

Impact

371 sessions were delivered by over 80 delivery partners across the 14 regions of the Citizens Advice Financial Capability Forums in England and Wales, reaching some 2,200 consumers and 1,300 frontline advice workers.

Wider reach

- On average the number of friends and family that each interviewee had passed information on to following the session was five, which means that information from the sessions is potentially reaching far more people than those who attended.
- Since the session they attended, the frontline advice workers interviewed had provided advice on topics covered in the presentation to an average of 15 clients each. Extending this to the entire group of frontline advice workers who attended the presentations, suggests that approximately 20,000 clients will have already benefited from frontline advice workers' attendance at the presentations.

"It was a really good session. Many of the clients I work with are very young people moving into their own home for the first time so this will be useful."

"The training was comprehensive and catered for all levels of existing knowledge."

The fact that significant numbers of clients are continuing to come to bureaux for support on energy matters indicates that there is still a real need for preventative work with vulnerable client groups and for those that advise them about how to check energy costs, improve energy efficiency, and switch supplier if appropriate.

Demand for Energy Best Deal sessions continues to outstrip supply and the model has now been developed so that, subject to funding for sessions, it can easily be replicated and rolled out to reach even more people vulnerable to fuel poverty.

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Raising awareness of
energy savings and
help in paying bills



Energy Best Deal 2010 was funded by EDF Energy, E.ON, ScottishPower and nPower.

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The evaluation of Energy Best Deal 2010, conducted by the Centre for Sustainable Energy, was funded by Ofgem



2010 Review

citizens
advice
bureau



What is Energy best deal?

Energy Best Deal is a programme run by Citizens Advice and funded by EDF Energy, E.ON, ScottishPower and npower.

It targets both domestic energy consumers and frontline advice workers, through group sessions led by a trainer, in order to raise awareness about:

- reducing energy costs by changing tariff or suppliers; and
- the help that is available from both suppliers and Government for those who are struggling to pay their energy bills.

Consumers of all ages were given advice, but sessions were particularly marketed at people on low incomes and frontline advice workers helping such clients.

The programme was piloted in 2008 and rolled out across England and Wales in 2009; 2010 is therefore the second year that the programme has been run across England and Wales. The independent evaluation, from which this short report is drawn, was conducted by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) and funded by Ofgem.

Why is Energy Best Deal needed?

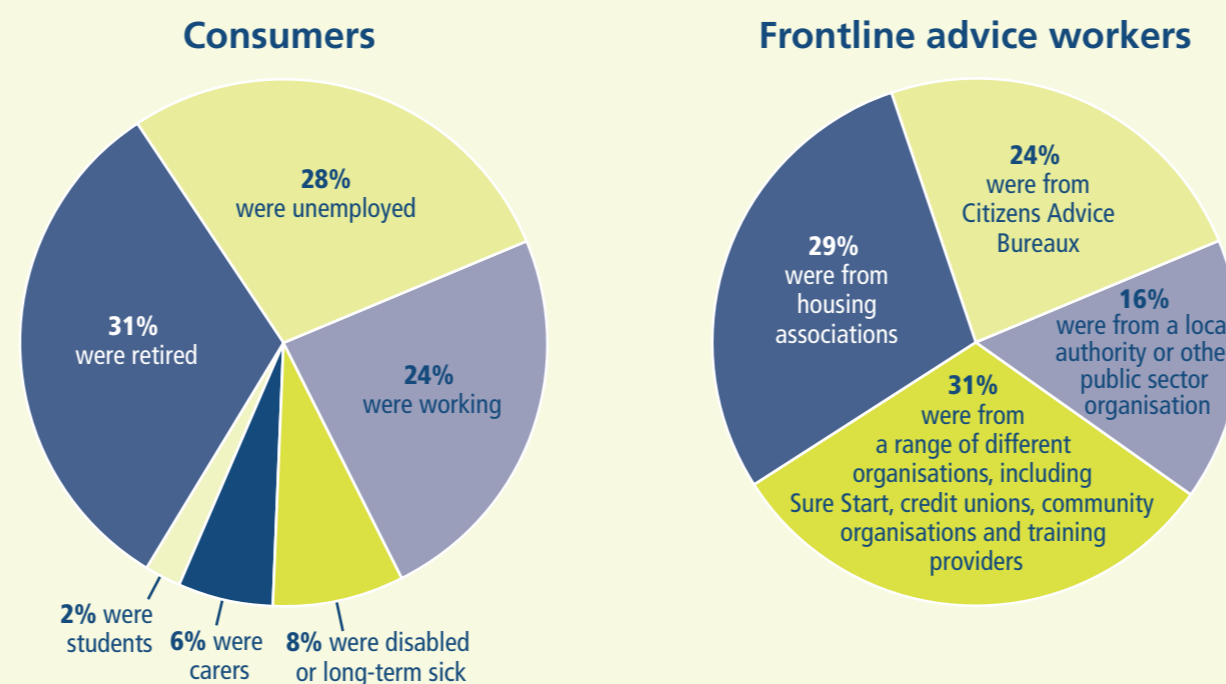
During the year April 2009 – March 2010 Citizens Advice Bureaux dealt with some 110,000 enquiries on fuel debts. This is up by 33 per cent compared to the previous year, itself a record period.

This continuing upward trend in the numbers of clients seeking advice for fuel debt problems means it is clear programmes like Energy Best Deal are required to get information to people on how they can reduce their energy bills, switch supplier to save money and where they can go for advice and information.

The feedback from Energy Best Deal sessions show that they have a real impact on the consumers and frontline advice workers that attend, with significant numbers taking action to improve their situations and passing on information as a result.

Who is being helped?

Energy Best Deal sessions were run by 81 agencies: 44 Citizens Advice Bureaux and 37 non-CAB forum partner agencies. This includes independent advice agencies, housing providers, credit unions, employment advice agencies and Age UK.



What were their attitudes and knowledge about energy matters before a session?

A quarter of consumers said that they found their energy bills to be a financial strain, while almost half (49 per cent) said that they worried about their bills although they were able to manage.

Prior to the session, 98 per cent of frontline advice workers knew it was possible to switch energy supplier, while 87 per cent knew that some payment methods can be more expensive than others.

Before attending Energy Best Deal, 73 per cent of frontline advice workers had some experience of giving advice on one or more of the topics covered in the presentation, with 54 per cent having previously given advice specifically on energy-related topics.

Consumers found the sessions useful, and acted on what they had heard

- Almost all (98 per cent) consumers said they found the session useful when asked immediately after the session.
- 68 per cent of people found the information about how to switch supplier useful.
- 49 per cent of people found the information about ways of paying for energy useful.

- The majority (82 per cent) of consumers **said they would definitely or probably do something as a result of the session**. The most popular action was contacting a current supplier, followed by seeing what prices were available from other companies and telling friends and family what had been learnt from the Energy Best Deal session.
- Follow-up interviews with a sample of 80 consumers selected at random found that **a third of them had taken action since the session**.
- Most of those that had taken action, **carried out more than one activity in relation to their energy costs**, with an average of 2.6 actions per person. The most popular actions were: looking at a switching website; contacting an existing supplier; and looking at energy suppliers' websites.
- **All of those that have gone on to switch supplier found the switching process very easy**.
- Apart from investigating switching, the most common other actions taken by interviewees included: giving friends and family information from the session, contacting the current supplier for advice, seeking advice on energy efficiency, seeking advice on benefits and tax credits, and seeking advice on debt and money management.

"It was really useful, I was surprised at how much I could save. I've talked about it with neighbours who are now also looking into switching themselves."

Frontline advice workers were more confident talking about energy matters after sessions, with some now giving advice on this topic to clients for the first time

- Following the session, 88 per cent of frontline advice workers said they were more confident in advising clients on one or more of the topics covered in the presentation, and 28 per cent said they were more confident in advising about all topics covered in the presentation.
- Follow up interviews were conducted with a sample of frontline advice workers:
 - 8 of the 21 frontline advice workers interviewed had taken some kind of action to look for a better deal on their own energy.
 - 12 out of 21 frontline workers interviewed, just over half, had already given advice on getting a better deal on their energy or on changing payment method to their clients. Only half of that group had ever given advice on this topic previously.

"I will use this information in my work as a family support worker"

*all quotes have been taken from comments given to researchers in follow-up telephone interviews