



Discussion groups on the government's consultation on:

- Potential age restrictions on social media, gaming sites and AI chatbots
- Addictive design features and risky functionalities
- School bans

Alton                    13 March 2026

Petersfield          20 March 2026

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/growing-up-in-the-online-world-a-national-consultation>



# Why we worry...?

## Content

- Pornography
- Violence
- Radicalisation
- Unreal worlds
- Mis & disinformation

## Contact

- Child abuse
- Bullying
- Bad influences

## Time

- Compounds other two
- Sleep, concentration
- Physical development
- Crowding out

# Up to now...

- 2018 Data Protection Act
- 2019 Online Harms White Paper
- 2020 Age-Appropriate Design Code
- 2023 Online Safety Act (OSA) – Royal Assent
- 2024 Non-stat bans on phones in school day – including break & lunch  
Safer Phones Bill (fell)
- 2025 OSA Phase 1: Illegal Content (March)  
(Ofcom enforce on proactive removal of illegal material e.g. terror, CSAM).  
  
OSA Phase 2: Child Safety (July)  
(Platforms legally required to use "highly effective" age assurance for e.g. pornographic or self-harm content  
+40 practical measures including filtering out priority content, prevent adult contact, geolocation off by default)
- 2026 Children's Well-being and Schools Bill (ongoing)  
  
This consultation – announced Jan, live Mar-May

# Two regimes

'Privacy'

'Safety'

## Data Protection Act 2018 & GDPR

ICO

Anything

that processes personal data  
(names, emails, IP addresses, tracking cookies)

Age-Appropriate Design Code  
for services likely to be accessed by children

'Age of digital consent' – 13

## Online Safety Act 2023

Ofcom

"User-to-User" services  
and Search Engines

Codes of practice

Apply own age rule consistently

High-harm material: 18+  
with 'highly effective age assurance'

# The consultation

“The consultation will consider how children use digital technology as well as measures including:

- setting a **minimum age** for children to access social media - and what age would be right
- restricting risky **functionalities and design** features that encourage excessive use, such as infinite scrolling and autoplay
- whether the **digital age** of consent should be raised
- how **age verification** and age assurance technologies can support effective implementation
- whether the guidance on the use of mobile **phones in schools** should be put on a statutory footing
- better support for parents, including clearer guidance and simpler **parental controls**”

## 1. Full consultation for anyone

Including: civil society, industry and members of the public

[Take the survey now >](#)

## 2. Survey for parents and carers of young people aged 21 and under

[Take the survey now >](#)

## 3. Survey for children and young people (aged 10 to 21)

[Take the survey now >](#)

**Open until 26<sup>th</sup> May**

**Response “in the Summer”**

## Consultation discussion

# Phones in Schools

### Current guidance:

- all schools *should* be mobile phone-free environments by default (including breaks and lunch)

### Government consulting on:

- Making this statutory (almost 'must')
- Exceptions possible (e.g. medical, young carers)

### Issues

- **'Never seen or heard' vs 'locked away'**
- **'Locked away' vs 'not on the premises'**
  - Issues with travel to / from school (brick phone; none?)
- **Cost**
- **Transition**

# Social media (&c.)

## Government consulting on:

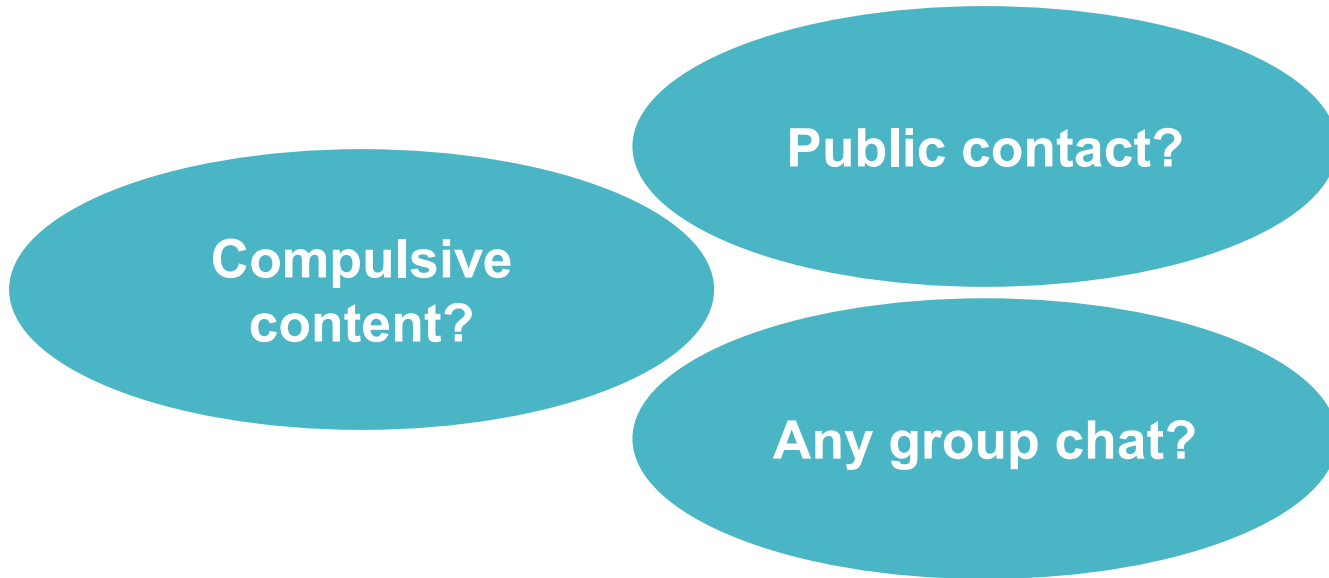
- Minimum age overall
- Minimum age for certain functions
- Screen time / curfews

## Issues

- **Some oppose overall**
  - Pluses; off-the-hook; darker places; won't seek help; cliff edge
  - NSPCC, Molly Rose Foundation & IWF oppose
- **Age-limit specifics (vs 'social media' in general)**
  - Live streaming; disappearing messages
  - Send/receive indecent images
  - Location-sharing
  - Stranger-pairing (e.g. on networked games)
  - Addictive features (infinite scroll, autoplay, likes, alerts, recommender algorithms)
- **Should there be a blanket curfew / per-app time limit**

Consultation discussion

# What do we mean by 'social media'?



Australia ban definition excludes messaging (WhatsApp) and gaming (Roblox)

# Other things

- Parental controls
- Age checking
- 16 & 17 year olds
- Transition
- AI & chatbots
- Whatever happened to the Metaverse?



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