

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your e-mail of 20 April 2017 in which you requested information on complaints about bias by the BBC.

Firstly, you indicated you sent this request by email in February 2017. We can find no record of having received any previous contact from you, but will be happy to check this further if you can confirm which e-mail address you sent the previous request to.

In your request, you stated, *“You audit the BBC to ensure they comply with their charter which includes impartiality. I would like you to provide me with the information you have on impartiality of the BBC and especially bias. This includes the amount of complaints the BBC receive about bias and how those complaints are broken down”*.

Ofcom’s remit over the BBC

Before responding, I need to clarify Ofcom’s role in this area.

A new BBC Royal Charter and Agreement was published in December 2016, which made Ofcom the new independent regulator of the BBC. Ofcom took up its new BBC responsibilities on 3 April 2017.

Before 3 April 2017, complaints about bias on BBC services funded by the licence fee fell outside Ofcom’s remit and we did not therefore assess such complaints. Regulatory responsibility sat with the BBC Trust.

Under the new Charter, the BBC has an obligation to comply with the [Ofcom Broadcasting Code](#) (which includes rules on due impartiality and due accuracy). Ofcom assesses the BBC’s compliance with these rules through complaints and monitoring.

Your request for information

As at the date of your request, we do not hold the information you have requested about the number of complaints the BBC itself receives about bias in its programmes. Our records are limited to complaints we have received about content on television, radio and video on demand services which fall within our remit.

Ofcom’s Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, published every fortnight on our website, includes decisions about the complaints we have received as well as a summary of the complaint. Issues of the Bulletin are available via the following link to our website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins>

As regards complaints received by Ofcom alleging bias in BBC programmes:

- Prior to 3 April 2017, such complaints were reported in the section of the Bulletins titled “Complaints outside of remit”.
- Under the new procedures, which came into effect on 3 April 2017, 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.
- Any complaints received by Ofcom before the BBC has reached its final decision are reported in the section of the Bulletin titled “Complaints assessed, not investigated”.
- Complaints we have assessed after the BBC has reached its final decision are reported in the usual manner in other relevant sections of the Bulletin.

You can therefore find details of complaints we have received alleging bias in BBC programmes listed in the Bulletins, but for ease of reference I have compiled a table summarising all complaints we have on record between 1 January 2015 and 3 April 2017 (which fell outside our remit) with the information published in the Bulletins.

Ofcom is unable to disclose further details of the complaints beyond that provided, and as listed in the Bulletins, or details of complaints reports we may receive from the BBC as part of our monitoring mechanisms. [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 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.

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