

Opening up the Premium Rate Services ("PRS") Range '0908'

A statement issued by the Director General of
Telecommunications on proposals to open up the '0908' range for
the PRS service 'Sexual Entertainment PRS', and the necessary
changes to the Numbering Conventions

7 May 2003

Summary

S.1 This Statement follows the Consultation Document entitled 'Opening up the Premium Rate Services Range '0908''.

S.2 The Consultation Document set out Oftel's proposals for opening up the '0908' range to accommodate future demands from telecoms operators for PRS number blocks within the service range 'Sexual Entertainment PRS'.

S.3 The necessary changes to the Numbering Conventions were also set out in the Consultation Document, and are outlined in Chapter 4, below.

Chapter 1

Background

1.1 Oftel allocates blocks of 10,000 numbers to telecoms operators for PRS for the service range - 'Sexual Entertainment PRS' – from the range '0909'.

1.2 The '0909' range is nearing exhaustion and therefore Oftel needed to open up another range to accommodate demand from the telecoms industry for new tariff points.

1.3 The '0908' PRS range will provide a further 1,000 number blocks for a possible 100 tariffs.

Chapter 2

Responses to the Consultation

2.1 Oftel received 7 responses to the Consultation. The majority of respondents were in favour of Oftel's proposal. However, there were 3 responses that expressed some concerns and these are addressed below.

2.2 The first concern was about unused blocks in '0909' not being allocated once the '0908' range is open. Oftel wishes to make it clear that it will continue to allocate blocks from the '0909' range where numbers are available at the required tariff, but Oftel cannot prevent new tariff points from opening and will therefore need '0908' to meet this demand.

2.3 One respondent sought confirmation concerning the tariffing and allocation levels for '0908'. As with '0909' the tariff will be set at the 100k level, and blocks will be allocated at the 10k level. This accords with current industry requirements. Oftel will pursue the possibility of reducing industry tariffing to the 10k level but it is not realistic to tie this to the realities of current allocation policy.

2.4 A respondent asked 'whether an alternative F-digit to zero could be elected to be used by allocatees'. As set out in the Consultation paper, a condition will normally be imposed on allocations from the '0908' range that only F-digit zero should be used initially. However, operators may select an alternative F-digit. Operators should seek confirmation from Oftel before further F-digits are used.

2.5 There was concern by one respondent that this Consultation pre-empted Oftel's forthcoming wider Consultation regarding '09' in general. The respondent suggested that, 'to address any short term need for more space in '0909', the '0904' range should be split, allowing for standard PRS and Sexual Entertainment PRS to be accommodated'.

2.6 The respondent also asked how Oftel envisages higher rate PRS being accommodated in the numbering spectrum.

2.7 As explained at 2.2 above, Oftel cannot delay opening up a new range for the service 'Sexual Entertainment PRS'. If Oftel does not designate a new numbering range for this purpose, it will fail to meet its statutory duty to ensure that sufficient numbers are available to meet all reasonable demands that end users, operators and service providers might have. Oftel does not envisage that '0904' can be used for Sexual Entertainment PRS, as '0904' has already been designated for the tariff range 'open ended time dependent charge or fixed fee'.

2.8 Further, in relation to the specific query on higher rate PRS, issues relating to future PRS numbering capacity will be considered as part of the wider consultation on PRS numbering, more generally, which is due for publication imminently.

2.9 A respondent raised concern that 'new tariffs appear to be being requested in order for companies simply to offer better number ranges, rather than for a particular need for the specific tariff itself'. The respondent sought clarification of Oftel's

thinking, as there was currently no disincentive for every company to request a non-geographic number block in every tariff, and hence the '090' range would run out of space with most blocks less than 5-10% utilised. The respondent suggested that, as a means of increasing available capacity, Oftel withdraw blocks, following the Annual Audit, that are not brought into use/adequately utilised, in a timely way, or tariffs that are under-used.

2.10 Oftel carries out an Annual Audit each year on numbering capacity that it considers may become in danger of exhausting. Oftel has successfully audited PRS number ranges and withdrawn ranges that have been allocated for more than six months and not brought into service. This has increased the available capacity and increased the period before exhaustion may be imminent in any particular PRS range. However, Oftel cannot withdraw number ranges that are in use. Even if only one number is used from a 10,000 block, the block is considered in use by that operator and Oftel would not want to withdraw a block where a number(s) is in use by a customer. 'Inadequate utilisation' is only a relevant consideration where operators are applying for more numbers of the same type and at the same tariff.

2.11 Respondents raised concern about Oftel implying that the industry requires another full number range to fulfil the requirements for Sexual Entertainment PRS, when recently published figures suggested an estimated 30,000 Premium Rate services in use at any one time across all the allocated PRS number ranges.

2.12 In reply, Oftel agrees that tariffing at the 100k level and routing at the 10k level does not promote efficient utilisation of non-geographic numbering, and that in many cases only a handful of numbers are in use within an allocated 10k block of numbers. However, as already indicated, this is current industry requirement, and while Oftel has had various discussions with industry about more efficient utilisation of non-geographic numbering, Oftel has been unable to make much headway. Proposals for a move to 10k blocks for tariffing were made to the industry in 2001, but it failed to achieve industry consensus on the grounds that significant system development, requiring substantial cost and lead times, would be required. The industry requested a more detailed analysis of the costs and benefits before it contemplated such investment. Oftel is now considering an examination of finer digit analysis as part of its new NTS Policy project.

2.13 There was concern by respondents over consumer awareness of the new Sexual Entertainment PRS range and, in particular, the ability for consumers to take advantage of customer control measures, such as call-barring facilities.

2.14 Oftel believes that '0908' is more closely identified with '0909' in terms of consumer awareness, and would therefore benefit consumers who wish to retain meaningful information about Sexual Entertainment PRS. Indeed, Oftel will be advising all operators who currently provide call-barring for Sexual Entertainment PRS, that there should be equivalence in the handling of the '0908' and '0909' ranges.

Chapter 3

Oftel's decision

3.1 Oftel will open up the PRS range '0908' for the service – 'Sexual Entertainment PRS'.

3.2 Oftel will accept applications for '0908' ranges from eligible operators (for price points that are not currently available in the '0909' range) from 7 May 2003.

3.3 Oftel will reissue the Numbering Conventions to include the '0908' range for the service 'Sexual Entertainment PRS', on 7 May 2003.

Chapter 4

Revised Numbering Conventions

4.1 Convention A7.6 has been revised as follows:

“A7.6 In order to provide service and tariff meaning to callers, codes will be allocated with B-digits having the following significance:

0900/0901	Time charged calls up to and including 60ppm and total call cost not greater than £5 or fixed fee up to £1 per call.
0902/0903	Protected for PRS expansion.
0904/0905/0906	Open ended time dependent charge or fixed fee.
0907	Pay for product that costs more than £1 in total.
0908/0909	Sexual Entertainment PRS.”
