



Confirmation of measures to improve price transparency and strengthen consumer protection for NTS calls, April 2006

Ofcom today confirmed measures to improve price transparency and strengthen consumer protection for calls to 0870 numbers. These changes are part of Ofcom's final statement following its review of all chargeable 08 number ranges (known as Number Translation Services or NTS).

Ofcom's approach is broadly in line with the proposals it published for public consultation in September 2005. Many of the 1,300 responses to this consultation highlighted the case for changes to 0870 and increased consumer protection.

In parallel with its work on NTS, Ofcom is currently consulting on a wider strategic review of UK telephone numbering. This proposes potentially important alternatives for organisations affected by changes to 0870 numbers. In particular Ofcom is proposing a new 03 number range as an alternative for country-wide non-geographic numbers, charged at the same rate as calling a geographic number.

Ofcom has decided that changes to 0870 calls will be introduced 18 months after the conclusion of the wider Numbering Review (due for publication in summer 2006). The 12 month timetable for 0870 changes proposed last September has been revised to ensure coordination with the outcome of the Ofcom's Numbering Review and to allow sufficient time for industry to make the changes required.

0870 calls

As proposed in September 2005, Ofcom will require mobile and fixed-line providers (including payphones) to charge the same or less for 0870 calls as they do for national-rate calls to geographic numbers (starting 01 or 02). If providers wish to charge more for 0870 calls they will have to make a free-to-caller price pre-announcement at the start of the call.

This change is likely to significantly reduce the price of many calls to 0870 numbers. It will also mean that 0870 calls will generally be included in call packages. Currently daytime 0870 calls usually cost around 8 pence per minute from fixed-lines. Typical fixed-line call packages offer calls to geographic numbers at 3 pence per minute or less.

Organisations using 0870 currently have the opportunity to share the revenue generated by per minute call charges. In September 2005 Ofcom proposed changes to NTS call regulation which would effectively combine with lower call charges to end revenue sharing on 0870. Ofcom has decided to implement these proposals.

Role of ICSTIS

In line with the September 2005 proposals, Ofcom will extend the role of the premium rate regulator ICSTIS to include calls made to 0871 numbers. This will happen at the same time as changes on 0870 numbers. Ofcom will also extend ICSTIS's remit to include all adult services regardless of price. Any adult services currently provided on 08 numbers will have to move to the designated 09 ranges.

Public bodies

Ofcom continues to recommend that public bodies should not use NTS numbers exclusively (ie: without giving equal prominence to a geographic alternative) especially when dealing with people on low incomes or other vulnerable groups.

The new 03 country-wide numbers, proposed as part of Ofcom's Numbering Review, would be well suited to the needs of many public bodies currently using chargeable 08 numbers.

0845 and 0844 numbers

As proposed in September 2005, telephone providers will be required to provide customers with more comprehensive and accurate pricing information about all chargeable 08 numbers including 0845 and 0844. Ofcom does not intend to make other changes on 0845 or 0844 numbers at this stage.

However Ofcom will review 0845 numbers again within the next two years. Currently 0845 numbers are widely used to provide dial-up pay as you go internet access and Ofcom's review will assess how much these services are being used in two years time.