

To: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE	Subject: Consumer Advice Operations 1998/99
From: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	
Date: 15th September, 1998. Ref: PF/MC	

PROPOSED DECISION

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND

The Protective Services arm of the Environmental Services Department incorporates, within its Environmental Education & Consumer Advice Unit, three Consumer Advice Centres at Coatbridge, Cumbernauld and Motherwell.

The advisory staff at these offices provide guidance to consumers and traders on civil trading standard matters, mediating and arbitrating in disputes between parties to consumer contracts whereby one party feels aggrieved in having statutory rights affected.

The staff also provide an important first port of call for Council service users and further promote the aims of North Lanarkshire Council by helping train other advisory bodies such as Citizens Advice Bureaux.

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS STATISTICS

At total of 10,742 cases involving mediation and arbitration, for the year ending 31st March, 1998, were handled by staff with a further 2,451 ongoing cases being recorded for the first quarter of the current year making a total of 13,193 cases. The Consumer Advice service dealt with a further 26,074 enquiries over the fifteen month period.

Graphic representations of the main areas of consumer concern are shown in the attached statistical digest tables at Appendices 1 and 2.

Where traders are intransigent, prove reluctant to take advice from our staff or cannot resolve consumer complaints, advice on small claims court resolution is given. Small claims civil actions are for cases involving less than £750 compensation. Clients who wish the Department's officers to help complete the 'complicated forms' or, indeed, represent them at court hearings are aided at all stages of the due civil process. A total of 683 clients received advice on small claims procedures, 84 of which have been helped through the courts process and £19,303 achieved in redress.

The 13,193 consumer cases have resulted in £538,318.32 redress for the 15 month period in 1997/98 and £75,714.59 so far this year for wronged purchasers.

In common with national statistics the house fittings and appliances group provides the greatest area of concern to North Lanarkshire consumers but, whilst 35% of national complaints fall into this category/...

category, almost 44% of complainants who use the service fell into this category.

Bases on the figures, shown in the Appendices, North Lanarkshire consumers' have differing complaining traits than their national counterparts.

On a national basis the top six specific areas of complaint are:-

1. *'other' personal goods and services;*
2. *secondhand cars;*
3. *radio, TV and other electrical goods;*
4. *home maintenance, repairs and improvements;*
5. *clothing and clothing fabrics; and*
6. *major household appliances.*

Whereas, in North Lanarkshire the main specific areas of concern are:-

1. *upholstered furniture;*
2. *home maintenance, repairs and improvements;*
3. *second hand cars;*
4. *double glazing;*
5. *clothing and clothing fabrics; and*
6. *carpets and other flooring coverings.*

The variance in figures, in part, can be explained by the type of trading premises, with a high incidence of 'trading estates', in the North Lanarkshire area and the high profile of the advisory service. It is not uncommon for traders to refer disgruntled customers to the service for impartial advice. Such links allow for speedy resolution of complaints.

THE FUTURE

The Consumer Advice service is an important part of the integrated advice unit and continually liaises with other NLC Departments, Police and Fire authorities to provide best value to the community. A new partnership with **OFFER** (Office of Electricity Regulation) was set up to deal with the deregulation and freeing up of the electricity market. Such networking allows greater service and information to reach the community and heightens North Lanarkshire's profile in that community and in the market place.

The consumer advisory staff will continue to work towards a fairer, safer trading environment with equal opportunities for all.

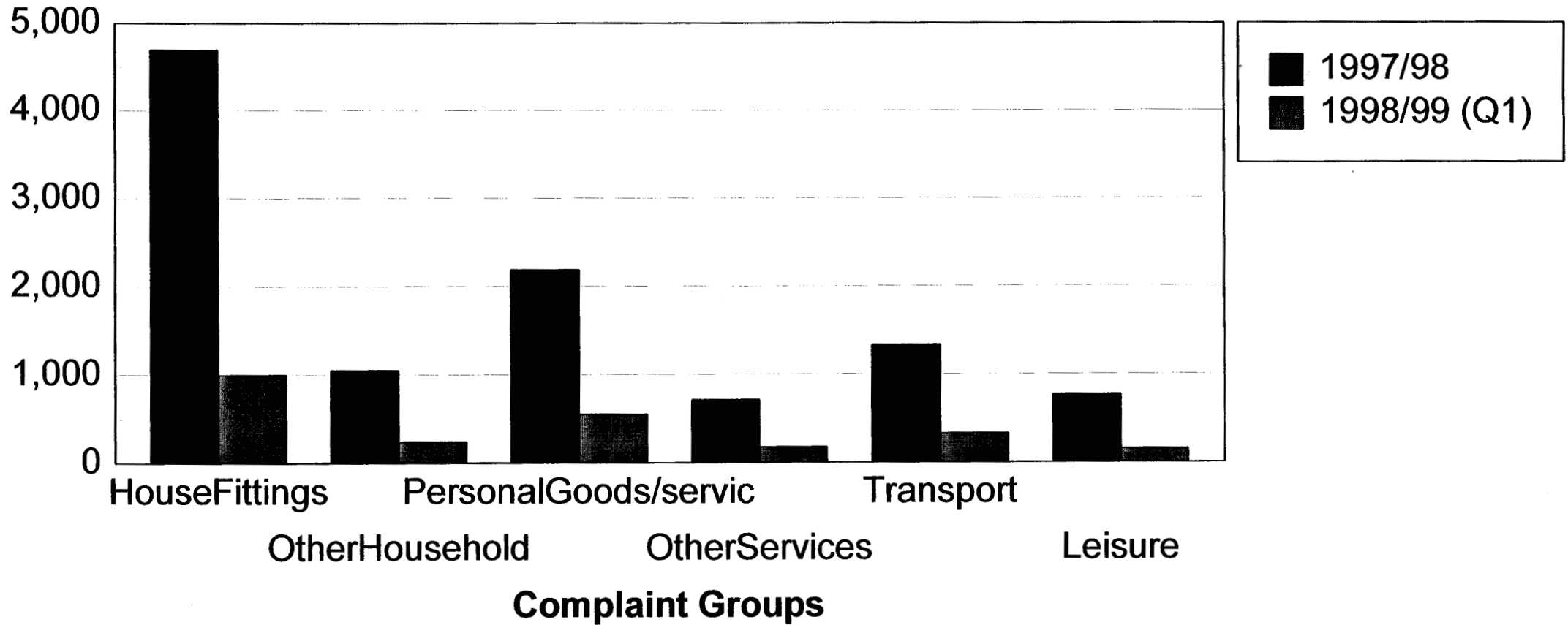
RECOMMENDATIONS

Note the Report.

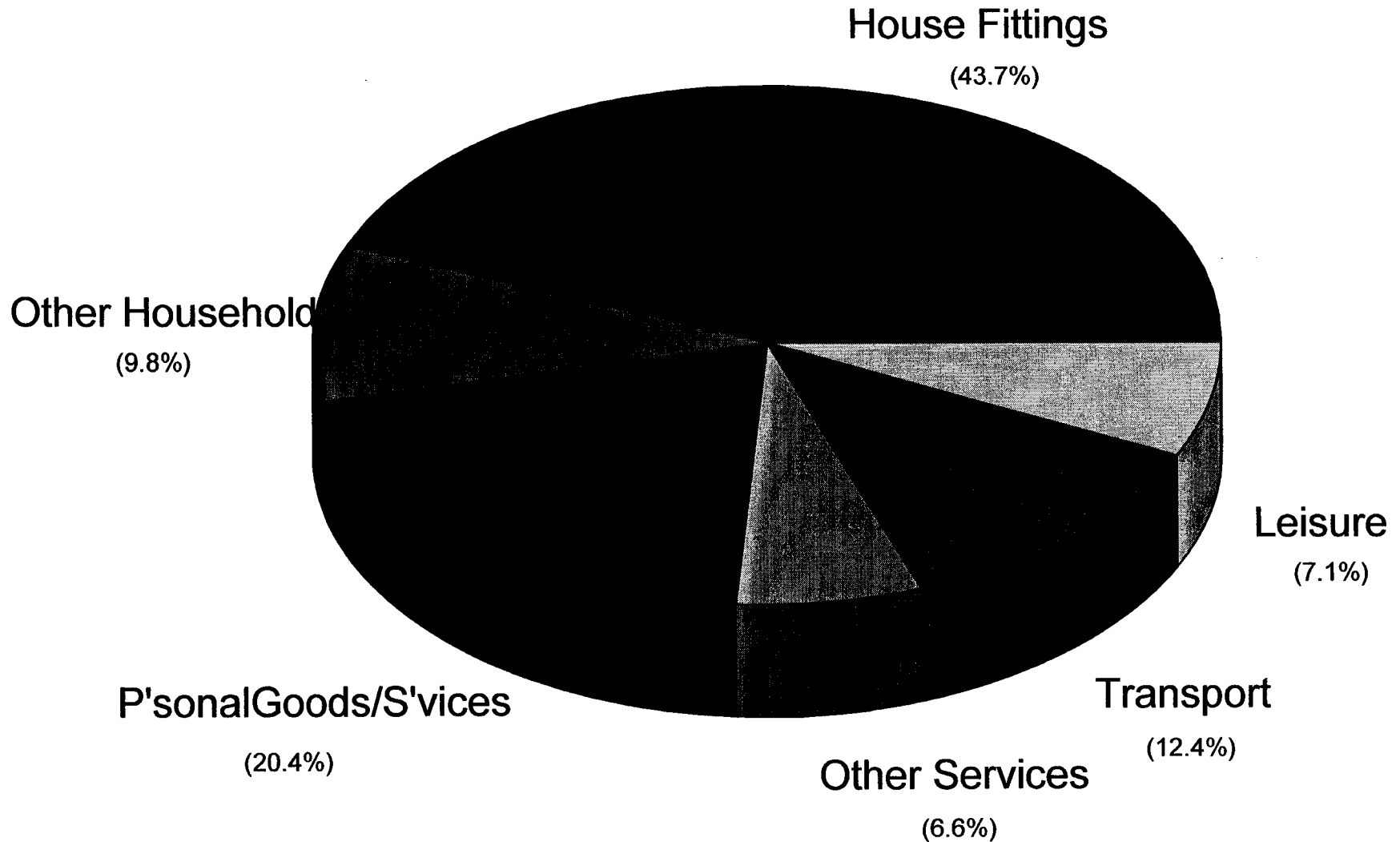
M. Kenzie L. Hutton

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS : No. of complaint cases

No. Consumer Cases



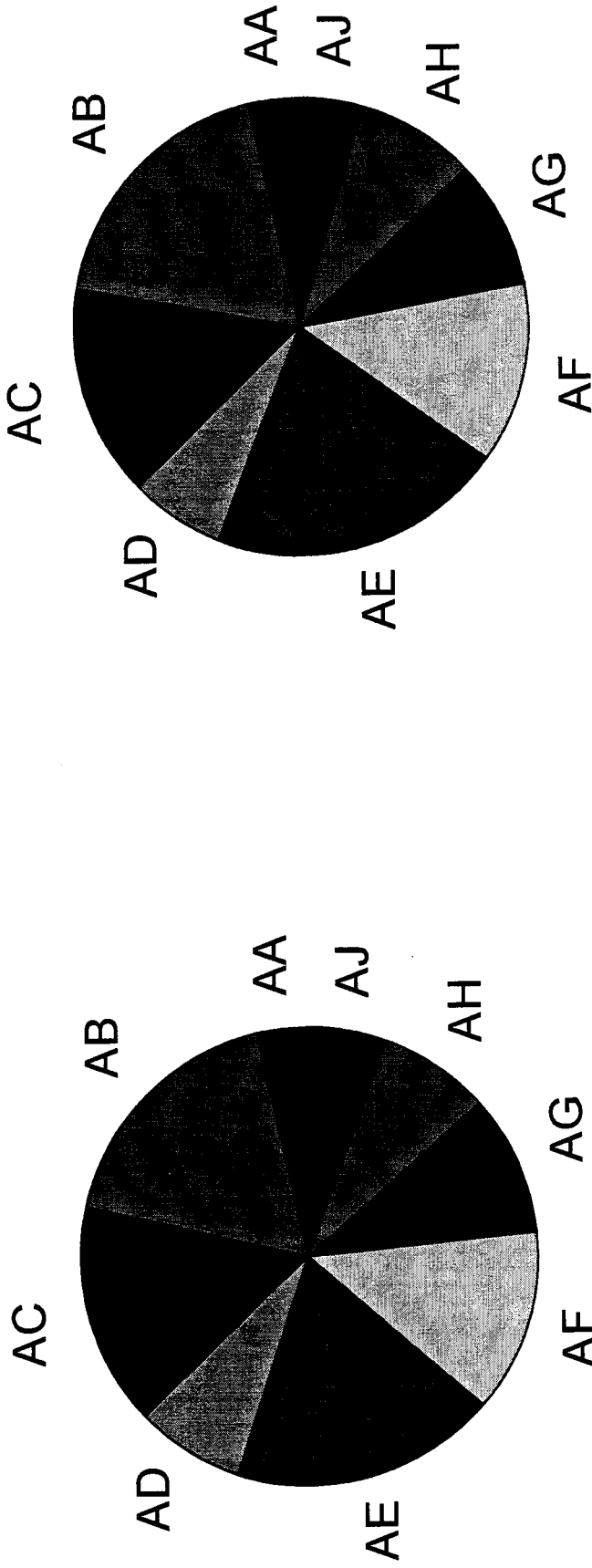
CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS : Areas of concern



Total of 13,193 consumer cases

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS :

House Fittings & Appliances



1997/98
4696 cases

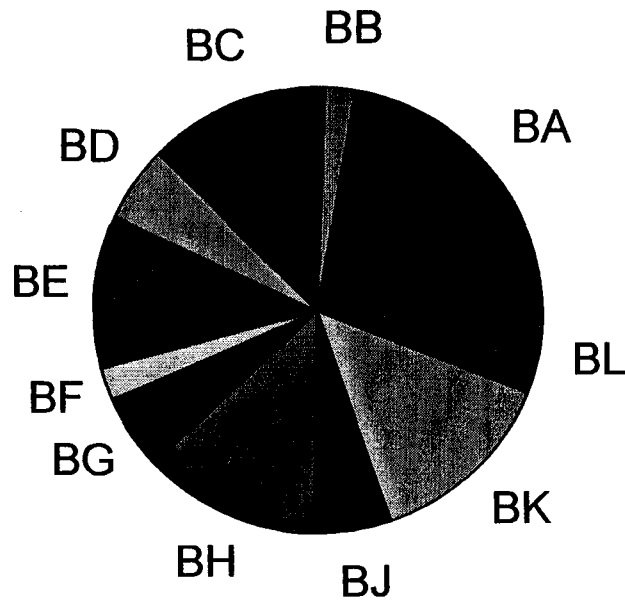
1998/99
1001 cases

AA: house construction **AD:** furniture/pictures **AG:** radio/TV electrical goods incl. hire

AB: home maintenance/improvements **AE:** upholstered furniture **AH:** major appliances

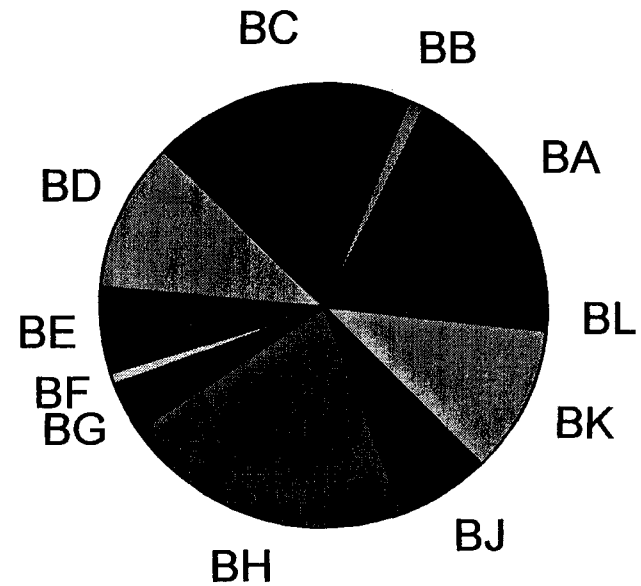
AC: double glazing **AF:** carpets/floor covering **AJ:** repairs / domestic appliances

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS : Other Household Requirements



'97/'98

1050 cases



'98/'99

239 cases

BA: food & drink

BE: water

BJ: DIY materials/tools

BB: domestic solid/liquid fuel

BF: postal service

BK: textiles/soft furnishings

BC: gas

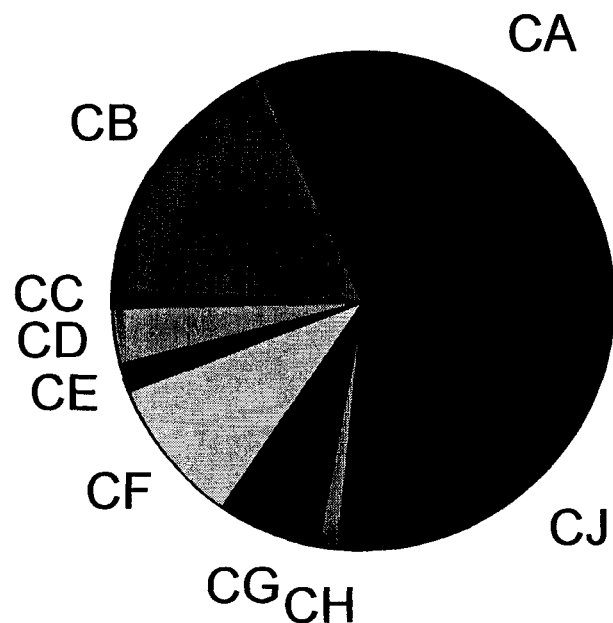
BG: telecoms

BL: hardware/cleaning materials

BD: electricity

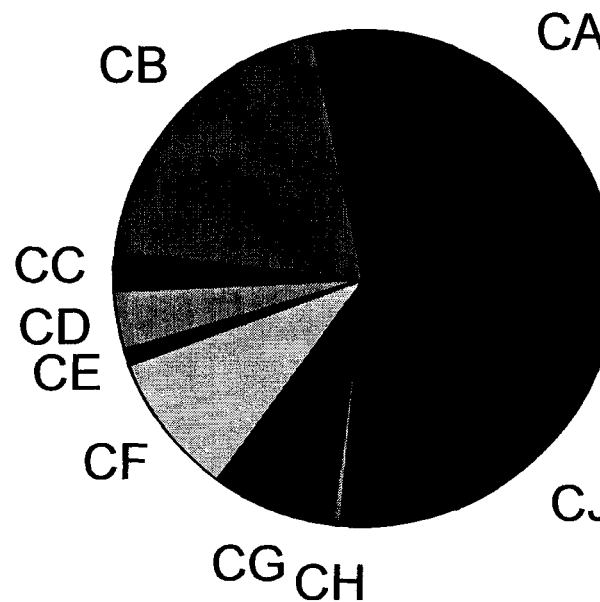
BH: laundry/dry cleaning

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS : Personal Goods & Services



'97/'98

2187 cases



'98/'99

552 cases

CA: clothing & clothing fabrics

CD: pharmaceutical/medical service

CG: nursery equipment

CB: footwear

CE: toilet/beauty articles

CH: tobacco

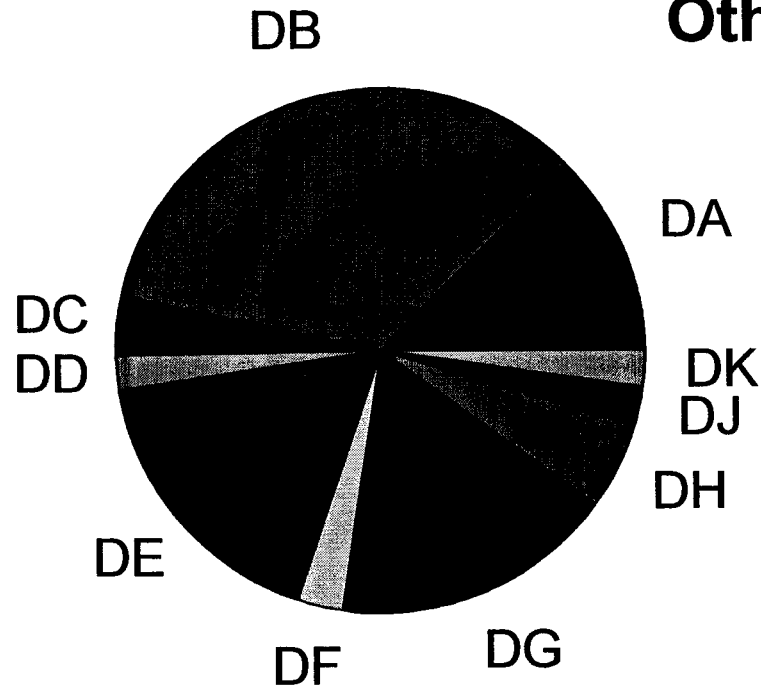
CC: footwear repairs

CF: jewellery/clocks/watches etc.

CJ: other personal goods/services

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS :

Other Services



'97/'98

712 cases

DA: banking

DB: hire & unsecured credit

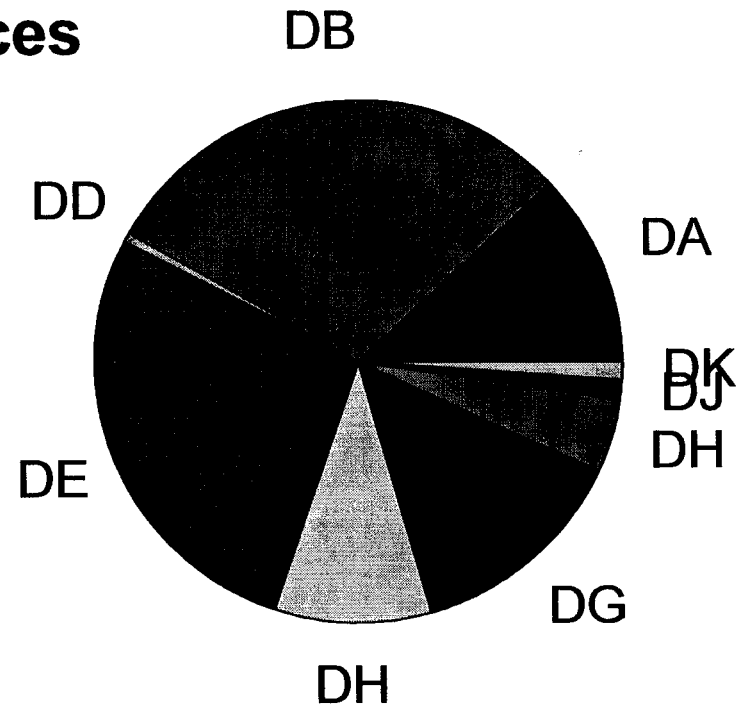
DC: credit secured by 1st mortgage

DD: other secured credit

DE: ancillary credit business

DF: life insurance

DG non-life insurance



'98/'99

175 cases

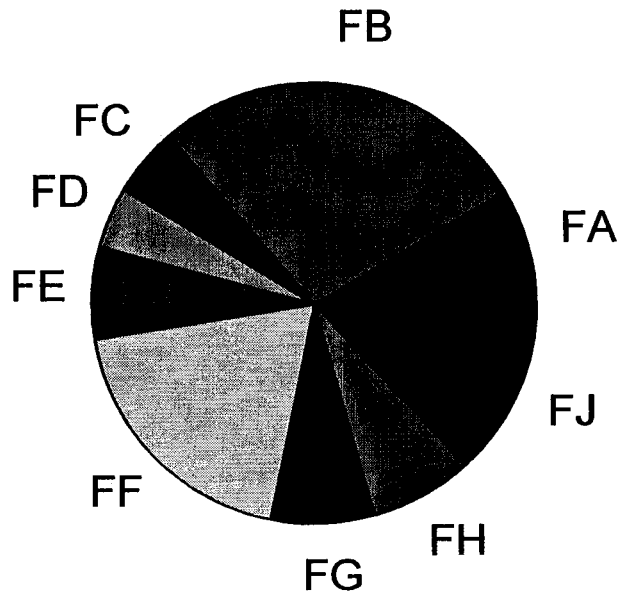
DH: other financial services

DJ: legal services

DK: estate agency

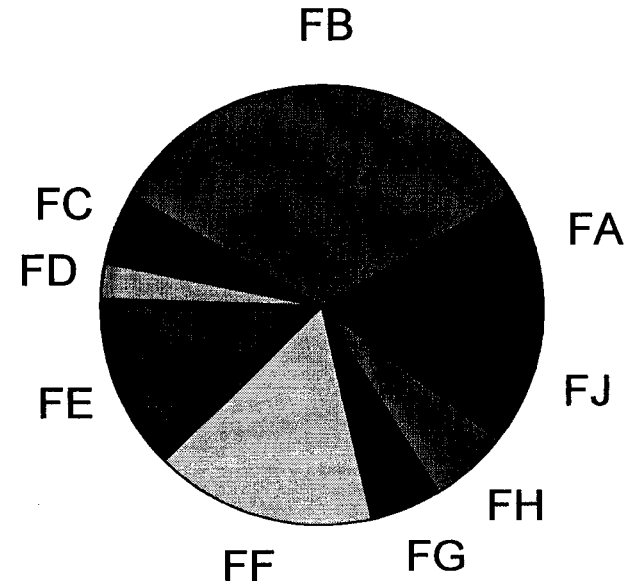
CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS :

Leisure



'97/'98

768 cases



'98/'99

154 cases

FA: package holidays-UK

FD: holiday caravan renting/sites

FG: books/newspapers/magazines

FB: package holidays-overseas

FE: timeshare-UK & overseas

FH: entertainment/catering/accommodation

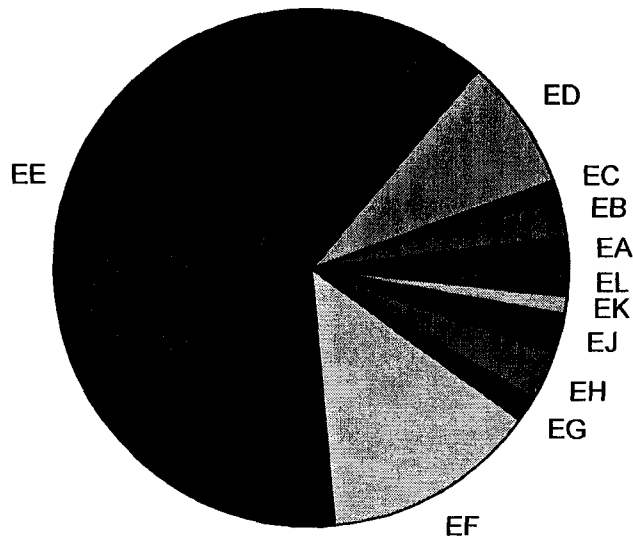
FC: travel agents

FF: sports/toys/camping goods

FJ: other recreational goods/services

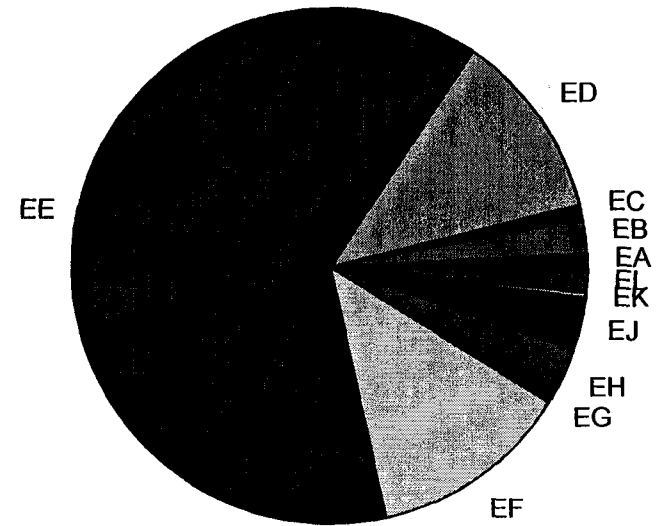
CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS :

Transport



'97/'98

1329 cases



'98/'99

330 cases

EA: rail/bus/coach travel

EB: air travel

EC: other public transport

ED: new cars

EE: second-hand cars

EF: car repairs/servicing

EG: motor cycles & repairs

EH: bicycles & repairs

EJ: other vehicle repairs

EK: petrol & oil

EL: other vehicular running costs