Citizens Advice consultation on Energy Supplier Rating – npower response.

Q1: Do you agree with our proposal to include email as a customer service metric?

Yes, npower feel that it is the correct approach to include this channel. It is important that response times to all the communication channels that consumers now like to use are measured.

Q2: Do you agree with our proposal to use percentage response time (within a certain number of days) as our measure of supplier performance?

Yes, but it should be noted that consumers value both a timely response and a quality one and, it could be that measuring response times drives the wrong kind of behaviours which will result in the quality of the response being compromised.

Q3: Do you agree with our proposal to measure response time to subsequent emails from consumers, following supplier responses, and to exclude response time to secondary messages?

Whilst we see the value in measuring this metric, npower do not differentiate between a primary and secondary email. This would require system funding for development, which npower does not have available at this time and a change to reporting.. Although we can identify whether the contact has been received from the customer previously, all emails are received via our email management system and stored in our billing system so, whether these are primary or secondary responses, they are recorded and responded to within the same SLAs.

Q4: Please share any relevant research you are aware of on customer expectations of email response time.

npower does not have any research available relating to customer expectation around email response time. We believe that it would have been best practice (and raised this point at the workshop in the summer) for Citizens Advice to have conducted their own research to find out exactly what consumers value. This would ensure that the star rating truly measures and reflects what is important to them.

Q5: Do you have any further comments on our proposal to include email as a customer service metric?No, we don't.

Q6: Do you agree with our proposal to include social media as a customer service metric?

Yes, npower does agree with this proposal, please see our response to Q1.

Q7: Do you agree with our proposal to measure Facebook and Twitter contacts, and to only measure direct messages?

Yes, as in our response to Q1. In particular, we agree with the proposal only to measure direct messages.

Q8: Do you agree with our not to make social media a mandatory contact channel, but to penalise suppliers who have a presence on social media but do not respond to customer queries via this channel?

We think that social media should be made a mandatory contact channel as more and more customers now expect to contact their supplier this way. So, suppliers that don't offer it should be penalised in the Supplier Rating Tool. We agree, however, with your proposal that suppliers that have a presence on social media, but do not respond to customer queries, via this channel should be penalised.

Q9: Do you agree with our proposal to change the wording around 'answered substantively' in our information request?

Yes, npower does agree with this approach .

Q10: Please share any relevant research you are aware of on customer expectations of social media response time.

npower does not have any research available in relation to Social Media response times. Please see our response to Q4.

Q11: Do you have any further comments on our proposal to include social media as a customer service metric in the rating?

No, we don't.

Q12: Do you agree with our proposal not to include webchat as a customer service metric at this stage, but to keep it under review as part of future iterations of the rating?

No, we don't – webchat is used more and more and is even expected by consumers these days – customer research conducted by npower shows that it is our 2nd most popular channel after voice. We suggest that it would be useful for Citizens Advice to undertake its own research to understand consumers' expectations of webchat as a communication option.

Q13: Do you have any further comments on webchat as a customer service metric?

No.

Q14: Do you agree with our proposal not to include telephone ringbacks and telephone abandonment rates as customer service metrics?

Yes, we agree with the proposal not to include both of these metrics. Not all call abandonments are necessarily a bad thing – for example, customers may abandon when they hear our IVR message letting them know about online services and choose to use that channel instead. We allow customers the option to receive a call back when the next advisor is available, or at a time up to 7 days ahead and, although we review performance to ensure these call backs happen, we do not have regular reporting set up to measure the timeliness of these call backs.

Q15: Do you agree with our proposal for incorporating the new customer service metrics into the rating?

Yes.

Q16: Do you agree with our proposal to include the Energy UK Vulnerability Code of Practice in the rating?

Yes, consumers should have as much information available to them when choosing a supplier, including how well they support their vulnerable customers and we believe that it should be suitably weighted to ensure that there is a strong incentive for suppliers to sign up to it. We also suggest that you consider including a metric for performance, not just for signing up to the Code of Practice.

Q17: Do you have any comments on the broader role of the Company Commitments element of the star rating?

We think that they make a valuable contribution as it is important that consumers can get a detailed view of the suppliers' performance / commitment in a range of areas.

Q18: Do you have any comments on the opportunity to dispute the reports from the Energy Ombudsman in the star rating processes?

With regard to our domestic customers, npower doesn't have any issues with reporting and the number being provided to Citizens Advice has already been reviewed based on the OS Domestic customer report.

However, we would like to highlight that npower currently does not receive a report from OS on its Microbusiness complaints and, in fact, the first place this information is seen is within the Citizens Advice publication. Where the information is incorrect, Citizens Advice has not accepted our challenge as it has not previously been challenged with OS – which has clearly not been possible as no report has been provided to npower to review, validate and challenge errors. npower have raised this concern with OS and are waiting for a response and timeline for resolution.

Q19: Do you have any comments on the proposal to align the star rating measure of switching timeliness with Ofgem's proposals?

Yes, we agree.