

Ups-and-downs: the role of the ombudsman

How to settle investment disputes in the recession

With the recent stock market ups-and-downs, the Financial Ombudsman Service is likely to be called on to settle a steady stream of investment disputes in 2009. The ombudsman can get involved in a wide-range of financial complaints that consumers haven't been able to sort out themselves - from pawn broking to portfolio management and from credit cards to critical-illness insurance. But in some circumstances it may not be appropriate or necessary for the ombudsman to decide on the merits of a complaint. For example:

■ **If the complaint is solely about an investment's performance.** If a consumer agrees that the investment they were sold was what they wanted, but they are disappointed with the way it has performed, it is unlikely that the ombudsman could help. However, people often realise that something is wrong only when they see

an investment performing badly. So although the trigger for their complaint might be a disappointing return on an investment, the underlying concern may be that the investment was not suitable in the first place.

■ **If the complaint has been dealt with by a court.** If the same complaint is already the subject of court action, it is unlikely that the Financial Ombudsman Service would be able to get involved.

■ **If the firm has already made a fair offer.** If a firm has already offered compensation that the ombudsman service considers is fair, it would generally not investigate the matter further. However, the ombudsman may sometimes need to investigate the complaint to be satisfied that any offer made is an appropriate one.

Hopefully, all will run smoothly. But if you do notice something has gone wrong, and you believe you have cause

for complaint, contact the firm involved and let them know. In the vast majority of cases, this may help to sort things out.

If you've already complained to the firm and you're still not happy, the Financial Ombudsman Service may be able to help. It's a free service and completely independent. The ombudsman has official powers to settle complaints about a wide range of financial matters.



**Financial
Ombudsman
Service**

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