

MLC's Position - Public Consultation on Internet Parental Controls

The Media Literacy Council is supportive of the Media Development Authority's efforts to facilitate adoption of Internet parental control tools as we believe that it should be a priority to keep young children safer on the Internet. Internet parental control tools, such as filters, are especially useful when children are increasingly accessing the Internet at younger ages and need a safe and healthy environment to explore the digital playground. In today's networked and "always on" society, parental control tools like filters can make it just that much more difficult for children to access content, by accident or otherwise, that is not appropriate for them.

In terms of enhancement to the current subscription process, the Council is of the view that "Option 2: Opt-out" or the "default-on" mode is most effective in protecting young children, and that Internet parental control tools should be provided at the network level to enable easy activation. With this approach, we are raising the level of protection for our young ones by removing all the possible obstacles that may impede a parent's ability to use filters as an option. For instance, there need not be concern about IASPs' failure to market the service, a point highlighted in other reviews. Neither need there be concern by parents who are not tech savvy, or who lack the awareness or resources to activate filters. In tandem, the opt-out process for adults or parents who do not wish to have their content filtered should be seamless and convenient.

We agree with MDA's recommendation that cost should not be a deterrent for parents who wish to activate filters. We feel strongly that it is the IASPs' social responsibility to at least provide a basic version of such tools at no charge. We think a basic version is one that should minimally filter sites that have content considered harmful or objectionable to young children. We think that such content would include sexually explicit material and violent content. For parents who would like to activate other functions like time-management or monitoring tools, we think it would be reasonable to expect that add-on costs be layered by the IASPs accordingly.

We also agree with MDA that the IASPs should facilitate the installation or activation process for new, re-contracting and existing Internet subscribers.

However, we would like to stress that the usage of parental control tools is just one component to help create a safer Internet for the young ones. More importantly, the Council feels that parents should build trust and a healthy relationship with their children, and provide them with a positive home environment. We will also need to inculcate good values and a critical mindset in them – these are habits and skills that will equip our children to navigate through life, online or off. MLC has been actively reaching out to parents through our public education programmes, emphasizing such points and providing them with useful parenting tips that can help them to better guide their children's Internet usage.