



Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

Oral evidence: [Retrofitting homes for net zero](#), HC
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Wednesday 12 February 2025

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Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Sir Christopher Chope; Torcuil Crichton; Wera Hobhouse; Josh MacAlister; Luke Murphy; Mike Reader; Bradley Thomas; Claire Young.

Questions 115 - 183

Witnesses

I: Zak Ashraf, member of the public; Amanda Hoyles, member of the public; Shabir Hussain, Domestic Energy Efficiency Manager, Luton Council; and Damian Mercer, Manager, Cavity Extraction Limited.

II: Simon Ayers, Chief Executive, TrustMark; Ian Rippin, Chief Executive, MCS; and Andy Manning, Energy System Transformation Head, Citizens Advice.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Zak Ashraf, Amanda Hoyles, Shabir Hussain and Damian Mercer.

Q115 **Chair:** Welcome to today's hearing of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee, where we welcome Zak Ashraf and Amanda Hoyles, who are two of the people who have some experiences to tell us of how badly—how disastrously badly—things have gone wrong with insulation that they have had fitted in their homes. They are joined by Shabir Hussain and Damian Mercer, who will back this up with their professional experiences.

Zak, you were kind enough to write to us and tell us that your mum's home now faces a bill of something like £100,000 to put right the damage done. The installation of insulation has caused dry rot in the house, I believe. You have raised concerns about regulation in home retrofit and the operation of rogue cowboy installers. Perhaps you can describe for us the mould and the dry rot. I will come back to you in a moment.

Amanda, your experience goes back a lot further, to 2007. You discovered damp mould and rot within weeks of moving into your home and you have been putting up with this ever since. I think you described that you have heard every excuse in the book.

Amanda Hoyles: Yes.

Q116 **Chair:** We want to hear all about it. I will perhaps start with you, Zak. Tell us your story.

Zak Ashraf: I want to start by saying that I consider myself somewhat privileged to have this audience, but also that I have been able to get this far on this case. Most of the people who have been affected by the issues that my mum has been affected by don't have the support system, English may not be their first language, they might be elderly and they might not have relatives there to support them. I found navigating this system extremely difficult, and I consider myself competent. I am not bragging, but I take part in civic society, I write to my local MP and local councillors, and I am part of various residents' associations. I should not have found navigating this system as difficult as it has been, but I have found it difficult and it has got me here today.

In a nutshell, my mum had external wall insulation fitted in Q4 2022, done by—it is well documented now—Saviour Energy Solutions Ltd. Everything was hunky-dory afterwards. The house was very warm afterwards, so my mum thought, "Great job; it is doing its job". About 12 months after the job was completed I found a mushroom in her house—a live, growing organism in one of her bedrooms. The first thing I did was contact Saviour to say, "Look, I think this might be related to the works that you guys have done. Can you come and have a look?"

To their credit, Saviour said they would send someone over to have a look. In the meantime, one of my friends had advised me to get a damp specialist in to have a look at it separately. A senior manager from



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Saviour was meant to attend and didn't quite attend yet, but sent a roofing specialist to have a look. The roofer went up on the roof, spent half an hour on the roof, then came down and said, "No, the roof looks perfect. I think it has to do with the cold and probably how your mum is managing the household". Eventually we did have a roofing specialist go up there, an independent person, who wrote a damning five-page report with about 20 images saying, "All of these things are wrong". He had never seen such a terrible job in his life.

Long story short, I have been told by a specialist that mushroom growth and dry rot can spread at six-plus inches per month, and it can eat through brick, wood, carpet—the whole lot. The longer it spreads, the more it is eating. It was on the joists as well, so I had been warned about the house potentially becoming dangerous, where the first floor could fall in. There have been examples of that, not necessarily to do with insulation work, but just to do with dry rot developing.

Essentially I have just been on the mother of all wild goose chases over the last two years, trying to get this resolved. If you take anything away from today, I would say that all the institutions and the entities involved—every single one of them—are complicit in this. They keep passing the buck. I have been sent round the houses. I just want to reiterate that I have been able to keep going round those houses and keep chasing people. We were very fortunate that Zoe Conway from the BBC took up this story. I think it has only got here today because it aired on flagship news programmes back in September last year.

Q117 Chair: Zak, thank you very much for telling us your story and what happened. I am sure everybody is already struck by what they have heard and the unbelievable nature of that story. We will probe into it in more detail with some further questions for you and your fellow panellists. The purpose of today's session—and this is true for you as well, Amanda—is that we want the evidence of what has gone wrong.

You mentioned a warm home, and obviously everybody wants a warm home and they want cheaper bills. Our job as a Committee is to gather that evidence and make recommendations to the Government to make sure these things don't happen to other people, and to support you and other victims in getting redress as well. Thank you for your opening comments. Amanda, yours is a longer story, sadly.

Amanda Hoyles: A sorry tale of woe. I am a leaseholder—a long leaseholder. I have a pretty unresponsive freeholder. I bought the property from my grandmother, who bought it under the right to buy when she had been rehoused by our council due to a compulsory purchase. She had a stroke, and I bought the property from her because she could no longer live at home. Within a few months of moving in, there were issues with damp, so I contacted the freeholder, North Devon Homes—it is now a charity, but I think it was a social landlord at that time—and I started asking it, "What is wrong with the house here?"

First of all, it would not respond, then it did respond and said it would do it under the next planned major works, which came and went, and the



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damp persisted. We had a 10-year argument about there being something wrong with my house. Eventually I nailed it when it was extracting other people's cavity wall insulation all over the valley where I live and I said, "I must be one of the longest complaining people here. Why are you not dealing with my house?" I was told, "We have other obligations to our tenants that are not extended to our leaseholders". I am a mortgaged owner-occupier with a house that somebody else is destroying and I cannot fix it. I cannot undertake the work myself because they are liable for the structure.

However, recently I have inherited some money and we have decided that we can't stand it any more, because this is eight years after the first 10 years, and my partner and I just started ripping our floors up, ripping our joists out and replacing from the foundations upwards in two of our rooms. We have not been into our kitchen yet, but we think it will be exactly the same there. My house is riddled with woodworm. It is like a superhighway where my subfloor ventilation is, which is below my damp proof course. I have a mixed fill of bead and old blown fibre in situ now. I have one complete wall extracted and two with the most bodged job you could ever imagine, which I am sure there are all over England.

I am here today because I could not force my leaseholder to do anything about it. When I have asked to see the guarantee, there is some dispute that there is any guarantee for the work whatsoever.

Chair: Thank you again for coming here and telling us your story. It is unbelievable; it really is.

Amanda Hoyles: I have had 10 years of back and forth and then eight years of bodged installs.

Q118 **Chair:** We will get into the detail, but just tell us about the impact on you personally. Amanda, do you want to go first?

Amanda Hoyles: I think you become institutionalised by the state of the house you live in. We do not have any wallpaper in our bedroom. We don't have any flooring down because that has long gone. We have bare floorboards throughout. All the plaster in our two bedrooms is moulded. Despite being professionally mould-washed, the mould has come back. All our soft furnishings and decoration is damaged. We have redecorated numerous times, but I have just stopped decorating because it is pointless. We have had mushroom growth. I am not sure it was dry rot, but I would not like to say that it wasn't.

When you come home at the end of the day, it is where you want to relax. We have three businesses. We are very busy people. We have the same things going on in life as everyone else—sick parents, things to sort out, illness—and on top of it, this just wears you down. It completely wears you out. I think I have battle fatigue from it, because I didn't even want to be here today. About three weeks ago I said to them, "Come and take the rest of the insulation out and leave us alone because I just want to fix my house now". The Housing Ombudsman, who I have a case with,



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said, "One way or another, the damage has to be fixed, so you may as well start doing it".

When we took our bedroom floor up, our joists were rotten through with woodworm. As we were taking the floorboards off, they were literally just breaking. Two weeks ago, I put my hand in the wall, in the subfloor vent, and pulled out wet blown fibre insulation. This is after three extracts. This is what you have going on in the industry right across Britain, because I will not be the only one, like Zak. It is everywhere and it is not necessarily external. This is bead and blown fibre, mixed quite openly in my walls today, now. That should never be happening.

Q119 Chair: I completely agree. I am so sorry this has happened to both of you. We want to use this session to help get to the bottom of it. Zak, what has been the personal impact on you and on your mum?

Zak Ashraf: I think Amanda said it all, to be honest. I am just shattered. I work full time. I have a very busy job. I am a carer. I don't have time to deal with any of this. Lots of people have given up. You alluded to it earlier, Chair. The costs are well north of £100,000 now. If I had to give you a real guesstimate, I think the longer it is taking, the worse it is getting. We are probably around the £200,000 mark now, to the point where people are asking me, "Wouldn't it be easier for them to knock your mum's house down and rebuild it?"

I have lost sleep over this. I have just made so many calls, written so many emails, spent hours every evening after work writing emails, chasing the bodies involved and the company itself, and dealing with a mediator as well. There is a mediator involved now, who was all flowers and roses initially, but is doing the bidding of the company. The mediator is being paid by the company. The mediator was there initially to help us both come to a resolution, but the wild goose chase continues. I am just shattered.

This is a government scheme. People are reassured by that—"Oh, this is a government scheme; this is government funded". This is what my mum thought she was getting. We have all heard stories about rogue traders, but this was supposed to be something legitimate. I am tired. It has got me here, but I just want to see this nightmare end for my mum. The worst thing she has said is that she wants to be able to die in her house. She has had to move out, and she wants to be able to return to her house so she can die in her house.

Q120 Chair: Thank you. One of the questions for the second panel is how on earth this is allowed to happen, given that it was a government scheme. I will just ask you both one more question before I pass to some of the other members of the Committee. Would either of you recommend to friends and family to have energy efficiency measures installed in their homes?

Amanda Hoyles: It would depend on what type of energy measures they were. Possibly, but I would never, ever agree to have insulation



again—never. Well, I didn't agree to have it in the first place, to be honest.

Chair: You moved in after it was installed.

Zak Ashraf: I would say the same for insulation, absolutely. I have been proactively telling people not to. You would be better off living in a cold house and paying higher bills, because the industry is not regulated properly. Everyone is marking their own homework, so they are just patting themselves on the back and making thousands of pounds, and people are being left to deal with it. Since this report, by the way, Chair, I have had so many people locally getting in touch asking, "Who should we contact? We have had issues". At least 20-plus people have been in touch about this. I am just telling people, "Don't get it done".

Chair: Thank you both very much for your opening comments. I am going to pass over to Bradley Thomas to ask you some more questions.

Q121 **Bradley Thomas:** Thank you, Chair, and welcome, Zak and Amanda. I am sorry to hear about what has happened as well, because it sounds like what you are both going through—and what your mum in particular, Zak, is going through—is not just soul-destroying, but you probably think, "What's the point?"

When this commenced, what were the first steps in the retrofit process? What kind of advice did you receive, and what sort of credentials were presented as to the authenticity of whoever was giving advice and how suitable the installation was going to be for the homes? That is a question for both of you.

Zak Ashraf: There was very little advice, from what I can remember. It just seemed legitimate, because it was a government-funded scheme, or it was a government scheme, anyway—an authorised scheme. I have since learned about what the process should be, which I am sure we will come on to in a bit. But essentially you have what is called a lead generator, who just goes door-knocking, telling people, "We can install a free boiler and do the installation" or whatever. They do not tend to be employed by the company itself; they just tend to get a referral fee, I think, if it all goes through, and then the company comes along and just gets started.

What happens in the background is that there is a retrofit designer who is probably qualified to design the insulation system. I am sure that Shabir will explain that later on because he knows a lot more about that than I do. What I found out is that the process is meant to be that once the design is drawn up, they are meant to sit with you to tell you about the options, "This is how your house makeup is; this is the design we have drawn up" so it fits well with the house. None of that happened. They basically get the approval for the funding, send over some workers, the scaffolding goes up and work begins.

Q122 **Bradley Thomas:** It sounds from what you say that that is driven by getting the grant, getting the money and just installing a solution. It



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sounds like that is what happened to you.

Zak Ashraf: Yes, I think so. I think that has happened to loads of people too, to be honest.

Amanda Hoyles: My position is very different. I have had absolutely no say in the process whatsoever. My freeholder has been entirely responsible for everything that has happened to my home.

Q123 **Bradley Thomas:** You have been involved in none of the conversations or anything?

Amanda Hoyles: Not a single conversation about how, why, or whether it should be. We did force them to undertake some surveys, which the people installing undertook, and they did point out to the freeholder that there were a number of issues with the housing, but they still went ahead with the work and the freeholder still let them. They said there was trouble with our lintels, our brushes—the bits at the top of the roof cloaking—cracks, lateral cracks to the render, there was render missing at the bottom of the walls above our damp roof course, and they still went ahead and installed, and they still went ahead and paid them to do it.

Q124 **Chair:** Just to confirm, Amanda, that was before you moved in?

Amanda Hoyles: No, that is since I moved in. That was after I finally forced them to take out the old blown fibre that was absolutely saturated. This is the new installs from 2017 onwards.

Chair: The retrofit of the retrofit.

Amanda Hoyles: Yes, I have a double retrofit.

Shabir Hussain: I want to add to what Zak has discussed. As a council, we have a duty to our residents. Zak has presented that for many of our residents, English is not their first language. They don't understand retrofit; it is never explained to them. The lead generator—the person who knocks on the door—is the only point of contact. Never does he ever disclose which installer company is doing the works or is behind the works. When a complaint comes to us, as a council we have to work out who the installer company is behind this work, which can be a task in itself. Once we identify the installer we then take it through the proper channels. We go to TrustMark and to the relevant accreditation body that the installer company is part of.

What happens then is that the resident is just sent around in a circle, and they come back to us, as the council, because are not getting any closure, they are not getting any help or assistance. In the end, the only solution I have found with our residents is that if I know who the installer is, I can find the email address and I can email them. I copy in TrustMark, I copy in the relevant accreditation body and the relevant bodies, and only then will the installer company react. For months and months and months, they will ignore the resident's calls, ignore emails—ignore any contact. There is one important thing that Zak failed to mention. I think they took £8,000 from you, Zak.



Zak Ashraf: £6,000.

Shabir Hussain: This is a government grant scheme. It is a free scheme, but these people are not only mis-selling the benefits of the scheme; additionally, they are taking money off residents who are in vulnerable conditions—poor households. This has been going on for two years. We have been leading on this in the country. I have been knocking on everyone's doors, as well as DESNZ and Ofgem, and I have emails to back up everything that I have been saying and what our residents have been saying, but we have never had any satisfactory response. It is only due to the BBC programme, which highlighted what happened to Zak's mum, that we now see that bodies are beginning to do something, but not necessarily the right thing.

I want to add one last thing. I know that TrustMark is here today and has taken a lot of flak, but we have been working closely with TrustMark to look at the extent of the problem, especially in Luton, and how we can identify positive steps to go forward. We have a lot of information that I am happy to share as we go on.

Q125 **Bradley Thomas:** A quick follow-up: one of my fears with any scheme like this is that when a government grant is available, an illicit underbelly emerges in any industry to exploit the grants that are available. Do you feel that is what has happened in this case?

Shabir Hussain: As you know, many councils rely on these grant schemes to help vulnerable households that live in fuel poverty, with high energy bills and the high cost of living. We wholeheartedly welcome energy efficiency grant schemes and we promote them.

What I have seen from my investigations and in looking at the processes throughout is that no one takes accountability for the issues. Everyone bypasses, which then makes the grant scheme seem like a failure when it is something positive and we welcome it. I think personally if there was accountability and responsibility, these schemes would be successful. They say there is regulation, but we are seeing rogue installs going on, poor workmanship and damage to people's houses, which is now costing hundreds and thousands of pounds to rectify.

Q126 **Bradley Thomas:** A very quick one for you, Shabir and Damian. Who do you think householders should consult for advice before proceeding with schemes? Do you think the Government should foot the bill for the advice that people are receiving so that it is delivered in an accredited fashion?

Shabir Hussain: This is going back to an email that I sent to DESNZ, and I will share it afterwards. I did stipulate that someone, whether it is TrustMark or somebody else, should set up a dedicated helpline so that complaints go to TrustMark and TrustMark can then filter out to the relevant bodies to investigate further. I never got any response. Unfortunately, the standard response that I have been receiving is, "Tell Trading Standards"—well, first you are telling local authorities not to get involved, but Trading Standards belongs to a local authority; it is part of



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our division—or, “Go to Citizens Advice”. Citizens Advice is saying, “What can we do?” because it is a government scheme.

I have always said that there should be a centralised helpline so that where people have had issues, they can just ring this number and talk to someone, who can then pass the information on to the relevant bodies to investigate further. That was my recommendation two years ago to DESNZ, TrustMark and Ofgem.

Damian Mercer: My name is Damian Mercer. I own a company called Cavity Extraction. We specialise in removing failed energy measures. The problems that we see every day are exactly what you have just heard about. My business should not exist. It does exist because the workmanship is horrendous. The guarantees are not worth the paper they are written on, and everybody is being hoodwinked constantly about these guarantees.

The Sunday Times just recently pointed at EWI. It is EWI, but it is also cavity wall insulation. My company is a member of TrustMark. We are not installers, but we qualify to belong to TrustMark because of the type of work we do. As a body, we have to have that. TrustMark is small and needs to grow. There aren't enough people to sort this problem out. It needs government backing, and it does not matter what colour party you are, if you are red, green, blue, yellow or whatever. I have been in this industry for 10 years, and before that I was in the industry for 10 years working for installers, working for British Gas, and I saw it all then.

I understand the rest of the panel here talking about how exhausting it is. It is. I banged the drum for the first five years of my business, and for two years I took a back step because it is so exhausting. I see it from the panel's point of view. I understand this industry and I see it every day—the guarantees of the properties, the cavity wall insulation. If you asked Ofgem you would probably find that about 14.5 million—probably a bit more, 15 million—installations have been done. You can research cavity wall insulation failures.

The BBA, which is a kitemark-type business, had an inquiry into the housing stock over in Northern Ireland. God knows why it was done over there—maybe to keep it off the radar—but 75% of the housing stock in Northern Ireland is either failed, failing or wrongly installed. If you apply that to 14.5 million properties in the UK, we must have 10.5 to 10.6 million homes with the possibility of failed cavity wall insulation for which the guarantees are not worth the paper they are written on. They put caveats. We are dealing with people in fuel poverty. Do you think they are going to put aside money that they have saved from an install just in case they need some maintenance on the property?

When it does fail, the guarantee companies will say, “Oh well, look at that. You have maintenance issues with your house”. People do not have the money to maintain those properties, so all of a sudden we have wet blankets around the houses of people who we were meant to be helping with fuel poverty, and it is costing more to heat their house now than it did when it was in its virgin state. The calculation is that their houses



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need about 0.9 tonnes extra carbon for heating to a recommended standard, and we have just put them out—"It doesn't matter. Let's throw them out there". They have nowhere to go.

The guarantee people deliberately take them down a one-way street, then they turn around and go, "Let's go to an ADR process". There is a file here of a process in Blackpool where the customer had sand in the cavity. That sand should have been removed before an install. They had an install of insulation on top of the sand and when the case went to the ADR process, they said, "That sand has got in there after the insulation". Unless they are magicians, that would have been the right idea. This is wrong, and I see it every single day.

There is a publicised scheme of EWI at Fishwick in Preston. I have been one of the main contractors addressing it and ripping it off, because it is wrong. It is wrong because of cheap silicones. It is wrong because the details are wrong. Those houses with mushrooms in—I have seen that many times. Zoe Conway from the BBC has seen it herself. I have been in a house where they had left a dinner plate-sized mushroom on the wall, and they wanted to show me. I am there reaching for my pocket, looking for a pocket knife to cut it off the wall because it should not be there.

This is because of the guarantees. Early last summer I was here in Westminster, again giving evidence and explaining about SSB law. SSB law is a combination of—well, it is a perfect storm. You have the guarantee companies that have given guarantees for cavity wall insulation. BUFGA, with SSB law in particular, does not exist any more. They put foam cavity wall insulation in these properties that should not have had cavity insulation. To fix each one of those houses costs £65,000. The houses are only worth £90,000. What are we going to do there? The guarantee that BUFGA used to offer was for £1,500. Who is going to pick up those 30,000-odd homes along the M62 corridor that have all been filled with urethane foam?

Then we look at the biggest one, Nigel Donohue's company, CIGA. It probably has the most guarantees in the UK. Why are we not dealing with them properly? "Oh, you have a maintenance issue. Oh, you have had your windows changed." If I change my windows, you will come back to me and say, "You have disturbed the insulation". If I don't change my windows, you will say, "You have got a maintenance issue. Your windows are rotten". People are in a no-win situation, and it is wrong.

My personal feeling is that all these guarantee companies need to be brought in-house. We talk about domestic energy assessors and retrofit co-ordinators. They do a five-day course or a one-month course. RICS surveyors are at it for three years, and that is just to get the degree. Use people with experience to deal with them, because this is where the problem is. The guarantees are wrong. The people who are knocking on the doors and putting the insulation in, they are after the money.



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It is not just about the install; it is about the carbon. The carbon that we signed up to in 1992 with the Kyoto Agreement and subsequently have gone further along the line with the Paris Agreement—

Chair: Damian, I am going to stop you there. Thank you very much. We will come back to you. There will be more, but that was very helpful and very insightful.

Amanda Hoyles: Just to interject, Chair, from an energy efficiency point of view, we are quite often told right throughout the valley where I live, “Turn your heating up and open your windows”. How can that possibly be energy efficient? That is the standard given thing, “You are not heating your house properly and you are not ventilating it, so you need to turn the heating up and open your windows”. Can you please—anyone in this room—make sense of that? We are told that by our freeholder over and over again.

Chair: Yes, it completely defeats the objective.

Amanda Hoyles: We are using more energy than we would be if we had dry homes.

Chair: Indeed. I am going to move on now to questions from another member of the Committee.

Q127 **Luke Murphy:** Thank you, Zak and Amanda, for sharing your stories. I will come to Zak first, if I may. I just want to focus on what happened when you noticed things had gone wrong. Was it easy to work out who it was you should be complaining to?

Zak Ashraf: No, not at all. I contacted the installer. Thankfully, I was very lucky that I knew who the installer was. To Shabir’s point earlier, most people only have the lead gen contact. They only have a mobile number, and often just contact via WhatsApp messages in all the examples I have come across locally. I had the installer’s number, and I rang the installer. To their credit, they said, “Yes, we will come around” but obviously they sent a cowboy who said, “The roof is all fine. This is the problem, nothing to do with the works” until we got our own specialists in independently to have a look.

Eventually I found a certificate which had TrustMark on it in some of the paperwork that was left with my mum, and I contacted TrustMark. I had never heard of it until that point. I contacted the TrustMark helpline, which explained and took the details, address details and name and said, “Give us a couple of days, and we will come back to you with the scheme provider or the accreditation body that the installer was registered with. You will need to raise your complaint with the accreditation body”, which is what I did. The accreditation body is NAPIT.

I contacted NAPIT. This is what I meant by what I said earlier about being sent around the houses. TrustMark told me to take it up with the accreditation body and then NAPIT, the accreditation body, told me that it encourages everyone to resolve it with the installer. The problem I had with that—and I said as much to NAPIT—was that they had obviously



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done a very shoddy job in the first place and marked their own homework, so how could I trust them to go back to fix it when they are essentially using cowboys? NAPIT said, "This is the process. You have to do this". Then I spent the next two years just going round in circles between the installer, the accreditation body and TrustMark.

This is what I meant when I said earlier that everyone is complicit, because there is no one entity holding anyone to account. The buck does not seem to stop with anyone. If it should stop with someone, I would love to know who it is and who has been given that responsibility. Is it Ofgem? Is it the Government? Is it TrustMark? I have been fortunate enough that I have been able to keep chasing this, but some people have been stuck and spent their own money to try to do their own repairs.

I had an inkling. I could only visibly see some mushrooms, some damp and some dry rot. I couldn't see what was going on with the rest of the property. I thought, "If they have done a very bad job, I am not skilled in this area. I need a professional to come and look at the whole job and say what has not been done to standard. Even something that looks right might not be right". I practically begged—I am not kidding you—TrustMark and NAPIT over email to send someone round. I said I couldn't trust the company, and I asked, "Because of how bad it is, can you guys do it?" They said no. They said no to me in writing so many times, and I still kept going back to them with a begging bowl, saying, "It is much worse than I expected it would be".

However, as soon as the BBC report went out, everyone and their mother wanted to get involved. I got a call. I will preface what I am about to say, because since that report, TrustMark has been very helpful—I know Simon Ayers is here—but prior to that report, no one wanted to know. I wrote to the CEO of TrustMark in March last year—no response. In April again, no response. In May I wrote again on the email ticket that I had, on the support ticket, and I cc'd the CEO, and even then, no response from the CEO. I appreciate that he is a very busy person with a very demanding job, but if someone is contacting you about some extremely serious issues going on in your industry that you should be responsibly looking after—no response.

I just got an email back from whoever was looking after the ticket saying, "We aware that you are in touch with the CEO. We are going to try to resolve it" but all they did was say, "We can just poke and prod NAPIT", which is the accreditation body. Earlier I said that I am shattered because I have just been going round and round in circles and no one is being held to account here.

Q128 Luke Murphy: When they were denying that they could help and were referring you back to the installer, what reason were you given by TrustMark and the accredited provider for not sending someone?

Zak Ashraf: I am laughing because there was no reason. There was just, "We couldn't possibly do it". TrustMark said, "We don't do this". NAPIT, the accreditation body, said, "No, no, we cannot possibly do this". Funnily enough, after the BBC report, NAPIT sent some inspectors around. I did



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ask them. I said, "You said you couldn't possibly do this. Why is it that it took a national TV report for you to send two inspectors?" On that, before I forget, they came along on 15 October, off the top of my head, last year. There were about 20 people at my mum's house, including Shabir and including Simon Ayers, CEO of TrustMark—to his credit—with one of his staff members.

NAPIT said that it was going to produce a report. It took more than six weeks to produce the report. When the inspectors came, before they even stepped inside the house they were shaking their heads because they could see from the outside, without even going upstairs, just how terrible a job it was. I kept chasing for that report after they visited, and they kept saying to me, "Your report has to be vetted. It is going through multiple layers of approval before we can release it to you". When they released that report to me six weeks later, I kid you not, that report had so many typos and grammatical errors in it that I was insulted by it. It went through that many layers of approval. Is this how much importance and weight you are putting on this report, that someone has not proofed this document? It was pathetic.

Q129 Luke Murphy: Thank you. Amanda, I will come back to you in a moment. Shabir, from your experience, how common a story is this, where people are referred back to the installer by the accreditation schemes or TrustMark? Following a complaint, how common is it to get someone on site to see what the issues are?

Shabir Hussain: Very common. I had a colleague in the council who had an external wall done and had so many issues. I explained the process to her and the channels she needed to go through. She came back to me almost in tears, saying, "What is the point of these accreditation bodies? They are not doing anything. I have given them evidence, photographic evidence and written statements, and they have taken the side of the installer". This is a very common story that I hear from residents.

Going back to what was said earlier, when you work with a resident, you follow the accreditation body's process—the PAS 2030 process. You contact the installer, the installer doesn't respond and then you escalate it to the accreditation body. The accreditation body investigates the complaint—allegedly—and then it will take appropriate actions. Many times, when it goes to the accreditation body, I will get the resident coming back to me saying, "It is not doing anything. Please can you help me?" I had to devise my own methodology.

Q130 Luke Murphy: Do you understand how a complaint can be investigated without a physical visit?

Shabir Hussain: Yes, I do. They take a statement from the resident and asks them to provide photographic evidence, then they go to the installer company, who is part of the accreditation scheme, and ask for information. But they never come back and tell us what the final decision was—what the outcome was. They will just write to a resident saying, "We have investigated and we have closed it, with no remedial action".



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Luke Murphy: Damian, a similar question to you, because you must come across similar situations.

Damian Mercer: I see it every day. I lead my company with my boots on the ground. I do not sit behind a desk; I employ people to do that for me. I go and visit houses. I see mould, I see damp, I see rotten joists. They have all tried, "Let's try to go down this route with a guarantor company or the guaranteed company that installed it". A lot of the installers set up and disappear. If the installers are still about, they will deny it until the cows come home, because it is expensive. EWI—external wall insulation—is probably the most expensive, and that is the next perfect storm that is coming.

Cavity wall insulation has been—and will be, and continues to be—a problem. We extract it. We take it back to its virgin state because a dry envelope is easier to heat than a wet envelope. A lady in Blackpool, Shirley Wild, used to have all her family around every Christmas to her house—she was very houseproud—and her house was destroyed by cavity wall insulation. We ended up helping her, along with the South Shore MP. We had the installer brought back and she won a claim against him. We removed that insulation. Just last Christmas she sent me a message saying, "Thank you very much. I have had my family around and have fallen in love with my house again".

It is not all about money for me—you can go and look at HMRC and whatever—this is about helping people, and this is why my business is growing year on year. Last year we did half a million gross. I don't want it to be big; I just want to be able to give and deliver quality, and that is what we do. That is why I am in demand everywhere. Housing associations want me to speak to them all the time, but I see it every day, and this is wrong. There is no recourse.

Q131 **Luke Murphy:** Thank you. I want to come back to you, Amanda, because it sounds as though your situation was different in that you do not even know who installed you.

Amanda Hoyles: Yes, I do, because I went and talked to them. I am quite active.

Q132 **Luke Murphy:** Can you say a bit about your experience and how you went about making the initial complaint?

Amanda Hoyles: When I first realised that they were doing some work on a neighbouring property, I went and said, "What are you doing? Why are you doing it? How is it? What do you think the problem is?" They said, "Well, the cavity wall insulation has failed. Probably should never have been installed in the first place"—but that is going back way before any of this. They said that there was rubble and debris in the bottom of the cavities above the DPC, and that render was missing at the bottom of the buildings, allowing water to just penetrate straight into the cavity and then wick into the interior walls.

Probably about 10 different houses have had this work done, so it is not just our house. It is endemic in our estate. I went out and knocked doors.



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Out of the 25 people I found at home on that day, 19 have damp issues. Some of them still have the blown fibre in, some have mixed fills with blown fibre and ball. Then they came to do ours. They said to us, "We really don't want this contract. The housing stock is in such a state here, it is going to cost us a fortune to undertake the work, and we would rather not have the contract". They then sold out to the next firm, LCX.

Just like Zak said, LCX has been around and policed its own work after the event and told us it is all fine, even though I bought a borescope and took my own photos of my own cavities which are full of rubbish, black bags, debris, mixed fill, no fill and large voids. They said, "Oh, that's all fine." I sent that information to my freeholder. It does not want to know about it, but it has the photographs. I have now had three extractions and two fills, so there must be a problem or that work would not have been taken up and carried out.

Q133 **Luke Murphy:** Have you had any interaction with the accreditation bodies?

Amanda Hoyles: No, because I do not have the guarantee, because I did not pay for the work. That was my freeholder.

Q134 **Luke Murphy:** Beginning with Zak and going along the panel, how can the redress system be improved? What would you want to see? It has happened and you need to make a complaint. How could the process be significantly improved from where it is now?

Zak Ashraf: I think it needs to be done centrally. It needs to be done independently. I do not know if TrustMark or the accreditation bodies can still be involved. Damian made a point earlier, alluding to this being the next big scandal. I truly, truly think that this is the next big scandal. Everyone is familiar with Horizon and the Post Office and the infected blood scandals. In five, 10 or 15 years, I don't want to be watching something on TV with this going on, where of 65,000 houses, about 50% need repairs costing upwards of £100,000 that we taxpayers are going to have to pay for.

This needs to be done centrally. People need to stop marking their own homework. All these companies had their own inspector come. He saw the state of it. If the accreditation body shook their heads when they stood outside the house, how could an inspector from the installer walk around the house and inside for two to three hours, tick everything on their list and then issue the TrustMark certificate? How is it that an independent person did not come round to mark this work to make sure?

I had to arrange for a chartered surveyor who specialises in retrofit, which is very difficult to find, by the way. I only got very lucky. He could rattle off every building standards protocol that was broken as part of this job. This process needs to be independently done. Fishwick was mentioned earlier—that was 12 years ago, in 2013—and we are in 2025 and still talking about this now.

Amanda Hoyles: I completely agree with Zak. Independent people, who are probably government-based, need to be out on the ground. There is



the need to be putting borescopes into walls and taking photos, because the evidence is out there, it is everywhere and there is no denying it. It is irrefutable. It is in our walls now. It is wet and it is causing wicking, and it is destroying our homes and our lives.

Shabir Hussain: A couple of things before I answer the question. I think we have to look at the cost to the economy of this because poor homes and unhealthy homes mean a strain on the NHS as well. One of the things that I did not mention is the cost to local authorities of the amount of fly-tipping that we have to clear up from these installers. It is a massive cost to us, which means that council tax, insurance premiums and so on go up. One of the recommendations I have made is that local authorities should be more involved in helping to police this situation, so give us the financial support so that we can help to police and report back to relevant bodies.

Damian Mercer: I am thinking about what Amanda was saying. I was chatting to Amanda just down the corridor before this session. She lives within one mile of the coast. If you look at the BBA rules of installation, you will see that most of the products should not be installed within seven kilometres of the coast. I think it is seven, off the top of my head. That means no house in Blackpool should be filled, but they all are. No house in Whitehaven should be filled, but they all are. Houses anywhere on the Welsh coast or in the south Wales are filled.

As a Welsh MP, Hywel Williams banged the drum for years about this, and he did not get the honour for saying how big this problem is. It is a big problem. I do not think he is an MP now—he is retired, or whatever—but he was very good at trying to bring awareness. It is all down to money. White fibre is the cheapest product that you can put in a cavity, but it is like cotton wool when your wife takes her makeup off at night; it turns to slop when it is wet. This is the problem. Polystyrene bead is a bit better, but when it is glued, it does have voids, and it holds water as well. I think our housing stock is the problem here.

Guarantees are a problem. The UK can sort this out, but it is going to cost a lot of money, and it needs to be from everyone. It is not just what we have just talked about briefly, with planning. Shabir here worked with the council. How many installs are there in the UK where because you have changed the fabric of the building, the guarantee companies were meant to inform building control? When you do something to your house and it is not building control orientated, that is a criminal offence, isn't it? I can tell you, because I have checked, that in the north, 65% of housing stock that has had cavity wall or external wall insulation does not have building control over it. Who is at fault?

Chair: Thank you all very much for your answers. We have hit 4 o'clock, which was going to be the deadline for the end of this panel. We will carry on for a few more minutes before we get to the next panel, but could your answers be a little bit shorter for the remainder of the time?

Q135 **Mike Reader:** Thank you very much for some very detailed accounts today. That helps me a lot, because I can perhaps jump around with



some of my questions to just fill in some gaps in my understanding. I was interested in the independent checks that were or weren't done. You have talked a lot about what happened once the work was finished. Zak and Amanda, were there any checks done to the proposals by anyone before the works were undertaken? Was anyone checking that what was proposed was right for your home before the work started?

Amanda Hoyles: You would have to ask my freeholder, because it dealt with the entire process.

Zak Ashraf: In my mum's case, no. I found out since that the checks and balances should have been done by the installation company itself, and that there should have been a sit-down with the designer or someone in the company to explain what was going to be done. None of that happened. These are essentially just rogue traders. I think some of them are making millions. They have been operating for more than a decade. It is not just ECO4, which is the scheme that my mum has had the problem with; various schemes have been in place for more than a decade. Some of these companies have been doing boiler installations and underfloor insulation for years.

Amanda Hoyles: My last installer has had four different installation companies that have wound up and he has just reopened another one to avoid responsibility.

Q136 **Mike Reader:** I would like to come back to that. That is a very interesting point, Amanda, so bear with me as I jump through my questions a little bit. Shabir, I was interested in what you said about Trading Standards. I wanted to ask if you thought it was effectively able to enforce against rogue installers. It sounds as though your advice is that Trading Standards shouldn't be progressing enforcement because it is part of the local authority. Have I understood that properly? Is that what you said?

Shabir Hussain: It is very difficult for our Trading Standards to enforce. We did bring in an installer company, because it had done a huge number of installs and we had had a huge number of complaints. We went through the basic PAS requirements it should have been following, which it was just confused about and thought, "We do not need to do this". In the end Trading Standards said, "You know what? You should have been closed down. We do not know how you are trading".

Can I add one point very quickly? Damian touched upon this. External wall insulation has to be registered and installed by a competent installer. We have numbers. Working with TrustMark in Luton, we have had 4,215 external wall insulation works done. Only 782 have been registered with the council—18% have been registered—which means that 3,175 installs are deemed illegal. As a council, we could take enforcement action, but we decided not to because it is going to cost the homeowner £1,000 just for the inspection plus the remedial cost, and because ultimately it is the homeowner who is responsible. This is something the installers are failing to do, and it means additional cost to the homeowner.



Amanda Hoyles: The installers know full well that local government cannot afford prosecution.

Q137 **Mike Reader:** For disclosure, I worked in the construction industry for nearly 20 years. When I was first a civil engineer, clerks of works and resident engineers were very common, but it sounds as if there is no independent checking of this work now. Do you think that in future government programmes for retrofitting heat pumps and so on, there should be a government-authorized clerk of works or a resident engineer—someone checking this work as it is going ahead? Damian, I will come to you first.

Damian Mercer: Losing clerks of works is where our industry has gone wrong. Bring them back. They were treated like God on site. They walked around and what they said, you did. There is no clerk of works now. We are self-policing all these retrofit schemes, and because of that, they get away with it. Planning applications—"We'll just do that scheme. We'll just add those houses on". No, no, no. It is what Shabir said. There is no application for them. The clerk of works checks the quality of the work. When you are putting stuff in cavities you can look. You can borescope. You can use thermal imagery.

I have a drone company with thermal imagery capability. We can look and see if it has been done. There are schemes that I have looked at over this winter that have been retrofit remedial schemes, and that are wrong. I see it now, and it goes on and on. We have this perfect storm coming here, and it will cost a lot of money but it needs co-operation from all parties to sort it out.

Q138 **Mike Reader:** Damian, can I ask two final quick questions? I am conscious the Chair wants us to try to stick to time. Do you think TrustMark and MCS are effectively able to monitor and sanction installers?

Damian Mercer: The installers are usually tied to the guarantee company. If you are a cavity wall installer, you will be tied because you are a competent installer, but they police themselves and send their photographs to the guarantee companies and say, "Look, this cavity is empty".

I have a photograph here—it is only two or three weeks old—of a cavity that has wool and polystyrene inside. It has two different products that will cause differentiation between the insulation values, and that can cause condensation. It is exactly what Amanda was saying, and that will happen again. You need to take it out, and you need a third party to take it out. You cannot be an installer and an extractor at the same time. You need that person to take it out, because the installer will come along, look inside the cavity and say, "We can't install on that". That is what you really need. You need a third party to check that you can install and it is right.

Mike Reader: I will bring Shabir and Amanda in very quickly.



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Shabir Hussain: We have been talking to TrustMark about this. One of the proposals that Simon Ayers has made, and I fully agree with is, to bring in a licensing scheme, so TrustMark and MCS. I fully agree and I am sure Simon will elaborate.

Amanda Hoyles: Because it causes such detriment to people's health and the way they live, there should be something like a gas check. Social landlords should have to do it every so often. From my point of view, where does it leave me if my mortgage company finds out about the state of my house? Surely there must be some obligation to carry out a check like a gas check to make sure my home is safe and is still mortgageable. When this all comes out, there is going to be a lot of trouble within the mortgage industry. A lot of houses are devalued now, and owners have negative equity. My house is not worth what my mortgage was because it has been so badly destroyed. That is going to be another can of worms.

Q139 **Mike Reader:** It is worth noting a very strong proposal on licensing from the Federation of Master Builders, which recognises this issue across the sector. The Committee should take note.

Are you aware of any directors of these companies that some of the panel have described as rogue traders being struck off, and those directors being unable to trade any further?

Damian Mercer: Not yet, but they should be.

Amanda Hoyles: My installer has had four companies. He is still working now.

Zak Ashraf: To your previous question about TrustMark's involvement, to Simon's credit, it is very heavily involved directly in my mum's case now, but even now the company—the installer—is running rings around all of us. It threatened me with legal action. To answer your question about what power TrustMark has, I have the CEO of TrustMark personally involved in this case, and with the sheer brazenness of the installer and the mediator, it has an army of solicitors now who are vetting its emails before it responds.

We have no power,, and we cannot do anything. No work has begun. The initial quote that I got for the dry rot when we discovered it in 2023 was about £11,000 to fix. A year later it was about £24,000 or £25,000 and now it is in the electrics, so rewiring and potentially a roof replacement, and we are looking at £200,000. If you have the very top of TrustMark involved and it is still just going round and round in circles, where else do we go?

Amanda Hoyles: Our freeholder said that it would consider knocking the whole estate down and rebuilding it.

Chair: Thank you. The final question to the four of you is from Torcuil Crichton.

Q140 **Torcuil Crichton:** The time has run, really, but thank you for you for your evidence and for coming in. You have typified an industry that



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seems out of control. You have called them rogue traders, but I am looking at the website of the company that installed your mum's insulation. It is there, it has TrustMark, it has stars on TrustPilot and it is just running. You are paying over a hundred grand yourself, and it has not given you anything.

Zak Ashraf: No. With the repairs, where we have been very fortunate is that its liability insurer has become involved. In most of the cases that I have been hearing about, no one talks about liability insurance. Just so you understand it, this is why it got involved. They gave me four offers. When they discovered that there was a problem and it was their fault, they sent the lead gen guy to negotiate four offers. The first was that they would get their own people to fix everything. I said, "Absolutely not. I cannot trust them to do it".

For the second offer, it said, "You pay half the cost and we will pay half the cost". This is what I mean when I say it is that brazen. The third offer was that they asked me to work out a figure for a lump sum. We could arrange for repairs ourselves, and they would pay out. They would write up a contract from the solicitor to say they had paid us, and that would be it; it would all be over to us. When I gave them the figure, it was about £50,000. They said no, and in hindsight I am really grateful for that, because the repairs are about £200,000 now.

Q141 **Torcuil Crichton:** I think the message from you all is: forget accreditation and start enforcement. Am I right?

Zak Ashraf: Yes.

Amanda Hoyles: I just want to say thank you for having me here.

Chair: Thank you, Amanda, Zak, Shabir and Damian. The evidence that you have given us is absolutely compelling. It is very worrying what you have said about the future as well. The next panel is sitting listening, and they probably anticipate that we will ask for their response to what you have said. We will be raising this further as part of the report that we complete as a Committee, with recommendations to the Government. Thank you again.

Damian Mercer: Just one second, please. We have not spoken about foam insulation being sprayed on the roofs. We will be back here again.

Chair: We will ask the next panel about that.

Damian Mercer: We will be back again.

Chair: Thank you for the reminder. We are very grateful to you all.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Simon Ayers, Ian Rippin and Andy Manning.

Q142 **Chair:** Welcome back to the second part of today's session of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee and our look into retrofitting schemes that have gone wrong. Will the three panellists briefly introduce yourselves? You can probably guess from the last panel what questions



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we will ask you.

Simon Ayers: I am Simon Ayers, Chief Executive at TrustMark.

Andy Manning: Hi everyone. I am Andy Manning, Head of Energy Systems Transformation at Citizens Advice.

Ian Rippin: Hi everyone. I am Ian Rippin, Chief Executive of MCS.

Q143 **Chair:** Simon, Andy and Ian, thank you for being here. You heard the graphic and at times harrowing testimony from Zak and Amanda about what happened to them and the support they had. What is your reaction to what you heard? While you are thinking about answering that question, we have had industry specialists contact us, telling us that our session today undermines the sector. I have to say that I think what undermined the sector is what happened to Zak and Amanda. What is your reaction? Who wants to go first?

Simon Ayers: If I may, I will start. First, Zak and Amanda have been through an absolutely horrible experience that they should never have gone through. We are talking about not just recent processes, but, in real terms, 30 years of different delivery that has probably never been managed, audited and controlled as it should have been. We are now seeing other areas being raised in the public domain. The Minister gave a speech on 27 January regarding solid wall and internal wall insulation—I am sure I will get some questions on that at some point—talking about the businesses that are now suspended. We are now acting upon the information that we have from audits that we are undertaking. We are looking at remediating wherever we can to ensure that those homeowners are put back to a place where they have a warm, healthy and safe home, but we are also looking at how that moves across the other sectors.

From a TrustMark point of view, we started to build a database back in 2020 when we took over. TrustMark has only been looking after the technical monitoring and auditing of ECO since 2020, and it really did not commence until 2022 with ECO4. We have data on a number of years that we are now looking at. On that data, we are now acting to make sure that we are making improvements and we move forward. However, I do think that it is now time for change. There is a requirement to look at the whole process and bring in the ability for a consumer to have a central point that they can engage with that then manages everything from that.

It is way too complex, and I say that as somebody who works within the industry. If you look at the process all the way through, it is not that anyone has particularly done that wrong; we have had years of bolting on additions rather than looking at root causes, and then bringing that together.

Andy Manning: It was extraordinarily powerful evidence that we received. I agree with you, Chair, that this is exactly the right time for us to be looking at it. It feels to me that we are at a pivotal moment. With the Warm Homes Plan we are looking to accelerate the rollout of home



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upgrades to the benefit of consumers and society in delivering our net zero ambitions and growth ambitions. You are absolutely right that the key to accelerating that growth is to build consumer confidence. I agree that we need a reset for how we get there so that we look from the perspective of the customer and make that a simple process.

We heard about the patchwork of schemes and bodies. We need a single accreditation scheme with easy ways of accessing that and then a simple redress process with the potential of a single ombudsman to listen to the cases. The point about legal enforcement and how we ultimately make sure that we have an effective legal enforcement regime came up briefly at the end. Underpinning all that—Zak spoke powerfully for this—is that consumers will need advice at every part of the journey. We know very strongly from when people talk to us the value that they put on independent, trusted advice. We need that at every part of the process so that you get a consistent message wherever you live in the country.

Zak spoke very powerfully about how he felt that despite his struggles, he was in quite a privileged place where he was able to engage with the complexities. If you look at the role that we play with energy, we have an extra help unit that is specifically there to help people in vulnerable circumstances to navigate this complicated thing. As part of our advice, we need the equivalent of an extra help unit to specifically help those in vulnerable circumstances to navigate these issues.

Ian Rippin: It was deeply depressing evidence that the Committee has heard. From the MCS point of view and the role that we play directly supporting the boiler upgrade scheme, we operate quite differently. If you are a recipient of the boiler upgrade scheme grant for a heat pump, one thing you get is a call from MCS. You get that a week or two after you have had your installation. That is an important radar for us to make sure that the installers delivered exactly what they promised. We stay in contact with that consumer. I completely understand the challenges that we have heard about, but the answer has to be that direct contact and the responsibility that MCS takes for complaints.

Two years ago, we started a programme of reforming MCS. It used to be part of Government and it was novated back in 2018 when my team took it on. That has been a long process to get us to a point where we are rolling out what we call the new MCS—MCS 2025. Part of that is making sure that consumers are not passed from pillar to post when they have had a failure with a heat pump or solar PV. They get their case managed. We do that in partnership with industry. We are absolutely distinct and separate from installers. We have contractual relationships with installers. If we need them to do things, to remedy a situation, we impose those remediation tasks.

The other point is that the recipe here, from my point of view—I am not saying that it is all great within the world of small-scale renewables and low-carbon technology, but I contrast what you have been hearing with how the boiler upgrade scheme is being managed. It is important that we work with industry, but we hold them to account at every step and we set



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an expectation early. That is why we have assessors who are on the MCS payroll who go to site if there is a complaint. It is an unreasonable expectation for consumers who are unfamiliar with this technology to determine what the root cause is. It is just not right. They don't know whether it is a sales issue, a design issue or an installation issue. That is our role.

Q144 **Chair:** Thank you. Before I bring my colleagues in, you used the phrase about holding to account. The evidence that we just heard is that, among other things, there has been too close a relationship between the installers and the regulators. How much responsibility do TrustMark and MCS have for what we have just heard?

Ian Rippin: We are very different schemes. MCS is a standards-based scheme. The standards are written by industry for industry. We benefit from 200-odd experts who help us maintain and develop those standards. The certification scheme that my team and I are responsible for, we deliver that through our certification partners, and we hold them to account, too. It is about the flow of data.

Q145 **Chair:** Are you telling us that certification side of it is working well?

Ian Rippin: We would not be reforming MCS if I felt that it was perfect, no.

Q146 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Simon, what we heard suggests that things have not been working well with the role of TrustMark. What is your role in what we have just heard?

Simon Ayers: We work in a different way from the MCS scheme. We were established in 2005 as a low-cost umbrella scheme by Government. The purpose of that scheme is to work through scheme providers, which we are talking about here, the accreditation bodies and the certification schemes. We will hold those schemes accountable under the framework operating requirement, and that has been strengthened year by year as we move forward. We are now in the next process of looking at how a sanctions policy will pick up the accountability to a high level.

We work closely with UKAS, which oversees the certification bodies. We also, very much as Ian has alluded to, have an internal team of surveyors who are independent, because we are a government scheme. The Government own TrustMark. It is their brand. We are funded purely from the fees that we collect from the installers. That is a £40 registration fee per annum and a £45 lodgement fee that we take for the work for each property that gets lodged. We are a low-cost scheme, in those terms. However, we also should take into account that if you look at the overall insulation schemes, including some low-carbon measures, 361,000 homes have seen a benefit from the delivery of insulation, low carbon, under ECO4 and under the other Green Homes schemes. We have to make changes to ensure that we avoid what has happened, without a doubt. We are strengthening all the different areas to help deliver that.

We must not forget that we are now looking at the advantages of technology. One of the questions earlier was, "How do you track a job as



it is being delivered?" You cannot, cost-wise, send somebody to site for every single job that is being undertaken, but you can now, through technology, start to identify plans, because we look at design. We will start looking at the technology that will allow us to read and understand documents and also photographs and videos. You bring that together with physical intervention, and we are starting to put the new level of capability into the system. There are opportunities now to scale up the rigour that we put into the audit and compliance regime.

The other point that has been mentioned already is that we also have to help consumers understand. Anybody who has looked at it knows that whether it be insulation or heat pumps, you go on to the internet and within probably 30 or 40 seconds you are confused by what you are reading. We need to have a very common, central source of information that will support. We also need to have tools built that will allow consumers to understand what they are really looking at—things like solar panels, batteries and all those areas. We need to help that process.

If I go back to the Each Home Counts review, which is where everything started to change, part of that had been an information hub that had been suggested. That was one of the 27 recommendations. That has never been implemented, and that would be a sensible solution by an organisation externally looking in and supporting that help. There are a number of things that we can do quickly, but longer term I also believe that we now probably have to look at how we hold the installers to more accountability. Part of what we need to look at as TrustMark is how we do that at the same time.

Q147 Chair: Thank you. You quoted 361,000 successful installations. I do not think that what we heard in the last session was described as successful for one minute, was it? You only seemed to get involved when the BBC published its inquiry. I note what you say—that you cannot attend every site—but that is pretty much what is—

Simon Ayers: In terms of the interaction, if we go back to 2022, when we started collecting data for these new schemes—that is when we came into play in this sector—we quickly started to build a number of digital programmes that would support it. One of those digital programmes that we started seeing benefit from in 2023 was an analytics platform. That analytics platform, during the mid-part of 2024, identified some challenges with some of the installer reporting, which we picked up and worked with Ofgem. We then started to see a trend around poor non-compliance, first-time non-compliance, with internal wall and external wall, which is where we raised it. That was at the same time that the BBC event came through. We were aware, and we were starting to target that, at the same time that the BBC ran its report.

Andy Manning: It is worth noting at this point that accreditation is only mandatory for government schemes. There is a world of measures being installed where there is no requirement for accreditation. We are talking about the effectiveness of those schemes, but there is another world out



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there where there is no accreditation at all. We certainly think that accreditation should be mandatory across all measures being taken.

Ian Rippin: The truth is that there has been an over-reliance on quality management systems. We talk about delivered quality. We are not that interested in how you get there, but as an installer you have to evidence to us that you have delivered quality. The other thing about resource is that it is a bit of an excuse, frankly. We should be doing risk-based assessments so that we drive our assessor resources at the places where we consider the most risk to be, and we reward—frankly, we have to do this—installers that do great work that we do not hear about through our outreach programme or complaints.

Chair: Thank you. We have talked so far this afternoon about the objective being warmer homes and lower bills. My colleague is going to ask some questions about how we get those right in the future with those objectives—and, indeed, the other ones that you mentioned, Simon, on the range of measures that can be installed.

Q148 **Mike Reader:** I will ask that, Chair, but can I ask you a direct question, Simon? In your CRM system now, how many more people are there like Zak was prior to the BBC's involvement, emailing TrustMark and saying, "I need help. Can you send a surveyor? Can you help me?" and who are getting the answer that Zak had prior to the BBC being involved, which is, "We can't help you. Take it up with the installer"? Do you have a feel from your customer data how many people are asking for help and at the moment—maybe because of your capacity, or maybe because it is not the process that you follow—those people are not getting help from you?

Simon Ayers: The process that we have is a complaint process that everyone has been privy to. You will be aware at the moment that Ofgem is writing out to 69,000 properties that have had external wall and internal wall insulation fitted. They are coming back through now, those letters. To give you an example, over 50,000 have gone out. The contact centre has taken roughly 300 interactions. From that, we are now looking at around 200 audits that will be required. These are properties the same as Zak's, where there has been external wall insulation and other measures. We need to remember that it is a project; it is not one measure.

Q149 **Mike Reader:** That is through the Ofgem work, but are there people who have emailed you who are sitting waiting for help, but as it was before the BBC—

Simon Ayers: There will be nobody in the TrustMark list waiting directly for help from TrustMark, because we will pass those certification issues on to the scheme providers, which are the certification bodies. For an example, one we received last night from an address in Luton has been actioned today.

Q150 **Luke Murphy:** I have a very quick question, and I should acknowledge that Simon and I have met before because TrustMark is based in my constituency. Earlier, you said that are responsible for holding the



scheme providers to account, but Zak made it quite clear that they were not being held to account. He was being constantly sent back to the installer. In that situation, what was TrustMark doing to hold that scheme provider to account, and how can we be assured that this has not happened to more people and is not still happening to more people?

Simon Ayers: I think in Zak's case—I cannot remember the exact details, and I can confirm that back to the Committee—the complaint had commenced, and probably the best part of a year had gone by before NAPIT heard that the body had started to interact. When legal systems come into play, there are rules about how they engage. That is through their certification process and accreditation process. Some of the framework that we have and the process that we have needs to be changed because it prevents direct action. That is something that we have done with our framework recently. The accountability there is for us to now start looking at how we engage with those scheme providers to make a programme of faster action to remediate those properties.

I know, using the Ofgem case, from what has happened recently that the remediation that has taken place at properties is probably at a rate that I have never seen before, on the basis that we carried out a massive audit before Christmas and we have about 12,000 pieces of evidence for different properties at the moment to get them remediated. There is a programme in place to start now holding people accountable.

Q151 **Mike Reader:** The Government aims to install around 600,000 heat pumps by 2028. How can the Government ensure that failures with insulation are not repeated with the rollout of low-carbon heating? I will start with Andy.

Andy Manning: There are probably four main elements to this. We think that we should be moving towards a single accreditation scheme that would cover all technologies aligned to home upgrades. That will allow a consistent, high-quality scheme to be adopted.

Q152 **Mike Reader:** That would be an accreditation scheme covered privately funded as well as—

Andy Manning: It would be covering all measures taken, regardless of whether they were via government schemes or otherwise. That gives increased expectations of successful implementation. If you do that under one badge, it starts building that consumer confidence. If we can put that towards a recognised mark that people can look for, it gives the consumer confidence to make those changes that are good for consumers.

To pick up redress again, looking from the consumer angle, we have to make the routes of redress as simple as possible. That takes you towards a single ombudsman. The third part is the legal enforcement, which Shabir talked about earlier. We see instances where it ultimately is left to the customer to try to take people to court, or it sits with Trading Standards, which has priority decisions to make about its resources. We need to find a way of making sure that that element is properly resourced



in a ringfenced way. The final bit underpinning all that is the one thing that comes most strongly through from the people we talk to, which is access to independent advice at all stages of the journey, with a special focus, as I said earlier, for those who may need more support because they are in vulnerable circumstances.

Mike Reader: Thank you. Ian, do you want to add anything to that?

Ian Rippin: In the work that we have been doing to reform MCS and get it ready for the future—MCS is not just for the boiler upgrade scheme; it is for able-to-pay and anybody who is having a microgen measure on their home—we have identified that you need to get the right organisation doing the right work. The certification bodies that we work with deliver certification assessments. What we do not want them to do is handle complaints. MCS will handle complaints, and that will be a single place to come. We put governance around that, which includes Citizens Advice, Consumer Scotland and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. We want them to hold us to account, because we are making promises that we will manage complaints through to a conclusion for the consumer. When we find that there are nonconformities, we will pass those to the certification bodies, because that is what they are good at. That is our conclusion of what we need for the future.

Q153 **Mike Reader:** This inquiry is about warm homes, but if the Chair will allow me, there is a suggestion that the Government will not be mandating a standard for new heat pump installations in new-build homes. Are you aware of that, and are you concerned about that?

Ian Rippin: Yes, I am aware of that. The insulation standards have been forged over 16 years. We know the technical truths, as we call them, in the insulation standards. If you follow them, you will stand a good chance of having a great installation. We are offering that to Government and saying, “Why don’t you use those standards?” without any condition attached. They can legislate for building regulations; I understand that. You do not need to be MCS-certified to install a new build today, but why not comply with standards that have been proven to work? That would be my suggestion.

Q154 **Mike Reader:** Simon, I will come to you with a different question. I am watching my time tick away. What role does regulation have in determining that the installation of heat pumps only occurs where it is appropriate, rather than everywhere that retailers find a willing customer?

Simon Ayers: It is interesting. We talk about a project on a property. Whether it is a heat pump, solar PV or insulation, it is a project for a property that brings that whole property to a point where we should be thinking about reducing the cost of running the property, not just the carbon. When we talk about fuel poverty schemes, we have to reduce all those things.

I believe that there is a position where we now need to align. I think that it that already happening, in fairness to my colleague Ian, where we are



talking about how we align the low carbon, the insulation measures and also things like the Building Safety Regulator and the competent persons scheme. There are so many different schemes that you are trying to plug into the same process that it becomes confusing. Shabir was talking earlier about the case in Luton with the building regulations notification process, where you have to be within a competent persons scheme, so you have to join a different scheme again to be able to notify that work. The Building Safety Regulator is looking, with the outcome of the inquiry, to see how it will change those schemes moving forward. That may include licensing for some of the high-rise areas, which I guess we will come on to in other areas.

My plea—Ian and I have spoken long and hard about this—is that we bring a commonality of delivery across these multiple schemes so that regulation can be based around a common set of standards and a common set of delivery mechanisms. I pick up Andy's point about ensuring that there is independent advice available at the stages through the programme and ensuring that you have the ability to obtain redress, but also that we are aligned in the future and we make sure that there is recourse to redress, and everything that goes with that. We must remember the level of work that we are talking about to a property; this is not just a £3,000 or £4,000 job like changing a boiler, but a £30,000 or £40,000 job in some cases.

Ian Rippin: To echo some of that, I often say that complexity is the enemy of compliance. Installers are often time poor and arguably admin poor, and they just want to know what the instructions are and what they need to comply with. We need that honesty and that direct relationship with installers that we believe we have under MCS. That needs to be backed by standardised assessments—not what one body wants to do, or what one assessor might decide or their expertise might lead them to. We need a clear set of standardised assessments that installers understand, too, so that it is open and transparent. That is what we offer. We want standardisation because we are standard-setting organisation.

Simon Ayers: Could I add one last thing? As Damian said, when we talk about warranties, we have to create a common set of requirements for warranties so that it is not a pot luck-style process. We need that commonality of delivery so that whoever is supplying the protection and whichever methodology it may be, it will protect the consumer in the event that something does go wrong.

Q155 **Claire Young:** Welcome to the Committee. I want to ask you about the Government's actions on failures under ECO4 and the Great British Insulation Scheme. My first question is for all of you, but I would like to start with you, Simon, because you referred earlier to 30 years of things being not done as they should have been. The Government's statement said that systemic issues are particular to solid wall insulation installed under the ECO4 and GBIS schemes. How confident can we be that the Minister is right?



Simon Ayers: I think that we can be very confident. I say that because there is a subtle difference in previous schemes. Previous schemes were normally single-measure schemes. The original CERT, CESP, ECO1, ECO2, ECO2t and ECO3 had all been based around a single measure being installed. ECO4 suddenly moved to a multi-measure, whole-house approach, so there was a stark difference between previous ECO schemes and the latest ECO scheme. That required the introduction of things like retrofit co-ordinators, with all the design programmes that came into play and the fact that you are bringing multiple different trades into a property at the same point. You could have heating engineers and insulation engineers; it might be a heat pump, or it could be windows. It is a very different style of delivery.

From the data that we collected on all of the ECO4 programmes, we started to be able to identify each of the areas and each of the schemes. We are confident that it is specific to ECO4 and that those higher non-compliances that we identified were within the solid wall insulation and the internal wall insulation areas.

Q156 **Claire Young:** My question was specifically about solid wall insulation. On some of the issues raised earlier by the people who have unfortunately suffered terribly, there does not seem to me to be any reason why they should not apply to have solid wall insulation installed in isolation of any other measures. I am not quite clear, so could you expand on that point?

Simon Ayers: Our main jurisdiction has been ECO4, but we have had experience and knowledge of data on ECO3 and previous schemes. We have not seen those high-level non-compliance rates within those other schemes. What we have seen is that in the new scheme, where there are multiple measures, there is a defined first-time non-compliance rate, so there is a big difference.

Claire Young: Can I quickly ask Andy and Ian to comment as well?

Andy Manning: I will quickly note that from those who come to see us, the largest component of people who talk to us about insulation do so about spray foam. Far more people contact us about issues with spray foam than about solid wall. That is to reiterate the point that we need to look beyond government schemes to how we do accreditation. We welcome what the Government have done, and removing installers from the accredited list is clearly the right move, but there is effectively a market for those installers to move into where accreditation is not needed. We do need to close those opportunities off.

Ian Rippin: MCS is not directly involved in the administration of ECO4, but I wrote to officials in August last and I am happy to submit that as a piece of evidence. We were starting to hear about issues with multi-measure installations, and heat pumps or solar PV being part of a package. It seems to us that there are complex contracting arrangements—mainly subcontracting—which if you are not in control of you end up having issues. We have steadily got ourselves involved in ECO4 because there are MCS installers contributing to it.



Q157 **Claire Young:** The Government immediately suspended 39 installers for poor practice under the ECO4 and GBIS retrofit schemes. Given that we are already facing a shortage of workers in this sector, how can we meet the level of retrofitting required in the UK to meet environmental targets?

Ian Rippin: I was shocked to see that. We perhaps take a different approach, where we are suspending installers every single week, but we work with them through a process, and they have every opportunity then to put things right. However, if they do not take that opportunity, they are withdrawn from the scheme. That is the way that we police it. We also have to remember that we have to work with industry. We have to encourage more entrants into the market. On average we get three installers a day joining MCS to fit solar PV or heat pumps. That is good but, I want to see more. This cannot look like the wild west; it has to look like a place where you can develop a career and a business. Those who do it right need to be rewarded, and those who do not need to attract more of our focus. That is what is baked into the changes that we are developing for MCS this year.

Andy Manning: The work that we do here on this Committee is important. I genuinely believe that if we get the consumer protection framework right, that will bring consumer confidence, which in turn brings the growth in the market. If you think about the importance of a single quality mark that consumers can believe in, that will help develop the growth of the market, which in turn gives the confidence that installers need to engage with the market. Getting the protection right is how we stimulate the growth.

Simon Ayers: We have a similar role to MCS where installers are suspended. We work with those installers through the certification bodies to bring them back into the marketplace, because we do have a limited number of PAS-accredited businesses to deliver insulation. The other challenge that we have generally within the construction and energy sector is that a bit of a cliff edge is looming where people who will be coming out of the sector without people coming in.

We have just carried out some research into skills for the micro and small businesses. If you look at the age group at the moment, it is late 40s and early 50s. A high percentage are saying that they are not taking on new people; they are just winding their businesses down. We are in a skills crisis as well as a delivery crisis, and we have to find that gap to fill to then plug in the entrepreneur and new people coming through. There are a number of challenges, unfortunately.

Q158 **Claire Young:** Andy, you have already indicated that you do think that it is wrong that companies are still free to operate outside of the government schemes. Do you have anything to add on that about what you think should happen?

Andy Manning: I will be repeating myself. It is about ensuring that the same protections are available to them, whatever route they take to fund these upgrades. If we are going to deliver our clean power mission, we will need individuals to make those choices and make the most of the



able-to-pay market. That is repeating my point about needing those protections to apply more generally.

Q159 **Claire Young:** Is there a role for TrustMark and MCS in rescinding certification for individuals who are identified as below standard traders, and preventing them from operating elsewhere? Ian, you have already touched on this.

Ian Rippin: One of the things that we do is to track directors—these characters who move around and set up businesses again. We watch that. Every single MCS-certified installer is monitored by us in the background on business probity, because very often when you lose control of your business, you lose control of your quality. We have to be careful here, because satisfaction on the boiler upgrade scheme, as monitored by us, is extremely high. Some 94.5% of people, on average—and we talk to everybody—are satisfied with their heat pump. So there are some fantastic installers out there, who I call artisan installers—smaller installers—right the way through to corporate installers. We need more of them, but we need to police those who are not good enough.

Simon Ayers: The area that TrustMark has to build is a greater interaction directly with businesses so that we can act more quickly. At the moment we suspend a business and we suspend them for all categories of work, whereas they may have multiple different areas of work that they would be delivering. We are looking at how we improve those areas and build them to a better level of understanding, but also bring a level of confidence back to the sector.

Q160 **Chair:** Simon, do we need the TrustMark brand to be stronger, and to get to a point where consumers will look to you to go to an installer who they believe is going to do a good job, so that people who are not accredited do not get the work? Is that where we need to head to?

Simon Ayers: I would go back to the original basis of why TrustMark was established as a government brand back in the late 1990s, before it became TrustMark (2005) in 2005. It was established for that exact purpose—to have a single organisation that could be contacted, would have oversight and would manage and deliver a programme and make sure that remediation and redress were undertaken.

Q161 **Chair:** Why do you think that has not happened? That is a leading question; I am assuming that it has not.

Simon Ayers: It is always a challenging scenario when it is a voluntary situation. If a scheme is voluntary, you are expecting people to sign up. If you put that in today's terms, where you have fewer tradespeople and more work, it is more challenging to get them to work in the owner-occupier market especially. For my sins, I have been a CORGI, when that started, but also on the Gas Safe Register, where licensing came into play for gas engineers. It removes a lot of that variance that we have with delivery.

Q162 **Chair:** If it is possible with gas engineers, is it possible more widely?



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Simon Ayers: Gas engineers have a defined accreditation route, but they also have a licence route. One of the key points with the gas scheme is that you have a business that is registered but you have individuals who are also identified. Subcontracting has been mentioned. In some of the areas of construction, as we know, you can have four, five or six levels of subcontracting, which causes some of those issues.

Ian Rippin: It is a good point, Chair. It is not about marketing TrustMark or MCS; it is about consumers knowing where to turn. Through our outreach programme, one thing we do is to position what MCS is. I have an MCS installation at home, but Mrs Rippin does not know that we have an MCS certificate. If you cannot get a solution from your installer, it is vital that you know who you go to. This is what Citizens Advice talks about in its reports, and we are reflecting that. It is a maze. You do not know who to go to, so that is why we talk to every single consumer and say, "We are here if you need us. Let's hope you don't, but we are here if you need us".

Andy Manning: Just an observation on that. We have done some research on where people go to with advice, particularly to do with heat pumps and that specific area. Both MCS and TrustMark are very much at the bottom end of where people go. I think that it does matter, and it does require promotion, because having confidence in that mark is how we build the market.

As an aside, going back to the earlier conversations, someone asked the witnesses what you they would recommend on insulation. The second most common place people go for advice is their friends and family, after tradespeople. Word of mouth is crucially important if we are going to deliver clean power. We have to get this right so that that word of mouth is a positive measure, reflecting positive experiences.

Ian Rippin: There used to be a place where you could get advice. A report that the MCS Foundation published on energising advice identified that this is a real gap—maybe not in Scotland, because there is some funding there, but the Energy Saving Trust does not have the funding to run that operation elsewhere in the UK.

Q163 **Wera Hobhouse:** We have been sitting here for two hours. Forgive me, but I feel myself to be in two separate panels here. We hear about the outrageous thing that has happened to Amanda and Zak, and they still do not have any redress. We are hearing from you that it is all quite under control, and you can deal with it, and you want to go into the future. I understand that the MCS was not necessarily involved in solid wall insulation, but if I was the MP for either Zak or for Amanda, I would like to understand how I can help them. They have gone round and round in circles, and that happens with a lot of things.

This is where even as a Member of Parliament, it becomes very frustrating that we cannot quick redress for our constituents, because the whole system seems to be set against that. All you can do as a private consumer is to be advised to take your own legal action, but people do not have the money to do that. Ultimately, quite aggressive installers



threaten their own legal action, and therefore people just go backwards and do nothing. I find that very frustrating.

How can we get to a point where my constituents, or Amanda and Zak—or, indeed, council officers on behalf of their citizens—can get redress and justice? How can we make that happen? I have not heard anything from the panel so far where you think that we can make that happen. What support would you need from this Government to make that happen?

Ian Rippin: I will take that first. Yes, that is the experience that consumers clearly are having. While MCS is not part of solid wall insulation, there are a small number of issues, as a percentage, that just bounce around. The responsibility that we take under the reformed MCS is that central point of contact. You get a case handler and you get a case, so you do not have to chase around. This is complicated, and consumers need their hand held all the way through the process. It needs to be backed by the right warranties, financial protections and guarantees. There is a lot said about these, and we have identified that they are not fit for purpose. Nobody gives you their claims history, because that is commercially sensitive. That is why for three years MCS has started selling these policies so that we could understand whether they were meaningful to consumers.

The key thing here is having one place to complain, and MPs do contact me. We take it on, and we make sure that the installer is held to account early. The longer you leave this, the more protracted and horrible it becomes. The years of pain are unbelievable. We know that the recipe is that you get to site early, and that is an expectation for the consumers and the installer. I am not saying that that happens as readily as it needs to, but that is certainly what MCS is building.

Q164 **Wera Hobhouse:** Would a single point of contact not be best placed in the council? Although councils get a lot of complaints, whenever we ask in surveys who residents trust most—is it an industry body, an independent body or the council?—a lot of people respond that it is the council. Yet the councils do not have the capacity currently to do that. Ultimately, if they had the capacity, would that still be a good point of contact for residents and constituents?

Ian Rippin: Essentially, it is where consumers will find the answers. Certainly in microgeneration, there is some complexity there and I don't know that councils have that understanding. That said, I am not just advocating for the role of MCS. We are independent and charity-owned. If we are part of a network, as long as the consumer finds a place where somebody will take on their issue, that is what we are offering for low-carbon technology. We want how you get there to be as easy to understand as possible, which is why we ring everybody and say, "If you do have a problem, you can talk to us about it".

Andy Manning: We are advocating for a reset of the consumer protection framework with a well-resourced single accreditation scheme, with legal enforcement and simple redress with a single ombudsman. If we get that right, that should reset the consumer protection framework.



Simon Ayers: We have a Warm Homes Plan, which is £6.6 billion-worth of investment to take place. Within the plan, there should be the opportunity from Government to look at how you support the information to the consumer and how you help them make the right choices for their property. There should also be a level of audit, compliance and requirement placed upon the businesses, so that they are almost required to go into a formal contract to deliver so that they can be held further accountable. We have to go through a whole process of making sure that the work is of the right standard, through different photographs and everything else.

When we think about the private rental sector, which is on the consultation at the moment, but the also the owner-occupier market, if you are spending a fairly large sum of money on your property, you want to validate that the work that you have undertaken meets those requirements on two counts. The first is energy efficiency. The second, as Amanda mentioned earlier, is about an annual check, through sensors or whatever it would be now with technology, to measure whether that property is doing what it should be doing. If it is not, that needs to be acted on very quickly and remediated. I believe that that should all be now driven from a central source.

Q165 **Wera Hobhouse:** Do you think that your own roles should be extended, and what is the scalability of that?

Simon Ayers: The scalability for TrustMark is all around funding, if I am honest. We are a scalable business, and it has always been set up to do that. We are a not-for-profit social enterprise. It is about delivering for the right reasons. I feel incredibly uncomfortable about the earlier panel, on the basis of what I have seen. I went to meet Zak in Luton, and I have seen his property. Driving home from there, I can assure you that there was a bit of soul searching going on. We cannot allow that to happen in the future, and we have to put a new map around it.

We have to recognise that through some of the new ECO programmes and Warm Homes, you will still have a mix of measures. You may have low-carbon measures and insulation measures together, so we have to make sure that there is a single source, not multiple sources. I believe that it is achievable, but it will need a bit of effort, a bit of support and a bit of funding to help that.

Ian Rippin: We have scaled to support the boiler upgrade scheme, one example being over 40,000 contacts with consumers to check, post-insulation, if they are satisfied with their installer and the insulation itself. We have offered the same service to ECO4. We think that it is part of the solution. That is what I said about earlier about getting in early and sorting problems out. I know that is different for insulation measures, and that is not our remit, but certainly on heat pumps and solar PV it makes a lot of sense to have that contact.

Q166 **Wera Hobhouse:** You are ultimately satisfied with the support and the scalability, and you think that for what you have been set up for, you are okay?



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Ian Rippin: Absolutely. We proved that last year with 274,000 installations under MCS. We have an active helpdesk that receives 100 calls a day from installers and consumers. We operate that, we operate outbound and we operate assessors in the field. For the installations that are certified under MCS, an installer pays us £30. We want to add value for that. The profit that we make, if we do, goes to the MCS charity to plough back into the industry.

Andy Manning: Just a note on advice provision. We have spoken about the importance of advice to help people navigate the whole customer journey, but that will get further complicated as new products come on that start integrating with how we use energy—heat pumps, EVs, batteries and so on. You have to be careful that the advice provision integrates with the energy advice provision that already exists. We have to make sure that the two complement each other.

Q167 **Luke Murphy:** There has been a bit of discussion, in particular with Claire, on previous schemes. In 2015, Ofgem found that about 10% of installations under ECO1 failed their first quality checks. In Northern Ireland, the 2019 report found that there was a 63% fault rate with cavity wall insulation installed in social housing. Can we really say, given the situation that we are now in and what we have heard from the previous panel, that lessons were learned?

Simon Ayers: I cannot answer for the 2015 scenario. There is an answer here about sharing more data so that we have greater insight.

Q168 **Luke Murphy:** You took over the technical reporting, I understand, from Ofgem in 2020.

Simon Ayers: Technical monitoring in 2020, yes.

Luke Murphy: So you would have been provided with the figures from Ofgem, and you would have known that there was that percentage of issues.

Simon Ayers: We had no figures. When we took over, we took over as a clean break and we did not have the previous data from Ofgem.

Q169 **Luke Murphy:** Was it not publicly available?

Simon Ayers: There were some published figures, but not all the figures were published, just its normal reporting.

Luke Murphy: Was that 10% figure of failure not available?

Simon Ayers: It would have been identified through analytics, I am sure, but when we took over we started afresh with the technical monitoring and we built our own information and source of data. We had been cognisant of the fact that there had been previous issues. Some of those Damian talked about earlier through warranty schemes and previous incidents with poor cavity installs.

Q170 **Luke Murphy:** What I am getting at is that I think that in your answer to Claire, the suggestion was that the problem with ECO4 was the multiple measures. But the data from Ofgem suggests that it was not to do with



the multiple measures, because they were single measures in ECO1. If TrustMark did not have that data, had not looked at the data or did not ask Ofgem for the data, the question is why not. Why did TrustMark not ask Ofgem to provide you with the data?

Simon Ayers: When we took over technical monitoring in 2020, there was a question set that we were given. Prior to that there would have been data, and we were aware that there were first-time non-compliances. I would not have known that it was 10%. My team may have known; I do not know. I would have to find out and come back to you. On the basis of where we were moving forward, we were looking at a very new style of independent auditing that would determine percentages. Prior to that, as you are probably aware through the various things with Ofgem, technical monitoring was delivered through technical monitoring agents that were aligned to businesses, aligned to the sector, and there was a level of questions over how good the auditing had been at that point. That is the reason that technical monitoring moved from being within the sector with the energy suppliers until the point that we took over.

Chair: I agree with Luke that this is an important question, but Damian made the comment that there could be 10.6 million homes affected by a cavity wall insulation. In my words, it is a ticking time bomb. Do you recognise that potential risk?

Simon Ayers: We would base the risk upon our current audit programmes and the analytics. Previous to when we took on the technical monitoring, that is something I would probably take away and speak to Ofgem about so that we have better stats and analytics. In the current situation—where we are today—we can look at what we have audited in terms of cavity wall. We are reducing the first-time non-compliance so that we do not have that issue moving forward. However, there is possibly a historic piece that Damian was talking about.

Q171 **Chair:** Of a very significant nature.

Simon Ayers: I could not make that comment without—

Chair: That is the point he is making.

Q172 **Luke Murphy:** There were allusions earlier from Damian to the spray foam scandal, and spray foam can still be installed through the Great British Installation Scheme. I just wondered how concerned you are about that. My understanding from the figures we have been provided is that a number of the major mortgage providers will not lend on those homes. Can we be satisfied that the households that are having spray foam installed through that scheme are not going to end up in a situation where they cannot get a mortgage on their home? It would be slightly confusing for someone who has a mortgage to have undertaken that through a government scheme, only to find that they cannot get a mortgage on their home.

Simon Ayers: There are a number of factors there. If I may come back on that one, I believe that in the reports that are being talked about,



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there are about 250,000 spray foam installations in roofs. We have registered with us 6,038 of those installations. We have had less than 50 new installations in the past two years, on the basis of the issues that we know now around mortgages and the challenges that go with it. If anything comes up in those 6,000—they were mainly through the Green Homes Grant voucher scheme as we came out of covid—we will push it back through our complaint process to investigate because there is, within that, a band where it has been installed compliantly. They have the right foam in the right loft, and it will not cause damage.

We work with a scheme provider called the Property Care Association, which will do surveying and check that process. It has also worked with RICS and with the lenders to look at how that can be achieved. I think Andy alluded earlier to the fact that there is a big market outside of the government scheme, because the government scheme is virtually nil now. We should be probably more concerned about that side, and ensure that we are regulating it in some way.

Q173 Luke Murphy: Are the guarantee agencies such as the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency—CIGA—and the Installation Assurance Authority fit for purpose, Andy?

Andy Manning: I think we can judge by the consumer outcomes that we are seeing. We are not seeing the outcomes we think are ideal at the moment. I do not have a view on the individual performance of those organisations, just that they are not getting the overall result that we are looking for at the moment.

Ian Rippin: Under MCS currently, you are obliged to buy an insurance-backed guarantee. We are not happy with those. They do not do what they say on the tin. Consumers expect a guarantee, and they are typically a two-year guarantee with highly caveated cease-to-trade policies. We are moving to change the consumer financial protections under MCS—we are going to be consulting on that soon—because we do not think that they are fit for purpose.

Simon Ayers: My very clear view on this has always been that we are working with other departments such as the Building Safety Regulator, which is at the moment undertaking a review of what a good warranty should look like. It does not stipulate the methodology, but it says what should be included. That is things like: if a business ceases to trade, what does that mean? If you retire, what does it mean? What if somebody refuses to go back and do the work and there is a failure to remediate? All of those elements should come into play. The point of all of that should be that it is wrapped up into any warranty or guarantee that is provided in the future to ensure that consumers are protected. I think everyone should then fall into line and offer that same level of protection to a consumer.

Q174 Luke Murphy: Who currently oversees the guarantee agencies? How are they regulated?



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Simon Ayers: The oversight of anything that is delivered through the regulatory scheme is through a financial protection panel, which reviews their availability on an annual basis. It does not necessarily look at the methodology; it is looking at the ability to protect the consumer. On that panel we have people from the FCA and insurers who are making that judgment.

Ian Rippin: Primarily it is the FCA looking at the insurance product itself. On the panel that involved Citizens Advice, as I mentioned earlier, we asked it for its opinion on what reliable, robust consumer financial protection should be, and we have defined that.

There are many people who would like to participate in that market, but the obligation on them will be to share their claims data, when they refuse a claim and successful outcomes. We, as MCS, want to see that, because it is part of the process of handling a consumer complaint, going through dispute resolution if you need to and then accessing the financial protection at the end. This is what consumers struggle with. They cannot join all those dots together. Someone needs to help them to do that.

Andy Manning: Yes, those caveats have been the concern, and also the fact that consumers are not aware of the caveats when they enter into contracts. There is a transparency issue there as well.

Ian Rippin: They may not know they even have a policy.

Luke Murphy: As I say, it is not just about joining the dots. It sounds like there could be a lot fewer dots. It sounds like a complete mess, if you ask me.

Simon Ayers: I would agree. The opportunity is here now to define how we protect a consumer, whether it be insulation or low carbon. I believe that any of the schemes where supporting funds are being paid out by Government and the Treasury should now fall into a position where we have that support to bring confidence back into the market.

Ian Rippin: As long as it is remediation, not compensation. People deserve what they are paid for and should get that, versus a payout to go away, as we heard in the earlier session.

Q175 **Luke Murphy:** There is an approved register, a licence or accreditation from a regulatory body for a new mobile phone contract, broadband, energy supply, taking out a bank loan, home insurance, car insurance and investing in a pension. Is there any reason why it should not be exactly the same in this sector?

Ian Rippin: DESNZ is consulting on the future role of Ofgem. We are very supportive of an extended role. Ofgem's focus, from my perspective, has been about protecting consumers from problems with their electricity bill or gas bill. In our world, these are devices that power your home. That is a very different market. We will be encouraging this review to look at an extension to the role of Ofgem, which we work with already on the boiler upgrade scheme.



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Andy Manning: I completely agree. If you are installing measures not under a government scheme, you have the right to less protection than for your mobile phone, which cannot be right.

Simon Ayers: The regulator has a role to play, as do all the regulators, but I believe that at the moment we have very few A-rated insurers, for instance, that will play in this marketplace and in the home improvement marketplace generally, including the regulatory area. We need to change that view of the sector so that you bring those organisations in to support.

I believe there is possibly a role that Government should have as well. If we look at insulation, you are expected to put a 25-year warranty on insulation with a lifetime. There are very few organisations in the country that will give a 25-year warranty. We need to think that through again and bring that all together.

Q176 **Claire Young:** If I may briefly return to my earlier question, I cannot understand how you have confidence that this is not affecting any insulation installed under other schemes when you say you can't answer for the 2015 scenario. It appears to me that there is quite a heavy reliance on what has been reported to you, and yet what we heard in the first panel was that consumers do not know how to report things. You are probably not getting the full picture.

We also heard in the first panel that somebody is capable of building a business around removing insulation, and there was a suggestion that there was possibly systemic installation of the wrong type of insulation for the location. Perhaps it is a case of going back, and I wonder whether you might consider reflecting on your answer to that one, Simon, and writing to us later. We do not have time to deal with it now.

Chair: You pre-empted what I was going to say at the end, but that is absolutely right. In fact, I think all three of you have recommendations that will need greater depth than we can manage in the six minutes we have left, when Claire has a load of other questions.

Q177 **Claire Young:** Yes, I have a bunch of questions to get through. We will try to do this quickly. We have probably already talked about the biggest challenges in regulating the retrofit industry, but, quick-fire, do any of you have any additional points?

Ian Rippin: We are putting ourselves inside the relationship that every installer has with its consumers, and we expect them to make a customer commitment that we hold them to account for. As I said in another answer, this is quite confusing for consumers. They recognise everything from, "The installer dragged mud into my house and damaged the carpet" to, "My home is cold" which of course is very serious. I would say that that is a key part: a clear, plain-English customer commitment that every MCS installer has to give.

Andy Manning: We have talked about advice, but we have not talked about information. There is a real opportunity for a national information campaign around net zero more generally but particularly around the



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consumer protection framework. When it comes to the need to take a strategic approach to talking to the public about net zero, my observation is that we are progressing towards a public information campaign supporting the need for more transmission infrastructure and public acceptance of pylons, and that is a perfectly worthy campaign, but if I was designing a public information campaign about net zero, it might start with things like this—consumer protections—rather than public support for pylons. It would be a more strategic approach to how we provide our public information, with this at the centre of it.

Chair: Thank you for that, because we have just decided to have an inquiry into making the case for the energy transition. We shall take your evidence there and include it in that inquiry.

Simon Ayers: I would support that wholeheartedly. Information and advice would be the first piece that we need to ensure is common and valid in its approach. We need better oversight of competence requirements for businesses, and the audit, validation and probably the control of those businesses needs to be stepped up. We have to improve our audit compliance on the installations themselves—that includes the pre, the mid and the post—so that we have a record of what is happening but we are also validating the outcomes. We need greater accountability for those that are within the sector delivering money, either through the capital or the grant-funded schemes.

Q178 **Claire Young:** I have one specifically for you, Andy. Can you give homeowners confidence when they are thinking about investing in energy efficiency measures?

Andy Manning: I think the measures that I discussed earlier, which I will not go over again, are the route to providing confidence. We need to reform the consumer protection framework in order to deliver that confidence. The good news story is that our evidence shows that where people have put in these measures, 90% of people would recommend them to their friends in general. That is not meant to devalue the terrible stories we heard earlier. People like them and they are good for consumers, but we need to make these changes to deliver that confidence.

Q179 **Claire Young:** I am not sure who this one would be directed at. Currently we have EPCs, which people use to judge energy efficiency. They are made on the basis that the work has been done correctly. If an EPC has been assessed on that basis and the installation has not been done properly, it is faulty and it has to be removed, at that point should the requirement be to do a new EPC, funded by the installer, as part of the redress for the errors?

Simon Ayers: Yes. My view would be that that would be a yes, because you are changing the fundamental value of the property, so it should have a new EPC.

Q180 **Claire Young:** Finally, a question for all of you. Is it possible to keep rogue traders out of the sector? Shall I start with Simon this time?



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Simon Ayers: One of the panel members mentioned that wherever you have free money—in other words, grant schemes or capital schemes—it is incredibly challenging, because you will have people trying to access those funds through many different ways.

We need to think more about how we track phoenixing, because phoenixing is not just about a director moving from one company to another but a relative who may set up a business and transfer. We look for addresses and commonalities, so there is more we are doing in that. Unfortunately, we have to work within the parameters of Companies House and what you are allowed legally to do, but we are also tracking things like mobile phone numbers and email addresses. There is a greater capacity to look and stop rogue traders where we can.

We have a very close working relationship with Trading Standards. One of the conversations we have started again at the moment is embedding Trading Standards back into TrustMark so that we have a direct relationship and the ability to take action.

Chair: We will get Chris Chope to ask one very short question to finish.

Q181 **Sir Christopher Chope:** I would like to ask Mr Ayers to start off with whether he believes that the mortgage lenders are wrong to withdraw mortgages from 250,000 homes.

Simon Ayers: We are talking about spray foam?

Sir Christopher Chope: Yes, exactly.

Simon Ayers: In terms of spray foam, I can only make a comment on what I have seen in the 6,000 that we know about. Where they are incorrectly installed, that roof should be remediated, absolutely, and I can understand why you would then be nervous about a mortgage on that property. There are instances where the correct foam has been installed and there are surveyors who can be engaged through RICS and the Property Care Association. Some of the lenders will accept their reports.

Q182 **Sir Christopher Chope:** Who pays for that?

Simon Ayers: At the moment it would be the homeowner who would be paying for that. If it is a complaint through our programme, we will push that back through the scheme provider, which is the Property Care Association, and we would look at how that is funded.

Q183 **Sir Christopher Chope:** Can I ask all of you about the issue relating to the preparation for these schemes? I think anybody listening to the evidence today would not touch a heat pump installation with a barge pole, for all sorts of reasons, including the issue around whether or not insulation is needed and other adaptations to the house. We have conflicting evidence. For example, Mike Foster, the Chief Executive of the Energy and Utilities Alliance, has said that heat pumps are unsuitable for 54% of homes currently using gas boilers. Other people say that almost every house needs to be adequately insulated, and yet there are issues around the extent of such insulation.



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Isn't the first thing to ensure that before anybody puts in a heat pump, there has been a proper survey of the house, there has been a proper specification, they have been told what the heating qualities of the house are and there is a guarantee as to what they will be after that installation? It is no good just installing a heat pump and then some time after the event saying, "It does not meet all my specifications". The Government is—I think commendably—taking some action about all this black mould, but if you install a heat pump and then you get black mould, are you going to be able to prove that it is because you had an inadequate specification in the first place?

Chair: That is one for Ian Rippin.

Ian Rippin: Yes, I think that is definitely one for me.

Chair: Put our minds at rest that we are not going to see another disaster with the installation of heat pumps.

Ian Rippin: I think the evidence is there that you are not, because of what I have said about the boiler upgrade scheme. I would say, though, that whatever your heat source, the best thing to do is use less of it. You should insulate your home properly and use less, even if it is a gas boiler. Gas boilers are very forgiving, are they not, and now that we have a different relationship with energy, we can see how expensive that is. A heat pump is the most efficient energy heating device there is on the planet.

MCS requires a detailed site survey and a design for the installation that we can hold the installers to account for, and they are required to give a system performance estimate to their consumer that you can then check. It is always that argument about, "I expected it to do this". Well, was it written down? Did your installer promise a particular level of performance for your home? Most people just want a warm and cosy home. It has not made us popular, but we have created standards specifically around system performance.

Chair: Thank you very much. I am going to call time there, because it is two and a half hours into the session. I thank Simon Ayers, Andy Manning and Ian Rippin for your evidence this afternoon, and I repeat my thanks to Zak and Amanda, in particular, from earlier for what you told us. We will take this away and add it into the work we are doing alongside the report we are publishing into the inquiry into heating our homes, and we will take this up with the Minister as well. I am sure that we will return to this numerous times. Thank you all for taking part, and that is the end of the session.