



The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
The Correspondence & Enquiry unit
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

17 November 2020

Dear Rishi

The UK Government has said that it wants to make the UK the safest place in the world to go online, an ambition shared by the UK Safer Internet Centre, who work tirelessly to keep children safe from online harms. We believe the Government's ambitions cannot be achieved without financially supporting the vitally important work the Centre does and we, therefore, urge you to support their bid as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process.

Over the past decade the UK Safer Internet Centre, a partnership of three world-leading charities, Childnet International, SWGfL and the Internet Watch Foundation has played not only a vitally important role in keeping children in the UK safe from harm but is also internationally recognised as a model of best practice.

Amongst their achievements, they have managed to keep UK hosting space free from child sexual abuse, trained over 21,000 professionals working with children and run Safer Internet Day, which last year, reached 49% of the nation's children and 26% of parents. In the past, EU funding has provided the ability to leverage additional matched funding from industry to support these initiatives. If this funding is lost, these vitally important programmes and ability to leverage funding from industry is too.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen the wonderfully positive benefits the internet has to offer, including the ability to work from home and stay entertained. However, as the Centre has consistently highlighted, there is a more sinister side to the internet and the dangers to children have increased. The National Crime Agency now estimates as many as 300,000 people in the UK pose a threat to children online or offline. The Internet Watch Foundation has warned in one month over lockdown, that there were 8.8 million attempts to access known child sexual abuse imagery. Public reports to the Centre's hotlines and helplines have surged by 50% and more compared with the previous year and who would deliver the vital touchpoint of Safer Internet Day in children's lives if it wasn't for the Safer Internet Centre?

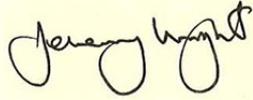
These programmes cost the Government just 10p per child under the age of 15. Research shows that Online Harms cost the economy, far more than this small investment. A 2014 study on the impact of child sexual abuse estimated the cost to the UK economy stood at an estimated £3billion per year in lost productivity. The emotional and associated health issues were estimated to cost as much as £182 million.

The £1.3 million pounds per annum investment in the UK Safer Internet Centre, is already in receipt of 50% match funding from the internet industry and charitable reserves. We believe that it is not only the right thing to do in terms of the protection of children, it is vitally important in achieving the Government's ambitions of becoming a world leader in online safety and we ask that Government plays its part in funding those activities.

The first function of Government is the protection of its citizens from harm. What could be more important than ensuring the safety and security of children and their right to a childhood free from abuse and exploitation?

We look forward to your response.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Wright', with a stylized flourish at the end.

RT HON JEREMY WRIGHT QC MP
Member of Parliament for Kenilworth and Southam

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