

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information on complaints about television soaps. Your request was received on 18 March 2017 and I am dealing with it under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”).

You requested the following information about *Emmerdale*, *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and *Hollyoaks* respectively:

- the number of complaints about storylines between 1 March 2016 and 1 March 2017, broken down into topics of complaint; and
- the number of complaints received between 1 March 2015 and 1 March 2016.

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>

You can therefore find details of complaints we have considered about the programmes you listed in the Bulletins. However, for ease of reference I have compiled a list of relevant cases in Annex A, listing the information you requested in the form published in the respective Bulletins.

Of those complaints, the following cases were referred for investigation by Ofcom and then judged not to be in breach of the Broadcasting Code:

Programme	Broadcaster	Transmission Date	Categories	Number of complaints

^[1] Available at:

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

Coronation Street	ITV	29/08/2016	Race discrimination/offence	473
Emmerdale	ITV	20/10/2016	Violence	14

Additional details of the *Coronation Street* case were published in Bulletin 317, see: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/94271/Issue-317.pdf

For all other cases, after careful assessment of the complaints and the broadcast material, Ofcom did not identify any issues which warranted further investigation under its rules.

Ofcom is unable to disclose further details of the complaints beyond that provided, and as 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 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