



See the signs.

If you can't see a student at risk in their online lives you can't respond.

The time for digital monitoring in further education is now.



Don't let your students fall through the gaps

smoothwall[®]
by Qoria

1. Introduction

Further education (FE) colleges are a unique educational environment. Large student numbers, nuanced risk profiles and wider institutional considerations mean DSLs must act quickly and decisively to mitigate risk.

Some online risks are more common amongst FE students than secondary students - such as radicalisation, racism and violence in the community - and they often emerge first, and sometimes only, in digital spaces.

The students they impact are digital natives, often more fluent in emerging technology than the adults safeguarding them.

A college's ability to detect these risks early is critical. Not only to protect student safety and wellbeing, but to support their retention and attainment and with it, the reputation and financials of the institution itself.

Comprehensive digital risk detection cannot be achieved with web filtering or with eyes and ears alone. It can only be achieved with the addition of digital monitoring.

This vital safeguarding capability identifies potential risks in what students do, say or share on digital devices and immediately alerts safeguarding staff with contextual evidence for a fast and appropriate intervention.



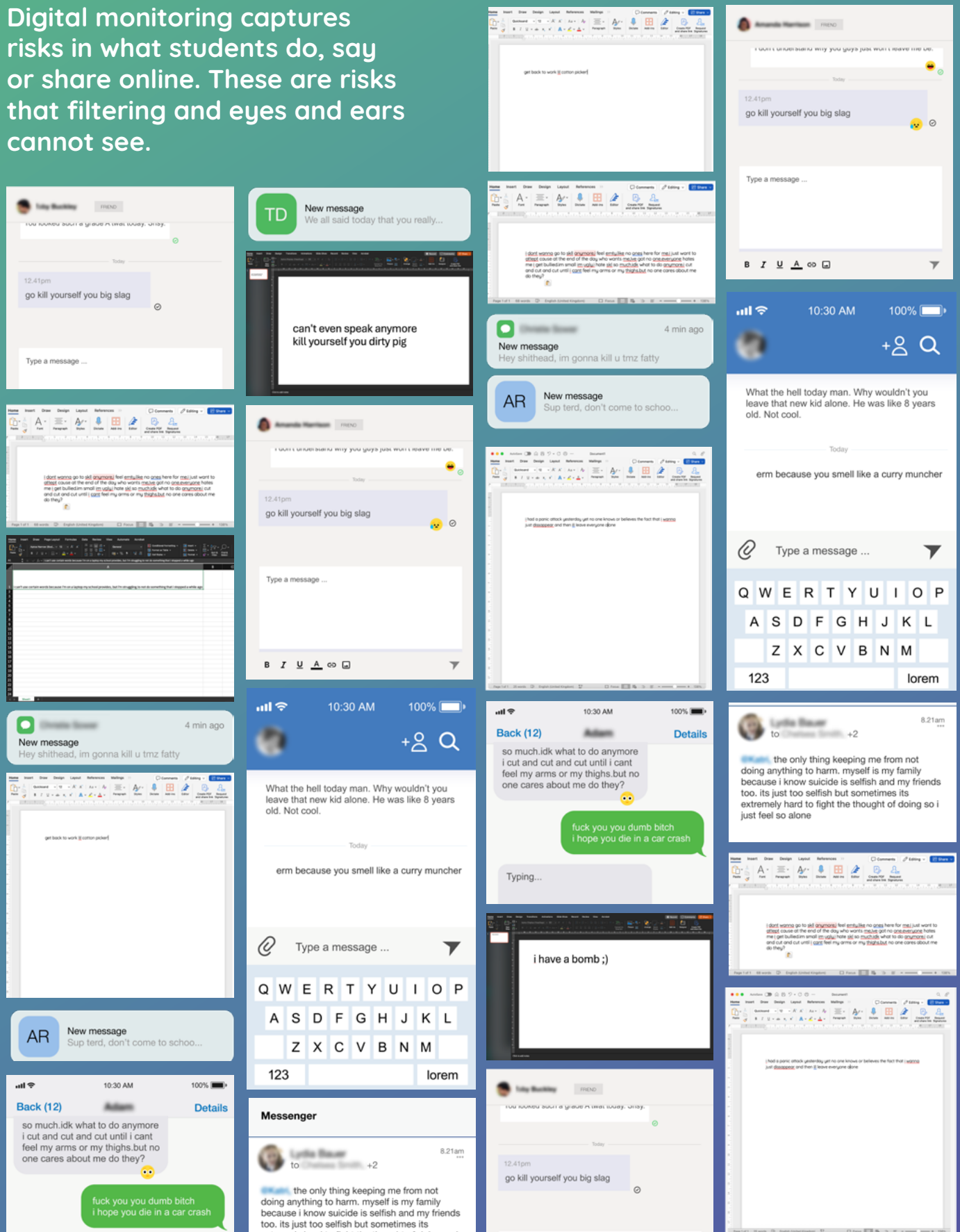
Digital monitoring's early detection capability can be life changing and life saving. It helps prevent risk escalation and all the negative impact that brings.

It's no longer an optional component in a robust and effective safeguarding strategy.

Yet despite the mountains of evidence on digital monitoring's critical impact, many FE institutions still lack effective provision or indeed, any provision at all.

This paper outlines the key considerations FE safeguarders need to understand in order to make the informed decisions that are right for them.

Digital monitoring captures risks in what students do, say or share online. These are risks that filtering and eyes and ears cannot see.



2. Digital safety is core to FE college success

Protecting students is a legal and moral obligation. But it's also fundamental to the financial and reputational stability of an FE college.

When safeguarding risks go unnoticed, it impacts:



Retention:

Vulnerable students disengage and eventually drop out.



Reputation:

Falling attendance and poor wellbeing erodes trust in leadership.



Revenue:

Lower student numbers can lead to budget cuts.

Digital monitoring is key to early detection and early detection is key to KSCIE compliance.

Keeping Children Safe in Education¹ states that it is essential for colleges to have appropriate monitoring systems in place and “regularly review their effectiveness.”

It points colleges to the Filtering and Monitoring Standards² - additional statutory guidance that clarifies: “For monitoring to be effective it must pick up incidents that are of concern urgently (...) allowing you to take prompt action.”

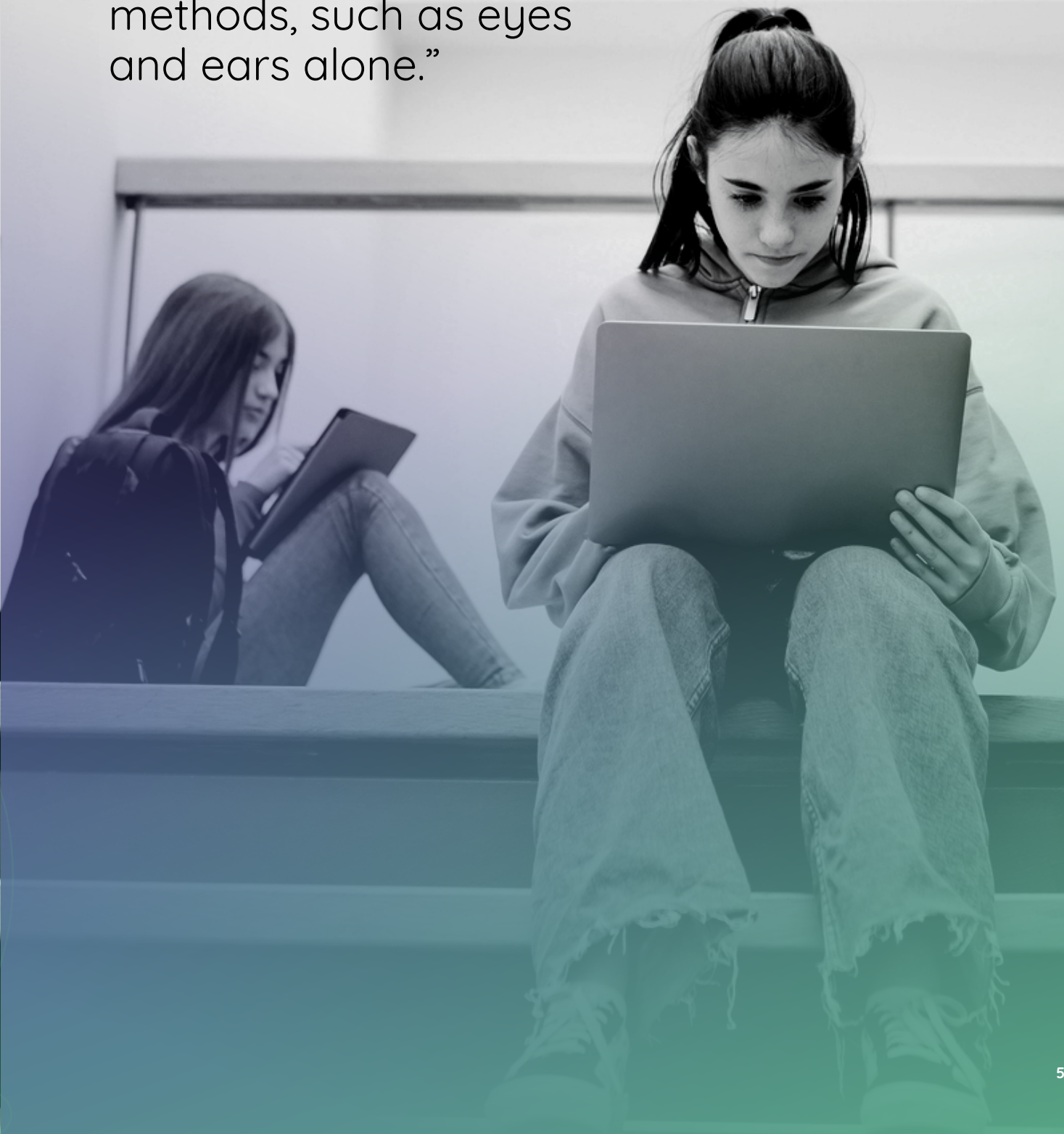
FE colleges that lack effective monitoring will find it very difficult to demonstrate urgent risk detection (beyond web searching) and, by extension, will struggle to fulfil their statutory obligations.

¹ Keeping Children Safe in Education, *Department for Education*, 2025

² Filtering and Monitoring Standards for Schools and Colleges, *Department for Education*, 2022



FE colleges cannot afford to miss these warning signs by relying on ineffective methods, such as eyes and ears alone.”





With no technology support and no trained human moderator working on their behalf, false positives are abundant and the chance of missing the needle in the haystack is extremely high.”

3. Digital monitoring and early risk detection: What the evidence tells us

In 2024, Smoothwall Monitor alerted FE safeguarding leads across the UK to students in need of a rapid intervention.

These risks were detected in what the students were doing, saying or sharing online. Without digital monitoring they quite likely would have gone unnoticed, or noticed too late.

Monitor identified:

An FE student facing a serious risk
- **every 18 minutes**

An FE student becoming vulnerable online
- **every 2 hours**

An FE student involved in a suspected terrorism alert - **every 24 hours**

An FE student facing a very serious risk to health or life - **every 10 hours**

An FE student involved in a serious grooming incident - **every 48 hours**

An FE student suspected to be involved in a serious cyberbullying, bullying or violent incident - **every 46 minutes**

An FE student involved in a serious incident of offensive behaviour
- **every 5 hours**

FE colleges cannot afford to miss these warning signs by relying on ineffective methods, such as eyes and ears alone, on filtering not intended for this purpose or worse still, on nothing.

Real-time, accurate monitoring changes lives and saves lives and impacts the compliance and sustainability of the college itself.



4. Where colleges fall short of early risk detection

There are two key issues that may prevent FE colleges from achieving early risk detection

1. Overreliance on web filter logs

Web filters prevent students accessing harmful content and report on harmful or inappropriate search activity. That is a vital safety function. However they do not identify risks based on what students do, say or share on websites or beyond the web browser - such as on email, digital documents, forums and chatbots.

For example, filters cannot see offensive messages sent by email, malicious intentions shared in a word document, or cries for help typed into a slide, and then quickly deleted. They cannot detect sexually inappropriate conversations on a social channel, suicide ideation with a chatbot or CSAM imagery shared on a forum.

DSLs relying on filtering will miss huge swathes of the digital landscape where risks are regularly detected. They must also rely on IT colleagues for reports and interpretation, as web logs can be technical and complex.

The result: Many risks go undetected and unaddressed. Risks that are identified through a student's online search behaviour lack the context needed for fast and appropriate intervention. IT teams need to pull the reports, which are often complex, resulting in stress all round and a slow response, or inability to see or respond at all.

2. In-house moderated monitoring

Risks detected by monitoring can contain false positives. Therefore a layer of moderation is needed.

In the case of human moderated monitoring, such as Smoothwall Monitor, AI technology does the first review of the alert to eliminate obvious false positives. If the alert is not discarded at this point it is graded from a low risk 1 through to a very high risk 5. Those graded 1 and 2 are recorded in the dashboard for the DSL to review when they next log in. Alerts graded 3 to 5 go to a human moderator for a trained review of the alert and its context. At this point if the DSL needs to see it, they will be emailed. If they need to see it immediately, they will be called. And all this happens within minutes of the risk occurring. The DSL can get on with their many other tasks safe in the knowledge that if a risk happens in a student's digital life and it needs their attention, they will be immediately notified.

In the case of non-human moderated monitoring the DSL is responsible for doing the sifting and sorting of alerts themselves - from the start.

These systems also tend not to distinguish between high-risk and low-risk alerts, so DSLs must manually assess each one and try to determine which need their attention and which don't. This wastes time and delays response. It's also incredibly stressful for the DSL and their team.

Without a fully trained and sufficiently resourced human moderation team, in house moderated monitoring is not recommended for effective safeguarding.

The result: Alert fatigue; important risks are buried beneath false positives; DSLs operate without confidence or efficiency.



Your monitoring must follow the device, not the network, ensuring that risk detection travels with the student wherever learning takes place.”

5. The six imperatives for digital monitoring success

Digital monitoring is no longer optional. It's the difference between catching a risk early, or dealing with the fallout when it becomes a crisis.

These six imperatives define what effective monitoring must deliver if FE colleges are to safeguard students, protect their reputation, and stay compliant.



1. Know instantly when you are needed

The earliest signs of radicalisation, grooming, violence or suicide ideation can often appear in the digital space first. Your monitoring system must be able to surface those signals and bring them to your attention fast, or you'll likely miss them — and the consequences could be catastrophic, for both students and the college.



2. Act in minutes, not days

In FE, risks escalate fast. A hostile message, a dangerous plan, or a cry for help typed into a chatbot can move from minor to serious within hours. Your monitoring solution must detect and escalate alerts in real time, allowing the DSLs to step in before any damage is done.



3. Cut through the noise

Drowning in false positives isn't just frustrating — it's dangerous. The more time you spend sifting through irrelevant alerts, the greater the chance you'll miss a real one. Monitoring must filter out the noise and surface only what matters, ranked by severity, so no genuine risk gets lost.



4. Respond with accuracy, not guesswork

Every alert should come with the evidence you need — screenshots, context, timelines — so you can act decisively. Without this, you're left second-guessing, delaying interventions, and operating without the proof that leadership, parents, and inspectors demand.



5. Protect students everywhere they learn

Safeguarding doesn't stop at the campus gate or the web browser. Students use devices at home, on public Wi-Fi, and offline. Your monitoring must follow the device, not the network, ensuring that risk detection travels with the student wherever learning takes place.



6. Never leave students unsupported

Risks don't wait for college hours. Neither can you. Your monitoring solution should have 24/7 human moderation to ensure no cry for help goes unseen, no high-risk alert is missed, and DSLs aren't left carrying the impossible burden of being everywhere at once.

6. The time to act is now

Digital monitoring is no longer optional. It is a statutory expectation, a moral obligation, and a practical necessity in FE safeguarding.

The evidence is clear: risks are emerging faster, in more hidden digital spaces, and with greater consequences for students and colleges alike.

Every week of delay leaves students unprotected, compliance unmet, and reputations exposed.

The question is not whether to implement monitoring, but whether you can afford not to.

Colleges that act now are not only protecting their students — they are strengthening retention, demonstrating leadership, and safeguarding the future stability of their institutions. Those that don't risk being left behind, with consequences that are difficult to recover from.

See the signs.

The time for digital monitoring is now.

About Smoothwall Monitor

Smoothwall Monitor has been developed to address the safeguarding realities facing FE colleges today.

It delivers against all six imperatives, providing DSLs with a monitoring solution that is both compliant and practical in the unique FE environment.

Trusted by hundreds of UK colleges, Smoothwall Monitor provides the clarity, speed and assurance DSLs need to detect risks early, protect student wellbeing, and maintain institutional stability.

Book a demo

Contact us today for an informal walkthrough on how it works. We can answer your questions and even put you in touch with other FE Colleges to learn their experiences of transforming safeguarding with Monitor.

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Smoothwall is the leading provider of digital safeguarding solutions in UK education. For more information, visit our website or get in touch with our team of experts.

Find out more
www.smoothwall.com

Qoria

Smoothwall is part of Qoria, a global technology company, dedicated to keeping children safe and well in their digital lives. We harness the power of connection to close the gaps that children fall through, and to seamlessly support them on all sides - at school, at home and everywhere in between.

Find out more
www.qoria.com