SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations are in bold.

Responsibility

1. Children of all age groups inhabit a world that seamlessly flows between on and offline. In order to thrive in both they need the protections and privileges that they enjoy offline. Digital technologies are the present and the future of these 21st century children. They will define their opportunities as workers and as citizens. These opportunities need to be upheld and shaped by many different stakeholders. (Paragraph 192)

2. Any future policy should be based on principles which firmly place children’s rights, wellbeing and needs as the preeminent considerations at all points of the internet value chain where the end user is a child. This shared responsibility requires all stakeholders to play their part, and all parties to sustain their commitment to children’s wellbeing in what is a rapidly changing landscape that will include on the near horizon the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence. (Paragraph 353)

3. The Government has a key role in providing an appropriate framework for stakeholders to act in a concerted, joined-up way. It has a particular obligation to comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure that children’s wellbeing is protected, to promote children’s right to be heard in matters that affect them, and to act in the best interests of the child in all cases. (Paragraph 360)

The Government

4. We recommend that the Government should establish the post of Children’s Digital Champion at the centre of the Government within the Cabinet Office, with a remit to advocate on behalf of children to industry, regulators and at ministerial level across all Government departments. (Paragraph 364)

5. The remit of the Children’s Digital Champion should include:
   • establishing and overseeing the implementation of minimum standards of design and practice across the entire internet value chain,
   • working with the Department for Education to set the standard of digital literacy and PSHE in all UK schools,
   • commissioning research, and
   • ensuring existing rights and legislation are implemented in online settings. (Paragraph 365)

6. We welcome the Government’s promotion of an Internet Safety Strategy and the intention to hold round table meetings with industry leaders. We see this as the opportunity for the Prime Minister to take forward the recommendations of this report culminating in a summit which would establish minimum standards for child-friendly design, filtering, privacy, data collection, terms and conditions of use, and report and response mechanisms for all businesses in the internet value chain, public bodies and the voluntary sector. (Paragraph 366)
7. **The standards should be set out in a code of conduct, which should also seek to promote digital literacy. If industry fails to implement the recommendations, then the Government should take action. The UK must be an exemplar in raising standards.** (Paragraph 367)

8. We further recommend that the Government should commission a version of the code of conduct which is written by children for children and that it builds on ‘in depth’ contributions of young people from existing research. (Paragraph 368)

9. We note the NSPCC’s suggestion for creating a user generated age rating system. We recommend that the Children’s Digital Champion work with others to investigate the potential of such a scheme. (Paragraph 397)

10. **The Committee feels that the role of the UK Council for Children’s Internet Safety in research and convening stakeholders should continue but in order to enhance its effectiveness it should report to the Children’s Digital Champion who has the independence from industry and access at a ministerial level. Its remit and membership should be extended to support a broader delivery that includes children’s rights, digital literacy, industry codes, as well as safety.** (Paragraph 370)

11. **The Government should also involve further education providers as well as universities and encourage them to incorporate the standards and the code of practice in relevant courses.** (Paragraph 371)

12. **Parents and carers need clearly communicated information about the digital world. We recommend that the Government and industry should invest in regular public campaigns to promote information and tools that help parents and carers. In particular, a campaign with a short memorable message, similar to the Green Cross Code, should be developed. It should focus on creating confidence in online parenting.** (Paragraph 216)

13. We recommend that specific training modules be developed and made compulsory as part of qualifying in frontline public service roles, including but not limited to, police, social workers, general practitioners, accident and emergency practitioners, mental healthcare workers and teachers. (Paragraph 217)

14. **We call on the Government to give an undertaking that, irrespective of its membership of the EU, the UK should maintain legislation which incorporates the standards set by the General Data Protection Regulation in respect of children, including the right to be forgotten, as a minimum.** (Paragraph 245)

15. **We support the age verification provision of the Digital Economy Bill. We hope that the Government will provide greater clarity about the powers of the regulator, and will include social media companies within the definition of ‘ancillary service providers’.** (Paragraph 265)

**Minimum standards for industry**

16. **The Committee supports children’s right to have upsetting content that concerns themselves removed. All businesses operating online, particularly companies which provide social media and content-sharing platforms services such as Google and Facebook, should respond quickly to requests by children to take down content. Where**
innapropriate content that concerns a child is reported by third parties, similar processes should be followed. (Paragraph 240)

17. Minimum standards should be adopted that specify maximum timeframes for report and response. Companies should publish both targets and data concerning complaint resolution. (Paragraph 241)

18. All platforms and businesses operating online should proactively remove content which does not comply with their own published standards. (Paragraph 242)

19. We recommend that, as suggested by the Children’s Commissioner, her power to request information from public bodies should be expanded to include aggregated data from social media companies and online platforms. ( Paragraph 243)

20. We further recommend that there should be a mechanism for independently handling requests from children for social media companies to take down content. This might take the form of an Ombudsman, as suggested by the Children’s Commissioner, or a commitment from industry to build and fund an arbitration service for young people. (Paragraph 244)

21. We recommend that all ISPs and mobile network operators should be required not only to offer child-friendly content control filters, but also for those filters to be ‘on’ by default for all customers. Adult customers should be able to switch off such filters. (Paragraph 258)

22. Those responsible for providing filtering and blocking services need to be transparent about which sites they block and why, and be open to complaints from websites to review their decisions within an agreed timeframe. Filter systems should be designed to an agreed minimum standard. (Paragraph 259)

23. We welcome the development of internet services which are specifically designed for very young children but regret that there are no such services for children as they grow older. We have found that there is resistance to providing services which incorporate the support and respect for rights that would enable a better internet experience for all children as they explore the wider internet. (Paragraph 298)

24. We recommend that the Government should establish minimum standards of design in the best interests of the child for internet products. For the avoidance of doubt this is for all products that might reasonably be expected to attract a large proportion of children, not only those designed with children in mind. (Paragraph 299)

25. The minimum standards should require that the strictest privacy settings should be ‘on’ by default, geolocation should be switched off until activated, and privacy and geolocation settings must not change during either manual or automatic system upgrades. (Paragraph 300)

26. Minimum standards should incorporate the child’s best interests as a primary consideration, and in doing so require companies to forgo some of their current design norms to meet the needs of children. (Paragraph 301)

27. All platforms and businesses operating online must explain their data collection practices, and other terms and conditions, in a form and language that children are likely to understand. Their explanations should not try to obfuscate the nature of the agreement. (Paragraph 302)
28. All platforms and businesses operating online must not seek to commercially benefit or exploit value from the sharing or transfer of data gained from a child's activities online, including data transferred between services that are owned by the same parent company. They should uphold a principle of minimum data gathering necessary for the delivery of a service when the end user is a child. (Paragraph 303)

29. All platforms and businesses operating online which large numbers of children use should incorporate a ‘time out’ function into their design even if it is not in their best commercial interests. It is the view of the Committee that the wellbeing of the child is of paramount importance, and in our view there is sufficient evidence that time-outs or breaks contribute positively to the mental health and wellbeing of children. (Paragraph 304)

Digital Literacy

30. We agree with the Digital Skills Committee that no child should leave school without an adequate standard of digital literacy. It is the view of this Committee that digital literacy should be the fourth pillar of a child's education alongside reading, writing and mathematics, and be resourced and taught accordingly. (Paragraph 317)

31. We recommend that the Government should make PSHE a statutory subject, inspected by Ofsted. The Committee further recommends that PSHE be mandatory in all schools whatever their status. The PSHE curriculum must be designed to look broadly at the issues young people are concerned about online, including compulsive use, data gathering, body image—rather than the current e-safety agenda of risk. Children need support in developing their critical thinking and understanding the veracity of online information. This should form part of the curriculum. We also note Ofcom’s duty under the Communications Act 2003 to promote media literacy. (Paragraph 318)

32. It is the Government’s responsibility to reassess the resources needed to deliver computer science and PSHE in all UK schools and to ensure that teachers are adequately trained and resourced. But we note with interest that graduates currently entering teacher training are the first group of teachers who might be considered ‘digital natives’. We recommend that the Government harness and further upgrade the skills of this new generation in the course of teacher training so that UK schools are at the forefront of the digital revolution. (Paragraph 319)

33. We commend the work of the voluntary sector and industry in delivering information and resources about online safety and digital literacy for parents and children, but note that it is currently fragmented and insufficient to meet the needs of all children. Once a truly rounded computer science education and fully resourced Personal, Social Health and Economic education is established in schools, we believe that there will be a clearer role for the voluntary sector and industry. (Paragraph 320)

34. The Government should ensure that schools are sufficiently resourced and directed to meet their obligations of child protection, including the ability to train their teachers and to develop digital policies which are right for them and to discern what sort of filtering and monitoring systems are appropriate, together with pastoral care, education and supporting parents. (Paragraph 331)

35. We caution that internet safety systems should not undermine children’s rights to privacy, to learn about the world and to express themselves. The Government
should require schools to obtain the informed consent of parents and students, and they should have the opportunity to opt out. (Paragraph 332)

Research

36. *Children are often first to encounter problems online because they are digitally active, but often not consulted about the nature of those problems. We recommend that the Government should commission research based on in depth consultation with children. We note that because of the rapid nature of technological change public policy may on occasion have to anticipate the conclusion of long-term research. Such research should include:*

- *the relationship between age and vulnerability, taking account of the differences of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds;*
- *the impact of screen time on social and cognitive development;*
- *the effect of watching online pornography upon children’s attitudes and sexual development.* (Paragraph 338)

Toward a better internet for children

37. *We find that the current regime of self–regulation is underperforming and believe it will take a step change from the highest level of the Government to represent the needs of children online. (Paragraph 352)*

38. *It is the Committee’s view that this is issue is of such critical importance for our children that the Government, civil society and all those in the internet value chain must work together to improve the opportunities and support where the end user is a child. Ultimately it is for the Government to ensure that this happens. We look forward to its response to this report.* (Paragraph 372)