



Making a positive difference
for energy consumers

Mr Mark Hodges
Chief Executive
British Gas

BY EMAIL

Date: 22 September 2016

Dear Mr Hodges

Open letter – customer satisfaction with British Gas’ complaints handling

Today we published the report of our latest survey into customer satisfaction with suppliers’ complaint handling. Simply put the results are unacceptable. The overall level of satisfaction, which had fallen from the 2012 to 2014 waves, has dropped again and the percentage of consumers having a different view to their supplier on the status of their complaint has only marginally improved.

Among the most concerning statistics is the significant rise in consumers reporting they are “very dissatisfied”, up 7% and 11% respectively for domestic and microbusiness consumers. Given industry’s performance I am writing to you to draw attention to the findings, to ask that you continue your efforts to improve your complaint handling and respond publically to the issues raised in this letter.

The survey results

This is the fifth wave of this survey and covers the largest nine suppliers. The results show that British Gas’ performance got slightly worse with a 4% drop in overall satisfaction for domestic consumers surveyed. The survey also shows that British Gas are still some way off scores that are comparable with the best performing supplier in the market.

The results indicate that there are issues throughout the complaints journey and that these are common to nearly all suppliers, including:

- making it as easy as possible for consumers to register complaints
- specifying timescales at the start and throughout
- keeping the consumer informed as to the progress of their complaint so they do not have to chase for updates
- the ability of complaint handling staff to make decisions “there and then” and generally speeding up resolution
- being clear with consumers on the status of the complaint – as with previous surveys there were a significant number of complaints which the supplier viewed as closed but the consumer still thought were open
- informing consumers that they could seek independent advice or contact the Ombudsman to support the resolution of their complaint.

As well as these procedural issues the survey found suppliers also need to ensure their staff take complaints seriously, are more helpful and treat consumers fairly.

The impact of suppliers' performance is that, at the time of the survey, 52% of domestic and micro-business complainants overall were either planning, in the process or had switched as a result of their experience. This represents an increase since 2014.

Next steps

Improving communication at the outset and throughout the complaint journey is necessary to prevent consumers feeling they need to manage the process themselves and to improve satisfaction. As stated above we would like you to publically respond to this letter setting out how you have and intend to improve the complaints handling experience you give your customers and, specifically, how you will ensure your communication with complainants improves.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dermot Nolan'.

Dermot Nolan
Chief Executive