

Consultation response form

Please complete this form in full and return to protectingchildren@ofcom.org.uk.

Consultation title	Consultation: Protecting children from harms online
Organisation name	Polis Analysis

Your response

Question	Your response
<p>Volume 2: Identifying the services children are using Children’s Access Assessments (Section 4).</p>	
<p>Do you agree with our proposals in relation to children’s access assessments, in particular the aspects below. Please provide evidence to support your view.</p> <p>1. Our proposal that service providers should only conclude that children are not normally able to access a service where they are using highly effective age assurance?</p> <p>2. Our proposed approach to the child user condition, including our proposed interpretation of “significant number of users who are children” and the factors that service providers consider in assessing whether the child user condition is met?</p> <p>3. Our proposed approach to the process for children’s access assessments?</p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p>
<p>Volume 3: The causes and impacts of online harm to children Draft Children’s Register of Risk (Section 7)</p>	
<p>Proposed approach:</p> <p>4. Do you have any views on Ofcom’s assessment of the causes and impacts of online harms? Please provide evidence to support your answer.</p> <p>a. Do you think we have missed anything important in our analysis?</p> <p>5. Do you have any views about our interpretation of the links between</p>	<p>Confidential? – Y / N</p> <p>4a. Ofcom’s has failed to consider or tackle the impact of mis/disinformation. Sch. 7 para. 37 of the Online Safety Act makes acts of foreign interference, including disinformation operations, a priority offence; the WEF has found mis/disinformation to be the most severe threat facing the world over the next two years; a study by the Center for Countering Digital Hate has found teenagers to be the most likely age group to believe in conspiracy theories; and Ofcom itself has also described 2024 as a “particularly important year” in connection to the online danger. Mis/Disinformation are key drivers in spreading a wide-range of harmful content online, including those</p>

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<p>risk factors and different kinds of content harmful to children? Please provide evidence to support your answer.</p> <p>6. Do you have any views on the age groups we recommended for assessing risk by age? Please provide evidence to support your answer.</p> <p>7. Do you have any views on our interpretation of non-designated content or our approach to identifying non-designated content? Please provide evidence to support your answer.</p> <p>Evidence gathering for future work:</p> <p>8. Do you have any evidence relating to kinds of content that increase the risk of harm from Primary Priority, Priority or Non-designated Content, when viewed in combination (to be considered as part of cumulative harm)?</p> <p>9. Have you identified risks to children from GenAI content or applications on U2U or Search services?</p> <p>a) Please Provide any information about any risks identified</p> <p>10. Do you have any specific evidence relevant to our assessment of body image content and depressive content as kinds of non-designated content? Specifically, we are interested in:</p> <p>a) (i) specific examples of body image or depressive content linked to significant harms to children,</p> <p>b. (ii) evidence distinguishing body image or depressive content from existing categories of priority or primary priority content.</p> <p>11. Do you propose any other category of content that could meet the</p>	<p>mentioned within Sections 60-62 of the OSA – UNICEF’s 2021 analysis of dis/misinformation described the “pressing public issue” as “very much a part of children’s lives,” and that current efforts are “falling short of protecting and empowering children,” with those below the age of 24, according to a 2018 commission on fake news and critical literacy by the APPG for literacy, reporting social media sites as the most common source of news. Yet despite this, this consultation has failed to appropriately address this multi-generational issue. This has likely been influenced by the regulator’s current failure to uphold its legal duties within Sections 152 and 165 of the OSA, with specific reference to the necessary establishment of an advisory committee on disinformation and misinformation and subsequent amendments to the Communications Act compelling Ofcom to a) help the public understand the nature and impact of disinformation, and b) reduce exposure to such harmful content. Discussions concerning generative AI fail to acknowledge its growing effectiveness in disseminating disinformation, despite acknowledgement of this very issue by the UK Parliament’s defending democracy enquiry as well as the UN’s AI Resolution and the Global Declaration on Information Integrity online. Research from Giovanni Spitale shows that false AI generated tweets are 3% more likely to be believed than those written by humans, displaying how this new technology can be used to spread disinformation by malicious actors to children. The recommendation of basic digital literacy skills such as fact-checking or fact-claim differentiation are missing from all provided documents, and will leave children heavily exposed to a wide range of possible consequences to belief systems and subsequent behaviour that may pose a danger to either themselves or the wider public.</p> <p>8. This question cannot be answered in relation to the danger and harms of disinformation as the consultation and the regulator has neither considered the OSA priority offense nor fulfilled its legal obligations outlined within section 152 and 165 of the OSA.</p> <p>9) GenAI content has allowed for the efficient and rapid production of disinformation which is exposed to children</p>

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<p>definition of NDC under the Act at this stage? Please provide evidence to support your answer.</p>	<p>at a disproportionately higher frequency than any other age group; Ofcom research shows that 83% of 16-24 year olds consume news through online sources, where GenAI disinformation is most prevalent, which is 15% higher compared to adults. With only 2% of children possessing the critical literacy skills to consistently identify mis/disinformation and two thirds of teachers agreeing that this harms the welfare of young people, according to a APPG for Literacy in 2018, GenAI’s content risks children losing trust in our media and affecting subsequent behaviour. Research from the British Journal of Developmental Psychology shows that conspiratorial beliefs heighten at age 14 and that this could be attributed to a “perfect storm” created by social media consumption. This is further evidenced through OfCom’s findings during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, where 58% of 16-24 year-olds came across false or misleading information about Covid-19, which correlates with findings from the Office for National Statistics showing that vaccine hesitancy tendency stood at 5% for over 30s but was as high as 14% for younger groups. This correlation indicates how disinformation can affect the behaviour of children in a wider manner than psychological and physical harm.</p>
<p>Draft Guidance on Content Harmful to Children (Section 8)</p>	
<p>12. Do you agree with our proposed approach, including the level of specificity of examples given and the proposal to include contextual information for services to consider?</p> <p>13. Do you have further evidence that can support the guidance provided on different kinds of content harmful to children?</p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>13. See answer 4a)</p> <p>14a. See answer 4a)</p>

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<p>14. For each of the harms discussed, are there additional categories of content that Ofcom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) should consider to be harmful or b) consider not to be harmful or c) where our current proposals should be reconsidered? 	
<p>Volume 4: How should services assess the risk of online harms?</p> <p>Governance and Accountability (Section 11)</p>	
<p>15. Do you agree with the proposed governance measures to be included in the Children’s Safety Codes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Please confirm which proposed measure your views relate to and explain your views and provide any arguments and supporting evidence. b) If you responded to our Illegal Harms Consultation and this is relevant to your response here, please signpost to the relevant parts of your prior response. <p>16. Do you agree with our assumption that the proposed governance measures for Children’s Safety Codes could be implemented through the same process as the equivalent draft Illegal Content Codes?</p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>15a. This question cannot be answered in relation to the danger and harms of disinformation as the consultation and the regulator has neither considered the OSA priority offense nor fulfilled its legal obligations outlined within section 152 and 165 of the OSA.</p>
<p>Children’s Risk Assessment Guidance and Children’s Risk Profiles’ (Section 12)</p>	
<p>17. What do you think about our proposals in relation to the Children’s Risk Assessment Guidance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Please provide underlying arguments and evidence of efficacy or risks that support your view. 	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>17a. This question cannot be answered in relation to the danger and harms of disinformation as the consultation and the regulator has neither considered the OSA priority offense nor fulfilled its legal obligations outlined within section 152 and 165 of the OSA.</p>

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<p>18. What do you think about our proposals in relation to the Children’s Risk Profiles for Content Harmful to Children?</p> <p>a) Please provide underlying arguments and evidence of efficacy or risks that support your view.</p> <p>Specifically, we welcome evidence from regulated services on the following:</p> <p>19. Do you think the four-step risk assessment process and the Children’s Risk Profiles are useful models to help services understand the risks that their services pose to children and comply with their child risk assessment obligations under the Act?</p> <p>20. Are there any specific aspects of the children’s risk assessment duties that you consider need additional guidance beyond what we have proposed in our draft?</p> <p>21. Are the Children’s Risk Profiles sufficiently clear and do you think the information provided on risk factors will help you understand the risks on your service?</p> <p>a) If you have comments or input related to the links between different kinds of content harmful to children and risk factors, please refer to Volume 3: Causes and Impacts of Harms to Children Online which includes the draft Children’s Register of Risks.</p>	<p>18a. This question cannot be answered in relation to the danger and harms of disinformation as the consultation and the regulator has neither considered the OSA priority offense nor fulfilled its legal obligations outlined within section 152 and 165 of the OSA.</p>
<p>Volume 5 – What should services do to mitigate the risk of online harms</p> <p>Our proposals for the Children’s Safety Codes (Section 13)</p>	

Question	Your response
<p>Proposed measures</p> <p>22. Do you agree with our proposed package of measures for the first Children’s Safety Codes?</p> <p>a) If not, please explain why.</p> <p>Evidence gathering for future work.</p> <p>23. Do you currently employ measures or have additional evidence in the areas we have set out for future consideration?</p> <p>a) If so, please provide evidence of the impact, effectiveness and cost of such measures, including any results from trialling or testing of measures.</p> <p>24. Are there other areas in which we should consider potential future measures for the Children’s Safety Codes?</p> <p>a) If so, please explain why and provide supporting evidence.</p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>22a. See response to 4a.</p>

Developing the Children’s Safety Codes: Our framework (Section 14)

25. Do you agree with our approach to developing the proposed measures for the

Children’s Safety Codes?

a) If not, please explain why.

26. Do you agree with our approach and proposed changes to the draft Illegal Content Codes to further protect children and accommodate for potential synergies in how systems and processes manage both content harmful to children and illegal content?

a) Please explain your views.

27. Do you agree that most measures should apply to services that are either large services or smaller services that present a medium or high level of risk to children?

28. Do you agree with our definition of ‘large’ and with how we apply this in our recommendations?

29. Do you agree with our definition of ‘multi-risk’ and with how we apply this in our recommendations?

30. Do you agree with the proposed measures that we recommend for all services, even those that are small and low-risk?

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25a. See response to 4a.

26. See response to 4a.

Age assurance measures (Section 15)

31. Do you agree with our proposal to recommend the use of highly effective age assurance to support Measures AA1-6? Please provide any information or evidence to support your views.

Confidential? – Y / N

<p>a) Are there any cases in which HEAA may not be appropriate and proportionate?</p> <p>b) In this case, are there alternative approaches to age assurance which would be better suited?</p> <p>32. Do you agree with the scope of the services captured by AA1-6?</p> <p>33. Do you have any information or evidence on different ways that services could use highly effective age assurance to meet the outcome that children are prevented from encountering identified PPC, or protected from encountering identified PC under Measures AA3 and AA4, respectively?</p> <p>34. Do you have any comments on our assessment of the implications of the proposed Measures AA1-6 on children, adults or services?</p> <p>a) Please provide any supporting information or evidence in support of your views.</p> <p>35. Do you have any information or evidence on other ways that services could consider different age groups when using age assurance to protect children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from encountering PC?</p>	
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Content moderation U2U (Section 16)

<p>36. Do you agree with our proposals? Please provide the underlying arguments and evidence that support your views.</p> <p>37. Do you agree with the proposed addition of Measure 4G to the Illegal Content Codes?</p> <p>a) Please provide any arguments and supporting evidence.</p>	<p>Confidential? – Y / N</p> <p>36) Although sections 152 and 165 guarantees that an advisory committee on disinformation and misinformation would be set up, Ofcom has so far failed to make sufficient progress in setting up this committee or any strides to the subsequent report. This comes despite a majority of respondents to an Ofcom survey believing the issue to be of ‘high concern’. Furthermore, the OSA’s ‘false communications offences’ have also granted unnecessary exemptions to ‘recognised news publishers’. With Reuters reporting that 53% of the British public</p>
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	<p>hear people criticising the media ‘quite’ or ‘very’ often, and the Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report placing the UK bottom out of 28 countries for trust in media, these exemptions do not help the spread of disinformation and ease public trust in our institutions. The scope of committing a ‘false communication offence’ is also too narrow to affect meaningful defence to the corrosive nature of disinformation as it is only limited to physical and psychological harm and does not address the wider societal harms of the effects of disinformation already described.</p>
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Search moderation (Section 17)

<p>38. Do you agree with our proposals? Please provide the underlying arguments and evidence that support your views.</p> <p>39. Are there additional steps that services take to protect children from the harms set out in the Act?</p> <p>a) If so, how effective are they?</p> <p>40. Regarding Measure SM2, do you agree that it is proportionate to preclude users believed to be a child from turning the safe search settings off?</p> <p>The use of Generative AI (GenAI), see Introduction to Volume 5, to facilitate search is an emerging development, which may include where search services have integrated GenAI into their functionalities, as well as where standalone GenAI services perform search functions. There is currently limited evidence on how the use of GenAI in search services may affect the implementation of the safety measures as set out in this code. We welcome further evidence from stakeholders on the following questions and please provider arguments and evidence to support your views:</p> <p>41. Do you consider that it is technically feasible to apply the proposed</p>	<p>Confidential? – Y / N</p>
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code measures in respect of GenAI functionalities which are likely to perform or be integrated into search functions?

42. What additional search moderation measures might be applicable where GenAI performs or is integrated into search functions?

User reporting and complaints (Section 18)

43. Do you agree with the proposed user reporting measures to be included in the draft Children’s Safety Codes?

a) Please confirm which proposed measure your views relate to and explain your views and provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

b) If you responded to our Illegal Harms Consultation and this is relevant to your response here, please signpost to the relevant parts of your prior response.

44. Do you agree with our proposals to apply each of Measures UR2 (e) and UR3 (b) to all services likely to be accessed by children for all types of complaints?

a) Please confirm which proposed measure your views relate to and explain your views and provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

b) If you responded to our Illegal Harms Consultation and this is relevant to your response here, please signpost to the relevant parts of your prior response.

45. Do you agree with the inclusion of the proposed changes to Measures

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UR2 and UR3 in the Illegal Content Codes (Measures 5B and 5C)?

a) Please provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

Terms of service and publicly available statements (Section 19)

46. Do you agree with the proposed Terms of Service / Publicly Available Statements measures to be included in the Children’s Safety Codes?

a) Please confirm which proposed measures your views relate to and provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

b) If you responded to our illegal harms consultation and this is relevant to your response here, please signpost to the relevant parts of your prior response.

47. Can you identify any further characteristics that may improve the clarity and accessibility of terms and statements for children?

48. Do you agree with the proposed addition of Measure 6AA to the Illegal Content Codes?

a) Please provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

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46a. This question cannot be answered in relation to the danger and harms of disinformation as the consultation and the regulator has neither considered the OSA priority offense nor fulfilled its legal obligations outlined within section 152 and 165 of the OSA.

Recommender systems (Section 20)

49. Do you agree with the proposed recommender systems measures to be included in the Children’s Safety Codes?

a) Please confirm which proposed measure your views relate to and provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

b) If you responded to our illegal harms consultation and this is relevant to your response here, please signpost to the relevant parts of your prior response.

Confidential? – Y / N

50. Are there any intervention points in the design of recommender systems that we have not considered here that could effectively prevent children from being recommended primary priority content and protect children from encountering priority and non-designated content?

51. Is there any evidence that suggests recommender systems are a risk factor associated with bullying? If so, please provide this in response to Measures RS2 and RS3 proposed in this chapter.

52. We plan to include in our RS2 and RS3, that services limit the prominence of content that we are proposing to be classified as non-designated content (NDC), namely depressive content and body image content. This is subject to our consultation on the classification of these content categories as NDC. Do you agree with this proposal? Please provide the underlying arguments and evidence of the relevance of this content to Measures RS2 and RS3.

- Please provide the underlying arguments and evidence of the relevance of this content to Measures RS2 and RS3.

User support (Section 21)

53. Do you agree with the proposed user support measures to be included in the Children's Safety Codes?

a) Please confirm which proposed measure your views relate to and provide any arguments and supporting evidence.

b) If you responded to our Illegal harms consultation and this is relevant to your response here, please signpost

Confidential? – Y / N

to the relevant parts of your prior response.

Search features, functionalities and user support (Section 22)

54. Do you agree with our proposals?
Please provide underlying arguments and evidence to support your views.

55. Do you have additional evidence relating to children’s use of search services and the impact of search functionalities on children’s behaviour?

56. Are there additional steps that you take to protect children from harms as set out in the Act?

a) If so, how effective are they?

As referenced in the Overview of Codes, Section 13 and Section 17, the use of GenAI to facilitate search is an emerging development and there is currently limited evidence on how the use of GenAI in search services may affect the implementation of the safety measures as set out in this section. We welcome further evidence from stakeholders on the following questions and please provide arguments and evidence to support your views:

57. Do you consider that it is technically feasible to apply the proposed codes measures in respect of GenAI functionalities which are likely to perform or be integrated into search functions? Please provide arguments and evidence to support your views.

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Combined Impact Assessment (Section 23)

58. Do you agree that our package of proposed measures is proportionate, taking into account the impact on children's safety online as well as the implications on different kinds of services?

Confidential? – Y / N

Statutory tests (Section 24)

59. Do you agree that our proposals, in particular our proposed recommendations for the draft Children's Safety Codes, are appropriate in the light of the matters to which we must have regard?

a) If not, please explain why.

Confidential? – Y / N

Annexes

Impact Assessments (Annex A14)

60. In relation to our equality impact assessment, do you agree that some of our proposals would have a positive impact on certain groups?

61. In relation to our Welsh language assessment, do you agree that our proposals are likely to have positive, or more positive impacts on opportunities to use Welsh and treating Welsh no less favourably than English?

a) If you disagree, please explain why, including how you consider these proposals could be revised to have positive effects or more positive effects, or no adverse effects or fewer adverse effects on opportunities to use Welsh and treating Welsh no less favourably than English.

Confidential? – Y / N

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