



## Property complaints up 8%

During 2014/15 we handled 1001 property complaints, 8% more than the previous year. The number of complaints about property management in particular increased from 16% last year to 24% this year. However this was second to the number of complaints about homebuyer surveys and valuations, which made up 42% of the cases we handled.

The increase was expected given the new legislation in October 2014, which required all lettings and management agents in England to be signed up to a government-approved property redress scheme. After obtaining approval from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to continue operating in this area, we welcomed an additional 150 firms to our service, increasing protection for landlords and tenants.

## Changes for the better

We support efforts to improve the industry by government and other bodies.

Ahead of the legislative change, we worked with leading property organisations to input into a best practice code for the private rental industry. The code, developed at the request of DCLG and facilitated by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), was intended to put pressure on landlords to perform better in areas such as repair and maintenance, terminating tenancies and honesty when advertising properties.

We also welcomed rulings by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) on auction guide prices, agency fees inclusive of VAT and the disclosure of material information.

## Working with the industry

We are the chosen ombudsman scheme for the RICS, the Association for Residential Managing Agents (ARMA) and the UK Association of Letting Agents (UKALA). We also have a close working relationship with the National Approved Letting Scheme (NALS).

We meet with these organisations regularly to analyse complaint trends and identify areas where training or guidance might be beneficial. We also attend stakeholder events and conferences to discuss consumer complaints, offer advice and highlight the benefits our service brings to participating companies and their customers.

For example:

- In November 2014 Ombudsman Services presented at the NALS conference in London and was interviewed; we provided advice about winning customer loyalty by effectively resolving complaints.
- In March 2015 we exhibited at the fifteenth annual West of England Landlord Expo in Bristol, attended by hundreds of landlords, letting agents and managers. The expo covered subjects such as planning finances, fire safety requirements in rented accommodation and the provision of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). It gave us an opportunity to discuss lettings complaints and the service we provide.

In addition to this, we continue to work with the media to offer advice about property complaints and ensure that consumers know what to do if they have an issue they cannot resolve.

In October 2014 we published research into student complaints. The report revealed that 1.7 million (74%) students have experienced problems with their accommodation, energy or telecoms provider, one quarter (27%) of students feel 'powerless' against landlords and 117,000 students have experienced threatening and abusive landlords. We published a student Know your rights guide, offering advice about moving into rented accommodation, and we talked about the findings of our research on regional radio stations. The guide is available on our website [www.ombudsman-services.org/student-guide](http://www.ombudsman-services.org/student-guide).

# Property year at a glance

## Total initial contacts

5,265



## How these contacts got in touch

1,770

(34%) Telephone



3,495

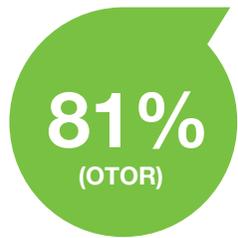
(66%) Written



## Of those written contacts

84%

2,925 were emails



81% of contacts were outside terms of reference (OTOR)



19% of contacts were inside terms of reference (ITOR)



## Awards and remedies



16%

565 were letters



<1%

301 were web forms



## Key performance indicators (KPIs)

96% of calls answered in less than 2 minutes

99% of calls answered in less than 5 minutes

100% of correspondence actioned within 10 days

95% resolved in under 8 weeks

<1%

5 were faxes



## Contacts outside terms of reference



51% about participating companies but outside of our remit\*

47% non participating company enquiries

2% general enquiries and literature requests

\*Includes complaints that are premature, too old or require more information

## Of the complaints resolved

1% pre-investigation case closure

0% early resolution

4% mutually acceptable settlements

95% Ombudsman Services decision



The most common financial award was £100

## Top three complaint types

