# TikTok to pay UK fine over under-13s

LEVEL C1


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## I. WARM-UP

1. How do social media platforms check a user's age?
2. What risks do you see for children on social media?
3. When should a company accept a regulator's decision?

## II. KEY VOCABULARY

**watchdog**
an official body that monitors whether laws and rules are followed

**enforce**
to make sure a rule is obeyed using checks or penalties

**underage**
younger than the legal or permitted age for something

**consent**
permission given by someone for something to happen

**algorithm**
a set of rules a computer uses to make decisions or show content

**harmful**
likely to cause damage or negative effects

**investigation**
an official process to discover the facts about a case

**bypass**
to avoid or get around a rule or system

## III. READING

TikTok will pay a £12.7m penalty to the UK's data watchdog after dropping its appeal over child-safety breaches. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) fined the video app in 2023 for failing to enforce its minimum age of 13 and for weak checks that let underage users stay on the platform.

The ICO said as many as 1.75 million UK children under 13 used TikTok in 2020. It also found that the company did not give clear information on data use or obtain parental consent. Not until it dropped its appeal did the fine become final.

TikTok says that after 2020 it expanded tools to detect and remove accounts that should not be there. The service has more than 30 million users in the UK.

TikTok has also withdrawn an appeal against an ICO request for details on how its algorithm handles teenagers' personal data and serves potentially harmful content. The ICO will now resume its investigation. Ofcom says more action is needed as the UK's under-16 access limit for social media comes into force next year.

In Australia, where an under-16 ban began last December, officials report that a substantial proportion of young users kept accounts or learned to bypass age-gating systems.

*Reading text adapted from reporting by* **The Guardian***: "TikTok drops appeal against £12.7m fine for...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

## IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who fined TikTok and for how much?
2. What age limit did TikTok fail to enforce?
3. When did TikTok expand tools to detect underage accounts?
4. What will the ICO examine about TikTok's system?
5. What point is made using Australia's experience?

## V. DISCUSSION

1. Should platforms verify age with ID, and why or why not?
2. How transparent should algorithms for teens' feeds be?
3. Who is most responsible for child safety online?
4. Are bans effective, or do they push problems elsewhere?

## VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

**Adding emphasis - inversion with negative adverbials**

When a negative or limiting adverbial is put at the front for emphasis, English uses inversion: the auxiliary comes before the subject. Use forms like "Not until... did...", "Never have...", "Rarely do...".

*"Not until TikTok dropped its appeal* **did the fine become** *final."*

*"Never* **have I** *seen so many children on one app."*

## VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

**Circle the correct option in each sentence.**

1. Rarely (do platforms / platforms do) enforce age checks. _____
2. Only now (the ICO can / can the ICO) resume its investigation. _____
3. On no account (should users / users should) share passwords. _____
4. Hardly ever (children do / do children) read privacy policies. _____
5. Seldom (did platforms / platforms did) detect underage users. _____

# Teacher's Notes

**TEACHERS ONLY**

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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## I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach: watchdog, enforce, consent, algorithm, harmful, investigation, bypass, appeal; elicit examples from other platforms.
- Run the reading in two passes: gist then detail. The story involves child safety and regulation, so begin discussion in pairs and allow students to refer to the news rather than personal experiences.
- Differentiate by task: stronger students draft a short policy recommendation for one regulator; others list three practical age-check steps with pros and cons.

## II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Poll the room on ID checks, then pair students with different views to find common ground.
2. Ask students to name one risk of opacity, then suggest one practical transparency step.
3. Have groups rank parents, platforms, schools, and regulators, and justify the order.
4. Split the class: one side argues for bans, the other for education and design changes.

## III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Debate:** In two teams, prepare 2-minute openings on whether under-16 bans reduce online harm.

**Writing:** Write a 120-word notice from the ICO explaining why the £12.7m penalty was imposed.

## IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

**Comprehension questions:** short factual answers from the text.

**Grammar exercise:** Adding emphasis - inversion with negative adverbials

**Discussion:** open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

# Answer Key

**TEACHERS ONLY**

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## IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who fined TikTok and for how much?
   The UK ICO fined it £12.7m.
2. What age limit did TikTok fail to enforce?
   Age 13, the platform's minimum user age.
3. When did TikTok expand tools to detect underage accounts?
   After 2020, according to TikTok.
4. What will the ICO examine about TikTok's system?
   How its algorithm handles teens' data and serves potentially harmful content.
5. What point is made using Australia's experience?
   A substantial proportion of young users kept accounts or learned to bypass age checks.

## V. DISCUSSION

**Open answers.** Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

## VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Rarely (do platforms / platforms do) enforce age checks. **do platforms**
2. Only now (the ICO can / can the ICO) resume its investigation. **can the ICO**
3. On no account (should users / users should) share passwords. **should users**
4. Hardly ever (children do / do children) read privacy policies. **do children**
5. Seldom (did platforms / platforms did) detect underage users. **did platforms**

## VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

**Key point:** When a negative or limiting adverbial is put at the front for emphasis, English uses inversion: the auxiliary comes before the subject. Use forms like "Not until... did...", "Never have...", "Rarely do...". (Examples constructed.)

*"Not until TikTok dropped its appeal* **did the fine become** *final."*

*"Never* **have I** *seen so many children on one app."*