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The Fifth Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

HM Government



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United Kingdom

May 2014

Protecting children from Commercialisation and Online Harm

Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Children

20. A concern for many parents is that their children are under pressure to grow up too quickly. In England, an independent review set up by the Government reported in June 2011¹ and called on businesses and broadcasters to play their part across four themes:

- The sexualised imagery that has become a ‘wallpaper’ to children’s lives;
- Clothing, products and services for children;
- Children as consumers; and
- Making parents’ voices heard.

21. The Government welcomed the broad approach recommended by the review and after 18 months published a stocktake on what had been achieved.² Much of the action was voluntary and resulted from a strong commitment from businesses and media regulators.

Key changes included:

- fewer advertisements using highly sexualised images in public places;
- family television programmes shown at times of the day when children are likely to be watching;
- making it more likely to find children’s clothes which are age-appropriate; and
- a new ParentPort website³ to make it easier for parents to make complaints, to get information on media regulation, and to provide useful help and advice on children’s use of the media.

The risks associated with children’s increased use of social media

22. Ofcom reports an exponential growth in the use of social media amongst children giving them new opportunities to develop friends and interests but also exposing them to risks such as cyberbullying, grooming and harmful content. The UK has developed a robust child internet safety protection programme through the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS). The Family Online Safety Institute finds UK to be a leader in internet safety best practice and, EU Kids Online reports that the UK is one of five countries with high internet use amongst children yet relatively low levels of risk.

23. A key achievement is that the four major ISPs will have prompted all new broadband customers in the UK to switch on parental internet controls by the end of 2014 thereby restricting access to harmful content. From September 2014, the national curriculum computing programmes of study in England will encourage children from 5-16 to learn about safe and appropriate internet use. A £25 million campaign to raise awareness of risks

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letting-children-be-children-report-of-an-independent-review-of-the-commercialisation-and-sexualisation-of-childhood>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letting-children-be-children-progress-report>.

³ <http://www.parentport.org.uk/>

associated with the internet will also begin in 2014, and *Safer Internet Day* is widely promoted every February.

Sale, trafficking and abduction (CRC/C/GB/CO/4: Para. 76)

24. The UK ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings on 17 December 2008 and the Convention came into force on 1 April 2009. The UK Government published its Human Trafficking Strategy in July 2011. Measures in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 that came into force on 6 April 2013 permit the prosecution of UK nationals who commit trafficking offences abroad and of those who commit non-sexual trafficking offences that occur wholly within England and Wales. This enabled the UK to ratify the European Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings in April 2013.

25. To strengthen the UK's response to human trafficking, and action to stamp out modern slavery, a draft Modern Slavery Bill was published in December 2013 for pre-legislative scrutiny. The draft Bill outlines the Government's intentions to:

- consolidate the existing human trafficking offences;
- increase the maximum sentence for human trafficking to life imprisonment;
- introduce an Anti-Slavery Commissioner;
- restrict movements or impose other prohibitions on convicted or suspected traffickers and slave drivers, to mitigate the risk they pose; and
- create a new requirement on public bodies to report all suspected cases of human trafficking to the National Crime Agency (NCA).

19. Other actions to tackle the issue across the UK include:

- In England, the Refugee Council and The Children's Society have undertaken a review of the support and care of trafficked children. In January 2014, the UK Government announced proposals to trial a new system of advocates for child victims of trafficking. Following debates in Parliament on this issue, the UK Government has confirmed its intention to trial these advocates across 23 Local Authority areas and to include an enabling power in forthcoming legislation on Modern Slavery. The advocates will provide individual, dedicated support, not only to those children trafficked across borders, but to those trafficked within the UK. In addition, an e-learning resource has been developed to enable healthcare professionals to identify victims and provide better care and support.
- Northern Ireland issued joint guidance on the *Working arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims of Human Trafficking* in February 2011.
- Scotland's national child protection guidance includes detailed advice on child trafficking. The first Scottish Summit on Anti-Human Trafficking was held in October 2012.

- In Wales, the Government published *Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked* in 2008, imposing responsibility on Local Safeguarding Children Boards to take account of the needs of children who may have been trafficked. An Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator has been appointed to coordinate the best possible support for victims and to make Wales a hostile place for human trafficking.