Derwen College: E-safety awareness for vulnerable learners

Summary

Derwen College has taken an innovative approach to e-safety. By creating a pseudo Facebook profile, staff are able to demonstrate and highlight to students the safeguarding issues associated with social networks. This has resulted in increased awareness of staying safe online, and recognition by Ofsted who referred to Derwen’s arrangements for safeguarding as ‘outstanding’ in their latest inspection report.

About Derwen College

Derwen is an independent residential specialist College close to the Welsh border. Catering for students aged between 16 and 24 years, the College supports students with varying degrees of physical disabilities and learning difficulties.

The College's specialism is to teach through the medium of vocational programmes that promote employability through direct experiences in work, rather than merely training for work. By providing services to members of the public, all students have opportunities to learn skills for the world beyond College.

The last Ofsted inspection resulted in an ‘Outstanding’ grade overall. Derwen is also a Beacon Status College recognised for its excellence and innovation in delivery.

www.jiscrse/casestudies
The challenge

In 2009, Derwen College set up a closed Ning social network aimed at Derwen students who were about to leave the College, as well as alumni. The network was free at the time; however Ning began charging for usage.

Dan Valentine, ILT Teacher says, “We were looking for value for money and as the students are more familiar with Facebook, it made sense to go down that route. We also found that family members had set up Facebook profiles for the students prior to attending Derwen College as a way of communicating with them whilst away from home.”

This presented problems as staff at Derwen discovered at the start of each term. A high percentage of students did not seem fully aware of e-safety issues such as posting certain types of information on their profiles and accepting friend requests from unfamiliar people.

Russell Pentz, Head of Department says, “At Derwen we are responsible for the education and safeguarding of vulnerable young adults. This extends to making sure that they stay safe online. If we don’t allow them access to Facebook in a supportive environment where staff are at hand to support them, what will happen when they leave college?”

Derwen College staff felt that blocking access to the social network was not the answer and wanted to teach the students how to use Facebook responsibly.

The activity

Russell and his team created a Derwen College Facebook account which learners agree to ‘friend’ upon joining the College. It is monitored by Russell, Dan and teacher Helen Edwards and allows them to look at trends amongst the learners’ Facebook profiles and identify those ‘at risk.’ This includes learners who have exceptionally large numbers of friends, anomalies in associations and sensitive information shared on profiles.

Image 1: Bradbury Centre
They also set up a pseudo Facebook profile in the name of ‘Georgina Price’ displaying a profile picture of a model. A friend request was sent out to all those learners who were considered to be ‘at risk.’

Russell says, “Our learners learn better by doing so we timetabled half a day per week, as part of the Personal Development programme, specifically for e-safety. It includes the use of Facebook and other social networking sites. In this session, we use the pseudo Facebook profile to highlight some of the dangers of using social networking sites and to re-inforce the importance of staying safe online.”

The session covers the following points

- All students are asked if they consider themselves to be safe on Facebook. All believe that they act safely

- They are all asked ‘who is friends with ‘Georgina Price?’ Some learners are unsure. Helen and Dan then reveal that most of the group has in fact accepted ‘Georgina’s’ friend request

- The students are asked who Georgina Price is, have they seen her around the College and why they are friends with her? The group is unsure who she is and admit to not seeing her at Derwen College

- The group is shown some of Georgina’s wall postings – some of the male students have expressed an interest in dating Georgina and commented on her attractiveness. They are asked how they know that ‘Georgina’ is a female in real life?

- To re-inforce the message that the students don’t know who ‘Georgina’ really is (and could in fact be anyone), Helen and Dan reveal the real face behind the Facebook profile which, fortunately for the students is Dan

- Helen or Dan discuss sharing personal information such as telephone numbers, postcodes and photos. The students are asked what potential dangers are associated with sharing such information. Some students relate what they discuss in the session to a television programme that they have seen on the dangers of sharing personal information on social networking sites

- The students are asked if there is anyone else on their individual profile that they don’t really know and the group discusses the concept of a ‘real friend’ and a ‘Facebook friend.’ The students recognise the need to keep only family and real friends on their Facebook profiles

- Helen and Dan ask the students to review their own profiles and try to get them to agree a deadline as to when this will happen. They also ask the group who they can ask for help if needed

In addition to the timetabled sessions, drop-ins are also available for students who need one-to-one support, and may need further encouragement to follow
up on the discussions.

‘At risk’ learners are also identified through the personal tutor system where staff meet with the students regularly on a one-to-one basis. The meetings are another way for staff to encourage the learners to review their Facebook profiles.
The outcomes

Of the current cohort of students at Derwen College, 55 are Facebook users. 35 of those students accepted Georgina Price as a friend.

In academic year 2011-12, Derwen carried out a similar exercise using a different pseudo Facebook profile and in academic year 2012-13, there were only 5 students who were repeat 'befrienders.'

The students are genuinely shocked when Dan and Helen reveal that Georgina is not real, and as a direct result, some students take immediate action by removing ‘friends’ from their profiles that they don’t know, and removing or hiding sensitive information such as mobile phone numbers and pictures of family members.

Dan says, “It’s a continuous process. The awareness raising doesn’t end when the session does. We continue to monitor the students’ Facebook profiles to ensure that they follow up on what we discussed in the session. Personal tutor meetings help with this and the drop-ins allow the students to get one-to-one support on changing their Facebook security settings. The students are also constantly reminded about e-safety with the various wall displays and notices around the College.”

Russell adds, “The e-safety sessions also feed into citizenship. It makes the students think about relationships and what is a true friend.”

“The sessions have also brought us more in partnership with the parents. During holidays, anything can happen so it’s important that the parents understand what we are trying to do.”

The impact

In March 2012, the College was inspected by Ofsted who awarded the College an outstanding grade overall. Specifically, they highlighted the work that Derwen is doing to safeguard its students:

“The College’s arrangements for safeguarding learners are outstanding. Learners’ individual risk assessments are very comprehensive and are reviewed continually. Teachers emphasize the importance of health and safety frequently through lessons. The promotion of e-safety is innovative and highly effective.

Careful monitoring and risk management by the College enable learners to use a wide range of technologies, including social networking sites, confidently, sensibly and independently” Ofsted, March 2012

Dan adds, “The inspectors were also particularly impressed with the creation of the pseudo Facebook profile and commented on this during the inspection.”

www.jiscrse/casestudies
The College also received recognition through the JISC TechDis OASES award for Institutional Progress on Equality using Technology. The judges specifically commented:

“The use of Facebook to discuss e-safety is a wonderful example of pragmatism.”

**The lessons learned**

Dan says, “The pseudo Facebook profile has worked extremely well and allows us to keep any eye on what’s happening. We have seen some inappropriate wall postings in the past and those have been dealt with.”

Building on the success of the e-safety sessions, Derwen College is currently planning to create a suite of e-safety videos and Xerte objects aimed specifically at vulnerable learners – a gap which Derwen College believes needs to be filled, as the resources currently available are either aimed at school children or the language is not appropriate for vulnerable learners. Also on the horizon are timetabled sessions which focus specifically on Facebook management such as security settings.

Russell says, “We are a residential College and so our duty of care does not end at 5pm when the lessons do. It’s not about blocking access to social networks – it’s about educating the learners to behave responsibly and independently online so that when they do leave College, they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to stay safe.”

**Useful links**

- [Derwen College](#)
- [Derwen College’s Facebook page](#)
- [Derwen College’s Latest Ofsted Report](#)
- [Jisc TechDis OASES award](#)
- [Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)](#)

---

**Disclaimer**

Jisc Regional Support Centres work with more than 2,000 UK learning providers helping them to improve performance and efficiency through the use of technology. Case studies may refer to specific products, processes or services. Such references are examples and are not endorsements or recommendations and should not be used for product endorsement purposes.