TELEPHONE (TELECOM) SELF HELP GUIDE (rev.02)

Disclaimer

Before we begin, please understand that neither I or nor 'home-connect' accept any responsibility for costs, damages or injuries incurred in following the below guide. It is freely given in good faith, please accept it in the spirit which it is intended.

Introduction

This self help guide is designed to help you determine if a telephone fault is within your own property and help you to avoid BT/openreach's call-out charge, regardless of your service provider (TalkTalk/BT/Sky/etc.) will normally be passed onto you. At the time of writing their charge is £144 (inc VAT), covers a maximum of 1 hour's work and excludes materials (charged additionally):

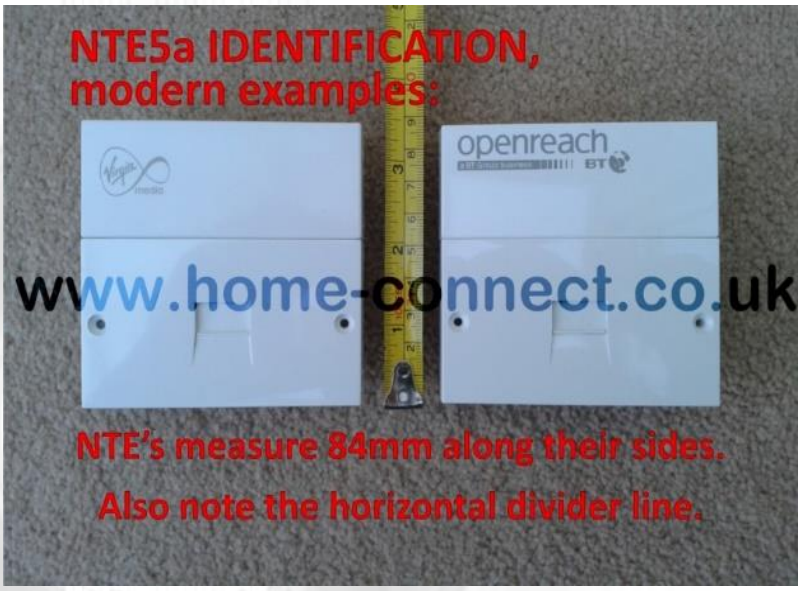
Feature	Operative date	Until	Normal Working Day £ Exc VAT	All other times except Sundays and Public / Bank Holidays £ Exc VAT	Sundays and Public / Bank Holidays £ Exc VAT
Standard Chargeable Visit (Visit plus **up to** 1 hours work)	01/04/2013		**120.00**	150.00	180.00

(For current BT/openreach pricing please visit the openreach website)

During the 15 years I worked for BT/openreach, the main reason I found customers being charged for visits was due to faulty/damaged equipment or wiring within their own properties. It might seem logical that BT would be best for fixing problems with the phone service, but contractually their responsibility ends at the 'Line-box'. This is the first 'main' phone socket within your home, normally an NTE5a (**N**etwork **T**ermination **E**quipment) pictured below. Everything beyond the NTE5 is your responsibility, should a fault be found with your equipment or wiring, openreach will raise a charge and your telecom provider (the company you rent your service from) pass this on to you through your bill. They are not obliged to repair a fault with your home wiring, simply prove that the line is working correctly at the line-box at which point they will normally charge for the call-out.

The NTE5a's pictured below are the property of openreach and Virgin Media, it is an Ofcom regulation for them to provide one of these with a new line installation as an official demarcation point for the purposes of customer testing. So if you are experiencing telephone issues, then please follow the guide below. Don't worry, you are fully entitled to do the testing described in this guide. If you are competent with a screw driver then you should not have any issues.

If you are struggling to locate the NTE5a, try tracing where the line comes into the property from the telephone pole or underground duct, this may give you an idea of where to look. Check under stairs, hallway, behind or under radiators, cupboards, downstairs toilet, etc. they can often be found in strange places so rule nothing out! Sods law, if you report a fault without first testing, the openreach engineer will find it in seconds and shortly after find that the fault is your own wiring!..



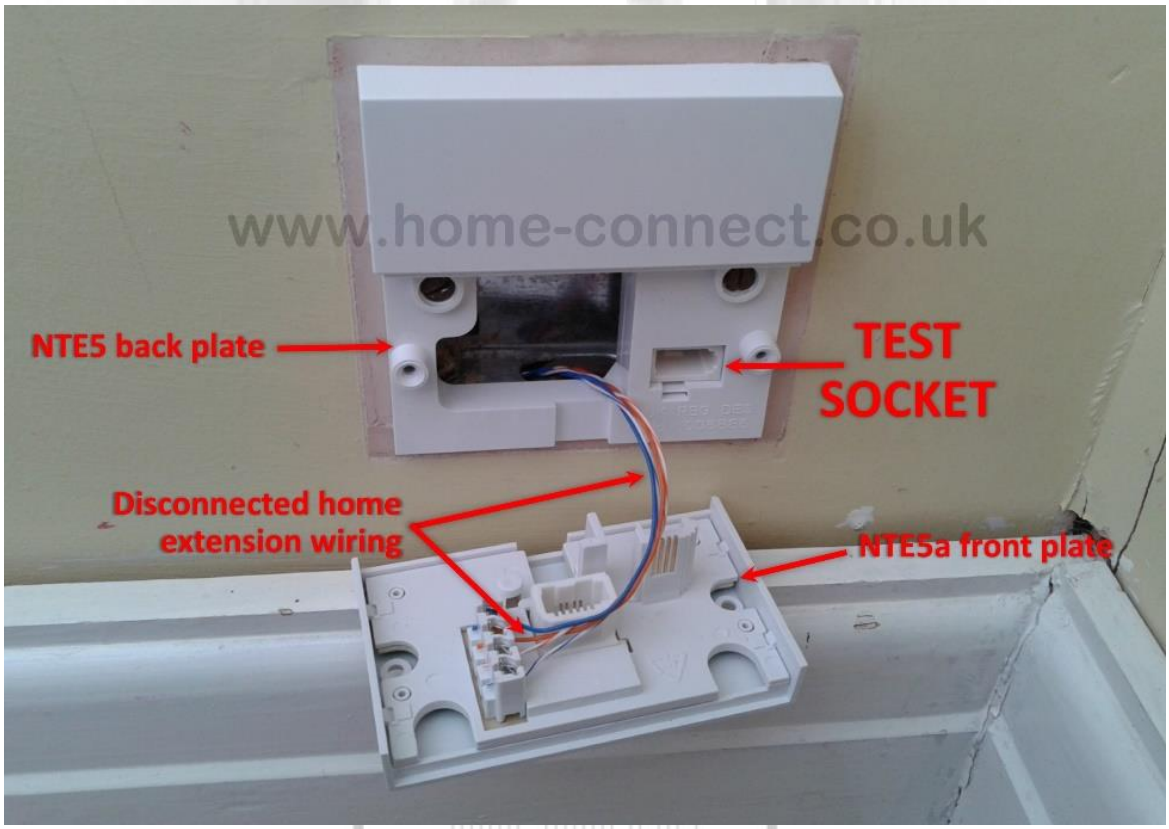
Note the appearance of the NTE5, square, measures 84 x 84mm along its sides and has a divider line just above its half way point, not to be confused with other telephone sockets the same size or smaller without the divider line. If all your telephone sockets have been replaced with decorative plates (i.e. brass or steel finish) openreach will not cover any of them in the event of a fault, even if the fault is outside your property in their network, their engineer (following the guidance of their line manager and current policy at time of writing) will insist on fitting an NTE5a as pictured above and levy the above charge + the cost of the NTE5a itself.

STEP 1

Once you have located the NTE5 you will need to undo the 2 screws that secure the removable lower NTE5a front-plate to the rear NTE5 back-plate. All new NTE5's use small cross head Phillips screws while older NTE's use flat blade screws. Be careful not to lose these as they're an unusual size so not easy to replace.

STEP 2

After removing the screws (and storing them safely), gently remove the lower plate by pulling it towards yourself, again be careful as wires connected to it may be loose (depending on who wired it). You don't want any of these wires to come out of their slots as you need a specialist tool to properly reconnect them. Let the front-plate hang loose by the wires that are connected to it. Removing the front-plate from the back-plate component will disconnect your own home telephone extension wiring from the incoming line and allow you to carry out further testing.

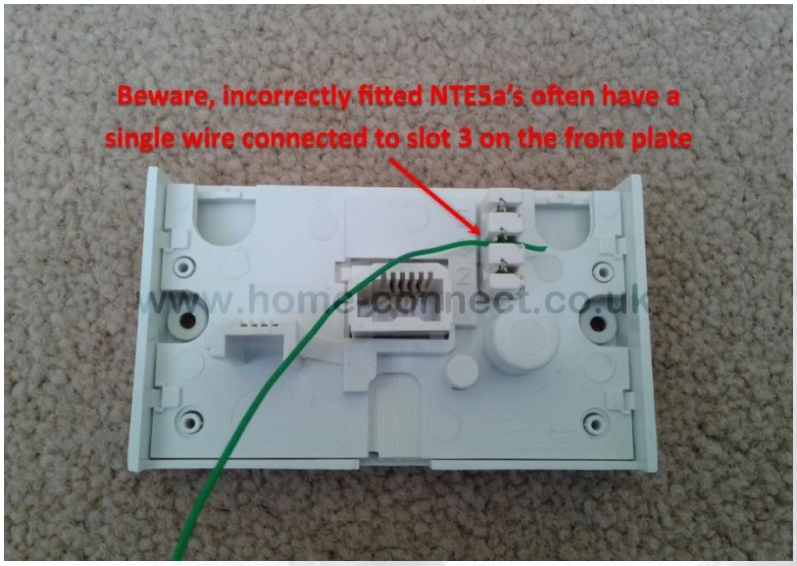


HOWEVER If there are no wires connected to the front-plate…

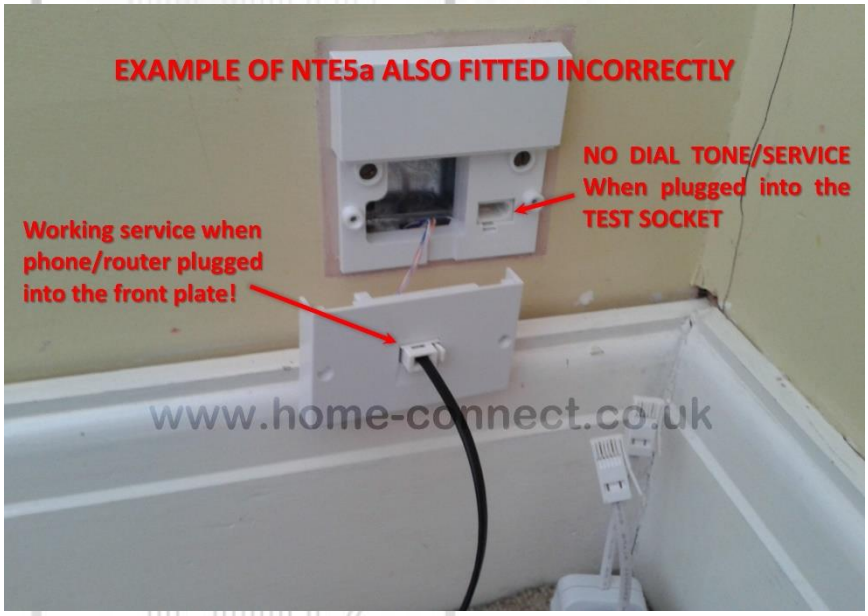
AND other telephone sockets within your home, connected to the same line (phone number) continue to work, i.e. have dial tone or ring when you dial your number from another line such as a mobile…

DO NOT attempt to use the NTE5 test socket for testing, it has not been wired correctly!

NTE5's IN THIS STATE WILL NOT HELP YOU TO RESOLVE AN ISSUE OR CARRY OUT MEANINGFUL TESTING - replace the NTE5a front-plate and give us a call if you are within the Wirral area, alternatively call your local independent telecom engineer if elsewhere in the UK. You can also call your telecom provider and insist they send an engineer to correct the wiring issue and provide you with a properly wired NTE5 but they may charge for this 'service'.



Another example of an incorrectly wired NTE5. Note there are only wire(s) connected to slot number 3 on the front-plate, this indicates that the NTE5 was fitted in place of an old Line Jack Unit (simple extension type socket) and only being used to power the old fashioned 'bell circuit', but not wired correctly as to function as a test point. Fairly standard practice during the 1980's-1990's when NTE5's we're being issued to replace old style Line-boxes. BT engineers seemingly did not have the knowledge, patience or time to rewire a property to the correct standard. A practice that unfortunately crossed over into the cable companies as many ex-BT engineers took bad habits with them when they joined these new companies to help build their networks.



Another example of an incorrectly fitted NTE5, not obvious to look at but If you plug your telephone (assuming it works and is not the cause of the fault) into the detached front-plate and get working service, then it shows that the line is live going into the wrong part of the NTE5. Also if you were to take the telephone you're using for testing to other telephone extension sockets around your home and find they are still working while the NTE5a front-plate is disconnected then you have what's called a "star-wired" circuit, these can't be tested using the NTE5 test socket and are generally poor performers for broadband. Again an NTE5a wired in this fashion is useless for testing purposes.

STEP 3

Once you have confirmed by following the above steps that you have a properly wired NTE5 test socket, i.e. all your other telephone extension sockets are now disconnected with no signs of life after removing the NTE5a front-plate from the back-plate. You can proceed with further testing.

First plug a known working telephone into the test socket of the NTE5 back-plate as pictured below, if the fault persists then it is a problem with the line up to this point, i.e. in your service provider's network. In theory you should be able to call your service provider and report the issue for them to resolve. However if in doubt you can also call us out to double check your findings, confirm the state of all your wiring, check for any other issues with the onsite equipment and cabling that could result in an expensive openreach engineers call out charge such as damaged cables or fittings.

Be as thorough as possible, try at least 2 telephones if dealing with a voice fault, I normally recommend borrowing a friend/family members/neighbours phone to try at your test socket instead of buying a new one, as even a new phone can be faulty out of the box and we've seen people get caught out and get landed with an expensive BT call out charge this way.

If the line appears to be working at the test socket then the problem is most likely on your own wiring or equipment which you disconnected by removing the front-plate. You can unplug all the devices connected to extension sockets within your home and try them one at a time in the test socket to test them out. If the problem persists after you have checked your equipment then it is likely a fault with your own internal wiring. You can leave a telephone connected to the test socket to give temporary service and **give us a call** if you are within the Wirral area or your local independent telecom engineer if elsewhere in the UK to help you resolve the problem.

ALL DONE!

Hopefully this guide has allowed you to find the cause of your telephone problem or at the very least prevented an expensive openreach call out charge. We are here to help! Please feel free to call if you need any further assistance. Also email us at info@home-connect.co.uk if you have any feedback regarding this guide or things that you would like to see improved, we're always happy to hear from you!