

BSG comments on Ofcom Consultation on Next Generation Access



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The Broadband Stakeholder Group (BSG) – the government’s advisory group on broadband and digital convergence – described the publication today of Ofcom’s consultation on the future of broadband as a key milestone in a debate that will shape the UK’s communications infrastructure for decades to come. “This consultation will be as important for the future of broadcasters and new media companies as it is for BT and other communications providers,” said Antony Walker, Chief Executive of the BSG.

The BSG is pleased that Ofcom agrees with its view that the potential impact of these new networks on the UK economy could be very significant. In general Ofcom’s consultation document supports the analysis of the BSG in its Pipe Dreams report published in April this year. Key comments the BSG would like to make regarding the consultation launched today include:

- We agree that the commercial, geographical and political drivers that are leading to early investment in next generation access in other countries are absent in this country. Consequently, next generation broadband deployment in the UK is likely to lag behind other countries.
- Ofcom’s current focus should be on creating regulatory certainty that will enable efficient and timely investment in next generation broadband access.
- Competition has been critical to the success of first generation broadband services. We agree that that the future regulatory framework should continue to be based on the principle of equivalence – this has been proven to work well in the UK and has helped create a vibrant and flourishing first generation broadband market. We do not believe that regulatory forbearance (the approach being taken in Germany to incentivise NGA deployment) would be appropriate in the UK.
- However, there may be a need in the future for Ofcom to take more interventionist measures if evidence emerges that the UK economy could suffer from delayed deployment of NGA.

- With this in mind, the BSG will work closely with government and Ofcom to understand the economic and social value of next generation broadband and to monitor developments in international markets.

The BSG will respond to the consultation and encourages all organisations involved in the knowledge economy to do so too.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

About next generation broadband

The BSG has used the same definition of next generation broadband as Ofcom did in its Next Generation Access discussion document:

'Broadband access services that are capable of delivering sustained bandwidths significantly in excess of those currently widely available using existing local access infrastructures and technologies.'

In practice this general definition currently suggests services that are capable of providing in excess of 20Mbps downstream (which would be sufficient to support services such as multiple HDTV feeds using MPEG4, broadband internet and voice services) as well as faster upstream access capable of supporting an increasing range of peer-to-peer applications and interactive and user generated services.

There is a range of technologies capable of delivering next generation broadband. Some are effectively evolutions of existing access infrastructures that have already been deployed (copper and cable), while others would involve the deployment of entirely new physical infrastructures.

About the Broadband Stakeholder Group

The BSG was established as a cross-sector government advisory group in 2001 to help the UK lead the G7 in broadband penetration and connectivity. It provides a neutral forum for collaboration between organisations across the converging broadband value-chain with the ultimate aim of helping to create a strong and competitive UK knowledge economy

It aims to be a critical friend of government and the regulator, and comprises companies from the telecoms and technology sectors through to content providers and rights holders. It also has direct representation from government departments and Ofcom. It is funded through a combination of government funding and industry sponsorship.

The BSG focuses on strategic, medium- to long-term challenges, which have latterly included next generation access networks, predicting future bandwidth requirements, the EU Television without Frontiers Directive, digital inclusion and self- and co-regulation in the audiovisual media market.

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