

**Completing the removal of "rip-off" customer support telephone numbers**

The government recognition that it is improper to use 084 / 087 numbers for customer enquiries is an important breakthrough. There seems to be agreement that this one amongst many measures was not adequately prioritised by **BIS** in its release - "[New powers to protect vulnerable and elderly consumers against rogue traders](#)". We are grateful to those able to react to [our release](#).

***Protection against "rogue traders"***

It is indeed particularly important that the vulnerable are protected against improper use of these numbers, by what **BIS** chooses to call "**rogue traders**" e.g.

- **Citizens Advice** consumer helpline (0845 4 04 05 06)
- **Citizens Advice Bureaux** (08444 111 444 / 08444 77 20 20)
- **UCAS** (0871 468 0 468) - a number formally classified as being used for a Premium Rate Service
- **Student Loans Company** (4 or more 0845 numbers)
- **Department for Work and Pensions** (35 or more 0845 numbers)
- **BIS** - Redundancy Payments Service Helpline (0845 145 0004)

The latter three cases are highlighted in [a report from the National Audit Office](#). This report is being used as the basis for work now being undertaken by the **Cabinet Office** to "address" this issue across government and the public sector. We look forward to resuming engagement with the **Cabinet Office**, after our earlier joint efforts were abandoned by the previous government.

The imminent announcement of '**A**' level results for England, on 15 August, will once again focus attention on the needs of those progressing to higher education. All vulnerable groups have a higher than normal tendency to use mobile phones, where the marginal cost difference in calling 084/087 numbers is at its greatest. The "Service Charge" subsidy of over 10p per minute earned by **UCAS** on calls to its 0871 number is only part of the call cost incurred. Most telephone companies also add an "Access Charge" when originating calls to all 084/087 numbers. This can be as great as 39p per minute on some mobile tariffs for some number types.

***The scope of regulation***

In our submission to the **BIS** Consultation on its proposals [we highlighted many cases](#) of businesses that will not be covered by the provisions as currently drafted. Whilst the cases listed above could not be brought within the scope of these regulations, these businesses could be included.

Whilst regulations must be applied and enforced against those who may be otherwise unable or unwilling to behave properly, we believe that ...

**companies and public bodies should be able to take responsibility for themselves**

- does **Citizens Advice** really need government regulation to tell it how to behave?

Whether compelled by law, inspired to do the right thing or pressed by angry customers -

**those who cannot justify a Service Charge on callers must cease using 084 and 087 numbers**

If it is found to be necessary, the **Department for Transport** and the **Financial Conduct Authority** must bring forward measures of their own, or permit an extension of the **BIS** measures, to ban use of expensive enquiry numbers by **passenger transport and financial services companies**.

