National report for Ireland

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1 The Internet

1.1 Children's Internet access

Ireland's Internet diffusion rate is rising but remains poor compared to other EU countries. There are no statistics available on children's use of library Internet services. The poor uptake of Internet in the home is at odds with Ireland's reputation as a centre of excellence in the ICT industry. Less than half (49%) of Irish homes have Internet access (CSO, 2006). Surveys conducted on children's use of the Internet in Ireland show that home Internet access is higher in households with school children.

Public libraries in Ireland are the main providers of public Internet access. Libraries have clear Internet access policies as Internet use tends to be well supervised and all computers have filtering software. Internet cafes are now common in villages, towns and cities, but these are rarely used by children in Ireland.

Ireland is steadily improving its levels of broadband penetration but by European standards its broadband market remains underdeveloped, particularly in the home. Only one-quarter of household Internet users in Ireland have broadband, compared with the EU average of 62%. In the OECD (2006) broadband league table, Ireland is 24th of the 30 countries plotted, with a broadband penetration level of 12.5% compared with an OECD average of 16.9%.

Low penetration has partly been due to high wholesale costs, lack of competition, high retail prices, limited coverage in many non-urban areas, and generally low market awareness. Government efforts to improve local loop unbundling and wholesale access resulted in strong growth in 2007 with growth levels among the highest of all OECD countries. Broadband subscriptions showed the highest quarterly growth levels in the first quarter of 2007 since broadband was launched in Ireland five years ago.

Among the EU15, Ireland ranked fifth in terms of the best-priced broadband household DSL package, five places less expensive than the EU average. The average Irish monthly cost is €27.35 compared with an EU average of €29.24. But the quality of broadband that Irish businesses and consumers experience is poor. An OECD study shows an astonishing gap between two Asian economic powerhouses and the rest of the world. Japan and Korea both recorded speeds of 100 Mbit per second and way down the table Ireland came in 23rd position, with a speed of just 3 Mbit per second. The OECD average speed is 13 Mbit per second.

The Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI) comprising 22 member ISPs operates the www.hotline.ie service, and provides general advice on anti-virus and filtering software. ISPs routinely offer Internet safety tools and advice on virus alerts with particular emphasis on online security issues. The largest ISP, Eircom, has recently introduced an e-Security package in conjunction with Norton Utilities, providing antivirus and firewall protection, identity theft support, email antivirus and spam blocker, anti-spyware protection and anti-phishing protection.

1.2 Findings on children's access to the Internet and online technologies

Home and school are the main places children access the Internet. 79% of children aged 9 to 16 have home Internet access (Webwise, 2006). Another 2006 survey, conducted with lower age groups reported lower figures for home Internet access. Fifty-eight percent of 4 to 12 year

olds have Internet access – a figure common to both rural and urban homes. Access is slightly higher for the 8 to 12 age group than for 4 to 8 year olds (CSER, 2006). The Amarach study (2004) reported limited Internet access for 10 to 14 year olds outside these sites: 11% of children accessed the Internet in friends' houses; 5% in relatives' houses; 2% in libraries; 2% elsewhere. In 2004, only 33% of children aged 10 to 14 reported using the Internet in school. Broadband is now provided to 97% of schools thought the Schools Broadband Programme. In 2006, 64% of children aged 9 to 16 reported using the Internet in school on a regular basis.

There is evidence of a digital divide (CSER, 2006). Children from designated 'disadvantaged' urban schools who are predominantly from lower SE groups have a higher than average possession of most forms of technology, with the exception of computers and Internet. 90% of children from more affluent homes have Internet access at home, compared with 38% from lower SE groups.

1.3 Findings on children's use of the Internet and online technologies

Children start using the Internet when they are 8 years old (Webwise, 2006). This compares with a starting age of 9.5 years in 2003. Young children tend to be introduced to the Internet at home rather than school.

The Eurobarometer (2007) study reported that respondents aged 9 to 14 used the Internet regularly, 2-3 times per week. Older children's usage (12 to 14 years) is higher than younger age groups (9 and 10 years). The average Internet session is 40-60 minutes. More than half (56%) the children aged 9 to 16 use the Internet once a week or more at home (Webwise, 2006), a considerable increase from the nine percent reported in 2004. 52% use the Internet in school more than once a week and 12% use the Internet in friends' houses more than once a week.

A 2007 survey of young people's (10 to 20 years) online social networking activity reported that 36% access social networking sites on a daily basis and 69% more than three times a week.

Ranking of online activities

The pattern of use has changed over the four years of the studies, as social networking websites have grown in popularity. Activities such as downloading music, playing games, doing homework, and instant messaging have become more popular since 2003. Using chat rooms, visiting fan sites, surfing for fun have become more peripheral activities.

1 (2007)	2 (2006)	3 (2006)	4 (2004)	5 (2003)
Messaging MSN	Information - hobbies/sport	Gaming	School projects Homework	Games
Bebo/youTube	Gaming & cheats	Music	Games	Surfing - fun
Games	Music	Surfing - fun	Chat & email	Music
Music	Chat	Homework	Music	Info - non homework
	Film trailers	Info - hobbies	Hobbies, sport	

Older children's (12 to 14) Internet usage was higher than younger age group (9 and 10) (Eurobarometer, 2007).

The social networking study of 10 to 20 year olds (Anchor, 2007) reported no gender differences in access, but found that girls spent longer during each Internet session, especially at weekends. 34% of girls spent 3+ hours, compared with 23% of boys.

1.4 Internet and Media Content for Children

RTE, the national public service broadcaster, is the major provider of content for children. Its Young People's division produces extensive programming for the two national channels. Children's content is also produced by TG4, the Irish language television channel. Research carried out by the ESRI shows that television viewing remains popular with no drop off during teenage years. RTE supplied data, however, indicate the most popular programmes watched by children and young people tend to be adult programmes.

RTE's Young People's output is informed by making programmes that are relevant to Irish children. The proportion of home produced programming for children is higher than most other European countries. Extensive interactive content for children's programme is available on RTE's various websites (see www.rte.ie/tv/theden/index.html).

Turning to the Internet, outside of broadcasting there is relatively little Irish-originated online content specifically for children. International children's online content is far more in evidence with leading media and entertainment sites, which the most visited by children in Ireland. The majority of nationally originated children's online content is educational in nature and supported by the Department of Education and Science with some private sector sponsorship.

Scoilnet (www.scoilnet.ie) is the main portal for Irish education and includes sections for children (primary and post-primary), teachers and parents. In addition to curriculum-related content, Scoilnet includes educational games, news and sports features aimed at children. *Fís* is a digital storytelling and film in schools project supported by NCTE and the Department of Education and Science. Its website, www.fis.ie, provides media literacy learning resources and a selection of digital content produced as part of the project. *Discover Primary Science* (www.primaryscience.ie/site/index.php) is an educational site to make science enjoyable and fun and is supported by Forfás, the government agency for science and technology development. Fundays.ie is a private sector portal providing listings and information for children and parents.

Concern about commercialisation of children and youth in Ireland led to the establishment of the Children's Advertising Code in 2005 by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland. Extensive lobbying to place a total ban on children's advertising was rejected. The code involves a series of restrictions on children's advertising including: celebrities and sports stars are not allowed to promote food and drink products aimed at children unless the advertisement is part of a "public health or education campaign"; characters or personalities from children's programmes are also restricted from endorsing or advertising products or services. Children's advertising has to be "clearly separated from programming content" and broadcasters are required to alert children when a commercial break is beginning and ending. The code is currently under review and has been widely recognised as falling behind European initiatives on curbing advertising promoted at children particularly in relation to health and nutrition.

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) has called attention to the growing commercial targeting of schools by commercial interests wanting to promote their products or services to the pupils and their families. Other activities involve proof-of-purchase schemes such as collecting tokens which can be exchanged by schools for sports gear or computer equipment based on the number of tokens collected. The INTO has developed guidelines for schools on how to curtail growing commercialisation of the educational sector.

1.5 Opportunities experienced by children online

The opportunities experienced by children are as follows:

	2004 Amarach	2006 Webwise	2007 Anchor	2007 Eurobarometer
Access to global information		yes		
Educational resources	yes	yes	yes	
Social networking			yes	yes
Entertainment, fun and games	yes	yes	yes	yes
User generated content creation			yes	yes
Specialist /fan fora/hobbies	yes			yes
Downloading/listening to music		yes	yes	yes
Chatting to friends they see often			yes	yes
Commercial information	yes			
Radio	yes			yes

Twice as many teens as younger children have chatted on the Internet (Webwise, 2006). Many of the activities listed in the guidelines were not included in the studies. The focus was more on consumption and risks than opportunities or broader use of the Internet. Only one study (Anchor, 2007) explored young people's use of social networking in some detail.

Girls (9 to 14 years) tend to use the Internet-based communication services, such as email and Instant Messaging more than boys who prefer to use more transactional functions such as gaming and downloading music (Eurobarometer, 2007). More than twice as many girls as boys (6 to 16 years) say that they publish pictures of themselves on the Internet (Webwise, 2006). This trend continues in the Anchor (200) survey. 26% of girls (10 to 20) have online photo albums which they share, compared with 13% of boys. Boys (aged 10 to 20) are more than twice as likely (16%) as girls (7%) to use social networking sites to make new friends. More boys (22%) than girls (17%) have a friends list on their social networking site (Anchor, 2007). More than five times as many boys (17%) as girls (3%) aged 9 to 16 said they viewed pornography online (Webwise, 2006). It is possible that this is seen by boys as an opportunity rather than a risk. There is considerable gender difference in girls' and boys' favourite features of social networking sites:

	Female	**Male**
Bands	3	8
Blogs	6	5
Comments	64	51
Friends lists	17	22
Online chat	1	3
Photo Albums	26	13
Polls	1	2
Quizzes	7	6
Songs Lists		1
TV/Video	19	48
Whiteboard	2	1

(Anchor, 2007). Favourite FeaturesH5b – subheading, 'Opportunities by socioeconomic status'

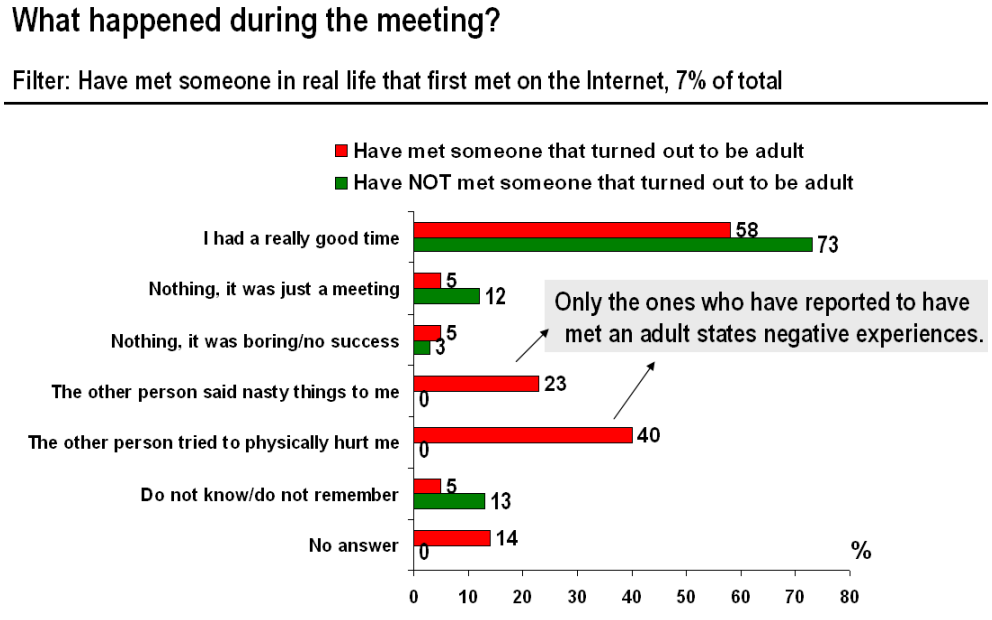
1.6 Risks experienced by children online

First, the risks perceived by children and their parents are compared below.

Perceived by:	**Children**	**Parents/Adults**
Illegal content		yes
Paedophiles, grooming, strangers	yes	yes
Extreme or sexual violence	yes	yes
Other harmful, offensive material	yes	yes
Racist, hate material	yes	yes
Advertising, commercial persuasion	yes	
Biased, misinformation		yes
Exploitation of personal information	yes	yes
Cyberbullying, stalking, harassment	yes	yes
Gambling, financial scams	yes	
Invasion, abuse of privacy	yes	
Illegal activities, hacking, downloading		
Generational digital divide		yes
Children becoming mentally and physically lazy		yes
Plagiarism		yes
Lack of awareness of ethical considerations		yes

Paedophiles, grooming, strangers

According to the Webwise (2006) survey, 7% of those aged between 9 and 16 years old have met someone in real life that they first met on the Internet. This is an increase from 4.5% in 2003. Most said that one of their friends went with them to their first meeting, while a quarter of teens said that they went alone. The majority of children said that they had a good time during the meeting. However, 11% of those who met with someone said that the other person tried to physically hurt them, and 7% said that the other person said nasty things to them. Only 22% said that they would tell their parents or teachers about anything bad that happened when they met someone. Worryingly, of those who went to face-to-face meetings, almost 25% said that they had experienced an encounter where the person who introduced themselves to them on the Internet as a child, turned out to be an adult. This was the case in all the abusive meetings.



(Webwise, 2006)

Extreme or sexual violence

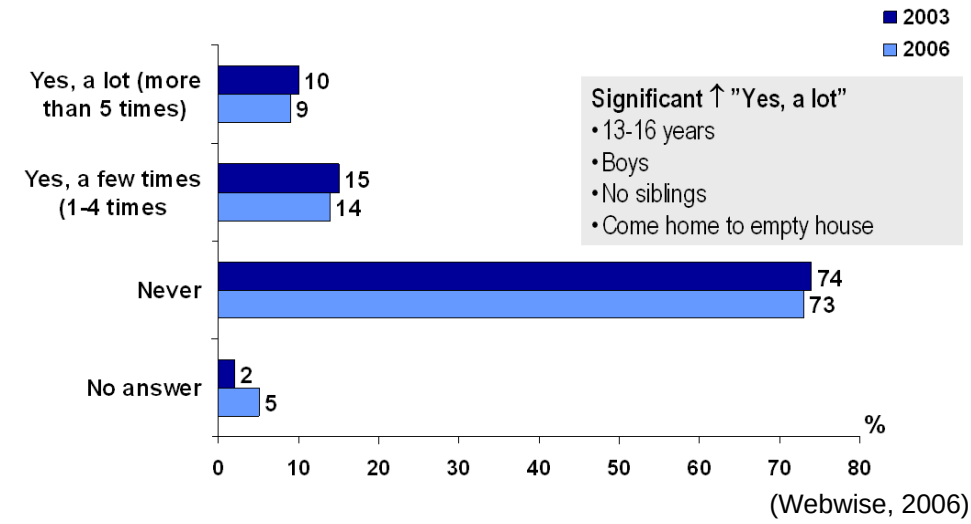
The Eurobarometer 2007 focus groups of children aged 9 to 14 years have shown that problems that youngsters spontaneously associated with the Internet included: viruses (via pop ups, downloading music, etc.); scams (e.g. competitions, free offers, etc.); chat rooms (engaging in online relations with a stranger); cyberbulling (e.g., Instant messaging, Bebo, etc.). One respondent in the 10 to 12 age group recalled watching a violent clip on the Internet: *"There was a video on YouTube of some guy getting kicked in the face. He was almost dead."*

Other harmful, offensive material

In the 2004 Amarach survey of 10 to 14 year olds, only 7% had come across material on the Internet that made them uncomfortable. In the Anchor (2007) study, which surveyed young people aged 10 to 20, 76% reported it was easy or very easy to encounter pornography on social networking sites. The Webwise study the previous year (2006) reported that 37% of children (9 to 16 years) had visited pornographic websites either accidentally or on purpose. A quarter had received pornographic junk mail. 9% reported receiving unwanted sexual comments.

Have you ever received unwanted sexual comments on the Internet?

Filter: Use Internet, 96% of total



(Webwise, 2006)

Racist, hate material

26% of children (9 to 16 years) surveyed in the Webwise (2006) had encountered hate material. 8% admitted posting hateful comments on the Internet.

Cyberbullying, stalking, harassment

19% of 9 to 16 year olds who had chat on the Internet reported that they had been harassed, threatened or embarrassed (Webwise, 2006). A very high percentage, 90%, of 10 to 20 year olds had encountered material that was intended to be harmful to someone. 10% reported that they had encountered hateful/bullying material lots of times (Anchor, 2007).

Invasion, abuse of privacy

There has been an increase in the number of children willing to give out personal information on the Internet. The use of social networking sites has had a major impact on how young people share personal information, particularly disclosure of their full name. In 2006, 28% of 9 to 16 year olds surveyed had disclosed their names. 27% had given their email contact. The

Anchor (2007) survey reported that 79% had given their name, 49% their date of birth, 12% had disclosed their mobile phone number and 8% had detailed their home address. There has also been an increase from 19% to 27% in the number of 9 to 16 year olds who have been asked by someone they did not know for personal information like photos and contact details (Webwise, 2006). The risks posed by chat rooms seem to be decreasing. Only 5% of children surveyed in the 2004 Amarach study said they had ever visited a chat room, a drop of 30% from 2001. According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2005/6, 9% of parents/guardians think that their child has ever encountered harmful or illegal content on the Internet. All the studies report that younger children's access is more likely to be supervised and monitored by parents.

More boys than girls reported that they had experienced online harassment. 21% of boys and 18% of girls aged 9 to 16 reported that they had been harassed, bothered, threatened or embarrassed in the past 6 months by someone chatting online (Webwise, 2006). This report also noted that boys are three times more likely than girls to have visited hate sites. Boys to a larger degree than girls believe the veracity of Internet content.

The Saft study (2003) reported that girls (9-16 years) were more conscious than boys of being contacted by strangers when submitting personal information. By 2007 there appears to be less of a reluctance to publish personal details, although gender differences are still evident. A higher percentage of girls (69%) than boys (65%) aged 12 to 14 have public web profiles. This is reversed in the older age group. More boys (81%) than girls (72%) aged 15 to 17 have public profiles (Anchor, 2007).

Eurobarometer (2007) reported that younger girls tend to adhere more to parents' rules when using the Internet. Mothers are more protective of girls. Rules predominantly relate to 'stranger danger'. It may be because of this that girls are more responsible than their male counterparts, who sought out "obscure and dangerous aspects online", despite parental rules for boys (12 to 14) forbidding pornographic websites. The majority of girls in the younger groups (aged 9 to 10) had not encountered much deeply shocking content, mainly due to the restrictions placed at home through parental control.

Only 41% of lower SE parents monitor their children's Internet use, compared with 81% of other groups. Children from lower SE groups are more likely to have access to computers and the Internet in their bedroom than higher SE groups (CSER, 2006).

Children use the Internet more frequently from home and are less likely to be supervised. The Schools Broadband Programme has filters. Social networking sites are banned. They use secure email systems. Less time is available for Internet use and activities tend to be structured around the curriculum.

1.7 Internet regulation and promotion

In Ireland the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published the first report of the working group on the Illegal and Harmful Use of the Internet in 1998. This report presented the framework for addressing the downside of the Internet that has been in use ever since. This report was the genesis of a strategy based on an approach of self-regulation by the Internet service provider industry: the establishment of a complaints hotline to deal with complaints about illegal content on the Internet; the establishment of the Internet Advisory Board (IAB) to coordinate the self-regulatory framework; and the establishment of mechanisms to develop awareness programme for users to empower them to protect themselves or others in their care from illegal and harmful material on the Internet. The Board has an independent chairperson and its members include representatives from the Internet Service Providers Industry Association of Ireland, An Garda Síochána, Child Protection interests, relevant Government Departments, the Office of the Data Protection Commission, the National Consultative Committee on Racism in Ireland (NCCRI) as well as a legal expert.

The Government has ultimate responsibility in relation to the illegal and harmful use of the Internet. However a self-regulatory approach was deemed the most appropriate. While the constituents of the self-regulation framework have elements that are the responsibility of particular parties, such as service providers, the overall maintenance and development of the framework is carried out by the Internet Advisory Board (IAB), which has representatives of all those with primary responsibilities in this area.

One of the most important elements in an overall framework of self-regulation is the adoption of codes of practice by the key stakeholders. It was envisioned that over time a number of codes of practice may be applicable to an environment which is constantly changing and where new players are continually being introduced. However the primary focus was the development by the Irish Service Providers of common codes of practice governing the provision of the services which they provide. The Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI) developed a number of common measures, including codes of practice, as part of a framework of self-regulation. Although most of the main ISPs signed up to the code of practice, they never achieved full compliance amongst ISPAI members.

In September 2007, The Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform announced that the Government had approved his proposals to establish an Office for Internet Safety (OIS) and an Internet Safety Advisory Council. The OIS will expand on the work that was carried out by the Internet Advisory Board. In addition to placing cybercrime issues within the crime policy framework of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the OIS will aim to encourage greater cohesion across state agencies and the industry generally. A key role of the executive office will be to monitor compliance with the Internet Service Provider industry code of practice.

The Hotline (www.hotline.ie) is managed by the Internet Services Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI). It provides a central point of contact for members of the public who wish to report instances of potentially illegal content encountered on the web, for example, child pornography. The European Commission's Information Society has established the Insafe network under the Safer Internet Programme. Insafe (www.saferInternet.org) is a network of national nodes that coordinate Internet safety awareness in Europe. The NCTE is the Irish member of the network.

Debates relating to regulation of the Internet in Ireland have focused on the maintenance and sharing of child pornography blacklists and the provision of content filtering services by ISPs to block access to these sites. The Hotline and the ISPAI have claimed that legislation is required to indemnify employees who develop and maintain such a blacklist in Ireland. Services such as British Telecom's Clean Feed is currently offered the UK and Northern Ireland but not in Ireland. Subscribers to British Telecom's Internet services in these areas who attempt to access illegal sites receive an error message as if the page was unavailable. The list of illegal sites is compiled and maintained by the Internet Watch Foundation, the British equivalent of the Hotline. No ISPs in Ireland offer this level of filtering service. The Code of Practice and Ethics of the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland requires members to provide information to customers about the availability of software tools which may assist them in filtering content which they might deem unsuitable. They also require members to follow best industry practice in offering filtering software or filtering services to a customer. Recently, Vodafone has broken ranks and is using the IWF blacklist from the UK to block child pornographic content in Ireland.

There is no specific legislation governing Internet safety at school level. There are, however, a number of laws that have relevance to Internet safety:

Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998 (www.acts.ie/zza22y1998.1.html)

This act legislates against anyone who knowingly produces, prints, publishes, distributes, exports, imports, shows, possesses or sells child pornography. A new offence of meeting a child following sexual grooming, on the Internet or otherwise, was included in the recently enacted Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) (Amendment) Act 2007. Some further amendments to our legislation are contained in the Criminal Law (Trafficking in Persons and Sexual

Offences) Bill which is being drafted in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. Among the provisions of the Bill is one that prohibits the sale of children, including through a computer system, for the purpose of the sexual or labour exploitation of a child.

Data Protection Act 1988 (www.acts.ie/zza25y1988.1.html)

This act was passed in order to deal with privacy issues arising from the increasing amount of information kept on computer about individuals.

Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 (www.irlgov.ie/bills28/acts/2003/a603.pdf)

This amendment extends the data protection rules to manually held records and also makes improvements to the public's right to access data.

Interception Act 1993 (www.acts.ie/zza10y1993.1.html)

(The Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages Regulation Act 1993). This act stipulates that telecommunication messages can be intercepted for the purpose of an investigation of a serious offence. Authorisations are subject to certain conditions.

Video Recordings Act 1989 (www.acts.ie/zza22y1989.1.html)

This act prohibits the distribution of videos which contain obscene or indecent material which may lead to the depravation or corruption of the viewer. It would apply where someone in the State supplied this kind of video over the Internet.

Ireland signed up to the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime in June 2002. The main objective of the convention is to foster international co-operation in protecting society against cybercrime. The convention deals specifically with the distribution of child pornography on the Internet, infringements of copyright, computer related fraud and violations of network security.

Incitement to hatred

Under the Prohibition of the Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 it is a criminal offence to publish, distribute or broadcast material which is threatening, abusive or insulting and is intended or likely, having regard to all the circumstances, to stir up hatred.

Criminal libel

The Defamation Act 1961 contains provisions relating to criminal libel. In 1999, a young man was jailed for two and a half years by Dublin Circuit Court Judge Elizabeth Dunne following a guilty plea in relation to charges for criminal libel in respect of very seriously defamatory postings he made about his teacher on bulletin boards and websites.

Criminal proceedings for defamation are only taken in the most serious circumstances. Proceedings have to be brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions or, alternatively, permission has to be sought from the High Court to bring a private prosecution for criminal defamation. Only one case has been successfully taken over the last number of years. If a minor defames a person but it is not within the category of criminal defamation then little or no action can be taken against them in respect of the material.

Harassment

The Non Fatal Offences Against The Person Act 1997 contains provisions which can deal with persistent bullying or harassment on the Internet. Under Section 10 any person who, without lawful authority, harasses another by persistently pestering, besetting or communicating with him or her shall be guilty of an offence. Harassment is deemed to occur where a person seriously interferes with the other's peace and privacy or causes alarm,

distress or harm to the other. This legislation has been used to prosecute individuals in cases of telephone harassment and stalking.

Data Protection

It should also be noted that it is a breach of the Data Protection legislation to disclose personal information which was obtained without authority. Such personal information can also include photographs. If such material is being posted on the Internet, the Data Protection Commissioner can bring a prosecution under this legislation. Complaints about such material should be made to the Data Protection Commissioner in writing. A copy of a complaint form can be obtained at www.dataprotection.ie. Content does not have to be for commercial purposes in order to breach data protection rules. In a recent case a woman who posted information about members of her church on a website was found to have breached the data protection rules in Germany. This ruling was upheld by the European Court of Justice.

Generally, in Ireland, as well as in most jurisdictions, what is illegal offline is considered illegal online. However, there isn't a specific gardaí unit tasked with implementing the law in this area. The Garda investigates reports of suspect activity and monitors child pornography on the Internet, working with international agencies such as INTERPOL. There has been a lot of recent criticism of the Garda in this area by NGOs working in the child protection field. Irish Internet service providers are not permitted to accept illegal material for hosting on their servers whether generated in this jurisdiction or elsewhere, and are required to report any such material to the gardaí.

The Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation (GBFI) remit involves the investigation of fraud on a national basis principally dealing with the more complex cases. The Computer Crime section of the bureau is a national reference centre for Gardaí requiring assistance in the investigation of computer related crime. The unit members have expertise in the examination of computer hardware and storage devices.

The Domestic violence and sexual assault investigation unit of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (N.B.C.I.) provides advice, guidance and assistance in the investigation of child sexual abuse, other sexual crimes and domestic violence. The Unit leads the investigation in the more complex cases. The Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit (DVSAIU) also liaises with relevant Government Departments, State bodies and voluntary groups, embracing the very necessary multi-agency approach to tackling these crimes and their causes. The unit has been involved in an ongoing Europol training module, involving police investigators from EU Member States, focusing on combating child pornography on the Internet. As a result of the introduction of the Sex Offenders Act 2001, certain notification requirements are now imposed on a category of convicted sex offenders. The DVSAIU has a central function in the operation of this legislation.

The hotline (www.hotline.ie) funded by the Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland with support from the EU Safer Internet Action Plan, accepts and investigates reports from the public about child pornography and other illegal material on the Internet. Special protocols operate between the gardaí and the hotline which maximise co-operation on law enforcement issues so that offences in the area of child pornography can be detected and prosecuted.

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 National Centre for Technology in Education is an Irish Government agency established to provide advice, support and information on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education. NCTE operates the Schools Broadband Programme which

connects 97% of schools in Ireland to the Internet. Its role is to enhance ICT in schools through the provision of a faster and secure network and online services.

Programmes raising awareness of potential social impacts and risks related to the Internet

The NCTE is the Irish Internet safety awareness node of the EU Information Society's safer Internet network. It also represents the Department of Education on the Internet Advisory Board in Ireland. In partnership with Childline and the National Parents Council Primary, it operates the Internet safety helpline for children. It also provides a panel of experts to parents associations and schools across the country to deliver information seminars and training to parents.

The Government established the IAB (Internet Advisory Board), which includes membership from the service provider industry, Government, education sectors, the Gardaí, child protection interests and the legal profession. The IAB has the role of supervising the ongoing evolution of self-regulation of Internet-linked organisations. The NCTE, as a member, works closely with this Board on all issues relating to safe use of the Internet.

Webwise is an Internet safety awareness initiative, developed by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) and comprises a range of online and printed information and advice publications for teachers, parents and students. It seeks to address key issues and findings arising from research conducted by the NCTE in Ireland over the past number of years relating to concerns about safety in regard to student use of and access to the Internet. The stated objectives of this initiative are:

- To promote the safe use of the Internet among school children (ages 4 to 18), their parents & teachers.
- To transform actual dangers into risks that they can master as autonomous, responsible users.

Content Filtering is also an integral part of NCTE's Schools Broadband Program, and involves allowing access to online content that is categorised as appropriate for schools while blocking access to certain webpages/websites or types of content that are categorised as inappropriate for schools. Schools must have an up-to-date written Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) in use before they will be connected to the Schools Broadband Network. The school must sign and return a form to the NCTE Service Desk confirming this. The school AUP should state that Internet and online use by pupils will be under the supervision of school staff.

Programmes promoting media literacy

Provision for media literacy is very uneven. Media literacy is part of the national curriculum at both primary and secondary levels but as recently reported by Radharc Media (www.mediaforum.ie), it is unstructured and responsibility for its delivery is unspecified. The topic is viewed as a 'soft subject' and the opportunities available are not widely taken up by teachers.

Currently, the regulator does not have any statutory responsibility for media literacy. New legislation is likely to vest overall responsibility for promotion of media literacy with a proposed reconfigured Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. This will follow the example of the UK where the Communications Act of 2003 places the responsibility on the regulator, OFCOM, to promote 'better public awareness and understanding of material published by electronic media, the purposes for which such material is selected or made available for publication, the available systems by which access to such published material is or can be regulated, and the available systems by which persons to whom such material is available may control what is received.

Awareness raising

The Government currently negotiates with ISPs through the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI). The recently established Office of Internet Safety (OSI) will assume a more direct role in such negotiation. An Internet Safety Advisory Council, to succeed the Internet Advisory Board, will be established to support OIS and will be drawn from representatives of the key stakeholders in the statutory, industry and community sectors.

Recent Awareness Campaigns in Ireland have included:

Get With IT (Sept 2007) – The 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".

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.

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.

makeITsecure (Oct 2005) – 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 Government recognises child protection practitioners as key stakeholders in the regulation of the Internet. Their role in the framework is in raising awareness of Internet safety issues in the community and being advocates for children who are not directly represented.

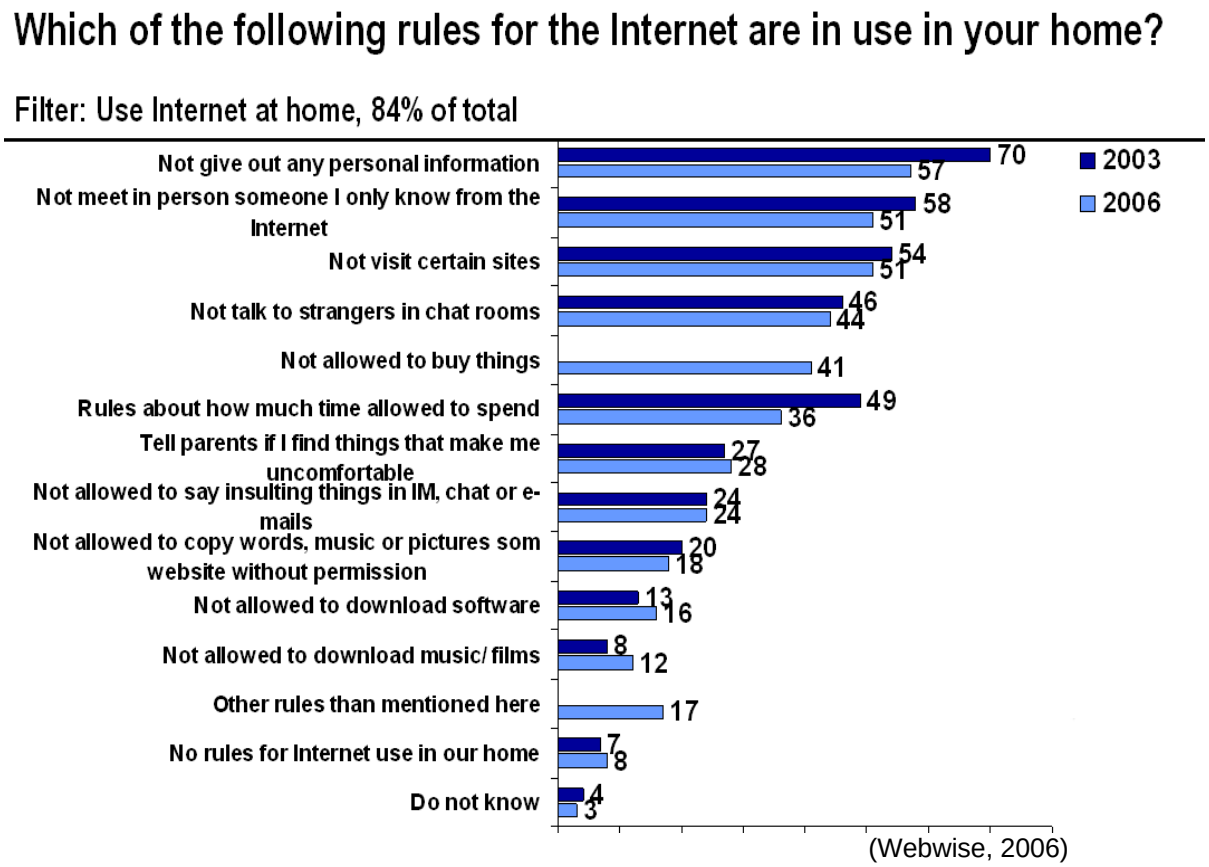
Barnardos (www.barnardos.ie) is a children's charity. Each year they work directly with approximately 12,000 children and families throughout Ireland. Barnardos raises issues through an advocacy programme. The organisation delivers services that challenge disadvantage from over 30 locations in 14 counties as well as nationwide services such as the National Children's Resource Centre, Beacon Guardian *ad Litem* service and Sólás – their bereavement counselling service for children. Barnardos has been a member of the Internet Advisory Board since its foundations. It has also been active in the development of Internet safety awareness materials since 2001.

Childline is the active listening and referral service of the Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, ISPCC (www.ispcc.ie). It has 120 trained and vetted front-line operatives, both volunteers and staff, operating a 24x7 helpline for children and caregivers throughout the country. Childline offers person centred, non problem focused approach. Childline uses external evaluation of its services and involves children in designing its service. Childline operates the Internet safety helpline of the Irish Internet safety awareness node.

In the past, the ISPCC frequently called for the immediate introduction of adequate vetting procedures for those wishing to work with children in Ireland.

1.8 Parental mediation

Rules and responsible Internet behaviour are more likely when children start using the Internet and are not revisited on a regular basis. For older children mediating strategies include monitoring use, checking history files, time restrictions and keeping up knowledge of new applications. Parents talk about the risks associated with the Internet more to younger children and supervise their use more closely. 90% of 9 to 16 year olds report that there are rules for using the Internet at home (Webwise, 2006). Over the years these seem to have been relaxed slightly by parents, possibly because the schools have become more proactive in providing Internet safety advice. The following chart compares the rules for Internet use for 9 to 16 year olds in the Saft study (2003) and the Webwise study (2006).



(Webwise, 2006)

The Amárach report (2004) reported similar parental strategies:

- 91% placed restrictions on giving out personal information.
- 89% had rules for children's use of the Internet.
- 79% discussed parameters of use.
- 55% monitored children's use of the Internet.
- Although 90% of parents forbid or restrict the use of the Internet, 32% of older children ignore the restrictions (Webwise, 2006).

Parents of 9 to 10 year olds sit with their children or are nearby when they are using the Internet. Parents rarely sit with older children (Eurobarometer, 2007). Teenagers tend to keep their use of the Internet private from their parents. Virtual environments are relatively free of parental control. Teenagers increased use of the Internet in their social lives results in a reluctance to alert parents to its negative aspects for fear of having access blocked by protective parents (Webwise, 2006).

Only 41% of lower SE parents monitor their children's Internet use, compared with 81% of other groups. Rules for children's Internet use are most evident in the ABC1 category:

	ABC1	C2DE	F
Website restrictions	57%	39%	5%
Monitoring the time of the day	57%	36%	7%
Ensuring an adult presence	55%	38%	6%
Time restrictions on the Internet	54%	39%	7%
Cannot give out personal details	55%	38%	7%

(Amarach, 2004)

Different concerns and rules are established by mothers and fathers. Mothers are more protective of girls. Rules predominantly relate to 'stranger danger'. Fathers are regarded as knowing more about the Internet, yet children are more likely to talk to mothers than fathers about what they do online (Webwise, 2006).

72% of teenagers reported that their parents never sit with them when they are online (Webwise, 2006).

Talking to younger children and supervising use raises awareness of risks. Having rules around home Internet use raises awareness among older children of risks.

1.9 Media literacy

Older children tend to use social networking to stay in touch with existing friends. Young children tend to use social networking sites to make new friends, potentially exposing them to more risk (Anchor, 2007).

Younger children (9 to 10 years) show and talk to their parents (Eurobarometer, 2007). Older children (12 to 14 years) confide in friends, siblings and teachers rather than parents. Older children (12 to 14) accept that offensive material is part of online experiences. They 'think before they click', avoid clicking on flashing icons and pop ups, avoid chat rooms, don't enter unfamiliar websites, give false information, block senders of emails, ignore requests for personal information, try to use moderated age-appropriate sites.

The most common strategies for 9 to 16 year olds when asked for personal information are to give false information, ignore the request, ask to be left alone, block the email sender, provide a limited amount of information and report to their parents (Webwise, 2006).

Some of the coping strategies are more subversive, involving ignoring parental concerns and rules. There has been an increase in the number of children (9-16 years) who used the Internet when forbidden by their parents: from 15% in 2003 to 32% in 2006. Half the respondents (50%) reported that it was possible to use the Internet without their parents' knowledge. According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2005/06, 64% parents/guardians think their child knows what to do if uncomfortable online, 16% think they do not.

1.10 Factors shaping public discourses about the Internet

Barnardos has proposed for some time that the Internet Advisory Board should be established on a statutory basis, and should have monitoring and regulatory functions as well as an advisory role. Barnardos has published a guide to Children and Technology: A Tool for Child Development. This publication outlines the important role that information and communications technology (ICT) can play in a child's development, ranging from improving young children's hand/eye co-ordination to enhancing speech, writing and reading skills and nurturing a child's creative ability. Barnardos have also produced several short guides and leaflets on other aspects of children's use of technology. Barnardos and eircom.net collaborated to produce the "Barnardos Family Guide to the Internet" aimed at giving families the information and support they need to stay safe online.

The ISPCC runs several direct access services for children. The 4me Mentoring service focuses on children at risk of misusing drugs and alcohol. The service also targets those particularly vulnerable at becoming isolated from mainstream society because of their anti-social behaviour or mental health problems. The ISPCC also runs an active schools outreach programme, giving talks to school students and youth groups on bullying, children's rights, the ISPCC, etc. The programme also offers assistance to school students with CSPE and schools projects. The ISPCC provides children and young people with information on their rights. They do this through talks and publications. The ISPCC provides talks to schools and youth groups around Ireland helping children to better understand their rights. In addition, the ISPCC has produced a booklet called My Rights, which can help children and young people to understand their rights in an age appropriate language. The Childline.ie website provides Internet safety advice targeted at young people. The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children as also produced Internet publication such as a leaflet entitled "A Young Person's Guide to the Internet".

Media coverage in Ireland is polarised. There are those who evangelise the transformative power of the Internet and eulogise children's use of new media. They use terms such as revolution, new paradigm, etc. They see interventions such as regulation as being contrary to the spirit of the founders of the Internet. These commentators tend be technology writers, employees or technology firms, techno-enthusiasts, or representatives or industry groups. Conversely, there are commentators who see only the downside of Internet use. Typically sections of the media, particularly the tabloid media, focus on issues that worry their readers. They capitalise on parents' fears arising from their lack of understanding of the technology and their fears about their children's use of the Internet. They tend to exaggerate the role of the Internet in issues such as child sexual abuse, anorexia, bulimia, suicide, etc.

The fact that Ireland houses the EU headquarters of many high tech firms such as Google, Microsoft, Oracle to name but a few, means that technology stories are prominent in the national press. All national newspapers have weekly technology sections; some are subsections of business supplements. As a result there is a large cohort of journalists covering technological developments. The rapid adoption of social networking technologies by young people between October 2005 and October 2006 was of significant interest to all sections of the media.

Most ISPs in Ireland can either trace their origins to what was the state telecoms sector or are mature global corporations like Vodafone and O2 (Telfonica). These companies have strong corporate responsibility programmes and are generally perceived as being responsible. Software and PC companies with a substantial Irish presence such as Symantec, Microsoft, and Dell have partnered with the Government in several substantial initiatives to raise awareness of Internet safety issues. Action taken by Microsoft to shut down its chat rooms following indications that they were being used by predators created substantial goodwill towards industry endeavours to keep children safe online. However, since we speak English many interactive web services from the US are effectively operating in Ireland without having a presence here. These companies have failed to demonstrate any corporate responsibility; the social networking websites Bebo, MySpace and Facebook are examples of this.

Two specific stories related to the Internet received massive attention in the national media in the past year. 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 two young men who met 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 with 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.

2 The Educational system

2.1 General education

It has been more than a decade since an adult literacy survey was conducted. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) undertaken by the OECD in a number of western countries in 1995 showed that one in four adults in Ireland had basic literacy problems and that this ratio was almost the highest amongst the countries surveyed. In 1999, the World Development Report reported that 23% of the adult population were functionally illiterate, leading to criticisms of the Irish educational system for failing to equip individuals with a basic level of literacy. NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, reports that 25% of the Irish population are at the lowest level of literacy. There is evidence, however, that there is a strong cohort effect at work, i.e., a low level of formal schooling of older individuals.
Recent media attention has focused on the persistent low level of literacy in Ireland compared to many other industrialised nations. A government committee on adult literacy reported in 2006 that the high level of literacy problems in Ireland was unacceptable and it should be a national priority to reduce it within as short a time as possible. They proposed the adoption of a long-term programme with measurable targets and a quadrupling of the current adult literacy tuition budget from €25 to €100 million by 2013 with an additional €25 million for improving support services. The Committee proposes that the long-term objective should be to halve the number of persons on the lowest level of literacy and to do this in 15 years. As well as suggesting that more regular literacy surveys be conducted in Ireland, the Committee recommends that the National Adult Learning Council should be activated as a matter of urgency and the implementation of the National Adult Literacy Programme should be assigned to it.

Compared with elsewhere, Ireland has a high level of educational attainment among the adult population (age group 25-64) and in a recent report was ranked 8th of 32 countries for this indicator (OECD, 2005). Census statistics for 2002 showed that 12.8% of the population had a university degree as their highest level of education. More than 86% of persons aged 20-24 in 2006 had completed second level education or higher. This figure decreased for older age groups down to 41.8% of persons aged 55-64.
The Dept of Health and Children have report that in 2002 just over one quarter of children under 18 lived in families where the head of the household had a third level degree. 59% lived in families where the head of the household was a lower secondary or upper secondary education. Only 13.1% lived in families where the head of the household had either no formal education or primary education only (Dept Health, 2006)

In Ireland there are 795,000 children in primary and post-primary education. The children attend 4,093 schools (3,328 primary and 763 post-primary). The pupil-teacher ratio at primary level in Ireland in the school year 2003/2004 was one of the highest in the EU 27 at 18.3. Twelve of the other EU 27 member states had a pupil-teacher ratio of less than 15 at primary level. In 2003/2004, the average class size in Ireland for primary education was 23.9 which,

mirroring the student to teacher ratio, was the second highest among reporting EU 27 countries.

Although participation rates in further and higher education are growing steadily, the experiences of those leaving school with lower levels of educational attainment are less positive. The 2006 School Leavers' Survey (ESRI, 2006) finds no improvement in levels of second-level completion, which continue to remain at levels found in the early 1990s. The unemployment rate for early school leavers in this age group was 19% in 2006 compared with an unemployment rate of 8.2% for all persons aged 18 to 24.

The growth in third level education in Ireland has been strong with the participation rate rising from 11% in 1965 to an estimated 57% in 2003 and in numbers from about 21,000 in 1965 to over 137,000 by 2003. The number of third level students has increased by 105% between 1990/91 and 2003/04. The proportion of 25 to 34 year olds that have attained tertiary education now stands at 37%, compared to an EU average of 27% and a US average of 40%. Over the last ten years, the number of full time students in third level education has increased by almost 80%, while the number of full time students in technical/technological institutions has more than doubled. Female enrolment constitutes 60% of all undergraduate enrolment. Ireland ranks fourth in the OECD in terms of the increase in third level education enrolments since 1995. In 2006, 40.2% of the population aged 25 to 34 in Ireland had 3rd level education compared with 28.6% across the EU 27. Over the period 1999-2006, the proportion of females aged 25-34 in Ireland with 3rd level education rose from 27.5% in 1999 to 46.9% in 2006. Over the same period, the rate for males increased from 26.7% to 36% in 2004 before falling back to 33.7% in 2006. The widening gap reflects the increasing tendency for females to remain in education for longer than males.

2.2 Education and the Internet

There is almost 100% Internet penetration in Irish schools. Despite the high level of broadband penetration in schools there remain concerns about the quality, reliability, and speed of the services available. Internet access in schools is provided through the Schools Broadband Network, which is managed by the NCTE. The NCTE provides a central filtering service that filters all Internet content going into schools.

According to an NCTE ICT in Schools census in 2005, pupil-computer ratio for primary schools was 9.1, while for post-primary schools it was 7.0, and for special schools, 3.1. These ratios are lower than in 2002, when they were 11.3, 7.4 and 3.8 respectively. In 2005, the ratio was better in disadvantaged than in non-disadvantaged schools at primary (7.4 vs. 9.4) and post-primary (6.1 vs. 7.4) levels, and better in vocational schools (5.0) than in community (6.2), comprehensive (7.8) or secondary (9.1) schools. Almost a third of computers in primary schools, and one-fifth in post-primary and special schools are more than 6 years old, with disadvantaged schools at primary and post-primary levels having greater proportions of older computers than non-disadvantaged schools.

45% of computers in primary schools, 80% in post-primary schools, and 35% in special schools were networked at the time of the 2005 census. The average number of hours online per week was 5.8 in primary schools, 25.6 in post-primary schools and 9.9 in special schools. This represented an increase of close to 50% from 2002 figures.

Since the expiry of the ‘Blueprint of the future of ICT in Irish Education’ in 2003, there has been no overall policy on the use of ICT in schools, although several pilot projects have been funded (see www.ncte.ie for examples). Ireland is in the process of developing a new ICT strategy for schools, a move welcomed by a range of stakeholders. A strategy group has been established, comprising representatives from schools, the Department of Education, ICT industry and the National Council for Technology in Education. The recent provision of funding for ICT in schools under the National Development Plan equates to €46 per child per year for the next 7 years. This is less than half the €110 spent per child in England on technology in the classroom.

In 2005, 89% of post-primary schools, 80% of primary schools, and 88% of special schools indicated that they had an acceptable use policy (AUP) in relation to use of the Internet. These represent an improvement over 2002, when the corresponding figures were 61%, 67% and 51% respectively.

The National Council for Curriculum Assessment have devised a new ICT Framework for schools. The NCTE is working with the NCCA in piloting the implementation of the ICT framework. The framework is a structured approach to ICT in curriculum and assessment. It identifies the knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and skills for ICT which all students should be enabled to attain from primary to the end of junior cycle/compulsory education. It is a cross-curricular 'scaffold' – a practical tool to support teachers in planning and providing opportunities for students to develop their ICT literacy across the curriculum.

71% of children interviewed in the Webwise 2006 survey had some form of instruction at school regarding use of the Internet. 17% said they received regular instruction. However, when we asked what was covered by the instruction, the most popular focus of instruction was how to connect to the Internet (54%). Education has mainly focused on the technical aspects of using the Internet. Only 29% of those who received instruction got direction on how to protect their personal information. Pre-teens were more likely to get instruction in all aspects of how to use the Internet except for how to connect to the Internet.

3 Wider society

3.1 Social change

Ireland has experienced a decade of rapid social change that was dubbed the ‘Celtic Tiger’. The population in Ireland increased by 15.7% to 4.24 million in the period 1997-2006. This was the second highest rate of increase in the EU 27 behind Cyprus. Population growth is due to an increase in immigration and a rising fertility rate. There has been net migration into Ireland in each year since 1997. The level of net inward migration increased from 19,200 in 1997 to 69,900 in 2006. Ireland is one of the most globalised economies in the world, and has consolidated this position over the past two decades, during which aggregate living standards in Ireland have converged with those of the world’s leading economies.

The cost of living has risen dramatically in Ireland. In the first half of the 1990s, price levels in Ireland were below the EU 25 average. Since 1995, Ireland has become considerably more expensive and by 2003 our price level was 25.7% above the EU 25 average. The average value of a new housing loan in Ireland rose from €52,800 in 1996 to €200,000 in 2005. Increased household incomes and changing consumer patterns are reflected in an increased share of average household income spent on services, recreation and entertainment.

The employment rate in Ireland rose from 56.1% in 1997 to 68.1% in 2006. The rate for women increased by over 14 percentage points over that period, while the rate for men rose by around 10 percentage points. The unemployment rate in Ireland increased from a low point of 3.6% in 2001 to 4.3% in 2006. Ireland had the third lowest unemployment rate in the EU 27 in 2006. The proportion of the population aged 18 to 59 living in jobless households in Ireland decreased by almost five percentage points in the period 1997-2006, falling from 12.5% in 1997 to 7.9% in 2006. The long-term unemployment rate in Ireland was 1.4% in 2005, which was lower than the EU27 average of 4%.

The number of lone parent families with children aged under 20 increased by 70.4% between 1997 and 2006. The ratio of female to male heads of household for lone parent families with children aged under 20, increased from over 8:1 in 1997 to almost 11:1 in 2006.

Information Society

Ireland's economic and social vision for 2016 is to be Europe's premier knowledge society with developments in ICT at the core of socioeconomic progress. In a relatively short space of time, Ireland had evolved from a traditional, agrarian society on the periphery of Europe to a major player in the global information economy. Almost every major player in the computer industry is located in Ireland. ICT industries are recognised as the prime driver of economic growth and engine of the Celtic Tiger economy. However, there is a huge gap between the stated national and EU policy prioritisation of information society and e-inclusion and the lack of political commitment and action (O'Donnell, McQuillan and Malina, 2005).

The rate of change in diffusion of ICT in Ireland has been steady, but disappointing for a country that aims to be Europe's premier knowledge economy. Benchmarking against other European countries has been fairly haphazard. The Central Statistics Office included information society indicators for the first time in 2006.

Ireland's ranking against international information society indices remains poor. IDC's *Information Society Index* service analyzes and forecasts the state of IT usage and adoption across more than 70 countries around the world. It provides detailed analysis of IT spending, Internet usage, telecommunications, and social factors. Ireland is ranked 23rd, similar to its ranking in 1996.

Irish people embrace new technology positively as a "way of life" (MRBI, 2003). Although home Internet access and broadband figures are low compared with OECD averages, mobile phone ownership is one of the highest in Europe. The mobile penetration rate for Ireland in the second quarter of 2006 was 103%. Mobile telephony, especially texting, has become an integral part of teenage culture and communication in Ireland. Social networking sites are also increasing in popularity among teenagers.

ICT Ireland, the representative lobby group for the high tech sector within IBEC (Irish Business Employers Confederation; www.ibec.ie) representing over 300 companies has been the most vocal critic of the Irish government's poor record in schools, homes and businesses. The managing director of eBay Ireland recently complained to government ministers that broadband in Ireland was "appalling, a disgrace and a mess". He reported that he was embarrassed to tell his peers in other countries about Ireland's poor broadband connectivity.

Inequalities

Despite strong economic growth for more than a decade, making Ireland one of the wealthiest countries in Europe, the country has one of the highest child poverty rates in Europe and the lowest social protection provision. Social protection expenditure as a proportion of GDP was lower in Ireland over the period 1995-2004 than in the EU 15 and EU 25 Member States. Expenditure in Ireland decreased from 18.8% of GDP in 1995 to 14.1% in 2000, but increased again to 17% in 2004. Ireland's expenditures on education and health were also below the EU 25 average in 2003. Ireland's combined expenditure on social protection, education and health amounted to 28.1% of GDP in 2003 compared to an EU 25 average of 41.2% of GDP

The current rate of consistent poverty in Ireland is 7.0%, and 18.5% of the population are at risk of poverty. The Office for Social Inclusion is the Irish Government Office with overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* and its *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion* (www.socialinclusion.ie/nationalactionplan2007.html).

Social groups and geographical areas that are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion have been identified. Groups include lone parents, people with disabilities, older people with low income and lack of social supports, people who are unemployed, early school leavers, immigrants, people with poor literacy skills. In 2005, 21.6% of unemployed persons were in

consistent poverty, compared with 1.7% of people at work. A large increase in immigration in the past five years is causing new forms of inequality and marginalisation.

Urbanisation

Since the 1990s there has been a sustained movement of population from rural to urban centres, leading to rapid fringe development in most of our cities and towns. The rapid increase in housing costs in our major cities has reduced the ability of many to afford city living, leading to migration from established areas to new development in the urban fringes or to towns in adjoining counties. Employment in the agricultural sector has fallen in the past 10 years, with the economy driven predominantly by the services and construction sectors.

Internet infrastructure by region

Internet access is more prevalent in the Southern and Eastern regions, which have a higher population and more urban centres than in the Border, Midland and Western regions (9CSO, 2006). While broadband is becoming readily available in cities and towns in Ireland it is still not as available in rural locations as can be seen from this map of Ireland.

Work and Social Class

Jun-Aug 07	Broad economic sector (NACE Rev. 1)	%
	Males	
106.3	A-B Agriculture	
482.9	C-F Industry	
629.0	G-Q Services	
	Females	
11.6	A-B Agriculture	
97.6	C-F Industry	
813.5	G-Q Services	
	All persons	
117.9	A-B Agriculture	6%
580.5	C-F Industry	27%
1,442.5	G-Q Services	67%
2,140.9	**Total persons**	

Irish Multiculturalism

Immigration into Ireland increased following its economic boom, and also as part of the shifting patterns in global migration since the late 1990s. According to the 2006 Census, 11% of people living in Ireland were non-nationals.

To some degree, the Irish media has sought to address this binary perception through increased representation of migrant peoples on television and radio. Numerous governmental and NGO anti-racism initiatives have also sprung up to combat racism and support migrant communities. The Gardaí, the Irish police force, developed the Garda Racial and Multicultural Unit to deal with crimes affecting migrant communities.

Ireland's relatively tardy engagement with the principles of multiculturalism means much of Irish understanding and application of them is imported from other countries such as the UK and the US, which have invoked multiculturalism as a way of promoting cultural, ethnic and racial diversity since the 1970s.

3.2 Role of the state

The Department of Justice considers measures to combat illegal activity on the Internet as being hampered by a multiplicity of jurisdictions, differing legal systems and differing societal norms. For these rehaznos, they consider combating the production and availability of illegal content on the Internet as requiring a combination of responses, and the co-operation of all the stakeholders at national and international level — legislators, law enforcement, service providers, schools, child protection practitioners, and most important of all, parents and guardians.

A system of self-regulation by the Internet service provider industry is in place which helps to ensure that child pornography and other material illegal in this jurisdiction is not made available on Irish servers. The components of this self-regulatory system are an Internet advisory board which monitors the progress of self regulation by the Internet service provider industry, a public hotline for reporting child pornography and an industry code of practice and ethics setting out the duties and responsibilities of each Internet service provider.

The Irish print and broadcast media operate freely within the confines of the law. Broadcasting is regulated by a commission appointed by the Department of Communications. The Competition Authority safeguards against unfair competition in the press sector. Cross-media ownership is permitted within limits – press groups may own up to 25% of local radio and TV stations.

4 Other factors affecting children's online experiences

English is one of the two official languages in Ireland and is ubiquitous in daily life, in government and in the media. Ireland won recognition of the Irish language as an official language of the European Union in 2005. It is also recognised as an official minority language in Northern Ireland. According to the census of 2006, 40.9% of the population regard themselves as competent in Irish and it remains a compulsory subject in Irish education. Media in Ireland is almost entirely in English though there is state supported Irish language broadcasting in radio and television and a number of Irish language newspapers.

Across the media landscape, the public broadcaster Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) dominates the radio and TV sector. It provides a comprehensive service in English and Irish. TV3, the main commercial TV station, opened in 1998, and Channel 6, a smaller commercial channel in 2005. Competition for RTE comes mainly from British public and private terrestrial TV channels. Satellite stations, including those carried by Britain's BSkyB, are widely available. There is extensive take-up of cable TV and over 60% of the population have access to international channels via cable, satellite and MMDS. Despite the extremely competitive environments in which media in general and broadcasting in particular has operated, Irish-originated programming remains extremely popular. The top ten television programmes for RTE 1, Ireland's premier television channel, were all Irish produced. RTE 2, which has a stronger youth focus and a higher proportion of imported programming, similarly had a very high proportion of top rated Irish television shows including extensive popular sports coverage. TV3's schedule is dominated by British soaps and popular entertainment programmes and has fewer Irish produced programmes in its schedule.

The lack of appropriate leisure facilities for children in Ireland receives wide media attention. An extensive consultation process with children as part of the National Children's Strategy (NCS) revealed that the lack of play opportunities was the most frequently cited concern of children throughout the country. Ireland's *National Play Policy* (2004) notes that in Ireland, play has been seriously neglected at policy level and reports, 'a shortage of safe public play spaces, no ring-fenced Government funding for play, a poorly developed public awareness of the value of play and no national strategy for play'. The NCS is a ten-year strategy to guide children's policy in Ireland and includes a commitment that 'children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood'. The National Play Policy will cover the years 2004-2008 and is intended to make a vital contribution to improving the provision of play facilities across Ireland. Public play space is operated and maintained by Local Authorities. In 2004, there were 168 playgrounds with fixed equipment for children aged 4 to 10. This represents a ratio of playgrounds to population of 1:23,598. This is only 43% of the infrastructure recommended by the Department of the Environment in 1987. The lack of facilities for older children and teenagers is similarly highlighted as an area of concern.

By contrast, cinema attendance continues to perform strongly in Ireland with in excess of 17.8 m cinema admissions in 2006, an increase of 8.9% on 2005. Significantly, 37% of cinema attendance is in the 15 to 19 age range and the growth of multiplex cinemas across Ireland provides a major venue for young people's leisure.

The *Play and Technology* survey indicated the prominence of media and entertainment culture and ICTs in Irish children's lives, mirroring international trends toward high presence of domestic technologies in the developed world. Despite this, children's expressed first preference is always to play outdoors with their friends with technology-based play a second

choice. There is a definite ‘bedroom culture’ phenomenon among a sizable minority of Irish children and the older a child gets, the more likely it is that he or she will engage with it. Increasingly, computers and the Internet are becoming a feature of bedroom culture. A 2007 survey (Anchor, 2007) reported that one third of young people accessing social networking sites are doing this from their bedroom.