Mobile phones and other mobile devices need a network of base stations in order to work. Without base stations, there will be no mobile signal.

Across the UK 96% of people lived in postcode districts with at least 90% 2G area coverage from one or more operators. This figure increases to 99% in England, but population coverage levels are lower in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which is a reflection of large areas of low population density and areas where hilly or mountainous terrain limits the range of cellular masts. *

All four mobile providers are now meeting the 90% coverage obligations for 3G mobile.

4G coverage has already reached 73% of UK premises since its launch in 2013.

O2’s 4G licence requires the company to extend indoor coverage to 98% of the UK population by 2017 at the latest. This will mean coverage of more than 99% of the UK population when outdoors. The other mobile operators have indicted that they intend to match O2’s 98% coverage obligation for 4G mobile. This will extend mobile broadband coverage into many areas still unserved by 3G.

In some areas, geographic or topographical, technological, economic factors, or the built environment may limit the availability of a mobile signal. There may be no signal at all, or only 2G, but not 3G, or the signal may be only partial or intermittent for individuals.

Operators are working with Ofcom and with other stakeholders to extend the benefits of mobile communications as widely as possible. However, lack of a signal can result from many different factors, and providing 100%, seamless mobile signal coverage across the UK is not technically feasible or economically viable.

Operators are investing in new infrastructure to improve capacity and maintain service to their existing customers, as well as addressing the demand to extend coverage to new areas.
In areas where their own network is unavailable, but coverage is provided by another network, mobile phone users can still call the emergency services, even though they cannot make a normal call.

Click here to see our latest briefing on connectivity in rural areas: MOA_Coverage_Briefing_2012.pdf

* Source Ofcom: The Communications Market Report 2011