

28 October 2026

Mr [REDACTED]

Our reference: CAS-516534-D401V3

Dear [REDACTED]

Your request for information

Thank you for your email of 25 September 2026 in which you requested:

"I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 concerning the time taken to determine the suitability of childminder assistants. For each of the 12 calendar months from **1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, please provide:

1. The number of childminder assistants for whom Ofsted issued a decision or letter confirming that they were suitable to work as a childminder assistant.
2. The **mean average number of working days** taken to determine suitability, using the same methodology that Ofsted uses for its published processing-time statistics.
3. The **median number of working days** taken, using the same start and end points as in question 2.
4. The shortest and longest processing times, in working days, using the same methodology.

For the complete 12-month period from **1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, please also provide:

5. The total number of childminder assistants determined suitable.
6. The mean average processing time in working days.
7. The median processing time in working days.

Ofsted's methodology

Ofsted has previously publicly stated that, where it determines that someone is suitable to become a childminder assistant, this takes an average of approximately **34 working days**.

In relation to this published figure, please provide the following information:

8. The precise period of data upon which the published figure of 34 working days was calculated.
9. Please specify precisely the event or date that Ofsted treats as the **start of the processing period** when calculating this figure.

10. In particular, please confirm whether Ofsted's processing-time clock begins only once **all required checks and information have been received**, including, where applicable, DBS information, local authority checks, health information and any other third-party checks or information.
11. If the answer to question 10 is yes, please confirm whether the period between Ofsted first being notified of a proposed childminder assistant and Ofsted receiving the final outstanding check or piece of information is **excluded from the published processing-time figure**.
12. Please specify precisely the event or date that Ofsted treats as the **end of the processing period** when calculating this measure.
13. Please identify any other periods that are excluded, deducted or treated as a pause when calculating Ofsted's processing-time statistics and explain the circumstances in which this occurs.

End-to-end waiting time

Separately from Ofsted's internal or published processing-time measure, I would also like to understand the actual elapsed time experienced by childminders waiting for an assistant to be determined suitable.

For each calendar month from **1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, please therefore provide:

14. The **mean number of working days from the date Ofsted was first notified of the proposed childminder assistant to the date on which Ofsted issued its suitability decision**.
15. The **median number of working days** between those same two dates.
16. The shortest and longest number of working days between those same two dates.

For the complete 12-month period from **1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, please provide:

17. The mean end-to-end waiting time described above.
18. The median end-to-end waiting time described above.
19. The shortest and longest end-to-end waiting times.

For the avoidance of doubt, questions 14–19 are intended to include the entire period following Ofsted first being notified of the proposed assistant, including any time spent awaiting DBS information, local authority checks, health information, other third-party checks or further information, rather than commencing only when Ofsted considers that all necessary information has been received.

If Ofsted does not record or calculate any of the requested statistics but holds the underlying dates electronically from which they could readily be extracted, please provide those dates in anonymised form (for example, the date of initial notification and date of suitability decision for each case), together with any other relevant date used to calculate Ofsted's processing-time measure."

The Freedom of Information Act

We have dealt with your request in accordance with the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000. The first requirement of the Act is that we confirm whether we hold information of the description set out in your request. We must then provide you with all the information we hold within the scope of your request, unless it is 'exempt' information.

I can confirm that we hold the data that you have requested. When considering the data, it is important to note that some records are affected by known system and administrative issues. These issues result in application statuses or processing times not fully reflecting the progress or outcome of an individual's suitability assessment. The limitations set out below should therefore be taken into account when interpreting the information:

1) Previous suitability decisions

Some individuals who appear to have an application 'in progress' have already been assessed as suitable in another role.

2) Application status not updated

In some cases, the application status has not updated correctly even though a suitability decision has been made.

3) Outstanding administrative actions

In some instances, a suitability decision can be made and the decision communicated to the applicant without all administrative processes being completed.

During the period covered by this request, Ofsted prioritised issuing suitability decision letters to applicants in line with the updated Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework which came into force on 1 September 2026.

As a result, some administrative actions, including updating internal systems, were completed after the suitability decision had already been made and communicated. When reporting on the processing times in these cases, they will appear longer than the actual time taken for the applicant to receive the suitability decision. Ofsted wanted to ensure that those who required the suitability letter received a copy of this for their records.

4) Applications completed immediately

Some applications show a processing time of zero days because checks from an existing active role can be relied upon, allowing a suitability decision to be made immediately.

It is important to note that some cases take considerably longer to conclude and therefore have a disproportionate effect on average case processing times. This may

occur when an individual is applying for more than one role, where additional assessment is required as a result of information identified during the suitability checking process, or where Ofsted needs to obtain further information or clarifications from the applicant or other parties before reaching a decision. During these periods, Ofsted remains in contact with applicants while the necessary information is obtained and considered. These factors should be taken into account when interpreting the minimum, maximum and average processing times set out below.

For context, childminder assistants must be deemed suitable by Ofsted before they can begin work at the childminding setting. Once deemed suitable, assistants can support childminders by caring for additional children and working in ratio or alone for up to 2 hours, for example while the childminder does school pick-ups and drop offs or attends appointments. Childminders and assistants have distinct roles and childminders are responsible for the work of assistants.

Everyone applying to be a childminder assistant needs to have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate with children's barred list check for the child workforce (this must also be home-based if the assistant lives on the childcare premises).

We will review information we receive from the children's services department in each local authority where the applicant has lived in the previous 5 years. The information we receive determines whether we carry out other checks. For example, if the assistant has lived abroad in the past 5 years, we may need to see a certificate of good conduct and an overseas criminal records checks from each country they lived in during that period.

If a person has lived within several local authorities in the past 5 years we will need to contact each local authority for information. This understandably takes a little more time. We may also request that assistants complete a health declaration form if the information we receive suggests that a health condition may impact their suitability to care for children.

For points 1-7, please see the table below:

Table 1. Childminder assistant suitability processing times between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026, by calendar month

Month and period	The number of suitable childminder assistant decisions	Average number of working days (mean)	Median number of working days	Minimum number of working days	Maximum number of working days
September 2025	204	47	34	0	272
October 2025	222	45	28.5	0	236
November 2025	284	44	23	0	622
December 2025	169	44	32	0	222
January 2026	332	43	37	0	508
February 2026	238	51	40	0	402
March 2026	213	49	36	0	335
April 2026	225	54	41	0	273
May 2026	277	50	33	0	378
June 2026	221	47	36	0	448
July 2026	203	46	26	0	263
August 2026	333	60	30	0	392
1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026	2921	49	33	0	622

For points 8-13, I will address these individually below:

8. *The precise period of data upon which the published figure of 34 working days was calculated.*
 - For the period 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025
9. *Please specify precisely the event or date that Ofsted treats as the **start of the processing period** when calculating this figure.*
 - The start of the processing period is the date that the application form that is completed by the applicant is accepted on to our system. By accepted, we mean the fully completed application includes the correct information required from the applicant to enable us to begin our suitability checking process.
10. *In particular, please confirm whether Ofsted's processing-time clock begins only once **all required checks and information have been received**,*

including, where applicable, DBS information, local authority checks, health information and any other third-party checks or information.

- Ofsted's processing time begins from the date an application is accepted as complete and ready to progress to suitability checks. Once an application has been accepted, Ofsted commences the suitability checking process which may include requesting Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, local authority checks, health checks, certificates of good conduct and any other checks considered necessary. The time taken before an application is accepted is not included in Ofsted's processing time.
- 11. *If the answer to question 10 is yes, please confirm whether the period between Ofsted first being notified of a proposed childminder assistant and Ofsted receiving the final outstanding check or piece of information is **excluded from the published processing-time figure**.*
 - NA
- 12. *Please specify precisely the event or date that Ofsted treats as the **end of the processing period** when calculating this measure.*
 - The date that the overall suitability decision is made.
- 13. *Please identify any other periods that are excluded, deducted or treated as a pause when calculating Ofsted's processing-time statistics and explain the circumstances in which this occurs.*
 - NA

For points 14-19, I will address these individually below:

End-to-end waiting time

Separately from Ofsted's internal or published processing-time measure, I would also like to understand the actual elapsed time experienced by childminders waiting for an assistant to be determined suitable.

*For each calendar month from **1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, please therefore provide:*

- 14. *The **mean number of working days from the date Ofsted was first notified of the proposed childminder assistant to the date on which Ofsted issued its suitability decision**.*
 - We class notification as receipt and acceptance of a correctly completed application form. We only have data from the point that a completed application form is accepted and we start our suitability checking process, which is the data outlined above.
- 15. *The **median number of working days** between those same two dates.*
 - As above - provided in Q1-7
- 16. *The **shortest and longest number of working days** between those same two dates.*
 - As above - provided in Q1-7.

*For the complete 12-month period from **1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, please provide:*

17. *The mean end-to-end waiting time described above.*
 - a. As above - provided in Q1-7.
18. *The median end-to-end waiting time described above.*
 - a. As above - provided in Q1-7.
19. *The shortest and longest end-to-end waiting times.*
 - a. As above - provided in Q1-7.

I trust that this letter clearly explains our position. If you have any queries about our response, please email informationrequest@ofsted.gov.uk and we will do our best to address them.

If you are dissatisfied with our response or the handling of your request, you may request a formal internal review. Details of how to do this are set out in the Annex at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Exton
Deputy Director, Operations

Annex - Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with our response or the handling of your request, you may request a formal internal review. To do this, please write to the following address, setting out the area(s) of the response you are unhappy with:

Email: Richard McGowan at: informationrequest@ofsted.gov.uk

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision as to whether we have complied with our obligations under the FOI Act with respect to your request. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint