

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport  
100 Parliament St, Westminster,  
London  
SW1A 2BQ

31 March 2021

## **Review of the Gambling Act 2005: Call for evidence.**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your policy-development in this field. The Age Check Certification Scheme is a Northern Powerhouse funded, independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party Certification Scheme, based in Stockport, which has developed a speciality in testing that age check systems work, both in the real world, and, increasingly, online.

We have been working closely with your Department, the ICO, UKAS and Ofcom on developing the Age Check Certification Scheme, alongside contributing to the Verification of Children Online (VoCO) work and the SafetyTech Network established with the support of your department. As such, our response focuses exclusively on age limits and verification.

I also chair the UK Government's Expert Panel on Age Restrictions (which comes under the auspices of the BEIS Office for Product Safety & Standards), but I am writing today in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Age Check Certification Scheme.

### **Age limits and verification**

#### **Q29: What evidence is there on the effectiveness of current measures to prevent illegal underage gambling in land-based venues and online?**

While there is plenty of evidence about the effectiveness of measures to prevent illegal underage gambling in land-based venues there is no equivalent evidence from such exercises online.

This is because there is no regulatory requirement for test purchasing to be conducted by remote operators, which is clearly anomalous. If this was required, then there would be extensive evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of age limits imposed by online gambling sites, or to highlight any individual or systemic failures.

There is also no defined standard to which online operators must conduct age verification, leaving the choice of method to each operator. Age assurance is a fast-moving sector with technology itself evolving at pace. Even the most well intentioned operator may struggle to understand the complexity of the range of solutions on the market without a standard being set to which procurement processes can refer.

In line with the approach taken by regulators in other fields, we would recommend that the Gambling Commission makes reference to internationally accepted standards for age verification.

We support calls by the Age Verification Providers Association for the updated Gambling Act to include a statutory duty on the regulator to provide guidance about the standards which are expected of operators when conducting age checks online.

BSI PAS1296:2018, the current de facto global standard of best practice for age-checking is already available as a suitable benchmark. Your department is also supporting its upgrade to an international ISO standard. The development of the UK Digital Identity And Attributes Trust Framework also by your colleagues in DMCS offers another useful way to improve this area of regulation by making reference to standards.

Requiring test purchasing, technical audits, and certification by assurance schemes such as our own, can then demonstrate compliance to the public and the regulator. This adoption of the co-regulatory model, given *earned recognition* to operators who use certified providers, was a core recommendation of the government's Better Regulation Taskforce and remains accepted best practice for UK regulation.

**Q30: Is there evidence of best practice, for instance from other jurisdictions, in how to prevent illegal underage gambling?**

Globally, the UK clearly leads the world in this field. By providing a model statutory and regulatory framework, HM Government can support the sector's export opportunities.

ACCS is part of a consortium recently appointed by the Commission (subject to contract) to develop age verification infrastructure across the EU, in a pilot project instigated by the European Parliament. This is a perfect opportunity to showcase the UK's approach to age assurance across all Member States, and by projecting our model of gambling regulation, with age checks as a critical component within the legislation, the government can make it easier for UK-based gambling operators to expand across the EU without having to redesign their operations to suit multiple regulatory systems.

We trust this response is helpful. Do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any further questions or we can provide advice in any way.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tony Allen', written in a cursive style.

Tony Allen  
Chief Executive  
Age Check Certification Services Limited