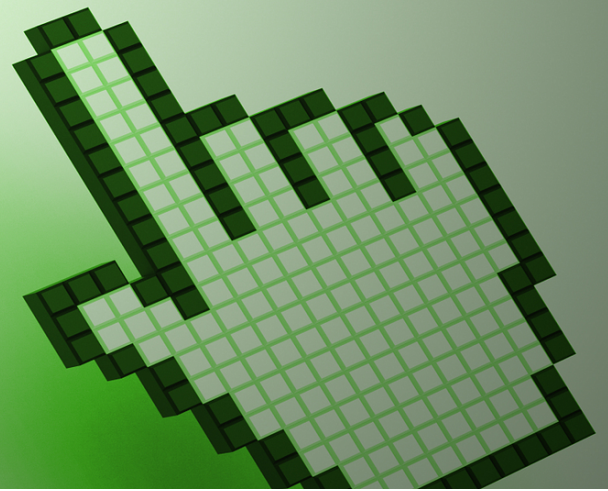


Rural Broadband |



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Northumbria academics help expose a continuing digital divide in the UK

Research by Northumbria University academics has been cited by a Parliamentary Committee investigating poor broadband in rural areas and the challenges of tackling the digital divide.

In its report *“An Update on Rural Connectivity”*, the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee referred to research articles by Professor Jason Whalley and lecturer Paolo Gerli from Northumbria’s Newcastle Business School.

Digital connectivity is widely regarded as an essential utility, but poor broadband in rural areas risks causing harm to the rural economy and leaving communities behind. The Parliamentary Committee believes that while broadband and mobile coverage has improved significantly since 2015, the divide between urban and rural areas continues to marginalise communities and businesses especially in hard to reach areas with weak or no connectivity. It also states a lack of confidence that the Government has fully grasped the extent of the problem, the scale of the challenge, or the wider cost of poor connectivity for rural communities and the rural economy.

The Parliamentary Committee's latest report cites Professor Whalley and Paolo Gerli's research on Broadband Delivery UK, which has recently been published in the [International Journal of Public Administration](#). Professor Whalley says this research found a lack of transparency in the management of public subsidies supporting the diffusion of superfast broadband in the UK.

He added: "The Committee concluded that there should be greater transparency on how the Government estimates costs for its broadband programme and allocates funding across the UK. It also shared our concerns on the Universal Service Obligation, whose target speed of 10 Mbps is way below the national average - as argued in our responses to the [Ofcom](#) and the [EFRA](#) committee consultations. In line with our findings, the House of Commons report concludes that the Government should commit to an immediate review of the USO specification as soon as possible".

Northumbria's contribution to the consultation and the on-going research that underpins it, reflects a wider body of research and expertise that has been presented at various international conferences including [TPRC](#) and [ITS Europe](#), published in journals and cited in the press ([Wired](#) and [ISP Review](#)). The on-going work of Paolo Gerli and Professor Jason Whalley examines the impact of technological change on telecommunications markets in terms of the availability and quality of networks, who provides these networks and the innovative approaches that some communities have adopted and their adoption by individuals and businesses particularly in rural areas.

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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