



OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD

Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2018-19 Q1 Statistical Release

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Key results

Complaints per 100,000 journeys increased by 6.6% in 2018-19 Q1 for franchised operators compared to the same quarter last year. An increase in complaints about punctuality/reliability and timetabling contributed towards this increase.

Top complaint categories, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q1

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change to 2017-18 Q1
 Punctuality/reliability	 22%	 1.3
 Facilities on board	 8%	 0.8
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	 7%	 0.0
 Ticketing & refunds policy	 6%	 0.0
 Ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	 5%	 -1.3
 Timetabling	 5%	 4.3

Background

This release contains information on **complaints** made by passengers regarding rail services in Great Britain with the latest quarterly data referring to April, May and June 2018. 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
- Praise rate by TOC
- Appeals made to passenger watchdogs
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling
- Number of calls to National Rail Enquiries (NRE)

Response times to complaints:



Nationally 94.9% of complaints were closed within 20 working days during 2018-19 Q1, 4.6 pp higher than the same quarter last year.

How passengers complain:



The majority of complaints (75%) were made via email/webform during 2018-19 Q1.

Complaint appeals closed by passenger watchdogs:

There were 1,518 appeals closed during 2018-19 Q1, 27% higher than the same quarter last year.

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1. Rail complaints

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 (TOCs).

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

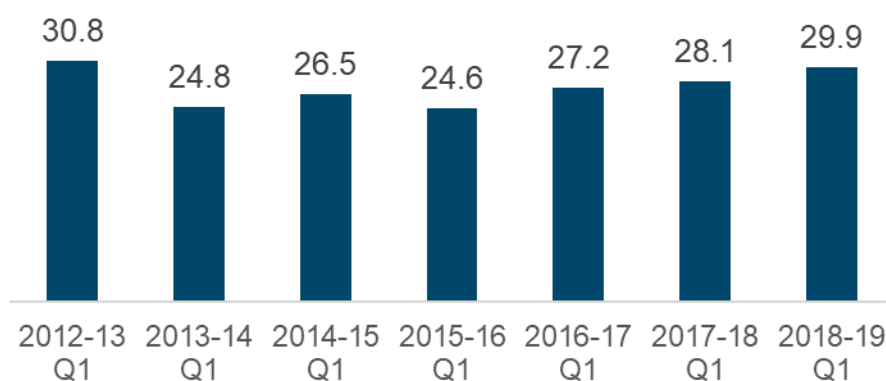
Social media comments are excluded from these statistics. The number of complaints received via such sources, the definition of a 'complaint' and the resources that each train operator allocates to these social platforms vary significantly, and therefore they are excluded from the published figures.

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

2018-19 Q1

- There were **29.9 complaints per 100,000 journeys** in 2018-19 Q1, this represents a 6.6% increase compared to Q1 last year.
- The complaints rate in 2018-19 Q1 is the highest quarter one complaints rate since 2012-13 Q1 (30.8 complaints per 100,000 journeys).

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators), 2012-13 Q1 to 2018-19 Q1 ([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 2017-18 there were 29.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys, this is a 76% decline since 1998-99.

Complaints per 100,000 journeys has been between 29.0 and 29.4 for the past five years, except for a drop to 27.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2015-16

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

Complaint by category

2018-19 Q1

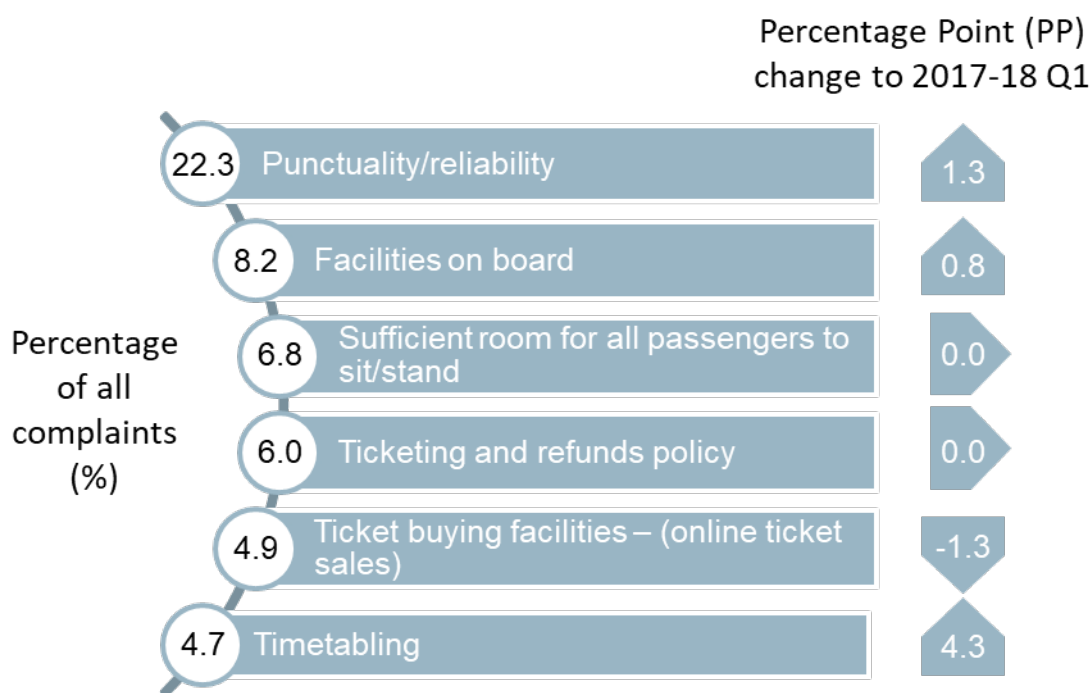
- Punctuality or reliability of services was the most common cause to complain. Overall 22.3% of complaints in 2018-19 Q1 were about punctuality/reliability, a 1.3 percentage point (pp) increase compared to Q1 last year.
- Complaints about timetabling were responsible for 4.7% of complaints, an increase of 4.3 pp compared to Q1 last year. This is most likely due to the implementation of the May timetable change.

Complaint by category: the type of complaint received by the train operator. Each complaint within a complaint 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.

The main reasons for the increase in complaints rate during 2018-19 Q1 are due to more complaints about punctuality/reliability and timetabling. Complaints about facilities on board also increased compared to Q1 the year before (by 0.8 pp).

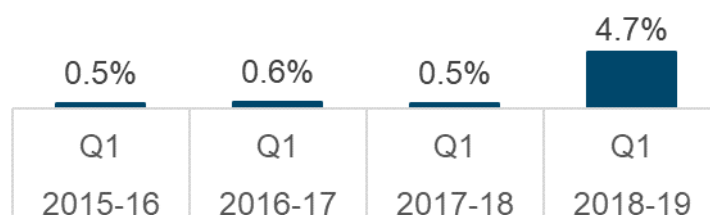
Top complaint categories (%), Great Britain, 2018-19 Q1 [\(Table 14.3\)](#)



Timetable complaints

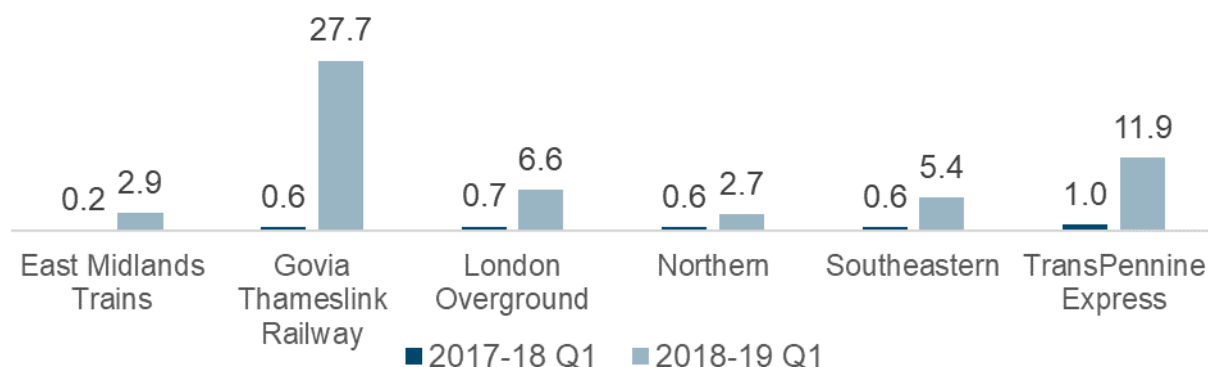
During 2018-19 Q1 there were a higher proportion of complaints about timetabling due to the implementation of the May timetable change. Complaints about timetabling increased to almost 5% of all complaints in 2018-19 Q1, whereas usually timetable complaints account for less than one per cent of all complaints (see graph below). The railway's May 2018 timetable change resulted in 46%¹ of train times changing.

Complaints about timetabling (%), Great Britain, 2015-16 Q1 to 2018-19 Q1 ([Table 14.3](#))



A number of TOCs experienced a higher proportion of complaints about timetabling during 2018-19 Q1 compared to the same time last year (see graph below). Journeys on Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and Northern were particularly affected. The percentage of trains ran by GTR decreased by 7.5 pp for the two weeks after the timetable change, and Northern decreased by 5.8 pp before recovering in the following weeks².

Complaints about timetabling by selected train operating company (%), Great Britain, 2017-18 Q1 and 2018-19 Q1 ([Table 14.5](#))



¹ Independent review of timetable disruption in May 2018, http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf

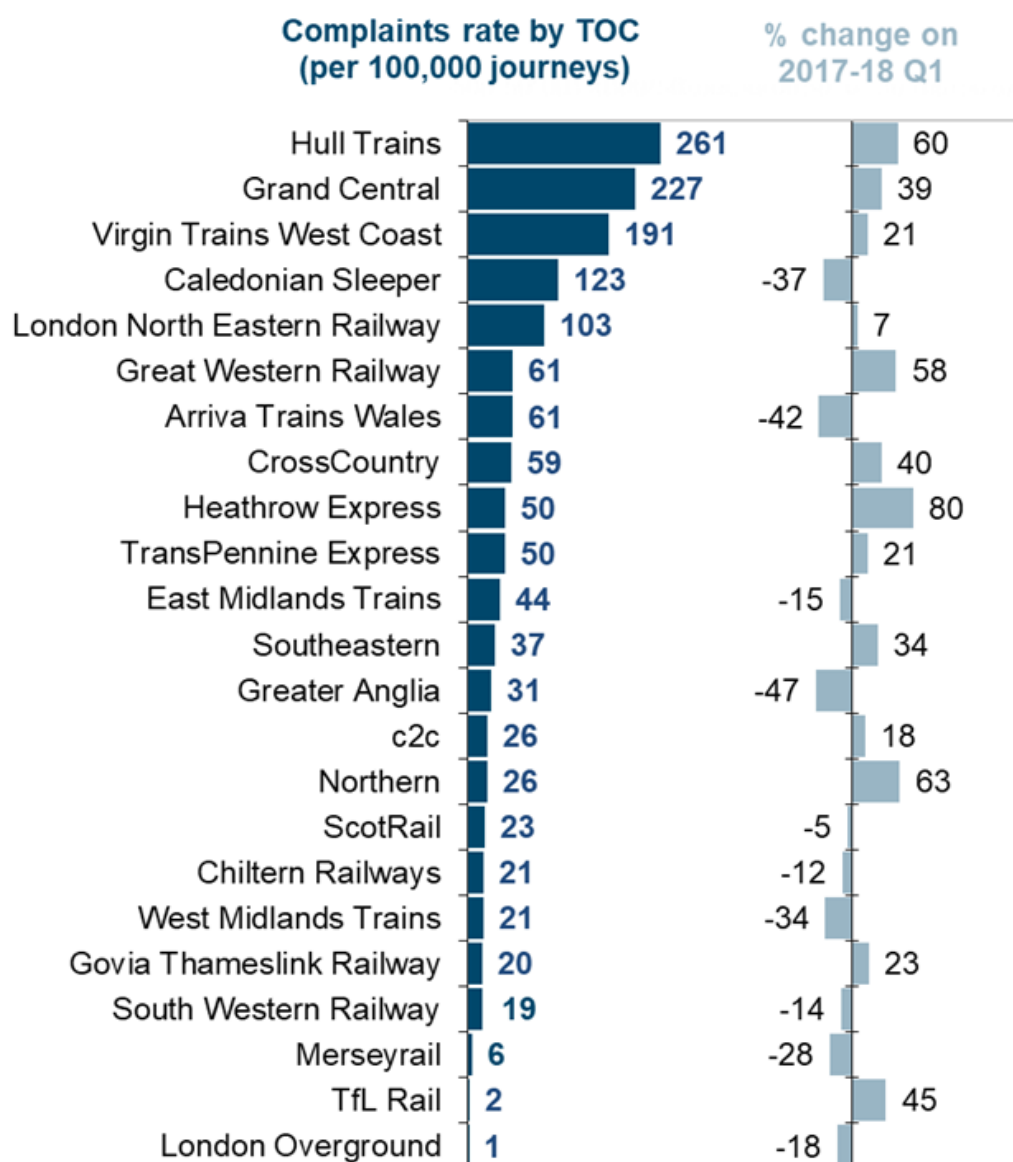
² http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/39038/may-2018-timetable-inquiry-annex-e-orr-service-performance-data.pdf

Complaints rate by train operating company

2018-19 Q1

- Overall 13 train operators had a higher complaints rate in 2018-19 Q1 than the same quarter last year, and ten operators had a lower complaints rate than Q1 last year.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q1 ([Table 14.9](#))



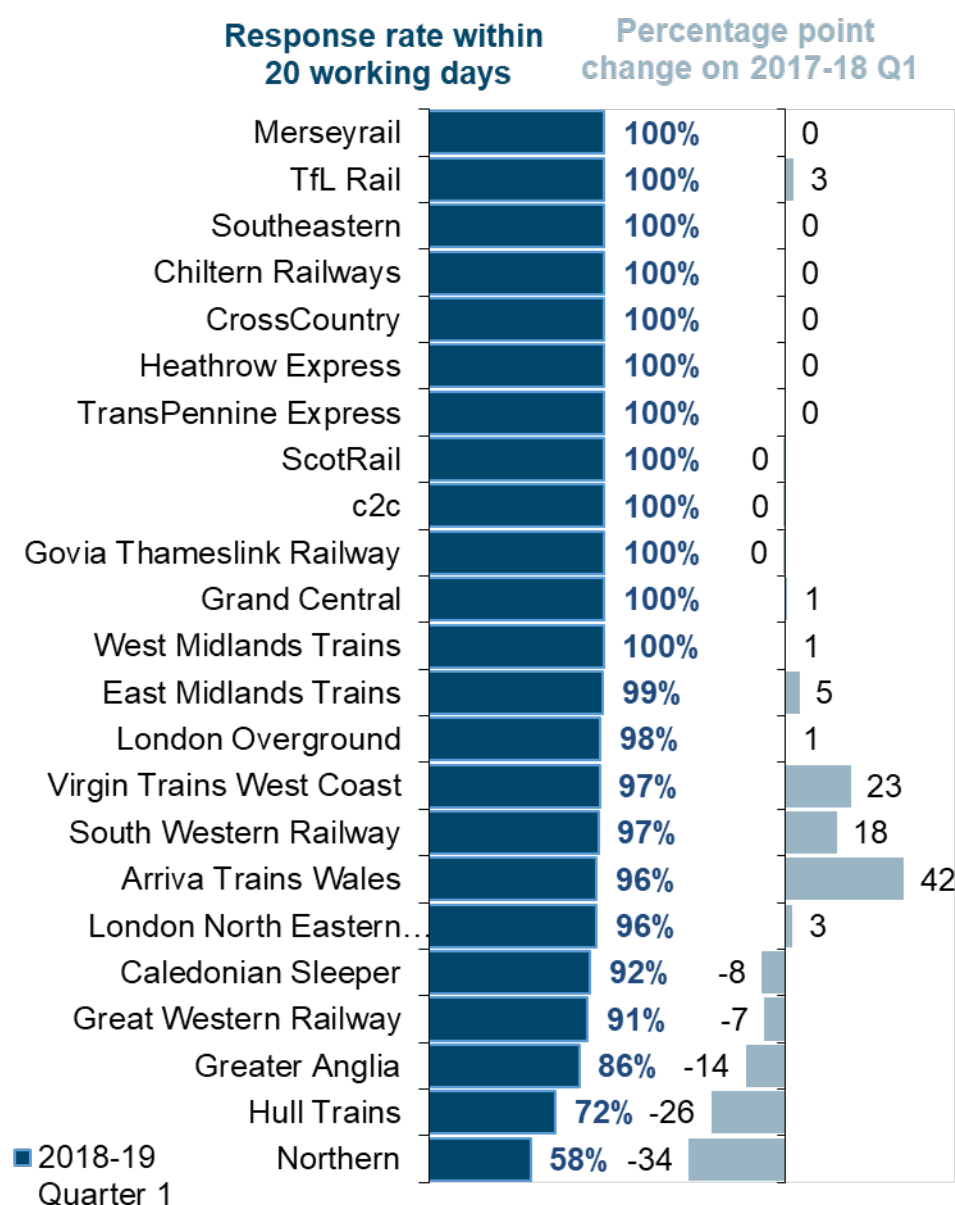
■ 2018-19 Quarter 1

Complaints answered within 20 working days

2018-19 Q1

- Nationally 94.9% of complaints were closed within 20 working days, 4.6 pp higher than the same quarter last year.
- In 2018-19 Q1, 18 out of 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days, compared to 17 TOCs for the same quarter last year.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q1 ([Table 14.2](#))



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](#)

Key changes for selected operators during 2018-19 Q1

The complaints rate for **CrossCountry** increased by 40% compared to Q1 the year before. Complaints about punctuality were responsible for 41.4% of complaints, a 1.3 pp increase compared to Q1 last year. Punctuality (PPM) in 2018-19 Q1 was 84.9%³, this was 5.1 pp lower than Q1 the year before. Complaints about facilities on board was the second most complained about area with 26.0% of complaints, a 0.2 pp increase compared to Q1 last year. Complaints about sufficient room was the third most complained about area with 10.3% of complaints, a 1.2 pp increase compared to Q1 last year. During 2018-19 Q1 CrossCountry responded to 100% of its complaints within 20 working days.

Great Western Railway (GWR) complaints rate increased by 58% compared to Q1 the year before. Complaints about sufficient room for passengers and online ticket sales (ticket buying facilities – other) were the top two area of complaint, both responsible for 11.8% of all complaints. Performance complaints accounted for 11.7% of all complaints, an increase of 6.5 pp compared to Q1 last year. GWR's punctuality (PPM) during 2018-19 Q1 was 82.0%, this was 6.5 pp lower than 2017-18 Q1, and the lowest Q1 PPM since the time series began in 2004-05.

Heathrow Express complaints rate increased by 80% compared to 2017-18 Q1. Ticket buying facilities attracted the most complaints with 34.1% of all complaints, a decline from 40.9% of complaints in Q1 last year. Punctuality complaints was the second most complained about area with 30.1% of complaints, a 0.8 pp increase compared to Q1 last year. The PPM for Heathrow Express in 2018-19 Q1 was 88.6%, 2.0 pp lower than Q1 last year.

Hull Trains complaints rate increased by 60% compared to 2017-18 Q1. Complaints about punctuality were responsible for 51.9% of complaints, an increase of 37.5 pp from the year before. Punctuality (PPM) in 2018-19 Q1 was 71.6%, which represents an 11.6 pp decline compared with Q1 in 2017-18. In addition, the response rate within 20 working days was 72%; this represents a 26 pp decline compared to 2017-18 Q1.

Northern's complaints rate increased by 63% in 2018-19 Q1 compared to the same quarter last year. This may be due to the impact of the May 2018 timetable change. Complaints about punctuality were responsible for 39.1% of complaints, a 13.1 pp increase compared to Q1 last year. Punctuality (PPM) in Q1 was 81.0%, this was 10.5 pp lower than 2017-18 Q1, and is the lowest PPM for any quarter since the time series began in 2009-10. As a result of the increased complaints rate, Northern's response to complaints within 20 working days decreased to 58%, 34 pp lower than Q1 last year.

³ All performance figures sourced from: http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/39045/passenger-freight-performance-2018-19-q1.pdf

Arriva Train Wales (ATW's) complaints rate declined by 42% compared to Q1 last year. At the same time ATW's response to complaints within 20 working days was 96%, a 42 pp improvement on Q1 last year. Last year ATW had a backlog of complaints which resulted in 54% of complaints being answered within 20 working days during 2017-18 Q1.

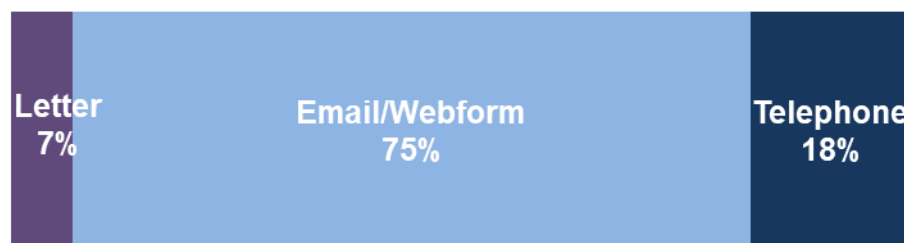
Greater Anglia's complaints rate declined by 47% compared to Q1 last year. Greater Anglia responded to 86% of complaints within 20 working days during Q1, 14 pp lower than the year before. Greater Anglia's response rate within 20 working days since 2017-18 Q3 has been below the 95% target, this may have been caused by Greater Anglia receiving more customer contacts following infrastructure and fleet issues and adverse weather conditions towards the end of 2017-18.

Complaints by contact method

2018-19 Q1

- Nationally 75% of complaints during 2018-19 Q1 were made by email or webform, a 6 pp increase from Q1 last year. This continues the trend of more complaints being made via email/webform, and fewer by letter

Percentage of complaints by contact method, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q1 ([Table 14.6](#))



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

Quarterly data is available from 2010-11 Q1.

Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling

2018-19 Q1

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

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.

NOTE: Passenger satisfaction with complaint handling tables (tables [14.18](#), [14.19](#) and [14.20](#)) are not designated as National Statistics as they have not been assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation.

2018-19 Q1 data is currently unavailable due to a reduction in the 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 report (available [here](#)), or the data portal tables (links below).

- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling by TOC (annual data) are available on the data portal - [Table 14.18](#)
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling (annual data) are available on the data portal – [Table 14.19](#)
- Passenger satisfaction survey by TOC (quarterly data) are available on the data portal - [Table 14.20](#)

2. Appeals

2018-19 Q1

- The passenger watchdogs closed 1,518 appeals during 2018-19 Q1; this was 27% higher than during 2017-18 Q1.

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

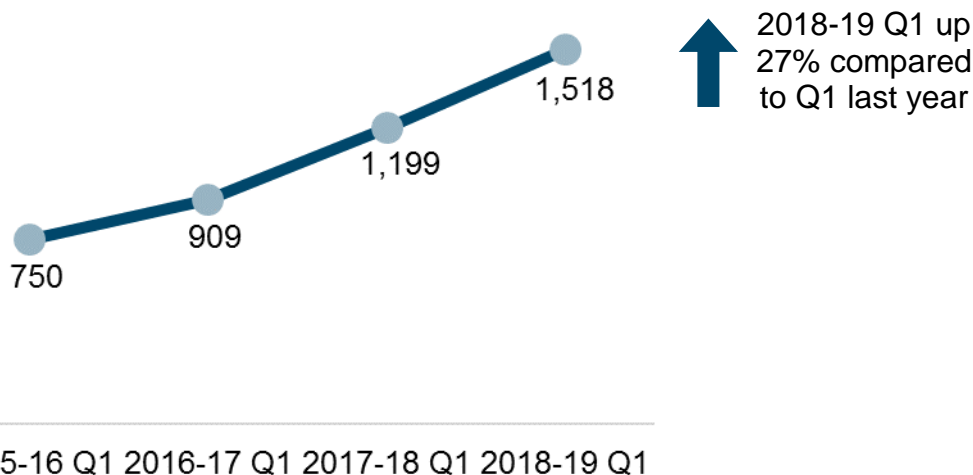
The independent passenger watchdogs, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, may open an appeal on behalf of a rail passenger whose initial complaint to the train operating company has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

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.

Transport Focus closed 1,123 appeals during 2018-19 Q1, 32% higher than the same quarter last year. London TravelWatch closed 395 appeals during 2018-19 Q1, 13% 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.

Appeals closed by passenger watchdogs, Great Britain, 2015-16 Q1 to 2018-19 Q1 ([Table 14.15](#))

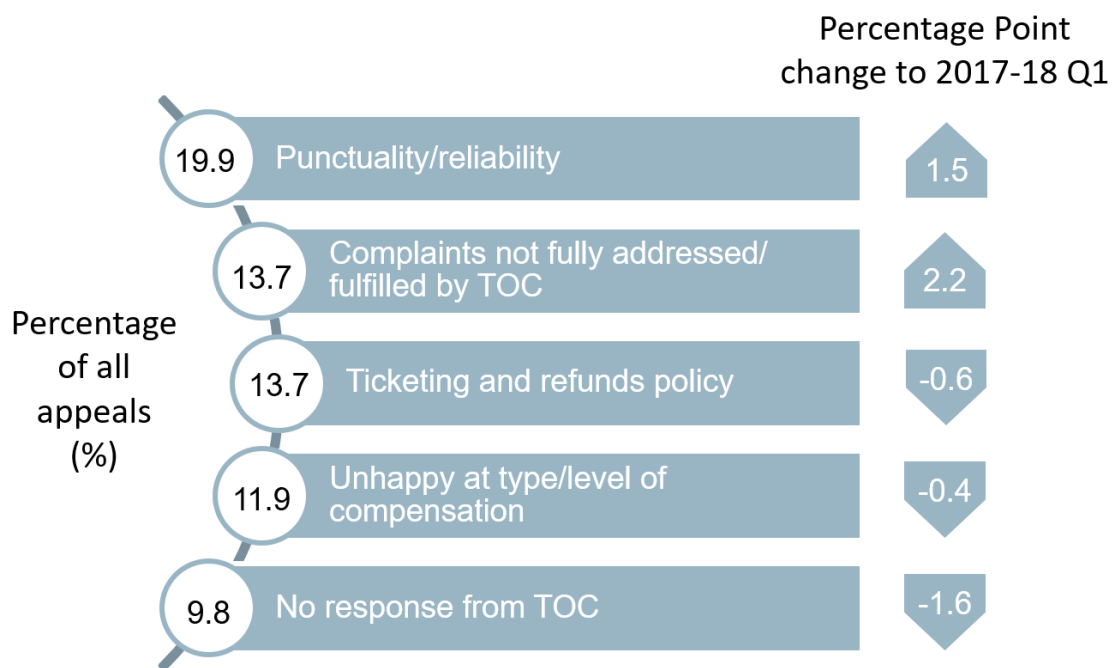


TransPennine Express had the largest increase in the number of appeals closed, increasing from 29 appeals in 2017-18 Q1, to 136 appeals in 2018-19 Q1.

What people are appealing about

- Appeals about punctuality/reliability remain the most appealed about complaint category, with 19.9% of appeals closed being about this category in 2018-19 Q1. This has been the largest appeals category since 2016-17 Q3.
- Appeals about complaints not being fully addressed by the train operator was joint second highest category of appeal, with 13.7% of complaints in 2018-19 Q1. This category of appeal has increased by 2.2 pp since the same quarter last year.

Top five appeal categories, Great Britain, 2018-19 Q1 [\(Table 14.16\)](#)



3. National Rail Enquiries telephone service

2018-19 Q1

- There were 0.6 million calls made to the National Rail Enquiries telephone service during 2018-19 Q1, a decrease of 0.8% compared to same time last year. Of those calls made in 2018-19 Q1, 97.1% were answered, and 2.9% were abandoned.

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](#);
- 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](#)
- Praise rate by TOC - [Table 14.17](#);
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling by TOC - [Table 14.18](#)
- Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling – [Table 14.19](#)
- Passenger satisfaction survey 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

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 Lyndsey Melbourne on 020 7282 3978 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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