

Initiatives in United Kingdom

Internet Safety Strategy

The UK's Digital Charter established two aims: to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online and to ensure that the UK has the world's best digital economy. The Charter aims to agree norms and rules for the online world as part of our work to build a thriving ecosystem where technology companies can start and grow, and where citizens can have confidence that the Internet is a well-governed space.

UK Government published its Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper public consultation in October 2017 which set out proposals relating to tackling unacceptable behaviour and content online including those that affect children. The Green paper proposed a set of principles:

1. What is unacceptable offline should be unacceptable online;
2. All users should be empowered to manage online risks and stay safe; and
3. Technology companies have a responsibility to their users, and for the content they host.

The Green Paper sought citizens' and stakeholders' views on various aspects of online safety including:

- the introduction of a social media code of practice, transparency reporting and a social media levy to fund awareness raising;
- technological solutions to online harms and support for the Internet safety technology market; and
- developing children's digital literacy and support for parents and carers.

The prevalence of online harms was confirmed by the nearly 600 respondents to the survey included in the Green Paper: 50% of users say they are concerned about what is on the Internet; 60% of respondents said they had witnessed inappropriate or harmful content online; and 40% has experience online abuse.

The UK Government issued its response to the Green Paper in May 2018 which announced the intention to publish a Government White Paper during winter 2018-19 which will set out more definitive steps, including legislation, for tackling online harms, including both harmful and illegal content. The UK is also developing a strategy for wider engagement internationally in addressing these problems.

The Green paper and the Government's response are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/internet-safety-strategy-green-paper>

Cairncross Review

The Cairncross review was launched in March 2018 to look into the sustainability of high-quality journalism in the face of difficulties caused by the shift from print to digital. As laid out in the terms of reference, the review will be looking into sustainable business models, content and data flows, the role of digital advertising and the impact of digital tech platforms. The call for evidence closed in September and the team are currently reviewing the responses. The review is an independent review chaired by Dame Frances Cairncross and supported by an expert panel comprised of publishers, advertisers and journalists. The report is due to be published in early 2019, in which Dame Frances will make recommendations to which the Government will respond.

Media Mergers (the follow up of Sky/Comcast/Fox)

In September 2018 Comcast completed the acquisition of Sky with their final offer just over £30bn. DCMS Secretaries of State reviewed both the Sky/Comcast and Sky/Fox mergers before allowing them to proceed due to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial decision making role in media mergers. In making decisions and at all stages, DCMS Secretaries of State have acted independently and followed a process that is fair and impartial.

The Secretaries of State chose to issue a European Intervention Notice for the Sky/Fox merger and the European Commission cleared the merger on competition grounds within a month. Though the Sky/Fox merger posed no competition concerns, the Secretary of State intervened on public interest grounds, a set of criteria unique to media mergers in the UK. In the case of Sky/Comcast, no Intervention Notice was issued as there were no public interest concerns raised by the merger.

The Sky/Comcast/Fox investigations took 18 months in total to complete, the decisions were based on rigorous inquiry conducted by the CMA, Ofcom and DCMS. The UK's intervention in both the Sky/Fox and Sky/Comcast processes did not obstruct the final bidding between the two companies for Sky and it ultimately led to the best outcome for Sky shareholders.

Contestable fund

The policy paper, published on 19 October, announced the final scope of the Contestable Fund pilot. The Contestable Fund will commit up to £60 million to help stimulate the provision and plurality of public service original UK content.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/contestable-fund>

Audiovisual Technical notices

The UK has published a series of technical notices in relation to the legal position of some sectors in relation to 'no deal' Brexit. The audiovisual one can be found on the following link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/broadcasting-and-video-on-demand-if-theres-no-brex-it-deal/broadcasting-and-video-on-demand-if-theres-no-brex-it-deal>

