

sequel

deaf telecoms update

Major new survey of deaf telecoms – have your say!



Researchers working on an important new TAG-initiated study, want to hear your views about text communication

Researchers at London's City University are examining whether the many text-based telecoms options available today are meeting the real needs of people who do not use conventional voice telephony.

The study, which being funded by BT, Orange, O₂, Vodafone, Oftel and DIEL, is examining how effective current services are and how to improve them. The researchers would like to hear your views about what changes to text services could be useful.

"This is the first independent research into deaf people's use and aspirations for text telephony," said TAG Chair Ruth Myers. "The researchers have been asked to ensure they reach people who have not previously been involved, such as children, people in rural areas, and ethnic minorities."

▶ To take part in the survey (in complete confidence), contact:

Textphone	020 7040 8353	Post	Text survey,
Voice phone	020 8992 4302		FREEPOST LONI 6480,
Fax	0871 433 9272		LONDON W3 8BR
SMS	07961 827 873	Email	textsurvey@hotmail.com

TAG's newsletter for advisers of deaf people and others interested in deaf telecoms.

Inside this issue:

- ▶ What will replace DIEL?
- ▶ Otelo - the new telecoms complaints body
- ▶ Accessing a relay service from your mobile
- ▶ Better access to mobiles
- ▶ Services for deaf children: Too little, too late.

Ofcom's new Committee for Disabled and Elderly People

Goodbye [Of tel](#),
Hello [Of com](#).

To keep pace with merging technologies, the Government's new regulatory body [Of com](#) has taken on the roles of the telecoms, TV and radio regulators:

[Of tel](#), the [Independent Television Commission](#), the [Radio Authority](#), the [Broadcasting Standards Authority](#) and the [Radio-communications Agency](#).

[TAG](#) thanks [BT](#) and [Vodafone](#) for their sponsorship of [Sequel](#)

With the replacement of [Of tel](#) by [Of com](#), [Of tel](#)'s disability advisory body [DIEL](#), has also disappeared.

However, the [Communications Act](#) specifically requires [Of com](#) to establish an [Advisory Committee for Disabled and Elderly People](#). What shape will it take? What has [TAG](#) asked for?

[Of com](#) has just completed a wide-ranging consultation exercise to obtain the views of organisations – including [TAG](#) – and stakeholders on how the Committee might work. The key purpose of the committee will be to assist [Of com](#) in carrying out its statutory duties, in particular through the provision of specialist advice and experience to augment [Of com](#)'s own knowledge, data, research and judgements.

[TAG](#) responded to the consultation on the new committee by requesting that those chosen should have the knowledge and contacts to enable them to represent the major constituencies of disabled and elderly people and that the majority of members should preferably have the disability they represent.

[TAG](#) stressed the importance of recognising the diversity of needs and requirements of deaf people and suggested that at least two representatives are needed to represent these diverse needs.

[TAG](#) also felt that the term of office should be a maximum of three years with the option of re-election for one further term, making a maximum tenure of office of six years.

TAG DBC Seminar

To consider the needs of people with a hearing loss as telecoms and broadcasting technologies merge, [TAG](#) and the [Deaf Broadcasting Council](#) joined forces to host a seminar in June. [Geoff Brown](#), [TAG](#)'s Vice-Chair, highlights four contributions from the informative and wide-ranging discussions.

[BBC](#) has conducted an accessibility study of [BBCi](#) ([BBC Interactive](#)) – it is available on the www.bbc.co.uk website.

The [Digital Television Group](#) is looking at the needs deaf and partially sighted people as part of a larger study of accessibility issues.

Three pilot programmes have been run by the [Department of Health](#) making it possible, for example, to run a video clip describing a particular condition such as cataract, to contact a [District Nurse](#) or to make an appointment with your [GP](#) via your television.

[Sky TV](#) will be launching a disability manifesto.


Otelo
the new
telecoms
complaints body



[Otelo](#) opened for business at the start of the year with membership representing a combined market share of more than 95% of the fixed line market and more than 30% of the mobile market.

[TAG](#) has asked [Otelo](#) to install a textphone and hopes this will happen soon.

As with most other complaints systems, customers must first contact the service provider and give them a chance to sort the problem out. If it has not been possible to resolve the problem within three months, the company should be told that a complaint will be sent to [Otelo](#).

 You can check latest membership details via their website – www.otelo.org.uk – or call the enquiry line 0845 050 1614.

Mobile access to relay services

The new Communications Act and the replacement of Oftel by Ofcom has distracted from a highly significant development in deaf telecoms that took place this summer *writes Ross Trotter, TAG's Secretary*: mobile operators will soon have to provide access to a relay service.

To bring the UK into line with recent EU Directives, the whole basis of how telecommunications companies are regulated has been changed. Until now, each company has had an individual licence which laid out its own specific obligations – although many things were common to all. Now, however, all those licences have been abolished and replaced by what are called General Conditions of Entitlement, which apply to all telephone companies – both fixed and mobile. They came into force on 25 July 2003.

For deaf people, the most significant requirement is General Condition 15 (GC15), which covers “special measures for end users with disabilities”. It includes things such as priority fault repair, bills in alternative formats and access to directory enquiries.

The most important is GC15.4 which states that all providers must enable access to a relay service and apply a special tariff for such calls. Previously the requirement to provide access to a relay service only fell on fixed line operators, but under GC15 mobile networks must also provide this, and have been given to

the end of 2003 to do so. This will obviously lead to greater equality for text users. GC15 does not specify how mobile operators should achieve this – so they do not necessarily have to use TextDirect or Typetalk if they can come up with an alternative which is acceptable to the regulators. Given the timescale, it is difficult to see how they can do anything very different.

GC15 only requires access to a relay service – the obligation to provide and fund the relay service itself will still be covered under a Universal Service Condition rather than a General Condition, and this will still fall on BT. However, a review of universal service is expected to take place early in 2004, and TAG will be arguing for changes in the current funding mechanisms, and for an extension of the definition of the relay service to include services such as video relay, IP relay and SMS relay.

GC15 lays down what all operators have to do. The mobile networks have also launched a voluntary good practice guide which goes beyond this and which also covers obligations under the DDA (see below). TAG welcomes this initiative.



Free to deaf people under 26 years of age – the latest edition of the [NDCS Omnidirectory](#) guide to technology and contacts for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Mobile companies aim to improve access


The UK Mobile Network Operators have published a Guide to advise and help mobile network operators, service providers and retailers make their products and services more accessible to disabled and elderly customers.

The Guide was created by a working group of industry and consumer representatives and is supported by all five mobile network operators. It was launched in late September.

The Guide gives general information on how the mobile industry should meet the needs of disabled people, focusing on

the Disability Discrimination Act and specific areas of concern highlighted by consumer groups and other stakeholders.

The mobile industry grouping has also produced a leaflet for customers to create awareness of the Good Practice Guide and indicate what disabled and elderly customers should expect from their mobile service provider.

 You can download the *Mobile Industry Good Practice Guide for Service Delivery for Disabled and Elderly Customers in the UK* from the Oftel website www.oftel.gov.uk

How many disabled children are there in the UK?

Estimates vary widely – anything from 3% to 16% of young people are disabled says an Audit Commission Report.



'Deaf kids don't want ugly equipment'

Audit Commission report on services for disabled children

A new Audit Commission report on disabled children has included hard-hitting comments on the equipment needs of deaf children.

Access to services for disabled children and their families, says the report, are a lottery dependent upon where they live and how hard their parents are able to push for change. Many families have to wait far too long for action, equipment and adaptations. As a result, opportunities for children to develop and integrate effectively are lost. In short, disabled children get too little, too late.

"We found a jigsaw puzzle of services," said Audit Commission Chairman James Strachan. "Families have to struggle through a maze of services to track down essential information. They then have to jump through a series of hoops to try to gain access to support. When they manage to be considered for help, families are asked to repeat their painful stories over again to a series of different staff."

Strachan says that organisations that provide services to disabled children need better management, improved leadership and to adopt a new attitude that sees the social exclusion of disabled children as unacceptable.

The Commission recommends that all relevant public sector bodies should identify what matters most locally and agree a joint plan of action to improve services with their strategic partners, including those from the independent sector.

The Audit Commission's "Improvement Handbook" for managers and staff who work with disabled children highlights the central role of communication equipment in children's personal and educational development, both in and out of schools. Good services, says the Handbook, are tailored to children's specific needs and demonstrate awareness of the acceptability of the equipment in terms of how it looks and feels – children do not want equipment that they think is ugly or outdated.

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/disabledchildren/

VOICE for deaf people

The VOICE Project is a European Commission programme investigating the use of speech recognition systems in conversation, conferences, television broadcasts and telephone calls.

It is developing prototypes of user friendly interfaces allowing an easier use of commercial products in translating the spoken voice into PC screen messages and subtitles.

Find out more at <http://voice.jrc.it/>

Survey – take part!

Don't forget – if you want your views on text services heard, take part in the text telephony survey – see front page.

To participate in the survey (in complete confidence), contact:

Textphone 020 7040 8353
Voice phone 020 8992 4302
Fax 0871 433 9272
SMS 07961 827 873
Email textsurvey@hotmail.com
Post Text survey,
FREEPOST LON16480,
LONDON W3 8BR

TAG website

telecomsactiongroup.org.uk

Events

Magic DUST – beyond the textphone

TAG & WGIH Seminar

8 October 2003

Portland Place, London

For proceedings, contact rmyers@waitrose.com

NDCS Technology Exhibition

18 & 19 June 2004

(18th is Professionals' Day, 19th is Family Fun Day)

For Felicity Martin, NDCS on 0121 234 9820 (voice & text) or email felcity@ndcs.org.uk

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