Protection of Children Code of Practice for search services

Draft consolidated version incorporating amendments submitted to the Secretary of State in accordance with section 43(1) of the Online Safety Act 2023 on 16 November 2026.

MARKED-UP VERSION

[VERSION NOT IN FORCE: This version incorporates amendments submitted to the Secretary of State on 16 November 2026 but which are not in force. For the current version of the Code of Practice, see here]

Contents

1. Introduction 3
   - The Protection of Children Code of Practice for search services 3
   - The recommended measures 3
   - Data protection 4
2. Application and scope 5
3. Index of recommended measures 7
4. Recommended measures 12
   - A. Governance and accountability 12
   - B. [Not used] 16
   - C. Search moderation 17
   - D. Reporting and complaints 26
   - E. [Not used] 35
   - F. Settings, functionalities and user support 36
   - G. Publicly available statements 39
5. Definitions and interpretation 41
   - Risks of harm 53
   - User numbers 53

1. Introduction

The Protection of Children Code of Practice for search services

1.1 Under the Online Safety Act 2023 (the 'Act'), Ofcom is required to prepare and issue Codes of Practice ('Codes') for providers of Part 3 services, describing measures recommended for the purpose of compliance with specified duties imposed on those providers by the Act.

1.2 This document contains the Code applying to providers of regulated search services (and to providers of combined services, so far as the duties applicable to search services apply in relation to those services) for the purpose of compliance with the following duties:

a) the safety duties protecting children set out in section 29(2) to (9) of the Act;
b) the duty about content reporting set out in section 31 of the Act, so far as it relates to content that is harmful to children; and
c) the duties about complaints procedures set out in section 32 of the Act, so far as relating to the complaints set out in section 32(4)(b)(ii)[1] and (5).

1.3 Recommended measures for user-to-user services are set out separately in the Protection of Children Code of Practice for user-to-user services.

1.4 Over time Ofcom will update the Codes to take account of technological developments, new evidence, and any other relevant matters.

The recommended measures

1.5 Section 4 of this document sets out the recommended measures and is divided into subsections by thematic area. The meaning of terms in **bold** and terms in ***bold and italics*** is explained in Section 5.

1.6 The Act provides that service providers which implement measures recommended to them in the Codes will be treated as complying with the relevant duty or duties to which those measures relate. The duties to which each measure relates are set out in the index of recommended measures at Section 3 of this document.

1.7 Where a service provider implements measures recommended to it in these Codes which include safeguards for the protection of freedom of expression and/or for the protection of the privacy of United Kingdom users, the Act provides that they will also be treated as complying with the duties set out in section 33(2) (in respect of freedom of expression) and section 33(3) (in respect of privacy).

1.8 Service providers may seek to comply with a relevant duty in another way by adopting what the Act refers to as alternative measures. In doing so, service providers would also need to comply with the duty to have particular regard to the importance of protecting United Kingdom users' and interested persons' right to freedom of expression and the privacy of United Kingdom users.

[1] So far as relating to content that is harmful to children.

1.9 Where they take alternative measures, service providers must also maintain a record of what they have done and how they consider that it meets the relevant duties, including how they have complied with the duty to have particular regard to the importance of protecting freedom of expression and privacy.

Data protection

1.10 Implementing the recommended measures set out in this Code will inevitably involve the processing of personal data. The Information ~~Commissioner's Office~~ Commission ('the ICO') is the statutory regulator for data protection law and has made clear that it expects service providers to comply fully with data protection law when taking measures for the purpose of complying with their online safety duties under the Act.

1.11 The ICO has set out that it expects service providers to take a 'data protection by design and by default' approach when implementing online safety systems and processes. It advises service providers to familiarise themselves with the data protection legislation, the ICO's Children's code and relevant ICO guidance, including the updated opinion published by the ICO in January 2024 setting out the ~~Commissioner's~~ Commission's expectations for age assurance under the Children's code, to understand how to comply with the data protection regime.

External documents

1.12 A hard copy of any external document referred to in the recommended measures can be obtained by writing to Ofcom at Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London, SE1 9HA (tel. 020 7981 3000).

2. Application and scope

2.1 This Code of Practice applies to a ***provider*** in respect of:

a) the **regulated search service** that is ***likely to be accessed by children*** it provides; or
b) the ***combined service*** that is ***likely to be accessed by children*** it provides, to the extent that the duties in section 29, section 31 (so far as it relates to ***content that is harmful to children***) and section 32 (so far as relating to the complaints set out in section 32(4)(b)(ii)[2] and (5)) of the **Act**) apply in relation to the service by virtue of section 7(6) of the **Act**.

2.2 If a person is the ***provider*** of more than one **regulated search service** (or ***combined service***) this Code has effect in relation to each such service (so far as applicable).

2.3 This Code applies regardless of whether or not the ***provider*** of the service is inside the United Kingdom.

2.4 The services in respect of which each recommended measure in this Code applies are specified in the "application" section of each measure. An overview can be found in the index of recommended measures at Section 3 of this document.

2.5 Section 5 of this document includes provision about a service's risk and size. The subsection headed 'Risks of harm' (which begins at paragraph 5.3) sets out when a service is at low, medium or high risk of harm arising from a specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**, and includes a definition of '**multi-risk (children)**'.

2.6 The subsection headed 'User numbers' (which begins at paragraph 5.6) explains when a service is to be treated as having more than a particular number of monthly **active United Kingdom users** for those measures which apply in relation to **services** of a certain size, and how to calculate the number of monthly **active United Kingdom users**. Definitions of '**large service'** and '**large general search service**' are included in the definitions section in Section 5 of this document.

2.7 The measures in this Code of Practice are recommended for the purpose of compliance with the **safety duties protecting children** and the **reporting and complaints duties** and their scope and application should be construed accordingly. In particular, the recommended measures should be construed in light of sections 25(1) and 30 of the **Act.**

2.8 Section 25(1) provides that the duties set out in Chapter 3 of Part 3 of the **Act** extend only to:

a) the ***search content*** of the service,
b) the design, operation and use of the ***search engine*** in the United Kingdom, and
c) in the case of a duty that is expressed to apply in relation to users of a service, the design, operation and use of the ***search engine*** as it affects ***United Kingdom users*** of the service.

2.9 Section 30 provides that:

a) the **safety duties protecting children** extend only to such parts of a service as it is possible for children to access (and a ***provider*** is only entitled to conclude that it is not

[2] So far as relating to ***content that is harmful to children***.

possible for **children in the United Kingdom** to access a service, or a part of it, if ***age verification*** or ***age estimation*** is used on the service with the result that **children in the United Kingdom** are not normally able to access the service or that part of it);

b) so far as a **safety duty protecting children** relates to ***non-designated content that is harmful to children***, the duty is to be taken to extend only to addressing risks of harm from the kinds of such content that have been identified in the **children's risk assessment** (if any have been identified); and

c) the duties set out in section 29(3) of the **Act** are to be taken to extend only to **content that is harmful to children** where the risk of ***harm*** is presented by the nature of the ***content*** (rather than the fact of its dissemination).

3. Index of recommended measures

Recommended measure		Application	Relevant duties
Governance and accountability			
PCS A1	Annual review of risk management activities	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are a **large general search service**.	Section 29(2), (3), and (5) to (9) Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)† and (3)†
PCS A2	Individual accountable for the safety duties protecting children and reporting and complaints duties	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 29(2), (3), and (5) to (9) Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)† and (3)†
PCS A3	Written statements of responsibilities	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2), (3), and (5) to (9) Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)† and (3)†
PCS A4	Internal monitoring and assurance	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are both a **large service** and **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2), (3), and (5) to (9) Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)† and (3)†
PCS A5	Tracking evidence of new and increasing harm to children	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS A6	Code of conduct regarding protection of children from harmful content	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2), (3), and (5) to (9) Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)† and (3)†
PCS A7	Compliance training	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children).**	Section 29(2), (3), and (5) to (9) Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)† and (3)†

Recommended measure		Application	Relevant duties
Search moderation			
PCS C1	Having a search moderation function designed to action content that is harmful to children	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 29(2) and (3) Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS C2	Filtering out primary priority content for child users	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are a **large general search service**.	Section 29(2) and (3) Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS C3	Setting internal content policies	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS C4	Performance targets	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS C4A	Steps to take on reversal of content decisions	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 30(8) Section 33(2) and 33(3)
PCS C5	Prioritisation	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS C6	Resourcing	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS C7	Provision of training and materials to individuals working in search moderation (non-volunteers)	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
Reporting and complaints			
PCS D1	Enabling complaints	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)(a)†
PCS D2	Having easy to find, easy to access and easy to use complaints systems and processes	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 31(2)* Section 32(2)(c)†

Recommended measure		Application	Relevant duties
PCS D3	[Not used]		
PCS D4	Appropriate action - sending indicative timeframes	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or at medium or high **risk** of any specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**.	Section 32(2)(c)†
PCS D5	Appropriate action – sending further information about how the complaint will be handled	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or at medium or high **risk** of any specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**.	Section 32(2)(b)† and (c)†
PCS D6	Opt-out from communications following a complaint	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or at medium or high **risk** of any specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D7	Appropriate action for relevant complaints about content considered harmful to children	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 29(3) Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D8	Appropriate action for content appeals – determination (services that are large general search services or multi-risk)	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D9	Appropriate action for content appeals – determination (services that are neither large general search services nor multi-risk)	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are neither a **large general search service** nor **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D10	Appropriate action for content appeals – action following determination	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 32(2)(b)†

Recommended measure		Application	Relevant duties
PCS D11	Appropriate action for age assessment appeals (services that are large general search services or multi-risk)	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are either a **large general search service** or **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D12	Appropriate action for age assessment appeals (services that are neither large general search services nor multi-risk)	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are neither a **large general search service** nor **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D13	Appropriate action for complaints about non-compliance with certain duties	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
PCS D14	Exception: manifestly unfounded complaints	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 32(2)(b)†
Settings, functionalities and user support			
PCS F1	Reporting and removal of predictive search suggestions	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that (a) are a **large general search service** and (b) where a **child-accessible part** of the service uses a **predictive search functionality**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS F2	[Not used]		
PCS F3	Providing suicide, self-harm and eating disorder crisis prevention information	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are a **large general search service**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
PCS F4	Providing age-appropriate user support materials for children	**Services likely to be accessed by children** that are **multi-risk (children)**.	Section 29(2) and (3)
Publicly available statements			
PCS G1	Publicly available statements: substance (all services)	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 29(5) and (7) Section 32(3)†

Recommended measure		Application	Relevant duties
PCS G2	Publicly available statements: substance (Category 2A services)	***Category 2A services*** that are ***likely to be accessed by children***.	Section 29(9)
PCS G3	Publicly available statements: clarity and accessibility	All **services likely to be accessed by children**.	Section 29(8) Section 32(3)†

* So far as it relates to content that is harmful to children.

† So far as relating to the complaints set out in section 32(4)(b)(ii) (so far as relating to content that is harmful to children) and (5).

4.Recommended measures

A. Governance and accountability

PCS A1 Annual review of risk management activities

Application

PCS A1.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is a **large general search service**.

Recommendation

PCS A1.2 The provider's most senior **governance body** in relation to the service should carry out and record an annual review of risk management activities having to do with **harm to children**, including in relation to risk remaining after the implementation of appropriate Code of Practice measures. The review should include how developing risks are being monitored and managed.

PCS A2 Individual accountable for the safety duties protecting children and reporting and complaints duties

Application

PCS A2.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS A2.2 The provider should name an individual accountable to the most senior **governance body** for compliance with the **safety duties protecting children** and the **reporting and complaints duties**.

PCS A2.3 Being accountable means being required to explain and justify actions or decisions regarding:

a) **harm to children** risk management and mitigation (including as to risk remaining after the implementation of appropriate Code of Practice measures); and

b) compliance with the relevant duties,

to the most senior **governance body**.

PCS A3 Written statements of responsibilities

Application

PCS A3.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS A3.2 The provider should have written statements of responsibilities for senior managers who make decisions about the management of risks having to do with **harm to children**.

PCS A3.3 A statement of responsibilities is a document which clearly shows the responsibilities that the senior manager performs in relation to the management of risks having to do with **harm to children** and how they fit in with the provider's overall governance and management arrangements in relation to the service.

PCS A4 Internal monitoring and assurance

Application

PCS A4.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is both a **large service** and **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS A4.2 The provider should have an internal monitoring and assurance function to provide independent assurance that measures taken to mitigate and manage the risks of **harm to children** identified in the **children's risk assessment** are effective on an ongoing basis. This function should report to, and its findings should be considered by, either:

a) the body that is responsible for overall governance and strategic direction of a service; or

b) an audit committee.

PCS A4.3 This independent assurance may be provided by an existing internal audit function.

PCS A5 Tracking evidence of new and increasing harm to children

Application

PCS A5.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS A5.2 The provider should track evidence of new kinds of **primary priority content** or **priority content**, and unusual increases in particular kinds of **content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy**, in **search content that can be accessed by children**. Relevant evidence may include, but is not limited to, that derived from:

a) complaints processes;

b) search moderation processes;

c) information that may come to light following an investigation or inquiry by a coroner or procurator fiscal into the death of a ***child***; and

d) information from **trusted flaggers** and any other expert group or body the provider considers appropriate.

PCS A5.3 The provider should ensure that any new kinds of **primary priority content** or **priority content** or unusual increases in particular kinds of **content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy** are regularly reported through relevant governance channels to the most senior **governance body**.

PCS A5.4 To understand this, the provider should establish a baseline understanding of how frequently particular kinds of **content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy** occur in **search content that can be accessed by children** to the extent possible based on its internal data and evidence. The provider should use this baseline to identify unusual increases in the relevant data.

PCS A6 Code of conduct regarding protection of children from harmful content

Application

PCS A6.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service**; or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS A6.2 The provider should have a code of conduct that sets standards and expectations for individuals working for the provider around protecting **children in the United Kingdom** from risks of **harm to children**.

PCS A7 Compliance training

Application

PCS A7.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS A7.2 The provider should secure that individuals working for the provider who are involved in the design and operational management of the service are trained in the service's approach to compliance with the **safety duties protecting children** and the **reporting and complaints duties**, sufficiently to give effect to them. This measure does not apply in relation to **volunteers**.

PCS A7.3 This does not affect Recommendation PCS C7 (provision of training and materials to individuals working in search moderation (non-volunteers)).

B. [Not used]

[Intentionally left blank]

C. Search moderation

PCS C1 Having a search moderation function designed to action content that is harmful to children

Application

PCS C1.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS C1.2 The provider should, as part of its **search moderation function**, have ***systems and processes*** designed to review, assess and (where relevant) take **appropriate moderation action** in relation to **search content that can be accessed by children** the provider has reason to suspect may be **relevant content that is harmful to children**.

PCS C1.3 For the purpose of PCS C1.2, when the provider has reason to suspect that **search content that can be accessed by children** may be **relevant primary priority content**, the provider should either:

a) determine, on the basis of all relevant information that is reasonably available to the provider, whether the search content is **relevant primary priority content** and, if it determines that it is, take **appropriate moderation action for primary priority content** in relation to the search content; or

b) where the provider has identified kinds of ***content*** as being subject to **appropriate moderation action for primary priority content** in its **publicly available statement**, and the provider is satisfied that the type of **relevant primary priority content** which it has reason to suspect exists is included within those kinds of ***content***, take **appropriate moderation action for primary priority content** in relation to the search content.

PCS C1.4 For the purpose of PCS C1.2, when the provider has reason to suspect that **search content that can be accessed by children** may be **relevant priority content** or **relevant non-designated content**, the provider should either:

a) determine, on the basis of all relevant information that is reasonably available to the provider, whether the search content is **relevant priority content** or **relevant non-designated content** and, if it is, decide whether to take (and, where relevant, take) **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content** in relation to the search content; or

b) where the provider has, in its **publicly available statement,** identified kinds of ***content*** in respect of which it will, or may, take **appropriate**

moderation action for priority content and non-designated content, and the provider is satisfied that the type of **relevant priority content** or **relevant non-designated content** which it has reason to suspect exists is included within those kinds of ***content***, decide whether to take (and, where relevant, take) **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content** in relation to the search content.

PCS C1.5 For the purpose of PCS C1.3, "**appropriate moderation action for primary priority content**" includes any action applied to the search content concerned that results, on **child-accessible parts** of the service, in:

a) where the content is **image-based search content**,

i) in all cases, the view of that search content being blurred, distorted or obscured for all **relevant users**; and

ii) where the provider considers it appropriate, the search content also being given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** for all **relevant users**; and

b) where the content is not **image-based search content**, the search content being given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** for all **relevant users**,

unless the feasibility and relevance condition set out in PCS C1.8 is satisfied in which case "**appropriate moderation action for primary priority content**" includes any action that results in the search content concerned no longer appearing in ***search results*** presented to **relevant users**.

PCS C1.6 For the purpose of PCS C1.4,"**appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content**" includes any action applied to the search content concerned that results, on **child-accessible parts** of the service, in:

a) where the content is **image-based search content**, either:

i) the view of that search content being blurred, distorted or obscured for **relevant users**; and/or

ii) the search content being given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** for **relevant users**; or

b) where the content is not **image-based search content**, the search content being given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** for all **relevant users**,

unless the feasibility and relevance condition set out in PCS C1.8 is satisfied in which case "**appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content"** includes any action that results in the search content concerned no longer appearing in ***search results*** presented to **relevant users**.

PCS C1.7 For the avoidance of doubt, PCS C1.5(a)(ii), PCS C1.5(b), PCS C1.6(a)(ii) and PCS C1.6(b) do not require **relevant content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy** to appear lower than other ***search content*** in ***search results*** where this is not possible in response to a given ***search request*** because:

a) only ***search content*** that is **relevant content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy** is relevant to a ***search request***; or

b) given the specificity of the ***search request***, ***search content*** that is **relevant content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy** is reasonably considered to be most relevant.

PCS C1.8 The feasibility and relevance condition is satisfied where:

a) the outcome(s) set out in PCS C1.5(a), PCS C1.5(b) or PCS C1.6(a) and PCS C1.6(b), as applicable, is not feasible because of the way in which ***search results*** are presented to users; or

b) the type of search content concerned falls outside the scope of ***content*** for which the service is designed to enable users to ***search***.

PCS C1.9 For the purpose of PCS C1.5 and PCS C1.6, "relevant users" are ***United Kingdom users*** other than those ***United Kingdom users*** the provider has, on reasonable grounds, determined to be ***adults***. For the purposes of this paragraph PCS C1.9, the fact that a ***user*** has self-declared their age (without more) is not be to regarded as giving a provider reasonable grounds to determine that a ***user*** is an ***adult***.

PCS C1.10 In designing the ***systems and processes*** referred to in PCS C1.2 and in particular the aspects of those ***systems and processes*** relating to what **appropriate moderation action** (if any, as relevant) to take (including the extent to which ***search content*** is given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** presented to ***United Kingdom users***), the provider should have regard to the following:

a) the findings of the service's **children's risk assessment** as to risk of **harm to children** in different age groups from particular kinds of **priority content** and ***non-designated content that is harmful to children***;

b) the prevalence of **relevant content that is harmful to children** hosted at the **URL** or in the database at which the ***search content*** concerned is present;

c) the interests of ***users*****,** and in particular ***users*** who are not ***children***, in receiving any material that is not **relevant content that is harmful to children** that would be affected; and

d) the severity of potential ***harm*** to **child users** that may arise if they ***encounter*** the ***search content*** concerned.

PCS C1.11 If the service has an existing functionality which allows moderation actions to be applied by default for ***users*** of the service, the provider may use this functionality to implement the **appropriate moderation actions** in accordance with PCS C1.3 and PCS C1.4, including where that default setting may be changed by ***users***.

Safeguards for freedom of expression

PCS C1.12 The following measures are safeguards to protect ***United Kingdom users***' and ***interested persons'*** rights to freedom of expression and the privacy of ***United Kingdom users***:

za) Recommendation PCS C4A;

a) where they are applicable, Recommendations PCS C3, PCS C4, PCS C6 and PCS C7 (in relation to search moderation);

b) Recommendations PCS D1 and PCS D2, so far as they relate to **content appeals**, PCS D8 or PCS D9 (whichever is applicable) and PCS D10; and

c) Recommendations ICS D1 and ICS D2, so far as they relate to complaints by ***United Kingdom users*** and ***interested persons*** if they consider that the provider is not complying with its duties in relation to freedom of expression or privacy, and ICS D11, in the Illegal content Codes of Practice for search services.

PCS C2 Filtering out primary priority content for child users

Application

PCS C2.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is a **large general search service.**

Recommendation

PCS C2.2 The provider should ensure that, on **child-accessible parts** of the service, ***search content*** that is **relevant primary priority content** or **primary priority content proxy** of which the provider is aware, by reason of following the processes set out in Recommendation PCS C1, does not appear in the ***search results*** of any ***users*** the provider has determined are **child users** using any **existing means to determine the age or age range of a particular user**.

PCS C2.3 The provider should take steps to ensure that any functionality which allows moderation actions to be applied by default for ***users*** of the service, to achieve the outcome set out in PCS C2.2, cannot be switched off by ***users*** the provider has determined are **child users** using any **existing means to determine the age or age range of a particular user**.

Safeguards for freedom of expression

PCS C2.4 The following measures are safeguards to protect ***United Kingdom users***' and ***interested persons'*** rights to freedom of expression and the privacy of ***United Kingdom users***:

za) Recommendation PCS C4A;

a) where they are applicable, Recommendations PCS C3, PCS C4, PCS C6 and PCS C7 (in relation to search moderation);

b) Recommendations PCS D1 and PCS D2, so far as they relate to **content appeals**, PCS D8 or PCS D9 (whichever is applicable) and PCS D10;

c) Recommendations PCS D1 and PCS D2, so far as they relate to **age assessment appeals**, and PCS D11 or D12 (whichever is applicable);

d) Recommendations ICS D1 and ICS D2, so far as they relate to complaints by ***United Kingdom users*** and ***interested persons*** if they consider that the provider is not complying with its duties in relation to freedom of expression or privacy, and ICS D11, in the Illegal content Codes of practice for search services.

PCS C3 Setting internal content policies

Application

PCS C3.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS C3.2 The provider should set and record (but need not publish) internal content policies setting out rules, standards and guidelines around:

a) what ***search content*** should be actioned in accordance with Recommendations PCS C1 and PCS C2; and

b) how policies should be operationalised and enforced.

PCS C3.3 The policies should be drafted in such a way that **appropriate moderation action** is taken in accordance with Recommendation PCS C1 (having a search moderation function designed to action content that is harmful to children) and where applicable, that the outcome set out in Recommendation PCS C2 (filtering out primary priority content for child users) is ensured.

PCS C3.4 The provider should:

a) have regard to the service's **children's risk assessment** (including, in so far as relevant, its findings as to **harm to children** in different age groups) in setting these policies; and

b) have processes in place for updating these policies in response to evidence of new and increasing **harm to children** on the service (as tracked in accordance with PCS A5.2).

Safeguard for freedom of expression and privacy

PCS C3.5 Recommendation PCS C4A is a safeguard to protect ***United Kingdom users'*** right to freedom of expression and the privacy of ***United Kingdom users***.

PCS C4 Performance targets

Application

PCS C4.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS C4.2 For the purposes of PCS C4.3 and PCS C4.4, ***search content*** is "actioned" when:

a) in the case of **relevant primary priority content** or **primary priority content proxy** the provider takes **appropriate moderation action for primary priority content**;

b) in the case of **relevant priority content**, **priority content proxy**, **relevant non-designated content** or **non-designated content proxy**, the provider has either taken **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content** or decided not to take **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content**;

c) a provider that is a **large general search service** ensures the outcome set out in PCS C2.2,

(as applicable) in respect of the ***search content*.**

PCS C4.3 The provider should set and record performance targets for its **search moderation function**, covering at least:

a) the time between the provider first having reason to suspect that ***search content*** may be **relevant content that is harmful to children** and the content being **actioned**; and

b) the accuracy of decision making.

PCS C4.4 In setting its targets, the provider should balance the need to ensure ***search content*** that is **relevant content that is harmful to children** is **actioned** swiftly against the importance of making accurate moderation decisions.

PCS C4.5 The provider should effectively measure and monitor its performance against its performance targets.

PCS C4A Steps to take on reversal of content decisions

Application

PCS C4A.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS C4A.2 If a ***provider*** reverses a previous decision that ***search content*** is **content that is harmful to children** or **content that is harmful to children proxy**, and this reversal is not in relation to a **relevant complaint** that is a **content appeal** (for which, see PCS D10), it should take the steps listed in PCS D10.2(a), (b) and (c).

PCS C5 Prioritisation

Application

PCS C5.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS C5.2 The provider should prepare and apply a policy in respect of the prioritisation of ***search content*** for review. In setting the policy, the provider should have regard to at least the following:

a) how frequently ***search content*** is returned in response to ***search requests***;

b) the severity of potential ***harm*** to **child users** if they ***encounter*** the ***search content***, including whether the content is suspected to be **relevant primary priority content** or **relevant priority content** or **relevant non-designated content**, and taking into account the **children's risk assessment** of the service; and

c) the likelihood that the ***search content*** is **relevant content that is harmful to children**, including whether it has been reported by a **trusted flagger**.

PCS C6 Resourcing

Application

PCS C6.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS C6.2 The provider should resource its **search moderation function** so as to give effect to its internal content policies and performance targets having regard to at least:

a) the propensity for external events to lead to a significant increase in demand for search moderation on the service; and

b) the particular needs of its ***United Kingdom user*** base as identified in the **children's risk assessment** of the service, in relation to languages.

PCS C7 Provision of training and materials to individuals working in search moderation (non-volunteers)

Application

PCS C7.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS C7.2 The provider should ensure individuals working in search moderation receive training and materials that enable them to fulfil their role in moderating **search content that can be accessed by children** including in relation to Recommendations PCS C1 and PCS C12 (where relevant), and the internal

content policies set in accordance with Recommendation PCS C3. This measure does not apply in relation to **volunteers**.

PCS C7.3 The provider should ensure that in doing so:

a) it has regard to at least the service's **children's risk assessment** and evidence of new and increasing **harm to children** (as tracked in accordance with PCS A5.2); and

b) where the provider identifies a gap in the understanding of individuals working in search moderation in relation to a specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**, it gives training and materials to remedy this.

D. Reporting and complaints

PCS D1 Enabling complaints

Application

PCS D1.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS D1.2 The provider should have ***systems and processes*** which enable **prospective complainants** to make each type of **relevant complaint** in a way which will secure that the provider will take appropriate action in relation to them.

PCS D2 Having easy to find, easy to access and easy to use complaints systems and processes

Application

PCS D2.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS D2.2 The ***systems and processes*** referred to in PCS D1.2 should be operated to ensure that:

a) for **relevant complaints** regarding a specific piece of ***search content***, a reporting function or tool is clearly accessible in relation to that ***search content***;

b) processes for making other kinds of **relevant complaints** are easy to find and easily accessible;

c) they are designed so that they only include reasonably necessary steps; and

d) it is possible when making **relevant complaints** to give the provider supporting information.

PCS D2.3 In designing the ***systems and processes*** referred to in PCS D1.2, including its reporting tool or function, the provider should consider the accessibility needs of its ***United Kingdom user*** base having regard to:

a) the service's **children's risk assessment**, including the groups of **children in the United Kingdom** identified as using the service;

b) other relevant information the provider holds on its ***United Kingdom user*** base;

c) industry standards and good practice as to the design of the service, to ensure the reporting and complaints process is accessible to disabled people; and

d) comprehensibility, based on the likely reading age of the youngest individual permitted to use the service without the consent of a parent or guardian.

PCS D2.4 For the purposes of PCS D2.3(c), the ***systems and processes*** referred to in PCS D1.2 should be designed for the purpose of ensuring usability for those dependent on assistive technologies, including:

a) keyboard navigation; and

b) screen reading technology.

PCS D3 [Not used]

PCS D4 Appropriate action – sending indicative timeframes

Application

PCS D4.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service**; or

b) at medium or high **risk** of any specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**.

Recommendation

PCS D4.2 The provider should acknowledge receipt of each **relevant complaint** and provide the **complainant** with an indicative timeframe for deciding the complaint.

PCS D4.3 PCS D4.2 does not apply if:

a) the provider's acknowledgement is non-ephemeral; and

b) the **complainant** has opted out from receiving non-ephemeral communications in relation to their **relevant complaint**.

PCS D5 Appropriate action – sending further information about how the complaint will be handled

Application

PCS D5.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service**; or

b) at medium or high **risk** of any specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**.

Recommendation

PCS D5.2 In the acknowledgment of receipt of each **relevant complaint**, referred to in Recommendation PCS D4, the provider should set out:

a) the possible outcomes; and

b) confirmation of whether the provider will inform the **complainant** of its decision whether to uphold the complaint and details of any action taken as a result.

PCS D6 Opt-out from communications following a complaint

Application

PCS D6.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service**; or

b) at medium or high **risk** of any specific kind of **content that is harmful to children**.

Recommendation

PCS D6.2 The provider should enable the **complainant** to opt out of receiving any non-ephemeral communications in relation to a **relevant complaint**.

PCS D7 Appropriate action for relevant complaints about content considered harmful to children

Application

PCS D7.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS D7.2 When the provider receives a **relevant complaint** about **search content that can be accessed by children** which may be ***content that is harmful to children***:

a) it should treat the complaint as reason to suspect that the search content may be **relevant primary priority content** or **relevant priority content** and/or **relevant non-designated content** (as applicable) and review the search content in accordance with PCS C1.3 or PCS C1.4 (as the case may be); and

b) if Recommendations PCS C4 and PCS C5 are not applicable to the provider, it should consider the complaint promptly.

PCS D7.3 PCS D7.2 does not apply to a complaint identified as manifestly unfounded in accordance with PCS D14.2.

PCS D8 Appropriate action for content appeals – determination (services that are large general search services or multi-risk)

Application

PCS D8.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS D8.2 The provider should determine **relevant complaints** which are **content appeals**.

PCS D8.3 The provider should, as a minimum, monitor its performance against performance targets relating to the following:

a) the time it takes to determine the **content appeal**; and

b) the accuracy of decision making,

and should resource itself so as to give effect to those targets.

PCS D8.4 The provider should have regard to the following matters in determining what priority to give to review of a **relevant complaint** which is a **content appeal**:

a) the seriousness of the action taken against the ***search content*** as a result of the decision that the ***search content*** was **content that is harmful to children**;

b) whether the decision that the ***search content*** was **content that is harmful to children** was made by ***content identification technology***

and, if so, any information available about the accuracy of the ***content identification technology*** at identifying similar types of **content that is harmful to children**; and

c) the past error rate on the service in relation to judgements about similar kinds of **content that is harmful to children**.

PCS D9 Appropriate action for content appeals – determination (services that are neither large general search services nor multi-risk)

Application

PCS D9.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is neither a **large general search service** nor **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS D9.2 The provider should determine **relevant complaints** which are **content appeals** promptly.

PCS D10 Appropriate action for content appeals – action following determination

Application

PCS D10.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS D10.2 If, in relation to a **relevant complaint** that is a **content appeal**, the provider reverses a decision that ***search content*** was **content that is harmful to children**, the provider should:

a) so far as appropriate and possible for the purpose of restoring the position of the ***search content*** to what it would have been had the decision not been made, reverse the action taken in relation to the ***search content*** as a result of that decision;

b) where there is a pattern or significant evidence of ***search content*** being given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** or not appearing in ***search results*** in error, adjust any relevant search moderation guidance if appropriate to ensure it is accurate; and

c) where possible and appropriate, take steps to secure that the use of automated moderation technology does not cause the same ***search***

content to be given a lower priority in the overall ranking of ***search results*** or not appear in ***search results*** again.

PCS D11 Appropriate action for age assessment appeals (services that are large general search services or multi-risk)

Application

PCS D11.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is either (or both) of the following:

a) a **large general search service;** or

b) **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS D11.2 The provider should have regard to the following matters in determining what priority to give to consideration of an **age assessment appeal**:

a) the seriousness of the restriction applied to the user's ability to access ***content*** in or ***via*** the ***search results*** of the service as a result of the assessment of their age;

b) whether the decision to restrict access to ***content*** in or ***via*** the ***search results*** of the service on the basis of the user's age was made without human oversight and, if so, information available about the accuracy of the specific technology used in making age assessments of the type concerned;

c) the past error rate on the service in relation to age assessments of the type concerned; and

d) any representations made by the user as part of the complaint as to the effect of the decision on their livelihood.

PCS D11.3 The provider should, as a minimum, monitor its performance against performance targets relating to the following:

a) the time it takes to determine the **age assessment appeal**; and

b) the accuracy of decision making,

and should resource itself so as to give effect to those targets.

PCS D11.4 If the provider determines that the user's age was incorrectly assessed, the provider should take any necessary steps to enable the user to access ***content*** to which access was restricted as a result of that incorrect assessment (so far as appropriate and possible for the purpose of restoring the position to what it would have been had the assessment been correct).

PCS D11.5 The provider should monitor trends in **age assessment appeals** to help improve any **age assurance process** used on the service**.**

PCS D12 Appropriate action for age assessment appeals (services that are neither large general search services nor multi-risk)

Application

PCS D12.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is neither a **large general search service** nor **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS D12.2 The provider should determine **age assessment appeals** promptly.

PCS D12.3 If the provider determines that the user's age was incorrectly assessed, the provider should take any necessary steps to enable the user to access ***content*** to which access was restricted as a result of that incorrect assessment (so far as appropriate and possible for the purpose of restoring the position to what it would have been had the assessment been correct)..

PCS D12.4 The provider should monitor trends in **age assessment appeals** to help improve any **age assurance process** used on the service**.**

PCS D13 Appropriate action for complaints about non-compliance with certain duties

Application

PCS D13.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS D13.2 This Recommendation PCS D13 applies to **relevant complaints** that the provider is not complying with:

a) the **safety duties protecting children**; or

b) the duty about content reporting set out in section 31 of the **Act**, so far as it relates to **content that is harmful to children**.

PCS D13.3 The provider should nominate a responsible individual or a team to ensure that such complaints are directed to an appropriate individual or team to be processed.

PCS D13.4 **Relevant complaints** should be handled:

a) in a way that protects ***United Kingdom users***, including ***children***; and

b) within timeframes the provider has determined are appropriate.

PCS D13.5 PCS D13.3 and PCS D13.4 do not apply in relation to complaints identified as manifestly unfounded in accordance with PCS D14.2.

PCS D14 Exception: manifestly unfounded complaints

Application

PCS D14.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS D14.2 When the provider receives a **relevant complaint** that is not a **content appeal** or an **age assessment appeal**, it may disregard the complaint only if:

a) the provider has prepared and implemented a policy in accordance with PCS D14.3 to PCS D14.6, setting out the information and attributes that indicate a **relevant complaint** is manifestly unfounded;

b) the provider identifies the complaint as manifestly unfounded in accordance with that policy; and

c) the provider has in place a process to monitor the degree to which the application of the policy incorrectly identifies complaints which are not manifestly unfounded, and to review the policy in accordance with PCS D14.4 to PCS D14.6.

PCS D14.3 In designing a policy for the purposes of PCS D14.2(a), the provider should have regard to:

a) the need to identify manifestly unfounded complaints accurately; and

b) the risks posed to (i) particular groups of vulnerable users and (ii) **child users**, if **relevant complaints** are incorrectly identified as manifestly unfounded.

PCS D14.4 The provider should, at minimum, carry out an annual review of the policy to ensure it is not incorrectly identifying **relevant complaints** as manifestly unfounded.

PCS D14.5 If the policy is incorrectly identifying **relevant complaints** as manifestly unfounded, the provider should make changes to it with a view to ensuring its accuracy.

PCS D14.6 The provider should keep a record of its review process and any changes it has made.

E. [Not used]

[Intentionally left blank]

F. Settings, functionalities and user support

PCS F1 Reporting and removal of predictive search suggestions

Application

PCS F1.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is a **large general search service** and where a **child-accessible part** of the service uses a **predictive search functionality**.

Recommendation

PCS F1.2 The provider should offer ***United Kingdom users*** a means to easily report **predictive search suggestions** which they consider direct ***users*** towards **primary priority content** or **priority content**.

PCS F1.3 Where a report is received, the provider should:

a) consider whether the wording of a reported **predictive search suggestion** presents a clear and material risk of ***United Kingdom users*** encountering **primary priority content** or **priority content**; and

b) if such a risk is identified, take appropriate steps to ensure that (on **child-accessible parts** of the service) the reported **predictive search suggestion** is not recommended to any ***United Kingdom user***.

PCS F2 [Not used]

PCS F3 Providing suicide, self-harm and eating disorder crisis prevention information

Application

PCS F3.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is a **large general search service.**

Recommendation

PCS F3.2 The provider should use ***systems and processes*** to detect, and provide crisis prevention information in response to, ***search requests*** made by ***United Kingdom users*** on **child-accessible parts** of the service that contain:

a) general queries regarding suicide, an act of deliberate self-injury or an eating disorder; or

b) queries seeking specific, practical or instructive information regarding suicide methods, an act of deliberate self-injury, an eating disorder or behaviours associated with an eating disorder.

PCS F3.3 The crisis prevention information should:

a) be prominently displayed to ***United Kingdom users*** in the ***search results***;

b) be comprehensible and suitable in tone and content for as many ***United Kingdom users*** as possible, including ***children***;

c) provide the following:

i) a helpline associated with a reputable mental health organisation with capability to provide crisis support regarding suicide, acts of deliberate self-injury or eating disorders (as appropriate to the particular ***search request***) that is available to all ***United Kingdom users***, including ***children***, irrespective of age or geographical location within the United Kingdom, for 24 hours per day for each day of the year; and

ii) link(s) to information and support suitable for ***children*** that is freely available through a reputable mental health organisation with expertise in suicide, acts of deliberate self-injury or eating disorders (as appropriate to the particular ***search request***).

PCS F3.4 Before including the information set out in PCS F3.3(c)(i) or (ii) in crisis prevention information, the provider should have regard to any terms published by the relevant organisation relating to the use of its helpline or information and support (as the case may be), including as to obtaining its consent.

PCS F4 Providing age-appropriate user support materials for children

Application

PCS F4.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides that is **multi-risk (children)**.

Recommendation

PCS F4.2 The provider should make ***publicly available*** (including to ***United Kingdom users*** who are not registered to use the service and persons in the United Kingdom who are not users of the service) materials which explain:

a) how ***United Kingdom users*** or ***affected persons*** can report ***search content*** which they consider to be ***content that is harmful to children***; and

b) how to make other kinds of **relevant complaints**.

PCS F4.3 Where a **child-accessible part** of the service uses a **predictive search functionality**, the provider should also make ***publicly available*** (including to persons in the United Kingdom who are not users of the service) materials which explain how to report **predictive search suggestions** (where the service includes this feature, and see Recommendation PCS F1.

PCS F4.4 The materials should in each case include:

a) a section aimed at ***children*** which includes at least one of the following:

i) visual elements;

ii) audio-visual elements;

iii) interactive elements; and

b) a section aimed at the parents or guardians of ***children***.

PCS F4.5 The section of the materials aimed at ***children*** should be clear, comprehensible and easy for a **child user** to understand.

PCS F4.6 The materials should not include any material which would be ***content that is harmful to children*** if it were ***search content*** of the service.

PCS F4.7 If it is possible to register to use the service, the provider should ensure that the materials are provided to ***United Kingdom users*** during the registration process.

PCS F4.8 The provider should ensure that the materials appear in ***search results*** in response to ***search requests*** relating to them made by ***United Kingdom users*** using the service's ***search engine***.

PCS F4.9 If the service includes a functionality which enables ***users*** to search for material relating to the service, the provider should also ensure that the materials are provided in response to ***search requests*** made by ***United Kingdom users*** using that functionality.

G. Publicly available statements

PCS G1 Publicly available statements: substance (all services)

Application

PCS G1.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS G1.2 The provider should include the following in the **publicly available statement**:

a) provisions specifying how **children in the United Kingdom** are to be protected from **content that is harmful to children** (including **identified kinds of non-designated content**), covering separately each kind of ***primary priority content that is harmful to children*** and ***priority content that is harmful to children***;

b) provisions giving information about any ***proactive technology*** used for the purposes of compliance with any of the **safety duties protecting children** (including the kind of technology, when it is used, and how it works); and

c) provisions specifying the policies and processes that govern the handling and resolution of **relevant complaints**.

PCS G2 Publicly available statements: substance (Category 2A services)

Application

PCS G2.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each ***Category 2A service*** that is ***likely to be accessed by children*** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS G2.2 The provider should summarise the findings of its **children's risk assessment** (including as to levels of risk and as to the nature, and severity, of potential **harm to children**) in the **publicly available statement**.

PCS G3 Publicly available statements: clarity and accessibility

Application

PCS G3.1 This measure applies to a ***provider*** in respect of each **service likely to be accessed by children** it provides.

Recommendation

PCS G3.2 The provider should ensure that the provisions included in the **publicly available statement** in accordance with Recommendation PCS G1 are:

a) easy to find, such that they are:

   i) clearly signposted for the general public, regardless of whether they have registered with or are using the service; and

   ii) locatable within the **publicly available statement**;

b) laid out and formatted in a way that helps ***United Kingdom users***, including children, read and understand them;

c) written to a reading age comprehensible for the youngest individual permitted to use the service without the consent of a parent or guardian; and

d) designed for the purposes of ensuring usability for those dependent on assistive technologies, including:

   i) keyboard navigation; and

   ii) screen reading technology.

5. Definitions and interpretation

5.1 Terms in **bold** used in this Code have the meanings set out in table A. The meaning given applies even if the term is also used in the **Act**.

5.2 Terms in ***bold and italics*** used in this Code have the same meaning as in the **Act**. Table B provides a reference to the provision(s) in the **Act** containing the definition of the relevant term as well as additional notes and references which are intended to assist the reader. In the event of any inconsistency between the **Act** and the information in table B, the **Act** should be regarded as authoritative.

Table A - Definitions of terms in bold used in this Code

Term	Meaning
Act	The Online Safety Act 2023 (c.50).
Actioning search content / search content is actioned	Has the meaning set out in Recommendation PCS C4.2.
Active United Kingdom user	As defined in paragraph 5.9.
Age assessment appeal	A complaint by a ***United Kingdom user*** who is unable to access ***content*** in or ***via*** the ***search results*** of the service because measures used to comply with a duty set out in section 29(2) or (3) of the **Act** have resulted in an incorrect assessment of the user's age.
Appropriate moderation action	**Appropriate moderation action for primary priority content** and/or **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content** (as applicable).
Appropriate moderation action for primary priority content	As defined in PCS C1.5.
Appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content	As defined in PCS C1.6.
Child user	A ***United Kingdom user*** who is under the age of 18.
Child-accessible part (of a service)	A ***search engine*** of a **service** other than any part which **children in the United Kingdom** are not normally able to access as a result of the use on the service of ***age verification*** or ***age estimation***.
Children in the United Kingdom	People under the age of 18 in the United Kingdom.

Term	Meaning
Children's risk assessment	The most recent risk assessment carried out by the ***provider*** pursuant to section 28 of the **Act**.
Complainant	The ***United Kingdom user***, ***affected person*** or ***interested person*** who made the complaint.
Content appeal	A complaint by an ***interested person*** if the ***provider*** takes or uses measures in order to comply with the **safety duties protecting children** that result in ***content*** relating to that ***interested person*** no longer appearing in ***search results*** or being given a lower priority in ***search results*****.**
Content that is harmful to children proxy	**Primary priority content proxy**, **priority content proxy** and **non-designated content proxy**.
Content that is harmful to children	***Search content*** that is: a) **primary priority content**, b) **priority content**, or c) an **identified kind of non-designated content**.
Existing means to determine the age or age range of a particular user	An existing ***system or process*** designed to determine the age or age range of a particular ***user*** which may be comprised of one or more of the following: a) any measure designed to estimate the age or age range of ***users***; b) any measure designed to verify the exact age of ***users***; and c) a measure which requires a ***user*** to self-declare their age (without more).
General search service	A **service** that enables users to search for information across the internet, whether from (in principle) all websites or databases or only some websites or databases. It derives ***search results*** from an underlying **search index** and presents ***search results*** using algorithms that rank based on relevance to a ***search request***. (For the avoidance of doubt, this term includes ***combined services***, the public ***search engine*** part of which enables ***users*** to search the internet in the manner described above.)
Governance body	A body which makes decisions within an organisation, for example a board of directors.
Harm to children	***Harm*** to **children in the United Kingdom** ***presented by*** **content that is harmful to children**.

Term	Meaning
Identified kind of non-designated content	A kind of ***non-designated content that is harmful to children*** in respect of which the service's **children's risk assessment** has identified a low, medium or high **risk** of ***harm*** to **children in the United Kingdom.**
Image-based search content	***Search content*** that takes the form of photographs, videos or other visual images (including but not limited to GIFs and illustrations), whether or not combined with text, emojis or other symbols.
Large general search service	A **general search service** which has more than 7 million monthly **active United Kingdom users** (see paragraphs 5.6 to 5.10).
Large service	A **service** which has more than 7 million monthly **active United Kingdom users** (see paragraphs 5.6 to 5.10).
Multi-risk (children)	See paragraph 5.5.
Non-designated content proxy	***Search content*** that is ***content*** of a kind that is identified in the ***provider's*** **publicly available statement** for the service as being subject to **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content**, where the ***provider*** is satisfied that one or more **identified kinds of non-designated content** are included within that kind of ***content***.
Predictive search functionality	An algorithmic feature embedded in the search field through which a ***search service*** predicts a ***user's search request*** and provides a list of **predictive search suggestions**.
Predictive search suggestions	***Search requests*** suggested to ***users*** by means of a **predictive search functionality**.
Primary priority content	***Search content*** that is ***primary priority content that is harmful to children***.
Primary priority content proxy	***Search content*** that is ***content*** of a kind that is identified in the ***provider's*** **publicly available statement** for the service as being subject to **appropriate moderation action for primary priority content**, where the ***provider*** is satisfied that **one** or more kinds of **primary priority content** is included within that kind of ***content***.
Priority content	***Search content*** that is ***priority content that is harmful to children***.

Term	Meaning
Priority content proxy	***Search content*** that is ***content*** of a kind that is identified in the ***provider's*** **publicly available statement** for the service as being subject to **appropriate moderation action for priority content and non-designated content**, where the ***provider*** is satisfied that one or more kinds of **priority content** is included within that kind of ***content***.
Prospective complainants	***United Kingdom users***, ***affected persons*** and ***interested persons***.
Publicly available statement	The statement that ***providers*** are required to make available to members of the public in the United Kingdom pursuant to section 29 of the **Act**. In relation to a ***combined service***, references to a publicly available statement include the service's terms of service (consistent with section 25(2)(a) of the **Act**).
Regulated search service	An ***internet service*** that is, or includes, a ***search engine*** (subject to section 3(5) to (7) of the **Act**) that is a regulated search service under section 4 of the **Act** (subject to the disapplication in section 5 of the **Act**).

Term	Meaning
Relevant complaint	The following kinds of complaint: a) complaints (including **reports**) by ***United Kingdom users*** and ***affected persons*** about ***search content*** which they consider to be ***content that is harmful to children***; b) complaints by ***United Kingdom users*** and ***affected persons*** if they consider that the provider is not complying with a duty set out in the following sections of the **Act**: i) section 29 (safety duties protecting children), or ii) section 31 (content reporting) so far as it relates to ***content that is harmful to children***; c) complaints by an ***interested person*** if the ***provider*** takes or uses measures in order to comply with the **safety duties protecting children** that result in ***content*** relating to that ***interested person*** no longer appearing in ***search results*** or being given a lower priority in ***search results***; d) complaints by a ***United Kingdom user*** who is unable to access ***content*** because measures used to comply with a duty set out in section 29(2) or (3) of the **Act** have resulted in an incorrect assessment of the user's age.
Relevant content that is harmful to children	**Relevant primary priority content, relevant priority content** or **relevant non-designated content**.
Relevant non-designated content	Any **search content that can be accessed by children** that is an **identified kind of non-designated content** where the risk of ***harm*** is presented by the nature of the content (rather than the fact of its dissemination).
Relevant primary priority content	Any **search content that can be accessed by children** that is ***primary priority content that is harmful to children*** where the risk of ***harm*** is presented by the nature of the content (rather than the fact of its dissemination).
Relevant priority content	Any **search content that can be accessed by children** that is ***priority content that is harmful to children*** where the risk of ***harm*** is presented by the nature of the content (rather than the fact of its dissemination).
Relevant users	As defined in PCS C1.9.

Term	Meaning
Reporting and complaints duties	The duty set out in section 31 of the **Act**, so far as it relates to ***search content*** that is ***content that is harmful to children*** present on a part of a service that it is possible for **children in the United Kingdom** to access and the duties set out in section 32 of the **Act**, so far as relating to the complaints set out in section 32(4)(b)(ii) (so far as relating to ***content that is harmful to children***) and (5).
Reports	Complaints by ***United Kingdom users*** and ***affected persons*** about ***search content*** which they consider to be ***content that is harmful to children***, made using a reporting function or tool provided by the **service**.
Risk	See the subsection headed 'Risks of harm' below (which begins at paragraph 5.3).
Safety duties protecting children	The duties set out in section 29 of the **Act**.
Search content that can be accessed by children	***Search content*** that may be ***encountered*** in or ***via search results*** by ***United Kingdom users*** on **child-accessible parts** of the service.
Search index	A collection of **URLs** that are obtained by deploying crawlers to find content across the internet, which is subsequently stored and organised.
Search moderation function	The ***systems and processes*** designed to review, assess and take **appropriate moderation action** in relation to ***search content***, including ***search content*** a provider has reason to suspect may be **relevant content that is harmful to children**.
Service	A **regulated search service** or a ***combined service***, to the extent that the **safety duties protecting children** or the **reporting and complaints duties** apply in relation to such a service by virtue of section 7(6) of the **Act**. This includes (but is not limited to) **general search services** and **vertical search services**.
Service likely to be accessed by children	A **service** that is ***likely to be accessed by children***.
Trusted flagger	A person with expertise relating to one or more types of **harm to children** for whom the ***provider*** has established a dedicated reporting channel.
URL	Uniform Resource Locator, meaning a reference that specifies the location of a resource accessible by means of the internet.

Term	Meaning
Vertical search service	A **service** that enables users to search for specific topics, or products or services offered by third parties with which the ***provider*** has a relevant arrangement (which may be contractual). Unlike **general search services**, they do not return ***search results*** based on an underlying **search index**. Rather, they use an API or equivalent technical means to directly query selected websites or databases, and to return ***search results*** to ***users***.
Volunteer	An individual who, in relation to the activity in question, is not: a) employed by the ***provider*** or anyone else, b) remunerated, or c) acting by way of a business.

Table B - Terms used in this Code that have the meaning given in the Act

Term	Meaning under the OSA
Adult	**Section 236(1)**
Affected person	**Section 31(5)** See also section 32(6). See the entries for "content", "child" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Age estimation	**Section 230(3) and (4)** Section 4(4) defines "regulated service". A "regulated user-to-user service" is a "user-to-user service" (see the entry for "user-to-user service" regarding the definition of that term) which is a regulated user-to-user service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). A "regulated search service" is an "internet service" (see the entry for "internet service" regarding the definition of that term) that is, or includes, a "search engine" (see the entry for "search engine" regarding the definition of that term) (subject to section 3(5) to (7)) that is a regulated search service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). Section 79(3) defines "Regulated provider pornographic content". Section 79(2) defines "provider pornographic content".

Term	Meaning under the OSA
	See the entries for "content", "internet service", "pornographic content" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Age verification	**Section 230(2) and (4)** Section 4(4) defines "regulated service". A "regulated user-to-user service" is a "user-to-user service" (see the entry for "user-to-user service" regarding the definition of that term) which is a regulated user-to-user service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). A "regulated search service" is an "internet service" (see the entry for "internet service" regarding the definition of that term) that is, or includes, a "search engine" (see the entry for "search engine" regarding the definition of that term) (subject to section 3(5) to (7)) that is a regulated search service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). Section 79(3) defines "Regulated provider pornographic content". Section 79(2) defines "provider pornographic content". See the entries for "content", "internet service", "pornographic content" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Category 2A service	**Section 95(10)(b)** Section 95(2)(b) requires Ofcom to establish a register, a part of which sets out the regulated search services and combined services which Ofcom considers meet the Category 2A threshold conditions (as specified in regulations made under paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 11). Services for the time being included in that part of the register are Category 2A services. A "regulated search service" is an "internet service" (see the entry for "internet service" regarding the definition of that term) that is, or includes, a "search engine" (see the entry for "search engine" regarding the definition of that term) (subject to section 3(5) to (7)) that is a regulated search service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). See the entry for "combined service" regarding the definition of that term.
Child	**Section 236(1)**
Combined service	**Section 4(7)** Paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 1 sets out the conditions to be met for a search engine not to be considered a public search

Term	Meaning under the OSA
	engine. See the entry for "search engine" regarding the definition of that term. A "regulated user-to-user service" is a "user-to-user service" (as defined in section 3(1) and (2), and section 204(1)) which is a regulated user-to-user service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). See the entries for "content", "encounter", "internet service" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Content	**Section 236(1)** See the entry for "internet service" regarding the definition of that term. See section 232 in relation to content communicated "publicly" or "privately".
Content identification technology	**Section 231(2)** Under section 231(1), content identification technology is listed as a form of "proactive technology". Section 231(3) describes situations where content identification technology will not be proactive technology.
Content that is harmful to children	**Section 60(2)** See the entries for "child", "combined service", "content", "harm", "primary priority content that is harmful to children", "Priority content that is harmful to children" and "search content" regarding the definitions of those terms. A "regulated user-to-user service" is a "user-to-user service" (as defined in section 3(1) and (2), and section 204(1)) which is a regulated user-to-user service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). Section 55(2) defines "regulated user-generated content". Section 55(5) to (12) contain interpretative provisions. Section 55(3) and (4) define "user-generated content". Section 55(4) provides interpretation of the scope of "content generated, uploaded or shared by a user" and explains when a bot or other automated tool may be regarded as a user of a service.
Encounter (in relation to content)	**Section 236(1)**
Harm	**Section 234(2)** See the entries for "content" and "user" regarding the definition of those terms. See section 233 in relation to "functionalities".
Interested person	**Section 227(7)**

Term	Meaning under the OSA
	Section 3(1) and (2) and section 204(1) define "user-to-user service". See the entries for "content", "combined service", "encounter", "internet service", "search engine", "search service" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Internet service	**Section 228(1)** and **section 204(1)** Section 228(2) and (3) describe what is meant by a service that is made available by means of the internet.
Likely to be accessed by children	**Section 37** Section 35(1) sets out what is meant by a "children's access assessment". Section 35(3) sets out when the "child user condition" is met in relation to a service. Section 36 details the requirement to carry out a children's access assessment. Schedule 3 makes provision about the deadline by which a first "children's access assessment" must be carried out. Section 236 defines a "child" (see also section 35(5)). Section 4(3) defines "Part 3 service". Section 230(2) and (4) define "age verification". Section 230(3) and (4) define "age estimation". Section 3(1) and (2) and section 204(1) define "user-to-user service". Section 236(1) defines "user-to-user part" in relation to a "user-to-user service". Section 55(3) and (4) define "user-generated content". Section 55(4) provides interpretation of the scope of "content generated, uploaded or shared by a user" and explains when a bot or other automated tool may be regarded as a user of a service. See the entries for "content", "encounter", "internet service", "search engine", "United Kingdom user" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Non-designated content that is harmful to children	**Section 60(2)(c) and (3)** See the entries for "content", "primary priority content that is harmful to children" and "priority content that is harmful to children" regarding the definitions of those terms. See the entry for "child" regarding the definition of that term.
Presented by (in relation to harm presented by content)	**Section 234(3) to (6)** See the entries for "content", "encounter" "harm", "search" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms. Section 233(3) defines "functionality".
Primary priority content that is harmful to children	**Section 61**

Term	Meaning under the OSA
	See the entry for "content" regarding the definition of that term. Section 236(1) defines "pornographic content".
Priority content that is harmful to children	**Section 62** See the entry for "content" regarding the definition of that term.
Proactive technology	**Section 231(1)** Section 231(2) defines "content identification technology". Section 231(3) describes situations where content identification technology will not be proactive technology. Section 231(4) defines "user profiling technology". Section 231(5) explains when technology will not be user profiling technology. Section 231(6) defines "behaviour identification technology". Section 231(7) explains when this technology will not be proactive technology. Section 231(8) to (13) contains further interpretative provisions. See the entries for "combined service", "content", "encounter", "internet service", "search engine", "search content", "search service" and "user" regarding the definition of those terms. Section 125(12) and (13) define "accredited technology". Section 59(9) defines "CSEA content" (and section 59(11) to (14) contains further interpretative provisions). Section 59(2) defines "illegal content" (see also section 59(4) to (7) and (11) to (15)). Section 79(2) defines "provider pornographic content". Section 236(1) defines "pornographic content". Section 236(1) defines "personal data". Section 4(4) defines "regulated service". Section 59(8) defines "terrorism content" (see also section 59(11) to (14)). A "regulated user-to-user service" is a "user-to-user service" (as defined in section 3(1) and (2), and section 204(1)) which is a regulated user-to-user service under section 4 (subject to the disapplication in section 5). Section 55(2) defines "regulated user-generated content". Section 55(5) to (12) contain interpretative provisions. Section 55(3) and (4) define "user-generated content". Section 55(4) provides interpretation of the scope of "content generated, uploaded or shared by a user" and explains when a bot or other automated tool may be regarded as a user of a service.
Provider	**Section 226**

Term	Meaning under the OSA
	See the entries for “combined service”, “internet service”, “search engine”, “search service” and “user” regarding the definitions of those terms.
Publicly available	**Section 236(1)**
Search content	**Section 57(2)** See section 57(6) regarding the reference to a “search service”. Section 3(1) and (2) and section 204(1) define “user-to-user service”. See the entries for “content”, “encounter” “internet service”, “search engine”, “search results”, “user” and “via” (in relation to references to encountering content “via search results”) regarding the definitions of those terms. Section 236(1) defines “paid-for-advertisements”. Section 56(1) defines “recognised news publisher”.
Search engine	**Section 229** Section 57(4) defines “search”. Section 3(1) and (2) and section 204(1) define “user-to-user service”. See the entries for “content”, “encounter”, “internet service” and “user” regarding the definitions of those terms.
Search or search request	**Section 57(4)**
Search results	**Section 57(3)** See section 57(6) regarding the reference to a “search service”. See the entries for “content”, “internet service”, “search engine”, “search request”, “search service” and “user” regarding the definitions of those terms.
Search service	**Section 3(4)** and **section 204(1)** See the entries for “internet service” and “search engine” regarding the definitions of those terms.
Systems and/or processes	**Section 236(1)**
United Kingdom user	**Section 227(1)** See the entry for “user” regarding the definition of that term.
User	**Section 227(2) and (3)** Section 227(3) sets out individuals and entities that will not be users for the purposes of the **Act**. Section 227(4) to (6) provide further interpretation of terminology used throughout section 227.

Term	Meaning under the OSA
	Section 57(4) defines "search". Sections 3(1) and (2) and section 204(1) define "user-to-user service". See the entries for "content", "encounter", "internet service", "search engine", "search service" and "user" regarding the definitions of those terms.
Via (in relation to references to encountering content "via search results")	**Section 57(5)** See section 57(6) regarding the reference to a "search service". See the entries for "content", "encounter", "internet service", "search results" and "search service" regarding the definitions of those terms.

Risks of harm

Risk of harm

5.3 A **service** is at low, medium or high risk of a specific kind of **content that is harmful to children** if the service's **children's risk assessment** identified a low, medium or high risk (as the case may be) of ***harm*** to **children in the United Kingdom** ***presented by*** that kind of **content that is harmful to children**.

5.4 A **service** is also at medium or high risk of a specific kind of **content that is harmful to children** if, by virtue of a confirmation decision given under section 134 of the **Act** in relation to a risk of serious harm, the duty set out in section 29(2)(a) of the **Act** applies in relation to the service as if a risk assessment carried out by the provider pursuant to section 28 of the **Act** had identified a medium or high risk (as the case may be) of serious harm ***presented by*** to that kind of **content that is harmful to children**.

Multi-risk (children)

5.5 A **service** is **multi-risk (children)** if it is at medium or high risk of two or more specific kinds of **content that is harmful to children.**

User numbers

5.6 This subsection applies for the purpose of determining whether a **service** has more than a particular number of monthly **active United Kingdom users**.

5.7 A **service** has more than a particular number of monthly **active United Kingdom users**:

a) from such time as the average number of monthly **active United Kingdom users** is more than that number; and
b) until such time as the average number of monthly **active United Kingdom users** has been at or below that number for a continuous period of six months.

5.8 A **service's** average number of monthly **active United Kingdom users** is the mean number of **active United Kingdom users** per month for:

a) the six-month period ending with the month preceding the time in question; or
b) where the **service** has been in operation for less than six months, the period for which the service has been in operation.

5.9 In this subsection, an **active United Kingdom user** means any ***United Kingdom user*** who has ***encountered search content*** in or ***via search results*** of the **service**.

5.10 For the avoidance of doubt, in relation to a ***combined service***, only ***United Kingdom users*** who have ***encountered search content*** in or ***via search results*** of the service's public ***search engine*** (within the meaning given by section 4(7) of the **Act**) are **active United Kingdom users** of that service for the purposes of this subsection.