

Britain seeks to restrict access to online porn

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Pornographic websites could be forced to check their users are over 18 under new measures debated by British lawmakers Monday that are designed to protect children but have raised concerns over privacy and censorship.

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Critics warn that this process, which could include a requirement to enter [credit card details](#), risks restricting adults' access to legal content—and could open a door to fraudsters.

Culture minister Matt Hancock said the legislation would "protect the freedom of adults to watch pornography online but provide adequate protections for children with the same sort of safeguards online as they have offline".

He admitted the measures outlined in the Digital Economy Bill would not cover social media sites such as Twitter, but said they represented an "important step".

"Our approach I believe represents a targeted and effective way of protecting children from accessing or stumbling across pornographic material that's most readily available and potentially harmful," he said.

There are also [privacy concerns](#) relating to who would have access to the user data, with one MP noting the breach suffered by Ashley Madison, a website for people seeking extra-marital affairs.

"There are no provisions in the bill as its currently drafted to secure the privacy and anonymity of those who are using these sites," said Alistair Carmichael, of the small Liberal Democrats opposition party.

He said the restrictions proposed could be "circumvented pretty easily by any tech-savvy 14-year-old", adding that the best solution to children's exposure to pornography was better sex education.

Last month Britain's data watchdog, Elizabeth Denham, also expressed concerns about who could access the data.

"Any solution must not result in the wholesale tracking or monitoring of individuals' lawful online activities, or the collection of data with a view to unlawful profiling of individuals," she said.

Hancock said: "We all want the internet to be free, but freedom operates within a framework of social responsibility, norms and the law."

After Monday's debate, the bill will pass to the unelected House of Lords for further scrutiny.

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