

Trust My Garage Consumer Code Audit - 25 January 2023

Background information

The Trust My Garage (TMG) Code of Practice is sponsored by the Independent Garages Association (IGA) and administered by Retail Motor Industry Standards & Certification (RMISC). First established in 1976, it has been revised over the years to reflect new legislation and the implementation of best practice identified from feedback from both members and customers.

On becoming members, the respective businesses make a commitment to the consumer regarding the provision of service, warranty, and repair of Vehicles. Membership of the Code is open only to Independent Garage Association members.

RMISC was established by the RMIF as a subsidiary company to provide certification services and is a completely independent entity. Because of this independence, RMISC has been appointed by IGA to administer the code.

Audit Process

An on-site audit was carried out by a Trading Standards Practitioner from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute on 25 January 2023.

The audit focused on the following areas:-

- Member application process, including checks carried out on prospective members
- Member auditing-content and process, including general compliance with the code, staff training and dealing with consumer complaints
- Sanctions for non-compliant members
- Marketing and advertising by member businesses - terms & conditions and pre-contractual information, including cancellation rights, deposits, delivery times and guarantees and warranties
- Customer service provisions, including support for vulnerable consumers
- Consumer complaints process, including ADR
- Customer satisfaction, information / complaints from enforcement agencies, and how this information is used to develop and improve the code

Audit Summary

The audit examined: -

- The initial application process
- Re-audits
- The process for businesses who resign as a member
- The monitoring processes

Member Application Process

TMG currently has 2,927 members. There have been 242 applications since the last audit.

IGA members can apply to join the TMG scheme, free of charge. Applicants are subjected to an on-site audit prior to being approved. Any issues raised during the audit are discussed with the garage owner/manager and noted on the audit form. The owner/manager and auditor then both sign off the audit form including any agreed recommendations.

Two applications were reviewed during the audit along with the first audit for each site. The applications were from KMAC Automotive Ltd and Riverside Garage Limited, their first audit scores were both a creditable 95%.

Any applicant whose first audit receives a score of less than 85% will be advised of the areas for improvement and is revisited after 12 weeks. If the business scores less than 85% again, then another 12-week period is allowed to enable them to address the issues. If the improvements are not implemented and the score remains below 85% then the application is refused.

Existing Member Inspections/Audit

TMG's monitoring commitment is to re-audit members on a five-year cycle. It is reported that in the previous 12-month period a total of 511 audits were completed. 176 audits of new members and 335 re-audits were carried out.

Across all 511 audits, 505 audits scored between 85% and 100% with just six failed audits with scores of below 85%.

The most common non-compliance found is lack of a Complaints Log. This tends to be most commonly missing within smaller businesses. The owner/manager is likely to have received and responded to the complaint him/herself and, therefore, would not find a log useful. TMG have produced a document that the auditors supply to members to be used as a Complaints Log.

Recommendation:

Consideration to be given to auditors checking Google reviews of garages prior to visits.

Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses

There is a process for the removal of non-compliant members, but TMG has not had cause to use the procedure this year.

Since the last audit, 201 members have left the scheme. When members leave the scheme, they receive a letter closing their membership, which includes instructions on removing all references to TMG and CTSI. A month after their membership has ceased, the company's online presence is checked to ensure that any references to TMG and CTSI have been removed. In addition, the TMG Field Team are made aware of all members that have left and will visit them if they are in the area, to check that all references to TMG have been removed. TMG have never needed to escalate this issue once a site visit has taken place.

Since the last audit, details of the offences potentially committed by not removing the TMG and CTSI logos has been added to the exit letters.

The websites for two members, who left in April 2022, were checked and no evidence of the TMG or CTSI logos were found.

Marketing and Advertising by Member Businesses

Member businesses are provided with information about the Code when they first become a member. They are given information allowing them to inform their staff of their obligations under the Code along with an information video and downloadable resources from the website. In the members' area of the TMG website, there are suggestions for marketing material that can be downloaded. Telephone advice is available via the member's helpline, with face-to-face assistance via the auditing team.

TMG maintain their evaluations of members online presence. A monthly random sample of five members are chosen and their marketing of the Code is reviewed.

The five member's websites and/or Facebook/Twitter pages are checked for the following:-

- ADR text and details
- CTSI logo
- TMG logo
- Any consumer facing advice

Following the review, if it is felt that the member could benefit from some advice then an email is sent with the TMG Marketing Toolkit attached and includes links to the TMG website where the member can find tips on improving their online presence. The data acquired via this review is used to formulate policy and provide relevant advice to all members as appropriate.

The latest spreadsheet, which was last updated December 2022, was supplied for the audit.

Best Practice:

As consumers increasingly rely on online reviews of businesses, it is essential that Codes monitor the online presence of their members.

Terms and Conditions and other Pre-Contractual Information

Model terms and conditions are available on the Members Only section of the TMG website. Terms and conditions are assessed at audit and if deemed not suitable it is suggested that members use the model document.

Customer Service Provisions

No update provided here.

Consumer Complaints Process

All complaints raised under the code go directly to the National Conciliation Service (NCS), a CTSI Approved ADR provider.

In the last year, 59 complaints have been handled for TMG by NCS. Of the 59 complaints, one was found in favour of the consumer, 19 reached a compromise and the rest were found in favour of the garage.

Observation:

TMG still struggle to get the information that they would like from NCS. NCS have committed to modernise their reporting systems and provide more information. This should be reviewed at the next audit.

Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

TMG provide stickers to be attached to invoices and posters to display in public areas encouraging customers to leave reviews on the TMG website. The online review form contains five yes/no questions and one multiple choice question. The aggregate of the answers creates a star rating for the garage on the TMG website. Since the last audit 621 reviews have been left. All feedback is verified to ensure it has come from actual customers.

In September 2022, TMG launched an online booking system for consumers to find a garage close them who are TMG members and to make appointments for servicing. This system also displays website details, opening times and any reviews left of members. This system has been a huge success for TMG with website visits increasing from 6,769 per month prior to launch, up to 28,196 in December 2022. This is a free service for TMG members and benefits consumer.

Best Practice:

From the results of the online reviews, it is reassuring to note overall satisfaction remains high at 94.04% and 95.17% of respondents said that they would use the garage again.

Conclusions

TMG continues to carry out its functions as a Code sponsor. The introduction of an online search and booking facility has enhanced the benefits of membership and given the Code more visibility to consumers.

TMG expressed concern about the ongoing review by the Department of Transport into the timing of the first MOT and their Call for Evidence relating to changes to MOT testing. TMG plans to submit its own response to the consultation and, in addition, will collate responses from their members for submission.