

Reference: 01557338

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Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information in relation to the number of complaints about the BBC News article titled "[The lesbians who feel pressured to have sex and relationships with trans women](#)". We received this request on 20 January 2023, and we have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the "FOI Act").

Your request

You asked:

I am making a Freedom of Information request for the number of complaints about (and, if any has been reached by Ofcom, verdict or opinion on) the BBC News article "The lesbians who feel pressured to have sex and relationships with trans women" (formerly "We're being pressured into sex by some trans women"), an article published on 26/10/2021.

If possible, I would like the number of complaints to be grouped by type, although this is a secondary concern.

Background on Ofcom's reporting processes and remit over the BBC

Complaints about broadcast standards are carefully assessed under Ofcom's Broadcasting Code which sets strict standards for programme content which broadcasters must follow. If we consider that these standards may have been breached, we will swiftly investigate. If we conclude that the standards set out in our Code have been breached, then we have the power to impose sanctions on broadcasters.

Complaints about BBC online material follow a different process, and Ofcom assesses them in accordance with our [Procedures for handling complaints relating to BBC online material](#) (the "Procedures"). These Procedures outline how Ofcom will consider and give an opinion, including such recommendations as it considers appropriate, on whether the BBC has observed the relevant [BBC Editorial Guidelines](#) in the content of online material in the UK Public Services.

You can find decisions about complaints we have received in Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin (the "Bulletin"), published every fortnight on our website [here](#).

It may also be helpful to highlight that, for complaints about the BBC, as outlined in our published Procedures, Ofcom can normally only consider complaints where the complainant has already complained to the BBC and the BBC has reached its final decision (known as the 'BBC First' process). The BBC website outlines the BBC's [complaints framework and procedures](#).

Our response

We have received 123 complaints about the article mentioned in your request, which were received ahead of completing the BBC First process. These complaints have been closed as "refer to the BBC" and reported in the [Bulletins for complaints about BBC online material](#), listed in the tables for complaints made to Ofcom before completing the BBC First process, in Issue 28 and beyond.

We have also received 238 complaints following the publication of the [BBC ECU response](#). We are considering these complaints against whether the BBC has observed its relevant Editorial Guidelines and as such can provide an opinion, including recommendations as we consider appropriate. Further details will be published in the Bulletin once our assessment has concluded.

I hope this information is helpful. 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,

Temiloluwa Dawodu

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

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 responding to 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 information.requests@ofcom.org.uk.

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