

The student guide to mobile broadband

*Advice for Students Published by
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Is mobile broadband for you?

Before you decide whether it's worth investigating mobile broadband any further, you need to know whether it will actually be of any benefit to you. Here are a few things that you should think about before going any further...

Mobile broadband versus land line broadband

This isn't necessarily an either/or thing and many people use both types of broadband. However, as a student, you probably want to keep your monthly bills to a minimum, and it's more than likely that you don't actually

need both.

There are pros and cons for both mobile and land line broadband. Here are some things to consider:

Land Line Broadband

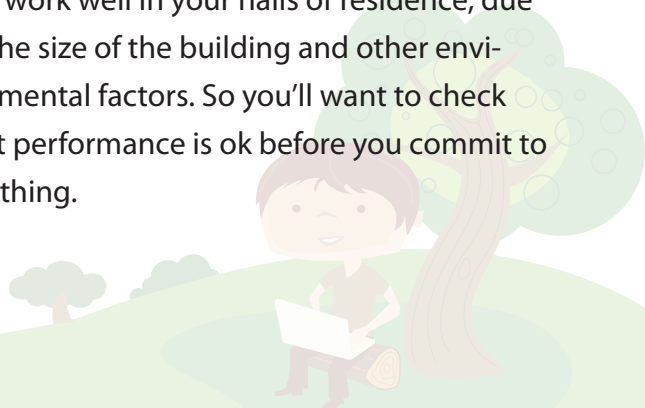
- Has larger data limits
- Is more reliable
- Can only be used at one address
- Requires a land line phone connection
- Set up and switching can take longer

Mobile Broadband

- Has smaller data limits
- Can suffer from poor signal quality
- Can be used anywhere with coverage
- Requires no land line
- Can be set up in seconds

If you're living in halls of residence, you usually won't be able to choose your land line broadband provider, as one provider often covers the whole building. Unfortunately, this can mean that students are forced to buy their broadband service at a set cost from a single provider. These built-in services often don't allow for the use of wireless broadband.

On the other hand, mobile broadband may not work well in your halls of residence, due to the size of the building and other environmental factors. So you'll want to check that performance is ok before you commit to anything.



Advice...

If you're living in halls of residence, find out what broadband services are available to you, at what cost. Ask around to find out if mobile broadband works well in your building and explore the available services and prices. Making a decision about which type of service to go for will be much simpler once you know what's available to you.

If you're living in shared student accommodation, you'll have a much wider choice of land line broadband providers. Remember that many land line broadband contracts last for at least one year, which may mean that you either have to pay for the full year, or that you have to pay a cancellation fee if you're only living in the same house for 8 or 9 months.



Choosing a mobile broadband provider

There are 5 major mobile broadband providers: O2, Vodafone, T-Mobile, Orange and 3. Virgin have just one option and the offers from BT are currently tied in with their home

Coverage

First, you need to make sure that your area is covered by each of the mobile broadband providers. If a provider doesn't cover your area, you can exclude them entirely, as they won't provide you with a mobile broadband signal and your dongle will be rendered useless.

You should also make sure that they offer high speed coverage for your area, as some areas are currently only covered by a 2G signal. Although you can still use mobile broad-

Network Performance

The quality of your mobile broadband connection is dependant on many different factors, ranging from geography and weather conditions, to the amount of use the network is experiencing in your area.

It's worth finding out as much as you can about the performance of the various net-

broadband packages.

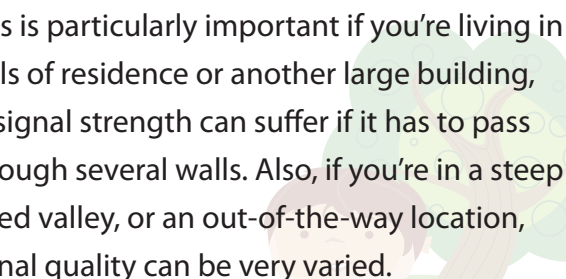
There are 2 main things to consider when selecting your mobile broadband provider:

band in these areas, the speeds will be very slow and impractical for many uses.

The best way to find out what level of coverage is available for your area is to use the coverage checking tools provided by each of the network providers. Links to each of these are provided at:

<http://MobileBroadbandSupermarket.co.uk/coverage>

works in the areas where you'll use your connection, before you decide on a provider. This is particularly important if you're living in halls of residence or another large building, as signal strength can suffer if it has to pass through several walls. Also, if you're in a steep sided valley, or an out-of-the-way location, signal quality can be very varied.



If you know anyone who already uses mobile broadband in your area (or even your building) ask them about it. Which provider do they use? What is the quality of the service like?

If you can't get an idea beforehand, you can always try out a mobile broadband provider,

What About Speed?

You shouldn't pay too much attention to the advertised maximum speed of each network. Whilst these speeds are possible, it's very unlikely that you'll reach them in real world

as they all offer a returns policy that allows you to cancel your contract if you don't get a good connection where you need it. Make sure that you return it within the specified period, as some of the major providers can be quite strict about their returns policies.

use, and the vast majority of mobile broadband users experience speeds that are much slower than these stated maximums.

Advice...

Start out by checking the level of coverage offered for your area by each provider, using the online coverage checking tools.

(<http://MobileBroadbandSupermarket.co.uk/coverage>)

Try before you buy. Each of the network providers has a returns policy that allows you to return your dongle and/or laptop if it doesn't work properly where you need it to.

Whether you're signing up for a pay monthly deal or a Pay As You Go package, plan to spend some time testing out your connection in each of the places you intend to use it. Do this within the first couple of days of receiving your dongle, so that you have plenty of time to return it for a refund if it doesn't work where you want to use it, or if the performance isn't what you need.

Choosing a mobile broadband plan

Getting the right mobile broadband plan means deciding on which type of plan will work best for your uses, and how much data you're likely to need.

Types of Mobile Broadband Plan

Mobile broadband plans fall into four categories:

Pay Monthly (dongle only)

With pay monthly plans you pay a set monthly fee and have a monthly limit on the amount of data that you can transfer using your connection. Typical limits range from 1GB to 15GB per month, and prices from around £10 to £30 per month.

Pay Monthly With A Laptop

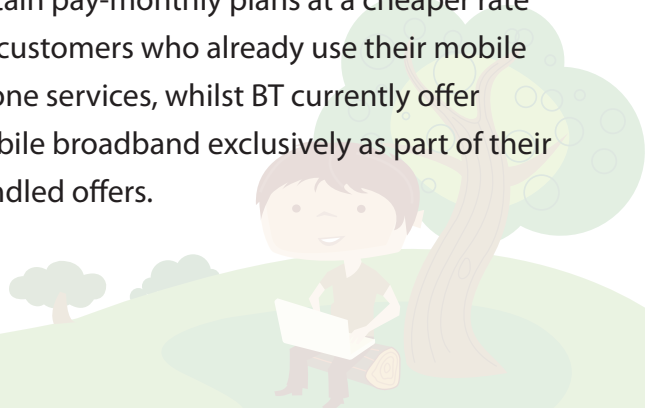
These plans work in just the same way as the pay monthly plans described above, but with a laptop included. They are often referred to as "free laptop" deals. In fact, you still pay around the same amount for the laptop over the period of your contract, because the monthly fee is higher. However, this can still be cost effective if you're in need of a laptop as well as a mobile broadband connection.

Pay As You Go

This works in the same way as Pay As You Go mobile phone plans. You buy a mobile broadband dongle (modem) and then top-up with data credit whenever you need to.

Bundled With Other Services

Some mobile broadband services are available as part of a package bundled with other services, such as home broadband and mobile phone services. Some providers offer certain pay-monthly plans at a cheaper rate for customers who already use their mobile phone services, whilst BT currently offer mobile broadband exclusively as part of their bundled offers.



The Pros & Cons of the Different Plans

Pay monthly plans offer more data transfer for your money, but they tie you into a monthly payment, often for a period of between 12 and 24 months (some providers offer one month rolling contracts). With longer contracts, the USB dongle (modem) is usually free, whereas shorter contracts tend to carry a one-time fee for the dongle when you sign up.

Pay monthly plans with a laptop offer similar value, and spread the cost of a new laptop. Remember that the laptop isn't actually any cheaper than it would be to buy outright (sometimes even a little more expensive, in fact) – the cost is simply spread over the duration of your contract. Make sure the laptop does everything you need.

Be aware that out-of-contract usage charges for pay monthly plans can be very high. Although these costs have reduced in recent months, O2 and 3 still charge very heavily once you exceed your monthly limit, whilst Orange, Vodafone and T-Mobile have much fairer out-of-contract pricing.

Most providers enforce a time limit on the credit that you buy for Pay As You Go plans, so that if it isn't used up within a month, you lose it. In this case, you may as well have a one month contract, as the only benefit is a quick get-out if you're not happy and you want to change provider. Look into current Pay As You Go policies - Vodafone, for example, offer Pay As You Go top-ups without a time limit.

Visit the following pages to find out what offers are available for each type of plan:

For Pay Monthly:

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/paymonthly

For Pay Monthly Including a Laptop:

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/laptop

For Pay As You Go:

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/pay-as-you-go

For One Month Rolling Contracts:

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/?order=tpk-fcni-da



Your Usage And Data Limits

Before choosing a mobile broadband plan, you should have an idea of the amount of monthly data you're going to need. This isn't an exact science, as one web page, video,

email or music track can require much more data transfer than another, but here's a rough guide based on averages:

Emails:

approx. 40 per MB (that's 40,000 per GB)

General Browsing:

approx. 40 hours per GB

Watching Video:

approx. 1 hour 20 minutes per GB

Downloading Music:

approx. 120 tracks per GB

Uploading/Downloading Photos:

approx. 1000 per GB

Uploading/Downloading Documents

(Word, Excel, Etc.):

approx. 700 per GB

Downloading/Updating Software:

approx. 800MB per download

There is a useful tool which calculates this for you at:

MobileBroadbandSupermarket.co.uk/perfectmatch

Advice...

If you're going to use your mobile broadband connection on a regular basis and for more than just checking emails, the best value offers are pay monthly.

If your mobile broadband connection is not going to get too much use, and you're just planning to use it for checking your emails occasionally, or as a backup internet connection for when your main one is down, Pay As You Go is a good option as long as you avoid Pay As You Go plans with time limits on top-ups.

A one-month rolling contract can be a good idea if you don't want to commit to a longer term agreement. However, you'll have to pay a higher set-up fee to pay for your USB dongle (modem) initially, and monthly costs are usually a little higher (or download limits are lower).

If you need a laptop, a pay monthly plan with a laptop included can be a cost effective way to spread the payments, although you can often find the same laptop (or equivalent) for a little less if you buy it separately and pay for it upfront.

Buying mobile broadband

You have two options when it comes to buying mobile broadband:

Buy From a High Street Store

Each of the providers has a high street store in every major city and even in many smaller

towns. There are also high street resellers, such as Carphone Warehouse or Phones4u.

Buy Online

There are online equivalents for the two types of high street store mentioned above: The providers' own online stores, and those of the resellers. There are even more resellers available to you online.

A third option if you're buying online is to use a comparison website. These sites will help you compare the available offers from the different providers, before directing you to the provider's official website to buy.

Advice...

Online versus high street shopping is down to personal choice, and you should use whichever method you're happiest with. However, it can sometimes be worth looking out for "online only" or "in-store only" offers.

We recommend using the official stores (online or high street) over resellers, mainly due to customer service issues. If you find that your mobile broadband connection isn't good enough, you need to be able to get the

returns procedure under way easily – resellers can cause problems here, as they act as a middle-man for the sale, and returns must go through them.

Beware of some of the cash-back deals offered, particularly by the less well-known online resellers, as it can sometimes prove impossible to actually get your cash-back payments.

For more information...

We have more guides and information about various aspects of mobile broadband at the MobileBroadbandSupermarket.co.uk website. Here are some links to a few of the most popular ones:

About mobile broadband coverage in the UK

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/mobile-broadband-coverage-in-the-uk

About using mobile broadband to access Facebook

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/mobile-broadband-and-facebook

About mobile broadband dongles

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/what-is-a-mobile-broadband-dongle

Pay monthly versus Pay As You Go mobile broadband

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/contract-or-pay-as-you-go-mobile-broadband

About the current state of mobile broadband and whether it's right for you

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/is-mobile-broadband-any-good

Some of the jargon in simple English

mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk/mobile-broadband-jargon-buster

Feel free to contact us with any questions at:

contact@mobilebroadbandsupermarket.co.uk



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