

# Acceptable use of the Internet in schools



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## Why do schools need to address the issue of acceptable use of the Internet?

The Internet is vast and unregulated, and, in common with all communication media, there remains the concern that it can be abused.

Children and young people may:

- be exposed to unacceptable materials (pornographic, violent, extremist literature)
- encounter inappropriate messages (harassing, demanding, belligerent contacts)
- arrange contacts and meetings (potential exploitation and physical dangers)
- inadvertently provide personal information whilst on line which could be sufficient to put them in danger or to allow commercial companies to exploit them.

However, the existence of undesirable material is not a valid reason to avoid the Internet. The Government wants everyone to have access to the wealth of cultural, scientific and intellectual material available on the Internet.

Teachers and pupils should be aware of the issues surrounding the use of the Internet for education, just as with television and video. A combination of measures should be put in place to ensure that pupils use the Internet safely and to deal with any issues which do arise.

Becta is currently developing an Internet Proficiency Scheme for children aged 7–11 in primary schools. It will provide targeted information and advice for practitioners in teaching and learning about the safe use of the Internet. The scheme will support schools in teaching pupils to adopt 'safe and discriminating' behaviour when on line. Further information about this scheme is available on the Becta web site.

Schools should develop safe systems and safe practices with very clear sanctions. An acceptable use policy is a way of pulling this thinking together and communicating it to pupils, teachers, parents and governors. It should be developed as part of the whole school ICT policy.

## What is an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)?

An Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) is a document, signed by students and their parents, guardians or carers, detailing the ways in which the Internet can and cannot be used. An AUP may differ from school to school to address particular circumstances, but some parts of it are likely to be common to all schools – for example, covering the Computer Misuse Act 1990. The policy needs to balance the desirability of fully exploiting the vast educational potential of internet resources for research and communication purposes, whilst also including safeguards against unacceptable activity. Policies must be reviewed and updated at regular intervals, and should be considered alongside the school's ICT policy.

## Who should be involved in writing the acceptable use policy (AUP)?

In order to ensure greater ownership of the AUP and its successful implementation, it is important that staff, parents, governors and pupils are all involved in discussions about what should be included in it. An AUP planning activity has been designed for UK online centre managers which could be adapted for the schools situation. The activity is intended to stimulate debate about the content of

the AUP and is available at: <http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/ukonline/document.php3?D=d15>. Once the AUP has been finalised, senior managers, governors and the PTA should all agree and subscribe to it.

### **What issues should be considered before writing the acceptable use policy (AUP)?**

The following points will encourage discussion and thinking around the range of issues that should be considered before writing your AUP. These issues should be considered in the context of teaching and learning and any other systems and/or policies that operate in the school.

- Why does your school need an AUP?
- What are the educational benefits of using the Internet in an educational context, and how will learning be enhanced?
- How will the school ensure that pupils are protected from unsuitable material and that they use the equipment safely?
- How will pupils be educated to access and evaluate internet content?
- How will e-mail be managed?
- Will the school have a web site? If so, who will take responsibility for co-ordinating and publishing content?
- Will the school give access to chat rooms and newsgroups?
- Who will manage ICT system security and how will it be maintained?
- Will internet access be given out-of-school hours to pupils and the community?
- How will the school deal with complaints?
- How often will the policy be reviewed and by whom?

In March 2001, the Government issued new guidance on the use of e-mail in schools, images of pupils on school web sites, the use of chat rooms in education, and internet filtering. This new guidance and advice can be found on the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Becta Superhighway Safety web site at: <http://www.safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools>.

### **What should an acceptable use policy (AUP) include?**

An AUP should include:

- a requirement that all potential users of the Internet understand basic conventions and navigation techniques before going on line and accessing pages
- information reminding students that logs are kept of sites visited and why
- an undertaking by pupils to respect copyright and not to plagiarise others' work
- an agreement by users to download pages to personal floppy disks rather than to the machine's hard disk, and an explanation of why such restrictions are necessary
- permission for members of staff to check personal disks for viruses and unsuitable material
- a commitment that pupils will keep their personal details private and not make them available to others using the Internet
- a pledge by users not to attempt to access unsuitable material
- a reminder that the possession of certain types of unsuitable material can lead to prosecution by the police
- information on sanctions for violations of the agreed AUP and how this links to other school policies: for example, how bullying electronically imposes the same sanctions as face to face – this would be linked to the schools anti-bullying policy.

Your school may also want to consider different AUPs or inclusion of different statements according to the group of people targeted: for example, consider differentiation between access for pupils / teachers, different age groups and so on. Many schools make their AUPs publicly available on the Internet, and examples of these are included at the end of this information sheet. Some LEAs also publish detailed advice and guidance to their schools about how to write and implement an AUP. Examples of these are also given at the end of this sheet. Although some AUPs can be freely copied and adapted for your school, it is advisable that schools set aside time to develop their own policy, in order to give as many people as possible the opportunity to discuss the issues surrounding use of the Internet in education. This would also ensure that the AUP reflects the local situation.

## How should the school get parents and pupils to sign up to the acceptable use policy (AUP)?

All schools will have a home-school agreement in place which is intended to increase parental involvement in schools/pupils. Many schools find it useful to include the AUP alongside the home-school agreement. Further information about home-school agreements is available at: [http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/hsa/hsa\\_how.html](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/hsa/hsa_how.html) and [http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Parental\\_Involvement](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Parental_Involvement).

A copy of the AUP should be sent to all parents, accompanied by an internet permission form, which should be signed by both the parent/guardian and the pupil. An example of an internet permission form and letter are included below. These have been adapted from the National Association for Co-ordinators and Teachers of IT's Acceptable Use Policy. They are just examples and should be adapted to suit the context in each school.

### ***Internet Permission Letter***

Dear Parent,  
Internet Access For Pupils

As part of the school's ICT programme, we offer pupils supervised access to the Internet. Before the school can allow pupils to use the Internet, they must obtain parental permission. Both they and you must sign and return the enclosed form as evidence of your approval and their acceptance of the rules on this matter.

Various projects have proven the educational benefits of Internet access, which will enable pupils to explore thousands of libraries, databases, and bulletin boards. They will also be able to exchange messages with other learners and teachers throughout the world. Although Internet use is supervised in our school, families will wish to be aware that some pupils may find ways to access material that is inaccurate, defamatory, illegal, or potentially offensive to some people. We believe that the benefits to pupils from access to the Internet, in the form of information resources and opportunities for collaboration, exceed any disadvantages. However, as with any other area, parents and guardians of minors are responsible for setting and conveying the standards that their children should follow when using media and information sources. The school therefore supports and respects each family's right to decide whether or not to apply for access.

During school, teachers will guide pupils towards appropriate material. At home, families bear the same responsibility for guidance as they exercise with other information sources such as television, telephones, films and radio.

I enclose a copy of the Rules for Responsible Internet Use that we operate at this school. We also have a number of leaflets from national bodies that explain issues further and also cover Internet use at home. If you would like copies of these, please contact the school.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of Internet use (or to see a lesson in operation), please telephone me to arrange an appointment.

If you decide to support your child's application for access to the Internet, please complete the enclosed form and return it to me by the end of term.

Yours sincerely

*Schools should enclose their Acceptable Use Policy with this letter.*

**Internet Permission Form**

Please complete and return this form to the headteacher.

Pupil,

As a school user of the Internet, I agree to comply with the rules on its use. I will use the school network in a responsible way and observe all the restrictions explained to me by the school.

Pupil's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Parent,

As the parent or legal guardian of the pupil signing above, I grant permission for my son or daughter to use electronic mail and the Internet. I understand that pupils will be held accountable for their own actions. I also understand that some material on the Internet may be objectionable and I accept responsibility for setting standards for my son or daughter to follow when selecting, sharing and exploring information and media.

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Pupil's name \_\_\_\_\_

Form/class \_\_\_\_\_

Home Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from: National Association for Co-ordinators and Teachers of IT, Acceptable Use Policy

**How should violations of the agreed Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) be dealt with?**

Procedures for dealing with pupils who misuse or abuse Internet access need to be built in to the AUP and communicated to everybody who signs up to it. They should also be considered in relation to other policies in the school. At the time the policy is written, the school should decide who has responsibility for handling incidents of misuse, whether by staff or by pupils. Minor infringements by pupils may be dealt with by enforcing a temporary ban on Internet use or by additional disciplinary action in accordance with other school policies. More serious incidents may need to involve the police.

## What other issues should be considered when implementing the acceptable use policy?

### *Make the policy accessible*

Once the policy has been agreed, it is important to make it accessible to staff, parents and pupils. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, such as ensuring that all staff and pupils are given a copy of the policy to sign up to, displaying the policy next to computer terminals, making the policy publicly available on the school web site, and ensuring that all new staff and pupils sign up to the policy before accessing the Internet.

### *Ensure that the policy is reviewed regularly*

Establish a mechanism for doing this, in order to take account of new Government advice and any incidents that may have taken place since the policy was first written. The policy could include a date for review.

## What other measures should be taken to ensure safe use of the Internet?

Ensuring that pupils' use of the Internet is appropriate and safe will mean implementing a range of sensible approaches and technical measures. Schools will need to think carefully about Internet filtering systems, and whether they want to use a walled garden and firewall. Issues such as intellectual property and plagiarism will also need to be considered. Advice about all of these issues is available on the Superhighway Safety web site at: <http://www.safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools>.

## Other sources of information

### *Becta*

Internet Safety information sheet

<http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/internetsafety.html>

Becta, May 2001. Free

Superhighway Safety: Safe Use of the Internet

<http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools>

DfES/Becta, 2001. Free

Writing a whole-school ICT policy information sheet

<http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/itpolicy.html>

Becta, October 2001. Free

### *Advice on developing an acceptable use policy (AUP)*

Computer Misuse Act 1990

[http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga\\_19900018\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga_19900018_en_1.htm)

HMSO, 1990

Developing an Internet Access Policy for Schools

<http://www.northants-ecl.gov.uk/apps/ICT/dia/hme.asp>

Northamptonshire County Council, 2001

Schools Internet Policy

<http://www.kented.org.uk/ngfl/policy.html>

Kent County Council, 2001

Writing a School Internet Access Policy

<http://www.naace.org/pub/use/index.html>

NAACE

### *Examples of school acceptable use policies (AUPs)*

Blakeston Community School, Stockton-on-Tees

<http://www.blakeston.stockton.sch.uk/subjects/ict/blakyinternet.html>

Blakeston School has an internet access policy which includes an acceptable internet use statement and rules for responsible internet use.

Churchtown Primary School, Southport

<http://www.churchtown.org.uk/parents/internet%20policy.htm>

Churchtown's internet access policy includes an example of a parental permission letter and an internet permission form.

Highcliffe Primary School, Leicester

<http://www.highcliffe.leics.sch.uk/information/internet.htm>

Highcliffe's internet access policy is written in a question and answer format, and is based on a discussion of internet safety issues with teachers.

North Chadderton School, Oldham

<http://www.webschool.org.uk/aup.htm>

North Chadderton have written an acceptable use policy for pupils, and a separate policy for teachers.

Reading School, Reading

<http://www.rs.reading.sch.uk/Departments/ICT/HTML/New/Policies/Reading%20School%20Internet%20Policy.htm>

Reading School's internet policy is part of the school's ICT policy and relates to other policies such as behaviour and personal, social and health education (PSHE), including citizenship.

Trinity Church of England High School, Manchester

<http://www.trinity.manchstr.sch.uk/inform/aupinfo.htm>

This internet acceptable use policy is a list of rules which the pupil and parent/guardian must sign up to.

This sheet can be accessed in full text on the Internet in a choice of formats:

- standard HTML: <http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/accuse.html>
- PDF: <http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/pdf/accuse.pdf>

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