

# Derby City LA PCE



**FORENSIC SOFTWARE LIMITED SPECIALISES IN DEVELOPING, SELLING AND SUPPORTING DETECTION AND PROTECTION e-SAFETY SOFTWARE TO ENSURE THE APPROPRIATE USE OF IT RESOURCES BY EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS.**

**Derby City Council takes its learning support responsibilities extremely seriously. Approximately half of its annual budget is allocated to education, 80% of which is assigned directly to schools. The Council works closely with 105 schools – 13 secondary, 8 nursery, 6 Special Educational Needs and 78 primary – in providing education for over 38,000 children each year.**

Given that commitment, it's hardly surprising that Derby City LA has taken vigorous measures to safeguard its students and teachers from the widespread and increasing threat of network abuse.

For the last 12 months – longer in some instances – the LA's weapon of choice against hackers, cyber-bullies, network violators and predators in the secondary sector has been Forensic Software's Policy Central Enterprise. (PCE)

PCE, an innovative, powerful and configurable monitoring and recording software application, is now installed in all of Derby City's secondary schools. Peter Simpson, Derby City LA's Head of ICT (Infrastructure and Support) believes

that while the Authority's primary schools don't presently have the "infrastructure and personnel to run PCE" its secondary schools are ideally suited to the software as, "secondary school culture is based on autonomy and if they have a problem they would want to know about it first and sort it out."

Monitoring software, he explains, "Generates data, but that only gets you to the start line." In practice, this means that each school deals with any issues that arise from potential abuses of the school network. Is, for example, a "Roman orgies" screen capture a genuine research query or a possible violation? There's a strong argument that a local teacher or ICT administrator is more likely to make a correct assessment than someone who does not know the children, or – and it's a possibility that can unfortunately never be entirely discounted - the staff, involved.

Peter maintains that this is the best solution. "Secondary schools", he explains "will generate the most data so giving them the workload makes it practical". The alternative would some sort of central clearing house that would generate, "huge amounts of data" through the accumulation of violation logs.



Derby City chose Policy Central partly as a result of its disenchantment with filtering software. Peter explains that, "We started with two different filtering programs but found that it was possible to access loads of inappropriate material. We tried another sort of filtering that analyses the screen dynamically rather than blocking on URL category but this didn't give us peace of mind. You then realise that filtering is limited. Becta's (British Educational Communication and Technology Agency) specification for a service provider states that the system should block 90% of inappropriate content. I don't think Becta is saying that it likes 10% of inappropriate material to be available to kids. It is recognition of the weakness of the technology. The recommendation now is 'filtering and monitoring'."

The Schools ICT team also had concerns that, "unfiltered home access could allow unsuitable material to be downloaded from the internet at home and then transferred into school". When it was pointed out that "the only product to help identify material brought into the network was PCE, the LA decided to run a pilot scheme using Policy Central in one of its secondary schools." "The head", says Peter "was alarmed and impressed in equal measure."

Peter delineates the whole selection thought-process, succinctly:

- **You start off thinking that filtering does what it says**
- **You then realise what inappropriate material is available**
- **You know that young people like to experiment**
- **You know there are as many people in the Internet community subverting filtering as there are supporting it**
- **You see monitoring software but you have a moment when you question the 'Big Brother' aspects**
- **You focus on your duty to protect kids.**

PCE in fact has no less than eight customisable violation libraries that cover topics such as pornography, profanity, violence, hate/violence, drugs and predatory behaviour. Augmenting this comprehensive set of parameters is an additional self-definable library that allows for the inclusion of user-specific words and phrases and gives Policy Central the ability to react instantly to any new violations or terms of abuse that spring up from the ever fertile ground of youthful imagination!

The initial installation, Peter reports, was "mostly easy" with some help being given by the Forensic Team who have been very responsive to the LA's specific requirements. Generally, says Peter, "the support has been excellent." Some of the participating secondary schools have laptop loan schemes but that has not been a problem as, Peter explains, "PCE can be set to operate offline."

PCE, however, offers far more than a monitoring and recording service – powerful and useful as that clearly is, being able to identify and capture violations that occur within browsers, search engines, emails, chat rooms and instant messaging as well as zipped files, spreadsheets, presentations and PDF (Portable Document Format) documents. It can also adjust web filtering and acceptable use settings depending on factors such as time of day, user need or the user profile. An extremely useful function given that at one of the secondary schools, says Peter, "the head was most concerned at the non-curricular use of the internet during lesson times." In such a situation, for example, Policy Central could block access to a non-curricular web site during lessons but allow access in free time.

Derby City does not presently have an LA-wide Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

A draft one is currently in use in one school but, says Peter, "We may decide that we offer a model only, as schools should not passively accept a given AUP but proactively decide what is appropriate for each institution." Consequently, there are few schools in the Authority where students actively 'sign' an AUP each time they log on to a school machine. Peter – and it's a view shared by many ICT professionals working in education – is sceptical of the value of a 'sign-in' AUP. "Is it a deterrent?" he asks "Not likely. It's just a screen you fly past logging on. However it does deal with 'I wasn't aware.'"

Are there any particular features of the software that have especially impressed him? "I like the fact that its evidence based – useful when trying to convince Mum that her 'precious' wouldn't have typed such a thing into Google. It has good coverage of issues – not just profanity and porn but self harm, suicide, grooming and bullying".

“The support has been excellent...”

...It does the job it is intended to do”

**Peter Simpson**  
Derby City LA's Head of ICT