

Building an internet we can trust

By Al Mik

On Tuesday, 9 February 2021, we celebrate Safer Internet Day along with many stakeholders worldwide, taking action to make the internet a safer and better place for all.

The theme this year is “an internet we can trust”, and we took the opportunity to speak with people closely involved in the Digital Future Commission (DFC).

What changes can help bring about an internet we can trust?

“To make a better working internet, innovation must serve the needs of those who are most vulnerable in society”, says Dr Ansgar Koene, one of the DFC’s Commissioners. This certainly fits the ambitions of the Digital Futures Commission.

Sudeshna Mukherjee, a DFC researcher, has been working on the potential for child rights impact assessment in the digital world:

Especially with the rise in artificial intelligence (AI), it would be great if more companies would introduce child rights impact assessments (CRIA) to inform the development and evaluation of their digital products and services. These assessments should include children’s voices at every stage because what companies do impacts upon children’s lives.

Dr Kruakae Pothong has been leading the DFC’s current consultation on play. She’s been hearing heard directly from children that there are lots of things they want to see:

Children are telling us in our consultation on digital play, that they want more moderation of hate speech, less commercial pressure and fewer loot boxes.

The potential and barriers of the digital environment for children’s free play is something Dr Angela Colvert is currently writing about for the DFC’s play work stream:

We need to understand the range of children’s experiences. Some really exciting projects recently examine intergenerational working groups, which bring together industry, children, academics, to talk about their anxieties and experiences online, and the things they’d like to change. If we’re to build an internet that we trust, we need to work together, and we need intergenerational working groups, so we can build a shared understanding of what we need to change.



Image credit: C. Robillard

Building an internet we trust matters not only for children's play but also for their education. Emma Day, a human rights lawyer working with the DFC, wants to see more focus on schools, for they have a key role, given their responsibility for so much of children's personal data:

Government needs to go back to the drawing board and create a new regulatory framework for education data, centred in children's rights, to make data work for education, rather than data governance being driven exclusively by commercial interests.

Indeed, the purpose of the Digital Futures Commission is to put children's best interests at the centre of the design of the digital world. Michael Preston, from the Joan Ganz Cooney Centre, Sesame Workshop, and a DFC Commissioner explains:

"Children are exploring and building their own identities as they grow up using digital tools that are created for adults. We must be more intentional about including young people in the design process so we can empower their learning and wellbeing while protecting their rights."

Realising the potential for a better internet will take concerted effort, as argued Anna Rafferty, a DFC Commissioner from the LEGO Group:

"We believe that digital play has the potential to significantly support children's development and growth. Yet, in order to realise this we all need to play our part in building a digital future that is designed with children's rights and wellbeing at its core."

The good news is that the Digital Futures Commission is working to make this a reality. Until the end of February, the research team is consulting children and young people, parents and carers, and professionals working with children to learn how they reimagine play in the digital world. To take part, please [click here](#).

Al Mik is Communications Manager at 5Rights. Al has a long history of working on human rights issues, and prior to 5Rights, Al worked in Brussels as Campaigns and Networks Director for an international criminal justice NGO. Al has a Law degree and a Masters in International Relations from the University of Nottingham.



Originally posted on <https://digitalfuturescommission.org.uk/> on February 9, 2021 .