COMPLAINTS TO ENERGY COMPANIES

Report for Ofgem exploring how energy companies handle customer complaints

Contacts

GfK: Nick Moon, Polly Hollings GfK NOP
nick.moon@gfk.com; polly.hollings@gfk.com

Ofgem If you would like to enquire about using any element of this report, or you would like further information about the research then please contact Ofgem's Consumer First Team: consumer.first@ofgem.gov.uk

Table of Contents

1 Executive Summary

Introduction

Ofgem's Complaints Handling Standards (CHS) prescribe the standards energy companies must meet when handling customer complaints. They apply to complaints from domestic customers and micro businesses to gas and electricity supply companies (and to network companies i.e. gas transporters and electricity distributors). The standards are designed to provide effective protection for consumers and comprise a number of key requirements to which suppliers and network companies have to adhere when a customer makes a complaint. Since August 2013 energy suppliers are also subject to enforceable Standards of Conduct which require suppliers to treat customers fairly across all interactions, including complaints.

Ofgem commissioned this research to gauge customers' satisfaction with suppliers' complaints handling and identify whether the requirements of the CHS are being adhered to by gas and electricity suppliers. The research was also required to identify areas of good practice and weakness in suppliers' complaints handling processes, including priority areas for action. It also sought to measure satisfaction at a supplier level to establish how individual companies were performing in terms of adhering to CHS and meeting complainants' needs and expectations.

Similar research was conducted in 2012 (and 2010 and 2009), and therefore this survey provided a way of tracking changes in customer experience and perceptions of the complaint handling process over time. For the first time, this year's research also aimed to examine the experiences of customers from four of the smaller suppliers[1] and to explore perceptions of fairness in light of the new Standards of Conduct. [2]

[1] Utility Warehouse, First Utility, Ovo Energy and Co-op
[2] Ofgem's Standards of Conduct - http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/press-releases/new-standards-conduct-suppliers-are-first-step-simpler-clearer-fairer-energy-market

Previous research had identified that there is often a discrepancy between what energy suppliers perceive as being a resolved complaint and what customers believe to be a resolution. This research therefore was also required to examine the reasons for this ‘Resolution Gap’, and to provide guidance on how to close the ‘gap’ and ultimately eradicate the problem.

A multi-method approach was used to fully examine the research objectives:

- A scoping phase of research comprising depth telephone interviews with relevant personnel within the six largest suppliers[3] and two smaller energy suppliers, to ensure their views were captured and that suppliers had the opportunity to inform aspects of the subsequent primary research with consumers;
- 2,744 quantitative telephone interviews with recent domestic and micro business complainants to examine perceptions of the way their complaint had been handled;
- 12 follow-up telephone depth interviews with a sample of complainants (who had participated in the quantitative survey) to explore reasons why some customers believed their complaint to be unresolved even though their supplier had identified it as resolved.

Experience of contacting a supplier to make a complaint

The proportion of domestic customers thinking it difficult to obtain their supplier’s contact details has increased since 2012, to one in four customers (26%). Micro business customers were as likely as domestic customers to think it difficult to obtain contact details.

Telephone is still the predominant means of communication used by customers to make a complaint; nine in ten contacted their supplier by telephone. The next most frequently used channel was email, used by about one in four.

[3] British Gas, EDF, E.ON, Npower, Scottish Power and SSE

Customers[4] reported having to contact their supplier a high number of times about their complaint (six times on average for domestic and nine times for micro business customers). There are no directly comparable figures from previous research to judge whether this is an issue that is getting worse or better.

Satisfaction with complaints handling

A high proportion of customers were dissatisfied with the way their complaint had been handled (57% of domestic and 52% of micro business customers). Indeed, over one in three was 'very dissatisfied'. Dissatisfaction among domestic customers has increased by ten percentage points since the 2012 survey, but remained at the same level among micro business customers.

Only a quarter of domestic customers were given a timetable for when their complaint would be resolved, and in only half of these cases did the supplier keep to the timetable. Both proportions are lower than reported in the 2012 survey. About half of resolved complaints took over two weeks to resolve, a critical issue given speed of complaint resolution is the single most important driver of customer satisfaction with complaint handling.

There was a high level of dissatisfaction on nearly all service aspects. The lowest ratings were for: **suppliers taking ownership of the issue and having a proactive approach**; **the ability to make decisions on the spot and the speed of resolution**; and **the communication of next steps in the process**. Service ratings have fallen markedly across all service aspects (except for clarity of language used) since 2012, particularly among domestic customers.

The key aspects to improve customer satisfaction with complaint handling are: **speed of problem resolution**; **taking a proactive approach and having the ability to make decisions on the spot**; and **the communication of next steps in**

[4] Please note, consistent with previous research years, only those who recall making a complaint were included in the research – this is likely to have contributed to the high number of contacts reported, as some who expressed dissatisfaction but got a quick (e.g. same day) resolution may not recall having made a complaint.

the process. This is because they are all important from the customer's perspective and are aspects where supplier performance is especially weak.

Satisfaction with the complaint outcome and the 'resolution gap'

Only half (54%) of domestic customer complaints had been resolved from the customer's perspective, a significant fall from the previous 2012 survey (59%). Resolution of micro business customer complaints was at a similarly low level (53%), the same as reported in the 2012 survey.

There is clear evidence that customers' dissatisfaction with the complaint handling process also extends to the complaint outcome. Nearly half of all customers were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint at the time of interview.

In nearly half of the cases where the supplier considered the complaint resolved, the customer did not (44% of domestic and 40% of micro business). The size of this Resolution Gap has not changed since 2012.

The quantitative research revealed two key reasons why customers in the Resolution Gap feel their complaint has not been resolved: 1) on-going concerns about billing or metering issues and; 2) the supplier not giving sufficiently clear communication that the problem has been resolved. Only a few customers in the Resolution gap (about 10%) had received communication from the supplier to say it considered their complaint had been resolved.

Evidence from the qualitative work provides further guidance on ways to close this Resolution Gap:

- Ensure staff are empowered to make decisions themselves so that customers have a direct point of contact within the organisation with whom they can communicate so that the complaint can be resolved more quickly
- Use the appropriate 'tone of voice' and make the customer feel that they are being treated as an individual
- Explain clearly the rationale for the response and final outcome
- Ensure supplier resolution is communicated clearly to customers, preferably in writing

How experience compares across the industry

There is little difference overall in the performance of different energy suppliers in adhering to CHS and meeting complainants' needs and expectations. However, SSE customers tended to be more positive than other customers, both in terms of their overall satisfaction with the complaints handling process and their perceptions of different service aspects, whilst Scottish Power and npower customers were likely to be more critical.

Domestic customers from small suppliers were as critical, and on some aspects more so, of the way their complaint was handled compared with customers of the six largest suppliers.

How experience compares with previous complaints to energy suppliers and other organisations

Domestic customers who had made a previous complaint to the same energy company (about one in seven of all domestic customers) were more likely to think their current complaint experience was worse than before, rather than better. Views from those micro business customers who had made a previous complaint were more balanced.

On balance, customers felt their complaint experience was similar to that experienced when complaining to a range of other organisations. However, banks and building societies were thought to handle complaints better than energy suppliers, whilst the opposite was true of transport providers.

Perceptions of fair treatment

Customers were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the energy supplier had treated them fairly in the way it handled their complaint. The majority of customers disagreed, and only about one in three agreed that they had been treated fairly. Only SSE customers were more likely to agree than disagree that they had been treated fairly, whilst customers of Scottish Power, npower and the smaller suppliers tended to be most critical of the way they were treated.

Impact of poor complaints handling

There is substantial evidence that the way complaints are handled has a significant commercial implication for suppliers. Nearly half of customers had either switched or planned to switch supplier as a result of their complaint experience; and indeed some had already switched (18% of domestic and 14% of micro business customers).

There is a clear correlation between satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled and propensity to switch supplier. The majority of dissatisfied customers had already switched or planned to switch, whilst over three in four satisfied customers had no plans to switch supplier.

However, potentially vulnerable groups, who were as dissatisfied as other customers with the way their complaint had been handled, were less likely to have switched supplier as a result of their experience. Far fewer had already switched among those who were: social grade DEs (12%); unemployed (13%); living in a household with an income of less than £10,000 (11%); with a disability (12%); of non-white ethnic origin (12%). This may reflect less confidence about how to switch supplier among potentially vulnerable groups.

Summary and Recommendations

Consumers have become more critical of the way energy suppliers are handling their complaints since 2012. Whether this is caused by poorer service from suppliers, or raised consumer expectations or more hostile opinion of energy suppliers in general, is open to debate. What is clear, however, is that consumers' expectations are currently not being met.

There appears to be no marked difference in supplier complaint handling performance, in that dissatisfaction is evident across the whole of the industry including the small suppliers (the exception is SSE where consumer opinion is more neutral). It is difficult therefore to identify any particularly good practices or processes that could serve as a benchmark for the industry.

However, the research has shown clearly where action needs to be taken to improve customer satisfaction with complaint handling. The key priorities for suppliers are to:

- **improve the speed of problem resolution;**
- **take a more proactive approach towards resolving complaints and empower staff to take remedial action to resolve the complaint on first contact; and**
- **improve the communication to customers of what is happening during the complaints process.**

It is also evident that there has been no improvement since 2012 in suppliers' ability to close the Resolution Gap. Many consumers do not feel their complaint has been resolved even though the supplier thinks it has been. Whilst there will inevitably be some consumers who will refuse to accept resolution on the grounds that they do not like the outcome, or will want to wait until they see evidence of resolution with their next bill, suppliers providing written communication of complaint resolution will help close this resolution gap and ultimately improve the customer's experience.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

The Gas and Electricity Markets Authority (GEMA) is the regulator of Britain's gas and electricity markets, and its principal objective is to protect the interests of current and future consumers. Ofgem carries out the day-to-day functions of GEMA.

Ofgem has set regulations prescribing standards for the handling of customer complaints made to the companies it regulates. These came into effect in October 2008 and are known as the Complaints Handling Standards (CHS). They apply to complaints from domestic customers and micro businesses to gas and electricity supply companies (and to network companies i.e. gas transporters and electricity distributors). The standards are designed to provide effective protection for consumers and comprise a number of key requirements to which suppliers and network companies must adhere when a customer makes a complaint.

Ombudsman Services:Energy (OS:E) has been approved by Ofgem as the statutory redress scheme in energy. It provides an important backstop mechanism for customers to obtain redress where they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been dealt with by their energy supplier. It is not there to either replace the energy companies' own complaints handling service or provide a back-up for companies who are unable to provide an adequate complaints handling service themselves. Furthermore:

- Citizens Advice consumer service (CAcs) has been established by Government to provide free advice and information to consumers who need independent help on energy matters or with their complaint.

- The consumer body Consumer Futures' Extra Help Unit (EHU) provides assistance to individual complainants relating to disconnection or involving a vulnerable customer. Consumers needing this help are referred to the EHU by CAcs.

Notwithstanding these additional channels of support, the responsibility for dealing effectively with a customer complaint lies firmly in the hands of the energy company. The CHS are designed to drive necessary improvements in performance.

Since the CHS were introduced, Ofgem has commissioned three waves of consumer research to help assess the effectiveness of the CHS in delivering an effective method of recourse and redress to customers who make complaints to their supplier. This involved a benchmarking wave in 2009, and two further waves in 2010 and 2012. The results of the 2009 customer satisfaction research were disappointing and demonstrated that there was scope for improvement in suppliers' performance. Whilst there was little improvement evident in the 2010 survey, the 2012 research showed some progress in overall satisfaction with suppliers' complaints handling as compared with previous years, but that consumers were still more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied. It also revealed ongoing discrepancies between suppliers' understanding of what constitutes a resolved complaint and what customers view as a resolved complaint. The research also identified a number of areas where further action was required to help improve satisfaction overall (such as calling customers back when agreed or promised).

2.2 Research objectives

Ofgem commissioned research with recent complainants in February 2014, to track developments since the 2012 research. The key aims of the research were to:

- Gauge customers' satisfaction with suppliers' complaints handling, and to understand the key drivers of satisfaction/dissatisfaction;
- Identify whether the requirements of the complaints handling standards are being adhered to by gas and electricity suppliers;
- Identify areas of good practice in the application of the complaints handling standards;
- Identify areas of weakness in suppliers' complaints handling processes, including priority areas for action;
- Assess the extent to which suppliers' handling of customer complaints and customer satisfaction has changed since 2012;
- Measure satisfaction at an industry level among domestic and micro business customers, and also at a supplier level, i.e. to compare the performance of different energy suppliers in adhering to CHS and meeting complainants' needs and expectations.

In addition to meeting the original objectives above, in this 2014 research wave Ofgem wished to:

- Investigate differences in complaint handling performance between the six largest suppliers and smaller suppliers (who had not been included in previous waves of research due to their relatively low market share);
- Understand in greater depth the reasons why there is often a discrepancy between what energy suppliers perceive as being a resolved complaint and what customers believe to be a resolution;
- Understand the experiences of complainants who are more likely to be in vulnerable situations.

2.3 Methodology and sample

A multi-method approach was used to meet the research objectives.

Supplier interviews

As part of the scoping phase of the research we carried out interviews with energy company representatives to ensure their views were captured and that suppliers had the opportunity to shape the primary research with customers. The six largest suppliers, and two smaller suppliers were included in this stage of the research. At each energy company we interviewed the person with responsibility for, or a good understanding of, the complaint handling process. In some instances this was two people, which was often the case where responsibilities for domestic and micro business customers were divided. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes and was carried out via telephone.

The interview with each supplier covered the following areas of discussion:

- How they manage complaints;
- How they have overcome challenges in the process;
- Best practice examples/ what works well / areas for improvement;
- How they define a ‘resolved’ complaint and views on why there might be a discrepancy between what resolved means for energy suppliers and customers.

Feedback from these interviews was used to shape the primary quantitative and qualitative research with customers.

Quantitative survey

Telephone interviews (average length of 18 minutes) were conducted with those who had made a complaint to their energy supplier in December 2013. 2,744 interviews were carried out by telephone, with fieldwork conducted 3 – 23 February, 2014.

Ofgem requested contact details of a sample[5] of domestic and micro business customers who had made a complaint in December 2013 from the six largest energy suppliers, and of domestic customers from a representation of smaller suppliers (Utility Warehouse, First Utility, Ovo Energy and Co-op)[6]. From this list of contacts, we planned to achieve 3,000 interviews in total; 400 interviews with domestic and 50 interviews with micro business complainants from each of the six largest suppliers, and 300 interviews among domestic customers of smaller suppliers. The design rationale was to obtain robust evidence from each of the six largest suppliers in the domestic market, and to have a sufficient number from small suppliers in total[7] to understand the experience of their domestic customers. We also wanted to look at micro business customers separately and therefore needed enough for rigorous analysis.

Sample contacts were selected at random from those provided by the energy suppliers.

It became evident during the survey that some contacts claimed to be using a different supplier from that indicated in the sample. This created an inconsistency between the information the supplier had given us and what the customer was reporting. For this reason we decided to exclude these interviews from the data (256 interviews in total) at the analysis stage, as we did not feel that we could

[5] For domestic customers Ofgem requested contact details for every customer who had made a complaint within the period 1-15 December 2013, and for micro-businesses they requested details for every customer that had made a complaint within the whole month of December 2013.

[6] We chose these suppliers as they are the largest of the suppliers outside of the six largest suppliers. For domestic customers Ofgem requested contact details for every customer that had made a complaint within the whole month of December 2013.

[7] As the sample size for individual small suppliers is relatively low, these small supplier results have been analysed in aggregate

allocate their responses to a specific supplier with any certainty. The total sample that we have reported therefore is 2,744 interviews.

The data has been weighted back to the number of complaints made to each supplier in December 2013 (aggregating all smaller suppliers into one cell). The table below shows the number of interviews achieved, and the weighted base of interviews.

Figure 1: Interviews achieved

	Domestic		Micro Business	
	Achieved	**Weighted**	**Achieved**	**Weighted**
British Gas	376	607	50	81
EDF	358	366	47	39
E.on	362	406	47	138
Npower	382	713	49	15
Scottish Power	361	122	48	7
SSE	353	202	46	8
Smaller suppliers	265	40		
Total	**2,457**	**2,456**	**287**	**288**

We have made comparisons with previous survey results in the report, where relevant. The 2014 domestic sample includes customers of the smaller suppliers, whereas the sample in previous years contained just domestic customers from the six largest suppliers. However, when analysing the results we found little difference in the experiences of customers from the six largest suppliers (as a whole) and those of smaller suppliers, and therefore the comparison of results across the years is not affected by the change in sample composition.

Domestic customer results have also been analysed to see if the experience of “potentially vulnerable” groups is different from other customers. Potentially vulnerable groups include: social grade DEs, unemployed, low household income, those with a disability, those without access to the internet and non-white ethnic groups. Where such differences exist, reference is made in the report.

Findings from micro business customers are reported separately, as has been the case in previous surveys.

Qualitative interviews

The quantitative telephone survey was followed by a ‘diagnostic’ qualitative phase which enabled us to investigate in further detail the key issues emanating from the survey results. The qualitative phase comprised 12 telephone depth interviews with customers who had taken part in the quantitative survey and agreed to be re-contacted for further research. Each telephone depth interview lasted up to 45 minutes.

The following issues were identified as the focus for the qualitative research:

- Understanding in more detail the experiences of customers whose complaint had been categorised as closed/resolved by the supplier but where the customer believed their complaint to be unresolved (i.e. those customers in the ‘resolution gap’);

- Explore customers’ views as to what could be improved to help make the complaint process easier and more effective in delivering satisfactory outcomes.

The sample for these telephone depth interviews was designed to capture a range of customers who met some of the following criteria. Across the 12 depth interviews:

- All had their complaint categorised as closed/ resolved by supplier;
- All believed that their complaint was unresolved;
- There were two customers from each of the following suppliers: British Gas; EDF; E.ON; npower; SSE; Scottish Power;
- Covering ten domestic customers and two micro business customers;

- Including two customers in potentially vulnerable situations (those who reported low income or disability in their survey responses).

3 Profile of complaints

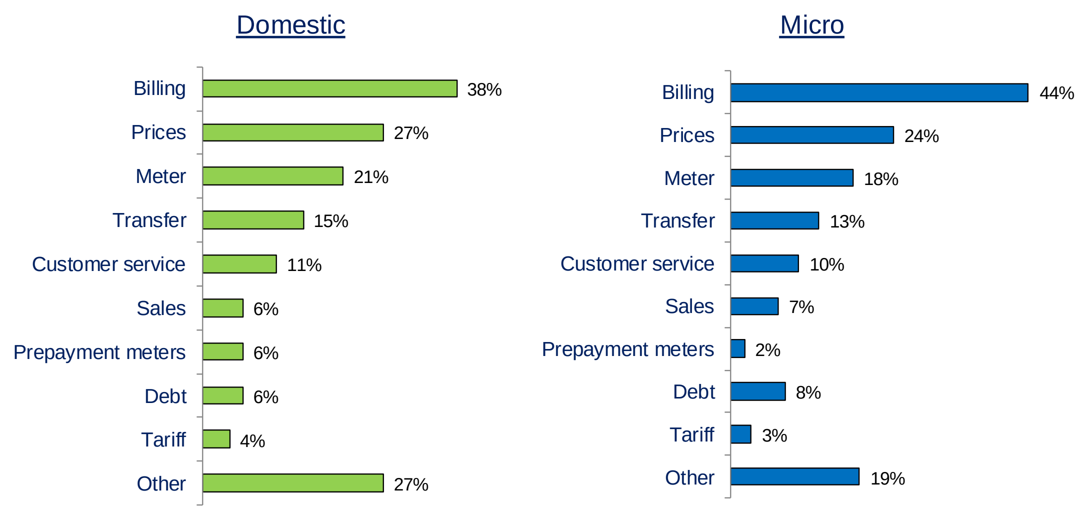
Some questions were asked to establish the nature of the complaint that had been made to the energy supplier, to help contextualise the findings. This covered what the complaint was about and the perceived severity of the complaint.

Key findings:

- Most complaints were about billing, prices and metering. There has been little change in the subject matter of complaints since 2012.
- Domestic customers were complaining about both energy types in the main, whereas micro businesses tended to complain more often about electricity supply.
- Customers tended to think their complaint was serious.

Most complaints were about matters to do with billing, prices or metering, and the proportion of each was similar to that found in the 2012 survey. There were just a few differences by energy supplier, with higher mentions of billing (48%) and transfer matters (25%) among npower domestic customers, and of metering issues among EDF domestic customers (30%).

Figure 2: Nature of complaint

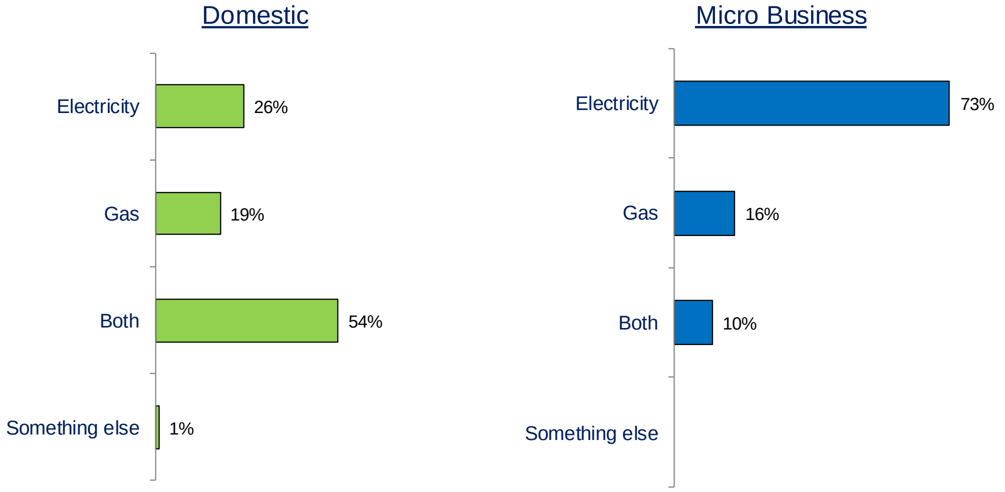


B3. What was your complaint about?

Base: All: Domestic 2,457, Micro 288

Most complaints from domestic customers were about both energy types, whereas complaints from micro businesses were mainly about electricity supply.

Figure 3: Which supply was the complaint about

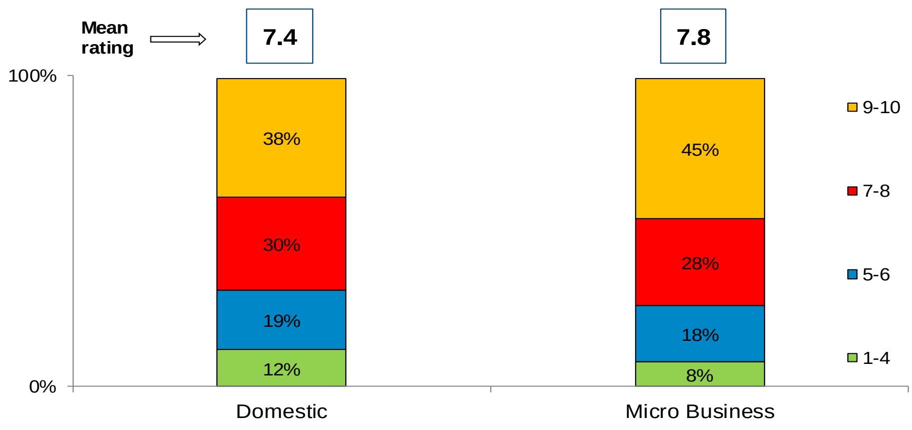


B2. Was it a complaint about your gas or electricity supply, or both?

Base: All: Domestic 2,457, Micro 287

Most customers thought their complaint was serious, with micro business customers particularly likely to think this was the case. Nearly half of the complaints from micro business customers were described as 9 or 10 (out of 10) in terms of seriousness, and four in ten of domestic customer complaints. These 'very serious' proportions are similar to those reported in the 2012 survey (although the rating scale was changed from a 5-point to 10-point scale in the 2014 survey).

Figure 4: Seriousness of complaint



B4. On a scale of 1 to 10, could you tell me how serious you felt your complaint was?

Base: All: Domestic 2457, Micro 288

4 Experience of contacting a supplier to make a complaint

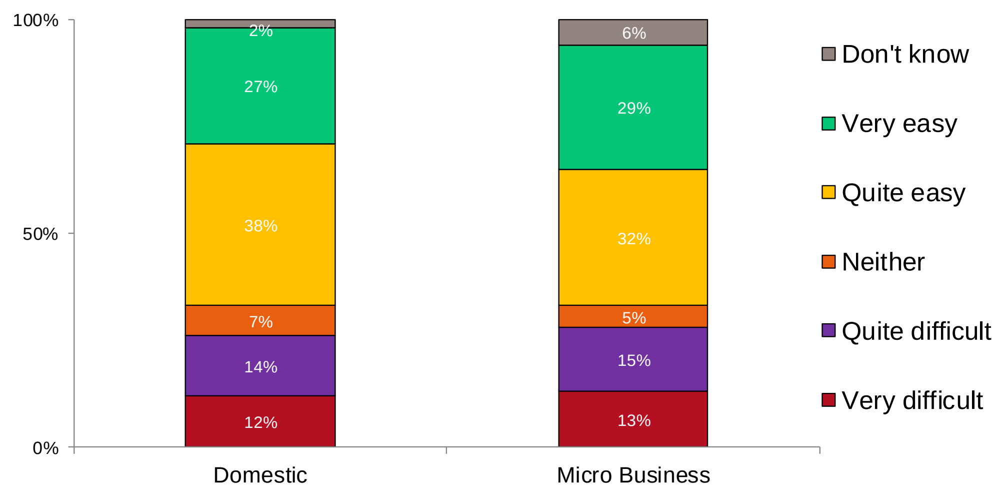
This section covers the experience of contacting a supplier to make a complaint, including the ease of obtaining contact details, the method of communication used by customers and suppliers, and the frequency of contact between customers and suppliers about the complaint.

Key findings:

- The proportion of domestic customers thinking it difficult to obtain their supplier's contact details has increased since 2012, to one in four customers.
- Micro business customers are as likely as domestic customers to think it is difficult to obtain these details.
- Telephone is still the predominant channel used by customers to make a complaint.
- Customers interviewed in the survey had to contact their supplier a high number of times about their complaint (six times on average for domestic and nine times for micro business customers).

One in four customers thought it difficult to get hold of their energy supplier's contact details to make a complaint. The proportion of domestic customers thinking it difficult this year (26%) was higher than in 2012 (19%) whilst there was no change among micro business customers.

Figure 5: Ease of obtaining contact details



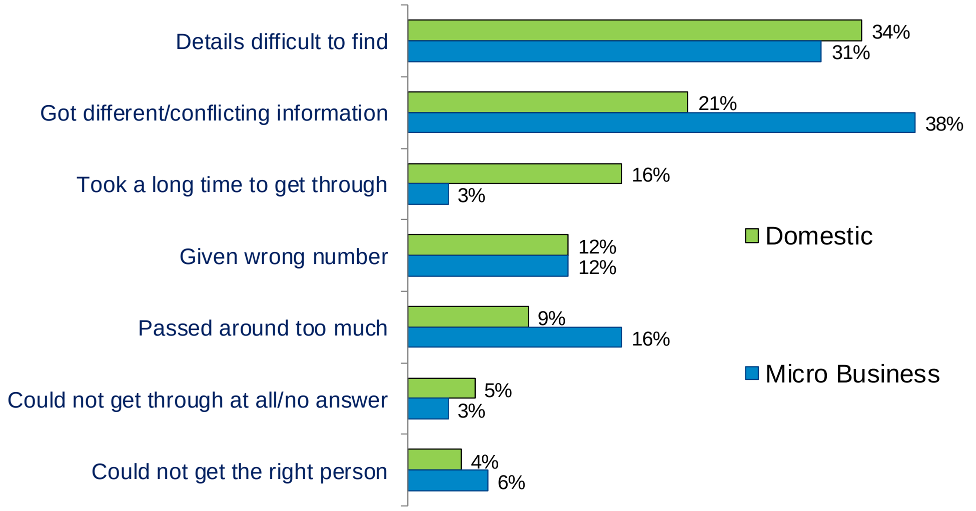
C2. How easy was it to get hold of the correct contact details to make your complaint?

Base: All : Domestic 2,457, Micro 287

Social grade DEs (31%), those with a disability (32%), and those without access to the internet (32%) were more likely to think it difficult to find contact information.

A mix of reasons was given for finding it difficult to make contact, including the time to get through (notably among domestic customers) and being passed around too much and getting conflicting information (particularly for micro business customers). About one in three said it was difficult to find the specific contact details to make the complaint.

Figure 6: Reasons why it was thought difficult to obtain contact details



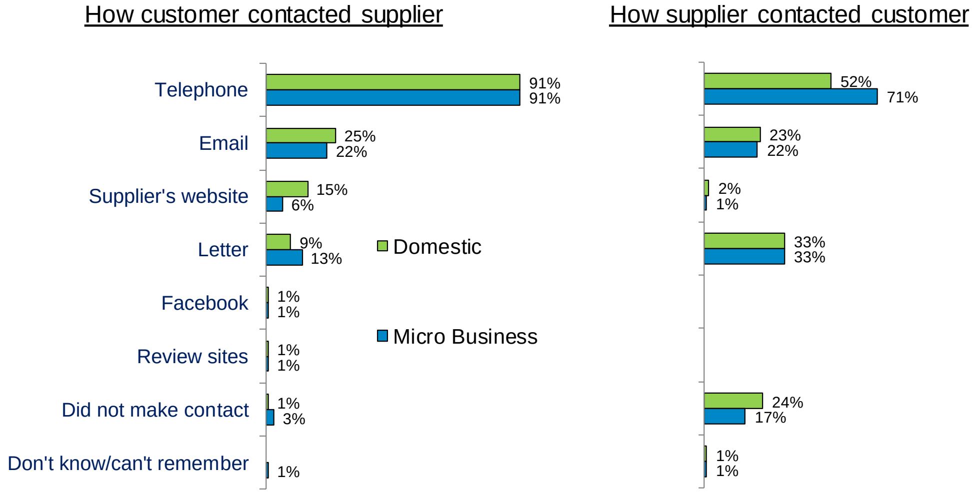
C3. Why did you find it difficult to get hold of the correct contact details to make your complaint?

Base: All who found it difficult to find contact details: Domestic 634, Micro 82

Telephone was the predominant method used by customers to contact suppliers, with nine in ten indicating they made contact by telephone. The next most frequently used channel was email, used by about one in four.

Suppliers were more likely to contact customers by a written means - letter or mail – but telephone was still the most frequently used channel.

Figure 7: Method of contact

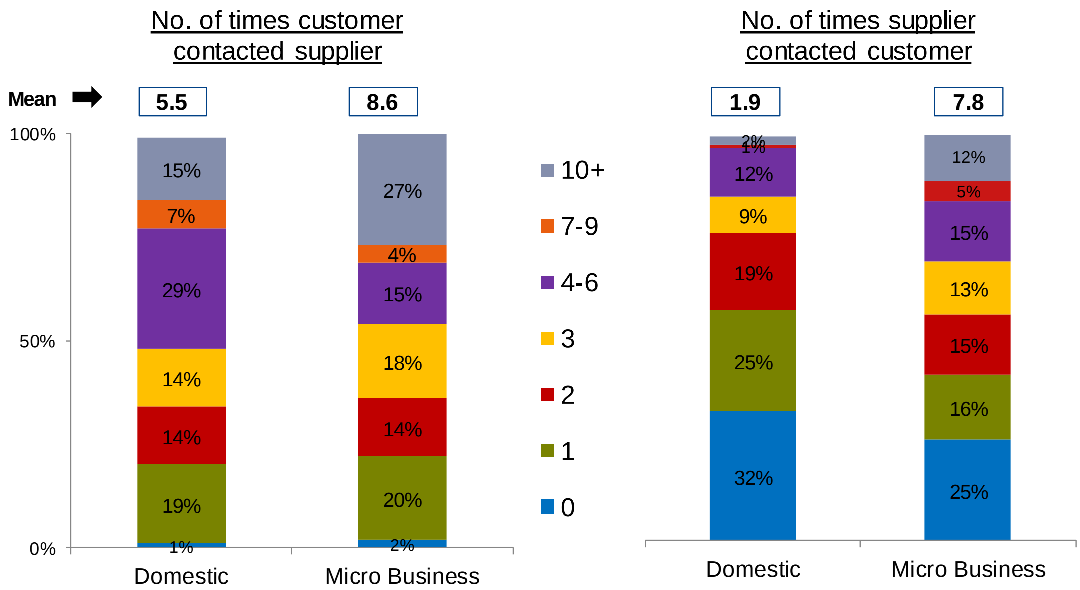


C4/C5. In which ways did you contact the supplier/supplier contacted you?
Base: All: Domestic 2,457, Micro 287

Customers had to contact their supplier a high number of times about their complaint, particularly micro business customers. The average domestic customer contacted their supplier six times, and the average micro business customer nine times (note there are no directly comparable figures from previous surveys). Consistent with previous surveys, it should be noted that about a quarter of domestic and a third of micro business customers had been screened out at the start of the survey as they claimed not to have made a complaint to their energy company or could not recall doing so. These could be customers who had made a low level complaint which was registered as an expression of dissatisfaction by the supplier, but the customer did not feel it was serious enough to be considered a complaint, or it had been dealt with immediately by the supplier at the first contact. If these customers had been included within the survey, the frequency of contact figures described above may have been lower.

Suppliers were often in contact with micro business customers (nearly eight times on average), but made contact with domestic customers much less frequently (twice on average). This might suggest that complaints from business customers were more difficult to resolve.

Figure 8: Frequency of contact



C6/C7. How many times did you contact the supplier/ the supplier contact you?

Base: All: Domestic 2,457, Micro 287

5 Satisfaction with complaints handling

This section reports on how well complaints were handled including: whether complaints were resolved or not; the time taken to resolve complaints; and satisfaction with various aspects of the way complaints were handled. It also helps reveal what aspects of the complaint process are important from the customer's perspective and establish the key priorities for suppliers to improve customer satisfaction with complaint handling.

Key findings:

- Only half (54%) of domestic customer complaints had been resolved from the customer's perspective, a significant fall from the previous 2012 survey (59%). Resolution of micro business customer complaints was at a similarly low level (53%).
- A high proportion of customers were dissatisfied with the way their complaint had been handled (57% of domestic and 52% of micro business customers). Indeed, over one in three were 'very dissatisfied'. Dissatisfaction among domestic customers has increased by ten percentage points since the 2012 survey.
- Just over a quarter of domestic customers were given a timetable for when their complaint would be resolved, and in only half of these cases did the supplier keep to this timetable. Both proportions are lower than reported in previous surveys.
- About a half of resolved complaints covered in the survey took over two weeks to resolve.
- There was a high level of dissatisfaction on nearly all service aspects. The lowest ratings were for: taking ownership of the issue and having a proactive approach; the ability to make decisions on the spot and the speed of resolution; and the communication of next steps in the process. Service ratings have fallen markedly since 2012, particularly among domestic customers.

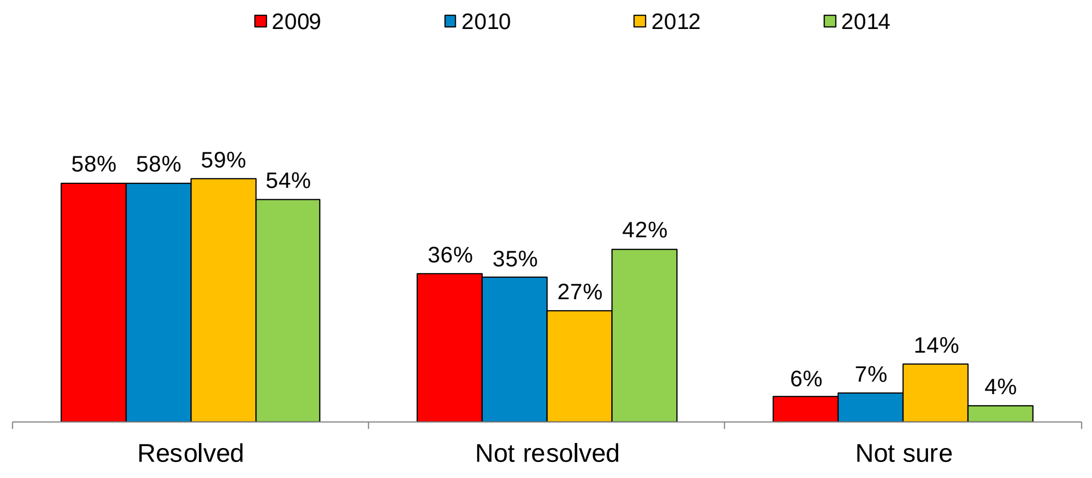
- The key aspects of supplier complaint handling to be addressed which will serve to improve customer satisfaction are: speed of problem resolution; taking a proactive approach and having the ability to make decisions on the spot; and the communication of next steps in the process. This is because they are all relatively important from the customer's perspective and are aspects where supplier performance is especially weak.

5.1 Whether complaint had been resolved

Customers were asked whether their complaint had been resolved or not, or whether it was still ongoing.

Looking first at domestic customers, just over half (54%) of complaints had been resolved from the customer's perspective. This is a significant fall in the proportion of resolved complaints compared with 2012. However, most of the unresolved complaints were still ongoing - 29% of all complaints fell into this category (note, there is no comparable figure from previous surveys).

Figure 9: Whether complaint had been resolved – Domestic customers

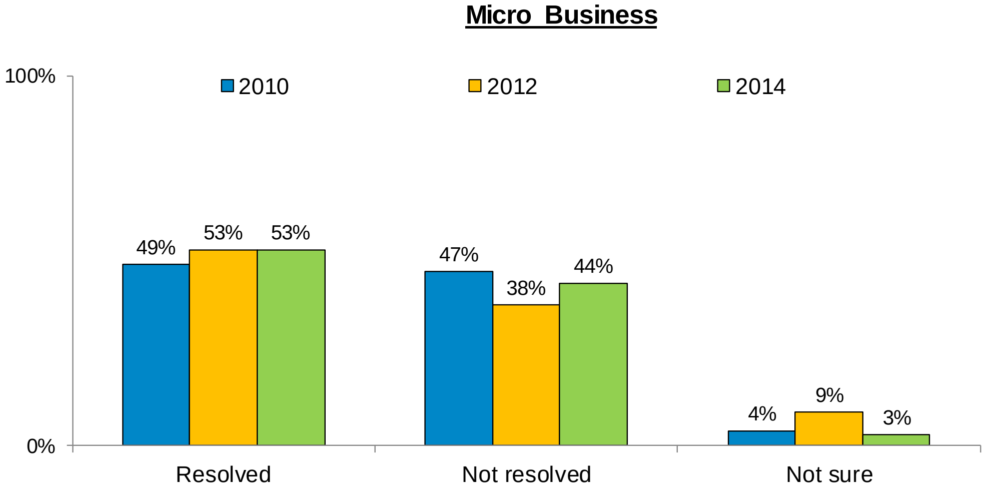


D7. Would you say your complaint was resolved, not resolved or is it still ongoing?
Base: All: Domestic 2009 = 2762, 2010 = 2,734, 2012 = 2,769, 2014 = 2,457

Certain potentially vulnerable groups were less likely to think their complaint had been resolved: social Grade DEs (46%), unemployed (47%), those with a disability (46%), those with a household income of less than £10,000 per year (44%), and those without internet access (46%).

The incidence of resolved complaints among micro business customers was similar to domestic, with 53% saying the complaint had been resolved, and 32% that it was ongoing.

Figure 10: Whether complaint had been resolved – Micro Business customers



D7. Would you say your complaint was resolved, not resolved or is it still ongoing?

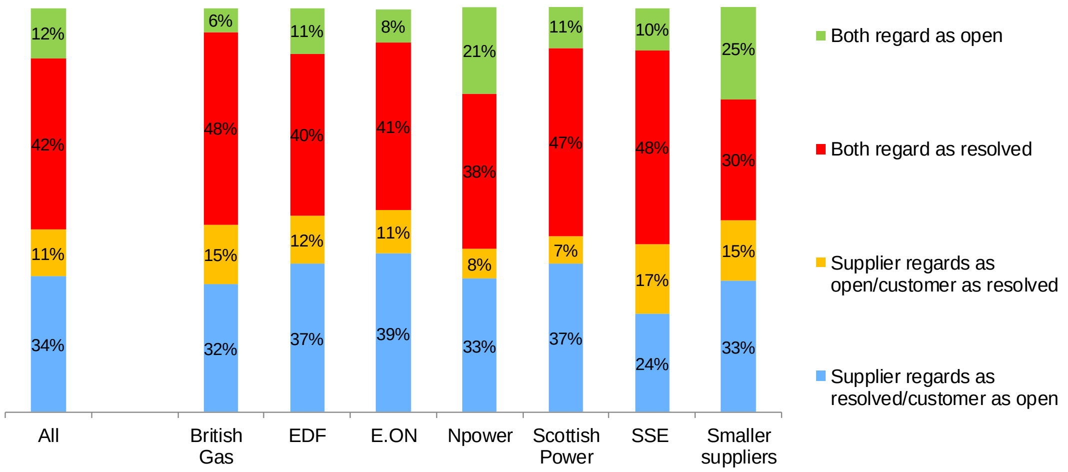
Base: All Micro business: 2010 = 274, 2012 = 256, 2014 = 288

Responses have been analysed by whether the energy supplier regarded the complaint as resolved or not. From this analysis we have identified four complaint types, which are where:

1. Both parties regard the complaint as open (unresolved or still ongoing)
2. Both parties regards the complaint as resolved
3. The customer regards it as resolved, but the supplier thinks it is still open
4. The supplier thinks it is resolved, but the customer regards it as open.

A high proportion (one in three) of all domestic customer complaints are considered resolved by the supplier, but unresolved or still ongoing by the customer. This figure is similar across all suppliers, excepting among SSE domestic customers where it is lower (24%).

Figure 11: Whether complaint had been resolved – Domestic customers

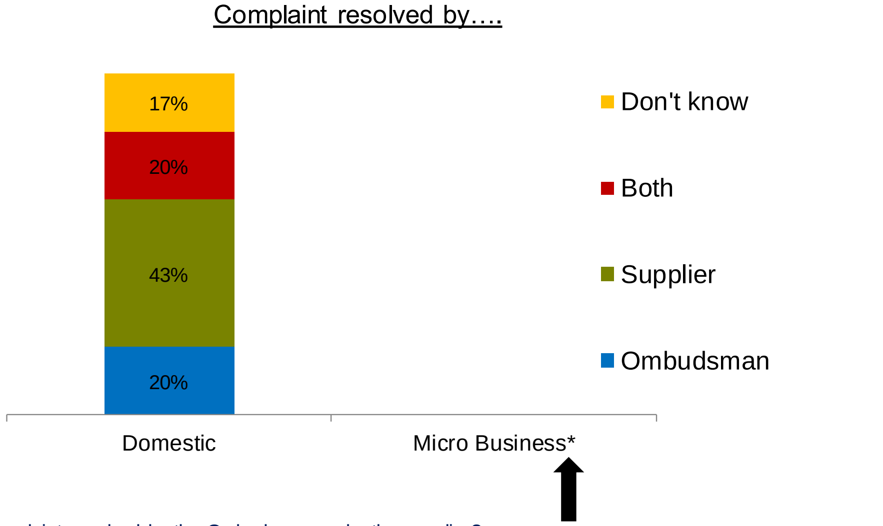


Data taken from sample database and D7 Would you say your complaint was resolved, not resolved or is it still ongoing?

Base: All domestic complaints: Domestic – 2,457, British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower - 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers – 265

Only a few took their complaint to Ombudsman Services:Energy (OS:E) - 5% of domestic and 7% of micro business customers. Resolution was considered to be delivered either jointly or solely by OS:E in four in ten of these cases (although some care is required with this result as the base size is relatively small (39 domestic customers).

Figure 12: Influence of OS:E on complaint resolution



D9. Was your complaint resolved by the Ombudsman or by the supplier?

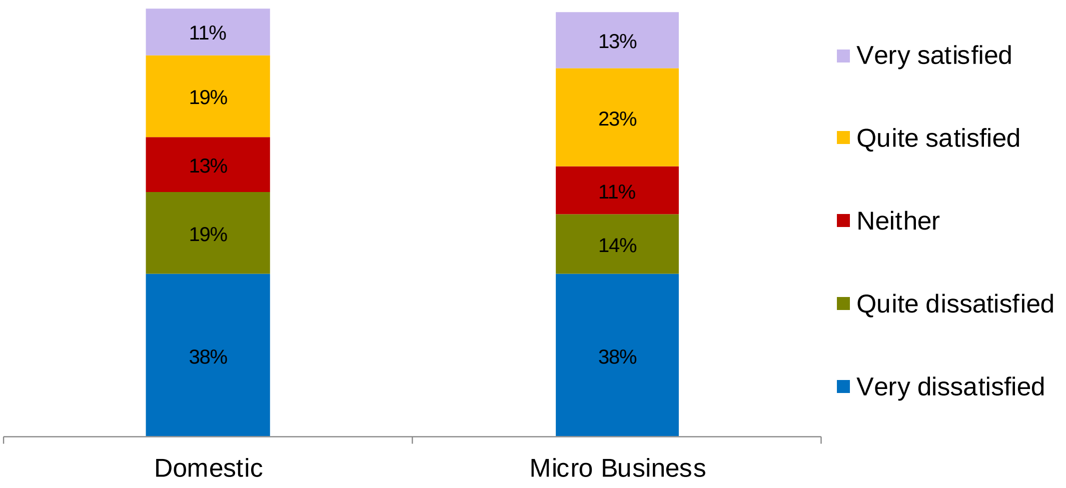
* Base size too low for analysis

Base: All whose complaint is resolved and took complaint to Ombudsman: Domestic 39, Micro 4

5.2 Overall satisfaction with the way the complaint is handled

A high proportion of customers were dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled (57% of domestic and 52% of micro business customers). Indeed, over one in three were 'very dissatisfied'.

Figure 13: Overall satisfaction with way complaint was handled

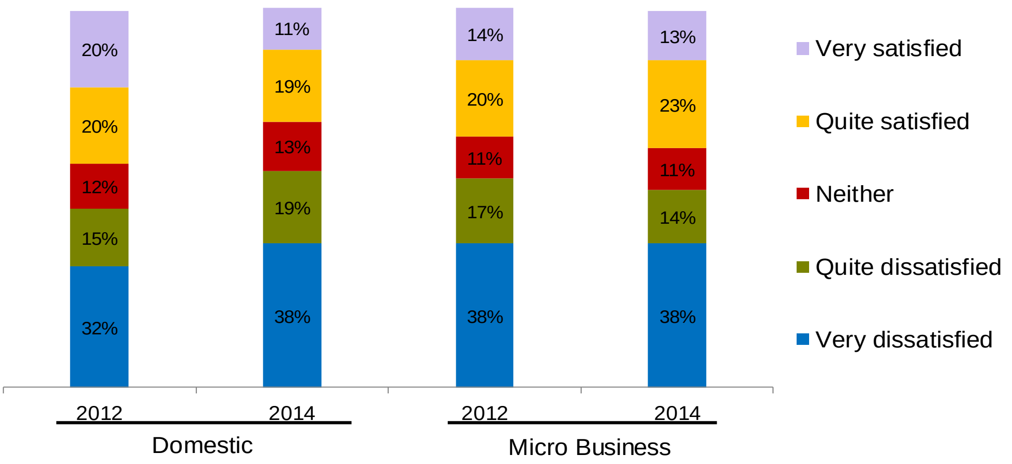


H1.Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint was handled by …(provider) ?

Base: All: Domestic 2,457, Micro 287

Dissatisfaction among domestic customers has increased by ten percentage points since the 2012 survey, but remained the same among micro business customers.

Figure 14: Overall satisfaction with way complaint was handled

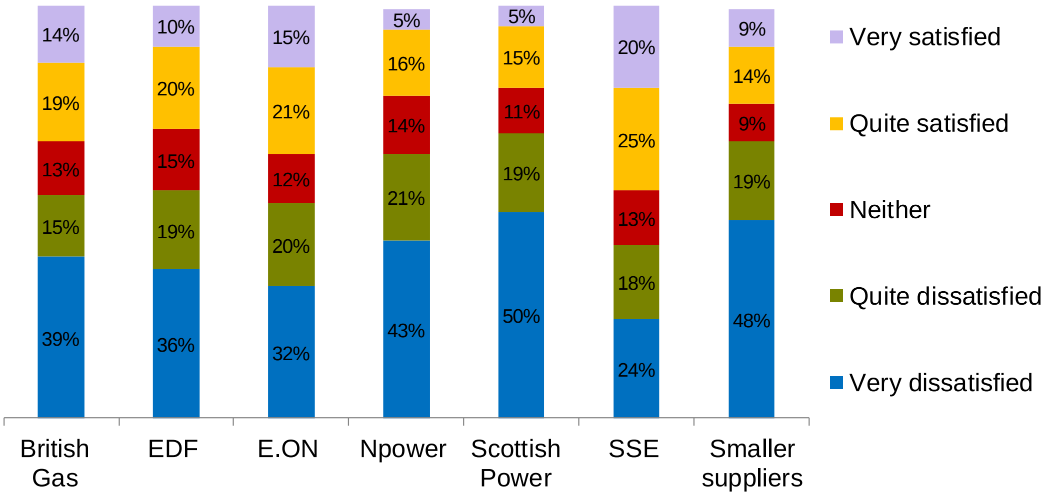


H1.Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint was handled by …(provider) ?

Base: All: Domestic 2012= 2,769, 2014 = 2,457; Micro 2012 = 256, 2014 = 287

Analysis of satisfaction levels among domestic customers shows greater dissatisfaction among npower, Scottish Power, and smaller supplier customers. SSE recorded the lowest levels of dissatisfaction.

Figure 15: Overall satisfaction with way complaint was handled by supplier – Domestic customers

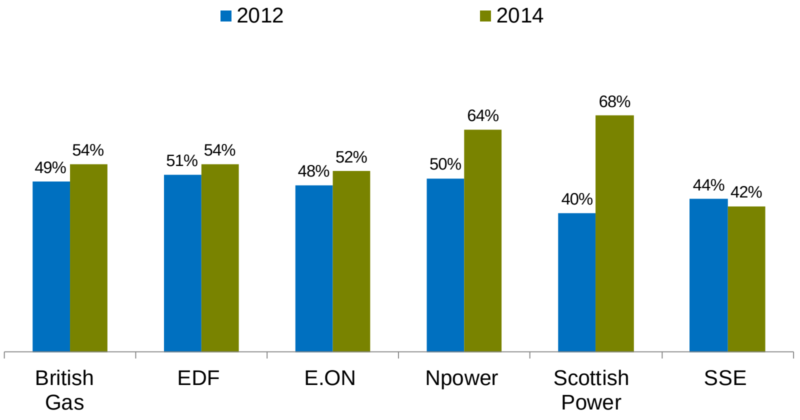


H1.Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint was handled by …(provider) ?

Base: All: British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers – 265

There was a sharp increase in the proportion of dissatisfied npower and Scottish Power domestic customers compared with 2012. Only SSE showed a reduction in dissatisfied customers compared with the previous survey.

Figure 16: Proportion of customers dissatisfied with the way complaint was handled – domestic customers



H1.Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint was handled by …(provider) ?

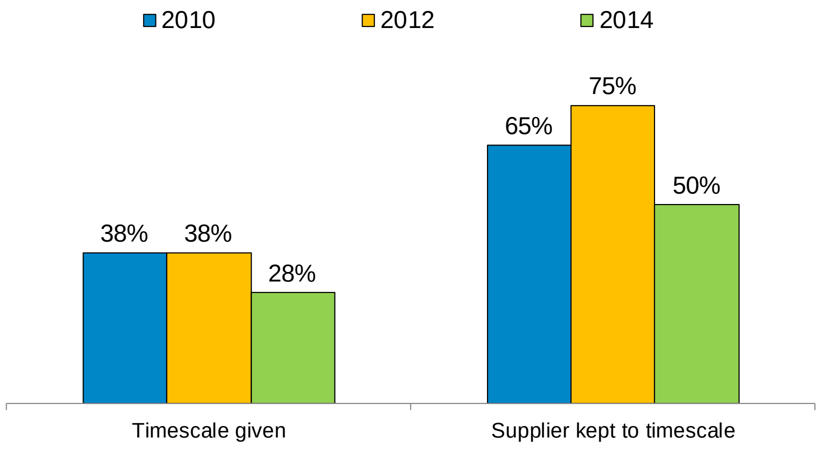
Base: All: 2014 = British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353,

There was no difference in satisfaction levels among potentially vulnerable customers compared with other domestic customers in the 2014 survey.

5.3 Timetable

Just over a quarter of domestic customers were given a timetable for when their complaint would be resolved, and in only half of these cases did the supplier keep to the timetable. Both proportions are lower than in previous years.

Figure 17: Whether given a timetable, and if so whether supplier kept to timetable – Domestic customers



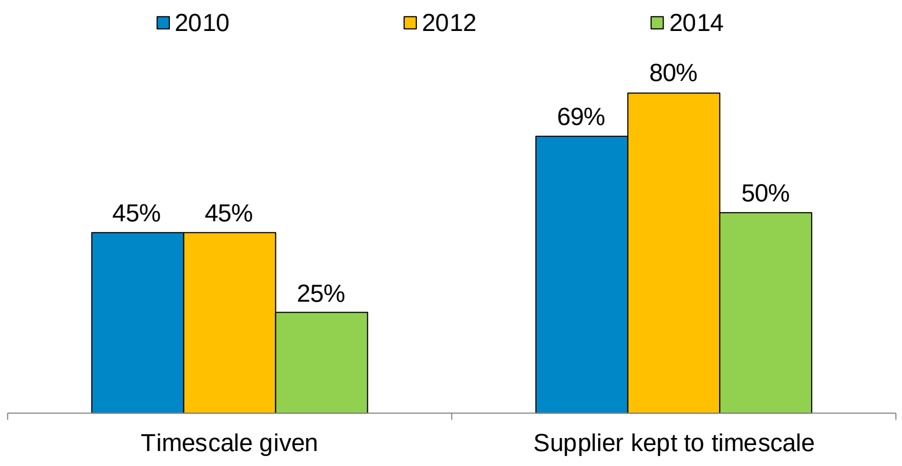
D1. During the complaints process did (the supplier) give you a timescale to say how long it would take to look into your complaint?
D3. Did (the supplier) keep to this timescale?

Base: All Domestic: 2010 = 2,734, 2012 = 2,769 2014 = 2457

Base: Domestic where timescale given
2010 = 1039, 2012 = 1,052, 2014 = 688

The pattern was similar among micro business customers.

Figure 18: Whether given a timetable, and if so whether supplier kept to timetable – Micro Business customers



D1. During the complaints process did (the supplier) give you a timescale to say how long it would take to look into your complaint?
D3. Did (the supplier) keep to this timescale?

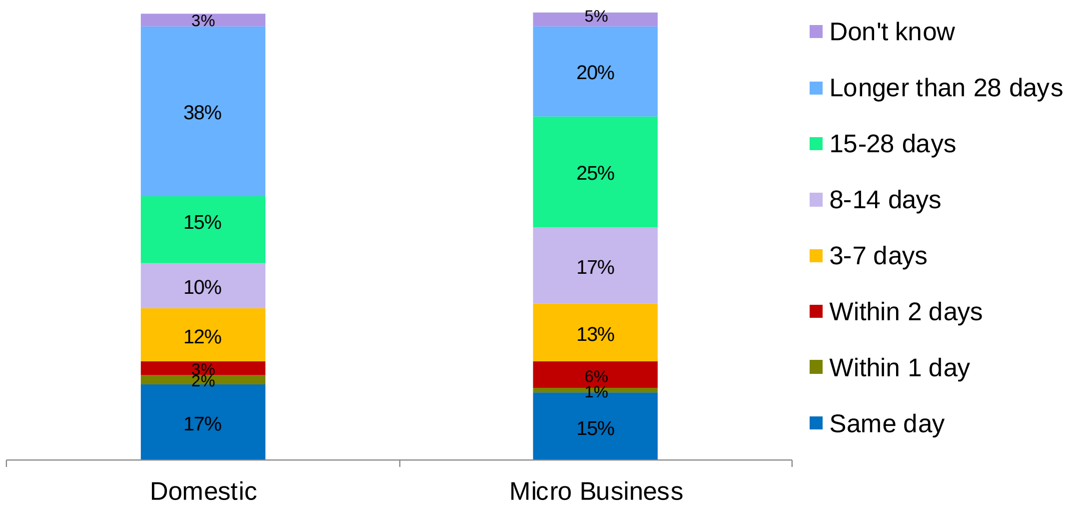
Base: All Micro: 2010 = 274, 2012 = 256, 2014 = 288

Base: Micro where timescale given:
2010 = 123, 2012 = 115 2014 = 72

5.4 Speed of resolution

Many complaints took a long time to resolve. About a half of resolved complaints took over two weeks to resolve (53% of domestic and 45% of micro business complaints). However, as described in section 4, some customers who had made a low level complaint which was registered as an expression of dissatisfaction by the supplier were not included in the survey (as the customer did not feel they had made a complaint). These could have been customers whose complaint was resolved more quickly, perhaps on first contact.

Figure 19: Speed of resolution

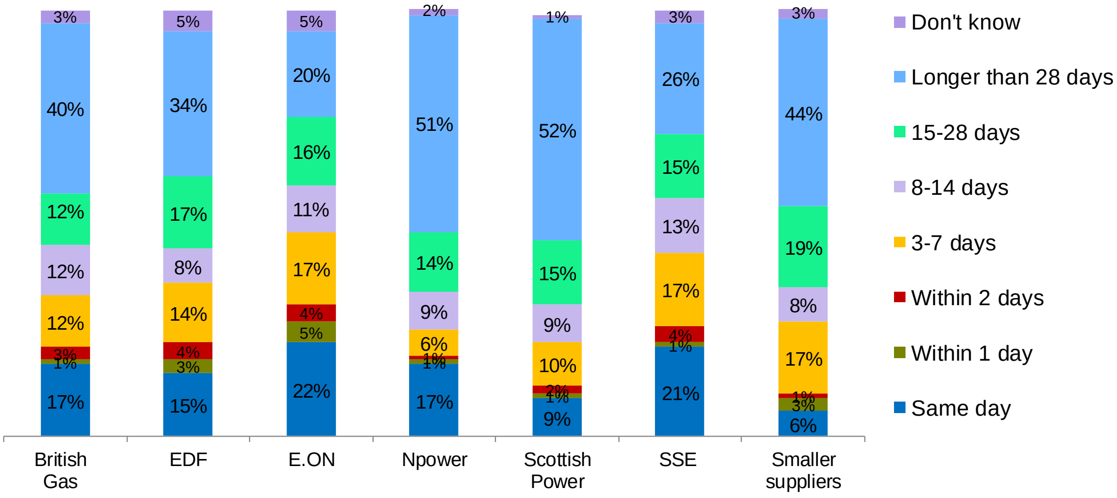


E1. How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved?

Base: All whose complaint has been resolved: Domestic 1,326, Micro 148

There was not much difference by energy supplier, although npower and Scottish Power tended to take longer than other suppliers to resolve complaints (half taking more than 28 days).

Figure 20: Speed of resolution by energy supplier – Domestic customers



E1. How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved?

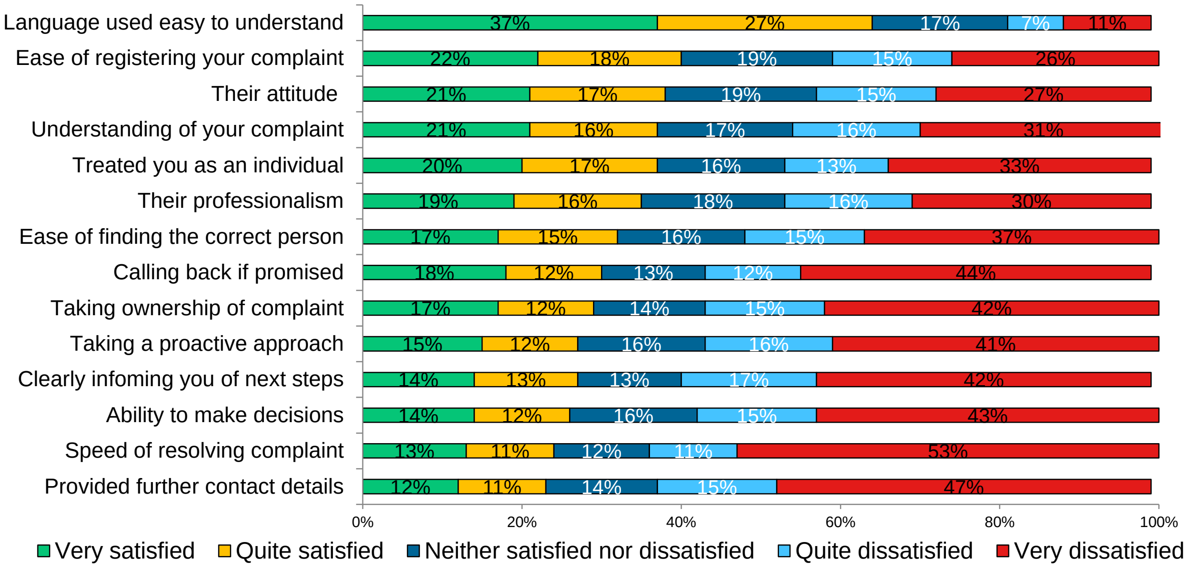
Base: All whose complaint has been resolved: Domestic – 1,326, British Gas – 235, EDF –187, E.ON – 189, Npower 175, Scottish Power – 191, SSE – 231, Smaller suppliers – 118

5.5 Satisfaction with handling aspects

Customers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the service they received from their energy supplier with the handling of their complaint on a number of different aspects, using a 5-point 'Very satisfied' to 'Very dissatisfied' scale.

Looking at responses from domestic customers, there was a high level of dissatisfaction on many aspects. The lowest ratings were for: taking ownership of the issue and having a proactive approach; the ability to make decisions and speed of resolution; and the communication of further contact details and next steps in the process. Over half were dissatisfied on each of these aspects.

Figure 21: Satisfaction with handling aspects – Domestic customers

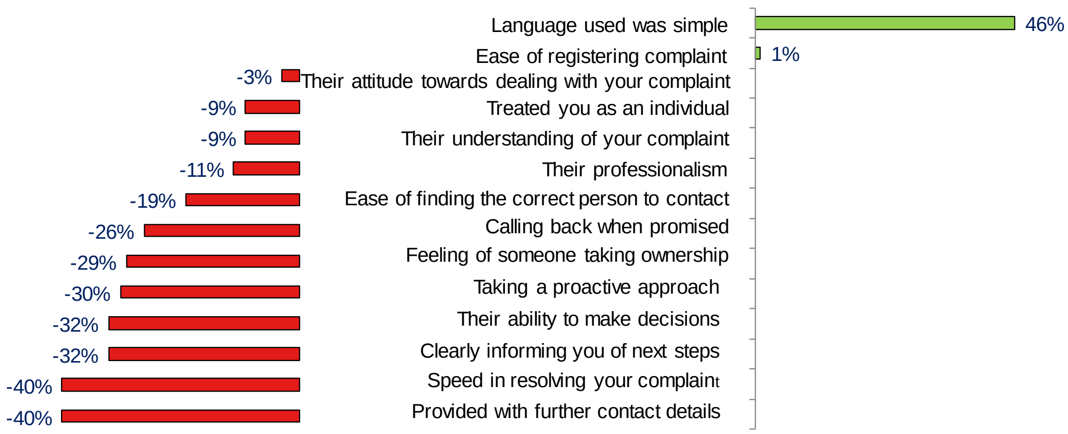


G1 How satisfied were you with the service you received?

Base: All Domestic: 2,457

The table below shows the 'Net satisfaction' rating on each aspect - that is the % satisfied less the % dissatisfied on each aspect. This further illustrates the balance of negative opinion on all aspects, except the language used was simple and the ease of registering the complaint.

Figure 22: Net satisfaction with handling aspects – Domestic customers



G1 How satisfied were you with the service the you received?

Base: All: Domestic 2,457

Satisfaction was lower on every aspect compared with 2012, with declines most evident on taking ownership and having a proactive approach, ability to make decisions, and communication of next steps.

Figure 23: Net satisfaction with handling aspects – Domestic customers

Aspect	2012	2014	Change
Language used was easy to understand	50%	46%	-4
Ease of registering complaint	15%	1%	-14
Their attitude towards dealing with your complaint	16%	-3%	-19
Treated you as an individual	N/A	-9%	N/A
Their understanding of your complaint	9%	-9%	-18
Their professionalism	15%	-11%	-26
Ease of finding the correct person to contact	7%	-19%	-26
Calling back when promised	1%	-26%	-27
Feeling of someone taking ownership	6%	-29%	-35
Taking a proactive approach	-3%	-30%	-33
Their ability to make decisions	-3%	-32%	-35
Clearly informing you of next steps	-2%	-32%	-35
Speed in resolving your complaint	-11%	-40%	-29
Provided you with further contact details	-13%	-40%	-27

SSE performed better than other suppliers on every aspect, whilst Scottish Power tended to attract the poorest ratings. Other particularly poor ratings were evident for:

- Small suppliers: attitude towards dealing with your complaint, taking a proactive approach;
- npower: treated you as an individual, feeling of someone taking ownership.

Generally, after Scottish Power, npower, and small suppliers, EDF Energy also stand out for having some aspects which are particularly poorly rated.

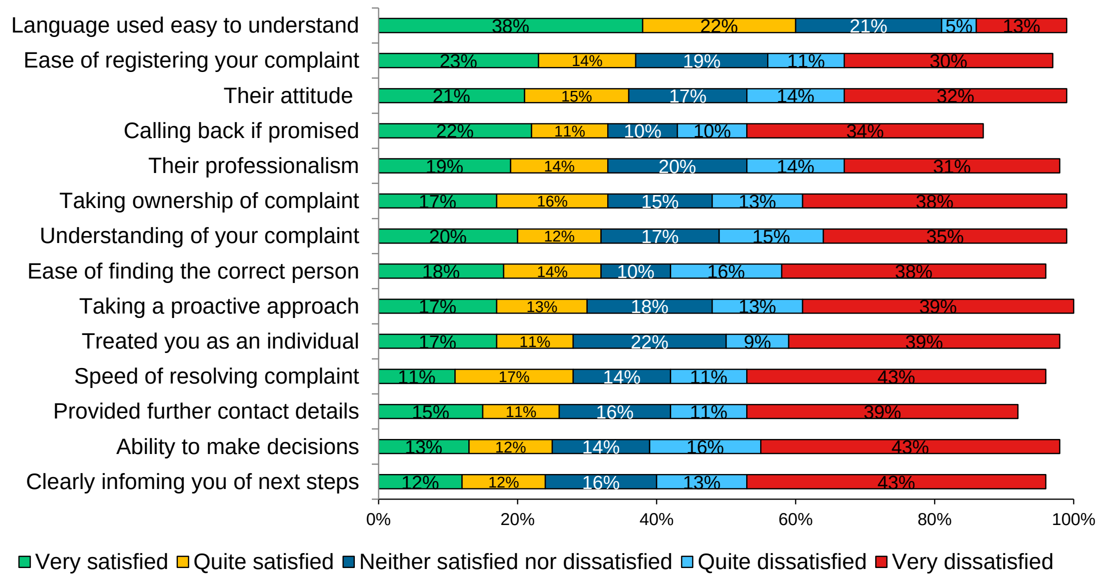
Figure 24: Net satisfaction with handling aspects by energy supplier – Domestic customers

	British Gas	EDF	E.ON	Npower	Scottish Power	SSE	Smaller Suppliers
Ease of registering complaint	-4%	-3%	11%	-4%	-22%	25%	3%
Ease of finding the correct person to contact	-23%	-15%	-9%	-28%	-57%	22%	-23%
Their attitude towards dealing with your complaint	-6%	-9%	5%	-9%	-18%	25%	-20%
Their professionalism	-12%	-11%	1%	-22%	-36%	23%	-20%
Their understanding of your complaint	-14%	-13%	0%	-12%	-26%	15%	-15%
Treated you as an individual	-15%	-18%	3%	-27%	-10%	11%	-3%
Taking a proactive approach	-25%	-36%	-18%	-46%	-48%	2%	-51%
Feeling of someone taking ownership	-25%	-33%	-16%	-45%	-44%	6%	-35%
Their ability to make decisions	-28%	-40%	-17%	-45%	-46%	-8%	-45%
Clearly informing you of next steps	-28%	-41%	-21%	-42%	-51%	3%	-45%
Calling back when promised	-25%	-32%	-13%	-37%	-44%	12%	-34%
Provided with further contact details	-33%	-47%	-32%	-49%	-57%	-13%	-41%
Speed in resolving your complaint	-35%	-44%	-20%	-58%	-63%	-8%	-48%

Base: All: Domestic – 2457, British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers – 265

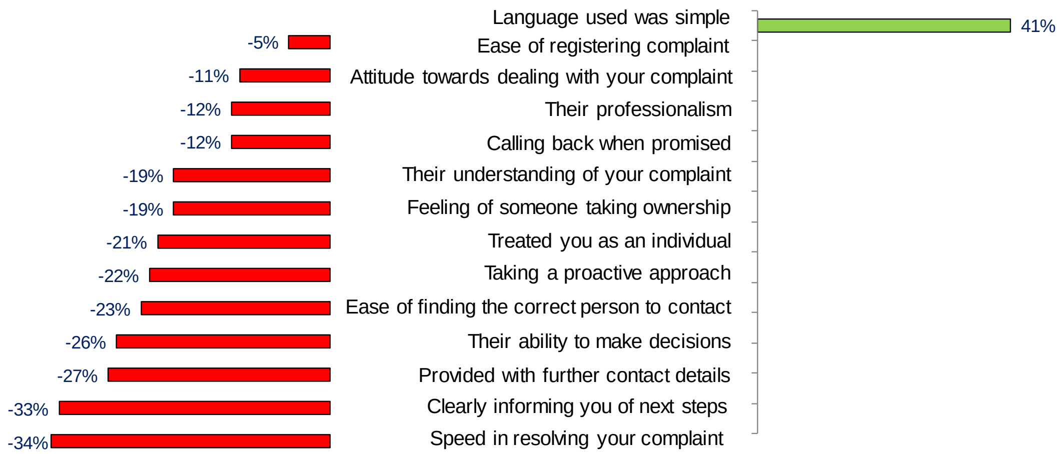
Looking at micro business, the pattern of ratings is very similar to domestic customers, with the same hierarchy of ratings.

Figure 25: Satisfaction with handling aspects – Micro business customers



G1 How satisfied were you with the service the you received?
Base: All Micro: 288

Figure 26: Net satisfaction with handling aspects – Micro business customers



G1 How satisfied were you with the service the you received – using a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means you were very dissatisfied and 5 means you were very satisfied?

Base: All: Micro 287

The pattern of falling ratings since 2012 is also evident among micro business customers, although the decline is not as marked as among domestic customers. However, the areas that have seen the most decline are slightly different to domestic customers, i.e.

- Their understanding of your complaint
- Their professionalism
- Ease of finding the correct person to contact, and
- Feeling of someone taking ownership.

Figure 27: Net satisfaction with handling aspects – Micro business customers

Aspect	2012	2014	Change
Language used was easy to understand	47%	41%	-6
Ease of registering complaint	-3%	-5%	-2
Their attitude towards dealing with your complaint	-1%	-11%	-10
Treated you as an individual	N/A	-21%	N/A
Their understanding of your complaint	-4%	-19%	-15
Their professionalism	3%	-12%	-15
Ease of finding the correct person to contact	-8%	-23%	-15
Calling back when promised	-10%	-12%	-2
Feeling of someone taking ownership	-4%	-19%	-15
Taking a proactive approach	-12%	-22%	-10
Their ability to make decisions	-21%	-26%	-5
Clearly informing you of next steps	-18%	-23%	-5
Speed in resolving your complaint	-25%	-34%	-9
Provided you with further contact details	-16%	-27%	-11

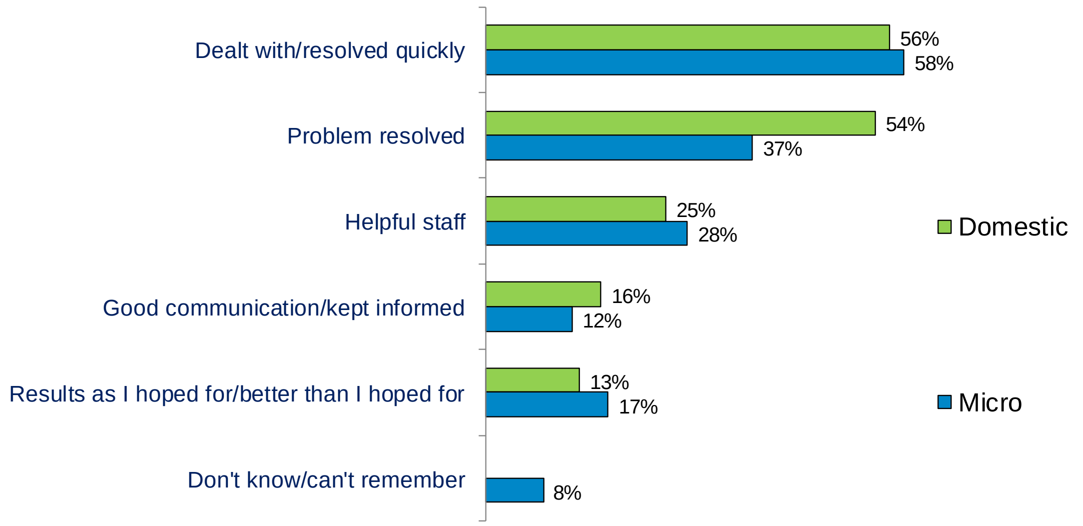
5.6 Drivers of satisfaction

5.6.1 Reasons for satisfaction/dissatisfaction

Those who were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled were asked why they were satisfied (with answers captured spontaneously but prompted to pre-codes).

Problem resolution and speed of resolution are the two key things that drive satisfaction with complaint handling. Over half of those who were satisfied with the complaint handling mentioned speed of resolution as a reason. Having helpful staff and good communication with customers also generates satisfaction, although at a secondary level to resolution. (Note that the findings for micro business customers should be treated carefully due to the low base size).

Figure 28: Reasons why satisfied with way complaint was handled



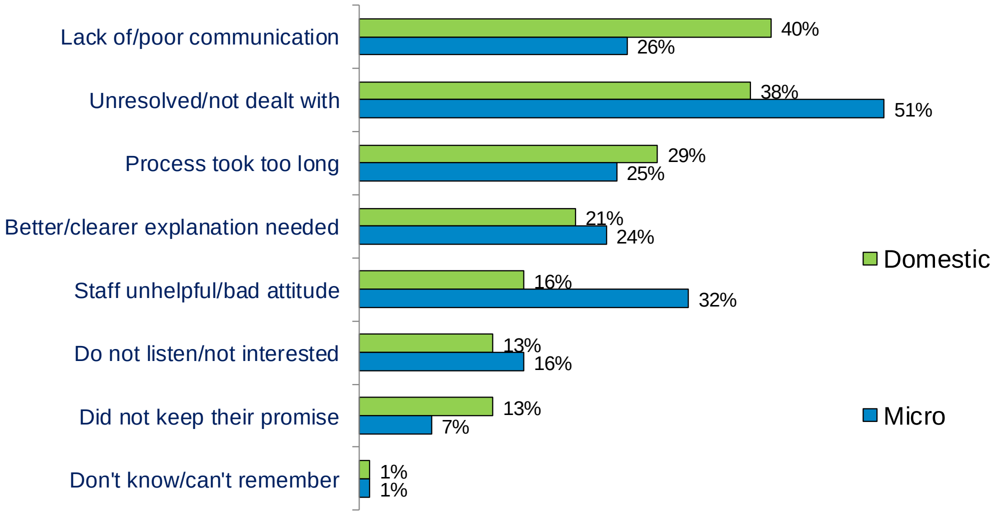
H2. Why are you very/quite satisfied with the way in which your complaint was handled?

Base: All who were very/quite satisfied with the way their complaint was handled: Domestic 274, Micro 33

Those who were dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled were also asked why this was the case.

Poor communication, the length of time taken to go through the complaint process, and a lack of complaint resolution are the things that primarily dissatisfy customers. Communication issues were highlighted more often by domestic customers, whereas micro business customers were more likely to mention lack of resolution as a reason for dissatisfaction. Micro business customers also mentioned poor supplier staff attitudes more often than domestic customers as a reason why they were dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled.

Figure 29: Reasons why dissatisfied with way complaint was handled

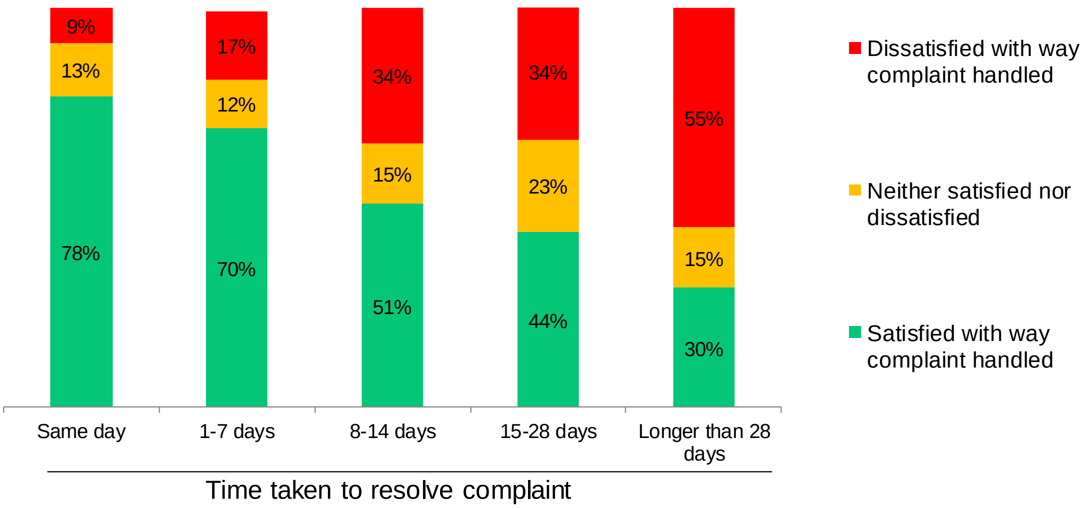


H2. Why are you very/quite dissatisfied with the way in which your complaint was handled?

Base: All who were very/quite dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled: Domestic 1,405, Micro 150

The importance of resolving complaints quickly is highlighted in the chart below that shows how satisfied customers are according to the length of time it took to resolve their complaint. Over three in four of those whose complaint was resolved on the same day were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled, compared with less than a third (30%) of those whose complaint took more than four weeks to resolve.

Figure 30: Overall satisfaction with complaint handling by time taken to resolve complaint – domestic customers



H1.Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint was handled by …(provider) /E1. How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved?

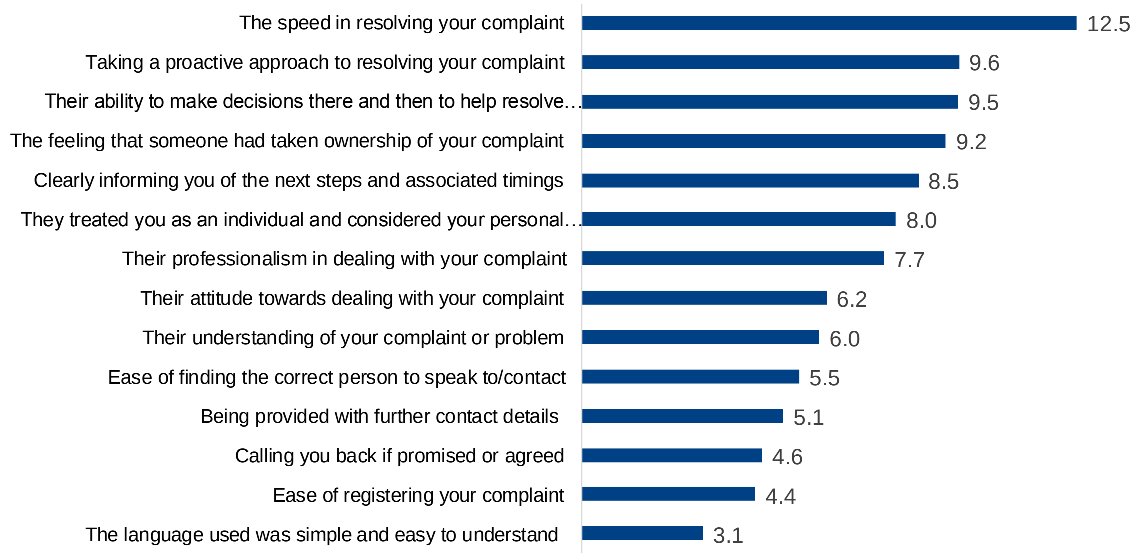
Base: All whose complaint has been resolved: Same day = 229, 1-7 days = 220, 8-14 days = 137,15-28 days = 193, Longer than 28 days = 501

5.6.2 Satisfaction drivers

We have used data modelling techniques to calculate the importance of the main aspects of service in driving overall satisfaction. The regression analysis identifies which of the 14 specific service features described in section 5.5 above are the most important in driving overall satisfaction with complaint handling. The analysis technique looks at the relationship between the rating score of each individual service feature and overall satisfaction with complaint handling - the stronger the relationship the more important the feature in driving satisfaction.

Speed of complaint resolution, the ability to make decisions there and then, and taking a proactive approach are the three most important service aspects from the customer's perspective. This is true of both domestic and micro business customers.

Figure 31: Importance of features in driving satisfaction – domestic



Base: All Domestic: 2,457

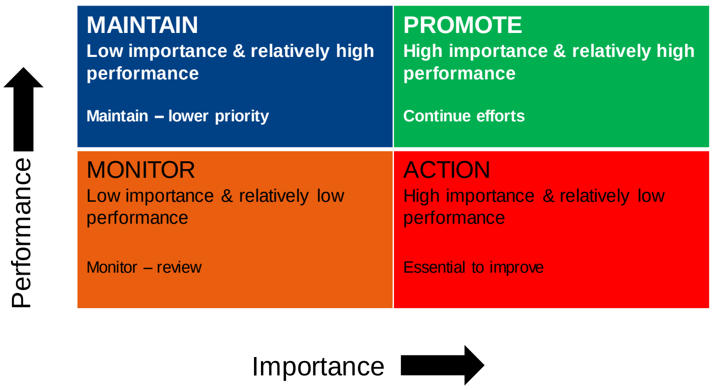
Figure 32: Importance of features in driving satisfaction – micro business

Base: Micro Business: 287

5.7 Actions/priorities to improve satisfaction

Having identified what is important to the customer, we can then identify the areas in which performance is meeting expectations in terms of customers' requirements, the aspects of service that should be prioritised to improve customer satisfaction, and where focused improvement will be of greatest benefit to the customer.

The chart below shows how we plot the importance of each feature against its rating, to help understand where resources would be best utilised to improve overall service. Action areas are where service elements are considered important in the key driver analysis, but score below average when customers rate the performance on those attributes. Aspects of service which should be promoted and efforts continued to ensure service standards are those where satisfaction ratings are relatively high and importance is high. Those aspects where performance is relatively low but so too is importance should be monitored and kept under review.



Note – the grid lines are plotted on the mean performance and importance rating respectively. The analysis therefore is based on *relative* importance/performance.

The following aspects fall into the ‘Action’ category:

	Domestic	Micro Business
Speed in resolving complaint	✸	✸
Taking a proactive approach to resolving your complaint	✸	✸
The ability to make decisions there and then to resolve your complaint	✸	✸
Clearly informing you of the next steps and associated timings	✸	✸
The feeling that someone had taken ownership of your complaint	✸	
They treated you as an individual and considered your personal needs and circumstances		✸
Ease of finding the correct person to speak to/contact		✸

These are the aspects that should be prioritised to improve satisfaction with complaint handling. However, it should be noted that performance on all aspects is weak in absolute terms, except on the simplicity and clarity of the language used by suppliers. Therefore whilst these are the aspects to immediately prioritise, this should not be at the expense of performance on other attributes.

Figure 33: Action Priorities – Domestic customers

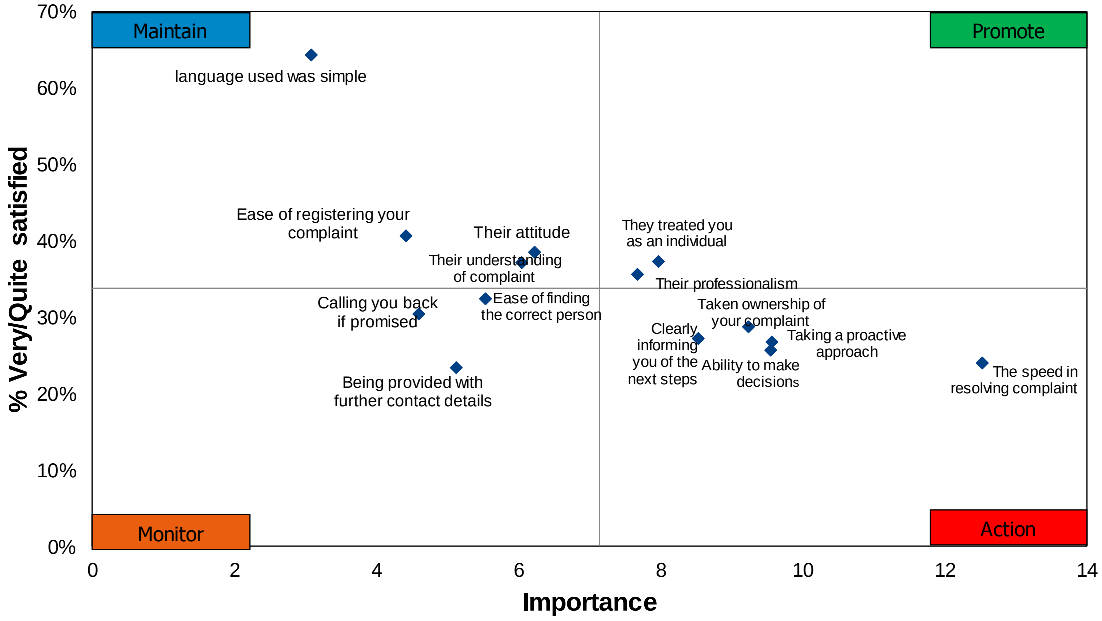
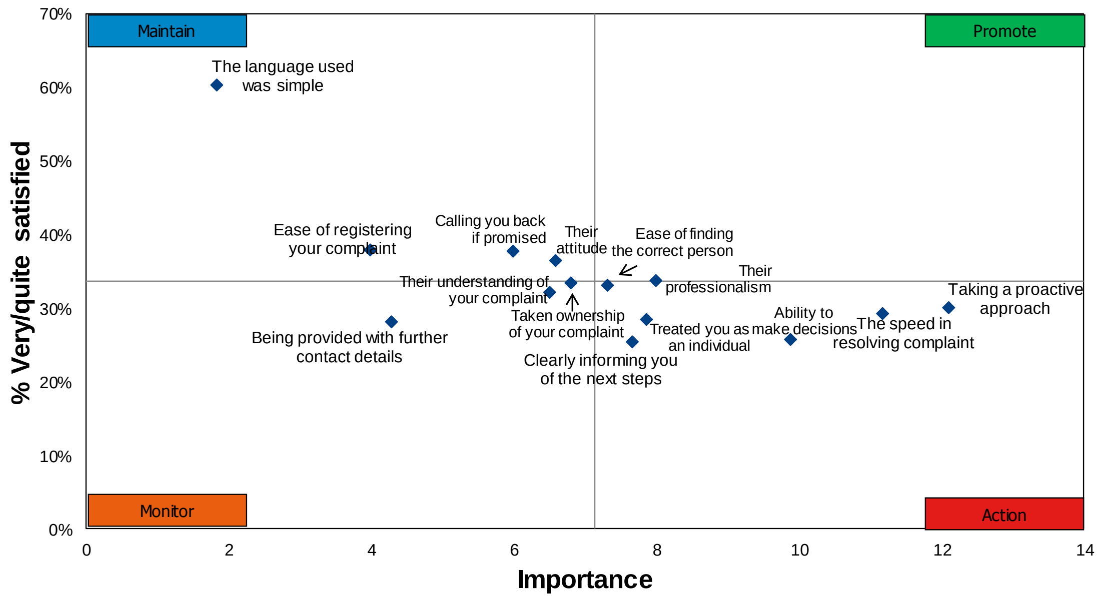


Figure 34: Action Priorities – Micro business customers



The qualitative work (section 6.4) provides further diagnostic information about the service aspects that need to be improved. This qualitative evidence reinforces the need for action in the areas described above. In addition, it highlights the need for suppliers to focus on treating customers as individuals, particularly so for potentially vulnerable customers who may not have the confidence or knowledge to articulate their concerns.

6 Satisfaction with the complaint outcome

This section looks at customer reaction to the *outcome* of the complaint. We report on customers' overall satisfaction with the complaint outcome and whether they expected and/or received anything as a result. We also look at those complaints that the supplier thinks are resolved but the customer does not i.e. are in the '*Resolution Gap'*. Quantitative analysis identifies the scale of the Resolution Gap, and reasons why customers feel their complaint has not been resolved. The in-depth qualitative work examines this in more detail, helping to both clarify the causes of the problem and, at the same time, generate actionable measures to potentially mitigate the issue.

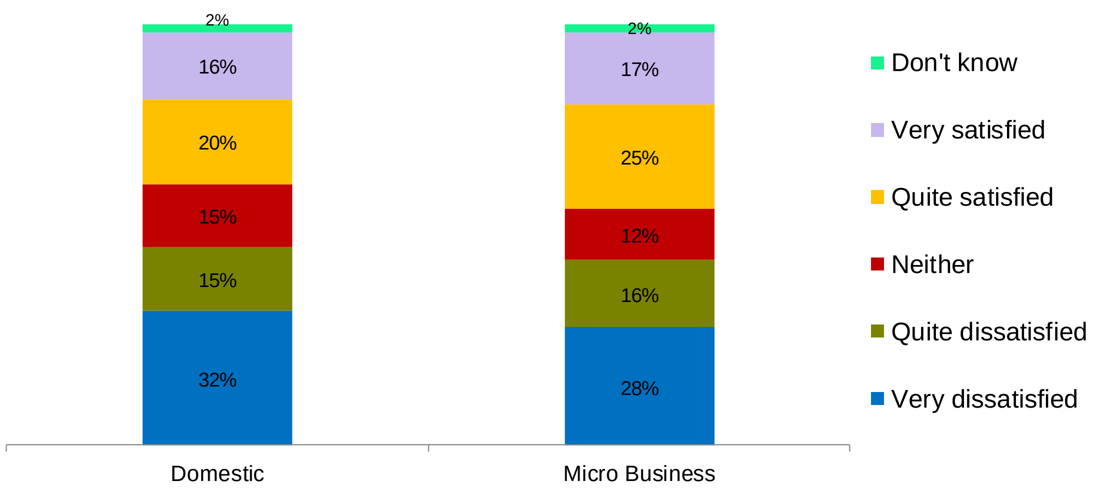
Key findings:

- Nearly half of all customers were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint at the time of interview
- There is a clear mismatch between customer expectation of what they would obtain as a result of their complaint, and what they actually received. The issue is not one of compensation, but the perceived inability of suppliers to resolve problems, and to do so reasonably quickly.
- In nearly half of the cases where the supplier considers the complaint resolved, the customer does not. The scale of this Resolution Gap has not changed since 2012.
- The quantitative research reveals two key reasons why customers in the Resolution Gap feel their complaint has not been resolved: on-going concerns about billing or metering issue; and the supplier not giving sufficiently clear communication that the problem has been resolved.
- Only a few customers in the Resolution Gap (about 10%) had received communication from the supplier to say their complaint had been resolved.
- Evidence from the **qualitative** work provides further guidance on ways to close the Resolution Gap:
- **Ensure staff are empowered to make decisions themselves so that customers have a direct point of contact within the organisation with whom they can communicate so that complaints can be resolved more quickly**
- **Deliver the appropriate 'tone of voice' and make the customer feel that they are being treated as an individual**
- **Explain clearly the rationale for the response and final outcome**
- **Ensure supplier resolution is communicated clearly to customers, preferably in writing.**

6.1 Overall satisfaction with the outcome

Nearly half of all customers were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint at the time of interview (when 29% of complaints were still ongoing). Whilst this is slightly lower than the level of dissatisfaction with the way the complaint was handled, it still represents a sizeable proportion of dissatisfied customers.

Figure 35: Overall satisfaction with the outcome

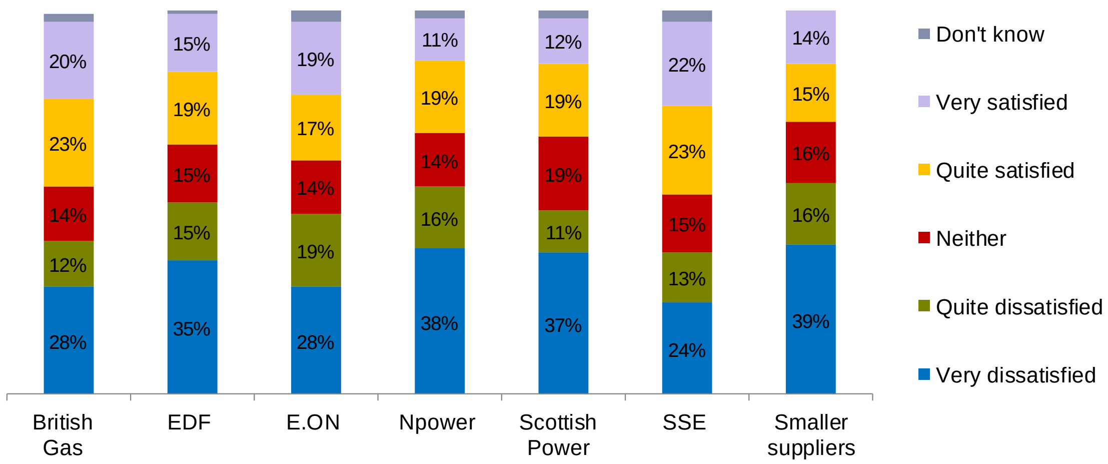


H3.How satisfied are you overall with the outcome of your complaint?

Base: All: Domestic 2457, Micro 287

SSE and British Gas domestic customers were slightly less dissatisfied with the complaint outcome than customers of other suppliers.

Figure 36: Overall satisfaction with the outcome – domestic customers by supplier used



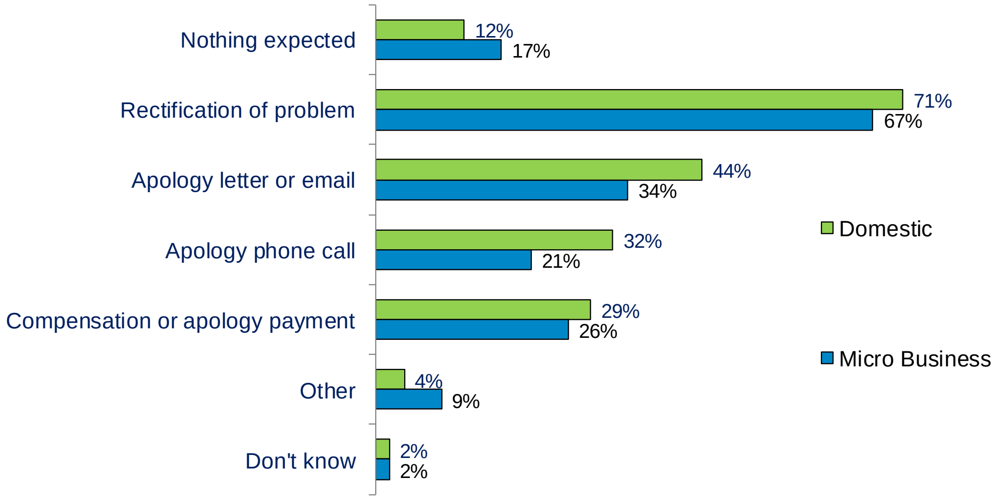
H3.How satisfied are you overall with the outcome of your complaint?

Base: All: Domestic. British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers – 265

6.2 Expectation of receiving something/whether received anything

When asked (from a prompted list) whether they expected to receive anything as a result of their complaint, most customers said they expected rectification of the problem. Many customers also said that they expected an apology, and about one in four expected some kind of financial compensation.

Figure 37: Whether expected to receive something

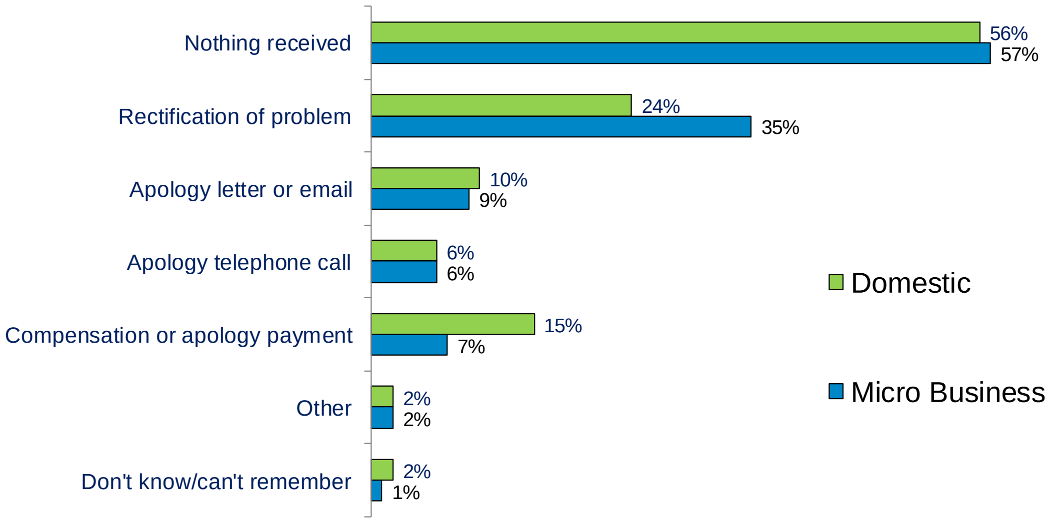


H4. Thinking about the outcome of your complaint, did you expect to receive any of the following?

Base: All : Domestic 2457, Micro 287

In the majority of cases the customer received nothing. The proportion who received an apology or compensation was markedly lower than the level of expectation.

Figure 38: Whether received something as an outcome of the complaint

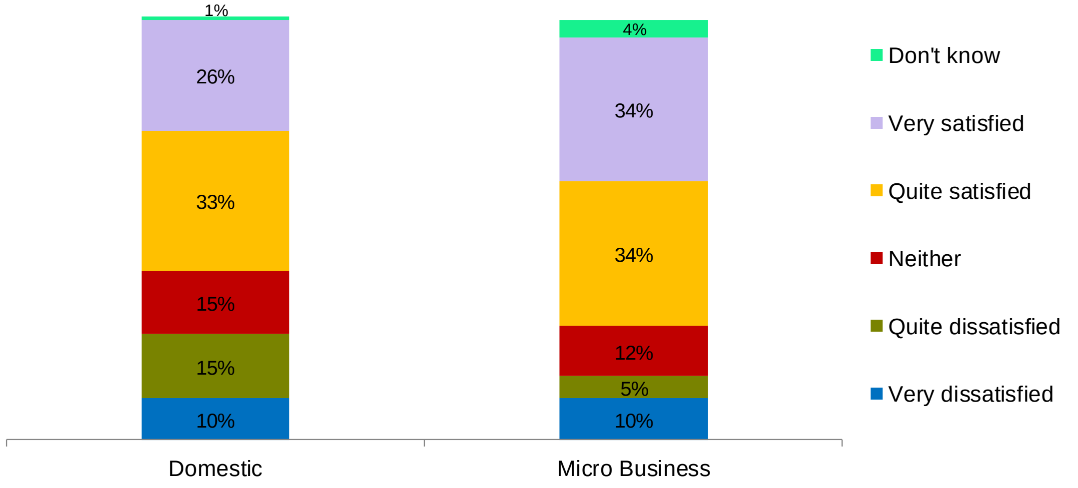


H5. Thinking about the outcome of your complaint, did you receive anything?

Base: All except those with on-going complaint: Domestic 1754, Micro 192

Those who received something from the supplier (e.g. a resolution to the problem, an apology or compensation) were asked how satisfied they were that it adequately reflected the problems they had encountered. In most cases the customer was satisfied, indicating that the nature of the remedial action or level of compensation where received is not the key issue from the customer's perspective. The greater concern is the inability of suppliers to resolve problems in many cases, and to do so reasonably quickly.

Figure 39: Satisfaction with compensation received or other remedial action



H6.How satisfied are you that what you received adequately reflects the problems that you have encountered?

Base: All who received something: Domestic 785, Micro 88

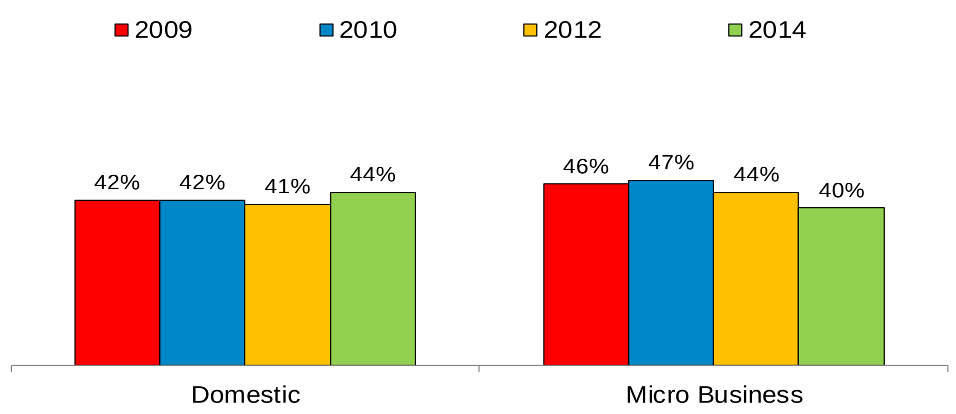
6.3 Scale of the Resolution Gap and reasons behind it (why suppliers think the complaint is resolved but customers do not)

The Resolution Gap (expressed as a percentage) is defined as follows:

$$\text{Resolution Gap} = \frac{\text{Supplier thinks complaints are resolved but customer does not}}{\text{All complaints supplier thinks are resolved}}$$

44% of domestic and 40% of micro business customer complaints fall into the Resolution Gap. In other words, in nearly half of cases where the supplier considers the complaint resolved, the customer does not. There is no evidence of any notable change in the Resolution Gap over time; whilst it is slightly lower than before among micro business customers it is slightly higher among domestic customers.

Figure 40: Resolution Gap

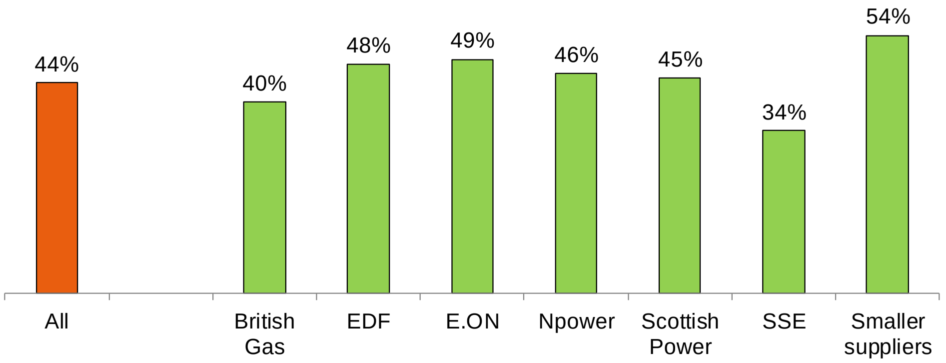


Data taken from sample database and D7 Would you say your complaint was resolved, not resolved or is it still ongoing?

Base: All: Domestic 2762, 2734, 2769, 2457; Micro 254, 274, 256, 288

The high Resolution Gap is evident across all suppliers, particularly among domestic customers of the smaller suppliers. It is lowest among SSE customers, but still describes one in three SSE domestic customers.

Figure 41: Resolution Gap by supplier – Domestic customers

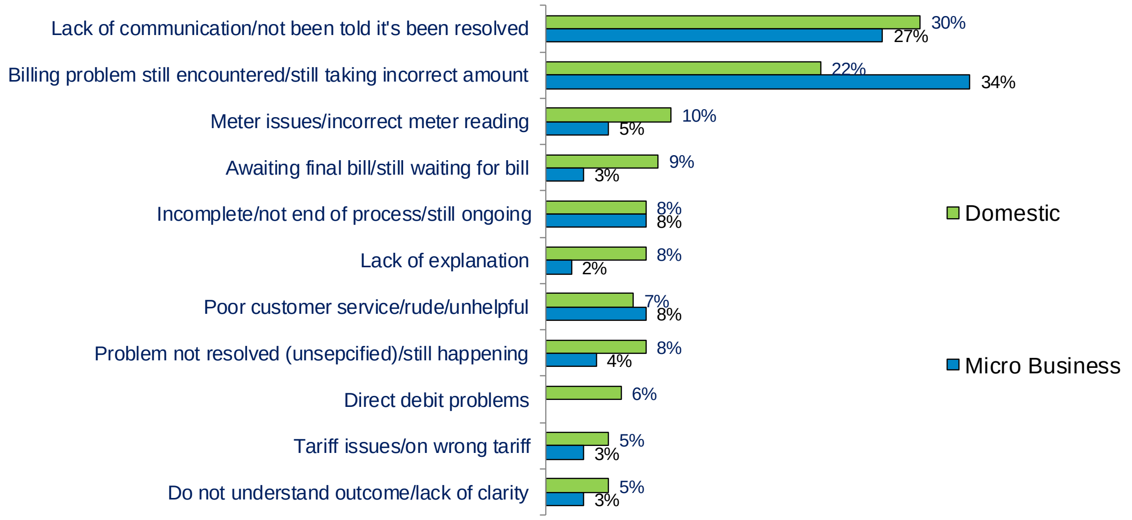


Data taken from sample database and D7

Base: All complaints supplier thinks is resolved: Domestic – 1,853, British Gas – 298, EDF – 275, E.ON – 292, Npower 272, Scottish Power – 298, SSE – 256, smaller suppliers – 162

Customers in the Resolution Gap were asked why they felt their complaint had not been resolved. Responses were captured spontaneously and each comment has been coded to capture all the themes. The two key reasons why customers in the Resolution Gap feel their complaint has not been resolved are: 1) on-going billing or metering concerns and; 2) the supplier not giving sufficiently clear communication that the problem has been resolved.

Figure 42: Reasons why customer feels complaint has not been resolved (those in Resolution Gap)

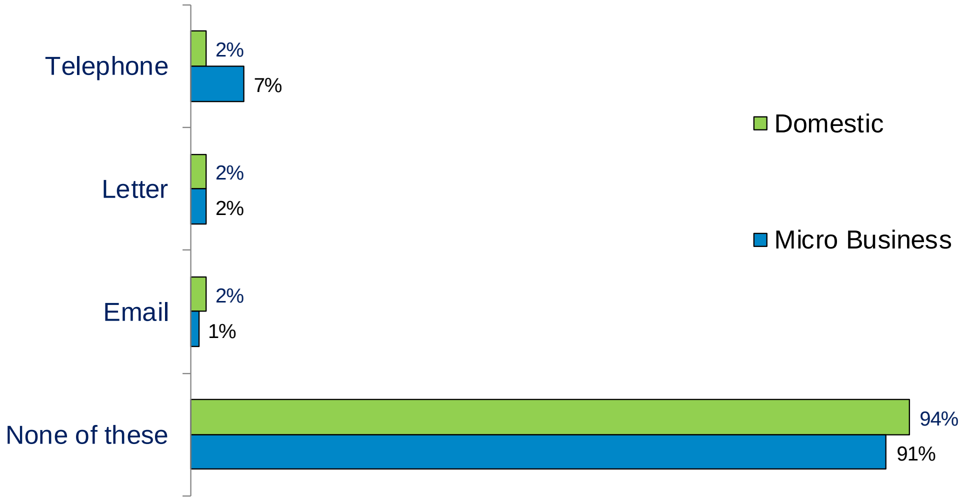


F6. Please tell us why you do not feel your complaint has been resolved?

Base: All where complaint not resolved but supplier regards as resolved: Domestic 826, Micro 89

In nearly all cases where the supplier thought the case had been resolved but the customer did not, no communication had been received by the customer to say the complaint had been resolved.

Figure 43: Whether received any communication from supplier to say complaint has been resolved (those in Resolution Gap)

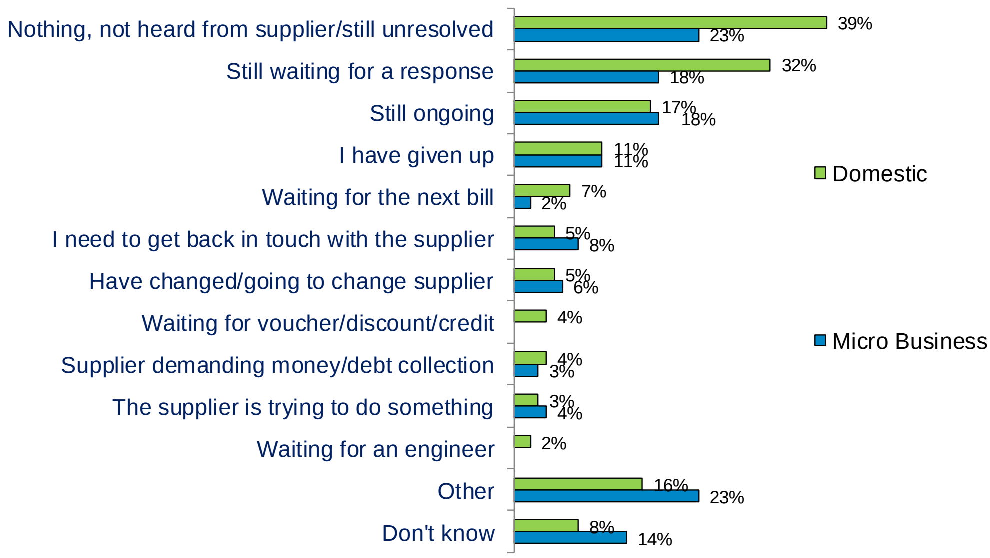


F5. We understand that your supplier believes that your complaint has been resolved. Have you received any communication to say that your complaint had been resolved?

Base: All where complaint not resolved but supplier regards as resolved: Domestic 826, Micro 89

All those who did not think their complaint had been resolved were asked what was happening with their complaint. Many of these customers had not heard anything from the supplier or were waiting for a further response.

Figure 44: Complaint status (all with unresolved complaints)

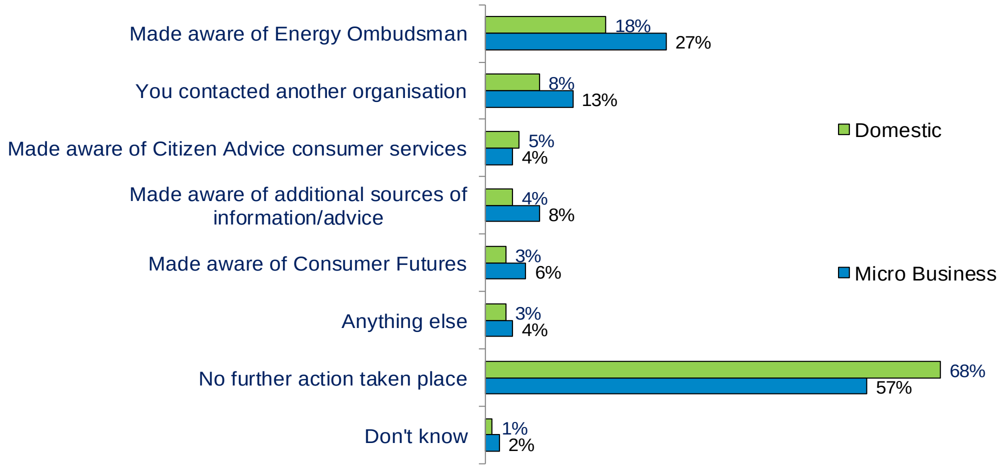


F4. What is happening with your complaint now?

Base: All where complaint not resolved: Domestic 1,131, Micro 139

Only a minority of customers with unresolved complaints were made aware of other information sources by their supplier, or had contacted another organisation themselves. However, whilst only a minority had been made aware of the OS:E, the proportion was higher this year (18% domestic; 27% micro business) than reported in the 2012 survey (10% domestic;8% micro business).

Figure 45: Other actions taken (all with unresolved complaints)

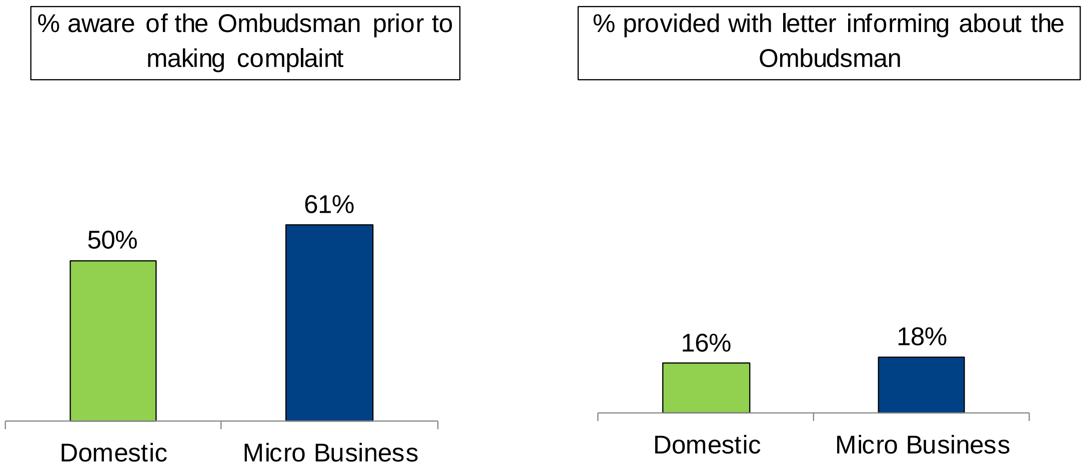


F1. You say that your complaint has not been resolved, have any of the following taken place?

Base: All where complaint not resolved: Domestic 1,131, Micro 139

All those who did not think their complaint had been resolved were asked whether they were aware of the OS:E prior to making the complaint, and whether the supplier had provided them with a letter informing them of the OS:E. One in two domestic and nearly two in three micro business customers had known about the OS:E before the complaint, and about one in six had received a letter about the OS:E from their supplier. It should be noted that fieldwork was conducted 5 – 12 weeks after the complaint had been made, so not all customers would have received an eight week or deadlock letter by the time the interview was conducted.

Figure 46: Awareness of OS:E (all with unresolved complaints)



F2/F3. Were you aware of the Energy Ombudsman prior to making your complaint/did the supplier provide you with a letter informing you about the Energy Ombudsman ?

Base: All except those whose complaint has been resolved: Domestic 1131, Micro 139

6.4 Potential measures for closing the Resolution Gap

The qualitative work looked at the Resolution Gap in more detail, and provides a deeper understanding of why so many customer complaints fall into this category. Reflecting on these insights we then offer potential ways of mitigating the problem i.e. closing the gap.

Across the qualitative participants (all of whom were in the Resolution Gap) a range of complaints were cited including queries and issues regarding: billing; tariffs; discounts; and switching from pre-payment metre to direct debit. Some participants noted that their complaint derived from the poor customer service they had received when they phoned to report the issue or error. Others noted that their complaint had stemmed from previous poor customer service which meant that they were using a service or were on a tariff that they felt they simply should not have been recommended for their circumstances. Two participants who could be considered more vulnerable described this experience, and felt that better, more tailored customer service and advice at the point of sale or switch of tariff would have avoided the situation occuring. Both of their complaints concerned unaffordable tariffs or bills.

> *"They should have taken more notice of what I was saying to start off – they must have known I wouldn't have been able to pay these new tariffs. They should have pointed me in another direction".* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)
>
> *"We had spoken for some length about it [disconnecting the gas meter] and at no point did they say to me 'well you will still get standing charges'."* (Domestic customer, vulnerable) [8]

The evidence from the qualitative work complements the findings from the quantitative work, and describes in greater depth the three key factors that describe why customers feel their complaint has not been resolved.

[8] Ofgem is currently reviewing this issue: https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications-and-updates/treatment-low-and-zero-consumers-gas

Waiting for something

Some participants described how they were still waiting to hear back from their supplier regarding their complaint. These participants assumed that the supplier was still looking into something and would be in touch to confirm the status of the complaint. Some of these participants recalled the supplier informing them that they would get back to them at a specific date, but this date had passed and they had still heard nothing. Whilst the customer had not been back in touch with their supplier regarding this, there was still some ambiguity about whether the supplier would still, at some stage, re-contact them about the complaint.

> *“The woman said they would go back to our records and get the conversation that was made at that time, and come back to [me], which they’ve never done.”* (Micro business customer)

> *“[They said] it would be investigated and I would be kept up to date…no one has been in contact.”* (Domestic customer)

One participant had simply given up hearing back from their supplier and in frustration had decided to switch supplier.

> *“They never rang me back, they never looked into it. I just had to give up.”* (Domestic customer)

No clear resolution

Most qualitative participants felt that they lacked a real ‘sense of closure’ regarding their complaint; they felt no clear resolution had been reached. In some cases this was because participants were dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint or issue. A small number of participants concluded that whilst there was not anything that the supplier could practically do to resolve their complaint, they were dissatisfied with the tone in which this had been communicated, and their complaint had been handled. The customer therefore remained dissatisfied with the process and outcome and did not consider the complaint truly resolved. Some described the supplier tone as ‘take it or leave it’.

> *“All they turned round and said was ’by law they are entitled to do this’.”* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

> *“As far as they [supplier] were aware the matter was resolved because they’d explained the situation to me and there’s nothing more they could do.”* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

Participants felt that the supplier had not fully listened to their complaint or spent time attempting to resolve it.

> *“I got the impression that nobody was reading them [the letters] – they were just going through the motions.”* (Micro business customer)

These participants wanted reassurance and formal confirmation that the complaint had been looked into and that someone had listened and tried to resolve it. Without this reassurance, they could not comfortably consider the complaint resolved. Other participants did not consider the complaint resolved because they felt that the supplier had not taken any responsibility for the issue or cause of the complaint. Again, this left participants without a sense of closure and many remained disgruntled about this, noting that an apology would, in their mind, bring closure to their complaint.

> *“I would have felt a bit better if they’d [supplier] acknowledged it.”* (Domestic customer, vulnerable).

> “*An apology for not doing their job properly.”* (Domestic customer)

> *“After a lot of hassle I got someone to sort it out and I did get the rebate, but my argument was the fact that when I phoned up they should have said to me ‘even if you cap the meter off, you will still receive a standing charge’…having a bill over £100 was a bit of a shock…I think they could*

make some sort of gesture to say 'we were in the wrong'." (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

Whilst a couple of participants mentioned financial compensation or a good-will gesture, most were simply keen for the supplier to acknowledge some responsibility for the issue or cause of complaint.

Many participants described how there was a lack of clear resolution to their complaint because they had not received any formal communication confirming closure. This is something that participants had expected.

"I would expect either a phone call or a letter to say that the account is sorted and running as it should be…I'm in limbo and not sure what is going on." (Domestic customer)

"At the end of the day at least you know that although you've put in a complaint it is finished with and it's not hanging on, whereas the complaint with [supplier] at the moment – I haven't had closure. I had no one ring me back to say 'we have looked into your complaint, there's nothing further we can do, we do apologise, end of story'. But I haven't even had that." (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

Written communication

Thinking further about the desired confirmation of the complaint being resolved, many of the qualitative participants felt that this should be provided in writing.

"I would have indeed wanted something in writing…even if they said 'we understand you are not happy', which was not said to me." (Domestic customer)

"I was basically told 'that was it' and I didn't receive anything else in writing." (Micro business customer)

Whilst some participants did recall discussing this via telephone with the supplier, most felt that written confirmation would be required for final closure of the matter.

"By writing, so I could prove that my complaint was sorted…at the moment I've only got my work against their word." (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

Customer response to Resolution Gap

During the telephone depth interview, the qualitative participants were informed that their complaint was considered resolved by their supplier. Participants were shocked and often dissapointed to hear this as they did not feel that resolution had been clearly communicated. Responses echoed the three themes outlined above.

Waiting for something	Some were still waiting for something and considered their complaint 'ongoing'. *"Maybe they do [think it is resolved] because I've not been in contact with them. I don't see why I should keep phoning them…they should be contacting me to resolve it."* (Domestic customer)
No clear resolution	Even where the customer had switched supplier there was no clear sense of resolution and therefore lack of comfort in considering the complaint/ issue to be resolved. *"I never felt it was closed, and had it been closed satisfactorily I would still be a customer of theirs."* (Micro business customer)
Written confirmation	Many simply felt that there had been no clarification of resolution, seeking written confirmation. *"I don't know it's resolved. They haven't written to me."* (Domestic customer) *"They've not even written to me or said anything to me. I think that's a bit far-fetched."* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

Reasons for Resolution Gap

Ability to make decisions

→ The qualitative research suggests that the customer's key concern is being given the opportunity to speak to someone who is able to resolve the complaint or issue.

The quantitative survey found that nearly two in three customers were dissatisfied with the supplier's ability to make decisions during the first contact to resolve complaints. Qualitative participants described how they had asked to escalate their complaint to someone more senior within the organisation feeling that the person they were speaking to was unable to answer their query or resolve the issue.

> *"I would have liked to have spoken to someone more senior because the person I spoke to, I didn't think he was very competent…because there was no room to negotiate, it was either that, or that's it."* (Micro business customer)
>
> *"The girl at the end of the phone clearly could not rationalise the questions I was asking. Basically I don't think she was up to the job."* (Domestic customer)

Participants were often disgruntled when informed they were unable to speak to someone more senior. However, it was clear across the qualitative research that the key issue was the competence and tone of the person they spoke to rather than the isolated desire to escalate. Being unable to speak to someone able to resolve and understand the query can add to concerns that the complaint/ issue is not being dealt with properly.

Lack of communications

→ The qualitative research suggests that lack of communication implies to the customer that the complaint or issue is not being progressed, and therefore has not reached any resolution.

Lack of communications during the complaints process was often cited as a concern by qualitative participants.

"They need to communicate because at the moment there's no communication whatsoever." (Micro business customer)

Qualitative participants did not feel that clear expectations were set regarding how much or how little communication they should expect to receive. This meant that some respondents felt that the onus for progressing the complaint was on themselves, and this resulted in them making further contact with the supplier. Participants expected the supplier to be proactive in resolving and progressing their complaint/ issue and were dissatisfied when they felt that this was not happening. This reflects the themes evident from the quantitative research.

"I've had no correspondence from them, no letters from them all the way through the complaint to tell me that it's still being dealt with…it's me that has to keep phoning each time." (Domestic customer)

Another concern regarding communications was not being contacted when promised. The quantitative survey found that about half of customers were dissatisfied with suppliers calling back if promised. This was articulated by qualitative participants who felt that, again, this lack of communication meant that they were required to proactively telephone the supplier to find out whether their complaint or issue was being progressed.

"They've said a few times they'll contact me and then no one ever does…I always have to contact them." (Domestic customer)

This lack of communication built feelings of frustration and an overall lack of clarity regarding what was happening with the complaint/ issue.

"I just got so frustrated with absolutely no progress at all." (Micro business customer)

The result was that many lacked confidence that anything was happening to resolve their complaint or issue.

Clarity of explanations

→ The qualitative research suggests that an important aspect of complaints handling is the clarity of the explanation customers receive about the cause of their complaint. Unclear explanations can leave customers feeling that their complaint is not fully understood and not being properly progressed.

The quantitative survey found most customers were satisfied with the language used during their complaint journey in terms of it being sufficiently easy to understand. However, the qualitative research identified some dissatisfaction regarding the clarity of *explanations* for why participants had experienced a particular issue and why it had not been satisfactorily resolved.

Participants noted that supplier explanations of issues, and the rationale behind what had happened, and why things could not be resolved (in line with customer expectations) lacked clarity and transparency.

> *"I said how have you arrived at that? It was absolutely fluffed, there was no serious discussion."* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

> *"It's their attitude about it…'you're not entitled to it, why are you asking for it?'…they didn't explain anything to me, they were just trying to fob me off, that's how I felt."* (Domestic customer)

Participants felt that the 'why' response to their questions often lacked clear rationale which suggested that either their complaint had not be taken seriously, or that the person dealing with the complaint lacked the required skills to understand and resolve the problem.

> *"It's a waste of time, whenever I contact them nobody knows anything."* (Domestic customer)

> *"Don't just write to me and say 'you're not entitled' and put a booklet in…that doesn't solve the problem."* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

Without a clear explanation as to what had happened participants felt unsure that the the supplier would really be able to resolve their complaint or issue.

Tone

→ The qualitative research suggests that a negative tone 'adds fuel' to a negative experience, driving increased dissatisfaction with the complaint handling and outcome.

The quantitative survey found that nearly half of customers were dissatisfied with the attitude of the supplier when handling their complaint. This was reflected in the qualitative research with some participants expressing surprise at the negative tone they came across.

> *"I felt like I was being treated like a criminal…the way some people talk to you, you just don't expect it."* (Micro business customer)

The tone was considered particularly important when customers had been waiting for a long time on an 0845 telephone number. Participants agreed that they were likely to be disgruntled when they first spoke to someone as the wait was typically longer than they expected, and often expensive.

Some participants had spoken to someone with a positive tone.

> *"They've been very good when I've been talking to them and saying that they're going to sort it out, but it's me that has to keep phoning them."* (Domestic customer)

However, even where a positive tone was experienced, this was outweighed by other negative elements of the experience, such as a failure to progress the complaint in a timely way.

Being treated as an individual

→ The qualitative research suggests that personalised communications and feeling listened to help customers feel like they are being treated as an individual. Evidence suggests suppliers are often failing in this area.

The quantitative survey found half of customers were dissatisfied insofar as not feeling like they were being treated as an individual. The qualitative research identified two aspects of being treated individually, both of which impacted on the customer experience.

The first of these, was feeling listened to. Many qualitative participants felt that the supplier had simply not listened to their concerns or queries. Some felt that the focus was on finishing the phone call as quickly as possible rather than listening fully to their complaint or issue and responding appropriately.

> *"Then when I spoke to somebody else they didn't really want to listen to me, they just seemed to want to get me off the phone."* (Domestic customer, vulnerable)

This perception amongst participants resulted in a feeling that the complaint was not being taken seriously and not enough was being done to try to resolve the complaint/ issue.

> *"They could have listened…if somebody is prepared to pay and arrange to pay…they should aim to resolve the situation and they aren't prepared to do that."* (Micro business customer)

It also suggested to participants that the supplier was not concerned about their personal circumstances or willing to take time to consider the impact any decisions regarding the complaint/ issue would have on their finances and wider life.

> *"Of the five times I've phoned there was only one girl that was what I thought was polite…the others, their attitude was matter of fact – 'you don't really matter'."* (Domestic customer)

This was particularly the case for some vulnerable customers for whom decisions regarding finances could have a major impact on day-to-day living.

The **second** aspect of being treated as an individual identified in the qualitative research was the provision of tailored or personalised communications. Tailored communications signalled to the participant that their complaint was being properly addressed. However, many felt that they did not receive tailored communications and instead had received computer generated, generic responses that did not reflect their individual circumstances or issue.

> *"They were just getting the [my] letter and sending off a standard letter in reply."* (Micro business customer)

A couple of participants described receiving generic letters that contradicted discussions they were having with the supplier which further frustrated them, and added to their concerns that the complaint was not being properly addressed or dealt with.

> *"One minute one person is saying they won't renew my contract and then I'm getting a letter saying your contract is up for renewal and let's discuss the prices."* (Micro business customer)

Summary of ways to close the Resolution Gap

The qualitative work provides a detailed understanding of the issues that were evident from the findings of the quantitative survey, and provides further guidance on ways to close the Resolution Gap. Addessing all of the points below will help mitigate the problem:

- Ensure staff are empowered to make decisions themselves so that a quick resolution satisfactory to both sides is more likely. Where this is not possible customers should have a direct point of contact within the organisation with whom they communicate. This direct point of contact should include a specific telephone number to an individual or team of individuals who have access to the query background ensuring continuity for customers and avoiding the need for customers to repeat their query with each interaction.
- Deliver the appropriate 'tone of voice' and make the customer feel that they are being treated as an individual.
- Clear explanations throughout the complaint process: what caused the issue regarding the complaint; why the supplier responded as they did, and; how and why the final outcome was arrived at.
- At the point the supplier considers the complaint resolved this must be communicated clearly to customers, preferably in writing.

7 How experience compares with previous complaints to energy suppliers and other organisations

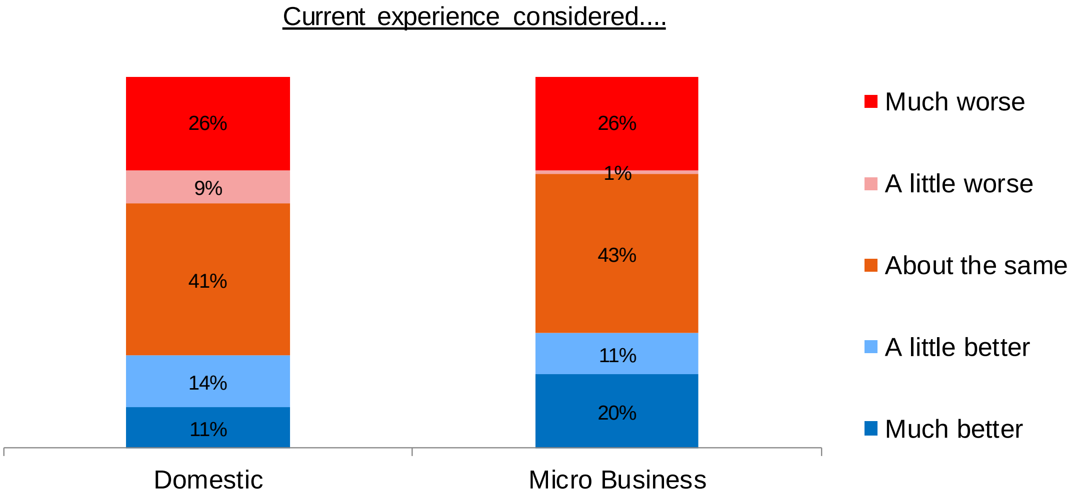
In this section we look at customers who have complained either to the same energy supplier before or to other similar organisations, and how that experience compares with the way their energy supplier handled their complaint. This provides a benchmark for energy suppliers to compare their complaint handling service against.

Key findings:

- Those domestic customers who had made a previous complaint to the same energy company (about one in seven domestic customers) were more likely to think the current experience was worse than before, rather than better.
- On balance, customers felt their complaint experience was similar to that experienced when complaining to a range of other organisations. However, banks and building societies were thought to handle complaints better than energy suppliers, whilst the reverse was true of transport providers.

A minority had made a complaint to the same energy supplier before (14% of domestic and 15% of micro business customers). These customers were asked how the way the supplier handled their current complaint compared against their previous experience. Whilst around two in five domestic customers thought there was no difference, the rest were more negative about the current experience than positive. A similar proportion of micro business customers felt there was no difference, but beyond this opinion was split more evenly (although some care is required with the interpretation due to the low base size).

Figure 47: How experience compares with previous complaints to same energy supplier

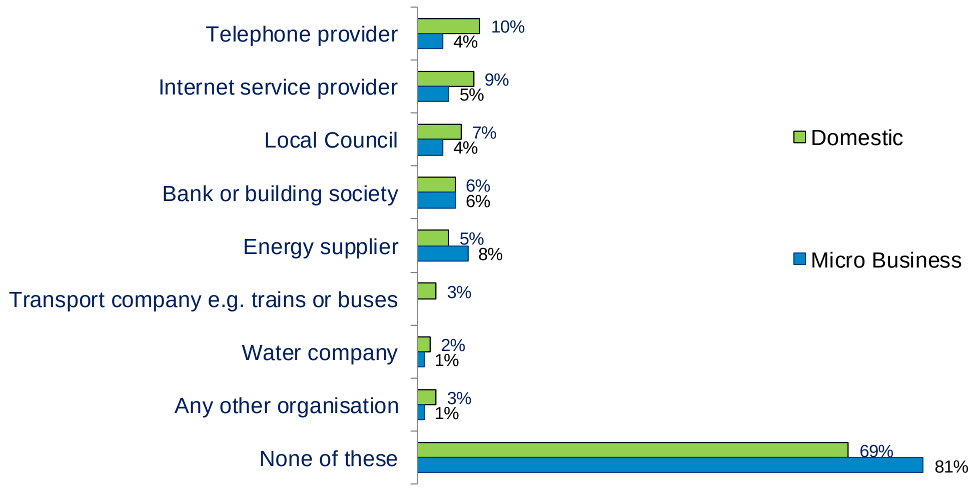


I4. How does the way provider handled the complaint compare against previous complaints?

Base: All who have made a complaint to energy provider before : Domestic 315, Micro 43

Customers were asked whether they had made a complaint to another organisation (from a prompted list) within the last twelve months. About a third of domestic customers, and one in five micro business customers, had done so.

Figure 48: Whether made a complaint to any other organisations in last 12 months

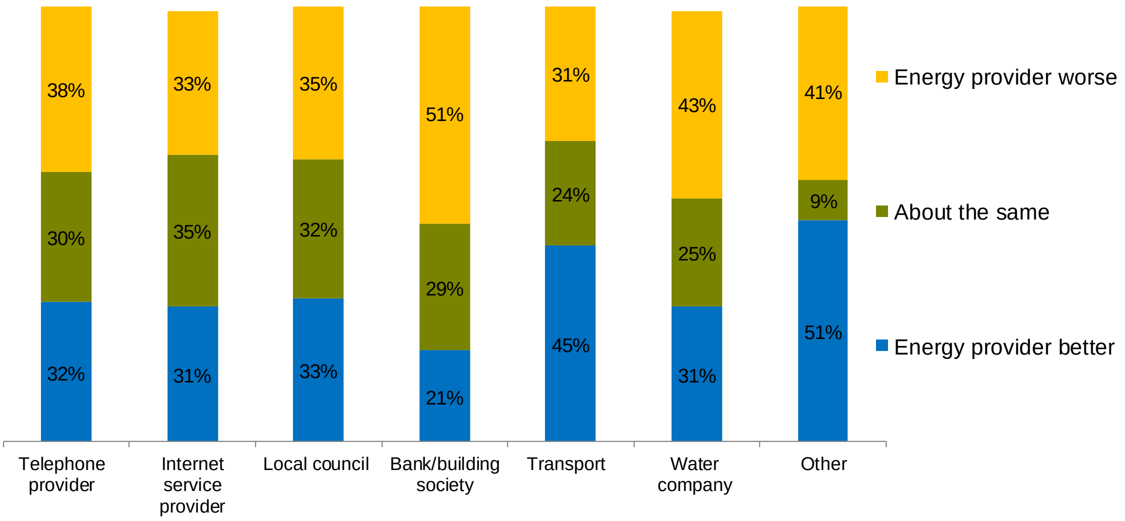


I1. Have you made a complaint, excluding the one we have talked about, to any of the following types of company or organisation in the last 12 months?

Base: All: Domestic 2,457, Micro 287

On balance customers felt the experience of complaining to their energy supplier was similar to when they complained to other organisations. However, banks and building societies were thought to handle complaints better than energy suppliers, whilst the reverse was true of transport providers (although care is required with this finding due to the relatively low base size for those who had made a complaint to transport providers (as well as water companies and other organisations)).

Figure 49: How experience compares with complaints to other organisations



I2. Comparing your complaints experience with …(provider) against other companies/organisations?

Base: Domestic customers made complaint against: Telephone provider – 242, Internet service provider – 215, Local council – 167, Bank/building society – 155, Transport company – 71, Water company – 58, Other – 69,

8 Impact of poor complaints handling

This section reports on whether customers feel they were treated fairly by the energy supplier, and the impact of their complaint experience on their decision to either stay with their current supplier or switch supplier. Whether the supplier was seen to act in a fair way is relevant to understanding how far suppliers are working successfully within new enforceable Standards of Conduct[9] set by Ofgem.

Key findings:

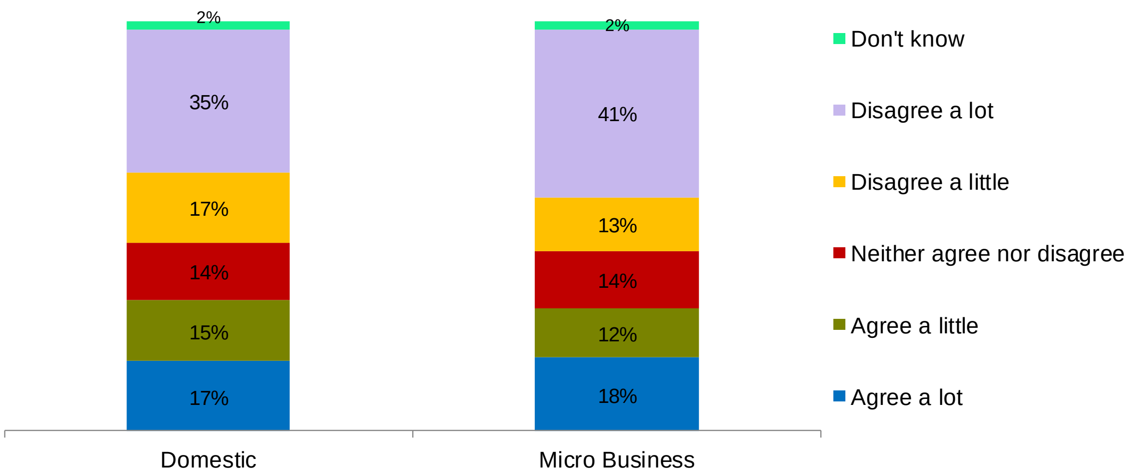
- The majority of customers disagreed, and only about one in three agreed, that their energy supplier had treated them fairly in the way they handled their complaint.
- Only a minority (17% of domestic and 15% of micro business customers) recalled receiving a letter or leaflet from their energy supplier in the last 12 months about the requirement to treat customers fairly.
- Nearly half of customers had either switched or planned to switch supplier as a result of their complaint experience.
- Some had already switched to another supplier (18% of domestic and 14% of micro business customers).
- There is a clear correlation between satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled and propensity to switch supplier. The majority of dissatisfied customers had already switched or planned to switch, whilst over three in four satisfied customers had no plans to switch supplier.
- This provides substantial evidence to suggest that the way complaints are handled has a significant commercial implication for suppliers.

[9] https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/press-releases/new-standards-conduct-suppliers-are-first-step-simpler-clearer-fairer-energy-market

8.1 Perceptions of fair treatment

Customers were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the energy supplier had treated them fairly in the way they handled their complaint. The majority of customers disagreed, and only about one in three agreed that they had been treated fairly.

Figure 50: Agreement that supplier has treated them fairly

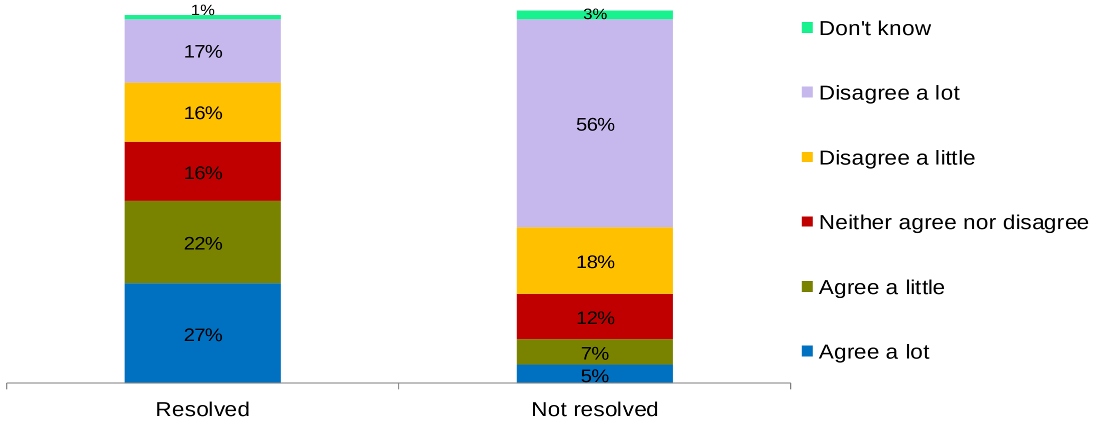


H7. Thinking about the way they have handled your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree that …(provider) has treated you fairly?

Base: All: Domestic 2457, Micro 287

Even among domestic customers where the complaint had been resolved, one in three thought their supplier had not treated them fairly. The great majority (three in four) with unresolved complaints said they were not treated fairly.

Figure 51: Agreement that supplier has treated them fairly (Domestic customers) - by whether complaint resolved or not

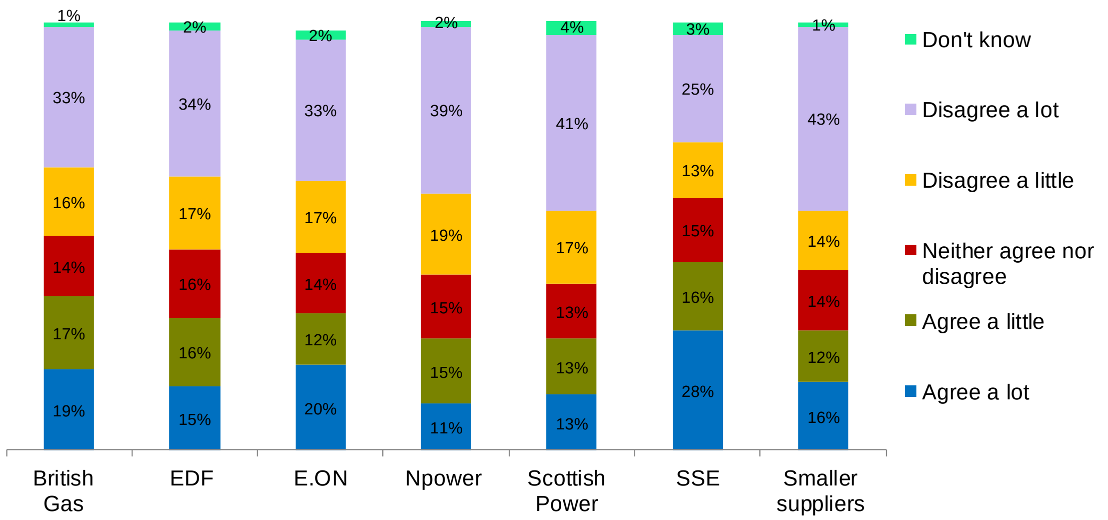


H7. Thinking about the way they have handled your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree that …(provider) has treated you fairly?

Base: All Domestic: Resolved 1,326, Not resolved 1,131

Looking at results by individual supplier, only SSE customers were more likely to agree than disagree that they had been treated fairly. Customers of Scottish Power, npower and the smaller suppliers tended to be more critical of the way they were treated.

Figure 52: Agreement that supplier has treated them fairly – domestic customers by supplier

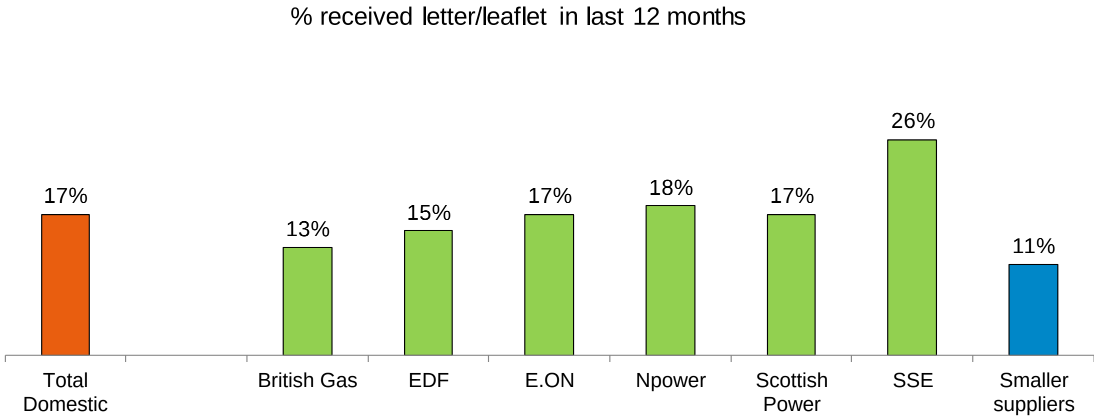


H7. Thinking about the way they have handled your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree that …(provider) has treated you fairly?

Base: All: Domestic, British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers 265

Just 17% of domestic and 15% of micro business customers recalled receiving a letter or leaflet from their energy supplier in the last 12 months about the requirement to treat customers fairly. SSE domestic customers were more likely to have received such a letter or leaflet, but still in only a minority of cases.

Figure 53: % received a letter/leaflet about requirement to treat them fairly (Domestic customers)



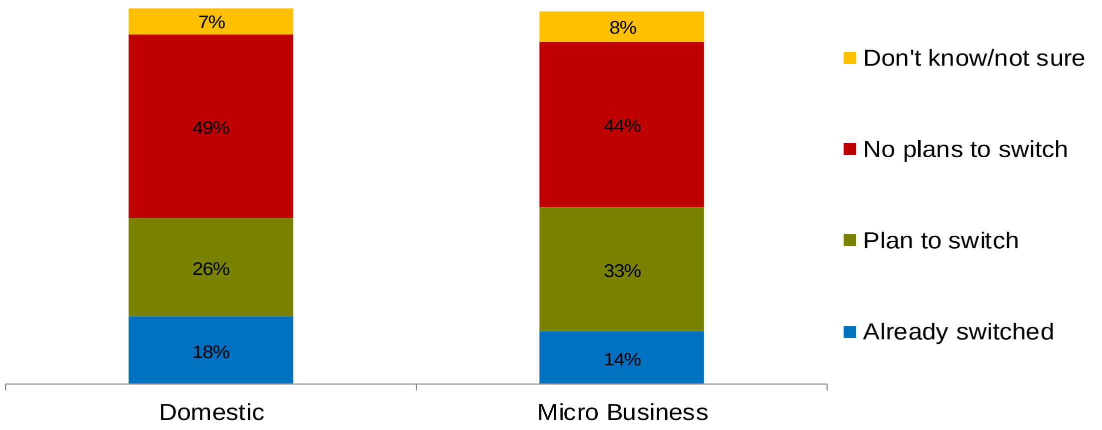
H8. In the last 12 months, have you received a letter or leaflet from your energy supplier about their requirement to treat customers fairly?

Base: All: Domestic – 2,457, British Gas – 376, EDF –358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers – 265

8.2 Impact of complaint experience on customer switching

Nearly half of customers had either switched or planned to switch supplier as a result of their complaint experience, and some had already switched to another supplier (18% of domestic and 14% of micro business customers).

Figure 54: Whether switched or plan to switch supplier

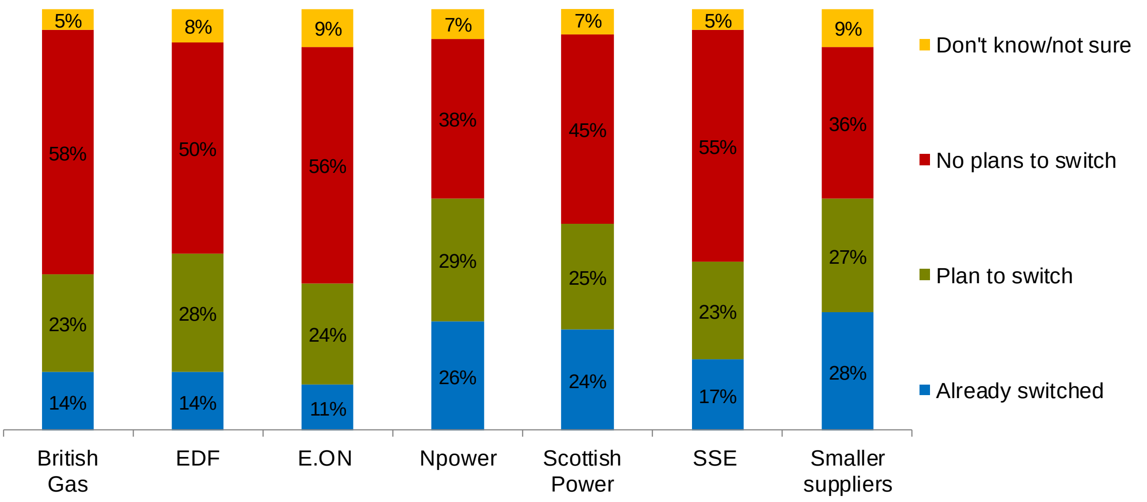


H9. Have you switched or do you plan to switch energy supplier , as a result of your experience with this complaint?

Base: All: Domestic 2457, Micro 287

Npower, Scottish Power and smaller supplier domestic customers were most likely to have switched already as a result of their experience.

Figure 55: Whether switched or plan to switch supplier

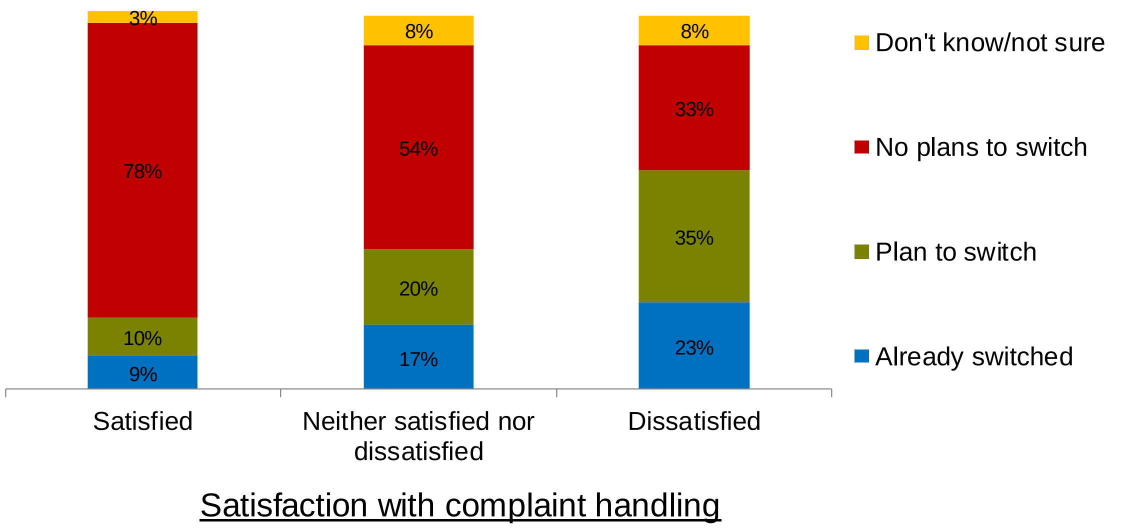


H9. Have you switched or do you plan to switch energy supplier, as a result of your experience with this complaint?

Base: All: Domestic, British Gas – 376, EDF – 358, E.ON – 362, Npower 382, Scottish Power – 361, SSE – 353, Smaller suppliers – 265

There is a clear correlation between satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled and propensity to switch supplier. The majority of dissatisfied customers had already switched or planned to switch, whilst over three in four satisfied customers had no plans to switch supplier.

Figure 56: Whether switched or plan to switch supplier – domestic customers by level of satisfaction with complaint handling



H9. Have you switched or do you plan to switch energy supplier, as a result of your experience with this complaint?

Base: All Domestic: Satisfied – 733, Neither/nor – 307, Dissatisfied –1405

However, potentially vulnerable groups, who were as dissatisfied as other customers with the way their complaint had been handled, were less likely to have switched supplier as a result of their experience. Significantly fewer had already switched supplier among those who were: social grade DEs (12%); unemployed (13%); living in a household with an income of less than £10,000 (11%); with a disability (12%); of non-white ethnic origin (12%). This may reflect less confidence about how to switch supplier among potentially vulnerable groups.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

Consumers have become more critical of the way energy suppliers are handling their complaints relative to the research conducted in 2012. Whether this reflects poorer service from suppliers, or raised consumer expectations or more hostile opinion of energy suppliers in general, is open to debate, but it is clear that consumers' expectations are currently not being met.

There appears to be no marked difference in supplier complaint handling performance, in that dissatisfaction is evident across the whole of the industry, including the small suppliers (the exception is SSE where customer opinion is more neutral). It is difficult therefore to identify any particularly good practices or processes that could serve as a benchmark for the industry.

However, the research has shown clearly where action needs to be taken to improve customer satisfaction with complaint handling. The key priorities for suppliers are to: **improve the speed of problem resolution**; **take a more proactive approach towards resolving complaints and empower staff to take remedial action to resolve the complaint on first contact**; and **improve the communication to customers of what is happening during the complaints process**.

There is still a very sizeable complaint Resolution Gap throughout the industry. Many consumers do not feel their complaint has been resolved even though the supplier thinks it has been. There will inevitably be some consumers who will refuse to accept the supplier's view on resolution on the grounds that they do not like the outcome, or will want to wait until they see evidence of resolution in their next bill. However, suppliers providing clear written communication to the customer of their stance on the complaint in terms of it being resolved, or not, will help eradicate the current confusion and ultimately serve to close this resolution gap.

Appendices

Appendix A - Complainant profile

Figure 57: Gender and Age – Domestic Customers

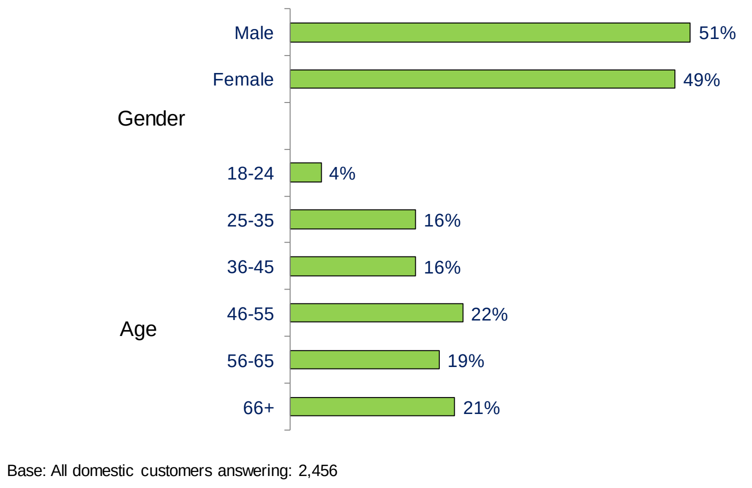


Figure 58: Working Status and Social Grade – Domestic Customers

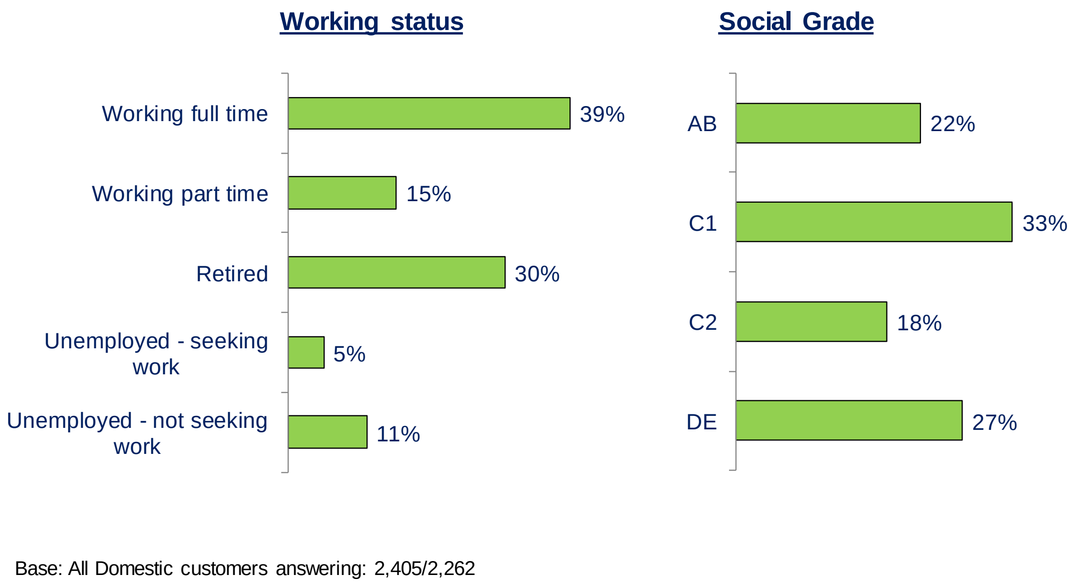
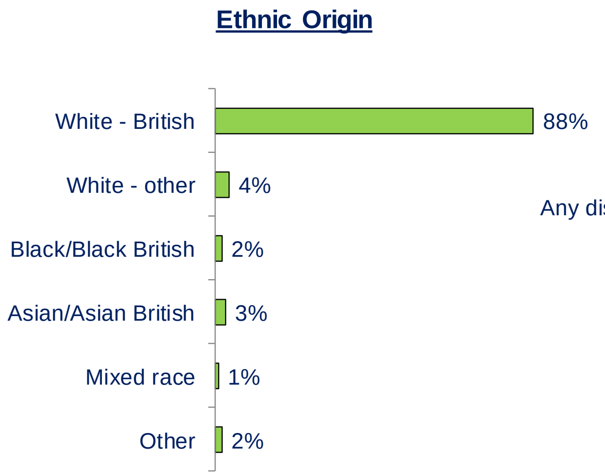
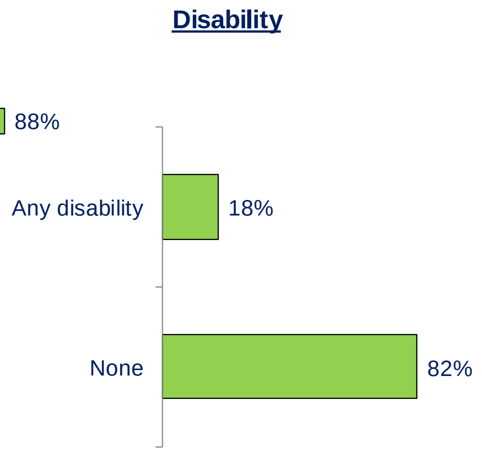


Figure 59: Ethnicity and Disability – Domestic Customers

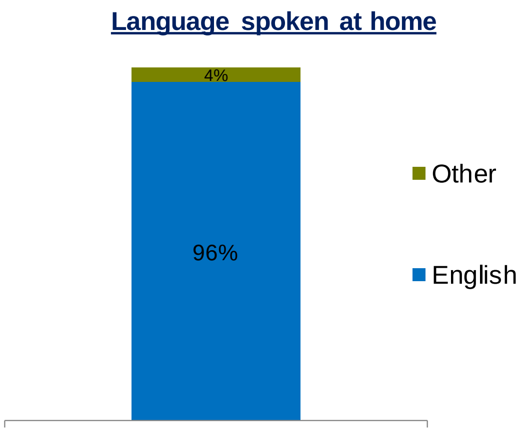


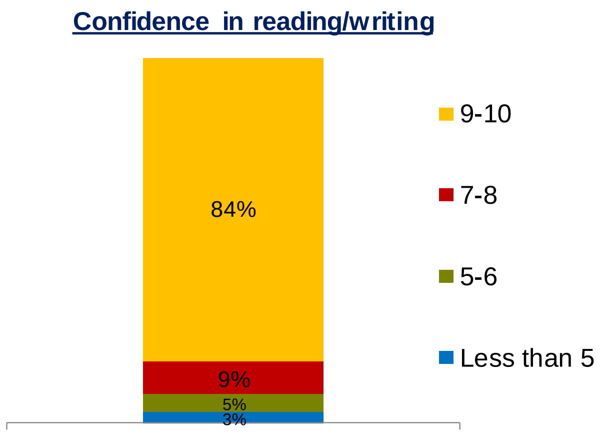


J6. To which of these ethnic groups do you belong?
J7. Do you have any long term physical or mental impairment which limits your daily activity or the work you can do including problems due to old age?

Base: All Domestic customers answering: 2,340/2,347

Figure 60: Language spoken and confidence in reading and writing – Domestic customers

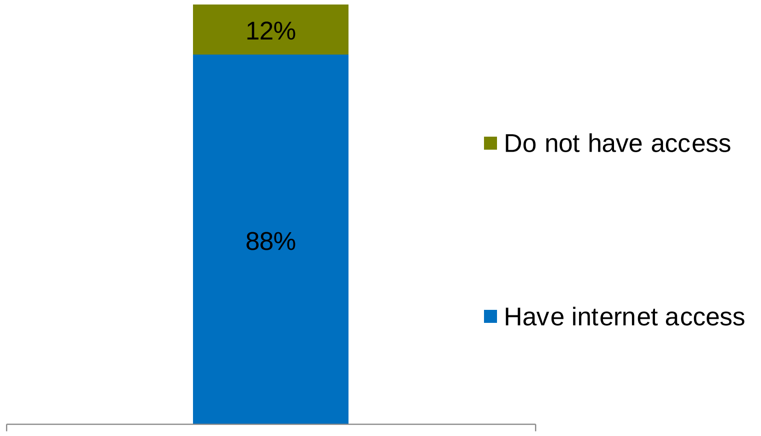




J8. Language spoken at home
J10. (On a scale of 1 to10) how confident do you feel about reading and writing?

Base: All domestic customers answering: 2,389/2,339

Figure 61: Internet access – Domestic customers

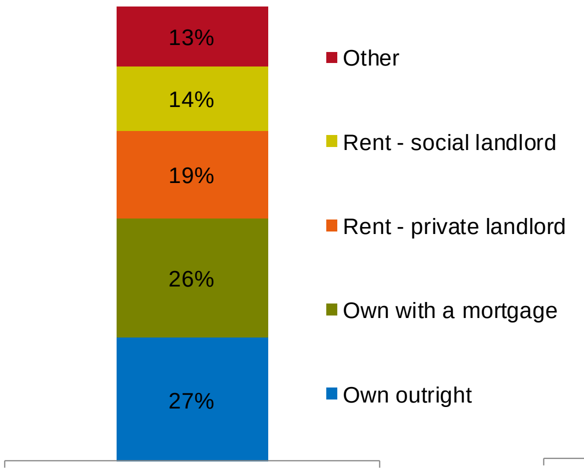


J9. Do you have access to the internet, either at home or at work?

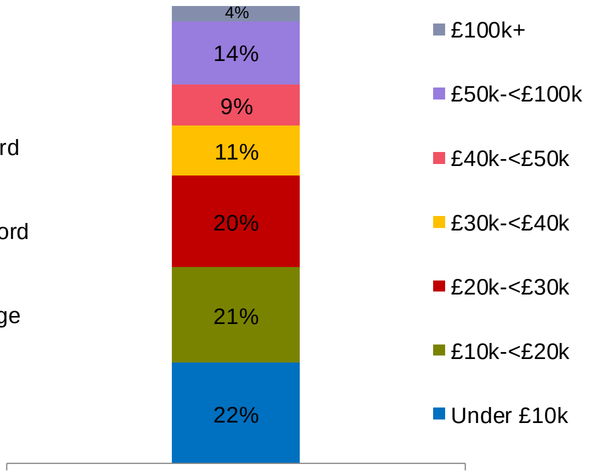
Base: All domestic customers answering: 2393

Figure 62: Property ownership and household income – Domestic customers

Property ownership



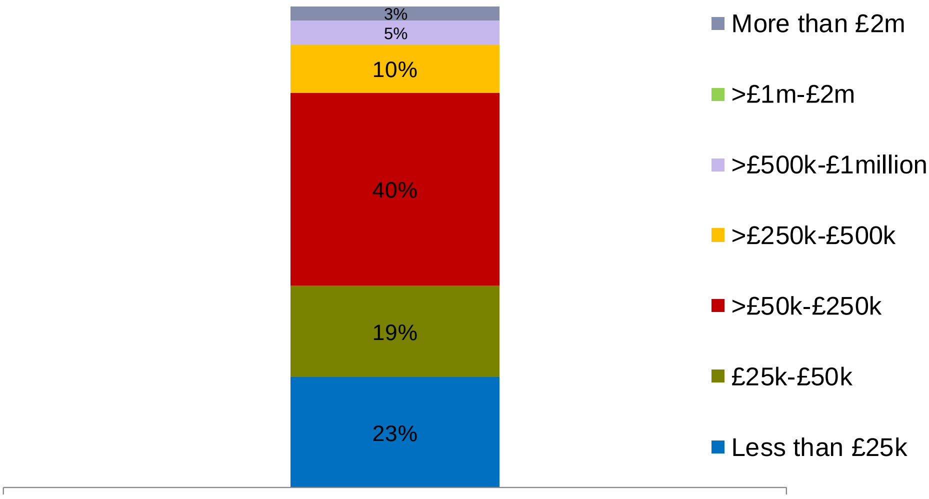
Annual household income



J11. Do you .....? J13. What is your annual household income before tax?

Base: All Domestic customers answering: 2,454/1,490

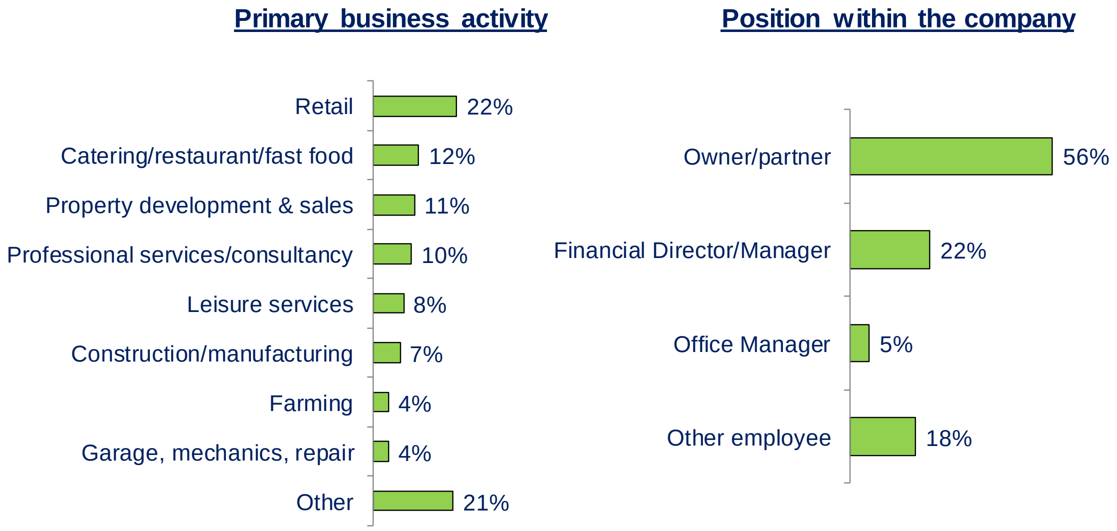
Figure 63: Annual turnover – Micro Business



J14. What is your organisation's approximate annual turnover?

Base: All Business customers answering: 230

Figure 64: Business Demographics – Micro Business



J15. What is your primary business activity? J16. What is your position within the company?
Base: All Business customers answering: 288

Appendix B - Quantitative questionnaire

OFGEM – EXPERIENCE OF COMPLAINTS HANDLING

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

FINAL VERSION: 3 February, 2014

A INTRODUCTION AND SCREENER

IF NAMED DOMESTIC CUSTOMER OR MICRO BUSINESS WITH NAMED CONTACT:

Good morning/afternoon. Could I please speak to ……. (INSERT NAME FROM SAMPLE)

My name is ….. and I am calling from GfK NOP, the research company. We are currently carrying out a project on behalf of the energy regulator Ofgem into energy suppliers' handling of recent customer complaints. Could you please spare 10 – 15 minutes to answer some questions?

IF MICRO BUSINESS AND NOT NAMED CONTACT

Good morning/afternoon. My name is ….. and I am calling from GfK NOP, the research company. We are currently carrying out a project on behalf of the energy regulator Ofgem into energy suppliers' handling of recent customer complaints? Please could I speak to the person within your organisation who is responsible for managing your energy supply.

ADD REASSURANCES AS NECESSARY:

- This is a genuine research survey to find out customer views of how they are treated by their energy supplier
- No attempt will be made to sell you anything, either now or during the course of the interview
- Your answers will be kept confidential, nothing you say will be attributable to you

Continue

Continue at later date – make appointment

Referral

Refused

IF DOMESTIC CUSTOMER OR MICRO BUSINESS CUSTOMER WITH NAMED CONTACT:

A 1 Energy suppliers are required to record any expression of dissatisfaction made to them by a consumer as a complaint. I believe that you made a complaint to an energy supplier in December 2013, is that correct?

1. Yes
2. Yes – on behalf of someone else
3. No

ASK A2 IF NO COMPLAINT MADE (A1 Code 3), OTHERS SEE INSTRUCTION AFTER A2.

A 2 Can I just check, did you contact your energy supplier in December 2013 in connection with an earlier complaint?

1. Yes
2. No

MICRO BUSINESS – IF COMPLAINT MADE (A1 OR A2 CODE 1) CONTINUE TO A6

DOMESTIC – IF COMPLAINT MADE (A1 CODE 1) CONTINUE TO SECTION B.

IF NO COMPLAINT MADE (A2 CODE 2), THANK & CLOSE.

ASK ALL MICRO BUSINESSES WITH NO NAMED CONTACT

A 3 Energy suppliers are required to record any expression of dissatisfaction made to them by a consumer as a complaint. I believe that someone from your business made a complaint to an energy supplier in December 2013 is that correct?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not a business

ASK A4 IF NO COMPLAINT MADE (A3 CODE 2), OTHERS SEE INSTRUCTION AFTER A4.

A 4 Can I just check, did someone from your business contact your energy supplier in December 2013 in connection with an earlier complaint?

1. Yes
2. No

INTERVIEWER: IF MADE A COMPLAINT (A3 OR A4 CODE 1), ASK TO SPEAK TO COMPLAINANT AND REPEAT AS MICRO BUSINESS WITH NAMED CONTACT FROM A1.

IF NO COMPLAINT MADE (A4 CODE 2), THANK AND CLOSE.

IF NOT A BUSINESS (A3 CODE 3), GO TO A5

ASK A5 IF NOT A BUSINESS (A3 CODE 3)

A 5 Was a complaint made relating to a home energy supplier?

1. Yes
2. Yes – on behalf of someone else
3. No

IF YES (A5 CODE 1 OR 2), ASK TO SPEAK TO COMPLAINANT AND REPEAT AS CONSUMER RESPONDENT FROM A1.

IF NO (A5 CODE 3) THANK & CLOSE.

ASK ALL MICROBUSINESS RESPONDENTS

A 6 And can I confirm, was your complaint related to the energy supplied to your business or to your home?

1. Business
2. Home

IF HOME (A6 CODE 2), CONTINUE AS A DOMESTIC CUSTOMER (GO TO SECTION B)

ASK ALL MICRO BUSINESS RESPONDENTS

A 7 And how many full time employees do you have?

INTERVIEWER: CODE FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT NUMBER

1. 1
2. 2-5
3. 6-9
4. 10+
5. Don’t know/not sure

CONTINUE IF 9 OR LESS EMPLOYEES (CODES 1-3 AT A7). REST THANK AND CLOSE

B CLASSIFICATION & NATURE OF COMPLAINT

ASK ALL

Ofgem would like to understand a little more about your experience of making a complaint and how satisfied you were with both the process and the way in which your complaint was handled.

B 1 With which supplier did you make this complaint?

1. Atlantic
2. British Gas
3. Co-op
4. EDF Energy
5. E.ON
6. Electricity Plus Supply
7. First Utility
8. Gas Plus Supply
9. Npower
10. Ovo Energy
11. Scottish Gas
12. Southern Electric
13. Scottish Power
14. Scottish & Southern Electric (SSE)
15. Swalec
16. Telecom Plus
17. Utility Warehouse
18. Other (Please specify)

ASK ALL

B 2 And was this complaint related to your gas, to your electricity or to both?
SINGLE CODE

1. Gas
2. Electricity
3. Both
4. Something else (please specify)
5. Don't know/can't remember

IF DON'T KNOW (CODE 5 AT B2) THANK & CLOSE. REST CONTINUE

ASK ALL

B 3 What was your recent complaint to ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) about? DO NOT READ OUT BUT CODE ACCORDINGLY, MULTICODE

1. Billing – accuracy of bill
2. Billing – estimated bill
3. Billing – frequency
4. Billing – refunds

5. Sales – behaviour of sales staff
6. Sales – mis-information provided
7. Sales – agreed to receive information only

8. Transfer – problems switching to supplier
9. Transfer – problems switching from supplier

10. Meters – accuracy of meter
11. Meters – position of meter
12. Meters – meter readings

13. Prices – notification of increases
14. Prices – amount of increase
15. Prices – direct debits
16. Prices – standing charges
17. Price – no longer fixed

18. Debt – debt recovery/can't pay the bill
19. Debt – debt payment schemes
20. Debt – disconnection

21. Prepayment meters e.g. setting, faults, use
22. Customer service – general
23. Internet /website problems
24. Other (please specify)
25. Don't know/can't remember

IF DON'T KNOW/CAN'T REMEMBER (CODE 25 AT B3) THANK & CLOSE. REST CONTINUE.

ASK ALL

B 4 On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means it was not very serious and 10 means it was very serious, could you tell me how serious you felt your complaint was? ADD IF NECESSARY: The higher the number, the more serious you considered the complaint.

INTERVIEWER: WRITE IN NUMBER

C CONTACTING THE SUPPLIER

ASK ALL

C 1 How did you find the contact information that you used to make your complaint?

DO NOT READ OUT BUT PROMPT IF NECESSARY. MULTICODE

1. On bill or account statement
2. Supplier website
3. Other website
4. Other form of communication from supplier
5. Referred from other department within supplier e.g. accounts, meter reading
6. Consumer Futures
7. Citizens Advice consumer service
8. Copy of suppliers' Complaints Handling procedure
9. Energy Ombudsman
10. Citizens Advice Bureau
11. Age UK
12. Friends/Family
13. Other (please specify)
14. Don't know

C 2 How easy or difficult did you find it to get hold of the correct contact details to make your complaint?

READ OUT

1. Very easy
2. Quite easy
3. Neither easy, nor difficult
4. Quite difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

ASK ALL WHO FOUND IT VERY EASY OR QUITE/VERY DIFFICULT (CODES 1, 4 OR 5 AT C2)

C 3 Why do you say that?

PROBE FULLY

Easy

1. Information on bill/letter/contract
2. Information was easy to find
3. Information/number on the website

Difficult

4. Information/details difficult to find
5. Given wrong number
6. Got different/conflicting information

7. Other (SPECIFY)
8. Don't know/not sure

ASK ALL

C 4 In which of the following ways did you contact ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) when making your complaint? READ OUT

RANDOMISE, MULTICODE

1. Telephone
2. Email
3. Letter
4. Fax
5. Supplier’s website
6. Facebook/Twitter
7. Review sites
8. Other (please specify)
9. I did not make contact (DO NOT READ OUT)
10. Don’t know (DO NOT READ OUT)

C 5 In which of the following ways did ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) contact you when handling your complaint? READ OUT

RANDOMISE, MULTICODE

1. Telephone
2. Email
3. Letter
4. Fax
5. Supplier’s website
6. Facebook/Twitter
7. Review sites
8. Other (please specify)
9. Supplier did not make contact
10. Don’t know

C 6 Approximately how many times did you contact (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) in connection with this complaint?

TYPE IN NUMBER OF OCCASIONS

C 7 And how many times did (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) contact you in connection with this complaint?

TYPE IN NUMBER OF OCCASIONS

C 8 How many people at (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) were involved in handling your complaint, was it the same person throughout or more than one person?

1. Same person
2. More than one person
3. Don’t know

ASK C9 IF COMPLAINT HANDLED BY MORE THAN ONE PERSON (C8 CODE 2). REST GO TO C10.

C 9 Roughly how many different people were involved?

TYPE IN NUMBER

ASK ALL

C 10 Did you experience any problems in finding the right person to handle your complaint, or not?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Can't remember

ASK C11 IF EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS WITH FINDING RIGHT PERSON (C10 CODE 2). REST GO TO INSTRUCTION BEFORE C12.

C 11 What problems did you experience?

ASK C12 IF COMPLAINT HANDLED BY MORE THAN ONE PERSON (C8 CODE 2). OTHERS GO TO D1.

C 12 Did you have to escalate your concern at any time to a senior member of staff or a manager?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ASK IF ESCALATED THEIR CONCERN TO A SENIOR MEMBER OF STAFF (C12 CODE 1). OTHERS GO TO D1.

C 13 Did escalating your concern have a positive impact, a negative impact, or did it make no difference to the way in which your complaint was handled?

1. Positive impact
2. Negative impact
3. No difference
4. Don't know

D RESOLVING THE COMPLAINT

ASK ALL

D 1 During the complaints process, did (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1)…..?

READ OUT, MULTICODE

1. Direct you to their Complaints Handling procedure on their website
2. Offer you a copy of their Complaints Handling procedure free of charge
3. Give you a named contact who would be responsible for handling your complaint
4. Update you on the progress or status of your complaint whilst waiting for it to be resolved
5. Offer you a facility to track the status of your complaint online
6. Give you a timescale to say how long it would take to look into your complaint
7. None of these

ASK D2-D3 IF GIVEN A TIMESCALE (D1 CODE 6). REST GO TO INSTRUCTION BEFORE D4.

D 2 You say you were given a timescale, how long did (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) say it would take to look into your complaint?

DO NOT READ OUT BUT PROMPT IF NECESSARY

1. Same day
2. Within 1 day
3. Within 2 days
4. Between 3 and 7 days (within a week)
5. 8-14 days (within a fortnight
6. 15-28 days (within a month)
7. Longer than 28 days
8. Don't know

D 3 Did ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) keep to this timescale?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ASK D4 IF COMPLAINED IN WRITING (C4 CODES 2-7). REST GO TO INSTRUCTION BEFORE D5

D 4 Thinking about when you made your complaint to ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) in writing, did you receive confirmation, by letter, email or telephone that your complaint had been received and would be addressed?

MULTICODE

1. Yes – letter
2. Yes – email
3. Yes – telephone
4. None of these
5. Don't know

ASK D5 IF CONTACTED SUPPLIER MORE THAN ONCE (C6 = >1). REST GO TO D7

D 5 You mentioned earlier that you contacted (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) more than once about your complaint. Did you contact them by phone at any time after your first contact?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ASK D6 IF CONTACTED SUPPLIER BY PHONE IN SUBSEQUENT CONTACT (D5 CODE 1). REST GO TO D7.

D 6 When you made further contact by telephone, did they have any of the following details about you and your complaint?

READ OUT, MULTICODE

1. Correct contact details
2. A record of your complaint
3. Full details about the complaint
4. None of these

ASK ALL

D 7 Would you say your complaint was resolved, not resolved, or is it still ongoing? SINGLE CODE ONLY

INTERVIEWER: IF "NOT RESOLVED", PROBE THAT COMPLAINT IS <u>NOT</u> STILL ON-GOING

1. Resolved
2. Not resolved
3. Still on-going
4. Not sure

D 8 Did you take your complaint to the Energy Ombudsman that investigates complaints on behalf of consumers?

1. Yes
2. No

ASK IF RESOLVED **<u>AND</u>** TOOK COMPLAINT TO THE OMBUDSMAN (D7 CODE 1 **AND** D8 CODE 1). OTHERS GO TO INSTRUCTION AT SECTION E

D 9 Was your complaint resolved by the Energy Ombudsman or by (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1)?

1. Energy Ombudsman
2. Supplier
3. Both (combination)
4. Don't know

E RESOLVED COMPLAINTS

THIS SECTION ASKED IF COMPLAINT RESOLVED (D7 CODE 1).

E 1 How long did it take for your complaint to be resolved?

1. Same day
2. Within 1 day
3. Within 2 days
4. Between 3 and 7 days (within a week)
5. 8-14 days (within a fortnight
6. 15-28 days (within a month)
7. Longer than 28 days
8. Don’t know

E 2 Did you receive any confirmation, at the time or after, either by telephone or in writing, that your complaint had been resolved?

READ OUT, MULTICODE

1. Yes – telephone
2. Yes – letter
3. Yes – email
4. None of these

F NOT RESOLVED COMPLAINTS

THIS SECTION ASKED IF COMPLAINT NOT RESOLVED OR ON-GOING OR NOT SURE (D7 CODE 2, 3, OR 4).

F 1 You say that your complaint has not been resolved, have any of the following taken place?

READ OUT, MULTICODE

1. (SUPPLIER FROM B1) made you aware of Consumer Futures
2. (SUPPLIER FROM B1) made you aware of the Energy Ombudsman
3. (SUPPLIER FROM B1) made you aware of Citizens Advice consumer service
4. (SUPPLIER FROM B1) made you aware of additional sources of information and advice (please specify)
5. You contacted another organisation (please specify)
6. Anything else (please specify)
7. No further action taken place
8. Don’t know

F 2 Were you aware of the Energy Ombudsman prior to you making a complaint to ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1)

1. Yes
2. No

F 3 Did ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) provide you with a letter informing you about the Energy Ombudsman?

1. Yes
2. No

F 4 What is happening with your complaint now? PROBE: What else?

DO NOT READ OUT, BUT PROBE TO PRECODES. MULTICODE PROBE TO NEGATIVE

1. Nothing, not heard from supplier/still unresolved
2. Still waiting for a response
3. Still ongoing
4. I have given up
5. Waiting for the next bill
6. Waiting for an engineer
7. I need to get back in touch with the supplier
8. The supplier is trying to do something
9. Waiting for vouchers/discount/credit
10. Supplier demanding money/debt collection
11. Have changed/going to change supplier
12. Other (Write in)
13. Don’t know/not sure

ASK F5 IF COMPLAINT ONGOING, NOT RESOLVED OR RESPONDENT NOT SURE, AND SUPPLIER THINKS RESOLVED (D7 CODE 2,3 OR 4 AND FLAGGED AS RESOLVED IN SAMPLE). REST GO TO SECTION G

F 5 We understand that ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) believes your complaint has been resolved. Have you received any communication from ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) to say that your complaint has been resolved?

1. Yes – telephone
2. Yes – letter
3. Yes – email
4. None of these

F 6 Please tell us why you do not feel your complaint has been resolved?
PROBE FULLY

G COMPLAINTS PROCESS

ASK ALL

G 1 I would now like to talk about the service that you received from ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) and the way in which you felt your complaint was handled.

For each statement that I read out, I would like you to tell me how satisfied you were with the service that you received using a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means that you were very dissatisfied and 5 means you were very satisfied.

ADD IF NECESSARY: So the higher the number, the more satisfied you were.

READ OUT. RANDOMISE ORDER BETWEEN INTERVIEWS

1. Ease of registering your complaint
2. Ease of finding the correct person to speak to/ contact
3. Their attitude towards dealing with your complaint
4. Their professionalism in dealing with your complaint
5. Their understanding of your complaint or problem
6. They treated you as an individual and considered your personal needs and circumstances
7. Taking a proactive approach to resolving your complaint
8. The language used was simple and easy to understand – not too technical
9. The feeling that someone had taken ownership of your complaint
10. Their ability to make decisions there and then to help resolve your complaint
11. Clearly informing you of the next steps and associated timings in resolving your complaint
12. Calling you back if promised or agreed
13. Being provided with further contact details to discuss the complaint if necessary
14. The speed in resolving your complaint

H OVERALL SATISFACTION

ASK ALL

H 1 Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you overall with the way in which your complaint has been handled by ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1). Would you say …..

READ OUT

1. Very satisfied
2. Quite satisfied
3. Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied
4. Quite dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK H2 IF VERY SATISFIED, OR VERY/QUITE DISSATISFIED (H1 CODES 1, 4 OR 5)

H 2 Why do you say that? IF DISSATISFIED **(H1 CODES 4 OR 5) THEN ALSO ASK:** What could ….. (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) have done differently to have made you satisfied with the service? **MULTICODE**

DO NOT READ OUT. CODE TO PRE CODES.

Satisfied:

1. Helpful staff
2. Dealt with/resolved quickly
3. Problem resolved
4. Result as I hoped for/better than I hoped for
5. Good communication/kept informed

Dissatisfied:

1. Unresolved/not dealt with
2. Lack of/poor communication
3. Staff unhelpful/bad attitude
4. Process took too long
5. Did not keep their promise
6. Better/clearer explanation needed
7. Do not listen/not interested

8. Other (SPECIFY)
9. Don't know/not sure

ASK ALL

H 3 And how satisfied are you with the outcome of your complaint,(IF COMPLAINT NOT RESOLVED D7 CODE 3 OR 4) …. so far? Would you say ….

READ OUT AND SINGLE CODE

1. Very satisfied
2. Quite satisfied
3. Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied
4. Quite dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

H 4 Thinking about the outcome to your complaint, did you <u>expect</u> to receive any of the following having made a complaint?

READ OUT, MULTICODE

1. Nothing expected
2. Rectification of problem
3. Apology letter or email
4. Apology telephone call
5. Compensation or apology payment
6. Anything else (please specify)
7. Don't know

ASK H5 OF ALL EXCEPT THOSE STILL ON-GOING (D7 CODE 3). REST GO TO H7

H 5 And did you receive anything?

MULTICODE

1. Nothing received
2. Rectification of problem
3. Apology letter or email
4. Apology telephone call
5. Compensation or apology payment
6. Anything else (please specify)
7. Don't know

ASK H6 IF RECEIVED SOMETHING (H5 CODES 2-6). REST GO TO G7

H 6 How satisfied are you that what you received adequately reflects the problems that you have encountered? Would you say ….

READ OUT AND SINGLE CODE

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied
4. Quite dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

Don't know

ASK ALL

H 7 Thinking about the way they have handled your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree that (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) has treated you fairly? Do you …..

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

1. Agree a lot
2. Agree a little
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree a little
5. Disagree a lot
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

H 8 In the last 12 months, have you received a letter or leaflet from your energy supplier about their requirement to treat customers fairly?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Can't remember

H 9 Have you switched, or do you plan to switch energy supplier, as a result of your experience with this complaint, or not?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

1. Already switched
2. Plan to switch
3. No plans to switch
4. Don't know/Not sure

I RECENT COMPLAINTS

ASK ALL

I 1 Have you made a complaint, excluding the one we have talked about today, to any of the following types of company or organisation in the last 12 months?

READ OUT / CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Energy supplier
2. Water company
3. Telephone provider
4. Internet service provider
5. Bank or Building Society
6. Transport company e.g. trains or buses
7. Local council
8. Anyone else (please specify)
9. Don't know/ None of these

ASK I2 IF MADE A COMPLAINT TO NON-ENERGY COMPANIES (I1 CODES 2 TO 8). OTHERS GO TO I3

I 2 Comparing your complaints experience with (INSERT SUPPLIER FROM B1) against the … (INSERT FROM I1), would you say …

READ OUT, SINGLE CODE

1 (Insert supplier from B1) was worse
2 About the same
3 (Insert supplier from B1) was better

REPEAT I2 FOR EACH OTHER TYPE OF ORGANISTION COMPLAINED TO IN LAST 12 MONTHS

I3 Have you ever made a complaint to (SUPPLIER AT B1) before?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Can't remember

ASK I4 IF MADE A COMPLAINT BEFORE (I3 CODE 1). REST GO TO SECTION J.

I4 How does the way that (SUPPLIER AT B1) handled the complaint we have been talking about today compare against previous complaints you have made to them? Would you say your recent complaint has been handled …

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

1. Much better
2. A little better
3. About the same
4. A little worse
5. Much worse

J CLASSIFICATION

ASK ALL DOMESTIC CUSTOMERS (AS DEFINED IN THE SAMPLE).

J 1 The final questions are for classification purposes only. Please could you tell me your age?

1. 18 - 24
2. 25 - 35
3. 36 - 45
4. 46 - 55
5. 56 - 65
6. 66+
7. Declined to answer

J 2 INTERVIEWER RECORD – DO NOT READ OUT

1. Male
2. Female

J 3 Which of the following best describes your current working status? READ OUT

1. Working – full time (30+ hours)
2. Working – part time (8 – 29 hours)
3. Unemployed – seeking work
4. Unemployed – not seeking work
5. Retired
6. Decline to answer

J 4 Which of the following best describes the area where you live?
READ OUT

1. Urban
2. Suburban
3. Rural
4. Decline to answer

J 5 What is your marital status?
READ OUT

1. Married/living with partner
2. Single
3. Separated/Divorced/Widowed
4. Decline to answer

J 6 To which of these ethnic groups do you belong?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

1. White – British
2. White – Other
3. Black/Black British
4. Asian/Asian British
5. Mixed Race
6. Other
7. Refused (DO NOT READ OUT)

J 7 Do you have any long term physical or mental impairment which limits your daily activities or the work you can do, including problems due to old age?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Refused

J 8 Is English the first language spoken at home, or not?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Refused

J 9 Do you have access to the internet, either at home or at work?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

1. At home
2. At work
3. Both
4. No internet access
5. Refused

J 10 On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all confident and 10 is extremely confident, how confident are you about reading and writing?

ADD IF NECESSARY: The higher the number the more confident you feel.
INTERVIEWER: CODE NUMBER OR REFUSED

J 11 Do you ….

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

1. Own your house outright
2. Own your house but with a mortgage
3. Rent your property from a private landlord
4. Rent your property from a social landlord
5. Other

J 12 What is the occupation of the CHIEF INCOME EARNER in your household?

PROBE FOR:
JOB TITLE:
JOB DESCRIPTION:
INDUSTRY:
QUALIFICATIONS:
SIZE OF COMPANY:
NUMBER OF PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE FOR:

CODE SOCIAL GRADE

1. AB
2. C1
3. C2
4. DE
5. Unclassifiable

J 13 What is your annual household income before tax?

READ OUT CODE BY CODE, STOP WHEN RESPONDENTS SAYS YES AT APPROPRIATE BAND.

1. Under £10,000
2. £10,000-19,999
3. £20,000-29,999
4. £30,000-39,999
5. £40,000-49,999
6. £50,000 - £99,999
7. £100,000+
8. Refused

ASK ALL MICRO BUSINESS CUSTOMERS (AS DEFINED IN THE SAMPLE)

J 14 What is your company's approximate annual turnover?

1. Less than £25,000
2. £25,000 to £50,000
3. £50,001 to £250,000
4. £250,001 to £500,000
5. £500,001 to £1 million
6. £1 million to £2 million
7. More than £2 million

(b) Decline to answer

J 15 What is your primary business activity?
PROBE TO PRECODES

1. Catering/restaurant/fast food
2. Construction/manufacturing
3. Farming
4. Garage, mechanics, repair
5. Leisure services
6. Professional/Consultancy services
7. Property Development & Sales
8. Retail
9. Other (Write In)

J 16 What is your position within the company?
PROBE TO PRECODES

1. Owner/partner
2. Financial Director/Manager
3. Office Manager
4. Other employee

ASK ALL

J 17 Thank you very much for your help. Would you be willing to be contacted again about this subject, if it were necessary?

1. Yes
2. No

Appendix C - Qualitative discussion guide

Below is a shortened version of the qualitative discussion guide that was used in the qualitative interviews. The version below includes the main questions that were asked, but does not include any prompts or the exercises used.

Objective:

Further explore the resolution gap between complaints that suppliers think are resolved, and that customers think are unresolved. Key issues for exploration are:

- Reasons why participants do not believe their complaint is resolved
- Role of communications in determining whether something is resolved
  - Reassurances/ confirmation that it is resolved
  - Apology/ compensation
- Communication/ customer service during complaint. Exploring satisfaction with, and how the following could be improved:
  - Transparency
  - Explanation of what is happening/ decisions/ outcomes
  - Short-term fixes
  - Fairness
  - Other aspects that made a big impact
    - Proactivity of staff
    - Call backs when promised
    - Difficulty getting through/ time taken to get through
    - One point of contact
    - Tone of staff
    - Account details up to date (this refers to the individual's details being up to date e.g. correct email address)
    - 0845 number

Participants:

- 2 x customers from each of: British Gas; EDF; E.ON; Npower; Scottish and Southern Electric; Scottish Power
- To include 2 x micro-business customers
- To include 2 x vulnerable customers

1. Introductions 2 minutes

- Thank participant for taking part. Introduce self and GfK: independent researchers working on behalf of Ofgem the energy regulator.
- Explain purpose of the discussion: I understand that you recently took part in a survey for GfK on behalf of Ofgem. The survey was about a complaint you recently made to your energy supplier (in December last year). We are now speaking to people to get some further detail about how you feel your complaint was dealt with. This will help Ofgem understand how customers are being treated by their suppliers, with a view to improving this in future.
- Our discussion will last 45 minutes.

- As a thank you, we will send a £20 cheque in the post, so I will ask for your postal address at the end of our discussion.
- Reassure: confidentiality and MRS Code of Conduct
- Check: audio recording
- Any questions?

2. The complaint 3 minutes

To start with, please can you briefly re-cap on your complaint…

- Who did you make the complaint to?
- When did you make the complaint?
- What was the complaint about?
- How did you contact them?
- What happened?
- What is the situation now?
- How do you feel about the current situation?

3. Transparency and explanation 10 minutes

Thinking about your complaint…

- To what extent do you feel that you understood what was happening with your complaint?
  - Was the complaint process made clear to you at the start?
    - If yes, did the complaint subsequently follow this process?
    - Were there any specific difficulties at any particular points in the process?
  - How much information do you feel you were given?
  - Too much/ too little?
  - Too often/not often enough?
  - What was missing?

- To what extent do you feel you were given an explanation about why the issue that you had complained about had happened?
  - What was explained well?
  - What was not explained well?
  - How important is it for this to be explained? Why?

- To what extent do you feel you understood decisions made regarding your complaint?
  - Firstly, how do you feel about the decisions the supplier made about how to address the issue you had complained about?
    - How could this have been improved?
  - Secondly, how do you feel about the decisions that were made about how to handle your complaint?
    - How could this have been improved?

4. The resolution gap 15 minutes

- When we spoke to you during the survey, you mentioned that your complaint has not been resolved…
    - Why do you say that?
    - What would need to happen for you to consider it resolved?
- How will you know when the complaint is resolved?
    - *Moderator: please allow for any spontaneous mention of supplier communications here.*
- Has anyone at the supplier talked about your complaint being resolved or asked you if you are satisfied with the action they have taken & the complaint can be closed?
    - What did they say/ when?
    - Have they used the word 'resolved' or 'closed'?
        - When?
        - What do you think about this?
    - What would you expect them to say?
    - Do you think that they consider the complaint resolved?
        - Why/ why not?
    - Do you think you were treated fairly?
        - Why/ why not?
    - Is there anything you think they could have done to ensure you were treated more fairly?

- How important do you feel it is for your supplier to discuss with you whether the complaint is resolved /closed or not?
    - *Moderator: please tease out any differences between being told that it is resolved vs closed and whether participants distinguish between these*
    - Why is it important?
    - What difference would it make to you as a customer?
    - Are there particular situations when it is more important to discuss whether the complaint is resolved or closed?
    - In what circumstances is it important?
    - In what circumstances is it not important?

- To what extent do you expect to receive confirmation from the supplier when the complaint is resolved/ closed?
    - *Moderator: again, please tease out any differences between being told that it is resolved vs closed and whether participants distinguish between these*
    - What would you expect to receive?
    - Why?
    - How would this work?
    - How would you expect to receive this? Why?
        - Written (post/ email)
        - Verbal (telephone)
    - What type of information would you expect to be included in this?
        - Spontaneous then prompt:
        - Apology
        - Compensation
        - Explanation of complaint
        - Reassurances about what will happen next
        - Other?

- What would you do if your supplier now told you that they consider your complaint resolved/closed?
    - How would you feel about this?

- Your supplier had indicated to us that as far as they are concerned your complaint has been resolved.
    - How do you feel about this?

- To what extent have you considered switching supplier as a result of your experience?
    - Why/ why not?
    - How likely would you be to do this? Why?

5. Customer service 10 minutes

And overall, how do you feel about the customer service you received during your complaint?

*Moderator gather spontaneous then prompt for **experiences** and **improvements** for:*

- Amount of communication
- Tone of communication
- Tone of staff (e.g. empathetic / helpful / respectful, etc.)
- Proactivity of staff
- Call backs when promised
- Having the right contact details for you
- Being escalated internally
- Ease of getting through to someone
- Being given one point of contact
- Where contacts involved more than one person, did they all have a full record of your complaint journey? (i.e. didn't have to repeatedly re-tell story with each person).
- Being treated fairly
- Resolving the practical query
    - *Moderator: please prompt on whether the participant feels that the supplier looked to fully resolve the query or made a short term fix that meant:*
        - *The problem happened again*
        - *The underlying problem was not resolved*

      Or did they do the 'minimum' and seek to close the complaint as soon as possible?

- How did these experiences make you feel about your complaint?

6. Summary and Close 5 minutes

Thinking about everything that we have discussed…

- What improvements would you like to see energy suppliers make to the way they handle complaints?
- Any questions

Thank and close