

Reference: O2091319

Information Requests  
[information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk)

9 January 2026

## Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning cost, VPN, personal data and the Online Safety Act (age verification).

We received this request on 15 October 2025. We sought clarification of your request on 11 November 2025 and you responded the same day. We have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the 'FOI Act'). We needed more time to consider the public interest in disclosure of the information requested – we have now concluded this.

### Your request & our response

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*I would like to know any information held on the following:*

*The amount of public money used to date (the date of receipt to this email) or allocated in total for the creation, implementation, enforcement, etc of this act.*

We have recently published a response to another [Freedom of Information request](#) which provides some information relevant to your request.

The table below sets out the total direct spend in preparing for and discharging our regulatory duties under the Online Safety Act by financial year as detailed in the above linked request. By way of context, we work within a budget cap set by Government. The spend includes research, professional advice, administration, stakeholder engagement, staff, technology and premises costs.

The budget for the current financial year has been agreed by Ofcom's Board at £72.6m for costs directly attributed to the Online Safety regulation. Please note that Ofcom is directly funded by the industries we regulate, not by taxes.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Actuals	£2.7m	£14.7m	£38.1m	£46.3m	£64.1m

*Data gathered on VPN usage as stated that VPN usage will be looked in to:*

- Increase in VPN usage vs age verification carried out (in other words, the amount of people bypassing the age verification vs the amount of people verifying their age).*
- Impact on law enforcement fighting online crime (If assessment was carried out prior to the act coming into effect and any data on increase in difficulty in fighting online crime).*

We have interpreted this to mean data gathered which determines an increase in VPN usage, compared with data that identifies the participation of age verification checks. We can confirm that we do not hold this information.

We have however, reported on VPN usage in our [Online nations report 2025](#) (pages 44-45).

*What information is being collected to assess the impact and reliability of the online safety act (Specifically age verification) including is any personal data being retained to measure its effectiveness.*

We are gathering information on how in-scope services have used age assurance and how effective it has been for complying with their duties under the Online Safety Act, to inform a statutory report that we (Ofcom) must publish under section 157 of the Online Safety Act. The information we will consider to inform this report includes market research delivered under our protection of children research programme, information collected under our information gathering powers and a broader [Call for Evidence](#).

The research under our protection of children research programme is conducted by independent third-party research agencies. The agencies only collect personal data that is necessary for the purposes of conducting our research programme. No identifiable information is shared with Ofcom. The length of time personal data is retained varies depending on how it is used for research purposes but is not retained for longer than is necessary.

*Any risk assessments carried out or evaluated by Ofcom in terms of the risks to personal data being given to third parties not always based in the UK to verify ages.*

Revised as:

*I refer to any risk assessments conducted by ofcom to do with the increased risk to personal data due to the increased collection by sometimes none UK based companies forced by the online safety act.*

We do not hold this information.

Privacy and data protection risk and compliance are matters for the [Information Commissioner's Office](#), as the UK data protection regulator. We have worked closely with the ICO in developing our approach to highly effective age assurance. Our Guidance on Highly Effective Age Assurance (for user-to-user services and providers of online pornographic services) assists providers in directing them to the relevant parts of the data protection regime and the relevant guidance.

Yours sincerely,

## Information Requests

### Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team ([information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk)) to request an internal review.

### Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).