

## NCTE welcomes appointment of Bebo Safety Officer

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**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2006**

The NCTE welcomes the appointment of a safety officer by Bebo. This appointment is in line with NCTE representations made to Bebo over the past few months.

The NCTE holds the view that companies offering services that explicitly target school children have a responsibility to do everything they can to ensure that their services are used to enrich and not to diminish their lives. Similarly, we strongly believe that companies that piggyback on the strong social bonds created in educational communities should take steps to ensure that their service doesn't adversely affect these communities in anyway.

Jerome Morrissey, Director National Centre for Technology in Education, commented: "I welcome the appointment of Rachel O'Connell to the role of Chief Safety Officer. As an expert in this area, Rachel has collaborated with the NCTE on several Internet Safety projects over the last five years. We look forward to working with her in the future."

Fionnuala Kilfeather, Chief Executive of the National Parents Council Primary commented, "Bebo has a responsibility to pump back some of the revenues earned from the site into hiring people to monitor it. They should ensure that the site is suitable and sensible for young people to use, they can't rely on individual parents to do this."

Many schools are finding themselves in a position where they have to deal with the fall-out in the classroom and in the schoolyard from inappropriate use of the web by students outside school. The NCTE through its internet safety website [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie) and through the ICT Advisory Service based in regional Education Centres is providing support and advice to schools on this matter.



We encourage Bebo to actively engage with their users and school communities to increase the awareness of the key internet safety issues. Young people need to be aware of the need to protect their privacy and good name on the Internet.

There are potentially serious disciplinary consequences in schools and in the courts of defaming or harassing others online. Contrary to popular opinion cyberbullying can be more harmful and easier to detect than traditional forms of bullying. The NCTE provides resources and support to schools to help them to put in place Acceptable Use Policies that address these complex issues.

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### **Note to Editors**

In April of this year (2006) following consultation with the National Parents Council Primary, The National Parents Council Secondary, The Hotline, The ISPPCC, and The ISPAI the following list of 10 recommendations were made to Bebo by the NCTE on how they could make their website safer for children to use:

1. There should be an appropriate registration process whereby the identity of the registered user is confirmed.
2. Bebo should establish practices and procedures with The Hotline in relation to reports of illegal content in Ireland. Material should be removed pending an investigation of a complaint referred by the Hotline.
3. There should be a complaints process whereby a person who alleges they have been defamed is able to make complaint to Bebo and then that complaint should be dealt with speedily.
4. Bebo should provide context sensitive help in the registration process that makes subscribers aware of who can access their information.
5. Bebo should refuse to host profiles that are inflammatory, controversial or which give rise to persistent complaints.
6. Bebo should undertake a campaign to educate parents and young people about Internet safety issues. The user should be made aware of their responsibility for the content of his/her own profile.



7. Bebo should prohibit the exploitation of minors in word-of-mouth campaigns and ensure "honesty of identity" in any campaigns aimed at non-minors.
8. Bebo should add staff and technology to filter out and remove pornography, defamatory, and potentially illegal content.
9. Bebo should banish permanently users who repeatedly post "deep links" to pornography or other prohibited content.
10. Bebo should employ an independent monitor, outside of the corporate structure, who reports to the company about inappropriate material, sexual predators or other problems on the site.

**Webwise is the NCTE's internet safety initiative. Webwise provides information, advice and tools for teachers, parents and young people. It is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Node of European Commission's Safer Internet network.**



The ICT in Schools' Programme of the Department of Education and Science