Research and data
Analogue and digital
Customers and money

# Customer satisfaction with energy supplier complaints handling 2016

Research Report

Prepared for Ofgem

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# 1 Executive summary

## 1.1 Context and approach

### Research background

Ofgem is the independent gas and electricity markets regulator for Great Britain. Its principle objective is to protect the interests of existing and future electricity and gas customers. In 2008, Ofgem set The Complaints Handling Standards (CHS) for all suppliers providing energy to domestic (private households) and/or micro-business (defined as a business with up to 9 employees) customers.[1] The CHS are a set of regulations that suppliers must follow when responding to and dealing with customer complaints; a complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction with the service received.

Ofgem has carried out research since the CHS were introduced to assess how well suppliers have been meeting the standards. Research in 2014 found that satisfaction with the way complaints had been handled had decreased and Ofgem asked suppliers to review their processes and improve their services to generate positive change for complainants. This research was commissioned to monitor any changes in complainants' experiences.

### Research aims and approach

The primary aim of this research was to measure domestic and micro-business complainants' satisfaction with the way their complaints had been handled by their supplier. This included establishing the extent to which satisfaction levels have changed since 2014, identifying the key drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and identifying evidence of good practice and potential areas for improvement.

The research was carried out in February-April 2016 with 3,049 domestic and 468 micro-business complainants who had lodged complaints with their supplier in late 2015. Interviews were carried using a structured questionnaire, conducted by telephone and lasted on average 17-18 minutes. Data were weighted to reflect the share of complaints in the market. It is important to stress that research findings reflect the complainants' experience of the complaints handling process.

### Profiling the complainants

Research participants were complainants of the following:

- The six largest suppliers: British Gas, SSE, EDF, E.ON, Scottish Power and npower (domestic and micro-business complainants); and
- The three largest of the medium-sized suppliers: First Utility, Utility Warehouse and OVO (domestic complainants only)

The most common cause for complaint among both domestic and micro-business complainants was billing and the vast majority of complaints were made by telephone. Just over half of all complainants stated that their complaint was resolved at the time of interview.

[1] https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/2008/07/complaint-handling-standards-decision-july-2008.pdf

## 1.2 Key research findings

### Overall levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction

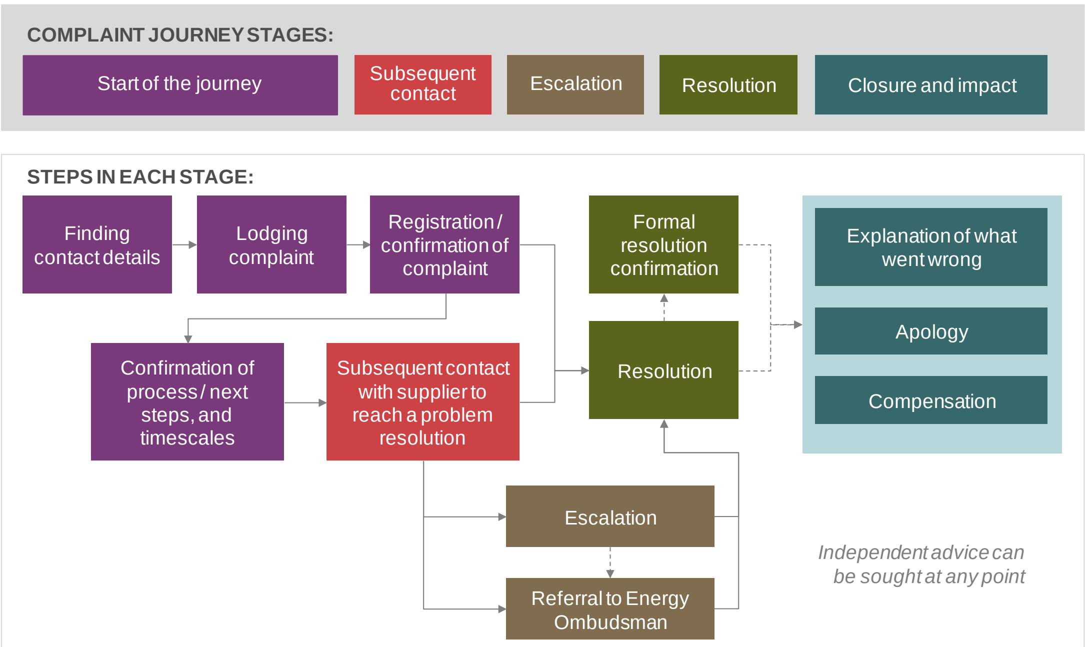
The level of satisfaction with complaints handling had fallen significantly for both domestic complainants (30% satisfied in 2014 vs. 27% in 2016) and micro-businesses (35% satisfied in 2014 vs. 21% in 2016).

In both markets, complainants remained more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with their experience (60% domestic and 68% micro-businesses were dissatisfied). Strength of negative feeling had intensified with almost half of complainants (45% domestic and 49% micro-businesses) saying they were *very* dissatisfied compared with 38% in 2014.

### Experiences at different stages in the complaints handling journey

Each stage of the complaints process was investigated in detail to understand what the process was like from the complainants' perspective, and what impact each element had on overall satisfaction with complaints handling. The questions asked within each stage reflected the requirements of the Complaint Handling Standards (CHS). Figure 1 presents the complaints journey model used for the purposes of this study.

*Figure 1: The complaint journey.*




- *Start of the complaints journey*

  The start of the journey worked well for most complainants and was found to drive satisfaction. Staff were seen as professional and avoided difficult to understand jargon (77% of domestic and 79% of micro-businesses complainants could understand the language used by staff). Contact details were easily found (77% domestic, 81% micro-business complainants) – typically on bills and statements. Where complaints were not about billing, these details were less easily found. Registering the complaint was easy for most (57% domestic, 58% micro-business complainants) – although among those experiencing difficulties at this stage, getting through to the right person and, particularly among domestic complainants, having their concerns acknowledged as a problem, were commonly reported.

Despite this overall positive start, customer expectations were often not well managed from the outset and there were inconsistencies around provision of information. Relatively few complainants recalled being given a named contact (36% of domestic and micro-business complainants) or being given a complaint reference number (39% domestic, 50% micro-business complainants). Fewer recalled being told how long each step in the resolution process would take (32% domestic, 25% micro-business complainants) or were given an estimated date for resolution (34% domestic, 26% micro-business complainants). Collectively, these inconsistencies had a negative impact on the rest of the complaints handling journey for both domestic and micro-business complainants.

- *Subsequent contact*

  Complainants had to work hard to find out how their complaint was progressing and overall, there was of a lack of ongoing communication about their complaint. Suppliers reportedly did not always follow-up with complainants at pre-agreed times (36% of domestic and 32% of micro-business complainants received contact when promised or agreed). Only a few complainants felt they were regularly updated on the progress of their complaint (25% domestic, 22% micro-business complainants).

  Complainants felt that *they* had to repeatedly chase their supplier for information and when they did, decisions were not always made 'there and then'. This was particularly prevalent among micro-business complainants (66% vs. 57% of domestic complainants chased their supplier), resulting in a need for further contact and delaying resolution. Whilst most suppliers had the right contact details (for 89% of domestic and 87% of micro-business complainants) and a record of their complaint on file when they were contacted (67% domestic, 68% micro-business complainants), relatively fewer had the full contact history (59% domestic, 63% micro-business complainants), increasing levels of stress among complainants (especially those contacting their supplier multiple times).

- *Escalation and third party involvement*

  In both domestic and micro-business markets, complainants thought that suppliers did not provide enough information about alternative resolution routes, making the complainants experience more stressful for those who had not reached a (relatively) speedy closure. This was one of the key areas driving dissatisfaction with the handling of the complaint.

  Only a minority recalled being told where they could seek independent advice (25% domestic, 23% micro-business complainants), being directed to complaints handling procedures on the supplier's website (18% domestic, 14% micro-business complainants) or offered a free copy of those procedures (14% of domestic and micro-business complainants). Among those complainants that did escalate their complaint to more senior staff, the main reason for doing so, particularly among micro-businesses, was that it was taking too long to get the complaint resolved (68% vs. 39% of domestic complainants).

- *Resolution*

  Whilst the resolution gap[2] had narrowed marginally among domestic complainants since 2014 (from 44% to 42%), the lack of on-going communication continued to leave complainants feeling uninformed about their situation. Most commonly, complainants who believed their complaint remained unresolved[3] reported that they had heard nothing back from their supplier to suggest it had been resolved. For those individuals where suppliers reported that the case was resolved but complainants disagreed with this, micro-businesses in particular stated that this was because they were still experiencing the same problem, typically concerning billing (24% domestic, 42% micro-business complainants).

  Among resolved complaints, the majority were resolved directly by the supplier (92% of domestic and 96% of micro-business complainants) with only a minority requiring involvement of third parties (e.g. the Energy Ombudsman) to aid in the resolution process. Complaint resolution time rarely matched complainants' expectations. Whilst only around 1 in 10 recalled being told that it would take longer than a month to resolve their case (9% domestic, 8% micro-business complainants who were provided with resolution timescales at the start and already had their case resolved), almost half (44% domestic, 60% micro-business) reported that their case did take this amount of time to resolve. Overall, over half of complainants in both domestic and micro-business markets (51% and 58% respectively) agreed that the time it took to resolve their complaint was unacceptable.

- *Closure and impact of the complaints process*

  More complainants expected some form of closure than actually received one. Just over half of those who said their complaint had been resolved (at the time of interview) reported receiving a confirmation from their supplier that the complaint has been resolved (54% for domestic resolved complaints and 63% for micro-businesses resolved complaints). Overall, a similar proportion reported receiving another form of complaint closure[4], such as an apology or explanation of what went wrong. Among them, opinion is very much divided on whether the complaint resolution was satisfactory. Around half (51% domestic, 50% of micro-business complainants) were very or quite satisfied with what they received following resolution and around a third in each market (34% domestic, 30% micro-business complainants) were very or quite dissatisfied.

  Overall, complainants received a (usually) polite (68% domestic, 70% micro-businesses), but sometimes unhelpful (39% domestic, 37% micro-businesses), response from supplier staff, and many complainants felt they had not been treated

[2] Complaints which are flagged as closed by the supplier but the complainants thinks have not been resolved yet – it is expressed as a % of all complaints flagged as resolved by the supplier.
[3] This includes a small minority of complainants who were not sure what the status of their complaint was; see Figure 8 on page 16 for details.
[4] Overall, 63% of domestic resolved complaints and 53% of micro-business resolved complaints received 'something' following complaint resolution.

fairly (though this is the case for fewer complainants than in 2014; from 52% to 47% among domestic complainants and from 54% to 44% among micro-business complainants).

As a direct result of their complaints experience, around half of complainants (52% in both domestic and micro-business markets) were planning to, were in the process of, or had already switched suppliers at the time of interview.

## 1.3 Key drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction

- *Domestic complainants*

  *Satisfaction*: One of the key drivers of satisfaction is telling complainants the steps that will be taken to resolve their complaint. This important information provides a pathway for complaint resolution and helps manage expectations. Staff acting in a professional manner and using the complainant's preferred channel for re-contact also helps improve satisfaction levels. Avoidance of jargon is an important hygiene factor (i.e. it appears unimportant when present but its absence could gradually drive satisfaction down).

  *Dissatisfaction*: Key drivers of dissatisfaction are the *absence* of regular updates on progress and *not* contacting the complainant when agreed or promised. This creates considerable uncertainty in the process, which is deemed too long, and the complainants respond by managing their own complaint i.e. *they* chase suppliers for information, which is also a strong driver of dissatisfaction. At this stage, complainants encounter staff whose responses are not necessarily helpful, which can lead to a feeling that their complaint is not being taken seriously and dissatisfaction reduces further.

- *Micro-business complainants*

  *Satisfaction*: As with domestic complainants, early management of expectations is critical. Providing information (in clear language) on the steps that will be taken to resolve their complaint is one of the key strengths that suppliers should build on to drive satisfaction upwards. Receiving resolution confirmation at the end of the process has a similar effect. Administrative elements of the complaint handling process, such as using preferred re-contact channels and ready access to complaints history – maintain a structure and reassure the complainants that their complaint is taken seriously. Collectively these actions drive satisfaction upwards.

  *Dissatisfaction*: The key drivers of dissatisfaction among micro-business complainants are similar to those within the domestic market, including a lack of ongoing communication or a lack of communication about likely resolution timescales. The information gap leads to complainants repeatedly chasing their supplier. A strong driver of dissatisfaction for complainants chasing for updates is dealing with multiple members of staff, who during re-contact are thought to be unhelpful. Furthermore, complainants reported unacceptably long resolution periods. Collectively, these exacerbate the problem (of not having up to date information about the complaint's progress) and drive satisfaction down.

## 1.4 Evidence of good practice and areas for improvement

### Good practice

Supplier staff play an important role in the complaints handling process and their professionalism, together with clear communication, *specifically at the start of the process,* drives satisfaction up and represents good practice. Among micro-business complainants in particular, perceptions of staff professionalism have shifted from being a driver of dissatisfaction in 2014, to a driver of satisfaction in 2016.

### Areas for improvement

Poor on-going communication sits at the heart of dissatisfaction and complainants describe their experience negatively when they feel compelled to manage the process themselves (e.g. by repeatedly chasing for information due to a lack of regular updates and lack of knowledge of what to expect from the supplier and when). The areas in need of improvement focus on providing complainants with estimated timescales for both steps in the process and ultimate resolution and committing to agreed re-contact arrangements. Domestic complainants in particular look for reassurance that their complaints are being taken seriously. Micro-business complainants need provision of information about alternative complaint routes (even if not used), and an explanation of what caused the issue that led to their complaint – the presence of those elements would improve satisfaction with complaint handling.

# 2 Introduction

## 2.1 Research context

Ofgem is the independent gas and electricity markets regulator for Great Britain. It has a principle objective to protect the interests of existing and future electricity and gas customers. It has set key consumer outcomes that it requires energy suppliers to achieve. These include standards prescribing better quality of service and fair treatment, as well as listening to consumers to ensure that their experiences in the energy market are understood. As part of that, Ofgem is committed to monitoring supplier performance against the regulations it sets for handling complaints. By definition, complaints are ‘any expressions of dissatisfaction with the service received’ made by consumers. These expressions of dissatisfaction should be logged by the supplier as ‘a complaint’ and dealt with thereafter as complaints.

Ofgem’s Complaints Handling Standards (CHS) include requirements on suppliers to use accessible language, offer a range of channels for lodging and managing complaints, provide a clear pathway from complaint to resolution, and provide a clear route for redress should the complaint not be resolved to the consumer’s satisfaction. All complaint cases must be logged in written electronic form and the process of complaint handling has to be readily available to consumers on the supplier website (and they must be informed about the existence of the procedures). Suppliers are required to treat all consumers fairly; the standards apply to domestic and micro-business[5] complainants.

Research to measure how well suppliers have been meeting the standards has been conducted since 2008, when they were introduced. Four waves of research have been conducted prior to this survey, with the last wave in February 2014.

The 2014 wave identified a decrease in satisfaction with the way suppliers were handling complaints. This decrease was found among domestic and micro-business complainants, with some variation between suppliers. Following the 2014 research, Ofgem asked suppliers to review their complaint handling processes and improve services to generate positive change for complainants.

This wave of research was commissioned to assess how well suppliers responded to the call for improvements and to monitor any changes in complainants’ experiences. Outcomes from the research will help inform Ofgem’s ‘next steps’.

## 2.2 Research aims and objectives

**The primary aim of this research was to measure domestic and micro-business complainants’ satisfaction with the way their complaints have been handled by their energy supplier.**

[5] Micro-businesses are businesses with up to 9 employees.

Specifically, the research set out to:

1. Gauge complainants’ satisfaction with suppliers’ complaints handling and understand the key drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction;
2. Identify whether the Complaints Handling Standards were being adhered to by suppliers;
3. Identify areas of good practice in the application of the Complaints Handling Standards;
4. Identify areas of weakness in suppliers’ complaints handling process and determine priority areas that require action;
5. Assess the extent to which suppliers’ handling of complaints and complainants’ satisfaction with this complaints handling has changed since 2014, revealing areas where improvements have been made or areas where they have not/ they have declined; and
6. Measure overall satisfaction with complain handling at a market and supplier level.

## 2.3 Research methodology

A summary of the research methodology is shown in the following figure. Further details about the methodology can be found as Appendix 2 in a separate Appendices document.

*Figure 2: Summary of research methodology.*

| DOMESTIC COMPLAINANTS | |
|---|---|
| **Method** | Telephone (CATI) |
| **Fieldwork period** | February to April 2015 |
| **Interview length** | 18 minutes on average |
| **Who we spoke to** | 3,049 domestic complainants |
| **Sample** | Provided by suppliers<br>*(complaints made between 1-15 Dec 2015 for the largest suppliers and in Nov or Dec 2015 for mid-sized suppliers)* |
| **Quotas** | 6 largest suppliers<br>3 medium-sized suppliers |
| **Weighting** | Share of complaints<br>*(number of domestic complaints received by each supplier as a proportion of the total number of complaints received by all domestic suppliers)* |

| MICRO-BUSINESS COMPLAINANTS | |
|---|---|
| **Method** | Telephone (CATI) |
| **Fieldwork period** | February to March 2015 |
| **Interview length** | 17 minutes on average |
| **Who we spoke to** | 468 micro-business complainants |
| **Sample** | Provided by suppliers<br>*(complaints made in Nov or Dec 2015)* |
| **Quotas** | 6 largest suppliers |
| **Weighting** | Share of complaints<br>*(number of micro-business complaints received by each supplier as a proportion of the total number of micro-business complaints received by all suppliers)* |

## 2.4 Reporting conventions

When interpreting the data presented in this report, please note that:

- **Results may not sum to 100%** due to rounding and/or due to participants being able to select more than one answer to a question.
- **Data presented in this report is from a sample of complainants** rather than the total population. This means the results are subject to sampling error. Differences between suppliers or other sub-groups and between different waves of the research are only commented on if they are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level. This means there is no more than a 5 per cent chance that any reported differences are *not* real but a consequence of chance/ sampling error.[6]
- **Statistically significant differences** are indicated on each figure with arrows, as detailed below, and commented on where appropriate. Typically, the larger the base size (the number of respondents answering the question), the more likely it is that any differences observed are statistically significant. Results in each section of this report are presented for the current wave of the survey in the first instance. Comparisons are made with 2014 (and in some cases earlier years) to establish what has/ has not changed over time.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Significantly higher/lower in 2016 vs. 2014 | This indicates significant differences (at 95% level of significance) between results reported in 2014 and results from 2016 (the most recent wave) |

- **Results represent the experience from the complainants' perspective**; it is *their* perception and recall of their experience that is reported.

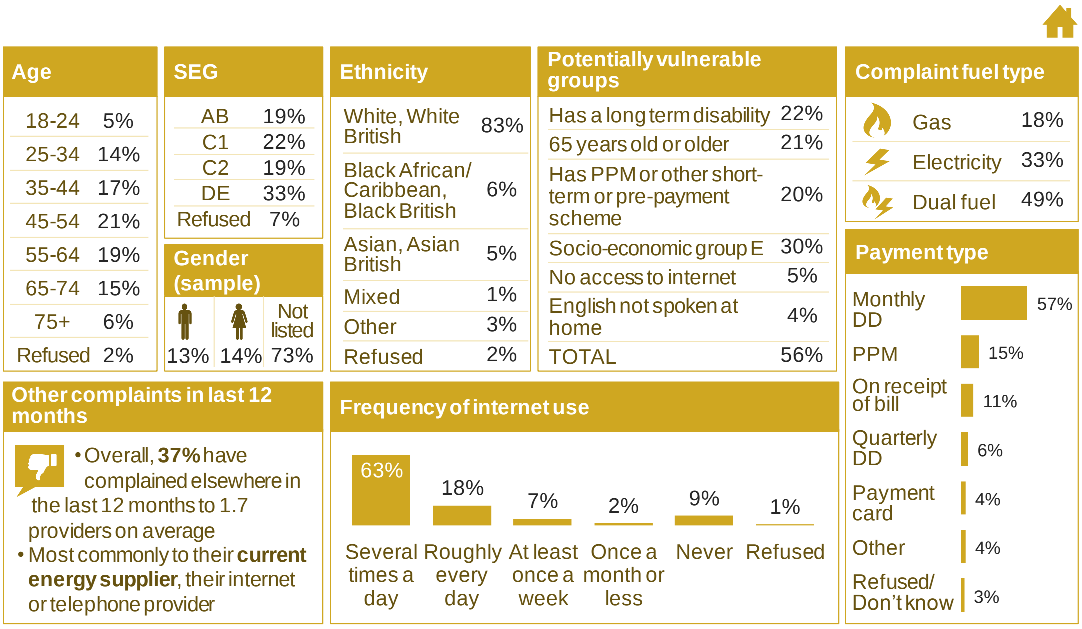
[6] Strictly speaking, calculations of statistical significance apply only to samples that have been selected using a probability sampling design. However, in practice, it is reasonable to assume that these calculations provide a good indication of significant differences for quota sampling (as used for this research).

# 3 Complainant profiles

## 3.1 Demographic and firmographic profiles of complainants

The complainants are a representative sample of all consumers who had contacted their supplier to ‘express dissatisfaction’ in late 2015.[7] The diverse profiles of the domestic and micro-business complainants who participated in the survey are shown below.

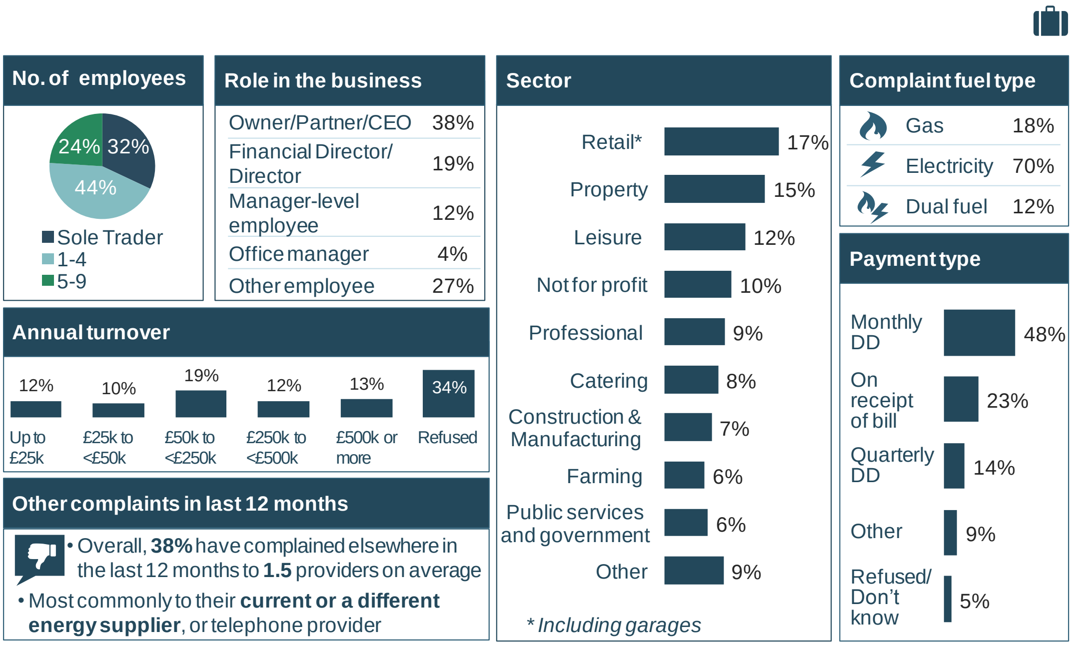
*Figure 3: Domestic complainant profile.*




**Base**: Domestic complainants (3,049).

[7] To reiterate, complaints are ‘any expressions of dissatisfaction with the service received’ made by consumers and for this research, the complaints were made between 1-15 December for the 6 largest suppliers and in November-December 2015 for the 3 medium-sized suppliers.

*Figure 4: Micro-business complainant profile (up to 9 employees).*




**Bases:** Micro-business complainants (468).

## 3.2 Profile of domestic and micro-business complaints

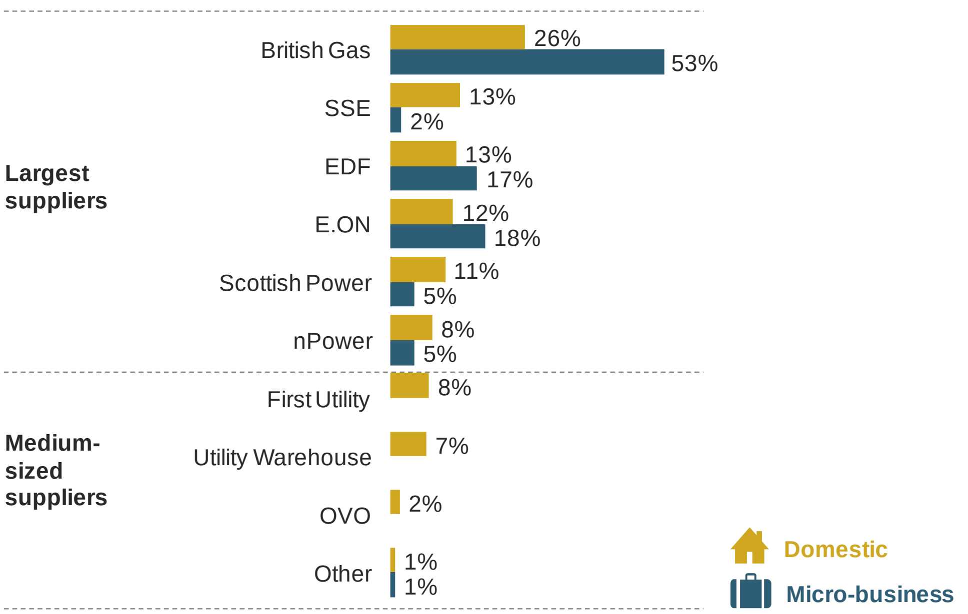
**Participants were complainants to the largest suppliers (domestic and micro-business) and three medium-sized suppliers (domestic only).**

Collectively, these suppliers comprised the majority of the domestic and micro-business energy markets (approximately 96% and 66% respectively).[8] British Gas, the largest supplier in both markets also had the largest share of complaints[9], generating 26% of domestic and 53% of micro-business complaints within each market. Each supplier's share of complaints as a proportion of all complaints included in the research is presented in Figure 5. Data was weighted to be representative of the share of complaints in the market.

[8] Domestic market data was provided by Ofgem and based on information received from suppliers (data based on number of accounts for gas and electricity separately). Micro-business distribution was from Ofgem's Micro/Small business survey (Fieldwork: December 2015).

[9] Within the specified timeframe for sample eligibility: see Figure 2 for details.

*Figure 5: Complaints distribution across domestic and micro-business suppliers.*




QS6. And which supplier did you make this complaint to?

**Bases:** Domestic complainants (All: 3,049), Micro-business complainants (All: 468).

**The majority of complaints were made by telephone** with 84% of domestic and 79% of micro-businesses having used this channel. Only 9% of domestic and 17% of micro-business complainants contacted their supplier by email.

**Billing was the most common cause for complaining**. Whilst just over half (56%) of domestic complainants contacted their supplier about billing problems, this increased to 70% for micro-business complainants. The second most common cause involved issues related to gas and electricity usage meters (not smart or pre-payment meters), which were cited by around one in four complainants (23% domestic and 20% micro-businesses).

*Figure 6: Nature of the complaint.*

| | Domestic | Micro-business | *More likely to be the case for…* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Billing | 56% | 70% | nPower (71%), First Utility (74%) |
| Meters | 23% | 20% | |
| Change of supplier / tariff | 15% | 12% | First Utility (23%) |
| Pricing | 12% | 10% | E.ON (16%) |
| Customer service | 12% | 6% | Scottish Power (17%) |
| Debt | 5% | 6% | |
| Sales | 4% | 6% | |
| Smart meters | 5% | 2% | OVO (29%) * |
| Pre-payment meters | 5% | 0% | |
| Account management | 3% | 2% | |
| Other | 2% | 1% | |

* LOW BASE

QS7. What was your complaint to [named supplier] about?

**NB.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants.

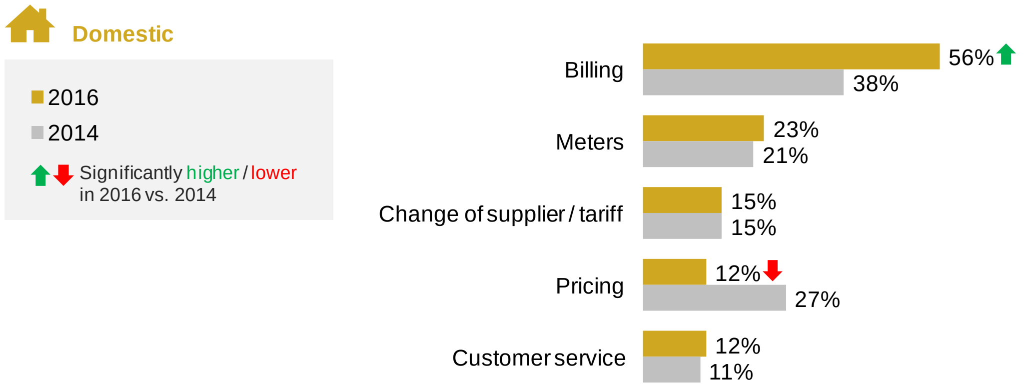
**Bases:** Domestic (All: 3,049, npower: 452, First Utility: 247, OVO: 91, E.ON: 500, Scottish Power: 332), Micro-business (All: 468).

Looking across all the reasons for making a complaint (Figure 6), domestic complainants were more likely than micro-business complainants to raise concerns about customer service, smart meters and pre-payment meters.

There are differences in reasons for complaining among suppliers, with over 70% of both npower and First Utility domestic complainants experiencing billing issues. OVO (domestic only) complainants were more likely to be raising issues about smart meter compared with complainants from other suppliers.

**The proportion citing 'billing issues' as the reason for their complaint increased significantly between 2014 and 2016 and remains to be the most common reason for raising a complaint** (in 2014 billing was cited by 38% of domestic complainants and 44% of micro-businesses compared to 56% domestic and 70% micro-businesses in 2016). Pricing had become less common than in 2014, when it accounted for 27% of domestic and 24% of micro-business complaints compared to 12% and 10% respectively in 2016. Please see figures 7a and 7b on the following page for more details.

*Figure 7a: Top 5 complaint reasons among domestic complainants – 2016 vs. 2014.*

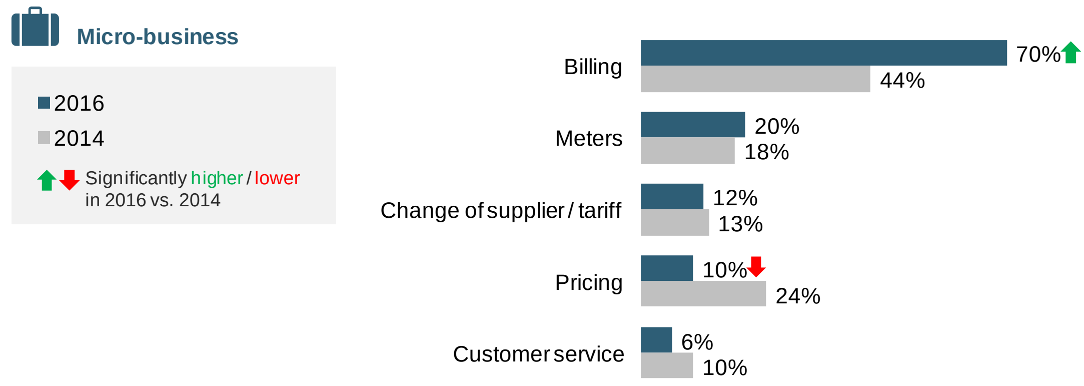



QS7. What was your complaint to [named supplier] about?

**Bases:** Domestic (All 2016; 3,049, All 2014: 2,457).

**NB.** Wording for 'Transfer' used in 2014 changed to 'Change of supplier / tariff' in 2016.

*Figure 7b: Top 5 complaint reasons among micro-business complainants – 2016 vs. 2014.*



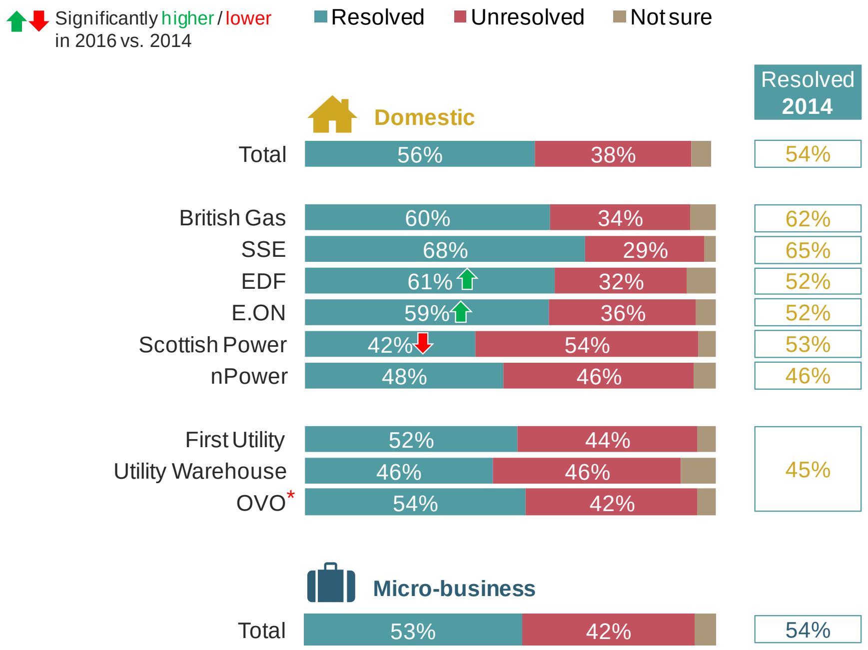

QS7. What was your complaint to [named supplier] about?

**Bases:** Micro-business (All 2016: 468, All 2014: 288).

**NB.** Wording for 'Transfer' used in 2014 changed to 'Change of supplier / tariff' in 2016.

**Just over half of complainants considered their case to be ‘resolved’**. While this proportion has fluctuated within individual suppliers year-on-year, the overall figure has remained fairly consistent across each survey wave.

*Figure 8: Complaint status from the complainants’ perspective.*




QD2.Would you say your complaint is…?

**Bases: Domestic** – All (2016: 3,049, 2014: 2,457), BG (2016: 653, 2014: 376), SSE (2016: 405, 2014: 353), EDF (2016: 228, 2014: 358), E.ON (2016: 500, 2014: 362), Scottish Power (2016: 332. 2014: 361), npower (2016: 452, 2014: 382), First Utility (2016: 247), Utility Warehouse (2016: 120), OVO (2016: 91), Medium-sized suppliers (2014: 265); **Micro-business** – All (2016 : 468, 2014: 287)

# 4 Satisfaction with complaints handling

## 4.1 Market level satisfaction

**Overall satisfaction with complaints handling has fallen significantly since 2014 among both domestic and micro-business complainants, though changes in the domestic market are much less pronounced.**[10] In 2014, around 1 in 3 (36%) micro-businesses were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled. This fell to 1 in 5 (21%) in 2016. Among domestic complainants, level of satisfaction fell from 30% in 2014 to 27% in 2016.

*Figure 9: Overall satisfaction with complaint handling, 2010-2016.*


QG1. Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint has been handled by [named supplier]?

**Bases**: Domestic (2016: 3,049; 2014: 2,457; 2012: 2,769; 2010: 2,734), Micro-business (2016: 468, 2014: 287; 2012: 256; 2010: 274).

[10] Statistical significance is a function of large base sizes.

**Complainants were more likely to feel dissatisfied than satisfied with the way their complaint had been handled.** Overall, 60% of domestic and 68% of micro-business complainants were dissatisfied with their experience. In the majority of these cases, they are *very* dissatisfied and this strength of feeling had increased significantly since 2014: 45% of domestic and 49% of micro-business complainants reported that they were very dissatisfied, compared to 38% of complainants (in both markets) in 2014.

**Potentially vulnerable complainants[11] (domestic market only) were significantly more likely than the market average to be very or quite satisfied with how their complaint was handled** (30%[12] vs. 27% respectively), with the highest levels of satisfaction observed among those who never access the internet (40%[13]).

## 4.2 Supplier level satisfaction

**There were differences in levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction across suppliers in the domestic market.[14]**

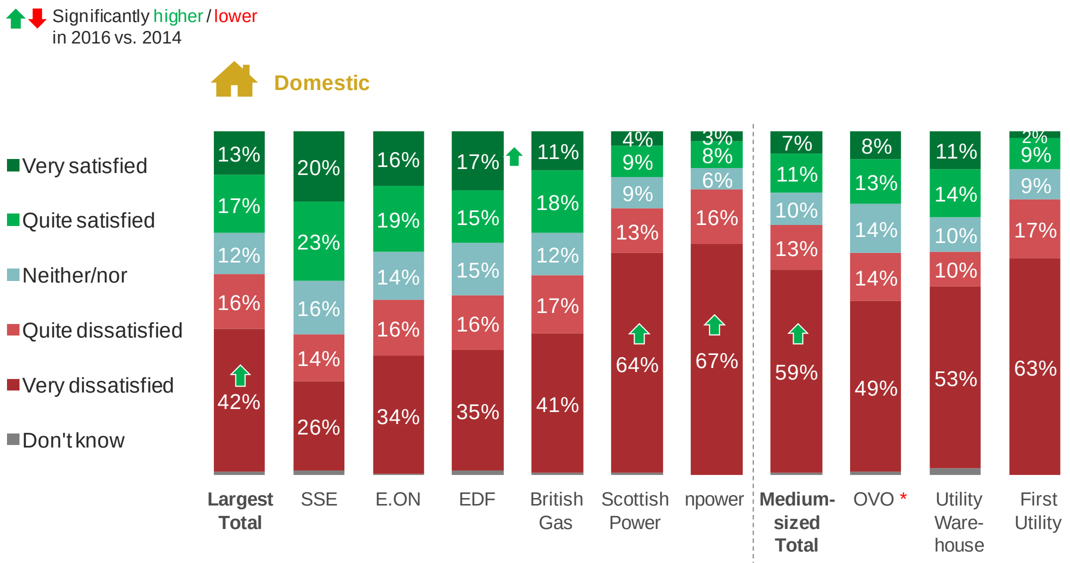
A majority (59%) of those who complained to the medium-sized suppliers were *very* dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled. This compared negatively with the total response for the largest suppliers (42% in total). However, there was considerable variance in level of dissatisfaction across all the individual suppliers; ranging from 26% of SSE complainants to 67% of npower complainants who were very dissatisfied with their experience (see Figure 10).

**The most striking shifts in levels of satisfaction over time were also found when comparing the largest suppliers.** Around two-thirds of complainants from npower (67%) and Scottish Power (64%) reported that they were very dissatisfied. This was significantly higher than in 2014, when 43% of npower and 50% of Scottish Power domestic complainants were very dissatisfied.

More positively, a slightly higher proportion of EDF domestic complainants were very satisfied compared with 2014 (17% in 2016 compared with 10% in 2014). Notably, while this appears to be a small shift, this increase was statistically significant and the only positive upward movement among the largest suppliers.

[11] See Figure 3 on page 11 for a list of criteria qualifying potentially vulnerable customers.
[12] **Base**: Potentially vulnerable customers (1,707).
[13] **Base**: Those who never use the internet and have no access to it (175).
[14] In the micro-business market, sample sizes did not allow for reliable supplier level analysis.

*Figure 10: Overall satisfaction with complaint handling – domestic supplier breakdown.*




QG1. Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint has been handled by [named supplier]?

**Bases**: Largest Total (2,570), British Gas (653), SSE (405), EDF (228), E.ON (500), Scottish Power (332), npower (452), Medium-sized suppliers Total (479), OVO (91), Utility Warehouse (120), First Utility (247).

# 5 The complaint journey

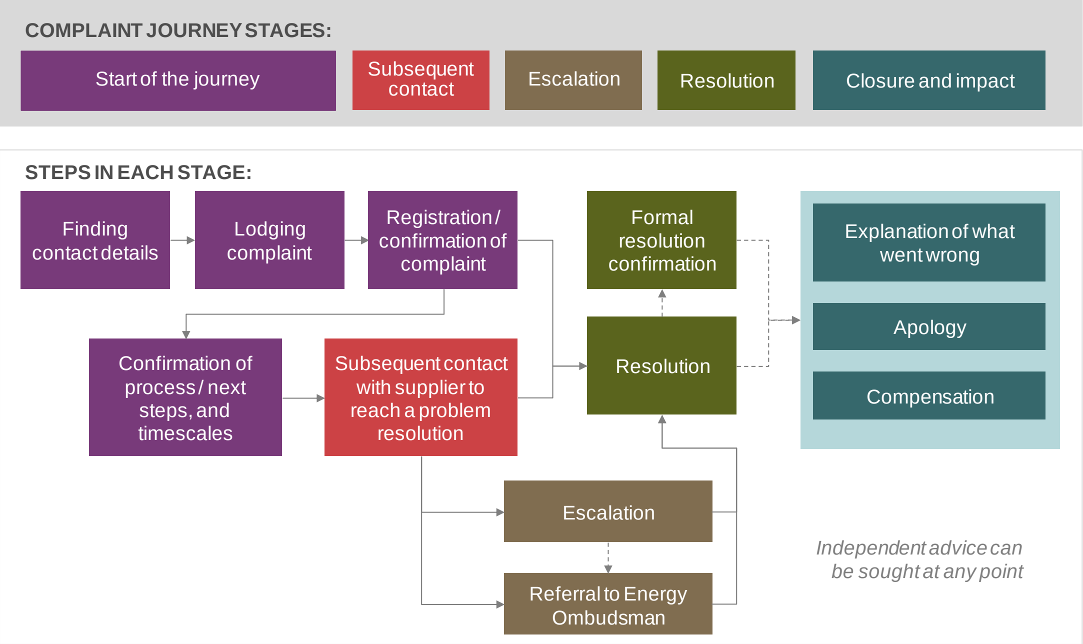
## 5.1 Introducing the journey

The complaint 'journey' was explored by identifying the core stages in the complaints process:

1. *Start of the journey*
   - Finding contact details
   - Registration and confirmation/ acknowledgement
   - Next steps and timescales
2. *Subsequent contact*
   - Communication following initial contact to reach problem resolution
3. *Escalation and third party involvement*
   - Escalation to a more senior member of staff and/or referral to the Energy Ombudsman
4. *Resolution*
   - Including receiving confirmation/ acknowledgement of resolution
5. *Closure*
   - Receiving resolution confirmation, an explanation of what went wrong or an apology
   - Receiving compensation, if applicable

Each stage was investigated in detail to understand what the process was like from the complainants' perspective, and what impact each element had on overall satisfaction with complaints handling. The questions asked within each stage reflected the requirements of the Complaint Handling Standards (CHS).

*Figure 11: The complaint journey.*



The remaining sections in this chapter address each of the core steps in the complaints journey in detail, starting with the ease of finding the correct contact details to be able to lodge the complaint or express dissatisfaction with the service received.

## 5.2 Start of the journey

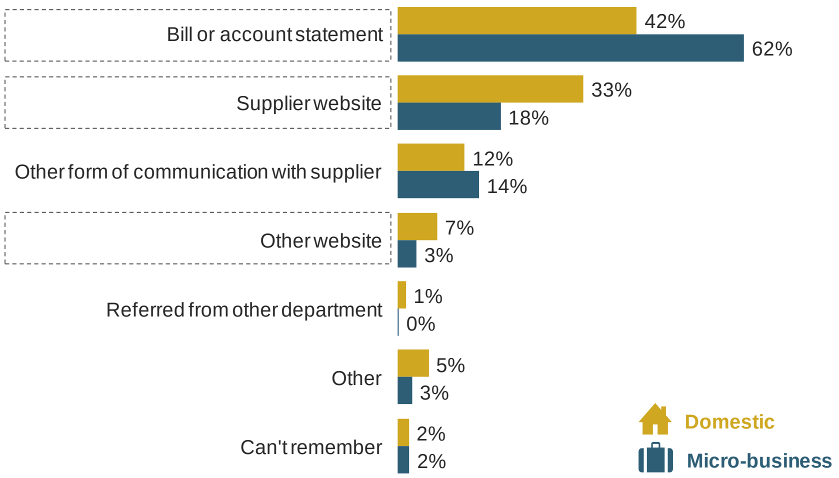
### 5.2.1 Finding contact details

**Most complainants could easily find their supplier's contact details to make their complaint**. A total of 77% of domestic and 81% of micro-business complainants easily (quite or very easy) found the relevant contact details, compared with 16% and 11% who reported difficulties (quite or very difficult), as illustrated in Figure A1.1 of Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document.

This finding represents an improvement since 2014, when higher proportions of domestic (26%) and micro-business (27%) complainants found it difficult (very or quite) to find contact details. Bills or account statements were by far the most commonly used source of contact details, particularly for micro-businesses (62%, compared to 42% of domestic complainants). Complainants who found it more difficult to obtain contact details typically complained about issues other than billing, suggesting those who don't have their bill to hand may struggle the most with finding contact information.

Figure 12 presents the full range of contact details sources, and highlights differences between domestic and micro-business complainants. Domestic complainants were more likely to find details for their suppliers online in comparison to micro-business complainants. Overall, 4 in 10 domestic complainants used online sources in comparison to 2 in 10 micro-business complainants. This includes 33% of domestic complainants who used their suppliers' website and 7% who used other websites (compared with 18% and 3% of micro-business complainants respectively).

*Figure 12: Source of contact details.*




QB1. Thinking about when you contacted [named supplier] in [Complaint month], where did you find the contact information you needed to make the complaint?

**Bases:** Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468). **NB.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants.

### 5.2.2 Complaint registration and acknowledgement

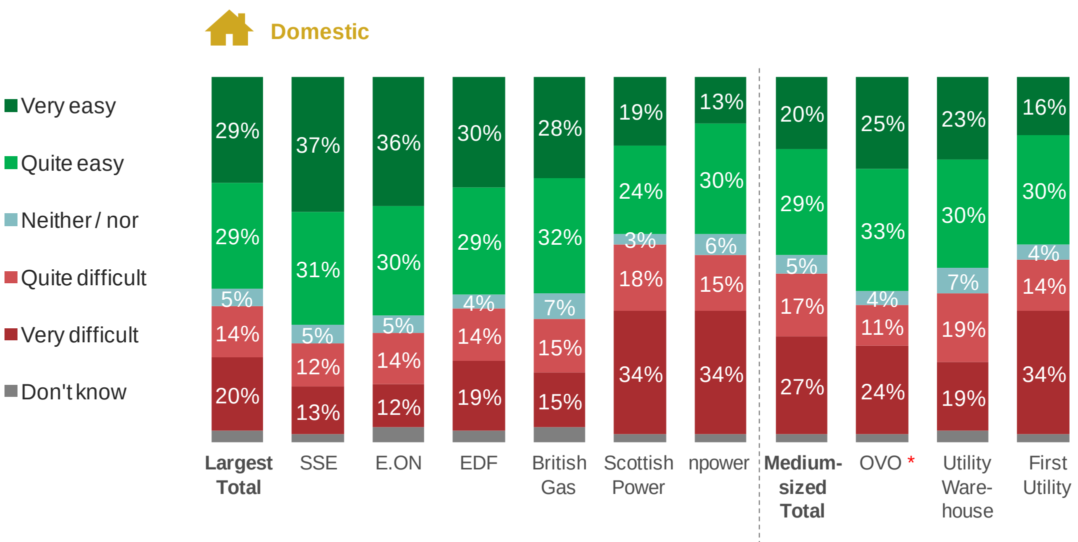
**More than half of complainants (57% domestic, 58% micro-businesses) found it easy to register their complaint.** Around 1 in 4 domestic and micro-business complainants found the experience *very easy* (27% and 25% respectively – see Figure A1.2 of Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document).

However, there remained a sizeable minority who found registering their complaint difficult. Overall, around 1 in 3 complainants found it very or quite difficult to register their complaint with their supplier (36% of domestic and 33% micro-business complainants). Those who complained to medium-sized suppliers were more likely to have faced difficulties (43% found it very or quite difficult) than those who complained to the largest suppliers (34%).

**This reflects a positive improvement since 2014.** At that time, satisfaction with ease of registering complaints was measured. Whilst results are therefore not directly comparable, a positive direction of travel can be observed. In 2014, 40% of domestic complainants and 37% of micro-business complainants were satisfied with the ease of registering their complaint compared with 57% and 58% (respectively) finding it a very or quite easy experience in 2016.

**There were significant differences in the ease of registering complaints among suppliers in the domestic market.** Among the largest suppliers, SSE and EDF complainants were more likely to find it very or quite easy to register their complaint, compared to the overall domestic market total (average).Those who had complained to npower or Scottish Power were more likely than average to find it very or quite difficult.

*Figure 13: Ease of registering the complaint – domestic supplier breakdown.*




QB2_2. How easy or difficult was it to register your complaint with [named supplier]?

**Bases:** Largest Total (2,570), British Gas (653), SSE (405), EDF (228), E.ON (500), Scottish Power (332), npower (452), Medium-sized suppliers Total (479), OVO (91), Utility Warehouse (120), First Utility (247).

**Among domestic complainants, there were significant differences in the types of complaints that were found easier or more difficult to register.** Complainants were more likely to find it difficult to register their complaint if it involved customer service issues or debt.

*Figure 14: Ease of registering different types of complaints.*

| Domestic | Easy % (Very/Quite) | Difficult % (Very/Quite) |
|---|---|---|
| *Average* | *57%* | *36%* |
| Billing | **53%** | 38% |
| Meters (any) | **58%** | 34% |
| Customer service | 45% | **50%** |
| Debt | 43% | **48%** |
| Account management * | **72%** | 25% |

* LOW BASE

QB2_2. How easy or difficult was it to register your complaint with [named supplier]?

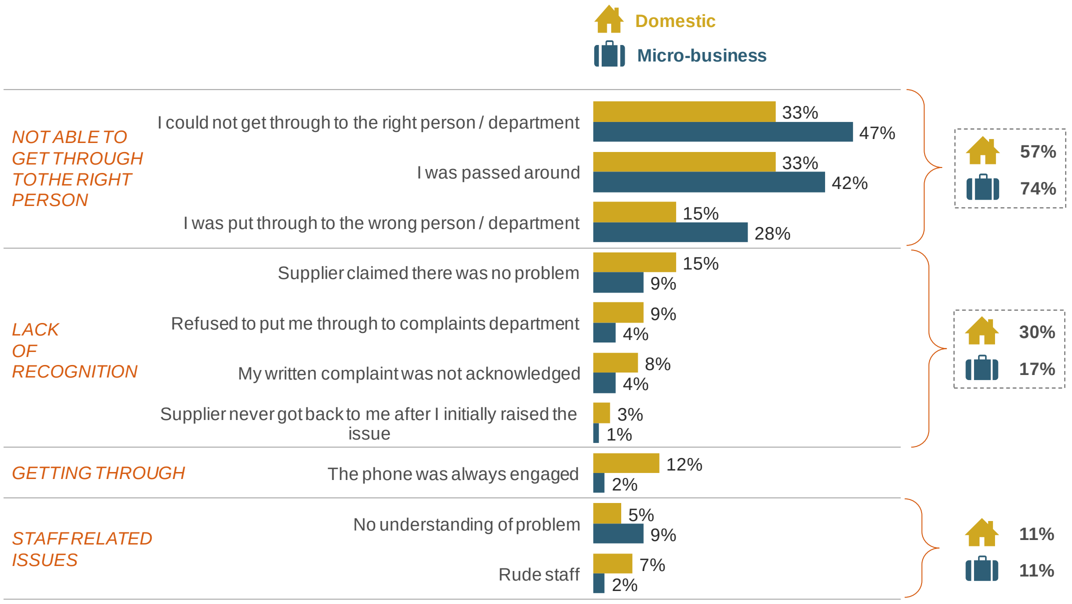
**Bases:** All domestic (3,049), Billing (1,738), Meters (any) (948), Customer service (362), Debt (162), Account management (94).

**Of those who found it difficult to have their complaint registered, the most common reasons involved being able to speak to the right person.** Whilst this experience was shared by complainants in both markets, it was particularly the case for micro-businesses (74% of micro-businesses compared with 57% of domestic complainants, as shown in Figure 15).

This included almost half (47%) of micro-business complainants stating specifically that they were not able to get through to the right person or department, compared to a third (33%) of domestic complainants. Micro-business complainants were also more likely than domestic complainants to report being passed around (42% compared with 33%) and being put through to the wrong person or department (28% compared with 15%).

Domestic complainants experienced a wider range of difficulties when trying to have their complaint registered. These included a lack of recognition of their complaint; specifically, having their issue acknowledged as a problem or dealt with as a complaint, and finding it difficult to get through to their supplier by phone. Figure 15 presents the range of experiences for both domestic and micro-business complainants. Experiences were broadly consistent across the different suppliers.

*Figure 15: Main reasons it was difficult to register the complaint*

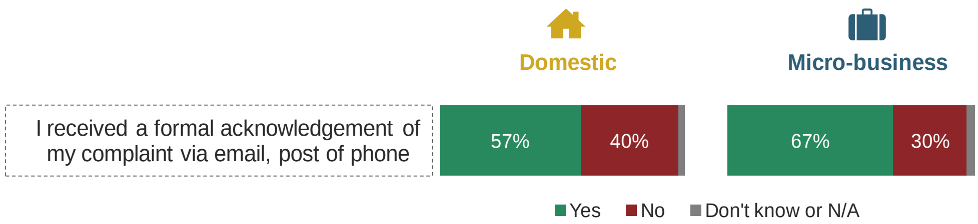



QB3. What would you say was the MAIN reason why you found it difficult to have your complaint registered?

**Bases:** Those who found it difficult to register a complaint (Domestic: 1,131; Micro-business: 163). **NB.** Figures on the far right show total figures including everyone who selected a reason within at least one of the four aggregate categories listed to the left of the chart. Boxed figures (dotted line) on the right indicate that the differences between the aggregated results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants are statistically significant. **NB.** Only reasons cited by 5% or more on average across the domestic and micro-business markets are reported here – please see published tables for further detail.

More than half (57%) of domestic complainants and 67% of micro-business complainants received a formal acknowledgement of their complaint in writing or via telephone. Domestic complainants to First Utility were significantly more likely to have received a confirmation (67%[15]) than the average. There were no significant differences among micro-business suppliers.

*Figure 16: Formal acknowledgement of complaint.*




QB4. I will now read out a few statements related to what might or might not have happened when you first contacted [named supplier] about your complaint. As I read each statement out, please say YES or NO to indicate whether or not it happened to you.

**Bases:** Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468). **NB.** Differences between domestic and micro-business complainants are statistically significant.

[15] **Base**: First Utility (domestic only) complainants (247).

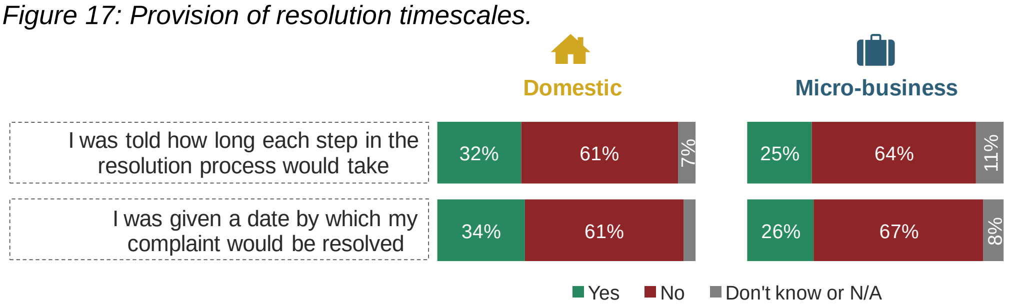
**Though some had difficulties registering their complaint, complainants felt that the language used by initial response staff was clear.** A majority of domestic (77%) and micro-business (79%) complainants said that staff used language that they could understand (i.e. they didn't use jargon). This is an improvement from 2014, when 63% of domestic complainants and 60% of micro-business complainants were satisfied (very or fairly satisfied) that the language used by staff was simple and easy to understand. Though 2014 and 2016 figures were not directly comparable, they indicated a movement in a positive direction. See Figure A1.5 of Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document.

### 5.2.3 Confirmation of process and next steps

**The range of 'next steps' information provided by staff is inconsistent.** A little over a third (36%) of both domestic and micro-business complainants were given a named contact for their case. A comparable proportion (39%) of domestic complainants were given a complaint reference or tracking number, though this is significantly lower than the proportion of micro-business complainants who received one (50%). Around half were told what steps would be taken to resolve their complaint (54% among domestic and 49% among micro-business complainants). See Figure A1.3 of Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document.

**Only a minority of complainants said that they were given a timescale for each of the steps in the complaints handling process, or an estimated final resolution date.** Among domestic complainants, around one third recalled being told how long each step in the process would take (32%) and 34% were given a date by which their complaint would be resolved. This was significantly lower among micro-business complainants, of whom only a quarter (25%) was told how long each step would take and a similar proportion (26%) was given a date by which their complaint will be resolved.

*Figure 17: Provision of resolution timescales.*




QB4. I will now read out a few statements related to what might or might not have happened when you first contacted [named supplier] about your complaint. As I read each statement out, please say YES or NO to indicate whether or not it happened to you.

**Bases:** Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468). **NB.** Differences between domestic and micro-business complainants are statistically significant.

**Although the result is relatively low, it represented a significant improvement among domestic complainants since 2014.** The proportion of domestic complaints who were given an estimated resolution date increased from 28% in 2014 to 34% in 2016.

In the domestic market, the medium-sized suppliers (27%) were *least* likely to specify a date by which the complaint would be resolved. SSE (42%) and British Gas (39%) were *most* likely to do so, according to complainants (see Figure A1.4 in Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document). For micro-businesses complainants, Scottish Power (35%) was most likely to provide a resolution date though not significantly different from other suppliers.

**Overall, complainants lodged by micro-businesses were expected to take longer to resolve than domestic complaints.** Of those who were given an estimated timescale, around 1 in 4 (24%) of domestic complainants were told that their complaint would be resolved either on the same day (as the complaint was lodged) or within a couple of days, compared to around 1 in 20 (6%) micro-businesses. Micro-business complainants were more likely to be told that their complaint would take between 1 and 2 weeks to resolve. A quarter (24%) was given this timescale, compared to 15% of domestic complainants; these differences were statistically significant.

*Figure 18: Estimated resolution period.*

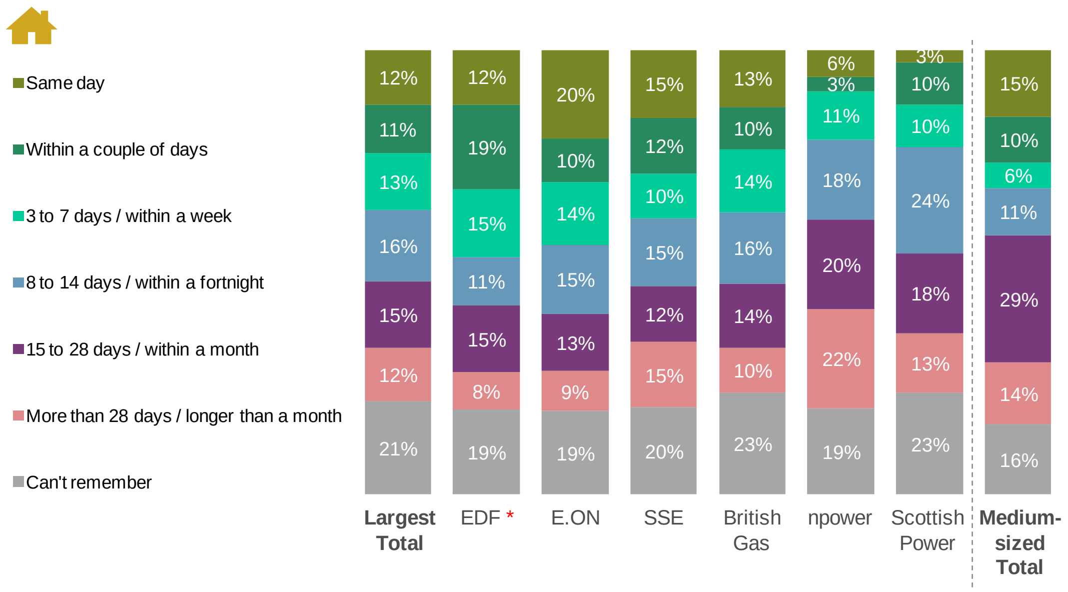
| | Domestic | Micro-business |
|---|---|---|
| Same day | **13%** | 5% |
| Within a couple of days | **11%** | 1% |
| 3 to 7 days/within a week | 12% | 12% |
| 8 to 14 days/within a fortnight | 15% | **24%** |
| 15 to 28 days/within a month | 17% | 17% |
| More than 28 days/longer than a month | 12% | 11% |
| Can't remember | 20% | 29% |

QB5. How long did named supplier tell you it would take to resolve your complaint?

**Bases:** All who were given a resolution date: (Domestic: 1,034; Micro-business: 117). **NB.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants.

For those who reported that they had received an estimated resolution date, the timescales given were longest for complainants to npower in the domestic market, where around a quarter (22%) was given a resolution date longer than one month (Figure 19).

*Figure 19: Estimated resolution period – domestic supplier breakdown.*




QB5. How long did named supplier tell you it would take to resolve your complaint?

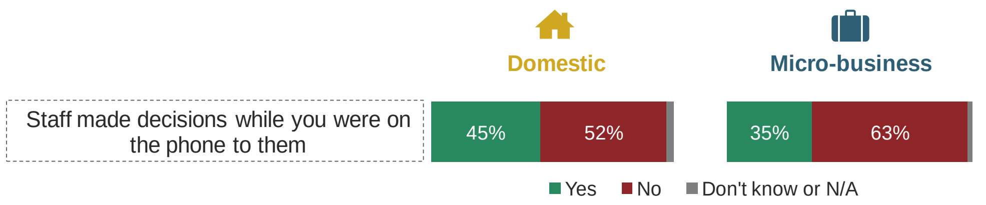
**Bases:** All who were provided with a resolution date; Largest Total (908); British Gas (257), E.ON (155), EDF (73), npower (149), Scottish Power (105), SSE (169). Medium-sized Total (126).

## 5.3 Subsequent contact to reach problem resolution

### 5.3.1 Ability to make decisions there and then

**Almost half of domestic complainants (45%) and a little over a third of micro-business complainants (35%) reported that staff were able to make decisions 'there and then', while on the phone to them.**

*Figure 20: Staff made decisions while on the phone to the complainant.*




QC8. During the complaints process, did [named supplier]..?

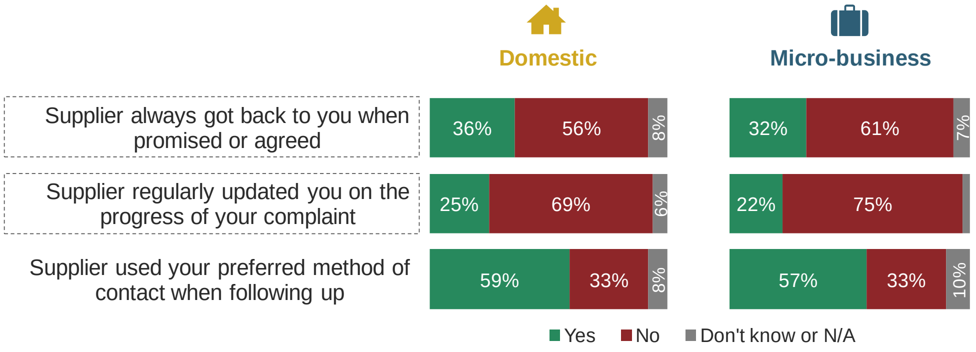
**Bases:** All who contacted the supplier over the phone (Domestic: 1,914; Micro-business: 316). Differences between domestic and micro-business complainants are statistically significant.

Although a majority still felt that staff were unable to make decisions there and then while on the phone to them, improvements since 2014 were evident. In 2014, complainants were asked to comment on satisfaction with staff's ability to make decisions there and then to help resolve their complaint. At that time, 1 in 4 (25%) of both domestic and micro-business complainants were satisfied. While results are not directly comparable, it is reasonable to say there has been an improvement in this area.

### 5.3.2 Adhering to agreed follow up

**A majority of complainants reported that suppliers did not keep to agreed follow-up contact arrangements.** Only around 1 in 3 complainants (36% domestic and 32% micro-businesses) said that their supplier contacted them when promised or agreed. Furthermore, only around 1 in 4 complainants (25% domestic and 22% micro-business) felt that they were regularly updated by their supplier on the progress of their complaint.

*Figure 21: Follow up contact.*




QC8. During the complaints process, did [named supplier]..?

**Bases:** Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468). **NB.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants.

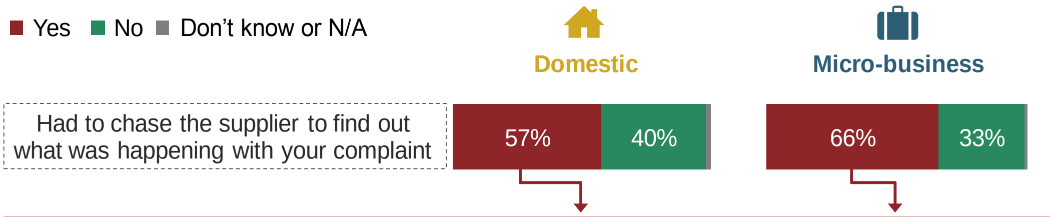
The proportion of micro-business complainants receiving regular updates about the progress of their complaint decreased from 31% in 2014 to 22% this year.

### 5.3.3 Re-contacting the supplier

**Most complainants felt they had to repeatedly chase their supplier for information, partly as a result of not receiving regular updates on progress.** Overall, 57% of domestic and 66% of micro-business complainants chased their supplier to find out what was happening with their complaint.

Among domestic complainants who chased their supplier for information, they re-contacted their supplier 7.2 times on average, while micro-business complainants who chased their supplier, re-contacted them as many as 10.8 times on average. A majority of complainants dealt with multiple members of staff. Around 8 in 10 (79% domestic and 81% micro-businesses) who chased their supplier spoke to more than 3 people in connection with their complaint. The impact of this is felt by complainants, with most reporting that they found the process stressful (77% of domestic and 84% of micro-business complainants).

*Figure 22: Chasing suppliers.*




| | Domestic | Micro-business |
|---|---|---|
| No. of times re-contacted supplier | **7.2 times** | **10.8 times** |
| No. of people dealt with | **3+ people (79%)** | **3+ people (81%)** |
| Found the process stressful | **77%** | **84%** |

C9. During the complaints process, did you…? QC1d.Have you contacted [named supplier] YOURSELF in relation to your complaint after you first raised it with them? IF YES: Approximately how many times did YOU contact, or attempt to contact them? QC5. Approximately how many people from [named supplier] contacted you in connection with your complaint? Derived no. of. people was derived from QC4_1, QC1d and QC5.

**Bases:** QC9: Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468). QC1d, QC5, Derived no. of people: All who chased (Domestic: 1,815; Micro-business: 303). **NB.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants.

**In the vast majority of cases (over 90%), complainants re-contacted their supplier by telephone.** Micro-business complainants were significantly more likely than domestic complainants to also follow-up in writing (either via email or post), suggesting a more formal approach to the process, as shown in Figure A1.6 of Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document.

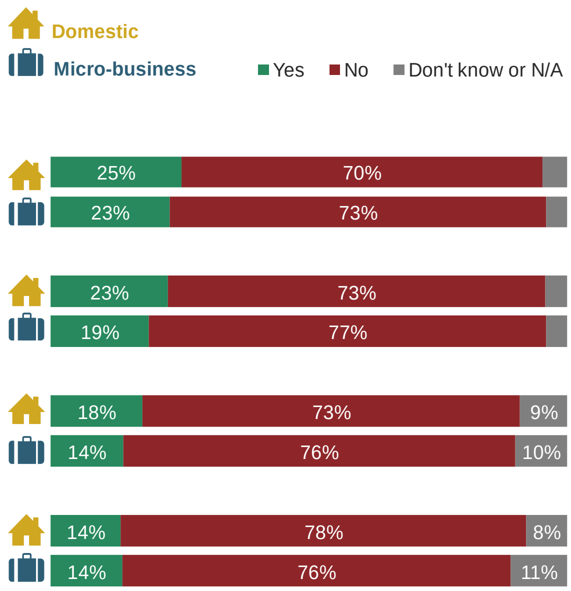
**When re-contacting their supplier, a majority of complainants found that the supplier had a record of their correct contact details, their complaint and full details about their complaint history.** Overall, complainants reported that the recording of the correct contact details had generally improved since 2014. Whilst around 8 in 10 (79% of domestic and 77% of micro-businesses) said contact details were recorded correctly in 2014, this increased to around 9 in 10 in 2016 (89% among domestic and 87% among micro-business complainants). See Figure A1.7 of Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document; the differences between the experiences of domestic and micro-business complainants.

## 5.4 Complaint escalation and third parties

### 5.4.1 Information provision

**Most complainants reported that suppliers had not directed them towards information on their complaints process or alternative resolution routes.** Around 1 in 4 (25% domestic and 23% micro-business) complainants were told where they could seek independent advice should they wish to use it. Fewer were directed to the complaints handling procedures on supplier websites or offered a free-of-charge copy of the procedures by post.

*Figure 23: Information given from supplier by domestic and micro-business.*




QC4_2 and QC4_3. I'll now read out statements relating to how you were dealt with by [named supplier] when handling your complaint. This relates to any contact you had with them, whether by telephone, email or any other format. QC8_1 and QC8_2. During the complaints process, did the supplier…?

**Bases:** Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468).

Nevertheless, there had been a perceived improvement in suppliers providing these details to domestic complainants since 2014. At that time, around 1 in 10 domestic complainants were directed to complaints handling procedures on their supplier's website (13% in 2014 rising to 18% in 2016) and/or offered the procedures free of charge (10% in 2014 rising to 14% in 2016). The experience of micro-business complainants remained relatively unchanged since 2014.

### 5.4.2 Escalating the complaint with the supplier

**A sizeable minority of complainants made use of escalation routes with their supplier.** Around one third (35%) of domestic and micro-business complainants escalated their complaint to a more senior member of staff. The main reason for doing so was that the supplier's response was felt to be too slow. This view was particularly common among micro-business complainants (68% of micro-business complainants who had escalated compared to 39% of equivalent domestic complainants). Domestic complainants were more likely than micro-business complainants to escalate their complaint due to suppliers' staff not understanding their complaint or problem (a reason given by 29% of those who had escalated, compared to 13% of equivalent micro-business complainants).

*Figure 24: Main reason for escalating complaint.*

| | Domestic | Micro-business |
|---|---|---|
| It was taking too long to get the complaint resolved | 39% | **68%** |
| Staff I spoke to did not understand my complaint /didn't understand what the problem was | **29%** | 13% |
| I found it difficult to find the right person to handle my complaint | 26% | **37%** |
| I just wanted things to move along quicker | 19% | 17% |
| Every time I called I had to speak to someone different | 12% | 12% |
| Complaint was not logged properly | 11% | 2% |
| Staff attitude | **10%** | 5% |
| I wanted to deal with one person | 8% | 4% |
| I hadn't heard anything for a long time | 7% | 4% |

QC6. You said that you escalated your complaint to a senior member of staff, why is that?

**Bases:** Those who escalated their complaint (Domestic: 1,118; Micro-business: 166). **NB1.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants. **NB2.** Only reasons cited by 5% or more on average across the domestic and micro-business markets are reported here – please see published tables for further detail.

The proportion of micro-businesses escalating their complaint had reduced significantly since 2014. At that time, more than half (54%) had escalated their complaint to a more senior member of staff compared with 35% in 2016. There were no differences for domestic complainants between 2014 and 2016.

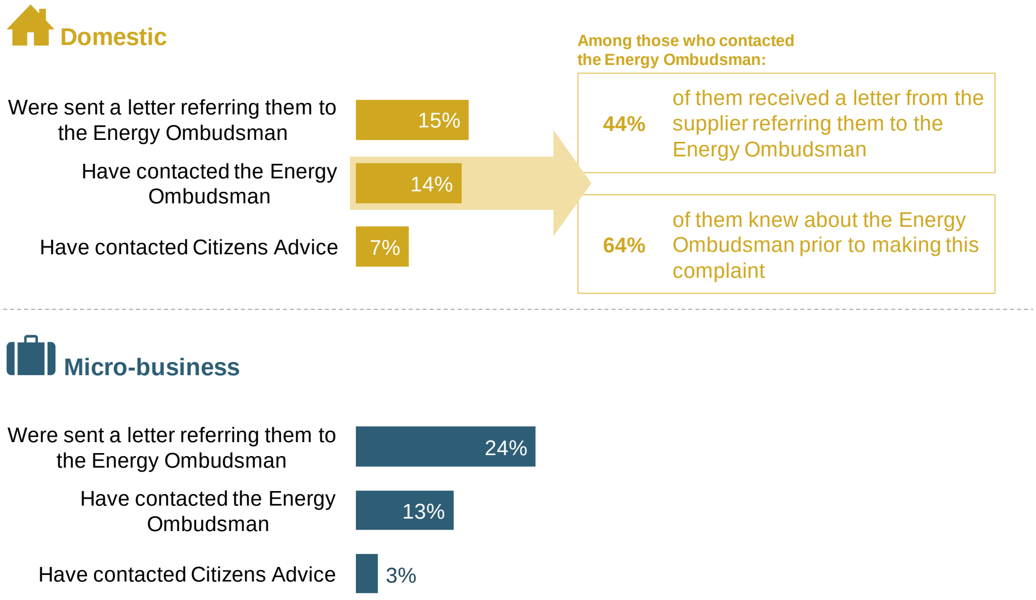
## 5.5 Resolution

### 5.5.1 Unresolved complaints

Just under half of complainants identified their complaint as unresolved or they were not sure if it was resolved at the time of their interview (44% of domestic and 47% of micro-business complainants).

**Among those who had identified their complaint as unresolved (or were not sure if it was resolved), a minority of complainants were referred to a third party by their supplier.** Among those with unresolved complaints, 14% of domestic and 13% of micro-business complainants contacted the Energy Ombudsman to support the resolution of their complaint. Much lower proportions had contacted Citizens Advice to seek independent advice (7% domestic and 3% micro-business complainants who were still waiting for a resolution)[16]. Of those who contacted the ombudsman, just under half (44% among domestic complainants who contacted the Ombudsman) had received a letter referring them to the Energy Ombudsman, with most of them (64%) being familiar with the Energy Ombudsman prior to making their complaint.

*Figure 25: Unresolved complaints – third party contact.*



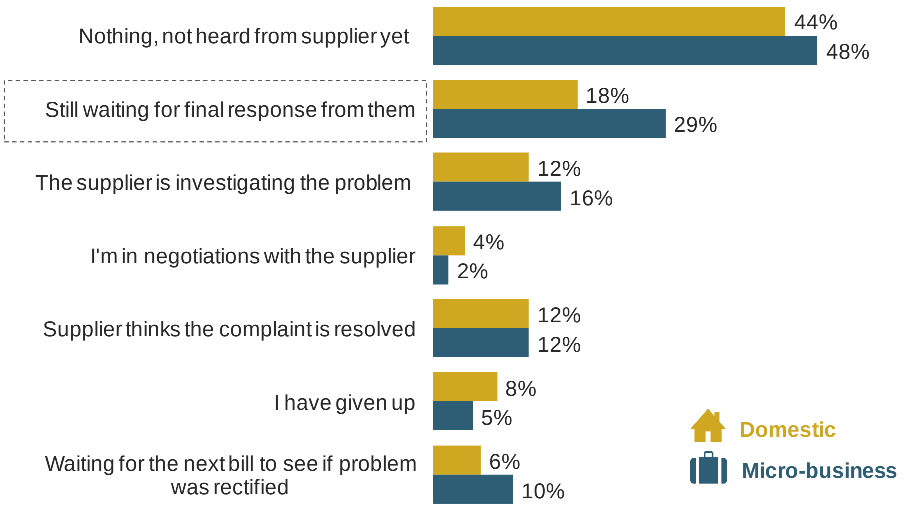

QF1. Thinking about what's been happening so far in relation to your complaint, has [named supplier]…? QF2. And have you…Contacted the Energy Ombudsman? QF3. Were you aware of the Energy Ombudsman prior to making a complaint with [named supplier]?

QF2: Unresolved complaints: (Domestic: 1,351; Micro-business: 218). QF1 & QF3: Those who contacted the Energy Ombudsman (Domestic: 215).

**Almost half of unresolved cases (at the time of the interview), complainants had not heard back from their supplier about what was happening with their case.** Overall, the majority of those with unresolved complaints were still waiting to hear back from their supplier, as illustrated in Figure 26.

[16] This refers to the situation as reported by the complainant at the time of fieldwork, when the complaint was still ongoing. Not all complaints would have reached the 8-week period meaning that not all suppliers were in a position to send out deadlock letters at that stage.

*Figure 26: Unresolved complainants – perceived complaint situation.*




QF4. As far as you're aware, what's currently happening with your complaint?

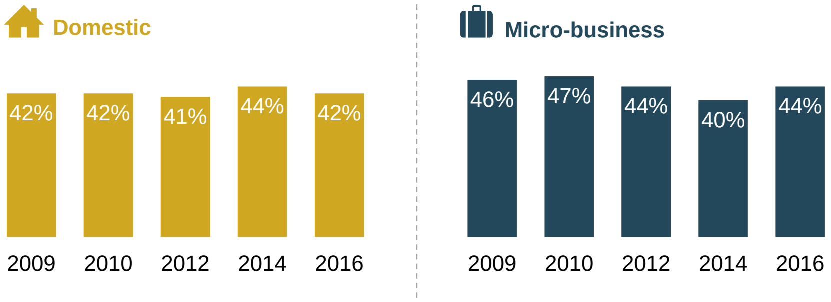
**Bases:** Unresolved complaints; Domestic (1,351), Micro-business (218). **NB.** Only reasons cited by 5% or more on average across the domestic and micro-business markets are reported here – please see published tables for further detail.

Those who had heard nothing from their supplier, or were still waiting for a final response, comprised 58% of domestic and 69% of micro-businesses with unresolved complaints. This provoked around a third of the unresolved complainants to complain again about the same issue (32% of domestic and 37% of micro-business complainants). Complainants to Scottish Power in the domestic market were more likely than other complainants to make a further complaint about the same issue.

### 5.5.2 Resolution Gap

The 'resolution gap' is a measure of complaints that are flagged as resolved (or closed) by the supplier but the complainants consider them unresolved or still ongoing. It is expressed as a percentage of all complaints flagged as resolved by the supplier. **Overall, the resolution gap has remained fairly constant since 2009**.

*Figure 27: Resolution gap.*



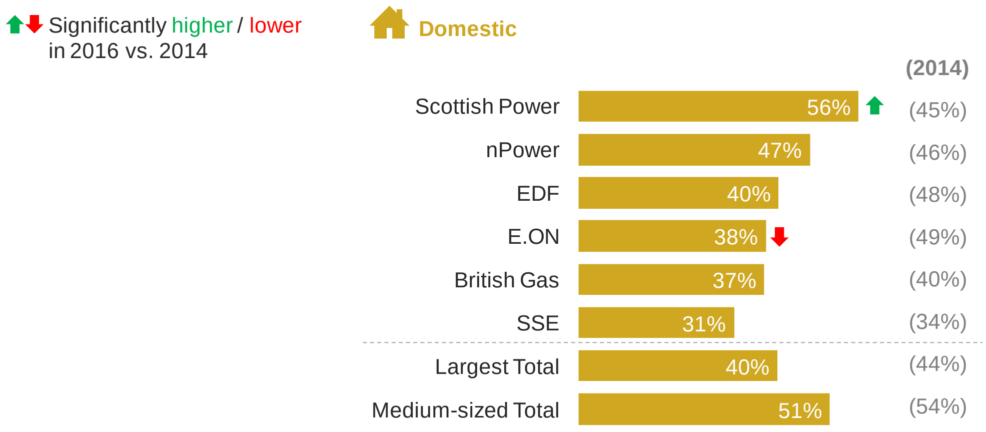

QD2. Would you say your complaint is…? Supplier status supplied in the sample. Resolution gap calculation is the number of complaints considered to be resolved by the supplier but open by the complainants, expressed as a percentage of all complaints considered resolved by the supplier. **NB.** Sample source has not always matched with supplier provided by respondent; therefore, there may be some discrepancies from the actual %s.

**Bases:** Complaints considered as resolved by the supplier; Domestic (2016: 2,078; 2014: 2,457; 2012: 2,769; 2010: 2,734; 2009: 2,762), Micro-business (2016: 320, 2014: 288; 2012: 256; 2010: 274; 2009: 254).

Since 2014, there had been some movement in the size of the gap between suppliers in the domestic market. While the shifts for Scottish Power (significant increase) and E.ON (significant decrease) were significant, their opposing direction meant that, overall, the resolution gap remained unchanged.

By supplier type, the resolution gap remained widest among the medium-sized suppliers (51%). Among the largest suppliers, the total resolution gap was 40%, but this increased to 56% for Scottish Power (56%), meaning that their records on complaint status were most at odds with their complainants' views.

*Figure 28: Resolution gap – domestic supplier breakdown.*

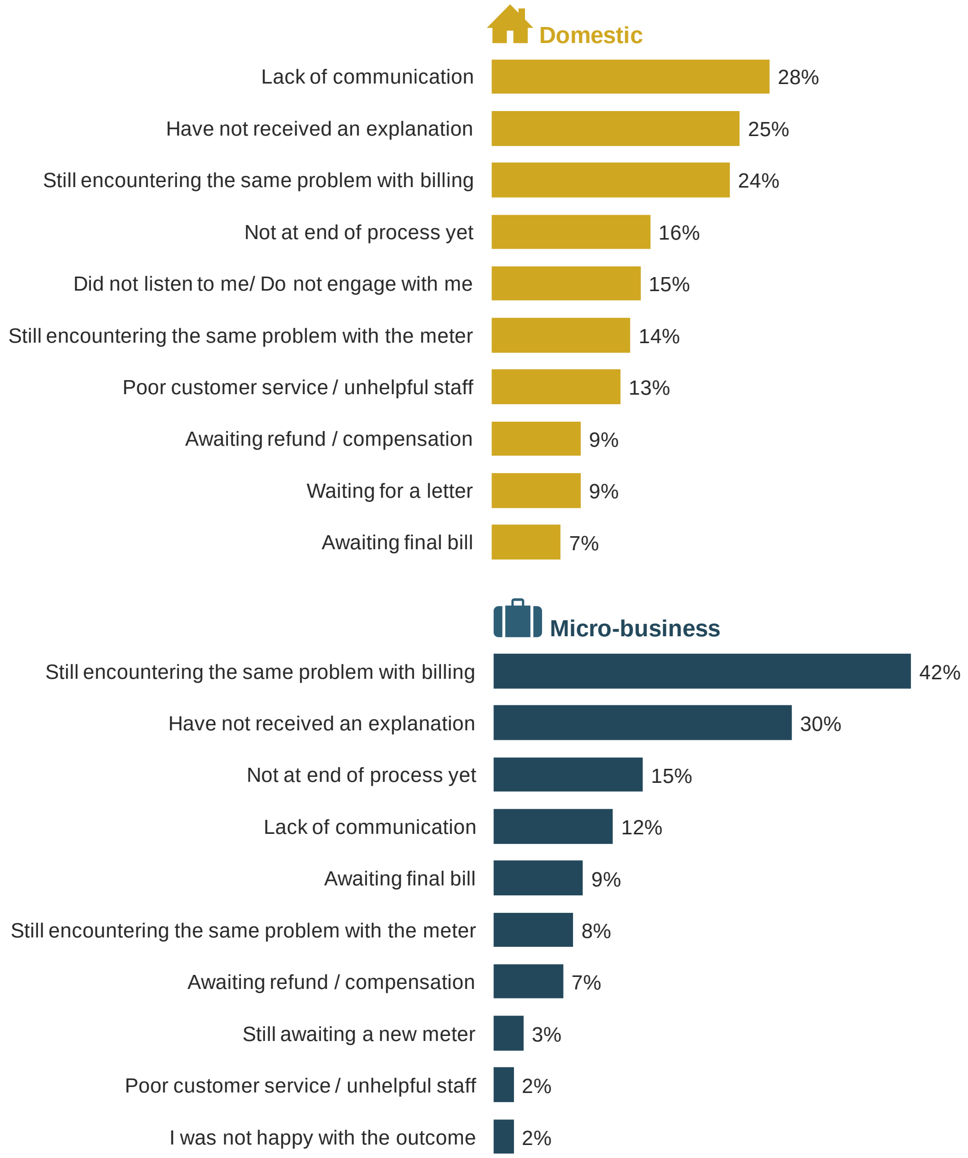



QD2. Would you say your complaint is…? Supplier status supplied in the sample. Resolution gap calculation is the number of complaints considered to be resolved by the supplier but open by the complainants, expressed as a percentage of all complaints considered resolved by the supplier. **NB.** Sample source has not always matched with supplier provided by respondent; therefore, there may be some discrepancies from the actual %s.

**Bases:** Complaints considered resolved by the supplier; Domestic (2016: 2,078, 2014: 1,853), Largest (2016: 1,739, 2014: 1,661), Medium-sized suppliers (2016: 339, 2014: 162), British Gas (2016: 401, 2014: 298), E.ON (2016: 387, 2014: 292), EDF (2016: 181, 2014: 275), npower (2016: 219, 2014: 272), Scottish Power (2016: 241, 2014: 298), SSE (2016: 310, 2014: 256).

**Lack of supplier communication and continuing to experience the same problem were the greatest contributors to the resolution gap.** Figure 29 presents the range of reasons given by complainants. For domestic complainants, the most common reasons for thinking the complaint was unresolved, while the supplier considered it resolved, were lack of communication, not receiving an explanation and still encountering the same problem with billing. For micro-businesses, encountering the same problem with billing was particularly pronounced (42% of those affected by the resolution gap). The main reasons for the resolution gap remained consistent with those reported in 2014.

*Figure 29: Reasons for resolution gap – Top 10.*




QF5. We understand that [named supplier] thinks that the complaint has been resolved. Please can you tell me the MAIN reason why YOU think it has NOT been resolved?

**Bases:** Complaints considered as resolved by the supplier; but considered unresolved by the complainant; Domestic (870), Micro-business (137).

### 5.5.3 Resolved complaints and resolution periods

Just over half (56% of domestic complainants and 53% of micro-business complainants) identified their complaint status as resolved. **A minority of them used third parties to reach a resolution.** Of all resolved complaints in both the domestic and micro-business markets, the vast majority (over 90%) were resolved by the supplier rather than the Ombudsman, as presented in Figure 30.

*Figure 30: Resolved complaints – third parties.*

| | Domestic | Micro-business |
|---|---|---|
| Resolved complaints | 56% | 53% |
| Resolved by the supplier | 92% | 96% |
| Resolved by the Energy Ombudsman | 3% | 1% |
| Not sure | 5% | 3% |

QD2. Would you say your complaint is…? QE4 And has the complaint been resolved by [named supplier] or the Energy Ombudsman?

**Bases:** QD2: Domestic (3,049), Micro-business (468). QE4: Resolved complaints: (Domestic: 1,698; Micro-business: 250).

Many complainants felt that **suppliers did not provide them with accurate resolution timescales.** A third (33%) of micro-businesses whose complaint was resolved had been given an estimated resolution date, and of these, only a third (35%) were given an accurate timescale. Only 40% of the equivalent domestic complainants were given an accurate estimated timeframe. Figure 31 presents the actual and estimated resolution times for the two markets.

*Figure 31: Resolution timescales.*

| | Domestic resolved complaints | | | Micro-business resolved complaints | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Actual resolution time | % given resolution timescales | % given accurate resolution timescales*** | Actual resolution time | % given resolution timescales | % given accurate resolution timescales*** |
| Same day | 14% | 7% | 13% | 5% | 4% | 8% |
| Within a couple of days | 8% | 5% | 7% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| 3-7 days / within a week | 9% | 5% | 4% | 6% | 2% | 4% |
| 8-14 days / within a fortnight | 9% | 4% | 3% | 11% | 6% | 10% |
| 15-28 days / within a month | 14% | 6% | 5% | 14% | 4% | 6% |
| 29-56 days / within 2 months | 14% | 6% | 2% | 14% | 4% | 3% |
| Longer than 56 days / than 2 months | 30% | 10% | ~ 6% | 46% | 13% | ~ 4% |
| Can't remember the time period | 3% | 0% | - | 2% | 0% | - |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** | **44%** | **40%** | **100%** | **33%** | **35%** |

QB4_12 Please indicate whether or not it happened to you: I was given a date by which my complaint would be resolved. QE1 How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved? QB5 How long did [named supplier] tell you it would take to resolve your complaint?

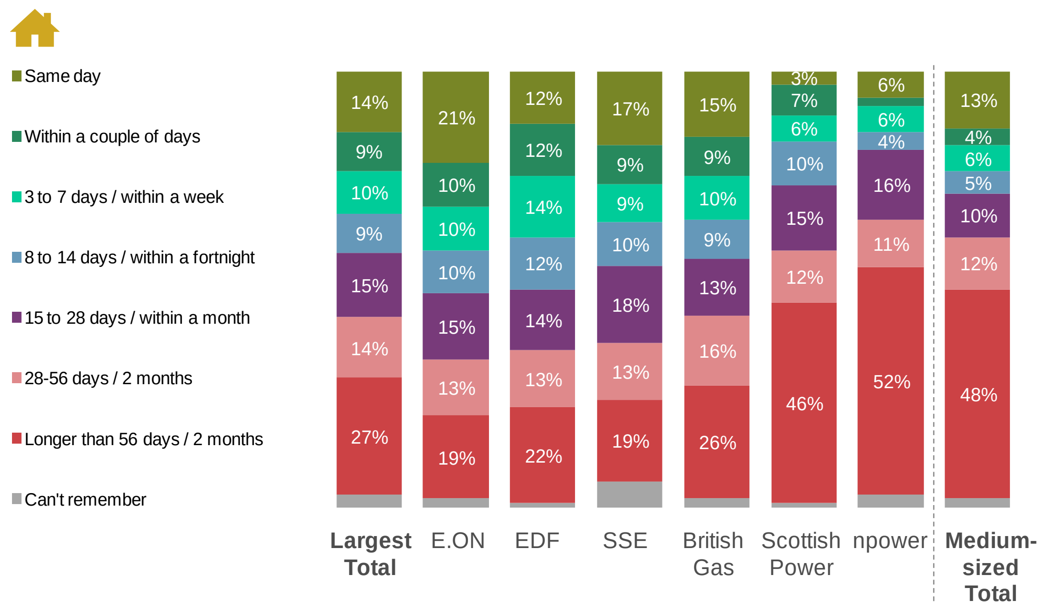
**Bases:** Resolved complaints; Domestic (1,698), Micro-business (250). ***Bases for accurate resolution timescales col.**: Resolved complaints where resolution date was provided (Domestic: 727), (Micro-business 80).

**Since 2014, the proportion of accurately estimated timescales had changed little.** Considering *all* who had a resolved complaint – and not just those who were provided with timescales – only 17% of domestic and 11% of micro-business complainants were given accurate resolution timescales. In 2014, the accuracy rates were 14% and 13% respectively. It is important to note that in 2014 the complainants were asked to say whether they felt that the supplier had kept to timescales, whereas in 2016 the accuracy rate was derived from estimated and actual resolution periods.

**Overall, most complaints took longer than a month to resolve.** Six in ten (60%) micro-business complaints took over a month to resolve; and almost half (46%) took more than 2 months. Domestic complaints took less time to resolve, with 44% taking longer than a month (14% waited between one and two months and a further 30% waited longer than two months).

Among the largest suppliers in the domestic market, around half of npower (52%) and Scottish Power (46%) resolved complaints took longer than 2 months to reach their resolution. Resolution timescales among the medium-sized suppliers were longer than among the largest suppliers; this was largely due to 70%[17] of First Utility complaints taking more than 2 months to resolve.

*Figure 32: Complaint resolution times – domestic supplier breakdown.*




QE1. How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved?

**Bases:** All resolved; Largest suppliers (1,460); British Gas (390), E.ON (297), EDF (139), npower (219), Scottish Power (138), SSE (277). Medium-sized suppliers (238),

Overall, resolution times in the domestic market had increased for all suppliers since 2014. Medium-sized suppliers had experienced the most substantial increases; 44% were

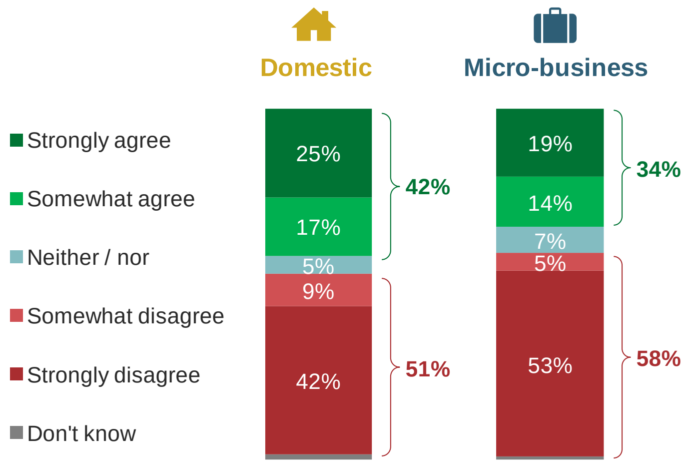
[17] **Base:** Resolved complaints among those who complained to First Utility (128).

resolved in 28 or more days in 2014 increasing to 60% in 2016. This was mostly driven by First Utility. Among the largest suppliers, npower had resolved 51% of complaints (from among the complaints considered resolved by complainants) in 28 or more days in 2014, increasing to 63% in 2016.

For micro-businesses, the average resolution period had also increased, with 20% of resolved complaints taking longer than 28 days to resolve in 2014, increasing to 60% in 2016, where a majority took more than 2 months to resolve. Differences among micro-business suppliers could not be observed between 2014 and 2016 due to low base sizes in both years.

**Half of those who said their complaint was resolved felt that the time it took for their supplier to resolve their complaint was unacceptable.** Of all resolved cases in the domestic market, 51% of complainants found the time taken to resolve their complaint unacceptable, with 42% strongly agreeing that this was the case. Strength of feeling was even greater in the micro-business market, where almost 6 in 10 (58% of micro-businesses whose complaint had been resolved) found the time taken to resolve their complaint unacceptable and just over half (53%) agreeing strongly with this.

*Figure 33: Acceptability of complaint resolution time.*




QE2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the time it took to resolve your complaint was acceptable?

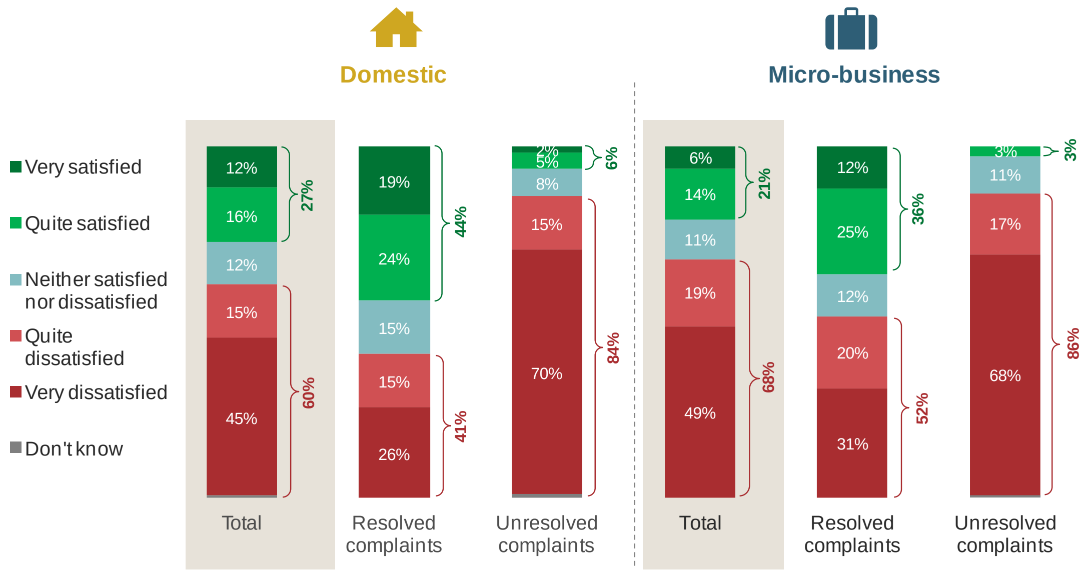
**Bases:** Domestic resolved complaints (1,698), Micro-business resolved complaints (250).

**Acceptability of the time taken to resolve the complaint is strongly correlated with overall satisfaction with complaints handling.** For example, among domestic complainants who (strongly or somewhat) agreed that the time it took to resolve their complaint was unacceptable, 69% were dissatisfied (very or quite) with how their complaint was handled (significantly higher than average). This level increased further to 80% among micro-business complainants.

### 5.5.4 Impact of resolution status on overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with complaint handling was lower among those with unresolved rather than resolved complaints. The vast majority (over 80%) of domestic and micro-business complainants whose complaints were unresolved were also dissatisfied with how their complaint was handled. This compared with only 6% of domestic and 3% of micro-businesses who had unresolved complaints and were also satisfied, as shown in Figure 34. This is an important finding as it shows that placing focus on ensuring complaints are resolved to the complainants satisfaction can increase overall satisfaction with handling.

*Figure 34: Impact of complaint status on satisfaction with complaint handling.*




QG1. Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint has been handled by [named supplier]?

**Bases:** Domestic (All: 3,049, Resolved: 1,698, Unresolved: 1,351), Micro-business (All: 468, Resolved: 250, Unresolved: 218).

## 5.6 Closure

### 5.6.1 Expectations following complaint resolution

**In addition to having their problem rectified, complainants expected an apology from their supplier and, in some cases, compensation.** Expectations have increased since 2014, especially among micro-business complainants.

Most complainants who considered their complaint resolved expected that, having raised their issue with their supplier, it would be rectified.

Among domestic complainants (whose complaint had been resolved), a third also expected some form of verbal or written apology. Compared with 2014, the proportion expecting some form of compensation had increased from around 1 in 4 (24%) to 1 in 3 (33%).

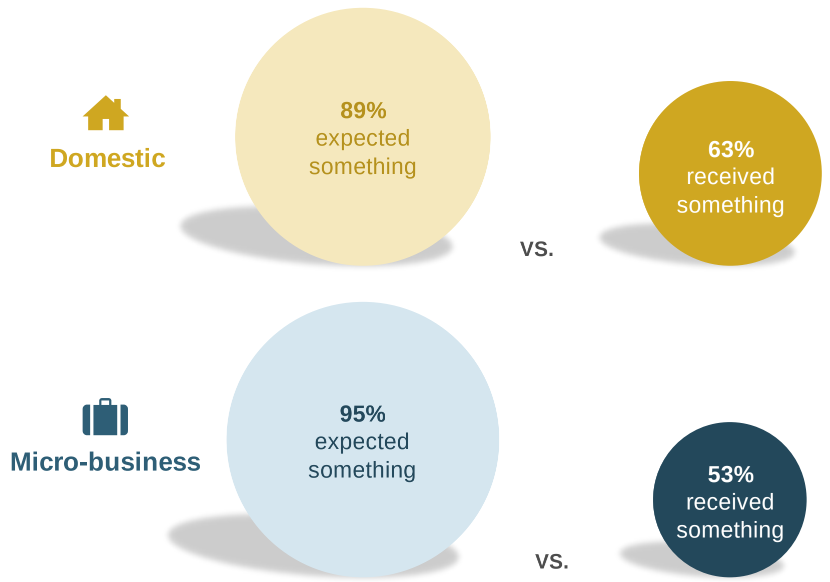
Expectations for an apology or compensation had increased significantly among resolved micro-business complainants. In 2014, 27% expected an apology in writing and 19% expected an apology by phone; this had now increased to 46% and 42% respectively. Similarly, whilst 18% expected compensation in 2014, this increased to 29% in 2016. See Figure A1.8 in Appendix 1 in a separate Appendices document.

### 5.6.2 What complainants actually received following resolution

**Expectations following complaint resolution were not fully met.** Overall, 89% of domestic complainants who had their complaint resolved expected to receive 'something' (e.g. compensation payment, an apology or an explanation) following resolution of their complaint, and yet only 63% recalled receiving anything. This expectation gap was more pronounced for micro-business complainants. Overall, 95% of micro-business complainants who had their complaint resolved expected 'something' and yet only half (53%) received anything.

Figure 35 presents what complainants received following resolution of their complaint and shows that relatively few, a third (36%) of domestic and quarter (25%) of micro-business complainants, received explanation of what went wrong.

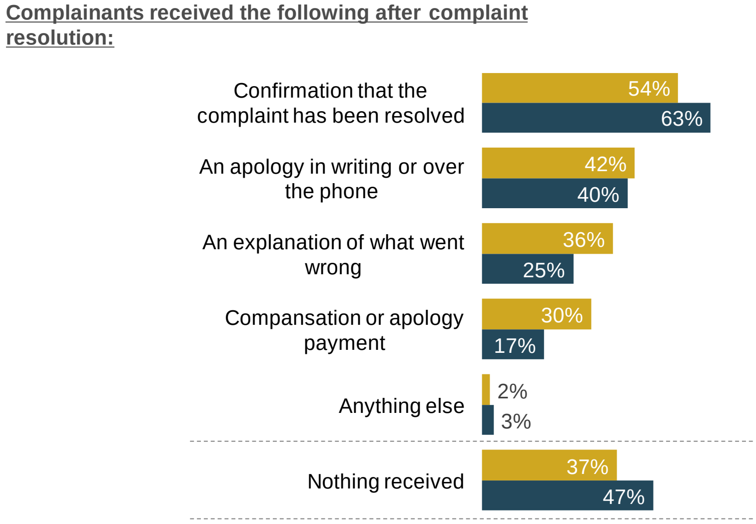
*Figure 35a: Formal complaint closure – resolved complaints.*




QD1 After making your complaint, did you EXPECT TO receive any of the following? QE5.Have you received…?

**Bases:** Domestic resolved complaints (1,698) Micro-business resolved complaints (250).

*Figure 35b: Formal complaint closure in more detail –resolved complaints .*

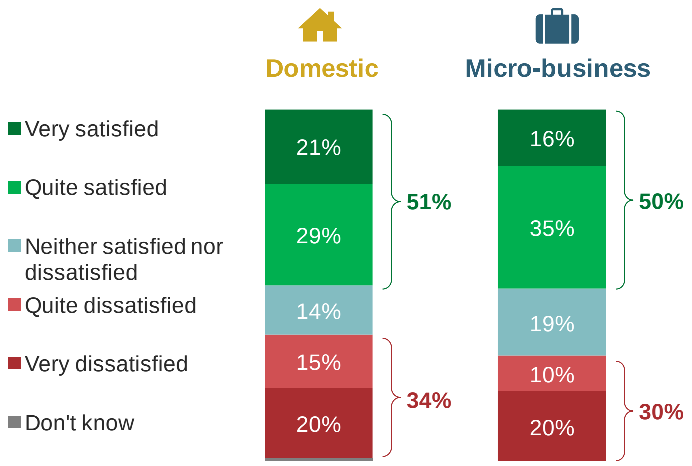



QE5.Have you received…?

**Bases:** Domestic resolved complaints (1,698) Micro-business resolved complaints (250).

**Opinion was divided on whether or not their supplier's acknowledgement of complaint resolution was satisfactory.** Views were very similar among domestic and micro-business complainants; 51% of domestic and 50% of micro-business complainants who had received something were satisfied with what they had received whilst 34% and 30% (respectively) were dissatisfied. **Satisfaction was strongly correlated with overall satisfaction with complaints handling.** Those dissatisfied with what they had received were more likely than average to be dissatisfied overall with the way their complaint was handled, as shown in Figure 36.

*Figure 36: Satisfaction with what was received following resolution.*




QE7 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you, that what you received adequately reflects the problems that you'd encountered?

**Bases:** Domestic complainants who received something following complaint resolution (1,088), Micro-business complainants who received something following complaint resolution (138).

# 6 Impact of complaint handling

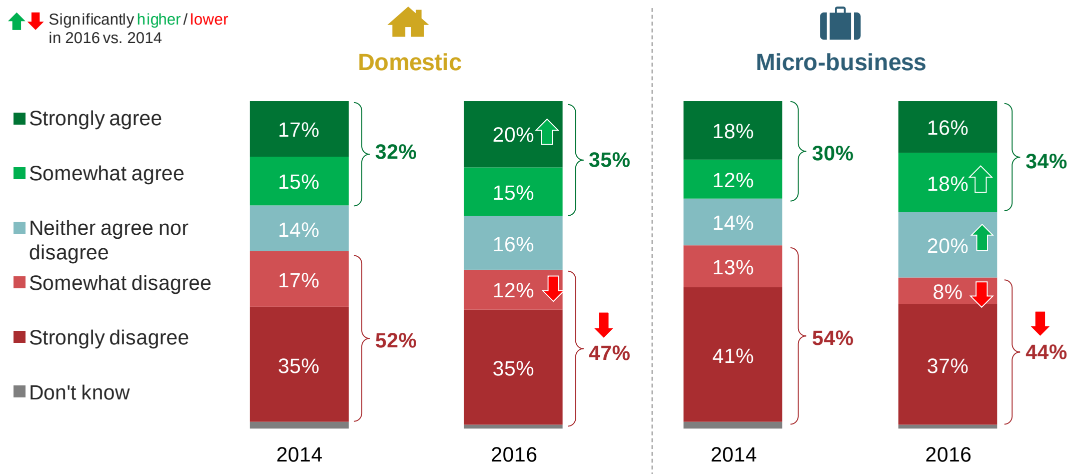
## 6.1 Fair treatment

**Nearly half of complainants felt they had not been treated fairly by their supplier, although this still represents an improvement since 2014.**

In 2014, just over half of domestic (52%) and micro-businesses (54%) did *not* feel fairly treated by their supplier. In 2016, this had decreased to 47% and 44% (respectively), which although marginal was a significant improvement.

**Being treated fairly is strongly correlated with overall satisfaction with complaints handling**, which underpins the importance of both measures and suggests that, from the complainants' perspective, dissatisfaction with how their complaint is handled translates into a feeling that they have been unfairly treated by their energy supplier.

*Figure 37: Fair treatment.*




QG3a_1 Thinking about the way [named supplier] have handled your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree that…?

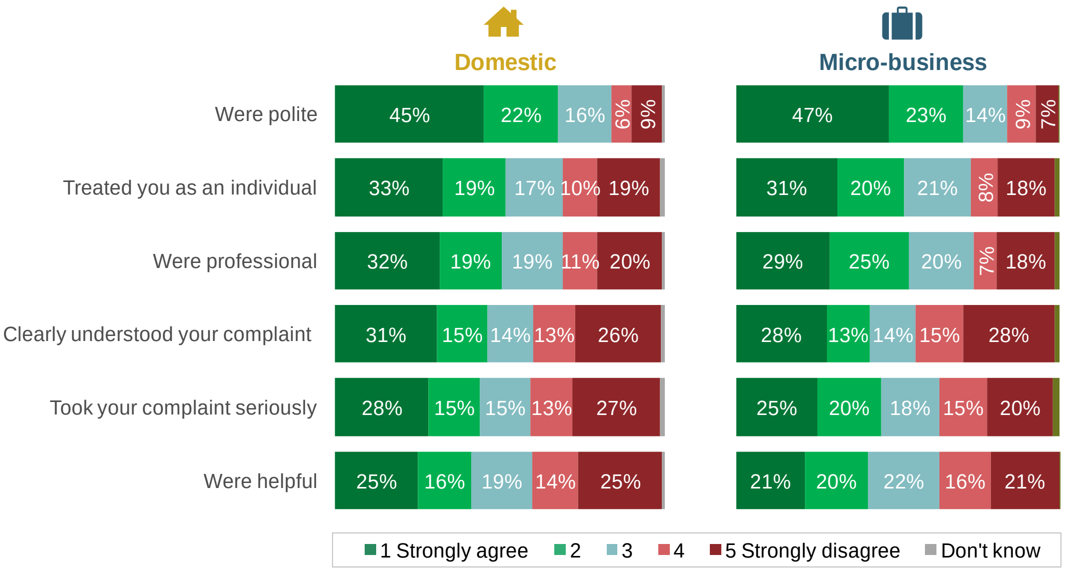
**Bases:** All domestic (2014: 2,457; 2016: 3,049), All micro-business (2014: 287; 2016: 468).

## 6.2 Complainants' perceptions of supplier staff

**Staff 'manner' was viewed positively but their perceived grasp of the complainant's problem and general helpfulness scored less well.**

A majority of complainants found the staff they dealt with to be polite; 68% of domestic and 70% of micro-business complainants agree with this and most strongly agree (45% and 47% respectively). However, complainants were less likely to feel that staff had clear understanding of their complaint. Whilst complainants were more likely to agree than disagree that staff clearly understood their complaint, as many as 1 in 4 (26% of domestic and 28% of micro-businesses) strongly disagreed with this. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 38, opinion was clearly divided on whether or not staff were helpful.

*Figure 38: Perceptions of staff.*




QG2a. To what extent would you say you agree that the [named supplier] staff that you dealt with throughout the complaints process…?

**Bases:** All domestic (3,049), All micro-business (468).

Perceptions of staff professionalism have improved since 2014. At that time, 35% of domestic and 33% of micro-business complainants were satisfied that their complaint was handled with professionalism. This year, 50% of domestic and 53% of micro-business complainants agreed that staff they dealt with were professional. While not directly comparable, this shows a clear improvement in this area.

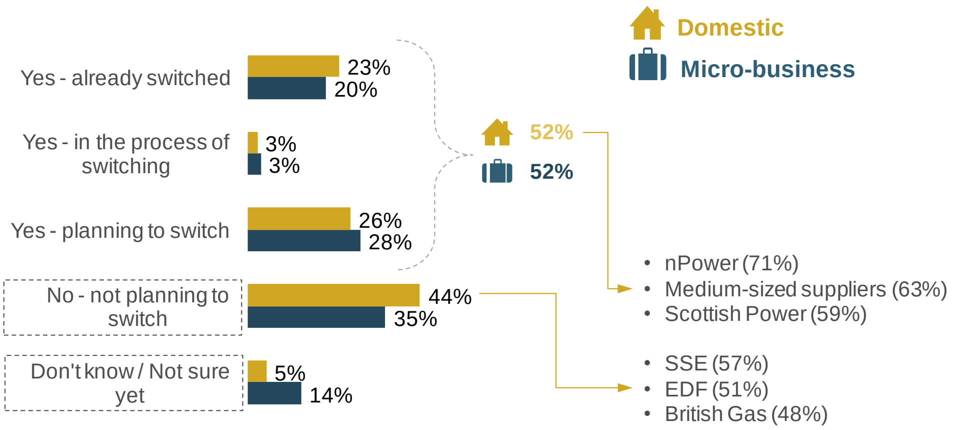
## 6.3 Switching supplier

**As a result of their experience, around half of complainants have already, are in the process of, or are planning to switch suppliers, and this has increased since 2014.** Among domestic and micro-business complainants, 52% overall have switched, are in the process, or are planning to switch. In 2014, these proportions were lower; 44% among domestic and 47% among micro-business complainants said they have already switched or were planning to.

In the domestic market, actual switching and the intention to do so were higher for some of the larger suppliers and the medium-sized suppliers. A majority of npower (71%) and Scottish Power (59%) domestic complainants have, are in the process or are planning to switch, as are those who are customers of the medium-sized suppliers (63%).

Overall, fewer micro-business plan to switch; 35% compared with 44% domestic complainants who do not plan to switch. The domestic complainants who do not plan to switch are more likely to be customers of SSE (57%), EDF (51%) or British Gas (48%).

*Figure 39: Switching supplier.*




QG4 Do you plan to switch energy suppliers, or have you already switched, as a result of your experience with this complaint? QG3a_2 Thinking about the way [named supplier] have handled your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree that…?

**Bases:** All domestic (3,049), All micro-business (468). **NB.** Boxed items indicate statistically significant differences between results reported by domestic and micro-business complainants.

# 7 Key drivers of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with complaints handling

## 7.1 Overview of the approach

Two types of Key Drivers Analysis (KDA) were used to identify what drives (has the greatest influence on) satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the complaints handling process. The use of **tactical** and **perceptual** KDAs is important as they reveal understanding of *where* the journey fails for complainants (tactical), and *how* the perceptions emotionally impact upon them (perceptual). Both tactical and perceptual factors influence satisfaction levels so their relative interplay is critical to fully understand the impact of the complaint handling journey on complainants.

The two KDA approaches use different analytical techniques and require different inputs (in this case, it means different types of questions used in the analysis):

- The **tactical** KDA approach looks at the influence of the *absence* or *presence* of particular events in the complaints journey on satisfaction (based on 'Yes' / 'No' / 'Not applicable' questions, such as:

  - ✓ Did the supplier update you on the progress of your complaint?
  - ✓ Did the supplier provide you with a date by which your complaint would be resolved?
  - ✓ Did you receive an explanation of what went wrong?

  It uses the difference in mean complaint handling satisfaction scores among complainants who have experienced particular aspects of the complaints journey (said 'Yes') vs. those who have not (said 'No'). The larger the difference in mean satisfaction scores among the two groups, the stronger the influence of that event on satisfaction with complaint handling. Direct action can be taken to address the elements which are shown to drive satisfaction downwards or upwards by more systematically introducing them into the complaint journey, or limiting complainant's exposure to them, depending of the event in question. The full list of events / elements included in this analysis can be found in Appendix 1, it includes 30 distinct elements, all of which form the complaint journey as described on page 19, Figure 10.

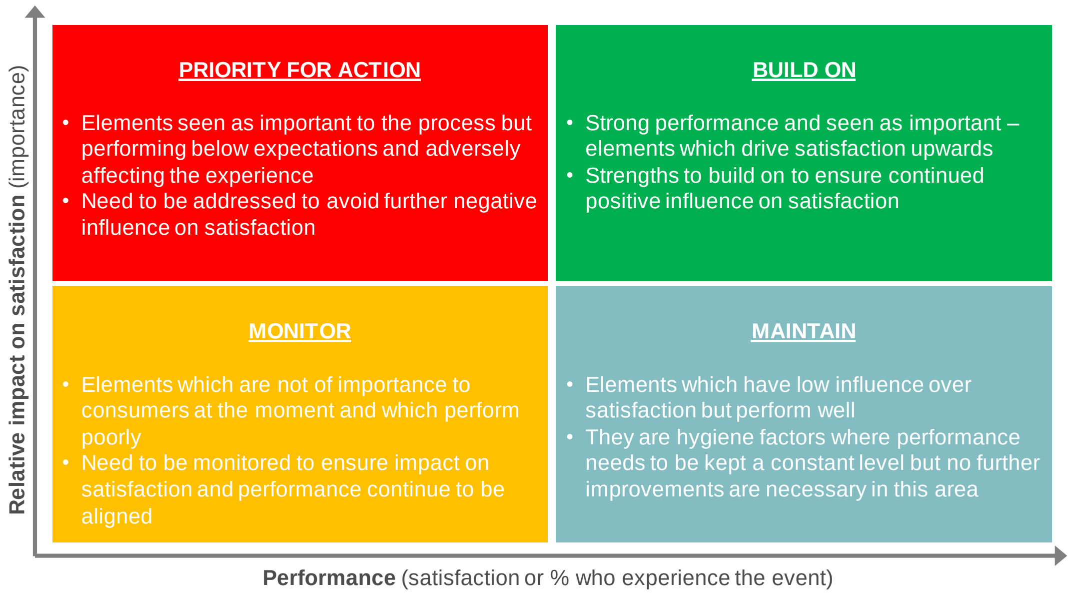
- The **perceptual** KDA approach looks at the influence of *perceptions* on satisfaction with the way the complaint has been handled (e.g. scale rated statements) such as:

  - ✓ Agreement that the time it took to resolve the complaint was acceptable
  - ✓ Agreement that the staff they dealt with were polite.

  This approach uses a traditional Key Drivers Analysis method, regression, to estimate whether changes in how the scale rated statements are answered would result in changes in satisfaction with complaint handling. It produces an importance measure for each of the investigated statements / elements to act as an indicator of strength of impact on satisfaction. Nine statements were investigated. The low number of statements (in comparison to the number of tactical elements) is a function of research design – i.e. upon investigation, those 9 statements were found to me most relevant to the complaints journey. While those elements still require attention, due to their subjective nature and level of difficulty to address directly, steps can be taken to positively influence them.

The two KDA approaches are therefore *not directly* comparable; however, they produce similar outputs that enable the identification of four types of outcomes as presented in Figure 40. The relative positioning of the tactical and perceptual elements in the four quadrants allows us to understand *which* tactical journey elements and perceptions have a similar effect on satisfaction, and how they may be therefore interlinked. The observations drawn from the outcomes of the KDAs described on the following pages illustrate these connections.

*Figure 40: Tactical and perceptual KDA analysis framework.*




In this chapter, the key drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the complaints handling process are presented and discussed. Comparisons (as far as possible) are also drawn with 2014 analysis to investigate where improvements have been made and which elements require further attention. Drivers analyses are conducted separately for domestic and micro-business complainants.

Care has been taken to overlay the drivers analyses with the complaint journey so as to give clear direction on which stage(s) of the journey fails the complainants.

## 7.2 Domestic: Drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with complaint handling

The outcomes from the Key Driver Analyses for domestic complainants are presented in Figures 41 and 42. Overall, outcomes support data presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

*Figure 41: **Tactical** drivers for domestic complainants.*

**PRIORITY FOR ACTION**
- Being given a resolution date
- Being told how long each step will take
- Being asked for contact preferences
- Making decisions there and then
- Not having to chase to get an update
- Dealing with one person
- Supplier getting back when agreed
- Supplier updating regularly
- Directing to complaints procedure on website
- Offering to send procedures for free
- Receiving an explanation of the problem

**BUILD ON**
- Telling me the steps that will be taken
- Using my preferred contact method

**MONITOR**
- Having a named contact
- Providing a complaint reference number
- Being told where to seek independent advice
- Informing complaint can be escalated
- Receiving an apology
- Receiving compensation

**MAINTAIN**
- Staff not using jargon
- Receiving a formal acknowledgement
- Supplier having correct contact details
- Supplier having record of complaint
- Supplier having full complaint history
- Not having to escalate
- Not having to make a further complaint
- Not having to contact Ombudsman
- Not having to contact Citizens Advice
- Supplier not sending letter referring to Ombudsman
- Receiving resolution confirmation

**Bases:** All domestic (3,049).

*Figure 42: **Perceptual** drivers for domestic complainants.*

**PRIORITY FOR ACTION**
- Staff helpfulness
- Staff taking the complaint seriously
- Acceptability of the time it took to resolve the complaint

**BUILD ON**
- Staff professionalism

**MONITOR**
- Staff understanding my complaint

**MAINTAIN**
- Staff treating me as an individual
- Staff politeness
- Ease of finding initial contact details
- Ease of registering the complaint with the supplier

**Bases:** All domestic (3,049).

### 7.2.1 Domestic: Drivers of satisfaction – summary observations

Just over half of domestic complainants were told the steps that would be taken to resolve their complaint; this is one of the key drivers of satisfaction. This information set the tone for the rest of the journey and provided an indication of what the process will be/ will look like. This information should always be provided in clear and intelligible language, making sure complainants understand what lies ahead. While staff *not* using jargon is *not* a strong driver of satisfaction, it is one of the elements that needs to be maintained – it is a hygiene factor, i.e. it appears unimportant when present, but its absence could gradually drive satisfaction down.

Furthermore, staff acting in a professional manner and using the complainant's preferred method of contact when re-contacting them also helps improve satisfaction levels (though this may be a product of the dominance of the telephone channel when dealing with complaints). These elements should be continuously built up and improved further to ensure satisfaction can increase as a result. The key will be providing this consistently to all complainants as not all shared the same experience in 2016.

### 7.2.2 Domestic: Drivers of dissatisfaction – summary observations

There are many more drivers of dissatisfaction than there are drivers of satisfaction, owing to more complainants being quite or very dissatisfied with the handling process.

The main themes contributing to high levels dissatisfaction with complaint handling concentrate around resolution period and being informed of the resolution progress on an ongoing basis. Complainants felt that the time it took to resolve their complaint was unacceptably long, which was exacerbated by lack of communication, and the Key Drivers Analyses support this view.

The key drivers of dissatisfaction are the supplier not updating the complainant regularly on the progress of their case, or not getting back to the complainant when agreed or promised. This creates considerable uncertainty in the process. Not being provided with resolution timescales and not being told how long each step in the resolution process will take contribute to this (and drive satisfaction down). This leads complainants to chase the supplier for information, which is also a strong driver of dissatisfaction. At this stage, complainants are met with staff whose responses are not helpful and lead to the complainant feeling that their complaint is not taken seriously, thus driving satisfaction with handling further down.

### 7.2.3 Domestic: How the results compare to 2014 outcomes

#### Improvements and maintained performance

Staff professionalism continues to be a strength among domestic suppliers and drives satisfaction upwards. Treating complainants as individuals was also one of the key drivers of satisfaction in 2014. While this has decreased in importance among complainants in 2016, performance in this area has been maintained at an overall level ensuring satisfaction is not adversely affected. Complainants being provided with an overview of the steps that will be taken to resolve their complaint is a key driver of satisfaction in 2016, marking a substantial improvement from last year.

### Areas requiring further attention

Staff taking ownership of the complaint and taking a proactive approach to resolve it were the key areas for improvement in 2014. Key Drivers Analysis suggests that, at an overall level, this has not changed. Taking the complainant seriously remains a key area for improvement, as does taking a proactive approach to resolving the complaint (in 2016, staff helpfulness is a proxy for pro-activity).

Staff not being able to make decisions ‘there and then’ continues to drive dissatisfaction among complainants despite some improvements observed in this area – this may in part contribute to the perception that staff aren’t helpful (they may not know how, or be permitted to, adequately address the issue at hand). It may also contribute to the view that resolution timescales are too long; staff not being able to make decisions and answer queries may prevent them from closing complaints. Not getting back to the complainant when promised may further elongate the process. This has not changed since 2014.

## 7.3 Micro-business: Drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with complaint handling

Figures 43 and 44 provide the drivers outcomes for micro-business complainants. The key drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction align closely to the findings in the domestic market.

*Figure 43: **Tactical** drivers for micro-business complainants.*

**PRIORITY FOR ACTION**
- Being given a resolution date
- Being told how long each step will take
- Having a named contact
- Dealing with one person
- Supplier getting back when agreed
- Not having to chase for updates
- Supplier updating regularly
- Being told where to seek independent advice
- Receiving an explanation of what went wrong

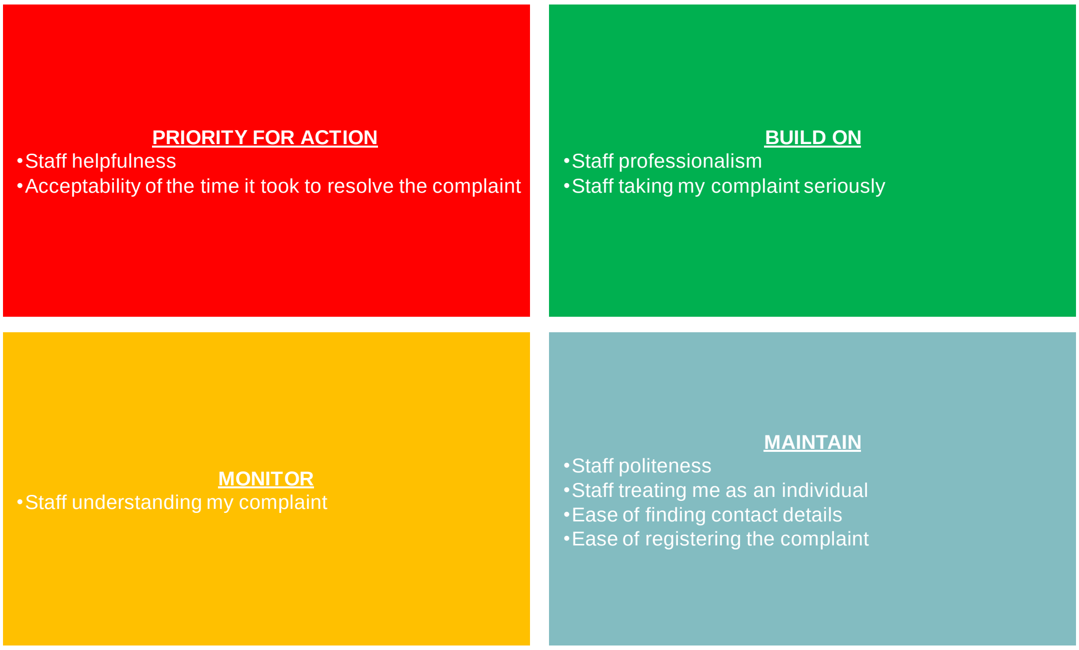
**BUILD ON**
- Staff not using jargon
- Telling me the steps that will be taken
- Using my preferred contact method
- Supplier having record of complaint
- Receiving a resolution confirmation

**MONITOR**
- Making decisions there and then
- Directing to complaints procedures on website
- Offering to send procedures for free
- Informing complaint can be escalated
- Receiving an apology
- Receiving compensation

**MAINTAIN**
- Receiving a formal acknowledgement of complaint
- Being asked contact preferences
- Providing a complaint reference number
- Supplier having correct contact details
- Supplier having full complaint history
- Not having to escalate
- Not having to make a further complaint
- Not having to contact Ombudsman
- Not having to contact Citizens Advice
- Supplier not sending letter referring to Ombudsman

**Bases:** All micro-business (468).

*Figure 44: **Perceptual** drivers for micro-business complainants.*




**Bases:** All micro-business (468).

### 7.3.1 Micro-business: Drivers of satisfaction – summary observations

As with domestic complainants, being provided with information on the steps that will be taken to resolve their complaint in clear language is one of the key areas that need to be built on to increase satisfaction. Receiving a resolution confirmation at the end of the process has a similarly positive effect.

Micro-business complainants are also positive about contact with the supplier following the complaint being lodged. They feel positive if upon re-contact, their preferred channel of communication is used (typically telephone), and staff have access to their complaint information. These elements provide a structure to the process and reassure complainants that their complaint is taken seriously – this is underpinned by staff professionalism and drives satisfaction upwards among micro-businesses.

### 7.3.2 Micro-business: Drivers of dissatisfaction – summary observations

The key drivers of dissatisfaction among micro-business complainants are similar to those within the domestic market. They focus around what complainants consider to be unacceptably long resolution periods and a lack of ongoing communication or communication about likely timescales. This creates an information gap that micro-business complainants fill by repeatedly chasing the supplier for information.

A strong driver of dissatisfaction is when complainants have to chase suppliers for updates, especially when they are dealing with multiple members of staff, who often appear unhelpful and unable to explain the problem. Due to lack of information about alternative solutions and a way to progress their case (often financial in nature as most complaints were about billing), the problem can become exacerbated and cause satisfaction with handling to fall. Improvements are needed in staff's ability to deal with queries about ongoing complaints.

### 7.3.3 Micro-business: How the results compare to 2014 outcomes

#### Improvements and maintained performance

Perceptions of staff professionalism and clear specification of the steps in the process have improved dramatically since 2014 and drive satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction. Feeling treated as an individual was a dissatisfaction driver in 2014 but has a lower importance in 2016 and decreased performance has shifted focus away from this area. This suggests that micro-business complainants are more concerned with effectiveness of resolution than they are with the emotional impact of how they are dealt with.

#### Areas requiring further attention

Being able to make decisions there and then was also a key driver of dissatisfaction in 2014. While the relatively poor performance in this area has not changed, its importance has decreased. This suggests that complainants are more concerned about the staff having an interest in effectively helping them resolve the complaint (staff helpfulness, continues to drive dissatisfaction since 2014) than them being able to make quick decisions – they are happy for them to get back to them with answers as long as they have confidence their concerns are being addressed.

Speed of complaint resolution remains a key driver of dissatisfaction and needs attention to halt its negative impact on satisfaction with complaint handling.

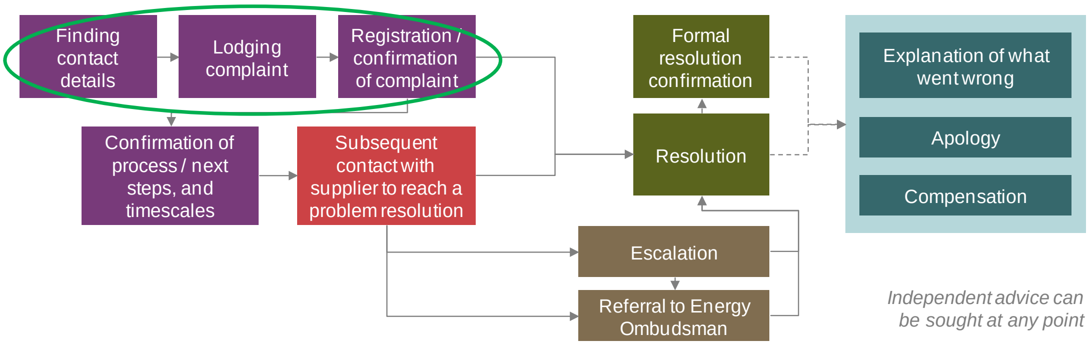
In 2014, difficulties with finding the correct person to speak at the start of the process were a key contributor to low levels of satisfaction. While not a driver, it is a problem a minority of complainants still face.

## 7.4 Drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction – summary of observations

Figures 45 and 46 highlight the parts of the complaints journey which drive satisfaction and dissatisfaction respectively.

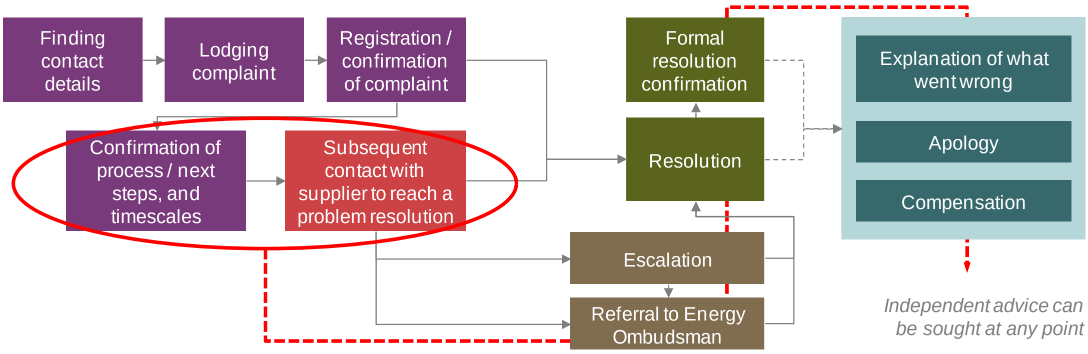
**Staff play an important role in the complaints handling process.** While there are some improvements to be made in this area, professionalism in how complaints are dealt with is a key driver of satisfaction, together with clear and understandable communication at the start of the complaints journey. This treatment needs to be injected further into the process to drive satisfaction with complaint handling upwards.

*Figure 45: Journey elements driving satisfaction with complaints handling.*




**The key elements contributing to lower satisfaction with complaints** handling in 2016 focus on resolution timescales being unacceptably long and not meeting expectations, as well as complainants feeling uninformed about the progress of their complaint (and having to chase for updates). These are priority areas for improvement across the market.

*Figure 46: Journey elements driving dissatisfaction with complaints handling.*



# 8 Conclusions

## 8.1 Summary of findings – domestic and micro-business markets

- Since 2014, the level of satisfaction with complaints handling has reduced significantly in the domestic and micro-business markets. For both markets, complainants remained more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with how their complaint had been handled.
- Satisfaction levels among complainants to the medium-sized suppliers have deteriorated significantly, along with two of the largest suppliers (npower and Scottish Power). Complainants to EDF were more likely to be 'very satisfied' in 2016, but overall levels of satisfaction remained unchanged for EDF and the other large suppliers.
- The start of the journey worked well for most complainants, driving satisfaction with how the complaint was handled. Staff were seen as professional and didn't use difficult to understand jargon.
- However, customer expectations were not well managed from the outset and there were inconsistencies around provision of information, which collectively had a negative impact on the rest of the complaints journey.
- Many complainants were working hard to find out how their complaint was progressing (there was a lack of ongoing communication about the complaint). This was the case across the market although SSE, EDF and in some cases British Gas (particularly when dealing with domestic complaints) performed better than average in this area.
- Suppliers didn't provide enough information about alternative resolution routes, making the complainants experience more taxing for those who didn't reach (a relatively) speedy closure. This was one of the key areas driving dissatisfaction with handling of the complaint.
- The 'resolution gap' remained at around 40% whilst the lack of ongoing communication left the complainant in the dark about their situation.
- Complainants accept that it can take time to resolve their issue but with many cases running substantially longer than anticipated (by complainants and suppliers), tolerance levels were stretched.
- Complainants faced a polite but often unhelpful response from staff and a sense of fair treatment was lacking in many cases.

## 8.2 Evidence of good practice in domestic and micro-business markets

- Across the domestic and micro-business markets, staff were seen as professional in their dealings with complainants and tended to use the preferred method of contact when following up with the complainant.
- Steps were only sometimes explained, but always in clear and intelligible language, making the journey clearer for those complainants

- For domestic complainants, staff professionalism continued to be a key strength and driver of satisfaction. Micro-business perceptions of staff professionalism have seen a shift from being a driver of dissatisfaction to a driver of satisfaction, helping reinforce a view that the complaint is taken seriously.
- The use of clear language at the start of the process has seen an improvement despite not being a priority in 2014. An ability to make decisions there and then has decreased in importance since 2014, no longer strongly driving dissatisfaction.
- Suppliers made sure that the complaints were properly recorded and that complainants received the required confirmations (at start and end of the process).

## 8.3 Evidence of areas for improvement in domestic and micro-business markets

- While some complainants were provided with an overview of what will be done to resolve their complaint, it appears that they were not provided this information in sufficient detail. Timescales were not specified and the supplier didn't commit to a resolution date – this was exacerbated by long resolution periods which were not acceptable to complainants.
- Many complainants were not updated regularly, creating an 'information void' and fuelling frustration with the process. After not hearing anything for a period of time, complainants felt the need to repeatedly chase suppliers for updates.
- Many also have to deal with multiple staff when chasing for an update – not having a single point of contact may create a perception of the staff being unhelpful as they are not familiar with the complainant or the case.
- Domestic complainants lacked information about timescales, which was likely to have been related to staff not being able to make decisions there and then. Complainants felt that their complaint was not being taken seriously – staff appeared not to have taken ownership of the complaint and the lack of regular updates reinforced this perception.
- Frustration among micro-business complainants was exacerbated by not having information about alternative resolution routes or where to seek independent advice. They would also benefit from an explanation of the problem as this was lacking in many cases and may lead to a feeling that the issue has not been fully addressed.

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