

Trust My Garage Consumer Code

18 January 2022

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.

Retail Motor Industry Standards and Certification (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

A desk-top audit was carried out by a Trading Standards Practitioner from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute on 18 January 2022.

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 2888 members. There have been 231 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 Nailsworth MOT Centre Ltd and North Street Motors (Stow) Limited, their first audit scores were 87.5% and 94.17% respectively.

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 227 audits of new members and 255 re-audits (this figure includes the re-auditing of new members) were carried out.

Across all 482 audits, there were 85 with 100% score; 143 scoring between 95% - 100%; 153 scoring between 90% - 95%; 93 scoring between 85% - 90%; with just 8 failed audits with scores of below 85%.

Re-audits are carried out by a different team because the Administrators believe it provides better oversight and moderation of the audit process. Issues identified during re-audit are discussed with both teams to ensure ongoing audit consistency.

TMG are still catching up with audits across all programmes due to staff absences and members not working to full capacity caused by Covid 19. It is therefore unlikely that they will meet the requirement of almost 600 audits this year. TMG are looking to expand their field team to have more members of staff in place to carry out

audits. They hope to be able to report changes that will help them to meet the Code requirements at the next audit.

Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses

There 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 102 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 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.

Details of three members who have left since the last audit were provided. The closure letters were found to be detailed as above and their websites were checked for reference to reference to TMG or CTSI. The website for Brooklands Motor Centre Leeds still displays the CTSI logo despite ceasing membership of the Code in April 2021. TMG have indicated that they will contact the business ASAP and require that they remove the logo from their website. Further TMG state that they will toughen up the process of checking that logos have been removed from websites etc.

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 is then used to formulate policy and provide relevant advice to all members.

The latest spreadsheet (last updated Dec 2021) was supplied for the audit. These evaluations carried on during the Covid pandemic lockdowns.

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 they use the model document.

Customer Service Provisions

No update provided here.

Consumer Complaints Process

All complaints under the code go directly to the National Conciliation Service. TMG had not had an update from the NCS team at the time of the audit. The following information was subsequently submitted post audit:

NCS processed 64 IGA disputes via the ADR service during 2021. Of those, 12 were cases carried forward from 2020. Out of the 64 cases, 37 were subscribed to Trust My Garage. However, two of these have since lapsed. There were no disciplinary cases for this period.

Recommendation:

It is unacceptable that TMG had received no details of cases referred to National Conciliation Service since Nov 2019. If this continues, TMG should review their ADR provider.

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 1512 reviews have been left.

All feedback is verified to ensure it has come from actual customers and is able to be produced into Management Information. Members can publicise this feedback service by publishing adverts in relevant publications.

TMG are in the process of building a new website which will provide an online booking system allowing customers to reserve appointments with TMG members as well as continuing to have the feedback function.

Best Practice

From the results of the online reviews it is reassuring to note overall satisfaction remains high at 87% and 96.5% of respondents said that they would use the garage again.

Conclusions

TMG continues to carry out its functions as a Code sponsor. However its lack of awareness of any customer complaints is worrying and must be resolved as soon as possible.