



ICT ADVICE: WI-FI

Wi-fi is being used increasingly as an easy means of accessing information while on the move, whether around the campus or outside the campus.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Devices

- Traditionally, laptops have been able to access networks wirelessly, and most laptops now have this facility built in.
- Many phones and palmtops (PDAs) carried by pupils now have wireless built in, and these can access a network or the internet in the same way as a laptop.
- Once connected to a wi-fi network, users can access the Internet, emails, and most facilities that would be available over a conventional cabled network.
- Phones, PDAs and increasingly laptops can also access network facilities (e.g. the Internet) via the 'mobile phone' networks, which is of course wireless.

Provision of wi-fi within your school

- If you decide to provide wi-fi access to your network, it could enable your staff, pupils, guests (and possibly even strangers walking past the school), to use your network from any wi-fi enabled device (laptop, mobile phone, etc.)
- You need to decide whether you wish to go down this line, and if so what security measures you are going to implement.

Provision of wi-fi near your school

- If there are domestic or business properties near your school, or your boarding houses, it may be possible for your pupils to connect to these wi-fi networks and use their network rather than the school's (filtered) Internet connection.
- In principle, these domestic/business systems should be secured so as not to allow this, but experience has shown that many are left 'open'.
- Some companies (MacDonald's) and some wide areas (Milton Keynes, Cambridge etc.) have decided to provide wi-fi areas for free or chargeable access to anyone.

Security considerations

- Users would potentially have the same facilities available to them as if they were plugged into the cable network.

- You must ensure that the system allows you to restrict access, and/or restrict what facilities are available to anyone connecting.
- Many of the modern 'wi-fi management' systems allow you to decide exactly what, say, a visitor to the school could access via your wi-fi system.

Health risks

- There are some who think that there might be health risks to users of wi-fi, or that some individuals might be susceptible to the wireless radiation.
- There is as yet little scientific evidence of this, and much scientific theory which dispels the theory.

WHAT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO DISCUSS

Are we going to provide a wi-fi facility at school, and if so will it be site-wide, or restricted to certain areas?

- How refined do we need the management and security to be?
- Are we going to allow access through 'non-laptop' devices, such as PDAs and phones?
- Have we got the expertise within the school to answer these questions, or do we need to bring in external consultants?
- Are we proposing that visitors to the school might be allowed access to certain facilities?

Are there potential risks of our pupils using neighbouring unfiltered wi-fi (in domestic or business properties) and if so how should we deal with this?

WHAT YOU MIGHT CONSIDER DOING NEXT

Review any existing wi-fi coverage, both from the viewpoint of coverage, and of security and other issues.

Discuss the advantages or otherwise of providing (more) wi-fi coverage within the school.