

Reference: 683536

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### **Freedom of Information: Right to know request**

Thank you for your request for information on complaints about political bias against BBC News and Sky News received by us.

Your request was received on 7 March and it has been considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”).

You asked:

*Could you provide all information as to how many complaints were made against BBC news & SKY news for political bias from 2016-2019 and also whether the complaints were upheld?*

### **Ofcom’s remit**

In relation to your request as it applies to BBC News please note that Ofcom took up its role as the independent regulator of the BBC, with responsibilities for this type of complaint on 22 March 2017. Before that date, complaints about bias on BBC services funded by the licence fee fell outside Ofcom’s remit. While such complaints were nonetheless made to Ofcom and were captured in our figures, regulatory responsibility at that time sat with the BBC Trust. Accordingly, the volumes of complaints we received in relation to BBC News prior to 22 March 2017 may not be representative of the total volume of complaints overall. You can find the BBC Trust’s complaints findings on its website [here](#).

For complaints received after 22 March 2017, under the BBC procedures 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. Full details on Ofcom’s procedures for assessing complaints and conducting investigations about the BBC and other broadcasters are available [here](#).

You can find decisions about complaints we have received about broadcast television programmes, including BBC News and Sky News, in Ofcom’s Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, published every fortnight on our website [here](#).

### **Your request for information**

You requested information on the number of complaints against BBC News and Sky News for political bias, from 2016-2019 and also whether any of these complaints were upheld.

We log complaints on our complaints database by category of the complaint issue (with reference to the rules in our broadcasting codes). Complaints related to “political bias” would be logged under the categories “Due accuracy”, “Due impartiality/bias” or “Elections/Referendums”. Each of these categories relate to rules in Ofcom’s Broadcasting Code, which sets standards for programme content that broadcasters must follow. The Broadcasting Code is published on Ofcom’s website [here](#).

We have therefore searched for complaints falling within these categories for BBC News and Sky News from 2016 to the date of your request on 7 March 2019. For Sky News we searched all complaints related to programmes broadcast on the Sky News channel. For BBC News, we searched all complaints related to BBC News on any BBC linear services (i.e. including BBC 1, BBC Radio services and BBC News Channel) but excluding related current affairs programming such as *Today*, *World at One*, *BBC Breakfast*, etc.

For administrative reasons, complaints received by Ofcom are assigned to a case. A case may comprise a single complaint or a number, where they relate to the same programme or issue. We provide information below in relation to the number of complaints received by Ofcom within the scope of your request and the number of cases which they generated.

The figures provided below are given in respect of all complaints we received during the relevant period within the scope of your request. They therefore include complaints which we were not able to consider, for example, in relation to BBC News complaints which we received before 22 March 2017 or where the complainant had not first pursued their complaint with the BBC before referring the matter to Ofcom.

To give you some context for these statistics, in this period Ofcom assessed over 18,000 cases (comprising 90,000 complaints) across the approximately 2,300 television and radio services we licence and regulate. For further context, we have also provided figures on the total number of complaints received and cases generated for BBC News (excluding related current affairs programming) and for Sky News on all issues.

	<b>Total complaints</b>	<b>Complaints logged against “Due accuracy”, “Due impartiality/bias” or “Elections/Referendums”</b>
<b>BBC News</b>	818 cases (887 complaints)	500 cases (530 complaints)
<b>Sky News</b>	854 cases (6,861 complaints)	436 cases (4,352 complaints)

As regards the second part of your request related to upheld complaints, this information is provided in Ofcom’s Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin available to you on our website. For ease of reference, we can confirm Ofcom upheld one complaint related to its rules on due impartiality against Sky News, as reported on page 20 of Bulletin Issue 360 [here](#).

Ofcom did not uphold any complaints related to issues of political bias against BBC News.

We hope this information is of assistance. If you have any queries, please contact [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk). Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Jerin John

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  
SK9 5AF