Reference: 02327563

Information Requests
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4 November 2026

Dear,

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about children's online habits, platforms and online safety research.

We received this request on 17 October 2026 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

Your request

"I am a concerned parent trying to develop a better understanding of the online environment that children and young teenagers are exposed to today, particularly those aged between 13 and 16.

I have become increasingly interested in which platforms young people actually use in practice, how much time they spend on them, and the different ways they communicate and encounter content online. I would be grateful for any publicly available research, published data or general guidance you could point me towards.

In particular, I would be interested in the following:

1. Platform usage: Which websites, apps and online services are most commonly used by children aged 8–12, 13–14 and 15–17, and what proportion of each age group uses them?

2. Time spent online: How much time children spend on individual platforms, including typical usage, heavier users and differences between age groups.

3. How children use these services: Where the available research allows, how children divide their time between watching videos, posting content, livestreaming, gaming, group chats, private messaging and interacting with strangers.

4. Contact and movement between platforms: Whether research indicates how often conversations begin on one service and subsequently move to another, such as from a public chat environment to a private messaging or social media service.

5. Online safety: What research is available on the platforms and types of online interaction associated with unwanted contact, inappropriate messages or other online safeguarding concerns.

6. Less mainstream chat websites: Whether your research captures usage of smaller or less widely known chat services, including ChatIB and its associated domains, and whether any figures are available on children's reach, frequency of visits or time spent on these services.

Our response

We have responded to each of your requests for information below.

In case it is helpful we also note that on 22 October 2026 we published our Report on content harmful to children. This report was produced under s 63 of the Online Safety Act 2023, which requires Ofcom to prepare and publish a report setting out the outcome of our review into the incidence of content harmful to children on regulated online services, and the severity of harm that children in the UK suffer, or may suffer, as a result of those kinds of content. This report draws on a range of evidence primarily gathered during the first nine months after the children's safety duties coming into force in July 2025[1].

You may also find it useful to review our Online Nation webpage. This sets out Ofcom's annual Online Nation reports that look at what people (including children) are doing online, how they are served by online content providers and platforms, and their attitudes to and experiences of using the internet.

1. Platform usage: Which websites, apps and online services are most commonly used by children aged 8–12, 13–14 and 15–17, and what proportion of each age group uses them?

We refer to the following information we have published:

- Children's Online Safety Tracker (COST) provides the data tables for services used and exposure to harmful content with demographic breakdowns for gender and age.
- The Children's Online Experience Report was published in May 2026, and examines children's online experiences, their exposure to harm and the safety measures in place before and after the Children's Safety Duties came into force on 25 July 2025. See particularly pages 10-11. Our website sets out links to other research which contributed to this report.
- The Children's Passive Online Measurement webpage includes our reports along with an interactive dashboard with the data. The study measures online children aged 8-14s' use of websites and apps across smartphones, tablets and computers. To collect this data the recruited children had passive monitoring software installed on the devices they used. This year's report published in May 2026 also includes data for 15-17-year-olds.
- The Children's and Parents: Annual Media Use and Attitudes report published in May 2026. See 'Children's media use and consumption' section starting on page 11.

2. Time spent online: How much time children spend on individual platforms, including typical usage, heavier users and differences between age groups.

We refer to the following information we have published:

- The Children's Passive Online Measurement webpage.
- The Children's Online Experience Report published in May 2026 (particularly pages 12-14)

3. How children use these services: Where the available research allows, how children divide their time between watching videos, posting content, livestreaming, gaming, group chats, private messaging and interacting with strangers.

[1] Sections 12 and 29 of the Online Safety Act 2023, which confer duties on the providers of online services likely to be accessed by children in the UK to take proportionate measures to protect children from content that is harmful to them.

We refer to the following information we have published:

- The Children's Passive Online Measurement report published in May 2026
- The Understanding Online Communications Among Children report published in 2026

4. Contact and movement between platforms: Whether research indicates how often conversations begin on one service and subsequently move to another, such as from a public chat environment to a private messaging or social media service.

We refer to the Understanding Online Communications Among Children report we published in 2026 (particularly pages 34-36).

5. Online safety: What research is available on the platforms and types of online interaction associated with unwanted contact, inappropriate messages or other online safeguarding concerns.

We refer to the Understanding Online Communications Among Children report we published in 2026 (particularly pages 42-47).

6. Less mainstream chat websites: Whether your research captures usage of smaller or less widely known chat services, including ChatIB and its associated domains, and whether any figures are available on children's reach, frequency of visits or time spent on these services.

We refer you to the Children's Passive Online Measurement report we published in May 2026 (particularly pages 25-26) and our interactive report, which contain some information on less widely used chat services. However, we do not hold any specific usage figures for ChatIB.

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) 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 Commission Office.