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Recommended web filtering standards for schools in Wales

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Guidance

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Recommended web filtering standards for schools in Wales

Audience	All parties who are affected by educational web filtering policies, including local authorities, all maintained schools including pupil referral units and interested organisations.
Overview	This guidance document is primarily to provide advice to schools and local authorities on recommended approaches to web filtering within educational settings.
Action required	None – for information only.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Digital Learning Unit Department for Education and Skills Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ Tel: 0845 010 3300 (English-medium enquiries) 0845 010 4400 (Welsh-medium enquiries) e-mail: hwb@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.gov.wales/educationandskills

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Ministerial foreword



In March 2013, my predecessor Leighton Andrews wrote to all local authorities with a request that they reviewed their web filtering policies for schools and removed the blocks on access to social networking sites. This was in response to clear evidence which suggested that children would be better safeguarded if they were taught safe and responsible online behaviours in schools which they could transfer into their everyday life.

On 10 June 2015, I announced the development of a new Digital Competence Framework which Graham Donaldson recommended in his proposals for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales. This will require teachers to access a broad range of resources in order to develop their own, as well as their pupils' capabilities. Through adopting these web filtering standards, local authorities will be at the forefront to bring about real changes to teaching and learning in classrooms across Wales and will help to appropriately safeguard children and young people.

I am pleased therefore to support the release of these web filtering standards. I encourage all local authorities to review their current web filtering deployments against these recommendations to ensure that all teachers and pupils can fully engage with the educational opportunities that this broader access will allow.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Huw Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Huw Lewis AM
Minister for Education and Skills

Recommended web filtering standards for schools

Rationale

The Welsh Government's view on safeguarding learners online is that young people need to be taught how to use the internet safely under supervision, and then helped to develop the skills and understanding they need to manage their own risks as they use the internet independently.

'There is a growing acceptance that simply blocking children and young people's access to the internet in schools is not an effective way to keep them safe and increase their resilience'

Professor Tanya Byron, Chartered Clinical Psychologist

Aim

The web filtering standards within this document will enable access to web sites that support the effective delivery of teaching and learning in schools and will provide pupils with the opportunity to learn safe, responsible and considerate online behaviours in the context of supported educational activities.

A common set of agreed standards for internet access will give schools the tools to make informed choices over filtered internet provision whether delivered by the local authority or another provider. The standards defined must be fit for purpose for 21st Century teaching and learning and allow the access required by schools whilst still safeguarding children and young people.

Background

In 2006, following a series of newspaper articles about children under the age of 13 sharing personal information online, the then Education Minister, Jane Davidson AM, wrote to all Cabinet members responsible for education in Welsh local authorities, asking for their assurance that social networking sites were blocked in council-run schools, libraries and youth clubs. Nearly all local authorities confirmed that they were already blocking these sites following concerns about the ability of children and young people to protect themselves online when using these new social technologies.

Over time, a greater understanding of social media developed in response to a body of work which had emphasised the need for a more balanced approach to child internet safety. Critically, these included:

- the Professor Tanya Byron report in 2008^[1] which talked about how schools should empower children and young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to embrace digital technologies and keep themselves safe on the internet

- the Professor Tanya Byron report in 2010^[2] which assessed the progress in approach made since the previous report and
- findings from Ofsted in 2010^[3] which showed that pupils in the schools that had 'managed' systems had better knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe than those in schools with 'locked down' systems. Pupils were more vulnerable overall when schools used locked down systems because they were not given enough opportunities to learn how to assess and manage risk for themselves.

The subsequent report from the Digital Classroom Teaching Task and Finish Group published in March 2012 recommended developing a culture of digital citizenship among teachers and learners in Wales, which both implicitly and explicitly included a more positive approach to the use of social technologies in education.

In June 2012, the then Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews AM, released a statement on Learning in Digital Wales, a response to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations. This included a clear commitment to safe and positive use of social networking sites in education. In March 2013, Leighton Andrews AM wrote to all authorities asking them to revisit their position with regards to the blocking of social media sites.

Further evidence of the need for change has more recently been identified in:

- the Online Safety Landscape of Wales report produced by South West Grid for Learning in March 2014 (<http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/Resources#resource/612d01c1-3ab0-4cfa-b82d-8633029b9678/en>) which concluded that 'Some professionals still experience a "lock down" approach to online safety by some schools and senior leaders'
- the Estyn thematic report: ICT at key stage 3 - The impact of ICT on pupils' learning at key stage 3 in secondary schools (<http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/319300.8/ict-at-key-stage-3-the-impact-of-ict-on-pupils-learning-at-key-stage-3-in-secondary-schools-july-2014/?navmap=30,163>) which recommends that the Welsh Government assists local authorities and regional education consortia to address the technical issues that constrain access to ICT resources in secondary schools and
- given the proposals made by the Donaldson report, (<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales/?lang=en>) schools are likely to request access to a wider range of sites, some of which have been traditionally blocked by authority filtering systems.

Current situation

The majority of schools across Wales still use web filtering solutions provided by the local / unitary authority. In some cases, this is done in active consultation with schools and in others the schools accept the local authority position and consequently have little flexibility over their access to websites

including, for example, social media sites. It should be recognised that some schools are happy with the local authority taking responsibility over social networking in school settings and that some local authorities may not have the technical means to offer differentiated, granular filtering. It is recognised that no local authority or school is purposefully putting children at harm.

Local authorities are employing a range of solutions for the provision of web filtering to schools, and are at different stages in their procurement processes. Some local authorities will find it easier than others when it comes to implementing the suggested standards. The standards should be viewed as leading future discussions around implementing web filtering solutions rather than a definitive set of statutory requirements.

There is anecdotal evidence that where schools have moved away from local authority provision, there may be a lack of understanding that filtering and restricting access to inappropriate material will now be their responsibility. A common set of agreed standards would provide such schools and local authorities with the tools to make informed choices over filtered internet provision.

Benefits of standards

- Schools and local authorities will have a common set of filtering standards, agreed by education professionals, technical staff and schools which can be applied appropriately to school settings. Different web filtering criteria should be applied depending upon the age of the child.
- Children and young people can be educated about how to use social technologies safely and responsibly in a controlled setting. The skills they acquire around staying safe online through this approach can then be applied when they are online outside of the school setting, for example at an internet café or on the school bus via their mobile phones.
- Teachers will have access to the full range of creative and collaborative online tools (including Hwb and Hwb+) they need to use to deliver improved outcomes for learners irrespective of where they are located in Wales – including streaming and social media.
- Learners and all teaching staff will benefit from the full functionality of the Hwb toolset. We expect that over time the site will integrate a range of 'tried and trusted' web-based technologies, giving learners access to a wide variety of tools and content and also the opportunity to use the tools which they use in 'real life' in their learning

Risks

- Unless there is a full programme of support and guidance for senior leaders, governors, teachers and education staff around safe and responsible use of the internet for themselves and for their students, schools will still be reluctant to engage with social media technologies and the wider teaching and learning opportunities presented on the web.
- The Welsh Government recognises that there is a challenge for local authorities to deliver the proposed standards and for some schools in embracing the full range of opportunities offered if the standards are adopted.
- It is expected that the categories identified in this document will change over time and it is therefore vital that these standards are reviewed with stakeholders annually to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose.

Overview of the process for defining the standards

- A survey of local authorities was designed by a small working group and sent out via the Society of IT Managers (Socitm) to gauge the current provision of web filtering across Wales. 17 local authorities responded. Highlights included:
 - 75% of respondents already offer age-differentiated filtering
 - 85% of respondents are due to change or renew their web-filtering provider within the next three years
 - Smoothwall, Websense and Bloxx were the most common solutions employed
 - Corporate IT teams overwhelmingly dealt with reporting on internet use rather than schools themselves.
- An initial meeting attended by representatives from the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authority technical teams and colleagues from South West Grid for Learning discussed how the proposed standards would be developed. It was agreed by all participants that:
 - the situation where some schools in Wales could access web sites that support the effective delivery of teaching and learning in schools (including social technology sites) and some schools could not – based on location alone – was not acceptable as a way forward
 - it should always remain the choice of the head teacher and governing body in the school as to which sites were used in the school setting

- there was an overriding need for the creation of a web filtering group where expert views could be brought in as required.
- It was decided that a review of the category approach to blocking used by the three main web-filtering providers would be undertaken. It was agreed that areas of commonality across the categories would form the basis of the proposed standards.
- The categories were then reviewed again at subsequent meetings and it was agreed that an age-appropriate approach would be taken and the categorisation would be split into four groups*:
 - Learners in Foundation Phase (3-7) & Key Stage 2 (7-11)
 - Learners in Key Stage 3 (11-14)
 - Learners in Key Stage 4 (14-16) & post-16
 - Teachers and non-teaching staff.
- Each age-group category was then reviewed as to whether or not websites in that category should be blocked or allowed.
- This document has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders across Wales.

* Special schools and pupil referral units should adopt the suggested categories based on the abilities of their learners rather than that of their chronological age as appropriate.

Summary of the proposed standards

- Education professionals should have access to the full range of categories apart from obvious harmful, illegal or inappropriate sites
- All users should have access to streaming media and media downloads
- Only learners in Foundation Phase & Key Stage 2 would not have access to social interaction websites which require age verification.

Expectations

The Welsh Government expects that:

- local authorities that control web filtering on behalf of their schools implement the standards
- schools that take their filtering provision from outside of the authority will check their current filtering is compliant with these standards

- education professionals embrace the opportunity to teach safe, responsible and considerate online behaviours in the context of appropriate educational activities.

Support

In January 2014, the Welsh Government awarded a contract to SWGfL and partner organisations in Wales to work with officials on a programme of e-Safety education and awareness raising activities. Through the new e-Safety zone on Hwb, (hwb.wales.gov.uk) a range of resources and advice for children, parents and teachers is provided including:

- the 360 degree safe Cymru self assessment tool which allows schools to judge their practice and provision through a self review process and delivers the opportunity for a quality mark judgement, the e-Safety Mark, if appropriate.
- the Digital Literacy Resource which contains lesson materials from Foundation Phase through to Key Stage 4 and post-16, which progressively covers eight key themes around safe and responsible use of technology and the internet including cyberbullying, digital footprint and internet safety.

Welsh Government will engage directly with local authorities to understand their position and view of these standards.

References

[1] *Safer children in a digital world: the report of the Byron Review*, (PP/D16 (7576)/03/08), DCSF and DCMS, 2008; ISBN: 9781847751348

[2] *Do we have Safer children in a digital world? A review of progress since the 2008 Byron Review*. (2010) DCSF Publications ISBN: 9781847757111

[3] *The Safe Use of New Technologies*. Ofsted, 2010. Crown Copyright.

Appendix: Standards

Key

Green = Allow
Red = Block

Please note the category titles and descriptions have been taken directly from one of the solutions provided to schools.

Category	Description	FP / KS2	KS3	KS4 / Post-16	Teachers and non-teaching staff
Adverts/advertising (a)	Sites which are advertising goods and services. This includes pop ups.	Red	Red	Red	Red
Alcohol and tobacco	Manufacturers and distributors of alcoholic drinks and tobacco products, as well as websites that promote their use.	Red	Green	Green	Green
Entertainment	Music, cinema, theatre, museums, art galleries are all included. Live entertainment venues and comedy clubs. Sites that allow the download of media (i.e. videos and music are explicitly excluded).	Green	Green	Green	Green
Auction Sites (b)	Online auction sites and any site that offers services to aid buying or selling via online auctions.	Red	Red	Green	Green
Automotive/vehicles	Vehicle manufacturers, dealers and servicing are all covered by this category. Sites that allow traders or the general public to buy or sell vehicles. Clubs for specific manufacturers/models are applicable, as are discussion groups.	Green	Green	Green	Green
Business and commercial	Businesses and commercial organizations belong in this category, as do groups that represent them and any reporting/commentary specifically targeted on this area. Note that IT-related businesses belong to the 'Computers and internet' category and are not included here.	Green	Green	Green	Green

Computing and internet	All sites related to computer hardware and software - including sales. News and current trends regarding the computing industry or internet are also applicable. Professional bodies within the IT industry are included. Please note that sites whose main function is to allow users to download software are listed in the 'Software download' category.				
Drugs	Sites that sell illegal/controlled substances, promote substance abuse, or sell drug-related paraphernalia.				
Education/Educational establishments	Colleges, universities, primary and secondary schools are all listed here. Online educational resources, such as exam syllabuses and example questions, are also included. Support organisations such as admissions bodies and research councils.				
Finance and investment/banking	All aspects of personal and corporate finance are included here. Sites that provide price comparisons between financial products. Sites that report or comment on financial matters.				
Food and drink	All sites relating to restaurants (whether eat-in or takeaway) and pubs/bars. All recipes and cuisine related sites are listed in this category. Farms and other foodstuff manufacturers.				
Gambling (c)	All online and offline gambling, and sites that promote gambling skills and practice.				
Gaming	All sites relating to video, computer or online games. All sites that support gaming through hosting online services, cheat information and general advice.				
Gaming (Education)					
Government/Affiliated Associations	All publicly-available central and local government web sites are applicable, as are related bodies and agencies. Sites related to defence forces such as armies, navies or air forces are not included here - they are listed in the 'Military' category.				

Hacking	Resources for the illegal or questionable use of computer hardware or software are listed here, as are sites that promote destructive or malicious software such as viruses and Trojans. Sites that describe how to gain unauthorized access to systems. Sites that distribute copyrighted material that has been 'cracked' to bypass licensing.				
Hate and discrimination	Sites promoting aggressive, degrading, or abusive opinions about any section of the population that could be identified by race, religion, gender, age, nationality, physical disability, economic situation, sexual preferences or any other lifestyle choice. Political and social groups that discriminate on the grounds of race, religion, gender, age, nationality, physical disability, economic situation, sexual preferences or any other lifestyle choice.				
Health	All sites related to personal health, hospitals, clinics, legally-prescribed medication and related services.				
Illegal	Sites that contain instructions, recipes, or advice on creating illegal items, such as explosives, or offer them for sale. Sites that give instruction on, advice about or promote of illegal acts.				
Image sites	Sites that provide hosting for images.				
Instant messaging	Instant messaging clients and services, and any domains required for their successful operation.				
Internet telephony	All sites that offer internet telephony/VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) products and services.				
Lifestyle and culture	Sites that deal with life issues such as motherhood and raising children. Life events such as marriage and bereavement. Lifestyle choice sites such as LGBT are listed here. Sexual content is explicitly excluded and is listed in 'Pornography and adult content'.				

Military	Sites belonging to official military organisations or containing information relevant to their activities should be placed in this category. Illegal/paramilitary organizations are excluded and should be placed in the Illegal category.				
News	All reporting media such as online news, newspapers and current affairs sites are listed here.				
Newsgroups and forums	Sites offering access to Usenet newsgroups or similar services, or any other discussion forum that doesn't sit well in another category.				
Offensive and tasteless	It's not very easy to define exactly what is offensive or tasteless. Sites included are not pornographic or violent; rather, more oriented towards content unsuitable for school children to view or that an employer would be uncomfortable with their staff accessing. Some examples are: discussion of sexual activity of a non-pornographic but explicit fashion; crude humour; images of the casualties from a car crash; defamatory or insulting comments about people, places, religions or cultures.				
Peer to peer (P2P)	All sites that facilitate the sharing of files using P2P software are placed in this category. This includes, but is not restricted to, sites that host P2P software and sites that allow users to search for files that can be downloaded using via P2P software.				
Dating	This category covers matchmaking sites, personal listings, sites that discuss romance and interpersonal relationships - whether partnership is the resultant goal or not. Sites specifically designed for initiating sexual encounters are excluded - these are categorized as 'Pornography and adult content'.				
Pornography and adult material	Sites containing sexually explicit content in an image-based or textual form. Any other form of adult/sexually-oriented material is also listed here.				
Property and real estate	All sites oriented to the selling, letting, and building of private or commercial property should be placed in this category.				

Proxy avoidance	Any site that operates as a web proxy, allows access to software that can bypass web filtering, or offers guidance on how web filtering can be avoided is listed in this category.				
Recreation and hobbies	This category covers all activities or interests, other than sport, that someone might pursue for their own pleasure and not as a main occupation. This is obviously a very broad definition.				
Recruitment/Jobs	All employment agencies, recruitment consultancies and headhunters, contractors, and agencies assisting anyone seeking employment are placed here. All sites that allow job vacancies to be posted, offer career advice, describe how to get through interviews or prepare a CV.				
Reference material	Online encyclopaedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, atlases and other information resources available for research purposes all belong to this category.				
Religion/Spiritual beliefs	All sites that relate to religious belief or scepticism should be placed in this category.				
Search engines	This category contains all search engines, meta-search engines and web directories.				
Sex education	This category is for sites that discuss sex and sexuality in an informative and non-voyeuristic way. Topics that fall under this category include: education about human reproduction and contraception, sites that offer advice on preventing infection from sexual diseases such as HIV, and sites that offer advice to the LGBT communities on sexual health matters. Note: KS2 pupils will require access to Sex education		KS2		
Shopping/e-commerce	Any site that meets one of the following criteria is listed here: Offers goods for sale; represents a non-online retailer; provides comparisons between goods; preferential purchase schemes. Please note that exceptions are made in the case of sites covered by the other categories: auctions, cars and spares, sexual goods and materials, computer hardware and software, computer and video games, holidays and travel, financial goods and services, alcohol and tobacco, drugs, prescription medicines and weaponry - these are all be placed in the category best suited to their specific purpose.				

SMS and mobile telephony services	This category is used for sites that allow the creation or sending of SMS text messages. Sites that sell ringtones, games, videos, or other downloadable content. Please note that mobile telephone retailers are not placed in this category - they are listed in 'Shopping'.				
Software download	All sites whose main purpose is to allow users to download software, whether on a free or commercial basis.				
Sport	All sport websites - whether official, unofficial, media-related or fan-related - are placed in this category, except those related to gambling.				
Streaming media and media downloads	Any site whose primary function is to allow users to download media content, whether streamed or not.				
Translation (d)	All sites that translate a Web page from one language to another, or that transform the text contained within a Web page, are listed in this category.				
Travel	Sites related to the following topics are listed here: travel agents; airlines, cruise and ferry lines, rail operators, bus and coach companies; hotels and holiday rental accommodation; travel advice; timetable information; car hire.				
Violence	Any site that displays or promotes content related to violence against humans or animals is placed in this category, as are sites that advocate any means of harming oneself such as self-mutilation or euthanasia.				
Weapons	Any site that sells weapons or ammunition or advocates the use of weapons. Sites of weapons manufacturers.				
Web chat	Web-based chatrooms.				
Weblogs and social interaction (age restricted) (e)	Any site that hosts a weblog or lists of weblogs, or provides social networking services is listed in this category. Social networking sites are defined as those that allow users to generate their own profiles or personal content, view the profiles of others, and create links between profiles in order to indicate friendship or approval.				

Weblogs and social interaction (open access)	Any site that hosts a weblog or lists of weblogs, or provides social networking services is listed in this category. Social networking sites are defined as those that allow users to generate their own profiles or personal content, view the profiles of others, and create links between profiles in order to indicate friendship or approval.				
Spyware/malware	Web sites hosting software that attempts to get hold of personal or secret information without the user's knowledge.				
Webmail	Any site offering Web-based email services is placed in this category.				

Notes:

- a. This refers to advertising directly including pop-ups, as opposed to shopping sites which many teachers use for literacy and numeracy activities.
- b. The group discussed Ebay in particular and that this was one of the most visited sites within schools. The group agreed that it was important to allow access to auction sites from a safeguarding point of view, in order to teach how to use such sites responsibly. It was agreed that younger learners should not be allowed access due to age restrictions.
- c. It was agreed that this category should be accessible to teachers but be blocked for all other categories.
- d. It had been pointed out that some translation websites can draw down images from websites which could potentially be inappropriate. It was agreed that these sites could be accessible to teachers and blocked to the other user groups.
- e. It was pointed out that individuals shouldn't be allowed access to social networking sites until they are 13. After much conversation around the age restrictions on Twitter and Facebook it was agreed that this content should be accessible to teachers and non-teaching staff, and older learners but be blocked to FP and KS2.