



DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Government Response
to the Culture, Media and Sport
Select Committee Report on
Harmful Content on the Internet
and in Video Games

*Presented to Parliament by the
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
by Command of Her Majesty
October 2008*



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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON HARMFUL CONTENT ON THE INTERNET AND IN VIDEO GAMES

The Government thanks the Committee for its report on content on the internet and in video games. We believe that this is a hugely important area and one that benefits enormously from this type of Parliamentary scrutiny, as it serves to air issues of concern.

The Government supports the general thrust of the Committee's report and its many useful and practical recommendations. These are issues we take extremely seriously and on which a great deal of work is already underway. The technology is moving quickly and it represents a significant challenge to set up mechanisms to respond to technological innovations. However, we believe that the mechanisms now emerging as a result of Dr Byron's work suggest an appropriate way forward.

Many of the Committee's recommendations fall within the remit of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), a body set up under the aegis of Dr Byron's review. We anticipate that the Council will be working in many of the areas recommended by the Committee, but it is for the Council to determine its own priorities. For this reason, it has not always been possible for us to provide, at this stage, a detailed reply to some of the Committee's recommendations.

We set out our response recommendation by recommendation below:

1. We agree that any approach to the protection of children from online dangers should be based on the probability of risk. We believe that incontrovertible evidence of harm is not necessarily required in order to justify a restriction of access to certain types of content in any medium.

We welcome the Committee's recommendation. In developing policies to protect children from online dangers, the Government will take steps to ensure that any new measures will be proportionate and risk-based, taking into account available evidence. The use of Impact Assessments will help policy makers think through and understand the consequences of any interventions, therefore enabling the Government to identify which proposals will effectively protect children, while minimising costs and administrative burdens.

2. It is sensible that parents set boundaries for their children's online activities, but a totally risk-averse culture in parenting will not equip children to face dangers which they will inevitably encounter as they grow older.

We agree with the Committee and believe that it is essential to strike the right balance in order to manage the risks associated with online activities whilst not unduly restricting children's access to the internet. As Dr Byron highlighted in her report (Safer Children in a Digital World), "risk taking is a developmental imperative of childhood".

The Government, through the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) launched by the Prime Minister on 29th September will consider how best to empower adults and children to make informed decisions. This may include:

- developing adults' skills so that they feel confident about having conversations with children about online safety;
- providing parents with advice on how to take technical steps to manage online risks on behalf of their children, which are appropriate to their age and competence;

- encouraging more clarity in signalling potentially harmful material, helping parents to decide what is appropriate;
- empowering children to develop their own skills and awareness by providing supporting tools and through better education awareness initiatives.

3. The Home Office Task Force on Child Internet Safety has, by common consent, done good work and has served its purpose well; but its loose funding and support structures have given the impression that its work is of a comparatively low priority. We agree with Dr Byron that the structure and funding of the Task Force should be formalised. We also welcome the announcement by the Government that the date for establishment of the Council is to be brought forward from April 2009 to September 2008. However, we are concerned at reports from some key players that there has been no contact with Government to take this forward and from others that there has been little opportunity to influence decisions as to how the Council will operate in practice. We expect the Government to address these issues urgently.

The Government welcomes the recognition by the Committee and many witnesses of the good work done by the Home Office Task Force.

The new Council will build on that work and we have sought to engage future members and other stakeholders fully in developing the design, structure and practices of the Council. At the time of the Committee's Inquiry, the government's engagement strategy with stakeholders was just getting underway.

The Council's cross-departmental secretariat has since carried out an extensive process of engagement with all sectors with an interest in internet child safety including industry, the third sector, academics and law enforcement. This has been in addition to discussions between departments and the devolved administrations.

We have held a number of roundtable meetings with Council members seeking their views on governance, decision making, resources and other operational issues. These discussions have already led to over 100 organisations accepting an invitation to join the Council. The full list of Council members and its Executive Board is attached as an annex to this paper. Membership was announced when the Prime Minister launched the Council on 29th September.

The government is committed to ensuring that the Council is a collaborative forum enabling Government Departments and all relevant stakeholders to come together and contribute jointly to the development and delivery of the Child internet Safety Strategy. This will build on the open, inclusive way in which Dr Byron's Review was conducted.

4. We agree that the Council, at least in its early years, should be chaired by a Minister, to ensure that Council members have direct access to public policy-making. However, we question the proposed joint chairing arrangement, which excludes DCMS Ministers. We believe that it would be unfortunate if DCMS were to appear subsidiary in Council governance, given its role in media regulation, although we recognise the practical difficulties in sharing the chairing role between many Departments: indeed, we question whether co-chairing is desirable in principle. We invite the Government to consider carefully whether to appoint a single lead minister, either from one of the Departments represented or perhaps from the Cabinet Office. There may be a case in future for the Council to be chaired by someone who sits outside Government, particularly if the role of the Council is to expand. Given that the Government has accepted Dr Byron's recommendations in full, we believe it should now move quickly to provide a budget.

We note the Committee's comments about the chairing arrangements for the Council. We carefully considered the practicalities of this issue, and the recommendation for joint chairs by Dr Byron, when scoping the governance of the Council and concluded that:

- As Dr Byron identified, a single chair would not be appropriate as responsibility for this policy area rests with more than one department.
- It is appropriate for the chairs to be at ministerial level given the importance of the work and the need to engage fully with stakeholders.
- More than two co-chairs would present unnecessary operational difficulties with no obvious benefits.
- Ministerial representation on the Council as a whole should be from the three departments responsible for delivery of the Byron Review recommendations – DSCF, DCMS and the Home Office.

DCMS will continue to play a key role in the work of the Council and the delivery of Dr Byron's recommendations.

Officials from DCSF, DCMS and the Home Office are currently in discussion to agree a budget for the work of the Council and the secretariat

5. While there might be an expectation that most of the Council's effort would be directed towards child protection, we believe that there is a danger of overlooking possible harm to vulnerable adults, and we recommend that the Government should give this proper consideration when deciding the Council's terms of reference.

We note the Committee's concerns but the Council's remit is clear – to take responsibility for developing and overseeing the implementation of a Child Internet Safety Strategy with two core elements:

- Better regulation – in the form, wherever possible, of voluntary codes of practice that industry can sign up to
- Better information and education for children and parents – where the role of government, law enforcement, schools and children's services will be key

Much of the Council's work could have beneficial effects for all internet users – for example, increased recognition of, and compliance with, Acceptable Use Policies that explain to website users what they are permitted, and not permitted, to do. However, any substantial change to its remit could deflect the Council from its core purpose of promoting child safety.

The government has also set up the Convergence Think Tank (CTT) to consider the future of communications regulation and policy. How to make the online environment safer for consumers of all ages is an important question being considered by the CTT. Potential harmful or offensive content is one part of this, and it is likely that better regulation, public information and education will play an important role, as they have in the Byron Review Action Plan. The CTT is due to deliver a final report in early 2009.

In the near term, there are some initiatives already in place. For example, implementation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive is currently being consulted on: this will extend some of the protections we currently have for broadcast television content to some on-demand services delivered online. And a new internet safety training module is being developed to be delivered through UK Online Centres. This will be appropriate for, and freely available to, children and adults alike.

6. We are much impressed by the work of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre and its close co-operation with charities such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. However, we are concerned that levels of funding are not keeping pace with the increasing volume of work which is referred to the Centre, and we therefore encourage the Government to look favourably on any request by CEOP for increased resources. We also welcome the financial contribution made by charities and industry, and we believe that the latter should be increased: business models for Internet-based services rely upon public confidence that networking sites are safe to use, and CEOP plays a large part in delivering that safety.

The Government has indicated that it will consider requests for resources, with the caveat that these requests need to be considered as part of the overall Home Office budget discussions.

The Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) receives an annual budget from the Home Office, which is paid through the Serious Organised Crime Agency to which it is affiliated. In addition to the Home Office grant, CEOP receives significant levels of support from industry and the third sector.

In 2008-09 CEOP received an annual budget (from the Home Office) of £5.77 million and an annual budget of £5.657 million 2007-08 and of £5.110 million in 2006-07.

The Government is pleased by the level of support industry, charities and other sources have shown to CEOP and encourages them to continue supporting CEOP in its excellent work.

7. We strongly recommend that terms and conditions which guide consumers on the types of content which are acceptable on a site should be prominent. It should be made more difficult for users to avoid seeing and reading the conditions of use: as a consequence, it would become more difficult for users to claim ignorance of terms and conditions if they upload inappropriate content. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety should examine this at an early stage and produce recommendations as to how it is best achieved.

We note the Committee's recommendation. At an early stage after launch, the Council will need to consider the priority to be given to this important issue.

The work of the Council will build on the Home Secretary's Taskforce on Child Protection on the internet that has already published a number of good practice guidelines to support industry in their design and moderation of chat rooms and instant messaging (2003), interactive services for children (2005) and social networking sites (2008). These guidelines set out practical steps that companies can take to help users use their websites safely and responsibly, and promote the communication of acceptable behaviour at the point of registration.

8. We are also concerned that user-generated video content on sites such as YouTube does not carry any age classification, nor is there a watershed before which it cannot be viewed. We welcome efforts by YouTube to identify material only suitable for adults, such as that containing foul language, and to develop potential controls to prevent children from accessing it.

See the response to questions 10, 11, 12 and 13

9. We do not believe that it is in the public interest for Internet service providers or networking sites to neglect screening content because of a fear that they will become liable under the terms of the EC E-Commerce Directive for material which is illegal but which is not identified. It would be perverse if the law were to make such sites more vulnerable for trying

to offer protection to consumers. We recommend that Ofcom or the Government should set out their interpretation of when the E-Commerce Directive will place upon Internet service providers liability for content which they host or to which they enable access. Ultimately, the Government should be prepared to seek amendment to the Directive if it is preventing ISPs and websites from exercising more rigorous controls over content.

We agree with the Committee that it is not desirable for ISPs and networking sites to refrain from scrutiny of content due to fears regarding the e-commerce Directive. We do not believe that the e-commerce Directive was designed to have this effect, and we believe that the UK's implementation is in line with the original intention.

In certain circumstances, ISPs can be required to take action to terminate or prevent specific infringements (e.g. monitoring/screening specific accounts for a specified time or filtering specific content). The e-commerce Directive, however, prevents the imposition of general monitoring requirements on ISPs, or the imposition of general obligations to seek actively the facts or circumstances indicating illegal activity.

The Government will work with the industry and other stakeholders to understand and address any legal issues in this area. We will also continue to engage with the European Commission and other Member States on this and other related issues with regards to a possible review of the e-Commerce Directive in 2009.

10. We found the arguments put forward by Google/You Tube against their staff undertaking any kind of proactive screening to be unconvincing. To plead that the volume of traffic prevents screening of content is clearly not correct: indeed, major providers such as MySpace have not been deterred from reviewing material posted on their sites. Even if review of every bit of content is not practical, that is not an argument to undertake none at all. We recommend that proactive review of content should be standard practice for sites hosting user-generated content, and we look to the UK Council proposed by Dr Byron to give a high priority to reconciling the conflicting claims about the practicality and effectiveness of using staff and technological tools to screen and take down material.

11. File titles and screening tools can help to identify files which appear to present a particular risk of exposure to inappropriate material. We encourage sites which handle user-generated content to develop as a priority technological tools to screen file titles and prevent the upload of – or quarantine – material which potentially violates terms and conditions of use until it has been reviewed by staff. We also encourage sites to share their knowledge and expertise at the UK Council on Child Internet Safety, with a view to developing codes of practice for prior screening of material.

12. We find it shocking that a take-down time of 24 hours for removal of child abuse content should be an industry standard.

13. We believe that there is a need for agreed minimum standards across industry on take-down times in order to increase consumer confidence. We recommend that the UK Council on Child Internet Safety should work with Internet-based industries to develop a consistent and transparent policy on take-down procedures with clear maximum times within which inappropriate material will be removed. This should be subject to independent verification and publication.

We agree with the Committee that the enormous growth in user generated content has highlighted the importance of effective screening and other measures to prevent, where possible, the display of inappropriate content to children.

The Government is committed to working with the Council on Dr Byron's recommendation to develop an independently monitored voluntary code of practice on the moderation of user generated content. As part of this process, the Government anticipates that the Council will consider the issues raised by the Committee.

Dr Byron has made several other recommendations, in relation to child safety and user generated content that will provide a safer environment for children and adults alike. These have been accepted by the Government, and will be considered in due course by the Council. These include:

- Encouraging websites to sign up to public commitments on "take-down" times
- Encouraging search providers to make it obvious to users what level of search is on (e.g. safe or moderate) and give users the option to 'lock it' on
- Ensuring safety information is displayed in prominent places
- Ensuring search engines have a clear link to child safety information and safe search settings on the front page of their website
- Raising children's and parents' awareness of their role in reporting abuse to the site's host
- Developing ways for parental control software to communicate automatically with websites' age-verification systems to prevent children from signing up to sites with false dates of birth.

14. We await the announcement by the Ministry of Justice on whether the law might be strengthened to help prevent the use of the Internet to encourage suicide. Even if it concludes that the offence of assisting suicide is clear enough in law to enable successful prosecutions of those responsible for websites which assist or encourage suicide, we believe that the law should not be the only means of controlling access. The characteristics of the offence should be clear enough in law to enable access to such sites to be blocked on a voluntary basis, possibly through the procedures established by the Internet Watch Foundation. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety should accord a high priority in its work programme to discussions with the Ministry of Justice on whether the law on assisted suicide is worded clearly enough to include websites which encourage suicide and to enable action to be taken to block access to websites which assist or encourage suicide.

Justice Minister Maria Eagle announced on 17 September that the law on assisting suicide is to be simplified to increase public understanding and reassure people that it applies as much on the internet as it does off-line.

This demonstrates the Government's commitment to implementing Dr Byron's recommendation in this area. The UK Council will consider the practicalities of restricting access to websites that are not in accordance with UK law and how enforcement mechanisms can and should be applied to online activity.

15. At a time of rapid technological change, it is difficult to judge whether blocking access to Internet content at network level by Internet service providers is likely to become ineffective in the near future. However, this is not a reason for not doing so while it is still effective for the overwhelming majority of users.

The Government is committed to encouraging all UK ISPs offering domestic broadband services, to block access to child abuse images online. We note the Committee's recommendation and agree that this method should be kept under review in light of rapid technological changes.

16. We believe that there would be advantage in establishing a forum at which governments or regulators from across the world could try to find common ground on how access to content on the Internet should be treated. This may, in time, lead to a more co-ordinated effort in frustrating access to material which is widely perceived as harmful. We recommend that the Government should take a lead in establishing such a forum.

We concur with the Committee on the importance of discussion among countries on trying to limit access to harmful content. We need, however, to distinguish between content which is generally considered illegal, where there are already mechanisms for international dialogue (such in the Internet Governance Forum) and potentially harmful content where there is less international coordination (not least because of the difficulty in agreeing what is harmful). Work has, however, been taken forward in the Council of Europe on harmful content (especially in relation to children) which the UK has been involved with.

17. It is clear that many users of social networking sites, particularly children, do not realise that by posting information about themselves, they may be making it publicly available for all to see. We recommend that social networking sites should have a default setting restricting access and that users should be required to take a deliberate decision to make their personal information more widely available. We also recommend that consideration be given to alerting users through pop-up displays about the risks involved in submitting personal details without restricting access.

It should be recognised that children join social networks in order for their profiles to be seen by other children but it is also clear that many do not realise how the different privacy settings work and that they may inadvertently make their profiles public for everyone. The recent HO Social Networking Guidance contains a number of recommendations to Service Providers including the provision of better information for users to understand what the different privacy settings mean, giving them a choice of ‘privacy or public’ options or settings to use and providing advice to users about the implications of posting personal data.

18. We commend Microsoft for providing a facility for direct reporting to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre within Windows Live Messenger. We believe that high profile one-click facilities for reporting directly to law enforcement and support organisations are an essential feature of a safe networking site. We recommend that the UK Council for Child Internet Safety should impress upon providers of networking services the value of direct one-click reporting from their websites to law enforcement agencies and voluntary sector organisations with expertise in offering support to vulnerable people. We also believe that facilities for reporting abuse should be obvious to users and should be directly accessible from all relevant pages of a website, close to the entry point. We would expect providers of all Internet services based upon user participation to move towards these standards without delay.

We note the Committee’s recommendations and agree that providing a mechanism for reporting inappropriate content would be a valuable tool for children and parents alike. How this can be achieved consistently across the internet and in a way that does not overburden law enforcement agencies is a matter for the Council to consider.

The Government also welcomes the work that CEOP continues to do to tackle the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and is pleased that CEOP will be represented on the Council and its Executive Board

19. We recommend that network operators and manufacturers of mobile devices should assess whether it is technically possible to enable images sent from mobile devices to be traced and viewed by law enforcement officers with the appropriate authority.

Monitoring of content transmitted over phone networks has serious implications in terms of civil liberties, and in general would not be permitted under EU law. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act already set out the circumstances under which this is permitted. It is also possible for forensic experts to recover images – often including those which have been deleted – from a mobile phone handset, in the same way that they can recover emails from computers

The Government supports the Committee's recommendation that network operators should assess whether it is technically possible to enable images posted online to be linked with the devices used to upload them when required to do so by law enforcement officers with the appropriate authority.

20. We commend Microsoft for their efforts to ensure that there are varied and effective parental controls built in to their hardware. We believe that other console manufacturers should be encouraged at least to match these. We hope that this matter will also be considered at an early date by the UK Council on Child Internet Safety.

We note the Committee's recommendation. At an early stage after launch, the Council will need to consider where this issue should figure in its priorities.

The Government has accepted Dr Byron's recommendation to look at establishing a kite mark for parental controls to provide recognisable consistency for parents. This will ensure that computers sold for use in the home in the UK have preloaded kite marked parental control software that takes parents through clear prompts and explanations to help set it up, and that internet service providers offer and advertise this prominently when users set up their connection. The Government will work with the Council and other partners to deliver Dr Byron's recommendation.

21. We expect the Government to apply continuing, and if necessary, escalating pressure on Internet service providers who are showing reluctance to block access to illegal content hosted abroad. In a lucrative market, the cost to Internet service providers of installing software to block access to child pornography sites should not come second to child safety.

The Government is committed to working with the Internet Watch Foundation and the internet industry to reach the target set by Ministers of 100% of UK ISPs (providing domestic broadband connections) blocking access to websites containing child abuse images

Whilst, as explained in the context of recommendation 9, it would be permissible under the e-commerce Directive to require internet intermediaries to carry out a certain degree of filtering/blocking, any specific proposals would need to be assessed for their compatibility with the prohibition in Article 15 of the e-commerce Directive to impose general monitoring requirements on ISPs.

22. We believe that leaving individual companies in the Internet services sector to regulate themselves in the protection of users from potential harm has resulted in a piecemeal approach which we find unsatisfactory. Different practices are being followed and there is a lack of consistency and transparency, leading to confusion among users. Nor is there any external mechanism for complaints about services provided by Internet-based industries to be considered by an independent body. However, we do not believe that statutory regulation should be the first resort. Instead, we propose a tighter form of self-regulation, applied across the industry and led by the industry. We therefore call on the industry to establish a self-regulatory body which would agree minimum standards based upon the recommendations of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, monitor their effectiveness, publish performance statistics and adjudicate on complaints.

See response to recommendation 24.

23. We recognise that a number of companies may choose to set higher standards for their own commercial reasons, but the public need the assurance that certain basic standards will be met. This is particularly important in the area of child protection and Internet safety. However, the new body might also take on the task of setting rules governing practice in other areas such as on-line piracy and peer to peer file-sharing, and behavioural advertising, which although outside the scope of this inquiry are also of public concern. Given the global nature of the industry, it is impossible to make membership compulsory for all service providers, but a widespread publicity campaign should ensure that consumers are aware that they can have confidence in the standards of protection and reputable practice which membership of the body carries with it and that this cannot be guaranteed by those companies that choose not to join.

We can see that there may be merit in considering in due course whether self regulatory arrangements set up under the auspices of UKCCIS should also cover other consumer protection issues. However, it is important to distinguish between issues that relate to consumer protection and those, such as piracy, that are principally about relationships between different parts of industry. The Government has recently published a consultation on suggested approaches to peer to peer file sharing, which outlines a possible industry led approach. However, this would require different structures, involve different parts of industry from those foreseen under UKCCIS and would need to be underpinned by regulation.

24. Our preferred model for any new body to maintain standards among providers of Internet-based services is that of the Advertising Standards Authority, which is generally successful at securing compliance with codes for advertising standards but which, if necessary, may refer companies which persistently breach those standards to statutory regulators that can apply penalties.

We agree with the Committee's view that statutory regulation in this area should not be a first resort and that industry self regulation based on agreed standards is the preferred way forward.

As part of her Review, Dr Byron stated that a priority focus of the Child Internet Safety Strategy should be to work with industry to develop a better regulatory framework, including independently monitored self-regulatory codes that will build on best practice, promote transparency and provide families with the tools and reassurance they need to use the internet safely. The Child Internet Safety Strategy will be developed by the Council and published in spring 2009.

Given the global nature of the internet beyond national boundaries Dr Byron recommended a self-regulatory system for protecting children from potentially harmful or inappropriate material. However, it is difficult to find a parallel example in another area of industry self-regulation to help define this approach to e-safety, not least because the internet is constantly evolving in how it is used and what it can offer. We therefore need an innovative, flexible approach that provides the appropriate levels of challenge and support to all stakeholders.

A part of this flexible approach could be the establishment of an industry self-regulatory body but that would be a matter for industry to consider with Council partners as part of their wider discussions on self regulation.

25. We commend the Government for the action it has taken to motivate the Internet industry, the voluntary sector and others to work together to improve the level of protection from risks from the Internet, particularly for children. However, we regret that much of this work remains unknown and has therefore done little to increase public confidence. We look to the UK Council to build on the existing agreements and to ensure a much greater public awareness of what has already been achieved.

We are grateful for the Committee's comments and do recognise the benefits of publicising both the importance of internet safety to families and the sources of available help. The Committee's report has drawn welcome attention to a number of the initiatives we have put in place and which have had a significant impact – the distribution of over one million Know IT All CDs being a good example.

The Government is already committed to delivering a £9m communications campaign on child safety over the next three years, as set out in the Staying Safe Action Plan published in February 2008. The Byron Review recommendations on public information will be taken forward as part of that commitment.

We look forward to working with the Council to co-ordinate our efforts and reach children and parents in a variety of ways.

26. We also note that the Government originally suggested that four different Ministers should give evidence to our inquiry and it does seem that there is scope for improved co-ordination of activity between different Government departments. We recommend that a single Minister should have responsibility for co-ordinating the Government's effort in improving levels of protection from harm from the Internet, overseeing complementary initiatives led by different Government departments, and monitoring the resourcing of relevant Government-funded bodies.

The Government recognises that there needs to be close cooperation. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety will, of course, be a key forum for engagement, but this will need to form part of a coherent strategy to ensure that we can balance public policy imperatives with the need to allow these key industries to develop, innovate and flourish. Ministerial responsibilities are a matter for the Prime Minister who keeps them under review.

27. We endorse the thrust of Dr Byron's recommendations on improving media literacy, and we commend her for her approach. However, we believe that the one-stop shop will only be worth locating on the DirectGov website if search tools, social networking sites, video-sharing sites and Internet service providers offer a direct link: otherwise the one-stop shop will languish in obscurity. We also recommend that all new computer equipment sold for home use should be supplied with a standard information leaflet, to be agreed with the IT hardware and software industries through the UK Council on Child Internet Safety, containing advice for parents on Internet safety tools and practices.

We note the Committee's recommendations on making effective links to a one-stop shop on child internet safety and the provision of an information leaflet with purchased computer hardware.

The Government agrees in principle with Dr Byron's recommendation that an authoritative one-stop shop for child internet safety is needed and this could be sited within the DirectGov network. However, it is for the Council to consider the practicalities of doing so and the links with the wider internet to ensure greater penetration of the right messages to parents and their families.

The Government recognises the importance of accurate, relevant, concise, readable and easily available information to all parents but the provision of internet safety material with hardware is an issue for the Council to consider as part of the wider communications strategy recommended by Dr Byron.

28. We agree with Ofcom that parents will need to take on greater responsibility for protecting children from harm from the Internet and from video games. In particular, they should be aware of the consequences of buying devices which allow unsupervised access to the Internet; they should have more knowledge of young children’s social networking activities and be more familiar with video game content, thereby gaining a better understanding of the risks; and they should, wherever possible, discuss those risks openly with their children. We recommend that the UK Council for Child Internet Safety should investigate ways of communicating these messages to parents.

We agree with the Committee’s recommendations that managing a lot of the risks that children face on the internet and video games will remain the responsibility of parents.

The Government has accepted Dr Byron’s recommendation to develop an information and education strategy, focused on raising the knowledge, skills and understanding around e-safety for children, parents and other responsible adults. We will work with the Council to produce and deliver this strategy.

As identified in Dr Byron’s report, the strategy will need to address two specific areas:

- The generational digital divide – this would mean addressing the very real needs of parents, teachers and others involved in the care of children and young people in order to empower them to address online safety issues with the children and young people in their care, so that parenting and education that addresses issues of safety and wellbeing is understood as being related to both the offline and the online worlds.
- The needs of children and young people – this would mean providing appropriately targeted information to enable children and young people themselves to develop their own online safety awareness and skills.

29. We recognise the concerns that the hybrid system for games classification proposed by Dr Byron may not command confidence in the games industry and would not provide significantly greater clarity for consumers. We believe that, ideally, a single classification system should be adopted. While either of the systems operated by the BBFC and by PEGI would be workable in principle, we believe that the widespread recognition of the BBFC’s classification categories in the UK and their statutory backing offer significant advantages which the PEGI system lacks. We therefore agree that the BBFC should continue to rate games with adult content and should have responsibility for rating games with content appropriate only for players aged 12 or above, and that these ratings should appear prominently. Online distributors should be encouraged to take advantage of the BBFC online scheme which should be promoted as offering greater confidence to parents about the nature of the game. While we hope that PEGI will work with the BBFC to develop a single system, distributors are of course free to continue to use PEGI ratings in addition, as they do at present.

The Committee will know that, in accordance with Dr Byron’s recommendations, a consultation on the classification of computer games was launched on 31 July. It will run until 20 November and we welcome all responses. The four classification options detailed in the consultation document are:

BBFC/PEGI (Pan-European Game Information) hybrid system

The BBFC would rate all games that are only suitable for players over the age of 12, with PEGI continuing to rate all 3+ and 7+ games. The BBFC logos would appear on the front of all boxes, with the PEGI logos on the back.

The BBFC would extend its statutory powers to cover games from 12+, bringing it into line with the classification system used for DVDs and videos and building on parental awareness and understanding of what those ratings mean. For this to work best, the BBFC and PEGI would need to agree to harmonise their logos and age classifications so there is no further potential for confusion.

Enhanced BBFC system

The BBFC would act as the sole statutory classifications body for all video games, applying its ratings from U to 18. It would retain its power to refuse to classify games it feels are potentially harmful based on its public consultations.

Enhanced PEGI system

A UK-based organisation (potentially the Video Standards Council) would be the designated statutory classification body for video games, applying the PEGI ratings. The VSC (or other UK body chosen) would need to sign up to this new role and any other legislative duties required of it. All video games would be rated using the PEGI system and the only role for the BBFC would be in classifying film content which is not integral to the game.

Voluntary Code of Practice

There would be no changes made to the legislation so BBFC and PEGI would continue to classify games as they currently do. The current system of dual classification and labelling would continue to exist. The Government would then ask retailers and suppliers to sign up to a voluntary Code of Practice to ensure that they adhered to the classification system when supplying video games to children aged 12 or above, even though a statutory offence would not be committed if they broke the Code.

As Dr Bryon said, the final system must have the following characteristics

- a uniform and clear set of symbols/labels to categorise the age ratings;
- the power to refuse to certify titles;
- a statutory basis to the video games classifications system from age 12 onwards;
- a non statutory system up to the age of 12;
- be flexible and future proof;
- work for the games industry;
- support retailers; and
- reflect the evidence on potential harms.

We note the Committee's views, and if they have further views on any of the options we are now consulting on, we would be happy to hear them.

UK Council for Child Internet Safety

– M E M B E R S H I P –

This is an alphabetical list of members of the UKCCIS as of Monday 29 September 2008. Organisation name is used in the main, except where the member is acting in an individual capacity.

3 TM	Electronic Arts
Activision/Vivendi	Joe Elliot
Advertising Association	Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA)
Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)	Entertainment Retailers Association
AOL UK	Facebook
Association for Infant Mental Health	Keri Facer, Futurelab
Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS)	Family and Parenting Institute
Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)	Family Online Safety Institute
Bebo	Family Welfare Association (now renamed Family Action)
Paul Beresford, MP for Mole Valley	Game Group
British Board of Film Classification (BBFC)	Adam Gee
British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)	Alisdair Gillespie, Leicester De Montfort Law School
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA)	Jon Gisby
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA)	Google
British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB)	Independent Commission for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS)
British Standards Institute	Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
British Telecommunications Plc (BT)	Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE)
Broadband Stakeholder Group	Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB)
Annette Brooke, MP for Mid Dorset and North Poole	Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
Carphone Warehouse Group Plc	Internet Services Providers' Association (ISPA)
Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)	Jagex
Childnet International	Anthony Lilley
Dr Richard Clayton, University of Cambridge	LINX
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	Professor Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics
Digital Media Group	Media Literacy Task Force
Disney	Mediawatch
Dixons Group	

Microsoft	Parenting UK
Andrea Millwood Hargrave, ATVOD	Parentline Plus
Mobile Broadband Group	Piczo
Myspace	Press Complaints Commission
National Academy for Parenting Practitioners	Fiona Romeo
National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	Samaritans
National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)	Sony Computer Entertainment Europe
National Children's Bureau	Stop It Now
National Children's Homes (NCH)	Symantec
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	Telefonica O2 UK
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	Thus PLC
NC Soft	Tiga
News Corporation	Tiscali
Nickelodeon	T-Mobile
Nintendo	Ubisoft
Office of Communications (OFCOM)	University for Industry (Ufi) - UK Online Centres
Open Rights Group	Vodafone UK
Orange	Dr Monica Whitty, Nottingham Trent University
Pan-European Game Information (PEGI)	Yahoo



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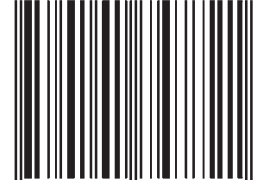
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