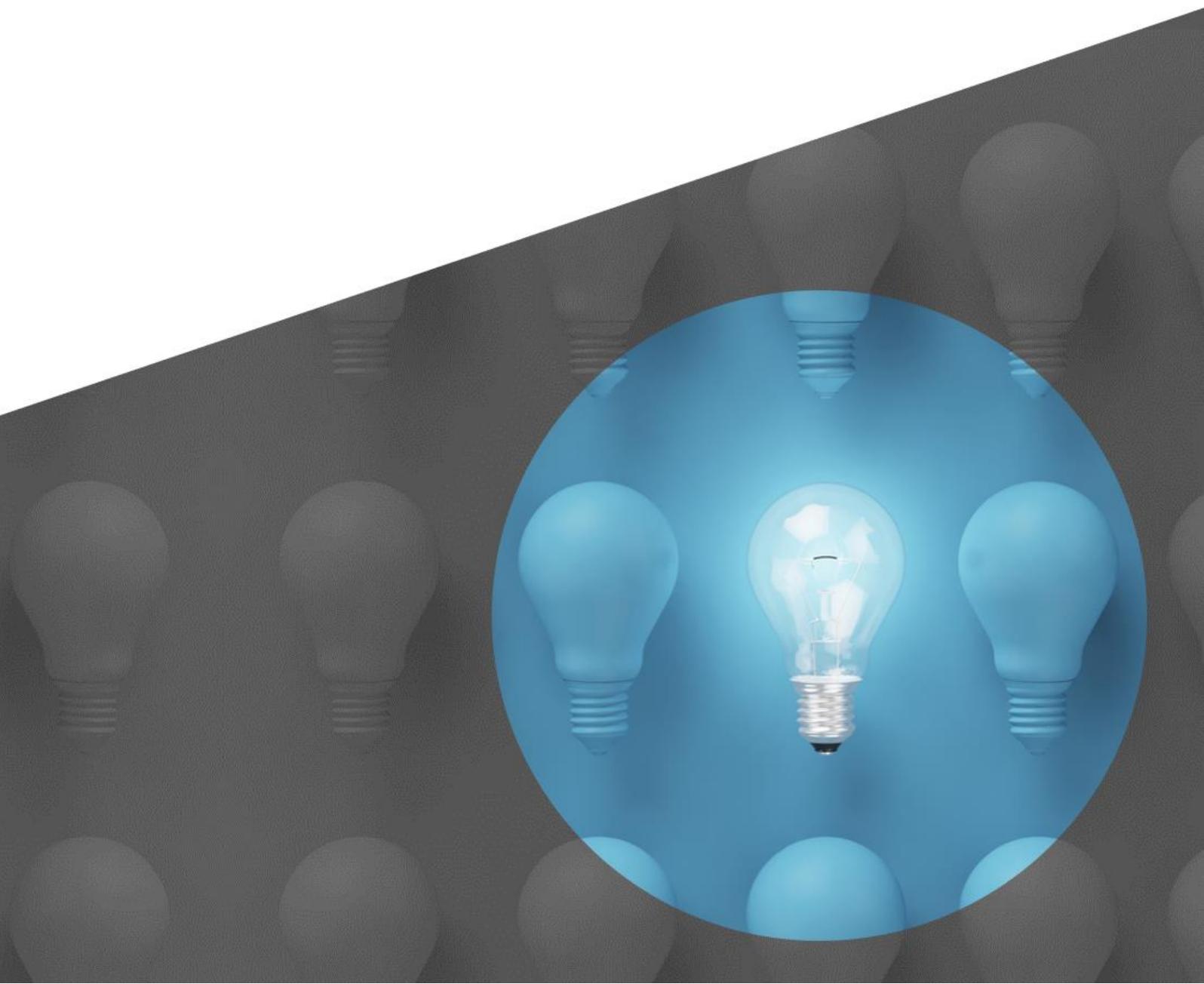


Audience perceptions of the BBC First complaints system

Research report

June 2022



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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Overview of the research

Ofcom has responsibility for regulating the BBC's content standards, including the due accuracy and due impartiality of BBC news, and whether BBC current affairs is duly impartial or materially misleading, as well as a duty under the [Agreement](#) to set procedures to handle and resolve complaints referred to it about the BBC's TV, radio and on-demand programmes. For complaints about content standards for broadcast TV and radio and on-demand content, a system of "BBC First" exists, whereby if a viewer or listener has a complaint about something they have seen or heard in a BBC programme, they must normally complain to the BBC in the first instance. This is different to complaints for all other broadcasters, which can go directly to Ofcom.

The [BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures](#) is detailed in full on its website but in summary, the process for editorial complaints is described below.

An editorial complaint to the BBC may proceed through the following stages:

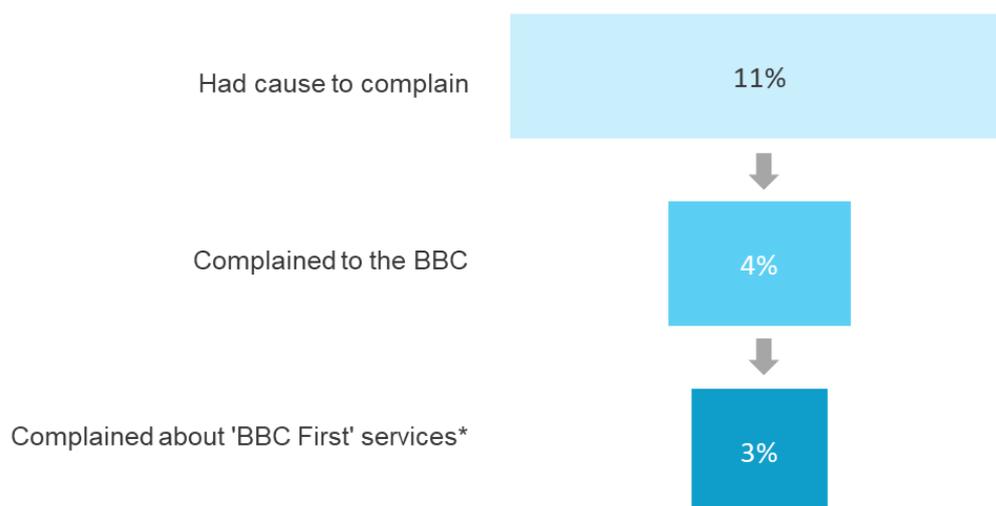
- **Stage 1a** – initial response, usually from BBC Audience Services.
- **Stage 1b** – if the complaint progresses further, a response is received from or on behalf of a BBC manager or a member of the editorial team.
- **Stage 2** – if the complaint progresses further, a response from the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU) is received.

Under the BBC First system, the BBC, unlike other broadcasters, can resolve audience complaints before they can be escalated to Ofcom. In 2021, as part of its review of Future Regulation of the BBC, Ofcom undertook this research to further understand whether the BBC First complaints process continues to deliver for audiences.

Ofcom wanted to find ways to explore audience experiences of the process, alongside satisfaction of both the process and complaints outcome. Therefore, as well as speaking to previous BBC complainants, Ofcom also wanted to hear from audiences in general to better understand the broad drivers and barriers to complaining, in order to better contextualise the research findings.

BBC Complainers

Figure 1: Incidence of complaining to the BBC in the past year:



*'BBC First' services included in the research comprised BBC TV, BBC Radio, BBC iPlayer or BBC Sounds

Note: BBC First services included in the research comprised BBC TV, BBC Radio, BBC iPlayer or BBC Sounds

In total, 11% of the adults surveyed had cause to complain about the BBC in the last year.

While the BBC received the highest level of cause for complaint among the broadcasters (11% vs 6% for ITV and 4% for Channel 4), its performance was moderate when compared to other industries (e.g. 11% vs 20% for phone/broadband providers and 14% for local authorities).

Of those who had cause to complain about the BBC (11% of adults surveyed), just over one half complained to friends and family (52%), either directly or via social media. Just under two fifths (38%) went on to make contact with the BBC – representing 4% of UK adults.

Participants reported using a variety of 'official' and 'unofficial' channels to complain to the BBC and not all complaints were 'official' or BBC First service complaints. Only 3% of UK adults complained about BBC TV, BBC Radio, BBC iPlayer and/or BBC Sounds (i.e. BBC First services).

The qualitative interviews indicated that there was some confusion among participants about whether they had submitted an official complaint or had contacted the BBC in a way which the BBC did not consider to be within its complaints framework. In some cases, this led to dissatisfaction about the response they received.

Among the 4% of UK adults who complained to the BBC, almost half (47%) were multiple complainants, with a quarter (23%) complaining three or more times.

Complaints covered a range of issues, including the TV Licence (20% of complaints), but the vast majority were about content on a BBC service and tended to relate to bias (39%) and misleading/ dishonest content (26%).

Barriers to making a complaint and experience of the BBC complaints process

Of the 11% of UK adults who had cause to complain to the BBC, just under two-thirds did not go on to make a complaint (representing 7% of UK adults).

The main barriers to complaining directly to the BBC were assumptions that 'it would not make a difference' (42%) or the complaint 'would not be taken seriously' (29%). Just under a quarter (23%) thought it would be too much effort but only 1 in 10 (12%) thought the complaints system was not accessible/easy to engage with.

Concerns about complaints not making a difference or not being taken seriously were much higher for the BBC than for the other broadcasters (42% BBC vs. 22% others and 29% BBC vs. 17% others respectively).

Less than one in five of those who had complained directly to the BBC reported they had had a satisfactory experience and over half reported a bad experience. Other brands/organisations were felt to provide a better overall experience than the BBC.

Some participants in our qualitative research felt that the BBC's unique position as the national broadcaster meant it must be more accountable and adhere to higher standards than other broadcasters.

Less positive experiences tended to relate to what participants perceived to be the lack of a significant response and engagement from the BBC. Fewer than half (45%) of those complaining to the BBC said they received an initial substantive response within two weeks. Of those receiving a response, only a third (33%) were satisfied with the speed of reply.

Although people felt generally satisfied with the ease of complaining to the BBC and finding out how to make a complaint, there were high levels of dissatisfaction across the board for the BBC's complaints process as a whole, and the BBC's final response.

Some qualitative participants believed that improvements could be made to the operation of the BBC complaints process to make it easier for complainants to make a complaint. There was also a view that complaints were not being taken seriously by the BBC, which made people feel under-valued or that there was no point in complaining.

Awareness and perceptions of the BBC First process

Overall, there was high awareness of Ofcom and its role in complaining about TV, on-demand services and radio services. However, there was low awareness of the BBC First process.

Only 21% claimed they were aware of the process for BBC editorial complaints and only 7% were aware of the full (3 stage) process described earlier.

The majority (72%) felt complaints about the BBC should be dealt with in the same way as other TV channels. However, half also said they would prefer to contact the BBC via the BBC First process.

Objective assessment of the BBC First process

The Mystery Shopping phase illustrated that it was easy to find out how to make a complaint, the forms were simple to complete and the responses were clear/easy to understand. However, response time targets were often missed, responses did not always address the complaint and the steps for escalation were not always clear.

At Stage 1a, the complaints process was easy to find and clearly explained. For all channels (phone calls, written and webform) the mystery shoppers did not generally feel that the next steps in the process were clearly explained. 4 in 5 of the mystery shoppers who submitted written or webform complaints received a response within the 10-working day target.

At stage 1b, mystery shoppers again found it easy to find their reference number and fill out the form/letter, but 1 in 3 were unclear about the next steps, and only 1 in 3 received a response within the 20-working day target.

At stage 2, mystery shoppers found it easy to fill out the form/letter and were left with a clear understanding of the next steps. However, only half received a response within the standard 20-working day target. Responses were clear and easy to understand.

2. Background, objectives and approach

2.1 Background and objectives

In 2017, Ofcom became the BBC's first external regulator and a new regulatory framework was put in place. Ofcom has responsibility for regulating the BBC's content standards, including the due accuracy and due impartiality of BBC news, and whether BBC current affairs is duly impartial or materially misleading, as well as a duty under the [Agreement](#) to set [procedures](#) to handle and resolve complaints referred to it about the BBC's TV, radio and on-demand programmes.¹ For complaints about content standards for broadcast TV and radio and on-demand content, a system of "BBC First" exists, whereby if a viewer or listener has a complaint about something they have seen or heard in a BBC programme, they must normally complain to the BBC in the first instance.²³ This is different to complaints for all other broadcasters, which can go directly to Ofcom.

The majority of complaints the BBC receives relate to editorial standards. An editorial complaint is one which suggests that a particular item broadcast or published on the BBC's services has fallen below the standards expressed in the BBC's [Editorial Guidelines](#) - standards such as observing due accuracy and due impartiality and avoiding uncontextualised offence. These guidelines reflect Ofcom's [Broadcasting Code](#), but differ in some areas, including providing more editorial guidance to BBC programme-makers as to how to comply with the relevant content standards.⁴

The [BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures](#) is detailed in full on its website but in summary, the process for editorial complaints is described below.

An editorial complaint to the BBC may proceed through the following stages:

- **Stage 1a** – initial response, usually from BBC Audience Services.
- **Stage 1b** – if the complaint progresses further, a response is received from or on behalf of a BBC manager or a member of the editorial team.
- **Stage 2** – if the complaint progresses further, a response from the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU)⁵ is received.

Explanations of these stages are available within the BBC's Complaints Framework and on the BBC's [complaints website](#). Information on escalation is also provided at each stage of the process, although to varying degrees.⁶ The majority of responses do not progress beyond stage 1a or 1b. Having gone through stages 1a and 1b, the complainant will be informed by the BBC that if they are dissatisfied with the BBC's final response, provided by the ECU, at Stage 2 then it is open to them to ask Ofcom to consider their complaint. Ofcom can then investigate editorial complaints in the areas covered by the Ofcom Broadcasting Code.

¹ Ofcom also has a role to consider and give an opinion on whether the BBC has observed the relevant BBC editorial guidelines in its online material. Unlike Ofcom's role regulating the standards of BBC broadcasting and on-demand programme services, it has no enforcement powers for BBC online material. Complaints about BBC online material were not included in this research study.

² This does not include complaints about alleged unfairness or infringement of privacy, which can be made either to the BBC or Ofcom first.

³ In exceptional circumstances Ofcom may intervene at an earlier stage to resolve a complaint which has not yet been resolved by the BBC - <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/advice-for-consumers/how-ofcom-deals-with-bbc-complaints>

⁴ For example, the BBC's Editorial Guidelines require due impartiality across all its output, whereas the BBC Charter and Agreement only require Ofcom to enforce its rules on due impartiality as set out in the Broadcasting Code, which apply primarily to news and current affairs content.

⁵ The ECU is tasked with considering complaints impartially and independently of the interests of the programme makers/content providers.

⁶ For example, a stage 1a response will usually have a link to the BBC's Complaints Framework at the bottom within which complainants can find information on escalation, whereas stages 1b and 2 typically contain more specific details within the response on how complainants can escalate if they are not satisfied with the BBC's response.

If Ofcom finds that the BBC has failed to comply with the Code in its UK public broadcasting and on-demand programme services, it may consider imposing a statutory sanction on the BBC for serious, repeated, deliberate or reckless breaches of the Code.

Under the BBC First system, the BBC, unlike other broadcasters, can resolve audience complaints before they can be escalated to Ofcom. This gives the BBC a material advantage over other broadcasters. In 2021, following nearly five years of the operation of the new regulatory framework, and as part of its review of Future Regulation of the BBC, Ofcom undertook this research to further understand whether the BBC First complaints process continues to deliver for audiences.

Mindful that individuals using any complaints system/process may well continue to feel some dissatisfaction, even when their complaint has been dealt with efficiently and fairly, Ofcom wanted to find ways to explore audience experiences of the process, alongside satisfaction of both the process and complaints outcome.

Therefore, as well as speaking to previous BBC complainants, Ofcom also wanted to hear from audiences in general to better understand the broad drivers and barriers to complaining, in order to better contextualise the research findings.

The specific objectives for this research were to understand:

Amongst the general population:

- Propensity to complain
- Types of organisations complained about
- Channels used to complain
- Differences between what people do and do not complain about
- Barriers to complaining, perceived by people who do not complain
- The general population's views as to the relative merits of the BBC First system compared with how Ofcom deals with complaints for other broadcasters

Amongst the BBC complainants:

- The profile of BBC complainants
- Their experience of and satisfaction with the BBC complaints process
- Satisfaction with the outcome
- Areas for improvement

2.2 Research approach

Given the challenging nature of this research problem, Jigsaw Research used a mixed method approach, as described below, to build a comprehensive picture of the BBC First complaints process.

2.2.1 Quantitative phase

This phase of research comprised two surveys:

- 528 Computer Assisted Telephone interviews (CATI) (to target those who were not online and therefore harder to reach)
 - Non-internet users were boosted to ensure a minimum of 100 interviews
- 1,879 online panel interviews
 - Black and Asian subgroups were boosted to ensure a minimum of 100 interviews with each
 - BBC Complainers⁷ were boosted to allow a more detailed analysis of the complaints process
- Quotas were set on age, gender and social grade within nation
- The data was weighted to ensure it was nationally representative of UK adults

⁷ Participants who had complained directly to the BBC in the past year.

Fieldwork ran from 19 November 2021 to 7 January 2022.

This phase was used to examine the general complaints activity across a range of industries as context to BBC/broadcasting complaints, discover the incidence/profile of BBC complaints/complainants and understand their experience of the BBC complaints process (including satisfaction)⁸.

Further detail on the research methodologies, sampling and weighting can be found in the appendix (section 8.1).

2.2.2 Qualitative phase

The quantitative phase was supplemented by depth interviews recruited from participants who had completed the quantitative survey.

In total, 16 qualitative depth interviews were conducted within the time available:

- 11 interviews with BBC complainants
- 5 interviews with non-BBC complainants.

The interviews took an average of 30 minutes to complete and were conducted using Zoom or by telephone.

A pre-task was used to gather correspondence together and review the participant's experience.

The interview itself used a combination of storytelling and direct questioning.

Fieldwork ran from 17 January to 25 February 2022.

The qualitative phase was used to understand, in more detail, the complaint, the experience of the complaints process and satisfaction with the process and final outcome.

This document contains several case studies of people who were interviewed during the qualitative phase. These case studies are designed to give a flavour of the end-to-end experience that people had when complaining to the BBC. They are not representative of all BBC complainants. The main findings of the report were drawn from the quantitative phase.

2.2.3 Mystery Shopping

In total, 50 complaints scenarios were developed by Ofcom's Standards & Audience Protection Team to progress through the BBC's complaints system within a four-month time period.⁹

- 3 x initial calls with BBC telephone operators, with subsequent complaints made via the BBC's webform.¹⁰
- 3 x initial calls where the shopper left a recorded message on the BBC's complaints telephone line, with subsequent complaints made via the BBC's webform.
- 5 x letter complaints to the BBC complaints postal address.
- 39 x BBC webform complaints.

A total of 50 mystery shoppers were recruited, each testing one complaint scenario. Once a response was received, the mystery shopper escalated the complaint to the next stage (when it was appropriate to do so).

⁸ BBC First services included in the research comprised BBC TV, BBC Radio, BBC iPlayer or BBC Sounds.

⁹ Details for the different methods of making a complaint are available on the BBC's website at [Complaints | Contact the BBC](#).

¹⁰ The BBC's complaints webform is available at [Make A Complaint | Contact the BBC](#).

Audience perceptions of the BBC First complaints system

Fieldwork ran from 13 November 2021 to 18 March 2022.

This phase has been used to provide an objective assessment of the BBC complaints process by tracking the process followed and complainant's experience in relation to each complaint scenario.

Detailed findings from the Mystery Shopping can be found in section 7.

3. Complaints behaviour

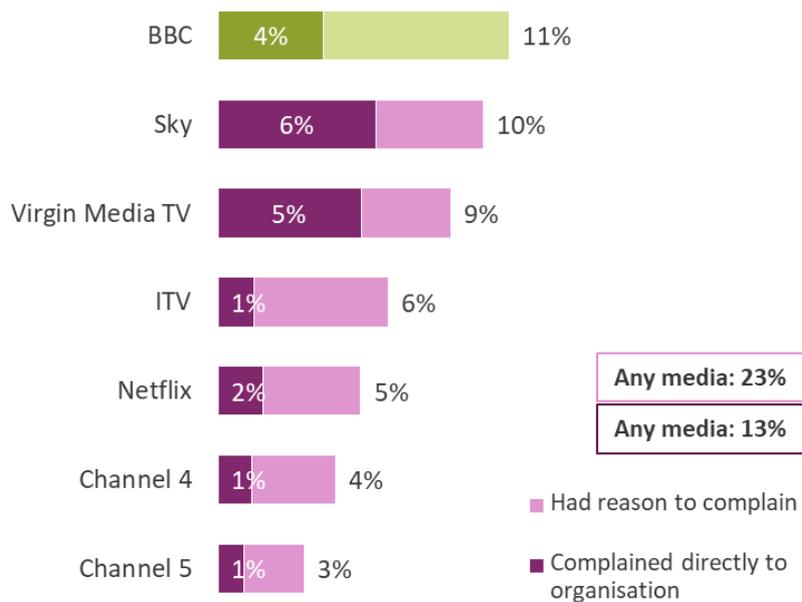
3.1 Complaining to different organisations and brands

Just over one in ten (11%) of UK adults had cause to complain about the BBC in the last year

Figure 2 shows the incidence of audiences having reason to complain to specific media companies in the past year and actually doing so.

23% of participants had cause for complaint about any media organisation, while 13% actually complained about any media organisation. The BBC received the highest level of cause for complaint amongst the media companies (11%), although higher proportions said they actually complained about Sky (6%) or Virgin (5%) compared to the BBC (4%). This could be because they offer multiple services across a range of delivery platforms.

Figure 2: Incidence of having cause for complaint and actually complaining in the past year – specific media companies



A2. Have you had a reason to complain about any of the following brands or organisations in the past year? A3. Thinking about each brand or organisation you have had a reason to complain about in the past year, who, if anyone, did you complain to? Base: All participants (2407). Note: BBC data is based on original sample, prior to including the boost of BBC complainants

While the BBC received the highest level of cause for complaint amongst the broadcasters, its performance was moderate when compared to other industries

Figure 3 below shows the incidence of participants having reason to complain to other types of organisations in the past year and actually doing so.

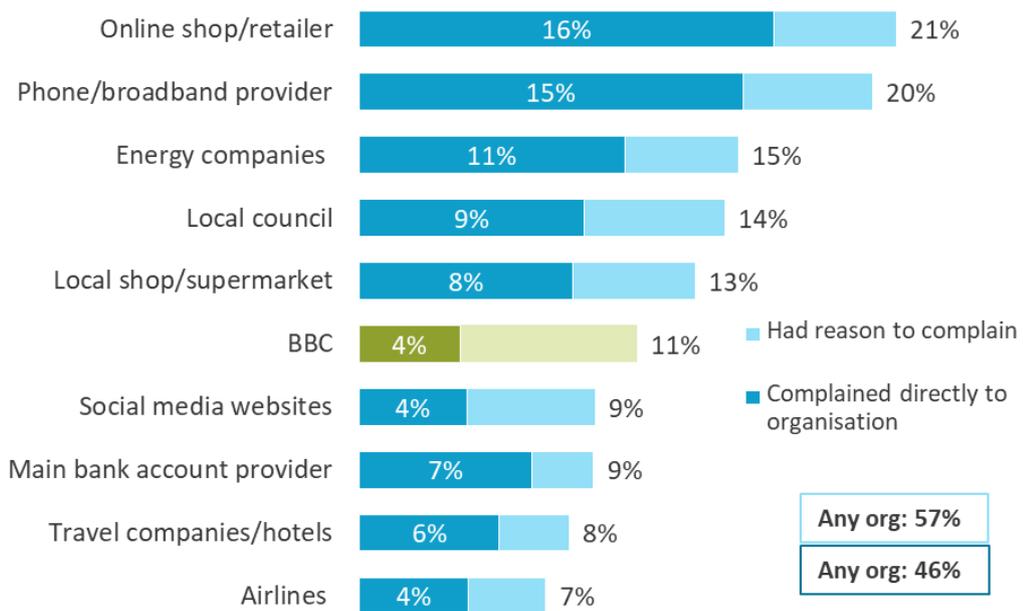
It shows that more than half (57%) had cause for complaint against any organisation, while 46% actually complained about any organisation.

In particular, minority ethnic participants were more likely to have had cause for complaint against any organisation (71%) and actually complained about any organisation (53%). Specifically, this related to online

shop or retailers and phone or broadband providers (35% vs. 19% and 36% vs. 19% of white participants, respectively).

Online shops/retailers and phone/broadband providers were the most likely to give cause for complaint (for around 1 in 5), with around 1 in 6 actually complaining about either of these. The BBC performed better than both of these types of organisations in terms of incidence of having cause for complaint.

Figure 3: Incidence of having cause for complaint and actually complaining in the past year – other types of organisation



A2. Have you had a reason to complain about any of the following brands or organisations in the past year? A3. Thinking about each brand or organisation you have had a reason to complain about in the past year, who, if anyone, did you complain to? Base: All participants (2407).

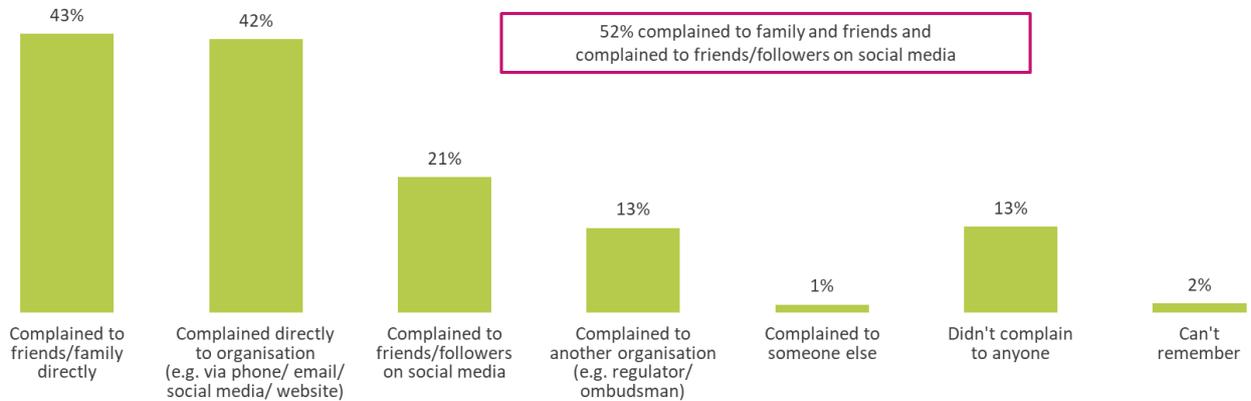
The majority of people with cause to complain about the BBC complained to friends and family (either directly or via social media). Under half contacted the BBC directly.

Figure 4 shows different actions taken in response to having cause for complaint about the BBC.

Among the 11% who had a reason to complain about the BBC, 42% said they contacted the BBC directly, whilst 13% contacted Ofcom. More than half (52%) complained to friends and family (either directly or via social media).¹¹

¹¹ Note: It was possible for participants to select more than one answer option for this question.

Figure 4: Action taken in response to having cause for complaint about the BBC

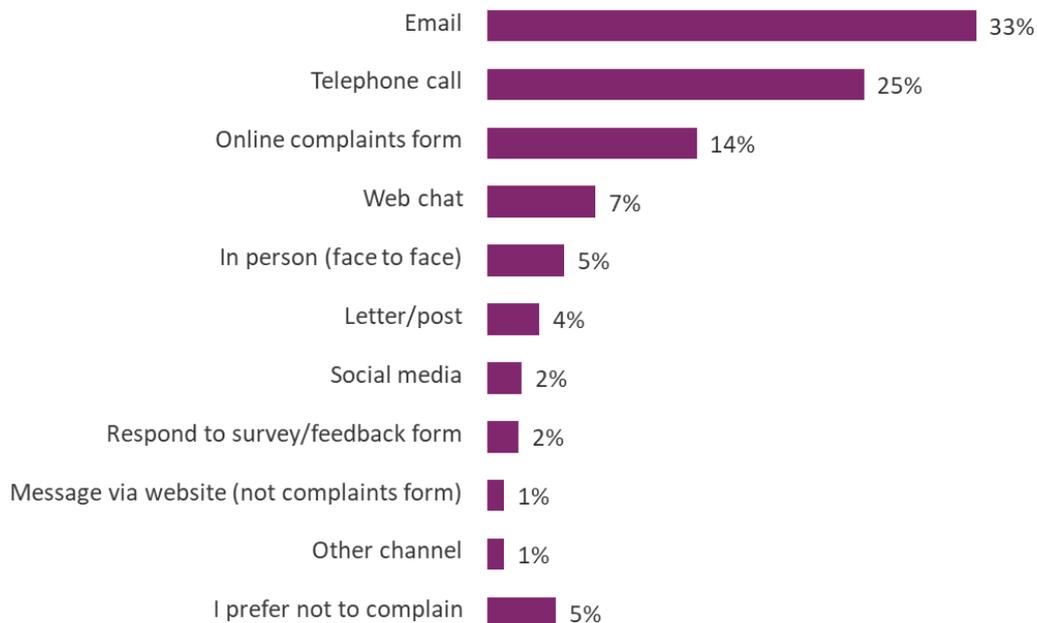


A3. Thinking about each brand or organisation you have had a reason to complain about in the past year, who, if anyone, did you complain to? (multicode). Base: All instances of having cause for complaint about the BBC (313)

Participants were also asked about their preferred channels for complaining to an organisation.

Figure 5 shows that email and telephone were the preferred channels, followed by online forms and web chats. A third said that they had a preference for email and a quarter for making a telephone call. The qualitative findings suggests that these channels were seen as the more convenient ones to use.

Figure 5: Preferred channels for complaining to an organisation



A8. When you need to complain directly to a brand or organisation, how do you prefer to complain? Base: All participants (2407)

14% said they preferred an online complaints form. This is the channel that tends to be used for BBC First complaints (see section 3.3). Complaining via an online form was less preferred among those aged 65+ (9% vs.

15% of 16–64-year-olds) and those in less affluent households (DE social grade households 10% vs. 17% of AB social grade households)¹².

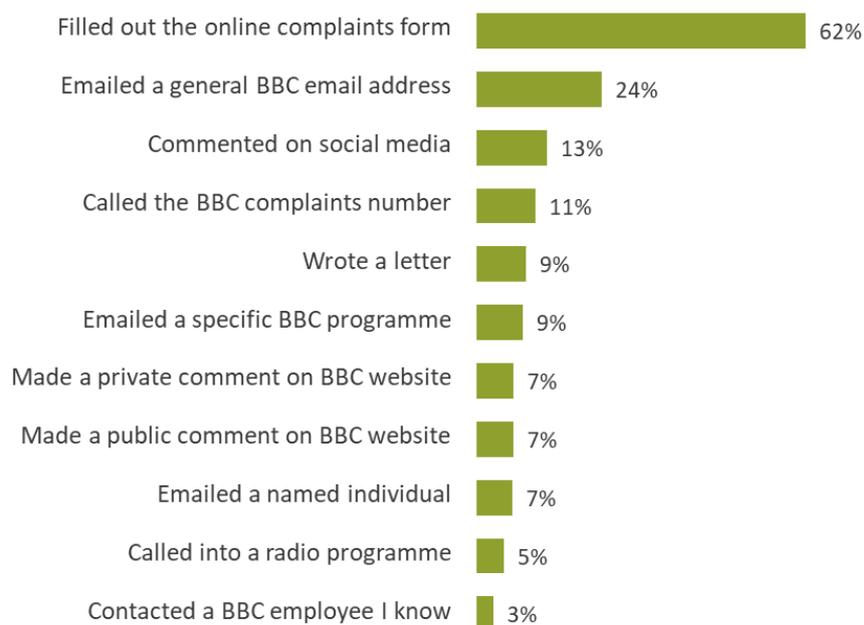
3.2 Complaining to the BBC

Just under two fifths (38%) of those that had a cause to complain about the BBC (4% of the total sample of UK adults) went on to make direct contact with the BBC. A variety of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ channels were used and not all complaints were ‘official’ or BBC First service complaints, i.e. those relating to BBC TV, BBC Radio, BBC iPlayer and/or BBC Sounds

Participants who had complained directly to the BBC were asked how they had found out how to complain and then how they had complained. Most had found out how to complain by going straight to the BBC website (56%) or searching online (39%).

Figure 6 shows the methods used to complain to the BBC. It shows that 62% filled out an online complaints form and around a quarter (24%) had emailed a general BBC email address.

Figure 6: Channels used to complain to the BBC



C4a. How have you complained to the BBC over the last year? Base: All complaining direct to the BBC (118)

¹² The social grades are a system of demographic classification used in the United Kingdom. They were originally developed by the National Readership Survey (NRS) to classify readers, but are now used by many other organisations for wider applications and have become a standard for market research. The classifications are based on the occupation of the head of the household:

A = Upper middle class: Higher managerial roles, administrative or professional; B = Middle middle class: Intermediate managerial roles, administrative or professional; C1= Lower middle class: Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial roles, administrative or professional; C2 = Skilled working class: Skilled manual workers; D = Working class: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers; E = Non-working: State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

There was some confusion amongst participants about whether they had submitted an official complaint or had contacted the BBC in a way which the BBC did not consider to be within their complaints framework. In some cases, this led to dissatisfaction about the response they received.

The BBC's Complaints Framework includes a specific definition of a 'complaint'¹³ and a specific request to submit a complaint using particular methods.¹⁴

The qualitative interviews (see section 5.3 below for further information) indicated that there was some conflation of understanding between 'complaint', 'comment' and 'feedback', with some participants feeling that leaving strongly worded comments on a 'feedback' email was the same as complaining. Instead of a formal response, they had often received a generic acknowledgement of their message – and almost never got an actual response to what they saw as 'their complaint'. Others in our sample had made what they thought was a complaint to the BBC but hadn't made it via the methods specified under the BBC Complaints Framework. For example, they might have emailed a specific programme's email address and complained within the content of the email. These participants often then felt that they had made a legitimate complaint that was worthy of a considered response.

As a likely consequence of both of these issues (which were not possible to differentiate within the qualitative research), they had not been recognised by the BBC as complaints. Instead, they might have received a generic acknowledgement of their message. The lack of response received could lead to increased levels of dissatisfaction and frustration with the process and the BBC's overall response.

Almost half of those who complained to the BBC were multiple complainants

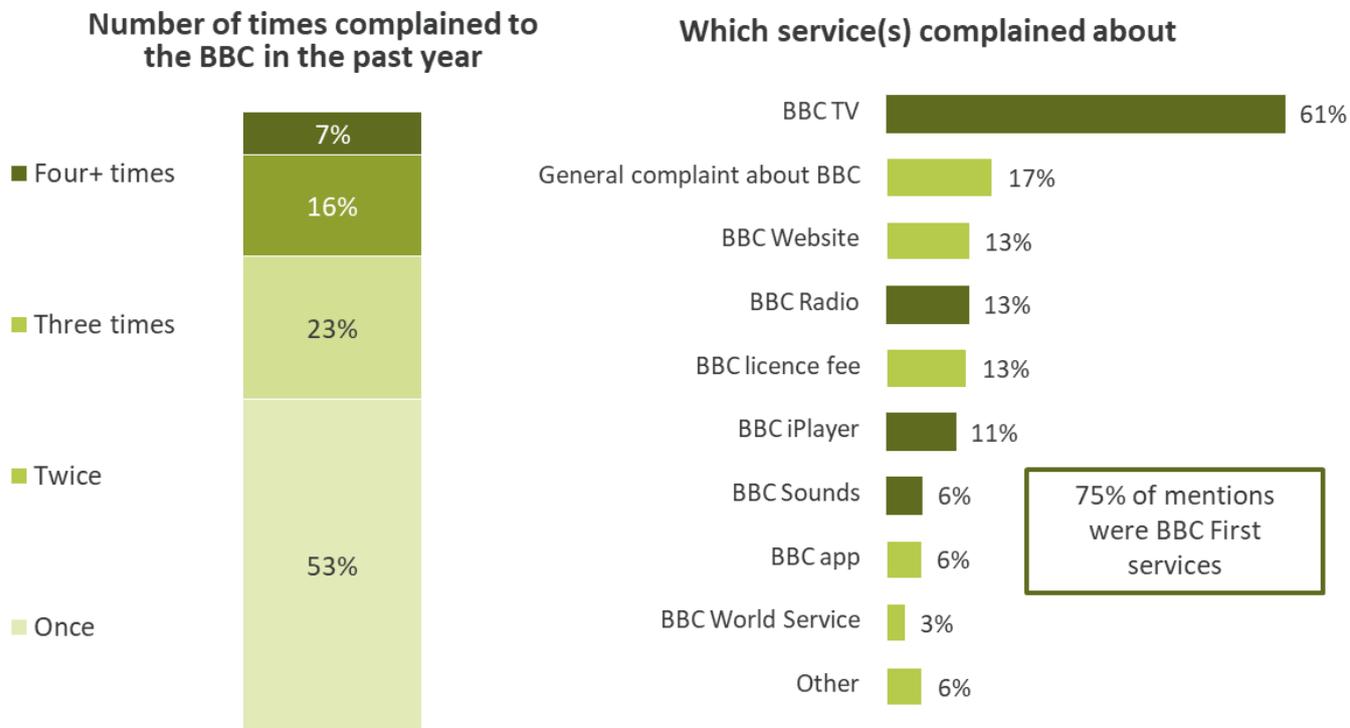
Figure 7 examines the complaints made to the BBC in the past year and the services complained about. It shows that among the 4% who complained to the BBC, nearly half (47%) were multiple complainants.

Overall, 75% of mentions related to BBC First services; the remainder were about issues which Ofcom does not regulate, such as the BBC licence fee and BBC World Service. TV services were the focus of the majority of complaints with the most of these being about content on BBC One (85%).

¹³ See page 6 of the BBC Complaints Framework: "The BBC receives comments about many issues but generally considers a complaint to be a criticism which has been made in the expectation of a reply and which looks for an acknowledgement of fault or a change in the way the BBC does things."

¹⁴ See pages 10 and 11 of the BBC's Complaints Framework: "Complaints should be made centrally... If you do not complain centrally, we cannot guarantee that your complaint will reach the right people or that you'll receive a reply when you write in. If you call we will summarise your complaint and notify the relevant department. You will not normally receive a response in writing unless you complain in writing..."

Figure 7: Number of times complained to the BBC in the past year and the service(s) complained about



C1. How many times have you complained to the BBC in the last year? C2. Which of the following BBC services did you complain about? C3a. Which of the following TV channels did you complain about? C3b. Which of the following live or on demand channels or podcasts did you complain about. Base: All complaining direct to the BBC (118)

Compared to the general population, those who had complained directly to the BBC were more likely to be male, 55+ and from the more affluent AB social grades. They tended to complain more frequently to other organisations (79% vs total sample of 42%) and described themselves as having strong political opinions (64% vs 35%).

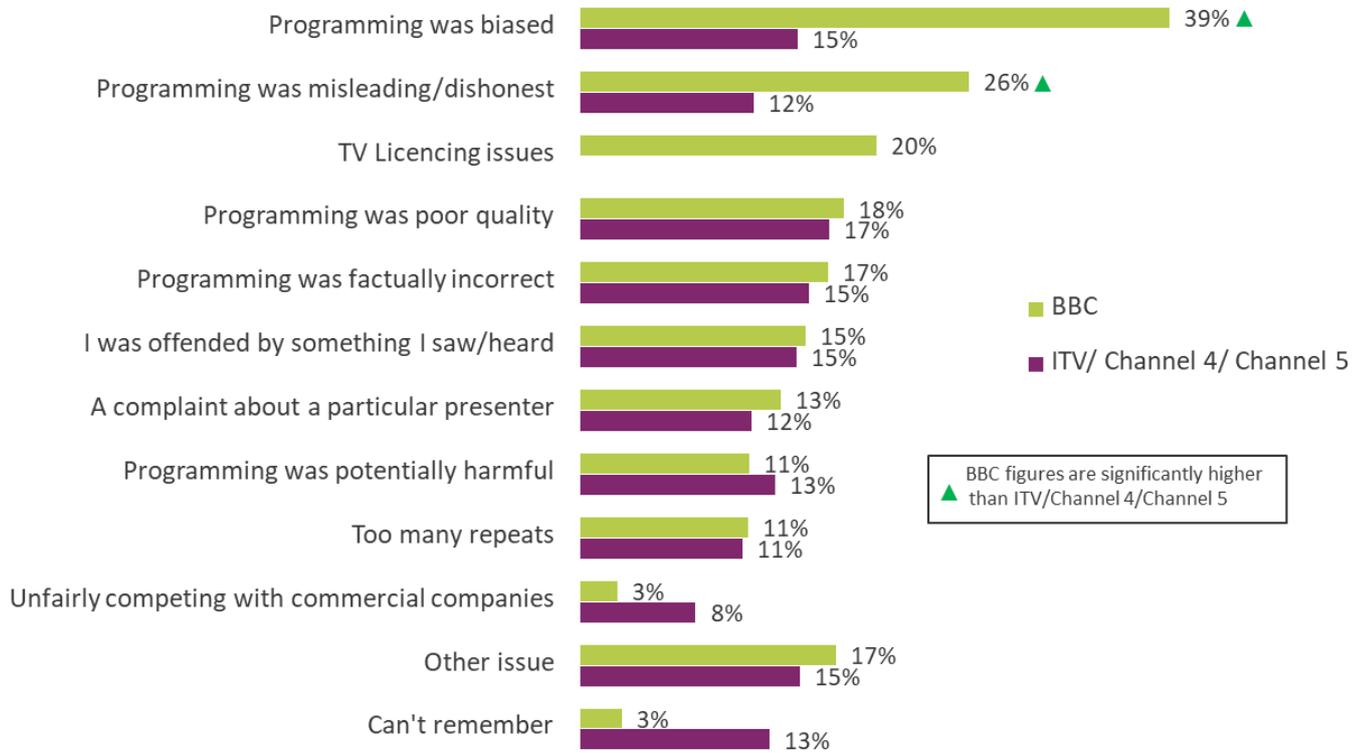
The biggest cause for complaint cited was ‘bias’

Complaints covered a range of issues, including the TV licence (20% of complaints), but the vast majority were about content on a BBC service and tended to relate to bias, misleading/dishonest content, poor quality content and factual incorrectness.

Figure 8 below shows that the BBC was significantly more likely to be associated with complaints about bias (39% vs. 15%) or misleading content (26% vs. 12%) than other broadcasters.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ofcom has also conducted research on audience perceptions of the BBC’s due impartiality, which is published alongside this report

Figure 8: Types of complaints – BBC complaints vs. other PSB channels



A7. Which of the following best describes the types of complaint you had about ORGANISATION?
 Base: All instances of having cause for complaint about the BBC/other PSB channel (313/354)

As previously noted, this document contains several case studies of people who were interviewed during the qualitative phase. They are designed to give a flavour of the end-to-end experience that people had when complaining to the BBC and are not to be seen as representative of BBC complainants in general. The first example is shown below:

Qualitative Case Study 1 – Editorial complaint relating to BBC News



“

I just felt the Downing Street redecoration was such a trivial matter... Laura Kuenssberg was digging for dirt rather than asking Matt Hancock a serious question about the pandemic

”

What happened

- Went straight from streaming the BBC News to the BBC complaints webform (searched using google)
- Really liked the form and felt it was easy to fill in
- Completed her complaint within 2 minutes
- Waited for a response; she didn't give her contact details as she was logged into her BBC account and assumed she'd get a response sent to her account

Background details

- 'Suzy' is 61, single, with 2 grown up children. She's retired and lives in an eco house in Hampshire
- Listens to Radio 4 and watches the BBC News Channel
- She has never complained to a broadcaster before

Cause of the complaint

- Complained to the BBC
- Annoyed at Laura Kuenssberg's question during a COVID-19 Downing Street briefing
- Felt it was inappropriate to ask a question about the Downing Street flat refurbishment during a 'national emergency'

Outcome

- Annoyed that she hadn't received a response. However, after retracing her steps during the interview, she realised that she hadn't entered her personal details
- She tracked down a response to her complaint on the BBC website (as others had made a similar complaint) and thought it 'generic and weak'

The BBC

- Felt the BBC should report on the big, serious issues of the day - rather than gossip column 'tittle tattle'.

4. Barriers to complaining

4.1 What are the main barriers to complaining directly to the BBC?

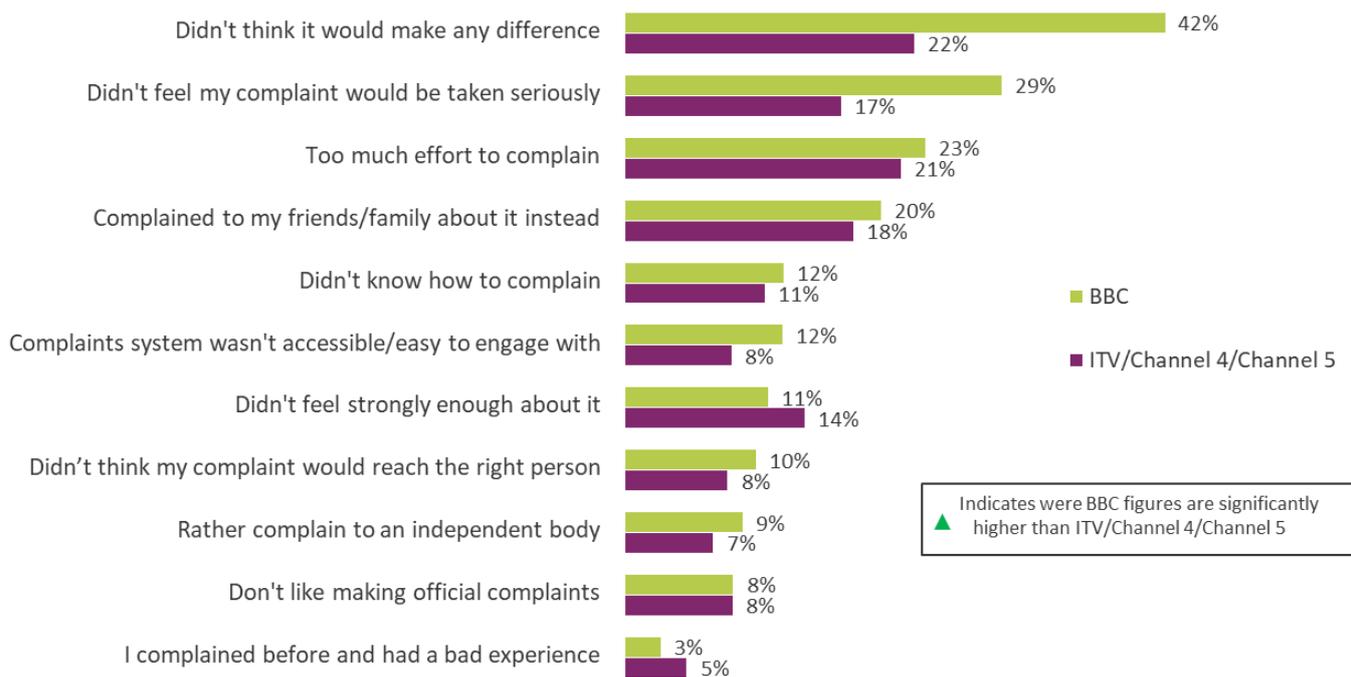
The main barriers to complaining directly to the BBC were assumptions that it would ‘not make a difference’ or ‘not be taken seriously’. Just under a quarter thought it would be too much effort.

Of the 11% of UK adults who had cause to complain to the BBC, just under two-thirds did not go on to make a complaint, this equates to 7% of UK adults. This figure was lower for ITV (5%), Channel 4 (3%) and Channel 5 (2%).

Figure 9 below illustrates the main barriers to complaining directly to the BBC compared with other broadcasters.

Concerns about complaints ‘not making a difference’ or ‘not being taken seriously’ were significantly higher for the BBC than for the other broadcasters.

Figure 9: Reasons for not complaining direct to organisation



B1. Why did not you complain directly to ORGANISATION? Base: All instances of having cause for complaint but did not complain directly to organisation (n=195/263)

4.2 What would encourage those people to complain directly to the BBC?

A follow up open-ended question asked if there was anything that would encourage people to actually make a complaint to the BBC in the future. The comments were coded into common themes.

One in three (29%) commented that ‘nothing would encourage them to make a complaint to the BBC’.

Illustrative comments from the quantitative research are shown below (in blue):

“Nothing, they have absolute power over everybody and one person isn’t going to change anything...”

“No, I just do not think it would make any difference”

Other comments matched the issues seen in the previous chart, including those identifying factors which might encourage people to take further action. For example, the largest numbers of comments (11%) related to complainants being taken seriously/being listened to:

“If I knew my complaint was going to be taken seriously”

One in ten (10% of mentions) said they would if they ‘felt strongly enough’ about an issue:

“If there was a problem I felt strongly enough about, and knew it wouldn’t be a large hassle”

A similar number of mentions (9%) related to it making a difference/resolving a problem:

“If I felt it would do some good”

14% of comments related to some kind of process aspect such as having an easier/clearer process or receiving a response/feedback.

“I’d like a clear complaints process that is easy to complete”

“Yes, if they improve their response team”

5% of people thought the BBC was either ‘woke’ or biased in some way.

“The channel is now institutionally biased and hopelessly woke - it’s beyond saving - I’d rather just let it fold in on itself”

5. BBC Complaints Experience

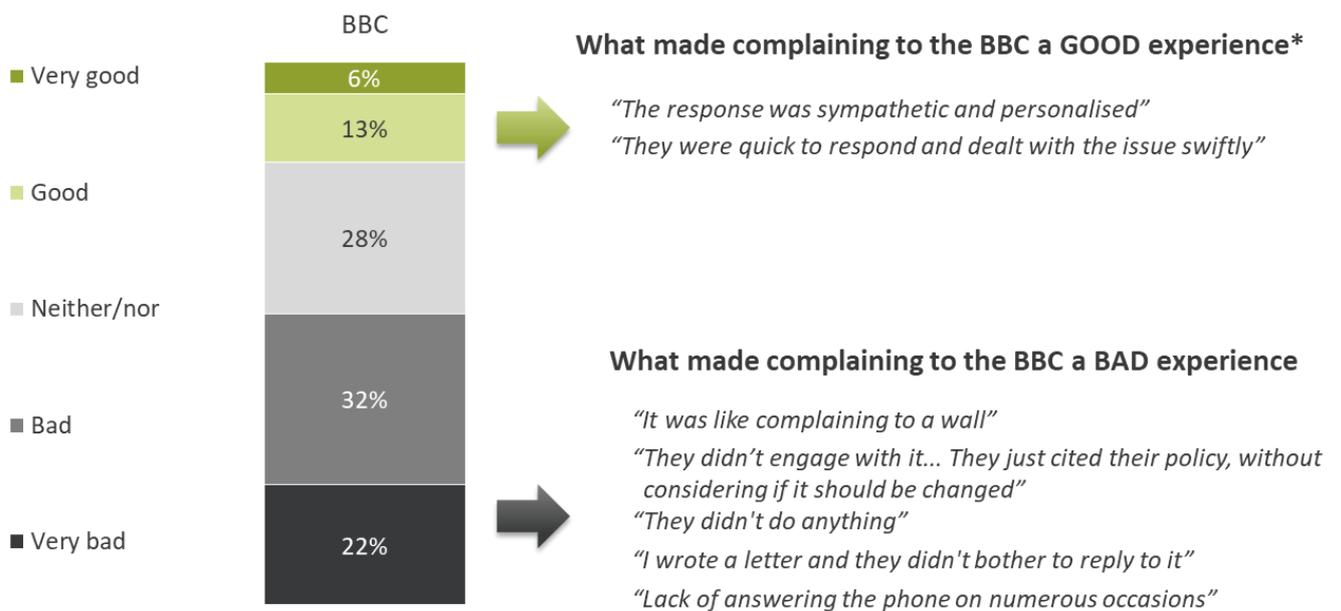
5.1 What was the overall experience when people complained to the BBC?

Less than one in five of those who had complained directly to the BBC reported they had a satisfactory experience. Over half of these reported the experience as being bad.

Participants who had complained to the BBC were asked about the overall experience of complaining. Figure 10 shows that over half of those who complained directly to the BBC (54%) said that they had had a bad experience (22% said very bad) with fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) saying that they had had a good experience.

These negative experiences tended to relate to lack of a significant response and a lack of engagement from the BBC, as illustrated in the example comments below.

Figure 10: Overall experience when complaining directly to the BBC



A4. When you last complained to ORGANISATION, how was the overall experience? Base: All complaints made direct to the BBC (118). A5/6. What made it a very good / good / bad / very bad experience when you complained to the BBC? Base: Verbatim comments from those having a good/bad experience when complaining to the BBC (25*/59). *CAUTION: LOW BASE

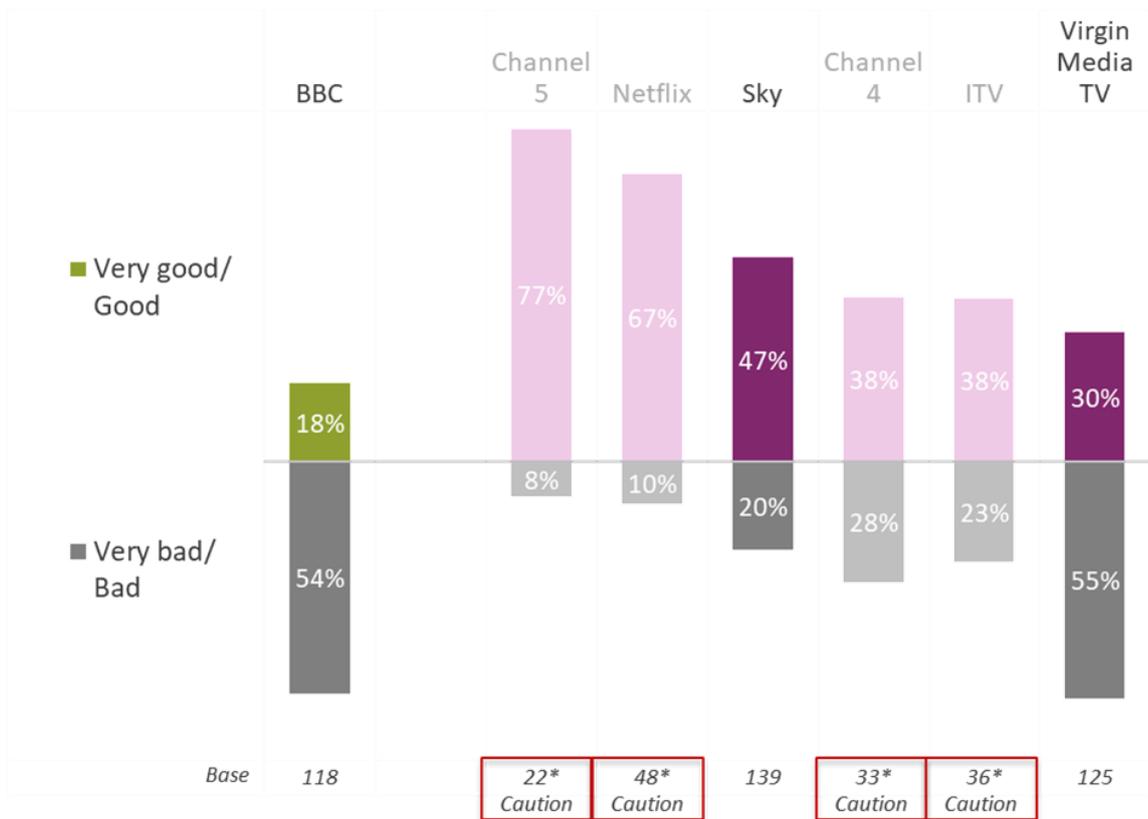
As discussed in Section 2.3 above this may in part be due to a lack of clarity on whether participants had engaged with the official complaints process.

5.2 Comparing the experience of complaining to the BBC to the experience with other organisations

Other brands/organisations were felt to provide a better overall experience than the BBC.

When comparing complaining to the BBC with complaining to other media brands (Figure 11), the other brands provided a better overall experience than the BBC. *Note: There is a possibility that some of the Sky and Virgin Media TV complaints related to some of their other products and services (such as phone or broadband).*

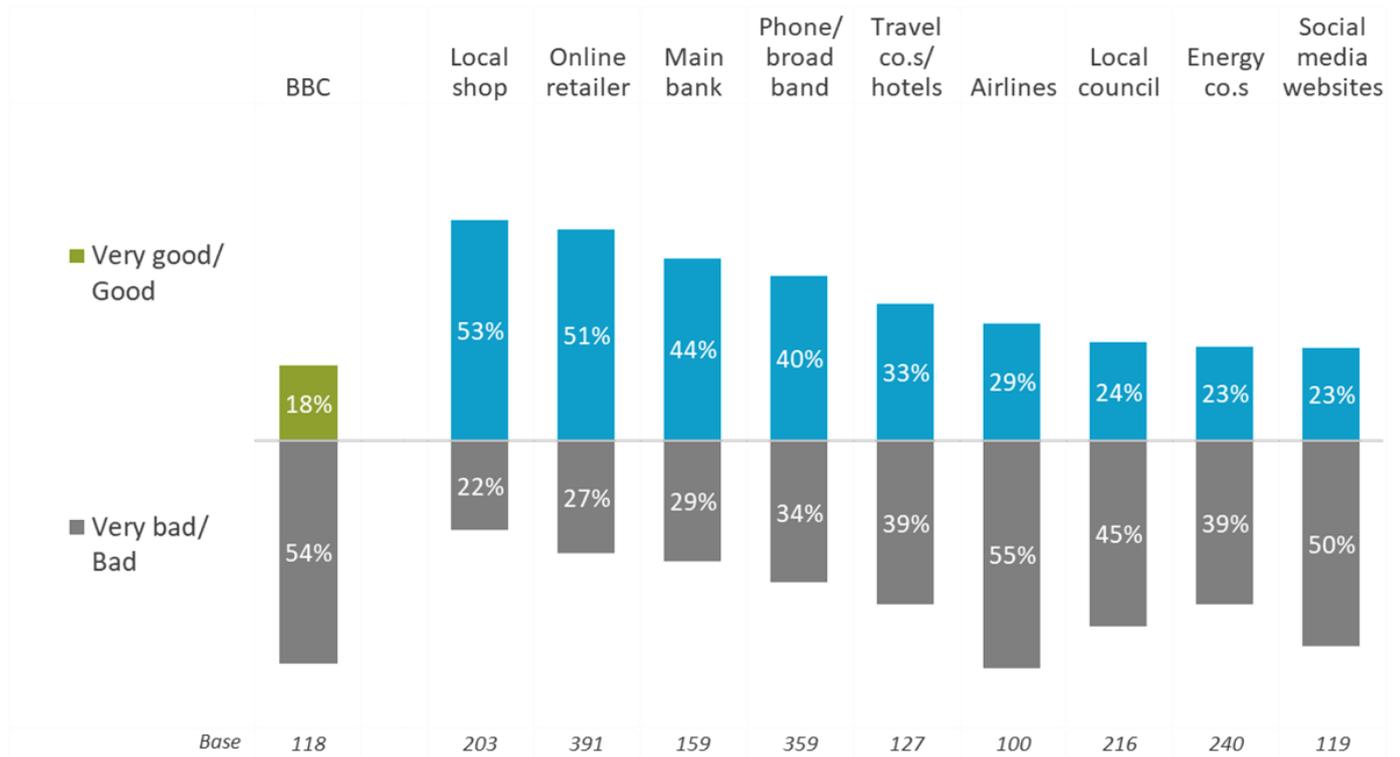
Figure 11: Overall experience when complaining directly to an organisation – for media organisations



A4. When you last complained to ORGANISATION, how was the overall experience? Base: All complaints direct to each organisation (sample sizes shown above *NOTE: BASE IS <50)

The same trend is observed when comparing complaining to the BBC with complaining to all other types of organisation (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Overall experience when complaining directly to an organisation – for individual organisations



A4. When you last complained to ORGANISATION, how was the overall experience? Base: All complaints direct to each organisation (sample sizes shown above *NOTE: BASE IS <50)

The qualitative element of the research can help us to understand more about perceptions of negative experiences when complaining to the BBC, as shown in the case study below. As previously noted, the case studies are designed to give a flavour of the end-to-end experience that people had when complaining to the BBC and are not to be seen as representative of BBC complainants in general.

Qualitative Case Study 2 – Left feeling dissatisfied with ‘vague’ and standard response



“

It should have been a brilliant opportunity to talk to the media division of the charity and talk about negative stereotypes but it just felt like they didn't care and wouldn't engage.

”

What happened

- The Crohn's and Colitis Society contacted its members and suggested if they felt strongly about it they complain to the BBC
- Included a link to the Complaints area in the email
 - She filled in the form which was easy but a little restrictive to get her points across
 - She received the '*generic holding email*' saying would get a response in 10 days
 - Then got another generic and 'vague' response after the 10 day period
 - Knows lots of them complained and they all got the same response
 - Saw little point in taking it further as didn't trust would get a more in depth response

Background details

- 'Kate' has Colitis
- A member of Crohn's and Colitis UK
- She has never complained before

Cause of the complaint

- Complained to the BBC after prompting from the Crohn's and Colitis society
- RuPaul's Drag Race – RuPaul made a joke about colostomy bag wearers smelling
- Felt it set back the cause of removing the stigma of Colostomy bags that the society had worked so hard to combat/normalise

Outcome

- Left feeling dissatisfied with the very 'vague' and 'standard' response
- Would have at least expected it to be more personalised with a 'thanks for reaching out'

The BBC

- Felt that as a TV Licence payer they should get a more robust response
- Would have expected the BBC to engage positively on this issue improving awareness of the negative stereotype with an article by way of a positive response
- Left her questioning whether it was correct for the BBC to 'mark' itself
- In particular thought it wrong that the BBC decides which complaints they publish on the website. Kate was not aware of the BBC's policy in this area

Some people felt that the BBC’s unique position as the national broadcaster means that it must be more accountable and adhere to higher standards than other broadcasters.

The qualitative research found that the BBC’s unique position may impact on participant perceptions of how their complaints should be dealt with. Many participants in the qualitative research felt that the role of the BBC as the publicly funded national broadcaster made it more accountable than other broadcasters. This perception suggested to some participants that it should adhere to higher standards not just in its programming but also in how it deals with complaints. Participants generally did not say exactly how the process would differ because of this – but did feel that the BBC should take more account of people’s issues.

More importantly, the TV licence fee meant that some participants felt that they ‘owned’ the BBC in a way that they do not the other Public Service Broadcasters¹⁶ or organisations such as Sky. This ‘ownership’ could then translate to a perception that the BBC then ‘owed’ them more of a personal explanation/response than organisations such as Sky or Netflix.

There was also some resentment of having to pay the TV licence fee among some participants who were very aware that they couldn’t just ‘leave’ the BBC – unlike pay TV providers such as Sky. This led them to be more critical of the BBC when it did not reflect their views or did not appear to take their opinions into account. For example, if they did not like the views or actions of a commercial organisation, such as Sky or Netflix, they could simply stop subscribing to the service, but they did not have that option for the BBC.

Those who were more supportive of the BBC could feel that they were playing the role of ‘critical friend’, so even though they felt positive towards the BBC in general, they still felt able to comment on the service it provided, to ‘help’ it maintain its standards.

Overall, it seemed that to many participants the BBC may need to do more than other providers to prove that it is not being complacent and that it does listen to its audiences. *Illustrative comments from the qualitative research are shown below (in purple):*

“I would expect higher standards as they are the national broadcaster, whether they would it admit it or not they are linked to Government and are part of the running of society.”

Gordon, 50s, Scottish, multiple complainant to the BBC

“All have some obligation, but the BBC has more obligation because of the TV Licence. If you took the TV Licence away people might be less critical...”

Wendy, 60s, non-BBC complainant

¹⁶The other public service broadcasters in the UK are ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, STV and S4C.

Qualitative Case Study 3 – Felt that the BBC should do more to deal with complaints



“

I worked in hospitality. Every single complaint needs to have an acknowledgement – you've got to make sure you've got enough people in the team to respond to everything

”

What happened

- He initially did a search for the email address of BBC Breakfast
- He then wrote a number of emails to them over the course of 6 months without getting a response
- He then went to the BBC website and found the webform (which he thought was not easy to find)
- He completed the webform but didn't find it that useful
 - The webform was a 'chore' to fill out
 - He mentioned that he didn't get a copy of his text
 - He didn't get an acknowledgement
- He decided not to follow-up as he didn't think he'd get a response

Background details

- 'Julian' is 65 and has recently retired from the hospitality industry
- He lives on the Scottish/English boarder and is married with grown-up kids
- He veers towards watching breakfast TV as he finds the interviewing approach less aggressive

Cause of the complaint

- He felt that the approach to interviewing used by the BBC was disrespectful and rude
- He also mentioned that he expected better of the BBC

Outcome

- Overall, Julian was not happy with his complaint to the BBC – either in terms of the process or their response to his issue
- Having worked in hospitality, it's his view that an organisation should have enough staff to deal with complaints
- He also wanted to know how many people would have to complain before the BBC took note and changed their policy

The BBC

- Julian felt that given that the BBC is publicly funded it should 'take the high ground' in regards to complaints i.e. operate to a higher standard
- Overall he felt it needs to listen more, and at least provide a rationale, even if it doesn't change it's policy in response to complaints

5.3 What response did complainants receive from the BBC?

Fewer than half of those complaining about a BBC service said they received an initial substantive response within two weeks. Of those receiving a response, a third were satisfied with the speed of reply.

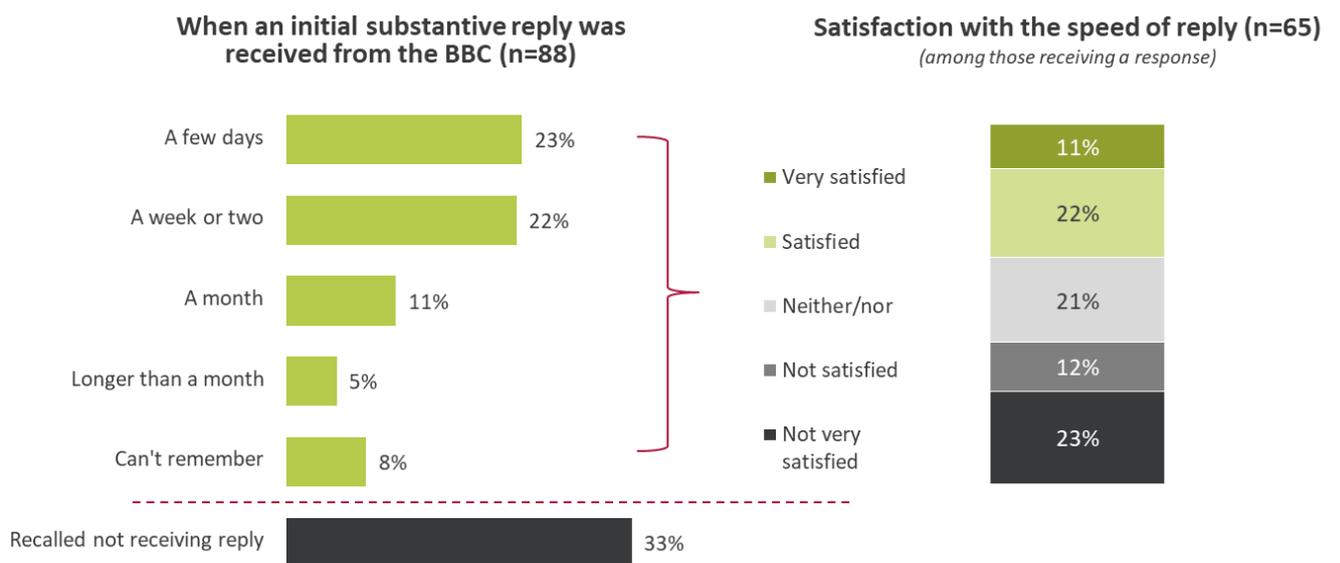
Participants were asked about the initial substantive response that they received from the BBC to the complaint they had made. An initial substantive response was defined as one that addressed the complaint and the programme complained about, rather than one that just acknowledged receipt of the complaint.

Note that sample sizes are under 100 so should be seen as indicative rather than conclusive.

Figure 13 shows that less than half (45%) of those complaining about a BBC First service claimed they received an initial substantive response within two weeks.¹⁷ A third did not recall receiving a reply at all.

Of those receiving a response, a third were satisfied with the speed of reply. All those who were very satisfied/satisfied received their initial reply within two weeks.

Figure 13: When an initial substantive reply was received from the BBC and satisfaction with the speed of reply



C7. How long did it take to get an initial substantive reply from the BBC? Note: a substantive reply is one that addresses the complaint and the programme complained about, rather than one that just acknowledges receipt of the complaint? Base: All complaining about a BBC First service (88). C8. How satisfied were you with the speed of this initial reply? Base: All receiving a reply from the BBC (65)

After receiving the initial substantive response, 18 participants (27% of the weighted data) felt their complaint had been addressed, 30 participants (47%) felt their complaint had not been satisfactorily addressed but did not

¹⁷ The BBC's Complaints Framework sets out on page 14 the following target for response at stage 1a: "The BBC aims to reply within 10 working days of receipt of your complaint though some complaints may take longer than others to investigate."

want to progress their complaint any further and 17 participants (26%) felt their complaint had not been satisfactorily addressed and did want to take it further.

Qualitative input: why participants don't take their complaint further

The qualitative research suggested that the decision not to take the complaint further may not have been driven purely by satisfaction with the response received from the BBC. Rather it seemed to stem in some cases from complainants' differing reactions to the generic nature of the response.

A minority of participants simply wanted to vent their feelings. Although they weren't overly happy with the response, they'd done enough to 'let off steam' and express their displeasure or irritation and did not want to take the matter further.

"I did complain again [about a different topic] and I said I did not want a response. I thought 'What's the point? No'."

David, male, 70s, multiple complainant to the BBC

Some were unsure how to follow-up on the BBC's initial response. Of these, some cited a lack of clarity about next steps within the response they had received, for example some were not sure who BBC Audience Services/the ECU were or why they should complain to them, or why they would provide a better response.

Some then complained using other channels, such as emails to the programme, Twitter, etc.

"It didn't give me an option to take it further, well I don't think it did. The whole process was not clear."

Oscar, male, 20s, multiple complainant to the BBC

The majority believed they would get a similar, generic response again. Therefore, it was not worth their time or effort to follow-up further. The reason that most participants in our study did not take the complaint further was therefore not that they were satisfied, but that they did not think it would achieve anything worthwhile.

"It felt like a complete waste of time, I did not bother going back as I do not think would get a more in-depth response."

Monique, female, 40s, first time complainant to the BBC

As outlined in section 3.1 above, the qualitative research also revealed that some participants had made what they thought was a complaint to the BBC but had not made an 'official' complaint (i.e., using the BBC complaints process) or had been confused between leaving a 'complaint', 'comment' and 'feedback'.

These findings suggest that more people may believe they have complained to the BBC than are actually recognised by the BBC's complaints system. These participants may also be more dissatisfied – given the lack of response that they receive.

5.4 What did people think about the BBC’s response to their complaint?

Although people felt generally satisfied with the ease of complaining to the BBC and finding out how to make a complaint, there were high levels of dissatisfaction across the board for the BBC’s complaints process as a whole, and the BBC’s final response.

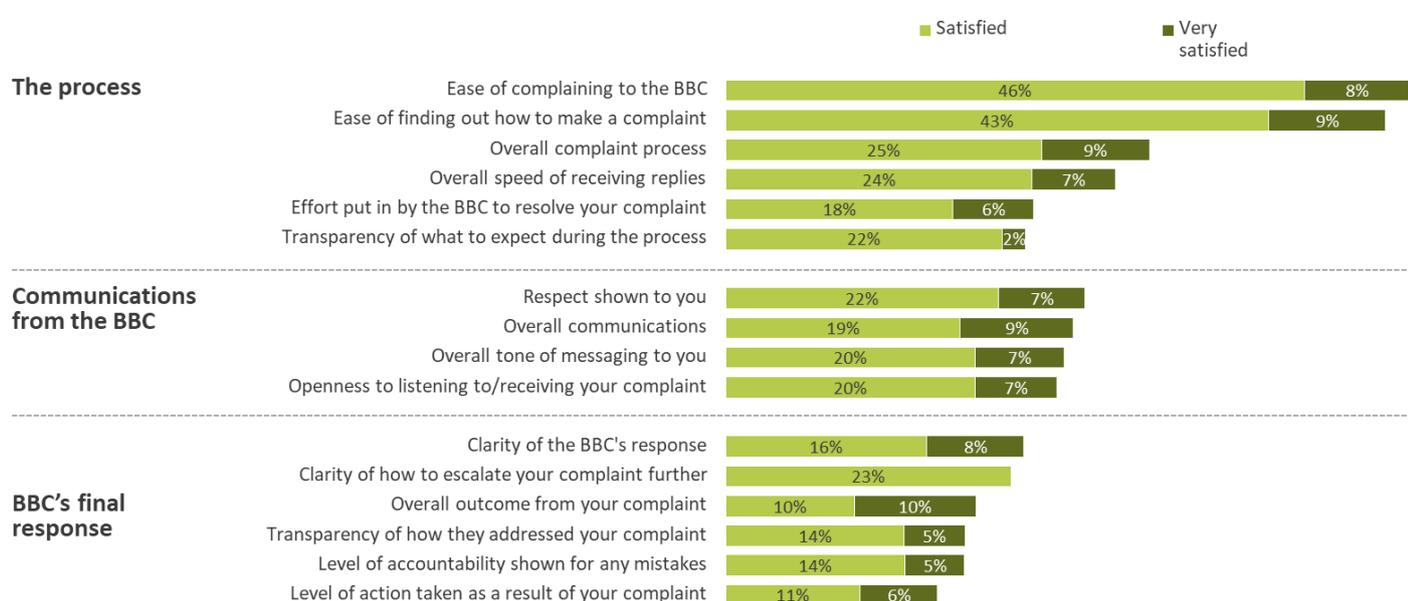
Note that sample sizes are under 100 so should be seen as indicative rather than conclusive.

Figures 14 and 15 examine the BBC’s response to complaints across a number of different elements.

Satisfaction levels were low across the board. The ease of complaining to the BBC and ease of finding out how to make a complaint were the most satisfactory areas, with 54% and 52% satisfied respectively (the majority within this were “satisfied” rather than “very satisfied”).

Fewer than a third were satisfied with most other elements.

Figure 14: Assessment of the BBC’s response to the complaint (satisfaction levels)



C13/C14/C15. Thinking about [the BBC’s final response to your complaint/ the process of complaining/ the communications you received from the BBC]. How would you rate the BBC in terms of the following? Base: All complaining about a BBC First service (88)

Below are some comments made by participants in the qualitative research in relation to how easy it was to complain to the BBC:

“It’s not difficult at all to find the form, even though it is my first time of complaining. I just Googled it”

Jon, male, 30s, first time complainant to the BBC

“How easy to find? Not too easy or too hard. I type in ‘BBC complaints’ in Google”

Michael, male, 20s, multiple complainant to the BBC

“It was really easy to locate the complaints form using Google. It was easy to fill it in and I submitted my complaint in about 2 or 3 minutes”

Suzy, female, 60s, first time complainant to the BBC

“The webform is not that easy. It’s a chore to find it and fill it in with all the details. And I did not get any acknowledgement. Just have to cross your fingers and hope”

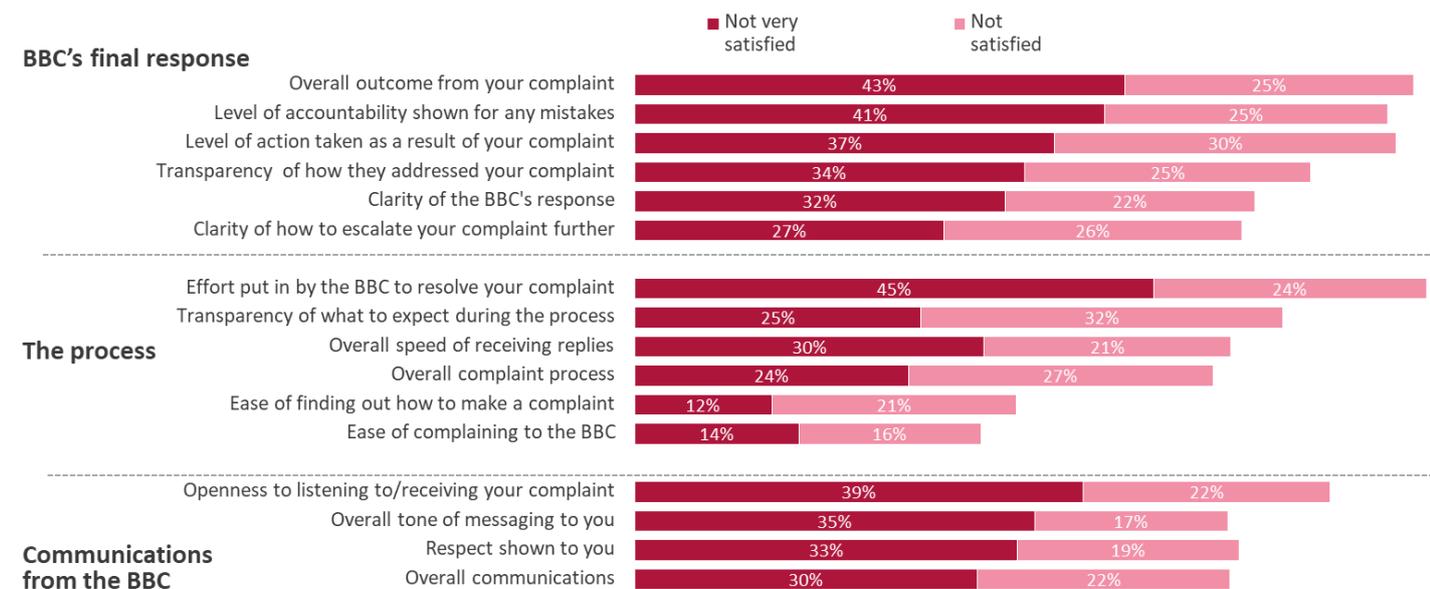
Julian, male, 60s, first time complainant to the BBC

There were high levels of dissatisfaction across the board for the BBC’s complaints process as a whole, and the BBC’s final response.

In particular, two-thirds of those complaining about a BBC First service were dissatisfied with the overall outcome from their complaint (68%), the level of action taken (67%) or the level of accountability shown (66%).

Almost 7 in 10 (69%) were dissatisfied with the effort they felt the BBC had made to resolve the complaint.

Figure 15: Assessment of the BBC’s response to the complaint (dissatisfaction levels)



C13/C14/C15. Thinking about [the BBC’s final response to your complaint/ the process of complaining/ the communications you received from the BBC]. How would you rate the BBC in terms of the following? Base: All complaining about a BBC First service (88)

5.5 Qualitative insights regarding the process of complaining to the BBC

Participants believed that improvements could be made to the operation of the BBC complaints process to make it easier for complainants to make a complaint. There was also a view that complaints were not being taken seriously by the BBC, which made people feel under-valued or that there was no point in complaining.

Overall perceptions of the webform

Participants in the qualitative phase of the research talked about the process they went through when complaining to the BBC. In summary, the webform was generally seen as easy to complete but also had room for improvement.

The webform was considered generally easy to find. The majority of qualitative participants simply used Google to search for it and followed a link.

Most also felt it was relatively easy to get started on the process of completing it.

The need to manage expectations

However, participants felt improvements could be made to the webform to better manage complainant expectations. The note referring to the fact that the BBC ‘may not reply in detail’ was missed by some participants¹⁸ – which raised expectations that they would receive a response. The link to ‘how we handle your complaint’¹⁹ was also missed by some participants – although this seemed to have less impact as participants tended to be less concerned with the detailed process of how the BBC would handle a complaint than with getting a response.

Usability issues mentioned by participants

With regard to the form, generally participants found the main body of the form easy to complete. Again, participants believed some elements could be improved: the level of detail asked about the subject of complaint and personal details was seen as unnecessary by a minority of participants.

Issues relating to the ‘end’ of webform completion

Some participants mentioned that they had not received a response to their complaint.²⁰ This may be due to the colour coding used for the question on the form that asks participants whether they wish to receive a response. Whether the participant clicks ‘yes’ or ‘no’, the tab then turns green. As green is more likely to be seen as a positive acknowledgement of a service or action, if the participant is not fully engaged, they may simply scan the colour and believe it’s a positive rather than read the text; therefore, they may believe that they have requested a response when in fact they haven’t.

Some participants were left with questions at the end of the process, which suggests that more information could be added or made more prominent. For example, the lack of a reference number which was not provided at this point meant a minority of participants felt that they could not follow up if they did not receive an acknowledgement or get a written copy of what they had written. This may be because participants did not leave an actual complaint and therefore did not get an acknowledgement and reference number²¹ (although it should

¹⁸ The first page of the BBC’s complaints webform currently states that “if your complaint is a matter of personal taste, opinion or preference or is about the BBC in general we will circulate your feedback overnight to the relevant producers and managers but may not reply in detail.”

¹⁹ This is currently an embedded hyperlink in the text on the first page of the BBC’s complaints webform.

²⁰ The last question on the second page of the BBC’s complaints form currently asks “Do you require a response to your complaint?” with “yes” and “no” click boxes.

²¹ Complainants who make a complaint via webform will usually receive an email acknowledgement with a copy of the complaint and a reference number.

be noted that they believed that they had left a complaint) and/or participants did leave an actual complaint but may have forgotten that they'd received an acknowledgement and reference number.

A minority also mentioned that, although the BBC included details in early complaints stages, the final page of the webform did not provide any details on how the complaint would be handled, e.g., timelines, the number of complaints needed on a topic before BBC would /change their policy or links to the location of a central online area to see if the BBC has received similar complaints and their response.

Qualitative Case study 4 | Straightforward process, but not happy with the outcome



Background details

- Karen is 41 and lives in Belfast with her partner and their three children
- She is disabled
- She is a first time complainer
- Drama is her thing; she watches on BBC, ITV, Netflix and Prime

Cause of the complaint

- She was watching a political panel show hosted by Steven Nolan
- She was very angry about the treatment of Irish Republican politician Gerry Kelly – and felt that audience choice was very biased (very Unionist)
- Karen felt anger, annoyance and ‘sense of disbelief’ – which spurred her into complaining

“
The process was very easy. Not a hassle, if it was I wouldn't have done it.

Doing it online was easy for me, but not sure my mummy could have done it.
”

What happened

- Initially Googled ‘how to complain about the BBC’
- Wanted to complain to BBC NI, but settled for complaining to main BBC
- Completed the webform
- She thought that if enough people complained then the BBC may acknowledge and apologise
- Received a quick acknowledgement of her complaint
- A few weeks later received a response which she thought was very generic which stated that the audience was chosen to be balanced

Outcome

- Overall not happy with the BBC response
- But decided not to take the complaint further as she didn't think it would do any good – “*What's the point?*”

The acknowledgement process

The qualitative research also revealed that some participants felt that the acknowledgement process could be improved to give complainants a better experience. All participants expected to receive an acknowledgement of their complaint, and most did receive one, however, some did not remember receiving an acknowledgement at all (see above).

On a positive note, many participants were satisfied that the acknowledgement provided a reference number for their complaint and/or reassured them that the BBC was looking into their complaint.

The small number of participants who did not receive an acknowledgement may have clicked on the web form that they did not want a response from the BBC – and did not realise that by doing so they wouldn't get an acknowledgement. This point is actually mentioned on the form; however, it appears that some participants may have missed this.

If the BBC First complaints process considered acknowledging all complaints, including those where the complainant had said they did not want a full response, it may help to reassure participants that their complaint will be read and possibly improve satisfaction with the process.

Some participants also noted that they would have liked information within the acknowledgement on whether it was possible to track their complaint and how to follow up the complaint if they did not get a response.

Why low satisfaction scores are given for the contents of the first substantive BBC response

The qualitative research also sheds more light on the low satisfaction scores in relation to the first substantive response received (i.e., at stage 1a of the complaints process). Most participants complained that the response they received was too generic and uncaring, with little indication of how to follow up. For many participants, who did not progress further, this 'initial' first response was the final response they would have received from the BBC.

Participants tended to say that the response was not personalised and did not attempt to explain or justify the BBC's position in regard to the issue they had complained about. The majority of qualitative participants stated that while they did not necessarily expect a change in policy about the particular issue, they did want a detailed explanation as to why the BBC was taking a certain stance. Many also felt that the response suggested that the BBC did not seriously listen to them or consider their point of view.

Logistically, many felt that it was not clear how they could follow up on the initial BBC response or that the next steps would be an escalation to a different team.

"The issue itself is not serious, it annoys me, but it's the lack of an appropriate response that annoys me more."

Gordon, male, 50s, multiple complainant to the BBC

"It was quite a formal reply, it was all I expected really even though I was a little bit disappointed...I think writing to my local MP is a more powerful way of making my voice heard. The BBC's reply looked too formal to me whereas my MP's reply made me feel closer to her. It is just that she agreed with my points or that the BBC did not take any further action it's also about the way the reply was written."

Jon, male, 30s, first time complainant to the BBC

"A few weeks later I got an email saying 'they felt the audience was fair and balanced and no problem' ... I felt they did not even look into it just said the audience was balanced. I do not think they were lying, it was just a standard answer"

Karen, female, 40s, first time complainant to the BBC

Overall, most qualitative participants felt the initial response they received suggested that the BBC did not care about their complaint, their concerns or issues, did not value them personally and would do what it wanted with little thought for its audiences. This seemed to contribute to driving low satisfaction with the entire process. They also believed that the BBC would behave in a similar way if they tried to follow-up on this complaint or make another complaint.

“I did complain again [about a different topic] and I said I did not want a response. I thought ‘What’s the point? No’.”

David, male, 70s, multiple complainant to the BBC

“How I felt? That the BBC did not really care about people’s views. That they couldn’t be bothered with the hassle.”

Michael, male, 20s, multiple complainant to the BBC

Qualitative Case study 5 | Feels that the BBC did not take his complaint seriously



“
Basically, I think the complaints process is a way to vent your feelings – then they just want you to go away.
”

What happened

- He went to the main BBC website and found the webform easily
- He thought the form was relatively easy to complete, although he did feel that it was asking for too many details in regards to the issue he was complaining about. He thought this could be off-putting to some people
- He remembered getting a reference number, but couldn't work out how to use it to follow-up
- David doesn't remember getting a response to his complaint. He decided not to follow-up, in part because he couldn't figure how to, but primarily because he didn't think the BBC would respond to him

Background details

- 'David' is 75 and retired from his job in the oil industry 5 years ago. He was in senior management and frequently travelled internationally
- He watches the BBC less than he used to. Now he spends more time watching Sky
- He has complained before

Cause of the complaint

- Complained to the BBC having become 'incensed' that, at the height of the PPE shortages, the BBC was giving its reporters PPE so that they could visit hospitals.
- David felt that this was a poor use of equipment that could have been better used for medical and care professionals

Outcome

- Overall, he felt that the process was designed so that people could feel that they'd had their say – but didn't feel that the BBC took his complaint seriously
- He's complained again about a different issue, just to let off steam, but now ticks the box for 'no response required' as he doesn't think he'll get a response anyway

The BBC

- David didn't consider complaining to anyone else other than the BBC in regards to his issue
- He felt that it's right that the first step in the process should be to complain to the BBC, so that they have a chance deal with the complaint first

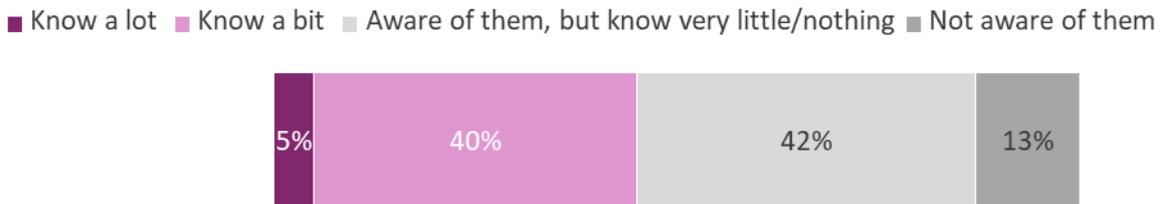
6. Awareness and perceptions of BBC First system

6.1 Awareness of Ofcom and its role

There was high awareness of Ofcom and its role in complaining about TV, on-demand and radio services. There was lower awareness of the BBC First process.

Overall, 87% of participants claimed they were aware of Ofcom and 45% claimed to know 'a lot' or 'a bit' about their role.

Figure 16: Awareness of Ofcom and its role



D1a. Before today, had you heard of Ofcom? D1b. How much do you know about Ofcom's role as the UK's communications regulator? Base: All participants (2407)

Participants were asked if they were aware they could complain to Ofcom if they 'had a complaint about TV, on-demand or radio services'. 69% said they were aware of this (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Awareness of Ofcom's role in complaining about TV, radio and On-demand services.

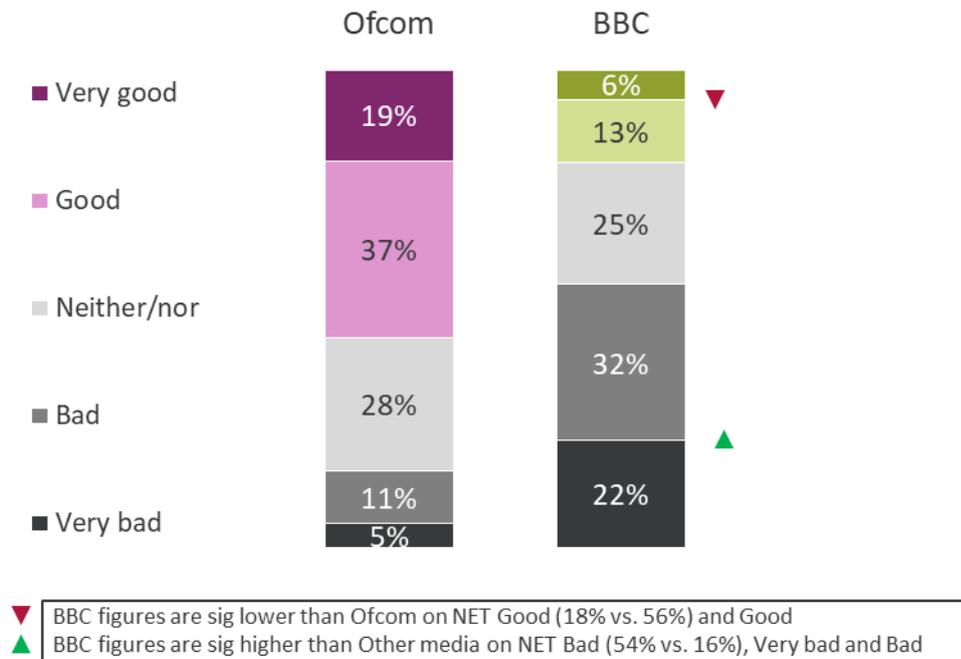


D1c. Did you know you could complain to Ofcom if you had a complaint about TV, On-demand or radio services? Base: All participants (2407)

Those who had complained to either Ofcom or the BBC were asked to rate their overall experience of the process and response (Figure 18).

Half of those who had complained to Ofcom (56%) said that they had had a very good/good experience. This is significantly higher than the 19% saying the same of their experience with the BBC.

Figure 18: Overall experience of complaining to Ofcom vs. the BBC



D1d. When you last complained to Ofcom, how was your overall experience of complaining? Base: All who have complained to Ofcom in the past (119). A4. When you last complained to the BBC, how was the overall experience? Base: All complaints direct to the BBC in the past year (118)

The majority of participants were not aware of BBC First (79%). Of those who said they were aware (21%), three-quarters were not aware of the full three-stage process.

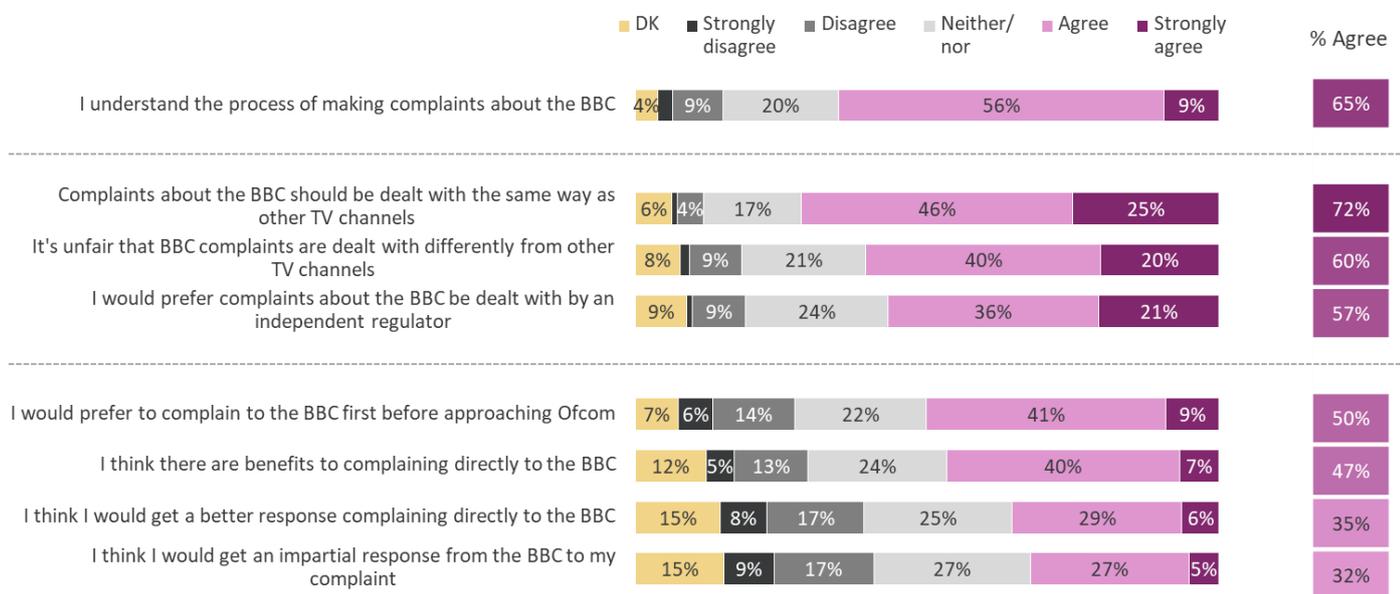
6.2 What did people think about the BBC First complaints process as a concept?

The majority (72%) felt complaints about the BBC should be dealt with in the same way as other TV channels. However, half also said they would prefer to contact the BBC via the BBC First process.

Participants were asked for their reactions to BBC First, having read through or having read out to them the process by which they were expected to complain to the BBC (Figure 19).

Overall, almost two-thirds (65%) claimed that they understood this process. Although half said that they would prefer to contact the BBC via the BBC First process, a large proportion (72%) also said that BBC complaints should be dealt in the same way as other broadcasters.

Figure 19: Reactions to the process for complaining about the BBC



D5. Having heard the description, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the way you need to complain about the BBC? Base: All participants (2407)

Qualitative input: reactions to a brief description of the BBC First complaints process

In the course of the qualitative research, participants were shown a brief description of the BBC First complaints process. This was a slightly longer version of that shown to quantitative participants. Note that, given that qualitative participants were also interviewed in the quantitative stage, they would have seen both.

On the positive side, the 10-working day target for a substantial response to stage 1a was thought to be acceptable by the majority of participants. It was also seen as fair that the first complaint had to go to the BBC rather than Ofcom. This was felt to give the BBC the chance to fix the issue, whereas it might be unfair to the BBC to go to Ofcom in the first instance. Some felt that it would be good if other broadcasters had to follow a similar process.

However, on the negative side, timescales between the later stages (the 20 or 35 working day target for a substantial response) were seen by the majority as overly long. The number of stages before escalation to Ofcom could also make some feel that the BBC was 'marking its own homework'. Overall, one stage before escalation to Ofcom seemed acceptable to all participants, but three stages seemed too many. Furthermore, the fact that there were three stages was often seen as unfair to other broadcasters.

The 'value for money' argument, i.e. that an initially generic response is proportionate, given that escalation is available if complainants would like a more personalised response, did not convince the majority of qualitative participants. Dealing with audiences' (licence fee payers') complaints was seen as important – so it was felt that the BBC should budget to give them the attention they deserve. There was also a feeling that if the service was better, then there would be fewer complaints for them to deal with.²²

“If the service was better, you wouldn't need so many staff answering complaints in the first place. You've got to make sure you have enough people in the team to respond to everything”

Julian, male, 60s, first time complainant

Participants did not understand why delaying the involvement of Ofcom was beneficial from a cost perspective. Illustrative verbatim comments and case studies can be found below:

“There are too many stages. There should only be one stage and if the complainant is not happy with the response, then they should be able to either go directly to Ofcom or send another complaint to the BBC if they wish to do so. What's the point of the third stage? It's not clear what the ECU is”

Suzy, female, 60s, first time complainant to the BBC

“My natural inclination is to complain to the BBC first.”

David, male, 70s, multiple complainant to the BBC

“It's good to have stages... Good that the BBC has enough time to sort it out first and if they can't be bothered it can go to someone else”

Wendy, female, 60s, non-BBC complainant

“It's a good thing. They're taking responsibility themselves, rather than saying go to someone else first. It might be better if you go once to the BBC then go to Ofcom – if you're told to do it again [i.e. contact the BBC again] it might put a lot of people off”

Siobhan, female, 30s, non-BBC complainant

²² Qualitative participants were asked to comment on possible justifications of the BBC process, which were described as shown below:

- The broadcaster stays close to its audiences and to what is concerning them.
- It recognises the accountability of the broadcaster, if an error has been made, to put matters right.
- It should provide value for money as issues may be dealt with quickly, keeping regulatory involvement to a minimum.
- The public funding also means that the BBC has to balance the amount of money it spends on its complaints system with the amount of money it puts into creating content and therefore has to be proportionate in the amount of money it spends on complaints.

Qualitative Case study 6 | Why should the BBC have a chance to respond first?



Background details

- 'Grace' is 22 year old graduate working for a technology and robotics company in London
- She watches the BBC news live during the evening, but tends to stream most of her other content

“

I think it's fine to contact the BBC in the first instance... but if I'm not happy with their response, I should be able to go to Ofcom straightaway. I just don't see why the BBC should have another chance to respond? ”

Cause of the complaint

- Racist language used in 'live' interview on BBC News Channel
- Very annoyed by this and wanted to make a complaint, but noticed that lots of others had already complained (it was trending on social media)

Positive points about BBC First Process

- *“I'd be happy to send my feedback to the BBC in the first instance. I think they can react a lot more quickly if they get feedback directly from their viewers or listeners”*
- *“I think people are used to providing feedback to the BBC... we've been encouraged to do this over the years... it's 'our' BBC”*
- *“I think the 10 day response time is OK. I don't think I'd need to hear back for them any sooner than this...”*

Negative points about BBC First

- *“As I say, I think it's fine to contact the BBC in the first instance... but if I'm not happy with their response, I should be able to go to Ofcom straightaway.”*
- *“There should only be one stage – then if the complainant is not happy with the response, they should be able to go directly to Ofcom or send another complaint to the BBC, if they want to do so.”*
- *“What's the point of the third stage? It's not clear what the ECU is”*

7. BBC Complaints Process (Mystery shopping)

This section summarises the findings from the Mystery Shopping phase. It has been used to provide an objective assessment of the BBC complaints process by tracking the process followed and outcome achieved in relation to a series of complaints.

A total of 50 shoppers were used, each testing one complaint scenario. Once a response was received, the shopper was asked to escalate their complaint to the next stage. Where possible, each complaint was taken through the following stages of the process:

- Stage 1a – submitting a complaint and the initial response, usually from BBC Audience Services.
- Stage 1b – if the complaint progressed further, a response from or on behalf of a BBC manager or a member of the editorial team.
- Stage 2 – if the complaint progressed further, a response from the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU).

To ensure that the mystery shopping complaints resembled genuine complaints as closely as possible, Ofcom's Standards & Audience Protection Team created a unique 'scenario' for each shopper. Scenarios were loosely based on real-life complaints and the subject matter was chosen to mirror the actual complaints received by Audience Services.

The 50 scenarios were split as follows across the BBC First complaints channels:

- 3 x initial calls with BBC telephone operators, with subsequent complaints made via the BBC's webform.
- 3 x initial calls where the shopper left a recorded message on the BBC's complaints telephone line, with subsequent complaints made via the BBC's webform.
- 5 x letter complaints to the BBC Complaints postal address.
- 39 x BBC webform complaints.

Caution should be used when reviewing the Mystery shopping findings, due to low sample sizes.

Stage 1a comprised 50 assessments, Stage 1b 46 assessments and Stage 2 25 assessments.

Findings therefore have been reported numerically rather than as percentages throughout this section due to the small-scale nature of this part of the study.

The Mystery Shopping phase illustrated that it was easy to find out how to make a complaint, the forms were simple to complete and the responses were clear/easy to understand.

However, response time targets were often missed, responses did not always address the complaint and the steps for escalation were not always clear.

Summary of findings

Stage 1a

Overall, the complaints process was easy to find and clearly explained. For phone calls, call handlers were courteous, but it was felt they could do more to tell complainants how to submit a written response and explain next steps. The recorded message on the BBC's complaints line was clear, but next steps were not explained.

4 in 5 of the mystery shoppers who submitted written or webform complaints received a response within the 10-working day target.²³ Responses were clear and easy to understand. However, 4 in 5 did not feel they received

²³ The BBC's complaints framework sets out the following target response times:

Stage 1a: within 10 working days of receiving a complaint

Stage 1b within 20 working days of receiving a complaint

Stage 2: within 20 working days of receiving a complaint, or within 35 working days for "complaints that require longer or more complex investigation".

However, at each stage, it notes that some complaints may take longer than others to investigate.

appropriate information on how to escalate their complaint and only half felt the response fully addressed their complaint.

Stage 1b

The mystery shoppers found it easy to find their reference number and fill out the form/letter, but 1 in 3 were unclear about the next steps after submitting their 1b complaint.

Only 1 in 3 received a response within the 20-working day target. Responses were clear and easy to understand, but around half said it did not provide any new information. A quarter did not feel they received appropriate information on how to escalate their complaint and less than half felt the response fully addressed their complaint.

Stage 2

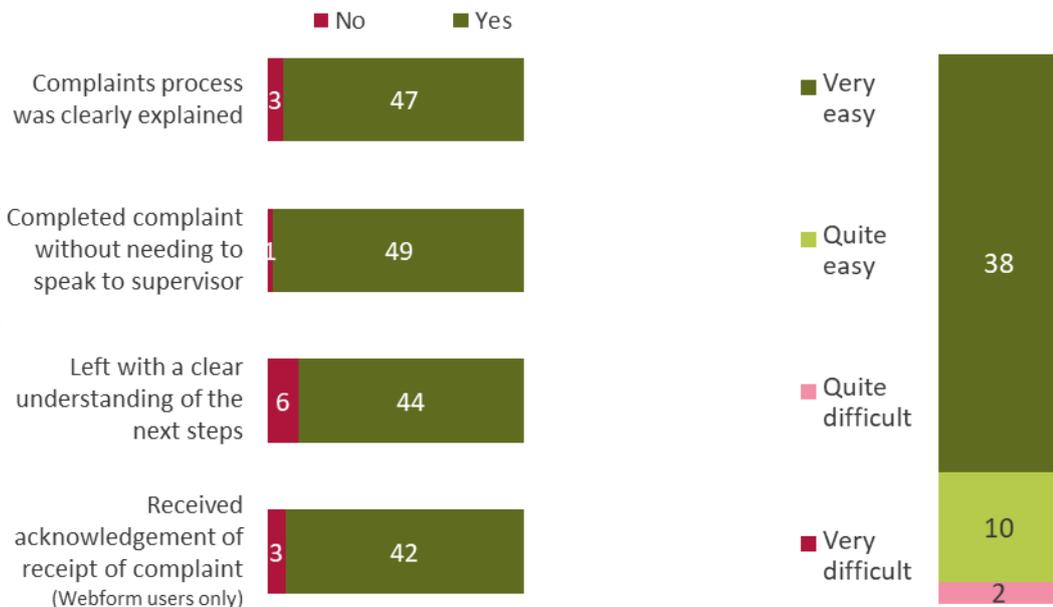
Mystery shoppers found it easy to fill out the form/letter and were left with a clear understanding of the next steps. Only half received a response within the standard 20-working day target. Responses were clear and easy to understand and around half felt the response fully addressed their complaint.

7.1 Stage 1a

45 complaints were made via webform²⁴ and a further 5 complaints sent as letters.

When making a complaint via webform/letter, almost all of the mystery shoppers said they found the complaints process easy to find (49 of 50) and clearly explained (47 of 50). However, 6 of the 50 were unclear about the immediate next steps after making their complaint, including how long they had to wait for a response from the BBC. The majority of mystery shoppers said it was very easy to find out how to make a complaint or to know how to fill out the webform or what to include in a letter (38 of 50).

Figure 20: Thoughts on making complaint and ease of knowing how to fill out the webform/what to include in the letter



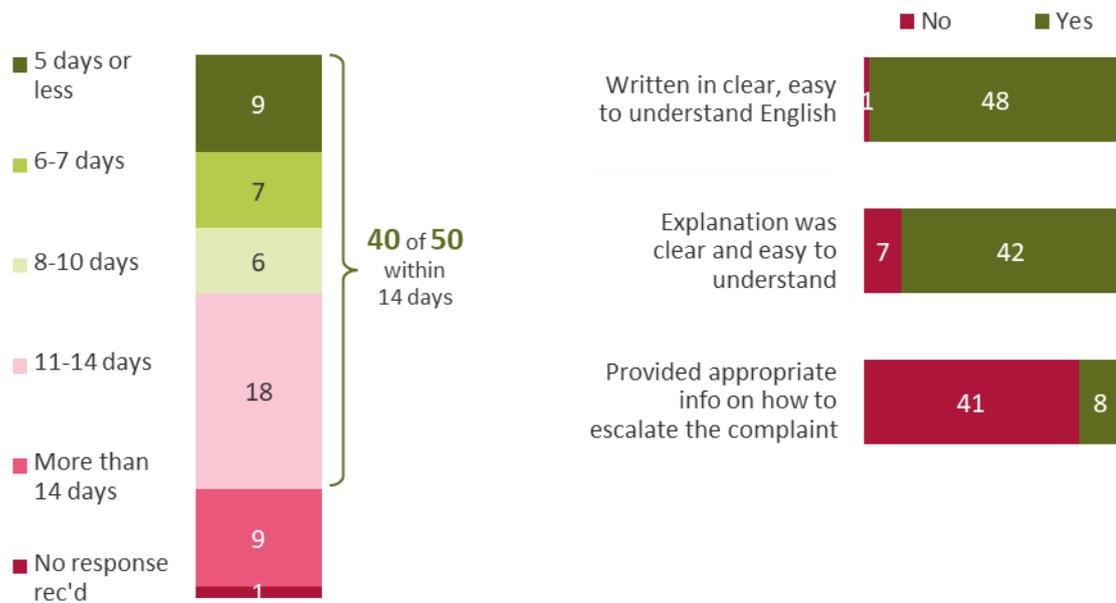
Q25-30 (50 or 45 complaints – actual numbers are shown above, not percentages)

The average time spent filling out the webform or writing the letter was 6.12 minutes.

²⁴ All telephone complaints were followed up with a complaint made using a webform.

As shown on Figure 21, 40 of 50 mystery shoppers received a substantive response within the 14 calendar-day (10 working day) target, but one shopper did not hear back at all. The average time taken to receive a response was 11 calendar days. Although responses were seen as generally clear and easy to understand, 41 of 49 felt they did not receive appropriate information in their response on how to escalate their complaint to the next stage, if they wanted to.

Figure 21: Time taken to receive a substantive response and thoughts on the response received



Q31/33/38/39a (50 or 49 complaints - actual numbers are shown above, not percentages)

In the majority of cases (43 of 50) the response provided information/clarification on the BBC’s approach in the area of complaint.

The mystery shoppers were asked to put themselves in the position of having actually made the complaint and to give their satisfaction levels on that basis. 26 of the 50 shoppers were satisfied with the response they received, 10 were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and the remaining 14 were dissatisfied.

Reasons for satisfaction:

“They were very clear in explaining and clarifying”

“They explained the basis of decision made which I could not argue upon”

“The response felt like it was individual and not a simple copy and paste generic response. It apologised for any inconvenience caused”

“They acknowledged my feelings and offence taken to the material discussed in the show, and displayed an element of sympathy”

Reasons for dissatisfaction:

“I would have expected a more detailed response, especially as I had waited for almost a month”

“I thought that the reply was patronising and did not address the issue of bias”

“The issue which I raised was not addressed specifically whatsoever and no escalation route was included or explained”

“No real reference to the content of my complaint within the response - it was far too generic”

“I have not received a substantive response”

27 of 50 felt that the response they received at stage 1a fully addressed their complaint. *Again, this the perception of mystery shoppers, rather than actual complainants.*

Positive responses:

“Although there was no apology, the response clearly stated it did not want to cause offence and that my complaint would be forwarded to the programme makers for feedback”

“The response explained to me the reasons why the BBC need to remain impartial and I do respect this”

“All points were addressed with care and clarity”

Negative responses:

“No action was taken and no justification was given to why no action was being taken”

“The complaint specifics were not addressed whatsoever”

“Justified the programme narrative and ignored my complaint”

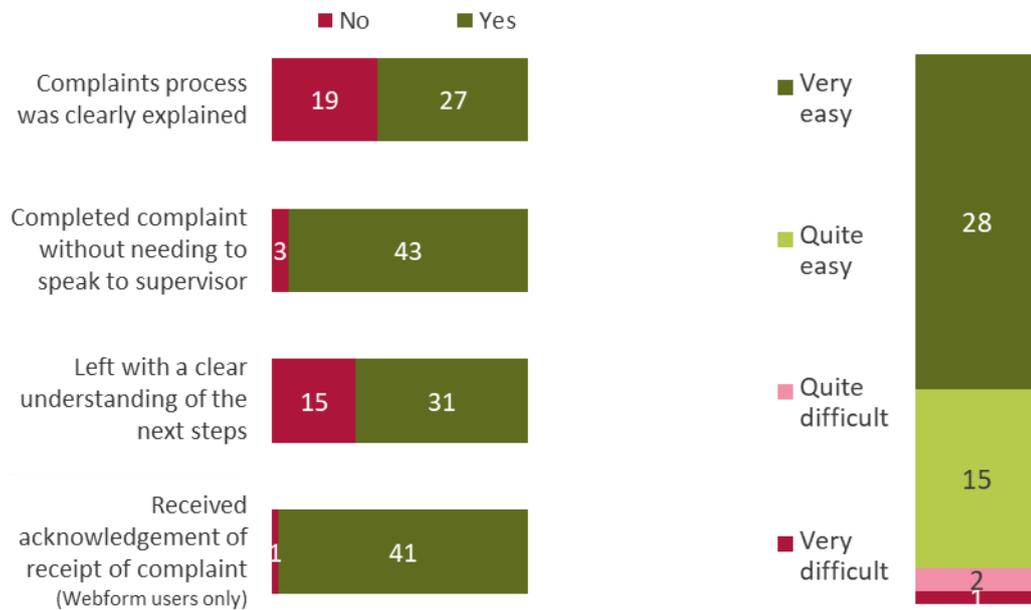
Of the 50 complaints made, just over half (26) of the mystery shoppers said they were happy with the response (they would not want to take their complaint forward to the next stage). 24 would have liked to take their complaint forward, but 17 would have been put off by the perceived effort involved. *Note: All of the mystery shoppers were asked to escalate their complaint to the next stage if they were able to, regardless of their feelings.*

7.2 Stage 1b

42 follow up complaints were made via webform and 4 were sent as letters.

When escalating a complaint, 19 out of 46 shoppers felt the process was not clearly explained (i.e. the need to write back to BBC Audience Services) and 15 out of 46 were unclear about the next steps, including the wait time for a response (Figure 22). Mystery shoppers found it relatively easy to find their reference number and fill out the form/letter and, on average, spent just over 5 minutes filling in the form or writing the letter.

Figure 22: Thoughts on making complaint and ease of knowing how to fill out the webform/what to include in the letter

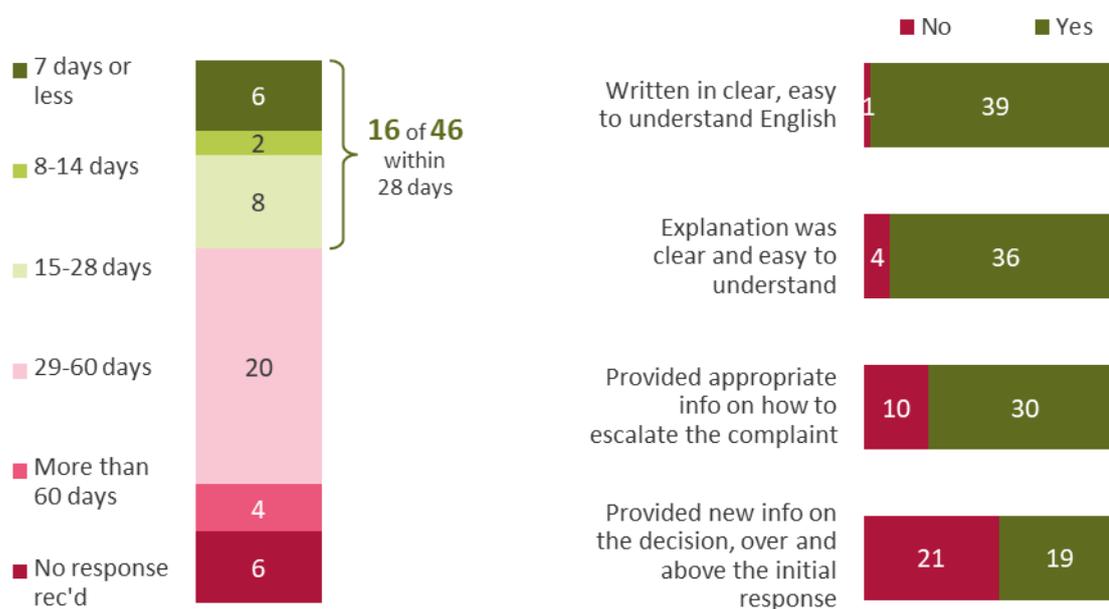


Q42-47 (46 follow up complaints - actual numbers are shown above, not percentages)

16 of 46 received a response within the 28-day (20 working day) target, whilst 6 did not receive a response at all (Figure 23).

39 of 40 responses were felt to be clear and 36 of 40 easy to understand. However, 21 of 40 said the response did not provide any new information on the decision and 10 in 40 felt it did not provide appropriate information on how to escalate the complaint further. In the majority of cases (35 of 40), the response was felt to provide information/clarification on the BBC's approach to handling complaints.

Figure 23: Time taken to receive a substantive response and thoughts on the response received



Q48, 50, 55-57 (46 or 40 follow up complaints - actual numbers are shown above, not percentages)

18 of 46 shoppers were satisfied with the response they received and 18 were not.

Reasons for satisfaction:

“The response seemed to directly address my specific concerns”

“Their response was well written and eloquent and explained their opinion on the matter”

“The response does go into greater detail regarding the ethos of the programming and acknowledges that not everyone can be pleased on all occasions”

“I liked the fact that the staff member acknowledged how I felt”

Reasons for dissatisfaction:

“This response is very formal and lacks empathy. I also feel particularly disappointed that it took an excessive amount of time to provide such a basic and templated response”

“The response was extremely slow and there was very little detail provided in it. I do not feel it was taken seriously”

“It is not conclusive at all; it is asking me to put more effort into complaining yet again. I feel that they are hoping to put me off complaining further and therefore I will drop the complaint”

“No response received”

16 of 46 shoppers felt that the response they received at stage 1b fully addressed their complaint.

Positive responses:

“I feel they have supported their response with a valid explanation and provided evidence to support it”

“An apology has been issued and a justification provided”

"BBC have explained their position but have left the choice to me if I want to escalate the complaint"

Negative responses:

"Nothing new has been added to what I have already been told"

"There was no actual reference as to what my complaint was about in their response, I feel this was a generic response"

"No response received"

Of the 46 complaints escalated in total, 19 shoppers said they were happy with the response (they would not want to take their complaint forward to the next stage). 27 would have liked to take their complaint forward, but 16 were put off by the perceived effort involved.

Below are some positive and negative participant comments related to their experiences of stage 1b.

Positive:

"The response took longer than the stated timelines but I was contacted with confirmation that they wouldn't be able to respond within their stated timings"

"Very easy to make a complaint, however it did take a long time for them to respond"

"I received an apology for any offence caused, which would have satisfied me"

Negative:

"Highly annoying that I had to fill out another form again and not just reply properly to my original email response"

"At this stage I would be more motivated to take the matter as far as I could as this response does not show any empathy towards how I previously felt, and feels quite mechanical and dehumanized"

"I found this sentence to be very ignorant and offensive... "For this reason, we regret we do not have more to add to the above and won't respond further or address more questions or points"

"The BBC takes too long to reply to complaints. After waiting 50 days I received a reply which only gave me a way to escalate the complaint"

"I feel that although there was a long delay in receiving their response, it still did not give the answers which I was expecting. I felt that they were hoping I would not bother to respond to their reply, and that they would make it a lot of effort for me to keep replying"

"The response process is very long winded. Nowadays people expect a fast response, not waiting forever"

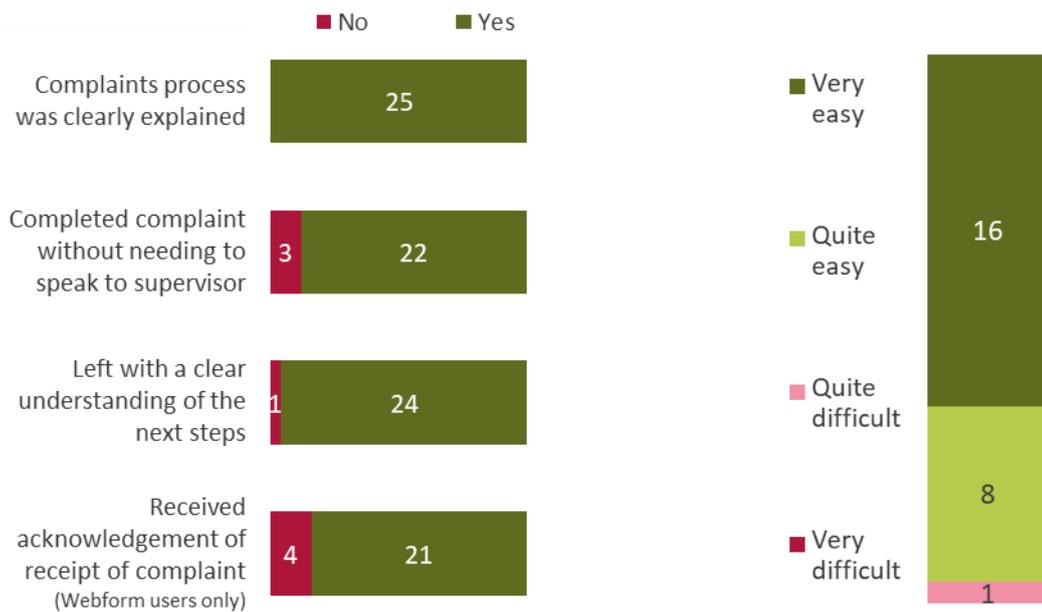
7.3 Stage 2

24 escalations were made to the Executive Complaints Unit (ECU) via a personalised link which led to a webform and 1 escalation was made as a letter.

Shoppers who experienced Stage 2 were generally positive about it. The process was clearly explained and 24 of 25 were left with a clear understanding of next steps – i.e. escalation to Ofcom (Figure 24).

24 of 25 found it easy to know how to fill out the webform/what to include in the letter and the average time spent doing this was just over three and a half minutes.

Figure 24: Thoughts on making complaint and ease of knowing how to fill out the webform/what to include in the letter

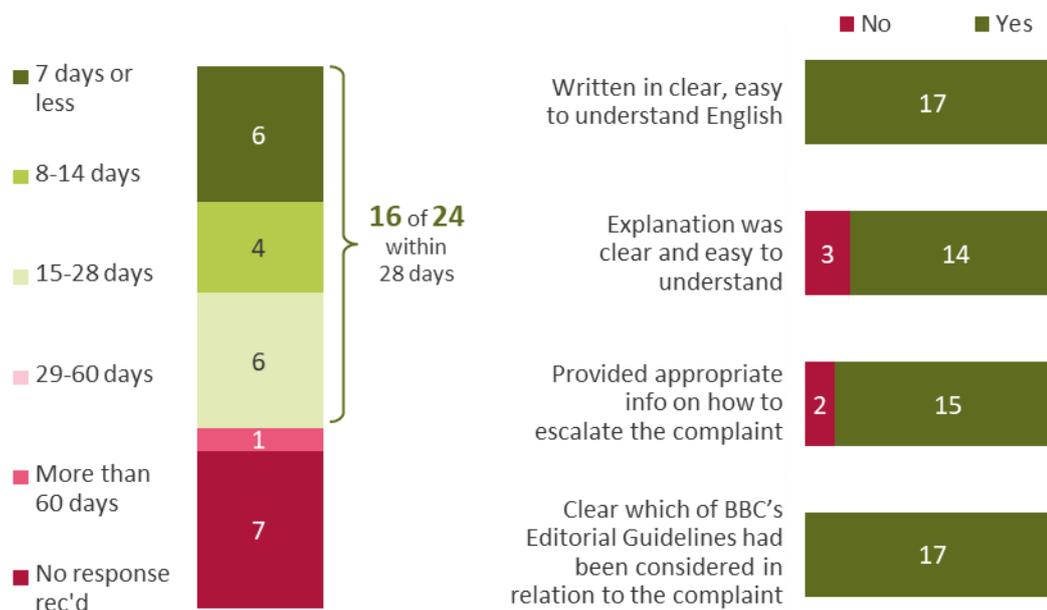


Q61-66 (25 escalations to ECU - actual numbers are shown above, not percentages)

Figure 25 shows that 16 of 24 received a response within the initial 28-day (20 working day) target. All responses were written in clear English and referred to relevant Editorial Guidelines, with 14 of 17 explanations being easy to understand. In the majority of cases (17 of 24), the response provided information/clarification on the BBC's approach to handling complaints.

Figure 25: Time taken to receive a substantive response and thoughts on the response received

Audience perceptions of the BBC First complaints system



Q68, 70, 76-78 (24 or 17 escalations to ECU - actual numbers are shown above, not percentages)

13 of 25 mystery shoppers were satisfied with the response they received at stage 2.

Reasons for satisfaction:

"The complaints director provided a thorough explanation of why editorial standards hadn't been breached"

"The response was sent in a timely manner. It was clear and explained the reasoning as to why the complaint was not upheld"

"I felt that all of my complaint was broken down and each section was explained in full"

"The explanation was clear and the reason given was reasonable"

Reasons for dissatisfaction:

"I found the whole tone generally patronising and did not address the complaint in any meaningful fashion"

"The email closed off any further communication with them. If I had genuinely made the complaint, the tone of the email may have been upsetting as it said that I had made a "sharp point"."

"I did not receive a response despite waiting nearly two months"

12 of 25 felt that the response they received at stage 2 fully addressed their complaint.

Positive responses

"There was a detailed explanation and it was clear it has been looked into in depth"

"Their argument was sound and corresponded to the facts."

"The email addressed my complaint. The content further explained how the decision was reached and that if I was still not happy, who and where to complain to, i.e., Ofcom"

Negative responses

“I did not receive a substantive response”

“No response received”

Of the 25 complaints made in total to stage 2, 15 mystery shoppers said they were happy with the response (they would not want to take their complaint forward to the next stage). 10 would have liked to take their complaint forward (submitting their complaint to Ofcom), but 7 would have been put off by the perceived effort involved.

7.4 The Overall Process

7 of 25 mystery shoppers thought it was very easy to go through the three stage complaints process, and a further 10 felt it was quite easy.

“The process was quick and simple. Automated responses clearly gave timescales and responses were well written. It was easy to understand the next stages in which to raise complaints”

“Everything was simple, straightforward and easy to follow and understand”

“Complaint forms were simple to complete with user friendly drop downs to help locate the programme”

“As mentioned previously, it was a very long process, however, easy to understand”

However, 8 of 25 mystery shoppers felt it was quite or very difficult to go through the complaints process. Suggested improvements focussed on shorter response times, responding within stated timeframes, a change in the tone used and making the steps for escalation clearer.

“The process is very long winded. I would have given up by now unless I had a very strong complaint.”

“It was lengthy and patronising, I would not have proceeded past the first complaint”

“The procedure is quite laborious to complete”

17 of 25 considered the overall complaints system, and responses received, to have been proportionate.

Positive comments

“Time was taken on all stages of my complaint to investigate it, then giving a response”

“I was content with the fact that all of my complaints and subsequent follow-ups were responded to and that when I wanted to escalate the issue, I was able to”

“I felt they took a non-biased view and gave their thoughts about why it was reasonable to show the incident involved”

Neutral comments

“I would imagine that the BBC receive numerous complaints some of which will be clearly vexatious or trivial and therefore some sort of screening process is required otherwise the ECU would be overrun”

“I felt my complaint was one of many. I can imagine that the BBC would have difficulty giving much time to each complainant if they have thousands to deal with”

Negative comments

“They have taken far too long to respond; it has taken over three months”

“I felt brushed off. It was lengthy but gave the impression of being formulaic and saying “We do not consider it an effective use of the licence fee to continue to correspond on issues that do not give rise to such a concern” just enforces that impression”

7.5 Complaints made by telephone

6 complaints were initially made using the telephone. 3 were made during office hours, when the mystery shoppers spoke to a phone operator. 3 calls were made out of hours, when the mystery shoppers left a recorded message.

When making a complaint via phone, 5 of 6 shoppers said it was easy to find the number, but only half knew if they would speak to a person or a recorded service. It generally took longer to get through to a person (around 3 minutes) than the recorded message (around 1 minute) and no calls were transferred.

All operators handled the mystery shopping calls very/fairly well and gave a very/fairly clear response.

Regarding the outcome of the initial call, 3 of 3 mystery shoppers found call handlers to be courteous, but 3 of 3 felt they could have done more to explain next steps and 2 in 3 claim they did not tell them how to submit a written response or check they were able to do this.

Shopper assessment of the call (abridged):

“Very polite and explained that it would be added to the fortnightly complaints report ... No mention was made of escalation or other services”

“Took the details of my complaint and assured me my issue would be raised with the BBC, however they did not mention how I could make a more formal response or take my details so that they could contact me”

“I felt a bit fobbed off that I couldn't raise my complaint by telephone. I am severely visually impaired, and I would have liked the person who took my call to have checked how easy filling in a web form or writing in to the BBC would be and that I am able to do these things”

After leaving a message, 3 of 3 mystery shoppers were unclear about the next steps.

Shopper assessment of the call:

“I was left feeling disappointed at the end of my call. I had to listen to quite a lot of information before leaving my complaint. The recorded complaint was limited to one minute and it was not clear what the next steps would be”

“I was disappointed, it was made clear that I would receive no feedback”

“I was confused at the end of the call as I was not asked to give any personal details to enable them to contact me and I was not made aware of what would happen next.”

8. Appendix

8.1 Quantitative methodology, sampling and weighting

The research was conducted using a hybrid approach, with 528 telephone (CATI) and 1,879 online interviews carried out between 19 November 2021 and 7 January 2022.

Telephone interviewing

Jigsaw Research adopted a quota sample approach to ensure that the CATI interviews were representative of UK adults. Sample frames were developed separately for each of the four nations (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) covering the following key subgroups - age, gender and social grade.

Jigsaw partnered with Sample Answers to select/supply the telephone numbers. The sample frame consisted of a 15:1 ratio that was split 50/50 between Sample Answers' Lifestyle and Random Digit Dial (RDD) databases. In total, 59% of interviews were sourced from the Lifestyle database, with 41% sourced from RDD. 44% of participants took part using a landline, whilst 56% used a mobile phone.

Online interviewing

Jigsaw also adopted a quota sample approach to their online interviewing to ensure that the sample was representative of internet users. The sample frame was developed at a UK level covering the following key subgroups – age, gender, nation/region, ethnicity and working status. In addition, a boost phase was used to ensure we had at least 100 interviews with non-internet, Black and Asian participants.

Given the BBC's responsibility to all nations and regions, Jigsaw introduced skews to the sample, which will allow Ofcom to undertake detailed analysis at a national level with the UK.

Weighting

Rim weighting was used to apply more than one weighting target, to ensure the weighting was the best fit possible.

The CATI weighting applied was based on a combination of the 2018 ONS population update (age, gender, and region) and the 2011 Census (SEG).

This online weighting applied was based on the 2021 ONS Internet User research (age, gender, nation/region, working status and ethnicity), to ensure the sample was representative of 'recent' internet users.

As a final step, the CATI and online data were merged, with internet users and non-users weighted to ensure the total sample was representative of internet usage (based on the 2021 ONS Internet User research).

The following tables show the demographic characteristics of the unweighted and weighted sample profiles.

Audience perceptions of the BBC First complaints system

| Weighting Category | Sub-group | Unweighted | Weighted |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| BBC TV Region | North East | 4% | 5% |
| | North West | 9% | 11% |
| | Yorkshire & the Humber | 8% | 9% |
| | East Midlands | 3% | 3% |
| | West Midlands | 9% | 10% |
| | East of England | 6% | 8% |
| | London | 17% | 19% |
| | South East | 3% | 5% |
| | South West | 2% | 3% |
| | South | 6% | 8% |
| | West | 3% | 4% |
| | Scotland | 10% | 8% |
| | Wales | 10% | 5% |
| | Northern Ireland | 9% | 3% |
| Gender | Male | 46% | 49% |
| | Female | 53% | 51% |
| Age | 16-24 | 21% | 14% |
| | 25-34 | 14% | 17% |
| | 35-44 | 16% | 18% |
| | 45-54 | 16% | 17% |
| | 55-64 | 13% | 14% |
| | 65-74 | 11% | 13% |
| | 75+ | 8% | 7% |

| Weighting Category | Sub-group | Unweighted | Weighted |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|----------|
| Working Status | Employed | 55% | 62% |
| | Unemployed | 42% | 35% |
| SEG | AB | 25% | 26% |
| | C1 | 33% | 32% |
| | C2 | 19% | 19% |
| | DE | 24% | 23% |
| Ethnicity | White | 85% | 88% |
| | Mixed/multiple ethnic background | 2% | 1% |
| | Black/African/Caribbean/Black British | 5% | 3% |
| | Asian | 7% | 6% |
| | Other ethnic group | 0% | 1% |
| Internet usage | Do not use | 4% | 6% |
| | Use | 96% | 94% |

8.2 Technical notes

The reporting of the results includes testing for statistical significance to ensure that the differences highlighted are real differences and not differences that might be observed because only a sample has been surveyed, rather than the whole population. For the purposes of this report, only differences that are found to be significant at the 95% confidence level are highlighted.

Percentages are shown rounded to the nearest whole number. This may cause some mutually exclusive categories to sum to slightly more or less than 100%. For open-ended and multi coded questions, participants may give more than one answer. When this happens, the percentages representing different responses may add to considerably more than 100%. Where figures in the text appear not to match figures in the graphics (particularly where sub-groups have been combined), this can be due to decimals being rounded up or down when combining these figures.

In some cases, answers of 'Do not know' or 'Not applicable' may not have been shown, meaning that the percentages do not add up to 100%.

8.3 Quantitative participant profile – Demographics and Region

S1, S2a/b, S4, S5a/b, S6, Z2, Z3a, Z5, Z6 Base: All participants (2407)

Figure 26: Gender



Figure 27: Age

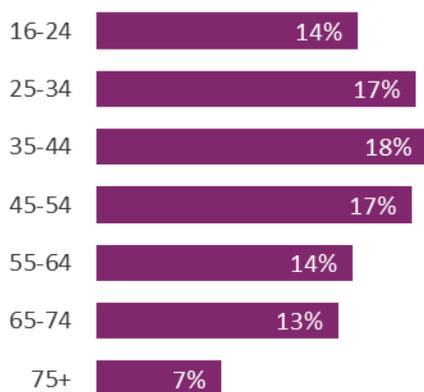
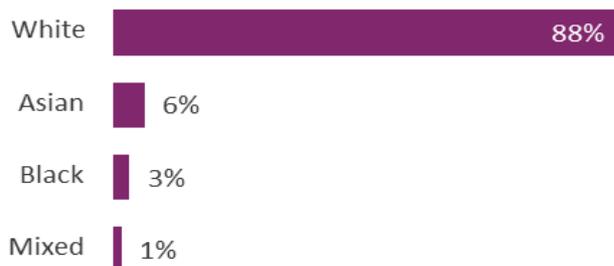


Figure 28: Ethnicity



Average number of adults in the household: 2.2

Average number with children: 25%

Any disability: 25%

Figure 29: Religion

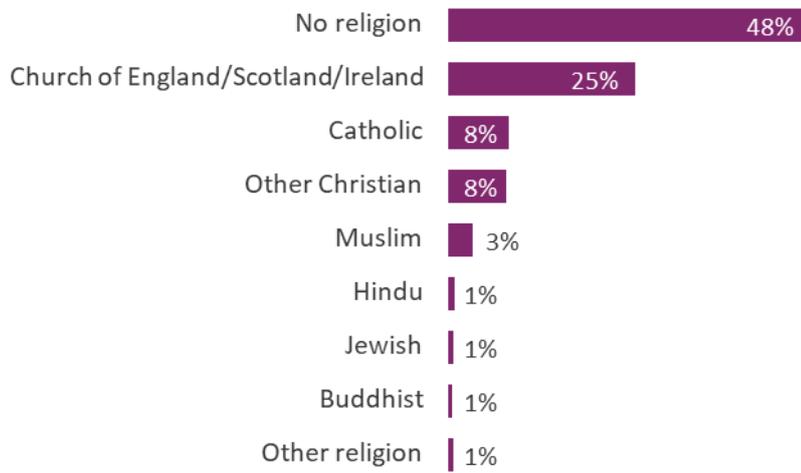


Figure 30: BBC TV region

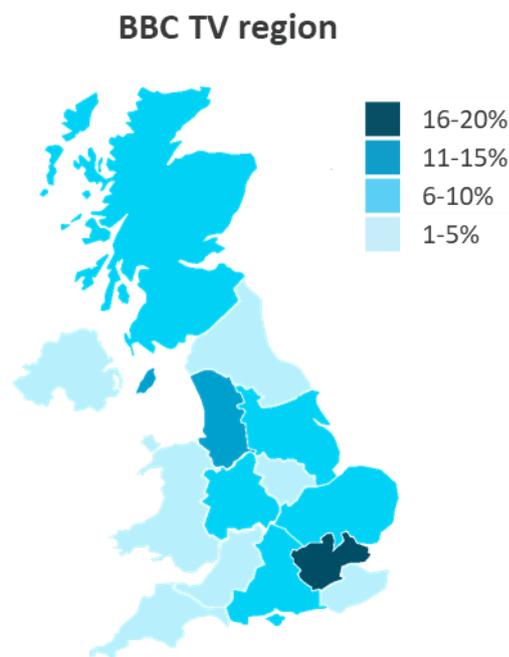


Figure 31: Urban vs rural



8.4 Quantitative participant profile – Education/Income and Political views

S3a/b, Z4, Z7, Z8, Z9 Base: All participants (2407)

Figure 32: Highest qualifications

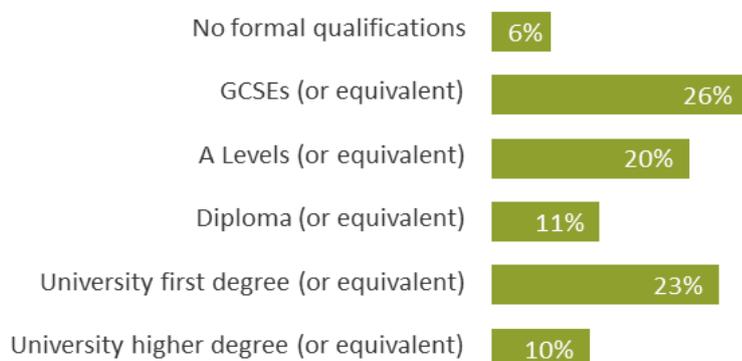


Figure 33: Working status

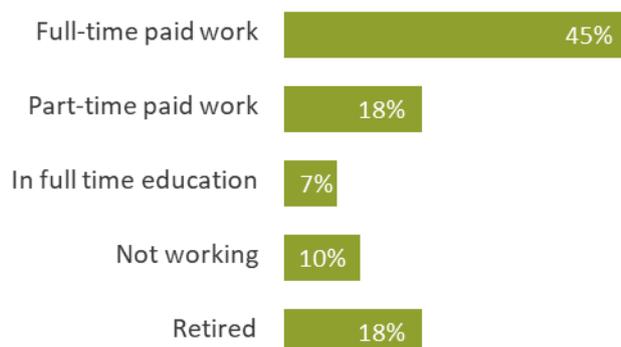


Figure 34: Household income

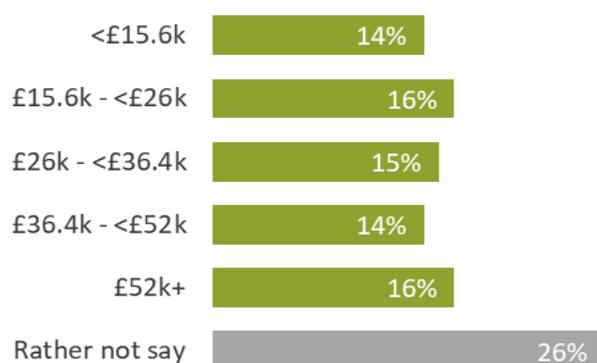
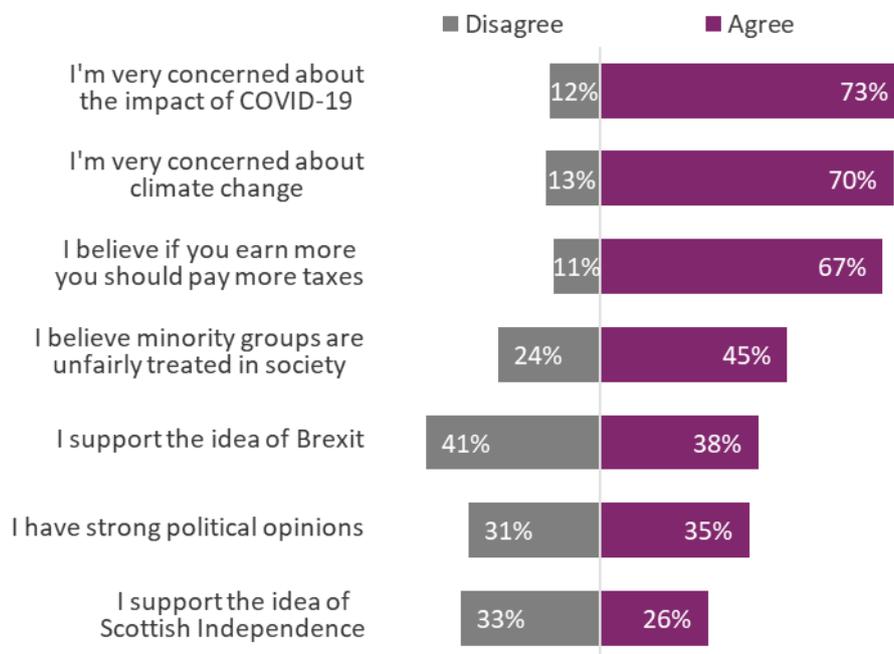


Figure 35: Social grade



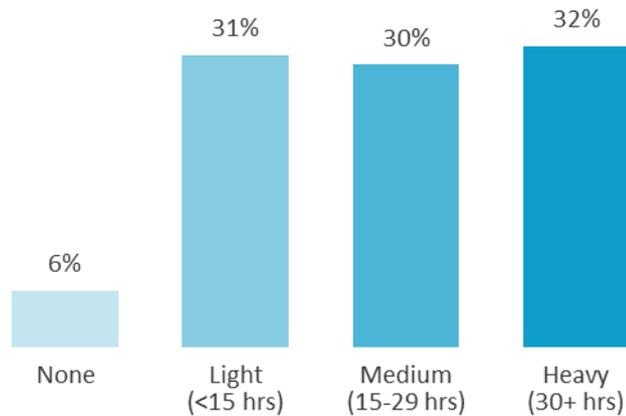
Figure 36: Political opinions



8.5 Quantitative participant profile – Media Usage

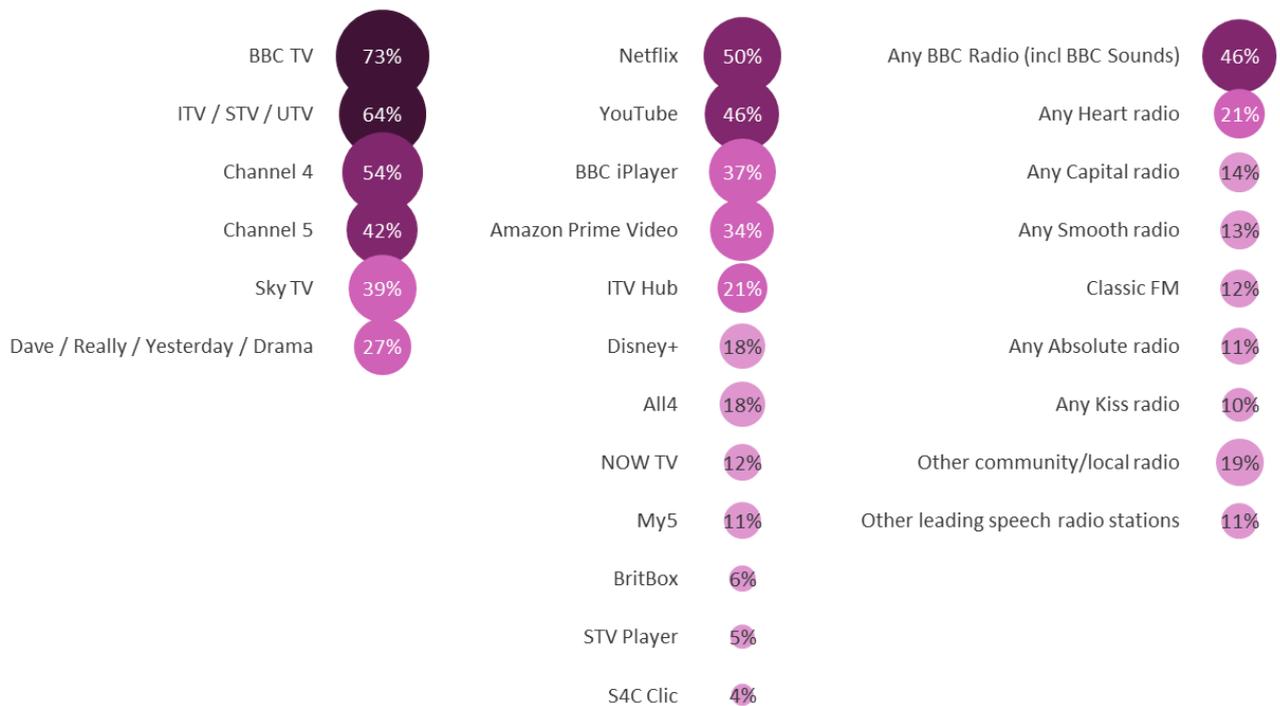
S7. Typically, how many hours do you spend on the internet per week? Z1a. Base: All participants (2407)

Figure 37: Weekly internet usage (all uses, any device, work and personal)



How often in the past 3 months have you [watched these TV channels / watched films or programmes through the following services / listened to the following radio stations]? Base: All participants (2407)

Figure 38: Channels/Services/Stations used



8.6 Mystery Shopping detailed findings

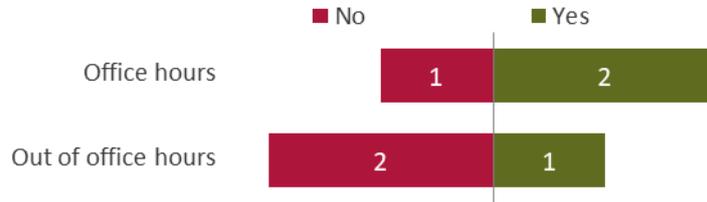
8.6.1 Assessments carried out via Mystery Shopping

Figure 39: Summary of operator calls, recorded messages and letter assessments carried out

| <u>Operator calls</u> | | <u>Comments</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Initial call | 3 out of 3 | <i>Subsequent complaints were made via webform</i> |
| <u>OOH calls / recorded message</u> | | |
| Initial messages left | 3 out of 3 | <i>Subsequent complaints were made via webform</i> |
| <u>Letters</u> | | |
| Stage 1a complaint via letter | 5 out of 5 | |
| Stage 1a no response received | 1 out of 5 | |
| Stage 1a response received | 4 out of 5 | |
| Stage 1b escalation made | 4 out of 4 | |
| Stage 1b response received | 4 out of 4 | |
| Stage 2 escalation made | 1 out of 4 | |
| Stage 2 escalation <u>not</u> made | 3 out of 4 | <i>1 x no ECU details provided, 1 x shopper unable to continue, 1 x no time left in field</i> |
| Stage 2 awaiting response | 1 out of 4 | |
| Stage 1a complaint via webform | 45 out of 45 | |
| Stage 1a response received | 45 out of 45 | |
| Stage 1b escalation made | 42 out of 45 | <i>2 x told they took 'too long' to escalate, 1 x shopper unable to continue</i> |
| Stage 1b no response received | 6 out of 45 | |
| Stage 1b response received | 36 out of 45 | |
| Stage 2 escalation made | 24 out of 36 | |
| Stage 2 escalation <u>not</u> made | 12 out of 36 | <i>6 x no ECU details provided (2 were told to contact Ofcom), 4 x shopper unable to continue, 2 x no time left in field</i> |
| Stage 2 awaiting response | 7 out of 36 | |
| Stage 2 response received | 17 out of 36 | |

8.6.2 Initial Call

Figure 40: Clear before calling whether they'd speak to a person or get a recorded message



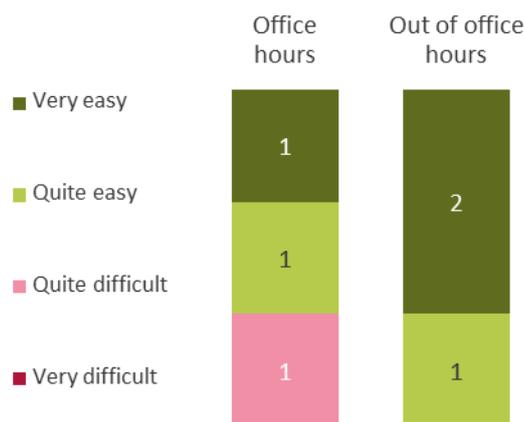
Q7. Was it clear before calling up whether you would get to speak to someone or if it would be a recorded service? Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 41: Day and time of call

| | | |
|---|-----------|----------|
| During office hours – spoke to operator | Monday | 11:02 am |
| | Wednesday | 10:41 am |
| | Thursday | 3:31 pm |
| Out of hours – left a recorded message | Sunday | 8:02 am |
| | Sunday | 9:01 pm |
| | Tuesday | 7:33 pm |

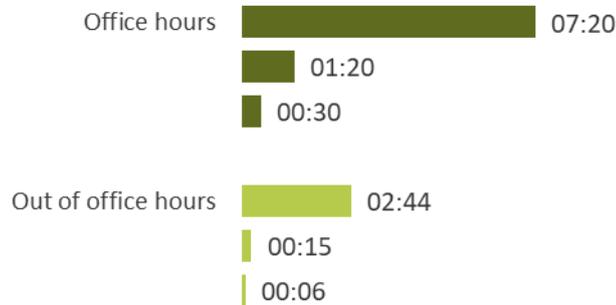
Q4. Date of call; Q5 Time of call

Figure 42: Ease of locating phone number



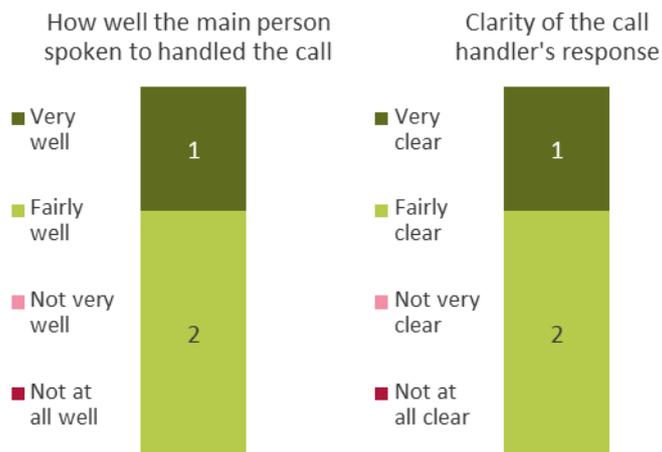
Q6. How easy was it to locate the phone number to call? Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 43: Time taken to get through on the phone for each call (in minutes)



Q8. How long did it take to get through on the phone? Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 44: Reaction to the call handler



Q16. How well did the main person you were speaking to handle the call? Q18. How clear was their response (was it in clear, easy to understand English)? 3 telephone calls made during office hours. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 45: Outcome of the initial call



Q15, Q17, Q19, Q20 and Q21: 3 telephone calls made during office hours. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 46: Leaving a message

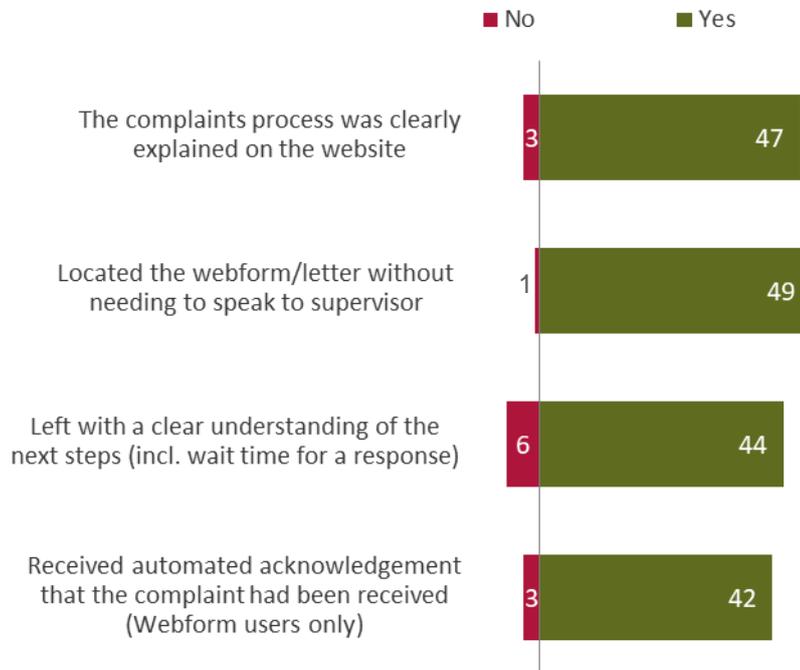


Q12-Q14. 3 called out of hours and left a recorded message. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

8.6.3 Stage 1a

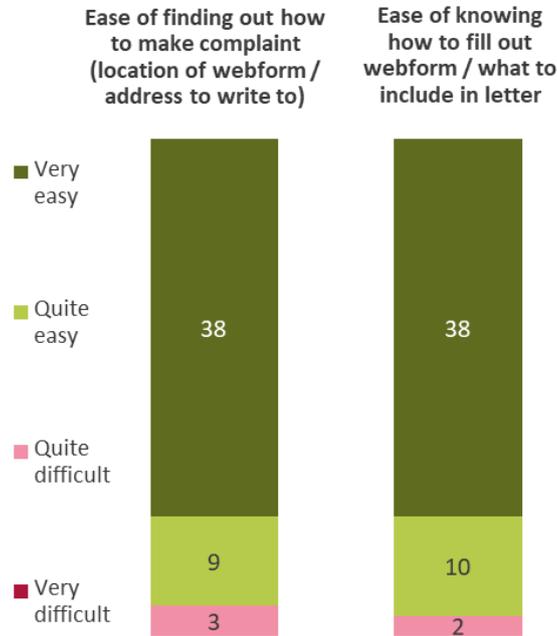
45 complaints were made via webform, with 5 complaints sent as letters.

Figure 47: Attitudes towards the complaints process



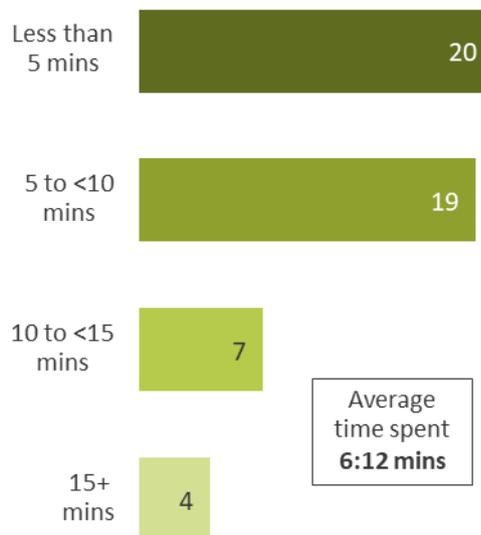
Q25, Q26b, Q29, Q30: complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 48: Effort in relation the complaints process



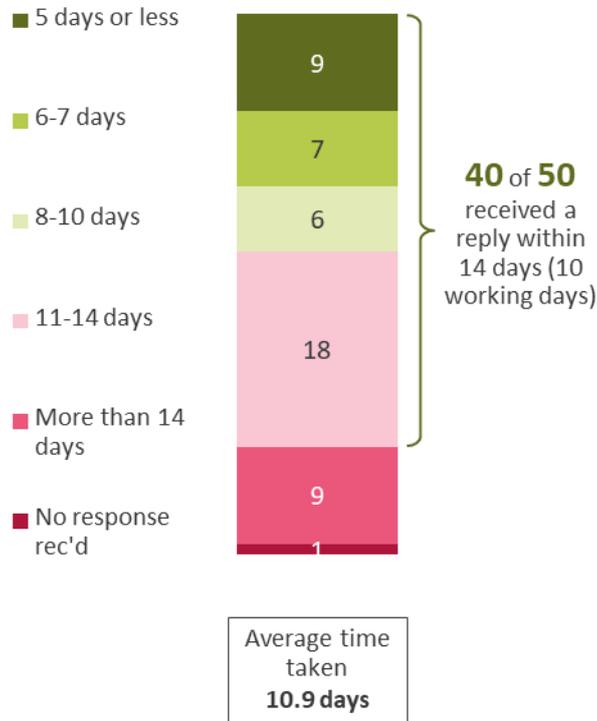
Q26a, Q28. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 49: Time spent filling out the webform or writing the letter



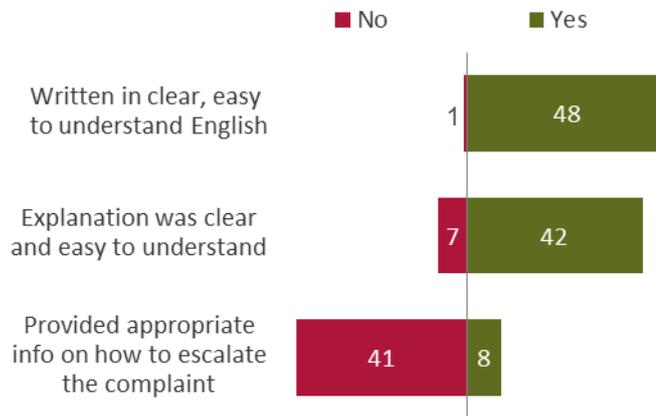
Q27. 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 50: Time taken to receive a substantive response



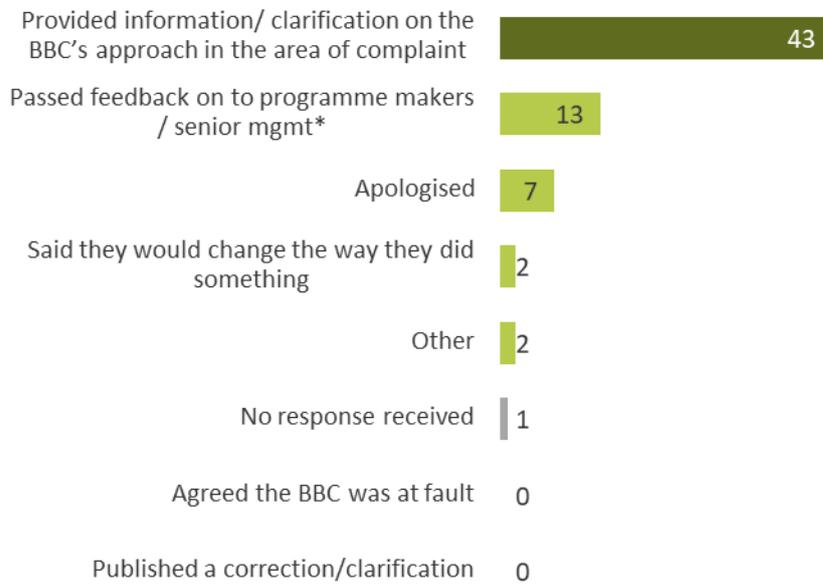
Q31. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 51: Clarity and ease of understanding of responses



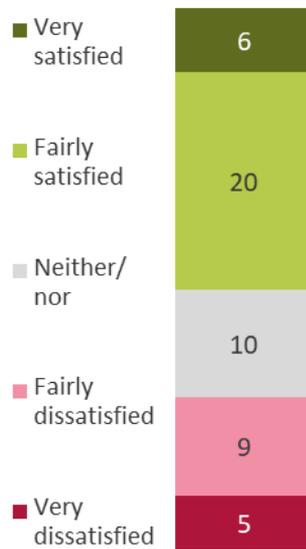
Q33, Q38, Q39a. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 52: Outcome of the response



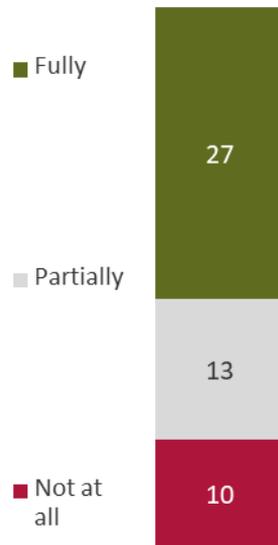
Q34. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 53: Level of satisfaction with response received



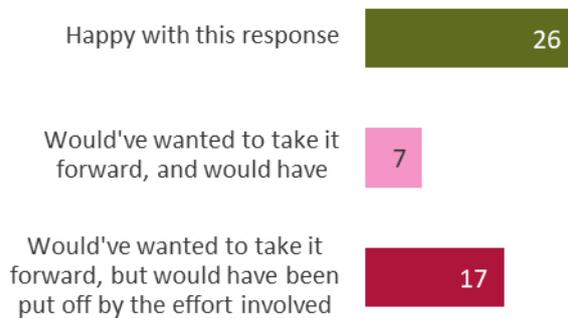
Q35. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 54: Extent to which response addressed complaint



Q37a. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 55: Inclination to take the complaint forward to the next stage

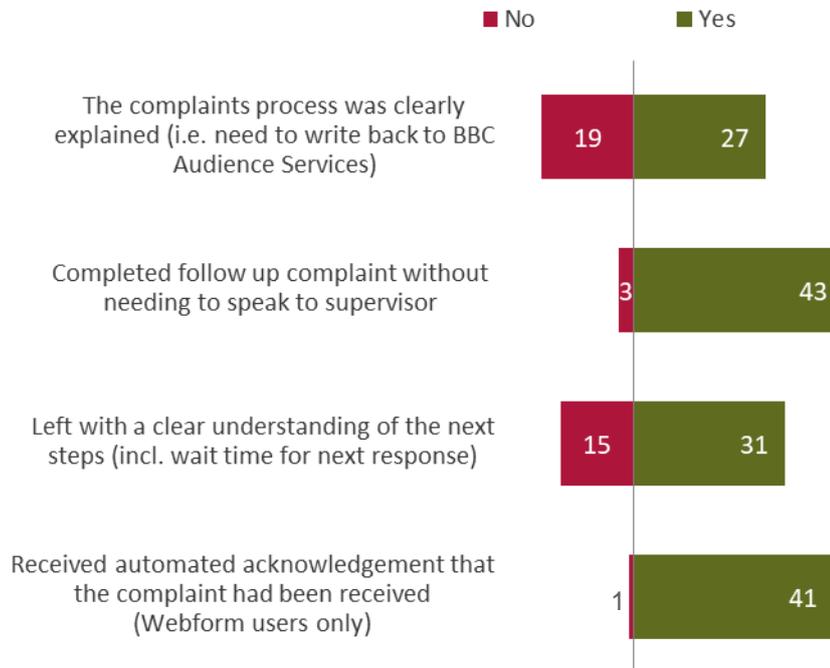


Q39b. 50 complaints made in total – 45 via webform, 5 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

8.6.4 Stage 1b

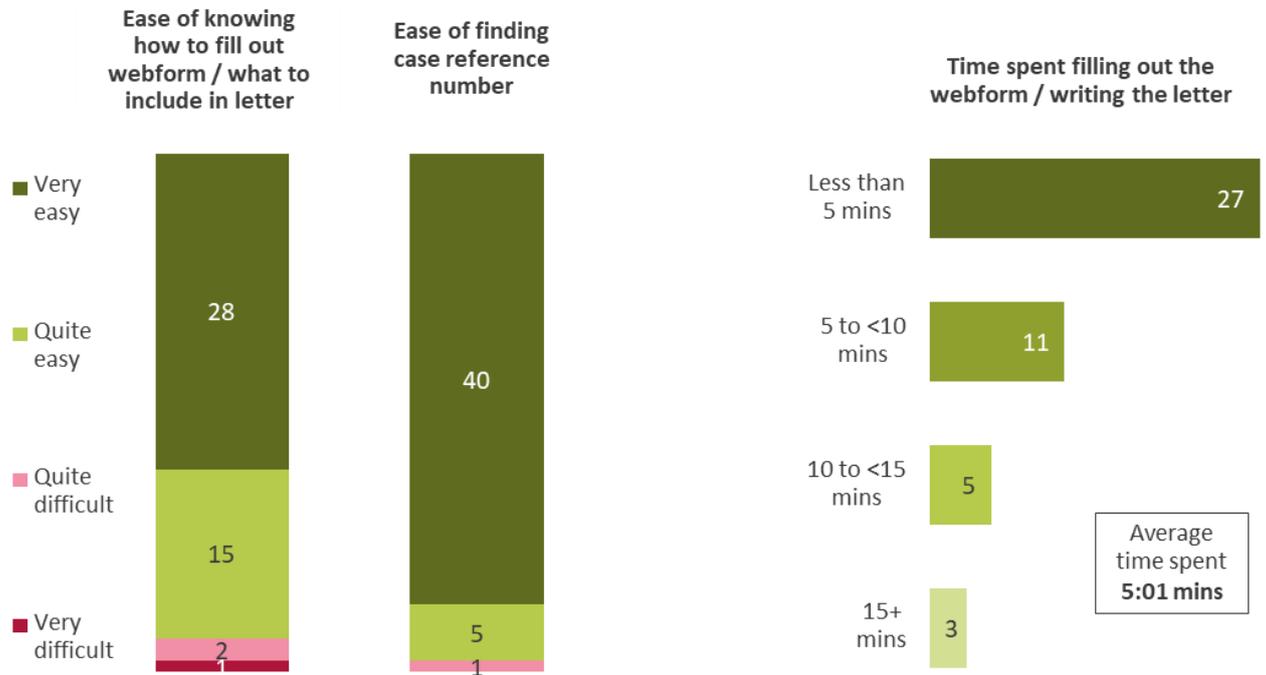
42 follow up complaints were made via webform and 4 were sent as letters.

Figure 56: Attitudes toward the complaints process (Stage 1b)



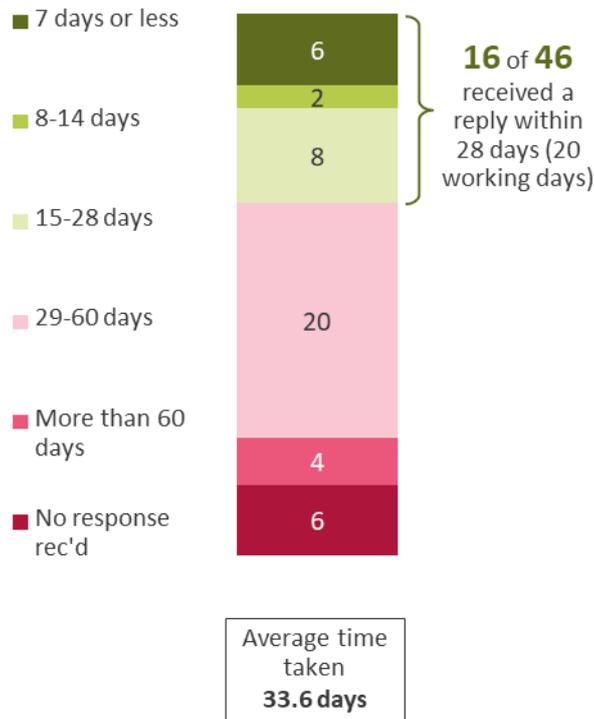
Q42, Q43b, Q46, Q47. 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 57: Making the follow up complaint via webform or letter



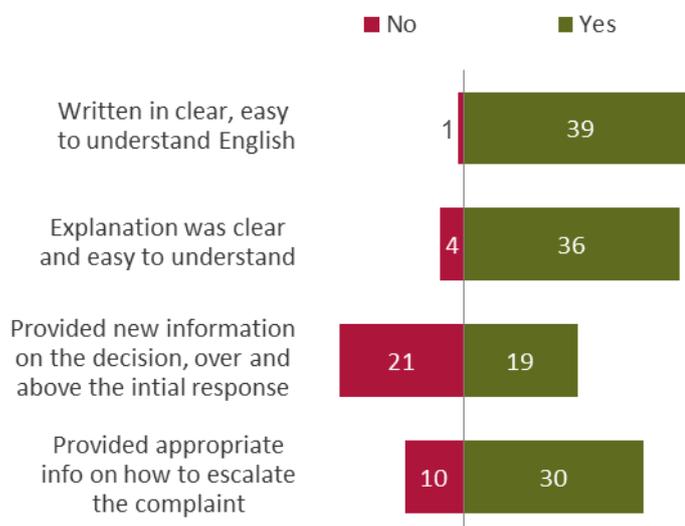
Q43a, Q44, Q45. 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 58: Time taken to receive substantive response



Q48. 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 59: Clarity and ease of understanding responses



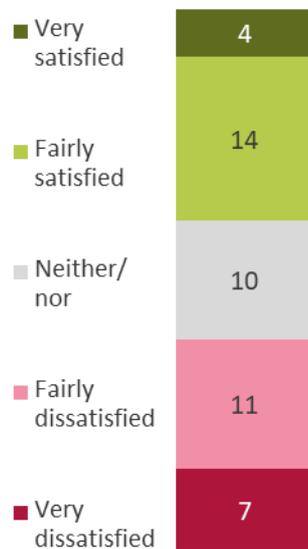
Q50, Q56, Q57, Q58a. 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 60: Outcome of the response



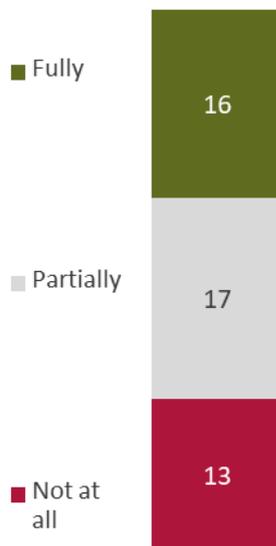
Q51. 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 61: Level of satisfaction with response received



Q52, 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 62: Extent to which response addressed complaint



Q54, 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 63: Inclination to take the complaint forward to the next stage

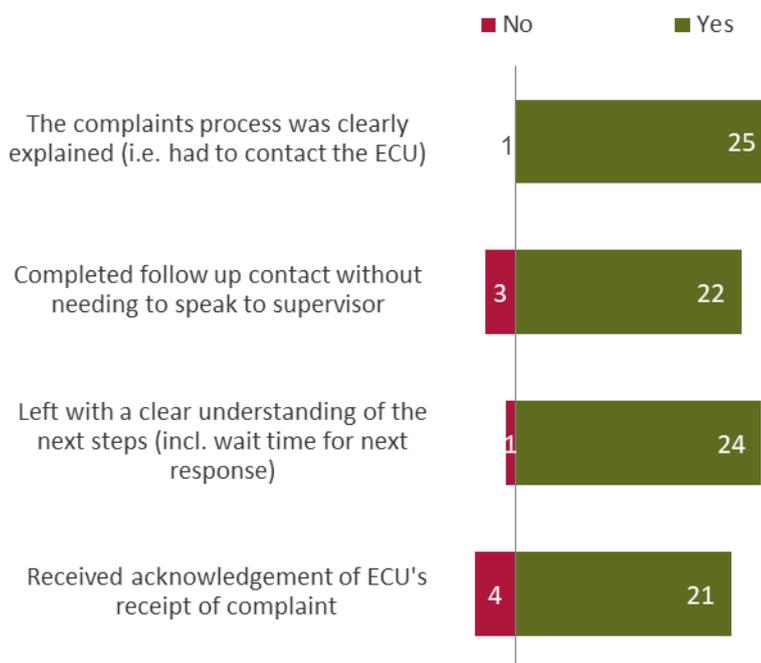


Q58b. 46 follow up complaints made in total – 42 via webform, 4 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

8.6.5 Stage 2

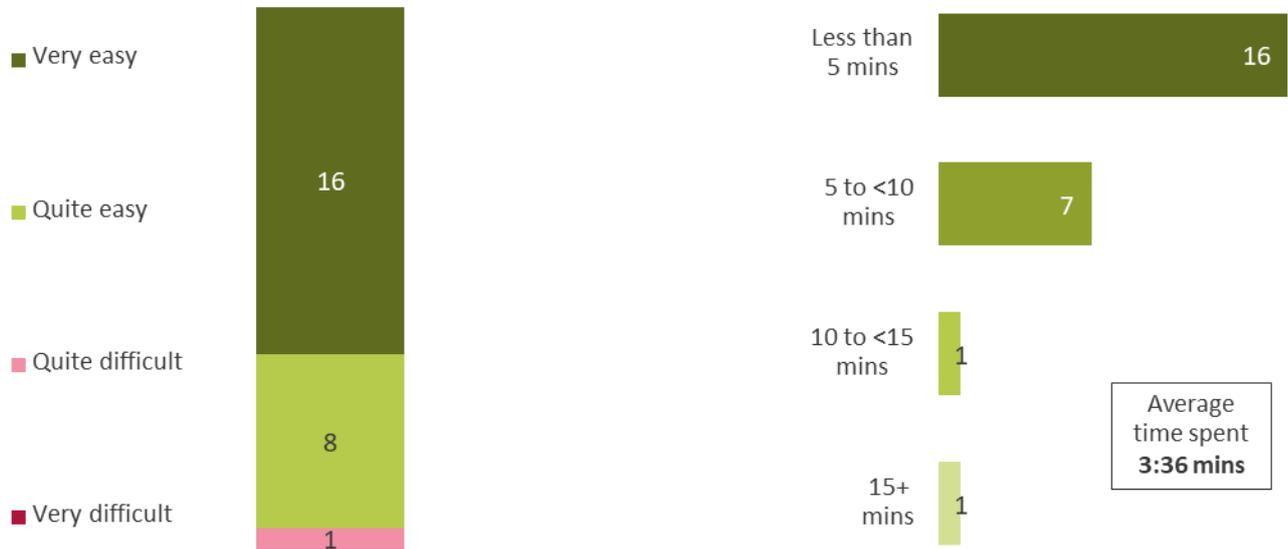
24 escalations were made to the Executive Complaints Unit (ECU) via webform and 1 escalation was made as a letter.

Figure 64: Attitudes towards escalating the complaint to ECU



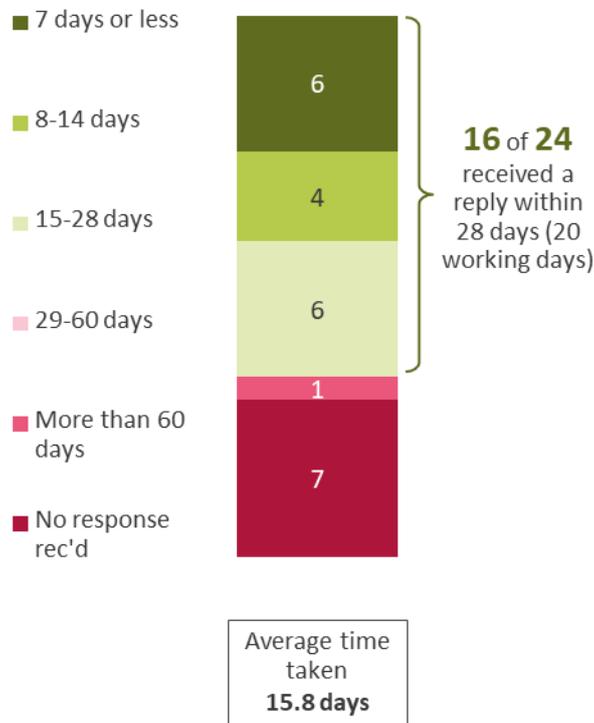
Q61, Q62b, Q64. 25 escalations to ECU in total – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 65: Ease of knowing how to fill out webform/what to include in letter and time taken



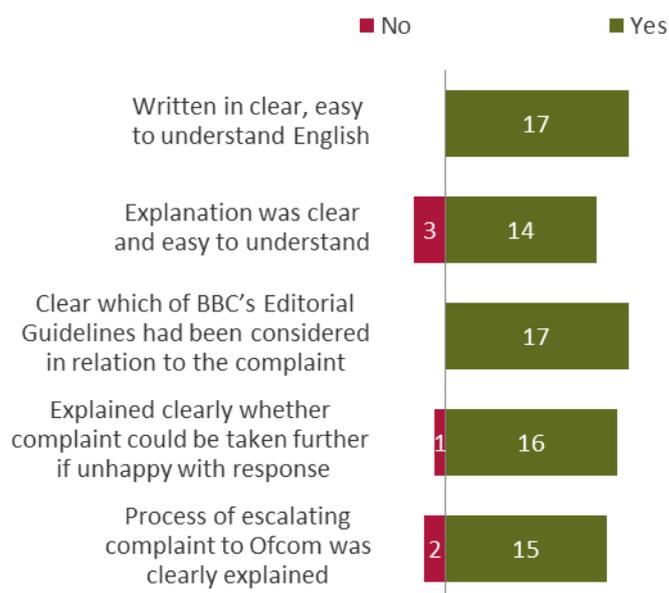
Q62a, Q63. 25 escalations to ECU in total – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 66: Time taken to receive a substantive response



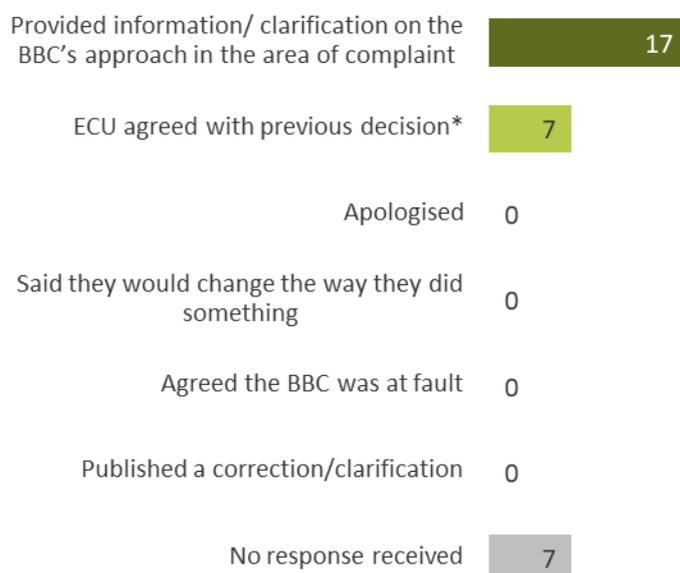
Q68. 24 escalations to ECU in total – 23 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 67: Clarity and ease of understanding responses



Q70, Q71c, Q76, Q77, Q78. 24 escalations to ECU in total – 23 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

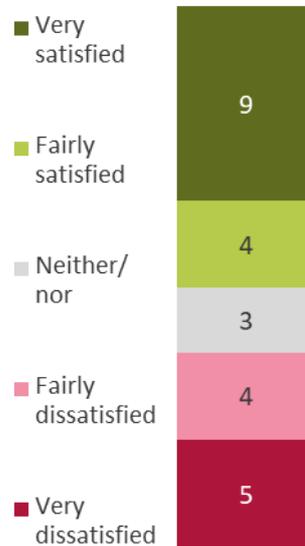
Figure 68: Outcome of the response



* The 'ECU agreed...' answer was written in by some assessors as an 'Other' comment. It is likely to be part of the standard messaging from the BBC so may well apply to more of the responses received

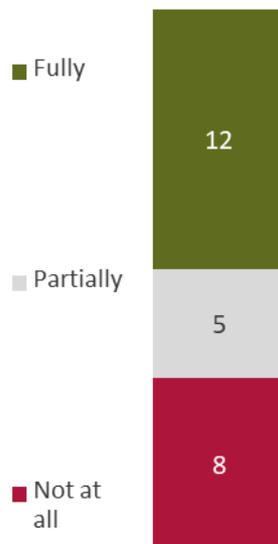
Q71. 24 escalations to ECU in total – 23 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 69: Level of satisfaction with response received



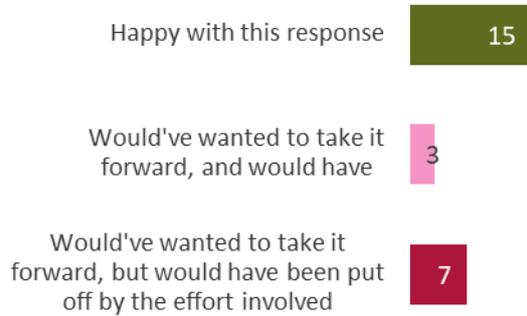
Q72. 25 escalations to ECU in total – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 70: Extent to which response addressed complaint



Q74. 25 escalations to ECU in total – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 71: Inclination to take the complaint forward to the next stage (Ofcom)

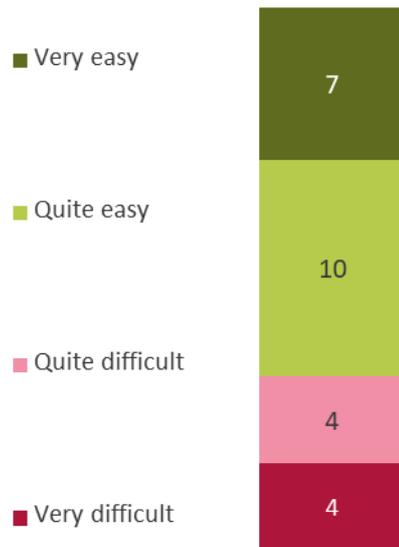


Q84b. 25 escalations to ECU in total – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

8.6.6 The Overall Process

As noted above, 25 scenarios were taken through to Stage 2.

Figure 72: Ease of going through the complaints process



Q80. 25 scenarios reached Stage 2 – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 73: Taking into account the BBC is publicly funded, is the overall complaints system, and responses received, proportionate?



Q82. 25 scenarios reached Stage 2 – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

Figure 74: Better to be able to complain to Ofcom directly, instead of completing the BBC complaints process first?



Q84c. 25 scenarios reached Stage 2 – 24 via webform, 1 by letter. Actual numbers are shown above, not percentages

8.7 Mystery Shopping participant profile – Demographics and Region

(50 mystery shoppers, 1 per complaint)

Figure 75: Gender



Figure 76: Age

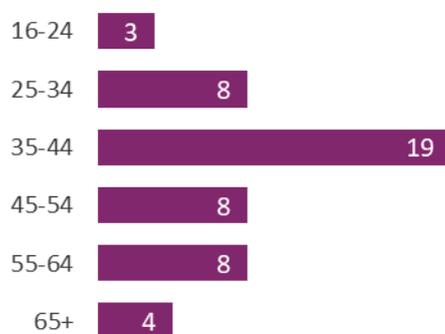


Figure 77: Ethnicity

