Metrics for the UK independent network sector

Including results from Spring 2021 survey

May 2021 1.0

A Point Topic report for the Independent Networks Co-operative Association

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Statement on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic

The INCA survey, as well as other research for this report, was undertaken as UK providers were coming out of the third national COVID-19 lockdown.

Despite a year of turbulent operational conditions, network suppliers have managed to overcome any initial significant concerns felt in last year's Spring report about the impact on maintaining and building new networks, undertaking street works and customer installations, with operations continuing at pace particularly at the close of 2020.

INCA and its members are grateful for the support provided by Government in recognition of the increased importance of digital communications for the country since the pandemic took hold in April last year.

Although the pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact on the sector this report demonstrates that the UK's appetite for robust and reliable digital services aims to be supported by the ambitious current and future build plans of the independent network providers.

Foreword

This year's INCA/Point Topic report assessing the development of the altnet market shows that the ambition of the sector is being matched by substantial investment in new gigabit-capable networks.

The history of telecoms in the UK over the past 40 years has been successive waves of private investment that have tended to focus on the economically most attractive urban areas. But in this current wave of investment in full fibre and gigabit capable networks there is no segment of the market and no geography where there isn't an altnet plan to build. This is dramatically different from the past and should be applauded – and supported – by government, regulator and the wider community.

The altnets are in prime position to help to deliver the Government's ambitious targets for national coverage of gigabit capable, and to make a major contribution to the 'levelling up' agenda.

Alex Blowers – Chair, INCA

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1. Summary

Premises passed

- The UK's independent operators - defined as an organisation deploying broadband infrastructure for wholesale and/or retail use, which is not part of either the UK's incumbent operators BT Group, and which is not Virgin Media as the national cable operator - are estimated to have passed 2.5 million premises with fibre broadband networks at end-2020[1]
- This represents over 110 per cent growth year-on-year, compared with 52 per cent from 2018-2019
- The majority use gigabit fibre-to-the-premises or home (FTTP/H) and fibre-to-the-building (FTTB) technology with some legacy VDSL gradually being phased out
- Fixed wireless access (FWA) networks are estimated to cover over more than two million premises[2] although not all will have full service available

Live connections

- There are 845,000 live connections to independent fixed networks primarily provided by full fibre and gigabit connections where growth has increased by 130 per cent year-on-year as residential consumers in particular demand better bandwidth, symmetry and stability

Expectations and aspirations

- Fixed symmetric gigabit infrastructure supplied by independent operators is expected to reach over 6.6 million premises at the end of 2021 with an estimated 1.1 million live connections
- By end-2025 these operators aspire to cover nearly 30 million homes and businesses, with around 6.2 million live connections. These footprints include some double counting, as networks will overlap in some of the most desirable locations.

Investment

- Interest and commitment are growing strongly in the independent network sector, with investment and expenditure commitments totalling £5.6 billion in 2020 and early 2021 alone
- From the survey inputs and research, we estimate intended CAPEX spend by the sector from now until end-2025 at over £10.8 billion[3] with operational expenditure of at least £1 billion
- Fixed independent network deployments are now completely focused on full fibre and gigabit capable networks, with some operators deploying fixed wireless networks in hard-to-reach areas

Concerns

- The top three concerns for independent network operators are getting wayleaves, overbuild from other operators and planning and street works delays.
- Access to skills and labour come fourth on the list of concerns as more operators seek to get the best people they can.
- Moving down the list though are access to finance, using Openreach PIA and delivery times for services reflecting the progress in the market and the processes in place today.

[1] This year's report focuses on premises passed, not addressed, for fixed infrastructure; past years have been backdated accordingly. There remains some variation in operators' reporting. See general caveat on page 4.
[2] The fixed wireless access (FWA) market is more difficult to assess due to line-of-sight issues and fragmented supply in the sector.
[3] See general caveat on page 7

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2. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the UK's independent network operator sector as of end-2020 and early 2021 in terms of scale, coverage, ambitions and concerns. As in the previous two years it includes both fixed and fixed wireless network operators.

Once again, the report has been produced in partnership between INCA – the Independent Networks Cooperative Association – and Point Topic, drawing on input from both INCA members and non-members.

Basis for research

In compiling these statistics, Point Topic has relied heavily on self-reporting by network operators. Where numbers are unknown, we have used our own estimates including postcode data if available. We do this in conjunction with our partner Thinkbroadband.

INCA members were surveyed during February to early March 2021. Survey questions can be found at https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/IndependentNetworkSurvey2021 and in Appendix A.

The report also draws on Point Topic's continuing full fibre, gigabit, superfast and ultrafast Broadband Update and Broadband Geography research programmes, which have been gathering information and datasets since June 2009. This research is used particularly in assessing expansion in recent years of the independent network operator footprint.

General caveat

The premises passed, investment and capex projections included in this report are from a number of sources, including INCA surveys, and should be treated as indicative only. Different data sources may be used for the different parameters reported, so it is not possible to directly compare them nor, for example, to divide capex projections with projected premises passed figures to estimate cost per premises passed.

Research aims

By gathering information on coverage in terms of premises passed, live connection numbers, expansion plans and key concerns on an aggregated basis, the independent sector will be better able to demonstrate to policy makers, Ofcom, investors and the media, the role it is playing and the advances it is making in bringing ultrafast broadband to UK homes and businesses.

This is especially important given Ofcom's approach to the regulation outlined in the Promoting investment and competition in fibre networks – Wholesale Fixed Telecoms Market Review 2021-26, which aims to work in conjunction with the Government's £5 billion , aiming to reach 85 per cent gigabit-capable coverage by 2025 and close to 100 per cent as soon as possible. The independent sector will play a key role in those objectives and will contribute significantly to a fully fibred UK.

Definitions

- Premises passed – this year we have used premises passed figures rather than addressable premises for fixed infrastructure. Point Topic defines premises passed as those that can readily order a broadband service. In our previous reports we included premises addressed as provided to us by operators – addressable premises tend to be classed as homes or businesses located within x metres of a network. The Ofcom definition for full fibre coverage is, “where the network has been rolled out to a ‘lead-in’ that will serve the consumer end premises and where the consumer would expect to pay a standard installation charge for that connection”.[4] We welcome the industry’s move towards more consistent definitions of coverage but recognise there remain varying definitions and different terms.
- Connections – live connections we define as premises which have an active subscription/s to a broadband service. We include both residential and business, wholesale and retail but without double-counting of these figures.
- Independent operator (also known as altnet) – we define this as an organisation deploying broadband infrastructure for wholesale and/or retail use, which is not part of either the UK’s incumbent operators BT Group, and which is not Virgin Media as the national cable operator. This includes community groups, not-for-profit organisations, and privately funded companies.
- Technologies – in terms of fixed networks, we cover full fibre-based network deployments, fibre-to-the-premises or home (FTTP/H) and fibre-to-the-building (FTTB) as well as small amounts of legacy VDSL. Fixed wireless access (FWA) deployments are included where we have been able to gain information although this is currently sparse. This report does not cover satellite, 4G, white space or leased line infrastructure.
- Bandwidth – we focus on symmetric gigabit capable networks. While there is some legacy VDSL in the portfolio of several operators it is a small and decreasing percentage as new deployments are now exclusively FTTP/B. However, coverage of FWA technology does include sub-superfast bandwidths.

Next steps

Now in its fourth year, we plan to continue this report on a regular basis in order to follow changes in the market, track advances in coverage and scale, and explore new issues and concerns within the independent community as they arise.

The 2021 survey at the end of this paper has been completed by 25 independent network operators forming a representative sample of the UK independent sector. Our thanks go to all those who have taken part in the survey.

As mentioned above, we rely to a large extent on self-reported statistics to assess the scale of the sector in terms of premises covered and live connections. To increase the rigour of data we will continue to work with INCA and the industry to agree on metrics and outputs, including definitions.

4 Ofcom’s Connected Nations 2020 Annex A: Methodology https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/209440/connected-nations-2020-methodology.pdf

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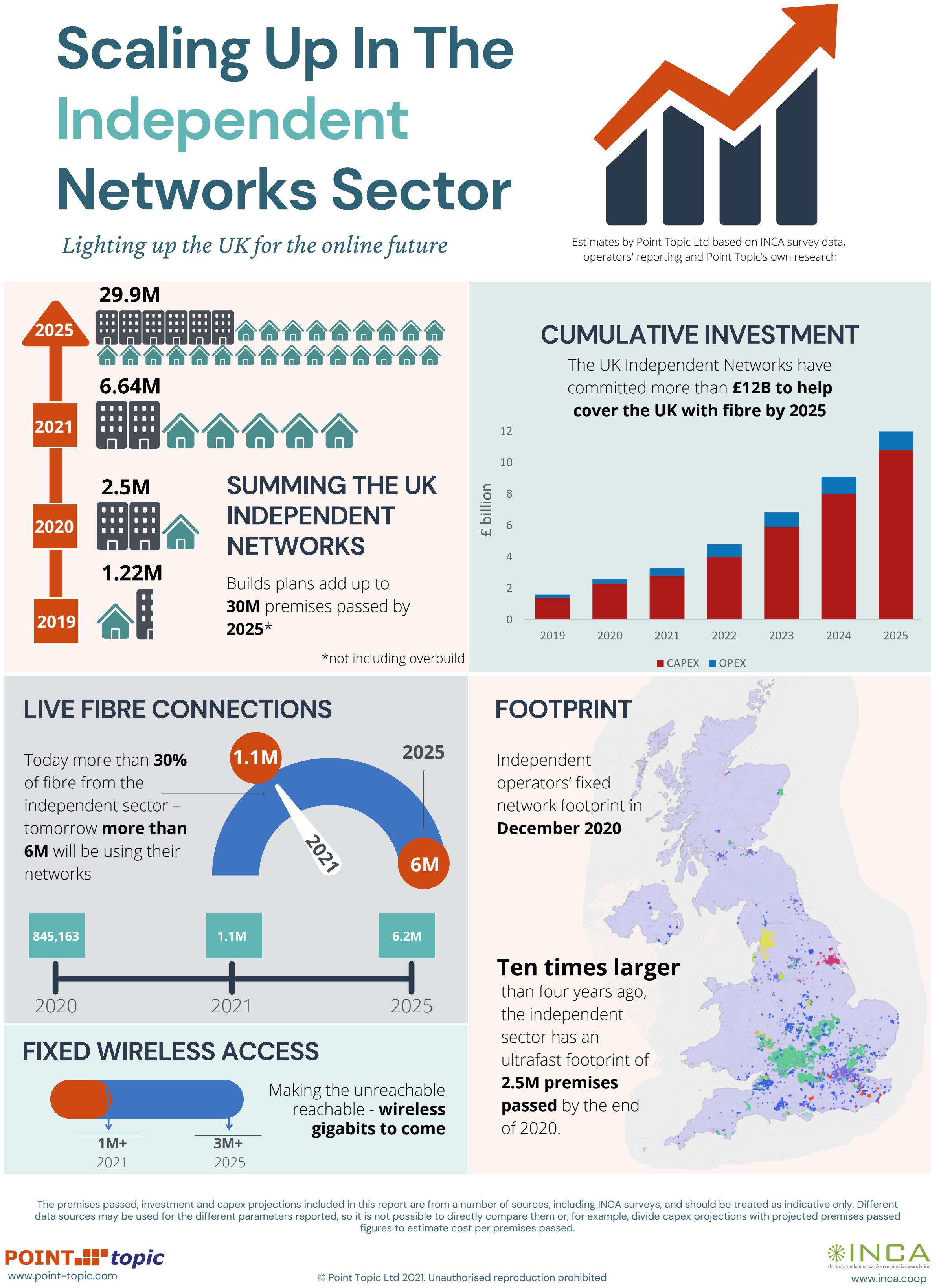
3. Key metrics

The following infographic provides a snapshot of the UK independent network operator sector at the end of 2020.



4. Assessing scale and ambitions of the independent network sector

Point Topic provides estimates of premises passed for the UK's fixed independent operators and live connections as at the end of December 2020. In addition, we have estimated, from available data, premises addressed or covered by fixed wireless access infrastructure of independent operators, as well as total connections for these players.

We collect expectations and aspirations for some (not all) of these numbers at the end of 2021, and end of 2025.

Estimates are based on public announcements, survey data supplemented by Point Topic and Thinkbroadband research as outlined above, either reported to us by network operators or using our own estimates when actual numbers are unavailable.

Table 1 below contains estimated key metrics for the UK's independent fixed networks, with full fibre dominating.

Premises passed and connected by fixed independent networks
At end-December 2020, the UK's independent network operators are estimated to have passed over 2.58 million premises with their fixed broadband infrastructure. This is an increase of 111 per cent year-on-year. The vast majority uses ultrafast FTTP and FTTB technology.

Live connections for independent operators stood at an estimated 845,000 at the end of December 2020, up from 366,000 or 130 per cent on last year.

Premises addressed and connected by FWA networks
Independent FWA infrastructure is estimated to have passed or addressed over 2 million premises at the end of 2020. Live connections over independent network operators' FWA infrastructure remain at an estimated 110,000.

Expectations for end-2021
We asked survey respondents to provide an indication of how many premises passed and live connections they expected to have at end-December 2021. Several operators have given public indications of their future coverage aims.

We estimate total plans are for 6.6 million premises passed, and over 1.1 million connections by fixed network operators. This does not take account of overbuild, which is already growing among independent networks operators as their coverage footprints expand.

Aspirations for end-2025
We asked operators to give an idea of their aspirations for end-2025 in terms of premises passed and live connections. We have also used public announcements and Point Topic research to arrive at estimates. These put targets for premises passed at 29.9 million and connections at 6.2 million for end-2025 for fixed ultrafast infrastructure. This also contains double counting of premises where footprints overlap. This is a challenging total for premises passed, however the sector remains optimistic and determined to push their networks further into the market.

For comparison, our survey last year (2020) put the end-2025 target at 15.7 million passed and connections at 4.3 million for 2025 for fixed ultrafast infrastructure. The year before (2019) the target figures stood at 15.9 million premises passed and connections at 4.8 million for 2025 for fixed ultrafast infrastructure. The year before (2018) these figures stood at 14.2 million for premises passed and 4.8 million connections for end-2025 for fixed ultrafast infrastructure.

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This is not based on the whole independent network operator market, but it does include the largest players.

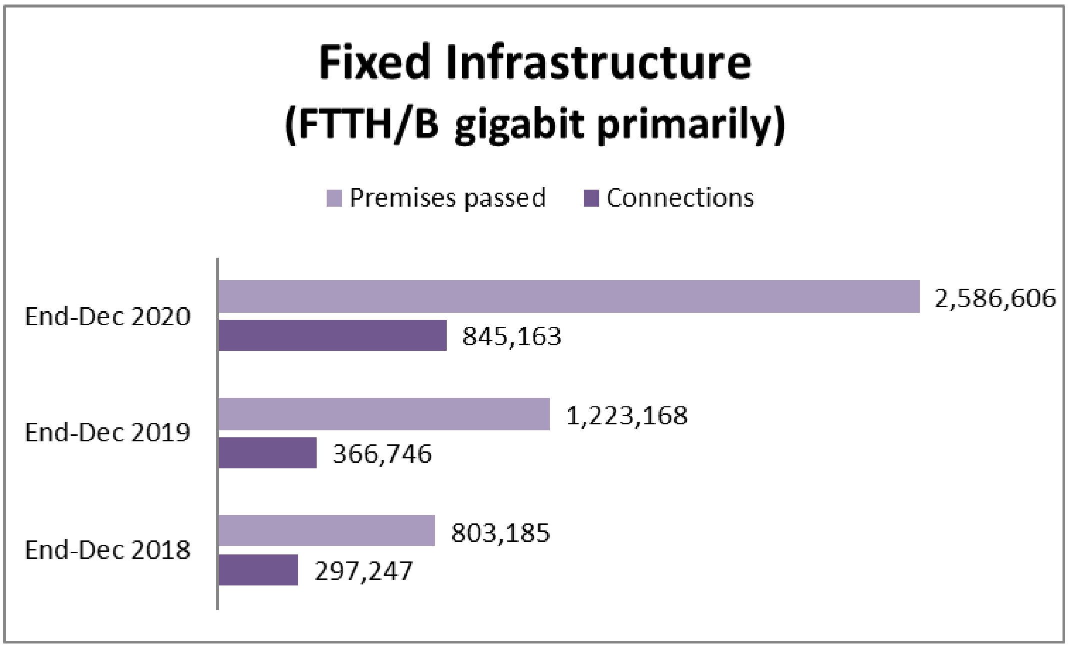
Unfortunately, there is still too little information available in the market for us to provide robust future estimates for the fixed wireless sector on this basis. However, INCA anticipates that with recent developments in fixed wireless technology it will become an increasingly important element in the overall mix of technologies to help meet the government's ambitious 2025 target. This is particularly likely in challenging, sparsely populated areas. A significant proportion of INCA's operator members have years of experience in deploying rural FWA networks and are well placed to deploy a mix of full fibre and wireless networks to suit local conditions.

Table 1: Estimated key metrics for UK independent network sector

FIXED INFRASTRUCTURE (FTTH/B and other)		
Total for fixed full fibre operators	Connections	Premises passed
End-December 2018	297,247	803,185
End-December 2019	366,746	1,223,168
End-December 2020	845,163	2,586,606
EXPECTATIONS & ASPIRATIONS (March 2021)		
FIXED SUPERFAST & ULTRAFAST INFRASTRUCTURE		
	Connections	Premises passed
End-December 2021	1,105,235	6,637,841
Aspirations for end-2025	6,203,225	29,927,435

See general caveat on page 4
Source: INCA survey, Point Topic research and estimates

Figure 1: Key data changes from 2019, 2020 to 2021 INCA surveys

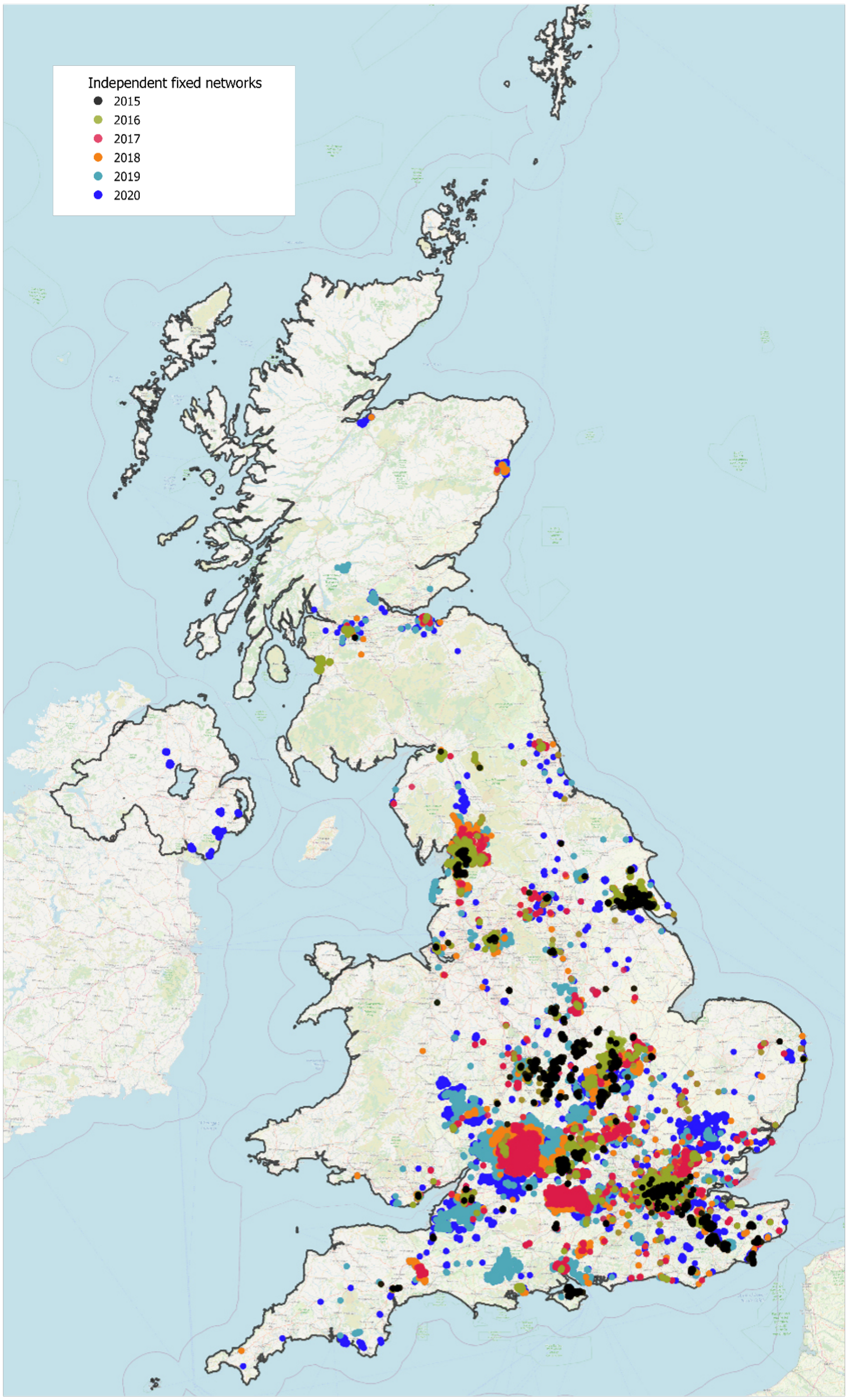


5. Independent network sector coverage mapping

Point Topic maps broadband provision throughout the UK, including footprints of the country's independent network operators.

As part of the INCA survey, we asked independent operators to provide their coverage details. We have also used our own research and that of our partner Thinkbroadband to provide a view of independent network infrastructure provision today as the sector expands rapidly. Figures 2 to 9 provide more detail.

Figure 2: Fixed independent operator presence in UK at Dec 2015 to Dec 2020 by year



Independent networks have been rolling out in the UK for more than five years.

Deployments have been accelerating across the UK with fixed infrastructure, almost entirely full fibre, available to almost 10% of UK premises at the end of 2020.

Full fibre deployments have focused primarily on towns and cities as operators seek the best return on investment from the most densely populated areas.

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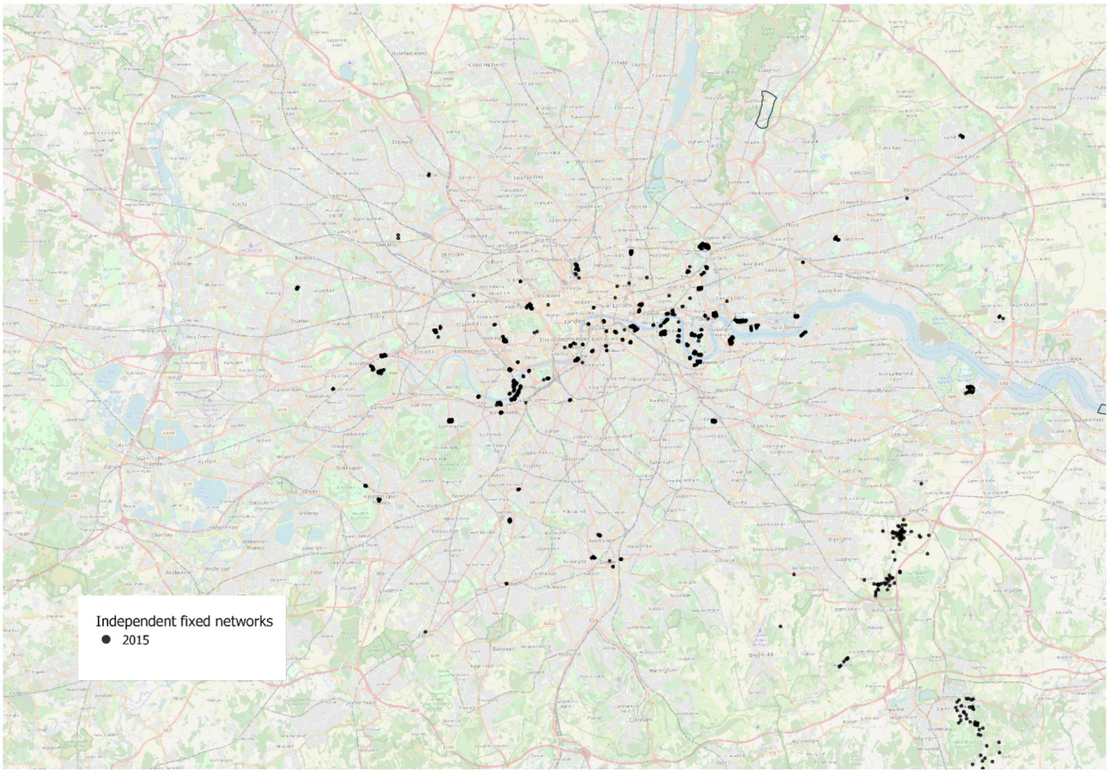
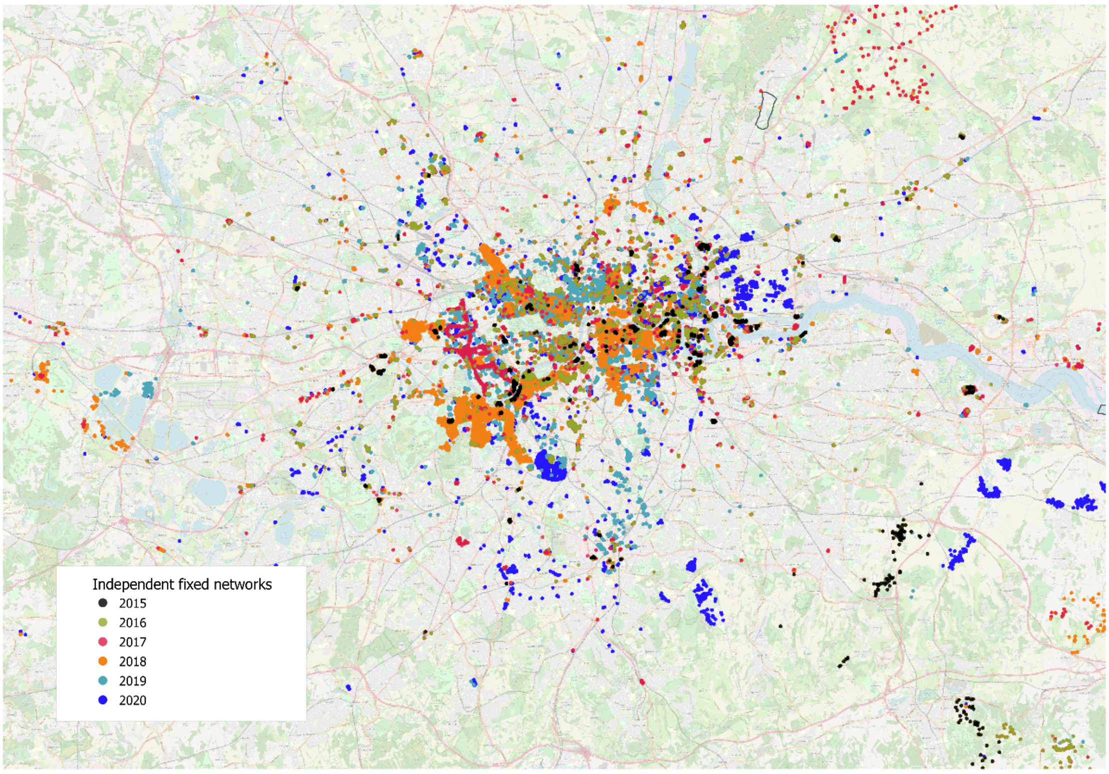
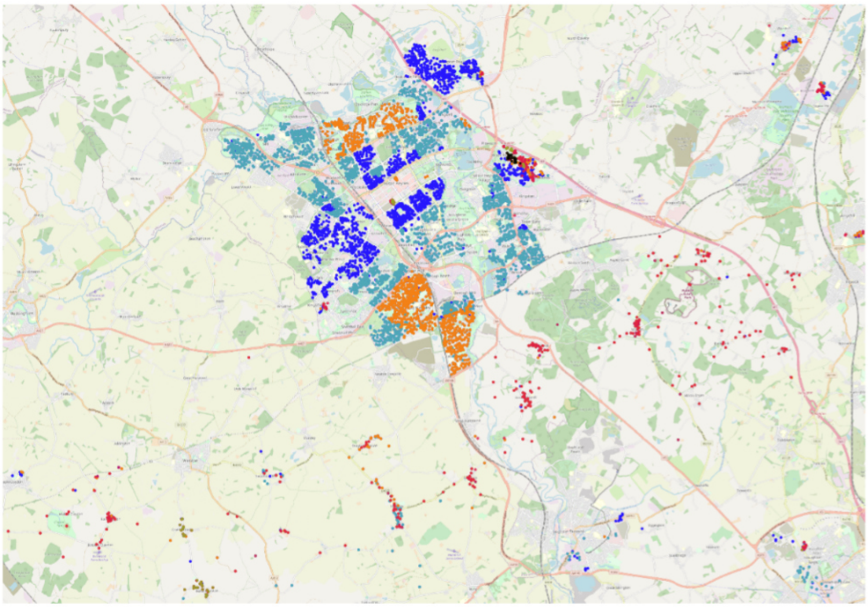
Figure 3: Fixed independent operator presence in London (2015 and 2015/16/17/18/19/20)





While London has been the city with the highest number of individual deployments it is not the urban area with the most coverage. At the moment that title goes to Milton Keynes with rapid roll-out from CityFibre with their partners at Vodafone, shown in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Fixed independent operator presence in Milton Keynes (Dec 2020)



Openreach also has some FTTP presence in Milton Keynes, not shown, which helps take full fibre coverage in the town to over 80% of premises.

Other towns and cities are increasing coverage from the independent sector but there is plenty of opportunity left even today in the UK.

Figure 5: Fixed independent operator presence around Leeds and Huddersfield (Dec 2020)

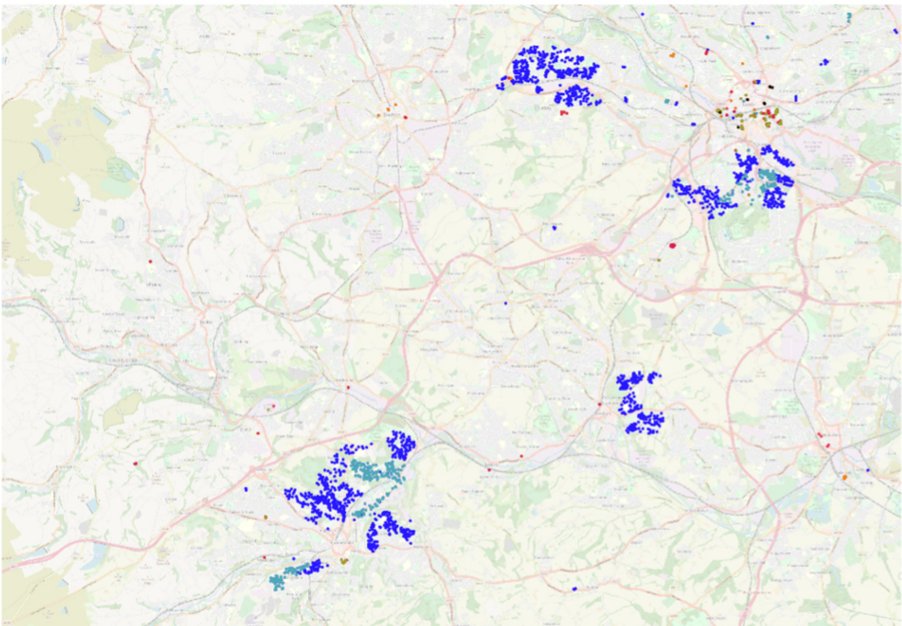


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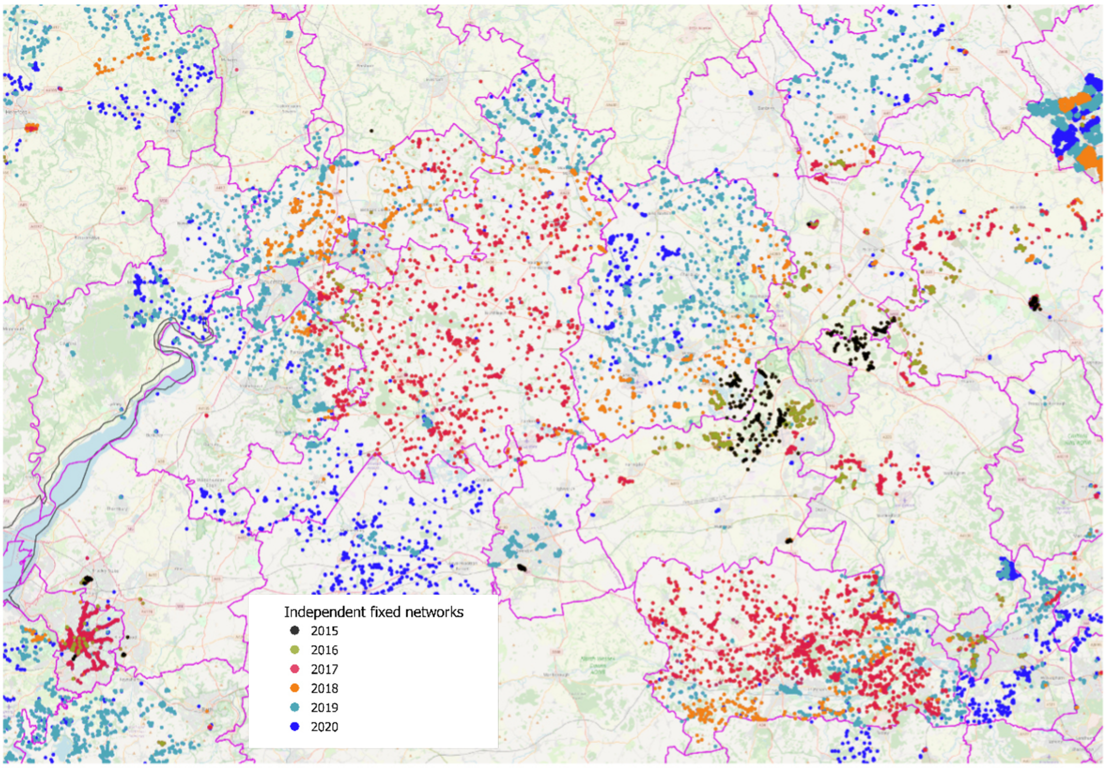
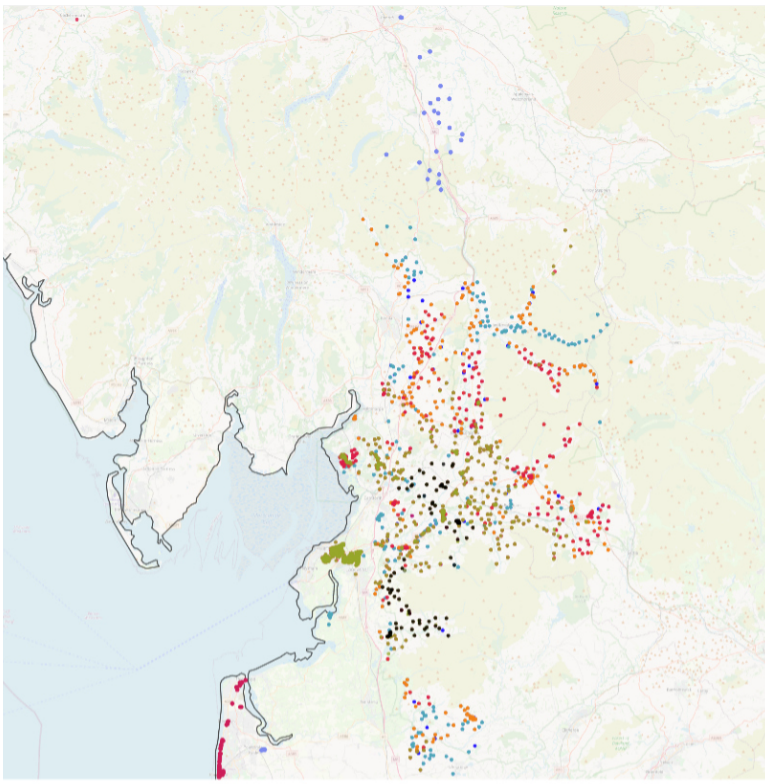
Figure 6: Fixed independent operator presence across the south/central England (Dec 2020)



While early focus for many has been on the urban areas there are also increasingly significant deployments across more rural parts of the UK.

Figure 7: Fixed independent operator presence – North-West England (Dec 2020)



As we will see the operators still face many challenges and Local Authorities and planning departments have a large part to play in supporting the sector in their drive to scale up across the country.

Even in deeply rural parts of the UK there are operators with effective models that allow full fibre coverage supplemented with FWA to reach the most remote areas.

6. Independent network sector investment

The past year has continued to see a strong interest and engagement from the investment community in the UK's independent network sector.

- Adding up the announcements made in 2020 we get over £5.30 billion worth of private funding. It is not immediately clear how much of this is 'new' money so exercise caution if combining with previous statements.
- Between January 2021 and the close of March 2021 there has been an additional £345 million in private investment announced, all of which is additional
- From 2017 to 2019, an estimated total of £9.8 billion in private investment-related funding has been announced.

To help provide better insight we asked the survey respondents to provide us with their totals for expected CAPEX and OPEX this year and next year as well as up to 2025.

We have added additional estimates to those figures collected through the survey for intended spend by independent network operators based on public announcements over time, where we are sure they are additional funds. Table 4 provides a summary.

Table 4: Intended capital expenditure (CAPEX), estimates for fixed full fibre operators

Current financial year (2020/21)	Next financial year (2021/22)	2020 to end-2025
£1.180 billion	£2.053 billion	£10.810 billion

Note: Figures form only part of the sector; capex relates to intended capital investment, not actual
See general caveat on page 4
Source: Operators taking part in INCA surveys 2021, 2020 and 2019; public announcements

Operational expenditure will also expand to meet the requirements of larger networks and more customers. From survey inputs and public statements, we are projecting an OPEX spend of between **£1bn** and **£1.2bn** up to 2025 for the fixed full fibre independent operators.

A summary of selected financial-related announcements is detailed in the annex below. Earlier announcements can be found in our previous report for INCA, Metrics for the UK independent network sector, published in May 2020.

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7. Independent network sector concerns

The INCA survey asked operators to rate how concerned they are about issues in terms of challenge to their network deployment and ability to offer services to and acquire customers – 22 operators provided their views this year.

The top three concerns in 2021 are:

1. Getting wayleaves
2. Overbuild by Openreach or other operators
3. Planning and street works delays and/or costs

Getting wayleaves moves up from last year to top of the list of sector concerns. A perennial challenge there is anecdotal feedback of improvements over time, but it is still an issue around the country and for most operators.

There are signs of progress in other areas too. Access to finance has dropped to the bottom of the list. As we have reported above there has been a large influx of investment as regulation and demand have both crystallised along with some other uncertainties.

High on the list of those was Brexit. As the process progressed and more clarity emerged operators and investors were able to price the impact and move forward with plans. Post Brexit the sector is less concerned with the impact of import barriers, second lowest in the responses, but much more worried about access to skills and labour. Echoing to an extent what we are seeing in other industries.

Using Passive Infrastructure Access (PIA) is not as worrying as proposed price increases. The recent Openreach move to make EAD circuits more expensive in particular situations (e.g. where used to provide backhaul for full fibre deployments) is further down the list of concerns, but it is possible we will see the impact of that play out over the next several months.

Access to a wholesale platform and attracting retail service providers are currently low on the list of concerns, but many operators are closely following developments with the Common Wholesale Platform project and other initiatives in wholesale provision.

Figure 8 lists the full range of responses. Figure 9 illustrates changes year-on-year.

Figure 8: Independent network operators' concerns

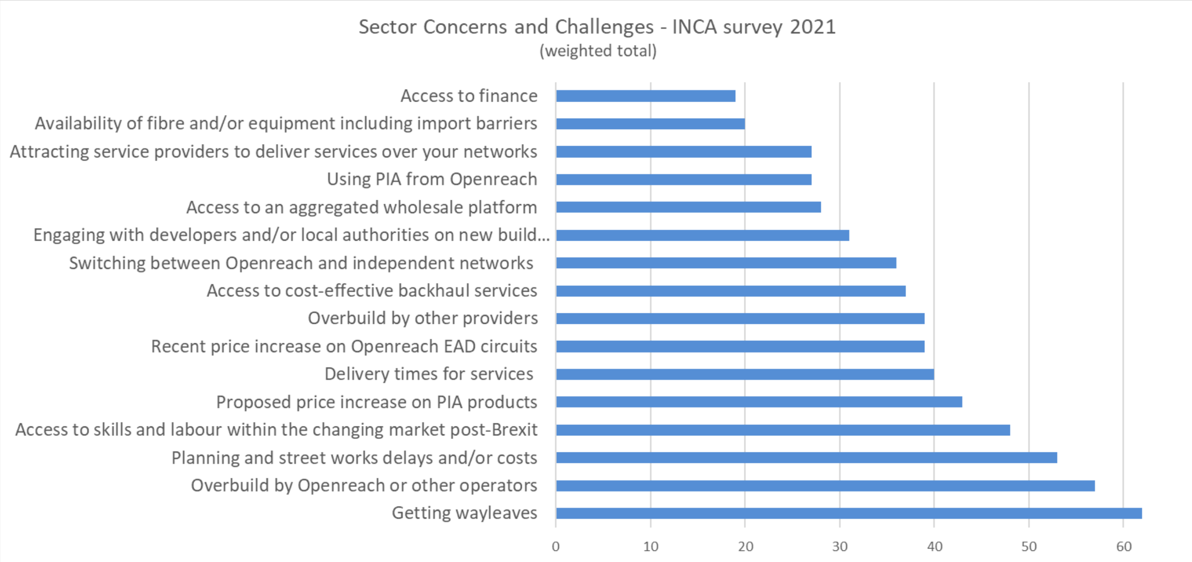

Figure 9: Changing concerns 2020 to 2021 (weighted rankings)

Sector Challenges	Rank 2021	Rank delta from 2020
Getting wayleaves	1	+2
Overbuild by Openreach or other operators	2	=
Planning and street works delays and/or costs	3	+5
Access to skills and labour within the changing market post-Brexit	4	
Proposed price increase on PIA products	5	
Delivery times for services	6	-5
Recent price increase on Openreach EAD circuits	7	
Overbuild by other providers	8	
Access to cost-effective backhaul services	9	-3
Switching between Openreach and independent networks	10	
Engaging with developers and/or local authorities on new build housing plans	11	-2
Access to an aggregated wholesale platform	12	
Using PIA from Openreach	13	-6
Attracting service providers to deliver services over your networks	14	
Availability of fibre and/or equipment including import barriers	15	
Access to finance	16	-11

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We have introduced a number of new 'challenges' (in **bold**) compared to earlier years to reflect feedback and better represent the concerns that operators and providers face today in the market.

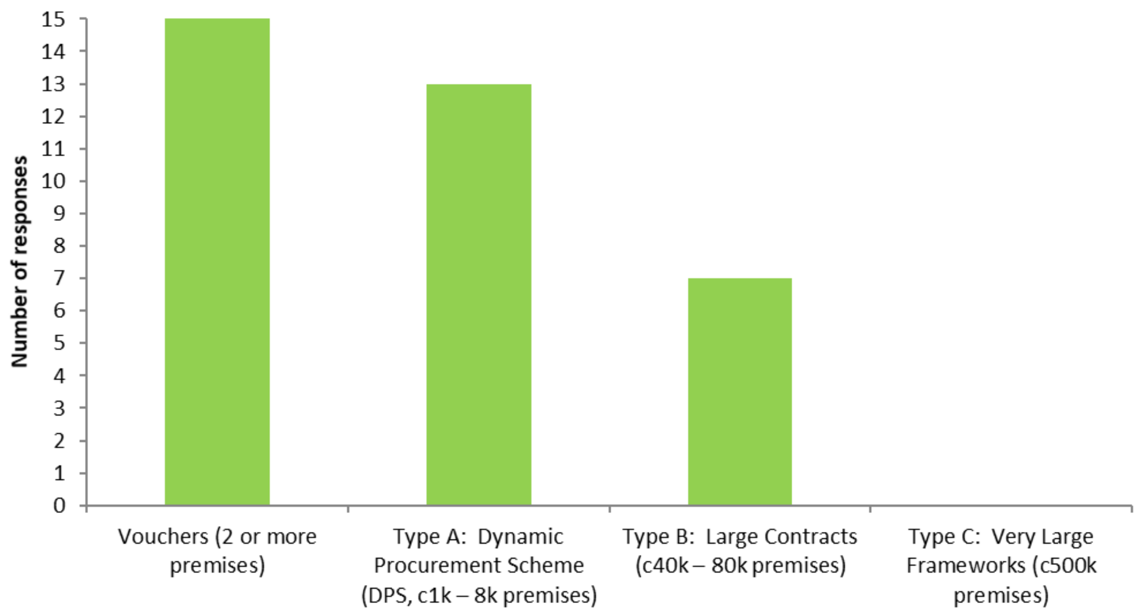
Perhaps of most note is the 'Access to Finance' challenge which has moved to the bottom of the list reflecting the changes in the UK market over the last year.

8.New survey questions

As we have seen above the annual survey has evolved and added sections that are of particular relevance at the moment.

For example, private finance is not the only source as the BDUK Gigabit Programme gets underway with a focus on networks capable of delivering gigabit coverage in harder to reach areas. Many players are interested with over 70% of operators surveyed saying they are keen to be involved. At the time of the survey, the smaller programmes (less than 100k premises) were attracting the most interest.

Figure 10: To what extent are you participating in the BDUK programme?

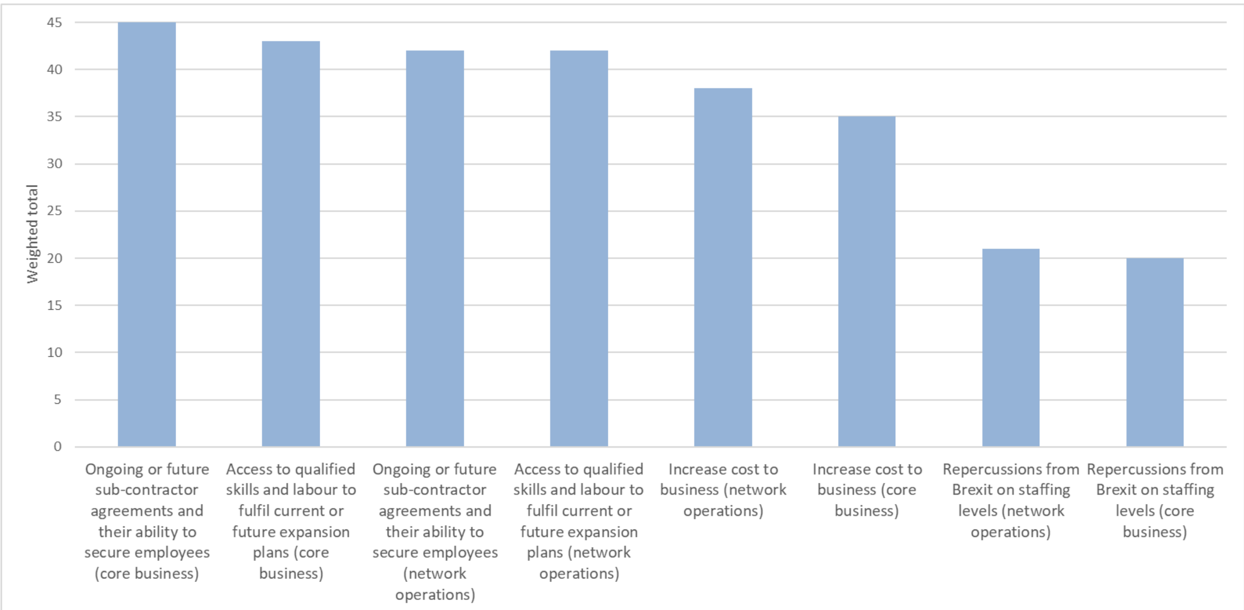


This is an evolving story as more data comes through there will be updates on what areas will attract what funding and as a result what independent operators will be involved.

With more and more competition in the market there are new challenges that arise. High on the list, at number 4 in the first year it is included, are the humans at the heart of all the action.

We asked the operators: How would you rate the following employment issues in terms of their challenge to your core business operations and your network deployment and maintenance operations?

Figure 11: Employment issues and the challenge to operations



With more and more high-tech jobs being created the sector is helping to boost training and employment around the UK.

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8. Appendix A

INCA/Point Topic independent networks survey – spring 2021

Help us make the case for the independent operators to Government and Ofcom

Each year INCA commissions Point Topic to survey the independent operators to assess investment, actual and planned network coverage and important challenges the sector faces. As private investment by independent providers has steadily increased, with an estimated £8.8 billion being pumped into the gigabit broadband sector up to 2025, our focus of this year's survey will be on how this investment will result in the scaling up of deployments and operations.

The data collected from this survey is anonymised and aggregated into a report that forms an important part of INCA's work to keep government and Ofcom appraised of the significance of the sector and the investment generated, whilst underscoring the impact independent providers can have on the realisation of the UK's gigabit targets. We also welcome responses from non-INCA members and those belonging to other associations including UKWISPA.

Completing the survey should not take more than 10 minutes of your time. The deadline for responses is 26 February.

A message from INCA's new Chair, Alex Blowers

The INCA / Point Topic survey and the resulting report is one of the most important things that INCA does. Collectively we need to keep banging the drum that independent operators are vital to the future success of the UK. All of us are bringing in new investment and building the new digital infrastructure on which the economy increasingly depends. Putting in front of ministers and senior officials the aggregated numbers helps make the case that we are meeting the challenge and cannot be dismissed as just bit players in BT's show.

So, I am personally asking you to complete the survey as accurately as you can. It will not take long and is an important contribution to our shared success.

Regards,

Alex Blowers
Chair of INCA

It would be really helpful if you are able to answer as many of the questions below as possible. If you prefer, we can contact you by phone instead to cover some or all of the questions – please contact Veronica Speiser at Point Topic, direct tel: +44 (0)7508 802243, veronica.speiser-@point-topic.com

If you are not the person in your organisation who can answer the survey, please forward this url to someone who can. Many thanks for your help.

1. Your Details

Name : ....

Company : ....

Email Address: ....

2. What type of networks do you build? (tick all that apply)

	Fibre to the Premises (FTTP, FTTH) active or passive
	Fibre to the Building (FTTB)
	Ethernet
	Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) LLU
	FTTC - Fibre to the Node/SLU
	FTTC - G.Fast
	Hybrid Fibre Coax (HFC / DOCSIS 3.x)
	Fixed Wireless Access using unlicensed or lightly licenced spectrum
	Fixed Wireless Access using licenced spectrum
	FWA - Point to Point
	FWA - Point to Multipoint
	Satellite Broadband
	Current wholesale access to your network
	Planned wholesale access to your network
	Other (please specify)

3. Is your network accredited to any of the following schemes? (tick all that apply)

☐ INCA Gold Standard
☐ UKWISPA Quality Accreditation
☐ Other (please specify)

4. Coverage

How many premises do your fixed networks pass – split by residential and business?
Note: Ofcom's definition of "full fibre coverage" is "where the network has been rolled out to a 'lead-in' that will serve the consumer end premises and where the consumer would expect to pay a standard installation charge for that connection".

	Residential	Business	Total
End-December 2020			
Do you anticipate by the end of 2021			
Your longer-term aspiration by the end of 2025			

Please provide your definition of "pass" if this varies and/or you use a different network technology.

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5. How many premises are within coverage range of your fixed wireless networks – split by residential and business?

	Residential	Business	Total
End-December 2020			
Do you anticipate by the end of 2021			
Your longer-term aspiration by the end of 2025			

Please provide your definition of "within coverage range".

6. How many end-users are connected to your fixed networks – split by residential and business? split by wholesale and retail?

	Residential	Business	Wholesale	Retail	Total
End-December 2020					
Do you aim to connect by the end of 2021					
Your longer-term aspiration by the end of 2025					

7. How many end-users are connected to your fixed wireless networks – split by residential and business? split by wholesale and retail?

	Residential	Business	Wholesale	Retail	Total
End-December 2020					
Do you aim to connect by the end of 2021					
Your longer-term aspiration by the end of 2025					

8. What is your overall capital expenditure?

Current financial year
Next financial year
Estimated spend from now to end 2025

9. How much do you spend on operating and maintaining the network/s?

Current financial year
Next financial year
Estimated spend from now to end 2025

10. How would you rate the following issues in terms of their challenge to your network deployment and ability to offer services to and acquire customers?

Please rate issues on a scale from 1 – 'Not an issue' to 5 – 'Very significant challenge'

	Access to finance
	Using Passive Infrastructure Access from Openreach
	Proposed price increase on PIA products
	Delivery times for services from Openreach or other operators (e.g. EAD circuits)
	Recent price increase on Openreach EAD circuits
	Getting wayleaves
	Planning and street works delays and/or costs
	Attracting service providers to deliver services over your network
	Overbuild by Openreach
	Overbuild by other providers
	Access to cost-effective backhaul services
	Engaging with developers and/or local authorities on new build housing plans
	Availability of fibre and/or equipment including import barriers
	Access to skills and labour within the changing market post-Brexit
	Switching between Openreach and independent networks e.g. through the Gaining Provider Led Switching process being developed by OTA/Ofcom
	Outside In approach and BDUK Vouchers
	Access to an aggregated wholesale platform

11. Do you see the BDUK Outside-In programme being an important part of your business plans between now or in the future?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

11a. To what extent are you participating in the BDUK programme? Tick all that apply.

☐ Type A: DPS (Dynamic Procurement Scheme) c1k – 8k

☐ Type B: Large Contracts c40k – 80k

☐ Type C: Very Large Frameworks (c500k)

☐ Vouchers (2 or more premises)

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12. In your negotiations for obtaining wayleaves what is the average timeframe for the process from beginning to gaining consent?

□ Less than 6 months □ 6-12 months □ 12-18 months □ 18-24 months □ 2 years or more

13. Skills and Labour

13a. How would you rate the following employment issues in terms of their challenge to your core business operations and your network deployment and maintenance operations?

Please rate issues on a scale from 1 – 'Not an issue' to 5 – 'Very significant challenge'

Core Business Operations (eg. Senior management, technology officers, in-office staff, customer support)

	Access to qualified skills and labour to fulfil current or future expansion plans
	Increase cost to business
	Repercussions from Brexit on staffing levels

Network Deployment and Maintenance Operations

	Access to qualified skills and labour to fulfil current or future expansion plans
	Increase cost to business
	Repercussions from Brexit on staffing levels
	Ongoing or future sub-contractor agreements and their ability to secure employees

13b. What are your total number of employees and how many are you expecting to employ in the future?

	Core Business Operations	Network Deployment and Maintenance	Total
End-December 2020			
How many do you anticipate to employee by the end of 2021			
How many do you anticipate to employee by the end of 2025			

13c. If you have current training programmes in place how many employees are currently enrolled on these programmes? How many trainees do you expect to have in the future?

	Core Business Operations	Network Deployment and Maintenance	Total
End-December 2020			
How many do you anticipate to employee by the end of 2021			
How many do you anticipate to employee by the end of 2025			

13d. Please provide any further information about your training programmes below.

14. Please note any specific comments that you may have on the above or on other issues

15. Postcodes and Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN)
In line with our approach to providing clear, up to date and accurate data it is very important to gather robust information that can be aggregated to influence Ofcom's and the government's understanding of the sector.
Do you hold your network plan at postcode and/or UPRN level? Please tick the relevant box below.

☐ Postcode ☐ UPRN

Please provide existing coverage and intended build postcodes/UPRN premises data, ideally up to April 2026. These will be used by INCA on an aggregated basis in its response to Ofcom.

The preferred format is an Excel sheet listing coverage data split by present and future (by year if available), if possible noting maximum speeds available to end users in each location if this varies – email to veronica.speiser@point-topic.com or tick the option below to be contacted by us.

In addition, Point Topic would like to use the aforementioned data in order to map the coverage of broadband networks. It works with thinkbroadband to do this and therefore shares this data with its partner accordingly, tick here if you are happy for us to do that.

Please contact me on:

16. INCA are also currently working on their plans for 2021 and would appreciate your feedback on their activities. This survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. Please find the link the survey here.

Is there anything that INCA is not doing that you think we should put resources into?

DONE - THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP

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Annex 1 2019 – 2021 Public expansion announcements by selected independent network operators

Operator	Plans
Airband	• 50,000 extra premises in England and Wales by 2021 (most expected to be FTTP) • 4,000 premises in Cheshire by March 2023 • 37,500 premises in Devon and Somerset by 2024 • 500,000 premises by 2025 • 4,000 extra premises in 10 rural communities in Herefordshire via Fastershire Programme, no completion date specified
B4RN	• 40,000 by 31 March 2022 • c.70,000 by 2025/26
Box Broadband	• Aimed to pass 10,000 premises end of 2020 • 160,000 premises by 2023 • c. 200,000 by 2025
Broadway Partners	• Aims to cover 500,000 UK homes and businesses by the end of 2022, starting with 5,000 in Wales (Monmouthshire) and Scotland (Perth & Kinross, Stirlingshire and Ayrshire).
Call Flow Solutions (Trooli)	• 150,000 by end 2021 • 500,000 by end 2023 • 1 million by 2024 • Current footprint is just over 50,000 premises in Kent, West Sussex, Hampshire
CityFibre	• On target to reach goal of 1 million premises by end 2021 • 8 million premises by 2025 across more than 285 cities and towns, roughly around 30 per cent of the UK
Community Fibre	• Initial target of 100,000 premises reached by the end of 2019 • 500,000 premises across London by 2022 • 1 million households (mostly in MDUs and social housing premises) and businesses across London by 2023 • Coverage in 19 London boroughs with 3 Gbps service available in 12 boroughs
County Broadband	• Initial plans aimed to cover around 15,000 total homes in 50 villages in east England until Q2 2020 increasing to 20,000 premises by end-2020 • 6,500 rural premises across 33 villages in the Breckland and south Norfolk due to go live by spring 2021 • 12 further villages added in Suffolk and Norfolk areas to cover a further 5,000 homes and businesses which is due to go live by spring 2022

Operator	Plans
Exascale	• 6,000 premises by end of 2021 • Passed more than 4,000 premises in West Bromwich in early 2021 • Q4 2020 announced it had lit 40km of dark fibre network between their Wolverhampton and Telford network sites, enabling DWDM Wavelengths, 10G and 100G Ethernet services
Fibrus	• 15,000 by mid-2020 • 145,000 Northern Ireland premises by 2024 • 76,000 rural premises by 2024 as part of Project Stratum
Full Fibre Ltd	• Focuses its FTTP products on market towns with between 5,000 and 40,000 premises, initially in the west and south-west of England and later across the UK • 100,000 premises by the end of 2021 • 5,600 premises in Herefordshire with building underway • 500,000 premises by 2025 and backed by specialist infrastructure investment fund Basalt Infrastructure Partners III ("Basalt")
F&W Networks	• Aiming for 1 million UK FTTP premises by 2024 • Q3 2020 increased coverage area during Phase 2 in Horsham, West Sussex to additional 10,000 premises, Phase 1 to 5,000 premises began in January 2020
G.Network	• Increased initial ambition to roll out FTTP to 120,000 premises across parts of London to 1.4 million premises across London by around 2025/26 • Current coverage is around 190,000 premises
Gigaclear	• Aims to cover 350,000 premises by end-2021 • Brought forward initial target of connecting 500,000 premises by 2024 to 2023
Glide	• Ambition to cover 200,000 premises by the end of 2020 with mostly fibre optic technology, from reach of over 100,000 premises • Majority of coverage focus is on student and built-to-rent accommodation, shared HMO living and businesses
Grayshott Gigabit	• Newcomer as of Q4 2020 aiming to bring gigabit fibre connectivity to homes and businesses in East Hampshire, Surrey Hills & surrounding areas • Phase 1 starting due to commence in summer 2021 in Grayshott, Hindhead, Beacon Hill, Headley & Headley Down
Hyperoptic	• Aiming to pass 2 million FTTB/FTTP premises by the end of 2021 • 5 million by 2024

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Operator	Plans
ITS Technology Group	• Plan to move into several new areas across UK to build full fibre networks which will pass at least 200,000 business and residential premises by end 2021 • Q1 2021 awarded joint venture contract with Liverpool City Region to build 212km full fibre, gigabit-capable fibre backhaul network, connecting three transatlantic cables and major economic clusters in each of the Liverpool City Region's six local authority areas by 2023 • Q4 2020 signed partnership agreement with Manchester-based The 4th Utility who focuses mainly on MDUs deployment, to pass 100,000 premises by end of 2021 and 500,000 before 2024
Jurassic Fibre	• Plans to build a network passing more than 300,000 homes in Devon, Dorset and Somerset in the coming years • Aims to pass 350,000 premises across region by 2025 • Current network coverage is around 20,000 premises
KCOM	• Announced in Q1 2020 first phase of expansion plans outside of its traditional Hull footprint into East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire • Aims to pass around 300,000 additional premises over the next several years; current footprint is over 200,000 premises in Hull and its surrounding areas
Lit Fibre (formerly Broadreach Networks)	• Reading-based new infrastructure company that will be building a new 10 Gbps capable FTTP network in small to medium towns, beginning with Corsham and Chippenham in Wiltshire and due to go live in June 2021 • Targeting 500,000 UK homes by 2026, starting with towns in Wiltshire
Lightning Fibre	• Original aim to deliver around 50,000 properties passed within the next three years in East Sussex was increased in Q4 2020 with aim of passing more than 100,000 properties • Deployment currently underway to cover 14,000 premises in Heathfield and Hailsham, 45,000 premises in Hastings, with 1,400 homes and businesses in Eastbourne going live and ready for service in April 2021
Lightspeed Broadband	• Focusing on network deployment mostly in the east of England and aims to cover 100,000 homes by end of 2022, followed by an ambition to reach 1 million by 2025 • Construction started in April 2021 in several towns across South Lincolnshire and West Norfolk
Lothian Broadband	• Expanding initial FTTP coverage in village of Gifford to next phase across East and Mid Lothian in Scotland • Reported that aim is to reach 50,000 rural premises with FTTP network, however no completion date was given

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Operator	Plans
MS3 Networks	• Aims to pass 21,000 premises in Hull area by June 2021 • Q1 2021 announced expansion of its fibre network footprint to reach 130km from its current reach of 60km across West Hull; additional 70km will extend its network reach to other parts of the City including East and North Hull, previously focused dark fibre and business connectivity the expansion will start focusing on connecting residential premises
Netomnia (YouFibre)	• Q1 2021 signed new agreement with infrastructure supplier Light Source to deploy a 10 Gbps FTTP broadband ISP network to 1 million UK premises by 2024 • Currently in advanced construction phase with Light Source of Cheltenham (Gloucestershire) network which is expected to reach 70,000 homes and businesses
Nextgenaccess	• Signed new 20-year concession with High Speed 1 for track-side rail deployment from London to the UK Channel Tunnel in Kent. Plans to deploy over 1,000km of new high-capacity fibre routes across the UK by end-2020 and open up ultrafast connectivity to over 4,000 underserved businesses along South Wales to Southwest England route • Q2 2020 completed 67km high-capacity carrier-neutral fibre network between Bristol and Wales
Pine Media	• Q3 2020 announced an additional 20,000 premises into their roll-out of gigabit-capable FTTP network in the South Yorkshire city of Sheffield, which will see their total coverage reach 50,000 • By end of 2019 coverage reached around 11,000 premises
Quantum Air Fibre	• Q3 2020 acquired engineering firm QConex and aims to complete FTTP rollout to 120,000 homes and businesses in Lincolnshire by Q1 2022
Quickline (part of Bigblu)	• Original aim of covering over 170,000 premises by 2022 has been increased to 500,000 over the coming years due to Northleaf Capital Partners acquiring a majority stake in April 2021 • Uses a mixture of FWA and FTTP technologies to deploy to underserved rural communities
Spectrum Internet	• Q1 2020 announced plans to cover 150,000 premises across South Wales by 2025
Swish Fibre	• Plans to build networks within commutable distance of London and has initially identified 250,000 properties for its 10 Gbps FTTP network • 33 towns named in deployment plan with plans to go live in 10 of those by June 2021 • Construction began in Q1 2020 to cover 50,000 premises in Buckinghamshire

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Operator	Plans
toob	• Fibre network to more than 100,000 premises by end-2021 with ambition to pass more than one million homes and business premises over next 10 years
TrueSpeed	• Aims to cover 75,000 premises in parts of rural South West England by 2021 and holds an aspiration of reaching more than 200,000 by 2025
VISPA	• Aims to cover more than 10,000 homes across UK by 2023
Voneus	• Q1 2021 announced aspiring for 1.6 million homes across the UK countryside in the future, but near-term FTTP target of 100,000
VXFiber	• Project with City of Stoke-on-Trent worth £19.2 million aims to create a publicly-owned and operated, open-access and gigabit-capable, 60-mile long full fibre broadband network with "citywide" coverage by spring 2021, approximately 100,000 premises.
Wessex Internet	• Deploying FTTP to hamlets of Cripplestyle, Broxhill, Crendell and surrounding areas (East Dorset)
WightFibre	• Rollout a new 1Gbps FTTH network across Isle of Wight with aim of 80 per cent of premises passed by the end of 2022, then 96 per cent (71,000) by the end of 2025
Wildanet	• Aims to cover 60 per cent of Cornwall premises by 2023
Zzoomm	• 1 million homes across 85 UK towns with 2Gbps FTTP by the end of 2025 • 28,000 premises in Hereford with speeds up to 10Gbps, no completion date listed • 9,000 premises in Ascot and Sunninghill with build to commence summer 2021 • 5,300 premises in Thirsk with build to commence summer 2021

Source: Independent operators, predominantly using FTTP/H/B technology

Annex 2 Selected independent network operator investment announcements 2020 to 2021

Date	ISP	Investment/Expansion
06 January 2020	ITS	Received £45m from Aviva to build full fibre networks and in partnership with The 4th Utility aim to pass 500k premises in the North West by 2024.
08 January 2020	KCOM	Announces £100m investment in network expansion beyond traditional Hull heartland into North Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire and is being supported by MEIF 6 Fibre Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Macquarie European Infrastructure Fund 6 which acquired the company in August 2019.
13 February 2020	VX Fiber	Announces £10m investment in Colchester open-model dark fibre style network expansion by September 2020 AMP Capital acquired a majority stake in the company to support it with new investment.
03 April 2020	Gigaclear	Secured £525m in financing from Lloyds, Natwest, Santander and ABN Amro. The package consists of a £480m seven-year capital expenditure facility and a £45m revolving credit facility.
05 May 2020	WightFibre	Secured £50m from NatWest to accelerate the upgrade of existing cable network to full fibre.
06 June 2020	Fibrus	NI-based provider commits £100m for rural full-fibre rollout in the province.
29 July 2020	Community Fibre	Secured £400m from Warburg Pincus and DTCP to expand FTTP network to pass 1m London premises by 2023.
31 July 2020	Broadway Partners	Monmouthshire County Council approves £2m commercial loan in order for Broadway to deliver full fibre to more than 10k homes and businesses across the county.
11 August 2020	Quickline	Received £12m from BigBlu to expand fibre-backed and 5G networks to cover 30K premises by 2023
19 August 2020	The 4th Utility	Secured £25m from DIF Capital Partners; in partnership with ITS will cover 500k premises in the North-West by 2024; received additional undisclosed amount of funding from DIF to facilitate further strategic expansion and acquires London-based Vision Fibre Media in Q1 2021.
10 September 2020	Connexin	Secured £80m from Whitehelm Capital to support the expansion of its Smart City digital networks.
28 September 2020	Zzoomm	£100m in funding from Oaktree Capital Management; FTTP network expansion to cover city of Hereford serving over 28,000 homes and businesses in Hereford.

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Date	ISP	Investment/Expansion
14 October 2020	Spectrum Internet	Secures £200m in funding from Infracapital (backer of Fibrus in Northern Ireland) to support rollout of FTTP network to around 150k premises in south Wales.
30 November 2020	Airband	Aberdeen Standard Investments (ASI) acquired a majority stake, with the founders and Amber Infrastructure retaining minority stakes in the company, with a significant, yet undisclosed, funding commitment to fuel network expansion to cover 500k premises by 2025.
14 December 2020	G.Network	London-based G.Network announced a £1bn investment strategy to cover 1.4m premises in 13 London boroughs with gigabit-capable fibre within next five years.
22 December 2020	Wildanet	Secured a major investment of £50m from the Gresham House British Strategic Investment Infrastructure Fund (BSIF) to expand FTTP network which is expected to be rolled out over the next 3 years and will combine with their existing FWA network to reach "60% of Cornwall's properties"
18 February 2021	Lightspeed Broadband	Secured £55m in equity commitments from AtmosClear Investments and Kompass Kapital with opportunity to increase to £300m as building progresses; by 14 April 2021 work commenced in 10 towns across South Lincolnshire and West Norfolk.
25 February 2021	MS3 Networks	Announced £3.5m investment in a city-wide expansion of a second fibre network in Hull.
15 March 2021	Lit Fibre (formerly Broadreach Networks)	£3m in opening shares, but additional funding via Newlight Partners LP.
17 March 2021	Netomnia (YouFibre)	Invested £28m in Cheltenham (Gloucestershire) project in partnership with Light Source which aims to pass around 70k homes and businesses
25 March 2021	Voneus	Macquarie Capital (owners of KCOM) increase ownership stake, with original commitment of £10m in 2019 with potential to increase to £30m, new investment is spurring expansion plans from 900k to 1.6m premises
14 April 2021	Borderlink Broadband	Received £10.5m in funding from BSIF to shift FWA focus to 10 Gbps capable FTTP network for homes and businesses in the Scottish borders and northern England.

Source: Independent operators

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