

"The Government's proposals include a new approach to parental controls by the internet service providers, and for all businesses in the information and communication industries, including retailers and device manufacturers, to develop universally-available family-friendly internet access which is easy to use.

Ministers will also explore with UKCCIS what more can be done to: improve online protections for the more vulnerable children; define inappropriate content and improve the means for identifying it online; establish clear, simple benchmarks and classifications for parental control solutions; and encourage a deeper understanding of the reasons why parental controls are not taken up by more parents."

Note: This document reproduces, in full, the Key findings and the Government's response to the consultation.

Paragraph numbers are those appearing in the full document, which can be downloaded at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/ukccis/news/a00218633/parental-internet-controls-consultation>

Key findings

15. The key headlines from the consultation responses are:

- Respondents very clearly said that children's online safety is the responsibility of parents or a shared responsibility between parents and businesses. A majority of parents think that it is their responsibility solely, and parents are more likely than other groups (with the exception of VCS organisations) to think it is a shared responsibility with business.
- A large majority of respondents, including parents, said that they did not like any of the three options for parental controls the consultation invited responses on. There was marginally more support for default filtering at network level (14 percent of respondents) than for the other options - parents choosing controls (9 percent of respondents) and a combination of default filtering and parental choice (7 percent of respondents).
- When prompted to say what kind of harmful things on the internet they know their children had been exposed to, parents chose a mixture of content and behavioural issues from a list of possible issues. The issues that parents chose, by size of response, were:
 - pornography
 - sexual messages
 - gambling
 - violence
 - alcohol and drugs
 - bullying
 - personal abuse on social networks
 - self-harming
 - anorexia/bulimia
 - religious and political radicalisation
 - suicide
 - grooming
- Parents also recognise that their children are more likely to be worried by other people's behaviour on the internet, such as bullying, than by inappropriate content.
- Pornography is the issue that parents are most likely to say they want help with to protect their children online, with bullying, violent content and grooming other key concerns. However, nearly a quarter of parents say they don't need help with any of the issues the consultation asked them about.
- Parents say they would like to be made more aware of parental controls and to have more information about how to use them.

The Government's response

16. The consultation elicited a wide variety of views. However, there was considerable agreement in a number of key areas.
17. It is quite clear that parents feel that it is their responsibility, with the help of industry, to keep their children safe online.
18. It is also clear that in accepting that responsibility, parents want

to be in control, and that it would be easier for them to use the online safety tools available to them if they could learn more about those tools. They also want information about internet safety risks and what to do about them. There was no great appetite among parents for the introduction of default filtering of the internet by their ISP: only 35 percent of the parents who responded favoured that approach, There were even smaller proportions of parents who favoured an approach which simply asked them what they would like their children to access on the internet, with no default settings (13 percent) or a system that combines the latter approach with default filtering(15 percent)6.

19. To date, the Government's approach has been based on expert advice that default filtering can create a false sense of security since:
 - It does not filter all potentially harmful content: given the vast amount of material on the internet, it would not be possible to identify all the possible content to be filtered, and very large numbers of websites are created each day.
 - There is also a risk from "over-blocking" – preventing access to websites which provide helpful information on sexual health or sexual identity, issues which young people may want information on but find difficult to talk to their parents about.
 - It does not deal with harms such as bullying, personal abuse, grooming or sexual exploitation which arise from the behaviour of other internet users.
 - It does not encourage parents to engage with the issues and learn about keeping their children safe online. There is a risk that parents might rely on default filtering to protect their children from all potential online harms and not think about how their children might want to use the internet, the kind of content that is appropriate for each child according to their own circumstances, and the risks and harms their children might face.
20. The Government has therefore been working with all parts of the information and communication industries through UKCCIS to promote the approach recommended by Reg Bailey, "that the internet industry should ensure that customers must make an active choice over what sort of content they want to allow their children to access ... those providing content which is age restricted.
- The full results are in Annexes 1 and 2, but note that the options described here were set out in three separate questions and were not, therefore, mutually exclusive: parents could have answered "yes" to all three options, and the large majority of parents who chose "no" for each option suggests that is the case.
- Whether by law or company policy, should seek robust means of age verification as well as making it easy for parents to block underage access."
21. The internet is a constantly evolving and dynamic facility with ever-expanding content and uses. The numbers of people using it continue to grow, and the activities they use it for, and the technologies through which they access it, are constantly evolving. For these reasons, the Government keeps its approach to children's online safety under continuous review. Having

- considered the responses to the consultation, which are set out below, and reviewed the progress to date, the Government believes that the approach to child internet safety needs to evolve.
22. The consultation elicited a wide range of views and little consensus emerged. There were, however, some clear messages, set out above, which suggested the ways in which that evolution should take place: supporting parents in their desire to be responsible for their children's safety; and making it easier for parents to choose what is right for their own children.
 23. Although there was only minority support among parents for the three options consulted on, the Government does not believe parents are uninterested in their children's safety online: the very high percentages of parents who think they have the responsibility for their children's safety suggests otherwise. However, the offer to parents should be reformulated in a way that ensures that children can be given the levels of protection their parents think is appropriate for them, reduces the risk of uninterested parents avoiding online safety issues, and does not impose a solution on adult users or non-parents.
 24. Our approach to child internet safety should therefore evolve in ways so that it:
 - actively helps parents to make sure they have appropriate safety features in place when their children access the internet and also encourages them to think about issues such as grooming, bullying and sexting as well as potentially harmful or inappropriate content
 - covers existing ISP customers as well as new ones
 - prompts or steers parents towards those safety features
 - makes it easier for parents to take charge of setting up the internet access their children will have, and less likely that they will abdicate this responsibility to their children
 25. The Government is now asking all internet service providers to actively encourage people to switch on parental controls if children are in the household and will be using the internet. This approach should help parents make use of the available safety features without affecting internet users aged 18 and over who can choose not to set up controls.
 26. Internet service providers have made great progress to date in implementing "active choice" controls where all new customers are asked if they want to switch on parental controls. The Government is urging providers to go one step further and configure their systems to actively encourage parents, whether they are new or existing customers, to switch on parental controls. The Government believes providers should automatically prompt parents to tailor filters to suit their child's needs e.g. by preventing access to harmful and inappropriate content. We also expect ISPs to put in place appropriate measures to check that the person setting up the parental controls is over the age of 18. This builds on the child internet safety approach already established by the four main ISPs by steering parents towards the safety features and taking responsibility for setting up those that are most appropriate for their own children. It will also help parents think about the knowledge and skills children need to prevent harm from the behaviour of other people on the internet: we are clear from the consultation that parents are conscious of these risks as well as those posed by age-inappropriate content.
 27. This is only one part of the approach which the Government is pressing for. All of the information and communication industries, including retailers and device manufacturers, should work to develop universally-available family-friendly internet access which is easy to use. The Government wants to see all internet-enabled devices supplied with the tools to keep children safe as a standard feature.
 28. Industry has already made progress on this. The four largest internet service providers - BT, Sky, TalkTalk, and Virgin are all now offering parental controls to new customers. Large retailers like Argos are giving away free parental control software. Nevertheless, everyone with a stake in the internet can do more.
 29. A particular area for action is for industry to do more to raise awareness and understanding of how to deal with internet safety issues such as grooming and cyberbullying, which is children's number one concern online. Businesses in particular need to go further and to make sure that the really good information about internet safety which is already available actually reaches parents.
- How this will be taken forward**
30. Ministers will now work with industry, charities and experts in relevant fields through UKCCIS to bring about the desired approach described in paragraphs 24 to 27. Government will not prescribe detailed solutions, but we will expect industry to adapt the principles of this approach to their services, systems and devices so that their customers, and particularly parents and children, have highly-effective, easy to use and free tools that facilitate children's safety online. Industry also needs to make every effort to engage parents and children in online safety issues, not just at the point of sale or commencement of a service, but through persistent, accessible, ongoing education, advice and support. Government will look to industry for innovative ways in reaching parents with different needs, such as those who have poor reading skills. This combination of parental tools and education will be needed in order to deal with the twin problems of harmful content and harmful online behaviour.
 31. The consultation also highlighted the need for action in other areas. Ministers will therefore also explore with UKCCIS what more can be done to:
 - define which children are most likely to be vulnerable online.
 - improve online protections for the more vulnerable children, including making it easier for parents and carers to find out what kinds of controls can allow these children to use the internet safely and how children in families where their safety is a low priority can be helped to have positive experiences of the internet;
 - define inappropriate content and improve the means for identifying it online, starting with an exploration of "community regulation"
 - establish clear, simple benchmarks and classifications for parental control solutions, so that parents can more easily understand what those tools will help them with and how various products compare; and
 - encourage a deeper understanding of the reasons why parental controls are not taken up by more parents.
 32. Additionally, Ministers will ask UKCCIS to investigate how a person's age can be verified effectively in order to limit children's access to harmful content.

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