

Speech

An Internet for Children and Young People

From: [Department for Culture, Media & Sport](#) and [Baroness Joanna Shields](#)
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Baroness Shields addresses the Internet Governance Forum



Thank you for inviting me to speak today. The Internet Governance Forum is a unique venue that brings together a wide range of stakeholders from industry, civil society, government, parliamentarians to academics. So it's a real pleasure for me to talk about a subject matter that I care very deeply about - children and young people.

I know everyone in this room thinks about the internet and its future. You ask: How can technology help us? How can businesses thrive in the digital economy? How can we stay safe from cyber attacks? How do we keep the internet open and free for it to thrive? How does social media influence political debate? How can we reach the next billion internet users?

My colleague Matt Hancock spoke earlier about some of these issues. And I know these topics, and many more, will be debated by speakers and participants today.

Children and Young People online

As Minister for Internet Safety and Security, one of the things I think a lot about is children and young people. According to Ofcom 87% of children aged 5-15 go online. We know that the internet has been a game changer for them - as for adults - and that it has brought incredible opportunities. It can enrich the lives of children and young people by offering new ways to communicate and be creative, stay in touch with peers and learn about the world. With so much information at the tip of their fingers, they can research their homework, find peer groups online and seek support and advice if they need it.

When you look at the data available that you realize how the online world is a massive part of their lives. Last year Ofcom compared children's media access and consumption across ten years – between 2005 and 2015. It showed that:

- the amount of time 8-11s and 12-15s spend online has more than doubled. In a typical week, 8-11 year olds spend 11 hours online, up from 4 hours. For 12-15 year olds, it's nearly 19 hours. Up from 8 hours a week.
- there is less research on 3-4 year olds, but we know that over half of children this age use a tablet. And that over 60% of 5-15s also use one.

Since 2005, interestingly - but perhaps unsurprisingly - the mobile phone has overtaken the TV set as the device 12-15s would miss the most. And for the first time, those in this age group who watch both TV and YouTube, say they prefer to watch YouTube content to TV programmes.

Of children who go online, nearly a quarter aged 8-11 and three-quarters aged 12-15 have a social media profile. Just yesterday Ofcom reported that:

- for the first time 5-15s spend more time online than watching TV. That's 15 hours of time spent online. 87% of 12-15s use YouTube website or app.
- take up of a social media account increases sharply between 12 and 13, from 50% to 75%.

So we know that young people spend quite a bit of time on the internet. Even prefer it to TV. Devices and online content start to become a part of their lives very early on. Many will also be sophisticated users of apps, and use a range of devices proficiently, including games consoles. This generation of under 18s will have different expectations from digital communications compared to adults.

While the internet has brought a lot of good, unfortunately, it also has its challenges. It reflects the ills and

dangers in society. Children and young people in particular are vulnerable to a range of risks. They may be exposed to age-inappropriate material online such as pornography, violence or hate speech. They can fall prey to bullying. Their personal images could be shared online without their permission or they may seek to imitate dangerous behaviour. Under 18s may also not fully know how to protect their privacy and share where they live, or start to interact with strangers that can lead to threats and abuse, or in the worst cases, to physical, sexual or psychological harm.

Government's approach to child internet safety

I passionately believe that in order to protect children from harm and violence in the 21st century, we must act to secure their safety online. I'd like to share how the Government is doing this while ensuring children and young people continue to benefit from the opportunities brought by the internet.

The UK has in place a range of robust offences to protect children from sexual abuse, exploitation and exposure to harmful material and activity online and offline. We are also passing new legislation to ensure that children are restricted from seeing commercial pornographic content online. While Government itself can drive change to improve child internet safety - and will continue to do so - our frame of mind is similar to supporters of the UK and Global UN IGF: we believe in the benefits of multi-stakeholder efforts and in building long-term partnerships with industry and other experts.

Multi-stakeholder approaches are hard work. It requires a common understanding of what's important, a vision for the future, and a drive and commitment by a range of people and organisations that may not be a natural fit. I have been privileged to work on two initiatives with such a strong purpose: the UK Council for Child Internet Safety and WeProtect. And my conclusion is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Government is committed to improving the safety of children online and have a strong track-record in working with the internet industries and the charity sector to drive progress. At home, we have the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), a multi-stakeholder forum representing over 200 organisations with an interest in child internet safety. I am one of its co-Chairs, along with Ministerial colleagues from Education and the Home Office. The UKCCIS Executive Board responds to new and emerging issues by setting up working groups to examine them in-depth. Through the voluntary efforts of its members, and encouragement by Government, UKCCIS has achieved a lot over the years. We have:

- rolled-out free, family-friendly filters for the vast majority of broadband customers with prompts to encourage parents to activate them.
- supported providers of social media and interactive services with a guide to encourage businesses to think about "safety by design" to help make their platforms safer for under 18
- created advice for schools and colleges on how to respond to incidents of 'sexting'; and also guidance for school governors on online safety.

Something I am very excited about is new work that UKCCIS has just started on Digital Resilience. It brings together relevant stakeholders that represent the education sector, parents, industry, expert civil society organisations and children themselves. What do I mean by 'digital resilience'? Well, it's all those things we can do to stay safe around people we meet on the internet. Many of you may do it without thinking - sometimes it's common sense and sometimes it isn't. So we are looking at these areas and what help and advice is already out there. We want to see what more we need to do to improve how children and young people have the digital skills and emotional understanding to feel empowered to lead their digital lives safely. It's very ambitious work and it is through such focused working groups that the UKCCIS Board is

able to respond to new and emerging issues. We are also looking at new and emerging technology so we can assess if they will have an impact on children and young people's safety.

Another extremely important area of my work as joint Home Office Minister is combating the sexual exploitation of children online. The Government strongly supports the work of the Internet Watch Foundation in tackling illegal images, and recognises the work that the internet industry has done to make blocking a real success. But the sexual exploitation of children online cannot be dealt with by any one country, company or organisation working in isolation: a coordinated global response is needed to address this global threat.

With this in mind, the UK has brought together the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online: a global coalition of countries, technology firms and organisations committed to national and global action to end the online sexual exploitation of children, working together to identify and safeguard more victims of this terrible crime and apprehend more perpetrators. It was launched in London nearly two years ago. Since then, it has merged with the Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Online. This has created, for the first time, a single global initiative with the expertise, influence and resources to transform how this crime is dealt with worldwide. By joining up our efforts across national borders, we can guarantee children the future that they deserve and secure their safety in the digital world.

I am really pleased the UK IGF is hosting a youth panel this year, and that they will have the opportunity to share their views with you on what everyone has been discussing today.

I want to leave you with a final thought. Since the global UN IGF started – eleven years now – the generation of under 18s has been quietly but steadily increasing their stake in the areas you are discussing today. Last year, the global UN IGF's mandate was renewed for another ten years – can you imagine what this cohort will think of the internet then? They will be setting up businesses, programming with the same ease as they type text messages today, and coming up with the next generation of technology. Some might be following your footsteps and think about internet governance.

My appeal to you is to incorporate children and young people into your thinking. As you consider your areas of work, research for new trends, and as you wonder how technology will impact society in future, consider the interests of children and the opinions of young people. Help them participate in our journey because before you know it, they will be right next to you deciding about our future.

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