

AoC NILTA recognises that access to technology among young people, which allows for the dissemination of information and the creation of content, is now so pervasive that any attempt to fully control how, when and where it is used is neither possible nor enforceable; moreover, as part of the broader [Every Child Matters](#) and Staying Safe Agenda, it has been noted that the principles adopted to protect young people should apply as much to the 'virtual' as the 'real' world in that:

'Although undoubtedly these aims were written with the 'real world' in mind, many equally apply to the 'virtual world' that children and young people may encounter when they use ICT in its various forms. Indeed, for many young people, the online world is very much their reality – offering them unprecedented opportunities to communicate, create, discover and be entertained in a virtual environment.'[\[Becta\]](#)

It is better to support young people in their use of technology for learning, in raising awareness of cyberbullying and navigating the Internet, with guidance rather than attempting to control and regulate the use of technology and online resources, other than responsible screening and fire-walling as part of good practice in Colleges. AoC NILTA argues however that any attempt to implement purely technical solutions to e-safety issues, for example the use of content filters and prescriptive firewalls, will not fully address the issue of e-safety. AoC NILTA instead recommends that the responsible use of technology and online resources should form part of the general curriculum within Further Education colleges (rather than in simply IT subject specific areas) as part of the drive towards increasing digital literacy, and the development of 'e - maturity' at the institutional level. In [recent work undertaken with Becta](#), AoC NILTA has argued that guidance on the issues surrounding e –safety and cyberbullying has, to date, mainly been drawn from the work done to protect children from online predators and exposure to offensive material, and that much of this work has focused on schools. AoC NILTA has argued that if guidance was to be effective in reaching students and staff then it has to recognise the social and legal transitions within the 14 – 19 age groups. It has been suggested that a broader definition of 'e – safety' was essential if the advice and policies developed are to have an impact on those students to whom they are addressed.

The question arises then of how Colleges might become 'e – mature' institutions which recognise the diversity of the community they it serve. Policies that are overly generic, too prescriptive, rely too much on retroactive punishment and which fail to address the requirements of students, teachers and staff will not secure the support of those they are intended to benefit. It is argued here that without the active support of staff and students, any e –safety policy will not be wholly effective.

Any solutions offered to foster e – safety ought therefore to:

- Allow the individual College to develop policies and practices that suit its specific requirements;
- Be implemented through procedures that are clear, consistent and fully understood by staff and students;

- Recognise that overly prescriptive policies and a view of young people simply as 'victims' will not be effective in developing an 'e – mature' community within a college;
- Ensure that awareness of e – safety issues and cyberbullying are part of a whole College approach to its duty of care.

The mechanisms by which effective e – safety policies might best be implemented should include:

- using checklists that enable individual colleges to develop its own policies, rather than relying on generic templates and case studies of 'best practice';
- developing Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) that are updated regularly to take into account developments in technology and patterns of use and which are drawn up in consultation with staff and students;
- ensuring that technical solutions and attendant procurement strategies comply with best practice. (See Becta's [functional and technical specifications](#) for further information).

The preceding overview of some of the issues relating to e – safety is intended to stimulate debate among colleagues and AoC NILTA welcomes any contributions which you may wish to make. Please use the contact section of this website to share your views and suggest how we might work together to ensure that technology is used responsibly.

Resources

[AoC NILTA online E – Safety Library](#)

[Becta Online Safeguarding](#)

[UK Children Go Online](#)

[The UK Access Management Federation](#)

[Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre](#)

[E – Safety.org](#)

[Teachernet - Cyberbullying](#)

[Net Moderator – latest developments in monitoring software](#)