



Complaints handling experience: qualitative insight

February 2023

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Background, methodology and objectives

Background, objectives and methodology

Ofcom wanted to better understand customers' experience of complaint handling by communications providers ("CPs"), and in particular what factors contribute to either a positive or negative experience. To do this, Ofcom commissioned **BVA BDRC** to conduct qualitative research into customers' experiences of making complaints to CPs.

This research is complementary to the evidence base from Ofcom's quantitative Complaints Handling Tracker ("CHT"), an online survey that monitors satisfaction with complaints handling among those who had made a complaint to their provider in the previous six months.

Participants were selected via a recontact question on the CHT and 40 individuals took part in an online qualitative research platform, Recollective. This involved a 45-minute set of tasks that explored topics such as: why the complaint was made; how participants got in touch; how their complaint was handled; what the providers did well; what could have been improved.

A sample plan was defined prior to recruitment. Participants were recruited on the basis of the complaint they made in the last six months (as per the quantitative study) but tended to reflect upon their most memorable or impactful experience of complaint handling, even when directed by the moderator to discuss the complaint they were recruited to expand upon. The sample profile is shown overleaf.

Discussion areas included:

Summary of
complaint
made

Experience of
getting in touch

Overall
complaint
handling

The complaint
handler

Expectations

Important
aspects

Sample profile

Fieldwork: 22nd Nov 2022 – 10th Jan 2023

Sample characteristics	Broadband	Mobile	Landline	Pay TV	All
Total (n)	21	11	5	3	40
England	12	7	5	3	27
Scotland	5	-	-	-	5
Wales	4	2	-	-	6
N. Ireland	-	2	-	-	2
Male	12	7	4	1	24
Female	9	4	1	2	16
Limiting condition*	11	5	3	2	21
Financially vulnerable*	7	1	-	1	9
Satisfied	7	5	2	1	15
Neutral	3	-	-	-	3
Not satisfied	11	6	3	2	22

Provider	Total (n=40)
Sky	9
TalkTalk	7
Virgin Media	5
O2	4
Vodafone	3
EE	3
BT	3
Plusnet	3
Three	1
Giffgaff	1
NOW Broadband	1

Age	Total (n=40)
18-34	16
35-54	18
55+	6

SEG	Total (n=40)
A	3
B	9
C1	13
C2	9
D	2
E	4

*see slides 36 and 37 in the appendix for definitions of limiting condition and financially vulnerability

Executive summary

Executive summary

Ofcom commissioned independent research agency BVA BDRC to gain a deeper understanding of consumer experiences when making a complaint to a communications provider. The key findings were:

1 Time and effort were key factors that contributed towards a positive consumer complaint experience:

Participants told us that the time and the effort required on their part had a significant bearing on their level of satisfaction with the process. They also indicated that being listened to and understood and having their complaint resolved upon first contact were likely to leave them happier with the process.

2 Besides customer effort there are multiple other factors which could contribute to a positive experience:

These factors included whether: complainants were kept informed of the progress / status of their complaint (if the complaint was ongoing); expectations were well managed (e.g. no over-promising) and providers did what they said they were going to do.

Participants also highlighted whether the call handler remained courteous, the complaint was logged well / appropriately (to avoid repetition with other call handlers) and, in some cases, whether compensation was offered.

3 A positive call experience could mitigate against the disappointment of an unresolved complaint:

Although participants whose complaints were not resolved often felt frustrated by this they could still have a positive call experience if they felt listened to, were helped and were treated professionally. Conversely, where the call was not handled well, this exacerbated the dissatisfaction with the unresolved complaint.

4 Better efficiency, communication and proactivity were identified as areas with room for improvement:

These included greater call centre efficiencies (call waiting times, getting through to the right person quickly, dealing with the complaint first time), improved communications by call handlers to customers in terms of the effort taken to understand the complaint, responding to a complaint accurately and keeping customers updated about the complaint progress (this was linked to staff training) and being given solutions or options where appropriate. In some instances, compensation was appreciated in recognition of any inconvenience on the part of the consumer.

1

Factors contributing towards the customer experience

Overarching factors which contributed towards a positive customer complaint experience

When participants explained the nature of their complaint, different factors spontaneously emerged as having had an impact on their experience of complaint handling. These factors are listed below:

Mentioned by most participants

- The time taken, with complainants preferring a short and efficient experience; this included short wait times, across both phone and live chat
- Complaint resolution, with customers valuing their issue being resolved on first contact
- Minimal customer effort, for example:
 - A limited number of obstacles to getting in contact with providers (e.g., easy to find contact details)
 - Not having to repeat themselves to multiple call handlers in the same call or over several calls
 - Not having to contact CPs multiple times
- Customers were listened to and understood

Mentioned by some participants

- Courtesy and politeness of call handler(s)
- If ongoing, customers were kept informed about the complaint progress
- Management of expectations
- Call handlers did what they said they were going to do (e.g. they called back when they said they would and engineers turned up on time)

Mentioned by a few participants

- Offered compensation
- The customer recognises that if the complaint is logged by the call handler it avoids the customer having to repeat their complaint on subsequent calls

Factors leading to a positive customer complaint experience

Mentioned by most participants

Time taken

“The process was fine, except that it took longer than it should have been to resolve”

Pay TV, service issue, 35-54

“I was most satisfied with the speed of the resolution of the issue. Really gave me an answer that was satisfactory, that relieved my worry and put my mind at ease very quickly”

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

Complaint resolution

“The complaint was only handled successfully at the 3rd time of asking and [took] 4 months all in. Very poor service”

Broadband, billing, 35-54

“I was most satisfied that I spoke to the complaint department. They offered me a better deal on my broadband”

Broadband, billing, 18-34

Customer effort*

“The complaint dragged on...I got passed around...I went from wanting to fix the issue to wanting to leave”

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

“Rang the customer service number, spoke to just the one lady. Only on the phone for 15 minutes top[s]”

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

Listened to

“They asked all the correct questions and responded with apt replies. They asked me what was the solution I wanted”

Mobile, service issue, 18-34

“I was impressed with being spoken to like a human being and also being updated along the way 'til my appointment time and date”

Broadband, service issue, 35-54

*See slide 13 and 14 to understand this issue further

Factors leading to a positive customer complaint experience

Mentioned by some participants

Courtesy and politeness of call handler(s)

"I was asked "what do you want me to do" [and] spoken over! The questions asked were almost rude!"

Landline, installation, 35-54

Customers were kept informed

"When there's a problem and your engineers are trying to fix it like you say, then why not follow that up with hourly updates to reassure us of progress?"

Pay TV, service issue, 35-54

Management of expectations

"I felt satisfied after speaking with the provider and hoped it would be resolved soon. But I still was awaiting a resolution"

Mobile, service issue, 18-34

Call handlers did what they said they were going to do

"I was told people would call me back that never did, over and over"

Landline, installation, 35-54

"They never made me feel confident that it was being investigated. This went on for weeks and weeks. Often the call would drop whilst I was talking and they would not automatically call me back despite this being agreed during the conversation"

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

"I was quite satisfied with the process. It did take a while to get through the automated part and to go through all the checks, but the woman on the phone was very helpful and friendly. I feel the complaint was handled very well by the advisor once I had gotten to the right person. They ran all available checks on their end and kept me updated about what they were doing every step of the way. The woman was very friendly and helpful"

Broadband, service issue, 18-34

Factors leading to a positive customer complaint experience

Mentioned by a few participants

Offered compensation

“Thankfully WiFi was restored soon after but [there was] still no communication about what happened, why it happened or compensation.”

Broadband, service issue, 35-54

“Overall I was happy with the way my complaint was dealt with and the outcome of the complaint. After failing to be able to fix the problem from their end or our end, the advisor arranged for an engineer to come out the next day to try and fix this and also refunded me the money for the days in which broadband hadn’t been working”

Broadband, service issue, 18-34

Logged the complaint

“I had to continually repeat everything... I began to request that the agents read the notes and actions they were claiming to make in their system back to me”

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

“Each agent I spoke to claimed they could not see any previous call notes on [that] occasion and so it felt like everything had to be constantly repeated. The provider would never put anything in writing to me - so instead I starting recording my calls so that I had a record”

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

Making contact

Being able to contact CPs in their preferred way, easily finding contact details and contact requiring minimal effort all contributed towards participants' satisfaction.

✓ Contact method preference

Live chat (i.e. text chat online, not an audio call) was the preferred method for some as it could be fast and efficient, but it wasn't viewed as a suitable method of contact for more complex queries.

Phone was the first choice for others as they preferred speaking to typing, or felt this was the best way to get an issue resolved.

✓ Finding contact details

Most found it easy to source contact details (e.g. by doing an online search or using pre-stored contact details).

Some participants reported that they had issues finding a specific department rather than a generic call centre, or were pushed towards online rather than phone contact.

✓ Ease of making contact

Our participants had **mixed experiences** in regard to the ease of contacting their provider(s).

Some of the negative issues highlighted included:

- Long call wait times
- Confusion when getting in contact online, and so having to resort to phone contact
- Multiple calls to resolve the issue
- Confusion with the call options given

Those satisfied with the handling of their complaint largely highlighted the short time taken to make contact and resolve the complaint, suggesting that it is a significant contributing factor in positive customer experiences.

Making contact: Some participants' views



Contact method preference

*“I prefer live chat but this wasn't available at the time so I had to email or phone. **I was unhappy about this as I prefer live chat** so that the issue can be sorted fast and that I could use chat whilst continuing with my work”*

Broadband, service issue, 18-34

*“Normally for things involving [my service provider] I speak in live chat. **But this was not a live chat complaint, I wanted to speak to a human.** I needed them to understand what happened and not just read it in a text box”*

Mobile, billing, 18-34



Finding contact details

*“If memory serves **I think I Googled it**, just... ‘[service provider] mobile customer service’. That’s often my first port of call but no harm on [sic] going on the [service provider] website or checking my bill too”*

Landline, installation, 35-54



Ease of making contact

*“To make the phone call was easy. **To get to talk to someone is really hard.** I sat on hold for 35 mins first time to explain [the complaint]. And then to file my complaint [it took] another 27 mins to speak to someone, explain to her what happened, why I was calling, then to be transferred again... **it took over 3 hours** to just give this complaint.”*

Mobile, customer service, 18-34

*“The process of getting through the automated part to **actually get through to an advisor is quite lengthy and irritating** if you press the wrong option. For certain options they try to get you to do it via the app or online and don’t have an option to speak to an advisor, so [then] you have to go through the process all over again with different options”*

Broadband, service issue, 18-34

Neutral complaint experiences

Participants who had neutral feelings about how their complaint was handled tended to have experienced both positive and negative aspects throughout the process



“I was satisfied with the process but not at the beginning. Nobody knew what was going on and we had to keep chasing it up.”

Broadband, installation, 35-54

“I was quite satisfied with the progress. It did take a while to get through the automated part and to go through all the checks, but the woman on the phone was very helpful and friendly.”


Broadband, service issues, 18-34

“The process was quite straightforward – however, it was lengthy and I was in a rush to get out the door by the end of it. The advisor made it easy, the automated system makes it annoying.”

Broadband, installation, 35-54

A positive call experience could mitigate against the disappointment of an unresolved complaint

While some customers were disappointed they didn't get the resolution they wanted, the actions of the call handler improved their perception of the process. For others, poor call handling exacerbated dissatisfaction with their unresolved complaint

 Some felt the call was not handled well but may or may not have got the resolution they desired

*"Once I called them I kept being transferred to another agent. They registered the complaint after a few tries. They gave me a date and time for the fixing of the service but **they never came round to fix it**"*

Broadband, service issues, 35-54


"I got my issue resolved but not quick enough [as] it has to go through the complaints department a lot and it was just going back and forth, to and from people in the company"

Broadband, billing, 18-34

Words selected to describe complaint handler(s) when the call was handled poorly:

Incompetent Blunt

Cold Unhelpful

 Some didn't get the resolution they desired but the call was handled well


*"I was somewhat satisfied because I was able to mention all of my problems and to have someone to contact. **However, I have not received anything back regarding the complaint.** They were helpful in giving many options regarding prices. **It was handled in a kind and civilized manner**"*

Mobile, billing, 18-34

Words selected to describe complaint handler(s) when the call was handled well:

Polite Friendly

Helpful Patient

 Many got the resolution they desired and thought the call was handled well

*"Very satisfied, quicker and easier than I expected. **Got the outcome I wanted and [was] pleasantly surprised how easy it was.** Very patient... Listening, no interruptions and **an understanding and compassionate attitude.** [It] was like talking to a helpful friend in a way"*

Mobile, service issue, 35-54

Participants were asked to select three adjectives that best described their complaint experience. The word clouds reflect the most common words chosen for each type of complaint.

2

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement


Participants had some suggestions about how CPs could improve their customer's experiences of complaint handling. These relate to five broad areas:

1



Efficiencies contacting the call centre

2




Communication

3



Problem solving

4



Knowledgeable staff

5



Compensation or a cheaper deal

Areas for improvement: contacting the call centre

1



Customers said that shortening call wait times and bettering the responsiveness of call handlers when getting in touch were areas for improvement



“Response times could be faster. More methods of contacting them [could be made available] e.g. Facebook, Instagram.”
Broadband, service issues, 18-34



“At least 1 of my 11 emails to the executive office should have been picked up and dealt with immediately. Live chat button should have been easily accessible but I tried on multiple occasions. When there's a problem and your engineers are trying to fix it like you say, then why not follow that up with hourly updates to reassure us of progress?”
Broadband, service issues, 35-54



“In this instance I think the only issue was the wait time. The volume of live chats / phone call complaints and waiting time is always high no matter when I attempt to do it. [Regardless of the] time of day or day of the week it's always high, so that could have been done better. The actual communication was fine.”
Mobile, services issues, 35-54



“No issues at all. From start to finish I think it took me about 15 minutes, if that, including a quick search for the correct number. [I] spoke to customer service, just the one person, who was able to assist and help me straight off.”
Mobile, billing issues, 35-54, satisfied



Areas for improvement: communication

Call handlers making the effort to understand the complaint and provide explanations or potential solutions to the customer were mentioned as areas for improvement



“Understood my complaint and studied the chat evidence that was on record.”

Mobile, billing, 55+



“They listened to my concerns and didn't interrupt me while I was explaining the concerns that I had. They then apologised for the issue as well.”

Broadband, service issues, 35-54



“The process was terrible. Each person we were passed to required a complete re-telling of the information before telling me to hold while they passed us to another department.”

Pay TV, billing, 55+



“They could have given me a better explanation as to why my service was so poor and how this is being resolved.”

Mobile, service issues, 45-54

Areas for improvement: problem solving

3



Customers thought CPs could do better at exploring the issue and providing different solutions



*“[They] took ownership of the issue and complaint and followed up with me as promised. [But they could] **make it easier for me to understand my options, rather than initially stating that if I were to leave then I would be in breach of the contract.** Yet they were not doing anything to help fix the issues, rather again simply asking me [to] make notes of the issues and call them back. They should be able to identify network issues automatically at their end and communicate this to me - i.e. [through] their findings based on network data and mobile handover information etc.”*

Mobile, service issues, 35-54



*“**Rather than just trying to sell me a better package, they could have looked at the problem and tried to see what was wrong first.**”*

Broadband, service issues, 55+



*“**To go through with their promise and agreed subscription cost which was [given] over the phone. They failed twice and I had to contact them three times to get this resolved.**”*

Broadband, billing, 35-54

Areas for improvement: knowledgeable staff and compensation

4



Knowledgeable staff

Customers suggested more staff training as a way to improve their experience



“Their staff need to be trained to understand their own terms and conditions and to actually listen to the complaint.”

Pay TV, billing, 55+

“We considered our fault and complaint about the service to be straightforward - video buffering and possible bandwidth issues. We know they have set questions to ask but it takes more time in [sic] doing this.”

Pay TV, service issues, 55+

“Training on where to send [items to] if they are not going to offer insurance on a device, [or] knowing at least at [sic] a reference – for example, Samsung deal with this product directly”

Mobile, service issues, 35-54

“For all engineers to be trained in fault-finding and not assume it’s a customer problem. If the second engineer did the same line test as the third, the fault would have been found and problem solved.”

Broadband, service issues, 35-54

5



Compensation or a cheaper deal

Customers thought there could be a better financial compensation to reflect their inconvenience



“On reflection, some compensation would of [sic] been nice but that might be me being greedy. All was resolved at quick pace.”

Mobile, service issues, 35-54

“I negotiated a deal with [my service provider] which meant I was paying £26 a month for broadband instead of £44.”

Pay TVs, service issues, 35-54

“They could of [sic] done a lot of things to help. They could of [sic] come out and fixed it when they knew they could of [sic] given me more money off. Then [they gave me] £4 off my bill and they only give me two months payback for two years of problems”

Broadband, service issues, 18-34

“At least [they] gave me the courtesy of an apology and knocking a few quid off my bill”

Broadband, service issues, 18-34

3

Complaint experiences specific to customer circumstance, including vulnerability

Some financially vulnerable customers described the complaint process as stressful and emphasised the importance of fairness

Some financially vulnerable participants described the complaint process as stressful and frustrating, particularly when it concerned billing issues. Some also raised a concern around how fairly they were being treated with regard to their money.

“

*“No, this process was very **stressful** and it’s still stressing me.”*

Broadband, service issues, 35-54

“

“They told me they could give me a better deal but they didn’t.”

Broadband, billing, 18-34

“

*“Very disappointed and yet another ploy to try and con us. If I was someone without knowledge, I would be none the wiser and they would **happily take our money**. Shocking to the point [that] when my contract is over we will leave.”*

Broadband, service issues, 35-54

“

*“I [was] left feeling I was just a **sack of money** or target.”*

Mobile, service issues, 35-54

Some of those with a limiting condition emphasised the importance of complaint resolution and empathy from call handlers

Some participants with a limiting or impacting condition described a sense of urgency in achieving a resolution. Some also described how clear communication from the call handler, and the handler giving the customer time to explain themselves, made the process feel more empathetic

“

*“I’m disabled so I rely on my internet working. I’m disgusted it **took over 6 months** to resolve the problem, disgusted the first engineer didn’t turn up.”*

Broadband, service issues, 35-54, mobility condition

“

*“The process was disgusting. It was awful. I **rely on an internet connection** for my studies and for hobbies... Due to having a disability I had my advocate call on my behalf and rectify things. To which they said: ‘She didn’t seem autistic – we just noted she was disabled but the condition was not noted.’”*

Broadband, installation and set-up, 35-54, autism

“

*“I personally get a bit flustered when I am on the phone so her **giving me the chance to explain** the issue without interrupting made the process easier.”*

Mobile, billing, 35-54, cognitive condition

4

Case studies

Broadband service issue

*The call handler listened and was reassuring, making this a **positive experience***

Gender: Male

Age : 35-54

SEG: B

Location: Wales

Financially vulnerable: Yes

Limiting Condition: No

The complainant's internet connection had completely dropped out. He went to the service provider app and clicked on the 'contact us' drop down and then rang the service provider. **The call handler took him through some quick-fix tips.** None of these worked so they booked in an engineer to come out and assess the problem. He was given a time and a date for this on the call and this was confirmed via text. On the day, he received **another message confirming the date and time.** The engineer fixed the issue and the complainant received a **follow-up call** to see if he was happy with the outcome. He felt the **call was handled very well** – they listened to his complaint and were apologetic and they reassured him the issue would be fixed. He believes he received the correct amount of information and that **the best outcome was achieved.**

Call handlers were polite, patient and helpful.



“The process was very good to have the fix / tip [for the] issues that they [were] try[ing] to help you with. If this had worked [it] would have been a very easy fix to my issue. The staff were very polite and patient.”



“I felt the complaint was handled very well. They listened to the complaint and were apologetic about the complaint that I had, and I felt that they listened well to my concerns and that made me feel better about the issue getting sorted.”



“I was impressed with being spoken to like a human being and also being updated along the way ‘til my appointment time and date.”



Participant selected image

Description of image* selected by participant:
People relaxing together outside. They are chatting, smiling and drinking tea or coffee

Participant's reason for image selection:
“I chose this image because after I came off the phone I felt very relaxed and confident that the issue will be resolved, and I could carry on with my day without feeling anxious or stressed in anyway.”

**Images not included for copyright reasons*

Mobile billing

*Good call handling and being kept informed made this a **positive experience***

Gender:	Male	Location:	England
Age :	18-34	Financially vulnerable:	Yes
SEG:	C1	Limiting Condition:	No

The complainant was struggling with the cost of living and looking to try and find a cheaper deal. However, his service provider told him he was not able to change plans without making an additional payment so he wished to make a complaint. **He found it easy to find how to make a complaint** as the details were on their website (and also on his original application). However, he would have preferred to make contact by telephone but found that he had to use web chat for complaints. However, once in contact, **he was then given a range of contact options which he appreciated and felt that he was kept informed.** However, he would have liked a little more time to respond on the web chat and to have received a transcript. Although his complaint was not ultimately resolved (due to financial issues), he felt that he had been dealt with in **a kind and respectful manner** and felt the experience was better than when he had complained over other issues.



Participant selected image

Description of image* selected by participant:
Semi-circular red-amber-green speedometer-style dial, with the pointer pointing towards the green/smiley face part of the dial.

Participant's reason for image selection:
"Compared to the previous complaints I have had to make regarding my place of residence, I was more satisfied because the issue would get resolved at a much faster rate. I was also given a wider range of options."

**Images not included for copyright reasons*



"They gave me options to further help them understand my complaints. I was often given multiple choices. Also, they seemed helpful by allowing me to mention a list of complaints that I had and to explain in my own choice of words."



"Having the option to be able to speak with them on the phone would be beneficial. Also, after getting in contact, it would be good if they inform me how long they would take to get back in contact."

Broadband service issue

*Good outcome but the lack of updates made this a **neutral experience***

Gender: Male

Age : 35-54

SEG: C1

Location: England

Financially vulnerable: No

Limiting Condition: Yes

When the complainant moved into his new house, he had no internet connection, despite having arranged a switch and connection being promised. He has the service provider's number saved on his phone **so found it easy to contact**. However, he had to keep ringing as handler(s) didn't know what the issue was and **did not keep him informed**. Despite this, he reported that the handler(s) were **polite and courteous**. In total, the participant had to call 15-20 times and was never called back as was promised. Eventually, the provider had to dig up their road as the wire had been cut during roadworks.

The complaint(s) handlers were courteous, it was easy to get in touch and he received £50 compensation. However, the lack of updates, promising to call back and not following through and the fact it took 2 months to get fixed, made the participants feel neutral towards the experience.

Call handlers were polite, happy, patient



Participant selected image

Description of image selected by participant:*

A man with his eyes tightly shut, sucking on a lemon.

Participant's reason for image selection:

"I was stressed and felt like this."

**Images not included for copyright reasons*



"Yes it was handled OK. It was not their fault they didn't know what to do as they didn't know about the roadworks cutting through the wire."



"I was satisfied with the process but not at the beginning. Nobody knew what was going on and we had to keep chasing it up."



"I was not kept informed at all. This could have been better"

Broadband installation

Was listened to and issue resolved, but length of the process made this a neutral experience

Gender: Male

Age : 35-54

SEG: D

Location: Scotland

Financially vulnerable: No

Limiting Condition: Yes



Participant selected image

Description of image* selected by participant:
Cat lying on its back, looking sleepy.

Participant's reason for image selection:
"It resembles me afterwards as I wanted to lie down - I felt exhausted after all the back and forth."

**Images not included for copyright reasons*

The complainant had ordered a new router but it hadn't arrived on time to his new property. **He found it easy to find a contact number** as they provided one in his recent emails from his service provider. He is pleased he was able to call as he wanted to make his point clear. **He found it a lengthy process getting through to speak to someone** as there were automated messages followed by a long wait. However, once he was through to someone, he **felt they listened well and were empathetic to his needs**. He spent **2 hours on the phone which he felt was 'ridiculous'** as it was a simple request. Despite this, the handler dealt with his frustrations well and kept him up to date whenever he was put on hold.

They ordered **a new router at priority request and discounted his bill** for the following month by 50%. He felt the call handler made the complaint easy but the automated system before the call, and length of the process made it difficult.

Call handlers were polite, patient, helpful



"The process was quite straightforward – however, it was lengthy and I was in a rush to get out the door by the end of it."



"Yes, they have several automated messages and call steering before a long wait to actually connect to a human and then [you can] begin to have a conversation about the issue at hand."



"They dealt with it well. They were empathetic and listened to what I had to say. The process was quite easy to do."

Landline service issue

*Only being able to email and not telephone to register the complaint, and not hearing from the provider, made this a **negative experience***

Gender: Female

Location: England

Age : 55+

Financially vulnerable: No

SEG: C1

Limiting Condition: No

The complainant had no telephone or broadband service for four days. She was unable to find a number to call to complain to her service provider so had to email her complaint (she would have preferred to speak to somebody). There was no contact or communication – after 4 days the service was restored but she never received any response to her email, which she found very frustrating. The lack of response left her feeling that her service provider was ‘cold, unhelpful and incompetent’.

Participant selected image

Description of image* selected by participant:
A man with his head in his hand, looking upset.

Participant’s reason for image selection:
“This shows my frustration at getting no response to my complaint.”

**Images not included for copyright reasons*



“As far as I am concerned the complaint wasn’t handled at all, as there was no response.”



“A response to the email would have been nice and something done about it would have been even better!”



“Not at all satisfied, no response and a four day wait for service to be restored.”

Pay TV billing

*Staff being unable to help and the long process made this a **negative experience***

Gender: Male

Age : 55+

SEG: C2

Location: England

Financially vulnerable: No

Limiting Condition: Yes



Participant selected image

Description of image* selected by participant:
A man with his head down running both hands through his hair.

Participant's reason for image selection:
"The lack of understanding from so many staff and the fact our service was cut off twice was frustrating."

**Images not included for copyright reasons*

The complaint was about incorrect billing following a house move. He called his service provider after finding the customer service number online. When he first called he **was passed to 8 different people**, requiring him to **repeat the issue each time**. Each advisor insisted his bill was correct and the first call took **over three hours**. He was put on hold multiple times and sometimes the call dropped out. Overall, the issue **took 3 months to sort out**, during which he spent about 18 hours in total on calls. There were a few times where he believed the issue was sorted only to be billed the same amount. He felt that the call handlers were **not trained enough** to deal with his complaint and **were sometimes rude**. After 3 months of trying, one advisor, the last he spoke to, was able to fix the billing problem and refund him for his losses.

Call handlers were unhelpful, incompetent, rude



"The process was terrible. Each person we were passed to required a complete re-telling of the information before telling me to hold while they passed us to another department."



"The complaint took three months to complete which I thought was disgusting."



"Their staff need to be trained to understand their own terms and conditions and to actually listen to the complaint."

Appendix

Sample selection process: 1

Participants were selected via a recontact question on the Complaints Handling Tracker. The CHT is a quantitative survey that asks individuals who had made a complaint to their provider in the previous six months to score their satisfaction with the process (satisfied to dissatisfied on a 10-point scale). We recruited participants using their answer to this question to ensure representation of those who were satisfied, dissatisfied and felt neutral about the handling of their complaint. The desired sample plan is provided below.

	Broadband	Mobile	Landline	Pay TV
Total interviews	12	12	12	4
Satisfied	3-5	3-5	3-5	0
Neutral	2-4	2-4	2-4	2
Dissatisfied	5/6	5/6	5/6	2
WITHIN THE ABOVE:				-
Financially vulnerable	2/3	2/3	2/3	
Limiting/impacting condition	2/3	2/3	2/3	

There was also a secondary priority to achieve the following where possible:

- A geographic spread to include all four nations
- Include some who did not have their complaint resolved after first contact

Where possible, we also looked to include (in order of priority):

- Even gender
- Spread of ages
- Spread of social economic grade
- Spread of limiting/ impacting conditions
- Spread of types of complaint (billing, service issues, repairs, installation, customer service)
- Spread of service providers

Sample selection process: 2

At the qualitative research stage, participants were invited to talk about a complaint but were given the freedom to talk about a complaint that they remembered most about. The purpose behind this approach was to maximise the richness of data collected at the qualitative stage, as discussing a complaint they could clearly remember would provide richer and more valuable insight compared to a complaint where the detail was less recalled. In practice, this led to some participants talking about a complaint made to a different type of communications provider or about a different type of complaint.

Participants were encouraged to talk about the complaint we had recorded (from the quantitative data) and wished for them to discuss. In practice, some participants were still focussed on a more memorable complaint. To some extent this was a research finding in itself, as participants were drawn more to discuss broadband complaints and less focussed on landline/Pay TV complaints, which perhaps indicates where their priorities lie particularly where bundled services are concerned. The achieved sample profile is below:

	Broadband	Mobile	Landline	Pay TV
Total interviews	21	11	5	3
Satisfied	7	5	2	1
Neutral	3	-	-	-
Dissatisfied	11	6	3	2
WITHIN THE ABOVE:				
Financially vulnerable	11	5	3	2
Limiting/impacting condition	7	1	-	1

Limiting or impacting condition: research definition

Participants were considered to have a limiting condition if they selected codes 1-9 of the following question in the quantitative study:

Which of these, if any, impact or limit your daily activities or the work you can do? Please select all that apply.

1. Hearing - Poor hearing, partial hearing, or are deaf
2. Eyesight - Poor vision, colour blindness, partial sight, or are blind
3. Mobility - Cannot walk at all/ use a wheelchair or mobility scooter etc., or cannot walk very far or manage stairs or can only do so with difficulty
4. Dexterity - Limited ability to reach/ difficulty opening things with your hands/ difficulty using a telephone handset, television remote control, computer keyboard, etc.
5. Breathing - Breathlessness or chest pains
6. Mental abilities - Such as learning, understanding, concentration, memory, communicating, cognitive loss or deterioration
7. Social/behavioural - Conditions associated with this (such as autism, attention deficit disorder, Asperger's, etc.)
8. Your mental health - Anxiety, depression, or trauma-related conditions, for example
9. Other illnesses/ conditions which impact or limit your daily activities/ the work you do
10. Prefer not to say
11. Don't know
12. Nothing – no impairments or conditions impact or limit my daily activities or work that I do

Financial vulnerability: research definition

Participants were considered to be financially vulnerable if they were in categories 1-4, as measured in the quantitative survey:

- 1) Had a household income of under £10,399
- 2) Were earning between £10,400-£25,999 and their household contained:
 - 1) 0 adults, 3+ children
 - 2) 1 adult, 2+ children
 - 3) 2 adults, 2+ children
 - 4) 3 adults , 1+ children
 - 5) 4 adults, 0+ children
- 3) Were earning between £26,000-£36,399 and their household contained:
 - 1) 0 adults, 4+ children
 - 2) 1 adult, 4+ children
 - 3) 2 adults, 4+ children
 - 4) 3 adults , 2+ children
 - 5) 4 adults, 1+ children
 - 6) 5+ adults, 0+ children
- 4) Were earning between £36,400-£51,999 and their household contained:
 - 1) 0 adults, 5+ children
 - 2) 1 adult, 4+ children
 - 3) 2 adults, 3+ children
 - 4) 3 adults , 3+ children
 - 5) 4 adults, 2+ children
 - 6) 5 adults, 1+ children
 - 7) 6+ adults, 0+ children