



The Official Response to the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee Report on Immersive and Addictive Technologies

The governments signals a more moderate stance yet pushes ahead on loot boxes

Regulator: The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

September 2019

RISK BAROMETER:



JURISDICTION RELEVANCE:

UK

TIMELINE:

Various and yet to be confirmed.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- On September 12th 2019, after a lengthy inquiry, the DCMS select committee on immersive and addictive technologies, released its [final report](#). It contains some of the most interventionist proposals for the video games sector ever to emerge in the West (see our brief: "[The Immersive and Addictive Technologies Inquiry](#)").
- On June 8th, the government published its [official response](#), taking a noticeably more moderate tone. Explicit praise of the role played by industry during the Covid-19 pandemic feels a long way from the acrimony and accusation which characterised DCMS select committee hearing.
- In quickfire summary:
 - » Video games research: There will be multi-stakeholder workshops to set the parameters of future independent research into the negative and positive impact of games - a lower bar than the mandatory data sharing and research levy originally proposed.
 - » Online age ratings: Self-regulatory systems are endorsed but this may change if voluntary compliance levels are poor - a lower bar than the select committee's call for legal enforceability.
 - » The future online harms regulator: The long-awaited regulator will not, at least in its initial phase, cover specific video games issues such as screen-time limits. However, in parallel with the Age Appropriate Code, it may impose a duty of care in relevant areas such as age- appropriate content.
- » Self-regulatory measures by industry: Positive steps taken by industry are cited, including PEGI's "randomised items" label and drop rate disclosure commitments made by major developers during the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) August 2019 workshop on loot boxes. Much more should be done to educate on parental controls.
- » Loot boxes and gambling mechanics: This is the meatiest element of the response - there will be a call for evidence on loot boxes, which will feed into the forthcoming review of the Gambling Act 2005 (See our brief: "[A Call for Evidence on Loot Boxes](#)").

MOST TELLING:

"Games companies have also contributed directly to support COVID-19 measures, working with the government to help reinforce essential health messaging with the public."

DELANY & CO HOT TAKE:

Distracted by the pandemic, the government has pushed the resolution of difficult questions down the road, whilst hedging its bets on satisfying anti-addiction critics with a call for evidence on loot boxes. Eyes must be kept peeled to ensure an ill-thought out, populist policy, does not emerge here, with serious implications for the sector. Whilst the report tries to strike a careful balance between harm concerns and a pro-business message, entirely absent is any sense of policy development as it pertains to mobile gaming.