

BT and the disappointing wait for NGTR

A month after we were supposed to be enjoying a new, improved text relay service delivering a modern telephone services for deaf people, there is still no sign of Next Generation Text Relay (NGTR).

The reality is that unless a new entrant can be persuaded to develop an NGTR service, consumers and industry are still reliant on BT fixing the problems and launching their product.

The delay has been caused by a technical problem causing audio quality problems when connecting the new service to the emergency services. It was identified very late in the day by volume testing the new service.

It may have been right not to launch the new service knowing that there issues with emergency service connection and performance but DAC has significant concerns about whether volume testing so late in the day was acceptable and therefore whether BT had the right approach to developing the new product and service.

Since the launch was delayed DAC has met with Ofcom, and written to both the Minister at DCMS and BT to seek assurances about the plans to launch NGTR. Ofcom, as the regulator, has expressed their disappointment and frustration at the situation to DAC. BT has a clear responsibility to solve the issues as quickly as possible, launch the NGTR service we are all entitled to, and engage more fully with all stakeholders providing the detailed information that consumers and other communication providers are seeking.

Discussions between BT and Ofcom are happening at a CEO level, and Ofcom do have regular technical oversight of the project at a senior executive level.

BT

NGTR now has senior executive support within BT – Graham Sutherland, CEO of BT Business has corresponded with DAC and we will be meeting him on the 27th May ([correspondence attached](#)). Colin Lees is the senior member of staff at BT leading on the project will also meet with DAC. The meeting will be a chance to hear from BT about why the complexity of NGTR appears to have been underestimated within BT and as a result the right resource and support was not in place to ensure a launch within the regulatory deadlines. Christopher Jones, Joff McGill, Jim Edwards, Damian Barry and Jack Sandover will be attending the meeting. Ofcom have said they are willing to be involved and this is being discussed with BT.

BT have not committed to a new launch date – clearly this is something DAC will be asking about when we meet later this month, but given the senior executive involvement it is unlikely BT will commit publically until they are totally assured the project team and all the suppliers involved can deliver. DAC is not expecting NGTR to be launched for a number of months.

The BT NGTR website (www.ngts.org.uk) does contain some new and updated information, including a long list of FAQs, but it is also clear that a significantly improved website is needed and that consumers expect both an overview of the new service and detailed answers to questions about the improvements, how they will work in practice, the devices that can be used with NGTR and the sort

of voice and data charges users can expect. DAC will be asking BT for regular updates and communication on NGTR and much better information for consumers.

Ofcom have produced a useful consumer guide for NGTR (which DAC have commented on although it is yet to be published), but it clear the responsibility for information and communication lies with BT.

Ongoing Testing at BT

BT has informed DAC they are now in a position to increase the numbers involved in trialling NGTR. 34 people have accepted an invitation to test the Android NGTR app (information attached). The desktop app is due to be trialled in smaller numbers. An Apple app is now in the final stages of supplier testing and internal testing at BT is due to start imminently. Invitations to test the Apple app will be sent to a small group of users who have already registered their interest.

BT are still keen to hear from those interested in testing the system, particularly deaf people with a visual impairment – please contact Lorna Stephenson directly (lorna.stephenson@bt.com) or you can register online

Ofcom and the regulatory position

It is clear that the whole telecoms industry is in breach of General Conditions 15 which states that all communication providers should by now be providing access to an NGTR service. They were all relying on provision from BT to meet this requirement. Ofcom are disappointed and frustrated about this and have a number of powers within the regulatory framework to investigate and rectify the breach – at a meeting with DAC members (Christopher Jones, Laura Matthews, Susan Daniels, Joff McGill, Jim Edwards) they have committed to keeping us up to date about any decisions they take in this area.

There are clearly lessons to be learnt about the NGTR approval process. Ofcom consulted on approving BT's NGTR service on the basis of some public correspondence where BT committed to meeting the requirements of the service and undertakings made by BT to Ofcom in confidence. However all stakeholders were being consulted on approving a completely untested service. DAC will continue to discuss this with Ofcom.

Related resources

[DAC letter to BT](#)

[BT response to DAC](#)

[DAC letter to the Minister](#)

[Ofcom Consumer Guide](#) (yet to be published)

[BT NGTR website](#) (link)