Dear Mr Betts,

I am writing following the Communities and Local Government Committee having taken oral evidence from Building Regulations Minister Stephen Williams MP on the subject of how electrical work in dwellings is conducted.

In light of some of the questions posed on 9 July, and the launch of the Registered Competent Person register on 30 June, I wanted to update you on what we will be doing to enhance confidence, standards, and safety in the industry. Given some of the technical questions that were posed on 9 July, I would welcome the chance to meet you to go over any queries that you might still have.

**Strengthening confidence in the Qualified Supervisor model**

There has been sustained concern that the person or persons who carry out electrical work may not be fully competent (such as qualified to Level 3 or equivalent, as Qualified Supervisors now have to be). Of the 36,000 firms that Certsure assesses on an annual basis, more than 70% are sole traders. Therefore, the QS (the person legally responsible for signing for the technical standard of the work) and the person doing the work are the same. Where this is not the case, our assessors work with firms to agree an appropriate ratio of QSSs to ensure the appropriate level of supervision and management of the electrical installation work carried out. This ensures it meets the relevant standards in compliance with H&S and all other statutory requirements.

You will be aware that the role of supervisor is recognised within health and safety legislation, and is common within the wider construction industry. However, we agree with the Committee that there needs to be a formalising of a QS ratio model, so that stakeholders and customers can be sure that where the QS and the person doing the work is not the same, that all work receives appropriate supervision and management from a QS. We will work with the Government on this.

We maintain, however, that Government should not seek for all persons in an electrical contracting firm to be qualified to the level of a QS, as many will be carrying out work (such as preparatory work including chasing out walls) where a different level of competence is required.

**The new Registered Competent Person website**

On 30 June, we launched the Registered Competent Person website ([www.electricalcompetentperson.co.uk](http://www.electricalcompetentperson.co.uk)), which contains a consolidated list of all electrical contractors that have been assessed by a competent person scheme certification provider. All seven certification providers have agreed to this (and we are pressing DCLG that any new bodies should be required to do this). Since the website went live, we have had over 15,475 visits to the website and over 9,608 people have already searched for a competent registered electrician local to them.
The Registered Competent Person mark will be included by all scheme operators next to their own individual brand. This will support a consistent mark, and has been made available to electrical contractors up and down the country (electronically and as a sticker) so that they can apply it to their materials and vehicles. This will boost brand recognition with the public, as well as support the awareness-raising work that the industry's charity Electrical Safety First (which part owns Certsure along with the trade association ECA) will be carrying out.

The new mark will be presented by certification providers next to their own specific brand. Not only will this ensure that one common mark is communicated across the entire industry, but it will sustain the competitive competent person scheme certification provider market that has driven the increase in the number of registered firms over the last nine years. This, in our opinion, matters. It means, for example, that Certsure can choose to operate an enhanced service that can genuinely benefit the firms we assess, and in turn their customers, such as offering insurance-backed warranties that guarantee a contractor’s work for six years. In this way, so long as there is a clear and robust UKAS-accredited benchmark for the service that certification providers deliver, we believe that competition amongst scheme operators actually promotes standards.

Complementing a common mark

We have appreciated the Select Committee’s calls for major retailers, such as B&Q, to notify customers at the point of sale for products where their installation requires the expertise of a registered electrician. As the Minister noted on 9 July, it surely makes sense that any wording references the Registered Competent Person website and shows the logo. We would appreciate the Committee’s continued support in this regard.

Secondly, the Select Committee’s interest has centred upon the number of certification providers that are licensed to operate under Part ‘P’ and list registered firms. However, our view is that we also need to look at the proliferation of websites (trustatrader.com etc...) that advertise electricians that have not been assessed as competent, as the reality is that these are a major search point for the public. There is nothing wrong with these websites operating – certification companies cannot be closed to competition – but we believe that if such websites are listing a firm, then they have a duty to ensure that the firm is registered as competent. In the immediate absence of this, we think that the DCLG should allow reference of the Registered Competent Person register as being ‘Government-backed’ as it creates differentiation and rightly attributes greater credibility to the new register.

I believe that moving ahead in both these areas would meaningfully boost electrical safety.

Reviewing how enforcement can be practically strengthened

Certsure supports increasing enforcement activity, as well as allowing for greater penalties for non-compliance. However, in reality, we know that local authority building control teams operate with limited budgets, particularly with councils prioritising funding across all the services they run. We commit to looking at how enforcement can be practically improved working with stakeholders like LABC and DCLG.

Liverpool City Council example raised in the evidence session

On 9 July, the Minister was asked about an example of unsafe work carried out by a competent person scheme registered contractor on a block of flats funded by Liverpool City Council (Muirhead Development). The electrical contractor was registered with one of our brands, NICEIC, and as such, I wanted to let you know what we are doing to understand the issue and resolve it.
Upon being contacted by the local residents association in June, we have conducted an investigation to match up the work with the certificates of work that were held by Liverpool City Council. One of our engineers visited the flats with an independent assessor on 11 July, and a return visit has been scheduled to visit more of the flats and to understand if and where faulty electrical work was fitted. We are committed to resolving this problem, continuing our dialogue with the residents and carrying out any rectification work where faults are located if necessary.

Lastly, at the 9 July evidence session, there were a number of queries raised about how electrical work is safety tested, as well as other questions of a technical nature.

Alongside one of our assessors, I would welcome the opportunity to meet you to answer any questions you may have, as well as to discuss some of the broader issues which came out of the session and that I have mentioned above. Indeed, I would be delighted to host you at one of our nearby offices if that works. If I may, I will contact your office to see if a meeting will be possible in the coming months.

I have copied this letter to the Communities and Local Government Committee’s 7 Millbank address.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Clancy
Chief Executive Officer