



# Buying a mobile phone

## Getting started

A SIM card is the small chip that goes into mobile phones allowing the phone to connect to the local network.

Making calls in the UK using your own international SIM card is likely to be expensive so you might want to buy a new SIM or buy another mobile phone with a SIM included.

It can sometimes be cheaper to buy an international calling card that will let you make calls home from a landline, mobile phone or phone box. You can buy calling cards from the newsagent's shop opposite the Parkinson Building.

Currently, when using a UK SIM, you will not be charged extra fees to use your UK allowance of minutes, texts or data plan when in countries within the European Economic Area (EEA). Some providers may also have offers for usage in other countries such as the US, so look out for this.

There are two different ways to buy a mobile phone: **pay-as-you-go** or a **contract**. Please read the following information carefully to see what you will need to get started.

## Pay-as-you-go

You can get a pay-as-you-go mobile phone or SIM card very quickly and it is easy to keep track of how much you are spending on calls. You can buy credit online, in supermarkets, newsagents, petrol stations and at some ATMs. You will also find a free pay-as-you-go SIM card for Lebara mobile in your Welcome Pack that includes £1 pre-loaded credit.

You may be able to buy a SIM card in the UK and use it in your own phone from home. If you want to do this you might need to have your phone "unlocked" as it may be "locked" on to your home network. You may be able to get this done at Kirkgate Market in the city centre. Some smartphones cannot be unlocked.

Most big companies such as 3, EE, O2 and Vodafone offer pay-as-you-go contracts. Other companies popular with many international students are GiffGaff, Lebara and Lycamobile.

### Things to look out for:

- How much it costs to buy the SIM card
- How much calls cost - this can vary depending on the type of call you are making (to a UK landline, mobile phone, international or non-geographic such as 0845 or 0870)
- If you want to use the internet on your phone how much it will cost
- If there are any "bundles" ie offers - for example spending £10 and getting free weekend texts.

## Contract

With a contract, you pay a set fee per month and have an allowance of minutes and text messages. Contracts are either sim-only, or offer you an (often free) mobile phone handset as part of your tariff. Some packages may include international calls at a cheap rate or for free. It is mostly the main phone companies that offer contracts, for example, EE, Vodafone, 3, and O2.

In order to set up a contract, you will need to have a UK bank account registered to your UK address. Often you will need to show proof of your UK address - usually in the form of a bank statement, credit card statement or utility bill (electricity, gas, water, telephone). Some companies may accept a letter from the University. Many companies will also require a credit check, and may require you to have a credit history with a UK bank for the past few years: for example, GiffGaff and Vodafone request this with their contracts that include phone handsets but *not* for their SIM-only deals. However, the phone company 3 only requires details of your past three addresses from your home country.

When buying a contract phone you also need to spend time comparing the different packages on offer. If you don't get the right amount of inclusive calls and data you could find that your monthly phone bills are very expensive.

### Things to look out for:

- Check the length of your contract. Most contracts are normally either 12 or 24 months minimum and cancelling contracts before the end date can be very expensive, so they are not ideal if you are staying in Leeds for under 6 months. However, EE and Vodafone offer 30-day rolling contracts for people that want shorter-term contracts that can be cancelled anytime.
- How many minutes of calls and text messages are included - check if these can be made to landlines, any mobile network, internationally and at any time of the day or week
- If the contract includes any internet access or downloads and how much this costs to use if not
- How much calls, texts and data cost once you have used up your allowance for the month - again check the price for landlines, different networks and if the price changes at different times of day
- What type of phone you can get cheaply or for free as part of the contract
- How good the network coverage is with different companies – network levels vary in different parts of the UK
- How to give notice that you wish to cancel your contract when it expires – most require at least 30 days' notice

## Where to buy a mobile phone

It can be better to start by going to a shop that offers products from a range of different suppliers so you can compare the different offers. Shops in the city centre that sell mobiles on different networks include Carphone Warehouse.

Alternatively you could go to a shop that only deals with one network to see if they have a better offer. Shops in the city centre that sell mobile phones on their own network include: O2, EE, Vodafone and 3. There is also an O2 shop in the Arndale Centre in Headingley.

A useful comparison site for both SIM only and contract mobile phone deals is [www.uswitch.com/mobiles](http://www.uswitch.com/mobiles)