

Education Broadband Services

Alongside their offers of connection bandwidths, ISPs will offer services to schools. Here are some that Educational Broadband Services should provide:

Content Filtering

A range of filtering solutions should be available with options to subscribe to a hosted, managed service or to purchase a locally deployed and managed application server. There are many filtering solutions but names schools should be looking for include Equinet, Lightspeed, Protex, Safetynet+, Smoothwall, Sophos and Symantec.

Understanding how and when to change filtering policies is a constant concern for schools so that ease of use and suitable flexibility should be major considerations. High performance too is essential. Schools should ensure that no bottlenecks occur through inadequately sized or managed filtering solutions.

Careful thought must be given to filtering: How many policies are needed? (For staff and pupils? For pupils of different ages? Personalised and configurable for particular sessions or lessons? For Parents? Governors? Visitors?) Do you wish to synchronise with Active Directory or equivalent? And how is each of these directed by your eSafety policies?

Email Services

As with filtering, email is a core service, especially in secondary schools. Solutions vary from those that are Cloud based and 'free' (e.g. Office 365 and Gmail) and those, such as MS Exchange, that can be hosted and managed locally. Schools should also have access to email services that can encrypt both the message and any attachments.

Many of the same issues of security and eSafety apply to email so that different solutions are likely to be appropriate for different types of user.

Email Features to look out for:

- email accessible from any web-connected device;
- email and calendar functionality including folders and address books;
- integration with local and third-party mail clients;
- user management from a local Active Directory;
- mailbox size for each user;
- anti-virus and anti-spam protection;
- low cost or free email for students, business class for staff, secure for administrative staff
- secure file transfer facilities.

Support Services

It is well known that support calls from schools are harder to manage than from other sectors. Schools should look for specialists in education calls and for suppliers that have a track record in managing schools' queries. Schools need to ensure that support requests are properly logged and managed during core hours but also that faults are automatically detected and logged on a 24x7 basis. And it is not only faults. Change requests (for example to firewall rules) are often not included in ISP charges, so that such requests rack up unexpected costs.

Quality ISPs would expect to discover network outages before schools report them. Monitoring tools should be deployed that watch network performance 24x7 and take pro-active measures to fix faults before they affect customers. Regular reports on performance, outages and fixes should be routinely available to customers.

Support Service Features

- dedicated, education focused service desk;
- out of hours monitoring, fault logging and reporting;
- choice of logging methods for faults, queries and requests (telephone, email, online?);
- SLA on response and fix times;
- charges on ad hoc change requests?

Other Services

There is a myriad of other services that broadband makes available to schools so that each school will have to assess its own needs. Some popular services in schools that should at least be options are:

- connectivity within a VPN – some services require VPN access to the school, often through specific firewall ports;
- secure information transfer (for example, via MPLS)
- off-site backup (requires good upload bandwidth)
- home access for staff (requires VPN)
- video conferencing (option for QOS?)
- personalised access (member of Janet access federation?)