



Passenger Rail Service Complaints

2019-20 Quarter 3

Publication date: 2 April 2020

Next publication date: 25 June 2020

Background

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

- 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 Q3 refers to October, November and December 2019.


Annual statistics for 2018-19 can be found in the [2018-19 Q4 statistical release](#).


There were 31.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys for franchised train operators in 2019-20 Q3, an increase of 5.7% compared to 2018-19 Q3

Punctuality/reliability of rail services remained the largest category of passenger complaint in 2019-20 Q3 at 26%. The largest percentage point (pp) increase in 2019-20 Q3 compared with Q3 last year was also regarding complaints about punctuality/reliability (a 3.1 pp increase).

Top 5 complaint categories, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q3

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change compared to 2018-19 Q3
 Punctuality/reliability	26%	3.1
 Facilities on board	10%	0.4
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	8%	-2.1
 Ticketing & refunds policy	6%	-0.3
 Other ticket buying facilities – online ticket sales	6%	1.8

 Nationally, 94.9% of complaints were closed within 20 working days during 2019-20 Q3. A total of 15 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.

 There were 316 appeals closed by passenger watchdogs in 2019-20 Q3, a decrease of 82.7% compared to the same quarter last year. This large decrease is due to many appeals being directed to the new Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus or London TravelWatch.

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Rail complaints rates, 2019-20 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 operator.

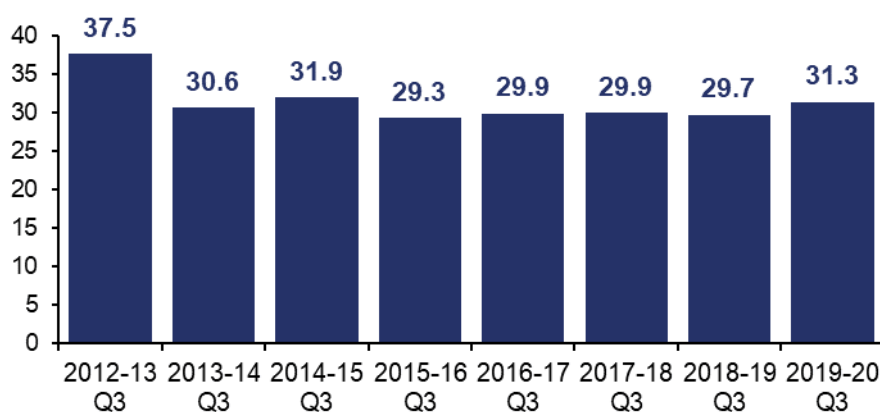
The **complaints rate** is the volume of complaint correspondences closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. Each communication with the customer is counted as a single complaint, regardless of how many topics are covered in the communication.

Franchised train operators are train operators who operate under the terms of franchises let by Government. **Non-franchised** operators (open access) hold licenses to provide supplementary services on chosen routes.

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

- There were **31.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys for franchised train operators in 2019-20 Q3**, compared to 29.7 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2018-19 Q3. This represents a 5.7% increase compared to Q3 last year.
- The complaints rate in 2019-20 Q3 is the highest complaints rate since 2014-15 Q3.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators only), Great Britain, 2012-13 Q3 to 2019-20 Q3 (Table 14.8)



- There were 53.1 complaints per 100,000 journeys for non-franchised train operators in 2019-20 Q3, a 20.1% decrease compared to the same quarter last year (these operators are Hull Trains, Grand Central and Heathrow Express).
- The national complaints rate (this includes both franchised and non-franchised train operators) in 2019-20 Q3 was 31.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys, an increase of 5.4% compared to Q3 last year.

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.

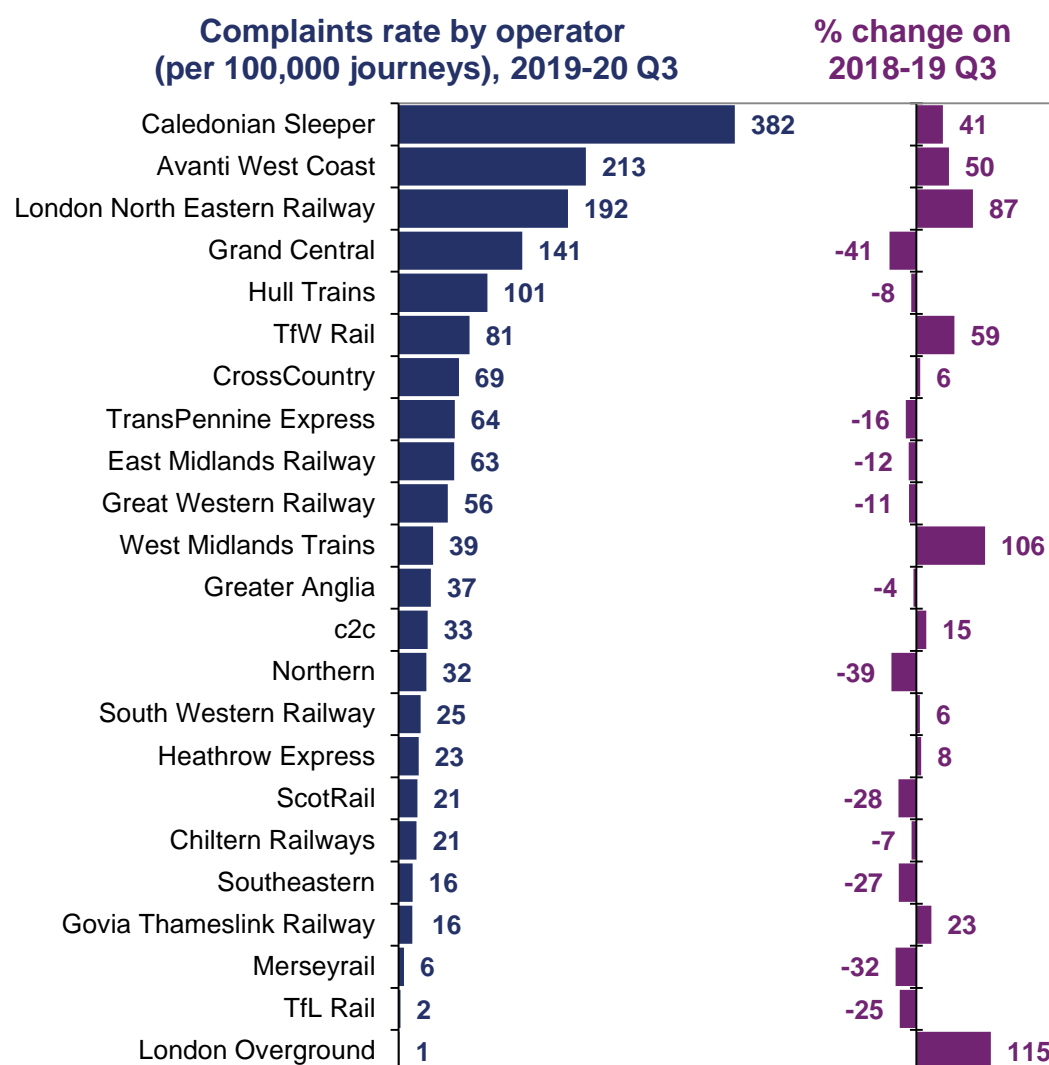
Long-term trend

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 passenger rail service complaints release](#).

Complaints rate by train operator, 2019-20 Q3

- **Caledonian Sleeper had the highest complaints rate in 2019-20 Q3** with 382 complaints per 100,000 journeys. The delayed introduction of new trains as well as unforeseen problems has meant Caledonian Sleeper has dealt with a larger volume of correspondence in 2019-20 Q3 than in the same quarter last year.
- There were 11 train operators that had a higher complaints rate and 12 train operators that had a lower complaints rate in 2019-20 Q3 compared with 2018-19 Q3.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operator, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q3 (Table 14.9)



Note: Avanti West Coast replaced Virgin Trains West Coast as the operator of the InterCity West Coast franchise on 8 December 2019. The Avanti West Coast data in this release includes data for both TOCS (Virgin Trains West Coast between 1 October to 7 December 2019, and Avanti West Coast from 8 December 2019 onwards).

Complaints by category, 2019-20 Q3

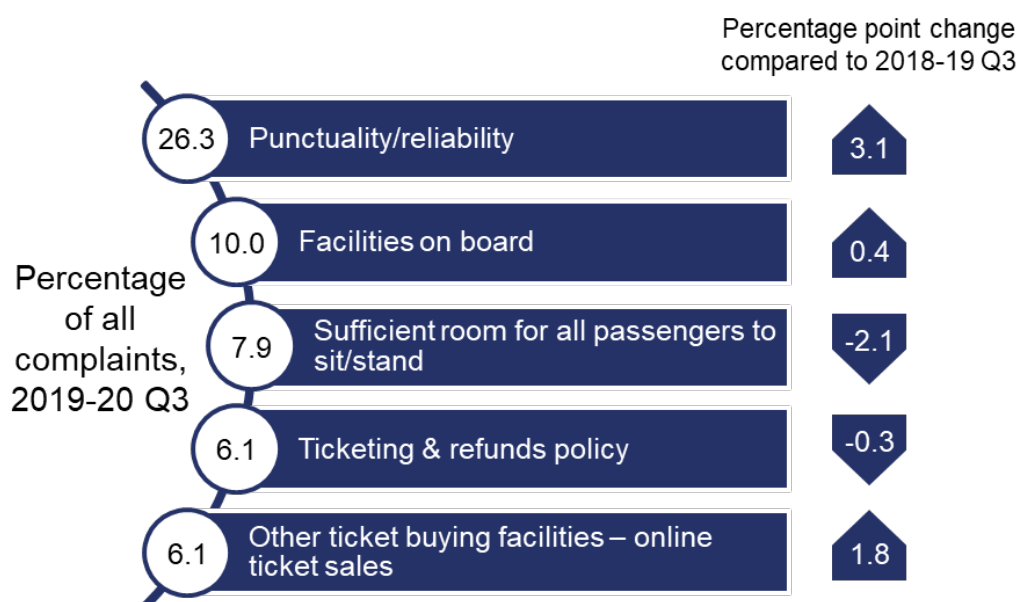
Complaint by category:

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 remained the most common cause to complain to train operators.** Just over a quarter (26.3%) of all complaints nationally in 2019-20 Q3 were about punctuality/reliability. This represents an increase of 3.1 pp compared to 2018-19 Q3.
- Complaints about facilities on board the train was the second most common reason to complain, with one in ten (10.0%) of all complaints made. Complaints about sufficient room for passengers was the third most complained about category with 7.9% of complaints, although this category declined by 2.1 pp compared to Q3 last year. Complaints about ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales) and ticketing and refund policy were the fourth and fifth most complained about areas. Altogether, these five complaint categories accounted for just over half (56.4%) of all complaints made.

Top 5 complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q3 (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. This data is also available by individual train operator in Table 14.5.

Largest increases and decreases in complaint categories between 2018-19 Q3 and 2019-20 Q3







- The largest increase in 2019-20 Q3 compared to the previous year was regarding punctuality/reliability, a 3.1 pp increase compared to 2018-19 Q3.
- The [On Time punctuality measure](#) (the percentage of recorded station stops arrived at 'on time' in Great Britain) for 2019-20 Q3 was 59.2%, a 0.4 pp improvement compared to Q3 last year. Nationally punctuality/reliability complaints may have increased despite punctuality improving at a national level due to poorer punctuality for a few train operators.

Top 3 increases in complaints category in 2019-20 Q3 compared with 2018-19 Q3, Great Britain (Table 14.3)

	pp change from 2018-19 Q3	2019-20 Q3 percentage of all complaints
 Punctuality/reliability	 3.1	26.3%
 Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	 1.8	6.1%
 Delay compensation claims process	 0.7	2.5%

- The largest decrease in 2019-20 Q3 compared to the previous year was regarding sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand, a decline of 2.1pp compared to 2018-19 Q3. The second and third largest decreases were both related to delay compensation schemes.

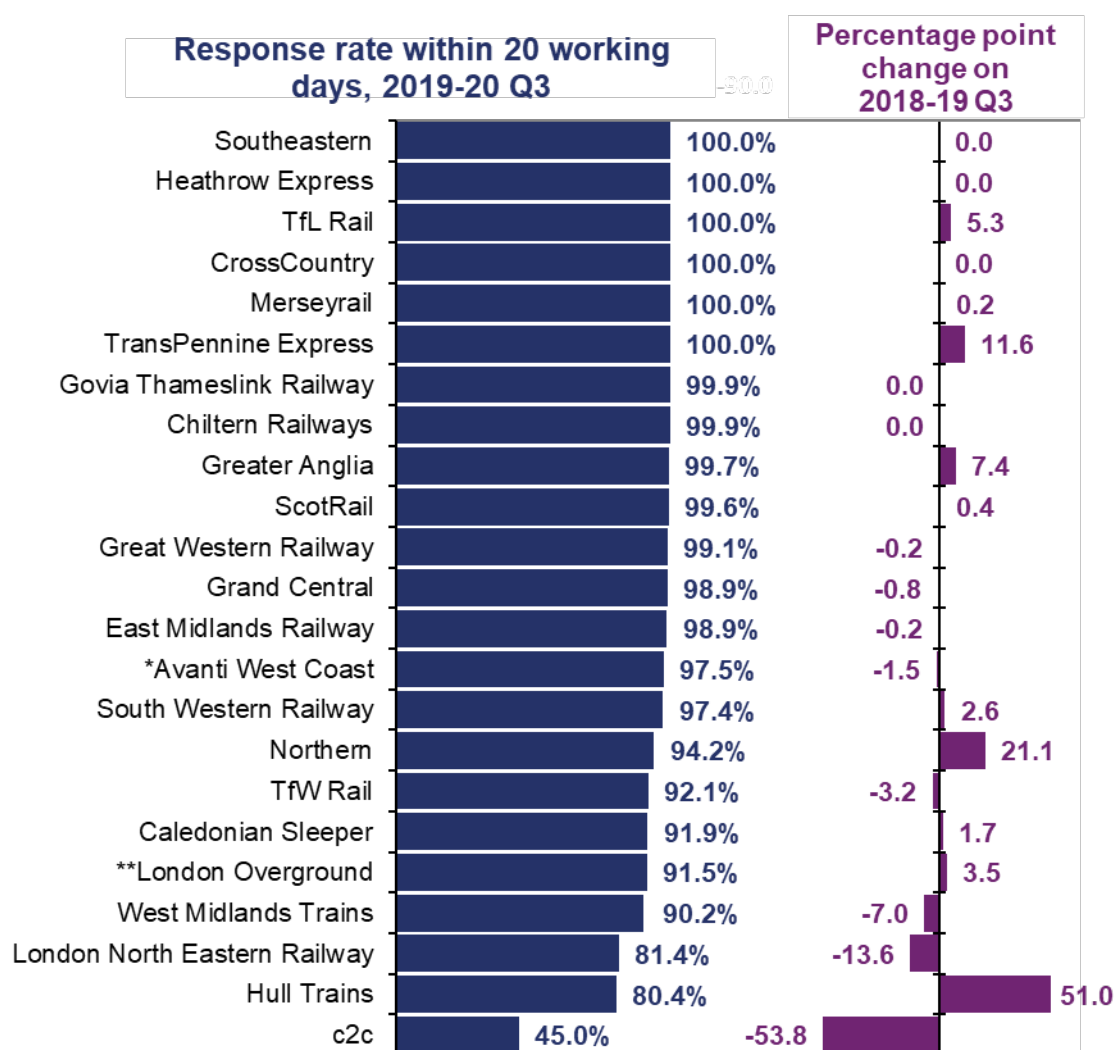
Top 3 decreases in complaints category in 2019-20 Q3 compared with 2018-19 Q3, Great Britain (Table 14.3)

	pp change from 2018-19 Q3	2019-20 Q3 percentage of all complaints
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	 2.1	7.9%
 Level of delay compensation	 0.7	1.0%
 Awareness/Promotion of schemes	 0.7	0.2%

Complaints answered within 20 working days, 2019-20 Q3

- Nationally, 94.9% of complaints were answered within 20 working days in 2019-20 Q3. For Q3 last year, 94.9% of complaints were also answered within 20 working days.
- In 2019-20 Q3, 15 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to answer at least 95% of their complaints within 20 working days. For Q3 last year, 17 operators met this requirement (when rounded to one decimal place).
- Hull Trains (up 51.0 pp) and Northern (up 21.1 pp) have seen the largest increases in their complaints response rates during 2019-20 Q3 compared to the same quarter last year. c2c answered 45.0% of complaints within 20 working days in 2019-20 Q3, this represents a 53.8 pp decline compared to Q3 last year.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operator, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q3 (Table 14.2)



Notes:

*Avanti West Coast replaced Virgin Trains West Coast as the operator of the InterCity West Coast franchise on 8 December 2019. The Avanti West Coast data in this release includes data for both TOCS (Virgin Trains West Coast between 1 October to 7 December 2019, and Avanti West Coast from 8 December 2019 onwards).

**London Overground's response rate data is provisional. London Overground have indicated to us that their 2019-20 response rate data may be revised due to some data quality issues. We expect this data to be finalised for our Q4 release due to be published on 25 June 2020.

Key changes for selected operators during 2019-20 Q3

Long-distance train operators had the three largest complaints rates in 2019-20 Q3, **Caledonian Sleeper** (382 complaints per 100,000 journeys), **Avanti Trains West Coast** (213 complaints per 100,000 journeys) and **London North Eastern Railway** (192 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 than operators in other sectors.

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

West Midlands Trains had the second highest complaints rate increase in 2019-20 Q3 compared to Q3 last year (a 106% increase). West Midlands Trains response to complaints within 20 working days in 2019-20 Q3 was 90.2%, a 7.0 pp decline compared to Q3 last year. A major reason for this was due to an increase in complaints following the May 2019 timetable change, and poorer punctuality in 2019-20 Q3. Train punctuality statistics show that 44.7% trains were on time at all recorded stations stops for West Midlands Trains in 2019-20 Q3, a 8.5 pp decline compared to Q3 last year.

Overall eight train operators responded to fewer than the required 95% of complaints within 20 working days in 2019-20 Q3.

- Four of these train operators had a decline in their response rate in 2019-20 Q3 compared to Q3 last year. These operators were: TfW Rail (92.1% responded within 20 working days, down 3.2 pp compared to Q3 last year), West Midlands Trains (90.2%, down 7.0%), London North Eastern Railway (81.4%, down 13.6 pp) and c2c (45.0%, down 53.8 pp).
- Three of these operators responded to fewer than 95% of complaints within 20 working days, however, they all improved their complaints response rate in 2019-20 Q3 compared to Q3 last year. These train operators were: Northern (94.2% of

complaints responded to within 20 working days, up 21.1 pp compared to Q3 last year), Caledonian Sleeper (91.9%, up 1.7 pp) and Hull Trains (80.4%, up 51.0 pp).

- London Overground's response rate data is provisional and is subject to change.

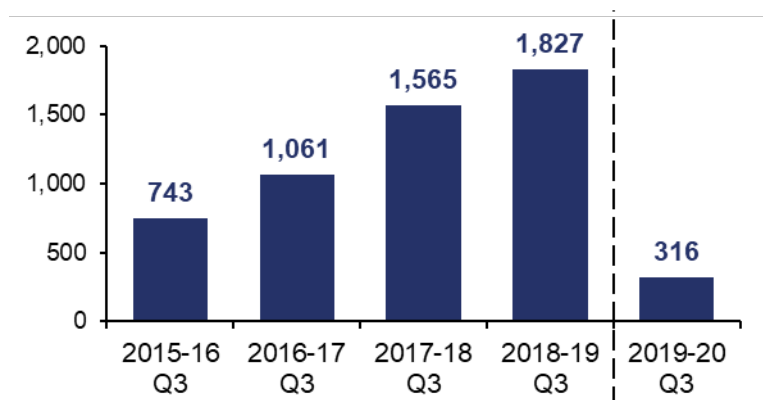
Appeals, 2019-20 Q3

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 316 appeals during 2019-20 Q3.** This was 82.7% lower than the volume of appeals closed during 2018-19 Q3.
- 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 decreased since the introduction of the Rail Ombudsman.
- Provisional figures indicate 612 appeals were eligible to be considered by the Rail Ombudsman and were subsequently closed during 2019-20 Q3.

Appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch, Great Britain, 2015-16 Q3 to 2019-20 Q3 (Table 14.15)



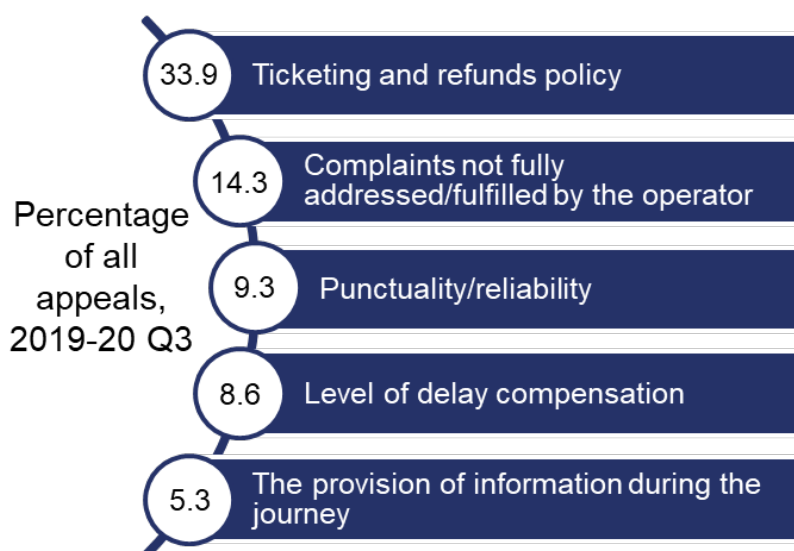
Note: The dotted line indicates a break in the timeseries when some appeals began being dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman instead of Transport Focus or London TravelWatch

Appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch attributed to each train operator or rail body is available on the ORR Data Portal in Table 14.15.

Appeals by category

- 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 or punctuality are ‘in scope’ for the Rail Ombudsman. **Therefore, comparisons on appeal categories with previous years should be treated with caution.**
- Appeals about ticketing and refund policies was the most appealed about complaint category with 33.9% of appeals closed being about this category in 2019-20 Q3. This was a 15.4 pp increase compared to 2018-19 Q3, and this category has overtaken punctuality/reliability of services as the most appealed about complaint category for this quarter.
- Punctuality/reliability category has seen the largest decline out of all appeal categories, with a decline of 13.5 pp compared to Q3 last year. This decrease reflects that these appeals are increasingly dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman.

Top 5 appeal categories, Great Britain, 2019-20 Q3 (Table 14.16)



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 [ORR data portal](#) free of charge and can be downloaded in Excel format. We can also provide data in csv or ods format on request.

All tables associated with this release can be found under Data Tables on the [Passenger rail service complaints page](#).

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*);
- Praise rate by train operator – Table 14.17 (*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.

National Rail Enquiries

- National Rail Enquiry telephone service – Table 14.13 (*updated annually*);

Other related data

- 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.

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

Revisions

There were revisions to London Overground's complaints rate data for 2019-20 Q2 due to data quality issues. There may be further revisions for London Overground's response within 20 working days data with the 2019-20 Q4 release due to more data quality issues being resolved. Further details on historic revisions to the data can be found in the [Revisions Log](#).

Methodology and Quality

For more information on data collection and the methodology used to calculate the statistics in this release please see the accompanying [Quality Report](#).

Annex 2 – Related data: Statistics on rail delay compensation

One of the complaint categories in this release relates to delay compensation schemes. Statistics published on delay compensation claims data were collected from 2018-19 onwards, and have been published in a factsheet 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 (Great Britain) level as well as by each individual train operator.

A factsheet, interactive charts, and a data table showing these delay compensation claim statistics can be found on the [delay compensation claims page](#) of the ORR data portal.

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

- Rail Finance
- Rail Fares Index
- Rail Safety Statistics
- Rail Infrastructure and Assets
- Rail Emissions
- Regional Rail Usage

Quarterly

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

In addition to the above, ORR publishes the following Official Statistics on the [ORR data portal](#):

Annual

- Estimates of Station Usage
- Train Operating Company Key Statistics
- Rail Statistics Compendium
- Occupational Health

Quarterly

- Signals passed at danger (SPADS)
- Delay Compensation Claims
- Disabled Person's Railcard (DPRC)
- Passenger assistance

The ORR data portal provides a list of [publication dates](#) for the next twelve months.

The Department for Transport (DfT) also publishes a range of rail statistics which can be found at [DfT Rail Statistics](#). For example, Rail passenger numbers and overcrowding on weekdays in major cities.

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

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 - Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). The OSR 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 OSR 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 were assessed in 2012](#) and hold National Statistics status. Since our assessment we have improved the content, presentation and quality of our statistical releases. In addition, in July 2019 we launched our new data portal. Therefore, in late 2019 we worked with the OSR to conduct a compliance check to ensure we are still meeting the standards of the Code. On 4 November 2019, [OSR published a letter](#) confirming that ORR's statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics. OSR found many positive aspects in the way that we produce and present our statistics and welcomed the range of improvements made since the statistics were last assessed. OSR identified some areas that we could consider that may enhance the value of the statistics further and we are working on these.

For more information on how we adhere to the Code please see our [UKSA Code of Practice page](#) on the ORR data portal.

For more details, please contact the Statistics Head of Profession Lyndsey Melbourne at rail.stats@orr.gov.uk.



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