

The logo for Which?, featuring the word "Which?" in white text on a red square background.

Which?, 2 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 4DF

Date: 14 September 2012 To: - Bee Thakur Response by: Sumedha Pathak

Consultation Response

Bee Thakur
Phonepay Plus
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Review of Information, Connection and/or Signposting Services

Which? is an independent, not-for-profit consumer organisation with around 750,000 members and is the largest consumer organisation in Europe. Which? is independent of Government and industry, and is funded through the sale of Which? consumer magazines, books and online subscriptions.

Which? welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the review of information, connection and/or signposting services (ICSS). Which? notes that Phonepay Plus has received a significant number of complaints from consumers who have found these services to be misleading. These ICSS often use similar layouts and branding to the sites consumers are searching for. In other cases, the ICSS lead consumers to believe that they can provide unique information not available elsewhere.

In all cases these numbers charge consumers a premium rate, far more than what would be charged were the consumer to phone the actual organisation they sought. We note Phonepay Plus's observation that often the consumers seeking advice are quite vulnerable, meaning additional costs are likely to be of particular detriment.

Which? agrees with Phonepay Plus's assessment of consumer harm and agrees with their proposal to introduce a prior permissions requirement for the operations of ICSS. We do not consider the prior permissions requirement to be so onerous or costly as to discourage companies offering a legitimate and useful service to consumers from applying. Further, we think the exemption for charities and providers who have an established, written agreement with an organisation to operate a service on their behalf is fair. In sum, correcting this problem in the market would not pose undue restrictions on the types of companies consumers are likely to use, and would restore confidence in the market.

Which? Is a consumer champion

We work to make things better for consumers. Our advice helps them make informed decisions. **Our campaigns make people's lives fairer, simpler and safer.** Our services and products put consumers' needs first to bring them better value.

www.which.co.uk

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