

Reference: 02014248

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

7 August 2025

## Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about the manosphere report. We received this request on 16 June 2025.

On 7 July we contacted you to inform you that we were extending the time limit, to conduct a public interest test. We have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

### Your request & our response

---

*I have read the recent report on the Manosphere and wish to find out the following details:*

1. *How many members of the team involved with the project were women?*

We have interpreted your request to refer to the agency's project team, who carried out the research and reporting for the project. This team comprised five individuals, two of which were women.

2. *Did participants refuse to answer questions from a female researcher?*

As outlined in the published report, at an early review point, the researchers were concerned that participants may be withholding some details for fear of presumed judgement by a female researcher. It was decided that all interviews with men would be conducted by male researchers from that point forward. No participant expressed any preference about the gender of interviewers. Prior to this review point, no participant had refused to answer questions from a female researcher.

3. *Were there any internal communications within Ofcom about the conclusions of the report?*

Yes. See response to Question 4.

4. *I wish to see any internal communications about the report raising concerns about the conclusions or whether the researchers were seen as becoming too drawn into the Manosphere, if possible.*

Whilst we do hold internal communications regarding the report, this information is being withheld as we consider its disclosure is exempt under section 36 of the Act. In particular, section 36(2) (b)(ii) and (c) of the Act provides that information held by a public authority is exempt from disclosure if, in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person, disclosure of the information would, or would be likely to, inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation and would

otherwise prejudice, or would be likely otherwise to prejudice, the effective conduct of public affairs.

In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing the information. I have attached a letter from the qualified person for Ofcom (the Corporation Secretary) confirming that this exemption applies (see Annex A) and a table setting out the factors Ofcom considered when deciding where the public interest lay (see Annex B).

We hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

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](#).

## **Annex A**

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

### **Section 36 exemption**

Some of the information you requested is being withheld as it falls under the exemption in section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

I am a "qualified person" as referred to section 36(2) of the Act and duly authorised by a Minister of the Crown for the purposes of that section. In my reasonable opinion, disclosure of the information requested would prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

In applying this exemption, I have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing the information.

I have set out in Annex B the exemption in full, as well as the factors I considered when deciding where the public interest lay in relation to the information concerned.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk)

Signed: Corporation Secretary

Date: 6 August 2025

## Annex B

### Section 36: Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs

Section 36 exempts information whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, have any of the following effects:

- inhibit the free and frank provision of advice,
- inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation; or
- prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

#### Key points:

- Section 36 can only be used if, in the reasonable view of a "qualified person", disclosure of the requested information would have one of the specified effects.
- In this case, we consider the disclosure of the information requested would, or would be likely to, inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation and would otherwise or would be likely otherwise to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.
- The application of section 36 is subject to a public interest balance

| Factors for disclosure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Factors for withholding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ofcom recognises that its approach to its duties under the Online Safety Act 2023 is a matter of interest to the wider public. Releasing such information could be said to increase transparency in our work and allow for discussion in a public forum.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The documentation in relation to which the exemption is claimed reflects internal discussion relating to research, internal policy making, and discussions regarding the report in question in its draft format. The disclosure of these documents could affect Ofcom's ability to effectively deliberate on and discuss such matters internally going forward.</li><li>• Releasing this information may impact Ofcom's ability to effectively conduct research and engage with external research companies effectively and openly in the future. This would therefore likely prejudice Ofcom's role as the online safety regulator, and more generally as the communications regulator.</li><li>• To fulfil its regulatory functions effectively, Ofcom teams need to be able to engage in free and frank discussions internally, and exchange opinions and recommendations in order for robust decisions to be made. The disclosure of information about such discussions would, or</li></ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>would be likely to, inhibit free and frank discussions in the future. This in turn would likely damage the quality of deliberation and lead to less robust decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disclosure of such communications would therefore likely prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.</li> <li>• Ofcom has published the report on the manosphere, which is the result of the research in relation to which communication is requested. The published report represents the final, confirmed outcome of this research.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Reasons why public interest favours withholding information</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, Ofcom is withholding the requested information. The public interest test has been applied based on disclosing information which would reveal internal discussions between Ofcom employees and deliberations in relation to the report in question. We consider that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosure.</li> <li>• This is because the disclosure of this information is likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs, as it would affect Ofcom's ability to freely and effectively discuss and deliberate on such matters.</li> <li>• Whilst there may be some weight attached to the public interest in disclosure to enable the public to understand how Ofcom is carrying out its role as the online safety regulator, we consider that prejudice would be caused by such a disclosure.</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |