

BELFAST CONNECTION VOUCHERS SCHEME

Guidance for applicants

The purpose of the Connection Vouchers Scheme is to assist businesses and third sector organisations to meet the upfront capital costs of a high-speed or high grade broadband connection to their premises.

This guidance contains information on who is eligible to apply, how the process works and contains a step-by-step guide on the BCVS Application Form.

1. Am I eligible to apply?

To be eligible for funding under the Connection Voucher Scheme:

- i. You must be a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) as defined by the European Commission.

Registered charities, social enterprises and sole traders that meet the SME criteria below are welcome to apply.

- You are a sole trader or employ between one and 249 persons AND
- You have an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million AND/OR
- You have an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €43 million.

If you are a start-up or pre-start-up business, you may be eligible to apply as long as you have or can gain start-up approval from the City in advance.

If you are unsure if you meet the SME criteria, there is a guide you can check on our FAQ on the website at <https://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk/belfast/registered-suppliers-in-belfast>.

- ii. Your business property must be located within the Belfast City Council area.

You can check your postcode on our website to make sure that you are in an eligible area www.connectionvouchers.co.uk. The address must be the registered office or trading address of your business. If you work from a residential property as your main business base you can still apply. You **cannot** apply if you are employed and work from home.

- iii. If you are a tenant of a business park or a commercial property landlord, additionally you must have the approval of your landlord to proceed with the work.

2. What can I use my Connection Voucher for?

For more information on what the technology terms mean, please visit www.connectionvouchers.co.uk where there is a guide to the kinds of connections available.

- i. To be eligible for a Connection Voucher you need to show us that the new connection is a 'step change' from what you had before. The following conditions therefore apply, depending on what kind of new connection you choose:
 - For new NGA Connections, your supplier must provide a minimum of 30Mbit/s to your premises. If your existing NGA-based broadband service is 30Mbit/s or greater, then the upgraded NGA-based broadband service must deliver at least a doubling of speeds compared to the service you currently use. So for example if you already have 30Mbit/s, you must upgrade to at least 60Mbit/s.
 - If you have chosen a business grade connection as your new service, it must have **both** of the following characteristics:
 - offer a minimum of 20Mbit/s services to your premises now and be capable of being configured/upgraded in the future to support at least 30Mbit/s services to your premises; and
 - deliver at least a doubling of speeds when compared to your current business grade connection. So if you are already on business grade, you must for example go from 20 to 40Mbit/s or 30 to 60Mbit/s. If you are transferring from NGA to business grade, the requirement for a doubling of speed does not apply.

Business Grade connections are those that are provided on a dedicated or uncontended basis to customers and are supported with service level guarantees. We recognise that these services can be provided in the form of leased lines (including Ethernet services) or point-to-point microwave links but we do not specify a particular type of service.

- ii. You cannot use the voucher to provide a second high-speed or high grade connection to your business premises or property, or for inter-site connectivity.
- iii. You can only apply for one Connection Voucher. If you have multiple premises you need to choose which one you wish to connect using the Voucher.
- iv. You cannot use the voucher to pay early termination charges if you switch from another supplier.
- v. The cost of your connection must be more than £250. If it is below that, we cannot offer you a grant.

3. What other conditions apply?

- i. You must not have already received public sector funding to improve the broadband connectivity to your business premises/ property.
- ii. You or your business/organisation must have no outstanding debts to the Local Authority at the time you apply.

- iii. You must confirm that you have not already received de minimis aid that, together with this voucher, would exceed the threshold of €200k (approximately £165k) over a three-year fiscal period. You will have been issued with a letter by any schemes that grant de minimis aid telling you how much aid you have received. You can find more guidance at

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/consumer-issues/docs/10-951-state-aid-beginners-guide.pdf>

or see the full EU de minimis Regulation at¹

Commission Regulation (EC) No 1998/2006 of 15 December 2006 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty to de minimis aid, L 379/5, OJEU, 28 December 2006,
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:379:0005:0010:en:PDF>

Businesses in certain sectors are not eligible for de minimis aid. If your business/organisation is active in the fisheries, agricultural or coal sectors, or if you are unsure of your entitlement to benefit from de minimis aid, it is recommended that you seek professional advice before participating in the scheme.

- iv. Your business must be financially viable at the time you apply.

4. What's the process?

You can start by using our postcode checker to make sure you are in an eligible area.

If you are, then on the website you can **register your interest** if you'd like us to get in touch with you, or to find out if your organisation fits the criteria for grant funding. If you wish to apply as part of a group of organisations working with a landlord or agent, please contact us for further guidance.

If you are eligible, you need to get two quotes from suppliers for comparable services; the two quotes need to offer the same kinds of speeds or services (both NGA or both Business Grade), even if the technologies are different. You need to use suppliers that have registered with us; they are listed on the main website and on the city pages in the **Who provides the Connection** section.

Now you are ready to apply. Follow the guidance on the Belfast City Council Connection Voucher website page on how to access the application form.

When we receive your form we will check your eligibility, check that the supplier quotes are appropriate for the kind of connection that you have requested and, if both are ok, we will send you an email or a letter confirming that you have an offer of a Connection Voucher and confirm the value of that voucher. If you have provided estimates rather than firm quotes,

you will need to send us the firm quote once the supplier has completed their survey before we can confirm your voucher offer.

You have 28 days to place your order with your chosen supplier. Please make sure you complete the process in that time. We may withdraw your offer if you do not place your order quickly.

When the connection is made, you need to make your claim and send us the supplier invoice and the service delivery certificate that confirms the new high-speed connection is now live, together with the speed check that provides evidence that the connection is working at the right speed. You pay any VAT due to the supplier, and we pay the value of the voucher directly to your supplier.

We then send you a letter to say how much grant you have received from the Connection Voucher Scheme.

The Connection Voucher Scheme has final end dates for applications and claims that are listed in the Terms and Conditions. Please make sure that you apply and make your final claim before the end dates.

If you have any questions at any time through the process, contact us on 0800 587 4695.

Application form Step by Step guide

SECTION 1 – YOUR INFORMATION

Choose applicant type either business, third sector or charity

1. Applicant Details

- Select Title (e.g. Mr, Miss, Mrs, Ms etc)
- Enter first name of applicant *This should be the person responsible for making the application*
- Enter surname of applicant (this will be the primary contact for the application)
- Enter phone number of application address
- Enter mobile number
- Enter email address (follow up emails for your application will be sent to this address, please ensure all details are accurate)
- Choose preferred method of contact

2. Address that the Connection Voucher is to be used for

- Enter full address for connection installation

3. Organisation details

- Enter your position within the organisation *Please tell us your role in your organisation, for example Finance Director, Proprietor, Trustee. The person applying must be able to accept any offer made on behalf of the organisation*
- Enter business or organisation name. *Your organisation name may be published if you are awarded a connection voucher*
- Please select which of the provided business sectors most accurately relates to your application business
- Confirm if installation address is also trading address *If your registered address above is not where you usually do business, please also include your trading address (if no, enter full trading address)*

4. Please tell us which sector your business belongs to

- Please indicate as accurately as possible the sector to which your business belongs more information on sector codes can be found at:
<http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/infoAndGuide/sic/sic2007.shtml>

5. Are you registered with Companies House?

- If you are a limited company (Ltd), LLP, public limited company (plc) or Charitable Incorporated Organisation, you will be registered with companies house
- If yes enter registration number

6. Are you a registered charity?

- You should be registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) or a deemed charity with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).
- If yes enter registration number

7. Are you registered for VAT?



- If yes enter VAT registration number
- 8. Number of paid employees**
- Enter number of paid employees
- 9. Number of volunteers if 3rd sector organisation**
- Enter number of volunteers (if charitable organisation). If you are a charity, you should list both employees and volunteers separately
- 10. Business/organisation turnover**
- Enter business/organisation turnover. This should be from your most recent accounts
- 11. Balance sheet total**
- Enter balance sheet amount - Total assets net of depreciation. This should be from your most recent accounts and the same accounts from which turnover is taken.
- 12. Date of last accounts**
- Enter date of last accounts
- 13. Does your business have a parent company or are you part of a group of linked enterprises?**
- *If you have a parent company or are part of a group, we need to know more about the other companies you are associated with.*
 - *If yes, please enter the relevant information below:*
 - i. Enter parent company number
 - ii. Enter parent company name
 - iii. Enter parent company postcode
 - iv. Enter parent company address
 - v. Enter parent company city
 - vi. Enter number of employees of parent company
- 14. Please tell us which sector your parent company belongs to**
- Please indicate as accurately as possible the sector to which your business belongs more information on sector codes can be found at:
<http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/infoAndGuide/sic/sic2007.shtml>
 - Enter parent company business turnover *This should be from your most recent accounts*
 - Enter balance sheet amount *Total assets net of depreciation. This should be from your most recent accounts and the same accounts from which turnover is taken.*
 - Enter date of last accounts
 - Enter percentage of applicant business owned by parent company

Section 2 - Your Existing Connection

Do you have a current connection? yes / no

15. What kind of connection do you have currently?

- Check with our glossary below for explanations of the connection types
- You might also consult your current provider (if relevant)



- Confirm current connection type

16. What kind of service do you get from your supplier of your current service?

- Confirm if current service is uncontended or contended (See glossary below for explanation of these terms).

17. What speeds can you upload and download with your current connection?

- You can discover your existing connection speeds by noting your current contract terms and/or measuring your connection using an online broadband speed test such as:

<http://www.broadbandspeedchecker.co.uk/>

- Enter current upload speed
- Enter current download speed
- See Glossary below for explanation of these terms

18. What is the monthly cost of your current connection?

- Please tell us how much a month you pay for your current connection

19. What were the initial set up costs for your current connection?

- Please tell us if there were any connection charges when you took out your current connection

20. Are there any other costs associated with your current connection?

- Please use the boxes below to describe what the costs are and how much per month you pay (e.g. for exceeding data limits, ongoing service charges)

21. Are there any service constraints on your old connection?

- Please use the text box to describe any restrictions on the use of the connection

Section 3 – Your preferred quotation

22. What is the supplier name?

- Enter preferred service provider name Please enter details of your chosen service provider. Please note that they must be chosen from the list of pre-registered suppliers.
- A full list of the registered suppliers for Belfast can be found at www.connectionvouchers.co.uk

23. What kind of connection have you selected?

- Check with our glossary below for explanations of the connection types
- You might also consult the supplier
- Confirm connection type

24. What kind of service do you get from your supplier of your new service?

- Confirm if service will be uncontended or contended (See Glossary below for explanation of these terms).



25. What is the product name?

- Enter supplier product name *Please give the name of the product chosen*

26. What speeds can you upload/download with your new connection?

- Enter upload speed
- Enter download speed
- See Glossary below for explanation of these terms

27. What is the cost of the supplier quotation?

- Please enter the cost from the service provider quotation. Please note that we may ask for a detailed breakdown of how the costs have been calculated.

28. Is the quote an estimate or a firm quotation?

- Confirm if your quote is an estimate or a firm quotation. Some suppliers are only able to provide firm quotations after survey. If they have provided you with an estimate, we need to know as your Connection Voucher offer will need to be confirmed once the final cost is agreed.

29. What is the estimated date of connection?

- Please enter the estimated date that the work will be completed

30. How long is the contract for your new connection (months)?

- Please enter the length of contract of your new connection in months

31. What is the monthly cost of your new connection?

- Please tell us how much a month you pay for your current connection

32. Are there any other costs associated with your new connection?

- Please use the boxes below to describe what the costs are and how much per month you pay (e.g. for exceeding data limits, ongoing service charges)

33. Are there any service constraints on your new connection?

- Please use the text box to describe any restrictions on the use of the connection

34. What is the Supplier Ref number?

- Enter supplier reference number Please provide the unique reference number from your chosen supplier's quotation. Contact your supplier if you cannot locate it.

Section 4 – Your rejected quotation

35. What is the supplier name?

- Enter preferred service provider name Please enter details of your chosen service provider. Please note that they must be chosen from the list of pre-registered suppliers.

36. What kind of connection was proposed?

- Check with our Glossary below for explanations of the connection types



- You might also consult the supplier
- Confirm connection type

37. What kind of service would you have got from the supplier you rejected?

- Confirm if service is uncontended or contended (See Glossary below for explanation of these terms).

38. What is the product name?

- Enter supplier product name *Please give the name of the product chosen*

39. What were the proposed upload/download speeds with the proposed new connection?

- Enter upload speed
- Enter download speed
- See Glossary below for explanation of these terms

40. What is the cost of the supplier quotation?

- Please enter the cost from the service provider quotation. Please note that we may ask for a detailed breakdown of how the costs have been calculated.

41. Is the quote an estimate or a firm quotation?

- Confirm if quote is an estimate or a firm quotation. Some suppliers are only able to provide firm quotations after survey. If they have provided you with an estimate, we need to know as your Connection Voucher offer will need to be confirmed once the final cost is agreed.

42. What is the estimated date of connection?

- Please enter the estimated date that the work will be completed

43. How long is the contract for the proposed connection (months)?

- Please enter the length of contract of your new connection in months

44. What is the monthly cost of the connection?

- Please tell us how much a month you pay for your current connection

45. Are there any other costs associated with the connection?

- Please use the boxes below to describe what the costs are and how much per month you pay (e.g. for exceeding data limits, ongoing service charges)

46. Are there any service constraints on the connection?

- Please use the text box to describe any restrictions on the use of the connection

47. What is the Supplier Ref number?

- Enter supplier reference number Please provide the unique reference number from your chosen supplier's quotation. Contact your supplier if you cannot locate it.

Section 5 - The benefits of your connection

Please select as many benefits as are appropriate

48. Please tell us the impact on your business of taking the new connection

- Enter business turnover in £
- In one year (if known)
- In three years (if known)
- Enter number of new jobs in year one (if any)
- Enter number of new jobs in year three (if any)

49. Are there any other benefits you expect to see as a result of taking the new connection?

- Detail any other benefits from taking the new connection

Section 6 – Maximising the benefits of your connection

Whilst the benefits of the high speed broadband access can be realised immediately, Belfast City Council is putting together a programme of support for participating organisations to help them get maximum benefit from the investment.

These schemes will be tailored to the requirements of the participating organisations and as such, it is vital that the relevant areas are selected.

Section 7 - Data protection

Please complete as necessary.

Section 8 - Declaration

Please ensure that the first four statements have been read and boxes ticked before submission. Also please tick that appropriate landlord permission has been received if relevant to your application. **FAILURE TO CONSENT TO ALL RELEVANT STATEMENTS WILL RESULT IN THE APPLICATION NOT BEING PROGRESSED.**

Signature - The person signing this form must be able to take financial responsibility on behalf of the business/organisation

Before you send in your application, please ensure that you have completed all sections of this form. Your application may be delayed if the information is incomplete

Glossary

What are the services available?

These are some of the descriptions you will see when you start to look for a broadband connection.

<p>Contended or sShared Service</p>	<p>A shared link or contended connection will provide the advertised download and upload speeds only when there are no other users sharing the service. You probably won't know that you're sharing a line or who you're sharing it with. To optimise the amount of time end-users actually get those speeds a provider calculates the overall speed they need on the main 'pipeline' to give each customer the service requested most of the time. The minimum service that can be expected can be calculated by looking at number of shared users. This is called the 'contention ratio'. For example a contention ration of 20:1 means that at peak time twenty other users could be using the same capability and so each user experiences a 20th of quoted download and upload speeds in a busy period. In reality, users aren't often all making heavy demands on the service at the same time. A shared service can be perfectly acceptable and cost far less than a similar dedicated service. The fact that the service is contended will be identified in the terms and conditions of contract.</p>
<p>Uncontended or dedicated Service</p>	<p>A dedicated or uncontended connection will provide your business with the full quoted download and upload speeds at all times, which you can chose how to configure. The price of uncontended services is usually higher as the costs of provision, by definition, are not shared with other users. These services will also often come with a detailed service level agreement that specifies quality of service for reliability and maintenance. You need to consider how important it is to your business to have certainty of the speeds available to you and whether it is worth the additional cost.</p>
<p>Broadband Speed</p>	<p>Speed is measured in Megabits per second (Mbit/s or Mbps – you will see the term shortened in several ways). There are 8 Megabits in a Megabyte with a Megabyte representing approximately 1 million characters of text. You will see terms such as superfast and ultrafast but there is no official fixed definition of the terms.</p>

Download speed	Download speed is the rate at which data (including emails, web pages, video etc) can be transferred from another network (or the Internet) to your end of a broadband connection.
Upload speed	Upload speed is the rate at which data be transferred from your business to another network (or the Internet). Upload speed may be the same or different from the download speed depending on which service you select. Most consumer services have much lower upload speeds; you should consider carefully how much upload capacity your business needs
Symmetric/Asymmetric	A symmetric connection will offer you the same upload and download speeds. An asymmetric service will usually offer you a considerably lower upload speed than download speed and will typically cost less. . Think about how your business uses the connection and whether having a fast upload speed is important to you.
Speed checker	There are a number of commercially available speed checkers where you can input your phone number or address to see what the estimated performance of your broadband connection would be, download and upload. These are normally offered on the websites of service providers. There are other kinds of speed checker where your computer can measure the

What do all the technologies mean?

In this section, we describe the main technologies used by suppliers to bring you your broadband connection. We have taken out as much ‘jargon’ as we can, but in places the only way to describe the technology is with some technical language that can’t be translated. If you have questions, remember that you can ask your suppliers to talk you through how it all works.

The suppliers you talk to will have product names for their services that may not be exactly the same as the wording below. We can’t list all supplier products but you can use these definitions with your suppliers to help you understand which category their product falls into.

Fibre To The Premise (FTTP)	Where an optical fibre runs all of the way from the provider’s network to your premises. Very high download and upload speed (e.g. 10 Gigabytes per second and above) are possible with some types of active fibre systems. However, lower cost passive optical networks (PON), also classified as FTTP, are often used by suppliers and typically offer asymmetric speeds of up to 330Mbit/s download speed and 30Mbit/s upload speed.
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Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC)	Where optical fibre is run to a street side cabinet, the additional expense of running fibre right up to a user's premise is avoided. However the existing copper telephone lines that are used for the final connection to the premises from the cabinet have lower capacity than fibre, typically up to 80Mbit/s download speed and 20Mbit/s upload speed. Speeds depend on how far you are from the cabinet: the speed will be lower the farther the copper has to run.
Fibre on demand	Where a supplier usually offers FTTC to customers as a standard product rather than FTTP (because of the high deployment costs), or if FTTC would not provide a sufficiently fast service to meet an individual customer's needs, then some network operators would offer FTTP for an additional charge by offering what suppliers call an 'on-demand' product. Charges are often considerable and are payable upfront.
Cable (DOCSIS 3.0)	The original Cable TV networks used fibre optic links from the network to street side distribution points and coaxial copper lines to users' premises. Coaxial copper lines have a higher capacity over longer distances than traditional twisted pair copper telephone lines and this TV technology has been adapted to provide data communications at up to 120Mbit/s download speeds and 12Mbit/s upload speeds.
Mobile	Mobile telephone technologies can provide high maximum download speeds. However its reliability and performance varies with the location, environment, loading of the network by other users and the available radio spectrum. Mobile connections are not eligible under the Connection Voucher Scheme as costs of connection typically fall below the minimum grant level. Mobile technologies can however be used as part of another solution (see below).
Ethernet First Mile (EFM)	Ethernet is the communications protocol (a kind of language) used by most wired office networks. You may be familiar with it in your office wiring systems. Connections to the external broadband network in the past have used other communications protocols (another one is called ATM) which need both equipment to translate protocols (to let different parts of the system talk to each other) and add extra operational costs for network providers. EFM allows the Ethernet protocol to be conveniently transmitted over the existing copper telephone lines and optical fibre links, and can reduce costs to users.
Fixed Wireless Access (FWA)	Wireless links can be used instead of copper or optical fibre links to connect users from a wireless base station. Usually the base station is mounted on a mast or



	building at your premises. The connection's performance is designed to be more stable and predictable than mobile because user equipment is in a fixed location. Often FWA uses mobile technologies adapted for fixed operations.
Leased line	A leased line is a copper or fibre connection providing a data service with a Service Level Agreement (for example, this may cover download speeds, repair times and so on.). Depending upon the type of service ordered the sockets and connectors, and their electrical characteristics, might differ from the usual Ethernet components that you may be familiar with.
Leased line – Ethernet	An Ethernet leased line can be connected to existing office-based Ethernet networks without additional protocol translation equipment. It 'presents' an Ethernet interface to the user.
Microwave	Microwave is a kind of leased line that uses a radio link rather than copper or fibre. Generally it requires a line of sight from the network location to an antenna dish mounted on or near your premises.