HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Briefing

Technology: Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People
Debate on 17 January 2019

Summary

This House of Lords Library Briefing has been prepared in advance of the debate due to take place on 17 January 2019 in the House of Lords on the motion moved by Baroness Kidron (Crossbench) that "this House takes note of the relationship between the use of digital technology and the health and wellbeing of children and young people".

With the development of new technology in recent years, most children and young people now use at least one form of technology every day. Activities include: using the internet to do homework; watching online content; and using social media platforms to communicate.

Increased ownership of personal devices such as smart phones, tablets and laptops has also affected how children and young people use technology, with concerns raised that their usage is becoming more private, and harder for parents to monitor.

These developments have raised questions about the impact of such use of technology on children and young people's health and wellbeing. In addition, internet safety has become an integral part of child safeguarding in the UK, with the Government announcing an aim to make it the safest place in the world for children and adults to be online.

This briefing provides an overview on some of the ways technology can affect the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It focuses on the issues of: cyberbullying; the use of social media; and screen time. In addition, it sets out the Government's policy relating to children and young people's safety and wellbeing online.

Nicole Winchester
10 January 2019

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1. Background

As a growing number of children and young people access the online world, and spend increasing amounts of time there, concern has increased about the potential effects on children and young people's health and wellbeing.

A 2017 literature review, carried out by the research group at the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), noted that the proportion of children aged 5 to 16 using the internet has reached about 94 percent.[1]

In addition, the review noted, the amount of time children spend online continues to rise steadily. The review highlighted risks that could be encountered online:

- one in ten children to one in five young teens say they encountered something worrying or nasty online in the past year;
- children's top worries are pornography and violence; they say they encounter these most often on video-sharing sites, followed by other websites, then social networking sites and games;
- children are also concerned about the levels of advertising online, their spending too much time online, inappropriate contacts, rumours and nastiness; and
- top parent concerns include online violence.[2]

In relation to the scale of the risks facing children online, the report argued:

> There has been little increase or decrease in online risk in recent years, although there are some indications of a rise in hate and self-harm content. It is not possible to determine whether the internet has increased the overall amount of risk children face as they grow up, or whether the internet instead provides a new location for risk experiences, but the nature of the internet itself surely alters and amplifies the consequences.[3]

The review identified cyberbullying, sexting and sexual harassment, online pornography, sexual solicitation online and radicalisation as specific online risks, concluding that "most research is on children's exposure to risk, with too little on which children come to harm and why, or what the long-term consequences are".[4]

The 2017 House of Lords Communications Committee report, *Growing Up with the Internet*, examined the impact that the internet had had on children's development, wellbeing and mental health, and highlighted several potential

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[1] UK Council for Child Internet Safety, *Children's Online Activities, Risks and Safety: A Literature Review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group*, October 2017, p 2.
[2] ibid.
[3] ibid, pp 2–3.
[4] ibid, p 3.

areas of concern which had:

> […] centred on areas such as cyberbullying and access to unsuitable content, but there are other emerging areas of concern. Parent Zone told us that parents regularly worry about "the commercialisation of childhood, the wholesale capturing of children's data and excessive screen time". Our witnesses also highlighted concern about the lack of regulation, the need to protect children's rights and the importance of encouraging online parenting.[5]

More recently, a June 2018 report by 5Rights, a foundation which seeks to "articulate the rights of children in the digital environment", found that the technology industry was using "persuasive design" practices "in order to deliberately keep children online to collect their data for commercial gain".[6]

The range of topics relating to the impact of digital technologies on the health and wellbeing of both children and young people is therefore vast. In considering this issue, this briefing provides an overview of some of the topics identified in both reports, namely: cyberbullying; the use of social media; and the impact of screen time. In addition, it sets out the Government's policy relating to children and young people's safety and wellbeing online.

2. Cyberbullying

2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Cyberbullying

Public Health England (PHE) has defined cyberbullying as "a form of bullying which is carried out using electronic communication, including through the internet, social media and mobile phones".[7] It can take the form of many behaviours, including: harmful messages; impersonating another person online; sharing private messages; uploading photographs or videos of another person that leads to shame and embarrassment; creating hate websites/social media pages; and excluding people from online groups.

Commenting on the differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, PHE has stated:

> Traditional forms of bullying and cyberbullying are related, with very few victims of bullying subjected to cyberbullying alone. However, research has shown cyberbullying to have effects on health outcomes independent of the effects of traditional bullying.[8]

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[5] House of Lords Communications Committee, *Growing up with the Internet*, 21 March 2017, HL Paper 130 of session 2016–17, p 13.
[6] 5Rights, '*Tech's Exploitative Relationship to Children is a Public Health Issue*', June 2018.
[7] Public Health England, *Cyberbullying: An Analysis of Data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey for England, 2014*, June 2017, p 6.
[8] ibid.

For example, with ownership of mobile phones and internet enabled devices widespread among 12- to 15-year olds—62% of this age group in the UK own a smart phone—PHE has argued that "the opportunity for bullying to take place is not limited by geography, time, or face to face contact".[9] In addition, it has asserted that high ownership rates means that the number of bystanders who are able to view or participate in bullying through online networks is increased. The issue has also been raised in evidence given to the Children's Society by young people. The problem of crowd mentality in particular, where groups of children and young people share or like content made to isolate someone, was highlighted.[10]

In oral evidence to the Children's Society, Emily Frith, from the Education Policy Institute, drew attention to the difficulty parents had in spotting and stopping cyberbullying, noting:

> Two of the most marked changes have been the development of smartphones and the use of instant messaging—these are more private, making it harder for parents to monitor.[11]

Public Health England also drew attention to this factor, stating:

> The ease through which this form of bullying can occur can also make it invisible to others, meaning that supportive peers and adults may be less aware than in cases of traditional bullying. An EU-based study has supported this argument, contending that smartphones are associated with more online activity, but also fewer parental restrictions and regulation of use than older technologies, such as TV.[12]

2.2 Relationship Between Cyberbullying and Poor Health

Focusing on the link between bullying and poor health outcomes, PHE has contended that longitudinal research has demonstrated "the causal relationship between experiencing bullying and poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, with potentially long-term impacts into adulthood".[13] However, bullying is not only felt by the victims: "those who are both bullies and victims (bully/victims) are likely to display the worst health and social outcomes".

An inquiry by the Children's Society has also highlighted the negative health impacts of cyberbullying.[14] It found that children and young people who are currently experiencing a mental health problem are more than three times

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[9] Public Health England, *Cyberbullying: An Analysis of Data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey for England, 2014*, June 2017, p 6.
[10] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry Report*, 2018, p 30.
[11] ibid, p 13.
[12] Public Health England, *Cyberbullying: An Analysis of Data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey for England, 2014*, June 2017, p 6.
[13] ibid, p 7.
[14] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry Report*, 2018.

likely to have been bullied online in the last year.[15] The charity also argued that although offline bullying remains the most common form of bullying, "it is clear that cyberbullying is distinct and potent, particularly due to its potential to be relentless". The report noted that, in an online environment, a bully can attack their victim 24 hours a day.[16]

In addition, the inquiry reported that 83 percent of young people said social media companies should do more to tackle cyberbullying on their platforms, with many feeling that the onus to act is on the person experiencing cyberbullying.[17] A perceived lack of consequences for perpetrators was also a theme identified by the charity, with young people reporting that the penalties which exist for actions offline, do not exist for behaviour online. In addition, the inquiry found that 82 percent of young people thought social media companies should do more to promote mental health. However, the report also stated:

> Throughout the course of the inquiry, we heard a number of examples from social media companies about positive initiatives they have established to respond to abusive content online, such as cyberbullying, as well as promoting the mental health of their users.[18]

2.3 Statistics: Prevalence of Cyberbullying

There is evidence which suggests cyberbullying is on the rise. Childline counselling services have reported a 12 percent increase in the number of cases related to cyberbullying in the 2016/17 financial year compared to the previous year.[19] In addition, the NSPCC has said the number of young people experiencing bullying online has increased by 88 percent in five years.

Public Health England's 2017 report summarises data on cyberbullying from the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Study for England, 2014.* The data draws on responses from 5,335 students aged between 11 and 15 years who completed the survey. The key findings of the report included:

- In the 2014 HBSC study, 17.9% of 11- to 15-year olds reported being cyberbullied in the two months prior to being surveyed.
- Girls were twice as likely as boys to report being cyberbullied.
- Cyberbullying increased with age for both boys and girls; the reported prevalence rates of cyberbullying at age 15 were almost double those for 11-year olds.
- Cyberbullying is associated with socio-economic status. Young people from more affluent families were more likely to report being victims of cyberbullying.

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[15] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry Report*, 2018, p 5.
[16] ibid, p 29.
[17] ibid, pp 5–6.
[18] ibid p 5.
[19] ibid, p 30.

- Young people who reported positive family communication, especially with a father, were less likely to experience cyberbullying.
- Positive perceptions of the school environment were associated with lower levels of cyberbullying.
- Cyberbullying was associated with feelings of safety in young people's local neighbourhood.[20]

3. Social Media

3.1 Children and Young People's Use of Social Media

Children and young people's usage of social media is both increasing and evolving.[21] Used for fast, low cost and hidden communication by its users, social media usage by children and young people can, the Children's Society observes, be "extremely challenging for adults to monitor".[22] This issue is exacerbated by the increase in children and young people owning personalised devices (such as mobile phones and tablets). In addition, the charity cites statistics released by Ofcom which reported that 74% of 12- to 15-year olds have a profile on a social media platform. Focusing on younger age groups, it found that 3% of 5- to 7-year olds currently have an account, with the figure rising to 23% for 8- to 11-year olds.

The Children's Commissioner for England has found that the majority of 8- to 12-year olds used social media to play and for creative purposes.[23] However, when children reached year 7, the commissioner found that they began to look to social media for social validation and "demonstrated over-dependence on 'likes' and 'comments'". In relation to this, Baroness Harding of Winscombe (Conservative), former chief executive of TalkTalk, highlighted the transition children face between primary and secondary school coincides with the first time they create a social media profile: "because all of their peers are also doing so".[24]

Despite most major social media companies—including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube and Instagram—specifying that users must be 13 years old to have an account, the Children's Society found that 61 percent of young people had a first account at age 12 or under.[25] Summarising evidence on this issue, the Children's Society stated:

> There was a sense that trying to restrict children under the age of 13 from using social media platforms through date of birth checks are not

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[20] Public Health England, *Cyberbullying: An Analysis of Data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey for England, 2014*, June 2017, p 4.
[21] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry Report*, 2018, p 14.
[22] ibid.
[23] ibid, p 18.
[24] ibid.
[25] ibid, p 5.

effective, as children will always find a way around such restrictions, or move on to other platforms with lower thresholds of safety features.[26]

Baroness Harding also commented on the issue, contending that:

> Social media companies should divert resources to AI (Artificial Intelligence) to detect under 13s. Social media companies are not proactive about this because customer need is a priority in relation to functionality […] this is a competitive field and without public and legislative pressure, they won't do it.[27]

Nearly half (44%) of children and young people with accounts spend more than three hours a day on social media, with 9% having reported that they always use social media overnight between midnight and 6am. Focusing on its impact, 38% of young people reported that social media has a negative impact on how they feel about themselves, compared to 23% who stated it has a positive impact.

3.2 Arguments For and Against Social Media Use by Children

An inquiry by the Children's Society found that there are multiple benefits that can stem from young people's use of social media.[28] For example, the Anti-Bullying Alliance and Youthworks Consulting both reported that young people with disabilities and communication needs (such as special educational needs) are able to find friendship and support on social media, particularly as they can connect with those who have similar experiences. Social media can also offer support to children and young people experiencing difficulties because of mental health, or who are questioning aspects of their identity such as their gender or sexuality. A survey by Childnet found that 48% of 13- to 18-year olds report that they have shown support online for a certain group (such as LGBTQ+ and disabled people) in the last year.

The *Good Childhood Report 2017* also identified that moderate social media usage is associated with higher levels of wellbeing than no usage.[29] This is especially applicable to specific aspects which include life satisfaction, friendship and school life. The Children's Society also argued that many social media platforms used by children centre on the development of friendships and sharing of content. Gaming sites and consoles such as Xbox Live and PlayStation Network are also places of interaction for young people.

In contrast, studies have also found a correlation between children's extensive use of social media and lower wellbeing. The Children's Society has reported that young people who are the heaviest users of social media are most vulnerable to low wellbeing, symptoms of anxiety and depression, in addition to

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[26] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry Report*, 2018, p 18.
[27] ibid.
[28] ibid, p 14.
[29] ibid.

other harms such as loss of empathy.[30] Research by the department of economics at the University of Sheffield found that the more time children spend chatting on social networks "the worse they feel about school work, school attendance, appearance, family and life overall, and the better they feel about their friends".[31] Further research also found strong links between using social media for more than four hours a day and low wellbeing.[32] Although less than one in ten children have this pattern of usage, girls are twice as likely to be high intensity users than boys.

The culture of comparison, where young people compare their lives and particularly their appearances to others including celebrities, is also cited as a negative outcome of social media use.[33] Academics from University College London have commented on this issue:

> If social media use does in fact causally impact on subjective well-being, it could be hypothesized that this may be a consequence of unhealthy models of perfection that are promoted in such networks. Such models of perfection are made increasingly impossible to attain as the 'comparison pool' is worldwide due to social media, and that the information presented is often deceptive (e.g. Photoshop). Hence, for some individuals, their use of social media could result in incorrect perceptions regarding physical appearance, social status, educational level or intelligence and thereby affect self-esteem and behaviours, even in the absence of cyberbullying.[34]

Exploring this issue further, some stated that this can mean that young people aspire for things they do not actually want and follow trends they do not necessarily like. However, evidence collected by the Children's Society showed that children are aware of this issue and acknowledge that some people are selective in what they post on social media in order to present a 'perfect life'.[35]

4. Screen Time

There are many different types of screen that children and young people may use in their day-to-day lives: televisions; computers; tablets; and mobile phones. Therefore, when discussing screen use, a large range of activities can be being referred to.[36] However, research has shown that the amount of time young people are spending using screens, especially online, has increased. The average time 12- to 15-year olds in Britain spent online more than doubled in 2017, from 8 to 19 hours a week.[37] In addition, in 2017, the amount of time children

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[30] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry Report*, 2018, p 21.
[31] ibid.
[32] ibid.
[33] ibid, p 22.
[34] ibid.
[35] ibid, p 27.
[36] Victoria Zamperoni, 'Screen Time and Children's Mental Health: What Does the Evidence Say?', Mental Health Foundation, 9 July 2018.
[37] Children's Society, *Safety Net: Cyberbullying's Impact on Young People's Mental Health: Inquiry*

spent on the internet overtook time spent watching TV for the first time. This increase led to a debate regarding the impact screen time has on health and wellbeing, with a variety of studies being published on the issue.

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee currently has an inquiry on the impact of social media and screen use on young people's health.[38] However, at the time of writing, the committee is yet to release its final report.

4.1 Impact on Psychological Wellbeing

There is no clear agreement on the impact, either positive or negative, of screen time on an individual's psychological wellbeing. A recent study conducted by researchers from the University of Oxford and Cardiff University assessed the impact of screen time of children aged 2 to 5.[39] The study tested American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) guidelines which propose a limit of one to two hours per day for the benefit of the psychological wellbeing of young children. It found that "limiting children's digital device use is not necessarily beneficial for wellbeing". Explaining the findings, the lead author, Professor Andrew Przybylski of the Oxford Internet Institute, stated:

> Taken together, our findings suggest that there is little or no support for the theory that digital screen use, on its own, is bad for young children's psychological wellbeing. If anything, our findings suggest the broader family context, how parents set rules about digital screen time, and if they're actively engaged in exploring the digital world together, are more important than the raw screen time.[40]

Another study by the University of Michigan which focused on children aged 4 to 11 had similar findings. It argued that "how children use the devices, not how much time they spend on them, is the strongest predictor of emotional or social problems connected with screen addiction".[41] The study suggested looking out for warning signs for screen addiction, which include: if screen time interferes with daily activities; causes conflict for the child or in the family; or is the only activity which brings the child joy. However, another study found that adolescents who spent more time on electronic communication and screens and less time on non-screen activities had lower psychological wellbeing, while those who spent only a small amount of time on screen activities were the happiest.[42]

Report, 2018, p 13.

[38] House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 'Impact of Social Media and Screen-Use on Young People's Health Inquiry', accessed 13 November 2018.

[39] University of Oxford, 'Children's Screen-Time Guidelines Too Restrictive, According to New Research', 14 December 2017.

[40] ibid.

[41] University of Michigan, 'Kids and Screen Time: Signs Your Child Might Be Addicted', 1 December 2017.

[42] Jean M Martin et al, 'Decreases in Psychological Well-being Among American Adolescents After 2012 and Links to Screen Time During the Rise of Smartphone Technology', *Emotion*, September 2018, vol 18(6), pp 765–80.

Further research, also led by Professor Przybylski, examined the effect that screen time has on children's sleep.[43] It found that screen time has very little practical effect, with every hour of screen time related to just 3 to 8 fewer minutes sleep a night.

4.2 Impact on Physical Health

Concerns have been raised that screen use is related to sedentary and inactive behaviour: time spent in front of a screen is time not spent exercising or participating in other forms of physical activity.[44]

Focusing on the impact of screen time on children's physical health, Cancer Research UK have reported that "young children who spend a lot of time online or watching commercial television are much more likely to be obese and ask their parents to buy them junk food".[45] The research completed by the charity and academics from Liverpool University and based on a survey of 2,500 children aged between 7 and 11 also found:

- Children who use the internet for more than half an hour a day are almost twice as likely than those who do not to ask their parents for chocolate, crisps, sugary drinks and takeaways.
- Primary school aged children who spend more than three hours a day online are more likely to spend their pocket money on such products than those who are online for less than 30 minutes.
- The same heavy users of the internet are also 79% more likely to be overweight or obese, while children who surfed the web for between half an hour and three hours were 53% more likely to be overweight.

Commenting on the issues raised, Caroline Cerny of the Obesity Health Alliance (a group of medical bodies and health charities) argued:

> Children see as many as nine junk food adverts during one 30-minute episode of their favourite TV shows, so it's not surprising this leads them to pester for, buy and eat more unhealthy foods.[46]

In addition, a study by the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health which involved children aged between 8 and 11 years found that those with higher amounts of recreational screen time on smart phones and playing video games had "far worse cognitive skills across a range of functions".[47] Specifically, the study

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[43] University of Oxford, 'Screen-Time Does Not Disrupt Children's Sleep, New Study Finds', 5 November 2018.
[44] Victoria Zamperoni, 'Screen Time and Children's Mental Health: What Does the Evidence Say?', Mental Health Foundation, 9 July 2018.
[45] Denis Campbell, 'Research Finds Link Between Time Online and Obesity in Children', Guardian, 17 October 2018.
[46] ibid.
[47] Laura Donnelly, 'More Than Two Hours Screentime A Day Could Damage Children's Brain Development', Telegraph (£), 26 September 2018.

claimed that more than two hours a day of recreational screen time was associated with worse working memory, processing speed, attention levels, language skills and executive function. The findings led the lead researcher, Dr Jeremy Walsh, to argue that screen time should be limited to two hours a day for children.

4.3 Guidance on Screen Time for Under-18s

As a result of the debate surrounding screen use, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) has produced guidance for screen use by under-18s.[48] The guidance was informed by a review of evidence on the effects of screen time on the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents published in the *British Medical Journal*.[49] The evidence review found that there was no good evidence that screen time is "toxic" to health, although did find associations between higher screen use and obesity and depression. However, on examining this, the RCPCH argued it was not clear if higher screen use was causing these issues, or if people with the issues were more likely to spend more time on screens.

As a result, the guidance contains no set time limits for children as the RCPCH argued that there was not enough evidence that screen time was harmful to child health at any age. However, the guidance does contain a series of questions it stated will help families make decisions about their screen time use:

- Is your family's screen time under control?
- Does screen use interfere with what your family want to do?
- Does screen use interfere with sleep?
- Are you able to control snacking during screen time?[50]

Commenting further, Dr Russell Viner, president of the RCPCH, claimed that screens are part of modern life and that there is no one size fits all solution, with parents needing to balance the risks and benefits in their family.[51] He also argued that parents should consider their own use of screens.

5. Government Policy

5.1 Digital Charter

The 2017 Conservative Party general election manifesto included a commitment to develop a digital charter.[52] The manifesto also set out plans to work with industry and charities to establish a new framework that balances

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[48] Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, *The Health Impacts of Screen Time: A Guide for Clinicians and Parents*, January 2019.
[49] Neza Stiglic and Russell M Viner, 'Effects of Screentime on the Health and Well-being of Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review of Reviews', *BMJ Open*, 3 January 2019.
[50] Alex Therrien and Jane Wakefield, 'Worry Less About Children's Screen Use, Parents Told', BBC News, 4 January 2019.
[51] ibid.
[52] Conservative Party, *Conservative Party Manifesto 2017*, 2017, p 77.

freedom with protection for users, and offer opportunities alongside obligations for businesses and platforms.[53] One of the fundamental aims of the charter was to "make Britain the safest place in the world to be online".[54] Commenting further, the Government stated that the starting point should be that online rules should reflect those which govern our lives offline:

> It should be as unacceptable to bully online as it is in the playground, as difficult to groom a young child on the internet as it is in a community, as hard for children to access violent and degrading pornography online as it is in the high street, and as difficult to commit a crime digitally as it is physically.[55]

Focusing specifically on protections for children, the Government stated:

- We will work with industry to introduce new protections for minors, from images of pornography, violence, and other age-inappropriate content not just on social media but in app stores and content sites as well.
- We will educate today's young people in the harms of the internet and how best to combat them, introducing comprehensive Relationships and Sex Education in all primary and secondary schools to ensure that children learn about the risks of the internet, including cyberbullying and online grooming.[56]

Following this manifesto commitment, the *Digital Charter* was published by the Government in January 2018.[57] It set out a series of principles which would guide the activity undertaken as part of the charter and outlined priorities for a programme of work. One of these priorities was on online harm, which focused on "protecting people from harmful content and behaviour, including building understanding and resilience, and working with industry to encourage the development of technological solutions".[58]

5.2 Internet Safety Strategy: Green Paper

In October 2017, the Government published a green paper as its first publication under the *Digital Charter*.[59] In its internet safety strategy, the Government set out its aims to establish Britain as the world's most dynamic digital economy: "we want to make Britain the best place in the world to setup and run a digital business, while simultaneously ensuring that Britain is the safest place in the world to be online".[60]

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[53] Conservative Party, *Conservative Party Manifesto 2017*, 2017, p 77.
[54] ibid.
[55] ibid, p 79.
[56] ibid.
[57] HM Government, *Digital Charter*, 25 January 2018.
[58] ibid, p 2.
[59] HM Government, *Government Response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper*, May 2018, p 4.
[60] HM Government, *Internet Safety Strategy—Green Paper*, October 2017, p 3.

Setting out how it plans to achieve these aims, the Government stated:

> This means developing an approach to the internet that benefits everyone. It means embracing and maximising the opportunities that the internet provides, while at the same time tackling the risks that it poses for its users. It means working together with a wide range of stakeholders to develop safer online communities and empowering citizens to manage risks and stay safe online.
>
> […] Through this green paper we will set out a high level of ambition on how we must all play our role in tackling issues of online harms. The government will address online safety by bringing groups across society together—including the voluntary sector, technology firms, schools, and the people of Britain—to establish a coordinated approach.[61]

The strategy was formed of five strands: our strategic response; working with industry to make online environments safer for all users; how can technology improve online safety for all users; supporting children, parents and carers; and responding to online harms.[62] The Government also proposed that three principles would underpin the work:

- what is unacceptable offline should be unacceptable online;
- all users should be empowered to manage online risks and stay safe; and
- technology companies have a responsibility to their users.[63]

5.3 Internet Safety Strategy: Government Response to the Consultation

Following the strategy's release, the Government ran a consultation which considered "the responsibilities of companies to their users, the use of technical solutions to prevent online harms and government's role in supporting users".[64] The Government published its response to the consultation in May 2018. In this response, it stated that the consultation had described a wide range of online harms which the Government was concerned about—particularly those which affect children—with cyberbullying, online abuse, harassment, trolling and sexting some of the issues named.[65] It reported that the prevalence of such behaviour were confirmed by the nearly 600 respondents, "many of whom had witnessed harmful content online, particularly online bullying, racial abuse and online misogyny". It also reported

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[61] HM Government, _Internet Safety Strategy—Green Paper_, October 2017, p 3.

[62] ibid, pp 4–6.

[63] ibid, p 3.

[64] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 'Consultation Outcome: Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper', last updated 7 June 2018.

[65] HM Government, _Government Response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper_, May 2018, p 4.

that the consultation had highlighted three main issues:

- online behaviours too often fail to meet acceptable standards;
- users can feel powerless to address these issues; and
- technology companies can operate without proper oversight, transparency or accountability, and commercial interests mean that they can fail to act in users' best interests.[66]

The response also featured a section on supporting children and parents.[67] Announcements in this section focused on keeping children safe online and included a new national computing curriculum for key stage 1 to 4 with content on how to use technology safely, responsibly, respectfully and securely.[68]

The development of new regulations and statutory guidance relating to safe online relationships as part of relationships sex education was also announced, with concerns regarding cyberbullying, sexting, and the dangers of talking to strangers online cited.[69] In addition, plans to revise the statutory safeguarding guidance for schools in England, *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE), was outlined, with a focus on support for schools and colleges to keep children safe online.[70]

In regard to cyberbullying, the Government stated that all schools in England are legally required to have a behaviour policy with measures to prevent cyberbullying among pupils, with head teachers given the power to regulate pupils' conduct when they are not on school premises.[71] Funding of £1.75 million over two years for four anti-bullying organisations to support schools in tackling bullying was also highlighted. Plans to support carers and parents in preventing online harm of children were also included in the response.[72]

The Government's, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: A Green Paper* (December 2017) was also referenced in the response.[73] A series of roundtables were convened by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) with a working group of the main social media and technology companies— including Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and Apple. These discussed children and young people's online safety, with a particular focus on the impact that social media products have on mental health. These were cited in the

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[66] HM Government, *Government Response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper*, May 2018, p 5.

[67] ibid, pp 31–42.

[68] ibid, p 31.

[69] ibid, p 32.

[70] ibid, p 33.

[71] ibid, p 36.

[72] ibid, pp 37–9.

[73] Department of Health and Department for Education, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: A Green Paper*, December 2017, Cm 9523.

response as being supportive of the green paper's key proposals.[74] Age verification, screen time and cyberbullying/harmful content were the focus of this work.

The Government also announced that to further understand the issues of long periods of time spent online and the relationship between social media and the mental health of young people up to 25 years of age, the Chief Medical Officer would lead a systematic review to examine relevant international research. This will report in 2019.[75]

In addition, Margot James, the Minister for Digital and Creative Industries, confirmed in December 2018 that a white paper considering "online harms" would be published early in 2019. She noted that the paper would consider issues such as placing a duty of care of social media platforms and the regulation of pornographic websites.[76]

6. Further Reading

- Children's Commissioner, *Life in Likes: Children's Commissioner Report Into Social Media Use Among 8–12 Year Olds*, 4 January 2018
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, *Impacts of Video Games*, 15 March 2012

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[74] HM Government, *Government Response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper*, May 2018, p 40.
[75] ibid, p 41.
[76] HC *Hansard, 17 December 2018, cols 611–12*.