

SpeedChecker Ltd: Ofcom Comparison Tool Consultation Response

[SpeedChecker Ltd](#) is pleased to participate in the public consultation on the Ofcom consultation paper “Digital Comparison Tools – proposed changes to Ofcom’s voluntary accreditation scheme”. We understand the need to have a trusted comparison site and, regardless of what happens after Brexit, we hope that the UK can establish a flexible and robust accreditation system.

Since 2008 we have helped millions of users get a better understanding of how to make their Internet go faster. Our solutions empower telecoms, regulators and researchers in making their Internet infrastructure better and more available for everyone.

SpeedChecker runs a global crowdsourcing data collection of quality of service and quality of experience KPIs which are used by regulators to monitor the progress of meeting regulatory objectives using unbiased third-party data. We also have experience in producing apps that allow consumers to test their QoS and report issues.

SpeedChecker understands that we are on the verge of great innovation and are keen to be part of the discussion to ensure that not only do we reap the benefits of this innovation but that customers, regulators and providers are able to ensure that the services are being delivered as promised and as paid for.

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Comments and Questions Arising from the Proposed Changes

Comments by Steve Gledhill, [SpeedChecker](#)

Open to Any Provider [Page 1]

In the summary list on page 1 it states *“Comparison tools must show offers covering a significant proportion of the market and be open to any provider that wishes to make their products available for comparison.”*

I agree with the first part of this: that the offers should cover a significant proportion of the market (and not ‘fixed’ as in the current scheme). However, I have concerns about making it a condition that I would be compelled to list any and all providers. In our case it could make for a very long table that would make it harder for customers to use. We would probably need to add a filter option to make it usable with extra work for us but also add more steps and complexity to the customer.

This is acknowledged in the current scheme as quoted in section 3.60: *“Given the vast number of small providers in some communications markets, it may not be practical for comparison tools to list all providers and options in their comparison results, so this is not part of our current requirements.”*

There are currently over 200 ISPs in the United Kingdom and probably many more operating at a very local level. I would like to see this part of the regulation reviewed to include some filter perhaps by including a minimum number of subscribers.

Include Date of Update [2.6]

Under the current scheme there is a requirement to *“update every 2 weeks and state when data was last updated”*. I can see the benefit of this but don’t see if it is to be included in the new scheme.

Assuming that it will still be included after the update, I have some questions regarding how this will be implemented:

- Is it expected that every package will include an ‘updated’ date?
- Will it be sufficient if the package has an “offer expires” date? Assuming this data is not in the past the customer can be assured that the data is current.
- Would a statement on the page such as “Package information is updated regularly and at least every 2 weeks” suffice?
- Or, if that is unacceptable, a statement such as “Page last updated on ... “?

The problem with the first option is, again, one of extra work for us and potential confusion for the customer. What Ofcom, the ISP, [SpeedChecker](#) and the customer consider an update is not always going to be the same.

Removal of requirement to sort by price by default [3.13]

[SpeedChecker](#) welcomes the removal of this requirement but also agrees with the requirement to ensure sponsored results are clearly identified.

However, I also note in section 2.12 the EU requirement that *“no provider is given favourable treatment in the results”*. It is unclear how this can be achieved if we are to be allowed sponsored results. More clarity is required.

Take user's location into account [3.54]

In the current scheme [2.6] there is a requirement to *"take into account a user's location when presenting information"*. We currently comply with this by providing an optional postcode filter. The user would see the default view of packages until they enter the postcode.

However, in the proposed scheme [3.54] there is a requirement that *"users are only shown offers which they can receive at their location (as opposed to their postcode area for example)"*. This implies that we will need to, not only ask for the postcode, but also the full address and then filter results accordingly.

This will also put a barrier in the way of the user who may prefer to move on to an unaccredited site where they can see packages without needing to enter their details.

This begs a number of questions:

1. Will all ISPs be able to provide this information and maintain currency?
2. If some (many) ISPs can not comply then comparison tools will fail accreditation either because they cannot supply this granularity of results or they will not be "open to all providers".
3. How frequently will comparison tools need to update their database of addresses and who will be at fault if the data is not correct?
4. Are there any privacy implications of using this personal information?
5. Will users resist providing this information and therefore be disadvantaged?
6. Can the tool also provide general information (not location-specific)? If not, is it proposed that the user will see no packages until they enter a full address?

My preference would be for the user to see a full (default) list of packages but with a clear option to filter by their address.

Divergence from EEC provisions [2.13]

I note that there is a requirement that Ofcom:

" may not maintain or introduce end-user protections in national law that diverge from those provisions of the EECC, including more or less stringent provisions "

I am not sure why Member States would be prohibited from providing better protections for consumers. Maybe I have misunderstood this because I can understand the need for minimum standards but would expect higher standards to be permitted.

Display QoS Performance [3.73]

I notice a requirement for the comparison tool to display *"the ability to compare prices, tariffs and quality of service performance"*.

I am not sure how we would do this. We already display the new average speed metric as provided by the ISPs; would there be a similar requirement of the ISPs to provide minimum service levels?

This is also referred to in 3.34 where it is stated that results should be calculated using price and *quality* as criteria. We may have information on average or minimum speeds but I am not sure how we will determine the quality of a package

Data Updated Every 2 Weeks [3.55]

There is a requirement *“that data is updated at least every 2 weeks”*.

We already do this as normal business at least in so far as we are notified of changes to packages. However, some packages don't change for many weeks or months. We carry out regular spot checks for these but that is not a formal arrangement. I'm not sure if it is proposed that we manually check all packages every 2 weeks and, if so, how the fact that this has happened should be indicated.

Offer Advice Offline [3.76]

“We also propose to retain a requirement from our current scheme to only accredit tools that offer users the ability to get advice offline”.

I am not sure if we, as a comparison site, are in a position to advise customers beyond providing them with clear data about the packages available. Some guidance on what we would be expected to advise on is required as well as our responsibilities and liabilities in the event that there is a complaint.

I am also not sure how this will be implemented in practical terms. We already receive enquiries via email where we are able to point the customer towards relevant information including Ofcom, of course. Some clarity on the mechanism that this advice should use would be helpful (email, online chat, phone calls etc).

I notice that section [3.78] duplicates some of the content in [3.76]

Links to Accredited Organisations [3.90]

We welcome the option to host the relevant information on our site rather than sending customers to other sites.

[V1]