

Reference: 631870

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Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information on complaints about bias in BBC programming received by Ofcom in 2018.

This was received by Ofcom on 25 October 2018 and it has been considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

You asked:

Please tell me how many complaints Ofcom has received in 2018 about perceptions of bias in BBC broadcasts such as news, News night, Question Time, Radio 4 Today Programme etc in favour of Brexit/Leave etc.

How many investigations has Ofcom launched and with what result?

Your request for information

We log complaints on our database by category of the complaint issue with reference to the rules in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (“the Code”) and other associated codes. There is no specific category (or rule) used exclusively to identify the individual subject of a complaint such as “Brexit” or “Leave”. This means we do not hold searchable information to provide a breakdown in the form you requested and, as such, are unable to provide the specific information you requested.

To help satisfy your query, however, we have provided statistics on complaints made to Ofcom about BBC programmes in 2018 (from 1 January to 25 October) logged under the category “Due impartiality/bias”.

As background to these figures, please note that a new BBC Royal Charter and Agreement was published in December 2016, which gave Ofcom new regulatory powers over the BBC. Ofcom took up its new responsibilities on 3 April 2017. Under the new procedures¹, Ofcom can normally only consider complaints about BBC programmes where the complainant has already complained to the

¹ See: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0002/100100/Procedures-for-investigating-breaches-of-content-standards-on-BBC-broadcasting-services-and-BBC-on-demand-programme-services.pdf

BBC, and the BBC has reached its final decision. Information about the BBC's content standards can be found in Chapter 6 of Ofcom's annual report on the BBC².

Ofcom received 432 such complaints in total in the specified period. The majority of these (357) were made to Ofcom before the complainant had completed the BBC's complaints process. We therefore directed the complainant to return to the BBC and follow its formal complaints procedure, in line with the "BBC First"³ process. Ofcom assessed 75 complaints that had completed the BBC's complaints process and, after careful consideration of the complaints and the broadcast material, did not identify any issues regarding due impartiality or bias that warranted further investigation.

You might also be interested to note that, as announced in our first annual report on the BBC, we will be reviewing the BBC's news and current affairs output, and how it can continue to be a trusted destination for audiences. This will inform our view of how the BBC delivers impartial news and information – one of its public purposes – over the Charter period.

If you have any queries, then please contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Catriona Lawrence

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:

Corporation Secretary
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

² Available at: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/124422/BBC-annual-report.pdf

³ See footnote 1

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