

CYPE(6)-13-22 - Paper to note 1

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref – Online Safety Bill

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

23 May 2022

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter of 22 April regarding the UK Government's Online Safety Bill.

The internet is now an integral part of children and young people's lives and offers many benefits, however it is critical that we ensure their safety in the online world. We share the concerns of the committee around the impact of social media and inappropriate online content. As a government, we are firmly committed to taking action that will keep children and young people safe online.

We welcome the interest from the committee in the UK Government's Online Safety Bill and have sought to respond to the questions you have raised below.

Principle clauses in the Bill

We welcome the UK Government's intention of the Online Safety Bill to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online while also ensuring that people can enjoy their right to freedom of expression.

While 'internet services' are a reserved matter for the UK Government, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people online is a key priority for the Welsh Government. We are pleased that the Bill recognises the need for enhanced protection for children and young people from harmful content online. We firmly believe that safeguarding is a shared responsibility and welcome the duties placed upon online providers to take action to remove harmful content and strengthen protection against activities that threaten the safety of children and young people.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

There are exemptions within the Bill which directly impact Wales. These relate to Education and Childcare and Welsh Government officials have worked closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to ensure that the exemptions for institutions and providers are appropriate for Wales.

As you know, on 30 March the Welsh Government laid a Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Bill before the Senedd in respect of Clause 175(5) which confers a power on Welsh Ministers to amend a list of Welsh education and childcare providers (Part 2 of Schedule 1) that will be exempt from regulation under the Bill.

Engagement with the UK Government

Welsh Government officials have had regular engagement with counterparts in DCMS both prior to, and following, the introduction of the Bill. This engagement has involved discussions in relation to the development of the Bill as well as consultation around priority offences for inclusion. Discussions have also been held with Ofcom as the regulator and will continue to work closely with Ofcom in Wales as they develop the codes of practice.

Following publication of the draft Bill in May 2021, Welsh Government officials have been actively engaged with DCMS on the exemption for Welsh Education and Childcare providers at paragraph 10 and Part 2 of Schedule 1 of the Bill.

We look forward to continued engagement with the UK Government during the Bill's passage through Parliament.

Amendments to the Online Safety Bill

We anticipate that with a complex Bill such as this there are likely to be amendments tabled as it continues its passage through Parliament. We will continue to work closely with the UK Government in monitoring any proposed amendments.

Welsh Government's Digital Resilience in Education Action Plan

With regards to your question on our intentions to update the Welsh Government's Digital Resilience in education action plan, we are committed to providing an annual update that reports our progress in this fundamental area.

Originally published as the 'Online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales' in July 2018, the action plan sets out the Welsh Government's commitment to working with a range of partner organisations across Wales to enhance online safety provision, policy and practice across Wales. In 2020, we further expanded this work recognising the important role cyber resilience and data security has in ensuring children and young people are safe and secure online. The [Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online](#) continues to provide the focus for our important work in online safety and supports our mission to increase the digital resilience of our children and young people.

We published this year's update in May outlining the progress during 2021/22. Our continued collaboration with key partners has resulted in the development of new areas of work that will provide a future focus and seek to ensure the safety and security of our children and young people in Wales.

Taking collaborative action in online safety

We recognise the need for cross sectoral collaborative action in tackling online safety and welcome all action which helps to safeguard children and young people in the online world.

As part of the Welsh Government's cross governmental approach to online safety, we continue to actively engage with the NSPCC and we are firmly committed to work with education, digital, communities and health and social services to further develop our digital resilience in education action plan.

We also understand the importance of working with expert partners and as part of our actions work with organisations including the National Crime Agency, Internet Watch Foundation, UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS), Tarian (police), Internet Matters and Childnet. This engagement is essential to us delivering a multi-disciplinary approach to enhance digital resilience provision, policy and practice in Wales.

We will continue this engagement as we develop our multi-agency action plan to tackle peer-on-peer sexual harassment. The plan, which we aim to publish in autumn, will outline the commitments the Welsh Government will take forward, and critically, it will address how we are going to tackle the role social media plays in these behaviours.

Key to the ambitions of our collaborative actions in online safety is ensuring that the voice of children and young people is central, and as part of the work being taken forward this year, we will be establishing a children and young people's advisory panel for digital resilience. Panel members will be invited to share their online experiences and provide opinions and insight that will shape and inform the direction of our work in this critical area.

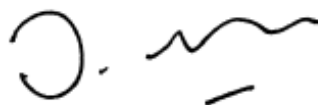
We trust that this letter provides the information requested and gives the Committee confidence that Welsh Government is committed to improving the safety of children and young people when online.

Yours sincerely,



Lee Waters AS/MS

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Deputy Minister for Climate Change



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