

Reference 1474228

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Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about Ofcom's procedures for reviewing complaints and our consideration of complaints about the Channel 4 Dispatches programme *Torn Apart: Family Court Uncovered*.

We received this request on 5 July 2022 and have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act"). Where questions are not valid questions under the Act, we have responded to be helpful.

Your request and our response

You asked:

1. What is the average time-period required to review complaint(s) about a programme and decide whether or not further action is required?

In relation to your questions 1 and 2, we are interpreting these to relate to the review of complaints from receipt of an initial complaint to Ofcom's decision whether to investigate.

Our [published procedures](#) state that for standards cases, Ofcom aims to complete an initial assessment of all complaints within 15 working days. For Fairness and Privacy complaints we aim to assess and decide whether to entertain a complaint within 25 working days. Ofcom publishes the average time period to consider complaints in our Annual Reports; see, for example, page 165 of our most recent [Annual Report](#).

2. To date, what has been the longest time-period between receipt of complaint(s) and completion of this review process?

Due to system and software changes and updates and data retention policies, we do not hold sufficient records of all the broadcast complaints Ofcom has received since its inception in 2003 that would enable us to respond to this request.

However, of the records that we do hold (which go back to June 2011), the longest time it has taken to assess a standards complaint to decide if the issue raised by the complainant warrants further investigation is 412 working days since receipt of the complaint.

3. *In specific relation to the Channel 4 programme Dispatches: Torn Apart - Family Courts Uncovered (broadcast July 2021):*

a. How many complaints have OFCOM received?

Ofcom received 605 standards complaints about the programme and one fairness and privacy complaint.

b. How many complaints have been successfully reviewed?

One standards complaint was closed as it raised issues outside the scope of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, and this was listed in the outside remit table of Bulletin Issue 434 of the [Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin](#) (the "Bulletin") on 13 September 2021.

c. How many complaints remain under review?

All remaining complaints are still under review.

d. Why is the review process for complaints about this programme taking so long?

While Ofcom aims to complete its assessments and investigations within its published time limits, certain cases can take significantly longer, especially if they are complex, raise difficult issues, or we receive significant representations from the broadcaster that require careful consideration (including representations on legal issues).

In the particular circumstances of this case, the process has been extended due to the complexity of some of the issues raised by complainants and consideration of the standards and fairness and privacy complaints issues in tandem.

e. When can we anticipate a decision on any outstanding reviews? Please see our response to question F below.

f. When can we anticipate outcomes from any outstanding or pending investigations?

We are unable to confirm when we will reach a decision, but our team is working to conclude our review of these complaints as swiftly as possible. The outcome of these complaints will be published in the Bulletin once concluded.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Gloria Akinyemi

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. Further information about this, and the internal review process can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office [here](#). Alternatively, the Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF