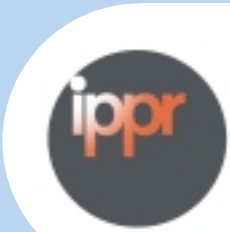
Online Freedom & Safety for Children | 3



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Online Freedom & Safety for Children

IPPR / Citizens Online Research Publication No.3 – November 2001

Citizens Online is an independent charity, established to explore the social and cultural impact of the Internet, to implement positive action to bridge the so-called digital divide, and to promote the benefits of universal Internet access.

Citizens Online is pledged to work in partnership with Government, industry, and voluntary and community organisations, to bring together the resources and expertise across all sectors. We are committed to ensuring that those who do not have access to the Internet, for whatever reason, have the opportunities to do so if they wish. Ambitious targets have been set by Government to achieve universal Internet access by 2005. Citizens Online has a role in addressing the needs of those in our society who are most at risk of falling through the digital divide.

Citizens Online believes that the companies who make the technology to access the Internet have a social responsibility to consider the impact of their activities on those in society who do not have access.
We will work with research organisations to establish a clear picture of where to invest their efforts in the UK and extend programmes aimed at providing and improving access and use of the Internet in society.

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Online Freedom & Safety for Children

Overview

This the third in a series of papers produced collaboratively by Citizens Online and IPPR exploring the social and cultural impact of the Internet on society.

Online Freedom and Safety for Children reviews the current state of knowledge regarding children and young people's use of the Internet in the UK, and proposes three specific policy initiatives to enhance their Internet literacy whilst minimising safety risks.

Series Editor - Damian Tambini IPPR
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CONTENTS

Summary	1
Introduction	2
Children going online	3
What is there to worry about	4
What can the Internet Offer	8
Literacy and safety must go hand in hand	10
Proposal 1: A Public Awareness Campaign	13
Proposal 2: A Co-ordinated Community Response	16
Proposal 3: A Surfing Policy Certificate	19

Lord Bassam Home Office Minister March 2001

"We wish to set a challenge for the Internet industry - that of ensuring that the UK is the safest place for children to access the Internet in the industrialised world."

John Carr, NCH:

"Children love to chat and should be able to do so safely on-line, as well as off-line. We all need to take responsibility for educating our children about the potential dangers of Internet chat, while working together to provide opportunities for them to have fun and learn in safe, moderated chatrooms appropriate to their ages."

Keith Ackerman, Association of Chief Police Officers:

"We must take the sort of action that will ensure the Internet is free from crime and a safe place for our children."

Alastair Brett, legal adviser to *The Sunday Times*:

"Every father or mother knows that they are responsible for the safety, protection and well being of a child under 16."

Ruth Dixon, Internet Watch Foundation:

"Parental awareness and confidence are crucial elements in protecting children online."

SUMMARY

This paper focuses on the role of education and awareness, seeking both to empower parents to create a safe learning and leisure environment for their children at home but also to support parents in their growing responsibility to manage the fast-changing domestic environment, maximising benefits and minimising risks.

Surprisingly little research exists into the nature of young people's experience of the Internet to date, with few accounts of the domestic practices emerging around this new entrant into the home, and with insufficient reliable statistics on the extent of potential and actual harms.

However, it appears that at a time of rapid expansion in Internet access at home and school, the uncertainties and fears expressed by many parents, particularly with younger children, are impeding UK children making the most of the Internet. These fears are both technical (breaking the computer, downloading a virus, losing a file, disabling software) and social (surveillance, stranger danger, exploitation, paedophiles). Teachers also express concerns (the end of the book, the end of the need for teachers, huge expectations with insufficient resources to deliver, being found out as inexpert), undermining an atmosphere of free exploration of the Internet.

The paper argues that we as a society have not clarified the nature of our hopes and visions for the Internet, nor have we specified the literacy skills and competencies necessary to realise these hopes. As a result, many children and young people in the UK are failing to gain from the benefits of the Internet. We have, by contrast, a rather clearer vision of the dangers introduced by the Internet into children's lives, but here we lack a co-ordinated framework of safety provision, involving a diversity of agencies, with the flexibility to ensure children are as prepared as possible for what they might encounter online, in order that they need not be undermined in exploring the Internet freely and fully.

In response to these twin concerns, of Internet literacy and Internet safety, this paper stresses the importance of education, encompassing both literacy (knowing what to do, where to go, and how to evaluate what you find there) and safety (knowing what not to do, where not to go, and what to do if you find something problematic).

Education for children is key because technical solutions are flawed, the home is rarely so safe an environment as the school, parents are not always able to guide and supervise appropriately, and so children must be prepared to deal with any harm they encounter. Children will also benefit from the sense of responsibility and competence which Internet literacy and safety training will engender.

Three recommendations are offered.

- First, a public awareness campaign, to stimulate public debate, public understanding, and the implementation of existing policy actions.
- Second, in recognition that an increased responsibility is being placed on parents' shoulders, a thoroughly joined-up approach from the various agencies involved, from Government and school to the home, drawing in the community more effectively.
- Third, the introduction of a new policy tool, the Surfing Proficiency Certificate, as a supplement to the approach of school and home, a community-based initiative which can be flexibly applied to ensure that all children have at a minimum a basic level of literacy and safety awareness.

ONLINE FREEDOM AND SAFETY FOR CHILDREN

Introduction

The Internet is diffusing rapidly through society

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are playing an ever-greater role in the economy, the workplace, education and leisure. Central to this expanding information and communication environment is the rapid growth in access to and use of the Internet over the past decade. This still-diversifying bundle of technologies – including email, the world wide web, intranets, chat rooms, online games, and so forth – increasingly mediates processes of communication, learning, participation and entertainment on a global as well as a local scale.

In Britain, as in many other countries, the last few years have witnessed a rapidly expanding domestic market as well as a significant educational market for the Internet. Today, families are going online for the first time. Schools are increasingly incorporating use of the Internet into the curriculum. For many adults, the workplace is a transformed ICT-mediated environment.

Everywhere the Internet is hyped as indispensable to business, vital to communication, a unique link to a world of information of every kind. At the same time, the growth of online pornography and racist hate sites, and the increasing commercialisation of the Internet, generates fears for its harmful consequences.

Attention must broaden to include Internet use in addition to access

Public attention so far has concentrated on questions of access and, particularly, inequalities in access. Today, attention must broaden to encompass questions of internet use. However, charting how people are actually using the Internet is proving more elusive than measuring access to technologies, particularly insofar as much of this use occurs within the privacy of the family home. While many policy initiatives are debated and developed internationally, this paper specifically focuses on these new questions and problems which arise as significant numbers of children and young people in the UK begin to make substantial use of the Internet.

Children and young people's Internet use arouses widespread hopes and fears. Optimistically, many believe them to be particularly enthusiastic, flexible, creative users and, as the adult users of tomorrow, developing their ICT competencies is seen as crucial for the future. More pessimistically, children are seen as innocent and vulnerable, as undergoing a crucial but fragile process of cognitive and social development to which the Internet may pose some significant risks.

Three next steps for public policy

This paper[1] briefly reviews the current state of knowledge regarding children and young people's use of the Internet in the UK, in order to recommend the next steps for public policy. The focus is on educational initiatives (rather than on the technical or legal responses being pursued elsewhere).

It is argued that Internet literacy and Internet safety must go hand in hand in public policy initiatives. In

order to enhance Internet literacy while simultaneously minimising Internet safety risks, three specific initiatives are proposed:

- *A public awareness campaign* – to engage children and, especially, parents in the crucial task of increasing Internet literacy and simultaneously reducing possible harms;
- *A co-ordinated response* across home, school and community - to ensure a single message reaches all families, minimising inequalities in use;
- *A surfing proficiency certificate* – a concrete policy tool providing the flexibility to deliver an initial measure of literacy and safety training in a timely manner.

We begin by summarising the current situation regarding children and young people's Internet use.

1 This paper benefits from the Seminar on Internet Surfing Proficiency held at IPPR (25/7/01) and from discussions with, among others, John Fisher (Citizens Online), Stephen Carrick-Davies (Childnet-International) and Damian Tambini (IPPR). Thanks to Shani Orgad, Eva Rubinson and Vivi Theodoropoulou for invaluable research assistance.

Children going online

Recent surveys suggest that half of the UK population (55.3%) is now online.[2]

At home

- UK households with domestic access to the Internet reached 34% of the adult population by February 2001.[3]
- NOP's Kids.net surveys of 7-14 year olds show a steady increase in Internet *access* at home, reaching 45% by November 2000.[4] By February 2001 a government survey suggested this had risen to half of primary school and two thirds of secondary school children.[5]
- Figures for actual *use* among children remain rare. One poll shows 84% of 7-14 year olds used the Internet in the previous month, twice the figure for adults.[6] Another showed over 2 million UK children using the web 'on a regular basis'.[7]
- Little is yet known of *how* children are making use of the Internet at home.[8] In this paper, I draw on my recent in-depth research with 30 families in which the research team made a series of visits to children at home to observe their Internet use.[9]

At school

- Following the launch of the National Grid for Learning in 1997,[10] Internet access through schools has expanded rapidly: by 2000, 86% of UK schools were online[11]. Secondary schools have an average of 60 PC's online, and several initiatives are underway to improve teacher

training, educational content, etc.

- More use the Internet in school (57% of all 7-14 year olds) than at home (42%), while one fifth use it at a friend's or relative's house.[12]

Other locations

- While home and school are the primary locations where children and young people use the Internet, some gain access through a parent's workplace, cybercafés, libraries, etc.
- Although few survey data is available, it appears that community locations are little available to or used by young people in the UK, certainly by comparison with Scandinavian countries, for example.[13]

2 http://www.nua.com/surveys/how_many_online/europe.html

3 Oftel residential survey (http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/stats/statisticsjun01_02.shtml).

4 NOP's Kids.net survey. http://www.nop.co.uk.

5 ONS survey of 53,000 pupils across England, Wales and N. Ireland. http://censusatschool.ntu.ac.uk/table2-1.asp.

6 BMRB's Access to Youth Survey (see Media Week 20/7/01 and www.bmrb-interactive.co.uk 'Internet Use Amongst Kids').

7 www.nielsen-netratings.com (*New Media Age*, 12/7/01).

8 The *ChatWise, StreetWise* report (March, 2000: www.internetcrimeforum.org.uk cites Reader's Digest poll suggesting two thirds of children to be frequent users of the email while one quarter of children (41% of 15-16 year olds) use chat rooms. www.readersdigest.co.uk/magazine/EWIS-4QFFMU.htm).

9 Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill. *Families and the Internet: An observational study of children and young people's Internet use*. Research Project funded by BT, 1999-2001.

10 See *Connecting the learning society: a national grid for learning*. Green paper (1997), DfEE. http://www.ngfl.gov.uk

11 *Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools, England*. (2000). DfEE.

12 www.bmrb-interactive.co.uk 'Internet Use Amongst Kids'.

13 Livingstone, S. and Bovill, M. (2001) (Eds.) *Children and Their Changing Media Environment: A comparative European study*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

What is there to worry about?

It is ironic that as the outside world is increasingly seen as a scary place for children, parents are equipping the home with ever more screen media to entertain their children in safety.[14]

But is the Internet introducing new forms of threat directly into the privacy of the home? While the extent of the potential harm is proving difficult to determine, arguably the Internet is 'like bringing a city into your living room'.[15]

The dangers of the Internet

What is known about the nature and scale of the problem? Setting aside the technological risks (viruses, computer crashes, filling up the hard drive, etc), those risks which occasion most concern are social, falling into what Childnet International has categorised as 'contact, content and commercialism'.

Contact

- The Pew Internet and American Life Project surveyed 12-17 year olds in December 2000, finding that nearly 60% of those online had received messages (of any kind) from strangers.[16]
- A survey of 10-17 year old Americans found almost 1 in 5 received some kind of sexual solicitation on the Internet in the previous year, particularly in chatrooms.[17] Three quarters claimed not to be distressed by the experience, and less than 10% of incidents were officially reported.

- The *Chatwise, Streetwise* Report (2001) suggests that incidents of adult sex offenders meeting children online and gaining their trust are increasing in both the UK and USA.[18]
- NOP's Kids.net survey in the UK suggests that 29% of children using the Internet might give out their home address and 14% their email address.

Content

- Reliable statistics on the extent of pornographic material online are unavailable, though estimates vary from 1.5% of all 800 million pages to 85% of the 3900 new pages created every day. The content of UseNet groups, chat rooms etc remains unquantified.[19]
- In the UK, the Internet Watch Foundation's annual report for 2000 noted more than 8000 tip-offs regarding illegal or offensive material last year, double the number for the previous year.[20]
- Who uses such material? One USA library, checking the demographics of library users whose access to materials was blocked by the library filtering software, found the age of most intercepts was 13.
- The COPA Commission was told in July 2000 that 19% of visitors to top adult-oriented websites were under 15.[21]
- NOP's Kids.net surveys suggest parents and teachers have little idea of what children do on the Internet and that young people visit 'inappropriate' sites if they think they can get away with it. Only a fifth of those who have come across anything inappropriate told their parents although half talked to friends; a quarter told no-one. While 24% felt upset only 4% had actually been frightened.[22]

Commercialism

- The risks of commercial exploitation attract less attention than those of sexual exploitation. In April 2001, reporting on COPPA's[23] first year, the Center for Media Education noted that some violations of both the spirit and the letter of the law continue.[24]
- Concerns exist regarding the unregulated expansion of online marketing, often subtly interwoven into the content of a website or based on personal information gleaned from online questionnaires, and targeted at children.[25]
- One in four children who use the Internet visit gambling and pornography websites.[26] This figure for the UK is higher than that of the other European countries surveyed.

Public perceptions of dangers are inhibiting children's Internet use[27]

Many parents and children are uninformed about the nature of dangers posed by the Internet or about what action to take when problems are encountered, but few are unaware that the Internet is a risky place for children. It appears that there is a climate of anxiety that leads many parents to heavily restrict their children's use.

- Parents worry about online communication, and outright bans on email and chatrooms are common. Yet when permitted to use email or chat, it seems that children's contact with strangers is infrequent, rarely leading to any sustained interchange; most contacts involve networks of school friends. Moreover, for many children it is their enthusiasm for online

communication – which for them includes rapid, unmoderated interchanges, swearing, sending personal photos and email addresses - which first motivates them to gain the ICT skills which transfer to more 'approved' activities; banning the former inhibits the latter.

- When searching, many children are influenced by parental anxieties and lack of expertise regarding viruses and other harmful consequences. As a result, they may shy away from unexpected content, avoid answering dialogue boxes, refuse to download programs or information, ignore file attachments and steer clear of invitations to participate online.
- There is a clash between adult's and children's values which circumscribes Internet use. Adults worry about interactive facilities, hoping children will concentrate on serious information searches, etc. Children and young people gain pleasure from activities which experimentation with multiple, fluid, playful identities, which may be disreputable or frivolous in adult eyes, and which exploit the interactive potential of the technology.
- Young people rarely stay within the spaces intended for them (preferring chatrooms or websites for adults just as they favour television programmes made for the general population, considering kids' programmes 'patronising'). If adults limit interactive uses, and available spaces, of the Internet for children and young people, they undermine the opportunities for learning through exploration, participation and fun.
- Children's use of the world wide web can be very conservative. Commonly, they spend much of their time with a small number of commercial sites whose brands are familiar and hence trusted, notwithstanding the commercial purposes of such sites.

On several occasions, we witnessed children apparently unaware that they could click to get from site to site, even unaware that by scrolling down more options would become available. One 11-yr old stayed on the AOL home page. An 8-year old stayed within the preliminary pages of the Nickelodeon site and the AskJeeves site. Neither realised there were other places to 'go', and they were not encouraged to explore by the website design.

On the other hand, some risks are real

Many worries concern searching for 'innocent' material and finding pornography. In our qualitative research with families, notwithstanding the likelihood of both under- and over-reporting of such incidents, most children told us that they have indeed inadvertently encountered pornography, although other sites which they think parents/teachers would not like them to see (e.g. how to make bombs, steal cars, with bad language) seem much rarer.

For example, during one observational session, an 11 year-old girl, trying to find pictures of Adolf Hitler for a school project innocently accessed a site labelled 'Adolf Hitler pictures'. She failed to note the rubric 'gaysexfreepics' and found herself face to face with a child porn site. As is common with such sites, it was very difficult to shut down, the first few attempts merely producing other similar sites. She claimed not to have been upset by it, saying that she had not found anything like it before but if she had would do as she did on this occasion – get rid of it and ignore it.

In another family, 10 and 12 year old brothers told us what happened when 'we once looked up the band Boyzone, but it came up with something else… Men doing stuff with other men… On a beach, like one was like that, and one was like that. [Demonstrates rectal penetration with humping movements] … It was a bit sick.'

Children tend to claim that they are rarely upset by such discoveries. They know how an innocent search can produce porn, some have experienced difficulties in getting rid of pornographic images, and for some, porn is mischievously enjoyed. Nonetheless, while occasionally funny, it is also intrusive, embarrassing, and sometimes shocking, partly because unexpected. Imagining a page of pornography inserted into a standard school textbook or family television programme illustrates the reaction such an image may produce within an educational or leisure setting, although it should be noted that little evidence has been produced to establish whether such exposure is damaging.

14 Livingstone and Bovill (1999), *Young People New Media*. http://www.psych.lse.ac.uk/young_people/press.html.

15 Childnet-International, www.childnet-int.org

16 *Teenage Life Online* (6/01) http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Report.pdf.

17 *Online Victimisation: A report on the nation's youth*. http://jama.ama-assn.org/issues/v285n23/abs/jbr10028.html.

18 Indeed, there has been a steady stream of convictions involving abusing children online (See http://www.chatdanger.com/setframe.html and http://www.childnet-int.org/publicat/sydney.html. Recommendations in the *Chat Wise, Street Wise Report* (http://www.internetcrimeforum.org.uk/)have been followed up in the Expert Workshop, *'Protecting the online generation'*, DTI 6/7/01. See also, *'Challenges of the Internet'*, by the European Research into Consumer Affairs, http://www.net-consumers.org/erica/safer.htm.

19 *Safeguarding the Wired Schoolhouse: A briefing paper on school district options for providing access to appropriate Internet content.* The Consortium for School Networking (6/01). http://www.safewiredschools.org/pubs_and_tools/white_paper.pdf.

20 See http://www.iwf.org.uk/about/annual2000.rtf.

21 See http://www.safewiredschools.org/pubs_and_tools/sws_document.html.

22 NOP's surveys use self-completion and face-to-face interviews. With self-completion surveys, more children say they have been upset by online content.

23 The USA's *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act* (COPPA, April 2000) prevents commercial online services directed at children from collecting, using or disclosing personally identifiable information from children under 13 without a parent's permission.

24 See www.cme.org/children/privacy/coppa_rept.pdf. See also The Annenberg Public Policy Center's privacy report, www.asc.upenn.edu/usr/jturow/PrivacyReport.pdf.

25 See ERICA's *'Challenges of the Internet'*, http://www.net-consumers.org/erica/safer.htm, and the Media Awareness Network's *'Kids for Sale'*, http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/webaware/teachers/kids/tkids.htm.

26 NetValue's survey of 300 under-17 year olds (The Independent, 22/5/01).

27 These and subsequent observations of parents and children's use of the Internet at home draw on Livingstone and Bovill (2001, *'Families and the Internet'* Research Project, op cit.).

What can the Internet offer?

Turning to the positive benefits of the Internet, it is curious that specifying the nature of these is more difficult than documenting its actual and potential harms. As a society we lack a concrete vision to guide and inform our expectations for Internet use. Most public discussion centres on what the Internet should not be than on what it is or could be.

Neither unbounded hype nor sceptical doubts or a focus on dangers, will foster creative and empowering conditions for Internet use. Rather, an imaginative but well-grounded debate is needed to map the actual prospects for improving and transforming children and young people's education and leisure.

For example, what valuable opportunities does the Internet open up? By what criteria will we judge its introduction into our homes and schools to have been successful? How much should we prioritise improving Internet literacy compared with the claims of other policy initiatives for young people?

The opportunities of the Internet

Most would agree that children should be educated to develop an informed, responsible attitude towards computer and Internet use within and beyond the school environment, allowing them to take full advantage of the benefits of the Internet while empowering them to protect themselves from harm. Let us unpack this claim in relation to three categories of opportunity – education, cultural expression, literacy.

Education

Parents' major justification for getting the Internet at home is to support their children's education. But parents, and many teachers, are still unclear about the advantages that may accrue. Does the Internet merely offer a more expanded, convenient and accessible resource for teachers and pupils? Does it give pupils valuable experience of a technology crucial to their future employment? Is its main value making learning more exciting and hence motivating for disenchanted pupils? Or does the Internet represent a more radical challenge to traditional, print-based, linear, hierarchical models of pedagogy, posing new hypertextual, visual, heterarchical and democratic alternatives to stimulate and challenge the learning process?

Cultural expression

A comparison with television is instructive, for we have a much more articulated understanding of what television can and should offer to children and young people. The internationally-endorsed Children's Television Charter[28] specifies not only that children's programmes should be non-exploitative and free from gratuitous sex and violence, but also that children should have high quality programmes made specifically for them in order to support the development of young people's potential, providing a means through which they can hear, see and express their experiences and their culture so as to affirm their sense of community and place.

Applying this to the Internet, we might say, just as unequivocally, that children have the right not only to a non-exploitative experience of the Internet, free from gratuitous sex and violence. And also that children have the right to high quality websites and online resources

specifically made for them, in order to support the development of their potential and through which they can hear, see and express their experiences and their culture so as to affirm their sense of community and place.

Literacy

Empowerment depends on literacy. If the Internet offers opportunities to transform children's education, leisure and cultural participation, it is crucial that they have the skills and competencies to take advantage of these opportunities. Drawing again on the parallel with audiovisual media, four key dimensions of Internet literacy can be identified as follows.[29]

- *Analytical Competence* requires an understanding of the formal qualities of the Internet, including how web sites are constructed, how hypertext links work, the symbolic codes of the web, etc. It is a prerequisite for effective use of the Internet.
- *Contextual Knowledge* requires an awareness of the broader social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which Internet information is produced and consumed. It underpins critical evaluation of the Internet.
- *Canonical Knowledge* requires a knowledge of 'classic' web sites and an understanding of why they may be considered to be important, reliable and useful. Which sites are canonical changes, but they constitute a shared frame of reference among users.
- *Production Competence* requires the ability to produce Internet content as well as interpret, consume and enjoy it. This includes creating web pages, productive searching, participating in mailing lists, chat groups and email. It also includes expressing one's identity through producing and communicating content.

Public uncertainties about the benefits of the Internet, and the competencies required to use it, lead to suboptimal use of the Internet by children

While children are undoubtedly delighted that they have gained access to the Internet at home, it is also the case that many are under-using, and often disappointed by, the Internet.

Our observations of their actual use suggest that many children visit only a very few websites, lacking a concrete vision of exciting and valuable sites to visit. Like adults, they find searching for information frustrating and perplexing, tending to use less than optimal search techniques and often not knowing how to evaluate the material they find. For example, they tend to rely on word of mouth recommendations for good sites, memorising the address for 4 or 5 sites rather than using bookmarks. Addresses are not always used effectively, being incorrectly remembered and/or typed into search (rather than address) boxes. When using search engines and search directories, children experience a number of pitfalls, primarily concerned with the difficulties with translating ordinary language questions into search terms or using key words effectively. Moreover, children's reluctance to read lengthy text on websites means they may not realise where a search has taken them or what kind of information results. Interestingly, children appear to show little interest in, or even not to notice, advertisements or promotions on the web. This lack of explicit interest in the commercial basis of most Internet content means that young people have surprisingly altruistic – and hence, naïve – perceptions

of the motives of web site producers, while sites that fit their interests are uncritically assumed to be trustworthy.

By contrast with the optimal skills and competencies mapped out above in our definition of Internet literacy, it seems that there are considerable discrepancies between what children claim to know and what they can actually do, and adults should be cautious in assuming the contrary.

In relation to 'analytic competence' many lack basic skills in searching, evaluating, integrating and rendering accessible the wealth of information potentially available. Moreover, the Internet literacy of most children and young people at present does not cover 'contextual knowledge' (or 'critical evaluation') as yet. Their 'canonical knowledge' is narrowly delimited, being heavily focussed on commercial/global sites and brands. And their skills include 'production competence' mainly in relation to peer-group communication, but rarely other kinds of content creation.

Of course, these are early days in establishing a 'culture of use' for the Internet. Yet while some teachers and parents appear to hope that Internet literacy will emerge spontaneously provided children gain sufficient hands-on experience, this may prove a naïve approach to learning – few would entrust the learning of print literacy to such an ad hoc process. In mapping out an approach to the digital curriculum, David Buckingham argues that 'technology will not in itself empower children to deal with the challenges of this new digital age: schools and other educational institutions also have a central role to play'.[30]

At present, children and young people are persevering, and their growing interest as more and more of their peers go online carries them through, though few stay online for more than half an hour or so. And few can be said to be creatively engaging with much of the vast potential of the world of information and fun that the Internet offers.

28 C. von Feilitzen and U. Carlson (1999) (Eds.). *Children and media: Image, education, participation*. Gothenburg: Unesco/Nordicom.

29 This draws on Cary Bazalgette's analysis of children's cinema literacy (*Making Movies Matter*; 1999, London: BFI).

30 Buckingham, D. (2001). 'New media literacies', p.17, in Buckingham, D., and McFarlane, A., *A digitally driven curriculum*. London: IPPR.

Literacy and safety must go hand in hand

The challenge ahead

From the current state of knowledge, regarding both opportunities and dangers of the Internet, it is clear that as a society we need a public debate to identify the opportunities opened up by the Internet, including an analysis of Internet literacy, and we need to know more of the safety risks children face when using the Internet.

The lesson to be learned from what we know of children and young people's actual use of the Internet is that while parents are still grappling with the problems of whether to get the Internet, where to put it, and how to make it work, this considerable investment in time and money is not yet paying off in terms of the use children and young people are making of the Internet.

Balancing opportunities and dangers

Getting the balance right between opportunities and dangers is not easy. In some ways, children's freedoms are being compromised to ensure their safety, as illustrated by the recent debate over whether pupils should be provided with individual email addresses and by the widespread banning by parents and schools of chatrooms. As communication online becomes increasingly part of society, these practices significantly limit children's social participation: perhaps much of it is 'just chat', but it also includes the Indian boy in London joining an Indian diaspora chat room, the worried teenage girl sharing experiences of puberty, and so forth.

The thrust of this paper is to argue that the challenge of Internet use can only be addressed if Internet literacy and Internet safety awareness go hand in hand. The table below illustrates the kinds of strategies families are currently adopting, with their associated problems. Of the four strategies indicated, only one balances opportunities and dangers in an optimal fashion, and this is far from common within UK households today.

Hypothetical relation between parental knowledge of the Internet and children's use of the Internet

Parents' awareness of the dangers of the Internet	Parents' understanding of the opportunities of the Internet	
	Low	High
Low	*Haphazard, risky use:* Children's use of the Internet is haphazard, tending to result in suboptimal use of the Internet while also running some risk of dangers.	*Confident but risky exploration:* Children explore the Internet freely and creatively but are likely to be exposed to a range of risks they are ill-prepared for.
High	*Cautious, narrow use:* Children's online activities are cautious, even fearful, tending to be restricted to a narrow range of activities or sites and with insufficient opportunity for spontaneous learning.	*Creative, managed use:* Children's benefits from the Internet are maximised through confident and free exploration while the risks of danger are minimised through forewarning and guidance.

From domestic usage to policy initiatives

It is not in domestic usage that Internet literacy and Internet safety must go hand in hand. The same is true for public policy initiatives. As the above table suggests, the promotion of Internet literacy, by encouraging children to explore freely and imaginatively, without a parallel improvement in safety awareness, will increase the risk of dangers. On the other hand, 'negative' regulation aimed at protecting children, even if pursued through the promotion of safety awareness, is pointless if there is no clear or imaginative vision aimed at ensuring children gain from Internet access. Rather, safety awareness without a parallel education for Internet literacy, will create a climate of fear, encouraging anxious parents to restrict or prevent their children's use.

Thus, in regulating children's Internet use, we risk two failures – the failure to take up opportunities, and the failure to protect against dangers. Only the combination of literacy and safety can provide the conditions of exploration, experimentation and creativity required if children are to use the Internet as freely and fully as possible. We must inspire children about where to go and how to benefit from what they find using the Internet, and simultaneously we must provide a safety framework combining awareness, education and regulation for when things go wrong.

"Don't regulate, educate"[31]

Literacy is obviously a matter of education. But safety can be addressed both in educational terms and as a technical/legislative matter. Without wishing necessarily to undermine current attempts by industry and the state to regulate Internet content and use through technical means, this paper stresses educational means to promote safety. This is against a context where public debate has been heavily in favour of technical solutions, by contrast with the USA, where there is stronger representation from those who stress freedom of speech issues.[32]

As yet, technical solutions to ensure online safety don't work well, encountering persistent practical difficulties. At best they provide only part of the solution; at worst they engender a false sense of security.[33] Moreover, technical and legislative solutions tend to trade freedoms against safety, while education allows for a both/and approach, guiding children towards valuable uses of the Internet while also teaching them safety awareness. Technical and legislative solutions also tend to pit adult against child, requiring parents (and teachers) to police children's leisure rather than engaging them in the co-operative teaching and learning of empowerment strategies.

Given the temptation to introduce knee-jerk regulation following the latest moral panic, it is vital to channel the public energies thereby aroused into an informed public information campaign alongside a more considered educational strategy.

What educational initiatives are needed?

The rapid diffusion of the Internet has been matched by a burgeoning of policy responses in the UK and internationally. Much has already been achieved and further activities are underway.

In reviewing the next steps to be taken, this paper offers three, linked proposals:

- A public campaign to increase Internet literacy and safety awareness, particularly among parents;

- A co-ordinated response, drawing in community-level organisations to complement home and school and relieve the heavy burden now falling on parents;
- A specific policy tool, the 'surfing proficiency certificate' as a basic educational tool sufficiently flexible for delivery across home, school and community locations.

31 R. Silverstone, (1999). *Why study the media?* Inaugural Lecture, LSE (9/11/99).

32 Notably, the Electronic Privacy Information Center (http://www.epic.org/copa/op_cert.pdf); see www.peacefire.org and http://www.liberty.org.uk/cacib.

33 See evaluations and critiques of filtering at www.pin.org.uk/filtering/index.htm, www.iwf.org.uk/safe/which/total.htm, www.getnetwise.org, and www.aclu.org/issues/cyber/burning.html. The Pew Internet survey of teens online (op cit.) finds 41% of US families have installed filters, while the forthcoming Children's Internet Protection Act will require all schools receiving federal subsidies to install filters (see http://netizen.uoregon.edu). In the UK, NOP's kids.net survey shows 31% of home users and 41% of school users think a filter is installed on their PC.

Proposal 1: A Public Awareness Campaign

The message is not getting across

Headline messages are not enough, and detailed messages are lacking. Parents already know they must get their kids online to be part of 'the future'; and they know this introduces unknown risks into the home. Yet public awareness of many key issues remains low. Many parents have only a partial grasp of Internet safety issues and even less understanding of literacy issues. Nor have they much less awareness of recommended practices, the options available or the sources of guidance open to them.

As things stand, information is available to those who seek it out, but little is directly put in the way of parents and children. Despite their considerable misgivings and anxieties, many parents do not know where to seek such information.

With insufficient concrete information, expertise or guidance, the rapidity of these changes is generating considerable uncertainty, even anxiety. The more complex the communication environment becomes, the more parents risk misunderstanding and under-using available resources. And so it is still the case that some children new to the Internet will only learn about the potential dangers by stumbling across those dangers as they surf the net, possibly becoming a victim of them.

Call for a public awareness campaign

Calls for a public awareness campaign are far from new, including in the DTI review of the IWF (which noted low levels of public awareness regarding Internet

risks),[34] the *Chatwise Streetwise* report (op cit.) and NCH Action for Children. Yet in the UK we are still awaiting a well-funded and properly targeted off-line advertising campaign focusing on education and safety awareness for children and young people.[35] As many parents interviewed as part of Childnet-International's Netaware research asked, 'When is this awareness programme going to start?'[36] A concerted, Government-led initiative is crucial to kick-start an effective literacy and safety awareness programme.

The window of opportunity

As children's access to the Internet grows rapidly, particularly spreading beyond the 'early adopters' to households and schools who are less technologically-expert, this is indeed the 'window of opportunity' to promote Internet literacy and safety awareness.

Constructing a public awareness campaign is not easy. Familiar problems include reaching the entire population rather than just those already motivated to learn, as well as the challenge of changing not only knowledge and awareness but also actual practices of Internet use.

On the other hand, without a public campaign aimed at increasing public understanding, parents may increasingly turn to solutions being developed by the industry, some of which are helpful and empowering, others less so.[37]

Age makes a difference

A public awareness campaign must differentiate by age. Addressing parents of 4 to 18 year olds as if the issues are equivalent for all 'children and young people' will miss the mark. Little as yet in the existing policy literature differentiates 'legal minors' by age, although parents work out regulatory practices in the home which are highly age-dependent.

Of the various safety strategies proposed, most are more appropriate for younger children rather than for teenagers (e.g. establishing walled gardens, locating the PC in the living room so as to monitor use unobtrusively, or banning chatrooms or downloading or personal email). The nature of the safety message, the degree of literacy expected, the acceptability of a protectionist or restrictive strategy, the importance of supporting values of civic participation and privacy, all these and many other issues in enhancing literacy and minimising risks must be addressed in an age-appropriate manner.

What should a public awareness campaign include?

A public awareness campaign must prioritise issues of literacy – in terms of both exciting opportunities and concrete new skills. And it must flag up issues of safety – both as matters of moral education and concrete practices of use. The aspects of the Internet which children and young people value (notably, interactivity, communication and participation) should be facilitated. There should be an endorsement for public as well as commercial sites as central to the mix. As core to the message, it should be stressed that exploration must go hand in hand with a knowledge of safety issues.

These are straightforward messages for the public, but they are not yet widely known. Without a public awareness campaign, we will continue to see many children and young people engaging in the kinds of Internet usage noted above – haphazard, frustrating, risky, fearful, restricted.

In terms of designing a campaign, several issues are important:

- A *central* site, and a consistent message, promoted across all sectors in order to direct parents, teachers and children to the same information.[38]
- The *timely* targeting of information to parents and children at key moments, including:
  - Initial purchase of a home computer;
  - Signing up with a first/new ISP;
  - Signing the 'Internet Acceptable Use Policy' from the school;[39]
  - When the Internet is introduced to children as part of the national curriculum.
- *Cross-platform promotion*: the message must be promoted across media (print, television, radio as well as online) and across locations (schools, libraries, health centres, online, etc).

The Labour Party Manifesto (2000) announced a package of measures including a plan to ensure all new family PCs come with child safety software and a guidance pack. But this is not yet implemented, and nor is it integrated with a broader promotion of Internet safety or literacy awareness.[40]

Such integration should target other key moments of internet adoption also. For example, why, when schools ask parents to sign the 'acceptable use policy' does the government not provide them with standard guidance notes so they understand, and have a chance to follow up, what they are signing at the moment when their interest is already aroused?

Families need materials which transcend location, available equally at home or school, in the library or elsewhere, materials which transcend medium, available equally off and online, and materials which are age-appropriate and which can be delivered and used flexibly according to circumstances.

Strong co-ordination is required so that the same message is widely available through multiple sources and so that parents and schools and the community can all be involved, drawing on the same or directly comparable materials. A single, respected message communicator is called for, the purpose being to simplify the sources of information available for parents and children in order that, ultimately, more than just the headline messages can be communicated effectively.

34 http://sbm-connect.tees.ac.uk/ecommerce/pdf%20Articles/Internet%20Watch%20Foundation%20Report%201999.pdf. By contrast with awareness of broadcasting regulation, this report notes that only 6% of UK respondents had heard of the IWF and so knew where to complain.

35 http://www.nchafc.org.uk/internet/index.asp?filename=/flatfiles/internet/agenda.html

36 At European level, the EU's Action Plan on Promoting Safer Use of the Internet is funding a variety of initiatives and pilot projects across Europe to promote education and awareness (1999-2002); see www.europa.eu.int/ISPO/iap/index.html and http://www.saferinternet.org/awareness/projects.asp. Elsewhere, other public awareness campaigns include America Links up (www.getnetwise.org/americalinksup), http://www.ram.net.au/NetAlert/netalert.html in Australia and www.pagi.org.sg in Singapore.

37 Damian Tambini observes an increasing tendency for commercial services to lock consumers in through pre-installed filtering systems, walled gardens, cut-down software and the branding of once-public resources. Tambini, D. (11/2000), *Universal Internet Access: A Realistic View*, IPPR/Citizens Online Research Publication No. 1.

38 European Research into Consumer Affairs (ERICA) and NCH Action for Children are working to provide a one stop website advising children and parents about problems on the net (www.net-consumers.org/connected.htm). But unless widely endorsed, it risks becoming merely one such site among many.

39 Schools send home the Internet Acceptable Use Policy for all parents whose children will use the Internet at school. At present, this policy is not tied to any educational activity and so may represent more a meaningless formality than an opportunity to stimulate awareness through the home-school link.

40 'Making Britain the safest place for children to surf the net'. Labour Party press release (20/5/01), www.labour.org.uk.

Proposal 2: A Co-ordinated Community Response

A public awareness campaign should have the effect not only of informing parents but also of reducing the burden of responsibility on them by drawing in additional key agencies to work with children and young people.

Is children's Internet use the responsibility of parents?

Whose responsibility is it to regulate children's Internet use? Beyond addressing illegal activities, is this a matter for government? Is the industry responsible for the uses made of its technology? Should schools become moral educators of children in their leisure time at home? Or should the burden of understanding and managing this new technology fall squarely onto parents' shoulders, since they brought it home?

Perhaps because of the difficulties of regulating the Internet nationally and internationally, many organisations advocate devolving responsibility onto users, here parents. Although no parent denies their moral responsibility for supervising their child(ren), this is an unsatisfactory solution to the difficulties of Internet regulation. It is also one for which many parents feel ill-equipped and insufficiently supported. Crucially, there are issues of expertise and resources, as well as questions of responsibility, at stake. Crucially, depending on parents raises prospects of inequalities in the quality of Internet use.

As the burden of responsibility increasingly falls on parents, parents need support

UK parents have accepted responsibility for providing their children with home access to the Internet. They believe that investing in home computers and Internet access will increase their children's life chances by giving them an educational advantage and an edge in the job market. Provided they can manage it – and the costs in terms of finances, domestic space, time and expertise should not be underestimated – UK parents are now making just this investment.

But it is proving more difficult for parents to take on this responsibility in relation to Internet use. Although there is a clear message from a range of agencies for parents to 'pick up the basics!', how are they to achieve this? Most guidance is available online, creating a Catch 22 for inexpert parents. For those able to take advantage of it, helpful advice is now online, much of it from the industry as well as from independent NGOs.[41] In addition, 'America links up' provides offline support for parents in the USA,[42] but little is available offline for UK parents. Nor is there much that is genuinely interactive, offering human guidance and support, either online or face-to-face.

Broadening responsibility for children's Internet use

Young people's Internet use is largely polarised between a privatised resource, dependent on parental income and expertise and often used alone, and an educational resource, squeezed into the school curriculum and highly restricted in terms of legitimate uses. A broader framework of key agencies contributing resources, activities and responsibilities is required to optimise children's Internet use in the UK.

Partnership

Tambini (op cit.) argued for a joined up Internet *access* policy. This paper argues for a joined up approach to Internet *use*. The ambition must be to work towards the establishment of an effective framework – encompassing all interested parties (government, charities, the new media industry, school, parents, and children themselves). This should:

- co-ordinate the often unconnected or overlapping activities of existing bodies;
- draw in those not yet centrally involved, notably libraries, community organisations, youth clubs, computer camps, etc.

Co-ordinating activities

Home-school link

Given that children mainly use the Internet at home and at school, problems arise in co-ordinating these sites:

- Educational policy specifically promotes the home-school link,[43] but for both parents and teachers, the home-school link is proving difficult to implement.
- At present, children are more likely to access the Internet at home, particularly for fun, particularly in an unfiltered and unsupervised context.[44] On the other hand, advice and guidance is more forthcoming from school than home.
- The ambition of communicating with parents electronically through websites, message boards, email, etc, and receiving emailed homework, is far from widespread.
- The ambition of opening schools' ICT resources to the community, for families to come in after school or at weekends to use and be taught about computers and the Internet is also not in place.
- Literacy and safety guidance is provided by bodies addressing either parents at home (e.g. the industry, ISP's) or teachers at school (e.g. the DfES), but co-ordinating a common message across sites and audiences is not easy.

To establish the home-school link effectively will require a considerable investment of resources, particularly in terms of staff time. It will also require a transformation in the formal definition of appropriate use of educational resources, and more informally, in parents' expectations of their role in both their own and their children's education.

Without such co-ordination…

A co-ordinated response across school, community and home is essential for constructive, safe and fair use of the Internet by children. If schools don't teach Internet safety because they have their own filtering system, this leaves children unprotected in their use at home. If parents try and teach one set of safety guidelines while teachers use a different set, children will think there are too many rules. If chatrooms are banned at home, children will visit a friend's house to chat. If a youth club encourages children to create their own content and the school calls this messing about, children will feel undermined. And so on.

Drawing in other community-based agencies

Internet literacy and safety are not just a matter for schools and parents, for crucial as they are, these are not the sole agencies involved in children's leisure. Moreover, both feel themselves to be overstretched. Hence, we need to broaden the set of agencies and activities with responsibility for children and young people's Internet use.

As children's lives are heavily community-based, lived within a fairly circumscribed locale, the local community has an important, and currently under-developed, role to play.

- Interestingly, in using the Internet, children are highly motivated to seek out local contacts and they value local resources, though often these are not available.
- Effective Internet use for many families depends on local support: in practice, few families learn how to use the Internet through online or print-based resources; rather, they place considerable reliance on informal community links.
- If children do not get safety advice in school at the moment they need it, and if their parents cannot guide them, there are few (offline) sources for them to turn to.

Children and young people regularly participate in local youth clubs, community activities, extra curricular lessons, and so forth. Why not capitalise on these pre-existing foci for young people's activities? Why not capitalise on the expensive equipment that libraries (and other community organisations) maintain in order to improve access, guidance and support for children during their leisure or vacation time? Why not draw in the expertise of other groups (community centre workers, youth club leaders, librarians, further education teachers, etc) into the efforts being made at home and school?

Public libraries

While the NGfL provides links to many online libraries and archives, the value of the library as a local community resource is currently underdeveloped in the UK.[45] Interestingly, little is said about libraries, either in the press or in policy debate and documentation, by contrast with developments in other countries, notably Canada and the USA.[46] And at present, the UK Library Association leaves each library the autonomy to develop its own policy regarding Internet provision, resulting in little coherence across the nation.[47]

Computer camp, youth clubs, etc.

Although often expensive in practice, the idea of the computer camp offers another community-based initiative little seen in the UK. In the USA this provides children from 7-18 with hands on training in a wide range of computer and Internet skills. Given the frequency with which British children – admittedly many of them middle-class – attend swimming, dancing or sports clubs after school and at the weekend, the expectation of attending a local extra-curricular club is already present in most families.

Hence there is considerable potential here for further development, particularly if public funding were available. Without utilising community-based resources and activities:

- we face a gap between an overarching but not necessarily all-encompassing national policy,

largely delivered through schools, and the very individual and highly variable domestic practices being worked out at home;
- there is a considerable underutilisation of ICT resources concentrated in particular locations which could benefit the community at large;
- moreover, such community-based learning has the potential to alleviate the digital divide in Internet use currently evident across households.

41 For more substantial adult education, the European Computer Driving Licence provides a qualification in computer skills (www.ecdl.co.uk).

42 www.getnetwise.org/americalinksup.

43 See the DfEE's green paper, *The Learning Age* (Stationary Office, 2/98, and the *National Grid for Learning* (www.ngfl.gov.uk).

44 NOP Kids.net survey (op cit.).

45 The Government promises to connect all UK public libraries through the People's Network Project, funded by the New Opportunities Fund (www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/project/background.html).

46 *'Net Safe, Net Smart: Managing and Communicating about the Internet in the Library'*, from The Canadian Library Association maps out a pro-education, pro-community, anti-filtering strategy and associated activities (www.cla.ca/netsafe/netsafe.pdf). The American Library Association argues strongly in defense of freedom of speech and children's online privacy (www.ala.org/oitp/privacy.html).

47 See www.la-hq.org.uk and the Consortium for Public Library Networking: www.earl.org.uk.

Proposal 3: A Surfing Proficiency Certificate

If parents became more aware of Internet literacy and safety issues, what could they do? If there were a common message across home and school, what would it say? If more community-based organisations made their resources available and become involved, what would they offer?

The third proposal in this paper introduces a starting point, flexible, comparatively easy to implement, likely to be effective across a range of contexts in which the Internet is used, designed to complement other developments within the industry and education system.

What would a Surfing Proficiency Certificate involve?[48]

Format and delivery

The proposal is for a short period of training, maximum of one week, to be provided across a variety of community locations addressing the basics of Internet literacy and safety for children and young people. The format would allow for a flexible delivery, in terms of:

- *Time*, including intensive delivery in a matter of days or spread more gradually over a longer period;
- *Mode*, crucially including teaching in a face-to-face situation but also with a parallel online version for use at home, with parental involvement.

Content

The content of the training should provide a balance between:

- A positive *literacy* training for effective searching, finding good sites, problem-solving, and meeting specific interests or needs;
- A protective training for *safety*, recognising and reacting appropriately to potential and actual harms, learning to judge the nature and purpose of sites visited or communications encountered.

More specifically, the content could include *an introduction* to:[49]

- Technical / analytic competencies (what is a website, how search engines work, keyword searching, boolean operators, safe downloading, viruses)
- critical strategies (contextualising Internet content, identifying the commercial basis of much of the web, determining the validity or biases of material on offer)
- social guidelines (e-tiquette, SMART rules, moderated and unmoderated chatrooms)
- canonical sites to visit, exciting things to do, where to get help
- production tools (creating a website, online design tools)
- creative ideas (learning techniques and ideas for content creation - just as reading and writing are linked in the curriculum).

Location

The training could be delivered through the school, and it should be available on - and offline at home. But crucially also, it should support the opportunity for other bodies to complement formal education in schools and parents' efforts at home, being deliverable through a community site - community centre, youth club, further education centre, computer camp, local library, etc.

In such locations, short courses could be run during school and summer holidays, or during after-school periods during term-time.

Advantages of a Surfing Proficiency Certificate

- A means of optimising the culture of Internet use as this becomes more established, and of simultaneously providing safety guidance in Internet use for children, young people and their parents.
- A strengthening of current responses to Internet risks, particularly given the growth in pornography and the fact that instances of stranger danger are occurring.
- A 'fun' way of learning about Internet searching and safety to complement formal teaching in schools, allowing children free access to the Internet in a relaxed climate where they can explore the opportunities for learning by trial and error.
- A check, delivered in a timely manner, that each child has received appropriate guidance in the use of the Internet. Safety training in schools, insofar as this occurs, cannot as yet be easily tailored to children's individual requirements (e.g. in relation to specific interests, or teaching them when they first get Internet access at home or want to start using email).

- A policy tool to be used in conjunction with parallel initiatives. One such use might be to tie the signing of schools' 'acceptable use policy' to the Internet surfing certificate: only when children have achieved the level of proficiency demarcated by the certificate would schools (and libraries, youth clubs, etc) permit unrestricted and private use of the Internet.
- A booster measure for pupils for whom the school curriculum fails to deliver, hence alleviating the digital divide. There is currently little backup in educational provision for children who miss out through illness or absence, or don't understand, or are alienated from the teaching of Internet safety when it is delivered at school. The Surfing Proficiency Certificate would be in part for those who otherwise slip through the net of existing safety provision.
- A means of supporting parents: there are few shared opportunities for children and parents to learn together, or to discuss risks and strategies. Yet the moral issues involved are traditionally the preserve of parents more than schools and, for continued monitoring and guidance it is important that parents understand the issues involved.

Possible disadvantages of a Surfing Proficiency Certificate

Various anxieties can be anticipated. For example, would the safety training involved mean teaching children how to find inappropriate sites, surely counterproductive given the small number of incidents thus far? Or, once a child has received a certificate, parents, teachers and, indeed, the industry, are let off the hook, and need not bother to monitor or regulate Internet access and contents.

Yet in other domains, we do not argue that children should not be taught about stranger danger or tested on road safety lest they discover hitherto unknown dangers or that car drivers, paedophiles etc are let off the hook. Even if the risks are small at present, measures are still required to protect children. In any case, combining safety training with a positive view of the Internet by showing children great places to go would provide children with enticing alternatives.

Some argue that children are more sophisticated in their use of the Internet than we think, particularly by comparison with many adults. Yet teaching about Internet literacy and safety is precisely intended for those children who are not, as well as to support their parents.

Rather than claiming either children's sophistication or their vulnerability, a balanced approach is needed, sensitive to children's developing competencies, depending on multiple factors including age and background, neither over- nor under-estimating their competence as a result. One grand policy to deliver Internet literacy (e.g. through the national curriculum) is unlikely to have either the flexibility or sensitivity to achieve this balance and hence multiple, complementary approaches are required.

Related initiatives

It is worth noting some related initiatives already under development. In July 2001, the British Educational Communications Technology agency[50] announced an Internet Proficiency Scheme to establish teaching objectives, teaching activities and assessment activities for delivery in schools to Key Stage 2 pupils.[51] The scheme, including a downloadable certificate, is to be piloted during Autumn 2001, evaluated in Spring

2002, and ready for voluntary use across primary schools in England thereafter.

With Government encouragement, Childnet International are currently (Autumn 2001) piloting the 'Net Benefit?' awareness scheme designed to provide resources and exercises for parents, teachers and children.[52]

As these pilots approach the stage of initial evaluation, there is much to be learned regarding the effectiveness of such schemes. Indeed, the thrust of this paper is to welcome such initiatives. But what is crucial is that the lessons to be learned here are not lost in a proliferation of diverse schemes. The proposal for a Surfing Proficiency Certificate is deliberately intended to meet the requirements outlined in this paper for the delivery of Internet literacy and safety awareness in a flexible manner: it is precisely not geared simply at schools, or available only to those already online, or to be delivered during the long time-frame of the national curriculum.

48 The analogy with the *National Cycling Proficiency Certificate* is interesting – also a community-based initiative to facilitate a positive 'culture of cycling' through one week's free training in skills and safety for children and adults, targeted on the moment of initial use. While not a failsafe to prevent accidents on the roads, it contributes to empowering children to cycle as safely as possible wherever they need or want to go. www.allatsea.demon.co.uk/cycling/, www.roadcode.co.uk/cycle.htm, http://www.roads.dtlr.gov.uk/roadsafety/rs/index.htm.

49 Possible models – not yet formally evaluated – include www.safekids.com, www.scotland.gov.uk/clickthinking and GridClub (www.gridclub.com), co-funded by Channel 4, a fun, password-protected educational website/chatroom for 7-11 year-olds.

50 www.becta.org.uk

51 *Internet Proficiency Scheme planned for Key Stage 2 pupils* (11/7/01). www.becta.org.uk/news/pressrelease/jul1101Internet.html Although the content of the pilot scheme is not yet finalised, it aims empower pupils to recognise un/comfortable, in/valid or un/desirable communications. The PSE and citizenship curriculum represent a vital opportunity for such a scheme in secondary schools.

52 Delivery is through schools, supported by interested LEAs, and through the Childnet website, with exercises also for parents to complete with their child at home. www.childnet-int.org/netbenefit/evaluation.htm

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Sonia was Guest Editor for a Special Issue of the European Journal of Communication, 13(4), in 1998, entitled *'Young People and the New Media in Europe'*.

With Moira Bovill, Sonia is currently working on her next book, entitled, *Going Online: An observational study of children and young people's Internet use.*

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