

Section Seven

Delivery of services to stakeholders

- 7.1 On an average day, Ofcom provides a wide range of important services to around 2,500 stakeholders, involving about 250 of Ofcom's staff.
- 7.2 In this section we:
- provide an overview of the services we deliver to stakeholders;
 - describe how we are improving those services; and
 - explain the links between delivering services to stakeholders and achieving our policy priorities.
- 7.3 We have already made significant improvements to our operational services, together with efficiency savings which we detail in Section Eight.

Dealing with enquiries and complaints from the public

- 7.4 Ofcom's Contact Centre deals with enquiries and complaints from consumers about telecommunications services, TV and radio services, and use of the radio spectrum. Every month we receive around 15,000 phone calls, 5,600 messages via our website, 1,000 emails and 1,550 letters and faxes.
- 7.5 Consumers often complain to Ofcom about telecoms issues because they have received an inadequate response from their service provider, or because they have been unable to contact them. We aim to help consumers resolve their complaints by pointing them to useful advice and information.
- 7.6 People usually complain directly to Ofcom about TV and radio programmes. For programmes broadcast on commercial TV and radio, we consider issues relating to harm and offence, fairness and privacy, impartiality and accuracy. For programmes broadcast by the BBC or S4C, we only consider issues related to fairness and privacy, and harm and offence. We also deal with complaints about programme sponsorship and alleged product placement.
- 7.7 The Ofcom Contact Centre also receives enquiries about the use of the radio spectrum, although these are mainly referred to our dedicated Licensing Centre.
- 7.8 We are investing in information systems to improve our call-handling performance in addressing enquiries and complaints. We also aim to optimise the role of the Ofcom Contact Centre in providing early warning about consumer concerns, such as silent calls, slamming and mis-selling. This is against the backdrop of rapidly changing communications markets; new types of complaints therefore arise all the time and create unexpected increases in the number of complaints we receive.

Allocating telephone number ranges to service providers

- 7.9 Ofcom plays an important role in allocating telephone number ranges to communications service providers who, in turn, allocate individual numbers to their customers. The number of applications received from service providers has grown

steadily in recent years, exceeding 2,000 for the first time in 2005. Indeed, in the first eight months of 2006, the number of applications had already reached 1850.

- 7.10 As part of our Strategic Review of Numbering, we have established the following principles governing numbering:
- the numbers consumers want should be available when they are needed;
 - the numbers consumers currently use should not be changed if this is avoidable;
 - the meaning that certain types of numbers have for consumers – such as 0800 numbers being associated with free calls – should be maintained;
 - number allocation processes should support competition and innovation; and
 - consumers should not be exposed to abuse.
- 7.11 A number of operational changes will be needed to apply these principles, with the objective of creating a number allocation process which is efficient, more consumer-driven and more market-led. Although changes will take place over a number of years, we have already started to allocate smaller blocks of numbers where there is a danger of shortages occurring.

Licensing access to the radio spectrum

- 7.12 Ofcom licenses access to the radio spectrum by issuing, renewing and revoking licences. Where necessary we make frequency assignments, perform site clearances and co-ordinate the use of spectrum internationally. In 2005/6 we issued 212,000 licences, the majority being annual renewals. Although our work to simplify spectrum licensing will result in us issuing fewer licences (see Section Five above), spectrum licensing will still be a significant activity.
- 7.13 Over the next 18-24 months, we are aiming to provide an improved licensing service to stakeholder and reduce the costs of licensing administration by:
- automating much of the licensing administration;
 - enabling stakeholders to apply for, and receive, licences online; and
 - administering licences for the majority of licence types via a centralised Ofcom Licensing Centre.

Keeping the radio spectrum free of interference

- 7.14 We monitor the radio spectrum and take action to prevent spectrum interference. The increasing demand for spectrum (described in Section Four above) is leading to more intensive usage and the risk of increased interference. In 2005/6 our Field Operations team handled 16,500 cases. They take action to:
- protect safety-of-life communications;
 - prevent illegal use of the radio spectrum;
 - enable legitimate use of spectrum by, for example, providing advice and assistance to spectrum users; and

- remove non-compliant equipment from the market.
- 7.15 Our strategy has been to focus our resources on keeping the radio spectrum free from harmful interference. This has involved a wide-ranging transformation of our Field Operations team, including the organisational structure, property, vehicle and equipment strategy, volume and mix of work, and people-management and culture.
- 7.16 These changes are now largely complete, and our current focus is on reviewing our approach in the key areas of illegal broadcasting; investigations and enforcement; monitoring; and interference resolution.

Providing information services

- 7.17 Ofcom provides the information services which underpin delivery of services to stakeholders, such as enabling the move towards increasing online access to services.
- 7.18 Ofcom inherited 45 different information systems from the regulators we replaced. These legacy systems are mostly bespoke, and based on differing platforms and technologies. We therefore revised our information systems strategy to enable us to meet our business requirements.

Publishing market research and communications market reports

- 7.19 We publish market research on the attitudes of citizens and consumers, including vulnerable groups. We also publish reports on developments in the communications sector, including an annual report on the communications market and reports on the different Nations and Regions of the UK.

Providing information to consumers via our website

- 7.20 Via our website we provide information to consumers by issuing, for example, alerts about scams to which they may be exposed.
- 7.21 We will continue to develop our website. In 2007/8 we plan to look at the scope for greater personalisation according to different types of user. We will also examine the feasibility and likely impact of providing additional alerts about scams and other topical issues.

Links between operational and policy delivery

- 7.22 The effective delivery of our operational services is closely linked to the key policy areas set out in our strategic framework (and which is discussed in Section Five).
- Driving a market-based approach to spectrum will be underpinned by the reform of spectrum licensing and effective interference management.
 - Developing new mechanisms for delivering public outcomes will be supported by the Contact Centre handling complaints about programmes broadcast on TV and radio.
 - Improving compliance and empowering consumers will benefit from the early warning system provided by the Contact Centre, and effective action to tackle illegal broadcasting.

- Promoting conditions for competition and innovation will be supported by the efficient allocation of telephone numbers and technology research and development.

7.23 Figure 7.1 provides some examples of the important links between the services we provide for stakeholders and the policy areas identified in our three-year strategic framework.

Figure 7.1: Links between operational and policy delivery

