



Monitoring Organisations and Systems



The Internet is used by people of all backgrounds and ages. Although individuals' rights to freedom of speech and freedom of choice must be observed, these need to be balanced against the rights of younger users. One way of ensuring the balance is through the monitoring of content and activity on the Internet, with a willingness to take action if necessary.

A number of systems are already in place and include:

National Grid for Learning safeguards

Teachers, parents and learners are becoming increasingly familiar with the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) (<http://www.ngfl.gov.uk/>) which is the UK's main educational portal, made up of a wide variety of websites catering for the whole learning community.

All sites linked to the NGfL must conform to ground rules and a code of conduct. Content must not contain unsuitable material, or links to unsuitable material. Connections to the Grid and observance of its rules are administered by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta), on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/grid/challenge/app_a.pdf).

GridWatch (<http://www.ngfl.gov.uk/ngfl/feedbackindex.html>) provides a reporting mechanism for the unlikely event of information appearing on the NGfL which is seen to be illegal, undesirable, inaccurate, misleading, out of date or in contravention of copyright legislation. It allows for immediate remedial action, including reporting sites to the authorities if appropriate. Linked sites are required to co-operate fully with GridWatch and to take prompt action to remedy deficiencies relating to their content. The NGfL is, therefore, a 'safe' area of the Internet.

Accompanying this is a full programme of content sampling and monitoring carried out by Becta. For information about filtering services offered to schools, see the sheet on 'Internet Filtering Systems'.

The Internet Watch Foundation

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) (<http://www.internetwatch.org.uk/>) aims to address the problem of illegal material on the Internet. It is an independent organisation implementing proposals jointly agreed by the Government, the police, and the two major UK service provider trade associations: the Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA) (<http://www.ispa.org.uk>) and the London Internet Exchange (LINX) (<http://www.linx.net/>).

Broadly, the aim is to enhance the enormous potential of the Internet to inform, educate, entertain and conduct business. This is achieved by hindering the use of the Internet to transmit illegal material and by encouraging the classification of material on the Internet. Classification allows users to customise their use of the Internet to their own requirements.

The IWF maintains a 24-hour hotline (Tel: 08456 008844; Fax: 01223 235921; E-mail: report@iwf.org.uk; On line: <http://www.iwf.org.uk/hotline/hotline.html>), which UK residents can contact to report anonymously anything on the Internet that they believe is illegal. The IWF will then carry out its own investigation, and if the material is potentially illegal, report it to the police either in the UK or overseas. The IWF will also contact the Internet Service Provider (ISP) that is hosting the material in order to get it removed.





Childnet International

Childnet (<http://www.childnet-int.org/>) is a non-profit making organisation, committed to ensuring that children benefit from new media like the Internet. The organisation is especially concerned with promoting the interests of children in international communications. They also wish to ensure that children are not exploited or hurt through their use of new media, and that illegal or harmful material is appropriately dealt with without damaging freedom of speech. Childnet operates internationally from its base in London. It has specific subsites: www.launchsite.org/english/index.html, which offers advice to children on how to surf safely and encourages them to get on to the Internet, and www.netaware.org, which is aimed at improving awareness generally.

The INHOPE Association

The INHOPE Association (<http://www.inhope.org>) is supported by the European Commission and has 12 members from across Europe. Its mission is to facilitate and co-ordinate the work of European hotlines in responding to illegal use and content on the Internet through the sharing of information and expertise, exchange of specific reports and supporting the establishment of new hotlines.

The Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA)

ICRA now owns and operates the major US-based RSACi (Recreational Software Advisory Council on the Internet) rating and filtering system and is currently undertaking a major revision of the system, due to be released in 2001 (<http://www.icra.org/>). Its aim is to protect children from potentially harmful material without damaging free speech on the Internet. ICRA allows the public, especially parents, to make informed decisions about electronic media by means of an open, objective, content advisory system and provides consumers with information about the level of sex, nudity, violence or offensive language on websites. To date, RSACi standards have been integrated into Microsoft's browser, Internet Explorer, Netscape's Navigator and MicroSystem's Cyber Patrol software. CompuServe (US and Europe) has also committed to rate all its content with the RSACi system.

Safesurf

SafeSurf (<http://www.safesurf.com/>) is a US organisation dedicated to making the Internet safe for children without legislated censorship. It has developed and is implementing an Internet Rating Standard, working together with parents, Internet and content providers, publishers and developers. The site gives access to press releases, monthly newsletters, an educational resource page, SafeSurf's Educational Resource Files (SERF), and Internet Lifeguard, which gives tips for protecting children on line.

