

National Body Repair Association (NBRA)

Consumer Codes Audit

22 September 2022

Background information

The National Body Repair Association (NBRA) is a trade association representing businesses that repair, maintain and service motor vehicles. The association runs a code of practice which was approved by the Consumer Codes Approval Board (CCAB) in July 2017.

The NBRA acts as an organisation that deals mainly with consumer to business transactions in the non-commercial vehicle sector. Its Code of Practice for Consumers migrated from the VBRA (Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association) in July 2017 and now also includes the members of the National Association of Bodyshops. The NBRA operates independently under the umbrella of the Retail Motor Industry Federation.

The NBRA currently has 632 members. Of these, 48 are supplier members and five training centers who are solely business to business contracts and, of the remainder of these, 295 are signed up to comply with the Consumer Code of Practice.

Audit Process

A qualified trading standards professional from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) completed an onsite audit. The audit focused on the following areas:

1. Member Application Process including checks carried out on prospective businesses
2. Existing Member Inspections/Audit content and process, including general compliance with the code, staff training and dealing with consumer complaints
3. Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses
4. Marketing and Advertising by Member Businesses
5. Terms and conditions and other pre-contractual information, including cancellation rights, deposits, delivery times, guarantees and warranties
6. Consumer complaints process, including ADR
7. Customer satisfaction and feedback, information/complaints from enforcement agencies, and how this information is used to develop and improve the code

Audit Summary

The audit examined:

- The application process and auditing of new members
- The records of audit of existing members
- Consumer review processes
- Former member's websites

Member Application Process

In the year 1 March 2021 – 28 February 2022, 41 new members joined the association, 20 have joined as supplier members or training centers where the Code is not applicable. There were seven successful applications to join the Code.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, NBRA started to offer remote sign up to membership, this remains the primary method of recruitment. Visits for recruitment are now infrequent and are only likely to happen within the locality of the Business Development Manager, who is based in Kent. This situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future due to budget issues.

The process remains that the prospective member is issued with a copy of the Code and all the information relating to the criteria of the Code. If NBRA judges that the applicant meets the criteria, they complete the audit remotely with them at the point of application. Any corrective actions are advised.

If an audit cannot be completed at sign up, up to six weeks later, the member is contacted by phone and the audit completed.

During a recruitment, NBRA check whether the member meets the Code criteria, or inform them on what is required. They also verify that they are trading legally and legitimately with appropriate tooling and equipment.

For the purposes of this audit, two new member's documents were provided and were found to be in accordance with NBRA's procedures. One of the new members websites was displaying both the NBRA and CCAS logo, however, the other one did not.

Recommendation:

All new members should be contacted soon after joining to establish if they are displaying the NBRA and CCAS logo, and if not, why not. The consumer protection offered by membership of the Code is diminished if membership is not promoted.

Comment:

By accepting the majority of applications remotely, with no face-to-face contact, it must be considered whether a sufficient relationship is built with the business and the intentions of new members are assessed sufficiently to further the aims of the Code and enhance consumer protection. The efficacy of remote assessment should be fully assessed as a matter of urgency.

Existing Member Inspections/Audit

Under Schedule 3 of the Code Monitoring process, the NBRA committed to auditing one third of Code members each year. Due to the pandemic 2020 – 2021, 106 audits were conducted remotely. In 2021-2022, 106 audits were conducted, still remotely.

Update:

One of the NBRA field area managers was made redundant in 2020 and others have been moved to other roles.

Comment:

As mentioned in the comment above, the efficacy of remote assessment should be fully reviewed now that all COVID restrictions have been lifted. As NBRA have decided to carry out the majority of audits remotely, then an increase of members audited may be appropriate along with a commitment given to a minimum number of on-site audits per year. Other methods of assessment can be utilised to strengthen remote audits e.g., video calls, photographs.

Two completed audit records were checked from 2021 – 2022. Both were found to be completed in accordance with NBRA processes, however, neither of these member's websites was displaying the NBRA or CCAS logo.

Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses

No businesses have been expelled from the NBRA scheme in the last year. It is noted that there has still never been a need for the panel to convene. The process in place for raising formal disciplinary procedures against members was reviewed and complies with the requirements of the Consumer Code Approval Scheme.

Between March 2021 and February 2022, 50 members left the NBRA, of which 17 were members of the Code. For the audit, the websites of all the members who have left within the last year were checked to see if the NBRA or CCAS website were erroneously displayed. The NBRA and CCAS logos were still present on three of the websites.

Recommendation:

The members that have left should be contacted immediately and instructed to remove all references to the NBRA and CTSI.

Marketing and Advertising by Member Businesses

The majority of NBRA members get most of their business via insurance companies, consequently, they are not, in general, chosen by the consumer to repair their vehicle, therefore, the advertising of membership of NBRA and of the Code is not checked at audit. Members are required, however, to have a copy of the Code available to consumers and staff.

Members who are recruited as a premium member and complete an audit are given a sign showing the NBRA/CCAS logo free of charge. A core member who is recruited and completes an audit is given the option to purchase a sign. Whether a sign is purchased or given, all members who have successfully completed an audit are given electronic copies of the logo and advised to use these on paperwork and websites. This is not enforceable or a mandatory requirement of NBRA Membership. NBRA display the CCAS logo against each applicable member.

Terms and Conditions and other Pre-Contractual Information

NBRA provides standard terms and conditions for members to use, but it is not obligatory. The standard terms and conditions are produced in-house and are clear, reasonable and comply with the requirements of the core criteria. No changes have been made to the standard terms and conditions since the last audit.

NBRA provides its members with discounted expert services and have developed video recording technology which is geo-located and time stamped to assist in resolving complaints with consumers.

Consumer Complaints Process

NBRA operates free conciliation and provides access to low-cost arbitration services via National Conciliation Service.

In the period March 2021 - February 2022, two cases were referred for conciliation. One case was settled through a compromise, in the other an agreement was not reached.

Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

The NBRA relaunched their website in March 2021 and the planned member review and member profiles will not be added anytime in the foreseeable future due to costs. NBRA have collated information from Google reviews and other online review applications from their 295 Code approved members. The data was mainly sourced through Google and uses the first page of results only. NBRA plan to continue to use this method to gather reviews on their members as it generates substantial review data. The individual results are published in the NBRA Annual Report. Any business with a score of 3.5 or less or with any review that contains allegations of worrying conduct will receive a call from the director of NBRA.

Conclusions

It is commendable that, due to reduced numbers of staff available for the task, NBRA are developing new methods of assessing that its members are treating customers fairly. However, these measures need to be formally incorporated into the NBRA's processes to ensure that the measures are effective and continue to satisfy the principles of the Code Criteria.