

Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland

**Proposals for the future provision of a Registration Scheme for Gas Installers in
Northern Ireland**

Consultative Document

January 2009

Replies should be sent, in writing to:

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Consultation closes 30 April 2009

Proposals for the provision of a Registration Scheme for Gas Installers in Northern Ireland

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Preamble

HSENI is committed to the highest standards of gas safety in Northern Ireland. In keeping with this position it has secured additional funding under the NI Assembly's Programme for Government's Budget 2008-2011 to establish as of April 2009 a new Gas Safety Unit that will promote general awareness about the safe use of gas as well as proactively police substandard and life threatening workmanship by unregistered gas installers. Ensuring the success of this approach depends very much on a well regulated gas installer sector and a well managed and proportionate gas installers registration scheme. Therefore ensuring that such a scheme exists and is the best fit for Northern Ireland is an important consideration and the subject of this consultation exercise.

It is therefore important that anyone with an interest in this be they a gas installer, supplier or consumer should take time to consider the options presented in this consultation document and forward any comments they might have so that they can be taken into consideration before a decision is taken on the future shape and scope of a gas installers registration scheme for Northern Ireland.

This consultation paper can be made available in a range of formats including large print, Braille and audio. Please contact Mr Stuart Harvieu at the address on the front page if you would like to take advantage of this provision.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Keyes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

**Jim Keyes
Chief Executive
Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland**

Summary

The fact that a new provider will take over the delivery of the gas installers registration scheme in Great Britain with effect from 1 April 2009 means that consideration needs to be given to the future of the gas installers registration scheme in Northern Ireland. In considering the way forward only two options present themselves.

Option 1

Northern Ireland adopts the new Great Britain gas installers registration scheme on a parity basis.

Option 2

Northern Ireland devises its own stand alone scheme.

To ensure that all views are considered and to provide a reasonable lead in time both for installers and consumers as well as alignment with HSENI new Gas Safety Unit, which will not be fully operational until the autumn of 2009, any changes would not be introduced until 1 April 2010. As a consequence 2009/10 would be seen as a transitional year with the CORGI scheme still operative.

Background to the gas installers registration scheme

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations require anyone who works with gas fittings to be registered with a body approved by the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI). Registration has been required in Northern Ireland since 1996, when the Regulations were introduced for the first time. HSENI appointed the Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI) replicating the scheme which had existed in GB since 1991.

Background to this consultation

In 2006 the Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain (HSEGB) undertook a review of gas safety regulation in Great Britain. As part of that review HSEGB commissioned a study by consultants into the operation of the of the gas safety regime in GB which included the installer registration scheme.

Subsequently and following a tendering process HSEGB announced in September 2008 that it had appointed Capita Ltd to provide a new registration scheme for gas installers and a range of additional services, including a new gas safety brand. This contract with Capita does not extend to NI consequently HSENI is now seeking views on the future provision of a registration scheme here.

The Current Northern Ireland Scheme

Currently, there are almost 550 gas installers registered under the CORGI managed scheme. These businesses employ approximately 720 registered gas operatives. There

are also 150,000 gas consumers across NI, including homes and businesses which use Liquefied Petroleum Gas. CORGI the registration scheme provider has provided installers and gas consumers with access to a bespoke website and telephone number for all matters connected with the scheme. These include:

- Checking installers registration details;
- Membership renewal;
- Membership enquiries by potential gas installers;
- Complaints about unsafe gas work;
- Technical assistance for installers;
- Technical magazine content.

HSENI has the role of enforcing the gas safety regulations, by the use of proportionate sanctions, which includes issuing enforcement notices and when required instigating criminal prosecution. Audits and field inspection of installer competence for entry to and retention on the register are carried out by CORGI.

The requirements for any new gas installer registration scheme for Northern Ireland

The scheme provider must have a modern computer based management system with hardware and software capable of supporting the volume of personal data outlined above as well as providing for the expansion of the Northern Ireland gas installer network to 1000 business in the next 5 years. Therefore any scheme provider must meet the following:

- A local assessor to provide assurance of the competence of installer businesses by conducting risk based audits of installation practice;
- A local assessor to conduct initial assessments of prospective installers who apply to join the registration scheme;
- A procedure for handling complaints against installers of unsafe gas work with sufficient capability to respond to complainants within a set time;
- From time to time, HSENI and the gas supply companies hold installer events and publicity campaigns covering key topic areas. It will be necessary for the provider to make available resource in terms of staff time and finance to contribute to these initiatives;
- An important aspect of the work of a scheme provider is to be able to develop standards of work and installation practice as well as contributing to the training syllabus for competency in gas work at national level;
- The provider must be able to ensure data held on installers is constantly updated and that it can be held securely to prevent loss of personal data;
- The provider must have computer systems with independent back up systems whose operation has been tested and verified through exercised business continuity plans, commensurate with the need to secure and provide high integrity data;
- The provider will also have to provide a telephone number through which the public and installers can contact the provider and a website capable of hosting a members' area containing a range of technical information for installers, a publicly

accessible area for allowing the identification of installers within a series of distances of a specified post code.

Options for the delivery of a gas installers registration scheme in Northern Ireland

Option 1

Northern Ireland adopts the new Great Britain gas installers registration scheme on a parity basis.

HSENI has sought to maintain parity with Great Britain in the field of gas safety since 1996. In setting up the original registration system, HSENI chose to appoint the Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI) because this organisation was nationally established and provided the economy of scale for the fledgling natural gas industry then emerging in Northern Ireland.

A UK wide scheme provides:

- a single easily identifiable gas safety brand;
- a single point of contact for consumers where consumers may make enquiries or lodge complaints;
- a single set of fees for installation businesses and operatives;
- a single registration system, whereby businesses within the UK, having undergone a single assessment, can trade in Great Britain and Northern Ireland on payment of a single fee.

Under this option registered gas installers who carry out work both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland would pay a single registration fee and undertake a single process of assessment in the jurisdiction in which their registered office lies.

Option 2

Northern Ireland devises its own stand alone scheme

HSENI may approve a gas installer registration scheme operated by a third party provider by virtue of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations (NI) 2004. The consequences of such a development would mean clear differences between a stand alone and a parity based scheme.

A NI stand alone scheme would mean

- The gas safety brand used in NI is likely to be different and unique to NI
- The fees levied are likely to be higher than a parity scheme because of a much smaller installer base locally
- Contact telephone number and website would be different to that provided in GB
- Installers wishing to work on gas fittings in both jurisdictions would either have to obtain a mutual recognition certificate recognising their competence to work on gas fittings acceptable to both scheme providers or go through registration in both jurisdictions.

Should CORGI be appointed to manage such a scheme there would be some advantages for NI gas businesses and consumers such as:-:

- Continuity of the widely recognised CORGI brand;
- Unchanged contact telephone number and website
- No need to change advertising by businesses in telephone directories, on vans or on paperwork.

Impact Assessments

Impact on consumers

This consultation exercise does not involve a change in legislation nor the introduction of new legislation. It proposes options which may result in a change to the way gas consumers engage an installer to carry out the installation of a new gas appliance or to service/repair an existing appliance. The views of the General Consumer Council are particularly important to HSENI in this regard.

Certain members of the public may be confused in the early stages of any change process and whatever option is decided upon will certainly mean change for all gas consumers. Therefore HSENI is seeking the views of representatives of those groups which may experience adverse impact from any changes. In particular, HSENI would welcome views on how any changes could be best introduced and communicated to all gas consumers and in particular to any who may have a disability.

Impact on businesses

Most gas installation businesses would be classed as small to medium sized enterprises, with the majority being micro businesses with less than 10 employees.

Adopting Option 1 which would introduce a UK wide scheme would require those businesses which display registration scheme decals on their vans to change to new signage. All gas installation and servicing businesses which leave warning notices when encountering unsafe gas appliances would be required to buy new packets of notice forms and other branded material as needed. Those firms which have display adverts in local press, trade directories and telephone directories would have to change the logo in the advert. This cost would recur with each renewal of the advert in any event and is discounted from the cost analysis of the change.

Taking these facts into account would mean that the estimated additional total cost to gas installation and servicing businesses in Northern Ireland are estimated at around £82,500 in the first year. This would be a one off cost and translates to an average cost per business of £150. Registration fees would be in line with those charged in Great Britain viz £150 per business and £55 per operative both per annum.

If option 2 were to be adopted and CORGI appointed to run the NI scheme these additional costs associated with changing branding to installation and servicing businesses would not occur. The fee structure for this option has not been finalised but is likely to be on a par with that for option 1.

Costs to Government

If the cost of registration is maintained at current levels of £150 per business and £55 per operative there would be a cost to NI Government to effectively sponsor the scheme. The

level of intervention has yet to be accurately determined, but is estimated at around £50,000 in year 1.

Responding to this consultation

Responses to this consultation will be made publicly available, unless you specifically request that your comments be withheld. In this case please supply reasons why your comment should be treated confidentially.

Replies should be sent before 30 April 2009, in writing to:

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Consultation List

Gas Suppliers

Calor Gas (NI) Ltd
Flogas Ltd
Firmus Ltd
Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd

Gas Trade Bodies and Associations

Association of Registered Gas Installers
Construction Industry Training Board
Heating and Ventilation Contractors Association
Gas Installers Forum NI
Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers Federation

Consumer Groups

General Consumer Council
NI Authority for Utilities Regulation
Age Concern
Disability Action
Royal National Institution for Deaf People
Royal National Institution for Blind People
Energy Saving Trust
Employers' Forum on Disability
Gas Installation Businesses

Trades Unions

GMB
Amicus
Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU)
Associated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW)

District Councils will be consulted through existing committee structures