Ofcom Complaints Handling Tracker 2024: Technical Report

General survey description

Since 2009, Ofcom has conducted research to quantify levels of satisfaction with customer service for the main communications providers in the UK; and since 2016, we have used one of the strands of this research to monitor customer satisfaction with complaints handling specifically. This was reported annually until 2022, when it changed to biennial.

As with the previous waves of the Complaints Handling Tracker ("CHT"), this research includes UK communications providers with a consistent market share of 4% or more (Q2 2024).

Survey objectives

The core aim of this study is:

- To understand the level of satisfaction with customer service complaint handling on a range of criteria across the main providers of landline, fixed broadband, mobile and pay TV services among those who have contacted their provider with a complaint within the last six months.
- To report customer service satisfaction and consumer perceptions of provider performance by types of complaint i.e. billing and customer service; repairs and installation; and service issues for each of the main providers in each sector.
- To gather an overall customer satisfaction measure for each provider per sector.

Sampling approach and sample achieved

Interviewing was conducted using an online panel and river sampling[1] approach, providing a cost-effective and efficient means to reach the low incidence audience consulted for this study. Targets were

[1] River sampling invites non-panel members to take part in the survey while they are visiting another website.

set by provider within sector in order to ensure that a minimum number of interviews per cell was achieved for the purposes of analysis.

We invited a sample demographically representative of the UK adult population to take part in the research from which respondents were screened for having made a complaint to a relevant provider within the six months prior to fieldwork.

In the absence of robust profiling data for this low incidence audience, we viewed this approach to be the best method to ensure that the resulting sample was as representative of the sample target as possible in the circumstances.

On analysing data from 2019 and 2020, Ofcom identified a higher-than-expected proportion of respondents with at least one impacting/limiting condition and a lower-than-expected proportion of respondents aged 55 and over in the sample who complete the complaints handling survey.

We explored this in detail and as a result made a change to our approach to sampling in the 2021 wave by opening up the survey primarily to over 55-year-olds and adjusting the proportion of the sample derived from river versus panel sample sources from 35:65 to 50:50 during the first two weeks of fieldwork, in order to increase the opportunity for over 55s to participate. We then opened the survey up to respondents of all ages and reverted to a proportion of 35:65 for river versus panel sample sources during the remainder of the fieldwork.

This adjustment was repeated in the 2022 and 2024 waves meaning the results can be compared year-on-year from 2021 onwards.

We monitor how the demographic profile of respondents falls out each wave and evaluate any potential impact on results. In the most recent wave the profile was 49% female and 50% male. In previous years there has been a higher proportion of females and a lower proportion of males (approximately 60% and 40% respectively). We analysed the effect of gender on satisfaction to see if this could have had an impact, and the analysis showed gender has no significant effect.

The providers included in the research and samples achieved are listed below.

Provider	**Sample Sizes by Sector 2024**			
	Landline	Fixed Broadband	Mobile	Pay TV
BT	553	638		343[2]
EE	235	376	739	276
giffgaff			256	
Lebara			167	
O2			868	

[2] Please note that BT and EE have merged their paid TV services under the EE TV brand. However, EE TV customers can pay for their service through either BT or EE. We therefore asked respondents who they pay for their EE TV service, and in the data and reporting we have included the results for EE TV customers who (1) paid for their service through BT (“Pay TV: BT”), (2) paid for their service through EE (“Pay TV: EE”) and (3) paid for their service through either BT or EE (“Pay TV: BT/EE”).

Plusnet	42	183		
Sky	561	740	172	774
TalkTalk	305	541		293
Tesco Mobile			322	
Three			490	
Virgin	422	762		525
Vodafone	166	243	581	

Fieldwork

The survey was conducted via an online panel and river sampling from 11th November 2024 - 6th January 2025 and comprised a total of 6,321 interviews. Therefore, the "previous six-months" time period referred to in the research corresponds broadly to complaints made to providers in the second half of 2024.

Data reporting

Data were reported on a total sector level (i.e. the combined results of the providers included in the research for each sector) as well as split by provider within each sector.

Complaints were grouped into three categories for reporting: *Billing and customer service* complaints, *Repairs and installation* complaints and *Service issues* complaints. Any complaints not falling into these categories were grouped as *Something else* and were not reported on independently due to low base sizes and their containing a disparate set of reasons for complaint (although they were included in the overall results).

Weighting

The data are presented at both a total sector level and at a provider level. Only total sector level data are weighted, provider level data are unweighted.

Total sector level data have been weighted using market share and incidence of complaints for each provider calculated from fieldwork data, in order to report total sector figures that best represent the make-up of complaints within each sector.

To illustrate, using **BT Landline** as an example, first we take the number of respondents who qualified due to having made a complaint to **BT Landline** in the six months prior to fieldwork as a proportion of all respondents saying they use **BT Landline** for their landline service, in order to establish an incidence of complaints for **BT Landline**.

We then multiply this by **BT Landline's** market share within the sector, among providers included in the research for the sector, to generate an incidence of complaints for **BT Landline**.

Finally, we take this incidence of complaints for **BT Landline** as a proportion of the sum of all incidences of complaint for all providers included in the research for that sector to generate the share of complaints for **BT Landline**, i.e. the contribution of **BT Landline** to the total complaints universe of the providers included in the research for the sector.

There were several reasons why we chose this approach:

- Weighting to market share alone, would not account for the differences in incidence of complaints by provider and, as such, could overweight the effects of some providers that have a larger market share
- This approach was repeatable for subsequent waves and was able to account for changes over time
- The provider level data is unweighted and is therefore as representative as possible of customers of the provider who made a complaint in the 6 months prior to fieldwork and who are online.

This approach to weighting has been taken consistently since the first wave in 2016.

Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the "true" values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone had been interviewed) can be predicted from the sample sizes on which the results are based, and on the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" values will fall within a specified range. However, as the sample is weighted, we need to use the effective sample size[3] (ESS) rather than actual sample size to judge the accuracy of results. As the provider level data is unweighted, the actual and effective sample sizes for results based on individual providers are identical. However, for results from any sample comprising more than one provider, e.g. the total sector results, the effective base is used. The following table compares ESS and actual samples for each of the four sectors.

	ACTUAL	ESS
Total landline	2,284	2,099
Total fixed broadband	3,483	3,161
Total mobile	3,595	3,494
Total pay TV	2,211	1,623

[3] Effective Sample Size shown as Effective Base in the data tables produced.