

NZEdNet - the Ministry of Education's Video and Audio Conference Bridge Service and Schools' VC (Videoconference) Network

What schools are always asking about the Ministry Videoconference Bridge!

Who uses it, why, how?

Background

A growing number of schools use broadband for videoconferencing. This means they have signed up with Telecom SchoolZone or their local telecommunications provider to pipe them to the Ministry's NZEdNet Bridge, through which they can participate in classes, professional development, meetings and events with any other schools, tertiary providers, organizations, who also use videoconferencing. This might be with one or many, within New Zealand or anywhere in the world. The Ministry's Bridge is the connecting device, and gateway to the outside world.

Who uses the Ministry's Bridge?

Schools for classes, taking part in virtual field trips and digital conversations with experts, teacher and parent meetings, Principals' meetings, BOT meetings or school community events; tertiary institutions providing STAR courses and the like to schools, Ministry of Education offices and stakeholders.

There are so far approximately 230 schools and tertiary providers in the VC Network - the videoconference network - and many of the Ministry of Education's offices around New Zealand. All schools on the Ministry's VC network are automatically listed in the address book on your videoconference system. **asnet** provides these as part of its service delivered remotely to VC schools. For content information – which schools are providing which courses - check out www.virtuallearning.school.nz

Availability of the Bridge.

The Ministry is providing free access for all schools using the videoconferencing Bridge for educational purposes. Most bridged classes and meetings involve 3-6 schools in any one session. The bridge is available for each hour of the school day and beyond, and many such classes, meetings and events can be happening at the same time. There is no restriction by type of activity except to be school-related, nor on hours a school might use the bridge while there are multiple ports available.

The NZEdNet Bridge is used by schools whenever there are more than 2 schools linking in the one virtual class or meeting. eg Whangamata, Roxburgh, East Otago and Darfield High School may 'meet' on the Bridge for Electronics, each Monday 11-12. This class of 4 schools uses 4 bridge ports for that hour each week.

When don't you need to use the Bridge?

When it's just two schools. Where one school wants to 'talk' via videoconference to another, they simply call them, using the automatic address book or speed dial on their videoconference system. This does not use the Bridge. eg Whangamata finds East Otago listed in their address book and calls them directly. They can be talking on videoconference for as long as they like, and at no cost per minute. (The contract with Telecom or your telecomms provider is for a single monthly amount, covering all use). This is called 'point to point' calling - calling another school from your address book that does not use the Bridge.

Contacting schools and places not linked to the NZEdNet Bridge.

Can we videoconference with schools and places outside the NZEdNet videoconference network?

The Ministry Bridge provides 'gateway' access to schools and places you wish to videoconference with for educational purposes. eg NASA when you're studying space, or a 'sister school' in Italy, for a cultural exchange. You need to arrange the details of the event, being mindful of time differences, and e mail the request to asnet at vcsupport@asnet.co.nz who will first make a test call to check the quality of the site, and then set up the connection for you.

What if we want to videoconference with someone who only has a webcam device?

You are on the Ministry's school VC network with your quality videoconference system that ensures everyone you talk to has good picture and sound from your school. If you wish to videoconference with a school or person using their webcam, you will need to e mail the information to asnet at vcsupport@asnet.co.nz. From there, we will make a test call to check the quality of the webcam site, and the network it is using to get to the bridge. If the webcam device is not producing quality to the standard set for schools on the Ministry's bridge*, it will not be accepted as an endpoint.

What standard is acceptable on the Ministry of Education's bridge?

The Bridge use is overseen by a governing body called VEN, which sets standards of use to protect the users. Amongst the standards is a set of technical specifications that are agreed to. Everyone using the NZEdNet bridge contracts to abide by these standards. asnet in managing the Bridge for the Ministry, acts as gatekeeper for upholding the technical standards.

Audioconferencing.

What about Audioconferencing – just using a conference phone?

A great benefit of the Bridge is for those who use audioconferencing for teacher PD, principal meetings, LEARNZ virtual field trips and the like. The Ministry's Bridge offers schools the use of multiple audioconferencing ports as well. If you have a need, you should contact the ICT Help desk - 0800 CALL ICT(22 55 42) - to ask about 0800 access and PINS per cluster.

Can schools use videoconferencing AND audioconferencing Bridge ports in the same meeting?

Yes, the Ministry Bridge has this capability. You can involve some schools 'via VC' and some may listen and interact via voice only, perhaps while viewing a shared web site.

Training for schools using the Ministry's NZEdNet videoconference bridge

Training courses for teachers and students using Videoconferencing for teaching and learning.

Use of the Bridge to join up schools for shared classes means that quality teaching and best practice by everyone in the videoconference class really counts. While your videoconference vendor should have provided you with some initial operator training, your staff who will be teaching 'on the VC network' are eligible to participate in comprehensive training for teachers, to assist them to translate their good teaching practice into the videoconference environment, and to understand how to use the NZEdNet Bridge effectively.

You should contact asnet - deniseh@asnet.co.nz to register your interest in attending a 3-day Certificate in Teleteaching Via Videoconference course for teachers, a 1-day Technology Exploits for Teleteachers advanced course, or to seek 2 hour Drivers' Licence training for your staff or students. These courses run by asnet have been supported by the Ministry for eligible teachers who will be teaching on the VC network, as part of its NZEdNet Bridge service.

Bookings and support.

Do schools always need to book the Ministry Bridge in advance of use?

It's always best practice when you plan your class or meeting, to book in advance of the time. Your Facilitator will do this for all repetitive lesson scheduling, eg Electronics every Monday from

10-11am, will likely be booked at the start of the year, or the new term. The PIN number suffices for that class, or for that meeting, for the year.

An example of a booking would be:

Please book

How much notice must we give?

The Ministry Bridge service allows 2 days to ensure your new Bridge booking has been made and notified back to you. Schools should simply e mail or fax their booking requirement to **asnet** at vcsupport@asnet.co.nz at least 2 days prior to the event.

Does the Ministry Bridge cater for 'last minute' or after hours scheduling?

Yes. Your ICT Lead Facilitator, once trained, is able to schedule classes adhoc via the web. While the majority of bookings will be made by e mail or fax to asnet, a late request from a Board member for a meeting with 2 other schools, or last minute decision to 'VC in' and not be there in person, may be served by the use of Web Commander. The Ministry offers through asnet one training session per cluster in the use of this web-based facility.

Who manages the technology?

The Ministry of Education purchased the Polycom bridge from **asnet**, and contracted **asnet** to manage it on a daily basis while also remotely managing the growing number of endpoint systems at the schools. Schools need only leave their videoconference system turned on, and identify a VC coordinator who is **asnet's** point of contact at the school. **asnet** has a helpdesk team for the purpose of providing VC support.

If I have issues to do with the Ministry's videoconference bridge, who do I call?

For all support for the Ministry of Education's NZEdNet videoconferencing (VC) network, including bridging and VC equipment at schools, you should contact **asnet** Technologies. This might be:

- o To book sessions
- o To seek a PIN number for video or audioconferencing sessions
- o To arrange a bridged call to somewhere outside NZEdNet
- o To seek help in using your VC equipment
- o To report issues when in a bridged VC call

Contact **asnet :**

1. Dial asnet support Auckland, Wellington or Papamoa from your VC system's address book.
2. E mail vcsupport@asnet.co.nz
3. Telephone 0800 163 525