

Reference: 2179

25 May 2016

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Information Requests

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Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about broadband and mobile phone studies in Wales which was received on 22 April and has been considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

You asked for:

1) Please can you tell me what studies you have done into the average broadband speeds and mobile phone reception in Wales?

2) Can you tell me what programmes Ofcom has to improve broadband speeds and mobile phone reception in Wales?

Information on average broadband speeds and mobile phone reception in Wales is available in our Connected Nations report for Wales (Dec 2015) please see the following links to our website where you can find this:

Connected Nations

[\(http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/infrastructure/connected-nations-2015/\)](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/infrastructure/connected-nations-2015/)

Wales report:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/infrastructure/2015/downloads/cn15-wales.pdf>

Data download page: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/infrastructure/connected-nations-2015/downloads/>

In terms of what programmes Ofcom has to improve broadband speeds and mobile phone reception in Wales you may find the following information helpful.

On broadband:

Ofcom's latest research, *Connected Nations*, found that there has been a significant increase in superfast broadband (30Mbit/s) availability in Wales from 55% of premises in June 2014 to 79% of premises in June 2015. In rural Wales, superfast broadband is available to 50% of premises. The increase has largely been driven by the Welsh Government's Superfast Cymru programme reaching out to all parts of Wales. To date, the programme has provided access to superfast speeds to more than 565,000 homes and businesses across all 22 authorities in Wales, with take-up of service recorded at around 25%. The programme is on track to reach its target of 96% of premises in Wales having access to superfast broadband by late 2017 (extended from spring 2016). This follows an additional £19 million investment by the Welsh Government announced last July to cover a further 42,000 premises in Wales. The full *Connected Nations Report – Wales* is available here: <http://bit.ly/1NQMASK>.

The areas outside the Superfast Cymru target are typically in rural or hard-to-reach areas. The Queen's Speech delivered on 18 May 2016 included the announcement of the Digital Economy Bill, which highlighted the UK Government's proposal of a universal service obligation for broadband. The ambition is to give families a legal right to request a connection to broadband with speeds of 10 Mbit/s. This is the speed Ofcom research suggests is sufficient to meet the needs of a typical household. We are actively supporting the development of a USO, which the Government consulted on in March. We expect the implementation of the broadband USO to go some way in improving broadband availability in the more challenging parts of Wales.

The Welsh Government has also extended two of its existing schemes to increase broadband availability in areas which are not covered by the Superfast Cymru roll-out. The announcement was made on 6 January 2016. Both the Access Broadband Cymru scheme, which provides financial assistance for those with a connection of less than 2Mbit/s, and the Ultrafast Connectivity Voucher Scheme, developed to help businesses to meet the capital costs involved in the installation of ultrafast broadband services will now run for an additional two years until March 2018. More information on these schemes can be found on the Welsh Government's website.

On mobile

Ofcom has taken a number of steps to improve mobile coverage. One such important move is around lower frequency 4G spectrum, which generally provides higher download and upload speeds and is likely to help extend mobile broadband coverage. Under the terms we set for its 4G licence, O2 is required to provide indoor coverage to 98% of the population and at least 95% of the population of each of the UK nations by the end of 2017. The other mobile operators have indicated they intend to match O2's obligation.

In December 2014, the UK Government also signed an agreement with the mobile network operators which guaranteed voice and text coverage from each operator across 90% of the UK geographic area by the end of 2017. In addition, all mobile operators have launched

voice over WiFi services, which are helping improving coverage in buildings that have poor mobile signal coverage but good indoor WiFi network coverage.

On 17 May, the Government published its proposals to reform the Electronic Communications Code. As we set out in the Initial Conclusions of the Strategic Review Digital Communications, while the review of the Code is a matter for the UK Government, we are committed to supporting its work and have provided some technical guidance and regulatory insight. The Code is important as it determines the rental fees paid by mobile operators to landowners. The new plans could lead to cutting costs for mobile operators to build infrastructure on private land as well making it easier for them to deploy and maintain their infrastructure paving the way for more improved mobile coverage in rural parts of Wales and the UK.

We will also assess how we can impose new obligations on operators bidding for spectrum in the future to increase coverage, especially in rural areas. The 700 MHz spectrum band, is particularly well suited to providing better coverage The 700 MHz band will be available for mobile use by the end of 2021 and potentially up to two years earlier. We expect to auction mobile licences for the band in late 2018 or 2019.

I hope this information is helpful. Please quote the reference number above in any future correspondence as this will help us to deal with your query more quickly.

Yours sincerely

Julia Snape

If you are unhappy with the response or level of service you have received in relation to your request from Ofcom, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be treated as a formal complaint and will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will acknowledge the complaint and inform you of the date by which you might expect to be told the outcome.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

Timing

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter.** There is no statutory deadline for undertaking internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact:

Steve Gettings
The Secretary to the Corporation
Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House

Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF