
National Body Repair Association (NBRA) Consumer Codes Audit July 2023

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 718 members. Of these, 62 are supplier members and four training centers, who are solely business to business contracts and of the remainder, 247 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 a desktop 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 last year, there have been 96 applications to join the association, 10 have joined as supplier members or training centers where the Code is not applicable. There were three successful applications to join the Code.

Following the coronavirus pandemic, NBRA offers remote sign up to membership, and this remains the primary method of recruitment. Visits for recruitment are now infrequent.

NBRA require that any prospective member is operating legally and legitimately. They must have the appropriate insurance in place and the correct equipment to carry out the work that they claim to be doing. NBRA believe that the investment required to set up and run a body-shop is a strong indication of the quality of the applicant. Some businesses join NBRA and then, with their support and guidance, become suitable businesses for Code members.

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 member did not. Following the recommendation in the last audit, all new members are now contacted within two weeks of joining (previously six weeks) to ensure that they have received and are using the logos. Some members are precluded from displaying the NBRA and CTSI Logos under commercial agreements with their principal work providers. NBRA continue to strongly encourage the display of relevant, correctly positioned signage.

Existing Member Inspections/Audit

NBRA operates a system of checks prior to acceptance into membership and periodically thereafter. Following the affects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Field Team was reduced and no longer focuses on member visits, therefore, all audits have been completed remotely for this period and the intention is that they will continue to do so. Initial and ongoing compliance discussions emphasise the obligations relating to the code approval. In the period 1 March 2022 to 28 February 2023, 176 audits were conducted, this represents 71% of members.

Five completed audit records were checked and found to be completed in accordance with NBRA processes.

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 2022 and February 2023, 85 members left the NBRA, of which 45 were members of the Code. For the audit, the details of three members who have left within the last year were requested and their websites were checked to see if the NBRA or CCAS website were erroneously displayed. The NBRA and CCAS logos were still present on one of the websites. The removal letter submitted is not dated so the period that has elapsed since its receipt is unknown.

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, but members are required 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 their 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 2022 - February 2023, just one case was referred for conciliation.

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.

Since 2020, NBRA have collated information from Google (and other online review applications) from their 250 Code approved members, a total of 15,900 reviews. The data was mainly sourced through Google and uses the first page of results only. The average rating found is 4.6 (out of 5). 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 even with low numbers of staff available for the task, NBRA are sustaining their methods of assessing that its members are treating customers fairly.