



Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2018-19 Q2 Statistical Release

Publication date: 10 January 2019

Next publication date: 4 April 2019

Background

This release contains information on **complaints made by passengers regarding rail services in Great Britain** with the latest quarterly data referring to July, August and September 2018.

This release contains information on:

- Complaints rate per 100,000 journeys, including for each train operating company;
- Complaint categories;
- Response time to complaints;
- Complainant contact method;
- Calls to National Rail Enquiries;
- Appeals made to passenger watchdogs.

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There were 33 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q2 for franchised operators, an increase of 16% compared to the same quarter last year.

Punctuality/reliability of rail services remains the largest category of passenger complaint, although the increased number of complaints in this quarter can be attributed to more complaints regarding train quality.

Top complaint categories, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q2

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change to 2017-18 Q2
 Punctuality/reliability	23%	0.7
 Facilities on board	9%	0.3
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	8%	2.0
 Ticketing & refunds policy	6%	-0.1
 Upkeep and repair of the train	5%	2.8



Nationally 92.6% of complaints were closed within 20 working days in 2018-19 Q2. A total of 16 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.



There were 1,743 appeals closed by passenger watchdogs in 2018-19 Q2, an increase of 23% compared to the same quarter last year. Punctuality/reliability remains the largest category for appeals.

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Website: <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/statistical-releases>

1. Rail complaints

2018-19 Q2

A **complaint** in the rail industry is any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer or potential customer about service delivery or about company or industry policy. All the complaints data contained within this release are sourced directly from the train operating companies.

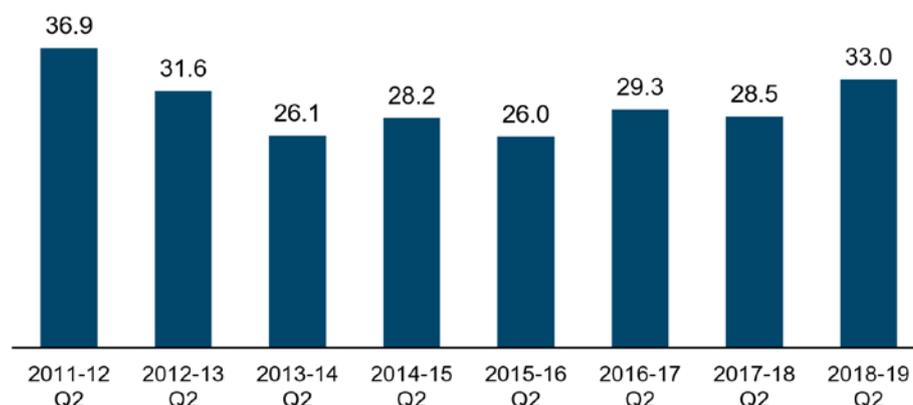
Complaints rate: the volume of complaint correspondence closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. This helps to standardise comparisons between operators.

Social media comments are excluded from these statistics. The number of complaints received via such sources, the definition of a 'complaint' and the resources that each train operator allocates to these social platforms vary significantly, and therefore they are excluded from the published figures.

For information on the quality of these statistics, please see the [quality report](#).

- There were **33.0 complaints per 100,000 journeys for franchised operators in 2018-19 Q2**, compared to 28.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q2. This represents a 16.1% increase.
- The complaints rate for **franchised operators** in 2018-19 Q2 is the highest Q2 complaints rate since 2011-12 Q2.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators only), Great Britain, 2011-12 Q2 to 2018-19 Q2 ([Table 14.8](#))



- There were 98.0 complaints per 100,000 journeys for **non-franchised operators** in 2018-19 Q2, a 47.3% increase compared to the same quarter last year. If these non-franchised operators are included, the national complaints rate in 2018-19 Q2 is 33.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys.

Long-term trend

There has been a long-term decline in the complaints rate since the time series began in 1998-99. In 2017-18, there were 29.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys, which was a 76% decrease compared to the complaints rate in 1998-99.

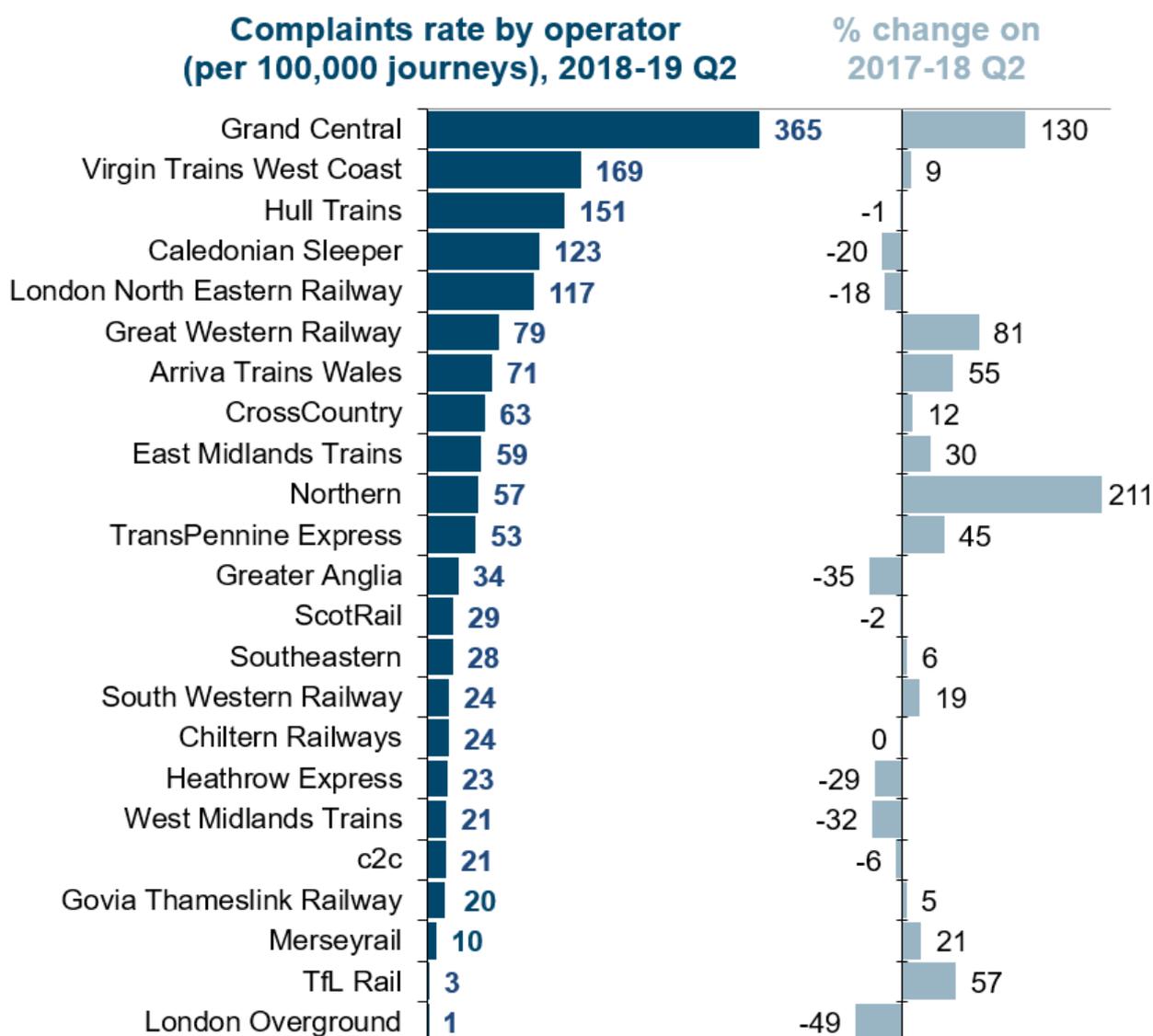
For further information on the reasons behind this long-term trend, please see the [2017-18 Q4 release](#).

Complaints rate by train operating company

2018-19 Q2

- Overall, 13 train operators had a higher complaints rate in 2018-19 Q2 than the same quarter last year, and 10 operators had a lower complaints rate than Q2 last year.
- Grand Central had the highest complaints rate in 2018-19 Q2 with 365 complaints per 100,000 journeys.
- Northern has seen the largest percentage increase in their complaints rate compared to 2017-18 Q2, increasing from 18 complaints per 100,000 journeys to 57 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q2.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q2 ([Table 14.9](#))



Complaints by category

2018-19 Q2

- Punctuality/reliability of rail services was the most common cause to complain. Overall, 23.1% of complaints nationally in 2018-19 Q2 were about punctuality/reliability, a 0.7 percentage point increase compared to Q2 last year.
- Upkeep and repair of the train has seen the largest percentage point increase of any complaints category, increasing to 4.7% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q2 compared to 1.9% in Q2 last year.

Complaint by category: The type of complaint received, where each complaint category within the correspondence should be recorded. For example, a letter covering two complaints is counted as two complaints categories. However, this would only be recorded as one complaint correspondence within the complaints rate.

There are 71 detailed categories, mainly based on National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) satisfaction categories, which make up 14 high level complaint categories.

Top 5 complaint categories (%), Great Britain, 2018-19 Q2 [\(Table 14.3\)](#)



During 2018-19 Q1, the percentage of complaints regarding timetabling (4.8% of all complaints) had seen a large increase compared to the previous year. The latest figures for 2018-19 Q2 have seen a decline in the proportion of timetabling complaints to 2.5%, although it is still 2.0 percentage points higher than the previous year. A high proportion of these timetabling complaints are because of the implementation of the May 2018 timetable changes.

- The percentage of complaints attributed to train quality, such as the upkeep/repair of the train and sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand, increased by 5.1 percentage points from last year to 24.0% in 2018-19 Q2. This could be due an increase in complaints related to the temperature of the train and air conditioning in the hotter than usual summer during July and August 2018.
- The percentage of complaints attributed to fares and retailing, such as the use of ticket buying facilities and online ticket sales, decreased by 8.5 percentage points from last year to 10.6% in 2018-19 Q2.

Top 3 increases in complaints category in 2018-19 Q2 compared with the same quarter in the previous year, Great Britain ([Table 14.3](#))

	pp change from 2017-18 Q2	2018-19 Q2 percentage of all complaints
 Upkeep and repair of the train	 2.8	4.7%
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	 2.0	8.2%
 Timetabling	 2.0	2.5%

Top 3 decreases in complaints category in 2018-19 Q2 compared with the same quarter in the previous year ([Table 14.3](#))

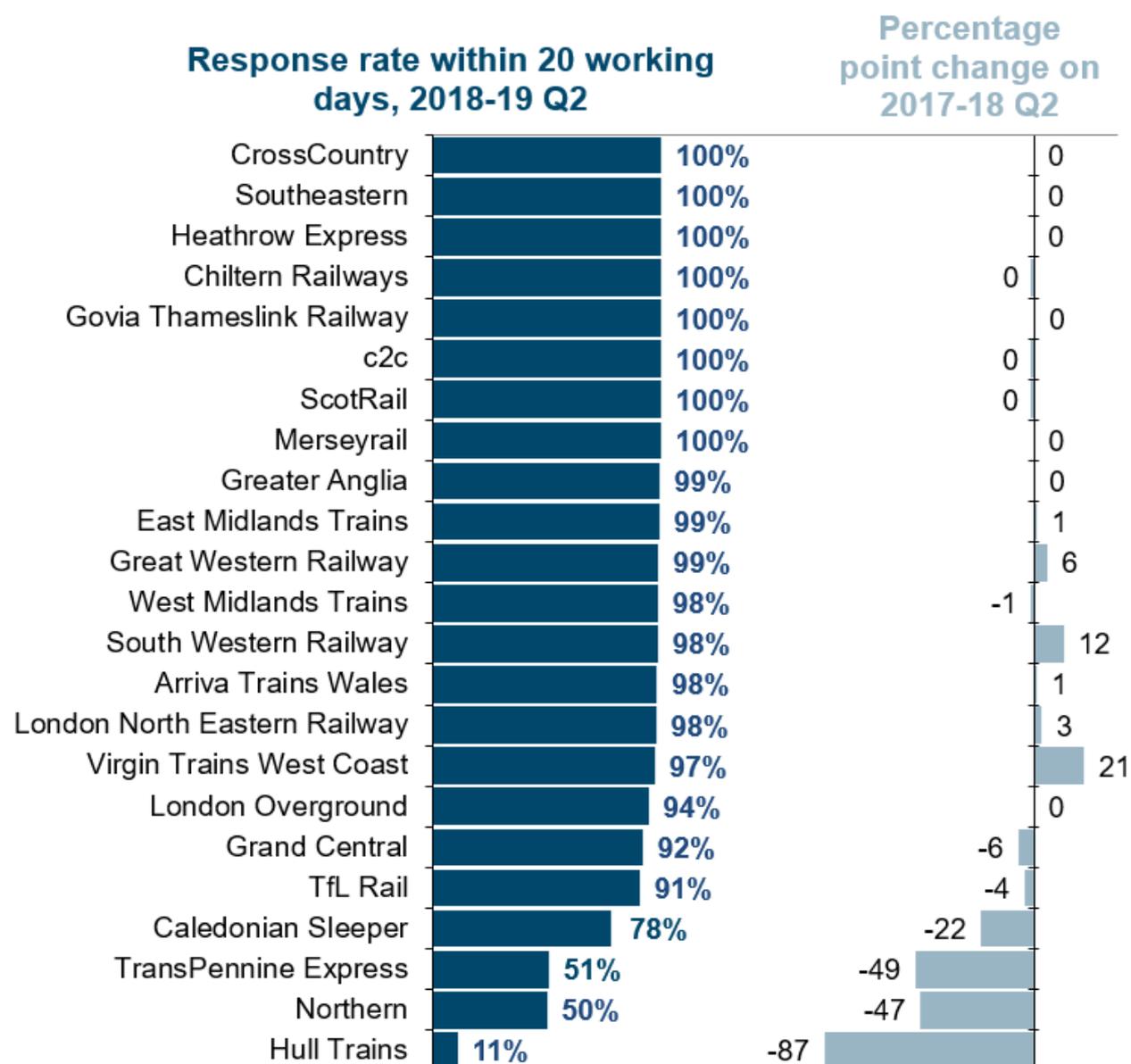
	pp change from 2017-18 Q2	2018-19 Q2 percentage of all complaints
 Ticket buying facilities	 3.9	3.6%
 Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	 2.5	4.0%
 Smartcards	 1.8	2.4%

Complaints answered within 20 working days

2018-19 Q2

- Nationally 92.6% of complaints were closed within 20 working days in 2018-19 Q2. This is 1.8 percentage points lower than the same quarter last year.
- In 2018-19 Q2, 16 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.
- Hull Trains, Northern and TransPennine Express have seen the largest decreases in their complaints response rates during 2018-19 Q2 compared to the same quarter last year.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q2 ([Table 14.2](#))



Key changes for selected operators during 2018-19 Q2

The highest complaints rate was for **Grand Central** at 365 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q2. This is an increase from 158 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q2. A reason for this increase is the higher number of complaints regarding the upkeep and repair of the train, which was the category for 38.9% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q2 compared to 17.1% in the previous year. This category included complaints regarding the temperature of the train and air conditioning, with the weather in 2018-19 Q2 being hotter than usual being a possible reason for this increase.

The largest increase in complaints rate was for **Northern** which increased to 57 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q2 from 18 complaints per 100,000 journeys during the same quarter the previous year. Complaints regarding punctuality/reliability of services were the largest increase in complaints and accounted for 41.9% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q2 compared to 28.7% in the same quarter the previous year. Northern has also seen a large decrease in the percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days, declining by 47 percentage points from the previous year to 49.9% in 2018-19 Q2. This may have been affected by the increased volume of complaints during this quarter following the May timetable implementation during the previous quarter.

The third largest increase in complaints rate behind Northern and Grand Central was **Great Western Railway**, which increased to 79 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q2 from 43 complaints per 100,000 journeys during the same quarter the previous year. Similar to Grand Central, a reason for this increase is due to the increased volume of complaints regarding the quality on the train including the upkeep and repair of the train (9.2% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q2 compared to 2.1% in the previous year).

Hull Trains has seen a significant decline in the percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days, with a response rate of 10.7% in 2018-19 Q2 compared to 98.0% in 2017-18 Q2, an 87 percentage point decrease.

TransPennine Express has also seen a decline in the percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days, with a response rate of 50.7% in 2018-19 Q2 compared to 100% in 2017-18 Q2. This has likely to be due to the larger volume of complaints received during this quarter following the May timetable changes.

There were three train operators which increased their response rate within 20 working days since Q2 last year, and in 2018-19 Q2 met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days. These train operators are **Virgin Trains West Coast** (up 21 percentage points from the same quarter last year), **South Western Railway** (up 12 percentage points), and **Great Western Railway** (up 6 percentage points).

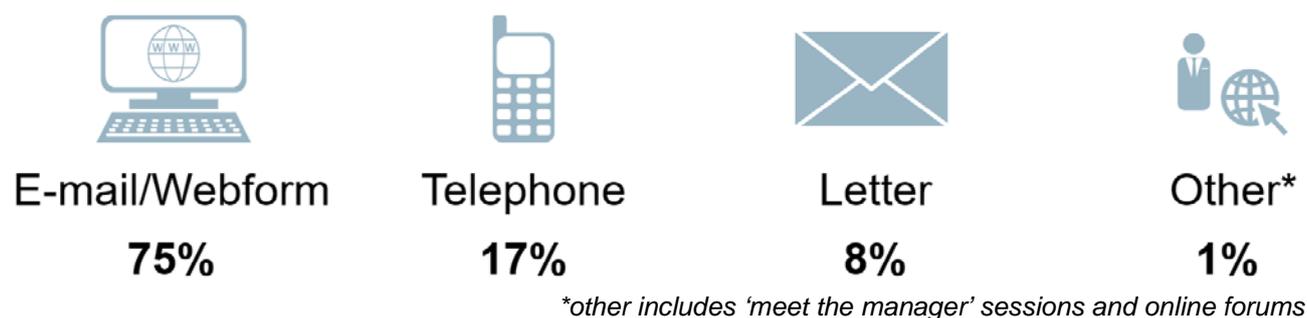
Complaints by contact method

2018-19 Q2

ORR are proposing to publish data tables on contact method & NRE annually instead of quarterly from 2019-20. See [Annex 1](#) for more details.

- Nationally 74.9% of all complaints during 2018-19 Q2 were made by email or webform, a 6.6 percentage point increase from Q2 in the previous year. This continues the long-term trend of the increasing use of online contact methods to complain to train operators.

Percentage of complaints by contact method, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q2 ([Table 14.6](#))



National Rail Enquiries telephone service

Enquiries to NRE can be made through numerous different channels, however the data presented in this statistical release relates to enquiries made through the NRE telephone service only. This data is provided by the Rail Delivery Group (RDG).

2018-19 Q2

- There were 0.7 million calls made to the National Rail Enquiries (NRE) telephone service during 2018-19 Q2, a decrease of 5.4% compared to same quarter last year. This continues the long-term trend in the decline in the number of calls to NRE due to the increased availability of other information sources. Of those calls made in 2018-19 Q2, 97.2% were answered and 2.8% were abandoned.

Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling

After a passenger makes a complaint to a train operator, they are invited to participate in a follow up survey by an independent research company, commissioned by ORR, about their experience of how the complaint was handled.

Data for 2018-19 are currently unavailable due to a reduction in sample size. This is following changes made to the survey to be compliant with GDPR. ORR are currently looking at ways of boosting the sample size.

For the latest data available please see [2017-18 Q4 statistical release](#) or the data portal tables (Tables [14.18](#), [14.19](#) and [14.20](#)). ORR are planning to publish annual results in the 2018-19 Q4 statistical release.

2. Appeals

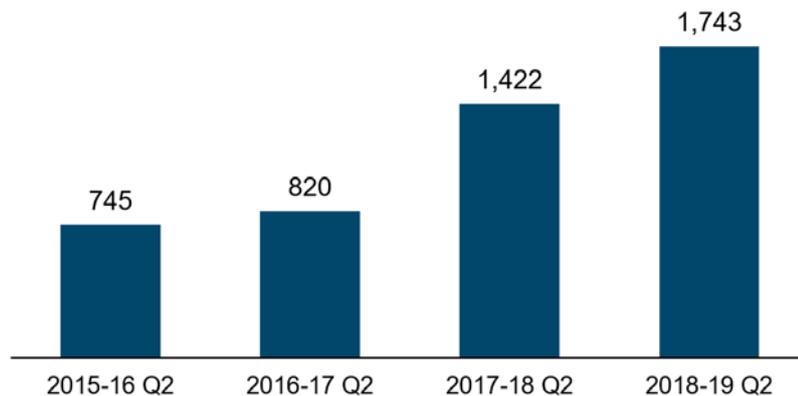
2018-19 Q2

Appeals closed: the number of complaint appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch for each train operating company (including all non-franchised operators) and some other rail bodies. The data also includes the number of appeals in each complaint category.

The independent passenger watchdogs may open an appeal on behalf of a rail passenger whose initial complaint to the train operating company has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

■ Passenger watchdogs closed 1,743 appeals during 2018-19 Q2. This was 23% higher than during 2017-18 Q2.

Appeals closed by passenger watchdogs, Great Britain, 2015-16 Q2 to 2018-19 Q2 ([Table 14.15](#))



Transport Focus closed 1,234 appeals during 2018-19 Q2, 14% higher than the same quarter last year. London TravelWatch closed 509 appeals during 2018-19 Q2, 48% higher than the same quarter last year.

Appeals may be increasing as ORR began to collect data from train operators on the number of complainants who were being sign-posted to the passenger watchdogs since 2016-17. This may have increased the number of complainants which are being sign-posted, and therefore more complainants are appealing due to a greater awareness of these watchdogs.

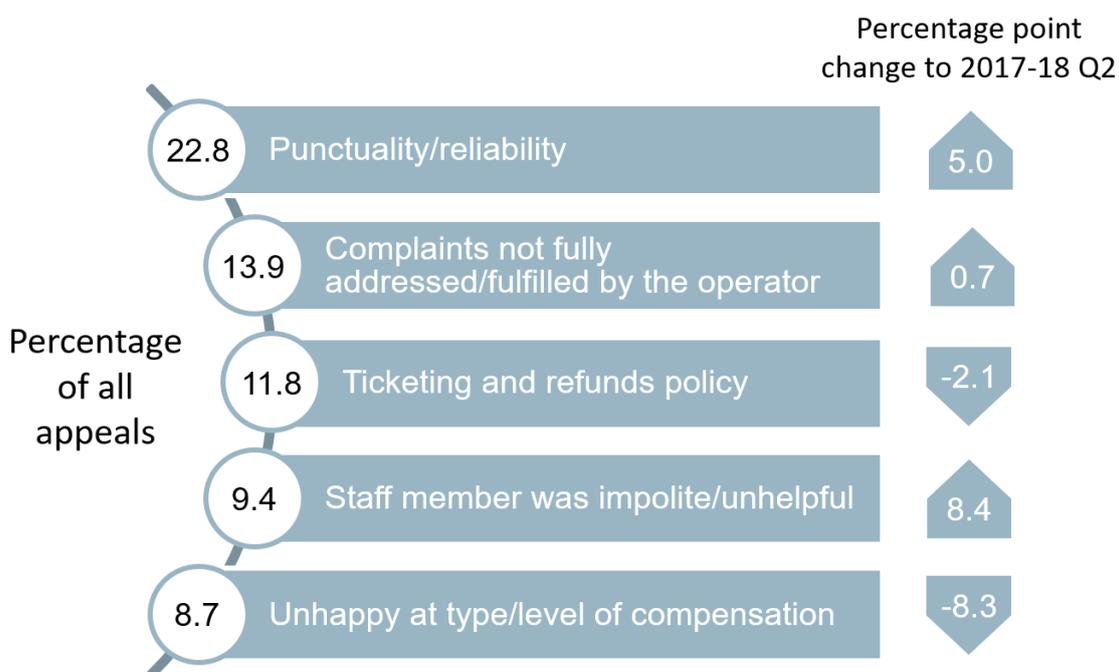
From 26 November 2018 (during 2018-19 Q3) the Rail Ombudsman started. The Rail Ombudsman provides a service for unresolved customer complaints within the rail industry. As a result, future statistics in this series may be affected with some appeals being dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus or London TravelWatch. More information on the Rail Ombudsman can be found at the following link: <http://www.railombudsman.org>.

Appeals by category

2018-19 Q2

- Appeals about punctuality/reliability of rail services remain the most appealed about complaint category with 22.8% of appeals closed being about this category in 2018-19 Q2, a 5.0 percentage point increase compared to 2017-18 Q2. Punctuality/reliability has been the largest appeals category since 2016-17 Q3.
- Appeals about complaints not being fully addressed by the operator was the second most appealed about category with 13.9% of appeals closed in 2018-19 Q2; this is a 0.7 percentage point increase compared to 2017-18 Q2.

Top five appeal categories, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q2 ([Table 14.16](#))



- Appeals about staff members being impolite/unhelpful saw the largest percentage point increase in 2018-19 Q2 to 9.4%, an increase from 1.1% in 2017-18 Q2.
- Appeals about the type or level of compensation given saw the largest percentage point decrease in 2018-19 Q2 to 8.7%, a decrease from 17.0% in 2017-18 Q2.

Annex 1 – List of pre-created reports available on the ORR Data Portal

All data tables can be accessed on the [Data Portal](#) free of charge. The ORR data portal provides on screen data reports, as well as the facility to download data in Excel format and print the report. We can provide data in csv format on request.

Complaints

- Complaints rate – [Table 14.8](#);
- Complaints rate by train operator – [Table 14.9](#);
- Complaints by category – [Table 14.3](#);
- Complaints by category and train operator – [Table 14.5](#);
- Complaints responded to within 10 and 20 working days by operator – [Table 14.2](#);
- Complaints by contact method and train operator – [Table 14.6](#);
- Praise rate by train operator - [Table 14.17](#);
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling by train operator - [Table 14.18](#);
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling – [Table 14.19](#);
- Passenger satisfaction survey by train operator and quarter - [Table 14.20](#).

Note: Statistics on passenger satisfaction with complaints handling are not designated as National Statistics as they have not been assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation

Appeals

- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by operator - [Table 14.15](#);
- Complaint categories for appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch - [Table 14.16](#).

National Rail Enquiries

- National Rail Enquiries (telephone enquiries received) – [Table 14.13](#).

Related data: New statistics on rail delay compensation

One of the high level complaint categories in this release relates to delay compensation scheme. For the first time new statistics have been published on rail delay compensation claims here: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/displayreport/report/html/efefea78-e211-48b1-9f5e-2b9de8792b0c>.

The statistics include the volume of delay compensation claims received, closed and approved, as well as the percentage of claims which are responded to within 20 working days. All these measures are provided at national level as well as by each individual train operator.

A factsheet on these delay compensation claims can be found on the ORR statistics homepage here: <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/statistical-releases>. Data tables on these statistics can be found on the ORR [Data Portal](https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/displayreport/report/html/efefea78-e211-48b1-9f5e-2b9de8792b0c) here: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/displayreport/report/html/efefea78-e211-48b1-9f5e-2b9de8792b0c>.

Note these statistics are not designated as National Statistics as they have not been assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation.

Proposed changes to the publishing of data tables within this statistical release

ORR are proposing to publish the following tables on an annual basis rather than a quarterly basis from 2019-20 Q1:

- Complaints by contact method and train operator – [Table 14.6](#);
- Praise rate by train operator - [Table 14.17](#);
- National Rail Enquiries (telephone enquiries received) – [Table 14.13](#).

These tables will be published alongside the Q4 statistical release, although the tables on the [Data Portal](#) will still provide a quarterly disaggregation.

Any feedback regarding this proposed change should be directed to rail.stats@orr.gov.uk.

Annex 2 – Statistical Releases

This publication is part of ORR's [National Statistics](#) accredited statistical releases which consist of annual and quarterly themed releases:

Annual

- Rail Finance;
- Rail Fares Index;
- Rail Safety Statistics;
- Rail Infrastructure, Assets and Environmental;
- Regional Rail Usage;
- *Estimates of Station Usage (not National Statistics).*

Quarterly

- Passenger and Freight Rail Performance;
- Freight Rail Usage;
- Passenger Rail Usage;
- Passenger Rail Service Complaints.

A full list of publication dates for the next twelve months can be found in the [release schedule](#) on the ORR website.

National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is ORR's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

For more details please contact the Statistics Head of Profession Lyndsey Melbourne on 020 7282 3978 or contact rail.stats@orr.gov.uk.

The Department for Transport (DfT) publishes a range of rail statistics which can be found at [DfT Rail Statistics](#).

Transport Focus also publishes the [National Rail Passenger Survey](#) (NRPS).



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