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# **Membership Application**

# Application form for Complaint Handler members

## Form version: May 2024

# Purpose

This form is for use by complaint handling bodies that wish to apply for membership of the Ombudsman Association (OA). Your completed form will be used by the OA’s Validation Committee (VC) to consider whether you meet the criteria for membership. This process is referred to by the OA as “validation”.

This form is also used by the VC for “revalidation”. Revalidation enables the VC to verify, approximately once every five years, that an existing Complaint Handler member continues to meet the membership criteria.

Effective validation and revalidation are critical to protecting the reputation, credibility and brand of both the OA and its members. The VC therefore takes its responsibilities very seriously, and aims to ensure its processes are robust, efficient and fit for purpose.

# Criteria

The criteria for the recognition of Complaint Handler members, against which your application will be assessed, are set out in the OA’s Terms and Rules. The Terms and Rules cross-refer to other OA materials that members are required to implement. In preparing your application, we suggest you take account of the following resources: [Terms and Rules](https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/OA%20Terms%20and%20Rules%20-%20July%202019.pdf); [Guide to Principles of Good Complaint Handling](https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/best-practice-and-publications/principles-good-complaint-handling); [Guide to Principles of Good Governance](https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/best-practice-and-publications/guide-principles-good-governance); [OA Strategic Position Statement](https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/best-practice-and-publications/strategic-position-statement); [OA Service Standards Framework](https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/best-practice-and-publications/oa-service-standard-framework); [OA Caseworker Competency Framework](https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/best-practice-and-publications/oa-caseworker-competency-framework).

# Application process

Please complete all sections of this form and return it to oasupport@ombudsmanassociation.org, together with electronic copies of any supporting documentation. Please provide weblinks and references to specific sections of documents wherever possible to verify the information provided. Guidance notes are included throughout the form in italic text. You can delete these when completing the form if you wish.

The VC may request further information or evidence in the course of assessing your application. It may also be appropriate to meet with you. We will let you know if this is necessary. Upon conclusion of the process, the VC will make a recommendation to the OA’s board in relation to the outcome of your application.

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| Part 1: About the applicant |
| Name of the organisation applying for membership |  |
| Date on which the organisation began accepting complaints | *If the complaint handling scheme has not yet opened, please indicate when it intends to open and then answer the remaining questions in this form by reference to how the scheme will operate once open, making clear where any aspects of the scheme’s operation are not yet finalised.*  |
| Ownership and purpose of the organisation | *Please describe the corporate ownership structure of the organisation and explain its purpose and objectives, including an indication of whether the scheme provides services in order to generate profit for shareholders..*  |
| Geographic area covered by the scheme |  |
| Sector or sectors in which the scheme operates | *Please describe the sector (or sectors) covered by the scheme and indicate which* [*Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Codes*](https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/ukstandardindustrialclassificationofeconomicactivities/uksic2007) *you believe apply to that sector.* |
| Brief description of the type of complaints the scheme accepts  |  |
| Is impartial complaint handling a significant part of the organisation’s role? *This is a threshold criterion for Complaint Handler membership.* | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Does the scheme comprehensively cover complaints in its sector, free from exclusions or exemptions to its jurisdiction? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Is this the only complaint handling body (including any private or statutory Ombudsman schemes, or escalation to an ombudsman scheme) operating in the relevant sector? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| If you answered “no” or “other” to any of the questions above, please provide further details. |  |

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| Part 2: Process and outcomes |
| Please describe the approach taken by the scheme to investigating complaints.  | *Please include an indication of whether the approach is adversarial or inquisitorial and how evidence is gathered, assessed and challenged.* |
| What guidance, training or other mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that all decision-making staff proceed fairly, professionally and impartially? |  |
| Please explain how the scheme supports and monitors the implementation of its decisions and recommendations in practice.  | *Please include an explanation of whether decisions are binding on those who participate, how the implementation of decisions and recommendations is monitored and followed up, and any measures that can be applied in cases of non-implementation.*  |
| Please describe the quality assurance mechanisms the scheme has in place in relation to its complaint handling practices. | *These might include monitoring of outcomes, annual audits, risk-based spot checks, peer reviews of processes etc.* |
| How does the scheme seek and obtain feedback from users, and potential users, about their experience? How is this feedback acted upon to improve the effectiveness of the scheme? |  |

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| Part 3: Accessibility and information |
| Are complainants able to lodge a complaint via a range of methods, including post, email/online and phone? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Does the scheme provide the parties with written reasons for the final determination of a complaint, including providing the complainant with reasons where a complaint is determined to fall outside the scheme’s jurisdiction?  | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Upon the final determination of a complaint, does the scheme inform the parties about where to get further help? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Does the scheme communicate in language that is accessible to users with a wide range of needs? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Does the scheme apply its processes flexibly, providing assistance, support and adjustments for complainants and potential complainants to access its processes? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  **Other** [ ]  |
| Please indicate whether the organisation does the activities below. In the righthand column, please provide weblinks to relevant published materials.  |
| 1 | Sets out clearly the type of complaints handled by the scheme | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 2 | Publishes a step-by-step guide to the complaint handling process used by the scheme, including likely timeframes for each step | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 3 | Publishes information about the potential outcomes of a complaint, the remedies available, and how those remedies are determined | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 4 | Publishes service standards to inform users of what to expect from the scheme | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 5 | Proactively raises and monitors awareness of the scheme among potential complainants | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 6 | Publishes and implements a reasonable adjustments policy for scheme users | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 7 | Publishes examples or summaries of decisions made by the scheme | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 8 | Publishes aggregate data on the number of investigations conducted and the outcomes of investigations | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 9 | Publishes aggregate information about the stages at which, and methods by which, cases were resolved | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 10 | Informs scheme users how they can make a complaint about the scheme’s service | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| 11 | Publishes information on complaints made by users about the scheme’s service | Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |  |
| If you answered “no” or “other” to any of the questions above, please provide further details. |  |
| Part 4: Expectations on OA members |
| Please describe the steps you have taken toward implementing the OA’s Service Standards Framework, or an equivalent framework, for the scheme. |  |
| Please describe the steps you have taken toward implementing the OA’s Caseworker Competency Framework, or an equivalent framework, for the scheme. |  |
| Are there any aspects of the OA’s Guide to Principles of Good Governance with which the scheme does not comply? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  |
| Are there any aspects of the OA’s Guide to Principles of Good Complaint Handling with which the scheme does not comply? | **Yes** [ ]  **No** [ ]  |
| If you answered “yes” to either of the questions above, please indicate which aspects of the Guide(s) the scheme does not fully comply with, and explain what steps are being taken to bring the scheme in line with the Guide(s) or why compliance is not necessary/appropriate. |

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| Part 5: Revalidation |
| Complete Part 5 only if you are an existing Complaint Handler member and you are applying for revalidation of your membership. Otherwise, please proceed to Part 6 (Declaration). |
| Please carefully review all the information in this form, which was provided when you last made an application for membership or revalidation. If anything has changed, please provide an updated response based on current information. Please highlight or otherwise mark all new/amended text in the form.  |
| Is there anything you would like to emphasise or explain about changes to the organisation since your last application? | *This is an opportunity to describe any changes in more detail. For example, you might wish to explain the rationale for a change in the scope of the complaint handling scheme, highlight improvements in effectiveness under a new structure etc.*  |
| Please explain how you have addressed any recommendations for improvement or other feedback provided by the OA in relation to your last application.  |  |

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| Part 6: Declaration |
| I sign this form as the head of the applicant organisation, or on their behalf. All information provided in this application is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I do not know of any information, other than as provided in this application, that would mean or be likely to mean that the applicant does not fulfil the OA’s criteria for Complaint Handler membership.  |
| Name |  |
| Position |  |
| Signature |  |
| Date |  |
| Contact email |  |