

## The services

The equipment is all set up and ready to go, so how do you schedule your videoconference and how do you know whether the quality will be good enough?

JVCS provides a managed videoconferencing environment to ensure you gain the maximum possible benefits from your equipment.

## Looking to videoconference regularly?

The JVCS Booking Service enables you to schedule meetings with other schools, colleges, universities and content providers months in advance. The first step is to register for the service and check that your equipment is capable of meeting the quality requirements for these videoconferences. See:

<http://www.ja.net/services/publications/factsheets/043-booking.pdf>

## Access to content providers

From the National Space Centre to the Cabinet War Rooms, it is not just other schools that you can videoconference with. A wide variety of stimulating learning experiences are now available using videoconferencing. See:

<http://www.ja.net/community/schools/vc/content.html>

## Further support

The first point of contact for all schools videoconferencing enquiries is:

- **England**  
Regional Broadband Consortia or Local Authority
- **Scotland**  
Learning and Teaching Scotland
- **Wales**  
Local Authority
- **Northern Ireland**  
Classroom 2000 Northern Ireland

The JANET Video Technology Advisory Service (VTAS) provides advice to the above regional bodies.

<http://www.video.ja.net/>

Front cover photograph courtesy of LGfL. Taken during the London Live 2005 event which linked over 100 schools together via the JANET Videoconferencing Service.

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# Videoconferencing at a glance



Videoconferencing can be a cost effective means of facilitating teaching and learning. However with numerous acronyms, Standards and a plethora of products all claiming to offer unique benefits it can be difficult to know where to start.

Since the early 1990s, the JANET Videoconferencing Service (JVCS), managed by UKERNA, has been providing unbiased advice and technical support to UK universities and colleges to help them navigate through this sometimes confusing area of technology. Thanks to a centrally funded initiative, these resources and National Videoconferencing Services are now available free of charge to schools through the JANET Videoconferencing Services Project (VCSP).

## Getting started

For a brief introduction to videoconferencing, see:

<http://www.ja.net/services/publications/factsheets/intro-to-videoconferencing.pdf>

Before you purchase your videoconferencing equipment you will need to find out from your broadband provider what type of videoconferencing is possible in your area – see the 'Further support' section overleaf.

## What equipment do I need?

Videoconferencing equipment should be

Standards-compliant (more on this later) and ranges from a webcam on top of your monitor through to a dedicated room with multiple screens and cameras. Budget is going to be a determining factor when considering which equipment to buy. Some software codecs with a suitable webcam and high specification PC may suit your needs, although it is worth noting that the quality of such a solution is such that it may only be suitable for head-head videoconferences. For meetings involving groups of people a solution designed specifically for videoconferencing should be considered. There is a wide choice of such equipment available via major manufacturers.

Another important factor when choosing equipment is to ensure that it is compatible with the other people that you want to communicate with. This is where Standards come in:

## What Standards should my equipment comply with?

The Standards supported by JVCS are H.323 (for IP videoconferencing) and H.320 (for ISDN videoconferencing), which are internationally recognised. The JVCS managed service also provides a gateway which offers support for videoconferences using both H.323 and H.320.

A number of manufacturers use proprietary solutions that enable you to videoconference happily with people using the same equipment,

but you will not be able to videoconference with people using equipment from a different manufacturer. You can find out more about the various Standards at:

<http://www.ja.net/services/publications/factsheets/videoconferencing-standards.pdf>

## Why use IP/H.323 videoconferencing?

IP/H.323 videoconferencing uses your existing school computer network and broadband connection to transmit the videoconference. This has the advantage that there are no call costs (unlike ISDN) for your videoconference.

When using the local network and the broadband connection for videoconferencing, the videoconferencing traffic has to compete with all the other traffic that is using the link, such as e-mail and web browsing, which raises the next question:

## How much bandwidth do I need?

With a broadband connection you have, in theory, sufficient bandwidth to conduct a videoconference. However, in practice, there are a number of other factors that will affect your ability to videoconference which include the amount of other network traffic.

Network specialists within your region should be able to give further advice (see the 'Further Support' section overleaf).