

High-speed Internet

The cost to upgrade Britain's ailing internet infrastructure to new fibre optic cables has been estimated at almost £30 billion. Will such a transformation really benefit businesses? More to the point, who is going to pay?

1 Which adjective best describes your internet connection at work / home? Compare your answer with a partner.

- very slow slow satisfactory fast very fast

2 Complete the chart with the missing countries. Choose: Germany / Japan / Latvia / The Netherlands / South Korea / Sweden / UK / US. Then check your answer by scanning paragraph 2 of the article.

Broadband Quality survey: fastest country speeds

1.	4. Latvia
2.	5.
3.	

Study sponsored by Cisco Systems.

Fibre optic: the use of long fibres of glass or plastic to carry information from one place to another as light signals.
(Definition from *Macmillan English Dictionary* © Macmillan Publishers Limited)

The future of broadband

The cost of bringing the next generation of broadband speeds to every home in the UK is likely to exceed £29 billion, according to one estimate. Preparing for the future requires the installation of a fibre optic infrastructure across the whole country. Of course, the cost will be far less if high-speed network coverage is less. For instance, Ofcom, the independent regulator of communications industries, has estimated a cost of between £10 and £15 billion for 80% coverage. However, this runs the risk of creating an even greater 'digital divide' between those in the city with high-speed connections and those in the countryside and remote areas without.

As the UK faces the dilemma of how to move into the future, it runs the danger of falling behind in the race for high speed connections. Which countries are best equipped? A recent study, sponsored by Cisco Systems, looked at 42 countries, and was carried out by a team based in Oxford, UK, and

Oviedo, Spain. The country with far and away the best infrastructure to be able to cope with the next generation of internet applications is Japan. In second place was Sweden, followed by the Netherlands. Both of these countries are investing in fibre optic cables. Latvia - neither Germany nor the US - was the fourth best-performing country in the study, and not surprisingly, South Korea came next.

The EU is keen to promote fast internet access. Currently, 36% of households have high-speed net access in EU member states. Some politicians argue that high-speed internet is essential for economic growth. Just how does high-speed help business? The answer to this question is not so clear. Many users simply want high-speed internet to play ever more sophisticated games and download films; they claim that for most businesses, current bandwidth is sufficient to access e-mails and for e-commerce. The choice facing the UK is similar to those facing many countries: to bring fibre optic cables to only the cities, or to every home? Not to mention the biggest question of all: who pays?

3 Read the whole article. What problems face the UK in upgrading to the next generation of internet connectivity?

4 Decide if these words are red (three-star, two-star, one star) or black words in the *Macmillan English Dictionary*.

generation	installation	infrastructure	sophisticated	estimate (n)
fibre optic	access (n)	dilemma	coverage	broadband

*** Very common words
** Common words
* Fairly common words
Less common words in **black**

(*Macmillan English Dictionary* © Macmillan Publishers Limited)

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups. Report back to the class.

- Do you think faster internet connection speeds will benefit businesses? In what ways?
- Does a 'digital divide' exist in your country? Do you have any examples of this?
- What is currently happening in the race to equip your own country with faster internet connections?