

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

for the Inquiry into

MANAGING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

run by the

APPG ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

1. Background

The widely cited [#StatusOfMind](#) report, published by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) in 2017, examined the positive and negative effects of social media on young people's mental health and wellbeing, and revealed a number of significant findings.

The report highlighted the potential positive effects of social media on mental health, including providing access to other people's health experiences and expert health information, emotional support and community building, providing a space for self-expression and self-identity, and making, maintaining and building upon relationships. However, with these positives come a range of potential negative effects, including creating and exacerbating feelings of anxiety and depression, negative body image, cyber bullying, contributing to poor sleep and a fear of missing out (FOMO). The report also illustrated the ways in which positive and negative effects varied across different social media platforms.

A number of other reports have raised similar concerns, such as the Children's Society's [Good Childhood Report](#), which found high intensity social media use is linked to lower subjective wellbeing in relation to family, appearance, school, and life as a whole.

In light of these findings, RSPH established the [APPG on Social Media and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) in March 2018 to build the evidence base around the impact of social media upon young people's mental health and wellbeing, to raise the political profile of the issue, and to drive policy change that mitigates the negatives and maximises the positives of social media for young people.

Polling commissioned for the APPG by RSPH in April 2018 revealed an overwhelming demand from the UK public for tighter regulation of social media companies – by government or by a self-regulatory mechanism – with four in five (80%) believing this is needed to address the impact of social media on the health and wellbeing of young people. Furthermore, more than half of the public (52%) say not enough is being done by social media companies to address the issue, with two in five (41%) also saying the Government is not doing enough.

Consequently, the APPG will be holding an inquiry from Summer 2018 to early 2019, to build the evidence base on the issue, but also to inform progressive and practical solutions including a proposed industry Code of Conduct. The group will be hearing evidence, views and experiences from a variety of expert stakeholders as well as young people themselves.

2. Inquiry Terms of Reference

2.1 Objectives

- To further build the evidence base of the impact of social media on young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- To establish where the capacity and responsibility to address the impact of social media lies, whether this be with the Government, the industry, third sector, parents and young people themselves or a combination of all of these.
- To make recommendations to Government on its role in mitigating the bad and maximising the good of social media for young people.
- To engage directly with the social media industry to explore how it can be more responsible in making social media platforms more conducive to positive mental health and wellbeing, including informing developer guidelines and an industry Code of Conduct.
- To assess, inspire and promote innovative digital tools and educational approaches that can be used by educators, parents and young people to manage their relationships with social media.

2.2 Topics for evidence

The inquiry invites evidence relating to the following four broad topics, which will likely form the basis of the proposed oral evidence sessions of the inquiry.

a) The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health and Wellbeing

Although this inquiry is primarily solutions-orientated, it is nevertheless necessary to ensure the inquiry panel is working on the basis of the most complete and up-to-date evidence of the impact of social media on young people's mental health and wellbeing. The inquiry therefore invites evidence of both positive and negative effects, which may relate to any of the 14 health and wellbeing factors identified in the #StatusOfMind report, or to new areas that the report did not consider. Specifically, we would like your response to address the following questions:

- Which negative areas of mental health and wellbeing impact of social media are of most concern and should be prioritised for action?
- Which positive areas of mental health and wellbeing impact show the most promise and opportunity, and should be protected, promoted and enhanced?
- Are there any areas of health and wellbeing impact that you feel were not adequately covered by the #StatusOfMind report?
- Is there any new research and/or new insights that have emerged since the original publication of the #StatusOfMind report in May 2017 that the inquiry panel should consider?
- Does the health and wellbeing impact of social media vary across different demographics and socio-economic groups, i.e. is there a health inequalities angle to consider?

b) A Healthy Relationship with Social Media

The inquiry is keen to establish what constitutes a 'healthy' and beneficial relationship with social media for young people, as a guiding end-point that any action taken should aim towards. Specifically, we would like your response to address the following questions:

- Is a healthy, positive relationship with social media possible, or is it always necessarily a case of mitigating negatives?
- What does a healthy relationship with social media look like, and what are its key components?
- Is it possible to establish official guidelines for the extent and nature of healthy or low-risk social media usage, in a similar manner to drinking guidelines or the body mass index? How should these be formulated?

c) Responsibility and Regulation

The inquiry invites evidence of what is, can and should be done by major stakeholders, particularly Government and the social media industry, to address the issues and make social media a more conducive place for positive mental health and wellbeing, maximising the positive and mitigate the negative impacts on young people. Specifically, we would like your response to address the following questions:

- Where does the balance and distribution of responsibility for managing the impact of social media on young people lie?
- Is it possible to address the impact of social media on young people through education, user-end solutions, or are fundamental changes to platforms required?
- What is the industry doing and what more it could do to address these issues, e.g. by refining its product both in terms of technological solutions and ethical practice?
- What is the potential role of Government action and legislation?
- Does the social media industry need Government regulation to address health and wellbeing impact, or is self-regulation a workable solution?
- What should any potential guidelines or regulation look like? Are there any elements you particularly feel an industry Code of Conduct should or should not include?
- Does the Government's draft code of practice for providers of online social media platforms, included in Annex B of their [response to the internet safety strategy green paper](#), adequately address the health and wellbeing impacts of social media? Why or why not, and what else should or shouldn't be included?

d) Innovation and Solutions

The inquiry invites evidence more broadly exploring what can be done by a wider range of players to enhance the positives and mitigate the negatives of social media for young people's mental health and wellbeing. Specifically, we would like your response to address the following questions (please include any relevant examples of best practice, technological/creative solutions, or other initiatives):

- What is the role of the third sector, including mental health and young people's NGOs, in managing the impact of social media?
- What role can third-party technological innovation play, including digital platforms and apps that can help young people manage their social media usage in a more health and wellbeing promoting way?

- What is the role of education and awareness in promoting digital skills and healthier social media usage, including among parents, young people, and those who work with them? What does effective social media education look like?
- What can be done to empower young people and what can they do themselves to better manage their social media usage for the good of their mental health and wellbeing?

3. Process and timeframe (provisional)

29 June 2018: Call for written and recorded evidence submissions opens

13 August 2018: Deadline for written and recorded evidence submissions

13 August - 14 September 2018: APPG secretariat undertakes analysis of submissions

17 September 2018: Call for oral evidence issued to witnesses

17 September 2018: Release of interim report

10 October – 12 December 2018: At least four oral evidence sessions hosted in House of Commons

4 February 2019: Release of final report, including proposed industry Code of Conduct

4. Outputs

The outputs of this inquiry will include:

- An interim report compiling the initial findings of the call for written and recorded evidence, including a representative sample of evidence obtained.
- A final inquiry report based on the findings of both the written and recorded evidence, and the oral evidence given in the six oral evidence sessions. The report will make a number of recommendations to Government, the social media industry, and other stakeholders on how best to manage the impact of social media on young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- Depending on the APPG's assessment on the best way to regulate social media for the good of mental health and wellbeing, the final inquiry report may be accompanied by a voluntary Code of Conduct which the industry will be asked to sign up to.

5. Who should submit evidence

The APPG invites all stakeholders with relevant knowledge and expertise to submit evidence. In particular, we welcome the input of:

- Children and young people themselves (whether on their own initiative or coordinated through young people's organisations).
- Representatives from individual social media companies and from the digital technology industry more broadly.
- Professionals and voluntary sector workers who work directly with young people, including teachers and youth workers.
- Charities and NGOs that work with or on behalf of children and young people.
- Charities and NGOs with expertise in mental health and wellbeing.
- Academics and researchers involved in existing and ongoing research in this and related areas.

- Clinicians and public health professionals with expertise in young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- Government representatives from relevant departments, especially the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education, and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.
- Technology developers and digital innovators and creatives.
- Parents and guardians.

6. How to submit evidence

All responses to this call for evidence should be directly related to the topics for evidence outlined in the inquiry terms of reference above. The majority of organisational stakeholders should submit their response in written form.

However, in order to encourage greater participation from young people themselves, we also invite the submission of evidence in video form, e.g. as a short vlog discussing personal and peer experiences of the impact of social media on mental health and wellbeing.

Written submissions should be emailed as a single document to Niamh McDade at nmcdade@rsph.org.uk, clearly marked as 'APPG social media inquiry response' in the subject line. When composing your response, please note the following:

- Responses should be set out under and directly related to the topics for evidence and specific questions set out in the inquiry terms of reference. Please use sub-headings and numbered paragraphs. Please note, you do not need to provide a response to all the topics and questions – please only provide a response to those questions where you feel you/your organisation has sufficient knowledge and expertise.
- Keep written answers as focused and as concise as possible, limiting your total submission (excluding appendices) to no more than 2,000 words.
- Include a brief introduction about yourself/your organisation and your reason for submitting evidence.
- Include an executive summary in bullet point form of the main points made in the submission.
- Include any factual information you have to offer from which the committee might be able to draw conclusions, or which could be put to other witnesses for their reactions.
- Include any recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the committee to consider.
- Reference (and hyperlink) the source of any assertions made or statistics used, where feasible.
- Files should be no more than 10MB in size, be in Word (.doc or .docx) format (no .pdf), contain as few logos or embedded pictures as possible, contain no macros and comprise a single document. If there are any annexes or appendices, these should be included in the same document.
- Clearly indicate whether you would like yourself or someone from your organisation to be considered to be called to give oral evidence to the inquiry – if so, please provide the most appropriate contact details.

Video submissions should be sent via WeTransfer, Dropbox or equivalent to Niamh McDade at nmcdade@rsph.org.uk, clearly marked as 'APPG social media inquiry response'. When composing your response, please note the following:

- Video submissions should be limited to a maximum of three minutes.

- Include, either in the video itself or an accompanying written note, a brief introduction about yourself and your reason for submitting evidence.
- Include any recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the committee to consider.
- Accepted video file formats include: .mov, .mpg, .mpeg, .avi, .wmv, .mp4 and .m4v.
- Alongside video submissions, please include a brief written summary in bullet point form of the main points made in the submission.
- If you would like to be called to give oral evidence to the inquiry, please clearly indicate this in the accompanying written note, and provide the most appropriate contact details.

The deadline for all submissions is 9am on Monday 13 August 2018.

7. Conditions and confidentiality

All submissions made to the inquiry will remain confidential until the submission deadline and the release of the interim report. At this point, evidence may be published in part or in full as part of the report or as supporting material.

By submitting evidence to the inquiry, you indicate your consent to such publication, unless you request otherwise – please clearly state in your submission if you would like your submission to remain either confidential or anonymous. You will be notified in advance by the APPG Secretariat if your submission is to be used in the published report.

In the case of evidence submitted by young people under the age of 16, no publication will be made without first securing the consent of their parent or guardian.

8. Contact

For further information and any questions about submissions, the inquiry, or the work of the APPG, please contact Niamh McDade, Senior Policy and Communications Executive, Royal Society for Public Health at nmcdade@rsph.org.uk or on 020 7265 7391.