R') process (Q4)**

The EC&R process option would be expected to lessen the difficulties consumers could have contacting their existing provider to cancel the service and coordinating the change of providers. However, consumers would still need to contact both suppliers when cross-platform switching, and would continue to face a patchwork of switching arrangements in relation to triple play services.

Which? agrees with Ofcom's assessment that the benefits of this option are clearly inferior to those of a gaining provider led process. It would do less to address existing problems of loss of service, double paying, and confusion about the switching process that applies.

#### **Ofcom's preferred option: A Gaining Provider Led ('GPL') process (Q5, 13-16)**

Which? strongly supports Ofcom's assessment that the introduction of a gaining provider led process should be the preferred approach. GPL would provide an effective means of addressing existing problems associated with consumers having to contact their existing provider - who will have little incentive to facilitate the switch in a timely and effective manner, and with problems of loss of service and double payment. It should provide a clearer, simpler, easier and more reliable switching process for consumers.

The GPL option would mean that the cross-platform switching process would be consistent with the existing within-platform process for the Openreach and KCOM platforms, and with



Ofcom's preferred option for reforming mobile switching. As Ofcom recognised in its Digital Communications Review, the effectiveness of switching processes is likely to become more important as services are bundled together to a greater extent, and as communications services converge. Harmonisation and simplification of switching arrangements can be expected to be of increasing importance.

As Ofcom notes, movement to a GPL process may also increase the extent to which intermediaries such as price comparison websites can play an effective role in relation to triple play services. This could be through the provision of one-stop search and switch services - which are not possible in a context where in order to switch the existing supplier needs to be contacted directly by the consumers.

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