Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport	GIGABIT BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
Rural Gigabit Voucher - Further Guidance
March 2020

Introduction

In May 2019 we introduced higher value Rural Gigabit Vouchers as part of the scheme. Following a review of the scheme in January 2020 we changed a number of the terms and conditions relating to Rural Vouchers. These changes were announced in Bulletin#24, published on 16 January 2020.

You can see copies of all the bulletins we have published here: https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/media/.

This note provides further guidance about preparing and operating Project Pre-Registered Packages (PRPs) supported by Rural Gigabit Vouchers and includes a set of questions and answers. Nothing in this guidance changes or updates the scheme's formal terms and conditions - currently, version 5.2.

The main changes we made in January mean:

- **100Mbps eligibility threshold introduced** - rural areas where the available broadband speed is <100Mbps are now eligible for vouchers. We use the latest Ofcom Connected Nations data as the basis for this. Previously, this figure was 30Mbps. We have made this change to make sure that more people in rural locations can benefit. The number of eligible premises has increased almost four fold.

- **New connection speed** - the new connection must provide a service of at least 30Mbps *and* it must also double the existing speed. So if a customer has 25Mbps today, their new contract must be for a service of at least 50Mbps. If the customer has a connection speed today of 2Mbps, they must take a new connection with a speed of at least 30Mbps.

Eligibility

The following summarises the key eligibility factors you must consider when preparing projects which aim to access Rural Gigabit Voucher funding on behalf of your customers:

- **Project PRPs only** - The only way in which customers can benefit from the rural voucher values is as part of a Project PRP, where the rural voucher values were agreed as part of the PRP application. Project PRPs are delivered in a defined geographical area and are required to identify in advance the total eligible costs incurred to deliver qualifying connections in that location **and** specify the number of anticipated beneficiaries. The minimum number of participants in a project is two, although we would prefer to see larger projects.
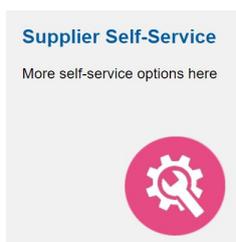
- **Beneficiaries** - Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including sole traders and not-for-profit organisations, are eligible. So are residents. We will often require you to provide trading evidence to confirm that an SME beneficiary is a legitimate trading entity. The type of beneficiary determines the maximum voucher contribution:

    - SME's vouchers have a value between £500 and £3,500 excluding any VAT, which the beneficiary must pay.

    - Residents' vouchers have a value between £500 and £1,500, this includes any VAT payable. Projects can be all residents, all businesses, or a mixture of both.

- **Location** - only premises which are in rural locations are eligible. See further guidance below for details of how we define rural locations.

- **Speed** - only premises where speeds of less than 100Mbps for the rural voucher.

- **State Aid** - Places where there is planned or completed public investment to deliver connectivity are excluded from the scheme.

Postcode Checker - We have created an online postcode level checker to help you develop projects. This is on your homepage when you are signed in on the scheme website.
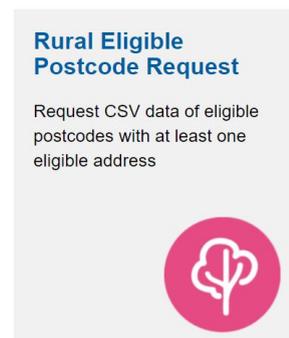
Eligible Postcode list - to help you further, we have made available a full list of all the postcodes that are eligible for the Rural Vouchers. These are postcodes where:

    - It is rural as defined by the scheme

    - At least one premise in the postcode has a speed of <100Mbps available

    - No "State aid" has been given or is planned for a gigabit capable service

To get a copy of the list, we need you to accept a data sharing agreement in which you must confirm that you will only use the information provided to support your participation in the scheme. To ask for a copy, sign in to the website using your user sign in and click this icon on the home page:

Supplier Self-Service

More self-service options here

Then complete the form behind this button ⇨

Rural Eligible Postcode Request

Request CSV data of eligible postcodes with at least one eligible address

When you have done so, we will email the list to you. Remember, that when you request a voucher for a customer, their actual premises must be eligible for the scheme.

Further Guidance - Q&A

How do you define "rural"?

We have used the formal definitions and associated postcode lists produced by the Office of National Statistics or its equivalent for that part of the UK. The formal definitions and access to the source data is available from links we have published on the scheme website. The links to the sources are reproduced here:

.

- England & Wales – DeFRA definitions D1 – F2
- Northern Ireland – NISRA definitions E – H
- Scotland – NRS definitions 3 – 6

Can I challenge your definition of "rural"?

Generally no, although we have had one or two questions about this. In England we have decided to use the Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs' tool which maps rural/urban areas in England at a premise level as the final arbiter:

https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx

(Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database rights 2018).

There is guidance about how to use the tool here:
https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/media/

There is currently no analogous tool for other parts of the UK. Please contact us if you think our definitions are incorrect.

Is eligibility about speed and rurality based on the premise or the postcode?

It is based on the premise. Currently, our online checker is only able to provide information at a postcode level.

How can I check what speeds are available at an individual premise?

Ofcom's broadband checker will provide this information and we use this data to check eligibility: https://checker.ofcom.org.uk/broadband-coverage.

What happens if we request a voucher for somewhere where DCMS thinks more than 100Mbps is available?

If this happens we will dispute the request and let you know. We will use dispute code D201 to let you know why we will not issue the voucher. You can find a full list of dispute and cancellation codes here:

https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/supplier-self-service/dispute-cancellation-codes/

What should I do if I believe that DCMS's data is incorrect about the availability of broadband at a property?

If you think our information is incorrect you must respond within 5 days otherwise we will cancel the voucher. You will need to provide evidence that our data is wrong - for example,

from the Ofcom checker for the premises - a screenshot for the premises showing we have made an error; the BT DSL checker - https://www.dslchecker.bt.com/ if appropriate. If you use another source of information - such as Sam Knows or Think Broadband - to identify the CP who has informed Ofcom that >100mpbs is available you will need to provide evidence from that CP which confirms that the service is not available. This may happen with cable providers, for example.

Sometimes postcodes are wrong or the premise you wish to connect is not listed. In these cases, we will use data about the nearest property for which data is available to determine whether an address is eligible. We will always attempt to arrive at a reasonable decision about the eligibility of a particular premise.

How do you determine what broadband speeds are available?
We use the information provided by Ofcom. This information is supplied to them by network owners and contains only information about existing structures and is updated regularly. We encourage all network builders to provide this information to Ofcom. Our decision about eligibility is ultimately final.

Will the online checker only say a postcode is eligible for the rural part of the scheme if all of the premises in that postcode are eligible?
No. The checker will say that the postcode is eligible if <u>any</u> premise in that postcode is eligible for the rural part of the scheme. You must check that the <u>premises</u> for which you request vouchers are eligible before requesting the voucher.

Can I request a Project PRP for a location where not all of the premises in a postcode are eligible for the rural part of the scheme?
Yes, you are able to do this, BUT if your project PRP is agreed, you must <u>only</u> request vouchers which meet the scheme rules. You are reminded that our agreement to a PRP means only that you may request vouchers *at risk,* it provides no guarantee of funding neither does it confirm that any vouchers will be issued.

How do I get more help and guidance?
We published a comprehensive guide for suppliers about their participation in the scheme. When the LFFN - original - part of the scheme becomes fully committed we will revise this guide so it focuses solely on the rural part of the voucher scheme. You can get the full guide from: https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/media/