

Safeguarding Advice regarding Virtual Encounters

We are experiencing a large number of queries regarding virtual encounters during these unprecedented times of home schooling and there are a number of considerations which need to be made regarding safeguarding in response to these.

Safeguarding policy is held by schools and we would always advocate that we work to a school or college policy to ensure that their students and our staff/employees, as well as those of our providers, are appropriately safeguarded during any activity. We currently do not have any advice regarding the corporate parenting aspect of safeguarding for schools in this unprecedented landscape. We are seeking further advice in respect of this and will update at the earliest opportunity.

Virtual encounters present a series of challenges and we perceive them to take a couple of different forms:

- Virtual encounters such as remote videos, YouTube, encounters and structured resources such as BBC Bitesize which may deliver information but do not require individual interaction. These pose no safeguarding risk. Effectively recording them poses a different challenge! Our recommendation would be that employers could make these available, but would not count towards our encounter KPIs.
- Encounters which involve personal interaction. An example that has been cited in a query is "Facetime a Farmer". This is an initiative which is normally delivered in a classroom, facilitated by a teacher. Facilitated virtual encounters for young people still in school would ordinarily fall under the school or college safeguarding policy and as they are facilitated by a teacher or member of school staff could be appropriate in this situation. However, it would be inappropriate to advocate unmoderated interactions which could lead to the sharing of contact details and have no safeguarding protocols in place regarding either contact or the conduct of the sessions themselves.