I work on policy and strategic engagement with large institutions and companies, to develop new ways to make things better for children online.

**Meet John Carr, writer and consultant on children and young people’s use of the internet and associated technologies**

John Carr is a leading expert on child online protection. He has advised the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the European Union and several major high tech companies including Google and Vodaphone.

**My role**

My work now is all around strategic engagement in the realm of policy so it is often quite hard to see immediate benefits. Typically I am working with large institutions and companies trying to develop new ways to make things better for children in the online space. However, several years ago I was involved in a very practical project. We were working with severely disabled children. They had no ability to communicate verbally and could not write or draw anything. We adapted several digital devices. Working with highly skilled professionals, we taught the children how to use them to “talk” to their parents for the very first time in their lives. D-Day was a highly emotional experience. Many tears of joy were shed that day. It was semi-miraculous.

**In 10 years’ time**

We will have resolved and settled the boundaries between voluntary self-regulation and state intervention in the digital sphere, at least in respect of companies’ responsibilities to children. In terms of how companies and other stakeholders should work together to address challenges and opportunities, I think it should happen sincerely and on a playing field that is much more level than it is today.

**The leading change makers of today**

Some of the work that Google, Facebook and Microsoft have been doing of late in relation to ridding the internet of the evil of child pornography is hugely impressive. For example, Google deploys Microsoft’s Photo DNA to detect still pictures of child sex abuse and they are developing a similar tool to facilitate the detection of child abuse videos. They have said – as with Microsoft’s Photo DNA – that when it is ready for release it will be given away gratis. Also, in a growing number of countries (the UK was the first), they have introduced “splash pages” so anyone trying to use the search engine to seek our paedophilic content will get a warning that what they are doing is very likely to be illegal, then pointing them to sources of help if they wish to confront their sexual feelings about children.
Why I remain wary

Not all children and parents are living in a society where civic institutions listen and respond or are interested in any kind of participation. The internet and its associated digital technologies do not guarantee any kind of progressive or democratic political change. On the contrary, there are lots of examples where digital technologies have been used to oppress citizens, not improve their lot.