

FOUR NATIONS PRIORITIES

2021-2022

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Introduction



In February 2020, representatives of the trading standards profession from all four nations of the UK met to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the profession. They agreed that having a set of shared priorities for next year, that everyone within the profession can support, would be helpful. CTSI hopes that having an agreed narrative around priorities will provide opportunities for advocacy with central, devolved and local government and be a powerful basis for articulating the importance of trading standards work with external parties.

These are different to the intelligence led operational priorities established via regional and national trading standards groups and provide cross cutting themes that can apply across the whole trading standards profession, both inside and outside local government. However we hope that they will also be useful for colleagues in local authorities to include in local and regional business planning where appropriate.

Beginning in June 2020, virtual consultations were held with heads of service and trading standards professionals from authorities in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland and with consumer, business and local government organisations.

It is recognised that 2020 has been a year of immense challenge for trading standards professionals, businesses and consumers because of the impacts of COVID-19 and EU Exit. The aftermath of these will still be being felt in 2021/22 and are reflected in the priorities.

The four priorities agreed across all four nations for 2021/2022 are:-

i. PROTECTING THOSE AT RISK OF THE HIGHEST HARM FROM THE WORST IMPACTS OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP INCLUDING:



Scams and doorstep crime – educating consumers on how to protect themselves from scams using local and national networks, preventing doorstep crime and taking action against fraudsters and scammers.

Housing and rents – with so many people living in insecure or unsuitable homes Trading Standards plays a critical role to ensure consumers are getting a fair deal and ensuring tenants rights are protected by working with estate agents, letting agents and landlords and taking action against rogue agents and landlords where necessary.

Unfair terms – working with consumer protection partners and business to keep contracts fair and ensure consumer rights are upheld.

Pricing and metrology – ensuring consumers have access to clear and accurate pricing information, get what they pay for and can make proper value for money choices, especially on essentials like food and fuel.

Educating consumers who may be seeking cheaper products due to financial hardship and turn to troublesome websites or marketplaces where they may be scammed or sold dangerous goods.

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ii. IDENTIFYING AND REMOVING DANGEROUS OR HARMFUL PRODUCTS FROM THE MARKET :



Intercepting and removing from the market dangerous or defective goods, including counterfeits e.g. PPE, Covid "cures" and claims, dangerous electronics and consumer goods, illicit alcohol and tobacco.

Ensuring food standards and quality to avoid illness and even death caused by undeclared allergens or misdescribed and poor quality food.

Preventing crises like BSE by assuring the integrity of the food chain from animal feed to final product.

Taking enforcement action against those who do not comply with the law, including formal action for the most serious or persistent breaches.



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iii. SUPPORTING BUSINESSES TO DIVERSIFY AND ADAPT TO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES



Working with businesses to help them diversify with new business models such as the shift to online transactions.

Helping businesses to get different products and services on the market.

Ensuring a level playing field by ensuring all businesses comply with trading standards laws.



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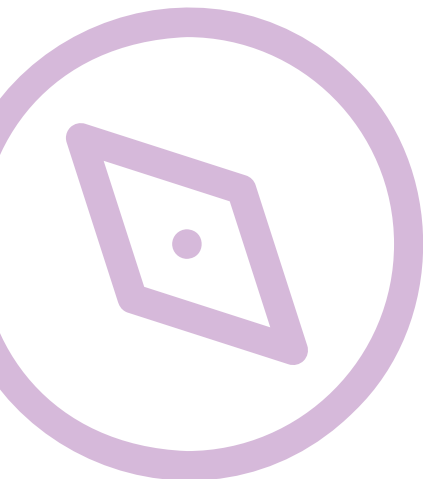
iv. HELPING BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE UK'S DEPARTURE FROM THE EU



Providing advice to business on new legislation and requirements especially in relation to the import and export of goods.

Ensuring compliance with, and enforcement of new rules e.g. ensuring products are properly marked.

Working with partners to ensure consumers have the right information about their rights and obligations.




Sustainability of the profession



To effectively deliver on the priorities, the trading standards service needs to be resourced effectively and be sustainable. Figures from recent CTSI Workforce Surveys combined with stakeholder feedback shows this is a key concern for everyone within the profession.

	Problem	Solution
1 Funding	Trading standards service budgets have fallen by 50% and 60% between 2009 and 2018.	Working together with Government to sustain funding and future proof the profession.
2 Staffing	Staffing levels have dropped by 56% between 2009 and 2017. The average number of FTEs in each local authority is 13 but some services in smaller areas may only have 2 or 3 people.	Alongside resourcing, trading standards must continue to support each other by working together to share capabilities, experience and best practice.
3 Diversity	Workforce surveys show an ageing profession and there is limited diversity in the workforce.	Examining the recruitment, support, training and qualifications available to help create new opportunities and attract a diverse range of applicants.
4 Competence	Trading Standards across the UK enforce over 250 pieces of legislation. Only 44% of services reported that they had the expertise to comprehensively cover the duties placed on their services. Even fewer services (38%) have the skills within the team to tackle e-crime.	Professional competence training, guidance and support covering the full range of functions that is reflective of the needs of the ever-growing online trading economy.

Additional Context across the four nations



Whilst the key priorities were common across all four nations, Trading Standards in each nation operates in a different context with differing governmental, regional, geographical or sectoral agendas which influence other priorities and ways of working. Examples of this are outlined briefly below.

Northern Ireland

Trading Standards in Northern Ireland is part of the civil service and is responsible to the Northern Ireland Government. Some "trading standards" functions, such as product safety and food standards, are not delivered by the Trading Standards Service in Northern Ireland. The Trading Standards Service in NI provides consumer advice through its Consumerline telephone helpline service. The Northern Ireland Protocol will be a key challenge in terms of imports and exports of goods both to Great Britain and Ireland. Under the Protocol, metrology in the country will remain aligned to the EU regime and may diverge from the rest of Great Britain. There are no separate centrally-funded support structures, such as National Trading Standards, in relation to high-profile issues like illegal money lending, mass-marketed scams or e-crime.

Wales

Welsh Government has a range of Trading Standards functions devolved to it. Trading Standards is engaged in partnerships such as the Wales Illegal Tobacco Programme, the Animal Health Partnership Delivery Programme and the Food Standards & Feed Hygiene programme. As with Scotland, Wales has introduced a system of Minimum Unit Pricing in respect of the sale of alcohol in an attempt to discourage the purchase of cheap alcoholic products with a high alcoholic volume. An agreement was reached with the Welsh Government that Trading Standards would undertake the inspection work on its behalf. There is a heavy dependency on agriculture, small food producers and tourism which can often be intertwined, hence the key importance of work relating to animal health as well as feed. The Welsh Local Government Association does not direct Trading Standards work but its political priorities will be important to Welsh local authorities and there is a very positive relationship with Trading Standards Wales.

Scotland

Scottish Government (SG) has a limited range of devolved Trading Standards functions. Scottish Trading Standards is engaged with the SG, contributing to evolving Scotland specific legislation and issues such as the Consumer Scotland Act, the associated Scottish Consumer Network and the SG's proposed Scams Strategy. Scottish Trading Standards also plays a key role contributing to the SG health agenda around tobacco/nicotine vapour products legislation, including business registration and Age Restricted Sales. There are particular geographical challenges in delivering services in areas such as the Highlands and islands, as illustrated by issues like internet connectivity and parcel delivery surcharges, and across Scotland there is a need to support tourism and the rural economy. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities does not direct Trading Standards work but its political priorities will be important to Scottish local authorities and there is a positive working relationship.

England

There are almost 150 local authorities across England that deliver Trading Standards. They range from very large County Council areas to very small urban unitary and London Boroughs. As you would expect, local priorities will vary depending on the geography and demography in each area. In all authorities there will be partnerships and priorities emanating from a range of devolved responsibilities such as combined authorities, elected mayors, elected Police and Crime Commissioners and Directors of Public Health. The Local Government Association does not direct Trading Standards work but its political priorities will be important to English local authorities and there is a positive working relationship with local authorities in England.



This is the first time this piece of work has been carried out and it will be used to inform CTSI policy. CTSI has gained invaluable insights into the focus of the trading standards profession across the Four Nations and would like to thank all participants.

CTSI will consider, in consultation with members and stakeholders, whether or not this report should be refreshed in future.



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