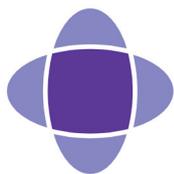
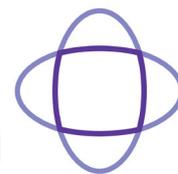


The Furniture
Ombudsman



Dispute Resolution
Ombudsman



2015

ANNUAL REVIEW

0333 241 3209

www.thefurnitureombudsman.org
www.disputeresolutionombudsman.org

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Chartered Trading Standards Institute

Approved by Government under the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015

Dear Reader



Our Annual Review provides the perfect platform to reflect upon our performance over the previous calendar year and to look forward to the challenges that lie ahead. The year 2015 was a very positive one for the Ombudsman. We engaged several new members and widened our scope which meant that our reach grew, and we made improvements to our infrastructure and our people who remain the heartbeat of our organisation.

Many things have changed within the consumer and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) landscape since my arrival in 2008. Some good and some not so good. I am proud however, that we have remained loyal to the reasons why the Office of Fair Trading and the industry established us way back in 1992. During the best part of a quarter of a century we have worked hard to train and educate the industries with which we work to encourage best practice and the raising of standards. Our origin and heritage is important to us and I am sure it helps to inspire trust amongst the consumers and businesses that rely on our services.

However, we understand that whilst an enviable track record and history is important - alone it is not enough to maintain our position as one of the leading schemes in the United Kingdom. As the months ahead pass, our commitment to continually improving at every level will shine through in our service. There is an inextinguishable desire at this ombudsman scheme to work hard and deliver results that will help to improve businesses, protect consumers, and ensure that we remain as the leader in our field.

Best wishes,

Kevin Grix

CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CHIEF OMBUDSMAN

A year at a glance

January

All of our largest members renew their membership

February

We roll out our first City & Guilds accredited training

March

We get approved by the CTSI under the ADR regulations

April

Our Director of Operations is made a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers

May

Our CEO joins the Exec of the Ombudsman Association

June

We host a consumer law workshop and attend the CTSI Conference

July

We support the Young Professional Industry Experience Day (YPIE)

August

We host a company wide training day followed by a team building event

September

Dr. Richard Kirkham of University of Sheffield joins our Standards Board

October

We partner with the Institute of Consumer Affairs

November

We establish the Consumer Protection Alliance

December

We launch the DRO website

Foreword



"I am proud to have been associated with the Ombudsman for over 15 years, time in which the scheme has remained the leading specialist ADR provider in the furniture, home improvement and retail sectors."

Guy Pratt

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR COMMUNITY PROTECTION

Hertfordshire County Council

With a heritage of almost 25 years, the Ombudsman continues to raise standards and occupies a unique position within the consumer landscape. I am Chairman of the Ombudsman's Standards Board that provides oversight and helps to ensure that the organisation is independent and impartial. The Standards Board, comprising of colleagues from trading standards, consumer groups and industry, also helps to ensure that the Ombudsman is equipped to meet the needs of consumers and businesses.

I am pleased that so many members remain loyal to the Ombudsman – from sole traders to some of the biggest high street retailers in the United Kingdom. This illustrates that good businesses have a real desire to raise standards. Today, the Ombudsman's members benefit from access to advice, accredited training that raises standards and performance, and their consumers are advantaged with help about their rights and free access to a Government approved Alternative Dispute Resolution service.

The team at the Ombudsman has well-defined expertise and backgrounds in consumer law, furniture, home improvements and retail. This translates into a high quality experience for every member and consumer who use the service.

I am thrilled to support the Ombudsman's ambitious plans to expand the scope of the service to help more businesses and consumers and look forward to being part of their success story in the years to come.

About us

We are a not for profit, government approved ombudsman scheme that offers services under two trading names, The Furniture Ombudsman and Dispute Resolution Ombudsman. We provide a range of services including alternative dispute resolution, training and advice to the furniture, home improvement and the retail sectors.

Set up by The Office of Fair Trading in 1992 and overseen by a Standards Board, we work with the industry to raise standards and inspire consumer confidence. Over the years, we grew more passionate to support the industry and have worked hard to go beyond our initial remit.

Today, we offer City & Guilds accredited training to traders and support our members with a dedicated advice line to ensure they meet their obligations and are better equipped to service their customers.

Every year, we bring the industry together through the members' workshops we organise. This is not just an opportunity to get an update on consumer law, but also to spot trends and share good practice, so consumers benefit from an enhanced experience when shopping with our traders.

Our pool of members extends to approximately 8,000 retail, furniture and home improvement outlets in the United Kingdom. All of our Full Members pledge to abide by a Code of Practice which bestows additional rights on the consumers who shop with them.

We recognise that traders in these sectors are diverse and face different challenges. Because we want to understand these challenges and be prepared to support businesses in tackling them, we have been creating alliances and non-commercial partnerships with relevant industry bodies and organisations. Read more about our partnerships and how these help us support our members and consumers better on [page 14](#).

"All of our clients, bar none, do their utmost to avoid court proceedings with their customers and we view the early and decisive involvement of The Furniture Ombudsman (TFO) as a critical part of the resolution process to be utilised wherever possible.

We have complete confidence in the transparency procedures adopted by TFO and their exceptionally even handed approach. Furthermore, it remains a very economical method of dispute resolution. We continue to use TFO extensively and found them of real benefit in helping us to resolve even the most intractable disputes.

We continue to successfully settle numerous cases by using TFO, that I have no doubt would have otherwise been expensively and unsatisfactorily pursued through the courts."

Adrian Bratt, Lawyer

MANAGING ASSOCIATE, BOND DICKINSON LLP

City & Guilds accredited training

We offer a two day City and Guilds accredited training course that covers legalities and consumer behaviour. Each participant receives an accreditation certificate, subject to passing an exam at the end of the course.

Read more on page 16.



Tailored training

We also offer a range of in-house training courses which are tailored to the specific needs of retailers and manufacturers, and helps them improve their customer service processes.

Read more on page 16.



Help, support, and advice

We offer services to both consumers and businesses and deal with thousands of contacts each month. Our advice line helps businesses understand their legal obligations to consumers. This reduces the risk of disputes arising and helps ensure that all parties get a fair deal.

We offer help and advice to consumers via our websites:

www.thefurnitureombudsman.org

www.disputeresolutionombudsman.org

See page 10 for testimonials.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is a process used to resolve disputes between two parties and acts as an alternative to going to court.

With a heritage of almost 25 years, we are the most recognised body for resolving disputes between consumers and retailers in the furniture, retail and home improvement industries.

A trader must be a member of The Furniture Ombudsman or Dispute Resolution Ombudsman before their consumers can benefit for free from our ADR service.

More info on the disputes we handled in 2015 on page 6.

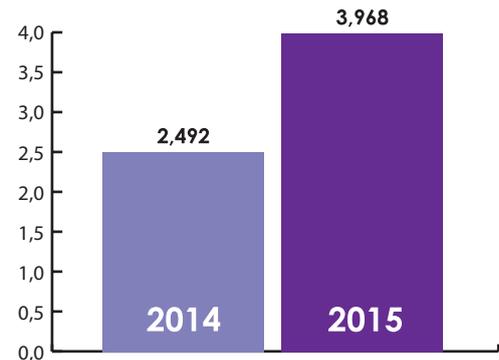
Results 2015

Consumer contacts in 2015 typically took place by telephone, letter, e-mail and via our website. Some of the reasons consumers contacted us were to obtain consumer law and shopping advice from our website, register a dispute with a retail member, and find out the status of an open case. This report includes data from 2014 for reference.

Case volumes

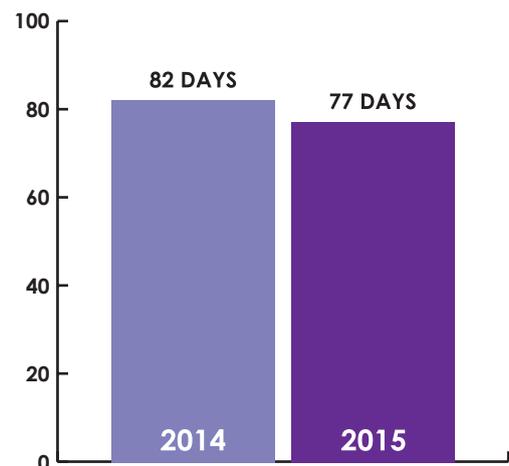
In 2015 we accepted 3,968 complaints about our members. All of these were registered from within the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Although case numbers increased in 2015, so did our list of registered members.



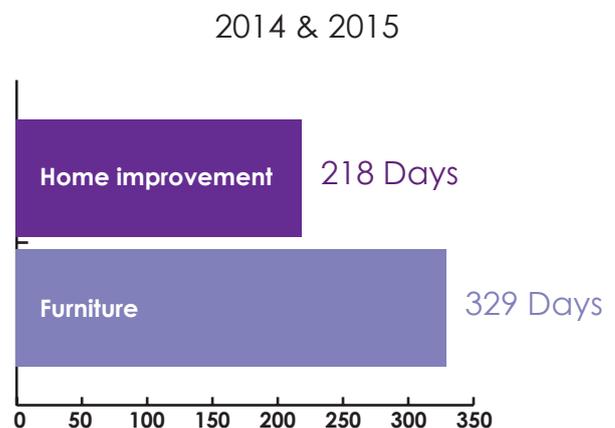
Days to complete a case

We estimate that on average our conciliation process lasted 77 days per case. This went down by 6.1% from 2014, when on average our conciliation process lasted for 82 days.



Average days a product was owned for before a complaint was filed

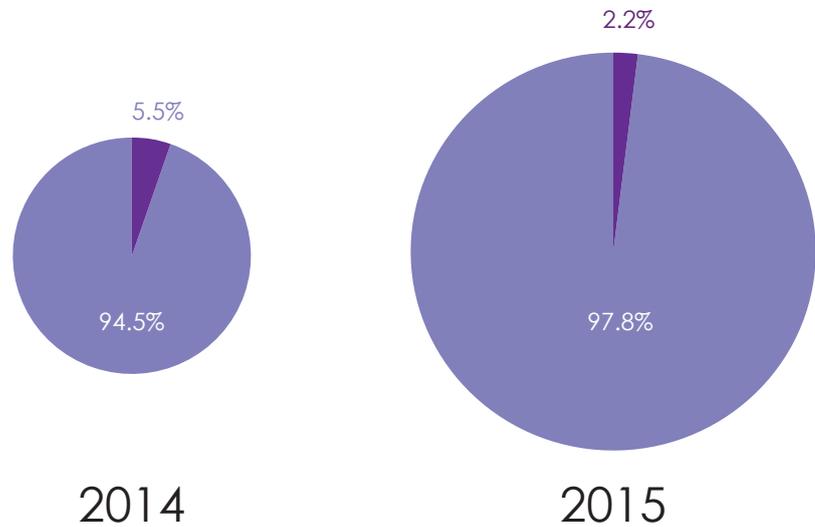
Using data from 2014 and 2015, we highlight that across this period of time, a furniture product was owned for 329 days before a case was brought to us. In home improvement, a product or installation had been in the consumer's home for an average of 218 days before a case was brought to us.



Case outcomes

Adjudications and conciliations

When an application is received from a consumer, detailing a complaint against one of our registered members, the claim is investigated through our conciliation process. Initially, we may be able to make a decision on the validity of a claim, recommend or uphold an offer which has already been made prior to our involvement, or negotiate a settlement. In 2015, 97.8% of our cases were resolved or closed as a result of our conciliation process.

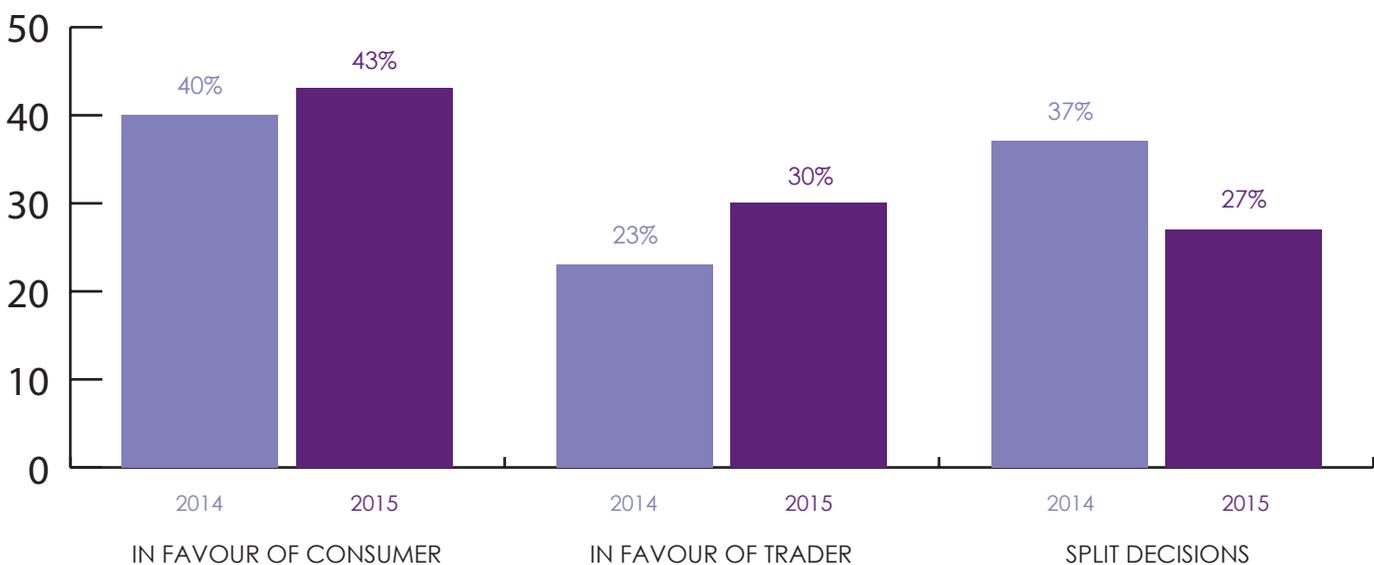


Where agreement cannot be reached or, in our opinion, there is insufficient evidence to allow for an initial decision during the conciliation process, we may then formally adjudicate. All of our decisions and adjudications are binding on the member.

In 2015, 2.2% of the total cases that we looked at required an adjudication. Of these:

- 43% of all adjudications were found in favour of the consumer and an award was made. Awards may have included a refund (full or partial), repair, replacement, additional works and/or compensation.
- 30% of all adjudications were not upheld in the favour of the consumer and we found in favour of the retailer.
- 27% were split decisions. In these cases some of the consumer's claims were upheld and others were not.

In each of these cases, we asked an independent expert to visit the consumer's home in order to view the goods/ installation, so that they could help us with our decision. There were no instances of non-compliance (where a settlement was not agreed) in 2015.



Goods and services

In 2015 we accepted complaints about various furniture and home improvement goods and related services, such as fitting and installation.

The various categories that we helped to resolve complaints about are illustrated in the table.

CATEGORY	%
Upholstery Sofas • Armchairs • Corner units • Footstools • Recliners	56%
Bed Divans • Mattresses • Bedsteads	10%
Flooring and doors Carpets • Laminates • Hardwood • Tile floors • Doors	2%
Bathrooms (product and installation) Baths • Showers • Toilets • Sinks	3%
Cabinetry (including bedroom and office furniture) Sideboards • Dressers • Wardrobes • Drawers • Desks • Fitted office furniture	11%
Kitchens (product and installation) Cabinets • Worktops	16%
Other Conservatories • Boilers • Outdoor furniture	2%



Inspiring consumer confidence

We work with our members to help raise industry standards and inspire consumer confidence. One of the ways we highlight our work is through our members' marketing materials, where consumers can read more about our services.



Peace of mind

Tesco is a full member of The Furniture Ombudsman, which reinforces our commitment to provide product and service excellence. Our membership of The Furniture Ombudsman and our obligation to its Code of Practice gives you peace of mind that, in the unlikely event of an unresolved dispute with your purchase, you are able to contact The Furniture Ombudsman, who will provide an independent dispute resolution service. For more about how our commitment to The Furniture Ombudsman can help you shop with confidence, visit thefurnitureombudsman.org.



"We recognise and value the increased reassurance our membership provides consumers. For this reason, we actively promote our partnership, during and after the sales process, through a range of channels. This ensures customers understand that they are able to buy with total confidence."

Gavin Jeffcoate, Tesco



"Through the expert, impartial advice of the Dispute Resolution Ombudsman and The Furniture Ombudsman, we can support our customers to the highest standards. The service provided is always knowledgeable, professional, supportive and impartial. A very trustworthy partnership. As a result of our dynamic working relationship with the Ombudsman we receive guidance and training."

Katarina Smart,
House of Fraser



HOUSE OF FRASER SINCE 1849

House of Fraser's Commitment To Customer Confidence

As a responsible retailer, House of Fraser is committed to providing products of the highest quality as well as first-class customer service.

We also understand that from time to time things can go wrong. In such an event, we will do our best to ensure our customers are fully satisfied with our response.

To give our customers additional confidence and peace of mind, House of Fraser is a full member of **The Dispute Resolution Ombudsman** and we are committed to their code of practice.

What can I do if I am not happy?

If you are dissatisfied with our response to a complaint, you may be able to refer it to The Dispute Resolution Ombudsman who will provide a specialist independent dispute resolution service. Their contact details are:

Dispute Resolution Ombudsman
Maxwell Road
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG1 2EW

www.disputeresolutionombudsman.org
0845 653 2064
info@disputeresolutionombudsman.org



HOUSE OF FRASER SINCE 1849

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Maxwell Road
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG1 2EW

www.thefurnitureombudsman.org
0845 653 2064
info@thefurnitureombudsman.org



Consumers

"I contacted The Furniture Ombudsman and was assigned to Judith Turner. I cannot praise and thank her enough; she was professional, sympathetic and dealt with every one of my emails in a swift and understanding manner. Thank you again for all your help."

Joan Potts

"Our experience with The Furniture Ombudsman has been a pleasant and a stress free one. The initial form was simple to fill out online, then it seemed to be within a few days that there was a solution to the issue. The Furniture Ombudsman is able to speak to high ranking members of companies; this is probably why our issue got resolved so quickly. I would recommend anyone to use this service. Thank you and keep doing what you do."

Mark Johnstone

"We found the services of The Furniture Ombudsman to be very efficient and our case was resolved with a positive outcome. We were really happy and would like to thank you for your services."

Chris Hanlon

"The service was simple to understand and we felt as though our case was heard and dealt with quickly."

Ian Pogson

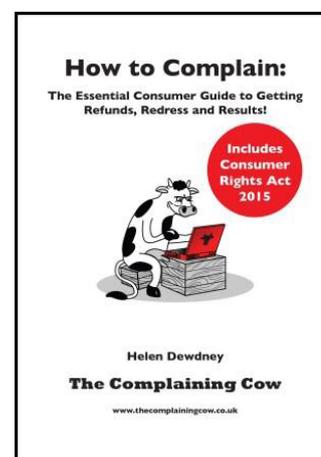
"We would both like to sincerely thank you for your most valued help and support in resolving this. What we thought was going to be a long drawn out affair was made so much easier knowing we had such a reassuring and helpful contact in you. You have made us both very happy."

Bill & Lorraine Sherman

"The current landscape for ADR is confusing for both retailers and consumers. It is good to see that Dispute Resolution Ombudsman incorporating The Furniture Ombudsman remains one of the longest established, knowledgeable, experienced and focussed Ombudsman schemes, particularly in the non-regulated areas and I frequently recommend consumers to use their services."

Helen Dewdney,

The Complaining Cow, Consumer Rights blogger and author of How to Complain: The Essential Consumer Guide to Getting Refunds, Redress and Results!



Retailers

"Adherence to a Code of Practice ensures we constantly strive to improve our customer service and discussions and meetings with The Ombudsman [provide essential information](#) to achieve that.

[The service is fantastic](#) – their staff take time to understand your business and work with you to reach independent resolutions that are fair to both parties. [Training is another vital element](#) of the membership, particularly in relation to relevant legislation changes.

Joining the scheme sends out a message that inspires customers; Homebase is a member of The Furniture Ombudsman, offering consumers independent advice, guidance, and more importantly, protection. "

Brenda McNamara, Homebase



"Our membership with The Furniture Ombudsman allows us to [benchmark our performance against our aim](#) to achieve the highest possible standards of service.

The expert advice offered by the Ombudsman allows us to keep pace with any changes in the legislation and customer expectations. [We rate the services of the Ombudsman as excellent.](#)"

Paul Wright, Marks & Spencer



"Our core purpose is Better Homes, Better Lives. We aim to help millions of people improve their homes and want our customers to feel [they can buy from us with confidence](#). Membership of The Furniture Ombudsman helps us do this. "

Sally Clifton, B&Q



"Membership with The Furniture Ombudsman allows us to show to internal and external audiences that we operate a true service culture and are willing to be bound by a third party in our decision making. This helps us to [inspire confidence in our product and service](#) right from considering a purchase, to consultation, decision making and post-sale.

The Ombudsman regularly [updates us on consumer law changes](#) and ensures that our interpretation of what can be complex matters is correct. [It makes law and process simple for all](#), allowing us to focus on our customer.

[The staff are always welcoming and supportive](#), whether on the phone or in person. The most important thing for us is the [quick and consistent approach they offer](#). [First class service!](#)"

Martin Guest, Bathstore



Operations and service update



With two new laws impacting significantly on our work, we have spent a vast amount of time ensuring both ourselves and our members were prepared for the changes.

The ADR Regulations 2015 required the Ombudsman to become accredited by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI), which I am pleased to say was duly completed in March.

Our accreditation was swiftly followed by a plan to ensure our members met their obligations under these regulations too. Our team of legal experts successfully prepared and delivered training workshops to members on the new Consumer Rights Act 2015 and ADR Regulations 2015.

Consumer contact with the Ombudsman has grown steadily throughout the year and as such the team has grown in both number and quality, with additions to both the ombudsman and administration teams.

One of our goals is improving efficiency and the way in which we deliver our service, and this year saw a couple of significant changes being implemented.

Consumers can now use the service and raise their disputes online, not only making the service more accessible, but also making things faster.

Furthermore, we recognised the need to speed up the service, and took the decision to implement a telephone-led approach across our teams. This has proven to be a great success with feedback from both members and consumers being very positive.

Looking toward to further development and growth in 2016, we have advanced plans for a new Case Management System which again, will provide service improvements for all stakeholders. We are also looking to develop our training material with specific focus on our City & Guilds approved programme.

Richard Griffin

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Legal and dispute resolution update

The year 2015 delivered all it had promised in terms of the challenges of both new law, and increased awareness of Alternative Dispute Resolution, when the provisions of the Consumer Rights Act and ADR Regulations came into force on 1st October.

I am pleased to say that the ombudsman team rose to the occasion on all counts. Cases were on the up, but days to resolve these were down.

Always mindful of our remit to raise standards, we have listened to feedback from all users of our process and reacted with a telephone-led approach, that we believed has enhanced the service we offer to both consumers and retailers.



Striving for operational excellence, our programme of internal training has been of vital importance this year, as the ombudsman team has ensured that we were up to date with the law and industry changes. We have, in turn, been able to pass this knowledge on to our members through our designated advice line and training courses.

Continuing the theme of change and evolution, some exciting developments in our training provision were rolled out in 2015 with the introduction of our City & Guilds course. This is a two-day accredited training programme, dealing with legalities and behavioural issues arising out of complaints, at the end of which every successful delegate receives accreditation. The course has been very well received by those delegates who have already attended, seeing an immediate difference in the attitude both to complaints and how these are dealt with.

We also carried out a Consumer Law Update forum in June and September 2015 which were well attended by a wide breadth of our membership and other stakeholders, and received great feedback. This was a good opportunity to engage with members and discuss their specific concerns regarding the changes across the consumer landscape. We are planning to repeat the event at more regular intervals.

Strengthening the ombudsman team by recruitment and internal development has placed us at the forefront of our industry. Operating with honesty, openness and integrity, we are well able to continue to rise to the challenges which 2016 holds, with our values, as always, at the heart of all we do.

Judith Turner

HEAD OF ADR AND SENIOR OMBUDSMAN

Partnerships

At the Ombudsman we believe that raising standards requires more than engaging with traders alone. This is why we also establish partnerships with key organisations in the industry.

The more we can understand the challenges facing traders across the supply chain, the better off consumers and businesses are - and the partnerships listed in this section help us do just that.

Consumer Protection Alliance

In 2015 we became a founding member of the Consumer Protection Alliance, a non-commercial, not for profit alliance to promote consumer safety and protection. The Alliance is the first of its nature in the United Kingdom. Together with our partners, we will be using our combined resources and combined media reach to educate consumers, landlords and businesses on the most frequent causes of injuries and fatalities in the construction, gas and electrical installation industries. Furthermore, it is our intention to assist policy makers in order to create more effective consumer legislation.

Individually, these organisations have a proven track record of promoting consumer safety awareness.

[Dispute Resolution Ombudsman](#) (which incorporates The Furniture Ombudsman) advises organisations on consumer law and provides dispute resolution services to consumers.

[Which? Trusted Traders](#) is a free-to-use service that helps consumers to find local, endorsed traders.

[Gas Safe Register](#) is the official list of gas engineers who are legally allowed to work on gas appliances. The Register works to protect the public from unsafe gas work through educating consumers and raising awareness of gas safety.

[NICEIC](#) and [ELEC SA](#), have a register of more than 34,500 electrical contractors who have been assessed to carry out electrical work in the home, and are members of the Ombudsman.

[B&Q Homefit](#) is one of our members and the fitting arm of one of the largest home improvement retailers in the United Kingdom.



Gas Safe Register

In 2015 we formed a partnership with Gas Safe Register to raise awareness of gas safety across the UK, including supporting Gas Safety Week.

"We want to show our support for Gas Safety Week as raising awareness of gas safety is paramount in our industry. We work closely with the home improvement industry and with consumers, so we want to be part of this campaign to encourage people to have their home gas safety checked every year by a Gas Safe registered engineer. Through our newly formed alliance with industry leaders, we aim to be at the forefront of promoting these crucial safety messages to the industry and consumers."

Kevin Grix, CEO



Institute of Consumer Affairs

In 2015 we pledged our support to the Institute by becoming an affiliate member. The Institute of Consumer Affairs began in 1974 as the professional body for consumer advisers working in local authorities, Trading Standards, consumer advice centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux, and other independent advice agencies. The aim of this partnership is to promote and protect the interests of consumers by supporting the development of consumer advice services and sharing our front-line experience with regulators, Government and consumer representative bodies.



IKBBI

We are partners with the Institute of Kitchen, Bedroom and Bathroom Installers (IKBBI) who provide us with technical expertise and supports our aim to raise industry standards. IKBBI is a non-profit organisation that works with professional kitchen fitters, bedroom installers and bathroom installation providers.

"The work being carried out by the Ombudsman is incredibly important to the KBB industry in general, none more so than the role they play within the requirement for Alternative Dispute Resolution. The Institute of Kitchen, Bedroom & Bathroom Installers is proud to be supporting TFO with onsite technical expertise from a wider perspective of raising standards within our industry."

Damien Walters, IKBBI CEO



The Furniture Makers' Company



The Furniture Maker's Company, the City of London Livery, is the British furnishing industry's charity, which supports the education of students by nurturing skills and expertise, provides help to those in need, and champions excellence.

We are a corporate member and through our directors we are represented on a cross-section of the Company's committees.

Training

In 2015 we trained hundreds of delegates, expanded the range of our training courses and became accredited by City & Guilds.

A combination of theoretical learning and practical delivery, our workshops and training courses are designed to help raise standards by informing businesses of their obligations and developing their understanding of best practices. The overall aim is to help traders make their processes more efficient for the benefit of their customers and their business alike.

Training workshops

- Principles of Consumer Law
- Pricing and Advertising Compliance
- Understanding Upholstery Complaints
- Understanding Bed and Mattress Complaints
- Understanding Home Improvement Complaints
- Understanding Retail Complaints
- Customer Relationship Management



City & Guilds accredited training



In 2015, we accredited hundreds of delegates in consumer law and customer service, on our two day City & Guilds programme.

The course helps traders to understand their legal obligations, to help them get things right the first time. Over the two days delegates are trained in legalities and behaviour, as per the below summary:

Day 1: LEGALITIES	Day 2: BEHAVIOUR
How consumer law impacts on their roles	Customer strategies for complaining – how and why some customers are more demanding than others
Two of the most relevant Acts – Sale of Goods and Supply of Goods and Services	How to negotiate successfully with rapport and trust
The Consumer Rights Act and how this is evolving the legal landscape	The importance of language when dealing with a complaint – both verbal and non-verbal (body)
The principle of managing complaints from a legal perspective	How to remove negative language from conversations with customers
The principles of compensation payments	How to reach a desired outcome for your business and your customers

Our pool of members extends to over 8,000 stores across the UK.

Over the past few years we have been featured on a variety of television and radio programmes, as well as in the written and online press.

Promoting Membership

At the end of the year we began our search for someone to promote the Ombudsman, raise the profile of the organisation, and support our members.

We recruited Alexandra Dobocan as our Head of Communications and PR. Her role within the Ombudsman will further enhance our traders' membership.

"I joined the Ombudsman to work with consumers and retail businesses alike, towards a goal I feel strongly about; empowering businesses and consumers through training and legal support."

Alexandra Dobocan

HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PR

We continue to work with our members to help them promote their membership to a wide audience. This helps consumers understand the added benefits of membership and helps them to make informed decisions about where they shop.

We often feature on national television, offering legal advice on shows like 'Rip Off Britain' and 'Don't Get Done Get Dom'.



Alongside working with industry trade publications, we understand that regional coverage can be very valuable to both large and small members that wish to communicate their commitment to raising standards near their outlets. Our team creates press releases for all new members and additional news stories to gain local and national coverage.

Standards Board

To help preserve our independence and provide an invaluable set of checks and balances to our work, the Standards Board regulates how we operate. All of our Standards Board members share our vision of inspiring consumer confidence and raising industry standards, and work with us on a voluntary basis.

Governed by a set of bye-laws, the Standards Board regularly reviews a cross-section of our adjudications, to assure they are both fair and reasonable. The Standards Board also oversees our rules, practices and procedures.

Guy Pratt (Chair)

Guy Pratt is the Assistant Director of Community Protection at Hertfordshire County Council, a role which makes him responsible for community safety, Trading Standards, and the Fire & Rescue Service's business enforcement and citizen engagement. He is the Vice-Chair of the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board, and a member of the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board.

Guy has over 30 years worth of experience in the field of consumer protection. He has chaired the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) and trained and qualified as a trading standards officer in London. He has been involved with the Ombudsman's Standards Board and Advisory Panel for over a decade.



Jon Walters

Jon has worked in a number of consumer protection roles during his career. He possesses an in-depth understanding of the consumer landscape, as well as the legislative and regulatory frameworks that underpin it. Jon currently works as a Service Delivery Manager for Citizens Advice, overseeing the operation of their national consumer advice functions.

Through this role, he maintains his strong links with Trading Standards services across the country, and other key organisations that offer support to consumers. He is also involved in helping to develop the service, particularly in light of the ongoing legislative reforms in relation to consumer rights.

"The Ombudsman provides consumers and members with high quality and timely dispute resolution. Within the context of the new legislation in particular, there is ever greater emphasis on reaching solutions outside of court and the Ombudsman plays a vital role in this within the sectors they operate.

They are able to provide that crucially important independent view and, in the vast majority of cases, help both parties reach an agreement on resolving their dispute in an amicable and fair way. On the rare occasion that cannot be achieved, their dispute resolution professionals make binding decisions on members. This ensures settlement is reached and the matter brought to a close.

Consumers can feel reassured that the scheme is underpinned by a code of practice for members, and a Standards Board that I, and others, sit on to provide oversight and guidance. I, and the other members of the Standards Board, are all proud to be associated with this Ombudsman - a scheme that raises standards and inspires consumer confidence."

Paul Wright

Paul has over 35 years of experience in the retail and service environment, with Dixons and Homeserve, across a variety of roles. His current position is Operations Manager for Home at Marks & Spencer, where he is responsible for the customer journey across suppliers, stores and after-sales.

Jim Potts

Jim Potts FTSI, DCA, MBA – Is the former Head of Trading Standards with Lancashire County Council. A Fellow of The Trading Standards Institute, Jim has a wealth of experience in dealing with consumer laws and complaints regarding furniture.

Dr. Richard Kirkham

Dr. Kirkham is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Law, at The University of Sheffield. He has written widely on the ombudsman institution, scrutinising its capacity to operate as a fair and effective dispute resolution service. In 2007 he was commissioned to write a parliamentary report on the 40th anniversary of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, and in 2012/13 was a member of an independent team that evaluated the Local Government Ombudsman.

Isabel Barrell

Isabel Barrell was the managing director of family owned and run Wesley-Barrell Ltd. The company is one of the founding members of The Furniture Ombudsman. Isabel has over 25 years worth of experience in business and nearly 20 years in upholstery, manufacturing and retail. Isabel has been on the Standards Board for over 10 years.

Ellen Morgan

Ellen spent 10 years as a Fair Trading Officer in Trading Standards before joining the retail sector as Legal Compliance Manager for B&Q. Ellen was the founding Secretary of the Trading Standards Institute Business Members Group and joined Ashfords LLP in 2015 as Head of Trading Standards.

Gordon McLaren

Gordon has spent over 30 years working in the kitchen, bathroom and bedroom industry. He has run his own business selling and installing bedrooms and kitchens and headed up sales and installations at B&Q for five years. Over the last 10 years Gordon has led Homebase's showroom business introducing an installation service and a customer centric service proposition.

Our people



Kevin Grix, LL.B (Hons), ACI Arb

CHIEF OMBUDSMAN AND CEO OF THE FURNITURE OMBUDSMAN

Kevin graduated from a law degree, prior to studying to be a Barrister in London, at the Inns of Court School of Law. He was called to the Bar by the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, after successfully passing his Bar exams and is also professionally qualified by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CI Arb).

Kevin is a Freeman of the City of London, Liveryman at the Furniture Makers' Company, and represents the Ombudsman on the All Party Parliamentary Group for furniture at the Houses of Parliament. He is a member of the Chartered Trading Standards Business Members Group, and sits on the executive committee of the Ombudsman Association and the advisory board at the Independent Football Ombudsman.

He has a keen interest in consumer affairs and through his work at the Ombudsman, has appeared on television, radio and in the press, to provide expert opinion on a range of issues that affect retailers and consumers.



Richard Griffin

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Richard is responsible for the day to day management of the Ombudsman, ensuring that the highest standards are achieved and maintained in accordance with our rules, values and quality assurance policies. He is responsible for promoting the work of the Ombudsman and fostering relationships with all of the stakeholders that have an interest in our work or that use our service. Richard began his career with a management role in the financial services industry and has subsequently held senior positions at a business consultancy and a market leading waste management company.



Judith Turner, LL.B (Hons), ACI Arb

HEAD OF ADR AND SENIOR OMBUDSMAN

Judith read Law at King's College London for 3 years before graduating with honours in 1998. She went on to complete the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and a training contract before qualifying as a solicitor in 2001.

Judith was previously employed by a city law firm, practising in Commercial Law. An experienced legal professional, Judith also specialises in Alternative Dispute Resolution and joined the Ombudsman in 2011. Since her appointment, Judith has written and presented training courses on Consumer Law and Compliance.



Alexandra Dobocan, BA(Hons), MSRES, MCIPR

HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PR

Alexandra is MCIPR accredited practitioner with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. She holds a BA (Hons) in Public Relations from The University of Bedfordshire and has undertaken a Master's by research in online communications norms, at the same university.

Alexandra has vast experience in the field of comms and PR, having previously worked in higher and management education, both in house and agency. She maintains her connection with the HE environment by being a research fellow at the National Centre for Cyberstalking Research. She has also been involved in voluntary work with young people and social enterprises.



Fiona Baxter

HEAD OF HR

Fiona is a senior HR professional with broad range of operational and change management experience gained in a variety of sectors including customer services, sales, manufacturing and facilities management organisations.

Fiona has honed her skills in a variety of organisations including international organisations, UK market leaders, not for profit, and family owned businesses.



James Courthold, LL.B (Hons), LL.M

OMBUDSMAN

James is an Ombudsman within the dispute resolution team having read Law with Politics at Keele University, and specialising in Alternative Dispute Resolution through gaining a master's degree from the School of International Arbitration at Queen Mary, University of London. Prior to his appointment, James gained experience through working in the financial sector and at the Financial Ombudsman Service dealing with specialist insurance disputes. He gained experience of the furniture industry within a leading West London luxury retailer.

Since joining the Ombudsman in 2014, James has written and presented training courses on consumer law and customer relationship management, carried out research for leading organisations as well as resolving hundreds of consumer disputes. James is also responsible for the Ombudsman's data protection policies and queries.



Tabassum Saudi, LL.B (Hons)

OMBUDSMAN

Tabassum read Law at Lancaster University for three years before graduating with honours in 2012. Following this, she went on to complete the Legal Practice Course (LPC) in 2013 at the Lancashire Law School.

Tabassum joined the Ombudsman in September 2015. She has spent time volunteering for the Law Clinic at the Lancashire Law School, an organisation that

encourages students to become involved with the law and provide advice on various topics. Tabassum also volunteered for the Citizens Advice Bureau. Prior to Tabassum joining the Ombudsman she gained valuable insight in resolving disputes out of court with her experience in Industrial Disease. She has also worked in the litigation department of a reputable law firm.



Emma Fowler, LL.B (Hons)

OMBUDSMAN

Emma read Law with Business at the University of Portsmouth for three years before graduating in June 2014. During this time she worked for the local council Trading Standards department, assisting on a wide array of cases from assessing counterfeit goods to raising awareness of local scams.

Prior to joining the Ombudsman Emma gained valuable experience at Which? Legal where she worked as a Legal Advisor. This role involved providing up to date consumer legal advice to Which? members and explaining the relevant steps to take to resolve each individual case.



Jane Parsons, BA (Hons), ACI Arb

OMBUDSMAN

Jane is an experienced Ombudsman and trainer has been involved with consumer issues relating to the furniture industry for over ten years. Before joining the Ombudsman in 2002, she gained extensive practical experience dealing with technical issues for a fabric and furniture wholesalers.

During her career with the Ombudsman she has overseen a vast array of complaints relating to furniture, kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms. She is academically qualified to post graduate level and spent a year studying in Colorado, USA whilst at University. In 2009 she successfully attained professional qualifications from the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (ACI Arb) in relation to her work in Alternative Dispute Resolution for The Furniture Ombudsman.



Sam Park, MCI Arb, DCA ICA

CONCILIATOR

Sam has more than 25 years' experience as a consumer law expert with her local Trading Standards Service, running a busy consumer law advice centre that handled more than 8,000 complaints and enquiries per year.

She is the Treasurer for the Institute of Consumer Affairs, a voluntary role that helps to promote the awareness of good trading practices to business and consumers, as well as presenting training on consumer law and ADR. In 2007 she qualified in mediation and has been an independent mediator for civil and commercial disputes since 2011.



Sarah Griffett, LL.B (Hons)

HEAD OF CONSUMER AND MEMBER SERVICES

Sarah joined the Ombudsman in June 2015 to lead the work of our administration team, which provides membership and consumer advice services.

Sarah read law for 3 years prior to graduating with honours in 2008. Later the same year she took up an advisory post at Consumer Direct, the national Government backed consumer advice service which was operated by the Office of Fair Trading. After a short spell with Citizens Advice, Sarah moved in to the private sector in 2010 where she worked as a Customer Service Executive responsible for managing commercial contracts and customer complaints.



Carol Lightowler

ADMINISTRATOR

Carol has worked at the Ombudsman since 2005 and plays a central role on the administration team. Prior to working at The Furniture Ombudsman, she spent many years working for the Furniture Industry Research Association where she gained extensive experience of the industry matters which affect consumers.

Carol and her colleagues deal with many thousands of consumers, retailers and lawyers who contact the Ombudsman each year. She plays a key role supporting her colleagues and the management of the Ombudsman and is an expert when it comes to understanding and explaining how the service operates.



Kelly Delaney, ACI Arb

ACCOUNTS AND MEMBERSHIP ADMINISTRATOR

Kelly began her career with the Ombudsman as a trainee administrator in 2007. Since her appointment she has been involved in all aspects of the Ombudsman's work and has gained invaluable experience of the dispute resolution service in particular.

Kelly plays a central role on the Ombudsman's administration team where she supports consumers and businesses with help and advice about our services.

Kelly also provides administration support to The Furniture Ombudsman Standards Board as well as playing a central part of the membership and accounting functions.



Amarver Minhas

ADMINISTRATOR

Prior to working for the Ombudsman Amarver worked for Which? and Admin Re where he gained comprehensive administration skills.

Amarver is experienced in dealing with complaints from his time working at Which?, a consumer organisation in the United Kingdom. Having held a business facing role at Admin Re, he easily interacts with the Ombudsman's business stakeholders such as traders, independent inspectors, and other third parties.

Full Members

Abbott Wade Limited
Amwell Kitchens Limited
Anglia Home Furnishings (AHF) Limited
Argos Limited
Arighi Bianchi
Arthur Brett & Sons Limited
Arthur Jenkins Furniture Centre
Ashley Anderson T/A The Recliner Factory
Associated Independent Stores Limited
B & Q Plc
Backchairs Direct Limited
Banburys Limited
Barker & Stonehouse Limited
Barkers Furniture
Bathstore
Beadle & Crome (Reading) Limited T/A Beadle
Crome Interiors
Beadle & Crome Limited
Bedshed
Bensons for Beds
Bentalls of Kingston
Bespoke Design Interiors Limited
Bestpricebeds Limited
Betta Living
BJS Distribution
British Beds Worldwide Limited
Built In Solutions
Cargo Home Shop
Carpet Mills
Carters Furniture Centre Limited
Certsure LLP
CFC Interiors Limited
Chairs and Beds Direct Limited
Chelmsford Star Co-Operative Society Limited
Chrysties Furnishing
Contract Kitchens
Cookes Furniture
Cousins Furniture Stores Limited
CRC Contracts Flooring Limited
D.D. Building Solutions
Danetti
Darlings of Chelsea
David Neville Limited
David Salmon Furnishers
DFS Furniture Company Plc
Dickinsons Furnishers Limited
Discount Warehouse (Totton) Limited
Dreams Limited
Duresta Upholstery Limited
Dwell
E & A Wates Limited
E Langton & Co Limited
Ekornes Limited
Eyes of Chesterfield Limited
Feather and Black Limited
Fenwick (Brent Cross) Limited
Fishpools Limited
Frasers House Furnishers (Ellon)
Furniture & Mirror Limited

Furniture Factors Limited
Furniture Superstore Limited
Furniture Village
Gallery Direct Limited
Gautier (UK) Limited
Gerald Shotton Furnishings
Glasswells Limited
Granite Zone Limited
Greysons Furniture Limited
H Thornburrow & Co Limited
Hammonds Furniture Limited
Hansons of Leicester Limited
Harding & Sons Limited
Harvey Jones Limited
Harveys Furniture
Haskins Furniture
Heal & Son Limited
Heartland Interiors Limited
Heico Fasteners UK Limited
Hitachi Capital Consumer Finance
Home of The Sofa Limited
Homebase Limited
House of Fraser
Housing Units Limited
HSL Chairs
HUB Kitchen Design Limited
Hulsta Furniture UK Limited
Hunters (Derby) Limited
Hyde & Sleep
Hypnos Limited
Ideal Suite Factory Limited
J W Treadwell Limited
JM Upholstery Limited
John Lewis of Hungerford Plc
Julian Foye
Kitchen Genie (Swansea) Limited
Kitchens Plus Limited
Kutchenhuas Limited
Lansing Landscapes
Laura Ashley
Leekes Limited
Levine Brothers (H.F.) Limited
Lima Kitchens Limited
Living Homes
Lloyds Industries Limited
LOAF
London Cabinet Makers Limited
M Burrows Furniture World Limited
Made.com
Magnet Limited
Maitland's
Mallers Kitchens
Marks & Spencer Plc
Marriotts House Furnishers Limited
Mathesons of Oban
Mattressman Limited
Meadowmead Limited
Middletons
Mills (Herne Bay) Limited

My Home Rocks Limited
Nasons Of Canterbury Limited
Natural Bed Company
Natuzzi Services Limited
Oak Tree Mobility
Oakworth Furniture Limited T/A TheOakBedStore
Park Furnishers Limited
Parlour Farm Kitchens Limited
Peter Betteridge (Furnishers) Limited
Peter Green
Peter H. Gammons
Platinum Enterprise (UK) Limited Group
Plumbs Limited
Ponsford Limited
Quilters Limited
Rainbow Carpets (Welling) Limited
Redworth Furniture Centre Limited
Ron Campion Furnishers Limited
Roomes Stores Limited
Roset (UK) Limited
Rosevears Furnishers Limited
Rotherwood Furniture Limited
Showcom Limited (aka K2Go)
Sinclairs First for Furniture
Smeg (UK) Limited
Smith Bradbeer & Co Limited
Sofology Limited
Sonnaz Upholstery Limited
Southon & Co Limited
Starplan Furniture Limited
Sturtons & Tappers Furnishings
Taskers Plc
Tesco Stores Limited
The Contract Chair Company
The Kitchen Store Retail Limited
The London Alcove Co Limited
The Sofa Workshop Limited
The Trade Circle Limited
Time 4 Sleep Limited
Top Furniture Limited
Topps Tiles
Vi-spring Limited
W Boyes & Co (Eastfield) Limited
W J Aldiss
W J Daniel & Co Limited
Ward Brothers (Furnishers) Limited
Wells Carpets Brokers Limited
Wesley Barrell (Witney) Limited
Westbridge Furniture Designs Limited (Stoke)
Incorporating Linea Interiors Limited
Wickes Building Supplies Limited
William Cole Limited
Willowbrook Limited
Wood Bros (Furniture) Limited
Woods (Dorchester) Limited
Worcester Furniture Exhibition Centre
Wren Kitchens And Bedrooms

The Furniture
Ombudsman 

Dispute Resolution
Ombudsman 

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