

Broadband FAQ for SOAS students

Researched together with Cable.co.uk - Ofcom-accredited TV, broadband and phone comparison site

While you've been living in the Halls of Residence, broadband has been supplied for you. However, once you move into your own accommodation you will need to arrange for broadband to be installed.

To help you make an informed choice, we have put together some top tips and short FAQs so that you know what you need to consider before you choose a supplier.

What are the broadband options in my area?

It depends where you live. Fortunately, London is well served with both ADSL and fibre optic broadband. But the first thing to do is to find out what is available in your area. Use an Ofcom-approved service such as Cable.co.uk so that you get fair and impartial advice. You can compare broadband availability, price and speeds by clicking here.

You can also look at individual providers' websites, but a comparison site such as Cable.co.uk is easier as it gives you an at-a-glance list with all of your options in one place.

What speed broadband do I need?

The required speed of your internet connection will depend on what you use it for. The faster the broadband speed, the quicker you will be able to download everything from films to documents. If you are not sharing with anyone else then an ADSL package of up to 8Mbps should be enough for your needs.

However, if there are several people sharing the connection or you want to use it for what are known as 'data-rich' activities (such as online gaming, downloading and streaming films or watching TV programmes on demand) then go for a faster, fibre optic service from the main suppliers such as BT Infinity, Sky, Virgin Media or Plusnet.

Fibre optic speeds can reach speeds of up to 152Mbps (depending on your location), so you will all be able to use the internet without slowing each other down.

What monthly usage limit is enough for my needs?

There are two main types of service, 'capped' or unlimited. Usage is measured in Gigabytes (GB) and, depending on the package you buy, you may have specific monthly allowances or an unlimited service.

If you are the only person using the internet then a lower priced, capped monthly amount may be enough. But if there are several people using the connection then it is better to go for a higher or even an unlimited deal, because you may be charged extra if you choose a capped monthly deal and then exceed the usage limit.

How much will it cost me?

It depends on which provider you choose, the type of broadband (fibre optic or ADSL), your usage (capped or unlimited) and if you decide to include other services such as TV, home telephone and mobile phone provision.

Think carefully about the cost because you need to balance the need to get a cheap deal with a service that it provides everything you need. Pay special attention to the usage limits, as if you exceed the monthly allowance you can be charged extra, moved to a higher cost package or find that your service slows down.

What about other costs?

Look closely at all the costs involved. That can include installation fees, fixed monthly line rental and even postage and packaging costs for your wireless router.

The main extra cost will be the line rental. All suppliers (unless you choose Virgin Media's broadband-only deal) will require that you have an active telephone line. For this you will have to pay monthly line rental costs. These are approximately £15/month, but it is worth shopping around to find the best deals.

However, if you are paying for line rental and broadband, you should be entitled to some free telephone calls as part of the package. Some suppliers include international calls, but others don't, so it is worth checking with your provider to find out what is available.

If you are on a shorter contract, there may be additional activation fees.

How long should my contract last?

If you are staying in your student accommodation for both term time and during the holidays then it is worth taking out a cheaper 12-month contract.

But if you plan to spend the summer at home or elsewhere then look for a nine-month student broadband deal.

Be aware that all providers have a 'minimum term' on their contracts. If you cancel your contract early then you may be charged a penalty fee and a surcharge for every remaining month that the contract has left to run.

Who is responsible for the account?

It is usually just one person who is responsible for the contract (known as the 'account holder'), so you will need to decide who is going to look after the account for the household. Or you can contact different providers and choose one that lets everyone's names be included on the contract.

How do I find out what's available?

At SOAS, many of our students find accommodation in and around the north London postcode of N4. This includes Finsbury Park, Haringay, Stroud Green and Manor House. It is a popular and affordable location among students and has a wide number of both ASDL and fibre broadband suppliers providing services to addresses across the area.

If you live in Finsbury Park then speeds for ASDL broadband are around 7Mbps. However, just slightly west and along Hornsey Road speeds increase to around 26Mbps, indicating this area has fibre optic broadband provision.

Around Haringay, speeds are around 14Mbps to 18Mbps, again indicating that there is fibre optic provision. However, there are some 'slow spots' close to the hospital, which may be due to old or damaged equipment.

Stroud Green's broadband speeds are slower at around 6Mbps to 8Mbps, indicating ASDL lines rather than fibre optic, while speeds along Seven Sisters Road can reach around 31Mbps.

Areas of North London are constantly being upgraded, so it is important to use a postcode checker like the one provided by Cable.co.uk to check availability and compare broadband deals.

Is there anything else I need to consider?

- **Equipment** – You will usually get a free wireless router when you sign up, but you may have to pay for postage and packaging. A wireless router is essential if you are sharing the broadband supply with your housemates. It will let them use different devices to access the internet. Check that the router you are given can work with different devices.
- **Mobile broadband** – If there is no fibre optic broadband where you live and you don't have a phone line for ASDL then you can go for mobile broadband. It won't be as quick as fibre but it should be enough for emailing and browsing the internet. You may also get free access to Wi-Fi 'hot spots' so you can access the internet when you are away from home.
- **Bundles** – Virgin Media, Sky and BT all have 'bundles' on offer that include broadband, digital TV and phone calls. This can be cheaper than buying each service from different providers, and it's easier to budget as there is only one monthly bill.

