

Are all quotations equal?

Obviously, the answer is ‘no’

The real question is: how do you compare them? If double-glazing, conservatories or building projects are new to you, what do you need to know?

We’ve compiled a list of suggestions and questions that we would ask if we were having work done ourselves. Although the questions below focus particularly on windows, doors and conservatories, the basic principle is the same for any home improvement project – you can only compare the price if the extent of the work and the quality of the work is the same.

Windows and Doors

- **Thickness of profile:** 70mm is the standard and is a good quality. Anything less will be cheaper, anything higher will be more expensive. We recommend 70mm wherever possible.
- **Locking Mechanisms:** Check the number of multipoint locks on each unit, and how they work. We recommend a minimum of 6 locking points on a window. It’s also worth checking that the glazing bars cannot be removed from the outside of the window. Trust us, we have seen this.
- **Is the glass the same?** All replacement windows and doors must be fitted with low energy glass, better known as ‘K’ glass. Conservatories, French or patio doors or front doors should be toughened glass, and will make a difference on price and ultimately on performance if the wrong glass is used. Also consider whether your home would benefit from a glass which is much harder to smash in the event of a break-in. If so, perhaps a laminated or toughened glass would be a good option.
- **Do the windows have trickle vents?** Building regulations stipulate that all windows installed into new build properties must have trickle vents, and all replacement windows be replaced ‘like for like’. So for example, you cannot replace an existing window with trickle vents with one that does not have them. However, anything added to a basic window frame will mean they are more expensive to purchase.

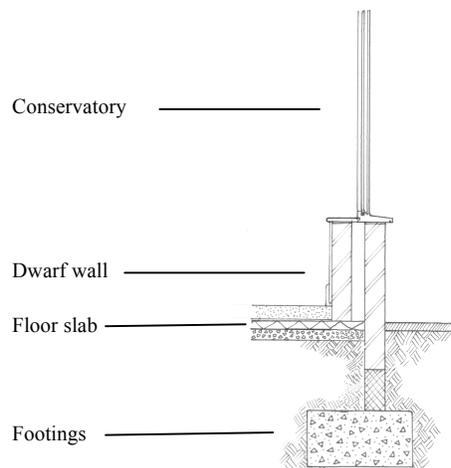
- **What energy efficient rating are the windows being offered?** In October 2010 changes to Building Regulations set a minimum window unit Energy Rating of 'C' (or a U-value of 1.6W/m²k), assessed on the combined energy efficiency of the frames and glazing. This means that all new replacement windows must at least meet this level of energy efficiency, offering higher levels of insulation to reduce heat loss through your windows. However, from a comparison basis, an 'A' rated window cannot be accurately compared to a 'C' rated window.
- **Are you being offered any guarantees or independent warranties?** Check out the guarantee offered by the company in addition to any independent warranty. An independent warranty is a policy offered by an independent insurer and runs alongside the company guarantee offered at point of sale. It covers both the deposit paid and the complete installation. It takes effect in the event that the company used for the installation ceases to trade for any reason within the period of their guarantee. The independent warranty will take up the period remaining on the original guarantee, though will not start again from scratch, for example if the installing company ceases to trade 8 years after installation and had offered a 10-year guarantee, the independent warranty will be valid for the remaining 2 years. Policies such as these offer assurance to the consumer in an uncertain economic period, but they do cost money. Whilst it is a stipulation of FENSA that all registered companies **offer** a policy free of charge to the consumer, they are **not** obliged to purchase one on your behalf. There is a link from the guarantees page to the website of our independent warranty provider, the Consumer Protection Association, www.thecpa.co.uk.
- **Will your installation be registered for you with FENSA or an alternative Competent Persons Scheme?** Since the 1st April 2002 all replacement windows and doors are subject to Building Regulations or inspection by council appointed officers. Regulations require all installations meet improved insulation standards and a certificate must be issued by building control officers for every installation. As there are up to 1.2million installations each year, building control officers face an impossible task in checking each one. A self-certifying scheme known as FENSA (Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme) was set up by the replacement window industry and regulates installers to self-certify their installations. FENSA registered companies will certify your installation (without charge to you), which in turn generates the building control certificates required by law. FENSA regularly check their members to inspect installations and ensure compliance and quality. There are other 'Competent Person Schemes' able to do the same and we would recommend that you do not entertain any quotation supplied by an installer not registered for self-certification.
- **Are you being offered the chance to view work locally or speak with existing customers?** This may not always be specified in a written quotation, but we would recommend you ask the question and follow up on any opportunities offered to check out completed work. Genuine recommendations can always be proven.

Conservatories

Some of the above questions will apply equally to conservatories, though there is no current requirement to register conservatory installations with FENSA.

In addition to the above, we would recommend that you check the following:-

- **The specification and quality of the basework:** (we know that this is not the most exciting thing in your life but it is important). As most conservatories do not need to comply with building regulations, the specification of the base provided can vary widely. Considerable savings can be made by laying shallower footings, and therefore we would recommend you check the details of the base proposed.



- **Who is going to build the base?** Find out whether the company build their bases in-house, or whether they sub-contract the work to an independent contractor or company. This is important to establish and to establish who has the liability for the base. A worst case scenario would be having a problem develop on the base, which you assume to be covered under the guarantee, and then find that neither the sub-contractor who built it, or the company who contracted him will take responsibility.
- **Is there any electrical work included with the base?** If so, how many sockets are included, any light fittings, wall or ceiling mounted, and who will be contracted to do the electrical work? Are they employed or sub-contracted? Again, establish who has liability in the event that anything goes wrong, and check whether they are classed as a 'responsible person' or a registered electrical contractor, for example with NICEIC or NAPIT (government-approved schemes), and will the electrical work be certificated? Is this free or is there a charge?

- **Check the roof system is comparable:** the cost and performance of a self-cleaning ‘Active’ glass roof (the most popular choice in recent years in our experience) cannot be directly compared with a polycarbonate roof. Similarly a solid roof structure is different again and cannot be compared directly in cost with either the glass or polycarbonate roof.

If choosing polycarbonate, check the thickness of the panels quoted, 16mm, 25mm, 35mm are all available at different costs. We would also recommend that you check the colour of the polycarbonate is the same on all quotes (as different colours are available). This may not have an effect on cost but will most definitely have an effect on light transmission within the conservatory affecting the general comfort of the conservatory. For example, bronze polycarbonate may make the conservatory uncomfortably dark on all but the sunniest days, and a clear polycarbonate too bright on sunny days.

- **Glass text?**
- Solid roof text?
- **Is the glass the same?** Check whether the glass units are toughened throughout, or only where required, and also whether the glass is low energy (k). It doesn’t have to be by law, but makes a huge difference in being able to use the conservatory all year round.
- **Internal works:** Are any internal works included in the quote? Are the walls going to be dry-lined and skimmed, painted, or left as face (exposed) brickwork? All options are likely to be available, but dry-lining and skimming a wall takes longer and may cost more than face brickwork. Is any floor covering included, i.e. tiling and does that include labour, laying material and tiles? Or is it a labour charge only and you are required to purchase the tiles yourselves.
- **Finally, can you accurately compare the companies themselves?** Do they have current and positive customer feedback? Are you going to receive the same level of attention and service? Are they members of any professional body or endorsed for their workmanship? Do they all comply with requirements of health and safety, waste carriage, employment law? There are elements here that can increase a business’ running costs which may impact on their quotation and are worth bearing in mind.

So, to summarise, when obtaining and comparing quotes we would recommend that you ask lots of questions to ensure you do get exactly what you had expected, and what you thought you’d paid for. Professional advice (in this industry anyway) is free, so make full use of it. If the advice given is vague or not fully explained, proceed cautiously.

And in our opinion, as with most things in life, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is! Nobody can afford to give you half a house full of windows for free unless the cost (and profit) for them is already in the other half!

We hope this has been helpful, but if we can offer any other guidance please do give us a call.

Kind regards

The Clover Team