



children's charities' coalition on internet safety

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29th July, 2010

Dear Graham,

We recently had a discussion within CHIS about the 2012 Race Online programme. The initiative was very warmly received and if you can think of any potentially useful linkages either with CHIS or, probably better, with any of our individual member organizations please let me know and I'll see what I can do to help them along.

Our discussion was in part prompted by some comments by Martha Lane Fox in which she seemed to suggest that the Race's efforts could be assisted by, for example, opening up the internet facilities within schools and colleges to wider public access.

While we support the principle of fully utilising existing resources to increase access, there are a number of issues we would like you to consider. Firstly, if school ICT equipment is to be used by members of the local community, consideration should be given to what they may use the machines for and what traces of this activity could be left behind.

An example of this might be where adult members of the public want to access material that would normally be blocked by school filtering systems. Would it really be workable to switch off the standard filtering and monitoring packages that would operate during a normal school day to allow adult weekend and evening users to use the facilities in ways which might be entirely legitimate for them but would be wholly inappropriate for a child? This poses potential risks that need to be thought about.

If adults, with or without any pre-existing connection to the school are to be given access to school premises at the same time as children there are an additional set of risks that will need to be considered.

In relation to public access to the internet through internet cafes, libraries and other access points, also mentioned by Martha, we have had a long standing concern which perhaps you could help with or advise.

You will know that all of the UK's mobile operators operate an "adult bar" in terms of content and services that are accessible either over their own networks or via the internet. In most cases the adult bar is turned on by default and can only be lifted if the end user can demonstrate that they are over 18. We very much approve of this. However, with the emergence of wifi enabled smartphones it is trivially easy for the networks' filters to be bypassed. Alternatively if a parent has gone to the trouble of engaging various ISP level safety settings at network server level, these too could be bypassed using a wifi enabled laptop or other internet enabled device.

Our view very much is that all of the UK's wifi access providers should be encouraged to broadly match the settings deployed by the mobile networks so there is no incentive, indeed no possibility, of anyone trying to get around the mobiles' safety barriers that way. We appreciate that still leaves open the possibility of children being able to locate a wireless router with no encryption e.g. broadcasting from a domestic environment, but hopefully such insecure routers are diminishing in number as all new routers appear to come with default settings that will engage at least a minimal level of security.

Best of luck with the project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Carr', is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

John Carr

Secretary

www.chis.org.uk