



GB passenger rail service complaints 2017-18 Q3 statistical release

Publication date: 05 April 2018

Next publication date: 28 June 2018

Key Findings

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 2017. You will find:

- A complaints rate per 100,000 journeys for each train operating company (TOC).
- What people are complaining about
- Response time to complaints
- Contact method used to complain
- Appeals made to passenger watchdogs
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling
- Number of calls to National Rail Enquiries (NRE)

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Complaints per 100,000 journeys increased by 0.8% in 2017-18 Q3 for franchised operators compared to the same period last year. This was partly due to a higher proportion of complaints about sufficient room for passengers and facilities on board.

Top five areas of complaint in 2017-18 Q3 (franchised operators)

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage Point (pp) change to last year
 Punctuality/reliability	 27%	↓ 1.0 pp
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	 9%	↑ 2.2 pp
 Facilities on board	 9%	↑ 1.9 pp
 Ticket buying facilities	 6%	↑ 0.3 pp
 Online ticket buying facilities	 5%	↓ 2.9 pp

Response times to complaints in 2017-18 Q3 improved.

Nationally 93.8% of complaints were closed within 20 working days, this is an increase of 7.2pp compared to Q3 last year.

Complaint appeals closed by passenger watchdogs in 2017 18 Q3 increased. The passenger bodies closed 1,565 appeals during 2017-18 Q3, this was 48% higher than 2016-17 Q3.

The majority of complainants were not satisfied with the handling of their complaint or the complaint outcome. Of the people surveyed 28% were satisfied with complaint handling. Of the people surveyed 26% were satisfied with complaint outcome.

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1. Rail complaints

2017-18 Q3

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.

We do this because each operator carries out different number of journeys. To make a standardised comparison between operators we look at complaints per 100,000

Social media comments are excluded from these statistics.

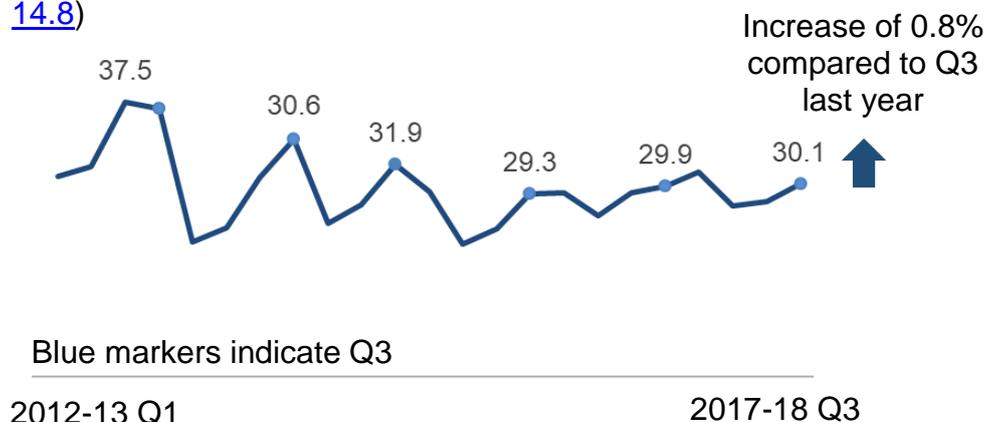
The number of complaints received via such sources, the definition of a 'complaint' and the resources that each train operator allocates to these social platforms vary significantly, and therefore they are excluded from the published figures.

For further information see this [report](#).

■ There were **30.1 complaints per 100,000 journeys** in 2017-18 Q3 for franchised operators. This is 0.8% higher than Q3 the previous year.

■ The complaints rate in 2017-18 Q3 was the highest for the past three years (since 2014-15 Q3)

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators), Great Britain, 2012-13 Q1 to 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.8](#))



Long term trend

There has been a long-term decline in the complaints rate since the time series began in 1998-99. For 2016-17 there were 29.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys, this was a 75% decline since 1998-99. For further information on the long-term trend, please see the [2016-17 Q4 release](#).

Factors that influenced the franchised complaints rate in 2017-18 Q3

Complaints about **sufficient room for passengers** is now the second most complained about area (after punctuality), with 8.8% of complaints made about this. During 2017-18 Q3, complaints about this category increased by 2.2 percentage points (pp) compared to Q3 last year, the largest increase out of all complaint categories collected.

Complaint by category: the type of complaint received by the train operator. There are 65 detailed categories, which make up 14 high-level complaint categories.



Four operators were mostly responsible for this increase in complaints about sufficient room for passengers.

- Complaints about sufficient room now made up 13.0% of Great Western Railway’s (GWR) complaints, a 5.6pp increase compared to Q3 last year. Complaints about the introduction of new rolling stock in October 2017 and some initial teething issues may have contributed to this¹.
- TransPennine Express (TPE) complaints about sufficient room contributed towards 38.5% of their complaints, a 16.6pp increase compared to Q3 last year
- Arriva Train Wales (ATW) had 13.9% of complaints about sufficient room, a 3.0pp increase compared to Q3 last year.
- East Midland Trains (EMT) complaints about sufficient room made up 29.1% of complaints, an 8.1pp increase compared to Q3 last year.



Facilities on board was the third most complained about complaint category.

Overall 8.7% of complaints were about this, a 1.9pp increase compared to Q3 last year. Long distance operators tend to get more complaints about facilities on board, with both Virgin Trains West Coast (VTWC) receiving 22.4% of complaints about this category, and Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC) receiving 22.0% of complaints about facilities on board.



The proportion of complaints about punctuality continues to decline. Overall 27.4% of complaints were about performance, this is the lowest proportion during Q3 (October –December) since the time series started in 2013-14. Several operators which operate in London and the South East sector had a decline in complaints about performance (see table below). This may reflect that performance within the London and South East sector, as measured by the Public Performance Measure (PPM), increased by 2.7pp to 84.5% during 2017-18 Q3 when compared to Q3 last year².

Operator	Percentage of complaints about punctuality	Percentage point change compared to Q3 last year
South Western Railway	39.3%	-5.6pp
Govia Thameslink Railway	15.6%	-14.1pp
Southeastern	15.6%	-6.7pp
c2c	6.7	-9.3pp

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-41634150>

² http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/27033/passenger-freight-performance-2017-18-q3.pdf

Top 10 complaint categories with percentage point change compared to the previous year (franchised operators), Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.3](#))

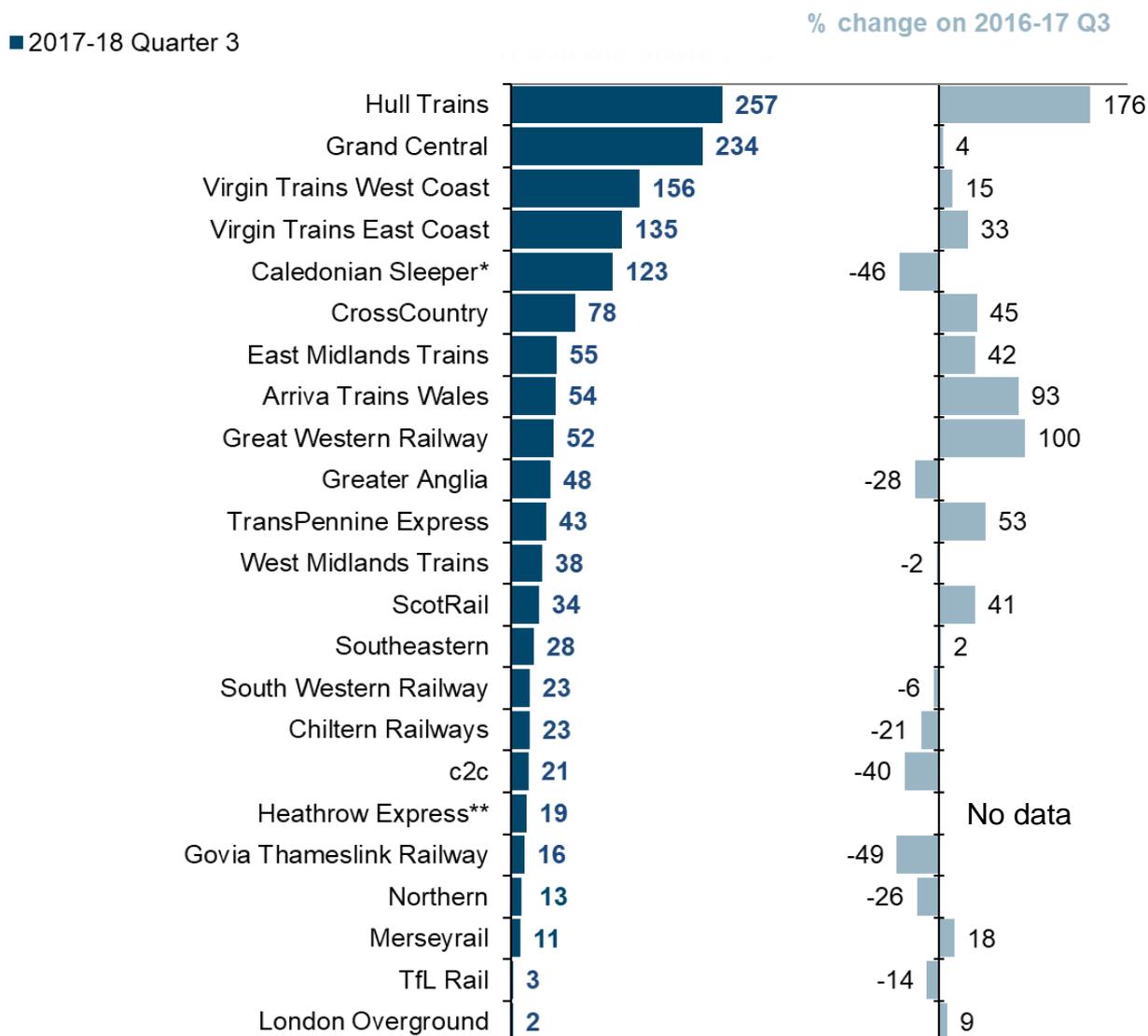
Percentage of all complaints during 2017-18 Q3		Percentage Point (PP) change to 2016-17 Q3
27.4%	Punctuality / Reliability	1.0 pp
8.8%	Sufficient room for passengers to sit/stand	2.2pp
8.7%	Facilities on board	1.9 pp
6.2%	Ticket buying facilities	0.3 pp
5.2%	Online ticket buying facilities	2.9 pp
5.0%	Tickets and refunds policy	0.5 pp
3.7%	The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at station	0.1 pp
3.4%	Smartcard	0.8 pp
2.9%	The attitudes and helpfulness of staff on train	0.4 pp
2.3%	Other policy	0.4 pp

Complaints rate by train operating company

2017-18 Q3

- Overall nine train operators had a lower complaints rate than last year, and 13 train operators had a higher complaints rate than last year.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.9](#))



Complaints rate by TOC (per 100,000 journeys)

*Caledonian sleeper has a volatile complaints rate as they operate a small number of journeys.

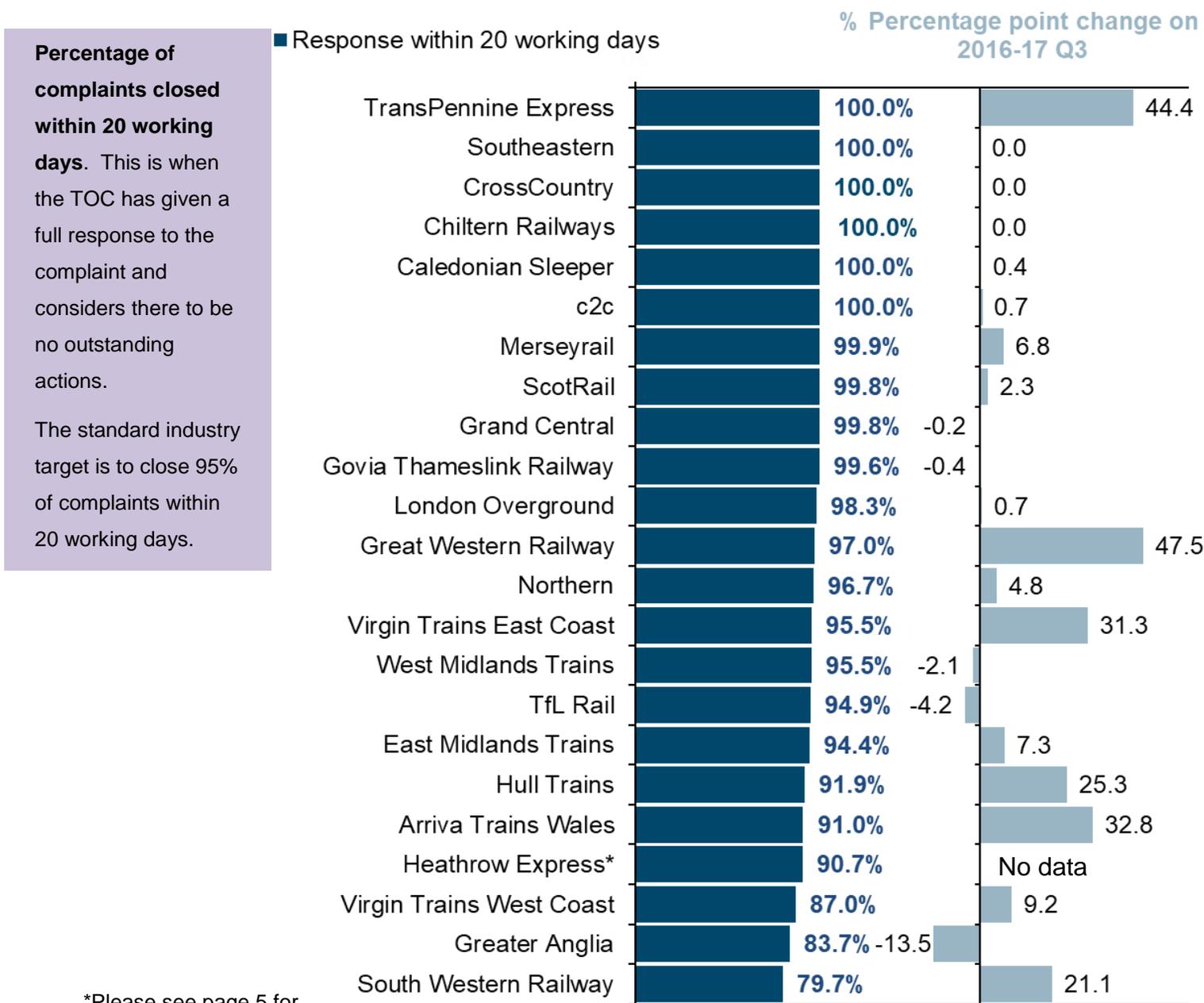
** Heathrow Express provided us with all correspondence rather than complaints only in 2016-17. From 2017-18 Q1 Heathrow Express correctly provided us with complaints only data. Therefore, no comparisons have been made to the previous year. Please also note there are ongoing data quality issues with the complaints data provided and we are working with Heathrow Express to resolve those issues, Please treat Heathrow Express data as provisional. We expect this to be finalised for our Q4 release.

Complaints answered within 20 working days

2017-18 Q3

- Nationally 93.8% of complaints were closed within 20 working days, this is an increase of 7.2pp compared to Q3 last year.
- Overall 15 operators responded to 95% of complaints within 20 working days, and eight operators responded to fewer than 95% of complaints within 20 working days.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.2](#))



*Please see page 5 for notes Heathrow Express

Key changes for selected operators during 2017-18 Q3

Arriva Trains Wales' (ATW) complaints about punctuality and sufficient room for passengers contributed towards the complaints rate increasing. ATW's complaints rate increased by 92.9% in 2017-18 Q3 compared to the same time last year. Complaints about sufficient room made up 13.9% of all complaints and complaints about performance made up 37.1% of all complaints. The increase in complaints rate may partly be caused by ATW responding to 58.2% of complaints in Q3 last year, which meant not all complaints received in Q3 last year will have been answered that quarter.

Fewer complaints about punctuality contributed towards Govia Thameslink Railway's (GTR) complaints rate declining. The complaints rate declined by 49.4% to 16.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q3 compared to Q3 last year. Overall 15.6% of complaints were about punctuality, a 14.1pp decline compared to Q3 last year. Throughout 2016-17 GTR experienced industrial action which contributed towards the higher complaints rate, however, the complaints rate is 126% higher than Q3 two years ago (2015-16 Q3). For 2017-18 Q3 GTR's punctuality, as measured by PPM, improved by 8.0pp to 76.8%³.

Complaints about sufficient room for passengers and ticket buying facilities for Great Western Railway (GWR) contributed towards the complaints rate increasing. The complaints rate doubled to 51.7 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q3 compared to Q3 last year. There were 13.2% of complaints about ticket buying facilities, a 3.0pp increase compared to Q3 last year, and 13.0% of complaints about sufficient room, a 5.6pp increase compared to Q3 last year. The complaints rate increasing can partly be explained by GWR's response to complaints improving compared to the same time last year. GWR answered 97.0% of complaints in 2017-18 Q3, a 47.5pp increase compared to Q3 last year.

Hull Trains had a higher proportion of complaints about sufficient room for passengers and facilities on board. Complaints about sufficient space had the largest increase (up 12.5pp compared to Q3 last year) with nearly one in five complaints being about this category. Complaints about facilities on board increased by 6.9pp compared to Q3 last year and this is the third most complained about area with 14.7% of all complaints. Over the same time period, Hull Train's response rate improved from 66.6% to 91.9% (a 25.3pp increase), which may be a reason for the increase in complaints rate this quarter.

³ http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/27033/passenger-freight-performance-2017-18-q3.pdf

Complaints about sufficient room for passengers for TransPennine Express (TPE) contributed towards the complaints rate increasing. The complaints rate increased by 53.5% to 42.6 complaints per 100,000 journeys in Q3 2017-18 compared to Q3 last year. Complaints about sufficient room for passengers had an increase of 16.6pp in Q3 2017-18 compared to Q3 last year.

A lower proportion of complaints about compensation claims processes for Greater Anglia contributed to the complaints rate decreasing. The complaints rate decreased by 28.5% to 48.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q3 compared to Q3 last year. Complaints about compensation claims process had the biggest decline of all categories, a 6.6pp decrease compared to Q3 last year. During 2017-18 Q3 Greater Anglia's response rate to complaints declined by 13.5 pp to 83.7%.

Complaints by contact method:
the method of communication passengers use to complain.

Complaints by contact method

2017-18 Q3

- Nationally 73% of complaints were made via email or webforms, a 3 pp increase from Q3 last year. This continues the trend for more complaints to be made via email/webform, and fewer by letter.

Percentage of complaints by contact method, Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.6](#))



Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling

2017-18 Q3

This survey data shows passenger satisfaction with train operators' complaints handling.

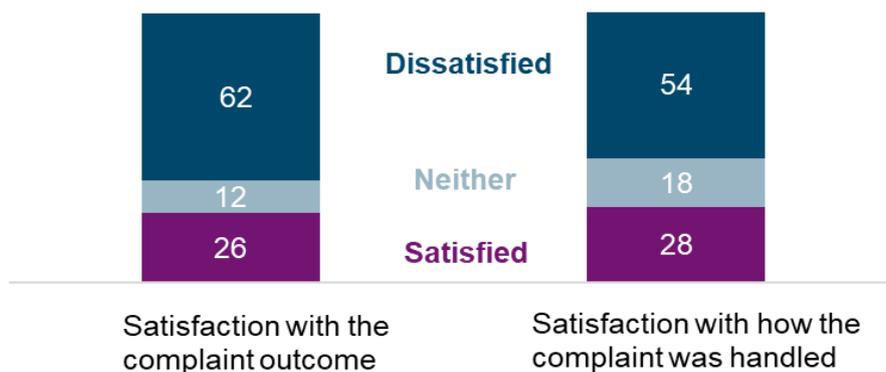
After a passenger makes a complaint to a train operator, they are invited to participate in a follow up survey by an independent research company, commissioned by ORR, about their experience of how the complaint was handled.

The survey asks questions relating to the complaints process and resulting outcome. The complainant is asked to rank their satisfaction with each on a five point scale.

Operators joined the survey at different stages throughout 2016-17. Therefore, comparisons with 2016-17 should be treated with caution. See the [quality and methodology document](#) for further details

- The majority of complainants were not satisfied with the handling of their complaint or the complaint outcome
- When asked about the outcome of the complaint, 26% of people surveyed were satisfied. For the handling of the complaint, 28% of people asked were satisfied.

Overall passenger satisfaction with the handling and outcome of their complaint, Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.20](#))



- When asked how they felt about the train company, 11% of complainants felt more positive and 58% more negative.

How the passenger felt about the train company in light of how their complaint was handled (%), Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.20](#))



2. Appeals

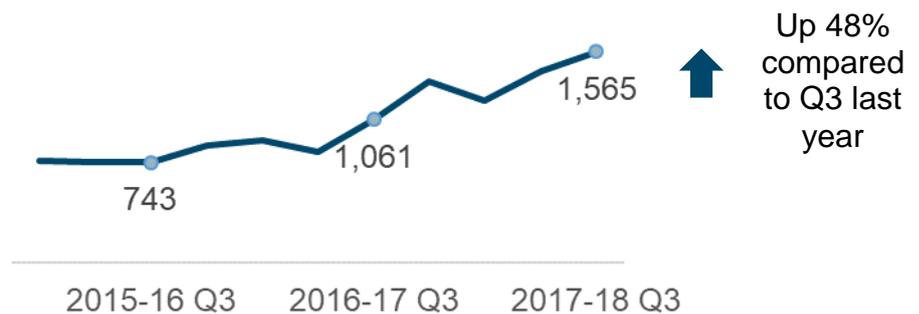
2017-18 Q3

Appeals closed: the number of complaint appeals closed by the independent passenger watchdogs, Transport Focus or London TravelWatch (LTW)

The 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.

■ Combined the passenger bodies closed 1,565 appeals during 2017-18 Q3, this was 48% higher than 2016-17 Q3.

Appeals closed by passenger bodies, Great Britain, 2017-18 Q2 (Table 14.15)



Appeals may be increasing as ORR started to collect data from operators on the number of complainants who were sign-posted to the passenger bodies since 2016-17. This may be driving the operators to ensure more complainants are sign-posted, and therefore more complainants are appealing.

Transport Focus closed 1,205 appeals during 2017-18 Q3, 69% higher than the same time last year. This is the highest number of appeals closed since the time series began in 2013-14. London Travel Watch closed 360 appeals, 3% higher than Q3 last year.

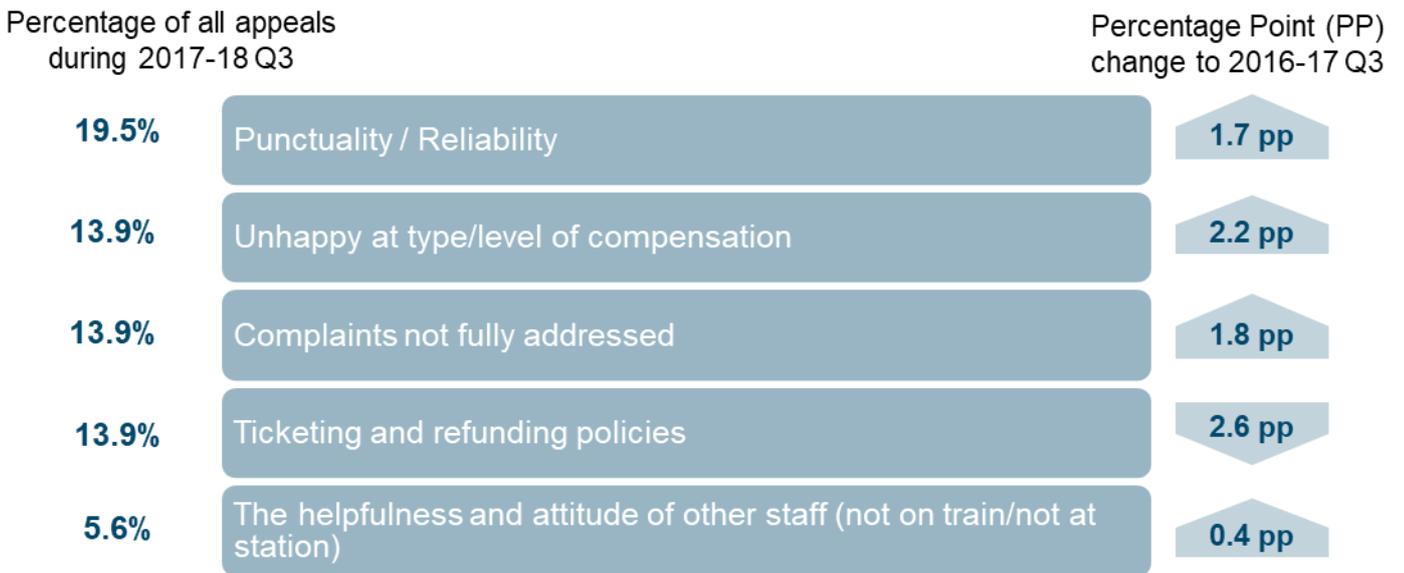
Appeals made against both GWR, VTEC and South Western Railway (SWR) helped to contribute towards the national increase. GWR had 240 appeals during 2017-18 Q3, a 122% increase from Q3 last year. VTEC had 153 appeals during 2017-18 Q3, a 139% increase from Q3 last year. SWR had 153 appeals during 2017-18 Q3, a 113% increase from Q3 last year.

What people are appealing about

- Appeals about punctuality remain the most appealed about area, at a rate of one in five appeals.
- Appeals about being unhappy at the type of level of compensation is the second most appealed category. Overall 13.9% of appeals were about this category, a 2.2pp increase compared to Q3 last year.

- Appeals about not having a response from a TOC regarding a complaint had the greatest decrease of 6.3pp in Q3 2017-18. This aligns with the increase in the national response rate to 93.8% of complaints closed within 20 working days.
- Appeals about staff members who were impolite and unhelpful increased by 5%. This category saw the biggest increase of four percentage points for 2017-18 Q3.

Top five appeal categories (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch), Great Britain, 2017-18 Q3 ([Table 14.16](#))



3. National Rail Enquiries telephone service

2017-18 Q3

- There were 435,941 calls made to the National Rail Enquiries telephone service during 2017-18 Q3, this was a decrease of 37% compared to Q3 the previous year. This is the fewest number of calls made to the NRE since the time series began in 1997-98.

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

National Rail Enquiries is part of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), 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.

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](#)
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling by TOC and Quarter - [Table 14.20](#)

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](#)

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 Abby Sneade on 020 7282 2022 or contact 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](#).



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