

UK Government Presses Ofcom to Enforce Tougher Online Safety Standards

July 26, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



The UK government has called on Ofcom, the country's communications regulator, to take firmer action in enforcing the Online Safety Act, amid rising public concern over harmful online content. Science, Innovation and Technology Secretary Peter Kyle warned that tech companies must be held accountable for protecting users, particularly children, from illegal and dangerous material on their platforms.

The Act, which came into effect in March 2025, mandates that online platforms remove content related to child sexual abuse, terrorism, hate speech, fraud, and material promoting suicide. Under the law, Ofcom has the authority to fine non-compliant companies up to £18 million or 10 per cent of their global turnover, and even block access to platforms that fail to cooperate.

Peter Kyle described the legislation as a crucial step forward but made clear that regulation must go beyond legislation. He outlined five strategic priorities for Ofcom, including safety by design, improved transparency from platforms, and tackling new risks such as misinformation and artificial intelligence. A government-funded study has also been launched to examine the effects of social media and smartphone usage on children's mental health.

Kyle's formal Statement of Strategic Priorities, presented to Parliament in May 2025, now guides Ofcom's enforcement responsibilities under the Act. However, campaigners and safety groups such as the NSPCC and the Molly Rose Foundation have criticised Ofcom's initial implementation as too lenient. They argue the draft safety codes fail to address issues like suicide-related content and grant excessive flexibility to tech firms.

In defence, Ofcom, chaired by Dame Melanie Dawes, has stated it is committed to robust regulation. The agency has introduced measures such as age verification and mandatory filtering systems aimed at preventing children from accessing harmful material. Dawes has assured the public that platforms will be held to account through a structured regulatory process.

Peter Kyle also urged Ofcom to assess the role of misinformation causing public disorder. He called for targeted provisions to be considered in future revisions of the safety codes, ensuring the law remains responsive to emerging threats.

From a centre-right perspective, the government's approach strikes a balance between public protection and regulatory pragmatism. By demanding accountability from tech giants and arming Ofcom with clear statutory guidance, the UK aims to lead in digital safety while respecting innovation and free expression.