

Global experts look at age verification for pornography sites

1.4 million reasons to act

The number of children who see pornography in the UK each month

John Carr, OBE, Secretary to the UK's Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety in association with The Reward Foundation, have published the [final report](#) of the international Age Verification Virtual Conference which took place in June 2020. The event included child welfare advocates, lawyers, academics, government officials, neuroscientists and technology companies drawn from twenty-nine countries. The conference reviewed:

- The latest evidence from the field of neuroscience showing the effects of substantial exposure to pornography on the adolescent brain
- Accounts from over twenty countries about how public policy is developing in respect of online age verification for pornography web sites
- Different technologies now available to carry out age verification in real time
- Educational strategies for protecting children to complement the technical solutions

Children have a right to protection from harm and states have a legal obligation to provide it. More than that, children have a legal right to good advice and to comprehensive, age appropriate education on sex and the part it can play in healthy, happy relationships. This is best provided in the context of a public health and education framework. Children do not have a legal right to porn.

Age verification technology has advanced to the point where scalable, affordable systems exist which can restrict access by under 18s to online porn sites. It does this while at the same time respecting the privacy rights of both adults and children.

Age verification is not a silver bullet, but it is certainly a bullet. And it's a bullet aimed directly at denying the online pornography peddlers of this world any role in determining the sexual socialization or sexual education of the young.

Government under pressure following a decision of the High Court

The only matter of regret in the UK at the moment is we still have no idea exactly when the age verification measures agreed by Parliament in 2017 will take effect although last week's [decision](#) in the High Court might be moving us forward.

Says John Carr, OBE, *"In the UK, I have called on the Information Commissioner to initiate an investigation with a view to securing the earliest possible introduction of age verification technologies, to safeguard the mental health and well-being of our children. Across the globe, colleagues, scientists, policy makers, charities, lawyers and people who care about child protection are doing likewise as this conference report amply demonstrates. The time to act is now."*

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