

Mobile & Auctions team,
Ofcom
Riverside House,
2A Southwark Bridge Road,
London SE1 9HA

Via Email

31st May 2011

Dear Sirs,

Re: Assessment of future mobile competition and proposals for the award of 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz spectrum and related issues

Digital Unite specialise in supporting older people to use digital technologies – from internet & email to social networking & blogs. We have a network of tutors throughout the UK who are specially selected and trained to deliver digital skills training. We work with everyone from learners and trainers, to public businesses and private enterprises, to older people's friends and family to promote digital skills to learners of all ages.

We believe older people can enjoy and be empowered by digital technology, like anyone else, if they get the right tools and training.

We know digital inclusion matters. 1 in 5 people aged 55-64 have never used the internet and this rises to 3 in 5 of those aged 65+. A society where older people are cut off because they lack digital skills is not a healthy happy place.

It is well documented that broadband coverage particularly in rural areas in the UK is patchy. Whilst mobile access is not a 100% solution in our view, we nonetheless consider that mobile broadband has the potential to ease access for some affected older people, and we welcome the spectrum auction, in particular if it results in more older people throughout the country being able to benefit from affordable and accessible services provided by mobile broadband.

We see the preservation of a competitive four-player mobile market as an essential outcome of the auction. Our community of interest includes many older and/or disadvantaged people, for whom cost is a major factor in determining whether they will be able to access new technologies, and the competitive allocation of mobile spectrum appears to offer consumers the best likelihood of good value mobile broadband retail deals including pay-as-you-go models which are often popular in lower income groups.

More broadly, we consider that the competitive allocation of spectrum is again the likeliest method of providing the incentives for network investment that will help more people get access.

Finally, we understand that lower frequency spectrum makes it easier to connect rural communities or those in built-up developments, such as care homes. We believe that Ofcom must ensure that lower frequency spectrum is allocated in such a way that the hard to reach areas including the rural parts of the country can get online, affordably and with a choice of providers.

Regards,
Emma Solomon
MD, Digital Unite