

# ACE Response: Digital Scotland Strategy

**ACE response to the:**

**Digital Scotland Strategy**

**December 2016**

## About ACE

As the leading business association in the sector, ACE represents the interests of professional consultancy and engineering companies large and small in the UK. Many of our member companies have gained international recognition and acclaim and employ over 250,000 staff worldwide.

ACE members are at the heart of delivering, maintaining and upgrading our buildings, structures and infrastructure. They provide specialist services to a diverse range of sectors including water, transportation, housing and energy.

The ACE membership acts as the bridge between consultants, engineers and the wider construction sector who make an estimated contribution of £15bn to the nation's economy with the wider construction market contributing a further £90bn.

ACE's powerful representation and lobbying to government, major clients, the media and other key stakeholders, enables it to promote the critical contribution that engineers and consultants make to the nation's developing infrastructure.

Through our publications, market intelligence, events and networking, business guidance and personal contact, we provide a cohesive approach and direction for our members and the wider industry. In recognising the dynamics of our industry, we support and encourage our members in all aspects of their business, helping them to optimise performance and embrace opportunity.

Our fundamental purposes are to promote the worth of our industry and to give voice to our members. We do so with passion and vision, support and commitment, integrity and professionalism.

## Further information

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## Introduction

1. ACE and its members welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the new Digital Scotland Strategy. This is an important part of the infrastructure debate and will go a long way to positioning Scotland at the forefront of the provision of high-speed broadband.
2. Our members represent the some of the most innovative and forward-thinking minds in the business world. They work on cutting edge buildings which incorporate the newest thinking on sustainability, and on solving some of the most intractable problems we face in renewing our transport and utilities networks while many are still in operation.
3. Working closely with these, and other, individuals and organisations will be of great benefit to Scotland in ensuring the new networks we need are fit for purpose and future proof. We stand ready to assist and look forward to working with the Scottish Government on its future endeavours.
4. In this response we have confined ourselves to responding to those areas most relevant to our work, namely Connectivity, Economy, and Skills. We hope these comments will assist in the Scottish Government's further thinking on how it might achieve its goals.
5. Overall, our members were pleased to see the Scottish Government going out to consult on its new strategy and how it plans to implement its ambitions. Some concern was expressed at the lack of detail within the document and, while this is perhaps to be expected, there is now significant anticipation of further clarity in the subsequent strategies we now await.

## Connectivity

6. ACE and its members are glad to see the Scottish Government prioritising connectivity ahead of the relaunch of its Digital Strategy. It is hugely important that businesses throughout Scotland are properly connected and able to improve productivity, particularly in remote and rural areas as identified by the consultation website.
7. The strategy must, however, begin with first principals and engage in a process of making sure that the plans undertaken by the government and its agencies are fit for purpose. It is very important that the authorities engage with businesses, particularly SMEs, across the country to understand their needs and ensure that the solutions met these. If they do not things are not likely to improve and extra measures will need to be developed further down the line, increasing costs and delays.
8. The National Infrastructure Commission has recently called for more to be done to speed up the rollout of 5G mobile coverage across the UK in the immediate future. It would be appropriate for the Scottish Government to consider this in its future Digital Strategy and make sure there is alignment between England and Scotland.

9. This is all something that ACE and its membership stands ready to assist the Scottish Government with, both as a sector with significant numbers of SMEs with extensive technological needs, but also as a body to assist in the engagement of other businesses. That way, answers to the challenges can be devised at the earliest possible stage and policies implemented that will enable Scotland to lead the way for the UK in digital connectivity.

## **Economy**

10. The provision of fast, reliable broadband will go a long way towards presenting Scotland as a place where business can thrive and investment will be secure and profitable. ACE therefore supports the Scottish Government's efforts to emphasise this aspect of the gains to be made through this investment in its future Digital Strategy for the nation.
11. It is especially important in the current climate, where there is the very real prospect that the UK will be leaving the European Union in two years. We must make sure that the infrastructure we possess is of sufficient standard to enable businesses to continue to invest in Scotland, and the rest of the UK, confident in the knowledge that we remain at the forefront of service provision in other areas.
12. A commitment such as this, backed up with results is the best way to ensure this perception becomes a reality and ACE urges the Scottish Government to continue prioritising the delivery of high speed broadband across the country. Working together with the industry, addressing the concerns of business, and delivering on the commitments made is the surest fire way to guarantee the future prosperity of Scotland.

## **Skills**

13. Everyone agrees that it is vital that digital skills are brought up to the correct standards to effectively utilise the new connectivity Scotland hopes to initiate through its Digital Strategy. It is also, however, crucially important that the Government and its agencies work closely with the infrastructure sector to ensure the development of the right skills among the workforce that will be needed to install the technology.
14. We would encourage as much early engagement between the client and the delivery bodies as possible, to ensure clarity of expectations, certainty of workload, and the highest standards of delivery. This will ensure the supply chain can marshal and allocate the right resources at the optimal times to develop the innovative and effective solutions required.
15. In light of the challenges facing the engineering sector in the years ahead, including a growing skills gap, ambitious government agendas on infrastructure development, and changing population demographics, this early engagement is much needed. ACE and its members are ready to assist the Scottish Government anyway it can.