

## CONNECTION VOUCHER SCHEME

### Guidance for Applicants

The purpose of the Connection Voucher Scheme is to assist businesses and third sector organisations to meet the upfront capital costs of a high speed/high grade broadband connection to their premises. The Scheme is funded by the Department for Culture Media and Sport and operated by local authorities across the UK.

This guidance contains information on who is eligible to apply and how the process works.

#### 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 1 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.

Businesses which are owned by another business or who own other businesses may be able to apply, but should check the guidance about [Linked Enterprises](#).<sup>1</sup>

If you are unsure if you meet the SME criteria, there is a guide you can check on the website at [www.connectionvouchers.co.uk](http://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk) under 'who's eligible'.

- ii. Your business property must be located within the Local Authority Area of one of the participating cities.

You can check your postcode on our website to make sure that you are in an eligible area [www.connectionvouchers.co.uk](http://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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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, at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:379:0005:0010:en:PDF>

- 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](http://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk) where there is a [guide](#) to the kinds of broadband 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 apply, depending on what kind of new connection you choose:
  - For new Next-Generation Access (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/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/property, or for inter-site connectivity.
- iii. You can only apply for one Connection Voucher. If you have multiple premises you may use the voucher to upgrade more than one premise but the total value of all connections may not exceed £3,000.

- 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 £100. 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 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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-aid-a-beginners-guide-guidance-notes>

or see the full EU de minimis Regulation at

*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 or are eligible but with different financial limits. 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 organisation is not a public sector organisation or is not (i) a school funded by DFE (ii) a privately funded school operating over the ages of 3-18 or (iii) an organisation solely involved in offering provision under the requirement for young people to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday.
- v. 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 wish to apply as part of a group of organisations working with a landlord or agent, please contact the city operating the Scheme in your area for further guidance.

If you are eligible, you need to get a valid quote from a registered supplier. You need to use suppliers that have registered with us – they are listed on the main website and on the city pages in the [Suppliers](#) section.

Now you are ready to apply. Follow the guidance on the [City pages](#) on how to access the application form.

When we receive your form we will check your eligibility, check that the supplier quote is appropriate for the kind of connection that you have requested and, if 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.

Once you have your voucher you have up to 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. **You must let the local authority know when you have placed your order.**

When the connection is made, you need to make your claim and send us a copy of the supplier invoice. The form contains a declaration that the new service has been installed and is performing as expected. You must pay any VAT due to the supplier and any costs not covered by the voucher direct to the supplier. Once they have checked your claim the local authority you applied to will pay the supplier the value of the voucher.

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 which may be subject to change. These are available on the website.

If you have any questions at any time through the process, contact us the local authority operating the Scheme in your area. Contact details can be found at [www.connectionvouchers.co.uk/cities](http://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk/cities).