Dummy Guide – Video Conferencing

Before you make any travel arrangements, have you considered whether it would be easier to manage the meeting on-line….?

Below are some detailed instructions on the options available for different purposes and how to set up and use the available software.

For more info or advice on any of these, contact Kevin Brace in CLIPP (k.brace@aston.ac.uk)

Skype

Skype is a free piece of software, which can be installed on individual computers with the assistance (permission) of ISA and allows free telephone type service between internet connected computers.

In addition to the basic audio service, high quality video calls can be made, together with the use of a suitable web cam. These can be conducted on a one to one basis, or in a small group conference call type conversation. Files can be exchanged, and instant messaging can also be used during calls. It is advised to make use of headphones and / or built in microphones or web cams.

You must set up a Skype account (name) for other Skype users to call you. Frequent contacts can be simply called by clicking on their name within your personalised list of friends.

In a similar manner to Blackboard Collaborate, the uses of Skype are many and varied for teaching and learning, although retaining a group small (approx.' 6-10) is recommended. Interviews, vivas, tutorials, virtual offices, meetings both national and international, presentations, language tuition, small group projects, and connecting to overseas "visiting lecturers", are all possible. Skype software is now installed into all pool room computers to enable lecturers to communicate to overseas guests and "broadcast" the video call to a lecture theatre via a screen. We advise the use of Skype specifically for this purpose, due to the ease of set up and higher quality video compared to Collaborate.

Video conferencing

This should be used for meetings where you need to see and hear <u>everyone</u> as a group sat around a table, e.g. vivas, Interviews, or presentations. There is a centrally managed system in G39 which can be booked free of charge. In addition, some schools may also have their own video conferencing facilities.

The basics for booking and using the video conference equipment:

- Check availability of the room with Amelia Hughes (a.hughes@aston.ac.uk) As the room is in the VC's corridor it is booked out quite frequently for meetings, so ideally plan ahead.

- Media and Learning Technologies (MLT) use JVCS (JANET videoconferencing service) to make videoconference bookings. They run a computerised booking system which will connect the participants exactly at the time the user specifies. This also means the videoconference will be terminated precisely after the specified duration so please bear this in mind and allow some extra minutes if you think they may be needed.

- As is mentioned on the videoconference webpage if you are planning to connect to another dedicated videoconference unit you should fill out the online booking form. This will provide MLT with all the information needed to make a videoconference booking on your behalf.

- If you are planning to connect to an individual using their own PC / laptop with microphone / headset / speakers then fill out the online booking form and leave the IP address or ISDN number part blank. Once MLT receive this information we will make the booking on your behalf and the participants will receive an email containing details of the JVCS desktop videoconference software they should download and test prior to the videoconference. It's important to stress to the participant that they find time to complete the test as this should help identify any possible network or audio / video errors prior to the videoconference and if there are any allow time to find help to fix them.

Finally, it is possible to connect directly to another videoconference unit by dialling the unit directly (much like making a telephone call). There is no support offered for this way of connecting but if users are comfortable with IT technology a member of MLT would be happy to show them how this can work.

Please note for all videoconference enquiries there is a dedicated email address of videoconference@aston.ac.uk

Blackboard Collaborate

Collaborate allows lecturers to schedule synchronous (real time) virtual classroom and webinar sessions over the internet, via a standard web browser. There are a number of tools for lecturers to use such as: a virtual white board, screen sharing, web tours and polling. Participants can communicate through text chat, as well as using a microphone or web cam if appropriate. The experience is therefore a media rich interaction with peers and tutors using video and audio, combined with traditional presentational materials. Any session can be recorded and shared for recall and reflection.

Aston has integrated Collaborate with Blackboard to allow for easy scheduling of sessions as well as convenient user management. It is available for all staff to use for a wide variety of teaching and learning activities, ranging from: one to one tutorials, vivas, language tuition, online international conferences, virtual office/tutorials, visiting overseas lecturers, peer supported learning in large groups, and national and international meetings.

However Collaborate does make use of Java software, which may need permissions setting, or updating occasionally. This will become apparent the first time you use the software, and you will be prompted to update Java if necessary. Any member of teaching staff is freely able to access their Blackboard course and begin using the tool. We advise that staff follow our comprehensive online instructions in the TLC

website: http://tlc.aston.ac.uk/tool/collaborate, and/or contact CLIPP for hands on instruction and support.

Carbon footprint savings through avoided travel can be significant, as this case study illustrates: http://www1.aston.ac.uk/about/environment/teaching/collaborate/ .

There are also a number of other technologies which can all be used to help reduce travel….
1. **Email**
2. **Blackboard (& its Collaboration tool – different to Collaborate!)**
3. **Panopto**
4. **PebblePad**
5. **SharePoint**
6. **Google Doc's and Google+**
7. **Facebook / Buddy Press / any social network**
8. **Dropbox**
9. **Twitter, Pinterest, etc…**
10. **Microsoft: Lync, Office 365, SkyDrive, Huddle**
11. **Second Life**