Review of the year 2022: Digital Futures Commission's milestones towards a child rights-respecting digital world

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The year 2022 has been an eventful year for the DFC! As the year is coming to an end, we reflect on our outputs and look forward to further translating our findings into policy and design recommendations and actions to realise children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

Play in a digital world

We began 2022 with a mission to socialise our Playful by Design (PbD) principles among designers and developers of digital products and services that children use for playful purposes. We spent the first half of the year co-designing and playtesting a design tool with 30 designers of educational games, safety tech, children's content and social media for children.

Talking to designers resulted in our Playful by Design (PbD) tool – a set of design cards that can be used flexibly across different design activities throughout product development. We are excited to see this getting used! The Playful by Design Tool is available in physical form (a pack of cards) using our online request form, as well as online. If you try our PbD tool (and please do!), we'd love to hear your feedback here.

We've talked about our Playful by Design principles at the Games for Change conference (University of São Paulo), the Forum of the ICT Coalition for Children Online, the International Communication Association conference, an event by Designing for Children's rights, and at the Children's Media Conference panel on "Understanding Kids in the Metaverse" "watch here and read our blogs on play here).

Beneficial uses of education data

In parallel, we stepped up our research into the practical reality of EdTech use in schools and the problems with data governance in UK schools. The revelation of the education data reality as a result of EdTech deployment in schools revealed the David and Goliath problem in which schools are left to navigate the abundance of EdTech choices and complex data protection obligations with insufficient support or guidance from public authorities.

The problems with data governance in UK schools derived from our socio-legal and technical investigation of two case studies – Google Classroom and ClassDojo. The case studies expose the complex and layered privacy policies and legal terms that render it virtually impossible for schools, let alone children, to work out – let alone manage – what data are processed when children use popular EdTech for learning. The data practices revealed by the two case studies are likely in breach of the GDPR and the UK Age Appropriate Design Code!

We concluded our education data workstream for 2022 on a reflective note by publishing our 21-chapter-open-access essay collection: *Education Data Futures: Critical, regulatory and practical reflections*. Thanks to our many wonderful authors from diverse fields – each essay offers something distinct and important. Do watch the launch event if you missed it last month.

Our work is being heard, we're glad to say. We contributed a child rights approach to the policy debates on *Improving Cybersecurity in Education Settings in England* and *Next Steps for EdTech in England* at the Westminster Education Forum. We discussed education data protection at the WSIS Forum 2022, and at the Dialogues in Data Power

conference. You can watch our account of the governance challenges at a conference in Edinburgh in May. Most recently, we spoke about education data at the 44th Global Privacy Alliance, at a Connected by Data event on 'Ensuring people have a say in future data governance' 'held at the House of Lords, at the Broadband Commission's working group on Data for Learning, and we addressed an audience including 34 European ministries of education at EMINENT 2022.

Drawing on these practical design, policy and business inspirations, we are now drafting a blueprint for regulation (for the spring) that can incentivise a new data eco-system that respects children's rights and offers children, their parents, and schools more meaningful control over education data. See our blog posts here and do let us know of your ideas or developments we should be aware of.

Guidance for innovators

Built on the use cases of digital play and education data, we have crunched the 54 Articles of the UNCRC into 11 compelling principles for Child Rights by Design. Recognising the design challenges that arise, we grounded the guidance for each principle in General Comment 25.

Our interviews with designers and developers revealed a mix of barriers to integrating children's rights (and Child Rights Impact Assessment) into the agile and iterative (but often messy) design processes. So, our last step is to devise prompt questions for designers and to signpost activities and resources to support practical ways to embed children's rights in product design. For this, we'll build on our consultation with children held during the summer – they had plenty to tell us!

We presented our Child Rights by Design work at the Association of Internet Researchers' annual conference (AoIR2022) in Dublin and at the Internet Governance Forum 2022. And we will launch our Child Rights by Design toolkit in spring 2023. We'd love to hear from you if you have suggested resources for us to include. In the meantime, see our thoughts on child rights in digital spaces here.

As you can see, we have been busy tackling the policy and design problems that beset children's digital futures. We are now plotting our big finale in April 2023, when we will share our recipes of what good looks like for digital products and services. More from us next year!

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