

Finland makes fast broadband a legal right

The Finnish government has passed a law that entitles every person to a one megabit-per-second internet connection.

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Finland's Ministry of Transport and Communications has committed to ensuring that every person in Finland can access the internet at a minimum speed of one megabit per second from July next year.

The Finnish government had already committed to rolling out 100 megabits per second broadband connections across the country by 2015. It's the first country in the world to make universal minimum internet access speeds a legal requirement.



Even the citizens of remote, rural parts of Finland will be legally entitled to a minimum broadband connection speed of one megabit per second, rising to 100 megabits per second by 2015. Photo: GETTY IMAGES

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The government said the move was aimed at improving broadband provision in rural areas. Telecoms companies across Finland will have to start rolling out high-speed services to all locations. But the Finnish authorities have stressed that this is merely an "intermediary step" ahead of the roll-out of superfast broadband within the next five years.

"We think [the internet is] something you cannot live without in modern society," said Laura Vikkonen, a spokesman for the ministry. "Like banking services or water or electricity, you need an internet connection.

"Universal service is every citizen's subjective right."

Finland, which has a population of around 5.2 million, is already one of the most connected countries in the world, with 95 per cent of citizens already hooked up to some form of internet connection.

Although other countries, such as France, have declared the concept of guaranteed web access a "human right", Finland is the first nation to recognise this in law.

The British government and internet stakeholders will be keeping a close eye on Finland's plans. In the recent Digital Britain report, the

government set a target of universal internet access of speeds of at least two megabits per second by 2012.

But it remains unclear whether this target will be achieved, as rural and remote areas may still have to rely on mobile or satellite broadband, rather than fixed-line internet connections, for their web access.

The Prince of Wales has added his voice to the debate, calling on the government and internet service providers to stop the countryside becoming a "broadband desert".

"Access to the internet is increasingly becoming a necessity," he wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* at the weekend. "The lack of access to high speed broadband is putting many of those who work in rural communities at a severe disadvantage."

BT recently announced that it was doubling the roll-out of its own next-generation, high-speed 100 megabits per second broadband network, making it accessible to 2.5 British households by 2012. However, most of those homes are expected to be concentrated in urban areas.

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