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Ollie Illott
Interim Director General for Emerging
Technology and AI, Department of Science,
Innovation and Technology

16 June 2026

Dear Ollie,

Following up on the letter from Dame Melanie Dawes to the Secretary of State yesterday, I hope it will be helpful to set out more detail on how Ofcom is preparing to deliver the expansion of social media restrictions for children.

New Protections for Children

We stand ready to implement the social media ban and measures on restricting dangerous functionalities as a matter of priority and thank you for the confirmation of additional funding to cover these new areas of work. We look forward to working closely with you and your team so that we have a clear view of what is required of Ofcom, allowing us to develop detailed implementation plans and a business case for funding.

A clear lesson from the first year of implementing the Online Safety Act has been that clarity in the law facilitates successful compliance and enforcement. We would encourage the Government's regulations to be as clear and specific as possible, including about the services these restrictions will and will not apply to. This would allow Ofcom to move rapidly to detailed implementation and then driving real improvements for children online as soon as possible.

We have already kicked off work to support Parliament's consideration of the regulations that government will be laying later this year, and I can confirm that we will deliver by the end of October a technical assessment of Highly Effective Age Assurance at 16. Our initial observations are:

- That age assurance at 16 should be technically feasible but there are currently fewer available methods than at 18. For example, email-based age estimation or credit cards checks are not applicable or not available at 16. We have more work to do to understand the effectiveness and accessibility of different methods, the availability of identity and age attributes at 16, and the privacy considerations of different existing and emerging methods. We will work closely with the ICO as we develop the assessment.
- There will be a range of practical implementation challenges, including accuracy at boundary ages and how to approach the "ageing" of child accounts. Some services will need clarity on how to ensure their age assurance process is highly effective at correctly determining both users who are 18+ and 16+, in order to fulfil concurrent regulatory obligations.
- We are already learning about effective design, implementation and enforcement from the new Australian regime. For example, some services likely to be captured by the ban have relied on age inference models (where user activity is analysed to estimate age) to meet their obligations in Australia. The evidence does not yet show that these models can deliver an effective, privacy-preserving solution for an under 16 ban.

- Age checks are most effective when they are built into multiple stages of the user journey. Our age assurance report in July will assess the use, effectiveness and challenges of the current service-level statutory approach to age assurance. In the longer term, a layered or whole-of-system approach may be most effective, reducing circumvention and increasing public trust. We will issue a follow-up report in the first year of the social media ban coming into force to specifically consider the issue of displacement.

On their own, age checks cannot stop all of the risks posed to children online. As the Secretary of State has set out, these new restrictions need to be part of a wider societal approach. We are committed to helping children and parents navigate the online world and develop healthy screen habits and safe online behaviours. Later this month, Ofcom will publish a Media Literacy Statement of Recommendations to support services to take proactive steps to empower children and adults to engage with online content critically and safely.

Wider implementation and delivery

The Government's new policies announced on Monday are part of broader set of changes to the online safety regime. We are already working on the enhancements to the online safety regime that were introduced through the Crime and Policing Act 2026. There are likely to be further changes arising from the Government's consideration of age restrictions and safety duties to AI chatbots, as well as screentime curfews to protect children from new harms. We are also tracking initiatives to protect the integrity of elections.

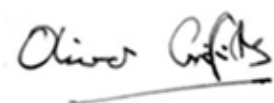
This new work is in addition to a busy existing programme. Alongside driving compliance with Online Safety Act duties, Ofcom has statutory responsibilities to deliver a series of reports this year, including a report about the use of app stores and a report on content harmful to children. We are also committed to implementing remaining elements the OSA, including publishing the register of categorised services, consulting on additional duties for categorised services, and standing up new functions to cover researcher access and setting minimum standards of accreditation of technology for Technology Notices. We will also need to consider what, if any, changes will be required to the existing Codes, and their enforcement, in light of the ban.

Delivering this combined programme of work will require both extra resources and clear prioritisation. We will be developing a business case over the coming weeks and will be grateful for detailed engagement with your team, including to understand government perspectives on sequencing and prioritisation.

As we enter this new chapter for online safety, I would like to underline Ofcom's commitment to scrutiny and engagement. In her letter to the Secretary of State yesterday, Dame Melanie said that we are open to strengthening our accountability to Parliament and would value Parliamentary proposals in this area. We note the particular stress that the Secretary of State has placed on enforcement and look forward to deeper engagement with Parliamentarians on our approach to driving compliance with the regime, while noting the constraints placed on us by the legal processes on individual cases and the importance of retaining flexibility to respond to developing situations.

I look forward to working closely with you and your team on this vital agenda over the coming months. I am copying this letter to the chairs of the select committees.

Yours sincerely,



Oliver Griffiths

Copied to: Dame Chi Onwurah MP, Chair, Science, Innovation and Technology Committee; Baroness Keeley, Chair, Communications and Digital Committee