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PRESS RELEASE

DATA PROTECTION SURVEY SHOWS THAT VIRTUALLY ALL LOCAL STUDENTS AGED 11 AND OVER USE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

This year the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority, as the Data Protection Commissioner undertook its second schools survey on the use of Social Networking Sites ("SNS") and privacy. In summary, the key findings of the survey are the following:

- 97% of Year 7 students use SNS
- Virtually all local students over 11 use SNS and 3 quarters use it daily
- 37% of the students hardly ever, or never use appropriate privacy controls
- Risks to privacy from the unauthorised disclosure and interception of photographs
- 1 in 4 students reveal information about others without their consent
- 9 out of 10 students use access controls on their mobile phones
- Students increase their use of SNS as they get older
- Year 9 students are the least secure when using SNS and portable devices.

Notably, the results show that virtually all the students over the age of 11 use at least one SNS and, worryingly, 37% hardly ever, or never, use the privacy controls.

The Commissioner's school survey is part of his Control Your Privacy Campaign, and is carried out with the co-operation of the Department of Education. Last year the Commissioner carried out a similar survey of Year 7 students. Building on this, participation in this year's survey more than doubled, with students from four different "year groups" taking part. The survey comprised of 893 students, consisting of 558 boys and 335 girls, with most being between the ages of 11 and 18, and a minority being over 18.

The survey covered a wide range of Gibraltar's youth, encompassing Year 7 students from Bishop Fitzgerald Middle School, St. Anne's Middle School, Sacred Heart Middle School, St. Joseph's Middle School and Loreto Convent. Also surveyed were Year 9 and Year 11 students from Bayside School, Year 11 students from Westside School and students aged 15 and over from the Gibraltar College.

The purpose of the survey was to obtain an understanding on the extent of use of SNS amongst local students between the ages of 11 and 18. Additionally, the survey also served to learn about the habits of these students with regards to SNS, in particular, which SNS are being used, the reasons and frequency of use, and the extent to which available privacy controls are being used. Finally, the survey also enabled the Commissioner to establish the extent to which the students using mobile devices, use available security, namely password or PIN.



RESULTS

Whilst many of the results do not show significantly alarming traits nor reflect tendencies which are of grave concern to the Commissioner, there are, however, some notable results.

In particular, it was found that virtually all the students surveyed used at least one SNS. It is worth noting that the survey included Year 7 students (aged 10-11) and that 97% of these stated that they used at least one SNS. In this respect, in many cases, certainly for 2 of the 3 most popular SNS used by the Year 7 students, the minimum age for use is 13. This statistic in itself is worrying, not only because it shows a disregard of the age restrictions imposed by SNS, but also because of the high percentage of the Year 7 students using platforms which are not designed for their age group.

Notable too is that three quarters of the students use SNS every day, in particular to message friends. The high amount of usage highlights the importance of continually emphasising the significance of safe use of personal data in SNS.

Considering that virtually all students surveyed use SNS, the most worrying result is that 37% of the students hardly ever, or never use the privacy controls. To be specific, 25% never use the privacy controls, whereas 12% hardly ever use them. The positive aspect of this statistic is that nearly two thirds of the students do use privacy controls, meaning that overall, there is a large awareness of the use of privacy controls in SNS. The Commissioner, however, still believes that 37% is a very high percentage, in particular for the younger students.

It is also worth noting that the three most popular SNS are Skype, Facebook, and Snapchat. In this respect, Skype and Facebook provide a number of functions; Facebook, for example, allows users to post comments, photographs and videos, and Skype allows its users to communicate via message, voice and video. However, Snapchat is specifically designed for the exchange of photographs and little else. In other words, given that 70% use Snapchat, for example, it may be implied that there are a large number of photographs being made available to another party and, in every case, there is an element of risk as regards unauthorised disclosure to a third party, interception by hackers or the photograph being used maliciously in the future.

It is important to note that the students surveyed, namely between the ages of 11 and 18, represent the majority of students in Gibraltar over the age of 11, as most students over 18 proceed to further develop their studies abroad. Thereby, the results provide a strong indication of the use of new technologies by all students in Gibraltar as from the age of 11.

The Commissioner's office is at the public's disposal should anyone wish to discuss matters which affect their privacy or feel that their data protection rights are not being correctly addressed.

For further information please contact the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority on +350 20074636 or email privacy@gra.gi.

Extract of survey results

