
Glass and Glazing Federation

Audit 14 June 2017

Background information

The Glass & Glazing Federation was founded on the 13th January 1977 by the change of name of the Flat Glass Association (founded 1st March 1964) to the Glass and Glazing Federation and the incorporation of the Insulating Glass, Safety Glazing and Glass Benders association thus amalgamating the representative bodies of the major parts of the industry at that time.

Since its formation the Glass & Glazing Federation has greatly increased its work on behalf of the industry in technical and trading standards, in marketing and communications including representations to the Government and the media, in industrial relations and in training and health and safety much work is conducted at a European and International level. The range of interests covered today includes every aspect of the glass and window industries along with solar applications.

In the last decade the GGF has set up and acquired several companies to strengthen its position for members' benefit.

Today the GGF is the voice of the industry and has unrivalled authority with the long term support and commitment of a high value membership that includes practically all the key players in all sectors of the industry. On behalf of its members, the GGF lobbies local and national Government, influencing policies and legislation to ensure that its members are considered in all the wider issues that could affect their businesses.

The Federation also represents its members in industrial relations, technical forums, in training and in health and safety at local, national and international levels. The range of issues covered by the GGF is far and wide and includes almost every aspect of the glass and window industries along with solar applications. Many GGF Members constantly supply their technical knowledge to the GGF's Technical Department which significantly adds to the technical expertise and publications that have become a touchstone for the industry.

The GGF has achieved accreditation to the Chartered Trading Standards Institute Consumer Codes Approval Scheme. The code covers the activities of code members with respect to all aspects of their business with consumers, either direct or through sales showrooms in respect of home improvement products including but not limited to glazing, replacement windows and doors conservatories, roofline, driveways, flat roofing plus renewable energy products.

Audit Process

A qualified chartered 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 members
2. Member auditing - content and process (including general compliance with the code, staff training and dealing with consumer complaints)
3. Sanctions for non-compliant members
4. Marketing and advertising by member businesses - Terms and conditions and pre contractual information (including cancellation rights, deposits, delivery times and guarantees and warranties)
5. Customer service provisions (including support for vulnerable consumers).
6. Consumer complaints process (including ADR)
7. Customer satisfaction, information/complaints from enforcement agencies, and how this information is used to develop and improve the code

Audit Summary

Member Application Process

There are currently around 450 members of the GGF, of which 290 sell direct to consumers and as such signed up to the GGF Consumer Code of Practice.

Companies must have been trading for three years to be accepted as a GGF member, this prevents 'phoenix' companies becoming members. Companies must supply three 'trade' references and their last two years' audited accounts. They also supply a copy of their consumer contract terms and conditions which are vetted by the Director of Home Improvement and Membership. A 'model' set of terms and conditions is available to members. The Head of Finance has to approve accounts to ensure a member company is financially sound and a 'fit and proper' company. When all these essential requirements have been passed, a site visit to the prospective member is made by a Regional Executive or Technical Officer who completes a written audit. If everything is satisfactory, then the member company is sent all relevant codes and procedures and record forms and signs to agree compliance.

There is also a "Promotion Programme" scheme for potential new members who have not yet been trading for three years which gives them access to technical, health and safety advice and 'trading standards' advice, there is a basic application procedure. However they cannot use any of the GGF's logos or state they are a GGF member during the three years. After three years they can transition to a full member going through exactly the same process described above.

Existing Member Inspections/Audit

There is a comprehensive very well organised and controlled procedure for monitoring members. There is a questionnaire of 55 questions. Each year members are asked the same 9 high priority questions with the other lower priority questions completed over a 4 year period. Guidance has been given to members on correct completion of the questionnaire. Members are 'chased' to ensure they complete and return the forms, ultimately they are told they will receive a site visit and be charged if they fail to complete and return on time. Site visits are carried out on at least 10% of members each year based on a random targeted schedule using the questionnaires to suggest which members need to be visited.

Members who have not completed the year 1 questionnaire do not receive the GGF CTSI logos file for use on their marketing and sales materials until the questionnaire is satisfactorily completed.

There are records for training on vulnerable consumers, and canvassing and particular focus being on customers' premises more than 4 hours, it was reported that no company recorded having a salesman on site for over 4 hours.

The results of all audits are scored and recorded on a database/spreadsheet enabling reports to be run.

Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses

Any breaches of the code are subject to a range of sanctions within the code. The Glazing Executive administer glazing issues and the Home Improvement Executive for other home improvements. The relevant Executive can decide on warnings, a requirement to change modify or establish an operating practice as a condition of continued membership, suspension or expulsion.

One member has recently been expelled for breaches of the code.

Marketing and Advertising by Member Businesses

The code requires marketing material to be in plain English and in compliance with the guidelines issued by the GGF Marketing and Communications Department.

Desktop and website audits are used as part on the monitoring to ensure compliance with the guide and use of logos.

In addition the GGF is very active in promotion of the code sending out approximately 100 press releases a year. Members are sent a monthly 'Newswire' e-zine summarising marketing activity.

Terms and Conditions and other Pre-Contractual Information

Members term and conditions are vetted as part of the initial application process to ensure they both comply with the code and comply with relevant 'consumer' legislation and there are no unfair restrictive terms. A model set of terms and conditions is available for members to use if they wish.

Customer Service Provisions

There is a comprehensive website 'myglazing.com' which is a consumer facing website providing a wealth of information giving various technical guides, copies of codes and how to find a GGF member.

GGF have a stand-alone procedure for vulnerable consumers and all members have to provide training to their staff and maintain records (which are part of the audit process).

Consumer Complaints Process

There is a complaints process in place which was satisfactory. All complaints go to the Conciliation Officer. Approximately 3000 enquiries are received a year but this includes all consumer queries, condensation problems (not a fault of windows themselves) and compensation claims. Compensation is not within the remit of the GGF Conciliation Scheme. The 3000 enquiries is therefore reduced to approximately 300 complaints. The focus on the conciliation process is about fulfilment of the contract. When the complaint is accepted there are strict time limits to be adhered to. If the complaint remains after 56 days then the consumer can opt for the binding ADR scheme operated by TGAS (The Glazing Arbitration Scheme). The complainant pays £100 and the member £395 again there are strict time limits.

Complaint statistics are used to help produce updated consumer guides a recent example is revised and updated information to consumers on acoustic glazing.

2 complaints per £1,000,000 turnover is considered a trigger point for intervention.

Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

Statistics are gathered from the My Local Services consumer review website but these are not providing sufficient numbers to draw any real conclusions for improvements. GGF are active members of CTSI consumer reference group and are looking to move to a new facility provided by Reference Line to get feedback from consumers to help continuous improvement of the scheme.

Conclusions

GGF are fulfilling their obligations as a code sponsor and their members are compliant with the CCAS core criteria and the GGF Consumer Code of Practice, it is a comprehensive very well run scheme with continuous improvement at its heart.

Best Practice: The member monitoring process was very comprehensive and efficient and the scoring and follow up process ensured that all members completed their desk top audits

Best Practice: My Glazing.com was an excellent example of providing useful and helpful information to consumers prior to and after making a purchase

Recommendation: No recommendations were made.