

**Report on the quality of energy efficiency advice
provided by gas and electricity suppliers**

**Research study conducted for Ofgem by New
Perspectives with Taylor Nelson Sofres**

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FOREWORD

This study has been prepared for Ofgem by New Perspectives, with Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shopping. The purpose of the study was to gain a full picture of the quality of energy efficiency advice which customers receive from suppliers. Under their licences, electricity and gas suppliers are obliged to provide domestic customers with advice on energy efficiency. Each supplier has to prepare and publish a Code of Practice giving practical information and advice. Ofgem collects statistics from suppliers on the numbers and types of enquiries they receive from their customers. Details are published quarterly on Ofgem's website (www.ofgem.gov.uk).

The study was done by using a panel of 'mystery shoppers' to make a series of telephone calls to suppliers' General Call Centres And Energy Efficiency Advice Helplines seeking advice on a range of problems. In most cases the callers were actual customers of the supplier concerned. To gain a further dimension, New Perspectives conducted telephone interviews with customers who have recently received advice from suppliers. The results presented in this document therefore provide a detailed, factually based, picture of what is happening on the ground.

The results indicate that standards vary widely. As well as good practice, there are also many instances where the service or advice given should have been better. Ofgem has decided to publish the research results in full, to give suppliers in particular the opportunity to consider and review their performance alongside that of other companies.

Ofgem has written individually to each supplier included in this report to seek their comments on the findings. Where performance is unacceptable, we are taking additional steps to ensure appropriate improvements are made. More generally, following a review of the results of this research, Ofgem will prepare guidelines for suppliers to follow, to promote greater consistency and improved service overall. We will invite views on the guidelines later in the year. In the meantime, any comments on this research can be sent to:

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Ofgem is grateful to Robin Sadler and his team at New Perspectives, and the 'mystery shopping' panel at Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shopping, for their work on designing and undertaking this research, and preparing this report on the results.

Ofgem, June 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives and Methods

1. This research was carried out for Ofgem by New Perspectives and Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) Mystery Shopping between January and March, 2002, in order to explore the quality of energy efficiency advice given by major and minor gas and electricity suppliers in Great Britain. The research consisted of two surveys:
 - i) A Mystery Shopping Survey, in which 270 assessors from TNS Mystery Shopping made 85 telephone calls to the General Call Centres of major suppliers, 235 calls to the Energy Efficiency Helplines of major suppliers, and 22 calls to the call centres and helplines of minor suppliers. Most of these assessors were real customers of the companies they called, and each asked for help dealing with one of five scenarios: high bills, a cold home (and an elderly person in residence), help to save energy, advice on finding an energy saving fridge, and advice on grants for energy saving measures.
 - ii) A Telephone Survey of 113 customers of major suppliers who had contacted their fuel supplier for energy efficiency advice in the previous five months. These telephone interviews were conducted by New Perspectives.

The project was managed and reported on by New Perspectives, who designed the mystery shopping and telephone questionnaires, and carried out the analysis on both surveys. The rest of this section summarises the main findings and conclusions, and is followed by Summary Charts which show how the major companies performed (above average, average, or below average) on a number of key criteria.

The Mystery Shopping Survey – General Call Centres of major suppliers

2. The first part of the Mystery Shopping Survey consisted of 85 calls to the General Call Centres of major suppliers, and was designed to check whether call handlers recognise the callers' need for energy efficiency advice, and refer them to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. The scenarios tested were: high bills, a cold home (with an elderly resident), and needing help to save energy.
3. From these 85 calls to General Call Centres we found that only about three quarters of the calls made by customers to General Call Centres are successfully connected at the first attempt. Some callers simply give up after waiting several minutes to get through, and a few have to wait unacceptably long times (e.g. five to 15 minutes) to be connected to British Gas, Yorkshire, TXU (Norweb), npower, SWALEC and Powergen. But once callers do get through, they are usually dealt with in a polite and professional manner.
4. We found that fewer than half the customers who call with the sorts of problems we tested seem likely to be referred *immediately* to their supplier's Energy Efficiency Helpline (only 46% were). A quarter (25%) of callers are instead given some sort of advice before being referred on to the helpline, and some of them had to push very hard to be referred at all. Altogether therefore 71% of callers are finally referred to Energy Efficiency Helplines.

5. Some major energy companies' General Call Centres do refer all or most of these types of enquiries to their Energy Efficiency Helpline, which is good; British Gas, London Electricity, npower, Powergen, Southern, Scottish Hydro, SWALEC and Seeboard. But some other companies seem rather poor at doing so. Half or fewer of our callers to these companies were referred to their Energy Efficiency Helplines: SWEB, Virgin, Yorkshire, Northern, Scottish Power, Manweb and TXU Energi. Some call handlers seemed not to know of the helpline, or did not have its correct number to hand.
6. Where some energy advice is given by call handlers at General Call Centres, the advice given is rarely as comprehensive or useful as that which can be supplied by the Energy Efficiency Helplines. It often consists of verbal advice about alternative tariffs, metering or payment methods, or the sending of an energy efficiency booklet. Few call handlers ask questions which might help establish the presence of fuel poverty or eligibility for grants, so almost no one was told about any grant scheme, and few people were advised about any energy saving measures to install.
7. Although some call handlers do claim to be trained in energy awareness, most of our mystery shoppers felt that the call handlers who they dealt with knew "little or nothing" about energy efficiency. Although their advice was found "easy" or "very easy to understand", most of our callers also felt that this advice was "not very useful" – and significantly less useful than many callers found the advice from the Energy Efficiency Helplines. This was sometimes because publications promised by the general call centres were never sent.
8. Although most customers with energy efficiency type queries are recognised and referred to helplines by General Call Centres, we conclude that there is much room for improvement. Some call handlers do not readily recognise when customers could benefit from "energy efficiency advice", even when they ask for it pretty directly. We conclude that call handlers at General Call Centres could benefit from further training on how to recognise or identify customers who could benefit from energy advice, or from energy efficiency grants (e.g. Warm Front), or from the company's own EEC scheme. Some also need to be reminded of the existence and correct telephone number of the company's Energy Efficiency Helpline so that they can refer such customers there successfully.

The Mystery Shopping Survey – Energy Efficiency Helplines of major suppliers

9. We found that although many customers do get more useful advice from these major companies' Energy Efficiency Helplines than from their General Call Centres, some customers are still dealt with inadequately. For example, customers who call with complaints about "high bills", "a cold home/elderly relative in residence", or for "help to save energy" are quite often not asked any of the questions which could establish whether they are suffering "fuel poverty", or might qualify for Warm Front grants or EEC schemes, and around one in three of these callers was not advised on any energy saving measures to install.
10. When customers ask about "refrigerators which use less energy" most (3 out of 4) do get useful verbal advice on "energy labelling", but only one in five then receives any

printed information to help them make informed purchases. And few energy advisers use this opportunity to give broader energy saving advice, such as suggesting other measures which could help “save energy”.

11. When customers call to ask specifically about grants, 80% do get some useful verbal advice (which is good), but few customers are then sent printed information on Warm Front (16%) or EEC schemes (11%) although some are offered a visit from a surveyor (22%). Indeed printed information on grants and EEC schemes was sent to rather few customers in every scenario. We conclude that these major fuel suppliers are missing many opportunities to promote their own EEC schemes and Warm Front, and to identify and help households suffering from fuel poverty.
12. When our mystery shoppers asked supplementary questions of the energy advisers (e.g. on grants, measures advised, condensing boilers and CFLs) they were usually (but not always) given some helpful and re-assuring information on costs, benefits and savings. But our callers sometimes encountered energy advisers who could not tell them how to apply for grants, or how long the process might take, or how much they might save from installing some energy efficiency measure – all things that a well-trained energy adviser should know or be able to access quickly. We also found advisers who did not know if booklets on energy efficiency or lists of other sources of advice were available (both required under Condition 25). One in four of our mystery shoppers concluded that their energy adviser “knew little or nothing about energy efficiency”. We have to conclude that not all Energy Efficiency Helplines are manned by adequately trained energy advisers (particularly at Scottish Power and Manweb) and that additional training is advisable in most or all companies.
13. Even if some energy advisers don’t know a great deal about energy efficiency, at least our mystery shoppers rated most of them as “professional” and “polite” in the way they handled the call – which is good - and our customers mostly rated the advice they received as “very easy” or “quite easy to understand”.
14. Verbal energy advice (given on the telephone) is of course only part of the process of helping customers to be more energy efficient. Verbal advice ideally needs to be followed up with printed material explaining how households can be more energy efficient in their behaviour, and through measures they install, and one of the best forms of printed advice has been identified through other research as the Home Energy Report. We were therefore interested to see what publications were sent to customers, and whether these included an energy audit questionnaire and, later, a report. In practice we found that Energy Efficiency Helplines varied quite widely in the follow-up printed information they sent, following the customers’ calls. Although this information usually arrived within a week or so, not everything that had been promised was sent; sometimes many extra leaflets were included, and sometimes many callers received nothing at all. For example, 81% of our callers were promised a general booklet on energy efficiency, but only 62% received one. We found that the ability to deliver promised booklets varied widely between companies: 100% of the Seaboard customers promised a booklet received one, but only 40% of Manweb customers did. We also found that few people told about grants received printed information about them, and that some of those offered energy audit questionnaires never received them. We conclude from this that several companies have poor systems

for recording what queries customers have, what advice has been given, and what publications have been requested or promised: this needs to be improved.

15. When we assessed the persuasiveness of these energy advice services by checking whether our mystery shoppers might install some of the recommended measures, we found big differences in the likely effects of advice from different companies. Those giving the most persuasive advice seemed to be Seeboard, London/SWEB, British Gas and Powergen (where around half or more of customers felt they would install some recommended measures). The least persuasive advice came from companies which performed well below par on several criteria - Scottish Power and Manweb - where fewer than one in five customers felt they might install anything. We conclude that advice from good Energy Efficiency Helplines can be over twice as effective as that from helplines that are inadequately manned and trained, and that standards of advice giving do need to be improved at several of these major suppliers.

The Mystery Shopping Survey – General Call Centres and Helplines of minor suppliers

16. We concluded from the 22 mystery shopping calls to these companies that several do not have adequate arrangements in place for providing energy efficiency advice to customers; these companies are Atlantic Electric and Gas, Cambridge Gas and Electricity, Countrywide Gas and North Wales Energy. Utility Link appears to offer only a part-time advice service. Amerada is poor at referring customers to its energy efficiency helpline but can provide some verbal advice, even if it fails to follow up with leaflets. Telecom Plus also has a poor referral mechanism from its call centre to helpline, but provides some verbal advice backed up (supposedly) by an EEAC to offer Home Energy Reports (yet to arrive). Enron too provided good verbal advice, but failed to send any literature. There is clearly room for improvement in the energy advice service provided by all or most of these small suppliers.

The Telephone Survey of recent customers

17. Some of these 113 “real” customers who contacted their fuel suppliers’ helplines recently encountered many of the same problems and delays in getting through as did our Mystery Shoppers. We conclude that some improvements are necessary to improve referral procedures and access to these Energy Efficiency Helplines.
18. The reasons why real customers call Energy Efficiency Helplines are very similar to some of those we used as mystery shopping scenarios – high bills and how to cut them, advice on energy efficiency, and information on grants – but they also include finding out about how to control storage heaters and advice on tariffs.
19. The types and scope of advice currently provided to real customers are the same as that provided to our mystery shoppers. Not enough questions are asked to identify the fuel poor or those eligible for grants and EEC schemes, so few callers are given advice on grants and EEC (even those who ask about grants). Some callers get advice on tariffs when they really need advice on how to reduce consumption. And only some callers get advice on energy saving measures to install, or energy saving behaviour to adopt. In short, energy advisers seem to answer only the “presenting problem”, without seeking how they can broaden the scope of their advice to help the customer more. As a result of this, we conclude that these companies miss many opportunities

to reach fuel poor and disadvantaged customers with their own EEC schemes, or with grants from Warm Front. This situation needs to be improved.

20. As we found in our Mystery Shopping Survey, not all customers who seek advice from helplines are sent follow-up printed information (28% received none) and rather few receive an energy audit questionnaire or Home Energy Report (12%). We conclude that arrangements for logging calls and sending out follow-up literature should be improved, and that Home Energy Reports should be more widely used as good practice.
21. Where recommendations are received on measures to install or energy saving behaviour to adopt, this is quite widely followed, which is encouraging. Over two thirds of customers given each of these types of advice are following at least some of it, so it is worthwhile for companies to provide such advice to a higher proportion of customers who call.
22. Although most customers feel that the advice provided by energy efficiency helplines is either “quite useful” or even “very useful”, customers who call about high bills and how to cut them tend to find the advice less useful, mainly because it does not seem comprehensive enough to really help them cut their fuel bills. This supports our conclusion that the advice provided needs to be more pro-active if it is to really help customers with high bills who may be in fuel poverty. At present it does not really raise their awareness of what energy efficiency can do for them.
23. One encouraging finding is that a fifth of customers who recently received advice are already noticing benefits from following it – e.g. lower fuel bills, warmer homes, reduced condensation and less frequent changing of light bulbs. We conclude from this (and from other recent studies) that energy efficiency advice can make a real difference to consumers – provided it is comprehensive and followed.

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF MAJOR COMPANIES' GENERAL CALL CENTRES

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES Above *** Average ** Below *	British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	Northern	Powergen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Manweb	Seaboard	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
First calls successful	***	***	**	***	***	**	**	***	***	**	**	**	**	***	***	**
Speed of Response	*	***	***	**	*	*	***	*	***	***	*	***	***	**	***	*
High proportion of callers referred to En. Effic. Helpline	**	***	*	*	**	*	*	***	**	**	*	*	*	***	*	*
TOTAL STARS (Max: 9)	6	9	6	6	6	4	6	7	8	7	4	6	6	8	7	4

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF MAJOR COMPANIES' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES

MAJOR FUEL COs/GROUPS Above *** Average ** Below *	British Gas	London/SWEB	npower	Yorkshire	Northern	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Manweb	Seaboard	TXU Energi
CALL HANDLING											
First calls successful	**	**	***	***	*	***	**	*	**	*	*
Speed of Response	***	*	**	*	***	**	**	**	**	*	**
PROVIDING ADVICE											
Asking about Home/Quest'aire	***	***	**	**	***	**	***	*	*	***	*
Asking about Benefits/Age	**	**	*	*	***	***	*	*	*	**	**
Advice on Measures to install	***	**	**	*	**	***	***	*	*	***	*
Advice on Grants/EEC	***	***	***	*	**	***	**	*	*	***	**
On Controlling CH/HW/Cooking	***	**	**	***	*	***	***	*	*	**	**
Advice on Energy Labelling	**	***	**	*	**	**	**	*	*	**	**
SUPPLEMENTARY INFO											
Giving more info on Grants	***	**	*	***	***	*	***	*	**	***	*
Giving more info on Measures	**	**	***	***	***	*	**	**	**	**	**
More info on Condensing Boilers	***	**	**	***	**	**	**	*	*	***	**
More info on Low Energy Bulbs	***	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	*	**	**
Whether do Home Visits	*	***	*	*	**	**	**	***	**	***	*
Whether can send Booklet	**	***	***	no data	***	***	***	**	**	**	**
Whether can send List	**	***	***	**	**	**	**	*	*	***	**
Whether adviser is Trained	**	**	**	***	***	***	***	*	*	**	*
ASKING CALLER DETAILS											
% asked for Name/Address/Tel	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	**	**	**

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF MAJOR COMPANIES' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES (Continued)

MAJOR FUEL COs/GROUPS Above *** Average ** Below *	British Gas	London/ SWEB	npower	Yorkshire	Northern	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Manweb	Seeboard	TXU Energi
PRINTED INFORMATION											
Sending Booklet promised	**	***	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	***	*
Sending Grant/EEC Info	*	*	***	**	***	***	*	*	*	***	*
Sending Questionnaire	*	**	**	**	**	*	*	*	*	*	**
Sending Home Energy Report	*	***	**	***	***	*	*	*	*	*	*
Amount of Information sent	**	**	***	***	***	***	**	*	*	**	**
OVERALL RATINGS											
Knowledge of Energy Efficiency	***	***	**	**	**	**	***	*	*	**	*
Professionalism	***	***	**	**	***	**	***	*	*	**	**
Politeness	***	**	**	**	**	**	***	*	**	***	**
Ease of Understanding Advice	**	**	**	*	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
Take-up of Measures Advised	**	***	**	**	**	**	***	*	*	***	**
Overall Usefulness	**	***	**	**	***	**	***	*	*	***	*
TOTAL STARS (Max: 84)	63	66	60	55	66	61	63	35	37	64	45

INTRODUCTION

Background

This study has been commissioned by Ofgem, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, which is the regulator for the gas and electricity industries in Great Britain. Ofgem wishes to examine the energy suppliers' performance in providing energy efficiency advice to domestic customers. Under the terms of their licences (Standard Condition 25), these companies are required to promote the efficient use of their fuels, and to provide energy efficiency advice (free of charge) to customers via an energy efficiency helpline manned by suitably qualified advisers. Companies are also expected to identify callers to their general call centres who could benefit from advice on energy efficiency, and to refer them to the specialist advice line.

Suppliers should produce a code of practice that explains energy efficiency measures which customers may wish to adopt, and that lists independent sources of advice and grants. Any such information provided should be up-to-date, technically correct, and presented in a format which is readily understood by customers. The code should include practical information on how to use gas and electricity more efficiently, including examples of energy efficiency improvements which can be installed, together with their costs and savings. Such improvements could include insulation, draughtproofing, low energy lighting, energy efficient appliances, and better heating controls.

Under Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) schemes, suppliers are also required to provide help with the provision of energy saving measures such as loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, draughtproofing, compact fluorescent lamps and efficient boilers and controls. Advice on energy efficiency may include referrals to suitable EEC schemes, as well as the Government's Warm Front grants, which are available to customers on income related benefits or tax credits.

The initial three year EEC programme, which replaced the Energy Efficiency Standards of Performance from April 1, 2002, places an obligation on all suppliers with 15,000 or more customers to achieve an obligated level energy savings set by Government. At least 50% of these savings must be targeted at customers on benefits or tax credits (similar to Warm Front). It is estimated that the total value of EEC is around £150 million p.a., or £3.60 per customer per fuel p.a., between 2002 and 2005.

Ofgem is contributing to the Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy, which has set a target for eliminating fuel poverty, initially among vulnerable groups by 2010. Fuel poor households are defined as those needing to spend more than 10% of their income on fuel in order to heat their homes to a comfortable standard. Ofgem has published a Social Action Plan, which sets out the ways it is working with fuel companies and others to help tackle fuel poverty. There are several key elements to the Social Action Plan: the code of practice obligations have been strengthened to provide more protection to vulnerable customers - e.g. those with payment difficulties, prepayment meters, the disabled, elderly or sick; another involves effective monitoring (each quarter) of suppliers' performance in relation to the Social Action Plan, including energy efficiency advice.

As well as collecting from each fuel supplier information relating to the energy advice it has provided (now published at www.ofgem.gov.uk/sap/keyindicators/charts/ee1.pdf). Ofgem has committed itself to undertaking a qualitative monitoring exercise into the energy advice services of fuel suppliers.

Purpose of the research

Ofgem wanted this research to focus primarily on the electricity and gas suppliers' energy advisory services. It wished to explore:

1. Whether the General Call Centres of fuel suppliers are good at recognising customers who need energy efficiency advice and refer them to their Energy Efficiency Helplines (i.e. by providing the correct telephone number to call).
2. Whether the energy efficiency advice services provided by the fuel suppliers comply with the codes of practice obligations and Ofgem's guidance.
3. Whether advice and information provided is accurate and appropriate.
4. Whether any advice given takes proper account of customers' circumstances (e.g. disabled, elderly, on benefits, spending a high proportion of income on fuel etc.).
5. Whether the advice given is effective at reaching the Fuel Poor.

This research was designed to highlight good and bad practice in the provision of advice. It will be used by Ofgem to assess whether fuel suppliers are meeting their obligations, and in the development of policy.

Research methods

The two main methods of research that we used to meet the objectives of this study were:

1. "*Mystery Shopping*" interviews, in which some 270 actual customers of the 20+ gas and electricity suppliers telephoned them with a variety queries which require energy efficiency advice. 85 calls were made initially to the General Call Centres of 16 major suppliers, and 235 to their Energy Efficiency Helplines. 22 calls were also made to the call centres and helplines of 8 smaller suppliers. This phase of the study explored what advice was actually given, and whether or not it was appropriate.
2. *Exploratory telephone interviews with consumers*, all of whom had contacted their fuel suppliers with energy efficiency queries within the last one to five months. These 113 telephone interviews explored real consumers' understanding of the advice they were given, and whether they have acted upon it or seem likely to in future.

Arrangement of the report

The Executive Summary outlines the main findings and conclusions. This Introduction is followed by the first Findings section which describes the main findings of the Mystery Shopping study. This covers, in turn, the results of: calls to General Call Centres of the major suppliers; calls to the Energy Efficiency Helplines of major suppliers; and calls to call centres and/or helplines of minor suppliers. Then comes the second main section of the Findings which covers the results from the Telephone Survey of 113 customers who had recently sought advice. Both these sections are illustrated with Tables.

In the Appendices can be found a more detailed description of the Research Methodology, the questionnaires used in both the Mystery Shopping and Telephone Interviews, the Sampling Plans for each survey, and an Analysis of Response to the Telephone Survey, showing the numbers of successful and unsuccessful calls made to customers of each company. We have also included an Acknowledgements section to thank all who assisted in this research.

FINDINGS

1. THE MYSTERY SHOPPING SURVEY

General Call Centres of the major fuel suppliers

One of the first objectives of this survey has been to see whether customers of fuel companies are referred to their Energy Efficiency Helplines, if they call the General Call Centres of those companies with queries or problems which could be solved with energy efficiency advice. We used three simple scenarios to test this. Mystery shoppers called the General Call Centre numbers of fuel companies with one of the following three scenarios:

- A. *“I have high fuel bills, which I am finding hard to pay.”*
- B. *“My home is cold and I am elderly/have an elderly relative living with me.”*
- C. *“What help can you give us to save energy?”*

“High fuel bills”, or difficulties with paying fuel bills, are outward signs of Fuel Poverty, and it would be reasonable to expect call handlers to see such customers as needing energy efficiency advice, and also as likely candidates for Energy Efficiency Commitment schemes, which are being expanded significantly in 2002. A “cold home” is also a symptom of fuel poverty, and an aged relative (aged 60+) living permanently at that home may qualify the household for a Warm Front grant; so again this should be an obvious case where energy efficiency advice may help, and where grant information may be appropriate. The final scenario tested here – *“What help can you give us to help save energy?”* – should be seen as a direct plea for energy efficiency advice by any fuel company’s call handler who has the slightest knowledge of the potential savings from energy efficiency.

Our “ideal model” of how General Call Centres should work in response to queries such as these would be that the call handler should either:

- i) refer the customer at once to the company’s Energy Efficiency Helpline (i.e. by providing the correct telephone number to call), or
- ii) offer a level of advice similar to that which should ideally be offered by the Energy Efficiency Helpline – e.g:
 - a) checking on fuel bills and identifying the underlying cause of the customer’s problem by asking questions about the home, its insulation and draughtproofing, heating system type/age/controls, and the customer’s circumstances (age/benefits etc); then...
 - b) offering *appropriate* verbal advice based on the information provided; this could include advice on behavioural changes to save energy/improve comfort, and/or energy efficiency measures to install, and it should include advice about available grant and discount schemes; and then...

c) following this up with printed information about energy efficiency and grants schemes, and (ideally) a printed report of recommendations appropriate to the customer's home and circumstances, based on a home energy audit and produced by an "expert system" of the sort used for energy advice by some of these companies and by Energy Efficiency Advice Centres.

The sections which follow look first in general (and then in detail for each company) at how the five or six calls made to the General Call Centres of each of the major suppliers were handled, and how many of them resulted in referrals to the Energy Efficiency Helplines of those companies. The data are summarised in a series of Tables in the text.

How quickly General Call Centres respond to calls, and how they respond

The first things we asked our Mystery Shoppers to note down was how long the General Call Centres of major suppliers took to respond to their telephone call, how the call was handled, and how they were greeted. Results are summarised in Table 1.

Only about three quarters of first calls were successful (74%). Some callers just gave up because they had to wait too long, although some of our shoppers just held on until they got through after 15 minutes (Yorkshire Electricity) or 14 minutes (British Gas). These waiting times are unacceptably long to most customers, as were some of the times to get through to npower (almost 8 minutes), Powergen (5½ minutes), SWALEC (7½ minutes) and TXU Norweb (almost 9 minutes).

Only about one in nine calls (11%) was answered directly by a call handler; most involved selecting touchtone options (48%) or waiting in a queue (28%). A few callers were answered by an Answerphone (7%), an engaged tone (2%), or disconnected without a reply (4%).

Most of the call handlers at the General Call Centres of these major suppliers gave a cheery greeting (e.g. "Good Morning" – 87%) and most asked how they could help (85%). But only about half gave the name of the fuel company (47%) or their own name (54%), or asked for any customer details like name, telephone number or customer number (48%). Where the customer's name is not checked now (or later in the call) the company will have no record of the call, and cannot therefore monitor its effectiveness later. On almost a third of calls (32%) no record was made of the caller's details.

There were some variations by company in the ways in which calls were handled, and these are described below (see also Table 1).

British Gas – General Call Centre

All the first calls to the British Gas General Call Centre (four by day, two by night) were successful, and five of our customers got through to someone who could help within 45 seconds to 2½ minutes: but the sixth caller had to wait over 14 minutes to get through during the daytime – far too long.

All our callers were answered with a greeting (e.g. "Good Morning"), five with the company name ("British Gas"), all with the call handler's name, and five with an offer of assistance.

London Electricity Group – General Call Centres

The London Electricity Group consists of London Electricity, SWEB and Virgin. All run their own General Call Centres, but use a common Energy Efficiency Helpline centre in Southampton. All but one of our callers were existing customers of these companies.

London Electricity – General Call Centre

All six of our callers got through within a minute or two (even at night), which are good response times.

Greetings were quite friendly: “good morning” etc (all calls), company name (4), call handler’s name (2), offers of assistance (5) and requests for customer details (3).

SWEB – General Call Centre

All five callers to SWEB’s General Call Centre got through within 95 seconds – good response times.

Greetings were full and friendly: “good morning” etc (all 5), company name (3), call handler’s name (4), “how may I help” (all 5), but only one customer was asked for her details at first.

Virgin – General Call Centre

Only one of our mystery shoppers made a call to Virgin’s number to ask for “help to save energy”. The General Call Centre and Energy Efficiency Helpline have the same number. He got through in 20 seconds and was greeted with “Good afternoon, Virgin Energy, how may I help?”

npower – General Call Centre

Five mystery shoppers called the npower General Call Centre, four by day and one in the evening. All got through eventually, although two callers had to hold on for 6 to 8 minutes before their calls were answered – unacceptably long delays. The other three calls were answered within 90 seconds.

All our callers were greeted with “good morning” etc., three with the company name, three with the call handler’s name, all with an offer of help, but only two with a request for their name or customer number, so npower would have no records of three of these calls.

Yorkshire Electricity – General Call Centre

Five of our mystery shoppers called the Yorkshire Electricity General Call Centre, three by day and two in the evening. All were Yorkshire customers for electricity (4) and/or gas (3). Two callers (one daytime, one evening) could not get through at first but did at the second attempt. Three got through within a minute, but two had to hold on for around 15 minutes before they finally got through: this is an unacceptably long wait.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 1

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man-web	See-board	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
CUSTOMER TYPES																		
Gas only customers	7	8	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Electricity only customers	37	44	0	4	5	0	0	2	2	1	2	4	3	3	3	3	3	2
Both	31	36	2	1	0	1	3	2	1	3	4	0	3	2	0	3	2	4
Neither (posed as new customers)	10	12	0	1	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE																		
No. of first calls successful	74	87	6	6	3	1	5	3	5	6	6	4	5	4	4	6	5	5
Time to get through - Shortest	0"		45"	12"	20"		30"	3"	15"	3"	30"	0"	32"	10"	10"	4"	10"	5"
Longest	15'20"	n/a	14' 10"	2' 06"	1' 15"	20"	7' 58"	15'20"	1'22"	5'26"	1'39"	2'00"	7'30"	2' 10"	2' 20"	3' 30"	2' 21"	8'55"
Length of successful calls - Shortest	1'		2'	1'	4'		2'	2'	1'		2'	3'	1'		1'		3'	
Longest	23'	n/a	8'	11'	20'	8'	7'	23'	5'	3'	17'	28'	10'	no info	6'	no info	20'	no info

HOW CALL HANDLED																		
Answered at once by CH	9	11	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Involved touchtone options	41	48	2	4	0	0	1	1	5	3	6	3	0	3	3	4	4	2
Queuing system	24	28	3	1	2	1	4	2	0	1	0	1	3	1	2	2	1	0
Engaged	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Answerphone	6	7	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disconnected/no reply	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Other outcomes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

GREETING																		
Good morning	74	87	6	6	5	1	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	6
Company name	40	47	4	4	2	1	3	2	3	5	3	1	1	0	1	2	4	4
Call handler's name	46	54	6	2	4	0	3	5	2	1	4	3	0	4	1	4	3	4
How may I help?	72	85	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	6	6	4	3	4	4	5	4	5
Ask for customer details	41	48	5	3	1	0	2	4	1	1	6	1	3	1	3	6	3	1
Other	8	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	2	1	0

Most callers were greeted with “good morning” etc. (4), the name of the company (2), the call handler’s name (5), an offer of assistance (5), and a request for the customer’s name or customer number (4).

Northern Electric - General Call Centre

Six mystery shoppers called Northern Electric’s General Call Centre, five by day and one in the evening. Four were genuine customers of the company. The evening caller was answered by an answerphone, and so called back by day. All callers then got through within 90 seconds.

Most callers were answered with “good morning” etc (4), the company name (3), call handler’s name (2) and an offer of help (5). Only one caller was asked for a name or customer number at first, and another later on, so Northern could only have records of two of these six calls.

Powergen- General Call Centre

All six of our callers got through to the Powergen General Call Centre first time, two within 45 seconds, and the others within 2½ to 5½ minutes. Four were genuine Powergen customers for gas and electricity (3) or electricity alone (1).

Most callers were greeted by “good morning” etc (5), the name of the company (5), and with an offer of assistance (6), but rarely with the call handler’s own name (once only). Only two callers (both existing customers) were asked for their names or customer numbers. There seemed to be no difference in the attention given to non-customers compared to customers.

Scottish and Southern Group – General Call Centres

This group uses a common Energy Efficiency Helpline in Portsmouth, but still has different General Call Centres for customers of Scottish Hydro, Southern, and SWALEC. All our mystery shoppers were existing customers of these companies.

Southern - General Call Centre

Six of our mystery shoppers called Southern’s General Call Centre. All called by day and got through within about 1½ minutes, one after finding the number engaged at first. The caller who waited longest (1 minute, 39 seconds) was thanked for waiting – a nice touch, which might have been welcomed after the far longer delays to get through to some other companies. These response times are very good.

Call handlers usually gave a greeting like “good morning” etc. (5), or their own name (4), but less often with the company name (3). All callers were asked for their name or customer number.

Scottish Hydro – General Call Centre

All five of our mystery shoppers called by day, but one could not get through at the first attempt, but did so a few minutes later. All calls were answered within 2 minutes, which is good.

All five call handlers greeted the caller (e.g. “good morning”) but only one gave the name of the company; three gave their own names, four asked how they might help, and all five took the customers’ details.

SWALEC – General Call Centre

Five of our six callers to SWALEC’s General Call Centre got through by day at their first attempt, and this took between 1 and 7½ minutes; 7½ minutes is really too long.

Greetings were rather curt: “good morning” alone in one case; only one call handler mentioned the company name; none mentioned their own names; and three asked for customer details.

Scottish Power and Manweb

Scottish Power owns Manweb, but they have separate general Call Centres and separate Energy Efficiency Helplines.

Scottish Power – General Call Centre

Of our six callers who called Scottish Power’s General Call Centre, four callers got through at the first attempt, but two had to try again (one by day and one at night). Two callers took over two minutes to get an answer.

Call handlers usually greeted our callers with “good morning” etc (5) and their own name (4); none gave the company name and four asked how they could help; only one asked for customer details.

Manweb – General Call Centre

One of our five callers had to make a second attempt to get through (by day) but our other four callers got through in no more than 2 minutes, 20 seconds – which are good response times. Call handlers usually gave a greeting like “good morning” (4), but only one gave the name of the company or her own name; four asked how they might help, and three asked for customer details.

Seeboard – General Call Centre

All six callers to Seeboard got through first go, and within 3½ minutes, to be greeted with “good morning” etc (5), the call handler’s name (4), the company name (2), “how may I help?” (5) and a request for the customer’s details (all six).

TXU Energi

This group consists of the former Eastern Energy and Norweb companies, which still run two General Call Centres, but a single Energy Efficiency Helpline in Ipswich.

TXU Energi (Eastern)

All five of our callers to TXU Energi (Eastern) were successful first time, as callers got through within 2½ minutes – good response times.

Call handlers usually greeted the customer with “good morning” etc (4), the name of the company (4), their own name (3), “how may I help?” (4), and a request for customer details (3).

TXU Energi (Norweb)

Most of our six callers to TXU Energi (Norweb) got through first time and within 90 seconds, but one caller made 4 attempts in the evening and only got through after almost 9 minutes – which is an unacceptably long delay.

Call handlers usually greeted the customer with “good morning” etc (6), the name of the company (4), their own name (4), “how may I help?” (5), but only one requested customer details. (All these data are shown on Table 1.)

How call handlers responded to customers’ problems at General Call Centres

This section looks at how our customers’ problems were dealt with – what questions were asked and what advice was given, and whether the customer was referred to (i.e. given the number of) the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Where opportunities arose, our mystery shoppers also asked some call handlers questions designed to test their knowledge of energy efficiency. We look at the results collectively first, and then in more detail for each major company. Some of the key findings are compared in the tables in the text below, and Table 2 (below) shows the main outcomes of these calls in terms of referrals and verbal advice given on the telephone.

Looking at all 85 enquiries our mystery shoppers made to these major fuel suppliers, we find that in only 46% of cases were the callers *immediately* referred to the companies’ Energy Efficiency Helplines, without being given any advice. By “referred” we almost always mean they were given another telephone number to call; there were only one or two internal transfers of calls from call centres to helplines. But in another 25% of cases our callers were later given the Energy Efficiency Helpline number, after they had been given some advice by the call handler. Altogether, therefore, 71% of our callers were referred to their supplier’s Energy Efficiency Helpline at some point during their call. Companies which seem good at referring *all* callers with energy efficiency enquiries are London Electricity, Powergen and Seeboard. Most callers were referred by British Gas, npower, Southern, Scottish Hydro and SWALEC. But rather few callers were referred by SWEB, Virgin, Yorkshire, Northern, Scottish Power, Manweb, TXU (Eastern) and TXU (Norweb).

In cases where some advice was given by the General Call Centre, it more often included topics such as alternative tariffs, metering or payment methods (20%) which might help customers spread the load of paying for their fuel, rather than trying to help them reduce consumption or get better value from the fuel they could afford through energy efficiency improvements. The most common “energy efficiency” advice was to offer to send a booklet on energy efficiency (19%), and some callers were also told about measures they could install

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 2

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man-web	See-board	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
a.Referred to: another C/H	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
a. Ref. to Energy Efficiency Helpline	39	46	3	5	1	0	2	2	3	6	2	0	4	3	2	4	1	1
b.i. Asked a few questions	21	25	1	0	4	1	1	2	0	0	4	2	1	0	2	0	3	0
b.ii Asked detailed questions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	12	14	0	0	4	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1
e. CH accessed my bills/records	17	20	2	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	2	2	2
f. Asked about Benefits	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
h. Asked about Temp. in home	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
i. Asked about state of fridge	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
j. Verbal advice on measures	11	13	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	1
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	12	14	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrig.	4	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
m. How to keep warm in winter	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
n. Would send Booklet on En.Eff.	16	19	0	2	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	1
o. Sending list of sources of advice	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
p. Told me about grants	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	17	20	1	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	2	2	2
u. Offered a Home Visit	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	21	25	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	3	4	1	0	0	3	1	2
w. Referred me to another agency	12	14	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
x. Other outcomes	13	15	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	3	1	1	0
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0

(13%) or changes they could make in the control of their heating or hot water (14%) or in their cooking and refrigeration (4%).

Prior to giving some advice to 25% of callers, the call handlers at General Call Centres quite often accessed the customer's billing record (20%) or asked about recent fuel bills (14%), but they very rarely asked questions about benefits (1%) or age (2%) which might have made the customer eligible for a Warm Front grant or the company's own Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) schemes. As a result very few callers were told about these grant schemes (1% each).

In only a very few cases (4%) was the call handler unable to help the customer at all, and unable to suggest who might. But in quite a few cases callers were not referred to the company's Energy Efficiency Helpline, but instead to a variety of other agencies (14%) including Social Services, Help the Aged, Age Concern, CORGI registered installers, and other departments of the company (not the Energy Efficiency Helpline).

How call handlers at General Call Centres responded to supplementary questions

Because most of our callers were referred to the Energy Efficiency Helplines of their fuel suppliers, there were limited opportunities for most of them to ask some of the supplementary questions we had suggested on grants, measures advised, condensing boilers, compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), home visits, booklets and lists of other sources of advice. The following Tables summarise the main findings. We have not shown analysis by company here because of the small bases.

Only six of our callers asked for more information on measures which the call handler had advised them to install: four call handlers could give useful information on the effects and savings, but only one knew the costs or that a grant might be available. Two callers asked directly for more information on grants, but only one call handler knew how to apply and one knew the name of the scheme only; neither knew what the scheme covered, the likely costs or savings, or how long measures might take to install.

TABLE 3	ALL	
HOW QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED	No	%
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100
GRANT INFORMATION		
No. asking for more details of Grants	2	2
CH gave Name of scheme	1	1
CH said what scheme covered	0	0
CH told caller how to apply	1	1
CH knew how long to install	0	0
CH knew cost to customer	0	0
CH knew likely savings	0	0
MEASURES RECOMMENDED INFORMATION		
No. asking for info on Measures	6	7
CH knew costs	1	1
CH knew effects/savings	4	5
CH said grant may be available	1	1

Fourteen of our 85 callers asked about condensing boilers: what are they and do they save money? Only five call handlers could provide any useful information about how condensing boilers worked more efficiently and did save money. By comparison call handlers seemed to know rather more about CFLs (low energy bulbs). Eighteen callers asked about these: what are they? How much do they cost? What do they save? Thirteen of them received a useful explanation of what they are, and 11 were quoted figures for costs and/or savings (Table 4, below).

TABLE 4	ALL	
HOW QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED (continued)	No	%
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100
CONDENSING BOILER QUERY		
No. asking about Cond. Boilers	14	16
CH provided useful information	5	6
LOW ENERGY BULBS QUERY		
No. asking about Low Energy Bulbs	18	21
CH explained what they are	13	15
CH quoted costs/savings	11	13

Nineteen of our mystery shoppers asked whether the company could provide a Home Visit for “an elderly aunt”. Ten call handlers said home visits were available, from British Gas, SWEB, Yorkshire, Powergen, Southern, Manweb, Seeboard and TXU (Eastern). Four said they were not offered at Scottish Hydro, SWALEC, TXU (Eastern) and TXU (Norweb). Four call handlers admitted they did not know if such visits were available, and another thought they were only available for customers on the Priority Service Register or living in certain areas. There does therefore seem to be rather patchy knowledge of whether this service is available or not (see Table 5).

TABLE 5	ALL	
HOW QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED (continued)	No	%
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100
HOME VISITS		
No. asking about Home Visits	19	22
CH said Home Visits offered	10	12
Home Visits not offered	4	5
Don't know	4	5
Others (e.g. some areas/PSR)	1	1
Home visits Free	9	11
BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY		
No. asking for Booklet	11	13
Yes - we have one & will send it	6	7
No - we don't have one	2	2
Normally have, but out of print	0	0
Don't know if one available	3	4
LIST OF OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE		
No. asking for a list	19	22
Yes - it's in the Booklet/we'll send one	9	11
No - we don't have one	10	12
No. of mentions of other sources	5	6
TRAINING OF ADVISERS		
No. asking if adviser was trained	5	6
CHs claiming to be trained	3	4

Our callers also asked these General Call Centres whether booklets on energy efficiency and lists of other sources of advice were available, both of which are required under the licence condition. Where they felt they could, a few callers also asked whether the call handler had been trained in energy efficiency. (This last question tended to be asked only where some energy advice had been given.)

Of eleven callers who asked for “a little booklet which sums up your advice on energy saving”, only six were then offered one. Five call handlers said none was available or that they did not know. Of the nineteen callers who asked for a list of other sources of advice, only nine were told that it was “in the booklet” or would also be sent. Although these questions were asked only on a relatively small sample of calls (generally where call handlers had offered some advice), the data suggest that many call handlers at General Call Centres may not know of the company’s Code of Practice on energy efficiency (or something similar), or that a list of other sources for advice is available.

Only five of our callers asked their call handler if they had had any special training in energy efficiency, and three of them claimed they had.

How our mystery shoppers rated the call handlers at General Call Centres

At the end of these calls to General Call Centres, we asked our mystery shoppers to rate the call handler on a number of dimensions, but this was usually done only where the call handler had given some advice, and not simply referred our caller at once to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Scores were awarded for each rating (100 for the top rating and 0 for the lowest) to provide an average score out of 100. The results are shown in full on Table 6.

In terms of “knowledge of energy efficiency”, 54 of our 85 customers rated the call handlers who dealt with their call to these General Call Centres. The overall average rating (23 out of 100) shows that they felt these call handlers knew rather less than “only a little about energy efficiency” (which was scored at 33). Indeed a third of them were rated as “knowing nothing about energy efficiency”. We conclude that there is room for improvement here.

In terms of “professionalism”, most of these call handlers score highly, and were usually felt to have handled the call in a professional manner even if they did not provide a great deal of energy advice. But twelve of our callers felt that the call handler was “unprofessional” in the way they dealt with the caller (see Table 6, overleaf).

Most call handlers were also rated as “excellent/very courteous” or “good/polite” and overall they score 80 out of 100 for politeness. Only a few were rated as “impersonal” (11%) and only one as “rude/aggressive”, but this was enough to give rather mediocre scores to Yorkshire (63), Scottish Power and Manweb (both 56 out of 100).

Any verbal advice given over the telephone is of no use unless it is comprehensible to callers. We asked our mystery shoppers to record how easy to understand they found the verbal advice they received. Overall, where advice was given, it was almost always found “very easy” or “quite easy” to understand by the 42 callers who rated it – scoring 85 out of 100.

These scores are shown in full on Table 6, overleaf.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 6

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man-web	See-board	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
Impression of Energy Efficiency																		
Knowledge of call handler																		
Knew a great deal about en. effic.	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Knew quite a lot about en. effic.	9	11	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	1
Knew only a little about en. effic.	14	16	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Knew nothing about en. efficiency	29	34	4	1	0	0	1	3	3	1	1	0	2	4	3	2	2	2
Average "Knowledge" Score (Max: 100 – based on all answers)	23	23	7	22	58	33	17	8	8	17	42	67	22	0	17	17	34	40

PROFESSIONALISM																		
CH handled call in professional manner	42	49	1	3	4	1	2	2	3	2	4	1	3	1	2	4	4	5
CH handled call in unprofessional manner	12	14	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	0

POLITENESS																		
CH excellent/very courteous	22	26	1	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	2	3	4
CH good/polite	21	25	2	1	1	1	1	0	3	1	3	0	2	1	1	2	1	1
CH impersonal	9	11	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0
CH poor/brusque	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CH rude/aggressive	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Average "Politeness" Score (Max: 100 – based on all answers)	80	80	83	92	92	75	75	63	69	88	85	100	83	56	56	88	94	95

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING ADVICE																		
Very easy to understand	20	24	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	3	0	2	2	1	0	3	3
Quite easy to understand	21	25	3	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	1
Some things easy/some things hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quite hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very hard to understand	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Understandability" Score (Max:100, base:all answers)	85	85	75	100	75	75	100	63	88	100	90	75	92	92	83	75	94	94

Only 21 of our mystery shoppers finally rated all the advice they received from General Call Centres in terms of its overall usefulness – partly because most of them spoke later to the Energy Efficiency Helpline and reserved their overall rating for the advice they received from that source. But those who received advice only from the General Call Centre did rate this advice here, and because most of them found it “not very useful” or “not at all useful” it got a poor overall rating of only 33 out of 100. We concluded that where energy advice is given to a customer solely by the General Call Centre it tends to fall far short of the advice given by Energy Efficiency Helplines (which later scored 66 out of 100 for the advice they gave).

TABLE 7	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virginpower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Powergen	South ern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Manweb	See-board	TXU Eastn	TXU Norweb	
OVERALL USEFULNESS OF ADVICE	No	%																
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
Very useful	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quite useful	3	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Not very useful	12	14	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Not at all useful	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Average "Usefulness" Score (Max: 100)	33	33	no data	33	44	33	33	17	33	n/d	33	100	33	11	22	n/d	50	33

The next sections look in more detail at the results from the General Call Centres of each of the major suppliers in turn.

British Gas - General Call Centre

Six of our mystery shoppers called the British Gas General Call Centre –two on each of the three scenarios A, B and C (high bills, cold home/elderly relative, and help to save energy). All six callers were genuine British Gas customers; all of them bought their gas from British Gas, and two also bought electricity.

Once our callers explained their problems, five of them were referred to the British Gas Energy Efficiency Helpline within 2 to 18 minutes. The sixth was referred to an insulation service number, to check if they were eligible for British Gas’s “half price insulation scheme”.

Two of our callers (both of whom complained about high bills) were also offered some advice on controlling heating and hot water before being given the Energy Efficiency Helpline number. One was initially given advice about tariffs, metering and billing options, and only after a good deal of persistence was she finally referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. The call handlers also accessed their billing records.

One of our mystery shoppers was on the phone for 18 minutes, as she tried asking about both condensing boilers and low energy light bulbs. The call handler advised her to ask the Energy Efficiency Helpline about these.

All our callers were either asked for their account number at the beginning of their call, or at the end, so British Gas should be able to keep records of these enquiries.

Three of our six mystery shoppers felt that the British Gas call handlers at their General Call Centre knew little or nothing about energy efficiency, and two considered their calls were not handled professionally, either because the call handler had too little knowledge to handle their query adequately, or because they felt the call handler should have given a fuller explanation of the benefits of calling the Energy Efficiency Helpline, or given more help themselves. But all our mystery shoppers rated these General Call Centre call handlers as polite and quite easy to understand. And, more importantly, all but one were identified by the call handler as likely to benefit from more detailed advice from the Energy Efficiency Helpline, to which they were then referred.

London Electricity – General Call Centre

Six callers (five of them existing customers) called the London Electricity General Call Centre – one with “high bills”, two with “cold homes/elderly relative” and three for “help to save energy”.

Five of our callers were referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, four of them quite promptly and one after an 11 minute call which involved the call handler accessing her payment records and then offering a booklet on running costs (which was later sent).

Our sixth caller (a 65 year old customer) had his very specific request for “information on how to save energy” dealt with solely by the call handler at the General Call Centre, who started off by offering cheaper payment methods (e.g. direct debit) or a dual fuel deal. Our caller had to ask again for “ways of saving energy” before the call handler asked a few questions about loft and cavity wall insulation and offered to send some information by post (which never came). Our caller also asked about low energy bulbs, which the call handler said lasted longer and were more efficient, but she could give no information on costs or savings. Nor did she know if the company ever did home visits, but she did say that a list of other sources of advice was in the booklet (which never came although she checked our caller’s name and address). Our caller felt that this call handler knew only a little about energy efficiency, although she was professional and courteous. But she never mentioned the Energy Efficiency Helpline, nor did she mention any grants or discount schemes for which this 65 year old might have been eligible.

We have to conclude that one in six of our callers did not receive the level of help from London Electricity’s General Call Centre which they had a right to expect.

SWEB – General Call Centre

Five mystery shoppers (all SWEB electricity customers) called for advice – one with “high bills”, two with a “cold home/elderly relative” and two for “help to save energy”. Having explained their problems, only two of these five customers (both of whom had “cold homes/elderly relatives staying”) were referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. One was first asked a few questions about his heating, and then advised to call the Energy Efficiency Helpline for advice on energy efficiency and grants. The other was at first offered a dual fuel package, and was only referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline when she asked for help to cut her fuel bills.

Two other callers were never referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. One was asked a few questions about his home, his bills and his age, and was promised a booklet which never

arrived. The other was asked about her home and bills, and was told about Economy 7. She was promised and sent booklets on energy efficiency, Economy 7 and the Green Electron tariff. Although this caller asked about other ways of “saving energy”, she was not told on the phone about any possible insulation measures or grants.

The fifth caller, by contrast, eventually received a level of advice comparable to that from a good energy efficiency helpline. She was at first asked a few questions about her home and bills, her billing records were accessed, she was given some energy saving tips on the phone, but she was primarily offered savings through paying by direct debit or having a dual fuel contract. But this caller was then sent four booklets by post, and a Home Energy Efficiency Survey, which she completed and returned, to receive an Energy Efficiency Report (twelve days after her initial call) which included much appropriate advice. She felt she might install radiator shelves and reflectors, and look for energy efficient models when next buying appliances. This is an excellent example of comprehensive advice from a General Call Centre.

Some of our callers asked these call handlers at the General Call Centre about specific energy efficiency measures. Two (both SWEB customers for electricity only) asked about condensing boilers. The call handlers did not know much about these – one confused it with a Combi boiler – although one knew it would save money even if it was expensive to install and the other expected it to save “15% to 17%”. The call handlers knew more about low energy bulbs, which they said used less energy, lasted longer, cost more (e.g. 6 for £15 on a SWEB offer) but would make quite a saving over their 10 to 15 year life. Two call handlers said that SWEB does home visits (free of charge), but only one knew that they could provide a list of other sources of energy advice, and the other suggested two electricians registered with SWEB or trying Yellow Pages for gas fitters or B & Q for low energy bulbs. One of these call handlers claimed to be trained in energy efficiency.

Only one of our customers felt the call handler knew a great deal about energy efficiency; three felt they knew little or nothing, although they all felt their calls were handled professionally and politely.

We conclude that some customers who call SWEB’s General Call Centre needing energy efficiency advice may be referred promptly to the helpline, or even given excellent energy advice immediately, but at least two of these five callers received a level of service which we conclude falls short of what is required.

Virgin – General Call Centre

Our sole caller (who bought gas and electricity from Virgin) said “I seem to be spending a fortune on high fuel bills. Can you help with advice on energy savings?” The call handler then called up the customer’s account, asked a few questions about his home, and told him he should have loft insulation (which he already had). He then asked about cavity wall insulation and double glazing, but doubted if our customer could fit cavity wall insulation as he thought it was a terraced house (it wasn’t, and he did not ask). The call handler then suggested low energy bulbs, not leaving appliances on stand-by, and buying energy saving kitchen appliances (which he admitted might be expensive and not really practical). The call handler re-examined the account, agreed the bills were high and suggested the customer check his meter for accuracy (but gave no advice as to how). No booklets, information on grants, or other advice was offered.

Our customer then asked some specific questions about condensing boilers, CFLs and so on. The call handler knew that condensing boilers were “most efficient and convert 88% of fuel”, but knew little of CFL costs – only that they “save money”. She did not know if Virgin did home visits or had a booklet on energy efficiency, and said they had no list of other sources of energy advice. Consequently our customer felt that this call handler knew little about energy efficiency, although he felt she was professional and polite. No materials were sent in the post, and our caller considered the advice “not very useful”.

On the basis of this one call we consider this service inadequate and inferior to that offered to customers of London Electricity who call their General Call Centre.

npower – General Call Centre

Once our five callers explained their problems (one “high bills”, two “cold home and elderly relative staying”, and two needing “help to save energy”) two of them were immediately referred to the npower Energy Efficiency Helpline without being asked any questions. Two other callers were first asked some questions, both about their bills and one about her home, before eventually being referred to the helpline too – so four out of five callers were referred on. One of these was also given some advice about changing tariffs, but the other (who called about high bills) reported that she had to ask several times if there were ways in which she could *reduce* the bill by saving energy before the call handler would refer her to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Three of our callers bought both their electricity and gas from npower, but two posed as possible new customers; this did not seem to affect the quality of advice.

Our fifth mystery shopper, a gas and electricity customer of npower who called about a “cold home and an elderly relative staying”, was never referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline at all. Instead the call handler told him to contact a CORGI engineer, or to look under “insulation” in Yellow Pages. This is not a satisfactory response, and the call handler should have referred the caller to the Energy Efficiency Helpline; the caller might also have been eligible for grants, especially with an elderly relative in residence.

Our callers received the impression that these call handlers from the npower General Call Centre knew little or nothing about energy efficiency. The caller who was given the advice to contact a CORGI engineer or to consult Yellow Pages felt that the call was not handled in a professional manner, and that the call handler was impersonal:

“She just wanted to process the call but never offered any real assistance, but just passed me off with other sources to look for help.”

Although this caller was not offered any booklet or questionnaire, three booklets and a questionnaire did arrive by post two days later, but no information on grants. Our caller completed and returned the questionnaire, but no Home Energy Report arrived within the next four weeks. He accordingly rated npower’s advice as “not very useful”, because:

“They never really got to the root of my concern for my elderly relative. They told me to go to outside gas people.”

We conclude from this that although npower's General Call Centre eventually referred four out of five callers to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, some callers do have to be very persistent to achieve this,

Yorkshire – General Call Centre

Once the five mystery shoppers had explained their problems (one “high bills”, two “cold homes and an elderly relative”, and two needing “help to save energy”) only two of our callers were referred to Yorkshire's Energy Efficiency Helpline – one who asked for “help to save energy” and one with a “cold home” etc.. Only one was also offered a booklet on energy efficiency. This is poor service.

Of the three callers who were *not* referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, one who complained about “high bills” was only told about pre-payment meters, warned about self-disconnection if she could not pay, but then advised to stick with her Budget Plan payments; another who called about a cold home was only told about booklets on energy efficiency and low energy bulbs when she specifically asked about them, and she was given a number to call for CFLs; the final caller, who specifically asked for “help to save energy”, was asked a few questions about her home and bills, and then given a little advice on controlling heating and hot water, and on tariffs (Economy 7). He too was told about low energy bulbs and a booklet only when he asked. Both these last two callers were not only *not* referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, but they were also told that there was no list available of other sources for energy efficiency advice.

Our callers thought the Yorkshire call handlers knew little or nothing about energy efficiency, and only two were felt to have handled the call in a professional manner. Three were considered “impersonal” in terms of politeness.

Although three of our callers were offered a booklet on energy efficiency, no printed materials of any sort were sent to any of our six callers over the next four weeks. They accordingly rated this help from Yorkshire's General Call Centre as “not very” or “not at all useful”.

We conclude that this level of service from Yorkshire's General Call Centre falls some way below the standard required to guide customers who need energy efficiency advice or to direct them to the Energy Efficiency Helpline.

Northern Electric – General Call Centre

Once our six callers to Northern explained their problems (one “high bills”, three “cold home with an elderly relative staying”, and two needing “help to save energy”) only three of these six callers were referred to Northern's Energy Efficiency Helpline within two minutes, without being given any advice. The other three were referred to a “Home Service Department” (which could not help at all), to a Freephone number (0800 440800) which was never answered, and (a non-customer) to another call handler who simply asked about bills and advised the caller to save money by buying both electricity and gas from Northern. This last caller had called about a “cold home and elderly relative” but was not told about any possible grants. No other advice was given.

Two of our callers (who were not referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline) did ask if any booklets on energy efficiency or lists of sources for energy advice were available; they were told that neither of these things was available. This is incorrect and poor service.

Not surprisingly our callers felt that these Northern Electric General Call Centre call handlers knew little or nothing about energy efficiency. One was considered “unprofessional” and “impersonal” because she could give no useful information or help. No booklets or any other information was sent by the general call centre to any of our six callers.

We conclude that this level of service from Northern’s General Call Centre falls below the standard which is required to spot customers with problems which could be solved through energy efficiency advice, and to advise them of the company’s Energy Efficiency Helpline which could provide them with help.

Powergen – General Call Centre

Six of our mystery shoppers called the Powergen General Call Centre: one called about “high bills”; two called about “cold home/elderly relative”; two called about “help to save energy”; and one called about “fridges which use less power”. Once they had explained their queries, all our six callers were promptly given the Freephone number for Powergen’s Energy Efficiency Helpline. None was asked any questions or volunteered any advice by the call handler; this is acceptable given that they had all been referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. But one of our callers then asked about low energy bulbs, and was told about the benefits and given typical prices. He was also told that home visits and booklets on energy efficiency were available, but the booklet was not sent on to him.

Our callers felt that the call handlers did handle these calls professionally and politely, even if they seemed to know little or nothing about energy efficiency.

Powergen’s General Call Centre seems to be good at recognising when callers could benefit from advice from their Energy Efficiency Helpline, and refers them all promptly as far as we can tell from these six mystery shopping calls. This is a good standard of service.

Southern – General Call Centre

After explaining the reason for their calls – two with “high bills”, two with “cold homes/an elderly relative” and two for “help to save energy” - only two of our four callers were immediately referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Three others were referred to the helpline eventually, but were first asked a few questions about their homes’ heating and insulation, before being given some advice or being referred. Payment records were accessed for two of them. Two callers felt they had to ask a lot of direct questions in order to prompt a referral to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. The caller who was never referred to the helpline felt her query had been misconstrued as “how can I save money” and was given a lot of spiel about Southern’s tariffs compared to other companies. She was eventually asked a few questions and advised to fit loft and cavity wall insulation and a heating controller.

One caller who had mentioned an elderly relative was also asked about their age and the temperature in the home, before being given verbal advice to install draught excluders and secondary glazing, verbal advice on controlling heating and hot water, on saving on cooking costs, and on keeping warm, and a suggestion he contact CORGI. Another was given advice

to install low energy bulbs (CFLs), on controlling heating and cooking costs, and on tariffs; he was also the only caller to be offered a booklet on energy efficiency (which never arrived). These two callers also quizzed the call handlers about the costs and savings from CFLs, draught excluders and secondary glazing, but the call handlers could only give useful information about CFLs. They could not answer our callers' queries about condensing boilers.

Two callers asked about home visits: one was told these were freely available, and another that these would only be done if the customer "*got their walls insulated at a special price, and had a free safety check*". (This was the only mention of any grants scheme in all four calls.) This caller was told (when she asked) that a booklet on energy efficiency was available (but it too never came) and she and another caller were told that lists of other sources of advice were *not* available, although the CAB and Age Concern were suggested as possible sources of help. One caller's name and address were checked at the end of the call, but nothing was sent.

Two of our callers felt the call handler knew little or nothing about energy efficiency, although they handled the calls in a professional and polite manner.

Our general feeling is that two of these callers, had they been less persistent, would probably not have been referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Instead they would have received some not very convincing advice, which was not followed up by any of the booklets promised. We feel it would be better for callers with queries like these to be referred more promptly.

Scottish Hydro – General Call Centre

Five of our mystery customers called the Scottish Hydro General Call Centre – one with a query about "high bills", two with complaints about "cold homes and an elderly relative staying" and two for "help to save energy".

Two of our callers were immediately referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline as soon as they had explained their problems, the third was transferred to it internally without having to call back (this happened very rarely), and the other two were referred to it only after being asked a few questions and being given some advice. One of these calls lasted 3 minutes and the other 28, before callers were referred to the Energy Efficiency number.

But the standard of advice given in this last case was quite high: during this 28 minute call the call handler established that our customer heated her home with electric fires and fan heaters, heated water on the on-peak tariff, and consequently had very high bills, and was not on mains gas. He then advised the customer to install electric storage heaters on an off-peak tariff, and to use this for heating hot water too, which he advised should be 40% cheaper, and would pay for the installation cost within 2 or 3 years (if a grant wasn't available). He told the customer about the possibility of Warm Front grants for such installations and provided the telephone number for EAGA; he also offered to send a booklet on energy efficiency. When our caller enquired about low energy bulbs, she was also told about a "four for £10" offer on these, that they saved energy and were guaranteed for ten years, and given a number to call to order some. But no mention was made of any other energy efficiency improvements such as loft insulation, cavity wall insulation or draughtproofing. The call handler also said they had no list of other sources of advice (they did, it was in the Code of Practice) and that they did not offer home visits.

Some useful materials were then sent in the post: a Code of Practice (“Saving money by using your electricity wisely”), an Energy Saving Trust (EST) leaflet on CFLs, and Scottish Hydro-Electric’s *Hienergy* magazine. But no specific information on Warm Front grants was sent.

Our call handler felt that this call handler knew quite a lot about energy efficiency, and handled the call professionally and very courteously. She found the advice quite easy to follow and felt she might follow the advice to install low energy bulbs (but would probably not install storage heaters, preferring oil central heating instead).

It was good that two call handlers immediately referred our callers to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, and in some ways admirable that two tried to deal with two customers’ problems themselves. But the comprehensive advice given in one case (though laudable and likely to cut the customer’s heating costs) was incomplete, and not followed up with the grant information which might have helped the customer apply for a Warm Front grant for storage heaters. But on the whole we conclude that the service provided by the General Call Centre to customers needing energy efficiency advice is generally good.

SWALEC – General Call Centre

Six of our mystery customers called SWALEC’s General Call Centre – one with “high bills”, two with a “cold home/elderly relative”, and three for “help to save energy”. Our caller who complained about her difficulty in paying “high bills” was never referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, even though she finally asked directly for energy efficiency advice. She was simply told about different ways to pay her bills (e.g. payment plans, token meters) and offered a booklet on energy efficiency advice (which never arrived). She felt the call handler knew nothing about energy efficiency and found the advice “not very useful”.

The two callers with “cold homes and elderly relatives staying” were referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, one immediately and the other only after being passed to another call handler, who suggested that if the home was cold the boiler must be at fault, and that a registered heating engineer might be able to help, but no mention was made of improving the home’s insulation or draughtproofing. No further information was sent to either of these customers.

The three callers who asked for “help to save energy” were all immediately referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. But one caller asked about condensing boilers and CFLs and was given some useful information, including that the call handler was trained to City & Guilds in energy efficiency. Our caller felt the call handler was quite knowledgeable, professional and courteous.

We conclude that SWALEC’s General Call Centre succeeds in referring to the Energy Efficiency Helpline most, but not all, of the customers who need energy efficiency advice. Where energy advice is given by call handlers at the General Call Centre it is sometimes incorrect, misleading or unhelpful. Standards could be improved.

Scottish Power – General Call Centre

Six mystery shoppers (five of whom were real customers) called the Scottish Power General Call Centre – one with “high bills”, two with “cold home/elderly relative”, two for “help to save energy”, and to ask “which fridges use less power?”

Having explained their problems only three of these customers were apparently referred promptly to Scottish Power’s Energy Efficiency Helpline, which one call handler referred to as “the experts”. These callers had called about “high bills”, “a cold home” and “fridges which use less electricity”. Only one was also given some verbal advice by the call handler - to install low energy bulbs (CFLs). No booklets were sent to any of these callers by the General Call Centre.

All three of these callers then tried to call the Energy Efficiency Helpline, as suggested and using the numbers provided by the call handler. But the caller referred to “the experts” (on 0800 272 1022) found this call handler did not deal with her type of enquiry and suggested calling the main switchboard for energy advice (0141 568 2000); they referred her to “Freephone Energy Advice on 0800 332233” but there was no-one available there to help and no-one called her back as promised, so she never did get any help with her problem. Another caller was referred to the out-of-area Energy Efficiency Helpline (0845 729 2292) which could not help in any way either (see below). Only one of these three callers eventually got some useful advice from Scottish Power’s Energy Efficiency Helpline.

The other three callers also received a very poor level of service. Two had called about “cold homes and an elderly relative”, and one for “help to save energy”. To begin with all three were told by their call handlers that *they could not help them, and that they did not know anyone who might*. One caller was however offered a booklet; the Code of Practice arrived six days later. One of our callers persisted in trying to get some help to save energy; he asked about condensing boilers which the call handler had never heard of; he asked about low energy bulbs about which the call handler said “It will tell you in the leaflet, but they don’t make much difference.”

Our mystery shoppers received the impression that most of these call handlers “knew nothing about energy efficiency”. The three who could not help our callers at all were also considered “unprofessional” and “impersonal”, and their advice was rated as “not at all useful” or “not very useful” because, as one caller wrote:

“All he wanted to do was to send me the booklet. He did not want to give me information, nor did he refer me to the Energy Efficiency Helpline.....I was not given any special advice, only sent a booklet, most of which is common sense. Because I was not asked anything specific about my home or circumstances I feel the booklet is too general. I would have liked more specific advice tailored to me and my home.”

From this limited evidence of six calls, it would seem that many call handlers at Scottish Power’s General Call Centre are ill-equipped to help callers who could benefit from advice from the Energy Efficiency Helpline. To begin with half of them seem to be unaware of its existence; and some of those who do know of it are apparently not provided with the correct telephone numbers to help customers contact it successfully. The end-result is that only one in six callers who may need energy advice are actually being enabled to contact the correct

helpline. These failings need to be addressed urgently, as the present standard of service falls way below that expected from a licensed supplier.

Manweb – General Call Centre

Five mystery shoppers (three of them real customers) called the Manweb General Call Centre, one with “high bills”, two with “cold homes/elderly relatives”, and two wanting “help to save energy”.

Once they had explained their problems, only two of our five callers (both of whom asked for “help to save energy”) were referred to other numbers described as the “Energy Efficiency Helpline” or “Energy Efficiency Centre”. One was indeed the Energy Efficiency Helpline, but the other was Scottish Power’s *Energy Services* which deals with the *installation* of storage heaters, boilers and insulation (0800 027 4477). Neither of these callers was offered any other advice or sent any materials by the General Call Centre.

The other three callers (with “high bills” or “cold homes and elderly relatives”) were not referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline at all, but the call handlers at the General Call Centre tried to provide some advice themselves.

One caller (who called about high bills) was asked a few questions about her bills and heating controls (on storage heaters) before being given some advice on how best to control the heating (turn up the Input Control to maximum), and being offered a booklet and a call-back from the “Energy Efficiency Department” (for which no number was provided). Nobody called her back, and no booklet was sent over the next four weeks. But this caller did try asking the call handler about low energy bulbs, only to be told they were “not worth it, as they only save pennies”.

Another caller (with a house “too cold for my 80 year old grandmother”) was offered an Information Pack and a Home Visit to check the temperature. He was told “no grants are available at the moment”, but the Information Pack arrived ten days later and included a thermometer and special offer on CFLs.

Our third caller asked for help on “how to keep the living room warmer for an elderly aunt, without increasing my bills too much”. The call handler asked about the heating (oil central heating) before advising purchase of a portable electric or Calor Gas heater. She could not say how much these cost to run per hour.

Most of our callers felt that these Manweb call handlers “knew nothing” about energy efficiency, and only two of them were considered “professional” in the way they handled calls. One was considered “impersonal”, and another “rude and aggressive”. Two of our callers rated the advice they received as “not at all useful”.

So not only were these callers not referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline which might have been able to give better help, but they were not given much useful advice on how to be more *energy efficient* either. The only advice they were given seems likely to increase their fuel bills.

So out of five callers to Manweb’s General Call Centre, all of whom needed *energy efficiency* advice, only one appears to have been referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline and

therefore seems likely to receive the sort of comprehensive energy efficiency advice which should be made available to callers like these. We conclude that this level of service from Manweb to its customers (as with Scottish Power) appears to fall well below the desirable level.

Seeboard

Six mystery shoppers (all real customers) called the Seeboard General Call Centre, one about “high bills”, three with “cold homes/elderly relatives” and two for “help to save energy”.

After explaining their problems, all six of our callers were referred to Seeboard Energy Efficiency Helpline numbers (mostly 0800 581 255, but one to 0845 601311). But two first had their billing records accessed by the call handler, and one was offered a Dual Fuel deal; the other was already on this tariff and was re-assured it saved money, before being given some advice about controlling heating and using low energy light bulbs, which “last twice as long as ordinary bulbs and cost £1.90 at IKEA”. This caller also asked about Home Visits and was told these were available free, and for a booklet and list of other sources (which were never sent). Our callers felt these call handlers knew little or nothing about energy efficiency, although they dealt with callers professionally and politely.

This standard of service is very good for a General Call Centre, in that all six callers who needed energy efficiency advice were identified as such and directed to the Energy Efficiency Helpline.

TXU Energi (Eastern) – General Call Centre

Five mystery shoppers (all real customers) made calls to the TXU Energi (Eastern) General Call Centre – one about “big bills”, two about “cold homes/elderly relatives”, and two for “help to save energy”.

After explaining their problems, two of our callers were promptly referred or transferred internally to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, and one was also referred to the Grants Helpline (0800 479 0162). One was first asked just a few questions about her home, and the other given some advice on tariffs.

The General Call Centre call handlers tried to advise our remaining three callers themselves. Two asked a few questions about the caller’s home, and another about fuel bills and the temperature in the home, before giving advice on controlling heating, hot water and cooking costs, and offering a booklet. One was also advised to fit radiator shelves and CFLs. The third was given some advice on tariffs and referred to Age Concern (as she had an “elderly relative” staying). No information was given about grants or about TXU’s own EEC schemes, no questions were asked to establish eligibility, and only one of the callers promised a booklet actually received one.

One caller asked for more information on the radiator shelves she had been recommended to install, and the call handler explained how these worked but not how much they might save. Three of our customers also asked about condensing boilers. Only one call handler knew they saved money but cost more to install. Three asked about low energy lamps, and here again the call handlers provided rather limited information that they use less energy, are more efficient, cost more but last much longer. Only one call handler thought TXU Energi ever did Home

Visits: two others said they did not or that they weren't sure. One caller asked if a booklet or list of other sources were available: the call handler thought not. Another call handler thought a list could be found in the booklet. Two callers asked whether call handlers had had any special training to provide energy efficiency advice – it appeared not.

Two of our callers felt the call handlers knew nothing about energy efficiency, although they were seen as professional and polite in the way they handled calls. But only one caller received any of the promised literature (a Guide to Running Costs) and three callers were disappointed at this.

Referring only two out of five callers to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, and providing inadequate advice to the other three, is not an adequate performance for the TXU Energi (Eastern) General Call Centre.

TXU Energi (Norweb) – General Call Centre

Six mystery shoppers (all real customers) called the TXU Energi (Norweb) General Call Centre – one with “high bills”, two with “cold homes/elderly relatives”, two for “help to save energy”, and one asking about grants.

After explaining the reasons for their calls three of our callers were referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline, and two were referred to TXU's Grants Helpline (0800 479 0162). Another was told (wrongly) that although she had her aged mother living with her, she would not be eligible for any grants as neither her gas and electricity accounts, nor her home, were in her mother's name. She was instead referred to Help the Aged and Age Concern.

Two callers were asked about their bills, before one was given advice to fit draught excluders and CFLs and offered a booklet (which never arrived). This caller asked for more information about CFLs and was told only that they “save energy and last longer”, and that no grants for them were available (not strictly true). The call handler could not help her with information about condensing boilers (but gave a number which might) and did not know if TXU did home visits. She said a list of “other sources” was in the booklet she'd send (but she didn't).

Three of our callers felt that these call handlers knew little or nothing about energy efficiency, although they handled the calls professionally and politely, and were described as “cheerful and friendly”. The caller who received none of what she had been promised felt that the advice had been “not very useful” on the whole, because “nothing was sent, but the initial call was quite useful”.

Overall it seems likely that five out of six callers to the TXU Energi (Norweb) General Call Centre who have energy efficiency queries are likely to be referred to the Energy Efficiency or Grants Helplines. But where call handlers try to give advice themselves, it is sometimes misleading and not followed up with the publications promised. “Could do better” is how we might sum this up.

Conclusions on the major companies' General Call Centres

1. From these results we conclude that only about three quarters of the calls made by customers to General Call Centres are successfully connected at the first attempt.

Some callers simply give up after waiting several minutes to get through, and a few have to wait unacceptably long times (e.g. five to 15 minutes) to be connected to British Gas, Yorkshire, TXU (Norweb), npower, SWALEC and Powergen. But once callers do get through, they are usually dealt with in a polite and professional manner.

2. We conclude that fewer than half the customers who call with the sorts of problems we tested (e.g. “high fuel bills”, “a cold home with an elderly relative staying here”, or for “help to save energy”) seem likely to be referred *immediately* to their supplier’s Energy Efficiency Helpline (only 46% were). A quarter of callers (25%) are instead given some sort of advice before being referred on to the helpline, and some of them had to push very hard to be referred at all. Altogether 71% of callers were finally referred to the Energy Efficiency Helplines.
3. Some major energy companies’ General Call Centres do refer all or most of these types of enquiries to their General Call Centre, which is good; British Gas, London Electricity, npower, Powergen, Southern, Scottish Hydro, SWALEC and Seeboard. But some other companies seem rather poor at doing so. Half or fewer of our callers to these companies were referred to their Energy Efficiency Helplines: SWEB, Virgin, Yorkshire, Northern, Scottish Power, Manweb and TXU Energi. Some call handlers seemed not to know of the helpline, or did not have its correct number to hand.
4. Where some energy advice is given by call handlers at General Call Centres, the advice given is rarely as comprehensive or useful as that which can be supplied by the Energy Efficiency Helplines. It often consists of verbal advice about alternative tariffs, metering or payment methods, or the sending of an energy efficiency booklet. Few call handlers ask questions which might help establish the presence of fuel poverty or eligibility for grants, so almost no one was told about any grant scheme, and few people were advised about any energy saving measures to install.
5. Although some call handlers do claim to be trained in energy awareness, most of our mystery shoppers felt that the call handlers whom they dealt with knew “little or nothing” about energy efficiency. Although their advice was found “easy” or “very easy to understand”, most of our callers also felt that this advice was “not very useful” – and significantly less useful than many callers found the advice from the Energy Efficiency Helplines. This was sometimes because publications promised by the general call centres were never sent.
6. Although most customers with energy efficiency type queries are recognised and referred to helplines by General Call Centres, we conclude that there is much room for improvement. Some call handlers do not readily recognise when customers could benefit from “energy efficiency advice”, even when they ask for it pretty directly. We conclude that call handlers at General Call Centres could benefit from further training on how to recognise or identify customers who could benefit from energy advice, or from energy efficiency grants (e.g. Warm Front), or from the company’s own EEC scheme. Some also need to be reminded of the existence and correct telephone number of the company’s Energy Efficiency Helpline so that they can refer such customers there successfully.

Energy Efficiency Helplines of the major fuel suppliers

In this section of the report we first look at how rapidly these Energy Efficiency Helplines respond to calls, and how they answer them. Next we look at how they respond (collectively) to the five *scenarios* tested, and how *each company's* helpline responded to our mystery shoppers' queries. Then we explore how each company responded to specific supplementary questions (e.g about CFLs or condensing boilers) or requests - e.g. for a booklet or list of advice sources. Next we look at callers' impressions of the service provided over the telephone by each company. Finally we look at the publications provided by each company, the likely take-up of advice, and how useful the verbal and written advice is thought to be.

The five Scenarios

The Energy Efficiency Helplines of the major fuel suppliers were tested using the same three scenarios as used on the General Call Centres, plus two more specifically asking about refrigerators/freezers which use less energy, and about grants. At least 20 calls were made to each of the major companies' or groups' helplines, with the exception of the Yorkshire helpline, to which 9 calls only were made, because we understand this is about to be merged with another helpline in the npower group. The five scenarios used were:

- A. *"I have high fuel bills, which I am finding hard to pay."*
- B. *"My home is cold and I am elderly/have an elderly relative living with me."*
- C. *"What help can you give us to save energy?"*
- D. *"I need to buy a new fridge (or freezer) and want advice on which ones use less power."*
- E. *"What grants can I get to make my home warmer and cut my bills?"*

Although a number of calls was made to each company on each scenario, the numbers are really too small to provide definitive analysis of how each company handles calls on each type of scenario. We have therefore looked at company performances as a whole, and the major suppliers' performance collectively across the five scenarios.

Our "ideal model" of how Energy Efficiency Helplines should work in response to most queries such as these would be that the call handler should:

- a) check on fuel bills and identify the underlying cause of the customer's problem by asking questions about the home, its insulation and draughtproofing, heating system type/age/controls, and the customer's circumstances (age/benefits etc); then...
- b) offer *appropriate* verbal advice based on the information provided; this could include advice on behavioural changes to save energy/improve comfort, and/or energy efficiency measures to install, and it should include advice about available grant and discount schemes; and then...

c) follow this up with printed information about energy efficiency and grants schemes, and (ideally) a printed report of recommendations appropriate to the customer's home and circumstances, based on a home energy audit and produced by an "expert system" of the sort used for energy advice by some of these companies, and by Energy Efficiency Advice Centres.

Scenarios D and E should possibly produce slightly different responses. In response to Scenario D the call handlers might be expected to talk more about energy labelling, and in response to Scenario E they should perhaps talk more about grants. But even so, both these scenarios also present opportunities for giving broader energy efficiency advice, as the caller is clearly interested in reducing costs through reducing energy consumption.

Identifying households in "Fuel Poverty"

One of the main reasons for asking about a customer's circumstances (e.g. age, benefits, size of fuel bills, temperature in the home, and perhaps even income) is that this is the only way to identify whether a customer is in "fuel poverty". This has been defined broadly as a customer living in a home which is so energy inefficient that it would require the customer to spend 10% or more of disposable income on fuel to maintain it at a reasonable (healthy) temperature. The elimination of "fuel poverty" is now a high national priority, and Ofgem hopes that fuel suppliers will play their part in identifying and helping households which are "fuel poor". We were therefore particularly interested in whether these helplines asked any questions which might help identify customers as "fuel poor".

Successful call rates, speed of response and call lengths

This section (summarised in Table 8) describes how easy or difficult it was for our mystery shoppers to contact these Energy Efficiency Helplines, and how promptly their calls were answered.

Our mystery shoppers mostly tried to call these Energy Efficiency Helplines on weekdays during office hours (e.g. 9.00am to 5.00pm). Only a very few calls were made to each company during the evening or at night, and these were not normally successful.

The number of customers who got through to these helplines on their first call varied widely. The helplines to which a high proportion of our mystery shoppers got through first time were Powergen (87%), npower (80%), Yorkshire (78%), London/SWEB (70%), Manweb (67%), Scottish and Southern (66%) and British Gas (63%).

But four companies performed significantly worse than this, and most customers failed to get through first time: Seeboard (only 48% got through first time), Northern (40%), Scottish Power (40%), and TXU Energi (30%). Northern's performance was poor mainly because it made much use of an Answerphone (in 40% of cases - which we counted as a failure to get through), and TXU Energi's was poor because there seemed to be much internal confusion over where the Energy Efficiency Helpline was, and what was its correct telephone number: 26% of calls to the listed helpline number were referred elsewhere.

Some callers to all these helplines did get through in seconds, and most got through (when they did so) within two minutes, but a few callers had to wait longer to get through to

Yorkshire (over 10 minutes), London/SWEB (6 minutes 50 seconds) and Seeboard (5 minutes 30 seconds).

Once callers did get through the total call length generally reflects how much advice the helpline could provide. Several calls lasted no more than one minute, but the longest calls to each helpline were between 16 and 45 minutes.

How calls were handled

In this section (summarised in Table 8) we look at how calls were dealt with by Energy Efficiency Helplines – e.g. whether an energy adviser answered them immediately, or whether the call involved waiting in a queue, or selecting touchtone options, or leaving a message on an Answerphone.

For most of our customers the nicest outcome was to be answered at once by a call handler. This happened most frequently with calls to Yorkshire (78%), npower (75%) and Seeboard (70%). Occasionally call handlers thanked callers for their patience, which customers felt was a nice touch.

Four helplines seemed to make extensive use of touchtone options – British Gas (59% of calls), Scottish Power (50%), Manweb (39%) and London/SWEB (22%).

Quite a few callers found they had to wait in a queuing system, especially when calling Manweb (28%), London/SWEB (22%), Yorkshire (22%) and Scottish & Southern (17%), and an “engaged” tone met some of our callers to Seeboard (13%), Manweb (11%) and Scottish & Southern (10%).

Answerphones seemed quite widely used (and we counted these as failures to get through at first call). These were used more by Northern (40%), London/SWEB (22%), British Gas (19%) and by Powergen, Scottish & Southern and TXU Energi (all 17%).

Only our calls to npower met with “no reply” or were disconnected after a time (10%).

How call handlers greet callers to Energy Efficiency Helplines

Around 90% of our mystery shoppers were greeted by call handlers with a cheery “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon”, except on the Northern helpline (where only 70% used such a greeting). Table 8 summarises the data for this section.

In about three cases out of four the call handler also answered with the company name, although this was less common on the helplines run by Scottish Power (45%) and Manweb (39%).

The extent to which call handlers volunteered their own names varied the most widely. They usually gave their own names at London/SWEB (83%), British Gas (81%), TXU Energi (70%), Seeboard and Scottish Power (both 70%), but much less often at Powergen (30%), npower (25%) and Northern (10%). Our view is that it does boost customer confidence if advisers give their names, as several of our mystery shoppers made a point of telling us the names of advisers who had been particularly helpful.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 8

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
CUSTOMER TYPES																								
Gas only customers	26	11	14	52	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	5	3	13	3	10	0	0	0	0	2	9	1	4
Electricity only customers	95	40	3	11	17	74	2	10	4	44	11	55	5	22	15	52	6	30	12	67	11	48	9	39
Both	76	32	7	26	3	13	7	35	3	33	5	25	11	48	9	31	8	40	3	17	8	35	12	52
Neither (posed as new customers)	38	16	3	11	3	13	9	45	2	22	3	15	4	17	2	7	6	30	3	17	2	9	1	4

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE																								
No. of first calls successful	141	60	17	63	16	70	16	80	7	78	8	40	20	87	19	66	8	40	12	67	11	48	7	30
Time to get through - Shortest	0"		03"		02"		04"		02"		05"		05"		02"		0"		02"		01"		02"	
Longest	10'15"	n/a	1'20"	n/a	6'50"	n/a	4'31"	n/a	10'15"	n/a	1'	n/a	3'00"	n/a	3'30"	n/a	2'22"	n/a	4'10"	n/a	5'30"	n/a	3'10"	n/a
Length of successful calls - Shortest	1'		2'		2'		1'		4'		3'		1'		6'		1'		1'		3'		4'	
Longest	45'		27'		26'		24'		16'		17'		36'		45'		28'		17'		30'		17'	

HOW CALL HANDLED																								
Answered at once by CH	96	41	1	4	8	35	15	75	7	78	10	50	12	52	13	45	4	20	3	17	16	70	7	30
Involved touchtone options	42	18	16	59	5	22	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	4	1	3	10	50	7	39	0	0	0	0
Queuing system	26	11	1	4	5	22	0	0	2	22	0	0	2	9	5	17	1	5	5	28	0	0	5	22
Engaged	10	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	3	10	0	0	2	11	3	13	1	4
Answerphone	39	17	5	19	5	22	2	10	0	0	8	40	4	17	5	17	2	10	2	11	2	9	4	17
Disconnected/no reply	4	2	0	0	0	0	2	10	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Other outcomes	7	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	2	7	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	4

GREETING																								
Good morning	211	90	25	93	23	100	20	100	8	89	14	70	19	83	29	100	18	90	16	89	20	87	19	83
Company name	170	72	20	74	20	87	17	85	8	89	15	75	14	61	22	76	9	45	7	39	20	87	18	78
Call handler's name	134	57	22	81	19	83	5	25	5	56	2	10	7	30	20	69	13	65	10	56	15	65	16	70
How may I help?	184	78	24	89	23	100	19	95	9	100	15	75	17	74	19	66	12	60	12	67	19	83	15	65
Ask for customer details	95	40	16	59	9	39	4	20	3	33	2	10	7	30	22	76	8	40	7	39	8	35	9	39
Other	37	16	4	15	1	4	1	5	2	22	2	10	7	30	11	38	4	20	3	17	2	9	0	0

Most call handlers also asked “How may I help?”, but the number who *initially* asked for customers’ details varied widely: from 76% of callers to Scottish & Southern, to only 10% of callers to Northern (but 95% of callers to Northern were asked for their name and address at the end of the call). Our view is that where Energy Efficiency Helplines can access customers’ billing records, then this may be helpful in determining whether customers’ fuel consumption is unusually high for the type of home, size of family etc.. It may also help the call handler identify customers in “fuel poverty” – e.g. having to spend over 10% of their income on fuel if they are to keep warm in winter.

Responses to the customers’ queries – by the five Scenarios

This is really the most important part of this research – looking at how each scenario was handled and how each company responded to its customers’ queries and pleas for help. We explore what questions callers were asked, and what advice they were given in response to their queries. Full results are shown in Tables 9 to 12, at the end of this section.

Scenario A - “I have high fuel bills, which I am finding hard to pay.”

When our mystery shoppers complained about having high fuel bills which they found hard to pay, we would ideally have expected energy advisers to have looked at the customer’s fuel bills, asked questions about their homes and circumstances, advised all callers on ways of reducing energy consumption through improving energy efficiency, and advised on any grants available which might help install appropriate measures.

In practice we found that most of our callers who called with this scenario (83%) were asked some questions about their home (mostly just a few questions), and 22% were offered a self-completion “Home Energy Check” questionnaire (mainly by London/SWEB and Northern) but billing records were accessed in only 41% of cases, although customers were asked about their fuel bills in 22% of cases. Only some customers were asked if they were on benefits (30%) or had anyone over 60 in the home (24%) – key questions which would help determine eligibility for grants and EEC schemes.

Having established some facts about the customers and their homes, call handlers gave verbal advice to install energy saving measures to only 63% of callers using this scenario, although they did also give some advice on controlling heating and hot water to 59%, and on saving energy when cooking to 22%. Two thirds of these callers were also promised a booklet on energy saving (67%) although not all of them received it.

We are disappointed that more callers were not advised about some energy saving measures to install, that only 39% were told about any grants schemes, and that only 22% were told about the company’s own Energy Efficiency Commitment schemes. Most of the “referred me to another agency” mentions were sources of grants or further information (e.g. Energy Efficiency Advice Centres).

There was also an underlying tendency for some call handlers and companies to see the customers’ problems with “high bills” and payment difficulties not as an underlying problem of “poor energy efficiency”, but as one of “poor planning and budgeting”, which is (we concluded) why 13% of callers on this scenario were advised primarily of alternative tariffs, ways of paying and metering, rather than of ways of saving energy.

Although about two thirds of callers who telephoned with this complaint did receive some useful verbal advice about measures to install or steps to take to reduce their energy consumption and their bills, about one third did not. However around a quarter of callers later received a “Home Energy Check” questionnaire.

Scenario B - “My home is cold and I am elderly/have an elderly relative living with me.”

We would have expected this type of complaint to encourage more call handlers to ask questions about the homes, ages and circumstances of people in these households, so that their eligibility for Warm Front and EEC schemes could be determined in most cases.

In practice we found that 77% of callers using this scenario were asked a few questions, and 16% more detailed questions, about their homes. 21% were also offered a “Home Energy Check”. Rather more callers were now asked about benefits received (46%) or the age of the relative (23%). Many were also asked about temperatures in the home (42%).

More of these callers were given verbal advice about measures to install (74%) but fewer were given advice on controlling heating and hot water (35%) compared with Scenario A (59%). Two thirds (67%) were again promised a booklet on energy efficiency. More people under this scenario were also told about grants (49%) or EEC schemes (21%) than was the case with other scenarios.

About three quarters of these callers seem to have received some useful advice over the telephone, and some later received a Home Energy Report (especially from London/SWEB and Northern).

Scenario C - “What help can you give us to save energy?”

This scenario was the one which we felt most directly asked for “help to save energy”, but even so a number of call handlers interpreted it as a plea for “help to save money”, and so more callers were told about alternative tariffs, dual fuel offers, alternative metering and payment methods (than was the case with any other scenarios). Rather fewer were asked a few questions about their homes (58%) or detailed questions about their homes (12%), although more were offered a Home Energy Check (28%).

Even though these callers had asked directly for “help to save energy”, rather few were asked about benefits (32%) or ages (16%) which might have helped qualify them for grants, and fewer were told about any grants (37%) or EEC schemes (21%) .

Rather fewer (than for Scenarios A or B) were given verbal advice on measures to install (54%) although quite a few were given advice on how best to control heating and hot water (47%) and almost three quarters (74%) were offered a booklet on energy efficiency.

Altogether we concluded that about three quarters of these callers received some appropriate and useful advice.

Scenario D - “I need to buy a new fridge (or freezer) and want advice on which ones use less power”

We expected callers who called with this type of query to be told primarily about “energy labelling”, but we also hoped that some call handlers would take the opportunity to offer a more comprehensive range of energy saving advice.

Over two thirds of callers were given verbal advice about “energy labelling” (68%) and 11% were told about the Fridgesavers schemes which provides low cost high efficiency refrigerators or freezers in exchange for older and less efficient models which are not working properly. In order to establish eligibility for the Fridgesavers scheme some 24% of callers were also asked about the current state of repair of their refrigerator or freezer. This is reasonably encouraging, although there were a few callers who were not helped at all by the call handler, being told instead to “ask in a shop”. Although half the Scenario D callers (50%) later received a booklet on energy saving, only 18% received information on energy labelling (compared to 29% who had been promised it). But 16% did later get printed information on Fridgesavers.

But rather few call handlers also took advantage of this opportunity to offer a broader range of energy efficiency advice. Only 11% asked any questions about the home, although 16% offered a Home Energy Check; and only 24% of callers were asked about benefits, and 11% about the ages of people in the household. Consequently only 11% of callers were given any advice on other energy saving measures to install, and only 13% were given any advice on controlling heating and hot water. General booklets on energy efficiency were only offered initially to 37% of callers, although later requested by 68% and received by 50%.

We conclude that Energy Efficiency Helpline call handlers do provide useful verbal advice in about three out of four cases where this sort of questions is asked, but that written information on energy labelling may only reach one in five of those who could make use of it.

Scenario E - “What grants can I get to make my home warmer and cut my bills?”

This is the most obvious request for grant information, and we would ideally expect all call handlers to explore the possibilities of obtaining an energy efficiency grant for customers who called with such a query. But we also hoped that call handlers would provide a broader range of energy efficiency advice where this seemed appropriate.

Around two thirds of customers calling with this query were asked a few questions (65%) or detailed questions (3%) about their homes, and about their ages (38%) and any benefits they received (57%). On this basis 41% were then told about grants (mainly Warm Front) and 46% were told about the fuel company’s own Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) schemes, so about 8 out of 10 callers received some verbal advice on grants. Quite a few callers (22%) were also offered a home visit (in most cases a surveyor’s call) to check if the home was suitable for a grant-aided installation.

Although a high proportion of callers was given verbal advice on grants (around 80%), far fewer were then sent any follow-up materials. Only 16% received any printed information on grants like Warm Front, and only 11% on EEC schemes. In many cases call handlers expected callers to contact another grants helpline, Warm Front Team or even an installer direct to take any grant application forward, rather than dealing with it themselves. Partly as a

result of this rather few of our mystery shoppers seem likely to take up any grants for which they may be eligible; *across all five scenarios* 36% of our callers received some verbal information on grants, and 22% on EEC schemes, but only 30% were sent any printed information on Warm Front, EEC or other grant schemes, and only 5% seem likely to apply to any of these schemes.

In response to their grants query, rather few callers received any general advice on what measures they should actually install (41%) or on ways to save by careful control of heating and hot water (16%), and only half (51%) were offered a booklet on energy efficiency. The measures more commonly advised were loft insulation (19%), cavity wall insulation (16%) and draughtproofing (11%).

Our general conclusion is that not all of those who may be eligible for grants are sent enough printed information about these schemes, nor are they often advised which are the more appropriate measures for their home, nor why. As a result, the take-up of Warm Front grants and EEC schemes through the channel of these Energy Efficiency Helplines is much lower than it could be.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 9

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY												
a.i. Referred to another C/H	9	4	1	2	3	5	2	4	1	3	2	5
a.ii. Referred to another number	13	6	0	0	1	2	2	4	5	13	5	14
b.i. Asked a few questions	137	58	32	70	44	77	33	58	4	11	24	65
b.ii. Asked detailed questions	23	10	6	13	9	16	7	12	0	0	1	3
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	51	22	10	22	12	21	16	28	6	16	7	19
d. Asked about fuel bills	33	14	18	39	3	5	8	14	1	3	3	8
e. CH accessed my bills/records	52	22	20	43	10	18	17	30	2	5	3	8
f. Asked about Benefits	89	38	15	33	26	46	18	32	9	24	21	57
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	52	22	12	26	13	23	9	16	4	11	14	38
h. Asked about Temp. in home	52	22	13	28	24	42	11	19	1	3	3	8
i. Asked about state of fridge	24	10	6	13	2	4	6	11	9	24	1	3
j. Verbal advice on measures	121	51	29	63	42	74	31	54	4	11	15	41
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	88	37	30	65	20	35	27	47	5	13	6	16
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrig.	30	13	10	22	6	11	10	18	1	3	3	8
m. How to keep warm in winter	7	3	0	0	5	9	0	0	0	0	2	5
n. Would send Booklet on En.Eff.	143	61	30	65	38	67	42	74	14	37	19	51
o. Sending list of sources of advice	28	12	4	9	7	12	10	18	2	5	5	14
p. Told me about grants	84	36	17	37	28	49	21	37	3	8	15	41
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	54	23	12	26	12	21	12	21	1	3	17	46
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	11	5	2	4	1	2	3	5	4	11	1	3
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	39	17	3	7	3	5	5	9	26	68	2	5
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	23	10	7	15	3	5	11	19	2	5	0	0
u. Offered a Home Visit	17	7	4	9	4	7	1	2	0	0	8	22
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	6	3	0	0	0	0	3	5	2	5	1	3
w. Referred me to another agency	53	23	10	22	14	25	17	30	4	11	8	22
x. Other outcomes	37	16	11	24	8	14	2	4	7	18	9	24
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	5	2	5

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 10

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
MEASURES RECOMMENDED												
Loft Insulation	48	20	10	22	19	33	12	21	0	0	7	19
Cavity wall insulation	44	19	9	20	16	28	11	19	2	5	6	16
Draughtproofing	31	13	6	13	14	25	7	12	0	0	4	11
TRVs	18	8	4	9	8	14	5	9	0	0	1	3
CFLs	40	17	18	39	9	16	8	14	2	5	3	8
Double glazing	13	6	2	4	5	9	3	5	0	0	3	8
Radiators shelves	12	5	3	7	4	7	4	7	0	0	1	3
Radiator foil/reflectors	16	7	4	9	5	9	6	11	0	0	1	3
New shower	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New boiler	2	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New condensing boiler	13	6	1	2	5	9	3	5	1	3	3	8
Insulation (unspecified)	6	3	1	2	2	4	1	2	2	5	0	0
Floor insulation	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Hot tank insulation	11	5	3	7	2	4	5	9	0	0	1	3
Hot water timer	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0
Hot water thermostat	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Pipe insulation	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
Room thermostat	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Thicker curtains	4	2	0	0	2	4	1	2	0	0	1	3
Storage Heaters/oil filled radiators	5	2	0	0	2	4	2	4	1	3	0	0
Central heating	3	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	3
Central heating timer	4	2	2	4	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0
Dehumidifier	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
"A" rated appliances	2	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 11

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
GRANT INFORMATION												
No. asking for more details of Grants	115	49	23	50	33	58	26	46	6	16	27	73
CH gave Name of scheme	55	23	14	30	16	28	10	18	3	8	12	32
CH said what scheme covered	45	19	10	22	10	18	9	16	3	8	13	35
CH told caller how to apply	86	37	16	35	27	47	17	30	4	11	22	59
CH knew how long to install	30	13	7	15	9	16	6	11	1	3	7	19
CH knew cost to customer	67	29	13	28	20	35	10	18	4	11	20	54
CH knew likely savings	56	24	11	24	20	35	12	21	3	8	10	27

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 12

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
INFORMATION DUE TO BE SENT BY POST												
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	9	20	12	21	14	25	7	18	6	16
Report on measures to install	8	3	0	0	1	2	6	11	0	0	1	3
Booklet on energy saving	191	81	40	87	49	86	49	86	26	68	27	73
List of other sources of advice	25	11	2	4	6	11	10	18	3	8	4	11
Information on Grants	43	18	8	17	14	25	5	9	6	16	10	27
Info. on company's EEC scheme	21	9	5	11	7	12	1	2	3	8	5	14
Fridgesavers information	8	3	0	0	0	0	2	4	6	16	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	17	7	1	2	2	4	3	5	11	29	0	0
Information on Tariffs	8	3	2	4	1	2	4	7	1	3	0	0
Information on Condensing Boilers	35	15	7	15	11	19	9	16	5	13	3	8
Information on CFLs	52	22	7	15	18	32	10	18	9	24	8	22
Info. on Priority Service Register	4	2	0	0	3	5	0	0	1	3	0	0
Other items	19	8	5	11	5	9	3	5	2	5	4	11

NUMBER RECEIVING INFORMATION BY POST												
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	12	26	7	12	13	23	9	24	7	19
Report on measures to install	26	11	7	15	7	12	5	9	4	11	3	8
Booklet on energy saving	146	62	33	72	38	67	38	67	19	50	18	49
List of other sources of advice	12	5	3	7	5	9	3	5	1	3	0	0
Information on Grants	40	17	7	15	12	21	7	12	8	21	6	16
Info. on company's EEC scheme	24	10	3	7	6	11	7	12	4	11	4	11
Fridgesavers information	12	5	0	0	1	2	3	5	6	16	2	5
Information on Energy Labelling	22	9	3	7	4	7	7	12	7	18	1	3
Information on Tariffs	9	4	2	4	0	0	4	7	1	3	2	5
Information on Condensing Boilers	26	11	8	17	6	11	4	7	4	11	4	11
Information on CFLs	63	27	6	13	22	39	16	28	13	34	6	16
Info. on Priority Service Register	5	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	5	0	0
Other items	72	31	19	41	16	28	14	25	10	26	13	35
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	69	29	12	26	12	21	14	25	17	45	14	38
AVERAGE NO. OF PUBLICATIONS SENT (excl HEC & Report)	2.8	n/a	2.8	n/a	3.3	n/a	2.5	n/a	3.1	n/a	2.5	n/a

Responses to the customers' queries – by major suppliers' Helplines

In this section we again explore responses to our callers' queries, but this time looking at the responses of *each major company's helpline* in turn. We do not attempt to explore responses *by each company to each scenario* in the tables, as the bases are too small for comparisons to be meaningful. Results are shown in full in Tables 13-22 in this section.

There are, we believe, eleven Energy Efficiency Helplines operated by the major fuel suppliers in Great Britain. British Gas operates a single call centre; London, SWEB and Virgin share a call centre in Southampton; the npower group run three separate energy efficiency helplines for npower, Yorkshire (soon to merge) and Northern; Powergen runs one; Scottish, Southern and SWALEC share on centre in Portsmouth; Manweb runs one; Seaboard runs one; and TXU Energi runs one centre (a merger of the old Eastern and Norweb centres).

There are noticeable differences in the ways in which these Energy Efficiency Helplines responded to our mystery shoppers' queries.

British Gas

The British Gas Energy Efficiency Helpline responded quite well to our mystery shoppers' enquiries. Call handlers asked most callers some questions about their homes (78% a few questions and 7% detailed questions), and asked many about benefits they received (48%) or the ages of people in the household (30%). They also asked around half our callers about temperatures in their home (48%) and they were the most thorough company at accessing customers' billing records (56%) or asking about the size of their bills (22%).

Having learned something about the customers who were calling, British Gas gave verbal advice on measures to install to 74% of callers, and on control of heating and hot water to 70%, thereby giving such advice to more callers than any other helpline.

British Gas also gave more callers information about their own EEC schemes (41%) than did other companies, although they only offered 30% of callers information about other grants.

Although their verbal advice was comprehensive, their printed advice was not so good. They only offered a booklet on energy efficiency to 48% of callers, and an energy audit questionnaire to only 11%. In the end some 63% of callers received such a booklet (after more had specifically asked for it) but only 7% actually received a Home Energy Check questionnaire, and hardly anyone received printed information on grants or EEC schemes (4%).

London Electricity/SWEB/Virgin group

The London/SWEB group asked only about half their callers (48%) a few questions about their homes, because they seem to rely much more on a detailed energy audit of customers' home before giving written advice: 78% of callers were offered an energy audit questionnaire about their homes. These questionnaires also cover customers circumstances like benefits and ages, but even so 57% of callers were asked about benefits, and 17% about the ages of household members.

Nevertheless, London/SWEB's helpline gave verbal advice to 57% of callers on energy efficiency measures to install, and also advised 30% on controlling their heating and hot water. They also told 43% of callers about grants, and 22% about their own EEC schemes, and they told more callers than other helplines about energy labelling (26%).

Almost half of the callers to this helpline (48%) were also referred to other agencies, mostly EEACs, Warm Front and local councils.

London/SWEB's printed advice was also good in some ways only. 87% of callers were offered a booklet on energy efficiency (and 87% received one). 83% were promised (but only 57% received) an energy audit questionnaire – still far more than with any other company - but only 39% had received a Home Energy Report within the next four weeks. However this was still a higher proportion of all callers than for any other company. Information on energy labelling was sent to 26%. But London/SWEB seemed poor on following up verbal advice on grants/EEC schemes with printed information: only 13% of callers received information on grants, and no one received information on EEC schemes.

npower

npower's helpline asked about two thirds of callers a few questions about their homes (65%) but rather fewer callers about benefits (35%) or ages (15%), and only 15% were offered an energy audit questionnaire. One caller who asked about grants was told they could not help her at all, and did not know who might be able to.

Only half the callers received any verbal advice on measures to install (50%) and less than a third were given any verbal advice on how best to control heating and hot water (30%). Only half were offered a booklet on energy efficiency (only two companies were worse on this point). But npower told half its callers about grants (50%) and quite a few about EEC schemes (30%).

npower also had some slight weaknesses in following-up calls with printed materials. Although 90% of callers were promised a booklet on energy efficiency (some after they had specifically asked for it) only 70% actually received one. But 35% received information on grants and 20% information on EEC schemes. Although only 15% of callers were initially offered a home energy audit, some 50% actually received and completed this questionnaire, but only 15% had received a Home Energy Report within 4 weeks. But npower sent more callers information on condensing boilers (25%) than most other helplines.

Yorkshire

Yorkshire's data need to be treated with caution because only nine calls were made to the helpline as it may soon be merged with another npower advice line. But Yorkshire's Energy Efficiency Helpline asked most callers a few questions about their home (78%), but fewer people about benefits (33%) and no one about their age, although they did ask quite a lot of people about temperatures in their home (44%). Nor did they initially offer anyone a home energy audit questionnaire (which is odd as they later sent many out).

They offered only one in three callers (33%) any verbal advice about energy efficiency measures to install in their homes, although they did give many more people verbal advice on

controlling their heating and hot water (67%). But rather few callers were told about any grants (22%) or EEC schemes (22%).

Yorkshire offered more callers a booklet on energy efficiency (89%) than any other helpline, and most of them did receive it (78%). They also sent 56% of callers a home energy audit questionnaire, although only 22% had received a Home Energy Report four weeks later. They sent rather few callers information on grants (22%) or on their EEC schemes (11%) but were good at sending out information on CFLs (56%) and on condensing boilers (22%). But they could not tell our callers anything about energy labelling.

Northern

Northern's Energy Efficiency Helpline (run for Northern by the Northumbria EEAC) asked 75% of callers some questions about their home, and also offered to send most of them (65%) a Home Energy Check questionnaire – which we believe is good practice. They also asked more callers about benefits (60%) or age (30%) than most other helplines, in order to establish if they might be eligible for grants.

Over half the callers were given some verbal advice on measures to install (55%) but fewer were given verbal advice on controlling heating and hot water (25%). Quite a few were told about grants (35%) or EEC schemes (25%).

Although rather few people were initially offered a booklet on energy efficiency (35%), others asked for one and it was promised to 90% of callers, although only 65% received one. Not all callers received the Home Energy Check they had been offered either: 65% were offered one, 40% received one, 35% completed it, but only 30% received a Home Energy Report within four weeks. But Northern's helpline was one of the best at sending out information on grants (30%) and EEC schemes (30%), and quite good at sending information on CFLs (35%) and condensing boilers (25%).

Powergen

Powergen's helpline asked most callers a few questions (65%) or even detailed questions (17%) about their home before giving advice, but they did not offer or send a home energy audit questionnaire to anyone, although one caller said he had later received a report (4%). Powergen were most thorough in asking about benefits (61%) or age (39%).

Almost two thirds of callers (61%) were then given verbal advice on measures to install, and half (48%) were given verbal advice on heating and hot water control. Many were also told about grants (43%) or EEC schemes (35%), and Powergen offered more callers a home visit (30%) than any other company – usually a surveyor's visit to assess the home for grant-aided work.

In terms of printed information, Powergen offered a booklet on energy efficiency to 61% of callers, although more asked for one; in the end 87% were promised one and 70% received one. Powergen was quite good at sending out information on grants (26%), EEC schemes (35%) and condensing boilers (22%).

Scottish & Southern (& SWALEC)

The three companies in this group share an energy efficiency helpline in Portsmouth.

Scottish & Southern's helpline asked more callers (90%) questions about their homes than other helplines – either detailed questions (31%) or just a few (59%). They also offered a home energy audit questionnaire to 28% of callers. But they asked rather few callers about benefits (21%) or age (17%), so they were not in a good position to know if all callers might be eligible for grants.

Two thirds of callers (66%) were given some verbal advice on measures to install, and 45% advice on heating and hot water control. But rather fewer were told about grants (28%) or EEC schemes (24%), although 17% were offered a home visit/survey to see what could be installed.

Most callers were offered a booklet on energy efficiency (79%) and a few more asked for it, so that 97% of callers were promised one, although only 72% reported receiving one. Although a home energy questionnaire was originally offered to 28% of callers, only 14% received one in the end, and very few received printed information on grants (7%) or EEC schemes (3%). But Scottish & Southern were among the best at sending out information on CFLs (52%) and energy labelling (38%).

Scottish Power

There was a certain amount of confusion when our callers tried to call the Scottish Power Energy Efficiency Helpline, and a few were referred to other internal lines or the grants helpline (30%).

Scottish Power asked rather fewer callers than other helplines any questions about their homes – 25% were asked a few, and 15% more detailed questions – and only 10% were offered an energy audit questionnaire. The call handlers also asked very few people about benefits (5%) or age (5%). The energy advisers cannot therefore have had a good picture of many of the customers whom they were trying to advise.

Perhaps because fewer customers were asked for any information about themselves or their homes, only a few were given verbal advice on measures to install (25%) or on controlling their heating and hot water (15%), and only a few were told about grants (20%) and none about EEC schemes. Only one of the four callers who called about fridges which use less power was told about energy labelling, and one call handler said she could not help at all and did not know who might.

Scottish Power was one of the poorest companies at providing printed information to back up its advice. (The other was its sister company Manweb.) Only 25% of callers were sent a booklet on energy efficiency, and only 5% were sent any information on grants. Only 10% received an energy audit questionnaire, and only 5% a Home Energy Report. Very little information was sent out on CFLs (10%) or condensing boilers (5%), even though five times as many callers had specifically asked about these. Altogether (excluding questionnaires and reports) 65% of our mystery shoppers were not sent any other useful booklets or leaflets by Scottish Power.

Manweb

Manweb (which is owned by Scottish Power) had very similar characteristics to its parent company in the way in which it handled calls to its energy efficiency helpline. Five out of 18 callers (28%) did not seem to find an “energy adviser” manning the Energy Efficiency Helpline when they called, as they were immediately referred to other sources. Several of our mystery shoppers were also referred elsewhere later on in the call, when it appeared that the call handler was not able to help them. Other sources of advice to which these callers were referred included the General Call Centre, “Manweb shops”, “the Warrington Centre”, the “Domestic Sales Team”, and even the Energy Efficiency Advice Centres’ Freephone number (0800 512012).

Under these circumstances only one in three callers (33%) was asked a few questions about their home, although 17% were offered an energy audit questionnaire. Very few callers (11%) were asked about age, and none was asked about benefits, so Manweb’s Energy Efficiency Helpline could not have been in a good position to advise about grants and EEC schemes.

Having asked our callers so little about themselves and their homes, Manweb provided less advice than any other company: very few callers were given verbal advice on measures to install (11%), or on controlling heating or hot water (17%); and very few were told about EEC schemes (11%) or other grants like Warm Front (6%).

Manweb was the only company where no call handlers could give any proper information about EU “energy labelling” to our three mystery shoppers who enquired about refrigerators which use less energy. Two were referred elsewhere, and one was told only about “the orange and blue Energy Efficiency badge”.

Manweb was also very poor at following up any verbal advice with printed information. Although 56% of callers had been offered a booklet on energy efficiency, only 22% of callers were sent one - the lowest proportion of all the major suppliers. Only 6% were sent information on grants, and none any information on EEC schemes or energy labelling. A few were sent a home energy audit (11%) but only half of them later received a Home Energy Report. Overall, two thirds of callers were not sent any follow-up information at all.

These outcomes suggest to us that the Energy Efficiency Helpline at Manweb is not properly set up, staffed and equipped to handle the types of energy efficiency enquiries which many customers would like to make. As a result its advice was rated the least useful of all the major companies, with 72% of callers finding it “not very useful” or even “not at all useful”.

Seeboard

Seeboard’s Energy Efficiency Helpline was good at asking most callers some questions about their home (83%), although rather fewer were asked about benefits (48%) and age (30%) and very few were offered a home energy audit (9%). But Seeboard was quite good at asking people about their fuel bills (26%) or accessing their account (26%).

Almost two thirds of callers were then given verbal advice on measures to install (61%), but fewer were given advice on how to save energy by careful control of heating or hot water (39%). Three of our callers who complained about “big bills” and three who asked for “help to save energy” were also given advice on alternative tariffs, metering or payment methods to

help reduce their bills or spread the repayments. Seeboard was the best company at telling callers about grants (61%), although fewer were told about EEC schemes (22%). Most callers were also initially offered a general booklet on energy efficiency (74%) although a few more people requested one later.

Seeboard was the only major supplier to send a booklet on energy efficiency to all of the callers to whom it had promised one (83%). It also sent information on grants to more callers than any other major company (39%), but few callers received any information on EEC schemes (9%) and none received printed information on energy labelling.

TXU Energi

TXU Energi now supposedly operates a single Energy Efficiency Helpline for all its customers, from the old Eastern and Norweb areas and from elsewhere. But many of our mystery shoppers had great difficulty in locating an energy adviser, or anyone who could help them, on the Energy Efficiency Helpline numbers listed on their bills (0800 183 1600 or 0800 834 550).

To begin with our callers got through at their first attempt on only 30% of their calls to these numbers. Then 35% of callers were referred elsewhere when they did get through – e.g. to another call handler (because the first could not answer the query), to another TXU number such as a Grants Helpline, or to an Energy Efficiency Advice Centre; one caller was referred or transferred in turn to three other numbers, one of which was unobtainable, one was the Staywarm scheme which referred him to another unobtainable number; and at the third call he was transferred to Customer Liaison. This gives the impression that TXU Energi is not operating a properly manned and dedicated Energy Efficiency Helpline at the numbers it lists as such.

Perhaps for these reasons only 56% of callers were asked any questions about their homes, although only some callers were asked about benefits (35%) or age (30%). No one was offered an energy audit questionnaire.

The amount of verbal advice available to callers was quite low: only 43% of them were given any advice on measures to install or offered a booklet on energy efficiency, and only 26% were given advice on controlling heating and hot water. Despite the limited questions asked, 43% were told about grants, but only 13% about EEC schemes. Some callers were also told about alternative tariffs, metering and payment options (22%).

TXU Energi were not very good at sending follow-up printed information. Although 74% of callers were offered or requested a general booklet on energy efficiency, only 43% were sent one, and very few were sent printed information on grants (13%) or EEC schemes (4%). Although 17% of callers were sent an energy audit questionnaire, only half of those who completed it were sent a report.

Several of our mystery shoppers found it very frustrating trying to contact TXU's Energy Efficiency Helpline, and rated the usefulness of the advice provided as rather low.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 13

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEb Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY																								
a. Referred to another C/H	9	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	2	10	2	11	1	4	2	9
a. Referred to another number	13	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	20	3	17	0	0	6	26	
b.i. Asked a few questions	137	58	21	78	11	48	13	65	7	78	13	65	15	65	17	59	5	25	6	33	17	74	12	52
b.ii. Asked detailed questions	23	10	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10	4	17	9	31	3	15	0	0	2	9	1	4
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	51	22	3	11	18	78	3	15	0	0	12	60	0	0	8	28	2	10	3	17	2	9	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	33	14	6	22	1	4	2	10	1	11	2	10	4	17	5	17	2	10	2	11	6	26	2	9
e. CH accessed my bills/records	52	22	15	56	6	26	2	10	0	0	0	0	6	26	10	34	2	10	0	0	6	26	5	22
f. Asked about Benefits	89	38	13	48	13	57	7	35	3	33	13	65	14	61	6	21	1	5	0	0	11	48	8	35
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	52	22	8	30	4	17	3	15	0	0	6	30	9	39	5	17	1	5	2	11	7	30	7	30
h. Asked about Temp. in home	52	22	13	48	0	0	3	15	4	44	3	15	9	39	8	28	2	10	0	0	5	22	5	22
i. Asked about state of fridge	24	10	3	11	2	9	2	10	1	11	4	20	1	4	8	28	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	9
j. Verbal advice on measures	121	51	20	74	13	57	10	50	3	33	11	55	14	61	19	66	5	25	2	11	14	61	10	43
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	88	37	19	70	7	30	6	30	6	67	5	25	11	48	13	45	3	15	3	17	9	39	6	26
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrig.	30	13	8	30	3	13	2	10	1	11	1	5	3	13	5	17	2	10	0	0	1	4	4	17
m. How to keep warm in winter	7	3	2	7	1	4	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
n. Would send Booklet on En.Eff.	143	61	13	48	20	87	10	50	8	89	7	35	14	61	23	79	12	60	9	50	17	74	10	43
o. Sending list of sources of advice	28	12	2	7	4	17	2	10	1	11	2	10	4	17	7	24	2	10	0	0	3	13	1	4
p. Told me about grants	84	36	8	30	10	43	10	50	2	22	7	35	10	43	8	28	4	20	1	6	14	61	10	43
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	54	23	11	41	5	22	6	30	2	22	5	25	8	35	7	24	0	0	2	11	5	22	3	13
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	11	5	0	0	3	13	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	4	3	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	39	17	5	19	6	26	4	20	0	0	3	15	4	17	6	21	1	5	1	6	5	22	4	17
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	23	10	3	11	1	4	2	10	0	0	2	10	1	4	2	7	1	5	0	0	6	26	5	22
u. Offered a Home Visit	17	7	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	30	5	17	2	10	0	0	1	4	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	13	1	3	0	0	1	6	0	0	1	4
w. Referred me to another agency	53	23	5	19	11	48	4	20	1	11	4	20	4	17	9	31	3	15	3	17	3	13	6	26
x. Other outcomes	37	16	4	15	3	13	1	5	1	11	1	5	3	13	3	10	5	25	8	44	3	13	5	22
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	3	17	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 14

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
INFORMATION DUE TO BE SENT BY POST																								
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	3	11	19	83	3	15	0	0	12	60	0	0	4	14	2	10	3	17	2	9	0	0
Report on measures to install	8	3	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	10	4	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Booklet on energy saving	191	81	23	85	22	96	18	90	9	100	18	90	20	87	28	97	7	35	10	56	19	83	17	74
List of other sources of advice	25	11	3	11	4	17	1	5	1	11	2	10	4	17	5	17	0	0	0	0	3	13	2	9
Information on Grants	43	18	1	4	7	30	6	30	2	22	5	25	5	22	2	7	1	5	0	0	13	57	1	4
Info. on company's EEC scheme	21	9	1	4	3	13	3	15	0	0	3	15	5	22	2	7	0	0	1	6	2	9	1	4
Fridgesavers information	7	3	0	0	2	9	1	5	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	7	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	17	7	1	4	4	17	1	5	0	0	2	10	1	4	3	10	1	5	0	0	2	9	2	9
Information on Tariffs	8	3	2	7	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4
Information on Condensing Boilers	35	15	3	11	1	4	9	45	2	22	3	15	6	26	4	14	1	5	3	17	3	13	0	0
Information on CFLs	52	22	3	11	10	43	6	30	5	56	2	10	4	17	12	41	2	10	4	22	3	13	1	4
Info. on Priority Service Register	4	2	0	0	3	13	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other items	19	8	2	7	1	4	4	20	1	11	0	0	3	13	3	10	3	15	1	6	1	4	0	0

NUMBER RECEIVING INFORMATION BY POST																								
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	2	7	13	57	10	50	5	56	8	40	0	0	2	7	2	10	2	11	0	0	4	17
Report on measures to install	26	11	1	4	9	39	3	15	2	22	5	25	0	0	3	10	1	5	1	6	0	0	1	4
Booklet on energy saving	146	62	17	63	20	87	14	70	7	78	13	65	16	70	21	72	5	25	4	22	19	83	10	43
List of other sources of advice	12	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	9	5	17	0	0	0	0	3	13	0	0
Information on Grants	40	17	0	0	3	13	7	35	2	22	6	30	6	26	2	7	1	5	1	6	9	39	3	13
Info. on company's EEC scheme	24	10	1	4	0	0	4	20	1	11	6	30	8	35	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	9	1	4
Fridgesavers information	12	5	0	0	2	9	3	15	1	11	1	5	0	0	4	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Information on Energy Labelling	22	9	0	0	6	26	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	11	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9
Information on Tariffs	9	4	1	4	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	7	1	5	0	0	1	4	1	4
Information on Condensing Boilers	26	11	1	4	0	0	5	25	2	22	5	25	5	22	2	7	1	5	2	11	2	9	1	4
Information on CFLs	63	27	1	4	10	43	9	45	5	56	7	35	6	26	15	52	2	10	3	17	2	9	3	13
Info. on Priority Service Register	5	2	0	0	3	13	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other items	72	31	9	33	7	30	7	35	4	44	10	50	6	26	8	28	2	10	3	17	7	30	9	39
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	69	29	10	37	4	17	5	25	2	22	3	15	4	17	6	21	13	65	12	67	2	9	8	35
AVERAGE NO. OF PUBLICATIONS SENT (excl HEC & Report)	2.8	n/a	2.0	n/a	2.4	n/a	6.3	n/a	5.6	n/a	4.2	n/a	3.6	n/a	2.9	n/a	0.7	n/a	0.7	n/a	2.1	n/a	2.5	n/a
% PROMISED INFO SENT		106		81		96		122		145		127		102		112		68		73		92		144
DAYS AFTER CALL ITEMS RECEIVED	1 to 17	n/a	2 to 7	n/a	1 to 16	n/a	1 to 8	n/a	2 to 12	n/a	1 to 3	n/a	2 to 15	n/a	1 to 14	n/a	1 to 6	n/a	1 to 17	n/a	1 to 10	n/a	2 to 11	n/a

Energy efficiency measures recommended to callers

In this section we explore which energy efficiency measures callers were advised to install, both by company and by scenario. Full results are shown in Table 15.

Overall about half of our mystery shoppers (51%) were given some verbal advice on energy efficiency measures to install in their homes. The measures more commonly recommended over the telephone were: loft insulation (20%), cavity wall insulation (19%), compact fluorescent lamps (17%) and draughtproofing (13%).

The companies which advised at least half of our callers to install some measures were: British Gas (74%), Scottish & Southern (66%), Powergen and Seeboard (both 61%), London/SWEB (57%) and Northern (55%). Some companies advised far fewer callers to install any energy saving measures: TXU Energi (43%), Yorkshire (33%), Scottish Power (25%) and Manweb (11%). Since we know from other research (EEACs 1993-1998) that over 90% of all UK homes lack between four and nine appropriate energy efficiency measures, it is disappointing to find so few households being recommended appropriate measures to install.

There were few other major differences between companies in the measures they would recommend customers to install. The main differences were again between the scenarios. The “cold home/elderly relative” scenario resulted in the most recommendations to install something (to 74% of callers) and loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, draughtproofing and thermostatic radiator valves were the main recommendations. The “high bills” scenario elicited slightly fewer recommendations overall about any measures to install (63%), but 39% of callers were told about CFLs – more than any other measure under any scenario. “Help us save energy” also resulted in disappointingly few verbal recommendations to install measures - only 54% of callers were given any such recommendations. The query about “what grants are available” also produced few firm verbal recommendations – only 41% of callers were advised to install any measures, although loft and cavity wall insulation were mentioned most, and 41% were told about grants and 46% about EEC schemes. And the fifth scenario – help to find “a fridge that uses less power” – produced very few recommendations about other measures to install (only 11%) although 68% of these callers were told about energy labelling.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 15

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
MEASURES RECOMMENDED																								
Loft Insulation	48	20	9	33	3	13	1	5	1	11	6	30	3	13	10	34	3	15	1	6	7	30	4	17
Cavity wall insulation	44	19	6	22	1	4	1	5	1	11	6	30	4	17	9	31	3	15	0	0	8	35	5	22
Draughtproofing	31	13	5	19	2	9	3	15	0	0	3	15	1	4	9	31	1	5	0	0	1	4	6	26
TRVs	18	8	3	11	2	9	1	5	1	11	0	0	4	17	4	14	1	5	0	0	2	9	0	0
CFLs	40	17	6	22	8	35	1	5	0	0	4	20	5	22	6	21	1	5	0	0	7	30	2	9
Double glazing	13	6	3	11	0	0	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	0	0	1	6	0	0	5	22
Radiators shelves	12	5	6	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	17	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Radiator foil/reflectors	16	7	9	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	17	1	5	0	0	1	4	0	0
New shower	1	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New boiler	2	1	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New condensing boiler	13	6	1	4	3	13	1	5	0	0	1	5	2	9	1	3	1	5	0	0	3	13	0	0
Insulation (unspecified)	6	3	1	4	2	9	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	0	0
Floor insulation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Hot tank insulation	11	5	1	4	3	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	3	2	10	0	0	1	4	2	9
Hot water timer	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot water thermostat	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pipe insulation	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Room thermostat	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Thicker curtains	4	2	2	7	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Storage Heaters/oil filled radiators	5	2	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	1	4	1	4
Central heating	3	1	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Central heating timer	4	2	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Dehumidifier	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
"A" rated appliances	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4

How Energy Efficiency Helplines responded to specific questions and requests

The second half of our mystery shopping calls to energy suppliers involved our mystery shoppers in asking some more direct extra questions to test the knowledge and services provided by these helplines. The questions involved probing for more information on grants which had been mentioned and on measures which had been recommended, and asking for more information on condensing boilers, low energy bulbs, home visits, booklets on energy efficiency (a Condition 25 requirement), lists of other sources of advice (another Condition 25 requirement), and whether the call handlers had received any training to do their job. Results are shown in full in Tables 16 and 17.

Grant information

All of our mystery shoppers who had been told about any grants or EEC schemes were requested to ask the energy adviser what the scheme was called, how to apply for it, how long installation might take, what it would cost and what it might save. These are all pieces of information which we believe a trained energy adviser should know or be able to access instantly.

49% of our callers asked these questions about grants. They found that energy advisers knew the name of a grant or EEC scheme in less than half the cases, but could usually tell them what measures it covered even if they didn't know the name.

Providing information on how to apply is pretty crucial to encouraging take-up of any scheme, but we found that only British Gas was able to tell all the customers who asked how they should apply. Across all the major suppliers, energy advisers could only tell about three quarters of those who asked how to apply. Two companies were very poor in this respect, being able to advise only half those who asked – London/SWEB and Powergen.

Only about a quarter of our callers were able to get any information on how long it might be before grant-aided measures could be installed, and three companies could give no idea to any callers – npower, Yorkshire and Manweb.

Just over half of those who enquired were told something about the cost to them (schemes ranged from 100% grants to 30% discount schemes). Yorkshire and Northern seemed better at providing this information, but London/SWEB, Powergen and TXU Energi seemed poor at answering this question.

Callers also asked about likely savings from installing any grant-aided measures which had been suggested, and in about half of all cases the energy adviser could give a useful indication. Northern's energy advisers seemed the most aware of likely savings (as well as costs), but npower, Powergen, Scottish Power and TXU Energi's advisers seemed to have less knowledge of this.

Information on measures recommended

Where any measures (not on a grant) had been recommended by the energy adviser on the telephone, our mystery shoppers asked for more information about one of those measures – what it might cost, what the effects or savings might be, and whether any grants were available.

45% of our mystery shoppers asked about a measure they had been advised to install; 26% were told of the likely cost; 36% of the likely effects or savings; and 11% were told that a grant might be available after all.

Companies whose energy advisers seemed less knowledgeable about costs seemed to be British Gas, Powergen, Scottish & Southern, Scottish Power, Manweb and TXU Energi.

Knowledge about the effects and savings from measures advised was generally better, and around 80% of all those who asked were given information on the likely effects or savings from installing some of the measures advised.

Condensing boiler queries

66% of our mystery shoppers asked “what exactly are condensing boilers, and do they save money?”, and 54% (82% of those who asked) were given some more useful information on how they worked more efficiently or what they might save. British Gas, London/SWEB, Powergen and Seeboard were particularly good at providing such information. But some of the explanations given by energy advisers (although reassuring on the whole to callers) did seem to be based on rather fanciful interpretations of the laws of physics:

“They (condensing boilers) re-use moisture to generate energy.”

“They can be fitted in cupboards and burn the energy twice!”

“They work by utilising moisture and generating it to heat water.”

Queries on low energy bulbs

80% of our callers asked “What are low energy bulbs? How much do they cost, and how much do they save?” 67% of our callers received an adequate explanation of what they are – e.g. much more efficient, long-lasting, compact fluorescent lamps - and 70% were told roughly what they cost and saved, or at least reassured that they did save energy, payback their cost many times over, and last a long time. Knowledge of CFLs seemed good amongst most energy advisers, except at Scottish Power and Manweb where quite a few callers did not get adequate explanations. Some of the explanations were again rather fanciful:

“They are very good. They give a sudden burst of electricity.”

Queries about Home Visits

Fuel companies have never been required to provide home visits, although some have in the past and still appear to, which is good. But we found a high degree of disagreement and uncertainty among energy advisers as to whether such visits are currently available. Our callers asked “Do you ever visit old people at home to give this sort of advice, because I have an elderly aunt who might appreciate this help?”.

74% of our callers asked their energy adviser this question, and 32% were told the company did offer home visits; 30% were told it did not; 22% were told the company only offered

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 16

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
GRANT INFORMATION																								
No. asking for more details of Grants	115	49	16	59	12	52	11	55	3	33	11	55	15	65	11	38	5	25	3	17	16	70	12	52
CH gave Name of scheme	55	23	9	33	6	26	8	40	2	22	4	20	7	30	4	14	2	10	2	11	7	30	4	17
CH said what scheme covered	45	19	6	22	6	26	3	15	1	11	8	40	6	26	3	10	0	0	1	6	5	22	6	26
CH told caller how to apply	86	37	16	59	6	26	9	45	2	22	8	40	8	35	9	31	3	15	2	11	12	52	11	48
CH knew how long to install	30	13	3	11	5	22	0	0	0	0	5	25	2	9	5	17	1	5	0	0	7	30	2	9
CH knew cost to customer	67	29	10	37	4	17	6	30	3	33	9	45	7	30	9	31	2	10	2	11	11	48	4	17
CH knew likely savings	56	24	7	26	7	30	4	20	2	22	10	50	2	9	7	24	0	0	2	11	10	43	5	22

MEASURES RECOMMENDED INFORMATION																								
No. asking for info on Measures	106	45	18	67	12	52	11	55	2	22	6	30	13	57	19	66	4	20	2	11	10	43	9	39
CH knew costs	60	26	8	30	10	43	8	40	2	22	4	20	6	26	9	31	1	5	0	0	8	35	4	17
CH knew effects/savings	85	36	15	56	7	30	9	45	1	11	5	25	11	48	17	59	4	20	2	11	7	30	7	30
CH said grant may be available	27	11	4	15	2	9	5	25	1	11	2	10	2	9	3	10	2	10	1	6	1	4	4	17

CONDENSING BOILER QUERY																								
No. asking about Cond. Boilers	154	66	21	78	13	57	15	75	8	89	14	70	15	65	18	62	10	50	9	50	17	74	14	61
CH provided useful information	126	54	20	74	12	52	10	50	7	78	12	60	14	61	15	52	3	15	4	22	17	74	12	52

LOW ENERGY BULBS QUERY																								
No. asking about Low Energy Bulbs	187	80	22	81	20	87	18	90	9	100	17	85	18	78	26	90	11	55	11	61	18	78	17	74
CH explained what they are	157	67	22	81	15	65	17	85	7	78	15	75	15	65	22	76	6	30	8	44	16	70	14	61
CH quoted costs/savings	165	70	21	78	19	83	16	80	8	89	16	80	16	70	24	83	6	30	8	44	16	70	15	65

HOME VISITS																								
No. asking about Home Visits	174	74	24	89	21	91	18	90	6	67	15	75	18	78	23	79	8	40	10	56	17	74	14	61
CH said Home Visits offered	75	32	5	19	19	83	5	25	0	0	6	30	8	35	9	31	6	30	4	22	9	39	4	17
Home Visits not offered	70	30	16	59	0	0	9	45	3	33	4	20	8	35	10	34	1	5	6	33	5	22	8	35
Don't know	9	4	0	0	2	9	1	5	1	11	0	0	2	9	0	0	0	0	1	6	1	4	1	4
Others (e.g. some areas/PSR)	22	9	5	19	0	0	3	15	2	22	5	25	1	4	2	7	1	5	0	0	2	9	1	4
Home visits Free	71	30	4	15	19	83	5	25	1	11	6	30	8	35	7	24	5	25	5	28	8	35	3	13

home visits to customers who were housebound or on their Priority Service Register (PSR), or living in certain areas.

Those companies where the consensus seems to be that home visits are still available are London/SWEB, Scottish Power and Seeboard. It seems unlikely that they are widely offered by British Gas, npower, Yorkshire or TXU Energi except under some circumstances (e.g. if on PSR). Powergen advisers seem split on whether they do home visits or not. However there is clearly confusion among many call handlers on this point. But wherever home visits were offered they nearly always seemed to be free.

Requests for booklets on energy efficiency

A “Code of Practice on Energy Efficiency” is supposed to be published by all fuel suppliers, and those 45% of our callers who had not already been offered a general booklet on energy efficiency asked “Do you have a little booklet or something which sums up your advice on energy saving?”

Most of these callers (39% - or 88% of those who asked) were told that a booklet was available and would be sent. But a few call handlers said that their companies did not have such a booklet (4%), that it was out of print (1%) or that they did not know if one was available (1%). These uncertainties about availability only occurred in some companies, and mainly at British Gas, Scottish Power, Manweb and TXU Energi.

But of all our callers who were offered or promised such a booklet (81% of all callers) only three quarters (61%) finally received one by post. This is disappointing. As already shown above, the companies who failed to provide such booklets to many callers were Scottish Power (25% only received one), Manweb (22%) and TXU Energi (43%).

Requests for lists of other sources of advice

The licence conditions also require these energy companies to publish a list of alternative sources of advice. This can be included in the Code of Practice or other publications. Our mystery shoppers asked “I’m interested in knowing some more about this energy saving. Are there any other local sources of advice you can let me have a list of?” 63% of our callers asked for such a list; 46% were told it was in the booklet or that the company would send one; and 17% of callers were told no such list was available. Companies which told more substantial numbers of customers that no such list was available were British Gas (26% told no list available), Northern (25%), Scottish Power (25%), Manweb (33%) and TXU Energi (26%). These are poor responses and need to be corrected.

The training of Energy Advisers

Call Handlers should be properly trained to provide energy advice if they are to act as Energy Advisers on a fuel company’s Energy Efficiency Helpline. We knew this would be a difficult question for mystery shoppers to ask without “giving the game away”, so we suggested they only ask if they felt they had established good rapport with the call handler: “You seem to know a lot about energy efficiency. Do you go on special training to learn all that?”

This question was asked by 88 of our mystery shoppers (37%) and 78 call handlers (33% of all, or 89% of those asked) claimed to be specially trained for the job. All call handlers whom

we asked at the following companies claimed to be trained for the job: British Gas, Yorkshire, Northern, Powergen and Scottish & Southern. At all the remaining companies our callers encountered at least one call handler not trained for the job: London/SWEB (1), npower (1), Scottish Power (4), Manweb (1), Seeboard (1) and TXU Energi (2). In practice we suspect that our callers encountered even more untrained call handlers at those companies where there seemed to be some confusion over the location and manning of the energy efficiency helpline – e.g. Scottish Power, Manweb and TXU Energi – but where they could hardly ask this question because the call handler clearly knew rather little about energy efficiency.

Details requested by call handlers

At the beginning of our mystery shopping calls we logged that only 40% of callers were asked for details like their name or customer number which might help the call handler call up their billing details. We believe it is good practice to record all energy efficiency enquiries together with the customer's name, address, and telephone number - as the latter is vital if the company is to commission any independent monitoring of its advice (which would be good practice) and plans to do this through telephone interviews.

At the end of the mystery shopping telephone call our callers also recorded whether or not these details were requested again or checked, as might be necessary if the energy adviser was posting any information or logging the query. We now found that 78% of our callers were asked for their name, 79% for their address, but only 41% for their telephone number.

We also found that practices varied widely between companies. Four companies asked virtually everyone for their name and address – npower, Yorkshire, Northern and Scottish & Southern, but only Scottish & Southern also asked almost every caller for their telephone number too.

Companies which seemed to ask rather fewer customers for such details were Scottish Power, Manweb and TXU Energi, and all of these, plus Powergen and London/SWEB, asked only a quarter (or fewer) of their customers for their telephone number. This may of course be because they have telephone systems which automatically display or log callers' numbers, but call handlers should not assume all callers are calling from their home number, as many such calls may be made from work. It would always be worthwhile therefore for companies to check the telephone numbers of customers who call with queries.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 17

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY																								
No. asking for Booklet	105	45	18	67	4	17	13	65	0	0	14	70	12	52	13	45	4	20	6	33	8	35	13	57
Yes - we have one & will send it	92	39	15	56	4	17	13	65	0	0	13	65	11	48	13	45	1	5	4	22	7	30	11	48
No - we don't have one	9	4	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	15	2	11	0	0	2	9	
Normally have, but out of print	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Don't know if one available	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

LIST OF OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE																								
No. asking for a list	148	63	21	78	11	48	9	45	6	67	17	85	16	70	17	59	11	55	11	61	17	74	12	52
Yes - it's in the Booklet/we'll send one	107	46	14	52	10	43	9	45	4	44	11	55	13	57	12	41	6	30	5	28	15	65	8	35
No - we don't have one	39	17	7	26	1	4	0	0	1	11	5	25	2	9	4	14	5	25	6	33	2	9	6	26
No. of mentions of other sources	68	29	11	41	7	30	6	30	0	0	8	40	8	35	11	38	4	20	1	6	7	30	5	22

TRAINING OF ADVISERS																								
No. asking if adviser was trained	88	37	17	63	8	35	9	45	3	33	10	50	6	26	11	38	4	20	2	11	12	52	6	26
CHs claiming to be trained	78	33	17	63	7	30	8	40	3	33	10	50	6	26	11	38	0	0	1	6	11	48	4	17

DETAILS REQUESTED BY CH																								
Name	184	78	22	81	17	74	19	95	9	100	19	95	19	83	27	93	9	45	11	61	19	83	13	57
Address	186	79	20	74	18	78	19	95	9	100	19	95	19	83	27	93	9	45	11	61	19	83	16	70
Phone Number	96	41	14	52	3	13	9	45	4	44	10	50	6	26	26	90	3	15	4	22	14	61	3	13

Customers' impressions of the Energy Efficiency Helplines

At the end of each call, we asked our mystery shoppers to record their impressions of the call handler's knowledge of energy efficiency, whether the call was handled in a professional manner, how polite the call handler was, and how easy or difficult they found it to understand the verbal advice and explanations given by the call handler. We found some big variations in the ratings these major fuel suppliers received on some of these criteria. The full results are shown in Table 18.

Impressions of the call handlers' knowledge of energy efficiency

It was here that we found the biggest differences in our mystery shoppers' ratings of these major fuel suppliers. We feel it is reasonable for customers to expect trained energy advisers manning the energy efficiency helplines of major fuel suppliers to be knowledgeable about energy efficiency. We therefore asked our callers to rate their call handler as to whether they "knew a great deal about energy efficiency", "knew quite a lot about energy efficiency", "knew only a little about energy efficiency", or "knew nothing about energy efficiency". We also allocated points for each answer from 100 (for "knew a great deal"), through 67 and 33 to 0 (for "knew nothing") and so calculated an "Average Knowledge Score" out of 100.

We found that the companies really fall into three groups as far as the apparent knowledge of their energy advisers is concerned. In the top group, where we feel most energy advisers seem to have a reasonable level of knowledge, fall the following companies:

<u>Companies with Reasonable Knowledge</u>	<u>Average Knowledge Score (max 100)</u>	<u>% calls where Call Handler knew Little or Nothing of En.Eff.</u>
British Gas	83	7%
Scottish & Southern	82	3%
London/SWEB	77	4%

British Gas and Scottish & Southern were the only two companies where around half or more of our callers felt that the call handlers "knew a great deal about energy efficiency".

Then comes a middling group where most call handlers seem to know "a great deal" or "quite a lot" about energy efficiency, but where there also appear to be significant numbers of call handlers (i.e. more than 15%) who give the impression of knowing "only a little" or "nothing at all" about energy efficiency:

<u>Companies with Limited Knowledge</u>	<u>Average Knowledge Score (max 100)</u>	<u>% calls where Call Handler knew Little or Nothing of En.Eff.</u>
Northern	73	20%
Seeboard	75	17%
Powergen	68	17%
npower	67	35%
Yorkshire	63	22%
TXU Energi	56	30%

Finally there is the third group of companies which generally gave the most limited advice to our callers, and where (consequently) our callers felt that most of the call handlers knew "little or nothing" about energy efficiency:

<u>Companies with Poor Knowledge</u>	<u>Average Knowledge Score (max 100)</u>	<u>% calls where Call Handler knew Little or Nothing of En.Eff.</u>
Manweb	39	61%
Scottish Power	31	65%

We suggest that companies in the last two groups should be looking to raise the levels of knowledge of some or all of the call handlers who provide energy advice via their energy efficiency helplines.

Impressions of call handlers' Professionalism in handling calls

The great majority of our callers (83%) rated the energy advisers as “professional” in the way they handled calls (even if the energy efficiency knowledge of some of these call handlers was suspect). British Gas and Scottish & Southern again achieved the best scores, with 100% of the calls being handled in a professional manner. The companies which fielded some call handlers whom our callers sometimes felt were not professional were Manweb (33% not professionally handled), Scottish Power (25%), Yorkshire (22%), npower (20%), and Seeboard (13%).

Impressions of the call handlers' Politeness in handling calls

Here again we found that most of our mystery shoppers rated the call handlers who dealt with their queries as either “excellent/very courteous” (61%) or “good/polite” (28%). Only a very few call handlers were described as “impersonal” (6%) or “poor/brusque” (2%).

The few companies where our callers more than once encountered call handlers who were not wholly polite were npower (20% described as “impersonal”), Scottish Power (30% “impersonal”), and Manweb (6% “impersonal” and 6% “poor/brusque”).

We again calculated an average “Politeness Score” out of 100 for each company. The companies which score exceptionally well were Seeboard (score of 98), Scottish & Southern (97), and British Gas (96). All the other companies scored in the 80s or 90s, except for Scottish Power which score only 71.

How easy or difficult it was to understand the energy adviser's advice

Overall most of the verbal advice provided by energy advisers was rated as “very easy to understand” (59%) or “quite easy to understand” (30%). Just a few callers found “some things easy and some things hard to understand” (5%) and 1% found the advice “quite hard to understand”. These results are encouraging and suggest that the language used by call handlers is readily understood by many callers. There were no major differences by company and all were rated between 78 and 93 on their “Average Understandability Score”.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 18

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
IMPRESSIONS OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY KNOWLEDGE OF CALL HANDLER																								
Knew a great deal about en. eff.	79	34	15	56	9	39	8	40	2	22	8	40	6	26	14	48	1	5	3	17	9	39	4	17
Knew quite a lot about en. eff.	90	38	10	37	13	57	4	20	5	56	8	40	12	52	14	48	4	20	4	22	8	35	8	35
Knew only a little about en. eff.	35	15	2	7	0	0	6	30	1	11	4	20	3	13	1	3	6	30	4	22	4	17	4	17
Knew nothing about en. eff.	21	9	0	0	1	4	1	5	1	11	0	0	1	4	0	0	7	35	7	39	0	0	3	13
Average "Knowledge" Score (Max: 100 – based on all answers)		67		83		77		67		63		73		68		82		31		39		75		56

PROFESSIONALISM																								
CH handled call in professional manner	195	83	27	100	22	96	15	75	7	78	18	90	18	78	29	100	13	65	10	56	18	78	18	78
CH handled call in unprofessional manner	25	11	0	0	1	4	4	20	2	22	0	0	2	9	0	0	5	25	6	33	3	13	2	9

POLITENESS																								
CH excellent/very courteous	144	61	23	85	14	61	11	55	3	33	11	55	12	52	26	90	3	15	7	39	20	87	14	61
CH good/polite	66	28	4	15	9	39	4	20	6	67	7	35	9	39	3	10	9	45	9	50	2	9	4	17
CH impersonal	13	6	0	0	0	0	4	20	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	6	30	1	6	0	0	1	4
CH poor/brusque	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0
CH rude/aggressive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Politeness" Score (Max: 100 – base: all answers)		89		96		90		84		83		88		86		97		71		81		98		92

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING ADVICE																								
Very easy to understand	139	59	19	70	13	57	11	55	2	22	15	75	13	57	20	69	10	50	10	56	12	52	14	61
Quite easy to understand	70	30	8	30	8	35	8	40	6	67	3	15	8	35	9	31	4	20	3	17	8	35	5	22
Some things easy/some things hard to understand	11	5	0	0	2	9	0	0	1	11	1	5	1	4	0	0	2	10	2	11	2	9	0	0
Quite hard to understand	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Very hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Understandability" Score (Max:100, base all answers)		89		93		87		86		78		93		89		92		88		88		86		90

Printed information and advice promised and sent following the telephone calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines

The rest of this section of the report deals with the information our mystery shoppers received following their initial telephone call, and their responses to and views of the whole “energy advice experience”.

Table 14 (above) shows a list of all the types of printed information offered or promised by Energy Efficiency Helplines, and the types of printed information later received.

As we have already seen above in the section which deals with how each fuel company responded to our callers queries, not all the printed information which was offered or promised was sent, and sometimes additional information which had not been requested was sent instead. For example, here are the overall numbers of callers being promised specific information, compared with the number actually sent that information later by post:

TABLE 19 PRINTED INFORMATION PROMISED AND SENT	% of callers promised each item	% of callers receiving each item
Base: All Mystery Shoppers calling Energy Efficiency Helplines	235 100%	235 100%
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	20%	20%
Report on measures to install	3%	11%
Booklet on Energy Saving	81%	62%
List of other sources for advice	11%	5%
Information on Grants	18%	17%
Info. on company's EEC schemes	9%	10%
Fridgesavers information	3%	5%
Information on energy labelling	7%	9%
Information on Tariffs	3%	4%
Information on condensing boilers	15%	11%
Information on CFLs	22%	27%
Info. on Priority Service Register	2%	2%
Other items	8%	31%
No information sent (excl. HEC)	n/a	29%
% PROMISED INFO. SENT	n/a	106%

Although overall rather more “bits of information” are finally sent than originally offered, the biggest discrepancy is a failure to send a general booklet on energy saving, although this was often specifically asked for by our callers where it had not already been offered. 81% of callers were promised one, but only 62% received one. The companies differed in their ability to supply such a booklet as follows:

TABLE 20 - GENERAL BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY - PROMISED AND SENT	% of callers promised each item	% of callers receiving each item	% of all promised booklet who received it
ALL MAJOR SUPPLIERS	81%	62%	76%
Seeboard	83%	83%	100%
London/SWEB	96%	87%	91%
Powergen	87%	70%	80%
Yorkshire	100%	78%	78%
npower	90%	70%	78%
Scottish & Southern	97%	72%	75%
British Gas	85%	63%	74%
Northern	90%	65%	72%
Scottish Power	35%	25%	71%
TXU Energi	74%	43%	59%
Manweb	56%	22%	40%

There is clearly room for improvement in most companies in the ways in which they ensure they send out information which has been requested by and promised to their customers.

We have also computed a “% of Promised Information Sent” score. Overall about 106 types of information were sent out for every 100 originally promised. In terms of actual numbers of publications, the main tables also show the average number of publications per caller (excluding Home Energy Checks and Reports which are covered separately).

Companies which tended to send out more types of information than they had originally promised were Yorkshire (145 for every 100 promised), TXU Energi (144), Northern (127) and npower (122). One factor that accounted for the extra Yorkshire and npower publications was that they sent Home Energy Checks to 50% or more of all callers - many more customers than had been offered them on the telephone. We feel this is a good way of providing appropriate written advice, but it might have been better to have offered and explained this service during the original telephone call.

But some companies failed to send Home Energy Checks to significant numbers of customers to whom they had offered them: London/SWEB (offered to 83%, only sent to 57%) and Northern (offered to 60%, only sent to 40%).

As already noted, some companies seemed to be poor at sending out information on energy labelling to those customers who had asked for it. Of our 38 callers who enquired about low energy fridges, only 29% were promised some printed information on this, and only 18% received it. Several companies failed to deliver any information on energy labelling: Yorkshire, Powergen, Scottish Power, Manweb and Seeboard.

Companies which seemed to be better than others at delivering printed information on Grants were Seeboard, npower, Northern and Powergen. The last three were also quite good at sending information on EEC schemes.

Printed information on condensing boilers came more readily from npower, Yorkshire, Northern and Powergen (although npower failed to send this information to some who had been promised it). Information on CFLs came more readily from Yorkshire, Scottish & Southern, npower and London/SWEB.

Excluding Home Energy Checks and Reports, some 37% of callers received no publications at all, which is poor. Scottish Power and Manweb were particularly poor in this respect, as around two thirds of callers received no booklets or any general information. These companies only sent out 0.7 publications per caller, compared to the overall average of 2.0, and the 3 to 6 publications per caller sent out by npower, Yorkshire, Northern, Powergen and Scottish & Southern.

Where publications were sent out, they usually came quite promptly – often arriving within one to four days of the original call, although a few callers had to wait over a fortnight for materials to arrive from London/SWEB, Powergen and Manweb.

Questionnaires and Home Energy Reports

We have concluded from other research done by New Perspectives (for the Energy Advice Providers Group, 2002) that the combination of verbal advice over the telephone, followed up by a written report on appropriate measures to install in the home, is one of the most persuasive forms of energy efficiency advice. We therefore believe it should be Good Practice for energy advice services, including fuel suppliers, to offer and promote Home Energy Reports based on DIY home energy audits such as the Home Energy Check questionnaire. But at present the use of self-completion energy audit questionnaires and the issuing of Home Energy Reports (based on the completed questionnaires) varies widely by company.

Companies which seemed to make quite extensive use of energy audit questionnaires were London/SWEB (sent to 57% of callers), Yorkshire (56%), npower (50%), and Northern (40%). Some companies sent these to only a few callers: TXU Energi (17%), Manweb (11%), Scottish Power (10%), Scottish & Southern and British Gas (both 7%). Two companies sent out no energy audit questionnaires to our callers: Powergen and Seeboard. See Table 22 for the full results.

As part of this project we asked our mystery shoppers to agree to receive such questionnaires where they were offered, and to complete and return them when they were sent. 48 of our callers received such questionnaires (20% of all our mystery shoppers) and 47 completed and returned them.

In our own follow-up questionnaire on their experience of getting energy advice, we then asked our mystery shoppers how easy or difficult they found these Home Energy Check questionnaires to complete. All 47 mystery shoppers who completed a questionnaire said they found it “easy” or “very easy”. 28 of them subsequently received a Home Energy Report within the next four weeks, and almost all found this “easy” or even “very easy” to understand. The only exception was one woman who found her report (printed out by “System 22” software) slightly mystifying, as the units had been removed from a table of costs, savings, and payback times, apparently due to lack of space. The inclusion of these units: £, £/p.a., years, kgs CO₂/pa etc., would probably have made all clear.

We conclude from this research that many more customers of fuel companies could probably benefit from receiving a Home Energy Report, and that this way of providing advice should be more widely adopted as Good Practice.

Likely take-up of Measures advised

Even though our mystery shoppers were not customers who had really called with the problems they described, we felt that it would be worthwhile asking them whether they felt they would take up any of the measures recommended by the Energy Efficiency Helplines of their fuel suppliers.

Of our 235 mystery shoppers who had called the major suppliers’ helplines, 41% felt they were likely to install some of the measures recommended, and between them these 97 callers felt they would install some 130 measures (1.3 measures each).

The fuel companies which appeared to give the most persuasive advice were Seeboard (61% of callers installing something), London/SWEB (57%), British Gas and Powergen (48%

each). The least persuasive advice came from the two companies which have performed well below par in this test – Scottish Power (20%) and Manweb (only 17% likely to install a recommended measure).

Likely take-up of Grants etc..

We also asked our mystery shoppers if they felt they might take up any of the grants or EEC schemes on offer. Only 30% of our callers were sent any information on grants, subsidies or free energy saving measures, and only 5% felt they would apply for any of these schemes. Our callers main reasons for not applying were that they were not eligible, or because they felt their home was already quite energy efficient.

Overall Usefulness of Advice

Although our mystery shoppers were not “real” customers with “real” problems, they had been playing that role in this research, and most were “real customers” of these companies. We therefore felt it would be worthwhile to ask them to rate the “usefulness” of advice as if they had been real customers with the problems they had described. So we asked them to record how useful they felt all the advice (both verbal and printed) which they received from these helplines would be to them in the personal circumstances which they described in their scenarios.

Most of our callers felt the advice provided was either “quite useful” (45%) or “very useful” (26%), but there was a substantial minority who felt it was “not very useful” (16%) or even “not at all useful” (6%). The companies where at least one caller in five felt the advice was “not very useful” or “not at all useful” were Manweb (72%), Scottish Power (40%), TXU Energi (26%), British Gas (26%) and npower (25%). We again calculated overall “usefulness averages” and the final table looked like this:

TABLE 21 OVERALL “USEFULNESS OF ADVICE” SCORE (Max 100)	Score (Max 100)	% of callers who rated advice “not very” or “not at all useful”
ALL MAJOR SUPPLIERS	66	22%
Seeboard	81	4%
London/SWEB	74	13%
Northern	74	10%
Scottish & Southern	73	7%
Yorkshire	71	11%
Powergen	70	17%
British Gas	67	26%
npower	61	25%
Scottish Power	56	40%
TXU Energi	56	26%
Manweb	35	72%

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MAJOR SUPPLIERS' ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 22

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100

QUESTIONNAIRES & HOME ENERGY REPORTS																								
No. of Callers returning Questionnaire	47	20	2	7	16	70	10	50	5	56	7	35	0	0	1	3	2	10	2	11	0	0	2	9
How easy callers found it to complete	easy	n/a	easy/ v.easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy/ v.easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/d	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	easy	n/a
No. receiving Home Energy Report	28	12	1	4	9	39	4	20	2	22	6	30	1	4	4	14	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0
How easy to understand is Home Energy Report	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	v.easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

TAKE-UP OF MEASURES ADVISED																								
No. likely to install any Measures	97	41	13	48	13	57	7	35	3	33	8	40	11	48	13	45	4	20	3	17	14	61	8	35
No. Measures likely to be installed	130	55	14	52	21	91	12	60	4	44	13	65	12	52	21	72	4	20	5	28	14	61	10	43

TAKE-UP OF GRANTS																								
No. sent any Information on Grants/subsidies etc	71	30	4	15	6	26	9	45	2	22	12	60	12	52	6	21	1	5	2	11	13	57	4	17
No. likely to apply for any grants/subsidies/freebies	12	5	1	4	1	4	1	5	2	22	1	5	1	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	13	1	4

OVERALL USEFULNESS OF ADVICE																								
Very useful	61	26	8	30	8	35	2	10	2	22	7	35	8	35	7	24	5	25	1	6	10	43	3	13
Quite useful	106	45	14	52	11	48	10	50	5	56	9	45	9	39	20	69	3	15	3	17	10	43	12	52
Not very useful	38	16	6	22	3	13	5	25	1	11	1	5	2	9	2	7	6	30	9	50	1	4	2	9
Not at all useful	14	6	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	9	0	0	2	10	4	22	0	0	4	17
Average "Usefulness" Score (Max: 100 – base all answers)		66		67		74		61		71		74		70		73		56		35		81		56

Conclusions on the major suppliers' Energy Efficiency Helplines

1. We conclude that although many customers do get more useful advice from these major companies' Energy Efficiency Helplines than from their General Call Centres, some customers are still dealt with inadequately. For example, customers who call with complaints about "high bills", "a cold home/elderly relative in residence", or for "help to save energy" are quite often not asked any of the questions which could establish whether they are suffering "fuel poverty", or might qualify for Warm Front grants or EEC schemes, and around one in three of these callers was not advised on any energy saving measures to install.
2. When customers ask about "refrigerators which use less energy" most (3 out of 4) do get useful verbal advice on "energy labelling", but only one in five then receives any printed information to help them make informed purchases. And few energy advisers use this opportunity to give broader energy saving advice, such as suggesting other measures which could help "save energy".
3. When customers call to ask specifically about grants, 80% do get some useful verbal advice (which is good), but few customers are then sent printed information on Warm Front (16%) or EEC schemes (11%) although some are offered a visit from a surveyor (22%). Indeed printed information on grants and EEC schemes was sent to rather few customers in every scenario. We conclude that these major fuel suppliers are missing many opportunities to promote their own EEC schemes and Warm Front, and to identify and help households suffering from fuel poverty.
4. When our mystery shoppers asked supplementary questions of the energy advisers (e.g. on grants, measures advised, condensing boilers and CFLs) they were usually (but not always) given some helpful and re-assuring information on costs, benefits and savings. But our callers sometimes encountered energy advisers who could not tell them how to apply for grants, or how long the process might take, or how much they might save from installing some energy efficiency measure – all things that a well-trained energy adviser should know or be able to access quickly. We also found advisers who did not know if booklets on energy efficiency or lists of other sources of advice were available (both required under Condition 25). One in four of our mystery shoppers concluded that their energy adviser "knew little or nothing about energy efficiency". We have to conclude that not all Energy Efficiency Helplines are manned by adequately trained energy advisers (particularly at Scottish Power and Manweb) and that additional training is advisable in most or all companies.
5. Even if some energy advisers don't know a great deal about energy efficiency, at least our mystery shoppers rated most of them as "professional" and "polite" in the way they handled the call – which is good - and our customers mostly rated the advice they received as "very easy" or "quite easy to understand".
6. Verbal energy advice (given on the telephone) is of course only part of the process of helping customers to be more energy efficient. Verbal advice ideally needs to be followed up with printed material explaining how households can be more energy efficient in their behaviour, and through measures they install, and one of the best forms of printed advice has been identified through other research as the Home Energy Report. We were therefore interested to see what publications were sent to

customers, and whether these included an energy audit questionnaire and, later, a report. In practice we found that Energy Efficiency Helplines varied quite widely in the follow-up printed information they sent, following the customers' calls. Although this information usually arrived within a week or so, not everything that had been promised was sent; sometimes many extra leaflets were included, and sometimes many callers received nothing at all. For example, 81% of our callers were promised a general booklet on energy efficiency, but only 62% received one. We found that the ability to deliver promised booklets varied widely between companies: 100% of the Seeboard customers promised a booklet received one, but only 40% of Manweb customers did. We also found that few people told about grants received printed information about them, and that some of those offered energy audit questionnaires never received them. We conclude from this that several companies have poor systems for recording what queries customers have, what advice has been given, and what publications have been requested or promised: this needs to be improved.

7. When we assessed the persuasiveness of these energy advice services by checking whether our mystery shoppers might install some of the recommended measures, we found big differences in the likely effects of advice from different companies. Those giving the most persuasive advice seemed to be Seeboard, London/SWEB, British Gas and Powergen (where around half or more of customers felt they would install some recommended measures). The least persuasive advice came from companies which performed well below par on several criteria - Scottish Power and Manweb - where fewer than one in five customers felt they might install anything. We conclude that advice from good Energy Efficiency Helplines can be over twice as effective as that from helplines that are inadequately manned and trained, and that standards of advice giving do need to be improved at several of these major suppliers.

Smaller Fuel Suppliers – General Call Centres & Energy Efficiency Helplines

The smaller UK fuel suppliers are required to follow the same licence conditions as the major suppliers, but may of course have more limited resources to do so. This section looks at how they seem to perform, but based on a much smaller sample of calls to their general call centres, and to their energy efficiency helplines where these exist. Some key results are summarised in Tables 23 and 24 at the end of this section.

Results of calls to minor suppliers

Amerada

Amerada has recently been acquired by TXU Energi, but it was formerly probably the biggest of the smaller licensed suppliers in the UK, and so we scheduled two calls to its General Call Centre and two to the Energy Efficiency Helpline (compared to 20 to 25 calls to the larger companies). All calls were made by real customers.

Amerada – General Call Centre

Our two callers to the General Call Centre phoned about a “cold home/elderly relative” and for “help to save energy”. One caller had to make two attempts to get through, but otherwise calls were answered within about 2 minutes.

Having explained their problems both callers were referred on to other Amerada numbers. One who asked for “help to save energy” was first referred to 0845 305 3000 (Account Queries) which in turn referred her to the Energy Efficiency Helpline (0845 200 4673). The other, despite complaining of a cold home and also asking for “information on any measures you can suggest to cut out draughts, insulation, that sort of thing”, was referred to “Domestic and General” (0115 976 6991) which apparently deals with gas boilers and central heating services. No advice was given and no materials were sent by the General Call Centre.

Although both these callers did finally get some useful advice, it would appear that call handlers in the General Call Centre are unaware of the correct number to which to refer customers for energy efficiency advice.

Amerada – Energy Efficiency Helpline

Three of our four mystery shoppers called the Amerada Energy Efficiency Helpline, and the fourth the “Domestic and General” number which she had been given by the General Call Centre. Two callers phoned about “help to save energy”, one about a “cold home/elderly relative” and one for advice on “fridges which use less power”. One caller had to make two attempts to get through, and waited over 3 minutes on the second attempt, but otherwise our four callers all got through within about 70 seconds.

The caller who asked about “fridges which use less power” was asked about the state of repair of her existing refrigerator, told about energy labelling (but not about Fridgesavers) and sent an Energy Saving Trust booklet “Is your home behaving badly?”, which includes a section on energy labelling of appliances.

The two callers who asked for “help to save energy” were both asked some questions about their homes and their ages, and one was asked about benefits and temperatures in his home before being offered a booklet (which never arrived), given some verbal advice on heating and hot water control, and being told about Warm Front grants. The other was sent a Home Energy Report listing measures to install, with details of costs, savings and payback times, but she found this hard to understand because...

“There were too many figures, too technical for a pensioner to understand. It’s OK for a construction worker..... All the figures like ‘from 5 to 10’ and the CO₂ range. You need simple layman’s terms. It’s too technical.”

The underlying problem seems to be that these Home Energy Reports quote a lot of figures without specifying the *units* referred to – e.g. £ per annum, kgs per annum, years to payback.

The caller who called the “Domestic & General” number found it answered promptly as “Amerada Efficiency”, by a call handler who asked her some questions about her loft insulation and cavity walls, and about her mother’s disability benefit, before advising her to top up her loft insulation and have cavity wall insulation fitted through a Warm Front grant. Although a booklet on energy efficiency and information on Warm Front were promised, these never arrived. But as our shopper wrote:

“The call handler had said the information Amerada had was quite limited and stressed that I’d get more help from my Local Energy Advice Centre.”

Some of our callers asked for more information on some measures. They were advised to contact Warm Front for information about grant details. Amerada’s energy advisers seemed to know quite a bit about condensing boilers and how efficient they are, one even claiming they were so efficient because “*they burn the fuel twice*”. They advised our customers that CFLs use less electricity, last longer and can produce big savings over time; that Amerada don’t do Home Visits but that EEACs might; and three said Amerada had no list of other sources of advice (but that EEACs might).

Although one call handler claimed to have “*extensive training*” in energy efficiency, none of our callers felt they knew a great deal, rather “*quite a lot*” (3) or “*only a little*” (1). They did however rate them as “*professional*” for the way they handled the calls, even if one was “*impersonal*” rather than “*polite*” as the others were.

We have to conclude that Amerada’s current energy efficiency advice to its customers is “*patchy*”, or (like the curate’s egg) “*good in parts*”. It is not easy for customers who call the General Call Centre with energy efficiency queries to find the right number to call. And if they do find the right number, they are not always sent the advice and information they have been offered.

Atlantic Electric and Gas

Because Atlantic is a small supplier we scheduled only one call to its General Call Centre and one to the Energy Efficiency Helpline.

Atlantic – General Call Centre

Our caller (who posed as a possible new customer) got through in 3 minutes 20 seconds after being placed in a queue, and asked for “help to save energy”. In response the call handler first extolled the virtues of Atlantic’s low tariff, but on being asked for help on things like insulation, his only suggestion was to contact *Energywatch* (0845 601 3131) or visit their website. No information was offered or sent. This is poor service.

Atlantic – Energy Efficiency Helpline

One caller who tried to contact Atlantic’s Energy Efficiency Helpline (on 0870 013 2080) ended up in a frustrating circular maze of numbers, and never got through to anyone who could help:

“I called the Energy Efficiency number (0870 013 2080) and the call handler stated they weren’t the Energy Efficiency Helpline and to look in Yellow Pages. I tried the same number again and was told to call 0800 512012 (EEACs). The call handler there asked me where I lived and then referred me to 0292 064 0908. I explained my enquiry to this new number but I was told to call the Energy Efficiency number (0870 013 2080). I explained I’d called this and (they said) that’s the only number they had!”

Our caller who had been referred to *Energywatch* also tried this 0870 013 2028 number again, asking again for “help to save energy”. She was again told about Atlantic’s tariff and discount for direct debit payments, but when she insisted she wanted to find out about insulation she was transferred to another call handler, who again talked about discounts and also about free insurance for keys. Our caller persisted by asking for information about condensing boilers and CFLs, and was told by the call handler that “*all the information you need to know about energy savings are contained in the booklet we’ll send you.*” But no booklet on energy efficiency was sent, only tariff details and a contract form.

Not surprisingly our callers received the impression that the call handlers at Atlantic Electric and Gas know nothing about energy efficiency, although they handle calls professionally and politely, and the advice they received was rated as “not very useful”.

It appears from this exercise that Atlantic Gas and Electric has no Energy Efficiency Helpline as such. Our shoppers never managed to locate any department that answered to this name, and no one they did contact was able to help them with energy efficiency advice or information. In short, this company appears to offer no energy efficiency advice.

Cambridge Gas and Electricity

We had originally scheduled two calls to be made to the General Call Centre only, as this was also the number listed for energy efficiency advice.

Both our customers (posing as potential new customers) got through in under one minute to the General Call Centre and explained their problems – one with “high bills” and one seeking “help to save energy”. Both were referred promptly to a supposed Energy Efficiency Helpline

(0800 587 2128) although one was first offered tariff information. However this number was not recognised and is unobtainable.

Cambridge Gas and Electricity therefore appear to have no adequate arrangements for providing energy efficiency advice to customers.

Countrywide Gas

We originally scheduled one call to the General Call Centre, as no separate number is listed for energy efficiency advice. Our mystery shopper (posing as a new customer) got through within 3 seconds to ask for “help to save energy”. She was immediately offered an “energy efficiency advice pack”. But she also asked if any grants or free measures were available, only to be told they weren’t as she was not in their area. She then asked for the “energy efficiency department” and was given a local call rate number (0345 277 200) which proved to be wrong: it should have been 08457 277 200. This it emerged is the Energy Efficiency Hotline run by the Energy Saving Trust, and not anything to do with Countrywide Gas. This hotline offered to send a questionnaire which would then be followed by a free report advising measures to install, but no questionnaire or report ever arrived at our caller’s home.

Two other customers also telephoned Countrywide in error. Neither could get any energy efficiency advice over the telephone from Countrywide’s call handler, although one was sent a set of Energy Saving Trust leaflets; the other was sent information only on Countrywide’s tariffs.

Countrywide Gas therefore appear to have no adequate arrangements for providing their customers with energy efficiency advice. We do not believe that referring callers to an Energy Saving Trust hotline, with which there appears to be no formal contract to run such a service, is an acceptable substitute.

Enron

With the collapse of its American parent company, Enron’s UK customers have recently been taken over by British Gas. But we had scheduled one call to Enron before this happened. Our mystery shopper called Enron’s General Call Centre for “help to save energy”, as there is no separate energy efficiency number listed. She got through in 20 seconds and was handled by a helpful call handler who gave good advice about stopping draughts, and advised fitting a new efficient boiler (if hers was over 15 years old) and radiator reflectors. He gave good advice on controlling the central heating more efficiently (e.g. by turning down radiators in unused rooms, setting the thermostat back 1°-2°C) and on how to save energy when cooking. He also mentioned the grants that Enron could provide for energy efficiency improvements and provided a Freephone contact number (0800 587 2128) although he did not establish whether our caller might be eligible or not.

Our caller then asked the call handler for more information about condensing boilers and CFLs, and he suggested an annual saving of £120 for a condensing boiler, but did not know about savings from CFLs. The call handler said he would send a booklet, but this never arrived. He said Enron do not yet do home visits, but hope to soon, and that they do not have a list of other sources of advice.

Our mystery shopper felt that the Enron call handler knew “quite a lot about energy efficiency”, and was professional and very courteous, but she rated the advice only “quite useful” as the promised booklet was never received.

We conclude from this limited evidence that Enron can give helpful and useful energy efficiency advice, but this was let down by them not sending the potential customer the information they had offered.

North Wales Energy

This company has recently had its customers taken over by Scottish & Southern, but we had previously scheduled one call to test its energy advice. One “potential new customer” from Wales called the General Call Centre”, as there is no separate energy efficiency number listed. She got through in a little over 2 minutes and asked “how you might be able to help me save energy”. The call handler told her that they did have energy efficiency information, and that a new scheme was being launched in April which could be reached by phoning 0800 512012. (This is actually the EEACs Freephone number.) He himself could provide no energy efficiency advice, and knew nothing about condensing boilers or whether home visits might be available. Our caller concluded he truly “*knew nothing about energy efficiency*” even if he was “*professional*” and “*courteous*”.

At the time of our survey it would therefore appear that North Wales Gas had no facilities in place for offering energy efficiency advice.

Telecom Plus

This company lists both a General Call Centre and an Energy Efficiency Helpline, so one mystery shopper called each, posing as potential new customers and asking for “help to save energy”.

It took over 6 minutes for our caller to the General Call Centre to get through, and when she had explained her request she was passed from one call handler to another. She was told there was an “Energy Team” but that they were all handling calls so no one could help her with her query. They could not call her back (and offered no alternative number) but did offer to send “an energy pack which contains all the information”. This arrived 5 days later but was simply a sales pack for the Telecom Plus service, and contained no hint of energy efficiency advice. Our caller felt the call handler “knew nothing about energy efficiency” and although he was professional and polite, the information provided was “not at all useful” in answering our customer’s query. We certainly see it as a failure not to supply the caller with the Energy Efficiency Helpline number, and not to send any energy efficiency information.

Our second caller got through to the Energy Efficiency Helpline within 30 seconds to ask for “help to save energy”. She was told at once that “there is a national scheme; I can give you a number as you don’t live in our area.” She was later advised to “ring a branch of Warm Zones in your area”. When our caller asked for more general information, she was advised to increase her loft insulation to 8 inches, install double glazing and “if you have no radiators apply for a £1000 grant to get them”. Low energy light bulbs and low energy appliances were also mentioned and explained.

Our customer was then passed to another call handler when she asked about condensing boilers, but the second call handler gave a reasonably useful explanation. This call handler said Telecom Plus would do home visits if customers were housebound, and that they could send a booklet which included a list of other sources of advice.

The booklet (EST's "Is your home behaving badly?") arrived three days later, along with a Home Energy Check questionnaire and an EnergyWatch leaflet. Our customer found the questionnaire very easy to complete, and she returned it to "North East London EEAC" as directed, but no Home Energy Report arrived within the next four weeks. She felt that the call handler "knew quite a lot about energy efficiency", was professional and polite, and that the advice received was "very useful" (even if no report had yet arrived).

The advice from the Telecom Plus Energy Efficiency Helpline appears comprehensive and potentially very useful (especially if the Home Energy Report does arrive). But the General Call Centre seems to be unwilling to reveal the direct line number so that customers can successfully contact the Energy Efficiency Helpline.

Utility Link (or Unit[e])

We scheduled one call to the General Call Centre of this company, as no separate Energy Efficiency Helpline number was listed. Our caller was answered within 30 seconds with the company name "unit [e]". When our caller asked for "help to save energy" the call handler could only offer to send an "energy efficiency leaflet, with lots of energy saving tips" and "the addresses to get grants". A "Customer Service Code of Practice – Energy Efficiency Information" arrived 18 days later.

A little later our persistent caller made a second attempt to get more advice over the telephone, but got the same call handler. This time she was told she needed to talk to a another named call handler "who would be back on Thursday".

Our caller then waited till Thursday to call the named call handler direct, and eventually got her. She repeated the original story that they could send an "energy efficiency pack". Our caller noted she was clearly "reading from the booklet", as when she asked about grants she offered to read out the qualifying benefits. The call handler could not provide the names of any grant schemes, but read out condensing boiler information from the booklet and said low energy bulbs can each save around £10 a year. Unit[e] did not do home visits, but said a list of other sources could be found in the booklet (it was).

The customer felt that the call handlers "knew only a little about energy efficiency", although they were professional and polite, and she rated the help provided as "quite useful".

Our conclusion is that although some advice was provided, neither of the call handlers seemed to be trained in energy efficiency as they were incapable of providing any advice over the telephone.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MINOR SUPPLIERS' GCCs & EN. EFF. HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 23

MINOR FUEL COMPANIES	ALL			Amerada		Atlantic		Cambridge Gas & Elec		Country-wide Gas		Enron		N.Wales Energy		Telecom Plus		Utility Link	
	ALL	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH
All Calls to GCCs & EEHs	22	10	12	2	4	1	2	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	2
CUSTOMER TYPES	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gas only customers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Electricity only customers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Both	4	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neither (posed as new customers)	16	8	8	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	2

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE																			
No. of first calls successful	17	9	8	1	3	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Time to get through - Shortest	2"	2"	2"	22"	2"			2"			6"								7"
Longest	6'17"	6'17"	3'12"	2'10"	3'12"	3'20"	2'00"	47"	0	3"	20"	20"	0	2'05"	0	6'17"	24"	32"	41"
Length of successful calls - Shortest	1'	1'	2'	2'	6'			1'			2'								
Longest	18'	18'	13'	15'	13'	4'	5'	3'	0	3'	3'	18'	0	9'	0	11'	9'	2'	5'

HOW CALL HANDLED																			
Answered at once by CH	10	4	6	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Involved touchtone options	6	3	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Queuing system	4	3	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Engaged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Answerphone	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disconnected/no reply	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other outcomes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

GREETING																			
Good morning	21	10	11	2	4	1	2	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Company name	15	7	8	1	2	1	1	2	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Call handler's name	9	6	3	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
How may I help?	10	6	4	2	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ask for customer details	3	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO MINOR SUPPLIERS' GCCs & EN. EFF. HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 24

MINOR FUEL COMPANIES	ALL			Amerada		Atlantic		Cambridge Gas & Elec		Country-wide Gas		Enron		N.Wales Energy		Telecom Plus		Utility Link	
	ALL	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH	GCC	EEH
All Calls to GCCs & EEHs	22	10	12	2	4	1	2	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	2
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY																			
a.Referred to another C/H	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
a.Referred to EHH	4	3	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b.i. Asked a few questions	3	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b.ii Asked detailed questions	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
e. CH accessed my bills/records	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
f. Asked about Benefits	3	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	3	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
h. Asked about Temp. in home	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
i. Asked about state of fridge	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
j. Verbal advice on measures	3	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrig.	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
m. How to keep warm in winter	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
n. Would send Booklet on En.Eff.	7	3	4	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
o. Sending list of sources of advice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
p. Told me about grants	4	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
u. Offered a Home Visit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
w. Referred me to another agency	6	2	4	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
x. Other outcomes	9	4	5	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Conclusions on the advice provided by smaller suppliers

We conclude from the evidence of these few calls that several of these companies do not have adequate arrangements in place for providing energy efficiency advice to customers; these companies are Atlantic Electric and Gas, Cambridge Gas and Electricity, Countrywide Gas and North Wales Energy. Utility Link appears to offer only a part-time advice service. Amerada is poor at referring customers to its energy efficiency helpline but can provide some verbal advice, even if it fails to follow up with leaflets. Telecom Plus also has a poor referral mechanism from its call centre to helpline, but provides some verbal advice backed up (supposedly) by an EEAC to offer Home Energy Reports (yet to arrive). Enron too provided good verbal advice, but failed to send any literature. There is clearly room for improvement in the energy advice service provided by all or most of these small suppliers.

2. TELEPHONE SURVEY OF RECENT CUSTOMERS

This telephone survey was conducted among 113 customers of the main fuel suppliers who had recently contacted their fuel suppliers for energy efficiency advice. It was done in order to check what advice real customers were getting (as opposed to “mystery shoppers”) and to see whether they were acting on that advice and deriving any benefits from doing so, and to see whether those likely to be suffering from Fuel Poverty were getting appropriate advice.

Contacting the fuel company for advice

Most customers (103) had sought advice from the Energy Efficiency Helpline by telephone, although some customers had contacted them in writing (4) or by completing a questionnaire (8) and had therefore had no telephone contact with the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Most of the customers of one company (9 out of 10) had received only printed advice after completing an unsolicited Home Energy Check questionnaire which they had been sent.

Customers were most likely to have obtained the telephone number to call from their fuel supplier, most commonly from the bill (45%) or through the company’s general enquiries centre (15%). 9% of customers had obtained the number from a friend/relative/neighbour. Customers calling to find out about grants (50%) were most likely to have obtained the number in this way. Other ways in which customers found the telephone number to ring are shown in Table 25 below.

TABLE 25: CONTACTING THE EEH	Total	Advice on eng. eff’y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/ meter reading	Advice on tariffs/ Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff’y query	Other
<i>Base: all contacting EEH by tel</i>	103	20	12	28	30	13	15	31	5
<u>Obtained telephone number from:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Magazine sent by company	2	5	-	-	-	-	-	6	-
On the gas/electricity bill	45	50	17	54	47	77	80	32	80
Telephone directory	3	5	-	-	-	8	7	6	-
Directory Enquiries	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
From company's own general enquiries centre	15	15	-	18	37	-	-	6	-
Citizens' Advice Bureau	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
Council	1	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leaflets at Post Office	1	5	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
From friend/relative/neighbour	9	-	50	-	-	-	-	10	-
Leaflet from company	3	-	-	4	-	8	7	6	-
Other leaflet	3	-	17	4	-	-	-	3	-
Letter from fuel supplier	2	5	-	-	-	8	-	3	-
Elsewhere	6	-	17	7	3	-	-	6	20
Don't remember	11	10	-	14	13	-	7	13	-
<i>Base: all calling for advice</i>	102	19	12	27	30	13	15	31	5
<u>When called for advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Got straight through to someone who could help	68	84	83	59	60	54	80	61	60
Had some problems contacting the right person to help me	25	11	17	33	33	38	20	26	20
Don't remember	7	5	-	7	7	8	-	13	20

Around two thirds of customers (68%) got straight through to someone who could help. However, 25% had some problems, most commonly having to speak to several people before finding the right person to help (42% of those who experienced problems). Other problems more commonly experienced are shown below, and are similar to the problems experienced by “mystery shoppers” in the other part of this research.

<i>Base: all experiencing problems</i>	26
<u>Problems experienced:</u>	%
Had to speak to several people before someone could help	42
Too many/confusing touch tone options	12
Had to ring back	8
Had to ring another number	12
Had to wait a long time in a queue/on hold	15
Unable to help but gave me number for energy efficiency helpline	8

Reasons for contacting the fuel company

Customers were asked why they contacted the fuel company. The results are shown in Table 30 below. The most common reasons for contacting the fuel company were to query a high bill/meter reading (28%) and for advice on cutting bills/fuel consumption (27%). The other more common reasons for contacting the fuel company were to get advice on energy efficiency (20%), for advice on controlling storage heaters (14%), to find out about energy efficiency grants/free measures (12%) and for advice on tariffs/off-peak tariffs/Economy 7 (12%). (Several of these common problems are the same as the scenarios used in the Mystery Shopping Survey.)

TABLE 26: REASONS FOR CONTACTING THE EEH	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/ meter reading	Advice on tariffs/ Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other
<i>Base: all asking EEH for advice</i>	107	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	5
<u>Reasons for contacting EEH:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
To get advice on energy efficiency	20	100	8	38	7	31	27	21	20
To find out about energy efficiency grants/free measures	12	5	100	7	3	8	7	6	-
To get advice on how to cut bills/fuel consumption	27	52	15	100	20	31	27	24	60
To query a high bill/high meter reading	28	10	8	21	100	8	20	3	-
For advice on tariffs/off-peak tariffs/Economy 7	12	19	8	14	3	100	33	9	-
For advice on controlling storage heaters	14	19	8	14	10	38	100	3	-
For advice on controlling gas boiler/central heating	5	5	8	10	3	-	-	15	-
For advice on controlling water heating	4	5	-	3	-	-	7	12	-
For information on/to obtain low energy lightbulbs	2	5	-	-	-	-	-	6	-
Because our home was cold/ damp/draughty/hard to heat	7	10	8	7	-	8	-	24	-
Other energy efficiency query	17	19	-	10	-	15	-	53	-
Other	5	5	-	10	-	-	-	-	100

Advice given over the telephone

Customers were asked what advice they were given by the Energy Efficiency Helpline over the telephone. The results are shown in Table 27 and Table 28 below. Around three fifths of customers recall receiving some advice over the telephone, and a further 19% said they were given no verbal advice but were offered printed information, a questionnaire or a visit from someone. Around 15% of customers said they received no help or advice on the telephone from the Energy Efficiency Helpline.

TABLE 27: TELEPHONE ADVICE RECEIVED	Total
<i>Base: all seeking advice by telephone</i>	100
	%
<u>Any advice on behavioural measures</u>	34
Advice on controlling heating/hot water	21
Advice on controlling storage heaters	9
Advice on use of appliances/running costs	5
Advice on other behavioural measures	2
<u>Any advice on specific measures</u>	26
Loft insulation	14
Cavity wall insulation	12
Double/secondary glazing/cling film on windows	2
Radiator foil/tin foil/radiator shelves	6
Draught excluders	3
Curtain linings	1
Gave us cfls/low energy light bulbs	3
Advised cfls/low energy light bulbs	1
Suggested a condensing boiler/new boiler	2
Advised to install other measures	2
<u>Other advice</u>	
Advice on tariffs/Economy 7	10
Advice on grants	7
Advice on reading/checking/ monitoring the meter	5
Gave me costs for storage heaters/central heating	2
Said bill about average for usage/size of house	4
Other advice	11
No verbal advice but offered info/questionnaire/visit	19
Unable to help/no advice given	15

Customers were most likely to recall receiving advice on behavioural measures (34%), such as controlling the heating and hot water (21%) or storage heaters (9%) and the careful use of appliances (5%). Customers who called for advice on energy efficiency, cutting fuel bills, to query a bill or for advice on storage heaters were more likely than average to receive such advice. Very few of those who rang to find out about grants mentioned being given behavioural advice on the telephone (8%), although these customers might well have benefited from such advice if they were on benefits or low incomes. We believe such advice should be given as Good Practice to all who call about grants.

Customers were less likely to receive advice on specific energy saving measures (26%), particularly those ringing for advice on tariffs or storage heaters (15% and 7% respectively). The measures more commonly advised were loft insulation (14%) and cavity wall insulation (12%), followed by radiator foil/tin foil/radiator shelves (6%) and draught excluders (3%). 3% of customers said they were given low energy light bulbs and an additional 1% said they were given advice on them.

Relatively few customers (11%) recalled receiving advice on both specific measures and behavioural ways of saving energy. Those ringing to find out about cutting bills (19%) or to query a bill/meter reading (20%) were the most likely to receive both types of advice from the Energy Efficiency Helpline.

Some customers mentioned being offered printed information (18%) or a visit from an Adviser/assessor (18%). Customers ringing for general advice on energy efficiency were the most likely to say they were offered printed information (37%), while those ringing to enquire about grants were the most likely to be offered a visit by an Adviser or assessor (58%). Several customers were given advice on tariffs/Economy 7 (10%).

The majority of customers found the telephone advice they received either 'very easy' (69%) or 'quite easy' (14%) to understand. Only one of those who found the advice 'quite' or 'very difficult' to understand said that this was because it wasn't explained clearly enough. Other reasons given were that the Adviser didn't give enough detail, the advice was difficult to explain over the phone or the Adviser was unable to help.

What the Energy Efficiency Helpline Adviser asked the customer before giving advice

Customers were asked whether the Energy Efficiency Helpline Adviser asked them questions about their home, its construction, insulation, heating system or controls, and about their circumstances, before giving advice. The results are shown in Table 28 below. Around half of customers (49%) were asked about their home but only 21% were asked about their circumstances, although a further 10% said that they had already mentioned this to the Adviser.

However the majority of customers who rang for information on *grants* were either asked about their circumstances (58%) or had already mentioned them to the Adviser (25%). Customers ringing for advice on storage heaters were the least likely to be asked any questions about their home (25%).

Energy Efficiency Helpline Advisers explained the reasons for asking about circumstances to around half of customers (53%) who were asked such questions.

On the whole we conclude that Energy Efficiency Helplines tend to answer only the *presenting problem*, and that they should be more pro-active in enquiring about their customers' circumstances and providing appropriate advice on measures to install, and behavioural advice, to a wider spectrum of customers who make enquiries. At present they are missing many opportunities to provide advice, and access to grants and EEC schemes, to a wider circle of customers who call them with queries.

TABLE 28: TELEPHONE ADVICE GIVEN BY EEH	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/ meter reading	Advice on tariffs/ Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other
<i>Base: all seeking advice by tel</i>	100	19	12	27	30	13	15	31	3
<u>Advice given over phone:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Any advice on specific measures	26	21	25	26	33	15	7	26	-
Any advice on behavioural measures	34	42	8	44	47	31	40	45	33
Advice on specific measures and behavioural measures	11	11	-	19	20	8	7	13	-
Advice on tariffs/Economy 7	10	11	8	11	7	46	27	3	-
Advice on grants	7	-	25	11	7	-	-	6	33
Other advice	22	16	25	15	43	23	27	16	-
No verbal advice but offered info/q're/someone to visit	19	32	33	26	3	23	13	19	33
Unable to help/no advice given	15	11	8	15	13	15	33	6	67
Can't remember	2	11	8	4	3	8	7	3	-
No reply	1	-	8	4	-	-	-	3	-
<i>Base: all receiving tel advice</i>	90	14	12	23	30	11	12	27	2
<u>Ease of understanding tel advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very easy	69	64	67	48	77	64	50	70	-
Quite easy	14	7	17	26	10	9	17	11	50
Neither easy nor difficult	8	14	8	13	7	9	25	4	-
Quite difficult	4	7	8	9	3	9	8	11	-
Very difficult	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Don't remember	3	7	-	4	-	9	-	4	50
<u>Whether asked about home before giving advice:</u>									
Yes	49	50	42	52	53	55	25	52	50
No	44	36	50	43	43	45	67	33	50
Don't remember	7	14	8	4	3	-	8	15	-
<u>Asked about circumstances before giving advice:</u>									
Yes	21	14	58	17	10	-	-	33	-
No	64	71	17	74	73	91	83	52	100
Had already mentioned this	10	7	25	4	13	9	-	4	-
Don't remember	4	7	-	4	3	-	17	11	-

Written advice and information received

Customers who contacted the Energy Efficiency Helpline for advice were asked whether they received any printed advice, information, leaflets or a questionnaire from the Energy Efficiency Helpline. The results are shown in Table 29 below.

TABLE 29: PRINTED ADVICE/ INFORMATION/LEAFLETS RECEIVED	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/ meter reading	Advice on tariffs/ Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other
<i>Base: all asking advice from EEH</i>	105	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3
<u>Sent printed advice/info/leaflets:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	70	76	62	69	67	62	87	68	67
No	24	14	23	21	27	38	13	24	33
Said they would, but didn't	3	5	-	7	3	-	-	3	-
Don't remember	4	5	15	3	3	-	-	6	-
<i>Base: all receiving printed info</i>	73	16	8	20	20	8	13	23	2
<u>How quickly info arrived:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Within 1 week	59	38	63	45	65	63	54	52	50
Over 1 but less than 2 weeks	22	19	13	30	25	-	15	26	50
Over 2 weeks to 3 weeks	4	6	13	5	10	13	8	4	-
Over 3 weeks later	3	6	-	5	-	-	-	4	-
Don't know	12	31	13	15	-	25	23	13	-
<u>Printed info received:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Booklets on energy efficiency/how to save energy	21	19	38	5	20	13	23	17	-
Information on heating	7	6	13	5	10	-	-	4	-
Tariff info/comparison with other co's	7	6	13	5	-	25	15	4	-
Info on Economy 7/using Econ 7	3	6	13	5	5	13	15	-	-
Info on green tariff/windmill leaflet	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	9	-
Running costs of appliances	12	6	-	15	25	-	8	13	-
Information on insulation	15	13	-	20	30	-	-	9	-
Information on cfls	7	-	-	-	15	-	15	4	-
Information on storage heaters	14	13	13	10	5	50	54	9	-
Questionnaire	11	25	13	15	-	13	-	17	-
Info on ways of paying fuel bills	1	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-
Information on boilers	4	6	-	10	5	-	-	-	-
Use of appliances	1	-	-	5	5	-	-	-	-
Booklet on what suggested on tel	8	-	-	-	30	-	-	-	-
Information on double glazing	3	6	-	5	-	-	-	4	-
Information on grants/special offers	4	6	13	-	-	-	-	4	-
Information on draughtproofing	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
Information on keeping warm	5	-	25	5	5	-	-	9	-
Other	15	19	38	25	10	25	8	13	-
Can't remember what sent	14	19	13	35	5	38	23	9	100
Av number of items received	1.6	1.6	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.3	1
<i>Base: all receiving printed info</i>	73	16	8	20	20	8	13	23	2
<u>Whether printed info read:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	96	100	88	100	95	100	100	96	100
No	4	-	13	-	5	-	-	4	-
<i>Base: all reading printed info</i>	70	16	7	20	19	8	13	22	2
<u>Whether printed info understood:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH</i>	105	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3
<u>Whether received questionnaire:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	24	43	8	24	13	8	7	29	-
No	64	52	85	66	70	77	67	62	100
Don't remember	12	5	8	10	17	15	27	9	-

70% of customers said they received printed advice, information or leaflets and 24% said they received a questionnaire – very similar figures to the Mystery Shopping Survey. Customers receiving information recalled being sent around 1.6 items each on average. When printed

advice or information was sent, it generally arrived within one (59%) or two weeks (22%). Almost all customers (96%) who received printed advice, information or leaflets said they read it, and all those who read it said they understood it, which is encouraging.

Customers phoning for advice on storage heaters (87%) or for general advice on energy efficiency (76%) were the most likely to receive printed information. Only 3% of customers, and 8% of those calling about grants, mentioned receiving information about grants or special offers. This supports the finding from the Mystery Shopping and confirms that fuel companies are missing many opportunities to provide information on national grants and EEC schemes.

Customers were most likely to recall booklets on energy efficiency/saving energy (21% of those receiving information), followed by information on insulation (15%), storage heaters (14%) and running costs of appliances (12%).

72% of customers who received a questionnaire after contacting the Energy Efficiency Helpline completed and returned it. The most common reason for not completing the questionnaire was not getting round to it (4 out of 6 of those who had not returned the questionnaire).

All customers were also asked whether they received any *written* recommendations about energy saving measures to install in their home, and 30% said they did, as shown in Table 30 below.

TABLE 30: WRITTEN RECOMMENDATIONS/GRANT INFORMATION RECEIVED	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/ meter reading	Advice on tariffs/ Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other	They sent me q're
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH/returning questionnaire</i>	113	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3	8
<u>Received written recommendations:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	30	38	23	31	17	23	20	21	33	75
No	62	52	77	59	73	54	67	74	33	25
Don't remember	8	10	-	10	10	23	13	6	33	-
<i>Base: all receiving written recommendations</i>	34	8	3	9	5	3	3	7	1	6
<u>Ease of understanding:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very easy	76	63	67	78	80	100	100	100	100	50
Quite easy	15	13	33	11	-	-	-	-	-	50
Neither easy nor difficult	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Quite difficult	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Very difficult	3	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't remember	6	13	-	11	20	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH/returning questionnaire</i>	113	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3	8
<u>Whether sent grant info:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes - sent an application form	4	5	23	-	-	-	-	6	-	-
Yes - sent info on grants etc	4	5	8	-	10	-	7	-	-	-
No - sent neither	88	81	77	93	87	85	87	91	100	100
Don't remember	4	10	-	7	3	15	7	3	-	-
Applied for grants on phone	1	-	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Customers generally found these written recommendations either 'very easy' (76%) or 'quite easy' (15%) to understand. Customers completing and returning a questionnaire were the most likely to receive written recommendations (77%).

The measures most commonly advised in the written recommendations were loft insulation (50%), cavity wall insulation (32%), low energy light bulbs (32%) and double glazing (18%). Other measures quite commonly advised are shown below:

<i>Base: all receiving written recommendations</i>	34
<u>Measures advised to install</u>	%
Insulation in loft	50
Cavity wall insulation	32
Low energy light bulbs (Compact Fluorescent Lamps)	32
Double glazing or secondary glazing	18
Hot water tank insulation	9
New central heating boiler/condensing boiler	9
Draughtproofing on doors and windows	6
Room thermostat	6
Hot water timer	3
Hot water thermostat	3
Other types of wall insulation	3
Boiler programmer or timeclock	3
Pipe insulation	3
Thermostatic radiator valves	3
Shelves over radiators or storage heaters	3
Energy saving appliances (e.g. fridge, washer)	3
Others (mainly behavioural/non-specific mentions)	35
Don't remember	9

Very few customers said they were sent information (4%) or an application form (4%) for grants, subsidised or free measures, even those who rang up to find out about grants (23% of whom said they were sent an application form and 8% were sent information). Of the 10 customers sent information or an application form, most received information or an application form for loft insulation (4) or cavity wall insulation (5). 3 had already applied for a grant and 2 intended to do so.

Given that 54 of our sample households (48%) were on benefit, or included someone over 60, we conclude that most of these companies are missing the opportunity to reach many Fuel Poor and “disadvantaged” customers more effectively through their helplines.

Energy saving measures installed on advice

Overall, 64% of customers who rang for energy efficiency advice mentioned receiving advice on specific measures to install, either on the telephone or in a written report. Those completing a questionnaire (85%) were the most likely to receive advice on measures to install, while those ringing for advice on tariffs/Economy 7 (38%) or storage heaters (33%) were the least likely to do so.

All customers receiving advice on specific measures to install were asked which measures they had already installed, and which they were planning to install. The results are shown in the table below.

TABLE 31: MEASURES INSTALLED OR PLANNED ON ADVICE	Measures	
	Installed	Planned
<i>Base: all customers given advice on measures to install</i>	72	72
	%	%
Low energy light bulbs (Compact Fluorescent Lamps)	24	-
Insulation in loft	13	13
Cavity wall insulation	10	8
Draughtproofing on doors and windows	3	3
Hot water thermostat	1	-
Double glazing or secondary glazing	1	1
New central heating boiler/condensing boiler	1	1
Reflective panels or foil behind radiators	1	1
Shelves over radiators or storage heaters	1	1
New electric storage heaters	1	-
Central heating/new central heating system	0	6
Thermostatic radiator valves	-	3
Hot water timer	-	1
Other measures	1	3
Following behavioural advice/advice on tariffs/Economy 7	17	-
None of these	50	64
No specific measures installed	60	na
Don't know/hope to/will install measures advised	-	4

Customers were most likely to have installed low energy light bulbs (24% of those given advice on specific measures), followed by loft insulation (13%) or cavity wall insulation (10%). Very few customers had installed other measures, although 17% said they were following behavioural advice or advice on tariffs/Economy 7. Around 33% of customers were planning measures, most commonly loft insulation (13%), cavity wall insulation (8%) and a new central heating system (6%).

Overall, 60% of customers given advice on specific measures had installed nothing so far, although 42% of them were planning to install measures in the future. Altogether 68% of customers given advice on measures to install had already done so, or were planning to soon; only 32% of customers given such advice had installed nothing and were planning to do nothing.

The main reasons given by these 23 customers for not installing or planning to install measures were that they already had/were doing everything (7 customers), that the measures were too expensive/the savings weren't worth it (5 customers), that the property was rented/the landlord should do it or they didn't like/want the recommended measures (both mentioned by 3 customers).

Advice on behavioural measures received

All customers were also asked whether they received any advice about ways to save energy by changing their behaviour, either by controlling their heating and hot water more carefully, by using appliances such as the cooker, kettle, refrigerator and freezer more carefully, by controlling their lighting more carefully or by using low energy bulbs. Customers were also asked whether they received any other sorts of advice such as advice on tariffs or condensation control. The results are shown in Table 32 below.

Half of the customers (50%) received advice on controlling their heating or hot water more carefully, 31% on using appliances more carefully and 52% on using their lighting more carefully or on using low energy bulbs. 14% of customers said they received other sorts of advice, more commonly on tariffs/Economy 7 (63% of those receiving other sorts of advice) or on condensation/ventilation (25%).

Customers ringing to query a bill were particularly likely to get advice on controlling heating and hot water more carefully (70%), while those ringing for advice on energy efficiency (33%) or to find out about grants (38%) and those who were sent a questionnaire without contacting the Energy Efficiency Helpline (38%) were the least likely to receive advice on this.

Many customers who received advice on behavioural ways of saving energy appear to be following the advice. 70% of those given advice on controlling their heating or hot water more carefully said they were following the advice, most commonly by checking or changing the thermostat settings (33%) or timer settings (19%) as advised, or having the heating on less (12%). (This proportion following behavioural advice is very similar to that found in our recent survey on The Benefits of Energy Advice for the Energy Advice Providers Group.)

74% of customers given advice on using appliances more carefully said they were following the advice, most commonly by not over-filling the kettle (37%) and using appliances at night/on Economy 7 (14%).

Almost two-thirds (63%) of customers given advice on lighting said they were following the advice, most commonly by using low energy light bulbs (41%), while 17% said they were following advice on turning off unnecessary lights. Almost all (13) of the 16 customers who were given other sorts of advice say they are following it.

TABLE 32: BEHAVIOURAL ADVICE RECEIVED AND WHETHER FOLLOWED	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/ meter reading	Advice on tariffs/ Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other	They sent me q're
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH/returning questionnaire</i>	113	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3	8
<u>Received advice on:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Controlling heating/hot water	50	33	38	52	70	62	53	44	67	38
Using appliances more carefully	31	14	38	31	23	31	33	38	-	13
Controlling lighting/using cfls	52	43	54	45	40	54	40	50	33	100
Other sorts of advice	14	24	8	3	7	46	40	18	-	-
None of these	20	29	23	24	17	8	27	21	33	-
<i>Base: received advice on controlling heating/hot water</i>	57	7	5	15	21	8	8	15	2	3
<u>How following advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Turned thermostat down/ checked temp of heating/water as advised	33	14	20	20	52	25	50	20	50	-
Using timer/settings as advised	19	14	-	20	14	13	50	27	-	-
Having heating on less/turning off at night/during the day	12	14	-	7	24	13	-	7	-	-
Adjusted boiler settings as advised	5	-	20	-	10	-	-	-	-	-
Following advice in other ways	16	29	40	13	14	13	25	27	-	-
Not followed the advice - already doing it/done it	12	14	20	20	5	25	13	7	-	33
Not followed the advice - other	19	29	-	27	10	13	-	40	-	67
<i>Base: received advice on careful use of appliances</i>	35	3	5	9	7	4	5	13		1
<u>How following advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Not over filling kettle	37	33	-	22	-	25	40	62	0	100
Using appliances at night/on timer/on Economy 7	14	-	-	22	-	50	40	8	0	-
Not leaving things on stand-by/ turning off when not in use	6	33	-	11	-	-	-	8	0	-
Keeping freezer full	6	-	-	11	-	25	-	8	0	-
Following the advice in the leaflet	6	-	20	-	14	-	-	-	0	-
Will buy energy efficient fridge when replacing current one	6	33	20	11	-	-	-	-	0	-
Following advice in other ways	40	-	20	33	43	-	40	54	0	100
Not followed advice - already doing	20	-	20	11	29	50	40	23	0	-
Not followed the advice - other	20	33	40	-	14	25	20	23	0	-
<i>Base: received advice on use of lighting/cfls</i>	59	9	7	13	12	7	6	17	1	8
<u>How following advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Turning off unnecessary lights	17	22	14	8	17	-	-	29	-	13
Using cfls/low energy bulbs	41	56	43	31	8	29	17	59	-	50
Given free low energy bulbs	8	11	14	15	-	-	-	12	-	-
Following advice in other ways	8	11	-	8	8	-	-	6	100	13
Already using cfls/low energy bulbs	8	11	-	8	25	-	-	6	-	13
Not following advice on cfls/bulbs	19	22	29	23	17	43	50	6	-	13
Not followed the advice - other	14	-	-	8	33	29	33	6	-	13
<i>Base: rec. other sorts of advice</i>	16	5	1	1	2	6	6	6	-	-
<u>Other sorts of advice received:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Advice on condensation/ventilation	25	40	-	-	50	-	-	50	-	-
Advice on tariffs/Economy 7	63	20	100	-	50	83	67	50	-	-
Advice on double glazing/curtains	13	40	-	-	-	-	17	17	-	-
Other advice	13	40	-	100	-	17	17	17	-	-
<u>Other sorts of advice followed:</u>										
Following advice on cond/vent	19	20	-	-	50	-	-	33	-	-
Following advice on tariffs/Econ 7	50	20	-	-	50	67	67	50	-	-
Following advice on d.glaz/curtains	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Following other advice	13	20	-	100	-	33	17	-	-	-
Not following advice	13	40	-	-	-	-	17	17	-	-

Usefulness of the advice received from the Energy Efficiency Helpline

Customers were asked how useful they found the advice they received from the fuel company. The results are shown in Table 33 below. Most found the advice either ‘very useful’ (33%) or ‘quite useful’ (43%), although 13% found it ‘not very useful’ and 8% found it ‘not at all useful’. Customers ringing to find out how to cut bills or to query a bill/meter reading were particularly likely to find the advice ‘not very useful’ (21% and 17% respectively) or ‘not at all useful’ (14% and 20% respectively) – apparently because not enough advice was provided on how to cut energy consumption.

TABLE 33: VIEWS ON THE ADVICE RECEIVED	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/meter reading	Advice on tariffs/Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other	They sent me q're
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH/returning questionnaire</i>	113	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3	8
<u>Usefulness of advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very useful	33	33	46	10	27	31	40	47	-	38
Quite useful	43	48	38	55	37	46	33	41	67	38
Not very useful	13	5	-	21	17	15	13	6	33	25
Not at all useful	8	14	-	14	20	8	7	3	-	-
Did not receive any advice	2	-	8	-	-	-	7	-	-	-
Don't know	1	-	8	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
<u>Whether any advice/help hoped for but didn't get:</u>										
Yes	33	33	8	62	40	46	47	24	67	-
No	66	67	85	38	60	54	53	74	33	100
Don't know	1	-	8	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
<u>Whether would contact fuel supplier again for advice/help:</u>										
Yes	77	86	85	72	67	77	67	85	67	100
No	17	5	8	17	33	15	13	6	33	-
Don't know	6	10	8	10	-	8	20	9	-	-
<u>Whether would recommend others contact fuel supplier:</u>										
Yes - would recommend them	68	71	69	66	57	62	73	79	33	100
No - would not recommend them	22	14	15	24	33	23	13	12	33	-
Don't know	10	14	15	10	10	15	13	9	33	-
<u>Whether noticed benefits from following advice:</u>										
Yes	21	24	15	14	3	38	27	38	-	25
No	22	14	23	38	33	15	27	15	-	25
Too early to tell	25	24	38	21	40	-	20	15	33	13
Don't know	8	10	8	-	7	8	-	12	-	13
No energy saving advice received	12	24	8	21	7	31	27	9	33	-
Energy saving advice not followed/not yet followed	12	5	8	7	10	8	-	12	33	25

Customers were most likely to say they found the advice ‘very’ or ‘quite useful’ because it helped them save money/fuel (13%) or gave them new ways of saving energy/keeping warm (12%). The other reasons more commonly given were:

Base: All finding advice very/quite useful

75
%

Helped save money/fuel	13
New ideas/ways of saving energy/keeping warm/told me things I didn't know	12
Reassured us that we were doing the right things/confirmed what we thought	9
They were very helpful/efficient/informative	9
Advice/information useful/helpful	9
Answered my queries	8
Followed/will follow their advice/installed measures as recommended	5
Leaflets/information received useful	4
Not enough info/advice/not very useful	4
Like the low energy light bulbs	3
Responded quickly	3
Already knew it/doing it	3
Sent someone to see me	3
Need council to install measures	3

The main reasons given for finding the advice 'not very' or 'not at all useful' were that not enough advice/information was given (29%) and that bills were still high/the problem had not been resolved (24%). Other reasons given are shown below:

<i>Base: All finding advice not very/not at all useful</i>	24
	%
No/not enough advice/information/help given	29
Bills still high/problem not resolved	25
Knew it all already/told nothing new/mostly commonsense	17
Advice not useful/appropriate to us	17
Already doing it all/got it all	13
Didn't receive leaflets/no-one came to visit as promised	8

Customers were also asked whether there was any help or advice that they hoped for but did not get from the fuel company. The results are shown in Table 33 above. 37 respondents (33%) felt that they did not get all the advice or help they hoped for, most commonly because some didn't get help with reducing bills (27%) or because they hoped someone would visit them to give advice (14%) or check their meter (11%) – see table overleaf::

<i>Base: all not getting the help/advice they hoped for</i>	37
	%
Help to reduce bills	27
Wanted face to face advice/someone to visit	14
Advice on storage heaters	11
Someone to check meter	11
Wanted to know what is causing big bills	11
Running costs of appliances	5
Said would get back to me/send information but haven't	5
Problems with change of supplier not resolved	5
Wanted more information/advice/more detailed information	5

Those ringing to find out about cutting bills (62%) are the most likely to feel they didn't get the advice or help they hoped for and those ringing about grants (8%) the least likely to feel that this was the case.

Customers were also asked whether they would contact the fuel company again for advice and whether they would recommended others contact it. The results are shown in Table 37 above. 77% of customers said they would contact the fuel company again for help if they needed it, and 68% said they would recommend others to contact them for advice.

Customers who would not recommend others to contact the fuel supplier most commonly said this was because the fuel supplier was unable to help them (35%). The other more common reasons given are shown below:

<i>Base: all who wouldn't recommend others contact fuel supplier for advice</i>	23
	%
They didn't really help me/not helpful/reliable	35
Don't tell you anything new/its all commonsense	13
Could just pass on the advice yourself	9
Don't talk to people about things like that	13
Difficult to get hold of them on the phone	9

Benefits noticed from following energy saving advice

All customers were asked whether they had noticed any benefits since following any of the energy saving advice they were given. The results are shown in Table 33 above. 21% of customers said they had noticed benefits and 22% said they had not noticed any benefits, while 25% said it was too early to tell, 12% said they had not received any advice and 12% said they had not followed any of the advice so far.

The most common benefits noticed by the 24 customers who noticed benefits were that the bills were lower/they were using less fuel (13 customers) or hadn't gone up (1 customer), and that the house was warmer (8 customers). Other benefits customers mentioned were that they liked the low energy bulbs (2 customers), they were now heating the home

efficiently/properly (2 customers), they were changing the light bulbs less frequently (1 customer) and that there were improvements in condensation (1 customer).

Quality of advice received from the Energy Efficiency Helplines

In order to summarise the quality of advice received from these Energy Efficiency Helplines, we have evaluated it in terms of whether it answered the customer's initial queries and to what extent the customer was offered additional energy saving advice as well as the advice he asked for. The results are shown in Table 34 below.

TABLE 34: QUALITY OF THE ADVICE RECEIVED	Total	Advice on eng. eff'y	Find out about grants	How to cut bills	Query bill/meter reading	Advice on tariffs/Econ 7	Advice on stor. h'ters	Other eng. eff'y query	Other	They sent me q're
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH/returning questionnaire</i>	113	21	13	29	30	13	15	34	3	8
<u>Quality of advice received:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Completed HEC and received written report. No telephone contact/advice	12	24	-	10	-	-	-	6	-	100
Sent an advisor/assessor to visit customer	11	5	46	10	7	8	7	9	-	-
Sent an advisor/assessor to visit customer but original query not answered	5	14	-	7	3	8	13	3	-	-
EEH answered query and gave good additional advice/written report	12	19	-	17	13	-	-	24	33	-
EEH answered query and gave some additional advice/leaflets	13	-	-	10	27	23	20	6	-	-
EEH answered query but no additional advice given or sent	28	29	46	17	20	46	33	44	33	-
EEH unable to/didn't answer query but did give other advice/leaflets/help	9	10	-	17	17	15	7	3	33	-
EEH unable to/didn't answer query or give any other advice or help	7	-	8	3	10	-	13	6	-	-
Customer can't remember what advice was given	2	-	-	7	3	-	7	-	-	-

Clearly there are some missed opportunities to send out more printed advice – especially to the 28% of callers who received nothing.

Advice given to customers on benefits and with elderly members of the household

In giving energy advice it is, we feel, desirable that Energy Efficiency Helplines should be able to identify all those customers likely to be in “Fuel Poverty”. As far as we can tell from both these surveys there is as yet no systematic approach by which any fuel companies try to identify customers in Fuel Poverty. In order to explore whether fuel companies seem to be addressing this problem, we also analysed these data by looking at all our respondents who are on benefits, and with someone over 60 in the household, to see if they were adequately served by these helplines.

In order to give appropriate advice, Energy Efficiency Helpline advisers should ask customers about their circumstances so as to assess their eligibility for grants. Table 35 shows details of the advice given to customers who were on benefits, and those in which a member of the household was aged 60 or over. These households may be eligible for grants, and are also more likely than average to be suffering from fuel poverty.

Customers in receipt of benefits were only slightly more likely (37%) than average (21%) to be asked about their circumstances, and 11% had already mentioned this to the adviser. However, almost half (48%) of those on benefits were *not* asked any questions about their circumstances before being given advice. Similarly, 45% of customers where the oldest member was over 60 were *not* asked about their circumstances, although such customers were more likely to have mentioned this already (21%).

Customers on benefits (31%) or with an elderly relative in the household (32%) were more likely than those not on benefits (24%) or with no-one aged 60+ (23%) to receive telephone advice on specific measures to install. The measures most commonly advised were loft insulation and cavity wall insulation. They were however less likely to receive telephone advice on behavioural measures (28% and 30% versus 37% and 37% respectively).

Customers on benefits or with an elderly relative in the household may potentially be eligible for grants, and these customers were more likely (19% and 14% respectively) than average (7%) to be given advice on grants on the telephone. They were also more likely (28% of those on benefits and 22% of those with an elderly relative in the household) than average (18%) to be promised a visit by an adviser or grants assessor. Even so, 94% of those on benefits and 85% of those with an elderly relative said they were not sent any information or application forms for grants. This is a very poor performance by these helplines.

We conclude that the major fuel companies are, at present, not very successful at identifying callers who may be in real need of energy efficiency improvements, and entitled to grants or eligible for EEC schemes. This situation needs to be improved.

Customers on benefits and those with an elderly relative in the household may also benefit particularly from advice on behavioural ways of saving energy as they are more likely than average to be on low incomes or suffering from fuel poverty. Even so, they were less likely than average to receive advice on ways of saving energy by controlling their heating or hot water more carefully (44% of those on benefits and 43% of those with an elderly relative in the household, compared with 50% on average).

Those with an elderly relative in the household were also less likely than average to receive advice on the careful use of appliances (24% compared with 31%), although those on benefits

were more likely than average to receive such advice (38%). Households with an elderly relative were more likely (57%) than average (52%) to receive advice on controlling lighting more carefully or using low energy light bulbs.

Customers on benefits are as likely (78%) as customers on average (76%) to rate the advice they received as useful, and are no more likely to feel there was advice or information which they hoped for but didn't get (34% compared with 33%). Customers with an elderly relative in the household are less likely to rate the information useful (71%) but were less likely than average to feel there was advice or information they hoped for but didn't get (28%).

Overall, these findings suggest that Energy Efficiency Helplines could do a great deal more to assess the circumstances of customers on benefits and those with elderly members in the household, and to provide such customers with additional help and information appropriate to their circumstances, particularly information on grants and advice on ways of saving energy through changes in behaviour.

TABLE 35: ADVICE RECEIVED	Total	Benefits received		Oldest in household		On benefits		Not on benefits	
		Any	None	60 or over	Under 60	Oldest in household		Oldest in household	
						60 or over	Under 60	60 or over	Under 60
<i>Base: all seeking advice</i>	100	32	68	37	62	15	17	22	45
<u>Advice given over the phone:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Any advice on measures	26	31	24	32	23	40	24	27	22
Any advice on behavioural measures	34	28	37	30	37	27	29	32	40
Advice on measures & beh. measures	11	9	12	8	13	13	6	5	16
Advice on tariffs/Economy 7	10	6	12	5	13	-	12	9	13
Advice on grants	7	19	1	14	3	27	12	5	-
Other advice	22	19	24	24	19	27	12	23	22
Said would send someone round	18	28	13	22	16	33	24	14	13
No verbal advice but said would send info/q're/someone to visit	19	19	19	11	24	7	29	14	22
Unable to help/no advice given	15	13	16	22	11	13	12	27	11
Can't remember	2	-	3	-	3	-	-	-	4
<i>Base: all receiving telephone advice</i>	90	27	63	33	56	13	14	20	42
<u>Asked about home before gave advice:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	49	44	51	48	50	38	50	55	50
No	44	48	43	42	45	54	43	35	45
Don't remember	7	7	6	9	5	8	7	10	5
<u>Asked about circs before gave advice:</u>									
Yes	21	37	14	27	18	38	36	20	12
No	64	48	71	45	75	38	57	50	81
Had already mentioned this	10	11	10	21	4	15	7	25	2
Don't remember	4	4	5	6	4	8	-	5	5
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH</i>	105	32	73	40	64	15	17	25	47
<u>Sent printed advice/info/leaflets:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	70	66	71	68	72	73	59	64	77
No	24	25	23	25	22	20	29	28	19
Said they would, but didn't	3	3	3	3	3	-	6	4	2
Don't remember	4	6	3	5	3	7	6	4	2
<i>Base: all receiving printed information</i>	73	21	52	27	46	11	10	16	36
<u>Printed information received:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Booklets on energy eff'y/saving energy	21	24	19	26	17	18	30	31	14
Information on heating	7	10	6	4	9	9	10	-	8
Tariff information/comparison with other companies	7	-	10	11	4	-	-	19	6
Information on Economy /using Econ 7	3	-	4	-	4	-	-	-	6
Information on green tariff/leaflet with windmills	3	5	2	4	2	9	-	-	3
Running costs of appliances	12	10	13	11	13	9	10	13	14
Information on insulation	15	14	15	22	11	9	20	31	8
Information on cfls	7	-	10	7	7	-	-	13	8
Information on storage heaters	14	5	17	7	17	9	-	6	22
Questionnaire	11	5	13	7	13	9	-	6	17
Information on ways of paying for fuel	1	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	3
Information on boilers	4	-	6	4	4	-	-	6	6
Use of appliances	1	5	-	-	2	-	10	-	-
Booklet on what suggested on phone	8	5	10	4	11	-	10	6	11
Information on double glazing	3	5	2	7	-	9	-	6	-
Information on grants/special offers	4	5	4	11	-	9	-	13	-
Information on draughtproofing	1	5	-	4	-	9	-	-	-
Information on keeping warm	5	19	-	11	2	27	10	-	-
Other	15	10	17	15	15	9	10	19	17
Can't remember what sent	14	19	12	7	17	9	30	6	14
Av number of items received	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.8	1.6
TABLE 35 cont: ADVICE RECEIVED		Benefits received		Oldest in household		On benefits		Not on benefits	
		Any	None	60 or over	Under 60	Oldest in household		Oldest in household	
	Total					60 or over	Under 60	60 or over	Under 60

<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH</i>	105	32	73	40	64	15	17	25	47
<u>Whether received questionnaire:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	24	25	23	18	28	20	29	16	28
No	64	53	68	73	58	53	53	84	60
Don't remember	12	22	8	10	14	27	18	-	13
<i>Base: all seeking advice from EEH/returning questionnaire</i>	113	32	81	46	66	15	17	31	49
<u>Whether received written recs:</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	30	25	32	30	30	40	12	26	37
No	62	66	60	67	58	60	71	71	53
Don't remember	8	9	7	2	12	-	18	3	10
<u>Whether sent grant information:</u>									
Yes - sent an application form	4	6	4	11	-	13	-	10	-
Yes - sent information on grants etc	4	-	6	7	3	-	-	10	4
No - sent neither	88	94	85	85	89	87	100	84	86
Don't remember	4	-	6	-	8	-	-	-	10
Applied for grants on phone	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	3	-
<u>Received advice on:</u>									
Measures to install (by tel or in writing)	64	59	65	67	62	73	47	65	67
Controlling heating/hot water	50	44	53	43	56	27	59	52	55
Using appliances more carefully	31	38	28	24	36	40	35	16	37
Controlling lighting/using CFLs	52	50	53	57	50	60	41	55	53
Other sorts of advice	14	13	15	13	15	7	18	16	14
None of these	20	19	21	26	15	27	12	26	16
<u>Usefulness of advice:</u>									
Very useful	33	31	33	33	33	40	24	29	37
Quite useful	43	47	42	39	45	47	47	35	45
Not very useful	13	9	15	15	12	13	6	16	14
Not at all useful	8	13	6	7	9	-	24	10	4
Did not receive any advice	2	-	2	4	-	-	-	6	-
Don't know	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	3	-
<u>Advice/help hoped for but didn't get:</u>									
Yes	33	34	32	28	36	20	47	32	33
No	66	66	67	70	64	80	53	65	67
Don't know	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	3	-
<u>Noticed benefits from following advice:</u>									
Yes	21	19	22	20	23	13	24	23	22
No	22	25	21	22	23	27	24	19	22
Too early to tell	25	31	22	20	29	40	24	10	31
Don't know	8	6	9	9	8	7	6	10	8
No energy saving advice received	12	13	12	13	11	7	18	16	8
No advice followed/not yet followed	12	6	14	17	8	7	6	23	8
<u>Quality of advice received:</u>									
Completed HEC and received written report. No telephone contact/advice	12	6	15	17	9	7	6	23	10
Sent advisor/assessor to visit customer	11	22	6	13	9	27	18	6	6
Sent an advisor/assessor to visit but original query not answered	5	3	6	4	6	-	6	6	6
EEH answered query and gave good additional advice/written report	12	13	12	11	14	13	12	10	14
EEH answered query and gave some additional advice/leaflets	13	9	15	11	15	13	6	10	18
EEH answered query but no additional advice given or sent	28	22	31	24	30	20	24	26	33
EEH unable to/didn't answer query but did give other advice/leaflets/help	9	16	6	4	12	-	29	6	6
EEH unable to/didn't answer query or give any other advice or help	7	6	7	13	3	13	-	13	4
Can't remember what advice given	2	3	1	2	2	7	-	-	2

Conclusions from the Telephone Survey

1. Some of these “real” customers who contacted their fuel suppliers’ helplines recently encountered many of the same problems and delays in getting through as did our Mystery Shoppers. We conclude that some improvements are necessary to improve referral procedures and access to these Energy Efficiency Helplines.

2. The reasons why real customers call Energy Efficiency Helplines are very similar to some of those we used as mystery shopping scenarios – high bills and how to cut them, advice on energy efficiency, and information on grants – but they also include finding out about how to control storage heaters and advice on tariffs.
3. The types and scope of advice currently provided to real customers are the same as that provided to our mystery shoppers. Not enough questions are asked to identify the fuel poor or those eligible for grants and EEC schemes, so few callers are given advice on grants and EEC (even those who ask about grants). Some callers get advice on tariffs when they really need advice on how to reduce consumption. And only some callers get advice on energy saving measures to install, or energy saving behaviour to adopt. In short, energy advisers seem to answer only the “presenting problem”, without seeking how they can broaden the scope of their advice to help the customer more. As a result of this, we conclude that these companies miss many opportunities to reach fuel poor and disadvantaged customers with their own EEC schemes, or with grants from Warm Front. This situation needs to be improved.
4. As we found in our Mystery Shopping Survey, not all customers who seek advice from helplines are sent follow-up printed information (28% received none) and rather few receive an energy audit questionnaire or Home Energy Report (12%). We conclude that arrangements for logging calls and sending out follow-up literature should be improved, and that Home Energy Reports should be more widely used as Good Practice.
5. Where recommendations are received on measures to install or energy saving behaviour to adopt, this is quite widely followed, which is encouraging. Over two thirds of customers given each of these types of advice are following at least some of it, so it is worthwhile for companies to provide such advice to a higher proportion of customers who call.
6. Although most customers feel that the advice provided by energy efficiency helplines is either “quite useful” or even “very useful”, customers who call about high bills and how to cut them tend to find the advice less useful, mainly because it does not seem comprehensive enough to really help them cut their fuel bills. This supports our conclusion that the advice provided needs to be more pro-active if it is to really help customers with high bills who may be in fuel poverty. At present it does not really raise their awareness of what energy efficiency can do for them.
7. One encouraging finding is that a fifth of customers who recently received advice are already noticing benefits from following it – e.g. lower fuel bills, warmer homes, reduced condensation and less frequent changing of light bulbs. We conclude from this (and from other recent studies) that energy efficiency advice can make a real difference to consumers – provided it is comprehensive and followed.

APPENDICES

Research Methodology

The Mystery Shopping Questionnaire

Mystery Shopping Sampling Plans

Telephone Survey Questionnaire

Analysis of Response – Telephone Interviews

Acknowledgements

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Mystery Shopping interviews

The 342 Mystery Shopping interviews that were conducted in this study were done (as far as was possible) by 270 mystery shopping assessors who are also real customers of the 20+ fuel suppliers covered in the survey.

This was achieved by New Perspectives working in partnership on this part of the study with Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shopping, one of the UK's leading mystery shopping specialists. Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) have a panel of some 15,000 assessors – typical consumers who also work on mystery shopping projects for TNS. From this large panel it was possible to identify around 15-25 customers of each of the larger fuel suppliers, and a few customers of some smaller suppliers.

This use of actual customers as assessors is important, because unlike most other mystery shopping exercises, some fuel suppliers' advisers (especially those at general call centres) can rapidly check whether callers are in fact their customers, and they can ask about and check on the size of their recent fuel bills, and on their metering and payment records. This makes it hard to simulate complex customer enquiries, unless one is genuinely a customer. However, where enough "real" customers were not available from the Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shoppers' Panel, we included a few mystery shoppers who posed as potential new customers.

In order to cover the full range of circumstances under which fuel suppliers should provide advice on energy efficiency, we arranged that some mystery shoppers would call either the general call centre, or the energy efficiency helpline, with a range of queries. Where callers were promptly referred by a call centre to the energy efficiency helpline, they would call both. This resulted in totals of 85 calls to the call centres of major suppliers; 235 calls to the energy efficiency helplines of major suppliers; and 22 calls to call centres and helplines of minor suppliers – a total of 342 calls.

Each of these mystery shopping interviews was carefully scripted to provide opportunities for the companies to fulfil their obligations to provide energy efficiency advice. Assessors recorded what questions they asked, and what replies were received. Normally around 20-25 calls were made to each of the major suppliers, and around 1 to 4 calls to the minor suppliers. The Mystery Shopping Questionnaire and Sampling Plan are shown in the Appendices.

All these "mystery shopping" telephone calls were conducted during January and early February, 2002, after which the Taylor Nelson Sofres mystery shoppers waited up to four weeks to see what materials arrived by post. Where questionnaires arrived they completed and returned these, keeping a copy. They kept all the materials they received from the fuel companies and returned these to Taylor Nelson Sofres and New Perspectives, along with their completed questionnaires which contained a full record of their initial calls, the materials promised and sent, and their views on the service they received.

Energy company General Call Centres

These calls were made to the general call centre number (which deals with billing enquiries) and were designed to test whether general call centre operators successfully recognise when energy efficiency advice is appropriate. We normally made 5 calls to the general call centres

of each major supplier, and one or two to smaller suppliers. The scenarios we explored in these interviews were:

1. When customers call querying “*big bills*”, “*cold homes and an elderly relative staying*”, or asks for “*help to save energy*”, does the call centre offer energy efficiency advice, either directly or by referring the caller to a dedicated energy efficiency helpline?
2. If the customer asks “*what help can you provide to help us save energy*”, what is offered? Code of Practice, other leaflets, referral to Helpline, information about grants and EEC schemes? List of other organisations which can help? What is the customer told? What are they sent? Are they asked questions/or sent a questionnaire about energy efficiency measures already in their home?
3. Is the customer asked about their age/any benefits they receive, to help determine their eligibility for grants? How was this explained? What grants are they told about? (e.g. HEES/Warm Front, EESoPs/EEC schemes, local HECA schemes etc).
4. Does the general call centre operate at night? Is there a computerised telephone answering service? How many steps/how long does it take to get through?

Where our mystery shoppers were referred promptly to the company’s energy efficiency helpline (i.e. given its telephone number) they then called this number in addition to their original call to the general call centre.

Energy Efficiency Helplines

The bulk of our mystery shopper calls were made to these dedicated energy efficiency helpline numbers. Normally at least 15 and 20 calls were made to each supplier, or to each call centre where a group of companies operate a single call centre. The facets of this service which we explored were:

5. How easily can customers get through to the energy efficiency helpline? Was a computerised system used? How many switches/how long did it take to get through to the person able to provide advice?
6. What hours does it operate?
7. How does it respond to queries such as:
“*My bills are too high. I find them hard to pay. How can I cut them down?*”
“*I am elderly/disabled/have an elderly relative (aged 60+) living with me who feels the cold; what can I do to make my home warmer without spending more on fuel*”
“*How can I save energy in my home?*”
“*I need to buy a new fridge (or freezer) and want advice on which ones use less power.*”
“*What grants can I get to make my home warmer and cut my bills?*”
8. How does the adviser suggest that fuel bills are cut or the house made warmer?
9. Are they asked questions over the phone about insulation, draughtproofing, controls? Or are they sent a questionnaire to complete?
10. Is the customer asked about age/benefits? Or are they told about any grants or other financial assistance which might be available? What grants were they told of? (e.g.

company's own EESOPs/EEC scheme, Warm Front/ Warm Deal in Scotland) What measures would these grants cover? (Or did they have to ask directly about grants themselves?)

11. Is there a general leaflet on energy efficiency in the home available from each company? (A Code of Practice on energy efficiency is a licence requirement).
12. What is offered if they ask about "*other possible sources of advice*"? Are they sent a list/Code of Practice or what? (A list of other sources is part of the licence condition.)
13. What training do the energy advisers have?
14. What advice are customers given? Verbal or printed? What measures are they advised to install? In what ways are they advised to change their behaviour to save energy?
15. How long does it take companies to send their customers any printed advice? Can they understand it? Did it seem appropriate to the assessor?
16. How useful do callers rate the advice and information they are given? Are they likely to install measures or apply for grants?
17. How do callers rate the knowledge, professionalism and politeness of call handlers at general call centres and energy efficiency helplines?

Pilot Test of the Mystery Shopping

Because of the complexity of the various scenarios which we generated to fully cover the fuel companies' obligations, we first conducted a small Pilot Test of some 20 mystery shopping interviews in early January, 2002, before embarking on the full scale study of 250+ calls. The Mystery Shopping questionnaire (appended) was designed by New Perspectives, and was only modified slightly in one or two places for the main survey. This allowed us to combine the Pilot Sample of 20 calls with the main study of 250+ calls.

Analysis of the Mystery Shopping

Because the 270 assessors kept a complete record of each call, and later added to this copies of any questionnaires and written advice they were sent over the next four weeks, and because some assessors called Energy Efficiency Helplines after being directed there by the general call centres, we had 342 call records to examine at the analysis stage - at least 20 cases for each major company, and between one and six cases for each smaller company. The analysis was done by an experienced energy research team at New Perspectives, who have experience working with energy advice software, and in both giving and evaluating energy efficiency advice given to consumers.

Case records were analysed to summarise what advice and information was provided, and under what circumstances (e.g. volunteered or requested), to see whether the advice provided met Ofgem's guidelines, whether it seemed appropriate to the circumstances reported by the customer, and whether it was in a clear and understandable format. Assessors were asked to comment on how understandable they found the advice provided, and how they rated the level of service provided.

Results have been analysed by company or group (where two or more companies share a call centre), by calls to the General Call Centre and Energy Efficiency Helpline, and by scenario (where this is appropriate).

Exploratory telephone interviews with real customers

This study forms the second major part of this research, and was designed to “close the loop” in evaluating the appropriateness and effects of advice. Whereas the Mystery Shopping Phase looked at *what advice is given*, and *whether it is appropriate*, this phase evaluated whether advice given by fuel suppliers to real customers is *readily understood* and *likely to be acted upon*.

In order to conduct this phase of the project, Ofgem requested the major fuel suppliers to provide New Perspectives with a list of recent callers to each fuel supplier’s energy efficiency helpline. These lists were supplied in due course, but found to be vary variable in the quality of the data recorded. Some lists were good and recorded accurately the customers’ names, addresses and telephone numbers, and the date and nature of each enquiry. But some lists were poor and incomplete - with missing or incorrect telephone numbers, and no record of the date or nature of each call; such lists are really inadequate for the regular monitoring of effects of advice, which would be good practice. We conclude that energy suppliers should be encouraged by Ofgem to keep better records of the enquiries they receive.

Nevertheless a sample of customers was then be selected by New Perspectives from the lists supplied, and 113 of them were interviewed over the telephone during February/March, 2002, by New Perspectives’ interviewers using a semi-structured questionnaire (appended) designed to cover the following topics:

1. What led the consumer to seek advice from their fuel supplier?
2. Where did they find the number to call?
3. What was the nature of their initial enquiry?
4. What advice did they receive over the telephone?
5. How easy or difficult was it to understand the verbal advice?
6. Were they asked about their home or sent a questionnaire to complete?
7. Were they asked about their circumstances (e.g. benefits, income, age)? Was it explained why?
8. Were they sent information about grants or a booklet on energy efficiency?
9. Did they complete any questionnaire they were sent? Why? Why not?
10. Were they sent advice about measures they could install?
11. How easy or difficult was it to understand this advice? Why?
12. Have they installed any measures? Applied for any grants? Will they? Why not?
13. Did they receive advice about changing their behaviour to save energy (e.g. controls on their heating, or how they cook, or use their appliances)?
14. Are they following any advice about changing behaviour? Why not?
15. Would they call this advice line again themselves, or advise others to do so? Why?

Most of the respondents’ verbatim answers were then coded to enable detailed quantitative analysis, but we also examined each case individually and categorised it according to the way it was handled and whether or not it seemed to meet the customer’s needs.

INSERT MYSTERY SHOPPING QUESTIONNAIRE HERE FROM SEPARATE FILE

REVISED SAMPLING PLAN FOR ENERGY ADVICE MYSTERY SHOPPING
(WITH TELEPHONE NUMBER CORRECTIONS)
MAIN SURVEY OF 250 CALLS

MAJOR SUPPLIERS	General Call Centre	No. of Calls	Energy Efficiency Number	No. of Calls	TOTAL CALLS
British Gas	0845 788 8400	5	0845 965 0650	20	25
<i>LE Group (all use S'hampton En. Eff. call centre):</i>					
London Electricity (LE Group)	0800 096 9000 (elec) 0500 005 008 (gas)	5	0800 096 9966	8	13
SWEB (LE Group)	0800 356 000 (elec) 0800 085 5800 (gas)	5	0800 328 9014	7	12
Virgin (LE Group)	0800 085 0000	1	0800 085 0000 (call ctr)	0	1
<i>npower Group (3 En. Eff. call centres):</i>					
npower	0845 714 5146 (elec) 0845 790 6050 (gas)	5	0800 022 220	15	20
Yorkshire (npower)	0800 073 3000	5	0800 591 748	5	10
Northern (npower)	0845 602 6363	5	0800 269 695	15	20
Powergen	0800 363 363	5	0500 201 000	15	20
<i>Scottish & Southern (one Portsmouth En.Eff. call ct):</i>					
Southern	0845 744 4555 (elec) 0845 758 5401 (gas)	5	0845 777 6633	5	10
Scottish Hydro-Electric	0845 300 2141 (elec) 0845 755 2233 (gas)	5	0845 777 6633	5	10
SWALEC	0800 052 5252 (elec) 0800 052 0567 (gas)	5	0800 052 0123	5	10
Scottish Power (owns Manweb)	0845 729 2292 (S.East) 0845 272 7111 (in area) 0845 270 0700 (out area)	5	0845 272 7111(in area) 0845 729 2292(out area) or 0800 889 9000 ??	15	20
Manweb	0845 272 1212	5	0845 272 7272 (in area) 0845 729 2292(out area)	15	20
SEEBOARD	0800 056 8888	5	0800 581 255	15	20
<i>TXU Energi Group (one Ipswich En. Eff. all centre):</i>					
Eastern (now TXU Energi)	0800 183 1515	5	0800 183 1600	8	13
Norweb (now TXU Energi)	0800 195 0101	5	0800 834 550	7	12
MINOR SUPPLIERS					
Amerada	0845 305 5000	2	0845 204 673	2	4
Atlantic	0800 052 2080	1	0870 013 2080	1	2
Cambridge Gas & Electricity	0845 071 1515	2	0845 071 1515 (call ctr)	-	2
Countrywide Gas	0138 675 7333	1	0138 675 7333 (call ctr)	-	1
Enron	0845 071 1515	1	0845 071 1515 (call ctr)	-	1
North Wales Energy	0197 883 3233	1	0197 883 3233 (call ctr)	-	1
Telecom Plus	0208 955 5555	1	0870 161 3131	1	2
Utility Link	0845 601 1410	1	0845 601 1410 (call ctr)	-	1
TOTAL		86		164	250

SAMPLING PLAN FOR ENERGY ADVICE MYSTERY SHOPPING
(WITH TELEPHONE NUMBER CORRECTIONS)
PILOT SURVEY OF 20 CALLS

MAJOR SUPPLIERS	General Call Centre	No. of Calls	Energy Efficiency Number	No. of Calls	TOTAL CALLS
British Gas	0845 788 8400	1	0845 965 0650	1	2
<i>LE Group (all use S'hampton En. Eff. call centre):</i>					
London Electricity (LE Group)	0800 096 9000 (elec) 0500 005 008 (gas)	1	0800 096 9966	-	1
SWEB (LE Group)	0800 356 000 (elec) 0800 085 5800 (gas)	-	0800 328 9014	1	1
Virgin (LE Group)	0800 085 0000	-	0800 085 0000 (call ctr)	-	-
<i>npower Group (3 En. Eff. call centres):</i>					
npower	0845 714 5146 (elec) 0845 790 6050 (gas)	-	0800 022 220	1	1
Yorkshire (npower)	0800 073 3000	-	0800 591 748	1	1
Northern (npower)	0845 602 6363	1	0800 269 695	1	2
Powergen	0800 363 363	1	0500 201 000	1	2
<i>Scottish & Southern (one Portsmouth En.Eff. call ct):</i>					
Southern	0845 744 4555 (elec) 0845 758 5401 (gas)	1	0845 777 6633	1	2
Scottish Hydro-Electric	0845 300 2141 (elec) 0845 755 2233 (gas)	-	0845 777 6633		-
SWALEC	0800 052 5252 (elec) 0800 052 0567 (gas)	1	0800 052 0123	-	1
Scottish Power (owns Manweb)	0845 729 2292 (S.East) 0845 272 7111 (in area) 0845 270 0700 (out area)	1	0845 272 7111 (in area) 0845 729 2292 (out area) or 0800 889 9000 ??	1	2
Manweb	0845 272 1212	-	0845 272 7272 (in area) 0845 729 2292 (out area)	1	1
SEEBOARD	0800 056 8888	1	0800 581 255	1	2
<i>TXU Energi Group (one Ipswich En. Eff. all centre):</i>					
Eastern (now TXU Energi)	0800 183 1515	-	0800 183 1600	1	1
Norweb (now TXU Energi)	0800 195 0101	1	0800 834 550	-	1
MINOR SUPPLIERS					
Amerada	0845 305 5000	-	0845 204 673	-	-
Atlantic	0800 052 2080	-	0870 013 2080	-	-
Cambridge Gas & Electricity	0845 071 1515	-	0845 071 1515 (call ctr)	-	-
Countrywide Gas	0138 675 7333	-	01386 757 333 (call ctr)	-	-
Enron	0845 071 1515	-	0845 071 1515 (call ctr)	-	-
North Wales Energy	0197 883 3233	-	0197 883 3233 (call ctr)	-	-
Telecom Plus	0208 955 5555	-	0870 161 3131	-	-
Utility Link	0845 601 1410	-	0845 601 1410 (call ctr)	-	-
TOTAL		9		11	20

SURVEY ON THE QUALITY OF ENERGY ADVICE (for Ofgem)
Questionnaire for Telephone Interviews

Customer name..... Tel. No.....

Address (Town/City/County).....

Fuel Company..... Fuels supplied.....

Date of advice (if known)..... Enquiry (from List).....

Date of Interview..... Interviewer.....

Introduction

Hello, is that.....? (customer name). IF “no”: May I speak to..... (customer name)? My name is..... and I am calling from New Perspectives. We are doing a survey on energy advice for Ofgem – the government regulatory body for the gas and electricity markets. They want to find out about the quality of energy efficiency advice being provided by energy companies. I understand that you contacted (fuel company) for advice in the last three or four months. May I ask you about the help they gave you? It will take about ten minutes and your answers will be entirely confidential and not used to sell anything.

Q1. Do you remember contacting..... (fuel company) within the last four or five months to ask for their help or advice?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| <i>Yes</i> | 1 |
| <i>No – don’t recall any contact</i> | 2 CLOSE |

Q2. Do you remember where you found the telephone number which you called to get advice from.... (company)?

- | | |
|--|----|
| <i>Magazine sent by company</i> | 1 |
| <i>On the gas/electricity bill</i> | 2 |
| <i>Telephone Directory</i> | 3 |
| <i>Directory Enquiries</i> | 4 |
| <i>From the company’s own general enquiries centre</i> | 5 |
| <i>Citizens’ Advice Bureau</i> | 6 |
| <i>Council</i> | 7 |
| <i>Leaflets at Post Office</i> | 8 |
| <i>From friend/relative/neighbour</i> | 9 |
| <i>Elsewhere.....</i> | 10 |
| <i>Don’t remember</i> | 11 |

Q3a. When you called (company) for advice, did you get straight through to someone who could help, or did you have any problems contacting the right person to help you?

- | | |
|---|-------|
| <i>Got straight through to someone who could help</i> | 1 |
| <i>Had some problems contacting the right person to help me</i> | 2 Q3b |
| <i>Don’t remember</i> | 3 |

Q3b. What sort of problems did you have contacting a person who could help you?

.....

Q4. For what reason did you contact (company)? (RECORD VERBATIM, PROBE FULLY, THEN CODE ALL THAT APPLY)

.....

NOW CODE ALL REASONS THAT APPLY:

- To get advice on energy efficiency* 1
- To find out about energy efficiency Grants/Free measures* 2
- To get advice on how to cut bills/fuel consumption* 3
- To query a high bill/high meter reading* 4
- For advice on tariffs/off-peak tariffs/ Economy 7* 5
- For advice on controlling storage heaters* 6
- For advice on controlling gas boiler/central heating* 7
- For advice on controlling water heating* 8
- For information on/to obtain Low Energy Lightbulbs* 9
- For information on appliances which use less energy* 10
- Because our home was cold/damp/draughty/hard to heat* 11
- Others.....* 12
- No particular reason* 13
- Don't remember* 14

CONTINUE INTERVIEW ONLY IF CALLED WITH "ENERGY EFFICIENCY" QUERY. OTHERS CLOSE AND THANK. DO NOT COLLECT CLASSIFICATION.

Q5. And what advice did the (company) Energy Efficiency Helpline give you over the telephone? (PROBE FULLY AND RECORD VERBATIM ALL ADVICE GIVEN – INCLUDING MEASURES ADVISED, AND ANY QUESTIONS ASKED)

.....

Q6a. How easy or difficult was it to understand the advice they gave you over the telephone?

- Was it....(READ OUT)
- Very easy* 1 Q7
 - Quite easy* 2 Q7
 - Neither easy nor difficult* 3 Q7
 - Quite difficult* 4 Q6b
 - Very difficult* 5 Q6b
 - (DON'T READ OUT) *Don't remember* 6 Q7

Q6b. What did you find difficult to understand?

.....

ASK ALL

Q7. Before they gave you advice, did they ask you any questions on the telephone about your home, its construction, insulation, heating system or controls? (RECORD EVERYTHING THEY ASKED ABOUT)

.....
.....
.....

ASK ALL

Q8a. And before they gave you advice, did they ask you any questions on the telephone about your circumstances – whether you or anyone else in your household was over 60, receiving any benefits, on a low income or disabled in any way?

.....
.....

IF SUCH QUESTIONS ASKED: Q8b Did the adviser explain why they needed to ask those questions? What reason did they give?

.....
.....

ASK ALL

Q9a. Did the Energy Efficiency Helpline send you any printed advice, information or leaflets?

- Yes 1 Q9b
- No 2 Q10
- Said they would, but didn't 3 Q10
- Don't remember 4 Q10

Q9b. And how soon did that printed advice, information or leaflets arrive?

- Within 1 week 1
- Over 1, but less than 2 weeks 2
- Over 2 weeks to 3 weeks 3
- Over 3 weeks later 4
- Don't know 5

Q9b What printed advice, information or leaflets did they send you? (PROBE & LIST ALL) ASK FOR EACH: And did you read that? Could you understand it?
SENT? READ? UNDERSTOOD?

.....
.....
.....
.....

ASK ALL

Q10a. Did they send you a questionnaire to complete about your home, its insulation, heating and heating controls?

- Yes* 1 Q10b
- No* 2 Q11
- Don't remember* 3 Q11

Q10b. And did you complete and return the questionnaire they sent you?

- Yes* 1 Q10c
- No* 2 Q10c
- Don't remember* 3 Q11

Q10c. Was there any particular reason why you did (or didn't) complete and return the questionnaire?

.....
.....

Q11a. Did the Energy Efficiency Helpline send you any written recommendations about energy saving measures which you should install in your home?

- Yes* 1 Q11b & c
- No* 2 Q12a
- Don't remember* 3 Q12a

Q11b. What energy saving measures did they advise in their written recommendations? (LIST ALL)

.....
.....
.....

Q11c. How easy or difficult was it to understand the written recommendations?

- Very easy* 1 Q12a
- Quite easy* 2 Q12a
- Neither easy nor difficult* 3 Q12a
- Quite difficult* 4 Q11d
- Very difficult* 5 Q11d
- (DON'T READ OUT) *Don't remember* 6 Q12a

Q11d. What did you find difficult to understand?

.....
.....

ASK ALL

Q12a. And did the Energy Efficiency Helpline send you an application form (or any printed information) for any Grants or subsidised or free energy saving measures which you might qualify for?

- Yes – sent Application Form* 1 Q12 b & c
- Yes – sent Information on Grants etc* 2 Q12 b & c
- No – sent neither* 2 Q13
- Don't remember* 3 Q13

Q12b. And which energy saving measures did they suggest you might get a grant or subsidy for? (ASK FOR EACH: And was that a Grant or Subsidy? Do you recall the name of that scheme?)

.....
.....
.....

Q12c. And have you already applied for any of these grants or subsidised energy saving measures? IF "Yes": Which?

.....
.....

ASK Q13/Q14 IF ADVISED TO INSTALL ENERGY SAVING MEASURES (Q5/Q11a)

Q13. And of all the energy saving measures which they advised you to install in your home, have you already installed any of them? IF "Yes": Which?

.....
.....

Q14. Are you planning to install any of them in the future? IF "Yes": Which?

.....
.....

IF NO ENERGY SAVING MEASURES INSTALLED/PLANNED, NOR GRANTS APPLIED FOR, ASK Q15:

Q15. Why is it that you haven't installed, and don't plan to, any of the energy saving measures which you were advised to?

.....
.....

ASK ALL

Q16a. Now I'd like to ask you about any advice the (company) Energy Efficiency Helpline gave about ways to save energy by changing your behaviour. Firstly, did they give you any advice about how to save energy by controlling your heating and hot water more carefully?

- Yes* 1 Q16b
- No* 2
- Don't know* 3

Q16b. And are you following any of that advice now? IF "Yes": In what ways?

.....
.....

Q17a. Did they give you any advice about saving energy by using your cooker, kettle, refrigerator, freezer, or other appliances more carefully?

- Yes* 1 Q17b
- No* 2
- Don't know* 3

Q17b. And are you following any of that advice now? IF "Yes": In what ways?

.....

.....

Q18a. Did they give you any advice on how to save energy by controlling your lighting more carefully or by using low energy bulbs?

- Yes* 1 Q18b
- No* 2
- Don't know* 3

Q18b. And are you following any of that advice now? IF "Yes": In what ways? IF "No": Why not?

.....

.....

Q19a. Did they give you any other sorts of advice? (e.g. on tariffs or condensation control) IF "Yes": What advice did they give?

.....

.....

Q19b. Are you following any of that advice now? IF "Yes":How? IF "No":Why not?

.....

.....

ASK ALL NOT FOLLOWING ANY BEHAVIOURAL ADVICE

Q20. Why aren't you following any of the advice they gave you on how to save energy by being more careful with heating, hot water, cooking, appliances or lights?

.....

.....

ASK ALL

Q21a. Now, taking everything into account, how useful do you feel all the advice you have received from.... (company) has been to you? Has it been..... (READ OUT)

- Very useful* 1
- Quite useful* 2
- Not very useful* 3
- Not at all useful* 4
- (DO NOT READ OUT) *Did not receive any advice* 5
- Don't know* 6

Q21b. Why do you say that?

.....
.....

Q22. Was there any help or advice you hoped to get from..... (company) that you did not get? IF "Yes": What was that?

.....
.....

Q23. From your experience of getting energy saving advice from..... (company), do you think you would yourself contact them again for help if you needed it?

- Yes* 1
- No* 2
- Don't know* 3

Q24a. And would you recommend others to contact this company for advice like this, or not?

- Yes – would recommend them* 1
- No – would not recommend them* 2 Q24b
- Don't know* 3

Q24b. Why is that?

.....

Q25. Have you noticed any benefits yet from following any of the energy saving advice you were given? IF "Yes": What benefits have you noticed? PROBE: Any others?

.....
.....

CLASSIFICATION DATA

Finally may I ask you a few questions about your home and household, to help us ensure we have interviewed a good cross section of people on this project?

Q26. What is you main form of heating?

- Gas central heating* 1
- Oil central heating* 2
- Electric Storage heaters* 3
- Electric fires/fan heaters* 4
- Gas fires* 5
- Other.....* 6
- None* 7

Q27. Do you own or rent your home?

- Own/or buying on mortgage* 1
- Rent* 2
- Other.....* 3

Q28. What age are you?

OFGEM TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS – QUOTAS & RESPONSE ANALYSIS

Company	Sample issued	Quota	Inter views	No recall/ made no enquiry	No reply	Number unobtainable/ Wrong No./ Ansaphone	Ineligible- business/ employee etc	Refused/ abandoned	No English	Enquirer unavailable	Moved	Other enquiry- not energy efficiency	TOTAL CALLS	Ints as % of Calls
Scottish Power/ Manweb	500	10	10	15	13	7	0	2	0	5	0	0	52	19
TXU Eastern	160	6	6	0	0	14	4	0	0	0	2	5	31	19
TXU Norweb	120	6	6	3	6	7	1	0	0	0	2	1	26	23
Scottish H/ Southern/ SWALEC	198	15	14	4	9	6	0	7	0	3	1	2	46	30
PowerGen	81	10	8	6	2	8	1	7	0	2	0	10	44	18
London	80	8	8	4	13	2	5	2	0	2	1	1	38	21
SWEB	242	8	8	8	9	2	1	2	0	4	0	0	34	24
Npower	289	10	10	1	12	11	1	8	2	3	1	1	50	20
Northern	150	10	11	0	0	3	1	4	0	1	0	0	20	55
SEEBBOARD	50	12	11	3	8	10	1	1	0	2	0	3	39	28
British Gas	230	20	21	0	9	25	0	11	0	6	0	1	73	29
TOTALS	2100	115	113	44	81	95	15	44	2	28	7	24	453	25

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We hope that this report opens the reader's eyes to the ways in which energy efficiency advice is already good and effective, but also to the ways in which can still be immensely improved, and so become a real force in the drive to help consumers use fuel more efficiently and end Fuel Poverty.

Robin Sadler and Gill Hammersley
NEW PERSPECTIVES
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