

Customer Contact  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Overline House  
Blechynden Terrace  
Southampton  
SO15 1AL

**Marcus Clements**  
Head of Consumer Policy  
Office of Rail and Road

11<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Marcus,

**RE: Complaint Handling Satisfaction 2019/2020**

Thank you for your letter regarding South Western Railway's passenger satisfaction scoring with complaint handling. The findings of the July 2020 published survey were not only disappointing to read for our teams internally, but also that the industry average only measured 31% satisfaction.

Although the complaint sample range is now between 10 and 22 months in age, the survey provided further insight into our passenger's views on some of our interactions, that supplements our existing customer insight understanding.

The 2019/2020 year proved challenging for South Western Railway. A sustained year of poor operational performance, driven by both network infrastructure failings and challenges driven internally. Of note, a month-long industrial action in December 2019 and the Eastleigh freight derailment in early 2020 caused significant inconvenience to our passengers across a 16-week period. These large incidents caused considerable contact increase into our contact centres, which naturally had a negative impact on the average response rate. Further customer dissatisfaction was driven through the lengthy resolution with the DFT of the strike compensation package under the Emergency Measures Agreement negotiation thereafter.

It is unsurprising then, that customer satisfaction with the complaint handling measures have been negatively scored, considering an already very poor passenger sentiment.

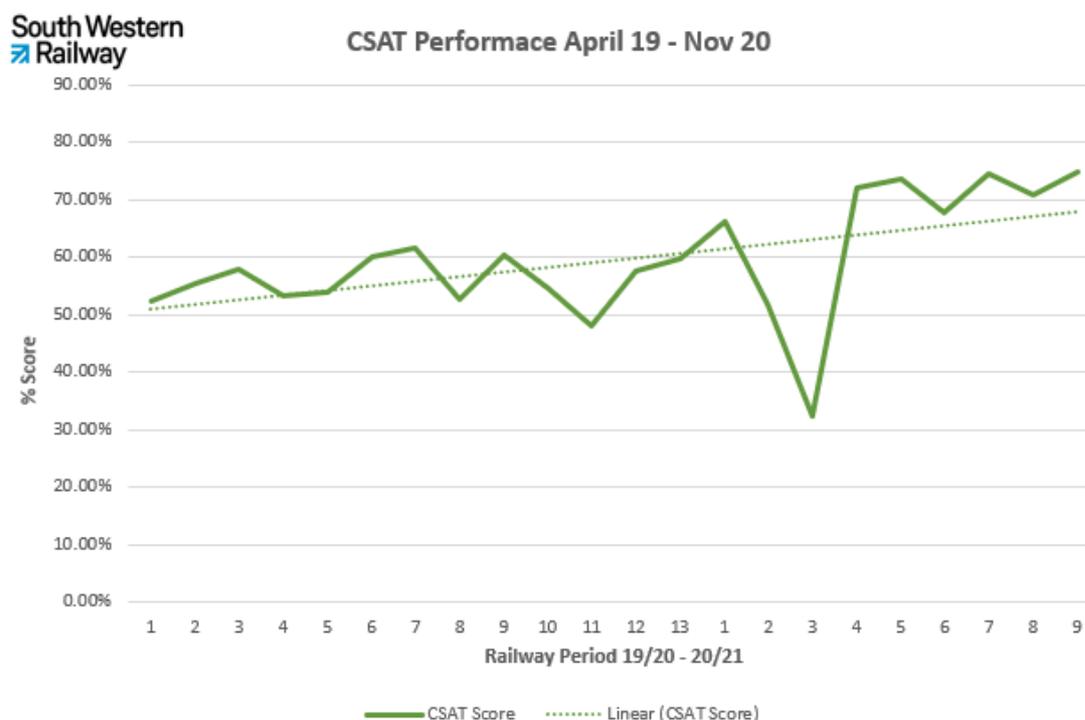
Throughout the course of 2019, the Contact Centres management team were in the process of restructuring the existing establishment to drive contact handling efficiency and drastically improve customer satisfaction with all services across the contact centre estate. This new structure manifested two new key components that were launched late November 2019. Namely, a dedicated Complaints & Dispute handling team and the Training & Quality Assurance team.

Complaints handling traditionally had been an activity managed across the entire establishment, the new team was architected of experienced customer service and rail team members. Focused on revising the tone and manner of complaint handling & building on the foundations already established with the Dispute Resolution Ombudsman. This resulted in a rewrite of over 300 email & letter templates during the summer of 2020, to incorporate greater

empathy and explanation. So that although our passengers may not always get the answer they hoped for, our responses are empathetic, whilst providing clear and accurate detail.

The Training & Quality team position is to support the customer facing teams with improved soft skills for handling both voice and written interactions. But to also measure their performance, and feedback on both developmental and successful contacts. This included the design and launch of a Quality Assurance framework and the procurement of a Quality Management software, which is currently undergoing its live deployment. The training leads have also delivered conflict management courses to frontline team members to add to the existing soft skill training.

Although these initiatives are still maturing, the results on performance are evidenced in our key measure, CSAT surveying. As demonstrated in the below graphic, scoring has considerably improved with customer satisfaction of the service delivered through our contact centres. The CSAT survey is presented against three key channels, Complaint Handling, Refunds and Live Chat.



Whilst we are pleased to see sustained growth against our customer satisfaction scoring, we continue to monitor the quality of our interactions through our Quality Assurance processes, in hand with customer insights such as Voice of the Customer, Wavelength and CSAT.

I believe this shows that South Western Railway is not only aware of our passengers' sentiment, but we have also taken considerable action & invested into reversing these trends throughout the last 18 months. Also resulting in significant improvement in the complaint handling timescale of 20 working days, now consistently achieving the 95% target.

If you have any queries concerning this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Nathan Marks  
Senior Customer Operations Manager  
South Western Railway