What's real and what's fake online? A Snapshot Survey of Children and Young People in Wales

Children's Commissioner for Wales

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Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Children's Commissioner for Wales

Introduction

During February 2025 we asked children and young people if they knew what was real and what was fake online.

The survey was part of an ongoing series of topical questions we ask children and young people monthly to hear their views on a variety of issues, called Monthly Matters. It was shared directly with all schools signed up to our children's rights schemes for primary and secondary schools, as well as community groups.

As part of the survey pack, children and young people were shown a video introducing the topic, and they were asked to consider some questions, like if they ever believed something they saw online that turned out to be fake and how can they check if something is real or not. We suggested in our session outline that, following this video, children and young people should have a few minutes to discuss their views with each other before answering the survey. Schools and groups had two options for completing the survey; children and young people could either do it independently, or a teacher or group leader could complete the survey on behalf of the group by answering a different set of questions to give an overview of the discussion.

569 children and young people answered the survey individually. A further 292 children took part in groups, with teachers and youth workers submitting a summary of their views. A broad range of ages took part, from children under the age of 6 up to 18-year-olds. We received responses from 19 local authority areas.

Questions were developed by the Commissioner's experienced staff team based on themes that had emerged from previous engagement exercises with children, young people, and professionals.

Questions for children and young people

PRIMARY AGED ANSWERS:

Have you ever seen something online that wasn't true?

Yes (266) - 67%
I'm not sure (95) - 24%
No (38) - 10%

If you saw something online that you knew wasn't true, what would you do? (You can pick more than one)

Tell an adult (like a parent or teacher) (253) - 65%
Ignore it (185) - 47%
Report it to the platform/website (137) - 35%
Tell a friend (79) - 20%
I don't know/something else (36) - 9%

How do you know if something online that doesn't sound right is true or not? (You can pick more than one)

Check if other websites are saying the same thing (224) - 56%
Ask friends or family what they think (214) - 54%
Ask a teacher (160) - 40%
Look at the post and think about who has written it and if you trust them (136) - 34%
I don't know (51) - 13%
Something else (45) - 11%
I just assume that it's true (10) - 3%

Do you think it's easy to believe something fake online?

Yes (195) - 52%
No (101) - 27%
I don't know (79) - 21%

Have you ever shared something online that you later found out wasn't true?

No (240) - 62%
I'm not sure (90) - 23%
Yes (59) - 15%

What was it?

The highest number of responses related to:
- Fake news / fake information about facts/games
- Fake videos
- Scammed / hacked

What do you think social media companies or websites could do to help stop fake information spreading?
(you can pick more than one)

Get rid of posts that are fake (245) - 62%
Make it easier to find out if information is real (211) - 53%
Make videos and posts to teach people how to spot fake information (161) - 41%
Let users report fake information easily (135) - 34%
Something else (72) - 18%

SECONDARY AGED ANSWERS:

Have you ever come across something online that you later found out was fake?

Yes (75) - 49%
I'm not sure (56) - 36%
No (23) - 15%

What was it?

The highest number of responses related to:
- Rumours about celebrities
- Don't remember / don't know
- Stories / fake news

If you saw something interesting online that seemed fake, what would you do? (You can pick more than one)

Ignore it and keep scrolling (104) - 68%
Search online to find out if it's true (57) - 37%
Ask an adult or friend to find out if it's true (39) - 25%
Report it (20) - 13%
Share it with others anyway (11) - 7%
I don't know/something else (9) - 6%
Ask a teacher for help (5) - 3%

How do you usually decide if something you see online is true or not? (you can pick more than one answer)

I check if other reliable websites/accounts are saying the same thing (71) - 48%
I look at the source (who posted it and if they are trustworthy) (59) - 40%
I ask friends or family what they think (55) - 37%
I don't know/something else (26) - 18%
I don't always check, I just assume it's true (16) - 11%
I ask a teacher (9) - 6%

Do you think it's easy to believe something fake online?

Yes (112) - 74%
I don't know (22) - 15%
No (18) - 12%

Have you ever shared something online that you later found out wasn't true?

No (78) - 51%
I'm not sure (47) - 31%
Yes (27) - 18%

What was it?

The highest number of responses related to:
- Fake news
- I don't know
- Concert tickets

What would make you more likely to believe something online? (you can pick more than one)

It comes from a well-known or trusted source (e.g., a news website, expert, (111) - 72%
It looks professional (good design, grammar, etc.) (50) - 33%
It matches what I already think or know (47) 31%
It's shared by friends or people I follow on social media (40) - 26%
Shared by celebrities/famous people (35) - 23%
Something else/I don't know (15) - 10%

What do you think social media companies or websites could do to help stop the spread of fake information?
(you can pick more than one)

Add warnings or fact-checking labels to posts (94) - 61%
Get rid of posts that are fake or misleading (87) - 57%
Let users report fake information easily (43) - 28%
Give people more educational resources on spotting fake news (40) - 26%
Something else (8) - 5%

What do you think they should do?

The highest number of responses related to:
- Not to post fake news
- I don't know
- Remove the post

Questions for Teachers

How did the group know what's real and what's not online?

The highest number of responses related to**:**
- Checking other sources of information
- Didn't feel realistic
- Using their own knowledge

Had they ever believed something online that turned out to be fake?

The highest number of responses related to:
- Yes, and responded with examples
- Mixed response

What did they think were the best ways to check if something is real or not?

The highest number of responses related to:
- Using a reliable website / link / resources
- Researching the information
- Asking a parent

Please add any other observations or ideas they had

The highest number of responses related to:
- Must be careful online

Conclusion

While a relatively low number of children and young people surveyed told us they had shared something online they later found out to be untrue (18% of secondary school learners and 15% of primary), a majority of all respondents told us they have seen information they later found out to be fake.

Over half (52%) of primary school learners, and 74% of secondary school learners, think that it is easy to believe something fake online. These results show us that a majority of children and young people have experienced seeing fake information online. However, less than half of secondary school learners stated that they took action to verify the source or seek alternative sources, with 68% saying that if they see something that seems fake they would ignore it and keep scrolling.

A clear majority want social media companies or websites to take action to add warnings to content, or to remove misleading content.

We have shared the results of this survey with Ofcom to inform their ongoing online safety work, and to the other UK Children's Commissioners' offices as we work together to address online safety concerns.