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Ofcom to trial 'white space' technology for rural broadband in the UK

26.04.2013

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The UK telecoms regulator Ofcom is to trial 'white space' technology in the UK to use the gaps in radio spectrum to provide better broadband in rural areas. The trial is one of the first of its kind in Europe.

The technology uses gaps in radio spectrum, called white spaces, which exist between frequency bands. In this instance, these bands have been reserved for digital terrestrial TV broadcasting and wireless microphones.

Use of these white spaces will allow devices to transmit and receive wireless signals for applications, such as broadband access for rural communities, Wi-Fi-like services or new 'machine-to-machine' networks.

White-space technology use wireless signals that can travel large distances and easily through walls, making it suitable for a variety of consumer applications, including doubling the range of Wi-Fi, as well as M2M (machine-to-machine).

Ofcom is **inviting industry** to take part in the pilot, which is intended to take place in the autumn. The locations for the trial will be chosen once trial participants have been identified.

Following a successful completion of the pilot, Ofcom anticipates that the technology could be fully rolled out during 2014, enabling the use of white-space devices across the UK.

White-space technology will be one way of meeting the growing demand for data in the UK. Ofcom is separately planning to free up more spectrum in the future for the next generation of high-speed data services, already dubbed 5G.

In February, Ofcom raised stg£2.34bn from its auction of 4G mobile spectrum. The UK government had hoped that the auction would have raised stg£3.5bn for the Treasury.

Under **Ofcom's plans** for white-space technology, a TV white-space device will not be able to start transmitting until it gets clearance from a database qualified by Ofcom and listed on a dedicated Ofcom website.

This database will provide updated information on where the TV white spaces are and the power level that devices would need to be restricted to if they wanted to use them.

This will help ensure there is no undue interference with the existing spectrum users.

Economic opportunities could arise from white spaces

In Ireland, the debate around using white-space technology to resolve deficiencies in broadband policy has yet to really take off.

Last September, we reported how tech industry giants, like Microsoft, and academics are urging the country to take advantage of **a huge economic opportunity** in the form of white spaces, which could be used to double the range of broadband in rural and urban areas.

In September, the CTVR telecoms research centre at Trinity College Dublin brought together ComReg, the Department of Communications and various businesses to hear from companies that had taken part in TV white-space trials in other countries.

An organisation called **White Spaces Ireland** has been established and includes Microsoft, Imagine, e-Net,



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HEAnet, Spectrum Bridge, Neul and Taoglas among organisations interested in getting the 'white spaces' ball rolling in Ireland.

Wireless networks image via Shutterstock

John Kennedy  

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