

Press release: BBFC proposed to enforce age verification of online pornography

Age verification will mean anyone who makes pornography available online on a commercial basis must ensure under 18s in the UK cannot access it. This is part of the Government's continuing work to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online.

The BBFC has unparalleled expertise in classifying content and has a proven track record of interpreting and implementing legislation as the statutory authority for age rating videos under the Video Recordings Act.

This, along with its work with industry on the film classification system and more recently classifying material for mobile network operators, makes them the preferred choice for regulator.

Digital Minister Matt Hancock said:

One of the missions of age verification is to harness the freedom of the internet while mitigating its harms. Offline, as a society we protect children from viewing inappropriate adult material by ensuring pornography is sold responsibly using appropriate age checks. It is now time that the online world follows suit. The BBFC are the best placed in the world to do this important and delicate task.

David Austin, Chief Executive Officer at BBFC said:

The BBFC's primary aim is to protect children and other vulnerable groups from harmful content and we are therefore pleased to accept the Government's proposed designation.

Age-verification barriers will help to prevent children accessing or stumbling across pornographic content online. The UK is leading the way with this age-verification regime and will set an international precedent in child protection.

The government's proposal must be approved by Parliament before the BBFC is officially designated as the age-verification regulator.

The regulator will notify non-compliant pornographic providers, and be able to direct internet service providers to prevent customers accessing these sites. It will also notify payment-services providers and other ancillary service providers of these sites, with the intention that they can withdraw

their services.

The Government will shortly also publish guidance on how the regulator should fulfil its duties in relation to age verification.

Notes to Editors:

- Once designated, the regulator will develop and issue guidance (subject to parliamentary approval) on the age-verification arrangements for online pornographic material that it will treat as compliant and the role of ancillary service providers
- With regards to privacy, the regulator's guidance will set out the expectation that age-verification services and online pornography providers should have regard to the ICO's guidance on data protection and wider data protection laws..
- The Digital Economy Act requires that companies delivering adult content in the UK act responsibly by having robust age verification controls in place to prevent children accessing explicit material.
- The regulator will also have powers to take action where a person is making available extreme pornographic material on the internet in the United Kingdom. Extreme pornography is defined in section 22 of the Digital Economy Act.
- Age verification for online pornography is being taken forward alongside implementation of the Government's recently launched [Internet Safety Strategy](#).
- A 2016 report by the NSPCC found that nearly two thirds (65%) of 15-16 year olds and just under half (48%) of 11-16 year olds had viewed online pornography. Over a quarter (28%) of 11-12 year olds had seen pornography on the internet. It also found that children were just as likely to stumble across pornography (28%) as to search for it deliberately (19%).
- Research shows that viewing pornography at a young age can cause distress, and can have a harmful effect on sexual development, beliefs, and relationships. Pornography tops the list of online risks named by children, with more than one in five young people expressing concern about such content according to [EU Kids Online research in 2013](#).