

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information relating to broadcasters being fined for offensive language in football coverage.

We received your request on 12 July 2017 and have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You requested information on:

- the number of times during the last five years that broadcasters have been fined for offensive language being picked up during coverage of football matches; and
- the average cost of these fines.

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

Complaints about content standards are handled under *Ofcom's Procedures for investigating breaches of content standards for television and radio*^[1].

Individual complaints received by Ofcom are assigned to cases. A case is opened when Ofcom is assessing a specific programme or issue and may consist of one or more complaints.

Ofcom assesses every complaint it receives. Based on an initial assessment of the complaint and a consideration of the related content, Ofcom will consider whether there may have been a breach of the Broadcasting Code (or other Ofcom codes or licence conditions). In cases where Ofcom considers there may have been a breach, it will launch an investigation. The possible outcomes of an investigation are that we judge an issue is in breach, resolved or not in breach of our rules.

Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, published every fortnight on our website, includes decisions about the complaints we have considered. The Bulletin covers a range of cases, including those which Ofcom has escalated for full investigation, and those which, after careful assessment, Ofcom has decided not to pursue because they did not raise issues warranting investigation. The Bulletins can be accessed via the following link to our website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins>

Where there is a serious breach of the Code we may impose a statutory sanction such as a financial penalty. Statutory sanctions are a very serious matter and often result in financial penalties, or even revocation of a broadcaster's licence. Ofcom's Broadcasting Standards Adjudications are available via the following link to our website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins/content-sanctions-adjudications>

With regards to the information you requested, Ofcom has never issued a financial penalty in relation to offensive language being picked up during coverage of football matches.

[1] Available at: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/information-for-industry/guidance/procedures>

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:

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