

*inspiring consumer confidence in the
furniture and home improvement industries*

Annual Review 2010

Consumer:
www.thefurnitureombudsman.org

Member:
www.fira.co.uk/tfo



The Furniture Ombudsman

I am delighted to reflect on what has been an extremely rewarding year for The Furniture Ombudsman (TFO) and look forward with optimism to the coming 12 months.

2010 brought with it many firsts for The Furniture Ombudsman – two new websites (one intended exclusively for consumers and the other for our members), an online Case Management System that is helping to increase our efficiency and reduce our carbon footprint, a new Associate tier of Membership and an internal telephone logistics system. I am pleased therefore to introduce another here, in this, our first Annual Review.

With many high profile members, publicity about The Furniture Ombudsman on the television, radio, the Internet and in the press is somewhat inevitable. That is why it is important for all stakeholders that The Furniture Ombudsman is not only fair, but also that it be *seen* to be fair. Our qualified team is dedicated to delivering first class dispute resolution and our Standards Board ensures that decisions are fair and reasonable. It reviews a cross section of adjudications and offers an independent form of regulation.

The next logical step is to publish our case figures in this review, which I hope you find interesting.

Despite the fragile state of the economy, our membership has grown by more than 25% over the year. Never has it been more important to exceed expectations and inspire consumer confidence.

The Furniture Ombudsman 

FIRA
Expertise • Independence • Integrity
The Furniture Ombudsman is
a division of FIRA International

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I welcome those businesses that have been accepted into Full or Associate Membership of The Furniture Ombudsman during the last 12 months and hope they join our existing members in raising and upholding standards and promoting their association with us.

The Furniture Ombudsman's umbrella now covers approximately 2,000 retail outlets across the UK. As many consumers seek additional reassurance before making their purchases – particularly on big ticket items – we are pleased to assist by directing them to our members via the Store Locator facility on our consumer website, another first for us.

Attracting more members has increased demand for training. An important advance is that the proportion of delegates trained in consumer law and customer services has more than doubled this year. It is reassuring that so many retailers are investing in their staff in this way, thereby increasing awareness of the law and their obligations to consumers.

Our trainers have presented courses at our base in Hertfordshire and in-house for members up and down the country. We look forward to delivering more of the same in 2011.

Throughout 2011, all of us at The Furniture Ombudsman intend to continue to promote our work, improve efficiency, and be ready to help drive up standards for the benefit of consumers and all of those connected with the furniture and home improvement industries.



Kevin Grix
Head of The Furniture Ombudsman



TFO in the news

The Furniture Ombudsman has attracted a lot of positive publicity during 2010 in both consumer and trade press channels.

Measure up before shopping for new furniture

Yell.com, 24 March 2010

"Check that the retailer is a member of The Furniture Ombudsman to ensure, in the unlikely event that anything goes wrong, you will have access to an independent dispute resolution service."

Redress for defective furniture

Watchdog, BBC One, 13 May 2010

A couple paid £4,200 for their three-piece suite, but after only six months, the armchair was broken. The retailer (a non-member) took two months to send an inspector round, only to tell them that they had done the damage themselves. As problems had now developed with all of the items in the suite, they asked The Furniture Ombudsman for an independent report.

The Furniture Ombudsman's report concluded that "all the joints on the backs of the chair and two sofas are defective". The retailer agreed a refund that included the cost of the report.

How to solve furniture complaints – without hassle

Good Housekeeping, May 2010

This story is about our Independent Inspection Reports intended for complaints against non-members.

"The Ombudsman – the independent standards body for furniture and floor coverings – will appoint a qualified independent technician to carry out a home inspection...it then produces a Smart Report that details the furniture's condition and indicates whether or not your complaint is valid. This can be used as independent proof of any defect and help you to get the repair or replacement you want."

Money Box expert highlights The Furniture Ombudsman

Money Box Live, BBC Radio 4, 28 April 2010

"Well I just like the idea of this Furniture Ombudsman..."

"We've just had an email from somebody who says that they had a problem very much like the one about the kitchen. They used the Furniture Ombudsman. It took seven weeks... and it's now been finished...so it can work. So that was good advice earlier."

TFO backs Homebase

Cabinet Maker, 12 March 2010

"The Furniture Ombudsman has declared its support for the Homebase's 'excellent' Independent Consumer Protection Scheme."

TFO launches new consumer website

Woodworking News, March 2010

"Increased web traffic from consumers to TFO's page on the FIRA website prompted the decision to launch the new site (www.thefurnitureombudsman.org), which features the details of all companies who are members of TFO and have agreed to abide by its Code of Practice."

New Associate Member package

Furniture News, April 2010

"The new Associate Member package [is] designed to help companies improve their customer service... Members also benefit from a listing on TFO's website, which receives thousands of visits from consumers looking for trusted suppliers."

TFO store locator

Furniture News, June 2010

"Consumers will be able to search for the nearest TFO member store using their postcode, and can choose their purchase from a simple menu."

"This new project contributes to an ongoing marketing campaign to establish TFO as a recognised consumer brand."

How we dealt with consumer complaints in 2010

Our role at The Furniture Ombudsman is to improve the standard and service offered by retailers, manufacturers and other associated companies in the furniture and home improvement industries. Our members are entitled to display The Furniture Ombudsman logo which is an endorsement of fair trade, quality and a commitment to customer service.

When a consumer identifies a problem with the goods received, their immediate recourse is to the retailer. In a small proportion of cases, however, the two parties are not able to reach an amicable settlement and the consumer may require the services of an independent third party. The Furniture Ombudsman can make a big difference at this stage because we are empowered by our members to make a formal decision on the claim.

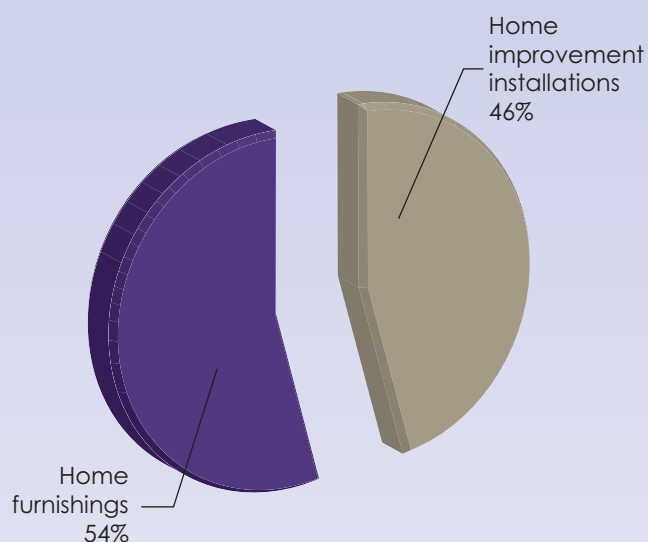
Alternative Dispute Resolution Service (ADR)

Our ADR service is a two-stage conciliation and adjudication process that is exclusive to consumers of our registered Full Members.

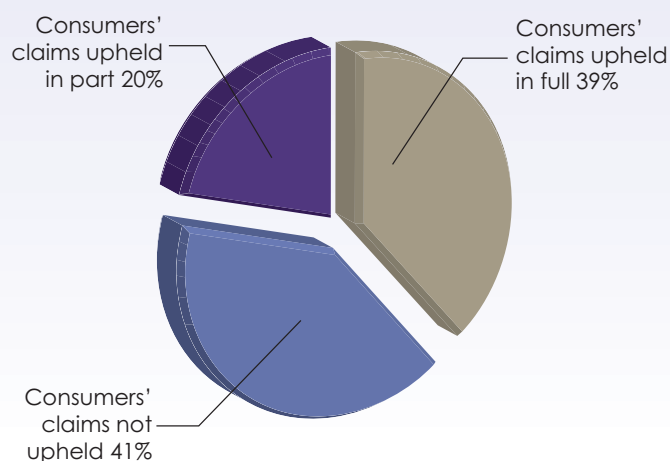
The statistics used in this review relate to the year ending September 2010.

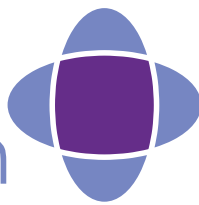
Through the ADR service we review both home furnishing complaints (eg cabinets, upholstery and beds) and home improvement installation complaints (eg kitchens and bathrooms).

Our recent figures show that 54% of all complaint applications received during the year were home furnishing complaints and 46% were home improvement installation complaints.



In the cases reviewed during the year, the consumer's claim was upheld in full in 39% of cases, the claim was not upheld in 41% of cases, and the claim was upheld in part in 20% of cases. Where a claim is upheld in part, a split decision has been made where some aspects of a claim with multiple issues have been found in favour of the consumer, and some have been found in favour of the retailer.





Independent Inspection Reports

We also provide a separate service to consumers and lawyers who require an independent inspection report in respect of a purchase made from a non-member, for use in litigation or dispute resolution elsewhere. During the past eighteen months, we have produced more than one thousand Independent Inspection Reports.

Standards Board

A cross section of the Ombudsman's adjudications are reviewed periodically by an Independent Standard's Board whose role is to ensure that our decisions are both fair and reasonable. The Standards Board is chaired by Guy Pratt, the Head of Hertfordshire Trading Standards, who sits alongside other individuals representing the interests of the consumer and the furniture industry.



“I feel The Furniture Ombudsman provides a valuable mechanism for consumers who are dissatisfied with any aspect of quality or service. Businesses that are members demonstrate a clear commitment to customer care and satisfaction.”

Jim Potts

Former Head of Lancashire Trading Standards and Member of The Furniture Ombudsman Standards Board

What these results mean for members and consumers

Feedback from our members suggests three key advantages:

- Less time for both parties spent dealing with disputes
- Removing the costly expense of going to court to make and defend claims
- Helps to inspire consumer confidence.



Members

The Furniture Ombudsman



Full Member

Amwell Kitchens Limited
Anglia Regional Co-operative Society Limited
Arthur Jenkins Furniture Centre
Ashbrooks (House Furnishers) Limited
Ashley Anderson
B & Q plc
Backchairs Direct Limited
Bainton Flooring
Banburys Limited
Barker & Stonehouse
Beadle & Crome (Reading) Limited
Bentalls of Kingston
Bernhardt Furniture (UK) Limited
Biddiscombes
Bretts of Ipswich Limited
Carpet Rack
Carters Furniture Centre Limited
Chelmsford Star Co-operative Society Limited
Cloisters Design Limited
Collective Imports Limited
Contract Kitchens (New Milton) Limited
Country Desks (2007)
Cousins Furniture Stores Limited
Crimson Interiors Limited
David Neville Limited
DFS Furniture Company plc
Dickinsons Furnishers Limited
Discount Warehouse (Totton) Limited
Dolphin Bathrooms (Homeform Group Limited)
DPS Distribution Limited (t/a Danetti)
Dream World
Dreams (Belfast)
Dreams plc
Duresta Upholstery Limited
E & A Wates Limited
Elite Bedding Company Limited
Eyes of Chesterfield Limited
Fenwick (Brent Cross) Limited
Fishpools Limited
Fords (Oakham) Limited
Frank Hudson Limited
Frasers House Furnishers (Ellon) Limited
Furniture Factors Limited
Furniture Superstore Limited

Furniture Village plc
Golden Nights Bed Company Limited
H Ponsford Limited
Hammonds Furniture Limited
Heal & Son Limited
Herbert Lewis (Drapers & Furnishers) Limited
Hitachi Capital Consumer Finance
Holmes Hill Furniture
Homebase Limited
Homeform Group Limited t/a MKD
House Of Fraser
Hunters (Derby) Limited
Imaggio Interiors Limited
Island Premier Beds Limited
J Scott (Marchwiel) Limited
Julian Foye
Kitchens Direct (see Homeform Group)
Kutchenhaus Limited
Langton & Co Limited
Lansdowne Interiors (see Marshas)
Leather Doctor Services Limited
Lee Longlands & Co Limited
Leekes Limited
Lenleys
Lima Kitchens Limited
Living Homes
Macdonalds (York) Limited
Magnet Limited
Maitland's
Marks & Spencer plc
Marriotts House Furnishers Limited
Mathesons of Oban
Midas House Furnishers Limited
Mills (Herne Bay) Limited
Milners
Mister Smith Interiors
Moben (see Homeform Group Limited)
Natural Bed Company
Natuzzi Services Limited
Nortek Educational Furniture and Equipment Limited
NTP Kitchens & Joinery Limited
Park Furnishers Limited
Paul Glover Furniture Limited

Pearsons (Enfield) Limited
Peter Adams (Watford) Limited
Peter Betteridge (Furnishers) Limited
Philpotts of Hitchin
Plumbs Limited
Purves Two Limited
Quilters Limited
Rainbow Carpets (Welling) Limited
Randalls of Uxbridge Limited
Rich Sofas & Interiors Limited
Ronald G Johnston Limited
Roomes of Upminster
Roset (UK) Limited
Rosevears Furnishers Limited
Russell & Dorrell Limited
Showcom Limited (aka K2Go)
Sinclairs First for Furniture
Skopos Design Limited
Smeg (UK) Limited
Sofa Workshop
Sofas UK plc
Southon & Co Limited
Stevens Of Pitlochry
Stroud Furniture Makers
Sturtons & Tappers Furnishings
Tamarisk Designs Limited
The Chair Centre
The Contract Chair Company
The Leather Studio
The Sitting Room
UBM Information Limited
Uniquemade Limited
W Boyes & Co (Eastfield) Limited
W Vasey & Son (Carlisle) Limited
Wallace King Interiors Limited
Ward Brothers (Furnishers) Limited
Wells Carpets Brokers Limited
Wesley Barrell (Witney) Limited
Wickes Building Supplies Limited
Willowbrook Limited
Wm Black & Son Limited
Wood Bros (Furniture) Limited
Worcester & Gloucester Furniture Exhibition Centres

The Furniture Ombudsman



Associate Member

Alexander Christian
Antiques 2 Modern
At Home with Gimbles
Bargain Furniture Store
Beds Direct
Blazes Logistics
British Beds Worldwide Limited
C Harris & Son (Fleet Limited)
Chrysties Furnishing Centre
Cloverstar Limited
Custom Carpentry
Everest Limited

Exclusiv Interiors
Factory Beds Direct
Hampshire Barn Interiors Limited
HCS Independent Carpet Inspectors
Heico Fasteners UK Limited
Holmes Bros Furnishers Limited
Homewood Interiors
Hypnia Limited
J&J Ormerod plc
JTS Interiors
Keechdesign UK Limited
La Source

Leisurewood Furniture Limited
www.mattressnextday.co.uk
New-life Interiors
Norman Furnishings
North Wales Beds
Oak Furniture Land
Sofa & Home
TC Group
The Bed & Suite Centre Limited
The Bedzone
The Ideal Suite Factory Limited