

Ofcom ref: 00544423

Information Requests
Email: information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

1 June 2018

Ref: 00544423 Freedom of Information: Right to Know Request

Thank you for your request for information on complaints received by Ofcom about the BBC and RT. Your request was received on 21 May 2018 and we are dealing with it under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the "Act").

You requested the following information:

- *How many complaints has Ofcom received about the BBC in each of the last 5 years?*
- *How many complaints has Ofcom received about Russia Today (RT) in each of the last five years?*

The volume of complaints received may be a consideration in assessing general audience reactions, but it is not determinative as to whether Ofcom will proceed to investigate any given case. Rather, it is the particular issues which have been raised by the complainant(s) which are of primary concern in Ofcom's assessment of a programme.

For complaints about the BBC, a new BBC Royal Charter and Agreement was published in December 2016, which gave Ofcom new regulatory responsibilities for the BBC. Ofcom took up these new responsibilities on 3 April 2017. Please note that under the new procedures, Ofcom can normally consider complaints about BBC programmes only where the complainant has already complained to the BBC, and the BBC has reached its final decision.

Prior to 3 April 2017 (i.e. for the earlier part of the period covered by your request), complaints about matters such as harm and offence could be considered by Ofcom against the requirements of the Broadcasting Code. However, complaints relating to due accuracy, due impartiality, elections and referendums and commercial references in programmes on BBC services funded by the licence fee fell outside Ofcom's remit. Where such complaints were made to Ofcom, they were captured in our figures, but the fact that regulatory responsibility for such complaints at that time sat with the BBC Trust means that the volumes of complaints we received may not be representative of the total volume of complaints overall. You can find the BBC Trust's complaints findings on its website here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/complaints_and_appeals/editorial.

The information you have requested is already available to you on our website and therefore it is exempt from disclosure under section 21 of the Act, but for ease of reference we've provided a table below collating the approximate number of complaints related to the BBC (capturing all BBC television and radio services) and RT / Russia Today, year on year. Please note that we only hold

searchable information on our complaints database for cases from 2014 onwards, therefore we have only provided details for each complete calendar year from 2014 - 2017. Please note that we do not consider it possible to draw meaningful comparisons between the numbers for the BBC and the numbers for RT, since the number and types of services involved differs.

	2014	2015	2016	2017
BBC (including all BBC television and radio services)	1,924	2,910	2,198	2,495
RT / Russia Today	53	16	18	22

Complaints about broadcast standards are carefully assessed under Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, which sets strict standards for programme content that broadcasters must follow. If we consider that these rules may have been broken, we work swiftly to investigate. Should we conclude our rules have been broken, we have the power to impose sanctions on broadcasters. You can find decisions about complaints we have received in Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, published every fortnight on our website here: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins>.

We hope this information is of assistance. If you have any queries, then please contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

If you are unhappy with the response or level of service you have received in relation to your request from Ofcom, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be treated as a formal complaint and will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will acknowledge the complaint and inform you of the date by which you might expect to be told the outcome.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

Timing

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for undertaking internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exception cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact:

Steve Gettings
The Secretary to the Corporation
Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane

Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF