

Code for Adoption Agreements

Water sector documents: Change proposal (Ref 017)

Modification proposal	Water Sector Guidance: Incorrect reference to WRAS when referring to Approved Contractor operating as plumbers and water supply pipe installers
Independent Water Adoption Panel Recommendation	The Panel recommended approving a change to the water sector documents using an alternative approach to that proposed by FWC
Decision	Ofwat has approved this change proposal based on the Panel's alternative approach with a minor change to the Panel's recommended approach
Publication date	12 December 2023
Implementation date	01 April 2024

The structure of our decision is as follows:

- Background
- The change proposal
- Consultation and assessment
- Panel recommendation
- Our decision and reasons
- Decision notice.

Background

Fair Water Connections (**FWC**) submitted this change proposal to the Independent Water Adoption Panel (**the Panel**) on 14 April 2023, with the Panel publishing the proposal on its website on the same day. The function of the Panel is to consider change proposals to the [water sector guidance and model water adoption agreement](#) (**the Water Sector Documents**) which apply to companies operating wholly or mainly in England. These documents were

developed by companies as required by the [Code for Adoption Agreements \(the Code\)](#) and came into effect in January 2021. A change proposal is defined in the Code as a proposed change to the sector guidance or the model adoption agreements.

The change proposed by FWC concerns references to the Water Regulations Advisory Service (**WRAS**) in the Water Sector Documents. FWC considers that the references to WRAS when describing plumbing installers that are approved contractors are incorrect as there are multiple approved contractor schemes that operate in England and WRAS is just one of these.

FWC also points out that WRAS had now been renamed 'Water Regs UK Limited'. There is a current organisation known as WRAS, but this is the Water Regulations Approval Scheme, which certifies plumbing products and materials. FWC considers the incorrect references to WRAS in the Water Sector Documents to be misleading and confusing.

The change proposal

In its change proposal form submitted to the Panel, FWC raised concerns with the references to WRAS in that:

- (1) There are 6 Approved Contractors Schemes across the UK approve installers under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. WaterSafe is an umbrella brand where members approved by all six schemes are listed on a website.
- (2) The Water Regulation Advisory Service (WRAS) has been renamed Water Regs UK Limited. This company only runs one of six Approved Contractors Schemes.
- (3) WRAS (Water Regulations Approval Scheme) is now a subsidiary company that independently certifies plumbing products and materials. To refer to WRAS is misleading and confusing.

FWC has proposed changes to several of the Water Sector Documents to address this issue which are marked in red font and strikethrough font:

Water Sector Guidance

- Add the following definition:

“Approved Contractor Schemes”

A scheme which approves contractors, under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. For example, those listed by WaterSafe.org.uk such as the APLUS, Water Industry Approved Plumbers Scheme or Watermark.

- Amend section 7 with the following changes:

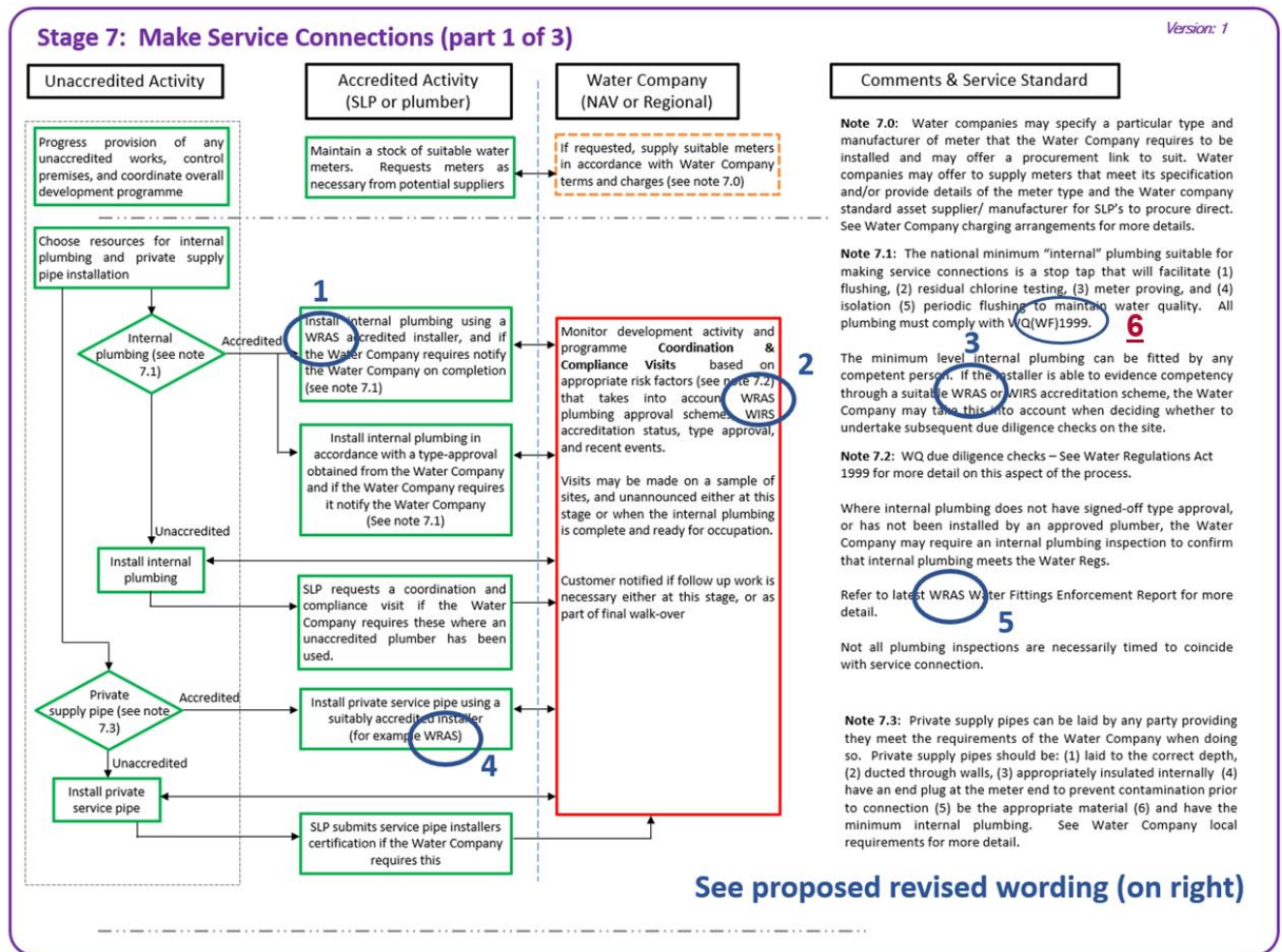
An SLP's competence can be demonstrated:

- through WIRS where the Accreditation Body awards scope-specific accreditation against the criteria detailed in the Water Industry Registration Scheme Requirements Document. (Details of the WIRS scheme can be found at <http://www.lr.org/en/utilities-building-assuranceschemes/uk-schemes/water-industry-registration-scheme/>); or
- ~~in the case of communications pipes, or plumbing, those accreditation schemes recognised by WRAS~~ **in the case of communications pipes, or plumbing, accredited for a relevant scope of work by an Approved Contractors' Scheme (for example a WaterSafe Water Supply Pipe Installer or Plumber;**
- local accreditation arrangements which are specified by the Water Companies in their ACS for the purposes of the "amber" activities (which allows SLPs to carry out works beyond those by WIRS accreditation).

Water Sector Guidance – Appendix C – Procedures

Make the following changes to stage 7 of the procedures process:

Current Procedures with reference to WRAS or water fittings regulations highlighted



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1. Replace 'WRAC' with Watersafe.
2. Replace 'WRAC' with 'Watersafe' replace 'plumbing approval' with 'approved contractors'.
3. Replace 'WRAC' with 'Watersafe'.
4. Replace 'WRAC' with 'Watersafe'.
5. Leave unchanged as this is an appropriate usage of WRAS
6. This change is not part of the original change proposal. This is an additional change proposed by the Panel that wasn't included in the original change proposal which is discussed later in the document.

Water Sector Guidance – Appendix D – Design and Construction Specification

Add the following definitions:

- “Watersafe” – “WaterSafe is a website that lists approved contractors from six Approved Contractors’ Schemes across the UK”.
- “Approved Contractors Schemes” – “A scheme which approves contractors, under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. For example, those listed by WaterSafe.org.uk such as the APLUS, Water Industry Approved Plumbers Scheme or Watermark”

Amend section 12.2 – Depth of Services:

Service Pipes shall be installed in accordance with the Water Regulations and Streetworks UK guidance.

Service pipes shall be laid with an even grade where possible, with cover between a depth of 750mm to 1350mm from the finished ground level in accordance with Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999.

If a boundary box is to be installed on the Service Pipe, the pipe shall be laid with cover between 750mm and 850mm for a minimum of 1.0metre on each side of the boundary box.

Service Pipes being designed outside this range ~~shall have special protective measures vetted and agreed by the Approving Design Engineer~~ **must be notified and consent given under the water fittings regulations and shall have special protective measures vetted and agreed by the Approving Design Engineer.**

Amend section 13.2 – Marker Tape and Tracer Tape

Marker Tape to be compliant with CESWI and Water Fittings Regulations **(for example conforms to BS 1710).**

Amend section 15.3 – Dedicated Fire Mains

Dedicated fire mains shall be designed and constructed in accordance with Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations ~~1999~~2016 ~~and fitted with backflow prevention, spiral wrapping and appropriate marker tape~~ **this would include: fitted with appropriate backflow prevention and pipe identification (e.g. conforms to BS 1710).**

Amend Appendix 1 WIS & IGN

Add the reference:

BS 1710 Specification for identification of pipelines and services

Remove the reference:

~~IGN 9 04 05 – Report of the expert group on the risks of contamination of the public water supply by backflow at: <http://wras.co.uk>~~

Water Sector Guidance – Appendix E – Minimum Information

Amend Stage 7 – Make Service Connections

LoS: SLPM 7/1

All Service Pipe connections are to be notified by the SLP in accordance with the WIRS requirements and relative to Water Regulation inspections to allow witness and / or audit by the Water Company at its discretion or alternatively submit paperwork according to an Approved ~~Plumbers~~ **Contractors'** Scheme.

Water Company may use a Local Practice and issue plot reference information and costings at Stage 3.

Amend Stage 7 – Make Service Connections

~~3. Approved Plumbers Scheme certificate or Water Company Water Regulations inspection pass~~ **Certificate of compliance from an approved contractor who is a member of an Approved Contractors' Scheme or Water Company Water Regulations inspection pass**

Consultation and assessment

In submitting its recommendation, the Panel confirmed that it met the Code requirement¹ to assess the change in terms of:

- The need for change, for example, is it a service improvement or is it needed to address a particular issue?
- Consistency with the principles and objectives of the Code, and any relevant statutory requirements; and
- The impact of the change (be it positive and/or negative) on customers and on water companies.

In considering the change proposal, the Panel has:

- Discussed the proposal at two meetings;

¹ See paragraph 3.8.11 of the Code.

- Sought feedback from Panel members' companies; and
- Consulted with the Drinking Water Inspectorate (**DWI**) on the proposal as the proposal raised potential water quality issues. However, the Panel noted that it did not receive a response from the DWI.

The Panel also consulted with FWC on its proposed recommendation.

Panel recommendation

On 14 August 2023, the Panel recommended to Ofwat, by unanimous decision, that we approve a change to the Water Sector Documents. However, the Panel has proposed an alternative change be made to the Water Sector Documents than that which was proposed by FWC. In reaching its decision, the Panel stated that it has considered the following:

- It was noted that the references to the approval schemes within the Code could be simplified, as there are several schemes which interact with each other, for example some are statutory, some relate only to materials.
- There is no universal approval scheme which applies across the whole industry; therefore it is for water companies to specify which approvals they will accept. Any works must be certified under the appropriate regulations, which prevents non-approved works being carried out.
- Panel members had reviewed the proposed consequential amendments with their respective water quality teams and overall they were content with the proposed amendments.
- However, the Panel stated that it was mindful that the inclusion of specific examples of approval schemes could become outdated quickly, which would necessitate frequent changes to the Water Sector Documents if the amendments were accepted.

The Panel stated that it agreed that the FWC's proposal should be accepted. However, it recommended using alternative wording to that proposed by FWC. This was primarily to avoid references to specific approval schemes which could themselves become outdated if such schemes are changed in the future. Instead, the Panel recommended referring to approval schemes in general. In addition to the changes proposed by FWC, the Panel recommended two amendments to the Water Sector Guidance Appendix D – Template Design and Construction Specification, Definitions. These additional amendments address the current references to WRAS in this document.

The Panel confirmed that it consulted with FWC on its recommended alternative approach to making the changes to the Water Sector Documents.

The changes to the Water Sector Documents recommended by the Panel are set out below. The current wording of the Water Sector Documents is in black text, the changes proposed by FWC are in red font and the alternative changes recommended by the Panel are in green font where new text has been added. Where FWC proposed additional text but the Panel recommended removing this proposed text, it is in red strikethrough font.

Water Sector Guidance

- Add the following definition:

“Approved Contractor Schemes”

A scheme which approves contractors, under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. ~~For example, those listed by WaterSafe.org.uk such as the APLUS, Water Industry Approved Plumbers Scheme or Watermark.~~

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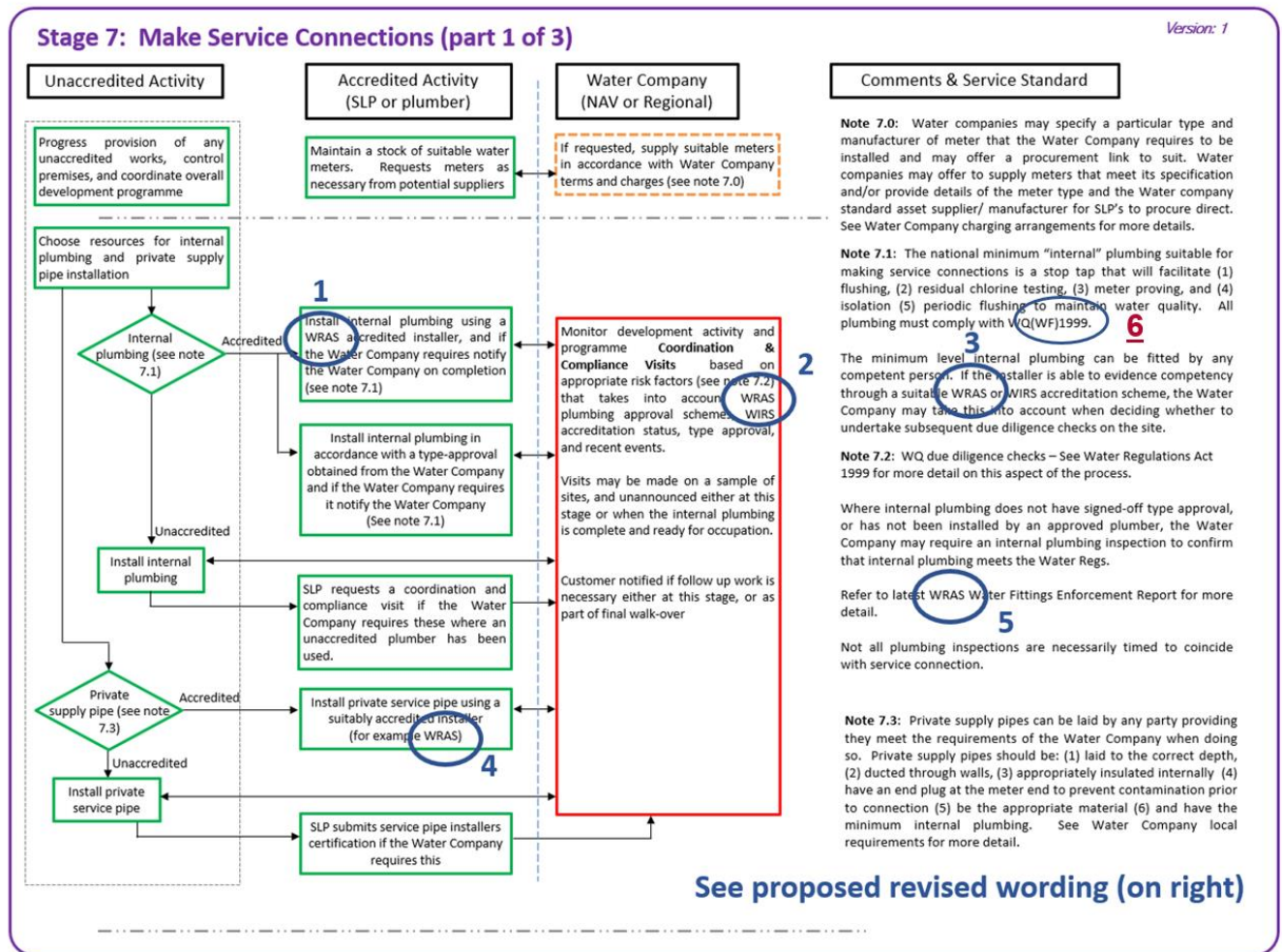
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- ~~in the case of communications pipes, or plumbing, those accreditation schemes recognised by WRAS~~ **in the case of communications pipes, or plumbing, accredited for a relevant scope of work by an Approved Contractors’ Scheme (for example a WaterSafe Water Supply Pipe Installer or Plumber;**
- local accreditation arrangements which are specified by the Water Companies in their ACS for the purposes of the “amber” activities (which allows SLPs to carry out works beyond those by WIRS accreditation).

Water Sector Guidance – Appendix C – Procedures

Make the following changes to stage 7 of the procedures process:

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1. Install internal plumbing using a ~~WRAS accredited installer~~ and installer suitably accredited by an Approved Contractors' Scheme (for example a WaterSafe plumber), and if the Water Company requires notify the Water Company on completion (see note 7.1) ~~Replace 'WRAC' with Watersafe.~~
2. Monitor development activity and programme **Coordination & Compliance Visits** based on appropriate risk factors (see note 7.2) that takes into account ~~WRAS plumbing approval scheme~~ the Approved Contractors' Scheme accreditation, WIRS accreditation status, type approval, and recent events ~~Replace 'WRAC' with 'Watersafe' replace 'plumbing approval' with 'approved contractors'.~~

3. The minimum level internal plumbing can be fitted by any competent person. If the installer is able to evidence competency through a suitable ~~WRAS or WIRS accreditation scheme~~ **accreditation with an Approved Contractors Scheme**, the Water Company may take this into account when deciding whether to undertake subsequent due diligence checks on the site. ~~Replace 'WRAC' with 'Watersafe'.~~
4. Install private service pipe using a suitably accredited installer (for example ~~WRAS a WaterSafe Water Supply Pipe Installer or Plumber~~). ~~Replace 'WRAC' with 'Watersafe'.~~
5. Where internal plumbing does not have signed-off type approval, or has not been installed by an approved plumber, the Water Company may require an internal plumbing inspection to confirm that internal plumbing meets the ~~Water Regs~~ **Water Fittings Regulations**. ~~Leave unchanged as this is an appropriate usage of WRAS~~
6. All plumbing must comply with ~~WQ(WF)1999~~ **Water Fittings Regulations**.

Water Sector Guidance - Appendix D – Design and Construction Specification

Amend Section 5 – Abbreviations

~~WRAS Water Regulation Advisory Service~~ **Water Regulations Approval Scheme**

WRUK Water Regs UK Ltd

Add the following definitions:

- ~~“Watersafe” – “WaterSafe is a website that lists approved contractors from six Approved Contractors’ Schemes across the UK”.~~
- ~~“Approved Contractors Schemes” – “A scheme which approves contractors, under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. For example, those listed by WaterSafe.org.uk such as the APLUS, Water Industry Approved Plumbers Scheme or Watermark”~~

Amend section 12.2 – Depth of Services:

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Service pipes shall be laid with an even grade where possible, with cover between a depth of 750mm to 1350mm from the finished ground level in accordance with Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999.

If a boundary box is to be installed on the Service Pipe, the pipe shall be laid with cover between 750mm and 850mm for a minimum of 1.0metre on each side of the boundary box.

Service Pipes being designed outside this range ~~shall have special protective measures vetted and agreed by the Approving Design Engineer~~ **must be notified and consent given under the water fittings regulations and shall have special protective measures vetted and agreed by the Approving Design Engineer.**

Amend section 13.2 – Marker Tape and Tracer Tape

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Add the reference:

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Remove the reference:

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Water Company may use a Local Practice and issue plot reference information and costings at Stage 3.

Amend Stage 7 – Make Service Connections

~~3. Approved Plumbers Scheme certificate or Water Company Water Regulations inspection pass~~ Certificate of compliance from an approved contractor who is a member of an Approved Contractors' Scheme or Water Company Water Regulations inspection pass

Our decision and reasons

We have considered the above issues and all supporting documentation provided to us by the Panel and have decided to approve the change based on the Panel's alternative approach with a minor change to amend the definition of "WaterSafe" as set out below.

We agree with FWC and the Panel that there is a benefit to updating the Water Sector Documents where names of organisations or schemes that are referred to in the documents have been changed. We also agree with the Panel that there is benefit in avoiding references to specific organisations when a more general reference to the organisation's function could be used in order to avoid having to update the Water Sector Documents whenever such an organisation or its name changes. This also avoids the potential confusion, as raised by FWC, of the Water Sector Documents only referring to specific organisations or schemes, when there are acceptable alternatives that could be used. We therefore agree with the changes to the Water Sector Documents recommended by the Panel. This aligns with the Code principle of being 'clear, complete and current'.

We have decided to make an alteration to one element of the Panel's recommended changes. The Panel recommended a change to section 5 of the Water Sector Guidance – Appendix 5 – Design and Construction Specification to include a definition of 'Watersafe'. We consider that the Panel's proposed definition should be amended to provide a more accurate and future-proofed description of the organisation. As such, we have decided to amend definition of "WaterSafe" to the following:

"WaterSafe" - "WaterSafe is an online search facility that lists contractors in Approved Contractor Schemes."

Decision notice

In accordance with paragraph 3.9.4 of the Code Ofwat approves this Change Proposal using the alternative approach recommended by the Panel with a minor change to this recommended approach to amend the definition of "WaterSafe" as set out above.

Emily Bulman

Director, Charges, customers and developer services