

Youth Select Committee

Youth Violence and Social Media

Youth Select Committee

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Summary

Whilst instances of youth violence have fallen in recent years, the total number of instances of youth violence remains higher than it was 10 years ago. Young people are now increasingly living their lives online, on social media platforms, where a significant number are viewing violent content. As a group of young people, we feel passionately about this issue, and have set out to better understand the impacts of social media on young people, the impact of youth violence, and what can be done to prevent that violence in the first instance.

In a survey by the Youth Endowment Fund, 25 percent of young people surveyed in England and Wales stated they had experiences where social media platforms suggested violent content to them. Whilst evidence does not conclude that there is a causal link between viewing violent content and incidence of real-world violence, it is clear it does have an impact on young people and how they view violence, and we believe that young people should be protected from exposure to violent or inappropriate content on social media. Recognising the risk of online harms, the Government and Ofcom are putting in place an ambitious regulatory system, to ensure companies remove certain kinds of harmful content, such as content encouraging or assisting self-harm and inciting violence and ensure that their sites are age-appropriate. However, we heard concerns about the pace and efficacy of this regulatory approach. We believe that greater publicity and transparency, focusing on highlighting both good and bad practice by social media companies, will drive better behaviour from them.

Whilst there have been initiatives aimed at tackling youth violence over the past 10 years, there has not been sufficient focus on prevention. For prevention to be effective, it should be on a sustainable, funded footing, and targeted, and requires a joined-up approach between agencies, charities, local and central government. Youth work and ‘third spaces’, safe places other than home and school for young people, are key violence-prevention mechanisms, and can also help to identify young people coming to harm online. However, youth services have experienced significant cuts in the last decade. The current Government is establishing a ‘Young Futures’ programme, which seeks to mirror the earlier Sure Start programme, to establish youth hubs and prevent young people from becoming involved in violence and establish youth hubs. If properly funded and implemented,

this programme presents an exciting opportunity to transform youth services. However, limited information, targets and funding plans have been published to date.

Educating children about the risks of the online world can keep young people safe both online and in the real world. In order to deliver media literacy education confidently and effectively, teachers and youth workers need the right support and training. Parents and carers also have a role to play in keeping their children safe. Yet, despite the existence of resources and awareness campaigns, many parents and carers feel overwhelmed by or do not understand the online world.

Police forces across the country are working hard to address youth violence, with many forces having a child-first approach which recognises the different needs and vulnerabilities of children. However, we heard that many young people, including those most at risk of youth violence, mistrust the police. The Government's renewed focus on community-based approaches, through the Safer Streets Mission and Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, has the potential to rebuild trust, if it is delivered effectively and innovatively engages with young people online.

Tackling youth violence and keeping young people safe online is a policy area that spans multiple Government departments. In order to ensure policy is effective, there should be a joined-up approach to working cross-Government—something which should be supported by the Government's aspiration to be a Mission-Led Government.

Young people have been the driving force behind this report, and young people should be consulted on policies that impact them to ensure they are fit for purpose. We have heard little evidence that Ofcom has engaged with young people on online safety, and by the Government on its Young Futures programme.

1 Introduction

The prevalence of youth violence

1. Violence is a serious issue for young people. The latest figures published by the Office for National Statistics show that teenage victims, aged 13 to 19, were far more likely to be killed by a knife or a sharp instrument (82 percent) than for victims of all ages (41 percent). This is an increase on the previous year (73 percent). In 2023–24, 53 of 64 homicide victims aged between 13 and 19 (83 percent) were killed with a sharp instrument.¹
2. The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) told us that according to a survey of 10,000 young people in England and Wales:
 - One in five children have been a victim of some sort of violence in the past year.
 - Nine percent of respondents were victims of serious violence.
 - 16 percent said they had perpetrated violence themselves.
 - Physical assault was the most common type of violence experienced, reported by 11 percent of 13–17-year-olds.²
3. In March 2023, a study conducted jointly by public bodies, including Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission, concluded that the extent and impact of youth violence is more serious than adults realise. The report looked at how local partnerships and services in England respond to young people and their families, when young people are affected by serious youth violence. While the inspectorates found examples of local partnerships doing effective work to reduce serious youth violence, the report notes that these practices are not being applied consistently. It found that a failure to consistently identify serious youth violence as a safeguarding issue is leaving too many children at serious risk of harm, and called for the Government to issue

1 Office for National Statistics, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2023](#), 8 February 2024

2 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

comprehensive guidance on how partners including, but not limited to, the local authority, police, and health services, should address harm outside the family.³

Violence and social media

4. Research by the Children’s Commissioner for England found that 91 percent of children in England use a social media platform.⁴ According to a recent survey of 10,000 young people, 70 percent of 13–17-year-olds reported seeing some type of real-world violence on social media in the past 12 months.⁵ The most common form of violence viewed online is fights involving young people, reported by over half of 13-17-year olds.⁶ Additionally, research commissioned by Ofcom found that young people first see violent content while at primary school.⁷ A YEF survey found that 91 percent of those young people who had perpetrated violence said they had seen violence on social media.⁸
5. As explored in Chapter 2, the extent to which exposure to violent content links to incidents of real-world violence is not well-understood. It is important to highlight that the evidence which we have received and drawn upon does not conclude that there is a causal link. In this inquiry, we sought to better understand young people’s experience of violence both online and offline, identify recommendations for policymakers and, most importantly, as a group of young people, to participate in the discussion.

Our inquiry process

6. The Youth Select Committee is a National Youth Agency and UK Parliament initiative, funded by the UK Government’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The 2024 Youth Select Committee consists of 12 young people, aged between 14 and 18, each representing a different region of the UK. The Committee is drawn from the UK-wide Youth Parliament, which is made up of over 300 elected young people. Youth Parliament elections are held

3 Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, HM Inspectorate of Probation, [Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children](#), 20 November 2024

4 Children’s Commissioner, [“I’ve seen horrible things”: children’s experiences of the online world](#), October 2024

5 Written evidence from Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

6 Written evidence from Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

7 Family Kids & Youth, [Understanding Pathways to Online Content Among Children](#), March 2024

8 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

in every part of the UK, typically in schools, every two years.⁹ Following a series of Committee discussions, we agreed to pursue social media and youth violence as the basis of our inquiry.

7. The conclusions and recommendations made in this report are based on the evidence gathered during the course of our inquiry. The Committee launched its public call for written evidence in November 2024, in which it called on experts, youth organisations and policy influencers to participate in the inquiry. In particular, the Committee encouraged young people from across the UK to submit evidence and share their own experiences of social media content that depicts serious violence. We received 14 written submissions to our public call for evidence.¹⁰ We held oral evidence sessions in Parliament over two days in December 2024, during which we heard from 14 witnesses across five panels. We would like to thank all those who contributed to our inquiry. Our conclusions are in **bold** and our recommendations, to which we expect a UK Government response, are in ***bold italic***.

Terminology and definitions

8. At the outset, we decided to agree shared terminology for the purposes of this inquiry. Using the scope of the Home Office’s Serious Violence Strategy,¹¹ we defined ‘youth violence’ as: specific types of crime such as knife crime, homicide, gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent such as in gangs, committed by or against young people. For this reason, the inquiry did not examine other areas of youth violence or online harms. Throughout our inquiry, and within this report, we have adopted the United Nations’ ‘young people’ definition of “persons between the age of 15 and 24 years”.¹²

9 National Youth Agency, [UK Youth Parliament](#), [last accessed 06/02/2025]

10 All written evidence can be found at: [Youth Select Committee written evidence volume, 2024-2025](#), March 2025

11 UK Parliament written questions, answers and statements, [Crimes of Violence](#), May 2018

12 United Nations, [Definition of Youth](#) (accessed 1 February 2025)

2 Regulation of social media

9. In this chapter, we examine stakeholder concerns voiced about the regulatory framework for social media platforms and the effectiveness of its mechanisms, the importance of positive incentives for the technology industry, and the need for further research into the links between online violent content and offline experiences.

The need for regulation

10. The Government has previously acknowledged that “the Internet is a powerful force for good” and has become an integral part of everyday life for most people in the UK.¹³ In 2023, Ofcom reported that 97 percent of 3 to 17-year-olds spend time online.¹⁴
11. The Youth Endowment Fund’s 2024 survey of 10,000 young people aged between 13 and 17 found that 70 percent have encountered some form of violence on social media in the past 12 months.¹⁵ This was also echoed in Serlby Park Academy’s written evidence submission, where students stated that social media platforms lack sufficient safety controls, as age-rated and violent content remain easy to access and share. They reported that, in some circumstances, “people would be offered something in return [for] doing something violent”.¹⁶
12. Several witnesses voiced concerns about the algorithms used by social media platforms. These algorithms enable violent and harmful content to be easily accessed and shared, precisely because they predict that this type of content is the most engaging.¹⁷ Results from the National Police Chief’s Council’s survey, published in April 2024, indicated that:

Platforms unintentionally or intentionally promote and/or share violent fights and do not take responsibility for persistently harmful content.¹⁸

13 Written evidence from His Majesty’s Government to the House of Lords Communications Select Committee, [IRN0109 - Evidence on The internet: to regulate or not to regulate?](#), June 2018

14 Ofcom, [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes 2023](#), March 2023

15 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

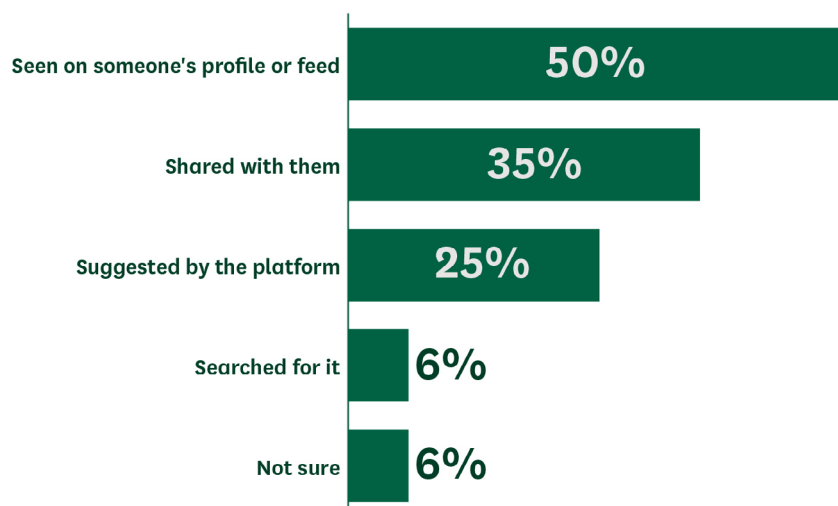
16 Written evidence from Serlby Park Academy ([YSC003](#))

17 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#)), Centre for Young Lives ([YSC005](#)), Future Views Today ([YSC001](#)), Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) ([YSC006](#))

18 Written evidence from the National Police Chief’s Council ([YSC004](#))

13. In September 2024, Almudena Lara, Ofcom’s Online Safety Policy Development Director, told the BBC that algorithms from all the major social media companies have been recommending harmful content to children, even if it is unintentional.¹⁹ Evidence from the Young People’s Action Group working with the London’s Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), suggests that social media companies’ business models prioritise engagement and user growth, which often conflicts with the robust protection “necessary to truly ensure safe online experiences.”²⁰ Revealing Reality told us that some social media designers admitted that they are driven by the company’s business metrics to increase engagement among children, so they spend more time on their platforms. As a result, platforms include features that enable easier sharing of content.²¹ YEF research indicates that a quarter of respondents who saw violent content online did so after it was suggested by the platform.²²

How young people reported encountering violent content on social media



Respondents could select multiple answers, so the total exceeds 100%.

Note: figures add up to over 100%, as respondents could indicate they had encountered violence online in multiple ways, such as seeing violence on someone’s profile and violences being suggested by the platform.

Source: [YEF children, violence and vulnerability 2024](#)

19 BBC News, [Social media: Why algorithms show violence to boys](#), September 2024

20 Written evidence from London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

21 [Q25](#) Olivia Nettleton

22 Youth Endowment Fund, [Children, violence and vulnerability 2024](#), November 2024

14. **Social media companies' business models and algorithms are designed to promote engaging content for young people and may result in companies inadvertently promoting violent content or content which incites violence. Regulation should act as a deterrent, driving social media companies to ensure content on their platforms is age appropriate.**

Regulatory framework

15. To address concerns regarding online safety and the proliferation of illegal, violent and harmful content online, Parliament passed the Online Safety Act in 2023. The Act aims to protect children and adults online, creating a range of new duties and responsibilities for social media platforms and search engines, and making them responsible for users' safety on their platforms. The Act made Ofcom the regulator for online safety, granting the regulator additional powers and duties, and requiring it to implement new rules to ensure that companies have effective systems in place to protect users from harm.²³
16. As part of the implementation of the Act, and before the safety regime can take real effect, Ofcom must produce formal codes of practice and guidance for regulated service providers, risk registers and pieces of research, setting out different parts of the regulations.²⁴
17. The Act grants Ofcom new powers, which enable it to act against non-complying companies, such as imposing fines of up to the greater of £18 million or 10 percent of their qualifying worldwide revenue. The regulator is required to publish its enforcement actions, unless they are commercially sensitive.²⁵ Ofcom will also be able to hold companies and senior managers (where they are at fault) criminally liable, if they fail to comply with the regulator's enforcement notices relating to specific child safety duties.²⁶
18. The National Youth Agency (NYA) and Catch22 acknowledged the Act's significance in regulating harmful online content.²⁷ Catch22, a charity and social business supporting people who face social disadvantage, told us that:

23 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Online Safety Act: explainer - GOV. UK](#), May 2024

24 Committee of Public Accounts, [Preparedness for online safety regulation](#), February 2024

25 Legislation.gov.uk, [Online Safety Act 2023](#), January 2024

26 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Online Safety Act: explainer - GOV. UK](#), May 2024

27 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#)), Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

Current UK Government policy, particularly through frameworks such as the Online Safety Act, demonstrates a commitment to protecting young people from harmful content and preventing the promotion of serious youth violence.²⁸

19. The UK Safety Internet Centre²⁹ praised the intention to make safer by design a key outcome of the Act’s implementation.³⁰ Internet Matters³¹ told us that the regulation should create a culture in which companies race to invest in children’s safety and that Ofcom’s latest guidance on highly effective age assurance (HEAA) makes safe and age-appropriate online environment for every child in the UK possible.³² Professor Victoria Nash, Associate Professor and Senior Policy Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, observed that financial penalties introduced as part of the Act’s enforcement measures “will hurt, and quite large fines are possible.”³³ Social media company Meta³⁴ told us that they share the Government’s objective of “making the internet safer while protecting its vast social and economic benefits”.³⁵

Compliance as a reputational benefit

20. Beyond punitive measures, the Act creates “a big market for technologies that are safe, but also positive and enriching, for young people.”³⁶ In September 2024, Meta began global rollout of Instagram Teen Accounts, which it states has built-in protections which limit who can contact young people and the content they see.³⁷ While it is too early to conclude whether these new protections will make a difference for young people, experts have said that “this level of protection” appears to be more substantial than on other platforms.³⁸

28 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

29 A partnership of three online safety organisations - SWGfL, Childnet International and the Internet Watch Foundation. They provide support and services to children and young people, adults facing online harms, and professionals working with children.

30 Written evidence from the UK Safer Internet Centre ([YSC011](#))

31 A not-for-profit London based organisation, launched in May 2014 by the United Kingdom’s largest internet service providers BT, Sky, TalkTalk and Virgin Media, that offers child internet safety advice to parents, carers and professionals.

32 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

33 [Q25](#) Professor Victoria Nash

34 Meta Platforms, Inc., a multinational technology conglomerate that owns Facebook, Instagram, Threads, WhatsApp and other products

35 Written evidence from Meta ([YSC013](#))

36 [Q25](#) Professor Victoria Nash

37 Written evidence from Meta ([YSC013](#))

38 Parents, [Will the New Instagram Teen Accounts Make a Difference?](#), September 2024

21. Baroness Jones, Minister for Online Safety, told us that there will be a global expectation that the companies will comply with the safety regimes if they wish to retain their customers and service users.³⁹ Dr Mhairi Aitken, Senior Ethics Fellow, Public Policy Programme, at the Alan Turing Institute, noted that there is an increasing public interest in how the social media platforms operate and what safety measures they deploy.⁴⁰
22. We also heard that young consumers themselves may demand safer online spaces. Olivia Nettleton, Associate Director at Revealing Reality, told us that “it does feel like there is a bit of a tipping point in terms of what young people themselves are starting to say about being on social media”, which places pressure on businesses.⁴¹ This is reflected in the views of pupils from Serlby Park Academy, who told us that social media companies should provide more suitable and safer content.⁴²
23. Baroness Jones told us that the Government recognises that implementing a safety regime cannot be done through legislation alone. She said that having a good relationship with the industry is very important, “because they bear a lot of responsibility for all of this.”⁴³ Professor Nash highlighted that “compliance would bring the reputational benefits—being renowned as responsible companies in this space—are worthwhile.”⁴⁴ She noted that the new regulation and changing societal expectations to have safer online environment create a new set of incentives for the industry.⁴⁵
24. **The Committee welcomes measures introduced in the Online Safety Act, which not only place responsibilities on the industry, but also present opportunities to develop technologies that are safe, positive, and enriching for young people.**
25. ***To further incentivise social media companies to develop safer online spaces, the Government should explore options to create a consumer-facing online safety scorecard or standards rating. This would evaluate platforms on their safety measures, responsiveness to harmful content, and efforts to educate users. The scorecard or standards rating would provide users with simple, upfront information about the safety of an online space, enabling them to choose safer spaces.***

39 [Q56](#), see also Global Online Safety Regulators Network, [Regulatory Index](#), October 2024

40 [Q25](#) Dr Mhairi Aitken

41 [Q25](#) Olivia Nettleton

42 Written evidence from Serlby Park Academy ([YSC003](#))

43 [Q52](#) Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

44 [Q25](#) Professor Victoria Nash

45 [Q30](#) Professor Victoria Nash

Effectiveness of safety measures

- 26.** Concerns have been raised around the effectiveness of the Online Safety Act’s safety measures, including age assurance and risk assessment mechanisms.
- 27.** Online providers, including social media platforms and search engines, must carry out an assessment to determine whether their platforms “are likely to be accessed by children”.⁴⁶ If a service is likely to be accessed by children, it must complete a “suitable and sufficient” risk assessment and implement safety measures (including age assurance).⁴⁷ The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England observed that Ofcom identified a wide range of risks to children, but did not provide safety measures for all those risks. For example, the service providers are required to name a member of staff who is accountable for online safety, but there is no requirement for the provider to ensure that this person is appropriately trained. They also noted that the risk assessments that social media are required to undertake to identify and address risks to children from using their platforms as a matter of priority are retrospective rather than proactive about identifying emerging risks.⁴⁸
- 28.** Jon Matthews, Service Manager at the Social Switch Project, and Professor Nash told us that it remains unclear how practically Ofcom will be able to tell whether mitigating measures are effective.⁴⁹ They called for greater focus to be placed on the platforms’ transparency, how they are going to better protect and safeguard young people, and how the regulator will enforce any breaches of their guidelines.⁵⁰
- 29.** Baroness Jones told us that, under the Act, social media companies will be expected to carry out risk assessments:
- [The Government is] hoping that the social media companies will take it seriously and properly play ball—that is absolutely essential.⁵¹
- 30.** ‘Age assurance’ is an umbrella term that refers to approaches used to ensure that children are unable to access adult, harmful or otherwise inappropriate online content. This includes age verification techniques that prove that someone is over a certain age.⁵²

46 [Age checks to protect children online - Ofcom](#), March 2025

47 Online Safety Act Network, [A guide to the OSA and its implementation](#), February 2025

48 Children’s Commissioner, [“I’ve seen horrible things”: children’s experiences of the online world](#), October 2024

49 [Q29](#) Professor Victoria Nash, Jon Matthes

50 [Q12](#) Jon Matthews

51 [Q63](#) Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

52 Information Commissioner’s Office, [1. Age assurance](#), January 2024

31. Currently, Ofcom does not require social media companies to use face-scanning technologies to estimate the age of children under 13, as part of the age assurance measures.⁵³ In June 2024, this approach was criticised by several members of the House of Lords and charity leaders, who argued that it fails to enforce minimum age limits on social media platforms.⁵⁴ Andy Burrows, CEO at the Molly Rose Foundation, echoed these concerns, highlighting that:

Enforcing minimum age limits should be a cornerstone of online safety regulation and we encourage Ofcom to reconsider its proposals.⁵⁵

32. Internet Matters called on the regulator to reconsider its stance on age assurance, as a priority, because:

Age assurance is critical to unlocking the effectiveness of many child protection provisions, including both age-appropriate experiences and enforcement of minimum age requirements on platforms.⁵⁶

33. **We are not persuaded that the Online Safety Act is robust enough to enforce minimum age limits on social media platforms and ensure children and young people will be protected from harmful content.**

34. ***While financial penalties issued by Ofcom to social media companies are publicised, we believe further work to publicise poor practice by social media companies would provide a greater incentive for companies to abide by legislation.***

35. ***The Online Safety Act contains interesting novel mechanisms, but it is not yet clear whether these are enforceable in practice. We therefore recommend that the Government should report annually to Parliament on the implementation and operation of the Online Safety Act. This reporting should include: a) social media companies' compliance with Ofcom's regulatory codes, b) fines levied by Ofcom and paid by social media companies, c) whether and how Government departments and public services have engaged with social media companies regarding the implementation and enforcement of the Act. The Government should also consider how this report could incorporate changes caused by other legislation, such as the Crime and Policing Bill.***

53 Preiskel & Co, [Navigating Age Assurance in Online Services](#) July 2024

54 The Telegraph, [Millions of under 13s will be exposed to harmful online content despite crackdown, campaigners warn](#), June 2024

55 The Telegraph, [Millions of under 13s will be exposed to harmful online content despite crackdown, campaigners warn](#), June 2024

56 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

The role of influencers

36. The role of influencers in both spreading potentially harmful content and modelling positive behaviour was also discussed during our inquiry. The YEF reported that “influencers’ presentation of crime as a lucrative career option can seem enticing” to young people in “challenging socioeconomic conditions with concerns about their future opportunities”.⁵⁷
37. The UK Safer Internet Centre suggested that “misogynist influencers... have leveraged their fame to promote polarised far-right extremism” with a focus on “gendered hate”.⁵⁸ Both Ben Lindsay, Chief Executive of the youth violence prevention charity Power the Fight, and Rani Govender, Policy and Regulatory Manager for Child Safety Online at the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), argued such content was influencing how boys were interacting with girls, including in schools.⁵⁹
38. We also heard that there may be financial incentives for influencers to create such content. Jon Matthews noted that “influencers who put out a lot of controversial views have openly declared that they are monetising those views.”⁶⁰
39. Ofcom have stated that investigating specific social media posts does not fall within their remit.⁶¹
40. ***The Government should work with social media companies to address the issue of harmful content being spread by individuals with significant influence over young people, including consideration of how to ensure social media companies do not financially reward such behaviour.***

A slow pace of change

41. Several witnesses said that the pace of the implementation of the Online Safety Act is not quick enough to address issues facing children and young people in the age of fast-moving technologies.⁶² They argued that slow implementation will delay the impact of the Act’s measures, because of the exponential growth of new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI).⁶³

57 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

58 Written evidence from the UK Safer Internet Centre ([YSC011](#))

59 [Q18](#)

60 [Q3](#)

61 Written evidence from National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

62 [Q46](#), written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#)) and National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

63 Written evidence from National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

42. Alongside this, Ben Lindsay told us that a new approach to legislation is needed in the face of rapidly evolving technologies—“it cannot just be a static document”.⁶⁴
43. Dame Diana Johnson MP, Minister for Policing, acknowledged that the pace is not fast enough. However, she stated that:
- People who are legislating [...] are dealing with problems today, but future-proofing legislation is really quite difficult, especially in this area.⁶⁵
44. However, Dr Aitken told us that we should not accept the slower policy response as something inevitable. She said that a government approach to regulation that anticipates these new technologies is possible with the right set of skills and expertise to understand these technologies, “to know what might be happening and what might be the risks—not just today,” but in years to come.⁶⁶

The option of a ban on social media for young people

45. Some witnesses were concerned that the legislation will fail to make online environment safer for children and young people and called for more robust actions. One option that was shared with the Committee was the decision by the Australian Government to ban access to social media for children under 16.⁶⁷ The Centre for Young Lives advocated for raising the minimum age for social media to 16 because they do not believe that Ofcom is sufficiently equipped and empowered to hold “powerful social media companies accountable”.⁶⁸ Ciaran Thapar, Director of Public Affairs and Communications at the YEF, told us that he is supportive of the idea of restricting access to under 16s:

As a long-term vision [...] create a generation in the future that would not be so reliant upon or toxically engaging with social media and the technology.⁶⁹

64 A charity that provides advice to those affected by youth violence/knife crime, provides training and guidance to faith and community groups and acts as a link between community and policy makers; [Q13](#) Ben Lindsay

65 [Q46](#) Dame Diana Johnson MP

66 [Q30](#) Dr Mhairi Aitken

67 BBC, [Australian social media ban on under-16s approved by parliament](#), November 2024

68 Written evidence from the Centre for Young Lives ([YSC005](#))

69 [Q95](#) Ciaran Thapar

46. However, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) emphasised the many benefits of being online while acknowledging that platforms need to do more to create safe, child-friendly interactive spaces without having the exposure to risks such as violent content.⁷⁰ Rani Govender told us that “young people have a real fear that a blanket ban would take away the benefits”, such as being part of a community, forming connections and learning about the wider world.⁷¹

47. We heard that an age ban is unlikely to be effective, because technical measures are relatively easy to circumvent.⁷² Both Patrick Green, CEO at the Ben Kinsella Trust,⁷³ and Will Gardner, Chief Executive at Childnet,⁷⁴ told us that this approach “lets the social media companies off the hook”.⁷⁵ Will Gardner suggested that a ban is unlikely “to lead to necessarily better outcomes for children and young people”.⁷⁶ Dr Aitken stressed that:

We don’t need to accept the ways platforms currently are or how they have been; we can make demands as to how we expect them to be in the future and change that.⁷⁷

48. In December 2024, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology stated that the Government is “not currently minded to support a ban for children under 16”, and the Department stated that, while children “face a significant risk of harm online”, the issue was complex, arguing the Government must “strike the right balance so that children can access the benefits of being online”.⁷⁸ In a Westminster Hall debate in February 2025, on an e-petition calling for social media to be banned for under 16s, the Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms, Sir Chris Bryant MP, recognised the “utter toxicity of large parts of social media” and highlighted comments from the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and technology, that “nothing is off the table”.⁷⁹

70 Written evidence from Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) ([YSC006](#))

71 [Q15](#) Rani Govender

72 [Q29](#) Professor Victoria Nash and [Q15](#) Ben Lindsay

73 Anti-knife crime charity that provides education to young people and campaigns to stop knife crime.

74 UK based charity that provides online safety advice, training resources and is involved in the policy work in the UK and internationally.

75 [Q110](#) Patrick Green and Will Gardner

76 [Q110](#) Will Gardner

77 [Q30](#) Dr Mhairi Aitken

78 UK Parliament’s petitions website, [Introduce 16 as the minimum age for children to have social media](#), December 2024

79 Hansard, UK Parliament, [Social Media Use: Minimum Age](#), February 2025

49. **A social media ban for young people under 16 years old would prevent many young people from accessing the benefits of social media and would do little to make social media websites safer for young people if they can circumvent age assurance mechanisms. We oppose a ban on social media for under-16s and welcome the Government’s current approach opposing such a ban.**

Research into links between online violence and offline experiences

50. Many young people experience violence offline and engage with content online which depicts violence. The Government has committed to addressing this through various measures, including the implementation of the Online Safety Act and giving police new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour.⁸⁰ We heard a range of views on how far exposure to and engagement with violent content online could be linked to violence offline.
51. Research from the Children’s Commissioner showed that many young people encounter graphic and violent content on social media platforms. The research concluded that this exposure can desensitise them to violence, normalise aggressive behaviour and, in some instances, lead to retaliatory violence.⁸¹ Similarly, research by Revealing Reality found that some children, especially those from less socioeconomically advantaged areas, felt incentivised to engage in real-life violence after being exposed to locally generated violent content.⁸² The UK Safer Internet Centre reported that content on social media platforms often glamourises, celebrates and normalises violence, further perpetuating real-world harms.⁸³
52. Research by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit found that social media features such as encrypted messages, location sharing, and anonymity can support the commission of offline acts of violence. They can even lead to the organisation of collective action for the purposes of committing violent crime.⁸⁴
53. However, several witnesses told us that the links between exposure to online content and offline violence are not well-understood. Catch22 argued that:

80 Home Office, [New powers to clamp down on anti-social behaviour](#), November 2024

81 Children’s Commissioner, [“I’ve seen horrible things”: children’s experiences of the online world](#), October 2024; See also [Q21](#) Olivia Nettleton

82 Revealing-Reality, [Anti-social-Media](#), June 2023

83 Written evidence from the UK Safer Internet Centre ([YSC011](#))

84 West Yorkshire Combined Authority, [Social media and violence: a study into the relationship between them and interventions to address this issue in West Yorkshire](#), 2021

Any links between social media and violence should not be understood and approached in isolation and should instead be addressed in its wider context.⁸⁵

54. Ben Lindsay from Power the Fight told us that “violence is never the cause; it is the consequence of something else.” He highlighted that multiple factors should be taken into consideration when addressing violence, such as poverty, a lack of understanding and support for young people with neurodivergence, and family and cultural attitudes towards safeguarding.⁸⁶
55. Professor Nash told us that she had not found “evidence or studies that suggest that consuming more violent content online clearly leads to an increase in violent behaviour offline”.⁸⁷ Dr Mhairi Aitken said that further research is needed “to understand what the connections and links might be”.⁸⁸
56. Findings by the YEF concluded that young people’s exposure to violent content on social media is a significant issue, but that more evidence is needed to establish whether there is a link between online violent content and offline incidents.⁸⁹
57. The Government and the regulators such as Ofcom use research and data to make decisions, and to shape policy in this area.⁹⁰ For example, Revealing Reality recently carried out research on behalf of Ofcom, looking into online harms and their effects on young people.⁹¹ The Minister for Online Safety confirmed that the Government has launched a research project investigating whether using a mobile phone is harmful for young people.⁹² However, key evidence gaps remain.
58. **Research linking the exposure to violence online to “real life” youth violence is limited, and more evidence is needed to determine the impact this exposure has on young people and their likelihood to engage in real-life violence.**

85 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

86 [Q4](#) Ben Lindsay and [Q15](#) Ben Lindsay

87 [Q22](#) Professor Victoria Nash

88 [Q22](#) Dr Mhairi Aitken

89 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

90 Ofcom, [Our research - Ofcom](#), [last accessed March 2025]

91 Revealing Reality, [Research into risk factors that may lead children to harm online](#), October 2022

92 [Q49](#) Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

59. ***The Government should conduct and publish a rapid evaluation of existing evidence of links between online experiences and incidents of violence. If the evidence is inconclusive, or if gaps in knowledge persist, the Government should commission research assessing the extent to which online experiences drive offline violence. The evaluation and subsequent research should feed into post-legislative scrutiny of the Online Safety Act.***

Weapons sales and social media companies

60. Content promoting the sale of weapons is illegal under the Online Safety Act.⁹³ and written evidence from Ofcom states that social media platforms will be required to assess the risk of such content appearing on their platforms, and “have robust governance measures to manage these risks”.⁹⁴ When companies judge there to be a high risk, they must resource and train teams to quickly identify and remove such content.⁹⁵
61. Written evidence from Meta states that buying, selling or trading weapons is prohibited by Meta’s commerce policy, and advertising such content relating to bladed items is also prohibited. They also state that for non-paid content, “the policy requires bladed items sales... to be age-gated to +18”.⁹⁶ When such policies are violated, Meta may take a range of actions “including but not limited to applying warning labels, removal of content and banning of accounts”.⁹⁷
62. Despite this, the YEF argues that “there is not currently enough regulation to prevent the online sale and promotion of weapons to young people”.⁹⁸ In September 2024, Commander Stephen Clayman, the National Police Chiefs Council’s lead for knife crime, suggested that social media companies were “wilfully blind” to weapon sales on their platforms.⁹⁹ Similarly, in January 2025, when discussing murders in Southport in July 2024, the Prime Minister stated that “it remains shockingly easy for our children to get their hands of deadly knives”.¹⁰⁰

93 Written evidence from Ofcom ([YSC007](#))

94 Written evidence from Ofcom ([YSC007](#))

95 Written evidence from Ofcom ([YSC007](#))

96 Written evidence from Meta ([YSC013](#)); ‘Age gated’ here would mean ‘restricted to those over 18 years old’

97 Written evidence from Meta ([YSC013](#))

98 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

99 The Independent, [Social media giants ‘wilfully blind’ to knives sold on platforms, police chief warns](#), September 2024

100 The Sun, [No words can express brutality of Southport murders but I won’t duck questions about why this act was allowed to happen](#), January 2025

63. In February 2025, the Home Office published the independent end-to-end review of online knife sales.¹⁰¹ The review found that there are “serious flaws in the system, particularly with age verification and point of sale and delivery” which allows individuals to sell knives “by using social media platforms to sell to others”.¹⁰² The review stated that, while many social media companies prohibit knife sales, sellers may advertise through social media posts and move buyers to other platforms to conduct the sale.¹⁰³ The review recommended that social media companies should be required to remove prohibited materials within 48 hours of police notification, and called for improved awareness for law enforcement agencies to request removal of content which breaks the law.¹⁰⁴ Alongside this, the review recommended social media companies be required to provide information regarding individuals and companies offering to supply weapons and knives online.¹⁰⁵

64. ***The Government should strengthen requirements on social media companies to prevent the sale of weapons and the promotion of the sale of weapons through their platforms. It should do this by building on the recommendations set out in the independent end-to-end review of online knife sales, and by working with young people, law enforcement agencies and social media companies.***

101 Home Office [Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales](#), February 2025

102 Home Office [Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales](#), February 2025

103 Home Office [Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales](#), February 2025

104 Home Office [Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales](#), February 2025

105 Home Office [Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales](#), February 2025

3 Youth services and preventative work

Focusing on young people most at risk

65. During the course of our inquiry, we heard that there are many structural drivers of violence impacting young people, and not all young people are equally likely to be involved in violence.¹⁰⁶ There are various factors relating to a young person’s background, characteristics and experiences that put some children and young people at greater risk.¹⁰⁷
66. The Government’s youth justice statistics for 2022–23 indicate that instances of youth violence are geographically concentrated.¹⁰⁸ More young people are affected by violence in London, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands than in other parts of England and Wales. Additionally, young people living in the most deprived areas¹⁰⁹ of England and Wales are 2.5 times more likely to be exposed to violent crime than those in the least deprived areas.¹¹⁰ Ben Lindsay told us that poverty is a key driver of youth violence, as areas impacted by serious youth violence tend to be poorer, recognising that drivers of youth violence are complex.¹¹¹

106 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#)), the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#)), [Q4](#)

107 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

108 Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, [Youth Justice statistics: 2022 to 2023](#), gov.uk, 25 January 2024

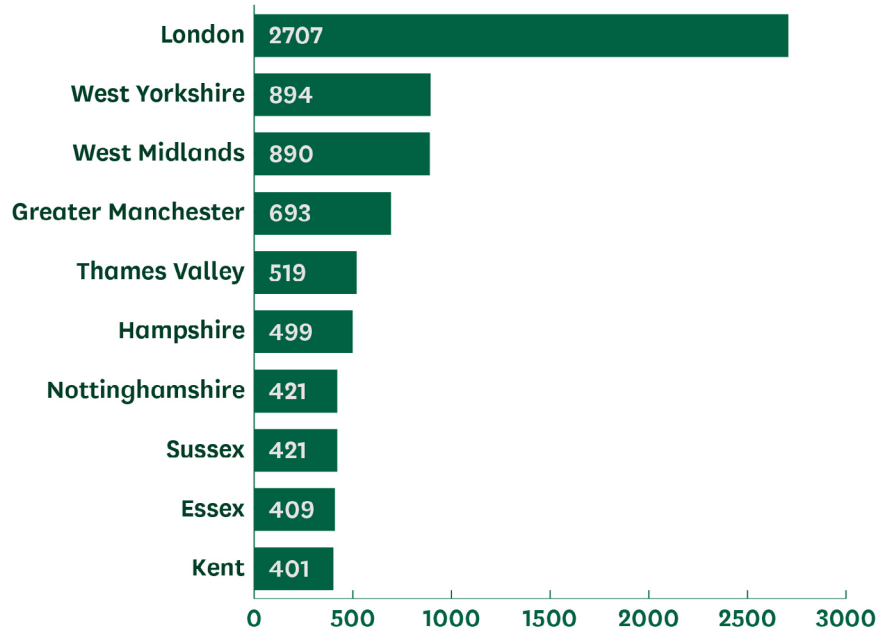
109 Defined as in the highest 10 percent of absolute poverty.

110 Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, [Youth Justice statistics: 2022 to 2023](#), gov.uk, 25 January 2024

111 [Q4](#)

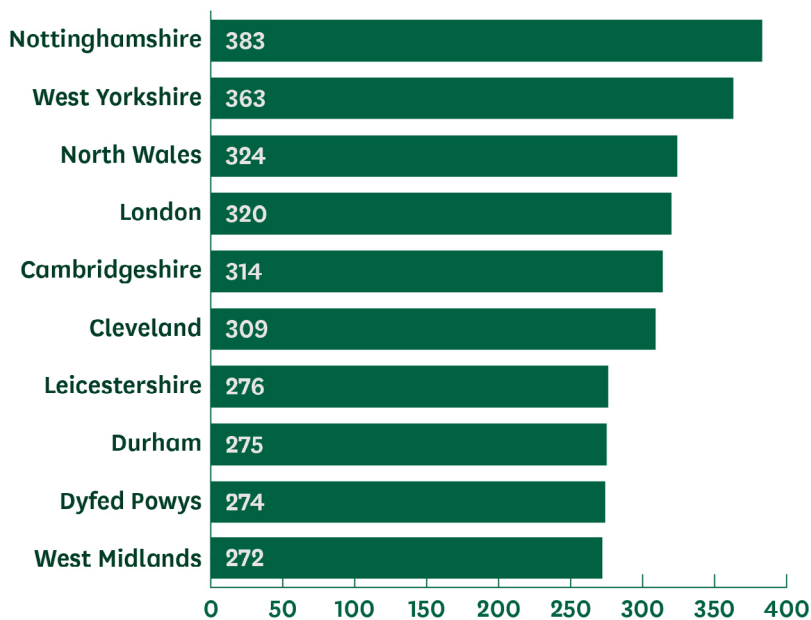
Top 10 police force areas on numbers of violent offences committed by children and rate per head (England and Wales):

Total number of violent offences



Source: Youth Justice Board. 2021/22 & 2022/23 average

Violent offences per 100,000



Source: Youth Justice Board. 2021/22 & 2022/23 average

- 67.** We heard that those who are persistently absent, suspended or excluded from school are far more likely to be victims of and engage in violent behaviour than their peers.¹¹² According to the Youth Endowment Fund’s survey, published in November 2024, 74 percent of excluded pupils report perpetrating violence, compared to just 16 percent across the population.¹¹³
- 68.** Children and young people at risk of exploitation are also at significant risk of being involved in violence. Those who have been approached to transport or store drugs and weapons are six times more likely to engage in violence than their peers.¹¹⁴ Young people who are in gangs or carrying weapons are seven times more likely to commit acts of violence than their peers.¹¹⁵
- 69.** Black young people are over-represented among victims of violence. According to the most recent dataset on homicides in England and Wales, over 35 percent of all homicides involving victims who were 16 to 24 years old in the year ending March 2023 were Black, which is six times more than their share of the population. This is higher than 10 years ago, when 20 percent of 16–24-year-old victims were Black.¹¹⁶
- 70.** In much of the evidence we received, we heard that neurodivergent young people are more at risk of engaging in violence than their peers.¹¹⁷ Strikingly, one in three people moving through the justice system are thought to be neurodivergent, many undiagnosed as a child. In comparison, only one in six people in the mainstream population are thought to be neurodivergent.¹¹⁸ Ben Lindsay told us that it is not easy for young people to be assessed for neurodiversity. He said that long NHS waiting lists and the high cost of private assessments could mean that young people fall into the justice system simply because they are not being assessed and given the right support.¹¹⁹ We also heard that young people with special educational needs, particularly cognitive or learning difficulties, are similarly at a heightened risk.¹²⁰

112 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#)), [Q4](#), [Q70](#)

113 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

114 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

115 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

116 Office for National Statistics, [Appendix tables: homicide in England and Wales](#), 8 February 2024

117 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#))

118 HM Inspectorate of Probation, [Neurodiversity - a whole-child approach for youth justice](#), July 2021

119 [Q5](#)

120 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#)), [Q70](#)

- 71. While violence affects young people across the UK, it is vital that the Government and local agencies target the needs of those most at risk of engaging in youth violence, including those in areas where violence is concentrated, who are neurodiverse, have special educational needs and/or are persistently absent or excluded from school.**

Effective prevention of youth violence

- 72.** Stakeholders, including policing bodies, have said there is a need to use non-criminal justice interventions, a so-called public health approach,¹²¹ to address the underlying reasons why people commit serious violence, rather than focusing on creating criminal justice deterrents. The Government's 2018 Serious Youth Violence strategy and the creation of Violence Reduction Units across England and Wales were designed to bring together local agencies, in order to encourage this public health approach to serious violence.¹²² The previous Government also established various initiatives aimed at preventing knife crime and serious violence, such as legislating for the Serious Violence Duty. The previous Government also funding the establishment of the Youth Endowment Fund, an organisation designed to fund and develop early intervention projects, targeting those young people most at risk of involvement in serious violence in England and Wales.¹²³
- 73.** The Serious Violence Duty mandates that councils and local services work together to share information and target interventions, in order to prevent and reduce serious violence.¹²⁴ Violence Reduction Units are intended to bring together police, local government, health and education professionals, and other key partners to encourage a 'multi-agency' response to the local drivers of serious violence, and agreement to take necessary action to tackle these.¹²⁵
- 74.** There is some early evidence that points to Violence Reduction Units' role in helping to reduce crime. However, a 2023 report by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services which examined how well police address serious youth violence, found that some Violence Reduction Units did not have a consistent approach to allocating resources for reducing serious youth violence.¹²⁶ It found that interventions were not evaluated

121 Greater London Violence Reduction Unit, [A public health approach to reducing violence](#), [last accessed March 2025]

122 See HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, and HM Government, [Violence Reduction Unit Collection](#), January 2024

123 House of Commons Library, [Knives, offensive weapons and serious violence](#), 17 January 2025

124 Home Office, [Serious Violence Duty](#), gov.uk, 16 December 2022

125 Home Office, [Violence Reduction Unit interim guidance](#), gov.uk, March 2020

126 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service, [An inspection of how well the police tackle serious youth violence](#), 8 March 2023

effectively or, in some cases, at all. The report recommended that the Home Office define processes for Violence Reduction Units to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions.¹²⁷

- 75.** Meanwhile, a report on inspections of multi-agency approaches in six areas found examples of some local partnerships doing effective work. However, it highlighted that this is not happening in all areas. The report found that a lack of comprehensive guidance from Government about how partners should work together to safeguard young people at risk of serious violence is exacerbating these problems.¹²⁸
- 76.** Catch22 told us that violence impacting young people is preventable, and that prevention requires a cross-governmental approach at both national and local level.¹²⁹ They emphasised the need for collaborative prevention strategies, and stated that the Government should do more to foster partnerships between the voluntary charity sectors, statutory agencies and social media companies.¹³⁰ This echoes evidence from Ruth Halkon, a Police Foundation Researcher, who emphasised the importance of a multi-agency approach in effectively preventing youth violence.¹³¹ However, the YEF welcomed the Government’s plans to introduce ‘prevention partnerships’ as they seek to solve, what they identified as the “lack of co-operation”, between different parts of the Government and different services in a local area.¹³²
- 77.** According to the Police Foundation, “a lot of research has been done to show what works” to prevent youth violence.¹³³ We heard that examples of effective violence prevention techniques include trauma counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy, explaining to young people that carrying a knife is more likely to make them a victim, and focused deterrence interventions.¹³⁴ Ciaran Thapar told us that focused deterrence is a “exciting” new type of policing, that combines the offer of harsh punishment of the criminal justice route with the option of widespread multi-agency support in the local area.¹³⁵

127 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service, [An inspection of how well the police tackle serious youth violence](#), 8 March 2023

128 Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, HM Inspectorate of Probation, [Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children](#), 20 November 2024

129 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

130 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

131 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

132 [Q90](#) Ciaran Thapar

133 [Q84](#) Ruth Halkon

134 [Q84](#) Ruth Halkon

135 [Q85](#) Ciaran Thapar

78. We heard that there are deep systemic, intergenerational social problems which are a barrier to effective prevention of youth violence.¹³⁶ In particular, Ciaran Thapar told us about issues surrounding racial disproportionality in how young people experience violence. To combat this, he called for the “positive but expensive solution” of widespread access to psychotherapy, as well as efforts to reduce exclusions in schools, which both disproportionately affect Black young people.¹³⁷

79. Diana Johnson told us that, over the last 10 years, there has not been a focus on prevention when it comes to addressing youth violence.¹³⁸ She said that prevention is one of the Department’s “fundamental priorities”.¹³⁹ One strand of the Government’s Young Futures programme¹⁴⁰ involves “prevention partnerships”, which Diana Johnson told us will bring together public sector bodies and organisations to work towards a targeted response towards at-risk young people.¹⁴¹

80. **We recognise that there are complex and often numerous factors that make a young person vulnerable to youth violence. We welcome the Government’s acknowledgement of the importance of collaborative prevention techniques to tackle serious youth violence.**

81. ***There is an urgent need for services to be empowered to work together and ensure these approaches are effective. The Government should introduce dedicated funding for local authorities to pursue multi-agency approaches to youth violence, which prioritise, but are not exclusive to, those most at risk of youth violence such as neurodivergent young people, those with special educational or mental health needs, and/or are persistently absent or excluded from school.***

82. ***The Government should conduct a rapid evaluation of Violence Reduction Units and multi-agency responses to serious youth violence, focusing on outcomes they have achieved. This should result in updated and comprehensive guidance on how local partners should work together to prevent serious youth violence, and how to prioritise the needs of children most at-risk. Where VRUs and other responses have proved effective, the Government should introduce longer term investment for the continued delivery of those programmes.***

136 [Q85](#) Ciaran Thapar

137 [Q72](#), [Q85](#), see also YEF, [Children, violence and vulnerability 2024](#), November 2024

138 [Q43](#)

139 [Q47](#)

140 For further information on the Young Futures programme, see paragraphs 92-99

141 [Q43](#)

Youth services

The provision of youth services

- 83.** Throughout our inquiry, the role of youth services has been a key theme. Several witnesses emphasised the importance of young people’s access to trusted adults, who can support young people who are at risk of engaging in violence or being exposed to violent and harmful content on social media.¹⁴² The National Youth Agency (NYA), the professional, statutory and regulatory body for youth work in England, highlighted the important role that youth work plays as a “preventative profession”, which provides young people with both “trusted adults to speak to and places to belong”.¹⁴³ Similarly, the Greater London Authority’s Violence Reduction Unit told us that youth work is key to the early intervention and prevention of youth violence. The organisation told us that the strong relationships formed with trusted adults creates a “vital” network of support for young people who feel unsafe online or experience escalating online risks.¹⁴⁴
- 84.** The NYA told us that, while teachers, schools and colleges play an important role in supporting young people when issues are raised, the capacity of school staff is “severely stretched”.¹⁴⁵ Some young people and families may also “mistrust statutory services”.¹⁴⁶ The NYA highlights that youth workers can help to bridge this gap, supporting young people in the community and in schools by helping with the “early identification of issues” and “referral to specialist services”.¹⁴⁷ We heard in-person support systems remain vital for tackling online harms.¹⁴⁸ Youth workers have told the Violence Reduction Unit that “really knowing” a young person allows them to spot early signs of online harm, even if a young person has not yet disclosed it.¹⁴⁹
- 85.** However, several witnesses told us about the strains and pressures currently experienced by the youth sector. The NYA told us there is a recruitment and retention crisis in the youth work sector; fewer people gaining the necessary youth work qualifications; and significant funding challenges.¹⁵⁰ Ben Lindsay stated:

142 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#)), London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

143 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

144 Written evidence from the London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

145 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

146 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

147 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

148 Written evidence from the London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

149 Written evidence from the London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

150 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

We have to talk about austerity and how the funding for youth sector organisations has been absolutely torn apart. When we look at the last 10-15 years, we see that actually there are no youth centres around.¹⁵¹

86. We heard that reversing “more than a decade of austerity” and public services cuts will “take a long time” and there is a “long way to go”.¹⁵² From the voluntary sector perspective, Ben Lindsay told us that, while there are lots of organisations in the youth and voluntary sector doing good work in this space, it is not enough.¹⁵³ He told us that charities need “more support, more funding, more resources” to bridge the gaps created by public sector spending cuts.¹⁵⁴
87. Through consultations, the Greater London Authority Violence Reduction Unit found that familiarity with social media varies among youth workers. The organisation noted that those in the sector recognise the need for dedicated training to help practitioners keep up with evolving trends on social media.¹⁵⁵ The London Violence Reduction Unit noted its work through the Social Switch project, which provides online harms training to youth workers, to equip them with the skills needed to support young people encountering online harms on social media.¹⁵⁶
88. We heard there are fewer spaces outside of schools and homes—so—called ‘third spaces’—for young people to express themselves positively through arts, music, sports or skills development.¹⁵⁷ Ciaran Thapar emphasised the importance of providing space for expression and creativity via youth work is an important part of youth violence prevention.¹⁵⁸
89. Ofsted has said that the period after school has ended between 4pm and 6pm is the most dangerous time for young people.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, a study conducted by Queen Mary University of London found that young people are most likely to be victims of knife crime at this time.¹⁶⁰

151 [Q4](#)

152 [Q91](#)

153 [Q16](#)

154 [Q16](#)

155 Written evidence from the London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

156 Written evidence from the London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

157 [Q85](#)

158 [Q93](#)

159 Ofsted, [Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime](#), March 2019

160 British Medical Journal, [Under 16s are at highest risk of being stabbed going home from school, UK study finds](#), 7 November 2018

The Young Futures programme

90. As stated in its manifesto, the Government wants to focus on preventative services through the Young Futures programme, which is a combination of youth hubs and prevention partnerships.¹⁶¹ The Government has said that it is committed to intervening earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime and that its new Young Futures programme is an essential part of achieving that.¹⁶²
91. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper MP has also said the Home Office modelled Young Futures on Sure Start, the early-years initiative introduced by the Labour Government in 1999. The Home Secretary said that this would involve placing youth workers in Accident & Emergency units, custody centres and pupil referral units to help those with mental health issues or engaging in criminal behaviour.¹⁶³ On this point, Ciaran Thapar told us the scale and funding support for Young Futures should also match that of Sure Start:
- If Labour wants to relabel Youth Futures as an equivalent to Sure Start, which was ... very successful, the scale of that was tenfold or twentyfold funding. The idea of having youth hubs is great but there needs to be a genuine roll-out of them across the country, especially in dense areas.¹⁶⁴
92. In its general election manifesto, the Labour Party pledged to create a network of youth hubs “reaching every community” as part of the programme.¹⁶⁵ They stated hubs will have youth workers, mental health support workers and career advisers on hand to support young people’s mental health and avoid them being drawn into crime.¹⁶⁶ When Young Futures was first announced, Labour committed to spend £100 million on the programme.¹⁶⁷
93. Since entering office, the Government has said it will work closely across government with external partners and young people to “design and develop the proposals for Young Futures Hubs, in a cohesive and integrated way”.¹⁶⁸ The Government’s Autumn Budget 2024 did not include the cost of the programme, but did mention the establishment of hubs will be paid for

161 [Q47](#) Dame Diana Johnson

162 Home Office, [Dame Diana Johnson on tackling anti-social behaviour](#), gov.uk, 22 October 2024]

163 BBC News, [Labour: Yvette Cooper plans ‘tough love’ youth hubs to combat crime](#), 10 October 2023

164 [Q90](#) Ciaran Thapar

165 Labour, [Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#), July 2024

166 Labour, [Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#), July 2024

167 Labour, [JUST ANNOUNCED: Labour will launch Young Futures programme to tackle knife crime](#), 10 October 2023

168 Young Futures Hubs, [UIN 7464](#), 7 October 2024

by Home Office funding.¹⁶⁹ In evidence to this Committee, Diana Johnson said the Government is in “the early stages” of delivering Young Futures.¹⁷⁰ We heard that the Department for Education will lead on youth hubs, while the Home Office will lead on the prevention partnerships.¹⁷¹ Diana Johnson told us the Government is planning to run prevention partnership pilots in locations where there is “good practice already”, but emphasised that the Government’s implementation of this is still a “work in progress”.¹⁷² It is not yet clear what progress the Government have made to planning or implementing the programme, or what the timelines, objectives or milestones the programme will operate with.

- 94. We believe that youth services should provide more than just a place for young people to be when they are not at home or in school. Recreational and leisure time activities, such as arts, sports, employment, and skills development, should be coupled with professional youth work support, where individuals in the community work directly with young people, identifying those most at risk of youth violence to be able to direct them towards resources and public services which can help them.**
- 95. The Young Futures programme, alongside the rollout of youth hubs, creates an important opportunity for the Government to empower local services to address youth violence and prioritise preventative work.**
- 96. *The Government should publish a timeline of the Young Futures programme and rollout of youth services, with details of milestones, intended outcomes, and how it plans to evaluate their effectiveness. Evaluations should include targets and milestones relating to youth worker recruitment, local authority uptake, engagement and integration with other local services and organisations, and engagement with young people.***
- 97. *Through the Young Futures programme and wider rollout of youth services, the Government should work with local authorities to create opportunities and activities for young people including, but not limited to, sports, creative arts, employment, and skills development. These youth service opportunities should be universal and open access, and linked to, but not reliant upon, schools.***

169 HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget 2024](#), HC 295, 30 October 2025

170 [Q47](#)

171 [Q43](#)

172 [Q47](#)

4 Schools and supporting families

98. This chapter discusses the importance of teaching young people, parents and families about online safety and media literacy, with a focus on digital literacy.

The role of schools in teaching online safety and digital literacy

99. Several stakeholders told us that educating children and young people on safe online behaviours can support their media literacy, critical thinking and resilience. They noted that developing these skills in a trusted environment, like schools, can help young people to address their fears about the risk of violence, equip them with tools to identify risks of encountering harmful content and how to mitigate them, and enrich their overall learning journey and support their well-being.¹⁷³ Similarly, Together highlighted that schools play important roles in supporting children to learn about online safety from a young age. They told us that many young people recognise that these lessons have helped them to make informed decisions and recognise potential dangers.¹⁷⁴
100. London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) argue that schools can foster a sense of safety and belonging, where children can learn about online safety.¹⁷⁵ The NYA told us that schools can provide access to trusted adults who can support children and young people when issues are raised.¹⁷⁶
101. Although schools play a pivotal role in teaching online safety, several witnesses noted that the existing provision is inconsistent and lacks efficiency. The NYA argue that there is a lack of clarity in existing guidance as to what professionals can discuss with children when they have been exposed to dangerous content.¹⁷⁷ As the media guidance for teachers and

173 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#)), National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#)), and London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

174 Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) ([YSC006](#))

175 Written evidence from London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

176 Written evidence from National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

177 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

school-leaders is currently split across multiple statutory and non-statutory documents, it is reliant on individual schools and their staff, who may not be experts, to decide how to teach media literacy.¹⁷⁸

- 102.** Future Views Today told us that schools are hindered by limited curriculum time and resources.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, Will Gardner told us that teenagers reported that they did not know who they should talk to within the school community if they came across harmful online content, with some saying that “teachers are too busy to talk to them”.¹⁸⁰
- 103.** Patrick Green observed that as “schools are performance-driven and compelled to deliver against the national curriculum” there should be incentives to proactively incorporate interventions, such as knife crime prevention and online safety workshops delivered by trained practitioners.¹⁸¹ Research by Internet Matters found that “improving media literacy education in the curriculum is vital for preventing online harms” and that it should be afforded the same status as reading, writing and numeracy skills.¹⁸²
- 104.** Baroness Jones stated that the Government “can do so much more to educate people about the potential of technology, but also about the threats and potential harms of technology”.¹⁸³ She told us that she is working together with DfE, which is currently reviewing the national curriculum, to ensure that media literacy is:

Properly built in, so that every child, at every age—literally from when they enter school right through the school years—understands the new opportunities, but also the new threats, that they might be confronting, and that we have age-appropriate education for them.¹⁸⁴

- 105.** **We welcome the Government’s recognition that media literacy is an important aspect of education and that it plays a significant role in safeguarding children and young people. However, the existing provision of media literacy in schools is inconsistent and fails to effectively address young people’s concerns about violence they see online or equip them with the tools they need to use social media safely.**

178 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

179 Written evidence from Future Views Today ([YSC001](#))

180 [Q102](#) Will Gardner

181 [Q103](#) Patrick Green

182 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

183 [Q49](#) Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

184 [Q50](#) Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

- 106. *The Government should ensure that effective media literacy and online safety are embedded in the National Curriculum alongside an awareness of serious youth violence prevention.***

Upskilling teachers, children and youth practitioners

- 107.** Children’s online safety and wellbeing is a shared responsibility across many stakeholders, including teachers, social workers and other youth practitioners. While these professionals understand the importance of online safety, many feel that they do not have the right tools or knowledge to teach media literacy topics, including through statutory relationship, sex and health education (RSHE).¹⁸⁵
- 108.** Patrick Green told us that teachers needed confidence to talk about difficult topics, such as safety.¹⁸⁶ However, an Internet Matters survey found that 30 percent of teachers reported a lack of relevant training as one of the key barriers to delivering effective online safety education at school.¹⁸⁷ Internet Matters call for media literacy to be incorporated into Initial Teacher Training to provide a foundation of knowledge and confidence as well as through Continuing Professional Development to ensure that teachers can adapt to teach emerging threats and trends.¹⁸⁸
- 109.** Dr Aitken stressed the importance for young people to have safe spaces and trusted adults to go to and have open, honest conversations about what is happening on social media.¹⁸⁹ Echoing this, Catch22 highlighted that to support safeguarding and violence prevention, other professionals who work with children and young people should also have online safety training, enabling them to have supportive conversations about online harms.¹⁹⁰ Evidence from the NYA also supports this, highlighting that the current capacity of school staff is severely stretched. They advocate for youth workers to come in to bridge the gaps, build trusted relationships with young people, implement digital wellbeing curriculums and help with early identification of issues and referral to specialist services.¹⁹¹ The Centre for Young Lives also call for the rollout of “online active bystander” training for children, which can empower them to find the safest and best ways to

185 Internet Matters, [A Vision for Media Literacy: Charting the path for media literacy in schools](#), June 2024. The survey was conducted by Shift learning in 2022, and was targeted at 218 secondary school staff.

186 [Q100](#) Patrick Green

187 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

188 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

189 [Q40](#)

190 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

191 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

intervene when they witness incidents of hate crime and discriminatory behaviour, and the development of digital safer schools' teams to be delivered by police officers.¹⁹²

- 110. *The Government should embed effective social media literacy education programmes for teaching professionals as part of Initial Teacher Training, and as part of equivalent programmes for youth practitioners. Alongside this, the Government should ensure professionals working with children have access to further training opportunities relating to online safety and media literacy.***

Support for parents and carers

- 111.** Parents and carers are an important support network for children and young people and can often recognise early behavioural changes that may be linked to exposure to online violence. However, we heard that many parents and carers feel overwhelmed by the volume and complexities of content and lack knowledge of the online landscape.¹⁹³
- 112.** Research by Internet Matters found that 84 percent of children and young people learn about online safety by speaking to their parents.¹⁹⁴ Will Gardner from Childnet told us that young people want their parents and carers to be involved and support them.¹⁹⁵ However, Future Views Today told us parents often lack the media literacy needed to guide their children effectively.¹⁹⁶ This was echoed by pupils surveyed at Serlby Academy who told us that they feel that parents are unable to support them because they do not understand social media.¹⁹⁷ Ben Lindsay agreed, noting that for many parents and carers “trying to understand [various social media] is like a foreign language”.¹⁹⁸ The responses that parents and carers submitted to London VRU network also reflected those concerns, concluding that there was a clear lack of training and resources accessible to parents and carers.¹⁹⁹
- 113.** Currently, various national and regional charities and non-governmental organisations make concentrated efforts to promote media literacy and online safety. For example, in the UK Childnet run annual campaign called

192 Written evidence from the Centre for Young Lives ([YSC005](#))

193 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#))

194 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

195 [Q120](#) Will Gardner

196 Written evidence from Future Views Today ([YSC001](#))

197 Written evidence from Serlby Academy ([YSC003](#))

198 [Q8](#) Ben Lindsay

199 Written evidence from London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#))

Safer Internet Day;²⁰⁰ Internet Matters provide support and guidance on online safety; and Social Switch, a London based project, deliver digital skills training. However, awareness of the relevant legislation remains very low, despite its important role in online harms prevention.²⁰¹ For example, Patrick Green told us that:

Very few people could comfortably tell exactly what the Online Safety Act is [...] Young people are probably as perplexed as I am.²⁰²

- 114.** Furthermore, Future Views Today emphasised the need for more accessible and targeted resources for parents, such as interactive workshops and peer mentoring programmes, to raise awareness of online risks that young people face online and the dangers of exposure to violent content.²⁰³ They called for wider support from the government, including a public awareness campaign on online safety and media literacy in general.²⁰⁴ Several stakeholders also stressed the importance of positive messaging that models good online behaviour, arguing this approach would be more effective in embedding online safety principles.²⁰⁵
- 115.** Ofcom told us that keeping children safe online is a collective responsibility and while the regulator aims to hold services to account, they also place an expectation on parents and carers to support their children’s online safety.²⁰⁶ Ofcom provides tips for parents on keeping children safe online such as modelling good digital behaviour, checking a child’s online age, using parental controls, and others.²⁰⁷ There is also a government webpage, last updated in February 2021, on supporting parents and carers to keep children safe online.²⁰⁸
- 116.** Baroness Jones observed that public awareness of online harms has increased.²⁰⁹ She told us that the Government has been running a number of media literacy projects and that the intention now is to launch “a more widespread campaign[...] a national campaign, which we will then assess to see what the effect is.”²¹⁰

200 Childnet, [Safer Internet Day](#), [last accessed March 2025]

201 [Q117](#)

202 [Q117](#) Patrick Green

203 Written evidence from Future Views Today ([YSC001](#))

204 Written evidence from Catch22 ([YSC012](#)), Future Views Today ([YSC001](#)), Centre For Young Lives ([YSC005](#)), and Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

205 [Q89](#) Ruth Halkon

206 Written evidence from Ofcom ([YSC007](#))

207 Ofcom, [How the Online Safety Act will help to protect children](#), February 2024

208 HM Government, [Keeping children safe online](#), February 2021

209 [Q56](#)

210 [Q50](#) Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

117. Parents and carers play an important role in helping young people feel safe online but need more support to develop their skills and confidence in this area. We welcome the Government's intention to launch a national public awareness campaign promoting online safety and media literacy, but that is only the first step. Parents and carers need access to the latest evidence-based resources to navigate the ever-changing online landscape which their children are exposed to.

118. *In conjunction with a national public awareness campaign, the Government should create and maintain an up-to-date online hub signposting to the latest information about media literacy and online safety for parents, carers and other adults responsible for children's wellbeing. This hub should contain guidance about what to do and where to report if your child has been exposed to violent and illegal content.*

5 The role of the police

Community policing and building trust

- 119.** As part of this inquiry, we examined the role of the police in preventing issues surrounding young people’s engagement with social media and youth violence. We recognise that the police work hard to protect young people across the UK. We know that some police forces have committed to a ‘child first’ or ‘child-centred’ approach to their interactions with children and young people which involves looking at the possible exploitation or wider vulnerabilities that may lie behind a young person’s offending.²¹¹
- 120.** However, we also heard concerns about young people, particularly those from minority groups, losing trust and confidence in the police as a consequence of policing tactics designed to address youth violence. We heard that minority communities feel over-policed and under-protected.²¹²
- 121.** In particular, we heard concerns about the use the use of Stop and Search. The College of Policing stated Stop And Search can play an important role in the detection and prevention of crime.²¹³ However, the YEF told us the police “do not get trained nearly as much as they should on Stop and Search and the nuance and necessary sensitivities [of it]”.²¹⁴ Similarly, Ruth Halkon argued Stop and Search was negatively affecting people’s confident and trust in the police due to sense of “disproportionality” and “violation”, whereby a small minority of young people are stopped by police multiple times.²¹⁵
- 122.** A more community-focused approach was recommended by witnesses to build trust between the police and the communities they serve. Ruth Halkon gave the Committee an example of good practice as part of a ‘safer neighbourhood team’ in London, which involved police going into schools and youth clubs to explain to young people the rationale behind Stop and Search in the area, what the processes were and what young people’s rights are.²¹⁶ She told the Committee:

211 National Police Chiefs Council, [Children and young persons policing strategy 2024-2027](#), October 2024

212 [Q71](#) Ruth Halkon and Ciaran Thapar

213 College of Policing, [Stop and Search](#), 29 September 2016

214 [Q73](#)

215 [Q71](#)

216 [Q73](#) Ruth Halkon

[...] empowerment, education-raising, explanation and transparency would really help both sides to understand each other and overcome a lot of this disproportionality.²¹⁷

- 123.** The Centre for Young Lives has called for the development of ‘digital safer schools’ teams led by police officers, that would work to actively deter children and young people from harmful uses of social media.²¹⁸ Some police forces work closely with schools already, with the aim of improving safety processes and helping to identify concerns about young people at risk of criminal engagement and/ or exploitation. In some cases, dedicated police officers, called ‘safer school officers’ or ‘school liaison officers, are placed within schools permanently or visit schools on a regular basis. However, the decision to deploy these dedicated police officers in schools is at the discretion of each police force, so roles can vary significantly.²¹⁹ The YEF has argued there is a lack of evidence about the role’s efficacy,²²⁰ and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services have recommended the role be evaluated.²²¹ Alongside this, we acknowledge wider concerns about police presence in schools, such as the Runnymede Trust’s argument that police officers are more likely to be based in schools with Black and ethnic minority students and can “facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline”.²²²

The Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee

- 124.** In November 2024, the Home Secretary announced a programme of policing reforms.²²³ The new measures include a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee to “rebuild trust between local forces and the communities they serve”; a new Police Performance Unit to track local performance and raise standards; and new National Centre of Policing to harness new technology.²²⁴

217 [Q73](#) Ruth Halkon

218 Written evidence from the Centre for Young Lives ([YSC005](#))

219 House of Commons Library, [Knives, offensive weapons and serious violence](#), Research Briefing SN00330, 17 January 2025

220 Youth Endowment Fund, [Police in schools toolkit](#) [last accessed March 2025]

221 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services, [Inspection of how well the police tackle serious youth violence](#), March 2023

222 Runnymede Trust, [Over policed and under protected: the road to safer schools](#), January 2023

223 Home Office, [Home Secretary announces major policing reforms](#), gov.uk, 19 November 2024

224 Home Office, [Home Secretary announces major policing reforms](#), gov.uk, 19 November 2024

- 125.** The Government has said the reforms will “restore community patrols with a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee” and ensure that policing services have the capabilities they need to “fight fast-changing complex crime which cut across police force boundaries”.²²⁵ The reforms are reported to be backed by over half a billion pounds of additional Government funding for policing, including an increase in the core grant for police forces and extra resources for neighbourhood policing. The changes are intended to support the Government’s ‘safer streets mission’.²²⁶
- 126.** Parts of the new Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee relevant to this inquiry, as set out in the Government’s safer streets mission, include neighbourhood policing team in every local area, a named and contactable officer for every neighbourhood, and new training and standards to ensure neighbourhood policing is developed as a policing specialism.²²⁷ In addition to this, the Government has said it will hold forces to account to ensure neighbourhood policing teams resource and funding is protected.²²⁸

Good social media practice in police forces

- 127.** During evidence sessions to our inquiry, we heard examples of good practice in some police forces involving the use of social media to engage young people about the risks they face online and offline, and the safety issues they care about.
- 128.** The Police Foundation told us about the importance of police forces, and adults more broadly, modelling good behaviour online for young people and highlighted the good work of YourPolice.UK, as well as the Quit Fighting for Likes campaign in Scotland.²²⁹
- 129.** The YourPolice.UK Instagram account is the public face of the National Police Chief’s Council’s Digital Youth Engagement programme. The account posts content aimed at young people across the UK, and seeks to provide reliable information, advice and safeguarding to young people. The National Police Chief Council team described posts on the account as promoting a public health approach to youth engagement, helping to keep young people safe, seeking to enhance youth voice and building trust and confidence in policing.²³⁰

225 Home Office, [Home Secretary announces major policing reforms](#), gov.uk, 19 November 2024 (accessed 1 February 2025)

226 Prime Minister’s Office, [Safer Streets](#), gov.uk (accessed 1 February 2025)

227 Prime Minister’s Office, [Safer Streets](#), gov.uk (accessed 1 February 2025)

228 Prime Minister’s Office, [Safer Streets](#), gov.uk (accessed 1 February 2025)

229 [Q89](#) Ruth Halkon

230 Written evidence from the National Police Chief’s Council ([YSC004](#)). As noted in Chapter 3, public health approaches would be approaches which are not based in criminal justice system interventions.

130. In written evidence to this inquiry, we learned that YourPolice.UK responds directly to queries through the site, regularly gathers insights from its Youth Advisory Group to inform its content creation, as well as seeking young people’s views on important issues through Instagram surveys. Its most recent survey asked its followers a series of questions related to ‘how often do you see real-life violence?’. We are encouraged by this youth-focused work at a national policing level, setting a strong example of the potential youth-focused social media support local police forces could offer.

131. In our evidence, we also heard about an example of good practice by the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, along with YouthLink Scotland and Medics Against Violence, who launched their Quit Fighting for Likes campaign in September 2024.²³¹ The campaign sets out to support young people to safely navigate social media and prevent the spread of violent content on social media. The campaign includes a toolkit with resources and activities for those working with young people, including online training sessions. The campaign also includes a set of memes with violence prevention messages about why filming and sharing fights is damaging. The campaign’s clear messaging gives young people the tools and confidence to modify their social media experience to one that features less violent content. Quit Fighting for Likes is a positive example of how police forces, and Violence Reduction Units, can model good social media behaviour.

132. **We welcome the Government’s recent announcement of extra resources for neighbourhood policing and the accompanying Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee.**

133. ***The Government should, via the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commit to local forces regularly engaging directly with young people as part of community patrols. This should include rapid evaluation of interventions such as the introduction of the Police School Liaison Officer position, and the development of clear guidance for police forces. Metrics, standards and training introduced by the Government as part of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee should include specific reference to engagement with young people.***

134. **Embedding media literacy into police force training has the potential to further support and promote the good work that is already being done to model good social media use, such as the national police Instagram account YourPolice.UK. It will also assist the police to engage with young people on issues that matter to them using and regarding social media in an effective and appropriate manner.**

231 Quite Fighting for Likes, [Quit Fighting for Likes](#) [last accessed 1 February 2025]

6 Cross government working and youth engagement

Youth engagement

- 135.** In much of the evidence we received, we heard that policymakers can only understand how young people experience violence and the online world through direct engagement with young people. In particular, witnesses emphasised to us the importance of young people being involved in decisions on the regulation of violence on social media.²³² For example, the Independent Office for Police Conduct work with a youth advisory panel.²³³
- 136.** Will Gardner told us that policymakers need to “bake in the inclusion of young people’s voice” into Government activity on online safety.²³⁴ Olivia Nettleton called for a “continual channel” through which young people have the opportunity to feed into future policy and regulation of social media.²³⁵
- 137.** Many of the charities and organisations we heard from throughout our inquiry—the YEF, London’s Violence Reduction Unit, the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the NSPCC, and Childnet—appear to regularly consult youth advisory panels in their work.²³⁶ We value the insights these stakeholders brought to our inquiry. We found the reference to authentic youth voices instrumental in building our understanding of how young people experience violence both online and offline. We were surprised to learn that Ofcom, as regulator of the Online Safety Act, does not currently have a youth advisory panel.²³⁷ We heard in evidence that with its expansive role in upholding and

232 [Q12](#) Rani Govender; [Q41](#) Olivia Nettleton, Dr Aitken and Professor Nash; [Q19](#) Jon Matthews

233 Independent Office for Police Conduct, [Our Youth Panel](#), [last accessed March 2025]

234 [Q106](#) Will Gardner

235 [Q41](#) Olivia Nettleton

236 Written evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund ([YSC010](#)); London Violence Reduction Unit ([YSC009](#)); National Police Chiefs’ Council ([YSC004](#)); [Q15](#) Rani Govender; [Q107](#) Will Gardner.

237 [Q41](#) Professor Nash; [Q107](#) Will Gardner

enforcing the new regulatory framework, Ofcom is well-placed to create a forum for young people to discuss the adequacy of the regime and to talk about new trends or emerging concerns.²³⁸

- 138.** We also heard that the needs and experiences of children and young people have not been considered so far within debates on responses to artificial intelligence (AI). Dr Aitken suggested that young people are the group that will be most impacted by advances in these technologies, yet they are not currently represented in debates surrounding its regulation.²³⁹ Dr Aitken called for more consideration and opportunities to use new technologies in positive ways that can be beneficial to young people through better engagement with young people directly.²⁴⁰
- 139.** In evidence to us, Diana Johnson told us that the Government often has “quite old-fashioned ways” of consulting and communicating with young people, and said Government needs to be “more imaginative and innovative”.²⁴¹ When asked on how the Government is engaging with young people on online safety policy, Baroness Jones told us there is “constant dialogue with all sorts of different organisations going on”.²⁴² After our evidence session with Ministers, we followed up to ask for clarification on how different government departments engage with young people in the development of policy relating to social media regulation and youth violence. As of March 2025, we had not received a response. We also requested that the Government submit a written evidence submission to the inquiry, which it did not choose to do.
- 140.** In some areas, the Government does directly engage with young people in the development of policy. For example, the Government state that their National Youth Strategy, which is currently being developed will “put the views of young people at the centre of decision making”, through “a series of face-to-face engagements”, a “‘Today’s Youth, Tomorrow’s Nation’ conversation”, and the establishment of a youth advisory board.²⁴³
- 141.** In March 2024, our predecessor Committee, as part of its inquiry into the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people, recommended that the Government provide more opportunities for young people to feed into policy decisions that affect them. Our predecessor Committee emphasised the importance of consulting it the early stages of policymaking processes,

238 [Q41](#) Professor Nash

239 [Q35](#) Dr Aitken

240 [Q35](#) Dr Aitken

241 [Q51](#) Dame Diana Johnson MP

242 [Q51](#)

243 HM Government, [New National Youth Strategy to break down barriers to opportunity for young people](#), November 2024

and the involvement of young people from marginalised communities.²⁴⁴ In its response, the DWP set out its working relationship with organisations such as the Youth Employment Group, but their response was less clear on how the Government engages with young people early on in developing policy, and how it engages with marginalised groups.²⁴⁵ We re-emphasise these aspects of our predecessor’s Committee’s conclusions and recommendations.

- 142.** **Young people should be engaged in every stage of the development and implementation of policy directly concerning young people, and we welcome steps the Government are taking to engage with young people in the development of the National Youth Strategy. However, while Ministers acknowledged that young people’s voices need to be heard on issues surrounding youth violence and social media, they were unable to set out clearly what the Government is doing to ensure this happens.**
- 143.** ***In response to this report, the Government should set out how it is engaging with young people, and specifically those from marginalised and under-represented groups, on issues surrounding youth violence and social media.***
- 144.** ***Ofcom should create a Youth Advisory Panel to consult on the implementation of the Online Safety Act. In particular, to consult young people on their experience of social media under the new regulatory regime, and to assess Ofcom’s regulation of social media companies against its Children’s Safety Codes. Ofcom should invite social media companies to participate in consultations with the Youth Advisory Panel where appropriate.***
- 145.** ***Alongside its engagement work with young people as part of the National Youth Strategy development, the Government should explore options to engage with young people to consult on youth-oriented policies such as Young Futures, for example by creating a permanent Youth Advisory Panel. In particular, the Government should consult young people on their experience of youth violence to better understand their needs and expectations of youth services. The Government should also seek to find more creative ways to engage with and consult young people on policies which affect them.***

244 Youth Select Committee, [The Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Young People](#), March 2024

245 Youth Select Committee, [The Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis: Department for Work and Pensions Government Response](#) [last accessed March 2025]

Cross-governmental approach to the youth violence and social media

- 146.** We heard that a joined-up approach across Government is necessary to address these complex issues. For example, Internet Matters told us that successful implementation of the online safety regime is a shared responsibility between “service providers, different Government departments and regulators, as well as parents and the professionals who support families and children.”²⁴⁶
- 147.** Diana Johnson told us that addressing fundamental issues such as violence and knife crime is a shared responsibility with Government focusing on the prevention of crime as a priority through the Young Futures Programme, youth hubs in particular, and prevention partnerships.²⁴⁷ She told us that she is “very involved in the prevention partnership work”²⁴⁸ and acknowledged that this is a cross-departmental policy.
- 148.** The DfE is leading on youth hubs, which is a joint initiative with the DWP, the MHCLG, and local authorities.²⁴⁹
- 149.** The implementation of the online safety regime is a joint policy between DSIT and the Home Office who share responsibility and work closely with Ofcom.²⁵⁰ Baroness Jones stressed that improving media literacy is another key element of addressing online harms. DSIT is liaising with DfE on embedding this into the national curriculum.²⁵¹
- 150.** The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport is the lead Government department for youth services, and they are leading the development of the National Youth Strategy,
- 151.** The cross-government working report by the Public Accounts Committee, published in February 2024, noted that it is not always clear where the responsibility and accountability rest in delivering policies which cut across departmental boundaries.²⁵² This Government is also committed to a ‘Mission Led’ Government, which is likely to be cross-cutting.²⁵³

246 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([YSC014](#))

247 [Q43](#)

248 [Q43](#)

249 UK Parliament written questions, answers and statements, [Young Futures Hubs](#), January 2025

250 HM Government, [Online Safety act enactment impact assessment](#), October 2024

251 [Q50](#)

252 Committee of Public Accounts, [Cross-government working](#), February 2024

253 The Labour Party, [Mission-driven government](#) [last accessed March 2025]

152. There is however, as the NYA observed, a risk that work is, in practice, not joined-up,²⁵⁴ and a recent report by the National Audit Office into action to address violence against women and girls, a similarly cross-cutting issue, found the Home Office was “not leading an effective cross-government response”.²⁵⁵

153. **The Committee welcomes the Government’s cross-cutting approach to addressing fundamental issues such as online safety and support for young people. However, there is a lack of clarity in practical terms as to how this work is overseen and where ultimate accountability for delivery lies.**

154. ***The Government should establish a dedicated task force with ringfenced resources and authority to provide leadership across Whitehall to oversee the implementation of the online safety regime in a wider cross-departmental context.***

254 Written evidence from the National Youth Agency ([YSC008](#))

255 National Audit Office, [Tackling violence against women and girls](#), January 2025

Conclusions and recommendations

Regulation of social media

1. Social media companies' business models and algorithms are designed to promote engaging content for young people and may result in companies inadvertently promoting violent content or content which incites violence. Regulation should act as a deterrent, driving social media companies to ensure content on their platforms is age appropriate. (Conclusion, Paragraph 14)
2. The Committee welcomes measures introduced in the Online Safety Act, which not only place responsibilities on the industry, but also present opportunities to develop technologies that are safe, positive, and enriching for young people. (Conclusion, Paragraph 24)
3. To further incentivise social media companies to develop safer online spaces, the Government should explore options to create a consumer-facing online safety scorecard or standards rating. This would evaluate platforms on their safety measures, responsiveness to harmful content, and efforts to educate users. The scorecard or standards rating would provide users with simple, upfront information about the safety of an online space, enabling them to choose safer spaces. (Recommendation, Paragraph 25)
4. We are not persuaded that the Online Safety Act is robust enough to enforce minimum age limits on social media platforms and ensure children and young people will be protected from harmful content. (Conclusion, Paragraph 33)
5. While financial penalties issued by Ofcom to social media companies are publicised, we believe further work to publicise poor practice by social media companies would provide a greater incentive for companies to abide by legislation. (Recommendation, Paragraph 34)
6. The Online Safety Act contains interesting novel mechanisms, but it is not yet clear whether these are enforceable in practice. We therefore recommend that the Government should report annually to Parliament on the implementation and operation of the Online Safety Act. This reporting should include: a) social media companies' compliance with

Ofcom's regulatory codes, b) fines levied by Ofcom and paid by social media companies, c) whether and how Government departments and public services have engaged with social media companies regarding the implementation and enforcement of the Act. The Government should also consider how this report could incorporate changes caused by other legislation, such as the Crime and Policing Bill. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)

7. The Government should work with social media companies to address the issue of harmful content being spread by individuals with significant influence over young people, including consideration of how to ensure social media companies do not financially reward such behaviour. (Recommendation, Paragraph 40)
8. A social media ban for young people under 16 years old would prevent many young people from accessing the benefits of social media and would do little to make social media websites safer for young people if they can circumvent age assurance mechanisms. We oppose a ban on social media for under-16s and welcome the Government's current approach opposing such a ban. (Conclusion, Paragraph 49)
9. Research linking the exposure to violence online to "real life" youth violence is limited, and more evidence is needed to determine the impact this exposure has on young people and their likelihood to engage in real-life violence. (Conclusion, Paragraph 58)
10. The Government should conduct and publish a rapid evaluation of existing evidence of links between online experiences and incidents of violence. If the evidence is inconclusive, or if gaps in knowledge persist, the Government should commission research assessing the extent to which online experiences drive offline violence. The evaluation and subsequent research should feed into post-legislative scrutiny of the Online Safety Act. (Recommendation, Paragraph 59)
11. The Government should strengthen requirements on social media companies to prevent the sale of weapons and the promotion of the sale of weapons through their platforms. It should do this by building on the recommendations set out in the independent end-to-end review of online knife sales, and by working with young people, law enforcement agencies and social media companies. (Recommendation, Paragraph 64)

Youth services and preventative work

12. While violence affects young people across the UK, it is vital that the Government and local agencies target the needs of those most at risk of engaging in youth violence, including those in areas where violence is concentrated, who are neurodiverse, have special educational needs and/or are persistently absent or excluded from school. (Conclusion, Paragraph 71)
13. We recognise that there are complex and often numerous factors that make a young person vulnerable to youth violence. We welcome the Government's acknowledgement of the importance of collaborative prevention techniques to tackle serious youth violence. (Conclusion, Paragraph 80)
14. There is an urgent need for services to be empowered to work together and ensure these approaches are effective. The Government should introduce dedicated funding for local authorities to pursue multi-agency approaches to youth violence, which prioritise, but are not exclusive to, those most at risk of youth violence such as neurodivergent young people, those with special educational or mental health needs, and/or are persistently absent or excluded from school. (Recommendation, Paragraph 81)
15. The Government should conduct a rapid evaluation of Violence Reduction Units and multi-agency responses to serious youth violence, focusing on outcomes they have achieved. This should result in updated and comprehensive guidance on how local partners should work together to prevent serious youth violence, and how to prioritise the needs of children most at-risk. Where VRUs and other responses have proved effective, the Government should introduce longer term investment for the continued delivery of those programmes. (Recommendation, Paragraph 82)
16. We believe that youth services should provide more than just a place for young people to be when they are not at home or in school. Recreational and leisure time activities, such as arts, sports, employment, and skills development, should be coupled with professional youth work support, where individuals in the community work directly with young people, identifying those most at risk of youth violence to be able to direct them towards resources and public services which can help them. (Conclusion, Paragraph 94)
17. The Young Futures programme, alongside the rollout of youth hubs, creates an important opportunity for the Government to empower local services to address youth violence and prioritise preventative work. (Conclusion, Paragraph 95)
18. The Government should publish a timeline of the Young Futures programme and rollout of youth services, with details of milestones, intended outcomes, and how it plans to evaluate their effectiveness. Evaluations should

include targets and milestones relating to youth worker recruitment, local authority uptake, engagement and integration with other local services and organisations, and engagement with young people. (Recommendation, Paragraph 96)

19. Through the Young Futures programme and wider rollout of youth services, the Government should work with local authorities to create opportunities and activities for young people including, but not limited to, sports, creative arts, employment, and skills development. These youth service opportunities should be universal and open access, and linked to, but not reliant upon, schools. (Recommendation, Paragraph 97)

Schools and supporting families

20. We welcome the Government's recognition that media literacy is an important aspect of education and that it plays a significant role in safeguarding children and young people. However, the existing provision of media literacy in schools is inconsistent and fails to effectively address young people's concerns about violence they see online or equip them with the tools they need to use social media safely. (Conclusion, Paragraph 105)
21. The Government should ensure that effective media literacy and online safety are embedded in the National Curriculum alongside an awareness of serious youth violence prevention. (Recommendation, Paragraph 106)
22. The Government should embed effective social media literacy education programmes for teaching professionals as part of Initial Teacher Training, and as part of equivalent programmes for youth practitioners. Alongside this, the Government should ensure professionals working with children have access to further training opportunities relating to online safety and media literacy. (Recommendation, Paragraph 110)
23. Parents and carers play an important role in helping young people feel safe online but need more support to develop their skills and confidence in this area. We welcome the Government's intention to launch a national public awareness campaign promoting online safety and media literacy, but that is only the first step. Parents and carers need access to the latest evidence-based resources to navigate the ever-changing online landscape which their children are exposed to. (Conclusion, Paragraph 117)
24. In conjunction with a national public awareness campaign, the Government should create and maintain an up-to-date online hub signposting to the latest information about media literacy and online safety for parents, carers and other adults responsible for children's wellbeing. This hub should

contain guidance about what to do and where to report if your child has been exposed to violent and illegal content. (Recommendation, Paragraph 118)

The role of the police

25. We welcome the Government's recent announcement of extra resources for neighbourhood policing and the accompanying Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. (Conclusion, Paragraph 132)
26. The Government should, via the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commit to local forces regularly engaging directly with young people as part of community patrols. This should include rapid evaluation of interventions such as the introduction of the Police School Liaison Officer position, and the development of clear guidance for police forces. Metrics, standards and training introduced by the Government as part of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee should include specific reference to engagement with young people. (Recommendation, Paragraph 133)
27. Embedding media literacy into police force training has the potential to further support and promote the good work that is already being done to model good social media use, such as the national police Instagram account YourPolice.UK. It will also assist the police to engage with young people on issues that matter to them using and regarding social media in an effective and appropriate manner. (Conclusion, Paragraph 134)

Cross government working and youth engagement

28. Young people should be engaged in every stage of the development and implementation of policy directly concerning young people, and we welcome steps the Government are taking to engage with young people in the development of the National Youth Strategy. However, while Ministers acknowledged that young people's voices need to be heard on issues surrounding youth violence and social media, they were unable to set out clearly what the Government is doing to ensure this happens. (Conclusion, Paragraph 142)
29. In response to this report, the Government should set out how it is engaging with young people, and specifically those from marginalised and under-represented groups, on issues surrounding youth violence and social media. (Recommendation, Paragraph 143)
30. Ofcom should create a Youth Advisory Panel to consult on the implementation of the Online Safety Act. In particular, to consult young people on their experience of social media under the new regulatory regime, and to assess Ofcom's regulation of social media companies against its

Children's Safety Codes. Ofcom should invite social media companies to participate in consultations with the Youth Advisory Panel where appropriate. (Recommendation, Paragraph 144)

- 31.** Alongside its engagement work with young people as part of the National Youth Strategy development, the Government should explore options to engage with young people to consult on youth-oriented policies such as Young Futures, for example by creating a permanent Youth Advisory Panel. In particular, the Government should consult young people on their experience of youth violence to better understand their needs and expectations of youth services. The Government should also seek to find more creative ways to engage with and consult young people on policies which affect them. (Recommendation, Paragraph 145)
- 32.** The Committee welcomes the Government's cross-cutting approach to addressing fundamental issues such as online safety and support for young people. However, there is a lack of clarity in practical terms as to how this work is overseen and where ultimate accountability for delivery lies. (Conclusion, Paragraph 153)
- 33.** The Government should establish a dedicated task force with ringfenced resources and authority to provide leadership across Whitehall to oversee the implementation of the online safety regime in a wider cross-departmental context. (Recommendation, Paragraph 154)

Witnesses

Thursday 12 December Panel 1

Rani Govender, Policy and Regulatory Manager for Child Safety Online, NSPCC; Ben Lindsay, CEO, Power the Fight; Jon Matthews, Service Manager, Social Switch Project (Catch 22).

Thursday 12 December Panel 2

Professor Victoria Nash, Associate Professor and Senior Policy Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute; Dr Mhairi Aitken, Senior Ethics Fellow, Public Policy Programme, Alan Turing Institute; Olivia Nettleton, Associate Director, Revealing Reality.

Thursday 12 December Panel 3

Dame Diana Johnson MP, Minister for Fire, Policing and Crime Prevention, Home Office; Nick Hunt, Head of Firearms & Weapons Policy Unit, Home Office, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; Daniel Okubo, Deputy Director for the Online Harms Policy and Regulation, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

You can read the transcript of evidence from [Thursday 12 December](#).

Friday 13 December Panel 1

Ruth Halkon, Researcher, Police Foundation; Ciaran Thapar, Director of Public Affairs and Communications, Youth Endowment Fund.

Friday 13 December Panel 2

Will Gardner, CEO, Child Net (UK Safer Internet Centre member organisation); Patrick Green, CEO, Ben Kinsella Trust.

You can read the transcript of evidence from [Friday 13 December](#).

Published Written Evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [Committee's website](#).

Future Views Today YSC001

Anonymous YSC002

Serlby Park Academy YSC003

National Police Chief's Council YSC004

Centre for Young Lives YSC005

Together Scotland YSC006

Ofcom YSC007

National Youth Agency YSC008

London Violence Reduction Unit YSC009

Youth Endowment Fund YSC010

UK Safer Internet Centre YSC011

Catch 22 YSC012

Meta YSC013

Internet Matters YSC014