

[Government smut blocks are a limp substitute for parents](#) [1]

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Government plans to filter adult content on the internet have in part relied on claims that opposition to them has been [merely ideological](#) [3]. In a new [ASI report](#) [4] released today, the very practical issues with such measures are laid bare. There already exist scores of options for parents concerned by what their children might see on the internet. This allows for more customisation than the standardised systems ISPs may be mandated to introduce. Such choice is vastly preferable; it is much harder to learn to circumvent a multitude of types of block than a single one.

Rather, a system where ISPs must decide which websites are acceptable and which are not will inevitably lead to a game of fast-paced Whac-A-Mole. New websites containing ?adult content? spring up at lightning pace, inevitably some will be missed while other websites are mistakenly blocked. Recent attempts to block such content have been laughable. TalkTalk has previously [failed to block leading adult content providers](#) [5] such as PornHub, while innocent [users of Google Images could still view thumbnails of pornography](#) [6] and almost any site could be accessed by viewing it through Google Translate.

Filters imposed by government can not replace a parent?s supervision of children or teaching children how to use the internet appropriately. This should be left to parents, and the attempts of Ministers to crowd out this parental responsibility will lead to growing complacency, as many will operate under the assumption that their children are protected.

Such a heavy handed approach does much to damage the internet at large, as websites which have nothing to do with providing explicit content may be obscured from view by the over-zealous censor. Could we expect to see the blocking of Guido Fawkes? website in reaction to his regular ?[Totty Watch](#) [7]? feature?

Having to put yourself down on a list in order to use the internet freely is a worrying prospect, and may be necessary for those not even interested in blacklisted content due to over blocking. The possibility of such a list being leaked could be deeply embarrassing.

If this does get implemented, worries about mistakes are not ill founded. As with many a Government IT program, there have been [blunders already](#) [8]. The Department for Education?s consultation process has allowed respondents to read all responses (including supposedly confidential personal information).

Do we really want people who don?t even understand the internet enough to ensure basic privacy, to be those deciding how it works?

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/regulation-industry/government-smut-blocks-are-a-limp-substitute-for-parents>

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