

Mobile phone guide for SOAS students

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You probably already have a mobile phone – in fact, you may have brought it with you to the UK when you arrived. However, did you know that you could save money by taking out a contact with a UK supplier while you are studying here?

You can also upgrade to the latest handset or find deals that will allow you to tether your phone and use it as a modem to connect to the internet. This guide will help you choose the best mobile phone deal and give you information on network operators, payment options and the locations of some of the area's mobile phone outlets and shops.

Which network should I choose?

Fortunately, London's mobile phone coverage is excellent, so no matter where you are you should be able to get good reception. 3G and 4G services are available across the capital, and all of the major providers operate in the area. That includes EE, 3, O2 and Vodafone, as well as many other smaller operators who use the big suppliers' networks but offer their own mobile packages and deals. This includes Tesco Mobile on the O2 network, for example.

To find out what is available in your area, take a look at the individual suppliers' websites. But there is nothing better than a personal recommendation, so ask your fellow students what service they use and whether it provides good coverage and a good deal.

What is the difference between 3G and 4G?

The 'G' stands for 'Generation', so basically 4G is the next generation on from 3G. It provides a wider frequency range, giving you higher data transfer speeds. So a 4G phone is ideal for tethering, although it is possible to tether using a 3G phone as well.

What is tethering?

Tethering is using your phone as a modem to connect to the internet. It can be done using a cable, bluetooth or Wi-Fi. It lets you go online when there is no other way of getting onto the internet and can be very useful if you are in a 'dead spot' or slow internet area.

Some mobile phone providers allow you to tether your phone as part of your monthly usage allowance, but others don't so it is important to check with the provider if you have to pay extra to be able to tether.

What are inclusive minutes?

These are bundles of minutes that are included in your monthly charge to both other mobile phones and UK landlines. If you are phoning abroad then check with your provider to see if they include international calls in their bundles of inclusive minutes, as this could save you money.

Check that they cover other networks too, and whether they count towards calls to check voicemail messages, and whether calls to numbers starting with 070, 080 and 090 are subject to additional charges. Some networks can charge up to £2.50/minute, so check the small print on your contract carefully.

What is Data Allowance?

If you've chosen a smartphone then there's a good chance you'll be using it to access the internet and not just make calls. The data allowance quota is how much data you can download, and is usually charged by the megabyte. If you are just checking your emails, then a low data allowance should be enough. But if you are using your phone to stream data then look for deals with a higher data allowance.

Also check whether your data allowance includes the time you spend using your mobile phone to tether a device to the internet.

What are my payment options?

No matter which network provider you choose, there are several different ways to pay for your mobile phone:

Pay monthly – This is usually a contract deal that will mean you commit to a 12, 18 or 24-month agreement, and pay a set amount each month. So if you are only going to be here for one term it may not be the best option. However, if you are staying in the UK for at least a year then pay monthly contracts can be the cheapest deal available.

It will also mean that in many cases you get a free handset, or one that's greatly reduced in price. that can include the latest 4G phones and a tethering allowance.

Pay-as-You-Go (PAYG) – 'PAYG' means that you buy the mobile phone and then top it up with credit as and when you want to. This is a good choice if you want to keep a close watch on how much you are spending, but if you are calling international numbers then look for deals that offer cheaper long-distance call charges. You can also look for 'freebies' such as unlimited texts.

SIM-only plans – if you are happy with your existing phone then instead of replacing the handset, why not go for a SIM-only deal? The provider supplies you with a new SIM card,

which you fit into your existing phone and you can choose from PAYG or short monthly contract deals.

Where can I find the nearest mobile phone stores to SOAS?

London has literally hundreds of mobile phone stores and outlets, so it really pays to shop around. There are plenty of independent phone stores in nearby Tottenham Court Road W1, and all of the major suppliers have their own shops too. Here are just a few of the shops you'll find that are local to SOAS:

CarphoneWarehouse – 231, High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA	0870 0870870
Phones4U - 71, High Holborn, London WC1V 6EA	020 7430 2426
O2 - 1, Procter St, London WC1V 6DW	020 7430 0286
Vodafone - Unit 20, Brunswick Shopping Centre, London WC1N 1AY	0870 0700191
3 - Unit K4, Brunswick, London, Russell Square WC1N 1AY	0800 358 4644