

Reference: 00609481

Jerin John  
Information Rights Adviser  
[Information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:Information.requests@ofcom.org.uk)

11 September 2018

## Ref: 00609481 Freedom of Information: Right to Know Request

Thank you for your request for statistics on complaints about offensive language on television.

This was received by Ofcom on 1 September and it has been considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”).

You requested the following information:

*I would like to access data regarding complaints about swearing on television. Specifically I need the data from 2008 and 2009 (how many complaints and about which programmes) but I would really like data from 2008 to 2018 to see if there has been any increase or decrease in complaints over the past decade.*

For your information, complaints about broadcast standards are carefully assessed under the 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>.

We log complaints on our complaints database by category of the complaint issue (with reference to the rules in our codes). Complaints related to swearing would usually be logged under the category “Offensive language” and reported in the Bulletins in reference to that category.

Turning to your specific request, although details of all complaints we have considered about programmes are listed in the Bulletins, we only hold searchable information on our complaints database for cases from 2014 onwards. We are therefore unable to search on the complaint statistics you requested for complaints prior to 2014.

As regards complaints from 2014 onwards, you can find information on offensive language in a response to a previous FOI request, published on 2 August 2018 under ‘Broadcasting’ - “Complaints under Sections Five and Six of the Broadcasting Code” <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/foi-dp/foi-responses>. This includes an Annex which lists complaints by category from 2014 to 2017, with statistics on complaints about offensive language year on year. Please see here: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/excel\\_doc/0028/117379/Complaints-by-category-and-outcomes-data-FOI.XLSX](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/excel_doc/0028/117379/Complaints-by-category-and-outcomes-data-FOI.XLSX).

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,

## Jerin John

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 exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact:

Jacqui Gregory  
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