

## PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND PROMOTING RENEWABLES

### Welcome to the Summer Newsletter

Dear RECC Members,

Welcome to the summer edition of the Newsletter!

In this edition you will find a summary of RECC's response to MCS's consultation on Scheme Development. You will also find details of the new Renewable Adjudication Service launched by RECC on 3 July.

In addition, you can read summaries of a report from the Competition and Markets Authority on consumer protection in the green heating sector and of a trading standards Business Guide into small-scale renewable energy systems.

Finally, RECC's 2022 Annual Report, published last week, contains a wealth of information about all our activities last year. I hope you enjoy it.

Best wishes for the rest of the summer,

Virginia Graham, Editor.



### Oxon Energy wins Installer of the Year Award

Oxon Energy Ltd won RECC sponsored Installer of the Year Award at the British Renewable Energy Awards ceremony held in June. The company was particularly praised for its clear commitment to high standards of consumer protection.

At the 18th Awards, several companies, projects and individuals received awards for their contributions to the renewable energy sector. The Association for Renewable Energy and Clean Technology (REA), who hosted the event, announced winners for various areas within the renewables sector in the UK.

REA Chief Executive, Dr Nina Skorupska, CBE stressed the importance of this awards night:

“Despite the industry facing a challenging year, the judges have chosen those who are resilient in the drive towards net zero. With the brilliant work showcased, we are truly inspired and energised to keep pushing forward towards a low carbon future.”

For a full list of categories and winners: <https://www.r-e-a.net/winners-on-receiving-their-awards-at-the-british-renewable-energy-awards-2023/>



Rebecca Robbins, Director of Consumer Codes, presenting the Installer of the Year Award to Oxon Energy

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## RECC calls on MCS to reverse tick box consumer plan



In its response to MCS's consultation on Scheme Redevelopment, RECC has called for enhanced consumer protection standards in the small-scale renewable sector as a matter of urgency.

RECC particularly questions MCS's proposal to substitute approved Consumer Code Membership with a tick-box Consumer Duty lacking in any detail or substance. RECC believes that the proposal will make MCS certification easier and quicker for unscrupulous contractors.

Virginia Graham, RECC Chief Executive said:

"If the UK is to have a robust and sustainable small-scale renewables sector there must be a balance between contractors' and consumers' interests. MCS' proposals will skew the balance in favour of contractors to the detriment of consumers, removing the balance carefully constructed since 2008."

RECC further questions MCS's proposal to set up a Fund of Last Resort. All MCS-certified contractors would be required to contribute to this Fund yet it is not at all clear who would benefit, on what basis or who would decide. The lack of transparency and regulation surrounding such a Fund would not provide consumers with the confidence to commit large, unprotected sums of their own money to purchase a small-scale renewable energy system.

While RECC has generally welcomed MCS's proposals to strengthen the relationship between MCS and the Certification Bodies, we warned that contractors could be confused as to which is their primary MCS interface and contact point. We also pointed out that, with some 20 Certification Bodies linked to MCS, there will be a complex landscape which will be easy for contractors to game and hard for consumers to navigate.

You can read a copy of the response [here](#):

## Call for stronger consumer protection in green heating sector

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has published its report on consumer protection in the green heating and insulation sector. It sees improving consumer confidence in this important sector as crucial to achieving the UK Government's commitment to reach net zero by 2050.

The report highlights the difficulties people face in finding the right information to inform their decisions about which products to buy and in identifying trustworthy businesses.

CMA found that some businesses were making misleading claims about products and/or exaggerating the environmental benefits they would bring (known as 'greenwashing'). Price information was frequently unclear.

CMA also identified a lack of consistency among the various standards bodies as well as those responsible for overseeing quality and consumer protection. As a result, they found that consumers could miss out on benefits they are entitled to or have difficulty in knowing how best to make a complaint.

Those consumers who funded their purchase themselves rather than through a Government-funded grant scheme were found to be less well protected since they were not required to use a certified installer and a member of a Consumer Code.

CMA has now published a consumer guide to help explain the processes involved in purchasing green heating and insulation products and set out good practice principles for standards bodies to follow. It is going to look further into the problems of misleading and greenwashing claims.

You can read the full report here:

**CMA Consumer Protection Final Report here:** [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6475f1685f7bb7000c7fa176/Consumer\\_protection\\_in\\_the\\_green\\_heating\\_and\\_insulation\\_sector\\_-\\_Final\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6475f1685f7bb7000c7fa176/Consumer_protection_in_the_green_heating_and_insulation_sector_-_Final_report.pdf)

**Good practice Principles Guidelines:** [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6475d124103ca60013039600/A\\_Good\\_practice\\_principles\\_for\\_standards\\_bodies.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6475d124103ca60013039600/A_Good_practice_principles_for_standards_bodies.pdf)

**Green heating and Insulation Consumer Guide:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/buying-green-heating-and-insulation-products-consumer-guide>



## RECC annual report reveals another year of stellar achievements

RECC's 2022 Annual Report shows that, in another excellent year, RECC membership rose from 2,000 to over 3,000. Among those applying to join, there was a significant increase in the number of applicants wanting to offer solar PV and battery storage products, up from 28% and 20% respectively in 2021 to 75% and 52% in 2022.

The report also shows that the number of installations of energy-saving products carried out by RECC Members rose to 108,000 from just over 70,000 in 2021. The latest figures include a very high number of solar PV combined with battery storage systems.

Members' compliance with the Code was encouragingly high. RECC's Compliance Team, which promotes consumer protection and compliance with the Code, carried out 215 compliance checks on member businesses, 40 desk-based or site-based audits and 121 investigations into suspected breaches of the Code and/or Bye-Laws. In total, 1,642 businesses were monitored in line with our Monitoring Strategy, including the due diligence checks carried out on all applicants.

38 RECC Members initially failed their audits, most commonly for exaggerating the benefits of products on their websites, failing to explain the consumer's right to cancel a contract or not dealing properly with design issues. Of the 121 members who were suspected of breaching the Code or Bye-Laws, 17 had their Code membership terminated.

The Dispute Resolution Team, which provides RECC Members and consumers with an impartial mediation service as well as access to an arbitration service, dealt with 382 complaints. The number of complaints about battery storage products tripled in the year from 28 to 80 in line with the increased number of installations. In total, through RECC's services, some £176,500 was recovered for consumers.

It is encouraging that 96% of RECC Members did not have a complaint registered about them in 2022.

You can find the report here: <https://www.recc.org.uk/scheme/annual-report/2022>

### RECC launches Renewable Adjudication Service

**On 3 July, RECC launched the Renewable Adjudication Service**, the final stage of the dispute resolution process. It is designed to provide a flexible means of resolving a complaint which the parties have been unable to resolve between themselves or using mediation, the first stage of the dispute resolution process.

An independent person, known as an adjudicator, will consider all the evidence and documents submitted by the parties before reaching a decision. RECC members may provide comments on a preliminary decision before it is finalised.

Once a decision is published both sides can review it. If the consumer accepts the decision, it is considered final and binding upon both parties. In this case the consumer can expect the RECC member to comply with it quickly, as the compliance process is robust, timebound and simple.

If the consumer rejects the decision, the option is available to pursue the dispute further through alternative means, such as the courts. However, the decision would have to be made available as part of the evidence.

Head of Dispute Resolution, Abena Asare-Frimpong, said:

"We hope that this will be beneficial to both parties as they will have an opportunity adequately to present their case and express their views during the process."

If you have any questions about the Renewable Adjudication Service, or you would like to know more, please email: [disputeresolution@recc.org.uk](mailto:disputeresolution@recc.org.uk).

<https://www.recc.org.uk/consumers/how-to-complain/independent-arbitration>

### RECC publishes Primary Authority assured model documents

RECC recently agreed a partnership with a new Primary Authority, Surrey County Council (Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards). This replaces our previous partnership with Hampshire County Council.

A Primary Authority partnership is part of a statutory scheme established by the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008. It enables a business to form a legally recognised partnership with a local authority (the 'Primary Authority') to get assured advice about how they can comply most efficiently with regulations. Under a Primary Authority partnership, a co-ordinator is chosen to co-ordinate the relationship between the Primary Authority and a group of businesses.

RECC has been working with the Primary Authority to make sure that our suite of model documents are assured advice. They are tailored to the needs of RECC Members, making it simpler and easier for you to comply with relevant legislation.

RECC members are automatically opted into the regulated group and, by following the advice given, you can be confident you are complying with the law, and protected from enforcement action for the regulatory areas the advice covers.

The cost of participation in the Primary Authority regulated group is included in your annual RECC membership fee.

You can find the model documents in the members area. here. Make sure you are using the up-to-date versions.

<https://www.recc.org.uk/member>



## Consumers signal bright future for heat pumps

A recent survey of domestic heat pump owners and gas boiler owners has revealed that heat pumps are increasing in popularity in the UK.

The survey, carried out by Eunomia Research and Consulting on behalf of Nesta (UK's innovation agency for social good), investigated levels of satisfaction with both types of boiler, the installation process, ease of use and access to information.

Satisfaction with heat pump boilers is now as high as with gas boilers with over 70% of owners saying that they were fairly or very satisfied with all aspects of their heat source. As far as running costs were concerned though, heat pump owners were more satisfied than gas boiler owners (67% vs. 59%).

Although overall satisfaction with installations was high, significantly more heat pump users had experienced problems than gas boiler users (63% vs. 24%). These usually involved disruption to homes and gardens, time delays and issues with controls. Gas boiler users found it easier to find an independent installer or energy company to help them, and their installations were also quicker, taking less than a month compared with one to two months for the installation of heat pump boilers.

When it came to ease of use and control, gas boiler owners were again significantly more satisfied (88% vs. 74%). Those using heat pumps felt less confident, with 22% saying they were not very or not at all confident compared with only 6% of gas boiler users.

The report recommended that clear, impartial information about heat pumps needed to be made more easily accessible. Homeowners should have better advice about using their heat pumps and the time and disruption associated with installations should be reduced.

You can find more details here: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/heat-pumps-a-user-survey/>



## Business Guide for green home improvements

Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) has published a new Business Guide for businesses that install energy-saving measures in people's homes. It explains the consumer protection laws that they should comply with and gives advice on practical matters and best practice policies.

While CTSI acknowledges that many businesses working in the renewable energy, green heating and insulation sector already belong to a trader or approved code scheme, the purpose of this new guide is to provide additional information on legal issues and best practice.

The Guide focuses on the difficulties consumers face in understanding the new products available to them and the associated complex technical data and terminology.

It also underlines the risk of consumers being exploited by unscrupulous and fraudulent traders and being given misleading information about the benefits of particular products without being told about any drawbacks.

The first three parts of the guide cover: how businesses promote their products and services, how businesses engage with consumers before, during and after the purchase and installation of energy-saving measures, and the complaints and redress process if anything goes wrong.

You can access the Business Guide here: <https://www.businesscompanion.info/focus/domestic-energy-saving>

## EVCC discount for RECC members



### CODE FOR HOME CHARGEPOINTS

**RECC Members can join our sister code, EVCC, for just £50 for the first year of membership!**

We know that many RECC Members already install home chargepoints in consumers' homes, often alongside solar PV and battery storage systems. That is why we set up the Electric Vehicle Consumer Code for Home Chargepoints (EVCC) to sit alongside RECC and set out high standards for installers.

#### 5 reasons to join EVCC:

1. Show homeowners you are competent, qualified and reliable, and serious about offering high standards of consumer protection
2. Stand out from your competitors
3. Be listed on the EVCC website and increase your exposure
4. Get assistance with resolving consumer complaints
5. Get access to guidance, training and model documents, making technical and legal compliance straightforward.

You can find more about EVCC, including how to join, here:

<https://www.electric-vehicle.org.uk/installers>