

Reference: 01765719

Information Requests  
[information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk)

12 February 2024

## Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about BBC complaints and Top Gear complaints since 2002.

We received this request on 15 January 2024 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the FOI Act”).

### Your request

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1. A) Please list the total number of complaints the television channel BBC One has received each year between January 1st 2002 and December 31st 2022.

B) Please break down the reasons for these complaints

2. A) Please list the total number of complaints the television programme Top Gear, shown on BBC One, received each year between January 1st 2002 and December 31st 2022.

B) Please break down the reasons for these complaints.

### Our response

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Ofcom was formally established as the independent communications regulator on 29 December 2003 following the passing of the Office of Communications Act 2002. We therefore do not hold complaint information which predates 29 December 2003.

For complaints about the BBC, a new BBC Royal Charter and Agreement was published in December 2016, which gave Ofcom new regulatory powers over the BBC. Ofcom took up its new responsibilities on 3 April 2017. Prior to this date, complaints relating to programmes on BBC services funded by the licence fee about due accuracy, due impartiality, elections and referendums fell outside Ofcom’s remit. Regulatory responsibility for such complaints sat with the BBC Trust. Complaints about all other areas, such as harm and offence, were considered by Ofcom against the requirements of its Broadcasting Code.

We have searched for the information you have requested and while we do hold information in scope of your request, this is being withheld under section 21(1) of the FOI Act. Section 21(1) of the FOI Act provides that information which is otherwise reasonably accessible to the applicant is exempt information. The information we hold which is in the scope of your request is publicly available on our [website](#) and therefore is withheld on that basis. Section 21 is an absolute exemption and therefore not subject to the public interest test.

However, we have provided some information below which you may find helpful.

The total number of complaints Ofcom has received in relation to BBC One between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2022, and the top reason for complaints for each year, is as follows:

Year	Number of complaints	Top complaint issue
2014	1269	Generally accepted standards (199)
2015	1730	Generally accepted standards (465)
2016	1372	Generally accepted standards (151)
2017	1494	Generally accepted standards (316)
2018	650	Due impartiality / bias (170)
2019	1698	Due impartiality / bias (495)
2020	2313	Race discrimination / offence (959)
2021	2465	Generally accepted standards (1257)
2022	793	Generally accepted standards (351)

Top Gear started broadcasting on BBC 1 from 2020. Ofcom received 7 complaints for broadcasts in 2020, and 6 in 2021. The top reason for complaints during this period was 'dangerous behaviour'.

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

Yours sincerely,

## Information Requests

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### 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](mailto: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](#).