



Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

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Dear Mr Ridley,

Thank you for your correspondence of 29 April providing your Regulation 2B Report to Prevent Future Deaths following the tragic death of Bradley Robert Michael Trevarthen.

I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to the Trevarthen family. The loss of someone so young is always a terrible tragedy.

The government shares your concern that children are at risk of being exposed to harmful content online. These experiences can have serious psychological and emotional impact. We are clear that more needs to be done to protect vulnerable users and tackle content and behaviour across a comprehensive set of online harms, including content which encourages suicide and self-harm.

That is why on 8 April we published our Online Harms White Paper (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>) which sets out our plans for world-leading legislation to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online. This will make companies more responsible for their users' safety online, especially children and other vulnerable groups.

The government will establish a new statutory duty of care to make companies take more responsibility for the safety of their users and tackle harm caused by content or activity on their services. Compliance with this duty of care will be overseen and enforced by an independent regulator. The regulator will set clear safety standards, backed up by mandatory reporting requirements and sufficient powers to take effective action against companies that breach regulatory requirements, including the power to levy substantial fines.

The regulator will have the power to require annual reports from companies, as well as require additional information from them to inform its oversight or enforcement activity, and to establish requirements to disclose information. It may also undertake thematic reviews of areas of concern, for example a review into the treatment of self-harm or suicide related content. The regulator will have the power to require companies to share research that they hold or have commissioned that shows that their activities may cause harm.

All companies in scope of the regulatory framework will need to be able to show that they are fulfilling their duty of care. This will include a requirement for companies to take robust action to address harmful suicidal and self-harm content that provides graphic details of suicide methods and self-harming, including encouragement of self-harm and suicide. Services must also



respond quickly to identify and remove content which is illegal or violates terms of use, and act swiftly and proportionately when this content is reported to them by users.

Some of the areas we expect the regulator to include in a code of practice include:

- Steps to ensure that vulnerable users and users who actively search for, or have been exposed to, this content are directed to, and able to access, adequate support
- Ensuring that companies work with experts in suicide prevention to ensure that their policies and practices are designed to protect the most vulnerable;
- Steps companies should take to ensure that their services are safe by design, including tools to help users avoid material or behaviour which encourages suicide or self-harm
- Guidance about how to ensure it is easy for users to understand these tools, and the company's terms of use in relation to these harms, when they sign up to use the service
- Processes to stop algorithms promoting self-harm or suicide content to users
- Measures to ensure that reporting processes and processes for moderating content and activity are transparent and effective at tackling the encouragement of self-harm and suicide and measures to ensure that users are kept up to date with the progress of their report
- Steps services should take to ensure they engage sufficiently with civil society groups and law enforcement, so that moderators are educated about what constitutes self-harm or suicide encouragement and how it can be prevented and tackled
- Steps companies should take to ensure harm is tackled rapidly, such as removing content which is illegal or violates acceptable use, and blocking users responsible for activity which violates terms and conditions, as well as steps that services can take to ensure that these measures are conducted sensitively
- Steps to prevent banned users creating new accounts to continue to encourage suicide or self-harm

While it will be for the new regulator to produce codes of practice when it becomes operational, the government expects companies to take action now to tackle harmful content or activity on their services. Indeed, there are already some existing arrangements between individual companies and charities to improve the identification and removal of this content when it is reported, and services that signpost help and promote supportive content to their users.

It is also worth noting that being online can be a beneficial experience for children and young people, and online users should be able to talk about sensitive topics such as suicide and self-harm. The internet holds significant potential benefits to prevent suicide and we know that people who are feeling suicidal may use social media and other online forums to reach out for help and support.

The Department for Education (DfE) continues to incorporate online safety into the school curriculum, to help children and young people improve their digital literacy to equip them to manage the different and escalating risks that young people face. As part of this, DfE is making Relationships Education compulsory for all primary pupils, Relationships and Sex Education compulsory for all secondary pupils and Health Education compulsory for all pupils in all primary and secondary state-funded schools in England. These subjects will include teaching about respectful relationships, including online, as well as health and mental wellbeing.

I can assure you that protecting children's mental health is a priority across government and a core part of the NHS Long Term Plan. The NHS has set a goal of an extra 345,000 children and young people (aged 0-25) receiving support via NHS-funded mental health services by 2023/24.



The Department for Health and Social Care and DfE's Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>), published on 4 December 2017, and the government's consultation response published last July, considers the impact of social media on young people's mental health. As highlighted in the green paper, we have convened a working group of social media and digital sector companies to explore what more they can do to help us keep children safe online.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Minister for Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention have also held two summits with social media providers this year about suicide and self-harm content on their platforms. Following these meetings, social media companies have committed to increasing their efforts to protect users by establishing, and funding, a strategic partnership with suicide and self-harm prevention experts, led by the Samaritans, to tackle this content and support vulnerable users of their platforms.

The Cross-Government Suicide Prevention Strategy and Cross-Government Suicide Prevention Workplan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-fourth-annual-report>) published on 22 January this year, also includes commitments to address suicidal and self-harm content online through the Online Harms White paper.

I hope this information reassures you that the government is taking significant steps to protect children and young people from harmful content online.

Yours sincerely
Margot James

Margot James MP
Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries

PS I would like to extend my deep gratitude to you for forwarding me your report on the tragic loss of ^{this} young life, it is indeed a terrible indictment of the excessive amount of this very harmful content online.