

European Commission

Public Consultation

Questionnaire 3

Social Networking

Submission from the

UK Film Council

July 2008

Contact

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About the UK Film Council

www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk

The UK Film Council is the Government-backed lead agency for film in the UK ensuring that the economic, cultural and educational aspects of film are effectively represented at home and abroad. Its goal is to help make the UK a global hub for film in the digital age, with the world's most imaginative, diverse and vibrant film culture, underpinned by a flourishing competitive film industry.

The UK Film Council's four key aims:

- Build a competitive film industry with the creativity and skills to succeed
- Stimulate greater choice for film audiences
- Widen opportunities to learn about film and encourage more people to use them
- Promote UK film around the world

The UK Film Council's policy priorities:

- Develop film education and media literacy
- Support film culture and archives
- Promote the relationship between UK film and UK broadcasters
- Encourage inward investment into UK film
- Support international co-production
- Combat piracy
- Build diversity and inclusion in UK film
- Improve digital access to film.

The submission of the UK Film Council:

The UK Film Council maintains that developing media literacy skills from an early age will provide the best long-term strategy for addressing the challenges, and enjoying the opportunities, presented by SNS and other media and online environments. It therefore supports and endorses the submission of the UK Media Literacy Task Force of which it is a founder member.

Specifically, in relation to the risks and opportunities for a broader and deeper engagement with wider personal and community networks through SNSs by young people, the UK Film Council recognises that there is an urgent need – and most particularly in the face of violent, obscene or unwanted content – for citizens to have the means to safeguard themselves. Traditional forms of regulatory intervention are likely to be of limited use in delivering this objective, except in cases involving extreme violence and extreme pornography.

The primary need is for public policy makers to help ensure that audiences, users and consumers, acting as responsible citizens, are empowered to make informed and educated choices about the sites they use and how they use them. Regulation of still relatively uncharted online territories is proving difficult, though the media industries' self and co-regulation should definitely continue to be encouraged. Codes of Practice and other means of ensuring responsible content and effective means of classification or warning are potentially useful. Therefore, nonetheless, developing media literacy skills from an early age is and will remain the best long-term strategy for addressing the challenges presented by SNS and other online environments.

The UK Film Council strongly supports the need for some legal safeguards in this area particularly around content involving extreme violence and/or non-consensual acts¹ which guide or support access to content or engagement

¹ An important step was taken by the UK Government in June 2008 with the passing into law of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act which criminalises the possession of extreme

with other users. But in general self or co-regulation around access to content remains key. Indeed the film industry in the UK has worked successfully with such content safeguards for many decades (principally through the work of the British Board of Film Classification see www.bbfc.co.uk). That is why the UK Film Council strongly maintains that encouraging responsible and creative use of media through both formal and informal education, through wide access to information about the nature of content, as well as by other means that producers and distributors of creative content have developed, is of paramount importance.

As one of the founder members of the UK Media Literacy Task Force, the UK Film Council strongly endorses the educational approach of the Task Force, and its approach to media literacy outlined in the Charter for Media Literacy. The UK Film Council therefore wholly supports and commends the submission that the UK Media Literacy Task Force is making to the Commission on issues relating to SNSs.

The submission of the UK Media Literacy Task Force is attached below as Appendix 1.

pornography, online as well as offline.

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/pdf/ukpga_20080004_en.pdf, Section 63.

APPENDIX 1:

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A Submission from the
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Online Social Networking

“Online social networking is a communication service typical of the “second generation” online world sometimes referred to as Web 2.0. Social networking sites (SNSs) are inclusive, participatory services which embody these principles fully. Users can place themselves in a social space of their own choice, engaging with others on their own terms whatever their physical or material circumstances. The popularity of SNSs, and the many opportunities for social interaction which they offer, must count as one of the most striking and potentially powerful benefits of the Internet.

SNSs are especially popular with young people, who represent the majority of users on many sites. Minors have been born into the digital age and are well equipped to grasp the opportunities which social networking offers. This raises safety issues which the Commission wants to explore in the next Safer Internet Forum (25–26 September). In order to collect facts and views on this topic, the European Commission launches a public consultation with the following questions”.

The UK Media Literacy Task Force sets out its responses to these questions below.

1. What risks are minors most likely to encounter on SNSs? Are you aware of relevant research or statistics? If published online please provide us with the relevant URL.

A Select Committee of the UK Parliament has recently reviewed child internet safety, and the risks to minors online, with expert evidence, including that from the UK Media Literacy Task Force. Its final report is available online at:

http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/culture__media_and_sport.cfm (from 31st July 2008)

The UK Government has also commissioned a specialist study of child internet safety issues, particularly in relation to video games, entitled The

Byron Review. Information about the Review, including the final Report, which took account of the submission of the UK Media Literacy Task Force, is to be found at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview>

The UK Government's Action Plan in response to the Byron Review was published in June 2008:

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview/pdfs/byron_action_plan.pdf

The submission of the UK Media Literacy Task Force to the Byron Review can be found at:

http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/s/h/The_Byron_Review_-_Task_Force_submission.pdf

Also of interest is the Report based on original research into the use of online services and particularly SNSs by British children published by the independent policy research institute IPPR:

'Behind the Screen: The hidden life of youth online' IPPR March 2008 (see

<http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=597>)

In its recommendations, this report calls for collaboration and support from peers, youth services, teachers and parents, rather than top-down restrictions and rules dictated from central government. The role of **media literacy** must be fully explored through informal and formal educational structures involving both young people and the older generations to enable use of the internet to be a safe and enjoyable process for all.

Taken together these Reports, including the submissions made by expert witnesses outline the main risks and issues for minors and the use of the internet in the UK at present.

2. What controls, if any, should be available to parents over their children's SNS accounts? Should parents be allowed to cancel accounts or change profiles of their children?

It is the view of the UK Media Literacy Task Force that considerable care should be taken by parents over their children's internet use in general, but that this is a matter for parental discretion and not one that in any way should be regulated by law.

That is, parents should take the time and trouble to acquaint themselves with the various sites and searches that their children undertake online, and to be involved in debate and dialogue, as appropriate, with them about this use. This is an aspect of responsible and caring parenting – being aware of where their children may be or what they are doing in the 'virtual' as well as in the 'real' world. Where children are primarily cared for by an adult other than their parents, the principle of *in loco parentis* applies to internet use just as it does more generally, and thus the observations above apply to such primary carers as well.

Specific controls may be exercised, depending on the age of the child, over internet use in general – using those provided by ISPs, or individual sites themselves, including safer settings and the blocking of unsuitable sites or aspects of sites such as inappropriate images. To introduce specific controls for SNS accounts could, however, be seen as an intrusion into the privacy and freedom of the child as an individual (with their own human rights) and lead to a breakdown in trust between parent and child. If this were to happen without discussion or dialogue with the child by a parent acting arbitrarily, it could be seen as an abuse of adult power and would not lead to a greater understanding by the child of the dangers presumed by the parent or the reasons for their actions. That is why the Media Literacy Task Force strongly supports the "Parent Know How" programme developed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.²

² http://www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview/pdfs/byron_action_plan.pdf, p.14

It is the view of the UK Media Literacy Task Force, therefore, that education for both parents and children, both separately and together, together with mutual discussion and dialogue, the sharing of information and time taken to understand the benefits and risks of online entertainment and engagement, is a far better solution to be explored than straightforward 'control' by parents. Arbitrary actions of control such as cancelling profiles could be thought to represent a lack of care, attention and education by parents about the internet and its use and about SNS in particular and should therefore not be undertaken lightly or thought an easy, 'quick fix' solution to the challenges SNS can, in some circumstances, present.

3. Which tools are the most appropriate to protect minors when using SNSs? What further steps should SNS providers take to reduce the risks to minors on their sites?

The view of the UK Media Literacy Task Force is that education about the internet and SNS sites is, in the medium to longer term, the best solution to the risks and dangers involved. Information, the development of personal safety regimes – including not giving out personal information, understanding the nature of profiles online and the ease with which users can ‘imitate’ people other than those they actually are – and the development of trust between parent and child concerning basic safety procedures online are more likely to ensure responsible and intelligent internet use. It maintains that this care of children online is not different, in essence, from the ways in which basic safety in the street or in the home is developed between parent and children. It does however presume a level of parent engagement and understanding which may need to be developed and encouraged.

On the other hand it is also recommended that discussions with ISPs and SNS providers should take place at national and European level, as appropriate, to explore codes of practice which would ensure that basic advice and information is available to all users of their services at the point of registration or use. These might include warnings about giving out personal information such as phone numbers, age, or addresses, pop-up questions as the user fills out registration or profile information (e.g. ‘Do you want all users to know your email address?’) or general warnings at the point where users confirm their entry – for example giving the opportunity for users to review and confirm their entry before they become public on the web.

4. What should Members States do in order to improve the safe use of SNSs by minors? (e.g. legislation, co-regulation, awareness activities, introduction of the subject into the educational curricula, etc).

It is the view of the UK Media Literacy Task Force that a holistic approach to the safe use of SNS is required. That is, a variety of broadly educational approaches, such as those mentioned above, are over the longer term most likely to bring the best response and results. Except in respect of extreme or non-consensual material, therefore, legislation should be regarded as a back-stop measure of last resort.

Self or co-regulatory regimes by service and content providers will generally be far more effective as they are initiated and exercised by those with the greatest knowledge of users and of the options and possibilities of the sites in question.

Above all the Task Force believes that media literacy educational approaches, which include awareness raising, will be most likely to develop a sense of personal responsibility in children and others based on knowledge and understanding.

The Task Force stands by the Charter for Media Literacy (www.medialiteracy.org.uk) which draws together the '3Cs' of full and rich literacy or understanding in relation to media. The Charter for Media Literacy describes a media literate person as someone who understands all "3 C s":

- Being Creative with media
- Being Critical of media
- Being Culturally aware of a range and spread of media

Learning to make choices about content available online, and to understand the 'message' being communicated – is part of what being media literate means. Being supported and resourced, either in a formal school setting or informally through the help given by content providers and manufacturers, by other agencies, or in the home, to become media literate is therefore the

responsibility of government, the media industries, educators and also parents – and citizens of all ages themselves.

Each Member State will approach the formal school curriculum differently, but it is the case in the UK that many schools are including media literacy development across the curriculum already – though not necessarily naming it as a separate activity or subject area. The Task Force believes that including a broad use of media in all curriculum subject areas, rather than making ‘media literacy’ another set of ‘special’ skills, is the best way to encourage a rich, contemporary ‘literacy’ in today’s world.

An example of good UK practice, in Northern Ireland, may be of interest to the Commission. The approach to media literacy was outlined in the following analytical Report in 2005:

<http://cmr.ulster.ac.uk/pdf/policy/medialiteracy.pdf>

and also in the report by Northern Ireland Screen:

<http://www.northernirelandscreen.co.uk/page.asp?id=59>

Recent developments in the Province as well as activities and initiatives associated with media literacy can be tracked at:

<http://www.egsa.org.uk/Content.aspx?nSectionId=986>

For a video account of Northern Ireland’s current Creative Learning Centres which promote media literacy see;

<http://www.northernirelandscreen.co.uk/page.asp?id=203>