

Removals Industry Ombudsman Scheme
Ombudsman Annual report 2017-18

This report is presented to the board of the scheme and contains details of the cases handled by the Ombudsman in the year ending 30th June 2018.

179 cases were received and 13 determinations issued, all domestic in nature in that they were disputes between a UK remover and a client based in the UK for at least one end of the removal operation. There were no disputes between a consumer abroad using a UK remover for a job between two locations abroad.

Last year, the major issue was ‘complaint handling’ by the remover and was aimed at a few removers, one of which was particularly noticeable. In the course of the year, a meeting was held with that removal company and a distinct improvement followed. Suffice it to say that the improvement is such that I am pleased not to be in a position to consider ‘naming and shaming’ them.

This year the major issues is ‘volume calculation’. A number of enquiries and substantive complaints have revolved around the issue of how the removal companies assess the volume of goods to be handled. Where a survey is undertaken, with a visit, there appears to be few issues. In other circumstances, whether by the client providing an inventory, or a generalised assessment is made, there appears to be a greater risk of a volume issue. Having said that, it is worth noting that with so few complaints reaching the stage of a determination, the proportion of moves that result in an unresolved dispute, is quite small.

Disputes rejected.

1. Insurance matters. 21

These are outside the scope of our scheme and are therefore rejected. Where there is a complaint that includes an insurance element, that specific issue is set aside.

2. Non-member disputes. 56

This number reflects complaints against removers who are not members of any identifiable trade body with its own alternative dispute resolution (ADR) scheme. See item 4 below. This scheme is currently restricted to members of the National Guild of Removers and Storers (NGRS). This ensures that any determinations are honoured by remover members who must abide by NGRS rules. Those who do not are removed from membership by NGRS.

In the year in question, no members were removed.

3. Complainants who have not completed the remover’s own complaints procedure. (18).

In some of the cases, referring the client back to the remover has resulted in a negotiated settlement. In other cases, this office has attempted to act as ‘mediator’, with varying success. The important aspect is that clients be encouraged to engage

with their supplier, and vice-versa, in an attempt to get what might become a major dispute sorted out at an early stage.

4. Referred to other trade association ADR process – 38.

In these cases, where we could identify that the remover was a member of another scheme, the complainant was referred to that other scheme.

5. Nine cases were rejected because they were being addressed by another body, subject to litigation or involved police action.

6. Referred to CAB - 47.

Where the remover is not an identifiable member of an ADR scheme, the complainant is referred to CAB. This group is included within item 2 above.

There were no cases that were discontinued because of operational reasons.

Average time to resolve disputes: 26 calendar days. (Cf 27 days last year) There were 5 cases that took 28 days or more with a maximum of 45 days in one case over the new year holiday period.

There were no cross border disputes.

Compliance rate is 100%. All member companies complied with my determinations. None had to be removed from membership by NGRS.

Having now accepted appointment to the substantive post of Ombudsman, I would like to express my thanks to the board for their support and the membership for their co-operation throughout the year. In all cases I have been treated courteously, even when issuing unwelcome determinations.

To repeat what I said last year, and with a house move under my own belt, I can say with some feeling that moving house is one of the most stressful activities undertaken by any family. Sometimes things happen that could not have been foreseen and their significance is multiplied by the stress factor of the move itself. While recognising that this adds to the challenges of the move, we hope to encourage our members to also recognise the responsibility that they carry in this regard and to improve the service level they provide at the initial 'quotation' stage when volumes and van sizes are determined.

Tony Kaye JP, BA, MBA, MCI Arb, MBCS.

Ombudsman

September 2018