

## **BT Response to Ofcom Quality of Service Review Topcomm Review: Second Consultation**

### **Summary**

BT welcomes the opportunity to participate in the ongoing Ofcom review on quality of service measures, having been an active participant in the existing Topcomm scheme and in previous similar schemes for several years.

As previously advised in our response to the first consultation in October 2008, we completely support the view that consumers should be able to make fully-informed decisions when comparing and choosing communications providers. BT will of course continue to work with Ofcom and industry in any way possible for the next steps of the review and to identify suitable customers for market research purposes. We would stress the need for careful consideration if new measures are required, to ensure that any future scheme achieves the original policy objectives, while not being too onerous for providers to administer. To this end if a future scheme is considered necessary BT would be more than happy to engage with Ofcom, industry and key stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcome for all concerned.

BT appreciates Ofcom's intention to review the current Direction under this consultation and not wait until the broader policy aspects are fully resolved. Looking at Ofcom's initial policy aim when making the Topcomm Direction in 2005 the principle of ensuring consumers benefit from the provision of comparable QoS information and to encourage the provision of timely, relevant, accessible and accurate information is certainly something that could be of benefit in having fully informed customers able to make sensible choices over the best provider for their circumstances. We have already expressed our view that in order for a comparison scheme to work effectively it is vital that consumers are able to compare like-with-like in a manner which is guaranteed to be accurate and which cannot be misleading in any way, and in BT's view the current topcomm scheme does not meet those aims. It is clear from the responses to the consultation last year that a number of respondents share our concerns about the effectiveness of the current scheme and doubt it gives a useful source of information. While BT can appreciate the comments relating to publication and awareness of the scheme, we believe that this is not the remedy as it does not address the fundamental principle of whether such information is necessary for customers to make the best decision.

For these reasons BT strongly supports Ofcom's proposal to withdraw the Topcomm direction.

BT looks forward to Ofcom quickly publishing a statement on the current Direction, but would appreciate clarity on what this means for the next round of Topcomm measures, which are currently due to be reported in August. BT's concerns about the scheme remain and as it seems likely the Direction is being withdrawn then investing in the resources needed for gathering the relevant data, ensuring internal verification and comparability testing, would seem to be an unnecessary burden.

## Response to Question

### **Do stakeholders agree that withdrawing the Topcomm Direction is the best option available given the evidence provided in the consultation?**

The original intention of the Direction was:

- “• balancing the promotion of choice and competition with the duty to foster plurality, informed citizenship, the protection of viewers, listeners and customers, and promote cultural diversity; and*
- serving the interests of citizen-consumers as the communications industry enters the digital age.*

*3.6 A part of Ofcom’s mission is to encourage the provision of timely, relevant, accessible and accurate information to citizen-consumers and enable them to make informed purchasing decisions.*

*3.7 Reliable consumer information facilitates the exercise of choice by End-Users and helps them to receive the benefits of increased competition. Ofcom believes that if End-Users are to rely upon such information it needs to be accurate, accessible, and truly comparable.”*

While the overall policy aims will be picked up as part of the next stage of the review, BT fully supports Ofcom’s conclusion to withdraw the current Direction.

Considering the other options it is clear that Option 1 to maintain the Topcomm Direction is not the preferred choice due to the limitations and concerns expressed by most respondents. BT fully agrees that for this option the costs of continuing with such a flawed scheme seem disproportionate when the consumer benefits are so tenuous. We are interested in Ofcom’s cost/benefit analysis on the value of the current scheme per customer visit and, although we do not have any research to either confirm or contradict Ofcom’s conclusion it seems a sensible methodology.

Turning to Option 2 and marginal improvements to the scheme, bearing in mind the views on the shortcomings of the current scheme then this does not seem a sensible way to proceed. We agree with Ofcom’s view that this would be a short term solution and a complete review would still be required as minor changes fail to address the fundamental issues and would result in additional cost and resource for a scheme that would still not be fit for purpose.

BT therefore agrees that Option 3 to withdraw the current Topcomm Direction is the only sensible conclusion and hope that the statement confirming this decision can be progressed as swiftly as possible.