

Press release: High speed broadband to become a legal right

The Government has confirmed that universal high speed broadband will be delivered by a regulatory Universal Service Obligation (USO), giving everyone in the UK access to speeds of at least 10 Mbps by 2020.

This is the speed that Ofcom, the independent regulator, says is needed to meet the requirements of an average family. After careful consideration the government has decided that regulation is the best way of making sure everyone in the UK can get a decent broadband connection of at least 10 Mbps as soon as possible.

Following the creation of new powers when the Government passed the Digital Economy Act 2017, we launched our consultation on the design of the regulatory USO in the summer. The Government will now set out the design for a legal right to high speed broadband in secondary legislation early next year, alongside our detailed response to the consultation.

Ofcom's implementation is expected to take two years from when we lay secondary legislation, meeting the Government's commitment of giving everyone access to high speed broadband by 2020.

In the summer, we received a proposal from BT to deliver universal broadband through a voluntary agreement. We welcomed BT's proposal and have considered this in detail alongside a regulatory approach. We did not feel the proposal was strong enough for us to take the regulatory USO off the table, and have therefore decided not to pursue BT's proposal in favour of providing a legal right to broadband.

The government believes that only a regulatory USO offers sufficient certainty and the legal enforceability that is required to ensure high speed broadband access for the whole of the UK by 2020. However, we welcome BT's continued investment to deliver broadband to all parts of the UK.

Culture Secretary Karen Bradley said:

We know how important broadband is to homes and businesses and we want everyone to benefit from a fast and reliable connection. We are grateful to BT for their proposal but have decided that only a regulatory approach will make high speed broadband a reality for everyone in the UK, regardless of where they live or work.

This is all part of our work on ensuring that Britain's telecoms infrastructure is fit for the future and will continue to deliver the connectivity that consumers need in the digital age.

This regulatory approach also brings a number of other advantages for the

consumer:

- the minimum speed of connection can be increased over time as consumers' connectivity requirements evolve;
- it provides for greater enforcement to help ensure households and businesses do get connected
- the scheme will maximise the provision of fixed line connections in the hardest to reach areas.
- places a legal requirement for high speed broadband to be provided to anyone requesting it, subject to a cost threshold (in the same way the universal service right to a landline telephone works)

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