



**Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Equality regarding
“technology, social media and children” (March 5th 2026)**

Introduction

The TUI would like to thank the Chair and the committee for this opportunity to make an opening statement on the topic of technology, social media and children. The TUI represents over twenty-two thousand teachers and leaders in post-primary, further and higher education.

Current Risks to Children

The TUI is strongly of the view that current usage of technology and social media by young people has benefits. However, there are also significant risks especially when safeguards are not in place.

For example, some young people are using social media as a place to socialise and interact with new friends. This can work very well if everyone involved is acting in a transparent and honest manner. However, a seeming lack of safeguards means that, in some cases, young people are communicating with other people online who they believe to be of the same age but in actual fact may be otherwise. Such people may be acting in bad faith in terms of their purpose in being on any particular social media site which may appeal especially strongly to young people.

It is also worrying that young people are, in some cases, accessing information about mental health on social media sites rather than from mental health professionals. It is welcome that they are accessing information which they feel will be beneficial to them, but not all information on social media sites about mental health is either accurate or helpful. This presents significant risk.

Generative AI can present significant benefits to students but we must also be conscious of recent developments whereby inappropriate use of GenAI has resulted in the exploitation of young people. For this reason the TUI recently permanently ceased posting on one particular social media site.

Conclusion

Education settings have an important role to play in the area of safe use of technology and social media, but very significant responsibilities also rest with parents, communities, NGOs, the Oireachtas, Government departments and aegis bodies. Most importantly, the commercial bodies need to make their products safe for young people to use. The American educationalist Larry Cuban almost forty years ago said that “when society gets an itch, schools get scratched”.

Recommendations

The TUI would like to make the following recommendations to the Committee:

- There should be additional provision of guidance and counselling support in all education settings.
- Parents need to be supported by the relevant Government agencies in supporting their children to access technology and social media safely, or in preventing their children from accessing any social media sites which may not have sufficient safeguards in place.
- The Oireachtas should actively consider whether minimum age limits could and/or should be implemented especially for use of social media sites. This will of course need to be considered in the light of knowledge that young people can sometimes easily bypass some safeguards through the use of VPNs for example.
- Funding is needed for sufficient school devices to prevent students from using personal devices in school settings as schools cannot supervise social media apps which are on personal devices.
- There should be a national social media safety framework for education settings.

Article 36 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children must be protected from “exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child’s welfare”. The work of this Committee could make a real and positive difference in that regard.

I’d be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have. Thank you.

Ends

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