

To Whom It May Concern,

I am making this submission as Chairman of the Argyll and Bute Economic Forum. I come from Argyll, and this submission is made in that capacity and is not connected to my role at Sky plc.

I am addressing in particular the concern that OfCom has quite correctly expressed, namely that mobile communication connections in UK are inequitably spread; and in particular, they are grossly inadequate, even non-existent in many rural areas. Argyll and Bute is just such an area.

The importance of this to us is quite simple. In common with other areas in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, we suffer from a declining population, caused by a fall in the number of young people staying in the area or coming to the area post education, which is not outweighed by the growth in the number of old people. So, our task is to retain and attract young and working age people. And a key part of this is obviously job creation. With this in mind, the Economic Forum was created to look at the best opportunities for creating jobs and what the barriers were.

While our review has not yet been completed, over the last 6 months we have established clearly that the top priorities for us, in terms of job creation, are tourism and food production, in particular, aqua culture. We have spoken to many people in Argyll operating in these two areas; and Visit Scotland has interviewed tourists. From this, it is clear that the number 1 barrier to the prosperous development of these two areas is the lack of mobile connectivity. From the point of view of tourism, it is probably obvious. The modern tourist, whether they are coming from Glasgow or Grenoble, arrives with a smart phone and wants to search out ferry timetables, restaurants, accommodation, etc. In Argyll, if they are very lucky, they will get a weak 2G signal. From the point of view of aqua culture, both the Chairman of the CFA and the CEO of the biggest salmon farming operation in Scotland, told us that lack of mobile connectivity was a major barrier to their operations. It is also a severe restriction on a number of social needs. For example, district nurses on patient visits are unable to communicate with the relevant GP by mobile phone or email.

Finally, I think it is obvious from observation that young people today use their mobile phones to connect, to inform and for entertainment, and if they can't get a connection, they will simply go and live in a place where they can.

Needless to say, we have held meetings with representatives of the mobile phone companies, most companies and the Scottish Government. While everybody expresses

concern, very little seems to be happening other than a lot of un-met promises. It is obvious to me that the gap in coverage in Argyll will not be filled without government subsidies, if we are to have the necessary full 4G penetration. Mobile phone connections are the 21st century infrastructure, as important as electricity or clean water and should be available to all. Failing that, we will remain worse than a developing country: I or members of my committee, have found full 4G coverage this year extensively in the Indian Himalayas, Croatia, Finland and Iceland, to name but a few. As tax payers, we do not see why we should be left as second class citizens. And if we are, not only will we not be able to stop the population decline, but rather it will accelerate.

I would welcome an opportunity to meet with OfCom to discuss this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas Ferguson

Chairman, Argyll and Bute Economic Forum