

Ofcom ref: 00529650

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

18 April 2018

### Ref: 00529650 Freedom of Information: Right to Know Request

Thank you for your request for information relating to complaints about television soap episodes. Your request was received on 21 March 2018 and I am dealing with it under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the FoI Act”).

You requested details of most complained about soap episodes and storylines going back as far as Ofcom records, comprising a list of about 20 with the number of Ofcom complaints received.

Before responding to your question, we would like to provide some background information on Ofcom’s complaints procedures and reporting.

Complaints about television soap storylines are carefully assessed under the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, which sets strict standards for programme content which 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>.

For complaints about the BBC, a new BBC Royal Charter and Agreement was published in December 2016, which gave Ofcom new regulatory powers over the BBC. Ofcom took up its new responsibilities on 3 April 2017.

Prior to this date, complaints relating to programmes on BBC services funded by the licence fee about due accuracy, due impartiality, elections and referendums fell outside Ofcom’s remit. Regulatory responsibility for such complaints sat with the BBC Trust. Complaints about all other areas, such as harm and offence, were considered by Ofcom against the requirements of its Broadcasting Code.

Please note that under the new procedures, Ofcom can normally only consider complaints about BBC programmes where the complainant has already complained to the BBC, and the BBC has reached its final decision.

In terms of identifying the top twenty complained about soap episodes, we only hold searchable information on our complaints database for cases from 2014 onwards. For ease of reference we have listed below the specific episodes for each programme which attracted the most complaints since 2014 we have and summarised the information in the form published in the respective Bulletins.

Programme	Broadcaster	Transmission Date	Categories	Number of complaints
Coronation Street <sup>1</sup>	ITV	27 October 2017	Violence	541
Coronation Street <sup>2</sup>	ITV	29 August 2016	Race discrimination / offence	473
Emmerdale	ITV	26 September 2016	Crime and disorder	448
Emmerdale	ITV	8 February 2018	Violence	336
Coronation Street	ITV	5 September 2016	Generally accepted standards	303
Emmerdale	ITV	6 March 2017	Violence	275
Coronation Street	ITV	26 February 2018	Drugs, smoking, solvents or alcohol	212
Coronation Street	ITV	16 March 2018	Generally accepted standards	174
Coronation Street	ITV	31 July 2017	Harm	136
EastEnders	BBC 1	12 January 2017	Offensive language	116
Emmerdale	ITV	24 April 2017	Violence	102
Coronation Street	ITV	7 September 2016	Generally accepted standards	99
EastEnders	BBC 1	6 October 2014	Scheduling	97
Coronation Street	ITV	5 January 2018	Violence	94
Emmerdale	ITV	26 February 2015	Scheduling	90
Coronation Street	ITV	16 June 2017	Drugs, smoking, solvents or alcohol	74
Emmerdale	ITV	27 September 2016	Crime and disorder	72
EastEnders	BBC 1	17 July 2015	Generally accepted standards	69
Emmerdale	ITV	25 November 2015	Violence and dangerous behaviour	58
Hollyoaks	Channel 4	17 October 2017	Suicide and self harm	58

Ofcom is unable to disclose further details of the complaints beyond that listed in the Bulletins.

[Section 44 of the Act](#) prevents organisations releasing information if another act has said that it shouldn't. [Section 393 of the Communications Act](#) prevents Ofcom releasing information if it is

<sup>1</sup> This issue was referred for investigation, full details of which were reported in Bulletin 350, see: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/112187/Broadcast-and-On-Demand-Bulletin-350.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/112187/Broadcast-and-On-Demand-Bulletin-350.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> This issue was referred for investigation, full details of which were reported in Bulletin 317, see: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/94271/Issue-317.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/94271/Issue-317.pdf)

about a particular business, unless we have the consent of that business or releasing that information helps Ofcom to carry out its duties, neither of which apply here.

We hope this information is of assistance. If you have any queries, then please contact [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto: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