

Gigabit broadband rollout milestone reached

- 45,000 vouchers, worth more than £90m, issued to help cover the costs of delivering gigabit speeds directly to people's homes and businesses
- New taskforce launched today to encourage further take-up of gigabit broadband services

Almost 500,000 premises across the UK have been connected to gigabit-capable broadband since summer 2018. This is part of a £1 billion government funding commitment until the end of 2021, with a further £5 billion for the hardest-to-reach areas to be earmarked soon.

It means that, alongside commercial investment, more than 7.5 million premises can now access gigabit capable broadband, compared to around 1.4 million premises two years ago.

Nearly 45,000 vouchers, worth more than £90 million, have been issued to subsidise the cost of building faster, gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure to homes and businesses.

The figures are released as the government calls on companies and residents in rural towns and villages to apply for more than £70 million on offer immediately to take them out of the digital slow lane.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman is today urging people to take advantage of the [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](#) which is open until March next year and aims to future proof people's internet connections for a generation.

The scheme is being targeted at rural, hard-to-reach areas that aren't likely to be connected through the commercial rollout of gigabit networks soon.

Minister Warman is also today launching a new taskforce, led by consumer and business groups including Which?, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to drive consumer take-up of gigabit speed internet connections.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

“It's fantastic to see so many people getting access to gigabit speed broadband. This is thanks to our investment alongside the sterling work of industry.

“Today I urge people in rural communities in the digital slow lane to apply for the immediate financial help available so they can seize the benefits of

better connectivity – from making work easier to catching up with family and friends.

“I am also launching a new drive with business and consumer champions to make more people aware of just how beneficial better, faster broadband can be.”

Gigabit broadband carries speeds of a thousand megabits per second. These connections will not only underpin the use of smarter devices such as intelligent heating systems and internet-connected fridges, but they will allow people to download HD movies in seconds and stream TV and gaming content at 4K picture quality on multiple devices at the same time.

The speeds will pave the way for new and unexpected social benefits alongside jobs and economic growth, and revolutionise rural communities by giving people the freedom to live and work more flexibly.

To date, through the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, more than 3,500 vouchers have been issued to rural homes and businesses in Somerset, nearly 2,000 in Cumbria, and more than a thousand going to Kent, Lancashire, Hampshire, West Yorkshire and Surrey.

The vouchers are worth up to £1,500 for rural homes and up to £3,500 for rural small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs) provided they come together as a collective of two or more properties.

Rocio Concha, Director of Advocacy at Which?, said:

“It’s really important that people across the UK, including those who are vulnerable or in hard to reach locations, have a quality broadband connection that meets their needs not just for entertainment and to stay in touch with loved ones, but also to be able to work, shop and bank.

“By bringing together industry, the regulator, government as well as groups representing both consumers and businesses, this new advisory group will be able to provide recommendations on the best way to ensure everyone can take advantage of faster, more reliable internet connections as they are rolled out.

FSB National Chairman Mike Cherry said:

“Small businesses require reliable, fast, and futureproof connectivity to operate with confidence. Gigabit-capable broadband will enable firms to connect with customers nationally and internationally with ease, develop new ways of using technology to improve their performance, and conduct more business online than ever before.

“This year has forced small firms to overhaul their business models, and digital connectivity has proved to be a lifeline during this time. However, many have struggled with poor internet connections, and would be better served with a step-change in connectivity.

“That’s why this task force could not have come at a more pressing time. FSB

is delighted to work with the Government, along with consumer and business representatives, to accelerate the take-up of gigabit-capable broadband.”

Felicity Burch, CBI Director of Digital and Innovation, said:

“Going for gigabit on digital connectivity is more important than ever as the UK responds to the Covid crisis. It’s great to be part of the Government’s new advisory group ensuring that the business view is heard. Bringing in expertise from across the board will spur more households and businesses to take up faster, more reliable broadband and help put tech and innovation at the centre of our economic recovery.”

Further info

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme case studies

Gavin Keeble and his wife Belinda, who live in Grisedale, Cumbria, run a corporate training business. They were paying £115 a month for an unreliable service which would drop out every time low-flying RAF planes went overhead. They had their broadband upgraded by using one of the government’s vouchers, which contributed to the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband.

Gavin and Belinda saw their speeds, as well as those of 121 homes and 56 businesses in the surrounding area, rocket from 8 Mbps to 1000 Mbps, which means they can successfully run their business.

Gavin said: “The difference that the new service has made is completely cosmic. It has given us total peace of mind connecting to the outside world and running an international business from a beautiful and remote part of the UK and dramatically improved our businesses professionalism and capability as well as transforming our family life.”

Dominic Fairman, a local councillor who runs a farm and campsite on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall, has recently benefited from the scheme. He can now run digital promotion for the campsite and do his online tax returns hassle-free.

Dominic said: “The difference that this has made to our lives and our neighbours’ lives has been incredible. My tax returns are seamless, I can upload photos and videos for the campsite to social media and I won’t ever have to lose data again.

“Of the 5,000 people who work for Cornwall Council, around 4,000 have been working from home during the pandemic so it has really brought it home to us how important it is to have reliable connectivity these days. I will certainly be recommending this scheme to other communities in my parishes.”

Gigabit Take-Up Advisory Group (GigaTAG)

Currently gigabit broadband is available to about 26 per cent of residential and business premises across the UK, but estimates show only 30 per cent of premises are taking up these services where they are available.

The new Gigabit Take-Up Advisory Group (GigaTAG) has been set up to lead a strategic review into boosting take-up as gigabit connections among consumers and businesses become more widely available.

It will be led by Which?, the FSB and CBI, with membership including Ofcom and industry representatives, to look at encouraging more consumers to engage with this new technology and to take advantage of the benefits that they will bring.

It will specifically explore increasing business take-up by promoting the benefits that gigabit broadband has brought to companies that already have it, and the role firms can play in incentivising their employees to upgrade too.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The UK Government committed more than £1 billion on gigabit-capable broadband to the end of the financial year 20/21:
- £400 million through the Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund
- £279 million through the Local Full Fibre Networks Programme, which funded the first wave of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
- £200 million through the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme, which is funding the second wave of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
- At least £200 million from the existing Superfast Broadband Programme is being transitioned to specify gigabit-capable connections for all remaining procurements / change requests
- There have been 44,792 vouchers issued so far through the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, and of these 29,142 have resulted in a live connection. And as of Q4 19/20, 464,458 premises now have access to a gigabit-capable connection through the redirected Superfast Broadband Programme. Therefore almost half a million (493,600) premises now have access to or are connected to gigabit capable broadband.
- Independent figures from ThinkBroadband released this week reveal 1 in 4 premises now have access to a gigabit broadband option.

What is the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme?

- The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is a UK-wide, supplier-led scheme

offering vouchers to offset the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband to premises, i.e., homes and businesses. Vouchers can only be used when part of a group project. Gigabit-capable broadband can provide speeds of over 1,000 Mbps or 1 Gbps but beneficiaries only pay for the speed they want to use, provided it is at least double the speed they had before and more than 30 Mbps.

- Businesses and communities are encouraged to check whether they are eligible through a postcode checker on the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme website: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>. If they are eligible they can approach any of the suppliers who are active in their area to apply for a voucher. Registered suppliers can only use the vouchers when they are part of a group scheme that can consist of homes and businesses.
- In June, the UK and Welsh governments [teamed up](#) to boost the amount available in certain areas, due the difficulty and expense of rolling out broadband infrastructure in rural Wales. This boost doubled the vouchers' worth so that homes in rural Wales can now receive £3000 and SMEs £7000. In England, similar voucher top-ups are also available in Cumbria, Kent, Northumberland, Hampshire, Dorset, Warwickshire and West Sussex, to help connect some of the hardest-to-reach places.