



A Mystery Shopping Exercise of the BBC First Complaints Process

Research Report



Published 29 November 2024
Contact: tim.barber@bva-bdrc.com

Foreword by Ofcom

At Ofcom, we are responsible for regulating the BBC’s editorial standards – we ensure that the BBC complies with the Broadcasting Code. We also have a role monitoring how the ‘BBC First’ complaints system is performing.

This system, under which people are normally required to complete the BBC’s complaints process before complaining to us, gives the BBC a unique and material advantage over other broadcasters. It is therefore essential that Ofcom is satisfied that the BBC First complaints process is working well for audiences in a clear and transparent way.

In 2022 we carried out several pieces of research, including a mystery shopping exercise, to understand audience experiences of the BBC First complaints system. This research uncovered a variety of issues that concerned us. We told the BBC they must urgently improve the BBC First process to make it simpler for audiences to make and escalate complaints.

In November 2022 the BBC [announced several changes to simplify its complaints system](#). We have been engaging regularly with the BBC’s editorial policy and standards teams to monitor implementation.

This year we carried out a new and much larger scale mystery shopping exercise to assess the effectiveness of these changes to the BBC complaints-handling processes. This saw us follow over 500 complaint journeys across multiple complaint channels to see how the BBC is performing in all areas. And for the first time, we’ve tested complaints submitted in Welsh, and by textphone.

Overall, our initial view is that the changes the BBC has made to its complaints process since 2022 are delivering well for audiences. The complaints website was found to be easy to use, and the BBC has introduced a video that most of the mystery shoppers found clearly explained the complaints process. Most mystery shoppers also found it easy to make initial contact with the BBC.

In addition, the research also found that the majority of responses to complaints were timely, and that substantive responses were clear and the explanation/rationale easy to understand. Crucially, we have seen progress made in terms of consistency in how the BBC informs people about how to escalate their complaint.

However, this report also identifies some areas where improvements could go further. While these issues were small in the context of this research, given the large number of complaints received by the BBC, they could potentially represent a sizeable number of cases if experienced in similar proportions among actual complaints.

In a minority of cases there was a lack of transparency and clarity in BBC responses. For example, we were concerned that several mystery shoppers received BBC responses which thanked them for their “feedback”, but did not, in the mystery shoppers’ view, answer the subject of the complaint. On reviewing these complaints, it was unclear to us what the BBC’s use of the term “feedback” meant and whether the concerns had been treated as a comment or a complaint.

Additionally, there were issues (largely at stage 1a – the initial response) where some responses were not clearly labelled and mystery shoppers were not provided with adequate information about what stage of the process they were at, or how they could escalate their complaint.

With the money for the BBC’s complaints system coming directly from the licence fee, we acknowledge that there is a need for the BBC to be proportionate in its responses. However, this needs to be balanced with a fair and transparent complaints system. We therefore remind the BBC that if a complaint is treated as a comment this should be clearly stated, and all complainants should receive clearly labelled responses and be sufficiently informed about the escalation process should they still want to escalate their complaint further.

We also saw that stage 1b of the complaints process (where a BBC manager or member of the relevant department responds) continues to be a particular area where we feel there is a need for further improvement. We suggest the BBC works further to address how editorial teams respond to follow-up complaints to make sure they are dealt with equally, fairly and in a timely manner.

We found that the BBC continues to successfully accommodate a range of complaint methods including phone, post, webform, and textphone – it’s vital the complaints system is accessible for all. However, we saw there were inconsistencies in how the BBC responded across these complaint channels. For example, over half of the mystery shoppers phoning in were not informed that, to receive a BBC response, they would need to make a written complaint.

We also found it concerning that responses to Welsh language complaints had inconsistent labelling, with half (four of the eight Welsh complaints) not providing adequate information about how to escalate the complaint.

Additionally, we noticed that responses to letter complaints were slow, often missing the BBC response timeframe targets. We ask the BBC to be mindful of its timings when handling letter complaints and to ensure *all* complainants are provided with consistent information on next steps, across all its complaint channels.

On a final note, we were surprised that in several cases, where the mystery shopper had correctly supplied the requisite information (title, time of broadcast, etc.), the BBC asked that this be re-supplied. This led to some complaint journeys being more complicated and longer than necessary. So, we encourage the BBC to address why this may be, and ensure the process is simple and straightforward for audiences.

The findings from this new research will feed into our wider review of the BBC First system which we will conduct before the end of the current Charter period.



Adam Baxter
Director, Standards and Audience Protection
November 2024

CONTENTS

Research Report.....	0
1. Executive Summary	4
2. Background and objectives	8
3. Methodology	11
4. Initial contact.....	15
5. Stage 1a.....	18
6. Stage 1b.....	24
7. Stage 2.....	29
8. Welsh-language complaints	35
9. Letter complaints.....	37
10. Issues experienced by some complainants	38
Appendix A – Research process	40
Appendix B – Substantive response examples.....	41
Appendix C – Questionnaire	44

1. Executive Summary

In 2017, Ofcom became the first independent external regulator of the BBC. Under the BBC's [Charter and Agreement](#) set by Parliament, complaints about BBC programmes are considered under a system of “BBC First”, whereby a viewer or listener must normally complain to the BBC in the first instance and complete the BBC’s complaints process before complaining to Ofcom.¹

The [BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures](#) are detailed in full on its website² but in summary, an editorial complaint³ 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.

In 2022 Ofcom undertook research to understand whether the BBC First complaints process was delivering for audiences.⁴ This included a mystery shopping exercise of c.50 BBC First complaints.⁵

As a result of Ofcom’s June 2022 review, the BBC put in place several changes to its complaints-handling processes, which are outlined below. In Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2021-2022, it said Ofcom would conduct a further review of the BBC First process again before the end of the current Charter period in 2027, to assess the impact of any changes made by the BBC. Ahead of any further review, this report details the findings of a standalone piece of mystery shopping research commissioned by Ofcom in 2023 (i.e. two years on from the previous review) to reach an initial view on the effectiveness of the changes the BBC made to its complaints-handling processes.

More details of the background and objectives are provided in the subsequent section.

¹ In exceptional circumstances, Ofcom can step in before a complaint has completed the BBC’s process. Complaints can also be made directly to Ofcom if the BBC has failed to provide a response within the timelines set out in the BBC Complaints framework.

² https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/sites/default/files/2020-06/BBC_Complaints_Framework.pdf

³ The BBC’s complaints framework defines an “editorial” complaint as “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 impartiality and avoiding unwarranted offence.”

⁴ Ofcom and Jigsaw Research (2022) ‘Audience perceptions of the BBC First complaints system’ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-2-6-weeks/222191-how-ofcom-regulates-the-bbc/associated-documents/3-bbc-first-complaints-research-report.pdf?v=328091>

⁵ Due to the small sample size of the 2022 study, statistical comparisons have not been made with this latest research.

The following summary of key findings from the mystery shopping research is ‘grouped’ by areas that the BBC said they would make further improvements to in the complaints process to support greater transparency and maintain trust with audiences.⁶

Note:

- The full body of the report details the findings by complaint journey sequence.
- Throughout the report we refer to the ‘mystery shoppers’ as ‘complainants’ for ease of understanding.

Make the complaints website easier to use

A majority of complainants found it easy to contact the BBC and to use the webform, although some issues were experienced by complainants who started the complaint journey by phone.

The majority of 451 complainants (99%) felt it was easy to find out how to make initial contact with the BBC online or via letter (79% very easy, 21% easy, 1% quite difficult).⁷

55 complainants began the BBC First journey by making a call to the BBC. All those making a call found it easy to locate the phone number from the website (42 people very easy, 13 people quite easy). All calls are logged as ‘feedback’ by the BBC and not considered to be formal complaints, and as a result no complaint reference was provided. Therefore, in order to receive a reference number and written response 45 telephone complaints (all telephone complaints excluding 10 submitted via textphone) were subsequently submitted via the BBC website, along with 406 new complaints. We asked complainants to try to call up to 10 times to speak to a call handler, 5 out of the 40 callers who called to complain directly to a call handler were unable to do so after 10 attempts.

The majority (99%) of 401 complainants who completed the webform said it was easy to fill out from the information provided on the website (75% very easy, 24% quite easy).

Better explain how audience feedback is shared and used across the BBC and improve how we explain the steps in the complaints process

A majority of complainants understood the complaints process and received appropriate information on how to escalate their complaint, although there were some inconsistencies.

The BBC introduced a video in 2023 to provide greater prominence to how to make an editorial complaint on the BBC website. After providing complainants with the complaints homepage, we asked if they had watched the short film on how the BBC responds to audience feedback. Around four in five (82%) said yes, 18% said no. Of those who watched the short film, a majority (99%) said it clearly explained the BBC First complaints process.

⁶ [BBC confirms changes to simplify complaints process](#), BBC Media Centre, 29 November 2022.

⁷ In some cases the sum of percentages adds up to more or less than 100% due to rounding.

The BBC also said it would ensure that additional text is included in all responses to complainants at each stage of the process, setting out what the next step might be.⁸ Although our research found a majority of complainants received appropriate information on how to escalate their complaints, this was not consistent across the system, particularly at Stage 1a:

- Of those that received a substantive **Stage 1a** response, 71% said it provided appropriate information for the *complainant* to work out how to escalate their complaint if they wanted to; 29% said it did not.⁹
- At **Stage 1b**, 88% of those who received a substantive response said it provided appropriate information for the complainant to work out how to escalate their complaint if they wanted to; 12% said it did not.
- At **Stage 2**, 28 of 30 who received a substantive response said it provided sufficient information about how to escalate to Ofcom; 2 said it did not.

We also found that in some instances there was a lack of clear labelling in the BBC's responses where the BBC did not provide information on which stage of the process the complaint was at. In some cases, the BBC also provided what Ofcom considered to be a second stage 1a response after the complainant had escalated to stage 1b.

Improve how all editorial teams respond to complaints so there is consistency across the BBC and follow-up complaints are dealt with equally and fairly

The majority of complainants in this research reported receiving a timely substantive response which was clear and contained an explanation/rationale which was easy to understand. However, there were some inconsistencies from the expected process.

The BBC said it would ensure responses contain a more reasoned or detailed response.¹⁰ Our research found a majority of complainants in this research said the substantive response they received was clear and the explanation/rationale easy to understand.

- At **Stage 1a** the majority (96%) said the substantive response they received was very/fairly clear (80%/16%) and that the explanation/rationale provided was clear and easy to understand (95%). Around four in five (78%) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, but around one in five (22%) felt it was only partially or not at all addressed.
- Likewise, at **Stage 1b** the majority (99%) said the substantive response they received was very/fairly clear (76%/23%) and the explanation/rationale in the response was clear and easy to understand (96%). Around four in five (78%) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, but around one in five (22%) felt it was only partially or not at all addressed.

⁸ [BBC confirms changes to simplify complaints process](#), BBC Media Centre, 29 November 2022.

⁹ Please see page 19 for more detail on what were considered to be substantive and non-substantive responses.

¹⁰ [BBC confirms changes to simplify complaints process](#), BBC Media Centre, 29 November 2022.

- At **Stage 2** 25 complainants felt the substantive response was very clear, 4 fairly clear and 1 not very clear. All felt the explanation/rationale was easy to understand. The majority receiving a substantive Stage 2 response felt their complaint was fully addressed (27 of 30), with one saying it had not been addressed at all.

Although the findings from this research are largely positive, a minority expressed through the verbatim comments¹¹ that they felt the BBC's responses were generic and wordy, lacking in depth and clarity. Throughout the course of the research, we also found a number of differences from the expected process that indicate that not all complaints are handled consistently. For example, in some cases it was not clear whether the BBC had treated *complainants'* first Stage 1a complaints as an actual complaint (as opposed to a comment), so when we attempted to escalate to Stage 1b, the BBC considered the escalation to be a first Stage 1a complaint. Further details of the small number of consistency issues we uncovered are outlined in chapter 10.

The BBC also said it would improve the timeliness of response to complaints.¹² Our research found a majority of complainants received a substantive response within the timeframes set out in the BBC's complaints framework at each stage:

- At **Stage 1a** nearly all online/letter *complainants* received a substantive response from the BBC (93%); a minority (7%) said the response they received was not substantive (instead they may have only received an automated acknowledgement email or no response at all). A majority of substantive responses (91%) were received within the BBC's target time of 10 working days, with 7 in 10 (71%) received within 5. A minority (9%) received a response after 10 working days.¹³
- At **Stage 1b** around three quarters (77%) received a substantive response, 23% did not. Around 7 in 10 (72%) substantive responses were received within the BBC's target time of 20 working days, with a third (32%) received within 10. Just over a quarter (28%) received a response after 20 working days.
- At **Stage 2**¹⁴ 30 out of 44 *complainants* received a substantive response, 14 did not.¹⁵ 28 *complainants* received a substantive response within the BBC's target time of 20 working days, with 20 of these received within 10 working days. 2 *complainants* received a response after 20 working days.

¹¹ In this research we have used some open-ended questions, where complainants can provide their thoughts in their own words. When using direct quotes or thoughts from complainants these are referred to as verbatims.

¹² [BBC confirms changes to simplify complaints process](#), BBC Media Centre, 29 November 2022 and [Ofcom Annual Report on the BBC 2022-23](#), p.76.

¹³ The BBC aims to reply within 10 working days at Stage 1a and 20 working at Stage 1b and Stage 2 respectively. However, the BBC makes clear that it may take up to 35 working days to respond to complex complaints at Stage 2. Please see page 13 for more details.

¹⁴ Note that in this report, Stage 1a and 1b results are show as percentages, but due to the smaller sample sizes for Stage 2, the actual numbers of *complainants* are shown for these results. A total of 451 online/ letter complaints were submitted at Stage 1a, 129 at Stage 1b and 44 at Stage 2.

¹⁵ *Complainants* reported no substantive response if one was not received within the timeframe allowed for, which was set as the BBC target response time plus a fixed amount of additional time. More detail is set out in Section 3. Methodology.

2. Background and objectives

In 2017 Ofcom became the BBC’s first external regulator and a new regulatory framework for the BBC was put in place. For standards in linear TV and radio, and on-demand content this includes a system of “BBC First”; 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 and complete the BBC’s complaints process before complaining to Ofcom (see below for a full outline of this system and its different stages). This is different to complaints for all other broadcasters, which can go directly to Ofcom.

In June 2022, as part of its review of Future Regulation of the BBC, Ofcom undertook some research to understand whether the BBC First complaints process was continuing to deliver for audiences. The research employed a mixed-methodology design, including a mystery shopping exercise of c.50 complaints.¹⁶ The aim of the mystery shopping exercise was to provide an objective assessment of the BBC First complaints process, by tracking the complainants’ experience of the process.

Key findings from the 2022 mystery shopping phase of the research programme indicated that it was easy to find out how to make a complaint, with the forms simple to complete and responses 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. In our June 2022 Statement we said that the BBC needed to urgently consider what changes were required to its complaints processes to make them simpler and clearer for audiences to navigate.

As a result of Ofcom’s June 2022 review, the BBC put in place several changes to its complaints-handling processes. In Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2021-22¹⁷, Ofcom said it would conduct a further review of the BBC First process again before the end of the current Charter period in 2027 to assess the impact of any changes made by the BBC. In preparation for any such review, Ofcom commissioned this standalone piece of mystery shopping research to reach an initial view on the effectiveness of the recent changes the BBC has made to its complaints-handling processes.

BBC complaints and the BBC First complaints process

The BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures are detailed in full on its website¹⁸ 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.

¹⁶ Due to the small sample size of the 2022 study, statistical comparisons have not been made with this latest research.

¹⁷ [Ofcom Annual Report on the BBC 2021-22](#)

¹⁸ https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/sites/default/files/2020-06/BBC_Complaints_Framework.pdf

- 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 (ECU¹⁹) is received.

Under the BBC First system, the BBC, unlike other broadcasters, must normally be given the opportunity to resolve audience complaints before they can be escalated to Ofcom.²⁰

The large majority of complaints to the BBC are resolved at Stage 1a or 1b.²¹ However, having gone through Stages 1a and 1b, the complainant can then escalate their complaint to Stage 2, with the BBC’s ECU. At this point they will be informed by the BBC that if they are dissatisfied with the BBC’s final response 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.²² This investigation is conducted in accordance with Ofcom’s Procedures for investigating breaches of content standards on BBC broadcasting services and BBC On-Demand Programme Services (ODPS).²³

If Ofcom finds that the BBC has failed to comply with the Code in its UK public broadcasting and on-demand programme services, they may direct the BBC to take steps to remedy the failure or prevent a recurrence. It is also open to Ofcom to impose financial sanctions on the BBC for serious, deliberate, repeated or reckless breaches of the Code.

The BBC First approach does not apply to those complaints raising issues of Fairness and/or Privacy, which may be made directly to Ofcom. Nevertheless, Ofcom encourages complainants with Fairness and/or Privacy concerns to follow the BBC’s own complaints procedures in the first instance.

According to the BBC, it received 179,743 complaints at Stage 1 of the complaints process in 2023/24.²⁴ The ECU dealt with 594 of these complaints at Stage 2.

¹⁹ The ECU is tasked with considering complaints impartially and independently of the interests of the programme makers/content providers.

²⁰ In exceptional circumstances Ofcom may intervene at an earlier stage to resolve a complaint which has not yet been resolved by the BBC. Complaints can also be made directly to Ofcom if the BBC has failed to provide a response within the timelines set out in the BBC Complaints framework. -

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/advice-for-consumers/how-ofcom-deals-with-bbc-complaints>

²¹ [BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2023/4](#), page 123.

²² <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code>

²³ [Procedures for handling complaints, investigations and sanctions on TV, radio and video-on-demand services - Ofcom](#)

²⁴ [BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24](#), page 123.

Objectives of this research

The overall objective for the research was to:

- Evaluate the experience of the BBC First complaints process with a larger number of complaints than previously used, as well as to understand if improvements have been made.

More specifically, the research needed to:

- Record and track how the mystery shops were processed.
- Assess the ease of escalating a complaint through the BBC First process.
- Assess the standard of the quality of responses from the BBC First system.
 - Were responses from the BBC easy to understand and in plain English?
 - Did the response address the complaint directly?
 - Was the tone of the response felt to be appropriate?
- Measure if the BBC is meeting its response timelines:
 - The BBC aims to respond to Stage 1a complaints within 10 working days (although says some may take longer).
 - The BBC aims to respond to Stage 1b complaints within 20 working days.
 - The BBC has a target response time of 20 working days for standard Stage 2 complaints and 35 working days for more complex Stage 2 complaints.
- Evaluate call handlers' explanations to complainants on how to submit a written response and explain the next steps.
- Evaluate the overall experience of the BBC First system.

3. Methodology

Timings

The mystery shopping complaints were submitted from 13th March to 16th August 2024.

Complaints

All complaints in this research were created by Ofcom to test the BBC First system. To ensure that the mystery shopping complaints resembled genuine complaints as closely as possible, Ofcom’s Standards & Audience Protection Team (S&AP) created a unique complaint for each ‘mystery shopper’. They were designed to mirror actual complaints received by the BBC and were categorised by a variety of themes.

Throughout the report we refer to the ‘mystery shoppers’ who posed as complainants for this exercise as ‘complainants’ for ease of understanding.

Contact channel quotas

In total 506 mystery shopping journeys were conducted using 461 complaints. Quotas were set to test the different methods of making a complaint – via telephone, textphone, letter and online via a web form.²⁵ Telephone complaints do not receive a written response from the BBC so these 45 complaints were subsequently also submitted online.²⁶

Figure 1. Mystery shops by contact channel

Complaint Method	Number of complaints
By calling and speaking to someone (and then via the BBC website)	30
By calling and leaving a message (and then via the BBC website)	15
Via the BBC website (as first point of contact), including 9 in Welsh	356
<i>Total via website</i>	<i>401</i>
By writing a letter to the BBC	50
<i>Total written complaints (online or via letter)</i>	<i>451</i>
Textphone	10
Total unique complaints submitted	461
Total complaint journeys (including 45 complaints made via telephone and then subsequently submitted via website)	506

²⁵ The web form collects all the information required to submit a complaint.

²⁶ Phone calls to the BBC’s complaints number are logged as ‘comments’ by the BBC, they are not considered to be formal complaints and therefore no complaint reference number is issued (unless the complainant cannot write in due to a disability).

Complaints developed by Ofcom were categorised by subject category and the make up by stage is shown in the following table. No quotas were set by category and the research was not intended to enable analysis by this dimension, but the distribution was designed to reflect the broad weight of different types of complaint that Ofcom understands the BBC is likely to receive.

Figure 2. Mystery shops by complaint category and stage

Complaint category	Stage 1a	Stage 1b	Stage 2
Due accuracy	28	8	3
Commercial references	13	0	0
Diversity	3	0	0
Generally accepted standards	96	15	4
Due impartiality	158	60	22
Materially misleading	28	8	2
Nudity	6	1	0
Offence (language, sex, violence, discrimination)	85	25	9
Protection of children	24	8	3
Scheduling	20	4	1

Each complaint was submitted by a separate individual complainant (apart from the 10 textphone complaints where specific software is required, so these were all submitted via the same person). Once a response was received, it was reviewed by Ofcom, who decided whether the complainant should escalate the complaint to the next stage. Not all complaints were escalated; some were closed on receipt of stage 1a or 1b responses. This was for a variety of logistical reasons, as well as to closely “mirror” the behaviours of real BBC complainants. Ofcom provided the text for complainants to use in all escalations.

After each stage, complainants completed a questionnaire designed to provide a detailed record of their complaint experience. A detailed diagram of the process can be found in Appendix A, and the full questionnaire used at each stage can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 3. Complaints/escalations at each stage

Stage	Online/letter complaints submitted
Stage 1a	451
Stage 1b	129
Stage 2	44

At each stage of the process, the BBC has a target time outlined in its Complaints Framework to respond to a complaint (although for each stage it notes that some complaints may take longer than others to investigate). For this research, additional time was allowed for each response and after this cutoff time the complaint was recorded as not having received a substantive response.²⁷ As the BBC response timeframes are targets rather than fixed deadlines, it was deemed fair to allow a degree of extra time for complaints to be dealt with at the relevant stage, but balanced against the need for any time extension to be appropriately limited so that all complaints could be treated equally within the fieldwork period.

Initially an additional 15 working days were allowed for online complaints and 25 working days for letters at each stage of the complaints process. During the fieldwork period a UK General Election was called, so these timings were extended by a further 10 working days to reflect the likely increase in complaints the BBC would have to deal with during the election period.

For the final two weeks of fieldwork (and sufficient time after the UK General Election had passed) the cutoff reverted to the BBC’s target response times to ensure results could be included in the data by the end of the fieldwork period. These are summarised below.

Figure 4. Response time allowed in working days

BBC’s target response time		Total working days allowed		
Stage	(working days)	Before General Election period (pre-22nd May)	General Election period (22 nd May -1 st August)	After General Election period - final two weeks of fieldwork (2 nd August – 16 th August)
1a	10	25 (website) 35 (letters)	35 (website) 45 (letters)	10
1b	20	35 (website) 45 (letters)	45 (website) 55 (letters)	20
2	20 or 35 for more complex complaints. ²⁸	35 (website) 45 (letters)	45 (website) 55 (letters)	20

If a complaint was not received within the timeframe allowed for (as detailed above), complainants recorded this as not having received a substantive response.

²⁷ Please see page 19 for more detail on what were considered to be substantive and non-substantive responses.

²⁸ In the [BBC’s Complaints Framework](#) it states at Stage 2/ECU a target of 35 working days is applied to complaints that require longer or more complex investigation. Ofcom considered that the complaints it drafted were not complex.

Percentages and actual numbers

Note that in this report, Stage 1a and 1b results are shown as percentages, but due to the smaller sample sizes for initial contact via telephone and Stage 2, the actual numbers of complainants are shown for these results. In some cases the sum of percentages add up to more or less than 100% due to rounding.

4. Initial contact

Summary

The process was easy to understand and the information given was clear

- 99% of those watching the short film on the BBC’s website said it clearly explained the complaints process.
- All 55 calling to complain found it easy to locate the phone number (42 very easy, 13 quite easy).²⁹
- Of the 35 callers that got through to a call handler...
 - All thought the response the call handler provided was clear (28 very clear, 7 fairly clear)
 - 33 said they understood what would happen as a result of their call
 - 26 were informed that if they wanted to get a response they would need to submit a written complaint.

All complainants

At the outset of the process, all complainants regardless of contact method assigned were directed to the URL for the BBC’s complaints page.³⁰ The page contains instructions on how to start the complaints process either by letter, phone or the webform online, including a short video on how the BBC responds to audience feedback. 99% of complainants who watched the short film said it clearly explained the complaints process.

The complainants then proceeded to make their complaint via their assigned method (using the BBC’s address, telephone number or webform online).

Telephone complaints

A total of 55 complainants initially contacted the BBC by telephone to submit their complaint.

15 called out-of-hours to leave their complaint on the answerphone and 40 called to reach a call handler (30 called to speak directly to a call handler and 10 calls were made via Relay UK’s textphone service where messages are typed in by the user and then relayed back and forth via a third-party Text Relay operator).³¹

All 55 callers found it easy to find the number they needed to call (42 very easy, 13 quite easy).

²⁹ N.B. due to the smaller sample sizes for telephone contacts at this initial stage, the actual numbers of *complainants* are shown for most results in this section.

³⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/complaints>

³¹ <https://www.relayuk.bt.com/about-relay-uk.html>

All 15 calling out-of-hours to leave a message were able to do so and nearly all (13 of 15) were clear on what to do and what would happen with their complaint. However, for complainants leaving a message they were not advised of the possibility of receiving a response to their complaint, if they wanted one, by submitting a complaint online or via letter or of other ways to make a complaint, and this was the end of their telephone complaint journey.

Figure 5. How clear was it to know what to do and what would happen next?

Answer	Complainants
Were clear about how to leave a message	14
Were clear what they needed to say	13
Were clear what would happen with their complaint	13

Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q11. Was it clear how to leave the message? Base: All calling to leave a message (n=15)

Q12 Was it clear what you needed to say? Base: All calling to leave a message (n=15)

Q13. Was it clear what would happen with your complaint after you left the message? Base: All calling to leave a message (n=15)

Of the 40 callers who called to complain directly to a call handler (including those who used the Text Relay service), 35 were able to do so. If a complainant was unable to speak to a call handler on their first attempt, they tried again, up to 10 times in total, and 5 were unable to get through in their 10 attempts.

Of the 35 callers that got through to a call handler, 34 felt the handler managed the call well (28 said very well), but one did say not at all well.

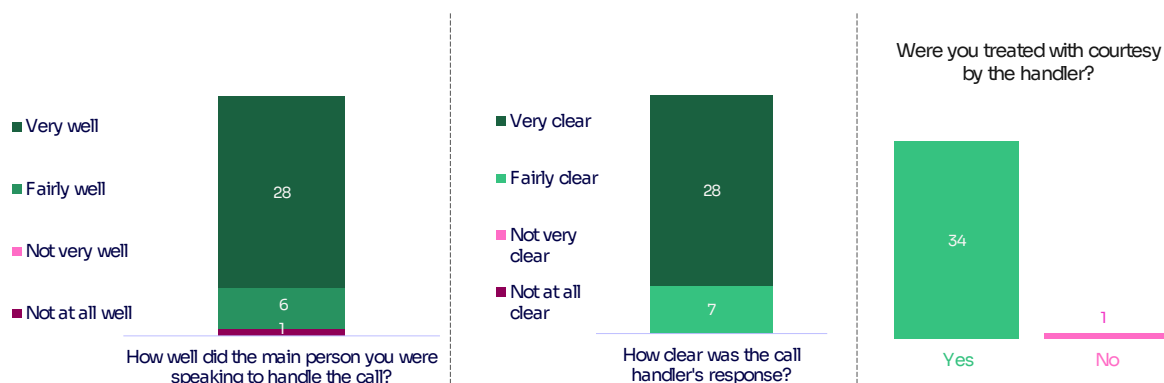
All 35 thought the response the call handler provided was clear, with 28 stating it was very clear.

When specifically asked if they were treated with courtesy and respect by the call handler, all but one said they had been.

The one complainant who felt the call was not managed well and that they had not been treated with courtesy and respect said that the call handler had interrupted them and hung up after they outlined their complaint. They reported being unable to get through to someone again for the rest of the day.

“I was left feeling surprised and annoyed at being hung up on. I couldn't get through to a real person again throughout the rest of the day.”

Figure 6. How the handler treated the caller



(of 35 who spoke to someone at Stage 1a)

Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q15. How well did the main person you were speaking to handle the call? Base: Group A (All who spoke to a real person) (n=35)

Q16. Were you treated with courtesy and respect by the call handler? Base: Group A (All who spoke to a real person) (n=35)

Q18. How clear was the call handler's response? Base: Base: Group A (All who spoke to a real person) (n=35)

Of the 35 callers that got through to a call handler, 33 said they understood what would happen as a result of their call. 26 of the 35 who successfully told the call handler their complaint, were informed that if they wanted to get a response they would need to submit a written complaint.

Phone calls to the BBC's complaints number are logged as 'comments' by the BBC, they are not considered to be formal complaints and therefore no complaint reference number is issued (unless the complainant cannot write in due to a disability).³² However, this was not always explained to the complainant. In summary, of the 55 total telephone complaints (including both the 40 who called to reach a call handler and the 15 who called out-of-hours to leave their complaint on the answerphone), over half were not advised that they would receive a response only if they submitted their complaint online via the website or via letter.

The 45 complaints that were to be made either by speaking to a call handler directly or leaving a message (i.e. all telephone complaints apart from the 10 submitted via textphone) were subsequently submitted via the BBC website, along with 406 new complaints (either online or via letter), as discussed in the following section.

³² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/how-we-handle-your-complaint>

5. Stage 1a

Note that the results for Stages 1a, 1b and 2 are based on both online and letter complaint methods and include Welsh-language complaints. They also include all those who started with a telephone call and then submitted their complaint online. However, they exclude the 10 textphone complaints which did not proceed past the initial phone call.

Summary

Most received a clear substantive Stage 1a response that fully addressed their complaint.

- All making a Stage 1a complaint online or via letter said the process was clearly explained on the BBC's website.
- Nearly all (99%) said it was easy to find out how to make initial contact online or via letter and were clear how long it might take to receive a response (87%).
- The majority (93%) received a substantive response and most of these (91%) were received within the BBC's ten-day target.³³
- Overall, substantive responses were seen as clear and easy to understand (96%, with 80% stating very clear).
- Nearly all (95%) felt the explanation provided was clear and easy to understand.
- Around four in five (78%) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, but around one in five (22%) felt it was only partially or not at all addressed.
- 29% of those who received a substantive response to their complaint did not feel they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint.

When making a complaint online or via letter at Stage 1a, nearly all (99%) said it was easy (79% very easy/21% quite easy) to find out how to make initial contact with the BBC and were clear how long it might take to receive a response (87%).

Nearly all (99%) of those who submitted their complaint online found it easy to fill out the web form from the information provided on the BBC's website (75% very easy/24% quite easy) and felt the next steps that would follow after submitting their complaint were clear (98%).

Most (97%) of those submitting an online complaint via the website received a verification email.³⁴ All found the email easy to understand and nearly all (99%) successfully completed the

³³ Complainants reported no substantive response if one was not received within the timeframe allowed for, which was set as the BBC target response time plus a fixed amount of additional time. More detail is set out in Section 3. Methodology.

³⁴ This is an automatic email sent by the BBC to the complainant asking them to verify their email address. If the *complainant* does not verify their email address within the specified timeframe (60 minutes) the BBC will not receive the complaint and the complainant will need to resubmit it.

verification process. Nearly all (96%) completing the process received an automated acknowledgement.

An example of an automated acknowledgement is shown below:

From: **BBC Complaints** <bbc_complaints_website@contact.bbc.co.uk>
 Date: Wed, Nov 8, 2023 at 3:19 PM
 Subject: BBC Complaints - Case number *REDACTED*
 To: *REDACTED*

Thanks for contacting the BBC. This is to confirm we've received the attached complaint sent in this name. We've included the text of the complaint and a case reference for your records (see below).

Our normal aim at this stage is to reply within 10 working days (two weeks). We hope you will understand that sometimes it may take us longer. If we think that will be the case here, we'll try to let you know in advance.

We'll normally include your complaint in our overnight report to producers and management. This will circulate your complaint (with any personal details removed) together with all the other reaction we receive today. It will then be available for the right team to read tomorrow morning.

For full details of our complaints process you can visit: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/how-we-handle-your-complaint>.

Please don't reply to this email because it's an automated acknowledgement sent from an account which can't receive replies. If you do need to get in touch, please use our webform instead at www.bbc.co.uk/complaints, quoting your reference number.

Here are the details of your complaint:

Substantive responses

A substantive response is an official response from BBC Audience Services or the ECU that addresses the complaint and the programme complained about, rather than one that just acknowledges receipt of the complaint and says when a substantive response can be expected.³⁵

Over nine in ten (93%) complaints submitted online or via letter at Stage 1a received a substantive response within the relevant timeframe set for the research (as detailed in the Methodology section).

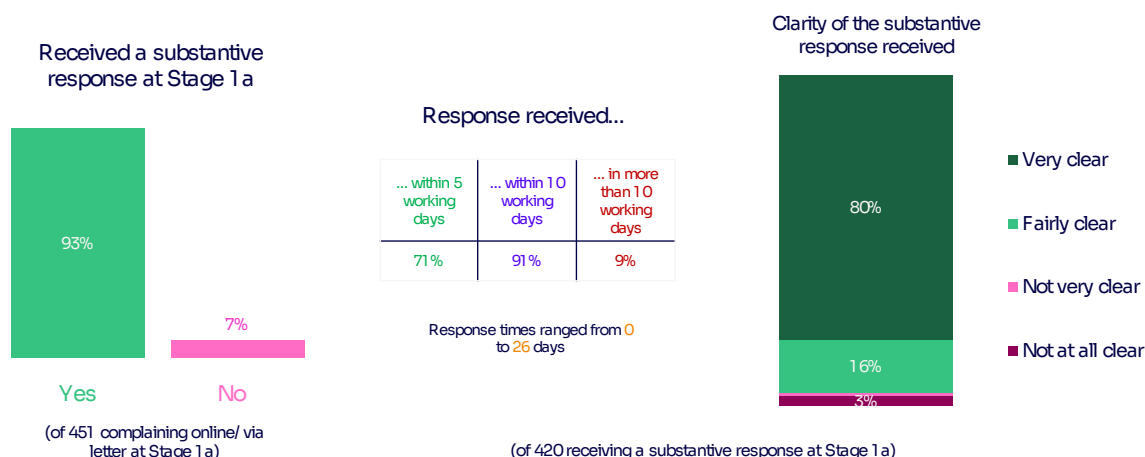
Of these substantive responses, nine in ten (91%) were received within the BBC's 10 working day target response timeframe for this stage.³⁶ Response times ranged from a response being received on the same day up to 26 working days from submitting the complaint. Nearly all

³⁵ Please see Appendix B for examples of substantive responses at Stage 1a, Stage 1b and Stage 2.

³⁶ Note this figure includes online and letter substantive responses. Two-in-five letters (16 of 40 letter complaints receiving a substantive response at Stage 1a) were received within the BBC's ten-day target.

(96%) felt the substantive response they had received was clear, with four in five (80%) saying it was very clear.

Figure 7: Substantive response: % received, time taken to receive and clarity of response



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q39. Have you received a substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All complaining online or by letter) (n=451)

Q40. Type in the number of working days since the complaint was submitted? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1a response) (n=420)

Q42. How clear was the substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1a response) (n=420)

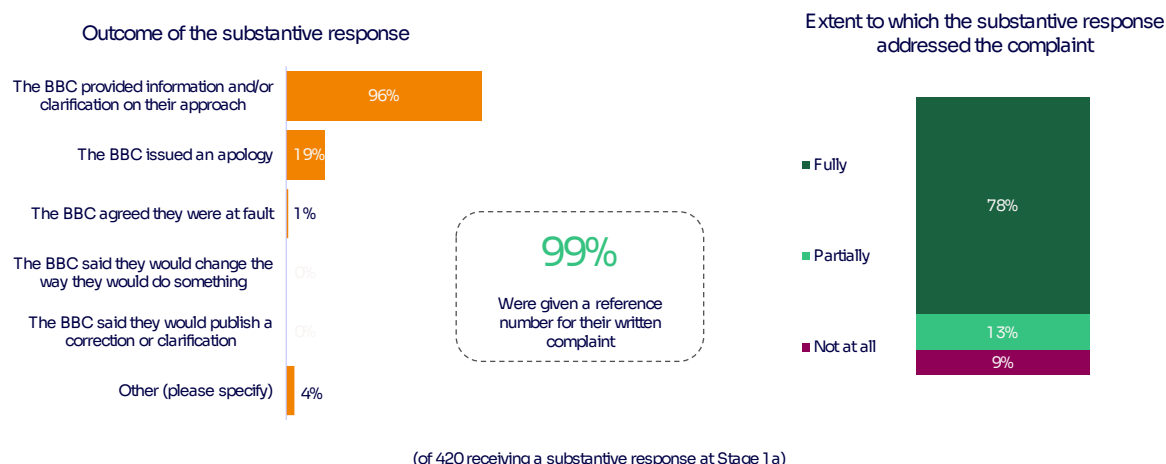
The majority (96%) who received a substantive response said that the BBC had provided information and/or clarification. Around one in five (19%) felt that the BBC had apologised.³⁷

Around four in five (78%) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, while around one in five (22%) felt it was only partially or not at all addressed.

Nearly all (99%) receiving a substantive response had been given a reference number.

³⁷ This research was testing the BBC First complaints process and not the BBC's decision/outcome on the subject of the complaints. Ofcom did not submit any complaints which would, in their view, be considered breaches of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines. As complainants were asked to provide the BBC's decision in their survey, we are reporting on these results to be transparent.

Figure 8: Substantive response: outcome and extent to which complaint addressed



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q44. What was the outcome of the substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1a response) (n=420)

Q45. Were you given a reference number for your written complaint? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1a response) (n=420)

Q46. To what extent do you feel that the response addressed your complaint? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1a response) (n=420)

Those who felt their complaint was only partially addressed or not at all addressed were asked to provide some detail. A selection of responses is given below.

“It made me think that my...complaint was not taken on board as a specific issue but was swiftly labelled as ‘not serious enough to be investigated further.’ As the complainant, I did not feel understood.”

“Because the BBC did not acknowledge the matter that I complained about, and they decided that it was not worthy of further investigation.”

“I do not feel they acknowledged any area of my complaint or personalised the response in any way. It felt like this was a copy and paste job rather than a personalised response that had actually been discussed.”

Nearly all (95%) who received a substantive response felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand. The minority (5%) who did not, were asked to explain further and some of these responses are given below.

“Whilst the letter itself was easy to understand, they didn't actually give any explanation or rationale in their response.”

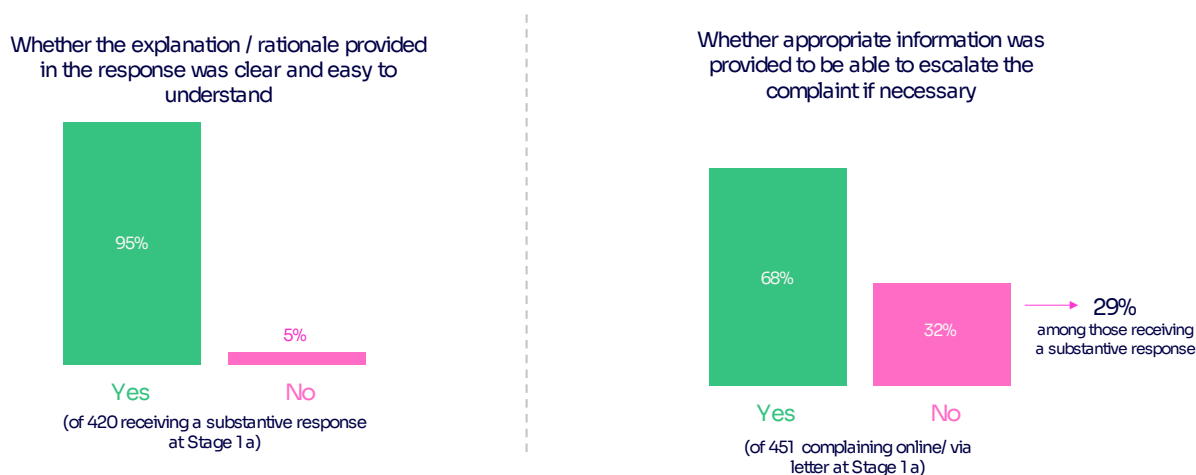
“I don't feel I was given a thorough explanation as their email regurgitated what was said in the broadcast. There was no depth to their rationale.”

“I felt the language used to be confusing, unclear and verbose throughout.”

Around one third (29%) of those who received a substantive response to their complaint did not feel they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate it. When asked for comments at the end of this stage of the process many of the complainants who felt they had not received appropriate information referenced this aspect. An example of this is provided here.

“The BBC explained that they would not be taking it further, but that they would inform programme makers and senior management at the BBC. There was no information about escalating a complaint as they have, in effect, closed the case.”

Figure 9: Clarity of explanation in substantive response and information provided to escalate



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q48. Was the explanation / rationale provided in their response clear and easy to understand? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1a response) (n=420)

Q50. Did they provide appropriate information for you to work out how to escalate your complaint, if you wanted to? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All complaining online or by letter) (n=451)

At the end of Stage 1a, complainants were asked for any comments about this stage of the complaints process. Overall, the responses reflected the positive views of the majority, while discontent related to a minority who experienced feelings of being dismissed and not receiving information about how to escalate. A selection of both positive and negative responses is shown below.

Positive responses:

“The process and response were straightforward and I clearly understood.”

“I waited 6 days to receive an email back following my complaint. I was happy with the personalised, informative email that I received from the BBC, and it fully explained the

reasons for their decision. Also, it helpfully explained what to do next if I wished to take this complaint further.”

“I feel that the BBC have given a detailed and acceptable response.”

“I feel the BBC were very quick to deal with the complaint and explained the reasons for what I had seen. They provided plenty of information about how to escalate this if necessary.”

Negative responses:

“The response gave no thoughts on my complaint. They just made it clear that, unless lots of people complain, it's not worth the trouble. There were no further opportunities offered within the email for me to complain to anyone else. I feel this is a complete brush off and I would be so disappointed and angry with the BBC if this was a genuine complaint. I do feel they could offer a few words to the complainant to at least make them feel their complaint had been taken seriously.”

“I was not impressed with the response I received. I felt it was very dismissive. The tone was too impersonal and I had the impression that it was a computer-generated response, so I do not know that someone even read my complaint. At the bottom of the email, it said the response was from an unmonitored address. The response showed no empathy towards my feelings. I was not given any information on how I could escalate my complaint if I wanted to.”

6. Stage 1b

Summary

The escalation process to Stage 1b was clear and easy.

- The majority (91%) escalating a complaint to Stage 1b felt the complaints process at this stage was clearly explained.
- Nearly all (98%) found it easy to know how to complete it (81% said very easy).
- Three quarters (77%) of complaints escalated at Stage 1b received a substantive response and of these 72% were received within the BBC's twenty-day target.³⁸
- Nearly all substantive responses (99%) were seen as clear, with 76% stating very clear.
- Around four in five (78%) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, but around one in five (22%) felt it was only partially or not at all addressed.
- Nearly all (96%) who received a substantive response felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand.
- Around one in ten (12%) who received a substantive response did not feel they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 if they wanted to.

Of the 451 complaints submitted online or via letter at Stage 1a, 129 were escalated to Stage 1b.³⁹

The majority (91%) escalating to Stage 1b felt the complaints process at this stage was clearly explained. Nearly all (98%) found it easy to fill in the web form or know what to include in the letter and four in five (81%) found it very easy, while all thought it was easy to find their case reference number.

After submitting their Stage 1b escalation, nearly all (99%) felt they had a clear understanding of what the next steps would be, and the majority (87%) were clear on how long it could take to receive a response.

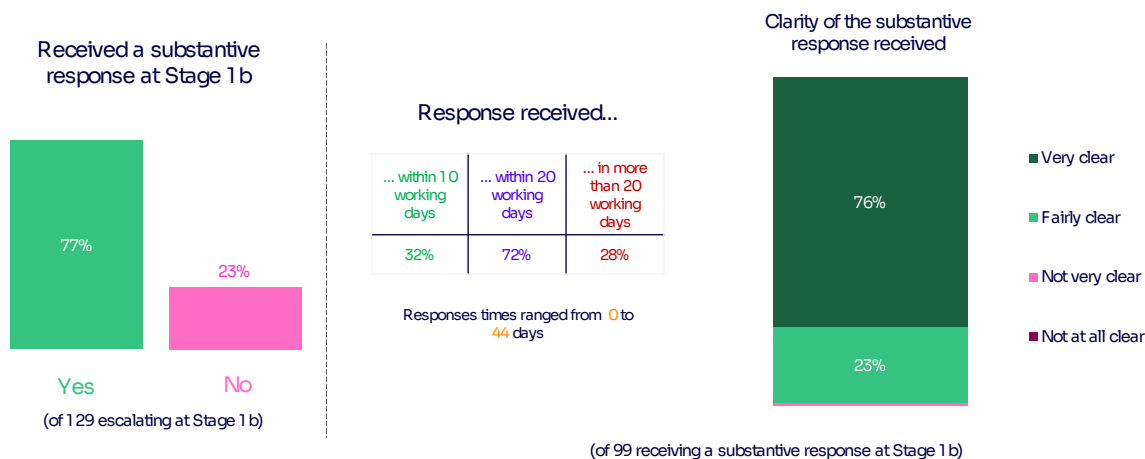
Among those escalating online, nearly all (97%) received an automated acknowledgement that their follow-up had been received.

³⁸ Complainants reported no substantive response if one was not received within the timeframe allowed for, which was set as the BBC target response time plus a fixed amount of additional time. More detail is set out in Section 3. Methodology.

³⁹ N.B. as explained above, once a Stage 1a response was received, it was reviewed by Ofcom, who decided whether the *complainant* should escalate the complaint to the next stage. Not all complaints were escalated; some were closed on receipt of the stage 1a response. This was for a variety of logistical reasons, as well as to closely "mirror" the behaviours of real BBC complainants. Ofcom provided the text for complainants to use in all escalations.

Over three in four (77%) complaints escalated at Stage 1b received a substantive response within the relevant timeframe.⁴⁰ Of these around seven in ten (72%) were received within the BBC’s 20 working day target for this stage. Responses ranged from the same day up to 44 working days from submitting the complaint escalation. Almost all (99%) felt the substantive response they had received was clear, with around three in four (76%) saying it was very clear.

Figure 10: Substantive response: % received, time taken to receive and clarity of response



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q63. Have you received a substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All escalating to Stage 1b online or by letter) (n=129)

Q64. How many working days did it take to receive a substantive response to your complaint Stage 1b escalation? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 1b response) (n=99)

Q66. How clear was the substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 1b response) (n=99)

Most (93%) who received a substantive response to their Stage 1b escalation said the BBC provided information or clarification of their approach, and two in five (40%) felt they had apologised.⁴¹

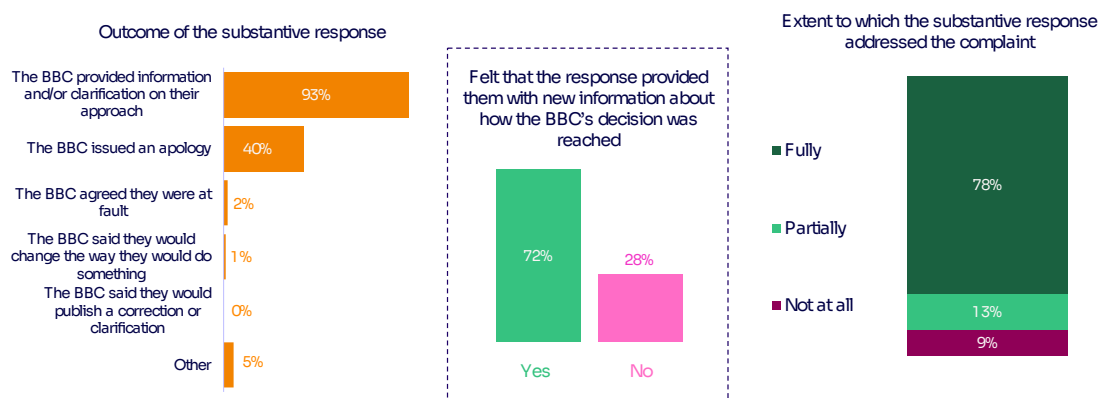
Seven in ten (72%) felt that the response provided them with new information about how the decision had been reached.

Around four in five (78%) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, while around one in five (22%) felt it was only partially or not at all addressed, the same proportions as Stage 1a.

⁴⁰ Note this figure includes online and letter substantive responses. We escalated 9 letters to Stage 1b, of these less than half (4 of 9) received a substantive response and of these, half (2 of 4) received it within the BBC’s 20 working day target.

⁴¹ This research was testing the BBC First complaints process and not the BBC’s decision/outcome on the subject of the complaints. Ofcom did not submit any complaints which would, in their view, be considered breaches of the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines. As complainants were asked to provide the BBC’s decision in their survey, we are reporting on these results to be transparent.

Figure 11: Substantive response: outcome and extent to which complaint addressed



(of 99 receiving a substantive response at Stage 1 b)

Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q68. What was the outcome of the substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1b response) (n=99)

Q69. To what extent do you feel that the response addressed your complaint? (All receiving a substantive 1b response) (n=99)

Q73. Did the response provide you with new information about how they had reached their decisions? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive 1b response) (n=99)

For those who said the response did not fully address their complaint, quite often it was due to a lack of explanation from the BBC – either about why they came to their decisions or about what would/could happen next. A selection of responses is provided below.

“Although they agreed there was fault, there was no follow up of what next steps BBC would take towards change.”

“They didn't say why they felt that the bad language used in the film was appropriate for a Sunday afternoon programme.”

“I feel that the tone of the email was to say that they disagreed with my complaint and explained they had done enough and were not at fault.”

“They only stated that they had no further comments to add. They didn't address the extra points raised.”

Nearly all (96%) who received a substantive response to their Stage 1b escalation felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand. The minority (4%) who did not were asked to explain further, and a selection of responses are below.

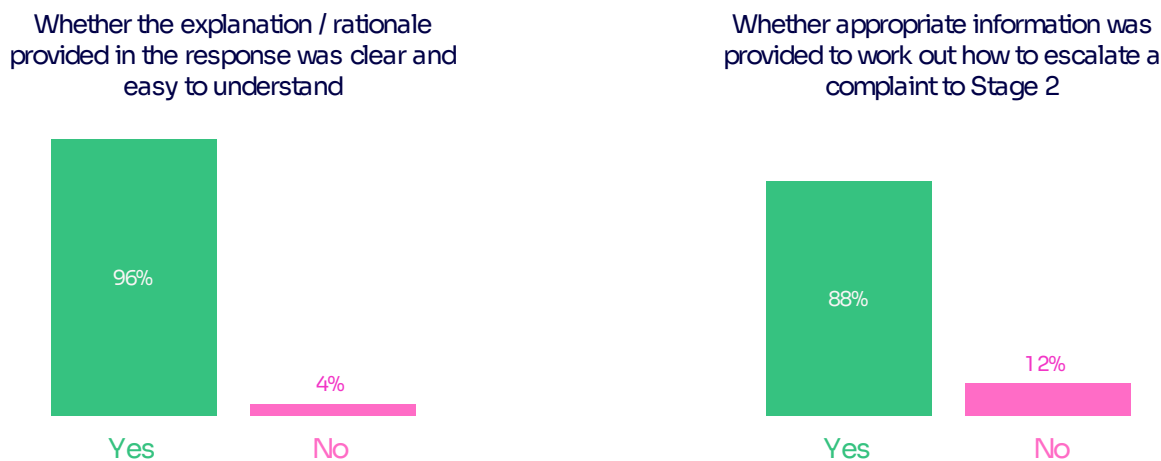
“Whilst they did break down the complaint into specific sections to address the points raised within the initial complaint, I would have liked them to refer to the specific questions that were ‘fair’ in being balanced with context.”

“It was not relevant to the second letter.”

“It simply explains the content of the programme and what viewers ‘should know to expect’, there is nothing to say it has been independently reviewed and little to no additional information from the previous reply.”

Around one in ten (12%) submitting a written complaint did not feel they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 if they wanted to.

Figure 12: Clarity of explanation in substantive response and information provided to escalate



(of 99 receiving a substantive response at Stage 1 b)

Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q71. Was the explanation / rationale provided in their response clear and easy to understand? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 1b response) (n=99)

Q74. Did they provide appropriate information for you to work out how to escalate your complaint, if you wanted to? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 1b response) (n=99)

At the end of Stage 1b, complainants were asked for any comments on this stage of the complaints process. The majority had no further comments or were positive about the overall Stage 1b process, e.g.

“I feel as though the BBC have listened to the concerns raised in the complaint. The explanations they provided in both responses were easy to understand and were very objective, definitely demonstrating how there was no bias in the original broadcast.”

“The process has been quite easy, intuitive and quick. If I were a legitimate complainant I would be actually quite impressed. They dealt with the complaint with quite a meaningful change which shows they are willing and proactive in improving.”

“I think the BBC have explained quite thoroughly their position on this matter and if I was not happy, then it could be further explored via BBC’s Executive Complaints Unit.”

However some did express concerns, such as these below:

“Although I got an email stating that there would be a delay due to the volume of complaints received, it did not indicate the expected timeframe for the response. For the reply received yesterday, it has addressed my concern and reassured the permission of the covered individual was received. They should provide a more valid explanation about how they believe there is no breach of standard in their reply.”

“It is interesting that the BBC is receiving so many complaints that they cannot respond within their 20-day response service level. It could be apportioned to the forthcoming election and makes me wonder if they can usually manage the complaints. I think the BBC need to respond to all complaints, no matter how trivial they may seem. If someone has taken the time to find out how to complain and make a complaint then it is only fair they receive a response.”

7. Stage 2

Summary

Nearly all escalating their complaint to the ECU said it was easy to do, most received a substantive response and said it fully addressed their complaint.

- All 44 escalating a complaint to Stage 2 found the escalation process clearly explained and all but one found it easy to complete.⁴²
- Two thirds (30 of 44) received a substantive Stage 2 response and of these nearly all (28 of 30) were received within the BBC's 20 working day target timeframe.⁴³
- The majority receiving a substantive Stage 2 response felt their complaint was fully addressed (27 of 30), with one saying it had not been addressed at all.
- All 30 who received a substantive response felt the explanation or rationale was clear and easy to understand.
- Of the 30 who received a substantive response, all but one felt the BBC clearly explained to them that they *could* take their complaint further, while two did not think the BBC had provided appropriate information to work out how to do this.

Complaints escalated to Stage 2 are dealt with by the BBC's ECU.⁴⁴ All 44 escalating to Stage 2 felt the complaints process at this stage was clearly explained. Nearly all (43 of 44) found it easy to fill in the web form or know what to include in the letter, and 38 of these found it very easy.

All but 1 of the 44 escalating at Stage 2 was left with a clear understanding of next steps and when they might receive a response.

⁴² N.B. due to the smaller sample sizes for Stage 2, the actual numbers of *complainants* are shown for results in this section.

⁴³ *Complainants* reported no substantive response if one was not received within the timeframe allowed for, which was set as the BBC target response time plus a fixed amount of additional time. More detail is set out in Section 3. Methodology.

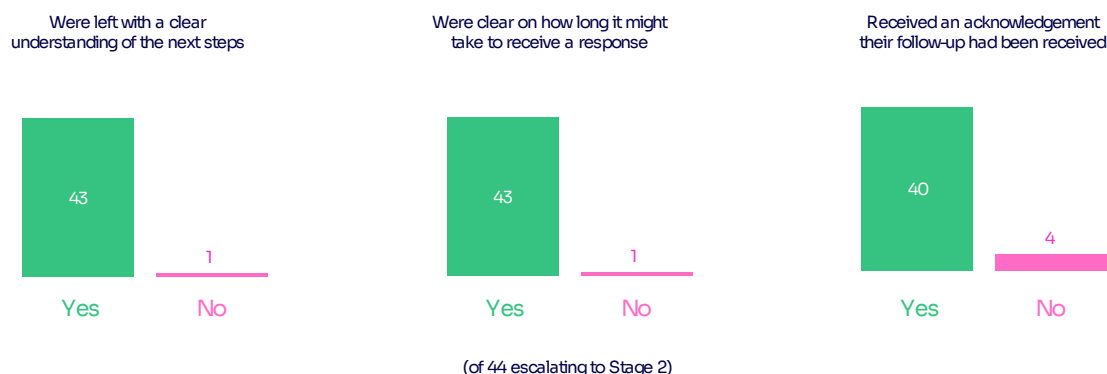
⁴⁴ N.B. as explained above, once a Stage 1b response was received, it was reviewed by Ofcom, who decided whether the complainant should escalate the complaint to Stage 2. Not all complaints were escalated; some were closed on receipt of the stage 1b response. This was for a variety of logistical reasons, as well as to closely "mirror" the behaviours of real BBC complainants. Ofcom provided the text for complainants to use in all escalations.

The complainant who was not clear about the next steps said:

“I followed the URL⁴⁵ from the BBC email, but my internet was interrupted and I had to stop halfway through. When I went back it said I couldn't use the URL twice, even though I didn't put the complaint there the 1st time.”

40 of the 44 received an acknowledgement that the ECU had received their complaint, with the majority getting it on the same day that their complaint was sent.

Figure 13: Understanding of next steps in the Stage 2 process



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q84. Were you left with a clear understanding of the next steps? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All escalating to Stage 2) (n=44)

Q86. Was it clear how long you might have to wait for a response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All escalating to Stage 2) (n=44)

Q87. Did you receive an acknowledgement that your follow up had been received? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All escalating to Stage 2) (n=44)

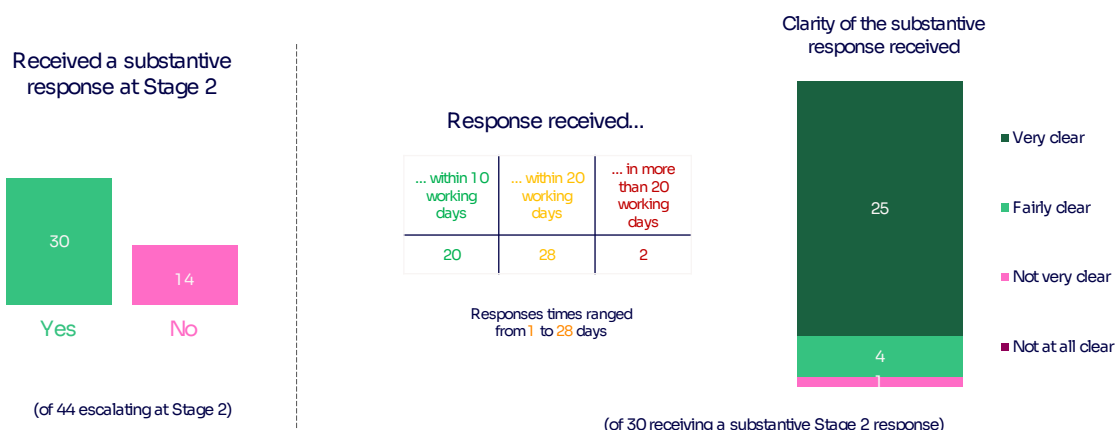
Two thirds (30 of 44) of the Stage 2 escalations received a substantive response, and of these all but two were received within the BBC’s 20 working day target response timeframe for this stage. Some responses were received the day after making the complaint, ranging up to 28 working days after.

All but one (29 of 30) who received a response found it clear, 25 said it was very clear. Just one said it was not very clear, and no one said it was not at all clear. The complainant who said it was not very clear, gave as their reason:

“The wording makes it sound like they have found 'against' the BBC at first but clarifies that they haven't later on.”

⁴⁵ In Stage 1b responses complainants are sent a URL via which they can escalate their complaints to stage 2. The URL is a unique single-use link that once used, will no longer work. Complainants are told they have 20 days to do this.

Figure 14: Substantive response: received, time taken to receive and clarity of response



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q89. Have you received a substantive response? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All escalating to Stage 2) (n=44)

Q90. How many working days did it take to receive a substantive response to your complaint Stage 2 escalation? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 2 response) (n=30)

Q92. How clear was the substantive response Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 2 response) (n=30)

All 30 who received a substantive response to their Stage 2 escalations felt the BBC provided information or clarification of their approach, while 2 of the 30 felt they had apologised.⁴⁶

26 of the 30 thought it was clear which of the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines were considered in relation to their complaint.

And all but one (29 of 30) felt the BBC clearly explained to them that they could take their complaint further, and 2 of the 30 did not think the BBC had provided appropriate information about how to escalate a complaint specifically to Ofcom, if they wanted to. Therefore, the majority of complainants (28 of 30) reported being told they could escalate to Ofcom.

“The ECU said I could contact Ofcom and provided a variety of contact details such as email or telephone to facilitate this.”

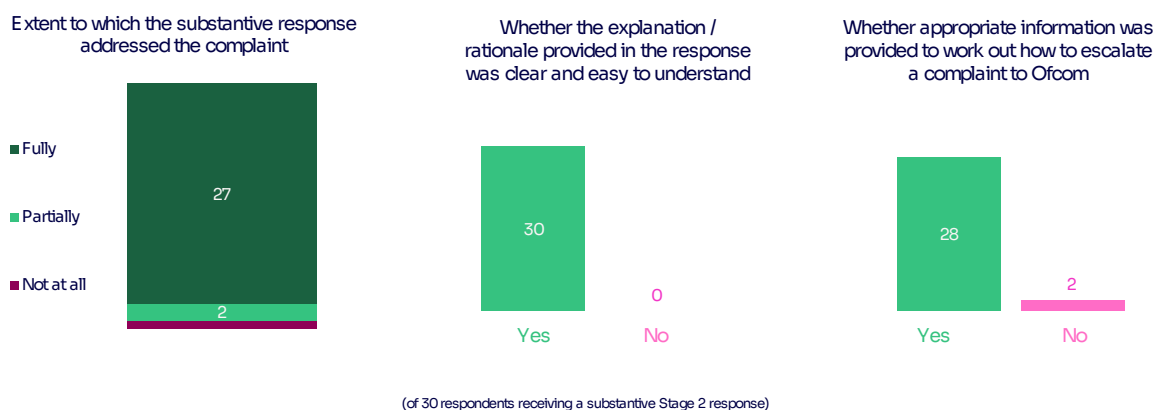
“The response explained there is no further appeal process within the BBC, but I could take it up with Ofcom.”

The majority (27 of 30) who received a substantive Stage 2 response felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage), with one saying it had not been addressed at all.

All 30 who received a substantive response felt the explanation or rationale was clear and easy to understand.

⁴⁶ This research was testing the BBC First complaints process and not the BBC’s decision/outcome on the subject of the complaints. Ofcom did not submit any complaints which, in their view, would be considered breaches of the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines. As complainants were asked to provide the BBC’s decision in their survey, we are reporting on these results to be transparent.

Figure 15: Substantive response: complaint addressed, clarity of explanation and escalation information



Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q96. To what extent do you feel that the response addressed your complaint? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 2 response) (n=30)

Q98. Was the explanation / rationale provided in their response clear and easy to understand? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 2 response) (n=30)

Q103. Did they provide appropriate information for you to work out how to escalate your complaint to Ofcom, if you wanted to? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All receiving a substantive Stage 2 response) (n=30)

At the end of Stage 2, complainants were asked for any comments on this stage of the complaints process. Overall, the responses reflected the positive views of the majority, with some negative views on how long the process had taken. A selection of both positive and negative responses is shown below.

Positive responses:

“The complaint was dealt with well and quickly.”

“I feel the response was thorough and demonstrated that my issue had been looked into fully.”

“I like the fact that the response is set out in a letterhead document rather than just an email response. It gives an air of formality.”

“I felt that this response was concise and detailed. It addressed the individual aspects of my complaint and responded with evidence regarding how the story was tackled by the BBC. I feel this is the reply that should have been given earlier in the process. Overall it has felt like a lot of red tape to get to this conclusion.”

Negative responses:

“I feel that the timeframe could be shorter in receiving a response but appreciate the time taken also shows that my complaint is being looked into.”

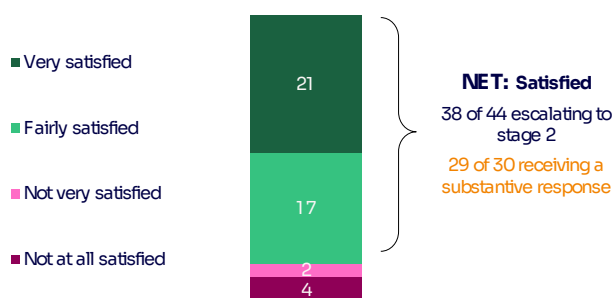
“In the initial automated response, I was informed that they aimed to reply within 20 working days. However, it eventually took 25 working days for them to respond. It would have been better if they had responded on time.”

“At first, I wasn't sure if it submitted the query so I pressed submit again and it came up with an error saying I had already used the link, so I assumed it had been submitted the first time but I did not get any acknowledgement email. Only being able to use the link once seems to be designed to impede people from proceeding and had I been complaining for real this would have made me very unhappy with the whole thing.”

“The link provided in the Stage 1b response email didn't work. I completed the form and submitted it, but the link indicated that it had already been used. However, the BBC provided the email address for the ECU, so I wrote to them instead.”

After taking part in all the stages, 38 of the 44 that had done so were satisfied with the overall complaints process, while among the 30 that received a substantive response, one complainant was not satisfied.

Figure 16: Overall satisfaction with all stages of the complaints process



(of 44 respondents escalating to Stage 2)

Source: BBC First Mystery Shopping 2024

Q105. Taking everything into account across all the stages of your complaint how satisfied are you with how the BBC considered your complaint? Base: Group C and D1/2/3 (All escalating to Stage 2) (n=44)

When asked what might have made the process easier, or how it could have been improved, comments related to the length of the process.

“I feel that the process should reach this level of detail earlier. I think it needs to be streamlined somewhat to get to the sort of conclusion reached today earlier in the process.”

“Being able to reply to email responses rather than having to submit a new request through the website, would improve the process.”

“It is a very lengthy process which, if known, I feel would deter people from following through the whole process, even if they feel strongly, hence potentially limiting well-rounded feedback from the audience.”

8. Welsh-language complaints

The BBC's Complaints Framework states that "if you complain in writing in the Welsh language, you will receive a written reply in Welsh".⁴⁷ Nine complaints were conducted using Welsh-speaking complainants to test the Welsh-language complaint route. All used the online complaints pathway. These complaints are included within the overall sample of complaints at each stage in the main body of the report but have been broken out separately here to provide a view of this complaint path. A summary of the findings of this subset follows.

<p>Stage 1a (9 complaints submitted online)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All making a Welsh-language Stage 1a complaint said the process was clearly explained on the BBC's website. • Nearly all (8 of 9) said it was easy to find out how to make initial contact, and were clear how long it might take to receive a response (8 of 9). • Nearly all (8 of 9) received a substantive response and of these all were received within the BBC's 10 working day target. • Substantive responses were seen as clear (i.e. easy to understand) overall (8 of 8, with 6 of 8 stating very clear). • Three in four (6 of 8) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, but 1 felt it was only partially and 1 not at all addressed. • Three in four (6 of 8) who received a substantive response felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand. • Half (4 of 8) of those who received a substantive response to their complaint did not feel they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint.
<p>Stage 1b (2 of the 9 Welsh-language complaints at Stage 1a were escalated to Stage 1b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both Welsh-language complainants escalating a complaint to Stage 1b: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ felt the complaints process at this stage was clearly explained ○ found it very easy to know how to complete it ○ received a substantive response and received it within the BBC's 20 working day target ○ thought the substantive response was very clear ○ felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage ○ felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand

⁴⁷ BBC Complaints Framework, p11

- felt they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 if they wanted to.

Stage 2

(1 of the 2 Welsh-language complaints at Stage 1b was escalated to Stage 2)

- The Welsh-language complainant escalating to Stage 2:
 - felt the complaints process at this stage was clearly explained
 - found it very easy to know how to complete it
 - however, did not receive a substantive response before fieldwork ended on the 16th of August.

9. Letter complaints

50 letter complaints were conducted to test this complaint route. These complaints are included within the overall sample of complaints at each stage in the main body of the report but have been broken out separately here to provide a view of this complaint path. A summary of the findings of this subset follows.

<p>Stage 1a (50 complaints submitted via letter)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All making a complaint via letter said the process was clearly explained on the BBC's website. • Nearly all (48 of 50) said it was easy to find out how to make initial contact and were clear how long it might take to receive a response (48 of 50). • Four-in-five (40 of 50) received a substantive response and of these around two-in-five (16 of 40) were received within the BBC's 10 working day target. • Substantive responses were seen as clear (i.e. easy to understand) overall (38 of 40, with 35 of 40 stating very clear). • Around three in four (29 of 40) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, while 7 felt it was only partially and 4 not at all addressed. • Nearly all (37 of 40) who received a substantive response felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand. • Around one-in-seven (6 of 40) who received a substantive response to their complaint did not feel they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint.
<p>Stage 1b (9 of the 50 letter complaints at Stage 1a were escalated to Stage 1b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two thirds (6 of 9) letter complainants escalating a complaint to Stage 1b felt the complaints process at this stage was clearly explained. • Nearly all (8 of 9) found it very easy to know how to complete it. • Less than half (4 of 9) received a substantive response and of these, half (2 of 4) received it within the BBC's 20 working day target. • All four who received a substantive response thought it was clear (3 of 4 very clear). • Half (2 of 4) felt their complaint was fully addressed at this stage, while 1 felt it was only partially and 1 not at all addressed. • Three quarters (3 of 4) felt the explanation was clear and easy to understand and felt they had received appropriate information to be able to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 if they wanted to (3 of 4).
<p>Stage 2 None of the nine letter complaints at Stage 1b was escalated to Stage 2.</p>

10. Issues experienced by some complainants

While the results of this study found the complaints process to be working well overall, throughout the course of the research exercise we found a number of divergences from the expected process. As these were unanticipated at the design stage, not all were captured in the questionnaire. These were logged separately and have been summarised below.

Overall, around 10% of complaints encountered an issue or otherwise diverged from what the majority of complainants were finding, and these included the following:

Trying to submit a complaint

- The BBC told one complainant they hadn't provided a genuine name and therefore couldn't respond to the complaint despite a genuine name being provided.
- For a small number of complainants, the BBC asked for more information including the time of broadcast and the programme title when the relevant detail had already been provided. In these cases, Ofcom checked the information and for most asked complainants to re-submit the original information, at which point the BBC would accept the complaint.
- In one case, the BBC referred to the wrong programme in their response.
- One complainant could not submit a complaint about BBC Sounds whilst also selecting the Welsh language option and was repeatedly redirected to the BBC Sounds webpage and asked to start the process again. The complainant found they could only successfully submit their complaint if in English. ⁴⁸

When in the BBC First Complaints process

- We found through the complainants' questionnaires that at Stage 1a, 29% said the response from the BBC did not provide information about how to escalate their complaint if they wanted to, and 12% said the same at Stage 1b. We also found that with the BBC responses that did not provide this information, there was also a lack of clear labelling, for example, the BBC did not provide information about which stage of the process the complaint was at, e.g. 'This is our Stage 1a/b response...'. In some cases, the BBC provided two 1a responses and labelled it as such whilst including the text 'consider this our first 1a response'.
- Additionally, there was also evidence of unclear labelling about what the BBC considered a 'complaint' and what it considered a 'comment'. For example, a number of responses acknowledged that the complainants 'feedback' had been received but didn't address the complaint in any way, or explain where the shopper was in the complaints system. This caused complications and a lack of clarity in the escalation process and meant that if the complainant attempted to escalate the

⁴⁸ After the close of fieldwork this complaint route was tested again and the issue appears to have since been rectified. At the time of writing it is now possible to submit a BBC Sounds complaint in Welsh.

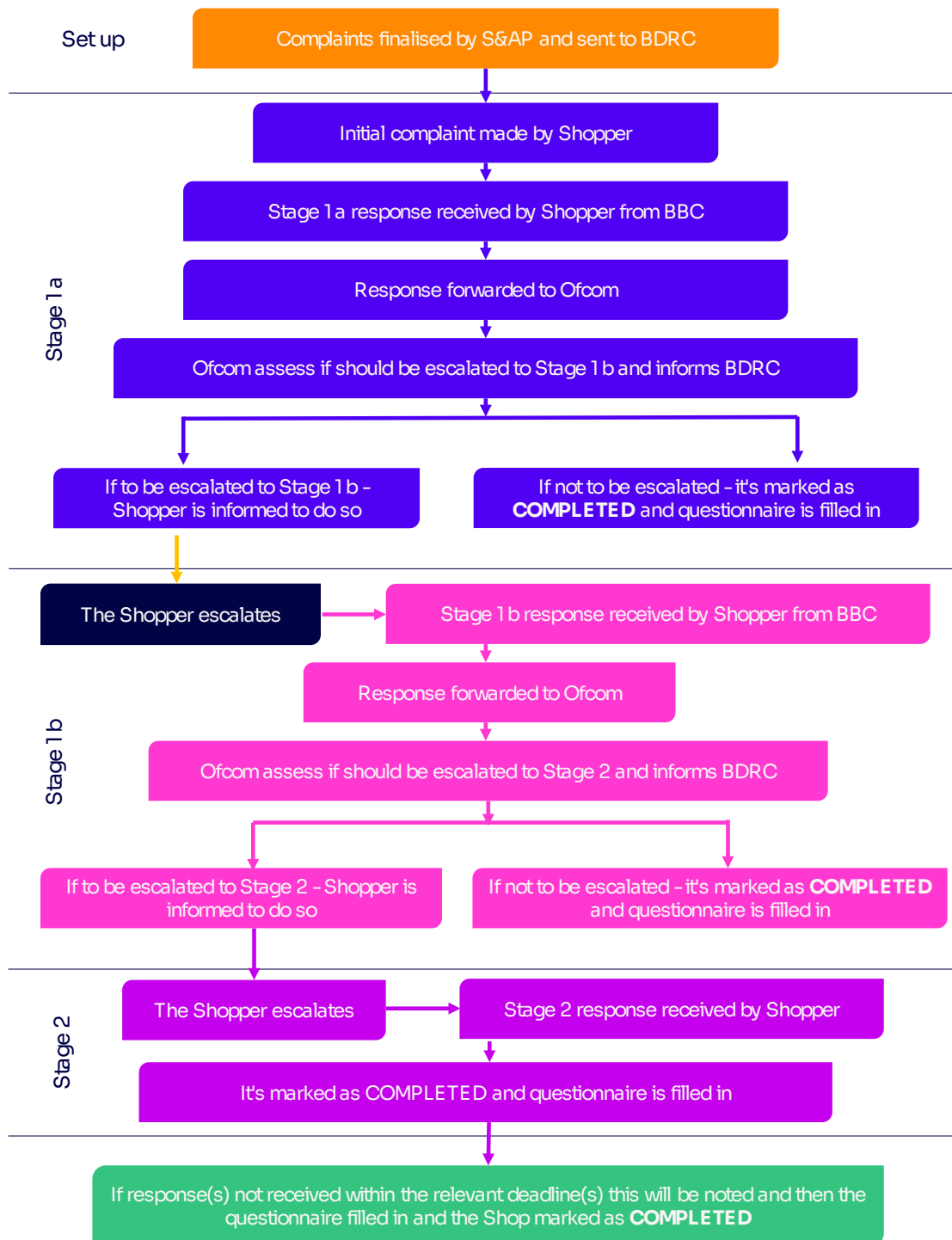
complaint, the second response they received was labelled as 1a response by the BBC, rather than the expected 1b.

- On one occasion, an identical complaint was submitted to the BBC twice. This was as a result of a system error, but one received a detailed response, the other a response which appeared to show the BBC treating it as a comment.
- In a couple of cases, the BBC declined to respond to an escalation stating it hadn't been submitted in time, despite it being escalated by the complainant within the required timeframe. When this was pointed out to the BBC, a 1b response was provided.

Appendix A – Research process

The mystery shopping exercise followed the process detailed in the diagram below.

Figure 17. Mystery shopping process



Appendix B – Substantive response examples

Example of a Stage 1a substantive response

BBC Complaints <bbc_complaints_website@contact.bbc.co.uk>
[Redacted]

Reference [Redacted]

Dear [Redacted]

Thank you for contacting us about BBC One's 'The One Show' broadcast 8 March.

We note your concerns about a comment made by Prue Leith.

We appreciate your comments and please be assured it is never our intention to offend or upset any of our audience and we are naturally sorry when any of our viewers feel that this has been the case.

We know viewers opinions on language can vary and what is acceptable to come will not be for others, however Prue did apologise but we appreciate you found it to be inappropriate.

We very much value your feedback. Complaints are sent to senior management and we've included your points in our overnight reports. These reports are among the most widely read sources of feedback in the BBC. This ensures that your concerns have been seen by the right people quickly, and helps to inform decisions about current and future content.

This is our response at Stage 1a of the BBC's complaints process. If you're dissatisfied with this reply, a follow-up complaint may be considered at Stage 1b. You must submit a follow-up within 20 working days through the BBC Complaints webform. If you do decide to contact us again, please include your case number, and explain why you feel your complaint has not been addressed. We will then review your complaint.

Kind regards

[Redacted]

BBC Complaints Team
www.bbc.co.uk/complaints

Please note: this email is sent from an unmonitored address so please don't reply. If necessary please contact us through our webform (please include your case reference number).

Example of a Stage 1b substantive response

BBC Complaints

BBC Complaints - Case Number - [REDACTED]

To: [REDACTED]

Reference [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for getting back in touch with us about Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg. We're sorry to hear you remain unhappy with our responses so far.

Each week Laura will speak to politicians from various political parties and will ensure that all of her guests are appropriately challenged. She will also seek answers for our audience, as was the case in her interview with Oliver Dowden when questioning him about whether he thought Lee Anderson's remarks were Islamophobic, for example.

We're confident that this edition of the programme was presented with due impartiality, but appreciate you may continue to feel differently.

We'd like to thank you once again for contacting us and rest assured your complaint has been shared directly with the editor at Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg.

This now concludes Stage 1 of our complaints process. That means we can't correspond with you further here. If you remain unhappy, you can now contact the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU). The ECU is Stage 2 of the BBC's complaints process. You'll need to explain why you think there's a potential breach of standards, or if the issue is significant and should still be investigated. Please do so within 20 working days of this reply.

Full details of how we handle complaints are available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/handle-complaint/>.

How to contact the ECU:

We've provided a unique link for you in this email. This will open up further information about how to submit your complaint. You'll be asked for the case reference number we've provided in this reply. Once you've used the link and submitted your complaint, the link will no longer work.

This is your link to contact the ECU if you wish:

[Click Here](#)

Kind regards

BBC Complaints Team
www.bbc.co.uk/complaints

NB You cannot reply to this email address. This is sent from an outgoing account only which is not monitored.

Example of a Stage 2 substantive response



Executive Complaints Unit
Room 4057, 4th Floor, Zone E
British Broadcasting Corporation
Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

Email: [Redacted]

Ref: [Redacted]

Dear [Redacted]

The News Quiz, Radio 4, 9 February 2024.

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the Executive Complaints Unit's investigation into your complaint about the above edition of **The News Quiz**. In your previous correspondence you said it was irresponsible for one of the guests, Diona Doherty, to make a joke about climate change and objected to the "trivialisation of such a serious issue on the BBC". In your complaint to this Unit you said "Jokes like Diona's only fuel the spread of misinformation on the matter".

I should begin by explaining the remit of this Unit is to investigate your complaint and decide if the programme you complained about met the BBC's editorial standards and values. These are set out in its [Editorial Guidelines](#). The section of the guidelines most relevant to your complaint would appear to be the one on Harm and Offence. This says when a BBC programme "includes challenging material that risks offending some of our audience we must be able to demonstrate a clear editorial purpose taking account of generally accepted standards, and ensure it is justified by the context". The term "generally accepted standards" means taking account of the content and the context in which it appears, as well as any editorial justification. I have therefore considered whether the joke which prompted your complaint went beyond what listeners to this programme would regard as generally acceptable.

The News Quiz is a long-running comedy show where contributors talk about topical issues in a way which is intended to be witty and entertaining. Regular listeners expect the panellists to take an irreverent and humorous approach to stories in the news. As with comedy in general, there is no subject which is automatically off limits and I think it is reasonable to assume those listening to the programme understand this.

In this case, the panellists were talking about the Labour Party's decision to roll back on its pledge to make £28 billion per year of additional capital expenditure available to meet the country's Net Zero target. Zoe Lyons began by saying "They've done it so clumsily and it's so much smoke being blown up people's bums and now the whole things gone up in flames that it's actually caused more environmental damage than it was going to solve in the first place". Diona Doherty continued "To be fair, right, yes climate change is bad and global warming's bad and all, but nobody likes it when it's freezing, do you know what I mean? Maybe Labour is trying to do us a favour and just give us sort of nicer summers so we don't have to go abroad, and they're getting absolutely no thanks for it".

I think it is clear the comment was intended to be funny and was entirely in keeping with the style and tone of the programme. I appreciate you think "joking about climate change is irresponsible" but I don't agree a satirical comment in a comedy show would, as you have suggested, "fuel the spread of misinformation" on climate change.

I hope I have been able to explain why I do not believe there are grounds for me to uphold your complaint. There is no further right of appeal against this decision within the BBC's complaints process but if you do wish to take the matter further, it is open to you to ask the broadcasting regulator, Ofcom, to consider your complaint. You can find details of how to contact Ofcom and the procedures it will apply at the following website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/how-to-report-a-complaint>. You can also write to Ofcom at Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA, or telephone either 0300 123 3333 or 020 7981 3040.

Yours sincerely



Complaints Director

Appendix C – Questionnaire

QA COMPLAINT METHOD CODED AUTOCODED IN SURVEY BASED ON SCENARIO.

Code	Complaint Method
A (D2)	By calling and speaking to someone via the BBC website (after speaking to someone)
B (D3)	By calling and leaving a message Via the BBC website (in addition to leaving a message)
T	Textphone
C	By writing to the BBC
D1	Via the BBC website (their first point of contact)

[ASK ALL]

Q1a. When you went onto the BBC website to find how to contact the BBC to make a complaint did you watch the short film on how the BBC responds to your feedback?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL THAT SAW THE SHORT FILM]

Q1b. Did the short film clearly explain the BBC First complaints process?

Yes
No

[ASK THOSE THAT SAID NO AT Q1b.]

Q1c. Why didn't it clearly explain the process?

[TYPE IN]

Initial call

TO BE ASKED OF GROUPS A AND B

Making the initial complaint on the telephone

[ASK TO GROUPS A AND B]

Q2. Date of call

Day: Month: Year

[ASK TO GROUPS A AND B]

Q3. Time of call

Hour: Minute

[ASK TO GROUPS A AND B]

Q4. How easy was it to locate the phone number to call?

Very easy
Quite easy
Quite difficult
Very difficult

[ASK THOSE THAT SAID QUITE DIFFICULT, VERY DIFFICULT AT Q4]

Q5. Did you have to speak to the Field Exec to help locate the telephone number?

Yes
No

[ASK TO GROUP A]

Q6. Was your call answered?

Yes
No

[ASK IF CALL WAS ANSWERED - YES AT Q6]

Q7. Did you speak to a real person or leave a recorded message?

Spoke to a real person
Left a recorded message

[ASK TO GROUP B]

Q8. Were you able to leave an automated / recorded message?

Yes
No

[ASK GROUP B – NO AT Q8]

Q9. Why were you unable to leave an automated / recorded message?

[TYPE IN]

[IF YES AT Q6, CALL WAS ANSWERED]

Q10. How long did it take to get through on the phone?

(Shopper guidance: Record how long you had to wait from when the call was first connected before speaking to the main telephone operator / getting through to the recorded message)

MM:SS

Initial call - Recorded message experience

[ASK GROUP B]

Q11. Was it clear how to leave the message?

Yes
No

[ASK GROUP B]

Q12. Was it clear what you needed to say (i.e. what information you needed to provide)?

Yes
No

[ASK GROUP B]

Q13. Was it clear what would happen with your complaint after you left the message?

Yes
No

Telephone operative experience

[ASK GROUP A]

Q14. How long were you on the call, from when the call was connected?

MM:SS

[ASK GROUP A]

Q15. How well did the main person you were speaking to handle the call?

Very well
Fairly well
Not very well
Not at all well

[ASK GROUP A]

Q16. Were you treated with courtesy and respect by the call handler?

Yes
No

[ASK IF SAID NO AT Q16– LIKELY NOT TO CODE THIS OE]

Q17. Why did you feel you were not treated with courtesy and respect by the call handler?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK GROUP A]

Q18. How clear was the call handler's response? (i.e. was it easy to understand?)

Very clear
Fairly clear
Not very clear
Not at all clear

[IF NOT VERY CLEAR / NOT AT ALL CLEAR AT Q18]

Q19. Why was it not clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK GROUP A AND B]

Q20. Were you left with a clear understanding of what would happen as a result of your call?

Yes
No

[ASK GROUP A AND B]

Q21. Were you aware that to receive a more formal, written response you would have to submit a complaint in writing either online or by letter?

Yes
No

[ASK GROUP A AND B]

Q22. Were you told how to do this/where to go to submit a written response?

Yes
No

[ASK GROUP A]

Q23. Did they check with you that you are able to do this (i.e. that you have access to a computer/no reason that would restrict you from being able to do this)?

Yes
No

Qualitative assessment

[ASK BOTH GROUP A AND B – POTENTIALLY UNCODED]

Q24. How were you left feeling at the end of the call?

[TYPE IN]

Stage 1a

ASKED TO ALL GROUPS

Making the complaint using a web form or letter

[ASK ALL]

Q25. Date that complaint was submitted.

Day: Month: Year

[ASK ALL]

Q26. Was the complaints process clearly explained on the website - i.e. was it clear what you would need to do and how the process would work?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL SAYING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS WASN'T CLEARLY EXPLAINED – NO AT Q26]

Q27. Why do you say the complaints process wasn't clearly explained?

TYPE IN

[ASK ALL]

Q28. How easy was it to find out how to make initial contact with the BBC in writing - i.e. where the web form was located / the address to write to?

Very easy
Quite easy
Quite difficult
Very difficult

[ASK THOSE THAT SAID QUITE DIFFICULT, VERY DIFFICULT AT Q28]

Q29. Did you have to speak to the Field Exec to help locate the web form/letter?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE]

Q30. Did you receive an email with a link you had to click on to verify it was you making a complaint?

Yes
No

[IF YES, RECEIVED A VERIFICATION EMAIL - YES AT Q30]

Q31. Did the verification email work?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE]

Q32. Was the verification email easy to understand?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE]

Q33. How long did it take you to make the complaint (i.e. fill out the form online)?

MM:SS

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE]

Q34. How easy was it from the information provided on the website to know how to fill out the web form / know what to include in the letter?

Very easy
Quite easy
Quite difficult
Very difficult

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE]

Q35. After submitting your complaint were you left with a clear understanding of the next steps (i.e. that you would need to verify your email address via an email that would be sent to you, and then the complaint would be reviewed by the BBC before sending you a response)?

Yes
No

[ASK IF NO AT Q35]

Q36. Why wasn't it clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE / WRITING A LETTER]

Q37. Was it clear how long you might have to wait for a response to your complaint?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE]

Q38. After verifying your email did you receive an automated acknowledgement that your complaint had been received?

Yes
No

The response

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE / WRITING A LETTER]

Q39. Have you received a **substantive** response?

Please note, a substantive response is one that addresses your complaint and the programme you complained about, rather than one that just acknowledges receipt of the complaint and says when a substantive response can be expected.

Yes
No – was just an automated response that acknowledged receipt of complaint.

[IF YES AT Q39 – HAVE RECEIVED A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE]

Q40. Type in # of working days since complaint was submitted.

[TYPE IN NUMBER]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE AT Q39]

Q41. Upload a photo of the substantive response.

Remove all personally identifiable data before doing so - e.g. name, job title, email address, phone number, etc.

Please upload here

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE AT Q39]

Q42. How clear was the substantive response (i.e. was it easy to understand?)

Very clear
Fairly clear
Not very clear
Not at all clear

[IF NOT VERY CLEAR / NOT AT ALL CLEAR AT Q42]

Q43. Why wasn't it clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE AT Q39]

Q44. What was the outcome of the substantive response?

MULTI-CODE

The BBC provided information and/or clarification on their approach
The BBC agreed they were at fault
The BBC said they would change the way they would do something
The BBC issued an apology
The BBC said they would publish a correction or clarification
Other (please specify)

[ASK ALL COMPLAINING ONLINE / WRITING A LETTER]

Q45. Were you given a reference number for your written complaint?

Yes
No

Qualitative assessment

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE]

Q46. To what extent do you feel that the response addressed your complaint?

Fully
Partially
Not at all

[ASK PARTIALLY / NOT AT ALL AT Q46]

Q47. You said your complaint was [partially/not at all] addressed, why?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE AT Q39]

Q48. Was the explanation / rationale provided in their response clear and easy to understand?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL NO AT Q48]

Q49. Why do you say that?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL SUBMITTING A WRITTEN RESPONSE]

Q50. Did they provide appropriate information for you to work out how to escalate your complaint, if you wanted to?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL SUBMITTING A WRITTEN RESPONSE]

Q51. Do you have any other comments to make about this stage of the complaints process?

Stage 1b

TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 1B

Making the complaint in writing (via website or letter).

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 1B]

Q52. How did you follow up on the response you received?

Online using the web form and reference number provided in the BBC's original response
Letter

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 1B]

Q53. Date that follow-up was submitted?

Day:Month:Year

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 1B]

Q54. Was the complaints process clearly explained - i.e. that you had to write back to BBC Audience Services and how to do so?

Yes
No

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 1B]

Q55. How easy was it to know how to fill in the web form/know what to include in the letter?

(Shopper guidance: please answer based on the method you used, i.e. web form or letter)

Very easy
Quite easy
Quite difficult
Very difficult

[IF SAID VERY/QUITE DIFFICULT AT Q55]

Q56. Did you have to speak to the Field Exec to help you find out how to go about this?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL STAGE 1b]

Q57. How easy was it to know where to find your case reference number?

Very easy
Quite easy
Quite difficult
Very difficult

[ASK ALL STAGE 1b]

Q58. How long did it take you to make the follow up complaint (i.e. fill out the form, write the letter)?

MM:SS

[ASK ALL STAGE 1b]

Q59. Were you left with a clear understanding of the next steps?

Yes
No

[IF NO AT Q59]

Q60. Why weren't you left with a clear understanding of the next steps?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL STAGE 1b]

Q61. Was it clear how long you might have to wait for a response?

Yes
No

[ASK IF SUBMITTED STAGE 1b FOLLOW UP ONLINE]

Q62. Did you receive an automated acknowledgement that your follow up had been received?

Yes
No

The response

[ASK ALL AT STAGE 1b]

Q63. Have you received a **substantive** response?

Please note, a substantive response is one that addresses your complaint and the programme you complained about, rather than one that just acknowledges receipt of the complaint and says when a substantive response can be expected.

Yes
No – was just an automated response

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q64. Type in # of workings days since complaint was submitted.

[TYPE IN NUMBER]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q65. Upload a photo of the substantive response.

Please upload here

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q66. How clear was the substantive response? (i.e. was it easy to understand?)

Very clear
Fairly clear
Not very clear
Not at all clear

[IF NOT VERY CLEAR / NOT AT ALL CLEAR AT Q66]

Q67. Why wasn't it clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q68. What was the outcome of the substantive response?

The BBC provided information and/or clarification on their approach
The BBC agreed they were at fault
The BBC said they would change the way they would do something
The BBC issued an apology
The BBC said they would publish a correction or clarification
Other (please specify)

Qualitative assessment

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q69. To what extent do you feel that the response addressed your follow up complaint?

Fully
Partially
Not at all

[ASK PARTIALLY / NOT AT ALL TO Q69]

Q70. Why do you say that?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q71. Was the explanation /rationale provided for their decision clear and easy to understand?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL NO AT Q71]

Q72. Why do you say that?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q73. Did this response provide you with new information about how they had reached their decision over and above their initial responses?

Yes

No

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q74. Was there appropriate information for you to work out how to escalate your complaint, if you wanted to?

Yes

No

[ASK ALL STAGE 1b]

Q75. The BBC is funded by a “universal licence fee” and must provide a range of services for its wide range of audiences.

The BBC also aims to provide a simple, clear and proportionate complaints system, which offers value for money.

Based on your experience of going through the complaint process so far, do you feel the response you have received is proportionate (i.e. is **a good use of BBC’s resources and provides value for money**)?

Yes

No

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE - YES AT Q63]

Q76. Do you have any other comments to make about this stage of the complaints process?

[TYPE IN]

Stage 2

TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2

Making the complaint to the Executive Complaints Unit

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q77. How did you follow up the complaint?

URL (a web link in the email they sent you)
Letter

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q78. Date that the Stage 2 follow-up was submitted?

Day:Month:Year

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q79. Was the Stage 2 complaints process clearly explained - i.e. that you had to get in touch with the Executive Complaints Unit and how to do so?

Yes
No

[ALL SHOPPERS SAYING NO AT Q79]

Q80. Why wasn't it clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q81. How easy was it to know how to fill in the web form/know what to include in the letter?

(Shopper guidance: please answer based on the method you used, i.e. web form or letter)

Very easy
Quite easy
Quite difficult
Very difficult

[IF SAID QUITE / VERY DIFFICULT AT Q81]

Q82. Did you have to speak to the Field Exec to help you find out how to go about this?

Yes
No

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q83. How long did it take you to make the follow up complaint (i.e. fill out the form, write the letter)

MM:SS

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q84. Were you left with a clear understanding of the next steps?

Yes
No

[ASK IF NO AT Q84]

Q85. Why wasn't it clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q86. Was it clear how long you might have to wait for a response?

Yes
No

The response

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q87. Did you receive an acknowledgement that your follow up had been received?

Yes
No

[IF YES AT Q87]

Q88. How many working days did it take to receive a response to acknowledge the Executive Complaint Unit's receipt of your complaint?

Type in (# of working days since complaint was submitted)

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q89. Have you received a **substantive** response to your Stage 2 escalation?

Please note, a substantive response is one that addresses your complaint and the programme you complained about, rather than one that just acknowledges receipt of the complaint and says when a substantive response can be expected.

Yes
No – was just an automated response.

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q90. How many workings days did it take to receive a substantive response to your complaint Stage 2 escalation?

Type in (# of working days since complaint was submitted)

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q91. Upload a photo of the substantive response.

Please upload here

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q92. How clear was their substantive response (i.e. was it easy to understand)?

Very clear
Fairly clear
Not very clear
Not at all clear

[IF NOT VERY CLEAR / NOT AT ALL CLEAR AT Q92]

Q93. Why wasn't it clear?

[TYPE IN]

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q94. What was the outcome of the substantive response?

[MULTI-CODE]

The BBC provided information and/or clarification on their approach
The BBC agreed they were at fault
Agree the BBC's Editorial Standards were breached
The BBC said they would change the way they would do something
The BBC issued an apology
The BBC said they would publish a correction or clarification
Other (please specify)

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q95. What was the Executive Complaints Unit's decision?

Not upheld
Partially upheld
Resolved
Upheld

Qualitative assessment

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q96. To what extent do you feel that the response addressed your follow up complaint?

Fully
Partially
Not at all

[ASK PARTIALLY / NOT AT ALL TO Q96]

Q97. Why do you say that?

Type in

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q98. Was the explanation/rationale provided for their decision clear and easy to understand?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL NO AT Q98]

Q99. Why do you say that?

Type in

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q100. Were they clear as to which of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines they had considered in relation to your complaint?

Yes
No

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q101. Did they clearly explain whether you could take it further if you were not happy with their response?

Yes
No

[IF YES AT Q101]

Q102. What did they say?

TYPE IN

[ASK ALL RECEIVING A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE – YES AT Q89]

Q103. Did they provide appropriate information for you to know how to escalate your complaint to Ofcom, if you wanted to?

Yes
No

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q104. Do you have any other comments to make about this stage of the complaints process?

[TYPE IN]

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q105. Taking everything into account across all the stages of your complaint, how satisfied are you with how the BBC considered your complaint?

Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Not very satisfied
Not at all satisfied

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q106. What might have made the process easier? How could it have been improved?

[Type in]

[ALL SHOPPERS ESCALATING TO STAGE 2]

Q107. The BBC is funded by a “universal licence fee” and must provide a range of services for its wide range of audiences.

The BBC also aims to provide a simple, clear and proportionate complaints system, which offers value for money.

Based on your experience of going through the complaint process during this Mystery Shop, do you feel the response you have received is proportionate (i.e. is **a good use of BBC’s resources and provides value for money**)?

Yes
No

END