

PRESS RELEASE: 25 March 2015



NEXT GENERATION TEXT SERVICE

Ofcom has fined BT £800,000 for failing to provide an improved text-to-voice service between April and September last year. The service, called 'Next Generation Text Service', helps users have more natural conversations using speech as well as text and is accessible on devices such as PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

In October 2012, Ofcom told all UK landline and mobile phone providers to launch their service by 18 April 2014. However, BT missed this deadline as they encountered technical problems with the sound quality of emergency calls. BT finally launched Next Generation Text on 24 September 2014. As a result of this delay, in June last year, Ofcom opened an investigation into why the improved text relay service was not available as required from April. Ofcom acknowledged that whilst the level of financial harm to consumers was limited, the provision of an improved text relay service was an important requirement, designed to provide people with hearing or speech impairments with equivalent access to phone services. BT had 18 months to meet that requirement and still failed to do so five months after the deadline.

Claudio Pollack, Ofcom's Consumer and Content Group Director, said: "The size of the penalty imposed on BT reflects the importance of providing an improved text relay service to its customers with hearing and speech impairments. However, BT has invested significantly in launching the new text relay service, which allows users to have conversations more easily and fluently and on new devices. We welcome the fact the service is now operating successfully".

BT will pay the £800,000 financial penalty to Ofcom which will then be passed on to HM Treasury.

In addition BT is required to take the following steps:

- a) provide the NGTR helpdesk and support facilities for the NGTR service;
- b) make and publish on the NGTR website instructional videos for using the NGTR service;
- c) hold the proposed "Train the Trainer" events on the accessing and use of the NGTR service; and
- d) provide for distribution to end-users, by organisations represented on the NGTR Steering Board, of 500 tablet devices to be used to access the NGTR service by those users.



Additionally, BT has committed to playing its part to deliver a mobile-compatible version of its NGT Lite application for Braille reading equipment users.

Whilst the transfer of the fine from Ofcom to the Treasury is standard procedure, DAC believes that this fine of £800,000 should have been made available to Ofcom to invest in the development of a range of different types of relay services such as Captioned Telephone and Video Relay Services (VRS) in order to meet the accessibility needs of the broad spectrum of deaf people ranging from those who are hard of hearing, deaf people whose speech is understood by hearing callers to those who use British Sign Language.

It is most unfortunate that the UK only has one type of relay service that is regulated by Ofcom whereas in other countries such as the U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand, deaf consumers have a choice of relay services.

It is not possible to meet the needs of all deaf people through the provision of a single service such as NGTR – using the fine to leverage change would make a significant difference to deaf people across the UK so DAC hopes that this proposal will be given due consideration by Ofcom.

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Notes

1. **Deaf Access to Communications (DAC)** is a Special Interest Group within UK Council on Deafness
<http://deafcouncil.org.uk/deaf-access-to-communications/>
2. The [UK Council on Deafness](#) is the umbrella body for voluntary organisations working with deaf people in the UK. Our mission is to assist organisations and the sector as a whole to maximise the positive impact they have for deaf people.
3. DAC can be accessed on Facebook and Twitter:
<http://www.facebook.com/deafaccessstocommunications>
<http://www.twitter.com/deafaccesscomms>
4. The reference to 'deaf' comprises deaf, deafblind, deafened and hard of hearing people.

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