



19 March 2025

**Invitation to make a written submission on the petition of Charlene Whyte: Education and safety restrictions on social media for children and teenagers CRM:0126920**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the petition of Charlene Whyte. The petition proposes that the Government should undertake a public education campaign to raise awareness about the negative effects of social media on children and teenagers through TV, radio, social media, leaflets, and workshops, targeting both parents and children. It also proposes that there should be a Social Media Licence for anyone under 18 to access social media or adult websites, with adults using their driver's licence for verification. This would be accompanied by mandatory education and an exam and appropriate accountability and enforcement.

As to the first proposition, Netsafe fully agrees there should be more government funded education and awareness raising about online safety. Netsafe creates and shares its own resources for public use and for use in schools and kura, and also undertakes targeted publicity campaigns on specific online safety topics. However, Netsafe has neither the resources nor the facilities to undertake an awareness raising campaign of the type envisaged. Additional or reallocated government resources to raise awareness and to equip young people and adults alike with the knowledge and skills to have safer online experiences is vital. Any awareness raising in this regard should highlight the positive aspects social media and digital technologies can bring rather than simply focusing on the negative aspects.

As to a Social Media Licence, organisations such as the Alannah and Madeleine Foundation and the DQ Institute have already created a similar proposition called the eSmart Digital License (see here: <https://www.alannahandmadeline.org.au/what-we-do/prevention-programs/esmart/esmart-digital-licence>). Netsafe supported the concept during its NZ pilot phase in 2023.

Netsafe considers such ideas are a useful way to teach children and adults about how to have safer online experiences and could usefully be deployed with other awareness raising and teaching methods and resources.

Whether any such licence should be mandatory and encompass age verification would require very careful consideration given the significant resource, logistical, enforcement, privacy and freedom of expression concerns such a proposal might entail.

Were this idea to gain traction, young people's voices should also be sought and heard.

**Netsafe**