



UK European Consumer Centre



Annual Report 2010

UK European Consumer Centre

Feel confident when you shop
in another Member State, just
as you do at home.

We're here to help.



Introduction

2010 was a particularly busy year for the UK European Consumer Centre (UK ECC) – one in which we firmly established ourselves both as the busiest centre within our network and a significant European consumer protection advice and information service.

It was our third full year of operation. We are part of the European Consumer Centre Network (ECC-Net), which has 29 centres covering Europe, plus Iceland and Norway. In the UK, the service is delivered by the Trading Standards Institute (TSI), so providing a pan-European dimension for the TSI.

It was a great achievement for the UK ECC to be the network's busiest centre in 2010, handling a total of more than 8,000 cases (Information Requests, Simple Complaints and Normal Complaints) – around 2,000 more than the next busiest ECC.

It is something we are proud of as it means we help an increasingly large number of UK consumers in dispute with a trader based in a European country outside the UK. We are also here to help other ECCs who share cases with us about UK traders, which of course could ultimately benefit UK consumers too.

A major positive which became evident in 2010 is the awareness of the UK ECC within the media. More and more, we are approached by journalists for statements on and information about situations affecting UK consumers who shop in another Member State. During 2010 we gave numerous press, radio and television interviews, which help keep consumers informed about the UK ECC and the vital work that we undertake for them.

In 2011 the UK ECC will continue to build on its reputation as a professional and efficient service – reflected in the results and success stories we achieve. You are not alone, even when you cross borders!



Susan Tolman

UK ECC Information and Communications Officer



Executive summary

As UK consumers face a harsher economic reality, along with consumers in much of the rest of Europe, the data gathered in our third full year of operation gives a picture of an increasing number of complaints.

The trend for our more in-depth cases (Simple and Normal Complaints) in 2010 was sharply upwards, with the number of Simple Complaints going up by 24.7% in 2010 (compared to 2009) and the number of Normal Complaints rising by 29.9%. The only category which saw a reduction was Information Requests – the fastest type of case to handle. The number of Information Requests we received dropped by 1.9%.

There are a number of subject areas worth mentioning specifically as we look back at 2010. Accommodation services of timeshares and related/similar products continued to form a large part of the complaints we received – in 2010 they accounted for more than 1,000 Simple Complaints and in excess of 300 Normal Complaints.

2010 was the year of the ‘volcanic ash’ and of the UK ‘snow’ and both of these had an impact in terms of the complaints we handled. In 2010, a larger percentage of consumers complained about Transport than in 2009.

Analysing our statistics shows that UK consumers’ way of buying in Europe appears to be changing. For the first time since the UK ECC started, E-commerce was the overall top choice selling method of UK consumers, with 27.7% of them choosing it.

Our work in educating consumers before they make purchases to try to reduce problems later on continued in 2010. As well as our media work, we continued to issue our regular e-newsletters to an increasingly large number of subscribers – further details can be found on page 26.

We also continued to support the European Commission and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in workshops and consumer-related projects. We collaborated and cooperated with other organisations to work for the benefit of consumers: we engaged with Trading Standards officers by staging a seminar and information stand at TSI Conference; worked with our partner organisation the European Consumer Centre for Services (ECCS) to implement best practise to ensure consumer confidence when shopping cross-border; attended a European Consumer Summit about the next stages of web evolution; and attended a Programme Cooperation Day with other ECC-Net centres to share ideas and best practices, as well as to brainstorm subjects affecting UK consumers.



Information on the UK ECC

The Network

The UK European Consumer Centre (UK ECC) is part of the European Consumer Centre Network (ECC-Net). 29 centres make up the Network covering the European Union, plus Iceland and Norway.

The ECC-Net is a vision which became reality. It was created by the European Commission to provide a service to all European consumers who shop 'cross-border' within the EU. The Commission wants consumers to have the same confidence shopping anywhere in the whole ECC-Net area as they do at home.

Each centre provides advice and information to consumers in their home country, about the purchase of goods and services from a different Member State. If there is a dispute with a trader based in a different country, the home country European Consumer Centre can offer support and assistance in contacting the trader to try to resolve the complaint amicably.

The aim of the UK ECC is to help as many UK consumers (who encounter problems with a trader based in Europe) to achieve a resolution as possible: a refund, replacement, repair, or cancellation of their contract. The main areas in which we operate include: buying goods and services, online shopping, internet auctions, holidays, timeshare and holiday clubs, air travel. Our core purpose is to help consumers.

The collaborative nature of ECC-Net is illustrated by the fact that the UK ECC also receives cases from European consumers having problems with a UK trader. These cases are shared with the UK ECC by our European counterparts, and every effort is made to contact the trader in order to resolve the complaint.

The ECC-Net service is of an advisory nature. We provide information and advice on your rights as a consumer shopping in Europe and, where appropriate, we can offer further help by contacting the trader on the consumer's behalf. But regrettably we have no enforcement powers, which consumers sometimes find upsetting and difficult to understand. This means that we are unable to force traders into a particular course of action if they ignore our communication or disagree with our point of view.

Each centre within the network works hard to form close relationships within its home country with organisations which do have enforcement powers. The UK ECC provides trading standards with information, allowing them to complete intelligence-led enforcement for UK consumers. We also work with the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) organisation in the UK – the Office of Fair Trading. The CPC exchanges information and cooperates with counterparts in other Member States in order to combat cross-border consumer fraud.

The UK ECC is co-funded by the European Commission and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It is delivered by the Trading Standards Institute at its head office in Basildon, Essex.

Further information on the ECC-Net can be found on the European Commission's Europe website at http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress_cons/

The Team	
UK ECC Director	Jed Mayatt
UK ECC Executive	Elisabetta Sciallis
Information and Communications Officer	Susan Tolman
Consumer Advisor	Laura Fergusson
Consumer Advisor	Adam Mortimer
Consumer Advisor	Sonia Payne
Consumer Advisor	Wojtek Szczerba
UK ECC Administrative Assistant	Danielle Ancient

Our staffing was boosted in February 2010 with the appointment of a new full-time consumer advisor, reflecting the increased number of Simple and Normal complaints the UK ECC received the previous year. The rest of the staffing remained constant in 2010, providing stability for consumers whose cases our advisors handle. This steadiness enabled us to build on the solid foundation from which we offer a professional and informative service for UK consumers, a service which gives consumers confidence that they can obtain correct and relevant advice for their particular situation.



Delivered by the Trading Standards Institute

The UK ECC is delivered by the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) at its head office in Basildon, Essex, effectively providing the institute with a pan-European dimension. The Trading Standards Institute is the professional and membership body for trading standards professionals and Consumer Direct professionals, working across public, private, and third sectors.

TSI is a high-standing professional body with a 129 year pedigree. It is a not-for-profit professional membership organisation, representing trading standards and market surveillance officials – in the UK and overseas - working in local authorities, business and consumer sectors, and government.

TSI performs a key influencing role in engaging with, and making representations to, central and devolved government, UK and EU parliamentary institutions, as well as key stakeholders in the local government community, business and consumer sectors, and other regulatory agencies.

The Trading Standards Institute has a long-established history delivering solutions in the public sector, government and local authority regulatory services; providing ICT and online solutions; delivering information and secure communication for professionals; business and consumer advice; and education and training products. Some solutions have been developed through the investment of TSI, others through successful bidding for government funding.

Solutions delivered include; consumer rights leaflets and business publications on compliance with trading regulations and food safety hygiene laws; syndication to local authorities for supply to their citizens and the local business community; classroom training and e-learning for businesses and staff on compliance with trading laws and underage sales, protection of consumers and improved customer service delivery; and publication of product recalls and alerts.



Our work: cases

The Network

Data gathered in our first three full years of operation is enabling us to build a more complete picture of trends as many UK consumers face a bleaker financial future. This case-handling experience contributes significantly to our greater understanding of the problems consumers face. In this section we look at the statistical information from 2009 and 2010 cases and compare results.

All of our cases are recorded on the IT-Tool, a piece of software provided by the European Commission for use by each centre within the ECC-Net. We have looked at statistics on the types of problems that involve UK traders as well as UK consumers.

The UK ECC deals with three different types of cases – Information Requests, Simple Complaints and Normal Complaints. All cases that are recorded are done so using a classification system called COICOP¹. There are three levels to COICOP – the top level provides an indication of the area of the complaint and the following two levels break it down further into a specific topic.

Information Requests

These cases are very basic enquiries from consumers – normally there is no specific complaint or trader involved, just a request for information. To complete an Information Request, the consumer is provided with information relevant to their case, which could be advice on a European Directive or perhaps contact details of another specialised organisation that could help them further (if the case is outside our remit).

In 2009 we handled 2,567 Information Requests – a 37.5 % reduction from the 2008 figure of 4,107. In 2010 this again dropped, by a much smaller percentage of 1.9% to 2,518. As in the previous year, this drop in 2010 could have been a reflection of an increase in the number of both Simple Complaints and Normal Complaints. Information requests are, generally speaking, the fastest type of case to handle.

¹ COICOP - Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose - is used to classify both individual consumption expenditure and actual individual consumption.

Simple Complaints

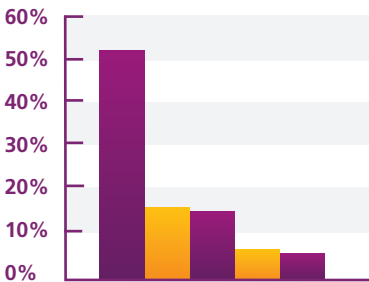
The next level of enquiry is a Simple Complaint; this is where a consumer is in dispute with a trader, but is not sure of his or her rights or what course of action to take. The UK ECC provides first-tier advice to the consumer to help them proceed.

In 2009 we handled 2,684 Simple Complaints from UK consumers, an increase of 5.4% on the previous year's 2,546. In 2010, we saw a significant jump to 3,346 – that's a rise of 24.7%.

Examining the top level of classification of our cases, we can see what type of enquiries the UK ECC received and the differences between 2009 and 2010.

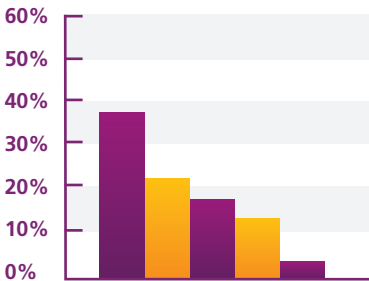
Simple complaints from UK consumers: top five areas covered

2009: Top Level % Simple Complaints



- 50.7%** Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services
- 15.2%** Transport
- 14.6%** Recreation and culture
- 6.0%** Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance
- 5.5%** Miscellaneous goods and services

2010: Top Level % Simple Complaints



- 37.1%** Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services
- 21.4%** Transport
- 17.8%** Recreation and culture
- 12.7%** Miscellaneous goods and services
- 3.6%** Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance



Although the positions of several of the categories have remained the same - for example, topping the Simple Complaints chart in 2010 (the same as in the previous two years) with 37.1% of the Simple Complaints was Restaurants, Hotels and Accommodation Services – there have been some changes of emphasis. Timeshares and Discount Holiday Clubs, contained within this classification, remained one of our largest areas for enquiries and complaints. In 2010, a larger percentage of consumers complained about Transport than in 2009 – up from 15.2% to 21.4%, although it stayed the second highest complaint category. Recreation and Culture stayed at third place, but its percentage also increased – from 14.6% in 2009 to 17.8% in 2010. Miscellaneous Goods and Services rose to fourth place, with Furnishing, Household Equipment and Routine Household Maintenance dropping to fifth.

Normal Complaints

The top level of enquiry is a Normal Complaint; these are enquiries where the consumer has tried to resolve their problem but attempts have failed – the trader does not respond or does not agree. In these situations the UK ECC will offer further assistance to the consumer and will share the case with the ECC where the trader is based.

As well as handling Normal Complaints from UK consumers in dispute with a European trader, the UK ECC advisors also deal with cases shared with them by another ECC where a European consumer is in a dispute with a UK trader.

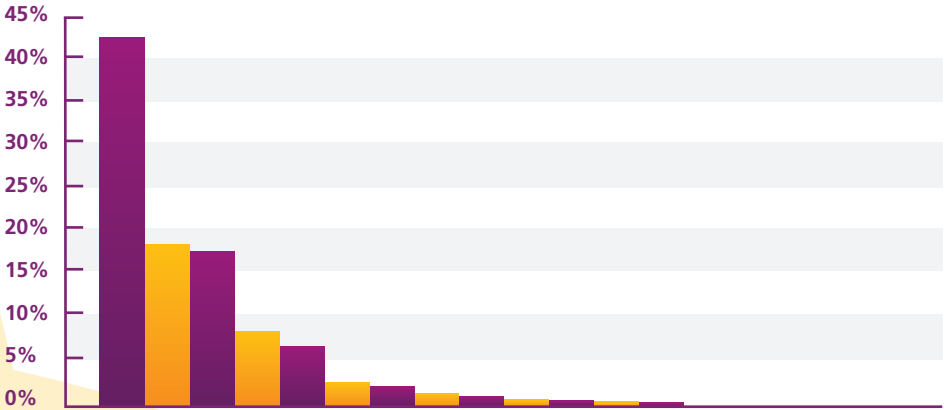
Cases from UK consumers

In 2009 785 Normal Complaints were recorded on the IT Tool by the UK ECC. In 2010 this figure had risen to 1,020, an increase of 29.9%. This followed a 17% increase from 671 in 2008 to 785 in 2009.

We have examined the types of Normal Complaints received from UK consumers by looking at the top level of classification and the more detailed third level. We have made comparisons between 2009 and 2010.

Normal complaints from UK consumers: top level classification

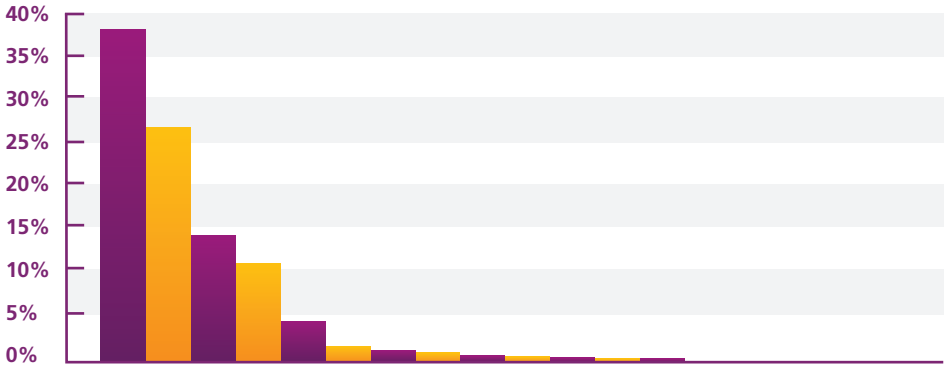
2009: Top Level % Normal Complaints



- 42.8%** Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services
- 17.6%** Recreation and culture
- 16.9%** Transport
- 7.3%** Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance
- 5.9%** Miscellaneous goods and services
- 2.5%** Outside COICOP classification
- 2.4%** Communication
- 1.5%** Clothing and footwear
- 1.1%** Alcoholic beverages and tobacco
- 0.8%** Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels
- 0.6%** Health
- 0.3%** Food and non-alcoholic beverages
- 0.3%** Education

Normal complaints from UK consumers: top level classification

2010: Top Level % Normal Complaints



38.5%	Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services
26.1%	Transport
14.1%	Recreation and culture
10.8%	Miscellaneous goods and services
4.0%	Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance
1.9%	Clothing and footwear
1.7%	Communication

1.0%	Outside COICOP classification
0.9%	Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels
0.6%	Health
0.4%	Alcoholic beverages and tobacco
0.1%	Food and non-alcoholic beverages
0.0%	Education

The main types of complaints from UK consumers varied slightly in 2010, compared to 2009, with some categories moving up – such as Transport – and some moving down – such as Recreation and Culture.



**Normal complaints from UK consumers:
3rd level of classification top five 2009**

Top Level	Second Level	Third Level	% of Normal Complaints
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services	Accommodation services: timeshare and related/ similar products	Discount holiday clubs	16.8%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation service	Accommodation services: timeshare and related/ similar products	Resale	14.1%
Recreation and culture	Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	Equipment for the reception, recording and reproduction of sound and pictures	7.6%
Transport	Transport services	Car rental	7.3%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services	Accommodation services (not classified elsewhere)	No classification available	6.9%



Normal complaints from UK consumers: 3rd level of classification top five 2010

Top Level	Second Level	Third Level	% of Normal Complaints
Transport	Transport services	Passenger travel by air	12.9%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation service	Accommodation services: timeshare and related/ similar products	Resale	12.5%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services	Accommodation services: timeshare and related/ similar products	Discount holiday clubs	11.4%
Transport	Transport services	Car rental	7.0%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services	Accommodation services: timeshare and related/ similar products	Other related propositions	5.1%

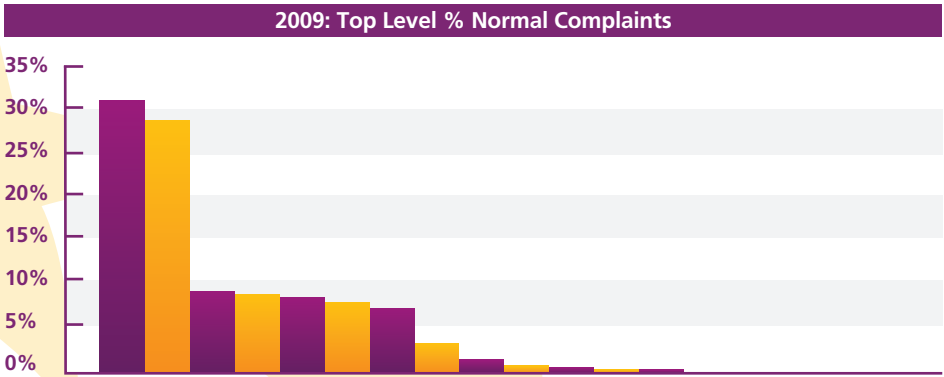
There is one major difference between 2009 and 2010 worth noting. Passenger Transport by Air has leapt from sixth to first place in the space of a year, knocking Discount Holiday Clubs off the top spot for the largest category of cases – maybe due to the ‘volcanic ash’ and the ‘UK snow’ crises. However, Discount Holiday Clubs and Resale (of timeshare and related/similar products) still retain significant positions in terms of the number of complaints we received.

Cases about UK traders

In 2009 1,111 Normal Complaints were recorded on the IT Tool concerning UK traders. In 2010 this figure rose to 1,410 (an increase of 26.9%). To give it extra perspective, this is almost double the 2008 figure of 800.

As with the Simple Complaints, Normal Complaints are encoded using COICOP. With Normal Complaints we are able to examine in detail all three levels of COICOP and provide comparisons between 2009 and 2010.

Normal complaints about UK traders: top level of classification



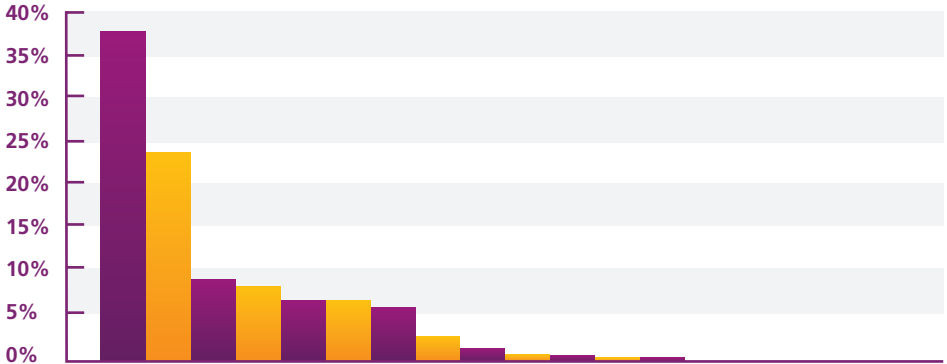
- 30.5%** Recreation and culture
- 27.7%** Transport
- 7.6%** Miscellaneous goods and services
- 7.3%** Clothing and footwear
- 7.1%** Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services
- 6.9%** Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance

- 6.5%** Communication
- 3.2%** Outside COICOP
- 1.5%** Health
- 0.6%** Education
- 0.5%** Food and non-alcoholic beverages
- 0.4%** Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels
- 0.2%** Alcoholic beverages and tobacco



Normal complaints about UK traders: top level of classification

2010: Top Level % Normal Complaints



38.2% Transport

24.7% Recreation and culture

8.4% Clothing and footwear

7.1% Miscellaneous goods and services

5.5% Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services

5.5% Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance

5.1% Communication

2.6% Outside COICOP

1.2% Health

0.6% Education

0.6% Food and non-alcoholic beverages

0.3% Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels

0.2% Alcoholic beverages and tobacco

The main difference between 2009 and 2010 was that Transport regained its top spot as the most complained about classification. It went from 27.7% of the total number of Normal Complaints about UK traders in 2009 to 38.2% in 2010.



**Normal complaints about UK traders:
3rd level of classification top five 2009**

Top Level	Second Level	Third Level	% of Normal Complaints
Transport	Transport services	Passenger travel by air	9.0%
Recreation and culture	Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	Photographic and cinematic equipment and optical instruments	6.3%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services	Accommodation services: not elsewhere classified	No classification available	5.6%
Recreation and culture	Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	Equipment for the reception, recording and reproduction of sound and pictures	5.1%
Communication	Mobile telephone equipment	No classification available	4.2%

Normal complaints about UK traders: 3rd level of classification top five 2010

Top Level	Second Level	Third Level	% of Normal Complaints
Transport	Transport services	Passenger travel by air	21.6%
Restaurants, hotels and accommodation services	Accommodation services: not elsewhere classified	No classification available	4.8%
Transport	Accommodation services: not elsewhere classified	Car rental	4.9%
Recreation and culture	Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	Equipment for reception, recording and reproduction of sound and pictures	4.1%
Recreation and culture	Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	Photographic and cinematographic equipment and optical instruments	4.0%
Recreation and culture	Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	Information processing equipment	4.0%

The number of European consumers complaining about Passenger Transport by Air remained the highest category in 2010, just as it was in 2009. However, instead of accounting for 9% of complaints, the figure shot up to 21.6%.

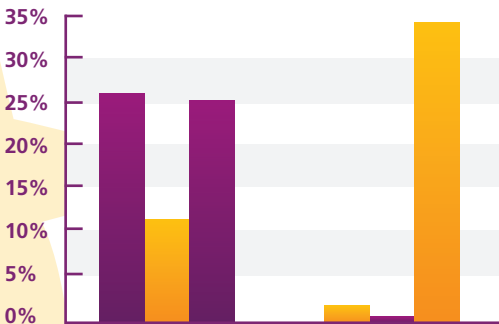
Selling methods

As well as choosing the correct classification for every complaint that is documented, we also make a note of the selling method: that is, how the consumer bought the item or service. Studying these results paints a picture of the most preferred way of buying.

UK consumers

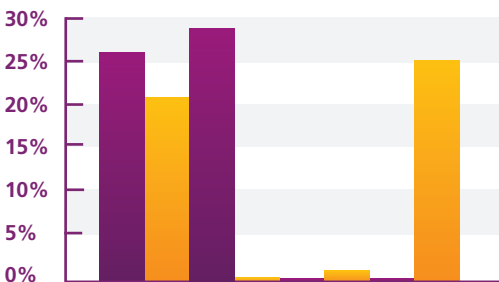
Selling methods preferred by UK consumers

2009: Selling Method % Normal Complaints



- 26.0%** On the premises
- 11.1%** Distance selling - "except E-commerce"
- 25.2%** E-commerce
- 0%** Market/trade fair
- 0%** Auctions
- 2.7%** Doorstep selling
- 0.2%** Internet auctions
- 34.8%** Other

2010: Selling Method % Normal Complaints



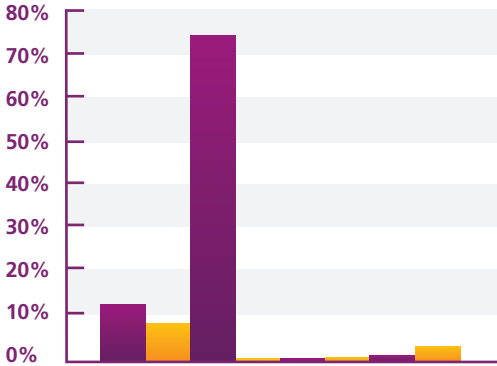
- 25.6%** On the premises
- 20.2%** Distance selling - "except E-commerce"
- 27.7%** E-commerce
- 0.1%** Market/trade fair
- 0.2%** Auctions
- 1.2%** Doorstep selling
- 0.1%** Internet auctions
- 25.0%** Other



European consumers

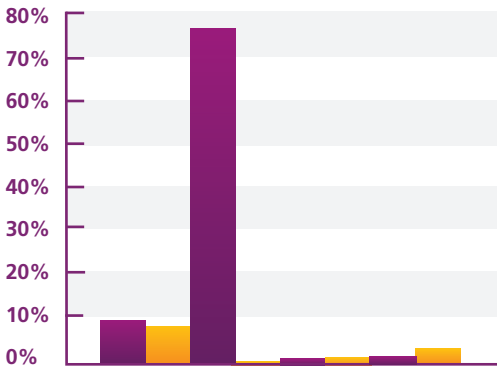
Selling methods preferred by European consumers

2009: Selling Method % Normal Complaints



12.0%	On the premises
8.5%	Distance selling - "except E-commerce"
74.3%	E-commerce
0.2%	Market/trade fair
0.3%	Auctions
0.4%	Doorstep selling
0.6%	Internet auctions
3.7%	Other

2010: Selling Method % Normal Complaints



9.4%	On the premises
8.2%	Distance selling - "except E-commerce"
76.6%	E-commerce
0.1%	Market/trade fair
0.4%	Auctions
0.6%	Doorstep selling
1.4%	Internet auctions
3.2%	Other

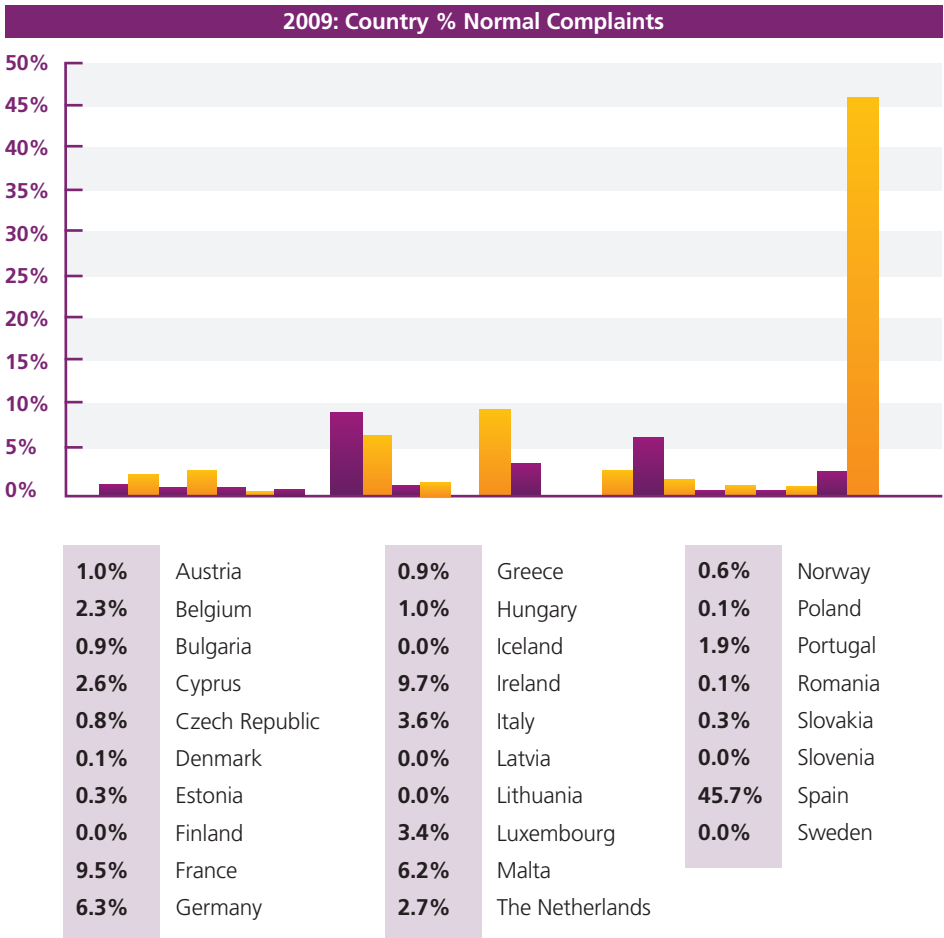
Looking at these results, there is still a marked difference between the selling methods preferred by UK consumers to those of European consumers. Whereas for UK consumers buying in Europe in 2010 there was a fairly even split between On the Premises, Distance Selling (except E-commerce) and E-commerce as the preferred selling method, it was much more clear-cut for their European counterparts, with 76.6% choosing E-commerce. Based on our statistics, it seems that UK consumers are becoming gradually happier completing their transactions online, as for the first time since the UK ECC started, E-commerce was the overall top choice of selling method of UK consumers, with 27.7% of them choosing it.

Country relationships

The UK ECC is part of the ECC-Network, which is made up of 29 centres throughout Europe. We are a network and all work together, but the nature of complaints means that there are some countries with whom we work more frequently than others. This section of our Annual Report looks at this and compares results from 2010 with those of 2009.

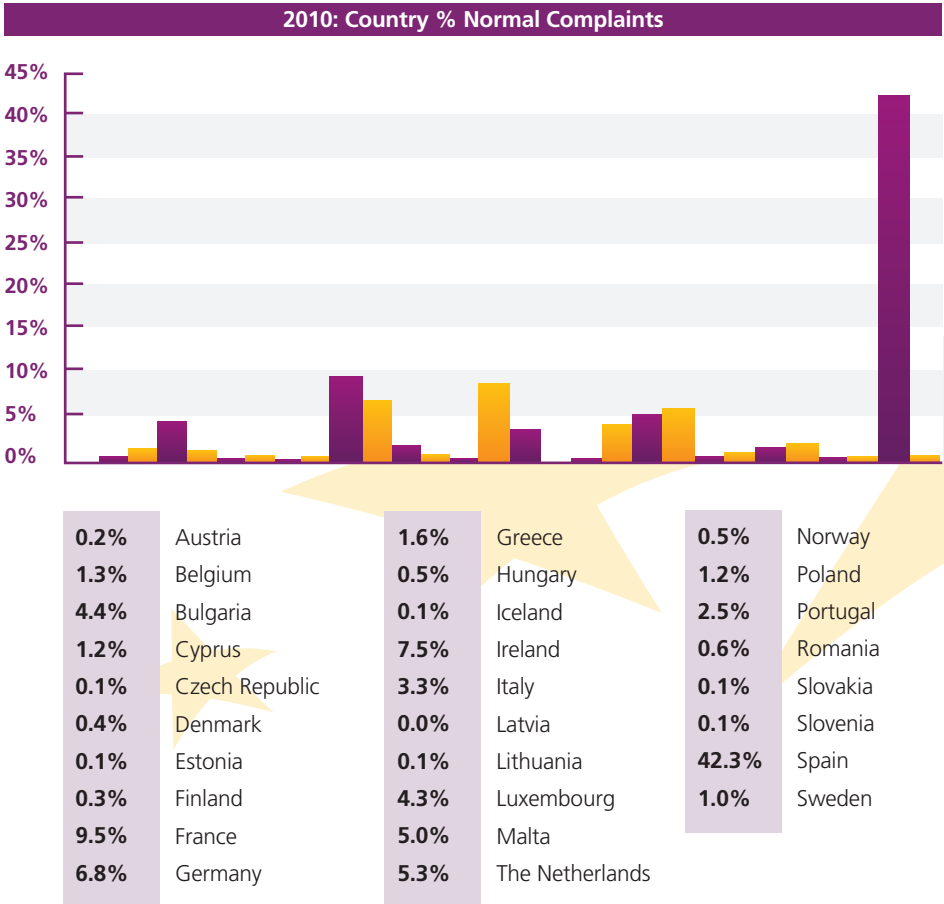
From UK consumers

Relationship with other European countries (UK consumer cases)



From UK consumers

Relationship with other European countries (UK consumer cases)

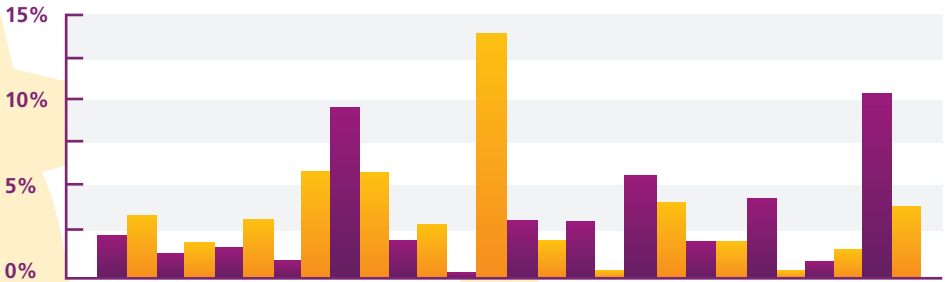




From European consumers

Relationship with other European countries (trader based in the UK)

2009: Country % Normal Complaints



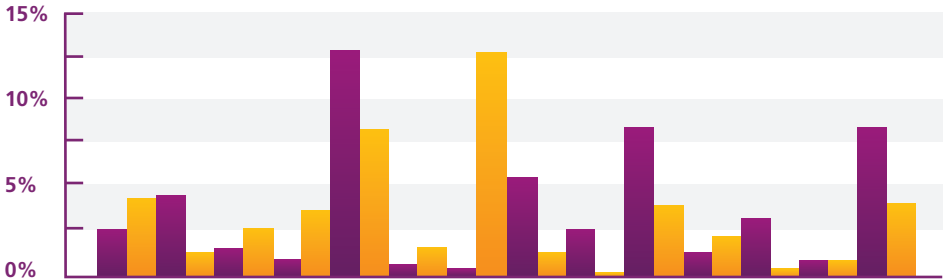
2.3%	Austria	2.2%	Greece	2.0%	Norway
3.1%	Belgium	2.7%	Hungary	2.0%	Poland
1.8%	Bulgaria	0.1%	Iceland	4.3%	Portugal
2.1%	Cyprus	14.6%	Ireland	0.4%	Romania
2.0%	Czech Republic	2.9%	Italy	1.1%	Slovakia
2.9%	Denmark	2.0%	Latvia	2.1%	Slovenia
1.3%	Estonia	2.6%	Lithuania	10.3%	Spain
5.7%	Finland	0.2%	Luxembourg	3.9%	Sweden
9.8%	France	5.7%	Malta		
5.7%	Germany	4.2%	The Netherlands		



From European consumers

Relationship with other European countries (trader based in the UK)

2010: Country % Normal Complaints



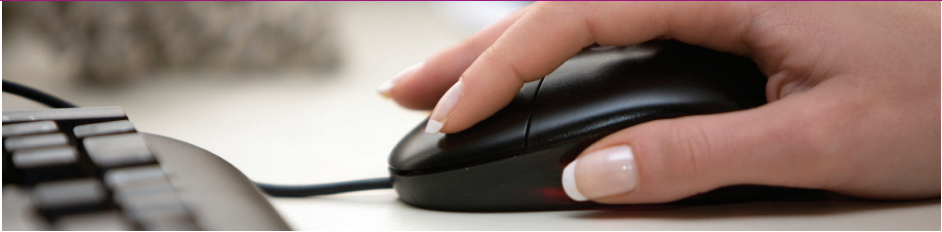
2.5%	Austria
4.0%	Belgium
4.4%	Bulgaria
1.6%	Cyprus
1.8%	Czech Republic
2.5%	Denmark
1.2%	Estonia
3.4%	Finland
12.9%	France
7.4%	Germany

1.1%	Greece
1.9%	Hungary
0.1%	Iceland
12.7%	Ireland
5.1%	Italy
1.5%	Latvia
2.5%	Lithuania
0.5%	Luxembourg
8.2%	Malta
3.6%	The Netherlands

1.5%	Norway
2.1%	Poland
2.7%	Portugal
0.6%	Romania
1.1%	Slovakia
1.1%	Slovenia
8.2%	Spain
3.7%	Sweden

We have shared cases from UK consumers with 27 other centres, that's three more than last year. The UK ECC has received cases from all 28 centres regarding UK traders. Combined, this is a real achievement, as in 2010 just a handful of other centres worked on cases with all other members of the network.

This highlights the significance of the UK as a Consumer and Trader country; UK consumers are more than willing to take advantage of the Internal EU Market and buy goods and services across Europe, perhaps in countries they would not previously have done. And UK traders are reaching out across Europe and selling to consumers in all Member States.



Incoming communications

All incoming communications to the UK ECC are recorded, either through our call management software or the physical recording of emails, letters, and faxes. In 2010 we received the following contacts:

Form of contact	Total received
Phone	7,300
Online form	983
Email	5,135
Letter	859
Fax	70

In total during 2010 we received more than 14,000 contacts from UK consumers, equating to an average of 56 contacts from UK consumers every working day, that's an increase of 21.8% from the average 46 contacts a day in 2009.

Our work

European Consumer Summit 2010

The UK ECC took advantage of attending the second-ever European Consumer Summit, held in 2010, to participate in discussions about how consumers, consumer advocates, business and consumer policy makers can respond to the challenges and opportunities of the next stages of web evolution.

The summit, held in Brussels, enabled the UK ECC to further its knowledge and influence in future policy making about the digital marketplace alongside UK consumers, businesses and ECC stakeholders.

Supporting the second European Consumer Summit helped to ideally position the UK ECC's consumer advisors to provide the best possible advice to UK consumers faced with challenges thrown up by shopping online. Our attendance also raised the profile of the UK ECC service amongst consumers and consumer advocates.

Other subjects addressed at the summit included bank account fees, car hire, urban transport and green energy.

In 2010 the UK ECC also attended a Programme Cooperation Day in Spain for centres within the ECC-Net to share ideas and best practices, as well as to brainstorm subjects affecting UK consumers – from the European Small Claims Procedure to Timeshare-like products.

Letting you know

One of our biggest challenges is to make more consumers and other consumer protection bodies aware of who consumers can turn to with EU-trader related problems. During 2010 we worked hard on this vital work of promoting the UK ECC – letting more consumers know about its work: how it helps consumers, the topics it covers, the types of cases its staff can advise on and about its part in the ECC Network.

As part of our quest to keep UK consumers informed, we sent out four issues of Your Update e-newsletters, a project started at the end of 2009. Written and produced in-house, Your Update was emailed to hundreds of subscribers, providing consumers with a flavour of what the UK ECC does, showing examples of cases we have been working on and providing the best advice on cross-border shopping.

Consumers can receive their own copy of the electronic newsletter by asking to go on our distribution list. Copies are also posted on the UK ECC website.

The UK ECC also continued to spread the word amongst trading standards teams and other stakeholders about its role in providing advice and support to consumers in dispute with a trader based in a European country outside the UK.

It manned a stand in the main exhibition area at the annual Trading Standards Institute's Consumer Affairs and Trading Standards Conference and Exhibition at Edinburgh in 2010, also holding mini-seminar sessions to explain more to trading standards officers and other attendees about how consumer advisors assist UK consumers who shop cross-border in Europe.

A range of UK ECC promotional items – each with its own distinct messaging and 'call to action' - was handed out at the event to help raise the profile of the UK ECC and to make it easier for consumers to remember the organisation and its service.

It is important for the UK ECC to maintain its positive and fruitful relationship with the TSI - the UK's national enforcement membership organisation – made up of local authorities' trading standards teams.

With this in mind, attendance at the TSI's annual conference strengthened the UK ECC's links with trading standards, allowing UK ECC consumer advisors to share intelligence in order to ensure that all consumers – both from the UK and from across Europe - will receive fair trading from UK businesses.

Awareness of the UK ECC within the media became a major positive in 2010, with a number of high-profile radio and television interviews and national newspaper articles featuring how the UK ECC can help consumers.

As well as the UK ECC issuing a number of press releases to the media, journalists approached us to ask for information and our position on consumer-related subjects, so strengthening the view of the organisation's role within the consumer protection environment.



Media requests, press releases and coverage

Selected Interviews and Media Requests
Guardian – Media enquiry – Fractional ownership (23/03/10)
Guardian – Media enquiry – Online shopping (23/03/10)
BBC Radio Bristol – Radio Interview - Volcanic ash (15/04/10)
ITV London News – TV Interview - Volcanic ash (15/04/10)
BBC Three Counties – Radio Interview - Volcanic ash (16/04/10)
BBC Devon – Radio Interview – Volcanic ash (17/04/10)
On Your Behalf, BBC Radio Belfast – Radio Interview – Volcanic ash (05/05/10)
GMTV – Media enquiry – Festival tickets (05/05/10)
Computer Active Magazine – Media enquiry – Consumer protection for electronic goods (25/05/10)
Highland News newspaper – Media enquiry – Secondary ticket market (27/05/10)
GMTV – Media enquiry – Secondary ticket market (02/06/10)
Guardian – Media enquiry – Fractional ownership (16/06/10)
French Property News – Media enquiry – Fractional ownership (21/07/10)
BBC News Online – Media enquiry – Car hire (21/07/10)
You & Yours, BBC Radio 4 – Media enquiry – Fractional ownership (22/07/10)
You & Yours, BBC Radio 4 – Media enquiry – Car hire (23/07/10)
Sky News – Media enquiry – Fractional ownership (23rd July 2010)
Daily Mail – Media enquiry – Bogus villa scam (04/08/10)
Sunday Mirror – Media enquiry – Car hire (04/08/10)
Radio 5 Live – Media enquiry – Bogus villa scam (04/08/10)
BBC Breakfast – Media enquiry – Bogus villa scam (04/08/10)
BBC 1 Rip Off Britain – Media enquiry – Bogus villa scam (05/08/10)

Selected Interviews and Media Requests

BBC Radio – You & Yours – Radio interview – Car hire (09/08/10)

BBC 1 Rip Off Britain – TV interview – Car hire (10/08/10)

BBC Wales – TV interview – Holiday clubs (07/09/10)

Sunday Mirror - Media enquiry – Volcanic ash (22/09/10)

BBC Three Counties Radio – Media enquiry – Fake websites (22/09/10)

Radio Five Live Investigates – Media enquiry – Car hire (07/10/10)

Sunday Times – Media enquiry – Car hire (12/10/10)

Radio Five Live – Media enquiry – General information (12/10/10)

Which? – Media enquiry – Car hire (16/12/10)

Press Releases

Warning to UK consumers: beware the EU scamsters! (24/02/10)

Goodwill gestures urged from car park operators as charges mount on overstaying vehicles (22/04/10)

European Consumer Centres act together to help volcanic ash crisis passengers claim their rights (04/05/10)

Can you rely on your festival tickets? (27/05/10)

UK consumers become more 'online-shopping' confident (17/06/10)

Car hire complaints from UK consumers rocket in 2010 (21/07/10)

Supporting national e-consumer week - 20 to 24 September 2010 (16/09/10)

European Commission report on internet sites selling electronic goods (16/09/10)

ECC-Net launches new report on online marketplace (12/10/10)

Selected Coverage

Timeshare Daily News 'Beware the EU Scamsters - warning to UK consumers' (January 2010)

Green Flag 'Consumers warned over EU scams' (25/02/10)

The Independent 'Online shopping: your right to return virtually everything' (13/03/10)

The County Times 'Trading Standard's advice for anyone affected by the volcanic ash' (16/04/10)

BBC News 'Ash aftermath: How to make a complaint' (21/04/10)

GMTV 'Fake festival tickets' (06/05/10)

The Independent 'Insurance uncertainty amid volcanic ash and airline strikes' (11/05/10)

Express 'Protection for holiday hiccups' (09/06/10)

Internet Retailing 'UK shoppers happier buying online from Europe' (25/06/10)

The Independent 'The 10 best money saving websites' (01/07/10)

The Guardian 'Timeshare: tourists warned to look out for new scam' (16/07/10)

Daily Tribune 'Timeshare: look out for new hard sell' (18/07/10)

Transfer Smart 'UK ECC Warns Consumers about the Latest Scam in Timeshare Market' (19/07/10)

Manchester Wired 'Ash aftermath: How to make a complaint' (20/07/10)

ERentals 'Dramatic increase in complaints about car hire' (22/07/10)

Car Hire News 'Car Hire Basics and the EU Leaflet' (22/07/10)

The Independent 'Are you safe if your holiday firm goes bust?' (24/07/10)

Virgin Money 'Brits warned over timeshare scams' (17/08/10)

BBC News 'Timeshare and Holiday Clubs' (20/09/10)

Isle of Wight News: Island Pulse 'Before Trading Online' (29/09/10)

TS Today 'Keeping it out of court' (October 2010)

BBC News 'Holiday car hire scam complaints have risen by a third' (10/10/10)



Thank you

Much of what the UK ECC does goes unrecognised. But amongst the large number of UK consumers which UK ECC consumer advisors helped in 2010, there were a gratifying number of people who expressed their thanks.

Here is a selection of thank-yous received from consumers we helped along the way:

"This case has been settled by the bank and they are going to refund me completely. I would like to thank you for all the help and advice you gave me." Mrs C

"I just want to say thank you. Terminal A confirmed my flights this last week and I can only put that down to your intervention." Mr H

"Thank you for the help and advice you have given me regarding an issue of a faulty projector which I purchased online. The matter has now been concluded to my full satisfaction and the projector has been replaced." Mr B

"Thank you very much for your kind, prompt and informative answer. I will contact my own 'national' service to further my query." Mr I

"I can now confirm that my refund has now been paid into my account. I thank you most sincerely for all your hard work and patience during the last two years of dispute." Mrs M

"Superior service such as this is rare and should be recognised!" Mr Y

"Just to let you know that a new replacement bag has finally been delivered to me. Can I also take the opportunity to thank you and your colleagues for the excellent work you have done on this case? I am really pleased that there is a facility like the one you work for, with people who are persistent enough to get the matter resolved." Mrs H

"Just wanted to let you know that I have been refunded the entire amount. Thank you very much - this would not have happened without your help." Mrs D

And finally...

Help is at hand if you plan to shop online. It may be beneficial for you to visit Howard the ECC-Net's online shopping assistant. For more information go to our website - www.ukecc.net. Howard will research a website for you and help you decide whether to use it. Just enter the website's name, and Howard will:

- Find out when it was registered
- Do a Google search for feedback from other consumers. If the website is new, you need to be very careful – especially if prices are low and it asks for pre-payment. And if there are negative comments from other consumers, there may be good reason to be cautious.

Howard can also advise you on your rights, such as:

- How long do you have to return goods after delivery for a refund?
- When is the latest you can make a claim if the goods become faulty?

Howard cannot guarantee that a website is trustworthy. Nor can he offer a guarantee of service or quality. But he will help you make an informed decision before buying.



HOWARD

THE SHOPPING ASSISTANT

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UK European Consumer Centre
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