

Safer Learning Networks



Worcestershire Learning Gateway
Connecting Learning Communities



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.

Worcestershire LA is one of a growing number of authorities that have opted for a county-wide solution to the multi-faceted threat of internet and network abuse in schools. In 2006, for example, research carried out by the Anti-Bullying Alliance reported that 22% of children and young people claim to have been the target of cyber-bullying.

Policy Central Enterprise (PCE) has been bought by Worcestershire County Council as an additional e-safety measure to protect its 80, 000 students spread through 269 schools. Developed by Forensic Software, PCE complements the robust Internet filtering system already in place and ensures that students and teachers can use internet resources safely, responsibly and creatively.

The need for a different approach to e-Safety became apparent when, “We felt that we were unable to clearly identify what our networks were being used for to support teaching and learning” says James Green, teacher adviser for e-learning at Worcestershire Children’s Services. “We wanted to make strategic and informed decisions about how we could develop our

networks into learning networks.” PCE enables us to open up the network to support this rather than having to block and filter.”

The education team became aware of Policy Central through discussions with regional colleagues and looked at a range of options as well as consulting with schools and other local authorities before arriving at a decision.

James elaborates. “We chose PCE for a number of reasons. The central server model seemed advantageous and also Policy Central linked in with existing infrastructures. It is more cost effective for schools to work this way and it adds value to the broadband infrastructure that they are paying for. This obviously works for the smaller schools who do not normally have access to economies of scale that this delivery model supports. A minimal amount of admin setup was required and this has been dovetailed into existing workflows and support to schools.”

PCE is deployed centrally by Worcestershire LA for Primary, Middle and Special Education Needs (SEN) schools and installed individually in Secondary schools. The software will also be used in libraries and foster homes throughout the county.



Policy Central Enterprise is a highly sophisticated and configurable monitoring application capable of identifying and recording improper network use. This could be inappropriate language, chat site acronyms, (**ASL?** Age, sex, location: **RUA?** Are you alone: **PAW:** Parents are Watching) or specific anti-social activities such as cyber-bullying, pornography or racism. There are eight pre-configured libraries comprising more than 10,000 words and a user-configurable database which can store words and phrases which might be specific to the locality, or even the school. PCE can also distinguish between innocent 'embedded' words - Sussex, for example - and genuinely offensive ones, thus cutting down on unnecessary log checking.

Any inappropriate language that is picked up on a monitor or through keyboard activity is captured on a date and time stamped image of the computer screen. These 'violation logs' - incontrovertible evidence - can be reviewed with student, parent or - in the most extreme instance - an outside agency such as the police. PCE is able to monitor activity in chat rooms, Microsoft applications such as Word or Excel, and instant messaging or email. The days of "It wasn't me, sir, I wasn't in school that day. . . .someone else used my log-in. . . .the computer was locked. . . . I don't even know how to type. . . .".are well and truly over.

In line with BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) recommendations, Worcestershire encourages each school to develop its own Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) which students are made aware of when they use the network. "Policy Central", James explains, "Provides us with a stronger understanding of how our IT facilities are being used." This knowledge has helped each school to create an informed and robust Acceptable Use Policy that has evolved from a set of principles established by the community stakeholders. Ultimately, he adds, "It is about developing

responsible use and understanding that there are consequences to misuse."

In the year since it has been installed, PCE has proved to be an invaluable resource. "The partnership with Forensic", says James, "has been second to none and it has almost been like employing an additional advisor."

Lloyd Roberts, head of ICT at Bewdley School and Sixth Form Centre concurs. "The company are really switched on to the needs of the school and the staff are helpful" he says, "and the installation was fast and easy."

Transparency, trust, instant feedback and the production of evidence that can be easily used are, Lloyd maintains, the key to the success of PCE in the school. of some 1200 students and 60 staff. "The students know what happens and are shown how the software works. A transparent system is essential. The students are responsible users in a partnership with the school. As a result we have very few violations. Being on YouTube too often, perhaps, and sending and receiving emails with inappropriate words. PCE leads to a trusting environment where people can make mistakes and be treated fairly."

At Bewdley, PCE works in tandem with the school's three Acceptable Use Policies, one each for staff, sixth form and students. The students created their own AUP – a growing trend in UK schools – and Lloyd is presently putting together a community one.

The huge range of online communication tools now available and the proliferation of social networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Bebo, present difficult choices for educators, administrators and ICT staff. Blocking and filtering offensive content and unsavoury web sites is the most obvious solution – and an effective one too - especially for younger, more vulnerable students. As James observes, "students' competence to evade security on networks is now commonplace hence

the need to develop more sophisticated and educational focussed strategies."

It would be a mistake, however, to dwell exclusively on the deterrent features of Policy Central – good as they undoubtedly are. In Worcestershire, the onus is on enablement rather than proscription. Better, surely, to direct students towards a socially acceptable use of internet and network resources that, properly managed, can be educational, stimulating and relevant. Instant messaging, podcasting and social networking can all have educational value if parameters of decency are set and observed. And this is something that can be achieved with the judicious use of Policy Central Enterprise and a well considered Acceptable Use Policy. "From my perspective as county lead of ICT and Learning Technologies", says James' colleague, Dave Thomson, "Policy Central Enterprise joins a collection of tools that together allow more open access to online services for young people and it is an important counter to the often knee-jerk reaction to block them."

James Green recalls that when the pilot study of the software was run in a Worcester school, "we moved from blocking and filtering to looking at learning opportunities and access. This was important as it gave the ownership back to the teachers and a window back onto our network."

Policy Central Enterprise is helping us develop good practice and responsible use of our network to support teaching and learning.