



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

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Thank you for your correspondence regarding online safety. I am responding as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for AI and Online Safety.

Over the past few months, I have received a very high volume of correspondence on online safety, reflecting how many people care deeply about this rapidly evolving area. This means I have not been able to respond as quickly as I would like to individual correspondence, and I want to apologise for this.

Please be assured that your correspondence has been carefully considered by officials, and your views are valued. They will be taken into account as my officials continue to develop advice and policy in this area.

This letter covers the key topics raised with me and what action we have taken over the last few months and future steps we be taking to improve people's online experiences.

Online safety is a critically important issue, and this government is clear that everyone – especially children – should be able to enjoy the benefits of being online while being protected from harm. We know many parents, carers and members of the public are concerned about the risks people can face online, and we are committed to ensuring there are stronger protections in place.

Children's Online Safety:

The government has taken action to strengthen online safety protections, particularly for children. In the last 12 months, we have legislated to make content that encourages self-harm a priority offence under the Online Safety Act ('the act'). We have committed to require AI chatbots to protect users from illegal content. We have acted to ensure that, following the tragic death of a child, relevant data is automatically preserved so that bereaved families can get the answers they deserve.

Alongside this, we launched the '*You Won't Know Until You Ask*' campaign and the [Kids Online Safety website](#), providing parents and carers with practical support to talk to children about what they see online.

You may also be aware that we recently consulted on further measures to prepare children for the future in an age of rapid technological change.

On 15 June, the government published a progress statement on the consultation announcing that it will:

- Ban social media companies from providing their services to under-16s;
- Prevent under 16s from accessing harmful functions on other online services, including



gaming services;

- Require default restrictions for 16- and 17-year-olds from harmful functions;
- Prevent under-18s from accessing AI chatbot services that primarily offer sexualised content. Other AI chatbot services will not be able to offer children features that enable sexually explicit or sexual role-playing content;
- Give children access to more educational and positive content and experiences, both online and offline.

You can find more details on this announcement [here](#).

This followed the government announcing that we will become the first country in the world where it is impossible for children to take, share or view naked pictures on their devices.

We will continue to hold technology companies to account where they fall short, and ensure the internet is a space where children feel safe and respected.

We also know that a lot of young people feel socially isolated. To help address this, the government is currently investing over £3 billion in: building or refurbishing up to 250 youth centres; school sport; building new and upgraded grassroots sport facilities across the country; and saving more than 1000 arts venues, museums, libraries and heritage buildings from closure.

Violence Against Women and Girls:

Tackling violence against women and girls in all its forms, including online and technology-facilitated abuse, is a priority for this government and central to its mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. This abuse is abhorrent and should never be tolerated. Over recent months, the government has taken further steps to tackle violence against women and girls online, including legislating to make cyberflashing a priority offence under the act, criminalising the creation of intimate image abuse, banning so-called nudification apps, and requiring platforms to take down non-consensual intimate images within 48 hours of being reported.

The government has also required platforms to act faster to address strangulation pornography and pornography depicting adults role-playing as children. Through its Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, the government has set out further action, including launching a call for evidence to improve understanding of online misogynistic image-based abuse and strengthening media literacy to tackle misogynistic content.

The government has also called on all platforms to implement the measures recommended in Ofcom's guidance for ensuring '*A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls*'.

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP, has also written to Ofcom asking them to continue to implement the act at pace and effectively enforce its requirements to: protect children; address violence against women and girls; tackle the spread of harmful content online impacting our communities; and focus on other areas of illegal activity of deep concern to the public such as child sexual abuse material and online fraud and scams.

Social Cohesion:

While social media can play an important role in society, it is unacceptable that people use it to spread hate and threaten our communities.

The Online Safety Act lays the foundation for strong protections against illegal content and harmful material for children online, including some content that is extremist, hateful or can undermine social cohesion.

Services must take proactive steps to tackle certain forms of illegal content, including threats which are likely to stir up hatred based on race, religion or sexual orientation. This includes taking proportionate measures to ensure their algorithms do not promote this kind of material and acting swiftly to remove illegal material once they are aware of it.

Services that are likely to be accessed by children must also protect them from content that is legal but nonetheless harmful to children, including content that is abusive or hateful. These services must put in place measures like filtering harmful content from children's algorithmic feeds. From Spring next year, social media companies will be banned from offering their services to children under 16 years old.

Ofcom, as the independent regulator for online safety, has strong powers to hold platforms to account where they fail to act. On 15 May, Ofcom announced that it had secured [commitments from X](#) to improve the speed at which it reviews and removes illegal and terror content, and to provide regular performance data to enable regulatory oversight.

The government is also taking broader action to address the conditions that allow harmful content to spread online. In March, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published '*Protecting What Matters*', a cross-government action plan that sets out the initial steps the government will take towards more confident, cohesive and resilient communities.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has committed to a range of actions in '*Protecting What Matters*', including increasing transparency about how online platforms operate, reviewing crisis response powers in the act, and exploring options to better understand online hate. We are also considering measures relating to tackling both the algorithmic amplification and monetisation of harmful content, and ways of improving the evidence base on online hatred and division.

Regulation alone is not enough; children and adults must also have the skills to navigate online services safely. That is why, in March, DSIT published a cross-government Media Literacy Action Plan, setting clear priorities for the next three years, including preparing children and young people for a digital future.

Alongside this, as I have set out, we have launched practical support for families. The '*You Won't Know Until You Ask*' campaign and Kids Online Safety website provide parents and carers with simple, accessible tools to build children's critical thinking and resilience to misinformation. We are now considering options to extend and adapt the campaign with a focus on mis- and disinformation that undermine social cohesion and democracy.

The government is resolute in confronting foreign interference online. We continue to work together closely to prevent attempts by hostile actors targeting the UK to threaten our national security, distort our democratic processes, or sow division in our communities. Through our whole-of-government approach, DSIT is the department responsible for the UK's policy on disinformation aimed at UK users online, supporting Foreign Office and Home Office led work on countering information operations directed at UK interests abroad and state threats respectively.

The government will not hesitate to act where credible threats are identified, using the full range of tools available under the National Security Act, the Online Safety Act, and other relevant UK law. The Online Safety Act requires social media companies to tackle online mis-

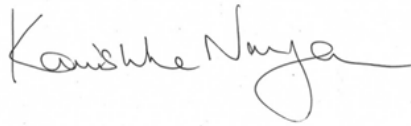


and disinformation proportionately, by focusing on the worst kinds - that which is illegal or harmful to children. State-sponsored disinformation is illegal under the Foreign Interference Offence, which is a priority offence under the Online Safety Act. Platforms must proactively prevent users encountering foreign interference content and remove it swiftly.

You may also find it helpful to read more about the government's approach to the Online Safety Act, alongside useful information about Ofcom, the independent regulator for online safety [here](#). You can also write to Ofcom directly here: contact@ofcom.org.uk.

Thank you again for taking the time to write. I hope this letter provides clarity and reassurance that the government is committed to improving people's online experiences ensuring they are safe, fulfilling, and empowering, while protecting users' rights, including freedom of expression and privacy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kanishka Narayan', written in a cursive style.

Kanishka Narayan MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the
Department for Science, Innovation & Technology