

Press Releases - Internet Access for Schools - 03/04/00

Eoin Costello call for free Internet use for Irish classrooms. In Irish classrooms the current situation is unacceptable according to Mr. Costello. *"In schools around the country each school is allocated one hour's free access to the Internet per day totaling 180 hours per year. After that the school must pay. This forces schools to ration Internet use to one hour a day. In a school of 500-600 students this means an allocation of 30 seconds per student per day. Imagine trying to go into a library and try and research a school project in 30 seconds and being told that if you go over the 30 seconds the authorities will charge you for using library books. And this is happening in a country whose stated objective is to be ecommerce capital of Europe. If students don't have proper access to the Internet at a young age how can we expect them to excel at it in their adult lives?"*

"There are now 60,000 computers in Irish classrooms and every school has an Internet connection. This however does not give the full picture. Teacher training in the area of the Internet has fallen well behind what is necessary. Many schools do not have teachers who are conversant with the Internet." According to Mr. Costello "Many teachers I have spoken to say the students know far more

than they do about the Internet, a bit like the student teaching the master!"

The Minister for Education announced a major investment in funding the use of technology in schools in February of this year. He promised high speed Internet connection to every classroom. *"The ironic thing is that high-speed Internet connection is even more expensive than the use of standard phone lines. Therefore the school's meagre free hour will turn into a free half hour!"* According to Mr. Costello the phone charges for peak time Internet use is forcing to schools to severely limit use of the Internet by students. The spending by the Minister of £81 million on hardware and software for schools will be largely redundant if the teachers haven't been properly trained and the students are not allowed to access the Internet!

Eircom gives schools a one-hour credit and a special rate of 75p per hour after the credit runs out. According to Mr. Costello the INTO are deeply unhappy with the current situation. The limit on access attacks those children whose family cannot afford to have a computer at home with Internet access. According to Mr. Costello *"I believe the current situation in Irish schools is perpetuating the growing division in our society between those that are information technology enabled and those that are not."*