

Companies must do more to ensure safe and responsible gaming and take action on 'loot boxes' to protect young people

- Government's call for evidence has unveiled a link between loot boxes and gambling harms, as well as wider mental health, financial and problem-gaming harms
- Government calls on games companies to step up and improve protections for children as well as players of all ages from the risk of harm

Video games companies and platforms must do more to make sure children can not make in-game purchases – known as 'loot boxes' – without their parents' consent, Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said today.

Loot boxes are a type of in-game purchase in some video games. Players can purchase a loot box with real money to receive random items, including "power-ups" to help a player compete better in the game and cosmetic items, such as virtual clothing.

The call for evidence on loot boxes, launched by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in 2020, found that players who have purchased loot boxes may be more likely to experience gambling, mental health, financial and problem gaming-related harms. The risk may also be higher for children and young people.

To protect players, the Government is calling for the purchase of loot boxes to be made unavailable to children and young people unless they are approved by a parent or guardian.

Some games platforms, such as Xbox, have already taken steps to improve protections, such as including options that require parental permission for under-18s to spend money within games. The Government wants to build on this with strong protections for children across the entire games industry and will not hesitate to consider legislation if companies do not bring in sufficient measures to keep players safe.

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

We want to stop children going on spending sprees online without parental consent, spurred on by in-game purchases like loot-boxes.

Games companies and platforms need to do more to ensure that controls and age-restrictions are applied so that players are protected from the risk of gambling harms. Children should be free to enjoy gaming safely, whilst giving parents and guardians the peace of mind they need.

Games companies and platforms should provide spending controls and transparent information to all players. Protections should support the minority of players who spend a disproportionate amount of money on loot boxes, and who may be at a greater risk of harm.

A new working group, convened by DCMS, will bring together games companies, platforms and regulatory bodies to develop industry-led measures to protect players and reduce the risk of harm. This will include measures such as parental controls, and making sure transparent, accessible information is available to all players.

The call for evidence also found a need for better evidence to improve understanding of the positive and negative impacts of video games. The Government will launch a Video Games Research Framework to support this.

The UK has a world class video games industry which contributed £2.9 billion to the economy in 2019, growing hugely from £400 million in 2010. As the sector continues to innovate the Government is committed to supporting its growth, whilst also ensuring games can be enjoyed safely.

Dr Jo Twist OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Ukie said:

As a responsible industry, we have committed to exploring additional ways to support players and parents to build on our existing work developing and raising awareness of parental controls.

We look forward to engaging closely with the Government and other organisations in the working group and on the Video Games Research Framework.

Dr Richard Wilson OBE, Chief Executive Officer, TIGA said:

TIGA believes that games businesses should aim to ensure that games are safe to use for all players. In 2020, TIGA formally adopted its 5 Principles for Safeguarding Players, designed to embody the spirit of the approach that games companies should adopt in operating their businesses within the UK. Children and young people should not be able to buy 'loot boxes' in video games without parental consent. TIGA also believes that vulnerable adults need to be protected against potential harms arising from loot boxes. TIGA looks forward to contributing to the DCMS's planned working group to advance measures to protect players from potential harms.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The Government response is on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

- The DCMS response considered over 32,000 responses to a player survey, 50 direct submissions, and an independent review of academic studies.