



Department for
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Dear Mr Carlyon,

Thank you for your email of 21 January, enclosing the coroner's report on the tragic deaths of Anthony Walgate, Gabriel Kovari, Daniel Whitworth and Jack Taylor. I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to their family and friends.

The Online Safety Bill was introduced to Parliament on 17 March. It will usher in a new era of accountability for the tech sector and ensure that they take more effective action to tackle criminal activity, including when their users are anonymous.

However, the regulation of tech companies is not an alternative or replacement for action by law enforcement to tackle criminals, whether they target their victims online or offline.

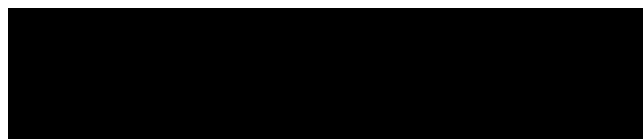
Your report makes reference to the law enforcement's ability to undercover the identities of unverified users. The police already have a range of legal powers to identify individuals who attempt to use online anonymity to escape sanctions for criminal activity. The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 gives law enforcement powers to investigate illegal activity by requesting access to communications data. Additionally, law enforcement agencies have a power under Schedule 1 to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) to obtain access to stored communications data held by service providers. The government is working with law enforcement to review whether the current powers are sufficient to tackle anonymous criminal activity online.

While we are not familiar with the details of whether there was any illegal activity online in this case, we are, however, aware that online services do not always remove illegal content from anonymous accounts even when they are made aware of it. The Online Safety Bill places new requirements on all companies in relation to illegal content and anonymity online. Services in scope will have to ensure that illegal content is removed swiftly and that the risk of it appearing and spreading is minimised by effective systems. As part of this, services will have to identify, mitigate and effectively manage the risk of anonymous profiles. This could include, as the Joint Committee recommended and your report has highlighted, putting in place user verification methods so disposable accounts are not created for the purpose of undertaking illegal activity.

Ofcom will be appointed as the new regulator overseeing the framework and will set out the types of verification methods a company could use in guidance. Ofcom will have a suite of enforcement powers available to use against companies who fail their duties. These powers include fines for companies of up to £18 million or 10% of qualifying annual global turnover, and business disruption measures.

We introduced the Online Safety Bill to Parliament on 17th March 2022. We are working closely with Ofcom to ensure that the implementation of the framework is as short as possible, following passage of the legislation.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

