

# Science and Technology Committee

## Oral evidence: [Impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health](#), HC 822

Wednesday, 4 July 2018

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Members present: Norman Lamb (Chair); Bill Grant; Darren Jones; Liz Kendall; Stephen Metcalfe; Carol Monaghan; Damien Moore; Neil O'Brien.

Questions 353 - 452

### Witnesses

I: Becca, Member of Youth Select Committee 2017; Sienna, nominated by the National Children's Bureau; Bethan, nominated by the National Children's Bureau; Orlaith, nominated by Barnardo's; and Jack, nominated by Kidscape.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Becca, Sienna, Bethan, Orlaith and Jack.

Q353 **Chair:** Welcome, all of you. We really appreciate you coming this afternoon to give evidence. The Committee sits round the table here and in turn we will ask questions of you. If there is anything at any stage that you do not want to answer or feel able not to answer, it doesn't matter at all. We will, in a moment, switch the cameras on to record the session. To be clear, we are recording it but we are not broadcasting it live. Are you all happy with that? Good, okay.

Again, welcome. This inquiry is all about social media and its uses—the positive and negative aspects of social media, and the impact on our health, wellbeing and so forth. We are interested first in finding out about your use of social media. I would be interested to know how much each of you uses social media in its various forms. Who wants to start? Jack, it looks like it is you, so go for it.

**Jack:** Due to instances in the past, I do not use social media at all. It is not something that has ever occurred to me as being particularly useful. I would rather meet up with people in person, text them or ring them or whatever. You are so vulnerable when you use it, especially when you have other things you need to be worrying about; it can be distracting. I guess it is good for connecting people in some ways, but, obviously, it does come with a lot of negatives.

Q354 **Chair:** Does not using it cause you any difficulties at all with friends?

**Jack:** No, not really; it's all good.

Q355 **Chair:** Excellent. Who is going to go next?

**Orlaith:** For my part, I am completely the opposite. I think I can be a bit of a stereotypical teenager in terms of using, basically, every form of social media available quite frequently.

Q356 **Chair:** What do you use it for?

**Orlaith:** Mostly I use it for connecting with friends. I have quite a lot of people who I do not see face to face frequently, so it is useful to keep in contact that way. I do understand that there can be dangers and I have had to take breaks from social media and spend a couple of months not using it, so I am very aware of managing my time carefully. Other than that, my use is fairly frequent.

Q357 **Chair:** Roughly how much time would you spend a day?

**Orlaith:** On social media itself, it is a few hours—maybe four.

Q358 **Chair:** Keep it fairly vague, yes. Thank you.

**Bethan:** I am a bit like Orlaith in that I use quite a lot of different types of social media. I probably use a bit less because I have quite a lot of



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extracurricular activities, so I would say I am probably on there about two hours a day maybe, in various breaks.

Q359 **Chair:** Okay. With either of you, does it end up ever with you switching off far too late and not getting to sleep?

**Bethan:** Yes, I am a bit guilty of that one. I have taken it up to my room and not got off it because I was in the middle of a conversation and I didn't want to, but then my parents have walked in and said, "Oh, Bethan, I don't think you should have done that."

Yes, I am a bit guilty of spending too much time on it, but it has made me more aware of what I need to be doing to stop it. When I am doing revision for exams, I will have my phone right next to me, something will come up and I will be like, "Oh, my gosh—check my Snapchat." I definitely need to be more aware of how I am using it.

Q360 **Chair:** Does it make concentration sometimes a bit difficult?

**Bethan:** Yes, definitely, and the fact that—

**Chair:** It does with me.

**Bethan:** Yes. Something can be going on and then automatically something else comes up on my phone and my concentration has switched into what is going on in a completely different part of the world; my brain has sort of gone, "Social media—let's jump to that one," because it's a lot more fun than looking at maths equations.

**Sienna:** Yes. I would say I used it more in the past, probably last year and the year before, but now, since starting—

Q361 **Chair:** Is it just that you have moved on?

**Sienna:** Yes, probably.

Q362 **Chair:** Or did you make a conscious decision?

**Sienna:** I think it is a bit of both. I knew that I was using it more than I wanted to and I wanted to move away from screens because I felt they inhibited my creativity. As I use Snapchat more, I feel like my creative brain—I did not write as much.

Q363 **Chair:** Can it become a bit obsessive?

**Sienna:** Yes, I think so. I was spending more time thinking about that than about my art, so that was a problem and I wanted to make a conscious effort to use it less, in the daytime certainly. I speak to my friends at night, but probably in the daytime I use it less.

Q364 **Chair:** How long each day, would you say, these days?

**Sienna:** It is probably one to two hours.

Q365 **Chair:** Becca, what has been your experience?



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**Becca:** To be honest, I wouldn't just sit on social media while I am not doing anything. If I am watching TV—if I am watching Corrie or something—I will go on my phone and go through Facebook. I think it is purely because I am really nosey about what people are up to. I use it a lot for current affairs and things like that. On Twitter you can get so many different opinions.

Q366 **Chair:** Is that how you get your news?

**Becca:** I get that and I have news updates as well. If there is something political in the news, I often want to know what other people think of it, so if I just search it up on Twitter I know I can get a general consensus of what people think. I find that really interesting.

To be honest, I wouldn't say I am hooked on it or anything, but I do enjoy using it every so often, looking at pictures and seeing what people are up to, because I am quite nosey.

Q367 **Chair:** I think you have all said why you like using it, apart from you, Jack, for obvious reasons, but is there anything else that any of you want to say about what is positive—what is good—about social media?

**Orlaith:** I can think of a few things. Like you said, there is the news issue there, I think. Social media offers a massive political voice, particularly to young people, and I know a lot of people who have got into politics and current affairs because of social media, because of things that might not have come to their attention; if they don't watch the news or read newspapers, they are readily available there from friends who are sharing them and things like that.

It is incredibly useful in engaging young people and keeping people updated. Social media can be a positive place if you are on the right side of it, if you are following or are friends with the right people. I see lots of people posting about self-care or how to look after your mental health, maybe things you are not necessarily informed of in school, because we are not necessarily educated about those things. It can be quite useful in that sense.

Q368 **Chair:** Do you think it helps to build relationships—friends and family and so forth—and can it sometimes do the opposite? Does it sometimes damage or destroy relationships?

**Becca:** I wouldn't necessarily say "build", because if you are messaging someone there is only so much that you can get, though if you FaceTime them, to be fair, that is quite good.

The problem with social media for me is so much drama: people infer the wrong things, the wrong bits from the wrong person and get the wrong idea, and people fall out and it leads to a bit of cyber-bullying. That is the issue—when it is used incorrectly—but it can be a very positive tool.

Speaking personally, the reason I am here today is that I am part of certain youth organisations that you have invited here. I wouldn't have



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found out about any of those opportunities had it not been for social media. I am sure that is the same for a lot of you.

So I think it can be a very positive tool, but, exactly the same, it is who you surround yourself with; it is who you follow. Unfortunately, it is often the people who are quite vulnerable who tend to follow and be friends with the people who are having a negative impact on social media. That is the issue.

Q369 **Chair:** Orlaith, I will bring you in in a moment and I will ask another question, which you can answer as well if you want to. I am interested in the risks that you see in social media, and I am interested to hear from you, Jack, but let us hear from Orlaith first and then come to you, Jack.

**Orlaith:** Following on from what you said about vulnerable people, I guess it is kind of like a cycle, worsening their vulnerability by being at the wrong end of it. I made an effort to surround myself with positive people on social media, and that is why my experience is so positive. But at other times of my life I know that other friends maybe have not put in that effort or maybe are going through negative experiences, and in trying to see people with common experiences and common interests end up in a kind of cycle of negative feeling—negative thoughts.

Q370 **Chair:** So you think it could reinforce how—

**Orlaith:** I think social media will always reinforce and perpetuate whatever is going on in your life and it will heighten the feelings of negativity.

Q371 **Chair:** So that could be positive or negative.

**Orlaith:** Exactly.

Q372 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Let us hear from Jack.

**Jack:** Thank you. I have a problem with news. I find with social media that people get their news from sometimes quite unreliable sources without checking what they are reading. This may not be true for everyone, but I have some experience of people coming up with crazy stories that have never happened.

**Carol Monaghan:** Politicians do that too.

**Jack:** Across the pond, yes. People come up with these crazy stories and it is so easy to write anything and then it is instantly valid.

Q373 **Chair:** This is the “fake news” type of problem.

**Jack:** Yes. It is instantly validated by the fact that someone else will read it and someone else will like it, and then, to you, that means it is real, so you are creating something or basically you think something is real because other people think it is real. It is another big problem.

Q374 **Chair:** Are there problems with—



**Jack:** Your beliefs can be validated by someone else.

Q375 **Chair:** That is a risk involved in social media.

**Jack:** Yes.

Q376 **Chair:** Are there other risks?

**Sienna:** I think body image is a really large risk for both boys and girls. If you are following celebrities, models or people that society aspires to, then even if it is not a conscious effort that you want to look like them, it is just something that gradually, over time, is ingrained into you and you think the tall, slim model is something that you want to be.

Q377 **Chair:** That could cause low self-esteem if you do not compare well.

**Sienna:** Definitely, both body image and low self-esteem—even if it is not from models, then it could be a friend, whether they are at a party, they have amazing grades or something like that or they have just got into their perfect university and you haven't. It is comparing yourself, I think.

**Becca:** The Youth Select Committee did a report on body image. We found that, on top of that, people from minority groups, like the LGBT community and people from ethnic minorities, often feel isolated by the fact that it is such a stereotypical European ideal of beauty. I think it is important to acknowledge that often it is not just girls and boys, but those minority groups that can be really strongly affected.

Q378 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Thank you. We have mentioned so far Snapchat and Twitter. Are those the main ones you are using or is the type of social media changing all the time?

**Bethan:** Instagram.

**Sienna:** I would say Instagram is probably the most popular for our age group at the moment.

**Becca:** Yes, Instagram definitely.

Q379 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Are there other competitors or new stuff coming along all the time?

**Bethan:** I think they have the most impact. They are definitely the most popular at the moment.

**Chair:** So if I get on to Instagram, you will all vanish, will you?

**Becca:** Can I say another thing about my age group? A lot of people of my age seem to be turning to dating apps and things like Tinder and apps like that, which I think is quite dangerous. A lot of my mates seem to like it, so I think it is important to know that.

Q380 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Yes. Thank you. We have also talked a little bit about fake news. You have grown up with social media. Are you sceptical about



everything you read or do you want to believe that it is true?

**Jack:** I am definitely sceptical about everything I read. I only get my news from reliable sources. I watch BBC news every morning and I read *The Guardian* and that sort of thing. I will sometimes go to the other side, so I might the read the *Daily Mail* online and see what the other side are saying about certain issues. There is certainly a wider scope with—

Q381 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Do you think you are quite rare?

**Jack:** I don't know really.

**Becca:** Do you know, I think people are much more aware now? From my personal experience, everyone seems to take everything with a pinch of salt. People do tend to cross-check, but often if people are not reading what they want to see, or there is something in their way, they will try their best to twist it so that they believe it.

Q382 **Stephen Metcalfe:** I am going to change topic slightly. May I ask how old you all were when you first got on to social media, and what was the first entry point for you?

**Orlaith:** I am trying to remember. I think I must have been 11 or 12, and I think it was Instagram at first. That was quite common.

Q383 **Chair:** Was that when all of your friends were getting into it?

**Orlaith:** Yes, definitely. One friend had an older sibling who had something and then it seemed quite cool so everyone got on board.

**Bethan:** I joined at the end of year 5, which must have been about 10, but my parents had all my account details and they had another account that followed me, so, no matter what I posted, they had access to the account. I think it was because loads of my friends were on it at the time and they would be arranging to meet up and go to town. You can't make a group chat as easily over text as through Instagram, WhatsApp or Snapchat. Everyone is in one group, everyone sees and is able to communicate with each other a lot more easily if you are all in the same thing.

**Sienna:** I got Snapchat at 12; that was my first.

**Jack:** I remember I got Instagram and WhatsApp when I was 12 or 13. I realised pretty quickly that it was not going to be very useful and it was just people screaming at each other.

Q384 **Stephen Metcalfe:** You came off again, so you were probably only there for two years.

**Jack:** Yes. I think I still have my account, but I don't use it.

**Becca:** I was 10 when I joined Facebook and my mum didn't know I joined it. I hope she doesn't see this.



Q385 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Fine. That is a range of ages at which you got involved. Given the potential to come across inappropriate material on these various platforms, do you think there should be a lower age limit for joining social media, or do you think it would be pointless because you would find a way round it anyway?

**Orlaith:** Technically, you are supposed to be 13, but people find a way around that anyway, so I don't see why changing that would—

Q386 **Chair:** Is it almost meaningless for young people? Does everybody just find their way around it if they want to?

**Bethan:** Yes. I know to sign up to Instagram at least you don't need to prove your email address. I know friends who have made four different accounts under four imaginary email addresses and, because it is never checked, your age is never checked and no one ever knows the difference because you can still use it.

**Jack:** I know what you mean. It is easy enough to just go on. It seems to just teach children how to subtract 13 from the current year, as far as I can tell really, when they put their age in.

**Sienna:** Yes. I don't think it is worth putting a solid, "You have to be 11 or 13." I think it is just better to raise awareness from parents, schools and authorities rather than put an age on it.

**Becca:** To be honest—and I am going to say something a bit radical here—everyone gets around it, so I would completely remove ages so that people are incentivised to put their actual age when they sign up so that all the material monitoring stuff is always correct and appropriate for under-18s. I joined Facebook when I was 10 and I lied that I was 13, so that meant, technically, I hit 18 when I was 15, so I was seeing 18-year-old material when I was 15. I changed it, but that is not really appropriate and that is what happens for a lot of people. So, yes, I would get rid of it completely so that people don't lie.

Q387 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Thank you for that. Just by a show of hands, how many of you have come across age-inappropriate material? You mentioned you were getting material for 18s at 15. That is three of you, though, Jack, you are no longer on there. Thank you. That is very useful.

If you did come across inappropriate material that you deemed to be unacceptable, would you report it or would you just ignore it and delete it?

**Orlaith:** I report it. I find it quite satisfying going on a sort of reporting spree, but that is recent. Originally, it was kind of the shock and you just wanted to scroll past and get it away as quickly as possible. Then, after a while, I became desensitised and thought, well, it's there, there's no point. Now that I am slightly older, I am realising that obviously younger children should not be exposed to that and that is why I report.

**Chair:** There is a quick question from Carol and then we will go back to





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Stephen.

Q388 **Carol Monaghan:** After one of our last evidence sessions where we heard that young people were being exposed to materials that might not be appropriate, I had a chat with my 11-year-old daughter and asked her whether she had seen stuff, and she said, yes, she had. Something that worried me was that she had felt too scared to tell me that she had seen it. Have you ever felt that you have seen things but don't want to discuss that with your parents?

**Becca:** Yes, 100%. If you see something, it is a bit awkward if you are 11. You are at that awkward stage where you are not sure whether you are a child or an adult; you don't want to admit to yourself that you have been exposed to that sort of thing and you don't want to tell your mum because it makes it real. That is definitely a big worry.

On the reporting thing, again, I report things, things which are quite clearly completely inappropriate or go against all the guidelines. It often comes back saying, "We have not found it breaches any guidelines," so I do not think they even—

Q389 **Chair:** On which platform was that?

**Becca:** Facebook.

Q390 **Carol Monaghan:** How could the parents actually help you in that situation if you had seen something?

**Orlaith:** I always felt uncomfortable to tell my mum because there was the worry that, if she knew that there was inappropriate material, she would ban me from social media completely. Parents could take a more tolerant approach—there can be this fear of social media and that you want it out of your children's lives completely, and for the most part young people are averse to that—and be encouraged to have open conversations with their children, knowing that there will not be repercussions or what might be seen as punishment for something that is not their fault.

**Bethan:** I was maybe the same age as your daughter when I first encountered inappropriate images. At her age, it is just shock; it is the first time you have ever seen something like that. You go on social media knowing that there is going to be bad stuff on it, but I don't think you are ever prepared well enough to decide, "What do I do with this?" I knew that it wasn't right; I knew that you shouldn't be posting it; but when you get it you are like, "Well, this is something I have never encountered." I did report it and I blocked the account that had sent it so that I could never see something like that again, but definitely I had the same fear as Orlaith that if my parents knew that I had seen it I would never be allowed on it again. I just wish there was more of a like, "Yes, it's on there but how do we stop you seeing more of this?" instead of, "You can't be on social media, full stop."



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**Chair:** I will bring Stephen back in. I am conscious that we are quite tight on time.

Q391 **Stephen Metcalfe:** My final question is around what Orlaith mentioned about desensitisation. Do you all feel that you have been to one degree or another desensitised to this because you have been exposed to things that you should not have been, and does that stick with you or does it diminish or dissipate over time?

**Orlaith:** With me, I was absolutely desensitised and I am now not shocked by it any more. Interestingly, I don't think it originally came from social media. I think advertising on websites of other websites that are inappropriate is a bigger issue. That started off a process, and when I moved to social media it was, well, this isn't as bad as that was. Like I said, I have taken breaks from social media and I don't think it helped diminish it when I returned and I saw the same kind of content; it was just normal, I suppose.

Q392 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Does anyone else want to add anything along those lines?

**Jack:** Adverts are never going to go away because, at the end of the day, these companies are businesses and they want to make money; it is how they make their money, so they are going to advertise on a platform. That is how Facebook, or whatever, earn £2 billion or something. They are capitalists, so they are not going to try to make their company more child-friendly in terms of making less money. They are not going to give up on taking the money, and that is it. You're not going to be able to do anything about it.

**Becca:** For me, yes, I am completely desensitised. The most important thing is the impact of that. I have had a lot of discussions, and there is a big issue with demeaning images towards women, which often pop up on websites and things, and the impact that that can have on what is normal to young people and what they see as a normalised thing for when they grow up. That is my real issue with that. That is why the desensitisation is so dangerous.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** Thank you all very much.

**Chair:** I am conscious that we have just completed the second round of questions, that we have nine to get through and we are quite tight on time, so, on the questioners' side and on your side, if you could be as tight as you can on the answers, it would be brilliant.

Q393 **Darren Jones:** I thought Instagram was just photos, but someone said you could have a group chat on Instagram—you can communicate with each other on Instagram.

**Becca:** Yes, you can chat now.

Q394 **Darren Jones:** I didn't even know that. The Children's Commissioner



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produced a report about the different apps that people are using and how often they use them. In the report that we have had, specifically looking at eight to 10-year-olds, so younger than you guys, I was interested that on the daily use there were apps like Roblox and musical.ly as well as Snapchat. I had never heard of Roblox or musical.ly. Do any of you use that?

**Becca:** That is for little ones, I think. They just make little cute music videos.

**Bethan:** Roblox is like Minecraft in a sense.

Q395 **Darren Jones:** So it is like a game.

**Bethan:** Yes. I wouldn't call it social media.

Q396 **Darren Jones:** What is musical.ly, do you know?

**Becca:** Basically, you get a song and you make little videos and dance to it; you make a little music video. It is dead cute.

**Chair:** You should try it, Darren.

**Becca:** Maybe we should all do one.

Q397 **Darren Jones:** Maybe not. The age verification point is really interesting. The Government say that tech companies need to be better at verifying the age of people who are going online. For example, there is a thing called the national pupil database where your date of birth is registered with the Government. That might, for example, be somewhere to check your age. But I really liked your point, Becca: let us be honest about it and ask the tech companies to do child-appropriate services that go with the age verification. Do you all agree with that or do you think verifiable checks are the way to go?

**Sienna:** I don't think verifiable checks would work because not everyone is going to be in school, so it is not going to run throughout the country.

**Darren Jones:** That is true.

**Jack:** It is too much time, effort and money for something that at the end of the day is not really going to affect that many people.

Q398 **Darren Jones:** That is really interesting. On a show of hands, how many of you read the privacy policy when you signed up? You did?

**Bethan:** Kind of.

Q399 **Chair:** Did you read all of it?

**Bethan:** I read the summary.

Q400 **Darren Jones:** Did you understand what it meant?

**Bethan:** No, it is really confusing.



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Q401 **Darren Jones:** So you did not really know what was happening to your data and what adverts you might get and that type of stuff.

**Orlaith:** The thing is, I do read it and I do understand it, but even if there is something I don't like, I can't really say no. If I want to use that website, I want to use that website.

**Sienna:** What can you do about that?

**Orlaith:** Exactly. I can't opt out of certain clauses, you know. You just have to agree.

**Becca:** So I just don't bother reading it.

Q402 **Darren Jones:** That is interesting. Moving on to a slightly different question now about behaviour online, as politicians, as much as everybody else, we all get subjected to trolling and people sometimes feel more able to be mean to each other online than they do offline. How would you differentiate people having a robust conversation from bullying? Are you able to decide how that is different?

**Bethan:** It is very hard because I know that instances have happened before where someone has said what they mean to be a joke, but because you are just seeing a typed message you don't know how to take things. That is why sometimes emojis are useful—if you put in a laugh emoji they know it is not very serious.

**Jack:** I would say that in this social media world sarcasm, nuance and circumstance have been lost, which makes you think you have to write "(sarcasm)" at the end of a message so that people don't call you anything that you are not. People just seem to read one thing and not take into account the circumstances in which it has been sent and knowing the person who sent it.

**Bethan:** There are always eight different ways a message can be read.

Q403 **Darren Jones:** How many of you know what a trusted flagger is? That is interesting. Have any of you reported comments as opposed to photos before, and, if you have, did anything happen about those comments?

**Bethan:** They get removed for—

**Becca:** Not necessarily.

**Bethan:** I know that on some sites they get removed for a certain amount of time until they are reviewed, and then I am guessing some higher power decides if they are going to be kept out or if they can get put back on.

**Becca:** For me, I think you can tell if it is mutual—if people are just ripping into each other and it is mutual, fair one—or if it is just attacking someone and it is quite obvious that is nasty. But I would never report something that was just a nasty thing to say because I don't know



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whether it is okay to do, if it is just being mean and personal to someone. As soon as they are being racist, sexist or anything, that is a line that you know that you can report, but if it is just being mean to someone, where do you draw the line?

**Q404 Darren Jones:** It's one of those definitions. It is interesting. In terms of the different platforms, we understand that Facebook, for example, has, I think, 7,000 moderators, whereas Instagram has very few. Do you find that different platforms are better than others? Would you say there is a good platform or are they all a bit rubbish at stuff?

**Orlaith:** I think they are all a bit rubbish. Instagram makes you feel like things are happening because if you report something it vanishes for you, so it feels like you have achieved something, but it has not vanished for anyone else, which I find really frustrating. Facebook, I think, is better with comments and text than with, say, images and videos. I don't know if they could maybe train their staff, but they are clearly not getting the picture. Tumblr and Twitter, I think, are the worst.

**Q405 Darren Jones:** How many of you have used Tumblr?

**Becca:** I don't know how to work it. I tried it once and didn't like it.

**Q406 Darren Jones:** You have talked about how people get involved in politics, about fake news and whether you follow good people or bad people. I have two questions. One, how do you decide whether you are following good people or bad people? Secondly, do you purposely follow people who disagree with you or just people who agree with you?

**Becca:** I follow people who disagree.

**Orlaith:** If I followed people who disagreed with me, I would get too angry.

**Sienna:** I try to follow some people I disagree with, but that is to keep on top of news. I would follow Trump, but that is to see what is happening, but I wouldn't follow a lot of people I didn't like.

**Becca:** I am just interested in seeing what is said, so I follow both sides.

**Bethan:** Yes.

**Darren Jones:** That is interesting. Thank you.

**Chair:** Darren, you mentioned Instagram and the number of moderators it had. That was based on incorrect information from yesterday. Apparently, it is Pinterest that has a very small number of moderators checking content. We do not know how many Instagram have and we are checking it out.

**Q407 Damien Moore:** Hi. How many hours a day do you think you spend on touchscreen devices? What are the main reasons you spend that amount of time on them?



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**Orlaith:** Personally, quite a lot, but I would not say all of that time is spent on social media. I might spend eight hours on a screen but some of that would be for work or to watch things through the internet. I think just having that number could be misleading.

**Bethan:** I would say, definitely outside of school, maybe three hours, including research I am just doing on my phone or whatever, but inside school we probably spend an extra two hours in computing lessons and various other things, like when you get taken down to a computing room or given iPads for a lesson.

**Sienna:** Yes, I spend quite a lot of time on screens for studying, but for social media not much, but then I spend time on research or TV and things like that.

**Jack:** I spend quite a lot of time on screens for video games, entertainment and news and stuff like that.

**Becca:** I listen to music constantly, so I am always on it to put music on and watch Netflix. I paint a lot and I watch Netflix while I am doing that, so it is 12 hours a day probably, and I have music on as well.

Q408 **Damien Moore:** Do you ever feel as though you have to go on and have a look at what is going on? Do you ever feel that you just have to go on there?

**Becca:** It depends on how busy you are. If I have a bit of time to kill, I will, but, if I am out with my friends, I just find it so rude to do that in front of people.

**Bethan:** I definitely think there is quite a lot of FOMO—fear of missing out. I know that, when I have gone on holiday, I don't want to never look at my phone the entire holiday and then come home and find something big has happened—"How did I not know? How did I not find out that my friend has done eight other things that are really cool and I never found out about them?"

**Orlaith:** That is definitely a thing, especially in messaging apps like WhatsApp. Somebody will bring up a big piece of news and there will be a massive discussion about it, and then you get there a bit late and the conversation has moved on; it is always frustrating. I also find that it can be quite exhausting trying to keep up on everything all the time. It is both sides really.

Q409 **Damien Moore:** As videos play automatically, do you feel as though you have to watch them?

**Sienna:** I turn off auto-play on YouTube.

**Becca:** I love that. I find such interesting things.

**Chair:** I didn't know that you could turn it off, so I have learned something. That is very useful.



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Q410 **Damien Moore:** Do your parents place restrictions on your screen time, the time that you are allowed do it, and would you follow it if they did?

**Becca:** No, they don't.

**Orlaith:** My parents certainly try. I don't know that it is massively effective, but I think we have quite a good relationship, talking about what we are using screens for and not using them when I should be studying and things. I think that kind of information is more useful than placing restrictions.

**Bethan:** I think the only restriction that I have on social media is when it gets near the time I am supposed to be going to bed before a school night. I tend to put my phone on charge or just away for 30 minutes before I go up and get ready for bed because the blue screen is not particularly good for you. It helps you calm down instead of staring at a screen and going, "Oh, my gosh, more news, more Snapchats."

**Becca:** I have never had any restrictions on it. I have quite a good relationship. My mum just trusts me and my brother. Neither of us is addicted to it, and it would be a bit hypocritical of my dad to do that because he loves Twitter and is on it all the time; he sits there like this with his glasses on.

**Chair:** Your dad's not here to defend himself.

**Becca:** It's all right.

Q411 **Liz Kendall:** That was exactly what I was going to ask. Are they on social media and is there the whole, "Well, you're on it."?

**Becca:** Yes, they are.

Q412 **Liz Kendall:** I don't ask you to do your parents in it, but—

**Bethan:** My dad watches those funny Facebook videos of people falling over.

Q413 **Liz Kendall:** So, yes, he does, even if you don't like it. Do anybody's parents not use social media? Do you think they understand what all the different platforms are and what you are on it for? Do they get it?

**Becca:** Mine are getting quite on the ball with it actually; I'm quite impressed. Mum has it all. My dad hates social media, but he likes Twitter because he just tweets at people a lot.

**Liz Kendall:** What's his hashtag? No, I'm joking.

**Sienna:** My mum always asks me about it and I like talking to her about it because she makes sense of it with me.

Q414 **Liz Kendall:** But do you feel you are ahead of them?

**Becca:** Definitely.



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**Sienna:** Yes—miles.

Q415 **Neil O'Brien:** Hello. In your school or college, what is the policy on the use of your own personal phone? Is it that you can't bring them on the premises? Is it that you hand them in at the start of the day? Are you allowed to use them in the classroom? Shall we start with Becca and work our way along?

**Becca:** Yes. At both the schools I have been to for high school, you are allowed to use your phone as a learning tool, use it in lessons for research and out in the common room—fine.

**Jack:** We are allowed to bring them in but not allowed to use them anywhere, so I don't often bring mine in in case I lose it.

Q416 **Neil O'Brien:** So it can be in school but no use in school.

**Jack:** Yes; no use in school.

**Sienna:** My school is a school and a sixth form. The lower school cannot use it in lessons, but we can.

**Bethan:** I am the same as Jack. We are allowed to have it in school with us but we are not allowed to have it out during lessons, and it should stay off in our bags. Whether that is the same at lunch times is highly debatable.

**Orlaith:** Officially in my school rulebook we are allowed to bring them in, but then we are supposed to keep them in our lockers; but that was written a while ago now and it is not really in force, I think. It does depend on your age. If year 7 are using them in the corridor, a teacher will generally tell them off. But now I am in sixth form I can use them in lessons if it is for research purposes. Sometimes the teacher will say, "Now make sure your phone is in your bag because I am going to say something important," but it is really on an individual basis.

Q417 **Neil O'Brien:** To follow up, what do you think the pros and cons are of tighter controls? Do you see instances of some people being distracted by their phone in class versus the upsides? What do you think the right policy is, given the policies you have experienced? Would you put a ban on schools having phones in them?

**Jack:** I would say you can have them but just don't use them, because I know our school have key logging and software on the wi-fi, so if you connect to it they can see you are using it, which I think is good. I don't think they can see what you are doing, but I know they can see there is something connected to the network that shouldn't be.

Q418 **Neil O'Brien:** They can see you are on the wi-fi.

**Sienna:** Our school blocks social media from the internet, but everyone just downloads a VPN and they get through it. It is completely pointless.





**Orlaith:** My school did the same thing. They had a blocker that did not work very effectively—certainly not with VPNs—so they introduced an even tighter block. They blocked YouTube and things, but then even the people who might have been going on with it before started getting around it, so that didn't work out.

I wouldn't support a blanket ban at all. I think there are lots of things people can use it for. I use it to contact my mum in the middle of the school day sometimes, and if that was taken away it would be frustrating and inconvenient.

Ultimately, schools are preparing people for adult life and there are going to be social media and wi-fi in adult life, so we need to get over that. But the things people are saying about not being able to use them in class is definitely good policy.

**Becca:** I think they are great in schools. I have been using a phone in class since year 7. Fair enough, if a teacher says, "Put it in your bag," or, "Turn it off," if they are doing a test in that lesson, but for us they are so useful. One thing: my schools have always had alternatives for people who don't necessarily have—not everyone could afford—the latest smartphone, so the school would provide iPads for people who don't have them. That would be one important thing to acknowledge, but the way the world is moving now, you are never going to be without an electronic device in the workplace, realistically, so why ban them in the place that is meant to be preparing you for work?

Q419 **Neil O'Brien:** I have a final follow-up question. Have any of you either experienced in your own life or in the lives of friends instances where people have stayed up late on social media and then had some negative consequence from that in being tired or underperforming the next day? Do you think it would be useful if some social media apps warned you about how long you have been on? Is it easy, do you think, to lose track, or would that just be an annoying pop-up that you would click and get rid of? Shall we start at the other end with Orlaith?

**Orlaith:** Yes. On your last point, I think it is very easy to lose track. I know people who have said that they don't realise how long they have been on their phone until they see the sun rise. If social media did introduce some kind of warning system, I know it would be useful to me because, genuinely, I do lose track and I don't intend to be on there very long.

**Bethan:** With my friends, you can tell from WhatsApp or Snapchat group chats that they are up until 3 o'clock in the morning still talking.

Q420 **Chair:** Is that a regular thing?

**Bethan:** Yes, I feel it is. Especially as you get older, you are more likely to stay up later and you want to be more in touch with other people and the news.



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Q421 **Chair:** It would be very common for a group of friends to be exchanging comments and messages at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning.

**Bethan:** Yes.

**Sienna:** I have a light filter that filters the blue light past 10 o'clock at night and that sets me reminders—"You have been on your phone for 30 minutes"—which does make me think, okay, I need to go sleep.

**Jack:** I always see people coming to school with red, bloodshot eyes and stuff and you know what they have been doing: they had coffee last night or something and have been up all night on Snapchat or whatever. I think if it made people guilty enough, if it came up and said, "You have been on your phone for seven hours. Go to bed," it would probably be better—you know, shame them.

**Becca:** Yes. People always do stay up really late and I could confidently put a message in any of my group chats at 3 o'clock in the morning and someone would reply. I quite like the idea of something popping up saying that you have spent too long on.

**Neil O'Brien:** That is interesting. Thank you very much. That is very useful.

Q422 **Darren Jones:** We have been talking a lot about communicating with each other and viewing content, but I just want to ask a couple of questions about posting content. How many posts a day do you think you do across all platforms?

**Becca:** One a week—absolute maximum, or maybe one every two weeks.

Q423 **Darren Jones:** So not that frequently.

**Bethan:** I would say on Snapchat I do—

**Becca:** Oh, on Snapchat loads.

**Bethan:** —a fair bit more. Snapchat is very regular.

**Becca:** Snapchat is maybe five a day.

**Bethan:** When you get to Instagram, because they don't disappear after 24 hours and I don't want to look like I'm always on my phone, I tend to do one every two weeks, or one every week when I have something good to post.

Q424 **Chair:** Is that quite typical?

**Becca:** I would say that Facebook and Instagram are one every couple of weeks or a month maybe and that Snapchat and Twitter are just constant; you wouldn't get judged for putting those on, but you would on the other two.

Q425 **Darren Jones:** You said "judged" and that is quite interesting. The posts



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that you put on Facebook or Instagram are curated—when you have something that you think is interesting or something that you want to post. Why do you post positive curated images?

**Orlaith:** I plan my Instagram posts in advance.

**Becca:** Do you?

**Bethan:** Get the filter, get the theme.

**Orlaith:** So I have maybe my posts for the next month ready.

**Chair:** Oh, my goodness.

**Orlaith:** I know that that is quite a frequent thing, I think, for people who use it a lot just to make sure—

Q426 **Chair:** You have a schedule for the next month.

**Orlaith:** Yes. Everything is curated, like you said.

Q427 **Darren Jones:** Why do you do that?

**Orlaith:** People use social media to find out more about you, so if someone looks at my Instagram and it looks really nice, there is a positive experience or impression of me. Instagram and Facebook are the ones we have greatest access to, whereas Snapchat, because it is technically a messaging app, I only give to the people I trust, which is why I post more frequently, because they are already impressed; I am not impressing anyone.

Q428 **Darren Jones:** What about everyone else?

**Bethan:** I definitely feel with Instagram that you always look at your photos and wonder whether they would look good if everyone in your school were to see them. I set up Instagram a few years before I set up Snapchat, so on my Instagram the people who follow me are slightly more lax; they are still people I know, but they are not necessarily people who I would always trust.

I definitely am more careful with what I put on Instagram than with what I put on Snapchat, but I definitely think that that is one of the reasons that it can have a negative impact, because the only thing you ever see on Instagram is of me looking nice or some empowering message. So we are not recognising that we all have bad days and we all look horrible sometimes.

**Sienna:** I think that platforms like Instagram can be used as an art form, so curating it is like your own mini art gallery. When you make your own profile, you pick your nice images that you want to post and you work out how they will look next to each other. That is definitely a positive—that people can use it as the latest art form that everyone can use. Every young person is going to use that. But, yes, it does mean that you are



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putting forward your most positive side and it means that you don't think you can recognise your emotions.

**Jack:** If some of us have mental health problems, it can make them become envious of other people's lives. You have to realise that these are not these people's lives—that them going out every evening or looking very nice is not how they look all the time and not what they do all the time; it is their fake lives, it is what they want to be their life, but it is not real, necessarily. People need to understand that.

**Becca:** For me—and I've broken my phone quite a few times and lost all my photos—it is quite a good place to store photos for a start and it is a bit like having a load of photos on your wall. That is how I use it. It is quite nice for my mum to see what I am up to, out and about, and she likes looking at my friends, so she lets me out more. I think it is just quite nice to put all your positive memories in one place. I love having a little look back at what I was doing two years ago.

**Chair:** May I give again a warning to everyone that the hour will be up in about 11 minutes and we have a lot more questions to ask, so keep tight questions and answers?

Q429 **Darren Jones:** My last question is for a show of hands. How many of you use filters on all your photos?

**Bethan:** Not all of them.

**Orlaith:** Not all of them, but some of them.

**Bethan:** Some of them.

**Becca:** I never use them. They make me look worse.

**Bethan:** Yes, but on Snapchat filters you have bunny ears; I do that.

**Becca:** I'm not a bunny; I'm a person.

Q430 **Darren Jones:** Just as a point of clarification, Snapchat are the quick images where you have those funny hats and things.

**Bethan:** Yes.

**Becca:** People do Photoshop for neater photos, though.

Q431 **Liz Kendall:** You don't have to answer this personally, but do you think your brothers, sisters or any of your friends feel under pressure to be sexting?

**Becca:** Yes, a lot of people do. I think my age group is out of it now, but it is around 14, 15 and 16 when you are the most uncomfortable with how you look, your body is changing, you don't know where you stand and people get under a lot of pressure because they want to be an adult before they actually are an adult. That is a way of people feeling that they are grown up. I know so many people who have had so many



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problems with this and images being shared round the whole school, people going, "Oh, has anyone seen this?"

It's horrible, but there is so much pressure because people just want to feel like they are grown up and that people appreciate them. It is like a cry for help; it is like self-validation for a lot of people, I think.

**Orlaith:** From what I have seen, it is not a general pressure. I think it is pressure placed on individuals, so if you are in a relationship and your boyfriend, girlfriend or whatever introduces you to it, asks you to do it, then I think, definitely, there can be a lot of pressure put on a person in that situation. I know people have said that they felt embarrassed to say no and they thought it would be awkward, but I don't think, in general, there is a collective peer pressure to do sexting.

**Becca:** I think there is a collective peer pressure to have people appreciate and like you, have a boyfriend and be in a relationship and all that sort of stuff, and the way people feel they can achieve that validation from their peers is to seek out individuals who show them attention and are exploiting them through sexting and things like that. So, although it is individuals pressuring into sexting specifically, that is a route to try to get the validation from their peers as a whole.

Q432 **Liz Kendall:** Has anyone ever talked to you about it—parents, teachers or anyone? Is it something you discuss with your friends?

**Becca:** Friends discuss it a lot. I remember when I was in high school, in years 9, 10 and 11, every couple of months it would be like, "Has anyone seen so and so's...?" It would go around the whole school and that is so horrible for someone to go through. My heart really went out to them. Then there would always be a big discussion about it; there would be an assembly. I feel like the way the education system approaches it is blaming. It is not an understanding, caring approach, nurturing, like, "People need support." It was more like, "Don't do it." That is not how you talk to teenagers.

Q433 **Liz Kendall:** You mean they don't get underneath the reason: why did you feel the need to do this?

**Becca:** Yes: why? One girl got put in isolation for it.

Q434 **Liz Kendall:** She did?

**Becca:** She did, and someone had pressured her into it. My parents have discussed it with me and my brother, but I don't think that is a general trend.

Q435 **Liz Kendall:** Does anyone else want to say anything on that?

**Orlaith:** The way schools and the education system approach it, as well as perpetuating a blame culture, feels performative: "Oh, this issue has been raised, and if we do an assembly we have ticked that box."



**Becca:** Yes, definitely.

**Sienna:** Showing it to the parents.

**Orlaith:** Exactly. Like you said, it doesn't feel genuine; there is no kind of care there.

Q436 **Carol Monaghan:** Thank you very much for all your answers so far; it has been hugely useful. I want to lead on from that and ask a bit more about online safety lessons in school. How much have you had? Was it useful? What did you find out? What was missing? Just general thoughts on that, please.

**Becca:** I think they miss out the uncomfortable topics, like sexting, indecent imagery and things like that. Teachers aren't trained on it, I don't feel. I don't feel that they have been given enough training on it. It is not fair to ask a teacher who has never had any training on how to approach the topic to speak to a class if it is completely out of their comfort zone.

Q437 **Chair:** You are saying they do not cover those tricky issues.

**Becca:** I would say that they would brush over them. They would never have a lesson on the real grimy ones that are quite hard to talk about, but I don't blame the teachers for that. That is a fundamental educational issue in the fact that teachers don't get enough PSHE training anyway. Often the way schools do it is just to throw the form teacher into doing that, and a form teacher could be a PE teacher, a chemistry teacher, or whatever: that is their specialism and they have been trained to do that; they haven't been trained to talk about looking after yourself online. The teachers need to be given the tools to be able to educate the young people on it.

Q438 **Carol Monaghan:** Do you think that the teachers are the main educators in this area or do you think there are other people who may be of more influence? I am thinking parents, siblings or friends.

**Becca:** I would say friends is where the main discussion is, but that is not always healthy because—

Q439 **Carol Monaghan:** They could be leading you on.

**Becca:** Yes, exactly, and there is always immaturity there; there are always people trying to cover their own backs. People need an objective approach. The best way to get that and to cover everyone would be through the education system.

Q440 **Carol Monaghan:** I know we are short of time, so, unless anyone has anything different to add, I will move on. You do, Jack, thanks.

**Jack:** As well, they usually just put on a video, and most of these videos are so terrible and so unrealistic that if you show it to a class of—

**Carol Monaghan:** So you sit and put other videos on.



**Jack:** If you show them to a class of teenagers, they just laugh and no one takes it seriously. Some of the CEOP videos do try to convey a serious message, but they are incredibly unrealistic. It is a scenario that would happen one in a million and they need to make it a lot more realistic and less humorous—they are not willingly humorous, obviously—a lot more serious and make it relate to what is happening.

Q441 **Chair:** Have any of you been impressed with the quality of what you are told at school—the teaching? You have said that the teachers are not equipped to do it; they are not trained to do it. I wonder whether anyone had had a different experience and felt that it was done well at school.

**Bethan:** I feel like the whole of it is very good. My school is very good in that we have PSHE forums, especially when it gets to quite hard topics to tackle. A lot of what we do is based on what students have said: this is how students will approach it and this is how it needs to be taught to be effective.

We do quite a lot of digital footprint as well; everyone always finds it fun to look up their name on Google and see what comes up. I feel like it is the way of getting rid of the attitude towards it. It is like we were saying earlier, that, yes, it is something, but we have to look at caring more about there being reasons behind everything. I definitely think that is something that needs to be approached by all schools and our community as a whole instead of just one school that is teaching 200 kids.

**Becca:** It is a bit of a postcode lottery.

Q442 **Carol Monaghan:** How aware are your parents of how much social media you are participating in?

**Sienna:** I think my mum is pretty good, but I don't think that is the same for everyone.

**Jack:** Yes; it is individual.

**Becca:** I would say they are pretty aware.

Q443 **Carol Monaghan:** Finally, we have heard some evidence that parents can post pictures on social media or Facebook of their children that possibly children do not approve of or find embarrassing. Have any of you experienced anything like that, and is this a problem?

**Becca:** I don't think it is a problem. My mum has put up some pretty ugly photos of me, but, to be honest, you can untag yourself. If your mum tags you, it will come up on your news feed and that is when your friends can see it, but if you just remove your tag or you put on the setting where you have to approve any tags you get, none of your friends can see it, so I don't think that is a major issue—not for me anyway. I haven't really heard of it other than jokingly. I don't think anyone takes it that deep.



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**Bethan:** I spammed my mum's phone the other day. She posted ugly photos on Facebook. It was a joke, so I didn't take it that badly.

**Orlaith:** My mum loves posting ugly photos or baby photos of me with some really loving caption, and I'm like, "Mum, this is excruciating," but it's not an issue.

Q444 **Carol Monaghan:** Ugly ones are funny, but what if it is maybe you in a swimsuit in the garden and that gets posted?

**Becca:** I have banned my mum from doing that.

**Orlaith:** Again, parents aren't going out of their way to make their children vulnerable or exploited. I don't think it is an issue. No parent is posting these pictures up with bad intentions. It is just a little bit embarrassing having your friends see it.

Q445 **Carol Monaghan:** Jack, were you going to say something there?

**Jack:** Yes. I agree with Orlaith. I haven't personally heard of it being a problem, though in some select cases it may have been, but no parents really mean anything bad for their child—or most parents.

**Becca:** I think most would remove it if you asked them to—well, I would hope so.

**Carol Monaghan:** I now have to check with mine if they are happy with the photos that I post; otherwise I am in trouble with them.

Q446 **Stephen Metcalfe:** I want to pick up on a point that Jack made about how dreadful the information videos were because the information does not reflect the reality of the situation.

**Jack:** No, it is very unreal.

Q447 **Stephen Metcalfe:** What surprises me—and this is more of a comment than a question—is that, believe it or not, we were all young once and it was exactly the same then. The information you are provided with is provided in an unrealistic way and you therefore don't pay attention to it in the same way.

**Jack:** Yes, it is not taken seriously. No one listens.

**Becca:** It is just the stiffest characters and the most stereotypical.

**Jack:** All the characters are just stupid.

**Orlaith:** I have seen about 20 videos of a girl posting a photo and then some 40-year-old man using it to lure her into the forest. It is obviously that—

**Stephen Metcalfe:** It is not a laughing matter, but—





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**Orlaith:** Exactly. Obviously, it is an issue but we have seen it a million times.

**Jack:** It is so terribly portrayed.

**Orlaith:** We know that it is a possibility but it is so unrealistic. There are more realistic, more frequent cases of grooming or uncomfortable behaviour happening online, and if those videos actually tackled that instead of taking it to the extreme situation, which we have all heard about, it might be more effective.

**Becca:** The problem with these videos that I tend to find is that they make it look like the young person is being stupid. That video makes that girl look like she is being really stupid and obvious, but that is not how it happens. There is a Barclays advert to do with fraud and it is done really well because it makes it seem really realistic and like it could actually happen to you. The way it is in these videos that we are shown, none of us are that stupid—come on.

Q448 **Stephen Metcalfe:** We need to improve that.

**Becca:** Definitely. Just acknowledge young people's intelligence and that they are quite aware.

**Jack:** They are for younger children—slightly younger children.

Q449 **Stephen Metcalfe:** Thank you for that—very useful. Is there anything else that you think that social media companies could do—maybe just one thing that springs to mind from each of you—to improve or reduce the risks that we have been discussing here today?

**Jack:** Stop stealing people's data. I was going to say "pay tax" before you finished the question, but I don't think that would improve the user experience.

**Orlaith:** Accept reports and tackle them correctly. I know of people who have reported adults messaging young girls and have reported Nazis. None of the content gets removed.

**Bethan:** Definitely better moderation. I think age-related content is a good idea as well.

**Becca:** I think—oh, I have forgotten what I was going to say.

**Sienna:** I think regulating is a hard one because they can't regulate every single user and even with all the reports it cannot become like they control you, so it is difficult, but I don't know how you—

**Becca:** I've remembered. You go first.

**Jack:** If you flick through the privacy policy, it says they cannot take down anything that is a truly held belief, but surely that is every belief that anyone has. Also, especially because they are international, the



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Americans have a constitutional right to say whatever they want, so it is very hard to regulate things that way as well.

**Becca:** I would say do more stuff like this, so have young people involved in improving things. Consult young people and have them at the forefront, like a committee of young people, to drive that change, because they are the ones who know best on this.

Q450 **Stephen Metcalfe:** I promise that this is the final question, Chair, and it is for you, Becca. In your 2017 report—you wrote a report—you said that the Government were yet to recognise the significance of the body of dissatisfaction around this area. Do you still hold that view or do you think it has improved at all?

**Becca:** I really liked the Government response to our report, but I want to see what was said in that report carried out and carried through. I do not think we are at the point yet where that has been rolled out enough for me to make a full judgment. I don't think there is enough done. I think the social media companies are still in a world of their own; they are still not in line; and that needs to be continued, so I do still stand by that belief—but I challenge you all to change that.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** What a perfect point on which to finish. That is me done.

**Chair:** To finish, we have a very quick question from Darren.

Q451 **Darren Jones:** We get lobbied by the tech companies and they tell us they are doing stuff on this. I am going to call out a couple of programs and put your hand up if you have heard of them: Apple Family?

**Becca:** Yes.

Q452 **Darren Jones:** Google internet champions and Facebook citizens safe, I think it is called.

**Jack:** Never heard of them.

**Darren Jones:** That is useful; thank you.

**Chair:** Hey, you lot, you have been absolutely brilliant. It has been really fascinating. I have learned quite a lot and it is really helpful to our inquiry because the whole purpose of it, rather like your inquiry last year, is that we want to come up with robust recommendations that are based on evidence to put to the Government to try to make sure that they act in a way that provides greater protection and so forth. Your evidence is incredibly valuable to us in helping us reach good conclusions, so thank you all very much indeed. It is appreciated. That was brilliant.