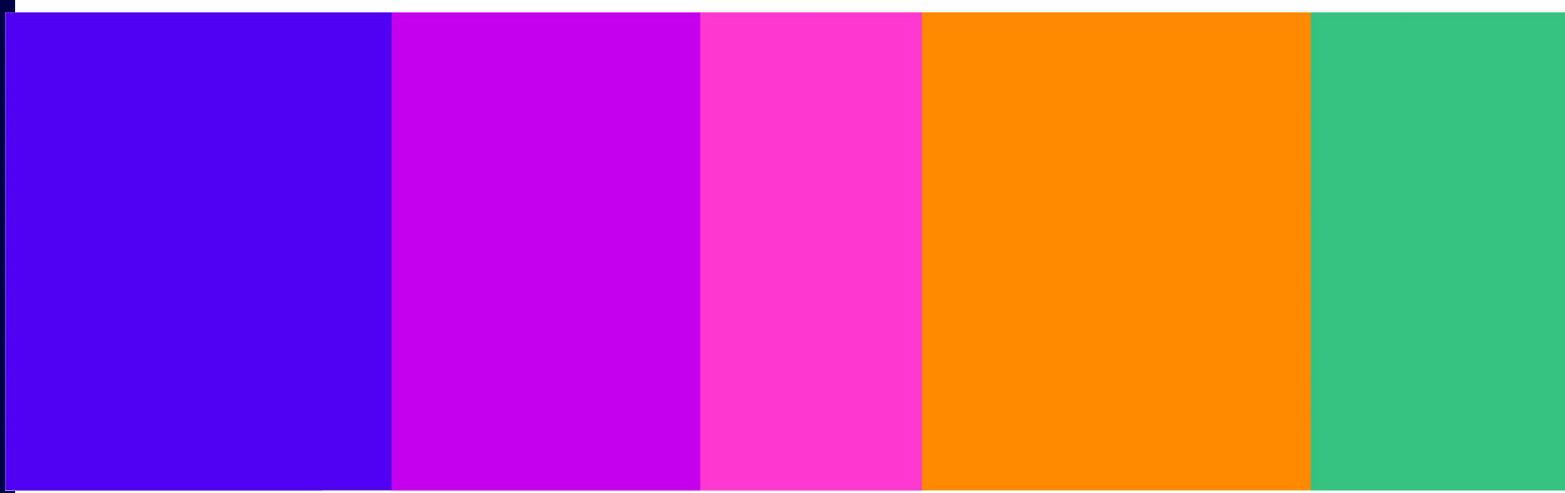




Ofcom Children's Online User Ages

Notification of proposed changes to the Children's Online User Ages research

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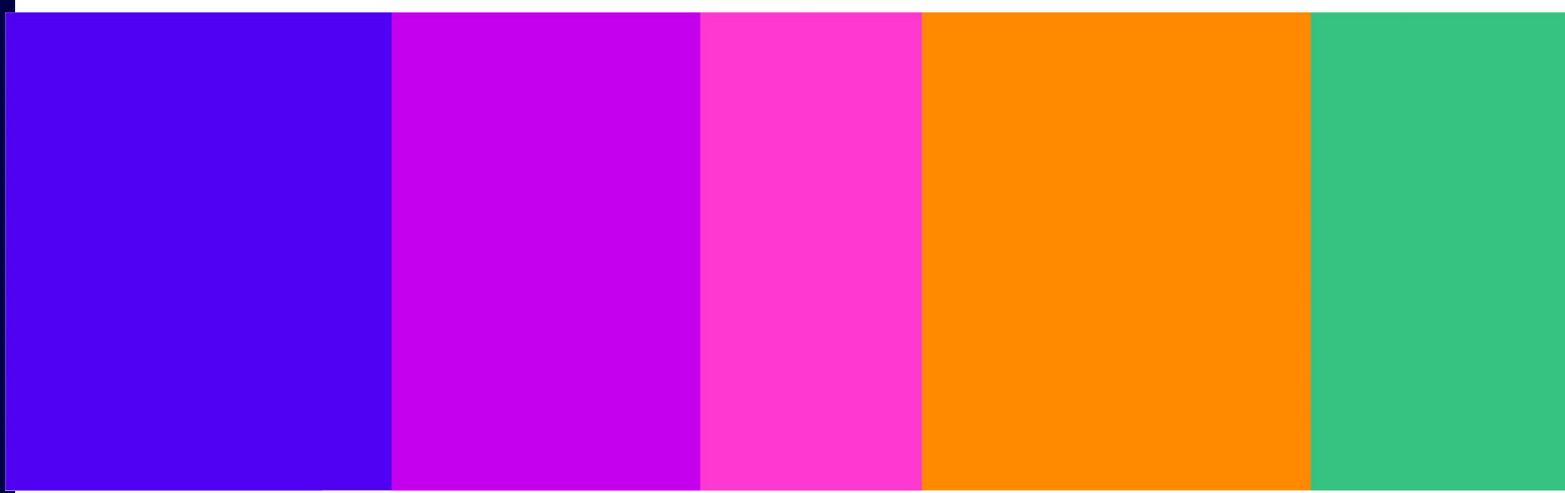
Summary

As a producer of official statistics, Ofcom follow the guidance set out in [Changing or ceasing to publish official statistics – Government Analysis Function \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](https://civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/2019/04/23/Changing-or-ceasing-to-publish-official-statistics). In line with this guidance, where substantial changes are made to a piece of research that is established as an official statistic, we notify stakeholders of the changes that are planned to be made and allow a period of time for stakeholders to provide input or feedback if they wish to do so.

We are proposing the following changes to Ofcom's Children's Online User Ages research, which is a survey that estimates children's (aged 8-17) user age and asks some additional questions about whether they have been asked to prove their date of birth on their profile. The proposed changes would come into effect after the completion of Wave 4. These are as follows:

- 1) We are proposing to reduce the frequency of running the research from biannually to annually.

More info on the background and proposed changes can be found throughout the rest of this document.



Background

In October 2023, the Government confirmed Ofcom as the regulator for online safety in the UK, under the Online Safety Act. As part of the Act, Ofcom will ensure online services regulated by the Act can identify, mitigate and manage risks to their users and that their services are safe by design, especially for children. This research is one in a series of research studies and sources that has informed the robust evidence base used in our [Protecting children from harms online Statement](#). This programme of research further develops our understanding of online harms and how we can help to promote a safer user experience.

Official statistics

Ofcom is named in the [Official Statistics Order 2023](#) as a producer of official statistics. As a producer of Official Statistics, Ofcom has a responsibility to follow the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) which ensures that published statistics have public value, are high quality, and are produced by people and organisations that are trustworthy.

As a producer of official statistics, Ofcom follow the guidance set out in [Changing or ceasing to publish official statistics – Government Analysis Function \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#). In line with this guidance, where substantial changes are made to a piece of research that is established as an official statistic, we notify stakeholders of the changes that are planned to be made and allow a period of time for stakeholders to provide feedback if they wish to do so.

The Children’s Online User Ages research to date

In Q4 2022, we published [a report](#) that explored how different risk factors combine to increase the likelihood of harm to children. Fake user ages was a factor identified within the research that may contribute to the increase of harm to children. As a result, we created a survey to estimate the proportion of children with user ages that may expose them to functionalities that increase the likelihood of them coming across harmful content online. We conducted the initial pilot in Q3 2022 and have since conducted another four waves (Q3 2023, Q1 2024, Q3 2024 & Q1 2025) establishing this research as an official statistic in Q3 2024.

For more information and access to research materials from the previous waves please follow the link here: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/cy/online-safety/protecting-children/online-user-ages/>

What we are proposing

1) Due to minimal changes in trends on a six-monthly basis, we are proposing to reduce the frequency of running the research from biannually to annually. We will continue to track children’s user ages as our regulatory powers from the Online Safety Act come into effect, with the fifth wave of research taking place in Q1 2026, aligning with previous fieldwork dates. Doing this will also ensure that Ofcom’s market research budget continues to be allocated as effectively as possible across the organisation. We recognise the importance of continuing to understand children’s experiences as services implement Age Assurance to comply with their duties under the Act, therefore, we are exploring research options to track this ahead of Wave 5.

If you would like any further information or if you would like to highlight any concerns for Ofcom’s consideration regarding the change to the Children’s Online User Ages research, please contact market.research@ofcom.org.uk by 3rd June 2025.