

**Remarks by Mr Brian Lenihan T.D.,
Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
at the launch of booklets published by the
Internet Advisory Board and the announcement of the establishment of
a new Office for Internet Safety and an Internet Safety Advisory Council
20 September, 2007**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in making two important and related announcements today concerning the work of the Internet Advisory Board and the protection of children in the internet age.

First of all, I am very pleased to have been invited by Ms. Audrey Conlon, Chairperson of the Internet Advisory Board (IAB), to launch on their behalf two booklets in the **GET with IT!** series which they have just published. These are a revised **Parents' Guide to new media technologies** and a new **Parents' Guide to filtering technologies**.

The first booklet in the **GET with IT!** series **A Parents Guide to new media technologies** was originally published in September, 2005 and was a major success. It received very favorable feedback from the public. In all 20,000 copies were distributed through the Internet Advisory Board's Secretariat. The original booklet gave parents an overview of the new technologies, including the internet at that time. The aim was to address parental concerns about the dangers of the new media for their children. But the booklet also highlighted the fact that the new media world is one of fun; a place of learning; of new means of communication; and of creativity. The booklet encouraged parents to get involved in the new media world of the internet with their children, all the way from PCs to TVs; from mobile phones to games consoles. The revised and updated version being launched today contains the same important messages, but builds very much on the success of the original.

Of course, the world of the internet is ever-changing, and so there is a need to provide updated guidance material for parents. The accelerated development of the internet over the last few years is one of the most significant societal phenomena of our times. In order to keep pace with these developments, the Internet Advisory Board decided that the time had come to update the Parents' Guide To New Media Technologies to include information on the changes in technology that have taken place since the booklet was first published.

I sincerely hope that this updated Media Technologies booklet will continue to be of help to parents to ensure their children use and enjoy the wonders of technology wisely. By taking an interest in the technologies their children use, parents can learn with them and also be aware of what their children are doing online. The message is simple, as the booklet says get involved: ***Get With IT!***

Parents, by sharing the internet with their children and by laying out ground rules for their use of the internet, are by far the best protectors of children from the downside of the internet. However there are also tools available to parents to assist them in making the internet a safer place for their children. The second booklet in the **GET with IT!** series is **A Parents' guide to filtering technologies**, and was developed by the IAB to assist parents with such protection.

All responsible adults would agree that children should not be exposed to content on the internet which is harmful to them. One measure parents can use to help protect their children from some of the dangers of illegal or harmful content on the internet is through the use of filtering software. Filtering software is a program that screens out and blocks inappropriate internet content before children can see it on a computer screen. The booklet is designed to show parents how such filtering software works and to assist them in applying it to the PCs used by their children.

In most cases, our computers already have 'filters' that we can use for free. All we have to do is switch them on. The booklet guides us through the processes of how to do this in a user-friendly way. For those of us who want extra security for our children online we can consider buying or downloading additional filtering software. This booklet should be of assistance to parents in choosing a particular software package to suit their needs.

As you can see both booklets are attractively presented. The visuals are clever, funny and eye-catching. The information given is non-technical and easy to follow and in fact easy to understand for those of us who fear we are not "techno aware". I am positive that these two booklets will be just as successful as the first booklet was and I expect that all who read them will find them both interesting and helpful. I am, therefore, delighted to launch both booklets here today. I should add that, in cooperation with the Internet Advisory Board my Department intends to distribute the booklets widely, particularly through libraries, community information centres, parents groups and on request through a **freefone number 1800 24 25 95**. The booklets will of course also be available on the websites of the IAB and the Department.

My second purpose here today is to announce that the Government has approved my proposals to establish an Office for Internet Safety (OIS) and an Internet Safety Advisory Council (ISAC).

The Office for Internet Safety will be an executive office of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with responsibility for the following:

- internet safety, particularly in relation to combating child pornography,
- internet Hotline (www.hotline.ie - the system for dealing with reports of illegal content on the internet), which will continue to be operated and funded by the internet service provider industry,
- involvement in internet safety awareness campaigns, and

- monitoring compliance with the Internet Service Provider industry code of practice.

In recent years, there has been an enormous increase in internet usage in Ireland. The nature of this industry is dynamic with spectacular developments in communications technologies. While these are largely positive developments, tackling the negative aspects of internet use – whether on a PC or on a mobile phone – is a complex business and continues to set new challenges for all those charged with protecting the vulnerable against the downside of the internet.

As Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, I felt the time had come to step up our response to meeting some of those challenges through the establishment of an office dedicated to a safer internet which would be located within my Department. Concern remains high about the appropriateness of certain material which is easily accessible on the internet. We are all, of course, particularly concerned about the evils of child pornography on the internet and the use of so-called ‘grooming’ to target children. There are highly sophisticated and technologically-aware individuals and groups who see in the internet another means of preying on children. We must continually and pro-actively examine the effectiveness of our defences against the activities of those who would use the internet to target children for sexual exploitation.

It is incumbent on all involved in promoting the internet to ensure the best possible protection for the community and to reduce the risk of internet crime, particularly that involving the exploitation of children, in all situations. The establishment of a dedicated Office for Internet Safety (OIS) is an important step in the process of building the best possible protection for the community at large and in particular for children from the downside of the internet.

In addition, to placing cybercrime issues squarely within the crime policy framework of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the OIS will be in a position to encourage greater cohesion across state agencies. It

will also be able to develop closer relationships with the Gardaí on the practicalities for the application of blocking technologies particularly with regard to child pornography.

The OIS will expand on the work that was carried out by the Internet Advisory Board (IAB). The IAB played a significant and pioneering role in raising awareness about the risks associated with the use of the Internet, both within the internet providers sector and among the general public. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Audrey Conlon, Chairperson and all the members of the Internet Advisory Board here today and also those members who could not be here, for the invaluable work they have done since the Board was established. Their dedication and commitment to the task that was set before them is commendable.

I will also be establishing, in the very near future, an Internet Safety Advisory Council, which will be the successor to the Internet Advisory Board. The Advisory Council will be drawn from representatives of the key stakeholders in the statutory, industry and community sectors, and will support the work of the OIS.

Finally, I want to address some remarks to the industry. Ireland is fortunate to have a vibrant ICT (Information and Communications Technology) sector. I want to congratulate members of the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI), who have enthusiastically cooperated with the measures already in place to protect children and other vulnerable sections of our community. The Internet Advisory Board together with the ISPAI has developed a model of self-regulation concerning harmful or illegal content on the internet which has stood us in good stead. It is a model which has found favour across the EU, based on an industry voluntary code of practice and ethics.

The Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland, as part of that self-regulatory regime and in association with the Internet Advisory Board

operates the Hotline www.hotline.ie . The Hotline accepts and processes reports from the public in relation to illegal and harmful material on the internet, particularly in relation to child pornography. This service is a crucial part of our battle against illegal and harmful content on the internet in general, and against the evil of child pornography in particular.

Adherence to that code of practice and ethics and support for the Hotline by the members of the ISPAI has been good for the industry and good for all those who access this exciting technology. It is not an accident that we have had no reported incident of a child pornographic site being either hosted or distributed on the internet from Irish ISP facilities. I am aware, however, that not all companies operating in this environment are members of the ISPAI and not all industry members subscribe to the code of practice and ethics, or financially support the Hotline. This is not, in the long run, in the best interest of the industry or of the users of the technologies. It is not good enough that some in this industry leave it to others to ensure that the internet is a safer place for all. I want all the industry to be active contributors in support of the industry code of practice and the Hotline. This will be a major preoccupation of the new Office for Internet Safety, and I can assure the industry that while I am willing to continue with the self-regulation model I will not hesitate, should it become necessary, to introduce a statutory compliance model in the interests of the safety of our children and other vulnerable users of the internet.

Thank you.