

VoIP in UAE – Advice on alternatives to using personal Skype service

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Please note that you must comply with the advice within this document. In the event that you have any intention to use an alternative, you must contact the Dubai IT team for authorisation prior to any commencement of use of an alternative product.

Purpose of Document

The personal Skype service, the popular software that allows users to make voice and video calls between computers, mobile phones and tablet devices via internet, has been blocked in the UAE. The access to the Skype app is blocked since it is providing unlicensed Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Service, which falls under the classification of prohibited contents as per the United Arab Emirates' Regulatory Framework. A long-standing statement on the website of the UAE's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) notes that VoIP services "are considered part of the UAE's regulated activities." This document aims to provide clear guidance on which products individuals should be using in order to ensure that there is no risk to the University, Staff, Students or Visitors of infringing UAE law and regulation. It also in the latter part provides an overview of the variety of products which may be used presently on Birmingham Campus and categorises them as either permitted for use or not permitted for use. This document will be revised over time as our options are more clearly defined. Please note this is not an exhaustive list but should help provide guidance when reviewing popular products.

Summary and Recommendations

For the purpose of this document, VoIP products are products that use the internet for voice or video calling and do not use a central telephone network for communication. Under UAE law these are considered illegal and should not be used. Most common and free products cannot be lawfully used within the UAE, such as Whatsapp calling, Facebook calling and Apple Facetime. Most common platforms will work when tried, but service will typically degrade after a few seconds until they become unusable. It is the opinion of IT Services that it is better to start with the understanding that it is 'probably unlicensed and therefore illegal' than to presume otherwise. Where a PC/device is connected directly to a campus network or remote access VPN connection is being used, communication stays within a corporate network. In this instance the University of Birmingham is free to use their standard enterprise-grade communication tools. This includes the Skype for Business application.

Please note that it is important not only to understand which products are permitted, but also to be mindful of what the product is being used for.

Article 9 of the Cybercrime Law states that it is an offence to use a VPN to commit a crime, or to try to prevent discovery of the crime. Federal Law No.5 has increased penalties for breach of Article 9, which now range between AED 500,000-AED 2 million. This would be incurred in addition to the existing custodial sentence. Examples of crimes that may be committed using VPN include but are not limited to the following:

- Accessing and viewing television content which is broadcast online outside of the UAE and which is not licensed for use in the UAE, for example BBC iPlayer. Therefore use of VPN to access content on the BBC iPlayer Service (or any other platform which is restricted to users in the UK or elsewhere outside the UAE) can amount to an unauthorised exploitation of a copyright work prohibited under Federal Law No.7 of 2002 (Copyright Law).
- Accessing indecent or obscene materials –it is an offence to transmit, send, save publish or re-publish pornographic materials and any other materials that may contravene public morals; and

- Accessing and using online gambling services Federal Law 3 of 1987 provides that it is an offence to gamble and the Cybercrime Law provides that it is an offence to transmit, send, save, publish or re-publish gambling activities.

Following a review of common communications platforms, the high level recommendation for communicating between user groups is as follows:

Staff to Staff – All staff should be connected to the corporate network (directly or via remote access VPN) and should use **Skype for Business**. Should this not be possible then a teleconference service, such as **BTMeetMe**, should be used and organised through the Telecommunications office www.telecoms.bham.ac.uk.

Staff to Visitor – When communicating with external visitors, an **invitation to campus** should be issued first. Where this isn't possible a **telephone call** should be used.

Please note that telephone conferencing services, such as BTMeetMe, will offer audio-only conferencing.

Staff to Student – When conducting remote Lectures, Tutorials, Seminars etc. it is recommended to use existing technologies such as **Canvas**, **Panopto** and **BigBlueButton**.

For staff members that are conferencing regularly it is recommended that a USB headset is purchased to ensure a consistent quality experience.

For further clarifications please contact your local IT Services representative or the IT Service Desk www.itservicedesk.bham.ac.uk.

For a full list of products tested which may have been used previously prior to commencement of Dubai Campus business, please see Appendix A.

Scenarios and Detailed Recommendations

The following is a list of scenarios along with their recommended product for use. Unfortunately due to the different needs of the organisation it is not possible to have a single solution and individual staff members will need make an informed decision as to which is the most appropriate communication tool for them at any given time.

The scenarios below can be used in one-to-one and one-to-many meetings. Where there are many participants in a single location it is recommended that LRAT are contacted to discuss room requirements and additional equipment installations to ensure meetings are successful.

The table below gives an indication of the most suitable solution in any given situation.

Parties Involved	Locations	Devices being used	Recommendation
Staff - Staff	Dubai Campus - Birmingham Campus	PC or mobile device. Large scale meeting room solutions are available. Please contact LRAT to discuss requirements.	1. Skype for Business. Devices must be connected to either Wired or Wireless UoB/Dubai connection. 2. BTMeetme 3. University landline telephone
Staff – Staff	Dubai Campus - UK (not on campus)	PC or mobile device	1. Skype for Business. Dubai devices must be connected to either Wired or Wireless UoB connection. 2. BTMeetMe 3. University landline telephone
Staff – Staff	Dubai Campus - Dubai (not on campus)	Landline telephone	1. University landline telephone call
Staff – Staff	Birmingham Campus - Dubai (not on campus)	PC, mobile device or landline telephone	1. Skype for Business (Dubai party must be connected to UoB VPN) 2. BTMeetMe 3. University landline telephone
Staff – Staff	Dubai (not on campus) – Birmingham Campus	PC, mobile device or landline telephone	1. Skype for Business (Dubai party must be connected to UoB VPN) 2. University landline telephone
Staff – Staff	UK (not on campus) – Dubai (not on campus)	PC or mobile device	1. Skype for Business (Dubai party must be connected to UoB VPN) 2. Mobile Telephone
Staff – Student	Dubai Campus - Birmingham Campus	PC or mobile device	1a. Canvas, BigBlueButton for live streaming 1b. Canvas, Panopto for recorded media
Staff – Student	Dubai Campus - UK (not on campus)	PC or mobile device	1a. Canvas, BigBlueButton for live streaming 1b. Canvas, Panopto for recorded media
Staff – Student	Dubai Campus - Dubai (not on campus)	PC or mobile device	1a. Canvas, BigBlueButton for live streaming 1b. Canvas, Panopto for recorded media
Staff – Student	Birmingham Campus - Dubai (not on campus)	PC or mobile device	1a. Canvas, BigBlueButton for live streaming 1b. Canvas, Panopto for recorded media
Staff – Student	UK (not on campus) – Dubai (not on campus)	PC or mobile device	1a. Canvas, BigBlueButton for live streaming 1b. Canvas, Panopto for recorded media
Staff - Non-UoB	Dubai Campus - UK (not on campus)	Landline telephone	1. University landline telephone call
Staff - Non-UoB	Dubai Campus - Dubai (not on campus)	Landline telephone	1. University landline telephone call

Staff - Non-UoB	Birmingham Campus - Dubai (not on campus)	Landline telephone	1. University landline telephone call
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Appendix A – Products Reviewed

Key: Green –the only Products which can be used in UAE, Red –unknown or **illegal and should be avoided in UAE**.

Product	Description	Platform	Pro's	Con's	Monthly Cost Per User	Use in UAE
Skype for Business (not the preinstalled Skype client)	Enterprise grade communications tool for video conferencing. Skype can be used 1-2-1 on individual devices and via much larger meeting room solutions. (Must be running over the University VPN service. Please seek advice from IT Service Desk www.itservicedesk.bham.ac.uk if in doubt)	Mobile App, Desktop Client	When used with a VPN it is acceptable use Costs – already licenced for UoB Easy to use interface Used by many organisations worldwide Video and Audio Large scale meeting room solutions	Must use a VPN client	Subscribed annually by IT Services under existing Microsoft Licence agreement. Zero cost to end users	
Botim	Application downloaded to mobile devices. Provide voice and video calling on a 1-2-1 basis. Instant messaging between multiple parties.	Mobile App only	Licenced under UAE law Easy to use interface	Costs Users must be register Not available for Windows	£10 per month (50 dirham)	
C'Me	Application downloaded to mobile devices. Provide voice and video calling on a 1-2-1 basis. Instant messaging between multiple parties.	Mobile App only	Licenced under UAE law Easy to use interface	Costs Users must be register Not available for Windows	£10 per month (50 dirham)	
BT Meetme	Audio conferencing only via telephone. Local Freephone numbers provided in each country with participants dialling in. Conferences arranged through UoB Telecommunications team and invoiced accordingly.	Telephone only	Compliant with UAE law Easy to use interface Cost Cost beneficial for 10+ participants (in comparison to Powwownow)	Audio only Participants pick up any costs locally – unless dialling freephone	£2.10 per hour per participant	
DU Conferencing	Audio conferencing only via telephone. Local Freephone numbers provided in each country with participants dialling in.	Telephone only	Compliant with UAE law Easy to use interface Cost	Audio only Participants pick up any costs locally – unless dialling freephone	£15 per hour per conference call (75 dirhams)	

Product	Description	Platform	Pro's	Con's	Monthly Cost Per User	Use in UAE
PowWowNow	Simple audio conferencing tool with separate integrated application. Local Freephone numbers provided in each country with participants dialling in. Conferences arranged directly by attendees by visiting www.powwownow.co.uk	Telephone only	Compliant with UAE law Easy to use interface Cost beneficial for less than 10 participants (in comparison to BT Meetme)	Audio only Participants pick up any costs locally – unless dialling Freephone Cost	£6.10 per hour per participant (billed to phone bill)	
University Landline (Birmingham)	Using a UoB landline phone to dial multiple parties	Telephone only	Compliant with UAE law Easy to use interface	Audio only Participants pick up any costs locally – unless dialling Freephone Cost	19.5p per minute per participant	
University Landline (Dubai)	Using a UoB landline phone to dial multiple parties	Telephone only	Compliant with UAE law Easy to use interface	Audio only Participants pick up any costs locally – unless dialling Freephone Cost	25p per minute	
Panopto	Lecture capture and audio streaming service. Integrated within Canvas and standalone.	Desktop Only	Compliant with UAE law Easy to use interface Integrated with Canvas Already in use at UoB Already licenced and paid for by UoB.	Users will need training	Free	
Big Blue Button	Open source web conferencing system. Create and host web meetings, virtual classes, screen sharing and webinars. Provides full many-to-many conference facilities and collaboration. It is important that BigBlueButton sessions only allow one participant to transmit audio (e.g. Lecturer).	Desktop only	Integrated with Canvas Already in use at UoB Already licenced and paid for by UoB.	Cumbersome to set up individual licences Users will need training in Canvas	Free	
Adobe Connect	Create and host web meetings, virtual classes, screen sharing and webinars. Provides full many-to-many conference facilities and collaboration.	All	Hosted platform – no hardware required Easy to use interface	Costs At this stage it is not clear the technology in use and therefore we cannot be certain on legality	£1.60 (£40 per month for 25 users)	

Product	Description	Platform	Pro's	Con's	Monthly Cost Per User	Use in UAE
Cisco Webex	Create and host web meetings, virtual classes, screen sharing and webinars. Provides full many-to-many conference facilities and collaboration.	All	Hosted platform – no hardware required Easy to use interface	Costs	£1.87 (£15 per month for 8 users)	
VScene	Vscene provides videoconferences in virtual rooms or schedule sessions via standards based systems, browsers and phones. Vscene provides a live conference management interface providing many control options not normally available in a videoconference, including streaming and recording.	Desktop only	Maintained by JISC	No mobile client HE use only Becoming a JISC spin off - Ajenta	Free	
GoToMeeting	GoToMeeting is a web-hosted service created and marketed by LogMeIn. It is an online meeting, desktop sharing, and video conferencing software that enables the user to meet with other computer users, customers, clients or colleagues via the Internet in real time.	All	Hosted platform – no hardware required Easy to use interface	Cost	£1.20 (£12 per month for 10 users)	
Google Duo	Google Duo is a video chat mobile app developed by Google, available on the Android and iOS operating systems.	Mobile App only	Cost	Not available for windows Uses VoIP Protocols that are illegal in UAE	Free	
Google Hangouts	Google Hangouts is a communication tool developed by Google, available on a variety of platforms	Mobile App only	Cost	Uses VoIP Protocols that are illegal in UAE	Free	
Apple Facetime	FaceTime is a proprietary videotelephony product developed by Apple	Apple devices only	Commonly used	Only available on iOS devices Uses VoIP Protocols that are illegal in UAE	Free	
WhatsApp	WhatsApp Messenger is a freeware and cross-platform instant messaging and Voice over IP service	Mobile App only	Commonly used	Uses VoIP Protocols that are illegal in UAE	Free	

Product	Description	Platform	Pro's	Con's	Monthly Cost Per User	Use in UAE
Facebook Messenger	Facebook Messenger is an instant messaging service and software application	All	Commonly used	Need to be registered on Facebook and some users may not wish to bring this in to the workplace Uses VoIP Protocols that are illegal in UAE	Free	
Skype (Personal)	Personal version of the popular voice and video messaging application	All	Commonly used	Uses VoIP Protocols that are illegal in UAE	Free	