



Communications Sector Report

January to December 2017

Communications

Sector Report January - December 2017

New ways of working

We started to work with the regulator, Ofcom, and both agreed that Ombudsman Services would publish data on our website about our largest companies for the first time in March 2017.

Initially, Ombudsman Services only published the types of complaint received. Later in the year, we started to publish complaint outcomes, for example, whether the complaints were upheld or not. Ombudsman Services wants to work with the industry to develop data publication further, such as the number of complaints received for each provider, in the context of the size of the business.

Collaboration with communications providers

In 2017, Ombudsman Services carried out analysis of the complaints we received to determine the root cause of complaints and provided detailed feedback to relevant providers where we saw a problem.

We ran calibration sessions and insight sessions with complaint handling teams to help them understand how we approach complaints. We also reviewed providers' complaint handling procedures to help them become more effective at complaint handling.

2017 also saw us trial a helpdesk for providers to use if they were unsure of how we are likely to approach a particular complaint.

Complaint trends and issues in the sector

We saw a significant reduction in complaints in 2017 progressed. We received over 3,700 complaints in January 2017, which reduced to 1,700 received in December 2017. Much of the complaint reduction was driven by a participating company resolving long standing billing issues. Several providers experienced case number reductions, which suggests improvements in the sector.

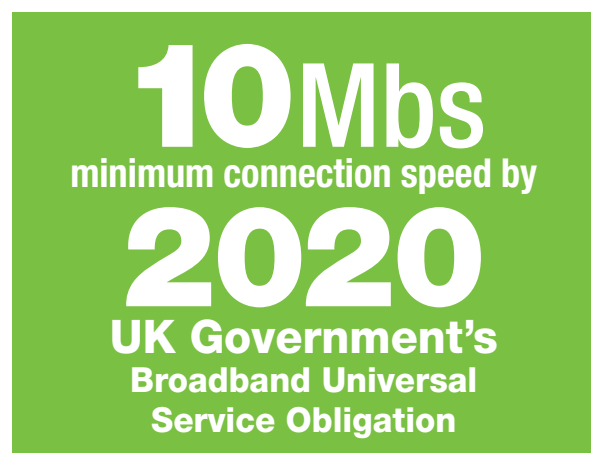
This is particularly impressive against the backdrop of an increase in communications providers telling consumers about their right to contact Ombudsman Services, which we also saw in 2017.

In fixed line complaints, complaints about service quality continue to dominate.

Most providers do not have direct control over network issues – which are the responsibility of Openreach. However, the way in which service providers respond to fault reports can add to customer's frustrations. In the complaints we have received, we have seen some cases of providers expecting customers to repeat the same diagnostic tests over and over again, closing faults down prematurely before a lasting repair is achieved, failing to call customers back as promised and sending the wrong type of engineer to fix a problem.

We also think that in some circumstances, providers have taken far too long to conclude their investigations into a fault. With this in mind, Ombudsman Services welcomes new initiatives to improve the services customers receive.

The government has announced a Broadband Universal Service Obligation, which will entitle most consumers to a broadband connection of at least 10Mbps. Ofcom has revised its Code of Practice for broadband speeds (March 2018), strengthening a consumer's right to cancel their contract if the




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provider cannot provide the speed of connection promised at the outset of the agreement. In 2019, customers will be entitled to auto compensation if things go wrong.

New Roam Like at Home regulations came into effect in June 2017. These new rules meant that consumers would be entitled to use their inclusive

 **As broadband becomes more and more central to people's lives, it is essential the industry continue to improve the services customers receive.** 

minutes while abroad, which should hopefully help people to avoid bill shock.

Complaints about billing, including complaints from customers who have received unexpectedly high bills, represent over 40% of complaints about mobile services. We have seen several initiatives designed to help people avoid bill shock in recent years. Ombudsman Services feels that mobile providers need to understand that it is no longer acceptable to allow customers to run up bills they cannot easily afford to pay and have made several high awards in 2017, where this has been allowed to happen.

In October 2018, we look forward to the introduction of a new requirement for providers to offer to cap mobile customers' bills, as a further measure designed to help people manage their spend.

Customers are increasingly taking their communications services by way of a bundle.

This can be more convenient and cheaper for consumers. However, bundles can discourage customers from switching, even when it might be in their best interest to do so. We have also become

concerned with how some providers have bundled up regulated and unregulated services.

Communications providers are not permitted to offer a contract for regulated products of over 24 months, but there is no such rule for unregulated services. Some providers have bundled up regulated and unregulated services where the unregulated service has a contract of over 24 months – which could act as a disincentive for the customer to switch services. Ombudsman Services has raised this with the communications providers concerned.

Customer satisfaction

In January 2017, we launched our customer satisfaction programme to key stakeholders of Ombudsman Services – consumers, participating companies and key external stakeholders such as Ofcom and Citizens Advice.

The 360° feedback we received during 2017 has helped us to understand perception of the service; our independence and impartiality; where we influence and add value to key external stakeholders.

Feedback received from users of the service has helped us to understand the consumer's experience of the customer journey, which has driven process improvements in an effort to maximise overall consumer satisfaction.

Overall consumer satisfaction in the communications sector was 71% - an increase of 8 percentage points from 2016. Overall speed and efficiency saw an increase of 23 percentage points from 2016 to 76% in 2017.

For more information about what we do and examples of how we handle complaints, please visit our website www.ombudsman-services.org/communications

Communications at a glance

Total initial contacts

78,085

How these contacts got in touch

36,639

47% Telephone 

41,446

53% Written 

of those written contacts

45%
18,647 web forms 

43%
17,835 emails 

12%
4,927 letters 

>0%
7 fax 

49% of contacts were inside our terms of reference (ITOR)

51% of contacts were outside our terms of reference (OTOR)

Contacts outside of terms of reference

32% More information was required

27% Premature complaint

11% Complaint about a non-member company

9% Not a customer of the company

21% Other

Complaints resolved

41,751

of the complaints resolved

Upheld **58%**

Not upheld **19%**

Settled **10%**

Maintained **13%**

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

100% of correspondence actioned within 10 days

73% resolved in under 6 weeks

78% resolved in under 8 weeks

Top complaint types

34% Billing

26% Service quality

14% Contract issues

Awards and remedies

 **2%** Financial

 **11%** Non-financial

 **86%** Both

The logo for Ombudsman Services features a stylized 'O' composed of a multi-colored ring (blue, green, yellow, orange, red) on the left. To the right of the 'O', the word 'Ombudsman' is written in a bold, grey, sans-serif font, and the word 'Services' is written below it in a larger, bold, grey, sans-serif font.

Ombudsman Services

Good for consumers – Good for business

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