

Reference: 02065657

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

16 September 2025

Dear,

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning complaints about Offensive Language in UK Broadcasting.

We received this request on 18 August 2025 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Your request & our response

***"I would like to request the following information held by Ofcom:
Complaint counts referencing "c***"***

1. The number of broadcast television and radio consumer complaints that explicitly reference the word "c" in connection with indecency/obscenity (or related) issues, for the following years: 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, and the most recent full year available.***

Before responding to your question, we would like to provide some background information on Ofcom's complaints procedures and reporting.

Complaints about Ofcom licensed services are handled in line with our published procedures for handling complaints, investigations and sanctions on TV, radio and video-on-demand services, please see [here](#).

Ofcom assesses every complaint it receives. Based on an initial assessment of the complaint and a consideration of the related content, Ofcom will consider whether there may have been a breach of the Broadcasting Code (or other Ofcom codes or licence conditions). In cases where Ofcom considers there may have been a breach, it will launch an investigation. The possible outcomes of an investigation are that we judge an issue is **in breach, resolved or not in breach** of our rules.

Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, published every fortnight on our website, includes decisions about the complaints we have considered. The Bulletin covers a range of cases, including those which Ofcom has escalated for full investigation, and those which, after careful assessment, Ofcom has decided not to pursue because they did not raise issues warranting investigation. The Bulletins can be accessed via the following link to our website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins>

For complaints about the BBC, as outlined in our published procedures for investigating breaches of content standards on BBC broadcasting services, please see [here](#), Ofcom can normally only consider complaints where the complainant has already complained to the BBC and the BBC has reached its final decision.

Turning to your question, for assessment cases, we only hold searchable data on our complaints management system for the last 5 years. Therefore, we are only able to provide this information for 2020 and the most recent full year - 2024.

We have searched for broadcast television and radio complaints for those years under 'Offensive language', and the total number specifically referencing the word "c***" (and variations that mean the same) in their description. There were 7 in 2020 (1 of the identified complaints was referred for investigation and resulted in 1 investigation case, which had a 'resolved' outcome), and 77 in 2024 (none of the identified complaints were referred for investigation/resulted in an investigation).

2. Totals for offensive-language complaints (all terms): The total number of broadcast indecency/obscenity complaints received in those same years (2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, and the most recent full year available), so that trends can be compared.

We hold searchable data on our complaints management system for the last 5 years. There were 777 broadcast television and radio complaints received in 2020 which were categorised under 'Offensive language', and 483 for 2024.

Data for 2005, 2010 and 2015 is publicly available by looking for complaints categorised as 'Offensive language' or 'Language' in previous [Broadcast and On Demand Bulletins published pre-January 2020](#).

Please note, this does not include complaints that have been categorised under another category. For example, complaints received about the use of discriminatory language on the basis of a protected characteristic would usually be categorised under a category specific to that characteristic. These categories would also contain a wide range of other complaints unrelated to language, so would be out of scope for this question.

3. Most-complained-about broadcasts (latest full year): For the most recent full year available, the top 10 most complained-about broadcasts (broadcast TV or radio) in which indecency/obscenity of language or offensive language was cited, including for each: program title, station/network, air date, and number of complaints.

The top 10 most complained about broadcast television and radio programmes in 2024 that have been categorised in our complaint management system under 'Offensive language' are:

1. *Married at First Sight UK*, E4, 13 November 2024, 69 complaints
2. *Married at First Sight UK*, E4, 11 November 2024, 47 complaints
3. *Live: America Decides: US Presidential Election*, Channel 4, 6 November 2024, 46 complaints
4. *Finders Keepers*, Channel 5, 24 January 2024, 10 complaints
4. *ITV News*, ITV1, 7 March 2024, 10 complaints
6. *Big Brother: Late and Live*, ITV2, 18 October 2024, 9 complaints
6. *Dancing on Ice*, ITV1, 28 January 2024, 9 records
8. *James Whale Unleashed*, Talk TV, 10 February 2024, 7 complaints
9. *Sky News*, Sky News, 6 August 2024, 5 complaints
10. *Police Interceptors*, Channel 5, 16 September 2024, 4 complaints

10. *The Dry*, ITV1, 28 January 2024, 4 complaints

4. Comparative terms: Please provide complaint counts for the same snapshot years for other common offensive terms (e.g., “f*,” “sh**,” etc) to enable comparisons.”**

We are able to provide this information for 2020 and the most recent full year 2024 – see under question 1.

The number of broadcast television and radio complaints that have been categorised under ‘Offensive language’ specifically referencing the term “f***” in their description is 137 in 2020 (42 of those complaints were referred for investigation and resulted in 4 investigation cases. Of these, 3 had a ‘resolved’ outcome and 1 had an ‘in breach’ outcome), and 94 in 2024 (10 of the identified complaints were referred for investigation and resulted in 8 investigation cases, all of which had an ‘in breach’ outcome).

The number of broadcast television and radio complaints that have been categorised under ‘Offensive language’ specifically referencing the term “sh**” in their description is 113 in 2020 (2 of the identified complaints were referred for investigation and resulted in 2 investigation cases, both of which had an ‘in breach’ outcome), and 46 in 2024 (4 of the identified complaints were referred for investigation and resulted in 3 investigation cases, all of which had an ‘in breach’ outcome).

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,

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](#).