

Welcome to Associate Membership of The Furniture Ombudsman...

Associate Membership provides you with an ethical code of practice which sets out to promote high standards and encourage good relations between you, your consumers and The Furniture Ombudsman. This helps to inspire consumer confidence and raises the profile of the industry for the benefit of all those associated with it.

As part of your pledge to abide by the ethics of the Customer Charter, you also agree to support the overall aims and objectives of The Furniture Ombudsman in raising the standard of the industry.

Your Associate Membership can be used as a practical tool to make public your commitment to quality and customer service. Moving closer to The Furniture Ombudsman is a unique way for your business to inspire consumer confidence.

The Furniture Ombudsman is recognised by consumers as a mark of excellence. It is seen as an assurance of quality and service in relation to products, the way they are sold, and the way customer aftercare and service requests are handled.

Integrity and Independence

Officially recognised by The European Commission as an Alternative Dispute Resolution scheme in the UK, The Furniture Ombudsman is referenced on the Consumer Direct website which is delivered in partnership with Trading Standards.

The Furniture Ombudsman is an associate member of The British and Irish Ombudsman Association, corporate affiliate members of The Trading Standards Institute and it maintains links with The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CIArb) through its adjudicators who are professionally qualified by them.

Organisation

The Head of The Furniture Ombudsman

The Head of The Furniture Ombudsman is responsible for overseeing the organisation, including its integrity and impartiality. The Head also oversees the day to day management and operation of The Furniture Ombudsman Alternative Dispute Resolution Service and is responsible for representing the organisation during meetings with The Furniture Ombudsman Standard Board and other bodies that work in partnership with the organisation.

The Dispute Resolution Team

The Dispute Resolution Team comprises of individuals who administer conciliation and adjudication casework and provide general advice to Full Members. They use their best endeavours to resolve disputes independently between Full Members and their customers as practically as possible.

The Administration Team

The administration team deals with administrative matters relating to The Furniture Ombudsman conciliation and inspection service.

The Membership & Marketing Team

The Membership and Marketing Team work in conjunction with the Head to market The Furniture Ombudsman. They are also responsible for administering the membership scheme, training courses and other events.

The Furniture Ombudsman Standards Board

The Furniture Ombudsman Standards Board seeks to ensure the organisation's integrity and impartiality. The Standards Board meets every three months to review a cross section of the Ombudsman's adjudication reports to ensure that its decisions are both fair and reasonable. It may also offer recommendations to The Head of The Furniture Ombudsman with regards to the administration of individual cases. The Standards Board is chaired by a senior official of Trading Standards who sits alongside other individuals representing the interests of the industry and the consumer.

The Furniture Ombudsman can be contacted at:

The Furniture Ombudsman
Maxwell Road
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG1 2EW

Telephone: 0845 653 2064
Fax: 0845 653 2065

Email: info@thefurnitureombudsman.org
Web: www.thefurnitureombudsman.org

The Associate Membership Customer Charter

Associate Members shall endeavour to:

1. Provide consumers with dependable products which are fit for the purpose for which they are bought
2. Provide clear and accurate product information prior to a sale which will assist consumers in making well informed decisions
3. Provide consumers with information regarding the likely performance of a product and any maintenance regimes which may be required after purchase
4. Provide consumers with clear and accurate information regarding product prices and delivery costs
5. Deliver products as agreed, on time and in good condition and advise the consumer of any issues which may compromise delivery as soon as is practicable
6. Promote a high level of customer service and professionalism amongst staff and encourage them to meet all service requests with courtesy and efficiency
7. Listen to all complaints seriously and sympathetically and adopt an effective procedure when trying to resolve them
8. Listen to customer feedback and where appropriate use it as a tool to improve service
9. Avoid any commercial practice that could be adverse to the consumer and the principles of fair trade in general
10. Promote the aims of The Furniture Ombudsman in raising the standard and profile of the furniture and home improvement industry for the benefit of consumers

Rules of Associate Membership

1. Associate Members shall actively promote the aims and objectives of The Furniture Ombudsman in raising the standard and profile of the furniture and home improvement industry. Associate Members shall endeavour to meet the requirements of The Customer Charter for the benefit of the consumer.
2. According to their business needs, Associate Members shall properly consider an application for Full Membership annually as part of their continuing commitment to The Furniture Ombudsman and to facilitate an improvement to their service.
3. Associate Members shall refrain from any commercial practice which could be adverse to the consumer and fair trade in general and which could bring The Furniture Ombudsman into disrepute as a result of their Associate Membership.
4. Associate Members shall not hold themselves out as a 'Full Member' or 'Member' or 'Member(s) of The Furniture Ombudsman' or any other description that could infer that they are Full Members of The Furniture Ombudsman Scheme. Associate Members shall refer to themselves only as 'Associates' or 'Associate Members' of The Furniture Ombudsman.

5. Associate Members shall not in dealing with The Furniture Ombudsman's affairs represent or purport to represent the views of The Furniture Ombudsman.
6. Any Associate Member, their staff or agents who are found to be in breach of the Rules of Associate Membership or show purposeful disregard for The Customer Charter or are guilty of dishonourable or unprofessional conduct or conduct which is, or could be prejudicial to the welfare of The Furniture Ombudsman or its stakeholders may be suspended or excluded from their Associate Membership and notice of such disclosed by The Furniture Ombudsman.
7. Associate Members shall inform The Furniture Ombudsman of any impending civil or criminal proceedings or actions involving themselves, their staff or agents which may bring their character or professional standing into question.
8. Any Associate Member who has been suspended or excluded by The Furniture Ombudsman shall have 14 days from the date of suspension or exclusion to present an appeal in writing to The Furniture Ombudsman for consideration. During any period of suspension the Associate Member must not hold himself out as a current Associate Member of The Furniture Ombudsman.
9. Associate Members shall keep The Furniture Ombudsman aware of any issues which may from time to time cause them to become or likely to become in breach of the Rules of Associate Membership.
10. Associate Members who have an order of bankruptcy made against them or enter administration, liquidation or otherwise cease to trade shall advise The Furniture Ombudsman immediately. Notice of such may be grounds for The Furniture Ombudsman to resign that Associate from Membership. Where The Furniture Ombudsman discovers that an Associate Member has ceased trading for any reason given in this clause other than by notice, The Furniture Ombudsman may resign the Associate Member immediately.
11. Associate Members authorise The Furniture Ombudsman to carry out checks with Credit Agencies for the purpose of indentifying any adverse information about them if required.
12. Associate Members shall answer any written requests for information from the Head of The Furniture Ombudsman as may be required from time to time enabling him to carry out his duties in administration of these rules or any other matters on behalf of the organisation.
13. Each individual term of Associate Membership shall last 12 months from the date of admission. Each term shall cost the applicant £99.00 plus VAT. Upon admittance the Associate Member shall provide a completed Standing Order Mandate. Renewal shall fall due 12 calendar months after admittance. Renewal for subsequent terms shall be automatic and no renewal reminders shall be sent.
14. Associate Members who wish to provide proper notice of their resignation must do so in writing no later than 28 days before the date of renewal falls due. Notice given inside the remaining 28 days of the current term will not constitute proper notice and that Associate Member shall be liable for payment for the following term in full.
15. The Furniture Ombudsman shall retain the absolute right to rescind or refuse to renew Associate Membership for any reason.

16. All Associate Members will display, only during the term of their membership, The Furniture Ombudsman sticker and membership certificate in all of their outlets. Associate Members who have resigned or are otherwise no longer Associate Members shall discontinue using The Furniture Ombudsman Associate Member Logo or any other reference to their Associate Membership to The Furniture Ombudsman.
17. Associate Members shall appoint an individual who will keep The Furniture Ombudsman updated fully with regards to the contact details of the member including all business names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers and email addresses if they change during the term.
18. The Furniture Ombudsman shall retain the right to amend the rules of Associate Membership without notice.

January 2010
The Furniture Ombudsman