Ofcom Telecoms Complaints Report

Notification of finalised changes to the complains report

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Overview

As the UK's communications regulator, Ofcom receives complaints from customers about their landline, fixed broadband, pay-monthly mobile and pay-TV services. We use this complaints data to inform our compliance, enforcement and policy work and publish the number of complaints that we receive about providers relative to the size of their customer bases (i.e. per 100,000 customers) by service.

This document outlines our decision to make the following changes to the data we publish in light of trends in complaints received and changes in the market:

- To reduce the frequency of the report from every three months to every six months.
- To remove the pay-TV category.

Stakeholders were given the opportunity to comment on our plans earlier this year and, following the feedback received, we have decided to proceed with the changes as set out.

Background

Official Statistics

Ofcom is named in the Official Statistics Order 2023 as a producer of official statistics. We therefore have a responsibility to follow the Code of Practice for Statistics. Ofcom follows the guidance set out in Changing or ceasing to publish official statistics – Government Analysis Function (civilservice.gov.uk). In line with this guidance, where substantial changes are made to a piece of research that is established as an official statistic, we notify stakeholders of the changes that are planned to be made and allow a period of time for stakeholders to provide feedback if they wish to do so.

Telecoms Complaints Report

Ofcom receives calls, web forms, emails and letters directly from consumers and many of these contacts result in complaints. We record complaints by service (e.g. fixed broadband or mobile) and by provider. While we do not resolve individual complaints,[1] we review this data on a monthly basis and use it to inform policy, enforcement, supervision and monitoring work, helping to ensure fairness for consumers.[2]

In addition, since 2011 we have published residential Ofcom complaints data by provider on a quarterly basis. The publication of performance data is consistent with our statutory duty relating to transparency and our obligations as a public authority. It provides useful information for consumers seeking to compare providers and is part of a range of information that Ofcom publishes, including the Comparing Customer Service Report and Pricing Trends Report. Publishing this data can also incentivise improved provider performance.

Given the variation in size of providers, we publish complaints as a proportion of providers' relevant subscriber base to put complaints numbers into context and to help ensure the data is more meaningful for consumers. To achieve this, we use the number of residential lines/subscriptions provided to Ofcom by the providers in question and confirm with providers that the number being used for the purpose of the Complaints Report is correct. To calculate pay-TV complaints per 100,000 subscribers, we request the subscriber numbers from providers directly. The background and methodology document provides more detail on our approach to the report.

[1] Ofcom does not have powers to handle or investigate individual consumers' complaints. Instead, these can be dealt with by Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) services.

[2] For example, Ofcom's recent Investigation into Virgin Media's compliance with contract termination and complaints handling rules was opened following significant numbers of complaints from Virgin Media customers.

Agreed changes

We have reviewed the frequency and nature of the complaints data that we publish in light of trends in the data and changes in the market. This review has highlighted sustained stability in the number of complaints we receive about providers and a decline in the traditional pay-TV market in favour of streaming TV. As a result, we will reduce the frequency of the report and stop publishing pay-TV complaints.

Separate to these changes, we are working to ensure that the complaints data we report reflects changes in how the key services are delivered, such as the use of Fixed Wireless Access and satellite technologies to deliver fixed broadband services. Any change to how we capture this data will be implemented alongside the proposed changes to the report.

Frequency of publication

Over recent years, complaint trends have become more stable, leading to few significant quarter-onquarter changes. Where there has been a significant change, this has been the result of single events or short-term problems affecting a particular provider. Given this, we consider publishing complaints data every six months, accompanied by more informative contextual market commentary, will deliver more meaningful information to stakeholders, while continuing to meet our objective of ensuring transparency of information. It will also allow Ofcom resources to be focused on deeper monitoring of complaints and compliance activity to help ensure providers are meeting their obligations and that we pick up on specific issues that may be affecting consumers. Reducing the frequency of publication from quarterly to bi-annually, along with planned improvements to the process of how we verify subscriber figures, is also likely to lead to some resource saving for providers and thus help reduce administrative burden.

We will publish complaints from January – June in Q3 of each year and from July – December in Q1 of the following year. We have been able to bring this forward from May which was originally anticipated due to internal process changes. We published the Q2 2026 report in October 2026 as usual. The first six-monthly report will be published in Q1 2027, covering complaints from July – December 2026. We will continue to publish the report data on Ofcom's Statistical release calendar. The underlying methodology for calculating complaints per 100,000 subscribers and benchmarking provider performance will remain unchanged. Any practical changes to the process will be communicated directly to the providers included in the report.

Change to 6-monthly subscriber data calculation

Currently, complaints per 100,000 subscriptions are calculated using each provider's lines/subscriptions data at the end of each quarter.

In switching to six-monthly reports, we will calculate the averages using each provider's lines/subscriptions data at the mid-point of each 6-month period, i.e.:

- the H1 (first half of the year) complaints per 100,000 figures will use the lines/subscriptions data at the end of March of that year, i.e. mid-way through the period, and
- the H2 (second half of the year) complaints per 100,000 figures will use the lines/subscriptions data at the end of September, i.e. also mid-way through the period.

Pay-TV complaints

For the purpose of the Complaints Report, pay-TV refers to traditional subscription television services provided by a small number of providers, typically purchased as part of a bundle. However, the way consumers access paid-for television content has changed significantly in recent years, with many now using a broader range of services and platforms that are not included within our definition of pay-TV.

Consequently, the current pay-TV category excludes a growing range of video on demand services delivered through streaming and on-demand platforms. The distinction between traditional pay-TV and streaming services has become blurred, meaning the report covers only part of the market and does not provide a complete view of consumers' experiences of paid television services.

Pay-TV complaint volumes are historically lower than broadband and landline services and as there are fewer reportable providers, there is less variability in the results, meaning the data provides comparatively limited additional insight for consumers and stakeholders. Internal analysis of webpage traffic suggests there is less engagement with the pay-TV section of the report webpage compared to the other services.

Removing pay-TV from the report will also reduce the administrative burden on providers by removing the need to supply and verify subscriber data.

Therefore, we will also remove the pay-TV category from the complaints data that we publish. This change will start from the July - December 2026 report, which will be published in May 2027.

Continuing our monitoring of complaints and reporting on consumer experience

We will continue to monitor the complaints we receive on a monthly basis to inform our compliance, enforcement and policy work, alongside the other intelligence we gather. We will also continue to publish the Comparing Customer Service and Pricing Trends reports, as well as a range of market research.