



children's charities' coalition on internet safety

Messrs Brokenshire and Loughton, Members of Parliament,
Respectively Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State at the Home Office
and at the Department for Education

29th July, 2010

Dear Ministers,

I am writing to put on record our huge appreciation of your attendance at our meeting in the House of Commons last week where we discussed the Digital Manifesto 2010. I know our members and the many internet industry representatives present found it both useful and stimulating. The sense of energy and purpose in the room was palpable and we very much look forward to working with you to take things forward, both through UKCCIS and through other relevant mechanisms. We would very much like to make our next Digital Manifesto to be an audit of success.

We have written separately to Professor Munro and to 2012 Race Online to pursue the specific points we referred to at the meeting in relation to their agendas. For ease of reference these letters are attached and will shortly be on our web site¹.

There is an outstanding request to table the Digital Manifesto as an item for a UKCCIS Board Meeting. For various good reasons this has not yet happened, although I believe some of the individual sub groups may have considered all or part of it. One of the reasons I mention this is because whilst much of the Manifesto falls squarely within the purview of the Byron Report and could therefore expect to be taken up in the ordinary course of events within the UKCCIS machinery, substantial sections do not but there is no obvious or other place where we can take them.

Rather than repeat all of the points made at the meeting or in the Manifesto I thought it might be useful here simply to present as headlines the topics we intend to prioritise in the coming period:

- Action against the distribution of child abuse images over Peer2Peer networks.
- Action to make it harder for children and young people to access or be exposed to legal pornography.
- Action to make “safety on by default” the new standard for all internet enabled devices, in a manner comparable to that already implemented by the mobile phone network operators. In relation to this and the previous matter the kitemark may have a role to play. A specific subset of this wider concern might also entail an approach to providers of wifi hotspots.
- Action through training to help children and the children's workforce to improve their capacity to respond to threats and harms in the online world, particularly around bullying and the actions of sexual predators. We will give a particular emphasis to the needs of vulnerable children and on the importance of being able to react flexibly to their needs.

¹ Unless there is a good reason to the contrary we normally publish all of our correspondence with governmental bodies and agencies at www.chis.org.uk

- Action to open discussions with the social networking sites to ask them to consider taking special measures to help minimise the dangers to adopted or fostered children who seek unauthorised contact with their birth parents or family or who are improperly sought out by their birth parents or families.
- Action to press for more to be done by the online retail industry in relation to the sale of age restricted goods and services over the internet, suggesting they might attempt to mirror the success of the UK's online gambling industry².

In addition there are also several points being pursued at EU level (and more widely) e.g. in relation to location services and codes of practices which ought to be looked at so as to ensure both that there is a minimum of duplication or wasted effort, and that the UK Government is up to speed and content with the way matters are progressing.

Some of the above are relevant to the work of the Childhood and Families Task Force but are also likely to arise in the context of UKCCIS. We appreciate that we can pursue items entirely under our own steam without necessarily having to involve any Government machinery, but at the same time where there is a coincidence of interest and timing it may be advantageous to ensure that we are all at least aware of each other's plans and that the right level of co-ordination is in place so as to minimise the possibility of duplication and wasted effort.

Beyond that obviously we are keen to help in any way we can to ensure that different bits of Government policy do not have unintended consequences for child internet safety. The Prime Minister's oft-repeated interest in this whole area will, I am sure, help enormously in that respect in terms of crosscutting areas. In particular the Prime Minister's obvious concern about the way certain contemporary business and advertising practices might be contributing to the early commercialization and sexualisation of childhood is one that we very much share.

There is one question hovering on the near horizon which we would like to take this opportunity to mention. We are concerned about the potential impact the curriculum review may have on the role of schools in promoting child internet safety. If the curriculum review produces a more sharply defined core curriculum, and schools are given greater flexibility in terms of what they cover there is the potential risk that the issue of internet safety may not be identified as a priority. This may be particularly the case in schools where the Head or the Governors, or both, do not fully appreciate the role new technology plays in children's and young people's lives today outside of school. In addition, e-safety is currently picked up in Ofsted inspections but if there is to be a change in emphasis for school inspections we may need to consider how else to monitor or measure how schools are delivering e-safety messages.

Finally I would just like to say that we also took very much to heart the comments you both made about the role of the Third Sector in the Government's "Big Society" ambitions. This is a matter that is receiving our urgent attention.

Yours sincerely,



John Carr OBE
Secretary
Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety

www.chis.org.uk

² The anti-money laundering rules and the recently launched OFT enquiry may also be relevant here.