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Introduction:

The ninth Safer Internet Forum, an annual conference under the EC Safer Internet Programme, was organised in Brussels this year with the support of Insafe-Inhope networks. It took place on 18 & 19 October 2012 in Brussels, Belgium. More than 300 participants took part, including young people and their parents and teachers.

33 countries were represented and included members from the Insafe network as well as representatives from the coordinating node, the European Commission, and countries and representatives from outside the network.

This report provides the Executive Summary and a brief overview of the workshops and parallel sessions, plenary and world cafe sessions, followed by conclusions and recommendations, following receipt of the feedback forms sent to participants after the conference.

**Keywords from young people and other participants at the SIF**
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Making the internet better for children and young people is one of European Commissioner Neelie Kroes’ main priorities. For the creation of a better internet, every citizen needs to play his or her part in showing and taking responsibility, as the digital world becomes our every day world.

Part of the EC’s commitment to better quality content, services and protection to encourage a more positive online experience is shown through its annual Safer Internet Forum, funded by the EC’s Safer Internet Programme.

The Safer Internet Forum (SIF) is the main European Conference on online safety issues since 2004, attended by young people and their parents or teachers representing the 27 EU member states plus Iceland, Norway and Russia. The young people present intervene as moderators and panelists in all sessions throughout the Forum. Alongside these stakeholders, industry representatives, child welfare organisations, researchers, policy makers and experts from across the globe share, investigate and express how they see the internet and new technologies, what they mean for them and how they influence their lives.

At a critical time for policy around creating a better internet, the SIF has never been more important. Just as we must forge ahead as active ‘digital citizens,’ the SIF continues to enable the EC to capture how this can best happen so that we can work together to further the goal for a more accessible internet, that encourages creativity, education, learning and key competences, and at the same time highlights the importance of information and knowledge as key drivers for growth.

As such DG Communications Networks Content and Technology has within its remit to boost Europe’s economy through the digital agenda, to support a sustainable, secure society, and to carry out the radically modernised research, resilience and innovation that can fuel our future.

A natural part of this exploration is how the internet can be used safely, responsibly and ethically, at the same time as for fun, creativity and enriching opportunities, so this year’s SIF provided an exploration into the status quo, and how we can best work together to contribute to shaping the digital road ahead with these elements at the fore.

Listening to young people and the interactivity between them, the other speakers and all present stakeholders is key at every SIF and this year was no exception. We used what is happening now and expectations of the future to explore forward-thinking ideas. Questions discussed at this year’s SIF included the following:

- How can stakeholders from diverse sectors contribute to build a better internet for children?

- How can we, the ‘digital citizens’ forge ahead taking joint responsibility to improve internet accessibility, encourage creativity, promote learning and the mastery of key competences?
- How can we boost the potential of the market for interactive, creative and educational content online?

- How can we channel the innovative energy and cultural diversity of the EU’s 27 member states and its neighbouring countries to build European added value and ensure that every child can benefit from the advantages of the digital world and sidestep its pitfalls?

As all the chairs explored, investigated and provoked their panellists, these questions produced discussion and responses that provided threads of consistency throughout the SIF, and it is these threads that should help provide clarity as the EC moves forward the key areas of policy and focus for itself, industry and all those affected.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Any future Safer Internet Forum needs to ensure a closer working relationship session by session, between the young people, their accompanying adult and their moderators, and the SIF conference organisers and session chairs. Additional pre-panel conference calls that also include the young peoples’ moderators and an additional face-to-face meeting during the week prior to the SIF would be advisable, even though challenging taking into account diary schedules of so many.

Although the SIF is aimed at European stakeholders, it felt international in nature, and indeed other continents were represented. There were good opportunities to think about issues with new people in different contexts, have new conversations and thus develop original ideas, particularly in the world café forum sessions, but also throughout the SIF, due to the interactive set-up. Networking, the sharing of best practice, and innovation and ideas for moving forward, were all aspects of the SIF that people commented about in a positive manner.

Here-follow recommendations as we continue to promote the best for young people and their families, encouraging safety and creativity, harnessing the fantastic opportunities they can all have at their fingertips:

1. Schools
   a. Although it is generally agreed that it is the role of the parents to ensure that they have dialogue and discussion with their children, this needs to be promoted through schools and teachers, and additionally at a societal level, both regionally and nationally. Communication between parents and children should be promoted within society as an essential aspect of parenting, but people who do not work with children or in the internet safety space are not aware of what it is they need to discuss with their children, so general awareness is still low.
   - There was agreement around this point during Session 7. Furthermore, during Session 2 one speaker spoke about the necessity for parental guidance more than parental control, furthering the idea that although society can help and teachers may be better at encouraging creativity and entrepreneurship, the actual responsibility for safety and a healthy use of technologies, where communication and boundaries are key, lies with the parents.

   b. Training is needed for parents and carers – this could come from the children if help for such activity was provided through schools. There’s an opportunity for better connection between parents/carers and their children using the internet as a platform to encourage this.
   - Training was discussed first in Session 2 and then throughout the SIF as an area of concern, and although each SIF session focused on different aspects of creating a better internet for children and young people, it became apparent that training was necessary for all user groups, especially for parents and carers to take on the responsibility of ensuring their child is safe while online. Furthermore, research has also found that one of the key areas of eSafety which is lacking in many schools but of course fundamental to creating a better internet, is that of staff training and their
In the summing up of her session Sonia Livingstone also highlighted the “need to talk about and put into action the best ways to provide parents with more answers, through training, workshops, role-play scenario opportunities and more publicised guidance to parents’ and teachers’ associations and through schools.”

c. Teachers, in their place in schools and in society, are key to the success of empowering children use digital technologies to their full potential. Local authorities, educational/teaching colleges, ministries of education, teachers’ associations and unions should be providing them courses and opportunities to learn how to use social media in the classroom and how to help their pupils get the best out of these technologies.

- **Drawing on the same inspiration as 1b., and throughout SIF discussions, we heard time and again that teachers are key to the success of how young people can make the most of digital technologies.** We heard from a number of teachers from all over Europe, of the positive use of social media and technology in the classroom, and that key to that success was the teachers’ own confidence and ability to have a good grasp themselves of being online, understanding social networks and applications etc. If more teachers were sufficiently able and confident, truly understanding social media, how critical thinking can be aided through online activity and how educational games can for example be used in the pursuit of teaching, the positive effects would be seen in schools all over Europe.

d. We need to harness the opportunities available to young people through digital technology such as coding, creating, designing, whether using apps or software, as a means of building their artistic and business skills; this is a way of helping our young people build themselves for their future and for the growth in employment and economy.

- **Emma Mulqueeny, in Session 5, advocated the need for coding and other ways of enabling children to realise their value and worth through online opportunities – her panellists and audience members agreed with her that this was a real opportunity for artistic and entrepreneurial skills to be developed in parallel.** Furthermore there was a thread of consistency throughout the SIF that called for a realisation that would enable young people to leverage their brilliant minds creating new games, apps, and technologies.

e. Technology needs to be integrated into all subjects at school from the early years.

- **Kristian Lund and Greg Gebhart, in Session 2, both advocated the need to address young children regarding staying safe online and ensuring moderate and healthy use from an early age.** Kristian suggested that 13, the minimum legal age for Facebook users, was far too late for adults to be discussing online issues with young people, rather that it needed to start with very young children in primary school. Following these discussions others agreed with this sentiment throughout the two days.

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f. There needs to be a focus on adolescents as a vulnerable group, with particular attention to this age group in school, at youth centres, in care homes or the care system and those less likely to have the support of a family unit.
- Research presented by Artemis Tsitsika during the penultimate session of the SIF, on the impact of technology on people and society, showed that there was a need to focus on early adolescence, as in any context this age-group continues to be vulnerable. Even if technology is integrated into curricular for young children, there will always be those that need support, guidance and boundaries in their adolescence.

g. Cyberbullying
A more holistic approach is needed and one that pays more attention to the perpetrators as well – maybe there should be a process incorporated in school policies that includes a mediator to work with the perpetrator and the person being bullied.
- During the world café sessions a few different groups raised the issue that cyberbullying might be more effectively dealt with in the long-term if the perpetrator could be brought together for mediation. This could be a more proactive preventative course of treatment than traditional methods of suspension or expulsion. This method of mediation is just a suggestion; of course the extremity of bullying or abuse must be taken into account in each case.

2. Policy
a. Internet safety should be embedded in national curricular for young children, starting as early as 5, because at that age many children already have access to a number of mobile devices in the home.
- As specified in recommendation 1.e., this was a subject that was talked about in a number of sessions and there is research that shows that many five year olds have access to a variety of digital devices.²

b. Intercultural dialogue and the creative industries could be brought into the school curricular as part of the integration of social media into the classroom.
- Peter Behrens, the chair of Session 7, said that the key factor that had come out of his session, that needed to be focused on as stakeholders look to stimulate positive online experience and behaviour, was intercultural dialogue. Culture and creative industries are increasingly where young people can make their mark, and this opportunity can be harnessed using digital engagement and activity.

c. Governments could work with creative industries to play their part in encouraging more choice and quality content.
- Panellist Felix Barckhausen, with the German Federal Ministry for Family, considered how governments must play their part and should promote positive content and encourage its creation. In explaining that Germany has a funding programme that promotes quality and positive online content for children, his fellow

² 5-7 year olds: 2% have a smart phone (Ofcom) and 67% use net at home averaging 5.2 hours of internet use per week. 61% of 5-10s have own games console (Childwise 2011) and 80% of 5-7s use games consoles. While television is still the most popular screen entertainment in the home for 5-7 year olds, gaming is second most used medium (Ofcom 2011). As for social networking site activity, 23% of 5-7s (Ofcom 2010/11) have used or are regularly using one. The good news is that 80% of parents of 5-7 year olds are most likely to have rulesactively supervise.
panellists and other participants agreed that to organise access to this content would be a challenge but that it should be a goal. In Germany there are currently child-specific search engines that point children to such content. Children are also encouraged to create their own content using sites such as www.meine-startseite.de. It was agreed during the session that all stakeholders, namely governments, industry and the creative industries, needed to work out the best way to provide more choice and better quality content to children, young people and their parents.

d. There needs to be a cross-border standard for age-appropriate content, without advertising.
- During Session 7, Felix Barckhausen, the German Ministry representative called for cross-border standards for age-appropriate content for children without advertising. While he suggested that there was a need for cross border standards for advertising on websites directed at children, his fellow panellist and academic Conor Galvin investigated the idea that the primary responsibility of classifying content should rest with the industry that has created it, again resulting in age-appropriate content. He suggested, and other panellists and participants agreed, that to make this work cross-border standards were needed. What is considered appropriate for young children and all the necessary definitions and criterion that must go with such standards, would have to be drafted by all stakeholders.

3. Peer mentoring
Peer mentoring (young people learning from other young people) as a way to raise resilience and empowerment is key for young people to succeed in their world. Young people also believe in peer mentoring as a way for schools to harness the skills of some students to share their knowledge. Schools nationally could be encouraged to give rewards (badges or certificates) to children and young people that teach their peers and at the same time reward the learners.
- During the youth panel and throughout the conference the benefits of peer mentoring were discussed by young people, the teachers present and those in academic circles, all of whom heavily encouraged this way of learning.

4. User-generated-content
Although there is a need for free age-appropriate filters for the safety of our children online, we need to let children explore and make mistakes and cheer their freedom to innovate and create user-generated-content. This will be easier for parents and carers if they understand what’s important to the children, and why – the trust will then come and the guidance only as and when necessary. There is a fine balance between over-protection and letting them experiment.
- In Session 2, Sonia Livingstone addressed the concern that although we do need to keep children safe while online, we must also be aware of their need to experience and learn for themselves, building resilience in this way. She suggests we ask, who DO we want children to meet online in terms of things like gaming and facebook, not who DON’T we want our children to meet, and that we risk closing down this space and its potential if we aren’t careful. Kristian Lund agreed and advocated that a better internet would have less censorship, more freedom and more plurality.
5. Privacy
Young people would like to see a cross-border definition of privacy; young people recommend that industry and policy makers:
- define ‘privacy’ across borders;
- draft an alternative way to sign up to privacy policies and data use policies because they don’t spend time researching these before they click ‘Agree.’
- These issues of privacy were particularly addressed by the Youth Panel representatives at the SIF in the day-long meetings they had prior, and during their contributions at the SIF.

6. Free age-appropriate simple tools
a. There is a need for industry to focus on developing simple parental tools for easy use by any parent or carer, including filters that are free, age-appropriate AND easy to install.

b. Tools need to be designed to promote the crucial aspect of parenting, in particular communication between parents and children. As Sonia Livingstone suggested in the reporting back session, a pop-up should appear on the screen when children are accessing something inappropriate as a trigger for parents to talk about going online and what it means, in terms of both the challenges and danger, as well as the fun they will have, skills they will learn and facts they will discover.
- 6.a and b. were points addressed by Sonia Livingstone in Session 8, and then again in her reporting back to the plenary. Other panellists agreed that the pop-up with advice would be ideal, and certainly one way to get to previously uninvolved parents to talk to their children about being online, or better still, go online with them. Although setting the bar high for industry, and indeed asking industry to help parents to do their job better, the suggestion to have the pop-up appear when necessary is an essential element that will in many cases be the lifeline for parents to talk to their children about online reputation, behaviour, privacy, copyright etc. The age of the child(ren) would determine the most appropriate discussion.

7. Create a consortium of teachers and industry
Educational games need to be produced by teachers AND gaming geeks (industry) for maximum impact, and they don’t need to fit into traditional subject area to succeed. One suggestion to make this happen would be to create a cross-section consortium made-up of educators and industry players, including but not limited to manufacturers, service providers, and gaming company engineers, designers and policy makers.
- Having been teachers and now also digital safety experts focused on bringing out the best in young people, both Ollie Bray and Ewan McIntosh, agreed that educational games needed to be made by gaming geeks in industry alongside teachers, so that all the best ideas for the games could be married with key ways to ensure a game could be a real educational tool AND interesting. Fellow panellist and Rewired State founder Emma Mulqueeny absolutely agreed that this would be a fantastic opportunity, as did others in the room.

Samantha Woolfe, in-house consultant, Insafe

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the European Commission or the joint Insafe and INHOPE networks. All information and web links were correct at the time of publication, but may change over time.