

Reference: 02166923

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

10 March 2026

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your letter addressed to Ofcom's Chief Executive Melanie Dawes, which was received on 19 February 2026 and passed to the Information Requests team to respond to.

Your letter included a request for data and more general comments and questions. Your request for data has been considered as a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and we have responded to your general comments and question below.

Your request

"In this country we have now, and for some time have had commercial TV programmes that have reached the abysmal depth that has applied in North America for a very long time. As you know, what we have are programmes that are almost universally interrupted every 15 minutes (If we are lucky) with advertising slots occupying at least 5 minutes each. These intervals do vary a little I know, but not enough to make a difference. Very recently for instance, I have noticed that programmes produced by UTV are sometimes interrupted at only 8 minute intervals.

The frequency of and lengths of these disruptions severely detracts from quality of entertainment programmes or from the value of information programmes because they severely reduce the ability of viewers to properly follow the thread of either the entertainment or the information being provided.

Quite how your organisation considers this state of affairs to be acceptable to viewers is extremely questionable.

I ask that I be informed by you of just how many letters you have received questioning this very matter?

The quite abysmal quality of the adverts is another matter, containing as they do, oft repeated claims the veracity of which is extremely economical with truth. Take those regarding hair products for instance, which still try to convince us that hair is actually alive!! What tosh, but still it is allowed to be aired. There are so many other instances of flagrant departures from the truth in advertisements that it would take many pages to list them all.

This prompts the questioning of an item in your web-pages where it is stated that the Advertising Standards Agency is an independent organisation! That statement is unfortunately untrue. The Agency is wholly financed by the Advertisers, and that means that it cannot be independent at all! Perhaps you would care to explain how this is not the case?"

Our response

Regarding your specific request for information on the number of letters received about advertising scheduling, we have taken that to refer to complaints received by Ofcom in any form, not just via post. Although details of all complaints considered by Ofcom are published in our fortnightly complaints bulletin, in line with data retention policies, Ofcom only holds searchable information on our database for complaints over the past five years. In that period, we logged 416 complaints related to advertising scheduling or placement.

Turning to your wider concerns about advertising, for your information, the Code on the Scheduling of Television Advertising ('COSTA') contains rules that limit:

- the amount of advertising that can be broadcast during each clock hour;
- the amount of advertising per hour when averaged across the channel's broadcasting day;
- the number of times a programme can be interrupted by advertising.

COSTA states that no more than 12 minutes of advertising can be broadcast in any one clock hour (e.g. between 10:00 and 11:00), and across the broadcasting day channels must average no more than nine minutes of advertising per hour (or seven minutes on commercial public service broadcasters – e.g. ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5).

It is important to note that content such as self-promotional material (e.g. trailers for forthcoming programmes), references to broadcasters' ancillary services (e.g. ITVX, My5) and sponsorship credits are not classed as advertising and do not count towards a channel's advertising allowance.

As stated above, COSTA also includes rules on the number of advertising interruptions a programme may contain. The number of permitted interruptions depends on the type and duration of programmes. For example, news, films and children's programmes can be interrupted once for every scheduled period of 30 minutes. It should be noted here that this allowance does not include advertising breaks inserted between separate programmes.

Although these restrictions have been re-versioned several times, the actual limits have not changed significantly since before Ofcom's inception in 2003.

Should you wish to make a complaint about specific instances where you consider the amount of advertising has exceeded the limits stipulated in COSTA, you can submit a complaint by:

- completing our online form: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/make-a-complaint>
- contacting us by telephone on: [0300 123 3333](tel:03001233333) or [020 7981 3040](tel:02079813040)
- writing to us at:

PO Box 1285
Warrington
WA1 9GL

Please note that complaints should include the time, date and channel of broadcast.

If you wish to make a complaint about the content of a specific advertisement, you should contact the Advertising Standards Authority ('ASA') which handles complaints about broadcast advertising on Ofcom's behalf. You can complain to the ASA by completing its online form (<https://www.asa.org.uk/make-a-complaint.html>) or by telephone on 020 7492 2222.

You have also expressed concern about the independence of the ASA in light of how it is funded.

The ASA is funded through an arm's length arrangement based on charging a levy on the cost of advertising space, to ensure that it is sufficiently independent of industry and Government. The levy is collected by the Advertising Standards Board of Finance ('asbof') and the Broadcast Advertising

Standards Board of Finance ('basbof'). The ASA is unaware of which advertisers are paying the levy or how much they are paying.

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](#).