Reference: 2233640

Information Requests

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6 August 2026

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about Online Safety Act and social media ban.

We received this request on 9 July 2026 and we have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the FOI Act').

Your request

We write to submit a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("FOIA"). We refer to:
(i) the government's announcement on 15 June 2026 to implement (amongst other restrictions) a ban which prevents social media companies from providing their services to individuals under the age of 16 years old (the "social media ban");
(ii) the consultation progress statement presented by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology ("DSIT") to Parliament in June 20261 (the "progress statement"); and
(iii) the letter dated 15 June 2026 from Dame Melanie Dawes to the Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP2 (the "progress statement response").

In the context of the social media ban and the progress statement, we request access to internal papers, memos, correspondence and submissions to senior decision-makers at Ofcom. This request covers material from and around the time of the Secretary of State's Ministerial statement to Parliament on 20 January 2026 regarding "Mobile Phones and Social Media: Use by Children"3 to the date of this letter.
We seek this information in relation to:
(i) Ofcom's role in relation to the social media ban decision;
1 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a2fbb99d95ffddb05d4b014/UAP1_2205_PR.pf
2 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/public-correspondence/2026/letter-from-dame-melaniedawes-to-secretary-of-state-for-dsit-on-the-social-media-ban.pdf?v=419520
3 HC Deb 20 January 2026, vol 779, col 151.
(ii) the rationale for the social media ban; and
(iii) the decision-making process for the timing of the social media ban announcement and implementation.

In the context of the progress statement response, we request access to internal papers, memos, correspondence and submissions to senior decision-makers at Ofcom in relation to:
(iv) the scope of work, review methodology, relevant technologies, and initial issues identified in relation to Ofcom's assessment of highly effective age assurance in relation to individuals under the age of 16 years old (the "HEAA assessment"); and

(v) how the HEAA assessment will consider, address and clarify the interaction of the social media ban with existing legal obligations under applicable UK laws, in particular the Online Safety Act 2023 and the UK GDPR.

Our response

In response to the information requested, we consider that this is exempt under section 12 of the FOI Act. Section 12 of the FOI Act provides that a public authority is not obliged to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the "appropriate limit". The appropriate limit is set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004, and is, for Ofcom, £450, which is equivalent to 18-hours. That sum is intended to cover the estimated costs involved in determining whether Ofcom holds the information requested, identifying, locating, retrieving and extracting the information from any document containing it. The Regulations provide that costs are to be estimated at a rate of £25 per person per hour.

In order to satisfy your request and provide the required information, we would need to review a large volume of documents which could potentially contain information in scope of this request. In particular, the request asks for *"internal papers, memos, correspondence and submissions"* which encompasses a broad range of documents - formal and informal - across various teams and departments. We would then need to extract the relevant information and consider whether any exemptions to disclosure apply. Moreover, some aspects of the request are ambiguous, such as the requested time period of *"around the time of the Secretary of State's Ministerial statement to Parliament"*, which further broaden your request.

You may wish to consider submitting a narrower, more focused request, such as focusing on specific records/assessments which Ofcom has produced, narrowing your request to certain teams or departments, and stating a clear timeframe. We would then consider this under the FOI Act. However, should you decide to make a further request for information, please note that the aforementioned appropriate limit and/or other exemptions may apply.

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 Commissioner's Office.