

Audit process

A qualified Chartered Trading Standards Institute Practitioner from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) carried out a audit. The audit was based on a telephone conversation with relevant staff and examining associated documents.

The accredited business application process, including checks on prospective businesses

Accredited business auditing content and processes

Terms and conditions

Marketing and advertising by accredited businesses

Sanctions for non-compliant accredited businesses

Customer service provision (including support for vulnerable consumers)

The consumer complaints process (ADR)

Customer satisfaction

Training provided by Code members to meet their obligations

Any outstanding issues from the 2022 a

Existing accredited business inspections/audit

Following the Covid pandemic the audit process is now carried out through by self-assessments. On-site audits were carried out on a sample of accredited businesses by the AA throughout the year however none were carried out in 2023.

TMO are currently working with some manufacturers to audit and assess their retail networks. These are expected to be completed by the end of the year with a corresponding increase in numbers of audits.

Audits are now achieved by a self-assessment process aligned with the member renewal date. If an intervention is considered appropriate this is normally done by a face-to-face visit to resolve any issues.

Businesses accredited to the Code sign compliance documents on an annual basis. Code members are also requested to attend at least one Committee meeting a year, which is an additional way to monitor industry trends, best practice and the outlook for the sector.

870 remote audits were completed, which equates to 25% of Code members.

The annual self-assessment has now been aligned with the annual renewal documentation.

Accreditation withdrawal and sanctions for non-compliant accredited businesses

Accredited businesses receive penalty points for instances where they fail to comply with the adjudication or compliance processes. Some of these points may be awarded to the business for a relatively minor infringement, for example failing to respond to an adjudicator within the allotted time period due to an absence from the business. In such instances, an adjudicator can opt to remove penalty points should they feel the mistake to be genuine and a one-off.

The system issues a written warning one for 30 points, written warning two for 60 points, and at 80

Compliance Assessment Panel (ICAP) who will consider the appropriate sanction, which could be a further warning, extended-suspension or expulsion from the Code.

Suspension can be applied at any time at the discretion of the TMO if the business refuses to co-operate and can result in automatic suspension.

At the time of writing, there were 102 members in the disciplinary process.

Marketing and advertising by accredited businesses

All new businesses accredited to the vehicle sales code receive a Welcome Pack, which includes the essential information they need to know about the Code of Practice as well as The Motor Ombudsman documentation that they require in order to be compliant.

E-Training is available to all code members through webinars and a virtual classroom. Subjects include ADR, Consumer Rights, Distance Sales and GDPR. All modules are specifically tailored to the motor industry.

TMO sends out email newsletters (Engage) and tailored emails informing businesses about the latest news from The Motor Ombudsman, industry insights and

Customer service provisions

GDPR requirements have been addressed, as have the changes required by the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) 2015.

TMO has developed e-based training modules for accredited businesses on key legislation such as the Consumer Rights Act and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) regulations. These courses have proved to be a popular and effective way of educating staff on core legislation affecting the industry without the need for staff to physically attend a classroom. As the training has been developed directly with TMO (in partnership with CTSI), it is automotive specific, which only adds greater value to its content for users.

TMO has also developed a policy to help assist vulnerable customers. This has been discussed at Committee meetings and shared as an example of best practice to be adopted. If necessary, this can be tailored by businesses to assist staff in dealing with customer queries.

Away from fixed or planned training that TMO operates, their Information Line provides information to consumers and businesses alike on their legal rights or obligations. It Customer Service Advisors who have all undergone automotive specific legal training.

On a similar note, TMO Adjudicators and in-house Ombudsman regularly provide

TMO is certified as an approved ADR body under the ADR Regulations and has been since the Regulations came into force in 2015 and is a member of the Ombudsman association.

Customer satisfaction and feedback

Consumers can leave feedback about their car purchasing experience on the TMO website. They simply need to find the dealer they would like to review and complete a short survey. This has been operating since 2018 and TMO are exploring ways to obtain greater levels of customer feedback including prize draws for completed feedback.

A summary of all aggregated customer feedback is reported on, on a yearly basis, and is presented within ICAP and Annual Reports.

Conversations have been held between TMO and various manufacturers over obtaining copies of their own Customer Satisfaction Intelligence (CSI) data. Restrictions under the GDPR have slowed progress in this regard but TMO remains confident of obtaining this information in due course.

Conclusions

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