

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences](#), HC 609

Tuesday 14 Mar 2017

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); James Berry; Byron Davies; Nusrat Ghani; Mr Ranil Jayawardena; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Naz Shah; Mr Chuka Umunna; Mr David Winnick.

Questions 407-629

Witnesses

[I](#): Peter Barron, Vice President, Communications and Public Affairs, Google Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Simon Milner, Policy Director for the UK, Middle East and Africa, Facebook, and Nick Pickles, Senior Public Policy Manager for UK and Israel, Twitter.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Peter Barron, Simon Milner and Nick Pickles.

Q407 Chair: May I welcome you to our Committee session today and our inquiry into hate crime? I put on the record my declared interest, as a member of the all-party group, Reclaim the Internet. I welcome our witnesses from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. We note, as a Committee, that we are able to bring you to give evidence because you have staff in the UK and community standards, whereas some of your counterpart social media organisations unfortunately have neither community standards nor staff in the UK for us to ask to appear before us.

We recognise that you do more than many social media companies to address issues around hate crime. However, we also recognise that you are the biggest companies and have, between you, millions of UK users on your platforms every day. We want to ask you about your response and the way in which you deal with issues around hate crime and abusive content on your platforms. We have sent each of you some individual examples of areas and content that we have concerns about. I want to start by asking you about some of those, before we get on to the general points.

Let me start with YouTube, Mr Barron. As part of your community standards, you say, "we don't permit hate speech", which is "content that promotes violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on certain attributes", such as race, religion and gender. You also say that it is "not acceptable to post malicious, hateful comments about a group of people solely based on their race." And yet, until yesterday, when we raised concerns with you, you still had a whole load of neo-Nazi videos on YouTube. Why?

Peter Barron: There are three videos that you sent us. One related to David Duke and two related to organisations in this country, including National Action. Of those three videos, we have removed two. One was on the grounds of our hate speech policy, because it was clearly condoning or promoting violence against a particular group, so that was removed. In another case, the video related to National Action, which is a proscribed organisation; it was removed because it was representing a proscribed organisation and was therefore illegal content. Whether the content of the video itself, which was a rally, would have counted as hate speech is uncertain.

The third video related to David Duke. I am not here to defend the content of the video; it was anti-Semitic, deeply offensive and shocking. Our teams looked at all three videos in exactly the same way that they would look at content that is flagged within our systems. I saw the email debate that went on among our legal and policy teams to make a decision about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that video. The decision they took was that that video should stay up. David Duke is obviously a well-known figure and has made many videos in this area, and we of course have removed many videos that do veer into hate speech and promoting violence against particular groups. In this particular case, the judgment of our team was that the video did not cross the line into hate speech. It was extremely offensive and shocking material, but it did not veer into the category of hate speech and therefore stayed on the platform.

Q408 Chair: Okay. Let's come back to that one. Let me just deal with the video from National Action. Why did you not take it down before?

Peter Barron: The way that our system works is on notice and takedown. We rely on our community of more than 1 billion people around the world to flag videos to us that they think may break our guidelines. On each video on YouTube, you have a flag, with a little drop-down menu that shows the different elements under which it may break our guidelines.

Q409 Chair: But National Action is proscribed by the Government. Not many organisations are proscribed by the Government. You did not have any system in place to ensure that you, as an organisation, were taking off your platform content that had been set up there by an organisation that was proscribed for terrorist links by the Government.

Peter Barron: When drawn to our attention, that material comes down very quickly. We get something like 200,000 flags a day, and we are hitting a target of about 98% reviewed within 24 hours. When drawn to our attention, our teams look at that material. If it breaks our guidelines, it comes down. That is what happened in this case. You drew it to our attention. Things are flagged to us by a variety of means, including through the platform. You flagged it to our attention. We looked at it and within a couple of hours took action on it.

Q410 Chair: That suggests we have to do an awful lot of inquiries to get you to just take down some basic stuff from a proscribed organisation.

Peter Barron: No, I am not making that point. We work with the community on YouTube of 1 billion people. We also work with trusted flaggers. We have experts out there in the community. The CTIRU, for example, are trusted flaggers, and they are extremely qualified experts in this area. They are constantly looking for terror-related videos and flag them to us. We are in constant touch with them—maybe every other week we hear from them. They are able to flag content in bulk to us, and their accuracy rate is around 80%, which is a very high degree of accuracy compared with lower rates in the community more broadly.

Q411 Chair: But there are not that many proscribed organisations. Do you not even feel any sense of responsibility, as a multibillion pound organisation, to at least check that you are not distributing material from proscribed organisations?

Peter Barron: We have 400 hours of video uploaded on to YouTube every minute, which is an extraordinary amount of content. Clearly we do not want illegal content on our platforms, and when flagged to us we remove

that as quickly as we possibly can. We are hitting targets to remove content within 24 hours in 98% of cases.

Q412 **Chair:** I will take that as a no—you don't feel you have any responsibility to do your own searches, even of proscribed organisations.

Peter Barron: We have a responsibility to act on notice and takedown.

Q413 **Chair:** Let me ask you about the video called "Jews admit organising white genocide". In what circumstances is "Jews admit organising white genocide" not a statement of hate speech?

Peter Barron: There is no clear definition of hate speech in British law. We have our own guidelines around hate speech. The guideline that we follow, which is very close to the law, is that a general expression against a country, for example, wouldn't qualify as hate speech, but if you are promoting or advocating violence against a particular group based on their race or ethnicity, that would constitute hate speech.

I accept that those are very nuanced judgments and that we are right on the borderline. As I mentioned, there are many videos relating to David Duke that go over the line and are removed. I would just emphasise that our teams are making highly principled decisions and debating these issues with a lot of intensity; we are not looking at these questions lightly. We are looking at the content of the videos and making decisions on whether or not they break our guidelines.

Q414 **Chair:** Have you watched this particular video?

Peter Barron: I have, yes.

Q415 **Chair:** Where in it is there actually something that justifies the title, "Jews admit organising white genocide"?

Peter Barron: I am not going to defend the content of the video; I found it abhorrent and offensive. However, the important question, which relates to wider issues of freedom of expression, is whether that content is illegal and whether it breaks our guidelines. Our policy and legal experts arrived at the conclusion that it didn't. I think everyone in this room would agree that it was deeply distasteful.

Q416 **Chair:** But your own guidelines say that it is "not acceptable to post malicious, hateful comments about a group of people solely based on their race" or religion or so on. How on earth is the phrase, "Jews admit organising white genocide", as well as being clearly false, not a statement that is a malicious or hateful comment about a group of people solely based on race, religion or the other protected characteristics that your own guidelines and community standards say are unacceptable?

Peter Barron: The test that our legal and policy experts are looking at is whether there is an incitement to violence against a particular identified group. I accept that these are borderline cases; we often see debate among our teams. The conclusion in this case was that it didn't break our policy guidelines.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q417 **Chair:** You don't just say that, though. You don't say you will only rule out stuff that is illegal or you will only remove stuff that somehow promotes violence. You have the phrase in your community standards, "it is not acceptable to post malicious, hateful comments about a group of people solely based on their race", and yet you allow David Duke to upload an entire video that is all about malicious and hateful comments about Jewish people. How is that not a breach of your own guidelines?

Peter Barron: I am not sure that you have the guideline that is exactly the one that we use. I'll see if I can pull it up. It is: "Our products are platforms for free expression. But we don't support content that promotes or condones violence against individuals or groups based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, nationality, veteran status, or sexual orientation/gender identity, or whose primary purpose is inciting hatred on the basis of these core characteristics. This can be a delicate balancing act, but if the primary purpose is to attack a protected group, the content crosses the line."

Q418 **Chair:** And you don't think that a video entitled "Jews admit organising white genocide" is one whose primary purpose is inciting hatred against a group of people?

Peter Barron: Ultimately, our lawyers, having looked at it and had a principled debate, ruled that that one did not break our guidelines.

Q419 **Chair:** Where are these lawyers and this group of people? Are they based in the UK? Are they based in the US? Where are they based?

Peter Barron: The lawyers and policy experts who were looking at this were based in the UK.

Chair: In the UK?

Peter Barron: Yes. Ultimately, these policy decisions are very often escalated right up to the top of YouTube and to the chief legal officer of Google and, on some occasions, to the chief executive. That happens on a relatively regular basis.

Q420 **Chair:** Do you agree with them?

Peter Barron: In this particular case? Of course I do.

Q421 **Chair:** So you think that those are not malicious or not hateful comments in the video?

Peter Barron: What I am saying is that it does not meet the test for removal under our guidelines. The point about all this is that we are in favour of free expression and we are in favour of access to information, but there has to be a balance. Let me quote what the Index on Censorship says about free expression. Free expression of course is an extremely important concept—

Q422 **Chair:** But I am not asking you about the law or about that; I am asking you about your own decisions based on your own community standards. You said a second ago that I was not necessarily quoting from the right



HOUSE OF COMMONS

community standards. This is from the YouTube website. It says in the section on "YouTube Help", in the section on "Hate speech", that "we don't permit hate speech." It specifically says that "we don't permit hate speech. Hate speech refers to" and then it says what it refers to. Then it says that "it is...acceptable to criticise a nation state, but not acceptable to post malicious, hateful comments about a group of people solely based on their race." So I am quoting at you your own community standards.

Peter Barron: I think if you go back one page, you will see the community standards, which are actually on the front page and which are what I quoted to you. We can come back to the Committee and clarify precisely the policy, but what I would say is that, as in the law, the emphasis is on promoting or condoning violence against a particular race or group.

Q423 **Chair:** Okay. I think it would be very helpful for the Committee to have a further explanation from you about why you think that that particular video does not violate your own community standards as well as, frankly, any standards of common decency, because I think most people would be appalled by that video and think that it goes against all standards of common decency in the United Kingdom.

Let me turn to Facebook. On your website, in your community standards, you say: "Facebook removes hate speech, which includes content that directly attacks people based on their...race...religious affiliation...sexual orientation"—you then refer to other protected groups—"Organisations and people dedicated to promoting hatred against these protected groups are not allowed a presence on Facebook." You still have on Facebook a couple of the pages that we raised with you. One is called "Ban Islam" and the other is called "The Truth About the Talmud", both of which have some deeply offensive and racist things on them.

Simon Milner: Actually, all four of the pages that you notified to us are still on Facebook. May I briefly explain? Good afternoon, by the way. When it comes to reporting content on Facebook, most reports that we get are about individual pieces of content, rather than whole pages or whole groups. When it comes to the four pages that you notified to us, I am somewhat loth to talk about them in detail, because we don't particularly want to give these pages a lot of publicity today, but if you want us to do that, we can. These pages, in and of themselves, do not violate, because we make it clear that you can criticise religions, but you cannot express hate against people because of their religion. "Ban Islam" is a page that is designed to criticise Islam as a religion; it is not expressly, in and of itself, designed to attack Muslims. That is also true of "The Truth About the Talmud" and the other two pages, regarding the Holocaust, that you also notified to us.

Q424 **Chair:** But you say as part of this: "Organisations and people dedicated to promoting hatred against these protected groups are not allowed a presence on Facebook."

Simon Milner: That is correct. None of these pages are expressly run by hate organisations. There are hate organisations that we have identified



that are not allowed a presence on Facebook. That is not true expressly of these pages—that they are run by hate organisations. But what I also can tell you is that we did look at the pages after you notified us of them. It was not possible to review every single piece of content on them in the time available, but there were certainly some that we spotted that had not been previously reported to us. We asked our expert team to look at them, and those posts were taken down. It is, relatively, a handful, and I am happy to talk a bit more about which ones those were.

Q425 Chair: Okay. I think we will come back to those in due course, because I want specifically to ask you some further questions about the concerns about your content monitoring more widely—concerns about it not working. You also have standards for things like dealing with sexualised images of children. You will be aware, obviously, of the BBC reports that they have reported to you 100 such images, that you have removed 18 of them and said that the remaining 82 did not breach your community standards. You then asked the BBC to send you the images that they were complaining about, according to the reports, and when they did so you then reported them to the police. That suggests that you thought these 82 images were somehow not worth you removing them from their pages, but they were worth reporting to the police when the BBC raised them with you. How come?

Simon Milner: Thank you for the opportunity to explain this. It needs a little bit of unpacking, so I hope you will bear with me while I do that. We welcome when a journalist or a safety organisation contacts us and says, “We think there’s something going wrong on your platform. We’re reporting something and your system is not working.” We welcome that because we know that we don’t always get it right.

In this case, this particular journalist told us he had identified content which involved the sexualisation of children, but he was very clear that none of it was illegal. It was not illegal child sexual abuse material that he had found. He said it was, if you like, rather innocent pictures of children—probably, like me, you have those yourself, and you may have put them on Facebook, of the child at the swimming pool or on the beach—with horrible comments underneath them. So that is what he told us he had found. We asked him to send us the links, as we always do in situations like this, because then we can find the content very quickly. Also, especially if it is regarding child sexual abuse, as this Committee will know well, the law is very clear. If you send images of child sexual abuse, for whatever reason, that is unlawful. So we were very clear and said send us the links.

Eventually this journalist sent us a document which actually contained screenshots. So he had been asked for links; we were sent screenshots. One of those screenshots—not 82, one—was an image of child sexual abuse, as determined by our expert team, and we were clearly under an obligation to let the authorities know about that, and it is now in their hands.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It was also clear that the journalist had indeed identified something where our system was not working, and there was something going wrong. Through the other material he sent to us—and eventually he did send us the links—we were able to identify what the problem was. It was that the reviewers were not always being able to see the comments alongside the picture. So the picture was perfectly innocent and therefore he was getting a message back saying “This picture does not breach our terms”, but it was the connection between the picture and the comments, and something was not working in our review tool. We have now fixed that problem. All the content that he has told us about we have also addressed and reviewed, and it has come off Facebook.

Q426 **Chair:** So all the images that they sent to you have been taken down?

Simon Milner: All of the ones that that particular journalist has now told us about we have acted on. I do not know if it is all of the ones that he has talked about in his story; that is a matter I think we would have to ask him about, in terms of whether it is the full 100.

Q427 **Chair:** Some of the ones that they raised included groups, including closed groups, but groups that have titles like “Schoolgirls are hot in uniform” and really quite disturbing titles that seem to be linked to child abuse or inappropriate sexualised images of children, even if they do not have photos that might be publicly accessible. Do you have any process for assessing the names of groups or pages like that, and investigating?

Simon Milner: We do have some processes in that regard, regarding groups and pages. Clearly we do not publish the list of words that we particularly look out for. It could well be that even some words that will on the face of it look worrying—actually some of those pages are groups about highlighting this problem. But, yes, there are some things we do in the background to identify those.

Q428 **Chair:** But a series of these groups were reported to you some time ago and your system failed to respond and to do anything about them.

Simon Milner: In regard to the particular examples that this journalist identified to us, yes, something went wrong and we had to fix it.

Q429 **Chair:** So if I now did a search for these groups that exist, while we are in the course of this Committee, you are telling me that I will not find them.

Simon Milner: I cannot be absolutely authoritative on that, but I am happy to look into it for you and come back to the Committee. Equally, if you want to use your time now to do it, we could do that, but I cannot hand on heart tell you they are no longer there. This is a dynamic platform and people may try again to create bad content. That is why ensuring that our reporting tools are working and therefore learning from examples—learning from this particular issue that this journey has brought to our attention—should mean that things are much more effective. But I do not want to say to you, “The problem has gone away,” because when you have a platform as large as ours—we have got almost 1.9 billion people on Facebook—I am afraid that, much like we have 65 million people living in the UK, not all of them are good people. People are trying to do bad



HOUSE OF COMMONS

things, including to spread hate speech and foment disquiet. That is why we have to be ever-vigilant and not assume that we have fixed it—absolutely not. We always know that we can improve.

Q430 Chair: But do you have teams of people who would look themselves for that kind of abusive content or for groups and pages that have titles that frankly would disturb most parents across the country?

Simon Milner: We certainly do use technology to some extent in this area already. We deploy a technology called photo DNA, which you may be aware of, which enables us to scan every single image and video uploaded to Facebook against a database of known illegal images—child sexual abuse images. We have also just announced a collaboration with colleagues from Twitter, Google and Microsoft to develop a similar kind of system for the most extreme forms of terrorist content. Furthermore, our CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, wrote recently about what he sees as the potential for doing even more. So, in answer to your direct question: no, but that does not mean that we won't have. But we actually think that technology here—because of the scale of our platforms—may be a more effective way of serving up likely infringing content to our reviewers. Human review will always be important, but it is about using technology to help you find that more effectively.

Q431 Chair: At the moment, are you confident that the kind of group where, for example, people can put up obscene sexualised comments alongside pictures of schoolchildren cannot take place on Facebook?

Simon Milner: I am confident that our systems for reviewing reports of such activity have been improved and that we are better able to address this problem, but I do not want to suggest that we have found a solution for a problem that occurs online—and, frankly, occurs in society—that absolutely prevents it from happening. I am afraid there are always bad people who will try to harm others, including children, and they will attempt to use the communication tools that we are all using, often for very positive things, for that purpose. We are absolutely determined to try to make it as hard as possible for those people to use our platform for that purpose.

Q432 Chair: How many people do you have working on this kind of thing?

Simon Milner: We have thousands of people who work in our community operations team, which is a global team with multiple languages who review millions of reports every week. They are based in a number of different locations, including Dublin—

Q433 Chair: How many people do you have in the UK?

Simon Milner: We don't have anybody working in that team in the UK. The teams that do this kind of work in terms of reviewing reports have to have special kinds of access to the data of people on Facebook, which is not generally available to everybody who works on Facebook. They have to have that special access so they can look at absolutely everything, and therefore they are in dedicated centres of excellence in Dublin, California, Austin and Hyderabad in India.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q434 **Chair:** So would complaints that are made in the UK—for example, complaints about groups coming from the UK—be looked at in Dublin, or would they be looked at in California?

Simon Milner: It would depend on the timing, what the language is and what the issue is about. Most reports that come from the UK, if they happen during our daytime, will be looked at by our team in Dublin, but it would depend on the particular issue or, frankly, the language—it may not be in English; it could need a language expert from somewhere else. So, it depends on the time of day and the topic of the report.

Q435 **Chair:** You think that you have now addressed the issue about context now being looked at. When did you sort that problem?

Simon Milner: I am afraid I cannot give you a definitive date for that, but it is certainly the case that this particular journalist's work—especially once he finally gave us some links so we could actually understand what the problem was—we were on to straightaway in order to address it very quickly.

Q436 **Chair:** As of two days ago some of these, quite frankly, disturbing group names were still live on Facebook. We will send you some of those names separately and ask you to review them, because to be honest it just sounds like your response has been slow. Finally, as the result of journalistic investigation and having a Select Committee ready to ask you questions, you have looked at something. Given how long Facebook has been operating and how long there has been extreme concern about paedophilia and online child abuse, it is surprising Facebook has not looked at that before.

Simon Milner: With respect, I disagree. Jim Gamble, who is one of the country's foremost experts on the problem of child sexual abuse and its behaviour online, was a very firm critic of Facebook six or seven years ago when he was running CEOP. If you talk to him now, he will tell you that Facebook has made enormous strides—not because of appearing in front of a Select Committee, as important as that is, or because of a journalist's story. That does not mean we have fixed it completely, and therefore every moment like this is an opportunity to improve and to fix a problem—that is exactly what we do as a company.

Q437 **Chair:** We will move on to Twitter. We raised a series of images with you, most of which have been taken down. There is one that has not been taken down. Do you want to explain why?

Nick Pickles: Of the four accounts you brought to our attention, we suspended three when we were made aware of them. The one that remains—one of the things we look at is context, so the way that an image is communicated to another person as opposed to not to. There is a distinction between taking an image and targeting somebody who perhaps identifies with the protected category in that image, and posting it on its own. Many of the accounts you raised with us highlighted people who were posting images to other people who perhaps belonged to those protected categories. In this one case, the tweet that was reported was not directly



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sent to anybody else, and while it was highly offensive it did not breach our rules around hateful conduct.

Q438 **Chair:** So despite the fact that it includes a hashtag—“#DeportallMuslims”—with a very disturbing graphic cartoon that is clearly designed to alarm and distress, it does not breach your community standards?

Nick Pickles: In this context, we reviewed that particular tweet and image and found that it was not in breach of our hateful conduct policy. However, these are accounts where, in the example of “#killallMuslims” and hashtags like that, we do see offensive hashtags. “#BanIslam” was a hashtag that was trending after the Nice attack, but when you looked into it the overwhelming majority of the people using that hashtag were using it to condemn people who were using it to call out religion. While hashtags are offensive in themselves, often the conversation that happens around them is where people’s bigotry and intolerance is challenged. Yes, it is offensive but you will never get to a point where there is nothing on the internet that offends anybody, and nor should we seek to get to that point.

Q439 **Chair:** You have, “Examples of what we do not tolerate includes... behavior that incites fear about a protected group; repeated and/or or non-consensual slurs, epithets, racist and sexist tropes, or other content that degrades someone.” Are you really saying that the cartoon we sent to you is not racist, degrading or a repeated slurs?

Nick Pickles: As with colleagues, these decisions are very hard. There are lots of areas where it is very difficult to leave something up and it is offensive and sometimes upsetting, but yes, in this case we reviewed it and we did not find that it was in breach of our rules. Examples like this one are incredibly important to us because they are the examples we use to refine our policies. As a simple example, when Twitter first began we prohibited violent threats, so people would use words like “I wish” and “I hope” as a way of getting around that policy. This is not something that we say is finished; we are constantly thinking, “Is there behaviour that we would want to catch that is not being caught by a current policy?” Examples like this one go into that feedback process. At present it does not breach our terms, but I am not saying that it will never breach our terms.

Q440 **Chair:** How long does it normally take you to deal with reported complaints?

Nick Pickles: We want to get to every report as quickly as possible. One of the challenges about Twitter is that we see real-world events breaking on it. In the case of terrorist attacks, we will divert resources to deal with the reports coming in related to it, and that might mean that in other areas we are slower as a result. We take our resource and we prioritise accordingly. We prioritise reports of violent threats, for example. On your question about technology, one of the things we are trying to explore is how to use technology to better prioritise, so that we can be quicker. We have already made some changes internally on how we figure out whether two people have reported the same content, which several years ago we

were not doing. We want to be faster, and we want to get to them quicker. We are using technology as well as people's reports to do that.

Q441 Chair: But for example, yesterday the Committee sent you a series of individual tweets, most of which you responded to. I also, privately, on my normal Twitter account, reported various tweets to you that are still up from an account I found at random just by doing a little bit of searching for a few racist or violent hashtags. That account is still up, even though it includes one about Angela Merkel that says: "This German bitch needs a bullet in the head." That seems to pretty much go against your community standards and is pretty vile. There is another one, similarly, with a violent threat against Gina Miller. There is another one with a threat against Sadiq Khan. There is another one with a series of vile, racist and violent attacks. Those are all still up, and I reported them yesterday. How long would you normally take to deal with those sorts of abusive tweets? I have not had anything back.

Nick Pickles: The challenge of communicating back with users is something we have acknowledged recently we are not doing a good enough job on. We don't communicate enough with users when they report something. We don't keep people updated enough, and we don't communicate back enough when we do take action. I am sorry to hear that those reports have not been looked at. We would expect them to have been looked at, certainly by the end of today, particularly for violent threats.

One of the things we are currently working on is how to use technology, as well as people, to identify those accounts for human review. For those kinds of violent threat that break our rules, we want to find a balance: as well as user reports, we want to proactively find those accounts for review, even if they are not reported. We have started rolling that technology out in recent weeks. That is a step change in how we deal with abuse—we are looking for it, and we will take action on content, even where it has not been reported by users.

Q442 Chair: Okay. This account is called @28sharwoddy. I hope that, if you have people at Twitter watching this sitting as it is streamed, they will do something about that and remove some of those abusive Tweets, even if they would not do so fast enough when an individual simply reports them through the normal processes.

There is a broader point here. I have been going through the individual examples. To be honest, I find none of your three responses particularly convincing. We understand the challenges you face. This is all moving very fast, and technology changes very fast, but you all have millions of users in the United Kingdom, and you make billions of pounds from those users. You all have a terrible reputation among users for dealing swiftly with problems in content, even against your own community standards. Surely when you manage to have such a good reputation with advertisers for targeting content and doing all kinds of sophisticated things with your platforms, you should be able to do a better job in order to keep your users safe online and deal with this kind of hate speech.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Simon Milner: With respect, I disagree. I spend a lot of my time in the UK, and indeed in other countries, listening to people about their experiences on Facebook, and I particularly encourage people, even if they have never had a problem with Facebook, which many people have not—unfortunately that is not true of many politicians—to report and to try our reporting tools. I get some very positive feedback from people about their experience of doing that.

That is not to suggest that we get it right every time. When you are dealing with millions of reports in multiple languages about a range of issues every week, you cannot possibly get it right every time. We would love to be able to get it right every time and to make the correct judgments each time. We want to improve, but to suggest that we are in some way negligent or not caring about this issue is simply not true. We deploy a lot of time, effort and resource to try to improve what we do in this area.

Peter Barron: We are constantly making improvements in this area. For example, I would point to the German tests that have been going on today, which were just announced. That was for illegal material that was flagged to our systems, asking us to take it down as quickly as possible. I don't know if you have seen the results yet; they were just announced in the last few hours. They have shown significant improvements in terms of the material that we have been able to remove—around 90%—so we take these issues very seriously.

As Simon says, we are never going to get to 100%. The platforms are very big and there will always be elements of unpleasant material on them. In terms of the way we have approached these issues over the years, on a range of different issues—for example, going back a few years, the work we have done since 2006 on child sexual abuse imagery—we have significantly improved our approach and our ability to remove that content. Some 98% were reviewed within 24 hours, which is a pretty high bar. It is something that we have made a lot of progress on.

Nick Pickles: No. I think this is an issue where Twitter, as a company, has acknowledged that, in the past, we haven't done enough. It is something that, from the top of our company, we have said is a priority. We are now in a renewed stage of not waiting months to change things; we are changing our product every week right now. We announced new technology in February to stop people repeatedly creating accounts. We have said we are going to proactively look for accounts that are actually posting this kind of material and behaving in a certain way and limit the number of people who can see those accounts.

We have also announced new tools to allow people to say, for example, to never show them a tweet from someone who has never changed their profile picture or someone who hasn't verified their phone number. We are now changing our product every day, which is partly a recognition that we haven't done enough.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think there is a broader question that. For all the technology we can deploy, and however good our policies and systems are—no system is ever 100% accurate—a lot of the issues that we face are based on real world prejudice and ignorance. By removing content, our platforms are not going to remove that ignorance from society. That is one of the challenging things we have to face, because there will be things on our platforms that we personally may find offensive, but if someone is expressing an offensive view, the best challenge to that is for people to challenge those views. That is how we get progress. It is painful; it is sometimes upsetting. We need to do more as a company to protect it, but the essence is that you cannot solve social issues with technology.

Q443 **Stuart C. McDonald:** May I just ask you a little bit about some recent high-profile examples in which individuals have been targeted? We are talking about, perhaps, musicians, singers or political figures. Diane Abbott was an example. On Sunday—I don't know if you are aware of the story in the *Sunday Herald* in Scotland—there was an article about the catalogue of horrific online abuse against political leaders such as Nicola Sturgeon, Ruth Davidson and Kezia Dugdale, which included death threats, threats of violence and extremely offensive and sexualised insults. Were you aware of that particular story? Twitter was asked to comment on it. Did you get to see that story that appeared on Sunday about those Scottish political figures?

Nick Pickles: I don't know if it was Sunday, but I saw something about Scottish political figures. I thought that was today, actually.

Q444 **Stuart C. McDonald:** So you wouldn't be able to say if anything has been done about these tweets since then? There were 150 tweets highlighted.

Nick Pickles: I don't know the details of it, no.

Q445 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Sure. More generally, then, are there proactive steps that Twitter can take when it is clear that an individual has been targeted? What is the company able to do if it is becoming obvious that individuals, such as Diane Abbott, or musicians or political leaders are being targeted pretty much every day?

Nick Pickles: This is one of the areas in which we think technology has a role to play. We have already deployed the very first steps of using technology in these cases. There are two things. First, it is about identifying offenders, and identifying people who perhaps have several accounts. We have built technology to spot people who may use several accounts to send abuse to one person. We want to remove those people from our platform.

As I say, we have tested and are rolling out technology to limit the number of people who see tweets. You can still tweet, but it might not show up in the politician or singer's timeline. I think we recognise that, in those situations, when you are having a lot of incoming messages, we need to find a better way of not having the burden being fully on the victim. We are experimenting with technology that way, and also to help victims to control what they see, which might be by prompting someone to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

ask whether they would like to turn on a setting. We are looking at technology to both catch the offenders and to help victims in those circumstances. Some of this comes down to very contentious political issues. We have seen more seismic political debates in the past 18 months than many people will see in a lifetime, from Scottish independence through to Brexit and the refugee crisis. Some of those comments are going to be offensive and very challenging but they will not break our guidelines. That is where we need to get better at spotting the people who do.

Q446 Stuart C. McDonald: In relation to your guidelines, I was interested in what you said about the difference between a tweet that was directed or sent to somebody and one that was not. I will pick out one of the milder examples of a tweet here. "If—I will not name the politician—was in front of me. I'd kick her something head in and probably really enjoy myself doing so."

That is not tweeted at anybody, and it does not use a handle or a hashtag or anything. Does that breach your guidelines, because it is sent out without reference to a handle or a hashtag?

Nick Pickles: As I said, it is one of the things we take into account when we look at an account. It is not the predominant factor. We will look at a variety of things, as I say. We might look at: does someone have several accounts? We might look at: has that person sent one tweet or have they sent a series of tweets? One thing we have introduced is a time-out, to say, "You just can't tweet for a certain time period."

That case you described sounds more severe but it is one where we can see a situation escalating and say, "Can we intervene early, stop someone tweeting and stop the situation escalating to that kind of level?"

It is still very important that users report content to us. We review content every day. Where it breaks our rules, we will take action.

Q447 Stuart C. McDonald: If some of these tweets do not in themselves breach your guidelines or policies but the person who is tweeting is breaking the law of Scotland, the United Kingdom or whatever, does that affect how you then deal with these individuals? Or do you just take an approach that that is a matter between them and the police and it is not for you to interfere with that?

Nick Pickles: We do work with the police. For example, if the police give us court orders. Some of the work we have been doing that we can perhaps talk about later is with the Crown Prosecution Service to talk about how restraining orders can be better used online.

The Government says in its own written evidence to this Committee that the vast majority of what we are talking about is not criminal. That is something that we see. Where there are allegations of illegality, it is not appropriate for companies to be making decisions, I think. In the case of criminal allegations, it is correct to follow due process and, where we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

receive due process that the law has been broken, we will take appropriate action.

People are also getting better at including in court orders the requirement to remove accounts upon conviction. I think that is something that should be encouraged.

Q448 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Are you saying there would not be any cases where, for example, a tweet might breach the law of Scotland or the UK but still not fall foul of your community guidelines? Or would you think that is inconceivable?

Nick Pickles: It is not helpful to get into hypotheticals and try to think of situations where that could happen. In my time at Twitter, I can't think of a case where I have seen something that has been the result of a criminal prosecution that has not breached some of our terms of service.

Q449 **Mr Umunna:** May I come back to Mr Barron about one of the cases we have been looking at? Can I ask you a basic question? Google is a for-profit company.

Peter Barron: Of course.

Q450 **Mr Umunna:** What was Google's operating profit in the last financial year, 2016?

Peter Barron: Globally, around \$20 billion.

Q451 **Mr Umunna:** \$20 billion? I have \$30.4 billion here—figures that the House of Commons Library has produced.

Peter Barron: We can debate the detail.

Q452 **Mr Umunna:** Billions then. How much does whoever posts a video on your site make per view from adverts that are posted alongside YouTube videos?

Peter Barron: Per view would be a very tiny amount of money.

Q453 **Mr Umunna:** I think it is \$7.6 for every thousand views. Is that right? Does that sound in the ballpark?

Peter Barron: It is a reasonable figure, yes.

Q454 **Mr Umunna:** Supporters of ISIS and neo-Nazi groups have been posting videos on your platform and taking up the option of making money from ads that appear alongside their videos, which makes them and you money. That has happened, hasn't it?

Peter Barron: It is very, very important to point out that terrorist organisations or their agents are not allowed to have YouTube channels and, therefore, not allowed to make money. Wherever we see that a channel—

Q455 **Mr Umunna:** I was quite careful then so let me clarify. I'm pretty sure I said supporters of ISIS and neo-Nazi groups.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Peter Barron: We wouldn't know what the background of an individual was, but we do not allow hate speech or terrorist content to be monetised. Whenever that is drawn to attention it is, of course, shut down.

Q456 **Mr Umunna:** But I asked you a factual question, and you will be aware of the important investigation that *The Times* has done on this. Going back to my question, supporters of ISIS and neo-Nazi groups have posted videos on your platform alongside ads that have made them and you money. Is that correct?

Peter Barron: Let me go into detail about *The Times* investigation, which is clearly what you are referring to. It is a relatively complex picture. "Big brands fund fear" was clearly a compelling headline, but if you dig into the detail of the videos involved in that case, it is a much more complicated picture. Some of the videos were against our guidelines, both on the content and monetisation side, and were removed. Others broke our advertising guidelines but not our content guidelines. Our advertising guidelines are more restrictive than our content guidelines and in some cases, videos that were drawn to our attention by *The Times* didn't break our guidelines—

Q457 **Mr Umunna:** Sorry to interrupt you, but I will be cut off by the Chair unless I get to the point. To go back to the question, I have seen the videos that *The Times* refers to, as I am sure many others have, and there is no getting away from the fact that supporters of ISIS and various neo-Nazi groups have posted video content on your platform with ads going alongside it that have made you and them money. All I am asking for from you is a straightforward answer. That has happened, has it not?

Peter Barron: Let me give you an absolutely straightforward answer. The video on the cover of *The Times* underneath the headline in that particular case made no money for the uploader. The monetisation on that related to the music on the video.

Q458 **Mr Umunna:** Hang on just a moment. Money was being made from videos peddling hate on your platform.

Peter Barron: Very small amounts of money. I don't want to mislead you but in terms of the amounts of money made from the videos in question, we are probably talking about around ten—

Q459 **Mr Umunna:** But you don't dispute the fact that you and these hate peddlers have made money out of ads appearing alongside those videos? That has happened on your platform.

Peter Barron: I would—

Mr Umunna: I am asking for a straightforward answer.

Peter Barron: I don't dispute that, on occasions, of course that will happen. I should say that advertisers have a large degree of granularity and control. They can choose not to appear next to political speech—

Q460 **Mr Umunna:** The point is that you are providing a platform that has



HOUSE OF COMMONS

acted as a money-making machine for the peddlers of hate and extremism, for supporters of ISIS and supporters of these neo-Nazi groups. That is happening on your platform and the way in which you are prevaricating and dancing around this factual matrix is disturbing. If I am honest with you, Mr Barron, all you need to do is say, "Yes, that has happened and this is what we are doing."

Peter Barron: We have no interest in making money from that.

Q461 **Mr Umunna:** But you have.

Peter Barron: It has happened. We work very hard to make sure that it does not happen, and we work with advertisers to give them more transparency and control so that they don't appear next to political content. It is worth pointing out that some of the videos that you are referring to were not ones that would break our guidelines. There is a whole area of concern about these kinds of videos—Nasheed videos, for example, are Islamic songs that may be referring to history, battles and so on. These videos may be distasteful to some and may be talking in broad terms about jihad, but they would not break our content policies. It is impossible to say, of course, who uploaded them. Where a terror or illegal organisation attempts to have a YouTube channel and to make money from that, it would be shut down and drawn to our attention.

Q462 **Mr Umunna:** My final point is this: the bottom line is that you are a for-profit company. Your operating profit in 2016 was \$30.4 billion. There are not many business activities where somebody, openly, would come and give evidence to this Committee and have to admit, no matter how many times they dance around, that they are making money, and people who use their platform are making money, out of hate. That is happening on your platform.

Peter Barron: We never want to make money out of hate.

Q463 **Mr Umunna:** And I would suggest to you, Mr Barron, that you as an outfit are not working nearly hard enough to deal with this.

Peter Barron: We are working very hard in this area and we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the technology and teams aimed at addressing these issues.

Q464 **Mr Winnick:** Do you feel any shame at all about the things that my colleagues have been referring to and what has been distributed on Facebook and Twitter? Do you feel any shame whatsoever?

Simon Milner: Would you like me to take this, given that my colleagues have had something to say? Perhaps I could just talk about the two—

Q465 **Mr Winnick:** No, just answer the question. Presumably the answer is no. You feel no shame, do you, Mr Milner, Mr Barron, Mr Pickles? Just answer the question without going into a rant about this, that and the other.

Simon Milner: With respect, I have maintained—

Q466 **Mr Winnick:** You always preface your comments with "With respect", but



HOUSE OF COMMONS

it's a simple question. Do you feel any shame at all about some of what is seen here?

Simon Milner: Mr Winnick, I don't think it's a simple question to say, "Do you have no shame?" I feel very responsible, as do my colleagues, for the safety of the 1.9 billion people using our service, and I am very proud of the work that we do.

Q467 **Mr Winnick:** Proud of the work? I see. Well, I am looking at some of the items that have been sent to us. Mainly, it's Twitter. And what I see before me is a group of Muslims engaged in rape, and the person who is complaining that it's his daughter who is the victim is told he is a "Racist bigot!" Then I see other items, equally obnoxious—for example, on Facebook, Mr Barron.

Simon Milner: That's me.

Q468 **Mr Winnick:** Sorry, Mr Milner—apologies. On Facebook, I see a Muslim at prayer, and while he is praying there is a dog behind him—right behind him. No shame—no apology?

Nick Pickles: With respect to the comment that you have just referenced on Twitter, we have removed that, because it broke our rules. What is incredibly important here is to remember that we have people around the world who work very, very hard to address these concerns. This isn't just us, sitting in London—

Q469 **Mr Winnick:** So hard that it appears before us now.

Nick Pickles: It has been removed, because it broke our rules. It is in your dossier, because your dossier was produced before we—

Q470 **Mr Winnick:** But it appeared in the first place, didn't it?

Nick Pickles: Let us be absolutely clear: we are never going to get to a point where internet companies pre-moderate content for the 400 hours of YouTube going up every day and for the 500 million tweets that go up every day. If you want pre-moderation of internet platforms, there may well be no internet platforms. I think we need to be very, very clear about how we discuss this, because there is a scale challenge. The positive benefits that our platforms bring and technology brings—yes, it comes with serious challenges. Yes, it brings out some of the worst in society and it brings to light things that we would all rather did not happen. But the idea that you can pre-emptively detect things and then remove them before they have been posted—we are never going to get to that point, and I think we need to be honest about that.

Q471 **Mr Winnick:** Listening to your response to the question from my colleague, Mr Umunna, when it came to the amount of money made, the billions of dollars, the thought that came into my mind was that it's a form of commercial prostitution that you are engaged in. I think that is a good and apt description. For example, Mr Barron, the way in which you did your utmost to evade the question put to you by the Chair about that obnoxious entry in relation to your social media organisation—it was a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

rather pathetic answer. I just wonder whether, on reflection, you don't feel you could have given a far better, more forthright response to the Chair.

Peter Barron: This is, of course, uncomfortable territory in the area of free expression; there is no question about that. The point I was making to the Chair was that these are principled decisions and sometimes extremely borderline decisions, but as an organisation we have a bias towards free expression—we are in favour of free expression—and we are in favour of access to information. As Nick says, there is an issue about how these kinds of beliefs and behaviours exist in wider society, and as an organisation we think that the best way of addressing these issues is to shine a light upon them and allow them to be debated and held up to scrutiny and ridicule. Of course these are difficult decisions but—

Q472 **Mr Winnick:** What you are saying, in effect, is that it should be put on as it has been and subject to ridicule, but it should be allowed to be there in the first place.

Peter Barron: If content is illegal, of course it should be removed. As in society, the same thing applies online. Illegal content is not allowed and will be removed; content that is offensive and extremely unappealing but nevertheless legal, we judge should stay on the platform. Of course, counter-speech—this is a very important area—is the best antidote to these kinds of beliefs and thoughts. We invest a huge amount of effort in working with organisations such as the Home Office and the police in promoting counter-speech. We have a project called the Redirect Method, which looks at promoting content that already exists on YouTube and that puts across alternatives to some of the very unpleasant thoughts that are out there. We work very effectively with influencers—with creators—on YouTube who are very trusted and have a lot of influence among their fans, to promote more empathy and tolerance across the platform.

Q473 **Mr Winnick:** Would it be more correct to say that this deeply obnoxious and racist propaganda and incitement to race hatred—there is no other way to describe it—goes on, and it is only under public pressure that you take any action, but the internal policing is minimal?

Simon Milner: That is simply not true. As I mentioned earlier when the Chair asked me, we have thousands of people working in our teams that are reviewing reports from our users, and we get millions of reports every week. In fact, the last time I was here before this Committee—albeit with a different Chair—I said that you would be very welcome to come and visit us in Dublin. Come to our international headquarters, meet those teams, hear from them about the work they do and see the expertise they have. You could also visit Google and Twitter at the same time. You would really learn from the horse's mouth, not just from the spokespeople here in London, about the work that those teams do. We would be very happy to welcome you.

May I give you an example of counter-speech? One of the pages you identified for us—a Holocaust denial page—only has nine followers. It was posted in 2013, but the second comment on the page is, "I have relatives



HOUSE OF COMMONS

who were there and saw everything you thick"—I won't use the expletive—"It happened whether you like it or not. Go away and spread your hatred somewhere else where there are small-minded people like you." You see that all the time on Facebook—people who want to try and divide us, and other people who say, "No, that is simply not true. I have friends from that community. I have family who were there at the Holocaust. You are talking nonsense." That is much of what you see in response to this material that does not breach our hate standards because it is trying to suggest an alternative view of history—you actually get lots of content from people saying it is nonsense.

Mr Winnick: Mr Milner, Holocaust denial is not a matter of debate; it happened. Therefore to say, in effect, "Well, it leads to a debate. Did it or did it not happen? Were millions of people murdered because of their racial origin?"—that is a not a subject of some sort of debate; it is a fact. If you give a platform to racists, and it leads to that type of debate that you are taking, it minimises one of the worst atrocities that has ever taken place in Europe. I do not think that is a good example. May I just say this in conclusion? I won't put it in the form of a question. I would be ashamed—absolutely ashamed—to earn my money in the way in which you three do.

Q474 **James Berry:** Mr Pickles, using the phrase "Filthy Jew bitch" face to face would be unacceptable and in most circumstances would be unlawful, wouldn't it?

Nick Pickles: I cannot speak for the quality of the law. That is a question for a police officer.

Q475 **James Berry:** So you have no idea whether that would be unlawful in some circumstances.

Nick Pickles: I imagine that the answer would be that it depends on context.

James Berry: So in some circumstances it would be unlawful.

Nick Pickles: Perhaps.

James Berry: Okay. Using that phrase on Twitter would be equally unacceptable, wouldn't it?

Nick Pickles: Again, it depends on context. You could be condemning it.

Q476 **James Berry:** In the context where you are not reporting speech or condemning it, using that phrase would be completely unacceptable, wouldn't it?

Nick Pickles: I expect so.

Q477 **James Berry:** And in some circumstances unlawful.

Nick Pickles: Again, that is not something that I should speak to.

Q478 **James Berry:** Can you confirm that you are aware that this Committee has raised concerns about that phrase being used on your platform? You



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are aware of that, yes? So you would be disappointed if that phrase was still being used on your platform, wouldn't you?

Nick Pickles: Yes, I would.

Q479 **James Berry:** So are you aware that that phrase, or variants of it, have been appearing on your platform since 2014 and are still there today?

Nick Pickles: Specifically with regard to this case, yes, we actioned a large number of accounts that had used that hashtag abusively. We have 500 million tweets every day and I am certainly not sat in my office looking through them for particular hashtags. I would say that where people have reported those accounts, they have been taken down. I believe that there were criminal prosecutions connected with it. Also, if that term was targeted at somebody and used in an abusive manner, as it often was, it is likely that those accounts breach our terms of service. There may still be tweets on our platform that use that hashtag that do not break our terms of service—I would have to check—but my expectation is that the ones that were posted abusively were actioned and many accounts were removed.

Q480 **James Berry:** I did a bit of searching about an hour and a half ago without the help of any technology that you might have or any staff, and from 11 March there is a tweet, "Filthy kike bitch. Burn in hell, you fake Jew." That would breach your community terms?

Nick Pickles: I expect so.

Q481 **James Berry:** From 17 October last year—it has been there for a while—"high speed picture of filthy Jew getting bitch-slapped". That would breach your community terms of service, wouldn't it?

Nick Pickles: I would refer it to the teams, but absolutely it would, I expect.

Q482 **James Berry:** Another one—I will not mention the MP's name, but I think you know who I mean—"filthy Jew bitch—MP's name—attacks free speech. Once again demands a nationalist rally be shut down." That is from 2 February 2015. That would breach your community terms of unacceptable abuse, wouldn't it?

Nick Pickles: I expect so.

Q483 **James Berry:** And one from 15 November 2014, referring to the same MP's name, "Filthy Jew bitch. Her dirty games caused labour councillor to quit politics". That would also breach your community terms.

Nick Pickles: I would refer to the teams, but I expect so.

Q484 **James Berry:** Why is it then, just to take the last tweet, that that tweet is still there from November 2014?

Nick Pickles: I cannot speak to individual accounts and individual tweets. I would certainly be happy for my colleagues to review those accounts and write to the Committee to update them on what happened with them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q485 **James Berry:** It seems strange that, when that particular phrase has been raised—I have raised it on the Floor of the House—at least once in a report of this Select Committee that you said you were aware of, that it took two seconds to find multiple tweets using that phrase. Is there any reason that Twitter, with all your resources, could not have removed all those tweets, almost instantaneously?

Nick Pickles: I can ask my colleagues to review why that did not happen. I know that we have actioned numerous accounts relating to that specific case of abuse. The overwhelming likelihood is that the examples that you have raised most likely do breach our terms of use, and I will ask colleagues to review them.

Q486 **James Berry:** But it is completely unacceptable that they are still on Twitter's platform, certainly from 2014, if not from a few days ago.

Nick Pickles: One of the critical questions for us is that we are currently trying to experiment with how we use technology proactively as opposed to waiting for users to report things. I cannot speak to which tweets were reported, if they have been reported, but I am happy to investigate them and update the Committee afterwards.

Q487 **James Berry:** I found these and many other tweets in a matter of seconds with no resources. How many staff does Twitter have looking for this kind of material, performing even the very simple searches that I just did?

Nick Pickles: One of the things to highlight is that we don't proactively look for tweets. We don't have people sat searching Twitter. We are currently experimenting and there is huge potential in using technology to do that, but we are in the very early days of delivering it. Since that first tweet you cited from 2014, we will have seen hundreds of billions of tweets being posted, so there is a not insignificant challenge of scale. We absolutely think technology has a part to play, but we rely on user reports as the primary means at present. In the long run we hope that technology can do a lot of that work, but artificial intelligence and machine learning is not a switch you can turn on and suddenly let it run. The technology is very challenging.

Q488 **James Berry:** Not searching proactively is a policy decision by Twitter, isn't it?

Nick Pickles: Some of it is a question of limitation, but yes. It is the same with colleagues—the "notice and take down" model underpins most internet companies, not just our own.

Q489 **James Berry:** Right, so it is a policy decision, but the resources that would be required to do what I did are minimal. We know that certain words and phrases are closely associated with racism. It is very easy to perform a quick search and then to manually filter out the ones that are reported speech or are condemning the use of those kinds of words. It didn't take me long.



Nick Pickles: No, and you have used one example. Sadly, there are examples around the world every day—there would be more than a couple. We could have staff, first, developing technology to help users to find the content and secondly, reviewing reports. Or, with 500 million tweets posted every day with different hashtags, staff could say, “I agree that this one hashtag is very focused,” but looking at every hashtag on Twitter in that way is not a resource-scalable solution. I don’t think it is for any business, so we need to figure how to use technology and our user reports to better action our terms of service and our rules. That is the challenge for us.

Q490 **James Berry:** Do you think it is possible that you have allowed the Twitter membership to grow too big for you to be able to do the level of searching that is required to make sure that that kind of phrase is not being used or is removed promptly?

Nick Pickles: That is why we are looking to invest in technology right now. We are looking to build things that we can use, not in months and years, but in weeks and days, that will take the burden off users when they are on the receiving end of the situations that your colleague, Mr McDonald, outlined, and that limits the ability of people to send tweets to other users and finds things that may end up with users being removed from our platform. That technology is being developed and deployed right now. Are we doing it fast enough? We would like to do it faster, but this technology—machine learning and natural language processing—is some of the hardest technology in the internet space, and it is not something that we are going to crack overnight.

Q491 **James Berry:** The Met police have dozens of staff who search for extremist and offensive content, and they report it to you for breaching your community terms of use. To your credit, you remove most of it, so it is possible to do that. My last question to you is this: who should be paying for identifying that material? Should it be my constituents through taxation or the police precept, or should it be Twitter?

Nick Pickles: In the context of CTIRU, we have a great dialogue and discuss various issues with them. At this point, the vast majority of accounts that we receive from CTIRU have already been suspended by us by the time that we open their reports. To pick up something that Simon said earlier, to take the case of terrorist accounts, the majority of accounts that Twitter removes for promoting terrorism are detected and removed by technological means. This is something where industry is acting. We are collaborating with different companies and are using technology to find content so that when the police come to us and say, “We think we found something,” we can say it is already suspended. All the accounts that CTIRU have submitted to us in recent reports have been suspended prior to them submitting their reports.

Q492 **James Berry:** To return to my question, you, for policy reasons, do not search for things proactively at the moment. Most people in the country think that you should, and our police are doing that for you. Do you think that we should be paying for that, or do you think that you should be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

paying for it as the company that profits from providing the platform on which this kind of behaviour can take place?

Nick Pickles: There is a really important question about how the internet fits into society, because the same argument is true of cars. Should car manufacturers pay for transport policing? The same is true of every major technological development that has come along. The internet is the latest one. Is the internet part of people's everyday lives? Yes. Does it, therefore, have a policing element to it? Yes. Again, I refer you to the Government's own written evidence to this Committee, which says that the vast majority of things that happen online, even where they are abusive, are not criminal.

Q493 **James Berry:** The difference there, of course, is that car manufacturers meet a lot of health and safety regulations put on them by the Government but you do not have any similar regulations that you have to meet. You are effectively unregulated in this respect. I return to my question. Our taxpayers' money is funding police to police the content on your platform. Should taxpayers be paying for that or should you?

Nick Pickles: One thing you have heard us all say is that we all have standards. We can disagree about whether those standards go far enough but we all have standards. We all have teams who are looking at removing content. We all action content that does breach our terms and conditions.

I think the industry is actually stepping up and saying we can do more. We are looking to be more proactive and use technology better. I don't think this is a simple either/or. It is industry saying, "We do have a responsibility here and we are going to continue to look at ways where we can better fulfil that responsibility." But we will never be done. We will never say, "Safety is finished; we can stop thinking about it." This challenge continuously evolves and behaviour changes so we will keep working hard to keep our platform safe.

Q494 **James Berry:** But if the police submitted a bill to you for the 90% of material that you do take down—and therefore agree breaches your community use standards—would you be willing to pay it?

Nick Pickles: As I said, the vast majority of accounts that CTIRU report to us right now are already suspended.

Q495 **James Berry:** I am asking about the ones that you do take down; the ones where you do agree that police have identified something that needs to be taken down. If they submitted a bill to you for the work involved in doing something that a lot of people would say that you should be doing yourselves, would you be willing to pay it?

Nick Pickles: That is a conversation we can have with the police.

Q496 **Chair:** We would ask all of you the same broader point that Mr Berry is raising about proactive identification of problems, at least in the most extreme cases, whether that be terrorist activity or proscribed organisations, online child abuse, or where a known trope or meme that is being used often to target individuals.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is baffling to us that you do not seem to have any proactive activity in these extreme cases, even if you are not doing a broad sweep of everything that comes in. Where you have these extreme cases, where everybody accepts that this is about illegal or really problematic content that clearly goes against your own community standards, we don't understand why you don't have any proactive activity.

Simon Milner: Chair, I think I explained earlier that we do. When it comes to child sexual abuse, absolutely we do. When it comes to terrorism, we do. We announced the EU Internet Forum in December—this collaboration among our companies to share information that would enable us to spot attempts by global terrorist organisations to distribute new extremist propaganda. Wherever it appears first, we are all able effectively to nuke it before it gets purchase.

What we also do when that happens or when we come across terrorist content, we will fan out from that account. We will look at the groups that person is in. We can often take down many, many more accounts as a result of a new piece of intelligence.

There absolutely is proactive work, and by human beings. What we also want to do—and we have talked about it—is to explore some of this really cutting-edge new technology around artificial intelligence. How can we surface? How can we improve the funnel, if you like?

The reporting we get from the public is like a funnel. It is not all wonderful; a lot of it is noise. With any kind of reporting, you want your expert people to be looking only at reports where there is a very high chance that it is infringing content. Otherwise it is a waste of their time. If we can make that funnel better using technology and still have human review, that could be a much more effective and, indeed, proactive way to do it. We are already doing proactive work but we want to do more.

Q497 **Chair:** So Facebook does proactive searching if you have particular issues on child abuse or you have a report that comes to you that raises problems? You will then do proactive searches linked to that?

Simon Milner: We will fan out from that, particularly in these extreme areas where, as a society, we are most concerned such as child abuse, terrorist activity and hate organisations. Absolutely, we fan out.

Q498 **Chair:** Let's clarify this for each of the three of you. On child abuse issues, do you do the proactive searching for frequent terms used around child abuse?

Nick Pickles: I will speak for myself. We are all members of the Internet Watch Foundation, which offers a variety of different products for different types of businesses. They offer a URL list, which is a website list that is predominantly used by ISPs. One of the technologies that we have been using is the hash database, which is where known images on one platform—

Chair: Sure. I understand about the—

Nick Pickles: That is all proactive.

Q499 **Chair:** Obviously that is easy and you can do it on a technological basis. What I am interested in is whether there are particular phrases that are often used, or if you actually just do a search from time to time to see what is coming up—perhaps around child abuse or things that have been raised—which is not stuff that would be automatically caught by the Internet Watch Foundation work.

Nick Pickles: They actually offer a search list as well, for that reason. As part of their suite of products, one of the things that they offer members is a keyword list of that variety, which—speaking for us—we have certainly used.

Q500 **Chair:** And that is done continually, is it?

Nick Pickles: Yes.

Simon Milner: I can't be certain on that—I would like to write to the Committee. What I can tell you is that we have a very close working relationship with CEOP and other forces around the world that play a similar role to CEOP. We employ someone who used to work at CEOP in order to be that liaison point with them and pick up what is going on—are there persons of interest, is there a new activity that they are seeing that might be happening on Facebook that we should be looking out for? It is not just about words; it is also about understanding what is going on in the real world and perhaps on other platforms, to make sure that we are looking out for new kinds of behaviour by these individuals, who after all are often very skilled at trying to evade detection, whether by the police or by our experts.

Peter Barron: As colleagues have mentioned, we use technology where it can be effective. We are able to identify spam and abusive accounts and automatically get rid of those. On hashing technology, which we have been discussing in some detail, we work with the Internet Watch Foundation, in particular for the hashing technology around child sexual abuse imagery. As we have been discussing and as the European Commissioner announced last week, we are embarking on the shared hashing database around terrorist content.

Q501 **Chair:** But you don't do things like look up National Action, from the discussion we had at the beginning of this session.

Peter Barron: No, we don't. Again, this is the principle of notice and take down. If we go back to the principles that were put in place with the e-commerce directive, the intention for how the web operates is that platforms should take down—

Q502 **Chair:** Sure. Other Committee members want to ask questions; I just want to understand the factual position. Do you do proactive searches and investigations on child abuse, on terrorism and on particular targeted hate crime phrases or attacks like “#FilthyJewBitch”, which Mr Berry referred to?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Peter Barron: I wanted to explain what the principles of the way we operate are, because the reason that—

Q503 **Chair:** I just want a yes or no, because we have a lot to get through. Do you do proactive work on those three issues?

Peter Barron: As I explained, we use technology proactively where it is effective. We do not proactively search for—

Q504 **Chair:** So you don't proactively search for any of those three things.

Peter Barron: Because of the underpinning of the e-commerce directive.

Q505 **Chair:** Sorry, the e-commerce directive stops you from doing those proactive searches?

Peter Barron: The principle of notice and take down is extremely important, because the way that the rules were designed was that as long as the platforms have a responsibility to take down when given notice, they do not have a liability for all the stuff that might appear on them. Of course, the point of this is to allow people to share content, to share creativity. The web would not have grown—it would not have been possible for Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to—

Q506 **Chair:** So you, as a company that provides a platform for a huge number of people and makes multi-billion pound profits from it, do no proactive work at all on clearly illegal content, including terrorism and online child abuse.

Peter Barron: We are involved in a huge—

Chair: A yes or no answer, please.

Peter Barron: We don't proactively search for this content.

Q507 **Chair:** Mr Pickles, do you have anything to add about any proactive work that you do?

Nick Pickles: I think I have covered some of the new proactive work that we are doing in the abuse space, but we also use PhotoDNA, as Simon says, as part of addressing child sexual exploitation, and we are part of the proactive hash-sharing programme on terrorist images.

Q508 **Chair:** So you do proactive work on terrorist—

Nick Pickles: And on child exploitation and abuse.

Q509 **Chair:** Okay. We would like further clarity from Facebook and Twitter on the precise proactive work that you do. While we have been sitting here, I have done some obvious searches that you might do on Facebook on phrases around schoolgirls. That has come up with a series of pages that I think it would be worth Facebook looking into, because it does not look as though the proactive things that you would expect are necessarily filtering things out. Similarly, on Twitter, it would be useful to know precisely what proactive work you do.

Q510 **Naz Shah:** As it is, if I want to open a Google or Twitter account, I don't



HOUSE OF COMMONS

even have to be real, do I? I can use a pseudo-name and a pseudo-everything. Yet when I want a verification on my MP Twitter account, I have to go through lots of hoops to get it. It feels to me that you guys—your companies—have created a second world that is anonymous and you are not doing anything to stop that happening. First, you are absolutely failing to deal with what you have already got on there. Secondly, what are any of you doing to stop new accounts? I will give an example from Twitter. TellMAMA complained about @DowHeater for four years. You finally took it down and that person now has four more accounts. What is the point of that?

Nick Pickles: Our policies explicitly prohibit reopening a new account once you are suspended. This is one of the challenges that we live with: when we suspend an account, someone will create a new account, then we will suspend that one and we get into this cycle. As Simon mentioned, some of these people are technically determined, so they will try to find ways to get around the measures that we put in place, whether they be phone or email verification.

Q511 **Naz Shah:** But I had to go through hoops and loops to get my verification. Why don't they have to apply the same standards to get a YouTube video or a Twitter, Google or Facebook account, and yet we have to do that to get verified?

Nick Pickles: But one of the values of having a system of verification is that users can see that this person's identity is real: they have a blue badge, they have submitted identification and we know who they are. That is why we are also now saying to people, "If you don't want to see tweets from people who haven't verified that their phone number is real, you can tick a box and you won't see them." It is why we are also saying, "If you don't want to see tweets from people who have not changed their profile picture, you can now get rid of them." That is in the process of going live as we speak, so there is technology there.

Q512 **Naz Shah:** But isn't that a huge contradiction? On the one hand, you are saying, "Let's verify", but on the other you are letting numerous accounts just come online every single day of the week. Every hour—every minute—there are new accounts that could be threatening me or somebody else to be raped and looking at child sexual images, but none of you are actually doing anything about it.

Nick Pickles: But the question you have here is, first, we are a global platform. There are people around the world right now who, if you say to them, "Can you go through that process and use your real name?" that would put them in physical harm. That might be because their religion is not tolerated in the country they are in. It might be because they are in Syria. It might be because the people who have been running the "Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently" account have been murdered for running that account. I am not going to ask those people to put their real name to that account and those tweets. So yes, anonymity and not using real names is a challenge, but I also think that that is why we have rules. It

doesn't matter if you use your real name or not. There are lots of people who have accounts who don't break our rules.

Q513 Naz Shah: I'm sorry, but that absolutely does not wash with me at all, and the reason for that is that you can have somebody that your organisation verifies but whose anonymity is still protected on the platform. That just doesn't work for me at all.

Nick Pickles: I'm sorry, but there are lots of people out there who do not trust American technology.

Q514 Naz Shah: I am going to ask yes or no questions to all of you now. On YouTube, can you tell me what Google does when you can't verify these accounts and you are putting up new ones all the time?

Peter Barron: In order to leave comments on a YouTube video, you have to be signed in. If you have a signed-in account and you are abusive and trolling on YouTube, you could be blocked or shut down.

Q515 Naz Shah: So you don't verify YouTube accounts, either? And then you wonder why you've got ISIS and everybody else on there. You make \$20 billion profit and you can't even get the verification process right. Are you guys for real?

Peter Barron: The way that it works on YouTube is that you can—

Q516 Naz Shah: Sorry, but forget the content. Forget your standards and everything else; you can't even get the basics right of growing your platforms with some corporate social responsibility and some ethics underlying all of that. That is what you are contributing to. Let's be really clear. There are three outfits sitting before us—a Select Committee—giving evidence, yet none of you can give me the assurance that you will not have fake accounts going up while we are going through this evidence session, which could be promoting hatred, child pornography or extremism. None of you can give us that guarantee and yet you're absolutely multinational, multi-billion pound companies. Then you have a look of shock and wonder why people are appalled at you.

Peter Barron: As Simon says, we would invite you to come and see the work of our trust and safety teams. I think you would genuinely be surprised, because you've just suggested that we don't do anything in this area; the reality is very, very far from that. In 2015, our trust and safety teams removed 92 million videos from YouTube—

Q517 Naz Shah: But the horse has bolted, hasn't it, Mr Barron? The reality is that you've still got accounts popping up every hour—every minute, more or less—on your platforms, and your concern here in all the evidence that you've placed before us is about growing the internet and growing the social platform, and it's not about managing what you've already grown and actually being ethical in your future growth. None of you are telling me that, unless you can tell me something different.

Peter Barron: We work extremely hard on these issues. Everyone would accept that the opportunities, creativity and economic value that have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

been created by the internet are very significant. Now that is not to dispute that of course the platforms are used for negative purposes as well, but we are extremely dedicated to battling—it is a constant battle, and you were right to say that.

Q518 **Naz Shah:** What process do I have to go through to get a Google account or a YouTube account?

Peter Barron: It is a constant, ongoing battle, as the web evolves, but in our trust and safety teams we have thousands of people and we are investing hundreds of millions of pounds in fighting acknowledged difficult issues that exist across the network.

Q519 **Naz Shah:** Are any of those hundreds of millions of pounds being invested to make sure people don't even get on your platform in the first instance?

Peter Barron: Absolutely. We are extremely—

Q520 **Naz Shah:** Are they going through verification processes?

Peter Barron: On abusive accounts, we are—

Q521 **Naz Shah:** Sorry—not once they've got to the abuse. Before that. You can't even control proscribed groups; you allow them platforms. What are you guys doing before they even get on your platform? What verification processes do you have to make sure that this is not an ISIS person and that this person is a bona fide taxpayer, or whatever, in this country—or whether they are even under age, or over age. You've got no way of knowing. My 12-year-old could have an account and pretend to be an adult, and you'd be all right with that, because you've got another user. That's what's coming across—

Nick Pickles: If we identified that, we'd remove their account, because our rules say they're under 13.

Q522 **Naz Shah:** But they can get an email account without going through verification.

Nick Pickles: If you said, "My child is breaking the rules", we'd take the account down.

Q523 **Naz Shah:** But when the horse has bolted—when the damage is done—you're all happy to take the account down. You're getting that wrong in the first instance. But what about the prerequisite for all of that, which is the verification of accounts? You've got children using accounts as adults, whether it's Instagram, Facebook, Google or YouTube, and not one of your organisations has talked today about what you are doing prior, in terms of vetting, apart from putting people like us, for example, through loops and hoops to get verification ticks. Why hasn't everybody got a verification tick? Why don't we verify everybody?

Nick Pickles: Verification is open to apply for, and anyone can apply for it, and we ask them, as you say, to demonstrate their identity—

Q524 **Naz Shah:** But do you encourage it for every user?

Nick Pickles: I think that, given the social status it confers, people see it as something to aspire to.

Q525 **Naz Shah:** How many new Twitter accounts do you think have been opened today?

Nick Pickles: I don't have those numbers to hand.

Q526 **Naz Shah:** Do you know how many have you taken down in the last 24 hours?

Nick Pickles: I don't have those numbers to hand.

Q527 **Naz Shah:** In the last week, or in the last month?

Nick Pickles: I don't have those numbers to hand.

Q528 **Naz Shah:** How many pages has Facebook taken down that have not been verified?

Simon Milner: I don't have those numbers, but I'm very happy to answer your broader question, if you'd like me to.

Naz Shah: Yes, please.

Simon Milner: Much as we would all love to live in a country where all 65 million people were law-abiding, and I am sure that, as politicians who set the laws of the land, you would love to have a situation where everybody behaved themselves—we would like the same—they don't all behave. That is why you—Parliament and Government—decide how much money should be spent on policing. We make those same decisions.

This Committee deals with the most important issues for the country, in terms of keeping people safe. That's also the most important issue for us. How do we keep people safe on our platform? We invest hundreds of millions of pounds, we employ thousands of people to work on this, and we are always trying to get better.

I strongly disagree with your suggestion that we don't care about this; we absolutely do. And we want to improve, and we want to be accountable for what we do—

Q529 **Naz Shah:** What do you do for verification, Mr Milner? Let's go back to my original question.

Simon Milner: Sure. We do have a verification process. It is nothing to do with the safety of people on Facebook; it is about ensuring that you know whether you are looking at the actual page that Naz Shah MP is responsible for, or fans of her page or people who want to comment on what she is doing. It is about saying, "This is the authentic voice of Naz Shah."

Q530 **Naz Shah:** How do you know it is authentic? You might have an email address that is not authentic.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Simon Milner: No, it is not that. We have a process. In the case of MPs, we have a specialist team that looks at—

Q531 **Naz Shah:** I'm talking about the average person on the street.

Simon Milner: The average person on the street cannot come to Facebook to be verified. That is not how Facebook works. Verification on Facebook is predominantly social, because you have to be your authentic self on Facebook—

Q532 **Naz Shah:** So, ISIS is its authentic self and you give it a page. Is that what happens?

Simon Milner: Would you allow me to finish? You have to be your authentic self on Facebook. You connect with people who are your friends, and most people—the vast majority—only connect with people they know in the real world. The way that they are authenticated is by those friendships.

Q533 **Naz Shah:** Mr Milner, I have just done a Facebook search and a Twitter search while we are taking evidence, and there are plenty of pages that are about banning Islam. There are plenty of right-wing pages on your Facebook platform. Whether they have 1,000, 2,000 or 3,000 likes, and whether it is right-wing or Islamic extremism, they peddle hatred. HT has platforms on Facebook and on Google and Twitter. Extremists have those platforms. At what point do you think it is not acceptable to have proscribed organisations and people who peddle hate on your platforms? What is the measure of your social responsibility in all of this? It appears to me that you are happy to grow your networks and your platforms, but you are not prepared to monitor them and make them ethical. That is how I feel.

Simon Milner: I am sorry that you feel like that, because it is fundamentally the opposite of my experience and the experience of many other people who are on Facebook and the organisations that we work with. We are working with lots of different organisations dedicated to combating hate speech as part of an EU process, right now, to test our systems and to figure out whether they work. On the whole, they are finding that we do have relatively robust systems, but there are certainly areas where we need to improve our knowledge about a particular type of hate speech or focus on a particular community in a particular European country. Through those processes, we learn.

We are doing a lot already. We can do and are doing more, both using technology and working with organisations such as TellMAMA, which gave evidence to this Committee, and the police and others around the world—particularly in Europe, where this is a hugely important issue—to get better at this. We know that we have an important responsibility as European citizens and as European companies to help address this problem.

Q534 **Naz Shah:** Thank you very much. You referred earlier to us as lawmakers and the fact that everybody does not abide by the law. Who reviews your



HOUSE OF COMMONS

ethics and the laws that you have for your social standards? Do you have committees like this that review everything and take evidence from your social platforms? What happens?

Simon Milner: Our statute book is much smaller than yours. We have a set of community standards that are public and always have been. We try to make those as understandable as possible, so that people can really understand the nuance of particular issues. They are absolutely there for people to give us their views as to whether or not we are drawing the line in the right place.

We also respect local law. There are some countries—not the UK—where the law goes beyond our standards. For instance, in Turkey it is illegal to defame Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, so in Turkey we have arrangements to ensure that, if there is that kind of content, we block it so that people cannot see it in Turkey. It is not illegal anywhere else in the world, so it is viewable everywhere else.

Q535 **Naz Shah:** So who actually makes those laws? We are here as lawmakers. We have a voting Lobby, and we table amendments. Who does yours? It is like a second world, isn't it?

Simon Milner: Absolutely not.

Naz Shah: While we have our 65 million that you referred to, you have 1 billion on your platform.

Simon Milner: It is actually the real world. It is 1.9 billion people just like you and I and the people in this room, all around the world. The standards are the same everywhere. They are there for everyone to see. They were of course drawn up by a team of experts within our company, but we are absolutely ready and happy to take feedback on them. Just like every other organisation, when you use our service there are terms and conditions. Those are typically drawn up by the organisation and people decide whether or not they want to partake. That is true of every single company I can imagine that provides a service.

Q536 **Naz Shah:** Let's just take that, for argument's sake. Earlier, the Chair read from a piece of paper the line about Jewish people—with particular reference to Jews. In the law of this country, that would be anti-Semitic. Does our law have precedence over the law that you create to govern your sites? Which one takes precedence: the law of the land or—

Simon Milner: Local law, if local law goes beyond our standards. I can't think of an example in the UK where we have had to act on content that is locally illegal here and is not against our terms. If there is an example, I will happily write to the Committee.

Q537 **Naz Shah:** Coming back to the statement the Chair referred to, about inciting hatred towards Jews, would you consider that anti-Semitic?

Simon Milner: Yes. I don't think it was actually content on Facebook—it may have been one of the other platforms, but I may be wrong on that.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q538 **Naz Shah:** It may have been Google. Mr Barron, if you would consider that statement anti-Semitic, why does it not breach your standards?

Peter Barron: We comply with the law in all the countries we operate in—

Q539 **Naz Shah:** You're clearly not, because earlier you said you didn't.

Peter Barron: And actually on YouTube, our community guidelines go above and beyond the law. Anything that was covered by UK law would be removed, either from Google Search or from YouTube. There is a legal requests form, easily found online, and if a user or anyone thinks that something that appears on YouTube is against the law, they can fill in that form and send it through, and our legal teams and policy experts will look at that and take a decision based on it. But if there was a court order saying that something was illegal, defamatory or copyright infringing, of course that would also come down.

Q540 **Naz Shah:** Mr Barron, for the final time—a yes or no answer—do you consider the following statement anti-Semitic? "Jews admit organizing White Genocide". Yes or no?

Peter Barron: Of course it is.

Q541 **Naz Shah:** Right, but when the Chair asked you earlier whether that breached your standards, you suggested it did not, so which law do you actually apply?

Peter Barron: We apply the law of the country—

Q542 **Naz Shah:** Well, in this instance you clearly haven't. Can you please refer back to us, as a Committee, and provide us with evidence that you have taken that content down because it is anti-Semitic? Can you do that for us?

Peter Barron: We will certainly come back to the Committee and explain our thinking.

Q543 **Naz Shah:** Thank you. I have a few more questions. Is child sexual exploitation automatically referred to the police in this country? While you are taking all this content down, is it automatically reported to the police?

Peter Barron: Yes.

Q544 **Naz Shah:** Is that a yes from all three of you?

Simon Milner: Just to be clear, it is not automatically referred to the UK police. We are under an obligation to report it to the US police, who then tip off the UK police. This is just a straightforward legal process. CEOP could give you evidence on this. We have to notify the US authorities, and they automatically notify the UK authorities, which can then get any information they need to get.

Q545 **Naz Shah:** If it is terrorist material, does that go to the FBI or to our counter-terrorism unit?

Simon Milner: It depends on who makes the request.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q546 **Naz Shah:** So if you have something that is ISIS propaganda or a call for anything on your platforms, do you go to our counter-terrorism unit or our Met, or do you go to the FBI in America? Where do you report it?

Nick Pickles: In the case of child sexual exploitation, it is a US law that requires us to do that, and we go to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, known as NCMEC. There is no legal obligation. This came up the last time we appeared before the Committee. The one thing we have heard is the number of accounts we have had removed. Police officers on both sides of the Atlantic have said that that number would create such a volume of work for the police that they don't want that notification. It is for Congress and for Parliament to pass those laws if they wish, for proactive notification, but it may create an operational burden on the police that makes their job harder.

Q547 **Byron Davies:** I want to return to the issue of proactive work. I have to say I am quite disappointed in what I have heard today. I accept that, in areas of terrorism and child abuse, you deal with CEOP and so on, but obviously there are many other issues around hate crime that will perhaps not be reported. It does make me wonder what chance there is of bringing offenders to justice with the level of proactivity that you have in cases outside terrorism and child abuse. Can you tell me in what circumstances, at what stage, you would report issues like this to the police?

Simon Milner: Which type of issues are you talking about? There are a number of different—

Q548 **Byron Davies:** You say that, on terrorism and child abuse, reporting is something that you do as a matter of course—you are proactive on those issues and you would report. But outside that there are clearly issues of hate crime that you would not necessarily automatically report. My question to you is: are these areas going undetected and therefore is justice not taking its course?

Simon Milner: We are focusing on our own platforms and keeping people safe. When it comes to hate speech, most of it is dealt with because of reports that come from the public. Actually, it would be interesting to look back on the evidence from the police that you have had here. Most of the speech that we are talking about does not constitute a hate crime—it may be hate speech, but it may not be a crime in the UK—but that is a matter for them.

Q549 **Byron Davies:** But who decides that?

Simon Milner: The police do. One thing we always say to people is, "If you see criminal activity on Facebook, report it to the police." That is absolutely what we say to them.

Q550 **Byron Davies:** So you expect the police to police it?

Simon Milner: No, I am not suggesting that. If people are concerned that speech is associated with a hate crime happening in their community, it is much better to let the police know about that. The police can also work



HOUSE OF COMMONS

with us, and we have specialist teams whose only responsibility is to liaise with the police and engage with them in understanding what is going on, and for the police to flag issues of concern.

Nick Pickles: That is a really good point. To give you the context, in the first six months of 2016 we received 631 requests from the UK law enforcement agencies for user data so that they could investigate and prosecute people, covering roughly 1,000 accounts. First, it is important to keep in context that those 631 requests—over the year about 1,000 requests—is a fraction of the nearly 500,000 requests that the police make across the board using the powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. The criminal scope of those powers in relation to our companies is surprisingly small.

Secondly—I have discussed this with the CPS and Government—there is a real opportunity to improve the process for victims. In some of those cases where people have been prosecuted, we have been working with the victim groups—it could be TellMAMA or CST—to make sure they get through the courts. Coming on for two years ago, I convened a roundtable with the Director of Public Prosecutions because I was concerned that there were a few cases not being dealt with. One of the reasons they were not being dealt with was the current way it was structured. If you report a crime to your local police force and someone in a different police force area reports a crime to their police force, even if the offender is the same person that counts as two investigations. In one particular case there was no triaging going on. One of the challenges is that you might have an offender in one place and multiple victims in different police force areas. How is the view taken that it is not actually four separate offences but might be a harassment or stalking offence? That is a big challenge and we are working with the CPS on it to train their prosecutors.

As Simon says, we also have a team that deals dedicatedly with law enforcement. Bringing offenders to justice where crimes are committed is something that we take very seriously. We have a good collaborative approach with the College of Policing to address these issues. It is very important. In a previous hearing, Mr Umunna actually referenced the importance of deterrence. It is very important that, where there are these issues, losing your account is not the only deterrent—it is important that there is a real-world deterrent. If you commit a crime, the deterrent should be the criminal justice system and not merely losing your account.

Q551 **Byron Davies:** What access do you allow UK police and law enforcement to your networks in terms of intelligence gathering?

Nick Pickles: Twitter is a public network so anyone can view and search tweets, as you heard during the Committee. The legal framework is the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, and is soon to be the IP Act. There is a set legal process there. Police officers can, through the single point of contact—the SPOC—in their force, contact us and request information. Actually, that process is internationally recognised as being good and it works very well. We are continuously talking to the police about making

sure the process works so that they can get the information they need for investigations.

Peter Barron: It is the same. We have a government request transparency report, and you can see the examples of where the Government or authorities have asked us for information or to remove content. We post information on the transparency report on a six-month basis.

Simon Milner: It is the same process as far I am aware. I won't repeat it.

Q552 **Nusrat Ghani:** We seem to be here again gentlemen. A year on, you are giving evidence, we are asking the same questions and, unfortunately, we feel we are hearing some of the same answers. We have heard that you have got community guidelines, but it is not an equal bar because you sometimes manipulate it to fit each country that you may be based in. You are more than just a platform because you do edit content and take down content that is obvious child sexual exploitation. There are still huge concerns about the profits that you make and the number of staff that you hire proactively to take down content.

I will not go over lots of issues already raised by the Committee. There is a feeling that social media platforms such as yourselves are not being responsible to the communities that they are meant to serve.

I know you have good relationships across Europe trying to take down content and manage how you deal with it. But then you have countries such as Germany and Israel that have also lost confidence in what you are doing. They are going to legislate to fine you for not taking down content. Is that the route that we are going to have to go down? You won't hold yourselves accountable until each country legislates and fines you appropriately for you take down content.

Peter Barron: The point is that we are very committed to working with Governments and the authorities and third-party organisations. As we have discussed today, we have a very good record in making progress on acknowledged issues that have cropped up over the years. I mentioned earlier the work we have been doing on child sexual abuse imagery since 2006. We are very committed to improving.

I hope the Committee will take up our offer to come and see what we are doing. I hope that, when we give you more information, you will accept that we are making progress. The statistics speak to the fact that we are improving our performance in these areas.

In relation to Germany, there is of course quite a debate going on within the German Government and more broadly about whether the balance is right. These things come down to the balance between the need to remove illegal content and the need to promote and preserve freedom of expression. That debate has just kicked off today in Germany but, of course, there is a long way to go before it comes into law. It is important to point to that balance and ensure that we get it right.

Q553 **Nusrat Ghani:** If the Knesset has declared that your content is anti-Semitic and it is going to fine you to take it down, surely you have to accept that you need to put more resources in place.

Peter Barron: We have talked about the resources and the investment that we are making in terms of moderation and removal. We have set ourselves some very challenging targets. Of course, those targets have also been included in the EU code of conduct, for example, which asked us to remove the majority of illegal content within 24 hours. We are reviewing 98% of flagged content within 24 hours. As we saw with the German example, in terms of illegal hate speech, our record is improving very rapidly and we are around 90%.

Simon Milner: I have had the pleasure of appearing before two Knesset committees on not dissimilar topics. The parliamentarians there have provided an interesting experience.

To your serious question, I want to correct one thing you mentioned earlier. We do not adapt our community standards for different countries. Our community standards are the same everywhere. What we do is that, as well as the community standards, we also respect local law when it goes beyond community standards or addresses a particular topic for that community. That does not mean that we change our community standards; they apply the same.

Q554 **Nusrat Ghani:** But they do bend, depending on which country.

Simon Milner: No, they do not bend.

Q555 **Nusrat Ghani:** Not at all?

Simon Milner: Not at all. They are the same standards.

Q556 **Nusrat Ghani:** You just bring in other standards on top of the community standards?

Simon Milner: No, we apply the same standards everywhere. You may find interesting what our founder, Mark Zuckerberg, has written recently about other ways in which we can help people adapt their experience of what they see on Facebook that goes beyond the standards. It is more about saying, "Do I want to see more or less of certain types of content?" That may be the thing you are referring to, but I am not sure. I am happy to follow up afterwards.

On the issue of legal frameworks, there are different legal frameworks already in place in different countries. For different reasons, different Governments and Parliaments have taken that decision. At the moment, two countries—Germany and Israel—are considering measures.

The German legislation has only just been published today. We are reviewing and I cannot give you a view on what we think of it. We are very actively engaged with Israeli policymakers to understand their concerns and to offer our views about their draft legislation. We have a concern that it may, indeed, impede free speech.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q557 Nusrat Ghani: So, Mr Milner, you have presented twice to the Knesset and we have read out anti-Semitic content to you but you have just said that you need to understand what their concerns are. Do you just not accept the concerns that the content you have is anti-Semitic and can lead to more violent activity, and that there is some responsibility? Do you still need that to be explained to you by the Knesset?

Simon Milner: Absolutely not. We recognise we have a responsibility to engage with the nation's lawmakers and to understand their concerns and, hopefully, to help them to understand our companies better and to address their issues. That is exactly the same process in Israel as in many other countries, where I or other colleagues represent our company.

The issues are not unique to the UK or to Israel. People are worried about the safety of their communities and the nature of speech and the polarisation of speech. It is something where we know there is much good that has come about because of our platform, but we also know that some of these issues have added saliency and more virality because of the scale of our platforms. We want to work hard to try to address that.

The reason why it is great to be back here after a year is that things have changed and things have moved on. There are new issues that the Committee has raised and there are new things that we are now doing. If you have us back in a year's time, or you come and see us later this year in Dublin, you will find that there have also been some new developments. These things are moving all the time.

Q558 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Pickles, what do we do with a platform like Twitter?

Nick Pickles: You have heard from us previously that this is not something that we think is finished and it is not something we think is a simple challenge. One of the issues we face as global platforms is different Governments passing different laws, some of which perhaps wouldn't get passed in one Parliament but would get passed in another. We have to find a way of working within that legal framework. Due process is a really important part of that.

People use our platforms to share their life and their experiences around the world. I am from Normanton. It could be someone talking from my local pub, which won CAMRA pub of the year and is fantastic, to someone talking in Kenya, where I was a few weeks ago, about their very real fear that there will be a famine next year. In building platforms that cross those different perspectives and their different rules, we have to have some way of saying that someone can't just come to us and say, "This is illegal; take it down."

Simon cited Turkey, which uses court orders. Court orders are a really important part of this process. First, if you break a court order, you do not just lose your account—there are real world consequences. Secondly—this Committee has taken a huge amount of evidence looking at things like misogyny—where people are being stalked and where harassment has happened, restraining orders and non-molestation orders are an incredibly

important part of protecting victims, and they are enforced by criminal law.

I think the challenges internationally are very, very complex—I started looking after Israel for the company in January. What we need to remind ourselves is that there are unintended consequences sometimes of legislating. That might be the economic harm. It might make it much harder to start a new business. Peter referenced the e-commerce directive. One of the principles is that you can start a business without worrying that you have to have in place the kind of infrastructure that we do as big multinational businesses.

It is a very difficult area. It is very important to say that this is something we think about at every level of the company. Across the world there are people of different nationalities, different faiths and different genders who are all working on these issues. I think Simon's right. Things have changed and things have improved since the last time we were here.

Q559 Nusrat Ghani: But will you take content down, if Germany and Israel decide to start fining you? Once there is an economic issue, you will have to start taking it down. What will you do?

Nick Pickles: In the case of Germany, I know that a lot of the content that has gone through the testing process that we have spoken about was removed under our terms of service. Germany has very specific laws around certain things. The German legislators chose to pass laws and they empowered an organisation to have legal powers. Different countries take different models. It is not for us to tell Parliaments what the right way or the wrong way is. We are going to take action on content that breaks our community standards, our terms of use and our Twitter rules irrespective of political pressure. We are going to do that because it breaks our rules.

Q560 Nusrat Ghani: Why can't your community standards change over a period of time? We have talked about extremism, but this Committee is looking at right-wing extremism, not Islamic extremism, so how do you make sure that your community standards are fluid enough to understand new forms of hate speech, which can lead to violent interaction?

Simon Milner: That is where the expertise of our teams—whom you are very welcome to come and meet—comes in. They are from many different countries and lots of them have incredible experience with hate. We have just hired one of this country's foremost experts in terrorist groups and their activity online to come and work for Facebook, because we want that kind of expertise in the company. It is not about adapting our standards; it is about adapting our understanding of what people are trying to do and ensuring that we are ahead of them.

Peter Barron: And the community standards do evolve. Going back a number of years in the UK, there was the issue of gang videos—gangs brandishing weapons on YouTube. That was an area where we took an approach that said, "In the UK this is becoming a bit of a phenomenon. We will apply a guideline that says that that should come down."



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q561 Nusrat Ghani: But you have been in front of us a couple of times now, and we keep raising particular sites and particular terminology, but they just haven't come down. When you come in front of a Select Committee, you would expect to do some due diligence, but we can quite easily google up those sites. I just think it is very irresponsible of you to come here and say, "Well, these sites are popping up and there's nothing we can do about it", even for the sites that we point out to you all the time.

Simon Milner: With respect, the four pages that were notified to Facebook have not been taken down, because in and of themselves they did not breach our standards. There were some posts that had not been previously reported that we then identified and took down, but the pages themselves were not taken down.

Q562 Nusrat Ghani: What about you, Mr Pickles? We took so much evidence in our previous anti-Semitism report from people who talked about content on Twitter that they had reported, and you still had not taken it down, even while they were giving evidence to us and you knew they were going to come and give evidence to us.

Nick Pickles: As Simon says, that might be because we have taken a view that it did not breach our rules.

Q563 Nusrat Ghani: Even though they gave evidence to say how damaging this content was?

Nick Pickles: I do not know the specific example that you are referring to, but one thing I will say is that we work very closely. We have a Trust and Safety Council which brings together expert groups from around the world, who give us feedback. We have absolutely changed our rules. In November, based on feedback from a wide range of people, we introduced a specific way, which did not exist previously, to report hateful content. We have made changes based on user feedback; only a few weeks ago, we made a change which we rolled back the same day because of feedback from users. As I say, it is absolutely a fluid process.

One of the challenges we see is that, when we change our rules, people change their behaviour to get around the rules, so we are constantly having to try to stay one step ahead. We get people who we have banned from our platform who try to return, and they are very determined to do so, so we invest in technology to catch those people. But this is not a constant; this is something that we are always thinking about—how are users reacting, how are people trying to get around our policies?—and if we need to change policies, we will.

Q564 Nusrat Ghani: We have talked about TellMAMA quite a bit this afternoon. It is an organisation that I assume you work with, and they have spoken to you about a number of sites that they feel disturbed about. One particular site that they raised with you over an 18-month period apparently only came down as soon as it was confirmed that you were coming to give evidence today. Was that linked at all, or did you always believe that the sites they tell you need to be taken down are taken down in due time?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nick Pickles: We really value our partnership with TellMAMA. They provide us with really useful insight into cultural context and they bring accounts to our attention. In the account you mention—this is in written evidence to the Committee, so I am not disclosing private correspondence—much of the information that they were concerned about was not posted on Twitter. One of the things we do say is that we are not responsible for material that is not hosted on Twitter. In the case of blogs or websites, people link to those sites, but the content that is hosted elsewhere—the words that are not on Twitter—is something that we cannot take responsibility for.

Q565 **Chair:** If people tweet a link to something that is a problem, will you delete the tweet?

Nick Pickles: Yes, if the tweet breaches our terms of service, but not if the content of the link does.

Q566 **Chair:** So if people tweet links to things that are clearly hate crimes, you will not delete the tweet?

Nick Pickles: For the simple reason that—context is everything and hypotheticals are very hard—it could be someone condemning it. If someone shares a condemnation and a link to news article, which happens a lot, we would not remove that. I think this is the challenge of the way platforms share information.

We do not always agree with our partners, but we really value their input. The account that you are referencing has been an edge case for a long time. We constantly see cases where some people say, “How about this account?”, and the account evolves in a different way or continues in a certain way. It might then actually go from being on one side of our rules to being on the other. We review accounts and we review reports at the point they are submitted. We can’t continuously monitor them.

Q567 **Nusrat Ghani:** But you just don’t seem to have enough people to review the accounts. How many people do you have monitoring them—400 people?

Nick Pickles: We do not give out numbers for the simple reason that someone, somewhere would say that it is not enough.

Q568 **Chair:** I’m sorry. Why can’t you tell us how many people you have doing that sort of content mediation?

Nick Pickles: It is the same with the number of reports we receive. The last time we were here, a colleague from Google said that the most reported video on YouTube is a Justin Bieber video. It is not about numbers in themselves, but your point is very important.

Q569 **Nusrat Ghani:** I think you previously gave evidence that you have 400 members of staff.

Nick Pickles: More than 100.

Nusrat Ghani: You just have more than 100.

Q570 **Chair:** Less than 200?

Nick Pickles: The important point to note is that, in the past 18 months, we have been through two restructuring processes, in which a number of staff lost their jobs. After those processes, there are more people working on trust and safety in the company than there were, so we haven't lost any people.

Q571 **Chair:** Useful factual information—it would be very helpful to know from each of you how many people you have working on content moderation and dealing with complaints. Mr Pickles, you said that over 100 people deal with complaints. Is that right?

Nick Pickles: That is still the case.

Q572 **Chair:** Over 100 globally? How many in the UK?

Nick Pickles: It is the same with the other companies. They are not based in the UK. They are based in Dublin predominantly and Europe.

Q573 **Chair:** So nobody in the UK. How many do you have in Dublin?

Nick Pickles: Again, we don't give specific numbers out for specific offices.

Q574 **Chair:** Why not?

Nick Pickles: Well, for a variety of reasons.

Q575 **Chair:** Because we might criticise you?

Nick Pickles: No. It is a global platform that faces a number of challenges, and we think that the things that matter are around our users. The feedback from our users saying that things aren't being taken down is very valuable.

Q576 **Chair:** But your initial answer to Ms Ghani was to say, "Because people might say it wasn't enough." Surely as an organisation that has in your previous evidence promoted free speech, you would not criticise people for criticising you as part of their free speech and saying that you aren't doing enough.

Nick Pickles: No, absolutely.

Q577 **Chair:** Okay. Let me ask you again. Can you tell us how many people you have dealing with complaints in Dublin?

Nick Pickles: No. I am happy to speak to colleagues and see if we have disclosed that information anywhere around the world. I am happy to ask that question.

Q578 **Chair:** Can you think of a single reason why you would not disclose that information? I am struggling to think of one.

Nick Pickles: We have a variety of reasons internally. One example is highlighting which offices people do these jobs in. Particularly in the case of terrorism, I think it is legitimate to say that there are security concerns

around highlighting where the people who are reviewing that content are based. That is a challenge. As I say, I am happy to speak to colleagues and write to the Committee if we are able to disclose that information.

Chair: I think that would be really, really helpful.

Simon Milner: I am able to say thousands, but I can't give you more clarity than that. I would say that—

Q579 **Chair:** By the way, what is the reason for not having the clarity?

Simon Milner: I am about to explain. We are a commercial company, and some matters are commercially sensitive, including how we deploy our resources and what people work on in Facebook. We are a technology company that employs about 17,000 people globally. We support a massive community of people, and we believe technology plays an incredibly important role in supporting them, including in the area of safety. It could well be that, in the future, we employ hundreds of people to review reports because the technology has got better. I would suggest that there is not necessarily a linear relationship between the number of people you employ and the effectiveness of the work you do. The most important thing is the quality and the commitment of those individuals. For the sake of it, I will repeat this again: you are very welcome to come and meet them. They would love to meet you.

Q580 **Chair:** If we came, could we count them?

Simon Milner: You could definitely count the people in the room—no problem.

Q581 **Chair:** I am still struggling with this. I accept of course that there are much broader issues, in terms of technology, quality and so on, but I still don't understand why you cannot tell us how many people you have dealing with complaints.

Simon Milner: Because as a company we have taken the decision not to reveal those numbers publicly. There are certain numbers that we have to reveal as a commercial company, but if you asked many other companies around the world specifically, "How many people work on this?" they would say, "That's commercially confidential and we won't disclose it." Like Mr Pickles, I am very happy to discuss with my colleagues whether we can provide a more specific number confidentially for the Committee. I reiterate that I do not believe that that number will tell you very much, in terms of how effective we are at doing the job that you are focusing on today.

Q582 **Chair:** In which case, I am still baffled about why you shouldn't have some transparency around it. This is about people who are dealing with issues to do with public safety and compliance with the law. For organisations that have such a huge reach and huge impact, on the basis of the answers that you have given, do you think it is unacceptable for you not to be able to tell us how many people work on dealing with complaints and these extremely serious public safety issues?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Simon Milner: I hear you, and I will discuss it with my colleagues.

Q583 **Chair:** Mr Barron?

Peter Barron: I am afraid I am going to give you a similar answer to my colleagues here, although I can say that we employ thousands of people on these issues.

Q584 **Chair:** Mr Miller and Mr Barron, if you are saying it is thousands, are we talking about more than 2,000?

Peter Barron: I do not think we want to get into the higher-lower game—

Q585 **Chair:** Thousands with an 's'—does that mean more than 2,000?

Peter Barron: We can certainly say thousands and hundreds of millions of dollars of investment.

Simon Milner: That is a good interpretation.

Q586 **Chair:** So more than 2,000.

Peter Barron: Our biggest operation is in Dublin. Most of our trust and safety team is in Dublin.

Q587 **Chair:** So you have more than 2,000 people in Dublin dealing with complaints.

Peter Barron: No, across the world dedicated to these issues—

Q588 **Chair:** So not thousands in Dublin dealing with complaints. Hundreds?

Peter Barron: I am going to say thousands—

Q589 **Chair:** We did manage to get Twitter to say it is over 100. I would love to get even a ballpark figure from you.

Peter Barron: Thousands is—

Q590 **Chair:** Thousands in Dublin.

Peter Barron: No, I am not saying thousands in Dublin.

Q591 **Chair:** Not thousands in Dublin. Have we managed to reach at least three figures in Dublin? Do we have more than 100 in Dublin?

Peter Barron: I do not have that figure. We have thousands engaged in this around the world and one of our biggest teams is in Dublin.

Mr Winnick: How invasive can we get, Chair?

Peter Barron: You will see that trust and safety team in Dublin when you visit.

Q592 **Nusrat Ghani:** I love this conversation we have had. You cannot tell us how many humans you have, because sometimes the technology supersedes the human capability and you are having to move around, but you have presented to us over a number of years a technology that has not superseded anything, because we are having the same discussion.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

You say that you might be reducing staff because technology has somehow got better and you are taking down content more swiftly, but that just is not really happening.

For my final question, I want to move on to the link between fake news and hate crime. I know that Facebook has come under criticism for how fake news flourishes. There is some evidence to show that fake news tends to go more viral and thus is more profitable than real news clicks. I want to talk about the link between that and programmatic advertising on your platform. Anyone can try to advertise on your site. If I link on to a number of fake news sites, you will understand the kind of content that I like and then maybe Nike or Dove soap will come on to my page. Do those companies know that when they are advertising on your site, they are then linked into fake news sites? That could diminish their brand. Are they aware of that?

Peter Barron: Fake news is clearly a very big issue, and in terms of the definition of what fake news is, there could be a whole debate or session on that question, and indeed we have got one coming up. Our *raison d'être* as a company is to take people to relevant and useful information, so fake news is an issue of concern. The approach we have taken on the purest form of fake news—the Macedonian youths who were throwing deliberately fake news into the American election campaign with the purpose of making money—is to choke off the money supply. We have a misrepresentative ads policy. If a site is claiming to be one thing and actually is another, we will cut off monetisation to that site. In the past couple of months since the US elections, we have looked at more than 500 sites around the world using that policy and have taken action on more than 300.

Q593 **Nusrat Ghani:** So there are 500 sites around the world with fake news—is that what you are saying?

Peter Barron: We looked at 500 misrepresentative sites.

Q594 **Nusrat Ghani:** Five hundred misrepresentative sites of fake news.

Peter Barron: In many cases involving fake news.

Q595 **Nusrat Ghani:** So you have got the technology and the wherewithal to look at 500 sites with fake news, but you have not been able to look at 500 sites that potentially have something to do with hate crime and the inciting of violence.

Peter Barron: That is a policy violation relating to the issue of fake news. We are doing a range of things in this area but, primarily, choking off the money supply relating to fake news is a very important thing. Of course we seek to choke off the money supply to terror or hate sites.

Q596 **Nusrat Ghani:** Do you have more staff working on this than are dealing with extremism sites? You are choking off money here, but you were not able to say how much money you were choking off when Mr Umunna asked you.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Peter Barron: These are the same trust and safety teams who are dealing with a range of issues across the board. You mentioned fake news, which we of course recognise needs to be addressed in a range of different ways. Choking off the money is a primary way of doing that.

Q597 **Nusrat Ghani:** Mr Milner, a small business or a big business advertising on your site could quite easily be linked to fake news, extremism sites and hate crime sites.

Simon Milner: Actually, it is extremely unlikely. I expect that as companies we will give evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee soon as part of its inquiry into fake news. I am loth to pre-empt that, but I can tell you that the amount of fake news on Facebook is very small—much like hate speech. None the less, we would like it to be zero.

Q598 **Nusrat Ghani:** What does very small mean, Mr Milner?

Simon Milner: We would like it to be zero. We would like to get rid of it and to make it really hard for people who want to try and do it. The amount of revenue we make from it is negligible, but we would like it to be zero and we want to do everything we can—that is humanly and technically possible—to make that the case. That is also true on hate speech: we want to do everything we can—everything humanly and technically possible—to try to get this stuff off our platforms. It does not belong there and it should not be there.

Q599 **Nusrat Ghani:** Your ambition is to get fake news to zero.

Simon Milner: Absolutely. We would like to do that—that is the right ambition, isn't it?

Q600 **Nusrat Ghani:** But how much is there at the moment?

Simon Milner: I don't have a number for you. It is a very small amount.

Q601 **Nusrat Ghani:** And your ambition is to get extremism content off it—no doubt to zero.

Simon Milner: Absolutely. We would like to get it off our platform.

Q602 **Nusrat Ghani:** With your possible 1,000-plus staff.

Simon Milner: No. To be clear, this is not about us piling on more people and that will get rid of the problem. It is a combination of different resources. It is also about partnerships and encouraging people to report. In this country we live in a society where people expect that if you press report or if you call the police, something will happen. I am afraid that there are many other countries around the world where people do not believe that. If you go to other countries, people there think, "There is no point in me pressing report, in the same way as there is no point in me ever phoning the police, because nothing will happen." We can do lots of other things to try to get people to tell us about this stuff to ensure that we have the right technology, expertise and people resources to review it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and do it accurately and swiftly, and then to try and disrupt the networks of people who are trying to perpetuate hate in our societies.

Q603 Nusrat Ghani: Unfortunately, the evidence we have taken in this and previous inquiries shows that people do not have confidence when they report content, whether to Facebook or Twitter. The other point that I am trying to make is that revenue-raising is a key part of your business. Do all the people who advertise on your site know the risks they are taking by being a brand that is linked to fake news, child sexual exploitation, grooming children for extremism and hate crime?

Simon Milner: I strongly disagree.

Q604 Nusrat Ghani: I will leave the final comment to you and to Twitter.

Simon Milner: Excuse me—you did suggest that my company is associated with that, and that is simply not true. The big brands, small brands and small businesses—hundreds of thousands of them—that use Facebook do not see it as that at all. They see it as a place where they can engage with real people—people like you and me and our friends and families—about their products and services in an incredibly safe way.

Q605 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Pickles, where does Twitter go from here? Are we going to see you again in a year's time when we have the same content online?

Nick Pickles: On the point about technology, when I appeared before this Committee a year ago, we hadn't made any public statements about the amount of terrorist content that we had removed, for example. Shortly after that appearance, we published our first announcement detailing that we had taken down 125,000 accounts, in some part by leveraging our own technology. We then updated that in August 2016 to highlight that we had suspended more than 360,000 accounts. I was asked by this Committee how we were being more transparent. Those two announcements were part of that process, and we are now looking to make sure that our transparency report—as with colleagues, that is published on a six-monthly basis—will include more data.

One thing that I have said today, which wasn't the case a year ago, is that the majority of terrorist accounts that we detect and remove are done so through technology. That was not the case a year ago. We are investing in technology and are looking to deploy it, both in abuse and in other areas. This is something that our businesses are investing in and are passionate about working harder on, but the challenge for us all is that we will never get to a point where we are 100% successful, because no system is ever 100% successful and 100% perfect.

Chair: Thank you for your continued patience. I realise that this has been a long session, but I realise that there are a lot of important issues to cover. We would like to cover other potential reforms that could be made.

Q606 Stuart C. McDonald: On the subject of potential reforms, it was reported that Facebook is thinking about having a police icon on its site that users could click if they felt threatened, which would then alert the police. Is

that a true reflection of what Facebook is thinking about?

Simon Milner: I think that may well be fake news.

Q607 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. And Twitter wouldn't think about anything similar?

Nick Pickles: We actually do have a similar service, called Twitter Alerts. If you go to the police page, you can press the alarm bell. It is a tool that police services can use to alert people to incidents happening. So there is something like that already there, but in a different context.

Q608 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But it is not the same thing as something that users could click if they felt threatened.

Nick Pickles: One thing we have changed is that if a user reports a violent threat to us, they now have the option to say, "Please provide me with an email I can take to law enforcement." That email will detail the specifics. I can send you an example. It contains the URL, so a police officer can type in the URL of the specific example, and it also contains a link for the police officer to contact us about our guidelines for requesting user data. We have introduced that to make it easier so that when people go to the police, they hopefully have, in one email, all the information the police need.

Q609 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Would Facebook consider equivalent measures to support or encourage police reporting, where necessary?

Simon Milner: In the last half year we had something like 2,500 requests for data from the UK police. We have very extensive relationships with all the single points of contact in the different police forces. But that doesn't mean we cannot try out new things. I am very happy to talk with my colleagues who manage this area to understand whether there are new things on the horizon of a similar type.

Q610 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Another thing that has been suggested to us is a "Watch my account" button that would alert moderators when large numbers of abusive tweets or comments were aimed at a user so that offensive accounts could be identified and stopped. Would Facebook consider a button like that?

Simon Milner: There are a number of different ways in which Facebook reporting is different from Twitter reporting. Most of our reporting is done in line, but as soon as somebody alerts us that they are concerned about their own safety, we can and do act to help them in that regard. I can also say that in the most extreme situations—for instance, if someone is reporting that they believe someone else they know is at real risk of harm, including potentially killing themselves—we can and do alert the authorities ourselves to get people help from someone in the real world.

Q611 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. What about "Watch my account"?

Nick Pickles: With some of the technology we are just starting to deploy, our ambition is that we would be able to do that without you even having to press the button.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q612 **Chair:** Would that cover the kinds of cases where an individual suddenly just gets targeted by a network and gets huge numbers of abusive tweets?

Nick Pickles: I think “dogpile” has become the word for that. That is exactly what—

Chair: So this would prevent that from happening.

Nick Pickles: You can’t prevent it from happening, but we can make sure that the victim doesn’t feel like they are exposed on their own. We can also make it quicker for our teams to review the reports and review the accounts that are involved in that dogpile. A good example of how our terms of service and our rules have evolved is that we have actually added cover to our Twitter rules to prohibit people from encouraging that kind of behaviour. This is an issue that we are very aware of.

Q613 **Chair:** So if people are encouraging it, what happens then? Is their account suspended, or what?

Nick Pickles: Yes, that is one of the options.

Q614 **Chair:** So you wouldn’t have to press a button to flag up that you were being dogpiled; in your system, you would notice it anyway.

Nick Pickles: That is our hope. This technology is in its very early stages, but that is our hope. It is not just about that—one of the things we are experimenting with is saying that the only people who can see your tweets are the people who follow you, so even if you were tweeting at other people, it wouldn’t be visible. We are experimenting with different areas. This is something we are doing in days and weeks right now and have been doing for about the past month, so you will probably see changes to the app happening quite quickly.

Q615 **Chair:** Sorry to interrupt, Mr McDonald. The Fawcett Society has been doing a survey on this and the sorts of things that it wants to see changed. Key things that it raised include adding a panic button in that kind of situation and blocking abusive accounts so that their posts can only be seen by their followers. So those are the two things that you are investigating now.

Nick Pickles: And actually may be live very soon on the platform.

Q616 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Do you want to take the chance to highlight any other initiatives that we might see soon that you think are going to make a significant contribution to tackling hate speech, intimidation and so on? Could you also address how we measure progress? How do you guys measure progress in this regard, and how should we as a Committee measure progress with it so that next time, when you come back, we can say for sure that things are getting better or things are much the same or even worse?

Peter Barron: We would certainly be very happy to let you know upcoming developments, and actually we have a range in terms of family safety and some of the experiments that we doing, particularly with



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jigsaw—I am not sure whether you are familiar with Jigsaw, but it used to be called Google Ideas. Over the years, they have done a lot of cutting-edge experiments relating to extremism and safety online. I should mention a project called Respective, which is in quite early years, that uses machine learning to counter trolling and to help people pre-moderate and keep their comments safe. Jigsaw is also involved in a number of other initiatives such as the redirect method, which is a counter-speech initiative towards more positive content. It has a project called Project Shield, which is designed to protect websites and news organisations from attack and so on. There is a lot of work going on and we would be very happy to write to the Committee with the details as they come up.

Q617 Stuart C. McDonald: What measurements do you use to determine whether things are improving?

Peter Barron: Judge us by our actions. We have quite a lot of data points, some of which I have shared with you today, which we can send to the Committee as we go.

Simon Milner: On the issue of how to judge us, the European Commission is undertaking an extensive exercise, the second wave of which is about to start, in something like 25 different member states, where a number of safety organisations will report content through the different channels that we have available, essentially to test our systems. Provided you get the methodology right for how you count the numbers—there were some issues around the first wave—that seems like a pretty good way to test. I would always encourage people to test our systems. Even if it is a piece of content that you do not think is hate speech, try it, see what happens. Test out the reporting flow and see what messages you get back. Please don't post hate speech to see if anybody reports it.

Nick Pickles: I am happy to share with the Committee as we change our product and the things that are actually going to change in this space. Some other developments outside of our companies are interesting. I think the CPS's revised guidance is really important, and I think it puts the proper scrutiny towards when a victim comes forward to report harassment and stalking offences. Working with the Crown Prosecution Service to make sure that their prosecutors understand how they can use orders such as non-molestation orders or protection from harassment orders to prevent people from using our platforms to cause harm is really good progress, and we continue to work on that.

Measuring success is hard, because, as we have discussed, a lot of these issues are underlying social issues. The manifestation of prejudice on our platforms is a result of prejudice in the real world, so I think that at a time when we are going through some seismic political issues that prompt extremely impassioned discussion on our platforms, one thing that is very hard to measure is social change. That is one of the reasons why as a company we are working not just at a technical level.

Last week we held the latest in a group of interfaith coding classes, where we bring together young women from across London schools to meet, who

may not otherwise have the opportunity to mix. That supports their development in careers, and hopefully brings more women into the technology world, and it offers an incredible opportunity for them to meet other people. I am happy to send the Committee more information on that. As companies, we can have a real world impact as well as work to make our platforms safer for all our users.

Q618 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But you are not giving me any idea of how you measure success or even progress in terms of tackling hate speech.

Nick Pickles: One of the best things that we do, and it is something that we are very keen to do, is to go to Belfast and to talk to people about different contexts, and to go to Bradford, Manchester and Coventry to meet people and ask, "How do you think we're doing?". It is anecdotal, not scientific, but our users are the people who give us a sense of whether we are doing right. As I say, we made a change to the product a few weeks ago and the reaction of our users on Twitter, telling us that this was a bad idea and unintended consequences were the following, led us to make that change and roll it back. For us, we can look at data, but the actual experience of our users is really, really important in measuring this, and people will feel if we are making progress.

Chair: I have a few policy questions. In our last report under the previous Chair the Committee recommended that Twitter and Facebook should use trusted flaggers. Are you doing so?

Nick Pickles: We have it, but we don't call it that.

Simon Milner: We have something similar, but we don't call it that.

Q619 **Chair:** But you have a trusted relationship with particular organisations. If they flag things, you will—

Simon Milner: They have their own dedicated channel for flagging things to us, but we do not make that email public because we want people to use our reporting channels that are available to everyone.

Q620 **Chair:** It would be helpful, even if it is on a confidential basis, if you could let us know which organisations you have relationships with as trusted flaggers. There have been different proposals for reforms on having Ofcom regulation of what you do, or having a requirement for you to have filters in place so that users can themselves filter out abusive content. What do you think of those sorts of reforms?

Nick Pickles: We have launched something we call the quality filter. We have also launched a tool called mute. As well as accounts, you can mute words, phrases and replies to things. We have also strengthened things based on feedback to our reports. If you block or mute somebody and somebody else replies to them, you will not see that, either. That is something we are developing and using now.

Simon Milner: We have a number of tools that people can use to keep themselves safe. We have been doing work around the issues of women's safety, particularly in the sub-continent where there are specific types of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

behaviour that we see around women's accounts that make them feel unsafe. So there are a number of things we are doing. I am happy to write to the Committee to explain those. As for Ofcom, that is a matter for Parliament.

Peter Barron: Comments are the relevant area here. On YouTube there is a lot of control. You can block comments and particular terms or a user.

Q621 **Chair:** Germany has proposed legislation to require you to take down illegal content within a certain number of days. There are fines as well should you not do so. What is your response to that legislation?

Simon Milner: I think I mentioned earlier that we have only just seen it. We have not had a chance to review it or provide a public opinion on it.

Peter Barron: I touched on it a little earlier, but it's early days.

Q622 **Chair:** Again, it would be helpful for us to have any thoughts you have on that proposal in writing. On the anonymity issue, Mr Pickles, could you provide us with information on countries and how many people are at risk if they provide information about who they are?

Nick Pickles: That might be something that Index on Censorship is better suited to provide. Tim Berners-Lee today made the point about one of the challenges of the internet being personal information. It is a much broader question about people controlling their own identities. We met a group of young people from the 5Rights group, which is working in Scotland right now on young people's rights. One of the questions at the meeting was from a young trans student who asked, "Can I change my name?" So it is not just about human rights. There is a whole range of issues.

Q623 **Chair:** But this is about people's safety if they provide the information to you, not whether their identity should be publicly viewed on Twitter. You were asked earlier about whether you should at least collect some identifying information about somebody so that, should they break the law, you have that information to either pass to the police or, alternatively, to prevent them setting up a further account under another anonymous name later on. You said that people might be at risk even providing that information to Twitter. Can you tell us in how many countries that is an issue?

Nick Pickles: I also said that some people might not want to provide information. There are different reasons why people might not want to do so. Anyone who has had any PPI marketing or spam texting might not want to give their mobile number because of the experience, so I do not think it is as simple as saying people are not giving us their passports for the simple reason of safety. I think safety is one of the clearest cases of where not using your real name is important, but it comes down to a whole range of different issues. It is very difficult to provide a list of places where people should have a different name and where they should not, because it is up to individuals to decide at what point they feel comfortable using their own identity.

Q624 **Chair:** But you are choosing as a company to set a policy about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

anonymity, which also makes it much harder for you to ensure that the law is enforced.

Nick Pickles: I think it is important to separate out using your real name and anonymity. Whenever someone sets up a Twitter account, they have to give us something. As the numerous prosecutions show, people are not anonymous. The police ask us for user information—Twitter is a public platform, and there are pieces of information available that anyone can see. It is very difficult to single out certain characteristics. Ultimately we have made a decision that people can use the name and identity they choose. That is a policy decision the company has made, but I don't think it is a simple list of, "Here's where it would work and here's where it wouldn't."

Q625 **Chair:** It would be useful for you to provide some clarity. I am not asking about the public persona that people have; I am asking about what information they are required to provide for you. It would be useful to have some further information about what information people are required to provide for you and how much you are able to identify that.

On Facebook, as well as having private groups, you can have secret groups, which are invisible when you search for them. What is done to ensure that those secret groups are not involved in child abuse, terrorist activity or other kinds of illegal activity?

Simon Milner: The kinds of technology tools we talked about earlier—I would rather not go into much detail about them, given that we don't want to tip off the bad guys—absolutely can be and are deployed in secret groups.

Q626 **Chair:** Okay. Fine. It would be useful if you could all send us some more general information including the number of complaints you get each month; the number of things that you remove from your sites for being illegal; the number of things you remove for being against your community standards; how many people you have working on public safety and community standards; and how much money you invest in public safety issues—you might be able to tell me that now.

Nick Pickles: I haven't got that figure.

Peter Barron: Hundreds of millions.

Q627 **Chair:** So more than £200 million?

Simon Milner: I cannot give you that, because I don't know the number; I'm sorry.

Nick Pickles: I do not know the number.

Chair: That would be very useful to know.

Simon Milner: I can provide you with the address of our office in Dublin, for your visit.

Q628 **Chair:** We will come with one of those ticker things, so we can wander



HOUSE OF COMMONS

around counting as we go. I want to ask you a few final questions. Do you think, based on the work you do and what you look at on your platforms, that hate crime is increasing?

Simon Milner: That is a really tough question. I don't have an answer for you. We certainly see that in countries around the world there is a heightened interest in this from lawmakers, the police and the public. That might suggest there has been an increase in polarisation and the hate speech associated with that, but I cannot be definitive about it. Certainly as someone who works in the policy team in Facebook, much more of my time and my team's time is spent on this issue than it was five years ago.

Nick Pickles: It is very hard. One thing we know about Twitter is that it reflects what is happening in the real world. Given the elections around the world and issues like Brexit and Scottish independence, there have been a number of real-world events that drive online conversation. If you look at the refugee crisis, there is undoubtedly more discussion around issues of migration and regional instability because of what is happening in the real world. As Simon said, it is very difficult to measure. In terms of the conversations we are having, we are doing some work with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime—MOPAC. It is holding a conference on 24 April, which we are part of. We want to understand what is happening, but also make sure that if there are things we can change, we should do and will. It is a very difficult question.

Peter Barron: Clearly, the web reflects wider society. Whether it is in the United States, this country or other parts of the world, it is clear that there is more division in society. That, of course, means that more attention is paid to these issues. In terms of flagged material, we are seeing a 25% year-on-year increase in flagging, but of course that may be due to more awareness of the nature of reporting these things. We are encouraging people all the time to flag content that breaches our policies and trying to educate people across YouTube and across the web in digital citizenship.

We are encouraging people all the time to flag content that breaches our policies and trying to educate people across YouTube and across the web in digital citizenship. It may be a bit of both things going on here.

Q629 **Chair:** Do you think misogyny is increasing?

Peter Barron: I don't think there is any doubt that issues relating to trolling of women is a serious problem, as the Committee has drawn attention to.

Simon Milner: We would not be supporting the campaign that you are leading if we didn't think that was a growing problem.

Nick Pickles: I absolutely agree. There are groups like Reclaim the Internet, and we also hosted the APPG on domestic violence two weeks ago to discuss these issues. It is a question of not only volume but how it impacts people. One of the challenges of mobile communications is that it is much more personal. You carry a phone around in your pocket. That is where we have an obligation on not just making sure this works at a policy



HOUSE OF COMMONS

level but also things like non-molestation orders and making sure that the existing framework in the real world works online.

That is why conversations with the CPS and the police are really important. If they understand how our services work, it enables them to better craft protective measures for victims. That is why the College of Policing's work is really important in this. As all these different issues come up, making sure the police have the skills and the knowledge to deal with them and the real-world consequences is really important.

Chair: We have had a long evidence session, and we appreciate your time. The reason we have had such a long evidence session is that we are worried—you have heard the concerns raised by so many Committee members. Frankly, we have heard considerable evidence about hate crime increasing and about people's online experiences of hate crime, harassment, death threats and abuse, and the way in which that is poisoning people's lives.

We all think that social media is amazing. We all use it. It is where we live our lives all the time, but that is also why we do not want to see it being poisoned and used by some people to ruin other people's lives—and that is what is happening at the moment. That is why you have heard such huge concern about some of the answers you have given and the scale of your response.

There is a general feeling that, for all the things you have said and all the things you say you are working on, in the end it is still not enough. In terms of YouTube, frankly, Mr Barron, your answers on how you are implementing community standards felt a bit of a joke. It does not feel as if you are taking your own community standards seriously enough and playing even by your own rules in terms of what counts as hate crime and what should be removed. For both Facebook and Twitter, there is still considerable concern about the pace at which you respond and are able to update your systems or deal with things that have been raised with you over a long period about the safety of users on your platforms.

There is a very strong sense from across Parliament—not just from this Committee—that we need you to do more. You have immense power. You are incredibly powerful organisations, and you have huge power over people's lives. A lot of that is used to great effect and to do wonderful things, but it is also used to do terrible things, and we need you to do more and have more social responsibility to protect people from those who want to use your platforms to do terrible things. I really hope you will be able to provide us with the additional information we need. I also hope that when we undoubtedly call you back again for a future evidence session, you will be able to tell us the progress you have made and the things you have been able to do to keep more people safe online. Thank you very much.