

Guidance for the safe use of videoconference equipment in school environments.

This document is designed to be used in conjunction with the school's Internet Security policy statement and has been prepared for use in Birmingham Local Education Authority schools.

Background:-

The implementation of videoconference equipment in schools, and the creation of a robust and capable information communications infrastructure have reached an important threshold. This threshold was reached when the internet bandwidth accessible by all schools (primary, secondary and special) exceeded 1mb. The next threshold will be reached when over half the potential schools have a videoconference unit installed.

The current LA/City progress for broadband connectivity has ensured that all schools have access to 10mg connectivity, while many have 100mg connections.

As this increased bandwidth is created, the switches and software used to enable the bandwidth to be used fully is regularly being upgraded. In addition, the creation of Regional Broadband Consortia (RBC's) and the JVCS (JANET Video Conference Service) has ensured that pathways have been created that link schools across the country. These pathways are increasingly robust and dependable with equal progress in connection quality and stability.

The creation of this enhanced information superhighway, brings with it the real possibility that all Birmingham schools can have 24/7 videoconference connectivity at high bandwidth, with stable audio and visual signals. The educational potential of this facility is extreme, opening up the possibility of faultless multi-point conferencing, application sharing and live video capture and web streaming as an integral part of the school environment.

Over the past six years ATHENA EICAZ has been trialing and evaluating a range of videoconference applications within a range of school contexts and a wealth of expertise and experience to be developed.

It is from this background that the Guidance for the safe use of videoconference equipment in school environments has emerged.

Advice to Schools

Videoconference equipment offers schools huge potential to open up the school and classrooms to new and exciting educational opportunities. It also has the potential to be abused. As with all other Electronic Communication mediums, schools should be aware that they have a

responsibility to ensure all computer equipment is used in a way that guarantees the safety of all those involved in its use at all times.

General

- Do not leave videoconference equipment unattended, or on in locations that are isolated
- Children should never be left to videoconference unsupervised
- Be aware that if the videoconference equipment is ON, it needs to be monitored by an adult.
- Only authorised adults should take responsibility for a videoconference
- Only videoconference with known and approved sources
- Never let children exchange personal information across a videoconference
- Seek parental permission for pupil's to take part in a videoconference
- Be aware that it is possible for the remote location to take pictures via the videoconference equipment and to zoom in on specific individuals
- Do not leave videoconference equipment on 'auto-answer'
- Ensure the videoconference equipment is secure and correctly configured
- Ensure everyone in the school knows how to videoconference safely
- Ensure a procedure is established and known, for the reporting of any miss-use of the videoconference facility

Definition of videoconference equipment.

There are many products available that claim to offer videoconference facilities. These range from small web-cam devices to full blown videoconference suites complete with conference lectern, microphones and projection facilities.

This guidance refers to any equipment that is capable of capturing live audio and visual information and digitally distributing it.

Installation of videoconference equipment.

- Decide what the prime use of the equipment will be and where it will be installed
- Decide who will be the named contact in the school for videoconference equipment and use
- Decide how the equipment will be sited and secured
- Establish a procedure for the regular checking of equipment use and configuration

Connectivity

- Ensure any installations conform to BGfL connectivity standards and is correctly configured and protected
- It is not recommended that schools use ADSL telephone lines to videoconference
- It is not recommended that schools videoconference using ISDN to ISDN connections. External connections should always be made through the BGfL gateway

Benefits of purchasing videoconference equipment recommended by Birmingham City Council:-

- The equipment complies with Birmingham's Quality of Service Standards
- The equipment is capable of connecting to the BGfL and integrating with internal and external sites.
- A current list of approved suppliers is available from Link2ICT

Management and Training

- Decide how the use of videoconference will be managed - for classroom use; for the use of senior managers in school; for other groups within, and external to the school; for curriculum; for training; for instruction
- Ensure all school staff are trained in the use of the videoconference equipment and understand the safe procedures required

Videoconference

- All videoconference sessions should be planned and approved
- Wherever possible, meet with the videoconference provider beforehand via the videoconference equipment and check who is going to be delivering material, the content and format for the videoconference.
- Take note of, and implement the guidance given, in the document "Best Practice in the use of videoconference in Schools"

Copy of 'Best Practice...' can be found on the ATHENA website - www.ATHENA.bham.org.uk

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