

Byron Review Omits to Mention Existing Course

"Safer Children in a Digital World", the report of the Byron Review issued on 27th March 2008, has been well-received, and deservedly so. It offers a balanced view which takes account of both the benefits and the dangers of children using the internet, and it makes several useful and practical suggestions which could be implemented to minimise the dangers.

However there is one glaring omission - the report does not mention that a certificated Internet Safety course has been available from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) since 2006 and is widely taught in Scottish schools and further afield. It is thought to be the only course of this type available from a national awarding body in the EU.

The course isn't only for schools - it's also offered to adults, including parents, teachers and youth workers through evening classes in many further education colleges. Strathclyde Police Force has used it for training police cadets and it has also been offered to around 4000 pupils in Manchester schools. A complete online package of teaching and assessment materials is available from SQA and a purpose-written textbook entitled "Internet Safety Skills", has been published by Scotland's leading educational publishers, Leckie and Leckie.

The omission of the course from the report is puzzling, especially since various other examples of good practice are described, including one from Ireland. Dr. Byron emphasises the importance of improved education for both children and parents throughout the report, but does not mention that a suitable course, complete with all the required materials, is already available.

There is nothing to stop every Education Authority in the UK from adopting this course immediately, instead of waiting, probably for several years, until alternative courses are developed. The potential is there to reduce the exposure of millions of children to online dangers and to increase their parents' knowledge of Internet hazards and how to avoid them.

The SQA course is interesting and engaging, while remaining highly practical. It provides information about the safety precautions which should be taken when using the Internet, and gives students practical experience in taking these. It is suitable for a variety of individuals, especially young people, parents and mature Internet users.

The first section examines the threats that can exist when using the Internet, including spam, malicious programs (eg: viruses, worms, trojans, spyware, adware and rogue diallers), hackers, phishing, identity theft and emerging threats such as ransomware. It places particular emphasis on threats to user safety including cyberbullying, inappropriate behaviour and grooming and highlights the fact that these threats can appear in a variety of contexts, eg: chat rooms, e-mail, social networking sites and instant messaging.

The second section covers safety precautions which should be taken including firewalls, anti-virus and e-mail filtering software and Internet security suites. Precautions for maintaining user safety include content filtering, proxy servers, monitoring and reporting user behaviour and withholding personal information.

The third part considers some of the legal aspects of using the Internet, including copyright, data protection, digital rights management, software licensing schemes (such as freeware and shareware), legal constraints on the construction of websites (including disability discrimination legislation) and legislation relating to illegal content (such as racist, terrorist and pornographic material). It also examines child protection legislation which prohibits grooming and inappropriate behaviour towards minors.

The last part focuses on providing practical experience of taking relevant safety precautions. Students are expected to install and configure anti-virus and anti-spyware programs, firewalls, spam filters and internet security suites and to show that they can take additional precautions for maintaining user safety, including content filtering, proxy servers, monitoring and reporting user behaviour and withholding personal information.

Many people will be happy to simply follow the content of the course and improve their knowledge of Internet Safety. Those who wish to do so can be assessed and, if successful, be awarded a certificate by SQA. The assessment consists a short multiple choice test, which can be taken online, and a log recording the practical work carried out during the course, which can be submitted in electronic format, eg: as a blog or an online portfolio.

About the Author

Ted Hastings is an education and IT consultant with more than 35 years of experience. He writes a popular blog entitled [Surf Safely](#). The [Internet Safety course](#) is available online from Millennium City Academy. Don't reprint this exact article. Instead, reprint a free [unique content](#) version of this same article.

