



OMBUDSMAN
ASSOCIATION

Promoting independent complaint resolution

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Lewis Shand Smith

FORWARD

It has been yet another busy year for the Association as we've started to implement the changes that members called for in the strategic review.

The changes to the Association's rules and governance at last year's annual meeting have started to bear fruit as we've seen greater engagement from members in all aspects of the Association's activities. At the same time the increase in membership fees has provided the resource to start to take forward some of the priorities identified by members, and that will continue in 2016/17.

I'm delighted that the role of the Interest Groups has been strengthened, with increased attendance from members and terms of reference agreed for each group to bring greater clarity to their work. The positive outcome of that can already be seen with work underway on several topics, from guidance on data protection to best practice on equality policies. The work underway to establish new Interest Groups for 'Casework' and 'Overseas Members' will provide further opportunities for members to share best practice and learn from each other. The importance of the project on developing a generic service standards framework should not be underestimated and I'm very pleased that will be implemented next year.

The Association has continued to raise its profile to influence stakeholders where appropriate, strengthening our contacts with government officials and stakeholders such as the Administrative Justice Forum. Further afield the Director has continued to engage with like-minded organisations in Europe and internationally, and a memorandum of understanding with the International Ombudsman Institute will be signed at our 2016 annual meeting in Dublin.

It has been a challenging year for many members and the Association has provided support wherever that added value, in reinforcing best practices when it comes to the design and governance of ombudsman

schemes and in ensuring that governments respect their constitutional position.

As members will know, the implementation of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Directive in the UK created a competitive environment between schemes. As a result the membership criteria and standards upheld by the Association are more important than ever, and a review of how these are applied by the Validation Committee when considering applications for membership has been carried out and will be implemented shortly.

It has been a year of change as well for many members, with us bidding farewell to several long-standing colleagues who have done much to establish the role of an ombudsman in their respective fields. Happily that has also provided the opportunity for us to welcome new colleagues and I know we all look forward to working closely with them over the coming years.

In February this year Donal Galligan was appointed to the newly created role of Director of the Association after an open competition. Donal had of course been fulfilling the role of Association Secretary on an interim basis whilst the strategic review was completed, and I'm delighted that he has stepped up to become the Association's first Director.

It's been a pleasure to Chair the Association and my thanks go to the members of the Executive for their work in helping steer the Association through the past few years. As an organisation I think we are now in a strong position to deliver our aims over the coming years.

Although my term as Chair and a member of the Executive has come to an end, I'll continue to be committed to, and support the aims and work of, the Association.

Lewis Shand Smith

Ombudsman Association Chair
Chief Ombudsman and Chief Executive,
Ombudsman Services
May 2016

ANNUAL MEETING 2015

The 22nd Annual Meeting of the Association took place immediately before the Biennial Conference during the morning of 14 May 2015, at Burleigh Court Conference Centre, Loughborough University. The Annual Meeting was attended by 74 people, including 24 Ombudsman Members, 6 Complaint Handler Members, 5 Individual Associate Members and 2 Corporate Associate Members.

In his opening address, the Association's Chair, Lewis Shand Smith, provided some context to the main items on the agenda; the implementation of the strategic review and the proposed amendments to the Association's Rules. The Chair drew attention to a speech made at the 2009 Conference by the late Laurence Shurman, the first Chair of the Association, in which he had highlighted the founding and early days of the Association from 1989 to 1994.

The Chair noted that the concerns of members were still very similar to those early days, as to whether schemes are sufficiently independent, effective, accessible and visible, whether the staffing of the Association was sufficient to cater to members' needs and how best to validate our members. However, it was highlighted how much had been achieved since then: the agreement of shared principles of good complaint handling and good governance; adoption of a 'Position Statement' setting down core policies for the Association, representing common ground; discussions around a shared Behaviours, Knowledge & Skills framework for caseworkers and a generic service standards framework that could be used by all members; and the strengthening of the protection of the title of 'Ombudsman' in the private sector in the UK, ensuring the recognition of the Association as the expert on what constitutes an ombudsman.

The Chair stressed that it was through the Association and the opportunities it provides for the sharing of best practice that members can strive for excellence for the whole sector.

The full text of the Chair's address can be found in the Members' Area of the website.

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Implementation of Strategic Review

Members received a paper in advance setting out the recommendations of the Executive Committee to implement the strategic review, following the work undertaken by the sub-committees of the Executive and the subsequent consultation on the proposal for universal membership.

The revised recommendations put to the Annual Meeting, following the consultation, sought to address the core concerns of members by maintaining a two-tier membership structure, whilst making changes to the composition of the Executive Committee and the governance of the Association to provide an enhanced voice for complaint handler members.

Amendments to Association Rules

The proposed amendments to the Association's Rules to adopt a 'Vision' statement, and to change the Association's governance and the composition of the Executive to encourage greater engagement from members were approved with immediate effect. The full details of the approved rule changes can be found in the minutes of the Annual Meeting.

New subscription rates

Members noted the revision of the existing subscription rate size bands to create a fairer approach, and the approximate 30% increase for all members (the first increase in membership rates for 10 years), to provide the resource to implement the priorities identified in the strategic review.

Executive Committee

Elections for the vacant positions on the Executive Committee took place, with the following elected for a two-year term (2015–17):

Association Vice-Chair:

Nick Bennett,
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Ombudsman Member representatives:

Kevin Grix, The Furniture Ombudsman
Jane Martin, Local Government Ombudsman
Peter Tyndall, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner (Ireland)

Complaint Handler / Associate Member representative:

Michael Morgan, Tenancy Deposit Scheme

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.

BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2015

The 2015 Ombudsman Association Biennial Conference, the 11th such Conference of the Association, was held on 14-15 May, entitled: 'Changing with the times: effective complaint handling in the 21st Century'.

Four plenary sessions took place, covering people's expectations of complaint handling, changes to the complaints landscape and how members are adapting to thrive. There were several external speakers at the Conference, with Dr David Halpern from the Behavioural Insights Team, and Dr Naomi Creutzfeldt from the University of Oxford speaking in the opening session.

15 workshops took place across the two days, with eight different areas focused on. Topics included: formal and informal evaluation of ombudsman schemes; building continuous improvement into service delivery; the current research on ombudsman schemes; navigating the complaints maze; the Association's work to develop a behaviours, knowledge & skills framework for caseworkers; and the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's Human Rights Manual.

The full programme and presentations from all the plenary sessions and workshops can be found in the Members' Area of the website.

POLICY NETWORK SEMINAR 2016

A Policy Network seminar on academic research took place on 15 March at the offices of the Financial Ombudsman Service in London. The seminar provided an opportunity for members to get a 'taster' of some of the research currently underway, building on comments made at one of the workshops at the Biennial Conference in Loughborough to strengthen links between practitioners and the academic community. The seminar was attended by 37 individuals, representing all membership categories of the Association: ombudsman members, complaint handler members, corporate associates and individual associates. The presentations from the seminar can be found in the Members' Area of the Association's website.

ANNUAL MEETING & DUBLIN CONFERENCE 2016

The 23rd Annual Meeting of the Association & Dublin Conference will take place at the St. Helen's Radisson Blu Hotel in Dublin on 12-13 May 2016. Events over the two days will include a fringe event held by the Office of the Ombudsman on the subject of The Ombudsman Behind Bars, and a dinner at the Guinness Storehouse. Full details of the event can be found on the Association's website, where the presentations and notes of discussions will be made available.



VISION OF THE ASSOCIATION

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.

OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION

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 ombudsmen 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.

GUIDANCE, BEST PRACTICE AND NETWORKING

Interest Groups

The Association currently has five Interest Groups with each meeting 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. Terms of Reference have been introduced for each of the groups to bring greater clarity to their purpose.

Initial work has been undertaken to explore the introduction of an 'Overseas Members' Interest Group, and a 'Casework' Interest Group. Further work will be taken forward on these in 2016/17.

Those interested in joining any of the Interest Groups should contact either the respective Chairs (see below) or the Director.

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 Andrew Walton, Media & Communications Manager at the Legal Ombudsman.

The Communications Interest Group has met twice in the past 12 months, in September 2015 (hosted by the Housing Ombudsman Service) and March 2016 (hosted by the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission). There has been consistent representation from schemes based across the UK and Ireland.

In line with the group's Terms of Reference, meetings have been used to share updates from the Ombudsman Association and member schemes, and to discuss communication specific topics. Activities of note during the year include:

- Discussions, with reference to best practice examples, regarding a revised format for the Ombudsman Association newsletter. This will inform the work of the OA Director who is looking to launch a new edition by the end of 2016.
- Discussion of member scheme activity regarding research outputs, and how this drives external communication activity. Items discussed included availability of resources

and budget, importance of PR and marketing within member scheme business plans, and successes and opportunities to learn.

- Sharing of best practice for creating and managing intranets. This will inform the work of a number of schemes looking to update their intranets and/or looking at options for implementing channel shift strategies.

Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Interest Group

The EDHR group has met twice in the past year. The Group brings together a wide range of operational professionals to actively promote and raise awareness about equality, diversity and human rights issues as relevant to all members of the Ombudsman Association. It is chaired by Baljit Kaur, Equality & Diversity Manager at the Legal Ombudsman.

The key activity of the Group in the past year has included:

- Sharing of good practice on issues of mutual interest outside of meetings.
- The development of a best practice equality policy based on good practice in members' existing equality policies (to be agreed at June 2016 meeting)
- Group members 'auditing' their organisation's policies and other documentation (e.g. Scheme Rules) for gender neutral language.
- The collation of members' approach to collecting customer equality information, return rates and use of data. This is with a view to establishing good practice and potentially producing a best practice framework for use by member schemes.



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First Contact Interest Group

This Group meets twice per year and provides a forum for discussion on advice services and initial complaint assessment issues. Group members have a common interest in effectively communicating the role of Ombudsman schemes, managing expectations, reducing premature complaints, providing support and guidance to complainants and testing customer service. The Group is chaired by Carol Neill, Advice Team Manager at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and the Secretary of the Group is Jonathan Buckley, Customer Service Manager at the Local Government Ombudsman. Discussion topics and suggestions for presentations are always forthcoming for meetings, the group have met a total of 17 times and next year will have been in operation for 10 years.

During 2015/16 meetings were held at the Legal Ombudsman, Birmingham, and The Pensions Ombudsman, London. Both meetings were well attended with representation from 15 member organisations. The Group considered unacceptable actions policies and when and how these can be effectively implemented. As with all discussion topics, members openly shared their experiences and practice around this subject.

A very informative presentation was also delivered to the group by the Chief Executive of Hammersmith and Fulham MIND on mental health awareness, making reasonable and practical adjustments to ensure accessibility and setting healthy boundaries in communication. This well received presentation resulted in many members recommending wider training on this subject for colleagues within their office.

As well as finding meetings useful, the Group also find the opportunity to build relationships with other first contact professionals very helpful. As a result there is often contact between the group throughout the year when looking to learn from others on policy, procedure and practice in their area of responsibility.

Legal Interest Group

The Legal Interest Group (LIG) is a forum for those with an interest in legal matters to meet and share information. In 2015/16 it was chaired by Marie Anderson, who was then the Deputy Northern Ireland Ombudsman. Marie had chaired the Group since March 2012. In April 2016, Katrin Shaw (Assistant Director & Legal Advisor at the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales) and Felicity Mitchell (Deputy Adjudicator at the Office of the Independent Adjudicator) were elected as Chair and Deputy Chair of the Group.

The Group met in March in the offices of Browne Jacobson LLP, and in October 2015 in Gibraltar House, London. LIG members at both meetings discussed a range of matters which included an update on the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's 'human rights' based approach to investigations of maladministration, an update on legislative changes within each of the members' respective schemes, and recent jurisprudence which was relevant to the members' work. The LIG agreed Terms of Reference in October 2015.

Guest Speakers

Brian Thompson from the University of Liverpool attended the meeting in March 2015 and gave a presentation 'The Courts' Relationship to the Ombudsman- Supervisor and Partner?'. Richard Kirkham from the University of Sheffield attended in October 2015 and gave a presentation on 'The Impact of Case Law on the Work of the Ombudsman Community'. He also discussed the development of a database of case-law for the Association's Members. Both speakers hosted discussions and a question and answer session following their presentations.

Principles for Remedy

The LIG debated and developed draft Principles for Remedy during 2015 and a draft guide, the 'Public Services Ombudsmen Principles for Remedy', was circulated among the members in March 2016. The guide outlines the Ombudsman's general approach to recommending remedies for injustice and the purpose of the guide is to achieve a consistent approach among the member schemes.

Data Protection Guidance for OA Members

The LIG drafted an update of the Association's document guidance for members to assist them in complying with their obligations under the Data Protection Act. The guide is intended to be used as an aid in conjunction

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with the ICO's Codes of Practice in order to assist with matters which are relevant for the Association's members in both public services and private sector schemes. The guidance will be finalised and circulated in 2016/17.

Legal database

Richard Kirkham presented a proposed bid to develop and maintain a Legal database for use of all member schemes which would be publicly available on the Association's website. The Group were highly supportive of the project and a commitment was made to ensure the members of the LIG would provide Dr Kirkham with the necessary case law and keep the database updated. The project will be taken forward in 2016/17.

HR Interest Group

The HR group met twice during 2015/16 at the Adjudicator's Officer (April 2015) and the Advertising Standards Authority (November 2015), both meetings were chaired by Niki Maclean, Director at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Members discussed developments within their schemes, current and future employment law developments and the group shared best practice for HR and L&D activities. During these meetings the group also began considering an Ombudsman Association competency framework to establish standards of knowledge, experience, skills and behaviours for caseworkers across all schemes. This was cross referenced with the draft service standards framework.

Between meetings the HR interest group members regularly kept in touch with requests for information, knowledge sharing and best practice guidance on key HR and L&D issues and to update the Group on important developments within their respective schemes. Requests for information and advice related to a range of issues including: redundancy, performance management, pay and reward, terms and conditions, job design and evaluation and current vacancies.

Note: notes of all Interest Group meetings and any presentations from meetings can be found in the Members' Area of the Association's website

Sectorial networks

Members meet in a number of sectorial networks to share best practice and sector updates. Although not formally Association meetings, the Director attends these meetings when invited both to provide updates on Association activity and to gain a greater understanding of members' current priorities and challenges.

- The Irish Forum – meet five times a year, tied into the Executive Committee meeting cycle.
- Private Sector Ombudsman meeting – meet twice a year
- Public Sector Ombudsman Group - meet 2-3 times a year

Service Standards Framework Group

In light of members' desire for the Association to expand its activities with regards to guidance and best practice materials, the Service Standards Framework Group met in London twice in 2015/16 (April 2015 at the Financial Ombudsman Service and in September 2015 at PHSO) to explore the options for the development of a generic standards framework for the Association's members. The Executive Committee subsequently approved the Group's recommendation that the project be taken forward with the support of the British Standards Institute to develop a 'private standard' that could be used by all members.

The composition of the Steering Group has now been established, with Ombudsman Services kindly seconding Kay Roberts to the role of 'Technical Author' to draft the standard. A full consultation will take place with members on the draft document. The Project Initiation Meeting will take place in May 2016 and the project is due to be completed in early 2017.

Between meetings the HR interest group members regularly kept in touch with requests for information, knowledge sharing and best practice guidance on key HR and L&D issues and to update the Group on important developments within their respective schemes.

POLICY AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Policy Network

The Policy Network was established to provide a forum for all members to share horizon scanning, develop initiatives, and to harness the existing expertise of members to develop joint Association positions. The core of the Network consists of the policy leads of those on the Executive Committee, to enable it to be more efficient in developing and signing off on policy positions. The wider Network consists of the policy leads of all members. This provides a pool of resources that can be engaged with as appropriate depending on the subject matter.

The core Network met twice during the year in May 2015 (Local Government Ombudsman in Coventry) and in November 2015 (Financial Ombudsman Service, London) to discuss, amongst other things, the implementation of the ADR Directive, the recently established Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on ADR, share updates on horizon scanning and explore the feasibility of joint briefing for parliamentarians and their staff. A seminar on research also took place on 15 March for the wider Policy Network, as described above.

Interface with governments and other bodies

ADR Directive

Implementation of the EU ADR Directive has continued to be the focus for many members' activities during 2015/16. Where the Association could provide added value by speaking on behalf of the sector we have done so, raising concerns that members had around the guidance that had been issued and the process for accreditation with the Chartered Trading Standards Institute in April 2015. We also met with the UK Department of Business, Innovation & Skills, in July, and subsequently inputted to the work underway to ensure that the competent authorities work together and align their processes.

Protection of title 'Ombudsman'

Following the success at the end of last year in our work to safeguard the role and title of 'ombudsman' in the UK (the term is already protected in Ireland), the Association met with officials from the UK Department of Business, Innovation & Skills and from Companies House in September 2015 to further discuss

the approach being taken to protect the term 'ombudsman'.

As members will recall, Companies House issued Guidance in 2015 on the criteria for registering a company in the UK with the title 'ombudsman', or trading as such. Businesses now have to be certified by the relevant competent authority, have a proven track record in that area (expected to be at least 12 months), and, crucially, hold Ombudsman membership of the Ombudsman Association. Those who use the term Ombudsman without permission in the UK are liable to a fine of up to £1000, with a further £100/day fine until the offence is resolved.

Support for members

The Association engaged with officials from the UK Cabinet Office during 2015 to provide a briefing on the wider ombudsman community to help inform their work on Public Service Ombudsman reform.

In August 2015 the Association wrote to the Parliament of Bermuda (the Speaker of the House of Assembly and the President of the Senate) to express support for the Office of the Ombudsman of Bermuda and voice our concern about the dismissive language used by some members of the Government towards the Office. The Secretary also raised the Association's concerns with the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) who also then wrote in support of the Ombudsman for Bermuda. The Chair subsequently had telephone calls with both the Speaker of the House of Assembly and the Premier of Bermuda, and was assured by both of their respect for the Office.

In autumn 2015 the Chair and the Secretary met with Sheila Drew Smith OBE, who was carrying out a review on the Independent Police Complaints Commission's (IPCC) proposal to move towards a 'classical' ombudsman governance structure, to discuss the corporate governance and reporting arrangements for public sector ombudsman schemes. The Association also coordinated various pieces of information from members to feed into the review.

Those who use the term Ombudsman without permission in the UK are liable to a fine of up to £1000, with a further £100/day fine until the offence is resolved.

The Association encourages the establishment of an ombudsman which meets our criteria for Ombudsman Membership, to ensure both that the ombudsman 'brand' retains credibility, and that people have access to an ombudsman in all areas of consumer and public services.

The Administrative Justice Forum
The Administrative Justice Forum (AJF) was set up to bring an independent perspective to bear on policy and practice in this area to inform the work the UK Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is taking forward to improve the administrative justice system for users and taxpayers. The Ombudsman Association is a member of the Forum and attends the meetings, held twice a year.

The Chair and the Secretary attended the AJF meeting on 20 May. The Forum discussed Mandatory Reconsideration, the process by which individuals can request that the Department of Work and Pensions reconsider and revise a social security benefit decision, the Cabinet Office's Public Service Ombudsman consultation, the Local Authority managed emergency payment schemes, and the concerns around the accuracy of content being migrated from the MoJ website to GOV.UK.

The Vice-Chair attended the AJF roundtable discussion on 8 June, which explored different aspects of proportionality, including how to resolve disputes more quickly, effectively, and by the most proportionate means to the scale of the dispute.

The Secretary attended the AJF meeting on 4 November. The Forum received a presentation from Cabinet Office on the trials the UK Government had been running with Land Registry and the Department of Work and Pensions to improve complaints handling and feedback mechanisms. The Forum also heard more about the reform underway of the HM Courts & Tribunals Service and discussed the concerns raised by HM Treasury's new guidance on consolatory payments.

Wider landscape

During the year a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed with the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) to establish a cooperative relationship and share best practice in complaint handling and redress, and the protection and promotion of human rights and consumer rights. The memorandum will be signed at the Annual Meeting on 13 May 2016.

The Director has continued to develop relationships in the wider consumer and administrative justice landscape and is now a member of the British Standards Institute's Consumer & Public Interest Strategic Advisory Committee.

Consultation responses

The Association continues to support and promote an effective system of complaint

handling and redress, and to encourage and protect the role of an ombudsman as the 'best practice' model, 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 an ombudsman which meets our criteria for Ombudsman Membership, to ensure both that the ombudsman 'brand' retains credibility, and that people have access to an ombudsman in all areas of consumer and public services.

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

- Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Ad Hoc Committee for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsperson Bill
 - Committee for Justice regarding the Prison Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.
- UK Cabinet Office regarding the consultation '*A Public Service Ombudsman*'.

Blog, OA News and social media

The Ombudsman blog, which replaced the formal periodic newsletter, provides a continuous blog of news, articles and features. This can be viewed at: www.ombudsmanassociation.org/ma/blog/ We are very grateful to Catherine Caladine from Ombudsman Services for her assistance with this.

Members have been kept up to date on the latest developments in the sector via the monthly 'OA News' email from the Director, which highlights shorter articles on the blog, horizon scanning and recent developments. The Communications Interest Group is supporting the Director with the re-introduction of a quarterly online newsletter in 2016.

The Association's Twitter account (@OmbudAssoc) is used to draw attention to articles on the Association's blog, job vacancies on the website, changes in personnel, activities of members and developments in the sector.

The Association Website

The Association website (www.ombudsmanassociation.org) consists of four main sections:

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

ABOUT – detailed description of ombudsman schemes, 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 Director. At the top of each page are links to job vacancies in member schemes and details of current accredited training opportunities.

Member schemes can 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 and others are also encouraged to. For further information, contact the Director.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Approved accredited training

During 2015/16, two 'Professional Award in Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Practice' courses were run by Queen Margaret University (QMU) in London (May and October 2015), which 19 students in total attended.

Two 'Professional Certificate in Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Practice' courses were also run by QMU during the year, in Dublin (April 2015) and Reading (November 2015), which 21 students in total attended.

Behaviours, Knowledge and Skills Framework

Further work was undertaken in 2015/16 on developing a generic competency framework to identify the behaviours, knowledge and skills required of caseworkers across all schemes. The initial work was discussed at one of the workshops at the Biennial Conference in Loughborough, and subsequently considered by the HR Interest Group on how best to take forward that work and the proposed directory of training products that members use and would recommend to other schemes. The links to the service standards framework project were also made. Further consideration will be given in 2016/17 on how best to take forward the project.

FINANCES

Finances 2014/15

The income for 2014/15 was £82,928 (€114,440).

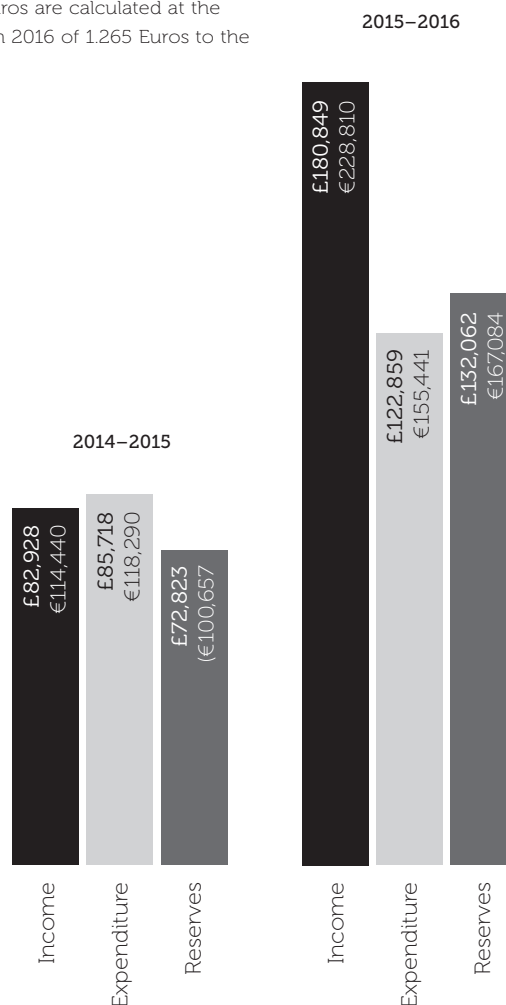
Expenditure was £85,718 (€118,290), giving a total deficit for the year of -£2,790 (-€3,850), thereby reducing the Association's reserves to £72,823 (€100,657).

(Note: figures shown in Euros are calculated at the exchange rate on 31 March 2015 of 1.38 Euros to the Pound Sterling.)

Finances 2015/16

Total income for 2015/16, including membership subscriptions and conference fees, was £180,849 (€228,810). Expenditure was £122,859 (€155,441), significantly lower than the amount budgeted for, as the recruitment of the Director and the Administrator were not taken forward at the start of the year, thereby increasing the Association's overall reserves to £132,062 (€167,084). This has created capacity in the Association's budget to fund projects in 2016/17.

(Note: figures shown in Euros are calculated at the exchange rate on 31 March 2016 of 1.265 Euros to the Pound Sterling.)



MEMBERSHIP

Personnel changes

There have been several changes at 'office holder' level amongst the Association's members during 2015/16:

Anthony Arter

was appointed as the UK Pensions Ombudsman and Pensions Protection Fund Ombudsman.

Sheila Braithwaite

was appointed as Complaints Commissioner of the British Virgin Islands.

Tony Kaye

was appointed interim Removals Industry Ombudsman.

Neil Stevenson

was appointed Chief Executive of the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission.

Judge Mary Ellen Ring

was appointed as Chair of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

Katrine Sporle CBE

was appointed as the Property Ombudsman.

Kathryn Stone

was appointed as the Chief Ombudsman at the Legal Ombudsman. Nick Hawkins was appointed Chief Executive.

Tom Frawley

retired following the passing of the legislation to create the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. Marie Anderson was appointed to the new role.

Judy Clements

was appointed as the Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Helen Megarry

was appointed as the Adjudicator for HMRC, Valuation Office and Insolvency Service

Paul Kenny

is due to retire as the Pensions Ombudsman for Ireland in May 2017. Plans have been put in place to appoint Ger Deering as Pensions Ombudsman, alongside his role as Financial Services Ombudsman, ahead of legislation formally merging the two offices.

Changes in Membership

We were pleased to welcome three new Ombudsman Members to the Association during the year: The Property Ombudsman, Scotland; The Retail Ombudsman; and the Channel Islands Financial Ombudsman. This new intake offset the reduction of the multiple memberships held by the UK Financial Ombudsman Service (from 3 to 1) as we re-structured our subscription categories.

Resolver also joined as a Corporate Associate Member during the year. The Law Society of Scotland resigned as a corporate member because of the reduction in their complaint handling responsibilities, but their Director of Regulation joined as an Individual Associate Member to retain links with the Association.

Three Complaint Handler Members chose not to renew their membership due to budgetary pressures: Commissioner for Public Appointments; Judicial Complaints Reviewer; and the Scottish Information Commissioner.

A number of Individual Associate Members chose not to renew their membership, either because they had recently retired from all work or had left the post that was complaints related.

Forthcoming changes to Membership

The Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (a Complaint Handler Member in 2015/16 as the Service Complaints Commissioner) became an Ombudsman Member in April 2016. An application from the Motor Ombudsman (currently Motor Codes Ltd) is also due to be completed during 2016/17. Other organisations have also expressed an interest in applying for Ombudsman Membership.

Legislative proposals in Ireland to merge the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau and the Pensions Ombudsman will, in due course, reduce the number of Ombudsman Members (by one) once completed. Similarly, proposals in the UK on public sector ombudsman reform will also reduce the number of Ombudsman Members in due course.

As a result of legislative changes in Northern Ireland there will also be a reduction in the number of Complaint Handler Members over the next year. The function of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman will pass to the newly formed Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the role of the Lay Observer for Northern Ireland is also expected to be abolished.

The Director will continue to promote the benefits of Association membership when engaging with both existing and proposed dispute resolution organisations.

Membership of the Association at 31 March 2016, as compared with a year ago, is as follows:

Members	31 March 2016	31 March 2015
Ombudsman Members	32	31
Complaint Handler Members	23	26

Associate Members

Corporate	4	4
Individual	37	46
Total	96	107

Executive Committee

The role of the Executive Committee is to manage the Association on behalf of members. The membership of the Committee during 2015/16 was:

Lewis Shand Smith (Chair)

Ombudsman Services

Nick Bennett (Vice-Chair)

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Judy Clements

The Adjudicator

Elizabeth Derrington

Independent Complaints Reviewer

Kieran FitzGerald

Commissioner, Garda Síochána
Ombudsman Commission

Kevin Grix

The Furniture Ombudsman

Jane Martin

Local Government Ombudsman

Dame Julie Mellor

Parliamentary & Health Service
Ombudsman

Michael Morgan

Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Peter Tyndall

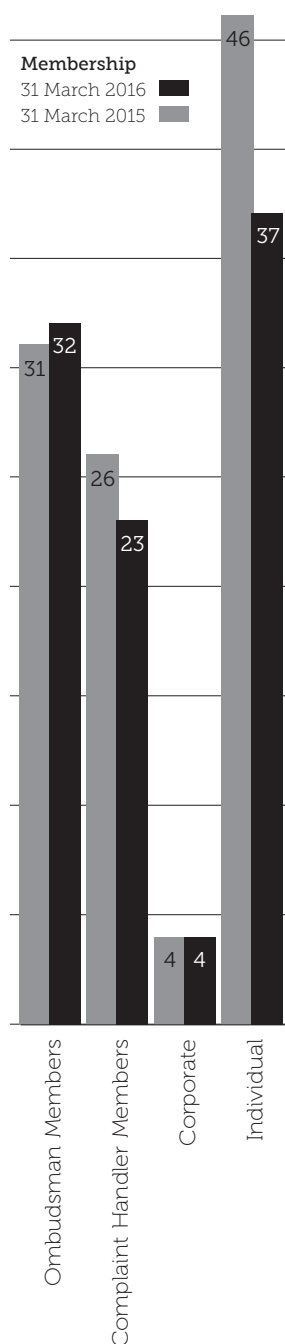
Ombudsman & Information
Commissioner, Ireland

Caroline Wayman

Chief Executive and Chief Ombudsman,
UK Financial Ombudsman Service

Donal Galligan

Interim Secretary, Ombudsman
Association (April-January)
Director, Ombudsman Association
(February-March)



The Executive Committee met five times during 2015/16:

- 10 April 2015
- 10 July 2015
- 25 September 2015
- 4 December 2015
- 26 February 2016

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.

A review was undertaken during the year to update the guidance from the Association's Executive Committee to assist the Validation Committee in making recommendations when considering applications for membership, in particular with regards to the Association's Guiding Principles regarding fragmentation of redress schemes within a single industry.

The Validation Committee's membership during 2015/16 was:

Chair

Nick Bennett

Ombudsman Association Vice-Chair

Representing Ombudsman Members

Kieran FitzGerald

Garda Síochána Ombudsman
Commission

Independent Members

Ann Abraham

(April 2015 –August 2016)

Margaret Doyle

Professor Mary Seneviratne

Chris Gill

(September-March 2016)

The three current independent members of the Association's Validation Committee were appointed in September 2015 for a two-year term, following a public call for expressions of interest. The Association is most grateful to the members of the Validation Committee for making themselves available as required.

Ann Abraham, a former Chair of the Association and the former Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman, had decided to step down as an independent member of the Validation Committee. The Executive are very grateful for the time Ann gave in recent years as an independent member of the Validation Committee.

MEMBER SCHEMES OF THE ASSOCIATION AT 31 MARCH 2016

Ombudsman Members

1. Bermuda Ombudsman
2. Channel Islands Financial Ombudsman
3. Complaints Commissioner for the British Virgin Islands
4. Complaints Commissioner for the Cayman Islands
5. Complaints Commissioner, Turks & Caicos Islands
6. Financial Ombudsman Service, UK
7. Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau, Ireland
8. Financial Services Ombudsman, Isle of Man
9. Furniture Ombudsman
10. Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission
11. Gibraltar Public Services Ombudsman
12. Health Service Ombudsman for England
13. Housing Ombudsman Service
14. Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
15. Independent Police Complaints Commission
16. Legal Ombudsman, England and Wales
17. Local Government Ombudsman, England
18. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
19. Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, Ireland
20. Ombudsman for Children, Ireland
21. Ombudsman for the Defence Forces, Ireland
22. Ombudsman Services
23. Parliamentary Ombudsman, UK
24. Pensions Ombudsman Service, UK
25. Pensions Ombudsman for Ireland
26. Property Ombudsman
27. Property Ombudsman: Scotland
28. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
29. Removals Industry Ombudsman
30. Retail Ombudsman
31. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
32. 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 (Irish 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 Services Complaints Commissioner
8. Greffier of the States of Jersey
9. IDRS Limited
10. Immigration Services Commissioner
11. Independent Case Examiner for DWP
12. Independent Complaints Reviewer (for Land Registry, The National Archives, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency and Children's Commissioner for Wales)
13. Independent Football Ombudsman
14. Information Commissioner
15. Law Society of Ireland
16. Lay Observer for Northern Ireland
17. Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman
18. Police Investigations & Review Commissioner, Scotland
19. Press Ombudsman, Ireland
20. Scottish Legal Complaints Commission
21. Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces
22. The Dispute Service Limited
23. Welsh Language Commissioner

Corporate Associate Members

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



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