



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01524**

### **Name of petitioner**

James Macfarlane

### **Petition title**

Free Wi-Fi in Scottish public buildings

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to issue a code of practice setting out a minimum standard for wifi connections provided by public authorities to members of the public; and to urge all Scottish public authorities to provide wifi connections that meet this standard in all their public buildings.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

I wrote to the Scottish Ministers asking if they could take action to require public bodies to provide free wireless internet access (wifi) to members of the public visiting their buildings. I received a response from the Scottish Government's Broadband Policy Team explaining that "the Scottish Government currently has no plans to fund the universal provision of free Wi-Fi in public buildings, however individual organisations will consider the business case and costs on a case by case basis. This process ensures that each organisation can demonstrate value for money in delivering the service, and also that there is the customer base that requires the service".

### **Petition background information**

In this petition "public wifi" refers to a wireless internet connection provided by a public authority in their premises (e.g. provided by a health board in a hospital) that members of the public can connect to and use on their laptops, smartphones, etc.

The Scottish Government's strategy set out in *Scotland's Digital Future* emphasises the importance of having an internet connection and states that public services will be increasingly delivered online. It would therefore be an enormous benefit for citizens to be able to connect their mobile devices to the internet, whether they are visiting their local library or the Scottish Parliament, attending a public meeting or court hearing, staying in a NHS hospital or studying at school.

Many public buildings already offer public wifi, but unfortunately not all meet the desirable criteria for a public wifi network:

- it should be available to the public throughout the opening hours of the building
- it should provide a decent speed (e.g. over 10 Mbps)
- it should be available straight away without users having to register or login (having to ask for a password or sign up for an account can be time consuming, offputting and

unnecessary)

- it should be secure to ensure traffic cannot be intercepted
- it should not be filtered excessively (filtering of extreme material may be necessary, but public connections often overdo this and block access to legitimate sites)
- activity should not be monitored by the authority providing the connection (i.e. so they can see what users are doing)

The object of this petition is therefore (1) to develop a national standard for public wifi connections and (2) to encourage public authorities to provide public wifi that meets this standard in public buildings such as council offices, libraries, schools, hospitals and courts.

The national standard would be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, but I envision it would incorporate the points raised above. Scottish public authorities would then install public wifi connections and the Scottish Government would be able to determine whether or not they meet the standard and, if so, add them to a register of certified public wifi connections. This register would be available online so members of the public can find out where approved wifi connections are available. The public authorities would also be able to display signage in their premises stating that they have public wifi that meets (or, indeed, surpasses) the national standard.

I have not specified whether the cost of providing public wifi would be met by individual public authorities, or if this is something the Scottish Government would provide funding for. This is something the Public Petitions Committee may wish to discuss and seek views on (e.g. from the Government and Scottish public authorities that would potentially be providing public wifi connections).

#### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/publicwifi>

#### Related information for petition

#### Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

#### How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

#### Closing date for collecting signatures online

26 / 05 / 2014

#### Comments to stimulate online discussion