

OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION

Promoting independent complaint resolution

25 years of setting the standard



ANNUAL REPORT

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The Vision of the Association is that throughout the public and private sectors:

- It is straightforward and simple for people to complain.
- People making a complaint are listened to and treated fairly.
- A complaint is dealt with quickly, fairly and effectively at the earliest stage by suitably trained staff.
- People have access to an ombudsman in all areas of consumer and public services.
- The learning from a complaint is used to improve services.

The objects of the Association are to:

- a) Support and promote an effective system of complaint handling and redress in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Britain's Crown Dependencies and Britain's Overseas Territories.
- b) Encourage, develop and protect the role of an ombudsman in both the public and private sectors as the 'best practice' model for resolving complaints, according recognition through membership.
- c) Provide an authoritative voice and promote best practice and policy for those involved in complaint handling and redress to ensure an effective service for the public.
- d) Support open and transparent accountability and endorse principles of good complaint handling.

FOREWORD



Foreword by the Chair of the Association

2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the Association's establishment in 1993 by 13 founder members, initially as the United Kingdom Ombudsman Association. Change appeared to be a constant from the very start, with the Association re-named the British & Irish Ombudsman Association just a year later when membership was extended to include ombudsman offices from the Republic of Ireland. The geographic scope of the Association was extended again in 2000 to include the British Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories.

This expansion was a symptom of the desire to share best practice and learn from others and so reflected a consistent approach rather than a changing set of priorities.

That consistency has shone most strongly through our membership criteria. Whilst 'Openness and Transparency' was added in 2011, the original criteria from 1993 of independence, fairness, effectiveness, and accountability, have remained. And the need to set and maintain that criteria as the 'gold standard' for an ombudsman is as clear in 2018 as it was in 1993, as our engagement with parliamentarians and policy makers this year has shown, whether that be in relation to proposals for a new rail ombudsman in the UK or ensuring the continued independence of our existing members. Sharing, and formulating, best practice was one of the strongest motivations for establishing an association of ombudsman schemes in 1993. In our first year of existence the Managers' Group was set up to discuss matters of mutual interest and it is the Interest Groups that remain the life blood and main benefit of the Association, where staff

of member schemes can seek support and counsel from colleagues and share the latest developments in their area of expertise, be that communications, first contact or casework.

Throughout the past 25 years we've published standards, not only to help our members raise their own performance but also to set the standard for complaint handling and redress in all areas. The Guide to principles of good complaint handling, published in 2007, was joined in 2009 by the Guide to principles of good governance. The Service Standards Framework was published last year, and I'm delighted that work has been taken forward this year to share best practice on how to assess and report against that. Progress has also been made this year on developing a Caseworker Competency Framework and I'd encourage all members, and stakeholders, to engage with the consultation on the draft Framework this summer.

The members of the Validation Committee have also played a major role in the Association's development over the years, and I and the rest of the Executive are very grateful for the work the current members have undertaken during the re-validation programme of our Ombudsman Members this year.

The potential perception of 'constant change' was perhaps reinforced in 2012 when the 'British & Irish' prefix was dropped and we re-branded as the 'Ombudsman Association' and again in the proposals that members will consider at the AGM on our 25th birthday to change the legal status of the Association to that of a company limited by guarantee. However, these changes simply reflect the ongoing desire to practice what we preach: good governance and accessibility.

One of my predecessors as Chair recently pointed out that whilst the Association's current objects perhaps reflect a bolder and more ambitiously articulated agenda - supporting and promoting an effective *system* of complaint handling and redress and providing an *authoritative* voice - she suspected the founder members of 1993 would have no difficulty in recognising and relating to the Association of 2018. I couldn't agree more. The brief history of the Association that has been produced and posted on our website highlights the remarkable consistency in issues and activities over the past 25 years.

I believe that what we have achieved this year shows what a strong position the Association is in on its 25th anniversary and I very much look forward to delivering the key activities in the business plan in my final year as Chair.

Nick Bennett

Ombudsman Association Chair
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Annual Meeting 2017

The 24th Annual Meeting of the Association took place on 25 May 2017 at Burleigh Court, Loughborough.

The Annual Meeting was attended by 53 people, including 23 Ombudsman Members, 12 Complaint Handler Members, and 7 Associate Members.

In the opening address Kieran FitzGerald, the Association's Chair, highlighted some of the activities undertaken during that year, including the establishment of both the new Casework Interest Group and the Overseas Members Network and the introduction of the personalised alerts system for the Members' Area of the website. The Chair also highlighted the Service Standards Framework, which was being launched that day, setting the high-level principles that members should aim for when delivering their service. It was noted that the inclusion of external stakeholders on the Steering Group, and undertaking a public consultation, had resulted in a more robust Framework.

Strategic Position Statement

Members received a paper in advance setting out the proposed revisions to the Strategic Position Statement following a review carried out through the Policy Network. The members voted unanimously to approve the revised Strategic Position Statement.

Amendments to the Association's Rules

The Chair set out the proposals to remove any reference to 'ombudsmen' from the Association's Rules, amending them to 'an ombudsman', 'ombudsman schemes', or 'ombudsman services' as appropriate, in

keeping with the Association's position that the term 'ombudsman' is gender neutral. The amendment to the Association's Rules was unanimously supported by the 23 Ombudsman members present.

Business Plan 2017/18

Members approved the Business Plan and budget for 2017/18, which set out the priorities that would be focused on and the activities that would be undertaken.

Executive Committee

Elections for the vacant positions on the Executive Committee took place, with the following elected for a two-year term (2017-19):

Association Chair:

Nick Bennett,
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Association Vice Chair:

Caroline Wayman,
Financial Ombudsman Service

Ombudsman Member representatives:

Judy Clements, Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

Kieran FitzGerald, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

Kevin Grix, The Furniture Ombudsman

Complaint Handler / Associate Member representatives:

Rónán Ó Domhnaill, An Coimisinéir Teanga (Language Commissioner)

Note: the minutes of the Annual Meeting are in the Members' Area of the Association website. Biographies of Executive Committee members, including photographs, are in the public area of the Association website.



CAROA Conference delegates

Report against the business plan

The Association's 2017/18 Business Plan grouped the activities for the year under the Association's Objects, highlighting the key priorities as:

- 1) Establish membership of the Association as a necessity for those involved in complaint handling.
- 2) Develop a Caseworker Competency Framework for all members to support development of a 'casework' profession.
- 3) Support development and sharing of best practice in capturing, measuring and reporting on performance against Service Standards Framework.
- 4) Review the Principles of Good Complaint Handling to ensure compliance with current good practice.

a) Support and promote an effective system of complaint handling and redress in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Britain's Crown Dependencies and Britain's Overseas Territories.

During the year, the Director undertook a significant programme of engagement with government officials and other stakeholders through meetings, speaking at and attending seminars and conferences, and responding to relevant consultations, to support and promote an effective system of complaint handling and redress and highlight the work of our members.

CAROA Conference

In June 2017 the Director presented at the Caribbean Ombudsman Association conference in Bonaire, alongside speakers from the International Ombudsman Institute and the African Ombudsman Research Centre, on the benefits of networking and sharing best practice. The conference gave the opportunity to develop relationships with other ombudsman associations and networks, and more importantly with the Association's own overseas members.

Institute of Consumer Affairs annual seminar

The Director chaired a panel of speakers and spoke at the annual seminar of the Institute of Consumer Affairs in London on 19 October. The seminar gave the opportunity to engage with consumer representatives from across the UK.

ADR Directive / Consumer environment

The Director met with officials from the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in October and in February to discuss the proposed Consumer Green Paper (which had been dubbed the unofficial review of the ADR Directive). The paper was eventually published in April 2018 and the Association will respond to the consultation.

The Director attended the launch of Money Saving Expert's report, 'Sharper teeth: the consumer need for ombudsmen reform' in the UK Parliament on 1 November. The report was commissioned by the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Consumer Protection to inform a proposed inquiry into the 'effectiveness of ombudsmen'. The report, based on a Twitter poll, resulted in significant criticism of non-statutory ombudsman in particular, but also of the compliance / enforcement rates of all ombudsman schemes, and criticism of the OA itself.

The Director took a reactive stance to the criticism, commenting when contacted by the media. The Director was quoted in an article in The Observer that trailed the report, and was also interviewed on BBC Radio 4's 'You & Yours' programme on 13 November, alongside the Chair of the APPG, Yvonne Fovargue MP.



The Director also attended a number of events during the year, taking the opportunity to engage with participants to promote the Association's Principles, including:

- Launch of the Property Ombudsman's annual report, House of Lords, London, June 2017.
- Public Services Ombudsman Group meeting, Brussels, June 2017.
- International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF), London, October 2017.
- Public Sector Ombudsman Group meeting, Manchester, November 2017.
- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman / QMU conference, Being Complained About, Edinburgh, December 2017.
- UK Cross Government Complaints Forum, London, February 2018.
- Irish Ombudsman Forum, Dublin, February 2018.
- Launch of Ombudsman Services' Consumer Action Monitor, London, March 2018.

Equality & Human Rights Commission - Access to Justice

The Director continued to engage with the EHRC's 'Advice for Advisors' project, attending meetings in the summer and autumn 2017 on the plans for their pilot helpline service, which was launched in England, Wales and Scotland in November, and on the development of their online guidance in spring 2018, building on the work developed in Northern Ireland. EHRC will be holding a workshop at the conference in May on their guidance.

BSI Consumer and Public Interest Strategic Advisory Committee

The Director attended a meeting of the BSI Consumer and Public Interest Strategic Advisory Committee (CPISAC) in January. The Committee, which was recently relaunched, provides advice to BSI on consumer and public interest policies and strategies. The Director's membership of the Committee provides the opportunity to keep abreast of developments in the sector and promote the OA's activities.

UK Administrative Justice Council

The Director attended the first meeting of the Steering Group of the Administrative Justice Council (AJC) in March 2018, having been invited to represent the ombudsman community. The Council, the successor body to

the Administrative Justice Forum, will review and consider administrative justice issues across the UK, advising relevant Ministers on developments. The AJC is chaired by the Senior President of Tribunals, Sir Ernest Ryder, with an independent secretariat provided by JUSTICE.

Caseworker Competency Framework

The Caseworker Competency Framework project was split into two stages and Greg Byron seconded from Ombudsman Services in late 2017 to undertake the first stage, reviewing the competency frameworks that currently exist across the membership and internationally. The OA was also successful in its bid for funding from the International Ombudsman Institute to contribute towards the costs of the project, with €2,000 secured. The report for the first stage was completed in January 2018.

In February, expressions of interest were invited to lead the second stage of the Caseworker Competency Framework project. As well as being advertised on the OA's website and promoted via Twitter, the role was advertised on LinkedIn resulting in considerable engagement: the posting gained over 1,700 'impressions' (i.e. saw the advert) and 88 'clicks'. Three bids were shortlisted from the nine applications and following interviews the panel (comprising Chris Vinestock, Niki Maclean and the Director) appointed Kate Wellington.

A Working Group has been established to develop an initial draft and a consultation will be launched over the summer, including workshops at the Conference in May, with anticipated completion of the project in autumn 2018.

b) Encourage, develop and protect the role of an ombudsman in both the public and private sectors as the 'best practice' model for resolving complaints, according recognition through membership.

The Director undertook a significant programme of engagement with government officials, parliamentarians and other stakeholders during the year to promote the Association's Principles and membership criteria.

Review of Strategic Position Statement

The review of the OA's Strategic Position Statement on Ombudsman, which the Director had commissioned through the Policy Network, was completed in May 2017 and the revised version agreed by members at the AGM. The Statement sets out the OA's position on a number of issues regarding ombudsman schemes, enabling the Chair and Director to represent the Association with confidence.

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

In April 2017 the Director raised concerns with officials at the Ministry of Justice and the Cabinet Office regarding the proposals in the Prisons & Courts Bill to put the existing Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (for England and Wales) on a statutory basis. The Director also wrote to Parliamentarians to highlight where the proposed legislation did not meet the OA's membership criteria. Following the concerns raised with Government officials and Parliamentarians the proposals were not included in the re-introduced Courts Bill after the General Election.

Proposed 'Sport Ombudsman'

The Director met with officials from the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport in September 2017 to discuss the recommendation in Baroness Grey-Thompson's Duty of Care report to establish a 'Sports Ombudsman' (or Sports Duty of Care Quality Commission). The meeting provided the opportunity to explain the role and value of an ombudsman, and to promote the OA's Principles and Membership Criteria.

Housing / Property landscape

A significant period of engagement followed the announcement in November 2017, by the then UK Secretary of State for Housing, of the intention to consult on the creation of a single ombudsman for all housing and property complaints in the UK, covering both existing redress mechanisms and gaps in the private sector, such as new build and complaints from leaseholders.

The Director had meetings throughout December-February with existing members, including the Property Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and two meetings in January 2018 with the Home Builders Federation. The Director and the Chair also met with officials from the UK Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in January

2018 to discuss the proposals and responded to the consultation in April 2018.

Proposed Rail Ombudsman

The Director has continued the intensive engagement with officials from the Rail Delivery Group, and other stakeholders from the Office for Rail & Road, the Department for Transport, and Which?, throughout the year to ensure that the proposals brought forward to establish a Rail Ombudsman meet the Association's criteria, in particular around independence and governance arrangements. It is expected that a service will be established in the autumn / winter.

c) Provide an authoritative voice and promote best practice and policy for those involved in complaint handling and redress to ensure an effective service for the public.

Interest Groups

The Association had seven Interest Groups active during the year. The Groups facilitate communication between schemes and enable staff to share ideas and issues of concern and disseminate good practice. Meetings are held at the offices of member schemes, and the Association is very grateful for those facilities being made readily available. The notes and presentations from the Interest Group meetings can be found in the Members' Area of the website and colleagues can sign up to receive alerts when new material is posted.

The Chairs of the Interest Groups met on 21 July 2017 and 16 March 2018 to share what was on the agenda of each group, coordinate dates and topics, and help drive collaboration and learning in running an effective group for members.

Policy Network

The Policy Network was re-launched in November 2017 to operate more along the lines of the Interest Groups and chaired by Caroline Mitchell, lead ombudsman at the Financial Ombudsman Service. The Network produced the first edition of the new quarterly horizon scanning bulletin in February, which aims to provide an overview of the various policy developments across the different sectors.

The Strategic Position Statement sets out the OA's position on a number of issues regarding ombudsman schemes, enabling the Chair and Director to represent the Association with confidence.

Casework Interest Group

The Casework Interest Group, which is chaired by Jane Brothwood, Head of Office at the Adjudicator's Office, met in May (at Gibraltar House in London, hosted by the Gibraltar Public Services Ombudsman) and in November 2017 (at the offices of the Financial Ombudsman Service). Meetings were extremely well attended with over 25 organisations represented.

Two sub-groups were established to explore topics in more detail: Quality Assurance led by Jonathan Francis / Philip Harrison from the Independent Office for Police Conduct (formerly the Independent Police Complaints Commission), and Proportionality in decision making, led by Jamie McGrandles from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The work of both groups will be presented at the Conference in May 2018.

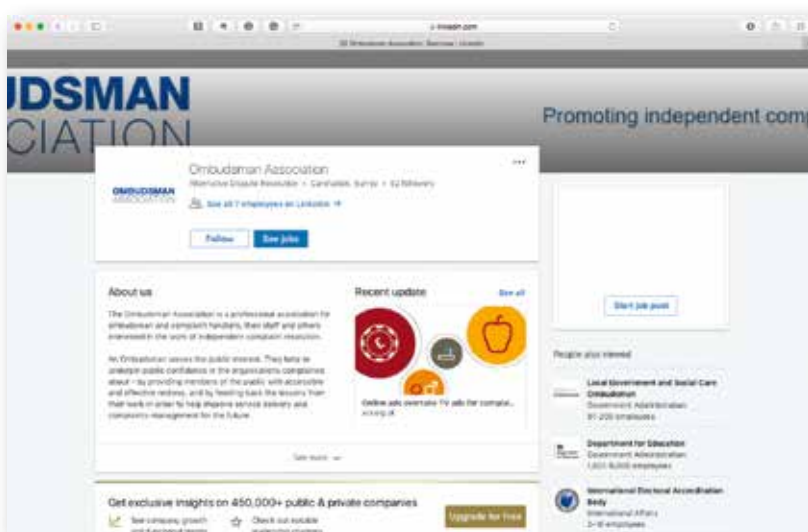
The Group also discussed the Caseworker Competency Framework project, the Equality & Human Rights Commission's new helpline and online toolkit to support ombudsman schemes when human rights issues emerge in casework, and the Service Standards Framework.

Communications Interest Group

The Communications Interest Group, which is chaired by Matt Wilson, Senior Media Relations Officer at the Advertising Standards Authority, met in November 2017, and undertook various other activities during the year.

The Group has set-up a LinkedIn profile for the Ombudsman Association to aid joined-up communications - using it to publish news, policy developments and announcements and to help amplify and support members' work.

The OA's LinkedIn profile will help amplify and support members' work.



First Contact Interest Group

The First Contact Interest Group, chaired by Carol Neill, Advice Team Manager at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, met in May (at the offices of the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman) and in December 2017 (at the office of the Housing Ombudsman).

2017 marked the tenth year of the Group operating with meetings continuing to be well attended. The Group discussed promoting electronic contact as the first point of contact, procuring training, reasonable adjustments, and delivering frontline services through an external provider.

The Group also received presentations on reflective and reflexive practice in coaching, operating flexible working practices for frontline staff, and from Mental Health First Aid England on creating and building positive working environments that recognise mental health problems and effectively support and manage staff who are experiencing mental health problems.

Human Resources Interest Group

The HR Interest Group met in April and November 2017 (at the offices of the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman) and in March 2018 (at the Office of the Independent Adjudicator). Niki Maclean, Director at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, stepped down as Chair at the meeting in April after several years, and was succeeded by Chris Vinestock, Chief Operating Officer & Director of Investigations at the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

At its meetings the Group discussed current best practice in caseworker training, including in relation to vicarious trauma and resilience, appraisal processes, staff surveys, arrangements for flexible working and engagement. The Group also discussed Equality & Diversity arrangements, GDPR implications for HR, and discussed and inputted to the work on the Caseworker Competency Framework.

Legal Interest Group

The Legal Interest Group, which is chaired by Katrin Shaw, Director of Policy, Legal and Governance at the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, met in April 2017 (at the Office of the Ombudsman, Ireland) and in November 2017 (at the offices of Browne Jacobson).

Alongside the standing items of updates on legislative changes and jurisprudence, the Group discussed the difficulties of accessing legal / privileged advice and how to address human rights issues in casework, reflecting the

pioneering work undertaken by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and the Equality & Human Rights Commission (for Great Britain) project.

The Group also received updates on the Legal Database Project with several members volunteering to sit on the advisory group.

The Group also discussed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and set up a sub-group to revise and update the DPA Guidance issued to members in January 2017 to take GDPR into account. The Guidance, which will assist UK members in complying with their obligations, will again be developed in conjunction with the UK Information Commissioner's Office and launched ahead of the OA Conference in May 2018.

Overseas Members Network

The Overseas Members Network met in the margins of the Caribbean Ombudsman Association Conference in Bonaire in June 2017, with the Director and the Gibraltar Public Services Ombudsman joining by videoconference. Colleagues reaffirmed the value in the Network and discussed the provision of a secretariat and the need to firm up terms of reference. Colleagues discussed a number of issues, including the balance that needs to be struck between focusing on systemic investigations or on individual complaints when resources are limited, and the conflict that sometimes arose in the tension between confidentiality and transparency. Following on from discussions at the CAROA Conference, colleagues also discussed the need to review their own legislation to be clearer on whether perceived restrictions were a result of legislation or convention. The challenge in persuading Governments to establish effective internal complaints processes was also discussed, especially considering the limited resources available.

2017 Conference 'Holding up a mirror'

The 2017 Ombudsman Association Conference, titled 'Holding up a mirror', was held on 25-26 May at Burleigh Court in Loughborough. The Conference was attended by 113 delegates and included plenary presentations on 'noise' and inconsistent decision making, taking a customer focussed approach, informal resolution, and creating the right culture. Workshops also took place on the Service Standards Framework, increasing impact, and vulnerability. The full programme and presentations from all the plenary sessions and workshops can be found in the Members' Area of the website.

OA Newsletter

The quarterly online newsletter was published in July and November 2017. The newsletter is aimed at those who deal with casework, highlighting the latest activities of the Association's members and developments in the sector.



Ombudsman Reform Seminar

A seminar jointly organised with the UK Administrative Justice Institute (UKAJI) and JUSTICE took place in London on 5 February 2018. The seminar, Complaints about public services – where next for the Ombudsman?, was well attended, attracting over 50 delegates from across academia, the Westminster Parliament, UK Government departments and agencies, the consumer / advice sector, and the ombudsman community.

Delegates discussed the powers and jurisdiction of the proposed new public services ombudsman, highlighting the best practice that has been developed in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. A write up of the seminar can be found on the UKAJI website.

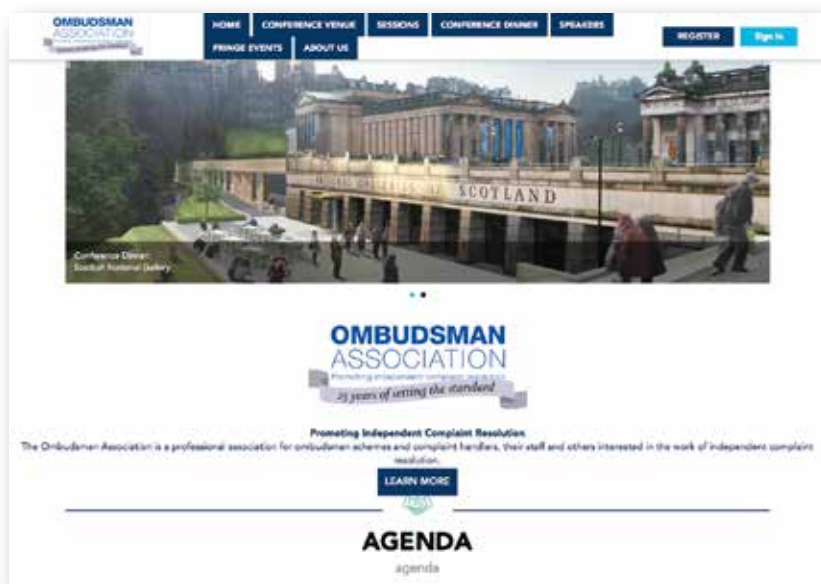


Below, from left: Walter Merricks, Nick Bennett, Helen Megarry, and Donal Galligan at the Ombudsman Reform Seminar.



2018 Conference

The 2018 Conference, Setting the Standard, will take place at the Hilton Edinburgh Carlton, on 24-25 May 2018. Full details of the event can be found on the Association's website, where the presentations and notes of discussions will be made available.



Members' Area of the website

The Members' Area of the website provides a vast resource of information, containing the notes of the various Interest Groups, dates of forthcoming Association events and activities, and presentations from conferences and seminars. Work was undertaken in April and May 2017 to enable the staff of member schemes to sign up for personalised alerts when new content is posted and 270 individuals have now signed up to access the website. Following feedback from members, a review will be taken forward in 2018 to make the Members' Area more user-friendly.

International engagement

In May 2017 the Director addressed a delegation from South Korea, on a fact finding mission to explore establishing a military ombudsman, at the office of the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces. The delegation was on a fact finding mission to explore establishing a military ombudsman. The Director presented on the role of the Association and the best practice displayed by our members.

In October the Director met with officials from the Australian Commonwealth Ombudsman to provide an overview of the work of ombudsman schemes in the UK and Ireland.

d) Support open and transparent accountability and endorse principles of good complaint handling.

OA Service Standards Framework

The Service Standards Framework, which members can use to raise their own performance, embed good practice in their organisations, and to demonstrate the quality of the service they provide, was launched at the AGM in Loughborough on 25 May 2017.

There were initial discussions at the Conference workshops on how best to develop and share best practice in capturing, measuring and reporting on performance against standards. A Working Group was established in February 2018 to share best practice, experience and ideas around implementing the Framework, in particular in capturing, measuring and reporting on performance.



The small Working Group, representing a cross-section of members who are reasonably advanced in their activities, is being chaired by Mark Bednarski from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Group met in February, March and April and will be sharing their experiences at the OA Conference in May 2018.

FINANCES

Finances 2016/17

Total income for 2016/17, including membership subscriptions and conference fees, was £170,994 (€199,875). Expenditure was £183,500 (€214,493). The deficit for the year had been forecast and was sustainable in the context of the large reserves that had been accrued. The Association's overall reserves at 31 March 2017 were £119,555 (€139,749).

(Note: figures shown in Euros are calculated at the exchange rate on 31 March 2017 of 1.168 Euros to the Pound Sterling.)

Finances 2017/18

Total income for 2017/18, including membership subscriptions and conference fees, was £174,649 (€198,506). Expenditure was £166,728 (€189,503). A deficit had been forecast for the year, in line with the OA's reserves policy, to take forward the caseworker competency framework project. The delay in taking the project forward means that most of the project spend will take place in 2018/19. The Association's overall reserves at 31 March 2018 were £127,476 (€144,890).

(Note: figures shown in Euros are calculated at the exchange rate on 31 March 2018 of 1.136 Euros to the Pound Sterling.)

MEMBERSHIP

Personnel changes

There have been several changes at 'office holder' level amongst the Association's members during 2017/18:

- David Connolly was appointed interim Housing Ombudsman
- Sandy Hermiston was appointed Ombudsman, Cayman Islands.
- Michael Lockwood was appointed Director General at the Independent Office for Police Conduct
- Rebecca Marsh was appointed Chief Legal Ombudsman.
- Felicity Mitchell was appointed interim Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
- Tony McCourt finished his term as Ombudsman for the Defence Forces.

Changes in Membership

During the year we were pleased to welcome the Independent Betting Adjudication Service (IBAS) as a Complaint Handler Member and the Gambling Commission as a Corporate Associate Member. Unfortunately, the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner decided not to renew their membership.

As anticipated, the number of Ombudsman Members reduced as a result of the merger of the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau and the Pensions Ombudsman in Ireland, and the decision of the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman, which traditionally held two memberships to reflect their two separate statutory roles, to opt for one overall membership going forward. In addition, the former Retail Ombudsman left in July 2017 after the re-validation process highlighted that they did not meet our membership criteria.

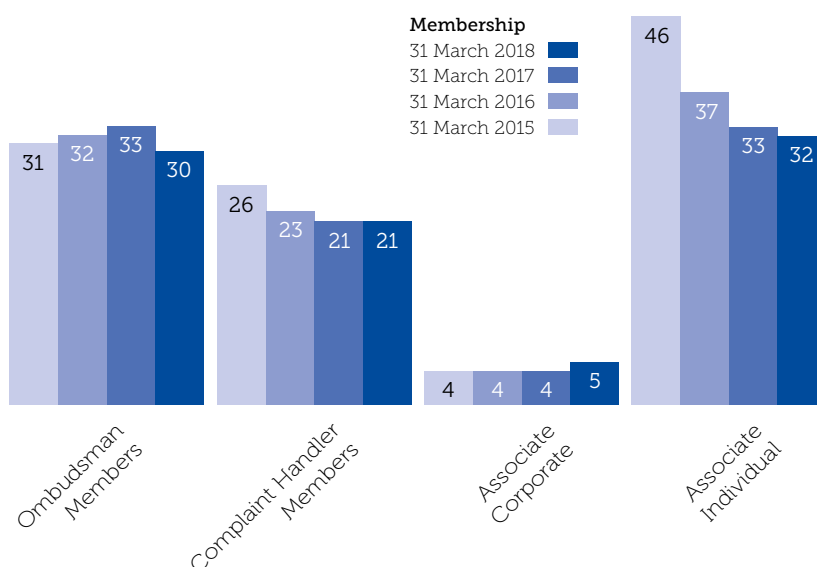
We did welcome two new Individual Associate Members during the year, although at the same time some existing members chose not to renew their membership, either because they had recently retired or had left the post that was complaints related.

Membership of the Association at 31 March 2018, as compared with a year ago, is as follows:

Members	31 March 2017	31 March 2018
Ombudsman Members	33	30
Complaint Handler Members	21	21

Associate Members

Corporate	4	5
Individual	33	32
Total	91	88



Forthcoming changes to Membership

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland's application to re-join the Association is expected to be approved in 2018/19, as is the application from The Consumer Council (for Northern Ireland) for Complaint Handler membership. An application is also expected in due course from the proposed Rail Ombudsman.

The Director has continued to engage with a number of organisations and stakeholders who have expressed an interest in applying for Association membership, or in establishing an ombudsman in a sector where one does not currently exist and further applications for membership are expected over the next two to three years. The Director will continue to promote the benefits of Association membership when engaging with both existing and proposed dispute resolution organisations.

Proposals in the UK on public sector ombudsman reform, as well as proposals on reducing the number of redress bodies in the housing / property sector, will reduce the number of both Ombudsman and Complaint Handler members if implemented.

Executive Committee

The role of the Executive Committee is to manage the Association on behalf of members. The membership of the Committee during 2017/18 was:

Nick Bennett (Chair)

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Caroline Wayman (Vice Chair)

Financial Ombudsman Service

Anthony Arter

Pensions Ombudsman Service

Rob Behrens

Parliamentary & Health Service

Ombudsman (January-March 2018)

Judy Clements

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (April-September 2017)

Kieran FitzGerald

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

Kevin Grix

The Furniture Ombudsman

Mick King

Local Government &

Social Care Ombudsman

Linda Kirwan

Law Society of Ireland

Helen Megarry

The Adjudicator, HMRC,

Valuation Office & Insolvency Service

Rónán Ó Domhnaill

An Coimisinéir Teanga

(Language Commissioner)

Kathryn Stone

Legal Ombudsman (April-December 2017)

Nicola Williams

Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (January-March 2018)

Donal Galligan

Director, Ombudsman Association

The Executive Committee met five times during 2017/18:

- 5 May 2017
- 13 July 2017
- 29 September 2017
- 30 November 2017
- 22 February 2018

The minutes of the Executive Committee can be found in the Members' Area of the website.

Validation Committee

The role of the Validation Committee is to advise the Executive Committee on whether applications for Ombudsman and Complaint Handler Membership should be approved.

During 2017/18 the Validation Committee focussed on the programme of re-validation of existing Ombudsman Members, which will be completed in 2019.

The Validation Committee have been taking into account the guidance from the Executive Committee both during the re-validation programme and when considering applications from new members, in particular with regard to the Association's Guiding Principles to avoid fragmentation of redress schemes within a single industry.

The Validation Committee's membership during 2017/18 was:

Chair

Caroline Wayman

Ombudsman Association Vice-Chair

Representing Ombudsman Members

Anthony Arter

Pensions Ombudsman Service

Independent Members

Margaret Doyle

Dr Chris Gill

Professor Mary Seneviratne

The three current independent members of the Association's Validation Committee were re-appointed in September 2017 for staggered terms of one year (Mary Seneviratne), two years (Margaret Doyle) and three years (Chris Gill) to ensure continuity. The Association is most grateful to the members of the Validation Committee for making themselves available as required.

MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION AT 31 MARCH 2018

Ombudsman Members

1. Bermuda Ombudsman
2. Channel Islands Financial Ombudsman
3. Complaints Commissioner, Turks & Caicos Islands
4. Financial Ombudsman Service, UK
5. Financial Services & Pensions Ombudsman, Ireland
6. Financial Services Ombudsman Scheme, Isle of Man
7. The Furniture Ombudsman
8. Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission
9. Gibraltar Public Services Ombudsman
10. Housing Ombudsman Service
11. Independent Office for Police Conduct
12. Legal Ombudsman, England and Wales
13. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, England
14. The Motor Ombudsman
15. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
16. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
17. Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, Ireland
18. Ombudsman, Cayman Islands
19. Ombudsman for Children, Ireland
20. Ombudsman for the Defence Forces, Ireland
21. Ombudsman Services
22. Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman, UK
23. Pensions Ombudsman, UK
24. Property Ombudsman
25. Property Ombudsman: Scotland
26. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
27. Removals Industry Ombudsman
28. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
29. Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces
30. Waterways Ombudsman

Complaint Handler Members

1. Adjudicator, HM Revenue and Customs, Valuation Office, and the Insolvency Service
2. Advertising Standards Authority
3. An Coimisinéir Teanga (Language Commissioner)
4. Barristers Professional Conduct Tribunal, Ireland
5. Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
6. Disclosure and Barring Service (Independent Complaints Monitor)
7. Financial Regulators Complaints Commissioner
8. Greffier of the States of Jersey
9. Independent Betting Adjudication Service (IBAS)
10. IDRS Limited
11. Immigration Services Commissioner
12. Independent Case Examiner for DWP
13. Independent Complaints Reviewer (for Land Registry, The National Archives, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency and Children's Commissioner for Wales)
14. Independent Football Ombudsman
15. Information Commissioner
16. Law Society of Ireland
17. Lay Observer for Northern Ireland
18. Press Ombudsman, Ireland
19. Scottish Legal Complaints Commission
20. The Dispute Service Limited
21. Welsh Language Commissioner

Corporate Associate Members

1. Brown Jacobson LLP, Solicitors
2. Gambling Commission
3. Resolver
4. Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
5. Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

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