[GB] Conditional access guidelines

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The Office of Telecommunications (OFTEL), responsible in the UK for regulating conditional access services for digital television, has published at the end of March its guidelines. These are the result of consultations began in last year (see IRIS Vol. III, No 1)). The regulations governing the provision of conditional access services were laid before Parliament in December 1996 and the Telecommunications Act class licence for conditional access services was issued by the Department of Trade and Industry. The regulations and licences require OFTEL to ensure that control of conditional access technology (e.g. set-top box) and services is not used to distort, restrict or prevent competition in television and other content services. The guidelines give guidance to interested parties on a number of issues including:

- the pricing of conditional access services and the circumstances in which any subsidy for set-top boxes might be recoverable through charges to broadcasters without having an anti-competitive effect;

- how electronic programme guides (the mechanism through which consumers will make their choice of programmes) can be made competitively neutral;

- subscriber authorisation including the potential operation of more than one smart card by competing broadcasters;

- subscriber management systems including how broadcasters using others' conditional access services can retain commercial confidentiality of their subscriber base while conditional access providers retain control of their intellectual property;

- the responsibility of conditional access providers to co-operate with cable operators to facilitate transcontrol (the mechanism by which satellite programmes can be carried on cable systems).

The Regulation of Conditional Access for Digital Television Services, 26 March 1997.

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