



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Appendix 2b

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18 November 2024

Councillor Harry Catherall
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Our Ref: MC2024/15230/NR

Dear Councillor Catherall,

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 September to the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, regarding the Online Safety Act. I am responding as the Minister for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety and apologise for the delay in you receiving a response.

The government is committed to tackling all forms of hate crime. We have robust legislation in place to deal with threatening, abusive, or harassing behaviour and incitement to hatred, including laws to tackle perpetrators who stir up racial and religious hatred and hatred based on sexual orientation.

Hate crime is listed as a “priority offence” in the Online Safety Act 2023 (“the act”). These priority offences ensure that companies and the regulator tackle the most serious illegal content where risk of harm is greatest or children are at risk so that regulation has the most impact. Under new legal duties, technology companies will need to put in place systems and processes to proactively prevent, identify, and remove priority illegal content and activity online. This includes taking proactive measures to reduce the likelihood of the most serious content from appearing on platforms in the first place. They will also need to have systems and process to take down other illegal content when they become aware of it. This means less illegal content, including content that incites hate on the grounds of race, religion, or sexual orientation, will appear online and, when it does, it will be removed more effectively.

Under the act, companies will also be forced to take action against illegal misinformation and disinformation. This means they will be required to take steps to remove illegal disinformation if they become aware of it on their services. This includes the False Communications Offence, which captures communications where the sender knows information to be false but sends it intending to cause harm.

The government funds an online hate crime reporting portal that was designed so that victims of all types of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. The government also funds the National Online Hate Crime Hub which supports individual local police forces in dealing specifically with online hate crime, the Hub provides expert advice to police forces to support them in investigating these abhorrent offences.

Our immediate focus is getting the act implemented quickly and effectively, to ensure the protections it brings are put in place as soon as possible. It is right that the government continually assesses the law’s ability to keep up, especially where technology moves so fast, which is why there is a duty within the act to assess how the framework is minimising the risk of harm to UK citizens once the regime is in force. However, our message to social media companies remains clear: there is no need to wait, they can, and should, take immediate action to protect their users.



Making the internet safer requires a broad toolkit, using the act to ensure platforms take steps to minimise harmful content online, but also ensuring both children and adults have the knowledge and skills to navigate the online world. Media literacy, which includes understanding that online actions have offline consequences, being able to engage critically with online information, and being able to contribute to a respectful online environment, can help tackle a wide variety of online safety issues for all internet users, including children.

The act updated Ofcom's statutory duty to promote media literacy, placing targeted duties on the regulator to raise the public's awareness of the nature and impact of harmful content, misinformation and disinformation. These duties are already in force. Under the act, Ofcom is also required to pursue, commission, or encourage other organisations to deliver media literacy initiatives and activities.

The government has also established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review that will consider the key digital skills needed for future life, as well as the critical thinking skills needed to ensure children are resilient to misinformation and extremist content online.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Maggie Jones.

Baroness Maggie Jones
Minister for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety