

Our Reference: 20090138  
Your Ref:

26 January 2009

Dr Ashok Kumar MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**ED RICHARDS**  
Chief Executive

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Dear Dr Kumar,

*To ask the Minister of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, what estimate he has made of the number of households that do not have access to broadband internet in (a) the UK, (b) the North East, (c) the Tees Valley and (d) Middlesbrough South and Cleveland East. [249637]*

I am writing in response to your question (above) to the Minister of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform tabled on 15 January 2009. It has been forwarded to Ofcom for a reply as the independent regulator for the UK communications industry.

While Ofcom does not hold broadband availability data at constituency level, we do collect this data on a regional basis i.e. for the North East of England, and also for the national level requested. The information provided below is taken from Ofcom's *Communications Market Report: Nations and Regions*, published in May 2008.

99.98% of exchanges in the UK, 100% of BT exchanges in the North East of England and 100% in England are broadband (DSL) enabled. This means that all households are connected to an exchange which can provide DSL. However, some households will be unable to receive broadband for various network reasons (e.g. distance from the exchange). BT currently state that 99.6% of their network can provide DSL at a speed of at least 512kBit/s. Virgin Media states that 51% of households in the North East of England and 52% of households in England were able to get cable broadband services at the end of 2007.

In the North East of England we are able to provide more localised information for the take-up of broadband services. In Middlesbrough it is 60% in urban areas (compared to 55% in Newcastle and 66% in Sunderland) and 54% in rural areas of Northumberland and Durham, compared with 58% in urban England and 60% in rural England.

Additionally, there is narrowband internet available to all of the UK as the Universal Service Obligation means that a fixed line is available to all of the UK, and the only other thing required is a Personal Computer.

There is currently no USO for broadband in the UK and Ofcom has no powers to mandate one. This is an issue we are keen to see debated and a matter that is being considered as part of the Government's Digital Britain project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Richards', written in a cursive style.

**Ed Richards**