Consultation Response

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Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper

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The Carnegie UK Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper. The Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. Our Strategic Plan (2016-2020) takes a holistic approach to wellbeing and outlines our current priorities under the themes of Enabling Wellbeing; Digital Futures; Flourishing Towns; and Fulfilling Work.

The Trust will be responding to this consultation based on learning from our current programme #NotWithoutMe, an initiative designed to improve digital inclusion and increase digital skills among vulnerable young people.

Developing children's digital literacy

Q135. Do you believe that an online safety peer to peer development scheme would be an effective way of helping children stay safe online?

Yes, we believe that peer-to-peer support can play an important role in the development of young people's digital resilience. Numerous examples through our #NotWithoutMe digital inclusion programme have highlighted the value of peer learning, particularly for vulnerable young people. Peer learning can encourage young people to engage in digital learning in a way they had not previously; provide the opportunity to meet other young people who share similar challenges; improve self-confidence and develop team working skills. Through their involvement in #NotWithoutMe, Mencap Northern Ireland found that peer-learning became an important element of supporting young people with learning disabilities to develop their basic digital skills. Value came through learning alongside peers, following the leadership of those young people with more advanced skills and all turning to one another for informal support. Professionals involved in #NotWithoutMe, highlighted that when it comes to digital 'peers are the go-to, not parents/carers/mentors/ teachers'.

There will be no one-size-fits-all peer education scheme which is effective for all young people. Needs, interests and capabilities will necessitate different kinds of approaches. Co-production is an effective way to work with young people on behaviour change initiatives – let groups take a leading role and develop their own peer-to-peer programmes.

However, peer-to-peer schemes cannot work in isolation to ensure safe behaviours online. Young people also need to be supported by a network of trained and confident adults in both formal and informal settings. Young people are not 'digital natives' in the sense that they do not have inherent ability to use digital technology safely and effectively. The Trust believes we should move away from the use of the term 'digital native' entirely. Young people need ongoing access, guidance and support to actively develop their digital literacy.

'Children in need' - this refers to children who are aged under 18 and who need local authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development; need local authority services to prevent significant or further harm to health or development; are disabled (6)

Children with with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/ Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) (9)

Young offenders (11)

Vulnerable young people, particularly those at points of transition in their life, are most at risk of falling outside the digital mainstream. They are the most likely to lack access to technology. Even more importantly, they are most likely to lack the positive adult support network to provide informal support and guidance. They are at risk of failing to learn the skills or confidence needed to navigate the internet safely and productively. Looked after and care experienced young people often have restrictions placed on their access to the internet, which far outstrip the barriers faced by their non-care experienced peers. Not all residential care units have wifi; units don't all have digital devices the young people can readily use; filtering systems can be so restrictive that it makes completing homework a challenge; and the adults supporting them may have limited digital skills and limited access to training for their own development.

The Trust's work with Mencap NI highlighted that young people with learning disabilities are often not included in digital programmes because the risks of abuse are deemed so high, so they are further excluded from the opportunity to build their digital resilience and confidence.

However, the Trust believes that a significant number of young people could benefit from further support. There is a need to develop more sophisticated measurement tools around digital literacy, particularly in relation to safety. Self-report survey data is not always appropriate or accurate as young people (and people of all ages) can over estimate their digital skill level. Asking young people about their confidence in undertaking tasks may not provide an accurate representation of how well they could deliver on that activity.

Q137. Do you believe that the technology industry has a role to play in supporting children develop their digital literacy skills?

The technology sector has to play a part in the development of digital skills for young people. Of paramount importance, industry needs to ensure that current and developing technology has robust safety measures, and that all safety and privacy features are accessible for young people to navigate, understand and use. Many young people involved in #NotWithoutMe did not know how to use these features, the language can be very complex and consequences poorly understood.

The sector should be encouraged to build relationships with the wide range of organisations supporting children and young people. This should not just be aimed at the advanced end of the digital skills spectrum, but also with those developing young people's basic digital skills. Collaborative work across all sectors (public, private, voluntary and academic) is required in order to understand the risks and opportunities for all young people. Young people most likely to experience digital exclusion must be part of these considerations in order to gain a full perspective of experiences.

Support charities who will develop materials on the industry's behalf (1)

Develop materials and games which promote digital literacy (for example, Google Legends school programme and Interlands, online game) (3)

Develop free materials for professionals who come into regular contact with children, for example doctors and social workers (9)

Critically, the technology industry must ensure they have robust safety and privacy systems in place, and ensure wording or communication around these processes is accessible for all young people. Industry should use their expertise to develop innovative solutions to deliver safety messages, through games and interactive content for young people.

The Trust believes that the technology industry also has a significant role to play in supporting the adults surrounding young people. Adults can only help young people if they themselves develop the appropriate skills and knowledge. In both formal and informal settings, and inclusive of parents, teachers and other professionals, the technology sector should help to develop the digital skills and confidence of adults. This can be either directly, or indirectly through other trusted organisations. Industry needs to be more innovative in how they communicate these resources and messages with the adult support networks. Simply hosting workshops may not be effective, particularly for professionals working directly with vulnerable young people as it is very difficult for them to be released from their frontline duties.

#NotWithoutMe