

Reference: 02112169

Information Requests
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18 December 2025

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning political bias and impartiality complaints.

We received this request on 25 November 2025 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the 'FOI Act').

Background

By way of background, complaints about broadcast standards are carefully assessed under Ofcom's [Broadcasting Code](#) ("the Code") which sets standards for programme content that all Ofcom licensees must follow. Individual complaints received by Ofcom are assigned to cases, and a case is opened when Ofcom is assessing a specific programme or issue and each case may consist of one or more complaints. In line with our published complaints [procedures](#), we review every complaint we receive to consider whether it raises potentially substantive issues under the Code which warrant investigation by Ofcom. If we consider that these standards may have been breached, we will investigate. You can find decisions about complaints we have considered in [Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin](#), published every fortnight on our website, with a separate [bulletin for BBC Online complaints](#) being published every two months.

For complaints about the BBC, 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 (known as the "BBC First" process). Where Ofcom receives a complaint about BBC content which has not completed BBC First, we retain a record of the complaint but normally refer it back to the BBC for response.

Your request & our response

Please provide aggregated numbers of complaints submitted to Ofcom since 1 January 2020 which alleged:

- a) left-wing bias in BBC output,*
- b) right-wing bias,*
- c) general political partiality,*
- d) failures to uphold due impartiality.*

If recorded, please also provide a breakdown by BBC programme area (e.g. BBC News Online, BBC News Channel, BBC radio, regional programmes).

We log complaints on our complaints database by category of the complaint issue (with reference to the rules in the Code for BBC Standards complaints, or the BBC Editorial Guidelines for complaints about BBC Online Material). Complaints related to matters of political bias would be logged under the categories “Due impartiality/bias” or “Elections/Referendums” for BBC Standards complaints, or “Impartiality” for BBC OM complaints. Each of these categories relate to rules in Ofcom’s Broadcasting Code, which sets standards in programmes.

For questions a) to c), there is no specific category used exclusively to identify the individual subject of a complaint such as whether a complaint relates to bias on the left or right, and we would only be able to identify this information by manually searching individual cases. This would require us to search case records for both complaints we receive which had completed BBC First and those which had not. This would be a substantial number of cases.

We are therefore unable to provide this information as we consider that disclosure of this information is exempt under section 12 of the FOI Act. Section 12 of the FOI Act provides that we are not obliged to comply with a request for information if we estimate that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the “appropriate limit”. The appropriate limit is set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (the “Regulations”) and is, for Ofcom, £450. That sum is intended to cover the estimated costs involved in determining whether Ofcom holds the information requested, locating, retrieving and extracting the information from any document containing it. The Regulations provide that costs are to be estimated at a rate of £25 per person per hour, which equates to 18 hours of time.

As the information requested does not align with categories under which we log complaints and does not specify whether the request only includes complaints which had completed BBC First, a considerable amount of time would be needed to manually locate, retrieve, identify and extract any relevant information. We estimate that this would take at least 18 hours and so the cost of complying with your request will exceed the appropriate limit under the FOI Act.

You may wish to consider submitting a narrower, more specific request, such as the breakdown you have requested for complaints since 1 January 2020 under impartiality which have completed the BBC First process. Should you decide to make a further request for information, please note that other exemptions may apply.

For question d), please refer to our Annual Reports on the BBC, in which we publish each year a breakdown of the complaints we’ve received about BBC content. We include a section on “impartiality” and set out our complaint statistics there (as well as the BBC’s complaints statistics). For example, refer to page 71 of [Ofcom's Annual Report on the BBC 2024-25](#).

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).