

Annual Activity Report for Ombudsman Services

July 2020 - June 2021 [**Communications**]



In June 2015, Ombudsman Services: Communications (OS:C) was approved by Ofcom to provide alternative dispute resolution under the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015 (the Regulations). Services/products that fall within the jurisdiction of OS:C include those provided to domestic and/or small business customers which fall within the scope of “electronic communications services” as defined under Section 32(2) of the Communications Act 2003.

As part of Ofcom’s approval under Schedule 5, of the Regulations, OS:C is required to produce an annual activity report which contains the information below:

a) The number of domestic disputes and cross-border disputes the ADR entity has received

OS:C received 38,887 disputes during the reporting period. A dispute is defined as a request from a complainant notifying OS:C of an unresolved complaint for investigation. Of these cases 20,962 fell within the scope of what OS:C can deal with.

None of the total cases received related to Cross Border disputes.

b) The types of complaints to which the domestic disputes and cross-border disputes relate

The following tables set out the types of domestic and cross-border disputes that were referred to OS:C within the reporting period which came within the scope of what OS:C can deal with:

Non-Cross Border Complaints

Complaint Type	Number of cases
Billing	5,694
Service Quality	5,296
Customer Service	2,171
Contract Issues	3,276
Mis-sell	1,858
Equipment	1,574
Security	689
Other	164
Unknown	240
Grand total	20,962

c) A description of any systematic or significant problems that occur frequently and lead to disputes between consumers and traders of which the ADR entity has become aware due to its operations as an ADR entity

With the end of the PSTN due to take complete by the end of 2025, OS:C noticed an increase in complaints relating to the forced urgency of sales and upgrades.

On investigating these complaint types, OS:C has identified that traders are often using the end of the PSTN as a way of committing small businesses to contracts with digital solutions before absolutely necessary. In contrast, OS:C has also noticed long contracts being sold for PSTN services which will become obsolete following the PSTN switch off.

- d) Any recommendations the ADR entity may have as to how the problems referred to in paragraph (c) could be avoided or resolved in future, in order to raise traders' standards and to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices

Strengthening any training to all sales advisors, whether office based or remote, to advise of when the PSTN will be switched off and the plans the trader has in place to ensure that its consumers are switched to a digital service when necessary; instead of creating a false sense of urgency for this to happen imminently. The sales agent should complete a detailed needs analysis of the consumer ensuring that they are not prematurely switching to a digital product. Care should also be taken when offering long contracts that may become obsolete following the switch off of PSTN.

- e) The number of disputes which the ADR entity has refused to deal with and upon what grounds

The number of disputes which OS:C has refused to deal with during the reporting period was 10,957. The percentage breakdown of the reasons for refusal is given below.

Reason for refusal	% of cases
(a) Prior to submitting the complaint to you, the consumer has not attempted to contact the trader concerned in order to discuss the consumer's complaint and sought, as a first step, to resolve the matter directly with the trader	99.56 %
(b) The dispute is frivolous or vexatious.	0.32 %
(c) The dispute is being, or has been previously, considered by another certified ADR provider or by a court;	0.08 %
(d) The value of the claim falls below or above the monetary thresholds you have set.	0.00 %
(e) The consumer has not submitted a complaint to you within the time period specified by you for dealing with complaints, provided that such time period is not less than 12 Months from the date upon which the trader has given notice to the consumer that the trader is unable to resolve the complaint with the consumer.	0.00 %
(f) Dealing with such a type of dispute would seriously impair the effective operation of your ADR operation.	0.04%

- f) The percentage of alternative dispute resolution procedures which were discontinued for operational reasons and, if known, the reasons for the discontinuation

During the reporting period, OS:C discontinued a total of 0 cases.

- g) The average time taken to resolve domestic disputes and cross-border disputes;

The average time taken to resolve a domestic dispute is 80 days. This is calculated from the date the complaint was received from the consumer rather than the date a full complaint file had been received from both parties.

No cross-border disputes were received.

h) The rate of compliance, if known, with the outcomes of the alternative dispute resolution procedures;

In the reporting period 96.8% of remedies were implemented within 28 days and 2.36% implemented outside of 28 days. Of the total confirmed remedies 0.83% remain unimplemented after 28 days.

i) The co-operation if any, of the ADR entity within any network of ADR entities which facilitates the resolution of cross-border disputes

OS:C has not investigated any cross-border disputes during the reporting period. OS:C is a member of the Telecoms-Net group of European ADR entities. The group shares best practice relating to ADR in the sector.



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