



THE INDEPENDENT  
FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN

# The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015

## Annual Activity Report 2023

Schedule 5: 12/02/23 - 11/02/24

Schedule 6: 12/02/22 - 11/02/23





Chartered Trading  
Standards Institute  
ADR Competent Authority

The Independent Football Ombudsman is approved by Government under  
the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes  
(Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015

## CTSI Activity Report Year Ending February 2024

### Schedule 5 Regulation 11 (2)

Information to be included in an ADR entity's annual activity report:

- a) The number of applications received, and cross-border disputes the ADR entity has received:  
ADR application received in 2023/24: **155 (6 of which were cross-border disputes)**

The IFO received **883** individual enquiries during the previous year, over 96% of which are submitted by e-mail. Some of these do not lead to a formal investigation or adjudication by the IFO.

- b) The types of complaints to which the domestic disputes and cross-border disputes relate:  
The IFO deals with a great variety of cases which include sanctions imposed on supporters, merchandise, stewarding and ticketing issues, demands for refunds and compensation, together with claims that there were shortcomings in the way the governing bodies [the Football Association, the Premier League, and the English Football League] have been exercising their powers.

- c) a description of any systematic or significant problems that occur frequently and lead to disputes between consumers and traders of which the ADR entity has become aware due to its operations as an ADR entity.

In the year under review some of the most common in-scope problems related ticketing, suspensions and bans.

- d) any recommendations the ADR entity may have as to how the problems referred to in paragraph (c) could be avoided or resolved in future, in order to raise traders' standards and to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices.

All IFO Adjudication Reports contain recommendations. On the issues raised in Paragraph 3, the IFO has made several recommendations involving: club sanction policy improvements, clarity of public information, improvements to complaints handling processes and individual case actions.

- e) the number of disputes which the ADR entity has refused to deal with, and the percentage share of the grounds set in paragraph 13 of Schedule 3 on which the ADR entity has declined to consider such disputes.

Total disputes: **7**

- the complainant has not attempted to contact the club or football authority first, 6 disputes (86%).
- other (enquires too early, not yet complained to the club or football authority, already investigated, 1 dispute (14%).

f) the percentage of alternative dispute resolution procedures which were discontinued for operational reasons and, if known, the reasons for discontinuation.

There were no complaints which were discontinued during the adjudication process and all cases were completed.

g) The average time taken to resolve domestic disputes and cross-border disputes:  
The average days to close disputes in 2023/24 (from receipt of complaint) **50.2** days.

The average days to close disputes in 2023/24 (from 'complete complaint file') **29.7** days.

h) the rate of compliance, if known, with the outcomes the alternative dispute resolution procedures (amongst your members, or those you provide ADR for)

Like many Ombudsman and ADR schemes the findings of the IFO are non-binding on the parties. In the year under review all but three cases containing recommendations were taken onboard for action. In the cases where recommendations were not taken onboard, the relevant football body was required to make a public statement of the reasons if they felt unable to implement IFO findings. Under the agreed procedure the relevant football body is required to make a public statement of the reasons if they felt unable to implement IFO findings.

i) The co-operation, if any, of the ADR entity within any network of ADR entities which facilitates the resolution of cross-border disputes

The IFO is a member of the Ombudsman Association which is a network of some 50 ADR type schemes. This organisation publicises good practice and arranges conferences and meetings to facilitate shared learning between members. The IFO has continued to receive the benefit of advice and support of its Advisory Panel.

## Schedule 6 Regulation 11 (3)

Information to be included in an ADR entity's annual activity report:

a) The number of applications received, and cross-border disputes the ADR entity has received:  
ADR application received in 2023/24: **155**.

ADR applications received in 2022/23 **162**.

The IFO received **883** individual enquiries in 2023/24, over 96% of which are submitted by e-mail. Some of these do not lead to a formal investigation or adjudication by the IFO.

Whereas in 2022/23 the IFO received **222** individual enquiries, over 90% of which are submitted by e-mail.

b) The types of complaints to which the domestic disputes and cross-border disputes relate:

The IFO deals with a great variety of cases which include sanctions imposed on supporters, stewarding and access issues at matches, demands for refunds and compensation, together with

claims that there were shortcomings in the way the governing bodies [the Football Association, the Premier League and the English Football League] have been exercising their powers.

c) a description of any systematic or significant problems that occur frequently and lead to disputes between consumers and traders of which the ADR entity has become aware due to its operations as an ADR entity.

In the year 2022/23 and 2023/24 some of the most common in-scope problems related ticketing, suspensions and bans.

d) any recommendations the ADR entity may have as to how the problems referred to in paragraph (c) could be avoided or resolved in future, in order to raise traders' standards and to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices.

All IFO Adjudication Reports contain recommendations. On the issues raised in Paragraph 3, the IFO has made several recommendations involving: club sanction policy improvements, clarity of public information and individual case actions.

e) the number of disputes which the ADR entity has refused to deal with, and the percentage share of the grounds set in paragraph 13 of Schedule 3 on which the ADR entity has declined to consider such disputes;

In 2022/23 there were no disputes refused during either period for the reasons set out in schedule 3 of the Regulations.

In 2023/24 there were **7** disputes refused during either period for the reasons set out in schedule 3 of the Regulations.

- 6 disputes (86%) the complainant had not attempted to contact the club or football authority first, or the complaints process has not been exhausted.
- other 1 dispute (14%) complaint had already been investigated.

f) the percentage of alternative dispute resolution procedures which were discontinued for operational reasons and, if known, the reasons for discontinuation.

There were no complaints which were discontinued during the adjudication process and all cases were completed.

g) The average time taken to resolve domestic disputes and cross-border disputes:

The average days to close disputes in 2023/24 was **29.7** days.

The average days to close disputes in 2022/23 was **21.9** days.

h) the rate of compliance, if known, with the outcomes the alternative dispute resolution procedures (amongst your members, or those you provide ADR for)

Like many Ombudsman and ADR schemes the findings of the IFO are non-binding on the parties. In the 2023/24 reporting year, all but three cases containing recommendations were taken onboard for action. In the cases where recommendations were not taken onboard, the relevant football body was required to make a public statement of the reasons if they felt unable to implement IFO findings. Under the agreed procedure the relevant football body is required to make a public statement of

the reasons if they felt unable to implement IFO findings. In the 2022/23 year, all but one case recommendation were taken onboard.

- i) co-operation, if any, of the ADR entity within any network of ADR entities which facilitates the resolution of cross-border disputes

The IFO is a member of the Ombudsman Association which is a network of some 50 ADR type schemes. This organisation publicises good practice and arranges conferences and meetings to facilitate shared learning between members. The IFO has continued to receive the benefit of advice and support of its Advisory Panel.

- j) where the ADR entity provides training to its ADR officials, details of the training it provides:  
All staff undergo a two-day City & Guilds accredited training on the legalities of consumer disputes and managing complaints and one-day City & Guilds accreditation on GDPR and Data Protection Compliance and all staff who have undergone their courses have passed the validation to date.

The IFO operates an ongoing know-how provision. Subjects covered in 2022/23 and 2023/24 include:

Equality Act & Inclusive Policies

Data Protection and Info-Sec

GDPR

Disability Awareness Training - Disability Rights UK

Muslim Employees in the Workplace (Targeted Help)

Mediation Training (1Day)

Neurodivergent Consumers (External Webinar)

Gender Neutral Writing & Drafting (External / Certificate Received)



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