

## **MOTORISTS' FORUM SUB-GROUP – IMPROVING GARAGE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

### **Minutes of meeting 23 May 2012**

#### **Attendees:**

Christopher Macgowan (chair)  
Peter Williams (RAC)  
Bill Duffy (Halfords)  
Paul Everitt (SMMT)  
David Innes (SMTA)  
Edmund King (AA)  
Jay Parmar (BVRLA)  
Sue Robinson (NFDA)  
Steve Scofield (IMI)  
Stuart James (IGA)  
Cathy Jenkins (DfT Observer)  
Jaur Rahman (DfT Secretariat)  
Vicky Waite (DfT Secretariat)

#### **Apologies:**

David Bizley (RAC)  
John Lewis (BVRLA)

### **1. Welcome**

Christopher Macgowan welcomed attendees to the meeting. Peter Williams and Jay Palmer introduced themselves as deputies for David Bizley and John Lewis respectively.

### **2. Approval of minutes of the last meeting**

One minor amendment had been received regarding minutes of the last meeting (Page 4 “a Code of some description” replaced with “a Code with teeth”.) The minutes were approved with the inclusion of the amendment.

Christopher Macgowan proposed that the minutes of meetings should be published on DfT's website to facilitate transparency. There were no objections.

### **3. Actions from the last meeting**

Christopher Macgowan has met with Stuart James individually to discuss the RMI's Trust My Garage scheme as Stuart was unable to attend the last meeting. Vicky Waite has met with representatives of the Good Garage Scheme.

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Status</b>
Action 1	DfT to suggest question areas.	Vicky Waite circulated suggested question areas for motoring organisations to survey their members on 10 May 2012.	closed

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Action 2	Paul Everitt to send name of Citizens Advice representative.	Paul Everitt sent the name of a Citizens Advice representative on 11 May 2012 (Teresa Perchard).	closed
Action 3	Christopher Macgowan to invite Ron Gainsford and Teresa Perchard to join the sub-group.	Vicky Waite has contacted both Teresa Perchard and Ron Gainsford to invite them to join the Sub-Group. Both Ron and Teresa have accepted the invitation and will be attending the sub-group meeting on 22 June.	closed
Action 4	John Lewis to send details of the EU proposal on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).	<p>The EU Commission press release on ADR is available here:</p> <p><a href="http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/1461&amp;format=HTML&amp;aged=0&amp;language=EN&amp;guiLanguage=en">http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/1461&amp;format=HTML&amp;aged=0&amp;language=EN&amp;guiLanguage=en</a></p> <p>The BIS response for call for evidence is available here:</p> <p><a href="http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/consumer-issues/docs/g/12-674-government-response-eu-proposals-alternative-dispute-resolution.pdf">http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/consumer-issues/docs/g/12-674-government-response-eu-proposals-alternative-dispute-resolution.pdf</a></p>	closed
Action 5	Christopher Macgowan to revisit the options at future Sub-Group meetings	Discussed under main agenda for the meeting	Closed
Action 6	Bill Duffy to forward MOT suggestions	Bill Duffy forwarded the suggestions on 24 April.	Closed
Action 7	DfT to schedule future meetings	Meetings scheduled	Closed

## **4. Secretary of State's commitments**

### **1<sup>st</sup> commitment:**

#### **Review MOT data gathered by VOSA further improve transparency**

There was discussion during the course of the meeting (see 3<sup>rd</sup> commitment and 5<sup>th</sup> commitment) regarding transparency of garage data.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Commitment:**

#### **Engage motoring organisations in surveying their members**

Christopher Macgowan outlined the organisations most likely to be able to survey their members quickly. The Institute of Advanced Motorists has offered to survey their members. RAC has made an offer, although they have longer lead in times. AA has a Populus panel up and running. Edmund King said that they get around 20 000 responses each month which are broken down by age, geographic location etc. The survey is conducted by a professional polling organisation. It was agreed that AA was in the best position to carry out a survey of its members within the timescale required, although surveys by other organisations at a later date may also give useful information.

**Action 1:** AA to survey its members.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Commitment:**

#### **Identify and work with organisations able to carry out mystery shopper exercises**

Many of the organisations represented at the Sub-Group said they use mystery shopping within their own business as a business improvement tool. They cited the importance of following up on the results of problems exposed as a result of mystery shopping to drive improvements or “closing the loop”. It was felt that mystery shopping can sometimes be seen as a headline grabbing exercise with little value if “closing the loop” does not happen. There were questions about the aim of mystery shopping. If the aim is to give the consumer greater confidence, then mystery shopping has to be handled with caution as negative headlines can damage confidence and may be misleading. VOSA and to a lesser degree Trading Standards were cited as two organisations who carry out mystery shopping to good effect, and it was thought that consumers might be reassured if they knew more about this type of mystery shopping. It was recognised that in the fleet sector the results of mystery shopping are used to select garage service providers and therefore can have a real impact on service quality.

There was discussion around empowering consumers by giving them accurate information in addition to publicising the results mystery shopping carried out by VOSA and Trading Standards.

Given the cost of mystery shopping it was thought by the Sub-Group that on balance investing in additional mystery shopping is not likely to be a significant driver for improving garage services.

**4<sup>th</sup> commitment:**

This item was noted as complete.

**5<sup>th</sup> commitment:**

**Work with industry and stakeholders to encourage wider adoption of codes**

Christopher Macgowan noted that there are two types of schemes –independent organisations (e.g. The Good Garage Scheme) and those that have external verification (e.g. VBRA which has OFT accreditation). He thought that the role of external validation needed to be seriously considered.

He outlined three main strands in the area of Codes and improving garage customer experience:

- An effective Code
- Qualified staff
- Empowered consumer

In discussion, the ability for customers to express views was added as a fourth strand, although it was noted that this is already a requirement for OFT approval.

It was thought that to be a effective a Code needs to give a good level of consumer protection. For example, consumers actively seek ABTA accredited organisations in the travel industry because they are aware of the level of protection that it gives them.

There was consensus that skills as demonstrated by the ATA are important, as well as on the importance of ADR.

There was some discussion about whether Codes do actually improve performance. Whilst the Sub-Group was not unanimous on this point, Christopher Macgowan pointed out that the Secretary of State had specifically asked them to consider how to encourage the wider adoption of Codes. There was consensus that action of some sort to improve standards in the industry is needed. Some consideration was given to whether there should be mandatory licensing of garages, although it was recognised that this was outside the scope of the Secretary of State's statement and contrary to the government's deregulatory agenda. Christopher Macgowan suggested that the industry may need to give a lead. Cathy Jenkins thought that given Codes are already available, Secretary of State may be looking for more than what already exists. It may be a case of joining up some areas of industry good practice which are already available in order to reduce the case for additional regulation.

There was some discussion about whether a particular Code should be recommended, and the relative merits of different Codes.

Views were expressed around giving consumers greater confidence by setting out criteria which government thinks are important, and giving consumers the opportunity to give "Trip Advisor" style feedback. A comparison was made with OFSTED reports in education which are publicly available and give parents the information on which to base choices. It was suggested that more information about existing audits of garages could be made available.

Christopher Macgowan suggested that there should be three recommendations.

Firstly, that garages should be encouraged to invest in the continual development of their staff in line with ATA and other similar qualifications. Steve Scofield was tasked with crafting a suitable form of words.

**Action 2:** Steve Scofield to craft a form of words in relation to qualifications.

Secondly, that consumers should be encouraged to become familiar with feedback options. Edmund King said that the AA would be willing to help educate consumers. Edmund was tasked with crafting a suitable form of words for this recommendation.

**Action 3:** Edmund King to craft a form of words in relation to consumer feedback.

Thirdly, to improve the consumer experience in relation to MOTs and general servicing garages should be a member of a Code that has independent backing where a consumer has recourse to action. Christopher Macgowan undertook to review this form of words.

**Action 4:** Christopher Macgowan to craft a form of words in relation to Codes.

Paul Everitt thought that the recommendations need to go beyond what is currently available. Both Codes and ATA were born out of the previously threatened OFT “super complaint”. There was discussion around what the recommendations would need to contain for organisations such as Citizens Advice and Trading Standards to be confident that they would bring about step change.

Christopher Macgowan said that the group as a whole should agree all the recommendations if at all possible.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> commitment:**

Measures to make it easier for consumers to give feedback in a transparent way that others can view.

This was closely linked with the discussion above on Codes. Edmund King said that he had researched how formal rating of hotels by AA corresponds with customer ratings on consumer feedback websites. Overall he found that there was a good match. It was agreed that consumer feedback was a useful source of information which helps consumers make decisions about which garage to use and therefore is likely to have an impact on standards.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> commitment:**

MOT certificates to show mileage for last three years; encourage motorists to view online database.

Cathy Jenkins reported this was on target for delivery in November 2012. There was some discussion about whether printing mileage on MOT certificates would “validate” fraudulent mileage clocking where it had occurred. It was thought on balance that the benefit of making the data available on MOT test certificates outweighed the risk.

#### **8<sup>th</sup> commitment:**

Consider adjusting standards for wear and tear

Christopher Macgowan was registered his thanks to the MOT Trade Forum for giving this item their attention. DfT has received a proposal from them which has been circulated to Sub-Group members and which DfT is considering in parallel with any Sub-Group

consideration. Christopher Macgowan thought that the Sub-Group was not the best place to hold detailed discussions about technical standards.

**9<sup>th</sup> commitment:**

Develop a means of measuring consumer confidence over time across all garage services.

It was thought that the RAC Motoring Report would be a good vehicle for tracking long-term trends.

**Action 5:** Peter Williams to find out whether RAC might be willing to include this area in the future.

Edmund King offered to include long-term questions in the AA Populus poll.

Bill Duffy said that Castrol might also be a suitable avenue to explore.

**Action 6:** Bill Duffy to find out whether Castrol would be willing to measure consumer confidence over time over all garage services.

**5. Next Steps**

Christopher Macgowan outlined the process going forwards. The Sub-Group will need to report back to the Motorists Forum meeting on 4 July 2012. The Motorists Forum will then report back to ministers. Therefore the next meeting of the Sub-Group on 22 June 2012 will be the final opportunity to refine the report if it is not possible to agree it in correspondence. Christopher Macgowan will circulate a draft report prior to the meeting and aim to achieve a consensus by correspondence prior to the meeting. If that is not possible, he will convene the meeting to discuss any outstanding issues. He will aim for a consensus report, although will accept a majority report if that is not possible.

**Action 7:** Christopher Macgowan to circulate a draft report prior to the next meeting.

**6. Dates of next meetings:**

The third and final meeting is scheduled for Friday 22 June.