

The background of the entire page is a dense, overlapping collage of numerous white, rectangular pieces of paper. These papers are scattered across the entire surface, creating a textured, layered effect. The papers vary in size and orientation, with some appearing more prominent than others. The overall color palette is a monochromatic blue, with the white papers providing a high-contrast visual element.

OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION

Promoting independent complaint resolution

ANNUALREPORT

2013 to 2014

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Objects of the Association

The objects of the Association are:

To encourage, develop and safeguard the role and title of Ombudsman in both the public and private sectors

To define, publish and keep under review criteria for the recognition of Ombudsman offices by the Association

To accord recognition publicly to those persons or offices who satisfy the defined criteria for recognition in:

- the United Kingdom
- Ireland
- the British Crown Dependencies
- the British Overseas Territories

To facilitate mutual learning between schemes and to provide services to members designed to develop best practice

To work to raise the profile of Ombudsmen and understanding of their work with key influencers and the wider public in ways which add value to the promotional work of individual Ombudsman schemes.

Foreword by the Chair of the Association

To begin at the end, as members will know, in late January this year I very reluctantly stood down as the Association's Chair. I mention that at the outset to explain the slightly unorthodox Foreword to this year's Annual Report, which has two contributors – me and Lewis Shand Smith. Lewis had been elected Vice Chair by the Executive Committee early in the year. He would not have expected to have to take over as Acting Chair for the last few months of it. But he stepped in as soon as it became clear I could not carry on, and I am greatly indebted to him for that. Between us we decided that we should each cover the period of our own tenure in this Foreword.

So, to return to the beginning.

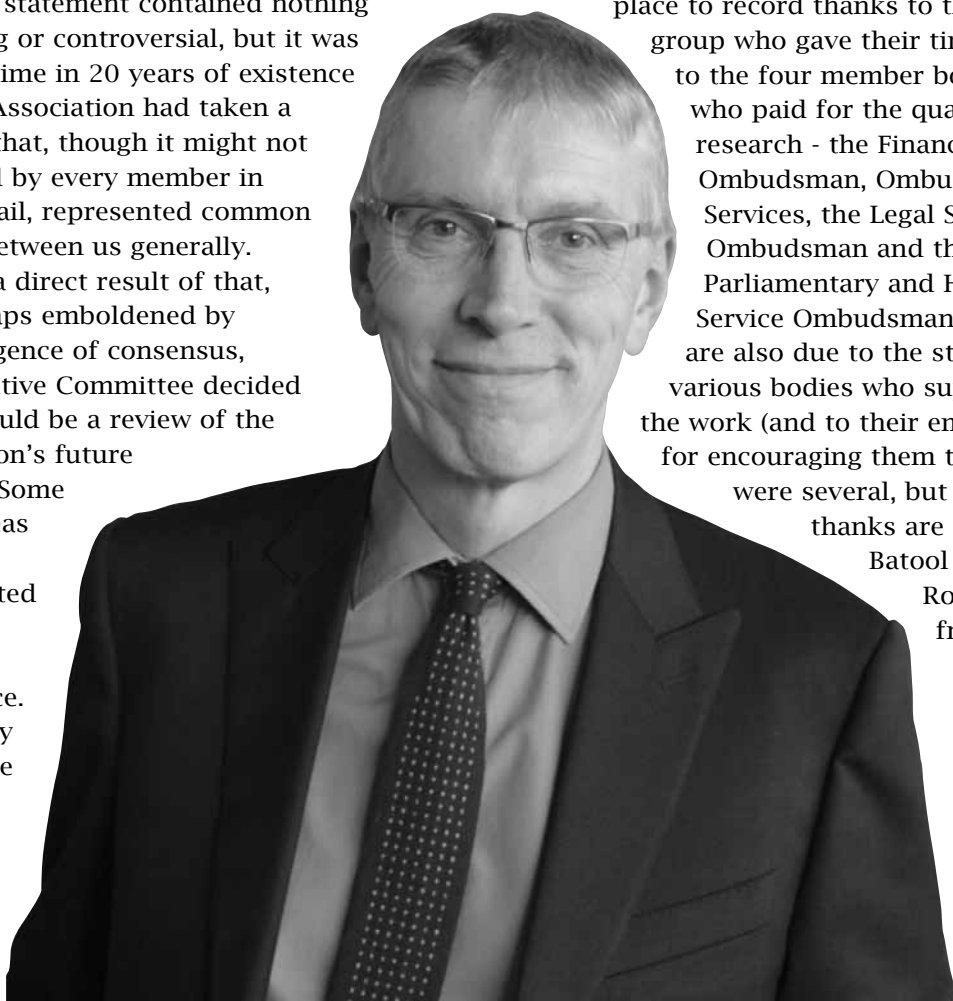
At the Annual Meeting on 16 May last year, the Association's voting members adopted the "Position Statement" which set down core policies for the Association, consulted on in the previous year. Its adoption was at one and the same time a small step and a giant leap. The statement contained nothing surprising or controversial, but it was the first time in 20 years of existence that the Association had taken a position that, though it might not be shared by every member in every detail, represented common ground between us generally.

Not as a direct result of that, but perhaps emboldened by the emergence of consensus, the Executive Committee decided there should be a review of the Association's future strategy. Some of the ideas behind it were floated at the May 2013 conference. Essentially there were three drivers:

- External influences such as increased governmental interest in public administration and ombudsmen (particularly in Westminster) and the EU ADR Directive
- Changes within our own membership, with several much larger institutions than could have been envisaged when the Association was established – or even at the last review some five years ago
- A need to review secretarial arrangements in the light of the present secretary's planned retirement

The review had three phases. First there was qualitative telephone research carried out by Ipsos Mori, coupled with a web-based quantitative survey. Second there was a facilitated seminar held in London. Third there has been a consultation exercise leading to proposals to be put forward at the May 2014 Annual Meeting.

This is not the place to discuss the likely outcome of the review. It is, however, the place to record thanks to the working group who gave their time and to the four member bodies who paid for the qualitative research – the Financial Services Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services, the Legal Services Ombudsman and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. Thanks are also due to the staff of the various bodies who supported the work (and to their employers for encouraging them to). There were several, but particular thanks are due to Batool Reza and Robin Hulme from the



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Foreword

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Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman who set up and managed the web based survey and subsequent consultation.

As an association for ombudsmen, we derive our legitimacy from the rigour with which we test ourselves against standards as to independence, process and governance. As described later in this report, during the year the Executive Committee completed the exercise of reviewing all existing ombudsman members of the Association against the relevant criteria for membership. The real work, though, was done by the Validation Committee which makes recommendations to the Executive Committee. It consists of the Association's Chair, one representative of ombudsman members (Peter Tyndall) and three independent members, Ann Abraham, Margaret Doyle and Mary Seneviratne, all of whom gave us their time for nothing; nothing, that is, apart from our gratitude.

I mentioned earlier the EU ADR Directive. As members will know, from mid-2015 there is to be a requirement that suppliers of consumer goods and services should make alternative dispute resolution available to their customers (through "ADR entities" authorised by a "competent authority") – or if they do not they must make that clear. The Association's most directly affected members have been actively engaged with policy makers in the UK. In Ireland it has been harder to make productive contact. The UK Department of Business Innovation and Skills published a consultation document on implementation in early March.

My period of office would have come to end in May, had I not stepped down earlier. I have found being Chair fascinating, occasionally frustrating, and always rewarding. My final thanks go to Ian Pattison who manages the business of the Association with total efficiency and unfailing (almost) good humour. We are very lucky to have had his services for so long.

I was deeply touched to receive so many thoughtful messages from members when I stood down. But I wasn't surprised. The Association's strengths have always been derived from the tremendous spirit of co-operation, support and friendship between its members. I am sure that, whatever decisions emerge from the strategic review, those strengths will not be diminished.

That will be good for the future of the Association and, more importantly, good for the ombudsman institution in all its manifestations.

Tony King

Ombudsman Association Chair
(May 2013 – February 2014),
UK Pensions Ombudsman



I don't have much to add save to put on record my thanks and that of the Association to Tony for the wise and sensitive way he has fulfilled the role of Chair, and in particular the way he managed the first stages of the review. By our very nature, we ombudsmen have strong views and Tony did much to steer us to the recommendations on which we will now build.

I join Tony in thanking Ian Pattison. Without his quiet briefings and able administration I would not have been able to take on the Chair when I did. He never ceases to have the interests of the Association and its members at heart.

Lewis Shand Smith

Ombudsman Association Acting Chair
(February – May 2014)
Chief Ombudsman and Chief Executive,
Ombudsman Services

ANNUAL MEETING 2013

The 20th Annual Meeting of the Association took place immediately before the Biennial Conference, during the morning of 16 May 2013, at Burleigh House Conference Centre, Loughborough University. Some 54 people attended it, including 14 Voting Members.

Chair's address

The Association Chair, Tony King, gave the following address:

There will be two strands to what I say in this brief address. I want to mention the key activities of the Association in 2012/13 against the landscape in which we have been working. And in doing so I want to pause to thank the member bodies and individuals whose time and efforts have made it possible for the Association to have any key activities at all!

Let me begin by reminding us where we were at the beginning of the 2012/13 year. In the wider world of administrative justice and complaints resolution of which we are part there had been a number of developments, some welcome, some less so.

The background was, of course, one of financial strictures. In particular, those of us dependent on taxpayer funding, both in the UK and in Ireland, were being expected to bear our fair share of spending cuts – and, in Ireland especially, there were possible mergers and changes to remit in the air, under the Public Service Reform Plan. In the UK, the bonfire of the Quangos was intended to include the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council, the only official independent overseer of administrative justice in England, Scotland and Wales.

The wind from Europe however, was in the direction of more complaint handling bodies rather than fewer. In November 2011 DG Sanco, the EU directorate with responsibility for consumer matters, had published proposals that would require bodies to be in place to provide alternative dispute resolution for all disputes between consumers and businesses.

So that was the wider background at the start of the year. But where was the Association itself? Well, in 2010 the Annual Meeting had considered a report on the future direction of the Association. There had been no appetite for sweeping change, but there was a clear view that the Association should do more as a public voice for our members – in particular engaging with Governments, policy makers and opinion formers. All well and good, but the inevitable question was “a voice saying what, exactly?” My predecessor Peter Tyndall had begun work on identifying some basic but important standpoints on which we might be able to agree.

So that is where we were at the beginning of the year. What has happened during it?

First, as regards having a clearer understanding of our policy, we have, building on the work Peter had begun, and through a process of discussion and

consultation, produced a set of policy lines on which future discussions and representations with outside bodies can be based. It is in the form of the Position Statement that this Annual Meeting will be asked to formally approve later on. It is not revolutionary. It is not (I hope after all the consultation) controversial. But it is an important start and marks a clear shift towards a more outward looking stance.

Second, in relation to actual engagement, there have been some broadly encouraging developments. The first was in the form of an invitation to give evidence on the matter of redress to the Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press, first in writing and then in person. That was, by a country mile, the most high profile contribution to public policy that the Association has ever made.

Which leads me to the first of my “gratitude pauses”. We have been very fortunate to have the assistance and support of David Thomas of the Financial Ombudsman Service on policy matters. He took the lion's share of the work on drafting the Position Statement that I have just mentioned as well as the written submission to the Leveson Inquiry. The call to give evidence to Leveson in person came at short notice, just as I was about to leave for a holiday in Iceland. It was with a mixture of disappointment and relief that I realised I could not appear. But it was with great confidence that we were able to turn to David and invite him to be grilled by Robert Jay QC in my place – an invitation which he took up. (And since, as it turned out, Lord Leveson greeted him as a long lost acquaintance, perhaps my absence was predestined).

As a further indication of the success of our efforts to be the first point of contact when possible complaint handling mechanisms are in the air, much later in the year we were invited to meet officials of the Department of Health in London as part of Professor Sir Bruce Keogh's review of the regulation of “cosmetic interventions” (in the wake of the PIP breast implant scandal). His report, published last month, recommended that all private health care should fall within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

Other engagements with governments have been around some less welcome events. I mentioned earlier the intended demise of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council, but it is still with us – though still destined not to be. We, along with many others, recently made representations to the Justice Select Committee emphasising the AJTC's value and expressing concern about its work being effectively carried out in future from within the Ministry of Justice.

In Ireland the planned merger of the Pensions Ombudsman and the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau has progressed slowly and with potential collateral damage in the form of harm to the perception of independence of the Financial Services Ombudsman. In England, ministerial and select committee interest in the Local Government

Ombudsman was a possible source of concern. In the event there was a considerable endorsement of our values when the Association's criteria for membership became the benchmark for an independent evaluation of the LGO.

Those criteria are the key to our legitimacy as a body representing what is best in independent dispute resolution. Two years ago we updated the criteria and agreed a process for revalidating existing members. The Validation Committee continued that process in 2012/13, with Ombudsman members being asked, in batches, to complete forms and to provide information to be used to evaluate them against the membership criteria. That exercise has greatly concentrated our minds on how the principles should apply in practice.

There was one new Ombudsman Member validated in the year, the Ombudsman for Children, Ireland, no stranger to us as she had hitherto been a "complaint handler" member.

And this is the second point at which I pause to offer the Association's thanks, this time to the members of the Validation Committee for their commitment and scrupulous attention to the detail of applications. Particular thanks are due to the independent members, who have given their time freely. Sadly this year, one of the independent members, Laurence Shurman, died. He had most recently been active in the ombudsman world as a member of the Validation Committee, continuing even as his health failed. But he will be known to many as a former Banking Ombudsman and one of the founder members of this association – and its first chair. We are indebted to him and he will be much missed. Indeed I doubt that there has been a conference without him until now.

The developments from the EU that I mentioned earlier – requiring there to be ADR "entities" for all consumer goods and services turned into a directive in March this year. The directive is likely to offer us a challenge, as more – and more varied – dispute resolution bodies will almost certainly come into existence, not necessarily meeting our standards for ombudsmen – and perhaps using, low cost, high tech models. We cannot stand snootily looking down on them. We have much to offer in knowledge and

experience. And the new institutions may develop in ways from which we can learn – and which may indirectly influence consumers' expectations for complaint resolution across the sectors that we currently recognise as our province. We must remain engaged as matters evolve – and find a way to ensure that the new bodies can become part of our community.

During the year our interest groups ("first contact", communications, legal and HR) have continued to meet. Thanks are due in particular to the chairs but also to the members for organising and contributing to those sessions. One of the great virtues of the association is that it allows for our staff at many levels to discuss matters of common interest, and facilitates informal networking.

I first became involved in the work of the Association through our newsletter "The Ombudsman" so I have a particular interest in the way that it has developed over time, through different editors and changing editorial boards. This year the Executive Committee decided we should make the leap to publishing it in electronic form only. The January edition was the last paper copy. Electronic publication may in due course give us the opportunity to share our news in different ways, perhaps more frequently. But that is for another day. For now thanks are due to the two editors during the year, Faye West, who stood down in the Autumn, and Gráinne Byrne who picked up the editor's peaked visor – and also to all the members of the editorial committee.

And now that I am fully in gratitude mode, I must mention two member bodies that have been particularly supportive in lending manpower to the Association. The UK Financial Ombudsman Service kindly gave us the time of David Thomas, as I have already mentioned. And the Local Government Ombudsman lent us the services of Nigel Karney, who has been supporting Ian, the Secretary, and is indeed here today assisting with arrangements for the conference. But thanks are also due to all the other member bodies, too numerous to mention, who have volunteered facilities and staff.

I am personally grateful to all of the members of the Executive Committee for their support, engagement (and just being an all round decent

bunch) and particular note goes to those who decided to stand down during the year. Bill Richardson of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman retired in the Autumn. Jane Hingston of the Financial Ombudsman Service stepped down in the Spring. And Paul Kenny, the Irish Pensions Ombudsman is standing down with effect from today in anticipation of retirement from his ombudsman post.

Final thanks are due to our Secretary, Ian Pattison. I was told by my predecessor, when I took up the chair, that the one thing I would not have to worry about was the administrative arrangements. That has proved to be entirely true. From handling of the wall information requests from the public to organising conferences, Ian manages to make things run incredibly smoothly (smoothness being a strength of any man who habitually wears a bow tie). As I note in this year's report, Ian has indicated an intention to retire in the early part of 2014, so we will need to think about succession plans this year – and somehow the next conference, in 2015, will have to find itself organised without him. There will be plenty of opportunities to wish him well. For now I just want to express our gratitude for his work in the year.

I started by describing where we were at the beginning of our 2012/13 year. I want to finish with a note of caution about where we are at the end of it. I am sure that many of us have found managing our own organisations' affairs pretty challenging in the last few years. In those circumstances there is at least the risk that each of us will, through necessity, become more inclined to focus on our own organisation's interests, and less inclined to look towards the Association and join up our thinking. If the Ombudsman Association is to do its job of promoting and supporting the best in complaint handling and dispute resolution then it cannot stay still. As the environment changes, which it has been doing apace, so must the Association evolve. How it does that is a matter for all its members and, in the next while, will call for the active engagement of every one of us.

So, leaving you with that dangling thought to take with you into the conference sessions later today, and confident that the notion will reappear over the next two days, I now bring this address to its conclusion.

Executive Committee

The new Executive Committee was then voted in, as follows:

Association Chair:

Tony King UK Pensions Ombudsman

Representing Ombudsman Members:

Tom Frawley Northern Ireland Ombudsman

Christopher Hamer The Property Ombudsman

Jane Martin Local Government Ombudsman for England

Dame Julie Mellor UK Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman

Lewis Shand Smith Chief Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services

Caroline Wayman Principal Ombudsman & Legal Director, UK Financial Ombudsman Service

Representing Ombudsman Members in Ireland:

Kieran FitzGerald Commissioner, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

Bill Prasifka Financial Services Ombudsman, Ireland

Representing Complaint Handler Members:

Judy Clements The Adjudicator

Elizabeth Derrington Independent Complaints Reviewer

The Association Secretary, Ian Pattison, is also a permanent member of the Executive Committee.

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

Rule change

Changes to the Association's Rules 7. and 8. were approved by the meeting.

The changes allow, from the 2014/15 year, for the formal election of a Vice-Chair, and the election for two years each time of the Association's Officers (Chair, Vice-Chair and Executive Committee members).

CONFERENCE 2013

The 10th Biennial Conference of the Association was held at the Burleigh House Conference Centre, Loughborough University on 16 and 17 May 2013, entitled:

‘20/20 Vision – looking forward on the Association's 20th anniversary’

The programme was:

Thursday, 16 May 2013

Chair's opening remarks

Plenary: Appropriate dispute resolution forums and legal challenges

Chair

Tony King UK Pensions Ombudsman
(Ombudsman Association Chair)

Speakers

Sir Jeremy Sullivan PC (Senior President of Tribunals)
Bill Prasifka Financial Services Ombudsman,
Ireland

Plenary: Accessibility – a strategic approach to managing the challenges

Chair

Peter Tyndall Public Services Ombudsman for
Wales

Speakers:

Dr Mike Biles Housing Ombudsman
Chris Kenny Chief Executive, Legal Services
Board

Friday, 17 May 2013

Plenary: Complaint Handlers and relationship with Ombudsmen

Chair

Adam Sampson Chief Ombudsman, Legal
Ombudsman

Speakers

Judy Clements OBE The Adjudicator
Elizabeth Derrington Independent Complaints
Reviewer

Plenary:

Ombudsmen – the next 20 years

Chair

Natalie Ceeney CBE Chief Ombudsman, UK
Financial Ombudsman Service

Speakers

Dame Julie Mellor DBE UK Parliamentary & Health
Service Ombudsman for
England
Lewis Shand Smith Chief Ombudsman,
Ombudsman Services

Chair's closing remarks

Workshops:

In addition to the above plenary sessions, six workshops were run on both days on the following topics:

Workshop 1:

Dealing with complaints about our service

Chair

Caroline Mitchell Lead Ombudsman, UK Financial
Ombudsman Service

Presenters

Walter Merricks CBE Service Complaints Reviewer,
Legal Ombudsman
Suzannah Beazley Head of Review Team,
Parliamentary & Health Service
Ombudsman

Workshop 2:

Human Rights

Chair

Dr Tom Frawley Northern Ireland Ombudsman
Presenters
Marie Anderson Deputy NI Ombudsman
Virginia McVeigh Director, NI Human Rights
Commission

Workshop 3:

Early resolution

Chair

Paul Kenny Pensions Ombudsman, Ireland
Presenters
Paulyn Marrinan Quinn former Defence Forces
Ombudsman, Ireland and
Insurance Ombudsman,
Ireland
Jon Lenton Ombudsman, Ombudsman
Services

Workshop 4:

Learning from experience for bodies under jurisdiction

Chair

Christopher Hamer The Property Ombudsman

Presenters

Chris McAlpine Acting Director of Customer Services & Assessment, Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman

Adam Sampson Chief Ombudsman, Legal Ombudsman

Workshop 5:

Information compliance in complaint handling

Chair

Kieran FitzGerald Commissioner, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

Presenters

Rosemary Agnew Scottish Information Commissioner

Graham Smith Deputy UK Information Commissioner

Workshop 6:

Managing change

Chair

Jane Martin Local Government Ombudsman for England

Presenters

Tony Boorman Deputy CEO/
Deputy Chief Ombudsman,
UK Financial Ombudsman Service

Emily O'Reilly Ombudsman for Ireland

SEMINAR 2013

A Seminar on the topic of '*Quality Assurance*' was held at the offices of the UK Financial Ombudsman Service in London Docklands on 12 December and was attended by 33 staff members of member schemes. The Seminar was chaired by the Association's Chair, Tony King.

STRATEGIC REVIEW SEMINAR

A Strategic Review Seminar took place on 24 January at the offices in London's Docklands of the UK Financial Ombudsman Services.

The event was attended by 19 Ombudsman Member scheme office holders (out of a possible 26) and 8 Complaint Handler Member scheme office holders (out of a possible 31).

The event was facilitated by consultants from '2020 Delivery' and was very successful in gauging participants views on various options for the Association's future over the next few years. There was a really impressive level of constructive engagement with the issue and almost universal agreement about the value of the exercise.

A fuller report of the Strategic Review, the research carried out and the subsequent consultation with members is shown below (page 9).

ANNUAL MEETING 2014

The 21st Annual Meeting of the Association will take place in Manchester on 15 and 16 May.

This will consist of three events as shown in the programme below. Formal notification has been sent to Association Members.

Thursday, 15 May 2014

Workshops event held at Manchester Meeting Place, University of Manchester during the afternoon.

Workshop 1

Case management systems

Led by

John Baguley Ombudsman,
Ombudsman Services

Presenters

Arlene Adams CEO of
Peppermint Technology Ltd

Hayley Chalmers Investigations Officer,
Ombudsman Services

Workshop 2

Role of social media in complaint handling

Led by

Sally Sykes Executive Director of External
Affairs and Strategy, UK
Parliamentary & Health Service
Ombudsman for England

Presenter

Jane Wilson former CEO, Chartered Institute
for Public Relations

Workshop 3

EU ADR Directive and its implications for the Association and its members

Led by

Lewis Shand Smith Chief Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services

Presenters

Nick Mawhinney European Consumer & Competition Policy, BIS

Eric Houtman Belgian Energy Ombudsman
Association Dinner in the Mumford Restaurant,
University of Manchester

Friday, 16 May 2014

Annual Meeting in the Harwood Room, University of Manchester

Session 1

Annual Meeting

Chaired by

Lewis Shand Smith (Chief Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services and Ombudsman Association Acting Chair)

- Acting- Chair's report
- Discussion on the Strategic Review of the Association and proposed resolutions for future action
- Annual Meeting

Session 2

Chaired by

Dame Julie Mellor DBE (UK Parliamentary Ombudsman & Health Service Ombudsman for England)

Emily O'Reilly (European Ombudsman)

Peter Tyndall (Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, Ireland and President of the European Region of the International Ombudsman Institute)

Closing summary by Lewis Shand Smith

BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2015

The 2015 Ombudsman Association Biennial Conference, the 11th such Conference of the Association, will once again be held at the Burleigh Court Conference Centre, Loughborough University, on 14 and 15 May. This is the same location as for the 2011 and 2013 Conferences.

ANNUAL MEETING 2015

The 22nd Annual Meeting of the Association will be held during the first day of the Biennial Conference (on 14 May 2015). Details and formal notification will be sent in due course, nearer the time.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Interface with governments and other bodies

EU ADR/ODR proposals

The Association continues to keep in contact with the UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) over the European Union Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Directive and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) Regulations which due to be implemented by member states in 2015. The UK government expects to implement them in July of that year. These proposals broadly seek to set minimum standards of redress for all suppliers of consumer goods and services throughout the EU area.

The consultation on the implementation in the UK of the Directive and Regulations was published by BIS on 11 March 2014, with closing date of 3 June.

The Association will be putting in a response, as will several of its member schemes in their own right.

General

The Association continues to seek to raise the profile of Ombudsmen, particularly in its responses to relevant consultations, White Papers and calls for evidence.

Where appropriate in responding to issues and consultations, the Association encourages the establishment of 'Ombudsman Association compliant' schemes which meet the criteria for (full) Ombudsman Membership, and strongly encourages them (in line with the Cabinet Office's own guidance to Departments) to be called Ombudsman schemes, rather than other names such as Commission. Conversely, it also continues to campaign for the protection of the word 'Ombudsman' to avoid 'the risk of damaging the credibility of the Ombudsman brand'.

This year, relatively few formal responses were made, namely to:

- UK Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) – triennial review of pension bodies (call for evidence)

- UK Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) – mandatory redress scheme for letting and property management agents

The Administrative Justice Forum

The Administrative Justice Forum was set up by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) after the abolition of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council (the predecessor body to the Council on Tribunals), with which the Association had close ties. The Forum is intended to provide a direct link between experts from across the administrative justice and tribunals system and the organisations that work with and represent its users. It is intended that the Forum will bring an independent perspective to bear on policy and practice in this important area of justice to inform the programme of work the MoJ will take forward to improve the administrative justice system for users and taxpayers.

The Forum's aims are:

- To gauge how the administrative justice and tribunals system is working, and identify any areas of concern or good practice.
- To provide early, informal, testing of policy initiatives (This will not replace formal consultation undertaken for any significant policy proposals where this is appropriate.)

The Forum, sponsored by the MoJ, is independently chaired and holds meetings at least twice a year.

The current membership, which is not fixed, includes representatives from complaint handlers, adjudicators, ombudsmen and members of the judiciary, as well as representatives of users across the UK jurisdictions. The Ombudsman Association provides a member of the Forum, currently Jane Martin, Local Government Ombudsman for England. The Forum is in its early days so the time is right to set an ambitious but achievable agenda. The Forum last met on 2 December 2013.

CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME

Strategic Review

The challenges facing Ombudsmen and Complaint Handling bodies, and also the Ombudsman Association itself, mean that they all are going through a period of considerable change. The Association has been assessing the options open to it and how, if at all, it should change to meet the needs of its members. This meant it was crucial to know what members thought of the Ombudsman Association, the services it provides and their expectations, needs and requirements of it. Members cover a wide variety of different sizes, backgrounds, and jurisdictions, which means it was vital to get feedback from as many as possible.

The Association therefore commissioned Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation, to conduct a

qualitative survey of its Ombudsman and Complaint Handler Member office holders. 36 in-depth telephone interviews were carried out with 20 Ombudsman Members and 16 Complaint Handler Members. Quotas were set on size, public/private sector and geography to ensure a good spread. This research was carried out during December and January.

At the same time, a quantitative survey of all members was carried out using SurveyMonkey, with an overall 63% response.

(The research and consultation results and reports are available to view in the 'members' area' of the Association's website.)

Following this research, a Strategic Review Seminar was held in January for office holders of Ombudsman and Complaint Handler schemes (see page 7 above).

Finally, using the results and feedback from the earlier research and Seminar, a SurveyMonkey consultation was held during March with all members to help formulate the Association's strategic work programme for the next year, to be put to the Annual Meeting for agreement on 16 May 2014. The proposals include Executive Committee led reviews of:

- The Secretariat, to decide on if and how it should be expanded to cover its existing functions, together with a wider policy, communications and training oversight remit
- Governance and membership of the Association, especially with regard to achieving greater inclusivity for all its members
- 'Horizon scanning' capability and profile-raising (including advice and advocacy roles) with governments and policy makers (in all its members' jurisdictions)
- Funding and revenue raising, including alternatives to conventional annual membership subscriptions (this may involve an additional levy on members during the 2014/15 year to fund additional staff and activities for the remainder of the year)
- Expansion of guidance and best practice, and also member networking capabilities (such as the existing Interest Groups and staff seminars)
- Expansion of approved training and development opportunities (including CDP) delivered by training partners, such as the current arrangements with Queen Margaret University
- Development of the Association's technology capability to support membership administration and communication, as well as its support of forums, blogs and increased website capability such as e-learning capability

(The Association would like to thank all those who assisted in the research and consultation, but especially Batool Reza and Robin Hulme from the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman for their help with SurveyMonkey.)

Re-validation of existing members

During the year, the Association continued its rolling programme of re-validating its Ombudsman Members following a 'pilot' in April 2012. Some minor changes have been made to the process, followed feedback

from members. All of the membership has now been re-validated, although there are still a small number of outstanding 'follow-up' queries with some members. In due course, it is proposed to re-validate Complaint Handler members as well, although this has been deferred pending the outcome of the Strategic Review which may well result in some changes to membership categories.

It is intended to carry out re-validation of members on a five-yearly basis.

Approved accredited training

During 2013/14, three 'Professional Award in Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Practice' courses were run by Queen Margaret University (QMU), in Reading (October 2013), in Edinburgh (November 2013) and in Dublin (March 2014) with 37 students in total attending.

Two 'Professional 'Certificate in Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Practice' courses were also run by QMU during the year, in London (May 2013) and in Manchester (September 2013) with 29 students in total attending. (A third course was also run in London at the beginning of April.)

We are very grateful to those member schemes which provided accommodation and facilities for these courses, which enabled costs to be contained.

IRISH MEMBERS – NEWS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Personnel changes

Emily O'Reilly, the Ombudsman, was elected by the European Parliament to the position of European Ombudsman in July 2013, taking up the position in October 2013. Peter Tyndall succeeded Emily O'Reilly as the Ombudsman. Peter was previously the Ombudsman for Wales and took up the position in Ireland in December 2013.

An Coimisinéir Teanga, the Irish language commissioner, Seán Ó Cuirreáin, announced in December 2013 his intention to step down. In an address to a Parliamentary Committee, he noted the failure by Government to implement legislation designed to improve services to the public through Irish. He also noted the fact that a Government decision was made in November 2011 to merge the functions of the Office with the Office of the Ombudsman as part of the **Public Service Reform Plan**. He was also of the opinion that the Office had not been given adequate resources to fully perform its statutory obligations in a satisfactory manner. Rónán Ó Domhnaill was appointed An Coimisinéir Teanga in February 2014.

Legislative changes

Legislation was amended permitting the Financial Services Ombudsman to report on the complaint records of individual financial service providers. The amendment became effective 1 September 2013.

A Decision was made by government to amalgamate the Pensions Ombudsman and Financial Services Ombudsman in early 2013. No legislation advancing the amalgamation was proposed by the government in the year.

Meeting of Irish Ombudsman Forum

The inaugural meeting of the Ombudsman Forum was held on 6 December 2013. The meeting was attended by office-holders and senior officials from the Ombudsman, Press Ombudsman, Financial Services Ombudsman, Pensions Ombudsman, Defence Forces Ombudsman, Garda Ombudsman, Children's Ombudsman and Irish Language Commissioner.

The Forum was chaired by Paul Kenny, the Pensions Ombudsman.

At the Forum, there was wide agreement on the core values of critical importance to all the organisations represented: independence, integrity, effectiveness. In addition, other areas were identified as representing common challenges across the organisations, such as EU developments (particularly in ADR and ODR), HR and funding. All these areas presented a compelling case for cooperation and exchanges of information and expertise. In addition, it was noted that there would be a benefit, on occasion, to speak publicly with a common voice.

It was agreed to meet up to 3 times a year. Kieran FitzGerald, Commissioner at the Garda Ombudsman Commission, was elected as Chairman.

THE OMBUDSMAN NEWSLETTER AND BLOG

The Ombudsman newsletter was produced and printed three times a year under the supervision of volunteer Editor and Editorial Board and had a circulation of around 1,500 copies. Each issue contained news items, case studies, profiles of office holders and member schemes, and a number of feature articles.

Issue 48 (January 2013) was the final printed edition. The Executive Committee at its meeting in December 2012 took the decision to discontinue printing the newsletter on cost grounds, due to continuing and unsustainable increases in both production and postage costs. The first, and as it transpired last, electronic version was Issue 49 (May 2013).

After that issue, it was decided to discontinue the formal periodic newsletter in favour of a continuous blog of news, articles and features. Development of that started and, after a temporary 'hold' when the Editor left the ombudsman world, an initial blog was produced at the end of April 2014 as a 'lead in' to the new blog. This can be viewed at: <http://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/ma/blog/>. We are very grateful to Helen-Louise Smith and Catherine Hand from Ombudsman Services

for their considerable assistance with this.

It is apparent that 'communications' is increasingly important to the Association and it is probably an opportunity with the Strategic Review to put it on a more permanent basis (within the Secretariat), rather than rely of volunteers from within member schemes, but this remains to be decided.

Gráinne Byrne, Communications Officer at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) very kindly took over as volunteer Editor for Issues 48 and 49, and it was she who started the development of the blog. Gráinne has now left her position at SPSO and works outside of the ombudsman environment. We are very grateful to her for all that she has done.

The Association is immensely grateful for the 'army' of volunteers, both as Editor and members of the Editorial Board, who have produced the newsletter over the past 16 years.

Back copies of most issues of 'The Ombudsman' are available to view at or download from the Association's website (www.ombudsmanassociation.org) or in printed form from the Secretary.

THE ASSOCIATION WEBSITE

The Ombudsman Association website at www.ombudsmanassociation.org was completely re-written and updated and was re-launched in January 2013. It consists of four main sections, as follows:

FIND

A search facility for members of the public to look for a suitable ombudsman or complaint handler

ABOUT

Detailed description of ombudsmen, what they do and what areas they cover (including Complaint Handlers)

THE ASSOCIATION

Details of the Association, its members, publications and activities

MEMBERS

A resource area for Association members and staff of member schemes containing the notes of the various Interest and Working Groups, in addition to other items of interest, as well as dates of forthcoming Association events and activities. Also available in this area are presentations given at Conferences and Seminars. Access details for this area for members and staff of member schemes can be obtained from the Association Secretary (secretary@ombudsmanassociation.org)

At the top of each page are links to job vacancies in member schemes and details of current accredited training opportunities.

Member schemes can, and are encouraged to, put job vacancy advertisements free of charge on the Association website. These can include advertisements for Council/Board members (where applicable), the office holder and staff members. Some schemes make great use of this facility, whilst others do not. For further information, contact the Association Secretary.

Development of the new website will continue in due course, to include blogs and forums.

FINANCES

Finances 2012/13

The income for 2012/13 was £86,297 (€104,385). Expenditure was £111,608 (€135,001), giving a total deficit for the year of £25,311 (€30,606), thereby reducing the Association's reserves to £64,314 (€77,794).

(Note: figures shown in Euros are calculated at the exchange rate on 31 March 2014 of 1.2096 Euros to the Pound Sterling.)

Finances 2013/14

The income for 2013/14, including the surplus from the 2013 Conference of £16,325 (€19,747), was £103,482 (€125,172). Expenditure was £90,933 (€109,993), giving a total surplus for the year of £12,549 (€15,179), thereby increasing the Association's reserves to £76,863 (€85,582).

(Note: figures shown in Euros are calculated at the exchange rate on 31 March 2014 of 1.2096 Euros to the Pound Sterling.)

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

The Association has five Interest Groups which meet usually twice a year. They 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.

These Interest Groups are now 'self-administering', with meetings being organised by Group members themselves.

Those interested in joining any of the Interest Groups should contact either the respective Chairs (see below) or the Association Secretary (secretary@ombudsmanassociation.org).

Legal Interest Group

The Legal Interest Group brings together legal advisers and those with an interest in legal matters within member schemes, including some of the Ombudsmen themselves. It is chaired by Marie Anderson, Deputy Northern Ireland Ombudsman.

Communications Interest Group

The Communications Interest Group brings together communications professionals and those with an interest in PR/Communications matters in member schemes. It is chaired by Alison Robinson, Head of Policy & Communications, Legal Ombudsman.

HR Interest Group

The HR Interest Group brings together HR professionals and those with an interest in personnel, training and development in member schemes. It is chaired by Niki

McLean, Director of Corporate Services at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

First Contact Interest Group

The First Contact Interest Group brings together those concerned with, and with an interest in, 'gateway' services within member schemes, and dealing with complaints and enquiries when they are first received. It is chaired by Carol Neill, Outreach Team Leader at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Interest Group

Chaired by Baljit Kaur, Equality & Diversity Manager at the Legal Ombudsman, this is a new Group which has met only once this year (a second meeting took place during May).

(Note: notes of all Interest Group meetings are in the 'members' area' of the Association's website)

MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Association at 31 March 2014, compared with a year ago, is as follows:

Members	Now	A year ago
Total	113	116
Ombudsman Members (formerly 'Members')	30	33
Complaint Handler Members	31	34

Associate Members:

Corporate	4	3
Individual	48	46

Executive Committee

The role of the Executive Committee is to manage the Association on behalf of members. The membership of the Committee during 2013/14 was:

Tony King (Chair) UK Pensions Ombudsman

Note: Tony King stood down from the executive Committee and as Chair in February 2014, and Lewis Shand Smith was appointed Acting Chair until the 2014 Annual Meeting

Judy Clements	The Adjudicator
Elizabeth Derrington	Independent Complaints
Kieran FitzGerald	Commissioner, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission
Tom Frawley	Northern Ireland Ombudsman
Christopher Hamer	The Property Ombudsman
Jane Martin	Chair of the Commission for Local Administration in England (Local Government Ombudsman)

Dame Julie Mellor	Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman
Bill Prasifka	Financial Services Ombudsman, Ireland
Lewis Shand Smith	Chief Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services

(Note: Lewis Shand Smith was elected Vice-Chair by the Executive Committee for the year)

Caroline Wayman	Principal ombudsman & Legal Director, UK Financial Ombudsman Service
Ian Pattison	Secretary, Ombudsman Association

The Executive Committee met five times during the 2013/14 year on:

- 12 April 2013
- 19 July 2013
- 20 September 2013
- 6 December 2013
- 21 February 2014

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. The Committee has had the additional role during the year of continuing advising the Executive Committee on the re-validation of existing members (see Page 9 above).

The Validation Committee's membership during 2013/14 has been:

Chair

Tony King	UK Pensions Ombudsman and Ombudsman Association Chair (until February 2013)
Lewis Shand Smith	Chief Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services and Ombudsman Association Acting Chair (from February 2013)

Representing Ombudsman Members

Peter Tyndall	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and then Ombudsman & Information Commissioner, Ireland
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Independent Members

Ann Abraham
Margaret Doyle
Professor Mary Seneviratne

The Association is most grateful to the members of the Validation Committee for making themselves available as required.

MEMBER SCHEMES OF THE ASSOCIATION AT 31 MARCH 2014

Ombudsman members

Bermuda Ombudsman
Complaints Commissioner for the Cayman Islands
Financial Ombudsman Service, UK
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau, Ireland
Financial Services Ombudsman, Isle of Man
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission
Gibraltar Public Services Ombudsman
Glazing Ombudsman
Housing Ombudsman Service
Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Independent Police Complaints Commission
Legal Ombudsman, England and Wales
Local Government Ombudsmen, England
Northern Ireland Ombudsman
Ombudsman and Information Commissioner for Ireland
Ombudsman for Children, Ireland
Ombudsman for the Defence Forces, Ireland
Ombudsman Services
Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman
Pensions Ombudsman, UK
Pensions Ombudsman of Ireland
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
Property Ombudsman
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
Removals Industry Ombudsman
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Waterways Ombudsman

Complaint handler members

Adjudicator, Revenue and Customs, Valuation Office Agency, Public Guardianship Office, and the Insolvency Service
Advertising Standards Authority
An Coimisinéir Teanga (Irish Language Commissioner)
Barristers Professional Conduct Tribunal, Ireland
Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
Complaints Commissioner for the British Virgin Islands
Disclosure and Barring Service (Independent Complaints Monitor)
First Civil Service Commissioner and Commissioner for Public Appointments
Furniture Ombudsman
Greffier of the States of Jersey
IDRS Limited
Immigration Services Commissioner
Independent Case Examiner for DWP
Independent Complaints Reviewer (for Audit Commission, HM Land Registry, Land Registers NI, National Archives, Charity Commission, Housing Corporation and Youth Justice Agency)
Independent Football Ombudsman
Information Commissioner
Judicial Appointments & Conduct Ombudsman
Judicial Complaints Reviewer (Scotland)
Law Society of Ireland
Lay Observer for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman
Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Police Investigations & Review Commissioner for Scotland
Press Ombudsman, Ireland
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for England and Wales
Public Standards Commissioner for Scotland
Scottish Information Commissioner
Scottish Legal Complaints Commission
Service Complaints Commissioner for the Armed Forces
The Dispute Service Limited
Welsh Language Commissioner

Corporate associate members

Brown Jacobson LLP, Solicitors
Law Society of Scotland
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

Ombudsman Association

PO Box 308

Twickenham

Middlesex TW1 9BE

020 8894 9272

secretary@ombudsmanassociation.org

www.ombudsmanassociation.org

'Ombudsman Association' is the
public name of the British and
Irish Ombudsman Association