Broadband: Openreach initiatives to improve end-customer experience

22 November 2019

Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to provide Ofcom with a summary overview of some of the initiatives that Openreach is actively undertaking, in collaboration with industry, to provide end-customers with a broadband experience that meets their rapidly changing needs. We would like to provide Ofcom with an overview of this important work as we enter into the next stage of the Fixed Telecoms Market Review (FTMR) consultation process[1].

Improving the service that we deliver to end-customers is the central focus of our operational plans. We have led the development of industry-wide collaboration initiatives such as; Service Layer Data share, line broadband service classification by likelihood of performance improvement following an Openreach engineering visit, engineer training and cultural changes (the Garden of Eden) and most recently efforts to create a "Working Broadband" definition. These initiatives have been developed by establishing unprecedented levels of collaboration with CPs, without the need for regulatory intervention, but at the same time improving performance against our regulated service measures.

The purpose of this document is to bring a number of these aspects together in one place for Ofcom consideration as part of the FTMR to demonstrate the importance of industry collaboration, and to set out a brief background of the development of some of these major industry programmes.

Background

During 2013 Openreach commenced a Service Layer Data sharing programme alongside industry, with the objective of increasing our (i.e. ours and industry's) joint ability to resolve end-customer broadband issues.

By 2015, the ADSL Service Layer Data share from some of our major CP customers had been established and further analysis was undertaken to understand what conclusions could be drawn. This led to the development of speed "BRAGs," where lines are now classified by their length and speed as recorded by the Service Layer Data. The classifications are described as "Very Bad", "Bad", "Good", "Very Good" and "Excellent". The lines classified as "Very Bad" and "Bad" have a high likelihood of seeing a speed improvement following an engineering visit, whereas the "Very Good" and "Excellent" lines are unlikely to see a speed improvement following an engineering visit.

A stability classification of Red, Amber, Pink, Green and Blue, based on the same principles of the likelihood of engineering uplift, was subsequently created to give further guidance to CPs on which tasks to submit to Openreach.

The speed and stability classifications have also been created for GEA-FTTC services.

[1] The overview provided here is our current thinking at the time of writing and could change as discussions progress.

As well as sharing these insights with engineers, Openreach has worked in close collaboration with industry to gain support for the process. Over time CPs have used Service Layer Data based insights as part of their internal systems to improve their end-customer issue management. An outcome of this work was an improvement in repeat rate[2] on broadband faults, but it was recognised more work was needed to achieve industry's joint ambitions.

In July 2017, CPs raised the Statement of Requirements (SoR) 8482: S/MPF performance standards which seeks to make Service Layer Data central to our joint fault management journey. To manage this SoR an industry working group was established chaired by Office of the Telecoms Adjudicator (OTA2), where 11 meetings have been held to date.

Investigations as part of the SoR assessment identified that the BRAG classifications, whilst effective at identifying when an engineering visit could uplift performance, did not provide enough clarity on the potential of an individual service. This is because the BRAG classifications do not provide any insight on the location of the impairment or if the line could realistically be expected to perform at a higher BRAG level. By their nature, the individual groups can also be broad in performance terms and therefore even if a line's performance could be improved significantly the BRAG classification could remain the same.

During this period Openreach identified that challenging the existing culture of a "test pass" ethos could support an overall improved end-customer experience, moving instead towards a focus on resolving verbatim end-customer issues. Alongside continued investment into engineering training, this led to the "Garden of Eden" programme which took advantage of the new insights available to engineers from the Service Layer Data programme to better understand the end-customer issue. Collaborating with CPs also confirmed the power and importance of a good end-customer issue detailed as a "Mission Statement" within the fault report which CPs signed up to provide.

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Working collaboratively with industry

Across this space we are continuing to work well with industry to jointly improve end-customer issues. For example, we have been running bilateral service improvement plans to improve fault qualification and diagnostic outcomes through sharing fault raising best practice, as well as continued focus on reducing faults associated with provision tasks. We have worked with numerous CPs with these goals in mind, trialling optimised diagnostic flows and tweaking customer journeys (for example to ensure routers are plugged in).

We are also helping CPs enhance their sales procedures, using data and insight to identify the right journey to take at point of sale for the best 'right first time' outcome. [✂]

Conclusion

[2] A "repeat" is a second fault raised within 28 days.

Openreach has shown real commitment to improve end-customer experience, making large scale investment to uplift the industries understanding of a broadband service as well as an engineer's ability to improve performance. We remain committed to this programme of putting the end-customer issue resolution at the heart of our repair journeys and understanding a line's broadband performance. However, to make any major changes to the way that we approach fault tasks today, we need to have a high degree of confidence in any new approach. We will continue to work with industry in collaboration.

If Ofcom would like further detail on any of the information contained in this paper, we would be happy to provide more information, or hold sessions as required.