

# Which energy supplier?

The biggest energy companies hit a new low in our latest utilities satisfaction survey

The last time we asked Which? members about their gas and electricity supplier (*Which?*, October 2008, p40), it was clear that most companies weren't doing nearly enough to keep their customers happy.

Our survey found that the average customer satisfaction score for gas and electricity suppliers was 47% – placing the industry below even banks and insurance companies in the satisfaction stakes.

### New survey

In our latest survey, customer satisfaction with suppliers has got worse. None of the big six has improved its overall satisfaction score. Npower remains rooted to the bottom, with British Gas not far behind. Even Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) – a reasonable performer last time – sees its score drop.

Heavy price increases last year – blamed on higher wholesale costs – are likely to have taken a toll on some suppliers' approval ratings. Energy is, after all, an essential service that we have to use.

But this doesn't explain why Utility Warehouse – the top-rated supplier last time – has improved its score since the last survey. The performance of not-for-profit newcomer Ebico also puts bigger companies to shame.

### Price isn't everything

When we checked prices, we found that Utility Warehouse and Ebico deals were not as cheap as the cheapest offers from the big six. But low prices are clearly not everything. In our survey, smaller companies score particularly well at customer service and, despite their higher prices, value for money. Of the big six suppliers, only SSE got good scores in these areas.

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As one Utility Warehouse customer told us: 'Utility Warehouse doesn't claim to be the cheapest supplier, but I'm dubious about claims by other suppliers to be much cheaper. Npower always seems to be the cheapest, but also comes bottom of most surveys on customer satisfaction.'

'I take other services from Utility Warehouse, such as my landline and broadband. I like the total package. They respond quickly to queries and are great on the phone – intelligent, helpful people and very good on customer service.'

**OUR RESEARCH**  
Between November and December 2008, we sent 15,371 members of the Which? online panel a survey about their gas or electricity supplier. We

received 6,088 responses – 2,860 for gas and 3,228 for electricity. As all of the suppliers featured supply both gas and electricity, we have combined their scores in the results table.

UTILITY PROVIDER	WHICH? SURVEY PERFORMANCE							SCORE
	ACCURACY OF BILLS	CLARITY OF BILLS	CUSTOMER SERVICE	ONLINE SUPPORT	TELEPHONE SUPPORT	DEALING WITH QUERIES	VALUE FOR MONEY	
UTILITY WAREHOUSE (90)	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a <sup>a</sup>	★★★★★	n/a <sup>a</sup>	★★★★★	83
EBICO (32)	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	n/a <sup>a</sup>	n/a <sup>a</sup>	n/a <sup>a</sup>	★★★★★	73
SSE (1,278)	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	53
SCOTTISHPOWER (887)	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	44
EDF ENERGY (602)	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	41
EON (1,151)	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	39
BRITISH GAS (1,288)	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★	★	★	37
NPOWER (601)	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★	★	★	30

**USING THE TABLE**  
Sample size in brackets.

**Performance**  
Online support Ease of use and satisfaction with online services.  
Telephone support Ease of use, time taken to get through and satisfaction with service. Queries Ability to resolve and speed of answering telephone/online queries.  
**Score**  
Combines overall satisfaction and likelihood of recommendation.

<sup>a</sup> Insufficient number of responses