

Future Focus: The EPC - Catherine Garrido, Qidos

As the human impact on climate change remains a prominent feature in the battle to reach net zero carbon emissions, we are appearing to finally see Government push it to its rightful position near the top of policy agenda. This, alongside an increase in mainstream media exposure should help in educating more of the population of the issues we all face if change does not happen.



The Committee for Climate Change estimate that the UK's buildings equate to approximately 20% of all carbon emissions and with this being the case, it is crucial that those within the industry work with Government on how future policy is going to enable the UK to reach the ever-encroaching Net Zero targets and swiftly. This has led to a dramatic rise in Government consultations that require stakeholder participation across the industry within the last six months, as they recognise the need to work together and involve those with the professional knowledge to help improve the energy efficiency of both our domestic and commercial properties. So how does this relate to the headline of this article being linked to 'The EPC' you may ask? Many would argue that future policy must focus on renewable energy, storage of electricity and management of the grid, however there is no point in having these as a focus if our properties are still oozing heat and a large percentage of occupants are living in fuel poverty.

One of the issues we face is that the UK has some of the oldest buildings in Europe, many are poorly constructed and not fit for purpose, homes will need to be better insulated, ventilated and we need to move away from our reliance on gas. Therefore, we still require a mechanism to compare our properties and recommend the best ways to improve our properties so our carbon footprint and just as importantly our fuel bills are reduced. Despite its flaws, the EPC has the ability to do this with some updates to the methodology.

The EPC started with a singular purpose, to be able to benchmark the energy performance of buildings across the UK, as well as provide cost-effective options for improvement. However, the EPC has started to become a more ubiquitous tool, linking properties to efficiency improvement funding and so not just for a purpose originally intended. Therefore, it has to reflect these changes within the industry to ensure that it is fit for purpose going forward.

The industry, as well as Government, recognise the need for the EPC methodology to be updated in order to include carbon, energy and cost figures. This is needed to ensure that the EPC is more accurate, so that the general public will gain a clearer understanding of the EPC content and gain a respect for the value of certificates.

The update must reflect the move from gas to electric, where carbon usage should reduce, and primary energy should go down as it becomes more efficient. However, the downside to moving to electricity is that it causes the costs on the EPC to rise, which is what the SAP rating is largely based on currently. So, there would need to be true and honest public engagement to explain the reasoning for this change and to show it to be more representative of energy usage in our buildings.

Ultimately, the way for the EPC to thrive is through public and stake holder involvement to educate and inform on its benefits and therefore an additional beneficial change could be an explanation of the rating and bandings on the EPC. Due to the fact legislation is linked with EPCs, with particular interest on MEES, each band could have a definition in line with the additional metrics to make it a truly representative, informative and easy to understand document. These changes would impact the way our properties are measured and result in a more accurate assessment that is fit for future

policy usage, as well as ensure homeowners and tenants are more engaged and therefore more likely to make improvements of their own accord.

We can go even further with stakeholder engagement and education. The new EPC central register has a plethora of open data, which is available to consumers and professionals and this could be used in a more positive manner, perhaps by aiding local authorities to determine how they can make more localised improvements and motivate them to hit targets early and cost effectively

The possibilities with a more accurate and representative EPC are vast, but the message is clear that they remain a key player in the energy efficiencies of buildings. By working cross-industry and educating the general public of their usefulness we can all take the steps required to mean Net Zero carbon emissions whilst also reducing fuel poverty.