

All Party Parliamentary Group for Schools, Learning, and Assessment

Misogyny and Social Media

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 8 July from 10:00am – 11:00am - Committee Room 17, Palace of Westminster

Parliamentarians in attendance

Peter Swallow MP (Chair), Baroness Boustead and Lord Hampton.

Guest speakers

Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, Associate Professor at University College London

Natasha Devon MBE, Writer, broadcaster, and activist

Dr Craig Haslop, Senior Lecturer in Media at the University of Liverpool

Flora Letanka, CEO, The Economist Educational Foundation

Agenda

Time	Details
10:00 – 10:05	Welcome to meeting and introductions (Peter Swallow MP)
10:05 – 10:10	Remarks from Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, Associate Professor, University College London
10:10 – 10:15	Remarks from Natasha Devon MBE, writer, broadcaster and activist
10:15 – 10:20	Remarks from Dr Craig Haslop, Senior Lecturer, University of Liverpool
10:20 – 10:25	Remarks from Flora Letanka, CEO, The Economist Educational Foundation
10:25 – 10:55	Discussion and Q&A (Peter Swallow MP)
10:55 – 11:00	Discussion about any follow up actions (Peter Swallow MP)
11:00	Close of Meeting

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair explained that this meeting would focus on misogyny and social media, particularly the impact these issues are having in schools - especially on young boys, their attitudes and behaviours, and the resulting effects on young girls. This is an increasingly urgent challenge, amplified by the rise of AI and the complexities of social media.

2. Remarks - Dr Kaitlyn Regehr

Kaitlyn introduced her research which focuses on the cultural impacts of social media particularly on children and youth. Her central concerns are not about the amount of time spent

online, but instead the information young people are being fed. Her work explores the technological processes behind algorithms and aims to develop tools to mitigate their negative effects.

She explained that in the digital space, consumer protection is largely absent - primarily because users are not the consumers. Instead, their time and attention are the products being sold to advertisers. This is referred to as the "attention economy". Kaitlyn emphasised that within this economy, harmful content and disinformation are often algorithmically prioritised. She highlighted that content which taps into vulnerable emotions tends to hold users' attention longer and this extra engagement is what advertisers are paying for.

She discussed the Safer Scrolling report which was produced in partnership with the Association of School and College Leaders. The report used a case study of online misogyny to investigate how such harm is pushed to young users through algorithms. The research included TikTok algorithmic analysis, interviews with young people, and the creation of user archetypes. The results found that in the first five days of usage there was an increase in misogyny being presented to the hypothetical young men.

Kaitlyn warned that the term "incel" has, over the past five years, become more mainstream and widespread. The report also found that neurodivergent individuals and those with existing vulnerabilities were more susceptible to this kind of influence.

As a potential solution, Kaitlyn highlighted the success of a peer-to-peer mentoring programme in a Scottish school, where older boys mentored younger boys on these issues. This low-cost, community-led intervention initiative has significantly improved school culture.

3. Remarks - Natasha Devon MBE

Natasha drew on her experience in schools and explained that young girls are often told to change their online behaviour in various ways, but this does not offer real protection from online misogyny. She highlighted the need to shift the focus towards teenage boys to better understand their behaviour and what draws them to this type of content.

She explained that the most common thing she hears from teenage boys is that they don't agree with Andrew Tate about women, but that he does have good advice about how to be a man in the modern world, in business and fitness. Natasha explained that this is a valuable entry point for starting deeper conversations and unpacking the issue.

Natasha emphasised the importance of driving home the idea for young boys that the advice they are consuming from influencers is actively toxic and harmful for their mental health. They are being told that their value as a human being is tied up in their earning potential and their productivity and that is all they bring to society and their communities.

Natasha emphasised the importance of early intervention, aiming to reach boys at the outset and encourage critical reflection on the content they engage with. She outlined the importance of introducing young boys to alternative role models who promote a healthier, more positive vision of masculinity. She also echoed the benefits of peer-to-peer mentoring in facilitating these changes.

4. Remarks - Dr Craig Haslop

Craig explained that his research focuses on boys and young men, the role of masculinity, and its intersections with lad culture, social media, and misogyny.

He drew attention to current evidence from schools, noting that teachers are increasingly concerned about the influence of misogyny on boys. In a recent survey of 200 teachers, 76% reported being moderately or strongly concerned about the presence of misogynistic attitudes among students. These influences include online discussions of misogynistic figures and the Incel movement.

Craig emphasised that this is not an issue affecting all boys - but it is a significant problem with serious implications, particularly for girls, who are often subjected to toxic and harmful comments.

In particular, Craig's research has explored what is currently known about boys' attitudes toward misogyny and online influencers. He found that between a quarter and a half of the boys interviewed were invested in Andrew Tate and perceived him as an authentic honest voice who speaks up for men and appreciated Tate's fitness and motivational content. Craig warned that this admiration can contribute to the normalisation and legitimisation of misogynistic figures.

He also noted a troubling discourse among boys that many see controversy as essential to kickstart their career and get attention. As a result, misogyny becomes commodified and is seen as a viable pathway to success and visibility.

Craig concluded by outlining some next steps to tackle these issues. This included the need for:

- Funding for large-scale funding research
- Critical digital literacy in schools including fact checking and developing political and ideological analysis
- Facilitating strong relationship and sex education in schools
- Humanising influencers
- Campaign government to embedding influencer, digital literacy and cultural critical literacy into the computer curriculum.

5. Remarks - Flora Letanka

Flora began with a note of optimism, explaining that most young people are not isolated, they are in classrooms with a mix of individuals and teachers. She highlighted this as a massive opportunity and something we need to utilise. She explained this is particularly important now given that young people are increasingly turning to social media for their news source and that some teachers don't feel equipped to deal with the political or controversial topics in their classrooms.

Flora explained how her team collaborates with Economist journalists each week to explore complex global issues and turn them into engaging, classroom-ready lessons. The aim is not only to help young people understand what's happening in the world, but also to build their critical thinking skills. Each lesson is designed to develop listening skills, help young people to understand different points of view and develop their speaking skills to justify opinions.

As part of this work, Flora's team has created several resources addressing social media and misogyny - highlighting figures such as Andrew Tate and Conor McGregor, whose public platforms have been used to normalise misogyny. These lessons give teachers the ability to rapidly react with fact checked, accurate and quickly produced information to deal with the issues in a safe way. Flora sees them as tools to build teachers' confidence and open space for meaningful classroom conversations, helping students to think critically in an informed and supportive environment.

Flora concluded by underscoring the importance of equipping young people with the skills to question what they consume online, and to examine the sources and viewpoints they're being exposed to. Ultimately, she sees this approach as a way to foster a more cohesive, tolerant society that values diverse perspectives.

6. Discussions and Q&A

Tender

Lord Hampton highlighted the work of Tender, a charity based in schools to teach young boys at an early age about relationships.

Social media ban

Anna McShane (The New Britain Project) mentioned their recent research with the NEU which found that there is overwhelming public interest in a ban for social media for under 16's.

Peter Swallow MP responded that a ban may be an overly simplistic solution and instead we need to support younger people and how they access online content in a safer way. Kaitlyn agreed and suggested a proactive rating system, like films, for material that should not be disseminated to young people.

Craig built on these concerns, warning that an outright ban could risk pushing young people further into unregulated spaces and result in a loss of the positive aspects of social media, such as access to sexual health or LGBTQ+ advice.

Natasha reaffirmed that the core issue isn't necessarily what young people are learning, but rather their ability to distinguish between harmful or false information and safe, reliable content.

Porn

Arabella Skinner (Health Professionals for Safer Screens) brought up the significant issue of online pornography within this debate. Craig responded that schools should be supported to address these topics through education on healthy relationships and consent.

Kaitlyn also noted that pornography operates within the attention economy and is becoming increasingly extreme, often acting as a form of sex education for young people.

Peter Swallow MP pointed out that many teachers lack the confidence and training to address topics like pornography, and that bringing in external experts is often prohibitively expensive. In response, Craig recommended the work of Beyond Equality, which offers adaptable resources to help schools tackle such issues.

Youth participation

Jack Lewis (DofE) referenced Youth Voices 2024 that covers young people's participation in decision making and the influence of social media. He called for their participation in shaping future legislation.

In response, Peter Swallow MP emphasised the importance of continually listening to young people and reviewing legislation regularly to reflect their lived experiences.

Teachers and RSE

Natasha added that teachers need protection from potential backlash when delivering politically or age-sensitive RSE content. Flora agreed and added that silence in the classroom is a missed opportunity - teachers must be empowered to act as facilitators of these essential conversations.

7. Conclusions

The Chair thanked all for their attendance.