

Consumer Codes Approval Scheme Annual Report 2015



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Forward

When the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) agreed to take on responsibility for the Consumer Codes Approval Scheme from the Office of Fair Trading we did so with a simple vision that every UK consumer should have the choice of a reputable and trusted trader. That vision remains relevant and at the heart of every decision that we at the Consumer Codes Approval Board (CCAB) take. Our partnership with code sponsors ensures that we have industry experts working with us to raise and maintain standards in some of the most important sectors to consumers. It also helps reputable businesses differentiate themselves from other traders by displaying the codes approval logo, a clear message to consumers that they are a trader to be trusted.

A simple Google search on "approved trader" returns 31 million results which means that consumers often struggle to understand the differences between schemes and make informed choices. We see our role much broader than just approving codes and believe that we are a key player in shaping and ensuring that the approval landscape meets both business and consumer needs. We are pleased that the Consumer Protection Partnership and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills have recognised this need as well.

We are excited by the progress that we have made so far and the potential for our scheme to tackle sector wide consumer detriment in partnership with legitimate businesses, whilst at the same time being held to account by consumers. This report sets out our performance over 2015 and our plans for the future.



Baroness Crawley
Chair, CCAB



Leon Livermore
Chief Executive, CTSI



History and purpose of the scheme

The Consumer Codes Approval Scheme (CCAS) was first introduced by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in 2001. In 2012, the government asked the CTSI to develop a successor to the OFT's scheme as a part of the 'consumer landscape review'. From April 2013, the management of CCAS transferred to a new Consumer Codes Approval Board supported by CTSI.

CCAS is facilitated self-regulation. It aims to promote consumer interests by setting out the principles of effective customer service and protection. It goes above and beyond consumer law obligations and sets a higher standard, giving consumers a clear indication - through the right to display the CTSI Approved Code logo - that code members can be trusted. CCAS aims to reduce consumer detriment and codes will only be approved if they can clearly demonstrate that they are contributing to this objective. Codes approval is a rigorous and intensive process for code sponsors.

The CCAS is committed to promoting codes of practice that meet our core criteria and have obtained CTSI approval.

Code sponsor – A code sponsor is the organisation, firm or entity that administers and promotes a voluntary code of practice (as opposed to statutory codes) and can influence and raise standards within its membership. It must be a distinct entity from its membership.

Code member – A code member is any member of a code sponsor. It is a requirement for the CCAS that all eligible members of a code sponsor's organisation sign up to the code.

CCAS is voluntary. A code sponsor must elect to submit its code of practice for approval and membership of the code sponsor must be voluntary.



Governance

The scheme was officially re-launched in April 2013 under the guardianship of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI). A great deal of work had taken place to ensure a smooth transition and a lot of our focus was upon getting the right governance in place. Having weighed up all the options we chose to establish a separate, not for profit community interest company. This has allowed us to focus on the consumer, business and policy benefits rather than any commercial imperative. We have an independent board with an independent chair. Other than two specific board positions board appointments are made on an individual basis. The two specific board positions that have a specific role are one appointment on behalf of CTSI and one appointment representing Citizens' Advice Services across the United Kingdom.



As part of our governance we also established the Consumer Advisory Panel and all new codes are presented to the panel for consideration. The Panel is chaired by Citizen's Advice and the remaining Panel members consist of key consumer group representatives and individuals with an interest in consumer rights. Consumer representatives from specialist sectors can be co-opted onto the Panel to provide specialised advice if required. If the Panel has particular concerns relating to a new code, the code sponsors are asked to make additional changes to their code and consider the comments of the Panel, before the code is submitted to the Board for consideration of approval.

An additional panel representing codes sponsors ensures that we balance consumer and scheme needs with those of industry and codes sponsors. The overall goal of the Code Sponsors Panel is to support the aims of the scheme, help reduce consumer detriment and raise consumer standards within their sectors. The Code Sponsors Panel is not involved in the approval process.

The role of the Panel is key in:

- helping shape the strategic vision of the scheme
- developing and strengthening the core criteria
- bringing a trade perspective to the scheme
- engaging with new code sponsors
- developing joint marketing strategies for code sponsors



Appendix 1 contains details of the current board appointments, consumer panel and code sponsors panel members.

Key Activity 2015

In order to ensure that we deliver on our strategic objectives the board relies very much on data collected by code sponsors.

We have worked hard with our industry partners to ensure that we build an accurate picture of our impact and every year we collect a data set from them. Attached as Appendix 2 is a summary of the data set; highlights include:

- 92% customer satisfaction rate with the service provided by Code Members
- £2.3m compensation recovered for consumers via the complaints and dispute resolution mechanisms which Code Members subscribe to
- 32,000 Code Members taking part in CCAS across 11 different consumer codes in a variety of economic sectors
- Approaching 500,000 consumers searching the directory on the CTSI website for businesses they can trust
- Net growth in new Code Members of 18% (or nearly 5,000 businesses)
- At least £85bn consumer spending across Code Members

The Consumer Codes Approval Scheme (CCAS)

The CCAS is designed to:

- reduce consumer detriment; for more transactions, by more consumers, in more circumstances
- be inclusive, independent, sustainable, visible, and well-understood



As you can see the scheme provides protection for a huge amount of consumer spend across a range of key sectors such as new homes, cars and home improvements. We will continue to work with new and existing code sponsors to keep standards and satisfaction high in these high spend areas.

One of the ambitions of the scheme is to grow the number of approved codes and to that end we are delighted that the following growth activity has taken place during 2015:

New Codes 2015

Expressions of Interest received - 9

Stage 1 approval - 7

Building LifePlans Code for Sale of New Homes
Glass and Glazing Federation Code
The Furniture Ombudsman Code
Trust My Garage Car Service & Repair Code
Consumer Code For Home Builders (stage 1 approval subject to statistician sign off of monitoring regime)
RAC- Approved Garages Code
RAC- Approved Dealers Code

Stage 2 approval – 3

Checkmate Consumer Code for Builders of New Homes
Home Insulation & Energy Systems Contractors Scheme (HIES)
Trust My Garage Service and Repair Code

CCAS has grown from 14,802 members (Jul 2013) to 33,392 members (Nov 2015)



When you consider that the Office of Fair Trading spent around £800,000 running the scheme and grew at an average of one new code per year we believe that we deliver excellent value for money. The only disappointing note is that despite playing a key role in delivering Government policy, such as within the renewable energy sector or with simple financial products, the Government no longer provides any funding to support the scheme.

In addition to cutting costs CTSI and the CCAB have made notable improvements to CCAS including:

- Stronger core criteria including relating to home selling and cold calling
- Transparent application and approval process - including open consultation on every application
- Transparent governance structure including a decision making Board, Consumer Advisory Panel (chaired by Citizens Advice) and Code Sponsors Panel
- Baroness Crawley and Board members attend Code Sponsor conferences and other key stakeholder events to promote the scheme and support their members
- Annual Code Sponsors Forum, with invited speakers and tailored training as requested by the Code Sponsors
- CCAS provides bespoke training and updates for Code Sponsors and their members on new legislation, such as Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Payments) Regulations 2013
- Annual audits of all approved codes
- Identification and sharing of best practice amongst Code Sponsors
- Promoting Primary Authority Partnerships as part of CCAS
- Pre-stage two audit of new codes
- Development work identifying sectors where a code would help reduce consumer detriment, and protect the vulnerable
- CCAS marketing plan and targeted consumer campaigns- including consumer surveys to collect baseline data
- CTSI online Directory of approved traders - to enable consumers to seek out trusted traders
- Development of key performance indicators



Communications & Marketing

The Marketing team conducted a YouGov brand awareness survey in December 2014 which produced some interesting findings and good baseline data. This survey was repeated in March 2015.



A consumer campaign to raise awareness of the CCAS logo among businesses and consumers was conducted between 23 February and 9 March 2015. There was a planned media campaign with a hook on property which tied in with many other Code Sponsors. To support this an intense Google adwords campaign was carried out supporting all Code Sponsors. The YouGov survey had shown that 36% of people use Google when choosing a business.



This campaign achieved 2,161,239 impressions (each time an advert is shown on a search result page) with 12,056 clicks on our adverts. In January 2015 the CCAS webpage received approximately 50 page views per day this increased during the two week campaign to an average of 1000 page views per day.

On Twitter, campaign related material received 1,105 click throughs and reached 392,704 users. #tsicodes was used more than 270 times during the campaign. There was also a live Q & A session which was well received plus a whole host of campaign materials on the webpages.



In the December 2014 YouGov survey 4% of respondents recognised the Codes logo, this increased to 15% post campaign.



Codes had a stand at the CTSI annual conference and exhibition in Bournemouth in June 2015 and held a mini-theatre session with stories from Code Sponsors.

CTSI has supported Codes, and will continue to do so through various social media channels including the CTSI Twitter account (@CTSI_uk), Facebook and LinkedIn. The CTSI communications team uses every opportunity to reference Codes and where appropriate journalists are referred to specific Code Sponsors. All CTSI lead officers have been briefed to reference Codes when speaking to journalists or at meetings if appropriate and relevant.



The CTSI monthly digital magazine, TS Today, has featured a number of CCAS articles over the past year.



Finances

Appendix 3 contains the draft outturn position for 2015 (please note that these are unaudited and still subject to minor changes).

The fact that the growth and improvements outlined in the previous section have been delivered at an expenditure of under £200,000 is testament to the dedication and hard work of all involved in delivering the scheme, especially when you compare this to the costs of the OFT running the scheme. The budget for 2015 shows a shortfall of around £16,000 and there is a projected loss of around £14,000 for 2016, before the scheme moves to a small surplus in 2017. Despite these losses the scheme will remain a going concern due to reserves built up during the first two years of operation and a commitment from the CTSI board to underwrite losses in the form of a loan until the new charges outlined below come fully into effect.

In order to ensure that the scheme does not continue to run at a loss a new charging structure has been put into place for 2016. This also reflects that the current method for setting fees, 2.5% of membership turnover (capped at £25,000) is not always an appropriate means for calculating individual fees. In summary the changes are:

New Applications

1. The Expression of Interest stage is time limited to one year. If a new code sponsor does not progress to stage I within a year, the Expression of Interest becomes lapsed and the process and the fee has to be repeated.
2. The fees for stage I were raised to £3950 + VAT
3. The fees for stage II remain at £3950 + VAT
4. £3000 + VAT is payable as soon as the applicant starts either stage I or stage II
5. £950 + VAT is charged when the applicant submits their application to the Board for approval at stage I or stage II
6. The Board, at its discretion, can charge applicants £950 + VAT for any additional submissions to the Board.




The Board approved these fee changes 21 July 2015 with immediate effect.

CCAS Vision "Every UK consumer to have the choice of a reputable and trusted trader"

Approved Codes Annual Fees

1. The minimum annual fee for an approved code will be raised from £2,500 to £5,000 from 1st April 2016. The maximum fee remains unchanged at £25,000.
2. All agreed fees will rise annually from April 2017 in line with inflation and are fully reviewed every two years.
3. For Code Sponsors who do not charge a membership fee a bespoke fee would be set to be used sector wide.
4. For any Code Sponsors that require additional services above and beyond that provided as part of the application fees or annual fees, including consultancy services, these are to be charged at a commercial rate.
5. Where a Government department wants to use CCAS as a way to regulate a sector CCAS should not bear the cost of additional work and this should be charged accordingly.
6. The annual on-site audits have moved to a three year cycle of one year on-site, followed by two years of desk based audits. Any additional onsite audits deemed necessary due to non compliance issues will be paid for by the Code Sponsor.

The Board approved these fee changes 20 October 2015 with immediate effect, unless otherwise stated.



tsi
APPROVED CODE™
TRADINGSTANDARDS.UK

Find an Approved Code Member

Business Type

Location / Postcode

Code Sponsors

We continue to be grateful for the support of our code sponsors. This is not only for their financial support but the fact that they, and their members, place the consumer at the heart of their sector. It can often be a challenge to convince their members of the benefits of the scheme when there are many rogue traders operating and the playing field does not always appear to be that level. The code sponsors are often our greatest advocate in promoting the scheme to industry and consumers. Appendix 4 contains details of our current code sponsors.



One of the challenges we have had to address during the course of 2015 is that of multiple codes within a single sector. We are keen to support legitimate competition and raise standards within sectors.

However we need to ensure that having multiple codes does not lead to a lessening or confusing of standards and the ability for traders to move from one scheme to another to avoid disciplinary action. To that end we have developed a memorandum of understanding that we expect code sponsors to adhere to where there are multiple codes within the sector.



Core Criteria

At the heart of the scheme is a set of core criteria that covers the following:

- Organisational criteria
- Preparation
- Content of codes
- Handling complaints
- Monitoring of codes
- Enforcement of codes
- Publicising codes



Each one of these core criteria has a set of much more detailed criteria that sit underneath them. More information on the core criteria can be found at:

<http://www.tradingstandards.uk/advice/Prospectivecodesponsors.cfm>

Consumers can have confidence in traders who carry our logo as our scheme provides higher protection in many areas including:

- clear pre-contractual information
- deposit and pre-payment protection
- additional consumer protection for business conducted in the consumer's home
- clear complaints procedure
- Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Not only are code sponsors fully assessed throughout the approval process, the assessment is undertaken in an open and transparent manner. At every stage we consult with the consumer advisory panel and conduct public consultation. We also expect code sponsors to rigorously monitor how their members comply with their code and we conduct ongoing compliance checks. This means that we have full confidence in our code sponsor partners and are proud to recommend them to consumers

Appendix 1

Board Appointments as of 1 September 2015

Baroness Crawley (Chair) (Appointed)

Leon Livermore (CTSI Appointee, Appointed)

Roy Martin (Appointed)

Barbara Hughes (Appointed)

Steve Brooker (Appointed)

Victor Olowe (Appointed)

Citizens Advice Appointee Vacant (Was Teresa Perchard, new appointee expected early 2016)

Biographical and more detail can be found at:

http://www.tradingstandards.uk/advice/governance_of_the_scheme.cfm

Consumer Panel Members as of 1 September 2015

Sue Edwards (Chair) – Citizens Advice

Alison Farrar - CTSI Lead Officer for Consumer Education

Helena Twist – the National Consumer Federation

Caroline Jacobs - Research Institute for Consumer Affairs

Fraser Sutherland – Citizens Advice Scotland

Professor Geoffrey Woodroffe – Solicitor and consumer law expert

Jane Negus – CTSI UK European Consumer Centre

Jane Vass – Age UK

Code Sponsor Panel Members as of 1 September 2015

Ray Hodgkinson (Chair) - British Healthcare Trades Association

Ian Studd - British Association of Removers

Bill Fennell - Motor Codes Limited

Mark Cutler - Renewable Energy Consumer Code

Paul Sharpe - Institute of Professional Willwriters

Appendix 2

Key Performance Indicators 2014

Information was gathered from 11 Code Sponsors during 2015. The following table contains the totals and indicates the number of Code Sponsors that were able to supply this information for 2014.

	Total	Based on # responses
Amount recovered	£2,253,124	7
Consumers assisted	28,397	9
Customers satisfied	92.1%	9
Number of complaints	34,685	10
New members	3,469	10
Market share	49%	10
Number customers/transactions	85.1 million	5
Total consumer spending	£83 billion	3
Consumer confidence	33%	8

Appendix 3

Financial Outturn 2015

	Budget 2015	Outturn 2015
Income		
Annual Fees	127,303.50	131,060.93
Expressions of Interest	2,250.00	6,000.00
Stage 1 Fees	17,700.00	25,700.00
Stage 2 Fees	27,650.00	23,700.00
Other Services	18,000.00	17,835.25
Total	192,903.50	204,296.18
Expenditure		
- Communications	21,969.50	29,270.50
- TSP	33,500.00	23,486.26
- Governance	12,000.00	5,995.02
- Financial Management	16,000.00	11,181.61
- Scheme Management	113,000.00	107,440.74
- Overheads	14,000.00	12,123.66
- Communications Support	7,500.00	6,219.50
Total	217,969.50	195,717.29
- CTSI Overheads	25,000.00	25,000.00
Total inc overheads	242,969.50	220,717.29
Balance	(50,066.00)	(16,421.11)

Appendix 4

Current Code Sponsors

British Association of Removers (BAR)

The BAR has continued to raise customer standards and to reduce consumer detriment in our sector predominantly through the more robust implementation and monitoring of adherence to the BAR/CTSI Code of Practice and the BAR criteria of membership.



We had already successfully achieved annual inspections of all member sites as a minimum and any non-conformances identified and corrective actions agreed. However, time taken to redress some of those non-conformances was/is unacceptable and is potentially in breach of the code and criteria, so further performance review mechanisms and sanctions have been established. Where non-conformances are identified, it is now our practice to define specific time parameters for those corrective actions to have been completed and we have also introduced a follow up inspection to formally verify compliance. We have also taken a more robust stand with regard to imposing sanctions in the event of non-compliance.

Other initiatives include the second revision and launch of the BAR Model Terms and Conditions 2015 which have been approved in partnership with Hertfordshire Trading Standards under the Primary Authority scheme, giving consistency of interpretation and application throughout every local Trading Standards office in the UK. We are currently actively working on adding 'assured advice' for Fire safety and Protection to this scheme, with future additions to include Health and Safety and Licensing.

Having been advised of impending changes to the current ADR process, we are reviewing that process flow with The Property Ombudsman to ensure that we remain compliant with the scheme's aims and requirements.

Finally, we are proud to have negotiated an exclusive Commercial Partnerships with the leading consumer facing brand Which? Trusted Traders, as it is our belief that partnerships such as this reinforces our commitment to constantly raise customer service standards throughout our membership.

01/08/2015 – 27/08/2015; **495** complaints processed as follows;

- 229 – Closed before progressing to ADR.
- 24 – Have been ‘Acknowledged’ by BAR and Complaints Form has been sent.
- 38 – Are ‘Case in Progress’ and are currently with ADR and are currently going through the Conciliation process
- 5 – Have been ‘Referred to Adjudication’ and are currently going through the process
- 11 – ‘Adjudication Concluded – Award to customer’
- 4 - ‘Adjudication Concluded – Award to member’
- 86 – ‘IADR Negotiated settlement’ (during conciliation)
- 98 – ‘IADR Unable to effect settlement’ (the customer to pursue through Adj/Courts)

British Healthcare Trades Association

The British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA) continues to expand, with 485 members at the end of 2015. Our Code of Practice (the only one in the healthcare and assistive technology sector approved under the Consumer Codes scheme) remains the principal reason for businesses choosing to join the Association, and to remain within it.



Our monitoring and feedback mechanisms show that 97% of customers are satisfied with the products and services our members provide. In the past year we have had 29 complaints referred to us and some £25,200 of consumer detriment was averted.

We are pleased that the evidence from our audits and mystery shopping exercises show that our members take the Code and their responsibilities to consumers seriously in an environment where more and more people are signposted by local authorities to trusted businesses, to buy equipment and source adaptations for themselves, to enable them to manage long-term conditions and remain safely independent in their own homes.

BOSCH

Within the independent garage sector, the Bosch Car Service organisation makes available to consumers the highest level of technical and customer service. In addition to our prestigious brand and automotive heritage, we are delighted to have the management and operation of our consumer code of practice independently tested and verified by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute.



We are particularly confident that the robust and stringent complaints handling procedure contained within the code provides consumers with an attractive and meaningful route to obtain a fair resolution should a dispute arise.

Over the preceding year the number of consumer complaints received regarding BCS members remains impressively low (<50) with the vast majority being found in favour of the BCS members. In those few cases where it is adjudged that the BCS member is liable to remedy the situation, the total financial award made was approximately £2000.

Irrespective of the low number of complaints stemming from BCS members and the associated relatively low financial outcome, we remain of the opinion that the BCS consumer code of practice remains a vital tool to set and police standards and in that, will reassure consumers that BCS garages are transparent and honest.

Carpet Foundation

The Carpet Foundation has been running a Code of Practice for 10 years. We currently have some 400 independent retail members and in the last year we investigated 25 consumer complaints. Of these 16 were resolved at Conciliation stage and 9 went on to low cost independent Arbitration. The vast majority of those that went to Arbitration found in favour of the retailer.



It would seem that there are high levels of consumer satisfaction with the service received from our Code Members. Our own Compliance monitoring also shows that 90% of members are fully compliant with the Code and they use membership of the Code as a way of distinguishing themselves from their other high street competitors.

Checkmate Consumer Code for Builders of Homes for Sale



The Checkmate Consumer Code for Builders of Homes for Sale (Checkmate Code) achieved Stage 2 Approval from the CTSI in February 2015. A significant moment for Checkmate and the CTSI as the Checkmate Code is the first and only consumer code to have full CTSI Approval in the new home sales sector.

The Checkmate Code addresses the relationship between the builder of the new home and the purchaser, covering areas such as:

- Ensuring the builder's staff are trained on the Code and what it covers
- Clear and transparent sale material and no high pressure selling techniques
- Fully detailed reservation agreement with cancellation terms
- Details how the exchange of contracts deposit is protected
- Notification of when the home will be ready and what to do once you move in if there is a problem

During the creation of the Checkmate Code research was carried out to establish the areas for improvement in the way builders deal with their purchasers. These areas were incorporated in the Checkmate Code and further enhanced via a Primary Authority Partnership (PAP) which Checkmate entered in to with Surrey County Council. The PAP allowed Checkmate to produce a suite of template documents for use by builders which are the subject of Assured Advice. These documents enable builders to be confident they are providing the correct information to their purchasers at the right time.

Due to the length of time taken to build and sell a home the Checkmate Code has not received any enquiries from purchasers under the terms of the Checkmate Code since its launch.

Checkmate is proud to lead the way in this sector; the Checkmate Code has significantly raised the standard and level of protection available to consumers compared with the non CTSI Approved codes.

DEMSA

DEMSA members have experienced a difficult year, having been involved in seeking full authorisation from the Financial Conduct Authority, who now regulate the sector.

DEMSA members account for a substantial portion of the fee-charging debt management sector (approximately 70% by volume) and are responsible for the management of some £4bn worth of debt, spread over almost 250,000 clients.



Through the Code of Conduct, and the promotion and monitoring of it, DEMSA continues to work with members, consumer representation bodies, regulators and other stakeholders to reduce the incidence of consumer detriment wherever it may occur.

Compliance with the Code by members is monitored through a number of channels including web sweeps, customer satisfaction surveys, audits, call monitoring and complaints handling and in addition a quality assurance checking process has now been introduced. In accordance with the ethos of the FCA we are focussing on the quality of outcomes achieved for consumers.

Customer satisfaction in the last year, evidenced by the surveys conducted showed a small increase to 87% on our weighted scoring system, although the actual number of customers not fully satisfied with their plan was 2% of those surveyed.

DEMSA has a complaints handling system and the number of complaints received from consumers fell to 96 which was a decrease from 114 the previous year. As a proportion of the total number of plans held this represents only a minimal percentage (0.04%). Of these complaints 90 were resolved by DEMSA and a total of £7659 was paid to consumers by way of redress. The complaints not resolved by DEMSA were referred on to the Financial Ombudsman Service and in total the FOS received a further 265 complaints referred to them directly of which 82 were upheld.

The Code of Conduct will be updated to fully reflect the emphasis placed by the FCA on certain areas and this will take place as soon as is possible. We continue to promote the highest standards to members through the Code to ensure that the consumer receives the fairest treatment and most appropriate advice to help them through difficult times.

Institute of Professional Willwriters

Since joining the Consumer Codes Approval Scheme in 2010, the Institute of Professional Willwriters has been at the forefront of protecting the consumer of wills and estate planning services in the legal sector.



Being part of CCAS has been pivotal to our part in raising standards in estate planning and estate administration services provided by our members. The Code has enabled the IPW to ensure that professional competency for new and existing members is maintained, and where things go wrong, a rigorous consumer complaints process is available, which includes a range of sanctions for non-complying members. To date, those sanctions have yet to be applied. Adoption of the Code has enabled the IPW to improve and enhance the standards of advice and service available to the consumer from our members.

Motorcodes

Peace of Mind for Motorists

Motor Codes is the government-backed, self-regulatory body for the motor industry. Our voluntary membership of over 7500 garages is committed to maintaining high standards of consumer protection and advice.



Peace of mind for motorists

The organisation was established by the UK motor industry in 2008 and is supported by 99.7% of motor manufacturers. We operate three codes of conduct which are delivered in partnership with CTSI.

The New Car Code, Vehicle Warranty Products Code and the Service and Repair Code aim to promote and safeguard the interests of motorists by helping them identify better businesses and warranty providers committed to delivering first-class customer service.

Our call handlers receive over 14,000 consumer calls annually and in 2014 recovered an estimated £2 million for consumers. The advice line operates as an advocate for both the consumer and the service provider. We mediate to ensure that both sides are aware of their rights and are supported through a structured complaints procedure.

All calls are handled by a Motor Codes Case Officer, so users of the service can be assured of a professional, unbiased and reliable service.

Motor Codes subscribers are committed to the Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved codes of practice. Whether consumers are buying a new car or looking for a service or repair job then they can use the Motor Codes Garage Finder which lists our approved subscribers in their local area.

In July 2015 Motor Codes became a (CTSI) Approved Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Provider and was amongst the first in the motor industry to achieve this.

Kevin Parker Head of Communications at Motor Codes says 'In partnership with CTSI we are striving for excellence and have developed an ADR training package that is being implemented across our network to ensure that businesses understand the new legislation and are compliant. He added 'This will help raise consumer satisfaction that will in turn build trust and confidence across the industry'.

RECC

2014 was the Renewable Energy Consumer Code's (RECC) ninth full year of operating as a Consumer Code. In 2006 RECC had a handful of members. Today it represents over 3,800 companies installing small-scale renewable energy systems. However, following drops to government incentives in recent years the sector is consolidating.



Renewable systems represent a very significant investment for consumers when compared with other purchase decisions they make. They need plenty of time to scrutinise carefully all the relevant information so as to understand it and be able to compare an offer with other offers they have received. This principle of informed decision making underpins the Code.

RECC has continued its mission to drive up business standards by:

- carrying out in-depth due diligence checks on all those applying to join the Code;
- carrying out frequent audit compliance checks to ensure that all members are complying fully with the Code and Bye-Laws;
- continuing to develop a wide range of guidance, model documents (such as fair contract terms, performance estimates etc.) freely available to members and applicant members;
- continuing to develop its comprehensive online training resource freely available to members and applicant members;
- introducing detailed guidance for members on consumer legislation such as the *Consumer Contracts Regulations 2013*;

- developing an animated video consumer advice video (see <https://www.recc.org.uk/consumers>)

From the Customer Satisfaction Surveys returned to RECC in 2014 61% of consumers rated the way the system was installed as 10/10 and 21% of consumers rated it 9/10 indicating they were satisfied/very satisfied. Only 18% of consumers rated the way the system was installed below 8/10.

Where consumer complaints arise RECC offers a dispute resolution service. 62% of consumer complaints registered with RECC were resolved through in-house mediation, 22% through legally binding independent arbitration and 16% directly between the consumer and member company.

Property Ombudsman

This year The Property Ombudsman (TPO) will celebrate its 25th year of providing redress to the property sector.

Throughout this time TPO's Codes of Practice has played a pivotal role, not just in providing the means to determine whether an estate or letting agent has provided an acceptable service, but in giving agents an ever evolving blueprint to check their day to day activities are consistent with what has become the primary set of industry standards.

TPO's Code of Practice for Residential Estate Agents is followed by an estimated 96% of estate agents trading in the UK, making it the largest code approved by the Consumer Codes Approval Scheme (CCAS). Last year the Ombudsman considered 963 disputes against this Code, making combined awards in excess of £200,000. The average award was £375 and 71% of cases were supported either in whole or in part. This year, the Code will evolve once again to take into account of new practices such as 'Sale by Tender' (buyer pays fee).

TPO's Code of Practice for Residential Letting Agents is the second largest code approved by the CCAS and is followed by an estimated 85% of letting and management agents operating in the UK. In 2014, the Code was used by the Ombudsman to measure agents' service in 1,477 disputes, making combined awards in excess of £490,000. The average award was £525 and 82% of complaints were supported either in whole or in part. Along with the Sales Code, this year will also see the Lettings Code evolve to include obligations with ensure compliance with new legislation such as The Consumer Rights Act and the Deregulation Act.



VBRA

Long before code approval arrived, VBRA's consumer code provided customer access to a conciliation service. It worked, and, aside from changes in personnel over the years, operationally it remained unaltered - on the basis that there was no need to change what was already successful.



Looking back over the period since, first OFT, and then CTSI approval was gained the numbers of conciliation cases has remained numerically stable in each 12 month period and the outcomes have also remained pretty static too.

In the 2014/15 period satisfaction rates for member companies was 97% - the same as the year before (and similar to the years before that).

Member companies are so good at getting jobs right first time and, if anything goes wrong resolving it direct with the customer that in 2014/15, there were only 11 cases that required investigation; of these 6 required the involvement of independent engineers, 4 of which were resolved in favour of the customer, 1 in favour of the member and the remaining 1 on a compromise basis. None required onward referral to arbitration.

The previous year's comparative figures were 12 cases in all (over a longer pro rata period) with a similar percentage outcome in terms of resolution – and it so it goes, back through the years within a few cases each time.

VBRA is fortunate that its members are so customer focussed towards getting it right; that means fewer cases that become an 'issue' which in turn means lots of very satisfied customers!





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