

Consultation Questions

1. Do you want to proceed with this consultation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Are you answering as a private individual or on behalf of an organisation?
 - a. Private individual
 - b. On behalf of an organisation
3. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please specify:
 - a. Organisation name
 - b. Role
4. Organisation type:
 - a. Business/trade association
 - b. Civil society/third sector/community organisation
 - c. Education setting
 - d. Prefer not to answer
 - e. Other (please specify)
5. If you are responding as a private individual, do you have a parental or caring responsibility for at least one child who will be 21 or younger by the 26th of May of this year (2026)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
6. As part of your current occupation, do you work with children aged 21 or younger in an education setting? (for example, as a teacher)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
7. Where are you located?
 - a. In the UK
 - b. Outside the UK
 - c. Prefer not to answer
8. This consultation has five chapters. Please choose the ones you would like to provide answers to based on your time and interest. You will not need to complete every question in these chapters.

Chapter 1: Understanding how children use technology

9. What are the benefits of social media use, and being online, for children?
10. What are the harms or risks of social media use, and being online, for children?
11. Do you think the benefits of children using social media, and being online, outweigh the risks, or the other way around?
 - a. Benefits strongly outweigh the risks

- b. Benefits somewhat outweigh the risks
- c. Benefits and risks are roughly equal
- d. Risks somewhat outweigh the benefits
- e. Risks strongly outweigh the benefits
- f. Don't know / Prefer not to answer

Chapter 2: Interventions for safer, more positive experiences

Restricting social media services by age

There is no current legal requirement for social media services to have a minimum age of access, though many services set their minimum age policy at 13. A minimum age of access for a social media service would equate to a ban for anyone younger than the minimum age.

12. Would you support a legal requirement for social media services to have a minimum age of access?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know/Prefer not to answer
13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Social media services should have a minimum age of access of at least 16 and should not be accessible to any children under that age"
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
 - f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
14. Would you support a legal requirement for social media services to have a minimum age of access lower than 16? If so, at what age would you set it?
 - a. Yes – 13
 - b. Yes – 14
 - c. Yes – 15
 - d. No – not lower than 16
 - e. Other (please specify)
 - f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Please explain the reasoning behind your answers about minimum age requirements.

15. What do you think the impacts would be of having a minimum age requirements higher than 13 for social media services? *For example, impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children, or the impact for parents and carers, as well as other users. You could also comment on the impact on all users' privacy and data or on business costs, revenue, and innovation.*

Age of digital consent

Under UK GDPR, 'information society services' often need to seek consent to use people's data for activities such as profiling for advertising purposes. Information society services are most online services that are provided for commercial purposes, including websites, apps, online gaming, social media, search engines, online marketplaces, etc. Children can only give their consent for their data to be used for such purposes if they are 13 or above. For children under this age, services are required to make reasonable efforts to verify consent from those with parental responsibility.

16. At what age do you think the age of digital consent in the UK should be set for information society services?
 - a. 13
 - b. 14
 - c. 15
 - d. 16
 - e. Other (please specify)
 - f. Don't know / Prefer not to answer
17. What risks or burdens may be associated with raising the minimum age of digital consent? *For example, ensuring parental consent, costs to industry, access to services, volume of requests, etc.*
18. What should be considered to make raising the digital age of consent effective and workable? *For example, suitable approaches to verify users' ages (including where parental consent is required) or suitable approaches to verify a parent or carer's identity, age and relationship to the child.*
19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There is a case for changing the digital age of consent for some online services but not others"
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
 - f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Please explain the reasoning behind your answer.

Restricting services based on 'risky' functionalities

'Functionality' refers to a feature of a service which enables interactions or actions between its users. This includes a range of capabilities that services offer.

20. Some online services allow their users to engage with the following functionalities. Do you think these functionalities should be age restricted so

children below a certain age cannot engage with them? (Please select all that apply)

- a. Live streaming
- b. Ability to send nude images or videos
- c. Disappearing content
- d. Location sharing
- e. Connecting or talking to strangers
- f. None of the above
- g. Other (please specify)
- h. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

21. Based on your previous answers, please specify your preferred minimum age for each of the functionalities below:

- a. Live streaming
- b. Ability to send nude images or videos
- c. Disappearing content
- d. Location sharing
- e. Connecting or talking to strangers
- f. None of the above
- g. Other (please specify)

22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“Restricting children’s access to these features/ functionalities, would provide for a safer online experience for children”. *Features/functionality include live streaming, the ability to send nude images or videos, disappearing content, location sharing and connecting or talking to strangers.*

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Somewhat agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Somewhat disagree
- e. Strongly disagree
- f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

23. What do you think the impacts would be

if some online services were required to introduce age restrictions on specific features and functionalities? *For example, impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children, or the impact for parents and carers, as well as other users. You could also comment on the impact on all users' privacy and data or on business costs, revenue, and innovation.*

'Addiction', compulsive design and displacement

24. The following design features are sometimes known as 'persuasive', meaning they may encourage children to stay online for longer. From the following list, please select the ones you think are particularly 'persuasive' to children: (Please select all that apply).

- a. Infinite scrolling

- b. Autoplay
 - c. Affirmation features (e.g. 'likes', comments)
 - d. Alerts and push notifications
 - e. Content recommendation algorithms (these are algorithms which provide personalised recommendations on a user's feed)
 - f. None of the above
 - g. Don't know/Prefer not to answer
 - h. Other (please specify)
25. Which of these features do you think should be age restricted? (Please select all that apply)
- a. Infinite scrolling
 - b. Autoplay
 - c. Affirmation features (e.g. likes, comments)
 - d. Alerts and push notifications
 - e. Content recommendation algorithms (these are algorithms which provide personalised recommendations on a user's feed)
 - f. None of the above – they should not be age restricted
 - g. Don't know / Prefer not to answer
 - h. Other (please specify)
26. Based on your previous answers, please specify your preferred minimum age for each of the features below.
- a. Infinite scrolling
 - b. Autoplay
 - c. Affirmation features (e.g. likes, comments)
 - d. Alerts and push notifications
 - e. Content recommendation algorithms (these are algorithms which provide personalised recommendations on a user's feed)
 - f. None of the above – they should not be age restricted
 - g. Other (please specify)
27. Would you support the following restrictions for children's access to online services? (Please select one)
- a. Daily screen time limits for individual apps
 - b. Restricting overnight access for individual apps
 - c. Both – Daily screen time limits and overnight access for individual apps
 - d. I would not support any of them
 - e. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
28. What do you think the impacts would be if online platforms were required to restrict specific features or functionalities, or to introduce time limits? *For example, impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children, or the impact for parents and carers, as well as other users. You could also comment on the impact on all users' privacy and data or on business costs, revenue, and innovation.*

Which services should age restrictions apply to

29. What factors are important when determining which apps, sites or services to apply **minimum age of access restrictions** to? *For example, user-to-user interaction, the ability to post material, persuasive design features, risky functionalities, ability to generate non-text mediums such as video or images, the target age group, the size of the service.*
30. Are there any types of apps, sites or services that you would want to be captured by **minimum age of access restrictions**?
31. What factors are important when determining which apps, sites or services to apply **age-restrictions on specific features and functionalities**? *For example, user-to-user interaction, the ability to post material, persuasive design features, risky functionalities, ability to generate non-text mediums such as video or images, the target age group, the size of the service.*
32. Are there any types of apps, sites or services that you want to be captured by **age-restrictions to features/ functionalities**?
33. Some services are already exempt from the Online Safety Act. Examples include internal business services, services with limited functionalities and services provided by persons providing education or childcare. Are there additional types of service which you think would be appropriate to exempt from age restrictions? *These might include services whose primary purpose is delivery of educational content, services that offer specific child or teen accounts or versions, or services which offer parental controls.*

Artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots

An AI chatbot is an artificial intelligence system that can replicate human-like conversations with users. They can generate images, videos, text or audio in response to 'prompts' from users in real time. They may also remember context and personalise responses to individual users. These services can draw from a variety of datasets including live search results and large language models. AI chatbots can be standalone services or embedded within another service. Examples of this include ChatGPT (standalone) or embedded within services, such as Grok (within X).

34. What are the benefits to children of using AI chatbots? *For example, this might include as a search function, for educational purposes, for creativity.*
35. Which AI chatbot features are most risky for children? (Please select all that apply)
- a. The realism of interactions, including realism of content generated
 - b. The personalisation of interactions
 - c. How they mimic relationships (friendship)
 - d. How they mimic relationships (romantic)
 - e. How they mimic empathy
 - f. Flattering language
 - g. Features to encourage more questions/ requests (e.g. asking questions back)
 - h. The ability to recall interactions across sessions

- i. The type of content generated – a) video, b) text, c) audio, d) image
 - j. Allowing children to have accounts
 - k. Hallucination or false, misleading responses
 - l. Ability to engage in and generate mature content (e.g. sexual / romantic roleplay)
 - m. Other (please specify)
 - n. None of the above/AI chatbot features are not risky for children
 - o. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
36. Which functionalities of AI chatbots should minimum age restrictions apply to?
37. Should AI chatbots have minimum age restrictions?
- a. Yes – minimum age requirements for AI chatbots
 - b. Yes – restrict access to certain features and functionalities
 - c. Yes – both minimum age requirements and restricting access to certain features and functionalities
 - d. No
 - e. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Please explain the reasoning behind your answer

38. What do you think the impact would be of introducing age restrictions on AI chatbots or certain features and functions? *For example, impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children, or the impact for parents and carers, as well as other users. You could also comment on the impact on all users' privacy and data or on business costs, revenue, and innovation.*

Chapter 3: Enforcement and compliance

Age assurance

If online minimum age restrictions were to be introduced, services in scope would need to prove that their users were above the required age. Age assurance methods include, but are not limited to, facial age estimation, photo ID matching, AI and biometric based systems, and age inference (where AI predicts age based on online behaviour).

39. To what extent do you agree with this statement: “Adults should complete age checks more often, if it means children are safer online”?
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
 - f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

40. What should be considered to make minimum age restrictions effective and workable? *This could mean either age restrictions for access to whole services, or for specific risky or 'addictive' features or functionalities.*
41. What do you think the impacts might be from requiring age assurance across a greater number of online platforms? *For example, impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children, or the impact for parents and carers, as well as other users. You could also comment on the impact on all users' privacy and data or on business costs, revenue, and innovation.*
42. How, if at all, could age assurance be made more effective?
43. What should be considered when assessing the effectiveness of age-verification and age-assurance technologies?

Circumvention of age limits

Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) are tools that create a secure private connection between your device and the internet. They are used for several purposes, such as protecting sensitive communications and protecting privacy, including in a corporate context.

44. What methods to circumvent online safety rules do you think children in the UK use, beyond Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), or similar technologies?
45. Which of the options below do you think the government should prioritise to reduce circumvention of online safety rules in the UK? (Select the most important to you)
 - a. More education for children
 - b. Restricting children's access to VPNs
 - c. None of the above
 - d. Other (please specify)
 - e. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
46. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Everyone should go through age checks to access a VPN if it would prevent children using them"
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
 - f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
47. What do you think the impacts would be if VPNs were age-restricted? *For example, impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children, or the impact for parents and carers, as well as other users. You could also comment on the impact on all users' privacy and data or on business costs, revenue, and innovation.*
48. What should be considered to make age-restricting VPNs effective and workable? *For example, public trust and engagement with increased age*

assurance requirements, accessibility of age assurance methods and variations of age assurance approaches across services, interaction with legitimate uses of VPNs.

Mobile phones in schools

In February 2026, the Department for Education (DfE) updated the guidance on mobile phones in schools and stipulated that all schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default unless there is a good reason for phones to be in use.

49. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “To address some of the challenges schools face with mobile phones, the Department for Education’s (DfE) non-statutory guidance on ‘mobile phones in schools’ should be made statutory.” *This would mean schools have a legal duty to follow the guidance, which explains to individual schools and trusts how to implement a policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones throughout the school day, unless they have good reasons not to. This includes during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.*

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Somewhat agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Somewhat disagree
- e. Strongly disagree
- f. Don’t know/prefer not to answer

50. What impacts would there be if this guidance was made statutory and why? *For example, on disruption in lessons, bullying or harassment, parental views on mobile phone policies, staff, etc.*

51. Are there specific circumstances where you think children should be permitted to have or use a mobile phone during the school day?
(Please select all that apply)

- a. Medical needs
- b. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) requirements
- c. Individual safeguarding concerns
- d. Caring responsibilities
- e. Educational or learning purposes
- f. Travel to and from school
- g. None of the above, children should not be permitted to have or use a mobile phone during the school day at all
- h. None of the above, children should always be permitted to have or use a mobile phone during the school day
- i. Don’t know/ Prefer not to answer
- j. Other (please specify)

Chapter 4: Preparing children for a digital future

Media and digital literacy

Media literacy is about understanding, questioning, and making sense of the content you see online. It helps children tell the difference between fact and opinion, check sources and assess their trustworthiness, and recognise how online content can affect thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Digital literacy means having the practical skills to use devices and online services safely, confidently and independently. This includes knowing how to set up and use devices, recognising scams, protecting personal information, and managing everyday digital tasks.

52. Which areas of media or digital literacy do children and families most need additional help with? (Please select all that apply)
- a. Managing screen time and online habits
 - b. Spotting adverts, sponsored posts or AI generated content
 - c. Keeping personal information private
 - d. Online behaviour and experiences (bullying, respect, comparison or peer pressure)
 - e. Checking if information is true
 - f. Understanding how social media works (for example, 'likes' or algorithms)
 - g. Staying safe online (including how to have conversations about online safety)
 - h. Reporting harmful or upsetting content
 - i. Knowing which apps or sites are right for their age
 - j. None of the above
 - k. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
 - l. Other (please specify)
53. If you are responding as a private individual, where do you go for help with online safety or media literacy skills? *By online safety or media literacy skills, we mean things like staying safe online, understanding digital content and using the internet confidently and responsibly.* (Please select all that apply)
- a. Schools or childcare settings
 - b. Community or youth spaces (for example libraries, youth clubs or local charities)
 - c. Parent or carer groups or networks
 - d. Public services (such as family hubs, GP surgeries or community centres)
 - e. Faith or cultural groups (including places of worship)
 - f. Non-governmental online sources (such as websites, platforms or online communities)
 - g. Government websites
 - h. Tools and resources on online platforms

- i. None of the above/I haven't used any of these to find help
- j. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
- k. Other (please specify)

What made these places helpful? *Please share any programmes, resources or activities that you have found useful.*

54. Where, if anywhere, would you like to see more support available in the future? *This could include places you already use but don't offer support and you would like them to, or places that could offer more support with help from government or others.* (Please select all that apply)

- a. Schools or childcare settings
- b. Community or youth spaces (for example libraries, youth clubs or local charities)
- c. Parent or carer groups or networks
- d. Public services (such as family hubs, GP surgeries or community centres)
- e. Faith or cultural groups
- f. Non-governmental online sources (such as websites, platforms or online communities)
- g. Government websites
- h. None of the above/I would not use these to find help
- i. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
- j. Other (please specify)

55. Outside of schools, how could the UK government better support children and young people to stay safe and feel supported online? (Please select all that apply)

- a. By providing clear guidance that children can use on their own
- b. By supporting parents and carers to support children online
- c. By working with online platforms and services that children already use
- d. By supporting youth organisations and community groups to help children online
- e. By making help or advice easy to access when something goes wrong online
- f. By involving children and young people in designing support
- g. None of the above
- h. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

56. What types of support would help children with additional needs stay safe online and build digital skills? *By 'additional needs', we mean children who may need extra support for a range of reasons (such as learning, communication, health or access needs).* (Please select all that apply)

- a. Clear, simple information using plain language
- b. Content adapted for different ages, abilities or needs

- c. Visual, audio or interactive formats
- d. Support delivered through trusted local or community services
- e. Flexible or on-demand support that can be accessed when needed
- f. Support that helps parents or carers guide children online
- g. None of the above
- h. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
- i. Other (please specify)

Promoting high quality content

We know that access to high quality content can be beneficial for children. By high quality online content, we mean content that can have positive impacts on children's learning and development.

57. Who would you trust to determine what is meant by 'high quality' online content' for children 13-16? (Please select all that apply)

- a. Government
- b. Online platform trust and safety teams
- c. Parents, carers or trusted adults
- d. Children
- e. Developmental experts
- f. Educators
- g. Youth workers
- h. Child advocacy charities and organisations
- i. None of the above
- j. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
- k. Other (please specify)

58. What further action should be prioritised to support positive online spaces for young people? (Please select all that apply)

- a. Develop best practice principles for industry
- b. Develop guidance for parents and carers
- c. Develop guidance for children
- d. Reviewing international approaches
- e. Industry voluntarily promoting high quality content for children
- f. None of the above
- g. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer
- h. Other (please specify)

59. What should be considered when taking further action to support positive online spaces and content for young people? *For example, how would this work in practice for services, taking into account existing best practice across industry, and who should feed into future guidance.*

Chapter 5: Supporting families

Parental controls

Many online platforms provide parental control tools which allow parents and carers to oversee and place parameters around children's online activity, including content, time and functionality-based restrictions.

60. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
“Parents should have control over the online experiences of their children”
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
 - f. Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Please explain the reasoning behind your answer.

61. How should this level of control change for children of different ages? *For example, a 16-year-old and an 11-year-old.*
62. What would help parents and carers to more effectively use parental controls? *For example, more information on how to do this on purchase of a phone, help from platforms on how to set up, or greater standardisation across tools.*