

**Submission to the  
The Internet Content Governance Advisory Group**

**By**



**Youth Advisory Panel**

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## A Summary of Our Thoughts

It is important that you listen attentively to young people when formulating policy that directly impacts on this aspect of our lives. We would like you not only to listen to our concerns but also work with us to address the issues that arise.

Pupils should be encouraged to contribute to the creation of school policies and be involved in developing classroom rules and awareness raising campaigns and delivering education activities in schools. Through this approach, pupils will develop a greater understanding of the issues involved, and will feel more ownership of and accountability for the policies. There is also a need to improve how internet safety content is delivered as part of the curriculum. It has been our experience that SPHE is not taken seriously in many schools and thus many students do not get any formal education on internet safety.

There needs to be more consistency between the social networking sites, with regard to reporting tools, processes and community standards. We'd like the government to help streamline reporting tools and procedures by introducing standards to which all social networking sites must comply.

An effective social marketing campaign targeting older children, combining blanket and targeted messages delivered through a wide range of media channels and involving children and young people themselves, is important for the promotion of effective cyber bullying prevention and coping strategies. For these campaigns to work they need to reach their targets regularly with clear, consistent, and relevant messages. At the moment much of the information provided around internet safety is not targeted at, nor accessed easily by, young people.

## Methodology

The following submission was written based on the responses of members of the Webwise Youth Panel. The students (all second level students from throughout Ireland) were encouraged to think about the issues around internet content governance through a pre-meeting survey. Then a face-to-face meeting was held to allow the students an opportunity to discuss the questions with each other. The students initially worked in smaller groups (4 or 5 people per group) before feeding back their main ideas to the whole group. Following a whole group discussion the Youth Panel members then decided on a final response to be submitted to the Internet Content Governance Advisory Group. Following the meeting the submission was written up and circulated to all Youth Panel members for comment before final submission.

## **Q2. Are existing arrangements for regulation of the internet industries adequate? If not, what additional arrangements are needed for internet content governance and better internet safety?**

### **Our question: Are existing reporting tools on social networking sites adequate?**

We feel that improvements have been made when it comes to reporting tools on social networking sites but there is still much to be done if we are to have full confidence in the effectiveness of reporting tools in combatting cyber bullying. Of primary concern to us is a lack of consistency in how reports are dealt with by social networking sites and also a discrepancy between social networking sites in the quality and accessibility of reporting tools.

We think that reporting tools can work when reports are dealt with in a timely manner and when the people involved are kept informed on how the report is being dealt with. Unfortunately, it is our experience that there is no consistency in how social networking sites deal with reports. While some of us have had positive experiences when using reporting tools, with the offensive content and report having been addressed within 24 hours, others have had to wait five months for their report to be addressed while more still have been left unsure as to whether concerns were ever heard. It has also been the experience of one of our members that numerous reports need to be submitted in order for offensive content to be removed. There is a strong feeling that individual reports need to be taken more seriously.

We also feel that reporting processes need to be made more user-friendly and access to report tools should be more obvious if people are to be encouraged to use them. We find the accessibility of reporting tools on Instagram and Snapchat to be particularly concerning. In other cases, namely Twitter, we find the reporting processes to be too lengthy and the type of information required to be complicated and off putting. We believe these confusing reporting processes result in many reports being filed incorrectly, thus further delaying resolutions. One possible solution to the problem of complicated reporting tools would be to streamline the process by introducing standards to which all social networking sites must conform.

We feel that reporting processes also need to be made more transparent. In general we are very unsure what happens when a report is filed or how a user is disciplined for not meeting community standards. There is a strong feeling that blocking or suspending an account for short periods of time is not an effective way of dealing with online abuse.

Another problem we've encountered with reporting tools is that it can be difficult to determine if a post is an example of cyber bullying or merely friends having a laugh with each other. This makes it more difficult for moderators to authenticate a report of cyber bullying on a social networking site. The fact that it is difficult to identify bullying online also means that it can be difficult for bystanders to have confidence in their ability to differentiate bullying behaviour. This can dissuade and discourage bystanders from intervening in bullying situations through the use of social reporting tools.

A possible solution to problems with reporting tools on social networking sites would be to have more accessible local centres that handle reports from social networking sites. Regional screenings of reports would allow those involved in the bullying and abusive content to access the appropriate help.

#### **Q4. Do we need additional measures to deal with the accessing by children and young people of content that may be age-inappropriate or harmful for their development?**

We strongly feel that there needs to be a way of checking the age of people using social networking sites. Many people are ignoring the age restrictions and are accessing social networking sites before they are ready. We feel that some form of government ID (perhaps PPS numbers, age cards or passports) could be used to verify the details given by social network users. Perhaps facial recognition technologies could also be explored to verify people's ages. Another solution might be for parents to set up their children's social networking accounts and be in control of the account settings, while the child is still under a certain age. Another possible solution might be for social networks to review new young social network users by introducing reporting of people who are too young and by moderating the new users' content in the first month to see if they really are as old as they say they are.

Another concern of ours is that the standards set in schools for preventing children and young people from accessing age-inappropriate and harmful material aren't up to scratch. We feel that the filtering in schools doesn't work as many young people know how to bypass or work around the filtering constraints. We also find that the passwords for gaining access to school wifi are readily obtained by students and in many cases are very easily guessed.

We also believe that in order to prevent children from accessing inappropriate or harmful material there needs to be a conscious effort to create more positive content for children. Learning to use the internet in an effective and responsible way is an important skill for young people to develop. In order for children to do this there needs to be appropriate and engaging content available to them. We think it might be worth adding a child friendly mark to websites that are intended for younger users. This would be especially useful for helping parents determine if a website is appropriate for use by their children. The child friendly symbol could be similar to the Norton tick that appears when websites are virus free.

As a group we are especially concerned about harmful visual content available online. We believe embarrassing personal photos and images that promote self-harm and anorexia to be the most potentially harmful online content. We find these sometimes very gruesome and grotesque images and accompanying messages to be horrifying. These images should not be used in awareness campaigns as they can have a terrible lasting effect on people, particularly with regard to body image. We make an impassioned call to you that the online sharing of these harmful images be addressed. Too often long periods of time are let pass before these images are removed. Other content that we find to be particularly worrying and potentially harmful includes the Neknominations trend and violent and pornographic material.

#### **Q5. Do you feel sufficiently informed about online internet safety? Do you know where to find the different educational resources and supports available to keep children (and young people) safe online? Do you believe these resources are easily accessible?**

We feel how informed a person is about internet safety varies depending on the individual. We feel younger students going on social networks for the first time are particularly vulnerable and in need of additional internet safety education. We also think there are too many young people who aren't bothered in dealing with or researching internet safety. That is why it is extremely important that people are educated in school on this topic.

SPHE, when done well, is the best method for schools to address issues around internet safety. We worry that people ignore and undermine the SPHE course. One of us has had the experience where SPHE class is used to catch up on maths. Another person hasn't had regular SPHE classes since 1<sup>st</sup> year. This and the fact that how internet safety is presented often doesn't interest students means that many young people aren't informed on this topic. While it's good to get people from outside to talk in schools on internet safety it's equally important to inform teachers. Information for teachers on internet safety needs to be kept updated. Schools should ensure that all students receive their required SPHE time and that teachers delivering the SPHE course have received proper training. Many of us have come across teachers teaching the SPHE course who haven't received any training in the topic. We also feel that there's a need for teachers to explore the topic of internet safety in depth and in a realistic way. We would like to have the opportunity to discuss these issues rather than simply be presented with facts to learn. We also believe that sometimes the more serious issues around internet safety aren't dealt with and need to be discussed.

When it comes to finding information on internet safety online most of us are most likely to turn to the internet first. We find sites such as SpunOut and ReachOut to be especially useful. We also might turn to Google Asks and Yahoo Answers for answers to questions. We find "how to..." articles and videos to be especially useful. While there is lots of information available on the internet, sometimes it is difficult to pick out the information that is reliable and relevant and we find that not enough information is targeted at young people. One particular area where online information could be improved is with regard to terms and conditions on social networking sites. These need to be condensed and made more accessible for younger users. More could also be done to promote reporting options on social networking sites. We are also concerned that there can be problems with finding help online, particularly in relation to some crisis situations (eg suicide hotlines), due to certain levels of filtering. We believe it is very important not to shy away from the gritty reality of things and instead to help us become more informed.

While schools and the internet can be good resources for information on online safety, when it comes to emotional issues many of us are more inclined to turn to our friends and peers who we trust first. This is why it's important for adults to embrace and facilitate peer mentoring systems. From our experience peer education works very well and we believe that all schools should look to incorporate it into how they address internet safety. We want to be the speakers on topics such as cyber bullying and social networking because we're the ones who know what it's like! From our experience of peer education, when students see us stand up and give the talks they immediately listen up and respond very positively, as do their parents. We also feel that students involved in leading these programmes get a lot out of educating their peers. We do, however, recognise that schools can't just rely on peer teaching. In order to tackle issues around cyber bullying and internet safety it is crucial that peer led education initiatives are supported by teachers and parents too.

In order for parents to be involved in educating and advising their children on online safety issues they need to have access to more and updated resources on this topic. We feel there is a particular need for printed resources on internet safety for parents, to allow parents who are less computer literate to access the necessary information and to explore the topic with their children.

Finally, we'd like to recognise that lots of individual groups have been making huge efforts to inform young people on the topic of online safety. We have found the talks that the gardaí give as part of the Garda Schools programme are particularly successful and effective.

## **Q6. Do you have any other comments or recommendations on the safeguards that should exist to deal with internet content and/or activity that may be harmful or age-inappropriate?**

We'd like to suggest that an SPHE module on internet safety be made compulsory for all students. We would also like more support on what to do when someone tells in cyber bullying situations. We would like resources on internet safety that clearly outline steps people should take in order to ensure positive and safe online experiences.

We also think that developing Junior Cycle computer or IT courses, which actively encourage use of technology could be effective in the promotion of responsible internet use. These courses could permit the use of Facebook and other social networks for explaining netiquette and would give students a break, while also teaching them something of interest and great practical use.

We believe the government can do a lot to tackle cyber bullying and the problems around inappropriate internet content simply by listening to people like us, the people who use the internet and feel the effects of cyber bullying and other forms of internet abuse. We appreciate this opportunity to have our say on internet content governance and internet safety and we hope that this consultation will provide the opportunity for state and industry players to work together with young people for a better internet.

We recognise that the government can't control the internet but we hope that they will put policies in place to help make it a better place.

## **About the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel**

The Webwise internet safety awareness initiative of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Office for Internet Safety (OSI) will be supported in its work by the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel. The members of panel are not elected and are not expected to be representatives, but the membership will reflect different geographic areas, age groups and social groups.

The role of the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel is:

- to provide the Webwise internet safety awareness initiative with views and opinions of children and young people's use of new online technologies
- to participate in the concept testing process of internet safety awareness raising resource development.
- to advise the OSI on all aspects of internet safety, particularly as it relates to children.
- to advise on priorities for awareness raising activities.

- to give feedback on awareness campaigns.

The Webwise Youth Advisory Panel meets face-to-face at least once every year and communicates between meetings using e-mail and online forum. The role and work of the panel is discussed fully with the children and young people, so that they can have a clear, shared understanding of their task; They get regular feedback about how their views are making a difference; The children and young people are able to raise issues, as well as responding to the issues raised by adults.

## **About the Safer Internet Ireland Project**

The Safer Internet IE SIC (SII2) project is a consortium of industry, education, child welfare and government partners that acts as a Safer Internet Centre in Ireland providing awareness, hotline and helpline functions and activities in the Republic of Ireland. It is part funded by the EU Safer Internet Programme. The project, coordinated by the Office for Internet Safety (OIS) aims to develop national initiatives promoting the safer use of electronic media and enhance protection of the vulnerable, particularly children, against the downside of the Internet. This consortium builds on the experience gained from the previous highly successful but independently run Safer Internet projects

The OIS acts as co-coordinator of the project, with overall responsibility for the financial and administrative aspects of the project. The project partners are:

- Webwise which on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills acts as technical coordinator for the Awareness Node, which has primary responsibility for the development of material and programmes of awareness to ensure children, teachers and parents understand the benefits and risks of the internet.
- The [Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland \(ISPAI\)](#) which is the technical coordinator of the [Hotline](#), the service which allows the public to report suspected illegal content or activities found on the internet
- The [Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(ISPCC\)](#) is the technical coordinator of the Helpline ([Childline](#)), which provides on a 24/7 basis services where children affected by issues encountered on the Internet may turn for advice and guidance.
- The [National Parents Council Primary \(NPC\)](#) is the technical coordinator of the parent/adult Helpline, a dedicated helpline to deal with issues relating to internet safety including cyberbullying.



## Recent Actions - #UP2US Anti Bullying Kit

The #UP2US (up to us) Anti-Bullying Kit reaches out to young people and encourages them to address the issue of cyber bullying themselves by leading awareness raising campaigns in their schools, clubs, and communities. . The pack was developed by the Webwise initiative of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Webwise Youth Panel with inputs from many other relevant experts such as Belong To and the PDST Wellbeing team.

The kit contains awareness raising material, a new teaching resource for dealing with the issue of cyber bullying through the SPHE curriculum in post primary schools and an innovative interactive poster initiative. The pack will challenge young people to find new ways to use the internet and social media to stand up to bullying and show solidarity with victims

The interactive poster lets young people create an anti-bullying poster with their own messages and designs. They are also encouraged to share what they create online using social media. This will contribute to creating a positive anti-bullying culture in schools and also on social media sites using messages generated by young people and disseminated amongst their peers. In short it is an opportunity for young people to use ICT in a creative, positive, innovative manner to help combat bullying.



### Enclosed Materials:

Please find enclosed the following publications:

1. #UP2US Anti-Bullying Kit