



# Ofcom Complaints Handling Tracker 2021: Annual Technical Report

## General survey description

Since 2009, Ofcom has conducted research to quantify levels of satisfaction with customer service for the main communications providers in the UK; and since 2016, we have used one of the strands of this research to monitor customer satisfaction with complaints handling specifically. As with the previous waves of the Complaints Handling Tracker (“CHT”), this research includes UK communications providers with a market share of 4% or more (Q2 2021).

## Survey objectives

The core aim of this study is:

- To understand the level of satisfaction with customer service complaint handling on a range of criteria across the main providers of fixed line, fixed broadband, mobile and pay TV services among those who have contacted their provider with a complaint within the last six months.
- To report customer service satisfaction and consumer perceptions of provider performance by types of complaint i.e., billing and customer service; repairs and installation; and service issues for each of the main providers in each sector.
- To gather an overall customer satisfaction measure for all providers per sector.

## Sampling approach, changes to the sampling methodology and sample achieved

Interviewing was conducted using an online panel and river sampling approach, providing a cost-effective and efficient means to reach the low incidence audience consulted for this study. Targets were set by provider within sector in order to ensure that a minimum number of interviews per cell was achieved for the purposes of analysis.

The CHT has evolved and in 2019 questions were added that allowed us to identify respondents who have an impacting/ limiting condition and/ or are financially vulnerable.

On analysing data from 2019 and 2020, Ofcom identified a higher than expected proportion of respondents with at least one impacting/ limiting condition and a lower than expected proportion of respondents aged 55 and over in the sample who complete the complaints handling survey.

We explored this in detail and as a result changed our approach to sampling in the 2021 wave by opening the survey up to only over 55s in the first two weeks of fieldwork and adjusting the proportion of the sample derived from river versus panel sample sources from 35:65 to 50:50, again in order to increase the opportunity for over 55s to participate. After which, we reverted to the previous approach of inviting a sample demographically representative of the UK adult population to take part in the research in order to achieve the sample targets. From here, respondents were screened as having made a complaint to a relevant provider within the six months prior to fieldwork.

In the absence of robust profiling data for this low incidence audience, we viewed this approach to be the best method to ensure that the resulting sample was as representative of the sample target as possible in the circumstances.

The providers included in the research and samples achieved are listed below.

Provider	Sample Sizes by Sector 2021			
	Landline	Fixed Broadband	Mobile	Pay TV
<b>BT</b>	556	634		350
<b>EE</b>	190	258	797	
<b>giffgaff</b>			241	
<b>O2</b>			641	
<b>Plusnet</b>	70	208		
<b>Sky</b>	610	718		732
<b>TalkTalk</b>	343	506		337
<b>Tesco Mobile</b>			339	
<b>Three</b>			479	
<b>Virgin</b>	465	691	206	515
<b>Vodafone</b>		186	502	

## Fieldwork

The survey was conducted via an online panel from 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021 - 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and comprised a total of 6,097 interviews. Therefore, the “previous six-months” time period referred to in the research corresponds broadly to complaints made to providers in the second half of 2021.

## Data reporting

Data were reported on a total sector level (i.e. the combined results of the providers included in the research for each sector) as well as split by provider within each sector.

Complaints were grouped into three categories for reporting: *Billing and customer service* complaints, *Repairs and installation* complaints and *Service issues* complaints. Any complaints not falling into these categories were grouped as *Something else* and were not reported on independently due to low base sizes and their containing a disparate set of reasons for complaint (although they were included in the overall results).

## Weighting

The changes in approach to sampling were effective in increasing the sample of older respondents to an extent. However, the age profile remained younger and the rate of impacting/ limiting conditions higher compared to the profile in the population as a whole.

Therefore, we considered whether it might be appropriate to apply rim weights<sup>1</sup> on specific characteristics – notably, the incidence of having at least one impacting/ limiting condition – to the total sector level data.

However, in light of the aforementioned absence of robust profiling data for this low incidence audience and because of the risk of potentially inaccurately adjusting the sample on certain characteristics, we decided to continue to employ the weighting approach outlined below.

The data is presented at both a total sector level and at a provider level. Only total sector level data is weighted, provider level data is unweighted.

Total sector level data has been weighted using market share and incidence of complaints for each provider calculated from fieldwork data, in order to report total sector figures that best represent the make-up of complaints within each sector.

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<sup>1</sup> RIM weighting is a method for weighting survey data on multiple dimensions for example respondent characteristics such as age, gender, geography, social grade, etc. RIM weighting is an iterative approach where each dimension is corrected for in turn until all dimensions align with specified targets.

To illustrate, using **BT Landline** as an example, first we take the number of respondents who qualified due to having made a complaint to **BT Landline** in the six months prior to fieldwork as a proportion of all respondents saying they use **BT Landline** for their landline service, in order to establish an incidence of complaints for **BT Landline**.

We then multiply this by **BT Landline's** market share within the sector among providers included in the research for the sector to generate an incidence of complaints for **BT Landline**.

Finally, we take this incidence of complaints for **BT Landline** as a proportion of the sum of all incidences of complaint for all providers included in the research for that sector to generate the share of complaints for **BT Landline**, i.e. the contribution of **BT Landline** to the total complaints universe of the providers included in the research for the sector.

There were several reasons why we chose this approach:

- Weighting to market share alone, would not account for the differences in incidence of complaints by provider and, as such, could overweight the effects of some providers that have a larger market share
- This approach was repeatable for subsequent waves and was able to account for changes over time
- The provider level data is unweighted and is therefore as representative as possible of customers of the provider who made a complaint in the 6 months prior to fieldwork and who are online.

This approach to weighting has been taken consistently since the first wave in 2016.

As the approach to sampling was changed, any year-on-year differences could be a consequence of this sampling adjustment rather than trends in the result, therefore we will not report wave on wave changes this year.

# Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the “true” values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone had been interviewed) can be predicted from the sample sizes on which the results are based, and on the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” values will fall within a specified range. However, as the sample is weighted, we need to use the effective sample size<sup>2</sup> (ESS) rather than actual sample size to judge the accuracy of results. As the provider level data is unweighted, the actual and effective sample sizes for results based on individual providers are identical. However, for results from any sample comprising more than one provider, e.g. the total sector results, the effective base is used. The following table compares ESS and actual samples for each of the four sectors.

	<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>ESS</b>
<b>Total landline</b>	2,234	2,119
<b>Total fixed broadband</b>	3,201	3,047
<b>Total mobile</b>	3,205	3,077
<b>Total pay TV</b>	1,934	1,671

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<sup>2</sup> Effective Sample Size shown as Effective Base in the data tables produced.