



Media Mentors give students a 'HeadStart'

Students and staff from three local secondary schools have taken part in an innovative pilot programme showing the dangers of not being able to escape from the internet.

Southampton Solent University hosted a 'Media Mentor' event - the first to be held by them in conjunction with the Big Lottery-funded HeadStart Southampton project.

Media Mentoring is one of the three components of HeadStart Southampton being delivered by Solent University for Southampton City Council. It is a purpose-built programme designed to help deal with the increasing presence of technology in young people's lives, and to encourage them to have fun online, whilst at the same time remaining safe and secure.

As well as students learning how they are linked to the digital world and how the internet can infringe their rights, the day allowed staff to view the internet from the perspective of the children.

The event was filmed, and is currently being turned into a book.

"We want young people to fully understand the risks of putting personal information online and actually think twice before they do it," says Natalie Johnson, Southampton City Council's HeadStart Project Co-ordinator.

"It cannot be stressed enough how important it is for students to understand the link between themselves and the digital world, and this was the foundation of the day.

"The internet is an incredibly powerful tool and can be great fun if used sensibly, but it is now recognised that issues such as cyber-bullying, 'sexting' and even child sexual exploitation are of growing concern as many more children have their smart phones with them all day at school and all evening at home. There is no 'escape' from what is being said on social media channels."

Psychology, media, and PR and communication student volunteers from Southampton Solent University were trained to become media mentors to the students.

As well as looking at internet safety, 38 pupils, aged between 12 and 14, learnt about digital literacy, digital media, and how to report issues on social media. Before the day started, 53% understood how the internet could infringe their human rights, compared to 100% after the event.

Reupes Bains, from Redbridge School, said: "Thank you very much for sharing the resources. It was a great day and the children enjoyed this very much."

Georgi Ivanov, Project Developer for Media Mentors and the Southampton Solent University HeadStart Co-ordinator adds: "I think it is really important to teach the younger generation how they can have power over technology, not vice versa.

"Social media is a now part of everyday life, and so it is especially important that they know how to use the sites responsibly and with caution.

"I think the really innovative part about this programme is that we are providing young people with the tools to keep themselves safe on line and to raise their awareness of the risks associated with the digital media. The book and film

created from the event, the first time something like this has been created in this way, will allow other young people to benefit as well.

“Our work with staff and pupils has helped to create a programme that can be utilised as a positive in an OFSTED review.

“This pilot is an approach that could be of wider value to schools in the city, particularly if it proves successful and the scheme is rolled out to all schools in the area.”

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT THE MEDIA OFFICE ON 023 8201 3079 or press.office@solent.ac.uk

About Southampton Solent University

Southampton Solent University offers more than 19,000 students over 200 qualifications ranging from HND to PhD, in subjects such as maritime education and training, fashion and design, media and television, music, health, sport and leisure, business, IT and technology. The University was awarded the 2013 Quality Assurance kitemark for quality and standards of teaching and learning. Solent was voted one of the most creative universities in the UK in a Which? University 2014 poll of students. Solent Business School has been awarded the Small Business Charter Award, which is supported by the Association of Business Schools and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and ‘gold approval’ by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).