

A summer read

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The month of August has been quiet. In fact, next to nothing of interest has been published on the news section of the FSA website and hence I was struggling to find something newsworthy to write about, assuming we have all heard enough about the securitisation and sub-prime problems across the pond and the market losses over here. Everyone is on holiday and the FSA's print runs are on hold. Peace at last.

Abandoning the usual rich pickings of the FSA website, I wandered over to the Financial Ombudsman Service's website. Apart from the article Are We The FOZ – Abbreviations, Acronyms and Clarity for Consumers, and Walter Merrick's speech at the FSA's summer school, there was very little there either. However, I am not to be defeated and I have something to say about both items.

As for Foz, or Fos, I was bemused to learn that it prefers its full name to be used – or 'ombudsman service' – rather than what it describes as the potentially confusing abbreviation of 'Fos'. I share the Fos's view about the over use of abbreviations but these are partially a direct result of the law makers and the regulators who rolled out the long descriptive terms in the first place. Who thought of TCF, MiFID, FSA, FSMA, SUP, COB, DISP, MEAF's and many other beauties that could make up a whole day's trivial pursuit?

Walter Merrick's speech to the FSA's summer school is well worth reading and provides some interesting information about – dare I say it – the Fos's handling of endowment complaints and how it serves, where the courts cannot. As Walter commented: "you could abolish the ombudsman service and the courts would still be there". Some may say that the Fos may be a more palatable alternative to expensive lawyers and inconsistent judges. Bearing in mind that half of the complaints received by the Fos relate to the 12 largest companies and the Fos handles 25,000 complaints a year, it can definitely claim it is servicing a need.

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