

# Factsheet: Complaints about communications service providers

July 2012



**The UK's telecommunications market is regulated by the independent Office of Communications (Ofcom). A good deal of advice for customers of telephone companies is available on their website:**

**<http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/tell-us/telecoms/>**

**Although Ofcom does not handle individual disputes or complaints, you can register your experiences with them to help them understand industry-wide problems, and this can lead to new enforcement or policy work.**

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## **1. What can I do if I believe I have been poorly or unreasonably dealt with by my telephone company?**

You should ask for your complaint to be escalated within the company. Many service providers have high-level teams that deal with customer complaints that cannot be resolved in the first instance. They can generally be reached by asking for the high-level complaints department when you call the usual customer services number. Service providers detail their complaints procedures on the back of their bills.

## **2. Can Ofcom or the Government look into my complaint about a telephone company?**

No, this is a commercial matter and the Government has no remit to intervene in disputes between customers and their communication service providers. Ofcom do not handle individual disputes or complaints. Please see 3 below.

## **3. What can I do if I am unable to remedy the situation directly with my service provider?**

There is a system of consumer protection in the form of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme, a free and independent service to domestic customers (and also to business customers with ten employees or fewer). The scheme acts as an independent arbitrator between the customer and the communications service provider. Ofcom approves two such schemes and requires that all providers are members. They are:

- the 'Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme' (CISAS); and
- 'Ombudsman Services: Communications' (the OSC, formerly known as 'the Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman' or 'Oteló').

To give a few examples, Everything Everywhere (trading on the High Street under the names of Orange and T-mobile) is a member of CISAS; while Talk Talk and BT and Telephonica O2 are members of 'Ombudsman Services: Communications'.

To find out which ADR scheme your telephone company is a member of, please see your bill or visit the ADR schemes' websites:

<http://www.ombudsman-services.org/memberlists/communications/>

[http://www.cisas.org.uk/Membercompanies-2\\_e.html](http://www.cisas.org.uk/Membercompanies-2_e.html)

If, as a result of the ADR process, the arbitrator concludes that the customer's complaint is valid, it can order the communications service provider to fix the problem and can potentially make a financial award. The provider is bound by the decision of the ADR scheme. A customer who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint is not bound by the decision of the ADR scheme, and is free to consider legal action against the communications service provider.

Before contacting the relevant ADR scheme, the customer needs a "deadlock letter" from the communications service provider. Alternatively, the customer may contact the ADR scheme directly if they have been unsuccessfully trying to resolve the matter with their provider for 8 weeks. For this purpose, the customer should keep a record of all contact with the provider, including the timing and content of any phone calls and copies of all correspondence.

Contact details for the OSC are as follows:

Ombudsman Services Communications, PO Box 730, Warrington,  
WA4 6WU

Tel: 0330 440 1614

Fax: 0330 440 1615

Textphone: 0330 440 1600 or 0845 051 1513

Email: [enquiries@os-communication.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@os-communication.org.uk)

Website: [www.ombudman-services.org.uk](http://www.ombudman-services.org.uk)

The deadline for bringing a dispute to OSC is nine months from the date the provider was first notified about the problem.

Contact details for CISAS are as follows:

CISAS, 24 Angel Gate, City Road, London, EC1V 2PT

Tel: 020 7520 3827

Fax: 020 7520 3829

E-mail: [info@cisas.org.uk](mailto:info@cisas.org.uk)

Website : [www.cisas.org.uk](http://www.cisas.org.uk)

#### **4. What can I do if I am not satisfied with the ADR scheme's decision or how it has handled my complaint?**

OSC and CISAS have their own internal complaints procedures should you wish to pursue the matter further.

You may also wish to seek independent advice on the options open to you from Citizens Advice. Their contact details are as follows:

Tel: 08454 04 05 06 (lines open 09.00 - 17.00 Monday to Friday)

Website: [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

And: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/contact\\_us.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/contact_us.htm)

#### **5. Can Ofcom or the Government look into my complaint about the ADR scheme?**

No, as given the independence of the arbitrator it would not be appropriate to comment on their decisions, or the way they have handled your complaint.

**For information on DCMS policy areas, visit our website:**

[http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/telecommunications\\_and\\_online/7761.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/telecommunications_and_online/7761.aspx)

**Or contact:**

Department for Culture Media and Sport

Telephone: 020 7211 6000

E-mail: [enquiries@culture.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@culture.gsi.gov.uk)