



Fit for purpose

A word of advice about when goods or services are not 'Fit for purpose'

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It cuts, it slices and dices, but it just doesn't filet like you specifically checked that it would. The knife isn't broken; it still works, and does a great job on over-ripe tomatoes. You might think that means that you just have to put up with it and buy something else. But you don't.

Under the Consumer Guarantees Act this is called not "fit for purpose". There are two ways that this can work. Either it's not fit for the purpose that you would normally expect. For example, that flash kitchen torch flame thing isn't hot enough to caramelize your crême brûlée. If it ain't hot enough, it ain't good enough. You can take it back to get it fixed, or get a new one, or get a refund.

Another way that items may not be "fit for purpose" is when you've specifically told the shop assistant what you want to do with it. Like, "I'm fixing a chair, so I need some glue that will stick wood together and will be able to hold weight". Then if they say, "Yip, this one will do the job" and it doesn't, then it's not fit for the particular purpose you bought it for.

This also applies to any services that you buy. For example, if your home decorator puts mood lighting in your kitchen, so that you can never really see what you are chopping.

You can also claim compensation for losses caused by the problem, such as if you bought a cleaning product that said it was safe for silk, but it damaged the fabric, you can claim compensation for the loss of the garment. The loss has to be something that the seller could reasonably expect to happen. For example, you have the right to get a shoe fixed if it collapses. But you can't get compensation for missing a flight because your shoe collapsed when you were running to catch it.

If the seller or tradesperson tells you that the product might not work for the purpose that you want it for, then you take on that risk yourself. For example the seller might tell you that the glue is suitable for wood, but may not be strong enough to put much weight on. Then if you decide to buy that glue and use it on your chair, the seller isn't responsible if the chair snaps again when you sit on it.

If you discover what you have bought isn't fit for purpose, go back to the shop or tradesperson and ask them to fix the problem and let them know if you want compensation for your consequential loss.