



Queen Margaret University
CONSUMER DISPUTE RESOLUTION
CENTRE



Our **consultancy** and
research services

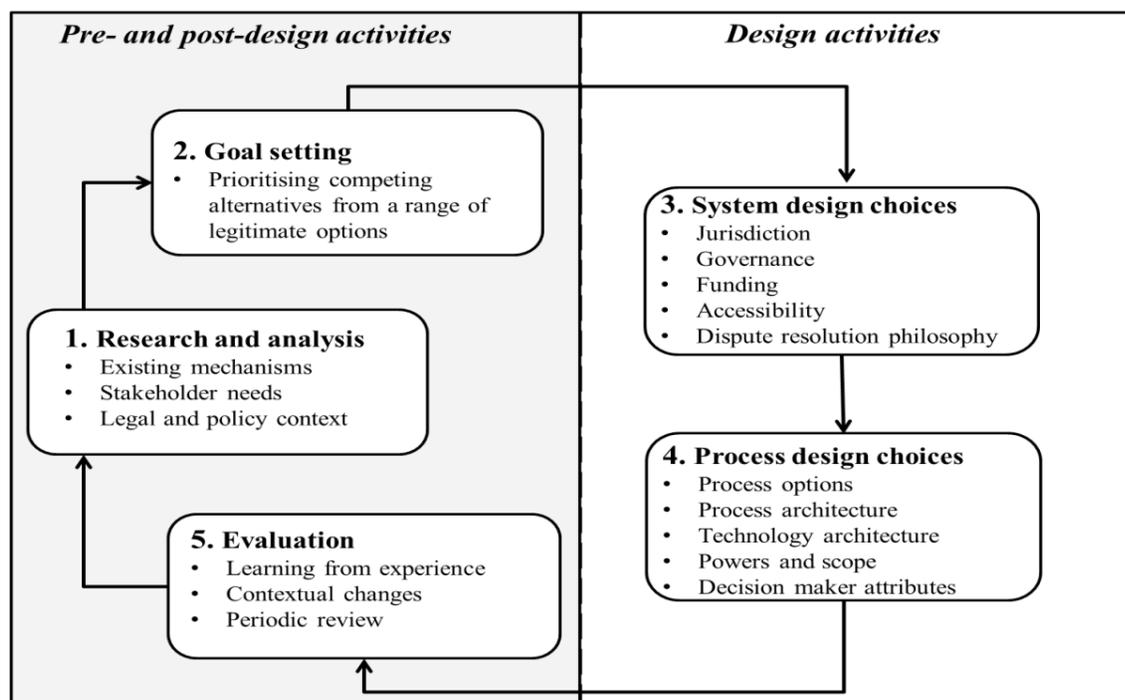
Our consultancy and research services

We offer a full range of consultancy services, providing our clients with unrivalled expertise in the areas of dispute resolution and consumer policy. We have carried out numerous research projects on understanding consumer perspectives in relation to dispute resolution; the design of effective dispute mechanisms; using complaints as a source of learning and innovation, and the impact of current dispute resolution policy for dispute resolvers.

We also have considerable expertise in wider consumer policy issues, such as consumer representation and consumer protection. Our focus here is on ensuring that robust structures are in place, in order to protect consumer interests and improve the cultures of organisations to place consumers at their heart.

The Centre's **staff** combine perspectives from law, public and private dispute resolution, consumer policy, and communications to provide a holistic service to clients. We also have close links with our colleagues in both the Business School and in the Division of Psychology and Sociology, giving us the opportunity to draw on their expertise where their knowledge and insight can add a unique dimension to our work.

Our Dispute System Design Model



What can we offer your organisation?

1. Academic insight with a focus on practical application

A distinctive feature of our approach is our mix of practitioner and academic staff, which allows us to provide our clients with the latest insights from research, policy and practice. Our consultancy services are rooted in our academic research, bringing academic rigour to our work, while being very much focused on the practical application of that research.

For example, through our research, we have developed a five-step Dispute System Design model for consumer dispute resolution, which sets out a series of steps involved in designing a consumer dispute resolution system from the start. We apply this model when helping organisations to design or improve their dispute resolution systems.

2. Flexible services tailored to your organisation's specific needs

We can offer a flexible range of consultancy services, which can be specifically tailored to meet your organisation's needs.

Our complaints consultancy services can include, for example, advising on the introduction of a new complaints system, or carrying out a fundamental review or evaluation of an existing system. We can also provide assistance with

specific aspects of complaints handling, such as goal setting or process design (for further information, see our Dispute System Design Model). We understand that your requirements will also vary depending on factors such as the sector within which your organisation operates; the size of the organisation; its customer base; and the regulatory requirements you must comply with.

3. A focus on the perspectives of both consumers and organisations

We place a particular emphasis on taking the consumer perspective into account in our work, to ensure that this is fully considered in ensuring that systems and processes meet consumers' needs. In the design of complaints systems, for example, we consider what consumers want and need from a complaint process, and how to place them at the heart of the process.

We are also focused on the needs of your organisation and your staff. In our complaints work, for example, we consider the needs of your complaints handling staff, and how they might best be supported to provide high quality, consumer focused complaints handling services.

You can find further details of the types of consultancy and research assistance we can provide on the next few pages of this brochure, together with examples of projects which we have delivered.

What our clients say about us

“The Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre offers an excellent range of services for alternative dispute resolution providers. Staff at the Legal Ombudsman have benefitted from the Centre’s CPD courses and are participating in the MSc Dispute Resolution programme. One member of staff is also engaged in PhD study with the University. The Centre’s courses have a practical focus, at the same time as drawing on academic research, and they have been a key resource in the development of the Legal Ombudsman. We have also commissioned several research projects from the Centre, which have been important in shaping our thinking in relation to our processes and future strategic thinking. The Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre is very client-focused and has consistently provided us with a professional and very timely service.”

Marcus Passant,
Head of Human Resources,
Legal Ombudsman

“The payments industry is subject to fundamental change at present. With the inexorable influence of technology enabling ever faster change in the ways people access and use payment services and financial services generally the need for effective engagement of end users in decision making is more critical than ever. To help understand how best to achieve that aim Bacs worked with the Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre at Queen Margaret University. The resulting report provided an excellent review of the strengths and weaknesses of different representation mechanisms and led to an effective overhaul of Bacs’ different governance and representative structures. The CDRC brought an excellent balance of academic rigour with practical experience of governance to produce recommendations that were clear and deliverable.”

Anne Pieckielon
Director of Product and Strategy
Bacs Payment Schemes Limited

1. Reviews and evaluations of complaints processes and dispute systems

Complaints handling is one of our primary areas of expertise. The Centre is a leading provider of ombudsman and complaint handling **courses**. We have also developed a free guide to complaints handling, which aims to help organisations to improve their complaints process, to the benefit of those who complain, for your organisation itself and for your staff.

Through our research, we have developed a five-step Dispute System Design model for consumer dispute resolution, which sets out a series of steps involved in designing a consumer dispute

resolution system from the start. We apply this model when helping organisations to design or improve their dispute resolution systems.

We have extensive experience of conducting reviews and evaluations of complaints processes and dispute resolution systems. These range from a full-scale evaluation of a dispute resolution body’s effectiveness to a review of an organisation’s entire complaints process, or certain aspects of this. Some examples of our work in this area can be found below.

Review of Utilities Disputes Ltd (New Zealand)

We have been commissioned to conduct the Five Year Independent Review of Utilities Disputes Ltd. We are reviewing the organization’s effectiveness against the key criteria for industry based alternative dispute resolution schemes. The methodology includes desk based research and fieldwork. This project recognizes the Centre’s international expertise in consumer dispute resolution and organisational reviews.

Ombudsman Services Interim Independent Assessor

We were appointed to act as Ombudsman Services’ Interim Independent Assessor. This involved dealing with complaints from dissatisfied users who had exhausted the internal complaints process of the organisation. Eighty-eight complaints were reviewed during the period of appointment, with a written adjudication provided in each case. An annual review featuring recommendations made to the organisation was prepared and published in its Annual Report.

Review of the Welsh Language Commissioner’s complaints process

We were commissioned to conduct a review of the Welsh Language Commissioner’s complaints process. This involved carrying out a series of interviews with key members of staff within the organisation; reviewing its complaints procedures, guidance and founding legislative instruments; observing staff handling complaints; and reviewing a sample of case files. The review made a number of recommendations to the client. We also conducted a comparative analysis of approaches to collecting customer feedback used by independent complaint handling organisations.

Evaluation of Audit Scotland’s correspondence process

We were commissioned to conduct an evaluation of Audit Scotland’s correspondence process. This process involved receipt of correspondence from members of the public in relation to the performance of public bodies. The process was evaluated with reference to best practice established in the Ombudsman Association’s Guide to Principles of Good Complaint Handling. The evaluation included examination of a sample of cases and interviews with key stakeholders in the organisation. The project resulted in a number of recommendations being made to the client and a significantly improved process for dealing with customers’ complaints and concerns.



2. Research into dispute resolution systems, processes and consumer perspectives

We have considerable experience of carrying out policy research in this area, from the perspective of both the redress organisation involved and consumers using their redress schemes.

This includes research and policy analysis of good practice within Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes, leading to recommendations for future improvement.

Ombudsman Services – Defining Consumer Ombuds Schemes

The Centre was commissioned by Ombudsman Services to conduct research to identify the defining characteristics of modern consumer ombuds schemes. The research involved a desk-based study and interviews with experts in the field. The research report provides important clarity on the roles, functions, and processes of consumer ombuds schemes.

Legal Ombudsman – Models of Alternative Dispute Resolution

We were commissioned by the Legal Ombudsman to research best practice in alternative dispute resolution. The research involved selecting 10 case study organisations across the world and identifying a range of different approaches to effective dispute resolution. The research was particularly concerned with how to design a good ADR scheme and provided a model and toolkit for ADR design.

Legal Ombudsman – the Future of Ombuds Schemes

The Legal Ombudsman commissioned us to survey the current policy landscape for ombuds schemes in the UK. This involved policy analysis of the strategic drivers which were likely to affect UK ombuds schemes now and in the future. The research used qualitative interviews with senior practitioners to understand how schemes were adapting to change. The research provided a model for the future development of ombuds schemes and a number of recommendations for policy.

Nesta – Gripes, Grumbles, and Grievances

We were commissioned (in partnership with Stirling University) by Nesta to look at the way in which complaints could be used to drive innovation in public services. The research collected examples of good practice and used these to identify the key factors which facilitate innovation in public services. The report provided a range of policy recommendations and is a key resource for those interested in learning from complaints.

We have also carried out projects analysing the consumer experience of using ADR/complaints processes, and making policy recommendations for improvement based on our findings.

Citizens Advice – A Consumer Perspective on ADR in Selected Markets

We were commissioned (in partnership with the University of Westminster) by Citizens Advice to conduct research into the performance of ADR schemes. This involved a mapping study of existing ADR providers and evaluation of their performance against a range of criteria. The research also involved conducting interviews with consumers to find out about their experiences of complaining. Bringing together the academic expertise of the research team with Citizens Advice's consumer knowledge, the final report built a picture of the UK's current ADR landscape, its problems and gaps, and set out recommendations for achieving a simpler, clearer and more accessible ADR landscape.

Care Inspectorate : the Outcome of Complaints

We were commissioned by the Care Inspectorate to investigate how people who had complained to them about a care service felt about the outcome of their complaints. The particular focus of the research was on whether complainants felt that complaining had been worth their while and whether they felt that anything had changed as a result of their complaint. The research involved qualitative interviews with complainants. The research provides important data about the way in which complainants experience complaint processes and the need to feedback on the outcome of investigations.

3. Consumer policy, consumer protection, consumer representation and engagement

Our team has considerable expertise in the area of consumer policy and consumer protection, with many years' combined experience of representing consumers and the consumer interest. The Centre regularly responds to consultation papers from government and regulators on consumer issues, where we consider that we can usefully contribute from a consumer perspective.

We have a particular interest in how consumers' views and interests might best be represented, to ensure that these are fully taken into account by service providers. Our focus here is on ensuring that robust structures are in place, in order to protect consumers' interests and improve the cultures of organisations to place consumers at their heart.

Consumer representation in the financial payments sector

We were commissioned by Bacs Payment Schemes Limited (Bacs) – the organisation behind Direct Debit, Bacs Direct Credit and the Current Account Switch Service - to carry out research into what good consumer representation in financial services might look like, with specific reference to the payments sector. The research identified ways in which consumer representation can be improved across the financial industry to ensure that the needs of end-users are put at the centre of discussions on how to develop, deliver and monitor the effectiveness of new products and services.

The research report also found that principles in relation to culture, people and processes underpin effective consumer representation. It concluded that strong consumer representation should be viewed as integral to an organisation's strategy and that, when consumers are put at the heart of corporate decision making, better outcomes are achieved.



Queen Margaret University
CONSUMER DISPUTE RESOLUTION
CENTRE

Further information

If you are interested in any aspect of our consultancy and research services, we would be very happy to discuss your needs and how we might assist you in meeting these. Please contact Carol Brennan, our Director, for further information on this at: **cbrennan@qmu.ac.uk** or tel: 0131 474 0000.