

# **Local Authority Assured Trader Scheme Network**

**Information and procedural guide  
for LAATSN scheme operators**

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of this document is to set out information on the policies behind the administration of the Local Authority Assured Trader Scheme Network (LAATSN) and also highlight procedures in respect of these policies that you, as a LAATSN scheme operator, need to follow.

## 2. Communications

The following outlines LAATSN's policy regarding communication, both internal and external. It also provides guidance regarding local promotion, and the assistance that you can receive in undertaking such promotion.

### **Policy**

LAATSN believes effective communication is essential to its work and central to its relationship with partners and the public. In addition, a comprehensive communications policy sends an important message to all stakeholders indicating that their support and input are valued.

LAATSN will ensure that its communications will operate in a manner that values diversity and does not discriminate because of skin colour, accent, culture, religious belief, sexual orientation, age, ability, gender, social background or any other difference.

LAATSN supports transparency in all its activities and encourages open communication at all levels.

The National Standards and Support Committee (NSSC) has overall responsibility for ensuring effective communication by LAATSN.

### Communication within LAATSN

Communication within LAATSN is facilitated by the NSSC secretariat under the direction of the NSSC.

The NSSC secretariat is responsible for forwarding communication between the NSSC and LAATSN scheme operators in accordance with any relevant procedural documents. The NSSC secretariat ensures that any relevant time limits are adhered to by the parties involved.

The NSSC secretariat is responsible for maintaining an appropriate record of all communications.

The NSSC secretariat is responsible for arranging meetings in accordance with agreed procedures and produces, distributing and maintaining records of all meetings held.

### External Communication

LAATSN is committed to consulting with all its partners and stakeholders on appropriate issues regarding the scheme, in particular with the business community and consumers.

Feedback and consultation on LAATSN is an on-going process. The NSSC secretariat ensures that appropriate communication channels are in existence to receive feedback from interested parties, for example through the LAATSN website.

The NSSC will normally consider all feedback and comments on the operation of LAATSN at its Annual Review. However, the NSSC secretariat has the discretion to forward a matter for immediate consideration if it believes the matter is of sufficient import.

The NSSC is responsible for ensuring the maintenance of the LAATSN website, which is the focal point for external communication.

Ratification of scheme members:

All LAATSN scheme operators are listed with contact details on the LAATSN website. After ratification, special emphasis shall be given to a new LAATSN member on the website for one month.

LAATSN scheme operators will be able to highlight the fact that they are members of LAATSN in any local promotional activities. However, this must be done in accordance with the promotional guidelines (as set out later under 'Promoting Membership of LAATSN – Guidelines for LAATSN Scheme Operators).

New LAATSN scheme operators will be given support and assistance from the OFT in designing regional promotion and publicity campaigns (as set out later under 'Promotional Support and Assistance for LAATSN Scheme Operators).

### Best Practice Guidance:

The LAATSN website will carry an index of best practice. When a new example of best practice is recognised, information shall also be disseminated via the LACORS (Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services) messaging system and further detail will be specifically provided to the LACORS Fair Trading Group for cascading to each regional grouping.

LAATSN scheme operators may agree to give other operators further individual advice and assistance regarding an example of best practice. A reasonable charge may be made by the originating operator for this assistance.

### General Information:

The LAATSN website carries general information about the network and electronic versions of all relevant guidance documents and forms.

Significant general information, such as any changes to the standards set down within the application form, or any changes to the application procedures, will be disseminated via the LACORS messaging system.

Regular updates will be provided by the NSSC secretariat to the LACORS Fair Trading Focus Group for cascading to each regional grouping. Where necessary the LACORS representative on the NSSC shall arrange for a more detailed report to be presented to the LACORS Fair Trading Focus Group.

### Media Communications:

Press releases and other proactive media communications are agreed by the NSSC before release.

Media enquiries are dealt with by the NSSC Chair or their nominated delegate.

## **Promoting Membership of LAATSN – Guidelines for LAATSN Scheme Operators**

Scheme members of individual LAATSN scheme operators will be able to indicate that they are approved by their local scheme operator but will not be able to claim directly or indirectly any form of approval, accreditation or recognition by any of the national organisations involved in LAATSN.

LAATSN scheme operators will be able to indicate that their scheme has national recognition. They will be able to use phrases such as “recognised

by” and/or “supported by” but will not be able to claim any formal approval or accreditation.

LAATSN scheme operators will be able to provide a direct link from any website under their control to the LAATSN website. Scheme members must not provide direct links from their website to the LAATSN website.

LAATSN scheme operators will have access free of charge to LAATSN’s bank of promotional material for incorporation into their local promotional activities.

The NSSC will, on behalf of LAATSN, endeavour to adopt as flexible an approach as possible to promotion and publicity by LAATSN scheme operators. However, any novel text, images or other promotional activities in so far as they relate to LAATSN must have the prior approval of the NSSC before being used.

Communications concerning promotion of LAATSN membership shall be directed to the NSSC Secretariat at [laatsn@oft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:laatsn@oft.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Promotional Support and Assistance for LAATSN Scheme Operators**

LAATSN scheme operators will receive the following assistance and support from the OFT for local promotion of the scheme:

1. A webpage on the main OFT website publicising LAATSN and providing links to individual local schemes for consumers to search for local businesses.
2. A bank of promotional material, accessible free of charge, for incorporation into local promotional activities. This will include:
  - A standard promotional strap-line and a statement to indicate that the scheme is a member of a recognised national network.
  - A selection of standard key messages
  - Sample press releases for various events; for example, the initial launch and key milestones in the development of the scheme.
  - Supportive quotes from OFT, LACORS & TSI, available on request.
  - Sample press advertisement templates
  - Sample radio advertisement texts
  - Sample media Q&A
  - Sample print artwork, including posters, business and consumer leaflets.
3. On-going advice and consultancy from the OFT regarding future local promotional activities.

4. Communications concerning promotional support and assistance for LAATSN members shall be directed to the NSSC Secretariat at [laatsn@oft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:laatsn@oft.gsi.gov.uk)

### 3. NSSC Terms of reference

#### **Purpose of the NSSC**

The primary aim of the NSSC is to provide leadership for LAATSN. The NSSC is responsible for ensuring that LAATSN is effectively promoted and developed and that appropriate networking and co-ordination exists between all relevant stakeholders.

In particular its role includes:

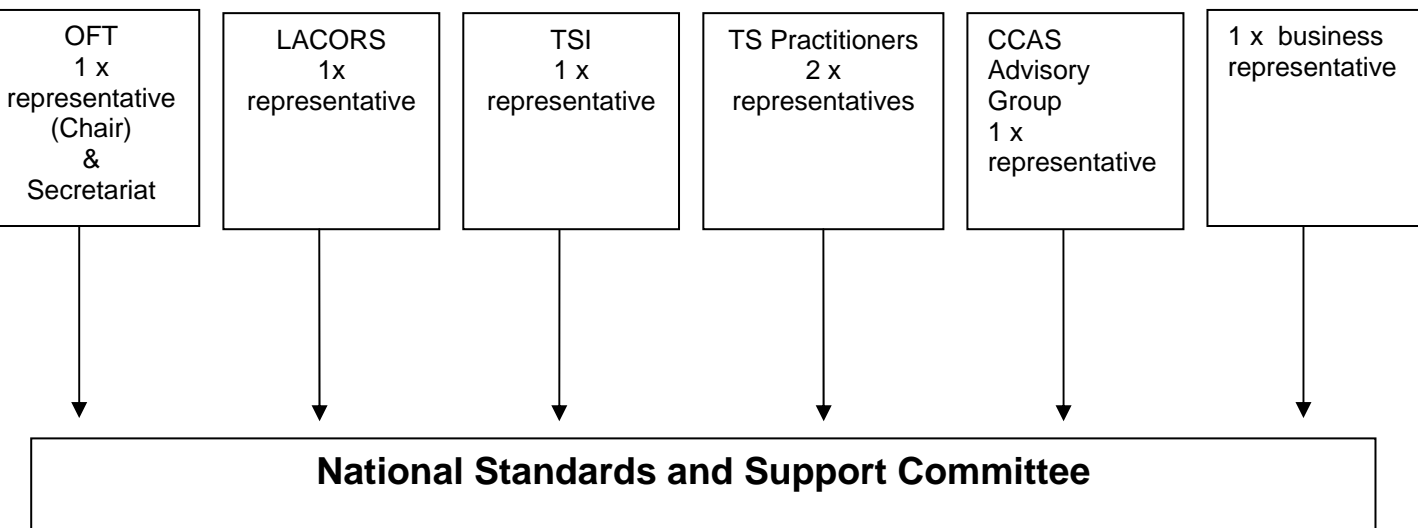
- agreeing the standards and guidelines that schemes must meet in order to join LAATSN,
- agreeing the other administrative documentation necessary to facilitate the smooth operation of LAATSN,
- ratifying applications for membership of LAATSN,
- monitoring and overseeing the development of LAATSN. This includes an Annual Review of the minimum standards and guidelines,
- promoting the take-up and development of existing schemes,
- considering the formation of sub-committees as necessary in order to most effectively accomplish the above responsibilities.

#### **Membership**

The constitution of the NSSC is as follows.

- A representative from the OFT (Chair). The OFT also provides the secretariat.
- A representative from the Trading Standards Institute (TSI),

- A representative from LACORS (Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services).
- Two representatives nominated by the LACORS Trading Standards Policy Forum.
- A consumer representative of the CCAS Advisory Group. Although there is no formal link between the CCAS and LAATSN this representative will not only provide an independent consumer perspective but also act as a useful conduit of information between the two systems.
- A business representative to provide a perspective from the small-medium enterprise sector.



The NSSC has the discretion to vary or increase representation to the Committee. Nominations for consideration can be put forward to the NSSC from any of the current stakeholders.

### **Conduct of Business**

The majority of NSSC business, including ratification of LAATSN schemes, is conducted electronically and facilitated by the NSSC secretariat.

The NSSC meets once each year to conduct an Annual Review of the LAATSN, including a review of the minimum standards and guidelines.

The NSSC may convene additional meetings to address specific issues or projects and has the discretion to amend the minimum standards or any of the LAATSN administrative documents with immediate effect.

Where NSSC members are unable to attend meetings every effort should be made to send a nominated deputy. Any nominated deputies present shall be afforded full committee member rights.

Decisions will be made by a simple majority of members.

### **NSSC Operational Sub-groups**

The NSSC agrees the constitution of any operational sub-groups set up to further the development of LAATSN or carry out any other work on behalf of the NSSC.

## **4. Monitoring and assessment**

It is the responsibility of the LAATSN scheme operator to notify the NSSC secretariat, in writing, of any change to their scheme which might affect their compliance with any of the minimum standards.

The NSSC secretariat will forward any such notifications to the NSSC for consideration and appropriate action.

It is the responsibility of the LAATSN scheme operator to ensure an independent assessment of their scheme is carried out every 3 years and that the findings of that assessment are forwarded to the NSSC secretariat.

The NSSC secretariat will be responsible for monitoring the timing of such assessments and ensuring that reports are received

The NSSC secretariat will be responsible for examining the reports and actioning as below.

The NSSC secretariat will forward any adverse comments relating to minimum standards to the NSSC for consideration and appropriate action.

The NSSC secretariat will record any general comments on best practice for consideration by the NSSC at its Annual Review.

The NSSC will consider any problems with the assessment process as part of its Annual Review.

## 5. Consultation and development

Members of LAATSN and other interested parties can forward comments and suggestions concerning all aspects of the operation of LAATSN to the NSSC secretariat.

The NSSC will take into consideration any comments received at its Annual Review meeting and may decide to amend LAATSN accordingly. (See NSSC Terms of Reference).

The NSSC secretariat will decide whether any comments require forwarding to the NSSC for more immediate consideration.

In such cases, the NSSC may decide to amend LAATSN with immediate effect.

The NSSC may decide at their discretion to carry out more formal consultation as and when necessary.

The NSSC may commission sub-groups to carry on all or part of its work as necessary.

## 6. Disciplinary Action

Responsibility for disciplinary action relating to membership of LAATSN is the responsibility of the NSSC.

Disciplinary action may be taken against LAATSN scheme operators for non-compliance with the minimum standards or in other exceptional circumstances as agreed by the NSSC.

Sanctions that may be imposed as a result of any disciplinary action include:

- A requirement to amend the practices and/or procedures of an individual scheme.
- A formal written warning.
- Expulsion from LAATSN.

