

New computer qualification for Scots aged 12 and over believed to be the first of its kind

Internet course will alert pupils to dangers

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PUPILS from the age of 12 are to be taught about the dangers of the internet as part of a new qualification believed to be the first of its kind in the world.

From the start of next term, secondary pupils at a number of pilot schools will be able to take an Intermediate 1 course on internet safety, which teaches them about the dangers of

'The survey showed levels of concern and areas teachers wanted addressed'

grooming and cyber bullying and how to protect themselves against viruses and identity theft.

The new course will also

highlight issues such as spam, hacking, copyright, the use of firewalls and spyware.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) developed the qualification after a survey of 550 teachers and college lecturers earlier this year which found the vast majority was concerned about pupil safety.

The survey found that 95% of respondents were concerned about internet safety, with 91% saying they were concerned about the use or downloading of inappropriate material by pupils or students.

More than 85% said they were concerned about pupils making inappropriate friendships online and the use of chat rooms while another major worry was students giving out personal details online.

Nearly 40% said they would be interested in offering an SQA course on the subject, while more than 80% said they

would use the teaching materials even if they did not offer a qualification.

Bobby Elliott, the SQA's qualifications manager, who helped develop the course with Strathclyde Police, child protection agencies and Microsoft, said there was a clear demand from schools and colleges for the qualification.

"The survey showed us the levels of concern there were about the use of the internet by pupils and the key areas which teachers wanted addressed," he said. The unit will offer a mixture of theory and practice and will give pupils the opportunity to discuss online dangers and also practice ways of reducing them."

The qualification will involve two assessments consisting of a multiple choice test and a practical exercise, both of which will be completed online, making it the SQA's first that is only available

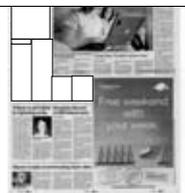
online – although other courses are set to follow.

The course will be piloted from next month at 38 schools and colleges across Scotland, including Cardinal Newman High School in North Lanarkshire, where 150 from S1 pupils will take the exam, Adam Smith College in Fife and

Lanark Grammar, where 20 fifth and sixth-year pupils will take part.

Mr Elliott also believes the qualification will appeal to teachers and other professionals who use the internet.

"Anyone who uses the internet will benefit from this and it makes sense to offer it to as wide a range of people as possible including parents, teachers, librarians, other professionals who use the internet as well as pensioners."





Five ways to stay safe

Install appropriate software to prevent the spread of viruses and don't open suspect e-mails.

Don't give personal details such as e-mails or mobile numbers to internet chat rooms.

Don't pass on credit card

details to any sites that you are unsure of.

Use legal websites to download music or other files to ensure you don't breach copyright.

Install firewalls to stop others accessing your computer when you are online.

'I trust her. Nicole's street-wise'

CORMAC BEAGAN

LIKE most 13-year-olds, Nicole Pottie likes to surf the internet. She spends up to three hours a day using the computer at her home in Glasgow, with MSN and My Space being her favourite websites.

Her school IT lessons cover

security, so she does not think using the internet safely is a problem.

Mother Debbie has set up the computer up in the kitchen rather than Nicole's bedroom.

She said: "She's mature enough to be safe. I trust her, she's pretty street-wise."

The family has not had any

internet-related problems with the computer, which has virus protection. But Debbie confesses she is not the most computer literate and would like to take a course.

Meantime, she thinks that what Nicole learns at school should be enough to keep her daughter safe.





GONE SURFING: Nicolle Pottie spends up to three hours a day on the internet, but her mother is confident that she will not get into trouble. Picture: Colin Mearns



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