



Financial
Ombudsman
Service

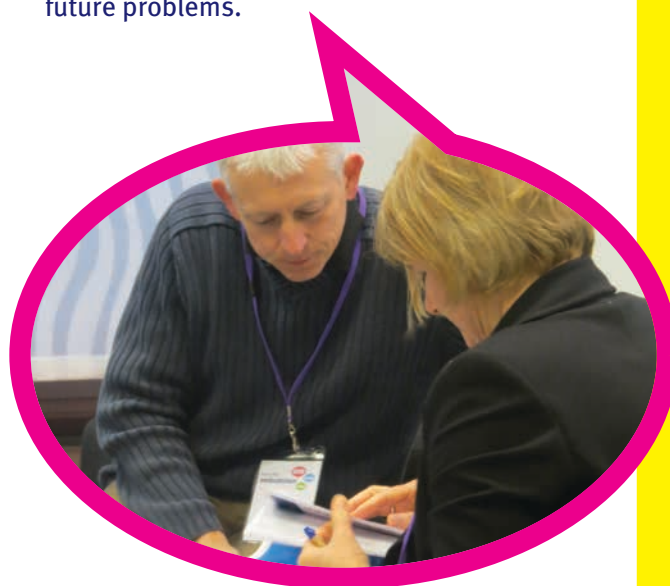
financial year 2015 | 2016

annual review of consumer complaints about ...

INSURANCE • **CREDIT** • **BANKING** • **SAVINGS** • **INVESTMENTS**

about the financial ombudsman

- We were set up under the *Financial Services and Markets Act 2000* to resolve individual disputes between consumers and financial businesses – fairly, reasonably, quickly and informally.
- We handle complaints about all kinds of money matters – from insurance and mortgages to savings and payday loans.
- If a financial business isn't able to resolve a customer complaint, we can step in to settle the dispute. But the business should have the chance to sort things out itself first.
- We're independent and impartial. When we decide a complaint, we look carefully at both sides of the story and weigh up all the facts.
- If we decide the business has treated its customer fairly, we'll explain why. But if we decide the business has acted wrongly, we can order it to put matters right.
- Our service is free to consumers.
- Consumers don't have to accept any decision we make. But if they accept an ombudsman's decision, it's binding both on them and the business.
- We don't write the rules for financial businesses – or fine them if rules are broken. That's the job of the regulator.
- Everyone can learn something from complaints – so that what's gone wrong in the past needn't happen again. This is why we have a crucial role in sharing what we see – to help prevent future problems.



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our year at a glance



- We answered 1,631,955 enquiries from consumers – over 5,000 each working day.
- We took on one in five of these enquiries for a more detailed investigation – a total of 340,899 new complaints.
- We resolved 438,802 complaints – almost 100,000 more than we received.
- 75% of people whose complaints we resolved rated us positively. And of those who felt they hadn't got the outcome they'd hoped for, 57% still gave us positive feedback – a rise of 16% on last year.
- 56% of new complaints were about the sale of payment protection insurance (PPI) – 188,712 complaints overall.
- Excluding PPI, we resolved two thirds of complaints within three months.
- Complaints about packaged bank accounts more than doubled – while complaints about credit broking fell by more than half.
- More than half of the total number of complaints we dealt with involved four banking groups – while 4,076 financial businesses accounted for just 3% of complaints.
- The proportion of people from an unskilled background (the DE socio-economic group) who used our service rose by just under half.
- Overall awareness of the ombudsman continued to rise – with nearly nine in ten people having some awareness of our service.
- We operated on a cost base of £257.9 million with 3,676 employees at the end of the year.
- More than nine in ten of the businesses and consumer advisers who met us face to face agreed they got clear, useful answers to take back to their organisation.

All figures relate to the financial year 2015/2016

chairman's foreword

This review gives us the opportunity to reflect both on our achievements over the year and on our purpose. The achievements are a tribute to the commitment and professionalism of our people for which I am hugely thankful. The figures show a year of substantial progress in settling complaints, in focusing on customer satisfaction both for consumers and businesses, and in making inroads into the volumes of cases with which the fall-out of payment protection insurance inevitably left us.



Sir Nicholas Montagu KCB



But, important though it is that we have resolved 100,000 more complaints than we have received this year, this is only part of the picture. It may be a truism that behind every case lies a human story, but it is one which we forget at our peril. In a perfect world nothing would go wrong – and there would be no need for complaints handling at all. But that world does not exist – and probably never will – which brings us back to our purpose.

It would be possible for us to judge complaints on the basis of what is fair and leave it at that. That could be efficiency of a sort, but not of a sort that we would ever espouse. A complaint being escalated to us means that earlier attempts at agreement have failed; it also suggests that there may be upset and frustration on one or both sides. Our involvement should aim to dispel those emotions.

That is why we set such store by our answers not only *being* fair, but *feeling* so. Our initial conversation with consumers enables us to probe their concerns and manage their expectations. Similarly, our contact with financial providers gives them assurance that we are not burdening them with unnecessary process, and that our approach is transparent, consistent, professional and sensitive to where they are coming from.



So we need to get away from the idea of “cases” – suggestive of stacks of paperwork and a prolonged process – and think more about what causes disputes and how we can stop them from happening in the first place. If we can enable consumers and financial providers to identify and focus on the real underlying concerns, and get them resolved quickly and informally, everyone wins. This is why we have continued to streamline our own internal processes this year; and I have been encouraged by and grateful for the readiness of financial providers to work with us in helping to do this.

Results are encouraging. The satisfaction rates among consumers whose complaints we don't uphold

are always a good indicator of how we are doing. Talking to some of our teams who are using these new ways of working, I was delighted to discover that among consumers whose complaints we have not upheld, a significant majority are satisfied nevertheless, feeling that they have been listened to and that they have received a clear explanation as to how things stand. So often, this satisfaction is just a question of our being able to step in as early as possible – to talk people through the reasons and the complexities behind their problem.

Of course some complaints may still involve reams of paper going back years. But the main thing is that we are more flexible, gearing our

approach to the fairest and quickest result. There are lots of issues to be decided along the way, but I believe that we have a genuinely stronger partnership with financial providers than ever before, with the shared aspiration of fairer, quicker outcomes for their customers.

I have also been encouraged by the strength of our relationship with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). While respecting our different responsibilities and boundaries, we have continued to work together constructively to address our common concerns, to the advantage of all our customers.

As ever, I should record my gratitude to my Board for their unfailing wisdom and support. Gwyn Burr left us during the year, and I thank her for her insights and the customer focus she brought – we were extremely lucky to secure Gill Whitehead as her successor.

We might legitimately rest on some of the laurels highlighted in this review of the year – but that is not something we would do. Instead we look forward to the coming year with the usual mixture of apprehension and enthusiasm. The commitment, energy and optimism of our people mean that enthusiasm will get the upper hand.



Nick Montagu

May 2016

chief ombudsman's report

In March 2016 we received our one-and-a-half millionth complaint about payment protection insurance (PPI) – accounting for half of all the complaints we've received since we were set up. These volumes of complaints – and the rate at which they're still arriving each week – reflect the scale of the challenge that remains, two years after the peak of PPI, of fully restoring trust in financial services.

I'm encouraged that the recent *Financial Advice Market Review*, carried out by HM Treasury and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), is supportive of our role in resolving complaints, as well as the wider work we do. And I'm confident that this *annual review* of 2015/2016 shows we've largely met the challenges we set ourselves at the beginning of the year – helping people move on from past unfairness, while building a service that's fit for the future.



Caroline Wayman

“... keeping fairness at our heart – being fair and feeling fair ...”



Fairness is fundamental to our work at the ombudsman. It's something that's continued to guide us throughout 2015/2016 – from the way we've approached each problem that consumers have referred to us, to the way we've managed and developed our service, and the way we've shared our insight and experience.

But if one thing's clear from the problems we see, it's that there's no set formula for fairness.

Everyday life doesn't follow set rules – so problem-solving requires flexibility and pragmatism. And for our answers to feel fair – as well as being technically sound – we need to show we've understood what really matters to the individual people involved.

So it's reassuring that, once again this year, a significant majority of businesses and consumers agreed that we got to grips with the problems they brought to us.

“... providing insight to encourage fairness ...”

Maintaining our customers' confidence in our service depends on our answers being clearly and consistently fair. As businesses look to learn and move on from past mistakes, this becomes increasingly important.

To give greater clarity and certainty around what we believe fairness looks like, during 2015/2016 we published around 35,000 of our ombudsmen's decisions – meaning that, since 2013, we've shared publicly our final answers to more than 100,000 individual complaints.



After listening to feedback, we've improved our online database of these decisions, so people can more easily find the insight they need to help stop the unfairness of the past repeating itself.

Since 2001 we've published 132 issues of *ombudsman news* – subscribed to by 14,000 people – to show our fair approach in action. Across the eight editions we've published this year, we've highlighted wide-reaching themes and challenges – including customer vulnerability, ageing and debt – which it's vital that financial businesses, regulators and other experts work together to address.

And after sharing our concerns about payday loans last year, we've continued to provide insight and promote discussion around problems we're consistently seeing – including perceived age discrimination, small businesses' dependence on financial providers, and the never-ending evolution of banking scams.


In our independent position, we hear both sides of every story – in hundreds of thousands of individual circumstances each year. The window this gives us into changing attitudes and wider concerns – together with our horizon-scanning work – means we’re often able to identify emerging patterns and trends.

So it’s essential that we maintain our close relationship with the FCA, who can take action to prevent problems from escalating. Over the last year, we’ve supported the FCA’s work around a wide range of key issues and themes – from debt management and consumer vulnerability, to small businesses’ experience of financial services.

And following the *Financial Advice Market Review*, over the coming months we’ll be ensuring we’re making the very best contribution we can towards fairness in this area.

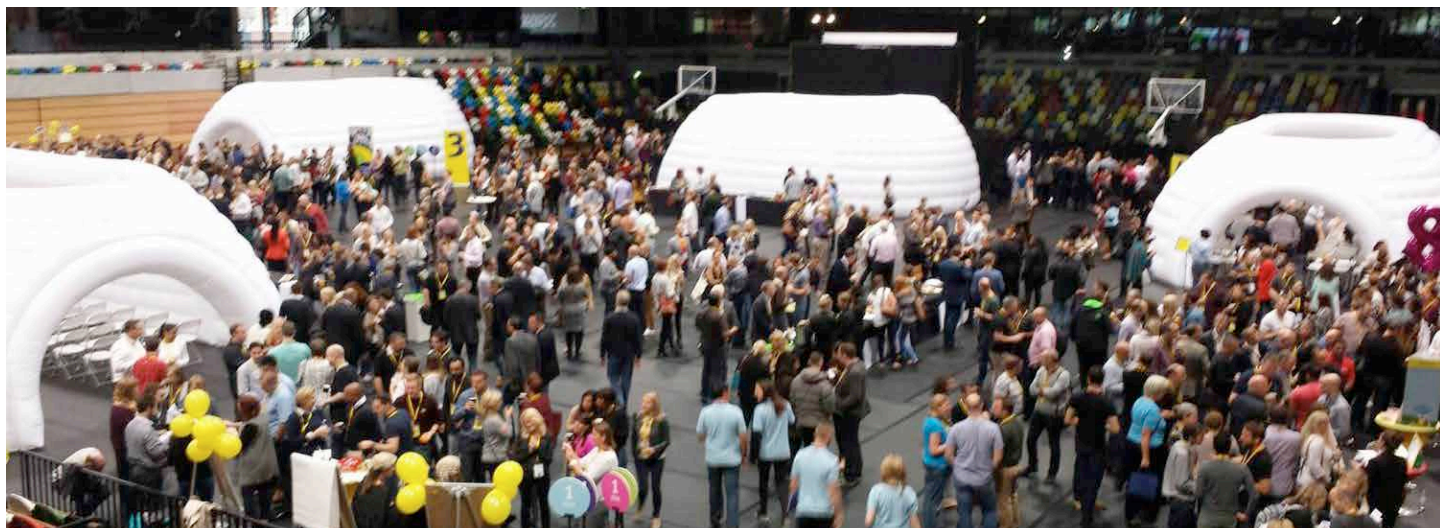
We’ve also continued to support the work of policymakers – who’ve called on our impartial insight into fairness in financial services. As the fall-out of PPI continued into this year, in March 2016 I talked to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee about the unprecedented challenges we’ve faced – as MPs considered financial services mis-selling, in light of the National Audit Office’s recent review in this area.

And in response to the persistent activity of claims managers, our relationship with the Ministry of Justice and the Claims Management Regulator – as well as our frank dialogue with claims managers themselves – has helped to reduce the unfair burden of inappropriate claims, on us as well as on financial businesses.



“... be trusted and respected – we’re the people who listen and know what to do ...”

These conversations with our stakeholders – have helped to ensure that throughout 2015/2016, we’ve continued to influence long-lasting decisions about fairness. But it’s also essential that our approach is understood and applied on the complaints front-line – where millions of individual decisions about fairness are made every day.



So once again this year, we've met people working for the larger financial businesses – whose customers account for a significant proportion of UK consumers as a whole. At our workshops for businesses, we've challenged complaints-handlers to find fair answers to some of the toughest disputes we see – involving people in vulnerable circumstances, including those who face losing their home and their security.

We've also met hundreds of small financial businesses – from car dealerships and insurance brokers, to pawnbrokers and IFAs – who may not know the ins-and-outs of the ombudsman, because their customers rarely, if ever, complain.

This engagement involved running dozens of our practical workshops across the UK – as well as working with local business groups and forums.

And we've continued to engage with trade associations and networks – who've again helped us to identify and respond to their members' questions and concerns.

I hope that the volumes of calls to our technical helpline – more than 23,000 enquiries in 2015/2016, a rise of around 10% on the previous year – is a good reflection that people on the front-line of financial services continue to look to us for clarity and common sense.

To make sure this continues to be the case, we've needed to carry on investing in our people. Collectively at the ombudsman, the breadth of our experience and industry-recognised qualifications means we're equipped to find a fair answer to each and every problem that's brought to us – whether it's a case of clearing up a misunderstanding, or unpicking a long-standing and complex dispute.

As I regularly highlight, there's considerable uncertainty around the number and nature of the problems we'll be called on to sort out in the future. And increasingly too – as this *annual review* shows – the issues we're seeing cut across the traditional categories of financial services.

So in particular this year – to make sure we're able to respond flexibly to changes in demand – we've focused on developing our capability and capacity to handle a greater breadth of problems. And to complement their technical product knowledge, we've continued to develop our people's wider problem-solving expertise.

“... be recognised as well run and efficient ...”

I know that our stakeholders – and particularly the financial businesses who fund us – expect a service that's value for money, as well as having expertise.

So over the last year, we've challenged and improved our ways of working – squeezing our budgets and making efficiencies across our operation. These have included streamlining our support functions, developing our use of electronic files, and improving our environmental performance.

Our focus on value means that, over the course of 2015/2016, we've provided our service at a lower cost. Two thirds of our work was again paid for by the largest businesses whose customers use us the most. So while we once again froze our individual case fee for businesses, more than nine in ten businesses whose customers complained to us didn't actually pay any case fee at all.


Unfortunately, we've still needed to invest considerable resources to put right the mis-selling problems of the past. Years after the peak of the scandal, the fall-out of mis-sold PPI has continued to have an impact on our work. And uncertainty resulting from the Supreme Court case of *Plevin vs Paragon Finance* – involving the level of commission on a PPI policy – meant we haven't been able to progress a significant number of cases as quickly as we would have liked.

This is clearly disappointing – and I'm grateful for our customers' ongoing patience and cooperation. I'm determined to make sure we continue to use our experience of PPI to prevent unfairness on this scale in the future.

But despite the continuing challenge presented by PPI, we've remained focused on ensuring we're ready for the future. In 2015/2016 the new ways of working that we've been trialling over recent years have increasingly become business as usual for us. I'm really encouraged by the enthusiasm we've seen among businesses – as we've worked together to remove barriers to finding fair answers at the earliest possible stage.

Our focus on efficiency and flexibility means that, in all our work other than PPI, we've resolved two thirds of complaints within three months. We've also shown we can reach the standards expected of us under the EU directive on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) – after being approved as an official ADR provider in July 2015.

As we've invested in our people, we've also improved our infrastructure for sharing their combined know-how – strengthening our ombudsmen's role at the heart of our service, and launching our digital knowledge management platform.



“... making sure we reach and help those who need us ...”

These improvements aren't only about showing we're a modern service. They're also crucial if we're to reach people who are turned off

by the perceived bureaucracy of the “complaints process”.

As we’ve continued to develop our digital services this year, thousands more people have got in touch directly with us from a mobile device – without having to download a traditional form if they want to take things further.

And of course, with people increasingly using social media to complain, these informal channels are increasingly becoming part of our own service. During the year we engaged with consumers, businesses and others who share our interest in fairness – providing answers and direction in thousands of online conversations.

We’ve also continued to use feedback to develop our online resources – helping people to find fair answers without our direct involvement. In 2015/2016 we added a range of practical problem-solving tools – covering areas ranging from packaged bank accounts and payday loans, to car insurance and equity release.

But we recognise that not everyone is – or wants to be – online. Reflecting this, over the course of the year we received over 1.6 million enquiries

from people who wanted to talk through the problem they were having.

The value people place on human conversation goes to the heart of our awareness-raising work. During 2015/2016 we’ve looked for new ways to engage with local communities – including, as we’ve highlighted in this *annual review*, meeting hundreds of local people and businesses in Birmingham’s Bullring shopping centre.

We’ve again shared our experience with front-line advisers – who help us reach people who may not know about us, or feel confident contacting us themselves. Together with featuring in thousands of media stories, this means we’ve been able to encourage fairness without the costs of local offices – giving practical support to communities across the UK. While public trust in financial services remains a work in progress, it’s reassuring that consumer confidence in us has grown – with three in four adults now saying they trust us.

The diversity of the communities who rely on us continues to be reflected in the backgrounds and

experience that our people bring to their everyday work. And at a time when, disappointingly, women still remain under-represented in senior roles in many areas of business, I'm pleased that women account for half our professional leaders at the ombudsman.

But true diversity has to be more than just quotas and figures. For us it's part of our commitment to making fairness central to everything we do.

“... remembering what matters ...”

Our line of work – finding fair answers to problems – inevitably involves looking back. Reflecting on 2015/2016, it's clear there's still a lot of hard work to be done before we can all finally move on from PPI.

But I hope this *annual review* shows we're focused firmly ahead – building a service that's accessible, sustainable and relevant to life today. The progress we've made speaks to the enthusiasm and hard work of the people who work here – for which, once again I am hugely grateful.

As financial businesses look to innovate and adapt, new questions about fairness will be asked. As this happens, the types of conversations we've been having this year – sharing our experience and providing common sense and clarity – will become only more important.

That's a big responsibility. But I'm confident that we're on a sure footing to find answers to those questions – encouraging fairness and confidence into the future.



Caroline Wayman

May 2016



“... around half had gone on to sort out the problems themselves – and nine out of ten of those people said our early help and advice had helped them to do this”

“... we’ve continued to develop our online resources – so people can get our answer to problems they’re having at a time that’s convenient for them”

sorting things early on

sorting things early on

getting in touch with us

Throughout 2015/2016 we received over 1.6 million enquiries from people with questions, concerns and complaints about money matters – over 5,000 each working day. These early conversations are a key part of our work to prevent complaints from escalating – and to encourage confidence in financial services.

Mr F's car dealership had received a complaint from a customer about the quality of a car bought on finance. He'd never had a complaint before, so he got in touch with us about where to start. After listening to what had happened, we directed him to relevant case studies on our website – to help him resolve the problem himself.

Mr V had read a story online about bank account scams – and contacted us through social media, worried that he'd been tricked as well. We replied to Mr V within minutes, and provided a link to useful information from Action Fraud to all our social media followers.

Mrs E was finding it hard to understand the final response she'd received from her bank about her packaged bank account complaint. We explained the jargon she was confused about – and talked through the features of the account that her bank was saying might have been useful to her. Mrs E said she felt reassured that the account hadn't been a waste of money – and was happy not to take things further.

This early help and support can involve:

- Unpicking people's frustration, confusion or upset – giving practical suggestions and directing people to online resources to help them resolve problems themselves.
- Reassuring people confused or put off by the jargon and perceived red tape of the complaints process – and, where necessary, directing people to financial businesses to raise their concerns in the first instance.
- Giving an informal steer, based on our experience, about whether a business's response to a complaint seems fair – and explaining the next steps for people who want to take things further.
- Signposting people to appropriate organisations and services – for example, free debt charities, other ombudsmen and regulators.
- Monitoring the types of enquiries we're hearing – and sharing any trends with stakeholders to help them take relevant action to prevent potential problems.

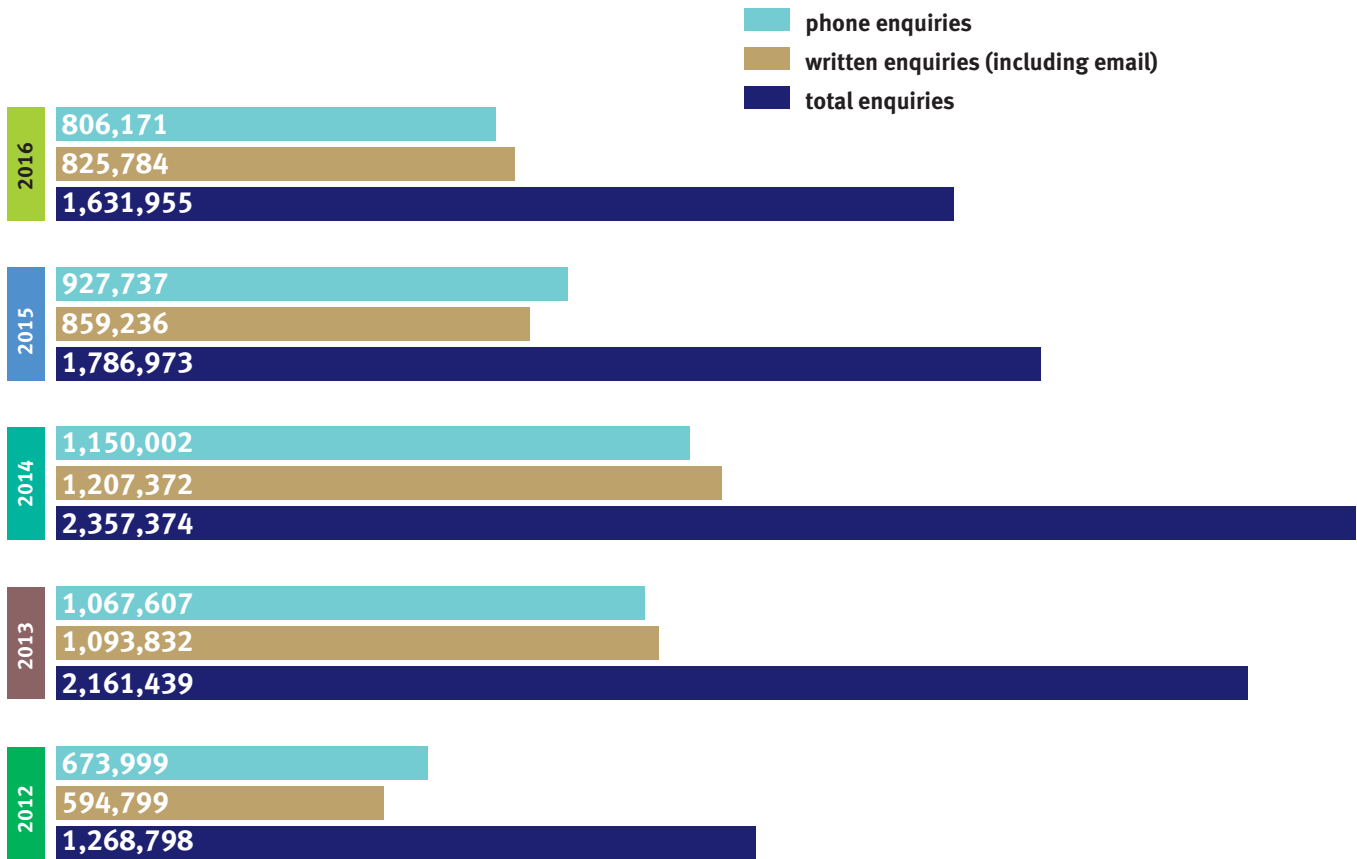
While the volumes of people getting in touch with us directly remain very high, they're slightly lower compared with recent years. This reflects the gradual fall in complaints about payment protection insurance (PPI).

People also use a wide range of channels to get in touch with us now – for example, sending us enquiries through mobile devices, or asking us quick questions over social media – as well as using our free phone number.

And as we've continued to expand and improve our online resources, more people are finding answers themselves – without needing to get in touch with us directly. As we explain later in this chapter, our online presence is an important part of our complaints prevention work.



the number of enquiries we received



year ended 31 March 2016

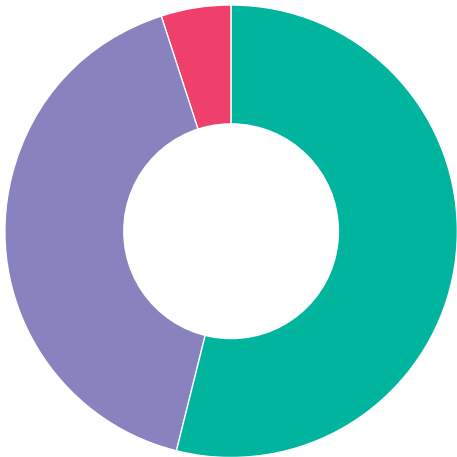
Mrs B contacted us after her business received a complaint from a couple who weren't happy with the investment scheme some of their pension pot had been put into. We explained that we'd recently been receiving a steady stream of similar questions – and pointed Mrs B to our online case studies, to help her understand what she'd need to consider.

Mr U approached us at a drop-in centre we were holding in his local area. He'd invested in a business opportunity that had gone wrong – but wasn't sure if we were the right people to help. After talking through the situation, we established that it was something we could look into. We gave Mr U some on-the-spot advice about how to raise his concerns – and explained how he could get in touch if he couldn't sort things out.

Mr and Mrs S had complained to their bank about PPI – and had received an offer of compensation. But they'd heard that banks could sometimes get this kind of thing wrong. We explained how the bank would have reached their answer – and confirmed that, based on our experience, we thought the offer was fair.

sorting things early on

the phone numbers people used to contact us

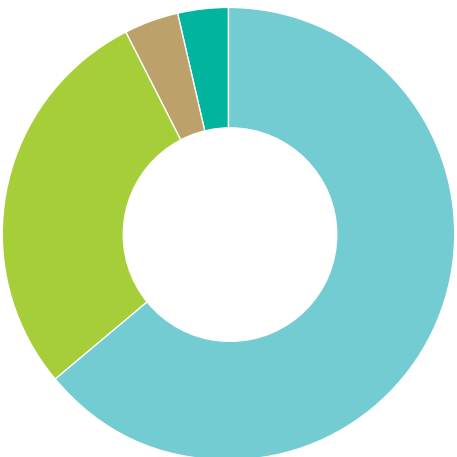


- 0800 023 4567 **54%**
- 0300 123 9123 **41%**
- 0845 080 1800 **5%**

This year more than half of everyone who called us used our 0800 phone number – which since July 2015 has been free from mobiles as well as landlines. Until then, our 0300 number was the cheapest option for mobile users.

Calls to our 0845 number dropped again, as we continued to remind businesses and other organisations that give out our details that we've had cheaper – or free – alternatives for some years.

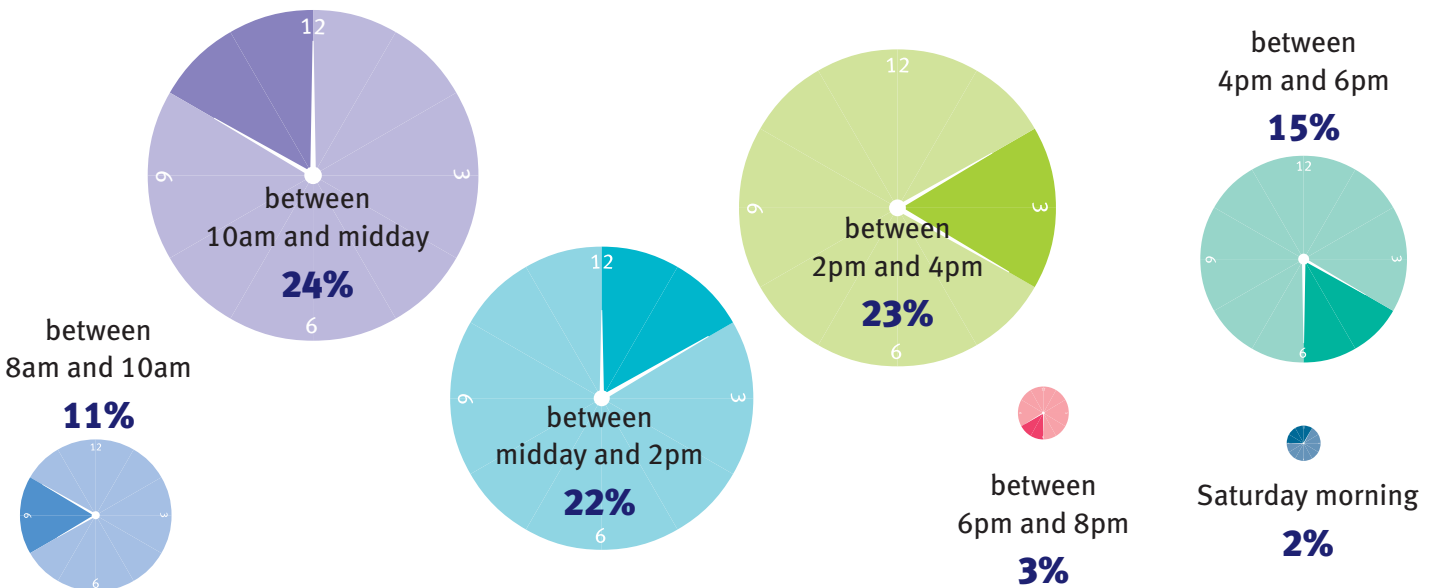
how people called us



- from a landline phone **64%**
- from a mobile phone **28.5%**
- overseas / unknown / other **4%**
- calls made over the internet **3.5%**

This year the proportion of calls we received from mobiles grew by more than a third, while calls from landlines fell by 12%. Calls made over internet services, including via Skype, also increased by around a third. Once again, we received a steady number of calls from people using a payphone – 1,677 this year.

the time of day people phoned us



As a service for everyone in the UK, it's essential that people can contact us at times that fit in with their different lifestyles and commitments.

Since 2013 people have been able to phone us from 8am to 8pm on weekdays, and 9am to 1pm on Saturdays. Our busiest times tend to be Mondays and Tuesdays between 10am and midday – when we received an average of around 450 phone calls an hour this year.

Being mentioned on television or the radio can cause a sudden sharp increase in phone calls. Monday 1 February 2016 was our busiest day this year – when we received 4,291 calls. This followed significant media interest over the weekend in the consultation by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) on bringing in a time limit for complaints about mis-sold PPI.

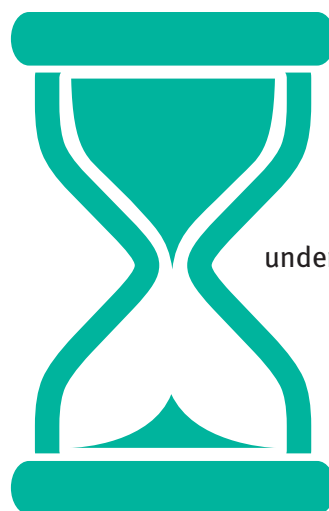
In contrast, the quietest time was the last two weeks in December 2015. But some people still had money problems on their mind over the festive season – with more than 1,400 people visiting our website on Christmas Day.

This year around half the phone calls people made to us lasted five minutes or less – reflecting the fact we're generally able to very quickly give people the practical answers they need to take things forward.

This year we answered 81% of calls that weren't about PPI within 20 seconds – meeting our target of 80%, which is in line with widely-used customer service standards.

Looking only at calls about PPI, we answered 95% within 20 seconds – up from 84% in the previous year.

how long the calls lasted



under 3 minutes **34.5%**



between 3 and 5 minutes **16.5%**



between 5 and 10 minutes **21%**



between 10 and 15 minutes **15.5%**



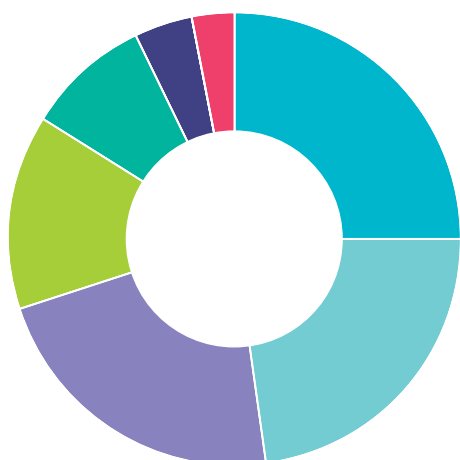
between 15 and 20 minutes **6%**

over 20 minutes **6.5%**



sorting things early on

how people first heard about us



● on the internet	25%
● from a financial business	23%
● from a friend, relative or colleague	22%
● in the media	14%
● from a consumer advice agency (eg Trading Standards or Citizens Advice)	9%
● from a claims management company	4%
● other and don't know	3%

We ask people who contact us with an enquiry how they first heard about us – so we can understand how to focus our awareness raising work most effectively.

This year one in four people said they'd found out about us on the internet. This could reflect the number of times we've been mentioned online – as well as the number of websites that link to our own.

And a similar proportion told us they'd heard about the ombudsman from a friend, relative or colleague.

There's more information about how we make sure people know about us in the chapter *who complained to us*.



our leaflet – *your complaint and the ombudsman*

Nearly a quarter of people who got in touch with us said they'd heard about us from the financial business they'd complained to. Under the rules about handling complaints, businesses are required to send their customers our leaflet – *your complaint and the ombudsman* – when they give their final response to a complaint.

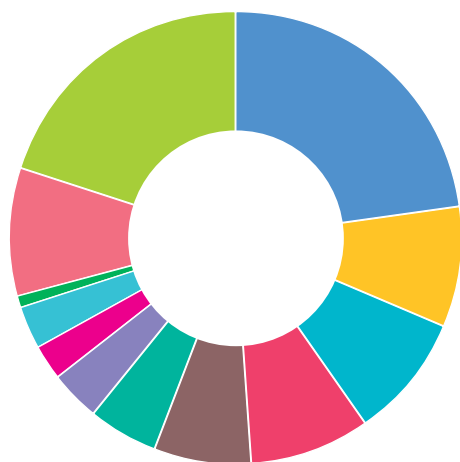
During the year we ran focus groups across the country to see how people responded to our leaflet. As a result of their comments and suggestions, we made a number of changes to the content and design.

We also reviewed the leaflet in light of changes to the FCA rules about

how businesses handle complaints, which have applied since 2015. These changes mean we can now officially get involved in a complaint during the eight weeks that businesses have traditionally had to respond – if the business and consumer both agree to this.

In 2015/2016 we distributed more than a million copies of our leaflet. It's free of charge to consumer advice agencies, libraries and other community centres – and we can provide it in a wide range of languages and formats. We charge businesses for bulk supplies, but they can print it themselves under a licence from us.

what people first contacted us about



This year just under a quarter of people who contacted us with an enquiry wanted to talk to us about PPI. This is down from almost one in three, two years ago. The relative proportions of calls about other issues remained broadly the same.

The increase in the number of people who've contacted us about packaged bank accounts this year is probably a result of the media attention these accounts have received. We were often able to signpost people to our practical online resources – which explain our approach to the common concerns we hear about packaged accounts.

In contrast, we saw a marked decrease in volumes of enquires about credit broking. During the year we continued to

share the problems we were seeing in this area – particularly where people had been charged several fees, but hadn't actually received a loan.

Money matters cut across most areas of life – whether it's paying utility bills, getting paid or receiving welfare payments. So it isn't surprising that when something goes wrong, some people contact the financial ombudsman for help in the first instance. In these cases, we're often able to quickly explain the

position – and refer people to other organisations who are better placed to take things forward.

However, fewer people contacted us this year about problems that weren't related to any specific financial product or service. As we highlight in the chapter *who complained to us*, awareness of our service has risen significantly this year – so it could be that more people understand more about what we can help with.

● payment protection insurance (PPI)	23%
● car and motorbike insurance	9%
● packaged bank accounts, interbank transfers, electronic money and other banking services	8.5%
● loans and credit	8.5%
● current accounts	7%
● warranties, mobile phone cover, home emergency cover and other insurance	5%
● credit cards	3.5%
● household insurance	2.5%
● mortgages	3%
● mortgage endowments	1%
● other financial products	9%
● other problems and concerns that people didn't know where else to take (for example, debt related worries and confusion about how to sort out a problem)	20%

sorting things early on

how our early involvement helped

We carry out research every year to make sure that our early conversations are valued by the people who've turned to us for answers.

We also talk to people who contacted us early on, but didn't go on to make a formal complaint to us, to find out what happened next. This year around half of these people said they'd gone on to sort out the problem themselves – and nine out of ten of these people said our early help and advice had helped them do this.

Of the people who hadn't yet sorted things out, two thirds said they were still talking to the business. But this still left some people who decided not to take things any further. In the chapter *who complained to us*, we talk more about people's attitudes towards complaining – and how we aim to reach everyone who might need us.



86%

... of people we spoke to early on felt we'd listened to them and cared about what they had to say.

83%

... said we'd got to grips with their situation and used common sense to help them find a solution.

84%

... said we gave them clear and honest answers and let them know where they stood.

ombudsman at the heart of Birmingham

We know that some people may be reluctant or uncomfortable engaging with services like ours – which may seem remote and official. So in 2015/2016, we've looked for new ways to open up our service – putting ourselves in the heart of local communities and giving people a further, face to face channel for engaging with us.

As part of this, in October 2015 we visited Birmingham's Bullring shopping centre – giving hundreds of

shoppers the opportunity to talk to us about problems they were having. Sometimes we decided we couldn't resolve people's queries there and then – because we needed to investigate further to reach a fair answer. In these cases, we took a few details and got back to people later on, to let them know where they stood.

We also met front-line consumer advisers from the Birmingham area, who told us about the issues local people were bringing to them. And we ran practical problem-solving workshops.

Haz, who worked in a local bank branch, liked our fresh, informal approach – which he felt removed perceived obstacles for businesses and their customers to talking to us. He said he'd take what he'd learned from talking to us – particularly the practical case studies – back to his branch colleagues.



Frank had recently been cold-called by a company offering to invest his pension in a property scheme in Cape Verde. After we'd talked through some of the cases we've seen involving schemes like this, Frank said he'd speak with his wife and think again.



Nikki was considering making a complaint about her packaged bank account, after receiving an email saying most were useless and mis-sold. We got talking about the different features of the account – and following our conversation, Nikki was reassured that the account could save her money.



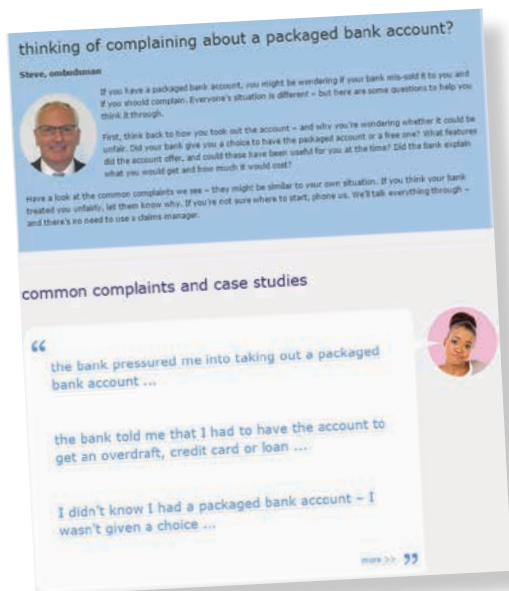
sorting things early on

social media

As people manage more and more aspects of life online, we've continued to work on our online presence. During 2015/2016 more than 50,000 people avoided the need to fill out a form to email or post back to us, by complaining online.

We've also continued to engage with people across social media. On Twitter alone, we were mentioned tens of thousands of times over the year – including people directly asking for our take on a problem they were having, sharing links to our website with their own followers, or retweeting information we'd shared.

We also received a steady number of messages through Facebook from people wanting to know if we could help – or following up a complaint they'd already referred to us. If another organisation was better placed to take a problem forward, we were quickly able to get them involved in the conversation.



Reflecting the different reasons people use social media, we also continued to provide insight and updates about our work through the professional network LinkedIn. And for people who prefer video content, we've made a series of animations with complaint prevention tips – on themes like moving house, shopping at Christmas, and relationships and money.

our website and online resources

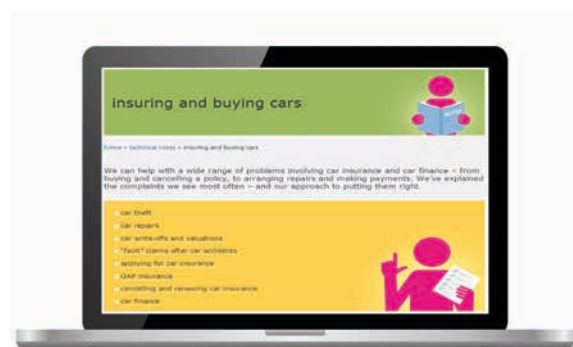
During 2015/2016 we've continued to develop our online resources – so people can get our answer to problems they're having at a time that's convenient for them, without needing to contact us directly.

To help us better understand where we need to provide support, we look at what people are searching for on our website – together with the enquiries we're receiving.

To help people easily find the information that's most relevant to their own situation, we focus on the questions and complaints we hear most often – and explain our approach to finding a fair answer. From conversations with our customers – in particular, with people on the front-line of complaints – we know that practical case studies can be very valuable in bringing our approach to life.

This year – in light of the numbers of enquiries we'd been receiving about credit broking and payday loans – we launched new resources to help clear up the confusion we often see in these cases.

We also refreshed our resources relating to problems involving vehicles – from buying insurance, to repaying finance agreements.





the most visited resources on our website

During 2015/2016 our website had nearly 7,000 visitors each day – 10% more than in the previous year. Pages setting out our approach to specific financial problems were the most popular part of our website, with over a million visitors over the course of the year.

And we've included new content on equity release – encouraging people to have honest conversations with their family about money matters, to avoid the upset we often see in these cases.

Given the high numbers of enquiries we've been receiving about packaged bank accounts, during the year we also developed our online support in this area.

And we reviewed and added to our online frequently asked questions – meaning people can find quick answers to queries they have about our service and our approach to different types of complaints.

We regularly carry out research into who's using our website and what for – to help us make sure our online support remains relevant and accessible. In the chapter *our insight and outreach*, we explain how our website helps us work openly and transparently.

Ombudsman news was also read online over a million times during the year. Our most popular issue online this year featured case studies about credit broking and unregulated collective investment schemes (UCIS) – which we published in response to receiving a large number of enquiries about these issues.

As in previous years, our research shows that the majority of people continue to reach our website through search engines – with two thirds of all visitors finding us through Google.

Apart from search engines, many people reached our website by following links from trusted websites such as *this is money*, BBC, online newspapers and blogs including *savvywoman.co.uk*. There's more information in our chapter *who complained to us* about how we raise awareness of the ombudsman through different media.



supporting complaints handlers

Throughout 2015/2016 we've continued to offer specialist free phone and email support for professionals working on the front-line of complaints. Over the year our helpline answered more than 23,000 calls from people including

complaints handlers at financial businesses, local community advisers, MPs' caseworkers and trading standards officers.

By talking things through, we're generally able to give these people the informal steer they need to resolve problems themselves – without the ombudsman's official involvement.

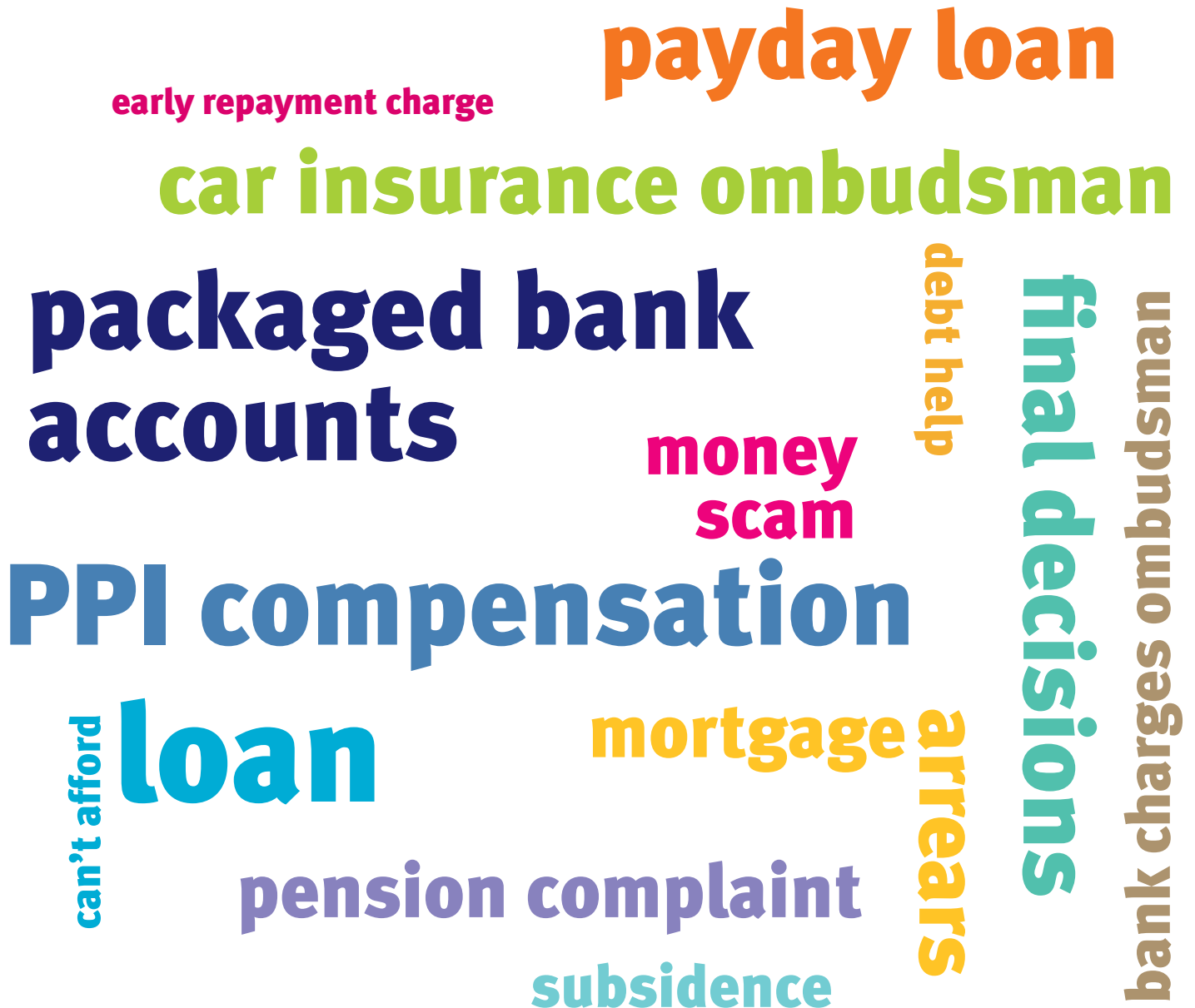
More than nine in ten people who got in touch said they were happy with the support we'd offered – helping them to resolve the question or problem they'd had.

Through these conversations we can identify themes and trends in the questions we're asked, spot potential

problems early on – and take steps to address them through tailored outreach work, online resources, or conversations with the FCA and other stakeholders.

There's more information about our work with our stakeholders in the chapter *our insight and outreach*.

words people search for to get to our website





“... in nine in ten cases this year, we were able to resolve the complaint informally following our initial investigation”

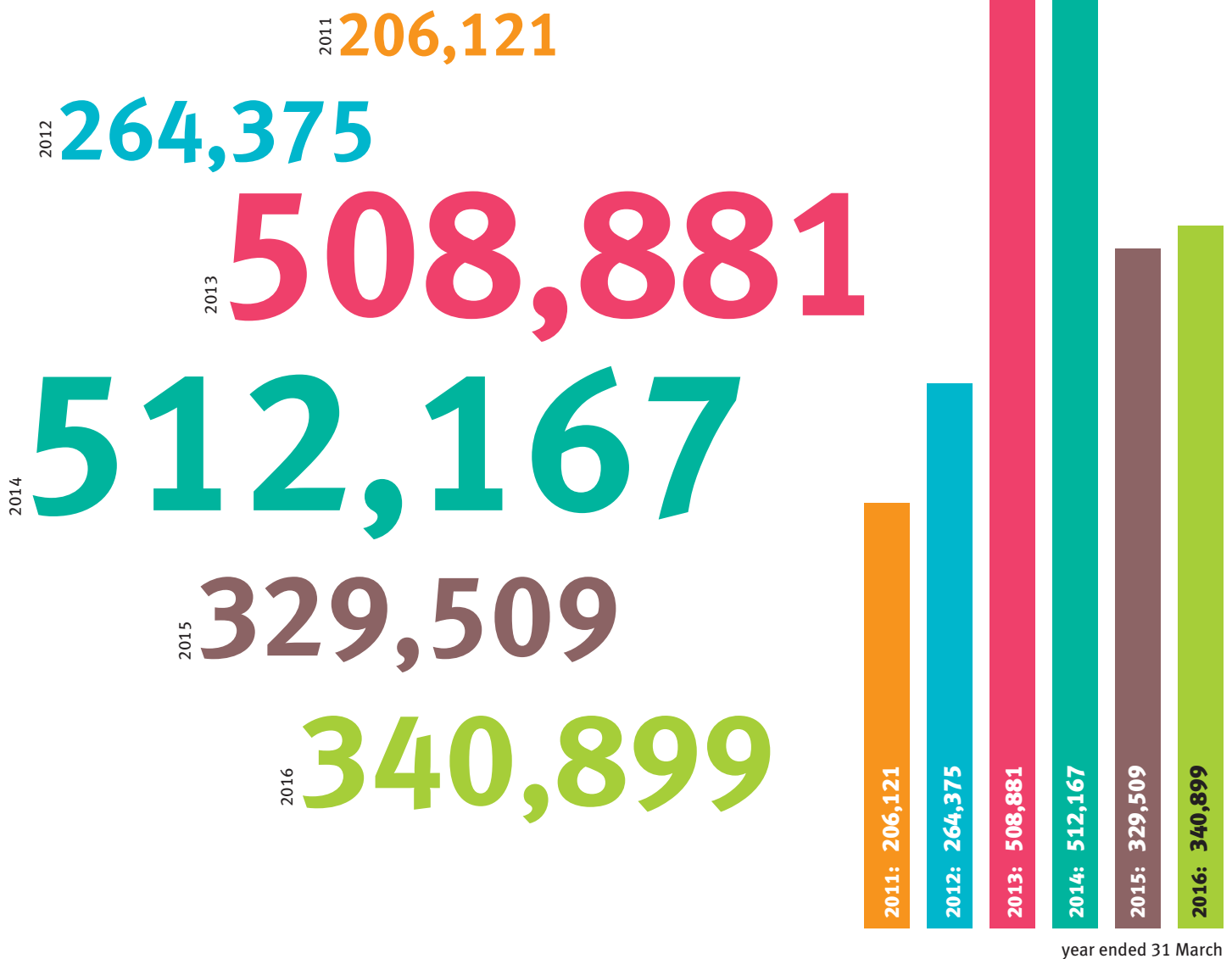
“... we’ve continued to invest in building a convenient, modern service that answers the problems people bring to us as quickly and informally as possible”

investigation

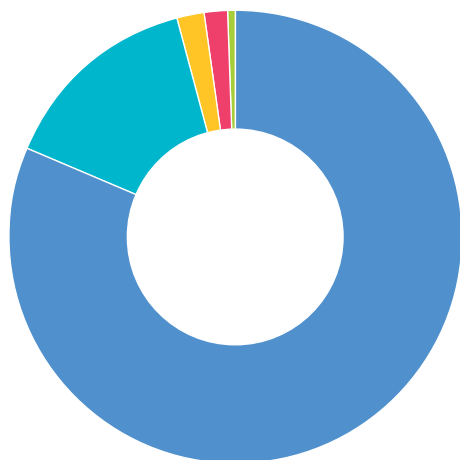
In the chapter *sorting things early on*, we explain the range of ways we help to sort out problems at a very early stage. But some of the problems we see each year need investigating in more detail. This is generally because we need more information to resolve the issues involved – or because people’s positions are already entrenched.

In 2015/2016 we investigated 340,899 new complaints – a 3.5% increase on the previous year. Since we were set up in 2000, people have referred a total of 3,128,550 complaints to us and payment protection insurance (PPI) accounts for half of these.

total new complaints we needed to investigate

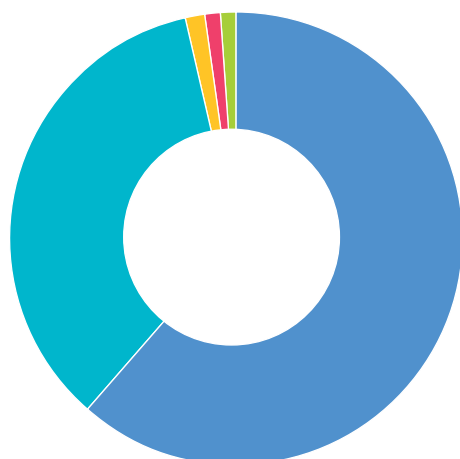


how PPI complaints were brought to us



- complaints made on behalf of consumers by claims management companies **81.5%**
- complaints made by consumers themselves **14.5%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by free consumer advice agencies (eg Trading Standards and Citizens Advice) **2%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by professionals like lawyers and accountants **1.5%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by friends and family **0.5%**

how complaints about packaged bank accounts were brought to us



- complaints made on behalf of consumers by claims management companies **61.5%**
- complaints made by consumers themselves **35%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by free consumer advice agencies (eg Trading Standards and Citizens Advice) **1.5%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by professionals like lawyers and accountants **1%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by friends and family **1%**

In the areas of PPI and packaged accounts, we're still seeing a significant proportion of complaints referred to us by commercial claims management companies.

Research for the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) suggests that most people who decided to

complain about PPI after being phoned by a claims manager went on to use a claims company.

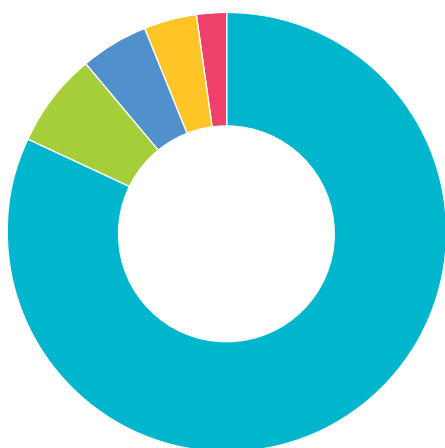
We've continued to stress that people don't need to use a claims manager to complain – but by the time a complaint is referred to us, people have usually already signed up with a

claims company and agreed a contract appointing the claims manager as their representative.

As we explain in the chapter *our insight and outreach*, during the year we've continued to report examples of poor practice to the Claims Management Regulator (CMR).

And following our frank conversations with claims managers themselves, they've decided not to pursue thousands of complaints – avoiding an unnecessary burden for us and for financial businesses, and meaning people who haven't actually lost out didn't have to wait months to be told that.

how complaints were brought to us – excluding PPI and packaged bank accounts



- complaints made by consumers themselves **82%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by friends and family **7%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by claims management companies **5%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by free consumer advice agencies (eg Trading Standards and Citizens Advice) **4%**
- complaints made on behalf of consumers by professionals like lawyers and accountants **2%**

In other areas, we continue to see very few complaints referred to us through claims managers. When complaints about PPI and packaged bank accounts are excluded, 82% of people contacted us themselves.

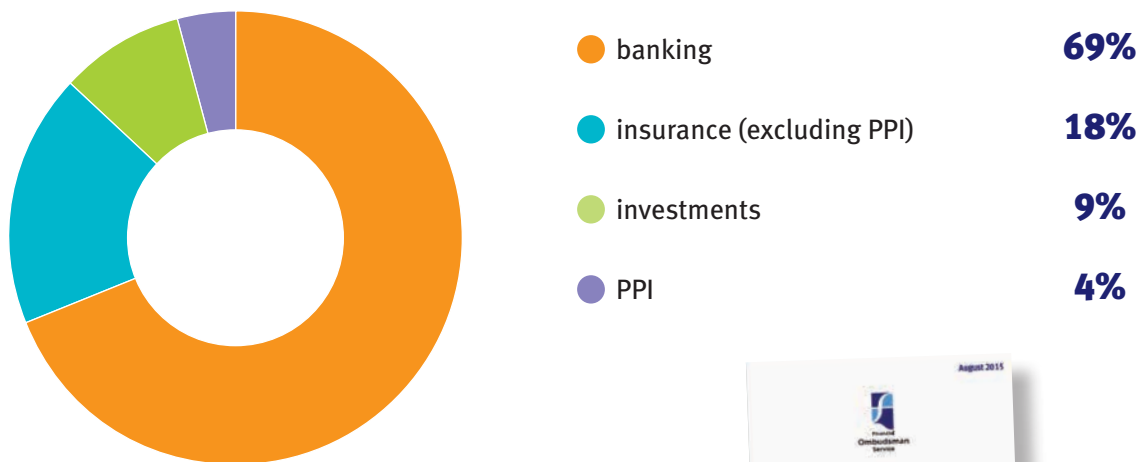
A further 7% asked a friend or family member to complain for them – and only 5% chose to use a claims manager.

complaints from small businesses

This year 4,777 of the complaints referred to us came from small businesses – around 5% more than the previous year.

To use the ombudsman, small businesses must have an annual turnover of up to two million euros and should have fewer than ten employees (defined as a “micro-enterprise” under EU rules).

what small businesses complained to us about



The proportion of complaints about different types of products remained broadly the same as the previous year. Within these categories, the problems we saw included:

- 1,299 complaints about current accounts
- 328 complaints about interest-rate hedging products
- 219 complaints about commercial property insurance

As in previous years, we think the actual number of small businesses who’ve used our service is likely to be higher – because some

small business owners choose to bring complaints to us in a personal capacity. Around one in ten consumers who complained to us are self-employed, whereas only around one in a hundred complaints are recorded as *business* disputes.

During the year we carried out research into the complaints we receive from small businesses – to better understand the issues causing disputes to be escalated to us. We highlighted the mismatch in expectations that can arise between small businesses and financial providers.



Our research also suggested that, in many cases, small businesses don’t have specialist support with financial and legal matters – and that their knowledge of financial services isn’t any greater than that of individual consumers. In *ombudsman news* in September 2015, we gave more details about what we found through our research – as well as our case handlers’ perspectives on resolving the problems small businesses bring to us.

the complaints we resolved

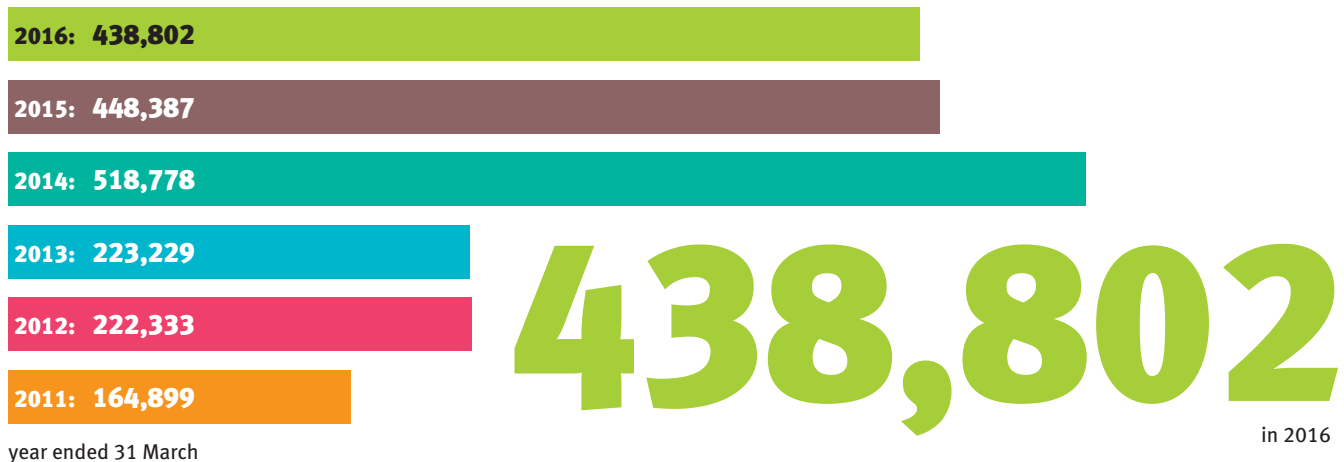
Our role is to find an answer that's fair and reasonable in the individual circumstances of each complaint – taking into account the relevant rules, laws and guidance, and good practice.

In practice, the types of information we'll need in order to unpick the problem is likely to include both sides' accounts of what's happened, relevant paperwork, and records of conversations.

In nine in ten cases this year, we were able to resolve the complaint informally following our initial investigation. In the other 10% of cases, the people involved chose to pursue the complaint

to the final stage of our process – asking for one of our ombudsmen to make a decision. Like last year, around a third of these requests were made by financial businesses and two thirds by consumers.

total complaints we resolved



year ended 31 March

Where either side isn't happy with the outcome of our initial investigation, an ombudsman can review the complaint with completely fresh eyes – and make a final decision. In many of these cases, important information only comes

to light at this late stage. Reflecting this, around one in six cases involved ombudsmen arriving at a different set of conclusions.

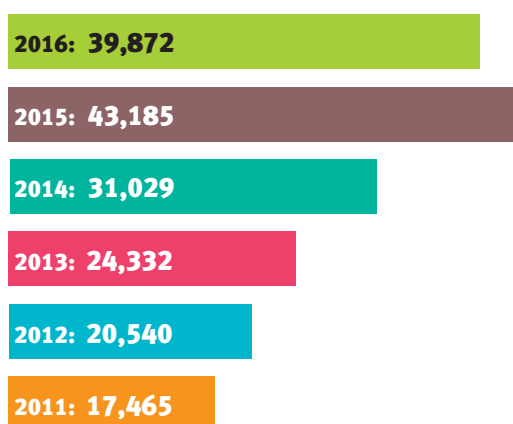
We know that financial businesses want reassurance that our

ombudsmen's decisions are consistent – to help them resolve their customers' concerns in a consistently fair way. We've published all our final decisions since 2013 – and during the year the number of published decisions reached 100,000.

This year we improved the accessibility of our online decisions database – to make sure people can find the answers they need as the number of published decisions continues to grow.

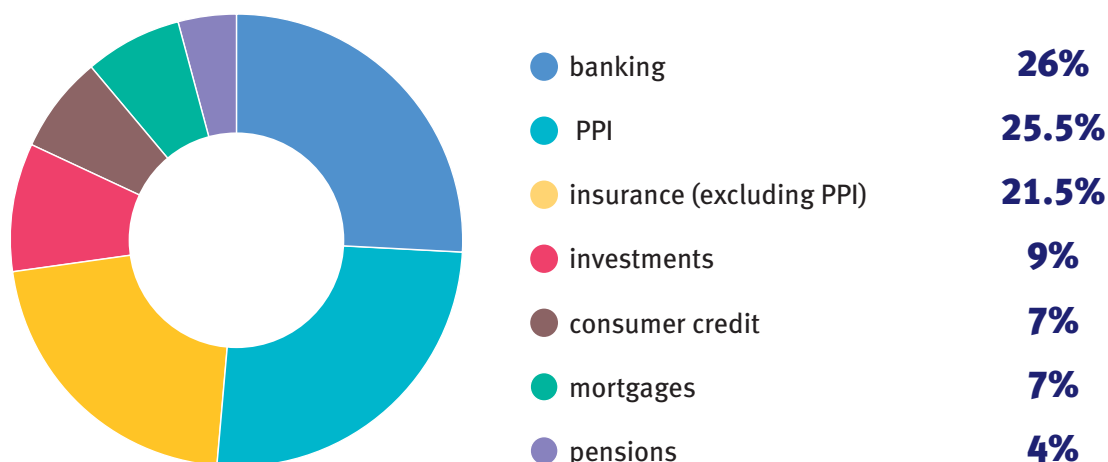
As in previous years, we've seen proportionately more people ask for an ombudsman's decision about problems with investments and pensions. Given the amount of money involved in these complaints – and the impact the outcome could have – it's not surprising that people may want to take things as far as possible.

complaints decided by ombudsmen – at our final stage

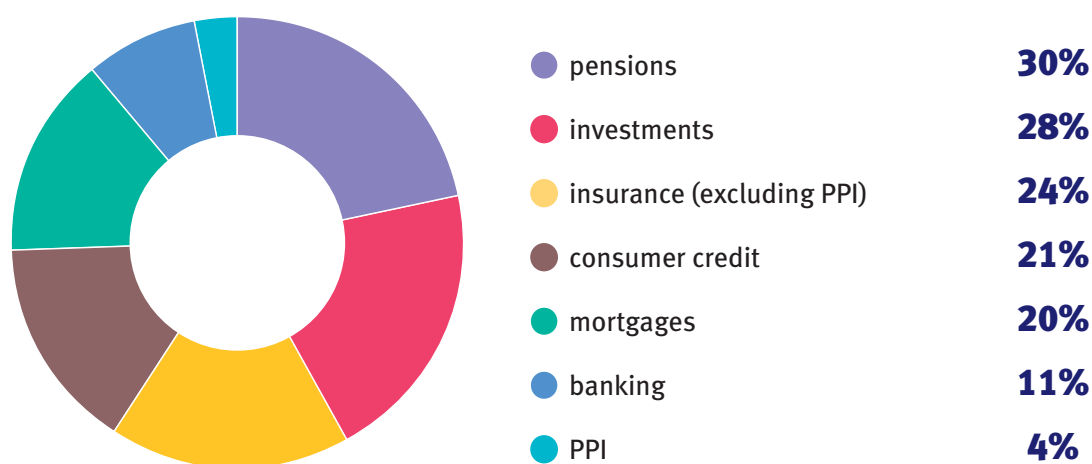


year ended 31 March

total ombudsman decisions – the types of problems they involved



% of different types of problems settled by an ombudsman's decision



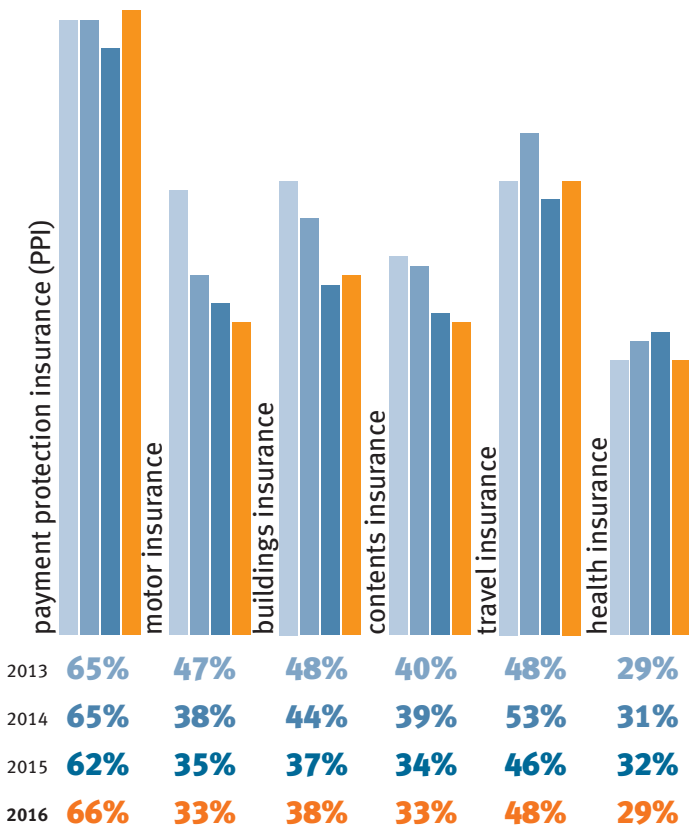
recording the outcome of complaints

We record and share the outcome of the complaints we look into each year – to help build a picture across different areas of financial services. The two possible outcomes we record – upheld or not upheld – each involve a wide range of fair, practical solutions and compromises we help people to reach.

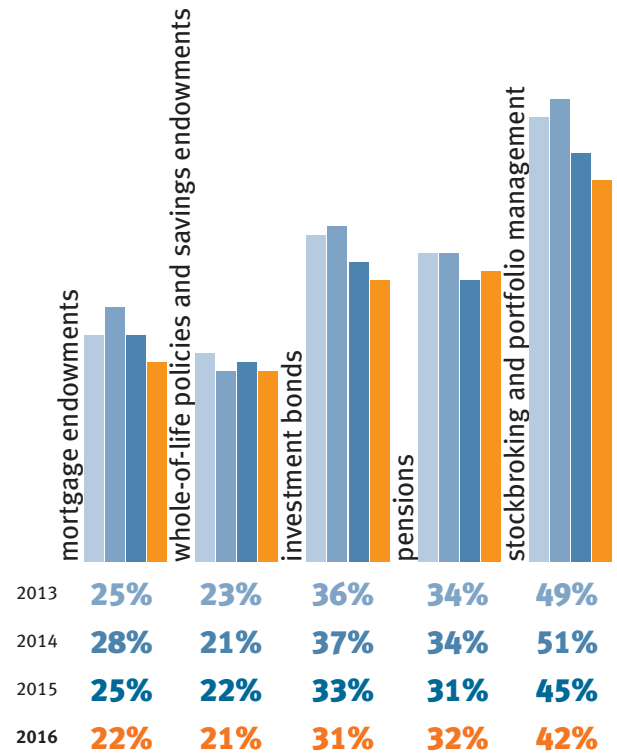
Typically, we say a complaint is upheld if we decide that someone's been treated unfairly by a financial business – and we tell the business to do something to put things right. We'll also uphold a complaint if a business has already made someone an offer – but we decide that the offer isn't fair, and tell the business to do something different to put things right.

On the other hand, if we decide a business hasn't acted unfairly – or they've already made a fair offer to settle their customer's complaint – we'll record the complaint as not upheld.

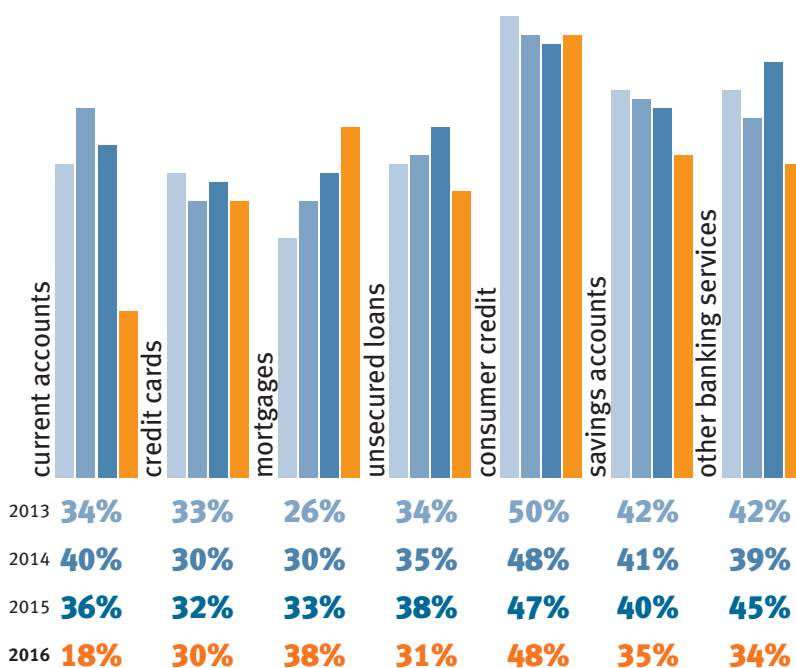
% of complaints we upheld insurance



% of complaints we upheld investment and pension complaints



% of complaints we upheld banking and credit complaints



While we upheld an average of 51% of complaints this year, the proportion continues to vary significantly depending on what the problem is about. For example, we upheld 66% of complaints about PPI, 21% about whole-of-life policies and just 14% about packaged bank accounts.

putting things right

If we uphold a complaint, we generally tell the business to put their customer in the position they would be in if they'd been treated fairly – or if a mistake hadn't happened.

In practice, this could mean a wide range of things – and will depend on the individual circumstances of each complaint.

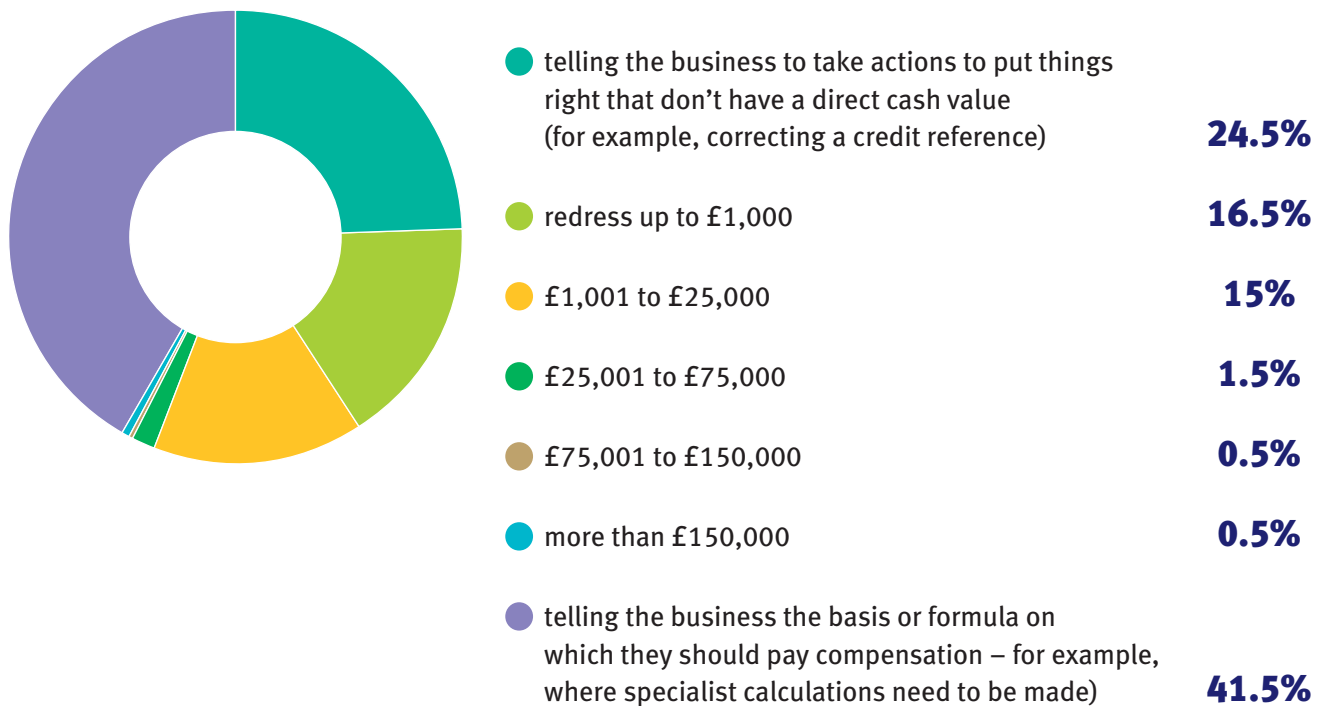
We can tell a business to pay a specific amount of money up to £150,000. But very often, they'll need to do something that doesn't have a particular cash value – like amending someone's credit file, or dealing with a claim that they'd originally rejected.

In 13% of complaints this year, we told the business to pay compensation to

recognise the non-financial impact of their mistake – including the inconvenience, upset or other type of trouble they'd caused their customer.

The amounts in the chart below don't include compensation we told businesses to pay for any non-financial impact their actions had on their customers.

how our ombudsmen told businesses to put things right



We can *tell* a business to pay compensation of up to £150,000 – and can *recommend* that they pay more than this.

Under our rules, we can decide not to look into a complaint if we believe it's "frivolous" or "vexatious". During the year we categorised a very small number of complaints this way – around 4% of cases overall. Of these, more than nine in ten involved PPI.

From experience, we know people aren't always sure how to articulate what they're unhappy about – for example, because they're

upset or confused about what's happened. So a concern which, on the face of it, seems unfocused or frivolous may turn out to be a more serious issue that needs addressing. As we explain in the chapter *the types of problems we've seen*, we've continued to stress the importance of clear, open communication in preventing and resolving complaints.

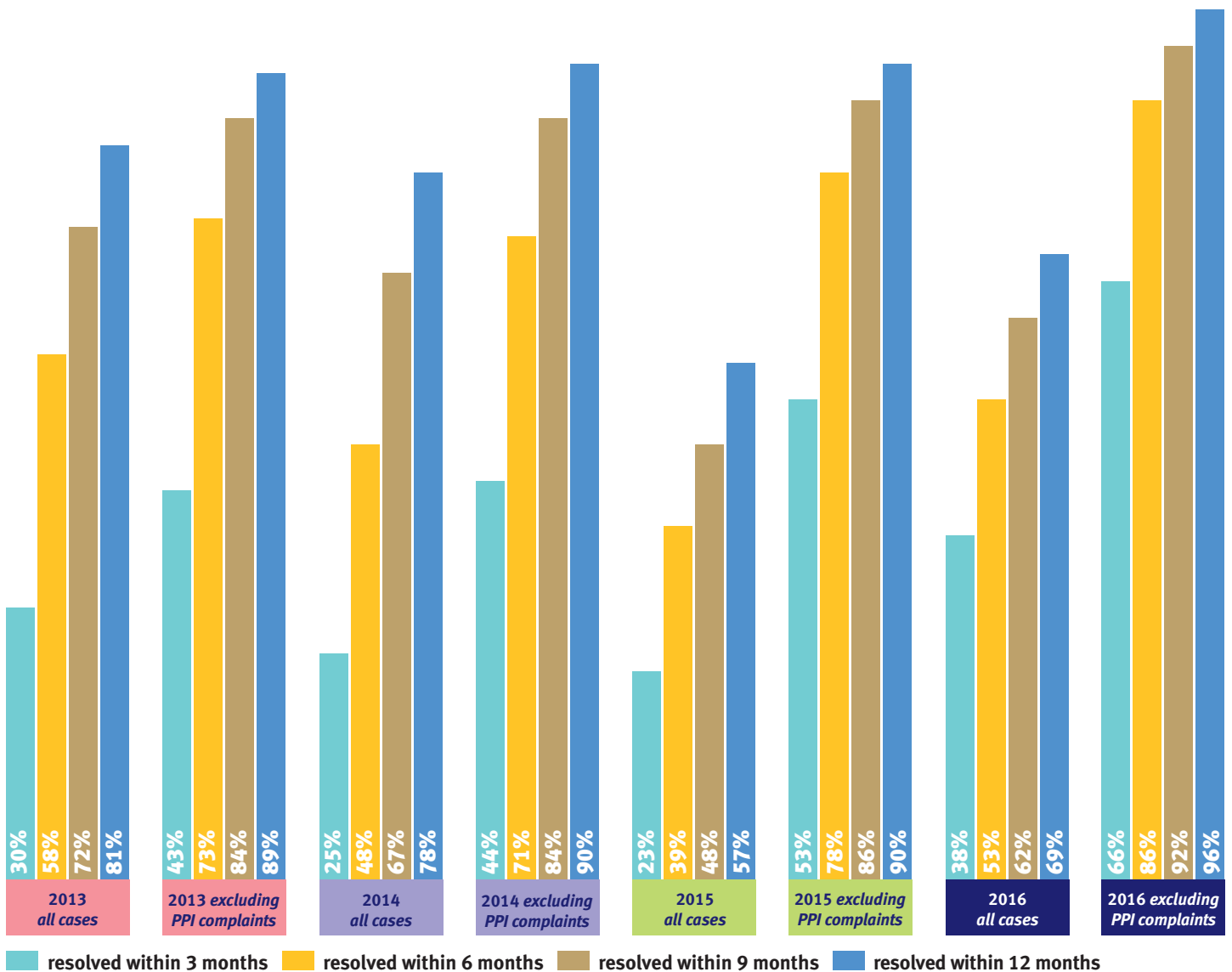
hearings

Under our rules, we have the option to hold a face to face hearing if we decide we can't give a fair answer to a complaint without one.

We were specifically set up as an informal alternative to the court system. And we don't think it's helpful or efficient to hold a meeting just so people can confront each other – which we know many people would find intimidating.

There are a range of options for talking to us – and we give people the chance to respond to what the other side has to say. So it's very rare that we can't get the facts and opinions we need in other ways, without having to bring the business and their customer together in person.

how quickly we resolved complaints



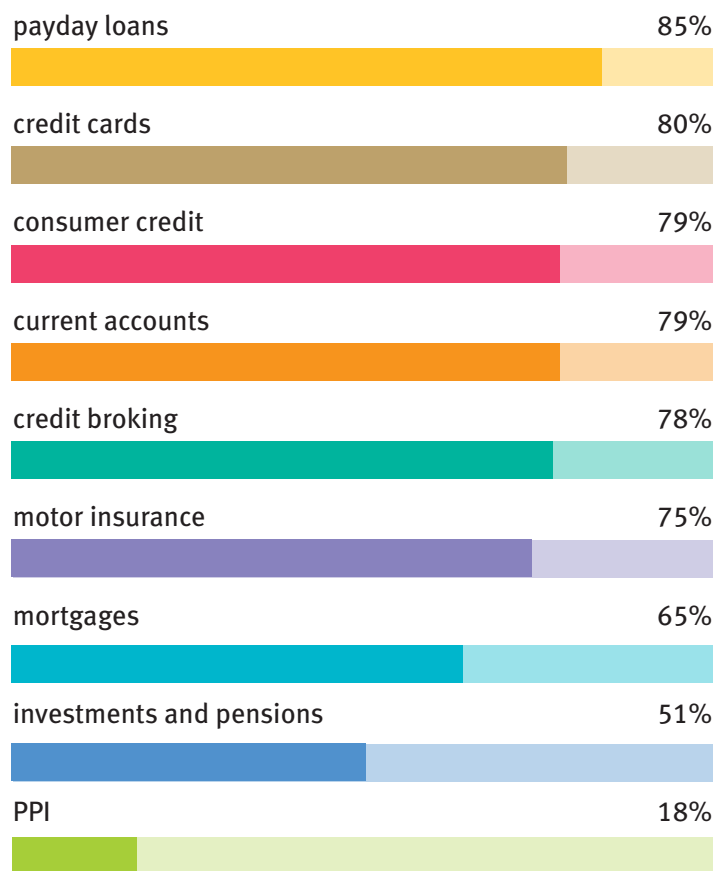
year ended 31 March

During the year we continued to see significant variation in the length of time it takes us to resolve complaints about different products and services.

In particular, the ongoing impact of the Supreme Court's judgment in the case of *Plevin v Paragon Personal Finance* – involving the level of commission on a PPI policy – meant that we haven't been able to progress a significant proportion of PPI complaints as quickly as we'd hoped. There's more about the issues involved in PPI complaints in the chapter *the types of problems we've seen*.

In July 2015 the EU directive on alternative dispute resolution came into force. As an official provider of alternative dispute resolution, we've been working towards the standards set in the directive – including giving our answer to complaints within 90 days. Across all types of complaints, we resolved proportionately more complaints within three months than in the previous year.

% of complaints resolved within three months – by product area



PPI complaints waiting to be resolved at 31 March 2016



- waiting for less than six months **33%**
- between six months and a year **20.5%**
- between a year and two years **26.5%**
- waiting over two years **20%**

developing our service

Over the last few years, new technology has significantly increased people's expectations of the businesses and services they use. Recognising this, we've continued to invest in building a convenient, modern service that answers the problems people bring to us as quickly and informally as possible.

Following trials in the previous year, during 2015/2016 we've extended our new ways of working to a greater number of areas. This has involved working flexibly with businesses – sharing information more quickly, and together challenging red tape and operational barriers to moving things forward. As we explain in the chapter *our insight and outreach*, we've strengthened our front-line relationships with businesses this year – helping us to identify and overcome potential issues more quickly and effectively.

Where we've been working differently, we've seen significant improvements in the time it takes to resolve problems. And a larger proportion of people – at businesses, as well as consumers themselves – are satisfied with their experience, regardless of the outcome of the complaint.



We've been keeping people up to date about what these developments mean for us and our customers in *ombudsman news* – and in our regular conversations with our stakeholders.

In the chapter *sorting things early on*, we highlight how we've developed our range of online services – including improving the problem-solving tools on our mobile-friendly website, and engaging with people through social media.

our knowledge and expertise

There's considerable uncertainty around the number and nature of complaints we'll be called on to resolve in the future. To ensure we're ready to respond efficiently – whatever problems people bring to us – we've continued to invest in our capability and capacity to handle a breadth of complaints.

We take a practical, on-the-job approach to growing knowledge within our service. In total we ran more than 1,300 internal training events this year – including coaching and mentoring by ombudsmen and experienced case handlers, and a range of instant e-learning resources.

We've also continued to support our people to gain relevant industry-recognised qualifications. During 2015/2016 this involved nearly 700 qualifications – accredited by professional bodies including the Chartered Banker Institute, the Chartered Insurance Institute, the Chartered Institute of Securities and Investment, and the International Compliance Association.

After trials last year, all our case handlers are now using our new knowledge platform. This online tool helps people to quickly find and share knowledge that's relevant to the problem they're resolving – whether it relates to an issue we see regularly, or a trend we've identified more recently.

And to make sure we continue to identify and respond to patterns in problems we're seeing, we've reviewed our framework for sharing knowledge and insight – as well as building on our horizon-scanning work.

our ombudsmen's knowledge and experience

During the year we've continued to strengthen our ombudsmen's role at the heart of our service – ensuring that their knowledge is being applied by everyone at the earliest possible stage.

We want our ombudsmen's backgrounds and experience to reflect the range of lives and livelihoods of the people involved in the complaints

we decide. As well as legal or financial services, our ombudsmen come to us from a range of other professions – including teaching, local government and the voluntary sector.

As we've highlighted in the chapter *who complained to us*, more than half our ombudsmen are women. There's more detailed information on our website about each individual ombudsman's experience.

solicitors and barristers

personal

human resources

banking

local government

appeals services

mortgage broking

charity and third sector

police and security services

district judges

consumer advice

underwriters

teaching

trading standards

investigation

listening and improving

Each year we gather feedback and views in a range of ways to ensure we're providing the best possible service – keeping fairness at the heart of what we do. In 2015/2016 this included:

- Running regular surveys to find out and monitor how consumers and businesses rate different aspects of our service – making sure that people feel we've listened to them and cared about what they have to say, that we've got to grips with their problem and used common sense, and that we've given clear and honest answers and let them know where they stand.
- Increasing our use of instant feedback tools – giving people the chance to tell us how we've done immediately after talking to us, and phoning them straight back if they're unhappy.
- Running focus groups to hear our customers' views face to face.
- Using feedback we've received about our service – and working closely with our independent assessor – to improve our response to people's concerns and to prevent problems arising.
- Collecting insight about people's experience of our online services, as well as other support such as *ombudsman news*.
- Meeting regularly with businesses to work through operational challenges – as we've continued to improve the efficiency and flexibility of our own processes.
- Asking people across the ombudsman – including senior leaders and our board – to regularly review our handling of cases, and challenge where they feel our service could have been better.
- Sharing ideas about improving customer service – and monitoring how proud our people say they are of how they've helped individual customers with their problems.
- Monitoring awareness of the ombudsman and attitudes towards resolving problems – to help us make sure that we're remaining relevant and accessible to everyone who needs us. There's more about this research in the chapter *who complained to us*.

learning from complaints about us

It's understandable that someone's feelings about the answer we've given to their complaint may have a bearing on how they feel about their experience of our service as a whole. But we want people to feel they've been treated fairly whatever the outcome – so during the year we've continued to learn from complaints people have made about our customer service.

Over the course of the year we received and responded to 2,202 complaints about our service – 20% fewer than last year. We resolved 46% of these straightaway – and in 35%, a senior manager put things right. We generally receive fewer complaints from businesses than from consumers or their representatives. This year around 2% of complaints about our service were from businesses – compared with 3% last year.

In 36% of complaints about our service, we agreed that the level of

service we had provided wasn't good enough – for example, because people had been inconvenienced by avoidable delays or administrative mistakes on our part. Where we decided it was appropriate to recognise the impact of these mistakes with compensation, we paid an average of £200.

If someone isn't happy with a senior manager's response, they can refer their concerns to the independent assessor for a formal review of the customer service we've provided. This happened in 35% of the complaints that senior managers dealt with this year – down from 39% last year.

The independent assessor, Amerdeep Somal – who is appointed by our non-executive board – can recommend we take action to make sure any problems she's identified don't arise again. She reports to our board each year on the findings and recommendations she's made – and we publish her report in full on our website.





“... in many cases, communications issues had caused avoidable upset at an already difficult time”

“... we saw many examples of businesses finding fair, practical ways forward for customers who needed support”

the types of problems we've seen

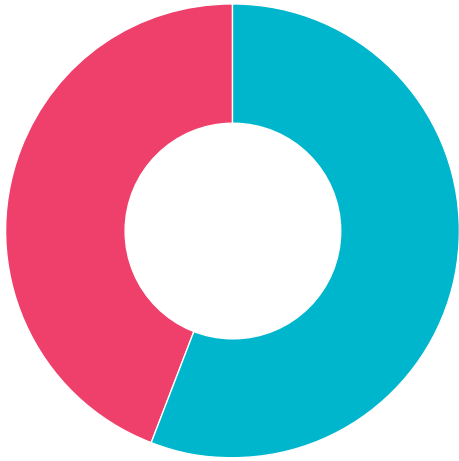
the types of problems we've seen

new cases by area of complaint

- banking and credit
- investments and pensions
- insurance (excluding PPI)
- payment protection insurance (PPI)
- new cases in total



year ended 31 March

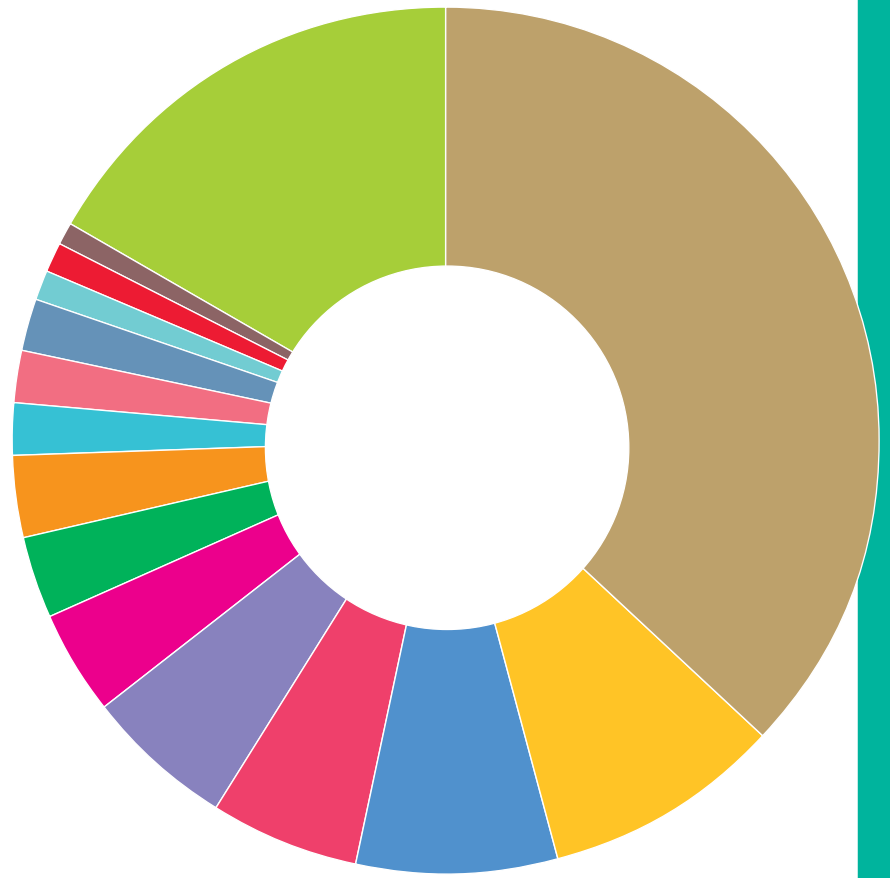


new cases by financial product

- payment protection insurance (PPI) **56%**
- complaints about all other financial products **44%**

new cases involving financial products *other than* PPI

- current accounts **37%**
- consumer-credit products and services* **9%**
- mortgages **7.5%**
- motor insurance **5.5%**
- credit cards **5.5%**
- unsecured loans **4%**
- pensions **3%**
- buildings insurance **3%**
- savings accounts **2%**
- term assurance **2%**
- travel insurance **2%**
- mortgage endowments **1%**
- whole-of-life policies and savings endowments **1%**
- contents insurance **1%**
- other products **16.5%**

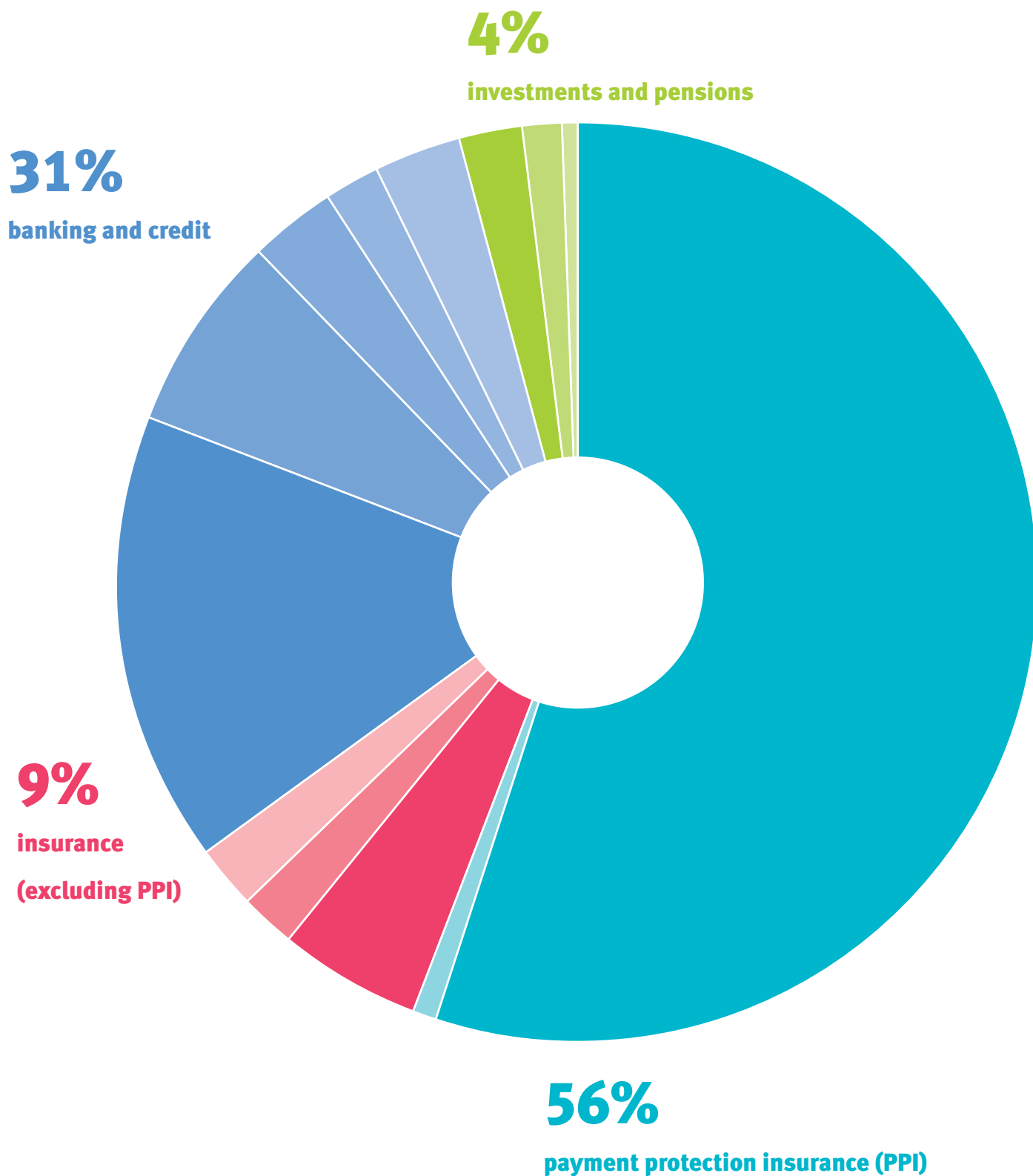


*eg hire purchase, debt collecting and catalogue shopping

the types of problems we've seen

the types of problems we've seen

the issues the new cases involved



56% payment protection insurance (PPI)

<i>of which</i>	● complaints about sales and advice	99%
	● other complaints	1%

9% insurance (excluding PPI)

<i>of which</i>	● complaints about claims	56%
	● complaints about sales and advice	24%
	● complaints about administration	20%

31% banking and credit

<i>of which</i>	● complaints about sales and advice	53%
	● complaints about administration	23%
	● complaints about charges	9%
	● complaints about transactions	6%
	● other complaints	9%

4% investments and pensions

<i>of which</i>	● complaints about sales and advice	59%
	● complaints about administration	34%
	● other complaints	7%

the types of problems we've seen

new cases by financial product	year ended 31 March 2016	year ended 31 March 2015	year-on-year change
PPI	188,712	204,943	8% ▼
current accounts	58,724	35,344	66% ▲
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ packaged accounts	44,244	21,348	107% ▲
◆ direct debits and standing orders	510	541	6% ▼
consumer credit products and services	13,382	9,572	40% ▲
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ payday loans	3,216	1,157	178% ▲
◆ hire purchase	3,072	1,784	72% ▲
◆ point-of-sale loans	2,071	1,582	31% ▲
◆ catalogue shopping	939	882	6% ▲
◆ debt collecting	707	843	16% ▼
◆ credit broking	563	1,213	54% ▼
◆ hiring, leasing and renting	508	333	53% ▲
◆ debt adjusting	471	508	7% ▼
◆ store cards	460	450	2% ▲
◆ credit reference agencies	351	189	86% ▲
◆ home credit	230	136	69% ▲
◆ debt counselling	209	140	49% ▲
mortgages	11,288	12,297	8% ▼
motor insurance	8,585	7,361	17% ▲
credit cards	8,200	8,482	3% ▼
unsecured loans	6,156	6,255	2% ▼
pensions	4,495	4,290	5% ▲
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ personal pension plans	1,985	1,618	23% ▲
◆ small self-administered schemes (SSAs) and self-invested personal pensions (SIPPs)	1,174	1,032	14% ▲
◆ annuities	763	776	2% ▼
◆ SERPS	218	436	50% ▼
◆ income draw-down	160	180	11% ▼
◆ free-standing additional voluntary contribution (FSAVC) schemes	146	142	3% ▲
◆ pension mortgages	39	94	59% ▼

new cases by financial product *(continued)*

	year ended 31 March 2016	year ended 31 March 2015	year-on-year change
other banking services	4,334	3,754	15% ▲
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ money transfer	1,884	1,323	42% ▲
◆ debit / cash cards	939	1,043	10% ▼
◆ electronic payment	685	491	40% ▲
◆ cheque clearing	501	563	11% ▼
◆ foreign currency	90	74	22% ▲
◆ safe custody	75	81	7% ▼
buildings insurance	4,095	4,510	9% ▼
investment-linked products	3,182	3,128	2% ▲
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ investment ISAs	1,290	1,006	28% ▲
◆ unit-linked bonds	543	560	3% ▼
◆ guaranteed-income bonds	480	555	14% ▼
◆ with-profits bonds	201	260	23% ▼
◆ unit trusts	125	93	34% ▲
◆ film partnerships	98	174	44% ▼
◆ PEPs	76	63	21% ▲
◆ structured products	25	37	32% ▼
savings accounts	2,751	2,989	8% ▼
term assurance	2,422	2,644	8% ▼
travel insurance	2,267	2,318	2% ▼
mortgage endowments	1,938	2,573	25% ▼
whole-of-life policies and savings endowments	1,932	2,107	8% ▼
home emergency cover	1,779	1,298	37% ▲
contents insurance	1,389	1,436	3% ▼
commercial vehicles and property	1,215	1,159	5% ▲
portfolio management	1,193	1,236	3% ▼
secured loans	1,130	1,070	6% ▲
pet and livestock insurance	1,089	790	38% ▲
income protection	999	1,156	14% ▼
extended warranty insurance	934	777	20% ▲

continued ►

the types of problems we've seen

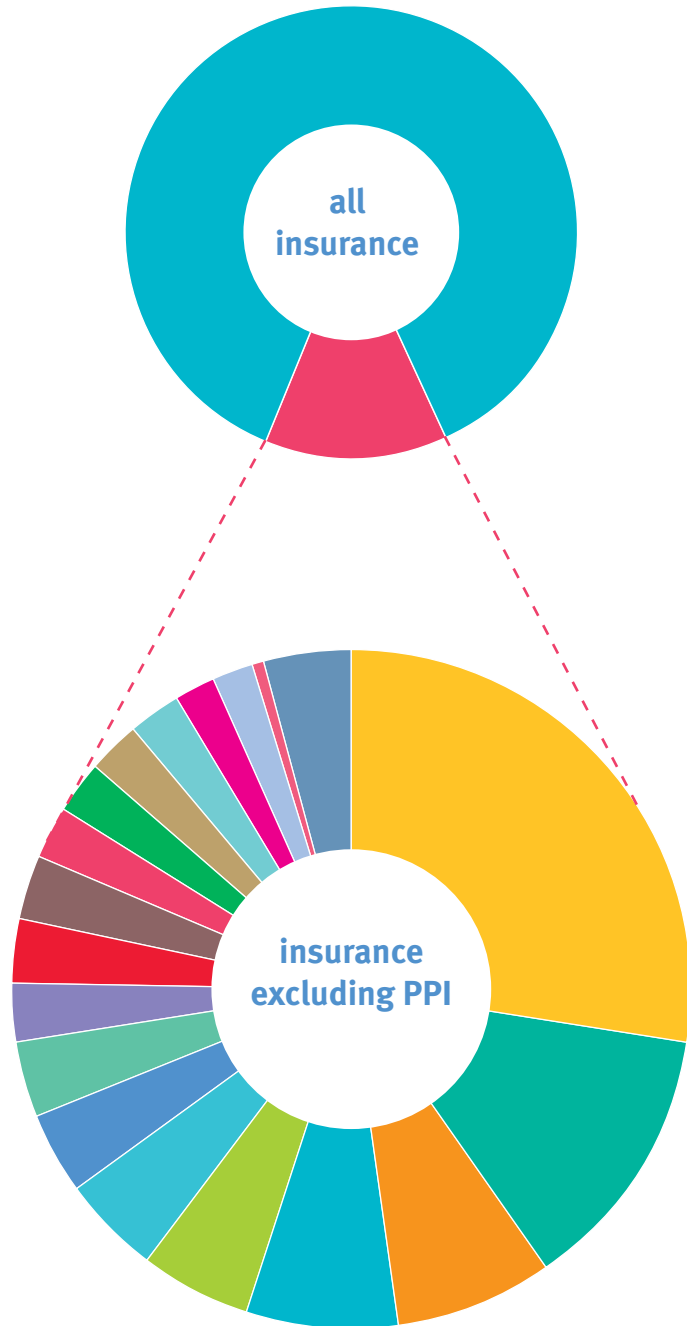
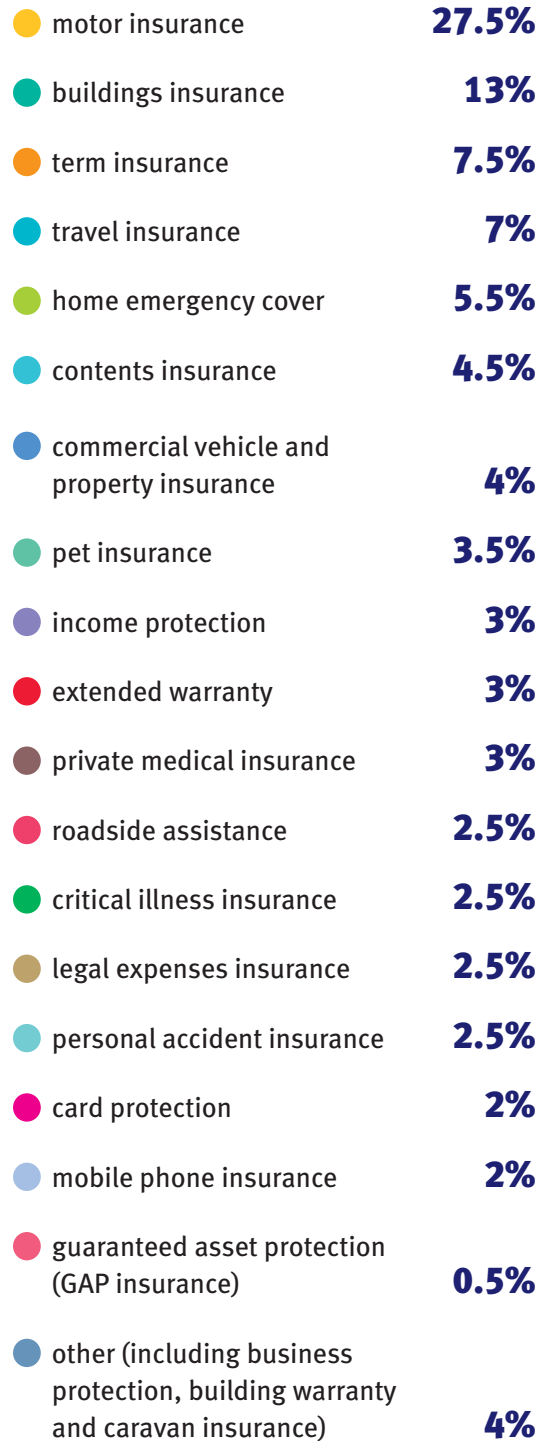
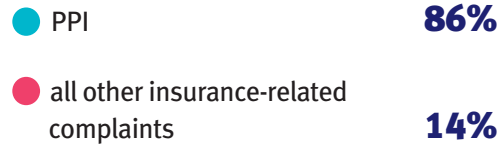
the types of problems we've seen

new cases by financial product <i>(continued)</i>	year ended 31 March 2016	year ended 31 March 2015	year-on-year change
stockbroking	919	807	14% ▲
derivatives	914	582	57% ▲
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ interest-rate hedging products	426	287	48% ▲
◆ spread-betting	209	98	113% ▲
private medical insurance	873	786	11% ▲
roadside assistance	803	733	10% ▲
critical illness insurance	747	791	6% ▼
legal expenses insurance	715	702	2% ▲
personal accident insurance	709	422	68% ▲
card protection insurance	666	1,401	52% ▼
mobile phone insurance	589	536	10% ▲
specialist insurance <i>(including marine and event)</i>	553	404	37% ▲
building warranty	287	299	4% ▼
business protection	267	253	6% ▲
guaranteed asset protection (GAP insurance)	201	206	2% ▼
caravan insurance	100	98	2% ▲
products we haven't previously categorised	365	-	-
<i>including complaints about</i>			
◆ instalment loans	211	-	-
◆ guarantor loans	61	-	-
◆ logbook loans	59	-	-
total number of new cases	340,899	329,509	3% ▲

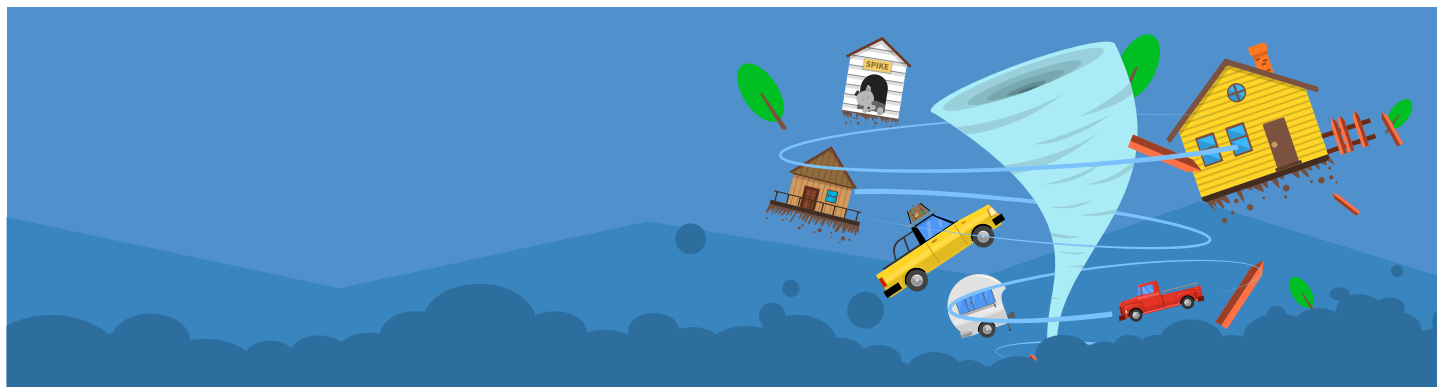
complaints about insurance

In 2015/2016 we received 219,996 new complaints about insurance – including payment protection insurance (PPI).

This was slightly lower than the previous year and represented 65% of new complaints we received as a whole.



the types of problems we've seen: insurance



Looking across insurance generally, the primary issue resulting in complaints to us remains the quality of communication between insurers and their customers. This applies whether a complaint is about how an insurer sold a policy, how they administered it, or how they dealt with a claim.

For example, some people who contacted us said they hadn't ever been told about the policy term that the insurer was now using to turn down their claim. Generally, the root of the problem is communication at the time the policy was sold – in particular, how the policy terms and conditions were explained and understood.

In some areas of insurance, disputes over what is and isn't covered can cause significant distress. For example, people claiming for medical treatment might delay surgery while they're waiting for an outcome. From our experience, better communication – not only during the claims process, but when someone's first choosing a policy – could prevent much of this disappointment and upset.

For their part, insurers continued to tell us that customers hadn't disclosed or had "misrepresented" important information – in some cases, suggesting claims were fraudulent. However, we often found insurers hadn't asked clear enough questions – so it wasn't surprising their customers hadn't given accurate answers. Where an intermediary was involved, we sometimes identified problems with how information had been passed to the insurer.

A large proportion of complaints about insurance involved claims that insurers had already accepted. Unfortunately, customer service issues – including poor communication – had made the settlement process unnecessarily stressful. Problems seemed particularly prone to arise when one or more third parties were involved – such as loss adjusters and contractors.





Some people we spoke to were confused about who they should be raising concerns with – and had already been passed from one party to another. Others were frustrated at ongoing delays, for which they couldn't seem to get an explanation.

In many cases, these communication issues had caused avoidable upset at an already difficult time – for example, when people were dealing with the aftermath of flooding. In our conversations with insurers this year, we continued to encourage them to see beyond the “claims process” – and to instead focus on what their customer is actually going through.

Other complaints were escalated to us simply because people hadn't understood the terminology their insurer had used. Once we'd put it in everyday terms, people often told us they “*wished the insurer had just said that in the first place*”. Many of these complaints could have easily been avoided if insurers hadn't fallen back on jargon.

For example, we continued to hear from people who felt they'd been blamed for a car accident – after their insurer had recorded a “fault claim”. After we'd explained that this simply meant the insurer didn't think they could defend the claim, people were generally content to let the issue drop.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

After some bad weather, Mr C's garage roof collapsed – causing water to get in and damage his guitar collection. The insurer said they wouldn't pay Mr C's claim because his policy didn't cover “escape of water”.

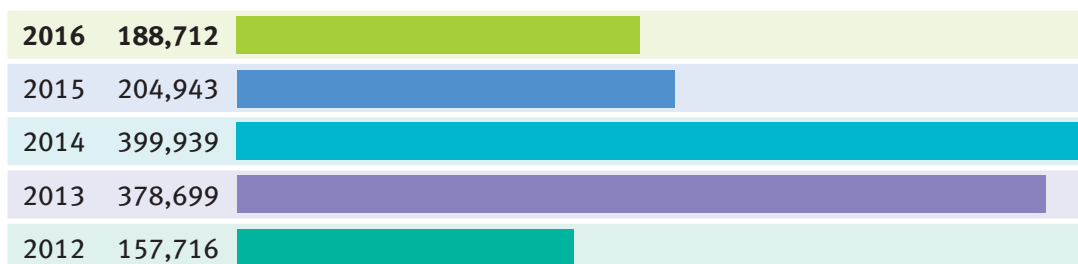
Mr C complained to the broker he'd used to buy and renew his policy – and later brought his complaint to us. When we listened to a recording of the renewal phone call, we heard the broker reassure Mr C that nothing had changed.

Mr C had been covered for water damage in the past and it was clearly important to him. We told the broker to arrange for the claim to be paid as if the right cover had been in place.



the types of problems we've seen: insurance

payment protection insurance (PPI)



year ended 31 March

By March 2016 we'd received over 1.5 million complaints about PPI – half of all the complaints we've ever received since we were set up in 2001.

As we explained in *our plans for the year ahead* – published in March 2016 – there's uncertainty about how PPI will pan out. Overall, the number of PPI complaints we received in 2015/2016 continued to decline – although at a slower rate than people had generally expected. But looking ahead, a number of factors – including a proposed time limit for complaining about mis-sold PPI – could mean we see higher volumes once more, at least in the short term.

Draft proposals by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) on PPI complaints – on which consultation closed at the end of February 2016 – also included rules and guidance in light of the judgment by the Supreme Court in the case of

Plevin v Paragon Personal Finance. In this case, the court decided that an undisclosed commission on a PPI policy could, in some circumstances, result in an unfair relationship under the *Consumer Credit Act 1974*.

Plevin – and the FCA's response to it – was relevant to a significant number of PPI complaints we looked at during the year. Unfortunately, this resulted in delays for our customers – as uncertainties resulting from the ongoing regulatory and legal developments meant we were unable to progress cases as quickly as we'd hoped.

However, during the year we were still able to resolve 70,000 more PPI cases than we received, as we realised the benefits of our investment in recent years in our PPI case handling capacity.

Disappointingly, in complaints that weren't affected by *Plevin*, we still found that businesses were rejecting some complaints

where it should have been clear we'd almost certainly agree that PPI was mis-sold. Over the year, we've taken steps to address this with the businesses involved – ensuring they take notice of our long-standing approach to PPI.

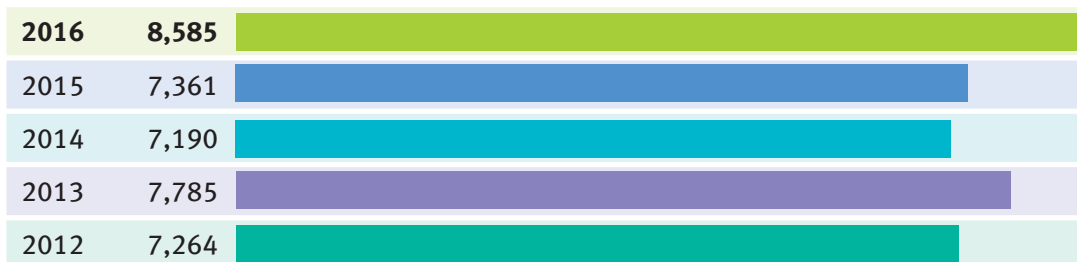
This year we've continued to decide whether "alternative" PPI redress is fair for individual customers. But compared with last year, we've seen fewer new cases where businesses have offered this type of refund – based on someone being sold a *different* type of PPI policy to the one they were actually sold.

On the other hand, we've seen businesses increasingly refine the way they calculate compensation – particularly for credit card PPI. However, if someone's had a PPI policy for many years, it may not be possible to get a full picture of what they paid. In these cases, we'll recommend fair compensation based on the account history available.

Over three quarters of the complaints we've received about PPI have been referred to us on behalf of consumers by commercial claims management companies. The outcome of Carol Brady's review of claims management regulation – as well as the Claims Management Regulator's proposals for a cap on the fees charged by 'no win, no fee' claims companies – should affect the number and type of complaints that claims managers refer to us in the future.

During the year we continued to have frank conversations about the quality of information claims managers were giving us about PPI complaints. Just as in other areas of complaints, we told claims managers that they needed to be far more specific – with us and with businesses – about their clients' individual circumstances when they were sold PPI.

motor insurance



year ended 31 March

We heard from a number of people this year whose motor insurance had been cancelled. In some cases, this had happened without their knowledge – and they'd only found out after being pulled over for driving without insurance.

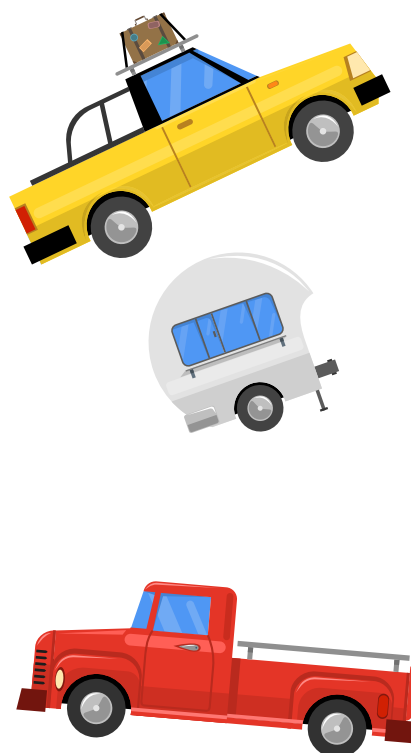
Driving without insurance is illegal – and insurers know how serious the consequences of cancelling a policy can be.

Some complaints had arisen following unsuccessful auto-renewals and other administrative errors. But if an insurer is intending to cancel a policy, an open conversation with their customer – well before the cancellation date – is likely to help prevent unexpected upset later on.

People also complained to us about the repairs their insurer had arranged after car accidents.

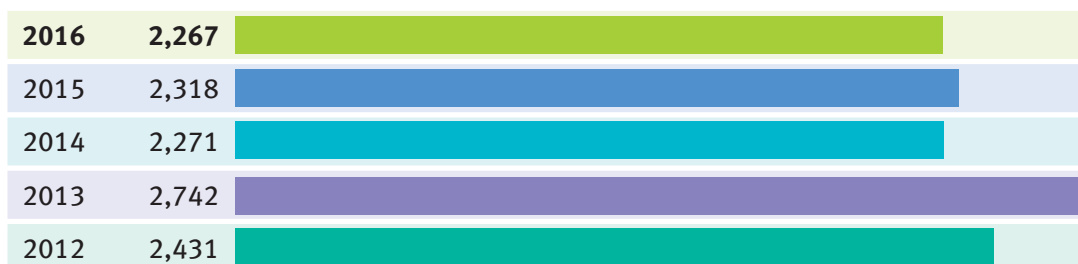
Some told us the damage hadn't been adequately repaired – or that further damage had been caused by the repairs.

We carefully check records relating to the repairs to clear up what – if anything – has gone wrong. In some cases, we found the insurer in question didn't have a quality-checking system in place.



the types of problems we've seen: insurance

travel insurance



year ended 31 March

We continued to hear from people who'd fallen ill or been injured while on holiday – and were unhappy with their travel insurer's response. In general, this was because the insurer was refusing to pay for their medical treatment – or had taken too long to guarantee the payment.

Some people who contacted us had been admitted to a private hospital – whereas their insurance only covered treatment in a public hospital.

If we find that an insurer explained this – and their customer still went ahead – we generally say it's fair for the insurer to pay the amount the treatment would have cost in a public hospital.

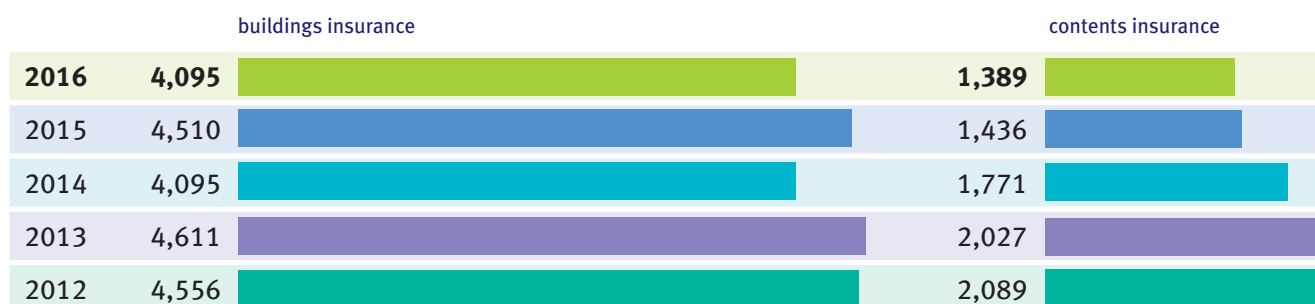
We've also seen a number of problems with annual travel policies – particularly those that come with a packaged bank account. These problems often came about because someone's health had changed during the year – and when they came to make a claim, they found they weren't covered.

In these cases some people were confused as to who they should contact about the problem – their bank or their travel insurer. There's more about the complaints we've seen about packaged bank accounts later in this chapter. The position can be complicated – because a problem with a claim might indicate the policy wasn't right for someone in the first place.

In some cases, we found the insurer hadn't clearly told a customer that they needed to report any changes to their circumstances. We usually told these insurers to pay the claim in question.



buildings and contents insurance



year ended 31 March

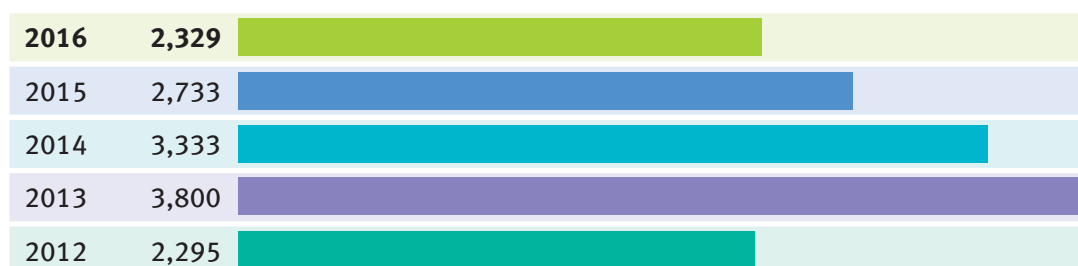
We generally get relatively few complaints relating to major episodes of bad weather – but like most years, we saw a rise in complaints directly after the colder, wetter winter months. Among these complaints, a number related to the serious flooding experienced by parts of the UK in the winter of 2015/2016.

Typically, people were upset that their claim hadn't yet been dealt with, were concerned about significant delays in the process, or were unhappy with the quality of repairs.

We've also continued to receive complaints from people who are unhappy with the way in which their home insurance premiums have risen year-on-year.

It's not our role to set the price of insurance – but we can check that insurers have applied their pricing policies fairly to individual customers. The FCA has recently consulted on ways that annual price changes can be made clearer.

health and medical insurance



year ended 31 March

This year we continued to hear from people who had a medical problem that they thought they were insured for – who were surprised and upset to hear their claim had been rejected.

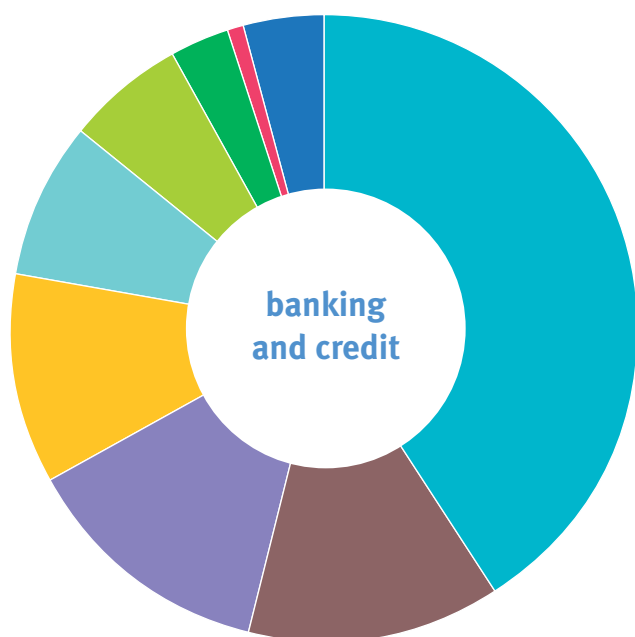
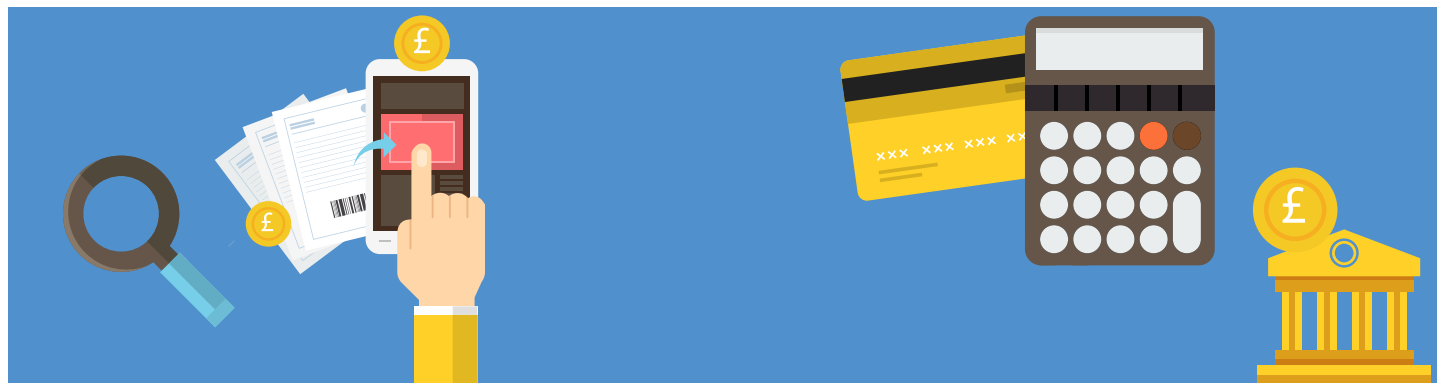
With income protection complaints in particular, we often found that the insurer hadn't made clear exactly what they covered.

As a result, some people had ended up with duplicated cover – or policies that didn't suit their particular circumstances.

Some people who'd had a private medical claim turned down said they hadn't been told their cover had changed.

In some cases, we found insurers hadn't done enough to notify customers about important changes when their policy was renewed.

the types of problems we've seen: banking and credit



Each year we see a wide range of problems involving banking and credit. Across these diverse products and services, we've identified a number of common underlying issues that often result in complaints being referred to us.

● packaged bank accounts	41%
● current accounts	13%
● consumer-credit products and services*	13%
● mortgages	11%
● credit cards	8%
● unsecured loans	6%
● savings accounts	3%
● secured loans	1%
● other banking services	4%

* eg hire purchase, debt collecting and catalogue shopping



addressing financial difficulties

A significant proportion of the complaints we received this year about banking and credit involved people experiencing financial difficulties.

In our experience of resolving these complaints, we've found that people are often embarrassed that they're struggling with their financial commitments – or worried about the consequences of admitting it. Unfortunately, this means some people who contact us have put off asking for help – and in the meantime, their difficulties have continued to escalate.

As in previous years, we heard from people stuck in a spiral of debt, interest and charges – which had left them unable to pay essential bills. Some were so far into mortgage arrears that they were facing repossession. While we can look into complaints about mortgage companies, repossessions usually happen after a court order, which we can't overturn.

It was clear that many of these situations would have been less distressing – or avoided altogether – if financial businesses and their customers had had open, honest conversations at a far earlier stage.

When someone tells a business they're struggling, the business has an obligation to respond constructively. This can mean a variety of things – from agreeing repayment holidays or lower repayments, to signposting people to free help with managing debt. And over the year we saw many examples of businesses finding fair, practical ways forward for customers who needed support.

Disappointingly however, we had to remind some businesses of their obligations in this area. We also found that some businesses had focused narrowly on one debt – rather than taking into account their customers' circumstances as a whole.

Some people who contacted us simply hadn't told the business that they were having trouble. And we sometimes decided there was no way the business could have known. But in a number of complaints, we were able to identify clear signs that there was a problem – and steps that the business could have taken to stop things getting worse.

For some people who contacted us this year, what started out as a small financial setback had escalated into significant debts across various lenders and accounts. A number of these people had turned to paid-for debt management services – but told us that, once the debt manager's charges had been applied, their debts didn't actually seem to be falling. As well as looking into someone's complaint about their debt management, we can signpost them to sources of free support.

After rising by a half in the previous year, the number of complaints we received about payday loans more than doubled in 2015/2016. This could reflect the high level of publicity there's been around payday loans this year, following FCA action in response to unfair practices by certain payday lenders. We also heard from people who said they couldn't afford to repay their loan – and that they shouldn't have been given it in the first place.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

After Mr W had to take a pay cut, he took out a £200 payday loan. When he realised he would miss his deadline to repay the loan, he emailed the lender to say he was struggling.

The lender didn't reply. Instead, they used a continuous payment authority to try to take the money directly – leading to further charges being added to Mr W's loan.

After several more emails over the next couple of weeks, the lender eventually responded – saying they'd only accept the full amount, including interest and charges.

In our view, Mr W had been open and honest about his difficulties – and had been proactive in trying to repay what he owed. But the lender hadn't responded constructively – and initially hadn't responded at all.

We told the lender to refund the interest and fees they'd applied since Mr W first contacted them – as well as any bank charges he'd incurred. We also told them to pay £100 for the stress they'd caused Mr W – and to work with him to reach an affordable repayment plan.

responding to scams

Each year we hear from people who've been the victims of scams. And as businesses adapt and develop the services they offer – and people do their banking in different ways – the scams we hear about continue to change and evolve.

Like last year, we continued to see complaints this year involving people who'd been tricked into thinking they were talking to their bank or the police on the phone. Believing the caller was *protecting* them from fraud, people gave out their bank details – typically being told their money would be transferred to a safe account.

While the number of complaints we see involving scams is relatively small, their impact on individual people can be significant. Some people who contacted us had lost their life savings – and were understandably extremely distressed.

We sometimes found people had been through their own bank's genuine security procedures in order to transfer the money. In giving their security passwords and codes, they'd given their bank their permission to make the transactions in question. This often meant that the bank wasn't obliged to cover the lost money.

In some cases, however, we decided that the bank in question could have done more to prevent the scam – or could have responded better once they were aware of what had happened.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

After she'd transferred money to scammers, Mrs O complained to us that her bank should have stopped the fraud. Following our involvement, the bank told us her experience had prompted them to warn all their customers about this kind of fraud – with the aim of making it less likely that other people would fall victim to it.

In our conversations with banks over the year, we continued to remind them to be sensitive to what their customers are going through – regardless of who’s technically responsible for the money being lost.

In summer 2015, we shared our insight into the complaints we were receiving about fraud – in particular telephone fraud. In light of what we were seeing go wrong, we encouraged businesses to warn their customers about the risk of scams – and suggested ways that people can help to protect themselves.

responding to vulnerability

Over the year, we heard from a large number of people who were clearly in a vulnerable position having problems with banking and credit.

As we explained in *ombudsman news* in August 2015, vulnerability doesn’t simply involve long-term problems like poor health. It can also be shorter-term – arising from significant events such as divorce, bereavement or sudden illness.

Vulnerability may cause – or coincide with – financial problems.

And a financial business’s response can be a key factor in stopping things getting worse. Unfortunately, we found some businesses hadn’t responded appropriately to customers’ vulnerability – or hadn’t identified the vulnerability at all.

In some cases, we decided that a business had put a vulnerable customer in a more vulnerable position – or had even made them vulnerable in the first place. In these circumstances, we’re likely to tell a business to pay compensation for the upset their actions – or inaction – have caused.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

When Mr G, aged 16, applied for a new bank account, his application was refused. The new bank said his previous bank had recorded a fraud marker against his name – because they believed he’d “*knowingly and actively*” taken part in a scam.

Mr G’s father complained to his previous bank. He explained that Mr G’s previous account had been used for fraud – after Mr G, who was being bullied, had been forced to hand over his card and PIN. But the bank wouldn’t remove the fraud marker.

Mr G’s father contacted us. He provided a letter from his son’s head teacher, confirming the bullying and subsequent fraud. We also saw related police reports, which confirmed there was no suggestion that Mr G had “*knowingly and actively*” taken part in the fraud.

From what we’d seen, it was clear the bank hadn’t done enough to investigate Mr G’s situation. We told them to remove the fraud marker and to pay £150 for the upset they’d caused.

the types of problems we've seen: banking and credit

complaints about current accounts and packaged bank accounts

	current accounts	packaged bank accounts
2016	58,724	44,244
2015	35,344	21,348
2014	19,878	5,713
2013	19,560	1,546
2012	14,595	34

year ended 31 March

As we explained earlier in this chapter, we heard from a number of people this year who'd given fraudsters their debit card or current account details.

By the time a complaint is escalated to us, there's often very little that can be done to recover people's money. We found that some businesses had done all they could to protect their customer's money – and to try to get it back once they knew about the scam. Banks who hadn't responded appropriately – causing their customer to lose more money – often agreed to refund money following our involvement.

Since the launch of the current account switch service in 2013, we've continued to hear from some people who feel things haven't gone smoothly. Many of these complaints involve payments being misdirected. Where something's gone wrong with an account switch, we'll check the bank has made sure their customer isn't out of pocket.

Over the year, there's been some media coverage of unexpected current account closures. We heard from a number of people who complained that their account had been closed – often without any explanation, and sometimes without any notice.

In these cases, we'll make sure that the bank fairly applied the account's terms and conditions. We'll also check that they gave sufficient notice of what they were doing – so their customer had time to make other arrangements.

It's ultimately a bank's choice who to have as a customer – and it's unlikely that our involvement will result in an account being reopened. But if we find the bank hasn't acted reasonably, we'll consider whether they should compensate their customer for any inconvenience or other upset they've caused.

A significant proportion of the complaints people referred to us about current accounts involved packaged services.

In most cases, we decided that, overall, the package of extras that came with someone's account had been useful to them – or had saved them money. This was often the case even if they couldn't use *all* the extras.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

Mrs D complained that she hadn't agreed to have a packaged bank account.

We found that – around the time she'd switched to the packaged bank account – Mrs D had asked the bank for a loan to pay for her daughter's wedding. By opening a packaged bank account, she'd got a lower interest rate on the loan. She'd also told the bank she was interested in the travel insurance that came with the account.

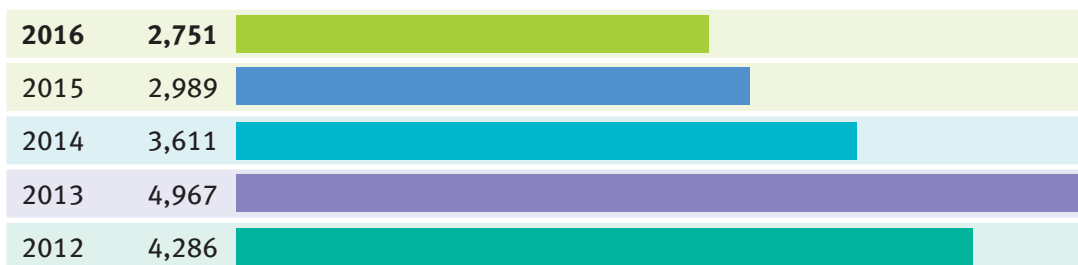
We decided it was likely that Mrs D had agreed to have the account – and we explained that it had saved her money.

However, we decided that some customers had been sold accounts that they didn't want or need. Some people couldn't have used any of the account's extras – or couldn't use the extras they'd specifically opened it for. In a few cases, people who hadn't had a UK bank account before weren't told that free account options were available.

This year we've continued to push back where claims managers – who refer the majority of the complaints we receive about these accounts – refer clients to us who clearly haven't lost out. At the same time, we've helped businesses who sold – and sell – packaged bank accounts to understand and apply our approach to complaints.

We're encouraged to see signs that both sides have found these conversations useful. Banks are following our approach more consistently. And claims managers have been more selective in the complaints they refer to us – recognising where a bank has already given a fair answer.

complaints about savings accounts



year ended 31 March

Interest rates on savings accounts have remained at record lows this year, reflecting the continuingly low Bank of England base rate. And we continued to hear from people unhappy with the returns on their savings – after initially receiving a higher promotional rate.

In some cases, people told us that they hadn't been notified of the change in interest rate. We also heard from people who told us they hadn't actually received the advertised rate.

It isn't our role to set interest rates. But we'll check that the business in question explained

the interest rate that would apply – including any changes – in a clear and appropriate way. In December 2015, the FCA announced new measures aimed at improving information about savings interest rates – which will apply from December 2016.

the types of problems we've seen: banking and credit

complaints about other banking services



year ended 31 March

In some scams, people are tricked into using payment services such as money transfers and BACS. A number of people complained to us this year about the bank that *received* the money they'd unwittingly transferred to fraudsters.

Most people who contact us are customers of the businesses they're having problems with. So it's encouraging that people are also aware that, in certain circumstances, they can turn to a business they don't have a direct relationship with for help.

However, we often have to explain exactly how we can help. For example, people may be upset that the bank in question allowed the scammer to open a bank account. But it's not our role to tell businesses who they should and shouldn't have as customers. Instead, we'll look into how the receiving bank responded once they knew about the scam.

We've also continued to receive complaints about safe custody services. Typically, people have left a box of valuables in their bank's care – and complain either that their bank can't find the box or that something's been taken from it.

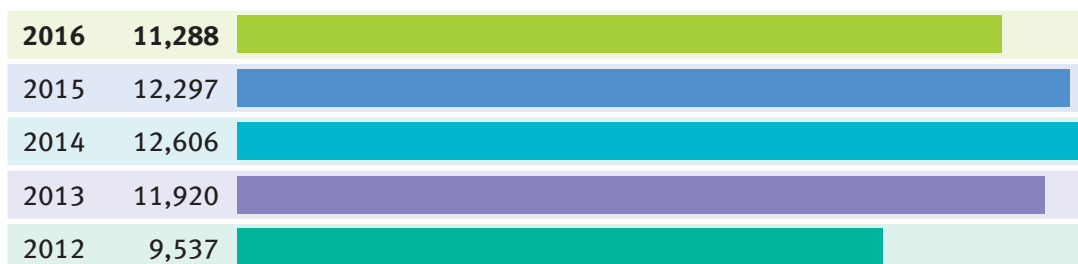
Unfortunately, there's often very little evidence about what's happened – because neither the bank nor their customer have evidence of what was in the box. Disappointingly, in a number of cases we found banks hadn't looked thoroughly enough for a customer's possessions before saying they were lost.

While online banking has been linked to a fall in the use of cheques, this more traditional means of payment can increasingly be carried out using mobile technology. Cheques remain a small but consistent feature of the banking complaints we see – from stolen cheques to delays in clearing.

On the other hand, we've seen very few complaints about newer banking services such as contactless card and mobile payments. The limits for these types of payments are relatively low. It may be that businesses are refunding small disputed transactions very quickly – or that people are willing to let small amounts of money go.



complaints about mortgages



year ended 31 March

Two years after new rules on mortgage lending came into force, we're still receiving complaints about how they've been applied by some mortgage lenders. In particular – as we highlighted in *ombudsman news* in July 2015 – some people are telling us they've been discriminated against because of their age.

It isn't illegal – or necessarily unfair – for a mortgage company to take a customer's age into account when deciding whether to lend to them. However, we've had to continue to remind lenders that rigidly applying rules – without considering each customer's individual circumstances – won't always lead to a fair answer.

In some cases, we found that the underlying problem wasn't the lender's decision, but their communication. This was reflected in an increase in complaints about mortgage "porting". In investigating these cases, it often became clear that the lender hadn't explained how porting worked – in particular, that only the mortgage product, and not the whole mortgage, would be ported.

We continued to hear from people with interest-only mortgages who were worried that they wouldn't be able to repay the capital at the end of their mortgage term. Encouragingly, we've seen signs that homeowners are talking to their mortgage companies at an earlier stage if they fall into financial difficulty.

However, given the consequences of serious mortgage arrears, it's perhaps not surprising that some people attempt to avoid their mortgage debt altogether. This year we've seen a small number of complaints from people who say that a "legal loophole" – which they've usually read about online – means their mortgage isn't valid.

It's the role of the courts – not the ombudsman – to make a call about whether a mortgage is legally valid. But we can look into how the mortgage company has responded to their customer's financial difficulties.

the types of problems we've seen: banking and credit

complaints about consumer credit and credit cards

	consumer credit	credit cards
2016	13,382	8,200
2015	9,572	8,482
2014	7,630	10,472
2013	8,470	19,634
2012	7,416	19,183

year ended 31 March

Items like solar panels, cars and timeshares aren't something people would automatically associate with the ombudsman. But people continued to contact us this year about a range of goods and services they'd bought on finance.

During the year we added more information to our website to explain how we can help with these types of problems – and how people can prevent and resolve these issues themselves. And we added more information around payday lending, following a 178% rise in complaints about payday loans.

We also heard from people who said they were being chased for debts that weren't theirs. It's clearly unfair and upsetting to be contacted repeatedly – but wrongly – about something so serious as debt. So we ask lenders for strong evidence that they're seeking repayment from the right person.

As we explained earlier in this chapter, we received a number of complaints about debt management services this year. Disappointingly, we saw an increase in cases where the debt manager wasn't responsive to their customer or to us – or had gone into liquidation.

Sometimes, where a debt manager has gone bust, it's clear that there's no realistic prospect of customers receiving any compensation. In these circumstances, we'll explain the position to any customers who contact us – and direct them to organisations who can offer free support with debt.

In June 2015, the FCA published a review of debt management services – including their findings that some debt managers hadn't treated vulnerable customers fairly. We shared our insight in this area in *ombudsman news* in March 2016.

We continued to receive complaints involving credit cards this year – and in particular, claims made under section 75 of the *Consumer Credit Act 1974*. This part of the law says that in some cases, where there's a problem with the goods or services someone's bought, they can ask their credit card provider to put things right.

Disappointingly, in a significant number of cases we had to clarify these legal responsibilities to credit card providers.



ombudsman news

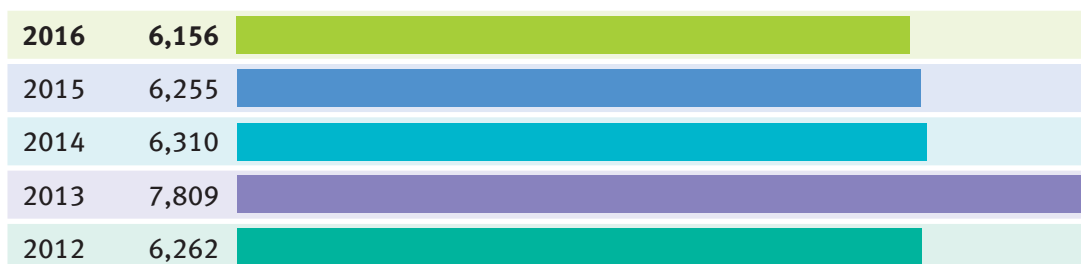
essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

Mr R paid on his credit card for a tailor-made suit – but when the suit arrived, it didn't fit properly. After the tailor didn't turn up to an appointment to alter the suit, Mr R complained to his credit card provider. But they said there was no evidence the suit didn't fit when it was delivered.

Mr R sent us photos of himself wearing the suit, which clearly showed the sleeves were too long and the trouser legs too short. We could see he'd got in touch with the tailor as soon as he'd realised there was a problem – and had given the tailor a chance to put things right.

Given that Mr R paid for a tailored suit – and the suit clearly didn't fit – he hadn't received what he'd paid for. So we told the credit card provider to refund the cost of the suit.

complaints about unsecured loans



year ended 31 March

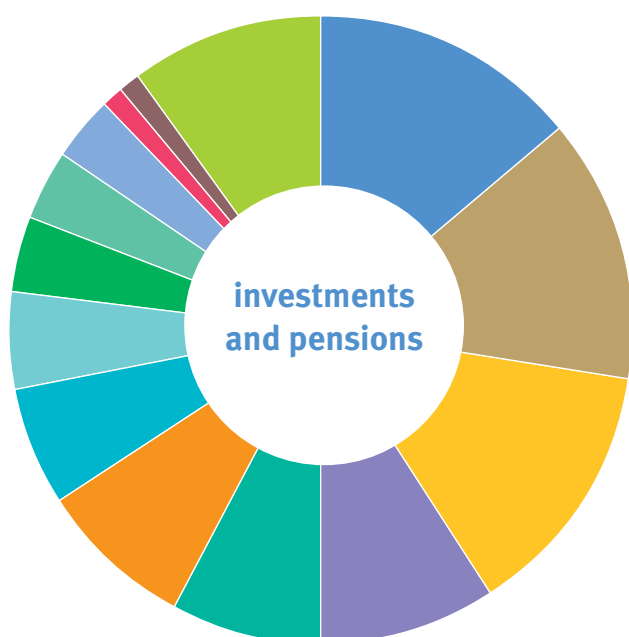
We continued to hear from people – including those running small businesses – who were struggling with loan repayments. In some cases, we found that lenders could have offered their customers greater support at an earlier stage.

Some people complained to us that lenders *wouldn't* lend to them – generally because the lender felt the loan would be unaffordable. It's not the ombudsman's role to tell lenders who to lend to. But it's likely that some of these complaints could have been prevented if lenders had clearly explained the reasons behind their decisions.

We also heard from a number of people who'd given a personal guarantee on a loan for someone else. In many cases, we found the lender hadn't made sure the guarantor knew what they were agreeing to – in particular, that they'd be completely responsible for the repayments if the borrower didn't pay.



the types of problems we've seen: investments and pensions



We received 14,576 complaints about investments and pensions over the year. This represented 4% of the total number of new complaints we received across the ombudsman – the same proportion as last year.

Each year we deal with a wide range of complaints about investments and pensions. Among all the problems we've helped with, we've continued to see a number of common underlying issues.

● personal pension plans	14%	● annuities	5%
● mortgage endowments	13.5%	● unit-linked bonds	4%
● whole-of-life policies and savings endowments	13.5%	● guaranteed-income bonds	3.5%
● investment ISAs	9%	● derivatives (including interest-rate hedging products and spread-betting)	3.5%
● portfolio management	8%	● SERPs	1%
● small self-administered schemes (SSASs) and self-invested personal pensions (SIPPs)	8%	● "with-profits" bonds	1%
● stockbroking	6%	● other (including unit trusts, "structured" investments and income draw-down)	10%

communication and expectations

As in previous years, the majority of complaints we received about investments and pensions centred on the conversations that happened when they were sold. Problems may only come to light – and be escalated to us – years later, when arrangements don't work out as planned.

For example, we continued to hear from people who were disappointed with how their investments had performed – and felt the risks to their money hadn't been properly explained in the first place. In some cases, we decided the business hadn't made the risks clear – or hadn't managed people's expectations well. In others, we found people hadn't read important information – or simply had unrealistic expectations.

Communication was also at the root of most complaints we received about certain whole-of-life products. These products are regularly reviewed – after which the premium or level of cover may go up or down. We continued to hear from people who said they weren't warned upfront that these sorts of changes could happen.

We also heard from people who'd invested in structured investments, guaranteed funds and structured deposits. These products can be complex.

And in many cases, we found people were confused about how they worked – and what that meant for the returns they might get.

the suitability of advice

Another large proportion of complaints about investments and pensions stemmed from the appropriateness of the advice people had been given. We continued to hear from people who had little or no experience of the types of complex investments they'd made.

In many cases, businesses were able to show us they'd carefully weighed up their customer's individual circumstances. But in others, we found that businesses hadn't fully explored all the options – or had given

inappropriate advice. And we decided that a number of people had been sold products that were totally unsuitable for their needs, experience and attitude to risk.

For example, we continued to see a steady number of complaints about unregulated collective investment schemes (UCIS). As we explained in *ombudsman news* in June 2015, at times of low returns on conventional savings, the high returns promised by exotic markets – ranging from wine to renewable energy – may sound particularly appealing. The FCA has now tightly restricted the sale of UCIS. But we still hear from people who, having invested in the past, have now lost significant amounts of money.



ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

After Mr J died, Mrs J complained that, because of his high blood pressure, he should have been offered an enhanced annuity. But the pension provider said they hadn't given Mr J any advice about what annuity to buy.

We asked for the letters the pension provider had sent to Mr J as he approached retirement. We could see that they'd told him that he could buy an annuity from another provider. They'd said that it was "highly likely" he could get a higher level of income if he did. The pension provider told us that they hadn't offered enhanced annuities at the time.

We explained to Mrs J that, in our view, the pension provider had given Mr J enough clear information about his options.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

After being told his investments had lost money, Mr M complained that 80% of his funds had been invested in UCIS exposed to property.

Mr M had received advice before the selling of UCIS to retail investors was further restricted. His financial adviser had recorded his attitude to risk as “cautious”. And he'd told the adviser that he wanted to eventually give his money to his grandchildren.

In light of this, we decided that the investments into the UCIS were unsuitable for Mr M's investment portfolio. We told the adviser to put Mr M in the position he'd be in if he'd received appropriate advice.

administration and delays

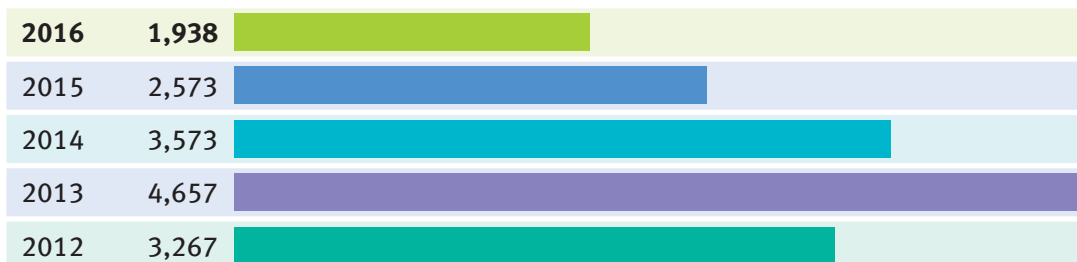
While the products involved may be complex, around a third of investment and pension related complaints we received this year arose from basic administration problems and delays.

Once again, we found that many problems could have been put right far sooner – and without our involvement. Unsurprisingly, many people were both worried and frustrated that large amounts of money – in some cases, their future financial security – could be put at risk by such seemingly simple mistakes.

For example, around half of all the complaints we received about pensions were about delays and administration issues. This included the small number of complaints we received from people trying to access their pensions – following the introduction of pension freedoms in April 2015.

Across the area of investments, we heard from people who'd lost out because of basic errors in calculating interest and returns. This included – as in previous years – people who'd missed the chance to invest their yearly stocks and shares ISA allowance as a result of delays in transferring funds.

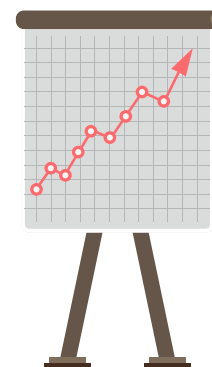
complaints about mortgage endowments



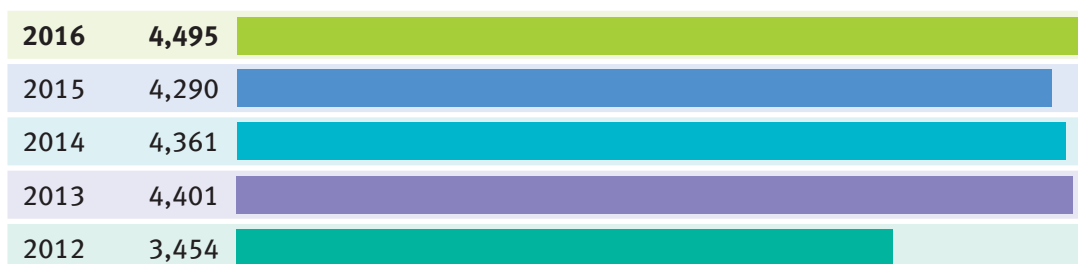
year ended 31 March

After falling sharply last year, the number of complaints we received about mortgage endowments dropped again this year. But they remain the second most complained about investment product – despite now making up only 2% of our caseload, compared with 63% at their peak ten years ago.

Because of time limits that apply to bringing a complaint about a mortgage endowment, it's now too late for many people to complain about their policy. If someone wasn't told about the time limits – or if there were exceptional circumstances meaning they couldn't complain in time – we might be able to look into their concerns.



complaints about pensions



year ended 31 March

We received around 5% more complaints about pensions this year – covering a range of different pension products. As in previous years, around half of these were about problems with administration and delays. And around a half came down to the suitability of the advice people received when making pension arrangements.

We continue to see complaints involving significantly more than £150,000 – the maximum amount we can direct a business to pay a customer – although we can recommend a business pay more.

After increasing by a third last year, the number of complaints we received about annuities steadied this year. Annuities – a retirement income people buy with their pension pot – continued to receive a large amount of publicity during the year. This follows changes that were introduced in April 2015 which mean people have more freedom in the way they access their pensions.

We heard from a number of people who'd said they'd had problems trying to take their pension as a lump sum. Many complaints centred on delays in accessing their money. Some people were unhappy about the fees they were being charged to end their existing pension arrangements early. Others were concerned about the need to seek financial advice – and the accessibility of that advice – where this was a requirement of taking their pensions under the new freedoms.

Last year we explained that we'd seen a significant rise in the number of complaints from people who'd taken out self-invested personal pension plans (SIPPs). Three quarters of these complaints were about advice to invest in UCIS.

We also received more enquiries about so-called “pension unlocking” or “liberation” schemes this year. Typically, people had received a call or text from a company about a “legal loophole” – which,

on the face of it, offered them the chance to access their retirement pot early. But these companies often hadn't given the full picture – particularly around the tax implications.

Some people who contacted us had lost everything in their pension after signing up to “liberate” or “unlock” it. From experience, we know that the sooner people report what's happened, the better the chances of recovering the money. People who've had a bad experience with schemes such as these can contact the national fraud reporting centre, Action Fraud.

Many of the companies involved in these schemes aren't actually regulated or covered by us. But if someone's unhappy with the response of their pension provider, we can look into whether the provider took adequate steps to protect their customer's money – and how quickly they acted once they knew there was a problem.

the types of problems we've seen: investments and pensions

complaints about whole-of-life insurance

After falling for the previous two years, the number of complaints about whole-of-life policies fell again this year. Most complaints came from people unhappy

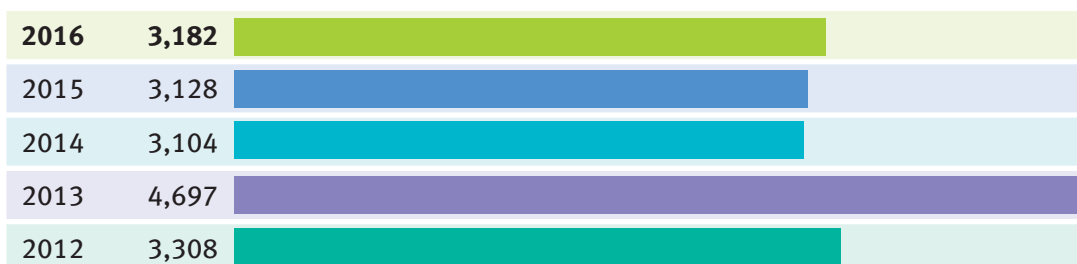
that their premiums had increased or their cover had changed – following a review of the policy by the provider.

We've also continued our work with claims managers to prevent them unnecessarily escalating

these kinds of complaints to businesses and to us. This builds on our work in previous years to push back where claims managers refer complaints we clearly can't look into – and those where there's no evidence that the business acted unfairly.

As a result of our frank conversations about our stance, over the year we've noticed a significant improvement in the quality of the complaints being referred to us by claims managers.

complaints about other investment-linked products



year ended 31 March

Complaints about investment-linked products remained broadly stable – despite turbulence in the market during the year.

We continue to hear from people who've lost money they invested in UCIS. We also continue to receive complaints about more

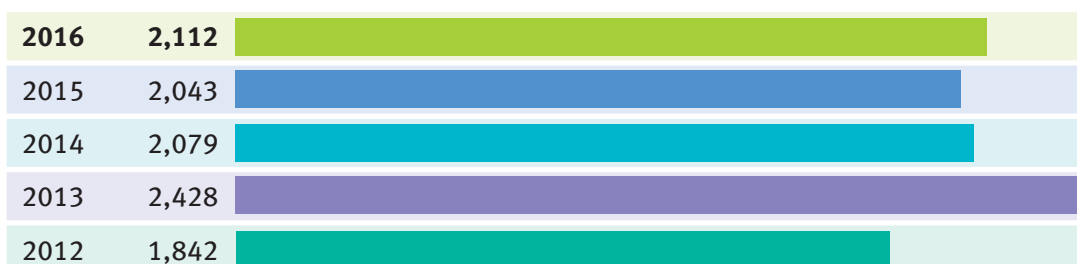
traditional investments. For example, people with stocks-and-shares ISAs contacted us after losing out on the chance to invest – generally as a result of delays in transferring funds.

Like last year, we heard from people with structured investments, guaranteed

funds and structured deposits. Many were unhappy to see a low return on their investment after a number of years – and complained that, when they were sold the investment, they were told they would get a higher return.

In the area of investments, we see a relatively high number of complaints about businesses that have failed – either before or after someone has contacted us. In these cases, we're often able to refer people to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

complaints about stockbroking and portfolio management



year ended 31 March

We received a steady number of complaints about stockbroking and portfolio management this year.

Yet again, a significant number of these came down to delays and basic errors in administration and calculations.

Compared with last year, we heard from fewer people who were unhappy with advice they'd received to invest for tax reasons – generally in more exotic schemes such as film

partnerships and carbon trading. HM Revenue and Customs has recently put further restrictions on such schemes.



“... we continued to develop our employees’ understanding of the range of disabilities and health conditions experienced by people who use our service”

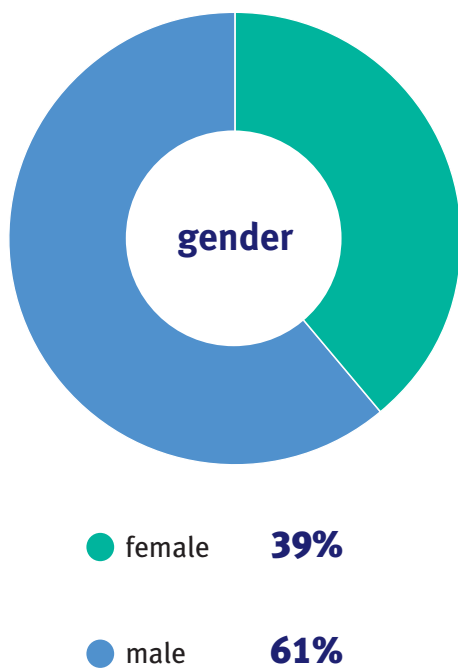
“... awareness of the ombudsman has increased this year – and in most groups, nearly nine in ten people now have some awareness of us”

who complained to us

who complained to us

We talk to thousands of people every day – asking questions to find out the details we need to sort out individual concerns and complaints. We also carry out a wide range of research activities each year to get a wider insight into who’s contacting us – and into how people respond when they’re faced with a problem.

the gender of consumers who complained to us



complaints upheld by gender



Understanding who is – and isn’t – using our service helps us to make sure we’re:

- meeting individual accessibility needs – and making our service easier to use for everyone.
- providing an equal and inclusive service – in line with our public commitments.
- focusing our outreach and awareness-raising activities on people who are less likely to know about us.

We also find out what people do, and how they feel, when they’re faced with a problem. We use what we learn to improve and develop the service we offer – to ensure we remain relevant to changing lives and attitudes.

Once again this year, we’ve found that people are increasingly likely to complain when they’re unhappy with a service they’ve received. This might reflect the growing number of quick, informal ways – in particular,

social media – that are available to air a problem and get a response.

As we explain later in this chapter, awareness of our service has generally increased over the past few years. Our research suggests that, when they encounter a problem, more people are trying to resolve things with the business involved – and also that more people are contacting us if they can’t do this.

It remains the case that when a man and woman take out a joint account or policy, the man’s name is more likely to go first. This might explain why, on the face of it, men continue to make up a higher proportion of the complaints we receive.

We’ve found little significant difference between the types of financial products men and women complain about. But once again, there does seem to be a difference in how they feel about complaining.

For example – like last year – we found that women were 20% less likely than men to say that they’d had a *problem* with a financial product or service – and 10% less likely than men to actually *complain* about a product or service.

Women were also less likely than men to make a formal complaint to us after talking things through with our helpline.

However, compared with men who'd complained, women who'd complained were 8% less likely to be happy with the business's response.

On the other hand, among the complaints we looked into this year, we upheld a slightly higher proportion of those made by women.

This is largely because a greater proportion of women complained about PPI, where we upheld more complaints than other areas. Looking at individual financial products and services, gender makes no significant difference in how likely we are to uphold a complaint.

complaints by where people live

South East	28%	Scotland	9%
Midlands	20%	Wales	5%
North West	12%	East Anglia	5%
North East	10%	Northern Ireland	2%
South West	9%		

By recording where the people who contact us live, we can identify areas where there's lower awareness of our service – or where people are less likely to contact us.

Of the people who contacted us this year, the highest proportions lived in the South East and the Midlands. We generally didn't find any differences in the issues people contacted us about from different nations and regions.

But there were some exceptions in the areas of PPI and current accounts.

PPI made up 68% of complaints from the North East of England, compared with 59% of complaints from the South East. On the other hand, of all the current account complaints we saw, 54% came from the South East – but only 2% came from the North East.

Variations in volumes of calls from different areas can help us to identify where we might need to raise awareness of our service – or address specific issues – through focused outreach work. There's more about this in the chapter *our insight and outreach*.



where people phoned us from the most

- 1 Warrington
- 2 Sale
- 3 Hounslow
- 4 Skipton
- 5 Tower Hamlets
- 6 Manchester
- 7 Central London
- 8 Gloucester
- 9 Central Birmingham
- 10 Bolton
- 11 Glasgow
- 12 Chester
- 13 Southampton
- 14 Burton
- 15 Leeds
- 16 Altrincham
- 17 Nottingham
- 18 Hull
- 19 Bristol
- 20 Stockport

who complained to us

As part of asking people whose complaints we've resolved about their experience of our service, we ask how they heard about us in the first place.

As we explain in the chapter *our insight and outreach*, we continue to work with front-line community advisers who people with problems are most likely to turn to in the first instance. This year we saw a small increase in the number of people who'd heard about us from these front-line community advisers.

And slightly more people had heard us mentioned in the media than in the previous year.

People from unskilled (DE) backgrounds were relatively more likely to have found

out about us through family and friends – with a quarter telling us this was how they'd first heard of us.

Compared with people aged over 55, younger people are around twice as likely to find out about us through the internet. On the other hand, the older people are, the more likely it is that they heard about us in a newspaper. Overall, slightly fewer people this year said they'd found out about us from a financial business.

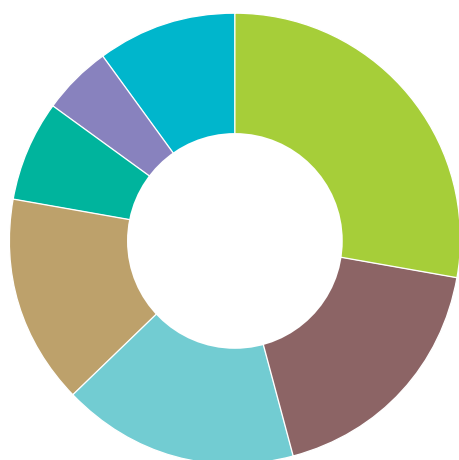
This year a greater proportion of people said they'd heard about us through local and free newspapers. We've continued to work with these types of publications, from *Metro* – read by

commuters in towns and cities across the UK – to the regional press, where we can explain how we can help with specific local matters, like insurance issues around flooding earlier this year.

During the year, we featured in around 6,000 media stories – over half of which appeared exclusively online. Journalists continue to ask for our independent perspective on money matters and complaints – and over the year we were able to provide the background for a range of features and stories.

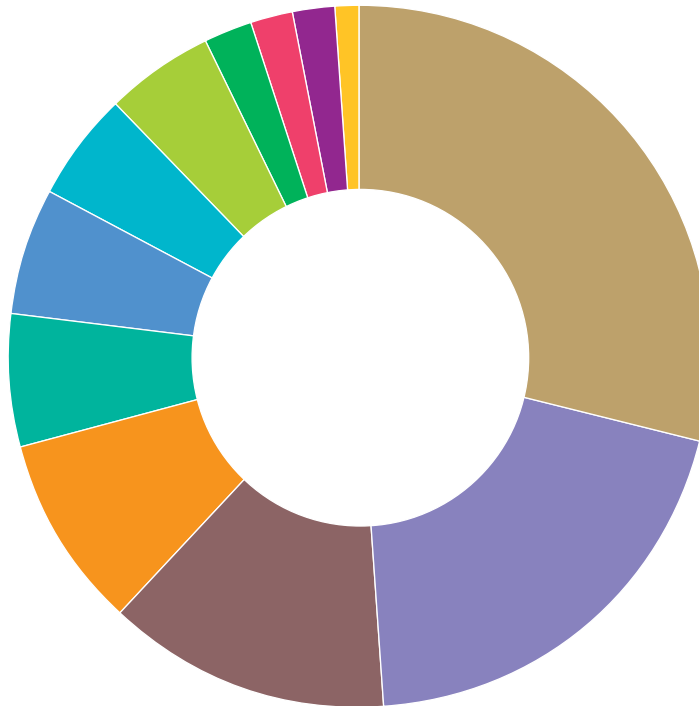


how people whose complaints we resolved found out about us



● from a financial business	28%
● on the internet	18%
● in the media	17%
● from a friend, relative or colleague	15%
● from a consumer advice agency (eg Trading Standards or Citizens Advice)	7%
● from a claims management company	5%
● other	10%

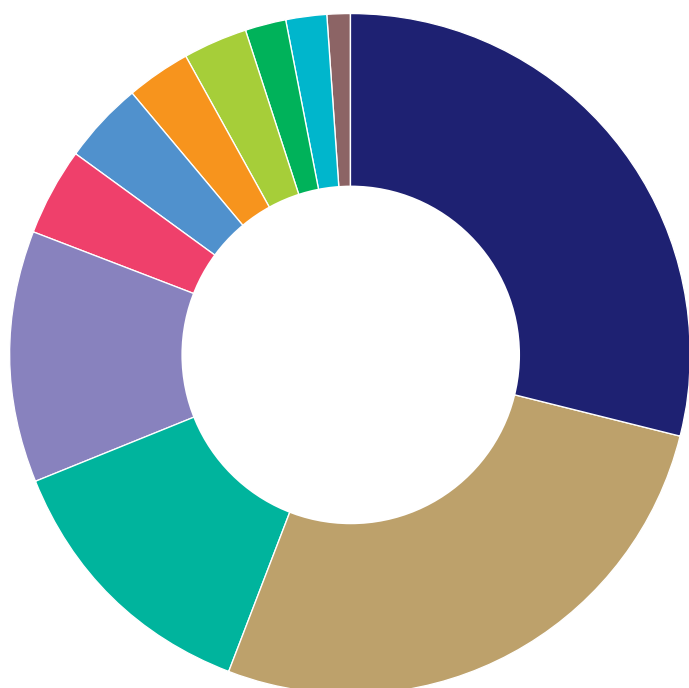
newspapers read by the people who complained to us



- regional and free papers (including Metro) **29%**
- Daily Mail / Mail on Sunday **20%**
- Sun **13%**
- Mirror **9%**
- Times / Sunday Times **6%**
- Telegraph / Sunday Telegraph **6%**
- Express **5%**
- Guardian / Observer **5%**
- Financial Times **2%**
- Independent / Independent on Sunday **2%**
- Star **2%**
- Other **1%**

who complained to us

media coverage of the ombudsman



● BBC (online, radio, tv)	29%
● regional and free papers (including Metro)	27%
● Times / Sunday Times	13%
● Daily Mail / Mail on Sunday	12%
● Independent / Independent on Sunday	4%
● Telegraph / Sunday Telegraph	4%
● The Mirror/ Sunday Mirror	3%
● Guardian / Observer	3%
● Financial Times	2%
● Daily Express	2%
● The Sun	1%



the ombudsman chats to Pete Price on his Liverpool Radio City late-night show – about pensions, scams, borrowing money for Christmas ... and hoverboards

we talk to BBC Radio Ulster's On Your Behalf about personal accident cover and problems involving mental health and travel insurance

Caroline Wayman, chief ombudsman, chats to Adrian Chiles on BBC Radio 5 Live about what's happening with PPI

the ombudsman chats to BBC Radio Wiltshire about how important it is to face up to mortgage problems – before they get out of hand

As the latest research shows, people get their news from a diverse range of sources, which tends to reflect their age and lifestyle. To make sure we were reaching different groups of people, our work with the media this year ranged from sharing *ombudsman news* case

studies in *the Mail* and *the Mirror*, to regular slots on national, local and online broadcasts.

We also continued to engage with consumers – as well as businesses and other stakeholders – across a range of social media channels.



the socio-economic background of people who complained to us



- AB professional and managerial
- C1/C2 skilled and semi-skilled
- DE unskilled

To help us make sure we're reaching everyone who might need us, we record the socio-economic background of people whose complaints we resolve each year. Over the last four years, the proportion of people from an unskilled (DE) background who used our service has nearly doubled.

This year, we upheld:

- 53% of complaints from people in the AB group
- 55% of complaints from people in the C1/C2 group
- 57% of complaints from people in the DE group

We also monitor the outcome of problems we've helped to sort out by the socio-economic background of the people involved.



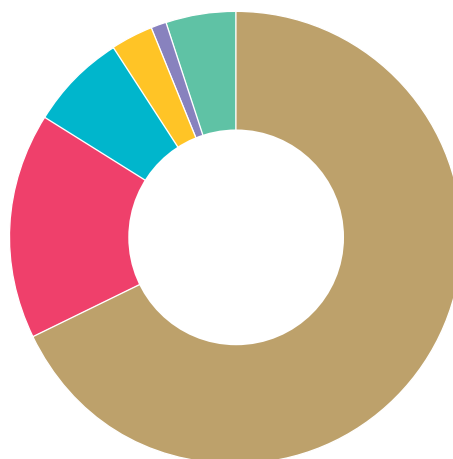
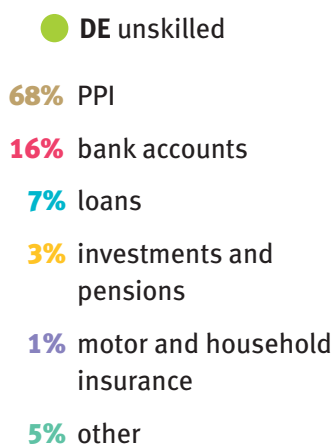
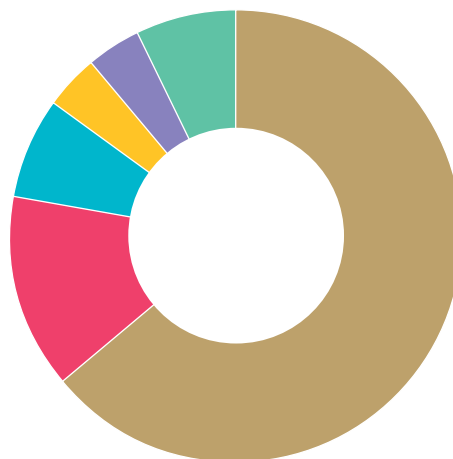
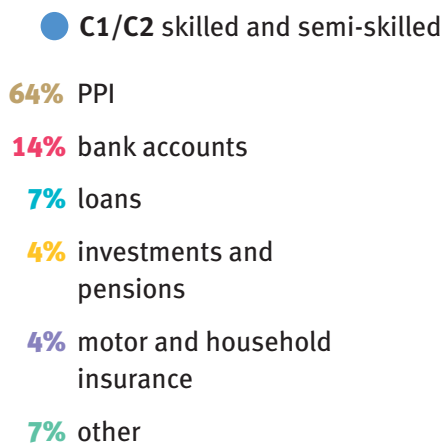
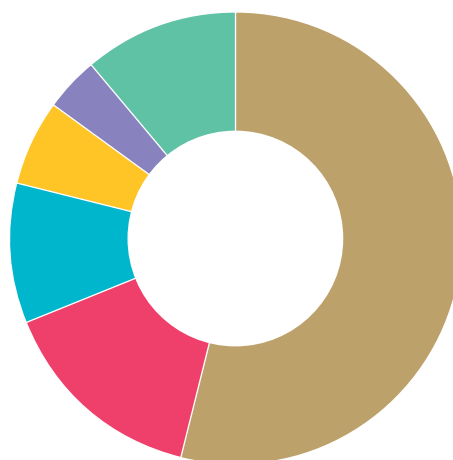
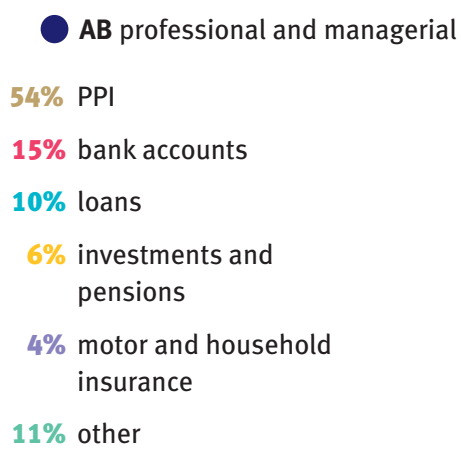
who complained to us

who complained to us

the types of problems people complained about – by socio-economic background

As these charts show, differences in outcomes across the socio-economic groups are mainly due to the number of PPI complaints each group brings to us. We uphold a high proportion of PPI complaints – and these make up a higher proportion of complaints from people in the DE group.

The most complained-about product – PPI – is the same across different socio-economic groups. And the proportion of complaints about bank accounts has risen significantly across all three groups – in line with increasing numbers of people who brought complaints to us about packaged bank accounts.

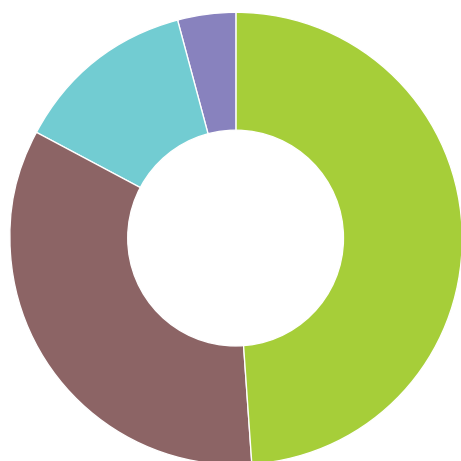


the occupational background of people who complained to us

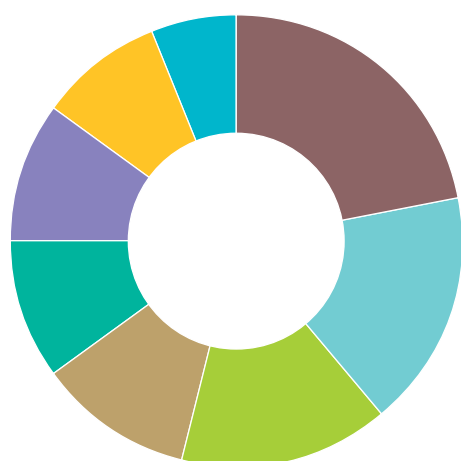
The occupational status of the people whose complaints we resolved this year remained broadly the same as last year.

But we saw some variation in the occupational backgrounds of the people whose complaints we resolved. We saw more

complaints this year from people working in skilled trades and plant work – including electricians, mechanics and assembly-line workers – but fewer from people working in professions such as teaching and law.



employed	49%
retired	34%
self-employed/running own business	13%
other (including studying and unemployed)	4%



skilled trades (eg electricians, plumbers, mechanics)	22%
managers and officials	17%
administrative and secretarial	15%
professionals	11%
personal services (eg care assistants, dental nurses)	10%
sales and customer service	10%
process and plant work (eg machinery operatives, assembly-line workers)	9%
elementary occupations (eg hotel & bar staff, farm workers, postal workers)	6%

who complained to us

different languages and formats

We hear from a number of people whose first language isn't English – including overseas customers of UK financial businesses that operate globally. Understandably, this may present a significant barrier to expressing a problem – and getting a complaint sorted efficiently. So this year we continued to ensure we're accessible to everyone – making different languages and formats available where we find this would be the most effective way to help.

During 2015/2016 we translated around 4,000 written documents – and spoke to people through our phone-based interpreter service over 800 times. Between these two services, we used more than 40 different languages – including British Sign Language. And ten of our people volunteered their own time to learn British Sign Language to help communicate with people face to face.

We also continued to use speech browser software on our website – meaning our online resources can be read aloud in more than 50 different languages.

disability

Over the year 16% of people who complained to us told us that they had a disability – most commonly mobility, circulatory and manual dexterity issues. Many of these people didn't need us to adapt our service to meet any particular communication needs.

But to make sure we're accessible – and there aren't any barriers to using us – we ask everyone who complains to us if they need us to provide information in a different format. Over the past year, we've communicated in

a different format 3,412 times – including using bold print, colour paper and simplified text.

People's disabilities and different needs – and how financial businesses have responded to them – continued to feature in a number of complaints that were referred to us during the year.



ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

Miss K received several letters from a debt collection company. They said she'd run up significant debts on her credit card – and she needed to repay the full amount.

Miss K's mother explained to the card provider – a bank – that Miss K had been forced to take out the card by her abusive ex-partner. Her mother said the ex-partner had taken advantage of Miss K because of her learning difficulties. But the bank refused to write off the debt.

We saw from the bank's records that Miss K's mother had told them about her daughter's learning difficulties. She'd offered to provide medical evidence – but the bank had told her that it wouldn't make a difference to their answer.

During our involvement, the bank accepted that if they'd had this evidence, they would have reached a different conclusion. They agreed to write off the debt and close the account – as well as making sure Miss K's credit file wouldn't be affected.

This year we continued to develop our employees' understanding of the range of disabilities and health conditions experienced by people who use our service. This helps us ensure we're sensitive to when we might need to do things differently – and are able to offer appropriate support.

For example, we've continued to build relationships with Macmillan, Mind and the National Autistic Society – who provide us with regular informal training. Maintaining these links means that, as part of sorting out complaints, our employees can identify and signpost people to organisations who offer specialist support.



who complained to us

black and minority (BME) backgrounds

Our research shows that someone's ethnic background doesn't have a bearing on the outcome of their complaint – or the likelihood of their appealing against our answer if they're unhappy with it.

On the other hand, we continued to see some variation in the types of

complaints people from different backgrounds bring to us. For example, 68% of complaints from people who said they were Black/Black British were about PPI – compared with 44% for people who said they had an Asian background.

This year we saw a decrease in the proportion of complaints from people who said they had a non-white background.

On the other hand, awareness of our service among Black/Black British people is 25% higher than the level two years ago. So this year we continued to work with black publications like the women's lifestyle magazine, *Pride* – featuring in a range of articles related to everyday money matters like saving up for holidays.

The proportion of people bringing complaints to us from each age group has remained consistent again this year – with the highest proportion of complaints being brought by people aged 45 to 54.

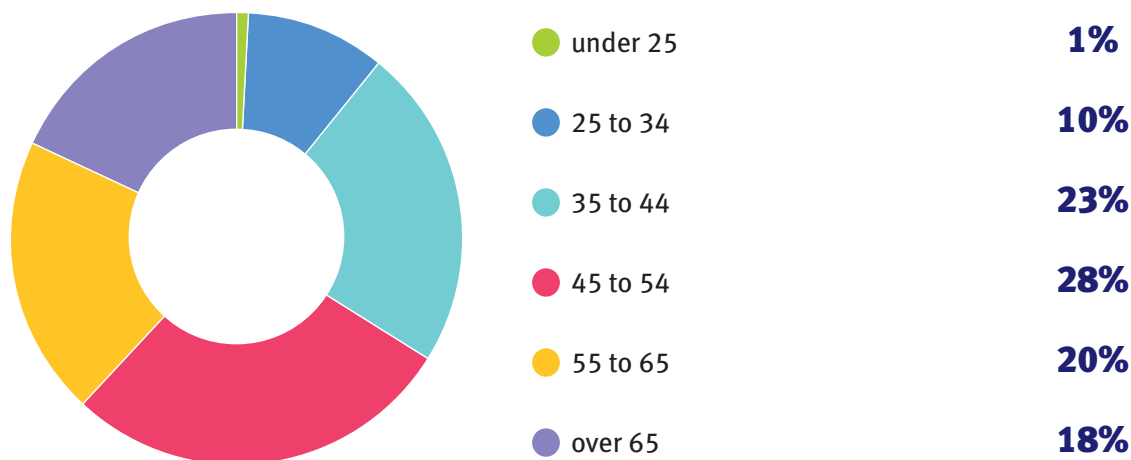
PPI remains the most complained-about financial product among people in most age groups – apart from those under 25.



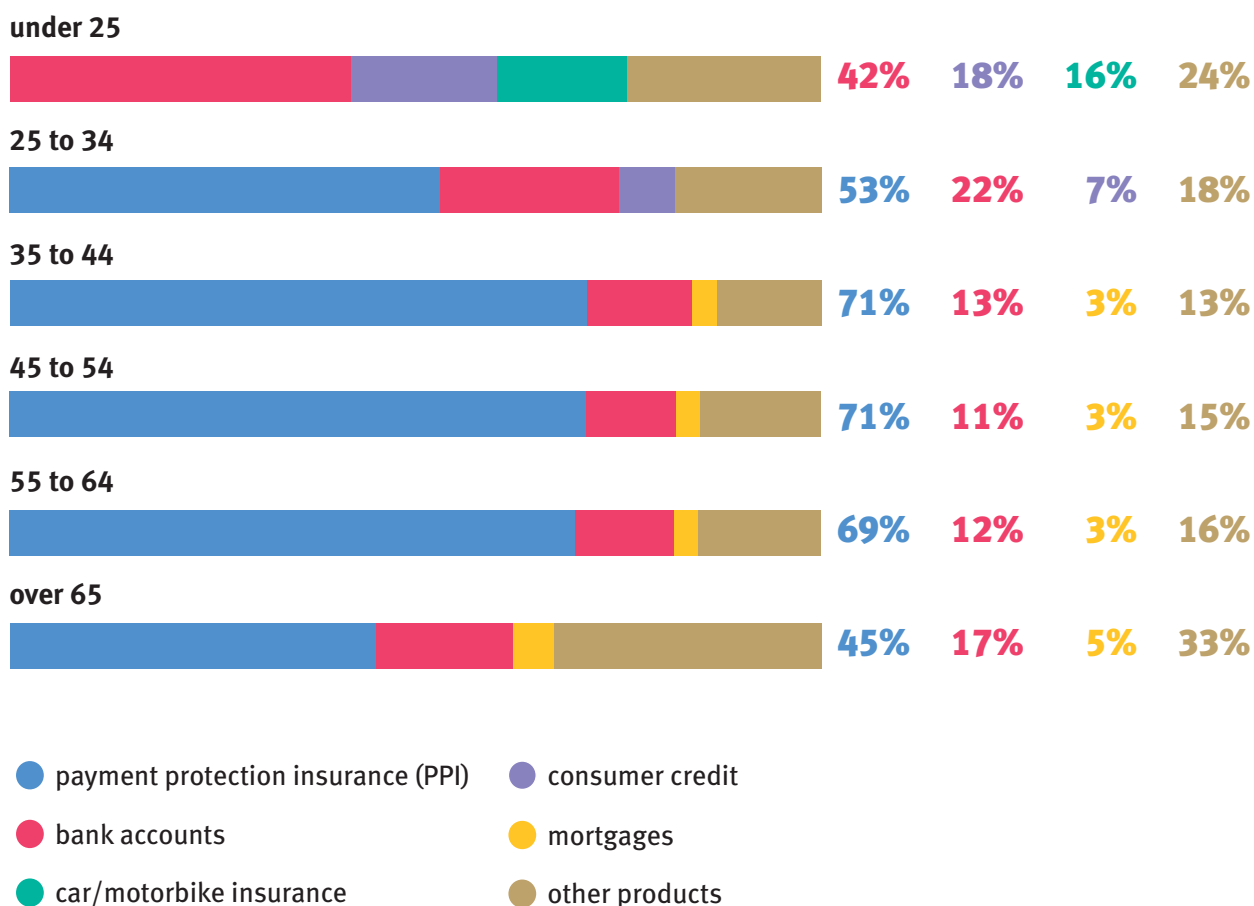
the ethnic background of people who complained to us



the age of people who complained to us



the most complained-about products – by age group



who complained to us

Including complaints about PPI, people aged between 35 and 65 accounted for around seven in ten of the complaints we received. Our research shows that, in general, people in this age group tend to be more aware of their rights as consumers.

And between these ages, it's likely people will experience a wide range of events – from travelling or buying a house, to running a business or planning for

retirement – many of which involve financial products and services.

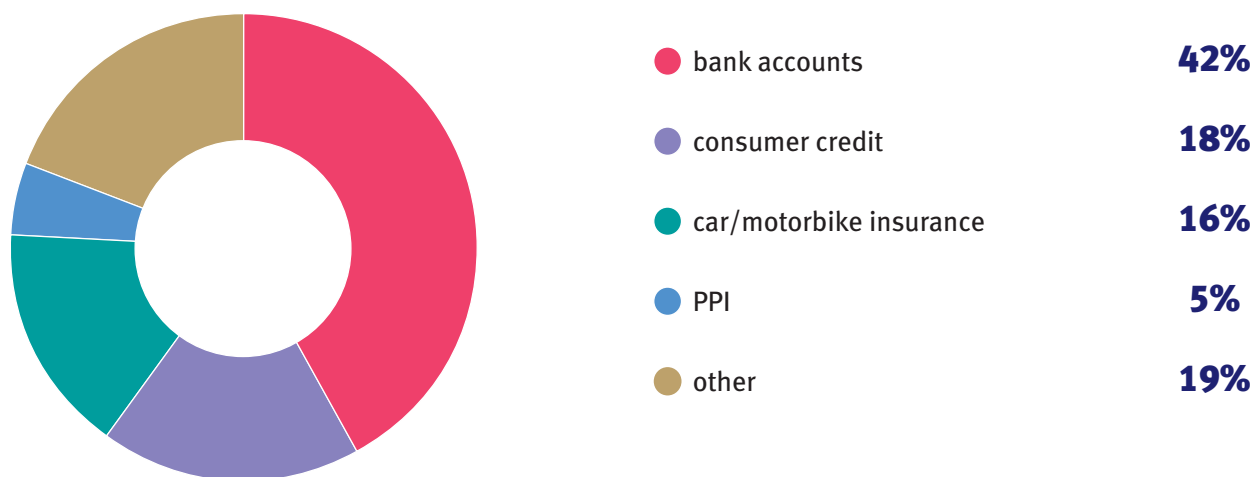
From our research, we know there are some differences in what people in different age groups complain to us about. There's particular variation in the complaints brought to us by older and younger people.

For example, after PPI, term assurance and mortgage endowments were among the most complained-about

products for people aged over 45 – whereas younger people are proportionately far more likely than any other age group to complain about problems with consumer credit products.

In particular, payday loans made up a significant number of the complaints we resolved from younger people – but featured less prominently among the most complained-about products for people over 35.

what people aged under 25 complained to us about



Overall, complaints from people under 25 were less likely to be upheld. But this age group is more likely to complain about banking products – an area where we uphold relatively fewer complaints – and less likely to complain about PPI, where we continue to uphold a high proportion.

People under 25 were the only age group where PPI wasn't the most complained-about product. In fact, complaints about PPI among the under-25s fell significantly this year – from 19% to just 5% of the complaints we received

from this age group. This reflects the fact that mis-selling of PPI should already be a thing of the past for this age group.

Bank accounts continued to be the most complained-about product for under-25s – and compared with last year, accounted for 20% more complaints from this age group.

Our wider research suggests that 23% of people under 25 had experienced some kind of problem with a financial product or service – up from 10% last year. While this is broadly in line with

other age groups, we continue to find that under-25s are less likely to go on to pursue a complaint.

To address this, we continue to focus on raising awareness of our service among younger people. This year, for example, we featured in publications including *The Gap Travel Guide* – and shared our insight into financial problems affecting younger people in the September 2015 issue of *ombudsman news*. We've also taken part in freshers' fairs and worked with front-line student advisers.

ombudsman news

essential reading for people interested in financial complaints – and how to prevent or settle them

Ms H wanted a student account, but her bank said she needed to close her existing current account with another bank first. In the meantime, they told her to open a new current account with them.

Ms H closed her other account. But when she tried to upgrade her new account to a student account, her application was turned down. The bank said she couldn't upgrade her account so soon after opening it – and apologised for telling her to open the new account.

Ms H wasn't happy with the bank's apology. She'd made several calls and trips to the bank over several weeks as a result of the problem. And she'd had to start university without a student account, missing out on several free offers – which she'd had to pay for separately.

Following our involvement, the bank offered Ms H £200 for the stress and inconvenience they'd caused her – as well as agreeing to open a student account for her.



who complained to us

The proportion of people aged over 65 who referred complaints to us increased over the year. This age group now accounts for 18% of people who use our service.

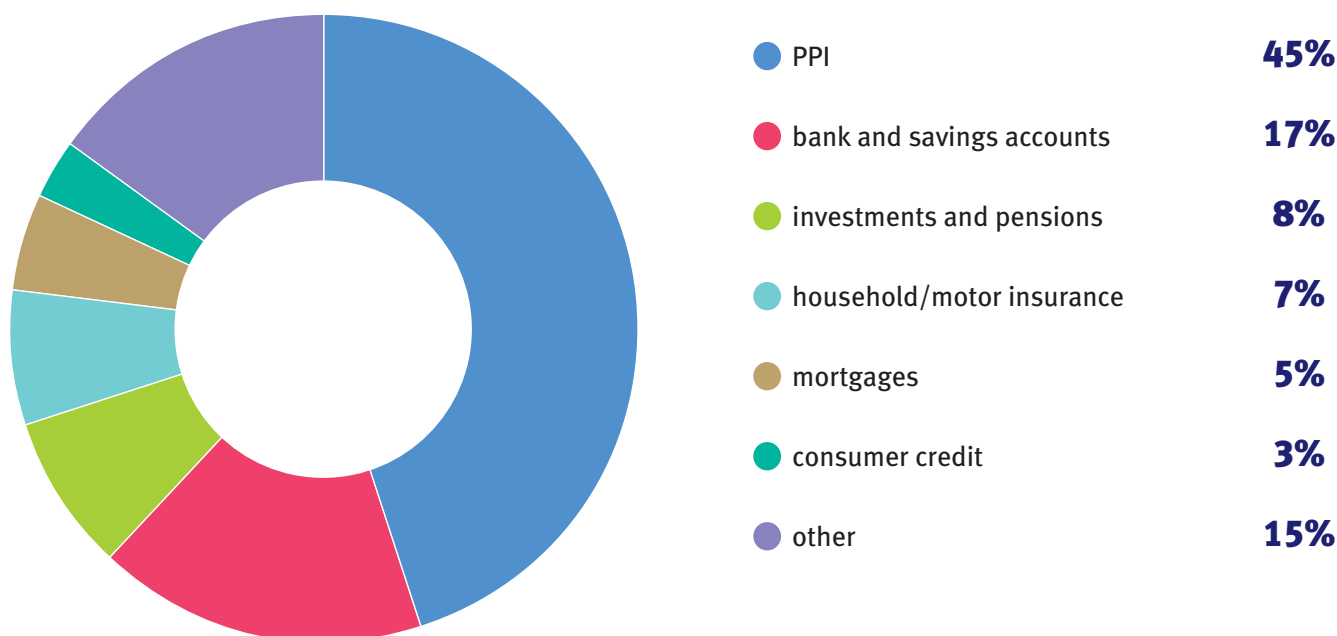
In contrast to younger people, consumers over 65 are the most likely to pursue their complaint and request an ombudsman decision as the final stage of our process.

This could reflect the kinds of financial products involved. Older people bring proportionately more complaints about pensions and investments – and, given the sums of money involved, may want to take things as far as they can.

Over the year there's been significant media focus on financial issues affecting older people – including new pensions freedoms,

powers of attorney and mortgage lending into retirement. We've worked with the media to provide background information for a number of features and news stories – explaining the types of things we see going wrong, and how we can learn from them.

what people aged over 65 complained to us about

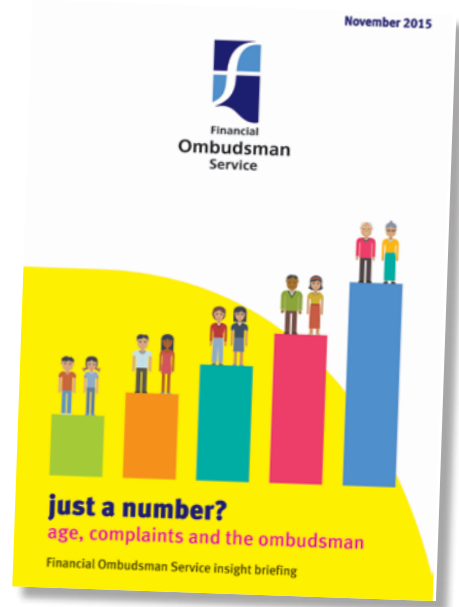


We also shared our own insight report – *age, complaints and the ombudsman* – based on a detailed review of complaints we’d received, looking at the kinds of problems we see that affect older people in particular.

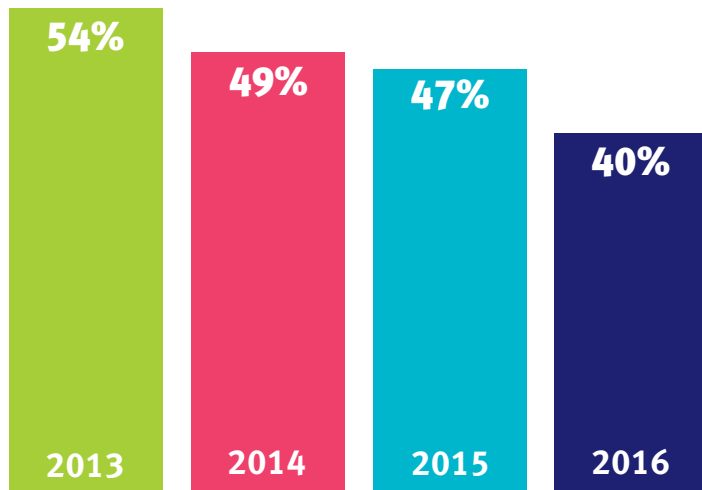
And in *ombudsman news* in November 2015, we shared case studies of complaints we’ve resolved involving older people and retirement.

Wider research suggests that the over-65s are more likely than other age groups to have no internet access.

Among people who complained to us, the proportion of people aged over 65 who weren’t online fell for the third year running – but four in ten remain offline. So as we develop new ways of working, we continue to use more traditional channels as well – both to communicate with people who contact us and to raise awareness of our service.



people over 65 who told us they had no internet access



who complained to us

who complained to us

promoting equality, diversity and inclusion

We publish our equality and diversity policy – which is set and monitored by our board and executive team – on our website. The commitments we've made around equality, diversity and inclusion are underpinned by our aim to provide a fair, impartial and trusted service.

We've continued to work with external experts to improve our understanding of a range of issues around equality and diversity – so we can support our customers and our own employees.

This has included working with Business Disability Forum and Stonewall (the charity for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

people). We established new partnerships with organisations including Heart of the City and gender diversity campaign *Opportunity Now*. And we were recognised by Jobcentre Plus for our work to encourage people with disabilities to work for us.

We were especially proud to be named Public Service Organisation of the year, 2016, by the National Centre for Diversity.

Like last year, we've maintained our relationship with the East London Business Alliance – meaning our employees can take part in a range of volunteering opportunities in our local community. For example, our ombudsman volunteers have been working with local charity Headway – to make art

from broken and discarded crockery and to help people with brain injuries regain confidence and communication skills.

the diversity of our own workforce

As a service for everyone in the UK, we want the people who work for us to be representative of a diverse range of communities and perspectives.

Over the year the make-up of our employees stayed broadly the same as last year – 45% are men and 55% are women. Women accounted for 50% of our non-executive board and 50% of our executive team. 55% of our ombudsmen are women.

56% of people working for us at the end of the year were aged between 25

and 34 – with 17% aged between 35 and 44, 10% aged between 45 and 54 and 5% older than 55. The age of our employees ranged from 18 to 71 years old.

36% of our employees say they are from a non-white background, 4% say they have a disability, and 3% have told us that they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).

This year we've continued to support our employee-led networks. These promote discussion and understanding among people from different backgrounds – including different faith groups, LGBT people, carers, and people with direct and indirect experience of mental health issues.

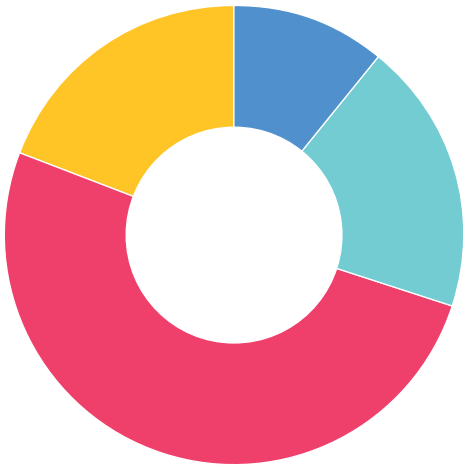


Congrats to [@financialombuds](#) on winning Public Service Org of the Year 2016 #NCFD1

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levels of awareness of the ombudsman service



- people who didn't recognise our name or know who we were **11%**
- people who could name us without any prompting **19%**
- people who said they *definitely* knew of us when they were told our name **51%**
- people who said they *may* have heard of us when they were told our name **19%**

As well as understanding who's using us, it's also important we raise awareness of our service among the public in general. This helps to improve confidence in financial services – because even though most people won't encounter problems, they'll know we're here to help if something does go wrong.

This year, 19% of people could name us unprompted – that is, they could specifically name us when our role was described.

And the number of people with *no* awareness of us nearly halved – from 20% last year to only 11% this year. The groups who *may* have or *definitely* had heard of us also increased from last year.

As part of our awareness-raising work – and commitment to making our service accessible in a range of different ways – we launched five animated videos this year, putting the work of the ombudsman into the context of a range of everyday situations.

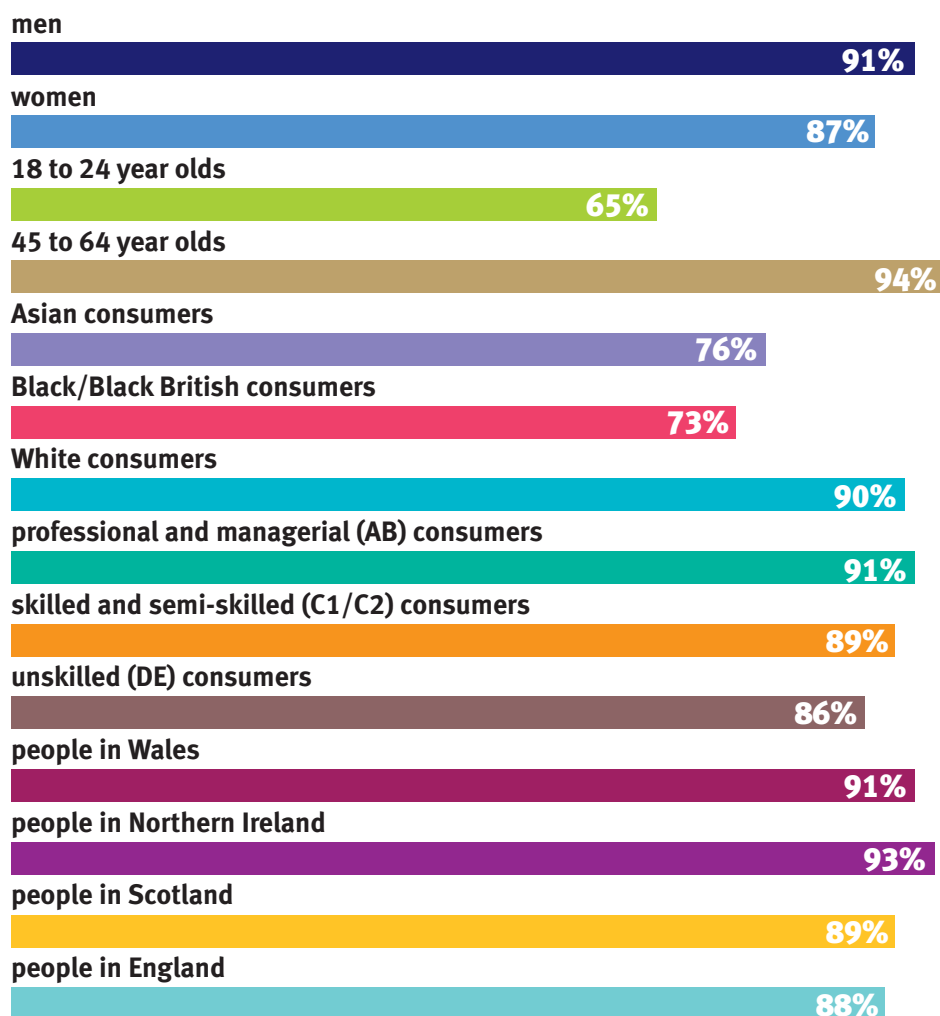
Each video reached well over 10,000 people online – with our original video, explaining the roots of “the ombudsman” and introducing our mascot viking Hakon, now having been watched 170,000 times.



who complained to us

who complained to us

awareness of the ombudsman service across different groups of people



We continue to promote awareness of our service through our ongoing outreach with communities across the UK – as well as our work with the media, including social media. There’s more about how we do this in the chapters *sorting things early on* and *our insight and outreach*.

This chart shows awareness of our service among different groups of people. Awareness of the ombudsman has increased this year in nearly every

group – and in most groups, nearly nine in ten people now have some awareness of us.

In Northern Ireland awareness is now 93%, compared to 66% last year. As well as continuing to meet businesses and community groups across Northern Ireland, we’ve now taken part for seven years in the Balmoral Show – one of Northern Ireland’s largest agricultural events – as well as regularly taking part in BBC Radio Ulster’s

consumer show *On Your Behalf* and advertising on public transport.

As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, even though awareness of our service is lower among younger people, it rose from 45% to 65% this year. Awareness among Black/Black British people remains higher than we’ve seen in previous years.

people who *don't* use our service

This year one in four people we surveyed said that they'd had a problem with a financial product or service – rising from less than one in five last year. Of these people, 71% told us that they went on to complain to the financial business involved. And 67% said they were satisfied with the business's response.

Among the 33% of people who *weren't* satisfied with the business's response, 38% didn't take things further – either by referring their complaint to us or to another organisation such as the FCA or the courts.

This is less than last year – when 51% of people said they hadn't taken things further. And more people this year – 48%, compared with 33% – said they'd referred their complaint to us.

People aged between 45 and 54 were the most likely to pursue their complaint – with 73% of people in this age group saying they would take further action of some kind, including referring the matter to us.

Once again this year, the majority of people who chose not to pursue a complaint said they didn't think it would achieve anything, or they found it too stressful.

These two reasons together accounted for why more than half the people we asked didn't pursue a complaint.

The number of people who told us they didn't think a complaint was worth their time increased from 10% to 14% this year. There's more information on how we try to sort out complaints as quickly as possible – including how we work together with businesses at an early stage – in the chapter *sorting things early on*.



who complained to us

trust

We're here to help put things right and help people move on when something has gone wrong. And we know this can't happen unless people trust us to give a fair answer.

Our research this year found that 75% of adults across the UK said they would trust our service – up from 71% last year. By comparison, wider research suggests that levels of consumer trust in financial services more generally remains at around 50%.

Among people who knew of us, but hadn't ever used our service, 14% said they would trust us completely. Among people who'd used our service, 65% said they would trust us completely – a level that's remained consistent for the past two years.

We ask people who've used our service for feedback on their experience at different stages in our process.

Some people tell us they feel the financial business they're complaining about has taken a "tick box" approach to dealing with their concerns. So this year we reviewed and updated the questions we ask about our own service, to help us better understand how people feel we've treated them.

Among people who called our helpline, more than eight in ten rated us positively – agreeing that we'd listened, got to grips with the problem, and given clear and honest answers. This rose to more than nine in ten among people whose complaints we needed to investigate further.

While a large majority of people still responded positively, our ratings were slightly lower among people who had pursued their complaint all the way to an ombudsman. This could reflect the fact that these people had generally waited longer for their problem to be finally sorted out – which we know has a significant bearing on how people feel about their experience.

you listened to me and cared about what I had to say

you got to grips with things and used common sense

you gave me clear and honest answers and let me know where I stood



how we were rated by people on their first contact with us

you gave me clear and honest answers and let me know where I stood



you got to grips with things and used common sense



you listened to me and cared about what I had to say



● consumers who agree ● consumers who disagree ● no view expressed

how we were rated by people while we were investigating their complaint

you gave me clear and honest answers and let me know where I stood



you got to grips with things and used common sense



you listened to me and cared about what I had to say



● consumers who agree ● consumers who disagree ● no view expressed

how we were rated by people who pursued their complaint to an ombudsman – the final stage in our process

you gave me clear and honest answers and let me know where I stood



you got to grips with things and used common sense



you listened to me and cared about what I had to say



● consumers who agree ● consumers who disagree ● no view expressed

how the outcome of a complaint affected people's views of our service

It's perhaps not surprising that the majority of people whose complaints we upheld told us they were happy with our service.

But it's particularly encouraging that more than half of people whose complaints *weren't* upheld still felt positively about the service they'd received from us – with many saying they felt we'd treated them fairly with a high level of service.

In our surveys, of those people who felt they'd got the outcome they'd hoped for:

- 91% gave us positive feedback on the level of service we provided – a very similar number to last year.
- 4% – like last year – gave us negative feedback, telling us they thought our service could be better.
- 5% didn't express a view.

Of those people who felt they *hadn't* got the outcome they'd hoped for:

- 57% gave us positive feedback – a rise of 16% on last year.
- 31% gave us negative feedback – a decrease of 20%.
- 12% didn't express a view.

Overall, 75% of people rated their experience of our service positively.

“honest answers to help people move on”

“listening, thinking and explaining”





“... four banking groups accounted for 56% of new complaints referred to us this year”

“... once again, a majority of managers at financial businesses agree that we provide good value for money”

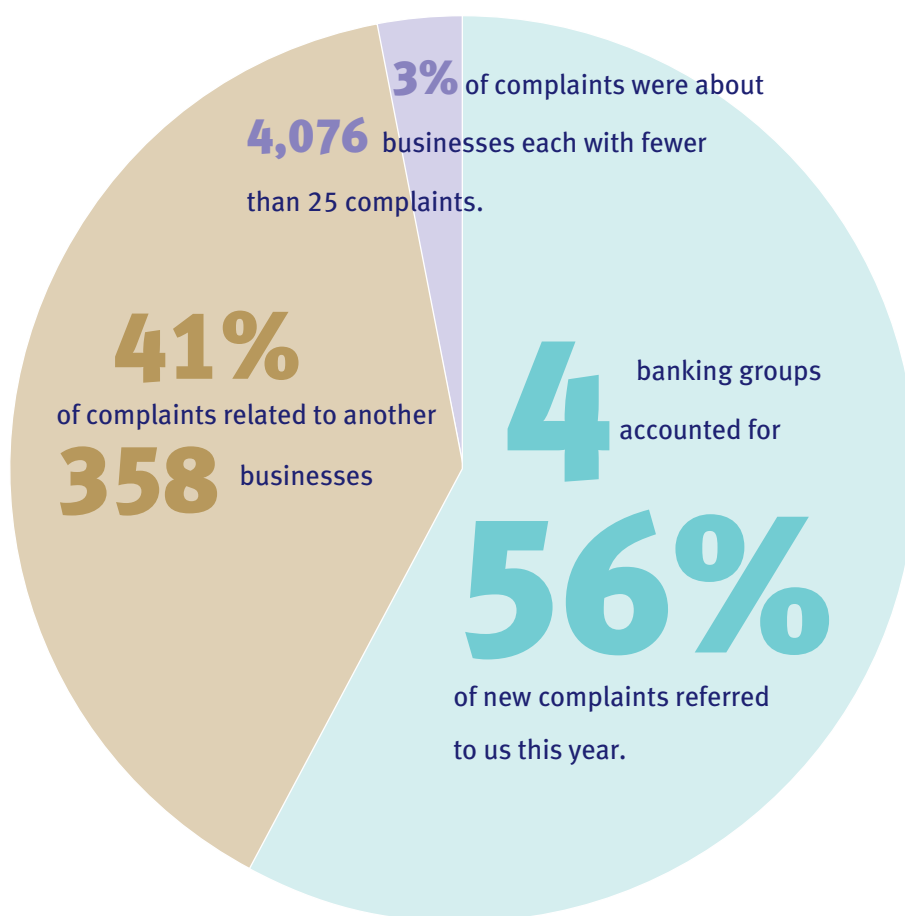
who the complaints were about

who the complaints were about

In total, we cover over 50,000 financial businesses – made up of those who are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), as well as a number who've signed up voluntarily so their customers can use the ombudsman.

These businesses range considerably in size – from sole traders to multinational financial services providers. As in previous years, in 2015/2016 the volume of complaints we received about different businesses broadly reflected the size of those businesses.

Of the total number of businesses we cover, fewer than one in ten had complaints referred to us this year. More than half of these complaints involved just four of the UK's largest banking groups.



Since April 2013 we've charged an individual case fee only for the 26th and each subsequent complaint we receive about a business each year.

As in previous years, this meant that more than nine in ten of businesses whose customers complained to us in 2015/2016 didn't pay any case fees at all.

how the complaints were spread across the businesses we cover

2,299 businesses each had **1 complaint** referred to us during the year



608 businesses each had **2 complaints** referred to us



290 businesses each had **3 complaints** referred to us



610 businesses each had **between 4 and 10 complaints** referred to us



223 businesses each had **between 11 and 20 complaints** referred to us



192 businesses each had **between 21 and 50 complaints** referred to us



94 businesses each had **between 51 and 100 complaints** referred to us



91 businesses each had **between 101 and 250 complaints** referred to us



38 businesses each had **between 251 and 500 complaints** referred to us



49 businesses each had **more than 500 complaints** referred to us during the year



who the complaints were about

complaints data about named businesses

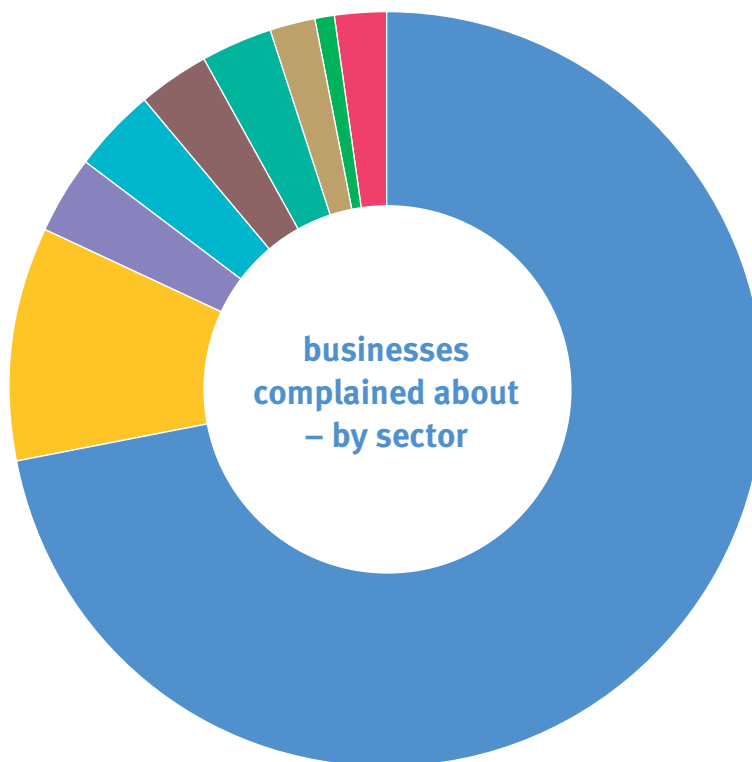
As we explain in the chapter our *insight and outreach*, every six months we publish tables of data on our website about the complaints we've been dealing with and the businesses involved.

For businesses that have had 30 or more new cases and 30 or more resolved cases over the previous six months, we show both the number of new complaints and the proportion of complaints we upheld.

From January 2016, we've also shared the numbers of complaints we've settled at an early stage. Under new rules that have applied since July 2015, we've been able to get involved in a complaint before the business has investigated – if both the business and their customer agree.

businesses we received complaints about – by sector

Although we're starting to see declining numbers of complaints about payment protection insurance (PPI), volumes have remained higher than we had planned for following consultation with our stakeholders. The proportion of complaints involving banks – who sold the policies involved in the majority of PPI complaints – also remains high.

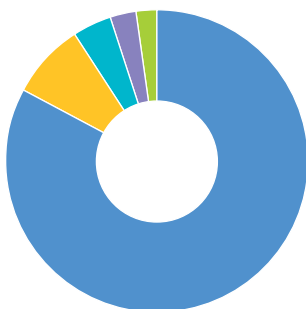


● banks	72%
● general insurers	10%
● insurance intermediaries	3.5%
● building societies	3.5%
● life insurance and investment product providers	3%
● consumer credit businesses	3%
● mortgage intermediaries	2%
● independent financial advisers (IFAs)	1%
● other (including fund managers and stockbrokers)	2%

the types of problems we've seen – by sector

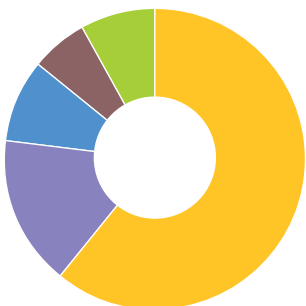
complaints about PPI

- 83%** banks
- 8%** general insurers
- 4%** building societies
- 3%** insurance intermediaries
- 2%** other



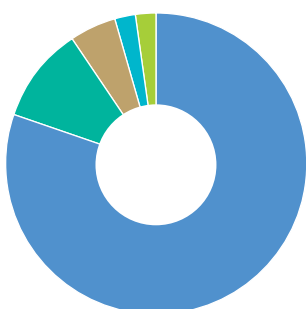
complaints about insurance (excluding PPI)

- 61%** general insurers
- 16%** insurance intermediaries
- 9%** banks
- 6%** life insurance and investment product providers
- 8%** other



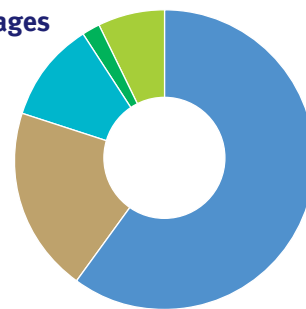
complaints about banking and credit

- 80.5%** banks
- 10.5%** consumer credit businesses
- 5%** mortgage intermediaries
- 2%** building societies
- 2%** other



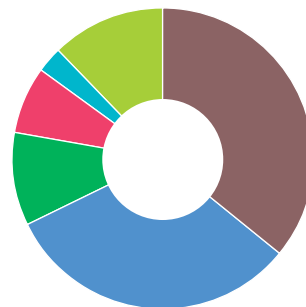
complaints about mortgages

- 60%** banks
- 20%** mortgage intermediaries
- 11%** building societies
- 2%** IFAs
- 7%** other (including non-bank mortgage providers)



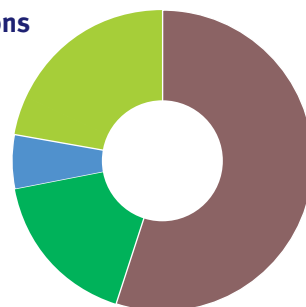
complaints about investment products

- 36%** life insurance and investment product providers
- 32%** banks
- 10%** IFAs
- 7%** stockbrokers and fund managers
- 3%** building societies
- 12%** other



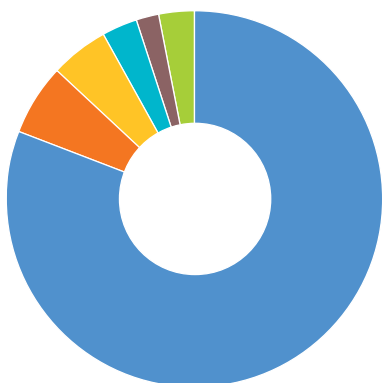
complaints about pensions

- 55%** life insurance and investment product providers
- 17%** IFAs
- 6%** banks
- 22%** other (including stockbrokers, consumer credit businesses and friendly societies)



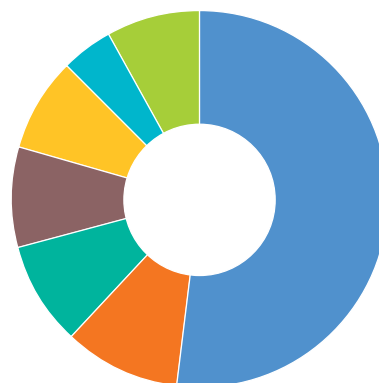
who the complaints were about

the types of problems we've seen – by sector



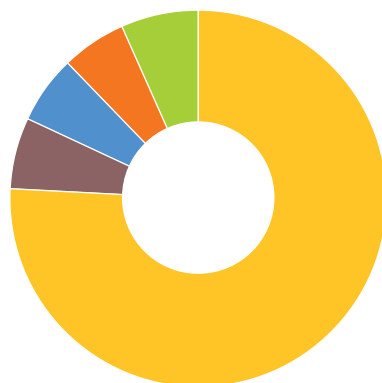
complaints about advice and sales

- 81%** banks
- 6%** general insurance and/or mortgage brokers
- 5%** general insurance providers
- 3%** building societies
- 2%** life insurance and investment product providers
- 3%** other (including IFAs)



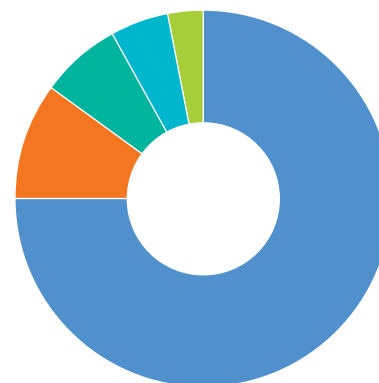
complaints about administration

- 52%** banks
- 10%** general insurance and/or mortgage brokers
- 9%** consumer credit businesses
- 8.5%** life insurance and investment product providers
- 8%** general insurance providers
- 4.5%** building societies
- 8%** other



complaints about claims

- 76%** general insurance providers
- 6%** life insurance and investment product providers
- 6%** banks
- 5.5%** general insurance and/or mortgage brokers
- 6.5%** other



complaints about charges

- 75%** banks
- 10%** general insurance and/or mortgage brokers
- 7%** consumer credit businesses
- 5%** building societies
- 3%** other

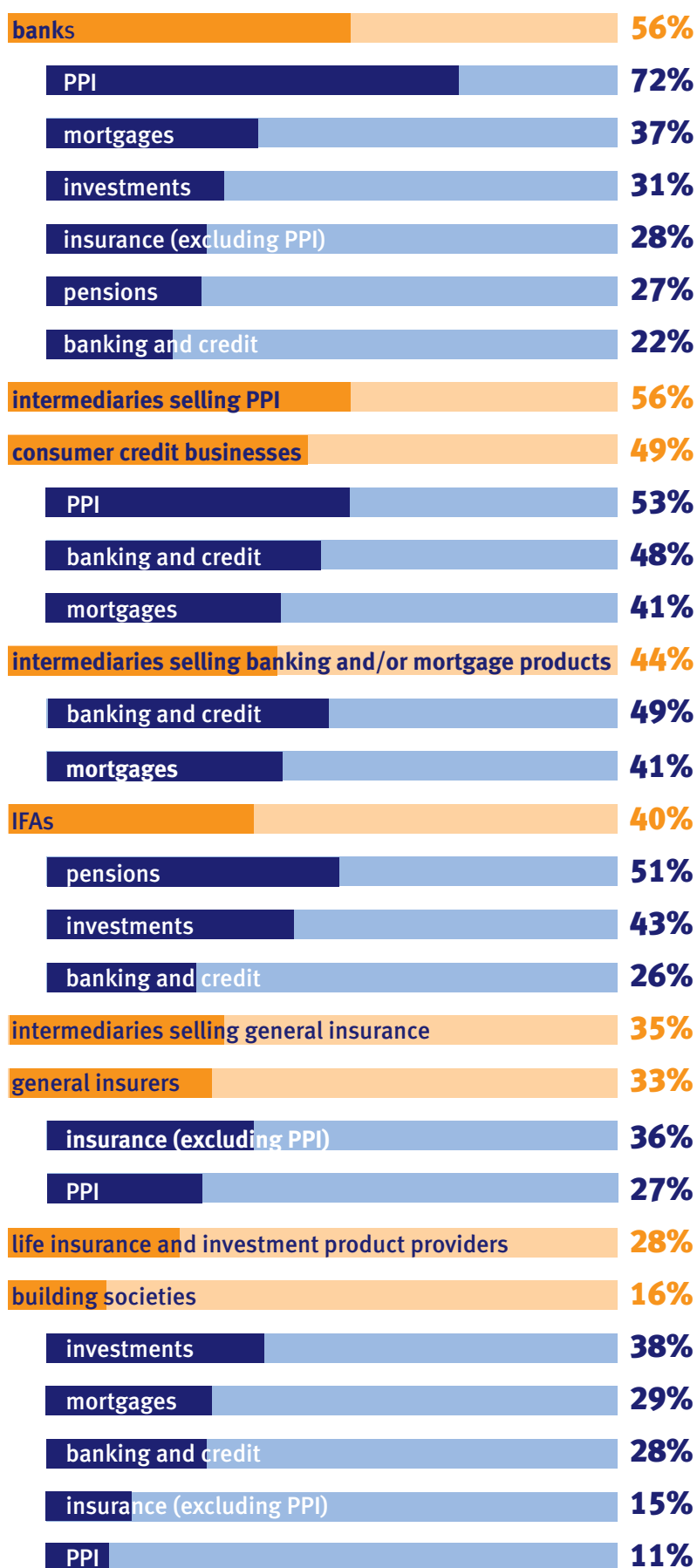
the outcomes of complaints

On average, during 2015/2016 we upheld 51% of complaints in consumers' favour. There's more information about how we settled complaints this year in the chapter *investigation*.

As the chart shows, the outcome of complaints continues to vary between different financial sectors and between the types of financial products involved.

- financial sector
- financial product

% of complaints we upheld – by financial sector



who the complaints were about

listening to businesses

It's essential that businesses as well as consumers have confidence in the ombudsman.

In addition to asking consumers about their experience with us, we regularly ask for feedback from people working for financial businesses.

how complaints handlers at financial businesses rated our service

you gave me clear and honest answers and let me know where I stood



you got to grips with things and used common sense



you listened to me and cared about what I had to say



● % who agreed ● % who expressed no view ● % who disagreed

As in previous years, we've found that complaints handlers at financial businesses are generally more positive about the ombudsman than their managers are.

This probably reflects the closer working relationships we tend to have with people who deal directly with complaints – and who talk to us every day to sort out their customers' problems.

how managers at financial businesses rated our service

the financial services industry can have confidence in the ombudsman service



our service is good value for businesses who pay the levy/case fees that fund us



our decisions on cases are fair and unbiased



our decisions are consistent



we provide a good dispute-resolution service for businesses



● % who agreed ● % who expressed no view ● % who disagreed

It's important that the businesses who fund us have confidence in us – including the way we run our service. So it's encouraging that, once again, a majority of managers at financial businesses – who include heads of compliance, customer service managers, legal advisers and company secretaries – agree that we provide good value for money.

our budget and funding

We're funded through a combination of annual levies on the financial businesses we cover and fees for the individual complaints referred to us each year. We review our funding arrangements at the beginning of each year – based on the types

of problems we and our stakeholders expect to see in the year ahead.

Following public consultation in early 2015, the board of the FCA and our own board approved a budget for our service that assumed income of £223.9 million and expenditure of £270.3 million – with a forecast unit cost of £678. Our unit cost is calculated by dividing our total costs (before financing charges and any bad debt charge) by the number of cases we've resolved during the year.

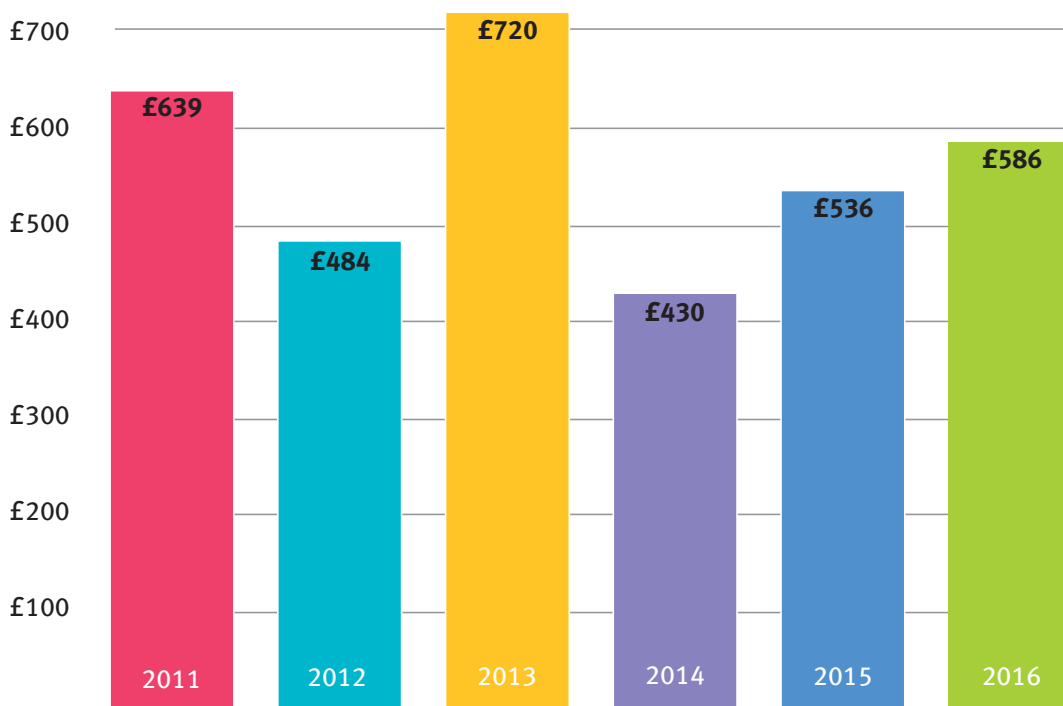
In 2015/2016 the overall fees charged to the financial services sector for our service were forecast to be 11% lower than the previous year. We again froze the levy paid by financial businesses. And we maintained our group-

account arrangement for the eight largest financial groups – so that, in line with our plans, two thirds of our workload was paid for in a fair, stable way by the businesses whose customers use us the most.

This year we kept the individual case fee at £550 for the 26th and each subsequent complaint – the third year it's been at this level. This arrangement recognises that customers of smaller businesses contact us only rarely. It meant that, even among businesses whose customers did complain to us this year, nine in ten paid no case fees at all.

Our actual unit cost was £586 – lower than we forecast, reflecting the fact that we resolved higher volumes of complaints than expected about PPI and packaged bank accounts.

our unit cost



year ended 31 March

who the complaints were about

summary of our income and expenditure

	actual year ended 31 March 2015 £ million	budget year ended 31 March 2016 £ million	actual year ended 31 March 2016 £ million
income			
case fees	61.3	51.0	57.5
supplementary case fees	0.0	0.0	0.0
group fees	163.9	146.6	157.7
compulsory jurisdiction levy	23.5	23.3	24.2
voluntary jurisdiction and other income	2.4	3.0	3.0
total operating income	251.1	223.9	242.4
net movement in accrued and deferred income	75.4	20.5	22.2
total income	326.5	244.4	264.6
expenditure			
staff and staff-related costs	193.1	220.0	210.1
professional fees	7.0	6.2	6.7
IT costs	6.6	7.3	7.3
premises and facilities	23.7	25.3	24.8
other costs	1.6	3.0	1.7
depreciation	7.7	6.0	6.5
bad debts	0.2	0.5	0.9
contingencies	0	2.0	0
total operating costs	239.8	270.3	257.9
operating surplus / (deficit)	11.3	(46.4)	(15.6)
accounting surplus / (deficit) before tax	86.7	(25.9)	6.6

The figures above are drawn from our unaudited management accounts – and may be subject to change. We publish our directors' report and audited financial statements on our website once they've been approved.



“... our regular constructive conversations with financial businesses help us to identify potential concerns before they escalate”

“... we want our stakeholders to use our insight and experience to help prevent things going wrong”

Our relationships with people who have an interest in what we do – including regulators, financial businesses, consumer organisations, government and other experts – help us to encourage fairness and confidence in financial services.



Our conversations with our stakeholders about what we're seeing mean we can together identify and address potential unfairness. And by sharing our different experiences and insight, we help each other to encourage fairness in new developments and initiatives – within and beyond financial services.

working with the regulators

One of our most important relationships is with the financial services regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). In addition to setting the rules that financial businesses have to follow, the FCA approves our budget each year – as well as appointments to our non-executive board.

By keeping in touch with the FCA about the types of problems we're seeing, we help them to see and understand emerging trends in complaints – so they can take appropriate action. We also share our insight to help the FCA build a picture of key issues facing financial businesses and their customers.

In 2015/2016 our work with the FCA included:

- Sharing information on the complaints people were bringing to us about debt management services. In June 2015 the FCA highlighted their concerns in this area – having identified unacceptably low standards of debt advice.

- Helping to inform the FCA's discussions around small and medium-sized businesses' experience of using financial services.
- Working with the FCA as they consulted on new rules for handling PPI complaints, in light of the Supreme Court's judgment in the case of *Plevin v Paragon Personal Finance*.
- Helping the FCA prepare for the implementation of new rules relating to handling complaints and the ombudsman's involvement – including making sure financial businesses understand what they mean in practice.
- Ensuring we meet the standard expected of us as a provider of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) under the new EU directive – having been approved by the FCA, in July 2015, as an official ADR provider.
- Sharing information about the complaints we see involving financial advice as part of the FCA and HM Treasury's *Financial Advice Market Review (FAMR)* – which looked to identify demand for, and potential barriers to, accessing advice.



FAMR made a number of recommendations around the support we can offer in this area – which we’ll be taking forward in the coming months.

- Supporting the FCA’s work to develop a “regulatory sandbox” – where businesses can test out new, innovative financial services, including FinTech developments.

As well as the financial services regulator, the work of other regulators has an impact on our service. In particular – given the stubbornly high level of claims management activity – we continue to talk to the Claims Management Regulator (CMR), part of the Ministry of Justice.

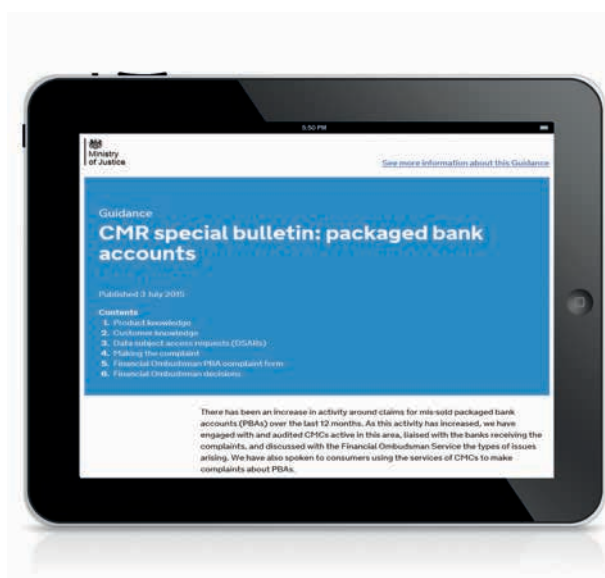


This year, our work with the CMR included:

- Regularly sharing with the CMR the numbers and types of complaints that claims managers are referring to us – as well as examples of where claims managers’ level of service is hindering our ability to sort out complaints.
- Contributing to the CMR’s bulletins for claims managers – helping us to share important messages affecting large numbers of potential and current complaints. For example, we used the bulletin to set out how we look into the concerns people raise about packaged bank accounts – stressing that claims managers need to reflect seriously on the complaints they’re choosing to pursue.
- Sharing our insight as part of Carol Brady’s review of claims management regulation. We’ll be supporting the FCA during the transition of claims management regulation from the CMR to the FCA – which was confirmed in the Budget in March 2016, in line with the review’s recommendations.

engaging with financial businesses

Our regular constructive conversations with financial businesses help us to identify potential concerns before they escalate. As in previous years, some of these conversations took place in our industry steering group meetings – where we meet at a senior level with businesses and trade bodies representing specific financial services sectors.



our insight and outreach

We also kept in touch with hundreds of people at businesses and trade bodies through our regular industry email newsletter. This includes operational news, pointers on our approach to complaints and opportunities to engage with us.

As we've continued to develop our service this year – including improving our IT and making our processes more flexible – we've been talking regularly to businesses about the practical impact of this on how we work together. During the year we strengthened our front-line contact with businesses – to ensure we're identifying and overcoming any challenges as soon as possible.

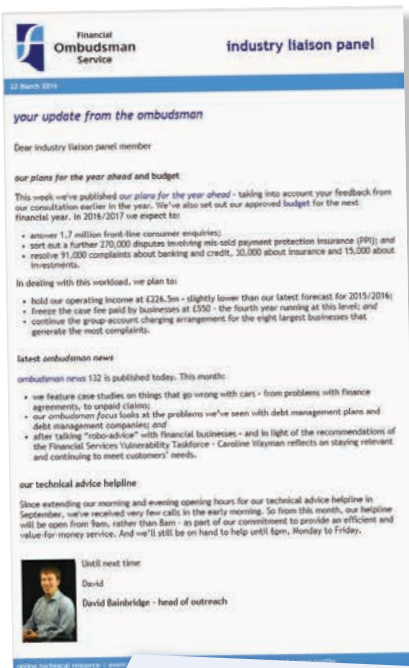
Since July 2015 – as we explain in the chapter *sorting things early on* – we've been able to get involved with complaints at an earlier stage, following changes to the complaints handling rules. We've continued to engage with businesses as we put this into practice – as well as helping to address questions about further upcoming rule changes around handling complaints and referring customers to us.

Throughout 2015/2016 we also met businesses and trade associations face to face at a number of national and regional meetings and events. These included local business networks, trade body forums and our own practical events

focusing on specific problems we're seeing.

For example, in July 2015 we brought together financial businesses and experts in vulnerability to share perspectives on treating vulnerable customers fairly. This followed the FCA's challenge to businesses earlier in the year to review their approach to vulnerable customers.

As we explained in August 2015's *ombudsman news*, vulnerability may be caused by one-off events, including losing your home. We followed this up in November 2015, when we met lenders to discuss how to identify and prevent problems – including where customers are, or risk becoming, vulnerable.

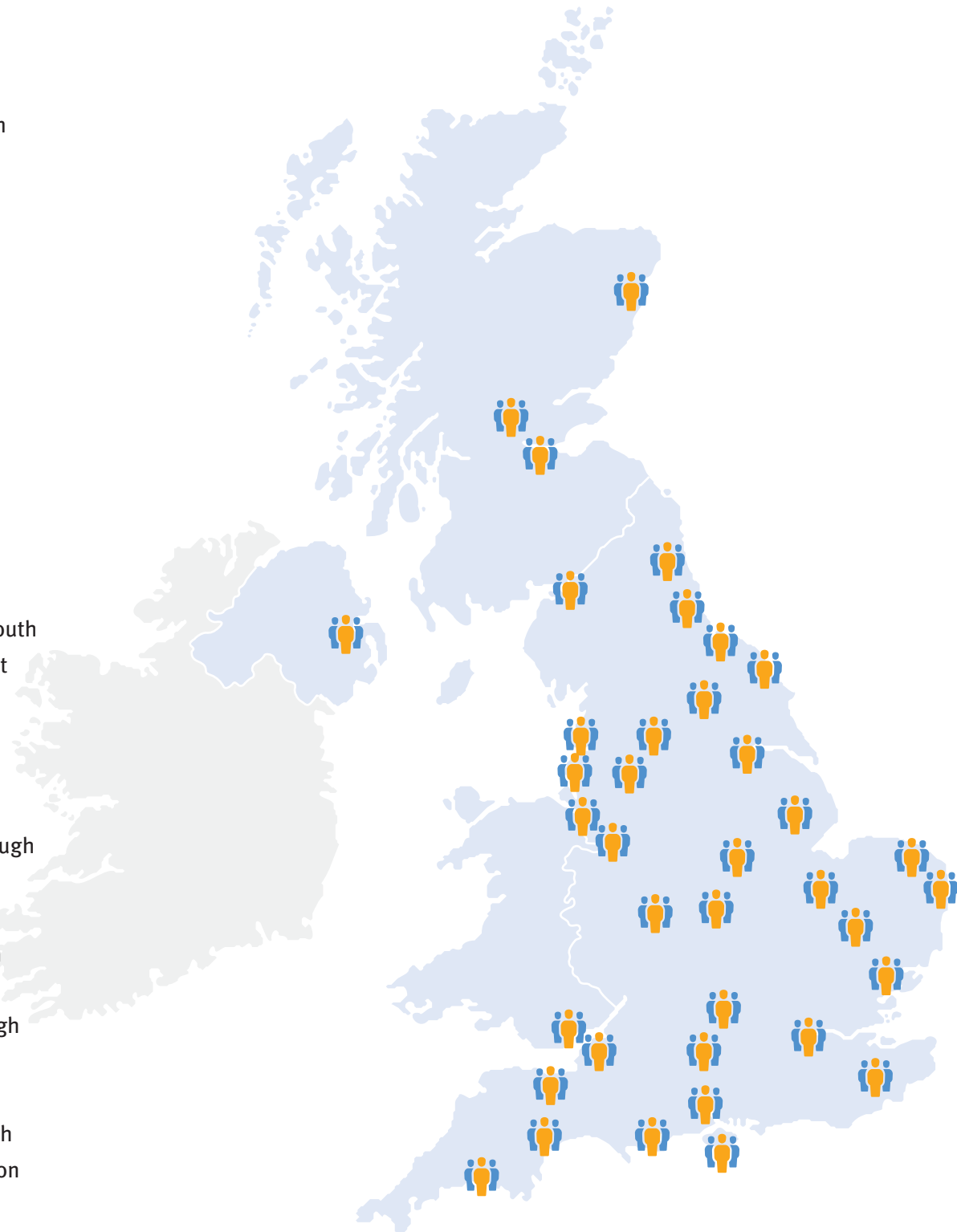


BSA @BSABuildingSocs - 17 Dec 2015
 Close to home - mortgages and the Ombudsman. New guest blog from @financialombuds. Take a look: bit.ly/22a0Wlq #Building Societies
 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More

Nick Bush @NicholasBush - 14 Jul 2015
 @financialombuds great to #meettheomb and other financial services people today dealing with the challenges of serving vulnerable customers
 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More

where we met people face to face this year

- Aberdeen
- Ashford
- Belfast
- Birmingham
- Blackpool
- Bradford
- Bristol
- Cambridge
- Cardiff
- Carlisle
- Chester
- Colchester
- Crewe
- Doncaster
- Durham
- Edinburgh
- Exeter
- Great Yarmouth
- Isle of Wight
- Leicester
- Lincoln
- Liverpool
- London
- Middlesbrough
- Newcastle
- Norwich
- Nottingham
- Oxford
- Peterborough
- Plymouth
- Poole
- Scarborough
- Southampton
- Stirling
- Stockport
- Swindon
- Taunton
- York



our insight and outreach

supporting small businesses

Small financial businesses account for only a fraction of our workload. And many small businesses – over many years of trading – have never had a customer complain to us. As we've mentioned in the chapter *who the complaints were about*, more than nine in ten businesses we cover didn't pay any case fees at all this year.

Even though this is clearly positive news, it means that the people running these businesses might not know much about us – and may have specific questions about what would happen if one of their customers *did* contact us.

So this year we continued to run our nationwide programme of free workshops, where people

from local firms can discuss fair answers to real-life case studies, find out the practicalities of how we work, and put their questions directly to our ombudsmen. During the year more than nine in ten of the people who met us this way agreed they got clear, useful answers to take back to their business.

We tailor our events to make sure we're addressing the issues where small businesses tell us they need the most support. This year small businesses often asked us about our approach to suitability – and so we've continued to focus on this area. As well as debating case studies at our workshops, our ombudsmen answered questions at a number of events hosted by trade associations – and featured in a "myth-busting" video for small businesses.

We also make sure that both *ombudsman news* and our online resources reflect questions and concerns that businesses are raising with us. Based on what we were hearing, during the year we used these channels to give clarity around new complaints-handling rules – and what they meant in practice for businesses and the ombudsman.

In 2015/2016 we continued to offer free phone and email support for people working on the front-line of complaints. There's more about what this helpline does to resolve problems informally in the chapter *sorting things early on*.



which support services businesses valued most



● our advice desk	26%
● <i>ombudsman news</i>	24%
● our website (including our online technical resource)	19%
● events and seminars	16%
● other publications	15%

working with consumers and consumer representatives

Alongside our engagement with the financial services sector, we regularly talk to national consumer organisations and third-sector experts – including Citizens Advice, Trading Standards Institute, Which? and Age UK. In 2015/2016 these conversations covered issues ranging from PPI and the impact of pensions reforms, to complaints related to age and vulnerability.

As we explain in the chapter *who complained to us*, we carry out research to find out who is – and isn't – using our service. This helps to inform our awareness-raising activities – from how we could work proactively with different media, to where it might be effective to meet consumers directly.

This face to face work helps us to engage with people who may be put off by the prospect of a “complaints process” – and allows us to give practical answers and support, to stop people's worries unnecessarily escalating into formal complaints.

So in 2015/2016 we continued to take part in a range of national and local events – including the 50+ show at London Olympia, the Balmoral agricultural



show in Northern Ireland and the disability lifestyle exhibition, Naidex, at Birmingham's NEC.

We also looked for new ways to make our service as accessible as possible – giving people a further, face to face channel for contacting us at Birmingham's Bullring shopping centre. There's more about this in the chapter *sorting things early on*.



Citizens Advice MCR @ManchesterCAB - 18 Nov 2015
great to have Jade and Rosh from [@financialombuds](#) back for another day of workshops - really informative, thank you! [#meettheomb](#)

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our insight and outreach

We also work directly with trusted consumer advisers – who provide a wide range of valued front-line support to millions of people across the UK. This helps us to reach people who, when faced with a problem, feel more comfortable talking to someone they know in their community – rather than approaching an “official” organisation.

One way we do this is through our own national programme of free workshops for front-line advisers – including Citizens Advice bureaux, local charities, trading standards officers and community groups.

In 2015/2016, we met hundreds of advisers at our practical workshops across the UK – with more than nine in ten agreeing that we listened and shared information that would help their organisation.

We were also invited to a range of local networks and gatherings of consumer representatives – ranging from foodbanks to pensioners’ forums – to hear about the issues facing local communities, and to share our own perspective on resolving and preventing problems.

During the year – having previously told us about problems with payday lenders – front-line advisers increasingly asked about our approach to guarantor loans, hire purchase agreements, and “rent to own” arrangements to pay for furniture and appliances.

We’ve also worked together with elected representatives. This included taking part in round-table events in Westminster, hosting a number of constituency drop-in sessions, and our chief ombudsman meeting MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) in Stormont.

We’ve continued to provide regular information about complaints we’ve been seeing – to help elected representatives build a picture of the issues affecting their constituency.

And we kept in touch with a number of MPs who’d asked us to keep them updated about particular constituents’ complaints.

sharing our insight nationally and internationally

Because of the volumes and range of complaints we’ve seen over fifteen years, we’re often asked to share our insight at a national and international level. And throughout 2015/2016 we continued to give our independent perspective on specific areas of financial services.

For example, each year we receive a number of complaints involving suspected insurance fraud. One of our lead ombudsmen was a member of the Insurance Fraud Taskforce – alongside representatives of insurers, brokers and consumers.

In January 2016 the taskforce set out recommendations aimed at raising awareness of fraud and improving consumer confidence in insurance.

As we explain in the chapter *the types of problems we’ve seen*, since April 2015 people have had greater flexibility around accessing their pension pot. We contributed to HM Treasury’s consultation on pension transfers and early exit charges – providing information about the small number of enquiries we’re receiving in this area.

In March 2016 our chief ombudsman answered questions from the Public Accounts Committee at the House of Commons – as the Committee looked into mis-selling in financial services, following the National Audit Office’s review of this issue.

Our work involves regular engagement with government ministers – including those from HM Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions. During the year we continued to provide insight into the numbers and types of complaints we see about different issues. We also responded to questions from individual MPs – some in their capacity as members of all-party groups with an interest in our work, including groups relating to debt and personal finance.



Financial Ombudsman @financialombuds - Feb 2
Chatting with @CaerphillyCAB @talkingmoneyuk & @StroudCAB about vishing
scams & how we can help victims living around #Cardiff#meettheomb

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We also engage with national organisations whose roles aren't primarily related to financial services, but are relevant to our own work. This year – as a service set up as an alternative to the courts – we shared our insight and experience with a number of legal bodies.

For example, we shared our experience of resolving complaints informally with HM Courts and Tribunals Service. We talked to the Legal Services Board about how we ensure our service is accessible, as they looked to improve access to legal services. And we helped to inform the Law Commission's review of Bills of Sale – providing information about the problems we see in this area, which includes logbook loans.

In July 2015, the EU's directive on ADR came into force – meaning businesses and their customers in all sorts of sectors should have a channel for sorting out problems out of court. As part of implementing the directive in the UK, this year we were approved as an official ADR body within the EU – with the FCA as our “competent authority”.

By the point the directive came into force, we'd already been carrying out ADR activities for fifteen years. Drawing on this experience, we contributed to research by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) into ADR and how it could be improved. And we've been able to support other people looking to set up and improve their own ADR schemes – which this year included those in Italy, Armenia and the Channel Islands.

During the year we talked to the EU Commission as it prepared to launch its online dispute resolution platform – and ensured we were ready to receive enquiries through this channel. The platform – which was launched in February 2016 – aims to

help people across the EU who've had problems buying goods and services online to find an appropriate out-of-court dispute resolution scheme.

We also continued to engage with other ADR schemes through our membership of Financial Dispute Resolution Network (FIN-NET), International Network of Financial Services Ombudsman Schemes (INFO) and the Ombudsman Association. These international networks help out-of-court schemes like ours to share good practice and innovation – including how to refer customers to each other efficiently.



our insight and outreach

working openly – encouraging fairness

We want our stakeholders to use our insight and experience to help prevent things going wrong – and to have confidence in our service. So we're committed to working openly – sharing our approach to the problems we see, and being transparent about how we work.

We know that financial businesses rely on the information we provide about problems we've resolved – to help ensure they're treating customers fairly. Consumers may also be interested in how we look into particular types of problems – so they can resolve things themselves or make a call about taking things further.

This year we published a further eight issues of *ombudsman news* – our regular newsletter explaining how we've fairly and practically resolved different types of complaints. We've now published 132 issues of *ombudsman news* – which is subscribed to by 14,000 people.

In 2015/2016 we shared our insight through *ombudsman news* into complaints relating to a number of themes – including vulnerability, relationship breakdown and younger people. We also continued to cover specific topics, including problems with cars, interest-only mortgages and unregulated collective investment schemes (UCIS).

And supporting our conversations with our stakeholders, we've used *ombudsman news* to update people on developments and improvements to our service.

We publish regular complaints data about the problems we're seeing – giving quarterly snapshots in *ombudsman news*, and six-monthly information on our website about specific financial businesses.

Since January 2016 we've also provided information about the number of problems we've sorted out at an early stage – before the businesses involved have investigated. As we explain in the chapter *sorting things early on*, this is something we're able to do under new complaints handling rules that have applied since July 2015.

As we highlight in the chapter *the types of problems we've seen*, during the year we've continued to receive complaints arising from scams including phone fraud.

After reviewing these cases – and identifying the key issues behind the complaints – we published our insight into what we were consistently seeing go wrong. As part of this, we suggested how businesses and their customers could reduce the risk of scams, and respond to them more effectively if they do happen.

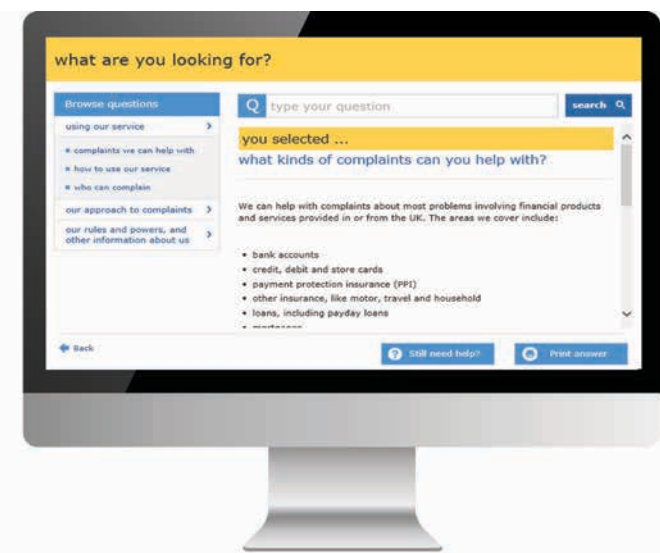
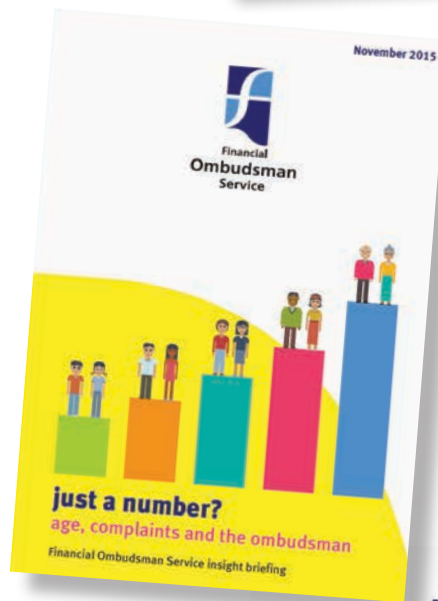


In August 2015 we published our insight into the mismatch in expectations that can happen between smaller businesses and financial providers – following a review of the complaints that smaller businesses had been referring to us.

And in November 2015 we contributed to wider discussions around age discrimination – reflecting on the different interpretations of rules and guidance in this area, the complaints we were seeing, and our conclusions on how problems could be avoided.

Based on what we know people are looking for on our website, this year we updated our online resources to explain how we sort out problems with motor finance and motor insurance, payday loans, credit broking and equity release.

And using feedback from visitors to our website, we reviewed our frequently asked questions – and improved the accessibility of parts of our website where we share our approach to complaints. Keeping our online resources accessible is particularly important as an increasing proportion of people – nearly 40% this year – engage with them using mobile devices.



publishing our ombudsmen's decisions

Since 2013 – as set out in the *Financial Services Act 2012* – we've published all of our ombudsmen's final decisions on our website. This year we added around 35,000 decisions to our online database – meaning we've now published 100,000 in total.

After gathering feedback from people using the database, we've made improvements to the search facility and we've made it easier to use on mobile devices.

freedom of information

We've been covered by the *Freedom of Information Act* since 2012. So if people can't find what they're looking for from the information we've already published, they can make an official request for it.

This year we received 650 such official requests from journalists, researchers and members of the public.

We provided detailed statistics about the problems we see, guidance on our approach to different types of complaints, as well as information about our organisation and how we use our resources.





“... we’re meeting community workers in Scarborough and Middlesbrough to talk about local money problems and how to prevent complaints”

“... for ombudsman case studies and information on our approach, download our free app on iTunes, Google Play or Amazon”

alert to scams

29 March 2016

we're joining local organisations in North London, talking to people about the risks of financial fraud and scams

staying relevant

22 March 2016

we publish *ombudsman news* issue 132, looking at problems we see about debt management – as well as case studies involving motor finance and insurance

lending a hand in East London

22 March 2016

we're meeting consumer advisers in East London, to talk about issues involving financial hardship and complaints

our annual plans and budget

21 March 2016

... are now finalised and approved for 2016/2017

north of the border

17 March 2016

we're running a workshop for MP caseworkers in Glasgow – hearing about local problems and how we can help their constituents

knowing your rights

15 March 2016

for World Consumer Rights Day we're tweeting about the matters we can help with – and how we're free, fair and for everyone

vulnerability matters

10 March 2016

we're speaking at the Chartered Insurance Institute about problems we see involving customer service and vulnerability

watch out for fake ombudsmen

8 March 2016

we warn about emails and phone calls from scammers claiming to be from the Financial Ombudsman

working together in the South West

8 March 2016

we're spending a few days getting to know charities across Devon and Somerset, as part of our work with front-line consumer advisers

sharing knowledge

3 March 2016

we're chatting to local businesses in Peterborough – sharing our experience of effective problem-solving

happy relationships

1 March 2016

our latest video is out now on YouTube – on relationships, joint accounts and what you should think about before sharing your finances

what feels fair?

26 February 2016

we're meeting members of the Finance and Leasing Association (FLA) to discuss handling complaints effectively

dropping into Devon

23 February 2016

we're getting to know local businesses in Exeter and Plymouth this week – seeing how good complaints handling helps customer relationships flourish

ombudsman publishes latest complaints data on individual financial businesses

23 February 2016

gathering in Glasgow

17 February 2016

we're at the annual "Gathering" run by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations – talking to community advice workers about the issues they see where we can help

it's good to share

16 February 2016

the ombudsman chats to Share Radio about the financial news of the day – and how to get in touch if people need help

vulnerability matters

10 February 2016

we're talking at a workshop run by the National Homelessness Advice Service – about how we can help vulnerable consumers facing financial problems

small businesses in South Wales

10 February 2016

we're meeting local businesses in Cardiff to hear their views and share complaints handling tips

insurance by the Mersey

10 February 2016

we're at the Liverpool Insurance Institute – discussing complaints prevention

West Country advice

3 February 2016

we're in Swindon talking with local consumer advisers about how we can help get things sorted

campus finances

3 February 2016

we're talking to first year students at Manchester University about how to stay smart with their money

coming to Cymru

2 February 2016

we're chatting to Cardiff's consumer advisers about problems involving mortgages, scams and consumer credit

the best laid plans

26 January 2016

our latest issue of *ombudsman news* features case studies on pets and animals, problems involving relationship breakdowns, and our complaint statistics for the third quarter of 2015/2016

heading to the East End

26 January 2016

we're in East London talking to smaller businesses about resolving customers' problems quickly and efficiently

insurance matters

20 January 2016

we're meeting members of the Insurance Institute of Nottingham – answering questions about the insurance-related cases we see

on credit

15 January 2016

we're at the National Fleet Services conference in Leamington Spa, talking with credit providers about consumer credit issues

coming together in Northern Ireland

15 January 2016

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action are bringing together local charities and consumers – and we'll be taking part to talk about solving money problems

a cold front

13 January 2016

avoid getting caught out in the cold by reading our special feature on problems involving bad weather

is pay day far away?

11 January 2016

January can be a long month – but for people facing financial difficulties, there are a range of organisations that can help

getting things sorted

8 January 2016

if you're unhappy with your bank, insurer or lender, our practical video on YouTube shows how to set about sorting things out

sharing is caring

7 January 2016

the ombudsman talks to Share Radio about the money matters that people contact us about

has that dream sale bargain become a financial nightmare?

6 January 2016

from wonky worktops to a suit that's not fit for purpose – see how we've helped people sort out their credit card complaints

“appy” new year

4 January 2016

for ombudsman case studies and information on our approach, download our free app on iTunes, Google Play or Amazon

shape up your finances

4 January 2016

whatever your new year's fitness resolution, our tips could help shape up your finances and make you more money savvy

got your gadgets?

30 December 2015

the ombudsman chats to BBC Radio 5 Live about insuring gadgets – and what to do if things go wrong

talking debt in Scotland

15 December 2015

we're in Glasgow at the Credit Services Association's regional forum – talking to debt collectors about effective complaints handling and how the ombudsman can help

we start the public consultation on our plans and budget for 2016/2017

8 December 2015

sharing our insight

8 December 2015

we're talking to payday lenders about the problems we see and to help them deal with complaints quickly and fairly

money matters in the Midlands

8 December 2015

we're in Birmingham, hosting our last training day of 2015 for consumer advisers

talking banking

7 December 2015

we're meeting members of the British Bankers' Association to talk about handling complaints effectively and treating people fairly

night time across the Mersey

3 December 2015

the ombudsman chats to Pete Price on his Liverpool *Radio City* late-night show – about pensions, scams, borrowing money for Christmas ... and hoverboards

in the garden of England

2 December 2015

we're talking to smaller businesses in Ashford about how we listen to both sides of the story to get things sorted

our Christmas countdown

1 December 2015

it's day one of our ombudsman advent calendar, as we launch our festive tweets on staying money savvy at Christmas

knowing what matters

1 December 2015

in our latest issue of *ombudsman news* we're looking at complaints from older people – as well as taking an in-depth look at the feedback we get from businesses

talking credit

30 November 2015

we're meeting credit providers and the Finance and Leasing Association – exploring consumer credit issues

should more SMEs be given access to the ombudsman?

27 November 2015

the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) seeks views on whether access to the ombudsman should be extended to more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – in addition to the small businesses (“micro-enterprises”) already covered and using the service

back in Birmingham

27 November 2015

we're meeting local people at Birmingham's Central Mosque – finding out what money matters are on their minds and seeing how we can help

deadline for PPI complaints?

26 November 2015

the regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), consults on introducing a deadline and other new complaints handling rules for PPI complaints

fairness at the front line

25 November 2015

we're meeting front-line advisers at the Money Advice Liaison Group's conference – talking about how we look at debt problems

linking up in Lincolnshire

23 November 2015

a trio of our training sessions with Citizens Advice kicks off in Grantham – talking money matters, financial hardship and vulnerability

money matters in Manchester

18 November 2015

we're running workshops for Citizens Advice in Manchester and finding out what's affecting consumers in the north west

shipshape and Bristol fashion

18 November 2015

we're in Bristol talking to financial businesses about how we look at complaints and how we can work together to help their customers

close to home

18 November 2015

we're meeting with building societies to share our insight about mortgage problems, such as financial hardship and vulnerability

sorting things out in Oxford

17 November 2015

we're meeting with local businesses in Oxford to talk about fairness and how we can work together to sort out problems

East Anglian advice

11 November 2015

we're talking to Norwich's front-line consumer advisers about the problems they're seeing and how we can help

a university challenge

10 November 2015

we're in Cambridge hearing from local community advisers about the money matters affecting the university city

money advice in Durham

6 November 2015

we're at the Community Money Advice conference talking about how we can help with debt and vulnerability matters

pottering into Stoke

5 November 2015

we're talking with local consumer advisers about how we can help people in financial difficulties and debt problems

farming finance

4 November 2015

the ombudsman's on BBC Radio Cumbria, hearing about the financial problems facing farmers locally

East Midlands money matters

4 November 2015

we're in the cathedral city of Lincoln chatting to consumer advice workers about the local issues they're seeing

on this day ...

2 November 2015

four years ago today we opened our phone lines on Saturdays – as part of our work to make the ombudsman more accessible

north of the border

28 October 2015

we're in Edinburgh talking with insurers about resolving disputes quickly and fairly

busting insurance myths

26 October 2015

we're in Newcastle talking with the Chartered Insurance Institute about what we're seeing and how to resolve complaints

on-the-spot advice in Birmingham

22 October 2015

we're in Birmingham's Bullring shopping centre till Monday, providing on-the-spot advice to help sort out money problems

north easterly

21 October 2015

we're meeting community workers in Scarborough and Middlesbrough to talk about local money problems and how to prevent complaints

finding fairness

20 October 2015

in our latest issue of *ombudsman news* we look at complaints about life assurance and hire purchase agreements – as well as publishing our complaints data for the second quarter of 2015/2016

talking credit

20 October 2015

we're talking with the Credit Services Association about debt collection complaints

it's Great to be in Yarmouth

14 October 2015

our small business roadshow is meeting with local businesses in Great Yarmouth to talk about solving money problems

money savvy in Stormont

13 October 2015

we're in Stormont talking to Northern Irish politicians about the money problems we can help with – as well as meeting business representatives and community advisers across Belfast

0800 – did you know?

9 October 2015

calls to 0800 numbers are free on landlines *and* mobile phones – so if you need us, just call us on 0800 023 4 567

compliance chat

7 October 2015

we're talking about our work in investments and pensions with compliance professionals in Huddersfield

supporting advisers in Birmingham

7 October 2015

we're at Advice UK's annual conference to hear about current challenges in the community advice sector

working together in Worcester

6 October 2015

we're at the Association of Professional Financial Advisers' regional forum, talking about how we can work with financial advisers to help get problems sorted

a day for the ages

1 October 2015

we're celebrating International Day of Older Persons at the *it's all about money* event in Liverpool – raising awareness about the work we do

sharing knowledge in South Yorkshire

30 September 2015

we're talking to Doncaster's consumer advisers about how we can help sort out problems like credit broking and debt collecting

what's suitable?

29 September 2015

we're meeting with financial planners to discuss our approach in assessing the suitability of investments

on your behalf for 20 years

26 September 2015

the ombudsman joins other contributors to BBC Northern Ireland's *On Your Behalf*, to mark the show's 20th anniversary

talking money matters

23 September 2015

we're meeting with the Money Advice Group in Preston and Birmingham, talking about how we can get things sorted

that back-to-school feeling

22 September 2015

our latest issue of *ombudsman news* explores what young people are complaining about – and the complaints we see from smaller businesses

knowledge Poole

22 September 2015

we're sailing into Poole to share our insight with smaller businesses on how to handle complaints effectively

checking on your behalf

19 September 2015

the ombudsman's on BBC Northern Ireland's *On Your Behalf*, helping sort out listeners' problems with electronic payments and cheque services

last stop in Scotland

18 September 2015

we're ending our week of Scottish events in Perth, meeting with the local branch of the Chartered Insurance Institute to discuss all things insurance

just off the Royal Mile

15 September 2015

we're in Edinburgh talking to local consumer advisers about how we can help with problems such as debt collecting and payday lending

disability matters

10 September 2015

we're at the Disability North exhibition in Newcastle – talking about how we can help people in difficult situations

getting it right

9 September 2015

we're meeting claims managers to make sure they understand our approach to packaged bank accounts – and to stop them referring complaints unnecessarily

over the Irish Sea

8 September 2015

we're in Belfast, meeting with local consumer advisers and talking about common problems with consumer credit, mortgages and scams

catching up with Citizens Advice

8 September 2015

we'll be joining over 800 advisers and volunteers at the Citizens Advice annual conference – hearing about the latest issues affecting consumers

did you know?

7 September 2015

we answered over 20,000 calls on our advice desk last year – giving an informal steer to businesses and front-line consumer advisers on a wide range of topics

rock solid advice

3 September 2015

we're at Granite City, catching up with Aberdeen's community advice workers, to hear about the local issues

what's suitable?

2 September 2015

we're meeting members of the Personal Finance Society in Perth and Bristol – talking about our approach to suitability reports and “insistent” clients

dee-lighted to see you!

2 September 2015

we're in Aberdeen, meeting smaller businesses and hearing about the local issues

on your behalf

29 August 2015

we talk to BBC Radio Ulster's *On Your Behalf* about problems involving mental health and travel insurance

head west

26 August 2015

the ombudsman's live on air on BBC Somerset, answering listeners' questions about PPI, mortgage endowments, money transfers and scams

ombudsman publishes latest complaints data on individual financial businesses

25 August 2015

from Devon to Merseyside

18 August 2015

we're on BBC Radio Devon and BBC Radio Merseyside this morning, chatting about our latest edition of *ombudsman news*

listening and learning

18 August 2015

issue 127 of *ombudsman news* features case studies on vulnerable consumers – as well as a focus on our work with consumer advisers

understanding micro-enterprises from the complaints we see

17 August 2015

the ombudsman takes a closer look at the types of complaints brought by micro-enterprises – and the relationship between these businesses and financial providers

here when you need us

13 August 2015

our technical advice desk, the free helpline for businesses and consumer advisers, is now open till 6pm

going on a summer holiday?

3 August 2015

our latest video on YouTube has hints on avoiding travel problems that might otherwise lead to complaints

Brighton rocks

31 July 2015

we're chatting with BBC Sussex, turning the tide on finance worries with our tips for avoiding scams

what's keeping Coventry awake at night?

30 July 2015

we're sharing knowledge and insight with consumer advisers at the latest consumer empowerment partnership meeting in Coventry

linking with the legion

29 July 2015

we're taking part in a drop-in session run by the Royal British Legion, as part of their debt and money awareness week

meet the Crewe

28 July 2015

our chief ombudsman, Caroline Wayman, goes along to our latest roadshow for local businesses in the Crewe area

tackling problems in Telford

22 July 2015

we're meeting with Telford Citizens Advice, to chat about the problems they're seeing and how consumers can wise up to scams

live on Merseyside

21 July 2015

we're on BBC Merseyside – answering listeners' questions with presenter Will Batchelor

for better or worse

21 July 2015

issue 126 of *ombudsman news* features case studies on mortgages – as well as our complaints data for the first quarter of the year

get by with a little help from the ombudsman

21 July 2015

we're in Liverpool meeting local advice agencies, to talk about debt and financial difficulties

better by design

14 July 2015

we're working with disability charity Shaw Trust to improve the accessibility of our consumer leaflet

let's talk vulnerability

14 July 2015

we're meeting with complaint handlers from banks, building societies and credit providers to talk about making sure vulnerable consumers are treated fairly

helping those who help consumers

14 July 2015

we're running a drop-in session for consumer advisers and MPs, focusing on the financial complaints we can help with

finance at fifty ... and beyond

13 July 2015

we're at the 50+ show at London Olympia, meeting older consumers and finding out about the issues they're facing

om-bus-man!

10 July 2015

we've been appearing on the sides of buses across Leeds, letting people know we're here to help

from Blackpool to Bradford

8 July 2015

our smaller business roadshow crosses from Lancashire to Yorkshire, as we talk fairness with local businesses and listen to what's on their minds

complaints avoidance

7 July 2015

we're talking with financial advisers at the Association of Professional Financial Advisers' regional seminar – about how we can work together to avoid the problems that lead to complaints

from BBC Cornwall to BBC Scotland

6 July 2015

we're talking to regional radio stations around the UK about keeping alert to avoid scams

wise up to scams and call time on phone fraud

6 July 2015

we report on the rise in scam phone calls involving fraudsters impersonating police officers and bank officials

Trading Standards at the seaside

30 June 2015

we're at the Trading Standards annual conference – talking money issues, vulnerable consumers and moving with the times

focus on debt

25 June 2015

we're taking part in the Salvation Army's debt advice best-practice day, sharing practical tips on helping people in financial hardship

keeping fairness, rebuilding trust

23 June 2015

issue 125 of *ombudsman news* features case studies on unregulated collective investments and complaints involving “middlemen” – as well as a look at how we’re moving with the times

keep app-y ...

23 June 2015

... and save paper by reading the online version of *ombudsman news* now available on our app

discussions in Durham

23 June 2015

we’re in Durham, chatting with smaller businesses about how the ombudsman can work with them and help solve problems

treated fairly?

23 June 2015

we’re joining a range of organisations at the Northern Ireland discussion forum to talk about treating vulnerable customers fairly

sharing knowledge in Surrey

15 June 2015

we’re meeting with members of the insurance industry at a regional forum of the Chartered Insurance Institute in Guildford

money worries hacking you off?

15 June 2015

Our mascot Hakon helps explain where the word ombudsman comes from and how the ombudsman can help

Midlands meet-up

9 June 2015

we’re taking our smaller businesses roadshow to Birmingham – to chat about financial difficulty and making money matters fairer

bringing it to the border

4 June 2015

we’re in Carlisle, sharing our approach as part of our work with front-line consumer advisers

Tyne to meet the ombudsman

3 June 2015

we’re in Newcastle, meeting small businesses and sharing our insights on how good communication makes all the difference

help by association

2 June 2015

we’re meeting the Association of Professional Compliance Consultants to talk about fairness and the help we can offer them

catching up in Crieff

1 June 2015

we’re at Money Advice Scotland’s annual conference, focusing on financial difficulty and hearing about the issues they’re facing

putting things right on the Isle of Wight

20 May 2015

the ombudsman chats to Isle of Wight radio about how we’ve helped people on the island sort out money problems

the ombudsman at fifteen – lessons from the past, looking to the future

19 May 2015

We publish our *annual review* for 2014/2015

walking out of the darkness

16 May 2015

we’re at CLASP’s walking out of the darkness event, hearing about mental health and money problems

money problems cropping up in Northern Ireland

13 May 2015

we’re at the Balmoral Show – organised by the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society – talking to people about finance and insurance-related complaints in rural and agricultural communities

listening in Leicester

12 May 2015

we’re speaking to consumer advisers in Leicester about how we can support vulnerable consumers – including problems involving powers of attorney

deaf awareness week

7 May 2015

we’re meeting representatives from the deaf community, to learn more about the problems faced by people who are deaf or hard of hearing

businesses in Belfast

6 May 2015

we're in Belfast, chatting to advisers, mortgage brokers and consumer credit businesses – answering questions about the ombudsman and sharing our approach to cases

meeting in Manchester

6 May 2015

we're in the North East at the Institute of Money Advisers' annual conference – hearing about best practice and current issues in the advice sector

removing everyday barriers

5 May 2015

making a complaint can be challenging enough without adding unnecessary communication barriers – which is why our information's available in a range of formats depending on your needs

heading to Naidex

28 April 2015

we're at Naidex – the largest disability and rehabilitation event in the UK – finding out more about the barriers disabled people can face

St George's Day in Brighton

23 April 2015

we're chatting to members of the Chartered Insurance Institute in Brighton about working together and resolving complaints quickly and fairly

insurance insight

20 April 2015

we're discussing insurance with brokers and advisers at the Chartered Insurance Institute conference in Milton Keynes

pleasure park

17 April 2015

we're by the seaside in Blackpool at the UK Credit Unions' annual conference, explaining how we can help get things sorted early on

finance, farmers and finding help

16 April 2015

the ombudsman talks to BBC Radio Cumbria about the insurance and banking problems that farmers can face – and the sources of help available

next stop, Nottingham

16 April 2015

we're talking to local businesses and working through some case studies, as our *meet the ombudsman* roadshow reaches Nottingham

pension risks and opportunities

14 April 2015

we highlight the scams to avoid and the new options to think about with the introduction of pension freedoms changes

Essex worries

14 April 2015

we're meeting with advice workers in Colchester, to talk about financial hardship, unaffordable lending and debt collection

powers of attorney

7 April 2015

we've published tips and case studies based on problems we've seen involving powers of attorney

what's the alternative?

7 April 2015

find out more about our future service – and where the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) directive fits in

on the menu

1 April 2015

travel and motor insurance – as well as investments and pensions – are all on the menu for our breakfast meeting with members of the Chartered Insurance Institute in Kent

Financial

Ombudsman

Our board members are “non-executive” – they have no involvement in individual complaints. Their job as “public interest” directors is to ensure that the ombudsman service is properly resourced and is able to carry out its work effectively and independently

our board and senior people

our board

Sir Nicholas Montagu KCB chairman

- chairman of Council at Queen Mary University of London

formerly

- chairman of the board of Inland Revenue
- a senior civil servant working on issues ranging from pensions to public service reform

Gerard Connell

- non-executive director and chair of audit committee, Defence Science & Technology Laboratory
- non-executive director, Land Registry
- non-executive director, Nuclear Decommissioning Fund Company Ltd
- member of council at the Science & Technology Facilities Council

formerly

- senior independent director, Pennon Group
- group finance director, Wincanton
- regional director, Hill Samuel
- managing director, Bankers Trust
- governor of King's College School, Wimbledon
- chair of audit committee, Pennon Group Plc

Alan Jenkins

- a non-executive board member of the Crown Prosecution Service
- a non-executive board member of the Pension Protection Fund
- chairman of the board of directors of Mencap Trust Company Limited
- non-executive director of Gross Hill Properties Ltd, and Sydney and London Properties Ltd
- non-executive director of Northcourt Ltd
- trustee of the London Middle East Institute

formerly

- independent non-executive at PKF UK LLP
- chairman of the board of trustees of Lattitude Global Volunteering
- partner & chairman of global markets at Eversheds LLP
- chairman of the board of Eversheds LLP
- managing partner of Frere Cholmeley Bischoff
- governor of Bishop Gilpin Primary School

as at 31 March 2016

**Baroness Maeve Sherlock
OBE**

- a member of the House of Lords
- currently doing research for a doctorate at Durham University
- chair of Chapel St (charitable social enterprises)

formerly

- a commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
- a non-executive director of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission
- chief executive of the Refugee Council
- chief executive of the charity, One Parent Families
- a member of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Treasury
- chair of the National Student Forum

Pat Stafford

- vice president and director of marketing, HCA Healthcare
- vice chair of Guide Dogs

formerly

- group marketing director at BUPA
- brand director at British Airways
- managing director at Corporate Positioning Services
- a non-executive director at HMRC
- a non-executive director at the National College for Teaching and Leadership

Gill Whitehead

- director of audience technologies & insight, Channel 4
- board director and chair of the remuneration committee, YouView Television Ltd

formerly

- director of strategy and corporate development, Channel 4
- head of global strategy and head of BBC commercial iPlayer, BBC Worldwide
- strategy, finance and economic consulting manager, Deloitte
- economist, Bank of England
- board director, Freeview Television (DTV Services Ltd)
- board director, Ragdoll Worldwide Ltd



as at 31 March 2016

our executive team

Caroline Wayman

chief executive and
chief ombudsman

Julia Cavanagh

chief financial officer

David Cresswell

director of strategy

Annette Lovell

director of engagement

Chris McDermott

chief operating officer

Richard Thompson

principal ombudsman and
quality director

Garry Wilkinson

principal ombudsman and
director of new services



as at 31 March 2016

our panel of ombudsmen

there are more details about our ombudsmen on our website

Caroline Wayman

chief ombudsman and
chief executive

Richard Thompson

principal ombudsman and
quality director

Garry Wilkinson

principal ombudsman and
director of new services

lead and managing ombudsmen

Carole Auchterlonie

Yvette Bannister

Nathan Horner

Pat Hurley

David Millington

Caroline Mitchell

Clare Mortimer

Charlie Sweeney

Richard West

Paul Whiteing

Susan Wrigley

ombudsmen

A

Esther Absalom-Gough

Tope Adeyemi

Shazia Ahmed

Susan Alegre

Sally Allbeury

Janine Allen

Claire Allison

Jane Archer

David Ashley

Nicolas Atkinson

B

Charles Bacon

Timothy Bailey

Hilary Bainbridge

Michael Ball

Clair Bantin

Louise Bardell

Gregor Barham

Lisa Barham

Rosalind Barnett

Miranda Bates

Audrey Baxter

Phillip Berechree

Collette Bewley

James Biles

David Bird

Graham Booth

Emma Boothroyd

Michelle Boundy

Cathy Bovan

Alexandra Bowen

Gemma Bowen

Nicola Bowes

Michael Boyall

Roxy Boyce

Matthew Bradford

Kalpesh Brahmhatt

Nigel Bremner

Sian Brightey

Sarah Brooks

Colin Brown

Joanna Brown

June Brown

C

Edward Callaghan

Michael Campbell

Nadya Chandra

Julia Chapman

Joanne Chilvers

Carole Clark

Graeme Clarke

Heather Clayton

Maria Cleaver

Melissa Collett

Juliet Collins

Robert Collinson

Laura Colman

Rebecca Connelley

Terence Connor

Peter Cook

Stephen Cooper

Jonathan Coppin

Nicola Crabb

Ross Crawley

Michael Crewe

Alison Cribbs

Julian Cridge

David Curtis-Johnson

D

Paul Daniel

Kim Davenport

Andrew Davies

as at 31 March 2016

continued ►

our panel of ombudsmen

there are more details about our ombudsmen on our website

Caroline Davies
Elizabeth Dawes
Robert Deadman
Karen Dennis-Barry
Simon Dibble
Katie Doran
Mary Dowell-Jones
Rona Doyle

E

Rachel Ellis
Rebecca Ellis
Susan Ewins

F

Paul Featherstone
Janet Ferrari
Elizabeth Forbes
Laura Forster
Michael Foster
Juliana Francis
Andrew Fraser
Christine Fraser
Linda Freestone
Simon Furse
Geoffrey Futer

G

Jane Gallacher
Philip Gibbons
Christopher Gilbert
Roderic Glyn-Thomas
Michael Goldberg
Cara Goodbody
Joyce Gordon
Lorna Goulding
Elizabeth Grant
Sandra Greene
Jocelyn Griffith
Dawn Griffiths

H

Abdul Hafez
Rebecca Haigh
Nigel Hamilton
Sean Hamilton
Ross Hammond
Karen Hanlon
James Hargett
Alan Harris
James Harris
Anthony Harrison
Carolyn Harwood
Jarrod Hastings
Kate Hennessey
Ruth Hersey
Douglas Hill
Richard Hill
Jane Hingston
Clare Hockney
Charlotte Holland
Mark Hollands
Claire Hopkins
Adrian Hudson
Chantelle Hurn-Ryan
Lale Hussein-Doru

Mark Hutchings
Katrina Hyde

I

Michael Ingram
Dara Islam

J

Claire Jackson
Ben Jennings
Cerys Jones

K

Razia Karim
Colin Keegan

Anna Keighley
Siobhan Kelly
Rachael Kemp
James Kennard
Sharon Kerrison
Ayshea Khan
James Kimmitt
Tony King
Belinda Knight
Roy Kuku
Loucia Kyprianou

L

Mark Lancod
Christopher Langford
Raymond Lawley
Dianne Lawson
Laura Layfield
Simon Leach
Helen Liburd
Stephen Lilley
Daniel Little
Rosemary Lloyd
Lauren Long
Daniel Lucas

M

Alexander MacDonald
Andrew Macnamara
Bridget Makins
Ifrah Malik
Amrit Mangra
Douglas Mansell
Claire Marsh
Daniel Martin
Kristina Mathews
Roy Mawford
Amanda Maycock
Eimear McAllister

Siobhan McBride
Harriet McCarthy
Melanie McDonald
Helen McKenna
Una Mckevitt
Michael McMahon
Patrick McManus
Robyn McNamee
John Miles
Philip Miller
Alison Miller-Varey
Janet Millington
Roy Milne
Guy Mitchell
Gideon Moore
Ashley More
Anthony Moss
Helen Moye

N

Jeshen Narayanan
Raymond Neighbour
Geraldine Newbold
John Norton

O

Claire O'Connor
Geraldine O'Donnell
Jan O'Leary
Avril O'Meara
Amy Osborne
Mehmet Osman
Annabel O'Sullivan
Sim Ozen

P

Helene Pantelli
James Park
Sharon Parr
Jeffrey Parrington

Donna Parsons
Kim Parsons
Sarah Partridge-Smith
Nimish Patel
Jonathan Pattinson
Athena Pavlou
Emma Peters
Susan Peters
Daniel Picken
David Poley
Nigel Pope
Louise Povey
Simon Pugh
Alessandro Pulzone

Q

John Quinlan
Sandra Quinn

R

Michael Ranaghan
Simon Rawle
Roslyn Rawson
Morgan Rees
Christopher Reeves
Paul Reilly
Tonya Richards-Clarke
Mark Richardson
Stefan Riedel
Philip Roberts
Fiona Robinson
Kenneth Rose

S

Douglas Sayers
Mark Sceeny
Joseph Scott
Rosslyn Scott
Anastasia Serdari
Claire Sharp

Marie Shenton
Navneet Sher
Daniel Sheridan
Nicole Shinnick
Robert Short
David Singh
Nicola Sisk
Sophia Smith
Anthony Stafford
Lesley Stead
Ruth Stevenson
Caroline Stirling
Joanne Storey
Suzannah Stuart
Michael Stubbs
Helen Sutcliffe
John Swain
Charles Sweet

T

Benjamin Taylor
Keith Taylor
Niall Taylor
Sarann Taylor
Sarita Taylor
David Thomas
Samuel Thomas
Stephen Thomas
John Thornton
Christopher Tilson
Jagdeep Tiwana
Lennox Towers
Lynne Townley
Stephen Townsley
Sarah Tozzi
Venetia Trayhurn

V

Raj Varadarajan
Kyley Vernon

W

Nina Walter
Susan Webb
Julian Weinberg
Karen Wharton
Claire White
Peter Whiteley
John Wightman
Adam Williams
Amanda Williams
Kevin Williamson
Anna Wilshaw
Charlotte Wilson
Louise Wilson
Lucy Wilson
Hannah Wise
John Withington
Lindsey Woloski
Catherine Wolthuizen
Christian Wood
Elspeth Wood
Jennifer Wood
Nicola Wood
Richard Wood
Chloe Wooles
Nicola Woolf
Claire Woollerson
Kevin Wright
Lisa Wright

Y

Roger Yeomans
Matthew Young

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