1.1 Interview with trader – Discussion Guide

**Qualitative research objectives for the Trader strand**

- Explore how businesses behave and what makes them think and act in the way they do – how they market themselves, how they operate and communicate with their customers
- Ascertain traders’ awareness, understanding and perceptions of trader schemes and compliance with legal requirements
- Identify ways in which consumer and trader behaviours might be changed to reduce the potential for consumer detriment

**Introduction, warm up and operating context 5 mins**

- Introduce TNS-BMRB
- Purpose of the research
- MRS Code of Conduct
- Recording
- Anonymity – we will not attribute comments to organisations and we will not reveal which organisations took part in this research to a third party (they will be described in such terms as ‘large home improvements supplier’; SME; small or single person trader)
- Stress (esp. to smaller companies) that we are looking for honesty and that we are not a potential customer!
- Any questions
- Can you describe your business for me (in your own words)

Note to interviewer: use third person technique throughout to get more honest responses

**What’s the radius of the area they cover / what areas**

- **How do you get work / market yourself** *(probe on to what extent need to)*
- How useful or important are / how do you make use of
  - Word of mouth
  - References
• Directories
• Anything else
• How do you know which work best / do you ask consumers how they found you?
  • To what extent do you track how customers find you?
    • How do you find this out and how do you keep track?
• What types of customer do you work with
  • Specific types (probe on experience, attitude, demographics, how knowledgeable they are, how much research they do, and also probe on to what extent they pick and choose customers)
  • All types (and if so, probe to extent that they tailor the way they operate and communicate with these types of customers)

We will have information such as no. of employees, no. of years operating, focus of work and whether local, regional or national from recruitment stage

| Causes of detriment / complaint handling / compliance | 10 mins |

• What are customers looking for when choosing a trader
  • What is most important to the customer in a typical home improvement project / repair job
• Where and when do most problems occur (either your jobs or those you hear about from other traders)
  • Probe for types of jobs / size of jobs / types of customer / repair versus home improvement/ whether emergency / what are the points in the job where things go wrong
  • To what extent is it caused by customer behaviour – what are the things that consumers do that are a hindrance / help
  • To what extent is it caused by trader behaviour – what are the things that traders do that are a hindrance / help

Bad trader behaviour

Bad consumer behaviour
• What are the biggest challenges you face which stop you from working to the best of your ability?

Take spontaneous responses then probe on:

  o Working with suppliers?
  o Working with subcontractors
  o Cash flow
  o Undercutting?
    ▪ Ask participants about the types of traders who regularly practice undercutting (to what extent is this by traders that do not comply with legal requirements / rogue traders)
  o Recruiting people with the right skills?
  o How do these issues affect the quality of the work they deliver?

What do you (other traders) do to maintain quality standards

  o Probe on feedback, complaints, training, accreditation, membership of schemes)

Complaint handling

  • How do you deal with complaints (probe extent to which have a system versus tailored to each project and customer type / whether they seek help and support from third parties / have they always had one / what triggered the use of it)
  • Do you record complaints – how, in what way
  • Do you tell customers about this system (what do you tell them and when)
  • Feedback – do you get feedback / customer satisfaction from all customers – why / why not (barriers towards doing this)

Compliance

  • How much do you (most traders) know about consumer law / a customer’s legal rights
  • What do you do to make sure you comply with consumer law?
• Can you describe what legal rights a consumer has, if, for example, they have a complaint about a fault in installation work?

• Have you come across any examples of practices by competitor businesses in your sector not complying with consumer law or not treating their customers fairly

NOTE FOR INTERVIEWER - DO NOT READ OUT: Consumer Law
Customers have the right to expect that any work be:

• Carried out with reasonable skill and care
• Completed within a reasonable time (unless a specific date is agreed)
• Provided at a reasonable cost unless a fixed price is agreed in advance.

Remedies for reducing Consumer / Trader detriment 10 mins

• What would stop the problems identified from occurring

• What do you think can be done to avoid jobs going badly
  o What can consumers do
  o What can traders do
  o What can government do or others e.g. trade bodies / consumer advisory bodies

Schemes

• What do you know about schemes which help consumers to find reliable traders

• Which ones are (or were you before we contacted you to take part in this) you aware of (probe for awareness of Local Authority Approved Trader Schemes, TrustMark or other commercial schemes e.g. my hammer)

Note – ensure participant understands that LA approved trader schemes are not the list of approved contractors which a council has for when they need work done.
Schemes can help consumers to find reliable traders by listing traders who have applied to join and who pass certain checks for quality and reliability. Some Local Authority Trading Standards Services offer this type of scheme. There may be upfront checks on things like financial status and insurance. Traders may be required to behave in a certain way e.g. having a complaints process or a formal feedback process. Traders may have to pay a membership fee to belong to the scheme.

- How did you come across these / learn about these
- Which ones have you used / been a member of (probe specifically on commercial schemes)
- What are the features or requirements of the scheme
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of being a member
- What persuaded you to join OR why did you decide not to join
- What should the schemes cover / include?

  (Take spontaneous views then probe on:)

  - Upfront checks
  - Monitoring
  - Rules members have to follow
  - Protection for customers
  - Who should operate

  - (Ask members) What do you do differently since joining
  - What would encourage more traders to join a schemes like this
  - What one thing should be emphasised to traders

Wrap up 5 mins

- What steps could traders take to help stop problems occurring
- What can the government do to help / encourage traders to take these steps?
  - Is there anything else at a local level? By the local authority?
  - Is this about providing more information / what information / who needs this information
• Anything else that can be put in place
• **Any other thoughts on how to promote best practice by tradespeople**

THANK & CLOSE