

EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY 24 JULY AT 00.01AM

Office for Legal Complaints

Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) launched

The Office for Legal Complaints today marked its launch with the publication of a discussion document *Towards Establishing the OLC*, which describes its plans for the setting up of a scheme to resolve disputes between lawyers and their customers.

The Office for Legal Complaints, which formally came into existence on 1 July this year, is part of the range of reforms brought about by the Legal Services Act 2007. The Act requires radical change in the way disputes about legal services are resolved and charges the OLC with establishing a new, independent Ombudsman scheme to investigate and resolve complaints made by customers about legal services they have received. The scheme will be up and running before the end of 2010.

In marking the launch of the OLC, Elizabeth France CBE, OLC Chair, stated:

“Our task is very clear. We have one thing to do and to do well. We must create an Ombudsman service which meets the needs of legal practitioners and all those who use their services.”

Ms France said that the OLC was making rapid progress towards this aim, having already created a first, discussion draft of the rules by which the Ombudsman scheme will operate. She added:

“For the ombudsman scheme to be successful the scheme rules that underpin the way we will resolve disputes must be widely understood and accepted. We have developed a first draft of the rules and we want to take this time to hear what people think over the coming months.”

Adam Sampson, who formally took up post as Chief Executive of the Office for Legal Complaints on 1 July, will be the Chief Ombudsman for the new scheme. He said:

“Over the last few months we have been working hard to put in place the foundation for the Office for Legal Complaints. We have to build a strong, effective organisation because the challenge we have is an important one: to give everyone who uses a lawyer the confidence that, in the unlikely event that something goes wrong and they do not receive the service they deserve, they have access to an independent body to resolve the matter. I’m excited to be in a position to set up and lead the new organisation and look forward to discussing our plans both with the profession and their customers over the coming months.”

Notes for editors:

1. The formal establishment of the Office for Legal Complaints on 1 July 2009 was the next step in the implementation of the Legal Services Act 2007.
2. The Act sets the stage for wide-ranging reforms to the provision and regulation of legal services in England and Wales and establishes the OLC to administer an Ombudsman scheme that will deal with all consumer complaints about legal services.
3. The OLC will be independent from government and the legal profession. It is a public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice and the Ombudsman scheme it will run will become fully operational by no later than the end of 2010.
4. Elizabeth France was named Chair of the OLC in October 2008 by the Legal Services Board. On 3 February 2009, the Legal Services Board and the Chair of the OLC announced the appointment of six OLC Board members. Biographies of each of the Board members and more information can be found on the Office for Legal Complaints website at www.officeforlegalcomplaints.org.uk
5. For information regarding the Office of Legal Complaints, please contact Adam Sampson or Elizabeth France on 0207 271 0089.