

**Water Regulations Advisory Committee
Plumbing Working Group (PWG)
20th November 2002
Water UK, 1 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9BT**

Those Present:

Members:

Geoff Marsh	(Chair, WRAC)
David Gibson	WRAC
Steve Tuckwell	Water Regulations Advisory Scheme (WRAS)
Ian Drummond	ODPM/Building Regulations Division
Margaret Lovett	DTI/Quality Mark
Richard Unwin	Anglian Water
Robert Burgon	Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers Federation (SNIPEF)
Dave Brindley	Thames Water
Rob Thomas	South West Water
Phil Chalk	Water Industry Approved Plumbers Scheme (WIAPS)
Robin Newhouse	Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors (APHC)
Andy Watts	Institute of Plumbing (IoP)

Secretariat

Peter Jiggins	Rob Mynard	Martin Macdonald	Nicola Clarke
Grant Gahagan			

Apologies

Terry Stephenson	WRAC
Linda Dulieu	WRAC
Ian Scott-Dunn	Department for Education and Skills
Eric Procter	Yorkshire Water
Ian Mitchell	Severn Trent Water

1) Introductions

- a) The Chair opened the meeting and introductions were exchanged among attendees.

2) Aim of meeting

- a) Geoff Marsh explained that this meeting would be used to work through the paper prepared by the Secretariat to seek consensus on any points not agreed at the last PWG meeting. It was agreed to concentrate initial effort on setting a common standard for plumbers who make up the majority of members, rather than attempting to cover specific groups of contractors who might only work on restricted components of water systems. Once this had been achieved, it would be beneficial to consider common standards for these other specific groups.

3) Plumbing qualifications

- a) Members agreed with the four qualification routes presented. The Group discussed the acceptability of a portfolio of work being used in place of a formal plumbing qualification. It was agreed that this would be acceptable in certain cases, although it was felt that assessing a portfolio was intrinsically difficult.

4) Insurance

- a) Concern was voiced that additional insurance provisions may increase the cost of schemes, and cause some contractors to move into the 'grey market'. It was noted that Approved Contactor schemes were voluntary, and so would not encompass all UK

plumbers. Members agreed with the levels of public and employer's liability insurance proposals in the paper.

5) Ongoing training and development

- a) The Group agreed with the proposals set out in the paper. It was suggested, and agreed, that all schemes should have a declared statement of their policy on training and development for their members.

6) Identification

- a) It was agreed that Approved Contractors needed a suitable means of identification. It was noted that a large number of different schemes/ID cards would be confusing for consumers, so one member voiced their interest in developing a single means of identification.

7) Water Regulations test

- a) The Group discussed setting a common benchmark for Water Regulations knowledge, with the initial proposal that this should entail either the BPEC/WRAS or City & Guilds qualification. It was suggested that the different water company tests were equivalent, but that they needed to have publicly available documentation. It was agreed that it would be advantageous to work toward a single test specification and it was felt that this would be achievable by January 2004.
- b) The Group had some concerns about the practicalities of having a ratio of Approved Contractors to non-approved in plumbing companies. It was essential to prevent having a situation where the Approved Contractor was in an office, signing certificates for work which he had not supervised or inspected. However, a ratio was felt by others to be necessary for schemes to be workable. It was agreed that a ratio of 1:5 would be acceptable as the minimum, but that the contractor signing the certificates must have closely supervised the work being undertaken on-site.
- c) The Group discussed how to deal with plumbers on existing schemes who had not passed a Regulations test. Concerns were expressed that if those contractors were required to obtain a Regulations qualification, they may prefer to leave the scheme. It was agreed that this would be returned to at the next PWG meeting. (Post meeting note: A paper produced by Ian Mitchell, Richard Unwin and Dave Brindley was circulated on 5 December)

8) Complaints procedure

- a) It was agreed that schemes must have in place a mechanism to address customer complaints and to ensure that contraventions of the Regulations are dealt with. This would need to include a defined procedure for investigating allegations of non-compliance against the contractor, as well as disciplinary and appeals processes.

9) Inspection of plumbing work

- a) It was agreed that it is was not appropriate to specify that plumbers to have their work inspected on application as a minimum requirement of all schemes, but that assessments could take place where deemed necessary. The schemes could also, if they wished, run an induction for new Approved Contractors.
- b) Some of the Group felt that an annual or even bi-annual inspection was too frequent. It was suggested that once a year might be fine for the first few years of membership, but then through benchmarking, competent contractors could be inspected less frequently, and others more often. There was agreement that schemes needed to include a mechanism to ensure that standards are upheld and the Regulations are adhered to. There were not any suggestions of how this might be achieved apart from via inspections

of plumbing work. The Group agreed to consider this matter in more detail at the next meeting. The Group agreed that if a scheme received a customer complaint about a potential Regulations issue, an inspection would take place as part of its complaints procedure.

10) Other issues

- a) The Group agreed that establishing a bi-annual meeting to oversee the development of the common requirements for schemes would be beneficial. The Terms of Reference would need to be carefully defined, as well as how this fitted with existing liaison groups.

11) Referenceline

- a) Most of the Group were already familiar with Referenceline. The Secretariat gave the Group a brief overview and it was agreed to consider how this might work in conjunction with Approved Contractor schemes once a minimum standard was in place.

12) Date of next meeting

- a) The next meeting will be held on 7 February 2003 in room 7ab Ashdown House.

13) Any other business

- a) No other business was reported.

**WRAC Secretariat
December 2002**