Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet

Good practice guidance for search service providers and advice to the public on how to search safely

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Contents

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Foreword by Paul Goggins MP,
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I am delighted to launch this good practice guidance which has been developed on behalf of the Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet. It is aimed at industry and consumers, and will help in the provision of safer search services, especially for children.

The Task Force was established in 2001 and brings together representatives of the internet industry, mobile phone companies, law enforcement, the children's charities and others, who work together to make the Internet a safer place for children without diminishing their enjoyment of the exciting opportunities which it offers. Building on this partnership the Task Force has run several successful education and awareness campaigns and assisted the Government in preparing a new offence of meeting a child following sexual grooming, which was introduced in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The Task Force has also published models of good practice and guidance for the internet industry to consider when providing chat services, instant messaging and web based services; and is working on a kitemark standard for rating, filtering and monitoring software.

One major use of the Internet - of great value to children and other users – is its capacity to search for information. One of the risks, especially for children, when searching the internet is finding material that may be offensive or even illegal. This risk can be minimised and working with the main search providers in the UK, the Task Force has developed this good practice guidance for the industry and consumers. This is another important step towards improving child protection standards online. I am very grateful to all those involved for the substantial amount of time and energy they have committed to developing the guidance.

I strongly recommend that search providers consider how the recommendations in this document can be applied to their search services and urge parents and carers to read the advice on safer searching. I am confident that they will find it of value.

1   Background

1.1   Introduction

This document has been produced by the Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet working with representatives of the search industry and other experts in the UK.

The Task Force was established in March 2001 in response to concerns about the possible risks to children after a number of serious cases where children had been abused by people who had contact with them via the internet.

In the face of such concerns, the Task Force brought together, in a positive partnership, representatives from the internet industry, children's charities, the main opposition parties, government departments, law enforcement and others who share the aim of making the United Kingdom the safest place in the world for children to use the internet. A sense of shared responsibility underpins the work of the Task Force and an acknowledgement that each of the groups represented has a part to play.

The Task Force set up a number of sub-groups to focus on issues around: the criminal law, law enforcement, training, child protection measures and education and awareness. The child protection measures group has considered ways of reducing children's access to illegal and unsuitable material. Part of this work was undertaken with search providers to see what could be done in this regard and this document represents one of the results.

1.2   Purpose of the document

This document is aimed at the public and at companies who provide search across all platforms, whether via personal computer, mobile phone or any other means.

There are three main objectives to this document.

Firstly, this document sets out what search is, why the user sees the results they do and how search is generally made available on the internet. This document aims to explain as comprehensively as possible, the full range of search services currently available via the internet. However, as many search providers are continuously expanding their product offering, there may well be services available to the public after this document has been published which are not included here.

Secondly, this document aims to provide a model of good practice for search providers across all platforms in the provision of services for customers in the UK with regard to consideration of the issues and importance of child safety.

Lastly, this document gives advice and information to help members of the public, especially parents, carers and those responsible for children, on how to make good use of search engines to explore the World Wide Web and how to reduce the risk of being exposed to unwanted and unsuitable results.

2   Search

2.1 What is search?

Search providers enable the user to search the internet for information. The user visits the website of a search provider and enters a word or words into a search box. The search provider uses search engine technology to carry out the search. The search engine produces a list of the addresses of websites relevant to the words typed into the search box. Websites which provide a search facility can be accessed via computer, mobile phone, games consoles, television, wireless devices and other handheld devices.

2.2   Search providers and search engines

There are many search providers, but these are powered behind the scenes by a smaller number of search engines. The term "search engine" refers to the technology which works to produce the results the user sees. A search provider, on the other hand, is a website or service which offers users the facility to search the World Wide Web. In this document "search provider" will be the collective term for both.

A search engine uses a powerful technology, often referred to as a spider, to index and catalogue all the websites it visits. Information about each website such as the name, address, and the description of the website is collected and used to compile an enormous catalogue of all the sites the spider finds, electronically and without human intervention.

2.3   How search works

Performing an online search is very different from searching for information in a library, where standardised alphabetical library subject headings are used to find books. Therefore, an element of performing an online search is guesswork. Users try to predict words which may appear in the document or website they are searching for.

The search engine applies a set of rules, known as an algorithm, to the index of websites it has compiled to ensure that the most relevant results are returned when a search is conducted. Each search engine has its own algorithm, which means that the user may see different results for the same search if they use multiple search providers. The search results are a list of websites, related to the words entered by the user, with a title, description and URL in the form of a hypertext link. (See section 7, *Glossary,* for definitions of "URL" and "hypertext".) The user can click on these links in order to access any of these websites and view the content they contain. The websites displayed in the list do not necessarily reside in the UK and can be hosted on servers and computers around the world.

2   Search

2.4   Image search

As well as searching for text on sites, a user can conduct a search for images. The user will enter a word or words into the search box as with any other search, but the results returned by the search engine are images rather than text. The search spider uses the file name or description of the image in order to catalogue the results.

For more information on the guidelines for search providers who offer image search, please see section 5, *Good Practice for Search Providers.*

For more information on the child safety implications of image search, please see section 6, *Advice to the Public.*

2.5   Video Search

Search providers may offer users the possibility of searching for video content on the internet. Users perform keyword searches from which stills from the video clip are returned. Users may then be able to click on the still image to launch video player software which will play the video on their computer (and other devices) or link through to websites which host the videos in order to see moving images.

2.6   Audio search

Audio search works in a similar way to other searches, but provides audio based content or links to websites which host audio based content in the results. Audio content can include music, spoken word or any other form of sound clips indexed by the search engine.

2.7   Toolbar search

Some search providers offer the possibility of downloading a toolbar. This bar appears at the top of the internet browser window, below the address bar where the address (URL) of the current web page is displayed. As well as offering users various features such as the blocking of pop-up advertising, toolbars usually contain a search box so that users can search instantly, even if they are not on the actual website of the search provider.

2.8   Mobile Search

The internet can now be accessed via mobile telephone, games consoles, wireless devices and other handheld devices. This means that users can access search providers via their mobile handsets.

2   Search

The UK mobile operators (Vodafone, Orange, O2, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile and 3) have worked together to develop a Code of Practice, designed to facilitate the responsible use of new mobile phone services whilst safeguarding children from unsuitable content on their mobile phones. Each mobile operator has agreed to place services and content rated suitable only for users 18 years of age and above behind access controls, making them available only to users who meet the age restriction[1]. This code of practice should be accessible on all mobile operator websites, and on the Independent Mobile Classification Body website: http://www.imcb.org.uk/adviceandhelp/otherpublications/

2.9   Desktop search

Many search engines now offer a desktop search facility which can usually be downloaded from the search provider's website. The desktop search processes the information on the hard drive of the user's computer to produce a list of results in response to a search query. Often when users are installing the desktop search they can specify if they want any files or folders to be excluded from the search. In this way, all the content found through a search is under the control of the owner of the computer.

Desktop search means that retrieving documents saved on the user's hard drive is quick and easy. However, any folders, files (including temporary files) or documents on the hard drive that have been indexed by the desktop search will be accessible by anybody performing a desktop search on that computer. If there is adult material saved on the hard drive then there is a risk of a child inadvertently accessing this material when performing a desktop search.

2.10 Search within a website

Many websites which are not specifically search providers offer their customers the ability to search within their website. This type of search is restricted to only the content on that particular website and will not provide results from the entire internet. All the content found through this type of search is under the control of the owner or producer of that website. This means that the results will be consistent with the nature of that particular site. This document is not aimed at search within a website.

[1] The Code of Practice states that:
"Mobile operators have no control over the content that is offered on the Internet and are therefore unable to insist that it is classified in accordance with the independent classification framework [as it can for mobile commercial content].
Mobile operators will therefore offer parents and carers the opportunity to apply a filter to the mobile operator's internet access service so that the internet content thus accessible is restricted."
In meeting this standard, operators have adopted different strategies. Some operators have a walled garden service, where access is restricted to specific sites. Others set filters as a default and only remove them once a customer has proven they are at least 18 years old.

3   Search Results

3.1   Where do results come from?

The results which are listed after the user has performed a search usually originate from more than one source. Some results are generated by the search spider, whereas others are inserted as a result of paid for or sponsored listings.

Most internet search results are listed because they have been identified by the search technology as being relevant to the search terms. All the websites the spider finds will be indexed, irrespective of the nature or content of the site. This indexing process is completely automated with no human intervention and the results will normally appear in order of perceived relevance to the search terms.

In terms of safety, this means that the removal of illegal sites is a manual and reactive process. All major search providers which operate within the UK work closely with the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and law enforcement authorities to remove identified illegal sites from the index as soon as they are made aware of them. Removing a site from the index does not mean that it no longer exists, but it does ensure that it cannot be found and accessed via the search provider. For more information, please see section 5, *Good Practice for Search Providers.*

Where search providers are made aware of potentially illegal sites, they notify the IWF who work to remove illegal content from the internet.

3.2   Sponsors and advertisers

Not all search results come from the spider which crawls the internet. Some results may be sponsored listings.

Companies can pay for their website to be included in the results of certain searches. For example, a recruitment agency might pay a search provider so that its website address will be included in a list of results if the user types in the search term "job".

In order to provide good quality and credible search results, search providers must distinguish between the way in which sponsored listings and automated search results are displayed. Search providers usually clearly separate and label sponsored results from automated results[2].

To comply with advertising guidelines, paid or sponsored listings undergo human editorial checks and are generally relevant to the search term that is typed in the search box. By virtue of the editorial review, such results are typically free of illegal content. However, should the user search for words which could be interpreted as adult-related, they will find relevant adult content in the paid listings.

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[2] The Committee of Advertising Practice Code states that "Marketers and publishers should make clear that advertisement features are advertisements, for example by heading them 'advertisement feature'." See http://www.asa.org.uk/asa/ for more details.

3   Search Results

3.3   Options – personalised search options

Most search providers' websites contain a section where users can adjust and personalise the search to suit their own needs. There may be a variety of options offered to the user, such as different language options and filter settings. Currently, there is no standard, industry-wide name for this section. "Preferences", "settings", "help" and "advanced" are all terms that are used by various search providers to denote this area at present. In this document, however, we will refer to this section of the search provider's website simply as "options".

4   Child Safety Concerns

The internet brings the world to children through computers and mobile devices. They can use it to research school projects, play games, and communicate with friends and relatives. Search providers have become an integral part of children's internet experience, and are commonly used for researching schoolwork, accessing multi-media files and information relating to entertainment and recreational activities. Recent research suggests that search engines are the most visited websites among 71% of young people aged between nine and nineteen who go online at least weekly[3].

The study by Sonia Livingstone and Magda Bober entitled "UK Children Go Online" (www.children-go-online.net/) conducted in 2004 showed that 60% of nine to nineteen year-olds in full time education regard the internet as the most useful tool for getting information for homework. The study also found that 20% of nine to nineteen year-olds who go online once a week worry about "seeing things that upset the user" when using the internet.

More worryingly, according to the study, 57% of nine to nineteen year-olds who go online once a week have been exposed to online pornography and 38% have been exposed to pornographic pop-up advertising while doing something unrelated to pornography on their computer. Of the young people studied, 36% have accidentally found themselves on a pornographic website when looking for something else[4].

The key child safety concern in relation to search is the potential for children to be exposed to illegal or potentially harmful material. Whilst there is a distinction to be made between potentially harmful and illegal material, (see section 2, *Good Practice for Search Providers* for more details on this distinction), it is recognised that even material which is not illegal may be distressing when presented to an audience it was not intended for. For example, pornographic search results or results linking to sites which advocate suicide or self-harm can cause children considerable distress, and may border on illegality[5].

The challenge for search providers, parents and carers is to help ensure that when children are using a search provider they can do so safely without worrying about being exposed to potentially harmful material.

Furthermore, there is a challenge for search providers to balance the demands of a wider adult audience with the need for child safety.

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[3] Study conducted by Sonia Livingstone and Magda Bober entitled "UK Children Go Online" in 2004.

[4] The study found 10% of the young people studied have visited pornographic websites on purpose. Out of this 10%, 1% was aged between nine and eleven and 26% were aged between eighteen to nineteen years old.

[5] For example, under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 it is an offence to publish material liable to deprave and corrupt a person likely to see, hear or read it, rendering the nature of the potential viewer an important factor in establishing an offence.

5   Good Practice For Search Providers

Search engines are an invaluable tool, providing the public with immediate access to an enormous range of information which might otherwise be difficult to obtain. However, in order to do this efficiently and comprehensively, search providers necessarily keep editorial control to a minimum. The list of results that is obtained when one performs an online search is generated automatically using search technology, usually with very little or no human intervention.

Except where an age-related control has been put in place, either within the search engine itself or by an external package of some kind (e.g. filtering software), the search provider will normally have no way of knowing the age of the person conducting the search. Unless the appropriate filters have been applied, an adult related search conducted by someone of any age, will result in the search provider displaying listings containing adult content. (See section 6, *Advice to the Public*, to learn more about search provider filters.) Furthermore, if the user clicks on one of the links displayed in the search results, the search provider has no control over the content, images or advertisements which may be visible on the website being accessed.

However, there are some things which search providers can do to help keep young users safe, which are listed below.

5.1   Importance of advice to users

Search providers should offer easily accessible safety advice for users when they are undertaking a search. This safety advice should include detail on how to conduct safer searches, how to use any filtering options and how to report unwanted and potentially illegal search results. This advice should be prominent and accessible to the user.

There is a need for clear and prominent information about the services offered by the search provider and any relevant safety information and safety tools should be made easily available to the user. The safety information should help users to understand how they can best adapt the search provider's services to their needs. Safety information should, for example, outline how the search provider's filters work in order to prevent potentially illegal or harmful content being returned in the search results. The safety messages should include information designed for parents, carers and other adults, as well as children. Consideration should be given to the language of these messages so that they can be understood by both younger and older age groups, as well as people who have different levels of computer literacy and technical experience.

Clear information should be prominently displayed about the choices or options the user can select with regard to their search, and the implications of these choices. For example, information should be visible about whether the search engine will return UK only websites or sites from all over the world. The relevance of such a distinction in terms of safety and search results should be clearly explained. For more information on the distinction between UK and World Wide Web results, please see section 6, *Advice to the Public*.

Search providers should also supply links on their website to online safety guides, whether they are the search provider's own guides or third party websites. See *Annex A* for further details.

Improving the accuracy of the search can be one method of reducing the risk of exposure to potentially harmful material. The search provider should give the user clear information on how to conduct a more accurate search, and this should be accessible and prominently displayed.

5.2   Illegal and potentially harmful: the distinction

In the interests of freedom of information search providers can make all material available to members of the public who are looking for it, provided that material is not illegal. Any decision to refuse to provide information of a particular type (that is legal to obtain) in response to a search term should be a matter of company policy. For example, in the context of a service specifically aimed at children, the provision of information in response to a search query may also be controlled to prevent access to potentially harmful material, but for services open to the adult general public the same controls may not be required.

All search providers who operate in the UK should seriously consider blocking URLs that contain potentially illegal child abuse images from a list maintained by the Internet Watch Foundation[6], from appearing in a list of search results. In addition, the IWF maintains a list of key words or combinations of words which, whilst not illegal in themselves, can be used to search for illegal material. Search providers should consider using this list to prevent abuse of their services by individuals seeking illegal material.

Search providers should work, as much as possible, in a positive partnership with each other, law enforcement and the Internet Watch Foundation in order to share knowledge about potentially illegal websites. Most of the main search providers operating in the UK are members of the Internet Watch Foundation and can deploy a list of potentially illegal websites to prevent these sites being accessed through their search engines. Arrangements can also be made to enable non-members of the IWF to have access to this list.

5.3   Reporting

Search providers should offer their users a clear and prominent reporting facility, which is easily accessible across the site. The reporting process should be simple to use and should explain to users what type of material to report. For example, it should be made clear to users that they should report potentially illegal material, or adult content that may be potentially harmful to children returned in a search where the filter was switched on.

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[6] The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is an independent body which examines websites on behalf of UK Internet Service Providers to establish whether they contain material that is illegal under the Protection of Children Act 1978, the Obscene Publications Act 1959, or incitement to racial hatred as defined by the Public Order Act 1986. See www.iwf.org.uk

5   Good Practice For Search Providers

The reporting process should ensure that users are encouraged and enabled to provide all the necessary information. It should be made clear to the user what response they can expect and a time frame for this.

The search provider should also ensure that there is a process by which they can evaluate and pass on reports of illegal internet content to the relevant authority[7].

5.4   Search services aimed at children

Search providers offering services aimed at children or a younger audience should manually review and approve websites which could be included in the results of a search. In other words, they should adopt a walled garden approach (see *Glossary* for more information). Human editorial intervention is the most effective method of verifying websites and organising content. However, as content and domain names can be changed frequently, there is a need to review websites regularly.

5.5   Warning or splash pages

Search providers sometimes serve warning pages (also called splash pages) which act like a buffer between the user's query and the results returned by a search engine. Splash pages are usually activated by words in the search query (e.g. an adult content related search term).

Search providers should consider using splash pages as a safety precaution in response to adult content related queries. The splash page can warn users that they are about to receive results which may contain or link to potentially harmful material. Whilst the splash page will not prevent a user accessing any sites, it can enable the user to make an informed decision on whether to access adult material, for example by asking users to click on an age confirmation button (e.g. an 'I am 18 or over' button or equivalent) in order to proceed to this content or giving users the option to view filtered results. This would reduce the chance of a child accidentally viewing potentially harmful material.

5.6   Image search

Search providers should consider whether and how they want to provide an image search, as the immediacy of images presents a real safety concern for children. Search providers may wish to adopt a walled garden approach where they screen and classify images manually. (See *Glossary* for more information on walled gardens.) Search providers should also consider serving a warning page if a user types in a search term which has been identified as returning adult material.

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[7] Reports can be made either to the Police, or in the case of child abuse images, criminally obscene adult content or incitement to racial hatred, to the IWF. A Memorandum of Understanding between ACPO and the CPS gives some guidance on the limits within which companies can investigate child abuse images. This can be found on the CPS website at www.cps.gov.uk or at http://www.iwf.org.uk/documents/20041015_mou_final_oct_2004.pdf.

5   Good Practice For Search Providers

5.7   Search provider filters

Search providers should offer some level of filtering on their search facility and most search providers operating in the UK offer a level of filtering as default. Filters are a useful way of protecting a child from inadvertently seeing potentially harmful material.

Search providers should provide information to the public regarding their company policy on filtering. The filter should be prominently displayed and the meaning of the different filter settings should be made clear to the user. Search providers should make it clear to the user what the default filter setting is and how to adjust this and there should be activated filtering in place on every search provider in the UK by default. It should be clear to a user about to make a search whether the search provider filter is on or off, or what the filter level is set to.

Search providers should consider offering users the ability to save their filter settings so that they do not need to be re-set for each search session. Some search providers use splash or warning pages to seek confirmation from users changing their filter settings (particularly when filter levels are being reduced).

5.8   UK and World Wide Web

Search providers should offer users the choice of searching only websites from the UK as opposed to websites from around the world. This can be an important distinction in terms of search safety and relevance since sites hosted in the UK are easier to police and more likely to be relevant to a user searching for UK-based results. The option to search UK sites or worldwide sites should be prominently displayed on the search provider's website. See section 6, *Advice to the Public*, for more information.

5.9   Desktop search

It is recommended that companies offering the facility of desktop search offer the user the ability to exclude certain files (including temporary files) or folders from the search when installing the product. Companies should explain to their users that excluding certain files or folders can help prevent children accidentally accessing information which the owner of the computer considers unsuitable.

5.10   Toolbar search

Companies offering toolbar search should ensure that the toolbar does not interfere with the filter settings that have been set by the user on the search provider's website.

5 Good Practice For Search Providers

5.11 Advice, hints and tips

Making users aware of how to conduct more accurate searches should help to reduce the risk of unwanted results, which has implications for user safety online.
Search providers should include a section on their website offering users advice on how to perform an accurate search and which symbols and/or words can alter the results. Examples include the use of "and", "or", inverted commas and other symbols. This information should be displayed in a clear manner and should be easily accessible for users.

5.12 Limitations

Whilst search providers offer methods to control access to potentially harmful online content, these cannot offer a total guarantee of safety. Efforts should be made within the technological feasibility of each search provider to offer filters, splash pages and manual editing. However, these measures are likely to be much more effective in conjunction with human guidance by a parent, teacher or carer.

6   Advice to the Public

This section will deal first with advice specific to safety and then outline more general advice for users in terms of obtaining more accurate results from search providers and the safety implications of this.

6.1   Advice on how to conduct a safer search

There are many aspects for a member of the public to consider when they are about to undertake a search on the internet. This section of the document aims to clarify exactly what the user can do to empower themselves when using online search facilities, both in terms of safety and in terms of getting the best results out of their search. There are many ways in which the user can make their search results relevant and enhance their safety online. Users should be aware that even though a website may be listed in the results this does not necessarily mean that the site contains accurate or appropriate information[8].

6.2   Search sites aimed at children

There are search providers who offer search services designed specifically for children, by providing access only to content that is suitable for children. These sites review every website which may be included in the list of results, utilising a walled garden approach (see *Glossary*). Websites are checked to ensure that their content is appropriate for children before being included in a database of possible websites which can appear in search results. (*See Annex B* for more details).

Whilst the child safety benefits of this approach are clear, walled gardens do have the disadvantage of offering access to a restricted internet and there is the risk that some suitable or relevant content may not be available within the walled garden.

6.3   Controlling your search

The websites of most search providers contain a section which users can adjust to personalise the search to suit their own needs and increase their control over the results. There may be a variety of options offered to the user, such as different language options and filter settings. Currently, there is no standard name for this section of the search provider's website. "Preferences", "settings", "help" and "advanced" are all terms that are used by various search providers to denote this area at present. In this document, however, we will refer to this section simply as "options". Options are an important way of improving the safety and accuracy of search.

There is usually a link to the options area of the search provider's website near the search box itself. Simply clicking on this link should take the user to the area of the search provider's website where they can select their own options. Below are details of the sort of options which are usually available to the user and how these can affect either the safety

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[8] For more information on assessing the accuracy of information, see www.quick.org.uk.

and/or the accuracy of the search. It is recommended that users should familiarise themselves with the options offered by their chosen search provider.

6.4   UK and World Wide Web

Websites which are hosted in the UK are subject to UK law and are therefore easier to police. Currently less than 1% of websites which the IWF has assessed to contain potentially illegal material is hosted in the UK, which means that the user is very unlikely to be presented with illegal material if the search defaults to UK only sites. However, websites hosted abroad are not subject to UK law and are difficult to monitor and, if need be, block (see section 2, *Good Practice for Search Providers*). The number of sites with illegal content which are hosted abroad is higher, increasing the probability that the user may unintentionally access illegal content in their search results if they are searching the World Wide Web.

UK search providers usually provide access to both the UK only and World Wide Web search options to the user about to undertake a search. A UK search provider will usually be a search provider website with a domain name ending in ".co.uk" (http://www.search_provider_name.co.uk). In terms of safety, it is recommended that users select the UK sites only option rather than the World Wide Web option. Users should be aware, however, that this may also limit the relevance of results that are returned for their search. For example, a user searching for US elections or Olympics using the UK only option is likely to exclude US website results and other foreign website results. It is also worth pointing out that while this option may help to reduce the likelihood of illegal content being returned, it will not reduce the possibility of returning any UK sites containing content which, though not illegal, could be potentially harmful to children.

This UK only or World Wide Web option should be displayed clearly on the search provider's website.

6.5   Image Search

Users can usually select the type of results which are displayed in the options section of the search provider's website. Users may be able to select, for example, that only audio files, movie clips or images are returned in the list of results.

Image search results are sometimes perceived to be less safe than text web results, mainly because image indexing has little way of knowing if the image being indexed is closely relevant to the search term, since it may be titled misleadingly and accompanied by misleading text.

The danger for children in terms of image search is the immediacy of images. Even very young children may be confronted unwittingly with unsuitable or potentially harmful images.

In the case of an image search where adult images may be produced in the results, some search providers use warning (splash) pages with an age confirmation button (e.g. an "I am over 18 or over" button or equivalent) to alert the user that they are about to see adult content in the results. Users can then decide for themselves whether or not they wish to view this content. Whilst the splash page will not prevent a user from accessing any sites, it can help to reduce the risk of children being accidentally exposed to potentially harmful material.

The filters offered by most search providers – described below – which users can set for themselves do apply to image search as well as other search results.

Filtering and monitoring

6.6   Search provider filters

Most search providers offer the user the option of activating a safety filter for their search.

Search provider filters can block potentially harmful content in the results, such as adult related content, when the user performs a search. Some search providers offer different levels of filtering (off, low, medium, high) while others simply offer an "on/off" option. It is recommended that users make themselves aware of the filter setting before performing a search. The user can usually switch filters on in the options or settings section of the search provider's website.

When the user switches a search provider filter on, a small file with information about the user's options (called a cookie), is placed in the user's computer to let the search engine know that the user wants the results to be filtered. Some search providers offer the possibility of "locking" the user's filter settings, so they are remembered and activated every time a user searches, even after restarting their computer [9]. However, some of these cookies are temporary and are therefore removed when the user switches their computer off. This means that the user's search provider filter settings will be lost and will need to be re-set when the user returns to the search site. Therefore it is advisable that an adult checks the search provider filter setting before letting the child perform a search.

It is important to note that while efforts are continuously being made to make search provider filters as effective as possible, they are not always totally safe. Some unwanted or offensive results may be returned for the search, even if the user does have a filter switched on. If this happens, the user should report it to the search provider. Similarly, if a user feels that a relevant, age-appropriate site has been blocked by the filter, they should also report it. Although filters are generally a simple and effective way of avoiding

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[9] If a computer is set up with more than one user profile, then the settings are individual to the profile. Therefore a parent or responsible adult should make sure the filtering options have been set correctly for every user. If a computer is set up with more than one user profile, then the settings are individual to the profile. Therefore a parent or responsible adult should make sure the filtering options have been set correctly for every user.

unsuitable results, the issue remains that filters work best in conjunction with the involvement of a parent or carer.

6.7   Additional filtering

It is worth highlighting that while there is no substitute for parental or carer supervision, one method of helping to protect children using the internet from potentially harmful material is to install filtering software onto the user's computer. Generally speaking most filtering software is not specific to search providers but has been designed especially to protect children on the internet as a whole and is intended to block websites containing potentially harmful material. Traditional filtering software normally allows a user to type in any word to search for and it is the resulting web page that is filtered.

Another form of filtering software also exists which provides an additional level of filtering that works in conjunction with search providers' filter. This software is based on keywords and will not permit certain words to be entered into the search box because as a user attempts to type the word it will be displayed in dotted (….) format and will not therefore be searchable. Not all software filters provide this functionality.

However, parents and carers should bear in mind that, whilst filtering software is improving, the nature of most filtering and blocking software means that there is a risk of over-blocking as well as under-blocking (blocking too much as well as too little). Parents and carers are advised that they should investigate the levels of protection the different types of filtering software can offer[10] . Websites such as www.getnetwise.org also offer more information about the different kinds of filtering tools.

6.8   Monitoring

In some instances it is possible to search or to review a history of websites visited from a computer. This could be one way of monitoring the sites that children visit when online. To find out more about this, users should check the help section of their browser. (See *Glossary* for definition of "browser".)

There are also monitoring software products available on the market if parents and carers wish to make use of them. Parents and carers should consider discussing what constitutes acceptable use of the internet with their children in the context of the use of monitoring software.

[10] In 2004 the Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet produced a guidance document to outline the different types of protective software you can get to block or filter material to your computer and how it can help keep your child safe. It outlines the different features which such products offer and what they can do to effectively manage risks. It is entitled "Using Software to stay safe on the Internet: Information for parents and carers" and can be found at http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents.htm.

6   Advice to the Public

6.9   Toolbar search

Some search providers offer the possibility of downloading toolbar search. This provides the user with a search box on their browser, so that the search facility is available, regardless of what website they are on. Whilst toolbar search provides a time efficient and convenient way of performing a search, it is less advisable for children since users usually need to be on the search provider's website in order to set safety features such as filters. Nevertheless, some search providers do ensure that the options set by the user will be applied to the toolbar of that same engine if downloaded by the user.

6.10   Mobile search

Some of the content and services available via mobile telephones may not be suitable for children. Mobile network operators recognise that this may cause concern for parents or carers whose children have mobile phones. Parental or carer supervision of a child using mobile search is not easy, given the portability and personal nature of mobile phones. See section 2.8 (Mobile Search) in the What is Search? chapter for details on what steps the mobile telecommunications industry has taken to address these concerns.

Users should find out from their mobile operator how their access controls work and can consult the website of the Independent Mobile Classification Body (www.imcb.org.uk) on mobile content issues.

6.11   Reporting bad results

When users are inadvertently exposed to bad results, it is important that they report this to their search provider. The search provider should have a clear and prominent reporting facility on their website to enable the user to report potentially harmful material (if the filter is activated) or illegal material. See section 2, *Good Practice for Search Providers*, for more information regarding the distinction between potentially harmful and illegal material.

6.11.1   Reporting potentially harmful material

If the filter is switched on and the user sees results they consider to be potentially harmful for children, they should report this to the search provider. Users should include in the report they send to the search provider the website address where they encountered the potentially harmful material, as well as the search term they typed which produced this result.

The search provider should give an indication of time frame for their response.

6　Advice to the Public

Alternatively, if the user has seen evidence of potentially illegal material online they can report the matter to the Internet Watch Foundation at: http://www.iwf.org.uk/.

Only reports of potentially illegal websites and online activity should be directed here. The Internet Watch Foundation deals with potentially criminally obscene adult content, racial incitement content and indecent images of children on the internet. Other possibly illegal activity should be reported to law enforcement or to the search provider. If the user is in doubt as to whether or not the content is illegal, they should always report this content to the search provider who can then contact the relevant authority on their behalf to advance the complaint.

6.12　Advice on how to conduct an accurate search

Improving the accuracy of a search means that the user's risk of being exposed to unwanted results is reduced, which has significant implications for user safety online.

Part of performing a search can involve guesswork. Users try to predict which words might be contained in the information they are looking for on the internet. Fundamentally, the relevance of results obtained by a search and the protection from unwanted results can be most easily increased if the user is as specific as possible when typing in their search query.
Users should be aware that entering multiple words into the search box may help to return more relevant results since the search technology will first try to locate any websites which contain the combination of all the words typed in the search box.

Users should take care when typing their search terms into the search box, as even a small typing error can lead to unwanted or inaccurate results.

6.13　How to refine your search

By using certain symbols, words and terms in a search the user is able to refine the scope of the search. Search providers should provide information about these methods of refining search on their websites.

For example, some search providers will produce refined search results if the user types in search terms contained within inverted commas. Placing more than one word within inverted commas when typing in a search query can mean that the search provider will display results which only match those words in the exact order they have been typed. This makes the search more precise.

6　Advice to the Public

6.14　Languages

Most search providers offer the user multiple languages in which to see the results of their search. The user can usually select the language of their choice in the options section of the search provider's website.

6.15　Display of results

Most search providers allow the user to choose how many results they wish to see displayed per page in response to their search. The user can normally do this via the options or settings section of the search provider's website. The results which the search technology deems to be most relevant will always be listed first.

6.16　Checklist for parents and carers

To help keep children safe while performing online searches, as well as enhancing their safety online in general, parents, teachers and carers should take note of the following recommendations:

- Set or check the search provider filter at the start of the search session to the desired level. (section 6.3)

- Read any help sections on the search provider's website. Most search providers offer search guidelines, tutorials and some even offer guides aimed especially at children and young people.

- Consider installing filtering software specifically designed to protect children on the internet as a whole. (section 6.7)

- Consider using search providers designed especially for children and young people. (section 6.2)

- Avoid errors in typing and check the spelling of words prior to submitting the search query. Even a small typing error can bring up unwanted results. (section 6.12)

- Be aware that the search technology will list the most relevant search results first, but these may be preceded by paid for results. (section 3.2)

- Aim to use UK only search option where appropriate and available. (section 6.4)

- Learn how to type in search queries which will produce more relevant results. (section 6.12-6.13)

- Be aware of the difference between image and web search. (section 6.5)

- Not all information on the internet is accurate, and there are things internet users can do in order to help trying to assess the integrity of a source of information. Websites like www.quick.org.uk provide advice on verifying the quality of information on websites. Alternatively, use an established brand you trust when searching online.

7 Glossary

Algorithm	A set of rules applied to the search engine's database which determines the order in which websites are listed in search results.
Browser	A programme that allows a user to find, view and interact with material on the World Wide Web. Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer are examples of popular browsers.
Cache	A temporary store of memory.
Crawlers	Computer robot programmes used by search engines to roam the World Wide Web via the internet, visiting websites and databases, and updating the search engine's database of web pages. (Synonym for Spider)
Cookie	A piece of information sent to a user's computer by a website. The computer then returns that information to the website. This is how some websites "remember" your previous visits.
Database	An electronic store of information usually categorised and ordered into a holding structure.
Filters	There are two types of filters which are referred to in this document; search provider filters and filtering software. See sections 6.6-6.7, *Advice to the Public* for more information.
Hosting	The housing of a web site. A web site must physically reside on a computer (a server) which is connected to the internet to ensure it is available on the internet.
Hypertext	Text which appears on a webpage which, when clicked on, will take the user to a different area or website.
Navigation	The act of moving from one area to another within a web site, or between websites, by clicking on links.
Network	A group of interconnected computers capable of exchanging information. The internet is a network. Most offices operate computers within a network.
Server	A computer on a network which is dedicated to a particular purpose and which stores all information and performs the critical functions for that purpose.
Spiders	Computer robot programs used by search engines to crawl the World Wide Web via the internet, visiting websites and databases, and updating the search engine's database of web pages. (Synonym for Crawler)

7   Glossary

Splash Pages	A page which appears once the user has submitted their search query and is waiting for the results. Can be used as a warning to alert the user that they are about to view results which may be considered potentially harmful.
Url	Uniform Resource Locator. This is another name for a web address. This indicates where a file (e.g. an image or a document) which can be accessed via the internet can be found.
Walled Garden	Refers to a selection of sites which have passed through human editorial intervention to ensure that content is handpicked and verified for inclusion.
Website	A location on the World Wide Web, usually containing multiple web pages and normally owned by an individual, group, organisation or business.

Annex A

Websites containing general child safety information relevant to internet use:

http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk

http://www.bbc.co.uk/chatguide/

http://www.chatdanger.com

http://www.kidsmart.org.uk

http://www.childnet-int.org

http://www.fkbko.co.uk

http://www.websafecrackerz.com

http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk

http://www.nch.org.uk/itok

http://www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com/index-corporate.html

http://www.getsafeonline.org

Websites containing specific information on filtering:

http://www.getnetwise.org

http://www.becta.org.uk/teachers/teachers.cfm?section=1_3_1&id=705

http://www.webuser.co.uk/products/Internet_Filtering_207_index.html

http://archive.iinet.net.au/support/softwarefilters.html

http://www.pin.org.uk/filtering/

Annex B

Search providers aimed specifically at children.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/search

http://www.ajkids.com/

http://www.kidsclick.org/

http://search.netnanny.com/?pi=nnh3&ch=kids

http://www.yahooligans.com/

Annex C

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