

The Diploma in Information Technology

Teachers' notes

The two activities are:

Activity 1: Should governments censor the internet? – A discussion exercise on this controversial subject.

Activity 2: Mobilising the grass roots – A research and action-focused task based on using the internet to mobilise support for a 'cause'.

Curriculum links

QCA guidance suggests that students can 'explore the use of IT and the internet in communicating ideas, influencing public opinion, and lobbying and campaigning on issues of concern' (level 2 and 3 guidance).

They should also 'investigate social, ethical, legal and economic implications of the use of IT' (QCA level 2 guidance). Through research into technology they should be able to describe how it is changing the way society operates and 'demonstrate knowledge and understanding of citizenship issues in relation to their findings... and discuss and debate these issues' (QCA level 3 guidance).

Other resources

The Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme has published a networking simulation which looks at the range of views on the introduction of ID cards in the UK. You'll find it in *Reality Check: citizenship through simulation*, pp.15–19 (QIA, 2006) order free hard copy or download from **www.post16citizenship.org**.

The publication *For the sake of argument: discussion and debating skills in citizenship* (QIA, 2006), also available from the site, provides guidance and resources for teachers to use when using debates and discussions with students.

Activity 1:

Should governments censor the internet?

Citizenship education should involve young people in clarifying their own views on some of the 'big' controversial issues of the day. One of those issues which is particularly relevant to IT Diploma students is whether it is right for governments to censor the internet and, if so, under what circumstances.

The handout, **Should governments censor the internet? For and against**, provides most of the key arguments on both sides of the debate and can be given to students to help them prepare for a discussion/argument about the issue.

Divide the group into threes and ask them to decide who will be A, B or C. Announce that in the discussion A will make the case for censorship, B will be against and C will be the observer who will decide which side won the argument or if it was a 'draw'.

Allow five to eight minutes for the two sides to argue their case. Then allow a couple of minutes for the observers to feed back their views to the protagonists.

Should governments censor the internet?

For and against

FOR	AGAINST
Every society agrees that the principle of freedom of speech or communication should not apply to bad things like child pornography and racial hatred. Governments should stamp out such material wherever it is published in a book, video or on the web.	Censorship itself is an evil in a free society. There are already laws in place to outlaw the publication of extreme views and child pornography. Banning anything tends to create martyrs and drive groups underground where they are more difficult to locate.
National governments have the right to protect their own citizens in line with their own laws.	The right of national governments to censor the web means, for example, that China can ban access to the BBC sites. How can that be right?
The level of censorship depends on the power of the medium so that television and film have higher levels of censorship than books and newspapers. The increasing use of sound and moving images means that this higher level of censorship should also apply to the web.	It is wrong to separate printed and broadcast media. Newspapers are increasingly going online and to allow censorship would be an attack on the fundamental principle of freedom of the press.
The anonymity provided by the internet allows criminals and terrorists opportunities to do bad things. Some countries have made citizens provide ID before they are able to post content on the web.	Although governments can try to control what is posted by their own citizens, they cannot control the rest of the world. It is often undemocratic regimes such as those in China or Burma which want this kind of control as a way of suppressing political dissent.
Internet service providers (ISPs) should be made responsible and liable for any content that is posted through them including information that is helpful to terrorists or hate sites or child pornography.	The quantity of information passing through ISPs makes the idea of censoring it all nonsensical. If ISPs were liable for all material deemed 'harmful' by governments, they would tend to err on the side of caution. This would mean a much more heavily censored internet and loss of freedom.
All the main issues of the internet including race hate, crime, protection of children and terrorist activity are international problems requiring global solutions. Damage caused by all these activities could be reduced by international agreements and action.	Many ISPs have shown that they are responsible and receptive when offensive material has been brought to their attention. Parents can use 'net nanny' browsers that screen out inappropriate sites.
Combined action by the countries of the world and law enforcement agencies can eventually lead to people posting obnoxious or dangerous material being identified.	Trying to censor what is said online is ultimately doomed to fail. Pseudonymity and data havens (such as Freenet) allow unconditional free speech as the technology guarantees that material cannot be removed and the author of any information is impossible to link to a physical identity or organisation.

Activity 2: Mobilising the grass roots

It is widely acknowledged that the 2007/08 Presidential campaign of Barack Obama was highly innovative and successful in the use of the internet and new technology to put across key messages and galvanise 'grass roots' political organisation. The techniques used in America today inevitably are transferred to Britain tomorrow and this is especially true in the field of politics. For example, negative campaigning which took root in US elections has been widely taken up by UK political parties (for classroom activities on the US elections see the supplement produced by the Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme, *The Us and us: The American Presidential Election 2008*, which can be downloaded from the website **www.post16citizenship.org**). This is a resources supplement to the programme magazine, *Citizenship News*, October 2008.

Students are cast in the role of consultants to a local community organisation which has a web presence. You will probably need to identify a list of suitable organisations from which students can choose according to their interest in the activities. Their role is to produce a report of recommendations suggesting how the organisation could use the web and other new technologies to communicate key messages, raise money, recruit members and add voters. The research task is based on investigating the methods used by the Barack Obama team during the 2008 election campaign.

Students could work in small teams and write a short report. The report can be sent to the local or national organisation concerned. There is also the possibility that local community organisations might invite students to present their findings and recommendations in person.

This kind of follow-up action constitutes the 'active' part of active citizenship.

Mobilising the grass roots

You are a team of IT consultants who have been asked to advise a community organisation on how to increase support via the use of innovative web tools. Your teacher/lecturer will advise on which community organisations you will be working for; they all will have a website. Your task is to:

- Undertake research to investigate innovative ways of using the internet and other new technologies to do four things:
 1. Communicate key messages
 2. Attract new members
 3. Organise more events and activities
 4. Raise more funds.
- Write a report with recommendations on what changes the organisation could make in order to mobilise grass-roots support and reach the four goals.
- Send your report with a covering letter or message to the organisation explaining the background to your project and offering to meet with them to explain your recommendations.
- Meet the representatives of the organisation to present your report (if they request a meeting).

Research task

The 2008 campaign of Barack Obama to get elected President of the United States was widely regarded as the most innovative and effective in using the internet to mobilise grass-roots support. His methods can be used by other political parties around the world or national pressure groups such as Friends of the Earth, or local community groups to achieve their goals. The Facebook co-founder, Chris Hughes, has advised on the use of social networking technology to support the campaign.

- Investigate the methods used by visiting **<http://my.BarackObama.com>** and watch the explanatory video. Check out the online precinct-captain training tool find out how the fund-raising tools work.
- Search YouTube to investigate the use of music and clips of speeches to communicate key messages (see for example **www.youtube.com** and check out the Video called Yes We Can by Black Eyed Peas singer Will.i.am).
- See how negative messages, rumours and lies about Obama were countered as soon as they were posted through the **www.fightthesmears.com** website.
- See how Facebook and MySpace were used by the campaign
www.facebook.com/barackobama and **www.myspace.com/barackobama**
- See how Obama has used ads in Xbox 360 racing game Burnout Paradise urging people to vote early **<http://tinyurl.com/3g7z72>**