

# HERTFORDSHIRE GOVERNANCE NEWSLETTER.

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## WELCOME

Dear Governors

As we head towards the Easter break, we'd like to extend our warm thanks to all Hertfordshire governors for your continued commitment during a busy and fast moving term. The HFL Governance team has been delighted to support you through a range of professional development opportunities, including our recent climate awareness briefing and the dedicated sessions for chairs of governors and governance professionals. It's great to see your engagement in these events strengthening governance practice across the county, and inspiring thoughtful discussions and collaboration.

In this issue, we shine a spotlight on inducting new governors — a vital area of practice for boards to build strong, skilled teams. This article will give you practical ideas to help new colleagues feel confident and well supported from their very first meeting.

We also offer an initial look at the government's recently published Education White Paper, "Every child achieving and thriving" and what it could mean for governance in the months ahead. While policy developments are still unfolding, we hope this early overview provides useful context as you start to consider future implications for your schools and settings.

We wish you a restful and refreshing Easter break and look forward to working with you throughout the summer term.

If your school would like to share something that you are proud of please contact [governance@hfleducation.org](mailto:governance@hfleducation.org)

# HFL UPDATES

## DISTRIBUTION OF HFL SURPLUS

Please see below a message from Carole Bennett, the CEO of HFL Education which was sent to headteachers and chairs of HFL Shareholder schools in February 2026.

HFL was established back in 2013 as a Hertfordshire based, schools-owned company, with a simple purpose: to provide a sustainable delivery structure for high quality services and support to help you deliver a great education for your pupils.

Since we were founded, we have aimed to deliver high quality, competitively priced services and support, but also used our not-for-profit ethos to ensure that any surplus generated is reinvested back into the Hertfordshire schools that own us. **Since 2013, we have been able to return over £1.3 million to the local education eco-system in Hertfordshire**, by providing funded training programmes, discounting services, distributing book vouchers and offering recruitment support.

In recent years, we've worked hard to rebalance and refine our services in response to what you've told us you want from us, particularly in the light of your evolving pressures and needs. We have worked to create efficiencies delivered by new technologies, such as our course booking system and relocated to a more cost-effective office space. Equally, this year, products which were created for local need, such as Essential Writing, Reading Fluency and MIS support, have been purchased by schools and trusts far beyond Hertfordshire.

We are therefore pleased that this year we are able to redistribute funding to our Hertfordshire shareholders.

**In March, each HFL shareholding school will receive a £400 credit on their March HFL invoice.** We hope this credit will give you flexibility to direct £400 to an area where it will have the greatest impact in your own context.

This continues to be a challenging trading environment for us as a company, but with the ongoing support of schools and trusts — and the honest feedback that helps us shape the right services at the right time — we are delighted to be able to return additional value to our shareholders.

Your backing, engagement and support throughout 2025/26 has been hugely appreciated, and it's thanks to that support that we can continue to strengthen our reach, efficiency, and impact together.

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## GOVERNOR TRAINING

### Climate Action Planning – Turning climate ambition into climate action in education

The DfE 'Sustainability and climate change strategy' supports all education settings with planning now and for the future to reduce the environmental footprint in their drive to achieve net zero. In our briefing in January which was attended by more than 100 governors, we invited 3 DfE Climate Ambassadors to share the DfE's vision, some 'real life' experiences and the impact. We also heard from a representative of the 'National Education Nature Park and Climate Action Awards', all of which will help us to understand how a Climate Action Plan can support the work.

Linked to this topic, please have a look at our Blog entitled: **Monitoring climate anxiety: a governor's role** [Blog | HFL Education](#)

# HFL GOVERNOR AND TRUSTEE CONFERENCE - TUESDAY 28TH APRIL 2026

The HFL governance team are pleased that so many of you have booked onto the 2026 online Governor and Trustee Conference on Tuesday 28th April 2026, 6-8pm.



The theme for this year's conference is: **Governing for tomorrow - exploring innovation, ethics and equity in an age of educational change & opportunity.**

In this two hour event we will have two wide-ranging, thought-provoking discussions with plenty of opportunity to ask questions of the presenters, they include:

- **Rakesh Patel (Ofsted Senior HMI)** - Education inspection framework, an introduction to the renewed approach, with a focus on leadership and governance.
- **HFL's Chris Carter & Fiona Tobin** - Keeping Learning Human: Agency Matters.

Join us for what we hope will be a truly informative and inspiring two hours!

Free to attend for all Herts, Bucks and out of county governors & trustees subscribing to any of the HFL governance services, and £10 to attend for all other governors & trustees.

For full details and to book please visit [this link](#) or email [gov.courses@hfleducation.org](mailto:gov.courses@hfleducation.org)

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## MODERN GOVERNOR

**Why governor training matters:** Governors and clerks hold strategic responsibilities that directly influence school outcomes, staff wellbeing, and children's futures.

Training ensures that everyone involved is confident, capable, and aligned in fulfilling those responsibilities with skills to influence educational outcomes and lead effectively in schools.



- **Core Governance Functions;** Governors learn to set strategic direction, hold leaders accountable, and oversee financial management. Training ensures governors feel better equipped to ask the right questions and make informed decisions.
- **Quality Board Collaboration;** Training fosters consistency and teamwork, improving decision-making across the governing board. A well trained board is more strategic, more effective, and more consistent whilst still providing challenge and support to school leaders.
- **Ensures compliance and builds understanding of statutory processes,** reduces legal and procedural risk and helps protect the school community through informed decision making.
- **Strengthens Governance for all;** Training equips governors to support diverse communities, promotes fairness & transparency which are essential when decisions affect pupils, staff, and families. It also enhances safeguarding awareness and responsibilities, improves accountability and strategic oversight and builds trust and confidence in governance processes.

The benefits of Modern Governor training include:

- Flexible Accessible Learning; The platform offers 24/7 online training tailored for governors, fitting learning around personal commitments and volunteer schedules.
- Comprehensive Course Catalogue; Modular courses cover essential governance topics including safeguarding, curriculum, SEND, financial monitoring, and roles. As well as pathway routes, which bring together specific modules within an easy to follow pathway to support governors develop within their role, understand their responsibilities and improve their knowledge. Governors can select the pathway that is right for them, based on their existing experience and complete at their own pace.
- Up-to-date Relevant Content; Content is regularly updated to reflect latest statutory guidance, Ofsted standards, and national policies for accuracy.
- Data-Driven Engagement Tracking; The platform enables individuals to track engagement and strategically plan training based on governor needs. This is called a DAR, designated administrator role, providing one users an overview of the training undertaken by the board.

**Linking Training to conflict resolution Challenges:** These modules reduce risk, increase confidence, and ensure governors enter these processes prepared rather than apprehensive

**Investigations: Best Practice;** Helps governors understand roles, boundaries, documentation and procedural fairness.

**Disciplinary Hearings;** Covers employer responsibilities, the legal framework, panel conduct and defensible decision making.

**Exclusions Refresher;** Ensures governors stay current with statutory requirements, decision-making expectations, equality considerations and the handing of challenging hearings.

### Are you aware of Modern Governor and how to access modules?

- Ensure all of your governors/trustees are aware of the training and know how to access modules for themselves.
- Is training a standing item on governor meeting agenda's to support engagement? We find regular reminders support engagement.
- Highlight specific modules that all governors can undertake to support pre reading for an agenda items on the next governor meeting.
- A catalogue of modules can be found within the Getting Started section of the subscription.
- Our DAR, designated administration features enables one user of the board to have an overview of who is set up, when they last accessed and training completed.

If you have any queries, we have two ways you can contact us:

- Technical helpdesk available 24/7 - **0345 0744 114**
- Email support: [support@moderngovernor.com](mailto:support@moderngovernor.com)

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## HFL COMPLAINTS SERVICE

The following communication was sent out to maintained school headteachers in January 2026.

*As you know, HCC and HFL recently visited local consortia to discuss the support for maintained schools that HCC procures from HFL.*

*We are pleased to confirm that the November Schools' Forum meeting elected to continue with the core contract support mechanism, following a positive consultative vote.*

As part of the conversations with schools, we heard strongly about the new and building pressures on schools as a result of increased complaints. Working together, HCC and HFL have been able to redistribute resource, and as a result from the 1st April 2026 **we will be providing every maintained school with the HFL Complaints Toolkit within the core contract (i.e. at no cost)**. We hope that this will enable schools to respond quickly and effectively to complaints and reduce pressure on school leaders.

The provision of the Toolkit is intended to help schools mitigate the wider impact of complaints, so please ensure it is shared with governors to help them understand the different complaint stages/ their role if a complaint is received, and with staff to upskill them in understanding how they can support with resolving concerns at an early stage, and hopefully avoid escalations. The toolkit also provides information about who to contact if advice/guidance on the process is needed.

We will contact all maintained schools soon with more details of how to access the Toolkit. **Maintained schools that have already subscribed to the Toolkit will be refunded by HFL for any subscription paid which covers the period beyond 1st April 2026.**

More information about the HFL toolkit is here: [Complaints toolkit | HFL Education](#)

Kind regards,

**Tony Fitzpatrick**

Director of Education, HCC

**Carole Bennett**

CEO, HFL

**Please take the time to look at the Complaint Toolkit and share the procedure with your governing board to ensure compliance in the event of a formal complaint.**



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## PARENT GUIDE TO SCHOOL COMPLAINTS

Parentkind and the DfE have come together to produce a parent guide to school complaints. You can view the guide [here](#).

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## HFL GOVERNANCE SOCIAL MEDIA



The Governance team is now active on LinkedIn; this will be the focus of our social media activity going forward.

Please search for and follow the **HFL Governance** account for updates on training, events, briefings and other team news.

Also search for and follow **Modern Governor** on LinkedIn.



## BLOGS

Monitoring climate anxiety: a governor's role - as school governors we are tasked not only with holding leaders to account today, but also with stewarding our schools in the interests of pupils' long term wellbeing and life chances. One emerging issue that governors should be aware of is climate anxiety.

[Blog | HFL Education](#)

## GOVERNORHUB KNOWLEDGE

In this issue we are going to put a spotlight on GovernorHub's new feature the AI Assistant. The feature was launched in June 2025 and has proved very popular with boards.

The AI Assistant is a generative AI tool that has been designed to use the same level of technology as many open generative tools such as Chat GPT or CoPilot, but to only look within GovernorHub for its information. This means that it is capable of making sense of what you are asking, and can provide reasonable responses, but it will use the safe environment of tried and tested GovernorHub articles to find your answers. It will always show you which articles it is taking information from so that you can sense check, and it can be a real time saver when you need an answer quickly. Importantly, any information that you enter into the system will not be used to "train" the assistant – this is done elsewhere.

When you ask a question, the AI Assistant will look at all of the GovernorHub Knowledge articles and the GovernorHub Help articles in order to respond instantly when other sources of information might not be available.



In addition to this, the Assistant has recently been updated to include a new feature. When you click on the blue AI Assistant button on your screen, you will now see a button in the search bar called “+ Choose file”. This will give you the chance to choose a file which you can then ask the AI Assistant to interrogate or look at in your prompt.

This is not a new thing for AI tools; many of them offer this function. However, GovernorHub is different in that it restricts the files that you can choose to the ones that are stored in GovernorHub on the boards that you have access to. The aim of this is to keep the use of the function relevant, and in the same vein, the number of documents that can be chosen is limited to five at any one time.

If you have any feedback regarding the new functionality of the AI Assistant, please do contact GovernorHub direct on their blue “Help” button in the bottom right hand corner of the page.



## TERM TIMES ISSUE 7 IS OUT NOW

This issue includes Governing AI in Schools: Key Principles for Governing Boards - With the exponential growth in opportunity and risk posed by artificial intelligence (AI) we will look at how boards and school leaders can manage the governance of AI in their settings and some of the underlying principles.

**Sign up to the next edition in your inbox.**



## HERTFORDSHIRE UPDATES

### SFVS GUIDANCE

The SFVS return is a mandatory annual requirement from the Department for Education (DfE) for **LA maintained schools**. The deadline for the submission of this to the Local Authority is Tuesday 31st March 2026.



To ensure that you comply with the DfE requirements please ensure that you submit your completed SFVS return to SIAS ([sias@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sias@hertfordshire.gov.uk)) in word format, by the above date. We will continue to post any further updates on the Grid and via Bulletins should any further changes be announced.

#### SFVS requirements

The SFVS process is outlined across the three pages below:

- [SFVS returns process](#)
- [SFVS timetable](#)
- [Extra information](#)

Please contact [sias@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sias@hertfordshire.gov.uk) if you have any questions regarding the SFVS return.



## SEND UPDATE

The Monthly SEN update from Hero Slinn, Director of Inclusion & Skills at Hertfordshire County Council for February 2026 is now available to read.

To read the full update on GovernorHub [click here](#)

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## FREE EVENT - CLIMATE ACTION SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Tring Natural History Museum –  
Monday 20th April 2026, 9.45-15.00

For Governors, Headteachers and Staff

All education settings are expected to have a Climate Action Plan and a sustainability lead in place. **This free Continuing Professional Development event will help you take the next step, using a hugely successful format.**

Do any of these ring a bell?

- “It’s not a priority for our school/nursery”
- “It’s not statutory”
- “We don’t have the time or resources”
- “We are too constrained by getting through the curriculum”

Join the Climate Ambassadors Scheme, National Education Nature Park, Let’s Go Zero and Natural History Museum, Tring.

The event will provide case studies and opportunities for collaborative sharing, to support your school in taking the next steps with its Climate Action Plan. Timings are as outlined below:

- **9:45 – 10:15:** Arrivals and registration
- **10:15 – 12:45:** Climate Action Support
- **13:30 - 15:00:** Optional afternoon case studies and collaborative action

**To book your place, please email Amy Padfield [tring-bookings@nhm.ac.uk](mailto:tring-bookings@nhm.ac.uk)**

Tickets are limited and booking is required.

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### SPOTLIGHT ON..... NEW GOVERNOR INDUCTIONS

A strong induction programme is not only essential for helping new governors and trustees settle into the role, but it also plays a vital role in:

- full/local governing board retention
- ensuring new governors/trustees feel welcomed and not too overwhelmed in the early days
- keeping new governors/trustees informed and supported to help them grow in confidence
- providing a foundation enabling them to develop

By giving new governors/trustees the right blend of support, clarity and connection from the outset, boards can build long term capacity and strengthen the overall effectiveness of governance.

HFL Education highly recommends that all new governors/trustees attend governor induction and safeguarding training courses within six months of being appointed/elected, however our courses, while useful and informative, should not represent the full induction process for your new governors/trustees. A thorough in-house induction process will impart bespoke knowledge about the school's context, policies/procedures and clearly lay out expectations and requirements.

#### **Safeguarding checks and references**

Some settings will start this process prior to a governor/trustee being appointed but their enhanced DBS check must be in place before they visit the school during the school day. However, inviting them to attend as an observer at an FGB meeting can be useful (just ensure any agenda items that should only be shared with governors/trustees in post are not on the agenda, or can be worked around). References should also be obtained. The DBS no. and confirmation of references received must be recorded on the school's single central record.

New governors/trustees may not be familiar with these checks, so we recommend that a member of the board explains the process and what documentation is required to prevent delays and any misunderstandings. Alternatively if you have a 'new governor/trustee' induction letter ensure a paragraph is added to reflect this requirement.

#### **Declarations and confirmations**

Ensure that new governors/trustees receive guidance to complete all their declarations/confirmations once they have been formally appointed/elected. Again, if you have a new governor/trustee induction letter, add the details in the letter to save time. They will need to declare or confirm the following:

- Any pecuniary/business interests
- They have read and understood Keeping Children Safe in Education (subject to status this will differ – e.g. governors in LA maintained schools read part 2; governors/trustees in Academy settings read the whole document)
- They have read and understood the school's Child Protection policy and are clear about the procedures to follow in the event of any safeguarding concern – e.g. name(s) of the Designated Senior Lead and Deputy DSL
- They have read and agree to the Governor/Trust Code of Conduct
- They agree to any other requirements that are bespoke to your board e.g. IT usage or GDPR policy

New governors/trustees will also need to agree to having their information added to the school website. The statutory information that must be published on the school website relating to governance can be found here:

## Maintained Schools

### Academies

**NB.** If your board uses an online system such as GovernorHub to record these declarations/confirmations they will need an introduction to this platform and guidance on how to complete.

### School email address

Governors are not statutorily obliged to use a school email address, but you may have policies in place that make it a requirement at your setting. If this is the case, new starters will need to be set up and given support to access their new email accounts.

### Information sharing platforms

Most settings are now using some sort of online document sharing platform that supports:

- storing meeting papers for governor/trustee access
- sharing meeting dates
- communication (e.g. via a noticeboard)

This could be a specifically designed platform like GovernorHub but may be an in-house platform/system. Governors/trustees will need to be shown how to access and navigate this system before they attend their first meeting.

### Training

Any new members of your board will need to be advised of any training requirements and expectations that you may have. This will not only mean showing them how to access any platforms that they might need to complete training, but also explaining the reasons for governor training, and outlining the board's plans for their development and growth as a governor/trustee.

Remember to make sure that new starters know where to record any training they have completed (in some cases training records are automatically updated) and are aware of any group training sessions/governor days that the board has arranged well in advance.

### Key documents

The sheer volume of sector specific documentation that governor/trustees need to look can be daunting for new starters, so ensure that you have a process in place to help "educational" novices navigate their first few meetings without too much overload. Consider supplying a glossary of acronyms, and maybe grouping together the school's key documents for them to look at in one "induction folder". Examples of documents could be:

- Governors annual plan
- School Development plan
- Self-evaluation form
- Minutes from recent meetings
- Instrument of government (maintained schools)
- Articles of Association (academies and MATs)
- Terms of reference for committees or local governing boards
- School complaints policy
- Governor visits policy
- Latest Ofsted report

**NB.** A school's website contains a vast amount of information, so direct governors to take a look. It will also provide them with a sense of the whole school community.

## Support

At the very least, please try to make sure that new governors/trustees know who they can contact to ask any questions that they might have in the first few weeks. You might consider allocating a mentor or a "buddy" to support new starters with meeting protocols, school visits etc.

In addition to this, you will need to signpost other areas of support available to your board. Do you have subscriptions to advice services like GovernorHub Knowledge or the NGA that new governors/trustees could use to get further information about their role? Are you a church school and can access Diocese support? Is your school in an Academy Trust where there is a central team to support trustees and local governing board members?

Being a new governor/trustee can be very overwhelming in the first few months. A welcoming introduction can make all the difference to a good start and a continued support network and collaborative approach will be reassuring and see confidence grow, which over time will lead to new governors/trustees feeling valued and part of a team.

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## DfE WHITE PAPER

The recently published Schools White Paper, *Every child achieving and thriving* sets out an ambitious vision for the future of our education system. We have put together a few key points you need to be aware of.

### System and Accountability Reforms

The Schools White Paper outlines system wide reforms, focusing on structural changes to enhance collaboration, accountability and school improvement across England.

A central ambition is for all state schools to join or form high quality multi academy trusts (MATs), a shift intended to strengthen collective responsibility and improve educational outcomes for all pupils.

Although the White Paper outlines this vision clearly, it notably avoids setting a mandated deadline, emphasising instead a voluntary and collaborative approach. Local authorities and area based partnerships will now also be able to establish their own trusts, reversing earlier restrictions and expanding opportunities for more regionally responsive models of school improvement.

A second major reform concerns new trust standards aimed at strengthening accountability. These revised standards place significant emphasis on inclusion, transparency, value for money, and the expectation that trusts actively contribute to community based collaboration.

Notably, the government stresses the importance of transparent executive pay that is evidence based and reflective of responsibility, responding to previous concerns about rising salaries in large MATs.

Additionally, the White Paper underscores the belief that strategic pooling of resources can unlock innovation and maximise benefits for pupils, provided such processes are clearly explained and openly reported.

These reforms reflect a consistent message: structural coherence, transparent governance, and trust led improvement are essential pillars of the government's strategy for raising standards nationally.

## Teacher Workforce and Support Measures

The document also includes major workforce related commitments designed to boost recruitment, retention and professional development within the teaching profession.

A significant announcement is the plan to recruit 6,500 new secondary and specialist teachers by the end of the current Parliament. This initiative aims to optimise entry routes into the profession and raise awareness of flexible working opportunities, workload management strategies, and best practice in teacher wellbeing. Importantly, the plan will be monitored annually using full time equivalent staffing data from 2023–24, ensuring progress is measured transparently.

Retention policies form a critical pillar of the White Paper. The Department for Education will pilot retention bonuses of up to £15,000 for newly appointed headteachers working in areas with the greatest need, while early career teachers in disadvantaged communities—particularly in shortage subjects such as maths and physics—will also benefit from targeted incentives.

Alongside these measures, maternity pay for teachers will be doubled from four to eight weeks from 2027–28, representing a substantial enhancement of employment protections. To further support staff development, the government will introduce a new teacher training entitlement and invest in mentoring, coaching and wellbeing support for school leaders.

These measures collectively aim to support career long development, enhance leadership capacity, and strengthen teacher retention within the profession.

## Pupil Outcomes, Inclusion and Funding Reforms

The White Paper also makes commitments to improving pupil outcomes, strengthening inclusion and modernising funding mechanisms to better reflect levels of need. A headline ambition is the government's pledge to halve the disadvantage gap by the time children born under the current administration complete secondary school. This target equates to ensuring all children achieve at least a grade 5 or above at GCSE, with pupils from low income families improving by a full grade relative to current performance. Additionally, all schools will be required to monitor pupils' sense of belonging by 2029, an expansion from the approximate 60 per cent that already do so.

In terms of funding, the White Paper proposes a more sophisticated model for allocating disadvantage funding through the National Funding Formula and Pupil Premium. Rather than relying on a binary free school meal indicator, the new approach could consider the depth and duration of family poverty, as well as geographical inequalities. This stepped model aims to ensure that schools serving the poorest children receive greater investment.

The government is also exploring a new progress measure to better account for pupils who begin secondary school significantly behind age related expectations, updating the existing Progress 8 system.

Collectively, these reforms seek to create a more inclusive, equitable and responsive education system, with stronger safeguards for vulnerable learners and clearer metrics for recognising genuine progress.

## School based complaints

Working in partnership with Improving Education Together (IET), the DfE will create a new digital, accessible solution for handling complaints. Mutual expectations and clear, consistent timeframes for complaints handling will be set.

The independence of complaints panels will be strengthened including consulting on an independent member for maintained school panels

Clearer national guidance will be published, including a parent's Guide to School Complaints, clarifying escalation routes.

## SEND reform

The consultation description:

'We are consulting on proposals to reform the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system. The consultation document explains the changes we plan to make and asks for comments from everyone with an interest. The changes aim to improve help and support for children and young people with SEND across the 0 to 25 years system'.

Closing date for the consultation is Monday 18th May, 2026

### SEND reform: putting children and young people first - GOV.UK

The White paper will be covered in more detail at the Governance Leadership briefing on Tuesday 23rd June 2026 6-8pm. Don't forget if you subscribe to the Governance Leadership Service, this allows up to 4 delegates from your board to attend the termly briefings.

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## KCSIE 2026 CONSULTATION

Following the landmark Cass review, 2024 DfE consultation on Gender Questioning Children and the 2025 Supreme Court ruling the DfE have issued a draft version of KCSIE for 2026 which is currently open for consultation:-

- Consultation closes on Wednesday 22nd April 2026 - have your say [here](#)
- Draft KCSIE for September 2026, referred to above, can be read [here](#)
- Boards may want to consider responding to the consultation and should be sensitive in their approach to discussions around social transitioning and single sex spaces and sport.

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## DIGITAL WELLBEING CONSULTATION

Launched on Saturday 2nd March 2026 to seek views on major measures to protect children on Social Media.

- Including gaming platforms and AI chatbots
- Seeking views on issues such as a minimum age to access social media, restriction of risky functionalities, the digital age of consent, mobile phone guidance in schools, support for parents
- Consultation can be found [here](#)
- Versions for anyone, parents and carers, children / young people aged 10-21yrs
- Consultation closes on Tuesday 26th May 2026