

# KEY-CON?

“What position do you have to use?”

“Have you tried it in the kitchen?”

Since term started and students on campus settle into the idea of doing some of that work stuff, there's been a common topic of discussion rattling around the corridors on campus - “Can you get it?” - “What position do you have to use?” - “Have you tried it in the kitchen?”. Some people can get it at their desk twenty-four-seven but for others it's not so regular.

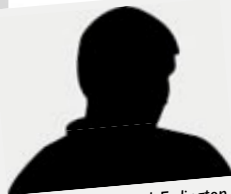
residences around the country, many of whom use a wired Ethernet system, similar to what you would find in the library or in open access labs around campus.

For some students, the service has been ideal - especially for those returning from placement that moved back onto campus to avoid the stresses of living in a private house with bills, busses and landlords. However, recently, there have been reports of problems ranging from erratic connectivity to having to use the service from the communal kitchen or another flatmate's room where the signal is stronger.

The topic, of course, is Wireless Broadband - one of the biggest improvements to campus accommodation over the last year and a great incentive to prospective and returning students alike. In theory, any student who wants to, can sign up and surf the information super highway from the comfort of their study bedroom - an invaluable tool for students, saving us from those midnight missions to the main building whenever last minute research needs doing and also easing the load on library and main building terminals too.

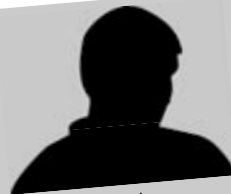
Alex of Lakeside paid an up front fee of £85 for a 256Kbps connection but says, “I can sometimes access the service from the desk in my room but the connection comes and goes. If I'm doing research and want to ensure a reliable connection I have to sit in the corridor close to the access point which is not very comfortable”. Similarly, Thomas of Gem House remarks, “I signed on to the 512Kbps 'fast' service at the start of term and am yet to see a difference in speed between what I receive and what my other flatmates on the slower service get. Connectivity is poor and I can't rely on my connection being usable when I want it to be”. A common complaint is that the helpdesk staff are friendly but seem to have little technical knowledge. Some students have been told several times that a member of technical staff will be visiting the flat to try to sort things out, but are still waiting.

Setting up this campus-wide system was no easy task. It has taken over a year for all of the residences on campus to go from having almost no Internet facility at all, to having the latest wireless technology. It's a big step in a short time, and one still to be taken by many university



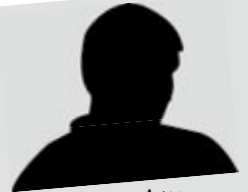
**Student A – Slade Road, Erdington**  
 Provider: Virgin.net  
 Cost per Month: £17.99  
 Speed: 2048Kbps

Comments: “In our house we chose this provider because there is no joining fee or contract and the pricing is great considering the speed we went for. My only qualm is the cost of the helpline but I have only had to contact them once for setting up. Overall I would say it has been excellent.”



**Student B – The Heights**  
 Provider: BT  
 Cost per Month: £21  
 Speed: 512Kbps

Comments: “More expensive than when I was on campus last year but I know this service is reliable and won't fail when I need to do last minute research at 3am. I have had absolutely no problem since I set it up and have been surfing since. It's there non-stop whenever I want it.”



**Student C – Lakeside, Aston**  
 Provider: Keycom  
 Cost per Month: £9.99  
 Speed: 256Kbps

Comments: “I joined up at the start of term, and since joining I have found the signal so weak that working in my room is close to impossible. I can get a weak signal if I sit with my laptop in the doorway, but in order to achieve a reliable connection I have to sit out in the corridor close to the access point.”

By Ben Cooke

## From the desk of Keycom

“The broadband network deployed by Keycom at Aston Campus was installed in January this year and comprises the very latest equipment supplied by a leading world class manufacturer in wireless technology.

At present there are 1477 registered users of the service on Aston Campus. We are aware of difficulties that have been experienced by a number of users. These range from PC configuration through to network issues. Network issues can be as serious as blank spots in the coverage and loss of

connectivity to the site, or as senseless as third party interference with the wireless equipment.

To cope with demand Keycom invest in additional equipment and bandwidth to achieve a contention ratio of 20:1 (c.f. 50:1 for the normal BT line)

Keycom recognises its responsibility to provide an adequate service to every customer and commits to investigate each response you receive to your survey.

Bill Roberts  
 Business Development Director”

Following concerns for the quality of service students receive from our wireless broadband provider; the Guild want to know about your experience of wireless broadband on campus? Good or bad, send your accounts to [keysurf@thestudentsguild.com](mailto:keysurf@thestudentsguild.com)

No connection? Leave a message at 0121 204 4826.

For more info visit <http://www.thestudentsguild.com/keysurf> or come up to the Executive Office on the third floor of the Guild.