



Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 6120 Email cmscom@parliament.uk website www.parliament.uk/cms

Rt. Hon. Oliver Dowden MP
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

11 March 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Disinformation about COVID-19

I am writing to express my support for the decision to set up the Counter Disinformation Unit within DCMS to tackle disinformation and misinformation about COVID-19. False narratives could potentially undermine the ongoing efforts of Government and public health organisations.

We also wish to ensure that the Government has fully considered how the Counter Disinformation Unit can be resourced and deployed effectively. As such, we request answers to the following questions:

1. Given that disinformation and misinformation has spread across social media at least since January¹, why has the Counter Disinformation Unit only been set up now?
2. How is the Counter Disinformation Unit being resourced, in terms of time, staffing and financial support?
3. Who is staffing the team and what is their expertise in tackling disinformation and misinformation?
4. How is the team working with social media companies, fact-checking organisations and health officials to identify and counter disinformation/misinformation about COVID-19?
5. Who does the team report to and how will this information reach COBR and other cross-Government planning groups?
6. How will information be publicly disseminated, especially to those with differing news consumption habits such as older or younger people, those in rural areas and towns and those who may face language barriers such as tourists?
7. Are there plans to make the Counter Disinformation Unit permanent and, if not, how will you ensure that the team's expertise and experience will not be lost between the COVID-19 crisis and future public emergencies?

¹ *The Guardian*, As the coronavirus spreads, misinformation is spreading even faster (1 February 2020).



Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 6120 Email cmscom@parliament.uk website www.parliament.uk/cms

We request your response by Wednesday 18 March so that we can factor your answer into our lines of inquiry with you at our evidence session on Wednesday 25 March.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Julian Knight'.

Julian Knight MP,
Chair, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee