

Oliver Dowden's Oral Statement on the Online Harms White Paper consultation response

Mr Speaker, we now conduct a huge proportion of our lives online.

People in the UK spend an average of 4 hours 2 minutes on the internet every day. And of course we know that for children, it's even longer.

Of course, that technology has improved our lives in countless ways.

But as members across the House know, too many people are still exposed to the worst elements of the web: illegal content; racist and misogynistic abuse; and dangerous disinformation.

Those interactions may be virtual, but they are causing real harm.

Over three-quarters of UK adults express concerns about logging on, while a declining number of parents believe the benefits of their children being online outweigh the risks.

Mr Speaker, trust in tech is falling. That's bad for the public, and it's bad for the tech companies.

So today the government is taking decisive action to protect people online. Through our [full response to the Online Harms White Paper](#), we are proposing groundbreaking regulations that will make tech companies legally responsible for the online safety of their users.

That world-leading regime will rebuild public trust, and restore public confidence in the tech that has not only powered us through the pandemic, but will of course power us into the recovery.

Now, I know this legislation is highly anticipated on both sides of the House.

I want to reassure Members that when drafting our proposals, I sought to strike a very important balance:

...between shielding people from harm, particularly children...

...while also ensuring a proportionate regime that preserves one of the cornerstones of democracy – freedom of expression.

And I'm confident that our response strikes this balance.

Under our proposals, online companies will face a new and binding "duty of care" to their users, overseen by Ofcom.

And, if those platforms fail in that duty of care, they will face steep fines of up to £18 million, or 10 percent of annual global turnover. Now I know that a number of people, including Ian Russell, the father of Molly Russell, expressed concerns about this point. I do want to reassure him and member's of this House that the maximum fine will be the higher of those two numbers.

And platforms will no longer be allowed to mark their own homework.

To hold them to their responsibilities, I can also announce to the House that major platforms will be required to publish annual transparency reports to track their progress. This could include the number of reports of harmful content received and the action taken as a result.

Mr Speaker, this will be a robust regime requiring those at the top to take responsibility. I can therefore confirm that we will legislate to introduce criminal sanctions for senior managers with Parliament taking the final decision as to whether to introduce that.

And of course, we hope not to use these powers, and for tech companies to engineer the harm out of their platforms from the very outset. But have no doubt, they remain an option – and we will use them if we need to.

Together, those measures make this the toughest and most comprehensive online safety regime in the world. And they will have a clear and immediate effect.

...A 13-year-old should no longer be able to access pornographic images on Twitter...

...YouTube will not be allowed to recommend videos promoting terrorist ideologies...

...And anti-semitic hate crime will need to be removed without delay.

Those are just a few examples – but I know that the House will take a keen interest in the details of this legislation. So let me lay out a few key areas of action.

Our first focus is on illegal content, including child sexual abuse, terrorism and posts that incite violence and hatred.

Sadly, many members here today have themselves been the target of online abuse – some of which will have been illegal, such as threats of violence or hate speech. Unfortunately, that is particularly true for female members of this House.

This isn't only a problem suffered by people in the public eye. Close to half of adults in the UK say they have been exposed to hateful content online in the past year.

Under these new laws, all in-scope companies will need to take swift and effective action to remove criminal posts. If it's illegal offline, it's illegal online.

Users will be better able to report this abhorrent content, and can expect to receive more support from platforms.

Crucially, this duty of care will apply even when communications are end-to-end encrypted. Encryption cannot serve as a protection blanket for criminals.

And given the severity of certain threats, Ofcom will also be given powers to require companies to use technology to proactively identify and remove illegal content involving child sexual abuse or terrorism, as a power of last resort.

Of course, not all harmful content is illegal.

Every day, people are exposed to posts, images and videos that don't break any laws, but they still cause a significant amount of harm. We of course all know that cyberbullying can ruin a child's life.

But I want to address one particularly horrific form of legal content first.

Sadly, too many members here today will be aware of cases where children are drawn into watching videos that encourage self harm. Some find themselves bombarded with that content, ultimately sometimes ending in tragedy.

It is unforgivable that this sort of content should be circulating unchecked on social media. And given the severity of its consequences, I believe there is a strong case for making it illegal.

So I can today announce that the government has asked the Law Commission to examine how the criminal law will address the encouragement or assistance of self harm.

This is an incredibly sensitive area, and we need to take careful steps to make sure we don't inadvertently punish vulnerable people.

But we need to act now to prevent future tragedies.

And I know many members are particularly concerned about the effect online harm has on children. We have reserved our strongest and toughest protections for them.

All companies will need to seriously consider the risks their platforms may pose to children, and take action.

They will no longer be able to abdicate responsibility by claiming that children do not use their services when that is manifestly untrue, and we all know examples of that.

And we also expect them to prevent children from accessing services that pose the highest risk of harm, including online pornography.

Cutting-edge age assurance or verification technologies will be a vital part of keeping children safe online.

At the same time, we are going further than any other country to tackle other categories of “legal but harmful” content accessed by adults.

Major platforms will face additional obligations to enforce their own terms and conditions against things such as dangerous vaccine misinformation and cyberbullying.

Where they fall short, they will face the legal consequences.

Now I do know that some members are worried these regulations might impose undue burdens on smaller, low-risk companies. I can reassure them that we have included exemptions for such companies; as a result, fewer than 3% of UK businesses will fall within scope.

I also know that in this House we have always ardently championed freedom of expression. Robust and free debate are what give our democracy its historic strength.

So let me be clear Mr Speaker. The purpose of this proposed regime is not to stop adults from accessing content they disagree with. It is not our job to protect people from being offended, and I won't allow this legislation to become a weapon against free debate.

Therefore, we won't prevent adults from accessing or posting legal content.

Companies will not be able to arbitrarily remove controversial viewpoints, and users will be able to seek redress if they feel content has been removed unfairly.

Nor will I allow this legislation to stifle media freedoms or become a charter to impose our world view and suppress others.

I can confirm that news publishers' own content on their sites is not in scope, nor are the comments of users on that content.

This legislation Mr Speaker is targeted exactly where it needs to be, and tightly focused on delivering on our core manifesto pledge: to empower adult users to stay safe online, while ensuring children are protected.

So Mr Speaker, we have engaged extensively to get to this point, and this process is by no means over. We want all parliamentarians to feed in to this significant piece of work, and will continue to listen to their concerns as we go through pre-legislative scrutiny and beyond.

However, I am confident that today's measures mark a significant step in the continual evolution of our approach to our life online – and it's fitting that this country should be a step that our country takes.

The World Wide Web was of course invented by a Brit.

And now the UK is setting a safety standard for the rest of the world to follow.

I commend this statement to the House.

UK Trader Scheme launched to support businesses moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland

Press release

Businesses urged to consider what they need to do before their first movement of goods after 1 January 2021.



- New UK Trader Scheme (UKTS) will help ensure traders don't pay tariffs on the movement of goods into Northern Ireland from Great Britain where those goods remain in the UK's customs territory
- Traders can self-declare goods not 'at risk' of entering the EU so that they're not subject to EU duty
- Businesses urged to consider what they need to do before their first movement of goods after 1 January 2021

Traders are being urged to consider whether they need to sign up to the new UK Trader Scheme (UKTS) to ensure traders don't pay tariffs on the movement of goods into Northern Ireland from Great Britain where those goods can be shown to remain the UK's customs territory 1 January 2021.

From Monday (14 December), businesses can apply for a UKTS authorisation, allowing them to self-declare goods not 'at risk' of moving on to the EU after entering Northern Ireland.

This means they will not be subject to EU duties on goods being sold to or used by consumers after entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain, regardless of the outcome of the UK-EU FTA negotiations.

Businesses who do not sign up could have to pay tariffs on their goods, unless they are eligible to claim a waiver.

Registering for UKTS is a simple and straight-forward process, which

businesses can do [online at GOV.UK](#).

The scheme is open to traders of all sizes and across all industries who operate under the Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP).

Traders who want to declare goods not 'at risk' from 1 January 2021 will need to apply for authorisation by 31 December 2020. Traders will be granted a provisional authorisation for a period of up to four months whilst HMRC processes their applications.

The government's £200 million Trader Support Service (TSS) also provides education and guidance on 'at risk' goods for NI and GB businesses. To register for the TSS visit www.tradersupportservice.co.uk

1. Traders applying to HMRC for UKTS authorisation must meet some basic requirements and show that they are able to accurately declare and evidence whether goods are 'at risk' or not.
2. Traders can apply by visiting:
www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-can-declare-goods-you-bring-into-northern-ireland-not-at-risk-of-moving-to-the-eu-from-1-january-2021
3. From 1 January 2021, tariffs will only be due on goods moving into Northern Ireland from Great Britain where they are destined for the EU, or where there is uncertainty or a genuine risk of onward movement.
4. Traders moving goods into Northern Ireland for the purposes of onward movement to the EU must always pay the EU tariff.

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[Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Armenia: John Gallagher](#)

Press release

Mr John Gallagher has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia.



Mr John Gallagher has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia. Mr Gallagher will take up his appointment during March 2021.

Full name: John Patrick Gallagher

Married to: Sarah Gallagher

Children: Two

Dates	Role
2019 to present	Buenos Aires, Deputy Head of Mission
2015 to 2019	Buenos Aires, Counsellor – Political and Prosperity
2011 to 2015	Beijing, Counsellor – Communications
2009 to 2011	FCO, Five Star Finance Programme Manager, Finance Directorate
2008	Joined FCO

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Joint Statement by the UK and Mexico

The Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Mexican States welcome the signing of the UK-Mexico Trade Continuity Agreement, marked by a meeting today between the Secretary of State for International Trade of the United Kingdom, Elizabeth Truss, and the Minister of Economy of Mexico, Graciela Márquez Colín, on 15 December 2020.

The Agreement provides for continuity in trade between Mexico and the United Kingdom after the end of this year. The Agreement is intended to be transitional in nature. The UK and Mexico agree to begin negotiations on a new and ambitious Free Trade Agreement in

2021.

Today's agreement will maintain preferential access for trade between Mexico and the UK following the end of the UK's Transition Period with the EU on 31 December 2020, when the EU-Mexico Global Agreement will no longer apply to the UK. Both sides will strive to bring the agreement into force on 1 January 2021, subject to parliamentary procedures and legislative approvals.

The agreement will provide certainty for UK and Mexican businesses trading the goods and services that make up our bilateral trade relationship, which accounts for over 5 billion dollars per year. It will deliver vital coverage for the automotive, pharmaceutical, textiles, agriculture, food and drink and other manufacturing industries. This will prevent the additional duty burden that would be levied under WTO MFN terms.

This follows the recent signing of the UK – Mexico Agreement on the Mutual Recognition and Protection of Designations for Spirit Drinks, an important geographical indications agreement between the United Kingdom and Mexico to protect the spirits of both countries. This agreement will protect our traditional spirits like Irish and Scottish Whisky and Tequila, Sotol and Mezcal.

Investment relations will continue to take place under the Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the United Mexican States for the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments.

Future Relationship

The agreement secured today, also commits the UK and Mexico to begin negotiations on a new ambitious and modern UK-Mexico Trade Agreement at the earliest opportunity in 2021 and strive to conclude it within three years. Both sides have agreed that a future deal should be at least as liberalising as the recently agreed EU-Mexico Modernised Agreement, but with ambition to go further in areas of mutual interest. In making today's announcement, the UK reiterates its intention to formally apply in early 2021 to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Mexico expresses its support for this process. Both sides have agreed that our future bilateral negotiations should run in parallel to this process.

Today's announcement is in line with the commitment to an ambitious future trading relationship which both countries made under the landmark 'Mexico and UK: Partnership for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth', which the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, and Foreign Minister, Marcelo Ebrard, signed in Mexico City in August 2019.

Political Dialogue and Cooperation

The UK and Mexico remain committed to a joint political dialogue covering all bilateral and international matters of mutual interest, including continuing and intensifying all areas of current cooperation.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to implementing the principles outlined in the UK-Mexico Partnership for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, signed by our Foreign Ministers in August 2019. Maintaining our bilateral political cooperation as specified in the Partnership remains a top priority for our future relationship. This includes cooperating closely on foreign policy, an inclusive COVID-19 recovery, and international peace and security.

It encompasses a common vision on the reduction of poverty and inequality, of action on climate change and environmental protection, promotion of sustainable investment, the protection of the oceans and of biodiversity, the defence of free trade, multilateralism and the international rules-based system. We will continue to regularly discuss our shared values of democracy, the comprehensive promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and social inclusion.

We restate and emphasise our shared commitment to effective multilateralism and international cooperation as the basis for addressing regional and global challenges.

The UK-Mexico relationship continues to grow, and we look forward to working together to deepen the political, economic, social and people-to-people ties between our two nations.

[New adoption and special guardianship leader appointed](#)

Dr Krish Kandiah has been appointed as the new Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB).

A critical friend to the Government on adoption policies for many years, Dr Kandiah comes to the role with the unique experience of being an adoptive parent himself who is passionate about championing for more people from all walks of life to come forward as loving adoptive parents.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford announced his new role during a speech at Coram British Association of Adoption and Fostering's (CoramBAAF) 40th anniversary event on Monday 14 December.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

As we get closer to Christmas, a special time of year that brings everyone together, it is a terribly sad fact that there are some children who do not have a family to celebrate with. We simply cannot overstate how important a stable loving family is.

I am delighted to announce Krish Kandiah as the new Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, who will work with us to make improvements to the adoption system, boosting vital support adopters and their families so every child can be placed in a loving, stable home.

The CoramBAAF event will celebrate the significant contribution it has made over the last 40 years to the lives of adoptive families, and those in special guardianships or kinship care arrangements, including helping to shape adoption policies, to give children hope, security and a loving family.

As chair of the ASGLB, which Coram helped set up in 2014, Dr Krish Kandiah will play an instrumental role in driving improvements in the sector, working closely with the Department for Education to continue raising the bar with the adoption system and in the lives of vulnerable children.

Dr Krish Kandiah, new chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) said:

Right now there are over 2,550 children waiting for adoption. Each one of them needs a unique loving family to commit to them for life despite all the trauma they have faced in the past and whatever their futures might hold.

I count it a huge privilege to take on the chairing of the Leadership Board and am looking forward to working with colleagues to find parents for all the children that are waiting and to provide great support for all adopted families. I take on this role as an adopted father, a foster parent and a birth dad keen to find the right solution for every child.

The Department for Education has invested in frontline charities through £750 million of funding to help them continue their vital work throughout this year. As part of this, it has provided £2.8 million in funding to 19 Voluntary Adoption Agencies, to help enable them to continue their work with prospective adopters and supporting existing adoptive families throughout the pandemic.

The support for adoptive families builds on the Education Secretary's [intervention](#) during National Adoption Week in October, where he launched a recruitment campaign to reach out to churches, mosques and other community groups starting with a pilot service in London and Birmingham, to encourage more potential Black and other minority ethnic adopters to come forward. He also urged local authorities to help break down the misconception of the perfect ethnic match that places too high a burden on parents who want to adopt.

Minister Ford's speech comes as the Department for Education prepares to launch the independently-led Care Review soon, which will support improvements in the children's social care system for every child, including

those for whom adoption may not be the right choice.