businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Services

In the guide

Services: your obligations
What customers are entitled to
Time for action
Disputes
Guarantees

Before you start, make sure you choose your location by using the drop-down list at the top of the page and then clicking on the arrow.

For more detailed information, please see the In-depth Guides below. Some laws are different in England, Scotland and Wales, and some are enforced differently, so the In-depth Guides provide country-specific information.

Once you've finished, make sure you look at the full range of Quick Guides to see whether there are any other areas of law that affect your business.

Services are provided by businesses such as accountants, dry cleaners, paid-parking providers, home maintenance firms and motor vehicle repairers.

A legal contract for the supply of a service exists between you and your customer. This means that you are responsible for the services that you provide.

The law sets out requirements for the performance of the service, time limits for legal action, and what customers are entitled to when something goes wrong.

These rules apply whether or not you also supply goods and/or digital content as part of the same contract.

If you supply goods and/or digital content as well (for example, materials used on a job, or fitting a kitchen / installing block paving you have supplied) there are additional rules that apply to you, so you'll need to read the Quick Guides 'Goods' and 'Digital'.

Services: your obligations

If you supply services, you have legal responsibilities, which means you must carry out the service:

- With reasonable care and skill
- In accordance with anything you or your agents / employees have told the consumer
- Within a reasonable time (if the time was not fixed as part of the contract)
- At a reasonable charge (if the price was not fixed in advance as part of the contract)

You should carry out only the work that had been agreed or authorised by the consumer. If extra work is needed, get the consumer's permission before you go ahead.

What is 'reasonable' generally depends on what is acceptable practice for your particular trade or profession.

What customers are entitled to

If the service was not carried out correctly, the consumer can require you to put the problem right. If this is impossible or unsuccessful, the consumer is entitled to a reduction in price. Alternatively, the consumer may be able to claim compensation for losses suffered or for the cost of having the work put right by someone else.

If the service was not carried out within a reasonable time, the consumer is entitled to a reduction in price.

> There are additional rules that apply when you accept card payments or offer credit.
>
> Please see the 'Pricing and payment' Quick Guide for more information.

Time for action

The law sets a time limit for customers to take legal action. In England and Wales, this time limit is generally six years from when the service goes wrong; in Scotland, the limit is five years, but, broadly speaking, this runs from the time the customer first discovered the problem.

Disputes

If a consumer is unhappy with the quality of your work, you are obliged to put the problem right free of charge. If you are in dispute with the consumer about whether or not the work is of poor quality, then the consumer needs to prove their claim.

> Consumers may have extra rights, including the right to a 14-day cooling-off period in which they

> can cancel an agreed contract, when they buy at a distance (online, phone, mail order, etc) or off-premises (such as at their home).
>
> When you've finished reading this, take a look at our 'Distance sales' and 'Off-premises sales' Quick Guides if these apply to you.

Guarantees

You are legally bound to honour the terms of any free guarantee you offer to consumers.

© 2026 Chartered Trading Standards Institute

Source URL: *https://www.businesscompanion.info/en/quick-guides/services*