

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

19 May 2022

Online Safety Bill

Dear Ms Dorries,

Senedd Cymru's Children, Young People and Education Committee, of which I am Chair, is currently undertaking an inquiry into peer on peer sexual harassment among learners. I would like to highlight some of our findings to you and ask for your views as to whether and how the Online Safety Bill may address these.

The inquiry draws on the findings of Estyn's review (published in December 2021); the testimonials on the Everyone's Invited website; and the considerable research on gender, sexual harassment and sexual violence between children and young people carried out by Professor EJ Renold and others. The inquiry's terms of reference include "the impact of online content and influences on young people's attitudes, and the wider context of online safety and potential legislation at Westminster".

Throughout the inquiry we have heard consistently that many children and young people access inappropriate sexual content online on a range of online platforms. We have been told that this content can have a negative impact on their understanding of what constitutes a healthy and consensual sexual relationship. It can also expose children and young people to online hate and abuse. And – of course – social media, gaming and social networking websites and platforms can, in themselves, be a mechanism for harassment and image-based abuse.

On 27 April 2022, a group of college students attended a meeting of our Committee to present a video that they had produced and to discuss the findings of our consultation with children and young people with members of the Committee. The students raised a number of concerns about peer on peer sexual harassment. I would like to highlight the following:

- Social media and social networking websites have made sharing explicit and inappropriate images more common among young people.
- The companies responsible for social media platforms, websites containing pornographic material, gaming platforms and social networking websites have a duty of care to protect children and young people from inappropriate content. Largely, we have heard concerns that they are not discharging that duty of care effectively.
- It is often not clear enough for children and parents when particular platforms, services or websites have minimum age limits. Where age limits are in place and are clear, they are not enforced effectively.

With that in mind, I would be grateful if you could respond to this letter to set out how, if at all, the Online Safety Bill addresses the students' concerns.

I would also be grateful if you would could support this Committee's work by arranging for your officials to provide us with a short, technical briefing in private session on the implications of the Online Safety Bill for children and young people in Wales.

If you would like clarification of any of the above points, or have any other questions, please contact the Committee's clerks (SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales). Otherwise I look forward to hearing from you.

I have copied this correspondence to the students themselves, their lecturers, and to the relevant Welsh Ministers.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.