

Connections

An Update from BT Scotland

April 2006



BT Brings Faster Broadband to Scotland

BT has announced plans to make the fastest-possible broadband services available to more than 2.5 million homes and businesses in Scotland.

The new higher-speed wholesale services will result in most broadband users being able to benefit from speeds between two and four times faster than those now available.

The higher line rates will help enable people to run more bandwidth-hungry broadband applications at the same time, such as image-rich content (i.e. videos) as well as e-mail and surfing the internet.

In Scotland, BT will this year upgrade more than 900 exchanges as part of a UK-wide project to provide more than 5,300 exchanges with the fastest broadband capability that the current ADSL technology will support.

UK-wide, it is estimated that more than three quarters of phone lines should support new broadband download speeds of four megabits per second (Mbit/s) and above. And for those living or working close to their local telephone exchange, speeds up to eight megabits should be possible. Brendan Dick, BT Scotland's general manager, said:

"BT has invested more than £120 million to bring broadband to homes and businesses across Scotland over the past six years. Now we want to provide as many communities as possible with access to the fastest broadband services that current technology will allow.

"Faster broadband does not just mean faster e-mailing or faster surfing on the net. Higher speed services make it possible to do a whole range of new and exciting things online, in areas ranging from education and leisure to public services and flexible working."

Broadband take-up in Scotland currently stands at 28 per cent. Many broadband service providers, including BT, have already increased speeds four-fold to up to two megabits per second. Some services are even faster.

The ADSL broadband speed that can be supported on an individual line is governed by a wide range of physical



A wider world of possibilities is opening up as broadband gets faster

factors including the length and gauge of the line from the exchange, electromagnetic noise from other lines in a cable or wiring within a customer's premises and the modems used.

There are around 150 smaller exchanges which are not currently able to host ADSL Max services. These are largely those exchanges using the Exchange Activate community broadband solution and don't have sufficient backhaul capacity to handle the Max services.

As part of the work involved in BT's 21CN network, new approaches which may ultimately provide higher speeds for small exchanges will be considered. BT is continually looking at the network to identify improvements to speeds for all customers.

BT's line checker at www.bt.com/broadband is being updated to show the expected speeds available for individual lines. Exchanges involved in trials of these new services, including a number in Strathclyde, will already show the expected speeds possible.

Contact

For further information on BT in Scotland visit our website at www.bt.com/scotland or contact Brendan Dick, general manager of BT Scotland, by e-mail: brendan.dick@bt.com

Virtual Work Experience

Young people across Scotland are to have access to state-of-the-art virtual work experience at the touch of a button, thanks to a new internet-based 3D simulation which has been unveiled by Deputy First Minister Nicol Stephen.

A series of workplace simulations is being created to allow young people to carry out interactive tasks in business sectors which may not always be accessible to them.

Careers Scotland Highlands & Islands, which first came up with the idea for a 'virtual work' experience, has developed the project with a number of partners – BT Scotland, Learning Teaching Scotland, Skills for Business and the Scottish Executive's Determined to Succeed division.

The technology was tested by Dunfermline's Queen Anne High School pupils who were given a sneak preview of the virtual working worlds whilst they were in development last year.

At a recent launch event in Glasgow, Nicol Stephen stressed the importance of giving young people the fullest access to knowledge of the world of work.

The Deputy First Minister said: "Determined to Succeed, our strategy for enterprise in education, makes clear the value of good quality work experience. Virtual work experience should supplement and never substitute the benefits of one or more work placements for every pupil."

Bob Downes, then outgoing director of BT Scotland who now heads up Openreach north of the border, said: "What excites me about this project is the way in which gaming technology and broadband have converged to help the pupils of today prepare for the challenges of tomorrow."

"And because it's virtual, it can beam a variety of workplaces into rural Scottish schools where remoteness might otherwise preclude pupils from experiencing the full range of work on offer in our larger towns and cities."

"Much has been said about how broadband can be used to shatter the distance barriers that can blight communities living on the periphery in Scotland. Today, we unveil a tangible example of that technology in action."

The 'virtual world' product will be rolled out to all secondary schools in August this year.



Nicol Stephen and Bob Downes check out the scope of the virtual operating theatre with a little help from pupil Claire Gillan, 15, from Queen Anne High School in Dunfermline.

Silver Surfers Become Golden Gliders to Bridge Digital Divide

Sheltered housing residents in Angus are being taught to surf the net in a unique project to help bridge the digital divide.

Around 60 "golden gliders" have clicked their way to a new lease of life on the internet, thanks to in-house training provided by Angus Council's Angus Gold 50+ project, with backing from BT Scotland.

Residents at sheltered housing complexes throughout Angus are learning basic IT skills, despite having no previous computer experience.

Groups of five or six residents at each complex are being taught to surf the net and send and receive e-mail by trainers from Angus Gold 50+, a project launched last year with the aim of promoting social and digital inclusion for the 50+ population of Angus. The Scottish Executive is supporting the project with £460,000 over two years.

BT Scotland has enabled sheltered housing complexes in Brechin, Carnoustie, Forfar, Kirriemuir, Letham and Montrose with broadband lines and has also installed routers so that residents can share their broadband line and go online at the same time.

Mary Franchi (75), who lives at Kirriemuir's Glebe Court, is an enthusiastic learner. "I used to be a shorthand typist in my younger days but I have never used a computer and was a bit scared to start with. Now I can send e-mails to an old school friend who lives in Vancouver.

"I just wish this training had been available when I was a young girl. It's absolutely wonderful to think that you can send a letter to a friend on the other side of the world and get a reply the same day!"

Her neighbour, May Milne (79), said: "I could do with more training but I've managed to use the computer to make birthday cards for my grandsons."

May, who worked as a weaver in the local jute mill,

added: "My main interest is genealogy so as I learn more about using the internet I am hopeful of finding out much more about my family background."

Doug Tonner, BT regional manager and a member of the Gold 50+ advisory group, said: "Access to information and communications technology can improve people's lives, which is why BT wants everyone to participate in the digital revolution, whatever their age.

"This project is not just about accessing information. I know of one resident in his 80s, who can't get out and



Madge Holland (85) and Jack Drummond (88) prove that computing can be fun.

about, ordering a deep pan frier online as a present for a relative. Another resident, who flew one of the first aircraft equipped with radar, was more scared of the computers than he was of flying at night!

"Thanks to the trainers, that techno-fear has gone. It just proves that you're never too old to get online and fear of the technology can be overcome with a little patience and good tuition."

Project co-ordinator Ann Craig said: "The broadband access from BT has been terrific and has been a huge boon to us. Older people are a bit reluctant to go to libraries or community halls to learn computing skills, they want to learn in a comfortable situation in their own environment, until they are more confident to move on. Some of them are now so confident they have bought their own computers.

"We try to respond to whatever people's interests are so we encourage them to look up everything from online music to gardening and bowling web sites. They're all incredibly curious to find out more and, although all of them originally thought that computers were just for young people, we haven't had any dropouts!"

The Angus Gold 50+ Project is delivered by a small multi-disciplinary team that brings together staff from community learning and development, health and ICT backgrounds.

Managed by Angus Council's Community Learning and Development Service, the project is supported by a multi-agency advisory group with representation from Social Work & Health and Leisure Services, Community Planning Partnership members – NHS Tayside, Tayside Police and Angus College – and Age Concern Scotland, Age Concern IT Edinburgh and BT Scotland. The advisory group provides access to a wide range of expertise and is a link to other services for older people.

BT has followed the lead set by the Scottish Executive by introducing a smoke free workplace throughout the whole company from Sunday, March 26.

The move was timed to coincide with legislation coming into force to make all enclosed workspaces, including vehicles, smoke free in Scotland – and ahead of implementation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in varying stages by summer 2007.

BT decided to introduce the new policy across all its locations to coincide with the Scottish launch rather than manage the varying timescales planned for each country.

The company has around 80,000 staff in the UK, about 10,500 of them in Scotland. It estimates that around a third of the workforce are smokers.

Dr Paul Litchfield, BT's chief medical officer, said it made sense to have one rule for all employees whether they were located in Dumfries or Devon.

"The new rules introduce what we perceive to be the best practice in terms of enabling our people to live a healthy life," he added. "A lot of our people tell us that they want to give up smoking but need a little help, and this is part of that."

BT is already smoke free in its buildings, with the exception of designated smoking rooms. However, the key changes have seen its buildings worldwide become smoke free, unless there are overriding cultural or local legislative barriers, and the closure of all designated smoking rooms.

Additionally, smoking will not be permitted in liveried vehicles and company cars being used on BT business.

The company has put procedures in place to support employees who wish to quit smoking. Hundreds have already signed up to a programme offering advice on ways to kick the habit and providing help and support.

The move was welcomed by the leading campaign group Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). A spokesman said: "We hope it sets a model for other employers. There is no need to wait a year for the new law to come into force. Good employers should be acting now."

BT Performance Audit

BT Audit 2005

BT Scotland, with the assistance of participating MSPs, recently completed its 2005 Performance Audit Report, the fourth annual audit of MSPs' perceptions, opinions and awareness of BT Scotland and its services.

All responses to the Audit questionnaire are confidential so only information on amalgamated results can be provided. However, the summary findings of the report include:

- The level of familiarity with the range of BT Scotland services and the potential applications of modern communications technologies is 73.6%
- In response to questions on BT Scotland's performance, across a range of service issues, 68.5% of respondents indicated the performance was either 'Good' or 'Very Good', whilst less than 2% of responses indicated 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (the remainder selecting 'sufficient')
- Regarding the rate of progress in the provision of broadband services, 47.3% of all respondents indicated that they considered progress to be 'Good' (compared to 19.9% in 2004) and 11.8% still considered it to be 'Too Slow' (compared to 40.9% in 2004).

Whilst the responses were generally positive, and indicated an overall improvement on perceptions, opinions and awareness levels compared to the previous audit responses, BT Scotland remains committed to improving performance as a service provider and will continue to issue regular communications to ensure stakeholders are as up to date as possible on key issues, services and initiatives.

BT Scotland would like to thank those MSPs who returned completed questionnaires.

It will seek to address all the individual issues raised, and is happy to answer any questions at any time. By responding to the questionnaire, MSPs raised a total of £1170 for 12 charities – which respondents could nominate – including a total of £780 for ChildLine.