

Press release: Hotel booking sites to make major changes after CMA probe

Expedia, Booking.com, Agoda, Hotels.com, ebookers and trivago have been the subject of CMA enforcement action due to serious concerns around issues like pressure selling, misleading discount claims, the effect that commission has on how hotels are ordered on sites, and hidden charges.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) took action last year because it was concerned that practices such as giving a false impression of a room's popularity or not displaying the full cost of a room upfront could mislead people, stop them finding the best deal and potentially break consumer protection law.

All companies under investigation by the CMA have co-operated with its work and voluntarily agreed to the following:

Search results: making it clearer how hotels are ranked after a customer has entered their search requirements, for example telling people when search results have been affected by the amount of commission a hotel pays the site.

Pressure selling: not giving a false impression of the availability or popularity of a hotel or rushing customers into making a booking decision based on incomplete information. For example, when highlighting that other customers are looking at the same hotel as you, making it clear they may be searching for different dates. The CMA also saw examples of some sites strategically placing sold out hotels within search results to put pressure on people to book more quickly. Sites have now committed not to do this.

Discount claims: being clearer about discounts and only promoting deals that are actually available at that time. Examples of misleading discount claims may include comparisons with a higher price that was not relevant to the customer's search criteria. For example, some sites were comparing a higher weekend room rate with a weekday rate or comparing the price of a luxury suite with a standard room.

Hidden charges: displaying all compulsory charges such as taxes, booking or resort fees in the headline price. Sites can still break that price down, but the total amount the customer has to pay should always be shown upfront.

CMA Chairman, Andrew Tyrie, said:

The CMA has taken enforcement action to bring to an end misleading sales tactics, hidden charges and other practices in the online hotel booking market. These have been wholly unacceptable.

6 websites have already given firm undertakings not to engage in these practices. They are some of the largest hotel booking sites. The CMA will now do whatever it can to ensure that the rest of the

sector meets the same standards.

Not all firms engaged in all of the practices cited above, but all have nonetheless agreed to abide by all the principles set out in the undertakings.

The CMA will now monitor compliance with the commitments made by the booking sites. All changes must be made by 1 September at the very latest, though the sites have already started making improvements.

It will also write to other hotel booking sites including online travel agents, metasearch engines and hotel chains setting out clear expectations for how they should be complying with consumer protection law. The CMA also expects these sites to make necessary changes by 1 September. If it finds sufficient evidence that others could be breaking consumer protection law, it will consider taking further enforcement action.

Notes to editors

1. The key piece of consumer protection legislation relevant to the CMA's investigation is the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs). The CPRs contain a general prohibition against unfair commercial practices and specific prohibitions against misleading actions, misleading omissions and aggressive commercial practices.
2. The CMA has not made a finding on whether the hotel booking sites' practices have breached consumer law. Ultimately, only a court can decide whether a particular practice infringes the law. As an enforcer under Part 8 of the Enterprise Act 2002, the CMA can enforce the above legislation through the courts if necessary. However, all parties co-operated with the CMA and agreed to make changes to their practices. The provision of undertakings is not an admission of a breach of the law.
3. Media enquiries should be directed to the CMA Press Office at press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.
4. Not all firms engaged in all of the practices cited above, but all have nonetheless agreed to abide by all the principles set out in the undertakings.
5. More information can be found on the [online hotel booking](#) case page.

[News story: Government moves forward on advanced trials for self-driving vehicles](#)

- government strengthens guidelines on trial safety and transparency
- UK seeks to cement position as a world leader in automated vehicle

trials

- government to develop process to help support advanced trials

In a strong signal of support for the UK automotive and technology industries, the government has announced today (6 February 2019) that a process is being developed to support the advanced trials of automated vehicles. Advanced trials will not be supported unless they have passed rigorous safety assessments.

In response to feedback from industry, the government has also announced that its world leading [code of practice for testing automated vehicles](#) will be strengthened further to set even clearer expectations for safe and responsible trials.

The news reinforces the UK's status as a global leader in the safe and responsible testing of automated vehicles. With the UK's market for connected and automated vehicles estimated to be worth £52 billion by 2035, this is a major boost to a sector open to investment from the world's brightest transport technology companies. It also demonstrates that the government is on track to meet its commitment to have fully self-driving vehicles on UK roads by 2021, as part of the government's modern [Industrial Strategy](#).

Jesse Norman, Future of Mobility Minister, said:

Thanks to the UK's world class research base, this country is in the vanguard of the development of new transport technologies, including automation.

The government is supporting the safe, transparent trialling of this pioneering technology, which could transform the way we travel.

Richard Harrington, Automotive Minister, said:

The UK has a rich heritage in automotive development and manufacturing, with automated and electric vehicles set to transform the way we all live our lives.

We want to ensure through the Industrial Strategy Future of Mobility Grand Challenge that we build on this success and strength to ensure we are home to development and manufacture of the next generation of vehicles.

We need to ensure we take the public with us as we move towards having self-driving cars on our roads by 2021. The update to the code of practice will provide clearer guidance to those looking to carry out trials on public roads.

The 'code of practice', first published in 2015, makes clear that automated

vehicle trials are possible on any UK road provided they are compliant with UK law – including testing with a remote driver. The update to the code acknowledges the growing desire of industry to conduct more advanced trials, and a process to handle such trials on public roads is now being developed.

Under the strengthened code, those carrying out trials for automated vehicles will be expected to publish safety information, trial performance reports and to carry out risks assessments before conducting a trial. Trialling organisations are also expected to inform the relevant authorities, emergency services, and anyone who might be affected by trial activity.

This announcement is another milestone in the government's [Future of Mobility Grand Challenge](#), a key part of the UK's modern Industrial Strategy, which aims to take advantage of the extraordinary innovation in UK engineering and technology to make journeys safer, cleaner, cheaper, and more reliable.

[Press release: Rohingya refugees shielded from disease by UK aid](#)

The life-saving early warning system gathers information on new disease cases across 168 health centres in Cox's Bazaar and uses an innovative mobile app to allow experts to identify and track potentially deadly outbreaks – helping to protect the more than one million Rohingya people living there.

Supported by the Department for International Development (DFID), the system is currently being used to track and respond to an outbreak of chicken pox in the camps.

More than 4,000 people are believed to have contracted the virus, almost half of whom are under five years old. The early warning system has helped the World Health Organisation (WHO) experts in Cox's Bazaar to provide health advice and medicine, focusing on the most vulnerable, complicated cases.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Aid isn't just about reacting to a crisis after the fact; we are using technology and intelligence to prevent and respond to problems before they become disasters.

By responding at the first stage of a disease outbreak, rather than when it is already an epidemic, we will save more lives, more efficiently.

Chicken pox is familiar to children and families across the world, but it is significantly worse in a refugee camp. That is why UK aid

is helping the most vulnerable and is prepared to respond to new outbreaks in the future.

The crowded conditions in the camps allow disease to spread rapidly. Early warnings are critical in quickly responding to prevent infections spreading and to train local health workers. This will make a significant difference when facing particularly dangerous outbreaks such as cholera or diphtheria.

Following an outbreak of diphtheria in the camps in December 2018, the UK aid funded Emergency Medical Team (EMT), made up of the UK's top medical professionals, was deployed to Cox's Bazaar to help stem the spread of this deadly disease.

While chicken pox is generally low risk, there is some risk of complications from secondary infections like pneumonia, or to pregnant women. WHO medical staff are distributing medicine for the worst symptoms and monitoring complicated cases.

Notes to Editors:

- WHO established The Early Warning Alert and Response System (EWARS) in September 2017 and with UK aid support the system has been considerably strengthened to manage with the major health challenges from the field.
- Total DFID support to the Early Warning Alert and Response System (EWARS) is £950,000.
- The UK is calling on the international community to provide long-term support to keep the Rohingya people safe in the years to come, both in Bangladesh and in Burma.
- The UK has contributed £129 million to the crisis in Bangladesh since 25 August 2017. The UK's contribution to preparedness and response plans will reduce the impact of natural disasters and outbreaks of disease and strengthen the resilience of affected Rohingya people and host communities.

Press release: Seven year framework for Government and public sector development projects launched

- Framework will support the long-term development of building projects across the Government and public sector estates up to 2026
- Scheme gives both small and large firms the chance to bid to work on projects

- Money for the work will come from existing budgets

A new funding framework has been developed to allow construction firms, small and large, the chance to bid for work on government projects over the next seven years.

The Construction Works and Associated Services commercial agreement will assist central Government and the wider public sector with projects focused on the construction, refurbishment, repair, demolition or decommission of public buildings across the UK.

The framework has been designed by Crown Commercial Service (CCS) to provide customers and suppliers with the assurances required for long-term projects, and make sure the Government gets best value for money.

John Welch, CCS's Deputy Director for Construction, said:

This agreement will support construction and drive industry growth.

Its lotting structure has been designed to maximise opportunities for all sizes of company and that includes SMEs, which play a key role in UK construction.

For example, standardised payment terms and other fair payment objectives are embedded within the framework scope. This agreement also facilitates the use of digitisation in construction and promotes the use of innovative solutions via modern methods of construction.

It is estimated that over the seven year life of the framework, the cost of the works carried out across the country could be up to £30bn or less – with the projects led by departments and the money taken from existing departmental budgets.

The framework has been designed with flexibility in mind to service a range of construction and civil engineering requirements across both central government and the wider public sector.

Prompt payment initiatives and project bank accounts (PBA's) have been incorporated into the framework to support supply chains. Policy like this is embedded throughout to help sustain and grow the market whatever the size of the organisation, but is particularly useful for SMEs and specialist suppliers.

Suppliers interested in bidding for this opportunity have to register on the CCS eSourcing system. Instructions on how to access the CCS eSourcing system can be viewed along with the tender documentation by visiting the project webpage:

The tender period went live on 31st January 2019. A bidders' day will take

place on Friday 8th February 2019, details are provided within the OJEU Contract Notice.

[News story: AI and digital design to transform future of UK construction](#)

Using artificial intelligence to predict and plan construction projects and avoid possible delays is one of the ideas to win funding to transform how the UK delivers buildings and infrastructure.

Just over £18 million is being invested through the [Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund](#) in research, development and innovation projects to support a more efficient, highly-skilled and productive construction industry.

The funding from [UK Research and Innovation](#) is part of the transforming construction challenge – a £170 million government commitment, matched by £250 million from industry – to embed new approaches and techniques that enable the UK to become a world leader.

Business-led collaborations

A total of £13.3 million has been awarded to 24 projects, which will see industry collaborate with the research base to innovate.

Included in the awarded projects are:

- a project by [nPlan](#), [Kier](#) and the [University of Cambridge](#), which will use AI and algorithms to better predict, plan and schedule construction projects. The aim is to optimise buildings and reduce time and cost
- a consortium including housebuilder, [Barratt Developments](#), and one of the largest social landlords, [L&Q](#), which aims to make offsite manufacturing a viable alternative to traditional methods by exploring how it can bring down the costs, reduce defects and improve productivity
- a [Keltbray Group](#)-led project to develop a new piling technology that will enhance capacity and improve sustainability when laying foundations

For all projects, the ultimate aim is to:

- develop digitally-enabled simulations that support the design and management of buildings
- adopt offsite manufacturing approaches that improve the quality of buildings
- create active power generation and storage within buildings

Construction Minister, Richard Harrington, said:

The use of artificial intelligence, digital techniques and off-site manufacturing help us harness new methods of working and delivers on the government's [Construction Sector Deal](#).

These new methods to help the construction industry are a testament to the government's modern Industrial Strategy's aims of building a better tomorrow for us all through scientific and technological advances.

Talented teams addressing complex challenges

A further £5 million is being invested to support successful research leaders to build talented teams and take on a complex research programme within the context of the transforming construction challenge.

There are 4 research projects that will share funding. These range from exploring the potential for digitally-designed, 3D-printed concrete components, to assessing the use of robots for both on and off-site construction.

Another project will look at integrating voice-activated AI and augmented reality in the assembly of components to speed up construction and increase productivity.

Industry working directly with researchers

Professor Sir Mark Walport, UKRI Chief Executive, said:

Technologies being developed in the UK provide a significant opportunity to transform the way we build, such as the use of augmented reality to improve design or robotics to aid complex building assembly.

Through projects such as these, the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund allows us to catalyse innovation across the UK's construction industry, improving productivity, sustainability and safety.

Sam Stacey, Director of the Transforming Construction Challenge, added:

These grants play a key role in advancing transformation across the sector.

They will help the construction industry work directly with talented researchers to explore new ways of working that will speed up assembly, save money, and improve the quality of building projects.