

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
BY DEPUTY L.M.C. DOUBLET OF ST. SAVIOUR
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON TUESDAY 28th MAY 2024
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 4th JUNE 2024**

Question

“Following my Question without Notice on 30th April 2024, will the Minister provide an update on his consideration of the body of evidence regarding the harms caused to children by smartphone use and social media; and will he advise which areas he has identified as being of most concern and what plans, if any, he has to protect children from these harms?”

Answer

As the Minister for children and families, I am aware from previous [local surveys](#) of children and young people that there are high levels of connectivity, with 6 in 10 children having a social media account in their own name and 1 in 4 Yr. 6 children using social networking sites every day.

I acknowledge the dilemma for government and parents that arises from such high levels of connectivity and the need to balance the known opportunities whilst reducing the harms represented by children's easy access to the digital world.

The forthcoming Children and Young People Survey (2024) has included a number of questions which reference to different aspects of young people's access to the digital world. In summary these include questions on:

- belongings which include a part on if they access to a smart phone or a smart TV or iPad.
- screen time divided into TV programmes (including streaming), playing games, and chatting / social media etc.
- e-safety, with hours slept, use of internet chat rooms / social networking and specific e-safety questions.

As the Minister for Children and Families I will be interested to review the responses to the survey which I hope will offer a timely insight into current trends in children's experiences; as well as offering me an insight as to where policy could be developed further to improve children's outcomes.

In the short term I would point to the following areas where I continue to lead or support government in its actions to reduce harm to children on this subject are;

1. As a member of the Council of Ministers I fully support the inclusion of the VAWG Final Report and recommendations which are now included in the Governments Common Strategic Policy (2024/6). The subsequent legislative changes will help tackle the perpetrators of on-line harms against women and girls.
2. As the Minister with political accountability for Children Adolescent Mental Health Services I am reminded of research that indicates excessive screen time is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes for children and young people. To mitigate risks, The British Psychological Society recommends that parents and carers use technology alongside children and engage them in discussions about sensible media use.

I am also advised by experts delivering our front-line services, that research and practice indicate Neurodivergent children / young people may prefer screens and communicating through devices.

Currently, Children Adolescent Mental Health Services provides online mental health support for children and young people which is particularly helpful outside of key service hours. I will continue to review the benefits and risks associated with screen use in this service context and continue to consider helpful educational supports for children and young people to navigate their use in healthy and appropriate ways.

3. In 2022 a report, '[Children and the Digital World](#)' was produced at the request of the then Chief Minister, John Le Fondre. The report considered how Covid-19 had impacted on use of the internet and devices by young people. Among other things, the report acknowledged the need to develop the digital confidence and competence of parents and carers, to keep their children safe, and for education policy to develop clear age-appropriate guidance for setting digital boundaries. I am fully supportive of the current work being progressed by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning who now has oversight of the subsequent Digital Education and Skills Strategy which incorporated many of the findings of this report within its key recommendations for digital development in Jersey Schools.

I am advised that a key part to this strategy includes digital safety and awareness. I am advised by Officers that Skills Jersey currently partner with the Smallpeice Trust organisation every year to deliver a Cyber Investigation experience for all Year 9 students, and our Education Department share excellent resources, with all school leads, from the UK Safer Internet Centre each year to promote National Safer Internet Day.