

Trust My Garage

Consumer Code Audit

19th March 2024

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

A desk-top audit was carried out by a Trading Standards Practitioner from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute on 19th March 2024.

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 2,998 members. There have been 231 applications since the last audit.

IGA members can apply to join the TMG scheme, free of charge. At application stage, TMG carry out an on-site Code audit, the process checks are the questions asked during the audit.

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 Harewood Garage and Harry Hooper Limited, their first audit scores were both above 90%.

Comment:

The websites of both new applicants were checked and neither showed the TMG (or CTSI) logo.

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 726 audits were completed, 225 were audits of new members and 501 re-audits were carried out.

Across all 726 audits, 698 audits scored between 85% and 100% with just 28 failed audits with scores of below 85%.

The most common non-compliance is that the garage does not carry out a Quality Control check on at least 5% of the completed jobs, with an average score of 84.41%.

In previous years the most common non-compliance related to the lack of a complaints log. Following the last audit TMG produced a document that the auditors use to supply to members to use as a complaints log. Compliance is now increased to 95.88%.

Following the recommendation made at the last audit, auditors now carry out checks of Google reviews prior to the audit. However, this is not recorded on the audit report.

Recommendation:

Auditors now carry out checks of Google reviews prior to the audit. This should be recorded on the audit report.

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, 129 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 three members, who have left since the last audit, were checked and no evidence of the TMG or CTSI logos were found.

Marketing and Advertising by Member Businesses

When members join they are provided with information outlining best practice in making use of their logo and the CTSI logo. Members are provided with information to inform their staff of their obligations under the Code, along with access to 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 in March 2024, 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

In previous years the most common non-compliance related to the lack of a complaints log. Following the last audit TMG produced a document that the auditors use to supply to members to use as a complaints log. Compliance is now increased to 95.88%.

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, 99 complaints have been handled for TMG by NCS. Of the 99 complaints, 4 were found in favour of the consumer, 15 closed as a compromise and the rest were found in favour of the garage.

Previously TMG struggled to get the information that they would like from NCS. TMG now feel like they have more control with NCS and have a named contact who speaks directly with 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 5 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.

When customers enter feedback, the information is collated and stored automatically in the system. The TMG admin staff can then produce statistics allowing Management Information to be produced.

To reduce the risk of non-legitimate feedback being added to the system all feedback is reviewed. Anything which appears to be suspect is flagged and an investigation carried out with the member. If they are deemed to be a genuine customer, the feedback remains, otherwise it is removed.

For the 12 months to 29/02/2024:

In response to the question -

“How Important is it to you that the garage is a Trust My Garage member”

73% of respondents answered Important, Very Important or “I will only use a Trust My Garage Member” - this is the same as last year’s figure.

“Are you satisfied that the garage only carried out necessary or quoted work”

98% responded YES - this is an increase from last year’s figure.

“Are you likely to use this garage again”

98% responded YES, an increase of almost 3% from last year.

Conclusions

TMG continues to carry out its functions as a Code sponsor. They have put a lot of resource into the collection and analysis of customer feedback and this demonstrates that consumers are content with the service received from TMG Members.

Note: Upon a review of the Code, some of the legislation is out of date.