

Telford and Wrekin LA



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.

- **To know we are protected from the most obvious worries in the light of the e-safety agenda.**
- **To inform our schools about the activities of their students**
- **To contribute to behaviour improvement.**

That, says Richard Lawson, ICT for Training Manager, is why Telford and Wrekin LA chose Policy Central Enterprise (PCE) to enforce acceptable use of ICT across the Authority's education networks.

PCE, Forensic Software's innovative monitoring application, was initially demonstrated to Telford and Wrekin LA's Heads of Service and then successfully piloted in a selection of different age-range schools throughout the borough. In August 2006 it was implemented in all 13 secondary schools with primary (58) and SEN (4) schools following later that autumn.

In fact, Telford and Wrekin is one of a growing number of Authorities who have chosen an LA-wide solution to counter the threats posed by network abuse and violation.

As Richard explains, for reasons of operational expediency and finance, Telford and Wrekin opted for a centrally managed system while at the same time giving their schools a degree of autonomy. "PCE is designed for large scale deployment, there is a Local Authority discount for the purchase, and technical support is obviously more effective if implemented by senior Local Authority technicians. It is safer for the authority to know that the software has been properly set up in all the schools although it could be argued that in good schools, the local 'ownership' is also effective."

Every workstation is configured with client software which collects PCE data. This information is then transmitted back to two central servers that store the information in a database and collate reports. Laptops are also monitored. If, for example, they are used offline, the information is stored locally and disgorged to the servers at the next logon. Laptop users, reports Richard, "cope fine with the monitoring."

Policy Central's 8 violation libraries allow LA staff to closely monitor and record all network activity throughout the borough. The software can also, however, be fine-



tuned to check on the activities of, say, a particular user or user group or to block access to certain web sites at specific times of day. Browsers, search engines, email, chat room and instant messaging are all scrutinised.

This form of monitoring, it should be stressed, operates entirely within current human rights legislation. The only time 'screen capture' mode is activated is when there has been a network violation.

Having run PCE for almost a year, Richard identifies the main strengths of the software as, "ease of use and the fact that students know they are being monitored and that when transgressions occur we have the evidence." To date, the most common network abuses have been the illegal downloading of games and MP3 files, attempts to access pornography, and cyber bullying.

The borough's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) which comes in three formats (for teachers, secondary students and primary students) was drawn up by Richard but individual schools are free to modify it as they see fit. Network users click on an 'accept' button each time they log on and Richard believes that while they may not, "read it assiduously" each time, the AUP does serve as a continual reminder of what is considered to be proper behaviour and as, "a focus for teachers to discuss the implications."

Madeley Academy is one of the borough's 58 secondary schools. Located in Madeley, Telford, it has established itself as one of the most successful schools in the region and - already an accredited Specialist Sports College - achieved Academy status in April 2007.

Network Manager, Steve Barnes, oversees the maintenance of the school's 200 workstations, each of which has internet and email access and is monitored by Policy Central Enterprise. Students don't have laptops but do have access to the Virtual Learning

Environment/Online Curriculum which many access from home.

At Madeley, all parents are informed that the school "can and does use monitoring and filtering software to enforce our AUP." Parents are also provided with a copy of the DfES guide, "The Dangers of the Net" which is, Steve believes, "an excellent way of making parents aware of the risks that lurk in cyberspace."

Policy Central Enterprise monitors all network activity, ensuring that the school's AUP is adhered to. Steve estimates that he and his colleagues spend less than an hour daily, checking for violations and printing logs. So far, the most common violation is "students attempting to access adult information." Should a serious incident occur that, "can't be dealt with by the school alone then an evidence report is created and the parents are invited in to discuss the matter."

Steve has been particularly impressed by the way the Forensic team has responded to its clients' needs. "The developers have worked extremely hard to resolve our issues and now, five or six versions later, it's a cracking product."

A view fully endorsed by Richard who points out that since the resolution of some initial, "traffic network issues - really no more than minor teething problems" - PCE has been a great success. Installation was relatively painless with the Forensic team giving excellent support. Most importantly perhaps, "schools love it. I expected some objections but teachers see that it is for their protection as much as the children's."

An observation, incidentally, that resonates with a number of recent surveys, most notably one conducted by the Teacher Support Network and Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2007) in which 17% of teachers questioned maintained they had been subjected to some form of cyber-bullying

with incidents ranging from, "upsetting emails and unwelcome text messages, to silent phone calls and the malicious use of websites and internet chat rooms."

Richard is confident that PCE will continue to meet the needs of Telford and Wrekin LA. "Forensic Software's solutions will enable us to monitor and address our students' IT behaviour and make our schools safer, more productive, less exposed to cyber risks and enable adherence to compliance regulations. We have found the PCE system remarkably easy to implement and it integrated easily with our existing network infrastructure. Critically, this means that all student data remains on the Local Authority central servers."

A stunning endorsement indeed. It seems facetious to ask whether Telford and Wrekin will be renewing their contract with Forensic Software. The answer could not be more emphatic,

"Yes, yes and most definitely yes."

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Richard Lawson
ICT for Training Manager
Telford and Wrekin LA