

## Online Safety Bill Briefing

### Queen's Speech May 2021

#### The Internet Watch Foundation



The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is a charity working in partnership with the tech industry, law enforcement and government to remove images and videos of child sexual abuse wherever they are hosted in the world.

We provide a secure and anonymous place for the public to report suspected incidents of this content and use the latest technology to proactively search the internet for these images and videos. The technical tools and services we provide help to keep technology companies platforms and services free from child sexual abuse.

#### Key Asks:

1. That Ofcom and the Government work hand in hand with IWF and their industry partners to ensure that the Bill is effective from day one.
2. That the Government [honours its commitments to online safety](#), consolidating and funding the existing expert mechanisms and programmes as EU funding for online safety initiatives ends in December 2021.
3. That the Government works with other countries to tackle the global nature of online harms, particularly given the UK's Presidency of the G7.
4. That the Government implements age verification for adult websites as well as implementing similar measures for social media providers in the Online Safety Bill, to limit children's exposure to adult content and age-inappropriate content.

#### Calls for the IWF to [work hand in hand](#) with Ofcom on CSAM:

Given the significant task that Ofcom will have to regulate 29 different online harms, the IWF is encouraged that Ofcom will be able to co-designate bodies to assist with regulation. In a recent statement on the Government's full response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, both Lord Clement-Jones and Greg Smith MP called on the regulator, Ofcom, to work in partnership with the IWF. We have had recent discussions with Ofcom about the role the IWF could play in supporting with this, particularly as we have over 25 years expertise in removing child sexual abuse material (CSAM.)

Some of our recent achievements include:

- Our analysts removed 153,350 webpages in 2020 containing CSAM (up 16% on 2019.) Each report can contain between one and thousands of individual images and videos, so this equates to millions of individual pieces of content.
- When the IWF was founded in 1996, the UK hosted 18% of CSAM globally; in 2020 this was just 0.1%. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse recently found we sit at the heart of the national response to Child Sexual Abuse Imagery and deserve to be recognised as a large part of the reason why the UK has a comparatively favourable position compared to our international counterparts on hosting this content.

- In just one month of 2020, three ISPs serving the UK market and deploying the IWF's block list reported they had blocked over 8.8 million attempts to access known CSAM. Further highlighting our effectiveness and the importance of effective collaboration with the industry in tackling CSAM online.

We believe that we are well-placed to provide insights to the online harms legislation and to work closely with Ofcom on the new regulatory framework.

### **Funding the work of the UK Safer Internet Centre post Brexit:**

The IWF is one third of the [UK Safer Internet Centre \(UKSIC\)](#) which runs the [Revenge Porn helpline](#), [Professionals Online Safety Helpline](#), [Report Harmful Content helpline](#) and provides [educational programmes](#) to children and those who work for them, as well as organising [Safer Internet Day](#), the critical online safety touch point in the lives of children and young people each year.

- In 2021 Safer Internet Day reached 51% of children and 38% of their parents/carers and set a [Guinness World Record for the most online safety pledges made in one day](#).
- Funding certainty is needed for the future of Safer Internet Day for 2022 as Government has so far not followed through on its pledge to replace EU funding for the Centre.

The UKSIC has been 50% funded by the EU. This funding is due to end in December 2021. The UK Government has made commitments to replace this funding as have various Ministers, including the [Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster](#) who announced that "funding would be maintained" following a question from Chris Elmore MP. The Culture Secretary, [Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP](#), also confirmed during questioning from Damian Hinds MP at the DCMS Select Committee, "that it was the default assumption that those who had received funding previously (from the EU) would continue to do so subject to any announcements in the CSR."

**We urge the Government to continue to fund the essential mechanisms and programmes that have been keeping children safe for over 10 years.**

### **Global Nature of the Problem**

The UK is currently in a significant position to be able to cement its place as the world leader on online safety. We [welcome the recent announcements](#) across the G7 to internet safety and believe the UK should ensure that there are dedicated priority G7 discussions around ending CSAM, and about how to develop international standards for removing this content.

The IWF stands ready to assist the UK Government in any capacity with this, particularly as we have **over 45 international reporting portals all around the world and are one of the only hotlines in the world that currently has the ability to proactively search for CSAM. We would like to see similar measures adopted in other G7 countries, where currently the response to this issue varies greatly. Only by working internationally will we solve this challenge.**

### **Need for Age Verification**

**We would urge the Government to mandate age verification for adult platforms and to take other steps to ensure that children are not viewing violent pornography.** Whilst we recognise that the Online Safety Bill has a specific focus on social media and gaming, we are concerned that whilst the Bill could have some impact on children stumbling across pornography, we believe the Government should also be pursuing Age Verification for Adult Websites.

We were recently one of 60 organisations who wrote to the Prime Minister, calling for him to include this in the Bill and were encouraged that the Secretary of State for DCMS said at the DCMS Select Committee he had an open mind on its implementation.