



# Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2019-20 Q1 Statistical Release

Publication date: 24 October 2019

Next publication date: 9 January 2020

## Background

This release contains information on **complaints made by passengers regarding rail services in Great Britain**. This covers:

- Complaints rate per 100,000 journeys, including by train operator;
- Complaint categories;
- Complaint response time within 20 working days;
- Appeals made to passenger watchdogs.

The latest **quarterly** statistics for 2019-20 Q1 refers to April, May and June 2019.

Annual statistics for 2018-19 can be found in the previous [statistical release](#).

**There were 24.9 complaints per 100,000 journeys for franchised operators in 2019-20 Q1, a decrease of 15.7% compared to 2018-19 Q1.**


Punctuality/reliability of rail services remains the largest category of passenger complaint in 2019-20 Q1. The largest percentage point (pp) increases in 2019-20 Q1 compared with last year were for complaints regarding facilities on board the train (up 3.7 pp).


## Top complaint categories, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q1

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change from 2018-19 Q1
 Punctuality/reliability	18%	-4.6
 Facilities on board	12%	3.7
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	8%	1.2
 Ticketing & refunds policy	7%	0.5
 Other ticket buying facilities – online ticket sales	6%	1.4

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 Nationally, 98.6% of complaints were closed within 20 working days during 2019-20 Q1. A total of 21 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.

 There were 394 appeals closed by passenger watchdogs in 2019-20 Q1, a decrease of 74% compared to last year. The reason for this decrease is due to a number of appeals directed to the new Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

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## Rail complaints rates 2019-20 Q1

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. In the complaints rate statistics each communication with the customer is counted as a single complaint, regardless of how many topics are covered in the communication.

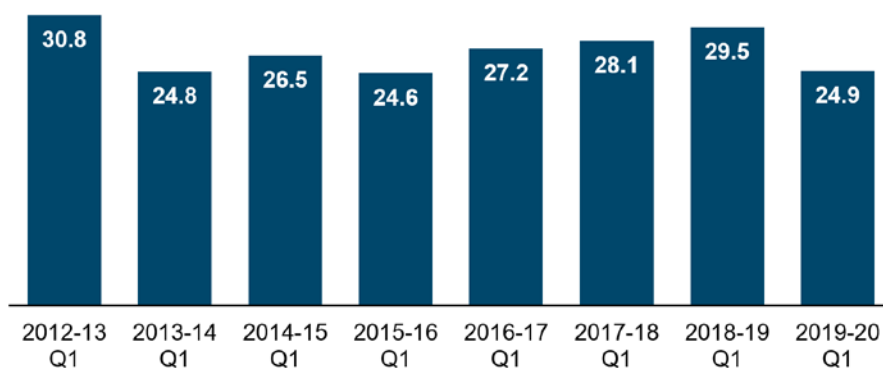
The **complaints rate** is the volume of complaint correspondences closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. Complaints are normalised by passenger journeys to allow effective comparisons of data between time-periods and train operating companies.

**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 methodology and quality of these statistics, please see the [quality report](#).

- There were **24.9 complaints per 100,000 journeys for franchised operators in 2019-20 Q1**, compared to 29.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q1. This represents a 15.7% decrease and has led to 2019-20 Q1 being the lowest quarterly complaints rate since 2015-16 Q1.
- The decrease in complaints rate follows an increased number of complaints in 2018-19 Q1 due to the disruption caused by the May 2018 timetable changes.

**Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators only), Great Britain, 2012-13 Q1 to 2019-20 Q1** ([Table 14.8](#))



- There were 30.9 complaints per 100,000 journeys for **non-franchised operators** in 2019-20 Q1 a 70.5% decrease compared to the same quarter last year (these operators were Hull Trains, Grand Central and Heathrow Express). If these non-franchised operators are included, the national complaints rate in 2019-20 Q1 is 24.9 complaints per 100,000 journeys.

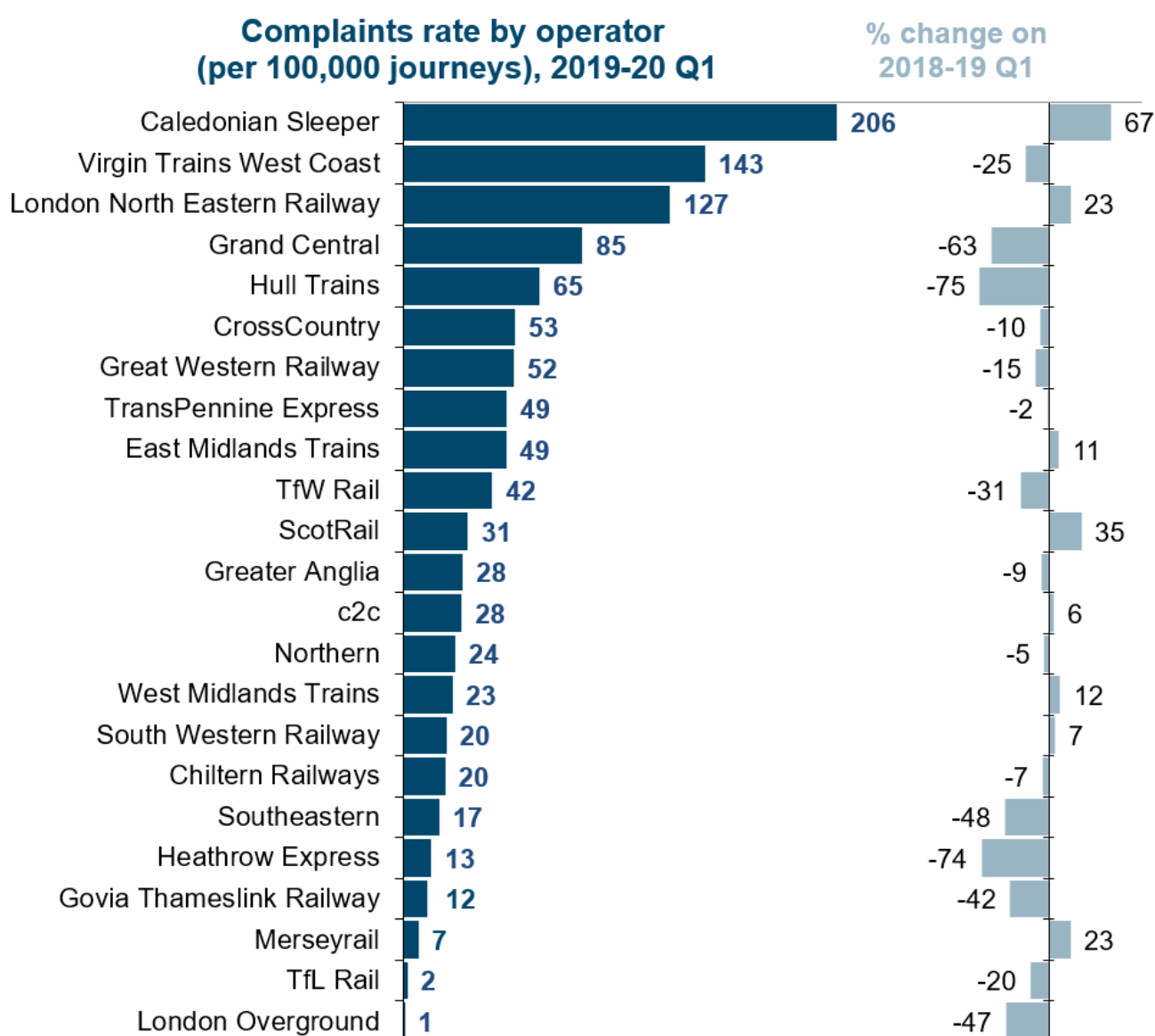
### Long-term trend

There has been a long-term decline in the complaints rate since the time series began in 1998-99. In 2018-19, there were 30.1 complaints per 100,000 journeys, which was a 75% lower than the complaints rate in 1998-99. For further information on long-term trends, see the [2018-19 Q4 release](#).

## Complaints rate by train operator 2019-20 Q1

- Caledonian Sleeper had the highest complaints rate in 2019-20 Q1 with 206 complaints per 100,000 journeys, followed by Virgin Trains West Coast and London North Eastern Railway with 143 and 127 complaints per 100,000 journeys respectively.
- There were eight train operators that had a higher complaints rate in 2019-20 Q1 compared with 2018-19 Q1, and there were 15 train operators that had a lower complaints rate.

### Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operator, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q1 ([Table 14.9](#))



Note: East Midlands Trains is operating as East Midlands Railway as of 18 August 2019. This name change will be reflected in our next publication which covers Q2 2019-20.

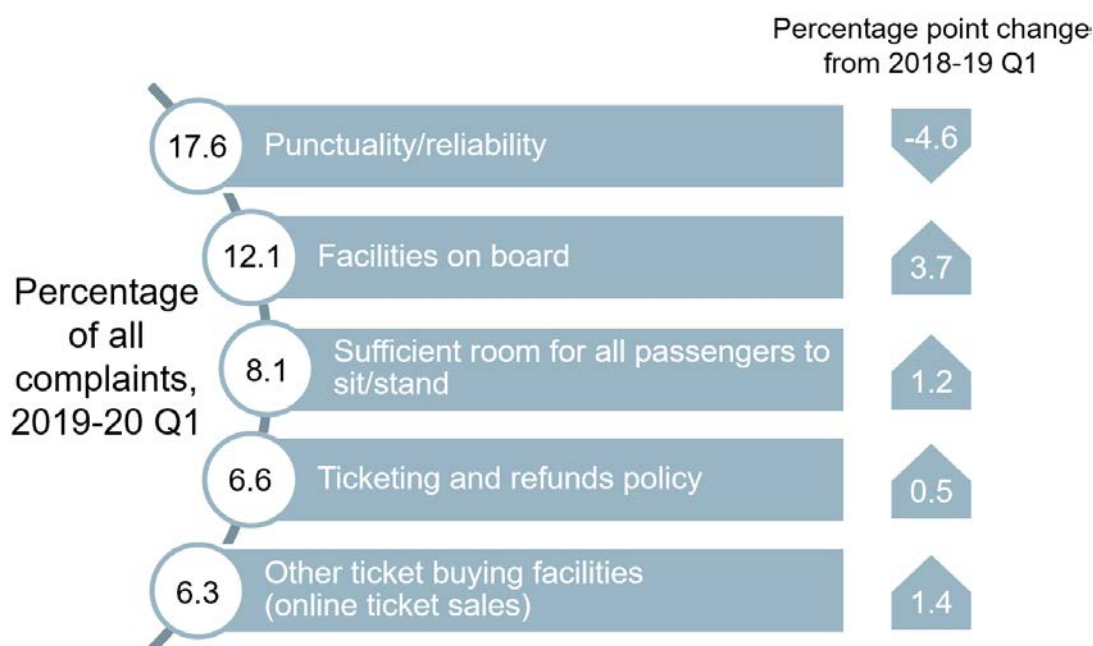
## Complaints by category 2019-20 Q1

**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.

- Punctuality/reliability of rail services was the most common cause to complain to train operators. Overall, 17.6% of complaints nationally in 2019-20 Q1 were about punctuality/reliability, though this was a 4.6 percentage point (pp) decrease compared with 2018-19 Q1.
- Complaints regarding the facilities on board the train remained the second most common cause of complaint in 2019-20 Q1, at 12.1% of all complaints (up 3.7 pp from 2018-19 Q1). Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand remains the third most common cause of complaint, at 8.1% of all complaints (up 1.2 pp from 2018-19 Q1).

### Top 5 complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q1 ([Table 14.3](#))









A full list of all complaint categories and the percentages attributed to each category is available on the ORR Data Portal in [Table 14.3](#).

## Largest increases/decreases in complaint categories between 2018-19 Q1 and 2019-20 Q1







- The largest increase in 2019-20 Q1 compared to the previous year was regarding facilities on board the train, where 12.1% of all complaints were attributed to this category, up 3.7 pp from 2018-19 Q1.

### Top 3 increases in complaints category in 2019-20 Q1 compared with 2018-19 Q1, Great Britain ([Table 14.3](#))

		pp change from 2018-19 Q1	2019-20 Q1 percentage of all complaints
	<b>Facilities on board</b>	 <b>3.7</b>	<b>12.1%</b>
	<b>Smartcards</b>	 <b>2.1</b>	<b>4.4%</b>
	<b>Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)</b>	 <b>1.4</b>	<b>6.3%</b>

- The largest decrease in 2019-20 Q1 compared to the previous year was regarding punctuality/reliability of rail services, where 17.6% of all complaints were attributed to this category, down 4.6 pp from 2018-19 Q1.
- Timetabling was the second largest decrease in 2019-20 Q1, down 3.3 pp from the same quarter last year to 1.6%. This is largely because of the increase in timetabling complaints during 2018-19 Q1 following the disruption caused by the May 2018 timetable changes.

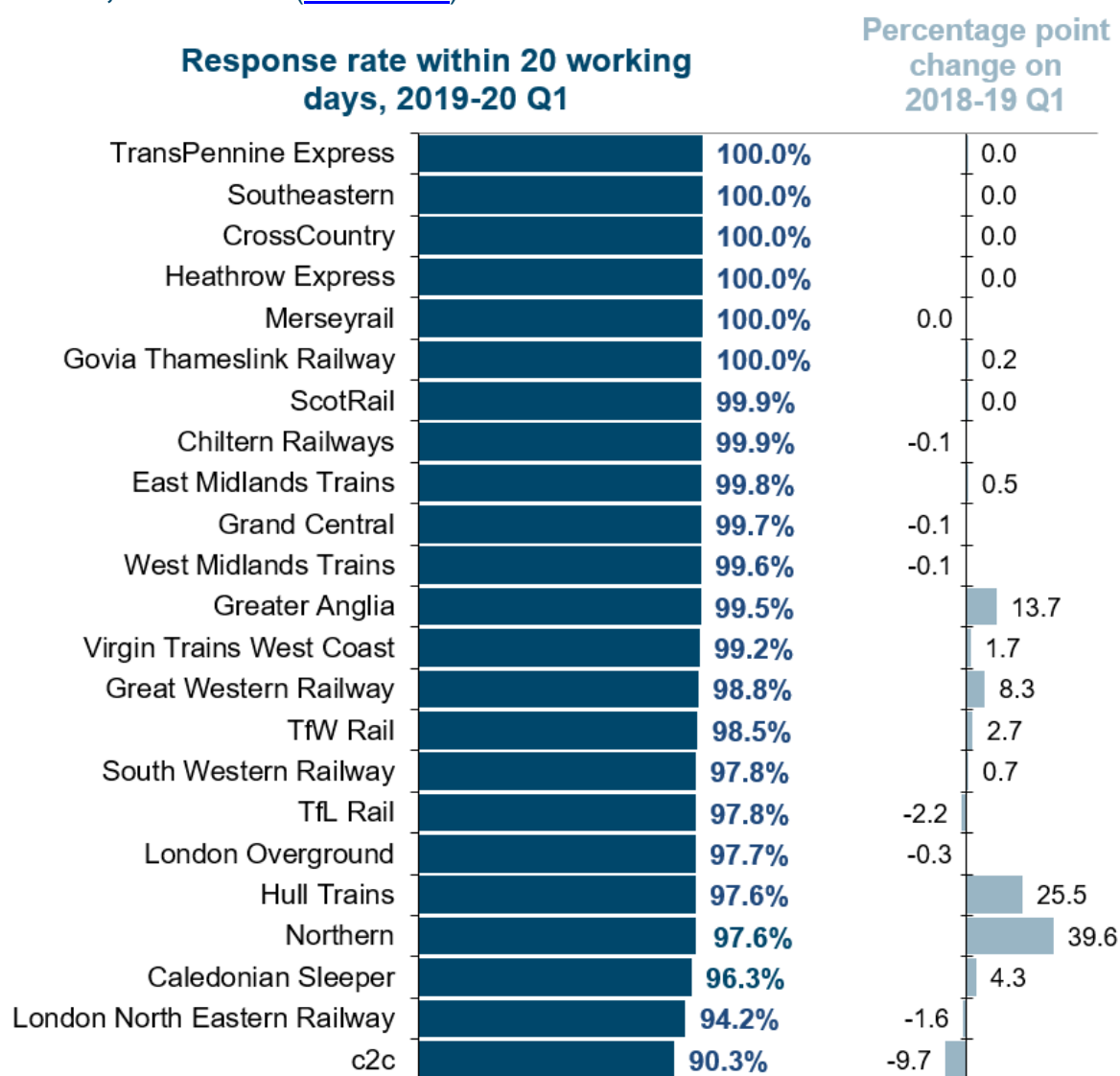
### Top 3 decreases in complaints category in 2019-20 Q1 compared with 2018-19 Q1, Great Britain ([Table 14.3](#))

		pp change from 2018-19 Q1	2019-20 Q1 percentage of all complaints
	<b>Punctuality/reliability</b>	 <b>4.6</b>	<b>17.6%</b>
	<b>Timetabling</b>	 <b>3.3</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
	<b>No response from operator</b>	 <b>2.2</b>	<b>0.6%</b>

## Complaints answered within 20 working days 2019-20 Q1

- **Nationally, 98.6% of complaints were closed within 20 working days in 2019-20 Q1.** This is 3.7 percentage points (pp) higher than in 2018-19 Q1.
- In 2019-20 Q1, 21 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close at least 95% of their complaints within 20 working days. This has increased from 18 out of 23 train operators that met the industry requirement in 2018-19 Q1.
- Northern, Hull Trains and Greater Anglia have seen the largest increases in their complaints response rates during 2019-20 Q1 compared to the same quarter last year.

### Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operator, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q1 ([Table 14.2](#))



Note: East Midlands Trains is operating as East Midlands Railway as of 18 August 2019. This name change will be reflected in our next publication which covers Q2 2019-20.

## Key changes for selected operators during 2019-20 Q1

Long-distance train operators have the three largest complaints rates in 2019-20 Q1, **Caledonian Sleeper** (206 complaints per 100,000 journeys), **Virgin Trains West Coast** (143 complaints per 100,000 journeys) and **London North Eastern Railway** (127 complaints per 100,000 journeys). This trend is consistent with previous data and is representative of the fact that long-distance operators receive more correspondence about their services.

**Caledonian Sleeper** had the largest increase in complaints rate from 2018-19 Q1 (up 67%) while **Hull Trains** had the largest decrease in complaints rate from 2018-19 Q1 (down 75%). All three non-franchised train operators (**Hull Trains**, **Heathrow Express** and **Grand Central**) saw decreases in their complaints rates (75%, 74% and 63% respectively).

The number of train operators responding to at least 95% of complaints within 20 working days has significantly increased in 2019-20 Q1 compared to 2018-19 Q1. The only train operators that did not meet this requirement were **c2c** (90.3%) and **London North Eastern Railway** (94.2%).

There were five operators which increased their complaints response rate compared to Q1 last year so that they responded to at least 95% of complaints within 20 working days in 2019-20 Q1: **Northern** (up 40 pp), **Hull Trains** (up 25 pp), **Greater Anglia** (up 14 pp), **Great Western Railway** (up 8 pp) and **Caledonian Sleeper** (up 4 pp).

There were four train operators that responded to all their complaints within 20 working days (i.e. 100%): **CrossCountry**, **Heathrow Express**, **Southeastern** and **TransPennine Express**. Additionally, **Merseyrail** and **Govia Thameslink Railway** responded to 100.0% of complaints rounded up to one decimal place.

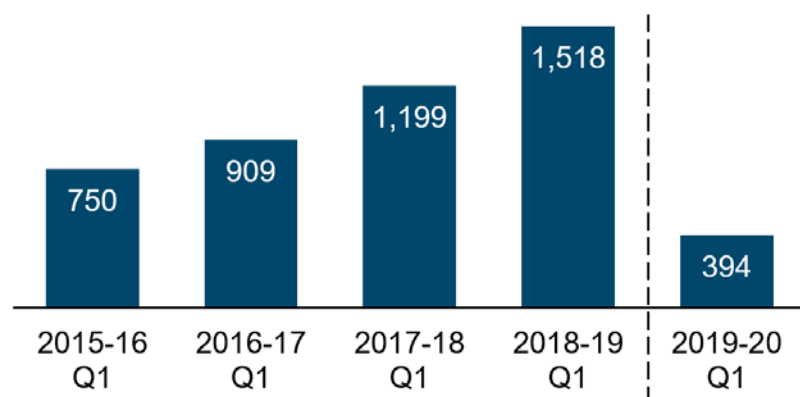
## Appeals 2019-20 Q1

**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 394 appeals during 2019-20 Q1.** This was 74% lower than the volume of appeals closed during 2018-19 Q1.
- From 26 November 2018 (during 2018-19 Q3) the [Rail Ombudsman](#) started and provides a passenger service for unresolved customer complaints within the rail industry. **As a result, many appeals are now being dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus or London TravelWatch.** This consequently has meant the number of appeals dealt with by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch has sharply decreased in the most recent two quarters.
- Provisional figures indicate 304 cases were ‘in scope’ and closed by the Rail Ombudsman during 2019-20 Q1. These statistics can be found at: <https://www.railombudsman.org/about-us/documents/>.

### Appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch, Great Britain, 2015-16 Q1 to 2019-20 Q1 ([Table 14.15](#))



*Note: The dotted line displays a break in series where some appeals are now being dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus or London TravelWatch*

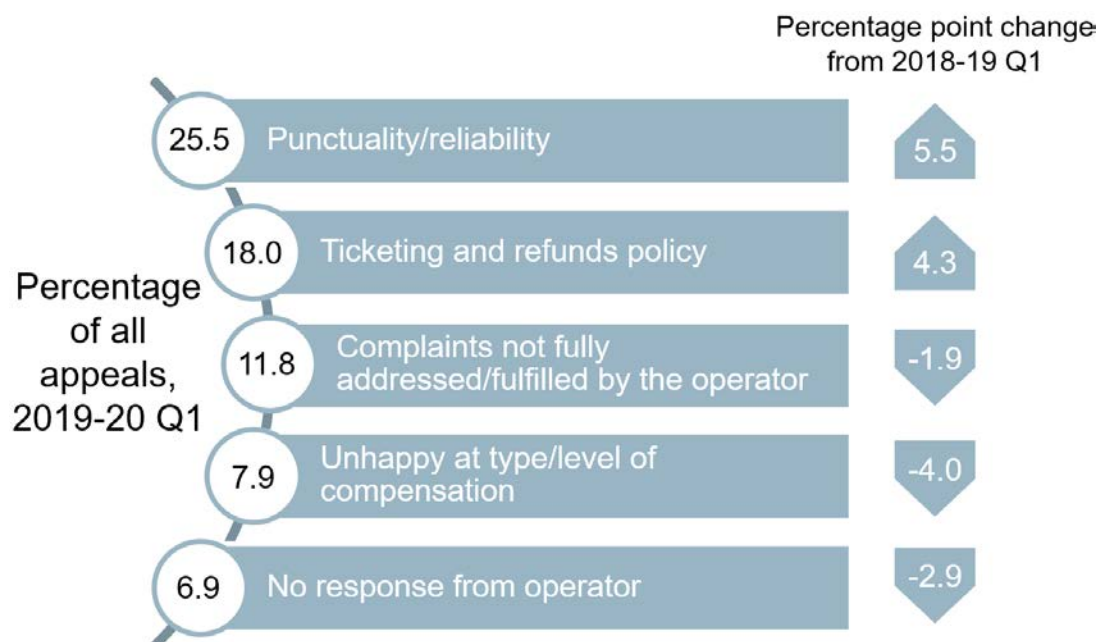
A full list of appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch attributed to each train operator and rail body is available on the ORR Data Portal in [Table 14.15](#).



## Appeals by category

- Appeals about punctuality/reliability of rail services remain the most appealed about complaint category with 25.5% of appeals closed being about this category in 2019-20 Q1. This was a 5.5 percentage point (pp) increase between the same quarter last year and was the largest percentage point increase of any complaint category.
- Appeals about ticketing and refunds policy remains the second most appealed about complaint category with 18.0% of appeals closed being this category in 2019-20 Q1, a 4.3 pp increase compared to the same quarter last year. Appeals about the complainant being unhappy at type/level of compensation saw the largest pp decrease in 2019-20 Q1, a decrease of 4.0 pp from the same quarter last year, to 7.9% of all appeals.
- The type of appeals dealt with by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch have changed since the Rail Ombudsman was introduced. For example, appeals regarding ticketing and refunds policies are ‘out of scope’ for the Rail Ombudsman so are dealt with by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch, but appeals about the complainant being unhappy at type/level of compensation are ‘in scope’ for the Rail Ombudsman. Therefore, comparisons on appeal categories with previous years should be treated with caution.

### Top five appeal categories, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q1 ([Table 14.16](#))



A full list of all appeals categories and the percentages attributed to each category is available on the ORR Data Portal in [Table 14.16](#).

## Annex 1 – List of data tables available on the Data Portal

All data tables can be accessed on the [Data Portal](#) free of charge. The data portal provides on-screen data reports, as well as the facility to download data in Excel format. 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](#) (*updated annually*).

### 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](#).

### Other data

- National Rail Enquiry telephone service – [Table 14.13](#) (*updated annually*);
- Praise rate by train operator - [Table 14.17](#) (*updated annually*);
- 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](#).

*(Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling tables have not been updated since 2017-18 - see the [2018-19 annual release](#) for information on this. 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)*

## Annex 2 – Related data: Statistics on rail delay compensation

One of the complaint categories in this release relates to delay compensation schemes. New statistics published on delay compensation claims data were collected from 2018-19 onwards, and have been published alongside this statistical release since 2018-19 Q2.

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

A factsheet, interactive charts, and [Table 17.01](#) showing these delay compensation claim statistics for the first four rail periods of 2019-20 (1 April and 20 July 2019) can be found at: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/passenger-experience/delay-compensation-claims/>

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

## Annex 3 – 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 and Assets;
- Rail Emissions;
- Regional Rail Usage;
- *Estimates of Station Usage (not National Statistics).*

### Quarterly

- Freight Rail Usage and Performance;
- Passenger Rail Performance;
- 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 Data Portal.

## 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.

Our statistical releases hold National Statistics status since being assessed<sup>1</sup> in 2012. Since our assessment we have improved the content, presentation and quality of our statistical releases. Also, in July 2019 we launched our new data portal. We are currently working with the Office for Statistics Regulation (the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority) to conduct a compliance check to ensure we are still meeting the standards of the Code and to therefore reconfirm our National Statistics status.

For more information on how we adhere to the Code please see our compliance statements at: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>.

For more details, please contact the Statistics Head of Profession Lyndsey Melbourne on 020 7282 3978 or contact [rail.stats@orr.gov.uk](mailto: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 publishes the [National Rail Passenger Survey](#) (NRPS), which provides a measure of passenger satisfaction for rail services.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/1334/ukxa-assessment.pdf>



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