

Green heating and insulation

Update on the standards
landscape

21 February 2024

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Summary

1. Overall, standards bodies have engaged positively with the CMA's [good practice principles](#). However, more still needs to be done to improve levels of consumer protection – particularly to ensure smooth dispute resolution and strong financial protections.
2. It is important that standards bodies continue to push forward with making further changes that are needed to improve their practices. We strongly encourage them to consider:
 - The potential interactions of any changes with the wider standards landscape, to ensure they do not inadvertently lead to further complexity for consumers or unintended consequences for the sector.
 - The design and delivery of any proposed changes, including the ability to scale up changes given the expected expansion of the sector over time.
 - Early and ongoing evaluation to ensure that any changes have been implemented effectively and are delivering good outcomes for consumers.
3. We recognise standards bodies alone cannot address all the concerns the CMA identified in its [2023 report](#). We therefore reiterate our call on UK government to consider:
 - Carrying out a holistic review of the standards landscape to look at how it could be simplified and protections further improved; and
 - Making business participation in approved Alternative Dispute Resolution schemes mandatory across the sector to help ensure people can uphold their right to redress, regardless of whether they have bought a product through a government funding scheme.

Introduction

4. In May 2023, the CMA published its [findings report](#) following a review of consumer protection in the UK green heating and insulation sector.¹ Our report included an assessment of the landscape of standard bodies that oversee quality and consumer protection standards for member businesses.²

¹ We considered heat pumps, solar products, home insulation, biomass boilers and 'hydrogen capable' boilers.

² The CMA defined 'standards bodies' as organisations that set quality and consumer protection standards, certify or accredit businesses against those standards and monitor compliance by businesses in the green

5. We found that while standards bodies played an important role by providing additional protections and safeguards to those under consumer protection law, and helping to increase consumer trust in the sector, the landscape was not working as effectively as it could, and levels of protection varied in some important areas. In particular:
 - (a) The standards landscape was complex and could be confusing for people to navigate, which could mean that they missed out on the benefits; and
 - (b) Some aspects of protections – such as the levels and robustness of standards (including compliance monitoring processes), complaints management processes and financial protections – needed to be strengthened to safeguard consumers more effectively.
6. We also identified emerging gaps in protection for ‘able to pay’ consumers who self-funded their purchase and were not eligible for government funding – as the businesses they use are not required to belong to a standards body.
7. To help address these concerns, the CMA published a set of [good practice principles](#) for standards bodies. We called on standards bodies to review their practices against these principles and, where necessary, implement any changes to meet them.
8. We also recognised that standards bodies alone cannot address all the issues we identified. We therefore set out several steers to UK government where improvements to the standards landscape are likely to require regulatory or legislative change.
9. This update sets out progress made in the standards landscape and next steps following our report.

Progress by standards bodies

Overview

10. Following our report, we have engaged constructively with several standards bodies to help take forward our good practice principles, including:
 - (a) The Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) – in July 2023 the [CMA responded](#) to MCS’s consultation on its proposed changes. We welcomed MCS’s proposals to make improvements in transparency, consistency,

heating and insulation sector. Standards bodies ensure that accredited businesses are competent to carry out the work, treat their customers fairly, and provide mechanisms for people to seek redress if things go wrong.

and compliance monitoring. We also set out several considerations to inform MCS's approach, to help ensure good outcomes for consumers through a high level of consumer protection. In October 2023 MCS published its [response to the consultation](#), setting out the scheme changes that will be taken forward, following a transition period, in Summer 2024. We welcome MCS's intention to meet the CMA's good practice principles through the planned changes.³

(b) We are aware that changes have been made and/or are being considered by TrustMark, the CTSI-approved Consumer Codes (the Home Insulation and Energy Systems Quality Assured Contractors Scheme (HIES) and the Renewable Energy Consumer Code (RECC)), the Competent Persons Scheme, and by some certification bodies. We consider these as part of our progress update, below.

(c) We also welcome the UK Accreditation Service's (UKAS) engagement with the certification bodies it accredits on our good practice principles.⁴

11. Overall, standards bodies have engaged openly and positively with the CMA, for example, sharing gap analyses and action plans,⁵ and highlighting changes they have made, are planning to make, or are considering.
12. This is a promising start and we welcome actions to align practices with our good practice principles, but more still needs to be done in some areas – we consider this further in the next section. It is important that standards bodies keep up the momentum and continue to push forward with implementing further changes as needed.

Assessment of progress against the good practice principles

13. While we have not audited standards bodies' self-assessments of their existing practices against the good practice principles, these self-assessments have informed our understanding of progress made. We also recognise that:

³ See Annex B of [MCS's response to its consultation on proposed changes to the scheme](#).

⁴ UKAS has also advised that it has increased its oversight of some certification bodies it accredits to put more emphasis on the key consumer protection requirements of the relevant schemes they belong to.

⁵ Several standards bodies have carried out gap analyses to self-assess and cross-check their practices against the good practice principles, which they have shared with the CMA. In some instances, standards bodies have also published their gap analyses – eg the Installation Assurance Authority ([IAA](#)) and NAPIT (in 'The Competent Person 2023' magazine, Issue 3).

- The extent to which each standards body needs to make changes will depend on how far their existing practices already meet the good practice principles; and
 - Each standards body is different and there may be different ways of meeting the principles, and the pace of changes will also vary depending on their complexity and other factors.
14. In assessing progress against the good practice principles, we have considered the main areas of concern highlighted in our findings report. This update summarises the progress made in these areas by key standards bodies.

Principle 1: Effective promotion

Standards bodies to actively promote their activities to help ensure consumers understand their scope and purpose and the benefits of using a member business.

15. Our findings report highlighted that people generally have a poor understanding of what standards bodies are and what they do and might only become aware of them (and visit the relevant websites) if things go wrong.
16. Some standards bodies told us they have reviewed and made, or are making, improvements to their consumer-facing materials. This includes clearer statements of the benefits of using accredited businesses. For example:
- HIES has been working with the Plain English Society to make its consumer materials clearer, supported by more consumer-experience driven communications (for example, answering common issues/problems);
 - The Installation Assurance Authority (IAA) has produced a ‘key facts’ document covering the benefits of IAA certification and guarantees for its consumer-facing webpages, and is planning to promote new consumer-facing materials;
 - TrustMark has implemented a new communication platform and refreshed the information on its website with an overview of the process to follow when hiring a tradesperson; and
 - NAPIT is making information about its consumer protections more prominent on consumer facing materials, including its website.

17. We welcome steps taken to improve the clarity of information for consumers on websites. However, we continue to have concerns about levels of consumer awareness and understanding, reinforced by recent surveys:
- A Citizens Advice commissioned survey found that standards bodies were some of the least common sources used by people looking for information when installing green heating technologies;⁶ and
 - A consumer survey commissioned by Trading Standards Scotland found that awareness of standards bodies amongst adults in Scotland was very low at no more than 6% for a single body.⁷
18. Although we recognise that standards bodies have limited marketing budgets, we believe more can be done to raise people’s awareness of the benefits of using accredited businesses. **We therefore encourage standards bodies to:**
- **Regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of their existing promotional activities, to identify new opportunities, channels, partnerships, and innovative approaches for engaging consumers; and**
 - **Consider how best they can reach digitally excluded and other vulnerable customers.**⁸
19. Other stakeholders, including consumer advice bodies, industry and governments can also play a role in promoting the benefits of using accredited businesses. The CMA has produced a [Consumer Guide](#) and [short video](#) for people buying and installing green heating products to understand their key rights and protections. Trading Standards Scotland [launched a campaign](#) in August 2023 (supported by Home Energy Scotland and funded by Consumer Scotland) which included advice on how to find trusted traders.

Principle 2: Robust vetting and monitoring

Standards bodies to conduct robust compliance checks on applicants and, on an ongoing basis, their members, to ensure they meet (and continue to meet) requirements.

⁶ Citizens Advice, [Home Safe, Giving consumers confidence to install low carbon technologies](#), December 2023. Online survey of homeowners in England and Wales who had looked into installing low carbon technologies in their home in the last year, YouGov, 4-18 August 2023.

⁷ The ScotPulse survey, conducted in September 2023, found that 2% of survey respondents said that they were aware of MCS, 5% said they were aware of RECC, and 6% said they were aware of HIES.

⁸ The CMA’s findings report found that consumers who are ‘digitally disadvantaged’ may struggle to identify available options and to make well-informed decisions about green heating and insulation products.

Risk-based compliance monitoring

20. Our findings report highlighted considerable variation in the approach by standards bodies to the onsite inspection of work, including the extent to which they were driven by a risk assessment.
21. We support the aim of risk-based models to ensure that greater focus is on higher-risk members. It is important that risk assessments are informed by a comprehensive and holistic set of 'risk factors' – and we welcome examples of changes we have seen to reflect this approach:
 - MCS plans to move to a risk-based compliance assessment model that is more focused on gathering evidence of a certified business's 'delivered quality' on-site. As part of this, each business' risk rating will be determined as a function of a series of risk indicators applied consistently across the scheme, irrespective of the business' choice of certification body; and
 - HIES now conducts assessments using a wider range of risk factors and considers these holistically in an overall risk assessment.
22. For risk-based models to be effective, standards bodies should ensure they have sufficient capacity and capability to carry out effective monitoring of members' compliance with (a) technical competence standards; and (b) consumer protection requirements. In particular, standards bodies need to have a sufficient number of suitably trained staff, assessors and inspectors with the required expertise and experience.⁹ This is especially important as the green heating and insulation sector is expected to grow.
23. **We encourage standards bodies to regularly review their risk-based models to ensure they are sufficiently robust, including in relation to:**
 - **The minimum volume and frequency of onsite inspections and other monitoring;¹⁰ and**
 - **The range of risk factors that are used to inform the overall risk ratings for member businesses.**

⁹ The CMA's 2023 findings report noted the challenges faced by some standards bodies in recruiting assessors with the required experience and knowledge.

¹⁰ We recognise that the level of monitoring carried out by a standards body will likely have an impact on resourcing and costs.

Use of customer feedback

24. Our findings report highlighted that some standards bodies were not always collecting customer feedback as part of their monitoring practices. Such feedback can provide important insights into member businesses' activities.
25. We therefore welcome the steps taken by some standards bodies to make better, or more, use of tools and techniques that draw on consumer experiences to inform their compliance monitoring. This should supplement other sources of intelligence, such as consumer complaints. For example:
 - IAA plans to expand its customer surveys to cover every onsite visit (mid or post-installation);
 - MCS plans to expand post-installation customer contacts to every customer (which will include checking their experience of the certified business' sales practices), irrespective of whether they use a government scheme; and
 - NAPIT is working with the National Consumer Federation to consider how to make better use of consumer feedback when issuing Building Regulations Compliance Certificates.
26. It is important that standards bodies also consider how they can capture customer feedback to help identify problems that may only come to light after the installation – for example, through further follow-up contact with customers.

Compliance training and support

27. Some standards bodies have also told us they have expanded, or are planning to expand, the training and support to members to help them comply with their consumer protection obligations. For example:
 - RECC has updated [guidance](#) to help members understand their obligations when in contact with consumers in vulnerable circumstances or with additional needs, for example due to poor levels of literacy, visual impairment, or mental health conditions; and
 - IAA has provided additional consumer law information and links for members on its website.
28. We welcome such changes. It is important that training and support is made as accessible as possible to members, many of whom are SMEs.

Principle 3: Smooth dispute resolution

Standards bodies to actively oversee and assist consumer complaints and dispute resolution to make the process as straightforward as possible and to help parties reach a resolution in a timely manner.

29. Our findings report highlighted that the complaints process was generally confusing for consumers, with no simple route to raise complaints. This made it hard for people to know how or to whom they should complain.
30. We welcome the steps some standards bodies have taken, or are planning to take, to assist complainants and make it easier for consumers to navigate the complaints process. For example:
- MCS is introducing a centralised complaints management system with support to consumers (through an assigned case manager and a single MCS point of contact);
 - TrustMark has introduced an [online reporting form](#) for consumers to initiate a complaint against a Trustmark registered business, which TrustMark will then facilitate through the relevant Scheme Provider.¹¹ This gives consumers an additional reporting channel for initiating complaints against a registered business. TrustMark is also looking at developing its channels (for example, videos and animations) to improve consumers' understanding of the dispute resolution process;
 - NAPIT plans to create a simplified summary of its complaints process to help consumer understanding; and
 - UKAS is engaging with those certification bodies it accredits on how they manage and engage with vulnerable consumers as part of their complaints processes, including the need to consider non-physical vulnerabilities such as neurodiversity.
31. However, we remain concerned that the dispute resolution process is complex and the key risk we identified in our report – of consumers facing inconsistent outcomes or multiple investigations into the same issue where standards bodies have overlapping responsibilities – continues.¹² **We therefore strongly encourage standards bodies to ensure:**

¹¹ TrustMark does not investigate individual consumer complaints itself.

¹² For example, where a business is a member of MCS (via a certification body), a Consumer Code, TrustMark and a Competent Person Scheme, it can still be difficult for a consumer to know how to navigate the process, who is in charge, etc.

- **They have effective mechanisms in place that provide consistent, quick and positive outcomes for consumers; and**
 - **There are clear and accessible communications to consumers about who is responsible for investigating their complaint.**
32. We also encourage the sector to consider having a single oversight body for complaints management (as recommended in our findings report).

Principle 4: Effective use of sanctions

Standards bodies to ensure that any potential non-compliance is investigated and dealt with as effectively, impartially and quickly as possible. Where appropriate, a sanction decision will be communicated to consumers.

Communicating sanction decisions to consumers

33. Our findings report highlighted that the level of communication by standards bodies to consumers about their sanction decisions was low.
34. We welcome the steps some standards bodies have taken, or are considering, to improve how they communicate to consumers where a business has had its membership terminated. For example:
- RECC has changed its bye-laws and now publishes membership terminations on its website;
 - HIES is considering publishing details of members whose membership was terminated for serious misconduct, assessed on a case-by-case basis; and
 - TrustMark is considering how to better communicate when and how businesses are removed from the scheme.
35. While there has been some progress, there remains considerable variation in how, and the extent to which, standards bodies communicate their sanctions decisions. It is especially important that standards bodies are transparent about members they have expelled for serious non-compliance, given those businesses can continue to engage with 'able to pay' consumers. Greater transparency will help to ensure that consumers can make an informed decision before choosing to use a business, as well as helping to deter other businesses from poor practices.
36. **We therefore encourage all standards bodies to make public the names of member businesses who have been expelled (in particular, where**

serious non-compliance has been found), other than in exceptional circumstances where this is deemed not to be in the public interest or there are specific legal reasons not to do so. Standards bodies may wish to seek legal advice on a case-by-case basis where publication may raise specific legal concerns.

Holding sanctioned businesses to account

37. Some standards bodies have also told us they are planning to strengthen, or enhance, their provisions to ensure that businesses whose certification has been withdrawn remain responsible for their obligations to consumers. For example:

- NAPIT plans to require members to comply with the decision of an Alternative Dispute Resolution scheme even when they are no longer certified;¹³ and
- MCS plans to introduce a legally binding agreement to hold businesses to account when it has evidence of consumer detriment, regardless of whether a business is still trading as MCS certified.

38. We welcome these changes, which should help to ensure that former members are held to account and honour their consumer obligations. However, it is important that standards bodies can effectively enforce such provisions where a business refuses to remedy a problem, to ensure that consumers are not unfairly penalised.

Principle 5: Strong financial protections

Standards bodies to ensure that consumer deposits and guarantees are effectively protected and the terms of these protections are made clear to consumers.

39. Our findings report highlighted that some financial protections, such as insurance-backed guarantees (IBGs),¹⁴ can be limited in scope and contain important caveats and exclusions that consumers may not expect. We were also concerned that consumers may be unaware that IBGs only apply if a member business ceases to trade and do not help consumers in other

¹³ NAPIT's scheme rules already include responsibilities that remain in place even when the member business is no longer certified, but it has identified that its scheme rules could go further.

¹⁴ Some standards bodies require member businesses to provide an IBG, which is an insurance policy that covers the original workmanship guarantee provided by the business. If the business is no longer trading, a consumer can make a claim under the IBG for any defects/problems relating to workmanship.

circumstances such as where the member refuses to remedy a problem or no longer belongs to the standards body.

40. In this context, we welcome the steps taken by some standards bodies to look at ways to strengthen financial protections in the sector. For example:
- IAA has introduced a [Microgeneration Guarantee](#) for MCS-certified businesses, valid six years from the date of the installation. Should there be a failure in workmanship or design of specified MCS measures, and the installer is unable or unwilling to fix it, the IAA – subject to terms and conditions – will put things right without charge. The Guarantee is available to IAA certificated member businesses and members of other MCS certification bodies;
 - [MCS is considering](#) a discretionary ‘fund of last resort’ to cover the cost of remediation of a customer's installation if (a) a contractor is unable or unwilling to complete the remediation work deemed necessary, and (b) all other financial protections have been exhausted;
 - TrustMark is exploring options for strengthening financial protections for consumers, in partnership with other organisations. It plans to announce changes later in 2024 as they are delivered.¹⁵ As part of this, it is developing proposals to establish an independent Protect Panel to help drive a more consistent approach to financial protection requirements (as well as other consumer protection requirements) across the sector; and
 - The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) is planning to review the ‘Conditions of Authorisation’ for Competent Persons Schemes in 2024, which will include looking at financial protection requirements.¹⁶
41. Standards bodies should continue to review their financial protection mechanisms to ensure they are fit for purpose, and make any changes needed to address gaps in existing protections. In doing so, it is important that they have regard to how any proposed changes – for example, in relation to ‘funds of last resort’ or equivalent options – would interact with financial protections provided by other standards bodies, to avoid the risk of duplication

¹⁵ The CMA's findings report also encouraged standards bodies that were part of the TrustMark scheme to submit their financial protections for review and approval by TrustMark's independent Financial Oversight Panel. The Panel provides a register of ‘approved’ financial protection mechanisms for use within the TrustMark scheme.

¹⁶ Health and Safety Executive (HSE), [Building Safety Regulator Strategic Plan 2023-26](#), November 2023. The BSR in England is part of the HSE. The Conditions of Authorisation for Competent Person Schemes requires the scheme operator to ensure consumers are provided with appropriate financial protection to put work to dwellings right, where the original installer cannot do so (because they are no longer trading). Financial protection must be provided for a minimum of six years from the date of completion for work to dwellings.

and confusion for businesses who are members of multiple bodies, or of consumers falling through the gaps.

42. **We encourage standards bodies to also take account of the following to help ensure the effective design and delivery of financial protections:**¹⁷

- **There are clear governance arrangements in place to ensure the ongoing financial stability of the financial protection, including for example, how any fund would be protected if the operator were to fail;**
- **The scope of the financial protection is clearly explained to consumers, including any exemptions, requirements or limits to coverage, and there is a clear claims process for consumers and rights of appeal where a claim has been rejected; and**
- **There are mechanisms in place to mitigate the risk that some consumers are left without any recourse where a member business is unwilling, or unable, to resolve problems.**

43. To enable the green heating and insulation sector to grow, it is also important that financial protection mechanisms are sustainable and do not add significant financial burdens which might put off new entrants into the sector.

Considerations for standards bodies when making further changes

44. We also encourage standards bodies to take a holistic approach and consider the following broad factors to inform further changes, to help maximise their effectiveness and ensure good outcomes for consumers.

Potential interactions of changes with the wider landscape and risk of unintended consequences

45. There are numerous standards bodies with different remits and a business may be a member of several bodies concurrently.

46. It is therefore important that standards bodies consider the interactions with the wider landscape of any changes they make to their schemes – we have highlighted complaints management and financial protections as of particular

¹⁷ See also the [CMA's response to MCS's consultation on changes to its scheme](#) (at paragraphs 50-51).

note.¹⁸ Otherwise, there is a real risk that changes inadvertently lead to further complexity for consumers or unintended consequences for the sector.

The design and delivery of any proposed changes

47. It is important that standards bodies carefully consider the design and delivery (and associated risks) of their proposals, and the practical implications around implementation. In particular, it will be critical that any proposed changes are forward-looking and standards bodies factor in their ability to scale up changes in the longer-term given the expected expansion of the sector over time. This includes, for example, ensuring that any proposed changes are sustainable and that they have sufficient resource and technical expertise to effectively deliver them.
48. To help mitigate some of the potential design and delivery risks, there is likely to be considerable value in standards bodies testing or piloting any proposed (and more substantive) changes to help ensure their effectiveness, prior to full implementation.

Early and ongoing evaluation

49. As well as implementing changes to improve their practices, it is important that there is early and ongoing evaluation to ensure that changes have been implemented effectively, and that there is evidence that they are delivering good outcomes for consumers.
50. There is also likely to be significant benefit in standards bodies submitting their practices to periodic review/audit by an independent third party as part of a holistic evaluation approach, to ensure their effectiveness. We encourage standards bodies to consider mechanisms to ensure accountability.¹⁹

Working with UK government

51. We welcome the changes made to date in the standards landscape. However, we also recognise that standards bodies alone cannot deliver all the changes needed to address the concerns set out in our findings report, some of which are likely to require regulatory or legislative change.

¹⁸ Standards bodies might also wish to consider and, where necessary, seek advice on the nature and extent of any potential implications for competition arising from their proposed changes.

¹⁹ For example, MCS plans to set up an independent Consumer Protections Challenge Panel to have oversight over the new MCS consumer protections.

52. As set out in our findings report, **we think there would be significant benefit in UK government considering carrying out a broader, holistic review of the standards landscape to look at how it could be simplified and protections further improved, informed by the CMA’s and others’ work in this area.**²⁰ This is especially important given the sector is expected to grow and become more important to consumers, businesses and the wider UK economy over time.
53. We also remain concerned that as the sector grows, ‘able to pay’ consumers (ie people who fully self-fund their purchase, rather than using government funding) are at risk of having lesser protections. This is because the businesses they use are only required to belong to a standards body if they operate through a government funding scheme. In particular, able to pay consumers may have fewer options for pursuing complaints if something goes wrong and accessing alternative dispute resolution.²¹ **We propose that UK government consider making participation in approved ADR schemes mandatory for businesses across the sector to help ensure people can uphold their right to redress, regardless of whether they have bought a product through a government funding scheme.**²²
54. We will continue to engage with UK government to progress our steers, to help further strengthen consumer protections in the sector.

Conclusion and next steps

55. Standards bodies play a key role in protecting consumers and increasing trust in the sector. We welcome the actions taken by standards bodies to improve and align their practices with our good practice principles.
56. This is a promising start, but we think more still needs to be done. Throughout this update we have highlighted particular areas that we encourage standards bodies to focus on going forward, including to:

²⁰ Citizens Advice and Which? have supported the CMA’s call for the UK Government to conduct a holistic review of the current standards landscape. See Citizens Advice report ‘[Home Safe, Giving consumers confidence to install low carbon technologies](#)’ (December 2023), and Which? policy research paper ‘[Empowering homeowners to insulate their homes through improved awareness and information](#)’ (September 2023).

²¹ Most standards bodies offer consumers access to an approved ADR scheme when the consumer and member business have failed to resolve a dispute themselves and need the input of a third party. ADR is a process that enables disputes between a consumer and business to be settled through an independent mechanism such as adjudication, mediation or conciliation, outside the court system.

²² Citizens Advice and Which? have also recommended that Government should mandate that all businesses in the sector participate in an ADR scheme. See Citizens Advice report ‘[Home Safe, Giving consumers confidence to install low carbon technologies](#)’ (December 2023), and [Which? article](#) on the home improvements sector (June 2023).

- Further raise consumer awareness of standards bodies and the benefits of using accredited businesses;
 - Improve the transparency of sanctions against member businesses for serious non-compliance;
 - Ensure consistent outcomes for consumers who raise complaints about a member business; and
 - Further strengthen financial protections.
57. We also encourage any standards bodies who have not already done so to review their practices against the good practice principles, and to publish their assessments and planned actions.
58. It is important that standards bodies keep up the momentum and continue to push forward with implementing any further changes that are needed. This is critical to improve levels of protection for consumers so that consumers get good outcomes in this important sector. It will also help to build people's trust, which will help enable the transition to innovative green heating solutions as part of achieving Net Zero.
59. The CMA remains committed to consumer protection in the green heating and insulation sector. We will continue to take forward follow-up work from our findings report; in particular, to finalise [compliance advice](#) for businesses marketing green heating and insulation products to consumers, which we consulted on in December 2023. Our [investigation](#) into Worcester Bosch's marketing of its 'hydrogen-blend ready' boilers and engagement with other boiler businesses that we sent warning letters to is also ongoing. We will also continue to work with UK government to take forward our steers to help improve consumer protection in the sector.