



Executive summary

SAFT – Safety Awareness Fact and Tools



National Centre for Technology in Education
Ionad Náisiúnta don Teicneolaíocht san Oideachas

Children's study – investigating online behaviour.



May 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Internet is one of the most powerful pedagogical tools available to educationalists in recent years as teachers are offered endless opportunities to improve the learning experience of their students. However, in promoting the positive pedagogical benefit of the Internet teachers must also be aware of the downside risks associated with this medium.

The underpinning objective of the SAFT project is to highlight the potential uses of the Internet and also to raise awareness amongst target audiences of the risks associated with the virtual world. In order to truly understand how children are using the Internet it is necessary to investigate children's current online activities. The justification for the SAFT comparative study was to gain knowledge on children's online risk behaviour and information needs in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Ireland. The findings of this survey will be the foundation for all project outputs such as the SAFT Education Programme and Safer Internet Guidelines, which will be promoted in all partner countries.

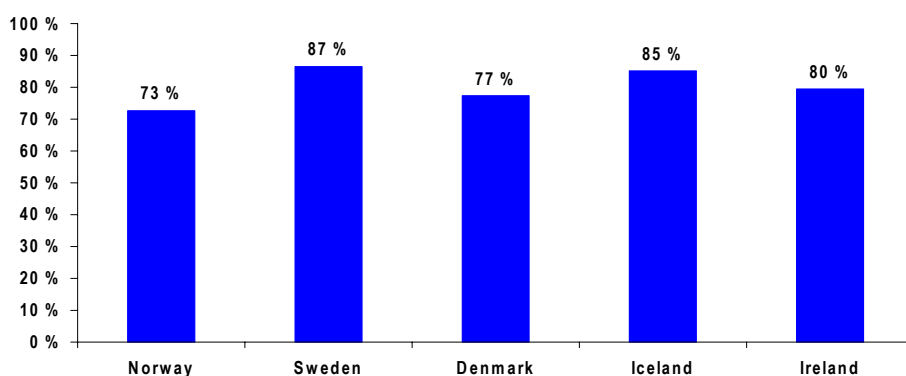
In Ireland the NCTE was responsible for all fieldwork and data collection. MMI (Media Marketing Institute) in Norway was the responsible partner for data analysis in all partner countries. 732 children from 18 Irish primary and post-primary schools participated in the study. The participant children aged between 9-16 were from both urban and rural schools. This sample represents a total base population of 530,000 children.

Technology and Internet use

The use of computers appears to be as popular with Irish children as it is amongst children from the Nordic countries. A high number of children aged 9-16 appear to be using computers with 95 per cent of children in Ireland stating that they use either a PC or other computer. Internet penetration is also quite high in Ireland with 80 per cent of Irish children stating they have a connection at home compared to 73 per cent of children in Norway and 77 per cent of Danish children. However, fewer Irish children are using the Internet regularly with only 12 per cent of Irish children stating they use the Internet at least once a day compared to 46 per cent of Swedish children who admit to using the Internet every day.

Do you have an Internet connection at home?

Base – Children who have a PC at home



In Ireland, most children use the Internet for;

- Games 51 per cent
- Surfing for fun 46 per cent
- Downloading music 42 per cent
- Getting information other than homework 41 per cent

Comments: *Despite equally high levels of Internet penetration Irish children appear to use the Internet less frequently compared to the Nordic countries. Only 12 per cent of Irish children claimed to use the Internet every day while 46 per cent of Swedish children claim to log on daily. There are significant differences between gender and age in what the children use the Internet for.*

Information and homework

What is your experience with using the Internet for schoolwork?

Base – children who use the Internet

	Norway	Denmark	Iceland	Ireland	Sweden
Schoolwork improves	44%	45%	41%	35%	53%
Schoolwork does not improve	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Makes no difference	18%	21%	11%	18%	17%
I do not use the Internet for school work	16%	18%	24%	24%	13%
Do not know	22%	25%	15%	7%	12%

35 per cent of Irish children believe their homework improves when using the Internet. This compares to 46 per cent of the total sample with 53 per cent of Swedish children stating their schoolwork improves. Interestingly the top three sources used by Irish children when doing homework are:

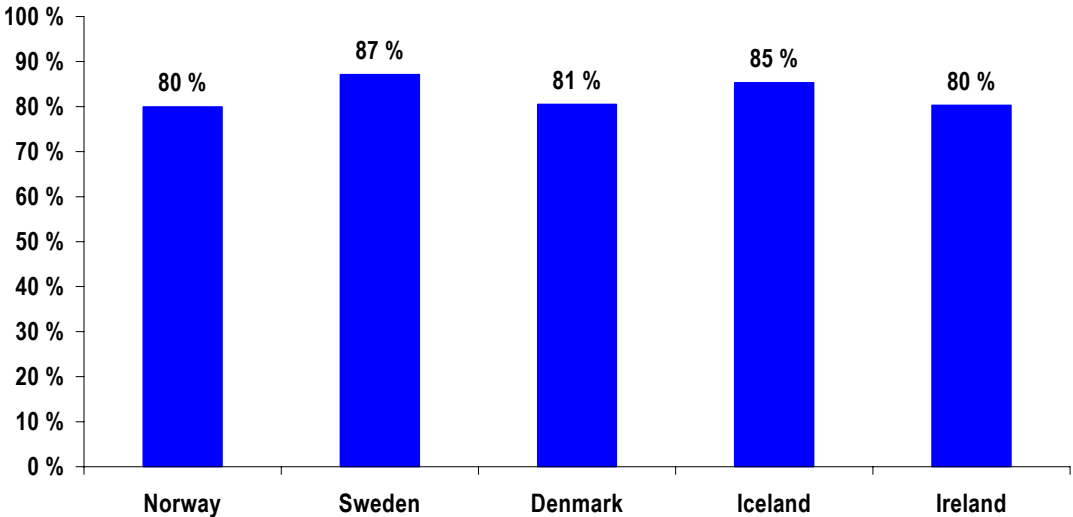
- Books from school 42 per cent.
- Books from home 41 per cent.
- Books from library 39 per cent.

Comments: *Books are still the main source of information used by Irish children when doing homework.*

Parental supervision

Do you ever use the Internet at home?

Base – Children who use the Internet



80 per cent of Irish children using the Internet have a connection at home. Findings show a similar trend in the Nordic countries. As expected, parental supervision of the Internet is far better with smaller children (9-12 years) compared with older children (13-16 years). 67 per cent of Irish parents check in on their children when they surf compared to 44 per cent in Sweden. Internet safety appears to be more of a priority in Irish homes compared to the Nordic countries. There are certainly more rules associated with Internet use in Irish homes as illustrated clearly in the following table.

Which of the following rules regarding Internet use are in place in your home?

Base – children who use the Internet

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Iceland	Ireland
I am not allowed to give out personal information	47 %	60 %	49 %	39 %	70 %
I am not allowed to meet in person someone I only know from the Internet	38 %	49 %	48 %	32 %	58 %
I am not allowed to visit certain sites	35 %	41 %	37 %	22 %	54 %
I have rules about how much time I can spend online	34 %	32 %	26 %	28 %	49 %
I have to tell my parents if I find something on the Internet that makes me feel uncomfortable	18 %	22 %	23 %	12 %	27 %
I am not allowed to talk to strangers in chat rooms	17 %	15 %	11 %	18 %	46 %

Comments: *Irish parents supervise children's online activities more so than in the Nordic countries.*

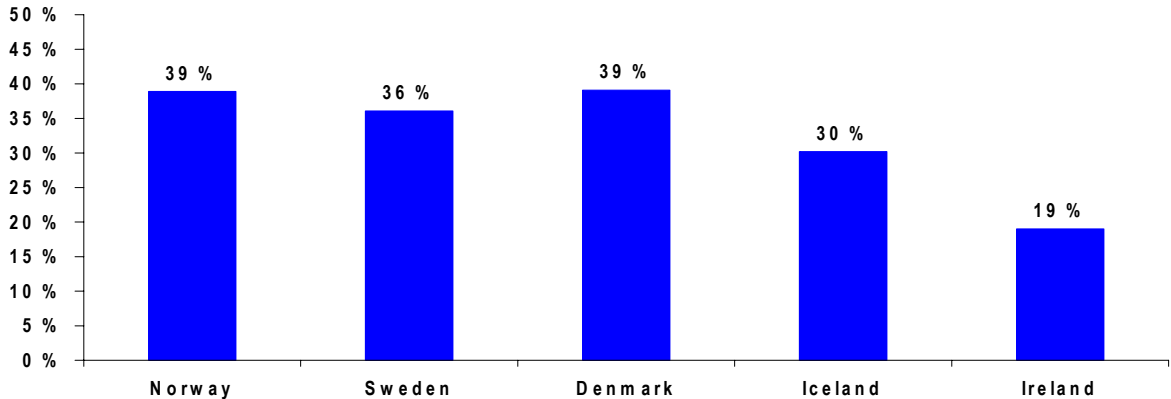
Disclosing personal information

The most common rule for children using the Internet is "not to give out personal information" with 70 per cent of Irish children stating it was an actual rule in their home. Passwords, photographs of themselves and parent's names are considered by children to be the most sensitive information to submit on the Internet. Most children are worried about being contacted by someone they don't know when submitting personal information, particularly girls. 19 per cent of Irish children who

have chatted on the Internet met a person online who has asked them to disclose personal information. Most children ignore or give false information to anyone asking them to disclose personal information.

Have you been invited to a face-to-face meeting?

Base: Have chatted on the Internet

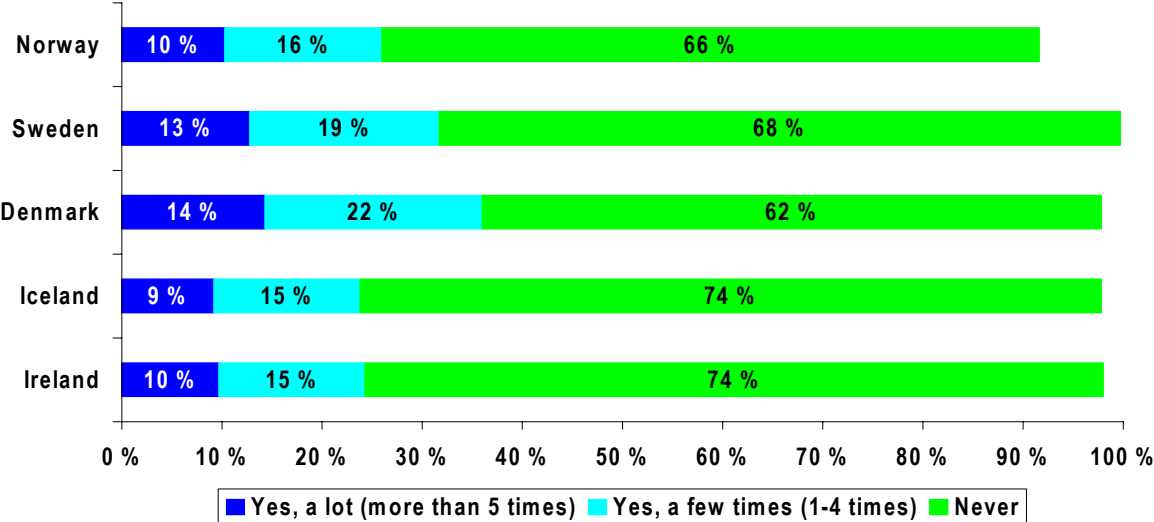


Comments: *Girls are more conscious than boys of being contacted by strangers on the Internet when submitting personal information. Children in Ireland are less likely than their Nordic counterparts to meet someone on the Internet who asks for this information.*

Adult material on the Web

Have you ever received unwanted sexual comments on the Internet?

Base – children who use the Internet



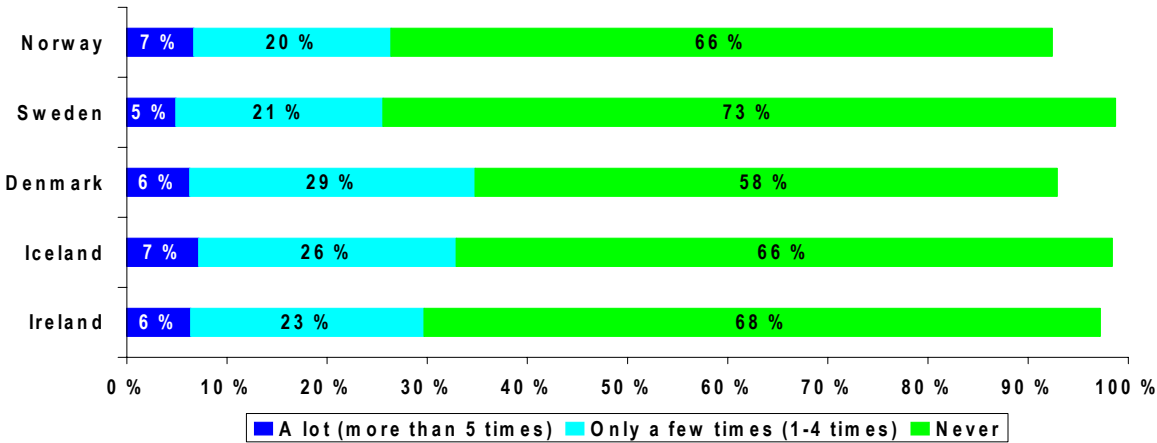
25 per cent of Irish children claim to have received unwanted sexual comments on the Internet. 35 per cent of Irish children stated they had accidentally ended up in a website with naked people with 22 per cent claiming to have visited these sites on purpose.

Comments: *In Ireland, fewer children have received unwanted sexual comments or visited porn sites compared to children from the Nordic countries. 40 per cent of Irish children will tell a friend if they visit a pornographic website. When asked how they felt about visiting a site like this 29 per cent of Irish children stated they “didn’t think too much about it”, 19 per cent stated “it was funny” while 23 per cent of Irish children stated “it was cool”.*

Violent material

How often have you accidentally ended up in a website with violent and gruesome pictures?

Base – children who use the Internet



34 per cent of children using the Internet have either accidentally or on purpose ended up on a violent web site. Most children ended up on these sites by typing the incorrect address or being told by friends. Most children didn’t think too much about visiting a site like this and tend to either ignore the site or tell a friend.

Comments: *In Ireland visiting violent web sites is just as common as in the Nordic countries. Most children don't think too much about it while Irish children tend to find these sites funny or cool. This is especially true for boys.*

Hateful websites

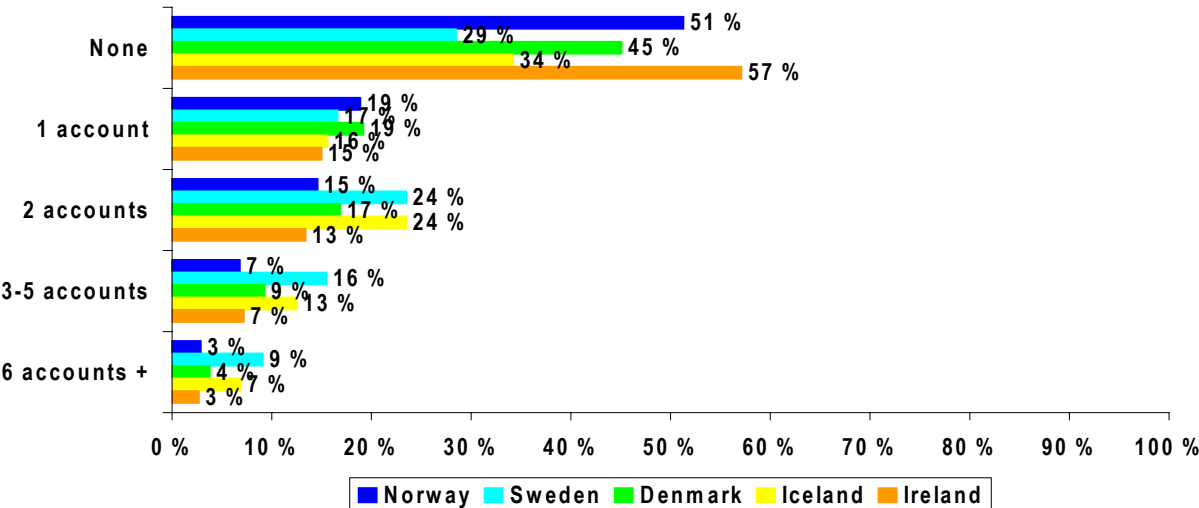
24 per cent of Irish respondents stated they have either accidentally or on purpose ended up on a hateful web site. Most of these children didn't think too much about visiting a site like this. Usually they ignored the site or never went back to it. 9 per cent of Irish children who use the Internet stated they have posted a comment online that was hateful towards a person or a group of people

Comments: *1 out of 4 children using the Internet have visited a hateful website. Older boys tend to be the most frequent visitors to these sites.*

Email accounts

How many email accounts do you have today?

Base: Children who use the Internet



38 per cent of Irish children using the Internet stated they have an email account. Most children use email to communicate with friends or family. 14 per cent of children

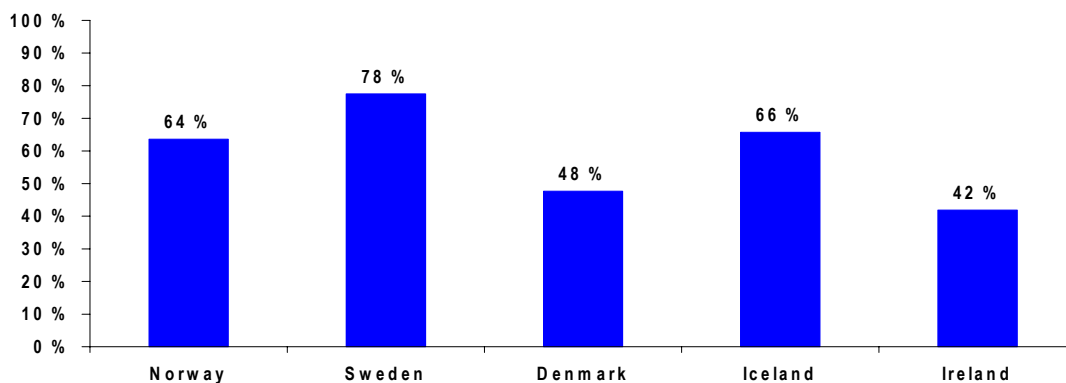
claim to have received an email that bothered or frightened them however; most children will delete these emails immediately.

Comments: In Ireland *children have fewer email accounts compared to the Nordic countries, particularly Sweden.*

Chatting and Instant Messaging

Have you ever chatted on the Internet?

Base – children who use the Internet



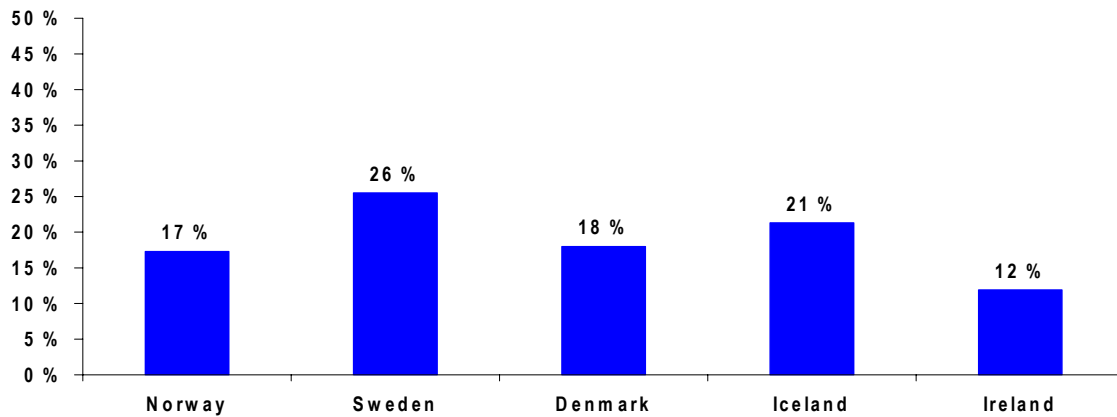
42 per cent of Irish children using the Internet stated they chatted online compared to 78 per cent of Swedish children. Most children visit the moderated teen chat rooms, however, 23 per cent of Irish children stated they visited chat rooms for adults of eighteen or older.

Comment: *In Ireland chatting online is less common than in the Nordic countries.*

Face-to-face meetings

Have you ever met anyone in real life that you first met on the Internet?

Base – children who have chatted on the Internet



12 per cent of Irish chat users have met in real life a person who they first chatted with on the Internet. In 2 per cent of these cases the person who introduced himself/herself as a child, turned out to be an adult. 53 per cent of Irish children said they brought a friend to these meetings. 69 per cent of Irish children had a really good time at these meetings. However, only 18 per cent of Irish children who attended a face-to-face meeting said they told an adult if something “bad” happened.

Comments: *Face-to face meetings are less common in Ireland due to less chatting compared to Nordic countries. Most of the time the children have a good time at the meetings.*

Internet education and safety

Irish children have received more Internet safety education at school compared to children from the Nordic countries. 51 per cent of Irish students who had received education on how to use the Internet stated they had received instructions on the safe use of the Internet. As indicated in the table below Irish children have a higher level of awareness of the key Internet safety guidelines compared to the Nordic children.

Which of the following Internet safety guidelines have you heard of?

Base – Total sample of respondents

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Iceland	Ireland
Never give out your address	61 %	70 %	65 %	62 %	83 %
Never arrange to meet a stranger	55 %	62 %	64 %	58 %	81 %
Do not download illegal material	43 %	46 %	57 %	35 %	57 %
Do not respond to nasty messages	47 %	48 %	48 %	40 %	64 %
Do not go to adult sites	38 %	55 %	21 %	53 %	63 %
Never give out your email address	27 %	21 %	25 %	34 %	52 %

Findings indicate that there is a high focus on Internet education in Irish schools. 50 per cent of Irish children stated that they had received instruction on how to connect to the Internet at school and 34 per cent of Irish children stated that it was their teacher who taught them how to use the Internet. Children from the Nordic countries

tend to explore the Internet on their own more so than Irish children. They will also talk to their friends more about their online activities with 54 per cent of Swedish children stating it was their friends who taught them about the Internet.

67 per cent of Irish children have received education in school on how to use the Internet. The most common Internet education received is instruction on safe use of Internet. The Internet safety guidelines that most Irish children have been exposed to are:

- Never give out your address 83 per cent
- Never arrange to meet anyone 81 per cent

To surmise, most children receive their Internet safety guidelines either at home or in school however 48 per cent of children stated that school was their preferred source for receiving Internet safety information. Therefore it is imperative that schools remain proactive in generating awareness of the Internet downsides.

Comments: *Internet education is far more extensive in Ireland compared to the Nordic countries. Irish children are more aware of Internet safety guidelines than their Nordic counterparts as more Irish children say they received education at school on the safe use of the Internet.*

CONCLUSIONS

Irish children are using the Internet less frequently than children from the Nordic countries. However, findings indicate that there is a higher level of Internet safety awareness among children in Ireland. Education on safer Internet issues appears to be much more common in Ireland. Fewer Irish children appear to engage in online chat however most students who attend a face-to-face meeting with someone they met in a chat room stated that they enjoyed the experience. In some few cases children stated that they had been threatened or physically hurt by someone they met

online. In these cases children generally don't tell adults which must be considered as a potential problem.

The findings from the SAFT survey indicate the need for continuous work to be carried out ensuring Internet safety for students and young people. In order to succeed in online child protection parents and teachers must continue to work together and accept a shared responsibility in protecting children in the virtual world. Increasing awareness of the potential downsides of the Internet amongst all stakeholders will ensure safer Internet for all concerned.

The preferred source for children receiving information on Internet safety is school. The results from the survey indicate that schools are an efficient channel to raise awareness on Internet safety issues amongst children in Ireland. It is imperative that we build on children's knowledge base of Internet safety guidelines and remain proactive in identifying the risks posed to children with the advent of new emerging technologies.

Key Findings

- Irish children are using the Internet less frequently than children from the Nordic countries however findings indicate that there is a higher level of Internet safety awareness among children in Ireland.
- Internet education is far more extensive in Ireland compared to the Nordic countries
- 80 per cent of Irish children say they have an Internet connection at home
- 12 per cent of Irish children claim to use the Internet every day
- Books are the main source of information used by Irish children when doing homework.
- 35 per cent of Irish children believe their homework improves when doing homework.
- Girls are more conscious than boys of being contacted by strangers on the Internet when submitting personal information.
- Irish children visit adult pornographic web sites far less than children from the Nordic countries.
- 42 per cent of Irish children who visit pornographic websites find them either “cool” or “funny”.
- Irish children have fewer email accounts compared to children from the Nordic countries.
- Chatting on the Internet is less common in Ireland than in the Nordic countries. Only 46 per cent of Irish children say they use chat rooms while 78 per cent Swedish children engage in online chat.

- 12 per cent of Irish chat users have met in real life a person they first chatted with on the Internet.