



# **ACT Government Submission to Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety**

## **Introduction**

The ACT Government appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety. The ACT Government acknowledges the need to take advantage of opportunities presented by developments in information technology while recognising the need to educate and protect children and young people against associated risks.

These technologies provide a means for citizens to engage and have access to information. This is consistent with the *ACT Human Rights Act 2004*, which contains provisions concerning protection of the family and children, freedom of expression and taking part in public life. The ACT Government is committed to engaging with the community in a meaningful, transparent, accountable, responsive and equitable way. Developments in Web 2.0 and Social Media offer new and useful ways for citizens to interact with Government that supplement and merge with face-to-face engagement.

Digital technologies have an increasingly important role in enhancing and supporting the learning environment for students, and providing access to information both within and beyond the school community.

The ACT Government is actively involved in the area of cyber-safety and cyber-crime, both within the Territory and through cooperation with other jurisdictions. Agencies have also introduced specific programs to educate children and young people on the safe use of these technologies and to equip those in positions of responsibility with the skills to address issues that may arise.

InTACT (the ACT Government information technology service provider) has some direct responsibility for cyber-safety as it applies to young people, through the supply of Internet access in libraries and schools. InTACT has worked to ensure that appropriate measures are in place where it is responsible for providing Internet access to children and young people. InTACT also provides ACT Government Staff Security Awareness Training (including cyber-safety), which encourages staff to share the information from this training with their families and the wider community.

The ACT Government acknowledges the importance of this inquiry and asks the Committee to note the concurrent work being carried out within and between jurisdictions. The ACT Government will continue to work collaboratively with public and private stakeholders on initiatives that enhance children and young people's cyber-safety.

To assist the Committee in its deliberations, specific initiatives being progressed by the ACT Government are outlined below.

## **Engaging and Protecting Children and Young People**

The *Children and Young People Act 2008* (the Act), provides for the promotion of the safety, wellbeing, care and protection of children and young people in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment. The Act takes into account the responsibilities of parents, families, government and the community for children and young people. The principles of the Act are aimed at providing children and young people with a safe and nurturing environment by organisations and people who, directly and indirectly, provide for their wellbeing, care and protection, and aims to prevent the abuse and neglect of children and young people.

Under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* (Priority action 6.1A – Implement cyber-safety initiatives), the ACT Government, through the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS), currently reports on initiatives underway in the Territory including:

- The *ACT Young People's Plan 2009–2014*, which takes account of issues that are of importance to young people including civic engagement through the use of the internet, social and environmental sustainability and public and personal safety. The *ACT Young People's Plan 2009–2014* priority action Participation and Access, outlines initiatives to be taken to address cyber-bullying; and
- The ACT Children and Young People Commissioner has commenced a program of work on obtaining the views of children and young people on a range of issues, that includes the use of online media tools. The Commissioner then advises Government on how to improve services for children and young people.

Care and Protection Services (CPS) within DHCS has in place a policy on Working with Police. This policy identifies the legislative processes which enable communication and reporting processes between ACT Policing and the CPS. Whilst cyber-safety is not identified as an abuse category, the policy allows for information to be shared between police and CPS in order to investigate where concerns about the welfare and safety of a child or young person are identified.

## **Information and Communications Technology in Education**

### ***ICT investment in the ACT***

The ACT is at the forefront of ICT in schools. ACT teachers and students are some of the most competent IT users in Australian education. ACT students scored the highest in computer literacy scores in Australia, according to the 2008 *Information*



*Communication and Technology Literacy Report*, which is consistent with a long term trend of high performance.

ACT teachers are the highest per capita users of digital content from the Le@rning Federation, which is a national repository of digital learning resources. The ability for teachers and students to directly access information through the use of ICT has implications for information and resource access at the school level.

The ACT Department of Education and Training is providing a wide range of ICT tools and services that will impact on information literacy in schools. The significant increase in the availability and access to information via the internet will continue to have an impact on the way teachers and students research and discover content. Significant investment from both the Australian and ACT Governments has built on the already solid foundations for ICT access and information literacy in ACT schools.

The ACT agreed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in May 2009 to work towards achieving a 1:1 ratio of computers to year 9-12 students by 2011. Under the Digital Education Revolution (DER), the ACT is receiving more than \$22 million over four years to roll out the devices to schools, and more than 4,000 units have already been delivered. Further work is being conducted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations within the DER program to cover professional development and the provision of digital resources.

In June 2006, the ACT Government committed \$20 million to deliver ICT upgrades and enhancements to schools over four years under the *Smart Schools: Smart Students Initiative*. A further \$7.7 million was allocated in 2008 to provide fibre connections to the ACT Government network for ACT public primary schools.

The 2009-10 ACT Budget provided a further investment of \$5 million over three years to improve student access to ICT in ACT public primary schools by replacing old computers and installing new interactive whiteboards (IWBs). This initiative will deliver a ratio of one computer to every six students and one IWB to every two classrooms. In addition, \$407,000 has been provided over four years for the ongoing technical support of these new technologies.

### ***Virtual Learning Environment in the ACT***

The ACT system has been using the *myclasses* Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) provided by Editure since 2003, with a large proportion of teachers from all sectors creating their own class pages. The environment is largely teacher controlled with students only being able to view content and participate in discussion board activities.

Students within the ACT can access this online environment at school through a simple authentication in which they need to put in their unique user name and password. All students must sign an Acceptable Use of IT form before they are able

to go online and this is normally completed at the beginning of the school year or during enrolment. Students are monitored while online and inappropriate websites are blocked and filtered by InTACT. ACT students can also access the current online virtual learning environment *myclasses* through their school website. As the Internet at school is filtered, many older students use their own devices to access websites which would be blocked on the school system.

Students are beginning to use more web-based tools to socialise with each other outside of school, especially sites such as Facebook and Myspace, email, online forums, MSN Messenger and mobile phones. A survey conducted by the Department of Education and Training in 2009 of year 5/6 students in one ACT public primary school, found that more than half of the students already had a Facebook or Beebo account or similar. Many of these students had limited knowledge about privacy settings and indicated that they took little notice to who they were adding as friends on their pages.

In 2009 a blogging feature was turned on for ACT teachers in the *myclasses* environment. Unfortunately it became apparent that some students began using this feature inappropriately without the knowledge of their teachers, and as a result the feature was removed from the environment. This illustrated the importance of providing appropriate training to staff, and of the role that schools need to play in educating students about the appropriate use of these technologies.

One of the most exciting recent ICT investments in the ACT is the development of a new Virtual Learning Environment, known as Connected Learning Communities (cLc), planned to be deployed in all public schools in 2010. The cLc will enable schools to access digital content to enrich their teaching and learning programs. The cLc will enable any teacher or student to search information via the Internet and use it for specific purposes of communication, collaboration and presentation. The cLc also provides teachers and students access to significant banks of quality assured digital content through the Le@rning Federation and from existing copyright free repositories of free to air television content.

In the selection and development of the new VLE, consideration was given to the experiences with *myclasses*, the level of risk, and cyber-safety concerns that the introduction of new web 2.0 technologies could bring to the ACT. The ability to filter and monitor student behaviour in the environment was an important factor in the selection of the Connected Learning Communities, which is due to replace *myclasses* by the end of 2010.

The cLc environment is currently being used by over 2 million students of all ages across the United Kingdom, Singapore, Hong Kong and the United States, and is being specially adapted to suit the needs of the ACT system. Education and cyber-safety are at the forefront of the cLc design, with teachers being able to monitor and keep track of student responses in forums, blogs, wikis and other teaching and



learning tools. This level of supervision has not been available to ACT teachers in the current *myclasses* environment.

Unlike other environments, the cLc provides teachers with the opportunity to proactively develop the essential skills and capabilities within students to be safe participants in the digital age. Some unique cyber-safety features included in the cLc are:

- an ACT Safe-Report Abuse button, which will be located at the top of every page. This button will automatically open up a new mail message response in which students can type in their issue and send. The recipient of these emails will be a selected member of the school staff;
- all students will be given a unique user name and password and must be authenticated before they are given access to the cLc environment. This will prevent students from making any anonymous interactions or contributions in the environment;
- students and teachers will be able to use a range of social networking tools which were once unavailable in the classroom due to risks associated with students engaging online with unknown people and privacy. Schools can also select who students can connect with. This may be their year group, the whole school, or across different schools;
- if students are caught using the environment in an inappropriate manner, schools can lock student accounts within seconds, and examine the digital footprint the student has left behind through the online monitoring and tracking systems; and
- ACT teachers will also have access to a Keeping Safe Online page, developed by the Learning Technologies Section. This will contain lesson plans, resources and video content which can be used to teach issues surround Internet safety with all students from P- 12.

### ***Access for the broader school community***

In 2011, ACT parents will have access to their own portal in the new cLc environment, allowing them greater access into what is occurring at school and what their children are doing while online. The ACT has been working with a number of organisations, including the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and the Budd:E Program to educate teachers, parents and students about cyber-safety. This has included the distribution of resources such as posters, brochures and teaching materials to schools. Many schools have also hosted free information nights provided by the ThinkUKnow and

ACMA Outreach Programs regarding Internet safety and cyber-bullying. ACT schools which have taken part in these sessions have indicated that they have been extremely beneficial and well received.

### ***School responses to cyber-bullying***

While reports of specific incidents of cyber-bullying in ACT schools are low, where cyber use escalates into bullying behaviours in the school, it is important that the schools respond appropriately. The implication for teachers is that they still need to address the behaviour of students rather than the technology that may have contributed to the behaviour.

Any incidents of cyber-bullying in ACT schools are currently dealt with under the following ACT policy documents:

- Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT Public Schools
- Countering Racism in ACT Public Schools
- Countering Sexual Harassment in ACT Public Schools
- Suspension, Exclusion and Transfers in ACT Public Schools
- Providing Safe Schools Policy P-12
- Keeping Children Safe in Cyberspace Guide
- The Code of Conduct for Public Schools

These policies and documents have been developed in accordance with *The National Safe Schools Framework*, which was developed by The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in 2002 and are reviewed and distributed by the ACT Safe Schools Taskforce. The *National Safe Schools Framework* is due for review later in 2010. ACT policies will be updated in order to reflect any changes made to this National document.

The Safe Schools Taskforce was created to ensure that the ACT remained a national leader in tackling school related bullying and that all ACT schools dealt with bullying issues in the same manner. The ACT Government's Safe Schools Taskforce includes representatives of ACT Policing, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Association, the ACT Principals' Association, Canberra Preschools Society, the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union, and the ACT Department of Education and Training. It also includes representatives of Catholic systemic schools and independent schools to ensure the best ideas across the three education sectors are shared and used for the benefit of all students.



At the start of 2010 a sub-group of the Safe Schools Taskforce was formed to specifically consider issues surrounding cyber-bullying and cyber-safety. This sub-group is investigating opportunities to hold an ACT cyber-safety forum in 2011. This forum will involve students from all public, private and independent schools, and include students, teachers, parents and members of organisations such as the Federal Police.

Consistency in response to incidents of cyber-bullying will be reinforced nationally through the development of the new Australian Curriculum, with greater consistency between states regarding what is taught. ICT will make up one of ten capabilities that will be addressed in all key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum, and will include aspects of cyber-safety and cyber-bullying.

### **Information and Communication Technology in Libraries**

#### ***Community Access with ACT Libraries***

The ACT Department of Territory and Municipal Services operates the nine public libraries, two mobile libraries, a Home Library Service, and the ACT Heritage Library as the ACT Library and Information Service (ACTLIS). ACTLIS forms part of the extensive network of libraries in Australia where people of all ages, including children, access the internet and online resources.

The ACT Government provides free internet access in its libraries promoting community access to ensure access to information. Community use of the internet services of the libraries is high and a project has just commenced to provide wireless access in the public libraries, in addition to the fixed computers. Increasingly ACTLIS is providing access to online information and services, assisting new users of the technology and the most vulnerable in society to access these online services. ACTLIS bases its policies on the right of each member of society to know about the world around them and to seek information on any topic.

In regard to the Library Service, InTACT provides an access policy that users are required to click on before they can use the terminals in the library. InTACT also has installed on library computers an Internet Blocking facility called ContentKeeper that prevents access to a range of sites identified in the Blacklist maintained by the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

ACTLIS libraries place computers in areas where there is a balance between privacy and supervision. Library staff uphold the library's policies on appropriate use and educate all users, specifically parents, on cyber-safety activities that they can adopt. Such education is the same for the online environment as for the book collection, where parents are encouraged to supervise their children's selection of appropriate hard copy reading materials.



ACTLIS is planning a series of cyber-safety programmes for parents in the near future to ensure that parents can manage access whilst enabling their children to make best use of the cyber world.

### ***Supporting a Safe Online Environment***

Public libraries such as ACTLIS generally have over 50 per cent of their community as registered members. This does not include the many families who borrow on one card, or people who use the library as a community space. Public libraries offer a powerful market penetration for education and information programmes to increase the level of skill and knowledge regarding safe internet use. There are public libraries around the country already fulfilling the role of access points and educators for the community, and they can be tapped into easily for making quick and effective progress.

In providing access to information and the Internet it is important, in particular to those who are not familiar with online and networking tools, to be educated and informed. Providing information forms part of the ACT Government commitment to facilitate provision of education for children, young people, parents, teachers, librarians, and others in positions of responsibility, to ensure they know how to use these technologies to safely access information and to connect socially.

In the context of the Libraries, it is important that schools, parents and the broader community work together with a consistent message. Education of the broad community, with a special focus on trusted professionals, will enable parents and children to operate in the online world safely. School and Public Librarians could be considered as early adopters of such initiatives.

The Internet Use Policy for ACTLIS recognises the role of parents in supervising children in the library generally and online access in the library specifically. It is important that parents see themselves as central to their children's cyber-safety in the same way as they are responsible for their safety in other contexts. Addressing the potential lack of parental knowledge and skill in the online environment needs to take place to enable them to fulfil this role. In the ACT parents sign a declaration that they understand and uphold the policies of ACTLIS when they join their children up as members of the library. However, additional explanation and support may be appropriate in some circumstances.

### **Interjurisdiction Cooperation**

The ACT, through the Standing Committee of Attorneys General (SCAG), has discussed the work being done by a number of different bodies throughout Australia to combat the growth of cyber crime. In recognition of the complex nature and affects

on a broad range of public and private sectors stakeholders across all jurisdictions, SCAG Ministers agreed to the creation of a National Cyber Crime Working Group on 7 May 2010. The purpose of the Working Group will be to facilitate a co-ordinated response to this important issue.