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# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales 2019** |
| **DATE** | **23 October 2019** |
| **BY** | **Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education** |

Today I am pleased to publish the *Online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales 2019*. This is the first annual update to the original plan which I previously launched in November 2018.

The action plan provides an update on the progress of each of the 46 actions detailed in the 2018 plan. It also sets out the details of 15 new actions which will be taken forward by Welsh Government to enhance online safety provision, policy and practice across Wales.

The world of technology is fast paced and constantly evolving. Over recent years there has been a technological revolution. A phone is no longer a device for simply connecting two individuals. It is also a camera, a compass, a Walkman, a camcorder, a calendar, a pedometer, and a portal to a connected world of full of information, people and possibilities.

It’s not just the technology that has changed, but the way we engage with social media has transformed. You only need to forget your phone for one day to understand the many ways we’ve come to rely on it.

Children and young people are unaware of the pain of dial up modems, or not being able to simply Google something you’re trying to research. They interact with digital services intuitively and move fluidly in and out of the digital world throughout their day.

As a result, our thinking in this area needs to move at pace. It is no longer helpful to differentiate between the ‘online world’ and the ‘real world’. What happens online is very much a part of real life and what happens online impacts on real people.

It is therefore critical that our children and young people develop digital skills to meet the needs of the 21st century and to be successful in education, work and in their lives more broadly.

However, digital skills in isolation are not enough. We must also ensure that our children and young people are digitally resilient – attaining the knowledge and developing the critical thinking skills to keep themselves safe and to make responsible choices when online.

There is no doubt that the internet brings enormous benefits, but it is critical that we openly discuss the darker sides of the internet and the many risks it poses. These are difficult conversations but essential ones to have if we are to educate our children and young people. They have the right to access information that keeps them safe from harm and allows them to navigate the world we live in, one which is very different to the world we, or their parents, grew up in.

I believe our job is to help them understand the importance of critical thinking, make responsible choices, understand the impact of their choices and to empower them to speak out if something goes wrong. It is only through doing this we will ensure a generation of young people who are confident, empowered and digitally resilient.

Over the past 12 months we have undertaken a significant amount of work across the Welsh Government to help ensure that our children and young people are digitally resilient. For details of progress made to date, I encourage you all to take the time to read it.