**Input to OHCHR Questionnaire on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective**

**United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

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**1. Women’s access to ICT**

**Women and Broadband programme**

*Background*

Since 2014, UK Government Equalities Office (GEO) have provided £2.2m to fund two phases of the Women and Broadband programme to provide targeted support for budding female entrepreneurs, women wishing to return to the labour market whose digital skills were outdated and women led businesses wishing to move into growth and/or diversify their business.

Over two phases of delivery at 6 months in length each, the programme has operated in 22 local authorities (LA) across England, reaching almost 4,000 women. Each LA received a maximum of £100,000 funding per phase, with joint LA bids encouraged.

LAs were not given specific activities to deliver but were given suggestions of types of intervention we would like to see whilst considering their local demographics and encouraging innovation. They were also expected to take account of local need, and existing provision and support. Interventions ranged from 1:1 support, to training courses and covered skills ranging from accessing finance, to exporting, to using social media in marketing.

*Rationale*

The rationale for partnership with the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) superfast broadband programme was to build on the £2 billion government investment in superfast broadband infrastructure by boosting the digital capability of women in areas where faster broadband was being made available so they could take advantage of better broadband to start-up or grow an existing business or take advantage of teleworking to work flexibly from home.

This was identified as a priority area because:

* Despite the large increase in the number of female entrepreneurs, there are still far more male led businesses (only around 22% of all SMEs in the UK were majority women-led in 2015).[[1]](#_ftn1)
* Research shows us that a lack of confidence, fear of failure and a perceived lack of skills prevent women from setting up or expanding their business.[[2]](#_ftn2)
* The rollout of superfast broadband opens up the opportunity to work flexibly from home which will support women to participate in the workforce either remotely or flexibly. It also supports women in enterprise to participate on a more equal basis through access to online and global markets.

*Outcomes*

Across phases one and two, over 400 new businesses were established. In phase two, over 250 women returned to the labour market in the 6-month delivery alone, with over 30 women-led businesses exporting for the first time.

Participants, tutors, ambassadors and LAs involved have all overwhelmingly provided positive anecdotal evidence about the impact this project has had, particularly the women-only element of the programme.

**2. Addressing gender based violence online**

**Background**

In the VAWG Strategy GEO committed to:

“Establish an official Government working group to map out current issues, prevalence, initiatives and barriers to addressing gendered online abuse to improve understanding and co-ordinate the response to online manifestations of VAWG.”

This group is active and our mapping work is well under way. The GEO is now actively engaging with partners in the women’s sector, technology sector and others to support a comprehensive response to gendered online abuse.

The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced a new cross-Government drive on online safety on behalf of the Prime Minister. It will involve ministers and officials from departments across Government including the Home Office, Department for Education, Department of Health and Ministry of Justice as part of a coordinated effort to make the internet safer.

* We will be asking experts, social media companies, tech firms, charities and young people themselves about online safety during a series of roundtables this spring. We want to know more about the scope of the problem, where the gaps are and start to think about solutions which we aim to develop in a Green Paper launched before the summer.
* While the initial focus will be on children and young people, the roundtables are also expected to examine concerns around issues like trolling and other aggressive behaviour including rape threats against women.

**Top lines**

* We created a new specific criminal offence of revenge porn, which came into effect in April 2015 to give courts the chance to impose immediate custodial sentences on offenders for up to two years. We are also funding the Revenge Porn Helpline.
* The Revenge Porn Helpline has received over 5500 calls since it opened in February 2015.
* The GEO has funded the Helpline almost £78,000 for the financial year 2016-17.
* In 2015-16 there were 206 prosecutions commenced of the offence of disclosing private sexual images without consent (revenge pornography).
* · The Home Office has introduced new legislation to tackle online stalking

[[1]](#_ftnref1) Data from the BIS Longitudinal Small Business Survey 2015

[[2]](#_ftnref2) Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2015 UK Report