**Progress Report published on the implementation of the Government Action Plan for Online Safety**

**Over 26 actions across Government aimed at improving online safety for all users**

The Government has today Tuesday 5th February published the first progress report on the implementation of the *Government Action Plan for Online Safety.*

The report was launched to mark Safer Internet Day and is available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/be-safe-online/>

The *Government Action Plan for Online Safety* includes a Sponsors Group made up of members of the six key departments that share primary policy responsibility for online safety at Government level: Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Education and Skills, which also acts as Chair of the Sponsors Group; Justice and Equality; Children and Youth Affairs; Health; and Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

The 2018 Progress Report outlines the achievements of Action Plan in the first six months of its implementation, from July to December 2018.

Across its five goals, 22 of the 26 actions for 2018 have been achieved, with four still ongoing in 2019 due to the nature of the work.

Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh T.D. said: “This report outlines excellent progress on the commitments the Government has made to highlight online safety for children and young people. We are making made good progress in a number of areas including legislation, improved cooperation between law enforcement and industry and enhancing child protection.

“In the Department of Education and Skills the work of Webwise has been key to promoting online safety among young people, teachers and parents. Their use of imaginative, creative and targeted resources are making a difference. Part of this success is because we are listening to young people to do our best to meet their needs.”

As part of the Action Plan, a National Advisory Council for Online Safety (Nacos) with representatives from a range of stakeholders including Government departments and agencies, relevant NGOs and industry, was established to provide advice to Government on online safety policy issues.

Chair of Nacos, Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Sean Canney T.D. said: “I welcome the progress Government is making on its commitments to online safety. It is a complex and fast changing issue, so having six Departments working in close cooperation and with Nacos ensures a consistency of approach to emerging issues.”

The Government’s Online Safety Hub, with a single online access point [**www.gov.ie/besafeonline**](http://www.gov.ie/besafeonline)provides links to a wide range of online safety resources and information from the six key Government Departments. Resources include links to information with specific resources for parents, teachers, children and young people.

The Sponsors Group will continue to implement the Action Plan throughout 2019 and a second Progress Report will be published in Q3 covering the period January to June 2019.

**Notes for the Editor:**

**The Government Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019:**

In July 2018 the first Government Action Plan for Online Safety was launched by the Taoiseach and is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/be-safe-online/>. The Action Plan is based around five goals and sets out 25 specific actions (with 48 constituent actions), to be progressed over the period of the Plan and commenced in July 2018. The five overarching goals are:

1.   Online Safety for All

2.   Better Supports

3.   Stronger Protection

4.   Influencing Policy and Building our Understanding

5.   Improve national planning and support services

**Government Departments involved:**

Recognising that online safety is not the responsibility of any one Department, the Action Plan involves a wide range of activities across six key Government Departments:

* Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) leads on structured engagements by Departments with online platforms; and review of the Audio Media Visual Services Directive.
* Department of Education and Skills (DES) leads on schools policy development; Webwise; support for National Parents Council (primary) helpline.
* Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) leads on oversight of hotline.ie; legislative changes to criminal law; liaison with An Garda Síochána on implementation/enforcement issues; and disbursement of EU funding.
* Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) leads on consultative engagement with children and young people, including through Comhairles, and Children First guidance.
* Department of Health (D/Health) leads on the development of online mental health tools that augment existing services and implementation of Healthy Ireland.
* Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) leads on oversight of the E-commerce Directive (2000/31/EC) and coordination of the EU Digital Single Market strategy.

**How implementation of the Action Plan is being progressed:**

A Sponsors Group, representative of six Government Departments, and chaired by the Department of Education & Skills, was established to drive the implementation of the Action Plan. Functional responsibility for the relevant policy issues remains with the lead Minister/Department who will be accountable to the Oireachtas for implementation of assigned actions.

Progress of the Action Plan for Online Safety is reviewed on an ongoing basis with publication of bi-annual progress reports to demonstrate implementation.

**Some key 2018 achievements include the following:**

* An Online Safety Hub, with a single online access point [www.gov.ie/besafeonline](http://www.gov.ie/besafeonline) for information on online safety has been created. This Hub is a repository providing links to all online safety resources and information available across the six key Government Departments.
* A new National Advisory Council for Online Safety (NACOS) which includes representatives from An Garda Síochána; Office of the Ombudsman for Children; Office of the Data Protection Commissioner; Age Action Ireland; ISPCC; Internet Providers and others has also been established to provide advice to Government on online safety policy issues with stakeholder input and engagement. There is close co-operation between NACOS and the Sponsors Group to ensure that emerging issues are considered for appropriate action(s).
* The functions of the Office for Internet Safety (OIS) has been refocused and incorporated into a new Cybercrime area of responsibility within the Crime and Security Directorate of the Department of Justice & Equality. This new area will deal with issues of law enforcement in relation to online safety and coordination of EU funding proposals.
* A dedicated Youth Hub was developed in 2018 which will act as the central point for representing the student voice in online safety. It gives practical advice on key issues, popular apps and platforms and details of ongoing youth work and campaigns
* A dedicated Parents’ Hub provides advice on a range of topics including cyberbullying, sexting, social media, popular apps and sites. Information and resources for parents will continue to be developed as new technologies emerge. This Hub will continue to forge the link between home and school on online safety issues.
* Teachers’ Hub provides free education resources and advice for teachers and schools on the effective and safe use of digital technologies in teaching and learning. In 2018 a range of new material was developed including material to help teachers plan internet safety campaigns and lessons through the academic year and also to access information and advice on how teachers can protect themselves online.
* Schools are required to consult with the school community, including parents and students, on if and how Smart Phones and other digital devices are used in schools. A range of supports for teachers, schools, pupils and parents to ensure development of appropriate policies continue to be made available through the respective Hubs detailed above.
* The DCCAE has prepared a draft approach to developing a practical guide for online platforms and interactive services to support best practice in online safety at all stages of design, development and roll out.
* The DJE work is ongoing on the Harassment, Harmful Communication and Related Offences Bill 2017.
* Discussions are taking place between DJE and the head of hotline.ie in order to progress the actions regarding enhancing measures to support improved co-operation between hotline.ie and industry for taking down child abuse and other illegal material
* The Department of Rural and Community Development and Local Authorities are investing some €8m towards the upgrade of digital capacity in public libraries, establishing them as important enablers of digital services and facilitators of digital skills development.
* The HSE has re-developed “yourmentalhealth.ie” to provide a significantly improved experience for those seeking mental health information, supports and services.
* The D/Health and the HSE are working to establish a 24/7 signposting telephone mental health line. The new service will act as a single point of contact to assist people locate and be referred to appropriate health services in their area.
* The HSE, working in close collaboration with an existing HSE provider of online counselling is currently undertaking a national project exploring the potential to develop the use of online therapies.
* In recognition that young people in particular are choosing to communicate in greater numbers via text and image-based messaging the HSE Mental Health has engaged with Crisis Text Line, a leading US-based provider of instant text messaging support services with a view to establishing their service in Ireland. It is expected that the service will be operational in early 2019.
* The HSE are putting plans in place to launch advertising and media campaigns to support the roll out of mental health initiatives which will focus on resilience building.

**Enclosures:**

* 2018 Progress Report
* Sponsors Group (Membership and Terms of Reference)