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PROGRESS REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON "WIRELESS BROADBAND"

As part of the RSPG work programme set out in document RSPG09-253, the working group on wireless broadband met for the first time on 15 January 2009 in London, at Ofcom's offices.

Representatives of 9 Member States and organisations were present, from the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Commission, the European Free Trade Association, France, Hungary, Ireland, Sweden and the UK.

This progress report on the wireless broadband working group's activities covers the following points:

1. the objectives of the work and the terms of reference;
2. the information that will feed into the analysis and some of the main issues for investigation;
3. the relationship with the RSPG working group on the Digital Dividend; and
4. the project plan and next steps (including dates for further working group meetings).

Objectives of the work on wireless broadband and terms of reference

The working group's objectives and terms of reference flow from the RSPG work programme for 2009.

The main objective is to provide strategic guidance for EU policy making, in the form of a high level position paper, that is designed to maximise the delivery of benefits to consumers, citizens and society as a whole from wireless broadband services.

In its analysis, the working group will focus in particular on the two expected results of the work programme:

- reviewing "Best practices" which could be taken to facilitate the roll-out of wireless broadband services; and
- ensuring that shortage of spectrum is not a bottleneck in the provision of wireless broadband services and forward this message to the stakeholders.

The Annex to this document sets out in full the terms of reference of the working group as agreed at the first meeting in January 2009.

Information that will feed into the analysis and main issues

The working group will ground its analysis in specific and precise information as far as possible to get a clear picture of where wireless broadband (covering mobile, wireless local loop, satellite, wireless LAN) is now in its development and where these wireless broadband solutions fit in the wider picture of broadband access and services.

The associated research will help in understanding different market situations across Member States and in considering policy responses that are suited to the range of circumstances across the EU. The working group however recognises that it may not be possible to get the same type of information regarding all Member States and that the research may have to focus on basic overall trends rather than precise measurements or assessments in certain cases.

The working group is going through a data gathering exercise conducted by OFCOM to build on available sources of information such as reports from COCOM or the ERG, publications from international organisations such as the European Commission and the OECD, and other published sources.

This exercise is designed to focus on key factors, in line with the objective to provide high level strategic guidance.

These key factors include the penetration of broadband services and the share of wireless; the growth in data traffic on wireless broadband networks and the growth of revenues from data services.

In addition, the working group will seek additional information from Member States on issues such as:

- what broadband and wireless broadband are (including Member States' views as to what type of definition may be associated to broadband, e.g. in terms of data speed);
- spectrum use and availability (now and in the future), including any evidence of potential shortages; and
- initiatives designed to promote the development of wireless broadband access and services and to address the digital divide.

We will do so through a questionnaire addressed to RSPG members, asking for responses by Monday 23 February.

The RSPG wireless broadband group would welcome the views of RSPG members on specific contacts in their Administrations who will lead on the preparation of a response so that we can send the questionnaire to them directly. Please send relevant contact details to brice.lecannu@ofcom.org.uk.

One of the ways in which the working group plans to use the information is to consider possible scenarios for wireless broadband development in the medium to long term.

In addition to the factual background on wireless broadband, four of the main topics which we plan to cover in the analysis are:

- the interactions between wired and wireless networks in the overall provision of broadband services;
- the extent of the digital divide, the options for reducing it, and the role that wireless access can play (considering all wireless options such as terrestrial and satellite services);

- hurdles to the development of wireless broadband access and potential regulatory responses to these hurdles; and
- spectrum that is currently available and spectrum that is likely to or may become available in future for the provision of electronic communications services including wireless broadband and the options for addressing any emerging bottleneck.

Relationship with the RSPG work on the Digital Dividend

In the course of its first meeting, the working group considered the potential linkages between the work on wireless broadband and the work on the digital dividend. The RSPG work programme for 2009 (document RSPG09-253) refers to these linkages.

The digital dividend is relevant in the context of the work on wireless broadband, as the digital dividend is one of a range of spectrum bands which are suitable for the provision of electronic communications services including wireless broadband. In that sense, the wireless broadband position paper will have some relevance for the digital dividend.

However, it is clear that the work on wireless broadband should not overlap with that on the digital dividend and that it is not part of this group's objective to identify recommendations that are specific to the digital dividend.

The two working groups will keep each other informed of their respective work to ensure that there are no unnecessary overlaps.

This working group will also welcome any further steer from the RSPG on linkages between the two work streams.

Project plan and next steps

Using the information identified above (from public sources, responses to the questionnaire to Member States), Ofcom and the working group will develop the analysis for the position paper for consideration by correspondence and at the next working group meetings.

The working group's plan, consistent with the RSPG 2009 work programme, is to deliver a draft final position paper for the RSPG meeting in May.

The sequence of meetings is currently planned as follows.

- RPSG # 18 – Wednesday 11 February
- Wireless Broadband working group meeting # 2 – Thursday 5 March
- Wireless Broadband working group meeting # 3 – Friday 3 April
- RSPG # 19 – Wednesday 13 May 2009

The working group will review the possibility of holding further meetings as the work progresses.

Brice Le Cannu
Rapporteur, RSPG working group on wireless broadband
30 January 2009

Annex - Terms of reference for the RSPG Working Group on Wireless Broadband

15 January 2009 [agreed at WG meeting 1]

See the RSPG work programme for 2009 (document RSPG09-253).

Main objective

1. The main objective of the RSPG working group is to provide strategic guidance for EU policy making, in form of a high level position paper, that is designed to maximise the delivery of benefits to consumers, citizens and society as a whole from wireless broadband services.
2. This will in particular focus on:
 - a. reviewing “Best practices” which could be taken to facilitate the roll-out of wireless broadband services;
 - b. ensuring that shortage of spectrum is not a bottleneck in the provision of wireless broadband services and forward this message to the stakeholders.

Considerations

3. In developing its guidance the working group will consider the following:
 - a. potential bandwidth/capacity requirements, technological developments and the existence and extent of complementarities between fixed networks and wireless broadband networks e.g. for Next Generation Access;
 - b. the role that wireless broadband may play in bridging the Digital Divide and how this may be best achieved;
 - c. what best practices may facilitate the development of wireless broadband access;
 - d. how regulatory provisions relating to wireless broadband access and services can be best defined to maximise benefits for consumers and citizens and ensure optimal use of the scarce resource that spectrum is, including a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of regulatory action;
 - e. the implications of such regulatory provisions for spectrum access for wireless broadband across the EU taking into account, where needed, various principles already set out in previous RSPG opinions, in particular WAPECS RSPG05-102; CUS RSPG 08-244, in order to allow the introduction of lighter touch regulation, give space for infrastructure competition and deliver consumer benefits.
 - f. any linkages with other EU policy initiatives, such as the RSPG position paper on the Digital Dividend and their respective scopes.

Timetable

4. The milestones for the working group are as follows.
 - a. First working group meeting in London on Thursday 15 January 2009.
 - b. First status report at RSPG # 18, on Wednesday 11 February 2009. Circulation of papers ahead of the meeting.
 - c. Second working group meeting in March/April – details to be confirmed.
 - d. Draft final position paper at RSPG # 19 on Wednesday 13 May 2009. Circulation of papers ahead of the meeting.

Working method

5. We are proposing to hold at least one working group meeting ahead of each RSPG meeting, in order to develop the working group's input to the RSPG.
6. We expect the working group to agree, at its first meeting on 15 January, on a working method designed to deliver the required outputs.

Membership

7. Membership of the working group is open to all RSPG members and their representatives, who will become members if they request it.
8. The working group papers will be available to all its members. To avoid unnecessary correspondence, we are not proposing to routinely send working group's documents to all RSPG members, although these documents will be available on request.

Annex : Source document RSPG09-253

Wireless Broadband

Wireless communications will become more important as a complement to wired access for consumers, as broadband services seek to penetrate further in rural areas and as the capacity and cost constraints of wired broadband services become more prevalent. A new and competitive wireless infrastructure would allow the introduction of lighter touch regulation, give space for infrastructure competition and deliver consumer benefits. The regulatory decisions to accelerate these developments lie with the Commission and the Member States because these services are likely to require more bandwidth and spectrum, and this range must be taken from somewhere – if not from the digital dividend.

<p>2. Wireless broadband</p>
<p><i>Outline</i></p> <p>Over the past approx. 15-20 years the Internet has fundamentally changed our lives and transformed Europe's economy: broadband became fundamental. This progress will accelerate as mobile Internet and ultra-fast broadband make it possible to deliver innovative services to more people, reaching out to the poorest and most remote communities of Europe. The European broadband market is developing rapidly. In January 2008, the average broadband penetration in Europe was 20%, with huge differences among Member States. In some Member States the penetration rate is above 30% while in others it is less than 10%.</p> <p>It has been acknowledged recently that the efficient use of spectrum is a vital factor in the development of broadband services in order to overcome the digital divide and to act as a vector for growth in the European economy at a time of serious economic difficulties. The RSPG considers that there is a need to comprehensively approach the case of digital divide and to attempt to identify regulatory challenges and market opportunities regarding the development of wireless broadband services. Therefore the RSPG intends to systematically analyze Member States' practices regarding the digital divide, the development policy implications of possible fixed network rollout and the competition issues related to wireless broadband services. The document may serve as an input to the wireless broadband strategy plans in Europe, including in relation to Next Generation Networks and the potential for wireless solutions to assist in delivering Next Generation Access to European citizens and consumers.</p>
<p><i>Type</i></p> <p>RSPG Position paper</p>
<p><i>Expected results</i></p> <p>Review "Best practices" which could be taken to facilitate the roll-out of wireless broadband services.</p> <p>Ensure that shortage of spectrum is not a bottleneck in the provision of wireless broadband services and forward this message to the stakeholders.</p>
<p><i>Timetable</i></p> <p>First status report: RSPG #18, 1Q 2009 Adoption of the document: RSPG #19, 2Q 2009</p>
<p><i>Public consultation:</i> No</p>