Collaborate Ultra Troubleshooting

Access to Collaborate Ultra from within China

There isn’t a simple answer as to whether someone can access Collaborate Ultra when based in China, there are various key elements at play (as well as the usual things that may impact a user’s experience):

1. **“The Great Firewall of China”**
2. **Connection Strength**
3. **Browser Support**

Different combinations of these three factors can lead to Collaborate Ultra webinars spanning the whole range of functionality, from not being accessible at all to being usable issue-free.

### 1. The Great Firewall of China

The People’s Republic of China highly controls the internet access of its population, limiting (and sometimes completely blocking) what content and sites can be accessed online and when. This is commonly known as the “Great Firewall of China”. What’s limited/blocked can change on a day to day basis, so something that can be accessed on one day may not be accessible the next. There are various third party tools online that claim to help identify what’s blocked and what isn’t (example: [chinafirewalltest.com/](https://chinafirewalltest.com/)), but these may not be completely accurate.

The address of our Collaborate servers ([https://eu.bbcollab.com](https://eu.bbcollab.com)) is **not** blocked by the firewall, at least at time of writing (February 2019), however this could change at any time.

A Note about VPNs

**VPNs (Virtual Private Networks)** allow users to run their internet traffic through servers physically located in another country, disguising the original location that the traffic came from and potentially opening up services that may otherwise be blocked in the original locale. People all over the globe use VPNs for various reasons, but in China they are of particularly questionable legality due to their potential to subvert the “Great Firewall of China”. As such, we should **not** advise users in China to use a VPN unless it has been approved at their end, even if it’s perceived that it may improve their online experience.

### 2. Connection Strength

Historically, Chinese internet speeds have been reported to be of a poor (or at least inconsistent) quality, with high latency that could cause online systems to lag or connections to drop entirely. **China’s general internet speeds have reportedly improved over the last few years** but according to colloquial reports, Chinese-hosted content tends to load faster than content hosted elsewhere, particularly in the West. The aforementioned firewall can also “dip in” at any time to check the contents of the data ‘packets’ that a user is sending over the internet. This “dipping in” activity will cause high latency (lag/delays) on the user’s internet connection and cause issues with connectivity for any/all services that they are currently using.

Additionally, as in many other countries, remote areas of China will likely have slower internet speeds than big cities.

All of the above can impact the connection speed of a user based in China. The slower a user’s internet connection, the poorer their Collaborate connection is likely to be.

We have prepared a document with tips for both presenters and attendees of Collaborate webinars to help optimise conditions for attendees with slower connections, which should be followed for sessions where there may be Chinese attendees: [Connection Troubleshooting - Tips for Using Collaborate on a Low Bandwidth / Slow Internet Connection](http://www.pdlt.org.uk/connectionsupport/techniques/collaborate-ultra-connectivity-tips/).
3. Browser Support

Google Chrome is suggested as the best browser to use with Collaborate Ultra, but this can provide two issues for attendees in China:

- Google Chrome is not easily downloadable in China, as Google products are blocked by the Great Firewall
- Google Chrome can be quite intensive on a computer, using a lot of its processing power. In a situation where a user already has a slow internet connection, this use of processing power could also impact Collaborate’s performance.

Popular web browsers in China such as QQ, Sigou and 2345 do not support WebRTC (the technology that Collaborate and many other webinar platforms leverage to facilitate the video and audio elements of their sessions), and so they cannot be used with Collaborate. There are WebRTC checker tools available that can try and assess the suitability of a browser.

Due to the above, it is recommended that attendees in China use Mozilla Firefox web browser instead of any other.

More information on supported web browsers: Collaborate Ultra Supported Web Browsers | help.blackboard.com