

Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Internet Safety

UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS)

Background

In 2007 Professor Tanya Byron - a clinical psychologist for children - was invited by the previous Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to conduct an independent review of child online safety. Her review, "Safer Children in a Digital World", was published in March 2008 and recommended the establishment of a council for child internet safety. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) was set up in the autumn of 2008 and now brings together over 160 member organisations including representatives from government departments – including the Department for Education (formerly the Department for Children, Schools and Families), Home Office, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the internet and videogames industries, regulatory bodies and children's charities. Secretariat to UKCCIS is provided by the Department for Education.

Overseen by an Executive Board (jointly chaired by Ministers from the Department for Education and the Home Office), the council has five working groups across industry, public awareness, education, video games and research, all of which have met on a regular basis since March 2009 to discuss, plan and implement the delivery of the Byron recommendations. In December 2009, UKCCIS published a strategy document outlining its priorities for the coming year.

In December 2009, Professor Byron was invited to review progress made by UKCCIS since the publication of her original review. This took place between January and March 2010.

Over the course of this progress review Professor Byron consulted with UKCCIS stakeholders from all sectors, along with groups of children to discuss their experiences with online safety. She also held a discussion with parents regarding their concerns about online safety via a live chat on a parenting website.

The recommendations made in this review have been referred to the UKCCIS Executive Board to consider. Copies of both Professor Byron's reviews and the UKCCIS Strategy are enclosed for information.

Achievements to date

Education

Internet safety skills and knowledge are embedded across the curriculum in various subjects, including the Information Communication and Technology school curriculum (which is statutory in secondary schools). A range of materials is available to assist teachers.

There has been an increased consensus amongst the education sector that 'locking down' the internet at school does not encourage children to take responsibility for their behaviour online and that helping children to manage online risks through education can be more effective.

Key facts:

- 82% of 12-17 year olds say their school has taught them about staying safe on the internet. The majority of learners feel that learning from teachers at school is one of the best ways to learn about internet safety. (former Department for Children, Schools and Families Staying Safe Survey 2009)
- 85% of teachers in 2010 felt they had the necessary knowledge of internet safety issues compared to 77% in 2009 and 83% felt they had the skills to use this within their teaching (compared to 74% in 2009).

Internet safety appears to be taught in the vast majority of primary schools; in a 2010 survey only 4% of primary teachers said they didn't teach internet safety.

Public awareness

In her 2008 review, Professor Byron found that 53 per cent of adults want more and better information about the internet and that 57 per cent of parents whose children use the internet do not know where to get information about how to protect their children online. As a result, she recommended two key public awareness activities:

- a properly funded information and awareness campaign on child internet safety; and
- an authoritative 'one stop shop' for child internet safety

In February 2010, UKCCIS, supported by the former Department for Children Schools and Families, launched a public awareness campaign that centred on three key messages, "Zip it, Block it, Flag it"

www.direct.gov.uk/clickcleverclicksafe

The messages encourage children to keep personal information private, block people who send nasty messages and tell a trusted adult if something online upsets them. This code was designed to give parents the confidence to be

able to help their children enjoy the internet safely and to help children and young people understand how their online experiences can expose them to risks. The campaign has recently been nominated for an internet industry award.

Industry

The Industry Working Group is currently focussing on working with representatives across a wide range of industries to help them develop and implement Professor Byron's recommendation for an independently reviewed code of conduct which industry can use to self-regulate their practices to keep children safe online. This may involve, for example, commitments to adhere to set take-down times of harmful and inappropriate material once identified and adherence to a standard way of handling reports and complaints.

The group agreed to work to the timescales set out by Professor Byron in her follow up review - to agree a framework by December 2010 with the first review complete by December 2011. Ministers in the new Government have not yet considered this timetable.

Video games

Professor Byron has made it clear in her 2010 progress review that improving the quality of parental controls, along with educating parents about how they are used, should be a priority area of the remit for the video games working group. In addition, she has recommended that UKCCIS looks at establishing a code of conduct for casual gaming websites and developers.

Key facts:

- 90% of children aged 7 to 16 own or have access to a games console
- 19% of parents report that their child accesses online material via a games console
- under a third (32%) of parents with children who use games consoles are aware of parental controls

Expert research

In addition to the working groups, there is a UKCCIS Expert Research Panel which has led work on gathering together evidence on online risks and has planned further work on the setting up of a database of evidence to inform policy makers. A copy of the report is enclosed.

Although Professor Byron did not make a specific recommendation on research in her 2010 review, she wrote about "establishing a solid evidence base" and the importance of having "an accurate view of the level of risk....so that our interventions are proportionate and evidence based."

Current topical issues

Professor Byron recognised in 2008 that there were a large number of diverse stakeholders all operating independently in the field of children's online safety, who would benefit from being brought together in one forum.

1) Executive Board

This is a large group of 22 members which has the potential to expand if Professor Byron's new recommendations are adopted. Professor Byron also recommended an independent chair for the Executive Board in her 2010 review. This is yet to be discussed by the board.

2) Processes

Professor Byron also recommended that changes are made to how the Council currently functions. For example, she recommended that the executive board, supported where appropriate by the working groups, develops a stronger business planning process to monitor performance. The council structure is currently being re-examined to establish more efficient ways of working.

3) Online safety and other digital issues

The online safety agenda is closely related to, and overlaps with, a large number of cross-government policy areas such as digital inclusion, digital life skills, media literacy, commercialisation, sexualisation, pornography, cyberbullying and cybercrime. The UKCCIS secretariat ensures that links with these policy areas are made.

Commercialisation, sexualisation and pornography

Recent government-sponsored reviews on sexualisation (Dr. Linda Papadopoulos) and commercialisation of children (Professor David Buckingham) have alluded to the increasingly influential role of the internet in the lives of children and young people.

In her 2010 review, Professor Byron also noted that pornography should be more clearly embedded within UKCCIS's remit and she highlighted that "accidental or involuntary exposure to pornography can be disturbing...and has been associated with the reinforcement of sexist or violent attitudes and behaviours."

The current government's Coalition Agreement stated 'We will crack down on irresponsible advertising and marketing, especially to children. We will also take steps to tackle the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood.' http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfq_coalition.pdf While this statement does not overtly mention the internet, it is clear that children's digital safety is a relevant channel for these issues.

European work on internet safety

In her 2010 report, Professor Byron recommended stronger links with the EU and, in particular, that there be a named liaison point between the European Commission and UKCCIS. This recommendation will be discussed with the Executive Board who will agree whether they wish to take this forward.

Current challenges to progress

Professor Byron expressed concerns about the rate of progress made towards the self-regulation of industry. Professor Byron did not recommend legislation at this stage but suggested that government may want to consider this as an option if progress is not made more rapidly.

Although there is valuable work being carried out in several countries to help keep children safe online, the internet remains a global environment. Progress made at national level in strengthening laws, regulating content and access cannot prevent potentially harmful or inappropriate materials being produced and distributed online from sources outside of their jurisdiction. This is a significant challenge to children's safety online and underlines the importance of effective international, as well as national, action.

Future direction of UKCCIS

Following a general election in May 2010, the UK has recently undergone a change of administration. The current coalition government is supportive of the child internet safety agenda and Ministers are keen to see the work of UKCCIS continue although it is not yet clear what this work will comprise.

Ministers from the Home Office and Department for Education will meet with the UKCCIS Executive Board on 20 July 2010 to discuss the activities UKCCIS should take forward over the coming year.