



Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2018-19 Q3 Statistical Release

Publication date: 4 April 2019

Next publication date: 27 June 2019

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 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 30 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q3 for franchised operators, a decrease of 1% compared to the same quarter last year.

Punctuality/reliability of rail services remains the largest category of passenger complaint in 2018-19 Q3. The largest percentage point increase from 2017-18 Q3 was for complaints about ticketing and refunds policy.

Top complaint categories, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q3

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change to 2017-18 Q3
 Punctuality/reliability	 23%	 -4.0
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	 10%	 1.4
 Facilities on board	 10%	 1.1
 Ticketing & refunds policy	 6%	 1.5
 Other ticket buying facilities – online ticket sales	 4%	 -0.8



Nationally 94.8% of complaints were closed within 20 working days in 2018-19 Q3. A total of 17 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.



There were 1,827 appeals closed by passenger watchdogs in 2018-19 Q3, an increase of 17% 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 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.

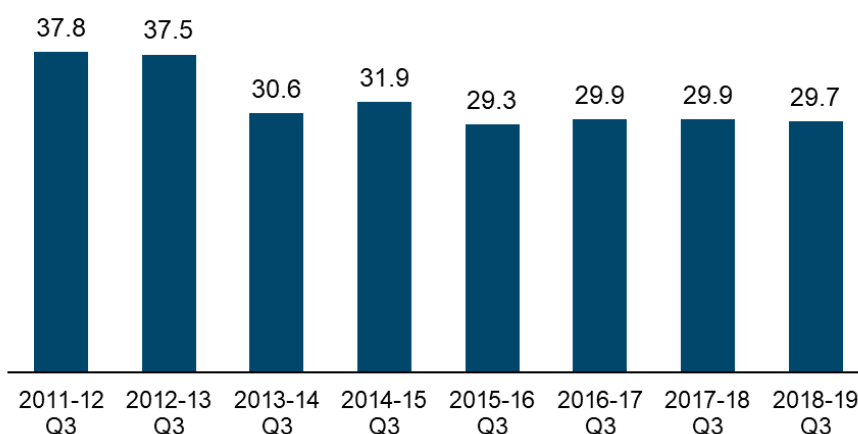
Complaints rate: the volume of complaint correspondence closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. This helps to standardise comparisons between operators.

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 **29.7 complaints per 100,000 journeys for franchised operators in 2018-19 Q3**, compared to 29.9 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q3. This represents a 0.8% decrease.
- The complaints rate for **franchised operators** in 2018-19 Q3 is similar to other Q3 rates in the previous five years:

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators only), Great Britain, 2011-12 Q3 to 2018-19 Q3 ([Table 14.8](#))



- There were 70.6 complaints per 100,000 journeys for **non-franchised operators** in 2018-19 Q3, an 18.0% decrease compared to the same quarter last year. If these non-franchised operators are included, the national complaints rate in 2018-19 Q3 is 29.9 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 2017-18, there were 29.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys, which was a 76% decrease compared to the complaints rate in 1998-99.

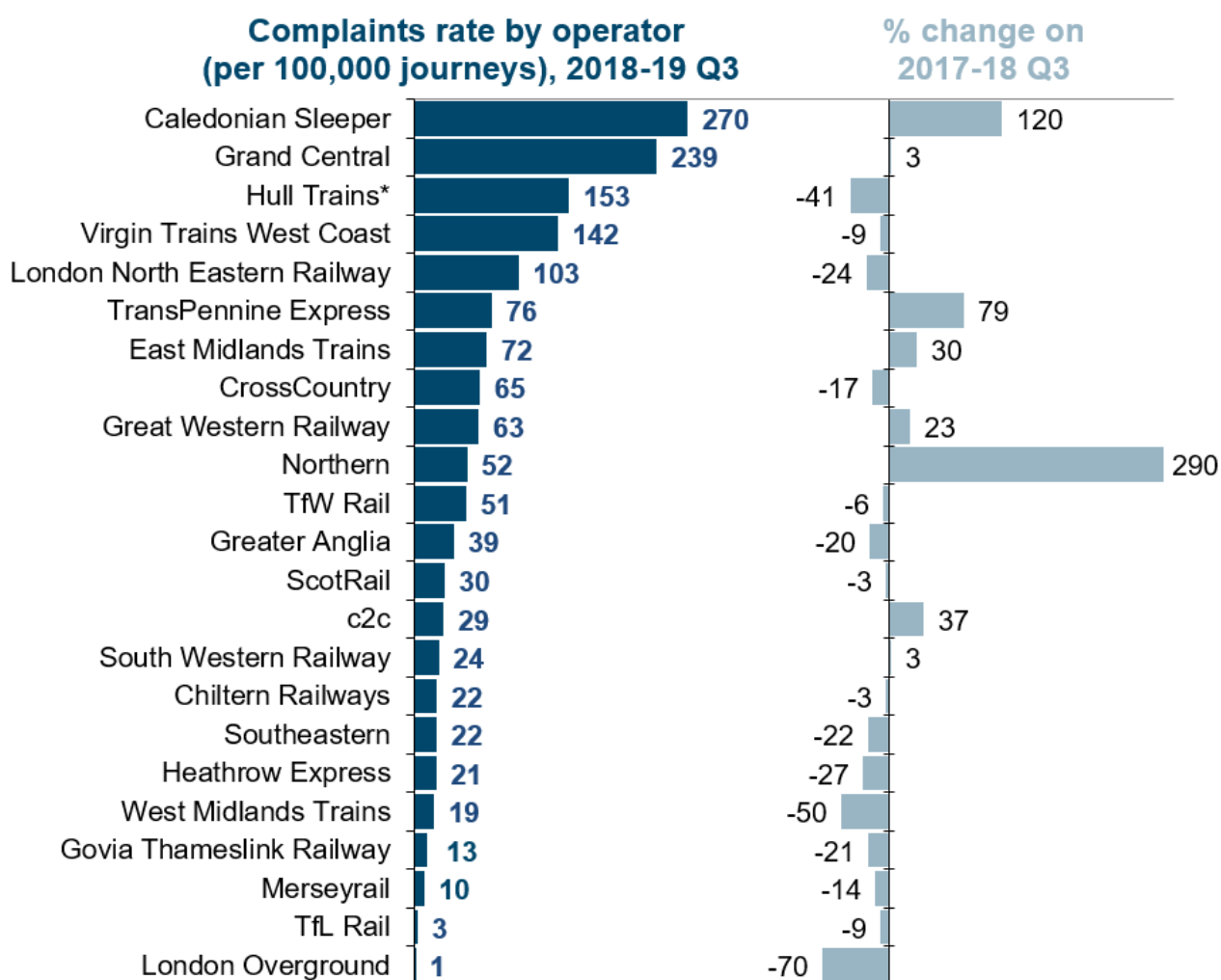
For further information on the reasons behind this long-term trend, please see the [2017-18 Q4 release](#).

Complaints rate by train operating company

2018-19 Q3

- Overall, 8 train operators had a higher complaints rate in 2018-19 Q3 than the same quarter last year, and 15 operators had a lower complaints rate than Q3 last year.
- Caledonian Sleeper had the highest complaints rate in 2018-19 Q3 with 270 complaints per 100,000 journeys.
- Northern has seen the largest percentage increase in their complaints rate compared to 2017-18 Q3, increasing from 13 complaints per 100,000 journeys to 52 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q3.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q3 ([Table 14.9](#))



Note: Transport for Wales Rail (TfW Rail) replaced Arriva Trains Wales as the operator of the Wales & Borders franchise on 14 October 2018

* We are currently liaising with Hull Trains regarding their data quality so this figure should be treated with caution.

Complaints by category

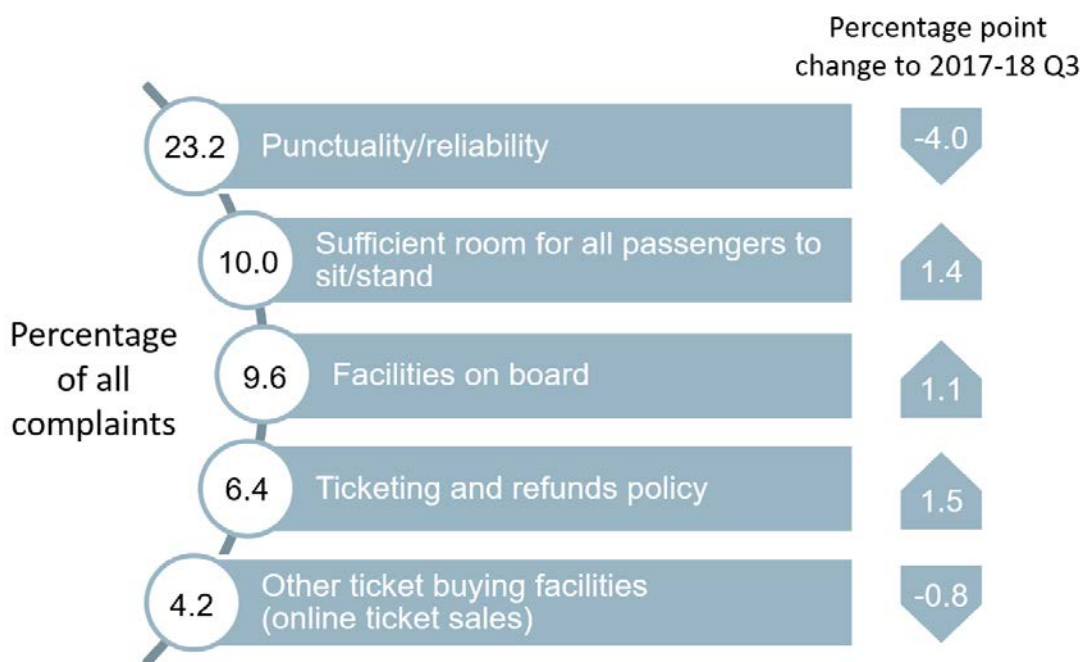
2018-19 Q3

- Punctuality/reliability of rail services was the most common cause to complain. Overall, 23.2% of complaints nationally in 2018-19 Q3 were about punctuality/reliability, though this was a 4.0 percentage point decrease compared to Q3 last year.
- Ticketing and refund policy has seen the largest percentage point increase of any complaints category, increasing to 6.4% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q3 compared to 4.9% in Q3 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 Q3 ([Table 14.3](#))






- The largest increase in 2018-19 Q3 compared to the previous year was regarding ticketing and refunds policy, where 6.4% of all complaints were attributed to this category, up 1.5 percentage points from the previous year.
- The largest decrease in 2018-19 Q3 compared to the previous year was complaints on punctuality/reliability of train services, where 23.2% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q3 were attributed to this category, 4.0 percentage points lower than the previous year.

Top 3 increases in complaints category in 2018-19 Q3 compared with the same quarter in the previous year, Great Britain ([Table 14.3](#))

		pp change from 2017-18 Q3	2018-19 Q3 percentage of all complaints
	Ticketing and refunds policy	↑ 1.5	6.4%
	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	↑ 1.4	10.0%
	Facilities on board	↑ 1.1	9.6%

Top 3 decreases in complaints category in 2018-19 Q3 compared with the same quarter in the previous year ([Table 14.3](#))

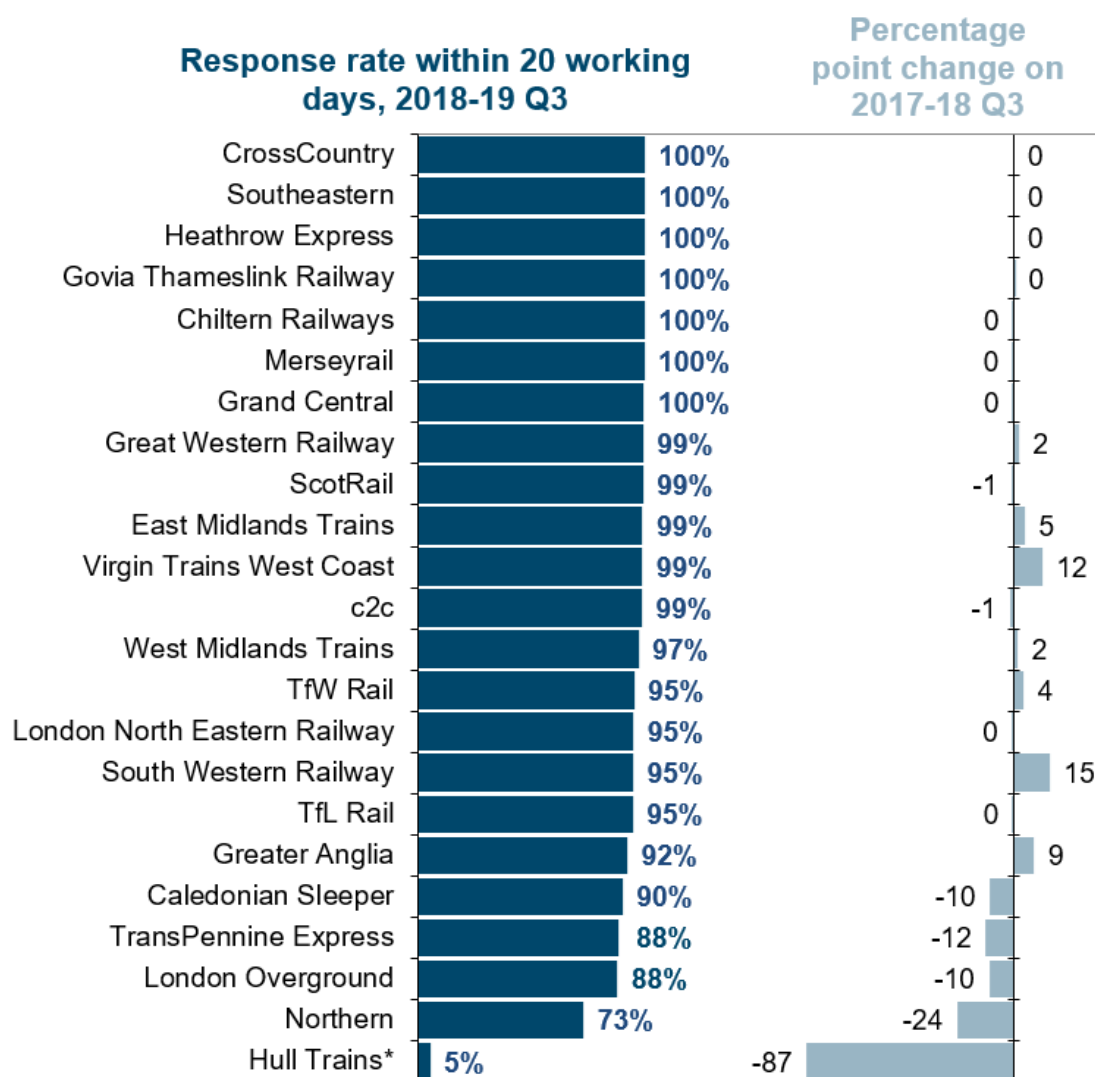
		pp change from 2017-18 Q3	2018-19 Q3 percentage of all complaints
	Punctuality/reliability	↓ 4.0	23.2%
	Ticket buying facilities	↓ 2.8	3.4%
	Other policy	↓ 1.2	1.1%

Complaints answered within 20 working days

2018-19 Q3

- Nationally 94.8% of complaints were closed within 20 working days in 2018-19 Q3. This is 1.0 percentage point higher than the same quarter last year.
- In 2018-19 Q3, 17 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.
- Hull Trains and Northern have seen the largest decreases in their complaints response rates during 2018-19 Q3 compared to the same quarter last year.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q3 ([Table 14.2](#))



Note: Transport for Wales Rail (TfW Rail) replaced Arriva Trains Wales as the operator of the Wales & Borders franchise on 14 October 2018

* We are currently liaising with Hull Trains regarding their data quality so this figure should be treated with caution.

Key changes for selected operators during 2018-19 Q3

The highest complaints rate was for **Caledonian Sleeper** at 270 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q3, an increase from 123 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2017-18 Q3. However, due to low number of passenger journeys taken on Caledonian Sleeper services, this rate corresponds to only 174 individual complaints closed during the latest quarter.

The largest increase in complaints rate was for **Northern** which increased to 52 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q3 from 13 complaints per 100,000 journeys during the same quarter the previous year. Complaints regarding punctuality/reliability of services was the biggest category accounting for 40.2% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q3, while complaints about sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand saw the biggest decrease from the same quarter in the previous year, decreasing from 14.7% in 2017-18 Q3 to 6.0% in 2018-19 Q3. Northern has also seen a decrease in the percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days in 2018-19 Q3, declining by 24 percentage points from the previous year to 73.1%.

The third largest increase in complaints rate behind Northern and Caledonian Sleeper was **TransPennine Express**, which increased to 76 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q3 from 43 complaints per 100,000 journeys during the same quarter the previous year. TransPennine Express has also seen a recent decrease in the percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days, falling from 100.0% in 2017-18 Q3 to 88.4% in 2018-19 Q3.

Hull Trains had a response rate of 5.1% in 2018-19 Q3. *We are currently liaising with Hull Trains regarding their data quality so this figure should be treated with caution.*

Four train operators increased their response rate within 20 working days since Q3 last year so that in 2018-19 Q3 they met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days. These train operators are **South Western Railway** (up 15 percentage points from last year), **Virgin Trains West Coast** (up 12 percentage points), **East Midlands Trains** (up 5 percentage points) and **TfW Rail** (up 4 percentage points).

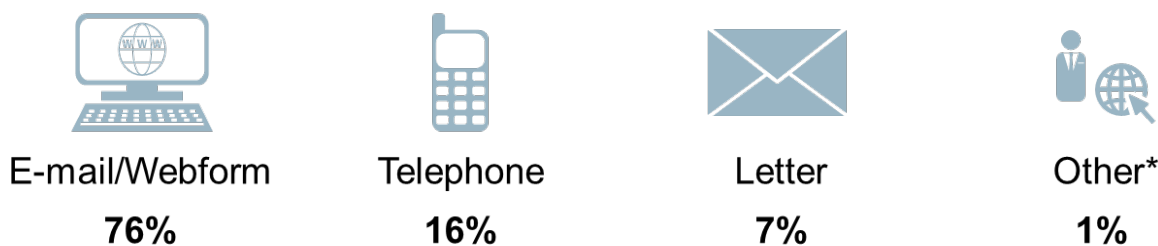
Complaints by contact method

2018-19 Q3

- Nationally 75.8% of all complaints during 2018-19 Q3 were made by e-mail or webform, a 2.5 percentage point increase from Q3 in the previous year. This continues the long-term trend of the increasing use of online contact methods to complain to train operators.

ORR are proposing to publish data tables on contact method & NRE annually instead of quarterly from 2019-20 Q1. See [Annex 1](#) for more details.

Percentage of complaints by contact method, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q3 ([Table 14.6](#))



*other includes 'meet the manager' sessions and online forums

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 Q3

- There were 0.5 million calls made to the National Rail Enquiries (NRE) telephone service during 2018-19 Q3, a decrease of 14.4% 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 Q3, 98.6% were answered and 1.4% 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

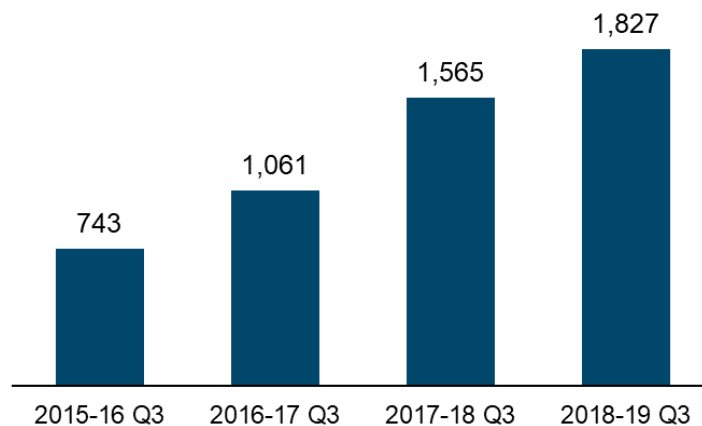
2018-19 Q3

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 1,827 appeals during 2018-19 Q3. This was 17% higher than during 2017-18 Q3.

Appeals closed by passenger watchdogs, Great Britain, 2015-16 Q3 to 2018-19 Q3 ([Table 14.15](#))



Transport Focus closed 1,228 appeals during 2018-19 Q3, 2% higher than the same quarter last year. London TravelWatch closed 599 appeals during 2018-19 Q3, 66% 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.

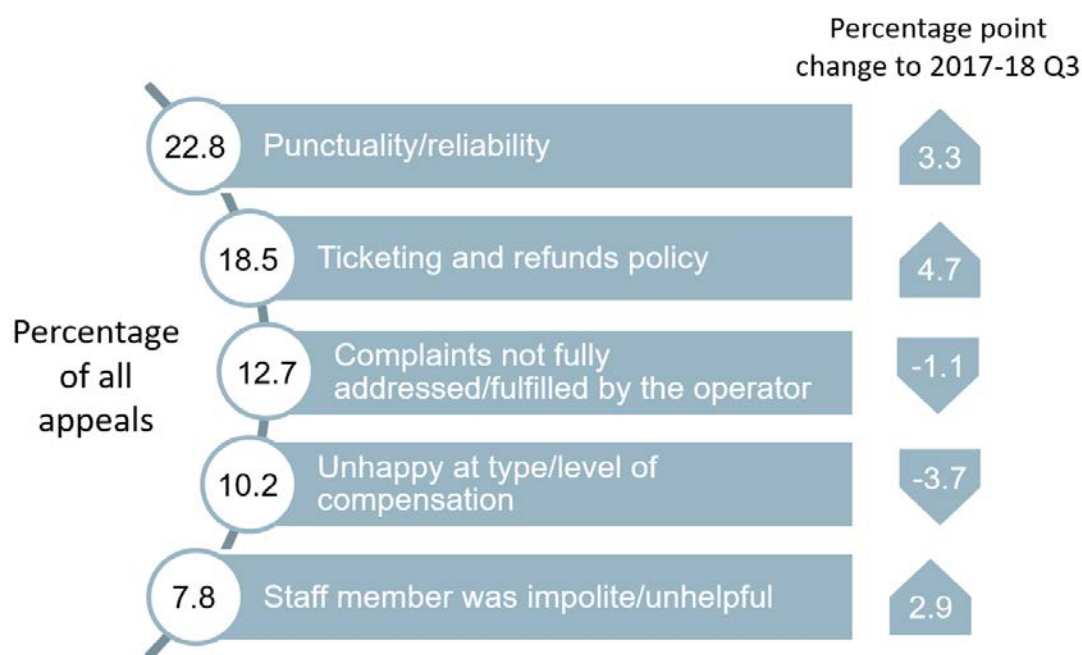
From 26 November 2018 (during 2018-19 Q3) the Rail Ombudsman started. The Rail Ombudsman provides a service for unresolved customer complaints within the rail industry. As a result, future statistics in this series may be affected with some appeals being dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus or London TravelWatch. The Rail Ombudsman is planning to publish data on the number of appeals closed during 2018-19 in July 2019. More information can be found at the following link: <http://www.railombudsman.org>.

Appeals by category

2018-19 Q3

- 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 Q3, a 3.3 percentage point increase compared to 2017-18 Q3. Punctuality/reliability has been the largest appeals category since 2016-17 Q3.
- Appeals about ticketing and refunds policy was the second most appealed about category with 18.5% of appeals closed in 2018-19 Q3; this is a 4.7 percentage point increase compared to 2017-18 Q3.

Top five appeal categories, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q3 ([Table 14.16](#))



- Appeals about ticketing and refunds policy saw the largest percentage point increase in 2018-19 Q3 to 18.5%, an increase from 13.9% in 2017-18 Q3.
- Appeals about the type/level of compensation provided saw the largest percentage point decrease in 2018-19 Q3 to 10.2%, a decrease from 13.9% in 2017-18 Q3.

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: Statistics on rail delay compensation

One of the complaint categories in this release relates to delay compensation claims. For the first time new statistics were published on rail delay compensation claims alongside this 2018-19 Q2 statistical release in January 2019. This data can be found on the ORR data portal in [Table 17.01](#).

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 at the following link: <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/statistical-releases>, where data tables on these statistics can be found on the ORR data portal in [Table 17.01](#).

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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