

Rt Hon. Norman Lamb MP  
Chair, Science and Technology Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

27 February 2019

Dear Norman

**RE: Impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health inquiry**

I am writing in response to your Committee's report 'Impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health' and in particular the conclusions and recommendations relevant to the Information Commissioner's Office.

The impact of social media on young people intersects with the work of my office at a number of points. I have submitted evidence to two recent inquiries of the House of Commons Digital Culture Media and Sport Committee that have subject matter overlap with your report. I attach the ICO's responses to both recent DCMS Committee inquiries.

The first inquiry looked at "Disinformation and 'fake news'". This initially largely took interest in the ICO's regulatory investigation and action against Facebook, Cambridge Analytica and others in the data misuse in political campaigning area. However the scope of the inquiry widened over time and engaged the wider area of internet harms, of which children's health and well-being is a prominent part. Addiction, self-esteem, depression and anxiety, and social isolation are all potential dangers that were identified by your inquiry and which have informed our developing work in this area. The ICO set out our view on our place in the regulatory framework of internet harms and what we currently can do in supplementary evidence.

The second inquiry is looking at 'immersive and addictive technologies'. Of particular interest is the use of data to drive or target these types of technologies. This is a concern for my office insofar as personal data about an

individual is used to keep that person, who can often be vulnerable and young, interacting with technology as long as possible.

Across both these areas the ICO is engaged in a number of work streams which are outlined in greater detail in the attached documents, but include most pertinently the creation of an 'age appropriate design code'. This is one of the statutory codes that the ICO is required to produce under the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and will contribute significantly towards helping technology designers and those who process children's data online to ensure that from the outset their products are created in a way that is safe, healthy and positive for children and young people.

I note that the Committee's report specifically references funding for the ICO. As you know the DPA 2018 introduced a new model for funding the ICO's data protection responsibilities. At this stage, I am confident that pay flexibility, combined with the new funding model allows me to recruit the expertise needed to carry out my expanded regulatory remit under the new data protection regime. However, the new funding model is only a few months old so we will continue to work closely with Government to keep it under review.

Your committee had a question in relation to my evidence to the DCMS Committee in November 2018, where I was asked which powers my office needed in addition to those already granted under DPA 2018. As I set out in my report on my investigation into data analytics for political purposes and my subsequent oral evidence to that committee, the ICO lacks the power to compel individuals to interview. In fact, a number of those individuals we requested to submit to voluntary interviews refused. It remains my view that this is an essential tool in order to fully facilitate transparency and accountability.

My office remains ready to assist your committee further in its understanding of the impact of social media and screen use on young people's health. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours Sincerely,



Elizabeth Denham  
UK Information Commissioner