

FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION:

YOUNG PEOPLE SHAPING ONLINE SAFETY



INSIGHTS FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS WALES ON ONLINE SAFETY

Supporting young people to lead change in online safety

By Platform (Rebecca Nunn, Lauren Davies and Luke Rees) and the Digital Guardians

PLATF **FORM**

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FOREWORD

At Platform, we have been working with children and young people since 2015, providing mental health and wellbeing services across Wales. Working alongside statutory services and in communities, supporting people with a range of life experiences to achieve sustainable wellbeing for all.

In all our support services, we place children and young people's voices at the heart of everything we do. By truly listening, we hear about the growing challenges of life online. Yet one thing is clear: young people are incredibly brave. It is time for organisations and decision makers to follow their lead, listen and act with the same courage.

We are delighted about working in partnership with the NSPCC on this Online Safety Project. We went into this project with the intention of using our expertise, plus the incredible guidance from the NSPCC, to listen, understand and amplify the voices of young people around online safety in Wales. Together, we have turned listening into action and ensured their voices sit at the heart of this work.

Throughout the project, we didn't want to just consult with young people across Wales, we wanted to build and maintain trusting relationships. This way, young people felt they could share their opinions in a safe, friendly environment. This is why we created our advisory group, the Digital Guardians, right at the start of the project. This amazing group of young people from across Wales, who are passionate about online safety for young people, came together to guide the project. They informed us about their opinions, about what was really going on online, and how we could engage and encourage other young people to share their views.

Thanks to the Digital Guardians, we were able to successfully engage with schools and groups across the country, where young people had fun, felt seen and heard, and were given opportunities that they may not have otherwise been presented with. We owe so many thanks to our Digital Guardians, this project wouldn't have been as rich without their expertise.

This report details what we have heard, achieved, and created over the past 12 months of the project. We want people to read this report and listen to what young people are saying. This has been an incredible opportunity to amplify youth voice from across Wales, and we are so excited to present this in this way.

Thank you to everyone who has helped us along the way, to every young person who was brave enough to share their experiences, to the schools, and communities that allowed us the time and space to talk to young people, to the NSPCC for their guidance, to our Platform colleagues for getting out there and delivering this work, and to our Digital Guardians who guided this project every step of the way.

Siobhan Parry

Platform Deputy Director,
Children, Young People, Families and Community

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Children and young people are growing up in a world which does not distinguish between online and offline. Their digital lives shape how they learn, connect, play and express themselves. Yet too often, decisions about online safety are made without meaningfully involving the very people that are most affected. At the NSPCC, we believe that young people's experiences, insights and ideas must be at the heart of shaping safer digital spaces.

We're proud to be working in partnership with Platform and would like to extend our heartfelt thanks for the outstanding work you've been doing on this project. Your dedication and expertise have been instrumental in driving this work forward to amplify young people's voices. Together, we're connecting young people with those who have the power and responsibility to make change happen.

This report, created in partnership with Platform and guided by the Digital Guardians, is a powerful reminder of why listening to young people matters. Across Wales, children and young people spoke candidly about what helps them feel safe online, what puts them at risk, and what they want adults, decision makers and technology companies to understand. Their reflections are honest, thoughtful and grounded in the realities of growing up in a rapidly changing digital world.

What stands out from their perspectives is their calls for a balanced approach. Young people recognise the immense value of being online (connection, creativity, community and learning) while also articulating the challenges they face, from misinformation and inappropriate contact to the pressures of online appearance and behaviour. They are not asking for adults to remove them from digital spaces; they are asking for support, understanding and meaningful action.

The Digital Guardians have played a central role in shaping this project. Their leadership, creativity and commitment ensured that the voices of their peers were not only heard but amplified. Their recommendations, which include calling for better education, stronger dialogue between adults and young people, greater awareness of misinformation, and clearer guidance on AI, offer clear and practical suggestions for change.

We are deeply grateful to every young person who contributed their time, ideas and lived experience. We also thank the educators, community groups and families who supported their involvement. Most of all, we recognise the courage it takes for young people to speak openly about their digital lives, especially when discussing difficult or sensitive experiences.



This report is both a celebration of youth voice and a call to action. It challenges all of us, whether professionals, policymakers, educators, parents/carers or those shaping technology, to do better. To create online environments where children are protected, empowered and respected; to ensure that safety measures reflect the realities of young people's lives; and to commit to working with children, not simply on their behalf. We must ensure sustained, inclusive and varied ways for children to share their experiences, influence decisions and help shape the systems that affect them, recognising that meaningful engagement is not a one-off exercise, but an ongoing responsibility.

Carl Harris,
NSPCC Assistant Director Wales

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“ I feel as though the negatives of the internet is all that people hear about nowadays, it would be nice for people to know about the good things it can do as well. ”

Digital Guardian

“ I love being part of the online safety project because the group is showing how to stay safe online from a child’s point of view and makes everyone feel seen and heard. ”

Digital Guardian

Young people in Wales told us that being online is a central part of their everyday lives. Digital spaces offer connection, creativity, entertainment, learning, and access to supportive communities. At the same time, young people shared concerns about exposure to harmful and distressing content, inappropriate adults, bullying, misinformation, and the growing influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI). They describe how online experiences can have both positive and negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

Despite this, young people are often left out of conversations about how online safety approaches are designed and delivered. Many felt that responsibility for staying safe is frequently placed on them, rather than on adults, decision makers, and technology companies who have a duty to protect children and young people from harm. This project sought to address that imbalance by placing young people’s voices and leadership at the centre.

The Online Safety Project was a Wales-wide, youth-led engagement programme involving **128 young people aged 11-18** across **14 schools and community groups**, driven by an advisory group of **19 Digital Guardians**. The project created meaningful opportunities for young people from across Wales to share their

opinions based on lived experience of being online and to influence those with responsibility for online safety. This work is aligned with the NSPCC’s Voice of Online Youth¹, ensuring Welsh perspectives contribute to UK-wide discussions while remaining grounded in the Welsh context.

The project was designed, shaped, and driven by young people. Our advisory group, The Digital Guardians led decisions about how engagement should happen, what questions should be asked, and what issues mattered most. They played a leadership role throughout the project - shaping session content, identifying key themes, creating resources, speaking at events, and presenting directly to decision makers. This approach ensured the work reflected young people’s realities rather than adult assumptions.

Young people shared that their ability to stay safe is strengthened when they understand privacy, know how to use safety tools, and can speak to trusted adults. However, safety is reduced by adults acting inappropriately online, people pretending to be someone they are not, gaps in education, and the increasing difficulty of recognising what content is real, particularly in relation to AI, deepfakes, and misinformation. While young people often described strategies they use to protect themselves, they were clear that the burden of safety should not sit with them alone.

¹ This is a UK-wide group of 14 young people aged 14-18 who help steer the NSPCC’s child safety online direction and provide a platform for young people to voice views and experiences of online safety.

Based on insights gathered throughout the project, the Digital Guardians proposed four key recommendations for decision makers and those with influence:

1



Better education for young people about how to stay safe online, developed and delivered by young people.

2



Increased dialogue between adults and young people to support open, informed conversations about online life.

3



Greater awareness of the widespread nature of misinformation and deception, including clearer labelling and education from tech companies and organisations.

4



Greater awareness of the risks of AI, particularly its impact on learning, trust, and perceptions of reality.

These recommendations are explored in more depth further into the report.

This project demonstrates the value of youth-led engagement and shows that when young people in Wales are trusted, listened to, and supported, they offer clear, practical, and insightful solutions. Listening to young people is not only ethical, it is essential to developing effective, relevant, and trusted approaches to online safety.



KEY INSIGHTS

The young people we spoke to highlighted that staying safe online is strengthened by keeping information private, being educated about online safety, and having access to the right tools. In contrast, risks were seen to increase through exposure to inappropriate adults, people pretending to be others, and a lack of education around online safety.

They also emphasised the importance of adults better understanding how to protect young people, as well as the reasons why young people spend significant time in digital spaces. Young people told us that being online can have both positive and negative impacts on mental health. For example, it can make them feel better by increasing connection, learning new things, and watching positive content, but can also make them feel poorly about themselves through

comparison with others, which can impact their self-identity and confidence.

Alongside this, young people put forward a wide range of ideas for how adults, decision makers, and technology companies could improve experiences, including more, better education, stronger content restrictions, and making privacy settings and safety tools easier to access and use.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

PROJECT CONTEXT

Online spaces are a central part of everyday life for children and young people, who are often the first to encounter new digital trends and technologies, making their insight essential to shaping effective responses (NSPCC, 2025a², NSPCC 2025b³). Recent figures show children aged 8-14 in the UK spent an average of 2 hours 59 minutes a day online (Ofcom, 2025a⁴). Research also shows that many children are using social media before the specified minimum age, with 51% of children under 13 saying they had used social media or apps (Ofcom, 2024⁵, Ofcom 2025b⁶). In Wales, trends are similar and social media has been found to be regularly used by 48% of primary age children (Public Health Wales, 2023⁷). There is a lack of

research showing how social media use impacts children and young people but some of the limited evidence available for Wales suggests that one in five girls and one in ten boys in secondary schools report problematic social media use, meaning they experience difficulties reducing screen time, find it consumes their thoughts, leads them to neglect other hobbies and activities, or experience conflict with family or friends as a result (Public Health Wales, 2025⁸). While research into the impacts of social media and online use remains limited, it's important to find ways to ask children how it shapes their wellbeing, mental health, identity development and social relationships and provide opportunities for them to share their experiences.

² NSPCC (2025a) <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2025/generative-ai-childrens-safety>

³ NSPCC (2025b) <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2025/tools-combat-online-harm-private-messaging>
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⁴ Ofcom (2025a) <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement>

⁵ Ofcom (2024) Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes. London: Ofcom

⁶ Ofcom (2025b) <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/statement-age-assurance-and-childrens-access>

⁷ Public Health Wales (2023) [Social media regularly used by 48% of primary age children in Wales, report shows - Public Health Wales](#)

⁸ Public Health Wales (2025) [Secondary school girls in Wales report their problematic social media use is double that of boys - Public Health Wales](#)

As online spaces evolve rapidly, children and young people are often the first to experience new risks, trends and behaviours, yet their voices are underrepresented in decisions about online safety. Research consistently shows that young people aren't being involved in shaping solutions that affect them. For example, although 90% of young people feel confident in their understanding of social media, 80% were unaware of the Online Safety Bill (now the Online Safety Act) (YoungMinds, 2022). This raises concerns about the extent to which young people have been informed, involved, or consulted on legislation that plays a key role in governing the online spaces they use every day.

The Online Safety Project is grounded in the belief that **young people are experts in their own digital lives** and **should play an active role in shaping how online safety is understood and addressed**. This project models the kind of meaningful opportunities that can allow young people to share what helps them stay safe, what puts them at risk, and what they believe

needs to change, ensuring that policy, practice and resources are informed by real, diverse experiences rather than assumptions.

PROJECT AIMS



There were 3 main aims of the project:

- 1 Work in collaboration with young people in Wales and put young people and their voices in the lead.
- 2 Understand more about young people's experiences online in Wales.
- 3 Amplify the voices and experiences of young people to decision makers and others with responsibility for online safety in Wales so they can keep young people safe online.

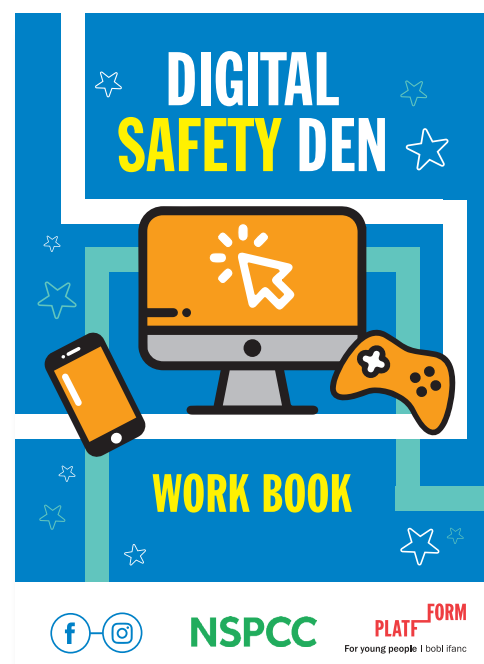
WHAT ARE OUR INSIGHTS?



We spoke to 14 groups of young people across Wales, with session materials and questions that were decided upon by our youth advisory group (the Digital Guardians).

They ensured that we engaged with young people in a way that created a safe, fun environment to share their experiences and ideas for change.

The themes outlined in this report are based upon what young people shared with us over the course of three engagement sessions. The detailed approach we took with these groups is explained further later in the report.





WHAT IMPACT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK BEING ONLINE HAS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

Young people thought there were both positive and negative impacts of being online. They thought it was important that adults appreciated that whilst the online world can be a **'scary place'** for some, it can also be a **'happy'** and **'safe'** place for other young people.

POSITIVES

- ✓ **Keeping in touch** – being online allows young people to “message” and “connect with friends”, especially ones that live far away such as “long distance friends.”
- ✓ **Building connections** – the internet can be used as a tool to “make new friends” and find “community with people having [the] same interests and hobbies.”
- ✓ **Learning** – online spaces enable them to “learn new skills or hobbies that can make you feel better” like “games” and “books.”
- ✓ **Support and advice** – young people expressed “how important the internet is to find resources/services” like “helplines” and “peer support.”
- ✓ **Staying up to date** – being online allows them to “know what is going on in the world.”
- ✓ **Entertainment** – young people mentioned lots of content they liked that “made me laugh” and “lots of funny videos that can cheer you up if you are feeling down.”
- ✓ **Positivity** – they also talked about content that made them “feel good” and “let me look back on memories.”

NEGATIVES

- ✗ **Bullying/mean comments** – young people talked about “people saying mean things” online and the prevalence of cyberbullying, which can “make young people sad or afraid.”
- ✗ **Inappropriate/distressing content or adults** – the online world can be “a dangerous place where children are exposed to things they should not see”. They often come across adults acting inappropriately, “can we have less adults on kids’ apps!”
- ✗ **Mental health difficulties** – being online can be “bad for your mental health” for many reasons, for example “people could negatively comment on your body” and “being online can make you feel depressed.”
- ✗ **Online perception/appearance** – looking at influencers and other people’s content can lead to “comparing your appearance” and feeling despondent about your own life, “people make it seem that if you are not successful, attractive or rich, you are a failure.”
- ✗ **Loss of connection** – some young people were worried that spending too much time online was “not good for your social life and “it takes away from socialising with family.”
- ✗ **Negative physical effects** – spending too much time online could lead to “eye strain” and young people could “get addicted to TikTok so don’t go outside which could lead to not exercising which could impact physical and mental health.”



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK SUPPORTS THEM TO STAY SAFE ONLINE?

Young people felt the best ways of keeping safe online were **keeping their accounts and information private, being informed on how to stay safe and taking action to implement safety behaviours and measures**. They thought that doing all this could help prevent young people from **experiencing risks online** (e.g. being scammed, hacked, blackmailed or contacted by inappropriate adults). Whilst these insights represent actions that young people can take, it is important that adults listen to and support young people to enable them to do these things.

KEEPING THEIR ACCOUNTS AND PERSONAL INFORMATION PRIVATE

- **Passwords** – “keeping your passwords to yourself” and “having a different password for different apps” was seen as important to prevent the likelihood of “being hacked.”
- **Personal information** – young people felt it was important to keep personal details confidential as it could lead to “random people having access to it, and therefore can share it around, causing unwanted attention by the wrong people.”
- **Location sharing** – young people had mixed opinions about sharing your location. Some felt you should “not share your location with anyone” whilst others thought it was okay to share with some people, for example “your friends can have your locations.”
- **Choosing who has access to certain information or accounts online** – some young people thought this allowed them to “keep your private life and online life separate” and prevent people from knowing things that young people did not want them to know, for example, “if your closeted like trans, gay, bisexual etc your friends might know but your parent or guardian might not and you might not want them to know”
- **Private accounts** – putting accounts on private was seen as a “pretty simple and straight forward way” to keep them safe “without needing a lot of supervision” from adults or education about how to keep safe online.

BEING INFORMED ON HOW TO STAY SAFE

- **Knowing what to do and what not to do online** – young people talked about how “being informed on internet safety is important to me because it enables me to stay safe online in the first place.”
- **Skills and tools** – being taught the right tools and skills to stay safe online “helps them learn” and “gives them control” over being safe.
- **Getting advice** – young people expressed that it was good to talk to and “get advice from people who have more experience online” like teachers and parents/carers.
- **Talking to a trusted adult** – young people thought it was important that their peers felt comfortable to “tell your parents if something happens that you are worried about.”

PUTTING THINGS IN PLACE TO KEEP SAFE

- **Not interacting with people that you don't know** – young people thought a simple way to stay safe was by not “talking to strangers” or “answering DMs from strangers.”
- **Blocking/reporting** – young people thought “blocking people you don't know or people who are being creepy” or “reporting someone if they are weird” were effective ways to keep safe.



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK REDUCES THEIR SAFETY ONLINE?

Young people thought the main factors that could affect their safety online were **adults acting inappropriately, people lying about who they are and their intentions and having a lack of knowledge and education about how to stay safe.**

ADULTS ACTING INAPPROPRIATELY ONLINE

- **Adults in young people's spaces** – adults are prevalent in spaces that young people frequent, e.g. “lots of different groups I'm in have these adults especially the video game ones or music-based ones.”
- **Inappropriate content** – lots of people post “bad things” or “show things that we shouldn't see” and young people were concerned that “children under the age of 6-7 might be seeing things that they don't want to.”
- **Not realising when someone is being inappropriate** – some “young people may not know if adults are being inappropriate”, especially if they are children.
- **Hard to block people/keep them blocked** – even though young people might block someone online, “people may continue to add you after you block them”
- **Being unable to prevent people adding you/ (again)** – young people try to stay safe online by not accepting requests from strangers but still may experience “people trying to add you as a friend even after you have declined them”

PEOPLE LYING ABOUT THEIR IDENTITY AND INTENTIONS ONLINE

- **People pretending to be minors and messaging young people** – “catfishing” is a significant concern, and young people are not always aware if someone is catfishing and how they may assume your identity “once they have your details and things.”
- **Hard to know if someone is actually who they say they are** – often people lie about their “age” or “nationality” and not always for

malicious reasons, e.g. “sometimes people lie about how old they are when signing up to games like Roblox.”

- **People trying to trick young people to get images or information** – one young person commented that “adults often pretend to be young people to encourage people to send explicit images and that can also leave the minor feeling trapped, as the adult now has something that they could share”

GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

- **Lack of education** – not being taught about the risks reduced young people's ability to stay safe, e.g. “a lot of children are on social media and don't understand the right and wrongs of privacy and media.”
- **Not knowing how to use safety features/ settings** – “young people may not know how to block or report inappropriate adults so we need to educate young people on how to block or report them, so they know how to”
- **Viruses or malware that looks realistic** – young people talked about how it is “easy to be scammed” and that lots of them often “fall for clickbait or scams.”
- **Content that looks realistic** – content that uses “AI, deepfakes and misinformation” makes it harder to recognise if something is real or not. One young person shared “it really impacts you in terms of how you think about things. AI makes young people not trust things.”
- **Lack of knowledge and people taking advantage** – some adults prey on young people as they can be “easy to take advantage of and manipulate them.”



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ADULTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BEING ONLINE?

Young people thought that, as there are a lot of potential risks for young people, adults need to understand and act **to keep young people safe** but also understand **why young people spend a lot of time online**.

HOW TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE ONLINE

- **Be aware of and understand the risks** – adults need to “listen and be educated” and parents/carers have a responsibility to “inform young people about the dangers of social media”
- **Check content/apps young people use/access** – young people had mixed feelings about whether parents/carers should check phones, some thought it was “an invasion of privacy” whereas others thought it was good as they may “spot things young people don’t see or notice.”
- **Safety settings/features** – it’s important that parents/carers learn about safety settings or features “because if they don’t know how to use it then there’s a chance their kids wouldn’t know how to use it.”
- **Try to understand online language** – adults need to understand the language young people use online, e.g. “different meanings for emojis” so they could recognise if something was inappropriate as “people shorten inappropriate language or hyphenate things.”
- **Take action** – it’s important adults check what young people do online “so they know what we see and can stop us from seeing it if it is not ok” and if they are shown inappropriate content from “anyone inappropriately messaging them,” that adults know what to do. Adults should know how “bad” cyber bullying can be, and “know what to do in case someone is being cyberbullied.”

WHY YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND TIME ONLINE

- **Being online isn’t all bad, there are lots of positives** – adults tend to focus too much on the negatives of being online and ignore the positives, “I feel as though the negatives of the internet is all that people hear about nowadays, it would be nice for people to know about the good things it can do as well”
- **Being online allows young people to engage with friends, people like them and communities** – young people discussed how “making friends online isn’t inherently bad/dangerous” and that online communities can be “positive and accessible”, especially for those who identify as LGBTQIA+ (i.e., “it’s easier for LGBTQ+ people to meet peers online”).
- **Being online allows young people to learn new things** – young people thought the “internet is a powerful learning tool” and talked about how much they have learnt from being online from “new words” to “improving IT skills.”





WHAT CHANGES DO YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO IMPROVE SAFETY ONLINE?

Young people often feel that they are expected to hold the responsibility of keeping themselves safe online. While many young people demonstrate awareness, resilience, and practical strategies for navigating online spaces, young people should not be expected to bear the burden of staying safe. Young people frequently speak about what they should do to stay safe because this responsibility has historically been placed on them, not because it's the right way to prevent harm. The onus should be on us, as adults, decision makers and technology/companies, we have a duty to create safer online environments and to protect children from harm, rather than expecting them to manage risk alone.

Throughout this project, young people shared their ideas for what **adults, decision-makers and technology companies** could do to support **young people** to have safer online experiences.

ADULTS COULD...

- **Hold regular online safety lessons/training from an early age** – young people thought they should be taught about online safety “from a young age in school” and “as soon as they have access to technology”. These lessons should be updated regularly due to “changes and things constantly happening.”
- **Educate about safety settings/features** – young people wanted to be taught about “cool settings” and thought that they “may not know how to block or report inappropriate adults so we need to educate young people on how to block or report them, so they know how to.”
- **Educate about what information should/shouldn't be shared and how to make safe profiles** – young people discussed how they could be taught to “make an account safe and a safe place” and the need to “educate young people the risks” of sharing personal information like “sharing private school details online and we need to show what could happen to you and what would realistically happen”
- **Educate about the prevalence of AI** – young people felt that AI may give “wrong expectations or different beliefs” about things online as they “don't know what is AI and what is not”. They thought it was important to “talk about it more.”
- **Educate all adults about the issues young people experience online and the content they consume** – some adults do not fully “understand the dangers of social media” or “know some really horrific sites or sites with notorious undergrounds”. Young people felt it

was important “all parents should be aware of how much their child uses their device and how it can affect them later on in life.”

- **Educate parents/carers on parental controls/safety measures** – young people wanted parents/carers to know “how to set up parental controls” and how to use apps or settings where they could check what young people were doing on their phones, like “have an app that can control the things that we can do on there” or “check age-restriction on the apps before they download it.”
- **Encourage more open conversations between young people and adults** – young people expressed the importance of having “open dialogues” and “parents and children discuss more their use of the internet.”

DECISION MAKERS COULD...

- **Ensure young people have a trusted adult/digital safety officer they can talk to about their worries or problems** – young people liked having “someone I can talk to that I trust” and being able to “ask a trusted adult if you think something is odd.”
- **Hold social media/apps accountable for their content** – young people expressed concern about some of the content that they see online, “mentally/emotionally harmful content is prevalent including homophobia/transphobia (especially on YouTube and Twitter)”. They thought more needed to be done to combat harmful and fake content, including content that may be AI-generated, “put ‘this is AI-generated’ labels on videos.”

- **Implement stricter consequences for inappropriate/harmful behaviour** – young people said they wanted people to “hold adults responsible for how they act online” and if people engaged in inappropriate behaviour like bullying others, “they get banned or removed straight away.”
- **Implement age restrictions on social media in line with children’s development** – young people thought “age restrictions should be more enforced” and had suggestions for the ages and apps that could be limited, e.g. “under 19-year-olds not allowed on TikTok”.
- **Stricter rules/restrictions on content** – young people were concerned about “people lying about their age and then seeing inappropriate content” and so thought rules could be imposed on content, “content creators should set certain age restrictions and clarify it is appropriate for kids of 13 or 14.”
- **Better moderation of inappropriate messages/accounts** – platforms could improve how they moderate content and could have a “dedicated team to monitor and be receptive to concerns” or giving people access to “more self-moderation tools (blocking words, types of content).”
- **Better processes for blocking and reporting** – young people wanted blocking and reporting to work better with a “report button to actually work” and for platforms to make “reporting more reliable and to make sure further action follows after reports.”
- **Protection from links/viruses** – young people wanted to be better protected from scammers, sharing that they can be “convincing and very persuasive.” Platforms could have “better anti hacks” and “link checking software” to combat “people masking malicious links.”

TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES AND PLATFORMS COULD...

- **Prevent people from sharing personal information** – platforms could do more to prevent people from sharing personal information online, from “having restrictions on what you can and can’t have on your username and profile” to “warnings that suggest or advise you that your information is sensitive.”
- **Have default privacy settings** – young people expressed a desire for “automatic privacy settings” and thought that “all accounts should automatically start off private.”
- **Implement warnings when people try to change their privacy settings** – they also thought “apps should protect the users more and make it easier to keep private and safe” and to help, they could “give you a warning before you put your account on public.”
- **Age-specific spaces online/apps and social media accounts** – young people had ideas about creating apps or spaces that only certain ages could access like “kid safe apps like Kids TikTok”. One young person said “there should be different versions of the same social media with strong restrictions for children to use on. However, we have to make it seem like it is better or somewhat the same so kids will use it.”

YOUNG PEOPLE COULD...

- **Use stronger passwords** – young people should be supported to “make secure passwords” and “have a different password for apps to prevent being hacked.”
- **Use settings/features on their accounts** – there are different settings and features young people could use to keep their accounts safer online, like “putting your account on private” or “using face id to keep things more private” or “2 step verifications.”
- **Take the time to learn about staying safe online** – young people felt it was a good idea to take time to “understand how important online safety is” and that “if you aren’t told you don’t know and that’s dangerous” and that it is important “that you have self-knowledge not only to stay safe now but in the future when you are above 18 and independent.”



WHAT ARE OUR CALLS TO ACTION?

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ASKS

We have had many insightful discussions with young people across Wales in the project about their experiences online and what changes they want to see in order to be better protected from the potential risks of the online world.

Based on our insights and their experiences and ideas for change, our Digital Guardians proposed **four** recommendations they think decision makers and other people with responsibility for online safety should implement.

1



Better education for young people about how to stay safe online

What does this look like?

This would take place in schools and colleges and include involving young people in the development and delivery of the education. Informing young people about the risks of being online, the potential risks of not employing safety measures and what to do when you need help.

2



Increase dialogue between adults and young people about online safety

What does this look like?

This would involve finding out what both young people's and adults' current opinions are on online safety as well as creating spaces for open conversations between adults (teachers, parents/carers, professionals) and young people about their time spent online and what being online means to them.

3



More awareness about the widespread nature of misinformation and deception

What does this look like?

This would involve social media platforms and other online spaces being required to put warning labels on content that might be misleading, for example if someone posts something which isn't verified, or isn't who they say they are, or uses AI. Creating information campaigns about how to recognise if sources/websites and people are reliable and can be trusted.

4



More awareness of the risks of using AI

What does this look like?

This would involve creating a culture where people talk about the effects AI has on learning and perceptions of the world. Creating information campaigns about the risks of AI and making sure that social media companies are expected to and held responsible for including warning labels on platforms and other online spaces about whether content may be AI-generated.

WHAT WAS OUR APPROACH?



This project was designed to bring together the voices of young people from across Wales, ensuring that a wide range of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds were represented.

From the outset, we were committed to creating meaningful participation by establishing a two-way form of communication with young people. This approach allowed young people to not only share their views but also enabled us to reflect what we were hearing back to them, ask follow-up questions, and explore issues in greater depth as the project progressed.

To allow for this type of engagement, we first created our advisory group of Digital Guardians. We recruited young people aged 11-18 from across Wales on a voluntary basis to become Digital Guardians. To do this, we created flyers that were posted online and sent out to schools and community groups, to inform as many organisations as possible about our project, and the opportunity. We had 19 young people sign-up to be Digital Guardians from areas across Wales.

Once we had established our Digital Guardians, we began contacting as many schools and community groups across Wales as possible to begin engagement and offered participation on a first-come first-served basis. We were mindful of ensuring that involvement was voluntary and youth-led. Clear messaging was shared with schools and groups to emphasise that young people did not have to take part if they did not wish to, and that participation should never be compulsory. This helped create a more open, honest, and engaged environment where young people felt comfortable contributing their views.

The project was delivered through three engagement sessions with each group. Having three sessions with each of the 14 schools/community groups allowed time to build relationships and trust with young people, establish an ongoing dialogue, and gradually deepen discussions. By working with the same groups across multiple sessions, we were able to move beyond surface-level views and develop a more nuanced understanding of young people's opinions of online safety.

DIGITAL GUARDIANS:

We had a group of 19 young people aged 11-18 from across Wales, named the **Digital Guardians**. These were **Amelia, Amy, Angelica, Anss, Brooke, Dylan, Emily, Faith, Faith, Fern, Gracie, Keira, Kiishi, Kiiti, Lily, Lucas, Ruby, Rufus** and **Tegan**.

The Digital Guardians were recruited on a voluntary basis. We created flyers that included information about the group and project, including what would be expected of young people, e.g., attending online and some in-person meetings to discuss online safety. These were emailed and mailed to schools and groups across Wales. Young people could read the flyers and if they were interested, sign up using a QR code that would take them to a Microsoft Form. We would then contact them and get them involved in the group from there.

The Digital Guardians had this to say about their experience on the project.

“ I love being part of the online safety project because the group is showing how to stay safe online from a child's point of view and makes everyone feel seen and heard. ”

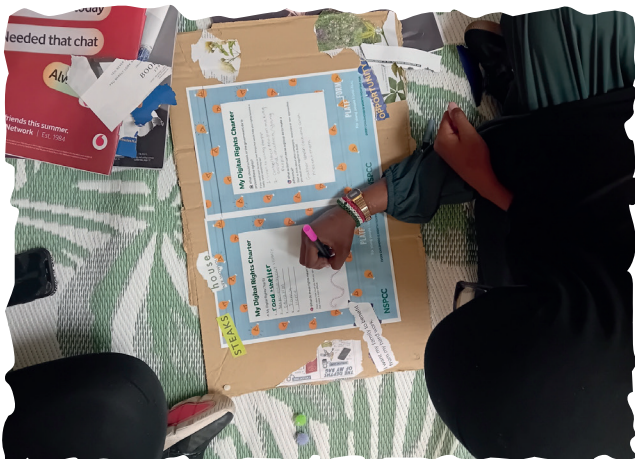
“ It's a once in a lifetime, ever-changing experience that I'm grateful to be a part of. ”

“ I enjoy working in the online safety group because I feel rather welcomed and accepted there as a queer young person. I feel safer expressing myself there than most places. ”

The Digital Guardians are a Wales-wide advisory group of young people aged 11-18 who have played a central role in shaping and steering the Online Safety Project. Acting as a consistent youth voice throughout the project, the Digital Guardians provided insight, challenge, and direction, ensuring that young people's experiences and priorities remained at the heart of decision making. The group was designed to foster leadership and teamwork, with members actively contributing to discussions, activities, and calls to action. This sense of ownership was further strengthened through the co-design of the Digital Guardians T-shirts, which helped to build a shared identity, pride, and visibility as a youth leadership group. The Digital Guardians were then able to represent the project and themselves at our events. Together, the Digital Guardians exemplify a collaborative, youth-led approach to online safety, empowering young people not only to share their views, but to help shape meaningful change.

WHAT WAS THEIR ROLE?

- Gave advice and ideas on what we should talk about with young people.
- Created artwork to express their views on the themes found from sessions with young people to be displayed at our final celebration event.
- Created informative resources educating young people and adults about online safety based on our insights. For example, the Digital Guardians created a poster, giving advice to other young people about staying safe online.
- Led on hosting events for young people and decision makers. Some of our Digital Guardians attended our Digital Safety Den event where they created and delivered speeches and sat on the judging panel.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Importantly, the Online Safety Project wanted to ensure that **all young people were able to participate, regardless of their background.** Young people from rural communities and lower socio-economic backgrounds often have fewer opportunities to influence decision making, access participation programmes, or engage directly with services and organisations. As a Wales-wide initiative, this project has been able to reach schools and community groups in a variety of areas, ensuring young people of all backgrounds have their voices heard. We spoke to **128** young people aged 11-18 across Wales in secondary schools, Welsh medium schools, colleges, along with a variety of Community groups, including LGBTQ+ specific groups.

By doing so, the project not only amplified youth voice, but worked to create a more inclusive understanding of online safety that reflects the diverse realities of young people across Wales.



ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

A range of interactive activities were used throughout the sessions to ensure they were accessible, engaging, and enjoyable for young people with different communication styles and preferences. Session one focused on creative activities, such as drawing and writing, to support reflection and discussion. One activity involved drawing a person, giving them a name, and exploring how being online positively and negatively impacts that individual. Working in groups, young people discussed their ideas and shared them with peers, encouraging conversation and reflection.

In session two, a different approach was taken by using the online platform Menti meter. Themes that emerged most strongly from session one were shared back with young people who were then invited to vote on which issues mattered most to them. The themes that received the most votes were explored in more depth through group discussion, allowing young people to expand on why these issues are important.

Session three used scenario-based activities to explore online safety in practical, real-world contexts.

Young people were given scenario cards featuring fictional young people and online safety situations based around each group's top themes from session two, such as sharing personal information online and being contacted by strangers. Working together, young people discussed each scenario and responded to guided questions.⁹

SESSION 1 Creative activities



SESSION 2 Exploring themes



SESSION 3 Working discussion



⁹ All questions asked in all three engagement sessions can be found in the appendices.



DIGITAL SAFETY DEN

The Digital Safety Den was a youth-led event that brought together young people from the schools we engaged with across Wales for a day of connection, collaboration and celebration of youth voice. The event was extremely well received, with both young people and educators spending the morning meeting others, building relationships and taking part in a range of interactive activities.

The afternoon focused on innovation and leadership, as young people pitched their school ideas for improving online safety within their communities to a panel of experts and professionals. This created a powerful opportunity for young people to be heard and valued by decision makers in attendance.

As the event welcomed schools and professionals from across Wales, accessibility was a key priority. The event was fully bilingual, celebrating and promoting the Welsh Language, and financial support was provided to schools to cover travel costs. This ensured that schools from all areas of Wales were able to attend and take part, regardless of their location or budget.

The Digital Safety Den offered young people a meaningful platform to share their ideas and create solutions to address challenges young people face with online safety. All whilst developing confidence, teamwork and presentation skills in a supportive and celebratory environment. All schools presented their idea to a judging panel of Digital Guardians and influential professionals with all groups being recognised for their contribution.

The winning school received funding and tailored support from Platform to **bring their project to life**, including support with developing the idea, delivery, and evaluating. In addition, the winning school was



invited to attend the Online Safety Project's final Celebration Event in the Senedd, ensuring young people's voices continue to influence decision makers beyond the Digital Safety Den.

Hosting the Digital Safety Den opened some exciting opportunities, including increased engagement with Welsh Government. This went beyond their attendance at the event and resulted in an opportunity for the Digital Guardians to be involved in the Welsh Government's Safer Internet Day event, where they led a Q&A session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

KEY LEARNINGS

Over the course of the project, we were extremely pleased with the high levels of engagement achieved during the 12-month delivery period. However, sustaining engagement over such a time frame presented challenges. Particularly in the later stages of the project, when two schools disengaged despite our effort to adapt delivery by offering multiple dates and alternative methods of delivery. These barriers to participation resulted in two schools ultimately withdrawing from the project due to increased pressures around maintaining young people's attendance in sessions and were therefore unable to complete the final engagement session. We have learned from this experience that flexibility is key when working with schools and young people, and that earlier conversations about capacity, competing priorities, and ongoing support may help to better sustain engagement over longer-term projects.

Alongside this, sustaining consistent attendance across all three sessions was an ongoing challenge, as some young people moved on, became less interested, or were unavailable over time. This is an issue that is commonly encountered in longer-term engagement work and was considered when reviewing the insights gathered. From this, we have learned the importance of building in regular re-engagement points, where we speak to the young people in each group to check what they are/aren't enjoying and what they want to do more/less of, along with maintaining flexibility in delivery to support continued participation over time.

While we were disappointed for those young people who were unable to complete the project, we are pleased with the proactive steps taken to re-engage young people where possible, including offering alternative session dates, adapting delivery methods, and maintaining open communication with schools to respond to capacity challenges. We fully respect the difficult decisions schools must make to prioritise young people's education.

ARRANGEMENTS

When young people come together in psychologically safe spaces, incredible things can happen. We prioritised creating environments where young people felt secure and confident to share their ideas without fear of judgement from their peers. Safeguarding and wellbeing were central throughout the project, ensuring young people were always supported and kept safe. This approach resulted in excellent levels of sustained engagement and meaningful participation throughout the project.

Throughout the project, our main priority has been to deliver high quality, meaningful engagement by providing young people with genuine opportunities to influence leaders and decision makers on how to create safer online spaces for children and young people.

Our engagement work has been built on the strong foundations of creating connection and collaboration, bringing together young people and partners who share a common purposeful commitment to online safety. The project has created opportunities for young people's personal development and growth, while actively championing their contributions, ideas and voices.

Accessibility has been at the heart of our project, ensuring that opportunities were open to young people from across Wales. This was achieved by removing barriers to participation by listening to young people's needs around meeting locations and providing financial support to enable attendance.

Trained staff were present at all engagement sessions to identify and respond to any safeguarding concerns. Where concerns arose, these were managed in line with Platform's organisational safeguarding procedures which were aligned with those of the NSPCC. Where appropriate, concerns were shared with the relevant school or community group to ensure young people received the appropriate support.



WHAT NOW?

Platform and the NSPCC came together for this Online Safety Project with one clear intention: to put children and young people at the heart of conversations about online safety not just as young people, but as leaders and changemakers.

This project has shown exactly why that mission matters. But this is only the beginning. We need leaders to listen to what children and young people are saying and take notice to change how they carry out their work to protect children and young people online. Children and young people are the future of our generations, and their voice deserves to be heard.

While this project comes to an end, our recommendations do not. We ask those in positions of influence to work together and take on the Digital Guardians' ideas and views and use them to drive meaningful change. Children and young people in Wales have spoken clearly about what they need to feel safer online. Now it is time for those voices to be heard, respected and acted upon. Together, we can build a future where children and young people can feel safe online.



Being a part of this project, I have felt welcomed and accepted to share my views and ideas on online safety. It's been a once in a lifetime, ever-changing experience that I'm grateful to be a part of.

Young people like us have a voice that deserves to be heard. We need to keep talking to each other, keep challenging the systems around us, and keep imagining better possibilities for how we all live and connect online.

Because when young people like us lead, change doesn't just happen, it accelerates.



Digital Guardian



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