

For immediate release

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WILLWRITING ORGANISATION TAKES ANOTHER GREAT LEAP FORWARD AS A CONSUMER PROTECTOR

The champions of consumer protection in the Willwriting sector, The Institute of Professional Willwriters (IPW), have become the first organisation in the sector to successfully complete the first stage of the OFT's Consumer Codes Approval Scheme (CCAS).

The 500-member strong IPW has submitted a code as part of its continued campaign to protect consumers in the unregulated Willwriting sector. Its code covers the drawing up of Wills, estate administration and other related activities.

The IPW has been a self-regulated institution since 1991, when the demise of a major Willwriting franchise caused much distress to affected families. This led a number of Willwriters to make a determined attempt to create high standards of consumer protection within their profession. Seventeen years later, there is still no mandatory need for a Willwriter to have any qualifications or professional indemnity insurance in place.

The IPW's consumer code of practice is another step towards the promotion and safeguarding of consumer interests in England, Scotland and Wales.

Key elements of the code are:

- Members are required to pass an entrance exam, marked externally, or have a recognised qualification of equivalent standard. They must also complete a programme of continuous professional development, keeping knowledge up-to-date and abreast of changes in the law.
- Members must provide a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau check.
- Members are forbidden from using pressurised selling techniques and will provide consumers with a seven day cooling off period.
- Members will complete work within strict deadlines agreed with the client.
- Should the member be unable to provide the agreed service, consumer pre-payments and deposits will be protected.
- A low cost, independent redress scheme will be available.

The IPW will now undertake comprehensive monitoring procedures, including compliance visits and consumer satisfaction surveys, to demonstrate the code works in practice and delivers its promises.

Chairman of the IPW, Paul Sharpe, says: "Our intention is to complete stage two of the CCAS and gain OFT approval for the IPW code. This will then enable us to display the OFT Approved code logo, signalling to consumers that they can fully place their trust in an IPW member. Whilst the code ratifies current practice and procedures, we view this third party endorsement as a major step towards enhancing consumer protection within our sector and will make every effort to gain full OFT approval."

Mike Haley, OFT Director of Consumer Protection, said: "A Will is an important document often made when time is of the essence. Consumers need help to identify professional organisations to assist them in making a Will. Consumers who buy goods or services from a business with an OFT approved Code can expect a much higher standard of protection than that required by law. We look forward to working with the IPW during the next stage towards OFT approval'.

More information about the IPW can be found at www.ipw.org.uk or by calling **08456 442043**.

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Press calls: Jane Hunt, Catapult PR, 01253 595558 - jane@catapultpr.co.uk

Notes to Editors

The IPW's submission of a code of practice to the OFT follows years of campaigning for higher levels of consumer protection within the unregulated Willwriting sector.

The IPW has continuously urged organisations that have an influence over consumer protection to consider the huge implications of Wills drawn up incorrectly, or lost without trace, due to the disappearance or demise of the Willwriters involved. It has firmly stated its belief that there is a ticking time-bomb that will explode in a few decades time when Wills are actually read and found, in many cases, to be unfit for purpose.

The IPW conducted The IPW commissioned research through TNS's CAPI OmniBus in May 2007 and 1038 consumers, from across the country, were interviewed. 92% of consumers were unaware that Willwriters did not need to have any professional qualifications. 77% wanted regulation in this sector.