

Ofcom Telephone Numbering Consultation
23rd February – 25th May 2006

General:

Ofcom have recently completed a review of the UK Telephone numbering plan.

The response contained below, represents the Department of Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus interests and views based on the proposals set out in the review, paying particular attention to the potential improvements associated with a dedicated public service non-geographic and free phone number schemes.

Therefore the Department's interest in this consultation review is largely focussed on particular areas of the document, which it should directly influence in order to improve customer service experience, numbering plan awareness and call tariff transparency.

Question 8:

Do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to open a new '03' number range for non-geographic, non revenue sharing services?

Response:

Ofcom's proposal for restructuring the existing 08xx and 07xx number ranges to include the provision of a dedicated non-geographic range would greatly improve the awareness of national low call tariffs, which to a large extent does not presently exist. The public service prefix would deliver the required additional public confidence in this service, removing the perceived risks of complex mix of premium, local or national call tariffs which presently exist within 08xx number range.

Question 9:

How should the '03' range be structured, in terms of tariffs and services?

Response:

The proposal for the '03' number range stipulates that tariff sharing should be prohibited. Jobcentre Plus agrees with this position, and the tariff should be at a level that allows citizen's access to Government and public services using a national standard tariff platform. The ranges should reflect the spectrum of services provided across Government and the public services, potentially with the focus on segmenting departments by sub number ranges.

Although not addressed directly within this consultation, generally customers originating calls via mobile networks who are seeking services offered by Jobcentre Plus are discriminated against due to the mobile tariff transparency and the proportion of calls inflated, on what is intended as a low cost call. A significant proportion of citizens contacting Jobcentre Plus are some of the most vulnerable in our society, who are either in receipt of state benefits or applying for benefits, which makes them some of the least able to pay for inflated call tariffs in order to access basic Government services.

Question 13:

Are there practical means by which the numbering plan could provide mobile tariff transparency?

Response:

With respect to mobile tariff transparency, Jobcentre Plus has a significant number of vulnerable citizens who are in financial crisis. In order to contact the Department and access specialist services focussed at assisting this section of the population, access is via free 08xx channel. As indicated in response to Question 9, people in crisis are unable to pay for additional mobile tariffs for what is intended as a free service. Public telephones are not always a viable option to people who are in crisis and who have very specific needs.

The Department are concerned that with increased portability of mobile numbers it is difficult to identify the terminating network and hence tariff.