

## Worksheet 1.16a: Consumer rights and ADR

Consumer rights improved in 2015. The law is now easier to understand, as is only fair, given that UK consumers spend £90 billion a month! More information is now available about customers' rights when they buy goods and services online and about their rights in terms of digital content – something that wasn't needed 30 years ago, when paper books were more popular than tablets. The government has also recently started encouraging customers to use ADR (alternative dispute resolution), as explained by Robbie below.

### **Robbie**

I work at my local Citizens' Advice Bureau. This morning I recommended ADR to a few people. It is useful for four main reasons: it can be quicker and cheaper than going through courts; most people find it less intimidating than going through the courts; and it's quite easy to arrange.

I explained to a man this morning that there are three main types of ADR: conciliation, arbitration and mediation.

Conciliation is usually the first stage. You and the supplier give written details of your dispute and evidence, such as photos. A conciliator will then suggest a solution. Usually this service is free.

Arbitration can be used if you're not happy with conciliation. A specially-trained arbitrator will make a decision, based on proof and further written information about your complaint. The arbitrator is not biased towards the buyer or the seller. You have to pay for arbitration, but the fee is usually refunded if you're successful. The agreements reached in arbitration have to be kept confidential, unless the supplier doesn't mind you telling people about the agreement.

Mediation's a good service too. It's great if the supplier and the buyer don't want to meet up in person, because an expert mediator can pass on messages between them. Mediation can also be done face-to-face. Mediators help sellers and consumers to see each other's point of view. This encourages them to reach a fair compromise and stick to it.