



Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport

# CODE OF PRACTICE



# CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PROVIDERS OF ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Culture, Media and Sport in accordance with Section 103 of the Digital Economy Act 2017. This Code provides guidance for social media platforms, in advance of the new regulatory framework envisaged in the Online Harms White Paper. It sets out actions that the Government believes social media platforms should take to prevent bullying, insulting, intimidating and humiliating behaviours on their sites. This code of practice does not affect how illegal or unlawful content or conduct is dealt with.

The Code is directed at social media platforms, but is also relevant to any sites hosting user-generated content and comments, including review websites, gaming platforms, online marketplaces and the like.

The Government hopes that advertisers and investors will also support the Code's goals and provisions.



# GUIDANCE FOR ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The Government expects social media platforms to adhere to the following four principles. Examples of how platforms may wish to adhere to the code are set out below. These are not exhaustive and platforms

should develop an approach best suited to their service and the needs of their users. It may be revised at the request of the Secretary of State.

## Building online safety for all - Key Principles



## GOOD PRACTICE

The following exemplars provide guidance on the four principles. We have consulted with a range of organisations, including tech companies, trade bodies, civil society and vulnerable users in identifying them:

**Social media providers should maintain a clear and accessible reporting process to enable individuals to notify social media providers of harmful conduct. Features may include:**

- Capacity for non-users to report harmful conduct for example parents, teachers and social workers reporting on behalf of children, young people or vulnerable users;
- Scope for the testing and improving of reporting mechanisms based on user feedback and as new products/ features are developed;
- Consulting relevant professionals, stakeholders, including disabled users when designing new safety policies.

**Social media providers should maintain efficient processes for dealing with notifications from users about harmful conduct. Features may include:**

- Sending users an acknowledgement, within 24 hours, that their report has been received and providing clear information about how reports are dealt with and when the outcome will be communicated;
- Considering the most effective way of communicating with users about their reports and tailoring responses appropriately;
- Reviewing reports against all terms and conditions for potential violations and not just in relation to the reported category.

**Social media providers should have clear and accessible information about reporting processes in their terms and conditions. This may include:**

- Clear and accessible definitions of what constitutes as harmful conduct on the platform and rules against specified conduct;
- Information on consequences for users in relation to the violation of terms and conditions;
- A reference or link to an explanation of how guidelines are developed, enforced and reviewed including information on performance metrics on take-down.

**Social media providers should give clear information to the public about action they take against harmful conduct. Features may include:**

- The removal of reported content on a 'comply or explain' basis i.e. providers remove reported content or explain why the reported content has not been removed;
- Platforms provide education on appropriate online conduct and the consequences of platform misuse to all users especially those who breach the platform policies.

### Equality & Accessibility Statement

The Government is committed to promoting equality and diversity online, aiming to ensure that all groups and individuals have equal access to the benefits of the internet. There is evidence that women, minority racial and religious groups, the LGBT community and

disabled people are disproportionately at risk of harmful conduct online. The Government expects Social Media Providers to have regard to the Equality Act 2010.



# STATEMENT ON CONSULTATION

The draft statutory code of practice was published in May 2018, as part of the Government response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper. Section 103(6) of the Digital Economy Act 2017 requires the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to consult with those social media providers to whom the code is intended to give guidance, and such other persons as the Secretary of State considers it appropriate to consult.

Our public consultation, which ran from October to December 2017, highlighted that there is strong support for a social media code of practice. Our recent consultation, which ran from May 2018 to December 2018, asked for specific views on the draft code of practice and examples of good practice. Stakeholders' views have been incorporated into this finalised version of the code.

## **Who did we consult with?**

In identifying good practice, we consulted with technology companies, civil society, the British Computer Society, online video game platforms, the Association for UK Interactive Entertainment and disabled people. The body of good practice examples used will no doubt grow as stakeholders continue to work in partnership to tackle online harms.

## **What stakeholders told us**

Our consultation highlighted that stakeholders felt the draft Code of Practice, was too detailed and prescriptive. Majority were in agreement that a high level approach is useful and good practice should be included as guidance to social media providers.

Our consultation with civil society and disabled people demonstrated an accessibility issue with reporting processes on social media platforms. Additionally, a number of charities flagged a need for better and efficient notification processes. Stakeholders firmly believed online safety is important for everyone and a social media Code of Practice should take into account diversity and equality.

## **What did we do?**

We have refined the social media Code of Practice in light of the feedback received. Guidance is now clearer and good practice guidance is listed as exemplars providers may wish to implement on their platforms. The 4 key areas listed in the Code of Practice ensure social media providers deal with accessibility issues on their platform, consider diversity and maintain efficient notification processes. The addition of an Equality and Accessibility statement aims to remind social media providers who sign up to this Code of Practice, of the Equality Act 2010.