

# Landmark laws to keep children safe, stop racial hate and protect democracy online published

- Milestone Online Safety Bill will help safeguard young people and clamp down on racist abuse online
- Bill to be published today includes new measures to uphold democratic debate online
- Financial fraud on social media and dating apps included to protect people from romance scams and fake investment opportunities

New internet laws will be published today in the draft Online Safety Bill to protect children online and tackle some of the worst abuses on social media, including racist hate crimes.

Ministers have added landmark new measures to the Bill to safeguard freedom of expression and democracy, ensuring necessary online protections do not lead to unnecessary censorship.

The draft Bill marks a milestone in the Government's fight to make the internet safe. Despite the fact that we are now using the internet more than ever, over three quarters of UK adults are concerned about going online, and fewer parents feel the benefits outweigh the risks of their children being online – falling from 65 per cent in 2015 to 55 per cent in 2019.

The draft Bill includes changes to put an end to harmful practices, while ushering in a new era of accountability and protections for democratic debate, including:

- New additions to strengthen people's rights to express themselves freely online, while protecting journalism and democratic political debate in the UK.
- Further provisions to tackle prolific online scams such as romance fraud, which have seen people manipulated into sending money to fake identities on dating apps.
- Social media sites, websites, apps and other services hosting user-generated content or allowing people to talk to others online must remove and limit the spread of illegal and harmful content such as child sexual abuse, terrorist material and suicide content.
- Ofcom will be given the power to fine companies failing in a new duty of care up to £18 million or ten per cent of annual global turnover, whichever is higher, and have the power to block access to sites.

- A new criminal offence for senior managers has been included as a deferred power. This could be introduced at a later date if tech firms don't step up their efforts to improve safety.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Today the UK shows global leadership with our groundbreaking laws to usher in a new age of accountability for tech and bring fairness and accountability to the online world.

We will protect children on the internet, crack down on racist abuse on social media and through new measures to safeguard our liberties, create a truly democratic digital age.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

This new legislation will force tech companies to report online child abuse on their platforms, giving our law enforcement agencies the evidence they need to bring these offenders to justice.

Ruthless criminals who defraud millions of people and sick individuals who exploit the most vulnerable in our society cannot be allowed to operate unimpeded, and we are unapologetic in going after them.

It's time for tech companies to be held to account and to protect the British people from harm. If they fail to do so, they will face penalties.

The draft Bill will be scrutinised by a joint committee of MPs before a final version is formally introduced to Parliament.

The following elements of the Bill aim to create the most progressive, fair and accountable system in the world. This comes only weeks after a boycott of social media by sports professionals and governing bodies in protest at the abuse of footballers online, while at the same time concerns continue to be raised at social media platforms arbitrarily removing content and blocking users.

### **Duty of care**

In line with the government's response to the [Online Harms White Paper](#), all companies in scope will have a duty of care towards their users so that what is unacceptable offline will also be unacceptable online.

They will need to consider the risks their sites may pose to the youngest and most vulnerable people and act to protect children from inappropriate content and harmful activity.

They will need to take robust action to tackle illegal abuse, including swift and effective action against hate crimes, harassment and threats directed at individuals and keep their promises to users about their standards.

The largest and most popular social media sites (Category 1 services) will need to act on content that is lawful but still harmful such as abuse that falls below the threshold of a criminal offence, encouragement of self-harm and mis/disinformation. Category 1 platforms will need to state explicitly in their terms and conditions how they will address these legal harms and Ofcom will hold them to account.

The draft Bill contains reserved powers for Ofcom to pursue criminal action against named senior managers whose companies do not comply with Ofcom's requests for information. These will be introduced if tech companies fail to live up to their new responsibilities. A review will take place at least two years after the new regulatory regime is fully operational.

The final legislation, when introduced to Parliament, will contain provisions that require companies to report child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) content identified on their services. This will ensure companies provide law enforcement with the high-quality information they need to safeguard victims and investigate offenders.

### **Freedom of expression**

The Bill will ensure people in the UK can express themselves freely online and participate in pluralistic and robust debate.

All in-scope companies will need to consider and put in place safeguards for freedom of expression when fulfilling their duties. These safeguards will be set out by Ofcom in codes of practice but, for example, might include having human moderators take decisions in complex cases where context is important.

People using their services will need to have access to effective routes of appeal for content removed without good reason and companies must reinstate that content if it has been removed unfairly. Users will also be able to appeal to Ofcom and these complaints will form an essential part of Ofcom's horizon-scanning, research and enforcement activity.

Category 1 services will have additional duties. They will need to conduct and publish up-to-date assessments of their impact on freedom of expression and demonstrate they have taken steps to mitigate any adverse effects.

These measures remove the risk that online companies adopt restrictive measures or over-remove content in their efforts to meet their new online safety duties. An example of this could be AI moderation technologies falsely flagging innocuous content as harmful, such as satire.

### **Democratic content**

Ministers have added new and specific duties to the Bill for Category 1 services to protect content defined as 'democratically important'. This will include content promoting or opposing government policy or a political party

ahead of a vote in Parliament, election or referendum, or campaigning on a live political issue.

Companies will also be forbidden from discriminating against particular political viewpoints and will need to apply protections equally to a range of political opinions, no matter their affiliation. Policies to protect such content will need to be set out in clear and accessible terms and conditions and firms will need to stick to them or face enforcement action from Ofcom.

When moderating content, companies will need to take into account the political context around why the content is being shared and give it a high level of protection if it is democratically important.

For example, a major social media company may choose to prohibit all deadly or graphic violence. A campaign group could release violent footage to raise awareness about violence against a specific group. Given its importance to democratic debate, the company might choose to keep that content up, subject to warnings, but it would need to be upfront about the policy and ensure it is applied consistently.

### **Journalistic content**

Content on news publishers' websites is not in scope. This includes both their own articles and user comments on these articles.

Articles by recognised news publishers shared on in-scope services will be exempted and Category 1 companies will now have a statutory duty to safeguard UK users' access to journalistic content shared on their platforms.

This means they will have to consider the importance of journalism when undertaking content moderation, have a fast-track appeals process for journalists' removed content, and will be held to account by Ofcom for the arbitrary removal of journalistic content. Citizen journalists' content will have the same protections as professional journalists' content.

### **Online fraud**

Measures to tackle user-generated fraud will be included in the Bill. It will mean online companies will, for the first time, have to take responsibility for tackling fraudulent user-generated content, such as posts on social media, on their platforms. This includes romance scams and fake investment opportunities posted by users on Facebook groups or sent via Snapchat.

Romance fraud occurs when a victim is tricked into thinking that they are striking up a relationship with someone, often through an online dating website or app, when in fact this is a fraudster who will seek money or personal information.

Analysis by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau found in 2019/20 there were 5,727 instances of romance fraud in the UK (up 18 per cent year on year). Losses totalled more than £60 million.

Fraud via advertising, emails or cloned websites will not be in scope because

the Bill focuses on harm committed through user-generated content.

The Government is working closely with industry, regulators and consumer groups to consider additional legislative and non-legislative solutions. The Home Office will publish a Fraud Action Plan after the 2021 spending review and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will consult on online advertising, including the role it can play in enabling online fraud, later this year.

Ian Russell, Molly Rose Foundation, said:

The Molly Rose Foundation and Molly's family say government internet regulation can't come soon enough and welcome this important step towards a safer internet for all.

It is vital to focus the minds of the tech platforms, to change their corporate culture and to reduce online harms, especially for the young and the vulnerable. Now is the time for the platforms to prioritise safety rather than profit; it is time for countries to change the internet for good.

Dr Alex George, The UK Government's Youth Mental Health Ambassador, said:

This is a landmark moment here in the UK. The problem of online abuse has escalated into a real epidemic which is affecting people physically as well as psychologically and it is time that something is done.

That's why I welcome today's announcement about the Online Safety Bill and the protection it will provide people. Social media companies must play their part in protecting those who consume and engage with their content.

Dame Melanie Dawes, Ofcom Chief Executive, said:

Today's Bill takes us a step closer to a world where the benefits of being online, for children and adults, are no longer undermined by harmful content.

We'll support Parliament's scrutiny of the draft Bill, and soon say more about how we think this new regime could work in practice – including the approach we'll take to secure greater accountability from tech platforms.

Yesterday the Digital Secretary visited Charlton Athletic FC to hear about the club's work on diversity and inclusion and met players from the first, women's and academy teams. He also spoke to representatives from UK safety tech firm Crisp.

Charlton Athletic academy player Wassim Aouachria said:

I am very pleased to hear that action is being taken to stamp out discriminatory abuse on social media. I was on the receiving end of abuse on social media a few months ago and it was difficult to understand for myself and my family.

I was grateful for the support I got from the club and more needs to be done so people are held accountable for their actions. Hopefully the upcoming online safety bill can help us create a safer, more welcoming and inclusive environment for players, managers, staff, fans and everyone associated with football.

Adam Hildreth, CEO of UK safety tech start up, Crisp, said:

We set up Crisp in 2005 with a vision of helping to create a digital world that is safe for everyone. We've been working alongside the UK government during that time to make sure legislation keeps up with changes in the online environment.

We're proud to have been contributors to the groundbreaking Online Safety Bill and we're pleased to play a part in the successful UK safety tech story.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- The Online Safety Bill follows the publication of the [Online Harms White Paper](#) in April 2019. An [initial Government response](#) to the consultation was published in February 2020, and a [full Government response](#) in December 2020. The full government response set out in detail the regulatory framework, which will be taken forward through this bill.
- The legislation will be published later today in draft, and will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a joint committee of MPs in this session. The make-up of the committee will be confirmed in due course.

---

## [Environment Agency launches new flooding Action Plan](#)

Communities, local authorities and government working together is crucial if

we are to tackle the climate emergency, the Environment Agency said today, as it launched its annual Action Plan to help protect England from flooding and coastal erosion.

England currently remains on course for 59 per cent more winter rainfall and once-a-century sea level events every year by 2100 and major adaptation will be required to meet the changing climate picture.

Involving local authorities, businesses, farmers, voluntary organisations, and infrastructure providers, the measures set out in the FCERM (Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management) Strategy Action Plan will help ensure the nation is ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change.

As the country recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, the Action Plan sits alongside a £5.2 billion investment from government in better protecting 336,000 properties by 2027. It plays an important part in coordinating efforts to ensure a clean, green recovery with climate resilience at its heart.

Examples from the Action Plan include the Environment Agency working with:

- The National Flood Forum to expand the network of community flood groups, to support residents and local businesses to develop flood response plans and train flood wardens.
- The Property Flood Resilience Roundtable to deliver a national suite of training for the property flood resilience industry.
- Partners in the Thames Estuary, Humber Estuary, Severn Valley and Yorkshire to develop long term plans for adapting to future flooding and coastal change and climate hazards.
- The LGA and ADEPT to run workshops to help local authorities attract private sector investment and green finance as a means of improving flood and coastal resilience.
- The Town and Country Planning Association to develop on-line training materials for town planners on flood risk and climate change.

Caroline Douglass, Executive Director, Flood and Coastal Risk Management at Environment Agency said:

It's clear that the climate emergency is bringing more extreme weather and so we need to step up our efforts yet further to meet the rising flood and coastal erosion risk.

By harnessing the collective power of the Environment Agency, government, all our partners and local communities, this Action Plan will help to better protect over hundreds of thousands more homes and businesses in the years ahead.

Innes Thomson, Chief Executive, Association of Drainage Boards, said:

ADA recognises the important role Internal Drainage Boards have in

delivering the FCERM Strategy, including contributing to carbon reduction.

ADA will be developing existing carbon calculator tools to specifically help internal drainage boards to take action to reduce the carbon emissions of their operations.

Julia Beeden, Chair of ADEPT's Flood & Water Management Group, said:

ADEPT have been working closely with the EA in developing the new plan which presents the first steps in enabling the delivery of the longer-term national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy.

We all have an important journey ahead and need to embrace resilience and adaptation collectively, not just as organisations, but also as communities and individuals. Local Authorities play a key role in the communication and delivery of this change.

The FCERM Strategy Action Plan will help deliver the strategic objectives set out in the Environment Agency's FCERM Strategy published in July 2020, as we continue to prepare millions of homes and businesses from the risk of flooding that the climate emergency will bring.

The publication of the Action Plan comes after the Environment Agency announced that it had exceeded its target in delivering the government's £2.6 billion investment in flood and coastal defence schemes since 2015, better protecting more than 300,000 homes.

The Environment Agency is now working alongside partners to deliver of the government's record investment of £5.2 billion in flood and coastal defences between 2021 and 2027, which will better protect an additional 336,000 properties as well as avoid £32 billion of wider economic damages.

### **Further information**

The FCERM Strategy Action Plan is a comprehensive list of actions designed to implement our strategic objectives as set out in the Environment Agency's FCERM Strategy.

Key actions include:

- The Local Government Association (LGA) and ADEPT will work with the EA by running workshops to help local authorities attract private sector investment and green finance as a means of improving flood and coastal resilience.
- The National Flood Forum and the EA will develop a network of community-led volunteers to support people living at flood risk to setup flood groups and to test local flood plans.
- Flood Re will work with the Association of British Insurers and the



British Insurance Brokers' Association to develop a specialist directory of brokers and insurers to help customers who find it difficult to get flood insurance.

- Highways England will work with the EA to develop a pipeline of investments in infrastructure that is more resilient to future flood risks.
- The EA will develop 'adaptive pathways' for the Thames Estuary, Humber Estuary, Severn Valley and Yorkshire to help partners better plan for future flood and coastal change and adapt to climate hazards.
- National Farmers Union will use its Integrated Water Management Strategy to help farmers and growers adapt to future flood risk and raise the resilience of farm businesses to both floods and droughts.
- Association of Drainage Authorities will develop existing carbon calculator tools to specifically help internal drainage boards to take action to reduce the carbon emissions of their operations.
- Coastal Groups and the EA will work together to review and improve the Shoreline Management Plans to help communities adapt to future coastal change.
- Chartered Institute of Water & Environmental Management and the EA will develop independent training and accreditation for the installation of property flood resilience to help communities recover more quickly after flooding.
- Natural England will work with the EA and partners to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies which will harness the power of nature to reduce the threats from flooding and coastal change.
- The EA will work with the Town & Country Planning Association to develop online learning to help planners better account for flood risk and climate change.

---

## [UK to lead the way on animal welfare through flagship new Action Plan](#)

In a first of its kind, the Government has today published an [action plan for animal welfare](#) that will revolutionise the treatment of animals in the UK and introduce measures to protect the welfare of animals abroad.

Now that we have left the EU, the UK has new freedoms to further strengthen animal welfare standards and reinforce its position as a global champion of animal rights.

The Action Plan for Animal Welfare, launched today by the Environment Secretary George Eustice, will build on our existing world leading standards by recognising animals as sentient in law and committing to a range of new game changing welfare measures to protect pets, livestock and wild animals.

During a visit to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, the Environment Secretary

said that the Government would take a significant step forwards on animal welfare by formally recognising animals as sentient beings through a new Animal Sentience Bill that will be introduced to Parliament tomorrow (13 May), putting animal welfare at the very heart of government policy decision making.

Launching the plan, the Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We are a nation of animal lovers and were the first country in the world to pass animal welfare laws.

Our Action Plan for Animal Welfare will deliver on our manifesto commitment to ban the export of live animal exports for slaughter and fattening, prohibit keeping primates as pets and bring in new laws to tackle puppy smuggling.

We will lead on the protection of animals abroad by implementing the world's toughest ivory ban and banning the import of hunting trophies to protect iconic species. As an independent nation we are now able to go further than ever to build on our excellent track record.

The Action Plan for Animal Welfare also sets out how the government will:

Improve welfare for pets by:

- tackling puppy smuggling through changes to import rules
- introducing compulsory microchipping for cats
- cracking down on pet theft through a new government taskforce
- banning remote controlled training e-collars

Protect wild animals by:

- making it illegal to keep primates as pets
- introducing new laws to crack down on illegal hare coursing
- supporting legislation to restrict the use of glue traps
- funding wildlife conservation projects both at home abroad

Protect animals abroad by:

- banning the import of hunting trophies from endangered animals
- banning the sale of ivory by implementing the Ivory Act this year
- prohibiting the import and export of detached shark fins to protect the iconic shark species
- exploring a ban on the sale of foie gras
- banning the advertisement in this country of unacceptable low-welfare animal practices abroad – such as elephant rides

Improve welfare for farmed animals by:

- ending the export of live animals for fattening and slaughter

- introducing new measures to improve welfare during transport
- giving the police more powers to protect farm animals from dangerous or out of control dogs
- examining the use of cages for poultry and farrowing crates for pigs
- improving animal welfare at slaughter
- incentivising farmers to improve animal health and welfare through future farming policy

To deliver these reforms, the Government will be introducing a series of Bills in due course focusing on animal sentience, kept animals here in the UK and the welfare of animals. There will also be a series of non-legislative changes to promote animal welfare over the coming months, with a number of regulations due to be brought forward as early as this year.

The Government will also ensure that animal welfare is not compromised in all our future trade negotiations.

The UK has a world-leading record on animal welfare, and over the last decade the Government has introduced a range of measures to ensure we offer animals the care, respect and protection they deserve. This includes banning the use of battery cages for laying hens, introducing compulsory CCTV in slaughter houses and raising the maximum sentence for animal cruelty [from six months to five years](#).

Chris Sherwood said, Chief Executive of the RSPCA said:

These announcements will make a real and lasting difference to animals' welfare, so we're pleased the Government is committed to improving animals' lives in the UK and abroad. We can no longer ignore the inextricable link that exists between the way we treat animals, our own health and that of the planet – but to really achieve a step change, it will take courage from right across Government.

We urge the government to put animal welfare at the heart of policy making and make these announcements just the beginning of an evolving, holistic animal health and welfare strategy.

Peter Laurie, Chief Executive of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home said:

Battersea very much welcomes the new Action Plan for Animal Welfare. Every dog and cat deserves to be safe from harm and this means clamping down on those trading animals illegally and in poor welfare conditions, being proactive to protect owners from the devastation of having their pet lost or stolen, and doing everything we can to reunite them.

Our pets are not only sentient beings, but much-loved family members and we support any measures that will protect them from unnecessary suffering, and reassure dog and cat owners, both now

and in the future.

Claire Bass, Executive Director of Humane Society International/UK said:

We are very pleased to see so many commitments to protect animals brought into focus by government through this action plan. Britain prides itself as a nation of animal lovers and animals suffering both here and overseas for food, fur, entertainment, the pet trade and more deserve this proactive agenda.

Delivering on the plan will require understanding and real commitment from across Whitehall. Respect for animal welfare is not only the right thing to do for animals, it will also play a critical role in tackling global environmental and public health challenges such as climate change, antibiotic resistance and pandemic prevention.

Since 2010, the Government has also brought in mandatory microchipping for dogs to help reunite lost dogs with their owners and has introduced additional protection for service animals by introducing '[Finn's Law](#)'. Last year, the Government introduced [Lucy's Law](#) to tackle puppy farming by banning the commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens. In 2019, the Government also outlawed the use of [wild animals in circuses](#).

Recognising the links between animal health and welfare and the health of our planet, the Government is also working closely with industry to transform future farming policy through the [Animal Health and Welfare Pathway](#) which will forge a new deal between government and farmers to promote healthier and higher welfare animals. The Pathway will pay farmers to improve animal health and welfare, reduce carbon emissions and slow the rise of anti-microbial resistance.

The full Action Plan for Animal Welfare can be accessed [here](#).

You stay up to date with all the latest developments by searching #ActionForAnimals.

---

## [Universities to comply with free speech duties or face sanctions](#)

A historic bill introduced in Parliament today (12 May) will strengthen the legal duties on higher education providers in England to protect freedom of speech on campuses up and down the country, for students, academics and visiting speakers.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will bring in new measures that will require universities and colleges registered with the Office for Students to defend free speech and help stamp out unlawful 'silencing'.

For the first time, these legal duties will also be extended to students' unions, which, under the measures in the Bill, will have to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure lawful freedom of speech.

This delivers on a manifesto commitment to strengthen academic freedom and free speech in higher education and will help protect the reputation of our universities as centres of academic freedom. Universities, colleges and students' unions that breach these duties may face sanctions, including fines.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

It is a basic human right to be able to express ourselves freely and take part in rigorous debate. Our legal system allows us to articulate views which others may disagree with as long as they don't meet the threshold of hate speech or inciting violence. This must be defended, nowhere more so than within our world-renowned universities.

Holding universities to account on the importance of freedom of speech in higher education is a milestone moment in fulfilling our manifesto commitment, protecting the rights of students and academics, and countering the chilling effect of censorship on campus once and for all.

A new Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom will sit on the board of the Office for Students, with responsibility for investigations of breaches of the new freedom of speech duties, including a new complaints scheme for students, staff and visiting speakers who have suffered loss due to a breach.

The Bill comes in light of examples of a 'chilling effect' on students, staff and invited speakers feeling unable to speak out. In one incident, Bristol Middle East Forum was charged almost £500 in security costs to invite the Israeli Ambassador to speak at an event.

In another example, over one hundred academics signed a letter expressing public opposition to Professor Nigel Biggar's research project 'Ethics and Empire', because he had said that British people should have 'pride as well as shame' in the Empire.

Registered higher education providers in England will have extended legal duties not only to take steps to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom, but also to promote these important values.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said:

The values of freedom of speech and academic freedom are a huge part of what makes our higher education system so well respected around the world.

Which is why this government will tackle head on the growing chilling effect on our campuses which is silencing and censoring students, academics and visiting speakers.

This Bill will ensure universities not only protect free speech but promote it too. After all how can we expect society to progress or for opinions to modernise unless we can challenge the status quo?

The government has been clear throughout that it is important to distinguish between lawful, if offensive, views on one hand and unacceptable acts of abuse, intimidation, and violence on the other.

Higher education providers and students' unions must ensure that they comply with their legal duties on discrimination and harassment as well as their legal duties to protect freedom of speech.

---

## [Olivia Jean report and safety flyer published](#)

News story

Fatal accident to crew member on a scallop dredger off Aberdeen, Scotland.



Our accident investigation report into the fatal crush injuries sustained by a crew member on the deck of scallop dredger Olivia Jean, approximately 39 miles north-east of Aberdeen on 28 June 2019, is now published.

## Statement from the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents:

Sadly, this was not the first serious accident to crew working on Olivia's Jean's deck that the MAIB has investigated.

The circumstances and many of the factors that contributed to this death are all too familiar. In particular, an ineffective safety management culture driven from the very top of the organisation, had resulted in hazardous practices taking place on board.

The working deck of a fishing vessel can be an extremely hazardous place, where good levels of communication, supervision, and control are essential. The importance of the implementation of a robust safety management system by fishing vessel owners, managers and skippers cannot be underestimated.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken: [read more](#).

A [safety flyer to the fishing industry](#) summarising the accident and detailing the safety lessons learned, has also been produced.

Published 12 May 2021