



Energy Best Deal

Evaluation of the national roll-out

Final report, June 2009

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Summary of key findings

The Energy Best Deal programme, run by Citizens Advice, offered consumers and frontline workers and volunteers the opportunity to attend a presentation offering information about how consumers can reduce their energy costs by changing tariff or supplier.

This report describes the results of an evaluation of the programme based on data from self-complete questionnaires filled in by participants at the end of each session. Results are drawn from 619 consumers and 868 frontline workers. Follow-up telephone interviews were also completed with a random sample of consumers (n=80) and frontline workers (n=20) who attended the presentations and provided contact details in their questionnaire.

Consumers

- Prior to attending the sessions, 15% of consumers did not know that they could change their energy supplier. Of those that knew this was possible, 32% did not know how to go about it. However, half of the consumers attending the sessions had previously changed their energy supplier for reasons other than moving house.
- The most popular method for paying energy bills among consumers was the cheapest option, direct debit (47%). A quarter (24%) paid by cash, cheque or card on receipt of the bill and 29% used token or prepayment meters (for electricity; results are similar for gas). However direct debit was used to pay for bills other than energy bills by 48% of consumers using prepayment meters and 42% of those paying by cash, cheque or card.
- The sessions were of value to most of the consumers who attended: 86% said they would or might do something as a result of the session. A substantial majority (64%) said they would seek a better deal on their energy prices by contacting their fuel company, investigating the prices of other companies or changing supplier. Nine per cent indicated they would apply for a home improvement grant (Warm Front or the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme).
- Younger people were more likely to seek a better deal than the older people: 80% of those aged under 30 years intended to seek a better deal when asked directly after the session, compared to 74% of those aged 30 to 59 and 49% of those aged 60 years or more. Private renters were also the most enthusiastic: 83% wanted to seek a better deal compared to 71% of owner occupiers, 63% of council tenants and 62% of housing association tenants. There were no significant differences by current payment method.
- The interviews showed that 45% of consumers had taken action since the event, by looking into getting a better deal on their energy. There was significantly more evidence of this among the younger age groups, compared to the over 60's.
- Among those who did look into getting a better deal, over two thirds (69%) said they had found it easy, or fairly easy, to get information about the different tariffs available. This suggests that the presentation is effectively signposting people as to where and how to source information.
- Just under half (49%) of those who looked into getting a better deal on their energy did proceed to switch tariff or energy supplier. This is equal to 21% of all of the consumers who were interviewed.

- Uptake of other avenues of advice covered in the presentation (e.g. energy efficiency, benefits, debt, home improvement grants) was relatively low. This could be a reflection of the emphasis of the presentation being on switching, rather than energy efficiency or financial matters, or it may be that such issues were of less relevance to the targeted audience.

Frontline workers and volunteers

- Prior to attending the sessions, a fifth (21%) of frontline workers did not know how to go about changing their energy supplier and 17% did not know that some payment methods for domestic energy supplies are more expensive than others.
- Three quarters (76%) of the frontline workers had some prior experience of advice work on energy or financial issues. This suggests that the sessions were well-targeted as most attendees had opportunities in their working lives to pass on the messages communicated through the sessions. Following the sessions, 89% of workers anticipated giving advice to clients.
- Almost all (98%) frontline workers said they felt better informed about switching fuel supplier and payment methods following the sessions. Over three quarters (77%) said that they would look for a better deal for their own energy supply as a result. The results of the interviews showed that 45% had done this and 15% went on to switch energy supplier or tariff.
- Four out of five (81%) frontline workers said that in future they would give advice to their clients about getting a better deal on their energy prices and 55% said they would give advice about home improvement grants. These are major improvements on previous practice: 52% of frontline workers had not given advice in the past about getting a better deal from energy suppliers but planned to do so in the future. Similarly, 29% had not given advice about energy home improvements in the past but planned to do so in the future.
- The interviews provided evidence of these anticipated actions being put into practice: 80% of interviewees had actually provided advice or information on fuel issues since attending the event. Of those who had advised specifically on switching fuel supplier or tariff after attending the session, fewer than one fifth had done so before attending.
- An estimated 21,500 people could have already received advice from the 2,002 frontline advisors who attended a session, based on extrapolating from interview responses from 20 frontline advisors. This is within a six month period, and so extrapolating this to a whole year gives a ballpark figure of 43,000 people potentially receiving advice from frontline workers who attended the sessions.
- Workers from housing associations were most likely to foresee future advice work on getting a better deal on energy bills (90%), followed by Citizens Advice Bureaux (88%), community organisations (81%) and public sector organisations (65%). However advice-giving on energy efficiency home improvement grants was anticipated most by workers from Citizens Advice Bureaux (75%) followed by community organisations (61%), housing associations (49%) and public sector organisations (47%).
- Among those frontline workers who felt better informed as a result of the session, almost all (98%) said they were likely to pass on what they had learnt to colleagues. The interviews

showed 65% had actually done this; the reason for this lower result could be that a number of interviewees did not pass on information because their colleagues were at the event anyway, rather than being because they did not see the value in doing so.

- Nine out of ten of all frontline workers (90%) said they would or might seek to influence the practice of the organisations they worked for as a result of the sessions.

The Energy Best Deal Programme

This report describes the results of an evaluation of the national roll-out of the Energy Best Deal Programme (EBD). The programme, run by Citizens Advice, sought to inform domestic energy consumers about how they could reduce their energy costs by changing tariffs or suppliers. It also sought to raise awareness about the help that is available from both suppliers and Government for those who are struggling to pay their energy bills. The national roll-out across England and Wales was funded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), supported by Ofgem following a successful pilot phase funded by Ofgem. The evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) with input from the Citizens Advice Financial Capability team.

The Energy Best Deal programme offered consumers and frontline workers (including paid workers and volunteers) the opportunity to attend a presentation about reducing domestic energy costs. The sessions were delivered by staff from Citizens Advice Bureaux and other voluntary organisations who had been trained as 'Energy Health Check Champions'.

Twenty sessions were delivered in each of the 14 regions of the Citizens Advice Financial Capability Forums in England and Wales. These 280 presentations were designed to reach 1,400 consumers and 1,400 frontline workers. The programme will have ongoing impact through the consumer advice work of the frontline workers.

Methods

The Energy Best Deal programme was evaluated using the following methods:

- A survey of consumers who attended the sessions, conducted at the end of each event (n=619);
- A survey of frontline workers who attended the sessions, conducted at the end of the event (n=868);
- A telephone survey of consumers (n=80) and frontline workers (n=20) who attended a session, some time after the event.

Questionnaires were designed by CSE with input from Citizens Advice and Ofgem. The post-presentation questionnaires were self-completed with data entry undertaken by delivery partners, overseen by the Citizens Advice Financial Capability team. The telephone survey was undertaken by CSE using personal contact information provided on the self-complete questionnaires. Telephone interviews were conducted at least four weeks after consumers and frontline workers had attended the sessions, in order to allow time for them to start looking for a better deal on their energy supply, if they planned to do so.

CSE collated and cleaned the data from all three sources. Analysis was undertaken using the statistical analysis software package, SPSS.

Self-completion survey results

The respondents

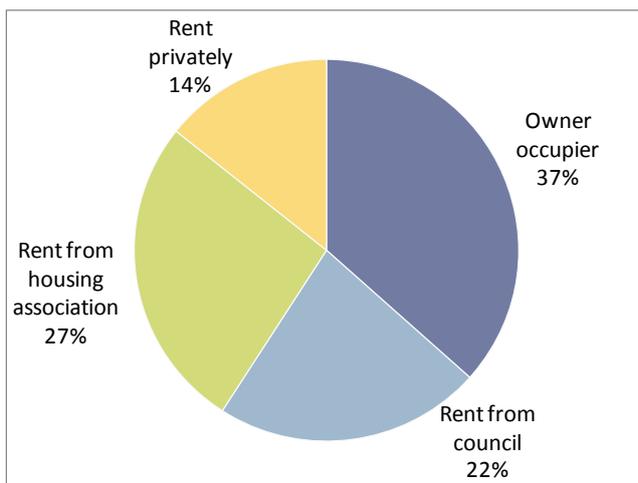
Consumers

Demographic information was collected for the consumers only. Of the 619 consumers:

- three quarters (76%) were women and one quarter (24%) were men
- 25% were aged under 30 years; 33% were between 30 and 59 years; and 42% were 60 years or over
- 29% were employed; 18% were unemployed; 14% were disabled or long-term sick; 27% were retired; 6% were carers and 3% were students
- half (50%) lived in households with children

Figure 1 illustrates the type of housing tenure of the consumers. The majority (63%) were living in rented properties.

Figure 1. Type of tenancy of consumers

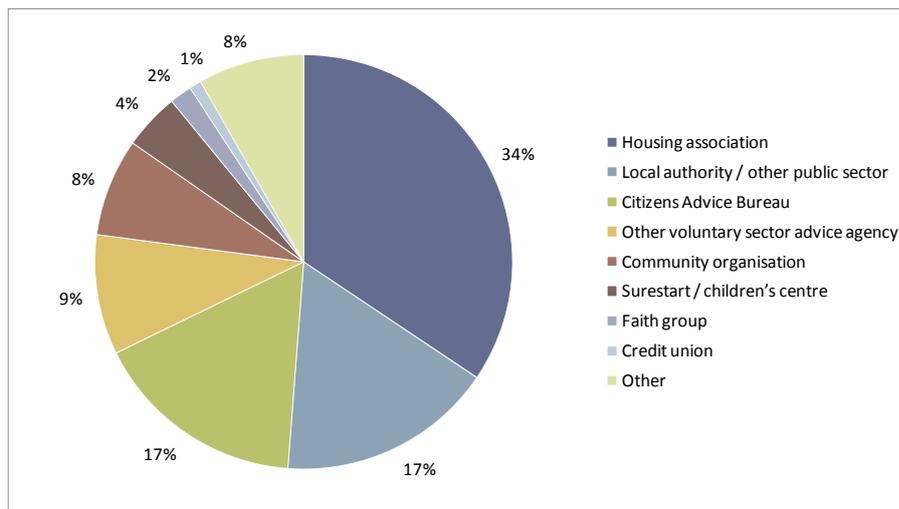


Nine in ten (91%) consumers had a bank account and six in ten (59%) had access to the internet.

Frontline workers

The 868 frontline workers who completed the post-event questionnaire were asked what type of organisation they worked for. Figure 2 illustrates the results.

Figure 2. Type of organisation of frontline workers



Consumers

Paying bills

Consumers were asked how they paid their electricity and gas bills. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the results for electricity and gas. The cheapest option, direct debit, is the most popular option for both fuels but more than a quarter of consumers paid for their energy using prepayment or token meters, which from some suppliers can be the most expensive of all payment methods.

Almost all consumers who use both fuels pay for them using the same payment method. The only slight divergence is among prepayment electric customers, 10% of whom pay for their gas using cash, cheque or card when the bill arrives.

Figure 3. Payment method (electricity)

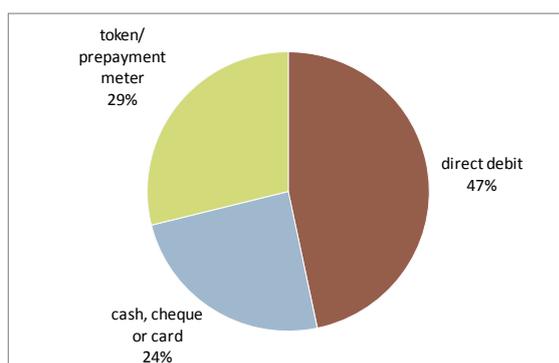
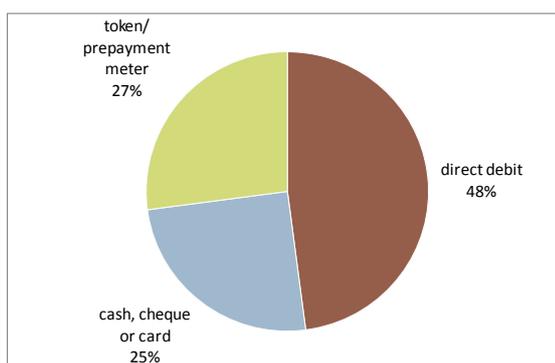


Figure 4. Payment method (gas)



Many consumers who pay for energy with prepayment meters or by cash, cheque or card when the bill arrives have experience of paying other bills by direct debit and of buying goods over the internet. Figure 5 describes the proportion of consumers using each payment method (for electricity) who have bank accounts and use direct debit to buy other goods. Prepayment meter consumers may be least likely to have a bank account but most (84%) do have one and nearly half (48%) pay for other goods by direct debit. Those who pay their electricity bills by cash, cheque or card are the least likely to use direct debit to buy other goods.

Figure 5. Consumers' experience of paying other bills by electricity payment type

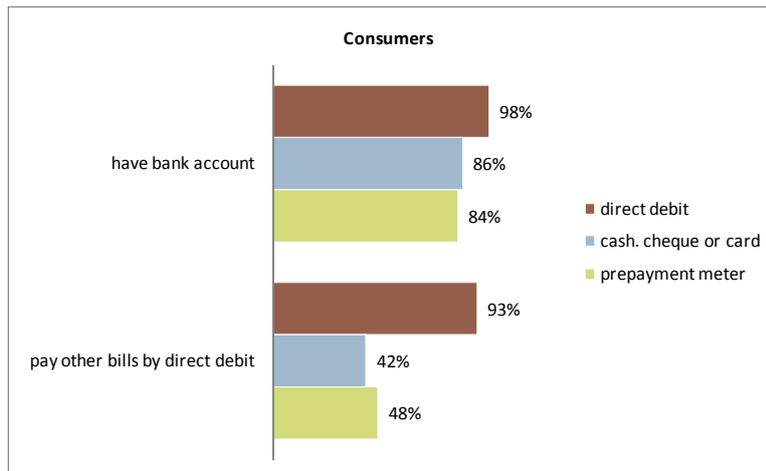
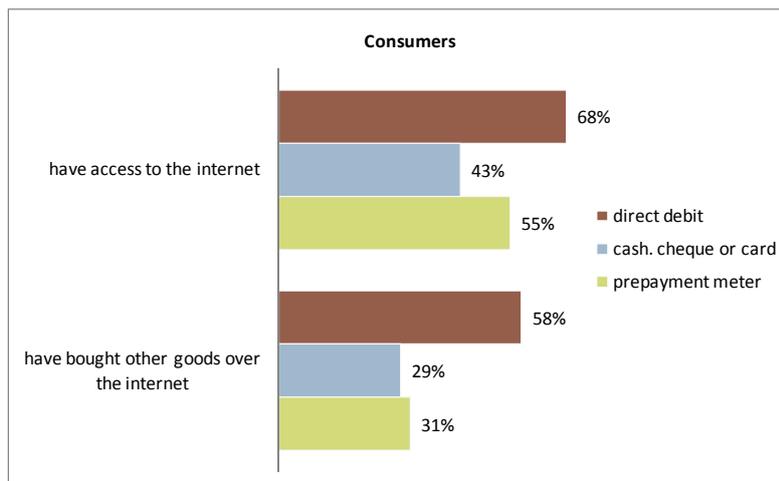


Figure 6 describes the proportion of consumers using each payment method (for electricity) who have access to the internet and who have experience of buying goods over the internet. Internet access and use is most common among consumers who pay their energy bills by direct debit and least common among those who pay by cash, cheque or card when the bill arrives.

Figure 6. Consumers' experience of buying goods over the internet by electricity payment type



Energy suppliers and experience and knowledge of switching

Figures 7 and 8 illustrate consumers' energy supply companies for electricity and gas. Half (50%) of all consumers said they had changed their gas or electricity supplier in the past other than when they had moved house. Experience of switching varied substantially according to electricity payment type, with consumers using prepayment meters being the most likely to report having switched:

- 55% of consumers who paid their electricity bills by direct debit said they had switched in the past
- 27% of consumers who paid their electricity bills by cash, cheque or card when the bill arrives said they had switched in the past
- 60% of consumers who paid their electricity bills by token or prepayment meter said they had switched in the past

Figure 7. Electricity suppliers (n=568)

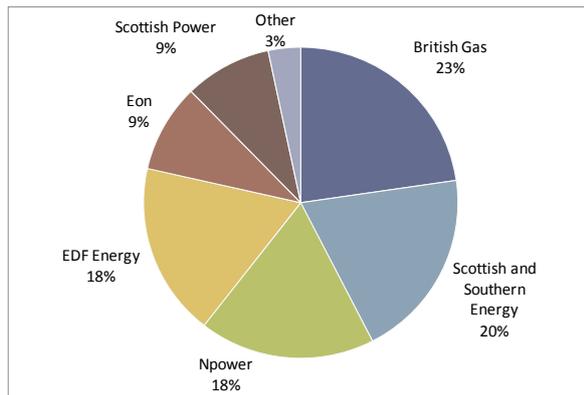
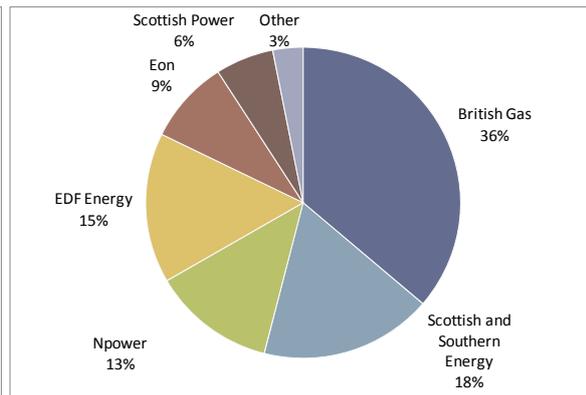


Figure 8. Gas suppliers (n=450)



Consumers aged 30-59 years were most likely to have switched in the past (59%) compared to 44% of those under 30 years and 40% of those aged 60 years or more. Switching was most common among owner occupiers (60%) compared to council tenants (50%), housing association tenants (38%) and private tenants (38%).

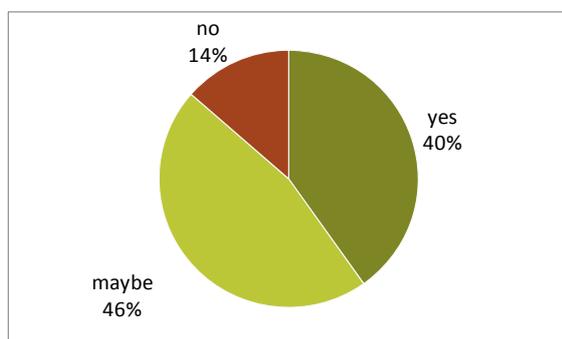
Fifteen per cent of all consumers said that, prior to the session, they did not know they could switch their electricity and gas suppliers. Of those who did know they could switch, nearly a third (32%) said they did not know how to do this, prior to the session.

Although prepayment meter consumers were the most likely to report having switched in the past, they were also the most likely not to know that this was possible: 21% of electricity prepayment meter consumers did not know they could switch, compared to 18% of those who paid with cash, cheque or card on receipt of the bill and 10% of consumers paying by direct debit.

The impact of the session

All consumers were asked if they would do anything as a result of attending the session. Most (86%) said they would or might do something. Only 14% said they would not act (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Consumers' expectations of doing something as a result of the session

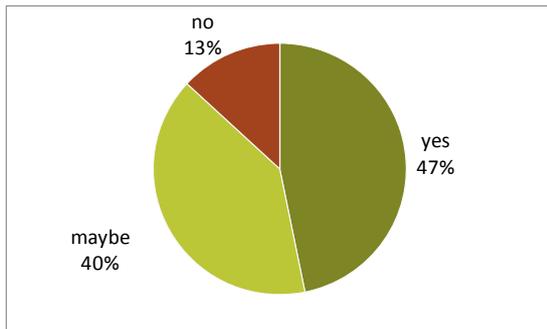


Variations in response across subgroups with different experience and knowledge of switching energy supplier were not as great as might be expected. Figure 10 illustrates the responses among those who had changed in the past; had not changed (other than when moving house); did not know they could change; and did not know how to change.

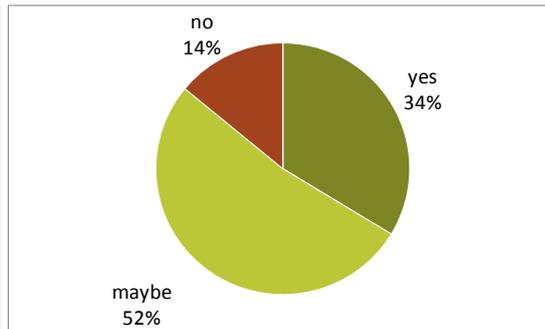
The group which demonstrated the highest level of motivation, judged by the number who said ‘yes’ they would act, was the consumers who had already changed in the past. This may reflect the fact that the people in this group are more likely to be engaged as consumers, and so be more likely to act on any issue, than those who had not changed in the past. Taking the ‘yes’ and ‘maybe’ answers together, results are similar across all groups though the group who did not know they could change supplier showed the greatest willingness to act (91% vs. 86% overall).

Figure 10. Consumer motivation to act in response to session by prior experience and knowledge

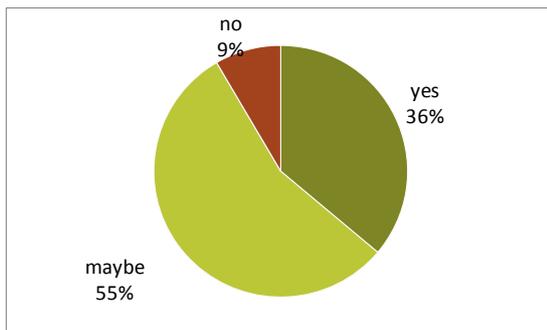
10.1 Changed before (n=282)



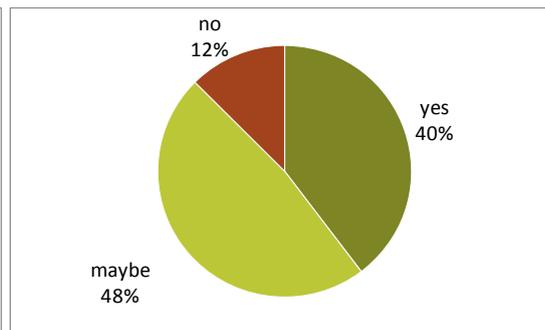
10.2 Never changed before (n=285)



10.3 Did not know could change (n=83)



10.4 Did not know how to change (n=184)



Differences across current payment type were small and not statistically significant, though prepayment consumers were most likely to indicate a willingness to act. A response of ‘yes’ or ‘maybe’ was given by:

- 90% of consumers with electricity prepayment meters
- 88% of consumers who pay their electricity bills by cash, cheque or card on receipt of bill
- 84% of consumers who pay for electricity by direct debit

There were statistically significant differences in motivation to act between different age groups: 96% of those aged under 30 said they would or might act, compared to 89% of those aged 30-59 and 78% of those aged 60 or over. There were also statistically significant differences by housing tenure: 96% of private renters said they would or might act, compared to 89% of those renting from housing associations, 84% of owner occupiers and 82% of those renting from the council.

Type of action anticipated

Consumers who said they would or might act identified the actions they wanted to pursue against a precoded list, from which they could choose more than one option. Of these consumers (n=497):

- 58% said they would contact their current energy supplier to try and get a better deal (51% of all consumers)
- 49% said they would find out what prices were available from other companies (42% of all consumers)
- 15% said they would change energy supplier (14% of all consumers)
- 9% said they would apply for a home improvement grant (Warm Front or HEES) (8% of all consumers)
- 18% said they would get advice on their entitlement to benefits and tax credits (15% of all consumers)
- 13% said they would get advice on paying off their debts (12% of all consumers)

Taking the first three actions together, 79% of those who said they would or might do something following the session planned to try and get a better deal on their energy bills. This was nearly two thirds (64%) of all consumers.

As with the general intention to act, current payment method did not affect this result. The goal of getting a better deal on energy bills was shared by 68% of consumers paying by direct debit, 65% of those paying by cash, cheque or card on receipt of the bill and 66% of those with token or prepayment meters. Younger people were, however, more likely to seek a better deal: 80% of those aged under 30 years wanted to seek a better deal compared to 74% of those aged 30 to 59 and 49% of those aged 60 years or more. Private renters were also the most enthusiastic: 83% wanted to seek a better deal compared to 71% of owner occupiers, 63% of council tenants and 62% of housing association tenants.

Those consumers who said they would find out what prices were available from other companies were asked to identify where they would look, again using a precoded list (from which they could choose more than one option). Of these consumers (n=246):

- 38% said they would phone fuel companies
- 36% said they would go to fuel companies' websites
- 33% said they would get price comparison sheets from Consumer Focus
- 32% said they would go to a switching website
- 27% said they would speak to friends or family
- 6% said they would wait for a fuel company salesperson to call

Frontline workers

Prior knowledge and practice

Prior to attending the sessions, a fifth (21%) of frontline workers did not know how to go about changing their energy supplier and 17% did not know that some payment methods for domestic energy supplies are more expensive than others.

Frontline workers indicated what types of advice, if any, they had previously given to their clients:

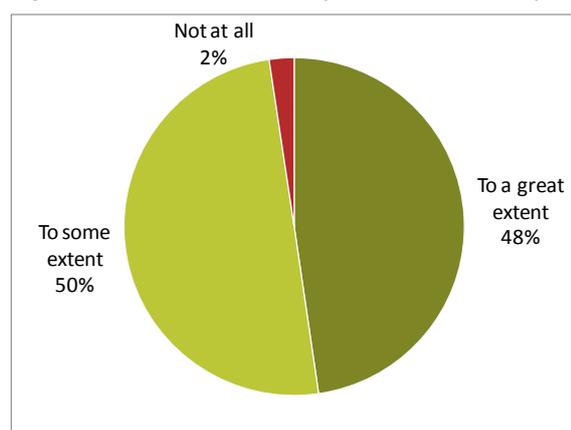
- 23% had advised clients on getting a better deal from their existing energy supplier
- 22% had advised clients about how to get a better deal from another supplier
- 26% had advised clients about how to apply for a Warm Front grant (in England) or HEES grant (in Wales)
- 65% had advised clients about how to get advice on benefits and tax credits
- 64% had advised clients about how to get advice on debts

Three quarters (76%) of the frontline workers who attended the sessions had some prior experience of advice work on one or more of these issues. This suggests that the sessions were well-targeted as most attendees had opportunities in their working lives to pass on the messages communicated through the sessions.

The impact of the session

Almost all (98%) frontline workers said they felt better informed about switching fuel supplier and payment methods as a result of the session (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Extent to which frontline workers felt better informed as a result of the session



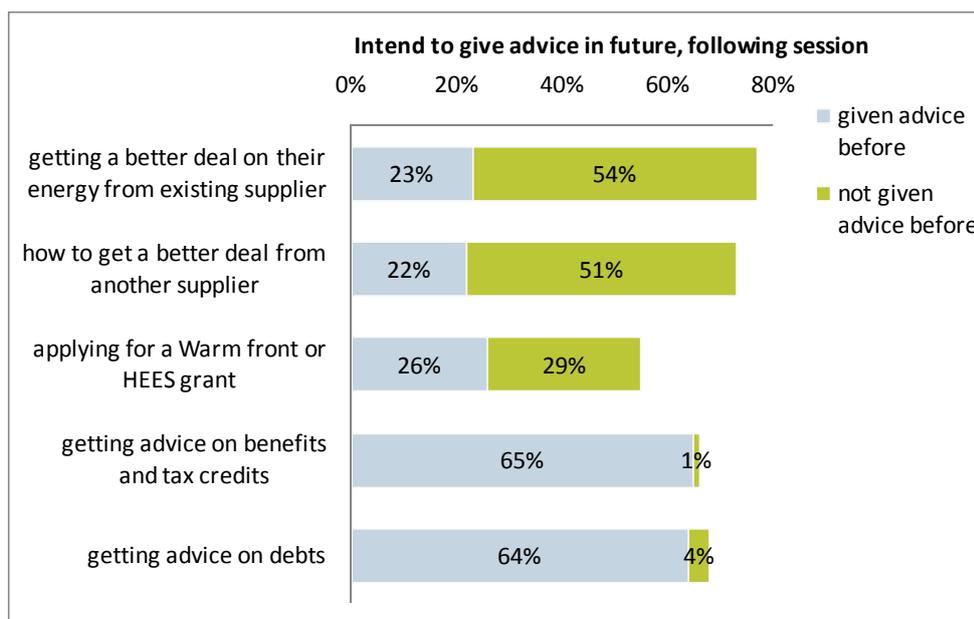
Over three quarters (77%) of frontline workers said that they would look for a better deal for their own energy supply following the session. Among those who said they did not know prior to the session how to change supplier (n=177), 92% said they would look for a better deal. Among those who said they did not know prior to the session that some payment methods were more expensive than others (n=137), 89% said they would look for a better deal.

Frontline workers indicated which types of advice they would provide in the future, following the session:

- 77% said they would advise clients on getting a better deal from their existing energy supplier
- 73% said they would advise clients about how to get a better deal from another supplier
- 55% said they would advise clients about how to apply for a Warm Front or HEES grant
- 66% said they would advise clients about how to get advice on benefits and tax credits
- 68% said they would advise clients about how to get advice on debts

The specific impact of the sessions can be assessed by comparing these intentions with past practice (Figure 12). Taking the first two actions together, 29% of frontline workers had provided one or both types of advice about getting a better deal on energy prices and 81% said they would do so in future. Hence more than half (52%) of all the frontline workers who attended the sessions had not given advice in the past about getting a better deal from energy suppliers but planned to do so in the future. Similarly, 29% had not given advice about energy efficiency grants in the past but planned to do so in the future.

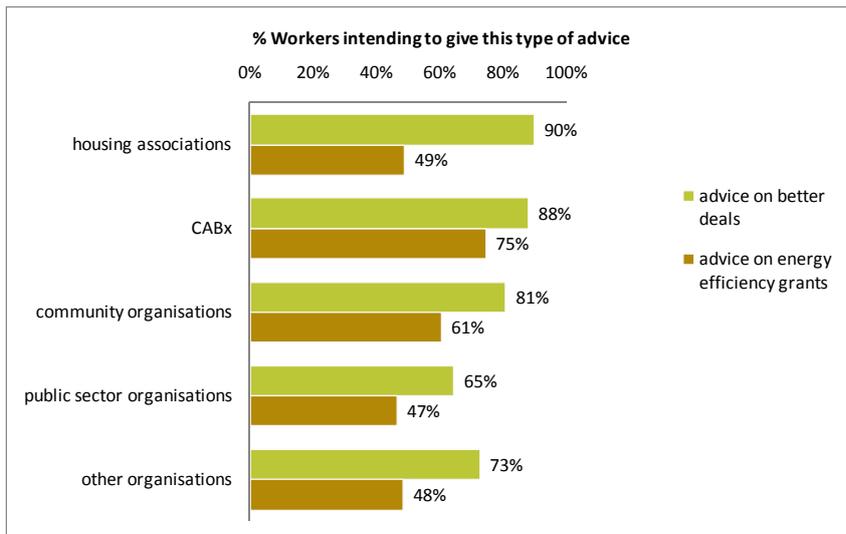
Figure 12. Frontline workers' future advice-giving intentions compared to prior experience



Overall, the proportion of workers attending who felt they had a role in providing advice on any of these issues rose from 76% (based on past experience) to 89% at the end of the session. Those who were expecting to give advice (n=774) were asked to estimate how many clients they expected to reach over the subsequent six months. The distribution of responses was highly skewed with 75% of answers below 100 but 2% of workers anticipating between 1000 and 8000 clients in six months. The average caseload was 128; the median was 30.

Figure 13 shows the differences in expectations of advice-giving across different organisation types for advice on either type of better deal and either type of energy efficiency grant (Warm Front and HEES).

Figure 13. Workers' intentions to give advice by subject matter and organisation



Impacts on colleagues and organisations

Among those frontline workers who felt better informed as a result of the session (n=812), almost all (98%) said they were likely to pass on what they had learnt to colleagues. Workers were also asked if, as a result of the session, they intended to influence the practice of the organisation, such as routinely providing information about switching suppliers to clients. Nine out of ten of all frontline workers (90%) said they would or might (Figure 14). Differences in response by organisation type are described in Figure 15.

Figure 14. Frontline workers intentions of influencing organisational practice following session

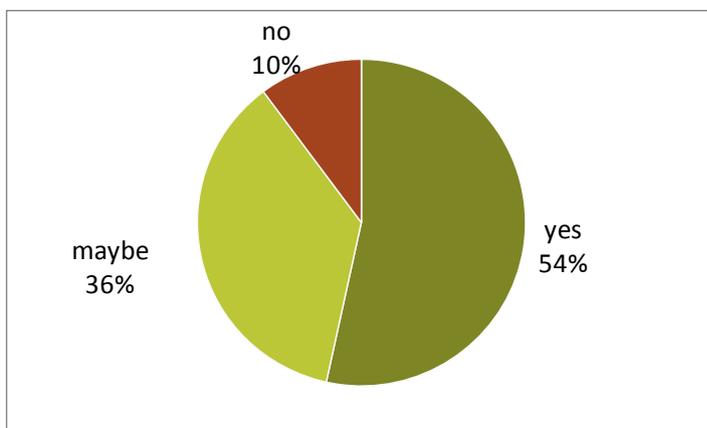
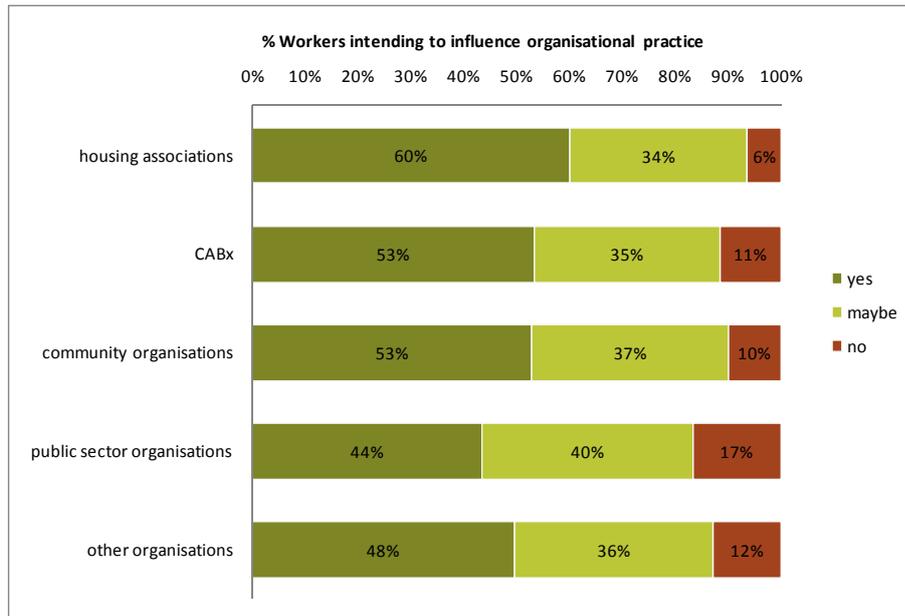


Figure 15. Frontline workers intentions of influence by organisation type



Follow-up interviews

Consumer Interviews

Follow-up telephone interviews were completed with 80 consumers who attended an Energy Best Deal presentation. This was to some extent a self-selecting sample because only the consumers who chose to provide a contact telephone number could be interviewed. However, within the group of consumers who provided contact numbers, the sample was random as telephone numbers were called in the order they were provided and interviews were completed with the first 80 people who answered the phone and consented to speak to the interviewers.

All interviewees had attended an Energy Best Deal presentation at least 4 weeks previously; for the majority (80%) it had been more than 4 weeks since they attended, and for nearly half of these it had been longer than 2 months.

Nearly all respondents (95%) said they did find the presentation helpful. A range of responses were given as to what in particular they found helpful about it. Qualifying remarks are summarised in Table 1 below. Where individuals said they did not find the presentation helpful, this seemed to mainly stem from a misunderstanding as to what the session was meant to be about and therefore expectations were not fulfilled. Three interviewees commented that they knew most of the information presented already.

Table 1: What interviewees found most helpful about the Energy Best Deal presentation

Summary of comments	N
Generally informative and well delivered	38
Showed how to compare prices and save money and where to go for help	16
Gave incentive, motivation and ability to research switching	7
Opportunity to ask questions and get answers	3
Wasn't aware of the range of different tariffs available with the same supplier	3
Energy efficiency tips	2
Wasn't aware how easy it was to switch before	2
Didn't know it was possible to switch on a prepayment meter	2

Interviewees were asked whether they had taken any action to get a better deal on their energy since attending the session. Comparing these responses with their stated intention to act (based on the self-completion questionnaire) shows that, on average, nearly half (47%) of those who said they would or might do something as a result of the session did go on to look into how they could get a better deal, as shown in Figure 16. Overall 45% of all interviewees took action, and of those, most did for both electricity and gas, as shown in Figure 17.

Figure 16. Comparison of action taken by intention to act

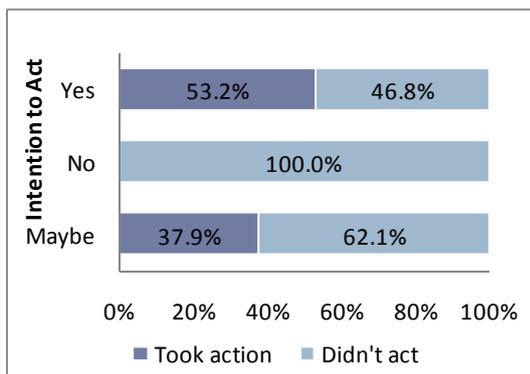
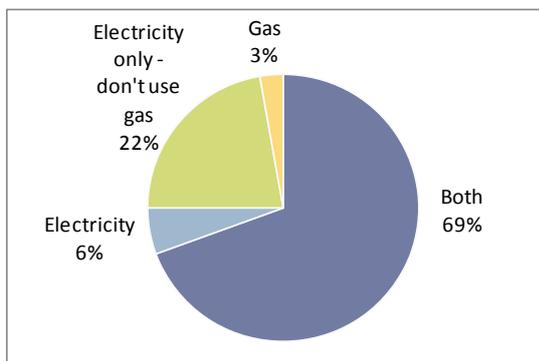
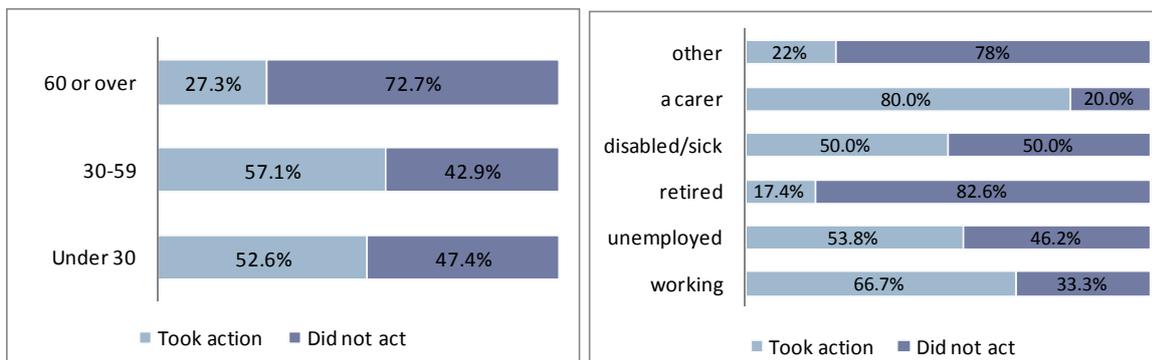


Figure 17. Breakdown of consumers who looked into getting a better deal by fuel type (n=36)



Males showed a greater propensity to take action than female respondents but this difference was not significant. There were statistically significant differences, however, in the proportions taking action between age groups and occupations: over 50% of those aged under 30 and aged 30-59 looked into getting a better deal on their energy, compared to 27% of over 60's (Figure 18a); similarly a lower proportion of retired consumers took action (17%) compared to consumers employed (67%), unemployed (54%), disabled or long-term sick (50%) and carers (80%) (Figure 18b).

Figure 18. Proportion of consumers taking action by (a) Age group and (b) Occupation



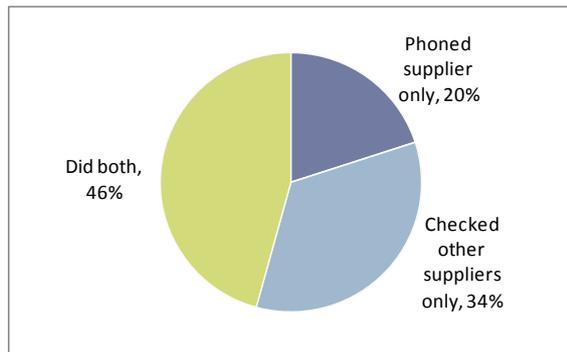
Home owners also showed a greater propensity to act, with 59% looking into getting a better deal, compared to one third (33%) of renters, but this difference is not significant. By contrast, private renters had the highest stated intention to act, but fewer than half (43%) actually took action.

Consumers who took action

This section looks at the 36 consumers who took some kind of action after the session. All percentages given are percentages of this subgroup of 36, not the full set of 80 interviewees, unless explicitly stated.

Of those who said they looked in to getting a better deal on their energy, 64% phoned their existing supplier and 78% checked prices available from other suppliers. Figure 19 shows the proportion of consumers doing one or both of these actions.

Figure 19. Consumers' actions looking into getting a better deal on their energy (n=36)



Among those who looked into getting a better deal on their energy, 69% said it was easy or fairly easy to get information about the different rates available. Just under half (49%) of consumers who looked into getting a better deal then went on to either switch tariff or switch supplier, as shown in Figure 20. The under 30 age group (n=10) showed a high propensity to switch (tariff or supplier), with 70% of those in this age group who investigated a better deal ending up switching. Of the 30-59 age group (n=16) 44% switched, and of the over 60's (n=10) 33% switched. All consumers living in private rented accommodation who looked into getting a better deal (n=3) went on to switch, whereas around half of home owners (45%, 9 out of 21) and Housing Association renters (50%, 4 out of 8) switched. (Note that the numbers are low here because this section considers only those 36 interviewees who took action).

Figure 20. Switching behaviour of consumers who looked into getting a better deal (n=36)

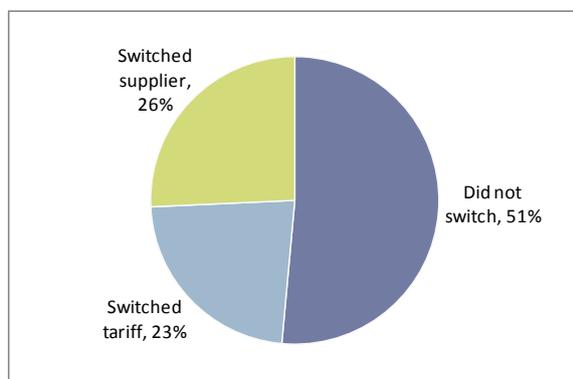
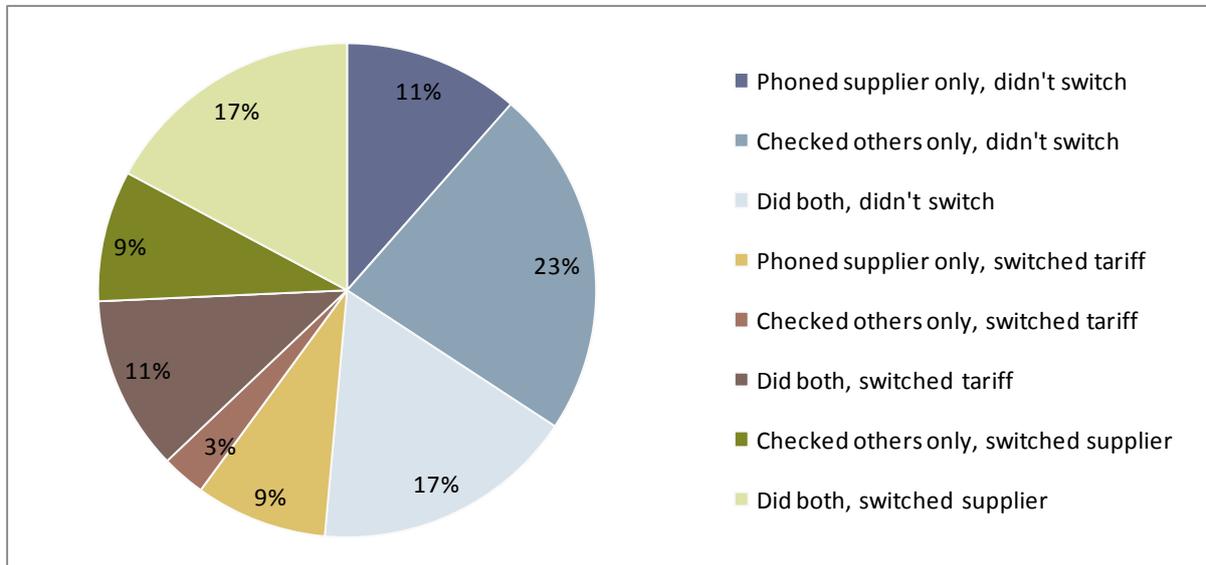


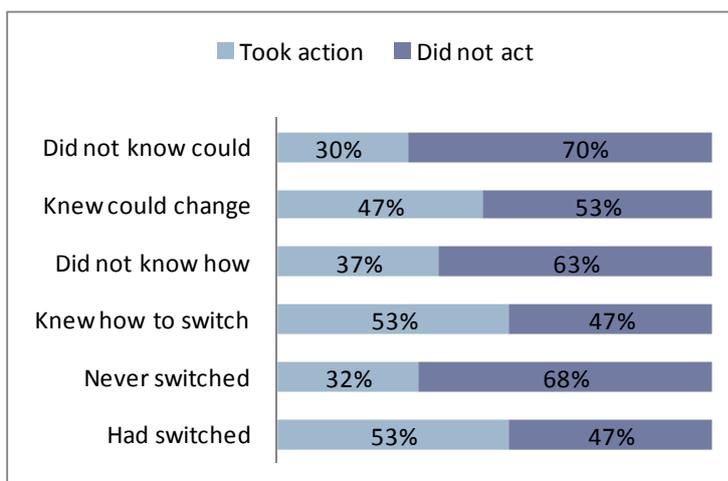
Figure 21 shows a detailed breakdown of the outcome of consumers' actions to get a better deal on their energy. This shows that just over half (51%) of those who looked into getting a better deal did not go on to switch tariff nor supplier; just under one quarter (23%) went on to switch tariffs; and just over a quarter (26%) switched supplier.

Figure 21. Outcome of consumers' actions to get a better deal on their energy



A comparison of reported behaviour after the session with previous knowledge and experience of switching energy supplier shows that a higher proportion of consumers who knew it was possible to change supplier, knew how to change supplier and had switched energy supplier in the past went on to look into getting a better deal on their energy than those who did not have this knowledge or experience before attending the session (Figure 22). However, around one third of those who had never switched before, did not know how to switch or did not even know it was possible to change supplier did go on to look into getting a better deal on their energy, which is encouraging.

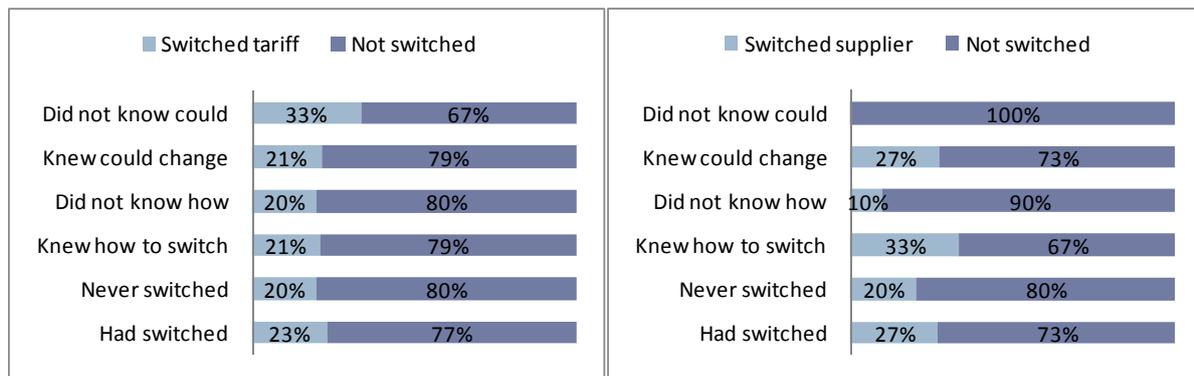
Figure 22. Consumers that looked into getting a better deal by previous knowledge and experience



Among those that did look into getting a better deal, there is little evidence of the effect of past experience and knowledge on tariff switching behaviour. A third of interviewees who before the session did not even know it was possible to switch supplier but did look into it after the session

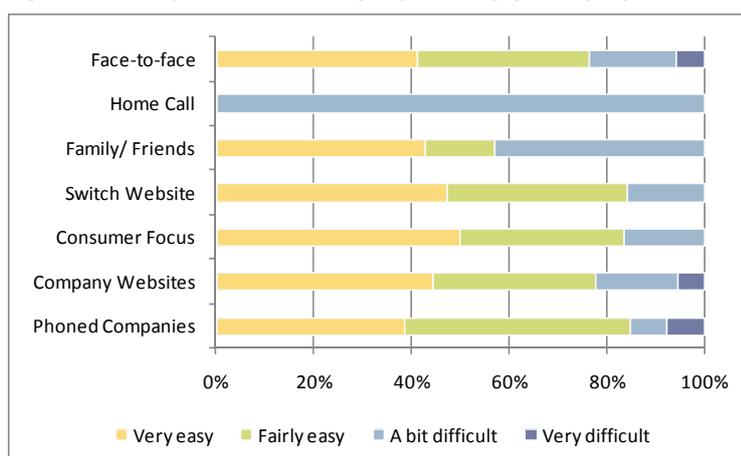
went on to switch tariffs, compared to 21% of those who did know it was possible to change (Figure 23a). Conversely, results suggest a higher frequency of consumers switching supplier among those who knew it was possible to do so before the session and those who had done so before (Figure 23b). However, both these results are based on a very small sample, given the limited number of interviewees that had actually switched energy tariffs (n=8) or switched supplier (n=9).

Figure 23. (a) Tariff switching behaviour and (b) supplier switching behaviour by past knowledge and experience of switching (n=36)



A switching website was the most popular source of information, with half of those who took action opting for this method, followed by fuel company websites, phoning fuel companies and using price comparison sheets from Consumer Focus. Figure 24 below shows how easy interviewees found it to get information about different energy tariffs by source of information. Overall, of those taking action to change tariff or supplier, the majority found the process easy and just over one third (36%) had completed the switch. There did not seem to be any significant issues with the length of the switching process. There was little evidence of respondents changing payment method for either electricity or gas.

Figure 24. Respondents' ratings of ease of getting information by information source



Concerns prior to the session

In this section all interviewees are once again considered, whether they went on to take action or not.

36% of interviewees said they did have concerns about changing energy supplier prior to attending the session. The main reason given was not so much a concern, but just that the respondent had not known it was possible and/or known how to switch supplier. Table 2 summarises the reasons expressed for these concerns. Of these consumers, only 5 (17%) felt that their concerns had not been addressed in the presentation, but this seemed to stem mainly from a bad personal experience in the switching process.

Table 2. Respondents' concerns about changing supplier prior to the session

Didn't really know how	8
Didn't know it was possible to switch with a prepayment meter	5
Conflicting advice/ too much information is off-putting	4
It can go wrong – could end up on a worse deal	3
Bad experience in the past	2
Time/ hassle factor	2
Don't like change	1
Never thought about switching before	1

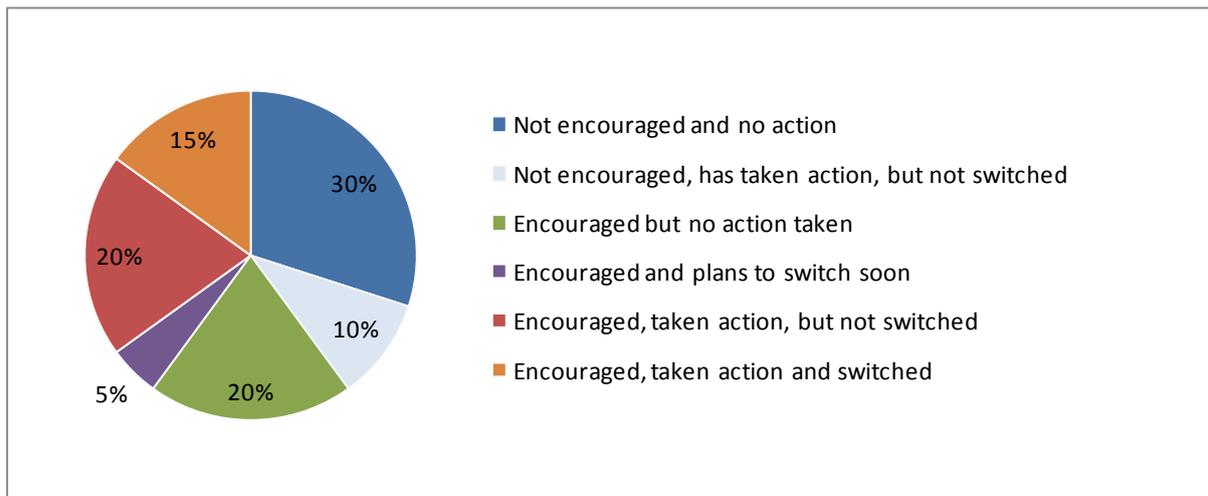
Across the telephone interviews as a whole, uptake of other suggested avenues of advice (that is, not related to switching) was relatively low, with the energy supplier being the most common point of contact (by 14% of respondents), followed by benefits advice (11%), debt advice and the Home Heat Helpline (8%). Energy efficiency advice and Warm Front grants had been pursued by 5% of interviewees.

Frontline Workers' Interviews

Follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with a random sample (n=20) of frontline workers who attended an EBD session and provided a contact telephone number. All interviewees had attended a session more than 4 weeks ago, and for the majority (90%) it had been more than 2 months since attending.

Interviewees were asked whether the session had encouraged them to look for a better deal on their own energy and 60% said it had. Among those workers, 58% actively looked for a better deal (or 45% of all interviewees, including two that said they were not encouraged by the presentation, but took action anyway) and 25% (15% of all interviewees) actually switched. The impact of the session on all frontline workers interviewed, in terms of whether they were: a) encouraged by the session to take action; b) actually looked into getting a better deal; and c) went on to switch energy tariff or supplier, is summarised in Figure 25 below.

Figure 25. Impact of the session on Frontline Workers in terms of action taken on own energy



The vast majority (95%) of frontline workers said the presentation did make them feel more confident about giving help or information about switching fuel suppliers/other fuel issues to consumers they come into contact with through their work. 80% of interviewees had actually given some such advice since the session. Four workers who had said they would give advice on fuel issues (in their self-completion questionnaire) had not done so and two workers who had not stated an intention to pass on this information had actually done so.

Among those who had given advice on fuel issues since the session (n=16), the majority had done so for fewer than 10 people, as shown in Figure 26 below. Figure 27 summarises the type of information being given by the frontline workers, compared to advice they were giving before attending the presentation. This shows that 94% of those giving advice on fuel issues since the session have provided information on debt, but two thirds of them (67%) already did so. Conversely, 76% and 82% of frontline workers interviewed had advised on getting a better deal from an existing supplier and switching suppliers respectively, but only fewer than one fifth of these (17%) of these had advised on these issues before. This suggests that the Energy Best Deal presentation has successfully increased the capacity of frontline workers to provide information on fuel issues to consumers and this is being actively put into practice (although this result is based on a small sample of 20 workers who attended the sessions).

Figure 26. Number of people frontline workers had given information to since the session (n=16)

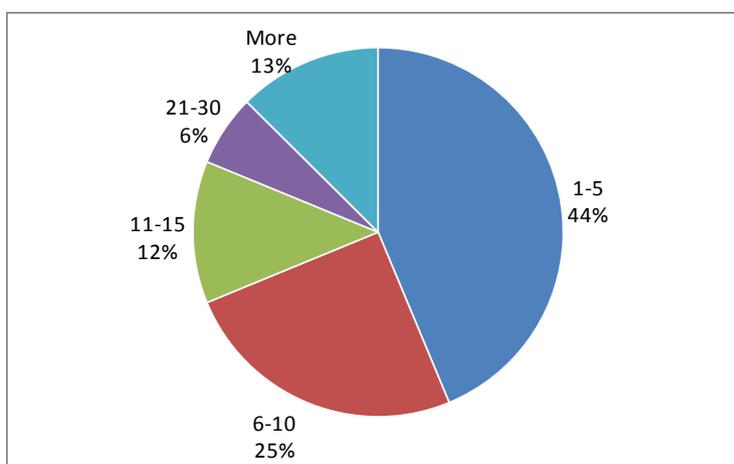
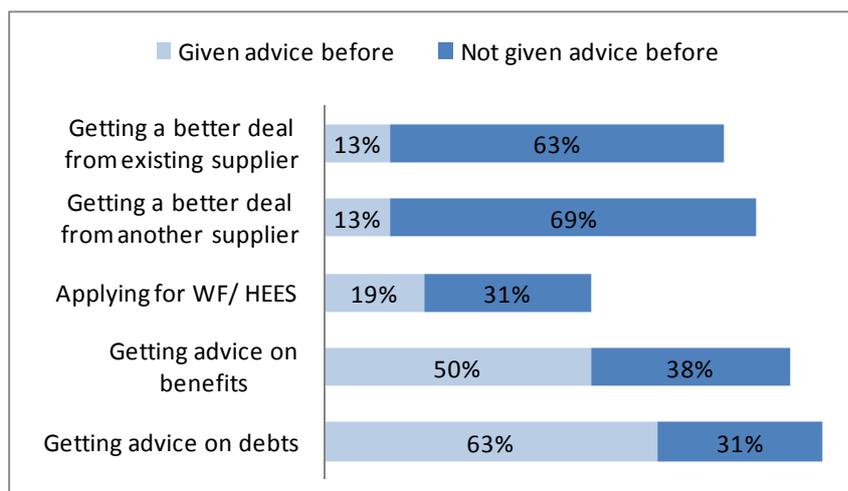


Figure 27. Frontline workers giving advice since the session, compared to advice given before (n=16)



Assuming that each frontline worker provided information to the maximum number of people in the range identified (e.g. if they chose 1-5, it was assumed they had advised 5), and also assuming that those who chose 'more' (than 30) actually reached 40 people each, then these 20 frontline workers have already reached an estimated 215 people. If this is extrapolated to the 2,002 frontline advisors who attended all of the sessions, then information from the sessions could have reached an estimated 21,500 people within the six months since the sessions started. Assuming that frontline advisors continue to pass the information on at the same rate, within a year 43,000 people could be reached. This is only a ballpark estimate and is based on the calculations below:

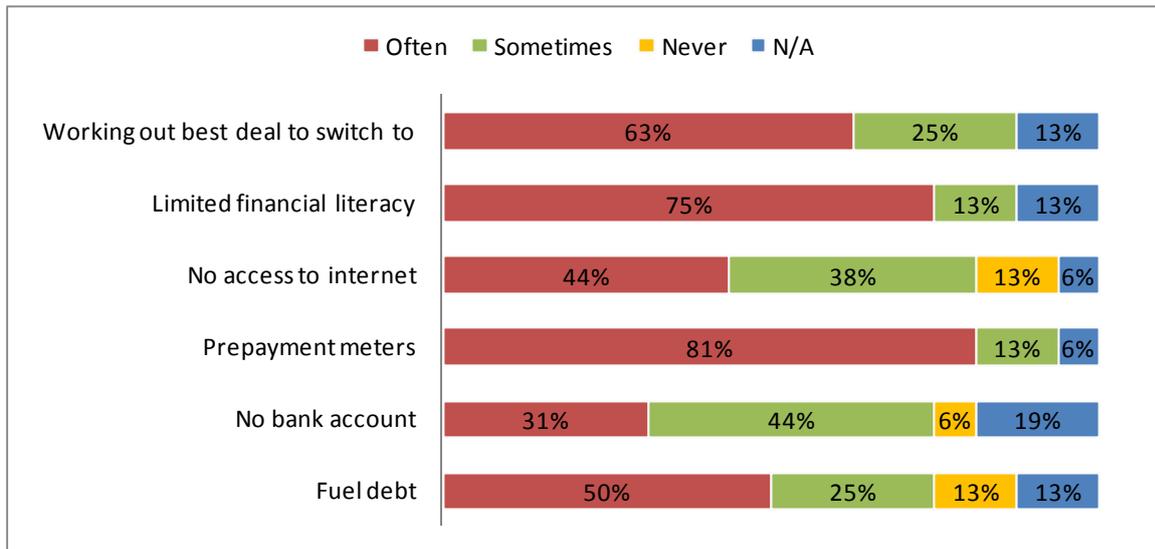
Range identified by interviewee	Maximum of range	Proportion of interviewees choosing this range*	Estimated number of people reached by 20 frontline workers interviewed	Estimated number of people reached (extrapolated to total of 2002 frontline workers)
	(A)	(B)	(A*20*B)	(A*2002*B)
0	0	20%	0	0
1-5	5	35%	35	3504
6-10	10	20%	40	4004
11-15	15	10%	30	3003
16-30	30	5%	30	3003
Over 30	40	10%	80	8008
			215	21,522 (6 months)
				43,033 (12 months)

* This is different to the proportion shown in Figure 26 because it includes the 4 interviewees who had not yet passed on advice.

Frontline workers were asked if any of the people to whom that they have provided information had experienced any problems with switching supplier. Their responses are summarised, as proportions of the total number of workers giving advice on switching (n= 16), in Figure 28 below. This suggests that prepayment meters caused the most problems, with 94% of workers noting problems 'often' or

'sometimes'. 88% of workers giving advice on switching noted problems with working out which is the best deal to switch to and limited financial literacy.

Figure 28. Problems experienced with switching supplier (n=16)



The majority of frontline workers interviewed said they had passed information from the session on to colleagues. For those that said they hadn't, this mainly seemed to be because their colleagues were present at the event anyway. Half of interviewees openly commented that the presentation had been informative and useful.

Conclusions

An evaluation of the Energy Best Deal programme based on data from self-complete questionnaires filled in by participants at the end of each session and follow-up telephone interviews with attendees some time after the event has revealed positive results. Nearly all of the consumers interviewed recalled finding the presentation helpful.

The self-completion questionnaire showed evidence of a lack of knowledge prior to the event, amongst consumers and frontline workers, both about the possibility of changing energy supplier and how to go about it. This suggests that the appropriate target audience for the sessions was identified. Nearly all respondents said the EBD session had addressed this knowledge gap, providing them with the ability and confidence to look into getting a better deal for themselves and/or advise others on doing this, in the case of frontline workers.

Nearly half of consumers and frontline workers interviewed (45% in both cases) went on to look into getting a better deal on their energy after the event.

Among consumers, the over 60 age group appeared significantly less likely to act, compared to the 30-59 and under 30 age group. This suggests there may be a requirement for further encouragement and assistance in switching supplier targeted specifically at this age group.

Among those who did look into getting a better deal, over two thirds (69%) said they had found it easy, or fairly easy, to get information about the different tariffs available. This suggests that the presentation is effectively signposting people as to where and how to source information.

Almost half (49%) of those who looked into getting a better deal on their energy proceeded to successfully switch tariff or energy supplier.

Uptake of other avenues of advice covered in the presentation (e.g. energy efficiency, benefits, debt, home improvement grants) was relatively low. This could be a reflection of the emphasis of the events being on switching, rather than energy efficiency or financial matters, or it may be that such issues were of less relevance to the targeted audience.

Whilst the principle aim of the EBD sessions for frontline advisors was to equip them with the necessary knowledge to advise consumers they come into contact with through their work on fuel issues, the sessions also encouraged nearly half (45%) of attendees interviewed to look into getting a better deal on their own energy. However, 77% of frontline workers had said on their self-completion questionnaire that they would look into getting a better deal. One sixth (15%) of those frontline workers interviewed actually went on to switch tariff or supplier.

Three quarters (76%) of the frontline workers surveyed (through the self-completion questionnaire) had some prior experience of advice work on energy or financial issues. This suggests that the sessions were well-targeted as most attendees had opportunities in their working lives to pass on the messages communicated through the sessions.

Nearly all frontline workers interviewed said the presentation did make them feel more confident about giving help or information about fuel issues and 80% had actually done so since the session, which is an encouraging result. Most of these (17%) had not given information of this kind before attending the session, which is evidence that the sessions successfully increased the capacity of frontline workers to advise on fuel issues.