



HOUSE OF LORDS

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CHILDREN AND THE INTERNET

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Witnesses: Dr Julia Fossi and Ms Vicki Shotbolt

Ms Susie Hargreaves and Dr Jamie Saunders

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on
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Members present

Lord Best (Chairman)
 Lord Allen of Kensington
 Baroness Benjamin
 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury
 Earl of Caithness
 Lord Gilbert of Panteg
 Baroness Kidron
 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall

Examination of Witnesses

Dr Julia Fossi, Senior Analyst, Child Online Safety Team, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and **Ms Vicki Shotbolt**, Founder and CEO, Parent Zone

Q18 The Chairman: Thank you both very much for joining us. We are very depleted. We do not have all the number that we should, but you are extremely welcome. Everything you say will be faithfully recorded and put on the record. Would you say a few words about yourselves? Although we have your biographical details, it puts it on the record if you also speak them. If you then want to make an opening statement to help us with this inquiry into children and the internet, that will be a very helpful start.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: My name is Vicki and I run an organisation called Parent Zone. We are, first and foremost, an organisation interested in parenting. We are interested in the quality of parenting that young people get, because we know one of the most important influences on how well a child turns out in life is the quality of their at-home parenting, to use a horrible phrase. Over the last 10 years our focus has been pretty much exclusively on the impact of digital on family life and the profound effect it has had on children's interactions with their parents, and on the requirements on parents to guide their children through a much more complicated space. That is us.

Dr Julia Fossi: I am Julia Fossi. I am acting head of child online safety at the NSPCC. Child online safety is a core priority for the NSPCC. We know that the internet can be extremely beneficial for children, who use it to learn, to explore, to create and to develop. Yet despite the fact that one-third of internet users in the world are children, it exposes them to inappropriate and often damaging content. At the NSPCC we feel it is essential to ensure that children are afforded age-appropriate, comparable levels of adult protection, care and

guidance online as they are offline. We are looking for parity of protection in the online space as offline.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. The first question is from Baroness McIntosh.

Q19 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Thank you. The online world is fairly recent to all of us. Children have always been exposed to risk, including some of the risks we now associate with the internet, such as bullying and pornography. Could either one or both of you talk to us a bit about the differences between the risks children face now online and the risks they faced before we had the internet? Is it simply a question of scale and reach, or are they exposed to different specific risks now?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: I think it is both those things. One of the things that is very difficult when we talk to parents and encourage them to take a balanced approach to raising their children through these risks is that the reality is that we have a window into children's lives that we never previously had. It has always been the case that children can be uniquely unkind to each other. The difference now is that we can see some of that unkindness and it is recorded for all time. But there is a specific difference about the scale, volume, inescapability—if that is a word—and amplification of those experiences that previous generations did not have.

Some of the risks are new and different. One of the risks that sounds like a very mundane one but is one that parents routinely talk to us about is young people being exposed to things at a much earlier age than they would previously have thought they might be, such as girls of eight, nine and 10 obsessively watching make-up videos and feeling it is important they present to the world a version of themselves that is beautiful enough to go on Instagram. That is quite different. Girls of eight, nine and 10 did not use to have to have that experience. Then there are the emerging risks. The emerging risk of gambling would have been unthinkable a few years ago—that a child of 14 could be facilitated in a gambling habit—because we would have taken offline measures to ensure that they were not going to be. But in an online world, enterprising services have figured out ways to facilitate gambling if you are 14. So there is a mixture of both: it is certainly true to say some of these risks are not new, but it is also true to say that the internet has facilitated risk-taking on an industrial scale and created some risks that did not previously exist.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Specifically on gambling, are you talking about access that children and young people can now get to adult sites—i.e. there are not enough barriers—or kinds of gambling that have been developed specifically for children?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: I am talking about the latter: kinds of gambling that have been developed specifically for a youth audience.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Is that just by luring them in?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: There is definitely a lure element and encouraging certain behaviour. One of the very common methods of getting points in an online game is to buy a pack. You have no way of knowing what is in the pack. In effect, you are rolling the dice and seeing whether you get something good or not. There is certainly a behavioural element to it, but there are also sites that facilitate gambling; you buy something virtual, then you gamble with it. The gambling site will say that it was only virtual, but of course a money transaction has gone on in the background. It is still money.

Dr Julia Fossi: There are similarities in children's offline and online experience, but certain angles and activities take place that are specific to the online world. As Vicki said, the additional impact for children and young people of bullying in the online space is that it is 24-hour. They cannot escape from it. It is everywhere. They go home with it. It is all-pervasive. It is that inescapability and the anonymity the online world offers: it allows people to create fake profiles to harass and bully, should they wish. Equally, we have had a number of calls from children and young people about baiting sites: sites where children and young people develop videos where they go into the local community and say—not in this language; imagine worse language—"Who is the worst girl in your class?" They then identify that individual and upload those on to the internet. So there are newer developments that children would not necessarily have experienced in the past. The knowledge that that is being shared widely and of who can access that material is another form of victimisation for that individual: not knowing who can access it.

The Chairman: Who would host those baiting sites?

Dr Julia Fossi: The contacts we have had from Childline have been children and young people uploading it themselves and it has gone viral. It is older children in the community. Children are using the online space to test and push boundaries, just as they have done in the offline world, but the repercussions and consequences are much greater, not only for themselves but for the individuals they are targeting.

Q20 Earl of Caithness: I would like to explore this a little further. Dr Fossi, you said that the good things for children were to explore, create and develop. In what way could the internet be used more positively in that direction compared with how it is used at the moment? My second question to both of you is as follows. When one talks about the problems that children face, the major problem that seems to come up is bullying on social media. When people are asked what they are going to do about it, the first thing they talk about is pornography. Which

is the more insidious of the two? You can go into the British Museum and see any sort of pornography you want as opposed to damaging pornography.

Dr Julia Fossi: Children have the right to explore and use the internet for their benefit. It is there and it should be open to everybody. However, provisions should be put in place to provide an age-appropriate experience for children and young people. In the Digital Economy Bill, the Government have offered to set up an age verification regulator to target pornography in particular. There is a possibility of that regulator's remit being extended so that it can provide a code of practice with minimum standards for providers of internet services, with child protection at its core. That would allow a filtered experience for children and young people so that they were not exposed to inappropriate content. Age appropriateness could be used in relation to pornography, for example. It is fantastic that sanctions will be in place for websites that do not have effective age verification procedures – however, the NSPCC does not believe that the current sanctions are strong enough, particularly for overseas sites. There should be backstop blocking powers at an ISP level to ensure that those sites cannot be uploaded in the United Kingdom.

So I think that there are huge possibilities. There are technical capabilities that could be applied in the online space to better protect children and young people. Instagram has today launched a filter that individuals can apply themselves so that certain things do not appear on their feeds, and the UK Council for Child Internet Safety has put together guidance for interactive services, setting out best practice. That is fantastic, but who is ensuring that internet service providers are fulfilling or applying those basic principles? The regulator could perhaps look at whether internet service providers are applying the minimum standards, and if they are not it could apply sanctions to ensure that they do.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: At the risk of going back over ground that Julia has covered, can I pick up on the positive point again? I think that we miss a lot of the positives about the online world. I look at the generation coming through—the 16, 17 and 18 year-olds—who have forged entirely new careers completely by themselves. We absolutely did not guide them towards blogging as a career, yet there are fantastically successful bloggers. For all the football fans in the room, anyone who saw the YouTube charity football match would think it incredible. A generation of young people have done something really special. One thing that we could get much better at is recognising young people who do good stuff online and celebrating it in the same way as we celebrate offline achievements. I do not think we do that enough. It is problematic for parents, because they understand that their children are going to have careers in technology, and children understand that. When we recently worked with children, 70% of

them expected to have a career that involved tech. So surrounding them with a space or a narrative that is very negative is not terribly helpful, and we should really challenge it.

On porn and bullying, it is fascinating that we always turn to bullying as a front-of-mind issue when we talk about the internet. I do not think it is correct to do so or that it is necessarily what young people themselves would say, and it is not necessarily what parents say is their front-of-mind concern. That is in no way, shape or form to say that it is not a significant issue. However, it is one that we seem to have caught hold of and can quantify quite easily, and we have organisations in place that can respond to it. Therefore, we are missing a whole load of other things to which we ought to be paying just as much attention.

Turning not least to the porn aspect, there is something very, very different about online porn. I absolutely take your point about the British Museum and the Victorian collections of pornography that we would now describe as art, but the sort of porn that children can access is hardcore, non-consensual and extremely unpleasant. The most powerful description that I had of it came from ATVOD, as it was, which said that this content would not be licensed for sale in a licensed sex shop. So we are talking about a new form of porn that is readily and easily available.

On filtering, I agree that there should be backstops, but I also think that we have done amazing things with filtering in this country. However, there are new services such as Snapchat, which is not that new any more, coming through that do not have parental filters on them. You can use that service once you are 13, and if you have the digital skills, which most kids do, to know how to look for a porn Snapchat handle, that can be added to the storyline and then you can have a newsfeed of porn on your Snapchat app. So encrypted services are making it extremely difficult for us to filter porn, which is a huge concern given the unpleasantness of the porn that is out there.

Earl of Caithness: Thank you. You said that we could do better. Who are “we”?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: That is a really hard question. I think it is we, the people. Am I allowed to say that here? I think that the media could do better and that schools could do more—I think we could be more creative in the school curriculum. I also think that parents could be encouraged. Instead of feeding them a diet of “Screen time is bad, bad, bad”, we could feed them the fact that there is also good screen time. I think that parents need to hear that. The industry could do better as well. It is possible to find some fantastic apps that help young people to be creative, but it would be nice to see an awful lot more of those being made available so that parents can guide their kids towards the stuff that will be creative, useful and empowering.

Dr Julia Fossi: I think that everybody has a moral, social and ethical duty to safeguard children in the online space. Putting children at the forefront and putting their needs at the front, centre and heart of the designs in the online world would help us to develop a better internet for children. I am thinking about tech developers and engineers, as well as at corporations, industry, schools, and parents and grandparents. A multifaceted approach is needed in relation to online safety.

Q21 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: I am going to ask my questions back to front, because my second question picks up on what you have been saying. It sounds to me as though there almost needs to be a new kind of teacher. How do parents keep up with the new technologies that are emerging all the time? Vicki was saying that Snapchat is being used in a way that was never intended. How can parents, teachers and adults in general keep up with what is going on out there—what the potential for young people is?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: It is almost impossible to keep up. One of the exciting things about the internet from my perspective is that when working in parenting 15 years ago we used to talk about the democratisation of family life and how teenagers and adults are having to have different sorts of conversations. The internet really has done that. Our young people are guiding this generation. That is good and healthy, except that we also rely on providers to be a bit more explicit about the services they are providing. At the risk of harping on about one particular app, I did a conference call recently with Snapchat and was flabbergasted. I thought that I understood how to use it but clearly I did not, and there was nothing on the device that would have helped me to understand it.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: So is this something that should be introduced into the education system?

Dr Julia Fossi: At the NSPCC we believe that parenting in the online world is very similar to parenting in the offline world. It is about having regular conversations with your children about the fundamentals of consent, respect, honesty and trust, which apply equally online as they do offline. We try not to bombard parents with the fact that they need to know all the technology; they just need to sit down with, and engage with their children, see how they are interacting with the online world and help guide them through that process.

Parents need further support on the technical capabilities, particularly for younger children, such as parental controls and filtering in their homes, but there is also an overreliance on this being a parental issue when it involves ISPs. Sky has default-on filtering for the likes of pornography. Why are all ISPs not doing that? It safeguards the most vulnerable in our society; for parents who have multiple adversities, who are unable to cope with their own

lives, let alone the online life of their children and young people. Equally, it could be a marriage between schools and parents. Schools need to be aware of parents' concerns in the online space and offer information to parents on what they are discussing in schools. Resources should be provided, not necessarily by schools themselves, to complement the advice and information that children get in the school setting back at home.

Q22 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: That moves on to how effective existing legislation is and where you feel that should go. I am going to ask you about sexting, which is obviously a big problem, and whether you feel that existing legislation is appropriate or whether we need to beef it up.

Dr Julia Fossi: There has been sexting guidance for schools outlining the activity and the risk assessment that takes place.¹ Equally, the police have set up new guidance for police officers. They have developed Outcome 21, which ensures that children and young people who have engaged in the consensual sharing of youth-produced images would not necessarily have it rest on their record. We are moving into the right space. For that specific topic, people are definitely acknowledging that children and young people are naturally curious. They will test out their sexuality. Rather than frame it as, “You must never do this activity”, highlight the risks involved and take a well-balanced view as to whether you should take part in it. Fundamentally I will not stop repeating issues of consent, respect and trust, which are the kinds of elements that can often get lost in some of the conversations—the impetus is placed on the individual who shared the image, not necessarily the person who shared it more widely—and take that more holistic approach.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Finally on sexting, is the NSPCC aware whether there is a difference between the effect on boys and on girls, and the way boys and girls behave over this?

Dr Julia Fossi: The research highlights that girls tend to be asked more for those images, but recent statistics from the Internet Watch Foundation show that there are equal numbers of boys sharing. The difference is that girls, because of the proximity of the parts being shown, tend to show their face, whereas boys show their genitals and are not easily identifiable. They can equally say, “That’s not me”. There are differential impacts, but it impacts on both.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Do the girls tend to be victims more, as it were? Are the boys showing off?

¹ Dr Fossi later elaborated that Sexting Guidance has been released for schools, outlining the pressures and motivations that children face in relation to sexting – and providing schools with a risk assessment and process for dealing with sexting cases.

Dr Julia Fossi: It is so nuanced. I do not think we can make broad generalisations. Boys feel equally harassed and pressured, and also pressured to show their manliness in wanting to have those images and requesting them from girls.

Q23 Baroness Kidron: I just want to ask a couple of things on age groups. One of the things about the internet, as we are discovering, is that it does not treat children as children but as adults. Of course, not everyone under the age of 18 is at the same developmental stage. As a group we have become very interested in the stages of childhood and what might be appropriate at different times. I will ask you a question about governance, but before I do I will ask for your perspectives on the nature of the technology—perhaps something about compulsion and things that you think are inappropriate for young people of different ages, which you touched on in your opening remarks. It would be great if you would say something about the different age groups and where you feel technology interacts with them in ways that might be problematic.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: It is an incredibly difficult question to answer because it is so new and because the generations coming through are experiencing it almost for the first time. One of the things I find really quite depressing is the increase in questions we have had from parents about tech tantrums: about much younger children for whom the device has become the thing that causes the big arguments. It used to be vegetables but not any more; it is taking the device away. There is a very legitimate question to be asked about how long for and at what age is it sensible to give a child a device. I do not think we know the answer to that. That is what makes it so difficult. There are fantastic resources on an iPad for a three year-old, so I would never criticise a parent for making the best use of that technology, but there is an issue about that uniquely individual device that is so engrossing being given at that very young age.

Moving on, the debate now is whether the default age for social networking should be 16, and there is the children's rights discussion about whether a child has a right to access the internet from the age of 13 without parental consent. All that says to me is that it is confusing and unclear, and we are not focusing on what is in the best interests of the child. My view is that it is not in the best interests of the child to expect them to sign up for terms and conditions they are unlikely to understand at the age of 13 without any parental oversight at all. I do not see how that can be appropriate in the online world, with all its dangers and complexities, if it is not appropriate in the offline world.

So, for me, there are some key points. There is the toddler question: the question of how we guide parents towards what is sensible for those very young children. What do we do about the point at which we accept that it is all right for a child to be online without any parental

oversight, and at what age do we say, “Fair enough, you’re old enough now to sign those terms and conditions and go and have fun”? For me those points feel like at aged 13 and 16. At 16 you should be old enough to do that. I say that thinking that I might hide under the desk because we do not know the answers to those questions. I am mindful of that.

Dr Julia Fossi: Absolutely. No proper research or impact assessment has been done looking at the cognitive, neuropsychological and developmental impact the online space has on children and young people. That is urgently needed so we can provide the resources in an age-appropriate way for children and young people. Our research, in particular the research that we carried out with the Children's Commissioner for England on the impact of online pornography, shows that children and young people are accidentally stumbling across this material. They are not actively searching for it. The fact is that it impacts them negatively however they see it, but the fact that children are as likely to stumble across pornography as they are to search for it highlights that there is absolutely a need to protect children in this space from adult materials.

Children can be affected by a variety of things. Our contacts from Childline and research carried out by EU Kids Online highlight that children and young people are negatively impacted by news content. They get really upset. The difference in the online space is that “inadvertent popping up”. They use a social-networking site to chat to friends, then on the side-lines there is a news article, an image, or an advert for pornography that pops up that they are not expecting but have to deal with there and then, with no context or anybody around them to help them understand where that has come from.

Baroness Kidron: Building on that—I understand that you do not have answers to the questions and that the research has not yet been done—what would be the road by which we would work out what sort of governance we needed for the under-18s? You are both talking about things that cannot be avoided, even if you are educated as a parent or a child. We would be interested in knowing what path you would take in looking at a different kind of governance. What would you like to see in place?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: At the risk of sounding draconian—that is not my default position by any stretch of the imagination—I think that up to the age of 16 we should expect parental consent. That would be my default setting. Let us start from an assumption that, if you are a minor, you ought to be getting parental consent in some form or another. Beyond that, we need research. We need to understand the impact of technology on young people’s cognitive abilities and to have some evidence-based policy-making around what is and is not appropriate at different ages. In the absence of that, I do not think that we can just wait and say, “We don’t know and

therefore it is all right not to expect parents to give their consent”. Only parents are in a position to judge how mature their child is or how comfortable they will be in the environment they are asking to join.

Baroness Kidron: You are talking about parental consent, but I am asking about governance of the online space. Do you think that other people in that space also have a responsibility to provide services that are appropriate to the development of the child? I suppose I am interested in that as well.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: A kind of online ecosystem for children has been built.

Baroness Kidron: That children are using?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: Indeed. Yes, I absolutely think that other people have a responsibility, but without regulation at this stage I do not think that we are going to see that ecosystem change. I had a teenager with me when I was having a conversation about Snapchat. Someone said, “People have really misunderstood it. It was created to be ‘delete by default’ but we never promised that it would always be ‘delete’”. We just said that it was more like a real live conversation. There might be people who choose to record your real life conversation, but we do not encourage them to do that”. The teenager with me in the room said, “That’s outrageous, because it was sold to us as ‘delete by default’”. It was sold to us as something that would instantly disappear”. It is at that level of development that we need to say, “That’s not all right. You have to be transparent”.

Dr Julia Fossi: Parity of protection in the online space can apply. Models exist in the offline space for gambling, for television and cinema certification - that can also be applied in the online space. The Government need to give a clear direction that age verification regulation is needed to safeguard children and young people. As I said originally, it is a case of extending those powers to all aspects of child protection. We have the ICT Coalition principles on child internet safety, and UKCCIS has developed guidelines on best practice. Let us start enforcing those in the governance structure of a regulator, specifically looking at child protection.

The impact that online space is having is relatively unknown. The NSPCC research on pornography shows a desensitisation impact. The more often children view pornography, the less shocked they are at seeing it and the more they are sexually aroused. That is shaping boys’ perception of things that they want to try out, and girls are really worried about what is expected of them within that space. That can be magnified across the board to all issues that children are concerned about, such as violent content and harassment. We are seeing an increasing number of children contact Childline about the sexually explicit content that they are being exposed to online. They are experiencing sexual grooming and live streaming. All

these things are happening more often. We have got to a critical stage where something needs to be put in place. Let us expand the powers of the regulator that the Government will be introducing. Let us protect children and young people. Let us provide minimum standards and age-appropriate filtered experiences. Children have a right to use the internet, but they need to use it safely. We ensure that children cannot access or buy alcohol in shops, but they can buy it online through an online delivery service. There needs to be absolute parity of protection.

Q24 Lord Allen of Kensington: Can I turn to the issue of trust? Ofcom research shows that 20% of 12 to 15 year-olds absolutely trust the information they get on the internet, whether through search engines or on sites. I am interested in asking a question from two perspectives. First, from the parent's perspective, is that a concern for parents? Are the children placing too much trust in the information they are getting? Secondly, from a child's perspective, what impact does that have on their forming views, prejudices, opinions and so on in later life? It would be fascinating to look at this issue from both those perspectives. Vicki, you might like to pick up on that.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: It is a completely fascinating question. I fear that I am about to repeat myself and say that, again, we do not know the answers to some of those questions because we are still dealing with the first generation coming through. We did some research on the impact of the internet on young people's mental health. We asked whether people would take advice that they saw online. We asked it of young people and of the professionals around young people. The professionals—a percentage in the high 80s—thought that young people would unquestioningly take the advice that they saw online, whereas the figure for young people was about 40%. So perhaps we underestimate young people's thoughtfulness about the content that they see.

On the other hand, they are on the receiving end of a tsunami of information—there is a vast amount of information—and helping them to navigate their way through it and develop critical reasoning skills is really challenging. We recently ran a project looking specifically at radicalisation and extremism. We talked to parents about how their children were being engaged in extremist views and how the level of debate was incredibly sophisticated. It is happening in their social networks—powerful arguments are being put across to these young people. Parents are simply not equipped to challenge some of the assertions that are being made by sophisticated groups. So I think it is making young people more vulnerable. I do not know that it is necessarily about trust; I think it is about their ability to put an appropriate level of faith in the information that they read and then to be able to contrast it with more reliable information. However, there is a real gap in the area of more reliable information.

You used to be able to watch the BBC and would pretty much know that what you saw was true. Now, they are getting their newsfeeds from Facebook, and they have no skilled editors to make sure that what they receive is truthful. That is a real concern.

Lord Allen of Kensington: Is it also a concern for parents, who are saying that they are worried about it because they do not have the tools to be able to address it?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: I would say that they are challenged by it, but I do not know whether it is true to say that they are worried about it. Parents tend to think, “Where did that come from? Why are you suddenly thinking that that is God’s honest truth?” Parents need other facts and information to be able to challenge that and to encourage their children to think in a slightly more open way.

Lord Allen of Kensington: On that point, Dr Fossi, would you treat it in the same way as you would do in the real world: getting children to talk about it? Is that something that you would encourage?

Dr Julia Fossi: Yes. Children have a right to explore different viewpoints. They should not be isolated and put in a completely walled garden, but it needs to be carried out in an age-appropriate way. There is also the question of the transparency with which these companies operate. I think we would all benefit from understanding a bit more about the algorithms that are used and what information is put forward. Again, that is something that an online regulator could ascertain, using self-audits and the reporting of functions across the board.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: At the risk of slightly disagreeing with the NSPCC, it is a massive ask to say to parents, “Just treat it like you would the offline world”, because it is not like the offline world. A parent 30 years ago would not have been faced with detailed questions about the behaviour of a terrorist group in Syria. These are sophisticated propagandists delivering messages to young people who are interested in them and have a right to hear them, but parents need the same sophisticated information to challenge it. At the moment, they are not there.

The Chairman: I see that we have 10 minutes to go and we are exactly half way through our questions. This is the Chairman not keeping you in order. We will have to speed up a bit.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: It seems to me there is one group of people we are missing out: people between the parents and young children who have grown up with the internet and have learned, like a certain lady in Canada, that it is not very good to put explicit photographs up and so on. I just wonder whether there is a generation that is there cautioning the younger generation.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: I do not think it is happening. We have an amazing opportunity there, because we have a group of young people aged 17 to 25 who have lived with it and grown up with it. They are quite wise about it—in many ways wiser than the parents we deal with. That is a resource we should unleash.

Q25 Baroness Benjamin: I congratulate both of you on the sterling work that you have been doing over the last two decades or so. Thank you. I think you have brought up this subject quite a few times in questions and in answers, but many parents feel inadequate when it comes to educating their children about online issues and modern technology. We all know that PSHE—personal, social, health and economic—education in schools can cover these issues and threats. In your view, is enough guidance and advice available to parents to enable them to educate and inform their children, or to protect them from inappropriate content?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: On the very specific question of protecting them from inappropriate content, a lot of information is available. The information issue that we have is of quality. There is a lot of information out there and it is very difficult for parents to figure out what is reliable information and what they should listen to.

Dr Julia Fossi: Advice is available to parents about inappropriate content. The difficulty is that it is everywhere; it is on advertising and music videos. For parents there is a specific challenge if you are looking at it just online. The NSPCC’s argument is that it has to be both; there is no distinction for children in these worlds and there should not be for adults. Having spoken to some groups of parents—and there is some research out there—even within the older generation there are lots of people who are brilliant on the internet and understand the issues. “Digital natives” is a dangerous term, because it makes parents feel immediately disempowered. Issues of consent, respect, honesty, trust, what is right, what is wrong and what kind of behaviour you should have, apply equally online and offline. That is a discussion that any parent could and should be able to have. More could probably be done in the advice and information children are given in schools, and having age-appropriate, fun and engaging material in the online space, whereby both children and parents engage after school.² There is a dearth of resources in that space, so let us use the online space positively. Let us develop that material so that parents and children can discuss these issues together in a safe environment.

Baroness Benjamin: I know of a parent whose four year-old was sexually abused by a 10 year-old. When the parent spoke to the parent of the 10 year-old boy about what had

² Dr Fossi elaborated: “There needs to be resources that are available online that children and parents can engage with together after school on these issues.”

happened, the parent was in denial. They were not aware of what this 10 year-old boy was watching. You said that a lot of material is available, but obviously there is a problem with parents not understanding it and not accessing it. What can be done to improve the development of communication about the resources available for parents in denial?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: Of all the questions you asked, this is the one that makes my heart beat faster. We have a really urgent need for a proper parenting strategy in the UK. It is not about having more information for parents—there is tons of information for parents—but about having proper support for parents; working with parents on their parenting skills, guiding them through the information, explaining it to them and helping them to overcome the very natural response “It would not be my little boy”. That is what every parent would say when faced with the reality that their child had done something awful. There used to be a requirement for every local authority to have a parenting strategy. That fell away. It needs to come back. Every school should have a parenting co-ordinator, every local authority should have a parenting strategy and every parent should have access to parenting support to help them make sense of all these complicated issues.

Baroness Benjamin: Through your experiences, are you aware of whether parents are aware of the effect on the mental and physical well-being of their children who are watching inappropriate material? Are parents worried about this?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: I would have to say no, on balance. The concerns that parents present to us are either after the event—something has happened and they are trying to pick up the pieces—or they are worried about the things that are immediately impacting on family life, such as screen time, in-app purchases and unexpected bills. It is not the long-term effects of some of these issues on their young people. To be fair to parents, that is often because they are just too busy getting through the day job, getting their kids fed, getting them to school on time and doing all those things. Generally, they are in denial. What is quite troubling is that the direction of travel for parents’ behaviour seems to be quite a curious one. We have done some research asking parents how many photos they share of their children. The average five year-old will now have 1,500 photographs shared by their parents. Parents are creating digital footprints for their children well before their children are in a position to give consent. Parents do not seem to be becoming more thoughtful and involved; they seem to be becoming a little less cautious.

Dr Julia Fossi: The majority of our contacts on the NSPCC helpline are from parents after an event. As Vicki said, it is after something has happened and they contact us for advice and information. We carried out some research relating to sexting on the kinds of information and

advice that parents would like. There was an overwhelming response from parents saying that they desperately want this information. They look for it from the police and the school, in the form of leaflets. There is a desire on the part of parents to have that material in those formats. We shared that research in the hope that other organisations, such as schools and the police, will start developing content as well as ourselves.

Q26 Lord Gilbert of Panteg: Can I just pick up on that last point? You talked quite a bit about challenges that parents face, their anxieties, the role of schools and what parents are looking for. What more could schools do with parents to help them understand the risks, but also the opportunities, of the internet for children, to understand what their children are doing and how they deploy their digital skills in school? What does best practice look like when schools are working very effectively with parents to take on those risks and explore the opportunities?

Dr Julia Fossi: Best practice is a ‘whole-school approach’; whereby schools engage with children and young people themselves, ask them what their concerns are and what they would like to talk about, get parents in and then develop policies and structures with teachers, parents and children together, using best-practice guidelines for schools on their policies and provisions. Equally, it is not the sole responsibility of schools. Research highlights that teachers are also unaware of this. It is about the provision of guidelines for schools, whereby they are given information and research to highlight risky behaviours to be able to spot abuse, to have effective risk-assessments where they can identify children who are vulnerable, and then have a package whereby they work with parents, where appropriate. Teachers also need guidelines about where engaging with a parent might not necessarily be the best approach. It is working with experts in the field and with the police to develop those guidelines, which are then applied in the school setting.

Baroness Kidron: I am interested in the way the conversation is going. It is partly us and your responses, but parents, schools and teachers are overwhelmed. However, the people whom we do not seem to be reaching are the providers of the services and information. Earlier you mentioned Snapchat and the false promise. I would love you to say something about designing for children in the first place so that the terms and conditions are appropriate. I think you said, Vicki, that they are inappropriate—that the providers are carrying inappropriate content. It is not just a case of inappropriate content; the whole world that you are describing seems overwhelming. There is a third party in the picture, is there not? Could you say a bit about that?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: Perhaps we are saying less about that because it is so difficult to figure out how you can start to influence those services. What is really unfortunate about the online world is that it is incredibly easy to take advantage of young people and their needs and desires. It is often young people who are designing the products and services, so they plug into what young people want to do without necessarily thinking about what is in young people's best interests. It is hard to see how you would shape the market to make it better for people to create good content for young people and have their needs front of mind. Instead, what people are currently asking is, "What will be attractive to young people and how can we get vast amounts of people on to the service?" That is why it is young people who have developed the gambling model, and it is a young company that has created it and made it possible.

Without a level of compulsion—whether it is through regulation or not I do not know—I am at a bit of a loss as to how you make services be designed for children.

Dr Julia Fossi: As I said before, it is about having minimum standards and a code of practice applied in the online space. That information needs to be passed down to university courses, so that child protection is front and centre in the development of anything in the online and technology world. We already have best practice guidelines, so let us apply them and make them mandatory for all sides. These things are designed by 21 year-olds. The feedback that I have often been given is that it is very difficult for the developers of the apps. They have to get them to market and only when they are popular do they have the money to look at child protection issues. That should absolutely not be the case. It needs to be front and centre. A third of internet users are children. We know from our NetAware research that 98% of children who are under the age that they should be use these sites because there is no effective system of age verification on the sites. However, rather than restrict children, let us develop these online spaces and apps with children in mind. Let us co-produce them with children and young people, looking at their needs and issues. We should put them at the forefront because they are the next generation. They are the ones who will be using them the most. Let us put them at the heart of the issue.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: Having been slightly melancholy about our chances, I guess we should celebrate YouTube Kids. At least there is a sign there. People banged on about the fact that YouTube was not really a suitable space for younger kids, so Google have come up with YouTube Kids. So maybe some of the bigger providers are starting to hear what we are saying, but I still think it is a challenge.

Dr Julia Fossi: To my mind, with the regulator and minimum standards, consistency of provision would be applied—it would be mandatory. You would not have only one or two sites that were suitable for children and young people.

Q27 The Chairman: To finish, as we have gone a bit over the time, you alluded to the legislative measures or action that might be taken by government and indeed by Parliament along the way. Could you summarise where you think we as parliamentarians should be going and where legislation might lead us? What key things would you like us to take away?

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: I will start because I am going to be predictable and say that first and foremost we should look at proper parenting support. I think that we need to reintroduce the notion of having structured parenting support. That would impact on the quality of support that schools can give. At the moment we tell schools that they should be working with parents, but we are giving them no skills or support to do that. That would be a really positive step. My second ask is that we look at the age at which a child can sign up to different services and who carries the duty of care. Who is responsible for that child when they use an online service? Ultimately we have to have some form of regulator that can enforce some minimum standards and ensure that online services have a duty of care or that they share that duty of care with parents because they ask for parental consent.

Dr Julia Fossi: Mine would be expanding the powers of the regulator to have a clear and accountable oversight function, consistent with that of other UK regulators. I would also include building on self-regulatory principles, and ensuring that children and child protection are the heart of the designs in the online space. Having a code of practice and minimum standards would go an enormous way towards ensuring safety and providing age-appropriate filtered experiences for children and young people in the online world.

The Chairman: That was brilliant—a very tight summary. Thank you very much for that, and that you both for a really useful session for us. It was tremendous. Thank you both for coming in.

Ms Vicki Shotbolt: Thank you for such interesting questions. It was a big hike around all the issues of online safety.

Examination of Witnesses

Ms Susie Hargreaves OBE, CEO, Internet Watch Foundation, and **Dr Jamie Saunders**, Director, National Cyber Crime Unit, National Crime Agency

Q28 The Chairman: Welcome to you both. Sue Hargreaves and Jamie Saunders, thank you very much for joining us. You have seen how the system works. We would like you, if you would, to introduce yourselves very briefly and, if you would like to do so, to make any kind of opening statement before we start. Although we have your biographical details, we need to have them on the record. Perhaps you could talk us through who you are, your organisations' purposes and where you think we should be going. Susie, would you like to start us off?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Thank you very much for inviting me here today. I am Susie Hargreaves, the chief executive of the Internet Watch Foundation. The IWF is the UK hotline for reporting and removing online child sexual abuse images and videos. We are the most successful hotline in the world. When we started 20 years ago, 18% of known child sexual abuse was hosted in the UK. Since 2004, that has been less than 0.5%, and last year it was 0.2%.

To give you an idea of what child abuse is, we are not talking about harmful content; we are talking about criminal content that nobody should see. Last year we removed 68,000 URLs—a URL is an individual web page. Each web page could have one or 1,000 images of child sexual abuse. We removed 68,000 of them. Of the images and videos we removed, 69% of the children were aged under 10; 3% of the children were aged under two; and around 70% of all the images and videos were categories A and B, which are rape and sexual torture. About 80% of the images and videos were of girls.

We are funded by the internet industry. We have 130 members, including all the big companies that you know of—Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook—through to the internet service providers, the mobile operators and filtering companies. We receive about 90% of our funding from them and a further 10% from the EU, as we are a third of the UK Safer Internet Centre.

Finally, we have a self-regulatory model, which means that we are able to work with the internet industry on a voluntary basis so that it can voluntarily remove content when notified. If we find content in the UK, we can have it removed in under two hours. We work nationally and mainly internationally—because a majority of the content is outside the UK—doing whatever we can to get that content removed. We do that with international law enforcement, other hotlines and the internet industry.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Dr Saunders.

Dr Jamie Saunders: I am Jamie Saunders. I am the director of the National Cyber Crime Unit in the National Crime Agency. We are responsible for combating all sorts of serious crime, the most relevant for today being child sexual exploitation online. We also deal with computer

misuse and offences, online fraud and the sale of illegal commodities, particularly on the dark web.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Just to get that in perspective, you mentioned that there are 68,000 such cases. What does URL actually stand for?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Each URL is an individual web page.

The Chairman: But what does URL stand for?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: It stands for uniform resource locator.

The Chairman: That is pretty obscure.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Instead of taking a website down—we do not do that—we work with the internet industry, saying, “On that individual web page, which is a URL, you have child sexual abuse images”. So we work with the industry to remove an individual web page.

The Chairman: Will the company to which you are addressing this requirement—in Latvia or wherever—instantly do as you request?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: In the UK they will. If we find content in the UK, we notify CEOP, which then gives us permission to issue a notice for take-down, which then goes to the company and it will remove it immediately. When we work internationally, we have to work with the appropriate organisation, whether that is their hotline or law enforcement. Until they remove that content—I am afraid that it takes a lot of time to have the content removed—we place that URL on our blocking list, or URL list, which is deployed across the whole world. We check that every day, and if the URL has been removed we will take it off the list. If we find new ones, we put them on. To give you an example, today there are about 2,400 URLs on our list. The list is very dynamic; it changes every day. Some URLs will be on there for a day, and some URLs on our list have been there for four years or longer.

The Chairman: Because they are coming from a country where you exert no influence.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: I guess so. We work very much with law enforcement in those countries.

The Chairman: They are ineffective. Jamie, in terms of the overall picture, are we seeing an increase in undesirable activity here or have we reached a plateau?

Dr Jamie Saunders: We are dealing with looking at victims—children who are being groomed or whose images are online—or we are looking at indicators that there are offenders in the UK. Both those figures are going up, and of course it is always difficult to tell whether that is because of greater awareness or because more people are coming forward. It is very hard to tell.

Q29 Baroness Benjamin: Under the general data protection regulation, the personal data of children under the age of 16 may not be collected unless consent is given by the parent or guardian. Do you think there is adequate knowledge and expertise in the enforcement agency to address the needs of children of different age groups between nought and 18? You mentioned how many children are found under the age of two. Is there enough?

Dr Jamie Saunders: We have access to a lot of expertise, including age-specific expertise, from social workers or child psychologists, who either work within law enforcement or can easily access law enforcement, so we have expertise that we can turn to. The main thing we do, which is protective security and advice, is very age-specific. In other words, it is targeted starting at five to seven year-olds and going up to 16 to 18 year-olds.

Baroness Benjamin: With the images you find of young children, are they aware of what they are doing and how those images have reached that point in the first place?

Dr Jamie Saunders: Whether the children are aware is very hard to tell. Each case is different.

Baroness Benjamin: You say that you deal with victims, so I thought that you had got to that point.

Dr Jamie Saunders: The first priority at that stage is safeguarding the child. Normally they are in an abusive situation and the priority is to get them out of that position. In some cases, it is obvious how the image has been taken. It might have been live-streamed, for example, which is an increasing trend that we are seeing. But generally we will first identify who the child is, and that is extremely challenging and difficult. Once the child has been identified, we consider what sort of safeguarding and intervention can be put in place. Then we consider who the offenders are and how to deal with them. They will be all over the world, of course.

Baroness Benjamin: It would be good to know how the information got on to the internet in the first place through knowing how the image was captured. Parents are then made aware so that they can tell their children, "This is what to look for". That is what I am trying to get at.

Dr Jamie Saunders: There are two categories. One is where a child is being abused and an image is being taken obviously without their consent because there cannot be consent. How it gets on to the internet is hugely important, because we want to understand how to trace the child and the offender. You may be referring to the situation where a young person has taken their own image, which has somehow got on to the internet. That is a point for education. It highlights the dangers to children who may be capturing their own images and sharing them by showing them what can happen when they get out of control.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: I absolutely agree with Jamie that child sexual abuse images that are shared on the internet by paedophiles is completely different from self-generated content. In the olden days that used to be selfies of kids sharing images taken on phones, but now we are seeing quite young children on webcams set up in bedrooms where it is clear that they are being coerced and groomed at the other end, but actually they are children unsupervised in their own bedrooms. Anyone with a camera-enabled internet device really should be given age-appropriate supervision in the bedroom. Those children are clearly vulnerable and are being coerced, because they do not necessarily know what they are doing, if you see what I mean. However, the majority of the images that we see are not self-generated in any way. They are images, taken by people, of children being sexually abused.

Baroness Benjamin: I visited a school yesterday and I was amazed at how many children still have computers in their bedrooms that they can use during the night. We need that kind of knowledge so that children can be made aware as well.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Absolutely. I can cite a specific video I saw recently involving a child who we thought was around 10 years old. She was in a very nice, smart bedroom. We could see around the room. She was doing some of the most serious sexual things on the computer and we could hear the mother calling, “Tea is ready”. Clearly the parents had no idea what was going on in their child’s bedroom.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Perhaps I may say, Lord Chairman, that the question I was going to ask has been wrapped into the answers we have been given to the last question, because the distinction between self-generated images and images that are produced by adults specifically using children as victims is important. Equally, what new developments make it more likely that children will, whether they are aware or not, be vulnerable? You have just given us a very graphic answer to that question, which is that the sophistication of the technology enables them to do things without parental supervision that not only should they certainly not be doing but that can be made widely available. Moreover, they are technically self-generated.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Yes, technically that is so. While they may be self-generated, that does not take away from the issue of grooming and coercion.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I am afraid that I have a view that you might like to take up with my colleagues, but is not the question of children as both perpetrators and victims quite a sophisticated analysis? In my view sexting is not a useful word, but it is the one that everybody uses. It is about young people themselves generating, sometimes for other young

people, stuff that if it gets out into the wider world is as dangerous for young people as anything that might be done by someone else.

Dr Jamie Saunders: Perhaps I may comment on that, because we have looked at it in terms of providing guidelines for the police. Obviously the legislation is not for us to deal with, but in terms of practice we would treat it primarily as a safeguarding issue and secondly as a perpetrator issue. That is the guidance for policing purposes. Yes, technically an offence has been committed and there may be circumstances in which there has to be some sort of law enforcement process, but the first priority is to treat the individual as a potential victim.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: I was going to respond to the technology question. While technology is abused by people using it to generate images, at the same time the technology industries are doing everything they can to develop new strategies to combat the problem. We work closely with the internet industry by looking at ways in which we can be ahead of the game and fight this kind of content. For example, the majority of images that we see are duplicates. It is quite rare for our analysts to see new children; nearly all the images are duplicates.

Let me give a specific example. In the summer I met a brave young woman in America. She was a victim who had been rescued at the age of 12. In the United States, you can opt in to being notified when anyone is caught with your images on their computer. She has already had 1,500 notifications of people being caught with her images, one of which had been viewed more than 70,000 times. The issue of duplicates is a massive one for us, so we are working with internet companies, in particular Microsoft, which has developed a package called PhotoDNA. We can put a digital fingerprint on an image and use it to work with the internet industry to search for the known duplicates not only through one company's services but on Facebook and so on. We also have the power to search the internet proactively. That is an example of how the technology is growing and how young people have access to it. They need to be educated so that they understand how to use it, but at the same time the industry is working with us and other organisations to tackle the issues.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Dr Saunders, when you described what you do, it sounded to me as though you had to cover quite a lot of ground, not only policing child pornography, which is what we are talking about. Are there enough people?

Dr Jamie Saunders: First, the structure of the NCA means that it has a number of commands and specialists for different functions. There is the CEOP command, which Susie referred to, which is dedicated to this job, while another team focuses on cybersecurity crimes such as hacking. Another team looks at online commodities such as firearms and drugs. The structure is good. There are capacity issues at the national, regional and local level of policing which I

think have been well expressed, but we are now getting a better understanding of the volume. The evidence is that the number of referrals of an offender here in the UK is increasing, which places a significant load on chief constables. Police and crime commissioners are aware of this, and while there is still a gap significantly more resources are going into it.

I will say one other thing, if I may. It is getting harder, because while it is one thing to show that there is a digital clue for an offender or a victim in a particular location, resolving that with a real-world identity so that you can make a physical intervention is getting harder for all the reasons that have been discussed in the context of the IP Bill, which I am sure you are all very familiar with.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: But presumably—I will get to my question in a minute—there is a financial incentive for this horrible crime.

Dr Jamie Saunders: In some cases. We have done a strategic assessment of this and one of the trends that we have seen recently is live streaming. Effectively, children are abused to order for the visual gratification of individuals, often in the West and sometimes with the knowledge of their parents. With the children in the developing world there is clearly a desperate financial motivation. So globalisation hits technology hits vulnerable children. Poverty creates an incentive, but we do not think that is the main motivation.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: But that is a route for stopping the dealers of this.

Dr Jamie Saunders: Money exists and it follows the line of opportunities.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: And that is a route.

Dr Jamie Saunders: But not in all cases.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: But you can follow that route.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: The NCA's work on perpetrators and live streaming is different from the work that we are doing, which is to go after the content. Of the content that we see, about 20% is what we would call commercial content, so it is behind a legitimate payment barrier that is abused—using a credit card payment, for example. The majority of content that we see—80%—is freely available on the internet. That is about behaviour and collectors as opposed to selling, which is more about organised crime.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: You said, I think, that 80% of the victims are girls. I think that answers the question that I was going to ask you, which is whether being a victim of the crime affects boys and girls differently. In fact, that is a slightly different question, but this is obviously overwhelmingly about girls. The boys are equally victimised, I imagine, but I am not quite sure.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: There is no distinction between the severity of abuse of girls and of boys; it is just that there are more girls. We have a category in which we cannot tell whether they are boys or girls, depending on what the act is. The impact is not our area.

Dr Jamie Saunders: We see no difference.

Q30 Lord Gilbert of Panteg: Looking at legislation and the legislative framework, is current legislation appropriate and useful? Is any further legislation required, either now or to meet technical developments that you foresee? Dr Saunders, do you think that the internet industry is doing enough, or should there be further regulations or requirements of it?

Dr Jamie Saunders: Perhaps I could leave Susie to comment on the filtering side. On the investigation side, which is where we are focused, there are enormous challenges because of the changes in technology. Our view is that in order to sustain our ability to investigate, new legislation is required. As I said, that is being debated as we speak. The precise obligations to place on service providers in that context are the most debated aspect of the legislation. But the short answer is, yes, I think that more legislation is required.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Legislation is a blunt tool, as is regulation. I think that we have some of the best legislation in relation to the work that we do. Many countries need to catch up; we are ahead in what we are trying to do to combat online child sex abuse. Where the legislation falls down is that there are perhaps some unintended consequences, particularly in the impact on older children—the 16 to 18 year-olds—who have found themselves in a potentially criminalised situation if they have been sharing images that are legally child sex abuse images. That should not be a consequence of the current legislation. We are all aware of it, including the police, and we are trying to resolve it. That is one area that is a bit shaky at the moment. Could the internet industry do more? Of course everybody could always do more, but the internet industry in this country does more than the industry in any other country. It totally steps up. We work really closely with it. We are always trying to bring industry members on board, but the industry will do what it can to work with us. It is not just that child sex abuse is bad for business, but industry members are people too and nobody wants to be associated with what is the very worst content on the internet. Yes, it could do more, but it really steps up and does a lot.

The Chairman: Are there any anxieties relating to Brexit, in that quite a lot of these issues are cross-boundary, right across the EU in particular? Will this make a difference? Are any of those measures in the pipeline EU measures rather than UK-based measures?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Yes. We work under the EU directive. Child sexual abuse on the internet is borderless, so we have to work internationally. We receive about 10% of our

funding from the EU and work closely with our EU colleagues and through the International Association of Internet Hotlines, INHOPE, which is based in Amsterdam and is funded entirely by the EU. Although we are coming out of the EU, we will continue to work with all these partners, because we cannot solve this problem on our own. One great thing that has been set up is a centralised database, held by INHOPE, which means that when we find content in France, say, we all push our content into that database. It is then pushed to the right country, which will deal with it accordingly. Even though we will not be in the EU, we will continue to work with them. We are sending out that message very clearly, because it is hugely important in relation to our work.

Dr Jamie Saunders: There are a number of instruments at that level that we use routinely. We will give the Government the information that they need on the impact of certain arrangements being stopped. We use these all the time. We think that they are an important priority in order to ensure that we can carry on doing our jobs once we have exited the EU.

Q31 Lord Allen of Kensington: I want to turn to data protection and cybersecurity, Dr Saunders. Although there are specific requirements on providers in relation to children, the law does not seem to differentiate between protection of children's data and protection of adults' data. It was interesting to note recently the WhatsApp decision to share data—as you know, WhatsApp is very popular with children, as is its parent company, Facebook. Are young people sufficiently aware of that as an issue? If they are, does it cause any specific problems for under-18 year-olds in sharing their data? Clearly, you would imagine that companies such as Facebook would want that data for advertising purposes and so on, but I am trying to understand whether there is a bigger issue. I would welcome your views on that.

Dr Jamie Saunders: An issue that affects the whole population is the nature of the consent and the use made of data. As has been covered, there is a lot of developing law in that area. I would pull out two things. There needs to be child-specific assistance on what you should be doing and looking out for. We are certainly seeking to promote that in the child protection context in the Thinkuknow campaign, which is age-specific and looks at different needs. The other angle is the vulnerability of children's information, or anyone's information, that is stolen and the ease with which criminals, voyeurs and predators can break the security around data. Alongside sensible advice about how to manage your own data controls and privacy settings, there are also the basics, such as how to protect yourself from being hacked.

Q32 Baroness Benjamin: We have spoken a lot about the horrors of online sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, but radicalisation to incite terrorism is also seen as a form of inappropriate material that is available to children. What role does law enforcement play in

preventing young people becoming radicalised online? Are the current strategies effective? What information and experiences can you share with us as far as radicalisation is concerned?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Obviously, we deal with child sexual abuse content and it is really important to us that that is exactly what we deal with. Our remit is very much inch-wide and mile-deep so we can work with people around the world because they are all on the same page on this issue. It means that we can work with the internet industry. People are interested in our work from a process point of view—how we do what we do—but on the actual understanding of the issue, I am afraid I have to defer to Jamie on that.

Dr Jamie Saunders: I am slightly embarrassed to defer on. I think you are seeing the Home Office as well. It is not a subject that the National Crime Agency currently covers. I do not have any way I can help you on that, I do apologise.

Q33 Earl of Caithness: The Chairman asked about Brexit and your influence. As a country that is part of a group with a population of 500 million, you have more clout when you say to somebody, “Stop it”. Do you think it will make any difference, although you will work closely with the EU, when we are only 65 million or 70 million people?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: That is a very good question. When it comes to our relationship with other hotlines, no. Last year we accounted for 73% of all the data that went into the INHOPE database, so we are very much a needed partner in that. We also bring a whole range of industry partnerships that other hotlines in other countries do not have. But inevitably our influence at the European political level will be different and diminished. We have been able to be at the heart of any policy developments and debate, although clearly that is going to change. But we will do everything that we can to make sure that we are still in that discussion, because we simply cannot deal with this subject by looking at the UK alone. Because we are so well resourced and the UK is so much at the forefront of tackling this issue, it would be hard for people to dismiss us because we were not part of the EU. But we will have to make sure that people are aware that we are into collaboration and partnership and we want to work with people. We may lose 10% of our funding but we cannot afford to lose those connections.

Earl of Caithness: A moment ago you said, “We’re all working on the same page”, but clearly some countries are not. Who are the baddies? Who are not working on the same page?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Obviously, this is a global problem. The majority of the content is hosted in countries where the internet industry is, so it does not necessarily mean that they are particularly bad. An awful lot of the content is in the Netherlands or the States, because that is where the hosting companies are. We also see countries where the internet is developing at a huge speed where they just do not have the mechanisms in place, which is why we are part of

WePROTECT, the international initiative founded by David Cameron to look at tackling child sexual exploitation in a very structured way. Our approach is not to name and shame; it is more to work with countries and help them build their capacity. We are working very closely with the NCA on this. The States used to be pretty bad at take-down. When we started, it used to take 20 days to get any content down in America. We have worked very closely with our American partners, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and we now have an agreement where we can simultaneously alert the companies and law enforcement if content is there, which means that we can bring the content down within three days. It is really important that we work with countries rather than look at where the problem areas are. We do everything we can on that front.

Earl of Caithness: The philosophy you are expounding is very much what I would call the rich western world philosophy. Are people in the rest of the world with different cultures also following your line?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: A few years ago, we launched the IWF portal, so we now work with other countries to help them provide a reporting solution. We now have 16 reporting solutions around the world for countries that do not have hotlines. In fact, I will be going to India to launch one there on Monday. It is really important that we look at where we can put that support in so that there is somewhere to report to. India is a great example because it is beginning to tackle this problem. The population is huge. The problem is huge. The legislative needs and the law enforcement capacity needs are huge. We are helping it by putting one of those building blocks in place so that there is somewhere to report to. That is what needs to happen. All these countries are becoming aware that tackling child sexual exploitation is a fundamental building block to being a thriving economy. I am sure that that is the NCA's position on helping these countries.

Dr Jamie Saunders: The challenge is capacity building rather than political will, I think.

Earl of Caithness: So there has been quite a seismic change in some of the attitudes in the countries?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Yes, and there is a long way to go. For instance, we do not say "child pornography" in the UK, we say "child sexual abuse". We are very clear. We call it child sexual abuse because it is an abuse of children. Pornography is a legal activity that happens separately. We do not want to minimise that and we have been working really hard to get that message across. One of the great things about this work is that even though there are countries that do not have the capacity, there are very few countries that would not be opposed to child

sexual abuse. It is a work in progress, but in each country we are identifying champions and people who want to work with us. But there is a long way to go for very many countries.

Q34 Earl of Caithness: My final question is: how effective is children's ability to filter unsuitable material and what confidence do parents have in that? Is there a better and more effective way of doing it?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: The IWF has a blocking list, as I say, that goes out, and 98% of the UK is covered by our blocking list of live child sexual abuse URLs. This is not for children to filter; it is filtered at network level. The companies filter it. All domestic broadband is filtered. To get the family-friendly sign, all public wi-fi has to have our list. It is deployed at that level. Our list is deployed by Google across the world, and many other organisations. Filtering will stop people from accidentally stumbling across child sexual abuse. Filtering and blocking will not stop the determined. The best way to deal with this content is to remove it at source, to issue a notice and take it down. We see it as a preventive, disruptive measure, but it will never replace removal of the content, education, awareness or any of those things.

Q35 Baroness Benjamin: It is often said that parents should educate, guide and protect their children from inappropriate online material, but not all children have that sort of parental guidance. What role do you think schools and the education system should play in safeguarding children in the digital world? What age should that start at, and should it be compulsory in schools right across the country?

Dr Jamie Saunders: Schools and other carers have an incredibly important role to play. That is something that we have really focused on. Earlier I mentioned Thinkuknow, which is very much a flagship campaign. It looks at a range of different ages and, school-wise, the penetration is pretty good. I think that altogether 3.5 million schoolchildren were reached last year. Obviously that is not 100% saturation, but the numbers are encouraging. The materials are there and it is helpful to get the message out that schools should be taking advantage of them.

Baroness Benjamin: At what age does it start?

Dr Jamie Saunders: Five. This is very carefully designed to appeal to certain age brackets, starting with cartoon characters for the youngest and going up to teenagers.

Baroness Benjamin: And what resistance do you find with the 12% of schools that have not taken this up?

Dr Jamie Saunders: I do not think that we are necessarily seeing resistance. To a certain extent we are producing or sponsoring the materials, and sponsoring a network that is there to

promote the campaign. It is not getting 100% penetration, but I do not think that that is necessarily due to schools pushing back. I do not have evidence of that.

Baroness Benjamin: So is there a problem with schools not knowing that the material is available?

Dr Jamie Saunders: I think we probably need to do more to advertise it.

Baroness Benjamin: And that would come through you or, as far as the Government are concerned, the education system? Who needs to be proactive in making sure that every single school is aware of the excellent material that you are putting out?

Dr Jamie Saunders: If there were to be mandation, that would be a matter for the Department for Education. That is not the route that we have taken so far; it has been promotion rather than mandation. Mandation may be required. That might be something that you would want to consider in your report.

The Chairman: Would you recommend it?

Dr Jamie Saunders: It would be helpful.

Baroness Benjamin: When you read some reports, it is clear that some schools do not feel that it is appropriate for a five year-old to know about this because they want to protect their innocence. Is that a case of, depending where the school is, the parents not being aware that the material that you spoke about at the beginning of your evidence is out there? Is it ignorance? Does the school think that it is perhaps not what the parents would like to happen?

Dr Jamie Saunders: That is a very valid point, and again that would affect any recommendation on mandation. Clearly, there is the question of what parents want. It is really not our position to judge which way it should go, but if they think, “We do not want this”, that is a legitimate concern that would have to be taken into account. I have seen no evidence of that, but you are absolutely right that that could be the reaction of some schools. I am sorry to keep deferring to others but I think that that is something for the officials in the department.

Baroness Benjamin: May I push you a little further? Some schools have taken it up and are promoting it, but have you taken any evidence about why they decided that it was important for them to promote this material?

Dr Jamie Saunders: Again, I apologise, but I am not aware that we have done an in-depth analysis of why things have been taken up with enthusiasm or not taken up at all, or somewhere in between. But I agree that if we are to aim to raise the level of penetration from the current level to much closer to 100%, even if 100% is not achievable, then some further research in that area would make a lot of sense.

Baroness Benjamin: Because as we speak there could be children who we are not aware are being affected.

Dr Jamie Saunders: Absolutely.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Our work concerns not harmful content but criminal content. We need to be absolutely clear that the issues around age verification and access to that content do not apply to our work. The overlap between the general internet safety rules and what we are doing is obviously around sexting and self-generated work. From our perspective, because we are seeing younger children becoming involved, that messaging needs to happen earlier. The NSPCC did a lovely campaign with the PANTS rule. Those sorts of messages are really important and need to start with children when they are as young as possible. As I said before, children need age-appropriate access to the internet—if they have a camera in their bedrooms, for example. In fact, that is nothing to do with us; it is about education. It is about awareness and working with parents, and the younger the children the better, really.

Baroness Benjamin: How do you recommend that we put that in our report regarding the Government taking responsibility for making schools aware of the material that younger and younger children are watching?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: As I said, the NSPCC video on the PANTS rule is pitched at very young children. There is no reason why it, and resources like it, cannot be shown in primary schools. There are ways in which specialists can broach the subject sensitively. Children need to be aware of the dangers so that they can build their own digital resilience and their own safety, even when they are quite young. We see very young children now, and they are getting younger.

Q36 The Chairman: You have covered a lot of ground. We have looked at schools and the things that parents need. Do you have any final thoughts about things that we have not yet tackled you on but which we ought to understand better? Please share anything that we have missed.

Earl of Caithness: While you are thinking of the answer to the Chairman's question, perhaps I may pose another one for you. In your brief, Susie, you say that you monitor trends in young people's use of online platforms. What trends are worrying you and, putting your eyes to the crystal ball, what is the trend for the future that we need to be aware of?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Basically we monitor the trends in relation to material that we have seen. We also look at which companies we should work with. The issue of apps is hugely important to us. We are constantly looking at ways to engage with the new technologies. We work with app providers and find ways of helping those companies build their child online

protection packages around what they do. The trends that affect us are technology-type trends. One of the most interesting things that we worked on—and we shared information with the NCA on this—is that there has been a perception over the last couple of years that all the content is on the dark web. We deal with what is on the open web. We deal with the dark web as well, but the majority of content that we see there links to image-hosting boards that are available on the open web. The majority of the content is on the open web, so we need to work on ways to bring it down from there, rather than get totally focused on it in a different place. On trends and young people's behaviour, I guess the truth is that they are very tech-savvy and are becoming so at a younger and younger age.

Baroness Benjamin: What do you think is a cause of people wanting to access this type of material? Is it that they can do so themselves? You say that a lot of people are critical when you try to put a filter or a block on something. They say, “Well, there is always the dark web and people are going to find it”. But now you are saying that it is out there in the open as well. What is causing the generation of this kind of material? Is it that people see something that is more openly available, so they know that they can do it as well? What do you think is the cause of all this?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Obviously we are talking about people's behaviour and why they are interested in child sexual abuse images. Organisations like Stop it Now! and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation are experts in that field. From our perspective, we want to know when people first access that content, how they access it and the ways in which we can disrupt access to it. It is true that child sexual abuse images have always been available, but there has never been such a magnitude of them as there is now or with such ease of access. It is quite easy to find this stuff if you really want to. I do not think that people know enough about the motivations behind it. We know that a lot of people are looking at it, and there are all sorts of theories about why people look at it. Jamie might have a better view of this, because he is going after the perpetrators.

Dr Jamie Saunders: I guess that we are involved at that next stage of the process. If people view this material, that is an offence and they will be treated by a criminal justice process. The concern then is whether it is an offence that leads to other child abuse offences. The question is whether our interventions and how we deal with the image offences will help to reduce the risk of contact offending, for example. We come in at that next stage. Why people started and how they originally got there are in a sense issues before we get involved. Once they have done it, they are on our radar.

The Chairman: Are those final thoughts? Is there anything that we have missed?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: I just want to reiterate the point about not criminalising young people who, for some crazy reason, decided that they would take pictures of themselves naked and share them. It is about education, awareness, supporting young people and, from our perspective, putting the resources towards dealing with the serial offenders—the people who are going out there, sexually abusing young children and sharing the images on the internet. They are not 16 year-olds in schools.

Baroness Benjamin: Has there been an increase in the number of young people who do not realise that it is a criminal offence to share that kind of material? Have you seen people being prosecuted or have people come forward having realised the extent of their innocent act—that is, innocent in their heads?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: About two weeks ago the NSPCC published some research showing an increase in the number of arrests of people under 18 for that offence. It is certainly a conversation that we have regularly with the police. I think we are all aware that it is not a great use of resources. No one wants to go after and criminalise a 17 year-old. We need to put the resources into going after the bad guys. That is one of the perverse consequences of the legislation that we have in place now. We want to support young people and enable them to deal with this. We are working with our partners in looking at ways in which we can help them reduce the number of images, because we do not want people's lives to be affected for ever.

Dr Jamie Saunders: On the question of whether we can get 100% penetration, as we discussed in the previous debate, I think that there can be more general education about online safety through schools, parents and other carers. In that regard, child sexual abuse is very significant. There are other issues, such as fraud and the security of personal data. More can be done to provide that as part of PSHE education in schools, for example. We are not where we need to be on that.

Baroness Benjamin: And what about the media?

Dr Jamie Saunders: I hesitated because it depends what you mean by the media. Kids are not watching lots of telly.

Baroness Benjamin: I will give you an example. A 10 year-old boy raped a four year-old girl. We have gone over that. The four year-old girl was told by the 10 year-old boy, “I’m going to rape you and you’re going to like it”, so every time there is a news report about a woman who has been raped, the four year-old girl asks her mother, “Did she like it, mummy?”. Should the language of the news reports be sensitive when very young children have had that experience? The person saying it might not think very much about it but, as you

say, there is an increase in the number of people who have been abused and have had that experience. Should the media be more engaged in this conversation as well? Perhaps a more holistic view is needed. Do you work at all with the media?

Dr Jamie Saunders: The language that we use is incredibly important. We work a lot with the mainstream media in publicising this issue, and we are extremely careful about the tone and the language that we use to describe things. The example of not using the words “child pornography” is a very good one. We are very careful about the language that we use. Of course, you can lead a horse to water, but we are extremely careful in our use of language and how we describe things. You are right: it is a very important part of dealing with this.

The Chairman: Final word, Susie?

Ms Susie Hargreaves: We get a lot of support in terms of the media because it is an issue that people want to cover, particularly in the news. They want to hold people to account if they feel that not enough is being done. That is really important to us. There is a perception that this is a victimless crime because the pictures were taken ages ago, but there is a real child at the heart of all these images. Every time someone looks at the images or videos, they are victimising that child. We are trying to get that message across again and again. We find that people are sensitive to that message. We work together very closely to ensure that people do not forget that they are real children at the heart of every single image.

The Chairman: Thank you both very much, and thank you for all the hard work you are doing, which sometimes must be quite distressing. Good for you, and thank you very much for joining us today.

Ms Susie Hargreaves: Thank you very much.