

BCC: Action needed on poor broadband, especially in rural areas and for small firms

Today the BCC launches results from a digital survey on broadband connectivity for businesses in the UK.

27th March 2017

Businesses across the UK, particularly in rural areas, are still without reliable broadband connections, despite companies saying the availability of fully functional broadband is extremely important to their operations, according to the results of a survey released today (Monday) by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC).

All companies surveyed (99%) say a reliable broadband connection is important, (82% say extremely so), yet nearly one in five (18%) suffer from unreliable connections (11% not very reliable; 7% not at all reliable).

The findings also show that firms in rural areas are at least twice as likely to have unreliable connections (30%) as those in towns (15%), inner cities (13%), and suburban areas (12%).

Smaller businesses are the most likely to suffer from unreliable broadband, with nearly a quarter (24%) of sole traders and 21% of micro-businesses reporting problems.

The survey suggests that more reliable connections would allow businesses to do more. Nearly half of businesses (48%) say if the reliability of their broadband connection was improved it would allow them to use more applications, particularly cloud-based services (24%), transfer of large files (22%), remote server access for employees (15%).

Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, said:

“Business communities across the UK still report that our digital infrastructure is not fit for purpose. Throughout the country, significant numbers of companies of every size and sector lack reliable internet connectivity – a basic requirement for businesses to operate efficiently in today’s world.

“Unreliable connections stunt productivity, causing needless delays, costs and frustration. While businesses in every corner of the UK are affected, our research shows that it’s rural areas and small businesses that are most likely to suffer. An unreliable connection acts as an obstacle to growth, and puts those firms most in need of support at a competitive disadvantage.

“We’ve been calling on both providers and on government for years to fund the

necessary upgrades required to deliver superfast broadband to business communities. Regulators, too, must ensure that firms actually get the quality and speeds of connection they are promised. While we welcome recent ministerial announcements about investing in 5G technology and efforts to build a world-class digital infrastructure in the UK, there is still a long way to go in getting the basics right. The immediate focus must be on providing all companies with connections that are reliable and of sufficient speed, which would boost business confidence and encourage firms to maximise opportunities for growth, trade and investment.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) surveyed 1,465 business people from all regions of the UK online in January 2017 to understand how businesses rate the overall reliability of their broadband connections, and how a more reliable connection could help their businesses. Of the businesses surveyed, 96% were SMEs, 22% operate in the manufacturing sector, and 78% operate in the services sector.

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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