

# OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

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Mr David Harker  
Chief Executive  
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux  
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11 November 2002

## NACAB SUPER-COMPLAINT

You wrote to me on 3 September about the sale of goods and services to consumers in the home, identifying a number of issues associated with this activity which you believed indicated that consumers were suffering detriment. You enclosed a copy of your report *Door to Door: CAB clients' experience of doorstep selling*. In my reply I said that we were happy to accept your letter and report as a super-complaint, and would respond substantively and publicly within ninety days.

We have looked carefully at the issues raised by your super-complaint. We have taken a preliminary look at published information about sales to consumers in their home, at the evidence disclosed by complaints to the OFT, and at the current legislative framework. We have discussed your evidence with you, and we have also spoken to a number of other parties with a knowledge of, or involvement, in this area. We are now in a position to respond.

Being able to buy goods and services in the home is useful for many consumers and for some it is essential. We do not wish to do anything which limits unnecessarily businesses' ability to sell in the home, and consumers' ability to buy. But at the same time, your report describes selling practices which were clearly detrimental to the individual consumers affected. What we cannot be sure of is whether these undesirable practice are specific to a small number of businesses or whether there is something about selling in the home more generally – or about some of the products and services commonly sold in the home – which makes them more likely to occur there.

We propose using powers under section 2 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to carry out an investigation which will throw light on these issues. Initially we will take a broad view of our subject, not confining ourselves to the goods and services identified in your report but instead considering the whole range of goods and services sold face to face to consumers in their own homes. Later on we will focus on some case studies, which we expect to include the supply of home improvements (such as double glazing and fitted kitchens) and of assistive products for the elderly and disabled. We will keep you informed as our investigation progresses.

We expect our investigation to take up to a year.

This letter, and the enclosed response to your super-complaint, will be posted on our website.

**John Vickers**  
**Director General of Fair Trading**