



March 2006

## ICT briefing note

Regarding: Safeguarding children in a digital world

Following: Becta e-safety conference, February 2006

---

Becta recently held an event concentrating on e-safety, at the National Motorcycle Museum near Coventry. The overall conclusion was that whilst there is no need for panic or restricting Internet use for children, the risks are widespread and warrant serious intervention.

The *UK Children Go Online* study investigated Internet use of 9-19 year olds between 2003 and 2005. It found extensive Internet use (92% at school and 75% at home), with 41% of children being daily users. There are many potential gains; 54% of regular users have used sites concerned with political or civic issues, promoting participation and one quarter of 12-19 year old regular users report going online to get advice.

However, the extent to which children lack the key skills to deal with the Internet safely is a cause for concern. 38% trust most of the information on the Internet and only a third of regular users have been taught how to judge the reliability of online information. Indeed, 30% claim not to have received any lessons on using the Internet. More than half of 9-19 year old regular users have come into contact with online pornography, most viewed unintentionally, eg. 38% have seen a pornographic pop-up advert whilst doing something else.

Some of the key e-safety issues can be divided into the following four categories.

- **Content** – exposure to age inappropriate material, inaccurate or misleading information, socially unacceptable material (eg inciting violence, hate or intolerance) and illegal material (eg images of child abuse).
- **Contact** – grooming using communication technologies leading to sexual assault and/or child prostitution.
- **Commerce** – exposure to inappropriate advertising, online gambling and financial scams.
- **Culture** – bullying via websites, mobile phones or other communications technologies. The downloading of copyrighted materials, such as music and films may involve children in illegal activities.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) starts work in April 2006, combining law enforcement, Government, NGOs and industry with the common aim of protecting children. Part of their brief will be to contribute to the delivery of specialist educational programmes.



Here are some key questions for schools to ask themselves.

- How can we improve the digital literacy of our learners?
- Is there a senior manager that has oversight of e-safety in the school?
- Does the school have an e-safety coordinator?
- Do we have a comprehensive Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) that addresses the key safety issues?
- Does the AUP cover the use of personal technologies such as mobile phones?
- Does the AUP extend to staff as well as pupils?
- Are staff and pupils aware of the key guidelines in the AUP and the procedures that should be followed in the event of a serious breach?

ICT offers a host of positive educational and social benefits to children and young people, but there are risks associated with its use, too. A balanced approach is needed if we are to exploit the positive potential of ICT to the full, whilst having due regard for the safety of the children and young people that we work with.

**Links:**

[www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net)

[www.becta.org.uk/schools/esafety](http://www.becta.org.uk/schools/esafety)

**References:**

“Safeguarding children in a digital world” *(For useful background material, some of which is reproduced above.)*

“E-safety: Developing whole-school policies to support effective practice” *(Useful if reviewing or writing an AUP or E-safety policy.)*

Both booklets are part of Becta’s ICT Advice series and copies can be ordered from [www.becta.org.uk/publications/](http://www.becta.org.uk/publications/)