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Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Policy paper
Digital Charter
Updated 8 April 2019

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We want to make the internet work for everyone – for citizens, businesses and society as a whole. We are determined that the UK should lead the world in innovation-friendly regulation that encourages the tech sector and provides stability for businesses. Through this work we will protect citizens, increase public trust in new technologies, and create the best possible basis on which the digital economy and society can thrive.

The internet is a powerful force for good. It serves humanity, spreads ideas and enhances freedom and opportunity across the world. Combined with new technologies such as artificial intelligence, it is set to change society perhaps more than any previous technological revolution – growing the economy, making us more productive, and raising living standards. Harnessing the benefits of new technologies is at the heart of our Industrial Strategy, through which we are supporting innovation and the commercialisation of ideas. We are investing an additional £7 billion in research and development by 2021/22, delivering major upgrades to our digital infrastructure, and ensuring that people are ready to seize the opportunities of technology through investing in our skills system.

As well as opportunities, new technologies have brought new challenges and risks. The internet can be used to spread terrorist material; it can be a tool for abuse and bullying; and it can be used to undermine civil discourse, objective news and intellectual property. Increasingly sophisticated use of data and AI can create powerful insights from our behaviour online, which can be deployed in ways that influence the decisions we make, or target the services and resources we receive. And legitimate concerns have been raised about the balance of power

between the big tech platforms, citizens and others.

Government must lead the way in tackling these challenges. Our starting point is that we will have the same rights and expect the same behaviour online as we do offline. We will take action to ensure that the internet and new technologies are not only safe and secure, but also that they are developed and used responsibly and ethically, with users' interests at their heart. And we will ensure that businesses can compete on a level playing field and digital markets deliver the best outcomes for consumers.

In some cases this will be through shifting expectations of behaviour; in some we will need to agree new standards; and in others we will need to update our laws. Where regulation is necessary, we will ensure it is well-targeted, proportionate and delivers a stable and predictable business environment for innovation to thrive. We will develop it in collaboration with industry and international partners and ensure our overall approach is coherent and easy to understand for citizens as well as businesses.

We are guided by these principles:

- the internet should be free, open and accessible
- people should understand the rules that apply to them when they are online
- personal data should be respected and used appropriately
- protections should be in place to help keep people safe online, especially children
- the same rights that people have offline must be protected online
- the social and economic benefits brought by new technologies should be fairly shared

Work programme

To support our ambition for the UK to be the safest place in the world to be online;

We have:

- published a Social Media Code of Practice, which sets expectations for preventing and responding to abusive behaviour, and annual transparency requirements
- taken a range of actions to raise cyber security standards across the UK, backed by £1.9bn of new funding, including the creation of the National Cyber Security Centre
- published a Code of Practice for Internet of Things devices to ensure that strong security is built into internet-connected products by design
- set new standards for protecting personal data, and given people more rights and control over the use of their data through the Data Protection Act

We will:

- introduce a new statutory duty of care, which will be overseen and enforced by an independent regulator, as set out in the Online Harms White Paper. This regulatory framework will require companies to take reasonable and proportionate action to tackle harmful online content and activity on their services.

To ensure that technology works for society as a whole;

We have:

- established the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation - a new advisory body which will provide independent, expert advice on the measures needed to enable and ensure safe, ethical and innovative uses of AI and data-driven technologies
- published the independent Cairncross Review, which considers how the news industry in the UK can become more sustainable as it transitions from print to digital.

We will:

- engage with the Centre to examine areas that pose key policy challenges; initial projects include a study of the use of data in shaping people's online experiences, and the potential for bias in decisions made using algorithms
- review how online advertising is regulated in the UK, recognising the need to look right across the different challenges brought by online advertising to develop an effective response

To promote fair and efficient digital markets;

We have:

- published an independent review of competition in the digital economy, undertaken by an expert panel in digital competition led by Professor Jason Furman
- through the Intellectual Property Office, facilitated a Code of Practice signed by search engines and copyright owners, which has reduced the prominence of websites hosting illegal copyright infringing content in natural search results

We will:

- continue to develop a National Data Strategy to unlock the power of data across government and the economy, while building public trust and confidence in its use
- set out our response to the range of challenges posed by digital markets as part of wider work to update the UK's competition regime

Approach

We look to the tech sector, businesses and civil society to own these challenges with us, using our convening power to bring them together to find solutions where possible. But we will not be afraid to take direct action or legislate where necessary.

We are committing to:

- make it as easy as possible for citizens and others to give us their views
- harness the ingenuity of the tech sector, looking to them for answers to specific technological challenges, rather than government dictating precise solutions
- consider the full range of possible solutions, including domestic legal changes where necessary, to establish standards and norms online
- lead by example, including through our procurement policy and the data we hold

These are challenges with which every nation is grappling. The internet is a global network and we will work with other countries that share both our values and our determination to get this right.

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