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February 7, 2018

# Top Contributors: Why the UK supports ITU

## By ITU News

This interview with Paul Blaker, Head of International Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for the United Kingdom, is part of an occasional series about why ITU's [Top Contributors](#) support ITU.

### 1. Why do you support ITU?

We believe that telecommunications and ICTs have the potential to transform social and economic development in every part of the world. The ITU's responsibilities for radio frequency coordination and telecommunication standards are critically important and we are strong supporters of the development sector and its work to build capacity and promote best practice.

The ITU is a great advocate for the role that telecommunications and ICTs can play in delivering the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The UK strongly supports that, and we believe the ITU has a major role to play in making it happen. That's one reason why we are so proud of Malcolm Johnson and the work he does as Deputy Secretary-General, making sure that the ITU is able to deliver for all its members.

### 2. How does the work of ITU help your strategic ICT initiatives?

One of the most important issues for us in the UK is the availability of radio spectrum that is harmonised internationally. Many services rely on spectrum that is part of a globally agreed harmonisation and this will be crucial for the development and deployment of 5G. It is very important that radio frequencies are allocated at the international level in a way that is efficient and forward-looking. We are preparing for WRC in 2019 and hope that the Conference will take forward the steps that are needed to promote global innovation and investment.

### 3. What specific benefits do you see from your work with ITU? And/or which ITU activities are most relevant to you?

The ITU has a unique role to play bringing countries together and promoting cooperation and collaboration. The work of the Radio Regulations Board, addressing issues of harmful interference to satellite communications, is one example of this. The work to identify new frequency allocations for 5G is another, offering the promise of ultrafast, low latency and more reliable mobile connections. We also value the critical role the ITU plays in managing the continuing development of the satellite sector, through its management of satellite filings.

More generally, we appreciate the unique role that the ITU plays in enabling countries to learn from one another's experience and share knowledge, particularly in the development sector and through the WSIS process.

### 4. Can you provide some examples of how ICTs are helping drive sustainable development in your country?

ICTs are critical enablers across the whole sustainable development agenda. The UK is working on infrastructure issues such as investment in superfast broadband, including in remote and rural areas, and the roll out of full fibre broadband networks. We are also addressing issues of digital inclusion, particularly for the most excluded groups, and promoting digital skills. The new computing curriculum in England makes it mandatory to teach coding to children in primary and secondary schools - we believe the first country to do so! The UN E-Government survey last year recognised the UK as the world leader in digital government and we want to ensure the UK continues to put in place an enabling environment for digital businesses to grow. This is a very broad agenda involving many different stakeholders. All stakeholders need to be fully engaged in the potential that ICTs have to promote development.

### 5. What do you see as the main ICT industry trends in your country?

We have a fast moving and dynamic ICT sector in the UK, with over 120,000 companies involved in developing a broad range of software and services. The take-up of digital services has been remarkable. Our mobile market is the largest in Europe, with 92 million mobile subscriptions. 88% of homes have broadband Internet with an average actual speed of 36 Mbit/s, and 58% of households have a tablet. 96% of households now receive digital TV services.

What's really striking over the last few years is how so many aspects of our lives now depend on ICTs, whether it is public services, e-commerce, entertainment or keeping in touch with friends and family. ICT is no longer a specialist area - it has become mainstream and all parts of society have important roles to play. The huge expansion and development of ICTs means that the landscape has become much more complex than it was ten or twenty years ago. That has led to new ways of working, with stakeholders cooperating more openly, sharing information and breaking down institutional barriers in order to achieve shared objectives.

### 6. Which priority issues should ITU address in the coming years?

The UK is proud to be one of the few countries to meet the UN target to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on foreign aid and we believe that the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda should be one of the highest priorities for the ITU. That means new ways of working and reaching out to other sectors - and the WSIS process is a really good example of that. The ITU is at its best when it opens its doors to other stakeholders and builds a spirit of common purpose, sharing information, encouraging all stakeholders to participate and promoting accessibility and diversity.

### 7. How should ITU evolve to meet the changing needs of the ICT industry?

The ITU best serves the interests of its members by engaging the capacity of the whole sector. As the telecommunications/ICTs landscape has become bigger and more complex in recent years, we need the ITU to play a strategic role, bringing stakeholders together and helping ITU members to understand and navigate this new landscape.

It is not possible for the ITU to tackle every issue on its own. We would like to see the ITU strengthen its collaboration with other organisations, recognising more explicitly where other organisations take the lead, disseminating internationally recognised standards generally, alongside its own standards, and sign-posting members to other relevant organisations when appropriate.

And of course the ITU should continue to be an organisation that values and attracts industry and technical expertise, developing and applying a strong evidence base and listening to the private sector, civil society and the technical community beyond its own membership. There will be many challenges and exciting opportunities ahead. We need the ITU to keep pace with best practice and new collaborative ways of working if we are to make the most of them together.

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