

INTRODUCTION

As an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) passionate about better protecting children and improving their online experiences, we are hopeful that 2024 can be the starting point for a great year of change.

The UK Government has recently passed into law the historic Online Safety Act, with the express intention of putting child safety at the forefront of these ambitious reforms. However, despite the fact the Online Safety Act is now on the statute books, we still have some way to go in finishing the job.

Our symposium was held on Safer Internet Day 2024 and facilitated by our Secretariat, the UK Safer Internet Centre and the Internet Watch Foundation, of which I am a proud, long-standing, Champion.

We heard from providers of online safety tech companies, designing technology at the forefront

of reducing incidents of child sexual abuse, hate speech, and academics researching this growing and evolving sector as industry responds to the regulations it is now facing.

We also heard from parents who sadly lost children who came to harm, in part, due to the content they had seen online. Both the children and bereaved parents sadly told us that little real change had been seen in their online experiences - yet.

As an All-Party Parliamentary Group, we will keep a laser-like focus on ensuring that real lasting change happens for these brilliant children and young people, and in memory of all those who have sadly been taken too soon.

Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP

This is what we learned, and what we recommend Government does to build upon the recently passed legislation >>>

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- + **Children are still continuing to have experiences online that are not appropriate for their age.** Many spoke of being bombarded by advertising, which often contains adverts for products that are not appropriate for their age.
- + **Awareness of the Online Safety Act amongst children and young people and their parents remains low.** Only 32% of children have heard of it and only 42% of their parents, with parents in particular calling for more accessible resources.
- + Children and parents explained there were **challenges with getting content removed once it was reported to companies.** They noted that access to harmful content was still proliferating.
- + Children explained that they were the generation growing up with the internet. **80% of children want to be involved in shaping their online experiences and should be listened to. Parents and children want to feed into Ofcom's**

consultation on online safety guidance but the process to do so is overly complex, opaque and prohibitively bureaucratic.

- + **Safety technology does currently exist to solve some of the problems online.** A particular example that was given was the maturity of the Age Verification sector, which is maturing well, **but it is not currently being implemented by companies.**
- + **The UK has a strong safety tech sector which needs to be nurtured and grown further** to meet the demands of the UK's regulation in this sector and assist with company compliance.
- + Safety Tech companies commented that it was **important that Ofcom was able to effectively evaluate the accuracy and efficacy of new technologies being developed to tackle online harms.** This includes a human rights approach, but freedom of speech should not necessarily mean freedom of reach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

APPG on
Online Safety
on Social Media



Our five point plan for making children safe online:

1

More should be done to promote awareness of the Online Safety Act in schools, especially by trusted third parties, with easily accessible information provided to schools.

2

Children should have a voice in designing the rules of the road for technology companies. Ofcom's current consultation is deeply complex and much more needs to be done to put children at the heart of the implementation.

3

We recommend that telecom providers and device manufacturers verify the age of their users and issue clear, simple, online safety advice and information about parental controls.

4

The Department for Education should, as part of its review into keeping children safe in education, think about introducing classes for parents on how to keep their children safe online.

5

Children's experiences should be age appropriate. Ofcom should consider age gating content and utilising age verification, estimation, and assurance technologies so children can have a tailored experience online - in much the same way they do with broadcasting and film regulation today.



The outcomes from this symposium will be raised directly with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt. Hon. Michelle Donelan MP and Ofcom CEO, Dame Melanie Dawes.

We will also share the document with all those who attended our symposium, including Robin Walker MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee who was looking for recommendations for his current screen time inquiry.

We also agreed to invite Ofcom CEO, Melanie Dawes to attend a future meeting of the APPG, which it was agreed we would hold in partnership with the Media APPG and its Chair Andy Carter MP.

For more information on the APPG on Online Safety on Social Media, please visit: socialmediaappg.org