

Harnessing Technology, Safeguarding Further Education and Skills Learners in a Digital World

Technology is part of everyday life: we use it in our work, our leisure time and increasingly as a tool within our learning. Colleges and learning providers have always had a duty of care for their learners at the heart of their policies and practice. Now that duty of care needs to be extended to the safe use of technology. Organisations have a key role in helping learners to develop the skills they need to keep themselves safe, secure and behave appropriately when using technology for learning, leisure and work.



Key messages for leaders

- Ensure that you have a whole organisational approach to the risks which includes both educational and technological solutions.
- Embedding safeguarding online messages into generic behaviour policies.
- Make sure that there are plans in place to ensure that learners are educated to identify the risks and help them develop the skills they need to safeguard themselves.
- Work with your partners to develop consistent and coherent policies and guidance.
- Involve managers, staff and learners in developing acceptable use policies and establishing reporting procedures for unacceptable use and incident handling.

What's the issue?

It is important that learners learn how to be safe when they are using technologies, particularly Web 2.0 collaborative technologies such as social networking sites, which are becoming an essential aspect of productive and creative social learning.

The risks are often characterised by the four 'Cs':

- **Content** – this is content that may be unsuitable or potentially illegal.
- **Contact** – this may be unwelcome or inappropriate contact, it could be grooming or sexual contact.
- **Conduct** – this could be as a recipient or as an active participant – giving out too much personal information or the bullying of another person.
- **Commerce** – this could be phishing or other methods of identity theft.

It's important that as an organisation you have measures in place to manage exposure to the range of risks highlighted above.

Why is this issue important to my organisation – the national context?

Organisations are finding that a blocking and banning approach, which merely limits exposure to risk, is not sustainable. Organisations need to focus on a model of empowerment; equipping learners with the skills and knowledge they need to use technology safely and responsibly and managing the risks, wherever and wherever they go online; and to promote safe and responsible behaviours in using technology at college, in the workplace, in the home and beyond.

The common inspection framework

In the common inspection framework for further education and skills 2009, safeguarding is one of the limiting grades and is considered to be essential in assuring the quality of the development and well-being of young people and adults. The grade for safeguarding may therefore limit other grades, including the grade for overall effectiveness.

Inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:

- learners are safeguarded and protected
- staff take action to identify and respond appropriately to users' welfare concerns
- safeguarding is prioritised.

The common inspection framework provides the backdrop for all organisations to ensure that they are managing risks in the online environment as well as the offline environment.

As well as this the responsibilities of colleges and providers to safeguard and promote the welfare of its learners was enshrined in the 2002 Education Act, The 2004 Children Act and subsequent legislation including the green paper Every Child Matters.

What should your organisation be doing?

Becta, with national partner bodies, has developed a model of support that can help to manage the level of risk. It encompasses four elements: policies and practice; infrastructure and technology; education and training; standards and inspection.



Policies and practice

- Do you have an acceptable use policy (AUP)? Is everyone (including staff and learners) aware of it?
- Do you have a named senior manager responsible for safeguarding online issues in your organisation?
- What is your policy on learners bringing their own electronic devices into your organisation for use in training/tutorial sessions?
- Do you establish e-safety roles and responsibilities at the outset of partnerships?

Infrastructure and technology

- Is your organisation's network safe and secure?
- Do you have internet usage monitoring in place, so that you know who has used the internet, what they have accessed and when? Is this policy transparent to learners?

Education and training

- Do you provide regular staff development to raise awareness of e-safety?
- Do your leadership team and governors have adequate awareness of the issue of e-safety?
- Do you include staying safe online in induction and pastoral provision?

Standards and inspection

- Do you regularly review your policies, systems and activities to ensure they continue to be suitable and effective?

In December, Becta will be publishing guidance on its website for FE and Skills which will include checklists for Leaders, Curriculum Managers and teachers, learners and technical staff.
www.becta.org.uk

