



# Consumer Complaints Review

Qualitative and quantitative research findings

An independent report written by  
Futuresight for Ofcom

futuresight

Research Document

Publication date: 10 July 2008

# Contents

| Section |  | Page |
|---------|--|------|
| 1       | <b>Introduction</b>  | 3    |
| 2       | <b>Executive summary</b>   | 5    |
| 3       | <b>Levels of dissatisfaction, reasons given and action taken – quantitative snapshot</b> | 7    |
| 4       | <b>Dissatisfied consumers who took no action – detail</b>                                | 11   |
| 5       | <b>Dissatisfied consumers who took action – detail</b>                                   | 13   |
| 6       | <b>Appendices:</b>   |      |
|         | – Appendix I: Omnibus questionnaire  | 28   |
|         | – Appendix II: Recruitment screener  | 33   |
|         | – Appendix III: Interview guides   | 35   |
|         | – Appendix IV: Summary of complainants / complaints                                      | 40   |

## Section 1

# Introduction

## Background

Ofcom's Consumer Policy Team wished to assess whether the processes by which consumers can make complaints about communications providers (landline, internet and mobile) are "fit for purpose" and satisfactory, i.e. effective and of value to consumers.

The current process for raising communications complaints is to contact the provider and try to resolve the issues through its own complaints process. If a complaint cannot be resolved, or if the company has not responded to the initial complaint within three months, then the complaint can be raised with CISAS or Otelo, the communications market's alternative dispute resolution (ADR) companies. If dissatisfied with the ADR process (not just with the outcome), the matter can be referred to Ofcom.

[Note: For the purposes of this study, the definition of a complaint was any expression of dissatisfaction]

## Objectives

The overall aim was to provide Ofcom's Consumer Policy Team with a detailed assessment of consumers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, making a complaint.

To do this, we agreed that the following specific areas should be examined:

- Consumers' views of goods and services across the telecommunications market, particularly their attitudes towards goods and services with which they were dissatisfied.
- The profiles and characteristics of consumers who had been dissatisfied, the different stages of the complaints process they had reached and the reasons why they did or did not take action, looking separately at consumers who:
  - were dissatisfied but took no action;
  - started a complaint but 'dropped out' of the process; and
  - completed the complaints process.
- Consumers' experiences of making a complaint about a communications service provider, in terms of:
  - their reasons for making a complaint;
  - their expectations of the process;
  - steps taken to make the complaint;
  - their understanding of the process / explanations given by the provider;
  - stage of the process reached;
  - reasons for continuing the process or dropping out;
  - levels of satisfaction with the process;
  - the impact on them of making a complaint; and
  - their thoughts and feelings throughout the process.
- The differences, if any, in how complaints are handled across the three types of service, and between one service provider and another.

## Methodology

The objectives listed above indicated the need for a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. However, a further issue was the limited amount of available sample that was both relevant and up to date.

Ofcom's residential tracker had produced over 300 contacts (people who had made a complaint) between the last quarter of 2005 and the first quarter of 2006. However, the sample did not contain any information about the nature of the complaint or whether any action had been taken. In addition, there was concern that the wording of the questions in the tracker may have excluded some relevant respondents.

It was agreed, therefore, that the approach needed to include an element of sample generation as well as meeting the above objectives. The following approach was agreed:

- Stage 1: Telephone omnibus and sample generation
- Stage 2: Qualitative interviews

### Stage 1: Telephone omnibus

Two telephone omnibus surveys were conducted between July 26<sup>th</sup> and August 3<sup>rd</sup> with a total sample of 2,167 UK consumers. In addition to gathering data on attitudes towards goods and services across the telecommunications market, these surveys produced 136 contacts who agreed to be re-contacted. (See Appendix 1 for survey questionnaire). All 136 contacts had had reason to be dissatisfied with their telecoms provider in the past 12 months; 110 had taken action, 26 had taken no action, and the sample was divided roughly equally between the three services (landline, mobile and internet).

### Stage 2: Qualitative interviews

All 110 of the consumers who had taken action were telephoned over two days between 10am and 8pm. Of these, 37 had complained to their landline operator, 38 had complained to their ISP and 35 had complained to their mobile operator. Contacts were called until 12 respondents for each service had been recruited for further interviewing.

All 26 who had taken no action were also called until 12, with a mix of service providers, had been recruited for further interviewing. For both audiences, quotas were used to ensure a mix of operators / service providers. (See Appendix II for screening questionnaire)

- Fifty face-to-face interviews were completed with consumers who were dissatisfied with their provider and who had taken action.
  - Thirty-six were recruited from stage 1 (12 per service)
  - The remaining 14 were 'free-found' and included over-65s (4), low-income (5) and people with disabilities (5).
- Twelve telephone interviews were completed with those who were dissatisfied with their provider but who had taken no action.

All interviews followed agreed guidelines (see Appendix III) and were conducted during September and the first week of October 2006.

It should be noted that all the contacts from Stage 1 volunteered to take part in further research.

## Section 2

# Executive summary

As part of its Consumer Rights Review, Ofcom commissioned research to understand whether the complaints processes operated by telecommunications providers (fixed, mobile and internet) were effective and of value to consumers. The study investigated a number of issues relating to service provision in the industry, including levels of dissatisfaction with services, reasons for dissatisfaction and actions taken, as well as consumers' experiences of making a complaint.

A staged approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, was used. Initial quantitative surveys provided an overview of consumers' attitudes to service provision and complaints processes, as well as generating a sample for the second stage of qualitative interviews. The qualitative interviews then provided detailed insight into the different experiences of consumers who had made a complaint, and shed some light on why consumers who were dissatisfied did not make a complaint. It is important to note that the majority of respondents volunteered to take part in further research, and the findings suggest that many did so because the interview provided them with an opportunity to share their often unfortunate experiences with an impartial third party.

The difference in attitudes to service provision in general, compared with attitudes towards complaints handling specifically, was highlighted clearly in the quantitative data. The vast majority of consumers were satisfied with their telecoms services (86%), but when they had reason to be dissatisfied, and made a complaint, the majority were unsatisfied with the way their complaint was handled. Mobile operators appeared to do marginally better than their counterparts - 52% of consumers were unsatisfied with how mobile operators handled their complaint, compared with 65% who were unsatisfied with their internet provider's complaint handling and 70% who were unsatisfied with their fixed line provider's handling.

The qualitative findings indicated a big difference between consumers' expectations of how their complaint would be handled and their experience. Consumers tended to think that their problem was commonplace and would be resolved quickly and efficiently, and so they were usually calm and optimistic before contacting their service provider. Their mood quickly changed when faced with long waiting times to get through and the problems commonly associated with customer services. Inefficiencies and mistakes on the part of the operators were often exacerbated by an inappropriate attitude from customer service staff and reluctance to accept responsibility for errors.

The quantitative and qualitative results were largely similar in the proportion of complaints resolved – an average of 42% and 54% respectively. Differences between the two data sets related to the time taken and the stage at which a complaint was resolved. While the average time taken to resolve a complaint in the qualitative interviews was over a month, the quantitative data revealed that just 22% of complaints were resolved after speaking to one person, and a further 16% after being transferred to a more senior person, leaving over 50% of complaints unresolved in the early stages of the process.

The proportion of complaints unresolved at this stage, combined with an average of 29% of people dropping out when their complaint was not resolved by the first, or more senior, person, implies that the initial engagement with customer services is the weakest part of the process. This is certainly supported by the qualitative findings; complainants consistently mentioned that the quality of the initial response from their provider varied considerably, ranging from informed and helpful to useless and sometimes rude. The consensus was that most call centre workers either lacked knowledge of how to deal with some of the most basic problems, or enforced their processes over-officiously. Overall, consumers felt that customer service staff were working within very tight parameters, without the flexibility or authority to resolve most of the complaints they encountered.

The interviews also revealed that customer service staff were not informing customers about complaints codes of practice, nor were they referring them to alternative organisations such as ADRs if customers remained unsatisfied. Less than one complainant in 50 was notified of these, even though over half of them had been engaged in the complaint process for more than a month.

For the vast majority in the qualitative sample, the impact of making a complaint was negative, both practically and emotionally, and in some cases, extremely negative. The result was that 16 had switched provider, five were waiting for the end of their contract before switching, four were considering switching and one was in the process of switching. In almost all of these cases, the way in which the complaint was handled that was the reason for switching, rather than the initial problem itself.

Overall, even when taking the bias in the qualitative sample into consideration, there is strong evidence to suggest that current processes for complaints handling across the three services are not as effective as they could be. The impression among the consumers we spoke to is that operators are 'getting away with' poor customer service; there is a growing sense of moral outrage from complainants at their perceived powerlessness against the machinery of large business. Consumers recommended an improvement in overall communication and a more honest, transparent and accountable approach if complaints processes are to become more effective and of value.

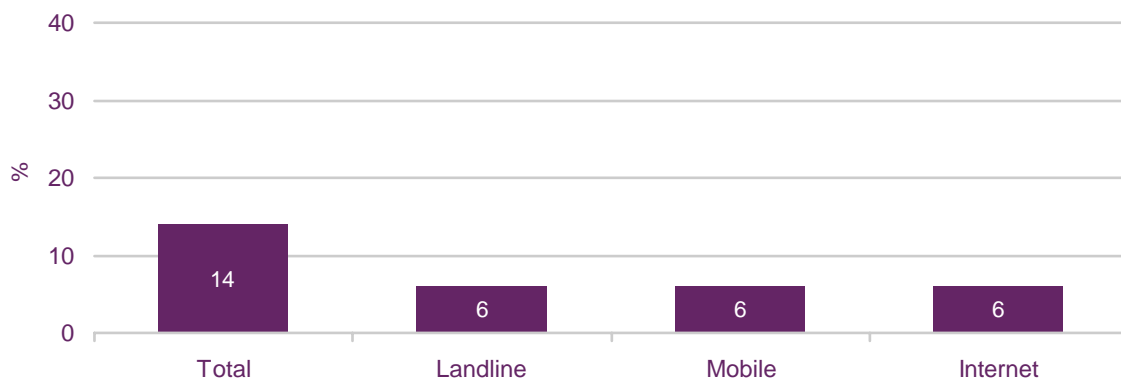
### Section 3

## Levels of dissatisfaction, reasons given and action taken – quantitative snapshot

### 3.1 Levels of dissatisfaction

- Overall, the majority of consumers were satisfied with their telecoms services:
  - 14% had had reason to be dissatisfied across any of the 3 services (landline, internet, mobile) in the past 12 months;
  - 6% had had reason to be dissatisfied with any one specific service.

**Figure 1: Consumers with any reason to be dissatisfied with their telecommunications providers**



Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006 (n=2,167)

- This attitude was largely consistent across different demographic groups, although:
  - the 25-34 age group contained the largest number of people who had reason to be dissatisfied;
  - older age groups (55+) had the least number of people who had reason to be dissatisfied;
  - the South East region contained more people who had reason to be dissatisfied than other regions.

### 3.2 Reasons for dissatisfaction

- Problems with billing, contracts and customer service were mentioned by users of all three services.
- The remaining reasons tended to be specific to a particular service:

## Consumer Complaints Review

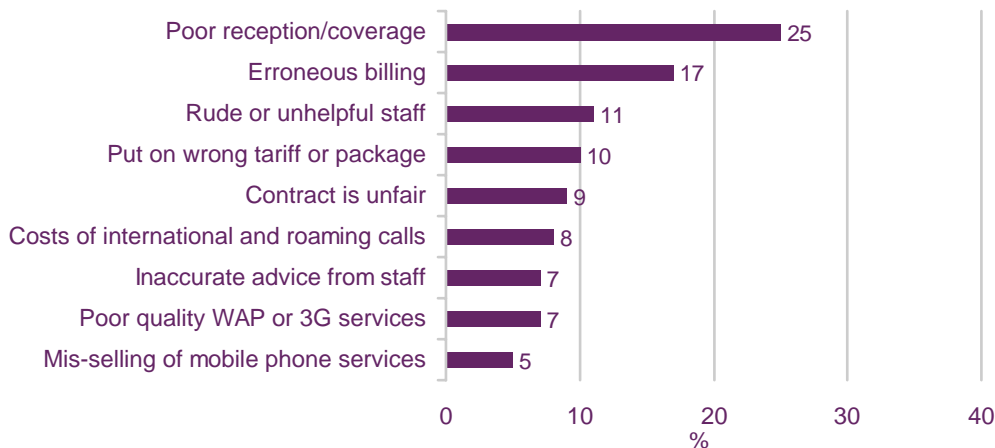
- Poor line quality and customer service were the key concerns about landline providers
- Poor reception was the primary reason for dissatisfaction with mobile operators
- Technical issues, including slow connection speed and quality of service, were the main reasons given for dissatisfaction with internet providers.

**Figure 2: Reasons for dissatisfaction with landline provider**



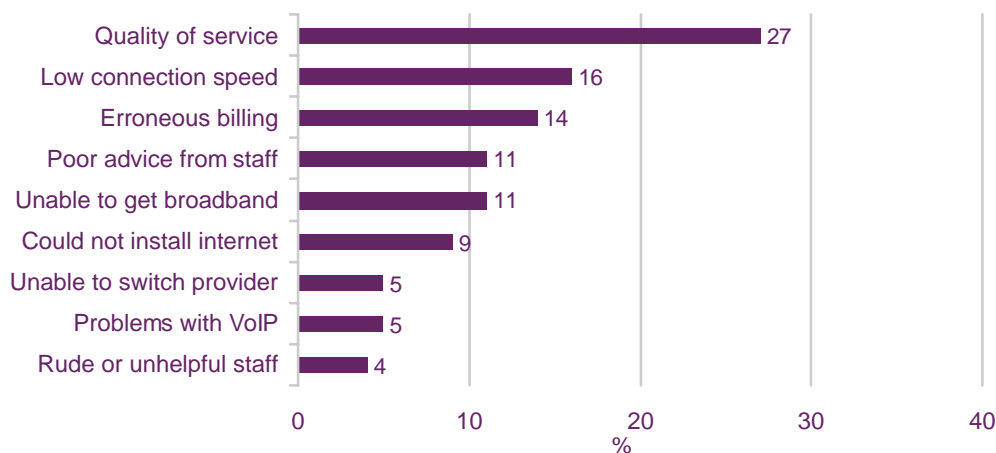
Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all dissatisfied with landline service provider (n=140), chart shows mentions 4% or above

**Figure 3: Reasons for dissatisfaction with mobile provider**



Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all dissatisfied with mobile service provider (n=126), chart shows mentions 4% or above



**Figure 4: Reasons for dissatisfaction with internet provider**

Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all dissatisfied with internet service provider (n=141), chart shows mentions 4% or above

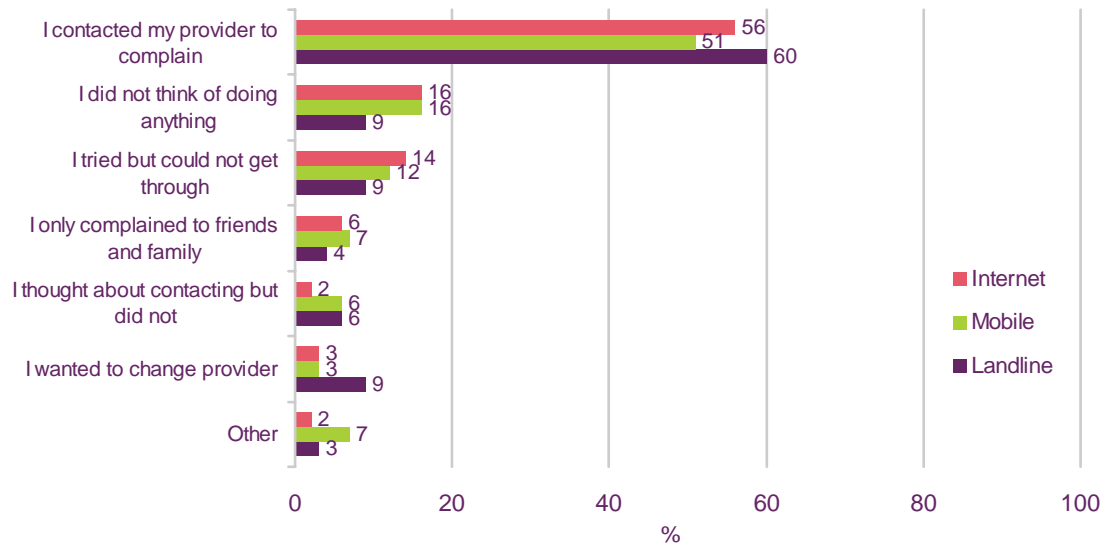
### 3.3 Operators

- Consumers had reasons to be dissatisfied with all the main operators:
  - Landline operators: BT, NTL, TalkTalk, Onetel / Centrica, Telewest
  - Internet providers: BT, AOL, NTL, Tiscali, TalkTalk, Orange Wanadoo
  - Mobile operators: O2, Orange, Vodafone, T-Mobile, 3

### 3.4 Action taken when dissatisfied

- Across the three services, consumers took similar levels of action:
  - 60% of landline users, 56% of internet users and 51% of mobile users had contacted their provider to make a complaint.
  - An additional 9% of landline users, 14% of internet users and 12% of mobile users had tried to make a complaint but could not get through.
- The consumers taking action had a mix of demographic characteristics - no distinct profiles were evident
- A significant number of consumers were dissatisfied with their provider but took no action - 19% of landline users, 28% of mobile users and 24% of internet users.

Figure 5: Actions of consumers who were dissatisfied with their service provider



Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all dissatisfied with service provider (mobile n=126, landline n=140, internet n=141)

## Section 4

# Dissatisfied consumers who took no action – detail

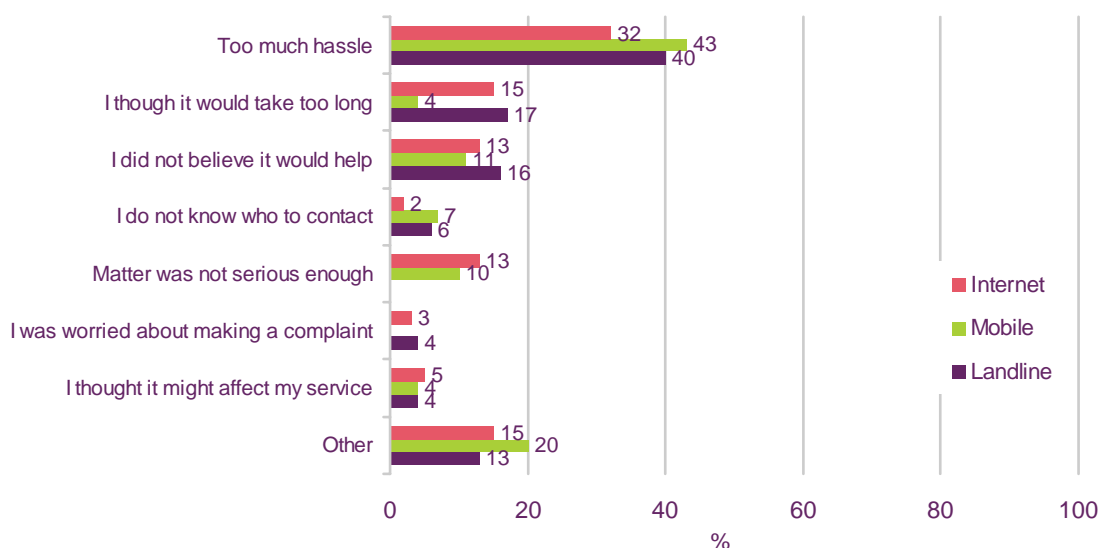
### 4.1 Profiles and characteristics

- The quantitative sample sizes were too small to give any insight into the profiles of the non-complainants, and observations from the telephone interviews did not uncover any characteristics that might distinguish this group from those who took action.
- The findings from the qualitative interviews suggested that the nature of the problem, and a consumer's past experiences, rather than their demographic profile, determined whether or not a consumer contacted their provider. It should be noted, however, that the qualitative sample was very small.

### 4.2 Reasons for not taking any action

- Respondents in the qualitative interviews gave two types of problems where they would not take action:
  - low-impact, ongoing issues such as reception, connection rates, unsolicited texts and billing formats; and
  - high-impact issues that were 'known problems', sometimes shared with others (e.g. the line had gone down in the street, the internet connection was down because the phone line was down, etc).
- In terms of their reason for then not taking any action, the qualitative findings matched the quantitative results very closely – 'too much hassle' was by far the most common response.

**Figure 6: Reasons for not taking any action with service provider**



Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all dissatisfied with service provider but did not complain (mobile n=34, landline n=25, internet n=29)

- The qualitative findings suggested that 'too much hassle' was a value judgement based on the combination of the time needed to talk to someone and the urgency / impact of the problem. Most of the non-complainants had made a complaint in the past and were keen to comment on the amount of time and effort it took to get through to someone
  - *"It's got to be something pretty important to get me to ring them up, calling up customer services can take at least 20 minutes"*
  - *"There's no point in me ringing them up if I know that the line is down in the street"*
  
- A small minority of respondents had also suffered bad experiences with the complaints process in the past and were unwilling to engage with the process again, unless it was absolutely necessary
  - *"I tend to avoid ringing customer services if I can – the last time I had a problem it took so long to resolve and caused such tension for myself and my family that it's not something I want to repeat"*
  - *"I got myself in such a state last time, I don't want to put myself in that position again"*
  
- One respondent had recently come out of such a protracted problem with her operator that she was concerned that she would be seen as a nuisance customer and there might be repercussions with the level of her service if she complained again
  - *"I think I'd prefer to suffer in silence if something happened again soon – I had such a run in last time that I'd prefer to wait until it is really important"*

## Section 5

# Dissatisfied consumers who took action – detail

### 5.1 Introduction

The following examples are intended to illustrate, albeit briefly, the varied nature of complaints and their impact on consumers, as well as to provide some context to the analysis that follows. (For a summary of each complaint see Appendix IV)

#### Example #1: Barbara, 46, home business, disabled, BT landline

Barbara noticed an engineer fiddling with wires outside her house and the phone then was cut off. She thought it was him. She couldn't get out to talk to him because she has severely impaired mobility. She played around with the internet but it was not working so she tried the fixed line which was also dead. She works from home and so needed things repaired quickly.

She was immediately frustrated because she felt they could have warned her there was a problem on the line and she could have made other arrangements. She found the BT number on her bill and rang BT on her mobile three times before getting an answer. Customer service was mystified and could give no explanation – the call centre was clearly based in India and the member of staff didn't really understand the problem. He said they'd call back.

BT never called back so she rang again about three hours later. She spoke to another person who had no idea about her problem - she was flabbergasted at their incompetence. They promised to let her know what the problem was but she didn't believe them and felt they were fobbing her off. She rang the next morning and was told it would take a week to fix. She was furious and had a very lengthy conversation explaining about lost business, etc. At the end of the call, she mentioned compensation (it was not suggested by BT) and she was offered £1 per day for using mobile – she thought this was ridiculous. She had already taken a whole day and a half in time, let alone calls on mobile and having to wait on the line.

She felt vulnerable having no access to emergency calls in her condition. She didn't see any other option but to just wait for a week *“What else could I do?”* She thought she could complain to Ofcom but did not feel that was constructive *“What could they do in a week?”* She felt that the practicality of complaining is a nightmare, such a long process, with lots of time writing and keeping records and all for what? *“If I could make a difference to how BT behaved I would but I'm small and insignificant to them, they don't care. It's the theatre of the absurd, like pissing in the wind”.*

She found BT extremely insensitive to her disability. She was asked to take off the connection box inside to check if it was a fault with her equipment because otherwise she would be charged when the engineer came out. She refused because she was physically unable, BT staff got annoyed when she refused *“I felt because I didn't get down to the box he made me wait a week – probably not true but it felt like that”.*

Throughout the process she felt totally helpless. She spoke to friends and family and they thought she was joking, they were horrified. She must have spoken to 20 people about it. She would love to switch but doesn't know where else to go.

*“The time and effort to complain just isn't worth it – BT is too big and there's nothing you can do”.*

**Example #2: Linda, 41, part time teacher, AOL internet**

The family had moved out of their home into rented accommodation while six months' building work was being done on their house. When they moved into the rented accommodation they had experienced no problems with transferring their AOL broadband internet connection. When the time came to move back into their home, Linda rang AOL to tell them that they would like their internet connection to be restored to its original location – this was the exact same way in which she had sorted it out before.

Having given AOL a week to ten days' notice of the move, the family had no internet connection when they moved back into their home on 19<sup>th</sup> December 05. Linda's expectation was that she would have no problems in sorting it out. She rang AOL and was told that they had tried to connect the internet but that BT had said she did not have a contract with them. She rang BT and was told that she did indeed have a contract with them. It was clearly just a case of a misunderstanding that could be easily resolved – “OK, these things happen” – and she thought everything would be all right.

She rang AOL and explained what BT had told her, and AOL then said that she would be connected within 7 days. As an interim measure, AOL gave her a dial-up connection. She then received an email welcoming her to AOL broadband service, but when she tried to connect she just got an error message. She contacted AOL again and they said, again, that BT said she did not have a contract with them. She contacted BT and they said they had received two ADSL requests from AOL but that they had both been cancelled. She kept trying to call AOL but found it very hard to get through to them – often she would hear a message saying they were experiencing a high level of demand and to call back later.

Eventually she realised it was easier to get through in the morning so she would try early in the day, at the time when the helpline opened. She spoke to AOL on five or six occasions at this stage, and they wouldn't accept what BT had said to her and they would say that she was indeed connected to broadband. She felt as though she was bashing her head against a brick wall. She told them that she would like to cancel her contract to enable her to go with another provider but they said that she couldn't, that she was locked into a 12 month contract and had no choice but to stay with them. She eventually decided to write them a letter saying that under the Goods and Services Act they had no right to prevent her terminating her contract as they had not fulfilled their side of the deal.

Soon after she sent the letter her broadband was connected and everything has been fine since. She had definitely intended to switch provider, but as soon as her connection was restored she became complacent and didn't bother to do anything about it. She found AOL to be very helpful at first but sometimes she would get cut off while they were in the process of transferring her call, and she “definitely felt fobbed off all the time”.

*“I felt they were being completely unhelpful and that I was speaking to people who had no authority or power to help me. They had standard answers to my questions and they wouldn't believe what I said”.*

Over the course of her complaint, her frustration increased and increased until “I became a ranting lunatic”. All in all, she spent about 2 – 3 hours on the phone to AOL and she very much begrudged the fact that she was paying for it. She would have liked AOL to have apologised to her, not least because it would have calmed her down. She would have liked to have been assured that AOL were doing everything they could to sort the problem out, and she would have liked them to keep in touch with her to inform her of any developments – to take the initiative. She considers AOL's customer service policy to be distinctly lacking. It was the inconvenience that was the problem more than anything, and the fact that she had a very grumpy son who was unable to play games online.

**Example #3: Sarah, 23, part-time shop assistant, low income, T-Mobile**

Sarah has had a contract with T-Mobile for five years, has never missed a payment and has spent on average £100 a month with them.

She moved house and redirected all her mail, bills, etc to her new address. The new address turned out to be a problem because the postcode was not recognised on the national database, apparently because it was a new build. It was not a problem for receiving post as she lived next to the post office, but it made it difficult when purchasing products over the internet because her address could not be verified with her bank details.

She notified her bank of her new address and also changed the type of bank account to a solo account, which didn't allow her an overdraft. All her direct debits had been transferred without a problem and continued as usual.

Three months after the changes, her phone suddenly didn't work; she could receive calls only. She called T-Mobile and found that they no longer could collect money from her bank. She explained that it must be related to the new bank account, gave them the new details but they were unable to verify them due to the postcode not being valid. They then told her, in a somewhat forceful manner, that she was under contract and she needed to ensure that her monthly payments were being made.

She was upset as she had the money in her bank account and didn't wish to be seen as dishonest. She then asked her bank to write to T-Mobile to verify her details, but although she called them regularly they denied that they had received any letter. At this stage she just wanted to get out of the contract and start all over again, but T Mobile would not allow her to do this.

To meet her contract she had to pay cash via the bank into a T-Mobile account every month. The trouble with this was that it took 10 working days to go through so every month she was cut off until the money was received into her T-Mobile account. In effect, she was paying for a month's use and was only able to use the phone for 2 weeks.

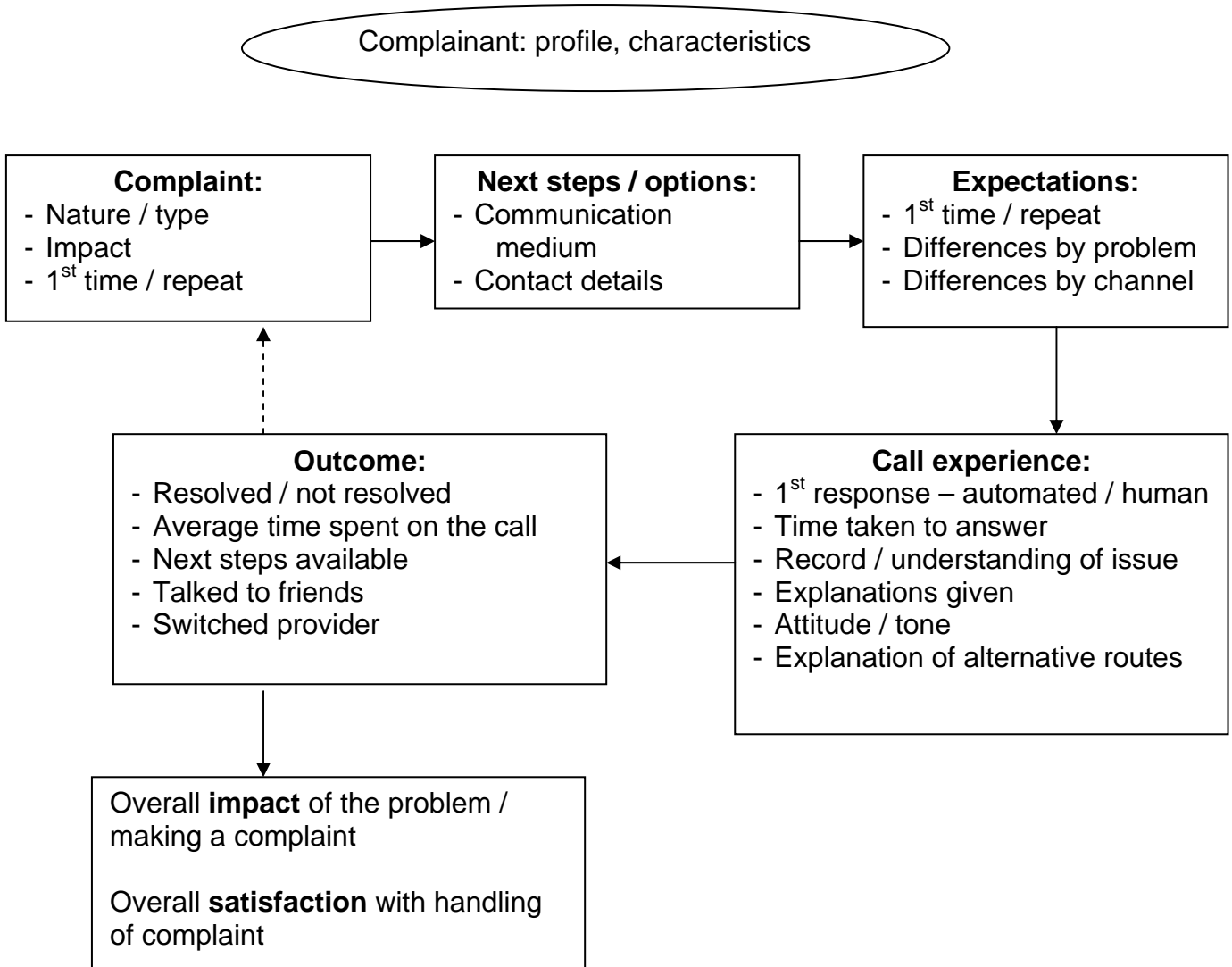
She has rung twice a week for six months and has received no assistance from anyone at T-Mobile. All she has been told is that she has to see her contract out. She used to use her phone all the time but now she barely uses it at all.

*“Every time I look at it I feel really upset, it's been such a nightmare and I'm still in it. I feel really cheated, I've been a loyal customer for 5 years, never been late with payments and they are keeping me in a contract when they know I can't use the phone for half the month. I feel totally helpless.”*

She has now given up ringing them as it just makes her depressed and upset. She's told all her friends about it and they think it is terrible. She still makes the monthly payments and is waiting for the contract to expire. She hoped that T-Mobile would see that it is not her fault and alternative arrangements could be made. She will never go back to T-Mobile once the contract is up. She has never been told of other organisations she could contact to assist her with her situation. She thought about the CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) but decided that if her bank could not do anything then the CAB would be unlikely to help.

### 5.2 The stages of making a complaint

- The process of making a complaint tended to involve the following elements and usually required significant effort, both practically and emotionally . . .



### 5.3 Profiles / characteristics of complainants

- The quantitative data did not indicate any profiles or characteristics that were particular to consumers who were dissatisfied and took action. Similarly, within the qualitative sample, there was a wide range of demographic profiles (ages, gender, working status, lifestage) and, as recruited, representation of low income, disabled and older people (65+).



## 5.4 Operators involved

- All the main operators were mentioned in the qualitative interviews, as well as a few that were less well known
  - Mobile: Orange (3), Vodafone (2), O2 (3), T-Mobile (2), '3' (2), Cellular Zone (1), Tulip (1)
  - Landline: BT (6), NTL (5), TalkTalk (3), Onetel (1), Telewest (2), Caudwell (1), Orb Communications (1)
  - Internet: BT (5), AOL (3), NTL / Telewest (2), Orange / Wanadoo (2), Tiscali (1), TalkTalk (1) Globalnet (1)

## 5.5 Reasons for dissatisfaction

- The reasons for dissatisfaction among consumers who took action were similar to those given in the quantitative data.
- Reasons for dissatisfaction with mobile operators included:
 

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unsolicited texts</li> <li>– Erroneous upgrade / billing</li> <li>– End of contract / erroneous billing</li> <li>– Billing format problem / unhelpful customer service</li> <li>– Non-competitive upgrade / rude staff</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Disconnection</li> <li>– Reception</li> <li>– Contract mis-selling</li> <li>– Disconnection due to payment issues</li> </ul> |
|--|---|
- Issues with fixed-line operators included installation problems, line disconnection, switching supplier and consequent billing problems, line quality and confusion over responsibility with internet providers
- Issues with ISPs were largely related to installation, connection speeds, billing / contractual problems and confusion over responsibilities with the fixed-line provider.
- However, the qualitative interviews revealed the wide variety and often multifaceted nature of many of the complaints. For many of these complainants, what began as a single isolated problem became more complex as a consequence of the way the original problem had been managed
  - *“I ended up having to deal with three different debt collection agencies all because of one simple mistake with my bill” (Jim, 32, estate agent)*
- Across all three services, the majority of complaints were one-off rather than repeat problems, and were first-time issues for most consumers. Repeat problems were less common and were generally concerned with reception (mobiles), billing (landlines) and poor connection rates (internet).
- Installation time, disconnection and reconnection time had the greatest initial impact on consumers, particular for those relying on their service for work purposes, and those with impaired mobility.
  - *“All my work is done using the internet, without it, it’s very difficult to operate” (Catherine, 57, church minister)*
  - *“It was a source of great anxiety when the line went down – with my disability I need access to the emergency services” (Barbara, 46, disabled)*

- *“As a full-time carer, it’s critical to have my mobile working so my patients can contact me wherever I am” (Sarah, carer, 58)*
- Contracts and billing issues were initially seen as less critical by all except low-income consumers
  - *“If they’ve overcharged us, I get straight onto it otherwise they’ll cut you off if you don’t pay, you’ll then get charged for reconnection and you’re into a nightmare of trying to get them to correct their mistakes” (Carol, 33, low income)*
- And landline and internet complainants shared some common ground, such as engineers not showing up at the arranged time and the passing of responsibility between service providers for internet connection problems.
  - *“I had to take time off work three times to wait for the engineer and all three times they didn’t show up – I was so incensed I didn’t even think of asking for compensation” (Anne, 63, part-time)*
  - *“I’ve been passed from AOL to BT back to AOL, in the end I had to send a letter and only then did the matter get resolved” (Linda, 41, part-time teacher)*

## 5.6 Next steps

- Having decided to take action, one complainant wrote a letter; all the others phoned their providers’ customer service number.
- Landline customers tended to look for the number on the bill and mobile customers were often familiar with the short number they could use from their mobile. Customer service numbers for internet providers were felt to be much more difficult to locate – some internet complainants had to try several numbers before getting through to the correct service
  - *“BT don’t make it easy for you to call them, it took me half an hour to find the right number, I went through four different numbers and many departments before getting through to someone who could help.” (Mark, 20, student)*

## 5.7 Expectations before taking action

- In general, most complainants thought that their problem was commonplace and would have been dealt with by customer services before. They therefore expected staff to understand the problem and to resolve the issue relatively easily. If the problem could not be solved at the first instance, then the provider was expected to log the call details, reassure the customer that they would find a solution and call the back when convenient. This expectation was consistent across the three services.
  - *“It’s a billing problem, how difficult can it be to solve it there and then – they must get hundreds of calls about this” (Richard, 23, finance)*
  - *“I expect them to be courteous, knowledgeable and helpful – if they can’t solve the problem then they should find someone who can and ring us back” (Carol, 33, housewife)*
  - *“Customer service is meant to be just that – making us feel that they’re working hard for our interests, we are after all paying them a monthly subscription fee” (Emma, 25, nurse)*

- Expectations differed according to the nature of the problem. Contractual and billing issues were expected to be resolved at the first call. Installation and connection issues were understood to take longer because of the likely need for an engineer's visit. Expectations in such cases were for 3-4 days waiting period and to have an agreed time when the engineer would visit.
  - *"I was told it would take a month to connect me to Orange / Wanadoo broadband, that's completely unacceptable when I know it's available in this area" (Charles, 52, accountant)*
- Overall, at the first stage of entering the complaint process, the majority of consumers appeared to be calm and accepted that problems and mistakes can occur. As a result consumers felt their problems would be solved easily. It was a very different story, however, when consumers were revisiting the process for the second or third time.

### 5.8 Call experience: getting through

- For the majority, the first experience of all providers' customer services was an automated service, asking them to choose an option that best suited their problem. This was the first source of annoyance for several complainants because there was not an option that accurately described their problem
  - *"Even though you think your problem is nothing special, there never seems to be an option for it so you have to join the huge queue at the end of other enquiries." (Tim, 25, salesman)*
- Then consumers had to endure a wait to get through. The average waiting time was given at between 8-10 minutes, which most consumers could tolerate on the first call but that became increasingly frustrating if more calls had to be made. This waiting time was the reason for one complainant dropping out of the process
  - *"I just couldn't sit on the phone any longer so I've given up. My friends had the same problem and also gave up" (Sarah, 36, carer, low income)*
- Several customers also commented that their customer helpline number was not free
  - *"We are being charged for making a complaint. It's a disgrace and Ofcom should deal with it" (Julie, 39, part time)*
  - *"It's an outrage that we should have to pay to make a complaint, it's has become profitable for companies to provide bad service" (Christina, 52, housewife).*

### 5.9 Experiences of making a complaint

- Complainants felt that the quality of response from their provider varied considerably, ranging from informed and helpful to useless and sometimes rude
  - *"It is hit and miss whether you speak to someone useful or not – one or two have been extremely courteous and helpful, but they are in the minority. You can see tramlines on the carpet where I've been pacing up and down on the telephone." (Phil, 58, consultant)*
- The consensus among complainants was that most call centre workers did not have sufficient knowledge to deal with the majority of problems and appeared to be working within very tight parameters, without the flexibility or authority to resolve many of the problems.

- All operators were considered to be similarly inconsistent in the quality of their customer service response
  - *“I was overcharged by TalkTalk, rang customer services, got through quickly and they sorted out the problem there and then. The service was excellent”*
  - *“BT have a call centre in India and aside from having difficulty understanding what they say, they seemed to be working from a script, which doesn’t really help you if your problem is not on the script”*
  - *“To get anything done, you need to get to a higher level otherwise you’ll go round in circles”*
- Across the three services, the following issues were consistently mentioned as being a regular part of the customer service experience . . .
  - Talking to someone who can’t help after waiting several minutes to get through
  - Then speaking to a different person and having to explain the problem all over again because no records have been kept
  - Being ‘fobbed’ off with explanations that are not relevant to the problem
  - Promises to call back are not kept
  - Having to call up because of the operator’s mistake and receiving no acknowledgement of their error
  - Being made to feel that they are making a fuss and the mistake is not the provider’s fault
  - Being made to feel that there is a need to prove the error was the provider’s
  - Having to get angry to get anything done
  - Having to threaten to switch provider in order to speak to someone who can provide the proper attention
- There were also practices particular to different services that were felt to be used inappropriately. For example, consumers would be asked by landline operators to check the connection box and the line with a spare phone otherwise they could be charged for the call out if it was their equipment that was faulty. While this advice was considered sensible, it was the tone and manner in which it was given that consumers felt was inappropriate
  - *“I’d already checked the line with a spare phone but they were so insistent that they made me think it was my fault and I went and bought another one to make sure but it was the line all the time” (Cathy, 28, low income)*
- Internet providers used similar routine checks to understand the nature of the problem. Again, customers understood the need for such checks but objected to the way they were enforced by support staff
  - *“They are just so patronising and refuse to accept that you have already done the checks, even though you’ve had to speak to them several times before” (Nicola, 32, security guard)*

- *“They treat you like idiots, and I don’t think it’s necessary particularly when it turns out that it’s a fault at their end.” (Christina, 52, housewife)*
- Minority groups, such as people with disabilities, low income and older age groups, did not appear to encounter any additional difficulties when making a complaint. The only criticism comment from a few of these complainants was a lack of sensitivity towards their situation
  - *“I pay the bill in cash every month, and two months ago I missed one payment because I went on holiday for 3 weeks. I’ve never missed a payment before and now I’m battling with them to avoid paying a penalty charge. How could I pay the bill if I didn’t know how much it was?” (Cathy, 28, low income)*
  - *“I’d said to BT that my mobility was severely impaired and I was not able to check the box. They were insistent and frankly rude when I refused” (Jane, 37, disabled)*
- Information about the alternatives open to consumers if they were not happy with the service was not offered to any of the respondents
  - *“I just thought of Oftel and then found out that they are now called Ofcom. It took me ages to find their number on their website, it looks like they too are doing their best to make sure people don’t call”. (Ian, 45, businessman)*
- Similarly, no-one was told about the complaints code of practice nor was there any mention of organisations that might be able to help such as ADR companies
  - *“I was desperate to find some other organisation that could tell me what my rights were as I felt so frustrated and helpless, but I didn’t get anything out of Caudwell” (Jim, 32, estate agent)*
- One complainant asked for advice on how to make a formal complaint. He was advised not to do so because “the forms are very long and wrapped up in legalese so it would require the expense of a solicitor or would take so long to decipher that it wouldn’t be worth it”.
- Several complainants also remarked that they had to enquire about compensation themselves rather than it being offered as a matter of courtesy
  - *“When I asked about compensation they were not exactly forthcoming, the best they could offer was to reimburse the line rental for the days on which there had been no service. This amounted to £8.40 for the three weeks we were without telephones, compared to the thousands of pounds we lost in business. It was a joke.” (Ian, 45, businessman)*

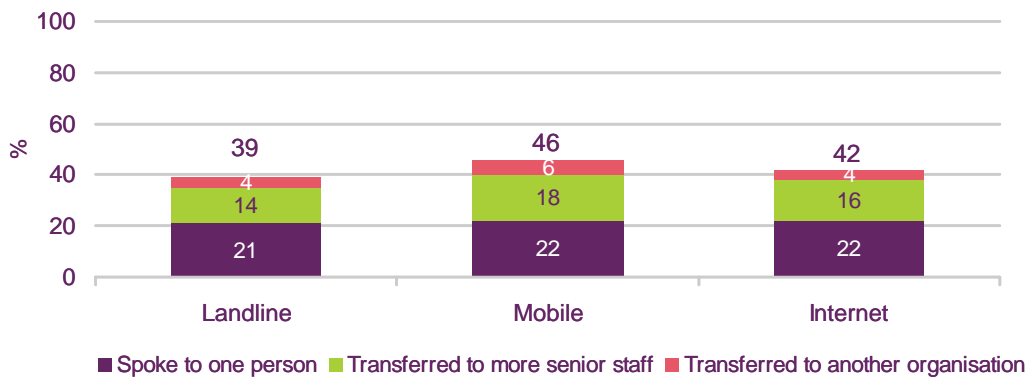
## 5.10 Outcomes of complaints made

### 5.10.1 Complaints resolved

- The quantitative data was broadly in keeping with the qualitative findings in terms of the percentage of complaints resolved
  - In the quantitative surveys, an average of 42% of complaints were found to have been resolved (landline 38%, internet 42%, mobile 46%) and in the qualitative findings 27 out of 50 (54%) complaints were resolved.

- However, there was differences in terms of the stage reached and time taken to resolve the complaint, though given the bias in the qualitative sample, this was perhaps not surprising
  - The quantitative data showed that an average of 22% had their complaint resolved by the first person they spoke to and an average of 16% had their complaint resolved when transferred to more senior staff
  - There was just a single occasion when the complaint was resolved at the first call in the qualitative interviews and only another two occasions when it was resolved upon being transferred to more senior staff.

**Figure 7: Stage at which complaint resolved**



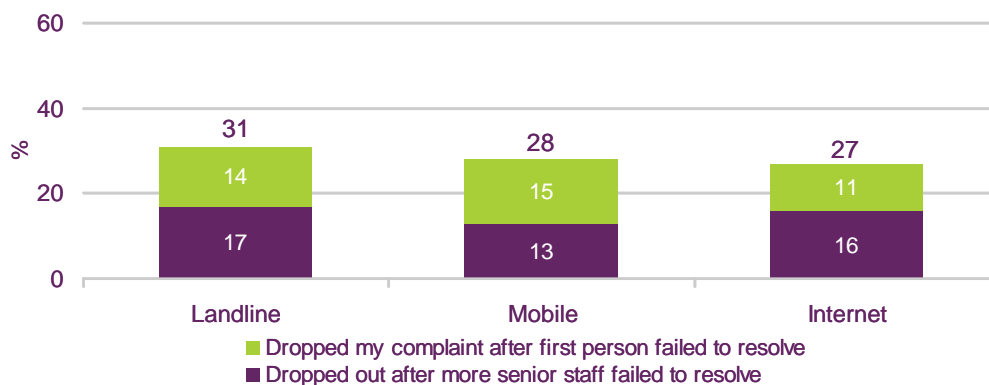
Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all made a complaint to service provider (mobile n=63, landline n=84, internet n=84)

- The time taken to resolve complaints in the qualitative interviews averages at over a month across the three services, with a resolution most likely to take either a week or 2 months. This would generally involve having to speak to more than 5 people.
  - Mobile operators appeared to resolve the most complaints, 11 out of 15, in an average time of two months (but most commonly taking 1 week)
  - Landline operators resolved 11 out of 20 complaints, in an average time of about 1 month
  - Internet providers resolved 6 out of 15, in an average time of over a month.
- The average amount of time spent on the telephone to resolve a complaint in the qualitative interviews was approximately 3 hours, with an average call length of approximately 20 minutes from dialling. This figure was largely consistent for each of the different services.
- Out of 27 complainants whose complaint had been resolved, six had switched provider or said they would do so at the end of their contract, and two would switch if they could find a better supplier.

### 5.10.2 Complainants who dropped out

- The quantitative data was also similar to the qualitative findings in terms of the percentage of complainants who dropped out of the process
  - In the quantitative surveys an average of 29% of complaints had dropped out of the complaint process (landline 31%, internet 27%, mobile 28%), and in the qualitative findings 15 out of 50 (30%) had dropped out.
- However, there were fewer similarities between the two sets of findings in terms of the stage reached and the time taken before dropping out
  - The omnibus data shows that, on average, 13% dropped out after the first person they spoke to failed to resolve the complaint, and an average of 15% dropped out after senior staff failed to resolve the complaint
  - Three participants in the qualitative interviews said they had dropped out after the first person they spoke to failed to resolve the complaint.
  - The difference in the two data sets implies that the qualitative sample was populated by people who had continued with their complaint and had not dropped out early in the process.

**Figure 8: Complainants who dropped out of the complaints process**



Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all made a complaint to service provider (mobile n=63, landline n=84, internet n=84)

- The process continued long after the initial call for the majority who dropped out in the qualitative interviews. Across the 3 services, the average length of time engaged in the complaint process before dropping out was approximately 3 months.
  - Mobile operators had the least number of drop outs – just 1 after a period of 6 months
  - Landline operators had the greatest number of drop outs – eight out of a total 20 after an average of over three months
  - Six dropped out of the process with their internet provider – the average length of time engaged in the complaint process was over a month.
  - Across the services, the average length of time on the telephone was just under three hours, with an average call length of 20 minutes.

- Reasons given in the qualitative interviews for dropping out of the process were broadly similar across the 3 services:
  - Having suffered continual problems (e.g. poor line quality, connection or billing problems) the complainant switched supplier

*“I decided that rather than fight BT, I’d just switch supplier as it would save me a lot of time and energy” (Tim, 46, manager)*
  - The complainant let it go because no solution to the problem was offered by the provider and the process was taking up too much time. Among this group was a lady with a hearing impairment

*“There was this buzzing on the line which made it very difficult for me to hear what BT was saying. They said the line had tested fine, but the problem was still there. I didn’t want to make a fuss or use my deafness as an excuse, so I thought I’d leave it. What else could I do?”*
  - Unable to get through to speak to someone who could help. This complainant was partially sighted and elderly and found the automated system difficult to navigate
  - No solution to the problem was offered by the provider but the problem was considered to be a one-off and not worth pursuing
  - The problem was solved by a friend
  - The complainant felt that continuing the complaint with another organisation was too much exposure. This was an elderly man who called Otelo having found the number on the back of a bill. He was instructed to put his complaint in writing but as he did not feel able to do so, he was advised by Otelo to go to the CAB. At this point, he dropped out.

*“I’m not the sort of person to make a big fuss, I prefer things to be quiet and I felt too exposed going to the CAB” (Michael, 67, retired)*
- Of the 15 complainants who dropped out, 10 switched supplier, 2 would have switched at the end of their contract and 2 considered switching.

### 5.10.3 Ongoing complaints

- Across the three services, there were six ongoing complaints
- The lifetime of ongoing complaints ranged from 3-9 months, with an average time of 7 hours already spent on the telephone
- The problems were either related to billing or switching supplier and consequent connection problems.
- Three of those with ongoing complaints were waiting for the end of the contract and would never use the provider again. Two were considering switching and one was in the process of trying to switch
  - *“I’m just hanging on for the end of the contract when I can put this all behind me and start again. It’s still a really unpleasant experience.” (Sarah, 23, low income)*

### 5.10.4 Complaints that included other organisations

- The omnibus data showed a tiny minority who were transferred to another organisation and had their complaint resolved (4-6%).



- There was no mention of a referral to another organisation from any of the operators in the qualitative feedback. Just one complainant contacted Ofcom on his own initiative and he was referred back to his operator.

### 5.11 Impact of the experience of making a complaint

- The impact of making a complaint had both practical and emotional implications for complainants.
- Practical implications included time spent dealing with the complaint, general inconvenience and costs incurred.
- Costs incurred included telephone calls, replacement equipment and lost revenue
  - The five respondents whose fixed line had interference or had been disconnected reported incurring costs by having to use their mobile phone to make their complaint. Four out of the five reported incurring costs of approximately £3-4, with one claiming costs of £20.
  - One respondent incurred costs of £20 due to purchasing a new telephone which she discovered was not necessary.
  - Two businesses reported loss of earnings – one in the region of £500, and the other around £3-4,000 pounds. Both were offered compensation for the days their line was down, amounting to 70p and £8.40 respectively.
- The emotional effects combined, in varying degrees, stress, anxiety, frustration and anger. Secondary effects included family tension, a general sense of not coping and health problems.
- We combined these effects to produce a qualitative measure of the emotional impact of making a complaint. The ways in which the complaints were handled had an overall negative impact on the vast majority of complainants in the qualitative sample.
- Across the interviews, the experience of making a complaint had:
  - a strong negative impact on 21 complainants, including five at a extreme level;
  - a medium negative impact on 24 complainants;
  - a small negative impact on four complainants; and
  - a single complainant for whom the outcome was satisfactory.
- All three services were broadly similar to each other in terms of their overall impact
 

*“I don’t think I’ll ever take out a contract again – the whole experience was so awful I wouldn’t want to risk going through that again” (Karen, 54, housewife)*

*“It’s a master and slave relationship and there’s nothing you can do. The theatre of the absurd” (Barbara, 46, business owner, disabled)*
- Of the 50 interviewees, over three-quarters said they had spoken to friends and family about their complaint, and in some cases, the subject had become so all-consuming that it had been banned as a topic of conversation:
 

*“We had to stop the family from talking about it because we felt ourselves getting angry at the mere mention of it – our friends thought we were so boring” (Phil, 52, consultant)*

### 5.12 Level of satisfaction with complaint handling

- The quantitative results presented a more positive picture than the qualitative findings in terms of levels of satisfaction with complaint handling
  - Mobile operators were highest – 39% of complainants were satisfied, compared with 52% unsatisfied
  - 28% of internet users were satisfied, with 65% unsatisfied
  - 21% of landline users were satisfied, with 70% unsatisfied (48% very unsatisfied)
- Levels of satisfaction from the interviews were generally very low. Just one complainant was satisfied with how her complaint had been handled, the rest said they were either fairly unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.
- As with previous differences between the two data sets, it would appear that the majority of respondents in the qualitative sample had volunteered to take further part in the research because they had been dissatisfied with how their complaint had been handled.

*“How can I be satisfied with a process that takes me at least 20 minutes to get through, the person at the other end is unable to help and I have to call them back to remind them to do what they promised to do in the first place” (Tim, 25, sales)*

**Figure 9: Level of satisfaction with how complaint was handled**



Source: ICM survey on behalf of Futuresight between July-Aug 2006, all made a complaint to service provider (mobile n=63, landline n=84, internet n=84)

### 5.13 Recommendations for improvements to services

- Complainants were very consistent in terms of their recommendations for handling complaints.
- Essentially, they proposed what they considered to be an appropriate level of service and which was the reverse of the situation they typically associated with call centres. Recommendations included:
  - Responding to queries promptly
  - Demonstrating an understanding of the problem by offering more than a basic response
  - Apologising where appropriate rather than implying that the customer was somehow at fault
  - Assuring the customer that they were doing everything they could
  - Giving honest answers as opposed to fobbing customers off with excuses
  - Communicating progress
  - Taking the initiative
  - Offering appropriate compensation rather than an amount that does not in any way reflect the costs incurred or the inconvenience caused
  - Complying with agreed times and dates
  - Making follow-up calls after the problem is resolved, to demonstrate an appropriate level of customer care

*“It’s amazing really that we have to put up with such bad service – I suppose it’s the downside of so little competition in the market” (Christina, 52, housewife)*

## Appendix

### APPENDIX I

|                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <h1>Survey questions</h1> |                             |
| <b>Client</b>             | Futuresight                 |
| <b>Survey Name</b>        | Telecoms Complaints         |
| <b>Dates</b>              | 26-27 <sup>th</sup> July'06 |
| <b>Sample</b>             | 1000 UK adults (16+)        |

**Q1 Have you yourself had any reason to be dissatisfied with the goods and/or services from your landline phone, mobile phone and/or internet supplier in the last 12 months? READ OUT - MULTICODE**

1. Mobile provider
2. Landline provider
3. Internet or broadband provider
4. None of these (Do not read out) – **END SECTION**

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO SAY MOBILE AT Q1**

**Q2 Thinking about a recent occasion when you were dissatisfied with your mobile phone which company was your service provider at the time?**

**PROMPT TO PRECODES (SINGLE CODE)**

1. Orange
2. Tmobile (formerly One2One)
3. Vodafone
4. O2 (formerly BTCellnet)
5. 3
6. Onetel
7. Virgin
8. Tesco
9. Singlepoint
10. BT Mobile
11. Cellular Operations
12. Carphone Warehouse (Fresh Telecom)
13. Project Telecom
14. Value Telecom
15. Other (specify)
16. Don't know (do not read out)

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO SAY MOBILE AT Q1**

**Q3 What was the main cause of your dissatisfaction with this particular mobile phone provider?**

**PROMPT TO PRECODES - MULTI-Code**

1. Put on the wrong tariff or package
2. Phone bill is wrong / over-charging
3. Inclusive or "free" calls not properly credited
4. Costs of international and roaming calls
5. Charged for cancelled services
6. Pre-pay credit lost or not credited to card
7. Unexplained premium rate numbers on bill
8. Charging for ringtones subscription or text messages
9. Text or voice mails being delivered late
10. Poor quality WAP or 3G services
11. Mis-selling of mobile phone services
12. Unable to keep phone number when switching supplier
13. Scam text messages
14. Abusive or threatening calls or text messages
15. Poor reception/coverage

16. Problems with call not being connected or disconnected during call
17. Poor or inaccurate advice from staff
18. Rude or unhelpful service staff
19. Problem with handset
20. Phone contract is unfair
21. Other (specify)
22. Don't Know

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO SAY LANDLINE AT Q1**

**Q4 Thinking now about a recent occasion when you were dissatisfied with your landline phone which company was your service provider at the time?**

**PROMPT TO PRECODES – SINGLE CODE**

1. Alpha Telecom
2. Argos Telecom
3. British Gas
4. BT
5. Bulldog
6. Equitalk
7. Euphony
8. First Telecom
9. Gotalk
10. Home Choice
11. Just Talk
12. Kingston Communications
13. Npower
14. NTL
15. One.tel/Centrica
16. Pipex Homecall/ Homecall
17. Planet TalkSky Talk
18. Post Office
19. Quip
20. Sainsburys
21. Sky Talk
22. Spacetel
23. Superline
24. Swiftcall
25. Talk (Pathfinder Telecom)
26. Talk More
27. TalkTalk / Carphone Warehouse
28. Telco Global
29. Tele2
30. Telecom Plus
31. Telewest
32. Tesco Home Phone / Tesco Telecom
33. Tiscali
34. Toucan
35. Vartec
36. Other (specify)
37. DK

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO SAY LANDLINE AT Q1**

**Q5 What was the main cause of your dissatisfaction with this particular landline telephone provider?**

**PROMPT TO PRECODES – MULTI-CODE**

1. Put on wrong tariff or package
2. Phone bill is wrong/over-charging
3. Inclusive or "free" calls not properly credited
4. Unexplained premium rate numbers of bill
5. Charged for a cancelled service
6. Switched company without permission or received bill from wrong company
7. Poor line quality

## Consumer Complaints Review

8. Time taken to repair a fault
9. Time taken to install a line
10. Damage to property during a repair
11. Appointment to install or repair equipment missed
12. Unsolicited sales and marketing calls or faxes
13. Abusive or threatening calls
14. Silent calls
15. Rude or unhelpful customer service
16. Poor or inaccurate advice from staff
17. Time taken to speak to someone in customer service
18. Quality of customer service - other
19. Phone contract is unfair
20. Other (specify)
21. Don't know

### **ASK ALL THOSE WHO SAY INTERNET AT Q1**

**Q6 Thinking now about a recent occasion when you were dissatisfied with your internet which company was your ISP, internet or broadband service provider at the time?**

#### **PROMPT TO PRECODES – SINGLE CODE**

1. Ace Internet
2. AOL
3. BT
4. BT Broadband
5. BT Yahoo! Broadband/BT Openworld
6. Bulldog
7. Cable & Wireless
8. Compuserve
9. Demon
10. Eclipse Internet
11. Freedom2Surf
12. FreeUK
13. GioInternet
14. IC24
15. Netscape
16. Nildram
17. NTL
18. Onetel
19. Orange Wanadoo
20. Pipex
21. Plusnet
22. Sky Broadband
23. Supanet
24. TalkTalk (Carphone Warehouse)
25. Telewest Blueyonder
26. Tesconet
27. Tiscali / Lineone / Tiny online
28. Virgin.net
29. Wanadoo (formerly Freeserve)
30. VNL
31. Yahoo
32. Zen Internet
33. Zoom
34. Other (specify)
35. DK

### **ASK ALL THOSE WHO SAY INTERNET OR BROADBAND AT Q1**

**Q7 What was the cause of your dissatisfaction with this particular ISP, internet or broadband service provider?**

#### **PROMPT TO PRECODES – MULTI-CODE**

1. Charged for cancelled service
2. Overcharged or inaccurate bill from service provider

3. Unexplained premium rate call on bill
4. Could not install internet service properly
5. Problems with Voice over internet/broadband (VOIP)
6. Unable to get broadband or switch supplier as there is tag/marker/presence/ISP on line
7. Unable to get broadband - other
8. Unable to switch internet service provider - other
9. Connection speed too low
10. Account suspended
11. Caps on usage (hours of use or amount downloaded).
12. Quality of service - other
13. Unwanted emails/spam
14. Offensive internet content
15. Rude or unhelpful sales staff
16. Poor or inaccurate advice from staff
17. Contract is unfair
18. Other (specify)
19. DK

**ASK Q8 FOR EACH TELECOMS ITEM DISSATISFIED WITH AT Q1**

**Q8 Thinking back to when you were dissatisfied about your [INSERT ANSWER FROM Q1] what did you think of doing next?**

**READ OUT – SINGLE CODE**

1. I did not think of doing anything
2. I thought about contacting my service provider but did not
3. I **only** complained to my friends and family
4. I tried to contact my service provider to make a complaint but was unable to get through.
5. I contacted my service provider to make a complaint
6. Do not read out: Other (Specify)

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO CODE 1, 2 and 3 AT Q8**

**Q9 What was the main reason why you did not take any action and make a complaint to the company?**

**PROMPT TO PRECODES – SINGLE CODE**

1. Too much hassle/inconvenience
2. I did not know who to ring / speak to
3. I thought the process would take too long
4. I did not believe it would help/make any difference
5. The matter was not serious enough
6. I was worried about making a complaint
7. I thought it might affect my service
8. Other (specify)
9. Don't Know

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO CODE 5 AT Q8**

**Q10 Thinking about the first call you made to your service provider regarding the complaint, which of the following most closely describes the series of events that followed... READ OUT – SINGLE-CODE**

1. The first person I spoke to at my supplier resolved my complaint.
2. I dropped my complaint after the first person I spoke to at my supplier failed to resolve it.
3. I was transferred to more senior staff at my supplier who resolved my complaint.
4. I dropped my complaint after being transferred to more senior staff at my supplier who did not resolve my complaint.
5. My supplier transferred me to another organisation who resolved my complaint
6. My supplier offered to transfer me to another organisation who could resolve my complaint but I declined.
7. My supplier transferred me to another organisation who did not resolve my complaint.

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO CODE 5 AT Q8**

**Q11 How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the way your complaint was handled?**

**SINGLE CODE**

1. Very Dissatisfied
2. Fairly Dissatisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Fairly Satisfied
5. Very Satisfied
6. Don't know (Do not read out)

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO CODE 1, 2 or 3 AT Q8 FOR ANY TELECOMS ITEM.**

**Q12. Would you be happy to be re-contacted by another research company who are working with Ofcom, the telecommunications regulator to discuss your dissatisfaction in further detail?**

**ASK ALL THOSE WHO CODE 4 or 5 AT Q8 FOR ANY TELECOMS ITEM.**

**Q13. Would you be happy to be re-contacted by another research company who are working with Ofcom, the telecommunications regulator to discuss your dissatisfaction in further detail?**

1. Yes
2. No



**APPENDIX II** **Screener for those who took action** 

Hello, am I speaking to / please could I speak to <NAME>?

If not in/available, ask when would be a good time to get hold of them and record in spreadsheet.

Good morning/afternoon/evening, <NAME>.

My name is Rachel and I'm calling you on behalf of Ofcom, who regulate the UK communications industries.

I believe you recently took part in a telephone survey, and were asked questions about whether you had been dissatisfied with your telecoms services.

I understand that you were indeed dissatisfied and took some action and that you kindly agreed to be re-contacted... is that correct?

**1. Service**

I understand that you yourself have made a complaint about <SERVICE> in the last 12 months...is that right?

**2. Provider**

Which company provided the service?

**3. Nature**

What was the nature of your complaint? / Why did you make a complaint to the provider?

**4. When**

How long ago did you first make this complaint?

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| - June, July, Aug 06   | <b><u>In last 3m</u></b>  |
| - March, April, May 06 | <b><u>In last 6m</u></b>  |
| - Dec 05, Jan, Feb 06  | <b><u>In last 9m</u></b>  |
| - Sept, Oct, Nov 05    | <b><u>In last 12m</u></b> |

**5. Stage**

Was your complaint resolved?

If no, what stage of the process did you get to?

- |                                     |                 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| - Initial contact with the provider | <b><u>1</u></b> |
| - Further contact with the provider | <b><u>2</u></b> |
| - Contact with an ADR and/or Ofcom  | <b><u>3</u></b> |

If yes, at what stage?

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| - After initial contact with the provider | <b><u>4</u></b> |
| - After further contact with the provider | <b><u>5</u></b> |
| - After contact with an ADR and/or Ofcom  | <b><u>6</u></b> |
| - Other                                   | <b><u>7</u></b> |

## 6. Anger

Rate level of anger on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=not angry, 5=extremely angry)

By asking many people these same questions we aim to get as broader picture as possible of the different experiences that consumers have when they make a complaint to their operator.

## 7. Call again

If you are selected, we would reimburse you for your time. In this case, would you mind if we contacted you again for this purpose?

## 8. Time

If yes, ask when is a good time of day to call

Thank you very much for your time.

Have a good day/evening.

Goodbye.

**APPENDIX III****Consumer Rights Review  
Interview Guide****Audience: Those who were dissatisfied and took action  
August 2006**

|    |  |
|----|--|
|    | <p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Explain we are working for Ofcom, the regulatory body for the communications industry. Remind them they took part in a survey in which they were asked some questions about telecoms provider and they kindly agreed to be re-contacted, etc</p> <p>1. Explain the purpose of the call is to find out more about their dissatisfaction they had with their provider and their experiences of taking action / making a complaint. Reassure them about confidentiality, anonymity assured, nothing attributed to them, etc</p>   |
| 2. | <p><b>Reason for dissatisfaction with provider</b></p> <p>Help the respondent to think back to the time when they were dissatisfied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How long ago was it?</li> <li>– What was the nature of the problem? Was it temporary / ongoing?</li> <li>– Which service / provider was it?</li> <li>– Was this the first issue with this provider or had there been others?</li> <li>– How did they feel? Mild reaction / strong reaction? Why?</li> <li>– What was the impact of the problem they had? [Probe on financial loss etc]</li> </ul>   |
| 3. | <p><b>Next Steps Taken</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What do they remember doing then?</li> <li>– What options did they consider were open to them, if any?</li> <li>– Who did they decide to talk to/contact? Why? How did they get the number/other contact details (e.g. email address)?</li> <li>– How did they feel before making the call/contacting the company?</li> <li>– What were their expectations of the outcome at this stage?</li> </ul>  |
| 4. | <p><b>The Process</b></p> <p>Ask respondents to recall their complaint 'journey' – help them by going over each part of the journey with gentle non-directed prompts (e.g. so you dialled the number, what happened next . . .). Use the following prompts if not covered . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Who / what responded (automated / human)?</li> <li>– How did you feel at this stage?</li> <li>– Did the first person who responded understand the nature of your complaint?</li> <li>– What were the responses / explanations given to you? Did they make sense / were they easily understood?</li> <li>– Was the complaint resolved at the first call/attempt? If not, what happened then?</li> <li>– Did you continue with the complaint or not?</li> </ul> |

## Consumer Complaints Review

- If not, why did you drop out then? How did you feel?
- If you continued, what happened?
- Repeat questions for all following people dealt with
- At any point, were you informed of any alternative routes you could take (such as going to a dispute resolution service, such as an ombudsman)?

### 5. **Review of complaint journey**

- Was your complaint resolved?
- If yes:
- How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved?
- How satisfied were you with how your complaint was handled?
- How much of your own time do you think you spent on sorting this out?
- How satisfied were you with the outcome?
- How do you think your provider should have responded to your complaint?

[NB We'd like to get some sense of consumers' expectations and their own recommendations about how things could be changed]

- If no:
- If your complaint was not resolved, how long was the process until you dropped the complaint?
- How satisfied were you with how your complaint was handled?
- How much of your own time do you think you spent on sorting this out?
- How satisfied were you with the outcome?
- How do you think your provider should have responded to your complaint?

For all:

- How did the whole process make you feel? What was the effect on you of having to make a complaint, if any?
- What was the impact of the problem you had and the impact of making a complaint, if any? [Include probing on financial impact]
- Were you made aware of the company's code of practice on complaints handling? If so, when?
- Did you tell any friends / relatives about the issue – do you remember how many?
- Have you switched provider as a result of the experience? Why / why not?
- Any other thoughts / comments

### 6. **Review, thank and close**

**Consumer Rights Review****Interview Guide****Audience: Those who were dissatisfied but took no action****24<sup>th</sup> August 2006**

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1. | <p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Explain we are working for Ofcom, the regulatory body for the communications industry, and remind them they took part in a survey in which they were asked some questions about telecoms provider and they kindly agreed to be re-contacted, etc</p> <p>Explain the purpose of the call is to find out more about their dissatisfaction with their provider and why they chose not to taken any action, etc.</p>  |
| 2. | <p><b>Reason for dissatisfaction with provider</b></p> <p>Help the respondent to think back to the time when they were dissatisfied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How long ago was it?</li> <li>- What was the nature of the problem? Was it temporary / ongoing?</li> <li>- Which provider was it?</li> <li>- Was this the first issue with this provider or had there been others?</li> <li>- How did they feel? Mild reaction / strong reaction? Why?</li> <li>- What was the impact of the problem they had? Probe on financial loss etc.</li> </ul>   |
| 3. | <p><b>Reason for taking no action</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do they remember doing then?</li> <li>- Did they talk to anyone? Spouse, friends, family? How many? Why / why not?</li> <li>- What options did they consider were open to them, if any?</li> <li>- Why did they not pursue any of these options? Probe on what 'too much hassle, not worth it' means</li> <li>- Have they made any complaints before for other issues? Why / why not?</li> <li>- If perceive process to be too difficult, what, if anything, would make it easier to complain?</li> <li>- How does taking such action / making complaints make them feel? Why?</li> <li>- Have they stayed with their provider?</li> <li>- Etc</li> </ul> |
| 4. | <p><b>Review, thank and close</b></p>   |

**Telephone Numbering  
Assessment of Proposed Ranges  
Discussion Guide  
April 2006**

Moderator Introduction

**Who we are, our independence and confidentiality.**

1. **Explain the group is sponsored by Ofcom, the regulator for the telecoms industry, and we're going to be talking about telephone numbers and number ranges. Explain that Ofcom is responsible for the provision of telephone numbers, and, as there is increasing demand for new numbers and new services, there is a need to ensure the numbering framework meets this demand. Ofcom is not proposing changes to people's home numbers but wants to make it easier for people to know from the number dialled what price and service is involved. Today, we're going to show some ideas for how telephone numbers could look in the future and would like their opinions.**

**We're going to ask them to write down some answers as well as discuss things. Reassure that there is no right or wrong, not a test of technical knowledge, just an opportunity for them to tell us what they think.**

2. **Respondent Introduction**

Ask respondents to introduce themselves and give a brief summary of their telephone usage, i.e. platform (fixed, mobile), usage, payment model (subscription, pre-paid).

3. **Assessment of Symbols / Descriptions**

Hand out write down exercises one after the other without discussion in between. (WD1 = Symbols; WD2 = Descriptions). Rotate order of write downs across the groups, i.e. 3 groups are shown WD1 first; 3 groups shown WD2 first.

Review responses to both write downs on a flipchart, and assess levels of understanding / confusion with the symbol and description for each number range.

Introduce alternative ideas for symbols and/or descriptions and discuss merits of each.

4. **Focus on new 03 range:**

Explain in more detail the concept behind 03 range – i.e. a new range that should be used instead of some 08 numbers

- Offers exactly the same rate as a geographical number
- Can be linked in with landline and mobile packages (free minutes, etc)
- Will be used to signify public service numbers – possible range within a range, e.g. -35 is local government, 033 is health service, etc
- The safe and trustworthy option

Assess responses to the concept: strengths, weaknesses, likelihood to use, etc

Focus on 08 / 09 range

**Reiterate that within the 08 and 09 ranges, there is an increasing demand for new numbers / services and in order to avoid some numbers running out, there is a need to make changes, as well as make things easier and clearer overall.**

**Explain that we're going to show how things currently work, and then ask respondents to comment on some other options. Remind respondents that current numbers will not change – all the options are in addition to what is currently available. Also that there is a cost associated with changing numbers, so some numbers will stay the same for some time – there is no magic option, etc.**

**Rotate order of 08/09 presentation across the groups.**

08 Range:

5.

**Ask respondents which 08 numbers they are familiar with and the associated costs. Hand out WD3 (08 range) and ask respondents to comment on current system.**

**Hand out all 3 options consecutively – rotate order. For each option, check understanding with respondents and clarify any questions. Ask respondents to fill out the write downs individually and without comment. Repeat for each option in selected range.**

**Review scores and comments for each option. Complete ranking.**

09 Range:

**Ask respondents which 09 numbers they are familiar with and the associated costs. Hand out WD4 (09 range) and rate current system.**

**Hand out all 4 options consecutively (rotate order), check understanding and clarify questions before respondents complete each write down (e.g. 09x allows for consumers to ban calls to certain types of numbers, etc)**

**Review scores and comments for each option. Complete ranking.**

6.

Review, thank and close.

## APPENDIX IV

### Summary of Complaints – Landline Operators (20)

| Operator  | Category                     | Complainant / Complaint Summary   | Outcome     | Lifespan | Total call time            | Impact |
|-----------|------------------------------|---|-------------|----------|----------------------------|--------|
| BT        | Line disconnect              | Nigel, 42, publishing. Lost connection, called BT from father's house. BT had accidentally cut off line, promised to fix it in 3 days time. On 3 <sup>rd</sup> day rang to check, no engineer for another 2 days. Enquired about compensation for having to call BT on the mobile. Response was to waive line rental charges (approx .80p). Considered unacceptable so advised by BT to make complaint in writing – no address given. Annoyed but will not change supplier.   | Resolved    | 1 week   | 2 hours / £20 mobile calls | Medium |
| NTL       | Switching / billing problems | Susan, 35, housewife. Wrote to NTL to cancel services. Confirmed but received a bill at end of the month. Wrote letter to complain, recorded delivery, no response. Received another bill plus charges for unpaid 1 <sup>st</sup> bill. Rang them but account in husband's name so unable to do anything. Received another letter from bad accounts department. Husband took afternoon off, spent all afternoon trying to get through, cancellation department sorted it out. Then received another bill for next 2 months and then letter from debt collector. Emailed NTL, tracked it and then sent all correspondence, with a letter from Which? Legal service. No response. Considered Otelo but waiting to go to court to get a proper hearing. Concerned about credit rating. Will never touch NTL again. | Ongoing     | 6 months | 5 hours / letter / email   | High   |
| Talk Talk | Billing problems             | Valoo, 36, housewife. Moving house so phoned TalkTalk to cancel her line. She then received a bill after cancellation. Called them up, they were wonderful, resolved the issue immediately and were suitably apologetic. Very efficient.  | Resolved    | 1 day    | 15 mins                    | Low    |
| BT        | Incorrect package            | Rose, 57, housewife. Partially sighted. BT sends her bills in big print. Notices that her friends and family have wrong numbers. Rings to sort this out – thought it would be easy – but found the automated system very frustrating. Has rung many times but still hasn't been able to speak to someone. Keeps receiving offers from BT but can't get through to anyone to discuss them. Very frustrated. Would consider switching.  | Dropped out | 6 months | 3 hours                    | Medium |



|           |                  |   |             |          |                         |        |
|-----------|------------------|---|-------------|----------|-------------------------|--------|
| BT        | Line quality     | Lydia, 53, housewife. Hard of hearing, has amplifier to make calls. Had buzzing on the line but thought it may be her end. Rang BT, felt like a nuisance, difficult to get through and hear what they're saying. BT tested the line and said it was fine, although it wasn't. She still has the problem but BT won't help so she has given up. Too much waiting around. Doesn't want to use deafness as an excuse or make a fuss.   | Dropped out | 1 month  | 3 hours                 | High   |
| Talk Talk | Billing problems | Cathy, 28, retail (low income). Signed up with TalkTalk but declined direct debit as she had just been declared bankrupt and didn't want to get overdrawn. She would pay in store. TT took her details anyway but would not debit her account. Received a letter from bank saying a direct debit had been requested and due to insufficient funds, she would be charged £30. Rang TT but couldn't get through, very upset. Went to a store, very stressed with kids, etc – they said go to the bank, the bank said go to TT. Went back to the store and cried. Got onto HQ and the matter was sorted. £30 refunded. | Resolved    | 2 days   | 1 hour / 2 store visits | High   |
| One.Tel   | Line quality     | Harold, 62, retired. 6 months after moving to Onetel line develops crackle. Neighbours did not have problem. Rang One.tel, was told line would be checked. No response for 4 days. Called back, was told there was no problem on the line, try unplugging everything. Called back again, they offered engineer for £108. Very frustrating, customer service was unhelpful, unconcerned. Switched back to BT   | Dropped out | 2 months | 4 hours                 | High   |
| NTL       | Line disconnect  | Brian, 59, retired. Cancelled TV package, but phone was disconnected also. Spent 3 days at a friend's trying to get through. Took 4 weeks to get phone service back on, having promised twice to reconnect him and failed. Wrote 4 letters to follow up complaints. Threatened to leave, was offered £10 as good will. Received bill with cancellation fee for the phone line. Mistake corrected but they refused to send out another bill. Very frustrated and worried that no emergency services were available.  | Resolved    | 1 month  | 5+ hours / 4 letters    | Medium |
| NTL       | Line disconnect  | Carol, 33, housewife, low income. Customer of 4 yrs, missed a payment and was cut off without warning. Rang NTL, recorded message saying there was a fault so didn't know they had been cut off. Got through and were reconnected. Next bill £30 reconnection charge. Annoyed and upset. Agent was rude and told her to pay bills on time. Decided to switch to BT, NTL rang up to apologise and offered her a good   | Resolved    | 3 months | 2 hours                 | Medium |

Consumer Complaints Review

|          |                           |   |             |          |                                 |        |
|----------|---------------------------|---|-------------|----------|---------------------------------|--------|
|          |                           | deal and £30 back. Accepted. After 3 months, free evening calls taken away. Felt badly treated, only got a response when threatened to leave.   |             |          |                                 |        |
| Caudwell | Billing problems          | Jim, 32, estate agent. Kept getting calls from Caudwell to switch line. Accepted offer but made it clear that there was no contract. Home business stopped so decided to cancel line after one month. Expected 14 days rental charge, was charged for full month. Received 2 more bills in error, on all occasions money was refunded. Then received bill for £250, saying he had faulted on a 18 month verbal contract. He was not aware of any contract and refused to pay. They offered to send a tape of the conversation for £10. No tape arrived. Instructed bank not to pay Caudwell any money. Letter from debt collection agency, then another, court action threatened. No more contact from Caudwell – 8 months after start. Very stressful.                   | Dropped out | 8 months | 5+ hours                        | High   |
| BT       | Line disconnect           | Anne, 66, retired, low income. Line not working, called BT, engineer arranged for 2 days later. No engineer came. Promised another engineer next day, again no show. Rang up again, no reason given. Got very angry and engineer came next day. Had to take time off work, lost income and frustration. Wrote a letter of complaint, received a standard response. No offer of compensation. Very angry.  | Resolved    | 1 week   | 2 hours                         | Medium |
| NTL      | Line quality / disconnect | Dave, 48, unemployed, disabled. Line quality became poor and then line disconnected. Engineer came round in 3 days – he was impressed. Problem was fixed. Wanted compensation for the 3 days that the line was down   | Resolved    | 3 days   | 30 minutes                      | Low    |
| BT       | Installation problems     | Ian, 45, owner financial services company. Moving offices, ordered new lines – phone and broadband. Sold VoIP and feature lines and agreed spec and date of installation. Came to move in, no lines, they had been installed in the wrong office. Engineers promised but never showed. Couldn't get hold of anyone to resolve problem, no lines for 3 weeks, had to lay off staff, lost thousands of pounds of business. Offered £8.40 compensation. Made a formal complaint but was told the process was wrapped in legalese to put them off – BT employee advised against it. Felt held to ransom. Called Ofcom, which was unhelpful. Finally, lines put in were wrong and bills increased by £400. Found a BT person who took pity and sorted it out. "A living hell". | Resolved    | 1 month  | 10+ hours / letter of complaint | High   |

|           |                             |  |             |          |         |        |
|-----------|-----------------------------|--|-------------|----------|---------|--------|
| Talk Talk | Billing problems            | Michael, 67, retired. Signed up to TalkTalk over the phone. Expected monthly bill but none came after 2 months. Worried about payments so rang them. Computer had problems. Another month, no bill. Rang again, same excuse. Didn't believe call centre. Found number of Otelco on a letter, they said put it in writing. He can't write very well so advised him to go to CAB. Decided not pursue this as he felt he was becoming too exposed. BT then called and he went back straight away. Still concerned about bills.  | Dropped out | 3 months | 1 hour  | High   |
| BT        | Switching / Line disconnect | Giles, 57, part time. Changed PC line from BT to Toucan. Line went dead. Rang BT who were not helpful, suggesting it was his equipment, then realised he was not a BT customer so refused to help. Rang Toucan who said it was a BT problem. Rang BT who agreed to send an engineer. Holes dug in the road, then filled in, took from March to May. Very frustrated and upset because no communication. Every time he called BT he had to re-explain the situation. Ongoing problems but will suffer in silence as he can't face going through the same experience again.  | Dropped out | 3 months | 5 hours | High   |
| BT        | Line disconnect             | Barbara, 46, runs own business from home. Severe impaired mobility. Line gets cut off, rang BT but they had no idea what was the problem. Said they'd call back, never did. Rang again, they said it would take a week. Very angry due to lost business. Compensation mentioned of £1 per day for using mobile – "ridiculous!" Felt very vulnerable without emergency services. Considers complaining a nightmare. BT insensitive to her disability – she can't check equipment, they were rude when she refused. Felt helpless, told friends they thought she was joking. Line came back on 2 weeks later, not a week. Lost business and huge stress. Would switch but don't know where else to go. | Resolved    | 2 weeks  | 4 hours | High   |
| Telewest  | Upgrade                     | Nigel, 65, retired. Received a letter out of the blue saying Telewest needed to send an engineer round because they were not getting a signal and it would cost him £65. He refused to pay. Customer service insisted otherwise he'll lose his service. Felt this was a threat, so he asked for number how to cancel service. Rang cancellations, who apologised, said they would remove the charge so he would stay with them. Engineer came round at a time which suited.  | Resolved    | 3 days   | 1 hour  | Medium |

Consumer Complaints Review

|          |              |  |             |          |         |        |
|----------|--------------|--|-------------|----------|---------|--------|
| Telewest | Line quality | Sarah, 58, carer, low income. Crackling on the line is really bad. Rang Telewest several times, they take her through the same procedure, feels like she is treated like an idiot. Bought a new phone on their advice, but it was not that. Told that if it was her equipment she would be charged, implying it's her fault. No engineer came out, line remained bad. In the end got fed up and changed to Bulldog.  | Dropped out | 4 months | 3 hours | Medium |
| NTL      | Billing      | Julie, 39, part time. Noticed incorrect entries on her phone bill – calls abroad and to premium rate services. She knows these are incorrect. Rang up and questioned the bill – takes ages to get through and then she has to fight to get refunded the money. Happens every month. Now she doesn't open the bill until she has done her work and is settled. She expects to spend 2 hours every month sorting out the problem. Is considering switching.  | Ongoing     | 4 months | 8 hours | High   |
| Orb      | Mis-selling  | Jessica, 31, self-employed. Gets a call from Orb selling cheaper calls than BT. Agrees to the offer but does not realise she is giving a verbal agreement over the phone. Gets the first bill and it is more expensive than previous BT bills. Calls up Orb and says she's not interested in staying with them. They say she is tied into a 12 month contract and will be liable for fines if she breaks it. She feels duped, she had no idea you could sign up over the phone. Thinks they are dishonest and will change supplier at end of contract. | Dropped out | 1 month  | 1 hour  | Medium |

## Summary of complaints – mobile operators (15)

| Operator | Category                              | Complainant / Complaint summary   | Outcome  | Lifespan | Total call time | Impact |
|----------|---------------------------------------|---|----------|----------|-----------------|--------|
| '3'      | Unsolicited texts                     | Verity, 53, housewife. Took out contract for daughter who receives PRS txt messages at £1 per time. Daughter was not aware of texts' provenance. Verity rang '3' who denied responsibility and gave her a web address to find the supplier. She was angry that '3' could not help her. Spent hours chasing the original company, felt '3' should have more control as they were billing her.  | Resolved | 4 days   | 4 hours         | Medium |
| '3'      | Upgrade / billing issues              | Phil, 53, carer. Call from '3' offering upgrade phone to which he agreed. New phone arrived but also a new contract and new number from Tulip which he hadn't heard of. Phoned to cancel and was asked to return the phone. £79 was taken from his account as handling fee, which was returned when he complained. 4 bills then arrived for 4 different numbers and money was automatically taken from his account. Furious at time and expense sorting out their mistakes. | Resolved | 2 months | 5 hours         | High   |
| '3'      | Unfulfilled contract / billing errors | Karen, 54, housewife. Took out contract for son, including 3 vouchers for £75 to send in for credit every 3 months. Received 2 phones, billed twice and had difficulty convincing them of their mistake. Sent in vouchers, each time not redeemed against the bill as '3' said they had not received them. Felt cheated. Tried to cancel contract immediately but couldn't. Will never take out another contract.   | Resolved | 3 months | 3 hours         | High   |
| Orange   | Billing errors                        | Paul, 38, manager. Wrongly billed towards end of contract. Complained but not offered any solution until he got angry. Offered extra free texts "to get rid of me" but no admission of guilt. Wanted a refund but didn't push his case because of no paperwork. Felt annoyed that he had to be persistent and shout to get anywhere.  | Resolved | 1 day    | 30 mins         | Low    |

Consumer Complaints Review

|                     |                          |  |          |        |                         |        |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--|----------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| Orange              | Billing errors           | Stephen, 39, accountant. Expected to receive a paper bill, called and told it was not part of his contract. Happy to look online but discovered he was already registered from a previous contract. Customer services had no idea, told to ring technical support costing 50p per minute. Rang back to claim money back, which was granted. Annoyed that it took more than one call.             | Resolved | 1 week | 1 hour                  | Medium |
| Vodafone            | Rude customer service    | Emma, 25, nurse. Rang to enquire about upgrade but offers not competitive. Rang cancellations, man was rude and unhelpful so she asked for her PUK code. It didn't arrive so she had to ring again. This time a nice lady gave her a new phone but she returned it as not the right one. Her return could not be traced. Finally received correct phone. Annoyed at amount of time taken.        | Resolved | 1 week | 1 hour                  | Medium |
| O2                  | Line disconnected        | Daphne, 58, retired teacher. Unable to make calls or send texts. Tried to call O2 but was unable to get through for 3 days. Anxious because her mother was ill. Visited store and discovered a change of credit card had meant payment had not gone through. Annoyed that she hadn't been contacted before being cut off.  | Resolved | 1 week | 1 hour / 2 store visits | High   |
| Virgin              | Reception                | John, 28, administrator. Has had ongoing poor reception. Called Virgin and told new masts were going up soon but he didn't believe it. Felt explanation did not address his questions. Doesn't feel he can take it further. Will switch provider.  | Ongoing  | 1 day  | 30 mins                 | Low    |
| '3' / Cellular Zone | Mis-selling / Rude staff | Jane, 32, housewife. Took up offer of a phone on '3' from Cellular Zone but offer only lasted 3 months and reverted to double the cost. Received 2 phones in error. Had to cancel contract within 7 days but got no answer for 6 days. Staff was rude and pushy and it took 10 minutes to get the cancellation code. Anxious about them charging for phones and taking money out of her account. | Resolved | 1 week | 1 hour                  | High   |

|          |                        |  |             |          |                |        |
|----------|------------------------|--|-------------|----------|----------------|--------|
| T Mobile | Mis-selling            | Roger, 67, retired. Negotiated a deal with T Mobile over the phone. No phone in stock so went to the shop. The shop denied the deal, saying salesman didn't have the authority. Called T Mobile and they denied any knowledge. Felt cheated. Found CEO's email and wrote directly to him. Problem solved the following day.  | Resolved    | 2 days   | 1 hour / email | Low    |
| O2       | Line disconnect        | Sarah, 23, part time assistant, low income. Changed bank account and moved house. Postcode at new house not recognised on national database. 3 months after move T Mobile cut her off and will not allow payment from new account. Has to pay cash into account which takes 10 working days. She is cut off every month, and pays for a month while only using her phone for 2 weeks. She feels trapped, depressed, no longer uses her phone. Desperate for end of contract. | Ongoing     | 6 months | Over 10 hours  | High   |
| O2       | Contract renewal error | Phil, 56, consultant. Incorrectly billed twice for contract renewal, phoned O2 to stop the charge. Then received letter that he would be cut off for non-payment. O2 had stopped all payments by mistake and promised to put it right. They were then cut off. Continuous mistakes and threatening letters from O2 meant hours on the phone. He was furious and very stressed at their incompetence.   | Resolved    | 6 months | Over 10 hours  | High   |
| T Mobile | Line disconnect        | Richard, 47, builder. 3 days after agreeing new contract with 3rd party was cut off. Problem related to his postcode and address. 3rd party threatened to take 18 months payment. T Mobile reinstated the service but at added cost. Disgusted at T Mobile's use of dishonest agents. Will never use T Mobile again.   | Resolved    | 4 months | 5 hours        | Medium |
| Orange   | Billing                | Sarah, 36, office manager. Signed up for 2 numbers on one bill. Expected paper bill but did not arrive. Money taken from account with no notice. Promises of paper bill not met. Takes too long to call so have now given up. Friends have had the same problem. Will leave Orange at end of contract.   | Dropped out | 6 months | 5 hours        | Medium |

Consumer Complaints Review

|          |                   |  |         |         |        |        |
|----------|-------------------|--|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| Vodafone | Unsolicited texts | Tim, 25, salesman. Discovered he was being charged for unsolicited premium rate texts. Rang Vodafone who said it was not their responsibility and he should contact the 3 <sup>rd</sup> party supplier. Angry that they took no responsibility and no time to chase 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties. Considering switching due to Vodafone's attitude. | Ongoing | 1 month | 1 hour | Medium |
|----------|-------------------|--|---------|---------|--------|--------|

**Summary of Complaints – internet Providers (15)**

| Operator | Category                         | Complainant / Complaint Summary  | Outcome     | Lifespan | Total call time  | Impact |
|----------|----------------------------------|--|-------------|----------|------------------|--------|
| AOL      | Connection problems / House move | Linda, 41, part-time teacher. Gave AOL 10 days to arrange connection in new house but no connection. AOL said there was no BT contract, which was not true. AOL then told them 7 days to connect. No connection happened. AOL then repeated she did not have a contract with BT. Endless calls with no progress so she decided to cancel with AOL but was told she was locked in. Sent a letter of complaint and matter resolved soon after. Very frustrated throughout process. | Resolved    | 2 months | 4 hours / letter | High   |
| AOL      | Connection problems              | Susan, 42, sales. Connection dropped, called AOL, took ages to get through. Help was too technical but connection restored. A week later stopped again. Rang AOL, found advice too technical, frustrating and no help. Children unable to do homework, embarrassing at school. Got a friend to help, problem solved.   | Resolved    | 1 month  | 5 hours          | Medium |
| BT       | Connection problems              | Tim, 46, manager. Connection dropping out often in the evenings. Had trouble finding number for BT. Rang BT but they didn't understand the problem and were no help. Sent email, got a reply about settings. Looked around for another supplier, easier to change than fight BT.   | Dropped out | 1 week   | 2 hours          | Medium |



|                  |                              |   |             |           |                 |        |
|------------------|------------------------------|---|-------------|-----------|-----------------|--------|
| BT               | Computer hacking             | Mark, 20, student. Came home to find computer settings different, files missing. Found alert re unauthorised access, traced IP address to company abroad. Difficulty finding number and then frustrated by phone system. BT denied hacking was possible, advised email to abuse department. Angry but just one incident so let it go.   | Dropped out | 1 week    | 2 hours / email | Medium |
| NTL              | Mis-selling / Billing errors | Richard, 33, finance. Signed up to deal for phone and broadband. Received letter to confirm 2 direct debits – not what he had agreed to. Immediately cancelled the debits and rang NTL. Sorted out the problem. Since then ongoing billing errors, agitated when bill arrives. Has to ring every time to get credited but a nuisance. Likes the package, just thinks the systems are incompetent.   | Ongoing     | 18 months | 5 hours         | Medium |
| Orange / Wanadoo | Installation time            | Charles, 52, accountant. Phoned Wanadoo to understand his position, told he was under contract and new line/ connection would take a month to set up. Outraged because they use the internet a lot. Had to follow their rules but hassled them. Took ages to get through. Made a formal complaint about installation time.  | Resolved    | 1 month   | 3 hours         | Medium |
| Orange / Wanadoo | Connection problems          | Mark, 53, builder. Wanted to upgrade to broadband. Sent a modem but no connection. Rung up by Orange twice to see progress, promises of help but no progress. Sent an email, response directed to telephone helpline. Engineer sent out 4 times but not at time promised. No progress. Money taken out of his account for broadband. Account stopped, he was furious and wanted a refund. Had to take time off work for engineer. Very unhappy. Changed supplier. | Dropped out | 6 months  | 5 hours         | Medium |
| AOL              | Poor connection rate         | Jane, 37, works from home. Highest level broadband bracket but slow connection speeds. Telephone AOL but couldn't understand the staff and response was scripted. No understanding of the problem, very disappointed. Impacted on her work and state of mind. Has upgraded again to wide bandwidth and some improvement. Would have changed supplier but felt change of email too complicated.  | Dropped out | 1 month   | 3 hours         | High   |

Consumer Complaints Review

|           |   |  |          |          |                              |        |
|-----------|---|--|----------|----------|------------------------------|--------|
| BT        | Connection problems / Installation time | Nicola, 32, security guard. Connection problems from the start. Rang BT put on hold, transferred, patronising attitude. Have to explain again every time she rings. Got very angry, partner had to take over. Moved house, took day off work for engineer – never came. Happened twice. Engineer then just turned up randomly at family occasion. BT then accused her of breaking contract when she moved house – she went mad at them. Family rows and upset, lost earnings. Will change supplier as soon as contract finished.   | Resolved | 2 months | 5 hours / large mobile bills | High   |
| Tiscali   | Switching problems                      | Christina, 52, housewife. Interested in Talk Talk phone / broadband, but would have to wait 4 weeks. Suddenly her current Tiscali connection went dead due to tech upgrade she was told. It took 4 weeks with no info from Tiscali. Rang Tiscali for transfer code but they wouldn't supply it. She mentioned Ofcom and they complied. Talk Talk tried to install their line but Tiscali had put markers on it. Tiscali then billed her for 2 months connection. She threatened Ofcom again and they refunded her. Thinks it's a conspiracy by AOL and Tiscali to stop Talk Talk. Terrible experience and hours on expensive helpline calls. | Ongoing  | 3 months | 7 hours                      | High   |
| Globalnet | Connection problems                     | Catherine, 57, minister. Upgraded to broadband but unable to connect. Rang helpline endless times but no progress. BT engineer came out, couldn't find a fault. Had her machine checked (£50) but no problem. More engineers and computer help – became very stressed. Massive impact on her work, has rung them every week for 9 months. They are courteous but little help. Will change supplier at end of contract  | Ongoing  | 9 months | 10+ hours                    | High   |
| Telewest  | Connection problems                     | Frank, 34, disabled. PC line kept going down. Called Telewest who claimed his equipment was faulty but it was new and working fine. Had to call customer help many time, they were unfriendly and patronising. Kept promising to call back but didn't. Wife got on the phone and threatened Watchdog, straight through to manager and engineer came out and sorted the problem. Missed homework and costs incurred.  | Resolved | 3 months | 5 hours                      | Medium |

|           |                     |   |             |          |                        |        |
|-----------|---------------------|---|-------------|----------|------------------------|--------|
| BT        | Mis-selling         | George, 67, retired. Saw ad for broadband in the area and rang BT to enquire. Told to call back, rang 15 times, always getting recorded message. Tried to get through with email, same message. 6 weeks of trying. Just wanted a yes or no to the availability of the service. Unicom then paid a visit and he signed up – broadband in 6 days.   | Dropped out | 2 months | 3 hours                | Medium |
| Talk Talk | Mis-selling         | David, 42, finance. Signed up to Talk Talk phone / free broadband deal in the shop where they confirmed availability in the area. Set a date for the engineer, took a day off work, he never came. Called TT, they apologised for the mistake but then said broadband service was not available for 3 months and he would have to pay £10 for the service. Felt lied to and cancelled contract immediately. | Resolved    | 1 month  | 3 hours / day off work | Medium |
| BT        | Connection problems | Jane, 37, disabled. PC connection always going down. Rang BT, they told her to make some checks but because of her disability she couldn't. She felt they were not sympathetic and insisted that if the problem was with the PC and someone came round she would be charged. Felt aggrieved at treatment. A friend helped out.  | Dropped out | 1 week   | 2 hours                | Medium |