

Understanding perceptions of Audience Protection Measures on Video-on-Demand platforms

A report for Ofcom

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I. Executive summary

Project background

This report presents findings from a project commissioned by Ofcom to gather both adults' and children's reflections and views on the kinds of Audience Protection Measures (APMs) that may be used on Video on Demand (VoD) services¹.

The project involved a deliberative methodology with 186 adults and 22 children across the UK. It aimed to gather participants' reflections on four APMs, and gain insight into their broader viewing habits and how they approached keeping themselves and their children safe while watching VoD content. Workshops and interviews took place between January and February 2025.

The four categories of APMs² on VoD services explored in depth were:

Guidance and information measures:

- Age ratings or classification systems; and
- Content warnings.

Control measures:

- Parental controls; and
- Age assurance measures.

General overarching findings

Participants were generally aware of and supported the presence of APMs on VoD services

- Overall, participants had prior recognition and experience of using most of the APMs to some degree.
- Participants demonstrated some familiarity with APMs and usually had a high level of familiarity with age ratings and content warnings.
- APMs were generally valued for enabling participants to make informed decisions, particularly among parents of younger children. They specifically supported measures that gave them the 'final say' and decision, valuing the ability to personally determine what was appropriate for their families.

There was a tension between participants wanting tailored audience controls and a smooth viewer experience

- There was a prevalent desire across the sample for APMs that allowed for greater individualisation and tailoring of their own viewing experience.
- However, concerns were also raised about how much friction APMs would introduce into their viewer experience on VoD services. Therein lay one of the key tensions in participants' responses in this research.

While there was no consensus on an ideal APM type, many expressed a preference for APMs that offered detailed supporting information and wanted APMs to be more uniform across services

¹ Definitions of key terms such as this are found in the Glossary.

² The Communications Act 2003 lists these as four types of measures that could be examples of audience protection measures under s3680B.

- Discussions across the groups also revealed nuanced findings concerning viewing decisions, particularly about what and how children view content and how parents and others prefer to be informed. APMs that offered more descriptive information were particularly favoured by parents.
- In addition, participants thought APMs would be easier to use and /or understand, and therefore more effective, if the same types of APM were used across different VoD services.

Generally, participants perceived VoD services to be relatively safe compared to other online environments

- The comparison of the potential risk of harm on social media services with that of VoD services was frequently raised without researchers prompting participants.
- Participants regarded VoD services as a safer viewing environment than social media, trusting that VoD services managed and curated their content, reducing the risk of harm.

Participants wanted APMs that were proportionate to the risk of harm

- While participants were generally supportive of the different APMs they were presented with, many raised concerns that some of them (such as stricter age assurance and verification methods and the sharing of potentially personal data that these would involve) were potentially disproportionate to the risk that existed on the VoD services they used.
- Other adult participants used comparisons to highlight the need for proportionality in applying APMs. For example, they noted that while ID checks might be important for pornography sites, they were considered unnecessary for safer, more mainstream VoD environments.

Viewing behaviours

- Adult participants used a range of VoD services, with Netflix, Disney+, Prime Video, ITVX and BBC iPlayer being the most common.
- Overall, children favoured Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD) services (such as Netflix) and rarely used Broadcast Video on Demand (BVoD) services (such as BBC iPlayer), with a handful of older children occasionally using ITVX to watch shows like Love Island.
- Participants were generally less familiar with Advertising Video on Demand (AVoD) services (such as Tubi).
- BVoD services were generally perceived as safer because they included less risky content overall than SVoD services – this was particularly in relation to BBC iPlayer, which several parents described as having more ‘family friendly’ content.

Awareness, use and perceived effectiveness of APMs

Although participants initially described VoD services as a relatively safe space in comparison to social media, more detailed discussions revealed nuanced perspectives on their awareness, experiences, and preferences regarding APMs, providing insights into both perceived harm on VoD platforms and effective tools to prevent children from encountering inappropriate content.

Age ratings or classification systems

Age ratings or classification systems are labelling frameworks used to categorise media content based on its suitability for different maturity and sensitivity levels.

- Both adults and children were generally familiar with age ratings or classification systems, recognising their role in setting expectations for content themes. This familiarity meant that age ratings carried weight and gravitas and were discussed as tools used in decision-making, especially around children’s VoD viewing.
- Concerns were raised about the consistency and reliability of age ratings or classification systems across different VoD services.
- Some participants also expressed the view that current systems did not adequately account for variations in individual maturity levels.

- Some participants liked the familiarity of hybrid labelling, which uses a combination of minimum age indicators (numbers) and abbreviations (letters), such as U, PG, 12, 15, but some reflected that the gaps between such labels were potentially too broad.
- Some participants liked the granularity of minimum age-based labels, which provide specific suitable minimum age-based recommendations (e.g., 0+, 4+, 6+ 9+ 12+ 14+ etc) to label content, appreciating the precision of the labels, which they felt could be matched to learning stages.
- Some participants indicated a desire for more granular ages to better reflect developmental differences among viewers, and they expected to see these ratings displayed prominently early in the viewing journey.

Content warnings

Content warnings alert viewers to potentially sensitive content, such as violence, strong language, or disturbing scenes, before or during viewing.

- Participants were generally aware of content warnings on VoD and wider online services and used them to contextualise age ratings. They highly valued the concept of content warnings as a vital resource for making informed viewing decisions, for themselves and when watching with children and/or making decisions about what children can watch.
- Participants, especially some parents, thought content warnings could be a helpful guide, though some recalled that the content warnings they had encountered previously did not have enough detail to inform audiences on the severity and frequency of potentially upsetting themes.
- Non-specific warnings (e.g., “viewer discretion is advised”) were criticised for offering vague information, with many participants believing that there was not enough detail on the level of risk to make appropriate viewing decisions, impacting trust.
- Participants generally favoured specific content warnings, (e.g., “this contains scenes of domestic violence”) viewing them as striking an appropriate balance between providing sufficient information and avoiding excessive detail.
- Most participants also reflected that warnings that signposted viewers to support services (e.g., to resources or to a helpline) were a valuable addition, offering viewers a means of further assistance if needed.
- Children paid attention to content warnings when watching with their parents to avoid content that may be ‘awkward’ to watch with parents.
- Advanced warnings were welcomed for offering even more explicit, often episode-specific, detail - allowing viewers to skip distressing content, although some raised concerns that these could be plot spoilers.

Parental controls

Parental controls are measures which enable adults with parental responsibility to manage children’s access to content on VoD platforms.

- Parents were generally aware of parental controls, such as PIN protection, child profiles and time limits.
- Parental controls were perceived as the most effective APM, balancing parental autonomy with robust access measures.
- They were also identified as the most common method used by parents to manage young children’s VoD viewing, particularly for those in primary school.
- Participants were very familiar with child profiles on VoD services and many had them set up at home. For primary school-aged children, participants reflected that this was a worry-free way of streamlining appropriate content for their children, if non-child profiles were restricted by PIN or password access. However, they were often seen as unsuitable or potentially over-limiting for older children.
- Parents valued the control afforded by these tools but also highlighted a tension between the desire for robust and flexible controls and the need for a seamless and user-friendly experience.
- Although many participants were not aware of existing age filters on VoD services, they reacted positively, especially because it reportedly took maturity into account.

- Some parents questioned the overall effectiveness of VoD parental controls, suggesting that their utility was limited by children's potential exposure to harmful content on social media platforms.

Age assurance

Age assurance methods require viewers to indicate their age to access content. These measures can vary in how strict they are, from viewers declaring their age, to entering their date of birth, to providing proof of ID.

- Participants had encountered self-declaration methods on VoD services and perceived them to be ineffective. However, they expressed a strong aversion to more robust age assurance methods not commonly implemented on VoD services (such as ID or bank card verification) due to concerns about intrusiveness and data privacy.
- Overall, participants perceived these measures as excessive for VoD content and disproportionate to the perceived risks associated with these services.
- Participants also expressed doubts about the practical implementation of age assurance methods and questioned the efficacy of age estimation technologies.

2. Introduction

In light of Ofcom's new duties under the Media Act 2024,³ Ofcom has been strengthening the framework for media regulation, which has introduced enhanced broadcasting-like standards for a wider range of VoD services, building on existing On-Demand Programme Service (ODPS) rules that are already in force for UK-based VoD providers. As part of these new duties, Ofcom commissioned this research into the effectiveness and awareness of different APMs provided on VoD services. APMs are provided by VoD services to try and protect viewers, particularly children, from viewing potentially harmful or inappropriate content.

APMs can broadly be categorised by their function:

- They can be advisory, offering viewers information about age suitability or content;
- They allow viewers technological control over what content is available, for example, via parental controls or viewer profiles; and
- They can be restrictive, such as requiring ID verification – though this method is rare in the current VoD market.

Current regulations require ODPS providers to protect audiences from harm. Certain kinds of harmful and/or prohibited content must not be made available. Otherwise, services must protect under-18 audiences from harm by taking appropriate protection measures that are proportionate to the risk of harm potentially posed to under-18s by the content on their services. There is no requirement for them to use one particular APM over another, and providers have adopted a variety of different approaches to audience protection according to the nature of their services⁴. Some of these approaches are familiar to audiences, drawing from existing regulatory frameworks and content standards (e.g., age ratings that are similar to those that audiences are used to from the cinema), while others are created specifically to support the viewer experience on individual VoD services, such as customisable parental controls and child profiles, where a parent can restrict what a child is able to access via the service.

Broadly, these APMs fall into four categories:

- Age ratings or classification systems;
- Content warnings;
- Parental controls; and
- Age assurance measures

This research was not designed to evaluate or test APM measures against each other, nor to assess them against current or future regulatory frameworks. Instead, Ofcom commissioned this research specifically to capture the range of views, attitudes, and experiences of APMs among VoD viewers in the UK, including the extent to which they feel protected and empowered by these measures.

To do this, Revealing Reality ran seven adult focus groups and seven children's groups (in the form of friendship triads) across the UK, engaging a total of 208 individuals on their awareness, use of, and thoughts about APMs on VoD services.

The project aimed to:

- Assess awareness, use, and perceived effectiveness of APMs across VoD services audiences;

³ [Media Act 2024](#)

⁴ See [Rules and Guidance, Statutory Rules and Non-Binding Guidance for provider of On-Demand Programme Services \(ODPS\)](#), Ofcom, 10 December 2021, updated 7 August 2025. This sets out the statutory requirements with which providers of on-demand programme services ("ODPS") must comply ("the Rules"). The Rules reflect Part 4A of the Communications Act 2003 (as amended) and include footnoted references to the underlying statutory provisions.

See also: [On-demand programme services \("ODPS"\) guidance](#), paragraphs 5.20 to 5.23, Ofcom, 10 December 2021

- Understand how well different APMs are working from an audience perspective;
- Identify areas for improvement; and
- Explore audience understanding and expectations of VoD regulation.

This project also contextualised these findings by exploring broader viewing behaviours among children and adults in the UK, examining how and where they consume VoD content, including mobile viewing habits.

Participants also spontaneously discussed broader online viewing and the perceived risks of harmful content on online video-sharing platforms (VSPs) such as YouTube and TikTok. These platforms fall outside the direct scope of Ofcom's current review, but related key findings on this topic are included in the report for context.

3. About the project

Method

The research took a qualitative research approach in the form of a multi-phased, deliberative methodology involving adults and children from across the UK. This was split across three phases:

Phase 1: Pre-task

In the days leading up to the workshop, participants were asked to submit a ‘diary task’ recording their use of VoD services in their household. This activity was designed to capture the viewing habits of participants, their home media setups, and their VoD account settings. The diary task was followed by a short ‘selfie’ video, where participants were asked to reflect on how they choose what to watch and how it may change based on who is watching.

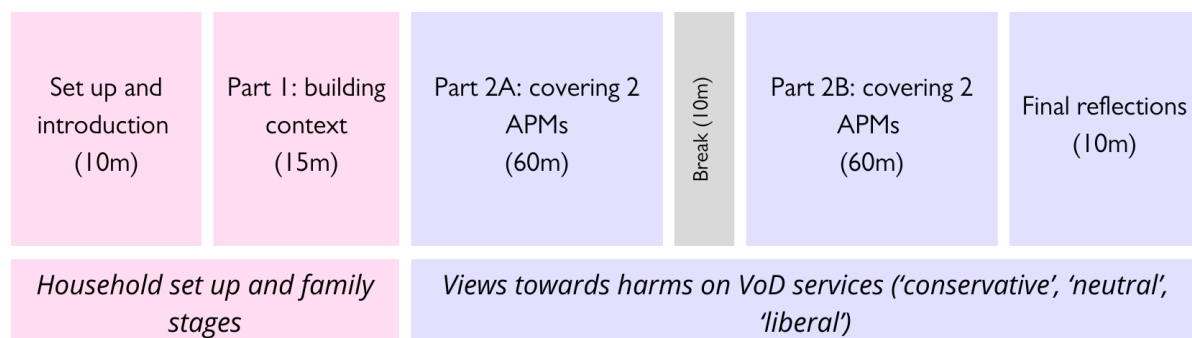
All 186 adult and 22 child participants completed these tasks. This was designed to ground participants’ reflections in their actual VoD experiences prior to the workshop. APMs were not introduced to the participants until Phase 2 to capture participants’ first and honest reflections on the measures.

Phase 2: Workshop

Adult participants attended a three-hour workshop in their local area that covered each of the main APM types available on VoD services and their reflections on safety when viewing VoD services. This face-to-face deliberative method was chosen as an effective way to engage a large sample and allow for in-depth discussion. The workshops facilitated initial participant reflections on APMs, followed by an interactive knowledge-building exercise, with ongoing reflection across each of the APMs.

Stimulus materials were specifically designed for the workshops to help review participants’ understanding of familiar APMs (such as age ratings or classification systems) and to introduce examples of APM types not currently in widespread use by mainstream services (e.g., age verification methods). To encourage reflection on the concept of each APM rather than feedback on specific services, the stimulus presented principles of each APM type rather than live examples from VoD services. This included the use of mocked-up or created examples of different label types and labelling systems for content and generic viewing journey materials for the restrictive measures. This approach was taken to avoid focus and comparisons made on any specific services.

This stimulus material assisted participants’ recognition of various APM types and encouraged more interactive, informed discussions, with thoughts and reflections captured on sticky notes and placed directly on the stimulus. Audio was recorded throughout the session with microphones placed on the tables.



Participants were assigned to one of four tables at the beginning of the session, split between non-parents, parents of primary school-aged children, parents of secondary school-aged children, and other parents (e.g. parents of pre-school-aged children, grandparents, etc.). They were asked to reflect on and share their VoD viewing habits from the pre-task and were then introduced to the four APMs for the first time. These initial reactions were recorded but also established participants’ levels of familiarity with the VoD services they used.

Participants then moved to a second assigned table, based on their attitudes towards a series of statements about how they felt VoD services provide information and controls to help manage their viewing experience, and protect themselves and their families. These were coded during the sampling phase. Each workshop consisted of one 'liberal' table, one 'conservative' table, and two 'neutral' tables, the details of which are in the 'Sample' section.⁵ There was a pilot session, after which some changes were made, with the six remaining sessions structured with a researcher staying with the same participants for all APMs.

Each section of the workshop in Part 2 covered two APMs and followed a similar structure:

- Establishing each participant's familiarity at a high level with the type and function of the APM to help understand whether they recognise it on VoD services and how they expect it to look.
- Introducing the types of APM and prompting detailed reflections, with participants encouraged to write their thoughts, and pros and cons, on sticky notes. Researchers probed on points raised by participants and encouraged them to think across different types of VoD services and step outside of their own experiences.
- Participants then identified which stage they would most like to see the APM, how they would want it to look, and what options they would prefer. This was mapped onto a VoD streaming journey stimulus, where participants were able to visualise and identify the stages where they felt the APM would be most effective.

Once they had engaged with all four APMs, participants were asked to sum up their final reflections, including which features they thought were the most effective methods of protecting audiences on VoD services.

The children's sessions ran the day after each of the adult workshops, consisting of groups of three or four friends and moderated by one researcher. Some children also had a parent present as a chaperone. The children were recruited in friendship groups, which placed them in a familiar, comfortable environment. This approach enabled freer conversation – and they were able to disagree and engage with one another in a way that would have been less likely if grouped with strangers. As the groups were much smaller, the session was also shorter, lasting only 90 minutes, following a similar structure to the adult groups.

A note on labelling participant verbatim

As adult participants were grouped based on different criteria for the first and second half of the session, attributions to evidence vary throughout the report.

Insights from the first half of the session are labelled as: *workshop location, adult, parent/non-parent or grandparent*.

Insights from the second half of the session are labelled as: *workshop location, adult (conservative/liberal/neutral)*.

Phase 3: Post-task

A week following the workshop, a post-task was sent to all adult participants asking them to reflect on the session and the individual APMs. This was designed to give respondents time to use VoD services after the session and reflect on both what they had heard in the session and any contact they had with APMs on VoD services since.

Children did not complete a post-task.

Focus group biases and their mitigations

⁵ These terms reflect participants' self-reported attitudes and perspectives towards their views on media content, age appropriateness, and the role of regulatory measures. This information was gathered during screening calls. Researchers used these groupings to categorise table groupings in the second half of the workshop where participants reflected on each APM in detail.

While focus groups are an effective way to reach a larger sample, this method also has drawbacks. Revealing Reality considered the impact of group effects, such as social desirability, where individuals in a group feel pressure to agree with or exaggerate opinions that they feel will receive the most approval in the group. In a session that covers topics such as the protection of children and viewing sensitive content, this effect was considered in the research design, with researchers probing on the experiences of participants and prompting them to reflect on what they want in theory versus in practice from APMs.

Another group effect considered was groupthink, where ideas introduced by one participant are taken on by others, making it difficult to discern whether everyone's responses reflect what they really think. Researchers tried to proactively identify when groupthink occurred in sessions and sought to counteract it by probing individual participants on their stances and not falling back on group consensus.

Researchers also recognised that many participants would be reflecting on the merits of APMs for the first time in the workshop, particularly as the terms and methods were withheld until the session itself. This introduced the potential impact of participants formulating opinions for the purpose of the research or changing their positions due to their participation. This was mitigated through the pre-task, which aimed to lay a foundation for participants to reflect, outside a group setting, on the ways they choose content for themselves and others, which organically drew attention to their understanding of existing APMs. The stimulus developed for this research also aimed to limit this impact, giving participants visual aids of APMs to help with memory recall and recognition.

To avoid order effects (e.g., priming, where the most recent encountered stimulus can influence views) across the groups, Revealing Reality varied the order in which each group discussed each APM (e.g. some starting with age ratings and others with age verification).

Sample

This research engaged 186 adults and 22 children. Adults participated in one of seven workshops held across the country, each of which consisted of 24-28 participants. Children participated in friendship groups of three or four children held in the same places as the workshops, the following day.

All participants were recruited to ensure a spread of demographic representation, including:

- Age;
- Gender;
- Socio-economic grade (SEG);
- Ethnicity; and
- Rurality

Each workshop met minimum sampling criteria for these demographics, alongside specific quotas relating to VoD usage.

Selection of participants: engagement with VoD services

Potential participants logged which VoD services they used, and how frequently from “Regularly” to “Never.” These services included:

- BBC iPlayer;
- ITVX;
- Channel 4;
- 5;
- U;
- Netflix;
- Amazon Prime Video;
- Disney+;
- AppleTV+;
- Now; and
- Discovery+

Those who did not regularly use any VoD service were screened out so that at least one viewer of each of these VoD services participated in each workshop, with minimum quotas decided based on UK viewer data⁶.

Life stage

Adult participants were grouped based on their life stage to ensure a range of experiences and family setups were engaged. Parents, non-parents, and grandparents were recruited for the adult workshops. To ensure there was a spread across life stages, parents and grandparents were coded by the age of their oldest child or grandchild as follows:

(Grand)Parent of pre-school age child;

(Grand)Parent of primary school-age child;

(Grand)Parent of secondary school-age child;

(Grand)Parent of sixth form-age child; and

Parents with multiple children were grouped based on the age of their oldest child.

Attitudes towards VoD controls

Adult participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about how VoD services provide information and controls to help viewers manage their viewing experience and protect themselves and their families. Each answer was assigned a 'score' between one and five, with one relating to the more 'liberal' or lenient answer and five the more 'conservative' or stricter answer.

Participants' total 'score' across the statements allowed each participant to be coded as a 'liberal', 'neutral', or 'conservative' participant based on their answers.

Children's groups

The children's groups were recruited as friendship triads. Sampling was recorded on the 'lead child', who was then asked to bring along two or three friends or people close to them in the same school year, with the only sampling requirement that they also use one of the VoD services listed. Only secondary school or sixth form age children were recruited for these sessions, being at an age where children have more freedom to choose what they want to watch on VoD services compared to those attending pre-school or primary school.

One triad was recruited from each school year from 7 to 11 (or the equivalent in Scotland and Northern Ireland), with two sessions held with children aged 16-17.

Sampling the 'lead child' ensured a range of SEG, rurality, and ethnicities, while still enabling organic friendship groups to participate in the sessions.

Location	No. of adult participants	No. of child participants
London	28	3
Wolverhampton	27	3
Leeds	24	3
Stockport	26	3
Glasgow	26	3
Lisburn	28	4
Caerphilly	27	3
Total participants	186	22

⁶ Based on Ofcom's [Media Nations UK 2023](#) report

4. Contextual findings

This section provides important contextual findings that underpin participants' specific views on APMs on VoD services. It highlights how viewers:

- Want to be in control, while simultaneously wanting a frictionless viewing experience. A frictionless viewing experience refers to a relatively smooth journey from selecting content to watching it, with minimal interruptions and steps that may disrupt the relaxing nature of watching TV.
- Perceive VoD viewing within a broader online landscape, including their spontaneous comparisons with social media and video-sharing platforms; and
- Their views on potential harms and appropriate proportionality of protective measures.

This section also discusses the practical viewer experience of VoD services, including solo and family viewing, and the tensions between a smooth viewing experience and the necessary friction introduced by APMs. Finally, it shows how these contextual findings are also shaped by participants' prior understanding of and experiences with APMs across various media, including their established trust in BVoD services⁷ and their expectations of robust editorial control by VoD providers as a primary safeguard.

Participants wanted customisable controls on VoD services to protect viewers and ensure a seamless viewing experience

While overall participants valued the protection offered by APMs, they were also concerned about the potential for these measures to disrupt their viewing experience. They wanted APMs that allowed them to be in control of what they and their families could watch. The more liberal participants⁸ also expressed a need for more flexible and customisable protection options and settings to limit friction.

For example, current APM structures could inadvertently create inconvenience when they did not align with specific family viewing needs, causing viewers to use potentially cumbersome workarounds.

“I think it'd be good if it let you add certain things from the adult profile to the kids as well. There's some things on the adult's profile that the kids can't watch so I have to let them use the adult profile to watch certain things and then we go back to the kids profile.” – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (liberal)

At the same time, these more liberal participants also wanted these measures to be easy and quick to set up and use, including appearing at the start of the viewer journey, so that they could make quick decisions.

However, some participants, including some liberal ones, also articulated a concern about the balance between protecting children and introducing too much friction into the viewing experience through active APMs, which were seen to be directly conflicting with the desire for a relaxing entertainment experience.

“TV is meant to be relaxing, you know? You go on there to switch off; I don't want to be doing all these things like Face ID or a PIN, or whatever. It's too much.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (liberal)

This highlighted a core conflict between ease of use and the desire for granular control over content access. Essentially, while participants saw the need for some APMs to be in place to ensure VoD services were safe, they also valued a smooth and seamless viewing experience.

⁷ Broadcast Video-on-Demand (BVoD) services refer to streaming services operated by broadcasters, such as BBC iPlayer and ITVX

⁸ Please see the methodology for an explanation on how participants were grouped, and what 'liberal' means in this context.

Most participants perceived the potential for harm from content on VoD services as “not that bad”, which led them to believe VoD services to be generally safe, and not a typical environment where harm happens

It is important to note that while the research primarily focused on VoD services, participants' own experiences extended beyond VoD services and they often contextualised their views within a broader landscape of online risks. While parents and children recalled instances of potentially harmful or inappropriate content on VoD services, they also recalled negative experiences and expressed concerns about the potential for exposure to inappropriate content on social media. Most participants, unprompted, raised greater concerns about harms on social media, leading many to deprioritise active risk assessment on VoD services. This underscored the importance of robust APMs prior to viewing content, enabling viewers to make informed viewing choices, especially where they might not expect to encounter inappropriate content.

Participants noted that unlike the often-passive consumption of social media (where content is encountered via autoplay or algorithmic feeds, such as an ‘Explore’, or ‘For You’ page), VoD viewing was perceived as involving more active decision-making. On VoD, participants felt they had greater control over their choices, using various information and tools, such as genre categories, age ratings, and content warnings, to inform their selections.

Children and adults generally placed less importance on the safety precautions on VoD services than on social media services. Their familiarity with VoD content and services led them to perceive VoD as a comparatively lower-risk environment

Participants also noted that VoD services featured professionally produced content, which is specifically commissioned and curated by service providers and perceived them to be regularly subject to processes to comply with industry standards. This stood in stark contrast to social media services, which were perceived by participants to have fewer content restrictions to allow for easier dissemination of user-to-user content. This distinction contributed to the sense that VoD content was inherently less risky. Participants broadly accepted that these underlying compliance, scrutiny, and quality control processes effectively protect audiences on VoD, leading them to trust that they were choosing from content that had already undergone robust ‘vetting’, and distrust online spaces where they believed that this was not the case.

“YouTube is a wild one. Anything goes there, doesn’t it” – Glasgow workshop, primary school parent

“On TikTok, I think you can get one where there’s less, like, appropriate content...yeah, you need [APMs] on TikTok” – Wolverhampton workshop, child (Year 7)

The perception that anyone could post anything on social media, increasing the likelihood that children could stumble upon inappropriate material, and the contrasting perception that VoD services curated their content, led participants to feel that VoD services were ‘safer’ than social media platforms.⁹

This comparative perception of risk influenced and was a constant frame of reference for participants' views on the necessity of APMs.

“You think Disney is Disney... They’ve got princesses and stuff; what’s the worst that can happen?” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)¹⁰

Considering VoD services as relatively safe, participants did not prioritise or even actively consider them as environments where harm could occur. For this reason, many reported, unprompted, being less focused on actively protecting themselves or their children on VoD services and said they exercised greater vigilance in relation to social media.

⁹ While social media was generally viewed as riskier, some participants, especially parents of primary school children noted that YouTube Kids was an exception. They perceived it as offering a degree of ‘ringfencing,’ creating a separate and more controlled space compared to the potential risks of YouTube.

¹⁰ Please see the methodology for an explanation on how participants were grouped, and what ‘neutral’ means in this context.

“My attention to protecting my children’s viewing has really been diverted. And I think I’ve let on TV slip... Social media, online streaming, and things like that. My concern is on there, and I’m probably really, really relaxed with TV” – Lisburn workshop, secondary school parent

Participants felt that the strictness of some of the APMs discussed was disproportionate to the perceived risk of harm on VoD services

When presented with the range of APMs in the workshops, participants’ reactions varied. While many acknowledged the value of measures such as age ratings or classification systems and content warnings, they had concerns about the strictness of some types of age assurance. In particular, they felt that more robust and ‘invasive’ age assurance techniques, such as ID verification or age estimation, were disproportionate to the perceived level of risk on mainstream VoD platforms, and that they would add more friction to the viewer experience than was warranted.

“I would understand if they used [hypothetical APM using document verification or age estimation] on extreme porn or adult sites for example, but it’s just Netflix. It’s normal shows” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

5. VoD viewing behaviours

Many participants stated that the flexibility of on-demand viewing was a key reason for choosing it over live television, although there were a variety of views about APMs and the riskiness of content

All participants in this research were recruited for their engagement with at least one VoD service, but most were watching diverse content from a range of VoD services. This included SVoD services, such as Netflix or Disney+, Broadcast Video-on-Demand (BVoD) services, such as BBC iPlayer or ITVX, Transactional Video-on-Demand (TVoD) services, for renting and purchasing content, such as renting a movie on Amazon Prime Video, and Advertising Video-on-Demand (AVoD) services, such as Tubi.¹¹

Secondary school children seemed to favour SVoD and reported rarely using BVoD. While some children reported using ITVX to watch shows like Love Island, overall, they usually preferred the content on SVoD services.

“iPlayer, I think, would be more like a documentary; there’s not much variety of actual films on it, and the films that are on it are usually, like, old.” Lisburn workshop, child (Year 12)

“So I use Netflix the most, and then if I find a film that I like, then I’ll go on Disney or Prime Video and watch it.” – London workshop, child (Year 12)

Participants were generally less familiar with AVoD services. This lack of familiarity prompted some to ask about how AVoD services worked and how these services differed from SVoD and BVoD services. Participants sought clarification on aspects such as ad frequency, content availability, and cost implications associated with AVoD services.

“I have heard of all of them except Tubi, on the advertising one. I’ve not seen that one; I don’t know anything about that one.” – Wolverhampton workshop, non-parent

Subscription to multiple SVoD services was common across the sample in order to give participants a wide choice of content to watch, with some making VoD streaming a central part of their day-to-day routine.

“Basically, majority of them we have [...] I’m a big fan of TV shows so I watch them a lot [...]. I tend to have my true crime shows on while in the kitchen cooking dinner, loading and unloading the washing machine. In the bath, on my way to work or on my way home. Just love them. It makes my housework seem easier and allows me to be entertained while doing my chores. Even washing dishes is more enjoyable [...]. It’s actually making me feel a little self-conscious as it is crazy just how many different things I’m watching.” – London pre-task, adult, secondary school parent.

“Between my partner and I, we’ve pretty much got them all. I pay for one and she pays for the other, I couldn’t even tell you off of the top of my head who pays for what... Primarily we use Prime and Netflix, but yeah, we have them all” – Caerphilly pre-task, adult, non-parent.

However, participants also discussed the increase in subscription costs and the cost of having access to multiple SVoD services. Some had engaged with services through free trials or were regularly cancelling subscriptions to help them afford to watch content on different services.

“I don’t have them all at once because they’re quite expensive. I’ll often have one, then get rid of it and get another. And there’s free trials too” - London workshop, adult, non-parent.

BVoD services were generally perceived as ‘safer’ than SVoD, although views were nuanced

The BVoD service that most participants were familiar with was BBC iPlayer, although there was a good spread of usage across workshops of other BVoD services, such as Sky, ITVX, Channel 4, and Channel 5.

Overall, participants usually associated BVoD services with ‘safe’ or less risky content. Some parents referenced iPlayer especially as having more ‘family-friendly’ content, and consequently these parents were more trusting of their children exploring the platform.

¹¹ Full definitions of types of VoD services covered can be found in the Glossary.

“We use BBC iPlayer for CBeebies... It’s on quite a lot in our house, so yeah for children’s stuff.” – Caerphilly workshop, primary and secondary school parent

However, participants also associated BVoD platforms with the type of programming found on their related, linear television channels, having used BVoDs as a ‘catch up’ service. This led some to mention Channel 5 and Channel 4 as having ‘riskier’ content compared to the BBC.

“Channel 5 can throw out some stuff... Like the worst prisons in America, that kind of, you know, more mature.” – Stockport workshop, adult, secondary school parent

There was a perception that Channel 4 and Channel 5 were less strict than the BBC, which was reflected in ‘riskier’ content on their VoD services. This observation was sometimes drawn in comparison to Netflix and Disney+, which were perceived as ‘safer’ because they offered children’s profiles that automatically streamlined suitable content and protected younger viewers from the ‘riskier’ content elsewhere on the platform.

While there was some reflection over the varying types of content on BVoD services - such as ‘riskier’ content like *The Inbetweeners*, *Naked Attraction*, or *World’s Toughest Prisons* - it was thought that most of the content hosted on BVoD services must still comply with broadcast standards. Participants often referred to the watershed on broadcast television but also perceived content on broadcast television as adhering to more rigorous compliance with regulations than SVoD services, as they felt their content was more constrained by what had been broadcast on their terrestrial channel.

“On terrestrial TV, there’s the watershed, and there’s a certain time they show stuff. On streaming services, there isn’t much... you can get anything any time of day.” – Stockport workshop, grandparent

“I kind of guess that they are appropriate because they’ve been screened. Like for iPlayer, I know that that is appropriate and I wouldn’t have to watch that for my children” Caerphilly pre-task, primary school parent, (conservative)¹²

Participants often distinguished between viewing experiences on SVoD services with and without protection measures in place. When participants were not actively using restrictive protection measures like child profiles or parental controls, some SVoD services were seen as platforms that offered a wider range of content, including more adult themes, which participants attributed to SVoD services being less constrained by the content limitations of the terrestrial broadcast. In these scenarios, SVoD services were sometimes characterised as the place to go for less restricted viewing. However, it is important to note that this perception existed alongside widespread recognition that SVoD services also offer APM tools to manage content access.

“I’m talking more bloody and more gory. Netflix has a lot of animation on there... literally you see people’s stuff getting ripped out.” – London workshop, non-parent

Many participants shared ‘cautionary tales’, emphasising the importance of APMs on VoD services

Across the workshops, participants shared stories of accidentally exposing themselves, their children, or others to potentially inappropriate content. While these were often humorous reflections, others had felt troubled by the content they had seen.

“Baby Reindeer... If I knew how bad it actually was or how many ridiculous scenes there were, I wouldn’t have watched it... There were times where there were scenes that came up and I was like, oh my God. And it was like the middle of the night and I was like, what the hell am I watching?” – Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral)

“Sausage Party, it just looks like an innocent cartoon, so she [grandmother] put it on for him [child]. I walked in to pick him up. “Oh, what is that?” It was F, C, F, C [swearing].” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

¹² Please see the methodology for an explanation on how participants were grouped, and what ‘conservative’ means in this context.

As a result, participants appreciated the need for APMs to mitigate the risk of exposing themselves or others to potentially harmful content. Participants often felt they should be accurately informed before selecting content to watch on VoD services.

Parents of primary school children were more likely to use APMs and additional information for guidance

Parents of primary school children were typically more careful about what their children watched on VoD services. They were more likely to check age ratings or investigate content further to work out if it was suitable for their child before selecting.

“I tend to look at the age rating, or I kind of decide based on seeing what the movie is about, what sort of content the movie has, whether it’s a scary movie, whether it’s got violence in it, sexual scenes and whatnot.” – London workshop, primary school parent

“It’s really useful because they have viewing guidance, so you can just look on the programme and it will say ‘family friendly’, or ‘contains nudity’, or better still, I’ll use word of mouth or media buzz and see what other people are saying about the shows.” – London pre-task, grandparent

Some parents of primary school children also relied on recommendations from other parents they knew and trusted to find suitable content for their children. Others looked for additional information and resources online (e.g. Common Sense Media) for guidance on what content was appropriate. During breaks in the workshop, researchers also observed parents sharing advice and information with one another.

“My wife will know what it’s about, but me, I’d have to Google the programme. Is it appropriate? You know, parents have different priorities.” – Stockport workshop, primary school parent

“When it comes to watching stuff with the kids and stuff, it’s usually like my sister’s family influence, or maybe a friend at school said they watched it, and then my son will be interested [...] I use something called ‘Common Sense’; it’s just a website that you’d go on and type whatever show you have to watch and you get parents’ opinions. They’ll say, “I found too many innuendos, too many swear words, too much violence; it says recommended for 10 but I wouldn’t let my 12-year-old watch it.” Stuff like that.” – Stockport pre-task, primary school parent

Secondary school parents and non-parents adopted a more flexible approach to guiding content selection, favouring discussion over controlling access

When watching with their children, parents of secondary school children more often paid attention to content warnings rather than age ratings as guidance. This tended to vary depending on the age of their children. Those with younger secondary school children (e.g. 11 years old) were generally more cautious than those with older secondary school children (e.g. 15 years and over). So, these attitudes - perhaps predictably - seemed to correlate with age. Overall, secondary school parents tended to pay more attention to what themes or scenes the content contained.

“Myself personally, I’ll read the description of whether it’s sexual, got sexual references, or violence or bad language or anything like that, and I’ll look at the age rating as well.” – London pre-task, secondary school parent.

However, many secondary school parents reported taking a more relaxed and ‘case-by-case’ approach, trusting their children to make decisions when watching alone. They were happy to discuss content with their children. Many felt that secondary school children were mature enough to watch more sensitive themes and were happy to make exceptions if their children particularly wanted to watch something.

“In terms of deciding what’s harmful for the kids, [...] for example, on Netflix they usually have their own profiles, so it’s okay; they’ll sometimes venture onto mine if there’s something they’ve heard about. For example, they wanted to watch Squid Game – my son’s fine to watch it because he’s 13.” London pre-task, secondary school parent.

Secondary school-aged children reported using social media to help decide what to watch and reportedly paid less attention to APMs

Most children reported using VoD services to watch content but reported using social media to make decisions about what to watch. They relied on recommendations or were watching snippets of shows and films on social media apps such as TikTok. The children’s exploration of VoD content was, overall, not happening on VoD services.

“If I see edits or something on TikTok or YouTube, I’ll just be like, that looks good, and I’d start watching.” - Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10).

[Researcher] “How would you find a film that you want to watch?”

[Child, 17] “TikTok a lot. TikTok, or like recommendations.” – London workshop, child (Year 12)

“You see a lot of videos on TikTok, like edits of the actual TV show, and that tells you if it’s good or not.” – Lisburn workshop, child (Year 12)

[Researcher] “Where do you get your recommendations from?”

[Child, 12] “Probably like TikTok and Snapchat and things like that.” – Wolverhampton workshop, child (Year 7)

Children were happy to watch content rated for older age groups, especially if their own age fell between age ratings (e.g. between 12 and 15), but some still had conversations with their parents if they wanted to watch something they knew was riskier. Children reported being knowledgeable about ‘risky’ content but there was variation in the extent to which they felt they were able to watch it or not.

“I sometimes watch South Park when I’m home alone... I have asked my mum, like a couple of months ago.” – Wolverhampton workshop, child (Year 7)

Younger teenagers had expectations set for them around what age-related content they had to seek permission to watch or knew to avoid. They referenced 18-rated shows and films that may contain extreme violence, scary scenes, or nudity, and would either ask for approval or they were trusted to make their own decisions.

“I’m not allowed to watch 18s because they can be extreme.” – Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10)

“An 18, if it was, like a horror, I would say that’s not that bad because horror is more an 18 because it might be gruesome, if it’s an 18 in a comedy or a romance, like, that’s weird.” – Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10)

Children were more likely to pay attention to content warnings when watching with their families to avoid any ‘awkward’ scenes, such as those involving sexual content. This was not to avoid the content itself, but to avoid or be prepared for the uncomfortable experience of watching it with their family.

“Sex [scenes]. Cos if one comes up and the sex scene comes up and you’re with your family, it’s so awkward.” – Lisburn workshop, child (Year 12)

6. Guidance and information measures

Participants were presented with four main categories of APM. Two of these were primarily about providing advice and information about content, while the other two were about restriction of access to content.

This section explores participants’ general reflections on APMs that provide guidance and information to viewers, with more detailed findings on each type of APM in the following chapters.

Guidance and information measures

“Age ratings or classification systems are labelling frameworks used to categorise media content based on its suitability for maturity and sensitivity levels”

“Content warnings alert viewers to potentially sensitive content, such as violence, strong language, or disturbing scenes, before or during viewing”

Most participants were familiar and broadly happy with existing guidance and information measures

- All participants were familiar with the concept of guidance measures. This familiarity came from a wide range of media. Particularly in the case of age ratings, it contributed to a perception that they carried a degree of reliability and authority.

“Well, we’ve all grown up with it really.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

“I feel like I see these every time I watch a programme.” – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (neutral)

- Parents with younger children and children in early secondary school (Year 7) primarily used age ratings to check content. In contrast, older secondary school children (Years 8 – 11) more commonly used content warnings.
- Generally, participants felt that guidance measures were most effective when used in conjunction with each other. For instance, a detailed content warning could add nuance to an age rating, while the rating itself could provide wider context on the scale and severity of a theme.

“They’d have to be together.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

“I’d want to see the content warnings with the ages. Because if it was a 15 because of violence, that might be fine. But if it’s 15 because of nudity, that’s a bit different.” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

- Parents generally felt that guidance measures placed responsibility with the viewer, or with parents, and were happy with this. They appreciated that these tools allowed them to make their own informed decisions and maintain control over what their children watched, valuing this flexibility over more restrictive control measures.

“I think for me it’s more guidance for us on what we can actually show our children, more so than prevention. The prevention is more in the controls, on how we limit their access to things.” – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

- A few participants voiced a strong critique, suggesting that guidance measures did little to prevent children from accessing inappropriate content. They argued that these measures potentially prioritised protecting VoD services from accountability, functioning as a way for platforms to “cover their backs” rather than to genuinely safeguard children.

“To me this looks like a way [for the platform] not to be blamed.” Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

“It’s them covering their own bottoms if you like. So if you’re upset about something, they [VoD services] can say, ‘We told you.’” – Leeds workshop, adult (neutral)

Current guidance and information measures were felt by some to be ineffective at times

- Some, particularly teenagers, felt that content warnings and age ratings could inadvertently attract children to content by labelling it as “risky” or inappropriate. Teenagers admitted that seeing warnings would sometimes increase their desire to watch a programme.

“I think it might motivate a child if they’re 15 to go like ‘Oh, I really want to watch an 18.’ So then like that they might seek it out.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral)

“It [content warnings] makes me more intrigued; I want to know what it’s about.” – Leeds workshop, child (Year 8)

- Some participants, particularly grouped as ‘liberal’ or ‘neutral’, expressed doubts about the accuracy and consistency of guidance measures. They recalled instances where ratings seemed either too lenient or too strict. This variability in perceived accuracy led some to question the objectivity and reliability of the entire system.

“There’s been some things I’ve seen that have been a 15, and I’ve thought, ‘Bloody hell, that’s a bit risqué; that should be an 18. And then there’s other 18s that I’d let my nine-year-old watch.” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

“They aren’t consistent across platforms and they aren’t always accurate, e.g. Toy Story is rated 6+ on Disney¹³ however I would be happy in allowing my kids to watch the films at 2 & 5 [years old].” – Stockport post-task, adult (liberal)

- When adult participants (some of whom were parents) thought that there were inconsistencies, some would turn to external sources—like reviews, friends, or other websites—to double-check content suitability. This highlighted a mistrust in the accuracy of the guidance provided by the VoD services themselves.

“I ask friends, or IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes. Those are good.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

- Despite being familiar with guidance measures, many participants admitted they rarely paid active attention to them. This was attributed to a pre-existing assumption that VoD content was generally safe and also to over-familiarity, where participants became so accustomed to seeing the measures that they stopped actively processing them. This was also brought up in relation to watching TV as a family – except in cases where parents use information and guidance to help them make rules or

¹³ Toy Story 1 and Toy Story 2 are rated 0+ on Disney+, while Toy Story 3 and Toy Story 4 are rated 6+.

discuss content with teenagers and children, or in some cases where parents of secondary school children paid more attention to content warnings over age classifications for guidance. In addition, some used content warnings to guide their decision-making based on their mood. Some children paid attention to content warnings when watching with their parents to avoid any potential embarrassment. When it came to children of secondary school age – they reported using social media to help decide what to watch, reportedly paying less attention to APMs.

- Guidance measures were considered valuable tools and a helpful reference point for decision-making. However, many participants noted that they were often easy to overlook, especially when not prominently displayed.

“I wouldn’t even look at that; that just goes over my head” – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

“I think you’re almost desensitised to them a lot of the time, unless you’re specifically looking for them.” – Lisburn workshops, adult (neutral)

“I feel like kids would just look at it and skip it, not really bothered.” – Leeds workshop, child (Year 8)

7. Age ratings or classification systems

“Age ratings or classification systems are labelling frameworks used to categorise and label media content based on its suitability for different maturity and sensitivity levels.”

This chapter summarises findings on the different types of classification and labelling approaches¹⁴, including:

- **Minimum age-based labelling** (0+, 6+, 9+, 12+, 14+, 16+, 18+) – age ratings that provide specific suitable minimum age-based recommendations.
- **Letter-based labelling** (G, G+, !) – Classification systems that use abbreviations (e.g. G for Guidance) or symbols (e.g. !) to indicate content may be unsuitable for some audiences.¹⁵
- **Hybrid labelling** (U, PG, 12, 15, 18) – age ratings that use a combination of minimum age indicators (numbers) and abbreviations (letters) to label the suitability of content¹⁶.

Participants were not shown specific age rating systems or real-world examples from specific services to avoid prioritising one framework over another. However, even when shown mocked-up examples, participants easily recognised these generic representations and understood how the different systems functioned in the real world.

To avoid order effects across the groups, the order in which each of the APMs was discussed varied. When discussing age ratings or classification systems, many participants brought up content warnings as well without being prompted, and many emphasised that age ratings or classification systems would only be effective in conjunction with each other.

Summary of findings

Overarching findings

- Participants were familiar with and found age ratings useful but some wanted more clarity and detailed guidance.
- Letter-based labelling was often perceived as confusing and lacking detail on suitability for audiences.
- Though familiar with hybrid labelling, some participants questioned whether this type of classification, by offering fewer age-specific labels, was nuanced enough to reflect children’s individual maturity and development stages.
- Many adults – especially parents – and children preferred minimum age-based labelling due to its more detailed age labelling, which they considered more granular and easier to interpret.

Specific findings on age ratings or classification systems

¹⁴ The research did not set out to compare preferences between the different Age Classification Systems. Therefore, the views expressed should be treated as a ‘top of mind’ responses rather than the conclusion of a robustly tested comparison.

¹⁵ This classification style is used by some BVoD services.

¹⁶ These ratings are used by The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). Some VoD services use these ratings with their associated official labels, while others may use similar elements of the BBFC’s ratings but not all (e.g., using the age ranges, but not the labels).

Minimum age-based labelling
(0+, 6+, 9+, 12+, 14+, 16+, 18+)

Familiarity: Participants were less familiar with this style of classification but generally felt positive about it.

Clarity: Across the sample, participants were on the most part easily able to identify who content was suitable for. However, some participants were unsure about how the content might be different, when the gap between minimum age labels was small.

Trust: Some participants felt that the granularity of this labelling addressed concerns about the broadness associated with the hybrid labelling approach. These participants responded well to the more precise nature of granular labelling; felt they were better matched to learning stages and were consistent based on age-appropriateness.

Proportionality: This was generally recognised as a useful mechanism to avoid watching inappropriate content on VoD services, though some did question the utility of having such granular age categories.

Consistency: Participants expressed confusion when VoD services used different/inconsistent age ratings or classifications and expressed a preference for a consistent system.

Ease of use: Some reported ignoring age ratings and making their own decisions, but those who did use them found them straightforward and frictionless to use.

Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey:

- While browsing
- Before the trailer; and
- When selecting content

Letter-based labelling
(G, G+, !)

Familiarity: Participants were largely unfamiliar with these classification styles and responded negatively to them.

Clarity: In isolation, participants said it provided little information about who the content is suitable for.

Trust: The letter-based labelling system was regularly described as confusing or pointless, as it did not offer enough information about the appropriateness of the content.

Proportionality: Most felt that this alone was not a useful mechanism for flagging inappropriate content, reporting that they wanted more detail.

Consistency: Participants preferred a more consistent system of age ratings or classification, stating that letter-based labelling was confusing.

Ease of use: It was often stated that this system provided little information and guidance and that they would likely ignore it if they saw it without accompanying content warnings.

Where participants expected to this in the viewing journey:

Participants generally did not expect to see this letter-based labelling in their journey.

Hybrid labelling
(U, PG, 12, 15, 18)

Familiarity: Participants were most familiar with hybrid labelling and were generally positive about it. Many identified it as the classification system they see in the cinema or on Netflix.

Clarity: Given the high level of familiarity, participants generally understood what content was suitable when classified by these labels.

Trust: Participants reported that the familiarity of hybrid labelling contributed to its perceived gravitas and trustworthiness. However, some also reflected that this labelling system lacked sufficient detail to account for individual children's maturity and development levels.

Proportionality: Participants often reported this as a useful mechanism alone to avoid watching inappropriate content on VoD services.

Consistency: There was a feeling among some that these ratings sometimes felt arbitrarily applied. Some participants, especially children, felt that hybrid labelling using labels/letters and numerical age indicators felt inconsistent.

Ease of use: Some children found hybrid labelling systems confusing, and some adults felt they skipped key stages of maturity development, but the overall view was that they were straightforward and frictionless to use.

Where participants wanted to see this in the viewing journey:

- While browsing
- Before the trailer; and
- When selecting content

Detailed findings

Almost all participants reacted positively to the concept of age ratings or classification systems as a source of guidance, but asked for clearer, more detailed and nuanced guidance

Most parents and children were familiar with and recognised the value of age ratings or classification systems

Across the workshops, people were generally familiar with and recalled using age ratings or classification systems, primarily hybrid labelling approaches (U, PG, 12, 15), as guidance for viewing choices. While they did not always strictly follow these systems - occasionally watching content outside the recommended age for children - participants generally found them to be reliable indicators of what was appropriate. They were largely positive about the ability of age ratings or classification systems to flag potentially inappropriate content, considering them effective guides for determining suitable material for younger people, a view supported by their widespread prevalence and familiarity.

"It is a good guide for both parent and child that the content is suitable or otherwise; the range of levels is quite comprehensive and easy to understand." – Leeds post-task, adult

"I think it's for me to make decisions, not to make a decision for me. And I just think of my little girl were 11, she's probably going to be having conversations very soon... I'd rather her have the conversation with me and feel comfortable having that conversation as opposed to me saying, "You cannot watch anything [over] 15"." – Leeds workshop, adult (liberal)

Participants also suggested that age ratings or classification systems in general facilitated discussions about VoD content, particularly with secondary school children and teenagers. Some parents described using age ratings as conversation starters to help their children understand why certain content might be inappropriate in relation to other content. This was seen as a useful way for managing the transition from enforcing restrictions to enabling children to become decision-makers as they grew up.

"I think it's a useful tool to have a conversation with a teenager, to talk them through their expectations: 'Oh well this might be in this film; do you want to watch that?'" - Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

However, there were some questions as to whether age was a good indicator of what is appropriate for children to watch

Some felt the concept of age ratings or classification systems as a whole did not sufficiently account for individual maturity levels. Parents often referenced their own children and the fact that maturity levels did not always correspond to age. As a result, some disregarded age ratings and made their own judgements based on what they felt was suitable content for that child's maturity level.

"I don't know how you can assess the maturity and sensitivity really [through age ratings]. My 15-year-old's more sensitive than my 12-year-old, and my 12-year-old's probably more mature than my 15-year-old." Stockport workshop, adult (liberal).

Others – particularly the liberal or neutral groups - felt that age ratings were somewhat arbitrary. One 'neutral' group discussed their perceptions of "hard" and "soft" 18s, meaning that they were not guided by the age ratings, and more by the content they had already seen, and would then make a decision about whether something was appropriate. They referred to genres as an important factor contributing to this decision, so age ratings were discarded in favour of what participants already knew or felt was appropriate themselves.

[Participant A] "There is stuff that would shock me, and then there's stuff – my 11-year-old – he's seen the Terminator... I think it's an 18, but it's not really gory or anything like that. I watched it when I was a kid. It didn't do me any harm."

[Participant B] "There's a fantasy element to that, but with the likes of Se7en, you know it's a serial killer; it's a bit more premediated." – Lisburn workshop, adults (neutral)

This perception of the arbitrariness of age ratings was also discussed in relation to the reclassification of films. Some felt that with social norms and standards constantly shifting, age ratings were only a temporary way of judging the appropriateness of content. Instead, they relied on their experience watching content themselves to make decisions.

Some parents questioned how objective and consistent the guidance from age ratings or classification systems was

These parents felt it would be difficult for VoD services to provide objective and consistent age classification systems given they considered classifying content as a somewhat subjective exercise

Despite reporting general use of these systems to guide decision-making about appropriate content on VoD services, participants identified several limitations with current systems that affected their confidence and trust in age ratings or classification systems.

Participants recognised that classifying content usually involves making subjective judgements, meaning some ratings can be debated, or differ depending on personal taste and sensitivities. This raised concerns about the objectivity of age ratings and led some participants to question their accuracy and application to their content selection.

"Disney might think that's a 16, whereas Amazon will think, why's that a 16? A 12-year-old can watch that! It's because there's too many opinions, too many companies involved." - Wolverhampton workshop, non-parent

Others highlighted that different classification systems across different VoD services may introduce minor confusion to their decision-making. This caused some to ask why content was rated conflictingly on different services.

There were concerns raised about the challenges services must face in accounting for different cultural standards when classifying content appropriately and consistently

Participants reported concerns with using ratings as classified in another country, namely the US, which they perceived as more lenient. A few participants felt that rating content according to a different culture and set of values could introduce some confusion and lead them to question the accuracy of some age ratings.

This perception highlights a broader lack of clarity among participants about the provenance of age ratings on VoD services. Participants were often unsure which rating system was being applied and by whom. For

example, the assumption that Netflix-produced programmes and films would be rated according to American standards was common, despite the fact that services such as Netflix use BBFC ratings.¹⁷

“Because with the old system, like when there's a lot less media around, limited TV channels, you really only watch films in a cinema. Like you knew that it was a consistent system. Whereas now because you've got, say, Netflix make their own films, you've got content from other countries that might be rated by them; you don't know whether an age rating in America is the same as it is here.” – Leeds workshop, adult (conservative).

“They have a very different rating in America than we do over here. They thought Saltburn was suitable for children over 12 ...So having a universal rating across all countries would be better.” - Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

Overall, some felt age ratings or classification systems were too reliant on subjective decision-making from each VoD service or were failing to account for content standards across different cultural contexts, which led to them to be sceptical of their overall accuracy.

There was a general preference expressed for a uniform classification system across all VoD services, though not everyone agreed on one specific system over another

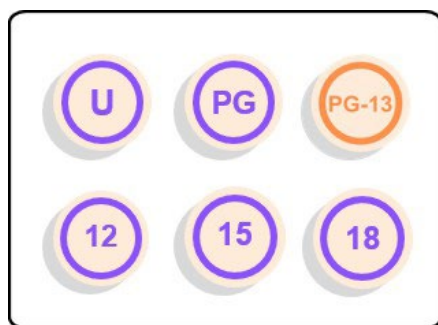
Many drew on their familiarity with age ratings or classification systems when deciding what to watch. They reported “knowing what to expect” from a hybrid approach to labelling (e.g. U, PG, 12, etc.) and what themes may be present (e.g. graphic violence, nudity in an ‘18’). This created a ‘rule of thumb’ that helped guide their decision-making process. They were less familiar when different systems or classifications were presented to them, with some participants unclear about what themes to expect from classification systems they did not recognise (e.g. G, G+).

To keep this rule of thumb effective, participants wanted age ratings or classification system approaches to be consistent across different VoD services to allow them to make properly informed decisions. Many participants believed a uniform system across VoD services would provide greater clarity and more effectively guide them when choosing what to watch, reducing confusion and enabling them to apply the same logic to content selection wherever they choose to watch VoD content.

“There's so many platforms and they're all doing things differently; it makes it hard to know if you're managing it. Maybe we need some sort of standardisation.” - Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral).

However, it is worth noting that the participants did not all agree on one specific system, instead weighing the benefits and drawbacks of each type in relation to their family setup.

Some parents leveraged their own familiarity with the hybrid labelling approach to age ratings or classification to help manage their children's viewing habits



The hybrid labelling approach to age ratings or classification (U, PG, 12, 15, 18) uses a combination of age-based indicators and guidance labels to label content for its suitability¹⁸.

Most parents perceived this system as authoritative, considering it a trusted source of guidance for viewing. Some children also reported checking with their parents if they wanted to watch content designated as being too old for them to watch. The legacy of this labelling approach and its associated trustworthiness and authority helped many parents make and justify decisions on what their children could or could not watch on VoD services. Many

¹⁷ The application of age rating systems on VoD services is complex and can vary. While some services like Netflix UK and Amazon Prime Video are in partnership with BBFC, other platforms may incorporate or display their own rating systems, or use other formal frameworks

parents mentioned referring to the authority of age ratings or classification systems to support their decisions when children weren't happy with them. There was consistent feedback among some parents regarding the hybrid labelling which they viewed as a standard they could reference and leverage to avoid appearing restrictive. This helped reduce conflicts with children.

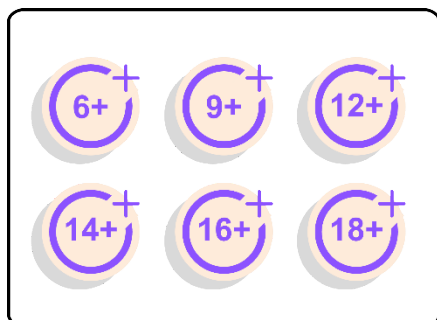
"I only really use it when it's something I really don't want them to watch, 'You've got to be 18 to watch that'... It's justification." - Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

Some parents talked about using the hybrid labelling approach to educate their children on how to watch things responsibly, helping them develop their media literacy, and allowing them to become involved in the decision-making process. Other parents encouraged children to pay attention to age ratings to avoid exposing themselves to unsuitable content, allowing them to be involved in the decision-making process.

"They see PG and my eldest says actually it should be GP, Get Parent, and she just goes, 'Dad! It's a PG!' and asks to watch it." - Leeds workshop, adult (neutral)

While the gravitas of hybrid labelling was valued, minimum age-based labelling was frequently responded to more positively by our research participants¹⁹ due to the clearer distinction between age groups, and greater range of categories

The minimum age-based labelling approach (e.g. 6+, 9+, 13+) is an approach that solely displays specific minimum age recommendations around the suitability of content. This provides a more granular age range compared to hybrid labelling, typically using seven labels in total.



When presented with the different types of age ratings or classifications, a preference for the minimum age-based labelling approach was the widely prevalent view.

While many felt hybrid labelling (U, PG, 12, 15 and 18) was useful and familiar, a system with minimum age-based labelling (0+, 6+, 9+, 12+, 14+, 16+, 18+) was perceived by some participants to be easier to interpret and better at accounting for children's individual maturity and development levels. These participants felt this was more informative and made it easier to choose content. In contrast,

participants - both adults and children - found it more challenging to determine the appropriateness of content rated PG compared to a 12.

"If it's PG to 12, that's quite a long age gap." - Stockport workshop, adult (liberal)

"I'd say the numbered ones like 6+, 9+ are probably better because they're more grouped together. Whereas U, PG, 12 is, I don't know, it's just kind of inconsistent." - Lisburn workshop, child (Year 12)

"You would understand - you saw a 9+ you gotta be older than 9. But with the Us or the PGs, you'd have to know what the age rating is for the letters, so I think they're just worse, because they're just harder to understand." - Wolverhampton workshop, child (Year 7)

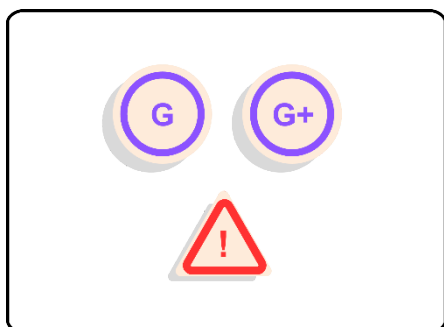
Other 'conservative' participants felt these minimum age-based labelling systems more clearly categorised content and were more effective in helping children avoid inappropriate content on VoD services. They felt the wider the gap between minimum age-recommendations, the more room there could be for potential harm to children. Overall, these participants leaned towards age-based labelling approaches to minimise this risk.

"I think when you've got the bigger age brackets, there's more room for them to be watching something that probably isn't suitable." - London workshop, adult (conservative).

¹⁹ A more positive response was frequently raised spontaneously by research participants. The research did not set out to compare preferences between the different Audience Protection Measures.

While acknowledging their familiarity and the perceived authority of traditional frameworks, participants considered the age-based labelling approach to potentially work as an effective classification system due to its increased precision and ability to distinguish between smaller more granular age categories.

Letter-based labelling approaches were criticised as being unclear, and were perceived as lacking information



Letter-based labelling that used letters or symbols, particularly those that weren't used regularly in other viewing environments, were mostly not recognised by audiences and received the most criticism.

[Pointing at the ! symbol] "What does that road sign mean?"
Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative).

Most had not recognised 'G' or 'G+' from any VoD services and were confused about what the warnings were drawing attention to. This non-age-specific classification was not well received across the groups, with many questioning their effectiveness, reporting they would either ignore it or think it related to something else.

"What's guidance? What does that mean, just guide yourself without your parents?" - Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

"Certain shows have 'P' on them for product placement... My head kind of went there as well. Is that anything to do with that?" – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

Participants felt letter-based labelling provided little information, reporting that they wanted to understand why 'guidance' was necessary and exactly which audiences it may be unsuitable for. Participants drew upon age-based ratings to get a sense of the themes to expect when making decisions about what to watch, and many felt that letter-based labelling did not provide them with enough information to make an informed decision.²⁰

There were also frequent questions as to whether separating G from G+ was enough of a difference to make judgements over different maturity levels. Given they are not understood to be associated with ages or maturity levels like other classification systems, many participants said they were left guessing whether the content was suitable for young people.

Some participants felt letter-based labelling systems were likely a 'tick box exercise' for VoD services to avoid responsibility for any potentially harmful content they make available to audiences.

"I think it's to keep it as vague as possible and put the liability back on the user. So they haven't put an age limit on it; it's up to either parents or the young user of whatever age they are to decide they're ready to watch it. If they're traumatised, it's their fault." – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

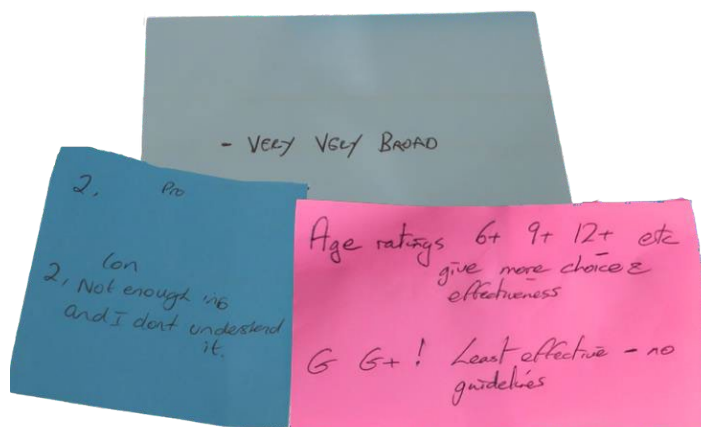


Figure 1: From left to right: "2. Pro 2, con not enough and I don't understand it" Stockport workshop, adult (neutral); "very, very broad" Stockport workshop, adult (neutral); "Age ratings 6+ 9+ 12+ etc give more choice and effectiveness. G, G+ ! least effective – no guidelines" Weetwood workshop, adults (conservative)

It is worth noting that a few participants felt the simplicity of a G warning was enough to flag to parents that a decision will have to be made about whether a child can watch the content. They said it would prompt them to look into the content further and make their own judgement over whether the content is appropriate.

²⁰ It is important to note that participants viewed these labels in isolation (as per the research design), whereas in practice, they are accompanied by content warnings and explanatory information. Additionally, they were not presented within the context of specific VoD services.

“For me, I'd say the Guidance is just guiding me to see what content it is. Not that it's appropriate or not. It's just telling you what's in it for you to make the judgement.” Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral).

“I think [G, G+, !] is probably the best one you get. Because that red triangle is a red flag as well, that draws you to the flag. There's something not very clever gonna happen.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral)

8. Content warnings

“Content warnings alert viewers to potentially sensitive or harmful content, such as violence, strong language, or disturbing scenes, before or during viewing.”

This chapter details participants’ views on content warnings. To facilitate discussion, participants were asked to consider the role content warnings play in their viewing experience.

To stimulate in-depth discussion, participants were also shown printed examples illustrating four different types of content warnings, identified by Ofcom as representative of what might be found on VoD services and developed by the research team. These types included:

- **Non-specific content warnings** – provide basic, non-specific information that the content may be harmful or inappropriate for some audiences (e.g., viewer discretion is advised).
- **Broad content warnings** – inform viewers in a generic way that the content includes themes that may be harmful or inappropriate for some audiences. (e.g., includes violence).
- **Specific content warnings** – inform viewers with more specificity about scenes or themes that may be upsetting (e.g., scenes of domestic violence).
- **Advanced content warnings** – provide detailed, often episode or storyline specific information about themes or scenes that may be upsetting. May also provide details of where affected viewers can find additional support. (e.g., “This episode was made in 2006 and contains strong derogatory language and scenes of strong domestic violence and sexual threat that some viewers may find distressing. For support, call [details of support services]”).

Building on the overarching attitudes towards Guidance Measures described in Chapter 6, this chapter highlights participants’ general experiences with content warnings before exploring their attitudes towards these specific types of content warnings.

To avoid order effects across the groups, the order in which each of the APMs were discussed varied. Participants often brought up age ratings or classification systems without being prompted when they were presented with content warning stimulus, and many emphasised that content warnings would only be effective in conjunction with a recognisable age rating.

Summary of findings

General findings

- Participants reacted positively overall to the idea of content warnings flagging any potentially harmful scenes.
- Many felt that content warnings should be shown early in the viewing journey, with some suggesting they should be included at the start of trailers.
- While seen as useful, participants felt that content warnings used on VoD services often lacked sufficient detail.
- A prevalent piece of feedback was that content warnings were most informative when combined with age ratings, which were perceived to provide context to highlighted themes, as well as a sense of scale and severity.
- Specific warnings were considered the most effective tool, balancing detail without providing too much information.

Specific findings on types of content warnings

Non-specific content warnings
“Viewer discretion is advised”

Familiarity: Participants were familiar with non-specific warnings but received them poorly.

Broad content warnings
“Includes violence”

Clarity: Many felt that they provided no information about *why* content was flagged.

Trust: Some expressed the view that non-specific warnings were used to protect VoD services from complaints rather than viewers from harm.

Proportionality: There was some concern that warnings could be placed on every piece of content, which devalued them.

Consistency: Participants did not reflect on the consistency of non-specific warnings.

Ease of use: Some felt the lack of detail included in non-specific warnings hindered their decision making.

Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey:

- Participants did not generally want or expect to see non-specific warnings in their viewing journey.

Familiarity: Participants had seen broad content warnings and were largely neutral about them.

Clarity: In comparison to Non-specific content warnings, participants liked being told what type of content was being flagged, but felt they lacked sufficient detail to clearly understand the volume and intensity of themes present.

Trust: There was a general consensus that this was a better warning than non-specific warnings and that they would pay closer attention to the type of content flagged.

Proportionality: There was consistent feedback that involved questioning what constituted ‘violence’. Many wanted to know the severity and frequency of content before watching.

Consistency: Some reported that the categorisation of themes such as ‘swearing’ or ‘violence’ was inconsistent across platforms.

Ease of use: Participants identified the lack of detail as a friction to their decision making.

Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey:

- Much like non-specific warnings, participants were largely neutral about broad warnings on the viewing journey.

Specific content warnings
“Contains scenes of domestic violence”

Familiarity: Participants often responded very positively to the concept of specific content warnings but were not familiar with them on VoD services.

Clarity: Participants reported wanting to have more detailed reasons about why content might be avoided, and felt specific warnings provided the right amount of information.

Trust: Most participants felt specific details were useful for decision making without giving too much away about possible plotlines and twists.

Proportionality: Participants felt, overall, that specific content warnings provided proportionate guidance to the risk of harm posed by certain themes.

Consistency: Participants wanted to know if the same themes would be flagged on different services, or whether it was up to the service to decide.

	Ease of use: Overall, participants did not raise serious concerns about content warnings causing unnecessary friction in their viewer journeys. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: • Opening credits; and • When selecting content
Advanced content warnings <i>“This episode was made in 2006 and contains strong derogatory language, and scenes of strong domestic violence and sexual threat that some viewers may find distressing. For support, call [details of support services].”</i>	Familiarity: Participants were familiar with advanced warnings. Clarity: Participants responded positively to advanced warnings, finding them to provide clear and precise information about specific themes and storylines, even pointing to individual episodes within a series where appropriate. Most understood why content may signpost to additional support and resources. Some raised concerns about advanced content warnings giving away plotlines. Trust: Participants trusted that more severe or triggering themes would be identified by VoD services. Proportionality: While many agreed advanced warnings were a proportionate level of warning, some felt they went too far and suggested they should be optional. Consistency: Participants felt advanced warnings should be available to those that need them for specific themes across VoD services. Ease of use: Overall, participants did not raise serious concerns about content warnings causing unnecessary friction in their viewing journeys. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: • When selecting content; and • Opening credits

Detailed findings

Content warnings were generally viewed positively and used by most participants

There was broad agreement that it was a good idea to warn people of potentially sensitive themes or potentially harmful content

Most participants had come across content warnings on VoD content and reflected positively on their ability to warn viewers that may want to avoid certain themes. Content warnings were often perceived as ‘trigger warnings’ - ways to alert viewers to potentially harmful content on VoD services.

Being informed was a priority for many participants when reflecting on APMs, and content warnings were seen as an important component of making an informed decision about whether content is suitable for them and others. If there were certain themes participants wanted to avoid, they wanted to be alerted beforehand, and felt content warnings were an effective way to communicate this to the right people.

Reflecting on the role of content warnings also encouraged participants to step outside of their own experience and

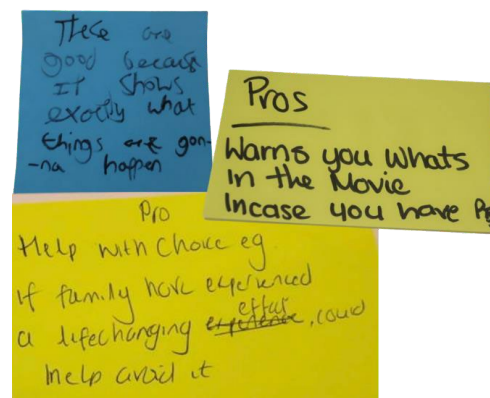


Figure 2: From left to right: "These are good because it shows exactly what things are gonna happen" Leeds workshop, children; "Pro Help with choice e.g. if family have experienced a lifechanging effect, could help avoid it" Leeds workshop, adult (neutral); "pros: warns you what's in the movie in case you have PTSD" Glasgow workshop, children

consider other potentially harmful content that may affect others. Most agreed it was important for sensitive themes to be flagged through content warnings.

“I think it’s important... if anything that triggers somebody, it’s your choice then to watch it or not to watch it.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral).

“I do an emotional job, so I don’t necessarily want to hear anything too detailed at that time of the night, and then certain topics, I’ve had miscarriages so I wouldn’t want to watch anything about that, or loss” Leeds workshop, adult (liberal)

Also common among the sample was the use of content warnings to guide their decision making when it came to their mood, not just to avoid potentially upsetting themes. Having a sense of the type of content before selecting it was important to most participants when deciding what to watch, and content warnings were an effective way for participants to filter out content on this basis.

“It can also prepare your mind, your mood. When you want to watch something, it depends on the mood you have. Do I actually want to watch violence at this time? - Glasgow workshop, primary school parent

Some children mentioned using content warnings to avoid watching ‘awkward’ scenes with their families. This was not so much to avoid potentially harmful themes themselves, but to avoid the conversations or potentially uncomfortable situations that may arise from watching them with their parents or close relatives.

“I read them when I’m in front of my parents, just so I’m not awkward watching it with them, so like, if it says, ‘sexual content’, I wouldn’t be watching that with my parents, so I just go upstairs and avoid it.” - London workshop, child (Year 12)

“If a sex scene comes up and you’re with your family, it’s so awkward.” – Lisburn workshop, child (Year 12)

Participants valued the idea of having content warnings early on in their viewing journey in order to make an informed decision

There was a general preference for seeing content warnings earlier in the viewing journey, with many expressing a preference for seeing warnings when they were browsing for content so as to not waste time considering content that may not be appropriate.

Some parents wanted warnings to appear before trailers to avoid potentially harmful themes being viewed in the preview. This showed a desire for warnings at multiple points in the content browsing process.

A small number of participants also said viewers should be able to opt in for more information, whether it is more detail on the warning or to access signposting information.

The focus on early warnings reflected participants’ desire for tools that would help them efficiently navigate the many options on VoD services without unnecessary exposure to unwanted content.

Content warnings being insufficient to give a sense of the volume and intensity of sensitive themes was a prevalent view across the sample

The possibility that content warnings may simply alert the viewer to the presence of certain themes, without communicating the frequency or intensity of those themes, was seen as a shortcoming.

Many participants pointed out that thematic words and phrases such as ‘violence’ or ‘sexual content’ could refer to a wide spectrum of content that varied in suitability for different audiences. For example, some parents reported feeling comfortable watching some types of violent scenes with younger people but said they would not want to watch more graphic or “realistic” violence with the same children. As such, participants felt that if two pieces of content were flagged as containing ‘scenes of a violent nature’, it would be hard to make an informed decision on this basis alone.

It was regularly pointed out that there was a scale of what could be counted as ‘violent’ or ‘sexual’. Participants felt that current content warnings did not always capture this, reflecting that two very different pieces of content could be marked as ‘violent’, but one could be more extreme.

“I hate gory things with, like, people being ripped apart, all that. It’s definitely a scale and I think sometimes they don’t give enough information... like ‘violence’ is so broad.” Lisburn workshop, adult (conservative)

Participants generally did recognise qualifiers, like ‘strong’ language and ‘mild’ violence, as indicators of intensity but still reported wanting to know the frequency of themes or more specific detail about the theme.

This point was frequently raised around profanity in content, where many parents expressed a desire to use their own judgement to decide the amount of swearing they were comfortable with children hearing in VoD content. For example, some of these viewers said they would be comfortable watching content with one instance of strong language, but not with content that contained strong language throughout. Many viewers felt content warnings would alert them to swearing but not properly communicate the degree of swearing to expect.

“With the swearing as well, if you watch something where they say like ‘shit’ once or something, then if you watch ‘Goodfellas,’ where it’s constant, all the way through, it kind of changes it a little bit” - Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

Some participants reported using content warnings in conjunction with age ratings or classification systems to help gauge the strength and frequency of the highlighted themes

While no participant reported wanting a warning to include a tally of any particular issue (i.e. ‘There are 5 instances of violence in this programme’), many reported considering guidance measures together to build a broader picture of what potentially harmful content to expect. Content rated for more mature audiences was expected to contain more instances and more severe examples of themes flagged by content warnings.

For example, if content was flagged to contain swearing, participants making decisions about suitability would decide on whether it would be suitable based on this information along with the content’s age rating: knowing a film was 12-rated rather than 18-rated helped participants get a sense of the volume and intensity of potentially harmful themes. Because of this, participants suggested guidance was most effective when content warnings and age ratings were considered in combination.

“With an 18 you know it’s bad. You know there will be lots of violence or swearing or sex. But [content warnings] you don’t know how many times it will come up... but if they say violence and then an 18, you can put 2 and 2 together and know, Okay, that’s going to be bad.” - Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

Non-specific and broad content warnings were perceived as vague and unnecessary

Non-specific content warnings provide basic, general information that content may be harmful or inappropriate for some audiences. These were introduced to the groups as warnings that flag content as unsuitable or not intended for all audiences.

Broad content warnings inform viewers in a generic way that the content includes themes that may be harmful or inappropriate for some audiences. (e.g., includes violence).

Across the groups, most participants criticised general and broad warnings for failing to give the viewer enough information about what to expect. Most participants felt at least some reference to the nature or type of potentially harmful themes present in the content was necessary.

“It’s not specific enough. You can’t really tailor it to something you specifically want to avoid.” – London workshop, adult (liberal)

While viewers were familiar with non-specific content warnings, phrases such as ‘viewer discretion is advised’ were often the source of some confusion



Viewer discretion is advised

Participants were aware of the phrase ‘viewer discretion is advised’ but claimed to be sometimes unaware of what kind of content it described. This uncertainty about what content viewers should be cautious about left participants determining the content’s appropriateness on their own, without much help from the VoD service.



Not suitable for all audiences

“It’s too general. What does it mean?... There’s going to be something somewhere, a bit of violence or a bit of nudity, but it doesn’t break it down.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral).



Intended for mature audiences

This non-specific warning was viewed as too vague to be helpful. Many felt it lacked the necessary detail to help them make informed decisions about whether content was appropriate for them and their family.

The need to understand exactly why content received this warning was a view frequently expressed across the sample. Several reflected that different individuals have different sensitivities and without knowing which specific elements triggered the warning, they couldn’t properly apply their own judgment.

Some participants also reflected that their familiarity with the phrase ‘viewer discretion is advised’ reduced its effectiveness. They said that because they had become accustomed to hearing it or seeing it on content, they no longer considered it to be an effective warning.

“It’s quite arbitrary and it goes in one ear, out the other. Like if you go to a film or you watch a DVD and it goes, ‘viewer discretion is advised’, that’s that kind of part of the film. You’re so used to it, you don’t take it as a warning; you just take it as a start of the film.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

Another example shown to the groups was ‘Not suitable for all audiences’, which prompted many participants to ask which audiences specifically this content was unsuitable for. Participants consistently wanted to be informed in more specific detail about the themes to expect, and felt the non-specific warnings were largely unhelpful for deciding whether content would be suitable on VoD services.

“To be honest when a programme states there may be ‘themes not suitable for some audiences’ it can be misleading. How do I determine if it’s ok for my child if it doesn’t say exactly what it is?” – London post-task, adult (liberal)

As a result, participants felt non-specific warnings would not effectively alert them to potentially harmful themes or sensitive content because in practice viewers would become used to, and eventually ignore, these broad messages. Some felt that such non-specific warnings could be placed on most content, which also meant they would be easily ignored.

“It becomes a bit OTT [over the top], doesn’t it? Like ignoring it because it’s on everything so it loses its weight, you know, like it’s on Peppa Pig, it loses its importance because it’s on everything.” – Stockport workshop, adult (liberal).

Some saw non-specific warnings as a ‘tick box exercise’ for VoD services that served little purpose

The vagueness of non-specific warnings prompted some participants to suggest that they were implemented simply as a way for VoD services to avoid responsibility for categorising inappropriate content or a way around not properly reviewing the content they offer.

“I think they are mainly there to cover the company showing the programme from legal action” - Wolverhampton workshop, adult (neutral).

A few participants, however, felt that even a non-specific content warning on a VoD service was sufficient to flag adult or sensitive themes, empowering them as viewers to make their final decision about watching the content.

“I quite like the general [non-specific] warnings because it just kind of gives you a wee bit of everything that you need to know... Sometimes when you look too much into it, it could just totally put you off watching it. So the good thing is that it’s not live TV, so you can fast forward parts of it if you don’t feel like it’s suitable.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral)

While broad content warnings offered some indication of the type of risk, many participants felt they lacked detail and clarity



Contains swearing

While seen as offering more guidance than non-specific warnings, many participants had questions about what the broad warnings meant, specifically. Participants frequently wanted to know what type of violence they would see, how frequent it would be, and how extreme.



Contains scenes of a violent nature

For many, the level of information shown on the stimuli was not enough to feel confident they were making the right decision when choosing content on VoD services.

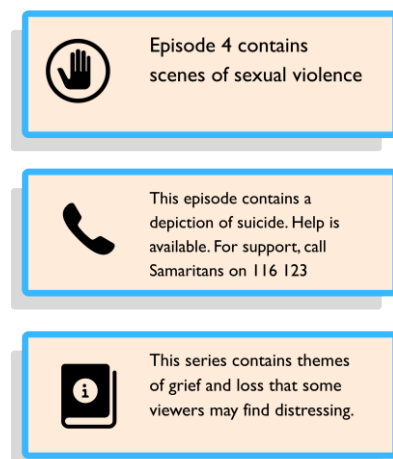


Contains mature themes

“Is that for one swear word in the entire feature you are watching or is it... excessive, you know. [...] Because otherwise you're having to warn against potentially every single thing.” – London workshop, adult (neutral)

Advanced warnings were seen as a potentially helpful tool, but should be optional

Some participants liked the idea of being able to skip specific episodes, scenes or plotlines



Advanced content warnings provide explicit and detailed information about potentially harmful themes, often specific to episodes, scenes, or plotlines, and may include details of additional support for viewers.

There was a general appreciation expressed for detailed content warnings that allowed participants to avoid specific themes or plotlines that might be distressing. Some wanted this feature for their own viewing comfort, while others empathised with viewers who might have sensitivities to particular themes. It also allowed participants to enjoy an entire series but filter out potentially harmful or triggering themes that impact them personally. Reflecting on advanced content warnings also helped participants step outside of their experience to think about how content may affect others.

"I think they're good as well. Because obviously I've not lived anything traumatic but I wouldn't want to watch it because I think that's, like, sad. I think it's sad watching people, like, getting abused and that, because I could

imagine myself getting abused." – Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10)

"Some on my table [perceived] these as "spoilers" however I firmly disagree. I think they're important to those who want to know about the content." – Stockport post task, adult (neutral)

When presented with examples of advanced warnings, most participants also reflected that warnings that signposted viewers to support services (e.g., to resources or to a helpline) were a valuable addition, offering viewers a means of further assistance if needed.

"When my daughter watched it [a programme with suicide themes] it would give her more of a kind of comfort and a guideline to say, you're going to be exposed to this, but there is help. So if anything triggers... that means to me that it's more morally responsible." – London workshop, adult (liberal)

There was a view held by some that advanced warnings, though seen as valuable, should be optional on VoD services

There were concerns raised about overly detailed advanced warnings, which could reveal too much detail about certain episodes and plotlines, and so act as spoilers, negatively impacting their viewing experience.

"It could be like a film where all the way through, there is no talk about suicide or anything, and then suddenly you're like 'right so one of these characters [...] well I really like this character so something's up, now one of these guys dies'" – Caerphilly workshop, adult (liberal)

Several participants proposed a multi-layered content warning approach, where advanced warnings were optional and viewers could opt-in for more advanced, scene-specific warnings if desired. This approach would also allow viewers to personally select and be warned about specific themes based on their individual sensitivities. This proposed system was seen as a way to balance the needs of those who want to proactively avoid certain content with those who prefer to watch without extensive prior knowledge.

"Some of the content warnings shown ('in episode 5, there are scenes of suicide') could be considered to be spoilers. You should have to opt in or out for this sort of content." – Glasgow post-task, adult (liberal)

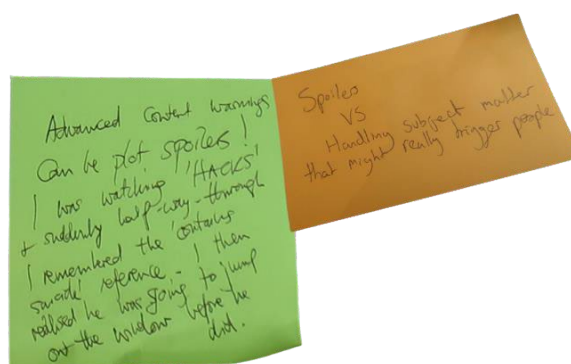


Figure 3: From left to right: "Advanced content warnings could be plot spoilers! I was watching 'Hacks' and suddenly halfway through I remembered the 'contains suicide' reference. I then realised he was going to jump out the window before he did" Lisburn workshop, adults (liberal); "spoilers vs. handling subject matter that might really trigger people" Lisburn workshop, adults (neutral)

Some suggested even more advanced options, such as features that could automatically edit out specific elements like strong language. These suggestions reflected the desire of some participants for greater control over their viewing experience, particularly when sharing content with younger audiences. However, there was a tension between wanting greater control over the viewing experience, and a reluctance to accept more friction in the process.

"'Safe mode' options that automatically filter out certain themes. So if you don't want to see anything related to suicide they could filter them out entirely." – Leeds post-task, adult (liberal)

"Ability to dub out swearwords as if it's pre-watershed. Much of the reality TV content contains inappropriate language for younger audiences. I do think we're fighting a losing battle but it's a responsible thing to discourage or not encourage the use of severe bad language often heard these days." - Leeds, workshop, adult (conservative)

9. Access and control measures

This section explores participants' general reflections on APMs that restrict or manage access to content, with more detailed findings on each type of APM in the following chapters.

Access and control measures

"Parental controls enable adults with parental responsibility to manage children's access to content on VoD platforms"

"Age assurance measures require viewers to indicate their age in order to access content. These measures can vary in how strict they are, from viewers declaring their age, to entering their date of birth, to providing proof of ID"

Across the groups, participants valued their autonomy in making viewing decisions

- Participants generally opposed the idea of VoD services dictating their viewing choices. There was a clear preference for parental controls, which were familiar and well-understood, over less familiar and more rigid age assurance measures.
- There was a broad preference from participants for having the final say on what young people could watch. They favoured measures that allowed for personal judgment, such as the ability to tailor restrictions or override them on a case-by-case basis.
- Stricter forms of age assurance, such as ID verification, were the most negatively received APMs. Participants found them too strict, intrusive, and felt they removed viewer agency. In contrast, parental controls were received positively. Participants appreciated that they could be customised to fit personal tastes and allowed them to make their own decisions on content suitability for their family.

10. Parental controls

“Parental controls enable adults with parental responsibility to manage children’s access to content on VoD platforms”

To stimulate in-depth discussion, participants were shown printed examples illustrating four different types of parental controls, identified by Ofcom as representative of what might be found on VoD services and developed by the research team. These types included:

- **PIN and password protection** – these enable account holders to restrict access to certain categories of content and/or profiles within a VoD service with the use of a PIN (personal information number) or password. Categories of content are usually based on age ratings or classifications.
- **One-click child profiles** – profiles designed specifically for children that include only age-appropriate content and are easy to set up – usually with ‘one-click’ of a button.
- **Age filters** – allows viewers to set a limit to what content is made available based on an age-rating; may be applied to profiles or across the account as a whole.
- **Time and spending limits** – limits how much time or money can be spent on a VoD service. Time limits can be applied to a profile or a whole account; spending limits usually apply to the account.

Building on the overarching attitudes towards Control Measures described in Chapter 9, this chapter summarises findings on parental controls more broadly and then highlights more detailed feedback on the different types of parental controls.

Summary of findings

Overarching findings

- Parental controls were a familiar and popular tool used by parents across the sample.
- Parents felt controls worked best when they allowed a degree of parental discretion in deciding what content their child consumed.
- PINs were widely used by parents in the sample.
- There were questions from some parents about the inconsistency in types of parental controls available across VoD services, as it led to questions about efficacy.
- Some parents felt parental controls on VoD services were somewhat redundant, given children were able to access content on most social media platforms.

Specific findings on types of Parental Controls

PIN and password protection
(e.g. inputting 4-digit passcode to access content)

Familiarity: Participants were familiar with this parental control method, and many had some kind of PIN protection in place, whether on devices or specific services.

Clarity: Almost all participants understood the purpose of PINs and found them a useful tool for controlling access to content.

Trust: Many thought they were the most effective method of parental control, being able to limit access to inappropriate content, though some concerns were raised about whether PINs and passwords could be circumvented.

Proportionality: PINs were seen to be a proportionate way to control access to content, giving parents the final say over what content children watched.

One-click child profiles

(e.g. separate profiles for children with only child-friendly content available)

Consistency: There were some who reported that setting up parental controls was different between platforms, with some requiring extra steps that confused the process.

Ease of use: Some worried about the security of PINs being breached or guessed by children and resented the maintenance necessary to update or change PINs regularly.

Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey:

- Selecting profiles
- Selecting content; and
- Pressing play

Familiarity: There was broad familiarity with child profiles on VoD services and many had them set up at home.

Clarity: Participants understood the purpose of child profiles, although felt that some services did not always offer clarity on what age these profiles were aimed at.

Trust: Many parents trusted the content offered on VoD child profiles, such as BBC iPlayer or Netflix, over content on social media and video-sharing platforms.

Proportionality: Most felt child profiles were a proportionate way to streamline content for younger children to prevent them watching inappropriate content. Some older children raised concerns that this was better suited to younger children and would disproportionately impact them (older children).

Consistency: There was mixed feedback about the process of setting up child profiles, which reportedly differed between platforms, with people feeling simpler setups were better.

Ease of use: Participants felt profiles had to be PIN protected to prevent children accessing adult profiles, adding an extra layer of setup. However, this was seen as only a minor inconvenience for some participants.

Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey:

- Selecting profiles

Age filters

(e.g. Setting a limit to what content is made available based on an age-rating; may be applied to profiles or across the account as a whole)

Familiarity: Generally, participants were less familiar with age filters, although some had set them up on services such as Disney+ and generally responded positively to them.

Clarity: Most understood age filters and liked the ability to adjust the availability of content based on the age or maturity of the child, and some had conversations with their children to give them access to more mature content.

Trust: Trust that VoD services would provide age-appropriate material was consistent across the sample.

Proportionality: It was generally felt that this was an appropriate measure for restricting access to inappropriate content.

Consistency: Some questioned why age filters weren't an option or weren't aware of age filters on some services and, as with other APMs, suggested that uniformity across platforms would be more effective.

	Ease of use: This was again seen as effective if secured by PIN and password protection to prevent children from accessing other unrestricted profiles on the account. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: • Selecting profile; and • Browsing content
Viewing time and spending limits (e.g. “You have reached your maximum viewing time for the day”)	Familiarity: There was broad familiarity with time limits on devices and other platforms, such as games and apps, but less so on VoD services. Clarity: Many participants deemed controlling screen time an important part of parenting but felt VoD services were less of a concern. However, they felt that having the option available may be a useful tool. Trust: Spending limits were received positively as an effective way to avoid unexpected bills from VoD services, and participants trusted these limits would not be easily circumvented. Proportionality: Given the risk participants thought was posed by excessive spending or screen time, most viewed this APM as proportionate. Consistency: There was less familiarity with this control on VoD services overall, and most could not speak to how consistently this APM was applied. Ease of use: Participants wanted to know what kind of time limits were set, e.g. by episode, length of time, or by bedtimes. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: • Pressing play (viewing time limits); and • Purchasing content (TVoD journey)

Detailed findings

Parental controls were a widely used tool across the sample to manage children’s access to content

There was broad support for the concept of parental controls and participants thought they were a robust way to protect children from inappropriate content

Parents expressed positive views on parental controls to manage what children watch on VoD services. Many reported having found setting up parental controls relatively straightforward and felt they were a reliable safeguard against children being exposed to unsuitable content, although a minority found implementation to be too technical or require too much effort.

“They’re quick and secure and actually protect children from content you don’t want them to see.” – Stockport workshop, adult (liberal)

The parents who had set up parental controls in their homes were confident about their ability to restrict children’s access to certain material. Some were already managing their children’s viewing habits based on their age and reflected positively on their addition to VoD platforms, and many felt this was the best way to manage this effectively.

“Parental controls are useful if you can set the age of the profile for the kids and block them from watching things that are age inappropriate.” – London post-task, adult (neutral)

Parental controls were generally seen as less essential on BVoD services compared to SVoD services, as participants linked the content available on BVoDs to existing broadcast standards. However, participants generally associated PIN-protected programmes with BVoD services. In contrast, it was generally considered more important to control and regulate access to SVoD services, which were typically associated with having child profiles as parental control tools. Outside of VoD services, parents were familiar with PIN and password protection across devices and frequently used this in their households.

‘Conservative’ participants preferred having the final say on what their children were watching

Parents across the groups generally acknowledged the value of parental controls for providing oversight. More 'conservative' parents showed a stronger preference for these measures. They found parental controls useful for overseeing their children's viewing and for determining what content was suitable. This direct control and responsibility over their child's viewing choices was viewed positively.

“I think this is helpful, as parents are able to have full control over what a child is able to watch.” London workshop, adult (conservative)

“They are our children. We should be in control of what we deem appropriate for them to watch and whether or not we feel that we are mature enough to understand, you know, some of the themes or whatever it is.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult, (conservative)

Some of the ‘liberal’ participants argued that parental controls prevented children from learning about boundaries

A few participants coded as ‘liberal’ raised concerns that parental controls removed the ability for children to choose what they watched. They saw free content selection as important for their development and thought that implementing controls hindered children from learning how to be responsible for themselves. These participants also highlighted the value in having conversations about content with children, believing it helped children set boundaries for themselves, rather than having them imposed.

“I like my child to make her own decisions; she's going to see it and hear it, and I think it's her choice, and for her to have that open conversation with me because certainly when she's at school I can't protect her.” – Leeds workshop, adult (liberal)

“I had something like this growing up, and my parents were so strict, but I didn't learn boundaries. Getting older, I didn't have self-restraint.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (liberal)

“In general, I dislike parental controls as I feel they don't give kids very much agency to make the right choices or to learn. However, I will allow that when it comes to young children of a certain age, they might not have developed these faculties yet.” – Glasgow post-task, adult (liberal)

Most children valued discussions with their parents over total restriction to services and content

Children who came across barriers due to parental controls said they often spoke to their parents to help decide whether they could watch something.

“When Baby Reindeer was going about, I really wanted to watch it because it was everywhere, all over my TikTok and that. But when I asked Mum and Dad they said no because they didn't like it..” Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10).

Some children mentioned that they did not have parental controls in place, but their parents trusted them to have open discussions about what content they watched. This suggests that the option of parental controls is useful to parents, but some management of children's viewing behaviour happens away from VoD services.

“If I'm not sure, I'll just ask them [parents] if it's okay or not okay.” – Stockport children workshop, child (Year 9)

Parents overall appreciated the customisable nature of parental controls and valued the ability to set their own viewing boundaries

There was a broad preference among parents for APMs that gave them agency over what content their child could access. This included using parental controls such as profiles, applying filters, or PIN-protecting access to content based on maturity levels. This ability to tailor the scope of restrictions appealed to parents who wanted robust safeguards but ones that still allowed them to exercise their own discretion in decision-making.

Some participants also reflected that they would welcome the ability to filter and restrict content based on specific themes or genres, allowing them to exclude content with particular themes from available content.

“I [wish that] parents are able to select whether they want content with particular themes to be excluded from available content.” – London post-task, adult (neutral)

The ability to customise the scope of restrictions appealed to parents who wanted robust restrictions to avoid their children watching potentially harmful content on VoD services, but that still allowed them to exercise their own discretion.

Use of PIN protection was reportedly prevalent and largely popular, but some raised concerns that they could be circumvented

PIN and password protection require viewers to enter a PIN or password to access categories of content or profiles within a VoD service.

Across the groups, PIN and password protection on types of content proved to be a popular choice of parental control for parents, as it restricted the access children had to certain content but could be overridden at their discretion.

“I feel like the PIN is the go-to for pretty much all of it. If they can’t get past the PIN, they ain’t getting in, and that’s it.” - Wolverhampton workshop, adult (liberal)

“The PIN comes up, you’re snookered. You have to have the PIN to put it in, otherwise you can’t watch it.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

PIN protection on both profiles and age-restricted content was seen as easy to set up, easy to implement, and offered robust restriction as long as children were not able to guess the password or combination. While this was a sticking point for some participants, who felt that once their PIN was guessed, it was “game over,” others noted the ability to change PINs and passwords if they were compromised.

“It’s easy to forget, and easy to remember... So a kid can get access to it; it’s easily frauded [sic].” – Leeds workshop, adult (conservative)

“Eventually you give in. It’s “1234” done. You might be busy doing something, and your kids are pestering and pestering you.” - Glasgow workshop, adult (conservative)

“It’s quite easy to change. I know that we’ve changed it a few times in the past.... But like I said, they only have to be looking through the crack of the door while you put it in one day.” – Leeds workshop, adult (neutral)

“I like these, especially PIN codes, but think we need stricter verification.” London post-task, adult (liberal)

PINs were also mentioned alongside profiles, to stop a child switching between accounts to circumvent profile restrictions. There was evidence of mixed awareness across groups of this function, as there were instances during the workshops where parents who used profiles told other parents how to apply PIN-protection to them.

While some parents recalled using one-click child profiles in their households, they also reflected that this APM did not account for individual maturity levels

One-click child profiles are designed to be a quick and easy way to create a profile for children that includes only age-appropriate content.

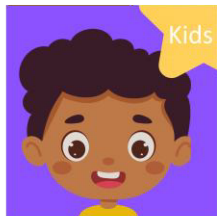


While parents felt having a separate child profile made children feel they had choice and responsibility, as well as protecting them from inappropriate content, it was generally seen as a ‘blanket ban’ that did not account for maturity levels. Participants were familiar with child profiles on services like Netflix, Disney+, and BBC iPlayer but felt they were too targeted towards children in primary school.

“You don’t get that option to set it to their age so they can miss out on stuff... My five-year-old says, ‘It’s just for babies’ and I’m like, ‘It’s not.’ And he’s like ‘Well it is, my baby sister watches it.’” – Stockport workshop, adult (liberal)

“My eldest, she likes to watch Malcolm in the Middle on Disney. It's a 12, she's 11. I've watched it and said, yes, she can watch it, but she knows if she goes on her profile, she can't find it. So she just says, I'll go on your profile. Just click straight on mine.” – Leeds workshop, adult (conservative)

Child Profile Creation / One-click child profiles



Parents of secondary school children especially found child profiles too restrictive and believed that they might encourage older children to try and circumvent, or “sneak” on to different profiles to watch more adult content. The perception of restrictiveness suggests that parents were not always clear about the intended age range for which these profiles were designed when setting them up.

“That [older children] demographic isn't being catered for. We've got the profiles for the wee kids, and we've got the PINs for the adults. What are we doing for the eight- to fourteen-year-olds? Because that's really the darkest bit.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (conservative)

Child profiles were therefore commonly seen as useful for managing the viewing habits of much younger children, but less so for older children.

So, this broadly aligns with the purpose of child profiles, namely, to streamline and show age-appropriate content for young viewers.

“The older a child gets, the more variation there is in their maturity levels, and the tool just becomes too blunt to be useful. And of course they always catch you out and spy you doing the PIN or something and get round it when you're not paying 100% attention. The older ones are so crafty!” – London workshop, adult (neutral)

“Useful when you have small children but not required once your children become mature enough to have trust that they choose wisely.” Glasgow post-task, adult (neutral)

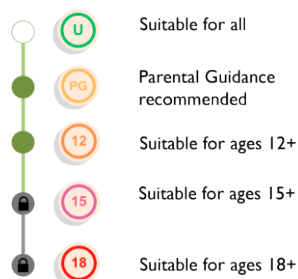
“Only works when (you have) younger children, but not older.” Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

Parents reported that child profiles were most effective for primary school children if profiles used by adults in the house were PIN or password protected to prevent children having access to content parents were watching. Some also mentioned separate profiles as a good way to check up on what children were watching, although this was less of a concern when using a one-click child profile.

“Setting up a PIN password for your account and not the children's account, so they have to know the PIN to get into your account. They can go into their own but they can't go into yours.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (liberal)

Although many participants were not aware of existing age filters on VoD services, they reacted positively, especially because it reportedly took maturity into account

Age Filters



Age filters let viewers set what age-rated content can be viewed and can be applied to profiles. While many participants were not aware of age filters, they reacted positively to the idea of them. Many participants perceived age filters to be flexible, allowing profile restrictions to be updated on registered profiles.

Adults felt that the idea of an age filter could provide nuance and a degree of freedom to children that one-click child profiles and PIN protection did not have.

“When my daughter turned nine, she wanted to watch Millie in the Middle or whatever it was called. And it wasn't available on her profile... so I changed the age range and then it became available to her.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

This mitigated concerns about restrictive 'one-click' child profiles, and many parents valued the option to apply a more bespoke, age-appropriate viewing experience, with the agency to choose what type of content they thought was appropriate for their child.

Children that had age filters set up were also positive about the range of choice it afforded them, whilst protecting them from more adult content.

"They can go in any account and they lock the films that the children won't watch, and then the only options are the appropriate ones. I think that's the best one."

London workshop, child (Year 12)

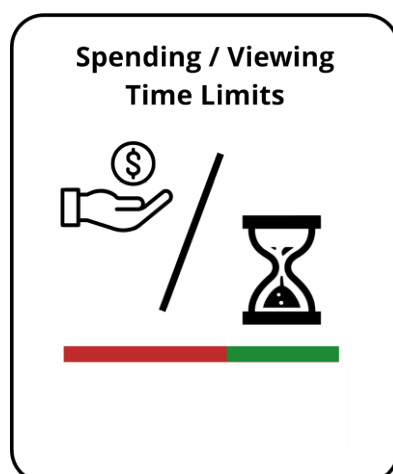
However, mirroring concerns about age ratings or classification systems, some participants felt that age filters, based on age ratings, do not always accurately reflect a child's maturity. They claimed that despite the fact age filters can offer greater nuance than a one-click child profile, for example, they still have limitations in terms of accurately capturing individual maturity levels.

Time and spending limits were seen as helpful tools to restrict children from spending too much time or money online

Time and spending limits control how much time or money can be spent on a VoD service. Time limits can be applied to a profile or a whole account. Spending limits usually apply to the account. Spending limits are more applicable to TVoD services, where viewers pay to access and watch a piece of content (e.g., renting a film).

Some parents in the workshops reported having had children make unauthorised payments with their card and supported controls on spending on VoD services. Most participants were not regularly using TVoD services but still felt a spending cap was useful to avoid unexpected payments.

"I don't want any spending without me being notified." – Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral)



Screen time limits were popular, with some parents reporting having set limits on their children's devices to limit the amount of time they could spend on their phones or tablets. However, the ability to apply time limits on VoD services is not commonly available.²¹

"She's got a time limit on that because you can see her attitude changes when she spends too much time...the whole point of telling her that she's getting a timer and she's got 15 minutes left is to pre-warn her that that's going to come away at some point" - Leeds workshop, adult (liberal)

"[Parental controls] help manage screen time with viewing limits and offer peace of mind for parents and guardians." - Glasgow post-task, adult (neutral)

One group explored how being able to set time limits would work if the limits were in line with an individual viewer's parenting techniques. They felt just restricting 'time' was a little too broad and suggested parents may want to manage their children's screen time based on time spent, episode limits, or nighttime restrictions. They felt having those options would improve parents' ability to effectively manage children's screentime. However, overall, most participants felt that time limits were useful for limiting screen time to protect children from addictive patterns of behaviour, particularly at night.

There was an overarching tension between the preference for stricter controls and an easy, frictionless set-up and viewing experience

While many parents wanted robust control measures that prevented themselves and young people from encountering inappropriate content, many also reported wanting a 'hands-off' setup and maintenance process

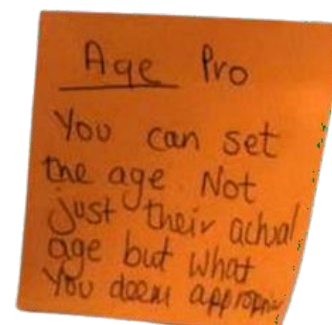


Figure 4: "Age pro - you can set the age not just their actual age but what you deem appropriate" Lisburn workshop, adults (conservative)

²¹ While some services (e.g., Paramount+) offer this feature, it is generally not used on major SVoD and BVoD services. Parents may rely on third-party device/system-level controls (e.g., Apple).

for these controls. Frequently, parents would reference the friction involved in setting up parental controls as a negative but still wanted to remain in control of their child's viewing behaviours.

"I think [separate profile creation] it's good but it might be a bit time-consuming. Parents have busy lives, don't they?" - Caerphilly workshop, adult (liberal)

The time it takes to set up, as well as "giving in" to pestering from children, were commonly cited as reasons that deterred parents from enforcing parental controls on VoD services. This lack of willingness was often at odds with parents' self-professed desire for control. This was a tension that existed across the workshops. This highlights a divide between what parents reported wanting in theory and what they were willing to implement in practice.

[Participant A] "[On setting up parental controls] It's so complicated, but actually the simpler but effective one is definitely better. A couple of steps."

[Participant B] "Yes and no full stop. 'You want parental controls?' Enable, disable, yes or no. That's it. Some of them you need to go through A to B to C. Then it goes through to another screen, it goes through to a dropdown menu which has three more sub[groups]... it's just too confusing sometimes." - Lisburn workshop, adult (conservative)

There were some doubts about the effectiveness of parental controls

Parents worried that the different types of parental controls on different services might mean some were less effective than others

The range of different parental controls available on different VoD services raised questions about efficacy. Although this view was not consistent with participants' early reflections on the differing content between SVoD and BVoD services. Participants saw discrepancies between the controls that different services offered as incoherent and wanted consistency across services to allay these concerns.

"About the different types of parental control, realising different platforms have different layers of control, how having something across all would be great." - London post-task, adult (liberal)

"They need to be more uniform." Wolverhampton post-task, adult (neutral)

There were also concerns raised across the workshops about whether certain parental controls would be consistent and effective across devices. Some parents reported that the settings for parental controls did not always transfer between devices, as many households reported watching VoD services on TVs, phones, tablets, and consoles. There were therefore concerns about parental controls being easily circumvented by simply accessing the service on a different device, prompting calls for consistency of parental control settings across all devices.

A few participants felt that the different setup processes across services led to confusion about what measures were available. In the example below, the participant ultimately did not set up child profiles on Prime Video.

"I find these useful when setting up, e.g. on Netflix, everyone has their own account and the kids' ones are for kids. However, I am unsure of how to set them up on some of the providers such as Prime. It would be good to be able to have appropriate profiles on each provider that are easy to set up." - London post-task, adult (neutral)

Some parents reported that controlling children's access to or within VoD services was immaterial because children could access the same content via social media

They felt that there was a limit to what parental controls on VoD services could prevent children from seeing, believing that if they really wanted to access restricted content, there were plenty of avenues away from VoD services to do this. This meant some participants were indifferent towards parental controls on VoD services, instead being more wary of the unrestricted access to content their children may have elsewhere.

"I feel as if whatever the age restrictions are on there, there's always clips of it on TikTok and things that young people have seen already...because they've probably seen most of the bad clips out of things because people just keep these posted and they can see everything on their apps." - Glasgow workshop, adult (neutral)

"Anything you've blocked on the TV, they're watching on the phones anyways." - London workshop, adult (neutral)

Compared to social media, parents expressed fewer concerns about VoD services, as APMs offered them greater oversight over what their children were watching. While the children spoke about watching VoD content on their personal devices, they also streamed content on shared devices with their parents. On the

other hand, parents had very limited oversight over what their children encountered on social media. As a result, VoD services were often seen as an afterthought for controls, with parents' attention more directed toward social media services instead.

"I think a 15-year-old will be switched on, knowing that we can see what they're watching, whereas on their phone they can watch whatever they want, so why would they go to a VoD platform to watch an 18+?" – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (liberal)

"I'm more concerned about social media than streaming services. You'd be scared at how many 11-year-olds are on TikTok watching stuff that they really shouldn't be watching. So I'd be more worried about that than video on demand, to be honest." – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

II. Age assurance

“Age assurance measures require viewers to indicate their age in order to access content. These measures can vary in how strict they are, from viewers declaring their age to entering their date of birth to providing proof of ID.”

While age assurance is not commonly used by VoD services, participants discussed different types of age assurance methods to help researchers explore whether they would find this measure helpful if applied to VoD services. This section covers findings related to existing VoD age assurance methods (e.g., self-declaration) as well as methods used elsewhere but not currently on VoD services. These methods include:

- **Self-declaration** – requires viewers to confirm they are a certain age or provide their date of birth to access content.
- **ID verification** – requires viewers to provide a form of identification, such as a license or passport, to verify age.
- **Bank card verification** – requires viewers to provide credit card or bank details to verify age.
- **Age estimation** – uses technology (e.g. facial scans) to estimate a viewer's age.
- **Parent/guardian verification** – requires a parent or guardian to verify their age and/or identity.

Building on the overarching attitudes towards age assurance described in Chapter 9, this chapter highlights participants' general experiences with age assurance before exploring their attitudes towards the specific types of age assurance listed above.

Summary of findings

Overarching findings

- Practical concerns about age assurance being either too easy to circumvent or too intrusive were consistently raised.
- Most felt that more intrusive age assurance methods were not directly proportionate to the risk posed by content available on VoD services.
- Most also raised concerns about data protection and privacy.
- Parents, overall, preferred parent/guardian verification out of the different age assurance methods. They felt this provided them with the discretion to decide what was appropriate for their child rather than a VoD service imposing a particular standard.

Specific findings on types of Age Assurance

Self-declaration

Familiarity: There was general familiarity with the concept of self-declaration on BVoD services, and it was not well-received.

Clarity: Participants understood self-declaration as a concept.

Trust: Circumvention was a concern, and therefore many saw it as an ineffective deterrent for children wanting to watch inappropriate content. Even when considered by some as a way for children to pause for reflection, many felt it was ineffective.

Proportionality: Most participants felt that self-declaration was no barrier for children to access inappropriate content on VoD services.

Consistency: There was not much concern about how consistently self-declaration was applied across services given participants thought it was ineffective overall.

Ease of use: Similarly, most felt self-declaration was too easy to circumvent, rendering it ineffective.

ID verification	Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: - Pressing play Familiarity: While there was general awareness of ID verification methods, participants were not familiar with them on VoD services (they are not currently used by any mainstream VoD service). Clarity: Participants understood how ID verification would work in principle on VoD services. Trust: There was a large degree of suspicion about VoD services having access to this data, with almost every group voicing data security concerns. Others expressed concerns that children could use adults' ID to verify their age. Proportionality: ID verification was seen as overwhelmingly disproportionate to the risk posed by VoD content. Consistency: As participants were not familiar with ID verification on VoD services, they did not reflect on consistency. Ease of use: It was seen as a significant obstacle to watching VoD content that would put people off. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: - Registering the account
Credit/bank card verification	Familiarity: There was a general awareness of some credit and bank card verification methods, but participants were not familiar with them on VoD services, as they are currently not used by any mainstream VoD service. Clarity: It was broadly understood that card verification could hypothetically be used for age verification. Trust: There were some data-related concerns about card verification, especially if used on free BVoD services where you did not register with a subscription. Proportionality: ID verification was seen as a disproportionate measure to the risk posed by VoD content. Consistency: Participants did not expect to see bank card verification on VoD services. Ease of use: Card verification was seen as a potential obstacle to many and seen as too much friction in their viewing experience. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: Registering and creating an account
Parent/guardian verification	Familiarity: Some participants were familiar with parental verification from other digital platforms, such as Roblox or PlayStation, but not on VoD services, as they are currently not used by any mainstream VoD service. Clarity: Parents understood their identity would be verified to have the final say over what their children were watching, rather than the VoD service restricting their access altogether.

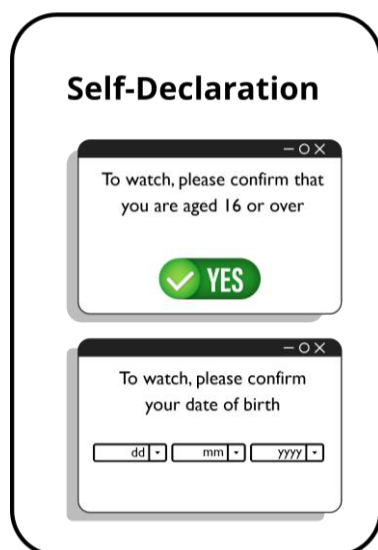
	Trust: While similar data-related concerns over ID and card verification were voiced, participants trusted they could make decisions on a case-by-case basis about content. Proportionality: Parent and guardian verification was seen as a more proportionate measure to the risk of harm, giving parents the choice over what content their child can watch. Consistency: Participants had not seen this on VoD services and so did not speak to the consistency of it across services. Ease of use: Some participants were concerned about the frequency of notifications required to verify, or the invasiveness of the process of setting up. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: Pressing play
Age estimation	Familiarity: Most were unfamiliar with age estimation as something that already existed (with a few exceptions), seeing it as a relatively new technology. Again, it is important to note that these measures are not currently used by any mainstream VoD service. Clarity: There was a general lack of understanding about how this technology could be applied. Participants were also sceptical of how accurately it could identify one's age. Children were more familiar with age estimation from apps like TikTok, and had mixed feedback about it, having reportedly both correctly and incorrectly had accounts suspended or restricted for being underage. Trust: There was broad concern as to whether it would accurately verify someone's age, especially a child, with many pointing out that children often look younger or older than they are. Proportionality: Many felt age verification was less invasive and therefore more proportionate than ID or credit card verification to associated risks but were not convinced it was necessary to prevent children watching certain VoD content. Consistency: Participants did not reflect on the consistency of age estimation across VoD services. Ease of use: There were frequent concerns raised as to how this would work on devices without a camera. Where participants expected to see this in the viewing journey: Registering and creating an account

Detailed findings

Across the workshops, participants were most critical about age assurance methods due to concerns about their practicality

Age assurance methods perceived as less strict, such as self-declaration, were criticised for being too easy to circumvent

Self-declaration methods require viewers to confirm they are a certain age or provide their date of birth to access content.



Participants recalled encountering self-declaration age assurance methods on BVoD services. While a small number reflected that the appearance of a self-declaration prompt might cause some children to reconsider their viewing choices, the overall effectiveness of this method was questioned.

“It’s one barrier. Like I mean I guess if a child was going to watch something that’s an 18 or something like that and then was second guessing being like oh what am I going to do? But it’s not much of a barrier, you know.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

Even those who suggested it could act as a deterrent reported that it was not a reliable way to block a child’s access to inappropriate or potentially harmful content. The overwhelming sentiment among most participants was that self-declaration made it too easy to misrepresent one’s age.

“Great idea in theory. However, anything that relies on youngsters’ input is inherently unreliable” – Wolverhampton post-task, adult (neutral)

“When you’re clicking on like ‘are you over 18?’, anybody can click ‘I’m over 18.’ And they may not be.” Leeds workshop, adult (conservative)

Many highlighted the lack of consequences about falsifying one’s age on self-declaration systems. There is reportedly nothing to disincentivise children from providing a false age. If they gave a false age, they could access and watch the content without any repercussions, whereas providing their real age might restrict them.

“Some people will be responsible and answer honestly, but can change their answer if they really want to see the programme” – Caerphilly post-task, adult (liberal)

“You could just like pick any age and they just have to believe you.” – Leeds workshop, child (Year 8)

Some parents also indicated that lying about one’s age was perceived as commonplace for children, citing examples of children misrepresenting their age to access social media platforms. Participants referred to their own personal experiences of how easy self-declaration was to circumvent on different online services. This led most to view this measure as an ineffective method to prevent children from accessing inappropriate content on VoD services.

“I have no trust in that these features will work, as children currently lie when accessing other forms i.e. social media” – London post-task, adult (neutral)

More robust methods, such as ID and bank verification, were often considered too intrusive

Participants were also presented with alternative examples of age assurance methods, including ID and bank card verification, parent/guardian verification, and age estimation. The initial reaction to these alternative methods was predominantly negative. While most acknowledged these methods might be more robust and effective than self-declaration, many were worried that these methods went too far.

There was a broad consensus that these methods felt too intrusive and involved the collection of excessive personal data. There was widespread apprehension of these age assurance methods both in the sessions and in the post-task responses.

“It feels a bit like Big Brother is watching you. Where does that information go?” – London post-task, adult (neutral)

“Could be seen as quite onerous/intrusive. For example, people may not always carry ID, and providing copies of it runs the risk of security issues if that falls into the wrong hands.” Stockport post-task, adult (neutral)

“Sites use this as an excuse to collect data on its users such as personal things like addresses, names, faces, details, habits” Wolverhampton post-task, adult (neutral)

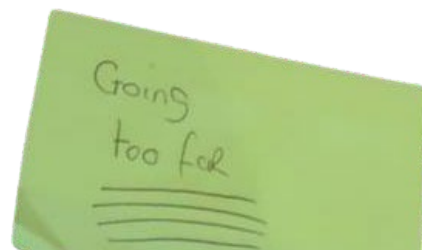


Figure 5: “Going too far” Stockport workshop, adults (liberal)

Concerns were raised about the practical application of age assurance methods

Some participants were concerned that age verification methods, such as age estimation, ID and card verification would require all viewers in an account to verify their age, even if they did not wish to have their access to content restricted. This was seen as an unnecessary imposition on those who were not seeking to view age-restricted content.

“[For] every single thing that’s rated an 18, do you have to show your ID for it? It’s not really realistic, is it? I just wouldn’t watch telly if I had to do that every time!” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

There were also concerns that these methods could potentially add too much friction to the streaming journey, with some participants reflecting that having these measures in place would be off-putting and discourage people from using VoD services that had these age assurance methods.

“I also feel providing ID is not practical; if this was every time you used the service, it would make me not want to use the platform.” – Wolverhampton post-task, adults (conservative)

The prospect of repeated or continuous age verification prompts frustrated some participants, who felt it would add unnecessary friction to their viewing experience. However, if age assurance was completed as a one-time prompt, participants were generally more receptive to the idea.

[Participant A] “It would be a bit of a pain, but if it’s just a one-time thing to get what you want to watch...”

[Participant B] “You’d have to do it wouldn’t you? If you know it’s legitimate, then you’ve got to do it.” – Leeds workshop, adult (neutral).

“I think I’d like to do that as a one-time thing and then not have to do it again, like setting up a Netflix account. I don’t mind doing it for me and my child, but I wouldn’t want to do it again.” – Lisburn workshop, adult (liberal)

Some participants were concerned about how age assurance methods would differ across devices

A key concern was the lack of uniformity in age assurance implementation. Participants questioned whether age assurance measures could be bypassed by switching from one device to another. As most participants accessed VoD services across different devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and TVs, they were concerned that age assurance methods would only apply at device level, not account level.

I think as well, it’s the amount of devices [you have], because it’s not just a TV that you watch.” – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

Participants highlighted additional practical questions that some assurance methods posed in relation to specific devices. For example, whether certain age verification processes, such as those requiring ID, might need the use of a secondary device to complete the process.

“If you’re watching something on, say, like an on-demand thing on your Smart TV, [I think] you need to have a smartphone with a working camera [to do this].” – Lisburn workshop, adult (conservative)

“You’ll have to put your face to it for biometrics to say, ‘Yes, it is me watching this bloody programme. Hurry up and get started!’” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (conservative)

The possibility of requiring a second device was seen as unnecessary friction to the viewer experience, potentially meaning over 18s would be prevented from accessing content they felt they did not need this level of protection from.

“It’s also the pain in the backside of having to [do ID verification] ...I just want to watch Marley & Me!” – Lisburn workshop, adults (liberal)

Age assurance methods presented to participants were not perceived to be proportionate to the risk of harm posed by exposure to content on VoD services

For many, VoD services were not seen as a primary place where harm happens

Some ‘neutral’ and ‘liberal’ participants thought age assurance measures were “too much” for platforms such as Netflix, as nothing “that bad” was on there to begin with.

In comparison to other online environments, such as social media, most parents expressed less concern about their children accessing potentially risky content on VoD services. VoD services were often perceived as safer and containing less harmful content.

In particular, parents voiced greater concerns about recommender system-based services such as YouTube or TikTok, where their children could encounter a wider range of potentially harmful material.

Some reported that content on VoD services was more intentionally produced than content on social media, leading to the belief that it was potentially less risky.

“I feel like the things they can access on social media and YouTube are far worse than what they might see on TV or at the cinema.” – London workshop, adult (neutral)

This perception influenced participants' attitudes towards more strict forms of age assurance methods on VoD services. Many expressed reluctance to undergo the more stringent verification processes required by some age assurance methods “just to watch TV,” while they were more comfortable with such restrictions on platforms like TikTok or on adult websites.

“Some are a bit overkill for watching telly, like bank card and ID.” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

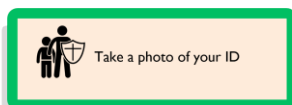
“I get it if it's with porn, but this is just normal TV” – Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

“Some of these features can be a bit frustrating, like if you had to get your bank card or ID out to access a programme or film.” – London post task, adult (neutral)

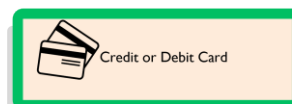
Of all age assurance methods, parent/guardian verification was the best received

Parents responded more favourably to having the final say over their children's viewing habits

Parent/guardian verification



Take a photo of your ID



Credit or Debit Card

In comparison to other age assurance methods, which were perceived as giving more control to VoD services, parent/guardian verification placed the power in the parents' hands and so was better received.

[Researcher: Do you think it's effective?] “Oh definitely. Cause there's certain things I'm like – decline, they're not watching that. Whereas if I wasn't in the room being able to do that it wouldn't be declined.” – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

Some parents were familiar with parent/guardian verification methods on other services and platforms, such as Roblox or PlayStation. They were appreciative of having the final say, but some mentioned the potential of becoming overwhelmed with notifications from different services.

“I think because you're constantly being notified, I just don't even take any notice to what is it, cos I'm so used to them.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

“My boy's PlayStation's mad and I get hundreds of emails and he's like, ‘oh, dad, can you approve that?’ And I've got to go into my emails, click on PlayStation Plus, accept it.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (neutral)

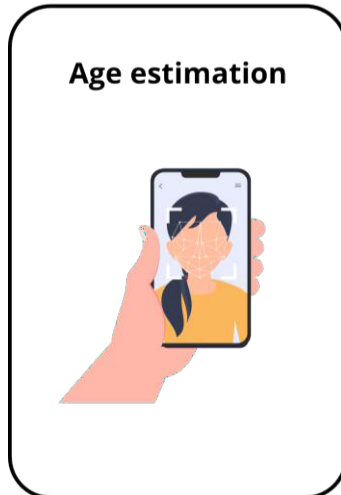
While APMs providing oversight were generally well received, some participants highlighted the challenge of balancing sufficient control with the burden of dealing with excessive information or interactions.

Parents overall like the fact that this method meant they could make discretionary decisions, finding other methods too rigid. Despite potentially having similar data requirements to ID/Bank card verification, the framing of parent/guardian verification as a matter of parental choice made it more popular.

Most parents seemed to be in favour of methods that they could choose to use, rather than methods they perceived were applied to them without choice.

While adults were less familiar with and doubted the efficacy of age estimation, some of the children were more open to this measure

Age estimation was new technology to many adult groups



Many adult participants had not encountered age estimation technology before the workshops and expressed doubts about its efficacy. A key concern was that children can look older or younger than their actual age.

“Some kids actually can look 18 and they’re only maybe 14.” – Glasgow workshop, adult (conservative)

“Well, if I did it now and then shaved my beard off, I reckon my age would be very different.” – Caerphilly workshop, adult (liberal)

“My daughter looks about 25, and she’s 15. She’s 16 next week. [...] That wouldn’t work in our house.” – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

There were also regular questions raised as to how age estimation technology would accurately account for these variations in age.

Even those participants who had encountered similar technology, such as on banking apps, while acknowledging its utility for verifying identity, remained sceptical about its ability to accurately discern an adult from an older child.

Children were more familiar with age estimation technology

In contrast to adults, some children reported having experience and familiarity with age estimation technologies on platforms such as TikTok or on devices such as the PlayStation, though to varying degrees of success.

One child recounted an experience of being temporarily banned from a feature on TikTok due to the technology incorrectly assessing their age.

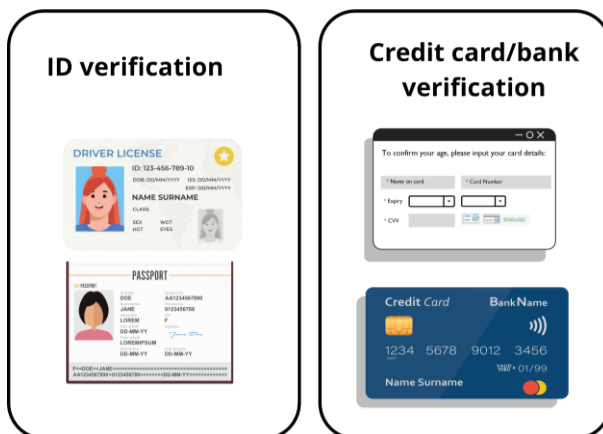
“To be fair on TikTok, like you sometimes get banned if you look younger than you are.” – Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10)

Overall, children expressed less apprehension about age estimation compared to adults and showed a greater willingness to engage with it, stating that it was generally accurate. This also shaped how some children perceived content restricted by age estimation, as they suggested that more robust age assurance indicated more extreme content that they are being protected from.

“I don’t know, something that’s meant for someone a couple years older than me and it says that I look like way too young, I’d be like - right, fair enough... like I must not be allowed to watch that”. Glasgow workshop, child (Year 10)

Verifying with ID or bank cards raised data protection concerns

Participants expressed concern about sharing personal information with VoD services



Sharing a form of identification was widely seen as an excessive requirement. Many participants expressed a lack of trust in VoD services' ability to securely store this sensitive information.²² It is important to reiterate that mainstream VoD services are not currently using this form of age verification.

"Parents don't want a random company to have their ID when they already have their card details. If that company gets hacked, the hacker will have everything they need to steal their identity." Glasgow post-task, adult (liberal)

"It concerns me that how do we know as a consumer that our information is stored appropriately, correctly, and who has access to that information? That's a concern." - Stockport workshop, adult (neutral)

Broader concerns were also raised about the potential for VoD services to misuse personal data. Some participants expressed the view that services might use age assurance as a pretext to collect extensive data on viewers, including: *"personal things like addresses, names, faces, details, habits"* [Wolverhampton post-task, adult, (liberal)], which they considered intrusive.

Many participants viewed bank card and ID verification methods as "too much" and raised significant data privacy concerns.

"[It's] extremely invasive and a GDPR nightmare. A bit too much like Big Brother" – Wolverhampton post-task, adult (liberal)

"Can you imagine how many accounts your bank details would be on if I was doing that? Because I've got Prime, Netflix, all of them. Your bank details will be on about 10 different things." – Wolverhampton workshop, adult (conservative)

It is important to note the potential influence of group dynamics on these discussions, with concerns sometimes being introduced by one participant and then echoed by others in the group.

There were a few participants who acknowledged that card verification could be a useful way for SVoD services to verify a viewer's age using existing data. However, most participants disagreed with the concept of this method.

"I can't imagine another way, but I think it should only ever ask for a payment card. Asking for photo ID or a face scan is taking it too far and I would be suspicious of how that information would get used or potentially sold." Wolverhampton post task, adult (neutral)

"I think if it becomes a hassle to access a programme, it would then just deter me from using the streaming platform altogether. I do think it's a good idea to be able to verify the age of somebody. However, I'm not sure the options that were presented in the workshops, such as a passport or a bank card, would work for me personally" – Leeds post-task, adult (conservative)

Others felt particularly uncomfortable providing free services, such as BVoD platforms, with bank card information. For these participants, bank card verification did not seem compatible with services that are free to use.

"If it's a service you're not paying for, why do you need my financial information?" – Lisburn workshop, adult (neutral)

²² Please note: participants were not told whether or how data would hypothetically be stored.

There was also doubt cast throughout the groups about the efficacy of ID and bank card verification

While bank card and ID verification were generally seen as the more stringent and robust age assurance methods, some still expressed concerns about their effectiveness.

Some parents believed that children determined to watch a particular piece of content would likely find a way to bypass these measures. They were concerned that these methods could easily be circumvented by using a parent or sibling's ID or card.

"I'm not sure they're not totally fool-proof cause my daughter is 10 and needed ID to download a game, so she got my partner's passport and downloaded it. Kids are tech savvy nowadays" – Leeds post-task, adult (neutral)

Concerns were also expressed about the potential for these methods to feel overly intrusive while still being susceptible to being bypassed. This combination of invasiveness and perceived ineffectiveness contributed to how poorly age assurance methods were received, with participants preferring the control and personalised feel of other access measures.

"Feels controlling in some ways, and also feels that children can get around." – Leeds post-task, adult (liberal)

"I do not believe these measures are robust enough and can easily be bypassed by using either fake IDs or borrowing someone else's ID." – Wolverhampton post-task, adult (neutral)

"A room could contain a mix of people who are old enough to watch content and those who are not. If it only takes one form of ID to access the content then onward viewing is uncontrolled." – Stockport post-task, adult (neutral)

12. Glossary

Advanced content warnings – provide detailed, often episode or storyline specific information about themes or scenes that may be upsetting. May also provide details of where affected viewers can find additional support. (e.g., “This episode was made in 2006 and contains strong derogatory language and scenes of strong domestic violence and sexual threat that some viewers may find distressing. For support, call [details of support services]”).

Advertising Video on Demand (AVoD) – VoD services that typically provide free (or in certain cases low-cost) access to content in exchange for showing adverts, such as Tubi, Pluto TV and Rakuten.

Age assurance – measures that require viewers to indicate their age to access content. These measures can vary in how strict they are, from viewers declaring their age, to entering their date of birth, to providing proof of ID.

Age estimation – age assurance method that uses technology (e.g. facial scans) to estimate a viewer's age.

Age filters – allows viewers to set a limit to what content is made available based on an age-rating; may be applied to profiles or across the account as a whole.

Age ratings or classification systems – labelling frameworks used to categorise media content based on its suitability for different maturity and sensitivity levels.

Algorithmic feeds – content recommendation systems that suggest videos or programmes based on audience behaviours and preferences (e.g. “We think you’ll like...”).

Audience Protection Measures (APM) – systems and tools provided by VoD services to assist in protecting viewers, particularly children, from viewing potentially harmful or age-inappropriate content.

Bank card verification – age assurance method that requires viewers to provide credit card or bank details to verify age.

British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) – statutory film and video regulator that provides age ratings and content guidance for films and videos in the UK. and also works in partnership with many VoD platforms who apply BBFC ratings to their content.

Broad category warnings - content warnings that inform viewers of a general type of potentially unsuitable material (e.g., scenes of violence), and also

Broadcast Video on Demand (BVoD) – VoD services operated by broadcasters, such as Sky, BBC iPlayer and ITVX.

Content warnings – warnings that alert viewers to potentially sensitive content, such as violence, strong language, or disturbing scenes, before or during viewing.

Hybrid labelling – Age ratings that use a combination of minimum age indicators (numbers) and abbreviations (letters) to label the suitability of content (e.g. U, PG, 12, 15, 18).

ID verification – age assurance method that requires viewers to provide a form of identification, such as a license or passport, to verify age.

Letter-based labelling – Classification systems that use abbreviations (e.g. G for Guidance) or symbols (e.g. !) to indicate content may be unsuitable for some audiences (e.g. G, G+, !)

Minimum age-based labelling – Age ratings that provide specific suitable minimum age-based recommendations (e.g., 0+, 6+, 9+, 12+, 14+, 16+, 18+).

Non-specific content warnings – Provide basic, non-specific information that the content may be harmful or inappropriate for some audiences (e.g., viewer discretion is advised).

On-Demand Programme Service (ODPS) – regulatory term for certain services providing video-on-demand.

One-click child profiles – profiles designed specifically for children that include only age-appropriate content and are easy to set up – usually with ‘one-click’ of a button.

Order effects – changes in participants' responses that result from the sequence in which tasks, questions, or conditions are presented to them.

Parent/guardian verification - age assurance method that requires a parent or guardian to verify their age and/or identity.

Parental Controls – measures which enable adults with parental responsibility to manage children's access to content on VoD platforms.

PIN and password protection – parental control tool that enables account holders to restrict access to certain categories of content and/or profiles within a VoD service with the use of a PIN (personal information number) or password. Categories of content are usually based on age ratings or classifications.

Self-declaration – age assurance method that requires viewers to confirm they are a certain age or provide their date of birth to access content.

Social media platforms – platforms that enable users to create profiles, share content like text, images, and videos, and connect with other users to build virtual communities and networks

Specific content warnings – content warnings inform viewers with more specificity about scenes or themes that may be upsetting (e.g., scenes of domestic violence).

Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD) – VoD services requiring subscription payments to access, such as Netflix and Disney+.

Time and spending limits – limits how much time or money can be spent on a VoD service. Time limits can be applied to a profile or a whole account; spending limits usually apply to the account.

Transactional Video on Demand (TVoD) – VoD services where viewers pay for individual pieces of content, such as renting films on Amazon Prime Video.

Video on Demand (VoD) – digital streaming services that allow viewers to watch content when they choose, rather than at scheduled broadcast times.

Video Sharing Platforms (VSPs)– platforms like YouTube and TikTok where users can upload and share video content.

Watershed – UK regulatory requirement that content unsuitable for children must not, in general, be shown on broadcast television before 21:00 or after 05:30.

13. Annex I – Quota breakdown

Quota breakdown for adult participants

Quota	Detail	Number of participants
Demographics		
Gender	Male	94
	Female	92
Age	18-35	68
	36-55	83
	56+	35
SEG	B	37
	C1	70
	C2	54
	D	25
Location	London	28
	Wolverhampton	27
	Leeds	24
	Stockport	26
	Glasgow	26
	Lisburn	28
	Caerphilly	27
Ethnicity	Black, Asian and Minority ethnic	47
Family type	Without children	42
	Primary school age children	51
	Secondary school age children	52
	Children pre-school or sixth form age only	7
	Grandparent of primary school age children	17
	Grandparent of secondary school age children	17
Views	Inclined towards conservative	50
	Inclined towards liberal	51
	Neutral	85
Specific characteristics or experiences		
Adults who regularly use BBC iPlayer		139

Adults who regularly use ITVX	123
Adults who regularly use Channel 4	96
Adults who regularly use 5	52
Adults who regularly use U	26
Adults who regularly use Netflix	144
Adults who regularly use Amazon Prime Video	133
Adults who regularly use Disney+	111
Adults who regularly use Apple TV+	37
Adults who regularly use Now	27
Adults who regularly use Discovery+	25

Quota breakdown for child participants

Quota	Detail	Number of participants
Demographics		
Gender	Male	12
	Female	10
Age	Year 7	3
	Year 8	3
	Year 9	3
	Year 10	3
	Year 11	3
	Year 12	3
	Year 13	4
SEG	B	5
	C1	11
	C2	4
	D/E	2
Location	London	3
	Wolverhampton	3
	Leeds	3
	Stockport	3
	Glasgow	3
	Lisburn	4
	Caerphilly	3
Ethnicity	BAME	3

Specific characteristics or experiences	
Children who regularly watch BBC iPlayer	5
Children who regularly watch ITVX	7
Children who regularly watch Channel 4	4
Children who regularly watch My 5	1
Children who regularly watch U	0
Children who regularly watch Netflix	20
Children who regularly watch Amazon Prime Video	19
Children who regularly watch Disney+	15
Children who regularly watch Apple TV+	3
Children who regularly watch Now	1
Children who regularly watch Discovery+	1