



**REPORT ON
CUSTOMER SERVICES
1997/98**

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The promotion of good customer service by the electricity companies is a major objective for OFFER. The Standards of Performance which have been set for public electricity suppliers (PESs) are an important element in the regulatory framework and serve to protect the interests of customers in key service areas. This report explains the background to the setting of the Standards and examines the companies' performances under them. It also comments on other important customer service issues.

The PESs (that is, the 12 regional electricity companies in England and Wales and the two Scottish Companies) are required to report to the Director General of Electricity Supply on their performances against the Standards set under sections 39 and 40 of the Electricity Act 1989. The Standards cover the provision by companies of electricity supply services to customers. They have been set by the Director General after consultation with companies, the Electricity Consumers' Committees and other customer representatives. Standards were first introduced in July 1991, and were successively revised and tightened in April and July 1993, April 1995, April 1998 and July 1998.

There are two types of Standards:

- Guaranteed Standards set service levels which must be met in each individual case. If the company fails to provide the level of service required, it must make a payment to the customer affected.
- Overall Standards cover areas of service where it is not appropriate to give individual guarantees, but where customers in general have a right to expect from companies predetermined minimum levels of service.

This report summarises the performance of companies under the Standards during the 12 months to 31 March 1998 and gives corresponding figures for preceding years. Also included are statistics on customer complaints handled by OFFER and on disconnections for non-payment of bills. Both are important indicators of company performance. In addition, the report shows the number of prepayment meter customers in each year since 1990/91.

Progress under the Standards

When the Standards were first set they allowed for differences in circumstances between companies, including differences in previously achieved performance, whilst at the same time encouraging companies to achieve higher levels of performance. Since then, companies have demonstrated a steady improvement in their performance against the Standards. As reported in last year's report, PESs made 2,251 payments to customers for failure to meet the Guaranteed Standards in 1996/97, compared with over 13,000 during 1991/92, even though the Standards were tightened over this period. Companies' performance against the Overall Standards also showed a trend of substantial improvement.

Some companies, particularly Eastern, Southern and Midlands, volunteered to accept higher levels of Standards in order to demonstrate their commitment to customer service. These were incorporated into the formal Standards, which consequently were in some cases set higher for these companies than for other companies. In many instances, the level of performance which companies actually achieved was well above the performance required under the

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Standards. Despite differences in circumstances between companies, differences in levels of performance for most of the Standards became considerably less marked after 1991.

The initial Standards were important in underpinning and encouraging improved services for customers. The subsequent process of change demonstrated what the best companies were capable of achieving and resulted in the lowest performers increasingly approaching the achievements of the better performers.

Consultation on New Standards

In October 1997, the Director General issued a consultation paper proposing improvements to the Standards. He indicated that, although the present Standards of Performance had worked well in protecting the interests of customers, there was now scope for further improvement, not least to ensure greater consistency in the Standards set for the 14 PESs and to improve the reliability of supply for customers. Standards would also need to be consistent with the introduction of competition in supply during 1998.

Distribution business Standards cover services where the PESs will continue to be monopoly suppliers. These Standards will therefore continue to have an important role to play as the competitive market develops. In addition, since second tier suppliers will in most cases be supplying customers in more than one PES area, there is benefit if such suppliers are able to carry out their businesses in circumstances where Standards for distribution are, as far as possible, uniform across all PES areas.

Market Research

In reviewing the Standards during 1997/98, OFFER took into account market research carried out by MORI into customer views on standards of service and related issues. MORI's findings were based on focus groups and personal interviews with more than 3,000 customers across Great Britain.

The main findings were:

- 65 per cent of customers described electricity prices as reasonable - up nine percentage points since 1992
- the electricity companies led the utilities in terms of customer satisfaction but only eight per cent of customers were totally satisfied, and only nine per cent felt that service had improved since privatisation
- 95 per cent of customers to varying degrees were satisfied with the reliability of their electricity supply, but only 15 per cent were totally satisfied, down three percentage points since 1992.

Improvements to the Standard

In the light of the consultation exercise the Director General brought forward in March 1998 a package of improvements to the Standards. The main elements were:

- from 1 April 1998 all of the Overall Standards, apart from OS1a (restoration of supply within three hours), were set at 100 per cent;
- from 1 July 1998 common customer service obligations under the Guaranteed Standards for all PESs;
- a new Guaranteed Standard on the repair of prepayment meter faults. All PESs are required to respond to faults within three or four hours (depending on when the fault is reported);
- a commitment to a further examination of the Standards affecting quality of supply during the programme of PES reviews over the next two years.

Further details of other revisions are given later in this report.

Guaranteed Standards

The Guaranteed Standards cover the 10 service areas shown in Figure 1. These Standards have been set to guarantee a level of service which it is reasonable to expect companies to deliver in all cases. A customer who fails to receive the required level of service is entitled to a payment.

Figure 1

Guaranteed Standards of Performance in 1997/98

Service	Performance Level	Penalty Payment	Changes from 1 July 1998
1 Respond to failure of a supplier's fuse	Within 4 hours of any notification during working hours*	£20	All PESs to respond within 3 hours on weekdays between (at least) 7 am to 7 pm, and within 4 hours at weekends between (at least 9 am to 5 pm)
2 Restoring electricity supplies after faults	Must be restored within 24 hours	£40 (domestic customers) and £100 (non-domestic) customers for not restoring supplies within 24 hours plus £20 for each further 12 hours	For domestic customers £50 for not restoring supplies within 24 hours plus £25 for each further 12 hours
3 Providing supply and meter	Arrange an appointment within 3 working days for domestic customers (and 5 working days for non-domestic customers)*	£20 - £100	2 working days for domestic customers and 4 working days for non-domestic customers
4 Estimating charges	Within 10 working days for simple jobs and 20 working days for most others*	£40	5 working days for simple jobs and 15 working days for most others
5 Notice of supply interruption	Customers must be given at least 2 days' notice*	£20 domestic customers £40 non-domestic customers	At least 5 days' notice
6 Investigation of voltage complaints	Visit or substantive reply within 10 working days*	£20	Visit within 7 working days or substantive reply within 5
7 Responding to meter problems	Visit within 10 working days* or substantive reply within 5 working days	£20	Visit within 7 working days or substantive reply within 5
8 Responding to customers queries about charges and payment queries	A substantive reply within 5 working days	£20	Agreed refunds to be paid within 5 working days
9 Making and keeping appointments	Companies must offer and keep a morning or afternoon appointment, or a timed appointment if requested by the customer	£20	-
10 Notifying customers of payments owed under Standards	Write to customer within 10 working days of failure*	£20	Payment to be made within 10 working days

Notes:
 Details of the Standards are set out in Regulations made by the Director General.
 Companies are also required to send an explanatory leaflet to customers at least once a year.
 Companies may not have to make payments if failure is caused by severe weather or other matters outside their control. But this depends on the particular circumstances and companies must make all reasonable efforts to meet the Standards.
 The Standards apply to tariff customers and those marked * varied between companies.

Overall Standards

The Overall Standards set minimum levels of performance which companies are required to achieve over a 12 month period in specific service areas. A description of each of these Overall Standards is given in Figure 2. Although there is no obligation to make a payment to the customer if a company fails to meet an Overall Standard, under the Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992, each company has a duty to conduct its business in such a way as can reasonably be expected to lead to its achieving the Standards. To ensure that companies account to their customers about the Standards, the Director General has directed each company to give information to customers about its performance under the Overall Standards. This is a further pressure on companies to achieve the required level of performance.

Figure 2

Overall Standards of Performance	
1.	Minimum percentage of supplies to be reconnected following faults within three hours (1a) and minimum percentage within 24 hours (1b).
2.	Minimum percentage of voltage faults to be corrected within six months.
3.	Connecting new tariff customers' premises to electricity distribution system. Minimum percentage of domestic customers to be connected within 30 working days (3a) and minimum percentage of non-domestic customers to be connected within 40 working days (3b).
4.	Minimum percentage of customers who have been cut off for non-payment to be reconnected before the end of the working day after they have paid the bill or made arrangements to pay.
5.	Visiting to move meter when asked to do so by customer within 15 working days in minimum percentage of cases.
6.	Changing meters where necessary on change of tariff within 10 working days of domestic customers' requests in minimum percentage of cases.
7.	Ensuring that the company obtains a firm reading for customers' meters at least once a year in a minimum percentage of cases.
8.	Minimum percentage of all customer letters to be responded to within 10 working days.

Data Collection and Reporting of Performance

As indicated companies have offered service improvements on top of the minimum laid down under the Standards, for example by giving customers more notice of supply interruptions than is required, or by working to targets in areas not at present covered by the Standards, such as issuing refunds or revised bills. Companies may also apply the Standards on appointments differently through their arrangements for offering timed appointments. Where a company does provide a service beyond the Standards, it is not always practicable for that company to monitor its performance against both the service target which it has set itself and the Standards set by the Director General. This means that

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in certain cases the performance returns to OFFER, on which this report is based, may reflect the company's performance against more demanding criteria than may be necessary for the Standards. However, the companies' performance returns are presented as if the data submitted by companies were, in all cases, measured against the Director General's Standard.

OFFER has given detailed guidance to companies on best practice in reporting performance under the Standards. In order to ensure consistent reporting across companies, the guidance requires all companies to commission annual independent audits of their reporting systems, to confirm that the guidance has been incorporated in the reporting procedures, and that those procedures are being followed.

Codes of Practice

The companies have important obligations to customers as set out in Codes of Practice. The Codes cover the payment of bills by domestic customers, services for elderly and disabled customers, advice for customers on the efficient use of electricity, and the companies' complaint-handling arrangements. Companies are also required to obtain the Director General's approval of their methods for dealing with tariff customers in default. The Codes also include agreed arrangements for promoting customer awareness of the Codes and for monitoring the quality of service delivered to customers. The Codes are a key part of customer protection. They set out the services which customers can expect from suppliers and provide reassurance to customers that suppliers will act responsibly.

During 1997 OFFER issued guidance to electricity suppliers on the preparation of the new or revised Codes of Practice which they should have in place to protect customers in the competitive market from 1998. This included a new Code covering procedures with respect to site access. OFFER and the Consumers' Committees were active in reviewing companies submissions on the Codes to ensure that robust arrangements for customer protection to support the competitive regime were in place. This resulted in new Codes being approved for suppliers from April 1998.

Social Action Plan

In March 1998 the Government published a Green Paper on utility regulation, "A Fair Deal for Consumers".

The Government asked the electricity and gas regulators to prepare an industry-wide action plan to ensure efficiency, choice and fairness in the provision of gas and electricity to disadvantaged customers. The Government asked that the plan establish timescales and identify milestones to be achieved over the next five years so that progress in assisting such customers can be judged against measurable targets.

In June OFFER and Ofgas published a joint plan covering electricity and gas, following consultation with the industries and with consumer organisations.

There was general agreement amongst respondents to OFFER's consultation over the plan that it was important that actions intended to assist disadvantaged customers, properly identified those customers and their needs. It was noted by these respondents that not all disadvantaged customers had prepayment meters (PPMs), or that all PPM customers were disadvantaged. Insofar as the problems of disadvantaged customers reflected their use of PPMs, it was felt by respondents that measures to improve such meters and to reduce their costs would be helpful. Other problems needed to be tackled in other ways. Respondents therefore thought it important that, in the early stages of the planning process, there should be provision for research into the characteristics and needs of both PPM and disadvantaged customers.

Competition in electricity supply began in September 1998. Time will be needed to assess the effect of competition on prices for different groups of customers, and to assess the effectiveness of the licence requirements and other arrangements put in place to protect them. It will be important not to constrain competition in the early stages of opening the market and stifle the development of innovative packages and charges for all classes of customer. OFFER's plan therefore provides for data gathering and monitoring in the early years, the results of which will inform the nature of any continuing price restraint to be implemented after April 2000.

In its Green Paper, the Government said that, whilst the measures it proposed to deliver efficiency and choice should go a long way to improving the situation for disadvantaged customers, it sought advice on whether there should be legislation to require the gas and electricity distribution networks to make differential charges to energy supply companies to assist PPM customers. Such charges would offset some, but not all, of the additional costs faced by PPM customers. The Government asked for advice on how such a proposal might operate in practice, including how the benefits should be passed through to the intended recipients and the level at which to set the differential charges.

In his reply, the Director General said that it was difficult at this stage to say how differential charging might work in practice in electricity, particularly given the unpredictable effect of opening the market, and the changing nature of PPM costs and benefits. OFFER would be analysing the costs of methods of payment, in particular PPMs, as part of its price control review. It would be difficult to estimate the appropriate level of differential charges in advance of the results.

Overview

During 1997/98 there was a significant increase in the number of Guaranteed Standards (GS) payments made by companies. The number of payments rose from 2,251 in 1996/97 to 17,308 in 1997/98. This increase is entirely accounted for by GS payments made (13,798 of them by NORWEB) to customers who were off supply for more than 24 hours during storms over the Christmas and New Year period. Excluding these payments, the number of GS payments was 1,953, continuing the reduction in the aggregate number of GS failures every year since 1992/93, the first full year in which the Standards applied, when there were over 12,000 payments.

Figure 3 shows the total number of GS payments made by each of the companies during 1997/98 and in each of the four preceding years. The majority of companies made fewer payments during 1997/98 than in the previous year. Of those companies who made more payments the two largest increases were by Northern and NORWEB and were due almost entirely to the winter storms payments (although payments by NORWEB under the remaining Standards also rose). Other companies made ex-gratia payments which are not counted as GS payments. London had the highest increase in the number of GS payments (excluding those due to the winter storms), rising from 80 in 1996/97 to 327 in 1997/98, an average of 16 payments per 100,000 tariff customers. (This was mirrored in the increased number of complaints about London received by OFFER during 1997/98, as indicated in Chapter 4). Southern and SEEBOARD made only one GS payment for every 100,000 tariff customers, and South Western and Midlands only 2 per 100,000 tariff customers.

Figure 4 shows the total number of payments made under each of the Standards in 1997/98 and during preceding reporting periods. The number of payments made under the different Standards varied significantly, with the restoration of supply Standard (GS2) and the appointments Standard (GS9) accounting for the majority of payments.

The total value of payments under the Standards during 1997/98 was around £572,200. The highest amount paid by any single company was just over £445,840. The corresponding figures in 1996/97 were some £50,500 and £7,800.

The number of services which public electricity suppliers provided to customers, covered by the Standards during 1997/98 reported by companies was over 14.8 million.

Figures 5 to 15 show the number of payments made by each company for each of the Guaranteed Standards.

Figure 3 Number of Guaranteed Standards Payments made by Companies

Company	1993/94	Payments/ 100,000 tariff customers	1994/95	Payments/ 100,000 tariff customers	1995/96	Payments/ 100,000 tariff customers	1996/97	Payments/ 100,000 tariff customers	1997/98	Payments/ 100,000 tariff customers	1997/98 (excluding winter storm payments)	Payments/ 100,000 tariff customers
Eastern	588	20	1,243	40	767	25	356	12	336	11	336	11
East Midlands	1,439	65	1,110	49	542	24	292	13	216	9	216	9
London	72	4	22	1	19	1	80	4	327	16	327	16
Manweb	253	19	181	13	242	18	81	6	62	4	62	4
Midlands	1,595	73	439	20	359	16	77	3	46	2	46	2
Northern	437	30	295	20	174	12	163	11	1,681	119	125	9
NORWEB	241	11	35	2	119	5	91	4	13,964	647	166	7
SEEBOARD	406	21	316	16	15	1	15	1	28	1	28	1
Southern	213	8	108	4	47	2	37	1	15	1	15	1
SWALEC	377	40	364	38	601	62	316	33	124	13	124	13
South Western	417	33	253	20	246	19	132	10	25	2	25	2
Yorkshire	645	32	596	29	334	17	271	14	279	14	278	14
Hydro-Electric	303	49	199	32	185	29	190	30	88	14	88	14
ScottishPower	1,051	60	249	14	145	8	150	8	117	6	117	6
All Companies	8,037	32	5,410	21	3,795	15	2,251	9	17,308	67	1,953	7

Figure 4 Number of Guaranteed Standards Payments made by Companies

Guaranteed Standard	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1997/98 (excluding GS2 winter storm payments)
1	49	48	43	17	17	17
2	589	419	485	167	15,409	54
3	45	23	16	6	4	4
4	91	22	18	32	13	13
5	1,594	880	705	363	251	251
6	31	29	14	2	20	20
7	119	96	23	12	9	9
8	254	491	198	165	191	191
9	5,004	2,942	2,119	1,340	1,167	1,167
10	261	460	174	147	227	227
TOTAL	8,037	5,410	3,795	2,251	17,308	1,953

Guaranteed Standards

GS1 Supplier's Fuse

The Standard requires companies to visit the customer's premises as soon as possible to examine the cause of the problem, within a specified number of hours of being notified that the supplier's fuse has operated (ie. that it has blown) or may have operated.

Variations in the Standard

In 1997/98 most companies had four hours to respond; Eastern and Midlands had three hours. The Standard also lays down the companies' working hours within which the Standard operates. Working hours varied between companies, with some working until 8.00pm, but the minimum was from 8.30am to 4.30pm.

SEEBOARD voluntarily had a target of three hours though its formal Standard was still four hours. ScottishPower voluntarily extended its working hours to 8am to 7pm (Monday to Friday) and 8.30am to 1.00pm (Saturday), and London voluntarily extended its working hours to 24 hours every day. NORWEB voluntarily extended its working hours for this Standard to 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday).

Payment levels

The payment for failing the Standard is £20 for both domestic and non-domestic customers.

Improvements to the Standard from 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to respond within three hours on weekdays between (at least) 7.00am to 7.00pm, and within four hours at weekends between (at least) 9.00am to 5.00pm.

Figure 5 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	4	27	24	3	7
East Midlands	4	4	1	0	0
London	3	0	1	0	4
Manweb	5	0	1	1	0
Midlands	9	6	2	0	0
Northern	1	0	3	0	2
NORWEB	2	2	1	0	0
SEEBOARD	1	0	0	0	0
Southern	1	2	2	0	0
SWALEC	5	0	6	3	1
South Western	2	1	0	2	0
Yorkshire	1	1	0	2	0
Hydro-Electric	6	0	0	2	1
ScottishPower	5	5	2	4	2
TOTAL	49	48	43	17	17

GS2 Restoration of Supply

To ensure that inconvenience to customers is kept to a minimum, this Standard requires companies to restore the supply within 24 hours of the company becoming aware of a fault on the distribution system.

Payment levels

If the company fails to meet this Standard the customer is entitled to claim a payment. During 1997/98, the payment was £40 for domestic and £100 for non-domestic customers. All customers could claim a further £20 for every additional period of 12 hours during which the supply remains off. Claims, which need not be in writing, must be received within one month of the supply being restored.

1997/98 Winter Storms

During the winter of 1997/98 large parts of England and Wales were affected by severe storms, causing widespread damage to overhead electricity distribution networks. Significant numbers of customers in many areas suffered supply interruptions. Full details are available in OFFER's April 1998 report to John Battle MP, Minister for Science, Energy and Industry.

The report shows that the companies generally responded positively to claims from customers, but there was considerable variation in practice as regards payment of compensation under Guaranteed Standards and goodwill payments. Although companies did not accept formal liability for customers' losses arising out of the supply interruptions, all recognised that customers had experienced considerable distress and inconvenience. Three companies (Northern, NORWEB, Yorkshire) made Guaranteed Standards payments although some said they felt that it would have been reasonable to claim exemption. These companies also made ex-gratia payments in certain circumstances, based on their assessment of the merits of claims. Others (Eastern, East Midlands, Manweb, Midlands, SEEBOARD, Southern, SWALEC, South Western) did not make Guaranteed Standards payments, considering that exemption should apply, but took the view that customers should still be compensated. These companies made payments equivalent to, or greater than, the amounts specified in the Regulations. Some companies made payments automatically, where they were able to identify that customers had been without supply for longer than 24 hours. Companies made use of the media to inform customers of their willingness to consider claims. Manweb informed OFFER that it had, in addition, advised community councils and caring agencies of the situation, which resulted in a significant number of claims.

Figure 6 shows the total number of GS2 payments made in the year including those for the winter storms. Figure 7 shows the total number of winter storms payments, GS2 and ex-gratia, made by companies, and the number of customers who received payments. Where a customer received GS2 payments for being off supply more than 36 hours it is counted as more than one payment.

Guaranteed Standards

Figure 6 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94		1994/95		1995/96		1996/97		1997/98	
	24hrs	12hrs	24hrs	12hrs	24hrs	12hrs	24hrs	12hrs	24hrs	12hrs
Eastern	36	4	172	14	28	2	39	0	1	0
East Midlands	13	1	61	0	18	0	3	0	3	0
London	0	0	0	0	3	0	17	5	17	4
Manweb	13	0	7	5	4	2	0	0	2	0
Midlands	310	1	45	3	149	65	1	1	0	0
Northern	6	0	1	0	1	1	2	2	1,556	0
NORWEB	9	0	2	0	20	16	11	0	5,561	8,258
SEEBOARD	14	4	5	0	0	0	3	1	3	0
Southern	8	0	6	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
SWALEC	19	4	38	0	89	65	*40	*19	0	0
South Western	5	0	17	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire	53	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	4	0
Hydro-Electric	5	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
ScottishPower	77	6	37	0	16	2	7	7	0	0
TOTAL	568	21	394	25	332	153	132	35	7,147	8,262

Note: * These figures include 24 payments for supplies restored outside 24 hours and 19 payments for additional 12 hour periods in respect of interruptions resulting from snowfalls on 5-6 February 1996.
 Note: Where a customer receives payment under GS2 for being off supply for 36 hours this is counted as more than one payment.

Figure 7 Winter Storms Payments 1997/98

Company	Guaranteed Standards Payments	Ex-Gratia Payments	Total Number of Payments	Total Amount (£)	Number of Customers receiving payments
Eastern	0	92	92	7,140	92
East Midlands	0	93	93	4,847	93
London	0	0	0	0	0
Manweb	0	20,261	20,261	1,981,122	20,261
Midlands	0	2,274	2,274	148,280	2,274
Northern	1,556	348	1,904	109,193	1,904
NORWEB	13,798	600	14,398	441,480	6,146
SEEBOARD	0	9	9	480	9
Southern	0	19	19	785	19
SWALEC	0	3,898	3,898	170,990	3,898
South Western	0	3,000	3,000	495,000	3,000
Yorkshire	1	135	136	6,827	136
Hydro-Electric	0	0	0	0	0
ScottishPower	0	62	62	3,990	62
TOTAL	15,355	30,791	46,146	3,370,134	37,894

Improvements to the Standard

From 1 July 1998 payments due to domestic customers under this Standard were increased to £50 for the first 24 hours loss of supply and to £25 for each succeeding 12 hours. OFFER has indicated that it will be discussing with companies for implementation in April 2000 the possibility of automatic payments under GS2, and the introduction of a requirement to restore supplies within less than 24 hours.

The winter storms revealed considerable variation in practice by companies as regards payments under Guaranteed Standards or on an ex-gratia basis. At present, the Guaranteed Standards provide for exemption from payments on the grounds of severe weather. OFFER intends to consider this matter as part of the distribution price control review.

Guaranteed Standards

GS3 Providing a Supply

Where a customer has made a written request for supply and has provided the necessary documentation and payment, the Standard requires companies to make an appointment to visit and install a meter. In 1997/98 most companies had to respond within three working days for a domestic customer and within five working days for a non-domestic customer.

Variations in the Standard

Eastern and Midlands had two working days to provide a supply for a domestic customer, instead of the three working days allowed for other companies.

Payment levels

For failing to arrange an appointment, a payment of £20 must be made. In addition, if the company fails to keep the appointment, domestic customers are entitled to £40 and non-domestic customers to £100.

Improvements to the Standard in 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to install a meter for domestic customers within two working days, and for non-domestic customers within four working days.

Figure 8 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	1	2	3	0	1
East Midlands	26	13	8	4	0
London	1	2	2	0	0
Manweb	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands	8	0	0	0	0
Northern	0	3	0	0	0
NORWEB	0	0	1	0	0
SEEBOARD	0	0	0	0	3
Southern	2	0	0	0	0
SWALEC	2	0	1	1	0
South Western	0	0	0	1	0
Yorkshire	2	2	1	0	0
Hydro-Electric	0	1	0	0	0
ScottishPower	3	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	45	23	16	6	4

GS4 Estimate of Charges

The Standard requires companies to provide an estimate of the charge to be made by the company for connecting a new supply or moving a meter, in 1997/98 most companies had to respond within 10 working days if no significant work was needed, or 20 working days if significant work was required.

Variations in the Standard

Eastern and Midlands had five working days for simple jobs, and 15 for difficult ones. Hydro-Electric had 30 working days for difficult jobs.

Payment levels

For failing to meet this Standard a payment of £40 must be made to both domestic and non-domestic customers.

Improvements to the Standard

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to provide an estimate within five working days if no significant work is needed, or 15 working days if significant work is required.

Figure 9 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	11	3	6	4	1
East Midlands	1	0	1	5	7
London	0	0	0	1	1
Manweb	0	1	2	0	0
Midlands	46	3	0	1	1
Northern	0	0	3	5	1
NORWEB	1	0	0	0	0
SEEBOARD	1	1	1	0	0
Southern	3	0	0	0	0
SWALEC	1	3	0	0	0
South Western	9	3	5	13	0
Yorkshire	2	5	0	3	0
Hydro-Electric	5	2	0	0	1
ScottishPower	11	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	91	22	18	32	13

Guaranteed Standards

GS5 Notice of Planned Interruptions to Supply

This Standard requires companies to give a minimum period of prior notice to customers whose supply will be interrupted for repair or maintenance work to the distribution system.

Variations in the Standard

In 1997/98 most companies had to give at least two days' notice, but Manweb had to give at least three, and Midlands, SEEBOARD and Southern at least five.

It was open to companies to give more than the minimum period of notice, and companies may make payments if they fail to meet this longer notice: thus, NORWEB gave three days' notice, East Midlands and Southern gave five days' notice and Midlands seven days' notice.

Payment levels

The payment for failing the Standard is £20 for domestic and £40 for non-domestic customers. Claims, which need not be in writing, are allowed within one month from the day supply is lost.

Improvements to the Standard in 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to give at least five days' notice.

Figure 10 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	81	36	87	21	6
East Midlands	194	149	126	53	49
London	10	1	0	5	14
Manweb	98	64	93	22	25
Midlands	335	139	62	38	28
Northern	81	53	46	35	10
NORWEB	83	8	22	7	41
SEEBOARD	41	15	6	5	0
Southern	54	51	12	11	6
SWALEC	135	190	111	55	26
South Western	146	94	60	40	1
Yorkshire	38	28	13	47	36
Hydro-Electric	89	19	23	10	4
ScottishPower	209	33	44	14	5
TOTAL	1,594	880	705	363	251

GS6 Voltage Complaints

The Standard requires companies to arrange an appointment to investigate voltage complaints, or to provide a substantive reply explaining why the supply was outside the permitted limits. If the company fails to keep an appointment a further payment is due.

Variations in the Standard

In 1997/98 most companies had to arrange an appointment or provide a substantive reply within 10 working days. Southern had seven working days for the Standard, and Eastern and Midlands had five for a substantive reply.

East Midlands and NORWEB had voluntary limits of five and seven working days respectively for replying.

Payment levels

The payment for failing any part of the Standard is £20 for both domestic and non-domestic customers.

Improvements to the Standard in 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to offer appointments within seven working days and provide written replies within five working days.

Figure 11 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	4	11	4	1	2
East Midlands	10	5	1	1	5
London	0	0	0	0	8
Manweb	0	0	1	0	0
Midlands	3	2	2	0	0
Northern	0	0	1	0	1
NORWEB	5	0	0	0	0
SEEBOARD	0	1	0	0	1
Southern	1	0	0	0	0
SWALEC	0	1	3	0	3
South Western	1	5	0	0	0
Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0
Hydro-Electric	2	0	1	0	0
ScottishPower	5	4	1	0	0
TOTAL	31	29	14	2	20

Guaranteed Standards

GS7 Meter Disputes

The Standard requires companies to respond to customers who report a meter error, either by making an appointment to investigate or by providing an explanation of why the meter appears to be operating outside the permitted margins of error.

Variations in the Standard

In 1997/98 most companies previously had five working days in which to provide an explanation or 10 working days (seven for Southern) in which to visit.

Southern and Hydro-Electric had a voluntary limit of five working days for a visit.

Payment levels

The payment for failing any part of the Standard is £20 for both domestic and non-domestic customers.

Improvements to the Standard in 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to provide a written explanation within five working days, and to make a visit within seven working days.

Figure 12

Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	0	7	2	2	4
East Midlands	49	17	4	1	0
London	0	0	0	0	0
Manweb	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands	0	3	4	0	0
Northern	2	0	0	1	0
NORWEB	1	0	3	1	2
SEEBOARD	0	9	0	0	0
Southern	2	0	0	0	0
SWALEC	4	2	5	1	3
South Western	5	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire	17	54	1	0	0
Hydro-Electric	10	4	3	3	0
ScottishPower	29	0	1	3	0
TOTAL	119	96	23	12	9

GS8 Charges and Payment

The Standard requires companies to reply within five working days to customers' charges and payment queries. The Standard covers replies to customer requests for a change to the method of paying bills (where this is not agreed) and queries about the accuracy of a bill or whether a payment is due under the Standards. In 1995/96 the period for responding was reduced from 10 working days to five for 11 of the companies.

Payment levels

A payment of £20 is due each time the Standard is broken.

Improvements to the Standard in 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to make any refund promised to a customer following an account query within five working days.

Figure 13 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	46	248	75	72	89
East Midlands	5	20	1	0	0
London	7	2	3	9	36
Manweb	0	2	0	0	1
Midlands	10	4	1	1	0
Northern	4	0	0	0	0
NORWEB	2	0	6	8	23
SEEBOARD	60	112	3	3	7
Southern	3	12	10	1	1
SWALEC	31	19	30	2	5
South Western	47	33	48	17	1
Yorkshire	24	22	12	6	4
Hydro-Electric	4	10	6	20	6
ScottishPower	11	7	3	26	18
TOTAL	254	491	198	165	191

Guaranteed Standards

GS9 Appointments

The Standard applies to a range of services provided by companies and requires them to offer a morning or afternoon appointment to a customer, or a more specific appointment within a two-hour time band, if the customer so requests. The Standard also obliges the company to keep the appointment.

Variations in the Standard

The Standard is common to all companies. However, within the Standard practice may vary between companies in the timing of appointments.

Payment levels

A payment of £20 is due each time either part of the Standard is broken.

Figure 14 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1997/98 Payments per 100,000 tariff customers
Eastern	344	483	460	143	122	3.92
East Midlands	1,123	821	374	219	141	6.15
London	40	14	9	27	186	9.38
Manweb	131	100	124	55	33	2.38
Midlands	839	209	67	33	16	0.71
Northern	342	238	119	116	108	7.64
NORWEB	134	23	50	63	64	2.96
SEEBOARD	244	57	2	1	5	0.25
Southern	130	26	13	18	5	0.19
SWALEC	171	111	250	175	78	8.00
South Western	201	92	131	57	23	1.73
Yorkshire	496	463	300	204	234	11.67
Hydro-Electric	171	149	146	149	71	11.04
ScottishPower	638	156	74	80	81	4.39
TOTAL	5,004	2,942	2,119	1,340	1,167	4.48 (Avg)

GS10 Payments

The Standard requires companies to notify customers that they are due a payment under the Guaranteed Standards. In 1997/98 most companies had to act within 10 working days of failing the Standard or receiving a claim under Guaranteed Standards 2 and 5.

Variations in the Standard

Hydro-Electric had 20 working days to notify customers, and Midlands five.

Payment levels

The payment for failing the Standard is £20 for both domestic and non-domestic customers.

Improvements to the Standard in 1998

From 1 July 1998 all PESs are required to notify **and** make payments within 10 working days.

Figure 15 Number of Payments made

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	57	240	76	71	103
East Midlands	13	20	8	6	11
London	11	3	1	16	57
Manweb	6	2	15	3	1
Midlands	34	25	7	2	1
Northern	1	0	0	2	3
NORWEB	4	0	0	1	15
SEEBOARD	41	116	3	2	9
Southern	9	11	8	5	3
SWALEC	5	0	41	20	8
South Western	1	7	1	2	0
Yorkshire	12	21	7	2	1
Hydro-Electric	10	9	5	6	5
ScottishPower	57	6	2	9	10
TOTAL	261	460	174	147	227

Overview

The Director General has set Overall Standards for each company in eight key service areas. The Standards require the company to achieve or exceed the particular level of performance determined for it in respect of each of these services. Performance is measured for each 12 month period ending 31 March each year.

The structure of each of the Overall Standards (OS) is the same for all companies, for example the Standards set the same deadlines for all companies. However, the level of performance required has varied between companies in terms of the percentage of services which they must deliver satisfactorily. Some companies have set themselves tighter deadlines for particular Standards and report their performance against these deadlines; for example, Midlands reports performance under OS8 (customer correspondence) with a deadline of five working days, rather than the 10 working days set by the Standard.

Each company's performance under the Overall Standards is set out in Figures 18 to 27. The figures also indicate the level required to be achieved for each company and allow the company's 1997/98 performance to be compared with its performance during previous reporting periods.

There are, in effect, 10 Overall Standards covering eight distinct service areas. (Two of the service areas are each covered by two Standards, and the other service areas have one Standard each). In most cases companies improved their performance in 1997/98 compared with 1996/97. However, there were instances of companies reporting a lower level of performance. In by far the majority of cases the Standards were met, even where the company's performance may have fallen. There were nine cases where companies failed to meet the Standards. In four of those cases the Standard was failed by less than one percentage point. However, London Electricity failed OS8 (replying to correspondence) by 11.5 percentage points. OFFER has pressed London to improve its performance and is closely monitoring the position. Midlands failed to meet OS1a (restoration of supply within three hours) by 3.7 percentage points. (Its Standard of 95 per cent is the highest of all the PESs and its achieved performance was exceeded by only five companies). Details of the Standards failures and of those cases where companies achieved a lower performance in 1997/98 than in the previous year, by more than one percentage point are given in Figure 16.

As a result of the changes to the Overall Standards introduced from 1 April 1998 all PESs are now required to achieve 100 per cent under each of the Standards, apart from OS1a. In the case of OS1a, the required level of performance ranges between 85 per cent and 95 per cent varying between PESs. OFFER will be exploring the scope for further improvements to OS1a as part of the distribution price control review. Details of the revised targets for OS1a are given in Figure 28.

Figure 16

Companies failing to meet Overall Standards or whose performance in 1997/98 fell by comparison with the preceding year (by more than one percentage point)

Overall Standard	Failed Standard (by more than one percentage point)	Performance lower than in 1996/97 (by more than one percentage point)
1a - Restoration of Supply within three hours	Manweb Midlands	Manweb Midlands SWALEC South Western Yorkshire
2 - Voltage Faults	ScottishPower	ScottishPower
8 - Customer Correspondence	London Northern	London

Overall Standards

Figure 17 OS1-OS8 Required and Achieved Percentages for 1997/98

Company	OS1a		OS1b		OS2		OS3a		OS3b	
	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved
Eastern	93	93.2	100	100	97	100	99	100	100	100
East Midlands	85	92	99	100	95	99.5	98	100	99	100
London	80	81.4	100	100	97	100	98	100	99	100
Manweb	85	83.7	99	98.4	95	97.1	98	100	99	99.8
Midlands	95	91.3	100	99.9	100	100	100	100	100	100
Northern	88	92.9	100	100	95	100	100	100	100	100
NORWEB	85	89.7	99	99.6	95	100	98	100	99	100
SEEBOARD	80	89.5	99	100	95	100	98	100	99	100
Southern	85	93.7	99	100	95	99	99	100	99	100
SWALEC	80	87.4	99	99.8	95	100	98	100	99	100
South Western	80	88	99	99.7	95	100	98	100	99	100
Yorkshire	80	94	99	100	95	99.4	98	100	99	100
Hydro-Electric	80	84.6	99	99.8	95	100	98	100	99	100
ScottishPower	80	88.1	99	100	95	93.7	98	100	99	100

Company	OS4		OS5		OS6		OS7		OS8	
	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved	Required	Achieved
Eastern	100	100	100	100	98	99.4	99	99	99	99.8
East Midlands	99	100	99.9	99.7	95	97.4	99	99.9	100	100
London	99	100	98	100	97	100	98	97.4	99	87.5
Manweb	100	100	98	99.9	95	100	98	98.1	99	100
Midlands	100	100	100	100	100	100	99	99.1	100	100
Northern	100	100	100	100	95	99.9	99	99.1	100	98.4
NORWEB	99	100	98	100	95	100	98	98	99	100
SEEBOARD	99	100	98	100	95	100	98	98	100	100
Southern	99	100	99	100	99	100	98	99	99	100
SWALEC	99	100	98	100	95	100	98	98.4	99	99.9
South Western	99	100	98	100	95	100	98	99.4	99	100
Yorkshire	99	100	98	100	95	100	99	99.3	100	100
Hydro-Electric	99	100	98	100	95	100	97	98.9	99	100
ScottishPower	100	100	98	100	95	100	98	98.7	99	100

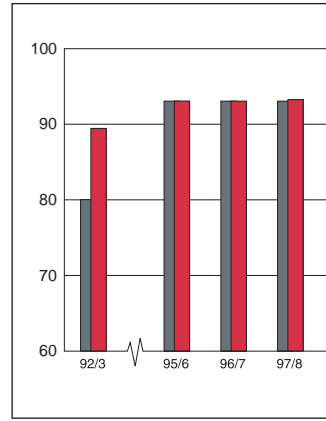
Overall Standards

Figure 18

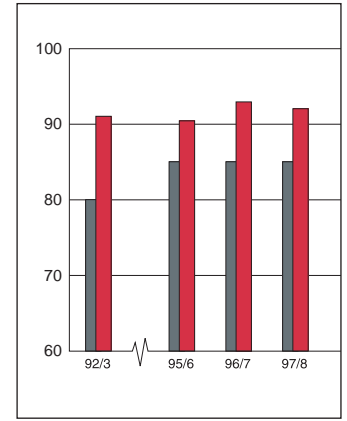
OS1a Restoration of Supply

The Standard requires supplies to be restored within three hours in a minimum percentage of cases.

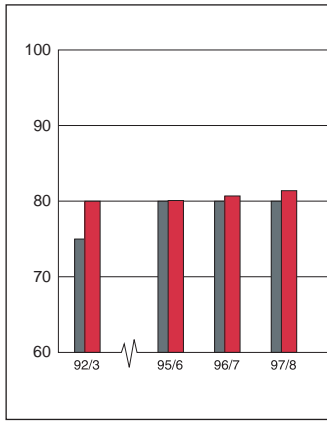
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



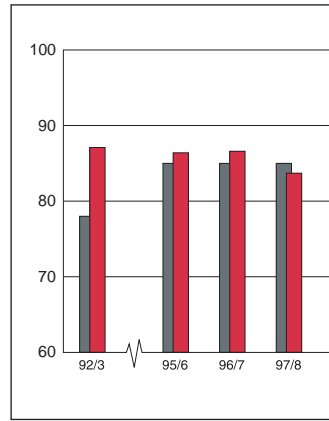
Eastern



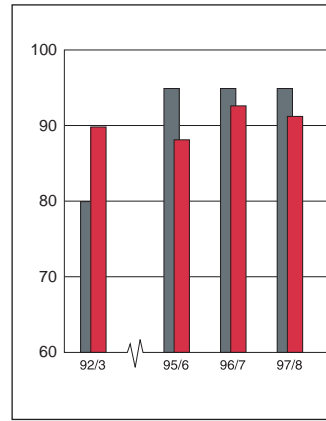
East Midlands



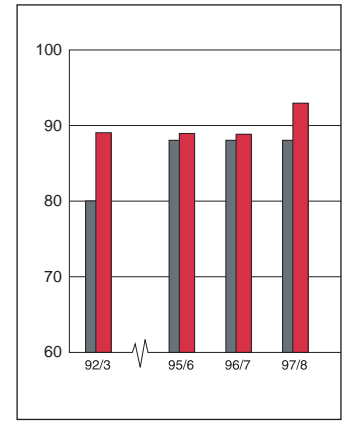
London



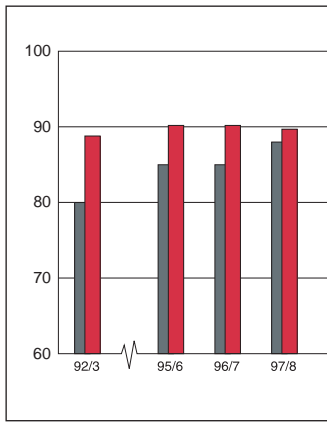
Manweb



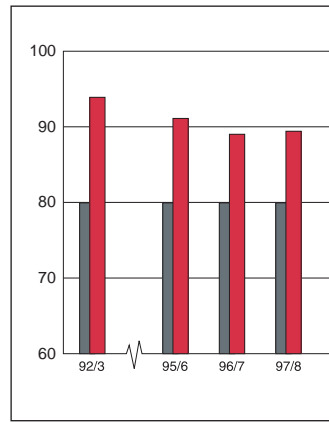
Midlands



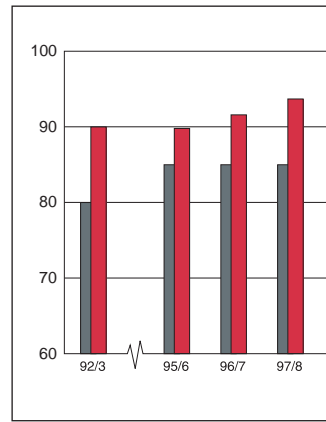
Northern



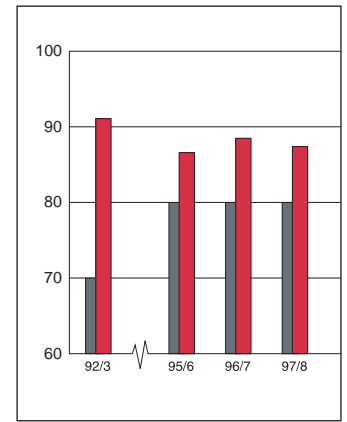
NORWEB



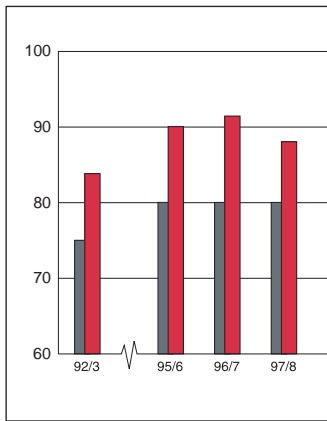
SEEBOARD



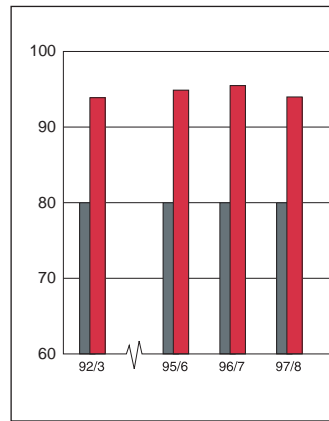
Southern



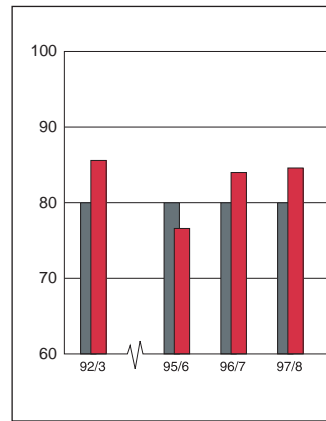
SWALEC



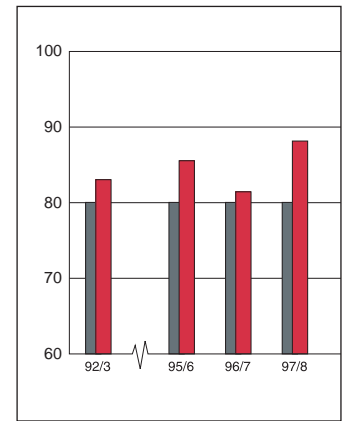
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

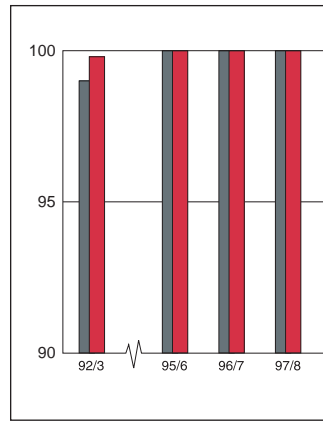
Overall Standards

Figure 19

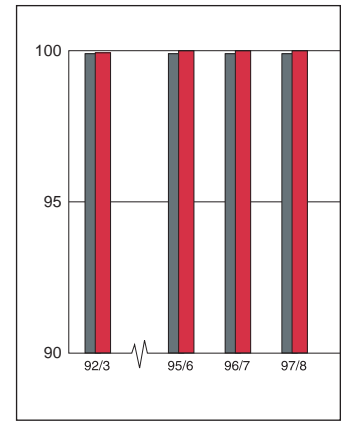
OS1b Restoration of Supply

The Standard requires supplies to be restored within 24 hours in a minimum percentage of cases.

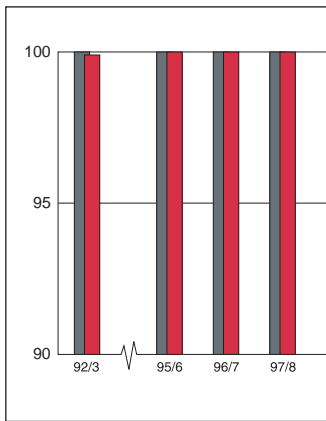
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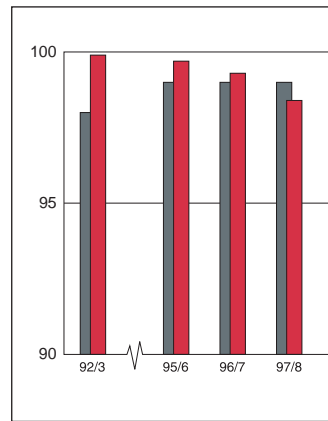
Eastern



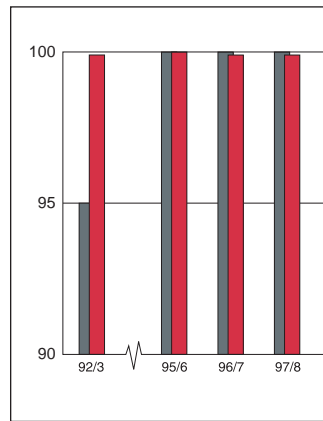
East Midlands



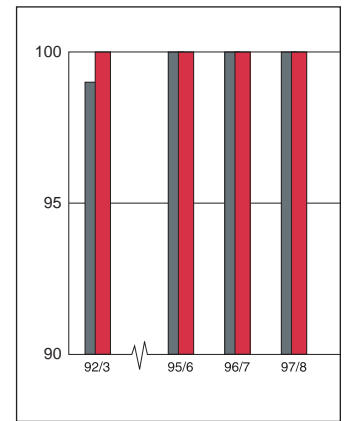
London



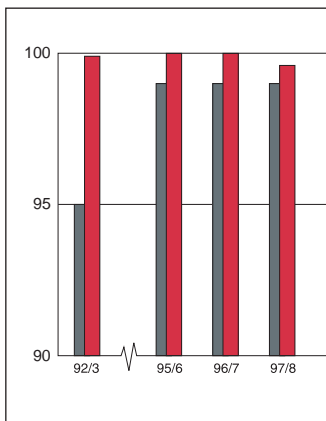
Manweb



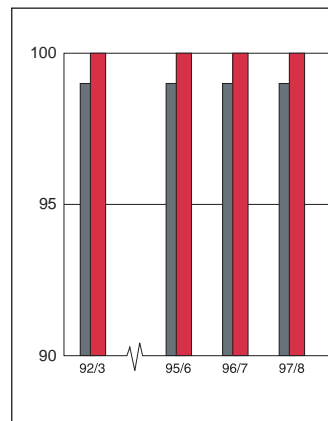
Midlands



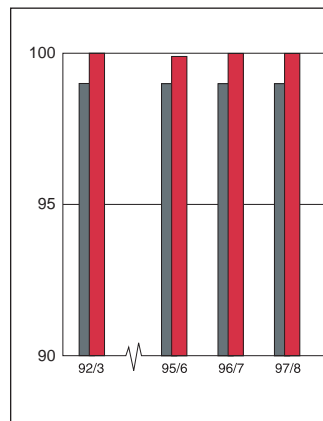
Northern



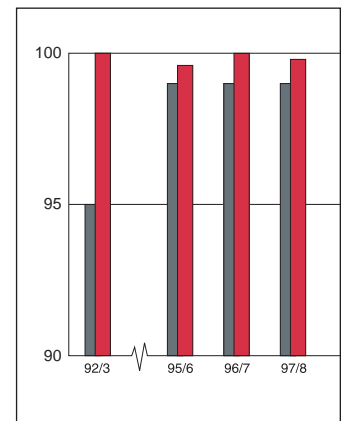
NORWEB



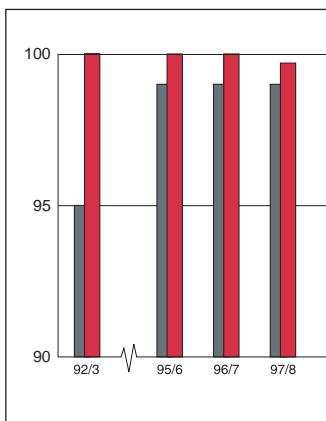
SEEBOARD



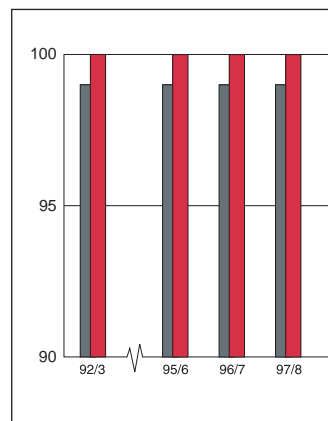
Southern



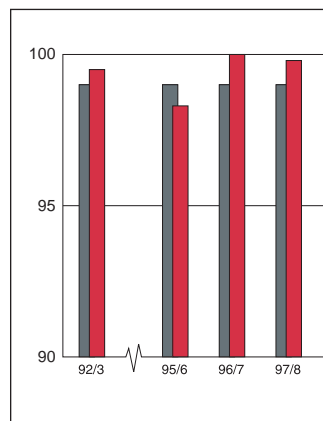
SWALEC



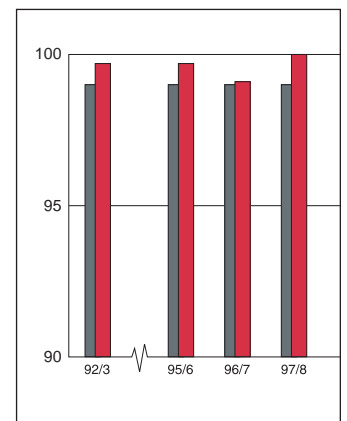
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

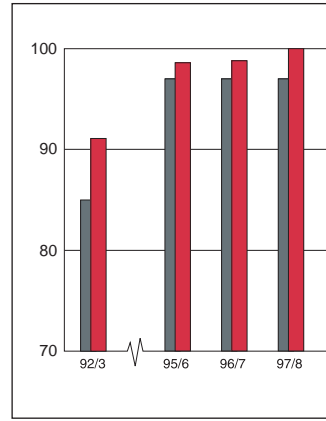
Overall Standards

Figure 20

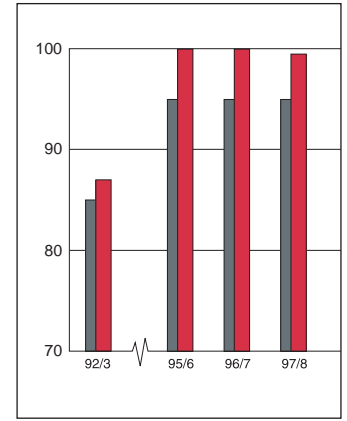
OS2 Voltage Faults

The Standard requires voltage faults to be corrected within six months in a minimum percentage of cases.

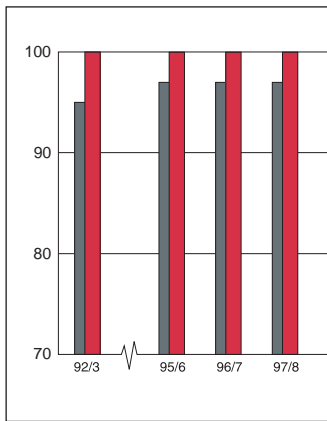
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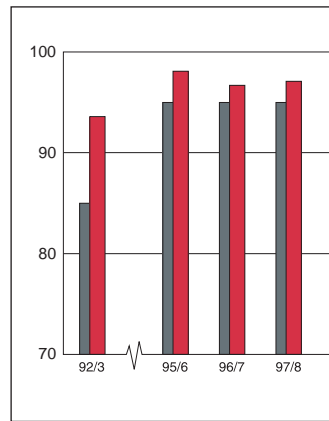
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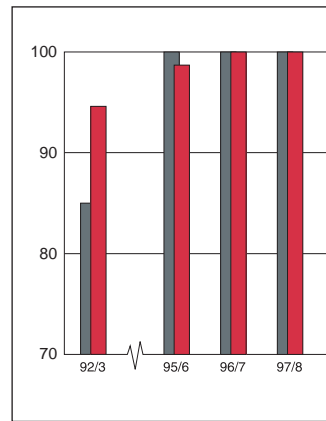
East Midlands



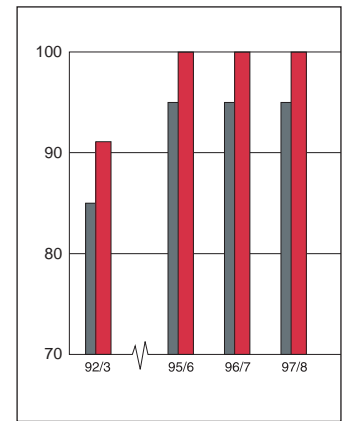
London



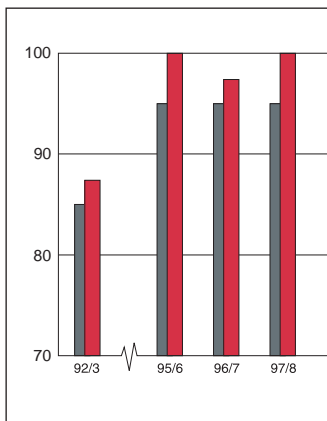
Manweb



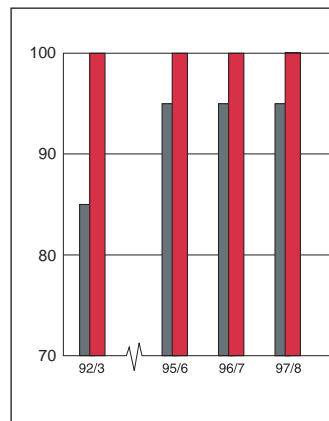
Midlands



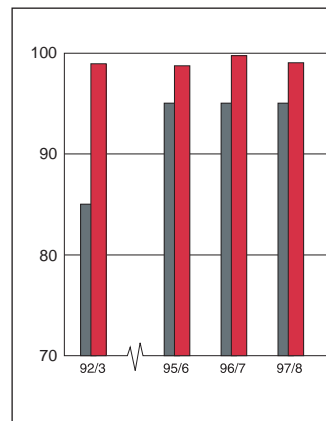
Northern



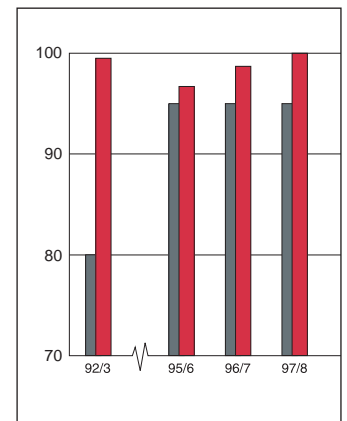
NORWEB



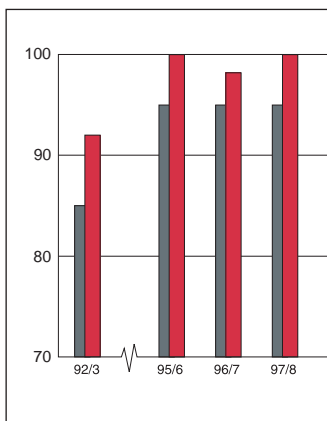
SEEBOARD



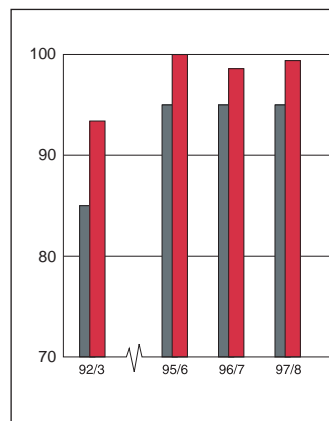
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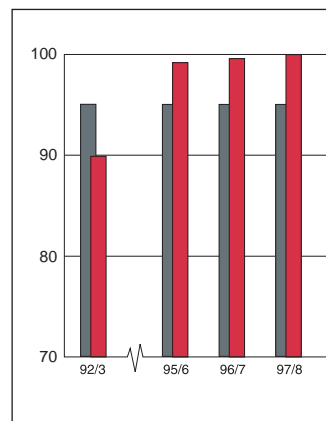
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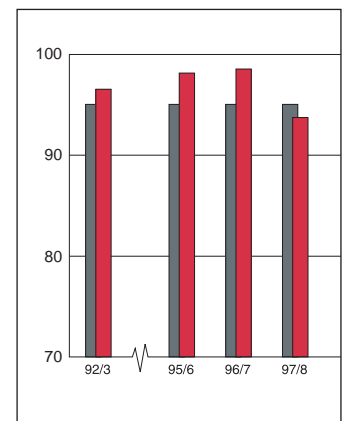
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

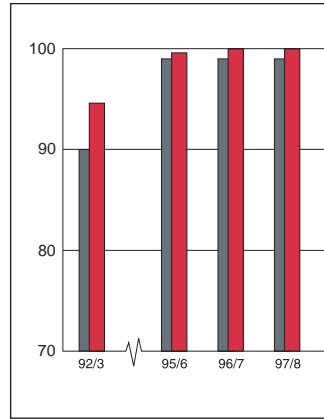
Overall Standards

Figure 21

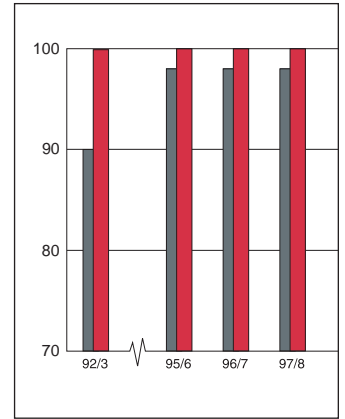
OS3a Connecting Supplies

The Standard requires new supplies (including the installation of a service line and meter) for domestic customers to be provided within 30 working days in a minimum percentage of cases.

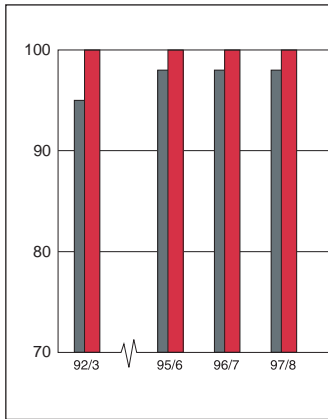
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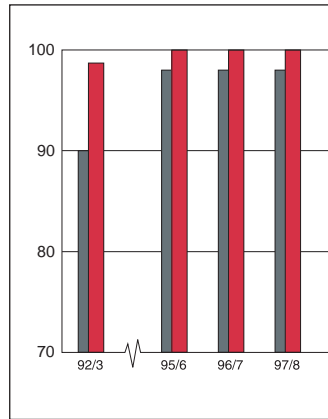
Eastern



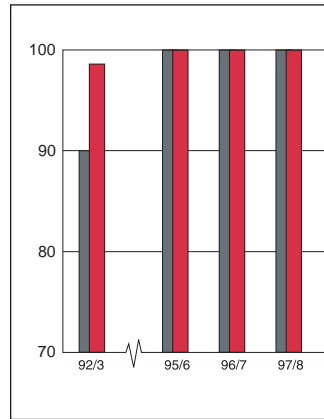
East Midlands



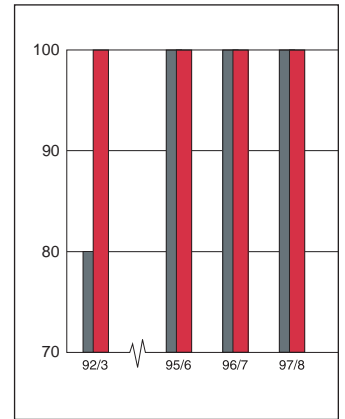
London



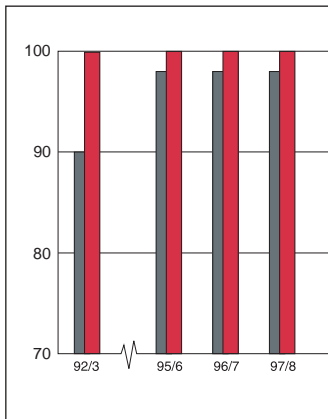
Manweb



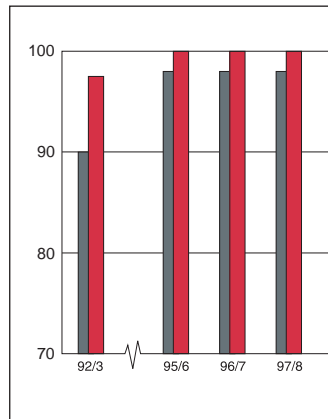
Midlands



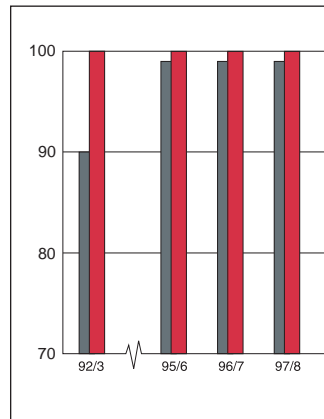
Northern



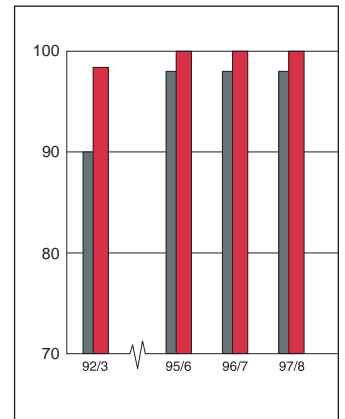
NORWEB



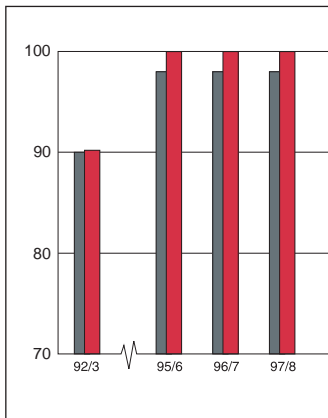
SEEBOARD



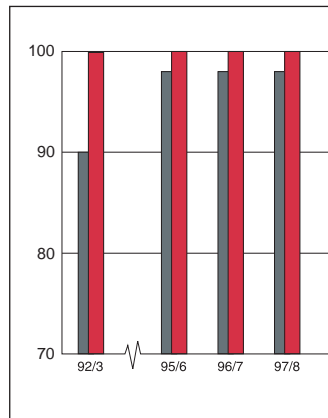
Southern



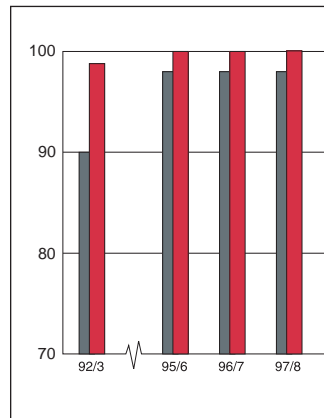
SWALEC



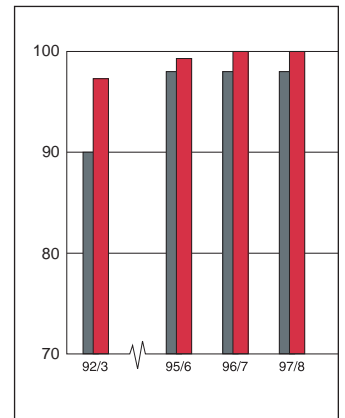
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

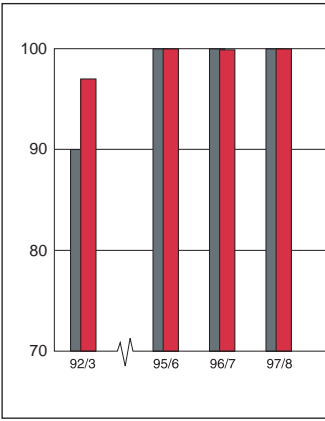
Overall Standards

Figure 22

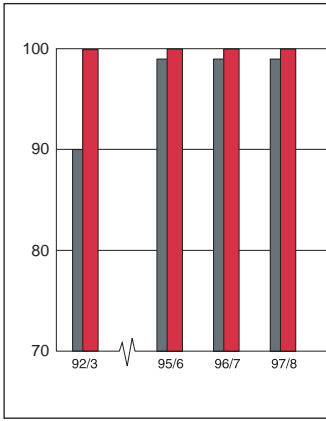
OS3b Connecting Supplies

The Standard requires new supplies (including the installation of a service line and meter) for non-domestic customers to be provided within 40 working days in a minimum percentage of cases.

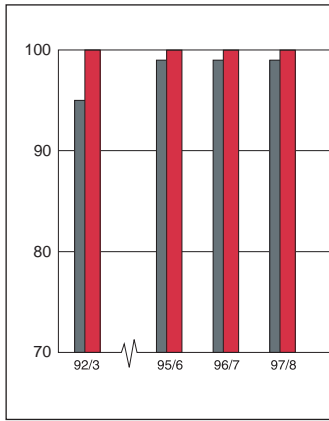
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



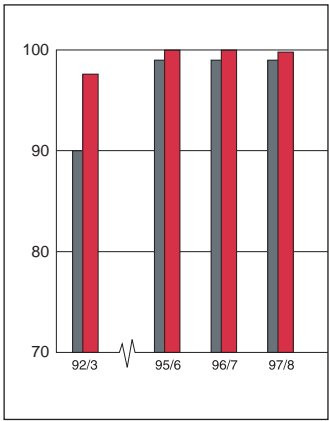
Eastern



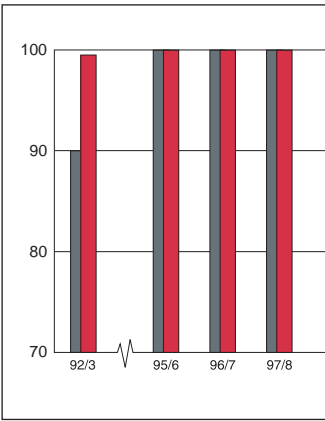
East Midlands



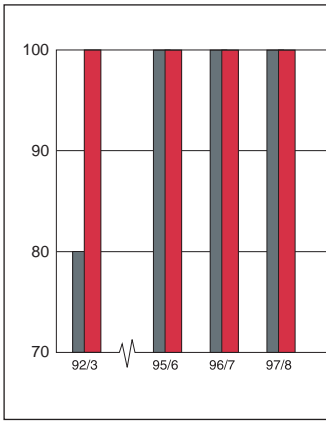
London



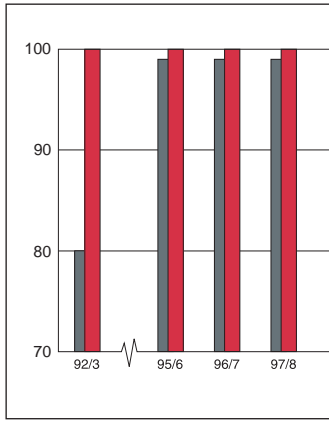
Manweb



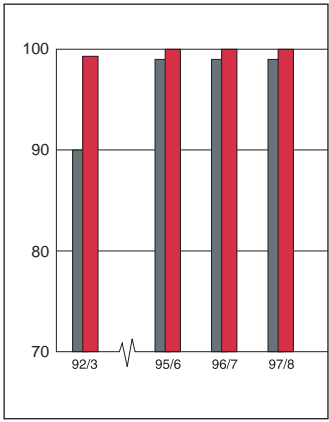
Midlands



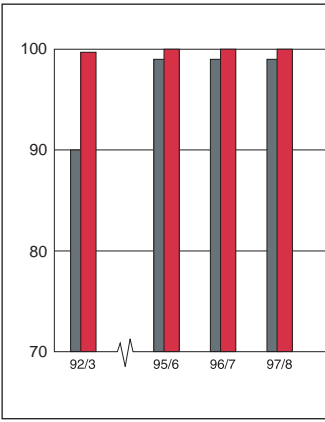
Northern



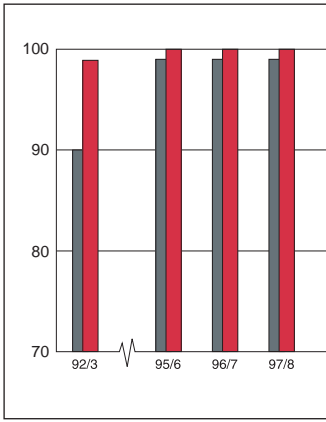
NORWEB



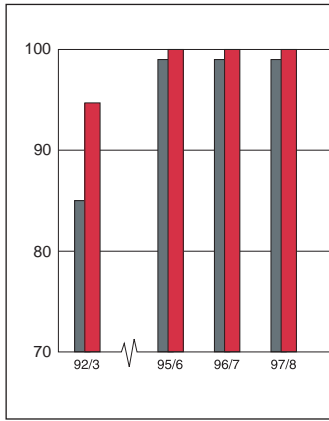
SEEBOARD



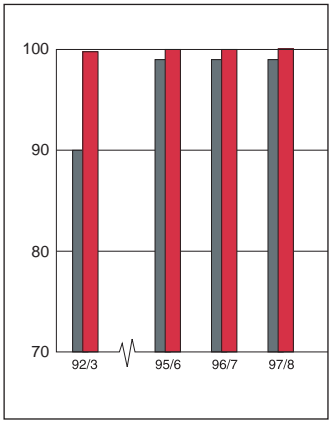
Southern



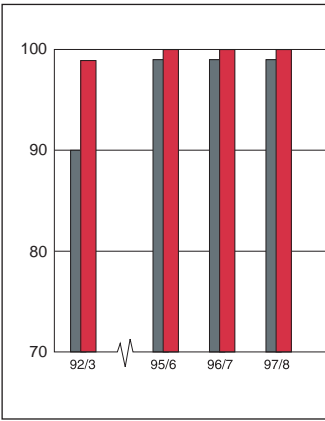
SWALEC



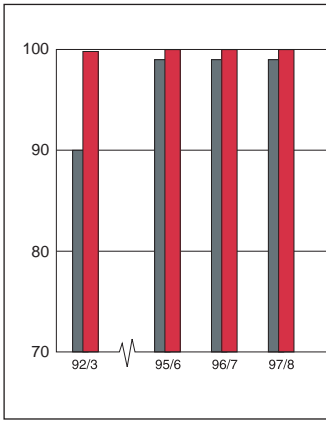
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

Overall Standards

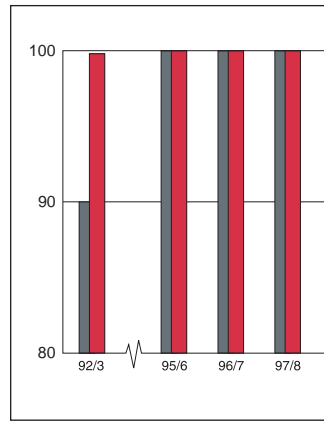
Figure 23

OS4 Reconnection

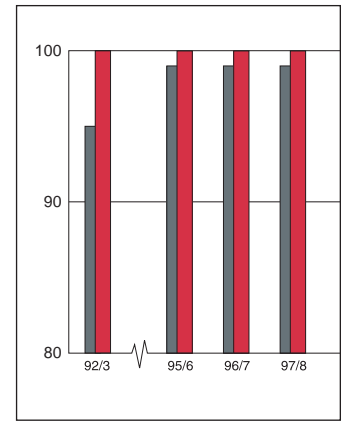
The Standard requires companies to reconnect customers who have been disconnected for non-payment by the end of the next working day following an agreement to pay, in a minimum percentage of cases.

* N/A Hydro-Electric's % Achieved not applicable since no services provided during 1996/97

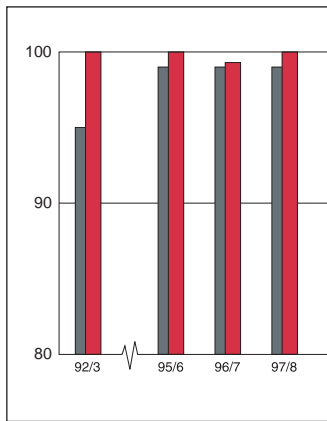
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



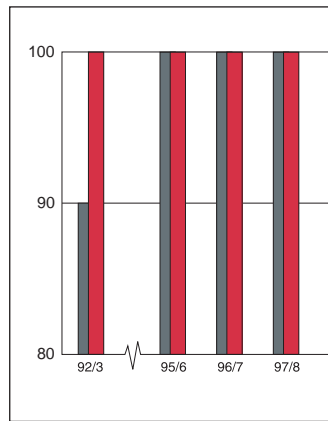
Eastern



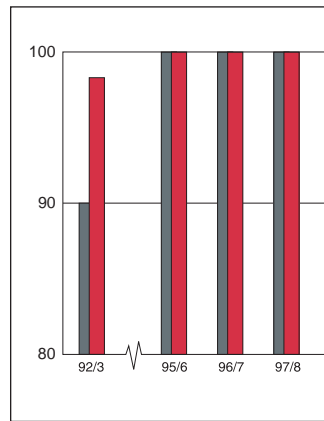
East Midlands



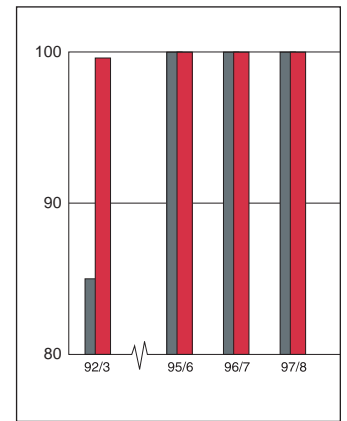
London



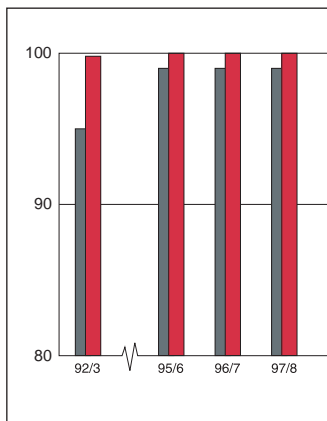
Manweb



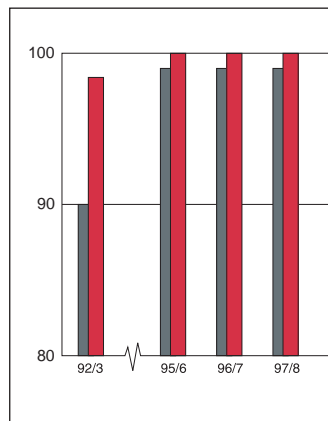
Midlands



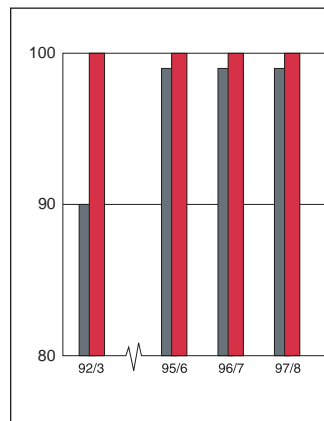
Northern



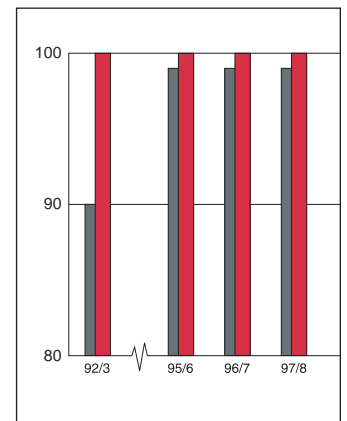
NORWEB



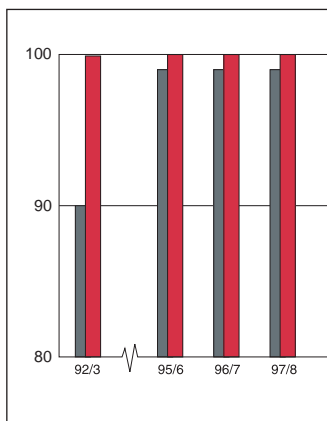
SEEBOARD



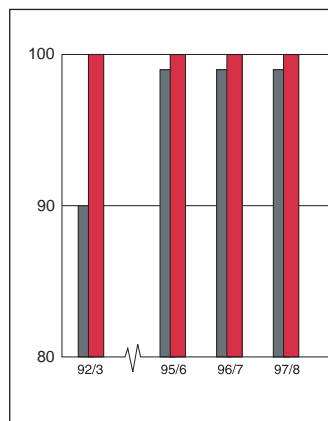
Southern



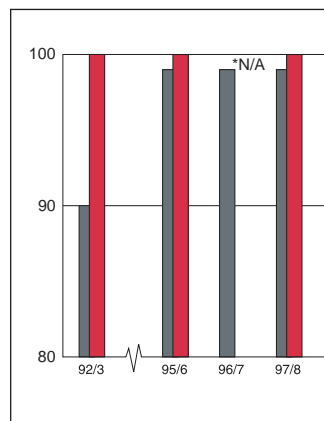
SWALEC



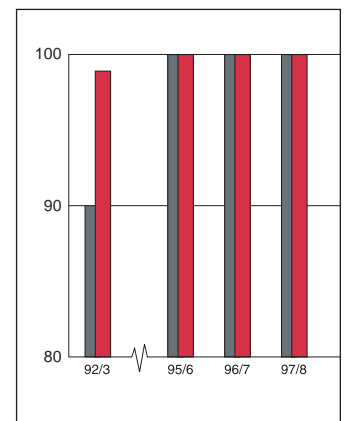
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

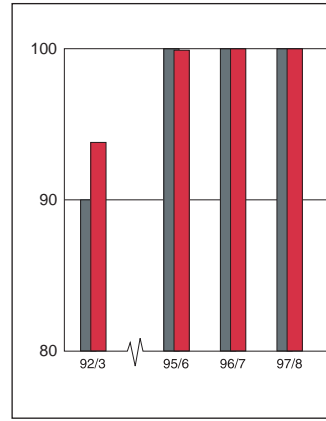
Overall Standards

Figure 24

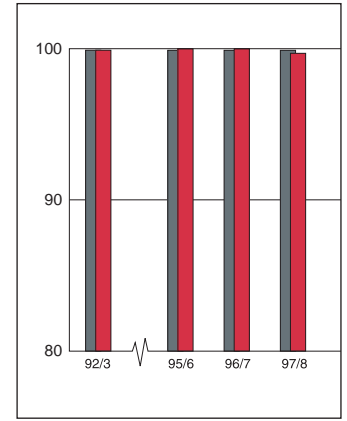
OS5 Resiting Meters

The Standard requires companies to resite the meter within 15 working days.

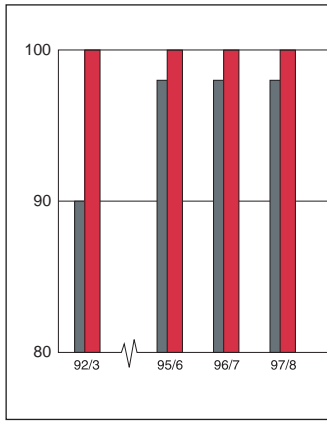
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



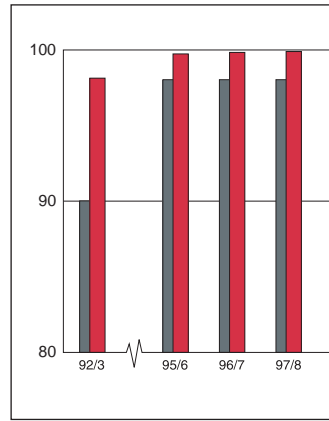
Eastern



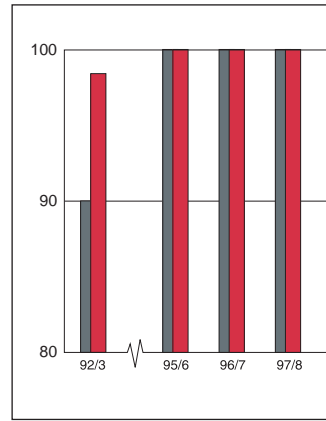
East Midlands



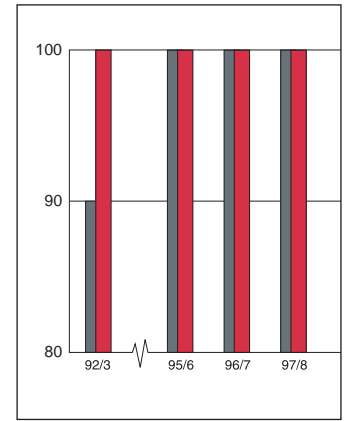
London



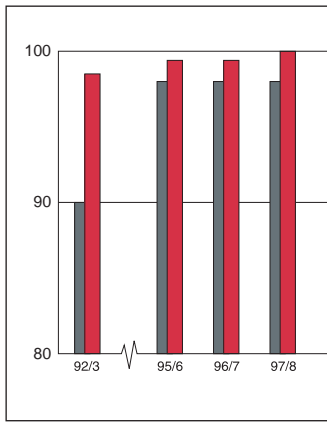
Manweb



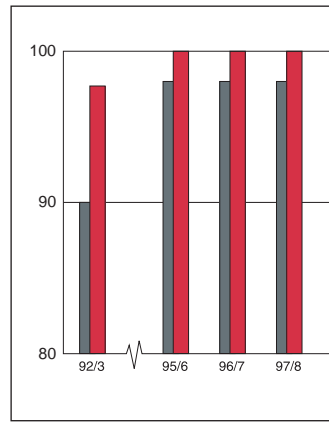
Midlands



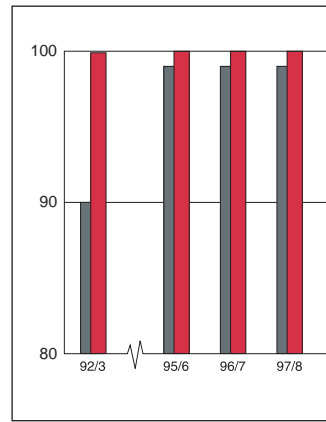
Northern



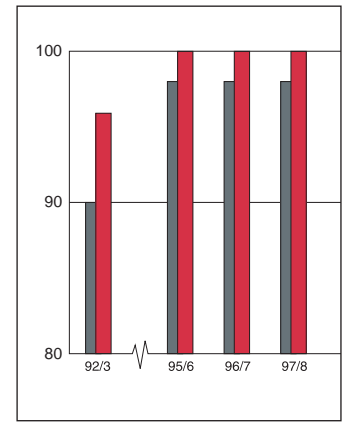
NORWEB



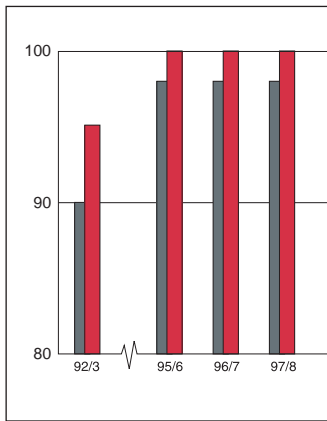
SEEBOARD



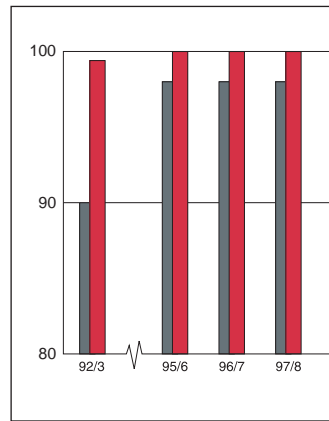
Southern



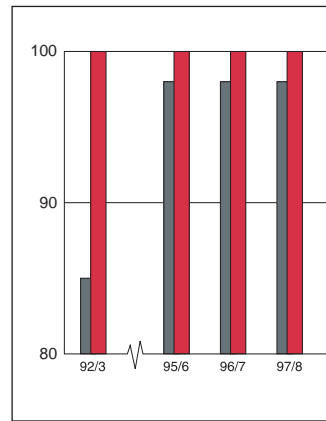
SWALEC



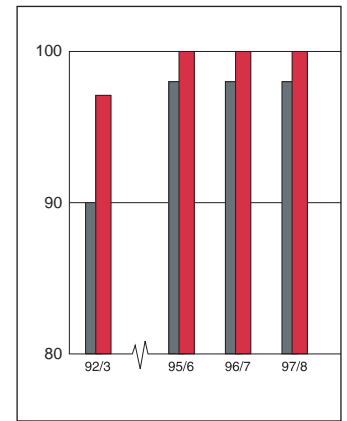
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

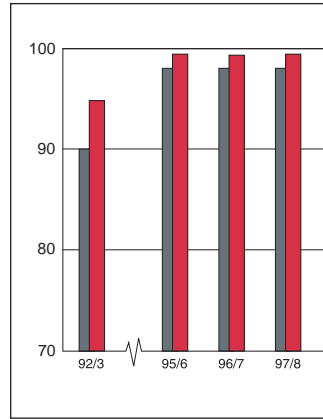
Overall Standards

Figure 25

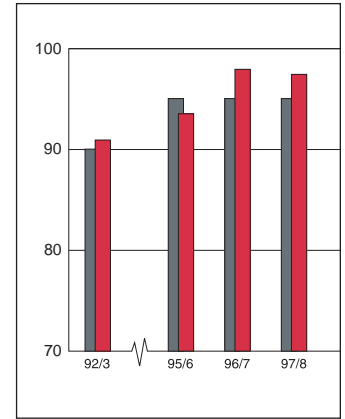
OS6 Changing Meters

The Standard requires companies where necessary to change the meter within 10 working days of agreeing with the customer a change in payment methods.

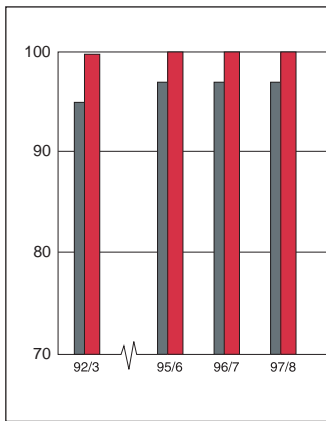
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



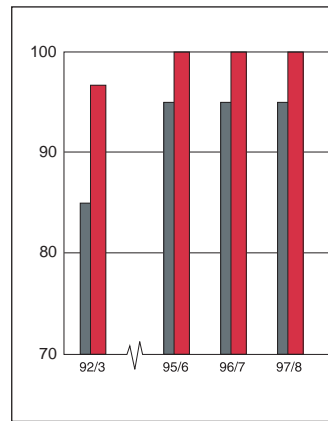
Eastern



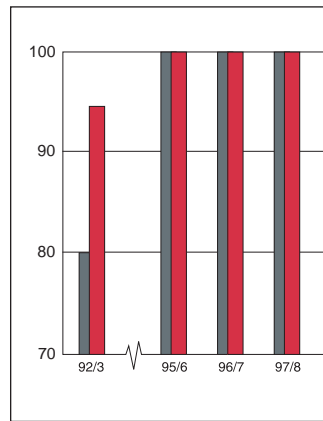
East Midlands



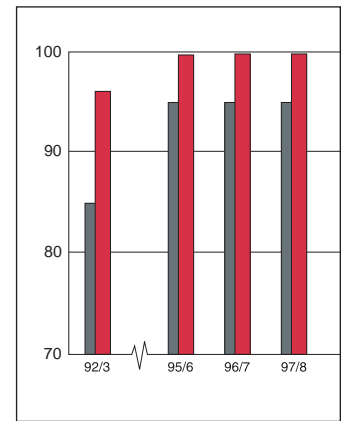
London



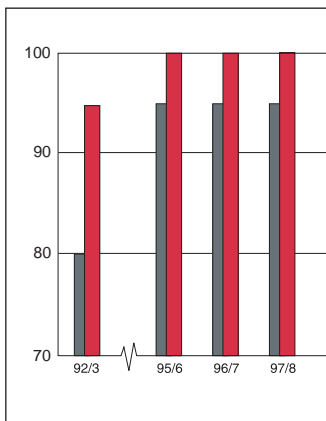
Manweb



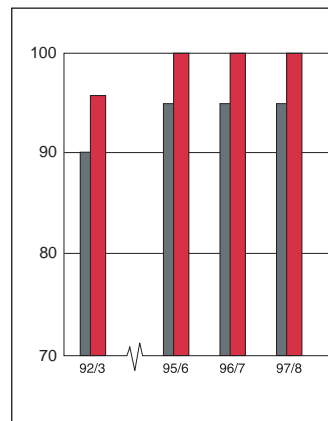
Midlands



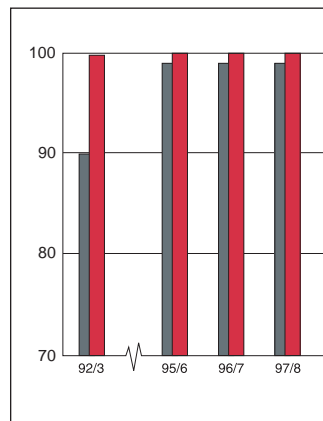
Northern



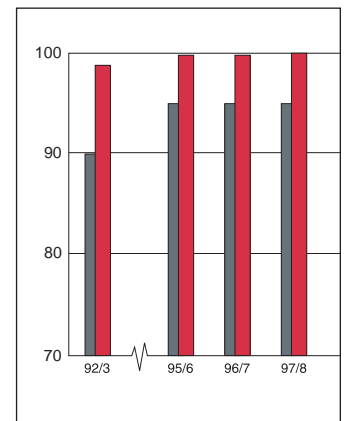
NORWEB



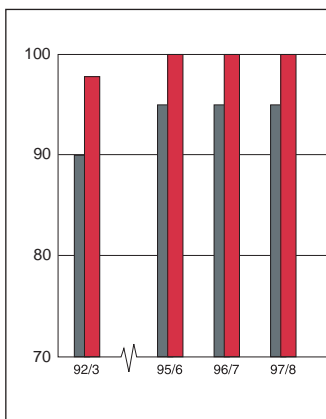
SEEBOARD



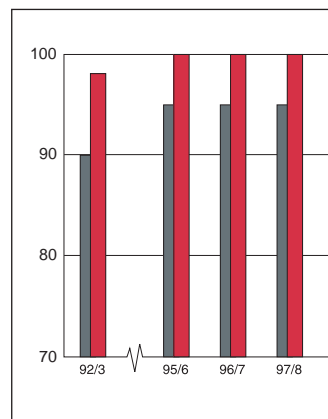
Southern



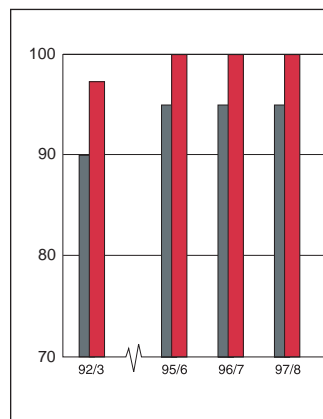
SWALEC



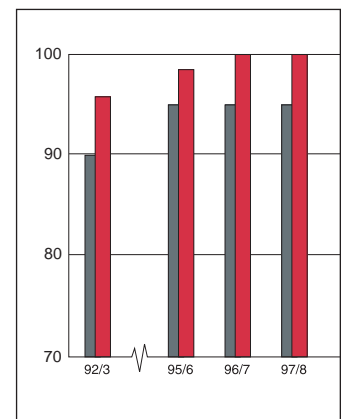
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

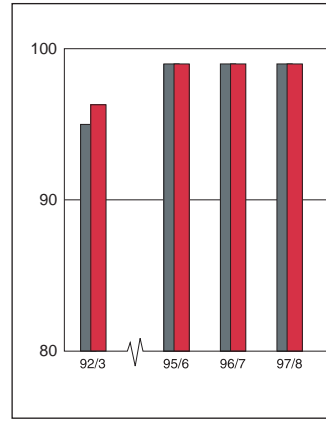
Overall Standards

Figure 26

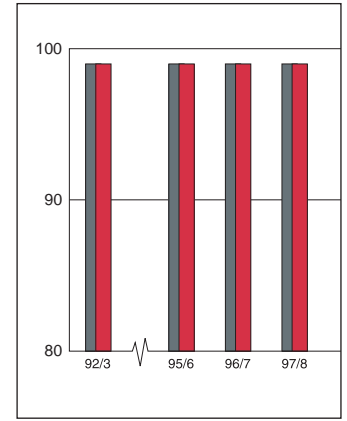
OS7 Reading Meters

The Standard requires companies to obtain an actual meter reading at least once every 12 months for a minimum percentage of meters.

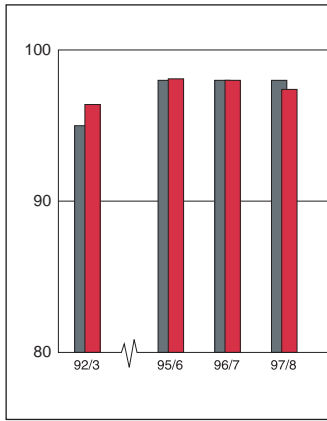
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



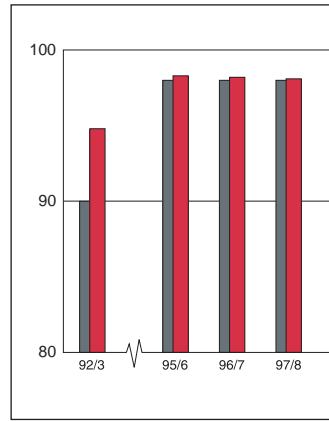
Eastern



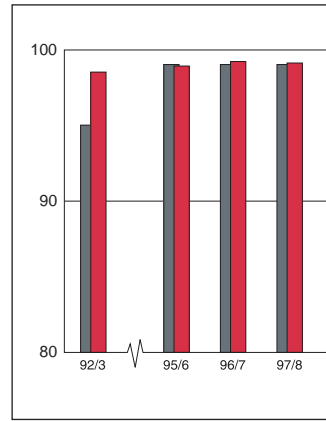
East Midlands



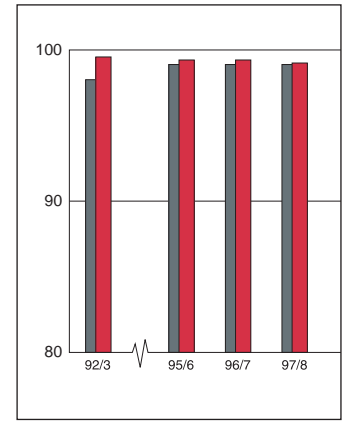
London



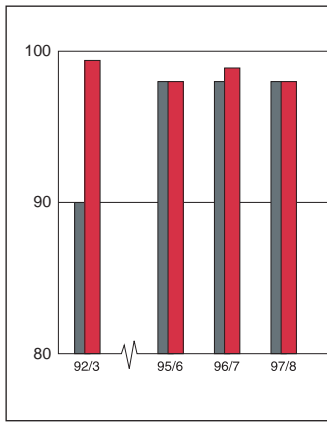
Manweb



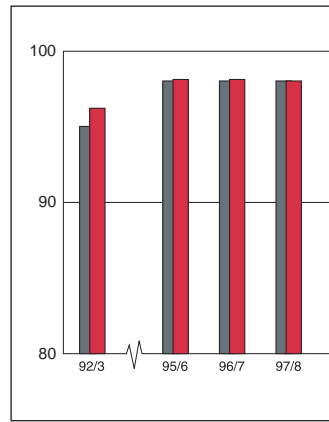
Midlands



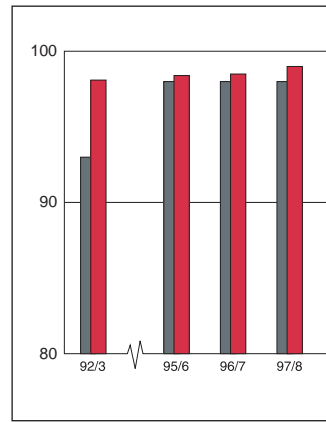
Northern



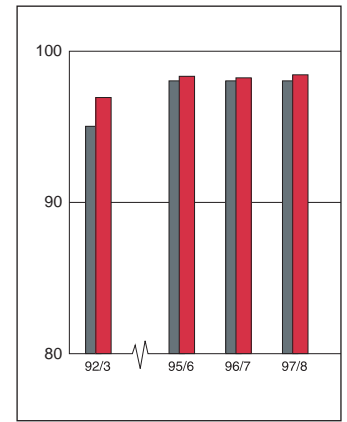
NORWEB



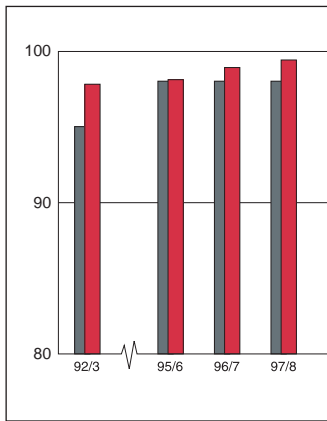
SEEBOARD



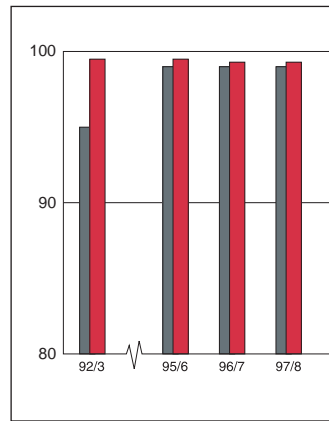
Southern



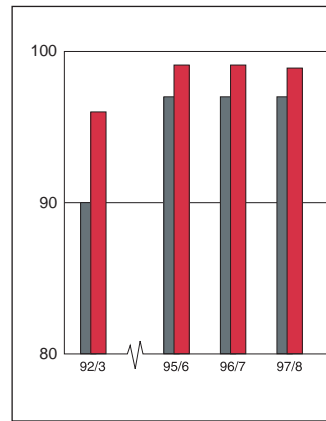
SWALEC



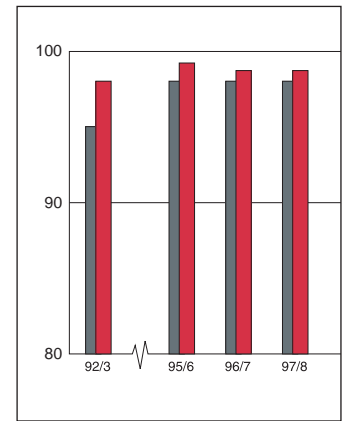
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

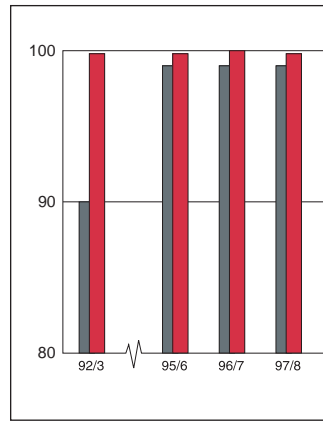
Overall Standards

Figure 27

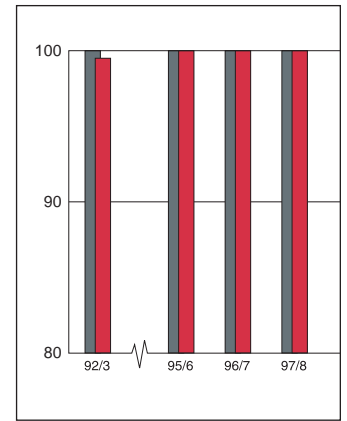
OS8 Customer Correspondence

The Standard requires companies to reply to customers letters about the distribution or supply of electricity within 10 working days.

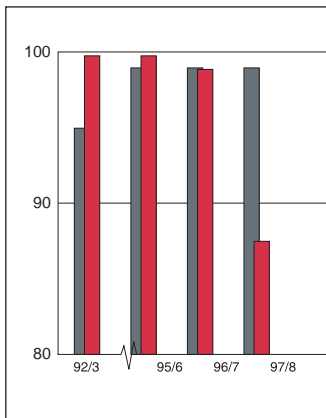
■ % Required ■ % Achieved



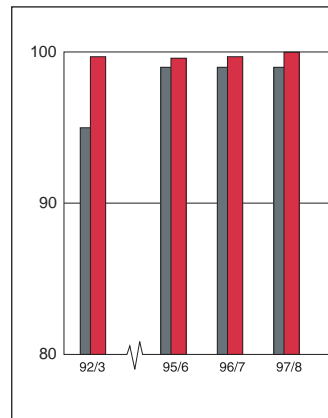
Eastern



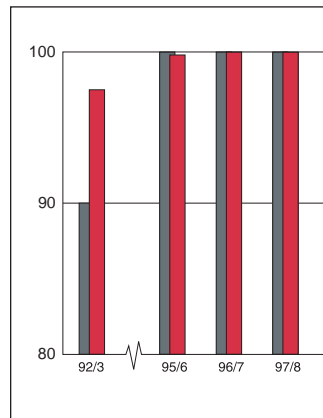
East Midlands



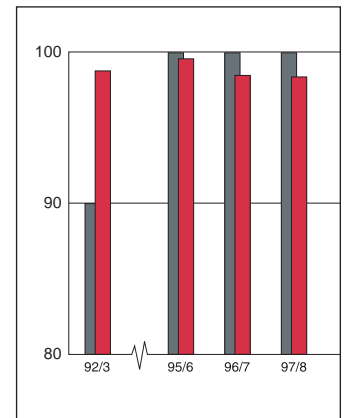
London



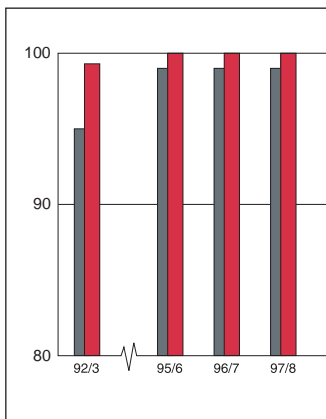
Manweb



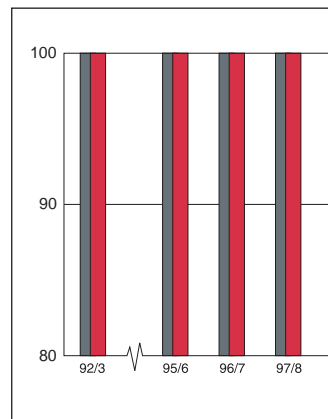
Midlands



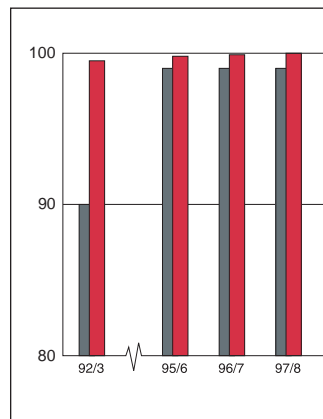
Northern



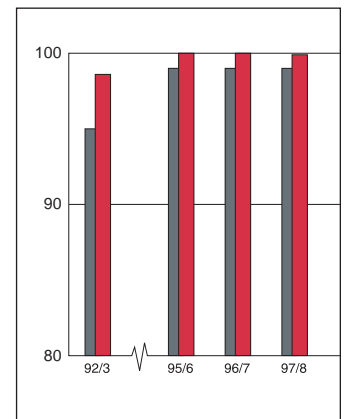
NORWEB



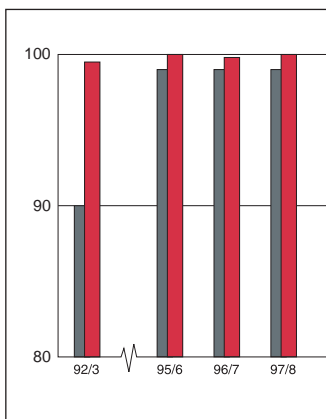
SEEBOARD



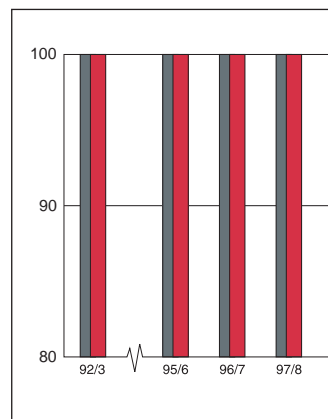
Southern



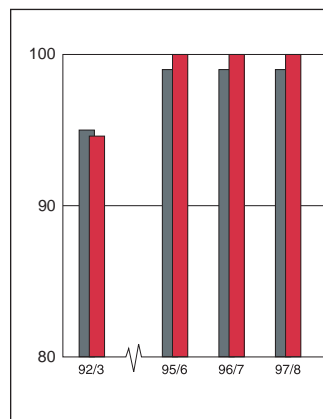
SWALEC



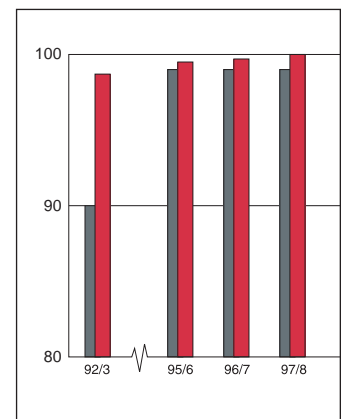
South Western



Yorkshire



Hydro-Electric



ScottishPower

Figure 28

Changes to OS1a (Restoration of Supply within three hours) from 1 April 1998

Company	OS1a	
	From %	To %
Eastern	93	93
East Midlands	85	90
London	80	85
Manweb	85	90
Midlands	95	95
Northern	88	90
NORWEB	85	90
SEEBOARD	80	90
Southern	85	90
SWALEC	80	85
South Western	80	85
Yorkshire	80	85
Hydro-Electric	80	85
ScottishPower	80	85

Chapter 4

Customer Complaints

During 1997/98, OFFER and the Electricity Consumers' Committees overall received a total of 6,320 complaints. This represents a fall of seven per cent on the previous year. Five companies, however, showed increases, with those against London Electricity rising by 69 per cent and those against SEEBOARD by 62 per cent. In terms of the number of complaints received in relation to the number of customers served by each PES, London received the greatest number of complaints followed by ScottishPower.

OFFER has been particularly concerned about the rising level of complaints about London Electricity. Complaints about the company were such that the Office of Public Service (OPS) announced in June 1997 that it was investigating whether London Electricity should have its Charter Mark removed. OPS subsequently announced, in April 1998, that in view of the significant progress the company had made, London Electricity would retain the Charter Mark. Changes have been made to the company's management structure and procedures. OFFER is looking to see how these changes feed through to benefit customers.

Figure 29 shows the number of complaints received for the last two years. Complaints are only recorded if the customer has previously raised the matter with the company and has been dissatisfied with the response. Figure 30 shows the trend in the number of complaints since 1992/93 by giving the number of complaints received per 100,000 domestic customers, for the past five years. (A fuller analysis of complaints, by calendar year, is contained in OFFER's Annual Report for 1997).

Figure 29 Customer Complaints

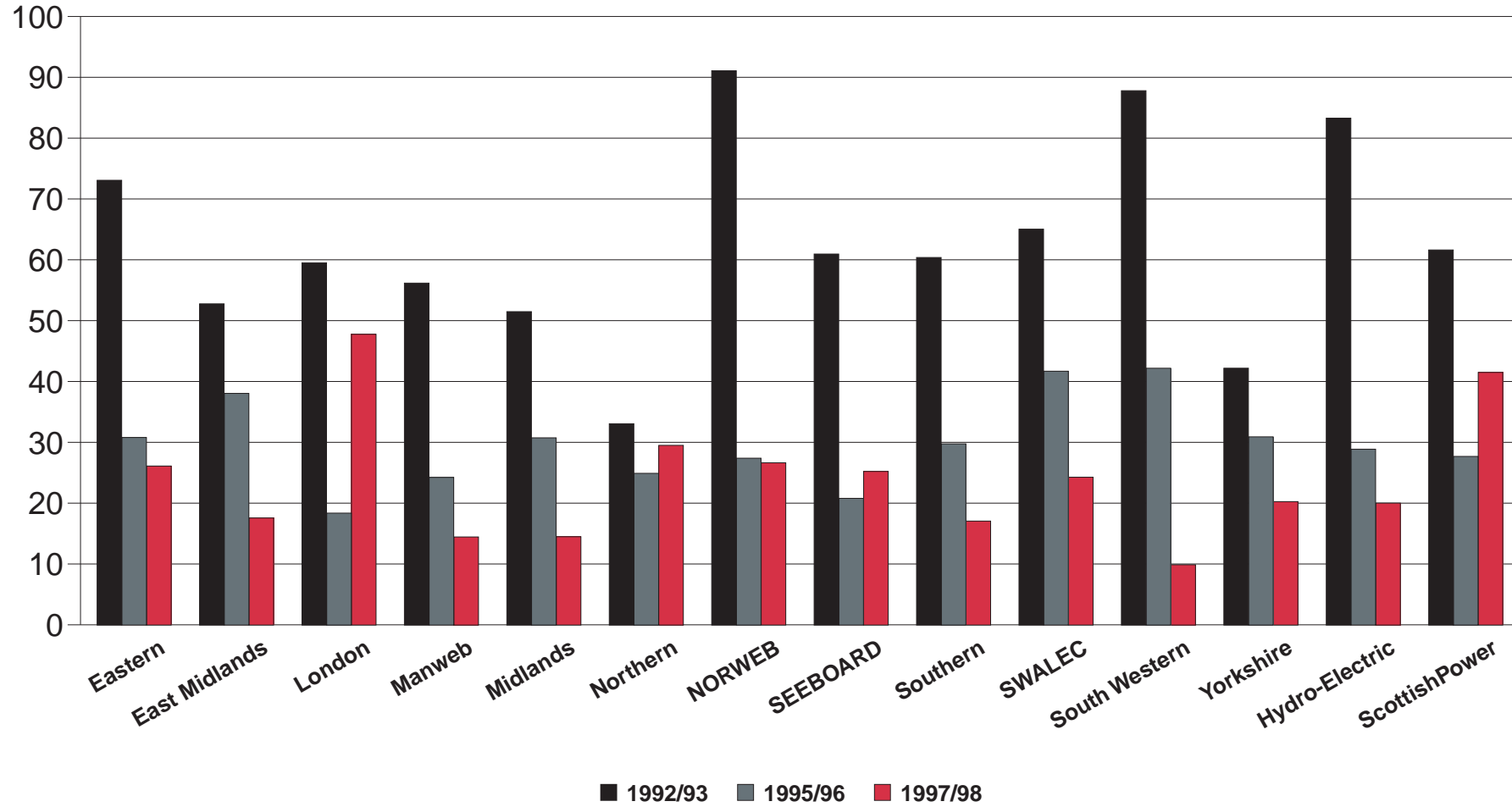
Company	1996/97 Number of complaints received	1996/97 Complaints received per 100,000 domestic customers	1997/98 Number of complaints received	1997/98 Complaints received per 100,000 domestic customers	Percentage reduction of complaints received between 1996/97 & 1997/98
Eastern	805	26.02	813	26.22	(1)
East Midlands	536	23.62	404	17.61	25
London	561	28.50	948	47.81	(69)
Manweb	325	23.69	201	14.64	38
Midlands	636	28.42	328	14.53	48
Northern	460	31.53	418	29.66	9
NORWEB	685	31.22	576	26.68	16
SEEBOARD	313	15.66	508	25.26	(62)
Southern	573	21.93	452	17.10	21
SWALEC	346	35.78	237	24.31	32
South Western	374	28.52	132	9.92	65
Yorkshire	505	25.27	407	20.30	19
Hydro-Electric	113	17.68	129	20.06	(14)
ScottishPower	581	32.09	767	41.97	(32)
TOTAL	6,813	26.27	6,320	24.25	7

() - Increase in complaint numbers

Figure 30

Complaints received per 100,000 customers

For the years 1992/93, 1995/96 and 1997/98



Chapter 5

Domestic Disconnections

As a condition of its licence and with the approval of the Director General, each company is required to operate a Code of Practice for domestic customers experiencing difficulty in paying their electricity bills. Since the introduction of the Code in 1991, the number of domestic customers disconnected each year for debt has fallen sharply. Figure 31 shows the actual number of domestic customers disconnected for debt by each company during the past five years. In 1997/98 the number of domestic customers disconnected for debt fell by almost 19 per cent by comparison with the preceding year. Four companies - East Midlands, Southern, Yorkshire and Hydro-Electric - showed increases when compared with 1996/97. In Yorkshire's case, the basis for calculation in 1997/98 has been brought into line with that used by other companies (which it now transpires had not previously been the case).

Figure 32 shows the number of domestic disconnections for debt, by each company, per 100,000 domestic credit customers.

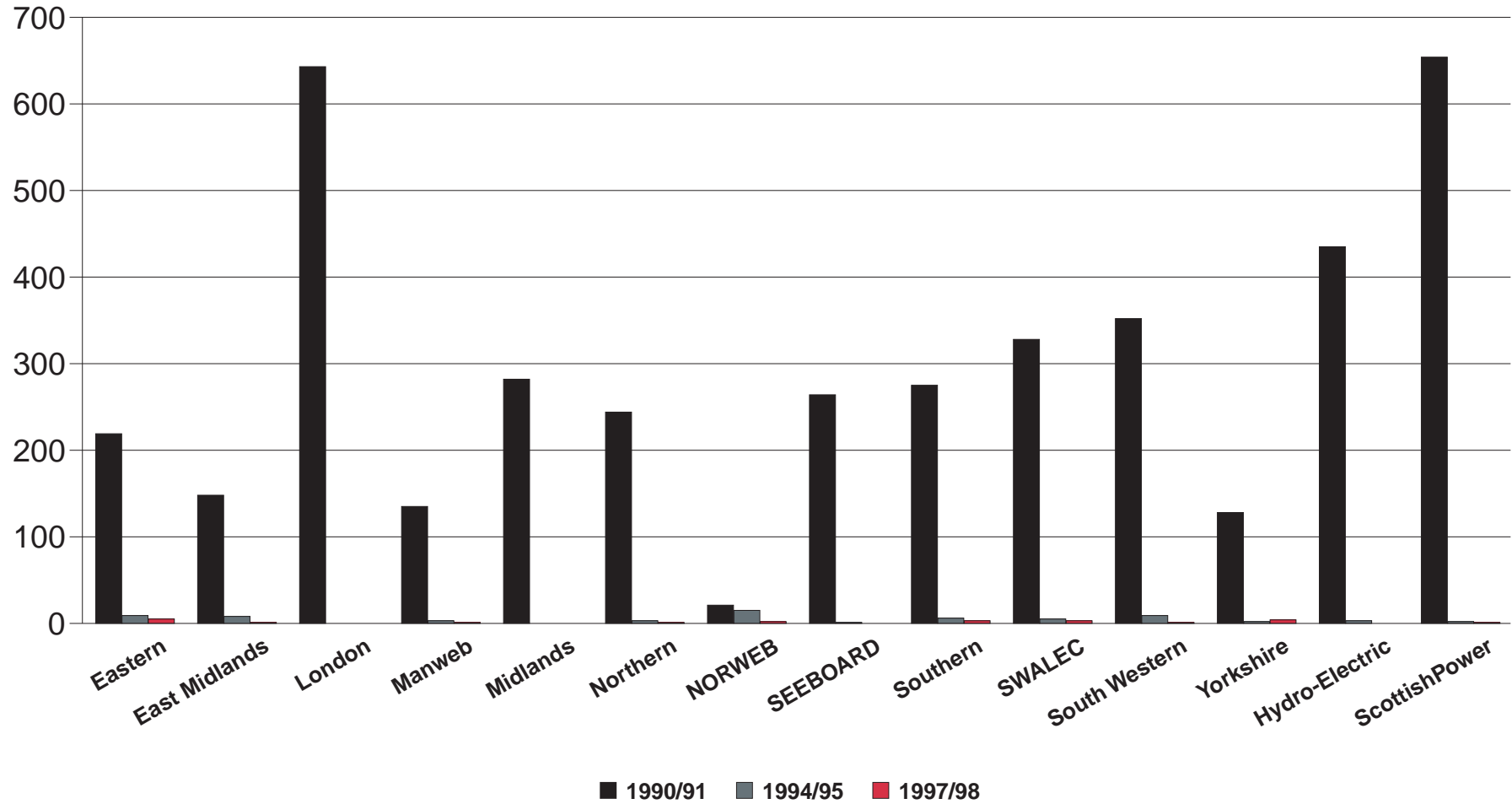
Figure 31 Domestic Disconnections

Company	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Eastern	508	229	238	161	115
East Midlands	311	153	56	18	20
London	139	0	0	0	0
Manweb	23	27	30	8	7
Midlands	211	8	7	1	0
Northern	184	39	54	75	14
NORWEB	344	270	101	82	42
SEEBOARD	101	23	0	0	0
Southern	185	128	73	41	53
SWALEC	54	35	24	24	23
South Western	66	94	67	53	10
Yorkshire	397	36	4	0	90
Hydro-Electric	227	14	10	0	2
ScottishPower	67	27	10	8	7
TOTAL	2,817	1,083	674	471	383

() - Increase in disconnections for debt

Figure 32

Disconnections per 100,000 Domestic Customers For the years 1990/91, 1994/95 and 1997/98



Chapter 6

Prepayment Meters

Figure 33 shows the number of domestic customers that pay for their electricity by means of a prepayment meter (either a coin meter or a token/key meter) since 1990/91. Over that period, the number of prepayment meters nearly doubled, from 1.8 million to 3.6 million. It rose by three per cent in 1997/98 by comparison with the preceding year.

Figure 34 shows the trend since 1990/91 in the number of customers with prepayment meters by each company, per 100,000 domestic credit customers.

Figure 33 Prepayment Meters

Company	'000 Prepayment Meters at end-March								Percentage Increase 1990/91 to 1997/98
	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	
Eastern	159	204	256	294	323	350	366	357	125
East Midlands	158	175	168	204	234	254	269	277	75
London	163	189	230	262	315	354	378	388	138
Manweb	171	174	201	218	237	238	271	284	66
Midlands	192	210	289	233	265	291	313	327	70
Northern	49	48	48	69	92	109	124	136	178
NORWEB	150	177	200	214	224	239	255	267	78
SEEBOARD	78	100	127	157	176	192	206	212	172
Southern	153	176	207	214	244	272	288	300	96
SWALEC	73	82	99	115	129	142	151	157	115
South Western	77	85	104	119	140	164	186	200	160
Yorkshire	112	131	156	185	221	231	241	247	121
Hydro-Electric	45	51	61	77	82	102	116	127	182
ScottishPower	227	278	312	339	360	377	392	395	74
TOTAL	1,807	2,080	2,458	2,700	3,042	3,315	3,556	3,674	104

Figure 34

Prepayment Meters per 100,000 Domestic Customers For the years 1990/91, 1994/95 and 1997/98

