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Consultation reference: URN 10/849 – Meeting the low carbon skills challenge

Consumer Focus campaigns for a fair deal on behalf of consumers. We do this through research, policy, analysis, lobbying and by working with policy makers, providers and others who can make a difference to consumers' lives. We have a special remit to represent the interests of disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers.

This letter sets out Consumer Focus's response to the consultation on meeting the low carbon skills challenge issued by DECC on 31 March 2010.

4. Is our overall analysis of the skills challenges, as outlined in this document, correct?

Consumer Focus wants the Government to place a greater emphasis on the importance of skills development in existing sectors, particularly domestic renovations, the installation of energy efficiency measures and energy advice. Energy efficiency is the most cost effective and durable means to deliver carbon saving, and the Green Deal should boost provision to the 'able-to-pay' sector. This 'pay as you save' approach must maximise savings from energy efficiency measures, rather than rely on revenue from the feed-in tariff and Renewable Heat Incentive. Builders, retailers and glaziers have the potential to boost uptake of the Green Deal, but this advice must give a full picture of potential savings from insulation and draught-proofing through to glazing and heating systems and include interaction effects between technologies for 'whole house' improvements.

14. What more could be done to improve awareness of low and zero carbon regulations along construction industry supply chains to enable them to take advantage of new low carbon markets?

Consumer Focus would like clarity on how competency is communicated to consumers. We are concerned by the potential for a proliferation of branded schemes, with differing levels of protection for consumers, different redress schemes, and multiple contact points for a single retrofit project. Our research on green claims found that consumers become sceptical of proliferating schemes (in discussions around different fair trade schemes) and we support the development of an over-arching scheme that incorporates self-regulation within sectors but working to a clear assurance framework, including cross-sector collaboration to follow the 3 Cs:

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- Credibility – consumers want realistic accessible and verifiable claims
 - Work to a defined public policy objective
 - Deliver monitoring, enforcement and redress through an independent party, including the ability to handle complaints that relate to multiple sectors
 - Develop and implement effective, proportionate sanctions
 - Undertake regular performance reviews of structure, rules, enforcement, complaints and redress
- Clarity – consumers want information that is direct and to the point.
 - An overarching brand, such as the 'Energy Saving Trust Recommended' label, could provide confidence to consumers in a similar way to the use of Energy Star label in the USA.
- Comparability – consumers want simple, meaningful and like-for-like comparisons
 - Gain accreditation from relevant independent approval mechanisms, such as the OFT Consumer Codes Approval Scheme Standards, which provide a benchmark across sectors
 - Enable cross-sector comparisons on costs and benefits

24. What will the key skills needed be, to build adaptive capacity for climate change, enabling organisations to minimise risks, and capitalise on the opportunities that climate change will bring?

Consumer Focus welcomes the consideration given to adaptation to climate change but this needs to be more firmly embedded within sectors. For example, the risks facing homes can be more efficiently addressed as part of the delivery of a national programme of energy efficiency measures, and therefore cooling, flooding and rainfall management should be embedded in training and accreditation programmes alongside energy efficiency measures.

We support the recognition that the roll out of smart meters to every home in Great Britain by 2016/17 will require a step change in the number of meter installers and technicians required. But there will also potentially need to be a greater availability of installers with not just technical ability but also the interpersonal and training skills necessary to provide effective energy efficiency advice to consumers. Consumer Focus is calling for energy efficiency advice, and instruction in how to use displays to be offered to customers at the point of installation. This is essential if the roll out of smart metering is to maximise the opportunities to help consumers cut their energy consumption and 'go green'.

Yours faithfully,

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