

Priority Service Research Project

A report on services to vulnerable customers

December 2003

Summary

This document sets out the findings of research commissioned by Ofgem into services provided by licensed companies under the Priority Service Register.

Research scope

Domestic electricity and gas suppliers have licence obligations to offer special services to customers who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick, which are available to these customers on their supplier's Priority Service Registers (PSR). These services include password schemes, repositioning of meters, redirecting bills to third parties, quarterly meter readings, provision of special controls and adapters, and gas safety checks. Electricity distribution network operators (DNOs) have licence obligations concerning vulnerable customers affected by supply interruptions. Gas transporters must provide adequate cooking and heating facilities to customers who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick where their gas supply has been disconnected for safety reasons. Further, gas transporters, DNOs, and gas and electricity suppliers must provide appropriate communication services for blind or partially sighted or deaf or hard of hearing customers.

Ofgem set out to investigate the quality of services provided under these obligations and the views of customers affected. Accent Marketing and Research conducted a mystery shopping exercise to test gas and electricity suppliers' call centres. MORI conducted focus groups and awareness research and interviewed customers who had received gas safety checks.

Research findings

The mystery shopping results show that awareness of the PSR and the types of customer who might be eligible for it amongst suppliers' frontline staff is variable and often not high. Improvements need to be made to the training of frontline staff so that they are better able to recognise and refer eligible customers. Improvements could also be made in the provision of follow up literature. Scottish Power and British Gas were the best performers amongst the six major energy suppliers tested.

MORI's awareness research shows that 76 per cent of eligible customers had not heard of the PSR. Only 53 per cent of eligible customers recognised one or more services that suppliers provide under the PSR, including the free gas safety checks. In the focus groups, it was established that customers valued the services provided under the PSR.

Additional services highlighted as being of potential value included special tariffs, appointments for meter readings, and bills with simpler layouts.

MORI's research into the gas safety check found a high level of satisfaction among customers who had received the check. One issue was in relation to a few customers whose equipment had failed the check and who would have benefited from more follow up support. Research on DNOs and Transco, which largely comprised a data collection exercise by Ofgem, found few issues about the provision of these companies' services. There was, however, evidence of a lack of consistency in the mechanism for referring eligible customers from suppliers to DNO's registers.

Recommendations and next steps

There is considerable scope for improvement if eligible customers are to receive the full level of service to which they are entitled. Suppliers need to do more to publicise the PSR and its benefits. They should consider the means through which they communicate with eligible customers and consider working with trusted agencies and intermediaries. Ofgem will carry out further awareness research in 12 months time to establish whether a greater proportion of eligible customers are aware of the PSR and the services available to them.

Suppliers should review the training given to frontline staff to ensure they are better able to recognise and refer eligible customers. Suppliers also need to do more to promote the free gas safety check, which many customers are unaware that they are entitled to, and put in place arrangements for ensuring follow up for customers who have failed the check. Ofgem will provide guidelines to suppliers and DNOs regarding the referral of customers to the DNO to improve the quality of their registers. Ofgem is challenging the energy companies to review their performance in providing these services in the light of this research, and to publicise by the 20 February 2004 how they will respond to these recommendations. Comments on this research would also be welcomed from other interested parties.

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1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1. In its Corporate Strategy 2003 - 2006, Ofgem undertook to “[review] the effectiveness of companies’ service to Priority Service Register (PSR) customers”.¹ In its Social Action Plan Annual Review 2003, Ofgem expanded on this undertaking, committing itself to “[research] the help given to customers who are eligible for priority services, to assess the quality of these services and whether these meet customers’ needs”.² This document outlines the findings of the research that Ofgem has undertaken and sets out work for Ofgem and others to take forward.
- 1.2. At the earliest stage of the review Ofgem held meetings in London and Glasgow to consult major consumer groups and charities, including energywatch, Citizen’s Advice, Age Concern and RNIB. These agencies all expressed the view that services provided to customers under the PSR were very valuable and their advice was extremely helpful in the process of the review. A number of their suggestions and recommendations are included in Appendix 1.

Priority Service Register

- 1.3. Each domestic electricity and gas supplier and electricity distribution network operator (DNO) has licence obligations to maintain a register and to offer special help to customers who are of pensionable age, disabled (including customers who are blind or partially sighted, or deaf or hard of hearing) or chronically sick. Gas transporters are not obliged to maintain a register, but must also provide certain services to customers who are of pensionable age, disabled (including those who are blind or partially sighted, or deaf or hearing impaired) or chronically sick.
- 1.4. Services suppliers must provide free of charge include password schemes, the repositioning of meters, appropriate communication facilities, redirecting of bills to third parties, quarterly meter readings and the provision of special controls

¹ p.16 Ofgem Corporate Strategy 2003 – 2006, March 2003

and adapters for appliances and meters.³ Gas suppliers must also provide on request a free gas safety check for customers where all adult members of the household are either of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick. DNOs must provide advance notice of planned supply interruptions to customers who rely on electricity for medical reasons by virtue of being of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick, and provide appropriate advice and information to customers on their registers in the event of a supply interruption. Gas transporters must provide adequate cooking and heating facilities to customers who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick where their gas supply has been disconnected for safety reasons. Both gas transporters and DNOs must provide appropriate communication services for blind or partially sighted or deaf or hard of hearing customers.

- 1.5. As of 30 September 2003, there were 658,740 gas customers and 627,690 electricity customers on suppliers' PSRs. Of these, 99.9% were registered with brands operating under the six major supply groups, namely British Gas, Innogy, EDF Energy, Powergen, Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy. The research undertaken has therefore concentrated on these six supply groups, although the obligations extend to all licensed domestic suppliers.
- 1.6. Research regarding the obligations on DNOs focussed on the eight companies responsible for the 14 distribution areas in Great Britain. As of 30 June 2003, DNOs collectively held 199,195 customers on their registers. These companies are Scottish and Southern Energy (S&S), Scottish Power Distribution, EDF Energy, Western Power Distribution (WPD), Northern Electric Distribution Ltd (NEDL) which incorporates Yorkshire Electricity Distribution Ltd, East Midlands Electricity, Aquila Power Networks and United Utilities.
- 1.7. Research regarding the obligations of gas transporters focussed on National Grid Transco (Transco), which provides emergency services to virtually all gas customers in Great Britain. The majority of other transporters contract out their obligations to Transco, and so are not included in this report. Although Transco

² p.30 Social Action Plan Annual Review 2003, March 2003

³ Gas and electricity suppliers must provide communication services to meet the requirements of customers who are blind or partially sighted or deaf or hard of hearing under SLC 38. Although these services are not strictly required under the PSR (which derives from SLC 37), in practice they are delivered by suppliers as part of their PSR services. In this report these services are therefore treated as services provided under the PSR, which reflects current practice rather than the precise legal distinction.

is not obliged to keep a register of its own, it holds details of all the customers on gas suppliers' registers. As of 1 November 2003, it held the details of 735,439 customers who had special requirements.

Aims and method

- 1.8. The aims of the review are two-fold. The first is to establish the level of service licensees provide with respect to their licence obligations to elderly, disabled or chronically sick customers. The second is to establish how appropriate these obligations are with respect to the needs of such customers.
- 1.9. The research project was subdivided into four main work streams as follows:
 - ◆ a mystery shopping exercise to test gas and electricity suppliers' call centres;
 - ◆ a focus group exercise to establish customers' views of services offered by suppliers;
 - ◆ a review of the free gas safety check provided by gas suppliers; and
 - ◆ a review of services provided by DNOs and gas transporters.
- 1.10. Ofgem decided that three of the work streams would require an element of market research and invited companies on its market research framework panel to tender for the work. It awarded the contract to carry out the mystery shopping exercise to Accent Marketing and Research (Accent) (covered in Chapter 2) and awarded a contract to MORI to carry out customer focus groups (covered in Chapter 3) and to interview customers who had received free gas safety checks (covered in Chapter 4). MORI also tested awareness amongst eligible customers of the Priority Service Register and the services available under it as part of its General Public Omnibus survey. The work on services provided by DNOs and gas transporters (covered in Chapter 5) was carried out by Ofgem.

Main results

- 1.11. Overall, the research showed that improvements are required in several areas. The mystery shopping exercise revealed a worrying lack of knowledge among call centre staff of the services available to customers under the PSR. The speed

of the provision of follow-up information is something which suppliers also need to consider. Of particular concern is the lack of awareness amongst qualifying customers, with three out of four people in the MORI General Public Omnibus survey who would be eligible for inclusion on the PSR being unaware of its existence, and only 53% of eligible customers recognising one or more services available to them from gas and electricity suppliers from a list presented to them.

Mystery shopping

- 1.12. The results of the mystery shopping survey, set out in full in Chapter 2, showed that Scottish Power performed best and EDF Energy least well in the survey. The standard overall was variable. Ofgem would like to see a general improvement in the standard of service provided to customers who are elderly, disabled or chronically sick across all suppliers. In particular, it would like to see greater awareness amongst frontline staff of such customers' possible needs and of the services the supplier can offer to them.

Focus groups

- 1.13. The focus group work undertaken by MORI revealed that the majority of participants were unaware of the PSR and the services available under it. This was in line with the findings of MORI's General Public Omnibus survey that 76% of people potentially eligible to be included on the PSR were unaware of its existence⁴. However, when told about the PSR, most participants in the focus groups (all potentially eligible for inclusion) felt that the services available were a good idea and appropriate to their needs. While none were deemed inappropriate, some additional services such as special payment schemes, appointments for meter readings, the provision of carbon monoxide alarms and clearer bill layouts were proposed.

Free gas safety check

- 1.14. MORI undertook a survey of customers who had received free gas safety checks. Overwhelmingly, customers found the safety checks a positive and useful

⁴ MORI interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,053 people aged 15+ across Great Britain, of whom 768 were aged 65+ or had one or more disabled people in the household. All interviews were conducted face-to-face between 6-10 November 2003.

service and most were very satisfied, with only 2% of customers dissatisfied. There were reassuringly few problems found by the inspectors during the checks, with most customers experiencing no problems at all and only a small minority having any appliances condemned. However, amongst the cases where there were problems, there was seldom support offered by the supplier. This is one area where improvements could be made.

Distributors and transporters

- 1.15. Ofgem wrote to all DNOs, suppliers and Transco to establish whether the transfer of information about customers with particular needs relating to the PSR was adequate and whether there were any particular difficulties. It also asked DNOs and Transco how they carried out their obligations to customers with special requirements. While overall systems appeared to work adequately, some issues were identified, particularly about data transfer and the need for clarity regarding the separate obligations of suppliers and DNOs. DNOs hold details of roughly one third of the customers on suppliers' PSRs, largely owing to the different obligations applicable to them. However, Ofgem recognises that further work may be required in this area to ensure that only appropriate and accurate information is transmitted and that this is kept up to date. There were also some examples of good practice amongst DNOs and Transco, with some going beyond their licence obligations to provide a service to registered and other vulnerable customers.

Conclusion

- 1.16. Chapters 2 to 5 of this document set out in detail the results of the research undertaken under each work stream. The majority of text in chapter 2 is provided by Accent and in chapters 3 and 4 by MORI. Each chapter includes an introduction and conclusion by Ofgem. Full copies of the reports by Accent and MORI are available on the internet at www.ofgem.gov.uk. Ofgem sets out its conclusions and outlines its suggestions for further work in chapter 6. We are proposing to hold a seminar in January to discuss issues arising from the report.
- 1.17. Ofgem welcomes responses to this document. Responses should be sent to graham.knowles@ofgem.gov.uk and will be published on the Ofgem website. Any confidential material should be clearly marked as such and will not be

published. Responses should be sent via e-mail. The deadline is 20 February 2004. After considering the responses, Ofgem will provide a summary and outline further progress in its Social Action Plan Annual Review 2004, due to be published in March 2004.

2. Mystery Shopping

Introduction

- 2.1. Ofgem commissioned Accent Research to undertake some mystery shopping to establish how suppliers handle calls from customers. An edited version of Accent's report is set out between paragraphs 2.2 to 2.59 below. A full version of the report is available on the Ofgem website at www.ofgem.gov.uk. An Ofgem summary follows in paragraph 2.60.

Accent Report

Background

- 2.2. Gas and electricity suppliers have certain obligations under their licence to provide special services free of charge to qualifying customers who are of pensionable age, disabled, chronically sick, blind, partially sighted, deaf or hearing impaired. These services are available to domestic customers who are registered on the Priority Service Register (PSR). Ofgem commissioned Accent in association with Grass Roots Group (GRG) to undertake mystery shopping research involving customers who would qualify to register in order to test the performance of the PSR.
- 2.3. The research was conducted with customers of the following six main suppliers: British Gas, Scottish Power, Scottish and Southern, Innogy, EDF Energy, and Powergen.

Objectives

- 2.4. The specific objectives of the research were:
- ◆ to test whether the supplier recognises the customer as being appropriate for inclusion on PSR and offers to register the customer/refer the customer to a specialist team.

- ◆ to establish whether the supplier is willing to send literature on the PSR to enable customers to specify their special requirements and services sought.
- ◆ to identify if the supplier offers/is aware of registered services including talking/large print/Braille bills, third party/re-directed bills, password schemes, and quarterly reads
- ◆ to establish whether the supplier will, on request, agree to carry out meter changes or moves free of charge, provide appropriate controls and adapters for appliances free of charge, and (for gas suppliers only) carry out a free gas safety check.
- ◆ to establish, for deaf customers only, whether the supplier can communicate by textphone/minicom
- ◆ to record whether suppliers make a point of offering customers any energy efficiency advice or help.

Method

2.5. The findings are based on a total of 90 mystery shops undertaken by a team of surveyors from GRG's panel of people with disabilities or of pensionable age. All the 'mystery shops' were undertaken by telephone or textphone/Talktype. Full details of the methodology are provided in Appendix 2. The aim was for 15 calls to be made to each of the six main suppliers, but due to the need to recruit panellists with specific disabilities to research each supplier, and the fact that some of the panellists were confused as to which company supplies their gas and electricity, there was a little variation in the number of calls achieved. The number of questionnaires completed by supplier was as follows:

British Gas	16
Scottish Power	16
Scottish & Southern	15
Innogy	14
EDF Energy	15
Powergen	14

2.6. Each panellist was provided with a specific scenario to test, such as asking for a gas safety check or a request for bills to be provided in an alternative format. A

total of eight different scenarios were tested so that different aspects of the PSR could be examined. This means that for any one scenario there are only a few questionnaires. Consequently, because the base numbers are low, some of the analysis presented here should be treated qualitatively (ie as an indication of trends and opinion rather than as a precise measure). Where the results are based on all respondents, such as the overall rating of the suppliers' performance, there is a sufficient base to interpret the results quantitatively. Normal practice is to treat with caution any results where the base number is lower than 30.

- 2.7. Many of the questions use rating scales and these are based on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the lowest end of the scale and 1 is the highest. The lower the score the more positive the opinion is.

Shopper profile

- 2.8. The profile of the panellists who undertook the mystery shops was as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. The survey team included a range of people in different age groups and with varying disabilities. Most considered that they had more than one disability, for example, a fifth of those who are blind or partially sighted also had mobility impairment. The majority (80%) of the team were resident in England but 10% lived in Scotland and 10% in Wales. This broadly reflects the proportional split of the population of Great Britain.

Table 1: Age and gender

Base: all 90	%
Gender	
Male	56
Female	44
Age group	
18-25 years	2
26-35 years	4
36-45 years	18
46-55 years	39
56-65 years	23
66-75 years	10
76-85 years	2
86 years and over	1

Table 2: Disability

Base: all 90	%
Mobility impaired	52
Dexterity impaired	18
Wheelchair user	31
Blind or partially sighted	33
Deaf or hard of hearing	19
Chronically ill	11
Elderly	7

- 2.9. Over two thirds (70%) live in households with one other person (42%) or alone (28%) and 30% live with two or more other people.

Main findings and areas to consider

- 2.10. Overall Scottish Power's performance was rated the best and EDF Energy's the poorest.
- 2.11. A number of suppliers failed to recognise the customer as being appropriate for inclusion on PSR. In a number of cases the panellist had to prompt mention of the PSR as this was not volunteered by the call handler. In only one in four calls where the panellist was testing registration on the PSR did the company offer to register them.
- 2.12. There was a high level of willingness to send information about the PSR but a lack of awareness by call handlers as to what services were actually available. Where information was offered, however, it was slow to arrive in the post and in most cases the panellists were unable to assess how useful the information was as it had not arrived during the fieldwork period. The work was completed before the postal strike so this was not an influence on the speed of sending out information.
- 2.13. Where requested, the suppliers were willing to arrange for follow up visits eg to read the meter or to carry out a gas safety check, but very few of these (five) were completed during the fieldwork period. Where the visit did take place the panellists were not wholly satisfied with the way it was conducted. For example, a password was not used because it had not been provided to the supplier representative. Instructions given during the visit varied by company. Scottish Power gave very clear or fairly clear instructions, but British Gas was not very clear.

- 2.14. Of the six people who conducted the scenario about controls and adapters, only one was actually offered equipment and this was by Scottish Power. There were criticisms that where the panellist was referred to a third party to enquire about controls and adapters the cost of the call was charged at a premium rate.
- 2.15. When testing the use of passwords, their use was offered in the majority of cases (15 out of 18) and in a third of the calls the company agreed a password during the contact phone call. British Gas and Scottish Power agreed a password on all calls testing this scenario but there was a mixed response from the other companies and there is, therefore, room for improvement on security issues for some companies.
- 2.16. Most companies were able to communicate by textphone/minicom. However, there was no reply from Innogy on more than one occasion. In all other cases the panellists thought the call using textphone was satisfactory.
- 2.17. Where specific scenarios were being tested, call handlers did not offer any additional information beyond the specific subject of the scenario, and in many cases the panellist had to prompt the call handler about the services covered by the PSR. Panellists' suggestions for improvements, therefore, centred on improving the knowledge of the call handlers about what services are available and in understanding the needs of elderly and disabled customers.
- 2.18. The call handlers were generally considered to be polite and helpful but some were thought to be abrupt and could have taken more time to listen to the panellists' needs and to explain what services were available.
- 2.19. Providing follow-up information was another area where panellists considered there was room for improvement. The contact call may have been helpful, informative and handled well but if the follow up information did not arrive soon after the call this reflected badly on the supplier.

General customer service

- 2.20. The panellists rated the performance of the suppliers during the mystery shopping contact calls on a number of key aspects of the call and an overall ranking of the suppliers was calculated using a summary of the mean scores for seven key aspects of the call, as shown in Table 3. This shows that all suppliers

rated fairly well with mean scores of less than three (a positive rather than neutral or negative score). Scottish Power was rated the best and EDF Energy the lowest.

Table 3: Overall ranking

	Base	Rank	Overall rating mean score*
Scottish Power	16	1	1.69
British Gas	16	2	2.00
Powergen	14	3	2.15
Scottish and Southern	15	4	2.27
Innogy	14	5	2.36
EDF Energy	15	6	2.40
All	90		2.13

* mean score based on a scale from very positive (1) to very negative (5)

2.21. A summary of the ratings on the seven key aspects of the call is provided in Table 4. The aspect that was rated highest was the politeness of the call handler who dealt with the initial enquiry (mean score 1.65) and the worst was knowledge of the PSR (mean score 2.53).

2.22. Scottish Power was rated particularly highly on the clarity of information provided during the call (mean score 1.40) and the politeness of the call handler (mean score 1.43). The area most in need of improvement was knowledge of the PSR. This is particularly true of EDF Energy (mean score 2.85) and Powergen (mean score 2.82).

Table 4: Summary of mean scores on key rating questions

	Base	Overall initial call handled	Polite	Helpful	Understand circumstances	Ease of understanding info	Clarity of Info.	Knowledge
British Gas	16	1.94	1.70	2.25	1.88	1.94	1.81	2.53
Scottish Power	16	2.06	1.43	2.06	1.47	1.60	1.40	1.79
Scottish and Southern	15	2.71	1.67	2.21	1.93	1.77	1.69	2.50
Innogy	14	2.79	2.00	2.57	2.50	1.71	2.07	2.77
EDF Energy	15	2.67	1.67	2.73	2.40	2.07	1.93	2.85
Powergen	14	2.62	1.75	2.46	1.92	1.54	1.46	2.82
All	90	2.44	1.65	2.38	2.01	1.78	1.73	2.53
Not stated		2	1	2	3	4	4	5

* mean score based on a scale from very satisfied/polite/helpful etc (1) to not at all satisfied/polite/helpful etc (5)

2.23. In some cases the panellist was unable to provide a rating on a certain aspect of the call. The reasons for this included:

- ◆ not getting an answer from the company after repeated attempts (Powergen)
- ◆ PSR not mentioned by the call handler so unable to assess the call handler's knowledge of it (Scottish and Southern, Scottish Power, EDF Energy and Powergen)

Initial contact

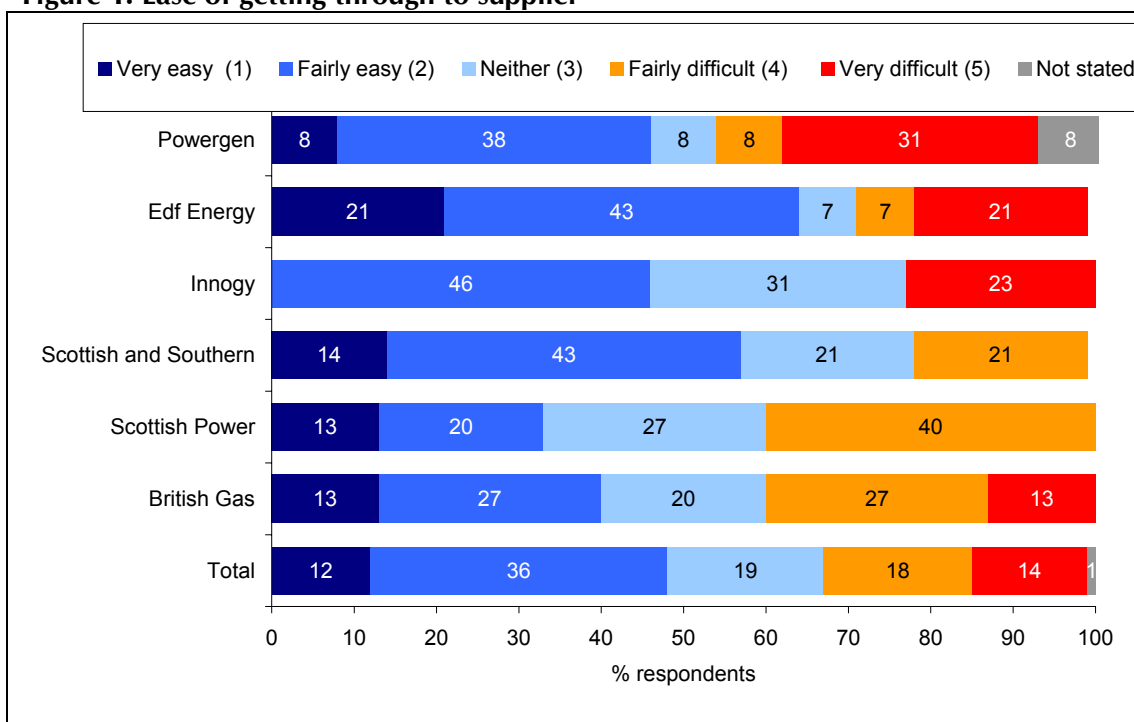
2.24. The calls were spread over different days and times of day in order to avoid clustering the calls on days and at times likely to be particularly busy (eg Monday mornings) or particularly quiet (eg midweek afternoons):

Monday	19%
Tuesday	17%
Wednesday	20%
Thursday	16%
Friday	28%
Saturday	1%

Before 10am	22%
10am-2pm	34%
2pm-5pm	36%
After 5pm	8%

2.25. Some of the panellists experienced difficulty in getting through to the supplier although generally they found it fairly easy as shown in Figure 1. Most problems were experienced with Powergen and EDF Energy with 31% and 21% respectively of their customers saying it was very difficult getting through to them. One Powergen customer tried on several occasions but was unsuccessful.

Figure 1: Ease of getting through to supplier



Base: all panellists except those using textphone (84)

2.26. There were a number of criticisms of the automated systems used by most companies with many saying they found this difficult to navigate through and would prefer to speak directly to a person rather than select the service they required from the automated system. The initial contact calls, therefore, were often slow and this caused frustration. Those making contact by textphone also had problems with the service either not being available or companies being slow to respond.

Scenarios

2.27. Eight scenarios were tested to examine the performance of the suppliers in dealing with enquiries about different aspects of the PSR. Some of the scenarios related to a specific disability; for example, the request to provide bills in alternative format was only tested by those who are blind or partially sighted and the use of textphone was only tested by the deaf or hard of hearing.

2.28. The different scenarios were as follows:

- ◆ A: request for help with reading the meter eg because the customer is partially sighted or has a physical disability and cannot get to the meter to read it

- ◆ B: request for information about registration on the PSR
- ◆ C: request for information about security ie concerns about bogus callers to test if the use of passwords is offered
- ◆ D: request for free gas safety check
- ◆ E: request for information about special controls and adapters
- ◆ F: request for bills to be sent to a third party
- ◆ G: request for bills to be sent in an alternative format such as large print/ Braille/talking bills
- ◆ H: use of textphone number

2.29. An example of the questionnaire used for one of the scenarios is provided in Appendix 3.

2.30. Each scenario was tested at least once with each supplier. Overall, the most frequently tested scenario was a request for help reading the meter which was tested by 25 panellists, 18 tested security (eg the use of passwords) and 16 tested the procedure for registering on the PSR. All other scenarios were tested by six or seven panellists as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Scenarios tested by supplier

	A Meter Read- ing	B Register on PSR	C Secu- rity	D Gas safety check	E Cont- rols & adap- ters	F Bills to third party	G Bills in alter- native format	H Text- phone
British Gas	5	3	3	1	1	1	1	1
Scottish Power	4	4	3	1	1	1	1	1
Scottish & Southern	5	2	3	1	1	1	1	1
Innogy	2	3	3	1	1	1	2	1
EDF Energy	4	3	3	1	1	1	1	1
Powergen	5	1	3	1	1	1	1	1
Base: all 90	25	16	18	6	6	6	7	6

Help from the supplier (scenario A)

2.31. Those who enquired about help to read the meter (Scenario A, 25 people) were asked what the call handler suggested. The majority were offered help from the

supplier but three people were told to ask a friend/member of the family or a neighbour to help. Where offered, the help from the company varied.

2.32. The three companies that did not offer help were:

- ◆ Scottish and Southern
- ◆ Innogy
- ◆ Powergen

2.33. Twelve people who conducted Scenario A said that the PSR was mentioned but four said they had to prompt the call handler to discuss the PSR (EDF Energy – 2, Scottish and Southern and Scottish Power). The remaining five who were offered help from the company said the PSR was not mentioned. Among those where the PSR was mentioned the most likely course of action was to refer the panellist to another number or suggest that information would be sent in the post. However, two people were offered help to register and both of these were customers of Scottish and Southern.

2.34. Each of the companies offered to register one or more of the callers but British Gas and Innogy were the most helpful with this, the offer being made on at least 50% of the calls where this issue was tested.

Information and services (scenario B)

2.35. The amount of information requested from customers during enquires or registration on the PSR varied according to company. While most companies that offered help or information regarding the PSR asked for address details, not all asked about the customer's circumstances or what services were required, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Information requested by company

	Total %	British Gas %	Scottish Power %	Scottish and Southern %	Innogy %	EDF Energy %	Powergen %
Name and address	68	58	57	55	71	83	100
Details of circumstances	48	58	50	55	14	58	33
What service required	39	50	50	45	29	17	33
Other	18	25	14	27	14	17	-
Not Stated	5	-	14	9	-	-	-
Base: all offered help from company	62	12	14	11	7	12	6

2.36. A range of services and information was offered by the companies and to a certain extent what was offered depended on the scenario being tested. However, most often offered was information to be sent in the post (66%) and the use of a security password was also offered to a high proportion of the panellists (42%). The range of information and services offered is summarised in Table 7 showing what was offered according to the scenario tested, and shown by supplier in Table 8. It can be seen that in many cases the call handler offered advice, services and information in addition to the specific request made by the panellist as part of the scenario being tested.

Table 7: Information and services offered by scenario tested

	Total	A - Meter Reading	B - Register on PSR	C - Security	D - Gas safety check	E - Controls & adapters	F - Bills to third party	G - Bills in alternative format
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Information in the post	66	69	69	71	33	83	100	50
Meter reading	32	63	25		17	33	50	17
Energy efficiency advice	15	6	44		17			
Special format bill	34	31	6	43	17	50	50	100
Gas safety check	27	19	31	14	50	33	100	
Controls and adapters	20	6	31	14		50	50	17
Password	42	31	50	86	17	50	100	
Other	15	13	25		17	17		17
Not Stated	3		6		17			
Base: all offered information/ services	59	16	16	7	6	6	2	6

Table 8: Information and services offered

	Total %	British Gas %	Scottish Power %	Scottish & Southern %	Innogy %	EDF Energy %	Powergen %
Information in the post	66	50	85	55	71	80	50
Meter reading	32	17	38	27	43	40	33
Energy efficiency advice	15	25	8	9	29	10	17
Special format bill	34	50	31	27	29	20	50
Gas safety check	27	42	23	18	43	20	17
Controls and adapters	20	25	15	18	14	20	33
Password	42	58	54	27	43	30	33
Other	15	8	15	27	29		17
Not Stated	3	-	-	9	-	10	-
Base: all offered information/services	59	12	13	11	7	10	6

2.37. Among the other advice or information offered were:

- ◆ Leaflets concerning all services to help customers' particular needs
- ◆ Special needs service - contact telephone numbers, booklet and other useful information
- ◆ Information pack and free telephone number
- ◆ Information on cookers/information about how much electricity is being used

2.38. Some of the scenarios required the panellist to specifically request information on the PSR or to request a particular service and 'information' and 'meter reading' were the most frequently requested. Table 9 sets out the information and services requested.

Table 9: Information and services requested

	Total %	British Gas %	Scottish Power %	Scottish & Southern %	Innogy %	EDF Energy %	Powergen %
Information in the post	65	43	86	40	67	86	50
Meter reading	32	29	29	40	-	43	50
Special format bill	13	29	14	20	-	-	-
Gas safety check	10	29	14	-	-	-	-
Controls and adapters	3	-	-	-	-	14	-
Password	3	-	14	-	-	-	-
Other	19	14	14	40	33	-	50
Base: all requesting information/services	31	7	7	5	3	7	2

Passwords (scenario C)

2.39. Those testing the security issues (Scenario C, 18 people) were asked if the call operator mentioned the use of passwords and in the majority of cases (15 out of 18) they did. In a third of the calls the company agreed a password during the phone call. British Gas and Scottish Power agreed a password on all calls testing this scenario but there was a mixed response from the other companies. Innogy and Powergen were least likely to agree a password during the call (only one each out of three calls per company).

Free gas safety check (scenario D)

2.40. Scenario D (6 people) concerned enquiries about a free gas safety check. Two out of the six companies offered a free gas safety check. These were British Gas and Scottish and Southern and in both cases the panellists said they had taken up the offer.

2.41. Of the four panellists who were not offered a free check, one was referred by Scottish Power to contact EAGA for further advice, and one said Innogy insisted that they registered on the PSR before they would conduct the safety check. In the other two cases no further details were provided.

Controls and adapters (scenario E)

2.42. Of the six people who conducted Scenario E about controls and adapters, only one was actually offered equipment and this was by Scottish Power. Innogy offered a booklet of descriptions and suggested a visit (which was not arranged

during the call). British Gas did not offer any equipment but gave a number for technical information. They stated that they had more information on gas adaptations than electrical. Powergen did not offer anything. They gave an agency number for a firm called SCOOT - which was charged at 50p per minute. The panellist did not call SCOOT because they considered this would have been too expensive. Scottish and Southern only offered information about how much electricity was being used.

Bills to third party (scenario F)

- 2.43. All 6 panellists who conducted Scenario F felt their calls were handled very courteously or politely, although the panellist who called Innogy felt the call handler had not understood their query at all.
- 2.44. Two call handlers offered to place the panellists on the PSR. The call handler from Powergen said the panellist had to request this in writing, while Scottish Power placed the panellist on the PSR even though they had not requested this. All suppliers except Scottish Power offered the required service. British Gas wanted the request in writing, saying an application form would be sent in the post.

Bills in alternative format (scenario G)

- 2.45. Of the 7 panellists testing Scenario G, 5 were offered the required service without any prompting. The panellist calling British Gas was first put through to another department and the Powergen call handler had to consult a colleague. Most call handlers (6) were very courteous or polite while Powergen was considered neutral for this aspect.
- 2.46. The Scottish & Southern call handler did not offer information about the PSR but, in addition to alternative bill formats, they did offer bump on stickers and Braille tape for appliance controls (although these were then unfortunately out of stock). They also suggested that the bill could be sent to someone else.
- 2.47. One Innogy call handler offered to post PSR information in addition to information on alternative formats. They also recognised that the PSR pack was in conventional print and asked if there would be anyone who could help read it.

- 2.48. The panellist contacting Powergen reported that the call handler had not offered the required service until prompted, and provided minimal information during the conversation. In the panellist's opinion, the call handler lacked basic understanding as to how to respond to the call and what could be provided to assist.
- 2.49. Suggestions for improving customer service related to printing the covering letter and the leaflet detailing the service in either Braille or in large print. It was also suggested that information on alternative bill formats and the PSR information pack could be provided in plain text by email. A voice application for reading a meter was also suggested.

Textphone (scenario H)

- 2.50. In five out of six cases where textphone was being tested the panellist got through to the operator at the first attempt. There was no answer from Innogy on more than one attempt and the panellist did not consider this to be satisfactory. In all other cases the panellists thought the call using textphone was satisfactory.
- 2.51. All except those calling Scottish and Southern and Innogy (where no contact was made at all) were able to provide a meter reading as part of the Scenario test. When Innogy was contacted and asked why the textphone line was not in operation, the call handler explained that the lines were very, very busy and apologised for the inconvenience. She suggested that it would be better if the panellist tried the textphone line after 6pm.
- 2.52. The time taken to complete the textphone call took between 4 and 10 minutes, with Scottish Power and EDF Energy being the quickest (4 minutes), and Powergen the longest (10 minutes).

Registration on the PSR (scenarios C, D, F and G)

- 2.53. Those testing Scenarios C, D, F and G (37 people) were asked if the supplier offered to register them on the PSR. The response was poor with only a quarter saying the supplier did offer to register them. Those companies most likely to offer to register were Scottish Power (four out of six calls) and British Gas (two out of six calls). The least likely was Innogy (none out of seven calls) and of calls to Scottish and Southern and Powergen in only one out of six calls to each

company did they offer to register the customer on the PSR. There was little difference in this experience between calls made to the general enquiries number and the dedicated PSR number with only a quarter of those calling each type of number saying the supplier offered to register them.

Follow up visits and information

- 2.54. Some of the scenarios involved testing follow up action such as confirmation that the customer had been registered on the PSR, information sent in the post or a visit to read the meter or undertake a gas safety check. All except those who tested the textphone scenario were instructed to ask for information to be sent to them. Half the panellists were asked to request a follow-up visit. In many cases, however, the information had not arrived or it had not been possible to arrange the visit during the fieldwork period, so no assessment could be made.
- 2.55. Out of the 60 panellists who had requested information to be sent to them 21 had received it within 2 weeks of the request being made. Of the 14 who had arranged a follow-up visit only five visits had actually taken place during the fieldwork period, three from British Gas and two from Scottish Power. It should be stressed that these base numbers are very low and the following analysis should be treated with caution. Information requested included:
- ◆ Details of the PSR/services
 - ◆ Confirmation of registration
 - ◆ Confirmation of follow-up visit
- 2.56. Where information was provided this was generally felt to be helpful, with 11 people saying it was very helpful and 8 saying it was satisfactory. Only one person said the information was rather unhelpful. The information provided also matched expectations compared with the discussions during the contact call. Only one person said the information was not really what was expected and one said it was not at all what was expected.
- 2.57. Of the 14 people who had arranged a follow up visit 4 were offered the option of using a password and out of the five follow up calls one caller, from British Gas, used the password. All but one caller were on time for the appointment and

the one who was late (from British Gas) was only 10 minutes late. All except one caller (from Scottish Power) gave their name and the company name and all showed their identification although the one partially sighted panellist said the identification was not in Braille or large type.

- 2.58. The visits were brief taking no more than 10 minutes to complete. On three of the five visits the caller explained what they were doing during the visit but the clarity of instructions given on how to read the meter was varied. Scottish Power gave very clear or fairly clear instructions but British Gas were not very clear.
- 2.59. Although only five panellists were able to rate the performance of a follow up visit they were not particularly satisfied with how the visit was handled.

Ofgem Summary

- 2.60. There is room for improvement in the performance of all suppliers. The survey suggests that suppliers need to train their staff more thoroughly about the services available to customers under the PSR and in how to handle calls from eligible customers. The mystery shopping panel did not find the staff who handled their calls particularly knowledgeable and helpful in response to their enquiries, even though they were polite, understanding and clear in the explanations that they provided. Ofgem was concerned to see that in a number of cases, panellists were not offered services which they had requested. While the base numbers involved are too small to draw any firm conclusions about the performance of individual suppliers, suppliers should note that they are obliged to offer services to an eligible customer when they are requested. Ofgem was also concerned to note that information requested by customers had in many cases failed to arrive within two weeks of the request being made, and this is clearly an area in which suppliers can improve.

3. Focus Groups

Introduction

- 3.1. Ofgem commissioned MORI to undertake some qualitative research into the services required by elderly, disabled or chronically sick customers and whether the services provided by suppliers are adequate to meet those needs. An edited version of MORI's report is set out between paragraphs 3.2 to 3.16 below. A full version of the report is available on the Ofgem website at www.ofgem.gov.uk. An Ofgem summary follows in paragraph 3.17.

Objectives

- 3.2. The key objective of the qualitative research was to identify the particular needs of certain customers and how well they feel the current service meets these needs, including awareness and performance of the Priority Service Register.

Methodology

- 3.3. MORI conducted five mini-groups with elderly and disabled customers who are *not* on the Priority Service Register and six in-depth interviews with chronically sick customers who are *not* on the Priority Service Register. Six in-depth interviews were also conducted with customers who are on the Priority Service Register.
- 3.4. Fieldwork was spread across three locations: Edinburgh, Hinckley and London, between 17 September and 24 September 2003. Details of the qualitative research schedule can be found in Appendix 4.

Interpretation of the Data

- 3.5. Qualitative research involves an interactive process between the moderators carrying out the research and those being researched. It provides a way of probing the underlying attitudes of participants, and obtaining an understanding of the issues of importance. The real value of qualitative research is that it allows insight into attitudes, and the reasons for these, which could not be probed in as much depth with a structured questionnaire.

- 3.6. However, it must be remembered that qualitative research is designed to be illustrative rather than statistically representative. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that this deals with perceptions rather than facts, though these perceptions are facts to those that hold them.

Summary of Findings

- 3.7. Overall, people were satisfied with their gas and electricity suppliers. A side of the industry that was less well regarded was the process of switching suppliers. Many participants shared experiences of being put under pressure to switch from one supplier to another - although previous MORI research about switching suppliers suggests that these experiences are not limited to customers with the particular needs being considered in the focus groups. There was also scepticism about the motives of gas and electricity suppliers – participants believed that suppliers were only interested in money and profits. This extended to cynicism about the extent to which suppliers were really willing to help customers with the needs under consideration.

Overview

- ◆ Overall the services offered were felt to match customers' needs and those that had used them were happy with them.
- ◆ The key issue was communicating to customers what the PSR is and what services it offers, as most customers who were on the PSR had little detailed knowledge about it.
- ◆ People with particular needs and/or disabilities are used to having to fight for the services they need and feel that they have to constantly complain to get adequate service. Participants felt that this should not be the case, especially as not everyone within these groups is able to fight.
- ◆ Trust is important. Customers can be vulnerable and they need to know that the people they are dealing with are legitimate and reputable. Working in conjunction with groups they do trust, such as Age Concern, can give suppliers a better reputation among these customers.

Perceived Benefits and Concerns of the Priority Service Register

Benefits

- ◆ The main perceived benefit of the PSR was that it makes life easier for customers with particular needs. Those activities which they find hard to do are made accessible to them – which is essential.
- ◆ It was also felt to give customers peace of mind. Companies they deal with on a day to day basis will know they have particular needs and take this into consideration when contacting them.
- ◆ Not everyone who took part in the research felt they needed the services on offer currently but found it good to know they were there if they did need them.

Concerns

- ◆ No concerns about the scheme arose spontaneously, but when probed some respondents said they might have concerns about confidentiality – the idea that being on a database could lead to their details being passed on to other people.
- ◆ Other customers were worried it might mean an increase in people coming to the door trying to sell things to them.
- ◆ Some were concerned that they would be singled out as being vulnerable and therefore would be more at risk of bogus callers or people trying to rip them off.
- ◆ There was also cynicism about whether the scheme would work. Would companies be prepared to invest enough money in the scheme or would they be more concerned with their profits at the end of the day?

Views on Services Offered

3.8. Participants who were not on the PSR had a very low awareness of any special services available to elderly, disabled or chronically sick customers. As a result, rather than discussing experiences of using these services, during the groups various services were introduced to participants and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each were discussed. In this way, for many participants the groups acted as information sessions, to the appreciation of many who were keen to find out more about the services available. Overall, the services on offer were seen to meet their needs and were generally well received. Specifically,

- ◆ **Security passwords**, used to identify bona fide supplier representatives, were received positively, the benefits being the extra security they offered, especially for more vulnerable groups such as the blind or elderly. However, some participants worried that they might forget their password. Other people who had used passwords said that, in their experience, staff did not always remember to use them; and some were less than polite when the customer consequently refused to let them in.
- ◆ The option of **repositioning meters** was another popular service - as many participants' meters were in awkward positions. The most popular choice was to have meters moved outside. This was seen not only to provide better security for customers, as they would not have to let people into their homes, but was also deemed to be more convenient, as having the meter read was not reliant on the customer being in.
- ◆ **Prepayment meters** were popular among those who were already using them. Users liked being able to keep track of how much energy/money they were using. However, they were viewed as unsuitable for some groups with particular needs, in particular blind customers who were unable to read the dials.
- ◆ **Alternative format bills** were felt to be an essential provision, especially for blind and visually impaired customers. Different people preferred different formats - some audio-tapes, others Braille. It was important to them to have *the choice* - by suppliers providing as many options as possible. One criticism of paper bills was that the layout and

appearance was believed to be too fussy and complicated. Participants with visual impairments - especially those who used special equipment to read their bills - requested that bills be printed using a plain black and white font.

- ◆ **Redirecting bills** was another popular idea, although none of the participants were actually using this service. It was also thought that having a secondary contact - in case of unsuccessful communications with the customer - was a useful facility. In this way, if bills were not paid for some reason, more information could be sought before taking action such as cutting off the supply.
- ◆ Several participants had received **free gas safety checks** and were happy with the service provided. It gave them peace of mind about an energy source that many customers are afraid of or nervous about (blind customers in particular). Customers in council property said, however, that they did not require this service as their gas appliances were checked once a year by their local council.
- ◆ High levels of satisfaction with the checks were also illustrated in the quantitative research with 95% saying they were satisfied with the level of service provided. Many people believed that more **regular reading of meters** - perhaps once a quarter - was necessary, rather than relying on estimated bills which could be wrong.
- ◆ The ability to **prevent disconnection during the winter** was welcomed. In particular, many elderly participants said they were afraid of using too much energy during the winter because of the cost and therefore risked becoming ill due to poorly heated homes.
- ◆ **Minicom** is seen as the best way of communicating with suppliers among the deaf and hearing-impaired customers who took part in the research. However, among those who did want to use it, all said that their supplier did not offer it.
- ◆ **Information on energy efficiency** was viewed by participants as a useful provision, especially if it focussed on money saving advice. Some people mentioned they would like to have a list which detailed how

much energy different appliances use, so that they could have a better understanding of how much money they are spending.

- ◆ **Appliance controls**, although not used by any of the participants, were seen to be a helpful service addition for some customers.

Attitudes towards customer services

3.9. During the focus groups participants were given a speech bubble exercise to complete individually or in small groups. Each was given a piece of paper detailing a scenario that might require them to contact their gas or electricity supplier. They were asked to fill in the speech bubble to indicate how they feel their supplier would respond. They were also able to draw in the face of the person they were contacting.

3.10. The participants' attitudes towards customer services can be split into three broad headings: positive, sceptical and negative.

- ◆ Those who were positive felt that suppliers' customer service representatives were helpful, friendly and pleasant. The kind of words they used to describe customer service staff were: patient, sympathetic and polite.
- ◆ Those who were sceptical about the level of customer service provided by suppliers spoke of staff that were sales and money orientated. They saw them as corporate, impersonal, over confident, and patronising.
- ◆ Other negative comments relating to poor customer service included staff being uninterested, unhelpful, mechanical and rehearsed. Participants complained about being passed from one person to the next, being put on hold and did not like automated call centres.

3.11. In all of the focus groups views fitting into each of these categories were expressed.

Communication with customers with particular needs

3.12. One of the key issues to emerge from the focus groups was the need for better communication from gas and electricity suppliers to their customers with

particular needs. Customers were aware of the problems that exist in identifying who is eligible and in need of the special services available and they acknowledged that some of the onus is on them to let the suppliers know about their particular needs. However, a lot more could be done by suppliers to communicate what is available. What customers say they want is suppliers to communicate more actively the services they offer, in a variety of formats.

- 3.13. The preferred method of communication varies from customer to customer. Some would like to be able to ring up their suppliers and talk to someone over the telephone. Therefore it is important that companies have well trained staff at the end of the telephone who are readily available and able to deal with all the customers' queries and concerns. Others would prefer leaflets or pamphlets outlining the services available sent with their bill. However, some customers admit to throwing away this type of communication without reading it (and other research shows such behaviour is common). Elderly participants say they would prefer to speak to someone face-to-face. Ideally they would like to go to gas showrooms (which do not exist any more) but Citizens Advice Bureaux were also mentioned. Other customers suggested advertising on television or radio to raise awareness of the services offered.

Awareness of the Priority Service Register

- 3.14. Among those who are not on the PSR very few had heard of it, and those who had did not know what it was. When the details were explained, reactions were positive with most people happy with the name and keen to go on it themselves. Some felt the services should be made available to everyone.
- 3.15. Even PSR customers themselves had little awareness of what the PSR is, other than the specific services they use. Most were not aware how they had come to be on the PSR, while others said it was because they had asked for a specific service. Customers were very happy with the services they use, such as audio tape bills or gas safety checks. As far as they were aware, they had not received any information on what the PSR is or the range of services available.

Additional Services and Improvements

3.16. Participants were also asked if there were any other services that are needed or any improvements that could be made. A list of their suggestions is given below:

- ◆ **Discounts or special payment schemes.** The Staywarm scheme – whereby customers pay a fixed amount per month regardless of how much energy they use – was widely mentioned and used. Current customers were very satisfied, and many who had not heard of it expressed interest. The key perceived benefit was seen to be not having to worry about how much energy is used, so that customers know how much the bill will be.
- ◆ **Making appointments with customers before meter readings.** This would help make sure meter readings are at times convenient to customers and that they will be in, but also offers extra security; customers would not be as worried about letting people into their homes because they are expecting them.
- ◆ **Making the layout of bills simpler and plainer** to aid blind and visually impaired customers.
- ◆ **Supplying gas alarms.** One customer said she had bought an alarm that goes off when the gas is left on or there is a gas leak. She felt it would be a good idea to provide these to customers.
- ◆ Introducing a **Special Disability Customer Service Team** available to discuss the needs or queries of customers on the PSR.
- ◆ **Collecting payment from people's homes.** In the same way that local Councils can collect rent from residents' homes, it was suggested that customers who are housebound could have their gas or electricity payments collected from their homes (maybe linking up with the Council's collections).
- ◆ **Schemes to help customers buy equipment they need.** The example given was power showers. Customers felt that if they make the effort to

pay their bills on time, companies should offer some kind of loyalty scheme whereby they can pay for equipment over a certain period of time.

Ofgem Summary

- 3.17. Ofgem was pleased to see from MORI's research that participants in the focus groups felt that services offered by suppliers would be likely to meet their needs. It seems clear, both from the relatively small sample of customers in the focus groups and the far larger sample questioned in the General Public Omnibus survey, that messages about the PSR and the services available under it are not reaching customers and, worryingly perhaps, not even those who are on the PSR. The survey suggests that suppliers need to give more thought to how they communicate with customers, perhaps looking at a range of methods, including highlighting some of the services likely to be of interest to customers. Suppliers should take account of the fact that some eligible customers can have difficulties with automated telephone systems. Suppliers might also consider some of the suggestions put forward by customers for services they would like. Ofgem is not currently minded to make any addition to suppliers' obligations in this area, but encourages suppliers to do more to meet the needs of such customers.

4. Free Gas Safety checks

Introduction

- 4.1. Ofgem commissioned MORI to carry out some quantitative research into free gas safety checks. An edited version of MORI's report is set out from paragraphs 4.2 to 4.22 below. A full version of the report is available on the Ofgem website, www.ofgem.gov.uk. An Ofgem summary follows in paragraphs 4.23 and 4.24.

Objectives

- 4.2. The key objective of the quantitative research was to examine the effectiveness of the provision of free gas safety checks among customers who have recently had one. The research is based on customer's views and recollections of the service provided. Generally customers have no special expertise in this area and therefore the research should not be read as an audit of the technical aspects of the safety check.

Methodology

- 4.3. MORI interviewed 100 customers who had recently received a free gas safety check. Data are unweighted. Interviews were carried out over the phone between 9 and 13 September 2003. Contact details of customers who had recently received a free gas safety check were provided by British Gas, Innogy, Scottish Power, London Energy and Scottish and Southern Energy.

Interpretation of the Data

- 4.4. It should be remembered that a sample, not the entire population of customers who have had a free gas safety check, has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. A guide to statistical reliability is provided at Appendix 5 and a copy of the questionnaire and summary of results is provided at Appendix 6.

- 4.5. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers. Throughout, an asterisk (*) denotes values above zero but less than half a per cent.

Summary of Findings

Awareness

- 4.6. A majority of customers found out about their free gas safety check through their supplier (51%), either through the post, over the telephone or by email. Other sources of information include family and friends (7%), and newspapers and magazines (7%). One in five say they cannot remember how they found out about the safety check.
- 4.7. Before the safety check took place, most respondents knew it was free (78%), however 15% thought they had to pay for it. For most, there were no particular reasons why they thought this, ‘they just thought they would’. In the end, 97% say the safety check was free, while two per cent say it was a payable service. It must be borne in mind that this represents just two people out of the 100 interviewed. It may be that they were mistaken or that they are confusing it with a service that they did have to pay for.

Appointment Making

- 4.8. Virtually all (99%) of customers say an appointment was made in advance of the safety check, the remaining one per cent cannot recall.
- 4.9. The time from the customer requesting the check to the check being carried out was less than a month in most cases (63%). One in ten say it was between one and two months and two per cent say it was over three months. One quarter cannot remember.
- 4.10. In almost all cases the inspector was on time (93%). Five per cent say the inspector was early and one per cent say they were late.

Security

- 4.11. Around half of respondents were given a security password to use when the appointment was made. Of these, 90% say inspectors used it when they arrived at their home while six per cent say they forgot to ask for it.
- 4.12. Rather more, eight in ten, customers say the inspector carried an identity card, of whom almost all say the inspector showed the card before entering the home (94%).

Inspection

- 4.13. The average length of inspection was 39 minutes.
- 4.14. Respondents were asked which gas appliances they have in their home, and which gas appliances were checked during the inspection. In most cases all gas appliances within the home were checked by inspectors.
- 4.15. Most inspections did not find any problems with the appliances checked. In four cases, appliances were reported as being “immediately dangerous” (three gas fires and one gas boiler). In all four cases, the inspector attached a warning label indicating that the appliance should not be used, and in one case the appliance was disconnected. An appliance identified as “immediately dangerous” should have a warning label attached and be physically disconnected. It is possible that three of these appliances were simply “at risk”. In four out of the nine cases where an appliance was identified as “at risk”, a warning label was attached to indicate this fact. Appliances identified as “at risk” must be turned off and have a warning label attached. It is possible that only four of these were actually “at risk”, the others being the subject of formal advice to the customer (eg an appliance that is operating safely but is not installed to current standards would not be labelled or turned off, but a notice issued to the customer recommending that the installation be upgraded to current requirements). In some cases customers were simply advised informally to get the appliance repaired or were given practical advice on how to get the appliance repaired.
- 4.16. Eight in ten respondents say they are aware that the inspector looked at the ventilation outlets, grills or air supply into the property. A greater proportion of

inspectors may have done so but the customers were not aware that they did. Around one in ten of these customers were advised there was a problem and in most cases the inspector advised that someone should come and fix it.

- 4.17. Around two-thirds of respondents say their inspector checked whether there was a leak or checked the pressure in the pipes. Of these, one customer was found to have a problem and in this case the inspector fixed the problem. Other respondents may have been unaware that this check was done.
- 4.18. Of those whose appliances, ventilation outlets or pipes were found to have problems (16 in all), three say they contacted their supplier after their visit and one says their supplier contacted them. The remaining 12 customers have not had any contact with their supplier. The four who did have contact with their supplier say they found it very helpful.
- 4.19. In the main, any information provided to respondents was given to them at the time of the inspection and consisted mainly of a certificate of inspection (in 82% of cases). A few (just 14%) received follow-up information from their supplier. In the main this was in the form of a letter or leaflet with safety advice (received by 12%).

Emergency

- 4.20. Most respondents (83%) say they know exactly where and how to turn off the gas in an emergency. Among those who thought they knew how to do this, two-thirds say the inspector checked the emergency control valve, used for turning off the gas in an emergency (but again this is not to say that this was not the case for the remaining one-third of respondents, it may just be that they were not aware of what the inspector did).

Conclusion

- 4.21. Overall almost all respondents are satisfied with the level of service provided by the inspector, with approaching nine in ten saying they are very satisfied. Just two per cent were dissatisfied. In addition, eight in ten say they would definitely have another gas safety check in the future and nine per cent say they probably would.

- 4.22. The findings show that most customers' experience of the free gas safety check is positive. Potential areas for improvement lie in giving better information about the check beforehand (for example making sure customers know the check is free), increasing the use of passwords, increasing the number of inspectors who show their ID badge on arrival at customers' homes and more follow-up information from the supplier after the visit.

Ofgem Summary

- 4.23. Ofgem was pleased to note from MORI's study that the customer satisfaction levels indicated by the survey were high, and that the number of instances where appliances were condemned was low. These findings should be seen against the background that the number of free gas safety checks has been falling during recent years, with 58,545 carried out during 2002 and 35,160 carried out between January and September 2003. MORI's General Public Omnibus survey revealed that only 31% of customers are aware that suppliers provide a free gas safety check. Monitoring information collected and published by Ofgem shows that some suppliers carry out very few gas safety checks.⁵ Evidence from the Accent mystery shopper in chapter 2, although with a very small base, showed that only 2 of the 6 requests for a free check were successful, suggesting that suppliers are unaware of this service or reluctant to provide it.
- 4.24. Anecdotal evidence from Age Concern and others has suggested that there is a perception, particularly among customers over 60, that they could be left without heating or cooking facilities following a safety check if their appliances are identified as "immediately dangerous" or "at risk". The fact that only four of the sixteen customers who experienced problems had contact with their supplier after the check, and that three of those cases were initiated by the customer, is therefore a concern. Suppliers are not obliged to proactively offer help, but in the few cases where help was given to customers, it was found to be useful. It is possible that the reassurance to customers that assistance would proactively be provided in cases of difficulties could lead to a greater take-up of free gas safety checks.

5. Distributors and transporters

Introduction

- 5.1. Ofgem wrote to the six major domestic supply businesses, all DNOs and Transco seeking their views on the operation of the PSR and services supplied to customers on it by DNOs and gas transporters. Most respondents reported that they were generally happy with the way that services currently operate, although some respondents raised issues regarding the transfer of data.
- 5.2. There are 627,690 customers on suppliers' PSRs and 199,195 customers on DNOs' registers. The obligations on DNOs differ from those on suppliers, and this in part explains the significant differences between the number of customers held collectively on supply and distribution registers. DNOs must maintain a register of customers who have special communication needs or depend on electricity for medical reasons by virtue of being of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick, need information and advice in the event of planned interruptions to supply. They must also have systems in place to deal appropriately with communication initiated by blind or partially sighted and deaf or hard of hearing customers, and provide passwords where requested when communicating with customers.
- 5.3. The obligations on gas transporters also differ from suppliers. Gas transporters do not have a specific obligation to maintain a register. However, under Guaranteed Standard 4, gas transporters (including independent gas transporters) must provide alternative cooking and heating facilities to priority customers within 4 hours if their gas supply is discontinued because of a planned interruption. Additionally, if there is an unplanned interruption, gas transporters should provide alternative cooking and heating facilities to priority customers within 4 hours of it becoming aware of the interruption where fewer than 250 customers are affected, and within 8 hours where more than 250 customers are affected.

- 5.4. Gas transporters must also have systems in place to communicate with blind or partially sighted and deaf or hard of hearing customers, in common with DNOs as outlined above.
- 5.5. Ofgem's aim in undertaking a review of services supplied by DNOs and Transco was to establish to the level of service provided by these companies with respect to their licence conditions. The results of this review will be fed into the work Ofgem is carrying out with respect to the review of distribution price controls, which come into effect in April 2005. As part of this review, Ofgem will give further consideration to the protection of priority customers.
- 5.6. The review of DNOs' obligations under the PSR took place largely through correspondence with interested parties. Ofgem wrote to all DNOs during summer 2003, inviting them to complete a questionnaire regarding their services in four areas. These areas were the operation of their registers, the operation of their password schemes, their policy with regard to planned interruptions to supply, and their policy with regard to unplanned interruptions to supply. Ofgem wrote to suppliers during the same period, inviting them to complete a shorter questionnaire regarding the transfer of data to DNOs and gas transporters and seeking their comments on the performance of DNOs and gas transporters where they act as suppliers' agents. Ofgem wrote to Transco seeking its views on how it operated its services in respect of customers on suppliers' PSRs. All parties provided responses which are outlined below.

Key findings

- 5.7. The key findings of the responses from DNOs can be subdivided into four headings namely, issues relating to the register; passwords; planned interruptions and unplanned interruptions.

The register

- 5.8. All DNOs store their registers electronically on their databases. The registers are made up primarily of referrals from suppliers on the Data Transfer Network (DTN), which is a system of forms that industry participants use to send information to each other. The DTN includes a dedicated form for transferring information about customers on the PSR. There are a limited number of referrals

from other sources, either direct from customers themselves, or from someone with a responsibility for the customer's care, such as a hospital.

- 5.9. DNOs' registers hold name, address, and in most cases information about customers' particular needs, for example that they have medical equipment that requires the use of electricity. Some, though not all, DNOs hold additional details such as medical contacts and specific information about the on-site medical equipment.
- 5.10. Most DNOs update their registers on a daily basis and also carry out some data validation exercises, though the frequency of these is variable. Some report that they rely entirely on suppliers for the accuracy of the data that they hold, although they were not confident about the accuracy of some of the data.
- 5.11. All DNOs distinguish medically dependent customers from others, with the former being a priority for contact during power cuts. However, some DNOs complained about the number of referrals sent by suppliers that either contained no relevant details beyond the customer's name and address, or that contained no details relevant to the DNO's obligations.

Passwords

- 5.12. DNOs sometimes have to visit a customer's premises as the supplier's agent and on other occasions for routine work or in direct response to a customer's request. Where they are acting as the supplier's agent, DNOs usually use passwords provided by the supplier. These passwords are sent by the supplier via the DTN, although there is a variation in policy between DNOs, with only some storing passwords on record. Where the supplier is not involved, most DNOs agree passwords directly with the customer. In these cases it is less likely that the password will be stored.

Planned interruptions

- 5.13. DNOs do not, except in one case, give more notice of planned interruptions to supply to customers on the register than to other customers. However, almost all exceed the minimum 2 day notice period under Guaranteed Standard 4 for Electricity Distribution as a matter of course, with some providing as much as seven days' notice. Western Power Distribution, the only DNO to provide

additional notice to registered customers, provide this by telephone to supply critical and blind or partially sighted customers a day before written notice is provided to other customers. DNOs communicate information about planned interruptions by letter or hand delivered cards, although some will telephone or door-knock customers with medical needs. Most DNOs do not use large print or Braille cards for customers with sight difficulties, although a few reported that they will do so on request.

Unplanned interruptions

- 5.14. There is no obligation on DNOs to contact customers generally in the case of an unplanned interruption, although all DNOs provide some kind of telephone information (either a manned line or a recorded message), and many state in their codes of practice submitted to Ofgem for approval under Standard Licence Condition 17 that they will provide information to local radio stations when appropriate. The majority of DNOs do not make particular attempts to contact registered customers during an unplanned outage, although some do take steps to pro-actively contact medically dependent customers. Northern Electric Distribution Limited (NEDL) provides a special telephone information line for customers with power-dependent medical needs. East Midlands Electricity operates various customer contact schemes, including a mobile unit which can attend to provide assistance and reassurance to registered customers. Other distributors provide such things as small generators, heaters or blankets to customers, depending on the circumstances.

Gas transporters

- 5.15. Transco does not limit itself to use of suppliers' registers when carrying out its duties, and uses other sources to identify customers who are vulnerable and require additional help. These sources include local authorities, social services, "local knowledge" and direct customer contact. Transco provided alternative cooking and heating facilities to customers it classed as "vulnerable" (a broader definition than customers who are on suppliers' PSRs) on slightly fewer than 20,000 occasions during 2002. The relevant Guaranteed Standard came into effect in April 2002.

- 5.16. Transco stores passwords it receives from suppliers on its customer database (where it also stores information about PSR customers), but does not store passwords it agrees directly with customers.
- 5.17. In terms of its obligations to blind or partially sighted and deaf or hard of hearing customers, Transco provides a textphone version of the gas emergency service and its engineers carry large print ID cards when visiting vision impaired customers.

Suppliers' views

- 5.18. Suppliers reported that they had no general problems with DNOs or transporters when it came to the operation of the PSR, although some did refer to isolated occasions where problems had occurred and subsequently been resolved. All also said that they were satisfied that DNOs and transporters were using passwords correctly and adhering to the supplier's code of practice on visiting customers' premises where DNOs or transporters might be acting as the supplier's agent. This assertion, however, seems to be based largely on a lack of complaints from customers as no suppliers carry out checks or audits of DNOs or transporters to establish whether they adhere to the code of practice or use passwords appropriately.
- 5.19. Suppliers use electronic data flows as their primary means of communication with DNOs and transporters, and it is through these flows that all relevant customer information is passed. Most suppliers say that they pass details of all their registered customers on to the relevant DNO and to the transporter regardless of the customer's needs. However, London Energy said that it only passes details to DNOs where it was clear that the customer needed to be included on the DNOs' register. Other suppliers suggest that only in rare exceptions (invariably at the customer's request) would they not pass a customer's details to the relevant DNO. All suppliers say that they highlight customers who depend on electricity to operate medical equipment and particularly vulnerable customers. All suppliers maintain that they keep DNO records up to date by sending updated flows when customer details change.

Conclusion

5.20. Having considered the responses provided by DNOs, Transco and suppliers, Ofgem believes that while in general services to customers on the PSR are effective, there may be confusion regarding the separate obligations of suppliers and DNOs in electricity. In particular, Ofgem believes that there are differences in the amount and quality of data being sent from suppliers to DNOs, and in the level of discrimination applied to that data by DNOs. This has led to an inconsistency in the numbers of customers on individual DNOs' registers, with some registers holding more customers than is strictly required under Standard Licence Condition 17. This is illustrated by the numbers held on each DNO's register outlined in the table below.

Number of customers on DNO registers

Distributor	Register
Aquila Power Networks	308
East Midlands Electricity	15,314
EDF Energy (EPN)	7,489
EDF Energy (LPN)	5,190
EDF Energy (SPN)	37,585
Northern Electricity Distribution Ltd	11,184
Scottish Hydro (S&S)	9,555
Scottish Power Distribution	1,708
Scottish Power Manweb	2,184
Southern (S&S)	47,111
United Utilities	5,150
WPD South Wales	16,418
WPD South West	38,289
Yorkshire Electricity Distribution Ltd	1,710
Total	199,195

5.21. Ofgem therefore needs to consider the most appropriate way of ensuring consistency across all DNO registers and to ensure that all suppliers and DNOs are using the same referral mechanism in the same manner. Ofgem will consult with relevant parties before issuing guidance to suppliers and DNOs.

5.22. Ofgem is pleased to note the good practice exhibited by a number of DNOs and Transco in providing additional services to vulnerable customers both within and without the scope of the register. In particular, Ofgem encourages other companies to take notice of initiatives such as East Midlands Electricity's mobile

unit, NEDL's dedicated telephone information line and Transco's provision of services to vulnerable customers outside the scope of the PSR and to consider providing similar services.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1. The major issues that Ofgem has identified from the research are set out below, followed by recommendations for improving services to customers eligible for the PSR.

Summary of major findings

Priority Service Register

- 6.2. Not enough eligible customers are aware of the existence of the PSR and services provided by suppliers. MORI's awareness research shows that 76% of eligible customers had not heard of the PSR. The research also showed that only 53% of eligible customers recognised one or more service that suppliers provided under the PSR when these services were listed to them.
- 6.3. A clear message from the Accent research is that awareness among suppliers' frontline staff of the PSR and the types of customer who might be eligible for it is variable and often not high. Accent's research also revealed instances where suppliers failed to provide the service requested by the mystery shopper. While it is difficult to draw conclusions about the degree to which suppliers are failing to provide services, any instance of failing to provide a requested service to an eligible customer is a matter of concern.
- 6.4. Research from MORI, and also to a degree from Accent, shows that customers value the services provided under the PSR. No particular service was identified as being irrelevant or redundant. Although research in this area was largely qualitative, the outcome suggests that all services currently offered under the PSR are valued by customers.
- 6.5. Research from MORI also suggested that customers eligible for the PSR would value additional services. Among those highlighted were special tailored tariffs, appointments for meter readings and bills with simpler layouts.

Free gas safety check

- 6.6. Research conducted by MORI shows that customers who have received a free gas safety check valued the service. Customer satisfaction among these customers is very high, with over 90% saying they were satisfied and over 80% saying that they would have another safety check.
- 6.7. Only a few customers who had received a check had appliances or systems which failed. However, only a small proportion of these customers received any assistance or support from their supplier, and this was mostly initiated by the customer requesting advice. Those who did receive support said that they found it very helpful.
- 6.8. The free gas safety check is a valuable service which gives peace of mind to vulnerable customers who live alone, yet use of this provision is on the decline. Research conducted by MORI shows that less than a third of customers are aware that suppliers offer a free gas safety check, indicating the need for greater publicity.

Distribution and transportation

- 6.9. Ofgem's research among suppliers suggests that there is a general view in the industry that the performance of DNOs and Transco is acceptable with regards to their obligations to customers who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick.
- 6.10. However, the research also revealed evidence that there is a lack of consistency in the mechanism for referring eligible customers from suppliers to DNOs.

Summary of recommendations

- 6.11. The findings of this research indicate considerable scope for improvement if eligible customers are to receive the full level of service to which they are entitled. Putting the necessary improvements in place will be a challenge for companies. Nevertheless, Ofgem urges them to act on the following recommendations.

Priority Service Register

- 6.12. Suppliers need to do more to publicise the PSR and its benefits in ways that are relevant to the target audience. Suppliers should consider working with interested agencies such as energywatch, Citizen's Advice and charitable groups who may be more effective in reaching customers of pensionable age or with disabilities.
- 6.13. Suppliers should also improve their communication with customers on the PSR, perhaps regularly reinforcing messages about services available to registered customers. Again, suppliers should give thought to the means of communication, as research from MORI suggests that bill stuffers and messages on bills are not always effective in reaching this particular group of customers.
- 6.14. Suppliers should review the training given to frontline staff to ensure that they are better able to recognise and refer eligible customers.
- 6.15. Suppliers should review their arrangements for stocking and distributing literature as a significant number of mystery shoppers had not received literature two weeks after requesting it.
- 6.16. MORI research suggests that customers would appreciate a wider range of services, including tailored tariffs. Some suppliers already offer tailored products for elderly customers. Ofgem would like to see more of such tailored products made available, which could be linked more closely to the PSR.

Free gas safety checks

- 6.17. Suppliers need to do more to promote the free gas safety check. The number of customers receiving such checks is falling, and awareness is low, with only 31% of eligible customers aware of the service according to MORI. As above, they should do this through means that will be relevant to their target audience.
- 6.18. Suppliers should put in place a mechanism for identifying customers who have failed or partially failed a gas safety check, and pro-actively contact them to offer support and advice.

Distribution and transportation

- 6.19. Ofgem recognises that it needs to provide guidance to suppliers and DNOs regarding the referral of customers to DNOs registers. Ofgem will consult with relevant parties before issuing guidance to suppliers and DNOs.
- 6.20. Customers who are registered should benefit from support from DNOs and transporters in the event of loss of supply. Ofgem draws attention to current good practice within the industry, for example, East Midlands Electricity's mobile response unit and NEDL's dedicated advice line for registered customers. Separate research carried out for Ofgem by Accent for the distribution price control review found that 93% of customers think that a dedicated advice line for priority customers is the most important service aspect during a power cut.⁶ It also found that customers think that the second most important service is getting accurate information on when the power will be restored. Ofgem recommends that DNOs and transporters take note of these findings and emulate current good practice.
- 6.21. Ofgem recognises that the existing regulatory arrangements in place for services provided by DNOs should be improved to protect registered customers better, and we are giving consideration to this during the current review of the distribution price controls. The next consultation paper on this review is due to be published later this month.

Next steps

- 6.22. Ofgem will be seeking the views of energy companies on their performance and their response to the recommendations above. Ofgem also welcomes comments on this report and its recommendations from all other interested parties. We are proposing to hold a seminar in January to discuss issues arising from the report. We will report on progress on taking work forward in the Social Action Plan Annual Review 2004, to be published in March 2004.

⁶ P.24 Expectations of Electricity DNOs and WTP for Improvements in Service. Stage 1 Quantitative Research Findings, September 2003
Priority Service Research Project
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets

6.23. Ofgem is grateful for the assistance it has received in producing this report from companies, energywatch, consumer agencies and the two market research agencies it contracted to work on the project, Accent and MORI.

Appendix 1 Views of consumer groups and charities

1.1 In June 2003, Ofgem met with representatives from energywatch, Citizen's Advice, Age Concern and RNIB at meetings in Glasgow and in London. In the meetings, these agencies put forward a number of suggestions for suppliers to consider in their work to assist customers through the PSR. A selection of suggestions from these meetings are outlined below:

- ◆ Suppliers should tie-in with agencies, advisers and DWP to promote the PSR
- ◆ Suppliers should include a reference to the PSR in the script of their sign-up phone call when gaining a new customer
- ◆ When promoting the PSR, suppliers should always use large print
- ◆ Suppliers should not rely on the back of the bill to promote the PSR
- ◆ Suppliers could include benefits health checks as part of the PSR
- ◆ Suppliers could provide information about winter fuel and cold weather payments to all PSR customers
- ◆ Suppliers could pro-actively provide energy efficiency advice to PSR customers
- ◆ Suppliers should consider the use of sign language interpreters for deaf customers

Appendix 2 Mystery shopper methodology

- 2.1 Accent set out the methodology they used in paragraphs 1.2 to 1.9 below.
- 2.2 The mystery shopping was undertaken by customers of the six main suppliers resident in different parts of Britain. It was a requirement that each member of the survey team should reasonably consider themselves to be elderly, disabled or chronically sick, blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing. For the purposes of the research the terms are those set out in statute, not those chosen by Ofgem or suppliers and it was accepted that some customers might not use these exact terms, but may define themselves by a common usage equivalent, such as older person or retired person, person with a long term illness or condition and so on.
- 2.3 Overall, five broad categories of customers were included in the research:
- ◆ elderly
 - ◆ physically disabled
 - ◆ those with visual impairments – blind and partially sighted people
 - ◆ deaf, hard of hearing and deaf sign language users.
 - ◆ ‘chronically sick’
- 2.4 In terms of the disabled there is a wide range of disabilities and each presents different requirements in terms of what service the individual may require from the suppliers. The team of surveyors included as broad a mix as possible so that the calls could reflect a range of different needs such as different requests for the way bills are provided and specific procedures when an engineer or meter reader calls at the house.

Method

- 2.5 A team of mystery shoppers was recruited from GRG’s database in order to allow a minimum of 15 customers from each of the 6 major UK energy suppliers. The survey was conducted by telephone or textphone. All fieldwork was conducted between 11 September and 21 October 2003.

Recruitment

2.6 The recruitment criteria for the survey team were as follows:

- ◆ current bill payers
- ◆ not on the PSR
- ◆ willing to be added to the PSR and to be followed up by the supplier as PSR clients
- ◆ in approximately equal proportions elderly, physically disabled, blind, deaf and 'chronically sick' (the '5 categories')
- ◆ willing and able to contact their supplier and mystery shop the service they receive as joining PSR clients.

2.7 The recruitment procedure was as follows:

- ◆ Using the GRG database of some 15,000 mystery shoppers, 3,000 of whom are disabled people, a sample of 680 possible participants were selected from the '5 categories'
- ◆ These 680 potential participants were contacted by e-mail, phone or letter (depending on their personal circumstance and preferred contact method) to pre-qualify their willingness and suitability to participate in the research and a team of 85 were recruited to participate in the survey (15 per supplier) with 5 participants conducting 2 assignments each to test different suppliers
- ◆ Each surveyor was offered an above average fee for joining the PSR and reporting on supplier follow up activity
- ◆ A total of 90 questionnaires were completed

Questionnaire

2.8 The mystery shoppers were provided with a detailed script following a scenario appropriate to their circumstances. The scripts were agreed with Ofgem and included the following:

- ◆ Shopper profile and circumstances
- ◆ Supplier
- ◆ Request to register
- ◆ Response of supplier, whether supplier recognises customer as being appropriate for inclusion on PSR and offers to register them/refer them to specialist
- ◆ Request for literature on PSR, whether supplier is willing to send literature on PSR to enable customer to specify special needs and services wanted
- ◆ Request for specific services such as talking/large print/Braille bills, third party/re-directed bills, password schemes, and quarterly reads. Whether supplier offers/is aware of such services
- ◆ Password schemes
- ◆ Appointment arrangements
- ◆ Meter changes/moves - whether the supplier will on request agree to carry out meter changes or moves free of charge, provide appropriate controls and adapters for appliances free of charge, and (for gas suppliers only) carry out a free gas safety check
- ◆ For deaf customers, availability of textphone/minicom
- ◆ Emergency procedures
- ◆ Advice on energy efficiency
- ◆ Overall assessment of the call

2.9 A series of eight questionnaires was used. The time taken to complete each questionnaire varied according to the scenario to be tested and if the surveyor was required to request and assess a follow up contact such as information sent in the post or a visit from a meter reader or engineer. On average they took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Appendix 3 Shopper survey questionnaire

- 3.1 Accent provided tailored questionnaires for each of the eight scenarios carried out by its panellists. Set out below is the questionnaire for Scenario A. All the questionnaires are available in the full report, available on the Ofgem website, www.ofgem.gov.uk.

Section 1 – Background Information

SURVEY INFORMATION			
Utility to test:		«GasElect»	
Number to call:		«Number to call»	
We would like you to request information to be sent to you:		«Info»	
We would like you to request a follow-up visit		«Visit»	
1	Please enter the first three letters of your postcode:		
2	Please tick the age band that applies to you:		
	18 to 25 years		56 to 65 years
	26 to 35 years		66 to 75 years
	36 to 45 years		76 to 85 years
	46 to 55 years		86 years and over
3	Are you:	Male	
		Female	
4	Please enter the number of people in your household, including yourself:		
5	Please tick the box(es) that corresponds most closely to your circumstances:		
		Mobility impaired	
		Dexterity impaired	
		Wheelchair user	
		Blind or partially sighted	
		Deaf or hard of hearing	
		Chronically ill	
		Elderly	
7	Please enter the day of the week, date and time you called.	Day:	
		Date:	
		Time:	am/pm

Section 2: The Scenario for the Call

Please make sure you have a copy of your most recent bill when making the call as you may have to provide your customer reference number to the call handler. Please call the general number for customer enquiries, which will be on your bill.

Please enter the telephone number you called:		
1	Please rate how easy it was to get through to the call handler who dealt with your initial call:	
		Please tick one box
		Very easy [e.g. got straight through to actual operator]
		Fairly easy [e.g. had to use automated system, but then got through quickly]
		Neither easy nor difficult, [e.g. automated system awkward or connection to operator took a little while]
		Fairly difficult [e.g. automated system difficult or lengthy queuing time]
		Very difficult [e.g. took a long time to get through or had to make several attempts].
2	Did the call handler give their name?	Yes
		No

Introduce the reason for the call: "Hello I want to check how much gas/electricity I am using and would like some help reading the meter." If the call handler asks you a question such as "How can we help?" explain your circumstances, e.g. you are partially sighted and cannot read the dial, or the meter is in an awkward place, or you have a physical disability and cannot get to the meter to read it.

If not prompted, explain your circumstances and record the fact that you had to volunteer the information.

3	Did you have to explain your circumstances?	Yes	
		No	
4	What was suggested?	Ask a friend, family member or neighbour to help	
		Help from the company	

If you were told to ask a friend, thank the call handler and end the call. Go to Section 3 to fill in the overall rating.

5	If you were offered help from the company, what help was offered? <i>Please explain below.</i>		
6	Was the Priority Services Register mentioned?	Yes	
		No	
7	If the Priority Services Register was mentioned, what sort of help was given at this point? Please tick one box.		
	They offered to help you register		
	They referred you to another department and gave you another number to call		

		They referred you to another department and put you through to them	
		They explained what it was and offered to send you information	
		Other	
8	If your call was passed on to another department to register on the PSR, did the new call handler give their name?		
		Yes	
		No	
9	What details did they ask for?	Please tick all that apply	
		Name and address	
		Details of circumstances	
		What service required	
		Other	
10	What information and services did they offer?	Please tick all that apply	
		Information in the post	
		Meter reading	
		Energy efficiency advice	
		Special format bill	
		Gas safety check	
		Controls and adapters	
		Password	
		Other	
11	If "other", what advice was offered? <i>Please explain below.</i>		
12	What information and services did you request?	Please tick all that apply	
		Information in the post	
		Meter reading	
		Special format bill	
		Gas safety check	
		Controls and adapters	
		Password	
		Other	

Section 3 – Overall Rating

1	Please rate the level of politeness of the call handler who dealt with your initial enquiry:	
		Please tick one box
		Excellent, very courteous
		Polite and pleasant
		Neutral
		Somewhat abrupt or rude
		Very rude and aggressive
2	Please rate the helpfulness of the call handler who dealt with your initial enquiry:	
		Please tick one box
		Excellent, provided all information

		Good and helpful	
		Neither helpful nor unhelpful	
		Not very helpful	
		Totally unhelpful	
3	If you were referred to another person to register on the PSR, please rate the level of politeness of the call handler who dealt with your registration:		
		Please tick one box	
		Excellent, very courteous	
		Polite and pleasant	
		Neutral	
		Somewhat abrupt or rude	
		Very rude and aggressive	
		N/A (Not referred to anyone else)	
4	Please rate the helpfulness of the call handler who dealt with your registration:		
		Please tick one box	
		Excellent, provided all information	
		Good and helpful	
		Neither helpful nor unhelpful	
		Not very helpful	
		Totally unhelpful	
		N/A (Not referred to anyone else)	
5	How well did the person you spoke to seem to understand your circumstances?		
		Please tick one box	
		Understood fully	
		Understood more or less	
		Had to explain a lot to them	
		Did not understand very well	
		Did not understand at all	
6	How easy did you find it to understand the information provided to you during the call?		
		Please tick one box	
		Very easy, no problems at all	
		Fairly easy	
		Neither easy nor difficult	
		Fairly difficult	
		Not at all easy.	
7	If you answered "Very easy" or "Not at all easy" to the question above, please explain why:		
8	How clear were the questions the call handler asked?		
		Please tick one box	
		Very clear	
		Fairly clear	
		Neither clear nor unclear	
		Not very clear	
		Not at all clear	
9	How clear was the information provided on the phone?		
		Please tick one box	

		Very clear	
		Fairly clear	
		Neither clear nor unclear	
		Not very clear	
		Not at all clear	
10	If you felt the call handler was "Very clear" or "Not at all clear" for either of the two situations above, please explain why:		
11	How knowledgeable was the call handler about the PSR?		
	Please tick one box		
		Very knowledgeable	
		Fairly knowledgeable	
		Had a little bit of knowledge	
		Not very knowledgeable	
		Not at all knowledgeable	
12	If you felt the call handler was either "Very knowledgeable" or "Not at all knowledgeable" for the question above, please explain why:		
13	How knowledgeable was the call handler about each of the following [where Please tick one box in each row. "1" is "Very knowledgeable" and "5" is "Not at all knowledgeable":		
		1	2
		3	4
		5	Not asked
	Free gas safety check		
	Special controls and adapters		
	Help with meter reading		
	Bills to be sent to someone else e.g. who is handling their finances		
	Bills in large print/Braille/talking bills		
	Passwords		
14	Overall, how satisfied were you with the way the call was handled?		
	Please tick one box		
		Very satisfied	
		Fairly satisfied	
		Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	
		Not very satisfied	
		Not at all satisfied	
15	Please note any excellent or poor aspects of the service or anything else you think may be useful in improving customer service from this particular company.		

Section 4 – Follow-up information / visit details

If you have requested any information to be sent to you or asked for a follow-up visit, please complete this section.

REQUESTING INFORMATION TO BE SENT TO YOU

1	Did you request any information to be sent to you?	Yes	
		No	
2	If yes, what information did you request?		
	Please tick all that apply		
	Details of the PSR/services		
	Confirmation of registration		
	Confirmation of follow-up visit		
3	Have you received this information?	Yes	
		No	
4	If yes, when did you receive the information?		
	<i>Day of the week Date.....</i>		
5	How helpful was this information?		
	Please tick one box		
	Very helpful		
	Satisfactory		
	Neither helpful nor unhelpful		
	Rather unhelpful		
	Not at all helpful		
6	How well does this information match what you expected to receive from what you were told during the contact call?		
	Please tick one box		
	Exactly what I expected		
	More or less what I expected		
	Not exactly what I expected		
	Not really what I expected		
	Not at all what I expected		

ARRANGING A FOLLOW-UP VISIT

7	Have you arranged a follow-up visit?	Yes	
		No	
8	If yes, please provide details of:		
	<i>Reason for visit</i>		
	<i>Date and time of visit</i>		
9	Were you given the name of the person who will call?	Yes	
		No	
10	Were you offered the option of using a security password for the caller to use?	Yes	
		No	

Note: All customers should use passwords if offered.

THE FOLLOW-UP VISIT

Note: Unless the visit takes place within two weeks of your initial phone call, you will not be able to complete these questions.

11	If you agreed a time for the visit of the meter reader or service engineer, please comment on his timekeeping:		
	Please tick one box		
	He or she arrived early		
	He or she was on time		
	He or she was late		
	He or she did not arrive at all		
12	If the meter reader or service engineer was early or late, by how many minutes or hours compared with the time agreed?		
 MinutesHours		
13	If the meter reader or service engineer was late or did not arrive at all, did you call the company to ask where he or she was?		
		Yes	
		No	
		N/A	
14	If yes, which department were you put through to and what explanation were you given?		
15	How would you rate this contact?		
	Please tick one box		
	Very satisfied		
	Fairly satisfied		
	Satisfied		
	Not very satisfied		
	Not at all satisfied		

When the meter reader or service engineer arrived:

16	If you had arranged for a password to be used, did they use it?	Yes	
		No	
17	Did they give their name and the company name?	Yes	
		No	
18	Did they show you their identification?	Yes	
		No	

IMPORTANT NOTE: IF NO IDENTIFICATION IS SHOWN OR THE PASSWORD IS NOT USED, ON NO ACCOUNT SHOULD YOU LET THE PERSON IN.

For blind or visually impaired customers only:

19	Was their identification in Braille or large print cards?	Yes	
----	---	-----	--

		No	
20	How would you rate the appearance of the member of staff?		
	Please tick one box		
	Excellent, uniform clean and tidy		
	Fine: clean uniform, reasonably tidy.		
	Acceptable: uniform and tidiness OK		
	Slightly dishevelled or unshaven		
	No uniform worn		
21	How long did they take to complete their work?		
 Minutes hours		
22	Did they explain to you what they were doing?	Yes	
		No	
23	How clear were the instructions they gave you?		
	Please tick one box		
	Very clear		
	Fairly clear		
	Neither clear nor unclear		
	Not very clear		
	Not at all clear		
	N/A – No instructions given		

And overall [call and visit]

24	Overall, how satisfied were you with the way the visit was handled?		
	Please tick one box		
	Very satisfied		
	Fairly satisfied		
	Satisfied		
	Not very satisfied		
	Not at all satisfied		
25	Please write down below any excellent or poor aspects of the service or anything else you think may be useful in improving customer service from your energy company.		

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses are valuable and always appreciated.

Appendix 4 Topic guides

4.1 MORI used the following topic guides for conducting the focus groups in its qualitative research as set out in Chapter 3. Below is the topic guide used for groups of customers not on the PSR.

Overall Objective: Evaluate the specific requirements of Special Needs customers and how well they feel the current service is performing, including the effectiveness of the PSR	
Section	Objectives
<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Thank participants for agreeing to come</p> <p>Stress Confidentiality/MRS Code, etc</p> <p>Permission to tape record (If one participant is not willing to be taped, we would prefer to have transcripts based on a smaller group, so reassure on anonymity/confidentiality issue and ask participant to leave if still not willing to be taped)</p> <p>Explain viewing mirror /video (as required)</p> <p>Explain what a focus group is</p> <p>Any questions before we begin?</p> <p>We are here to discuss service provision from companies and organisations that they deal with on a day to day basis</p> <p>Breach terminology - different people use different terms. What's offensive/what's not. Don't want to offend anyone, what's neutral?</p> <p>Introduce self/others in room – personal details and get each participant to say if they could invent one handy item, what would it help them do? Eg Automatic ironing machine which irons and puts clothes away!</p>	<p>Establish group.</p> <p>Personal intros useful for background information and helping to get group dynamics started.</p>
<p>GENERAL BACKGROUND ON SERVICE DELIVERY EXPERIENCES</p> <p>We all use different services in our day to day life – such as the Post Office, bank, supermarkets.</p> <p>In your experience, have you ever experienced a particularly good service? What made it 'good'? price? efficiency? staff? quality?</p> <p>And have you experienced a particularly 'bad' service? What made it 'bad'? price? efficiency? staff? quality?</p>	<p>Warm group up with discussion about general service delivery and understanding of the issues. Provide useful background information on previous experiences and expectations. Ask about good/bad service aspects – will provide info on what service aspects they prioritise.</p>
<p>GENERAL BACKGROUND ON SERVICE DELIVERY EXPERIENCES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS</p> <p>What kinds of things that everyone else takes for granted do they find difficult to do/a problem because they are older than they used to be, disabled etc, etc</p> <p>To what extent do the companies and organisations that they deal with in their everyday life (like banks, post office, supermarkets etc) take this into account when dealing with them, the customer?</p> <p>Which companies and organisations do a particularly good job – probe for specifics about what they do that is particularly good and why</p> <p>And which do a particularly poor job – again, probe for specifics about what they do which is particularly poor and why?</p> <p>Do any of these companies and organisations offer any special services</p>	<p>Respondents may not realise they have 'special' needs or a different perspective on these service issues. We will ensure we tease out what problems they have specific to their need as a disabled person, elderly person etc. EG We all have problems understanding energy bills and understanding how the billing is calculated, but what's particularly difficult for them? They might not be able to access the meter</p>

<p>geared specifically to elderly, disabled etc? If so: what do they offer? how did they hear about them? have they used them? what do they think of them? how useful/appropriate are they? What could these companies and organisations do to make life easier for their older, disabled etc customers? How would this help you personally?</p>	<p>to check the (E)stimated reading the bill is based on for example.</p> <p>Look at how this varies between different groups/general public.</p>
<p>GENERAL SERVICE DELIVERY FROM GAS AND ELECTRICITY SUPPLIERS Thinking about your gas/electricity supplier, how satisfied are you with the service you receive? Why do you say that? Probe: Pricing? Opportunities to pay as frequently as would like to? Availability of advice or information? (e.g. on energy efficiency, on possible grants)? Literature provided (if any)?, satisfaction with (a) 'visiting' staff and (b) 'call centre' staff? Do they feel they need help/advice on how to maximise the warmth and energy efficiency of their home? Energy efficiency advice - any received? Where from? What was it? How useful was it? How could it be improved? What physical help was provided to improve the energy efficiency of their home? Awareness of what help is available - practical advice, grants etc</p>	<p>This is a warm up to explore overall satisfaction. Again, elderly/disabled people may not be aware they have 'special' needs on these issues –they'll just think their needs are 'normal'. But, if compare with GP, their needs may differ.</p>
<p>SPECIAL SERVICES FROM GAS AND ELECTRICITY SUPPLIERS? What kinds of things that everyone else takes for granted do they find difficult to do/a problem when dealing with their gas/elec supplier because they are older than they used to be, disabled etc, etc Probe for specific problems encountered, degree to which this is a problem, how often it occurs etc What specific needs do they have with regard to gas/elec services? Which are particularly important? Does it vary? In what ways? To what extent do their current suppliers meet these needs: What do they do well – probe for specifics and reasons What do they do badly – again probe for specifics and reasons. What services are obsolete, out-of-date? Why? How can they be changed? General treatment by suppliers - do they feel "special", "normal" etc Speech bubbles – ask them to write down what a customer service representative from their gas/elec supplier might say to them if they rang up with a query How do they communicate with their supplier? What's good/bad/needs to/could be improved? Explore areas where they find it difficult to communicate with suppliers and areas where services could be enhanced How do they read meters/read bills etc? What, if any, special services for the elderly, disabled etc are available from their gas/elec suppliers? Which do they use/not use? Why? Probe for awareness of the various services available? SEE OVER FOR PROBING AREAS Aware? Used? Why/why not? Appropriate/Useful? Why/why not? How did/would they find out about what extra/special services are available? How easy was it to find out? How easy was it to obtain these services? Were they free? Should they be free/rented etc? Did the supplier proactively offer them (how did they do this) or was it up to the customer to find out /make sure they got what they</p>	<p>Look at specific issues relating to their special needs and current services offered and what they would like in the future.</p>

<p>were entitled to?</p> <p>How would they prefer to find out about what special services are available?</p> <p>What else could their gas/elec suppliers do to make life easier for them?</p> <p>How would this help them? How could technology be better used in the services they receive?</p> <p>Prioritise areas for improvement</p> <p>Give each person 20 points represented by stickers, which they can allocate in whichever way to reflect the priority they feel should be placed on each area for improvement (elements of service improvement should be written up on flip chart or on separate sheets that can be handed round to participants)</p>	
<p>PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER</p> <p>Have they ever heard of the Priority Services Register? If yes, how did they hear about it? Did their supplier tell them about it? If no, how could its existence/purpose be better communicated?</p> <p>Explain what PSR it is.</p> <p>What do they think about the concept? What connotations does it have?</p> <p>How could it be improved? What services do you think should be provided to PSR registered customers?</p> <p>What do they think about the name? What connotations does it have? How could it be improved?</p> <p>Would they mind being on such a register? What concerns might they have about possible consequences? Why? What benefits/disadvantages would there be? Why? What details would they NOT want recorded on the register? Why?</p>	Looking at perceptions of PSR
<p>CONCLUSIONS & CLOSURE</p> <p>Is there anything else I have missed that I should have asked about on this subject?</p> <p>THANK PARTICIPANTS</p> <p>GIVE PARTICIPANT PAYMENTS & SIGN-OFF SHEET</p>	Wrap-up. Check any points not covered

4.2 This topic guide was used for discussions with customers who are on the PSR.

Overall Objective: Evaluate the effectiveness of the PSR and how well customers they feel the current service is performing	
Section	Objectives
<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Thank respondent for agreeing to participate</p> <p>Stress Confidentiality/MRS Code, etc</p> <p>Permission to tape record</p> <p>Any questions before we begin?</p> <p>We are here to discuss service provision from companies and organisations that they deal with on a day to day basis</p> <p>Breach terminology - different people use different terms. What's offensive/what's not. Don't want to offend anyone, what's neutral?</p>	
<p>GENERAL BACKGROUND ON SERVICE DELIVERY EXPERIENCES</p> <p>We all use different services in our day to day life – such as the Post Office, bank, supermarkets, energy companies</p> <p>In your experience, have you ever experienced a particularly good service?</p>	Warm up with discussion about general service delivery and understanding of the issues. Provide useful background information on

<p>What made it 'good'? price? efficiency? staff? quality? And have you experienced a particularly 'bad' service? What made it 'bad'? price? Efficiency? staff? quality?</p>	<p>previous experiences and expectations. Ask about good/bad service aspects – will provide info on what service aspects they prioritise.</p>
<p>GENERAL BACKGROUND ON SERVICE DELIVERY EXPERIENCES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS What kinds of things that everyone else takes for granted do they find difficult to do/a problem because they are older than they used to be, disabled etc, etc To what extent do the companies and organisations that they deal with in their everyday life (like banks, post office, supermarkets, energy companies etc) take this into account when dealing with them, the customer? Do any of these companies and organisations offer any special services geared specifically to elderly, disabled etc? If so: what do they offer? how did they hear about them? have they used them? what do they think of them? how useful/appropriate are they? What could these companies and organisations do to make life easier for their older, disabled etc customers? How would this help you personally?</p>	<p>Respondents may not realise they have 'special' needs or a different perspective on these service issues. We will ensure we tease out what problems they have specific to their need as a disabled person, elderly person etc. EG We all have problems understanding energy bills and understanding how the billing is calculated, but what's particularly difficult for them? They might not be able to access the meter to check the (E)stimated reading the bill is based on for example.</p> <p>Look at how this varies between different groups/general public.</p>
<p>PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER How long have they been on the Priority Services Register? How did they find out about it? Did their supplier tell them? What do they think about the concept? What connotations does it have? What do they think of the name? What connotations does it have? How could it be improved?</p> <p>How do they feel about being on the PSR? What are the advantages? Do they feel they are getting an extra service? Do they see it as something they are entitled to, and not a 'special service'? Do they feel they are just on a database that is used as a mailing list? Do they feel they are being labelled? Do they know who is on the PSR? Who do they think should be on it? Is anyone left out, is anyone included who shouldn't be? Does its existence/purpose need to be better communicated? How?</p> <p>What services does the PSR provide? Which services have they used? PROBE: Special controls and adapters for appliances and meters, including prepayment meters, repositioning meters, providing special means of identifying employees of suppliers by means of special passwords, providing advice on the use of electricity or gas, redirecting bills to a third party, reading the meter once a quarter if customer is unable to do so, limiting the hours in which meter readers will call, arranging safety checks by gas suppliers of gas appliances and advice on repairing or renewing if unsafe, providing bills in large print, Braille or on audio tape, facilities such as minicom and/or textphone. What do they think of them? What other services could/should it provide?</p>	<p>Looking at perceptions and experiences of PSR</p>

<p>How did they find out about what special services are available? How easy was it to find out?</p> <p>Do they receive information leaflets about the special services available? What do they think of the information provided? Is it customer friendly? How could it be improved?</p> <p>How easy was it to obtain these services? Were they free? Should they be free/rented etc? Did the supplier proactively offer them (how did they do this) or was it up to the customer to find out /make sure they got what they were entitled to?</p> <p>How would they prefer to find out about what special services are available? Are they notified by their supplier each year about the PSR? Have they ever had a supply cut? IF YES: What happened? IF NO: Do they know the procedure of what would happen if there was a supply cut? Have they ever tried to change supplier? Did being on the PSR make this difficult, or make no difference? Overall, what do they think is the main priority for improvement?</p>	
<p>CONCLUSIONS & CLOSURE</p> <p>Is there anything else I have missed that I should have asked about on this subject?</p> <p>THANK RESPONDENT</p>	<p>Wrap-up. Check any points not covered</p>

Appendix 5 Statistical reliability

- 5.1 MORI's guide to statistical reliability for data in Chapter 4 is set out below.
- 5.2 The respondents to the questionnaire are only samples of the total "population", so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the "true" values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the "true" values from a knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the "95% confidence interval".

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels			
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Interviews			
100	6	9	10

Source: MORI

- 5.3 For example, with a sample of 100 where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the "true" value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of plus or minus 10 percentage points from the sample result.
- 5.4 When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be "real", or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is "statistically significant", we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume "95% confidence interval", the differences between the two sample results must be greater than the values given in the table overleaf:

Differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels

	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Size of the samples compared			
61 (male) and 39 (female)	12	19	20
66 (British Gas) and 17 (Scottish Power)	16	25	27
31 (65-74) and 44 (75+)	14	21	23

Source: MORI

Appendix 6 Free gas safety check questionnaire

6.1 The questionnaire results for the data summarised in Chapter 4 are set out below.

- ◆ 100 interviews conducted over the phone in with customers who have received a free gas safety check
- ◆ Results based on all (100), unless otherwise stated
- ◆ Fieldwork conducted between 9 - 13 September 2003
- ◆ Data are unweighted
- ◆ An asterisk (*) denotes a finding of less than 0.5%, but greater than zero
- ◆ Where figures do not add up to 100, this is due to multiple coding or computer rounding
- ◆ Where bases are less than 30, unweighted numbers (N) are given, rather than percentages (%)

INTRODUCTION

SPEAK TO NAMED CONTACT/PERSON WHO PAYS THE GAS BILL ONLY

Good morning / afternoon, I am calling from MORI, an independent market research company, on behalf of Ofgem - the electricity and gas regulator. IF NECESSARY, EXPLAIN THAT OFGEM IS A PUBLIC BODY WHICH MONITORS GAS AND ELECTRICITY COMPANIES TO CHECK CUSTOMERS ARE BEING TREATED FAIRLY BY THEIR SUPPLIERS. We are speaking to customers about the level of service they receive from their gas supplier and were wondering whether you could spare 10 minutes to answer a few questions. ONLY IF NECESSARY, EXPLAIN THAT THEIR CONTACT DETAILS WERE PROVIDED BY THEIR LOCAL GAS SUPPLIER. REASSURE THEM THAT THEIR LOCAL SUPPLIER IS NOT BREAKING ANY DATA PROTECTION LAWS AS IT IS ALLOWED TO CONTACT CUSTOMERS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. EXPLAIN RESEARCH IS FOR OFGEM, NOT SUPPLIER. IF THEY WISH TO BE HIGHLIGHTED AS A CUSTOMER NOT TO BE CONTACTED FOR RESEARCH, THEY SHOULD CONTACT THEIR LOCAL SUPPLIER. I would like to assure you that all the information we collect will be kept in the strictest confidence, and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any particular individual or address in the results. IF NOT CONVENIENT TIME ASK TO MAKE AN APPT WITHIN NEXT 1 WEEK IF POSSIBLE

SCREENERS

Firstly, I would like to ask you a few questions about services you may have received recently from your gas supplier.

ASK ALL

Q1. Do you or any member of your immediate family work in the electricity or gas industry or market research? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%	
Yes	0	CLOSE
No	100	CONTINUE

Q2. Have you recently had a gas safety check carried out in your home by your gas supplier? **IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT KNOW, EXPLAIN THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF SOMEONE HAS COME TO THEIR HOUSE ON BEHALF OF THE COMPANY WHICH SUPPLIES THEIR GAS TO CARRY OUT SAFETY CHECKS ON THEIR GAS APPLIANCES - EG COOKER, BOILER, HEATER ETC. IF THEY ARE STILL UNSURE, CODE DON'T KNOW AND CLOSE.**

	%
Yes	100
No, but one is scheduled	0
No, not at all	0
Don't know	0

AWARENESS

Q3. Thinking about when you had your recent gas safety check, how did you first find out about the availability of this service? **DO NOT PROMPT. SINGLECODE ONLY**

	%
Supplier - Telephone call	14
Supplier - Letter/flyer/brochure in the post	32
Supplier - Letter/flyer/brochure by e-mail	1
Supplier's website	0
Work colleague	0
Family member/friend	7
Citizen's Advice Bureau	2
Help The Aged	1
Ofgem	1
Energywatch	2
Newspaper/magazine	7
Supplier – unspecified	4
When I changed gas company	2
On the back of the gas bill	2
Other	4
Can't remember/Don't know	20
None of these	1

Q4. Before you had your gas safety check, did you think it was a free service, or did you think you had to pay for it? **SINGLECODE ONLY**

	%
Free service	78

Payable service	15
Didn't know	4
Can't remember/Don't know	3

Q5. What made you think you had to pay for this service? **DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE OK**

Base: All who thought they had to pay for the safety check (15) N

Supplier representative told me	0
Information sent by supplier led me to believe so	0
Work colleague told me	0
Family member/friend told me	0
Citizen's Advice Bureau Adviser told me	0
Help The Aged representative told me	0
Ofgem told me	0
Energywatch told me	0
Read it in a newspaper/magazine	0
No reason, just thought you would	12
Other	3
Don't know	0

()

Q6. And in the end, did you have to pay for the service or was it free? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
Free service	97
Payable service	2
Can't remember	1

APPOINTMENT MAKING

Q7. When you received your gas safety check, was an appointment made in advance or did the inspector turn up on spec? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
Appointment	99
On spec	0
Can't remember	1

Q8. How long was it between you requesting/being offered a gas safety check and the inspector coming to carry out the safety check? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All with appointment (99) %

Less than 1 week	14
1-2 weeks	31
3-4 weeks	18
1-2 months	10
3+ months	2
Can't remember	24

Q9. When the inspector arrived for the appointment, did he turn up on time? **IF NO, PROBE:** And was the inspector early or late for the appointment? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All with appointment (99) %

Yes	93
No – early	5
No – late	1
Can't remember	1

Q10. How early was the inspector? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All where inspector was early (5) N

Under 15 minutes	2
15-29 minutes	0
30-59 minutes	0
1-2 hours	2
3-5 hours	1
6-24 hours	0
More than 1 day	0

Q10. How late was the inspector? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All where inspector was late (1) N

Under 15 minutes	0
15-29 minutes	0
30-59 minutes	1
1-2 hours	0
3-5 hours	0
6-24 hours	0
More than 1 day	0

SECURITY

Q11. When the appointment was made, were you given a special password which the inspector would use, so you could check who they were? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All with appointment (99) %

Yes	51
No	42
Can't remember	7

Q12. Did the inspector give the correct password before entering your home? **IF NO, CHECK WHY. SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All who used special password (50) %

Yes	90
No – inspector did not know it	0
No – I forgot the password	0
No – I forgot to ask for the	6

password	
Can't remember	4

Q13. Was the inspector carrying an identity card when he came to your home? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

%

Yes	79
No	2
Don't know	19

Q14. Did the inspector show you the identity card before he came into your home? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All whose inspector had identity card %
(79)

Yes	94
No	3
Can't remember	4

INSPECTION

Q15. Approximately how long did the inspector spend at your property? **INTEGER RESPONSE**

%

Under 15 minutes	5
15-19 minutes	7
20-29 minutes	13
30-39 minutes	29
40-49 minutes	19
50 minutes – 1 hour	12
Over 1 hour	6
Don't know	9
Average in minutes (mean)	38.7

Q16. A) Can you please tell me which of the following appliances you had in your home at the time of the check? **READ OUT MULTICODE OK. ROTATE START KEEP GROUPED ANSWERS TOGETHER.**

B) And which of the following appliances did the inspector check? **READ OUT ALL THOSE CODED AT Q16A. MULTICODE OK**

	QA %	QB %
Gas boiler	68	64
Gas convector heater	16	13
Heating Gas fire	71	70
Gas warm air unit/gas air heater (a hot air system which lets out hot air through grills)	4	4
Gas tumble dryer	1	1
Gas hob	47	42
Cooker Gas grill	31	28
Gas oven	50	45
Can't remember	0	0

None of these	0	0
---------------	---	---

Q17. Were any of the appliances condemned/marked as immediately dangerous or marked unsafe/at risk? **IF YES, READ OUT CODES MENTIONED AT Q16B. SINGLE CODE PER APPLIANCE**

Base: All who had appliance checked

	Gas boiler	Gas convect or heater	Gas fire	Gas warm air unit/gas air heater	Gas tumble dryer	Gas hob	Gas grill	Gas oven
	(64) %	(13) %	(70) %	(4) %	(1) %	(42) %	(28) %	(45) %
Yes – condemned/ marked as immediately dangerous	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Yes – marked as unsafe/at risk	2	0	6	0	0	5	4	2
No – appliance OK	97	100	90	100	100	95	96	98

Q18. What happened to **INSERT APPLIANCE FROM Q17** after the inspector said it was condemned/marked as immediately dangerous/ marked as unsafe/at risk (**READ OUT AS APPLICABLE**). **MULTICODE OK. READ OUT COMPLETE LIST. ROTATE START OF ANSWER LIST, KEEPING GROUPED ANSWERS TOGETHER**

Base: All with condemned/unsafe appliances

		Gas boiler	Gas fire	Gas hob	Gas grill	Gas oven
		(2) N	(7) N	(2) N	(1) N	(1) N
Power	- Inspector turned off the gas at the mains	0	0	0	0	0
	- Inspector disconnected the appliance	0	1	0	0	0
Labelling	- Inspector attached a sticker or label to the appliance to say it was condemned/immediately dangerous	1	3	0	0	0
	- Inspector attached a sticker or label to the appliance to say it was unsafe/at risk	0	1	1	1	1
Disposal	- Inspector took the appliance away to dispose of it	0	0	0	0	0
	- Inspector advised you to throw the appliance away	0	0	0	0	0
Repair	- Inspector advised you to get the appliance repaired/ fixed	0	2	1	1	1
	- Inspector repaired/ fixed the appliance themselves during visit	0	0	0	0	0
Advice	- Inspector advised you not to use the appliance	0	1	0	0	0

- Inspector advised you to contact the supplier for advice	0	0	0	0	0
- Inspector gave practical advice on how to get appliance repaired	0	0	1	1	1
- Inspector informed you who to contact for further advice (NOT SUPPLIER)	0	0	0	0	0
None of these	1	0	1	0	0
Don't know	0	0	0	0	0

Q19. Are you aware whether the inspector checked any of the following when he came to your home? **READ OUT COMPLETE LIST. MULTICODE OK. ROTATE START.**

VENTILATION/FLUES	- Looked at the ventilation outlets/ventilation grills/air supply into the property	%
		81
SOUNDNESS TEST	- Made sure there was not a leak/checked the pressure in the gas pipes	65
	None of these	4
	Don't know/can't remember	9

()

Q20. **Did the inspector advise you that there was a problem with the ventilation/flues?**

Base: All whose ventilation/flues were tested (81) %

Yes	11
No	89
Can't remember	0

Q20 **Did the Inspector advise you that there was a problem with the soundness test?**
SINGLE CODE ONLY

Base: All who had soundness test (65) %

Yes	2
No	97
Can't remember	2

Q21. **What did the inspector do about ventilation outlets/ventilation grills/air supply into the property?** MULTICODE OK

Base: All with a problem found on ventilation/flues (9) N

	- Nothing	2
Power	- Turned gas off at mains	0
Advice	- Advised you to leave the house until the problem was sorted	0
	- Advised you to contact the supplier for advice	0
Repair	- Arranged for someone to come and fix the problem that	0

day	
- Arranged for someone to come and fix the problem that week	0
- Arranged for someone to come and fix the problem – time unspecified/more than a week later	0
- Suggested that you get someone in to fix the problem	6
- Inspector fixed the problem	1
- Can't remember	0

Q21 What did the inspector do about the gas supply – a leak? MULTICODE OK

Base: All with a problem found on soundness test (1) N

	- Nothing	0
Power	- Turned gas off at mains	0
Advice	- Advised you to leave the house until the problem was sorted	0
	- Advised you to contact the supplier for advice	0
Repair	- Arranged for someone to come and fix the problem that day	0
	- Arranged for someone to come and fix the problem that week	0
	- Arranged for someone to come and fix the problem – time unspecified/more than a week later	0
	- Suggested that you get someone in to fix the problem	0
	- Inspector fixed the problem	1
	- Can't remember	0

Q22. Following the safety check, did you contact your supplier about the problem(s) identified by the inspector, did your supplier contact you, or have you had no contact with your supplier about this/these problems? SINGLE CODE ONLY

Base: All with problems found (appliances and/or ventilation/flues and/or soundness test) (16) N

Yes: I contacted my supplier	3
Yes: My supplier contacted me	1
No, no contact was made by either party	12
Can't remember	0

()

ASK ALL WHO CONTACTED/WERE CONTACTED BY SUPPLIER AT Q22 (CODE 1 OR 2). OTHERS GO TO FILTER BEFORE Q25

Q23. **What advice, if any, were you given by your supplier? PROBE FULLY What else? WRITE IN BELOW**

ANY ANSWER (WRITE IN AND CODE '1')	1
No advice given	2
Don't know/can't remember	3

Q24. How helpful, if at all, was the advice given to you by your supplier? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All who were given advice by their supplier (4) N

Very helpful	4	
Fairly helpful	0	
Not very helpful	0	()
Not at all helpful	0	
No opinion	0	

ASK Q25 IF 'TURNED OFF GAS MAINS' CODED AT Q18 OR Q21

Q25. How long were you left without your gas supply after the inspector switched it off at the mains? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base = 0

Up to 3 hours		
3-10 hours		
11-24 hours		
1-2 days		
3-5 days		
5+ days		()
Can't remember		

Q26. Did the inspector leave you any of the following? **READ OUT. MULTICODE OK**

A letter or leaflet containing safety advice in relation to your gas appliances	12
A warning or advice notice about the appliances marked as condemned/immediately dangerous	2
A warning or advice notice about the appliances marked as unsafe/at risk	2
A warning or advice notice about ventilation	4

A warning or advice notice about gas leaks	1
A record or certificate of inspection	82
None of these	8
Can't remember	4

()

Q27. Were you subsequently sent any of the following from your gas supplier? **READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
A letter or leaflet containing safety advice in relation to your gas appliances	3
A warning or advice notice about the appliances marked as condemned/immediately dangerous	0
A warning or advice notice about the appliances marked as unsafe/at risk	1
A warning or advice notice about ventilation	1
A warning or advice notice about gas leaks	0
A record or certificate of inspection	4
None of these	86
Can't remember	5

Q28. Overall, how satisfied were you with the level of service provided by the inspector whilst he was in your home? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
Very satisfied	87
Fairly satisfied	8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Fairly dissatisfied	0
Very dissatisfied	2

()

ASK Q29 IF DISSATISFIED WITH SERVICE AT Q28 (CODES 1 + 2)

Q29. **Why were you dissatisfied with the level of service provided by the inspector while s/he was in your home? PROBE FULLY Why else? WRITE IN BELOW**

ANY ANSWER (WRITE IN AND CODE '1') 1

Don't know/can't remember 2

Q30. Do you plan to have another safety check in the future? **IF YES, PROBE IF DEFINITELY OR PROBABLY. SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
Yes - definitely	79
Yes - probably	9
No	5

Don't know	7
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EMERGENCY

Q31. In an emergency, would you know how and where to turn off the gas? Would you say....**SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
Yes, I know exactly where and how to turn off the gas in an emergency	83
I think I know where and how to turn off the gas in an emergency	5
No, I don't know where and how to turn off the gas in an emergency	10
Don't know	2

()

Q32. During the inspection, did the inspector check the apparatus used for turning off the gas in an emergency, known as "the emergency control valve"? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Base: All who know or think they know how and where to turn of the gas (88) %

Yes	69
No	2
Can't remember/don't know	28

()

CLASSIFICATION

Q33. Can I ask what age you are please? **WRITE IN & CODE EXACT AGE SINGLE CODE ONLY. IF REFUSED, ASK BY RANGE**

Exact Age

	%
18-24	1
25-34	0
35-44	2
45-54	3
55-59	4
60-64	12
65-74	31
75-84	36
85 +	8
Refused	3

Q34. How would you describe the area in which you live? **READ OUT SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	%
Town/City	65
Countryside/village	33

Don't know	2
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Q35. Do you or any other household members aged 18+ have any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your or their daily activities or the work you or they can do? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

	Resp %	Household Member %
Yes	39	18
No	53	
Don't know	0	

Q36. Social Class

	%
A	2
B	4
C1	12
C2	6
D	14
E	56
Refused	6

Please remember that your replies to these questions will, of course, be kept absolutely private and confidential and only aggregated figures will be sent to Ofgem.

Q37. Ofgem may wish to explore some of the findings of the research in more detail. Would you be willing to be re-contacted by MORI/OFGEM for follow-up research at a time and for a duration of your choice?

	%
Yes – willing to be contacted	69
No – not willing	31

Q38. Code Gender

	%
Female	39
Male	61

Gas Supplier

	%
British Gas	66
Innogy	12
Scottish Power	17
London Energy	5

Distribution Area

	%
Aquila	15
East Midlands Electricity	2
EPN Distribution	7
LPN	9
NEDL	12
Seeboard	1
Southern Electric	15
SP Distribution	6
SP Manweb	6

United Utilities	13
Western Power South West	4
YEDL	10
