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ComReg consults on Telephone Universal Service obligations

The Commission for Communications Regulation has today issued a consultation paper concerning aspects of the telecoms Universal Service Obligation (USO). The consultation paper relates to the obligation on eircom to provide connections to the public telephone network.

Eircom as the designated Universal Service Provider is required to fulfil obligations which are set out in Regulations made by the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. These regulations permit ComReg to set requirements in connection with aspects of those obligations.

The provision of a working connection to the fixed telephone network is important to Irish society. It allows people to keep in contact with family and friends and provides other services such as e-mail and internet access. Its availability is therefore expected by all.

To ensure access to a fixed telephone service - along with ensuring that a minimum data rate is available to users for functional Internet access - ComReg is proposing to place the following requirements on eircom:

On access to the telephone network, ComReg is proposing that eircom should meet all requests for connections within stated timeframes; that all connections which involve expenditure of less than €7,000 be provided for the standard connection charge and that where the cost exceeds €7,000, applicants should be able to get service by paying the excess.

On functional Internet access, ComReg is proposing guidelines for meeting a required minimum data rate of 28.8 kbit/s for functional narrowband Internet access. It is expected that the telephone lines for all end users who wish to have internet access will meet this minimum standard. Where this is not the case, ComReg will expect that eircom will use all reasonable efforts to rectify the situation.

In considering the issue of functional Internet access, ComReg's concern has been to ensure that priority and investment continues to be focused on meeting the national objective in relation to Broadband roll-out.

ComReg Commissioner, Mike Byrne said: "Universal Service is really about social inclusion, and access to basic telephone services is a right of all members of society. This consultation will contribute to providing greater clarity as to the nature of that right and also in the nature of the duty which eircom has in delivering access. However, that should not be regarded as the limit of expectations by either customers or by eircom itself. For instance, in proposing a data rate for narrowband Internet access, ComReg expects that this will be the minimum data rate provided to any customer who wants internet access. The data rate which most customers expect is broadband which is a multiple of the minimum rate and eircom has publicly committed to achieving 90% DSL coverage by March 2006."

This consultation process is open from today until the 6th of April during which time ComReg will welcome written submissions on the proposals. All views will be considered by ComReg before final decisions are made.

ENDS

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