



# Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2016-17 Q3 Statistical Release

Publication date: 23 March 2017

Next publication date: 15 June 2017

## Key results (2016-17 Q3)

### Background

This release contains information on **complaints** made by passengers regarding rail services in Great Britain with the latest quarterly data referring to October, November and December 2016. A complaints rate per 100,000 journeys is calculated for each train operating company (TOC). Complaints data for each TOC are provided by complaint category and by contact method. Also presented are the percentages of complaints answered within 20 days, a praise rate, the number of **complaint appeals closed** by industry watchdogs (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch) and the number of **calls to the National Rail Enquiries** telephone service.

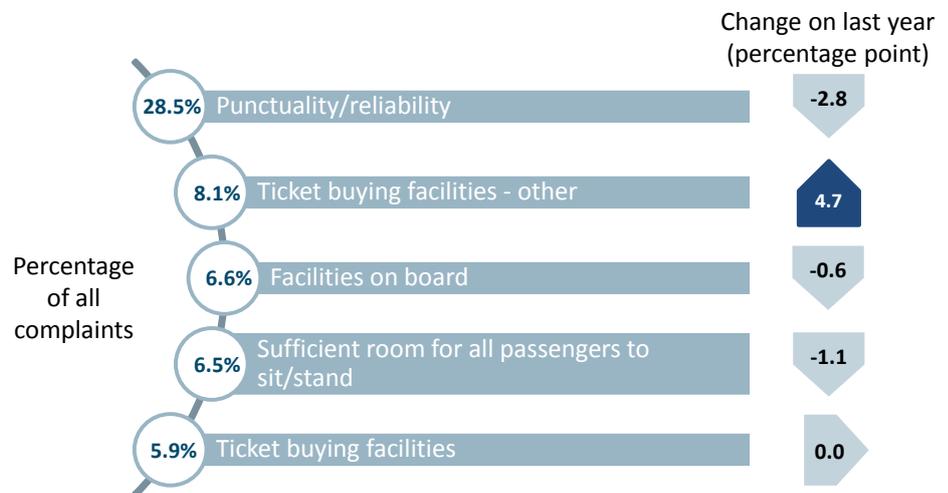
### Contents

- Complaints – page 3
- Appeals – page 12
- NRE – page 15
- Annexes – page 16

### Complaints rate:

29.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys

### What passengers complained about:



### 95% of complaints answered within 20 working day target:

11 out of 21 train operating companies achieved the target

### How passengers complain:

68.5% of complaints are made via email/webform.

### Complaint appeals closed by passenger watchdogs: (change compared to 2015-16 Q3)

|                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| 712 by Transport Focus    | (52.5% increase) |
| 349 by London TravelWatch | (41.3% increase) |

Note: From Q1 2016-17 onwards there have been improvements to the quality and consistency of these complaints statistics. Consequently many of the metrics presented are not directly comparable to previous quarters/years.

Responsible Statistician: Christopher Casanovas (Tel: 020 7282 3747)

Public Enquiries: Email: [Rail.Stats@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Rail.Stats@orr.gsi.gov.uk) Media Enquiries: Tel: 020 7282 2094

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

# 1. About the release

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 is counted as a single complaint, regardless of how many topics are covered in the communication.

## Social media complaints:



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. In March 2015 ORR published a [report](#) on the increasing use of social media amongst passengers and the challenges in capturing complaints. There is also a [blog](#) which highlights some of the issues of counting social media complaints.

## Methodology improvements for 2016-17:

For 2016-17 ORR has worked with the train operators to improve the consistency and quality of complaints reporting. This has led to some changes in methodology in both data collected from the operators and reporting by ORR in this statistical release. Consequently many of the metrics presented are not directly comparable to those presented for previous years. For further information please refer to Annex 3 and the [Quality Report](#).

## Data quality issues affecting 2016-17 data:

Complaints rate for some operators in 2016-17 Q3 should be treated with caution when compared to the previous year. This is due to either a change in methodology or data supply issues. For more information, please see page 7.

## 2015-16 detailed overview:

This statistical release focuses on the data for quarter 3 of 2016-17. For a detailed overview of the 2015-16 annual data please refer to the ORR's [Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2015-16 Quarter 4](#) statistical release.

## 2. Complaints

**Complaints rate:** the number of complaint correspondence closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. Complaints are normalised by passenger journeys to allow effective comparison of data between time periods and train operating companies

**Data available:** Complaints rate data is available from 1998-99 nationally (franchised operators), and from 2007-08 by individual TOC. Complaint category data is available from 2007-08 nationally, and from 2010-11 by individual TOC.

### 2016-17 Quarter 3 Results

The national complaints rate was **29.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys** in 2016-17 Q3. This is broadly stable compared to the same quarter the year before (29.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys).

#### Factors which may be influencing the complaints rate in 2016-17 Q3:

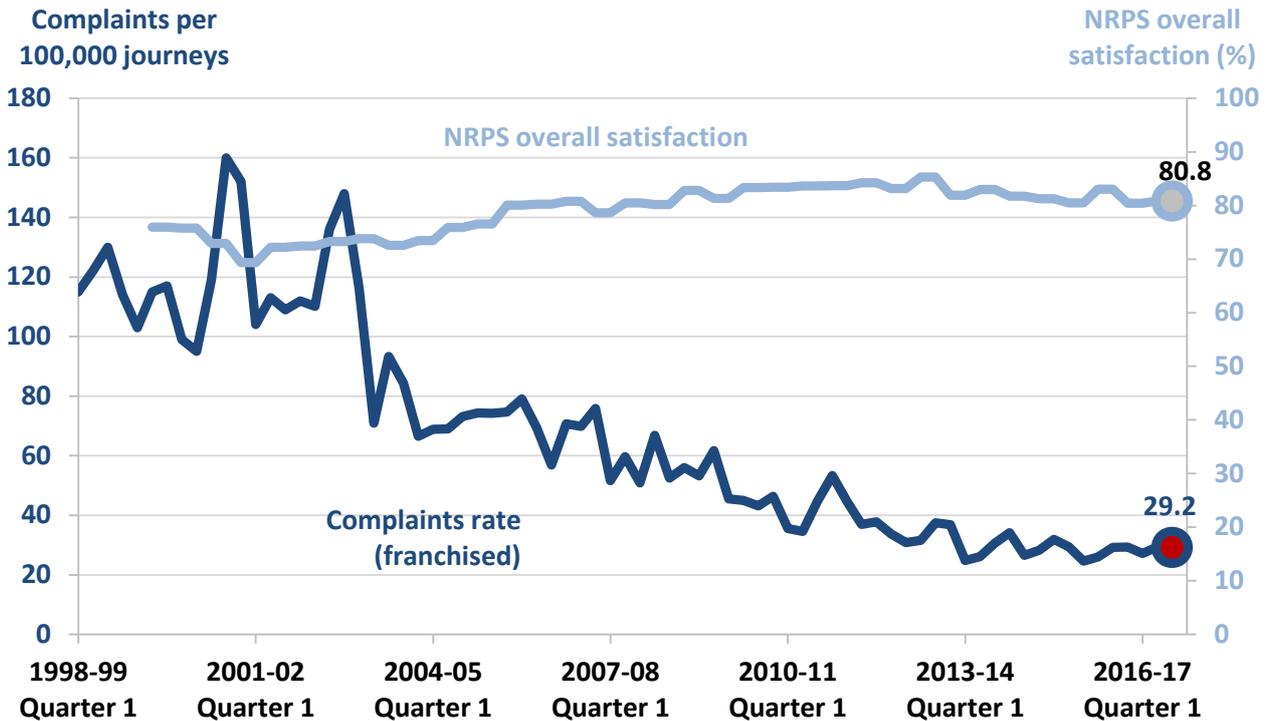
- The complaints rate stabilising in Q3 this year has been caused by the increase in complaints to London and South East TOCs. Without the increase at these TOCs the complaints rate would have continued to fall.
- The main reason is due to Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) complaints increasing by 347.1% compared to Q3 last year. GTR accounted for 19% of all complaints made nationally in Q3. Other London and South East TOCs with big increases include South West Trains with a 71.5% increase compared to Q3 last year, Southeastern by 33.3% and Greater Anglia by 18.3%. Together these four TOCs were responsible for 51% of complaints closed nationally during 2016-17 Q3 (see page 6 for further details).
- Punctuality is the main reason to complain and accounted for 28.5% of all complaints. Punctuality complaints were the most common complaint for the four TOCs listed above. This coincides with the punctuality of trains (as measured by PPM) being 84.3% in 2016-17 Q3, this was the lowest Q3 PPM since 2005-06. Trains within the London and South East sector recorded a PPM of 81.8%; this is the lowest Q3 level of punctuality since 2003-04<sup>1</sup> (see page 8 for further details).
- Complaints about fares and retailing are increasing. 'Ticket buying facilities – other' which consists of complaints about the ticket buying process (mostly online ticket sales) is the second most complained about area with 8.1% of complaints, a 4.7 percentage point increase on last year. Similarly complaints about ticket buying facilities (mostly ticket booking offices or ticket vending machines) accounted for 5.9% of complaints, which is

<sup>1</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/24079/passenger-freight-performance-2016-17-q3.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/24079/passenger-freight-performance-2016-17-q3.pdf) (page 5)

similar to last year. There was an increase in complaints about smartcards for some operators, and accounted for 2.6% of all complaints, a 1.8 percentage point increase on Q3 last year.

## How the complaints rate has changed throughout the time series

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators) and National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS), Great Britain, 1998-99 Q1 to 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.8](#))



Please note that the chart above shows the franchised complaints rate, not the national complaints rate. This is because the national complaints rate time series only starts in 2015-16 Q1. The latest NRPS data available is for Autumn 2016.

The **peaks in complaints rate in 1998-99 and 2000-01** were due to the Ladbroke Grove rail crash in October 1999 and Hatfield derailment in October 2000. Following the Hatfield derailment safety precautions and engineering works were implemented and resulted in a sharp decline in punctuality across all sectors, especially the Long Distance sector. Punctuality reached its lowest level during 2001-02 Q2.

### Potential reasons for the decrease in complaints:

There was a sharp fall in complaints rate during 2003-04, followed by a long-term downward trend in the complaints rate. The franchised complaints rate reached the lowest in the time series in 2015-16 with 27.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys.

- The improvement in punctuality following 2001-02 may have reduced the number of complaints. Since 2001-02 the punctuality of trains, as measured by the Public Performance Measure (PPM), increased from 78.0% of trains on time in 2000-01 to a high of 91.6% in 2011-12. Since 2011-12 PPM stayed at or above 90%, until 2014-15 where it dipped to 89.7% and 89.1% in 2015-16<sup>2</sup>. Transport Focus research indicates punctuality/reliability is the biggest driver of satisfaction<sup>3</sup>, so this may be a reason for the decrease in complaints.
- The National Rail Passenger Survey shows that customer overall satisfaction with the rail network increased from a low of 72% in 2001-02 (Autumn 2001 survey) to a high in 2012-13 of 85% (Autumn 2012 survey). Since then there have been small fluctuations in satisfaction levels, with the latest result for Autumn 2016 at 80.8%.
- Methodology improvements may have also caused a decrease in complaints. Some operators previously included passenger charter, delay repay or other type of delay compensation as a complaint. Since ORR took over the data collection in 2009-10 we have worked with the industry to standardise the data definitions to ensure only complaints are included within the data submitted by operators.
- More recently the increasing use of social media may have caused a decrease in the complaints rate. Over the past few years operators have set up social media accounts to interact with customers. These social media interactions are not included within these statistics. It may be that social media is either replacing the traditional way of making a complaint, or it allows operators to interact with customers and prevents a formal complaint being made.

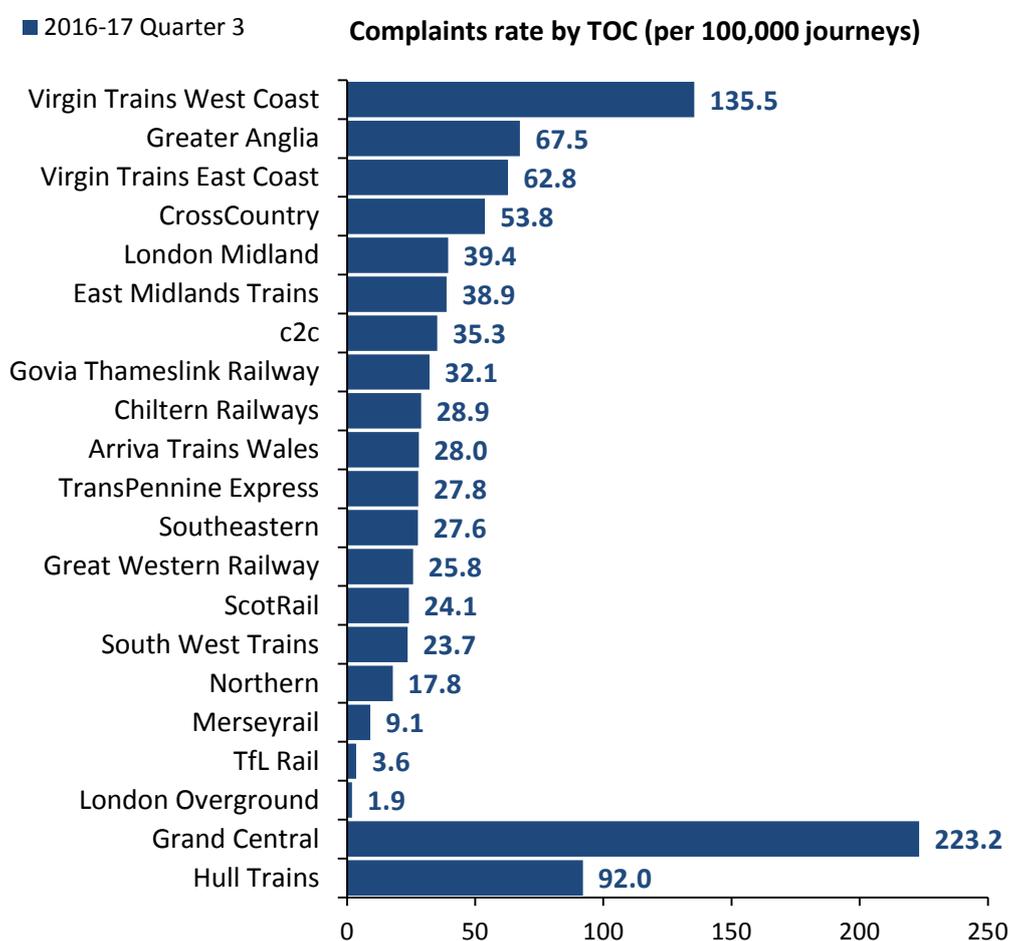
---

<sup>2</sup> [Public Performance Measure \(PPM\) by sector – table 3.43](#)

<sup>3</sup> [National Rail Passenger Survey](#) (Page 57)

## Complaints rate by train operating company

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.9](#))



**Govia Thameslink Railway's (GTR)** complaints rate was 32.1 per 100,000 journeys, a 347.1% increase compared to Q3 last year. This represents about 1 in 5 (19%) of all complaints made to TOCs during Q3 (GTR operated 15% of all services in Great Britain). 29.7% of GTR's complaints were about punctuality/reliability, a 22.0 percentage point increase on Q3 last year. This can partly be explained by GTR's poor punctuality during Q3 where 68.8% of trains were on time (as measured by PPM); the lowest punctuality in a Q3 since the time series began in 2004-05<sup>4</sup>. In addition, 23.9% of complaints were about their delay compensation schemes; the highest proportion of all TOCs (this was a new group of complaint categories introduced for 2016-17).

**South West Train's (SWT)** complaints rate was 23.7 per 100,000 journeys, a 71.5% increase compared to Q3 last year. 43.0% of complaints were about punctuality/reliability, a 4.0 percentage point increase compared to Q3 last year. Complaints about 'ticket buying

<sup>4</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/24079/passenger-freight-performance-2016-17-q3.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/24079/passenger-freight-performance-2016-17-q3.pdf) (page 9)

facilities – other’ accounted for 25.3% of all complaints (the highest of all TOCs), an increase of 24.3 percentage points compared to Q3 last year.

**Southeastern’s** complaint rate was 27.6 per 100,000 journeys, a 33.3% increase compared to Q3 last year. The most complained about category was punctuality/reliability with 22.3% of complaints. Two areas during Q3 emerged within their top five complaint categories for the first time. Complaints about delay compensation claims being rejected were the fourth most complained about area with 5.1% of complaints. Smartcards was the fifth most complained about category, with 5.7% of complaints (last year this category was ranked 48<sup>th</sup>). This could be due to the release of The Key smartcard.

**Greater Anglia’s** complaints rate was 67.5 per 100,000 journeys, an 18.3% increase compared to Q3 last year. The majority of complaints were about punctuality/reliability with 42.5% of complaints. Greater Anglia received the second highest proportion of complaints about their delay compensation scheme (after GTR) with 19.4% of complaints.

#### **Data issues to be aware of:**

Arriva Train Wales (ATW) changed the way they reported complaints. Previously they reported complaints *received during* a period, whereas from 2016-17 Q1 they correctly report on complaints *closed* during a period. Since ATW are experiencing a backlog of closing complaints (as shown by the low response rate within 20 days) this means not all complaints have been reported to ORR yet. The impact of this is that their complaint volumes have declined since last year, and any year on year comparisons should be treated with caution.

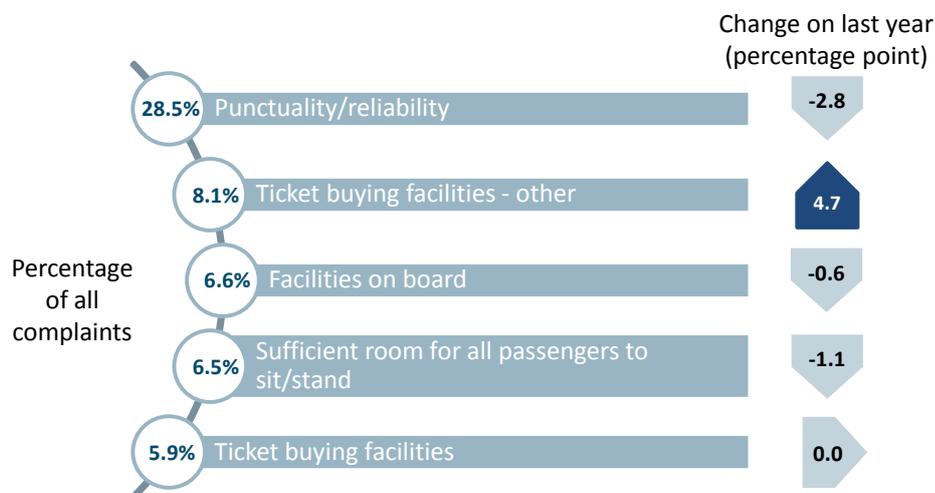
Great Western Railway and TransPennine Express have changed their complaint volumes methodology from 2016-17 Q1 onwards. Previously if one complaint correspondence, e.g. a letter, contained several complaint categories the TOC would count each complaint category as a separate piece of complaint correspondence (which had the effect of increasing the complaints rate for these TOCs). From 2016-17 Q1 they have counted these as one closed complaint correspondence; this follows ORR guidance and is consistent with other TOCs. The impact of this is their complaint volumes has declined since last year, and any year on year comparisons should be treated with caution.

Virgin Trains East Coast informed us they are experiencing issues with reporting, and have a backlog of complaints. This means that some complaints have not been reported to ORR yet, and are therefore lower than expected.

- Complaints rate quarterly and annual data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.8](#)
- Complaints by category quarterly and annual data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.3](#)

## Complaints by category

Top five complaint categories, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.9](#))



**The majority of complaints are about punctuality/reliability of services.** Punctuality/reliability complaints vary by train operator, with London Midland receiving the highest proportion of complaints about this with 52.3% of all complaints, and Virgin Trains East Coast receiving the lowest proportion of complaints about this with 2.2%.

**Six operators do not have punctuality/reliability of services as their highest complaint category.** c2c's most common complaint was about smartcards with 34.2% of all their complaints. Chiltern's was about ticket buying facilities with 13.3% of all their complaints. Great Western Railway's was 'other policy' with 22.9% of complaints. TransPennine Express's was sufficient room for passengers to sit/stand with 21.9% of complaints. Virgin Trains East Coast and Virgin Trains West Coast had facilities on board as their most commonly complained about category (with 20.8% and 19.0%).

### Complaints about fares and retailing have increased compared to Q3 last year.

'Ticket buying facilities – other' (complaints about online ticket sales) was the second most complained about category with 8.1% of complaints, a 4.7 percentage point increase on Q3 last year. Ticket buying facilities complaints (ticket booking offices or ticket machines) accounted for 5.9% of complaints, which is similar to last year. Complaints about smartcards increased for some TOCs and now account for 2.6% of all complaints, a 1.8 percentage point increase on Q3 last year.

■ Complaints rate by train operating company quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.9](#)

### Complaints by

**category:** the type of complaint received by the train operator.

For 2016-17 there are 65 detailed categories, mainly based on National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) satisfaction categories, which make up 14 high level complaint categories. Praise is also recorded.

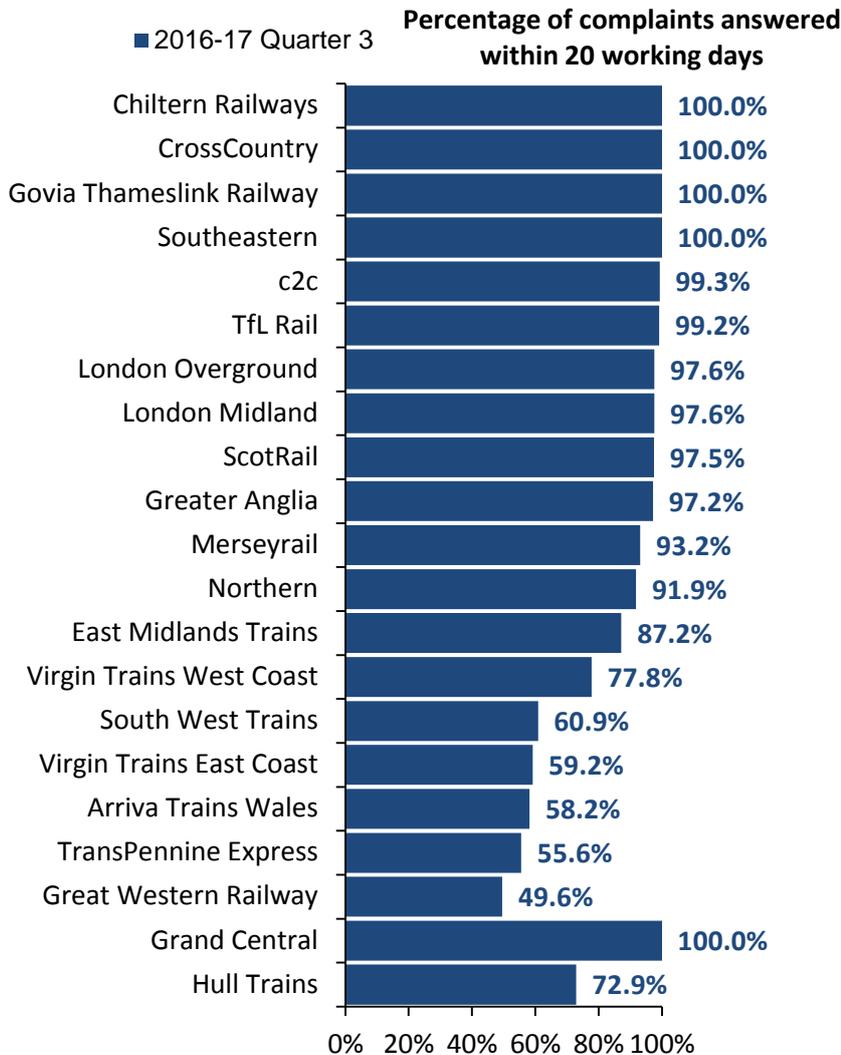
Each complaint within a communication should be recorded. For example, a letter covering two topics is counted as two complaints categories. However, this would only be recorded as one complaint within the complaints rate.

■ Complaints by NRPS category and train operating company quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.5](#)

## Complaints answered within 20 working days

**11 out of 21 train operating companies answered 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.** Nationally 87.2% of complaints were closed within 20 working days, 1.9 percentage points worse than Q3 last year. 70.3% were closed within 10 working days, 5.2 percentage points better than Q3 last year.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.2](#))



**Complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company:** the percentage of complaints closed within 20 working days for each train operating company.

The standard industry target is to close 95% of complaints within 20 working days.

Quarterly data is available from 2007-08 Q4.

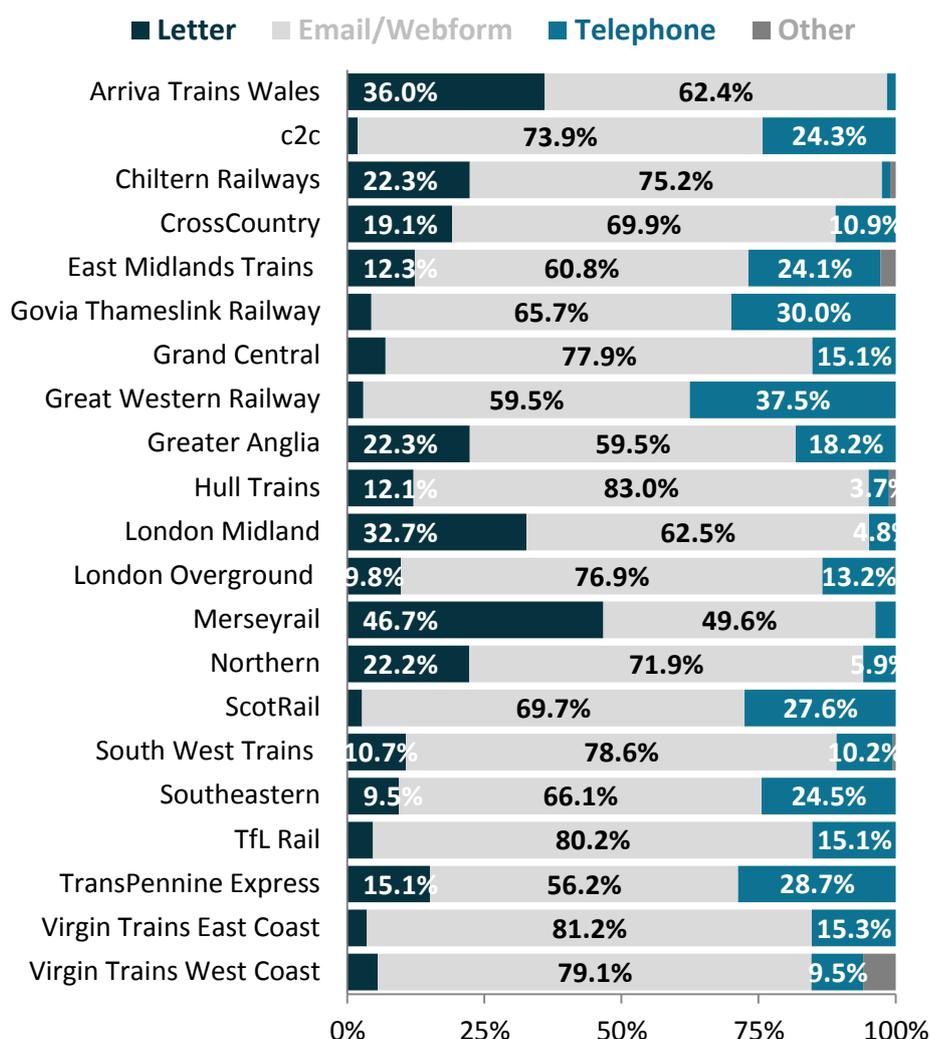
Data on complaints closed within 10 working days and within TOCs own targets are also available on the data portal in [Table 14.2](#)

■ Complaints answered within 20 days by quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.2](#)

## Complaints by contact method and train operating company

For 2016-17 the complaints by contact method statistics are calculated using a different methodology to previous years. For more information see [Annex 3](#).

Percentage of complaints by contact method and train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.6](#))



### Complaints by contact method:

the method of communication passengers use to complain.

Quarterly data is available from 2010-11 Q1.

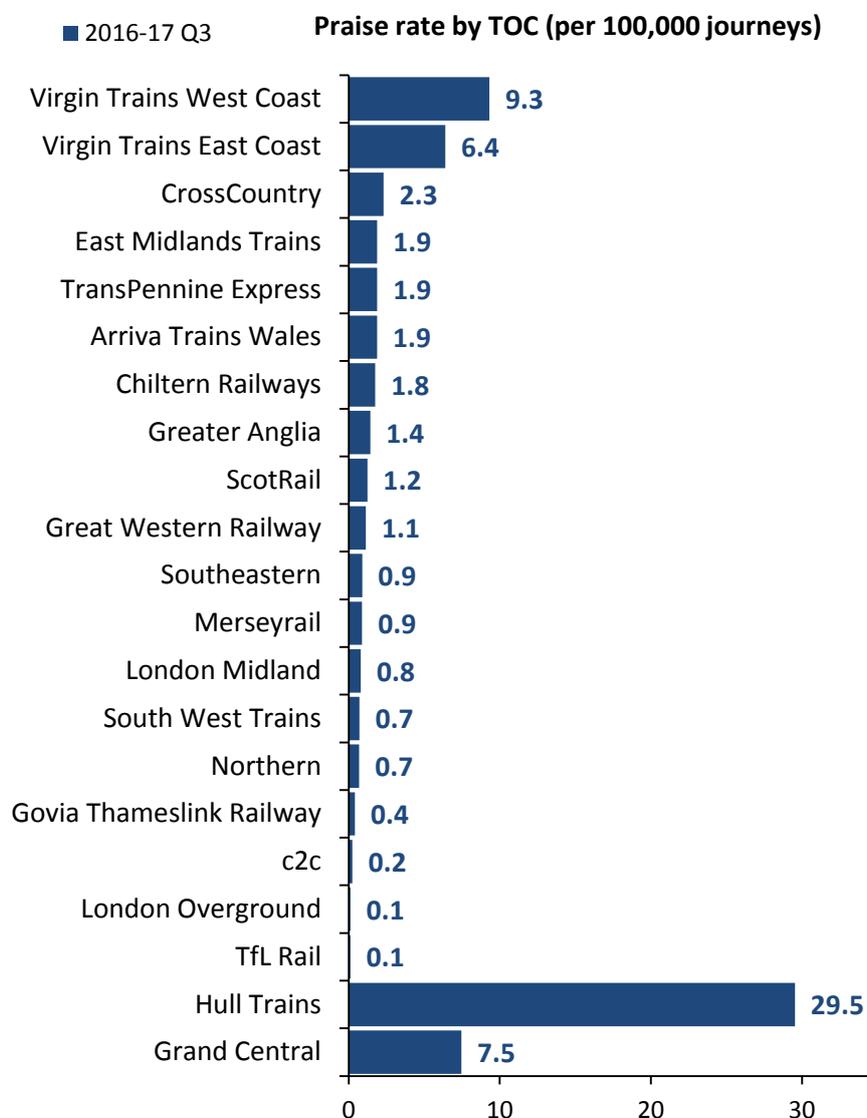
**The majority of complaints (68.5%) were made via email/webform in 2016-17 Q3.**

This reflects a shift away from letters as the most common contact method. At the start of the time series in 2010-11 letters were the most common method for complaints for all but three train operators. This move from letters to other forms of communication is likely to be reflection of both the changing communication habits of the population and also the contact methods offered and promoted by operators.

Complaints by contact method and train operating company by quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.6](#)

## Praise comments received by train operating company

Praise comments per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.9](#))



### Praise comments received per 100,000 passenger journeys.

This can include praise comments within complaints, or separate correspondence with praise.

Praise should only be counted if there is specific satisfaction shown about service delivery, or about company or industry policy. General phrases such “thanks” or acknowledgement or receipt of the TOCs reply should not be counted.

Praise comments are normalised by passenger journeys to allow effective comparison of data between time periods and train operating companies.

**Train operators with the highest praise rates are long distance operators (Hull Trains, Virgin Trains West Coast and Virgin Trains East Coast).** It may be that this type of service encourages a higher rate of customer correspondence (both good and bad), and also generates more active engagement with customers before and after the journey (for example, e-mail communication and marketing following advanced ticket purchasing).

■ Praise rate by train operating company quarterly data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.17](#) (*This is a new table from 2016-17 Q1*).

## 3. Appeals

**Appeals closed:** the number of complaint appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch for each train operating company (including all non-franchised), ATOC and Network Rail, and the number of complaints categories for appeals closed.

The independent passenger watchdogs, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, 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.

Quarterly data on appeals closed is available from 2013-14 Q1 for Transport Focus and 2015-16 Q1 for London TravelWatch. Quarterly data on appeals categories is available from 2014-15 Q1 for Transport Focus and 2015-16 Q1 for London TravelWatch.

### Annual 2015-16

In 2015-16, Transport Focus closed a total of 2,109 complaint appeals, 267 fewer than the previous year, while London TravelWatch closed a total of 1,000. When the total appeals closed from both passenger watchdogs are combined, Govia Thameslink Railway and South West Trains had the highest number of appeals closed in 2015-16, accounting for 15.7% and 10.5% of the total respectively.

### 2016-17 Quarter 3 Results

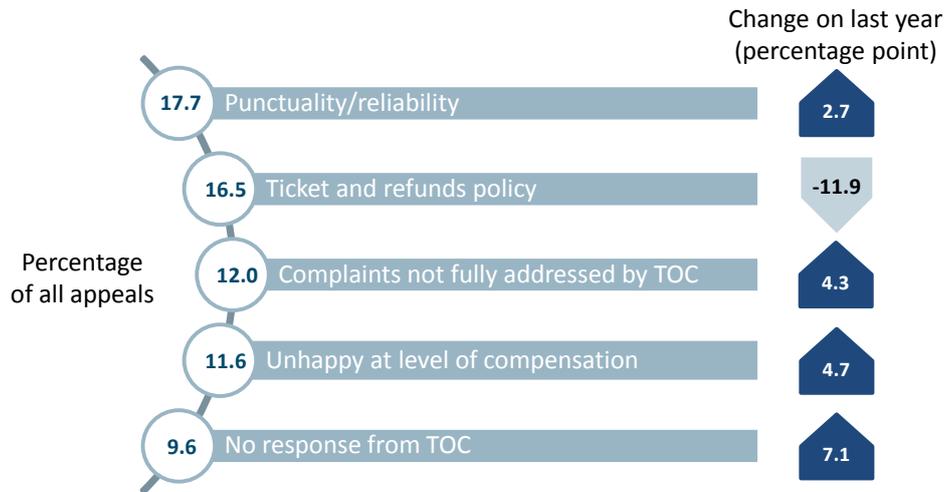
**There were 1,061 appeals closed by passenger watchdogs in 2016-17 Q3, a 48.6% increase on the same quarter last year.** Of which, Transport Focus closed 712 appeals, a 52.5% increase on Q3 last year, and London TravelWatch closed 349 appeals, a 41.3% increase on Q3 last year.

Virgin Trains West Coast had 204 appeals across both passenger watchdogs, this represents the highest number of appeals of all operators (19% of the total), and is a 716% increase on Q3 last year. GTR had the second highest number with 187 appeals, a 91% increase on Q3 last year.

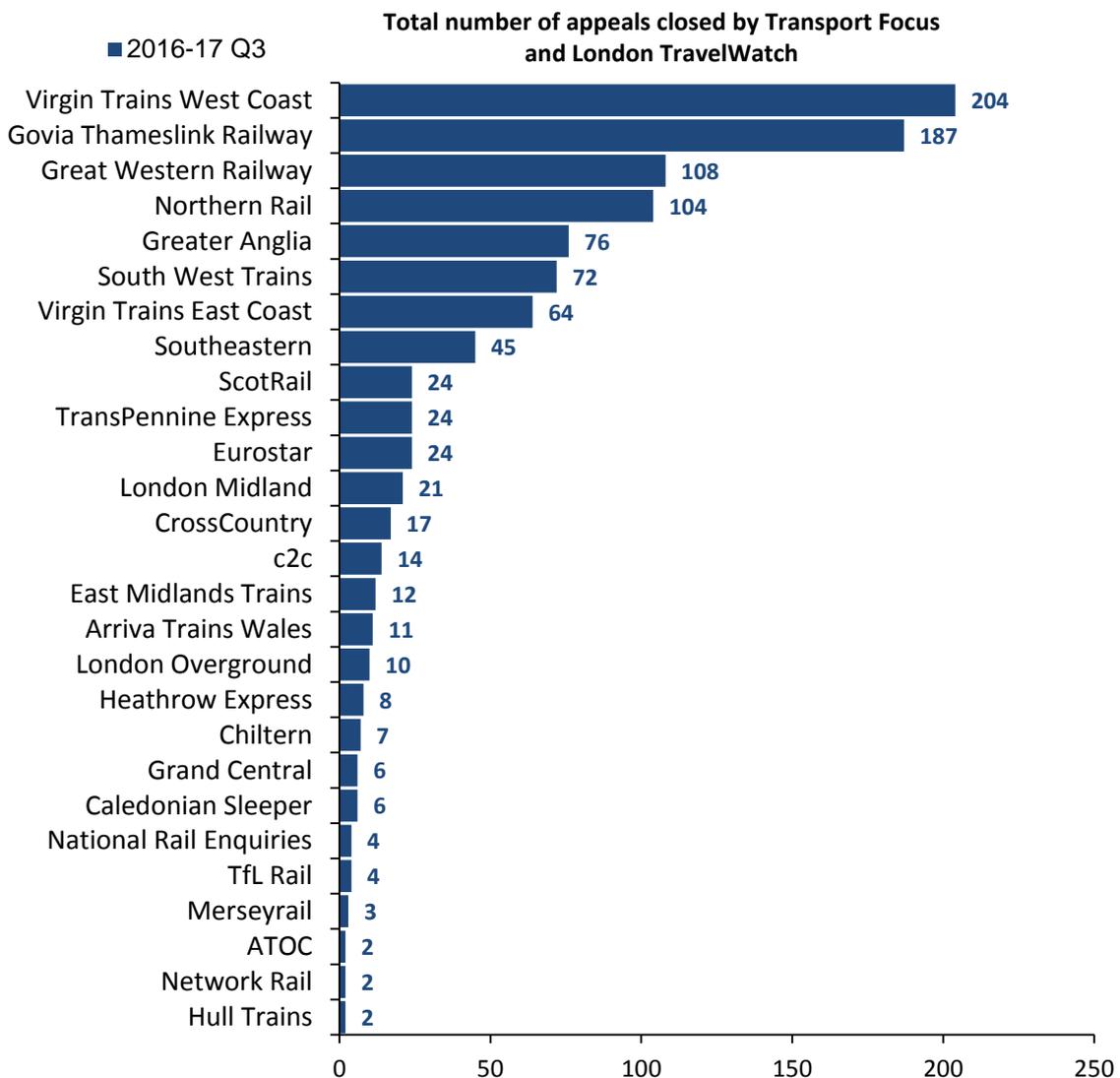
The increase in appeals may be due to ORR starting to collect data from TOCs on the number of complainants who were referred to the passenger watchdogs. This may be driving the TOCs to ensure more complainants are referred, and therefore more complainants are appealing.

Punctuality is the most complained about area for an appeal, with 17.7% of all appeals. Appeals about how operators handle complaints has increased compared to Q3 last year. This includes appeals about complaints not being fully addressed by the TOC (4.3 percentage point increase) and no response from TOC (7.1 percentage point increase).

Top five appeal categories (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch), Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.16](#))



Number of appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q3 ([Table 14.15](#))



- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by TOC quarterly data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.15](#)
- Complaint categories for appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch quarterly data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.16](#)

## 4. National Rail Enquiries telephone service

### Annual 2015-16

There were 3.1 million calls made to the NRE telephone service during 2015-16, a decrease of 5.5% compared to the previous year. This is a reduction of 95.0% since the start of the time series in 1998-99, when 61.7 million calls were made. The decline in the number of calls made to the NRE telephone service is mainly due to the introduction of more ways of accessing train information and the increasing use of these methods, such as self-service channels like websites and apps.

Of the calls made during 2015-16, 96.9% were answered whilst 3.1% were abandoned. This is almost unchanged from 2014-15 when 97.0% of calls were answered

### 2016-17 Quarter 3 Results

The NRE telephone service received 692,289 enquiries in 2016-17 Q3, a decrease of 6.8% compared to 2015-16 Q3. Of the calls received 98.1% were answered while 1.9% was abandoned.

#### **National Rail Enquiries**

**(NRE):** the total number of calls made to National Rail Enquiries (NRE).

National Rail Enquiries is part of the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), who provide the data for this section of the release. 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.

Quarterly data is available from 1997-98 Q2.

- National Rail Enquiries telephone service quarterly data is available on the data portal in: [Table 14.13](#)

# 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 TOC – [Table 14.9](#);
- Praise rate by TOC - [Table 14.17](#);
- Complaints by category – [Table 14.3](#);
- Complaints by category and TOC – [Table 14.5](#)
- Complaints responded to within 10 and 20 working days by TOC – [Table 14.2](#); and
- Complaints by contact method and TOC – [Table 14.6](#)

## Appeals

- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by TOC - [Table 14.15](#);
- Complaint categories for appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch - [Table 14.16](#); and
- Complaint appeals opened by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch - [Table 14.14](#) (*data available until 2012-13 Q4 only*)

## National Rail Enquiries

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

### **Revisions:**

Please see the [revisions log](#) for detail on revisions.

## Annex 2

### Statistical Releases

This publication is part of the statistical releases which cover the majority of reports that were previously released through the [Data Portal](#). The statistical releases consist of four annual and four quarterly themed releases:

#### Annual:

- Rail Finance & Rail Fares Index;
- Rail Safety Statistics;
- Rail Infrastructure, Assets and Environmental;
- Regional Rail Usage.

#### 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.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rail.stats@orr.gsi.gov.uk).

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

## Annex 3 – Quality and methodology

### Changes to TOCs

On 31 May 2015 a new franchise known as TfL Rail began operating services into and out of London Liverpool Street. This operator is the precursor to Crossrail and the services were transferred from Greater Anglia. At the same time, a number of Greater Anglia services were transferred to London Overground. Complaints data for TfL Rail has been collected from 2015-16 Q2 onwards. We are not able to remap historical complaints data for Greater Anglia and London Overground therefore for this quarter the data for these TOCs are not fully comparable with data from previous years.

The new Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) franchises commenced operation on 1 April 2016. As part of this services between Manchester Airport and Blackpool North/Barrow-in-Furness and between Oxenholme and Windermere were transferred from TPE to Northern. Therefore, as these two operators run slightly different services, the data presented are not fully comparable with data from previous years.

### Effect of methodology changes

In 2016-17 ORR introduced some improvements to the way it collects complaints data from the train operators. Because of this the methodologies for how a number of the metrics in this statistical release are calculated have been updated. In this annex the effect of these changes are discussed, and where possible measured by comparing the old and new methodology. For further information on the changes to data collection for this year please see the [Quality Report](#).

### Complaints rate

Train operators report their complaints data to ORR after each railway period (every 28 days). In general there are two ways by which this can be done:

1. Complaints received: i.e. complaints received by the operators within a period and handled either within that period or at a later date
2. Complaints closed: i.e. complaints fully closed by the operators within a period, which were received either earlier in that period or in previous periods

Prior to 2016-17 there was a mix of the two different reporting methods across the different operators, partly because of differing internal reporting needs by the operators and partly because of lack of clarity in the guidance provided by ORR. For 2016-17 all operators agreed to provide data based on the complaints closed methodology<sup>5,6</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> This method was chosen as it was favoured by the majority of TOCs and the most commonly used in previous years

<sup>6</sup> Merseyrail were unable to implement this change until after 2016-17 Q1. Therefore there will be a slight discontinuity in the data for that operator for this year.

Over a long time series (particularly quarterly and annually), this change is unlikely to have any substantial impact on the complaints rate, as ultimately the same number of complaints would be received and closed, and therefore recorded by each method. The most likely impact is the introduction of a time lag in reporting of complaints. For example, if a TOC received a large number of complaints in January, but didn't close the majority of these until March, these would be reported in the March data rather than January. However, with the aggregation to quarterly and then annual data the impact of this should be minimised.

There is a chance that for those operators who changed methodology some complaints could have been double counted in our statistics. For example a complaint received in March and recorded under complaints opened (and thus recorded under 2015-16 Q4) and closed in April (and thus recorded under 2016-17 Q1). However, because the TOCs implemented this change at the start of the year, there should be no double counting within the 2016-17 Q1 results.

A further refinement to the data collection guidance for 2016-17 was emphasizing that praise related communications should not be counted under the complaint statistics. Previously some TOCs had included these communications, which would have inflated the complaints rate.

It is difficult to quantify the number of praise comments included previously in complaints statistics because ORR does not receive the number of unique praise correspondence. Therefore we cannot quantify the effect of this methodology change. However, for those operators for which praise communications were being included in the complaints rate, the removal of praise would lead to a reduction in the complaints rate.

## **New delay compensation scheme categories**

For 2016-17 ORR has introduced six new categories to capture complaints related to delay compensation schemes (see [Quality Report](#) for more detail). In 2016-17 Q1 these new categories accounted for approximately 1.9% of all complaints. It is likely that complaints in these new categories would previously have been classified under the ticketing and refunds policy category, which in 2016-17 Q1 was the fifth most common category for complaints with a 6.7% share of the total. Previously this category has ranked more highly in the categories for complaints. The introduction of the new categories for delay compensation may have contributed to a decrease in the share of complaints under the ticketing and refunds policy category compared to previous years.

## **Praise**

For 2016-17 praise has been removed as a category within the complaints by category tables. This is due to the introduction of a new praise rate table (see below) and methodology change described above which ensures praise is not counted as a complaint.

The impact of this is to increase the percentage share of every other complaint category because praise is now excluded. The table below presents the 2016-17 Q1 data using both the old and new methodology. The table below shows the percentage point change for the top 10 complaints categories following the removal of praise. The relative difference between the complaint categories remains unchanged between the different methods.

| Complaint category (top 10)   | Previous methodology (with praise included) | 2016-17 methodology (without praise) | Percentage point increase per category |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time) | 24.1%                                       | 25.6%                                | 1.5pp                                  |
| Facilities on board   | 7.8%  | 8.3%                                 | 0.5pp                                  |
| Ticket buying facilities - other                                    | 6.9%  | 7.3%                                 | 0.4pp                                  |
| Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand                     | 6.5%  | 6.9%                                 | 0.4pp                                  |
| Ticketing and refunds policy  | 6.3%  | 6.7%                                 | 0.4pp                                  |
| Ticket buying facilities  | 6.1%  | 6.4%                                 | 0.4pp                                  |
| Praise  | 6.1%  | -                                    | -                                      |
| The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at station               | 3.5%  | 3.7%                                 | 0.2pp                                  |
| Other policy  | 2.9%  | 3.1%                                 | 0.2pp                                  |
| The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train                      | 2.7%  | 2.9%                                 | 0.2pp                                  |
| Provision of information about train times/platforms                | 1.8%  | 1.9%                                 | 0.1pp                                  |

The general effect of the methodology changed described above is consistent for all TOCs, however the size of the increase in percentage share varies between operators depending on the volume of praise they receive.

## Praise rate

Following the removal of the praise comments from the two measures discussed above, ORR has introduced a new metric of praise rate. This is calculated using a similar methodology for the complaints rate. Praise is normalised by per 100,000 passenger journeys. This provides a praise rate metric that is comparable between operators. This metric has been back calculated to the start of 2015-16 in order to provide a short time-series. This can be found on the data portal in Praise rate by TOC - [Table 14.17](#).

## Complaints by contact method

Prior to 2016-17 complaints by contact method was calculated using complaints category data. In this each topic covered in a communication would be assigned as a single complaint by that contact method.

For 2016-17 we have adjusted the methodology for this to use complaint correspondence data; i.e. each communication (e.g. letter, email) is counted only once, regardless of the number of topics covered. This change was implemented because it is considered that this is a more accurate representation of the frequency by which operators are contacted by the different methods. Under the previous method results were skewed by those contact types more likely to include multiple complaint categories.

The table below shows the 2016-17 Q1 national data using both methodologies. The new methodology slightly increases the percentage share of telephone complaints, while reducing the share for email/webform and letter. Emails and letters are the types of communication that are more likely to include multiple topics of complaint, hence why their share reduces after the methodology change.

|                             | Email/Webform | Letter | Meet the Manager | Online Forums | Telephone |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------|------------------|---------------|-----------|
| <b>2016-17 methodology</b>  | 63.6%         | 16.9%  | 0.0%             | 1.0%          | 18.5%     |
| <b>Previous methodology</b> | 64.8%         | 17.1%  | 0.0%             | 0.9%          | 17.2%     |

## Complaints answered within 20 working days

As discussed above, ORR has taken measures to ensure that praise related communications are not included within the complaints rate data for 2016-17. This may have a slight effect on the complaints answered within 20 working days statistics. However we cannot quantify the effect of this as we do not know how praise communications were being considered as answered in the previous data. However the effect is likely to be minimal as relatively few praise comments are received compared to complaints (in 2016-17 Q1 there was approximately one praise comment for every 16 complaint comments).



© Crown copyright 2017

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3) or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.