



**The Children's Media**  
FOUNDATION

## **Report on the Outcomes of an Industry Discussion on Internet Safety for Children and Young People,**

The Children's Media Conference  
Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

### **Introduction**

In July 2017, media producers, experts and researchers gathered at the Children's Media Conference in Sheffield, UK to discuss the issues facing the kids' media industry today.

#### **The Event**

The [Children's Media Conference](#) (CMC) is the UK's only gathering of media professionals from all sectors concerned with developing, making and distributing media experiences to children. 2017 saw the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the conference, which welcomed 1200 delegates, 220 speakers and staged over 60 sessions and workshops. Delegates come from many different fields – television (broadcasting and production), interactive media, games, publishing, licensing, educational media, theatre, galleries and museums, attractions, and academia.

The CMC has a long history of revealing and exploring policy issues from an industry perspective.

#### **This Report**

This report was commissioned by the [Children's Media Foundation](#) - a separate body from the CMC - that has produced many policy-based sessions at the Conference.

The Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation which acts as an advocate for the children's audience in matters of policy, regulation, funding, support, safety and appropriateness. As part of its objective to improve the public discourse around children and media, the CMF brings together industry, researchers and policy-makers. The ultimate aim being to develop better-informed and more reasoned policy and regulatory outcomes.

The report covers the discussions at and outcomes from a single session at CMC 2017 "[Can We Fix It?](#)" It will detail the views of the expert panellists on stage and the media professionals in the audience regarding recommended action for policymakers and practitioners. This was captured from the live commentary at the event and the social media app Slido, which provided the audience with a method of annotating their views on a series of questions posed at the session.

## The Session

“Can We Fix It” specifically examined the task of making digital media for children and the platforms on which it is accessed more ethical through joint efforts across regulation and education.

The session was produced by BBC Producer [Ellen Evans](#) (all sessions at CMC are produced by volunteers from the industry) and Executive Produced (editorially supervised) by [Marc Goodchild](#) a former member of the Children’s Media Foundation Executive Group, now Head of Digital Strategy & Product EMEA at Turner Broadcasting. Marc is a leading authority on internet safety for the young, having previously been Head of Children’s Digital at the BBC.

[Giles Dilnot](#), a former BBC presenter now Director of Communications for the Children’s Commissioner for England, moderated the discussion.

There were five panelists:

- [Baroness Beeban Kidron](#), Founder, 5Rights
- [Alice Webb](#), Director of Children’s and the North, BBC
- [Vicki Shotbolt](#), CEO, Parentzone
- [Deepak Tiwari](#), Founder and CEO, Privately SA
- [John Carr](#), consultant and Secretary of the UK Children’s Charities Coalition on Internet Safety.

55 people attended the session according to the CMC headcount on the day. They ranged from digital media professionals with a deep concern for the issues under discussion, as central to their business future, to television executives and producers with a strong interest in the topic. Many of the audience were also parents.

## Discussions and Outcomes

### The UK Position

To start, the group considered the strong positioning of the UK media industry to set global standards for digital content and services that support young people. As one audience member commented, “We have a really good history in the UK of making content for kids that they like, and we still deliver a duty of care. That duty of care should (also) apply to digital services.” Another argued that with the second most valuable online market in the world, the UK has “considerable leverage” in affecting international change, and “we should use it.” They recognized that as part of the industry, media producers share a responsibility to support kids and suggested doing their part by creating more programmes that reflect digital life and safety.

### Regulation

The children’s media professionals strongly agreed that regulation is needed in order to make online spaces safer and more supportive for young people. The urgency for regulation stemmed from concerns about the lack of accountability at the largest digital

platforms worldwide, with the use of social media by children under 13 highlighted as an area where policy intervention is particularly pressing.

**75% of audience members polled through Slido agreed with the statement that “regulation is essential but must be global,”** and several ideas were proposed for what such regulation might look like:

- First and foremost, a Digital Charter should be developed to outline new industry regulations. The Charter should include at a minimum:
  - Digital design standards (e.g. easier options for turning off features such as GPS and Autoplay, restrictions on algorithmic bias, etc.)
  - Specific clauses addressing the use of social media by under 13’s
  - The creation of an Ethics Commission to enforce such regulations and to which digital media platforms are held directly accountable
- Additionally, an industry-wide digital parental consent system should be put in place. The BBC could take the lead on this and build it for the industry.
- The government should support small/ startup companies creating innovative tools for kids, and provide incentives for platforms and services effectively supporting them.
- The government should also invest in technology for kids’ tools, which could perhaps be funded by a levy on the largest platforms.

## **Education**

A considerable portion of the conversation revolved around the importance of education.

This cohort agreed that previous digital literacy approaches needed to evolve in order for young people and their parents to navigate an increasingly complex online landscape. As one panellist stated, education “is not what kids need to do, but what we need to do” arguing for collective responsibility among diverse stakeholders. This sentiment was echoed by audience members’ comments wherein the duty to inform, empower and engage young people was emphasised, as was a pragmatic approach to considering online safety from a systems-level, holistic approach. When audience members were asked, **“What would help kids develop digital resilience?”** in relation to education reform, they provided the following suggestions:

- Providing mental health support in tandem with digital resilience training, to emphasize the connection between mental well-being and a “healthy” approach to the digital world
- Targeting intervention for young people who are more vulnerable as opposed to assuming that all youth are equally “at risk” online
- Educating about the different types of risks encountered online - from “unknown dangers” like viruses and online predators, to cyber bullies who may be in a child’s own classroom
- Ensuring that online safety education is engaging and enjoyable, and not executed through scaremongering tactics
- Moving from the focus on “adult-driven guidance” to education that is more peer-driven. With the right resources and community support, this youth-led, peer-driven model can be increasingly effective in influencing young people’s development
- Providing better government-funded tools for young people

- Fostering an overall culture around digital safety as opposed to relegating digital safety education to schools (e.g. looking at programs in the United States where young people are awarded with digital ‘badges’)

## **Technology**

Technology was also discussed as a potential tool to enable online safety and digital literacy.

More specifically, industry members were asked, “**How can technology help kids thrive online?**” and provided the following insights:

- Technology can be used to assist young people in locating subtle, negative behaviours that can ‘slip through the digital cracks’ and impact behaviour.
- It can be integrated into in-school programming whereby educators are involved in exposing their students to literacy-building technologies, and are active in fostering a holistic culture, both in-and-outside the classroom, dedicated to online literacy/ safety.
- When including technological tools as skill-building and safety-enhancing mechanisms, it is important to make chat language/vocabulary kid-friendly and conversational.
- Technology can be leveraged to open up communication channels (e.g. chat rooms) where young people can ask questions, talk to someone about their concerns, and access immediate resources.
- Prior to integrating technology as an intervening tool for online safety programmes, we need to better understand what exactly young people use technology for (e.g. to connect with friends, access information etc.). We need to assist them in differentiating between safe, accurate sources and false information, and make sure we do not penalise them for turning to the internet to develop their resilience.
- Technology can provide points of access for young people to share their stories and exchange advice. Peer-to-peer education is essential given that young people value listening to one another.
- Similarly, technological pursuits can only help kids thrive if said technologies are targeted, relevant and are not patronizing.

## **Conclusion**

“Can We Fix It?” provided the opportunity for an important dialogue among media professionals, media literacy experts and the deep experience of the issues on the panel.

The group were eager to see the government step in to make digital spaces more supportive for kids.

Most industry members indicated interest in global regulation to support the facilitation of safer online spaces and higher standards through which to hold platforms accountable.

Implementing more innovative, youth-centred forms of education was also viewed as an important component to young people’s online safety, as is engaging and educating parents in these discussions.

The group acknowledged that the proposed regulations may not be perfect from the start, but felt it was imperative to start somewhere. They look forward to being part of continued efforts to make the UK the best place for kids online.

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