

News story: Revolutionary new tools to tackle streaming of child abuse

The Home Secretary last week (Tuesday 21 May) pledged a further £300,000 towards the development of cutting-edge technology that disrupts the live streaming of child exploitation and abuse.

It came after he attended a roundtable with private technology firms who showcased a series of new technological innovations designed to tackle the growing online problem.

The new innovations were developed as part of a fund set up by the Home Office's Joint Security and Resilience Centre (JSaRC) – a unit that works with industry to respond to emerging security challenges.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The live streaming of child abuse is vile and sickens me to the core.

It disgusts me that twisted paedophiles lurking on the internet are able order this type of horrific abuse at the click of a button – and cowardly predators are making money from these horrific acts.

I'm doing everything in my power to end all forms of child sexual abuse – but we need action on all fronts. It's encouraging to see private firms developing new technology to disrupt this perverse trade and I will continue to give them my support.

The Home Secretary met representatives from five small and medium sized technology companies who have all developed concepts to stop live streams of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). The developments also have the potential to help law enforcement bring perpetrators to justice and identify the location that people are viewing livestreamed abuse.

Among the concepts presented were a tool to identify and block livestreamed abuse by analysing viewers' comments and the development of a capability that can analyse video streams and automatically link content depicting the same individuals or locations.

The Home Secretary has made it his mission to tackle all forms of CSEA. In a speech last September, he detailed how children were being abused to order online around the world, sometimes for as little as £12. In some cases, perpetrators are even selecting the age, hair colour, gender and clothing of the child they want to see abused over the internet.

These innovations are the latest in a series of measures announced by the Home Office to tackle all forms of CSEA.

Last month the Home Secretary launched the Online Harms White Paper, which sets out ways to keep children safe online, including imposing a statutory duty of care on tech companies, enforced by an independent regulator.

Interim codes of practice being drawn up, which the Home Office will also expect the future regulator to include in its code of practice, are likely to include the reasonable steps companies should take to proactively identify and act upon CSEA activity or content, including within live streams.

Other actions include:

- in November the Home Secretary convened a Hackathon in the US to work with tech firms to develop new tools to tackle online grooming
- last week a Home Office-consortium gave £635,000 to the Marie Collins Foundation to help tackle CSEA at source internationally
- convening advertisers to discuss how advertising is inadvertently funding sites with CSEA content, including live streams