



November 2017

[Internet safety strategy green paper: Girlguiding consultation response](#)

Introduction

About Girlguiding

1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and The Senior Section (14-25 years). Registered Charity No 306016. www.girlguiding.org.uk

About our evidence

2. Girlguiding's submission focuses on evidence from our annual Girls' Attitudes Survey - the largest survey of girls and young women in the UK - which gathers the views and opinions of over 1,700 girls and young women throughout the country aged 7 to 21, from inside and outside guiding. For more information and data on the latest and previous reports please see www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes
3. Our response includes quotes from members of our youth panels. Our Advocates are a group of 18 Girlguiding members aged 14 to 25 who lead the direction of Girlguiding's advocacy and research. Our British Youth Council (BYC) delegation has 10 members aged 14 to 25, who work with other BYC delegates to campaign for change and improve young people's lives.
4. Our submission also includes the responses from a small sample of ten Girlguiding young members aged 14 to 21. We based this engagement on the questions in the consultation, but used more accessible language suitable for young people to understand and respond to. This survey is included as an appendix at the end of this document.

Overview

5. Girlguiding warmly welcomes the Internet Safety Strategy green paper. We think it is really positive that the government is committed to tackling online safety issues and seeking the best ways to do this by consulting and working with people from across different sectors. We also fully support the strategy's key principles around unacceptable content, managing risks and technology companies' responsibilities.

Other positive aspects we'd like to highlight are:

- recognition that online harassment and abuse often disproportionately affects girls and women (p4)
- recognition that online harassment and abuse disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ communities

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- emphasis on using the strategy in conjunction with other relevant documents, such as the green paper on Children and Young People’s Mental Health and the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy
- highlighting of the role of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) in addressing online harms
- recognition of the need to balance supporting young people to develop their resilience to cope with online harms and to tackle these unacceptable behaviours (p29)
- acknowledgement that a global approach is needed
- inclusion of advertising and gaming as areas that children and young people can experience abuse and harassment
- emphasis on encouraging technology companies to be child focused and to ‘think safety first’ - especially for new business to embed this cultural change (p21)
- reference to children learning about internet safety from a young age (while they are in Early Years settings) (p27)
- acknowledgement of the positive aspects of being online (p43) - as opposed to just the negative and harmful ones.

In addition, there are some areas that we believe require further consideration and clarification:

Impact of online harms (p8)

We believe it would be beneficial for the strategy to clearly define ‘online harms’ and that this definition must include online pressures. Throughout this response, we use our Girls’ Attitudes Survey data to show the negative impact of online pressures and gender stereotypes online on women’s wellbeing and outcomes.

The language used in this section states ‘We know that too many people face online bullying, abuse and content that leads to anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders and even suicide’. From our understanding, there is a lack of evidence on the impact of online harms in relation to eating disorders, so we believe it’s important not to make conclusive statements on this without reference to the evidence.

Remodelling UKCCIS (p11)

We recognise that online harassment and abuse affect people of all ages. However, it’s vital that the new UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) does not lose its expertise around children and young people and the particular issues they face.

Context

6. The Monitor Report 2016 by ChildWise offers useful insights into the extent to which girls and young women use the internet and provide some context for our response. The report looks at children’s media consumption using a sample from across the UK of over 2000 children aged 5 to 16. The main points we would like to highlight include:

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- 95% of girls aged 5 to 16 has access to the internet, with 72% of those girls able to go online in their own rooms
- On average, girls spend 2.8 hours a day online, with 7 to 10 year olds spending 1.7 hours online, rising to 4.1 hours by the age of 11 to 16
- 40% of children aged 5 to 16 go online to look up information, with girls more likely to use the internet this way
- 45% of children aged 5 to 16 go online to message friends and family, and 42% go online to use social networks. These activities are favoured by girls and increases with age, with 75% of teenage girls messaging their friends and 81% using social media
- Girls are also drawn towards visual social networks, with 54% of girls normally using Instagram and Snapchat

Our response

7. We believe we are in a good position to respond to this consultation because of our extensive research with girls and young women, including around their experiences - positive and negative - online. Although we know internet safety is an issue that affects everyone, as the UK's leading organisation for girls and young women, our submission focuses particularly on this group. In addition, as the consultation document notes, online harassment and abuse can affect girls and women disproportionately, so we believe it's vital to represent their experiences, views and voices on this issue.

Our submission includes girls' views on a number of issues, such as:

- Being exposed to unwanted violent or graphic imagery
- Cyberbullying, harassment and abuse and online pressures
- The role of parents in keeping children safe
- Positive experiences online and the role of influencers, such as YouTubers

In order to best represent the views of the girls who contributed to this response, we have answered relevant questions from the 'Individual' questionnaire as well as those tailored to organisations. We have also provided additional information about our response to multiple choice questions and amended some questions to give girls the opportunity to give their full views on issues - for example, what they feel their parents should know about online safety. Please note that the specific responses we collected from girls about the Strategy are those of a small sample to include girls' views in the response and should not be taken to represent the whole of Girlguiding's membership or 'the views of girls' more generally.

Consultation questions

8. Qs 5 and 6 - This response is on behalf of an organisation, Girlguiding. However, as discussed, it also incorporates the views of individual girls and young women.



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Q7 - We are happy to be contacted further about our response. See end of response for contact details.

Q10 - Our organisation is in the charity sector.

Q15 - We heard about this survey because we were contacted by DCMS to take part.

Questions from 'Individuals' section

"All forms of abuse online are increasingly widespread and it seems as though, online, people can intimidate and manipulate others in a way that they would never do in real life." (Girl aged 14-21)

8.1 What girls think parents should know

Q19 - What do you feel parents and carers should receive more information about?

[We've amended this question (which was originally just aimed at parents) as we believe it's important that young people are also given the chance to give their views on what their parents should know about].

It's vital that parents are given the information they need to help keep their children safe online. Parents should also be supported to understand the issues their children experience online. Our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that only 47% of girls aged 11 to 21 think their parents understand the pressures they face online.

This information should also cover how to avoid inadvertently putting children at risk - for example, by sharing photos or locations publicly. It should also include the importance of asking children's permission before sharing images of them. In our 2017 Survey, 22% of girls aged 7 to 10 said their parents post pictures of them on social media without asking permission - 21% in this age group said this made them feel embarrassed.

Children's rights and potential discomfort around how their parents may use their image or information online should also be considered in relation to the 'right to be forgotten' (Consultation, p18). This indicates that children under 13 would need their parents to make a request for information about them to be removed and deleted. While it makes sense for parents to take on responsibilities for young children, it's vital that these children's voices are also represented in the process.

Members of our youth panels thought parents needed to know more about what their children were accessing online and raised issues of privacy and security in relation to sharing images of their children:

"I think parents need to show their children how to make their social media accounts private, as this would prevent a lot of issues arising. [Parents] should ask children when sharing photos of them online because children are entitled to privacy. A photo being posted without permission could make the child uncomfortable and carries the risk of



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these getting into the wrong hands, especially if photos include personal information e.g. school name affecting children's safety.” (Laura, Advocate, 16)

“I think parents should know what social media their child uses to make sure they are comfortable with the sites. However, teenagers should be given the freedom to use social media, as it comes with many benefits such as keeping in contact or sharing memories. Raising awareness about risks is important for both parents and children to understand how to stay safe online.” (Imogen, Advocate, 15)

“It's important that parents are aware of dangers and know ways to prevent their children from risk online, through parental security and blocking certain types of pages.” (Girl, aged 14 to 21)

“Parents need to be more aware of what teenagers are doing online, particularly as social media sites and their popularity are constantly changing. Ones with anonymous functions need to be tackled as well, such as Sahara, Yellow and ask.com, as these are ones that can cause massive cyberbullying issues. Asking about sharing photos of anyone needs to be something that all groups in society tackle, as I think that if children aren't being taught to ask, they're less likely to do it as they get older.” (Izzy, Advocate, 16)

“Parents should be taught how to set child locks and restrictions, as lack of knowledge can lead to children seeing inappropriate content. Parents sharing photos of children can certainly be frustrating, from the child's point of view. Too often, parents see it as a compliment when really it can be embarrassing, and at the more severe end, put the child in danger of being featured in ads or even porn sites. Posting photos is seen as so harmless. If a campaign could be launched that could make parents see that no photo is an exception to the rule, that permission should be sought, this might be effective.” (Juliet, Advocate, 17)

8.2 Girls' exposure to inappropriate content

Qs 33 and 34

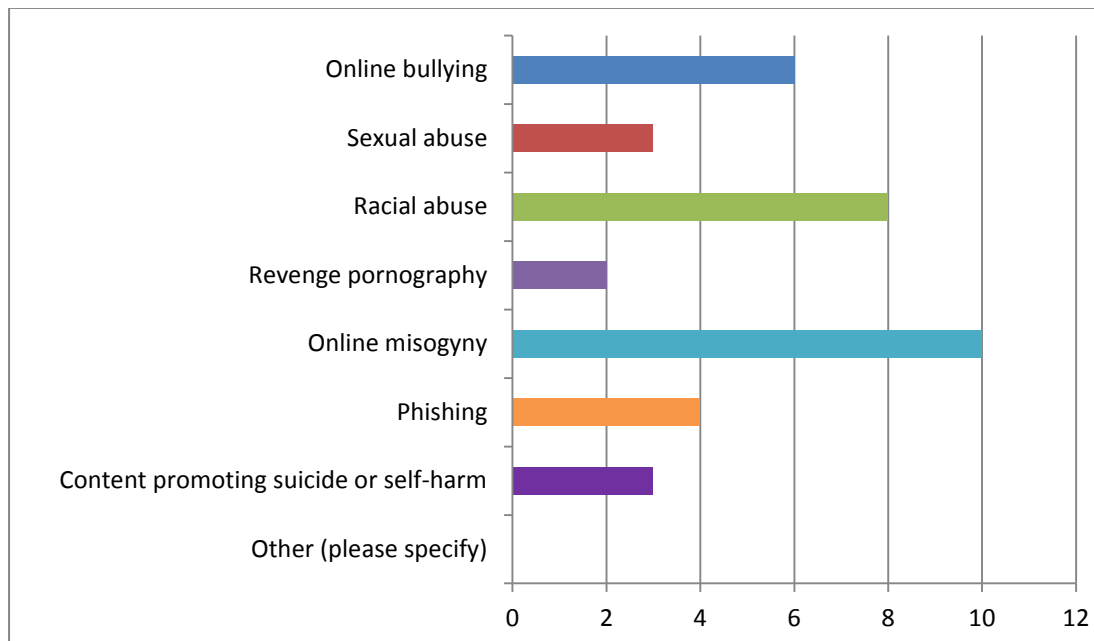
Our Girls' Attitudes Survey highlights the inappropriate content girls have been exposed to and what impact this has. In 2017:

- 54% of girls aged 11-21 said they have come across unwanted violent or graphic images online that made them feel upset or disturbed
- 26% of girls aged 13 to 21 said they have come across pornography accidentally
- 50% aged 7 to 10 are worried about seeing rude pictures online
- 44% aged 11 to 21 have seen statements about women or girls that they thought were sexist on the news or social media in the past week and 47% had seen stereotypical images of men and women that made them feel less confident to do what they want
- 65% see or hear gender stereotypes on social media often

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In 2016 we found that 70% of girls aged 11 to 16, and 80% aged 17 to 21 think women are too often shown as sex objects in the media and online - for 61% of these girls, this makes them feel disempowered.

Responses from the small sample of girls we spoke to reflects this with all of them having witnessed online misogyny and 8 out of 10 had seen racial abuse.



8.3 Girls' confidence in reporting issues

In our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey we found that 88% of girls aged 11-21 felt confident they understand how to protect their privacy and personal information online. However, when asked what would make them feel safer, many responded with calls to make it easier to report harassment and abuse.

Qs 41, 42 and 97 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"I feel confident that social media companies would resolve concerns which I report."

Within the small sample of girls we spoke to 7 out of 10 girls disagreed with this statement. Girls' said they did not feel confident that issues they reported would be dealt with properly and this prevented them from reporting incidents.

(For those who have reported content) "My reported concerns are taken seriously by social media companies."

Responses to this question from our small sample somewhat reflected the Government's finding that those who had actually reported issues were more confident in social media



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companies' ability to resolve them. Here two chose 'agree' and two chose 'neither agree nor disagree' and the remaining three girls chose 'strongly disagree'. We asked our small sample of girls to tell us more about why they rated the statements this way.

"Facebook, Tumblr and YouTube seem to have pretty proficient systems in place to deal with this sort of thing from my experience."

"Although companies always say that they take concerns seriously, too often it's just for show and comments aren't taken down."

"I think social media sites are reluctant to take responsibility for content. They're constantly quoted in the media as emphasising that they're platforms not publishers, and this doesn't give me confidence that they'd respond to concerns. To be honest, I'm not even sure how I'd contact them." (Girl aged 14 to 21).

Some highlighted delays in getting abusive content removed:

"I feel as if social media companies act on things eventually, but not quickly enough - so the damage has already been done by that point."

Others shared personal experiences about their difficulties in getting issues addressed by social media companies:

"I have reported concerns before. I asked for a post to be taken off Facebook but was told it wasn't inappropriate. I disagreed. I have no confidence that enough is being done to stop harmful posts or content."

"A lot of the time social media can be lazy when responding to concerns. This is evidenced through countless occasions where I have come across racist, misogynistic and offensive attacks where the perpetrator's comments were not a one-time thing. I think social media doesn't take these hate remarks as seriously as they should, as I know of people that have reported others and the most that was done was that the account was temporarily suspended, but not permanently, and further checks were not undertaken."

Barriers to reporting abuse

To provide further information for this question, we asked girls whether they thought girls their age felt comfortable reporting abuse. Their responses illustrate a worrying tendency for incidents to be normalised and shrugged off as well as girls' desire for more to be done to support them to identify issues and feel confident to report them. This reflects what we've found previously in our 2016 report 'Girls' wellbeing explored'. Fear of embarrassment, shame and being blamed can stop girls opening up about the pressures they face, preventing them from getting the support they need. The research showed that when girls do seek help, it is often from their friends rather than professionals. This is



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reflected in the online world. Evidence from our 2013 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that girls aged 11 and up tend to react in an informal way to rude or abusive messages online. 59% of girls delete the messages and block the sender, 39% ignore the messages, 30% tell a friend or a sibling and 22% tell their parents. Girls aged 16 to 21 are more likely to report comments to a moderator (29%) than those aged 11 to 21 (22%).

Our research revealed girls want to know more about where to get help and support, and more should be done to build resilience and challenge the gendered pressures they face.

"I don't think girls feel comfortable reporting abuse, as they may not even recognise it as being abuse in the first place. I think every comment or message with a potentially harmful word in should be flagged, alerting the girl that it has the potential to be abusive. Then, if the girl recognises that the comment is abusive, they can easily report it." (Laura, Advocate, 16)

"I think it's incredibly rare for girls to report abuse and harassment, likely because they fear judgement or being told that 'it happens'. This leads girls to feel as though their harassment is not worth anyone's time, but this needs to end. Spreading awareness of harassment and educating people to know that it should be reported would be a big step forward for reporting abuse to be more supported." (Imogen, Advocate, 15)

"I don't think girls feel comfortable reporting harassment, particularly when it comes from male peers and acquaintances. This is because, in my experience, many girls feel they need to "laugh it off" and fear being labelled a "snake" by others for reporting unacceptable comments. I think although most websites are clear on their safety functions, it doesn't necessarily get used by girls because of these fears." (Izzy, Advocate, 15)

Questions from 'Organisations' section

8.4 Actions girls think are successfully in place

Q107 - Which of the following actions/processes do you consider are already successfully in place on the majority of social media platforms?

Our 2017 Survey showed that the vast majority of girls feel confident they understand how to protect their privacy and personal information online (as outlined above).

Encouragingly, 10 out of 10 of the small sample of girls we spoke to agreed that 'blocking users who bully or insult other users, or display behaviours likely to intimidate or humiliate' is already successfully in place on most social media sites. However, they were much less likely to agree that other aspects were successfully in place:

- 3 out of 10 thought that 'Reporting functions for users to notify social media companies about issues' were successfully in place



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- 1 thought this about 'Terms and conditions of use'
- 3 thought this about 'Community rules and guidelines'
- 6 thought this about 'Privacy settings'
- 4 thought this about 'Removal of illegal content'
- 1 thought this about 'Online safety advice'
- 2 thought this about 'Removal of material which goes against the terms and conditions'

8.5 Social media companies' responsibilities

Q109 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Social media companies have a duty of care to remove and reduce inappropriate behaviour or content on their platforms"?

We strongly agree with this statement and believe that social media companies should do more to protect users on their platforms. Our 2016 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed 80% of girls aged 11 to 21 thought more should be done to tackle sexism and abuse online.

"Girls can face groomers online who make fake accounts to try and lure them into sending inappropriate photos or to meet them. I think social media sites are responsible for stopping this. They could do this by adding a symbol on someone's profile when they have been verified to show they are who they say. Then, if an unverified account contacts a girl, she would be aware that it has the potential to be a fake account, and to be wary of a potential groomer." (Laura, Advocate, 16)

What Girlguiding is doing

At Girlguiding, our '[Safe Space](#)' safeguarding training for staff includes online issues and keeping children and young people safe online. We also provide [guidance](#) to our leaders on making the most of using social media whilst being aware of the risks.

In our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey, we asked girls what they would like to feel safe online:

Girls aged 7 to 10:

"If you could block bullies and people you don't know"

"I'd feel safer online if there were kids-only channels that didn't have things popping up that aren't suitable"

Girls aged 11 to 16:

"Make sure age appropriate material or adverts are shown on social media and YouTube."

"If you were notified when people took screenshots of your social media profiles."

Young women aged 17 to 21:

"More clarity as to where my personal information is going."

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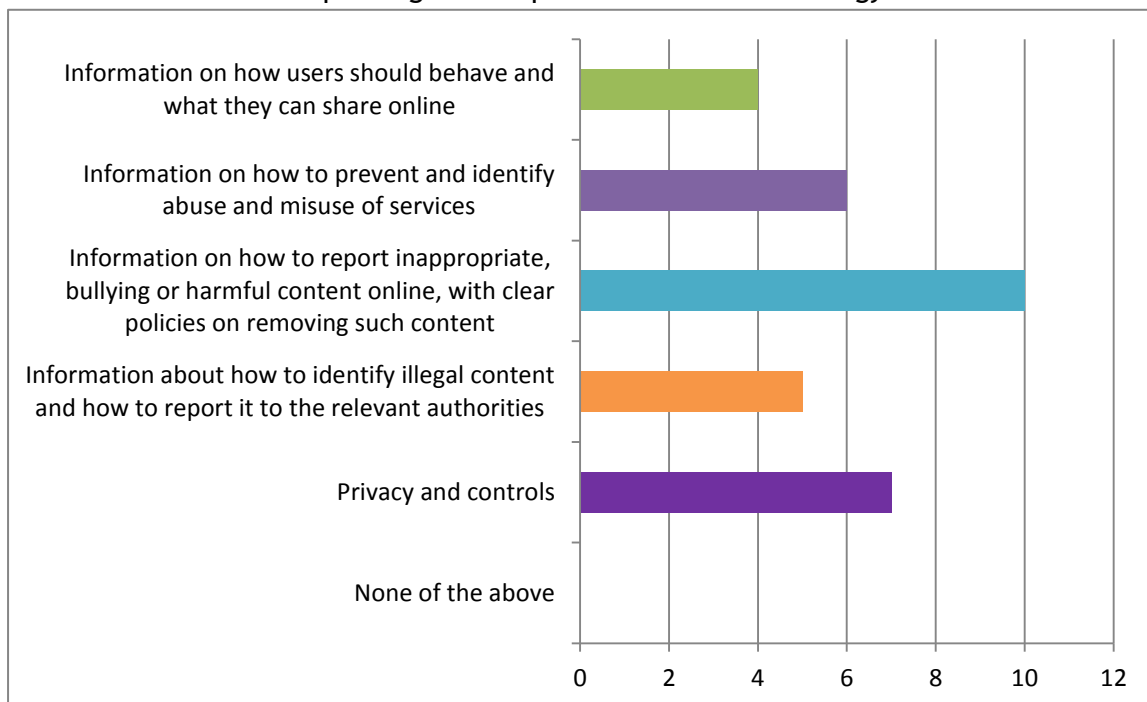
“More restrictions on abusive, violent and inappropriate content.”

“Social platforms taking more time to delete and remove bad people and their accounts.”

8.5 Q110 - Which of these areas do you think are the most important?

- Information on standards for user content and conduct, including how community guidelines are developed, enforced and reviewed
- Information about the prevention and identification of abuse and misuse of services, including persistent abusers across a range of harms
- Reporting mechanism for inappropriate, bullying or harmful content, with clear policies and performance metrics on take-down, including considering the manifesto commitment for content removal on a ‘comply or explain’ basis, *‘Comply or explain’ means that companies need to either comply with a request, or, if they do not comply, explain publicly why they do not.*
- Information about how to identify illegal content and contact and report it to the relevant authorities in a local jurisdiction
- Privacy and controls - policies, practices and communications
- None of the above

We asked the small sample of girls we spoke to about the Strategy.



As can be seen, all 10 girls chose ‘information on how to report inappropriate, bullying or harmful content online, with clear policies on such content’.

8.6 Q111 - Do you think companies should encourage people to use their real identity when using social media?



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Encouraging people to supply their real identity could be an important way of identifying and tackling abusers. However, there are other reasons users may feel more comfortable using anonymous accounts which should be taken into account. Our 2016 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that 55% of girls aged 11 to 21 feel safer expressing their views anonymously and 24% of girls aged 13 to 21 have at least one anonymous social media account. It is vital to tackle the abusive online behaviours that make them feel this way, however, while such issues still exist, it's important that users do not worry that their identities will be freely available to people who could abuse them. This could be achieved by clear and easy to understand terms and conditions.

8.7 Social media code of practice and levy

Q112 - Do you think the code of practice should include steps to tackle those who use anonymous social media accounts to abuse others?

Yes. It's important that abusive behaviour and those responsible are identified and held responsible.

Qs 113 and 120 - Which platforms should have a code of practice and social media levy?

Platforms which perform all the functions listed in the Green Paper.

Q114 - Which areas do you think are most important for social media companies to report on?

We welcome the proposals for an annual internet safety transparency report (p18, consultation). In addition to the groups listed in this section, we believe complaints should be categorised by all protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that companies are aware of the scale of abuse against people from these groups and able to tackle it. In addition, as well as 'women', there should be a 'girls' category to cover gender and age to reflect the particular pressures and abuses that girls face.

Our Girls' Attitudes Survey highlights some of the pressures girls face online. In 2017, 52% of girls aged 11 to 21 have seen airbrushed images in the media that made them feel pressured to look different and 45% said they sometimes felt ashamed that they are not like the girls and women in the media. Additionally, 35% aged 17 to 21 are worried how universities and future employers judge their social media profiles.

Our 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey revealed that a significant minority of girls have experienced controlling behaviour from a partner, with 18% of girls aged 13 to 21 saying their partner had checked up on them on their phone or social media. In addition, 45% aged 11 to 16 say they have experienced bullying on social media and 49% who had experienced bullying said it led to them taking more risks than they usually would. One in four 17 to 21-year-olds say the pressure of bullying made them use drugs or alcohol (27%),



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or pressured them into having sex (24%), and 44% aged 13 and over say that cyberbullying has led them to self-harm to some extent.

Q115 - Do you think that all social media companies should have the same standards of behaviour?

Yes, as far as possible. At least in terms of minimum standards expected and following the code of practice.

Q117 - A centralised social media levy will be an effective way for industry to provide a contribution to tackling online harms.

We support this proposal and see it as a positive first step, but believe that voluntary participation may make the levy (and broader code of practice) less effective. We would like more information on how and when the proposal will be put in place and whether the only incentive for taking part will be reputational. We would also like to know how the proposal will be reviewed and, if the voluntary levy doesn't meet the outlined aspirations, what further considerations will be made. We agree with the point raised in the recent House of Lords debate (13/11/17) on internet safety, that Government should take further action if it is shown that voluntary participation of companies is not producing the necessary results in reducing harm.

Q119 - What would you like to see funded by the social media levy (select your top three preferred items)?

We believe the levy should be used to promote existing programmes run by organisations, such as Girlguiding's Free Being Me and Think Resilient, which support reliance and confidence building for young women and critical thinking around navigating the online world and staying safe.

Girls from our small sample gave us their views on what a social media levy could be used to fund. Their top choices were:

- 'Education programmes and resources for children which could be delivered by organisations' (7/10)
- 'Support for charities offering online safety advice or other services' (5/10)
- 'Peer-to-peer support networks' (5/10)

Q121 - What would be the best way to distribute a social media levy?

We believe it is important that this is undertaken by a group or body that is separate from the companies themselves to promote transparency and accountability.



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Q125 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “There should be minimum safety standards which digital and platforms must meet”.

We strongly agree. Social media companies should aspire to more than these, but the minimum expected should be laid out in a way that’s clear to sites and users.

8.8 Peer-to-peer learning about online safety

Q135 - Do you believe that an online safety peer-to-peer development scheme would be an effective way of helping children stay safe online?

Yes, we believe there would be many positive aspects to doing this. However, there is a need to consider how to achieve a balance between giving young people the space to talk openly about issues and not exposing them to further abuse from others within a group. To ensure this is the case, peer educators must receive proper support and training.

We know that the peer-to-peer method can work really well, as our own peer education programme has proven successful in giving girls a space to talk about issues that are important to them with peers they trust. *Free Being Me* sessions help girls recognise beauty myths, grow in confidence and be happy in their own skin. *Think Resilient* is designed to help girls build mental wellbeing and grow resilience.

While peer support is one way to tackle this issue, it should not be considered a catch-all solution and should be implemented alongside other forms of support and education, including quality Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) as well as support and guidance for parents and guardians.

It would be worth considering how online influencers, such as YouTubers could help spread messages about online safety, due to their immense popularity amongst young people. Our 2017 Survey showed that 55% of girls aged 11 to 21 go to YouTube to find out something they’re not sure about and over a third (34%) would be more likely to get advice from a YouTuber than their parents. This would have to be done carefully to ensure that those spreading messages were appropriate ambassadors (and not known for spreading inappropriate content).

It’s also important not to assume that young people will want to access everything online simply because they are ‘young people’. Many may prefer a face to face approach or find this easier to access and so information should be available through a variety of means so it meets the needs of all young people.

We asked the girls in our small sample whether they thought an online peer to peer development scheme would be a good way to help children stay safe online, and received many positive responses:



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“[Having a peer education scheme] could help children recognise internet danger and help them prevent future issues.”

“As a young person myself, I know that children are more likely to listen to their peers rather than adults. I think that this is because in lots of cases, adults are less in touch with the online world. However, if children are spoken to by an active user of social media, they are more likely to take on board what’s being said and co-operate.”

However, some girls had reservations and wanted to know more about how this would work:

“I think peer interaction is one of the best ways to engage young people and make them feel they are being addressed as equals. But I only feel it would be effective if every child knew about it, had access to it and was encouraged by their peers themselves to use it.”

“It would depend on the circumstances and how this was to be done. Children, especially ones who feel confident on the internet may not want to take part (even though they may be vulnerable). Children new to the internet may be more inclined and so for them it would be useful. Even if it doesn’t prove valuable to a number of children, if it helps others then it’s worth it.”

“I’m not entirely sure what this entails. If it involves pupils teaching each other about online safety, my concern would be that children would not take it seriously or that there may not be enough children willing to volunteer. Some may fear that they’d be considered boring if they started trying to suggest rules for being safe online with their peers.

And it was clear from other responses that, despite its many benefits, a peer-to-peer approach would not suit everyone, evidencing the need for a variety of learning methods.

Q136 - Which of these groups of children do you think would most benefit from a peer to peer online safety support scheme?

As discussed, this issue affects all young people (and people of all ages). However, we believe that girls and young women would benefit especially as they experience particular gendered pressures. In addition, girls from different groups - such as those from BAME backgrounds, those with disabilities or those identifying as LGBTQ+ - could particularly benefit, as they can experience double or multiple forms of discrimination. For example, our 2016 Girls’ Attitudes Survey showed that 41% of girls who identified as LGBTQ+ had experienced cyberbullying, compared to 25% of girls overall.

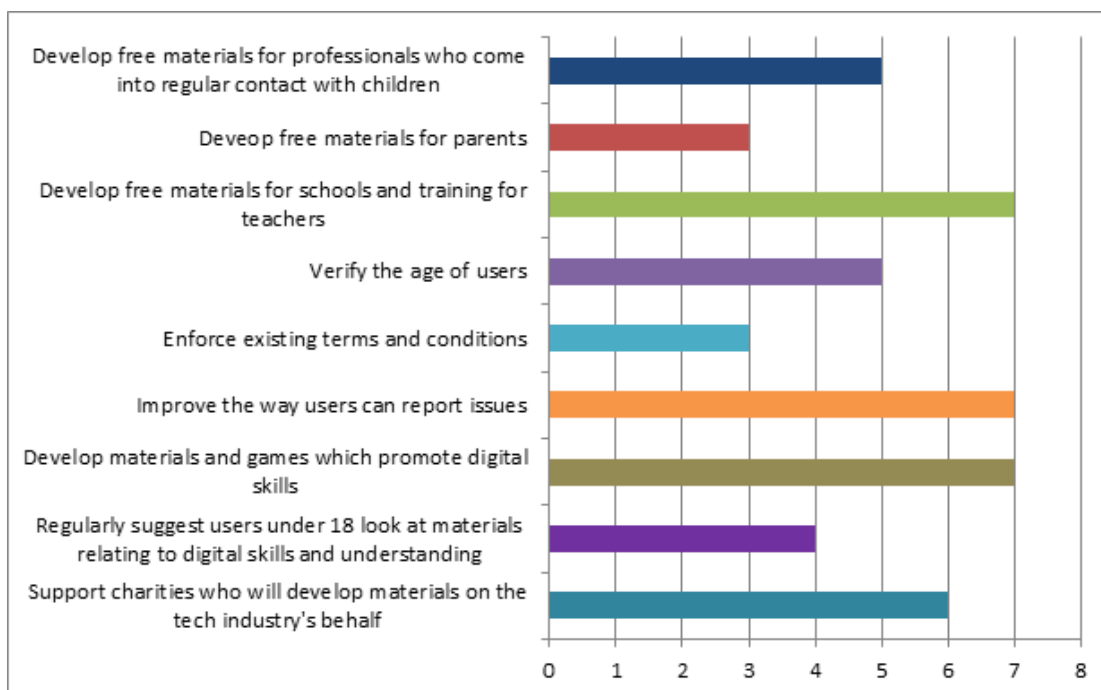
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8.9 Role of the tech industry

Q138 - How do you think the technology industry should support children to develop their digital skills?

We believe that the technology industry can and should play a vital role in supporting children to develop their digital skills - both to help children stay safe online and to engage them in learning essential skills for their futures. In our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey, 76% of girls aged 7 to 21 were confident in their digital skills. However, only 37% of girls aged 7 to 21 said they would consider doing a job in technology and 49% did not know what jobs they could do in technology.

It's crucial the tech industry has the right skills and talent to effectively address issues of safety and tackle abuse and harassment. More must be done by the tech sector in collaboration with schools to close the gender gap when it comes to women in the tech industry and improve girls understanding on how tech offers a cross-cutting theme when it comes to thinking about future careers from health and care to creative industries. This starts with girls feeling supported and encouraged to develop and continue their interest in ICT at school. In 2016 our Survey found 52% of girls aged 11 to 21 thought STEM subjects have the image of being more for boys; 41% said there are too few role models in STEM related careers and 35% said there are too few women role models teaching these subjects. We asked girls in our small sample of ten how they thought companies could do this, using the list of options from the green paper:





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Digital skills training should take into account the barriers that can affect girls' confidence in this area such as gender stereotypes - our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that 30% of girls aged 11 to 16 think computing is 'more for boys'.

8.10 Preventing under age access to adult sites

Q143 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“Adult-oriented applications or services with terms and conditions applying to users over 18 should be subject to age-verification.”

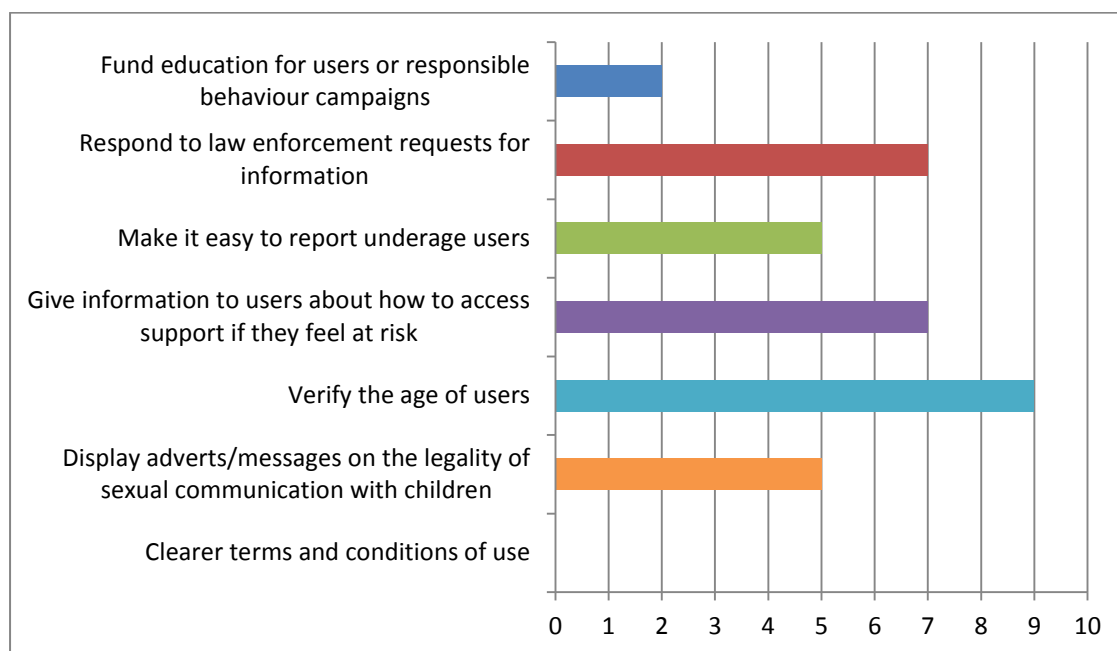
We believe more needs to be done to stop children from accessing adult content online and the harm this can cause. We support age-verification for online pornography and were delighted when this was brought in with the Digital Economy Act - our 2016 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that 75% of girls aged 13-21 supported this. However, more needs to be done to control graphic, disturbing and violent images on other sites across the internet - our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that 54% aged 11 to 21 have come across such images, causing girls to feel upset or disturbed. We believe age-verification could be extended to all sites with terms and conditions indicating that the site provides adult content which would be subject to the watershed. In the case of social media sites, where users as opposed to providers post adult content, providers should be responsible for removing inappropriate content. Additionally we believe it would be beneficial for young people and parents to have clear guidance about age restrictions applying to social media (i.e. 13 and above) and why this is important for both safety and wellbeing.

It is also crucial that the new relationships and sex education curriculum provides information for young people to stay safe online including the risks around sexting - in 2017 our Survey found that 16% of girls aged 18 to 21 have felt pressured to send nude pictures.

Q146 - What steps should social media or application services offering dating or adult-oriented services put in place to prevent use by young people?

Girls in our small sample told us what they thought sites offering dating or 'adult services' should stop young people using them, choosing from the options given in the green paper.

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Q97 - To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

“Social media and application services enabling contact between users on a sexual/romantic basis, do all they can to prevent abuse of young people.”

9 out of 10 girls from our small sample chose ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, showing their lack of confidence in the actions taken by such sites. Girls told us more about their negative perception of dating sites’ protection of underage users:

“I think dating sites make little or no attempt to verify the age of the people using them, so they cannot be considered to be doing their utmost to protect children.” (Girl aged 14 to 21).

9 Additional key areas

Following discussion with DCMS, we have agreed to provide evidence on several key areas of the consultation document which matter to girls, but which are not reflected in the consultation questions.

9.1 Related issues

In addition to the issues discussed here, online harassment and abuse should be considered alongside the other pressures girls and young women face online, such as gender stereotyping and sexism in advertising and appearance pressures. Please see our [response](#) to the Youth Select Committee’s inquiry into these issues for more information.

“I think one of the main issues for girls and young women is distinguishing between reality and the internet. On social media, it’s easy to believe that everyone is living a



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"perfect life" all of the time, and that their internet life directly reflects their real life. I know this is not the case, but many girls have anxiety stemming from this. This needs to be tackled through better education delivered to girls through schools and workshops - for example, through Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)." (Izzy, Advocate, 15)

"There are a number of issues that girls face online. One is body image. When girls go online and, say, go internet-shopping for clothes or make-up, they will immediately be confronted with models who seem to have "perfect" bodies. Almost all will be white, and very thin. This can lead to girls who don't have bodies like this feeling less comfortable with their bodies. At the same time, the internet is full of articles and ads promoting "fad diets", low-calorie diets or food substitutes, frequently promoted using images of very slim people. This can perpetuate the dangerous idea that calories are always "bad", and diets, even those that involve missing out on key nutrients, "good". Advertisers should take responsibility for the messages they're sending out online, and choose a diverse group of models with a range of body shapes to promote products. I believe the government must take action. For example, it could require that warnings about possible nutritional deficits arising from using them be put on dieting products, and ban the use of models below a minimum healthy BMI, as France has done." (Juliet, Advocate, 17)

9.2 Fake news

Girls in our small sample also highlighted the problems young people may face with distinguishing reality from 'fake news':

"I worry about being exposed to "fake news" as I don't want my generation growing up with misinformation about current events happening and without full knowledge of what's going on the world. I think fake news can be particularly damaging to younger children who cannot distinguish as easily between fiction and reality. I think social media sites need to be better at the removal of fake news as this can harm particular groups in society, and lead to prejudice and discrimination against them." (Izzy, Advocate, 15)

10 Our recommendations

1. We support the use of a social media code and levy. However, we would like to know the timescales and method of evaluating these, considering that sign up is voluntary. We agree with the point raised by peers in the House of Lords debate on 7th November 2017 that government should take further action if it is shown that voluntary participation of companies is not producing the necessary results in reducing harm.
2. We agree that it's necessary to educate young people on how to stay safe online. We agree that a peer-to-peer development scheme would be an effective way to do this. However, this should be alongside other methods including quality RSE and PSHE; and involve online influencers and tech companies.



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3. Online safety education should also be available to parents/guardians through both on and offline methods. The aim would be to help them keep their children safe online and to educate them on the risks of sharing photos and information about their children.
4. The voices of girls and young women - and all young people - must be included in discussions and decisions on this issue, through direct participation (with support from civil society organisations as required) and taking advice from experts in children and young people. This includes finding a way for the voices of children under 18 to be heard in relation to the 'right to forget'.
5. Terms and conditions should be clear and easy to understand so that young people know how to report harassment and abuse. A good example of this is the accessible terms and conditions from the [Children's Commissioners'](#). However, the government should also tackle the barriers that stop girls and young women from reporting issues such as the normalisation of sexism and abusive behaviour or the fear of being bullied for speaking out. These should be tackled as part of quality RSE and PSHE lessons.
6. Social media sites should have to follow minimum standards. These should include the issues highlighted by girls in this response - e.g. delays and lack of consistency in addressing reported issues.
7. We support the age-verification principle laid out in the Digital Economy Act for online pornography being extended to all sites providing adult content. Social media sites should be responsible for removing adult content from their platforms.
8. We welcome the Strategy's consideration of other documents and issues - such as the VAWG Strategy - and would also recommend considering issues of online harassment and abuse alongside other online pressures, such as the pressure to live the perfect life online, body image anxiety and sexual harassment in schools.

For more information, please contact:

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Appendix - survey questions for young members

Online abuse

1. What types of inappropriate or harmful content have you witnessed online?
 - Online bullying



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- Sexual abuse
- Racial abuse
- Revenge pornography
- Online misogyny
- Phishing
- Content promoting suicide or self-harm
- Other (please specify)

Reporting abuse

2. How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements? Please tell us why
“I feel confident that social media companies would resolve concerns which I report”
“My reported concerns are taken seriously by social media companies”

Online dating

3. How much do you agree/disagree with the following statement?
“Social media websites and apps that allow users to contact each other romantically/sexually are doing all they can to prevent the abuse of young people”
4. Some social media websites and apps offer dating or adult services. What should they do to prevent young people using them? **(select up to three options)**
- Give clearer terms and conditions of use
 - Display adverts/messages on the legality of sexual communication with children
 - Verify the age of users
 - Give information to users about how to access support if they feel at risk
 - Making it easy for users to report users under the age of 18
 - Responding to law enforcement requests for information
 - Funding education or responsible behaviour campaigns
 - Other (please specify)

Digital education/skills

5. How can the technology industry support children in developing digital skills? **(select up to three options)**



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- Support charities who will develop materials on the industry's behalf
- Regularly suggest to users under the age of 18 that they should look at relevant digital literacy materials
- Develop materials and games which promote digital literacy (for example, Google Legends school programme and Interlands, online game)
- Improve reporting functions on their sites
- Enforce existing terms and conditions
- Verify the age of users
- Develop free materials for schools and training for teachers
- Develop free materials for parents
- Develop free materials for professionals who come into regular contact with children, for example doctors and social workers
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

Peer support

6. Which of these groups of children do you think would most benefit from a peer to peer online safety support scheme? **(Select up to three options)**
- 4-12 years
 - 13-16 years
 - 17-21
 - Girls
 - Boys
 - Children in need - this refers to children who are aged under 18 and who need local authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or
 - Children who reside away from home (for example, those at boarding schools)
 - Children who qualify for free school meals
 - Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/ Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD)
 - Children with behaviour and school attendance issues
 - Young offenders
 - Children with mental health issues
 - Other (please specify)
 - None of the above (explain)
 - Don't know

Code of practice

7. Which of these actions do you think are already successfully in place on most social media platforms
- Reporting function for users to notify platform
 - Blocking users who bully or insult other users, or display behaviours likely to intimidate or humiliate



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- Terms and conditions of use
 - Community rules or guidelines (which typically state what can be shared)
 - Privacy settings
 - Removal of illegal content
 - Provision of online safety advice
 - Removal of material which goes against the platform's terms and conditions
 - Other (please specify)
8. Which of these areas do you think are most important? **(Select up to three options)**
- Information on the standards of user content and conduct (e.g. how community guidelines are developed, reviewed and enforced)
 - Information about the prevention and identification of abuse and misuse of services, including persistent abusers across a range of harms
 - Reporting mechanism for inappropriate, bullying or harmful content, with clear policies and performance metrics on the removal of such content, on a comply and explain basis (*Comply or explain' means that companies need to either comply with a request, or if they do not comply, explain publicly why they do not*)
 - Information about how to identify illegal content and how to report it to the relevant authorities in a local jurisdiction
 - Privacy and controls - policies, practices and communications

Social media levy

9. The Government has asked for social media companies to sign up to a code of practice to make sure they keep their users safe. The companies who don't tackle abuse on their platforms will be fined. What should this money fund? **(Select your top three preferred items)**
- Peer to peer support network to help children and young people develop their digital literacy skills
 - Support for 'code clubs', which can teach coding and share online safety messages with children and young people
 - International engagement on online safety
 - Education programmes and resources for children which could be delivered by organisations such as nurseries, schools, civil society organisations, libraries, arts organisations and sports clubs
 - Education programmes and resources for parents
 - Education programmes and resources for professionals such as social workers, troubled families key workers and health care providers
 - Education programmes and resources for all adults
 - Online safety awareness campaigns
 - An independent online safety advice centre
 - Support for charities offering online safety advice or other services
 - Challenge/ Innovation fund for safety related products and designs
 - Sharing forum(s) for safety ideas in technology
 - Other (please specify)