

2 July 2014

CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S REVIEW OF THE BALANCE OF COMPETENCES BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Semester 4 - Voting, Consular, Statistics

The Ombudsman Association (formerly the British and Irish Ombudsman Association) was established in 1991 and includes as members all major public and private sector Ombudsman schemes and complaint handling bodies in the United Kingdom (and the Republic of Ireland).

The Association welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's Review of the Balance of Competencies between the UK and the European Union. Our comments are limited to the sub-section *Wider forms of democratic engagement*, specifically: The right to complain to the European Ombudsman.

Ombudsmen help to underpin public confidence in the institutions that they cover – by providing members of the public with accessible and effective redress, and by feeding back the lessons from their work in order to help improve service delivery and complaints- management for the future. In this way, ombudsmen help to reinforce democratic engagement.

The Association is of the view that there should be comprehensive ombudsman coverage, overseeing all bodies that provide public services, and there should be clear boundaries between different ombudsmen, avoiding gaps and overlaps in jurisdiction.

The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about EU institutions and agencies. It is not empowered to deal with complaints about the UK's national institutions, which fall within the jurisdiction of the relevant public sector ombudsmen in the UK. The European Ombudsman has set up a European Network of Ombudsmen that enables their office to promptly and effectively re-direct complaints that fall outside their jurisdiction to the relevant national ombudsman.

There is a clear distinction between the jurisdictions of the European Ombudsman and the national ombudsmen in the UK, without gaps or overlaps, resulting in an effective balance of competencies.

The Association supports the work of the European Ombudsman. Their crucial role in holding European institutions to account, and driving improvements in services, is an integral part of democratic accountability and it would benefit the democratic engagement between the citizens of the UK and the European Union if the role of the European Ombudsman was better known.

Yours sincerely

Donal Galligan
Interim Secretary