

QA Scheme Support Services

2020 Alternative Dispute Resolution Annual Report

As required by the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015



QA Scheme Support Services owns and operates consumer codes of practice in the home improvement industry. These include:

- **HIES**, the Home Insulation and Energy Systems Quality Assured Contractors Scheme, a Chartered Trading Standards Institute approved code of practice operating in the domestic renewables market
- **DGCOS**, the Double Glazing and Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme
- **HICS**, the Home Improvement Consumer Protection Scheme

All schemes are approved by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute for Alternative Dispute Resolution.

ADR Officials

Adrian Simpson, Director of Policy and Regulatory Affairs

Charlotte Pilkington, Dispute Resolution Manager

Cathryn Wolfenden, Senior Dispute Resolution Officer

Tracy Dilworth, Dispute Resolution Officer

SCHEDULE 5 - Information to be included in an ADR entity's annual activity report – to cover the period 1/8/19 – 1/8/20

- a) The number of domestic disputes and cross-border disputes the ADR entity has received.

457 total complaints across all schemes, there are no cross border complaints (no complaints were taken from 1st April – beginning of July due to COVID-19 affecting business and businesses were not operating so we could not mediate without both parties present) this is the reason for the low complaint volume.

- b) the types of complaints to which the domestic disputes and cross-border disputes relate.

All complaints were domestic (UK consumer to UK business).

- c) A description of any systematic or significant problems that occur frequently and lead to disputes between consumers and traders of which the ADR entity has become aware due to its operations as an ADR entity.

Product fault which makes up 36.4% of the total complaints received in this period.

- d) Any recommendations the ADR entity may have as to how the problems referred to in paragraph (c) could be avoided or resolved in future, in order to raise traders' standards and to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices.

- Problems with products are covered under warranty so consumers can replace products under the warranty. However, we are looking at the reasons why this has ended up as a complaint and we have found it is due to bad communication from installers. After the lockdown, it has proven difficult for installers to source the products as the manufacturers have also closed so there has been a huge backlog of product deliveries. This is why we believe that consumers are complaining.
- Communication with consumers could be a lot better by installers so we do constant work on this giving them feedback and coaching them, for example, advising them of consumer rights and the affects it could have on their business etc.
- We believe that ADR should be mandatory for the home improvement sector.

- e) the number of disputes which the ADR entity has refused to deal with, and percentage share of the grounds set out in paragraph 13 of Schedule 3 on which the ADR entity has declined to consider such disputes;

The only complaints we reject:

- Are either not to do with our member during the period of their membership.
- Where the installer was never a member.
- Where the consumer was actively pursuing legal action or had a legally binding decision made.

As the above happens infrequently no records are kept.

- f) the percentage of alternative dispute resolution procedures which were discontinued for operational reasons and, if known, the reasons for the discontinuation;

During lockdown, we had to work to prevent escalation of complaints as installers were not operational during that period and therefore, we could not mediate. Other than this extraordinary circumstance we have not had to abandon complaints.

- g) the average time taken to resolve domestic disputes and cross-border disputes;

6 days (0 cross-borders)

The average resolution time has been impacted by the period of lockdown. Between 2018 and 2019 the average dispute resolution time was 3.59 days

- h) the rate of compliance, if known, with the outcomes of the alternative dispute resolution procedures;

This is not recorded.

- i) the co-operation, if any, of the ADR entity within any network of ADR entities which facilitates the resolution of cross-border disputes.

We are not part of any network.

SCHEDULE 6 - Information which an ADR entity must communicate to the relevant competent authority every two years – to cover the period 1/8/18 – 1/8/20

- a) the number of disputes received by the ADR entity and the types of complaints to which the disputes related;

1018

Cancellations 65

Certification issues 10

Compensation 25

Customer service issues 228

Failed appointments 5

Finance 12

FIT 18

Generation issues 17

Mis-selling 74

Performance 55

Product 371

Workmanship 138

- b) the percentage share of alternative dispute resolution procedures which were discontinued before an outcome was reached;

None.

- c) the average time taken to resolve the disputes which the ADR entity has received;

6 days.

- d) the rate of compliance, if known, with the outcomes of its alternative dispute resolution procedures;

None.

- e) any recommendations the ADR entity may have as to how any systematic or significant problems that occur frequently and lead to disputes between consumers and traders could be avoided or resolved in future;

We constantly work with our members to improve their communication with consumers.

We also picked up on the fact that two members were having issues with their circuits boards. We have been able to feed that back to the manufacturer, who was unaware, so that they can look at this issue. I believe that it has now been resolved which has prevented further complaints of this nature.

- f) where the ADR entity is a member of any network of ADR entities which facilitates the resolution of cross-border disputes, an assessment of the effectiveness of its co-operation in that network;

None.

- g) where the ADR entity provides training to its ADR officials, details of the training it provides;

ADR colleagues receive on-the-job training including on consumer rights, data protection, treating customers fairly, business process, ADR processes and CTSI ADR requirements.

Some of the team have had training with manufacturers for products such as Air Source Heat Pumps which has included video tutorials on how products are installed. We also developed a professional mediation training course which lasts 2 days. However, we have not yet implemented this as it requires physical presence and COVID-19 has prevented full return to the office. However, we have not had any new employees within our ADR team and therefore the on-the-job training has sufficed and we continue to refresh ourselves with any new legislation relevant to our department such as the new MCS guidelines, TrustMark, the Green Homes Grant Scheme.

- h) an assessment of the effectiveness of an alternative dispute resolution procedure offered by the ADR entity and of possible ways of improving its performance.

Monthly KPI's are produced internally which break down the number of complaints by month, by scheme, by type, by outcome (for example, if resolved in first or second stage ADR), the average days to close and any Ombudsman referrals in that month. This makes it easy to compare month on month performance enabling us to identify any patterns or areas of concern so that we can resolve and prevent future issues of the same nature.