

## Your response

Question	Your response
<p><b>Question 1:</b> Do you agree with our provisional analysis of whether our rules which facilitate access to ADR are meeting our objective?</p>	<p><b>OFCOM Advisory Committee NI (ACNI): General Comments</b></p> <p>Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes play a critical role in ensuring consumers have access to fair, efficient, and accessible means of resolving disputes with service providers. In the telecommunications sector, where contracts are complex and disputes over billing, service quality, and contract terms are common, ADR schemes provide an essential safeguard for consumers.</p> <p>Awareness and uptake of ADR schemes by consumers continues to be an issue. Access, especially for vulnerable consumers, must be straightforward and make it easy for consumers to raise and pursue their complaint.</p> <p>It is important for Ofcom to review developments across the wider ADR landscape. Many sectors operate ADR schemes and there may be lessons and insights into how these schemes support consumers. In addition, the European Commission proposed significant revisions (2023) to the ADR framework to enhance consumer protection and adapt to the evolving digital marketplace. Again, any lessons from this review should be used to help inform the approach of Ofcom in relation to ADR.</p> <p>In relation to the <b>Call for Input</b></p> <p>Ofcom's analysis suggests the existing rules facilitate ADR access reasonably well, with 94% of complaints resolved within 6 weeks and 95% within 8 weeks.</p> <p>However, there are several key observations to make.</p> <p>Firstly, although the resolution timelines for ADR complaints are strong, they only apply to consumers who have successfully accessed an ADR process. Research demonstrates a widespread lack of consumer understanding of ADR schemes which will result in many consumers being unable to fully exercise their right to access</p>

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	<p>redress. Although it may not be a direct focus of the current consultation ACNI would strongly endorse a greater focus on promoting and raising awareness of ADR – supporting consumers to understand the role, benefits of ADR and how to access is an essential step.</p> <p>While a significant majority of complaints are resolved within 6 weeks, delays beyond this could lead to consumer dissatisfaction or harm consumer confidence in the process. It is also clear that some vulnerable consumers face accessibility issues, such as difficulty navigating digital platforms or lack of tailored support.</p> <p>There is a need to enhance communication from providers about ADR, emphasising availability from the outset of complaints and placing greater focus on the needs of vulnerable groups.</p>
<p><b>Question 2:</b> Do you agree with our proposal to modify the GCs to reduce the timeframe for access to ADR to 6 weeks?</p>	<p>Yes, we support the proposal to reduce the timeframe for accessing ADR from 8 weeks to 6 weeks.</p> <p>Encouraging quicker access to redress schemes and ensuring prompt resolution will enhance consumer confidence. It will also provide businesses with greater certainty and allow them to resolve complaints earlier, improving overall consumer satisfaction</p>
<p><b>Question 3:</b> Do you agree with the findings of our provisional impact assessment?</p>	<p>Yes, we believe the impact assessment provides a sufficient analysis of the benefits of reducing the timeframe to 6 weeks.</p> <p>It is possible that the reduced timeframe may increase the volume of ADR cases but again the ACNI view is that the biggest driver will be consumer awareness rather than reducing access to ADR from 8 to 6 weeks.</p>
<p><b>Question 4:</b> Do you agree with our proposed implementation period?</p>	<p>The proposed 6-month implementation period would seem reasonable.</p>

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<p><b>Question 5:</b> Do you agree with our provisional assessment and proposal to re-approve both schemes based on the approval criteria set out in the Act? Please provide your reasoning.</p>	<p>Yes, ACNI supports the re-approval of CO and CISAS as they continue to meet the statutory criteria.</p> <p>It is important to ensure consistency in approach between ADR schemes, so consumers have consistent access to support, redress and appeals procedures no matter the scheme used.</p>
<p><b>Question 6:</b> Do you agree with our proposed changes to the decision-making principles? Please provide your reasoning.</p>	<p>Yes, generally the changes to the ‘Decision Making Principles’ (Annex 6 of Consultation Document) do not dilute the protection offered to consumers or fairness to the Communication Provider (CP).</p> <p>Although not directly related to the decision-making process, ACNI suggests incorporating ‘Clarity of Communication’ as a key principle in decision-making. Decisions must be communicated in plain, accessible language, especially for consumers with vulnerabilities.</p>
<p><b>Question 7:</b> Do you agree with our proposed changes to the KPIs including the proposed implementation period? Please provide reasons.</p>	<p>ACNI agrees that the current approach to KPIs should be revised and strengthened. The existing KPIs (e.g. 80% of call answered in less than 2 minutes, 90% of calls answered in less than 5 minutes) provide no insight into quality of service or customer satisfaction.</p> <p>The proposal to ‘work with the schemes to harmonise and improve the consistency of their customer satisfaction data’ seems weak. As the consultation highlights there is no consistent approach across ADR schemes to measure customer satisfaction. Tracking call answer or correspondence rates is of limited value if service quality and customer satisfaction metrics are not measured consistently.</p> <p>ACNI believes Ofcom should adopt a stronger position to the setting of consistent service quality and customer satisfaction KPIs, ensuring that ADR scheme operators report to these metrics on a regular basis.</p>

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