

035 Individual response

Subject: Consumer standards statutory consultation

I am replying to this consultation.

Firstly, the length of the document (98 pages) makes it extremely difficult for me as a layperson and consumer to provide a realistic response. However, I have attempted to answer the six questions at the end of the document from my personal consumer needs, experience and understanding:

Questions 1 & 2 My expectations as a consumer are:

1. That I can speak by telephone to a supplier contact centre representative when required, at reasonable hours (08:00 - 20:00?) seven days per week.
2. That my call will be answered within a short period e.g. three minutes. It is infuriating to hear the same message that "we are busy - please visit our website" on a continuous loop on some occasions many times. If organisations are busy it suggests that there are reasons causing people to call, and that contact centres should be adequately resourced to meet the demand within a short response time. The way to reduce the demand is to provide high levels of efficient service.
3. That the person answering my call is adequately trained to understand, own and resolve the query satisfactorily, hopefully at the first attempt. If a call back is required, it should be received within a mutually agreed timescale.
4. Having the opportunity to make contact by email, when the overall response time should be no longer than 24 hours, again seven days per week. An initial acknowledgement response with a query reference (probably automatically generated), should be provided within one hour of receipt to provide confidence that it has been received.

The above represents a basic standard of service that any supplier should be capable of achieving. Incidentally, the organisation that I worked for was achieving far better thirty years ago, and a number do so currently! Why should Energy Suppliers be any different?

Question 3 No Comments

Question 4 I agree that customer service standards should be published and would suggest the following types of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) relating to defined periods, to achieve this:

1. Number of telephone calls received and number/percentage answered within say three minutes
 - a. 1. Number/percentage of calls not answered/abandoned by caller
2. Percentage calls fully resolved at first attempt
3. Number of emails received and number/percentage answered within 24 hours

Much of this information should be capable of being generated automatically, and should highlight to suppliers, where improvement is needed.

Question 5 No Comments

Question 6 I believe these standards should be being currently achieved. If not, the timescales for improvement should be very short e.g. three months.

For far too long, consumers have had to endure poor customer service, particularly call response times, from Energy Suppliers. The establishment and publication of acceptable customer service standards should be linked to the Supplier's financial performance. Failure to meet established acceptable standards, which favour the consumer, should result in Ofgem applying financial penalties to Suppliers' revenue. Also measures should be in place to ensure that any financial penalties are not recovered from consumers in any way.

I hope that these views will be duly considered and taken into account.