

The Ombudsman Service Limited

Energy Supply Ombudsman Customer Satisfaction 2007

A Report
by
craigforth
Consultancy & Research

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Having started operating as an alternative dispute resolution for the energy supply industry in July 2006 the Energy Supply Ombudsman has recently commissioned an independent research company to undertake a customer satisfaction survey. The survey asked members of the public to rate a range of different aspects of the service they had received, including the quality of the first contact with the ombudsman service and the quality of service they received from the organisation's staff. They were also asked about their satisfaction with the service overall.
- 1.2. The survey was primarily sent to people who had made an enquiry of the Energy Supply Ombudsman. In addition, the small number of people who had made a complaint to the ombudsman and the case had already been concluded were consulted. However, as the number of concluded cases is currently very small, any complainant related results can not be considered to be statistically robust.
- 1.3. People contacting the Energy Supply Ombudsman are evenly split between those with a problem relating to their gas supply, those with a problem relating to their electricity supply and those with a dual fuel related problem. Difficulties associated with billing and charging were reported as the single most serious problem by the majority of both those making an enquiry and a complaint.
- 1.4. The staff of the Energy Supply Ombudsman are already emerging as one of the organisation's greatest assets. Almost 9 out of 10 of those making an enquiry reported being satisfied with their first contact with staff. Overall, 9 out of 10 enquirers were satisfied with the friendliness, knowledge, helpfulness and reliability of staff. While still high, at just under 4 out of 5 enquirers, the lowest satisfaction rating related to staffs' authority to deal with people's problems.
- 1.5. When people first got in touch with the Energy Supply Ombudsman over 7 out of 10 were advised to get back in touch with their energy supplier and give them another chance to sort out the problem. Around 1 out of 2 of these people reported that they had gone back to their supplier and the problem had now been resolved. For around 2 out of 5 people who had re-contacted their supplier the problem remained unresolved at the time they were surveyed.
- 1.6. Less than 1 out of 2 enquirers felt that the Energy Supply Ombudsman had done most to help resolve their problem. The remainder of people were split evenly between feeling the energy supplier or their own advisor or another agency had done the most.
- 1.7. Almost 3 out of 5 enquirers were satisfied with the Energy Supply Ombudsman overall and just 1 out of 5 people were dissatisfied. Although the numbers were small 13 of the 16 complainants also reported being satisfied. Encouraging, 7 out of 10 enquirers said they would use the Energy Supply Ombudsman again or would recommend the service to family or friends.

- 1.8. Although there is a clear potential to improve overall satisfaction ratings these are nonetheless positive results for an organisation's first year of operation and based on these early findings the contribution of the staff is likely to be key to improving customer satisfaction over the next few years.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Having started operating as an alternative dispute resolution for the energy supply industry in July 2006 the Energy Supply Ombudsman has recently commissioned an external research agency to undertake its first customer satisfaction survey.
- 2.2. In 2005 Ofgem determined that energy suppliers should establish a scheme to resolve outstanding billing disputes in a fair and independent way. The members of the Energy Retail Association made a commitment to establishing that scheme and the Energy Supply Ombudsman is the result. The Energy Supply Ombudsman's members include over 99% of UK energy suppliers.
- 2.3. Before making a complaint to the Energy Supply Ombudsman (ESO), customers must first have taken their complaint through their energy supplier's complaints procedure and the case must effectively be 'deadlocked' i.e. the company has stated that it can do no more to try and resolve the complaint¹.
- 2.4. If the ESO considers that a complaint is within its remit, the team will investigate the case and the Ombudsman will consider whether the supplier must take any action. The suppliers that have joined the scheme have undertaken to honour the Ombudsman's decision.

Aim and Objectives of the 2007 Research

- 2.5. The aim of this first year of customer satisfaction research is very much to set a benchmark against which future research can be compared and the results judged.
- 2.6. Under its terms of reference² the ESO must provide a service that is independent, easy to use, transparent, effective and free of charge. The service must also effectively communicate these principles to members of the public. Assessing whether members of the public who have used the service consider they are adhering to these principles is the primary objective of this research.
- 2.7. Members of the public who use the ESO service are likely to fall into one of the following 3 broad groups:
 - Those whose complaints have been accepted for investigation by the ESO, and have either been through the investigation process and received the Ombudsman's final decision or have had their case resolved through assisted negotiation by the Ombudsman;

¹ Or if 12 weeks have elapsed and the company is not willing/able to issue a deadlock letter the customer can also approach the ESO.

² The Energy Supply Ombudsman Terms of Reference. Available at: http://www.energy-ombudsman.org.uk/downloads/Energy_Terms_of_Reference_adopted_20-06-06.pdf

- Those who made an enquiry and whose complaints were within the ESO's terms of reference but who did not return a complaint form to the ESO;
- Those who made an enquiry to the ESO but, for whatever reason, the ESO was not able to investigate their complaint e.g. either because their energy supplier is not a member of the scheme or because the complainant had not yet given their service provider an opportunity to resolve the problem.

Research Methods

- 2.8. The research was undertaken between January and June 2007. Postal survey was the method used to gather original data. The survey asked members of the public to rate a range of different aspects of the service they had received, including the quality of the first contact with the ombudsman service and the quality of service they received from the organisation's staff. They were also asked about their satisfaction with the service overall.

Enquirers

- 2.9. The enquirers group is made up of members of the public that made contact with the ESO (seeking advice, information etc) but had not gone on to make an official complaint against their supplier. It is possible that some of the enquirer group will go on to make a complaint at some point in the future but they had not done so at the point the survey was issued.
- 2.10. For 3 weeks from 17 January 2007 ESO staff asked all those who contacted the organisation to make an enquiry if they would be willing to participate in the study. The addresses of those that had agreed were forwarded on to Craigforth. A total of around 500 sets of contact information were forwarded to Craigforth.
- 2.11. The study team then drew a random sample of 250 from all the names and addresses supplied to them. The 250 postal surveys were issued during the week beginning 26 February 2007. The surveys were issued with a covering letter from the ESO and a reply paid envelope. After 3 weeks a reminder was sent to those that had not responded to the initial mail out. The survey was closed on the 16 April 2007.
- 2.12. A total of 75 analysable surveys were returned, a response rate of 30%.

Complainants

- 2.13. The complainants group is made up of members of the public that went on to make an official complaint to the Energy Supply Ombudsman. Given that the ESO only started taking on complaints in the summer of 2006 only a small number (25 cases) had been completed by the time the research was being undertaken. Given the extremely small number of possible survey participants the 2007 survey should be seen as a pilot for the 2008 research.

- 2.14. Given these small numbers all complaints with a closed case were issued with a survey. The 25 surveys were all issued with a covering letter from the ESO and a reply paid envelope. The surveys were issued during the week beginning 12 March 2007. Three weeks later a reminder was issued to those that had not responded to the initial mailing. The survey was closed on the 16 April 2007.
- 2.15. A total of 16 analysable surveys were returned, a response rate of 64%. Although the response rate is high the absolute number of returns is clearly very low. In consequence, the results cannot be considered to be either reliable or statistically robust.

3. WHO WERE THE ENQUIRERS AND THE COMPLAINANTS?

- 3.1. This chapter sets out the main characteristics of those who responded to the surveys of enquirers and complainants. As noted earlier the sample size for the complainants is very small and has no statistical validity. In response, the commentary combines the enquirer and complainant responses to increase the sample size and hence the reliability of the data.
- 3.2. There was a relatively even split between male and female respondents and just over 2 out of 3 fell into the 36-65 years age group. Around 1 out of 6 respondents was aged 66 years or older.

Sex of respondents

Sex	Enquirers	Complainants
Male	35	9
Female	32	7
Base (n)	67	16

Age of respondents

Age	Enquirers	Complainants
Under 19	1	-
19-25	2	-
26-35	7	5
36-45	19	4
46-55	17	3
56-65	15	1
66 +	11	3
Base (n)	72	16

- 3.3. Almost 4 out of 5 (77%) live in the owner occupied sector – this is slightly higher than the national rate which was estimated at just over 70% for 2007. Tenants of the council and housing association sectors were slightly under-represented among respondents.

Tenure of respondents

	Enquirers	Complainants	UK dwellings by tenure ³
Owner occupier	56	11	70.2%
Tenant of a council	4	1	10.7%
Tenant of a housing association	2	3	10.7%
Tenant of a private landlord	8	1	8.4%
Other	1	-	-
Base (n)	71	16	26.2 million

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Note: It should be noted that the enquirer and complainant figures refer to individuals whereas the UK tenure figure refers to properties.

³ Office for National Statistics, Social Trends No 37, 2007 edition.

- 3.4. English is the first language of all but 2 respondents and just under 9 out of 10 (88%) identified themselves as white. This is slightly below the national rate of 92%. Of the group that identified themselves as white, more than 4 out of 5 (83%) said they were English.

Racial or ethnic background

		Enquirers	Complainants	Census 2001
White	English	50	12	
	Welsh	3	-	
	Scottish	6	-	
	Irish	1	-	
	Other British	2	-	
	Any other White	1	-	
Total White		63	12	92%
Mixed		1	-	
Asian or Asian British	Indian	1	-	
	Pakistani	1	-	
	Bangladeshi	-	-	
	Any other Asian	1	-	
Black or Black British	Caribbean	2	1	
	African	-	-	
	Any other Black	-	1	
Chinese/ Other Ethnic Group	Chinese	-	1	
	Any other	-	1	
Total Ethnic Minority		6	4	8%
Base (n)		69	16	58,789,194

English as first language

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	69	15
No	1	1
Base (n)	70	16

- 3.5. In addition to asking respondents to identify their racial or ethnic background the addresses of enquirers have also been analysed by country of residence within the UK⁴. The results are displayed in the table below and are for both all those who made an enquiry (i.e. the analysis is of all the addresses supplied to Craigforth by the ESO) and those that responded to the enquirers survey.

⁴ It should be noted that this analysis identifies where people actually live rather than the racial group to which they consider they belong.

- 3.6. The proportion of both all enquirers and enquirers survey respondents that lived in England was higher than for the UK as a whole. Scotland was slightly over represented among survey respondents while Wales was under represented. There were no enquirers or survey respondents from Northern Ireland although almost 3% of the UK population is based there.

Country of residence of enquirers based on postal address

	Enquirers		Mid 2005 Population Estimates ⁵
	All	Survey Respondents	
England	88%	85%	83.8%
Northern Ireland	-	-	2.9%
Scotland	8%	12%	8.5%
Wales	4%	1%	4.9%
Outside UK	<1%	1%	-
Base (n)	292	75	60.2 million

⁵ All enquirers – this is all the people whose information was based on to Craigforth and from whom the 250 sample for the postal survey was drawn. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 3.7. Around 1 out of 5 people reported that they had one or more disability. A hearing impairment was the most frequent and affected almost 1 out of 10 people.

Type of disability

	Enquirers	Complainants
Impaired hearing	9	-
Poor sight/ blindness	1	-
Problems with physical mobility	3	1
Other disability	6	1
None reported	58	15
Base (n)	75	16

Numbers do not sum to base due to multiple responses (i.e. people reporting multiple disabilities)

⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=6>

4. THE MEMBER COMPANIES AND THEIR CUSTOMERS' PROBLEMS

- 4.1. Based on survey responses this section provides information about the type of member companies subject to an enquiry or complaint and the reasons why the enquiry or complaint was made.

Type of Company and Actual Company

- 4.2. The 91 respondents were quite evenly split between the type of supply their enquiry or complaint related to. Around 1 out of 3 people were making an enquiry or complaint about a company that supplied only their electricity, around 1 out of 3 about a company that supplied only their gas and a similar proportion about a dual fuel supplier.

Type of Supplier

	Enquirers	Complainants
Electricity only	22	7
Gas only	24	4
Both electricity and gas (dual fuel)	29	5
Base (n)	75	16

Problems with Energy Suppliers

- 4.3. When asked to identify all the main problems that had led to their enquiry or complaint billing and charging emerged very strongly as the most common with over 4 out of 5 respondents (84%) saying it had been a problem. Two out of five people (40%) said customer service was involved and around 1 out of 5 had experienced problems with changing supplier.
- 4.4. Respondents were also asked to identify the single most serious problem that had led to their enquiry or complaint. Again, billing and charging emerged as the single most serious problem having been selected by 2 out of 3 people (66%). More specifically, it was selected by 13 of the 16 complainants.

All problems experienced with member companies

	Enquirers	Complainants
Problems with changing supplier	16	2
Other disconnection/reconnection	10	-
Equipment faults	1	1
Loss of supply	2	-
Customer service	29	7
Billing/charging	61	15
Something else	13	4
Base (n)	75	16

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

Single most serious problem

	Enquirers	Complainants
Problems with changing supplier	3	1
Other disconnection/reconnection	3	-
Equipment faults	1	-
Loss of supply	-	-
Customer service	9	2
Billing/charging	39	13
Something else	8	-
Base (n)	63	16

- 4.5. Respondents were spread relatively evenly according to how long their problem had been ongoing before they contacted the ESO. The greatest proportion (around 1 out of 3), had been experiencing a problem for between 3 and 4 months at the point when they made their enquiry or complaint. Over 1 out of 5 report their enquiry or complaint going on for over 6 months with their energy supplier before involving the ESO.

Duration of complaint to company - pre- Energy Supply Ombudsman

	Enquirers	Complainants
Under a month	10	-
1 - 2 months	12	2
3 -4 months	23	6
5 - 6 months	13	2
Over 6 months	16	5
Not really sure/ don't remember	1	1
Base (n)	75	16

Information about how to Complain

- 4.6. Only just over 1 out of 5 respondents (22%) report that they had been made aware of their company's Code of Practice on complaints handling, although this result may be affected by people's level of recall. Of the 20 respondents that had been informed about the Code 6 had heard about it through a telephone conversation with their company and 5 from the company's website.

Made aware of Code of Practice on complaints handling?

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	16	4
No	51	10
Not sure/ don't remember	8	2
Base (n)	75	16

How Enquirers and Complainants were made aware of the Code of Practice

	Enquirers	Complainants
Information on a bill sent by the company	2	-
The company sent me a copy during my complaint	1	-
Telephone conversation with the company	4	2
The company's website	5	-
The Energy Supply Ombudsman	1	1
The regulator/ Ofgem	-	-
Other	3	1
Not sure/ don't remember	-	-
Base (n)	16	4

- 4.7. Only 6 respondents (or 7%) recalled being advised that they could refer their problem/case to the ESO. For 4 of these 6 this had happened at some stage during the company's complaints process.

Advised that could refer to the Energy Supply Ombudsman after 12 Weeks?

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	3	3
No	70	12
Not sure/ don't remember	2	1
Base (n)	75	16

Stage at which advised

	Enquirers	Complainants
When I first complained to the company	-	-
During the company's complaints process	3	1
When the company told me it was unable to resolve my complaint or could do no more	-	1
Not sure/ don't remember	-	1
Other	-	-
Base (n)	3	3

5. INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE ENERGY SUPPLY OMBUDSMAN AND THE ENERGY SUPPLY OMBUDSMAN WEBSITE

- 5.1. This section of the report examines respondents' initial contact with the ESO, including sources of information about the organisation. It also includes data about customers' use of the Energy Supply Ombudsman's website.

Sources of Information about the ESO

- 5.2. People had heard about the ESO from a range of sources. The most frequent source had been the internet and the ESO's own website (3 out of 10 people). Just under 1 out of 5 said they already knew about the ESO while friends, family or colleagues and Energy Watch were also mentioned by at least 1 out of 10 respondents.

Sources of Information about the Energy Supply Ombudsman

	Enquirers	Complainants
I already knew about the Energy Supply Ombudsman	15	1
From the company's code of practice on complaint handling	5	2
From another leaflet sent by the company	2	-
From a letter from the company saying they could not do anything more about my complaint	1	3
From the Energy Supply Ombudsman website/from the internet	21	5
From the telephone directory	1	-
From Energy Watch	9	1
From Consumer Direct	3	-
From a CAB, trading standards or other advice centre	6	2
From press, radio, TV	3	1
From a professional advisor (lawyer, accountant etc)	1	-
From friends, family, colleagues	12	3
From the regulator/ Ofgem	4	-
From elsewhere	10	2
Base (n)	74	16

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

- 5.3. Most people (just over 3 out of 5) had first contacted the ESO after complaining to their company but before receiving a decision. Almost no one (only 2 people, both enquirers) had contacted the ESO before they had complained to their company.

Time of first contact with the Energy Supply Ombudsman

	Enquirers	Complainants
Before I had complained to the company	2	-
After I had complained to the company but before I had received their decision	46	8
After the company had made their decision, and I decided I wanted to take my case to the Ombudsman	24	8
Base (n)	72	16

First Contact with the ESO

- 5.4. When people contacted the ESO the majority of people (3 out of 5) made that contact by telephone while 1 out of 5 wrote to the ESO. Around 1 out of 6 people contacted the ESO by email.

Method of first contact with the Energy Supply Ombudsman

	Enquirers	Complainants
By telephone	44	10
By letter/ fax	17	1
By email	9	3
Using the online form	1	2
By text phone	-	-
Somebody else on my behalf	2	-
Base (n)	73	16

Reasons for Contacting the Energy Supply Ombudsman

- 5.5. People had contacted the ESO for a variety of reasons. The most frequently reported reasons were to ask the ESO to contact the customer's energy supplier and ask them to do something (42%), to get specific advice about what to do next (41%) and to register their complaint and get the complaints process going (35%).

Reasons for first contacting the Energy Supply Ombudsman

	Enquirers	Complainants
To get general advice about what energy supply companies normally do/ don't do ("can they do that?")	6	4
To give me advice about making a complaint to my supplier	15	3
To get specific advice about what I should do next	31	5
To give me an indication about the strength of my case, to see if it was worth making a complaint to the supplier	7	5
To give me an indication about the strength of my case, to see if it was worth making a complaint to the Energy Supply Ombudsman	12	5
To send me a form/ leaflet on how to complain to the Energy Supply Ombudsman	4	7
To give me an idea of the time a complaint might take	3	2
To contact my supplier on my behalf and ask them to do something	27	10
To register my complaint and get the complaint process moving	24	7
Base (n)	72	16

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

Initial reception

- 5.6. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction various aspects of the initial reception they received from the ESO. Combining the results for enquirers and complainants the results were good with around 7 out of 10 or more satisfied in all categories. The staff spoken to received the highest satisfaction rating with nearly 9 out of 10 people satisfied and just under 7 out of 10 very satisfied.
- 5.7. The speed of initial response and the website⁶ were also highly regarded with satisfaction ratings of around 4 out of 5 or higher.
- 5.8. The highest levels of dissatisfaction related to the explanation and advice given and the speed of initial response. Although less than 1 out of 5 respondents were dissatisfied in either category most of those dissatisfied with the speed of response were 'very' dissatisfied.

⁶ It should be noted that only a small number of respondents – around 30 people – answered questions about the website.

Satisfaction with first contact with the Energy Supply Ombudsman – Enquirers

Enquirers	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Staff spoken to	33	13	3	1	3	53
The leaflet/ form sent	16	5	5	3	3	32
Explanation/ advice given	24	13	6	6	5	54
Speed of initial response	23	16	3	2	7	51
Explanation about the powers of the Energy Supply Ombudsman	22	14	10	2	3	51
The Energy Supply Ombudsman website	8	10	4	2	-	24

Satisfaction with first contact with the Energy Supply Ombudsman – Complainants

Complainants	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Staff spoken to	11	2	-	-	1	14
The leaflet/ form sent	8	2	3	-	-	13
Explanation/ advice given	9	3	1	-	1	14
Speed of initial response	9	3	-	1	1	14
Explanation about the powers of the Energy Supply Ombudsman	10	-	2	2	-	14
The Energy Supply Ombudsman website	2	4	-	-	-	6

Other Advice Taken

- 5.9. Most people (57%) did not take advice from any other sources other than the ESO. Among those who did get information or advice from elsewhere the most frequently cited sources were Energy Watch, a CAB, trading standards or other advice agency or a friend, colleague or relative. Around 1 in 6 continued getting advice from other sources once they were in contact with the ESO.

Other sources of advice

	Enquirers	Complainants
Another energy supplier	7	-
A lawyer/ law centre	2	-
Another professional advisor e.g. accountant, surveyor)	2	-
Energy Watch	11	2
Consumer Direct	3	1
CAB/Trading Standards/ other advice centre	10	1
Ofgem/ Government department or agency	1	-
Unpaid help from a friend/ colleague/ relative	9	-
Other	3	-
I did not take advice from anyone	39	12
Base (n)	74	16

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

Use of other advice during the Energy Supply Ombudsman process

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	13	1
No	22	3
Base (n)	35	4

The Energy Supply Ombudsman Website

5.10. Where applicable respondents were also asked to give their views on the ESO website; enquirers were asked a wider range of questions than complainants. The number of people answering questions about the website is relatively low and although the data is presented here, the information should only be regarded as indicative. Points to note are that:

- Overall satisfaction with the website seems to be high and a majority of enquirers thought it was good or excellent compared to other sites they had visited;
- Most enquirers had found the website via a search engine when looking for information on energy complaints. Once there most people said they had found what they were looking for without much difficulty; and
- Around half of enquirers used the web site on more than one occasion.

5.11. Among enquirers and complainants a small number of people (9) had completed the on-line complaints form with most of them (7) saying they had done so easily.

Satisfaction with the Energy Supply Ombudsman website

	Enquirers
Very Satisfied	8
Fairly Satisfied	10
Neither/ Nor	4
Fairly Dissatisfied	2
Very Dissatisfied	-
Base (n)	24

Source of information on the Energy Supply Ombudsman website – Enquirers

	Enquirers (n)
Through a search engine/I was looking for information on energy complaints on the internet	25
Through a link on another website	7
Through a reference in an Energy Supply Ombudsman	2
From a reference in another publication	3
By word of mouth	2
Other	1
Base (n)	40

How many times visited the website – Enquirers (n)

	Enquirers (n)
Once	20
Two or three times	20
Four or more times	1
Base (n)	41

Found what wanted?

	Enquirers (n)
Yes, and I found much more of interest too	5
Yes, I found what I was looking for without much difficulty	25
Yes, I found what I was looking for but with some difficulty	1
To some extent - I found some of what I was looking for but not all	5
Not relevant – I was just browsing	1
No	3
Base (n)	40

The Energy Supply Ombudsman website in comparison to others

Overall, how do you rate the Energy Supply Ombudsman website in comparison to others you visit?	Enquirers (n)
Excellent	3
Good	22
Neither good nor poor	11
Poor	2
Very poor	1
Can't say/don't know	2
Base (n)	41

Completed the online complaints form

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	5	4
No – I tried to complete it but found it difficult	1	-
No – I couldn't find it	2	-
No – I was just looking for information	32	3
Not sure/ don't remember	1	1
Base (n)	41	8

Online complaints form easy to complete

	Enquirers	Complainants
I completed it easily	3	4
I had some difficulty but managed to complete it	1	-
I found it very difficult to complete	1	-
I was unable to complete it	-	-
Base (n)	5	4

The Online complaints form – Enquirers

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither /nor	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Base (n)
The questions were easy to answer	1	2	1	-	-	4
It was difficult to go backwards and forwards between pages	-	1	-	2	-	3
The instructions were easy to follow	-	1	1	-	1	3
The Energy Supply Ombudsman could not deal with my complaint according to the online form	-	-	-	1	1	2

The Online Complaints Form – Complainants

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither /nor	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Base (n)
The questions were easy to answer	2	2	-	-	-	4
It was difficult to go backwards and forwards between pages	1	1	1	1	-	4
The instructions were easy to follow	1	3	-	-	-	4
The Energy Supply Ombudsman could not deal with my complaint according to the online form	-	-	-	-	2	2

6. THE EXPERIENCE OF ENQUIRERS

The 2006 Enquirers

- 6.1. In this chapter the experience of those contacting the ESO with an enquiry is explored in greater detail.

Enquirers' experience of people at the Energy Supply Ombudsman

- 6.2. The survey results suggest that around 2 out of 3 people had spoken to someone at the ESO. When asked to evaluate the staff they had dealt with the results were generally very good and more than 9 out of 10 people were satisfied with the friendliness, helpfulness, knowledge and reliability of ESO staff along with their understanding of the problem(s) they had contacted the service about. In all these categories the majority was 'very' satisfied. There was also virtually no dissatisfaction relating to any of these aspects of the service.
- 6.3. Although more than 3 out of 4 people were satisfied with ESO staff's authority to deal with peoples' problems, this was also the only category to attract any significant dissatisfaction (4 enquirers).

Spoke to the people at the Energy Supply Ombudsman - Enquirers

Yes, when I made my initial enquiry	37
Yes, at a later stage	11
No, I did not speak to anyone at all	25
Base (n)	73

Enquirers' satisfaction with ESO people

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Friendliness	34	8	2	1	-	45
Helpfulness	30	12	2	1	-	45
Knowledge – knew what they were talking about	30	12	2	-	-	44
Reliability – always did what they said they would	17	3	2	-	-	22
Understanding of my problem – knew what I was on about	26	13	-	1	1	41
Authority to deal with my problem	17	6	3	2	2	30

Advice given by the ESO and Enquirers' Actions

- 6.4. The initial advice given to most enquirers (2 out of 3) was to get back in touch with their energy supplier and give them another chance to sort out the problem. Just over 1 out of 6 enquirers were advised to complete and submit a complaint form to the ESO. Eight of those 11 people said they had returned a form.

Advice Given – Enquirers

To get back in touch with the company and give them another chance to sort out the problem – but return to the Energy Supply Ombudsman if they did not resolve my problem/ if they sent me a deadlock letter	45
To get back in touch with the company and give them another chance to sort out the problem – the Energy Supply Ombudsman did not tell me I could return to them if the company did not resolve my problem	5
The problem was outside the Energy Supply Ombudsman's terms of reference and I should seek legal or other advice	6
My company was not a member of the Energy Supply Ombudsman and I should use another form of redress/contact	-
To return a signed and completed form to the Energy Supply Ombudsman with supporting documents	11
Base (n)	67

Reasons for not returning a complaint form – Enquirers

I could not be bothered/ it was not that big a problem	2
From the advice the Energy Supply Ombudsman gave me I was not confident my complaint would be successful/ would be upheld	1
From the Energy Supply Ombudsman's advice I was not confident that a formal complaint would get me enough cash compensation to make it worthwhile	-
From the Energy Supply Ombudsman's advice I was not sure that they could get the company to fix the problem or to give me compensation	2
The Energy Supply Ombudsman's procedures seemed very bureaucratic and off-putting	-
The Energy Supply Ombudsman did not seem truly independent of the energy industry – I was not confident I would get a fair and balanced resolution	-
I did return a signed and completed complaints form to the Energy Supply Ombudsman	8
Base (n)	13

Outcome and Satisfaction with Action by Member Company

- 6.5. Around 50 enquirers (83% of those answering the question) reported going back to their energy supplier. The outcomes achieved were mixed – only 20 people (38%) reported going back to their supplier and that the company had dealt with the problem. Twenty people were still waiting to hear from their supplier while 8 people had got nowhere and were still considering what to do.

After contacting the Energy Supply Ombudsman – Enquirers

I went back to the company and they dealt with the problem	23
I went back to the company and got nowhere and gave up	-
I went back to the company and got nowhere and I am still considering what to do	8
I went back to the company and am still waiting to hear from them	20
I complained to the regulator/ Ofgem	-
I sought advice from elsewhere/ did something else	8
I did nothing/ gave up	1
Base (n)	60

- 6.6. In 1 out of 2 cases the enquirers reported that their problem had not been resolved as yet. Around 1 out of 3 reported that the problem had been resolved in the way they wanted. Offering an apology or explanation was the most frequently reported action taken by the energy suppliers.

Action taken by energy supplier – Enquirers

They resolved my problem the way I wanted	21
They offered me an apology/ explanation	12
They did not charge me the full amount	5
They gave me time to pay what I owe	2
They waived my bill entirely/ I got a full refund of my bill	4
They offered me a discount on my bills	1
They gave me a goodwill payment for my trouble/ inconvenience	2
They refunded my expenses	-
They offered me a gift	-
They could not resolve it to my satisfaction/ have not resolved it yet	33
Base (n)	66

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

- 6.7. Enquirers overall satisfaction with the action taken by their supplier was mixed. The highest proportion of enquirers (22 or 1 out of 3) said that they were not at all satisfied and no action had been taken. At the other end of the spectrum 9 enquirers (1 out of 7) reported being completely satisfied.

Satisfaction with action taken by energy supplier – Enquirers

I was completely satisfied	9
I was not completely satisfied, but the action taken was acceptable	15
I was not completely satisfied, but some action was taken	5
I was not at all satisfied with the action taken	11
I was not at all satisfied and no action was taken	22
Base (n)	62

- 6.8. Encouragingly for such a new service almost half of the enquirers who answered the question (23 of the 51) thought the ESO had done the most to resolve their problem.

Which body did most to resolve problem – Enquirers

The Energy Supply Ombudsman did most	23
My advisor/ another agency did most	15
The regulator/ Ofgem did most	1
The energy supplier did most	12
Base (n)	51

Enquirer Outcomes and Perceptions of the ESO and its Role

6.9. Enquirers were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements about the ESO and its role and the results are displayed in the table below. While the number of people responding to each statement is often low a couple of points do emerge:

- Over 2 out of 3 people agreed or strongly agreed that the ESO was excellent and had given advice which helped with their problem;
- A minority of enquirers (7 out of the 22 that responded to the relevant statement felt the ESO had made no difference at all.

The role of the ESO

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither /nor	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Base (n)
The Energy Supply Ombudsman was excellent – they gave me advice which helped me with my problem	22	11	6	4	6	49
Its impossible to say – I have no idea whether the Energy Supply Ombudsman’s involvement made any difference or not	4	8	8	5	4	29
Once my company became aware that I had contacted the Energy Supply Ombudsman it changed its tune and settled my complaint quickly	11	6	4	2	10	33
The Energy Supply Ombudsman made no difference at all – the company still refused to give me what I wanted	7	2	2	6	5	22
The Energy Supply Ombudsman were very helpful – giving me information about my case, and I was better able to deal with the company on my own	9	8	7	5	3	32
The Energy Supply Ombudsman were completely useless – they just spoke to me and I heard nothing more from them	5	-	1	4	15	25
The Energy Supply Ombudsman and my advisors helped to sort out my problem	4	8	2	3	5	22
The Energy Supply Ombudsman said my case was not one they could deal with	5	2	3	6	8	24
The Energy Supply Ombudsman will be talking to the company/ industry to persuade them to change their policy	3	1	-	4	1	9

- 6.10. Overall a clear majority of enquirers (29 people or around 2 out of 3) felt that their problem had been resolved in their favour – this group was evenly split between those who felt the resolution was completely in their favour (14 people) and those who felt on balance it was in their favour (15 people). However a substantial minority (13 people or over 1 out of 4) felt the outcome had gone completely against them – again this group was evenly split between those who felt it had gone completely against them (7 people) and those who felt on balance the outcome had gone against them (6 people).

Perceived outcome for Enquirers

Completely in enquirer's favour	14
On balance in enquirer's favour	15
On balance it was a draw	3
On balance against enquirer	6
Completely against enquirer	7
Base (n)	45

- 6.11. Overall a majority of enquirers (56%) were satisfied with the ESO – people were twice as likely to be very satisfied as fairly satisfied. One out of five enquirers (20%) was dissatisfied, with the majority being very dissatisfied. Although there is room for improvement, these are encouraging results for an organisation that is still in its first year of operation.

Enquirers' overall satisfaction with the ESO

Very Satisfied	25
Fairly Satisfied	12
Neither/ Nor	16
Fairly Dissatisfied	4
Very Dissatisfied	9
Base (n)	66

Lasting Impressions of the ESO

- 6.12. Finally, enquirers were asked a few questions about the lasting impressions of the ESO they would be left with. Encouragingly, 7 out of 10 people said they would be likely to recommend the service or would be likely to use it again. Almost 1 out of 2 people also said that their confidence in the ESO had increased as a result of their experience.

Enquirers' willingness to recommend the ESO

Yes, definitely	36
Yes, probably	14
Not sure	8
Probably not	7
Definitely not	6
Base (n)	71

Enquirers' willingness to use the ESO again

Yes, definitely	38
Yes, probably	13
Not sure	4
Probably not	9
Definitely not	7
Base (n)	71

Enquirers' Confidence in the ESO

Greatly increased	18
Increased	15
Remained the same	22
Decreased	7
Greatly decreased	7
Base (n)	69

7. THE EXPERIENCE OF COMPLAINANTS

7.1. As noted in the first chapter of this report only a very small number of people had been through the entire complaints process and had a close case at the time of the 2007 survey. Effectively, therefore, this year's complainants survey has acted as a pilot for next year's study. While the base data is presented here, numbers are not sufficient to draw any significant conclusions. However there are early indications that:

- ESO staff are achieving a very good satisfaction rating;
- The information provided was generally well received;
- Most people were looking for an apology or financial compensation and these were the most frequently made awards; and
- A majority of complainants were satisfied with the ESO overall, would recommend the service to others and would use the ESO again.

2007 Complainants Survey Results

Speaking to the people at the ESO – Complainants

Yes, when I made my initial enquiry	9
Yes, to the person who investigated my complaint	6
Yes, to someone senior/ the Ombudsman	-
Yes, but I am not sure who it was I spoke to	6
No, I did not speak to anyone at all	2
Base (n)	16

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

Satisfaction with the person or persons spoken to at the ESO – Complainants

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base (n)
Friendliness	11	2	-	-	1	14
Helpfulness	11	2	-	-	1	14
Knowledge - knew what they were talking about	10	3	-	-	1	14
Reliability - always did what they said they would	11	2	-	-	1	14
Understanding of my problem - knew what I was on about	11	2	-	-	1	14
Authority to deal with my problem	9	3	-	-	1	13

Satisfaction with the Information Provided by the ESO – Complainants

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base (n)
Readily given/easy to get	8	2	2	-	1	13
Timely/ given when needed	7	1	1	2	1	12
Clear/ easy to understand	9	2	2	-	1	14
Comprehensive/ told me everything	9	1	2	-	1	13

Contacted by the ESO for more information – Complainants

Yes, by the investigating officer	3
Yes, by the Ombudsman	1
Yes, by somebody else/ not sure who it was	5
No	8
Base (n)	16

Numbers may not sum to base of total respondents due to multiple responses

Updated by the ESO on progress - Complainants

Yes, it contacted me once	3
Yes, it contacted me twice	4
Yes, it contacted me three or more times	4
No	5
Base (n)	16

Complainant contact with the ESO to chase progress – Complainants

Yes	4
No	11
Base (n)	15

Ease of access to Investigating Officer – Complainants

Always get through straight away	2
Sometimes get through/ sometimes had to leave messages	1
Always had to leave messages	-
Base (n)	3

Speed of telephone response from Investigating Officer - Complainants

If telephone messages left, did officer ring back	
Always within the same day	1
Always within 24 hours	-
Usually within 24 hours but sometimes longer	-
Sometimes did not return call	-
Base (n)	1

Speed of written response from Investigating Officer - Complainants

Reply/acknowledgement within 7 days	
Always	2
Sometimes	-
Never	1
Base (n)	3

Length of case – expected and actual

	(a) Expected	(b) Actual
Less than 1 month	-	2
1-2 months	9	7
3-6 months	7	7
7 months and over	-	-
Base (n)	16	16

Complainant satisfaction with the ESO process – Pre- Decision

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base (n)
Explanation of what to expect given at the start of the process	11	3	-	1	1	16
Extent to which I was kept updated	7	2	1	2	-	12
Ease of access to investigating officer	5	2	2	1	-	10
Extent to which the ESO attempted to resolve the complaint through mediation/ negotiation	8	2	2	2	-	14
Efficiency of the process	6	5	2	1	-	14
Speed	7	5	1	1	1	15
Overall level of service	9	4	2	1	-	16

Outcome of complaint - Complainants

Completely in complainant's favour	7
On balance in complainant's favour	3
On balance it was a draw	4
On balance against complainant	1
Completely against complainant	1
Base (n)	16

Complainant satisfaction with Ombudsman's report

Very satisfied, exceeded my expectations	6
Fairly satisfied, met my expectations	5
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, met some but not all my expectations	4
Fairly dissatisfied, did not meet my expectations	-
Very dissatisfied, none of my expectations were met	1
Base (n)	16

Benefits awarded – hoped and actual – Complainants

	Hoped to be awarded	Actually awarded
An apology	13	11
An improved service	2	-
New equipment	-	-
Release from contract	1	1
Financial compensation	11	10
Other	4	2
Base (n)	16	14

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

Financial awards – Complainants

Up to £25	2
£25 to £50	2
£50 to £100	6
£100 and over	-
Not sure/ Don't remember	-
Base (n)	10

Complainants' overall satisfaction with the ESO

Very Satisfied	6
Fairly Satisfied	7
Neither/ Nor	1
Fairly Dissatisfied	1
Very Dissatisfied	1
Base (n)	16

Complainants' willingness to recommend the ESO

Yes, definitely	12
Yes, probably	2
Not sure	-
Probably not	1
Definitely not	1
Base (n)	16

Complainants' willingness to use the ESO again

Very likely	12
Fairly likely	2
Neither/ nor	1
Fairly unlikely	1
Very unlikely	-
Base (n)	16

Complainants' confidence in the ESO

Greatly increased	6
Increased	5
Remained the same	3
Decreased	2
Greatly decreased	0
Base (n)	16

Confidence in the energy supply industry – Complainants

Greatly increased	2
Increased	3
Remained the same	4
Decreased	4
Greatly decreased	3
Base (n)	16

8. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE 2007 RESEARCH

- 8.1. Having only started operating in the summer of 2007 this round of customer satisfaction has come early in the life of the Energy Supply Ombudsman. Although the number of people who had used the service, and were consequently potential respondents to a survey, was relatively low the exercise has nevertheless set a benchmark against which future customer satisfaction results can be judged. It has also established that the survey methods used are effective.
- 8.2. While the sample size means that all this year's results need to be treated with a degree of caution the overall picture to emerge is very positive. Most notably, the staff of the Energy Supply Ombudsman are already emerging as one of the organisation's greatest assets. Almost 9 out of 10 of those making an enquiry reported being satisfied with their first contact with staff and there was the same high level of satisfaction with staff friendliness, knowledge, helpfulness and reliability.
- 8.3. Almost 3 out of 5 enquirers were satisfied with the Energy Supply Ombudsman overall and just 1 out of 5 were dissatisfied. Although the numbers were small the vast majority of complainants also reported being satisfied. Encouraging, 7 out of 10 enquirers said they would be likely to use the Energy Supply Ombudsman again or would be likely to recommend the service to family or friends.
- 8.4. Although there is clear potential to improve overall satisfaction ratings these are nonetheless positive results for an organisation's first year of operation and based on these early findings the contribution of the staff is likely to be key to improving customer satisfaction over the next few years. Assuming that staff continue to develop their understanding of the sector there is no reason to believe that next year's results will not be equally, if not more, impressive.

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