

Fighting digital exclusion [1]

The online revolution has transformed our lives forever. Never before have we had such an opportunity to share information, express our opinions and participate in new opportunities. The Pirate Party believes it's time to think about digital rights rather than digital privilege.

The online economy is now worth £82 billion a year. The Internet now contributes to over 20% of economic growth in the UK. It's used for everything from banking and shopping to accessing council services and applying for schools for our children; it is vital that all can participate on an equal footing.

Too many people don't have access to these new opportunities.

[Rural areas are falling behind](#) [2] despite government promises. [20 per cent of families](#) [3] in rural regions have poor broadband connection. Even after programmes like BDUK, coverage won't extend to cover the whole of the UK. False and misleading advertising of Internet speeds mask poor services. Wifi hotspots are currently an almost exclusively inner-city phenomenon, leaving working class neighbourhoods out in the cold. This must become something of the past. If we fail to act soon, the disadvantaged will be left further behind, cementing poor education outcomes and ultimately creating a new level of poverty.

Instead of increasing access and bringing about greater inclusion, the dominant political voices in Britain have been pushing in the opposite direction. Perhaps the clearest example of this in the UK is the [Digital Economy Act](#) [4]. In the name of combatting so-called "piracy" this law threatens to turn ordinary people's Internet service providers in to spies to check what they are downloading. It could restrict entire households' access to the web and internet, or even throw them off altogether. This would have a devastating effect on British families - stop them from completing homework, paying bills, filing tax returns, [getting Universal Credit](#) [5] and, ultimately, participating in democratic debate.

This is not the only area where digital rights are under threat. Currently it feels as if the Internet under seige. Whether it is Hollywood's attempts to impose web-blocking on British business, the coalition's unwillingness to [stand up for net neutrality](#) [6], or US attempts to gain access to data stored in the EU, it's vital that we have a strong voice to defend online opportunity. Pirate Party UK is ready to speak out. Some brave politicians have been ready to stand up against their parties, but we need more than that. We need a political movement. It is the Pirate Party who are putting digital rights at the heart of the political agenda, where they belong.

What we want to do

- We will increase investment in the Rural and Urban Broadband Funds.
- We will make sure there is genuine competition to provide services, not just hand contracts to BT on a plate.
- We will expand public WiFi.
- We will make digital a central part of library services.
- We will extend the current universal service provision requirement for telephones to include genuine broadband access.

- We give customers a new right to pay only for the fraction of the claimed broadband speed that the provider actually delivers.
- We will repeal sections 3 to 18 of the Digital Economy Act.
- We will oppose government attempts to expand web-blocking.
- We want a right to file share for non-commercial purposes, and to ensure the proposed right we have been calling for to format shift is granted.

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Links

[1] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/campaigns/issues/fighting-digital-exclusion>

[2] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-24227096>

[3] http://recombu.com/digital/news/lack-of-rural-broadband-harming-education_M12940.html

[4] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/press/digital-economy-act-unworkable>

[5] http://www.turn2us.org.uk/about_us/media_centre/news_archive/digitally_excluded.aspx

[6] <http://www.greens-efa.eu/electronic-communications-12053.html>