



Non-CONFIDENTIAL  
Vodafone Response to  
Ofcom consultation:  
Tackling scam calls

**Updating our CLI Guidance to expect providers to block more  
calls with spoofed numbers**



# 1. Introduction

Vodafone welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofcom’s consultation proposals that would extend the blocking of calls from overseas using UK Calling Line Identities (CLIs). We are supportive of any measure that will decrease the volume of nuisance and fraudulent calls aimed at UK consumers. However, perpetrators will not simply give up their fraudulent activity, but instead seek to find other ways to deceive consumers, meaning our goal can only be to make life more difficult for them. As the exercise is inevitably a “whack-a-mole” one, it is thus important that implementation costs are proportionate. We are comfortable that from a communications provider perspective the costs are proportionate to the benefits yielded for UK consumers, but in assessing the costs it is important that Ofcom also takes into account any views expressed by UK businesses that may be affected by the changes.

# 2. Answers to Questions

Question 1: Do you have any views on the potential impact of the proposed change?

The proposed change, to extend blocking to Presentation Number CLIs as well as Network Number CLIs, will certainly disrupt the business model of perpetrators of fraud, if effectively implemented. We believe that it will force perpetrators to either use alternative communications channels (such as email, WhatsApp or social media), or if they continue to use telephony, to connect via UK networks hence face our due diligence measures and be better within Ofcom and the police’s reach.

However, inevitably there is a risk that legitimate users of communications services will also be impacted, specifically UK businesses that use off-shore call-centres for outbound calling. The proposals would not outlaw off-shore call-centres, but instead would dictate that enterprises with such a model need to connect their call-centre to a UK network utilising a long-lining approach such as a SIP trunk, rather than egressing calls to their local overseas network.

We are not able to comment authoritatively as to the proportion of legitimate off-shore call-centres that already adopt this approach, but our sense is that primary communications channels from blue chip enterprises tend to connect to UK networks rather than a local overseas network. We do have concerns, though, about call-centres providing services to multiple smaller UK businesses, about those commissioned to provide temporary campaign-based outbound calling, and about secondary routing for blue chip enterprises (i.e. overflow and disaster recovery options). In this context, we would highlight the significant amount of Government-funded outbound calling that was routed via overseas networks during the COVID pandemic as an example.

We note that BT has already implemented blocking of +44 Presentation Number CLIs (we are unclear whether this is universal, or for specific upstream carriers), seemingly with little impact on legitimate callers. This evidence should be treated with caution, however. It may well be that those upstream carriers with



legitimate +44 Presentation Number CLI traffic have routed it to alternative UK international gateway providers to avoid BT's blocking and ensure the calls are terminated. It may also be that there is a danger lurking that enterprises' disaster recovery options have been silently removed, with the impact going unnoticed until these recovery options are invoked in the future. We are not criticising BT for carrying out such blocking, but we do assert that Ofcom would be taking a risk if it assumed that the evidence of BT's activity can be extended to provide assurance that there will be no issues if all international gateways take the same approach.

We therefore believe it important that Ofcom carries out an outreach exercise to such businesses to warn them of the impending changes. Vodafone has played its part – we have written to our enterprise base to flag the potential change to regulation and will inform them of alternative approaches that will allow them to avoid disruption to their business.

Any positive impact of the proposed change will also be conditional on universal, consistent adoption. This is a problem, because there is currently no universal, consistent definition of what constitutes an overseas network: there is considerable uncertainty when it comes to the treatment of individual networks where (using the language of paragraph 4.19 of the CLI Guidance) “*the traffic has originated from UK customers that are hosted on overseas nodes or cloud services*”. Regulatory teams in networks with international gateways are left having to exercise considerable judgement of whether to exempt individual upstream networks from blocking, based on this wording. This is dangerous on three levels:

1. It puts international gateway providers in the unenviable position of having to assess the nature of upstream carriers' (i.e. their customers') business. How are they to do this? What level of evidence is expected by Ofcom to support the upstream networks' assertions?
2. The degree of strictness of interpretation becomes a competition factor. A gateway operator who takes a relatively lax interpretation to the rules can attract more traffic – legitimate and not so legitimate – hence secure competitive advantage.
3. If Ofcom wishes to deploy a “ring of steel” around the UK regulatory jurisdiction, this can only be as strong as the weakest link. If gateway operator X believes that an upstream network meets the criteria of providing cloud services to UK users, then any blocking carried out by other gateways Y and Z against that upstream network's traffic is rendered largely redundant.

There is no ready way for international gateway operators to act collectively in this area. Gateway operators are typically also communication providers to UK consumers and enterprises, so there is an extreme risk that if there was collective agreement on whether a specific upstream network operator be exempted from having their traffic blocked, this would be perceived as cartel-like behaviour.

We understand that in response to this consultation, NICC Standards has suggested improvements to the wording of paragraph 4.19 of the CLI Guidance to better refine which networks can be exempted. However, whilst this may narrow the grey area, we do not believe that it is practicable to remove it completely and any discussion must ultimately be on the specifics of each case.



We believe that Ofcom must play a more active part in this process. We recognise that Ofcom would be shy to publish a list of upstream “international” networks that it considers meets the criteria of being treated as “quasi-national”, however it must address this issue if blocking is to be effective. We note that inherently any upstream network being treated on this basis must fall within scope of Ofcom regulation, as to meet the criteria they are a Public Electronic Communication Network/Service to UK customers – it is not an unreasonable request for Ofcom to clarify whether a given network is subject to their regulation. The Technical Measures Sub-Group where Ofcom shares intelligence with principal network operators may provide a suitable forum for sharing this intelligence.

Question 2: Do you agree with our proposed change to Paragraph 4.19 of the CLI Guidance? If not, please explain why.

On the assumption that Ofcom is comfortable that relevant stakeholders have been informed and consulted, Vodafone agrees with the proposed change. As noted in our response to Question 1, we feel that Ofcom needs to take a more proactive role in the interpretation of the guidance, specifically what constitutes an “overseas node”.

Question 3: Do you agree with proposed implementation date of six months after the publication of the Statement? If not, please explain why.

The earlier that the proposed changes are implemented, the earlier consumer protection will be improved. However, as we set out in our response to Question 1, early implementation needs to be balanced with the need for legitimate users to make preparations, and we are unconvinced that BT’s implementation provides compelling evidence that there are few or no impacted customers.

We believe that six months is a feasible period in which to make the necessary changes to the gateways in our network, but we cannot speak for businesses operating off-shore call-centres as to whether six months is sufficient time to make changes.

There is considerable value in setting a (relatively narrow) implementation window in order that legitimate customers can be sure that their calls will not be prematurely blocked. This would also head off the situation of international traffic streams being migrated between gateways in an attempt to bypass those providers that had implemented the blocking early.

We note that if Ofcom issues its conclusions in the next two-three months, a six-month implementation deadline would lead to a deadline around the time that is typically covered by Christmas network freeze periods by communication providers (these can extend to as early as the week prior to Black Friday, and typically remain in place until the new year). Ofcom should therefore keep this in mind when setting a practicable deadline for implementation.

**Vodafone UK**  
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