



# Broadcaster Complaints Process: Satisfaction Survey

Report Prepared For:

**Broadcasting Standards Authority**

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## Executive Insights

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### Business Needs Assessment

This survey was conducted for the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) to gain an understanding of broadcasters' perceptions and experiences of the complaints process. The results of this survey will help build a complete picture of how effectively the current complaints process contributes to the BSA's core goal of *"ensuring decisions will be, and will be seen to be, principled, firm, just and relevant by the complainant, broadcasters and the wider community"*.

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### Conclusions

On the basis of this research, we conclude that:

- For the most part, broadcasters remain satisfied with how the BSA manages the complaints process. In particular, the responsiveness of the BSA is a key strength.
  - Although the overall time the process takes is still an issue for some, the BSA's efforts to provide a more efficient service have been recognised.
  - BSA staff continue to be rated positively, however, the strength of satisfaction has weakened since 2006.
  - Personalised forms of communication (such as written correspondence and phone/face-to-face contact) are considered the most effective information sources by broadcasters.
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**Recommendations** With broadcasters relatively happy with how the BSA managed the complaints process and the decision process, it is broadcasters' individual needs that shine through.

We recommend addressing individual broadcasters' needs, such as:

- more coaching where required
- improving web-site generated complaints
- providing a better distinction between complaints considered formal as opposed to informal.

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Focus at an individual level will help to build on the overall relationship between the BSA and each broadcaster and assist in developing the relationships between new BSA staff and broadcasters.

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## Needs Assessment

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### Background

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) is set up by the Broadcasting Act 1989. The Act imposes a duty on all broadcasters to maintain standards, including the observance of good taste and decency, the maintenance of law and order, the privacy of the individual, the protection of children, the requirement for broadcasts to be accurate, fair and balanced, and for broadcasters to have safeguards against the portrayal of persons in programmes in a manner which encourages denigration or discrimination.

The functions of the BSA include:

- Receive and determine complaints
- Issue advisory opinions to broadcasters relating to broadcasting standards and ethical conduct
- Approve codes of broadcasting practice developed by broadcasters
- Conduct research and publish findings on matters relating to standards in broadcasting.

In 2006 the BSA surveyed broadcasters to understand their perceptions and experiences of the complaints process. This is a repeat of that survey and will again provide the broadcasters' perspective about the process itself and the contribution made by BSA staff to this process. The results of this survey, compared against results from 2006, will help build a complete picture of how effectively the current complaints process contributes to the BSA's core goal of *"ensuring decisions will be, and will be seen to be, principled, firm, just and relevant by the complainant, broadcasters and the wider community"*.

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### Research Objectives

The overall objective of the research is to determine the level of satisfaction broadcasters have with the complaints process. In particular, how do they rate the performance of the BSA in relation to:

- The information available to broadcasters about the complaints process in general (not relating to a specific complaint)
- The personal contact broadcasters have had with BSA staff about, or during, the complaints process
- BSA's management of the complaints process, particularly in relation to timeliness and information exchange
- The written decisions received from BSA

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- Perceived fairness of decisions about formal complaints in the two calendar years 2007 and 2008.
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## Research Design

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### Methodology

An online survey was conducted. Fieldwork was undertaken between the 18<sup>th</sup> November and the 4<sup>th</sup> December among broadcasters who had been the subject of a formal complaint during the calendar years 2007 and 2008. In total, 11 broadcasters were given the opportunity to complete the survey. A total of nine broadcasters responded, including all the major broadcasters.

As a comparison, in 2006 15 broadcasters were invited to participate in the survey and 10 went on to complete it.

The online process was as follows:

- An initial email was sent out from the BSA, introducing the survey and inviting participation
  - The Nielsen Company followed this up with an email invitation to broadcasters to participate in the survey. This contained the link that took the respondent to the survey, which was hosted on The Nielsen Company's server. All links were unique to the individual broadcaster to ensure confidentiality
  - A reminder email was sent out to those who had not yet completed the survey, and during the last few days a courtesy call was made to ensure the survey was not cut off before anyone who wanted to complete it had had a chance to access their link.
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## Information about the Complaints Process Generally

### All broadcasters have visited the BSA website

Most broadcasters have received information about the complaints process through all of the resources available.

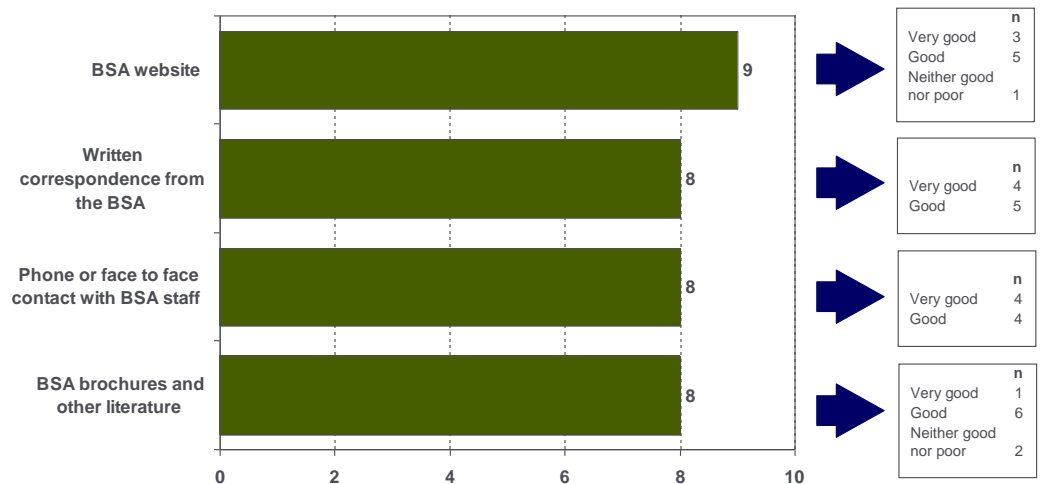
In particular, all nine broadcasters who completed the survey had visited the BSA website. This important channel is also seen as an effective source of information among broadcasters. Aside from BSA brochures and other literature, all other sources of information have been rated well in terms of their effectiveness.

In fact, only one broadcaster rated BSA brochures and other literature as ‘very good’..

Written correspondence is still considered an effective approach to communicating with broadcasters, with all broadcasters rating this source as either ‘good’ or ‘very good’.

In fact, both the personalised forms of communication (written or phone/face-to-face) appear to be rated the most effective, with more generic sources rated less positively.

**Q1. Through which of the following sources have you received information about the complaints process in general?**  
**Q2. For each source used, can you please indicate how effective the information you received from this source was in helping you to understand the formal complaints process?**

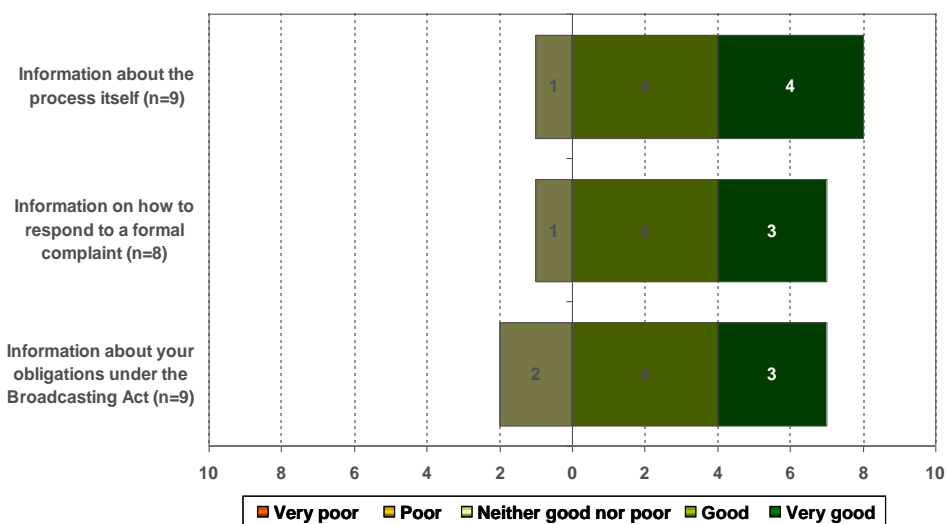


(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable)

**Broadcasters are generally happy with information content, but specific opportunities exist**

In terms of information content, broadcasters are generally happy with the information received regarding the process itself, how to respond to a formal complaint, and their obligations under the Broadcasting Act.

Q3. Overall, how would you rate the general information received from the BSA about each of the following...?



(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable)

Whilst ratings in this area are positive, all broadcasters are not necessarily confident their staff have a thorough understanding of the process.





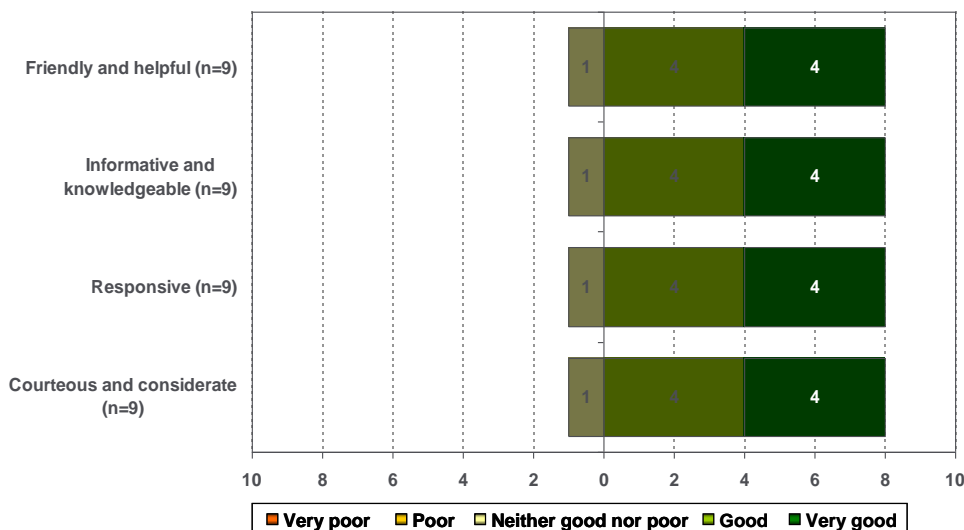
## Dealing with the BSA Staff

### BSA staff continue to receive positive ratings

When asking broadcasters to think about the personal contact they have had with BSA staff about, or during the complaints process via phone, face-to-face or e-mail, perceptions are generally positive.

Ratings are not quite as strong as in 2006. At least seven broadcasters rated staff ‘very good’ on all attributes the last time this survey was conducted.

Q4. How would you rate BSA staff you have dealt with in terms of being...?



(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable)

While the degree of satisfaction has weakened slightly, it continues to be encouraging that no broadcasters rate the BSA staff as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’.

One area that has been identified for the BSA to consider further training and education for staff is in regards to cultural and ethical differences.

*...I think it would be helpful for BSA staff to understand cultural and ethnic differences in specialist media.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Note that all names have been removed from quotes to protect the anonymity of the broadcasters surveyed.

## Management of the Complaints Process

**Responsiveness of BSA is recognised among broadcasters; however, overall time of the process is an issue for some**

For the most part, broadcasters are happy with how the BSA manages the complaints process, particularly, in regards to the BSA’s responsiveness.

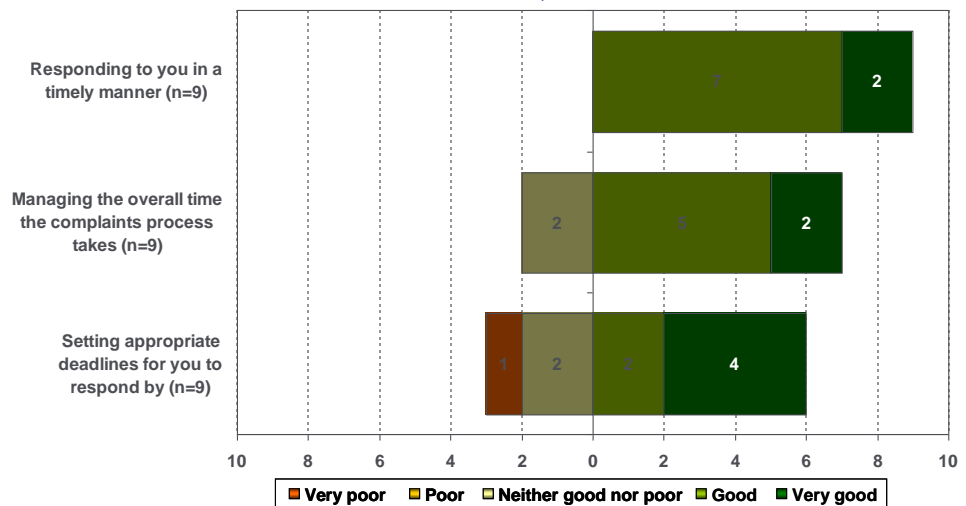
One broadcaster rated the setting of appropriate deadlines for broadcasters to respond by as ‘very poor’. The underlying reason for this comparatively lower rating can be found in the following comment from this broadcaster:

*By continually referring broadcasters’ submissions to complainants, the processing of the complaint can become a long drawn out and consequently expensive process for broadcasters.*

These sentiments are echoed by another broadcaster.

*The process needs to have a finite end and not full of endless counter submissions.*

**Q5. How would you rate BSA's management of the complaints process, from a formal complaint first being referred to the BSA until the decision is released, in terms of...**



(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable)

Despite this dissatisfaction from two broadcasters, the BSA’s work to improve the overall time the complaints process takes has not gone unnoticed:

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*The advantage with the broadcasting standards authority process is that it's quick and recent developments have seen it become even quicker, with reporting now down to one month intervals from the date of determination from three months*

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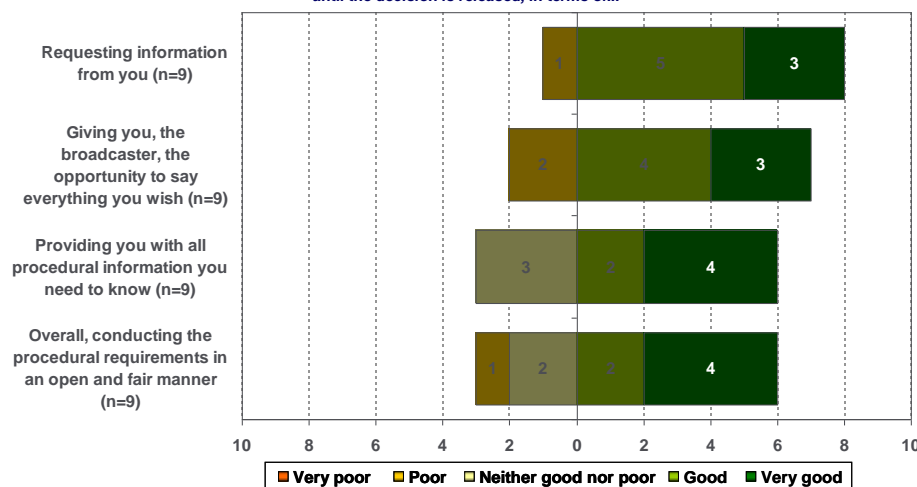
**Broadcasters are generally happy with management of information exchange**

Broadcasters generally rate the information exchange process positively; at least three have given ratings of ‘very good’. This is consistent with 2006 results when between two and four broadcasters rated each aspect ‘very good’.

Two broadcasters gave a rating of ‘poor’ on at least one aspect of the information exchange. Although they wished to remain anonymous, one of these broadcasters provided the following comment in regards to their rating:

*It would be good if the BSA adhered to its earlier promise that the broadcasters will have the final say on complaints.*

**Q5. How would you rate BSA's management of the complaints process, from a formal complaint first being referred to the BSA until the decision is released, in terms of...**



(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable)

Although, no broadcasters rated the provision of procedural information as ‘poor’, one pointed out an issue with the provision of web-site generated complaints.

*Automatically sending on web-site generated complaints often contain incomplete and miss-directed complaints.*

Another broadcaster had the following suggestion:

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*...a better distinction between complaints the Authority believes are formal as opposed to informal complaints may be useful.*

In addition, at least one broadcaster feels more could be done to outline the criteria for investigative procedures:

*The BSA's discretion to invoke investigative procedures has no clear rules or criteria. This leaves broadcasters with the suspicion that these powers are invoked in an arbitrary manner.*

Finally, another had a suggestion that would see a better opportunity for broadcasters to say everything they wished, and potentially also save on time, which has been identified as a problem area for some broadcasters in the previous section.

*...one suggestion would be, to teleconference [sic] broadcasters to make vocal submissions. This may speed things up even more and have direct opportunity for the broadcaster to answer questions that the broadcasting standards authority may have. There is already statutory authority for this to be permitted.*

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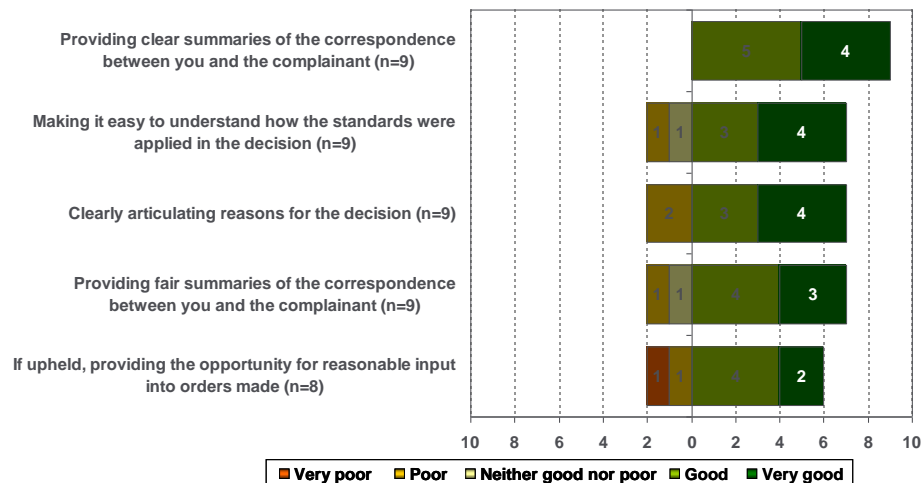
## The Decision Process

### Increased opportunities for input into the decision is desired by at least two broadcasters

Broadcasters are also, in the main, satisfied with aspects of the decision process; in particular, the BSA providing clear summaries of the correspondence between themselves and complainants.

One broadcaster rated ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ on all aspects other than providing clear summaries of correspondence. This was one of the broadcasters that was unhappy with the length of the overall process, but their feedback did not offer any insight into the reasoning for such low ratings of the decisions received from the BSA.

Q6. How would you rate the written decisions your organisation has received from the BSA, in terms of ...



(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable)

Another broadcaster rated the BSA poor on articulating reasons for the decision and providing the opportunity for reasonable input into the orders made. This was one of the broadcasters that was dissatisfied with aspects of the information exchange. Once again, the root of this dissatisfaction appears to stem from the broadcaster’s involvement in the process (or in this case perceived lack thereof):

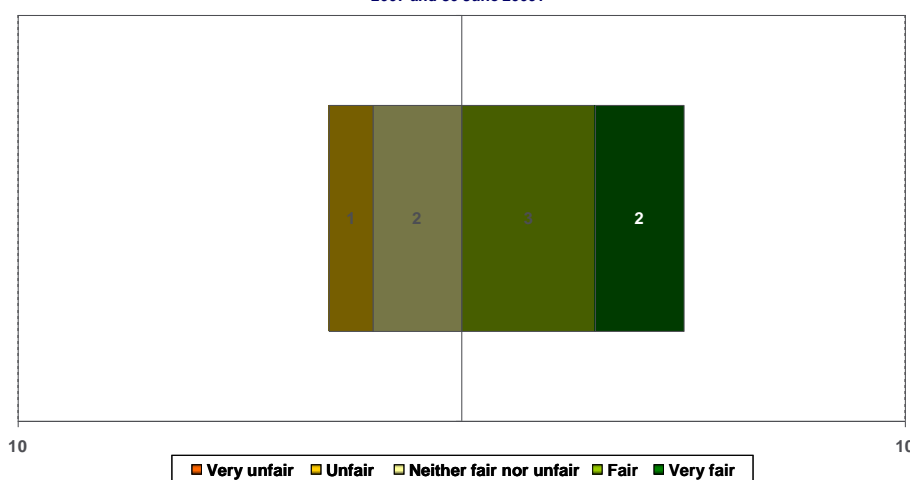
*It would be good if the BSA adhered to its earlier promise that the broadcasters will have the final say on complaints.*

**BSA's final decisions perceived to be fair**

Five of the nine broadcasters who completed the survey consider the BSA's decisions about the formal complaints received between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2009 to be 'fair' or 'very fair'. This is very similar to 2006, when six broadcasters gave these ratings.

Whilst there were two broadcasters (both of them wishing to remain anonymous) who rated aspects of the decision process as 'poor' or 'very poor' in the previous section, only one of them rated the actual decision as 'unfair'.

**Q8. In general, please rate how fair you think the BSA's decisions were about the formal complaints you dealt with between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2009?**



(Base: All respondents excluding don't know and not applicable) (n=8)



## Appendix – Questionnaire

### A. Information about the Complaints Process Generally

These first few questions are about the information available to broadcasters about the complaints process in general, not relating to a specific complaint.

Q1 Through which of the following sources have you received information about the complaints process in general?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
	(126)		
(R1) Written correspondence from the BSA.....	01	02	03
	(128)		
(R2) Phone or face to face contact with BSA staff .....	01	02	03
	(130)		
(R3) BSA website .....	01	02	03
	(132)		
(R4) BSA brochures and other literature .....	01	02	03

Q2 For each source used, can you please indicate how effective the information you received from this source was in helping you to understand the formal complaints process?

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't know	N/A
	(138)						
Written correspondence from (R1) the BSA.....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
	(140)						
Phone or face to face contact (R2) with BSA staff.....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
	(142)						
(R3) BSA website .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
	(144)						
BSA brochures and other (R4) literature .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07

Q3 Overall, how would you rate the general information received from the BSA about each of the following...?





## Appendix II – Questionnaire, Continued

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very poor	Don't know	N/A
Information about the (R1) process itself .....	(150) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Information on how to respond to a formal (R2) complaint.....	(152) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Information about your obligations under the (R3) Broadcasting Act.....	(154) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07

### Q4 B. Dealing with BSA Staff

Thinking now about the personal contact you have had with BSA staff about, or during, the complaints process. This contact may have been via phone, face-to-face or e-mail contact.

How would you rate BSA staff you have dealt with in terms of being...?

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know	N/A
(R1) Friendly and helpful .....	(162) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Informative and (R2) knowledgeable .....	(163) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07
(R3) Responsive .....	(164) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07
(R4) Courteous and considerate ...	(165) 01	02	03	04	05	06	07

Q5 How would you rate BSA's management of the complaints process, from a formal complaint first being referred to the BSA until the decision is released, in terms of...



## Appendix II – Questionnaire, Continued

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't know	N/A
<b><u>Timeliness</u></b>	(170)						
Responding to you in a timely (R1) manner .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Setting appropriate deadlines (R2) for you to respond by .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Managing the overall time the (R3) complaints process takes .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
<b><u>Information Exchange</u></b>	(176)						
Requesting information from (R4) you .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Giving you, the broadcaster, the opportunity to say (R5) everything you wish.....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Providing you with all procedural information you (R6) need to know .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Overall, conducting the procedural requirements in (R7) an open and fair manner .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07

**Q6 C. The Decision Process**

How would you rate the written decisions your organisation has received from the BSA, in terms of

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't know	N/A
Providing clear summaries of the correspondence between (R1) you and the complainant .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07



## Appendix II – Questionnaire, Continued

Providing fair summaries of the correspondence between (R2) you and the complainant .....	01 (229)	02	03	04	05	06	07
Making it easy to understand how the standards were (R3) applied in the decision .....	01 (231)	02	03	04	05	06	07
Clearly articulating reasons (R4) for the decision.....	01 (233)	02	03	04	05	06	07
If upheld, providing the opportunity for reasonable (R5) input into orders made .....	01	02	03	04	05	06	07

Q8	In general, please rate how fair you think the BSA's decisions were about the formal complaints you dealt with between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2009?	Code (241)	Route
	Very fair.....	1	
	Fair .....	2	
	Neither fair nor unfair .....	3	
	Unfair.....	4	
	Very unfair .....	5	
	Don't know .....	6	
	Not applicable .....	7	

Q9 **D. Overall comments**

Thinking about the complaints process overall,

What improvements, if any, would you like to make to the way the BSA processes complaints?

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Q10 Do you have any other comments to make about the current process?

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