

Helping your learner move to 4G and 5G

2G, 3G, 4G and 5G are the technologies used to provide signal to mobile phones that allow you to make calls, send texts and access the internet using mobile data.

3G is now more than 20 years old, prone to faults, and unable to keep up with the demands of modern online activity. This is why 3G technology is being retired by all UK mobile operators.

In this guide, we will help you support your learner to make the simple transition to a modern mobile network such as 4G or 5G.

*Instructions may vary according to your device model.

What you'll cover

1. Why 3G is being retired and what that will mean for people
2. What actions your learner can take to be prepared

Why is the 3G network being retired?

Mobile operators, both in the UK and around the world, have already begun retiring 3G. The technology is more than 20 years old, pre-dating the demands of the online world, and is prone to faults. In a time when we are all using resources with care, mobile operators can use the old 3G airwaves to run mobile networks more than ten times more efficiently on 4G or 5G while giving your learner a much faster, more reliable and more secure mobile experience.

When is the 3G network being retired?

Explain to your learner that EE's legacy 3G network will be phased out from the beginning of 2024. Other phone providers have different timetables, but many of them will have phased 3G out by the end of 2024. You should help your learner contact their mobile provider so they can check when they plan to switch off the 3G network in the learner's local area.

How will the 3G switch off impact people?

If your learner has an older 3G mobile phone they will need to upgrade to a new handset. However, if they have a 4G or 5G smartphone but with a 3G SIM or monthly plan, they will need to upgrade if they want to retain access to mobile internet on their phone for things like sending WhatsApp messages, browsing the internet and checking the weather.

If they have an older 3G handset but only wish to send calls or texts or browse the internet using wi-fi (not their personal mobile data), they will not need to do anything. Even though the 3G mobile network is being retired, the 2G network is remaining for now so your learner will be able to do those activities in the same way as they do today. However, if they want to retain their paid-for mobile internet, they will need to move to a 4G or 5G phone and SIM, or if they already have, make sure they have a 4G or 5G data plan.

Helping your learner move to 4G and 5G continued

How can I help my learner check if their mobile phone supports 4G or 5G?

A quick online search of the make and model of your learner's phone should confirm if it is 4G or 5G compatible. You can help them do this by visiting their phone manufacturer's website to see if the specifications include 4G (also referred to as LTE) or 5G. To find out more about helping your learner search the web, you can use a factsheet on the topic by either clicking the link below or typing it into their internet browser: bt.com/seniorskills

If your learner is an EE customer, they can simply text HANDSET to 150 to see if their mobile phone is already compatible with a modern mobile network. Alternatively, they can speak to one of our expert advisers in any EE store who will be happy to check.

How can I help my learner check if their SIM or phone contract supports 4G or 5G?

In order to check if your learner's SIM or phone contract already supports 4G or 5G, you will need to help them check the paperwork from when they started their contract, or you can help them contact their mobile network provider directly.

Can my learner still make and receive calls and texts without 3G?

Yes. If your learner has a 4G or 5G mobile phone, SIM and plan, they can continue to use their mobile phone as they do today.

If they have an older 3G phone and do not upgrade to 4G or 5G, your learner will still be able to use the 2G mobile network to make phone calls and send SMS text messages as they do today. But they will have to use wi-fi (not mobile data) to connect to the internet on their phone.

What should my learner do now?

Here are three simple steps everyone can take today to get ready for the nationwide retirement of 3G:

1. Use our guidance above to help your learner check whether their mobile phone already supports 4G or 5G. If it does, ensure that 4G Calling is turned on in their mobile phone settings. 4G Calling may be referred to as LTE Calling or VoLTE on some phones. For Android users, get your learner to click 'settings' then 'mobile networks' to check 4G calling is on. iPhone users should click 'settings' then 'mobile data' and 'voice and data'.
2. Help your learner make their mobile operator aware if they may require dedicated support so they can discuss their options and receive the help they need to move to 4G or 5G.
3. Discuss with your learner whether moving to a modern mobile network like 4G or 5G would benefit them. If the answer is yes, then support them in speaking to their mobile provider about

upgrading either their phone, SIM or plan to one that best suits their mobile needs.

My learner needs more help.

Every mobile operator will have their own plans for supporting customers. You can help your learner contact their mobile provider directly to find out what additional support they can provide.

EE will contact all customers in advance to make sure no one is left behind and is offering dedicated one-to-one support for vulnerable customers to help their transition to a modern mobile network. If your learner is registered as chronically sick, disabled or receives state benefits, such as universal credit, you can help them fill in this online form to let EE's customer care team know and help them access dedicated support: bit.ly/EE_register_your_vulnerability

EE customers who require additional support are encouraged to get in touch directly as they may find they can access a discounted or even free handset to support their move to 4G or 5G.



Links to further learning

For more information on what 3G retirement means and how to make the move to 4G/5G, please visit: ee.co.uk/3g-switch-off

You can discover more about what action the mobile industry is taking on 3G by visiting: mobileuk.org/2g-3g-switch-off

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When is the 3G network being retired?

EE's legacy 3G network will be phased out from the beginning of 2024. Other phone providers have different timetables, but many of them will have phased 3G out by the end of 2024. You should check with your mobile phone company when they are switching off their 3G network in your local area.

How will the 3G switch off impact you?

If you have an older 3G mobile phone you will need to upgrade to a new handset. If you have a 4G/5G smartphone but with a 3G SIM or monthly plan, you will need to upgrade if you want to retain access to mobile internet on your phone for things like sending WhatsApp messages, browsing the internet and checking the weather.

If you have an older 3G handset but only wish to send calls or texts or browse the internet using wi-fi (not your own mobile data), you do not need to do anything. Even though the 3G mobile network is being retired, the 2G network is remaining for now and you will be able to do those activities in the same way as you do today. However, if you want to retain your paid-for mobile internet, you will need to move to a 4G or 5G phone and SIM, or if you already have, make sure you have a 4G or 5G plan.

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How can I check if my SIM or phone contract supports 4G or 5G?

In order to check if your SIM or phone contract already supports 4G or 5G, check the paperwork from when you started your contract or SIM plan, or contact your mobile network provider directly.

Can I still make and receive calls and texts without 3G?

Yes. If you have a 4G or 5G mobile phone, SIM and plan, you will not be impacted at all by the retirement of 3G and can continue to use your mobile phone as you do today.

If you have an older 3G phone and do not upgrade to 4G or 5G, you will still be able to use the 2G mobile network to make phone calls and send SMS text messages as you do today. But you will have to use wi-fi (not mobile data) to connect to the internet on your phone.

What should I do now?

Here are three simple steps everyone can take today to get ready for the nationwide retirement of 3G:

1. Use our guidance above to check whether your mobile phone already supports 4G or 5G. If it does, check – or ask a family member – to ensure that 4G Calling is turned on in your mobile phone settings. 4G Calling may be referred to as LTE Calling or VoLTE on some phones. For Android users, click 'settings' then 'mobile networks' to check 4G calling is on. iPhone users should click 'settings' then 'mobile data' and 'voice and data'.
2. Make your mobile operator aware if you may require dedicated support so they can discuss your options and help guide you through the move to 4G or 5G.
3. Consider whether moving to a modern mobile network like 4G or 5G would benefit you. If the answer is yes, then speak to your mobile provider about upgrading either your phone, SIM card, or plan to one that best suits your mobile needs.

I would still like some help.

Every mobile operator will have their own plans for supporting customers. You should contact your mobile provider directly to find out what additional support they can provide.

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