New cryptocurrency offers users tokens for scanning their eyeballs
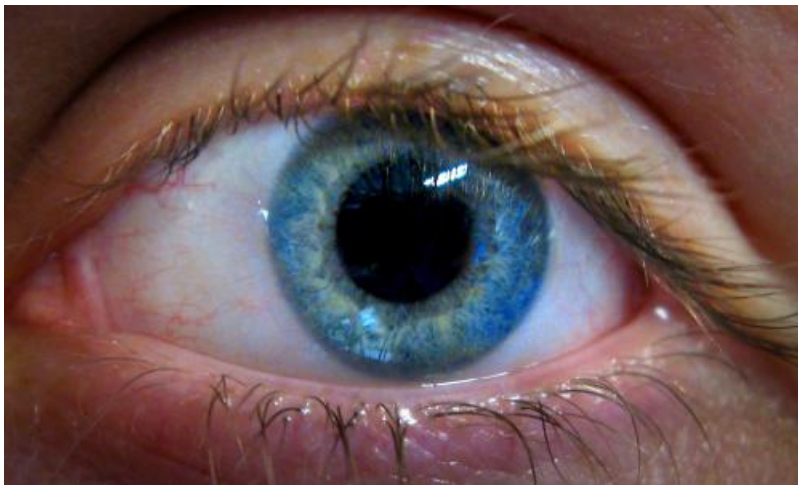
Members of the public are being invited to have their eyeballs scanned by a silver orb as part of cryptocurrency project that aims to use biometric verification to distinguish humans from AI systems. People signing up to the Worldcoin scheme via an app this week will receive a "genesis grant" of 25 tokens, equivalent to about £40, after having their iris scanned by one of the bowling ball-sized devices. Once users scan their eyes they will receive a World ID, which the scheme says will prove they are a "real and unique person" while preserving their privacy, and a crypto wallet on their smartphone. The project was launched by Sam Altman, of the machine learning research firm OpenAI, and on Tuesday the London orb at Techspace Worship Street, near Old Street tube station, was busy with potential users. Worldcoin promises that those scanning their irises will have their privacy protected. However, the Information Commissioner's Office, the data regulator, said it was examining the scheme, telling Reuters: "We note the launch of Worldcoin in the UK and will be making further inquiries." According to the company, Worldcoin will be a way to distinguish between real "verified humans" and AI systems. It seeks to establish universal access to the global economy "regardless of country or background", and is described on its website as an opportunity to establish "a place for all of us to benefit in the age of AI". The Worldcoin protocol works by giving biometrically verified users a digital identity in the form of a Worldcoin token, which claims to be the first crypto token to be globally and freely distributed to people just for being a real, unique person. Users will also gain access to the World App enabling payment, purchases and transfers globally using digital assets and traditional currencies. The project, in the works for more than three years and co-founded by Altman and a theoretical physics student, Alex Bania, launched officially on Monday with 2 million users from 33 countries having signed up and submitted to scans in its trial stages, predominantly from Europe, India and southern Africa. Altman and Bania said: "Worldcoin is an attempt at global scale alignment, the journey will be challenging and the outcome is uncertain. But finding new ways to broadly share the coming technological prosperity is a critical challenge of our time." Altman, whose company is responsible for creating the artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT and the image generator Dall-E 2, has previously called regulation of AI "essential", and has supported regulated guardians for technology that would seek to minimise the harms while also allowing the benefits of artificial intelligence. The launch of Worldcoin has been at the subject of global attention, with many divided opinions. Jack Dorsey, the Twitter founder, reacted to Worldcoin's aspirations to "global scale alignment" with a single word: "cute". Vitalik Buterin, a co-founder of the Ethereum network, shared his mixed thoughts on the launch of Worldcoin in a long-form essay on Twitter and warned against the possibility of too much dependency on the orbs for scanning with their "dystopian vibez". "The problem of making a proof-of-personhood system that is effective and reliable, especially in the hands of people distant from the

existing crypto community, seems quite challenging," Buterin said.