National report for Ireland

By Brian O'Neill

Contribution to the European report:
Stald, G. and Haddon, L. (2008) *Cross-Cultural Contexts of Research: Factors Influencing the Study of Children and the Internet in Europe*. A report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

Universities and Disciplines

According to the OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland (2004), there are 20 main publicly funded tertiary education institutions, seven of them universities and 13 of them institutes of technology (together with some small teacher training institutions).[1] There is a small but growing private sector in higher education, the largest of which is the National College of Ireland.

Ireland established a binary higher education system during the 1970s in order to formally differentiate between institutions according to mission and curriculum: universities provide an academic and generalist education at BA and postgraduate level while institutes of technology (IoT) provide professional and career focused programmes at certificate and diploma level. Over time, these distinctions have blurred, and the universities now offer a wide range of professional-focused post-graduate programmes, while the IoTs offer advanced qualifications to PhD – albeit some curriculum differences remain.

Research is concentrated in the seven universities and in the larger IoTs, of which Dublin Institute of Technology is the largest.

Media and communications studies have been a feature of the Irish higher education sector since the late 1970s when the first, professionally-focussed media programmes were introduced. The longest established departments or schools of communications are those of Dublin Institute of Technology and Dublin City University, both of whom offered the first degree level programmes in media and communications studies. Communications and media were for many years noticeably absent in the older universities. Departments such as Sociology have developed interests in media research though more recently there has been a trend towards a broader representation of media across different disciplines. There are now 5 named media/communications departments in the university system, concentrated in the Dublin region, each of which actively conducts research. Undergraduate programmes in media, communications studies, media arts, journalism etc are among the most popular in Dublin with places highly sought after. An academic association the *Irish Media Research Network* was established in 2005.[2]

Informatics or information studies as a separate discipline exists only to a limited extent. University College Dublin offers the only programme in Information Studies. Interests in digital literacy are represented more widely within media and communications departments with Dublin Institute of Technology and Dublin City University having particular interests in this regard.

National Data Collected

ComReg is the statutory body responsible for the regulation of the electronic communications sector (telecommunications, radio communications and broadcasting transmission) and the postal sector. It is the national regulatory authority for these sectors in accordance with EU law which is subsequently transposed into Irish legislation. ComReg publishes the Irish

1 REVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICIES FOR EDUCATION: Review of Higher Education in Ireland. URL: http://www.hea.ie/en/webfm_send/877
2 www.imrn.ie

Communications Market Report with detailed statistics on internet connectivity and market data. Additional surveys are undertaken or are commissioned by ComRon a once-off basis, for example, its occasional Consumer ICT Survey, measuring consumers' awareness and usage of ICTs and the internet.

The main market data represents numbers of subscriptions and connections. Limited consumer data broken down is available though there is no formal study of internet and children exists as such. As above, one off or occasional surveys such as the Consumer ICT Survey or the study commissioned by the Internet Advisory Board *The Use of New Media by Children* (2004) provide more detailed data on children's usage. Typically, the lowest age surveyed is 15 years unless specific research is conducted on children and new media.

A National Longitudinal Study has been established by the Office of the Minister for Children but has not reported yet. It contains some questions in relation to media consumption though details will not be available for some time yet. The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland, also known as Growing up in Ireland, 'Growing Up in Ireland' is a Government-funded initiative which aims to study 'examine the factors, that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families'.[3] The study will monitor the development of 18,000 children – a birth cohort of 10,000 and a 9-year-old cohort of 8,000 children - yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives.

Institutional processes in applying to conduct research

There are no formal restrictions that apply on national level as such. Funding agencies and university departments will have specific requirements and controls in relation to the conduct of research, as informed and advised by relevant professional and academic discipline-based associations.

It is standard practice that all research, especially research involving children, will require ethics approval by the University-appointed ethics committee. The Dublin Institute of Technology's Ethics Committee, for instance, was established to formulate ethics policy and procedures for all research and scholarship across DIT; to provide researchers with the resources and 'best practice' models for understanding and addressing ethical issues which arise in their research and scholarship; and to promote responsible research and scholarship across the organisation. Funding agencies, whether at national level or at European level (as for example in the Seventh Framework Programme) routinely require an ethics statement regarding the research.

Proposals for research for external funding are normally co-ordinated via the institute's Directorate of Research and Enterprise as they will require institutional sign-off or will involve contractual obligations or implications. All universities will have similar arrangements for supporting, developing and monitoring research which is externally funded.

Practice varies regarding research or proposals for research conducted more locally or which is the basis of an internal departmental initiative. Worthy of note also is the widely varying practice concerning research work conducted by students, undergraduate and postgraduate, as part of course dissertation requirements. Rather than requiring approval by an Ethics Committee, this will normally come under the responsibility of the Head of School or Department, except where specific ethics arise and higher approval is explicitly required.

Pressures to conduct research

Increased emphasis on winning external research funding has intensified competition both within specific disciplines/domains and across the sector as a whole All higher education

[3] http://www.omc.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Research/nlstudychildrenie.htm

institutes have a mission to teach and to research. In practice, research is concentrated in the university sector which is seen as research-intensive with less of an emphasis in the Institute of Technology sector which is thought of as more applied and oriented more to a teaching mission. This is not a hard boundary, however, and research, both basic and applied, is found across the system.

National research funding is competitive and consequently there are increasing pressures on faculty and individual departments to deliver strong research performance. There is no formal national research assessment exercise as such
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Increasing emphasis has been placed in Irish research policy to promote research allied to national needs and according to national priorities as defined by government agencies. National research policy recognised that the emergence of the knowledge society has fundamentally transformed the economic and social organisation of advanced societies. There is increased competition between Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) both within Ireland and internationally, but conversely increased opportunities exist for productive research collaborations with public and private partners. Society is demanding more from higher education. In turn, the agenda of higher education has progressed from a desire to simply increase the general education level of the population and the output of scientific research to meeting the needs of a knowledge driven society in a global economy. There is now concern to harness higher education, research and scholarship to broader social, economic and cultural objectives[4].

The Institute of Technology sector (within Ireland's binary higher education system) has traditionally been close to industry and has a stronger pro-enterprise driven research approach. Research in this sector therefore has to some extent been more applied and application-focussed than that found in the traditional university system. This is not a pressure as such, and rather is a part of the mission of this part of the system. At the same time, there is increasing co-operation in research, particularly in science, engineering and technology, between industry and the higher education system as a whole. Funding models of the major state agencies are a key driver in this respect.

Factors influencing the orientation of research

It does really depend on the sector. As a rule, research in industry, and industry research requirements, will have a different focus to research in the university. There are more local

[4] OECD, The Response of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Needs, Paris, 1999.

instances where specific projects arise directly commissioned by an industry partner are involved, though this is less common and places the university department on a commercial footing, in competition with other private sector research and development bodies that may exist. A number of government departments commission research either through a tender process or through a research awarding scheme. Usually, such research is designed to augment the limited internal research of the department. In some instances, this is placed on a more formal basis as, for instance, with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) located within the government department of Health and Children.[5] The OMCYA has a research mandate to "facilitate the achievement of a better understanding of how children grow up in Ireland, including both their individual and shared needs." Research is conducted both internally and externally through an annual research programme including funded project awards, scholarships. The OMCYA established a Children's Funded Research Programme in 2004. All studies are commissioned in line with good public procurement practices and legislation.

The Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) has a number of schemes for funding research.[6] These include Fellowships and Scholarships and a series of project funding schemes. The latter initially were open in any of the disciplines supported by the Council. More recently, major project grant funding (in excess of €300k) has been linked to themes proposed by the Council, which in turn are aligned with national and European research priorities as for instance in the 7th Framework Programme. Universities are invited to compete for funding under these thematic categories. This process is under review and one of the major difficulties experienced is the lack of continuity from year to year, and the difficulty in planning research in the absence of advance knowledge of forthcoming thematic priorities.

There are many instances where university research departments interact and engage with industry in developing research proposals. The primary agency in this respect is Enterprise Ireland. Enterprise Ireland is the government agency responsible for the development and promotion of the indigenous business sector with a mission to accelerate the development of Irish companies in global markets.[7] As part of their research and innovation mandate, Enterprise Ireland (EI) facilitates collaborative links between enterprise and the university research community leading to practical applications of research in business. EI has a number of major initiatives to seed fund centres of excellence within the university sector, particularly within areas of ICT and Biotechnology – which are defined national research priority themes. EI funded research has a major emphasis on capacity building for Irish industry and has been a major catalyst in support for applications-based, applied research in the sector as a whole.

A major initiative where university research departments were invited to bring forward ideas for industry development is the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC).[8] Described as a centre for "Creating Value through Collaborative Translational Research", this is an initiative of the Irish government whereby a group of Irish universities with interests in digital research have formed a limited company,
technology transfer and translational value, and driven by its potential for societal and/or commercial impact. The NDRC followed a previous initiative called Media Lab Europe whereby MIT Media Lab hosted a Dublin-based research laboratory designed to act as a catalyst for the indigenous digital media sector.[9]

National Research Traditions

Quantitative research is strongly established within the social sciences and human sciences in general. Social sciences feature strongly in all Irish universities. There are a number of

[5] http://www.omc.gov.ie/
[6] http://www.irchss.ie/
[7] http://www.enterprise-ireland.com/
[8] http://www.ndrc.ie/
[9] http://medialabeurope.org/

major research institutes in the social sciences also providing the principal source of data about Irish society, social trends, and emerging areas of policy interest.

The national statistics agency, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is the principal agency charged with the responsibility for collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State.[10] The CSO publishes over 300 statistical releases and publications each year, based on high-quality statistical information as required for future planning and monitoring outcomes, at national, regional and local levels. The CSO serves the needs of Government and the wider community for impartial and relevant information on social and economic conditions. Users include business, researchers, the academic community and other organisations and individuals.

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) is an independent research institute, funded by government, producing high-quality research that contributes to understanding economic and social change and that informs public policymaking and civil society in Ireland and throughout the European Union.[11] ESRI research , drawing particularly on empirical research in economics and sociology, provides analysis that helps inform economic and social policymaking in Ireland. Key features of the research are its strong empirical base, its policy focus and its coverage of many of the major areas of relevance to current policy issues in Ireland and the European Union.

Similarly, there is a well-established tradition of qualitative research, though somewhat less prominent than quantitative research. UCD's Geary Institute conducts research on life course issues and the way public policy affects life outcomes, based on cross-disciplinary perspectives and research translation to economic, political, epidemiological and social questions.[12] DIT's Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice conducts ethnographically-driven media production scholarship. With a particular focus on issues of migration and interculturalism.[13]

Media research and scholarship falls behind other aspects of the social sciences and has been less successful in establishing a national profile for its research. Academic research on the media has is conducted within the main university departments of media and communication (DIT, DCU, NUIM) and to some extent in other university departments, particularly in sociology (UCD, UL). Academic publications on the media in Ireland date back to the mid 1980s. A series of symposia sponsored by the national broadcaster, RTE, led to a number of major publications, effectively formally launching media studies in Ireland. More recently, a number of book publications on media history, media institutions, and on audiences have been published. The only Irish academic journal on media and communications in Ireland, the *Irish Communications Review,* is published by Dublin Institute of Technology.[14]

While there is not a significant literature in the mobile/telephones area, some research (including PhD research) dating from the mid 1990s exists. Studies of the internet and the Information Society have come to be a major focus for media social scientists. The Government's Information Society Commission, for a period, supported research in this field and a number of publications exist on its website. [15]

Sources of Funding for Research

The main sources of funding for the social sciences and education generally is from direct government, indirect government, EU, private sector and Research Council sources. Government sources in this instance refer to major research funding mechanisms

[10] http://www.cso.ie
[11] http://www.esri.ie/
[12] http://geary.ucd.ie/
[13] http://ctmp.dit.ie/
[14] http://www.icr.dit.ie/
[15] http://www.isc.ie/

administered by the Higher Education Authority and awarded to universities and Institutes of Technology on a competitive basis. Indirect sources include allocation of universities own funding to research and development. Research Councils administer funding schemes for individual and collaborative research. The balance of funding for the humanities and social sciences has tended to comprise relative underfunding through direct government initiatives and Research Council sources and a greater reliance on individual institutions own resources. Increased budgets for research have seen this balance shift towards higher expenditure by government on HSS research, though investment still falls below European norms.[16]
There is a limited amount of research of commercial research on ICTs and the internet primarily from a marketing point of view, some of which is publicly available. *Decode,* for instance, is lifestyle and marketing survey of the 18-24 youth market in Ireland, sponsored by a consortium of national newspaper, broadcast media and advertising organisations.[17] The research examines trends in youth lifestyles, attitudes and behaviour, and seeks to create with a focus on their relationships with advertising and brands. Some information is available on questions of ICT adoption and use but full details are not publicly available.

Political initiatives influencing research

Support for the Information Society and the development of a knowledge economy has been a strong feature of the Irish political landscape for over 10 years. This has not always been matched by appropriate action and investment and despite a booming economy in the period from 1998, progress on ICT infrastructure and broadband has been notoriously slow. The national research agenda which prioritises ICT and Biotechnology as research themes was the outcome of an intensive Technology Foresight study conducted in 1999.[18] Concerted lobbying by both public research agencies and the higher-education sector to formalise and expand infrastructural supports and funding for research and development (R&D) across all disciplinary areas. A number of major initiatives followed including ambitious targets for research investment in the National Development Plan 2000–2006 (2000) culminating in the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006 – 2013.[19] The vision articulated by the strategy is one whereby "Ireland by 2013 will be internationally renowned for the excellence of its research, and will be to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation driven culture."

The strategy seeks to create a world class research environment, a greatly increased capacity for research, and a doubling of PhD graduates in the period to 2013.
In the period under review, media regulation has moved towards a models of co-regulation and self-regulation in keeping with European norms and in response to a rapidly changing media environment. The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland is currently the main media content regulator. Its functions include: the licensing of independent broadcasting services including the additional licensing of television services on digital, cable, MMDS and satellite systems; the development of codes and rules in relation to programming and advertising standards and the monitoring of all licensed services to ensure that licence holders comply with their statutory obligations and terms of their contracts. Legislation currently under review will create a super regulator, combining for the first time, regulation of all broadcast media, public and private, under one authority.

With regard to censorship and reporting, one of the most significant developments has been the establishment of the Press Council of Ireland and the Office of the Press Ombudsman as of January 1, 2008.[20] The Office of the Press Ombudsman is regarded as part of a new system of independent regulation for the printed media in Ireland. The job of the Ombudsman is to investigate complaints that breach a new Code of Practice which the press industry signed up to in 2007. Ireland's libel laws had created a situation where complaints were

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16 *Advancing Humanities and Social Sciences Research in Ireland - a report by the Royal Irish Academy.* URL: http://www.ria.ie/policy/pdfs/website.pdf
17 http://www.medialive.ie/Comment/decode.html
18 Technology Foresight Ireland: an Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation overview (1999) URL: http://www.forfas.ie/icsti/framework.html
19 http://www.entemp.ie/science/technology/sciencestrategy.htm
20 http://www.pressombudsman.ie

notoriously difficult to process and hampered independent investigative journalism. The new form of Press regulation is viewed as a fairer means of making sure that newspapers and magazines comply with an agreed set of ethical standards and behaviours include accuracy, fairness, privacy and other journalistic principles.

In parallel with reform of media law, new recent developments affecting the internet have included changes in defamation law and the introduction of the concept of "Innocent Publication" with reference to ISPs. Unlike the press, the ISP sector has operated a process of self regulation for some time. Internet self regulation is monitored by the Government-appointed Internet Advisory Board[21] and a Code of Practice was adopted in 2002.

One further issue of importance is the transposing into law of the EU Data Retention Directive. Ireland was among the first to bring the directive into force in Europe, despite the fact that it has also challenged it in the European Court of Justice. The challenge does not relate to the substance of the directive, which the Government has championed in the EU, but the fact that it was introduced by vote of the larger EU members, a precedent that worries the State. Privacy advocacy group Digital Rights Ireland (DRI) is challenging the existing call data laws in the High Court in a case that is before the European courts.

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) is the Government's initiative to encourage the use of IT and the Internet in schools. It was established under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science in 1998.
As the Government's agency on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education it plays a central role in helping to maximise the benefits for learners and teachers in using ICT. At the time of its formation, the NCTE was charged with managing the implementation of Schools IT 2000. This role has now evolved to include: policy and support for all aspects of ICTs in education; supporting schools in the development of their technological infrastructure; maintaining the educational website portal – ScoilNet; and developing and evaluating educational software. NCTE also operates the Schools Broadband Programme which connects 97% of schools in Ireland to the Internet.

Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe, T.D., published two reports on ICT in Schools in July 2008. *Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2008-2013* is the Report of the Strategy Group appointed to advise on the priorities for investment in ICT in Schools having regard to the critical success factors for successful integration of ICT into learning and teaching. *ICT in Schools* reports on the evaluation of the impact of ICT on teaching and learning undertaken by the Department's Inspectorate.

ICT in Schools is an evaluation report prepared by the Department's Inspectorate. Based on case studies of over fifty schools, inspections in over 180 schools and survey evidence from almost 1400 teachers, over 900 principals and over 900 students, ICT in Schools is the first major study of the impact that ICT is having on teaching and learning in Irish primary and post-primary schools.

The report notes that significant improvements that have taken place in reducing the student-to-computer ratio since the commencement of specific ICT funding initiatives for schools. The evaluation found that in the main, schools make effective use of ICT grants provided by the Department to develop their ICT systems. It also shows that most schools have an ICT plan and an acceptable-use policy (AUP) in place. The report also indicates that the majority of teachers use ICT in lesson planning and preparation and acknowledges that large numbers of teachers have participated in continuing professional development courses in ICT.

However, the Inspectorate's evaluation recorded limited integration of ICT in the classroom at primary level. The evaluation found that the use of ICT in primary schools is currently focused on developing students' numeracy, reading and writing skills, and that it is also used in the teaching of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (History, Geography and Science).

[21] www.iab.ie

At post-primary level, the inspectors found that ICT impacts predominantly on the development of students' research and investigation skills, as well as their writing and presentation skills. The highest levels of integration of ICT were found in the science and applied science subjects, in Mathematics and in subject such as History, Geography, Music and Art, Craft and Design. It is also used in Transition Year and in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The inspectors report that ICT is widely used by schools at both primary and post-primary levels to support students with Special Educational Needs, more often by special needs teachers than in mainstream classes.

Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools, 2008-2013

The then Minister for Education and Science Mary Hanafin T.D. appointed a Strategy Group to advise on the priorities for ICT in Schools in February, 2007. The Group was chaired by Mr Jerome Morrissey, Director of the NCTE and comprised individuals with a range of complementary experiences and expertise in education, industry and the public service.

The Report "Investing Effectively in and Communications Technology in Schools, 2008-2013" sets out the views of the Steering Group having regard to the critical success factors for successful integration of ICT into learning and teaching. The report is clear and comprehensive arguing for an integrated approach across the recommendations of the Strategy Group. Their recommendations cross 7 related areas:

• Continuing Professional Development – to ensure that teachers gain the capabilities to make meaningful use of ICT in their work

• Software and Digital Content for Learning and Teaching – to ensure that there is an adequate supply of innovative, high quality and Irish curriculum-related digital teaching and learning material available to teachers and students at all levels

• ICT Equipment – to ensure that adequately specified , up-to-date teaching and learning technology is available in sufficient quantity in all schools

• Schools Broadband Services – to ensure that every school has access to n appropriately specified, cost-efficient broadband service that is delivered to all necessary learning area within the school

• Technical Support and Maintenance – to ensure that all schools can provide, with a high degree of certainty, a functioning and dependable ICT infrastructure, and that they have access to appropriate technical support and maintenance to sustain this quality of service

• Implementation Structures – to ensure that there is a well-informed, well-resources and responsive authority that can progress the initiative of transforming schools into e-learning environments with the seriousness of purpose and the vision required

• Innovative Practice and Research – To ensure that our vision for digital technology in education becomes and remains vibrant, relevant and at the forward edge internationally

The Group believes that addressing any one area in isolation will reduce the impact and outcomes for the learner. The Strategy Group Report highlights the need for systematic planning to ensure maximum impact from the planned ICT Strategy for schools.

The report stresses that the critical role of the Principal and ICT Co-ordinator in driving the integration of ICT within the school is pivotal to developing a whole-school shared vision of ICT as a motivational and inspirational tool for use in meeting the objectives of the curriculum. The report states that the challenge now is to ensure that the emphasis on ICT in schools shifts, in the immediate future, from technology provision to a focus on its deliberate use by the learner. The pursuit of creativity and inventiveness are now pivotal skills in a knowledge economy and the embedding of ICT in learning can greatly facilitate their development.

NCTE operates the Teaching Skills Initiative (TSI), the principal professional development programme for teachers in the use of ICT. The programme has operated 1998 and provides Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training for teachers. In excess of 130,000 teachers have availed of ICT training places. Where the numbers are sufficient, training courses are offered to groups of staff in a whole school environment. Further support is provided by a national network of Education Centres.

The Information Society Commission (ISC) was established in 1999 as an independent advisory body to Government, reporting directly to the Taoiseach. It drew on high-level representation from the business community, social partners, and government members and was charged with the task of shaping the evolving public policy framework for the Information Society in Ireland. The Commission produced a series of reports and recommendations on building an inclusive information society and for improving broadband infrastructure. The Commission was wound down in 2004 and its functions subsumed within the Department of the Taoiseach.

The Commission's role included highlighting the opportunities and challenges presented by Information Society developments and monitoring Ireland's performance nationally and internationally.

Get With IT: The Internet Advisory Board (IAB) ran a campaign aimed at making parents aware of how new media works and encourages them to engage with, and use, new technologies with their children called "Get With IT". The campaign includes the publication of a free booklet, "A Parents' Guide to Filtering" and a reprint and update of a booklet called "A parents Guide to New Media". In 2008 a new publication "Get With IT" parents guide to social networking websites was released.

Watch Your Space (Feb 2007)- The Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D., launched WATCH YOUR SPACE - a new campaign to raise awareness and promote safe, responsible practice by young people when online. The campaign has a strong peer-to-peer perspective and centres on an interactive online service, www.watchyourspace.ie developed by the National Centre Technology in Education (NCTE).This site offers practical tips and advice and supports teenagers who use the web. A key feature is the advice given from teenagers to teenagers on how to cope with the fall-out from abuses and misuse of social networking and picture -sharing websites.

Webwise Internet Safety Seminars for Parents (Sept 2007) - National Parents Council Primary working with the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) has developed a seminar to take the mystery out of the Internet for parents and to give them the skills to engage with their children's online lives. The seminar will give a practical demonstration of the technologies and the websites young people are using. You will hear young people talking about how they use the Internet, why it is attractive to them, and get an insight into children's main concerns about being online. Parents will be introduced to strategies to help their children be responsible, effective and safer Internet users. If you are interested in holding a seminar for parents in your school please download the form below. Seminars can be delivered as part of your Parent Association Annual General Meeting if desired

makeITsecure - is an IT security awareness campaign run by a unique public/private sector consortium led by the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources and including Dell, NCTE, Microsoft, Symantec, Vodafone and BT. The coalition assembled with the common goal of creating awareness for computer security and safety issues. The aim of the campaign is to reach all the citizens of the island of Ireland with guidance on how to effectively protect themselves from IT security threats particularly in the areas of phishing, spyware, ID theft and child safety online. The campaign was first run in October 2005 and then again in February 2008

A Code of Practice and Ethics[22] was adopted by Irish internet service providers in 2002 and has been in force since then. Not all ISPs have signed up to it though it does have majority backing and is supported by the government-appointed Internet Advisory Board.

Barnardos have been the principal NGO in the Irish context leading on representation of issues affecting children. Their Childhood Poll 2007 raised a number of issues relating to the prominence of media technologies in children's live. Eight out of ten children polled, for instance, agreed that childhood today is better than in previous generations. Parents and children both cite their top reasons for this as: more money, more 'toys/games/ stuff', more opportunities. The survey goes on to reveal that three out of ten 5 to 9-year-olds have a television in their own bedroom and one in seven children aged 1 to 4 have a TV in their bedroom.[23]

The Influence of media coverage, events and lobbies on research

Studies commissioned by the Internet Advisory Board (*The Use of New Media by Children)* while not prompted by any specific instance was a response to increasing media attention to instances of cyber-bullying, high use of mobile phones by young people, and uncertainty regarding harmful online content. *The Use of New Media by Children* (Amarach Consultants) was published in October 2004.[24]

NGOs have not been particularly active in Ireland on the topic of children, media and digital culture. There is a generally low level of public awareness and discussion. Consequently, the principal actors in promoting internet safety as an agenda are statutory agencies such as the Internet Advisory Board (IAB), the newly established Office of Internet Safety, and the responsible government department, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources,[25] whose annual MAKE IT SECURE campaign promotes greater public awareness coinciding with the Safer Internet Day.[26]

From our WP3 report:

Two specific stories related to the Internet received massive attention in the national media in the past year (2007). One involved an underage boy who was the victim of statutory rape on more than one occasion at meetings set up on a gay dating website. The other was a suicide pact between a two young men whom in an online community. There have been several other stores that spread moral panic related to paedophiles use of social networking sites that are popular with children. There have also been many lifestyle features about the "Bebo/Facebook/MySpace generation".

In the media the risk of a child being the target of an online predator is disproportionately represented. Stories will a sexual dimension receive prominent positioning in the media. Recent Eurobarometer qualitative studies indicated that children's main concerns about using new technology are the risk of bullying and commercial exploitation. These issues are rarely covered in the mass media.

Particular debates and concerns about children

There is growing concern in Irish educational debate about issues of commercialisation and childhood. The main teachers' union, the INTO, have supported calls for stricter guidelines and regulations concerning the involvement of commercial interests in education matters, particularly at primary level.

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[22] www.ispai.ie/docs/cope.pdf
[23] http://www.barnardos.ie/section/sub-section/?content=61
[24] http://www.iab.ie/Publications/Reports/Archive/
[25] http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Home/
[26] http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Communications/Business+and+Technology/MakeITSecure/

The Campaign for Commercial-Free Education (Ireland)[27] was established in 2005 to address the increasing advertising and sale of commercial products in Irish schools. It is a grassroots body of teachers, parents and concerned individuals who believe that students should not be subject to commercial marketing during school time. The Campaign seeks to raise awareness of commercial presence in schools through the media, at local level meetings and through representative organisations. It supports and publicise those schools who refuse to allow commercial access to students in their care.

Following on from Ireland's Second Report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (July, 2005), the Ferns Report (October, 2005) and the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution Tenth Progress Report: The Family (January, 2006), in November, 2006 the Government announced its intention to hold a Constitutional Referendum on children. The Minister for Children initiated a process of consultation and discussion with the other Parliamentary parties and with all relevant groups, with the aim of achieving consensus on the wording of an appropriate amendment regarding the place of children in the Constitution. The aim was to find a wording that would reflect the desire of the Irish people to establish

For a number of reasons, issues of children's rights have featured prominently in robust safeguards for all children and that enshrines the very highest possible standards for the protection of children. However, to date no satisfactory formulation has been agreed, and the government has recently announced that plans for the referendum will be postponed until such time as there is all party agreement.

More broadly, Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1992), triggered an evolution in child policy, strengthened through the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) (2006).

One of the ideas to emerge from the National Children's Strategy was the idea of a National Youth Parliament – Dail na nOg. Dáil na nÓg is organised by the National Youth Council in co-operation with, and on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC). It encourages youth participation and represents children's and youth views on current issues affecting them.

Established in 1995, the Children's Rights Alliance[28] is a coalition of non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and welfare of children and young people in Ireland. The overall aim of the Alliance is to secure the changes in legislation, policies and services required to ensure the implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ireland ratified this international agreement in 1992. The tenth anniversary of Ireland's formal commitment under international law to vindicate the rights of children enshrined in this Convention takes place on 21 September 2002.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) was established in 2002 and deals with:

* Independent complaints handling
* Communication & Participation
* Research & Policy

There has been increased attention given to issues about how children in Ireland use their outdoor space. Research on childhood obesity and methods of getting to and from school would seem to indicate a general loss of independent spatial mobility. A number of factors have been cited as contributing to this loss of freedom to access communities unsupervised. Among those factors is media coverage of particular issues which may instil fear of 'stranger danger' among adults and children.
Research is beginning to examine concern regarding a loss of independent spatial mobility among children in urban areas, and to consider the relationship between media coverage of issues which may cause apprehension among adults and children and this loss.

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[27] http://www.commercialfreeeducation.com/about_the_campaign.html
[28] http://www.childrensrights.ie/alliance.php

Additionally, media attention has focussed on the question of childhood obesity arising from insufficient outdoor play activities for children. There is a strong focus both here and in the UK on limiting advertising to children and teenagers, with moves underway to regulate the advertisements that can be shown at times when children are likely to be watching TV. The recent Broadcasting Bill (2008) proposes stronger regulation of food advertising specially targeted at children.

Case Studies

Amárach Consulting (www.amarach.com) was commissioned by the Internet Advisory Board (www.iab.ie) to undertake research on the use of new media technologies by children and the awareness of both parents and their ten to fourteen year old children of some of the downside issues that may be associated with their use. This was the second time Amárach has research and reported for the Internet Advisory Board. In 2001 Amárach conducted research which focused exclusively on the downside issues associated with children's use of the Internet.

The Internet Advisory Board had to this point been exclusively dealing with harmful and illegal uses of the internet and had the primary objective of establishing a Code of Practice for ISPs Mindful of the fact that such illegal and seriously harmful aspects were quite rare, the Board decided to place greater emphasis on awareness-raising of the prevalence of ICTs in young people's lives and the role that internet and mobile communications were playing in everyday leisure patterns. The research was commissioned to coincide with a major national conference and the launch of an IT safety information pack for teachers and parents.

Amárach (Irish for 'tomorrow') specialise in new media research and have been tracking internet and technology usage since 1998. The company offers market research for a wide number of consumer and technology clients and also produce research for ComReg, the telecommunications regulator.

The methodology for the project followed previous research conducted into technology usage and used a survey method, with separate child and parent interviewer-administered questionnaires. 317 parents of children aged between 10 and 14, and 317 children aged 10-14 were interviewed at 60 sample points around the Country. Although using different language, they addressed the same issue: the use of new technology by children. Both questionnaires were designed by Amárach in consultation with the Internet Advisory Board and the Internet Advisory Board approved them for research in early August 2004.

The age range chosen was influenced by the concern of the Internet Advisory Board to gain greater insight into what was felt to be a particularly important group who might be more vulnerable than younger or older children. The age range covered upper primary school and lower secondary school ages. The high take of up mobile phones among children and younger teenagers was noted. Concern was expressed at the potentially unregulated and unsupervised use of mobile internet applications, and was a topic explicitly addressed at the conference to launch the report. In addition, much public attention had been given to unregulated premium telephone numbers and commercial sites selling ringtones and other download applications to children.
The choice of questions was guided by the mission and objectives of the Internet Advisory Board to promote safe use of the Internet, and as a result was particularly interested in gaining knowledge, firstly, of the differing ways in which children accessed the internet, and secondly, parents' knowledge and understanding of potentially harmful and illegal aspects. The research as a whole, therefore, might be seen to focus to a greater extent on the downsides of internet usage and did not provide any opportunity to explore in depth children's positive experiences.

The funding was provided by the parent government department, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.