Your response

Question 1: To assist us in categorising responses, please provide a description of your organisation, service or interest in protection of children online.
Is this a confidential response? (select as appropriate) No

[Catch22](#) is a social business: a non-profit business driven by a social mission. For more than 200 years, we have worked across the UK to deliver better outcomes for young people and their families, wherever they face disadvantage. Last year we worked with 110,000 people, through 1,700 staff and volunteers in over 100 locations.

We support **thousands of young people and their families** every year and see the increasing impact on children, parents and carers regarding online harm. We run alternative provision schools across England and Wales, and our teachers witness the offline impact of online harm every day. We know **parents often feel unprepared** to deal with the harms online, and **teachers are attempting to balance the unprecedented pressure** their students feel in relation to OH, and the **mental health impacts** as a result.

We run services addressing child exploitation and those at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation across Stoke and Staffordshire, Merseyside and Derbyshire and Kent. In 2021, **97% of referrals to our missing and exploitation services involved online harm**. For half of those, the primary reason for referral was online activity. We run victim services across Hertfordshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire supporting victims of all forms of crime – including those who are **victims of fraud, hate crime, child abuse** and domestic violence.

We run **employability services**, upskilling people, to help them access the digital roles now in huge demand. We deliver The Social Switch Project – a fantastic programme supported by the UK's largest VRU's – London and Manchester. It has **trained over 1400 frontline professionals in London** (police, youth workers, teachers and health staff), by giving them the language and tools to talk about with young people in a constructive manner. It has also trained 95 young people in digital skills, followed by 12 months of career support for digital jobs. It aims to see young people thrive online.

In 2021 we released our Online Harms research paper, [Online Harms Experienced by Children and Young People: Acceptable Use and Regulation.](#)

Question 2: Can you identify factors which might indicate that a service is likely to attract child users?

Is this a confidential response? (select as appropriate)

No

In our experience, young people are more likely to engage with a platform or service if it includes:

- Comedic content
- Fashion content
- Sport content
- Platforms that allow you to follow influencers and engage with influencer lifestyles
- Gaming content

Question 6: Can you provide any evidence relating to the presence of content that is harmful to children on user-to-user and search services?

Is this a confidential response? (select as appropriate)

No

- **Violence**. This includes, videos of people getting attacked, videos of weapons, music depicting violent activity. This is mainly aimed at boys and young men, and is often associated with gang lifestyles. People we support spoke about influencers, people they would look up to, promoting this lifestyle.
- **Violence against women and girls (VAWG).** Across our programmes at Catch22 we have seen a rise in the violent and misogynistic content being produced, shared and consumed online. Our teams spoke about the rise of influencers that promote misogynistic content. This includes Andrew Tate, Sneako, Aiden Ross, and Harrison Sullivan. Our programme team spoke about their concern on how this content is being posted. Half of their content isn't negative and features self-help material e.g. how to become an entrepreneur. This allows for the harmful content to filter through with less rigorous scrutiny.
- **Body image and impact on self-esteem.** This includes, pro-anorexia content. This is particularly targeted at girls and young women. There was particular concern here around the use of 'explore' and 'discover' pages on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and BeReal. Where these apps take into account the age, gender and search history of a user to produce the suggested content. Our support staff believe this results in girls and young women being shown dieting, pro-anorexia and negative body image content.
- **Pornography and cyberflashing.** Chat functions on apps such as YouTube are being used as a gateway for a child to access sites that include pornography. Sites such as Omegle are accessed by children we support, they then risk being exposed to indecent images through entering chatrooms.

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In our experience, certain groups are more at risk of consuming harmful content online.

- **Neurodiversity**. Case workers from our child exploitation services have raised concern over the negative experiences children who are neurodiverse can have online. Often, this cohort of children will often feel more comfortable online. It is a safer space for them to navigate, especially if they feel marginalised by people in real-life situations. Their online community allows them to feel like they are not alone. This leaves them vulnerable to being groomed online, through chatrooms and online communities. Neurodiverse children who have encountered online harm are disproportionately presented in our child exploitation services.

Question 7: Can you provide any evidence relating to the impact on children from accessing content that is harmful to them?

Is this a confidential response? (select as appropriate)

No

Following on from the points raised above. Below outlines the impact this content is having on some of the children and young people we support.

- **Violence.** Our frontline staff have raised concern over the impact violent content online is having on boys and young men. Repeatedly interacting with violent content can cause desensitisation to violent behaviour and the injuries people can inflict. In contrast, some of the young people we work with become traumatised by the violent content and do not want to leave the house.
- **VAWG.** Young people (specifically boys) are taking learnings from the misogynistic content they are exposed to online and applying them to real-life relationships. We have seen an estimated 10% increase in young women being referred to our gang exit services.
- **Pornography**. In our children and young people services, we are seeing the direct impact of children being exposed to pornographic videos and images. Some young people are taking the behaviours they see online and applying them to their real-world relationships. Below is an quote from a Catch22 case work in our CSE service:

"So I had a 9 year old YP that accessed Omegle and saw older males Masturbating. (She heard about it from a youtuber). The impact caused her to form sexualised behaviour towards her younger siblings and so she was not allowed to be left alone with them"

- **Mental health**. Our own research, and wider research suggests that young people know that 'everyone is faking it'. However, the cases presenting in our services suggest it is still have an impact on young people's mental health. Young people spoke about feeling pressure to compete and make it look like you are having a

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great life. Our caseworkers spoke about the trauma many of the cases they support have been inflicted with due to seeing harmful content such as violence against others, self-harm and suicide content. Below is a quote from the service manager for our Gangs Exit services:

"we had one young boy who had seen so much violent content...videos of people being beaten up...being stabbed...they didn't want to leave the house...they were traumatised"

Question 15: What actions do or should services take in response to reports or complaints about online content harmful to children (including complaints from children)?

Is this a confidential response? (select as appropriate)

No

- **Minimum time frame to respond to complaints, and not just an automated response.** In our research with children and young people, they told us that they often don't feel empowered to make a complaint. We believe platforms should send personalised responses, as automated responses do little to make children and young people feel listened to. Delays on the part of companies often make them relive aspects of the harm. Platforms should have a duty to respond promptly and efficiently to complaints.

    "When I have tried to report stuff on [platform], they haven't done anything, even though the account will be blatantly going against the rules. So posting kind of like graphic stuff on hate and stuff like that, or revenge porn and things like that. Then you go and report it and two days later, I got a message from [platform] saying, oh we can't go through all the reports right now, there's not enough people working. It felt like you're saying you've got these rules in place to kind of stop this stuff from spreading on the platform, but you're not actually enforcing them."

Question 17: To what extent does or can a service adopt functionalities or features, designed to mitigate the risk or impact of content that is harmful to children on that service?

Is this a confidential response? (select as appropriate)

No

- **Disable the feature that automatically adds someone to a WhatsApp group.** Currently you have to go to settings and choose to not be automatically added to a WhatsApp group. This puts young people at risk of being added to groups that encourage illegal behaviour or might lead to grooming. Once a young person is added to a group their mobile number is visible for all participants to see. A number of young people we have spoken to say once they are added to a group chat (especially if by a friend) they feel a pressure to stay in the group.
- **Push Notifications.** We suggest introducing a self-check tool on platforms. For example, adults accessing gambling or porn sites can receive a pop-up asking them if they're sure they want to continue. (Stop It Now suggest that this has pre-vented a number of people going on to access Porn Hub). Banks also use this when users send money e.g. 'are you sure you want to send this?'. We want children and young people to feel supported and empowered on the internet, not just limiting and prohibiting them. The message could be something they and/or their parents could set to make them think twice before accessing certain platforms, groups or searches.