

Online Safety Policy and Practice in the UK – An Analysis of 360 degree safe self review data

Aims

360 degree safe was launched by the South West Grid for Learning in November 2009 to allow schools to (i) evaluate their online safety provision; (ii) benchmark that provision against others; (iii) identify and prioritise areas for improvement; and (iv) find advice and support to move forward. This research evaluates the self review data submitted by 547 institutions across the UK to evaluate areas of strength and weakness in online safety policy and practice in UK schools.

Key Findings

The data shows that in some aspects there are strengths, and these generally focus on infrastructure and policy areas. Based upon a self review rating of 1 being best and 5 being worst, average values across all institutions show the greatest strength in areas such as:

- Filtering (2.57)
- Acceptable Use Policies (2.78)
- Policy Scope (2.8)
- Policy development (3.02)

However, in these weakest areas, around wider engagement or education, the data suggests that schools require further development and support:

- Community understanding (4.03)
- Governor training (4.03)
- Monitoring the impact of policy and practice (3.96)
- E-Safety Committee (3.94)
- Staff training (3.84)

A comparison of scores between primary and secondary schools in various aspects of online safety policy and practice reveals that primary schools are consistently less developed compared with secondary schools. Primary schools also have significant issues in whole school involvement and those issues that require significant specialist input:

- Whole School (1.5 difference in average ratings between primary and secondary schools)
- Community understanding (1.23)
- Password security (0.93)
- Technical Security (0.81)

There is some evidence that urban setting might have better resourcing to provide a more consistent practice than in rural settings.

This research shows, drawing from an extremely large and detailed evidence base, the areas of weakness related to online safety policy and practice in schools. It raises concern in the areas of training and monitoring, as well as wider community engagement. It demonstrates that schools are not confident in equipping their staff, governors or communities with up to date awareness of the latest online safety issues.

Policy Context

Primary and secondary schools are required to develop and implement appropriate online safety policies and practices. However, the level of confidence and expertise is subject to considerable variation. It is necessary to measure the provision of appropriate policy and practice in order to identify gaps in knowledge and expertise which could negatively affect the ability of schools to fulfil their safeguarding role.

Methodology

Data collection is by school self review via the 360 degree safe website. This analysis is based on self-evaluation data.

The relational database backend to the self review tool allows for detailed quantitative analysis of self review data at various levels of granularity, from individual institutions to UK wide. The data also allows for the analysis of specific aspects of online safety policy and practice across participating institutions for comparative purposes.

Sources The 360 degree safe tool can be found at <http://www.360safe.org.uk/>

Full details of the research can be found at <http://www.swgfl.org.uk/Staying-Safe/Content/News-Articles/Largest-ever-survey-of-E-Safety-in-schools-reveals>

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