



Meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Media

**Monday 8th February 2021: “An Internet we can trust: Exploring reliability in the Online World.”
(held via Zoom 3.30pm-4.30pm)**

Attendees:

Dr Lisa Cameron MP, Vice Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Media (in the Chair)
Aaron Bell MP, Secretary, of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Media
Owen Thompson MP
Chi Onwurah MP, Shadow Digital Minister
Alexandra Landes (Office of Chris Elmore MP)
Sophie Octavia Ferdinand (Office of Caroline Ansell MP)

Speakers:

Pupils and Teachers from St. Patricks School, Dunaganon
Will Gardner OBE, CEO Childnet International and Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre

Secretariat:

Susie Hargreaves OBE, CEO Internet Watch Foundation and UK Safer Internet Centre Director
David Wright, SWGfL, Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre
Michael Tunks, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Manager, IWF and UK Safer Internet Centre
Abi Fedorovsky, Policy and Public Affairs Assistant, IWF and UK Safer Internet Centre

Apologies:

Caroline Dinenage MP
Maria Miller MP
Diana Johnson MP
Damian Hinds MP
Fiona Bruce MP
Simon Fell MP

1. Introductions and Opening Remarks- Dr Lisa Cameron MP

Dr. Lisa Cameron welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlining the format for the discussion which includes:

What influences people in what they see online?
What does this mean for online safety?
How inaccurate content appears online and what more can be done about online harm?

Dr. Cameron also said it was good for the APPG to be able to hear directly from children and young people on how the internet impacts on their lives.

2. Presentation from Chi Onwurah MP, Shadow Minister of State for Digital

Chi opened her presentation stating she was proud of her work as an engineer over the past 20 years and takes great pride in what the internet can do.

The current pandemic has highlighted just how important the internet has become as we are all now increasingly living our lives online. Social Media companies are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives, everything from video conferencing to healthy eating.

That makes the work of the APPG on Social Media even more important than it was before. It is fundamental that children must use the internet now as part of their schooling.

We are, however, seeing scammers, paedophiles and criminals making increasing use of the internet. The Rt. Hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid MP) has described the pandemic as “the perfect storm” for child sexual abuse online. This is further supported by the fact that in September 2020, the Internet Watch Foundation had a record month for reports it received from the public.

Those children who are most vulnerable offline are also the most vulnerable online. We have seen online platforms become a focus for misinformation and have seen the deeply worrying impact of anti-vax conspiracy theories and how that impacts on vaccine roll-out, how we contribute to public debates and how we spend our free time.

There is no control over how content is curated and monetised before being delivered to us. Twitter has recently implemented changes which introduces more “friction” before a user retweets something they have seen online. But it is not enough.

Facebook estimates that millions of users have seen Covid-19 misinformation on its platform and a recent survey of adults estimates as many as 50% have seen fake news online.

It all leads you to question why isn't there some form of regulation over some of this content?

It is harder than ever to trust what we see online. We need to better support children and young people online. The internet can be a challenging and dark place. Protecting children and young people from online harms is vital in some cases “a matter of life and death” as Ian Russell of the Molly Rose Foundation has said.

The first suicide from something that had been seen online through a social media platform was over a decade ago. New laws are urgently required; there have been 13 voluntary codes and none of them have achieved anything to make children safer online.

It is clear to the Labour Party that regulation has simply not kept pace with tech, crime, or consumers.

So, what can be done?

The Age-Appropriate Design Code and the forthcoming Online Safety Bill are welcome first steps, but we also want to see an effective approach to media literacy and a common understanding of principles that should be used to govern technology companies.

Labour believes that technology can change lives for the better, but the negative consequences need to be addressed. We need a public debate about on what the digital future should look like and Labour's Our Digital Future consultation received over 600 responses.

Labour is calling for a Digital Charter with a digital rights strategy which ensures that UK citizens have more control over their data and how it is used.

It is also important the Government secures the future of the UK Safer Internet Centre as they do such vital work to protect children from harm online.

There are difficult discussions about anonymity, crimes vs harms, who should be the arbiters of all of this, but the new regulator and measures put in place must end the misinformation and enable the lives of everyone to be more productive and skills based which is more empowering. People must be empowered to take control of their lives online.

Dr. Lisa Cameron offered her reflections on the speech praising the Chair of the APPG, Chris Elmore, for leading from the front on this agenda, before introducing Will Gardner OBE.

3. Will Gardner OBE, UK Safer Internet Centre Director, CEO Childnet International

Tomorrow is Safer Internet Day. It is currently celebrated in 170 countries globally and for the last decade the UK Safer Internet Centre has been responsible for organising Safer Internet Day here in the UK. Over the last decade the Centre's reach has expanded significantly. In the UK last year, 49% of children and 26% of parents heard Safer Internet Day messages in Safer Internet Day.

Each EU country has a Safer Internet Centre, and it consists of three component parts:

1. Hotline- operated by the Internet Watch Foundation for reports of CSAM.
2. Helpline- operated by SWGfL- providing advice and support to professionals working directly with children as well as the Report Harmful Content platform, where users can report harmful content they see online.
3. Awareness Centre- operated by Childnet International

The Centre is currently in discussions with DCMS to secure the future of its funding, and clearly there is a lot riding on the outcome of this decision.

Tomorrow, charities, Government, devolved administrations, football clubs, police services, local government, tech industry, schools, and thousands of others are all signed up as supporters to help explore this year's theme- exploring reliability in the online world.

Research the Centre is launching tomorrow has found that children are spending more time online than pre-2020 and also that the internet has been a big source of support for them in the current pandemic.

However, 48% of young people are coming across unreliable content online every day. More than 1 in 10 see unreliable content more than 6 times per day. Many, (62% of 8–17-year-olds), have friend requests from people they don't know and 44% of children say they know more about unreliable content than their parents do and as many as 6% of those children we surveyed have challenged their parents about sharing misinformation.

Unreliable content also has a significant emotional impact. On average 91% of children and young people say that they are being tricked and receiving misleading content makes them feel annoyed, angry, upset, sad, attacked, or scared.

43% have seen their friends, peers or people in their age range sharing misleading content online and 35% have seen influencers, bloggers, celebrities, or people in the public eye doing this.

What are young people doing about this and how are they responding?

48% are likely to ignore misleading content or do nothing in response. 28% talk to a parent or carer about it, 21% block it and 16% report it. 53% of young people feel they have a responsibility to educate their friends about what they share online and to call out misleading content when they see them sharing misleading content.

Dr Lisa Cameron summarised by saying it is clear the internet is booming and that it is vitally important the funding situation of the Centre is resolved as well as the crucial need for awareness raising. She remarked as a parent and MP it is vital these platforms are safe to use.

Dr Cameron then welcomed the children joining the meeting from St Patricks School in Dungannon.

4. Children and young people from St. Patricks School Dungannon

Chair: ***Why is the internet important to you and how has that changed in the last year with the impact of Covid?***

Child A (18 years old):

A lot of young people nowadays find friends through the internet. The internet is important for him, he has used it from a very young age. Learned how to be safe on it and how to enjoy it. Example from World of Warcraft: one of his friends died and they couldn't go to the funeral, so made a funeral online and space to talk to each other about how they felt.

Child B (17 years old):

As a student who does coursework subjects, she must use resources from the internet to complete her work. This allows her to do her work quicker and learn even when not being at school over the last year.

Child C (14 years old):

Internet is important because she is very outgoing and love to communicate with people e.g., can communicate with family abroad. Nearly three quarters of young people have said internet during the pandemic is more important than ever as it is a main source of communication. Can talk to people they wouldn't meet otherwise and can become friends.

Chair: ***What are your thoughts about unreliable information? How does it affect your lives?***

Child B:

Resources online can be very untrustworthy, can mislead you. Getting the right information for school for example is crucial. There are many people who get fake friend requests which can be dangerous particularly for very young people (11, 12-year-olds for example.)

Child A:

It's hard to trust anyone on the internet, particularly social media. It seems like social media accounts make more money/followers from false information than real information.

Talked about how sometimes you meet nice people on the internet, but sometimes people send you things you don't want to see - the easiest thing to do is to block people. Social media platforms like Facebook should block people who do this frequently.

Child C:

It's becoming hard to trust things on the internet. It's very important for young people to be able to identify false information, particularly during the pandemic as many people are making up false information and this is becoming harder to identify.

Chair: Question: ***whose responsibility is it to moderate the content?***

Child B:

Depends on who you're talking about. Have seen influencers posting things that aren't true, so it is important to report those channels. Platforms do need better reporting channels, but we need to be careful not to negatively impact the positive role platforms like YouTube have in our lives.

Child A:

A lot of people would love the internet to be governed by the same moral standards as the offline world. Things online can be quite inconsistent.

Child C:

Difficult to pinpoint who is responsible. Would like to see misleading/hateful content deleted. Trolling has become a big part of the internet. Facebook tends to only remove bad content if it's a paid ad, but not other hateful content. No consequences to someone acting badly.

David Wright: ***As digital leaders, what would happen if you weren't there to be able to offer advice?***

Child B:

Talked about one of her friends as an example who could have given out personal information, etc.

Child A:

A lot of his friends would have downloaded files that could have contained viruses.

Child C:

A lot of her friends are quite vulnerable e.g. tend to add people they don't know and start messaging them. One of her friends had someone ask to meet up with them.

Will Gardner: ***what advice do you have for parents?***

Child B:

My Dad knows a lot about the internet and has taught her a lot of useful information. However, he once went through my phone without my permission which I wouldn't advise parents to do.

Child A:

You must explain things slowly to your parents, so they understand properly, show them what is bad and how to not be scammed.

Child C:

Her parents are very aware of these things e.g., her dad makes sure she's being safe on the internet and not giving out personal information.

5. Closing Remarks- Dr Lisa Cameron MP

Dr Lisa Cameron MP closed the event by thanking the children and young people for taking time out of their day to attend the APPG. Dr Cameron also thanked Chi Onwurah and Will Gardner before drawing the meeting to a close.