



ippr Seminar Summary: "A Responsibility Shared? Finding Solutions to Protect Children Online"

ippr Manifesto for a Digital Britain

**"A Responsibility Shared? Finding Solutions to Protect
Children Online"**

Tuesday 2nd November 2004, 14:30 – 16:30

Moses Room, House of Lords



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Agenda

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| 14:30 | Chair's welcome & intro |
| 14:40 | Paul Goggins MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Home Office and Chair of the Home Office Internet Task Force for Child Safety on the Internet
Followed by Questions from the floor |
| 15:10 | John Carr, NCH and Spokesperson for the Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety |
| 15:25 | Mike Galvin, Director Internet Operations, BT |
| 15:40 | Bill Thompson, Freelance Journalist |
| 15:55 | Questions from the floor |
| 16:25 | Vote of thanks |
| 16:30 | Close |

Background

Since 1997, the percentage of reported child pornography hosted in the UK has fallen from 18% to less than 1%. However, BT recently announced they had blocked almost 250,000 attempts to view illegal child pornography in just three weeks since the company switched on its CleanFeed system.

While the industry has done much to 'clean up the net' problems of child abuse images and protecting children from inappropriate content continue to concern parents and pose potential barriers to increasing home internet access in the UK.

Speakers invited to put forward recommendations for further improving the UK's record in this area and to discuss practical and policy implications of legislative and technological developments were **Paul Goggins MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary, Home Office and Chair of the Home Office Internet Task Force for Child Protection on the Internet; **John Carr**, Spokesperson for the Children's Charity Coalition for Internet Safety; **Mike Galvin**, Director, Internet Operations, BT and **Bill Thompson**, freelance journalist and commentator on new technology issues for the BBC.

The event took place from 2:30 - 4:30pm, Houses of Parliament. Brian White MP, Officer of the All Party Internet Group, provided the Chair.

The Presentations

John Carr began the seminar by introducing the Children's Charities Coalition for Internet Safety's Digital Manifesto, published on 2nd November. The Manifesto accused police resources of being "inadequate" to tackle the problem of Internet paedophiles and asked for an urgent review of Internet policing.

In addition, the Manifesto called for:

- A virtual 999 service for the internet, providing a national focal point for public and professionals.
- A change in the law to make it illegal to offer advice on how to abuse children
- Computer manufacturers and retailers to pre-install internet safety software which has been set to a high level.
- Banks to design payment cards, which will automatically alert others e.g. gambling web sites that they are being used by someone under the age of 18.
- For all government departments to form a common policy on tackling child abuse online

The full text of the Digital Manifesto and a summary are available in pdf format.

John Carr was also keen to point out some of the success the Home Office Internet Task Force for Child Safety on the Internet had achieved over its four years in operation. He acknowledged it had provided a great forum for negotiation, where previously communication between industry and child protection agencies had taken place under the auspices of media interviews and public debate.

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He also praised the Sexual Offences Act, in particular the 'grooming' offence created in Section 15, as well as the awareness raising activities the Task Force had undertaken. It is now the case that 94% of children in the UK are aware that people on Internet chat rooms may not be who they claim to be. Before the task force such awareness levels were significantly lower.

The actions of the mobile phone industry in producing a Code of Practice on online content as well as a new classification body were commended. John singled out Vodafone for particular praise in demanding each customer verify they are an adult or by default have adult content restricted. Vodafone also enable filtering and blocking software by default. This is something the Children's Charities have asked of fixed Internet service providers for many years, and something John Carr promised they would continue to campaign for.

He also emphasised the lack of parental awareness of filtering systems, and criticised the ISP and hardware industry for not providing such systems at point of sale. While he stated he was not seeking a new legislative approach, John Carr nonetheless felt this was something that needed to be addressed quite urgently.

Paul Goggins MP had similar praise for the achievements of the Task Force. He singled out the awareness campaigns saying £3million had so far been spent in promotion of these. He also said that the old fashioned approach to regulation would not work in this area: by the time the Home Office had issued anything, the technology would have moved on. The Task Force and its flexible approach was therefore essential to tackling the issue of child safety online.

He then went on to outline future projects for the Task Force including a Good Practice document for chat room moderators, currently in the consultation process, work with the British Standards Institute to produce a kitemark for filtering systems which he hoped would increase parental confidence in using such tools.

A major future project for consideration was discussed at the last Task Force meeting and involves developing a National Centre for policing in this area, built on the US NCMEC model. Paul Goggins felt this should be considered within the context of the Police Reform White Paper and stated that he was very interested in taking this idea further.

He questioned the Children's Charities call for more police resources saying it is not about extra resources, but rather where those resources are deployed. He emphasised the need for co-operation amongst industry, law enforcement, government and child protection agencies, citing the IWF as a key achievement. While it is important not to be complacent, the Minister said he nonetheless felt the UK had the key to successfully tackling the problem of child abuse images online.

A major development in preventing viewing of child abuse images online came with BT's introduction of their http blacklisting initiative, commonly called 'cleanfeed'. **Mike Galvin** from BT outlined the project. Cleanfeed uses a list of sites which have been found to frequently contain illegal material, produced by the IWF, and blocks them at server level such that when an access attempt is made the user will receive a '404 error' message stating the site is not available. While the figures for attempted access BT published are very high, the company has no way of telling to what extent they were boosted by multiple access attempts. BT does not record the IP address of access attempts and therefore no further action is taken.

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Mike Galvin was keen to point out that BT do not see cleanfeed as the whole of the solution, rather it was 'just one weapon in the armoury' and a significant step in the right direction. The decision to introduce the system was not taken lightly and BT still have some overhanging legal exposure. However, the company felt that the legal risks were outweighed by the 'rightness' of their action. There was also no way that this system could have been introduced previously; the IWF lists were not available and the technology was not sufficiently advanced.

Mike Galvin also touched upon the range of other activities BT is involved in to promote child safety online. These include assisting with the training of law enforcement agencies, pioneering an 'abuse team' set up to deal with customer complaints regarding abuse of the Internet, and the decision, taken two years ago, to close all their chatrooms as the company felt they could not run them without compromising the safety of children online.

He emphasised the importance of educating customers, particularly parents and guardians so that they can set controls for their children's access.

The final presentation was given by **Bill Thompson**. He stated that while it was essential to reduce the instances of children engaging in dangerous activities online, it was also important not to create a climate of fear.

He criticised the war terminology used by children's charities and said we should search for a liberal and progress alternative to tackling the problem. The role of the Internet in child abuse should not be overstated; instead the Internet should be preserved as a space in which adults act as adults.

Again, he emphasised the importance of raising awareness and particularly of including ICT teaching in the curriculum to be taught at schools.

The full text of Bill Thompson's speech is available at <http://www.ippr.org/research/files/team34/project214/041102%20children%20online.pdf>

The discussion

The limits of self regulation

There were comments on the origins of the Internet Watch Foundation, and the self regulatory approach to Internet content that has become the norm. At a time when the Internet is now much more pervasive in home and school use, some felt it made sense to take a fresh look at how we deal with issues of harmful content online. There was a feeling that the original approach had grown out of necessity: the Government's lack of expertise had meant that there was no other alternative but to rely on industry. This was contrasted to what had happened in the mobile industry, where safety concerns were considered early on in the adoption of the technology.

While everyone agreed there were limits to self-regulation, there was support for the approach that had been taken and comments that it had meant a growth in responsibility felt by all stakeholders leading to better co-operation and more effective solutions being offered.

The most common self-regulation approach to Internet content is the use of notice and takedown schemes. If an Internet user comes across content they believe to be illegal, defamatory, obscene they can notify the ISP hosting the material and the ISP will then takedown the site if it is felt to breach UK law or an ISP's acceptable use policy. However, a recent study had shown that there was great potential for abuse of this system, particularly with false accusations which may result in legitimate sites being taken down. The problem for ISPs is that in many cases they do not have the time or the expertise to fully investigate a claim and rather than risk legal exposure, they remove the content. It is particularly difficult in the case of copyright, when there may be counterclaims from each side.

Blocking / Filtering Content

The effectiveness of projects such as cleanfeed was discussed in terms of reducing child abuse images online. Many felt that blocking was only mildly effective and did little more than stop naïve people from accessing content, the 'hardcore' paedophiles would find a way around any such scheme, perhaps by using peer to peer networks.

There was also concern that merely blocking, without taking further action, meant that the paedophiles could no longer be traced, and that illegal content would simply move elsewhere.

BT agreed that cleanfeed was not a complete solution, however, it removed the defence that someone had 'accidentally' looked at child pornography by dramatically reducing the chances of accidental access.

Some people felt that instead of returning a 404 error message, BT's system should return a message saying that the user had tried to access illegal content which had been blocked.

Since Microsoft had recently introduced firewalls to their operating system there were calls that hardware suppliers and / or ISPs should do the same and content filtering. However, it was pointed out that firewalls are much easier to write than effective filtering programmes.

Awareness Raising

It was generally agreed that one of the most effective tools in keeping children safe online is awareness raising and education. Ofcom recently published the results of their media literacy consultation and it was felt this was an important part of the solution. There were some criticisms of the 'perfunctory' training teachers received and their lack of knowledge of safety mechanisms.

Indecent Displays Act

In their Digital Manifesto, the children's charities had called for an Internet equivalent of the Indecent Displays Act saying that the Internet is now a public space and should be regulated as such.

There was some disagreement with the charge that the Internet should not be treated differently to the offline world. Given it's global nature, people argued it had to be treated differently. Secondly, it was felt further legislation would do little to counter the problem. Many ISPs have Acceptable Use Policies which require an initial warning page to be



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displayed before adult content is accessed and it was felt this would be just as effective as extending the law.



Attendee List

Alison Scowen	Ebay UK
Amy Stephenson	Oxford University
Andrey Kobilnyk	BBC Creative
Annette Brooke MP	
Annie Mullins	Vodafone
Austin Mitchell MP	
Baroness Howe	
Belinda Sproston	SurfControl
Bill Thompson	Freelance Journalist
Bob Batchelor	DfES
Brian White MP	
Chris Yapp	Microsoft
Christine Houghton	Steria
Clare Dryden	Childalert
Clare MacNamara	BT
Clare Wardle	Royal Mail
Damian Tambini	PCMLP, Oxford University
Dave Wright	EURIM
David Drew MP	
David Harman	Fishburn Hedges
David Masters	Visa Europe
Donald Findlater	Lucy Faithfull Foundation
Dr Martin Garrard	Childalert
Dr Paul Miller	Joint Information systems committee
Elena Martellozzo	Westminster University
Emily Taylor	Nominet
Emma Wilson	Vodafone
Fay McDonald	IWF
Fred Garnett	BECTA
George Kidd	ICSTIS
Guy Lambert	Steria
Hannah McBain	BBC Creative
Jane Griffiths MP	
Jeff Richardson	BT Retail
Joanne Hageman	LLM Communications
Jody Haskayne	Tiscali
John Carr	NCH
John Walker	Experian
Julia Davidson	Westminster University
Kay Withers	ippr
Kevin McNulty	Home Office
Leah Provost	e-Skills UK
Lucinda Fell	ISPA
Lynda Jackson	Home Office
Magdalena Bober	LSE
Margaret Moran MP	



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Mark Gracey	Thus
Martin Salter MP	
Matt Lambert	Microsoft
Mike Galvin	BT
Mita Mitra	BT
Natasha Finlayson	Childline
Nicholas Lansman	ISPA
Nick Stringer	Orange
Nick Truman	BT
Paul Goggins MP	
Paul King	Cisco
Paul Morris	Microsoft
Peter Jessup	DTI
Rev Martin Smyth MP	
Richard Ayers	Tiscali
Richard Clayton	Thus
Roger Lowry	Ofcom
Roger Williams MP	
Russell Chadwick	SurfControl
Samantha Cole	ISPA
Shilpa Patel	Home Office
Simon Persoff	Wanadoo
Stephen Balkam	ICRA
Stephen Smith	Steria
Tim Loughton MP	
Tim Wright	Home Office
Dr Ute Navidi	
Vicki Nash	OII
Will Gardner	Childnet