# Liz Kendall takes helm at DSIT amid tense online safety and US diplomacy challenges



In a significant shake-up at the UK government’s Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Liz Kendall has replaced Peter Kyle as the new Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, commencing her role on 5 September 2025. Kyle, who previously led DSIT, has transitioned to the role of Business Secretary and Minister for Trade, where he is expected to shoulder a challenging diplomatic agenda, primarily involving negotiations with the United States amid tensions over the UK’s Online Safety Act (OSA).

Kendall, formerly Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and MP for Leicester West since 2010, inherits responsibility for the ongoing implementation of the OSA, a landmark yet controversial regulation aimed at bolstering online safety. The OSA mandates stringent age verification controls on access to adult and harmful content, with particular focus on protecting children. Since enforcement began in March 2025, platforms have been required to apply risk mitigation measures, with full child safety provisions—including compulsory age assurance for accessing pornography—coming into force by late July 2025.

Public sentiment toward these measures, as revealed by a recent Sumsub survey of 2,000 UK consumers, appears cautiously supportive but marked by significant apprehensions. Sixty-four percent agree that age verification checks are essential to protect children, rising to 78 percent among parents with minors. However, scepticism runs deep, with half of those critical of the OSA doubting the government or regulator Ofcom's ability to enforce it effectively. Concerns also linger over the accuracy of facial age estimation technologies, distrusted by 26 percent of respondents, and the practical impact of the rules, as over a third of participants reported still being able to access adult content without verification. Moreover, political sensitivity is heightened by nearly half of people expressing unease that the OSA could lead to censorship—an accusation that has fuelled diplomatic friction with the U.S.

In his new role, Kyle faces the delicate task of managing escalating tensions with the U.S. administration, which has accused the UK and EU of attempting to impose a “global censorship regime.” The Trump administration’s critique focuses on the OSA’s perceived threat to First Amendment rights and American business interests. Reports indicate Kyle has already visited Washington and is preparing for President Trump’s UK visit in mid-September, where the OSA is expected to feature prominently in bilateral talks.

Adding to the complexity, a legal complaint filed in New York challenges Ofcom's enforcement of the OSA, arguing that the regulator has pursued American companies not as part of neutral regulatory duties but for politically motivated reasons aimed at undermining U.S. constitutional freedoms and damaging American internet businesses. This legal challenge follows broader discontent expressed through lawsuits by entities such as the owners of 4chan, who allege European attempts to control and hobble the American internet sector due to their own technological shortcomings.

Against this backdrop, Kendall has already demonstrated a robust stance on online safety, notably on regulations addressing self-harm content. However, industry stakeholders question how she will balance continued regulatory pressure with fostering innovation and managing the expanding scope of the OSA. One upcoming challenge involves the categorisation rules that assign services to different regulatory categories based on reach and functionality. A recent UK high court ruling against Wikipedia challenged its designation as a Category 1 service under the OSA—subjecting it to stringent obligations typically reserved for major platforms. Wikipedia warned that such classification would jeopardise user privacy, safety, and resource allocation, echoing wider fears that the OSA’s impact could extend far beyond its original remit to shield children from harmful content, veering instead toward broad censorship.

The court ruling places responsibility on Ofcom and the government to ensure proportional and fair application of the categorisation process, yet critics highlight the incongruity of Wikipedia facing such heavy regulation—akin to requiring ID to enter a public library. Ofcom is expected to publish its register of regulated services soon, testing Kendall’s approach to balancing protection, privacy, and innovation.

The DSIT has undergone significant internal turmoil in this period, with several ministers—including Baroness Maggie Jones and AI minister Feryal Clark—departing, leaving only Lord Patrick Vallance, the minister for science, research and innovation, as the stable presence. Kendall’s leadership arrives at a pivotal moment, with digital identity, online safety, and AI regulation all poised for major developments amidst geopolitical pressures and domestic concerns about privacy and censorship.

Kendall’s political background in the Labour party and her voting record, including support for stringent online safety clauses related to self-harm, indicate a willingness to pursue aggressive protective measures. Early remarks emphasising the damaging consequences of harmful online content suggest she may push for further restrictions, potentially mirroring international moves to limit social media access to older age groups. Nonetheless, as the government weighs these measures against increasing international scrutiny and legal challenges, Kendall's tenure will be crucial in shaping the UK's digital regulatory landscape going forward.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/people/liz-kendall), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/secretary-of-state-for-science-innovation-and-technology), [[6]](https://www.uktech.news/news/government-and-policy/who-is-new-tech-secretary-liz-kendall-20250908)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives), [[4]](https://sumsub.com/media/news/compliance-digest-july-2025/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives), [[4]](https://sumsub.com/media/news/compliance-digest-july-2025/), [[7]](https://www.medianama.com/2024/11/223-online-age-gating-systems-failing-children-ofcom-survey-raises-alarms/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives), [[6]](https://www.uktech.news/news/government-and-policy/who-is-new-tech-secretary-liz-kendall-20250908)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives), [[6]](https://www.uktech.news/news/government-and-policy/who-is-new-tech-secretary-liz-kendall-20250908)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202509/new-uk-tech-secretary-takes-over-major-online-safety-initiatives> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/liz-kendall> - Liz Kendall was appointed Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on 5 September 2025. Prior to this, she served as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions from 5 July 2024 to 5 September 2025. She has been the Member of Parliament for Leicester West since May 2010.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/secretary-of-state-for-science-innovation-and-technology> - The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology holds overall responsibility for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. The current officeholder is Liz Kendall, who assumed the role on 5 September 2025, succeeding Peter Kyle.
4. <https://sumsub.com/media/news/compliance-digest-july-2025/> - The UK began enforcement of its Online Safety Act on 17 March 2025, with full child safety provisions, including mandatory age assurance for access to pornography and harmful content, coming into force on 25 July 2025. Platforms must implement risk mitigation measures from this date.
5. <https://sumsub.com/age-verification/> - Sumsub offers compliant age verification solutions that are fast, conversion-friendly, and meet global compliance standards. Their AI-powered system boasts a 99.8% accuracy rate and covers over 14,000 documents worldwide, ensuring underage users are blocked without hindering growth.
6. <https://www.uktech.news/news/government-and-policy/who-is-new-tech-secretary-liz-kendall-20250908> - Liz Kendall has been named the new Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology as part of a cabinet reshuffle. She replaces Peter Kyle, who has been appointed as Business Secretary. Kendall has been the Member of Parliament for Leicester West since 2010.
7. <https://www.medianama.com/2024/11/223-online-age-gating-systems-failing-children-ofcom-survey-raises-alarms/> - A survey by the UK's communications regulator Ofcom found that 22% of 8-17-year-olds lie about their age online, claiming to be 18 on social media platforms. This highlights concerns about the effectiveness of age verification systems in protecting children online.