

Inquiry in to Superfast broadband in Wales

Response from Spectrum Internet

About Us

Spectrum Internet provides high-speed, superfast and ultrafast broadband across Wales and the South West of England. As an Internet Service Provider (ISP) we supply large businesses with leased line fibre optic connections as well as SME's and residential communities with broadband services.

We believe that everyone should be able to connect, communicate and collaborate and so we have literally go the extra metres installing our own fibre infrastructure and trialling new methods of delivering connectivity to bring speeds up to date for businesses and communities where there has been no offering from BT or Virgin. To date we have completed a number of schemes offering FTTC in Cardiff gate Business Park, Gower and Monmouthshire, a wireless to cabinet in St Brides Wentlooge, and several FTTP solutions for businesses in Carmarthenshire and Cardiff.

<https://spectruminternet.com/welsh-minister-alun-cairns-visits-superfast-newport-businesses/>

<https://spectruminternet.com/spectrum-internet-bring-gigabit-fibre-to-cardiff-gate-international-business-park/>

Q: What is the performance to date of the roll-out and take-up of Superfast Cymru, including the extent to which the project has been communicated to people in the intervention area and interim targets have been met?

We published some thoughts on our website back in November 2016 following an article about the performance <https://spectruminternet.com/welsh-government-superfast-cymru/>

To our mind, take-up has been as expected and is following a pattern. To begin with take-up was poor but this has increased as the project has reached those affected by poorer broadband. From what we have seen this seems to be the pattern throughout UK. We believe this is because no one specified cover should begin in the harder to reach or worse affected areas first.

Most people still aren't aware of what they can do with superfast. Costs still going up and down and it is still not clear, what packages offer what to the consumer. Businesses are so far behind in their understanding what superfast can bring for them so there is also a wider economic concern.

Q: What work can Welsh Government do to improve mobile coverage, including use of the planning system?

In rural areas the MNO's will argue that the cost to run in rural areas are high. Also we have experience where landowners have been reluctant or have tried to hold the provider to ransom over wayleaves. We suggest a radical approach – not only look at the planning restriction but also compulsory purchase of land so they can then offer the network operators sites and they could then charge for the use of that site.

Roaming is an excellent solution but the only way that will happen is if there is legislation. If WG has the power to do so, they could lead the UK. If more spectrum was made available then if OfCom only offered to MNO's in return for increased coverage in certain worst covered areas then there would be better coverage.

Q: What has been the efficacy of the Welsh Government's other broadband schemes, such as Access Broadband Cymru and Ultrafast Connectivity Vouchers?

Both of these voucher schemes are very useful – particularly for communities that can 'pool' them together to create a solution that benefits, say a whole village. However, the administration is hard work for us and we have found almost preventative.

Whilst we believe it is important that any application and service should be scrutinised, we have recently witnessed an auditor recommending that a voucher be turned down for a growing success organisation and told to get an ordinary Virgin broadband connection. That's like suggesting Lewis Hamilton racing in a golf buggy!

How could ABC/Ultrafast be better? There needs to be more consultation with industry as there has been very little to date. We believe that there needs to be better resourcing and correct resourcing for the scheme. Can some of the processes be automated?

One idea would be to change it so that it is not necessarily grant funding. For example, it could be debt funding so that WG could look to recover some of the fund in the future – that may provide better longer term solutions coming forward.

What are the plans for the Superfast Cymru successor scheme?

This hasn't been made clear yet and we are still waiting on Welsh Government on what the successor will look like. We are in no doubt that it must be divided into smaller lots rather than as a whole nation, as the Superfast Cymru project. This will give the opportunity for 'alt-nets,' like us who have access to external funding sources and as well as the likes of BT and Virgin to bid in lots.

Local authorities can also therefore look to set up partnerships (e.g. SPV's) to work alongside the private sector and then prioritise where they think require the connectivity first. We would also suggest a debt equity model rather than grant funding.

How could alternative technologies be used to improve superfast broadband and mobile coverage?

This depends on what you want to achieve. Do you want Wales to become a leading nation with a future-proof infrastructure? If so, the only alternative technology is fibre optic. It is expensive (compared to other technologies) and would mean years of planning and a longer payback but it is the only one that can offer you reliable speeds, quality and infrastructure reliability and the ability to upgrade as costs fall and demand increases.

If you mean, what are the 'band-aid' solutions for those that have been left behind, then a combination of wireless solutions which could include FWA and satellite. But these should be a solution for absolute last resort.

How could Welsh Government learn from international examples of public sector intervention in the roll-out of broadband and mobile coverage?

If we want to become a leading nation, we won't get there by copying others. We believe we know what needs to be done, it's now about achieving it.