



Scottish Council for
Development and Industry

POLICY SUBMISSION

ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH
DIGITAL SCOTLAND

SCDI Consultation Response

July 2010

POLICY SUBMISSION

SCDI is an independent and inclusive economic development network which seeks to influence and inspire government and key stakeholders with our ambitious vision to create shared sustainable economic prosperity for Scotland.

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SCDI is pleased to respond to the RSE interim report on Digital Scotland. SCDI strongly believes that making the correct decisions about our IT strategy and provision is an important aspect of Scotland's future success. SCDI's Blueprint for Scotland¹ called for a change in mindset within Digital Britain which said that investment to deliver 90% super-fast broadband coverage is sufficient for future prosperity. We wish to see Scotland 100% full-wired to high-speed broadband, led by the market, with public funding for the areas the market will not deliver.

The last decade has seen numerous advances in digital technology, and Scotland's public and private sectors have worked together to deliver IT access. The challenge for now, as technology moves forward, is to ensure infrastructure delivers on current technology and is 'future-proofed' as far as possible. We must look at examples from overseas on how other countries have developed their digital infrastructures. Particular mention should be made of Finland, where access to broadband has been made a legal right. We should also be aware of the potential social and economic impact of digital connectivity in Scotland. As a country, Scotland has natural assets that make quality-of-life very desirable. Providing the digital infrastructure to make business possible, will allow many internet-based workers and entrepreneurs to choose Scotland as a place to live where they can also do business. With many future high-growth businesses likely to be virtual, it is essential that the UK has ICT infrastructure which encourages them to be founded and based here. In the last ten years, the roll-out of first generation broadband has supported the Highlands and Islands economy in becoming - for the first time in recent history - a net contributor to the Scottish economy. The deployment of super-fast broadband into rural areas would sustain and develop this economic contribution. No country has managed to secure the necessary investment for a national high-speed broadband network without public intervention.

Access to internationally competitive next generation broadband by businesses and society would support the delivery of a number of Government priorities, including:

- Raising productivity and rebalancing the economy
- Skills development and utilisation
- Social inclusion and social mobility
- Climate change
- Public service delivery
- Public sector efficiency

SCDI is concerned that a lack of digital literacy will be a major cause of poverty in the future. It is essential therefore, that IT skills are taught in schools, using up-to-date equipment and well-trained teaching staff. Supporting young people to learn the effective use of computers should be regarded as a key life-skill and presents opportunities for electronic teaching materials, which allow for easy updating and cost-effective replication. Specific effort should be taken to encourage greater uptake of broadband, particularly in the Glasgow area.

¹ Blueprint for Scotland, www.scdi.org.uk/blueprint

Wireless connectivity through mobile broadband is also set to become a major contributor to the way we connect to the internet. We should ensure that Scotland's transportation network, particularly trains, are served by mobile signals and onboard wifi is rolled out starting with intercity and commuter routes. SCDI supports the view that the stability and reliability of fixed-line (fibre) should make it the preferred basis for super-fast broadband provision. Point-to-point solutions where possible would maximise the penetration of fibre and create a fixed fibre backbone extending to suitable hubs in communities. However, alternative technologies, such as mobile technologies, may potentially be less expensive and more suitable than fibre in certain areas.

Scotland has the potential to develop an innovative and world class digital economy sector. With its renewable energy resources and cool, stable climate, Scotland is an ideal location for green data centre development.

There have been links made between higher broadband speeds and increased exports. Certainly, enhanced access to high-speed broadband will allow for more flexible working, public sector efficiencies (BT quotes 15%). The roll-out of ICT infrastructure and a networked society would support the delivery of more personalised, effective and efficient services, through greater citizen self-service, assisted service and remote service. There are particular opportunities with eHealth. Distributed cities – enhancing economic, educational, cultural, social and public service opportunities in rural areas could become a reality. 'Full-wiring' Scotland would reinforce all parts of Scotland as a competitive business location.

Smart energy meters and smart grids which will be enabled by digital technologies will have critical roles in meeting renewable energy and climate change targets.

The Scottish Government's consultation "Speak up for Rural Scotland" refers to the flourishing culture of small business development in rural Scotland, based on natural assets and natural talent. The Scottish Government is determined to support the rural economy to make rural Scotland successful. The key mechanism to achieve this is to better connect rural businesses and rural communities.

SCDI supports the core priorities of the report – that everyone should have access to digital communications technology, with the skills to use it effectively. The draft RSE report provides many detailed observations and SCDI is happy to continue to work with RSE to achieve our shared vision of a globally connected Scotland.

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