



Child safety online

Digital manifesto summary

Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety

Why a manifesto?

It is still not quite ten years since the internet began its dramatic transformation from obscure technology to mass consumer product.

The Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety (CHIS) wants all children and young people to be able to share in the huge advantages of the internet, and therefore strongly supports the government's continuing efforts to encourage mass take up. But at the same time CHIS also wants to ensure that such access is as safe as it can be. Almost nothing in life is ever 100 per cent safe, 100 per cent of the time, and the internet is no exception to that rule. But the internet can, and should, be a lot safer than it is at present, particularly for children and young people.

The creation of the Home Secretary's Internet Task Force on Child Protection in March 2001 was a pivotal moment in the development of internet policy in the UK. Several members of CHIS are directly represented on the task force. The task force was a world first and the British government has now become an acknowledged leader in the on-going, increasingly global, efforts to make the internet a safer place for children and young people.

With a general election fast approaching, and with several years' experience of the task force under our collective belts, CHIS thought it would be timely both to reflect on the many important, positive achievements of the task force, and some of its

difficulties, and then to put forward our suggestions about how internet policy in this area might be further developed.

Many of the proposals made in the manifesto have already been or are being put to government, both through the mechanisms of the task force and more directly, but it seems clear to us that there is also a need for wider public debate, particularly around some of the broader policy issues that we raise.

The manifesto contains a mixture of both highly strategic and more detailed points. It updates and becomes, in effect, version two of the *Agenda for Action* that CHIS first published in early 2001 and which is reproduced as an appendix to this document. Gratifyingly, many of the points from the *Agenda* have been taken up, but a number remain unfulfilled although still highly relevant. They are therefore repeated here.

The task force has enjoyed very broad political support, with both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives directly represented on the task force by MPs. CHIS very much hopes that this kind of consensus will be maintained. CHIS further hopes that the publication of this manifesto gives all the political parties the opportunity to think about where the UK goes next with this important area of public policy, and encourages them to lend their weight to help get there.

Summary of recommendations

Government and parliament

1. The task force should have its own budget and a dedicated secretariat.
2. Steps should be taken to ensure that, across government, there is a shared understanding of the risks to children online.
3. The Home Office, DfES and DOH, in particular, urgently need to formulate an agreed view and response to abuse via the new technologies. New forms of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency ways of working need to be developed around online abuse and crimes against children.
4. In the wider public interest, the government should develop its own independent sources of knowledge of the internet and related technologies.
5. The government must find ways to develop the capacity of NGOs to participate more fully in the work of the task force.
6. A cyber equivalent of the Indecent Displays Act 1981 should be made law and consideration should be given to placing new duties on web publishers to rate their online content.

7. In relation to children and young people, the data protection laws need to be overhauled to take account of the new realities of cyberspace.
8. New ways should be found to ensure that laws relating to the provision of age-restricted goods or services are not flouted in cyberspace.
9. The government should investigate the possibility of using tax incentives to encourage technology companies, computer manufacturers and retailers to develop new contributions to online child safety.
10. A number of specific legal reforms need urgent consideration (see main report).
11. The DfES needs to step up its outreach to parents to help them help their children stay safe when they use the internet at home.
12. Membership of the task force should be kept under review to ensure that all relevant interests are always represented.
17. New ways must be found to enable the police to intervene effectively and in a timely manner in a range of policy and technical forums.

Internet and mobile phone industries

18. An effective public-domain child protection package should be widely available.
19. All computer manufacturers and retailers active in the domestic market should, on all new machines they sell, pre-install child protection software set to a high level of security.
20. Software houses need to devote resources to helping parents and the law enforcement community defeat a number of pressing technical challenges such as the abuse of peer2peer software, the abuse of anonymity and the abuse of encryption.
21. The provision of passive location services through mobile phones to the mass consumer market raises a number of issues that need to be addressed, eg could the use of such services amount to a breach of an access order following a divorce or other family breakdown?
22. Clarification is needed of the civil liability of ISPs and other online service providers for legal minors who use their networks.

Policing

13. The National Policing Plan needs to be amended to make child protection a key national target. The resources devoted to this work generally need to be reappraised in the light of its new priority status, and especially in relation to its internet dimension.
14. A new or enhanced national operational police resource is needed to deal with internet crimes against children. This or a related body ought also to be able to deal with enquiries from the public and provide advice, information or support, or be able to direct people to other appropriate sources.
15. We need UK policing to improve the number of child victims it identifies and rescues as part of or following online operations.
16. New ways need to be found to crack down on overseas cyber crime havens. More generally the UK needs to strengthen its contribution to the different international bodies working on child protection online.

Child welfare system

23. More research is needed into the longer term effects of online child abuse, into new forms of treatment and into the effects of the long-term exposure of children and young people to a range of material now readily available through the internet and related technologies.
24. A reliable means of risk-assessing people found guilty of child pornography-related offences needs urgently to be developed.

What is CHIS?

The Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS) consists of seven of the UK's largest professional child welfare and child protection organizations: Barnardo's, ChildLine, Children's Society, NCB, NCH, NCVCCO and the NSPCC. More recently the Stop It Now! UK & Ireland campaign also affiliated. Each of the organizations is a charity and some have histories stretching back to the 19th century.

CHIS was established in 1999. It grew out of an already existing collaboration between the seven children's organizations on the national plan to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

CHIS focuses on lobbying and campaigning on internet safety for children, and on the child safety aspects of other interactive communications technologies.



the children's charity



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