



Consumer Research - Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) and Overall Standards of Performance (OSP)

Final report prepared for the Utility Regulator

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1. Executive summary

The following section summarises the key findings from a comprehensive study to assess the views of domestic and non-domestic customers in relation to guaranteed standards of service (GSS) and overall standards of performance (OSP) for electricity.

Background

The current electricity GSS/OSP requirements in Northern Ireland refer only to the electricity distributor, NIE Networks, and have been in place since 1st October 1999. The Utility Regulator (UR) has committed, through the Consumer Protection Programme, to review the electricity GSS/OSP. The aim of this research study is to gain insight into domestic and non-domestic consumer views on the current requirements. It is intended that the review will update the GSS/OSP requirements to reflect current industry structure – introducing a regime for electricity suppliers and aligning with the regulations for the gas industry in NI and the electricity sector in GB.

For this study, the UR required Perceptive Insight to undertake comprehensive representative surveys of domestic and non-domestic electricity customers in Northern Ireland.

Methodology

A telephone interviewing methodology was used to conduct the surveys. The survey of domestic customers was undertaken between November 2020 and February 2021, and during February and March 2021 for the non-domestic customers. Each interview took, on average, 10 to 15 minutes to complete and was carried out in compliance with the GDPR 2018 and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. In total, 1,211 domestic and 500 non-domestic interviews were completed.

Key findings

Awareness of existing standards

Domestic consumers

- 91% of domestic customers believe that there should be similar standards of service in place for electricity companies as there are for gas companies. This compares to 2% who think there is no requirement for the standards, and 7% who were not sure.

Non-domestic consumers

- 90% of non-domestic customers believe there should be similar standards for electricity companies as there are for gas companies, whereas 4% think there should not and 5% were not sure.

Importance of standards of service

Overall, a large majority of both domestic and non-domestic customer confirmed that it is important to have specific individual guaranteed standards of service in place. The following

table summarises the percentage of domestic and non-domestic customers who rated each standard area as important¹.

Table 1.1: Importance of having standards of service

	Domestic customers	Non-domestic customers
Meter disputes		
Time taken to deal with a problem with a pre-payment electricity meter	84%	-
Time taken to deal with a problem with any other type of electricity meter	86%	87%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to an incorrect meter read	88%	80%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to a faulty meter	90%	86%
Charges, payments and complaints		
The time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method	82%	66%
The time taken to respond to a query about your bill	88%	81%
The time taken to respond to a complaint	90%	86%
The time taken to respond to a query about a payment related to a set standard of service	86%	78%
The time taken to issue payment to customers for failure to keep to set standards	88%	81%
Supply interruptions		
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions	93%	96%
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 households are affected	91%	93%
Time taken to restore your supply in very poor weather	87%	88%
For the notice given for a planned interruption to your electricity supply	86%	99%
For customers who experience four or more supply interruptions in a 12-month period, each lasting more than 3 hours	92%	97%
Appointments		
Offering and keeping appointment slots	94%	92%
Allocating 2-hour slots for appointments at any time of day, or morning/afternoon slots if acceptable to the customer	93%	92%
Providing a supply		
Length of time taken to arrange an appointment to install a new meter	86%	76%
Keeping an appointment to provide a brand-new electricity supply	89%	83%
Length of time taken to provide a cost estimate for a brand-new supply	85%	80%
Notice of rights		
The provision of information about these set standards.	93%	90%
Other services		
Supply interruptions on a rota basis	92%	92%
Voltage problems	93%	93%
Replacement of a faulty main fuse for electricity supplying your home	97%	97%

¹ Respondents were asked to rate importance on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was not at all important and 5 was extremely important. The percentages displayed are of those who provided a score of 4 or 5.

It is worth noting that those who had someone in their household with a disability were more likely than those who had not, to rate each of these standards of services as extremely important.

Maximum acceptable times to respond to issues

Customers were asked their views on the maximum time they consider is acceptable to respond to the various issues addressed by the proposed standards of service. The following table summarises their response across each of the standards.

Table 1.2: Maximum acceptable time to respond to issues*

	Domestic customers			Non-domestic customers		
	Fewer	About right	More	Fewer	About right	More
Meter disputes						
A maximum of 5 working days to respond to a query over a faulty meter	67%	30%	1%	52%	45%	1%
A maximum of 3 hours on a working day or 4 hours on any other day to deal with a problem with a prepayment meter	20%	72%	2%	N/A		
Charges, payments and complaints						
	Fewer	About right	More	Fewer	About right	More
A maximum of 5 working days to respond to a query about a bill	52%	46%	1%	42%	56%	2%
A maximum of 10 working days to provide an initial response to a complaint	64%	34%	0%	71%	27%	0%
A maximum of 20 working days to provide a substantive response to a complaint	66%	32%	0%	66%	31%	1%
Supply interruptions						
	Fewer	About right	More	Fewer	About right	More
A maximum of 18 hours to restore supply if there is a power cut in normal weather conditions	80%	17%	1%	72%	26%	1%
A maximum of 24 hours to restore supply if there is a power cut in normal weather conditions affecting more than 5000 premises	63%	33%	2%	58%	41%	0%
A maximum of 24 hours to restore supply in bad weather conditions	49%	45%	3%	31%	65%	2%
3 days' notice for a planned interruption	Too little 27%	72%	Too much 1%	Too little 82%	8%	Too much 9%
Providing a supply						
	Fewer	About right	More	Fewer	About right	More
A maximum of 2 working days to arrange an appointment for turning on a brand-new supply	14%	81%	2%	14%	79%	4%
A maximum of 7 working days to provide a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a small job	38%	58%	1%	26%	70%	1%
A maximum of 15 working days to provide a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a big job	39%	55%	1%	32%	64%	1%

*Data may not add to 100% as not sure responses are not displayed

Continued overleaf

Other services						
	Fewer	About right	More	Fewer	About right	More
A maximum of 3 hours on a working day and 4 hours any other day to replace a faulty main fuse for electricity supplying your home	13%	85%	1%	10%	87%	1%

*Data may not add to 100% as not sure responses are not displayed

Medical and Customer Care Registers

- Two thirds (66%) of domestic customers believe that those on the Medical Customer Care Register should receive greater payments from electricity companies when a set standard of service has not been met.
- Similarly 70% think that those on the Customer Care register should receive higher payments when a standard of service has not been met.

Payments

Domestic consumers

- The majority of domestic consumers (85%) are in favour of payments being made when a standard of service has not been met by an electricity company.
- 84% think that these payments should be paid automatically by the electricity company rather than claimed by the consumer themselves (9%).
- Almost three quarters (74%) believe these payments should increase with the cost of living rather than remain fixed (17%).

Non-domestic consumers

- 87% of non-domestic consumers are in favour of payments being made when a standard of service has not been met.
- 79% believe this payment should be made automatically by the electricity company.
- 70% said that the payment should increase with the cost of living.

Overall standards of performance

Domestic consumers

- Awareness of minimum standards is low amongst domestic consumers, with only 12% being aware of them before taking part in the survey.
- However, the majority of domestic consumers (94%) believe that it is important for electricity companies to have these standards.

Non-domestic consumers

- Businesses were mostly unaware (86%) of minimum standards for electricity companies in Northern Ireland.
- Almost all (97%) agreed that there should be minimum standards for electricity companies alongside standards for individual customers.

Conclusions and areas for consideration

The follow paragraphs outline several overarching trends within the data and areas which the Utility Regulator may wish to explore further.

Domestic consumers

Awareness of overall standards for electricity companies

Although the findings point to a low awareness of minimum standards among domestic consumers, the findings suggest that domestic customers recognise their importance. Only 12% of respondents had heard of any minimum standards of service for electricity companies before they took part in the research, but 94% think it is important to have these overall standards.

The findings from the research point to a desire for consistent standards across both gas and electricity companies, with nine in ten (91%) domestic respondents saying there should be similar standards in place for both utilities.

In addition, it should be noted that domestic customers want to see the promotion of standards of service, particularly those in the most vulnerable groups, with 93% of domestic consumers believing it is important to have standards for the provision of information on GSS.

Support and response times for specific GSS

There is a high level of support for having GSS in place across all of the areas of provision that were included in the research, with in excess of 82% of domestic customers rating each of the areas as important.

In relation to the maximum times that are set to respond to issues as part of the GSS, the majority of domestic customers are keen to see shorter timeframes in place for a number of areas including;

- queries about faulty meters and bills;
- responses to complaints; and
- the restoration of power in normal weather.

Level of payment and making claims

The majority of domestic consumers (85%) are in favour of payments being made when a standard of service has not been met, particularly those who have or live with someone who has a disability (93%). Most domestic consumers are in favour of having this payment being made automatically by the electricity company (84%), and that any payment set should increase with the cost of living (72%). The time it takes to make this payment is also significant with 88% of people saying it is important to have a GSS for this.

Non-domestic consumers

The findings from the non-domestic survey replicate those from the domestic survey, with a low level of awareness of the standards but a strong level of importance attributed to having them in place.

Awareness and views of GSS

Similar to domestic consumers, there was a low level of awareness of overall standards among non-domestic customers with 13% having heard of minimum standards of service

before taking part in the survey. Also, non-domestic customers placed a high level of importance on having these standards, with almost all (97%) saying that it is important to have them for electricity companies alongside standards for individual customers. Non-domestic consumers also showed a desire for electricity and gas companies to share consistent standards, with nine in ten (90%) saying there should be similar standards for electricity companies as there are for gas companies.

Support and response times for specific GSS

Again, there is a high level of support for having GSS in place across all of the areas of provision that were included in the research, with in excess of 76% of non-domestic customers rating each service area as important (apart from time taken to respond to a change in payment method which had 66% rating it as important.)

In relation to the maximum times that are set to respond to issues as part of the GSS, the majority of non-domestic customers are keen to see shorter timeframes in place for a number of areas including;

- queries about faulty meters;
- responses to complaints;
- the restoration of power in normal weather; and
- the notice given for planned interruptions.

Level of payment and making claims

Non-domestic customers are in favour of being eligible to receive a payment when a standard has not been met (87%), with any payment being made automatically by the electricity company (79%) and which should increase with the cost of living (70%).

However, as one business suggested “*money back doesn’t solve the problem*”, and the results suggest that businesses place greater importance on the notice given for planned interruptions (99%), replacement of faulty mains fuses (97%) and the restoration of supply in normal weather (96%) than they do on the time it takes for a payment to be made if a standard has not been met (81%). This points to businesses being more concerned with having a continuous supply to ensure they can continue operating than they are with being reimbursed if the service they receive does not meet the required standard.

2. Introduction

Background

The Utility Regulator (UR) is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries. As part of its mission the Utility Regulator aims to protect the short and long-term interests of consumers of electricity, gas and water, with a vision to ensure value and sustainability in energy and water. The Utility Regulator recognises that 'starting with the consumer is paramount and consumer needs will be at the centre of our strategy.'

The current electricity GSS/OSP requirements in Northern Ireland refer only to the electricity distributor, NIE Networks, and have been in place since 1st October 1999. The UR has committed, through the Consumer Protection Programme, to review the electricity GSS/OSP and aims through this research study, to gain insight into domestic and non-domestic consumer views on the current requirements. It is intended that the review will update the GSS/OSP requirements to reflect current industry structure – introducing a regime for electricity suppliers and aligning with the regulations for the gas industry in NI and the electricity sector in GB.

Research aims & objectives

The research aim was to gain insight into domestic and non-domestic consumer views on the current requirements in relation to GSS and OSP, their attitudes toward any change in these, and any impact these may have.

The specific objectives were as follows:

- To identify areas which have implications for the review of existing GSS and OSP; and
- To highlight areas which may require further consideration by the UR.

Report structure

The report begins with an overview of the survey methodology and an outline of respondent demographics. The subsequent sections explore each of the survey themes as follow:

- Utility use and method of payment;
- Awareness of existing standards;
- Meter disputes;
- Charges, payments and complaints;
- Supply interruptions;
- Appointments;
- Providing a supply;
- Notice of rights;
- Other services;
- Medical and customer care registers;
- Payment; and
- Overall standards of performance.

Key findings and trends are identified throughout the analysis. Where relevant, statistically significant results at the 95% confidence level, are clearly highlighted.

The report concludes by highlighting areas for further consideration and with possible implications for the Utility Regulator GSS/OSP requirements.

3. Utility use and method of payment

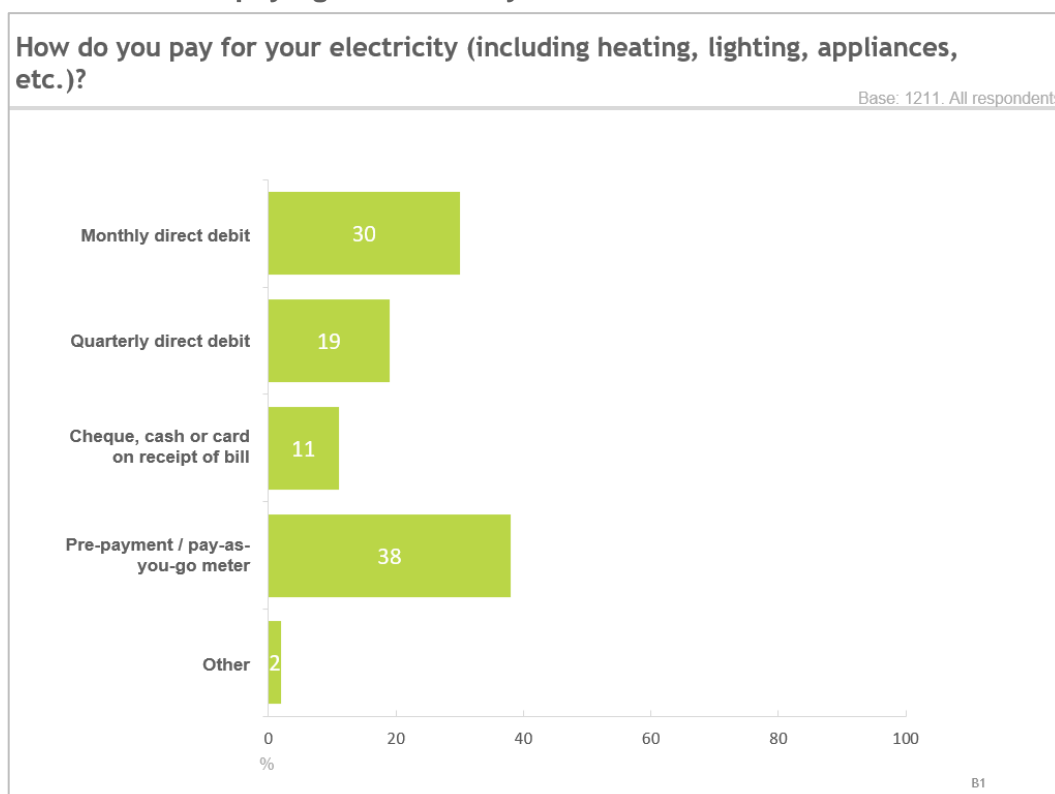
In this section, to set the context, we provide background information on those who took part in the study. We provide an overview of the methods used to pay for their electricity, the type of heating they have at their property, and the amount spent on electricity. This profile information has been used to further analyse views on guaranteed standards of service.

Throughout each section in this document, we firstly present the findings from the domestic customer survey, following by the findings from the non-domestic study.

Domestic consumers

The following chart provide a breakdown of the payment methods used by domestic customers. 38% confirmed that they use a pre-payment or pay-as-you-go meter, while 30% pay through monthly direct debit. One in five (19%) have a quarterly direct debit, and one in ten (11%) pay by cheque, cash or card on receipt of their bill.

Figure 3.1: Method of paying for electricity



The following table provides further analysis of the use of payment methods, and in particular the differing profile of those households that have a pre-payment meter. Those most likely to have a pre-payment are younger (58% of those aged 35 to 44 and 48% of those aged under 35 use this method). Pre-payment meters are also more commonplace in households that are located in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland (66% of households in quintile 1,

according to the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017², use this method) and in households that are classed in socio-economic groups C2DE.

Table 3.1: Payment method by demographics

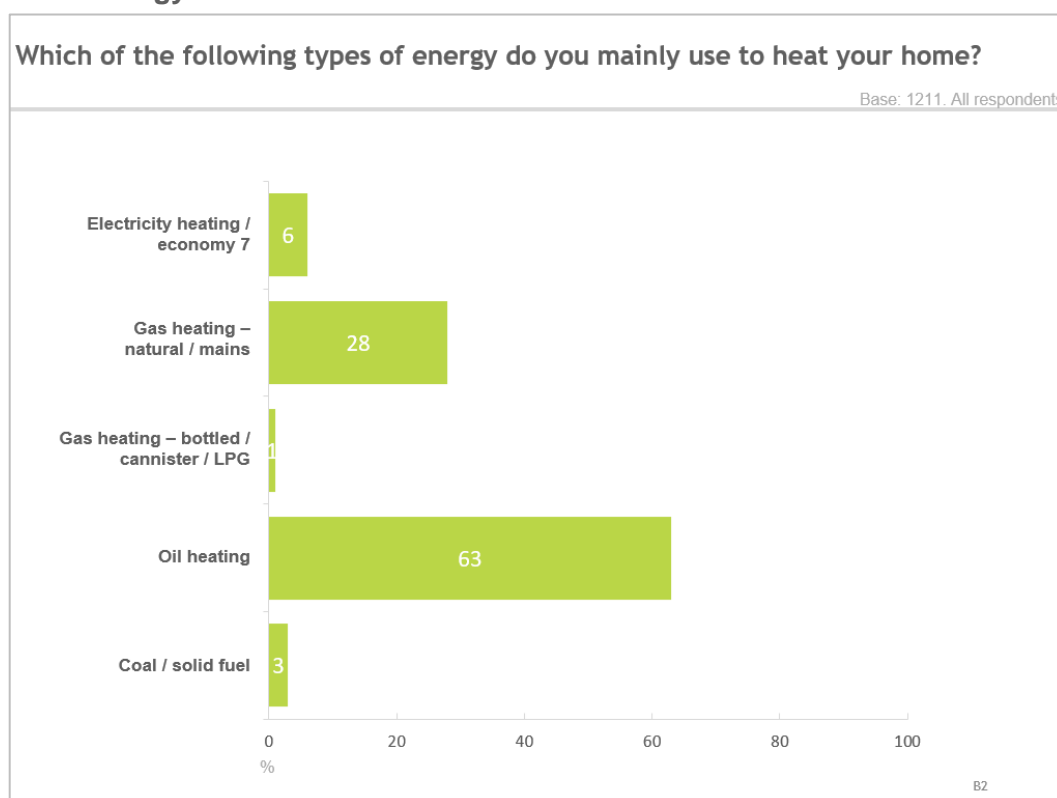
	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	ABC1	C2	DE
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	561	216	358
Monthly direct debit	30%	23%	22%	34%	33%	37%	21%	21%
Quarterly direct debit	19%	18%	13%	21%	23%	24%	18%	13%
Pay by cheque/cash/card on receipt of bill	11%	9%	6%	8%	21%	9%	12%	14%
Pre-payment/pay-as-you-go meter	38%	48%	58%	35%	21%	28%	48%	50%
Other	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Urban	Rural	1 - Most deprived	2	3	4	5 - Least deprived
<i>Base</i>	1211	693	518	263	255	242	268	183
Monthly direct debit	30%	31%	28%	16%	27%	30%	35%	45%
Quarterly direct debit	19%	16%	24%	11%	19%	17%	26%	27%
Pay by cheque/cash/card on receipt of bill	11%	8%	15%	6%	13%	17%	12%	7%
Pre-payment/pay-as-you-go meter	38%	44%	31%	66%	40%	34%	25%	20%
Other	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Oil is the most common type of fuel for home heating with just less than two thirds (63%) using this fuel to heat their home compared to 29% that use gas – either through natural or mains (28%) or through bottled, cannister or LPG (1%).

² <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/nimdm17-soa-level-results>

Figure 3.2: Energy used to heat home



Respondents that live in social housing (65%) and those who live in the most deprived areas (53%) were more likely to have gas heating. Those who own their home (68%) or who live in the least deprived areas were more likely to have oil heating.

Table 3.2: Heating method by demographics

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Own home	Private rented	Social housing
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	561	216	358
Electricity /economy 7	6%	9%	10%	3%	4%	6%	5%	4%
Gas – natural/mains	28%	37%	32%	26%	22%	22%	30%	65%
Gas – bottled/cannister/LPG	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	-	2%
Oil	63%	51%	54%	67%	70%	68%	61%	28%
Coal/solid fuel	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%	4%	1%
Other	0%	-	-	0%	0%	0%	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Urban	Rural	1 - Most deprived	2	3	4	5 - Least deprived
<i>Base</i>	1211	693	518	263	255	242	268	183
Electricity /economy 7	6%	7%	4%	7%	4%	5%	7%	5%
Gas – natural/mains	28%	43%	8%	53%	16%	19%	19%	34%
Gas – bottled/cannister/LPG	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	-	1%
Oil	63%	47%	83%	37%	76%	73%	69%	57%
Coal/solid fuel	3%	2%	4%	2%	3%	2%	4%	1%
Other	0%	0%	0%	-	0%	-	0%	1%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-domestic consumers

The following chart provides a breakdown of non-domestic customers by the method of paying for their electricity. Direct debit is the most commonplace method of payment with 37% paying quarterly and 34% monthly. One quarter (24%) of organisations pay by cheque, cash or card on receipt of their bill, with this being more likely for agriculture businesses (35%).

Figure 3.3: Method of paying for electricity

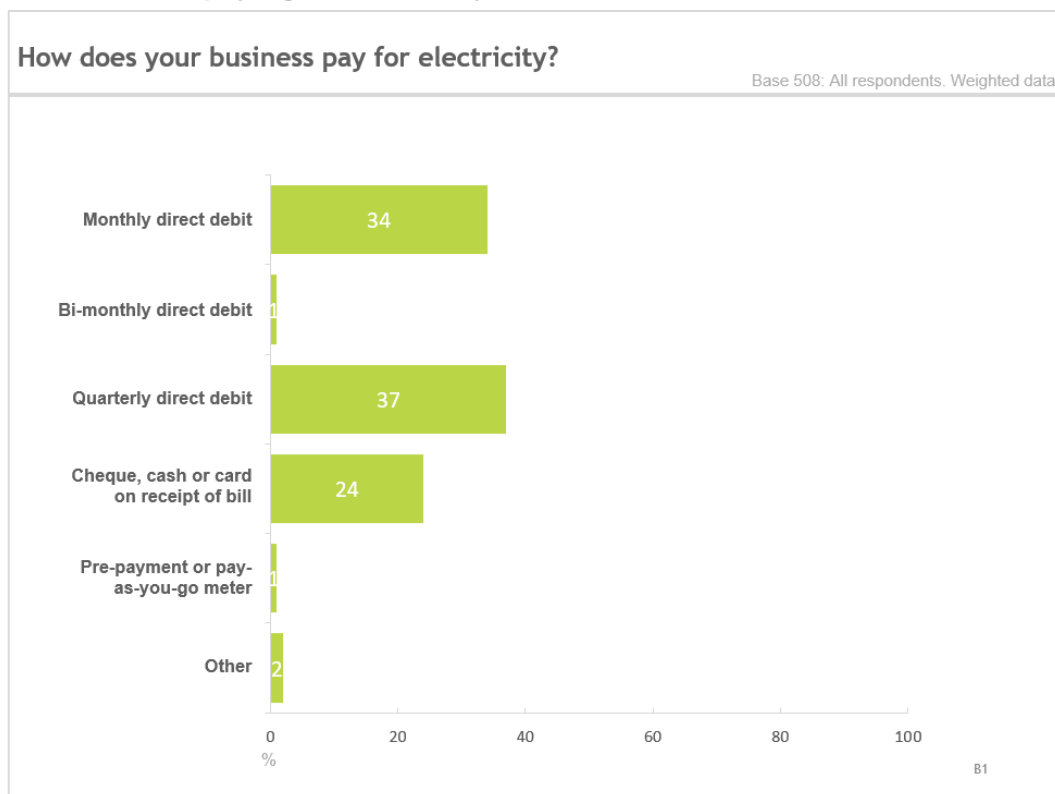


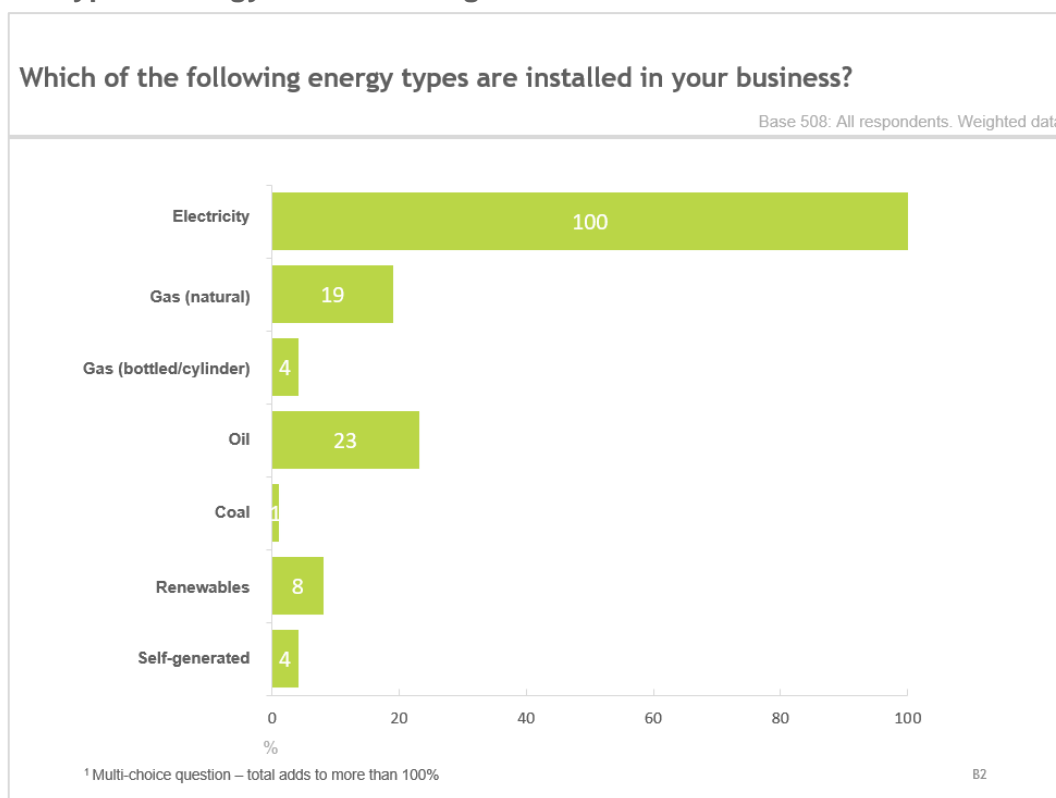
Table 3.4: Payment method by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10
Monthly direct debit	34%	35%	31%	45%
Bi-monthly direct debit	1%	1%	1%	-
Quarterly direct debit	37%	35%	57%	41%
Pay by cheque/cash/card on receipt of bill	24%	25%	11%	12%
Pre-payment/pay-as-you-go meter	1%	1%	-	-
Other	2%	3%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Monthly direct debit	34%	53%	30%	33%	35%	37%	33%	39%	25%
Bi-monthly direct debit	1%	-	-	6%	-	-	-	6%	-
Quarterly direct debit	37%	35%	31%	34%	51%	36%	33%	39%	55%
Pay by cheque/cash/card on receipt of bill	24%	12%	32%	21%	14%	21%	35%	10%	14%
Pre-payment/pay-as-you-go meter	1%	-	2%	3%	-	3%	-	-	-
Other	2%	-	5%	3%	-	3%	-	7%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

All (100%) non-domestic customers report that they have electricity installed. In terms of other sources of energy, 23% have oil and 19% use natural gas. 8% have renewables installed and 4% report that their energy is self-generated.

Figure 3.4: Type of energy installed in organisation



Organisations with urban premises (34%) and those that are situated in Greater Belfast (42%) were more likely to have natural gas installed than those with rural premises (4%) and those in the rest of NI (13%). Those with premises in the rest of NI were more likely to have oil installed (26%) than those in Greater Belfast (15%). Over half (55%) of hospitality businesses have natural gas.

Those using renewable sources of energy are more likely to be larger businesses (22%), those located in a rural area (14%) and those in the agriculture sector (18%). Larger businesses are also more likely to report that they use self-generated energy sources (23%).

Table 3.5: Type of energy installed in organisation by size, location and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508/508	226/452	189/46	93/10	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Electricity	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Gas - natural	19%	18%	31%	43%	34%	4%	42%	13%
Gas – bottled/cannister/LPG	4%	4%	6%	11%	4%	5%	9%	3%
Oil	23%	21%	38%	47%	23%	25%	15%	26%
Coal	1%	1%	-	1%	1%	1%	-	1%
Renewables	8%	8%	5%	22%	3%	14%	5%	9%
Self-generated	4%	4%	7%	23%	2%	6%	1%	5%
Other	0%	-	2%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508/508	51/38	75 /81	76/72	50/42	75/72	76/127	54/33	51/43
Electricity	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Gas - natural	19%	10%	12%	32%	55%	16%	2%	20%	42%
Gas – bottled/cannister/LPG	4%	6%	5%	4%	19%	1%	2%	5%	-
Oil	23%	28%	21%	29%	30%	13%	18%	38%	29%
Coal	1%	-	-	3%	-	-	2%	0%	-
Renewables	8%	12%	8%	3%	0%	4%	18%	3%	1%
Self-generated	4%	3%	3%	3%	7%	1%	8%	2%	1%
Other	0%	-	-	-	3%	0%	-	0%	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-domestic customers were asked how much they spend on electricity annually. Most are not large users with 46% reporting that they spend less than £2,500 on electricity per year; this includes 50% of businesses with 1 to 9 employees, compared to 3% of those with over 50 staff. Just less than one quarter (23%) spend between £2,500 and £5,000, and 10% spend up to £10,000. 12% spend between £10,000 and £50,000; this includes 41% of businesses with 50 or more employees and 30% of those with 10 to 49 staff, compared to 10% who have under 10 employees.

Figure 3.5: Annual spend on electricity

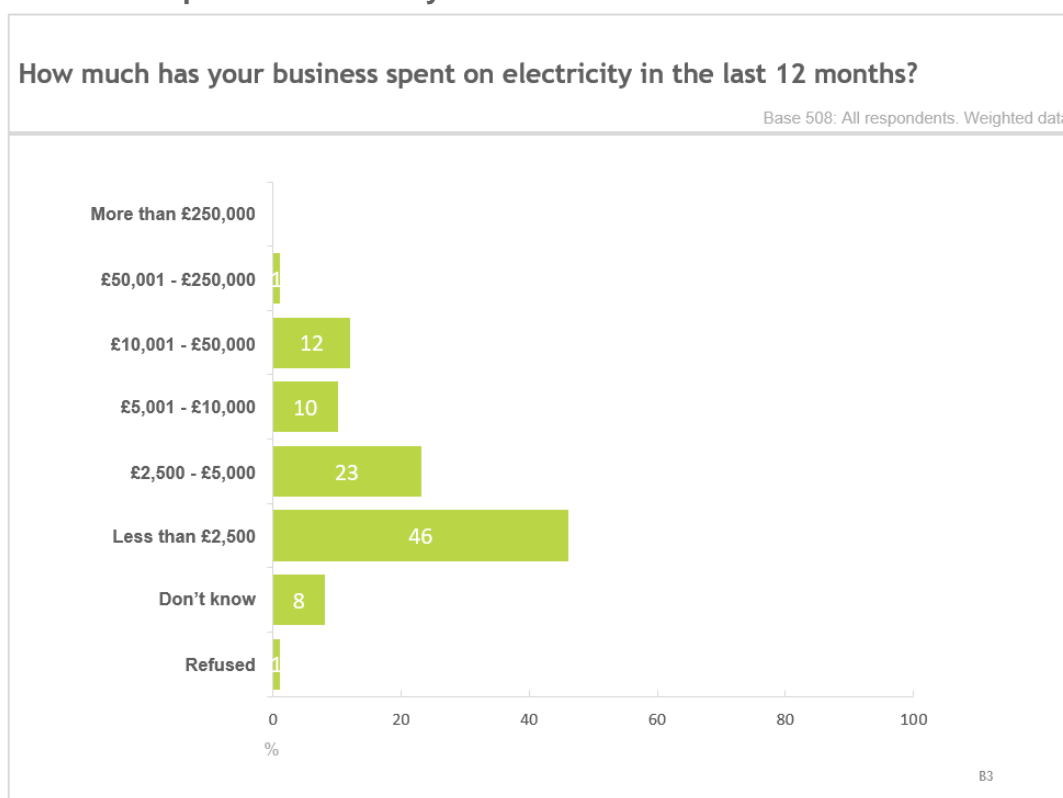


Table 3.6: Annual spend on electricity by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10
More than £250,000	0%	-	-	9%
£50,001 - £250,000	1%	-	4%	15%
£10,001 - £50,000	12%	10%	30%	41%
£5,001 - £10,000	10%	8%	26%	14%
£2,500 - £5,000	23%	24%	20%	6%
Less than £2,500	46%	50%	11%	3%
Don't know	8%	8%	9%	12%
Refused	1%	0%	2%	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
More than £250,000	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	2%	0%
£50,001 - £250,000	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%
£10,001 - £50,000	12%	17%	1%	9%	15%	11%	23%	6%	4%
£5,001 - £10,000	10%	13%	5%	4%	24%	6%	15%	2%	9%
£2,500 - £5,000	23%	8%	22%	29%	26%	17%	24%	28%	31%
Less than £2,500	46%	48%	59%	55%	29%	50%	36%	50%	39%
Don't know	8%	7%	13%	2%	5%	15%	2%	10%	16%
Refused	1%	5%	-	1%	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

4. Awareness of existing standards

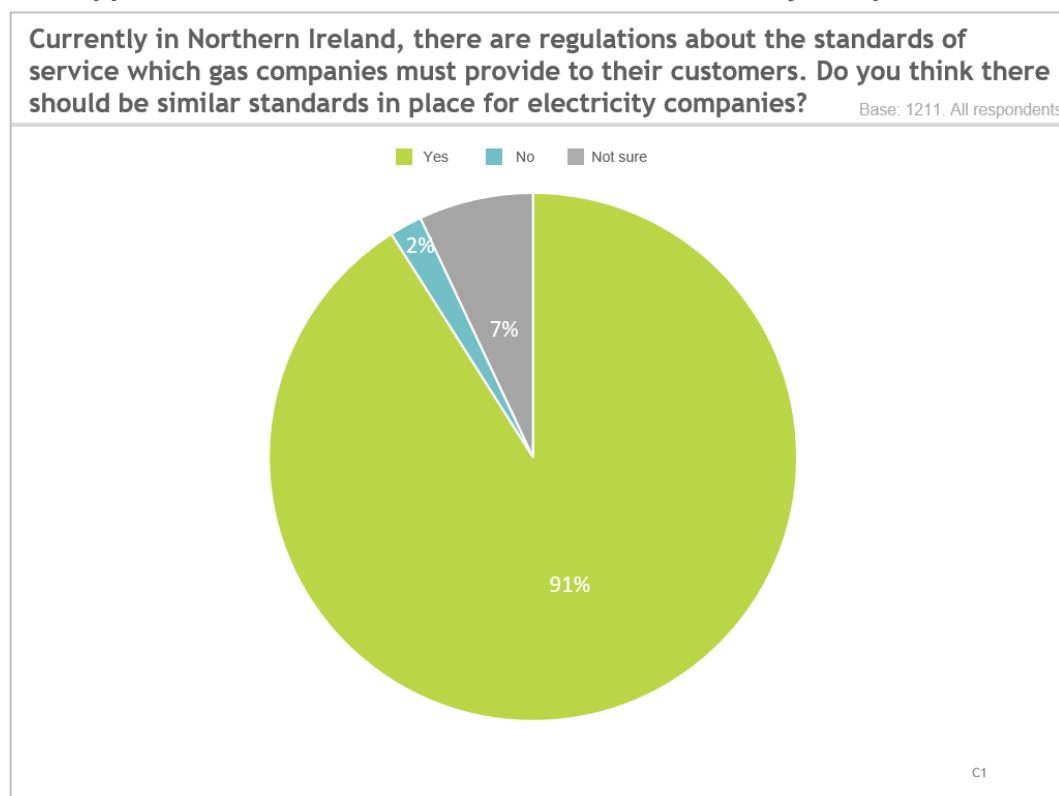
In this section we explore the views of consumers on whether standards of services should be in place for electricity companies, similar to those that are currently in place for gas companies in Northern Ireland.

Domestic consumers

Respondents were informed about the regulations in Northern Ireland around the standards of service which gas companies must provide their customers and asked whether there should be similar standards set for electricity companies.

The majority (91%) of domestic customers agreed that there should be similar standards for electricity companies, compared to just 2% who disagreed.

Figure 4.1: Support for similar standards of service for electricity companies



Given the strength of response to this question there was little variation across most demographics sub-groups. However, older respondents, aged 65 or older (84%), and those who pay their electricity bill by cheque, cash or card on receipt of their bill (85%) were less likely to think there should be similar standards for electricity companies.

Table 4.1: Support for similar standards of service for electricity companies by demographics

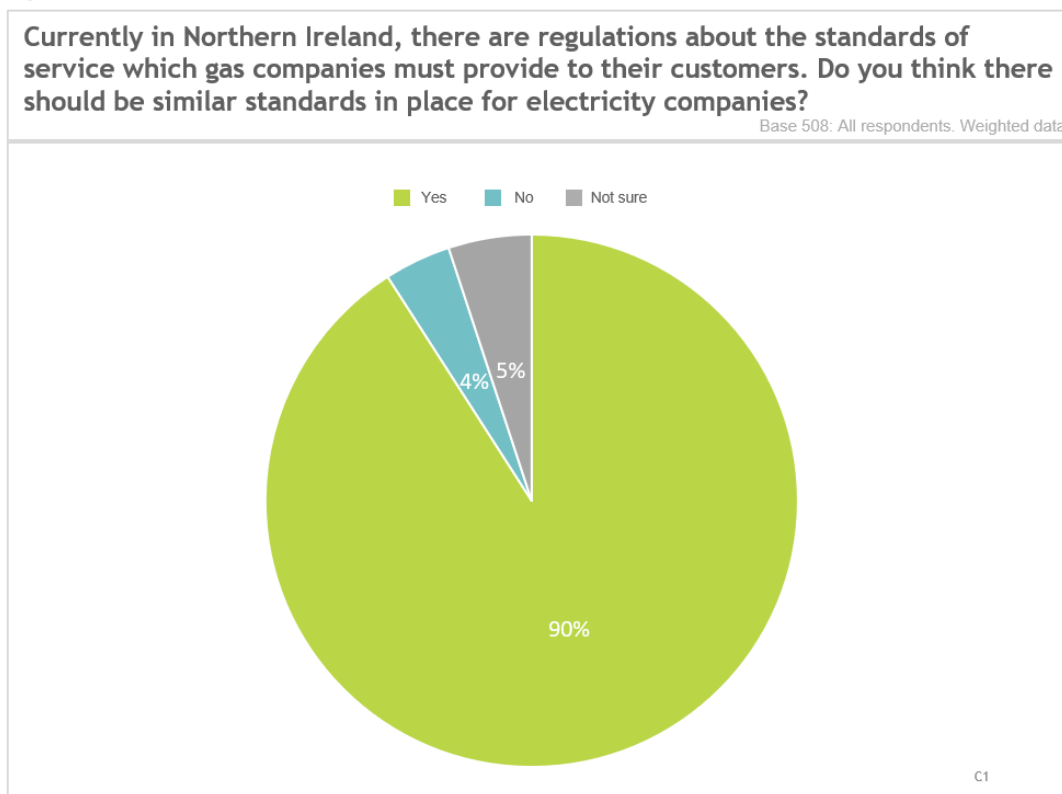
	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282
Yes	91%	93%	93%	94%	84%
No	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Not sure	7%	5%	4%	5%	13%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Yes	91%	92%	93%	85%	92%	90%
No	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	-
Not sure	7%	7%	6%	12%	5%	10%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-domestic consumers

Similar to the domestic customers, the majority (90%) of non-domestic customers agreed that there should be similar standards as there are for gas companies in place for electricity companies. Just 4% thought that there is no requirement for introducing similar standards.

Figure 4.2: Support for similar standards of service for electricity companies (non-domestic)



5. Meter disputes

In this section we explore the views of consumers on their expectations of the standards of service in place should they have an issue with their electricity meter. Areas covered are as follows:

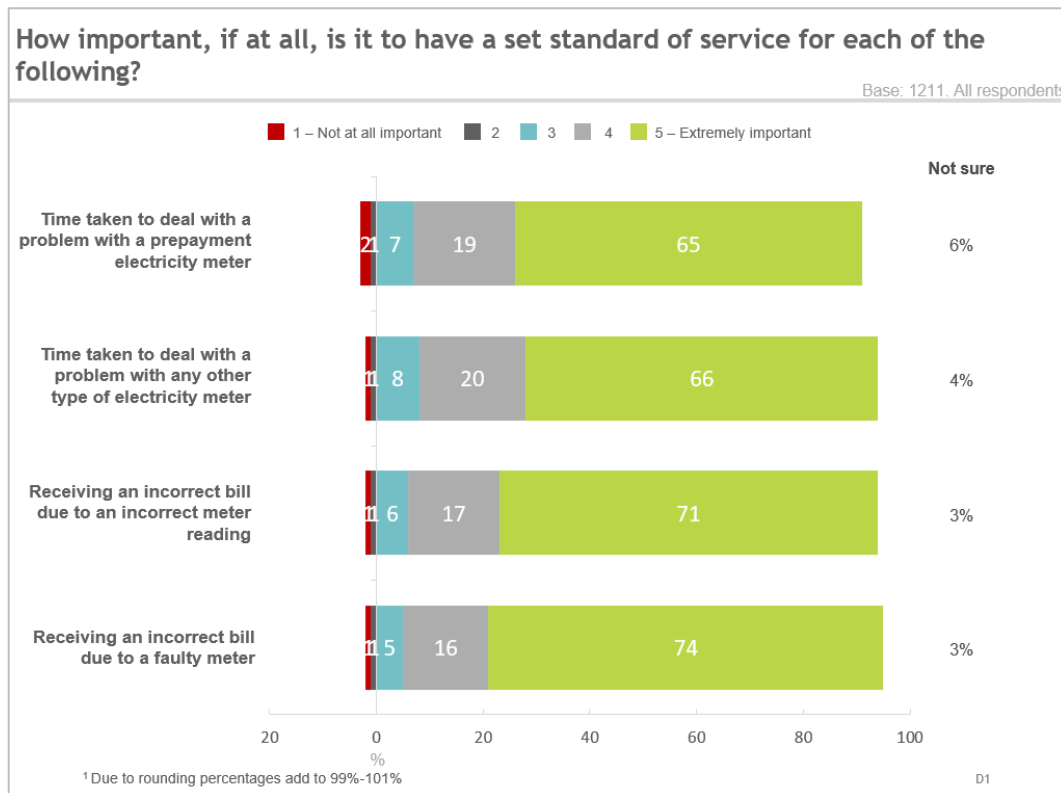
- Importance of set standards of service for the time taken to deal with a problem with an electricity meter;
- Importance of set standards of service for receiving an incorrect bill due to an incorrect reading or faulty meter;
- Expectations on the time taken to respond to a query over a faulty meter.

Domestic consumers

Resolving a problem with an electricity meter or incorrect bill

Respondents were asked how important they felt it was to have standards of service for the time taken to resolve problems with a faulty meter (pre-payment and any other type) and for receiving an incorrect bill (due to an incorrect meter reading and due to a faulty meter). Respondents were asked to rate the importance on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was not at all important and 5 was extremely important. Across each of the four areas the majority (84% or more) gave a score of 4 or 5 indicating that most believe that these standards of service should be in place.

Figure 5.1: Importance of standards of service for problems with electricity meters and bills



Analysis by sub-groups shows that those aged 45 to 64 are more likely to rate it as extremely important to have the standards for service in place across each of the areas, as are those who have someone with a disability in their household and those who have a pre-payment meter.

Table 5.1: Importance of standards of service for problems with electricity meters and bills by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	203	1008
Time taken to deal with a problem with a prepayment electricity meter	65%	56%	62%	71%	63%	77%	63%
Time taken to deal with a problem with any other type of electricity meter	66%	52%	60%	73%	68%	77%	64%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to an incorrect meter reading	71%	62%	65%	77%	72%	79%	70%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to a faulty meter	74%	64%	69%	80%	74%	80%	73%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Time taken to deal with a problem with a prepayment electricity meter	65%	63%	62%	52%	73%	55%
Time taken to deal with a problem with any other type of electricity meter	66%	66%	67%	55%	69%	60%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to an incorrect meter reading	71%	75%	72%	59%	71%	65%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to a faulty meter	74%	77%	75%	65%	74%	65%

Responding to queries or problems with a faulty meter

Domestic customers were asked a series of questions to obtain their views on the maximum time that should be set, as part of the standards, to respond to issues with electricity meters and incorrect bills.

When asked their view on a set standard of a maximum of five working days to respond to a query over a faulty meter (other than a pre-payment meter), 30% indicated that this was about right. However, the two thirds (67%) thought that the set maximum time to respond should be shorter ie less than five days.

Those who have someone with a disability in their household (80%) were more likely to say it should take fewer than five working days than those without a disability (64%), as were females (72%) when compared to males (61%).

Figure 5.2: Responding to a query over a faulty meter

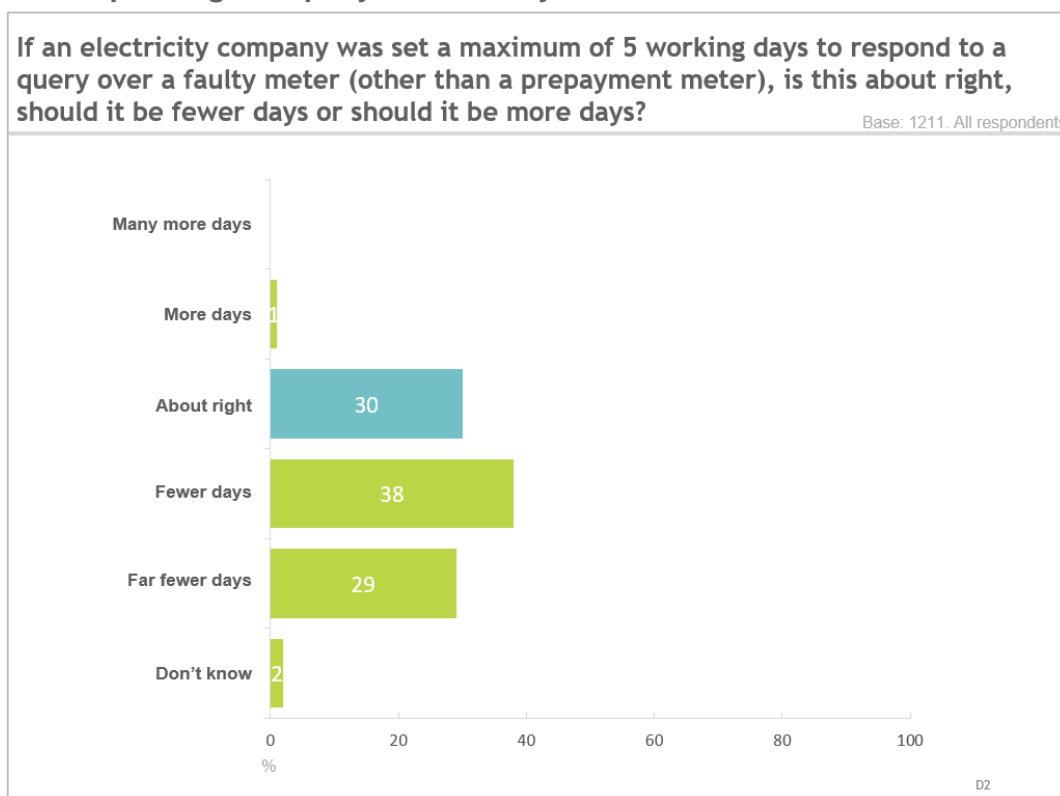


Table 5.2: Responding to a query over a faulty meter by demographics

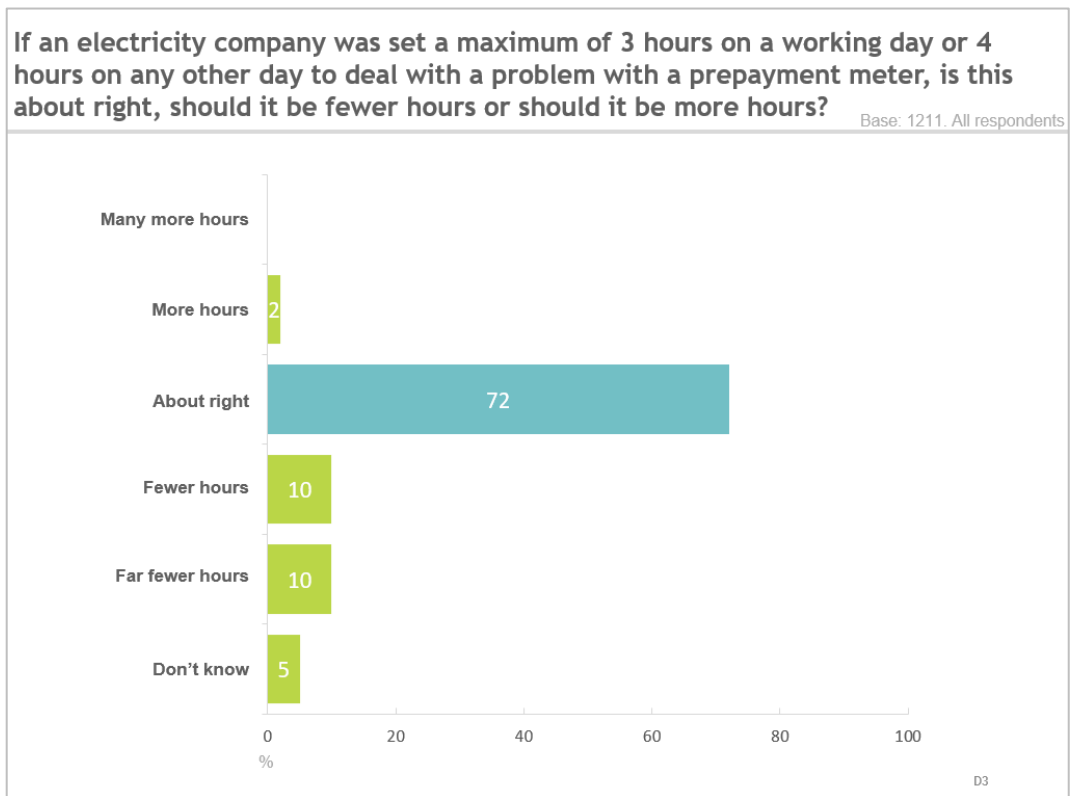
	All	Male	Female	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	580	631	203	1008
Fewer days	67%	61%	72%	80%	64%
About right	30%	36%	25%	18%	33%
More days	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%
Don't know	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Fewer days	67%	64%	65%	59%	71%	65%
About right	30%	33%	32%	36%	26%	35%
More days	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	-
Don't know	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Responding to a problem with a faulty pre-payment meter

Domestic customers were asked their views on a set standard of a maximum of three hours on a working day and four hours on any other day to deal with a problem with a pre-payment meter. Almost three quarters (72%) consider this timeframe to be about right, while one fifth (20%) believe that the maximum response time should be less than this.

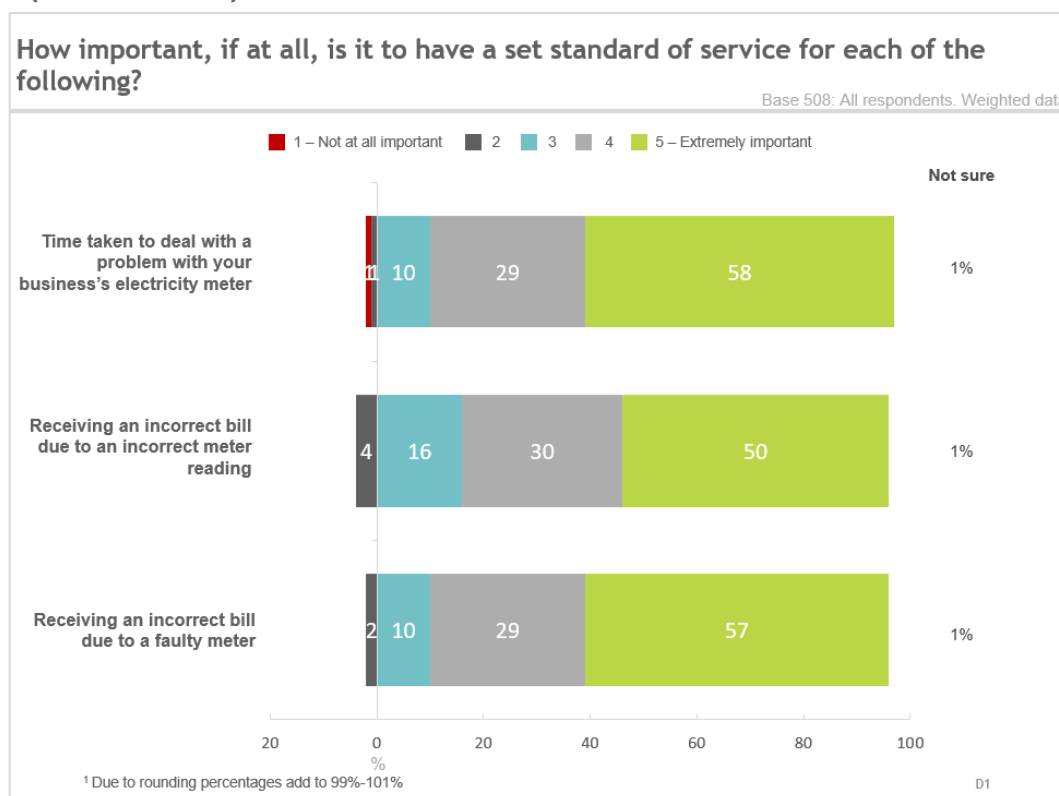
Figure 5.3: Responding to resolve a problem with a faulty prepayment meter



Non-domestic consumers

Similar to the domestic survey, non-domestic customers were asked their views on whether it is important to have a set standard of service for problems with their electricity meter and receiving an incorrect bill due to either an incorrect meter reading or a faulty meter. The majority of non-domestic customers thought that it is important to have standards of service for each of these issues (87%, 80% and 86% respectively rated them as 4 or 5 on the scale).

Figure 5.4: Importance of standards of service for problems with electricity meters and bills (non-domestic)



Hospitality businesses were less likely than other sectors to rate these standards as extremely important, while smaller businesses were more likely to rate these standards as extremely important, as were those with rural premises.

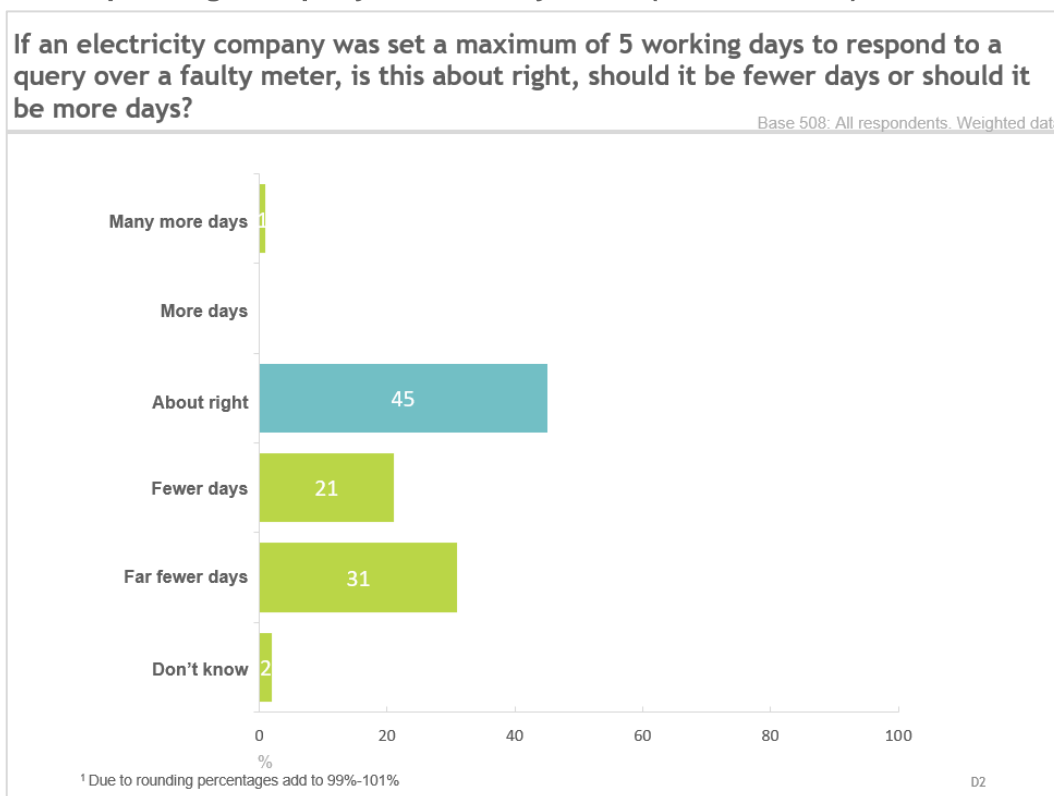
Table 5.3: Importance of standards of service for problems with electricity meters and bills by size, location and sector (rating as extremely important (5))

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
Base (unweighted/weighted)	508 / 508	226/452	189/46	93/10	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Time taken to deal with a problem with your business's electricity meter	58%	61%	33%	39%	44%	70%	44%	61%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to an incorrect meter reading	50%	52%	28%	32%	37%	61%	34%	53%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to a faulty meter	57%	60%	33%	37%	42%	70%	48%	59%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	<i>508 / 508</i>	<i>51 / 38</i>	<i>75 / 81</i>	<i>76 / 72</i>	<i>50 / 42</i>	<i>75 / 72</i>	<i>76 / 127</i>	<i>54 / 33</i>	<i>51 / 43</i>
Time taken to deal with a problem with your business's electricity meter	58%	69%	70%	47%	12%	47%	83%	52%	34%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to an incorrect meter reading	50%	64%	62%	34%	13%	45%	71%	39%	30%
Receiving an incorrect bill due to a faulty meter	57%	59%	70%	47%	13%	54%	80%	50%	30%

When asked about the maximum time of five working days as a set standard for responding to a faulty meter, 45% thought this was about right. However, over half (52%) indicated that the maximum standard should be set at fewer days.

Figure 5.5: Responding to a query over a faulty meter (non-domestic)



Those in the construction (63%) and professional service (62%) sectors were more likely to say that the standard should be less than five days, compared to retail (38%) and hospitality (36%) businesses, as were smaller businesses (54%) when compared to medium sized (38%). Businesses with rural premises (56%) were also more likely than those with urban premises (46%) to say the standard should be set at fewer days.

Table 5.4: Responding to a query over a faulty meter by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508/508	226/452	189/46	93/10	319/259	216/261
Fewer days	52%	54%	38%	47%	46%	56%
About right	45%	43%	61%	53%	50%	42%
More days	1%	1%	1%	-	1%	1%
Don't know	2%	2%	-	-	3%	1%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 /81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer days	52%	46%	63%	62%	36%	38%	57%	53%	42%
About right	45%	54%	37%	32%	59%	54%	41%	47%	57%
More days	1%	-	-	-	-	3%	2%	-	1%
Don't know	2%	-	-	6%	5%	6%	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

6. Charges, payments and complaints

In this section we explore the views of consumers in relation to the following:

- Importance of the time taken to respond to and resolve queries and complaints about payments; and
- Expectations on how long it should take for energy companies to respond to a complaint.

Domestic consumers

Standards of service for responding to a query or complaint about a payment

Domestic customers were asked if it was important to have a set standard for the time taken to respond to issues connected with payments, bills and complaints. For each of these areas the majority (>80%) rated it as very or extremely important (score of 4 or 5) to have a set standard including:

- 82% indicated that it is important to have a standard of service for the time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method;
- 88% rated it important to have a standard for the time taken to respond to a query about a bill;
- Nine in ten (90%) believed it is important to have set standards when responding to a complaint;
- 86% confirmed that it is important to have a standard for responding to a query about a set standard of service related payment; and
- 88% thought there should be standards in place for the time taken to issue a payment for when an electricity company fails to meet a standard of service.

Those in households who have someone with a disability were again more likely to rate having these standards as extremely important compared to those who do not have a disability, as were those who are in the DE socio-economic group.

Figure 6.1: Importance of standards of service for complaints and making payments

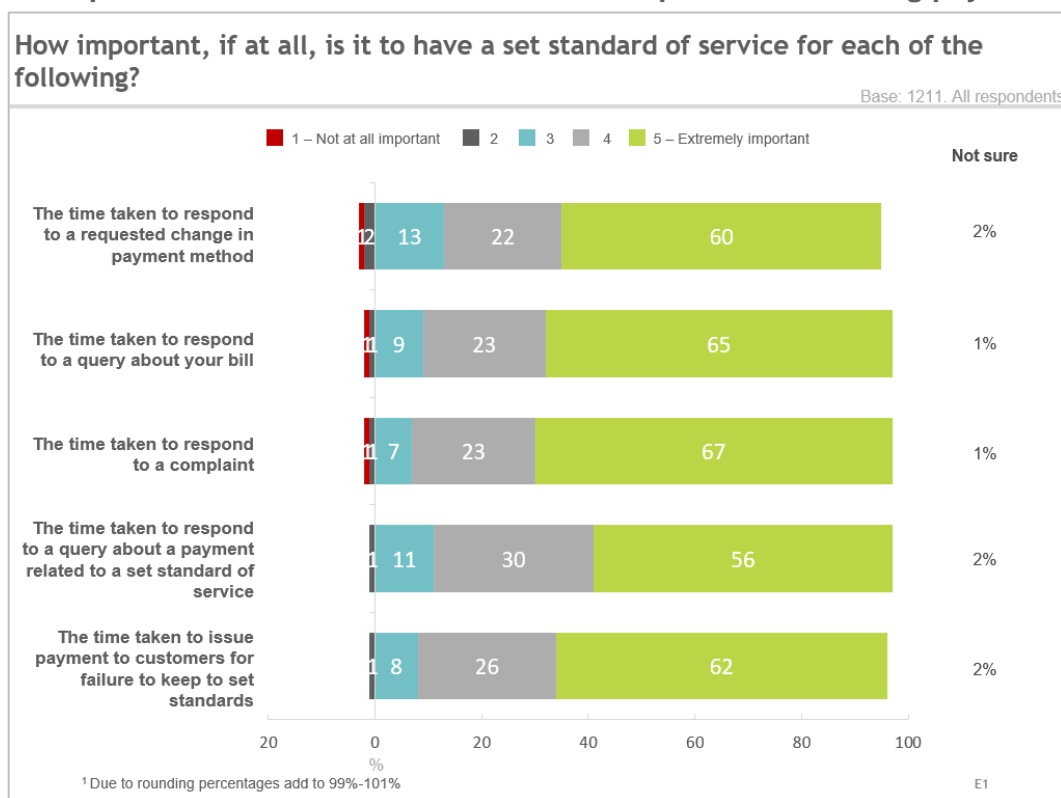


Table 6.1: Importance of standards of service for complaints and making payments by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	203	1008
The time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method	60%	42%	54%	68%	64%	74%	57%
The time taken to respond to a query about your bill	65%	48%	61%	71%	70%	78%	62%
The time taken to respond to a complaint	67%	52%	61%	75%	70%	79%	65%
The time taken to respond to a query about a payment related to a set standard of service	56%	36%	51%	65%	58%	68%	53%
The time taken to issue payment to customers for failure to keep to set standards	62%	41%	59%	71%	64%	72%	60%

	All	ABC1	C2	DE
<i>Base</i>	1211	561	216	358
The time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method	60%	56%	57%	67%
The time taken to respond to a query about your bill	65%	62%	63%	72%
The time taken to respond to a complaint	67%	65%	63%	75%
The time taken to respond to a query about a payment related to a set standard of service	56%	54%	54%	61%
The time taken to issue payment to customers for failure to keep to set standards	62%	59%	62%	68%

Time taken to respond to a query or complaint about a payment

Over half (52%) of domestic customers thought that the set standard should be less than five working days for an electricity company to respond to a query about their bill, compared to 46% who said that five days is about right. Those in households who have someone with a disability (63%) were more likely than those without (50%) to say the standard should be fewer than five days for a response, as were females (57%) compared to males (47%).

Figure 6.2: Responding to a query about a bill

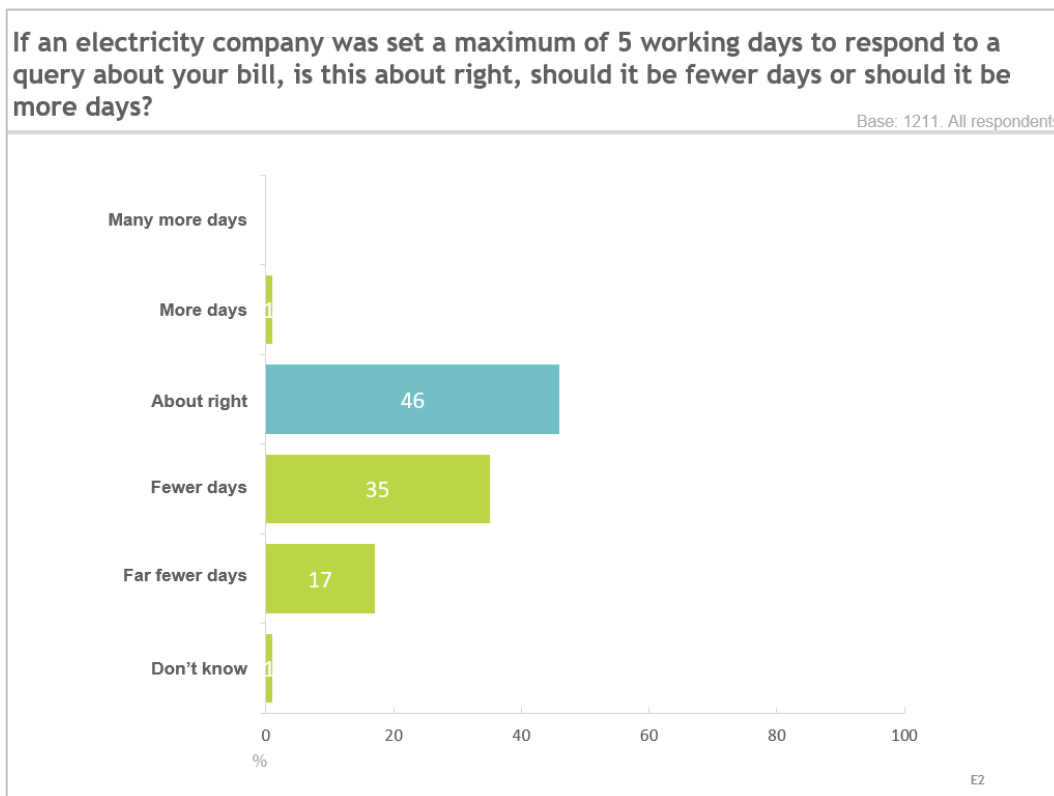


Table 6.2: Responding to a query about a bill by demographics

	All	Male	Female	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	580	631	203	1008
Fewer days	52%	47%	57%	63%	50%
About right	46%	51%	41%	34%	48%
More days	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Domestic customers were asked about their expectations for standards relating to an initial and substantive response to a complaint. An initial response is the acknowledgement by the electricity company of a complaint, while a substantive response is outlining the actions to be taken or the timescale to resolve the complaint.

Almost two thirds (65%) thought that the standard for a response to an initial complaint should be set at fewer than ten working days, compared to over one third (34%) that thought that this timeframe is about right. Respondents aged under 35 (76%) were more likely than older respondents to say it should be set at fewer days for an initial response.

Figure 6.3: Time taken to provide an initial response to a complaint

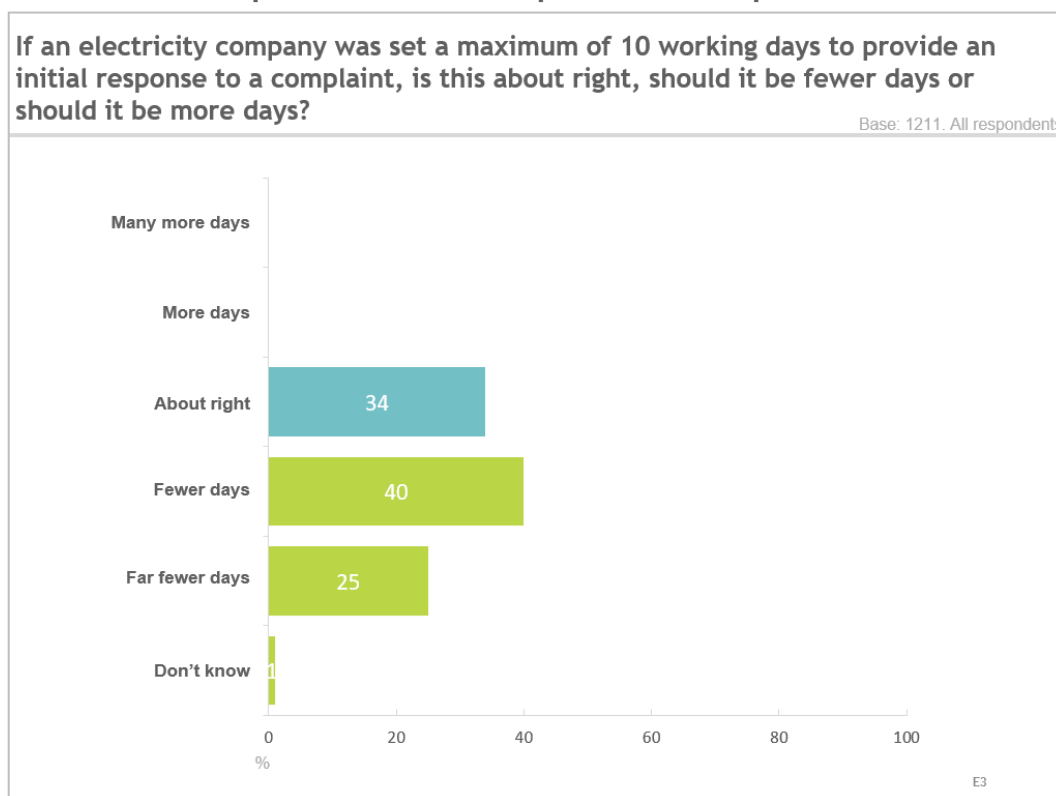


Table 6.3: Time taken to provide an initial response to a complaint by demographics

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282
Fewer days	64%	76%	65%	64%	56%
About right	34%	22%	34%	35%	41%
More days	0%	0%	0%	1%	-
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

When providing a substantive response, two thirds (66%) said that the standard should be set at fewer than 20 working days, compared to under one third (32%) who indicated that this timeframe is about right. Those living in the most deprived areas (74%) were more likely than those living in areas of less deprivation to think the standard should be set at fewer than 20 days for a substantive response.

Figure 6.4: Time taken to provide a substantive response to a complaint

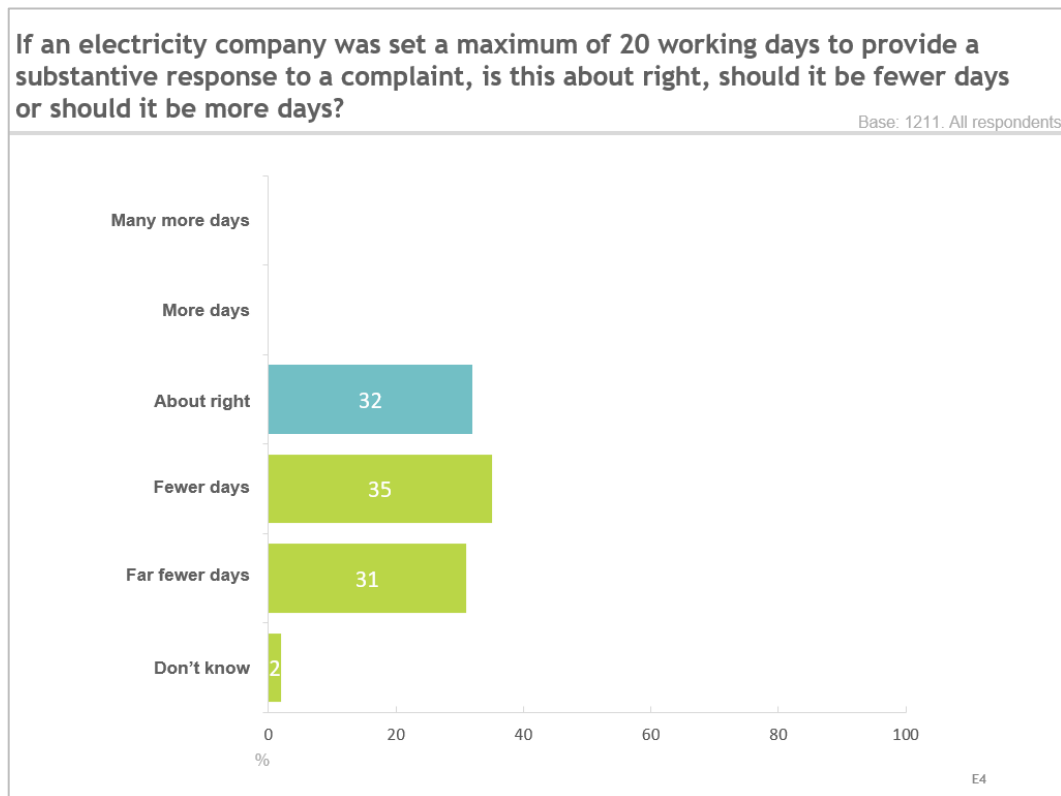


Table 6.4: Time taken to provide an initial response to a complaint by demographics

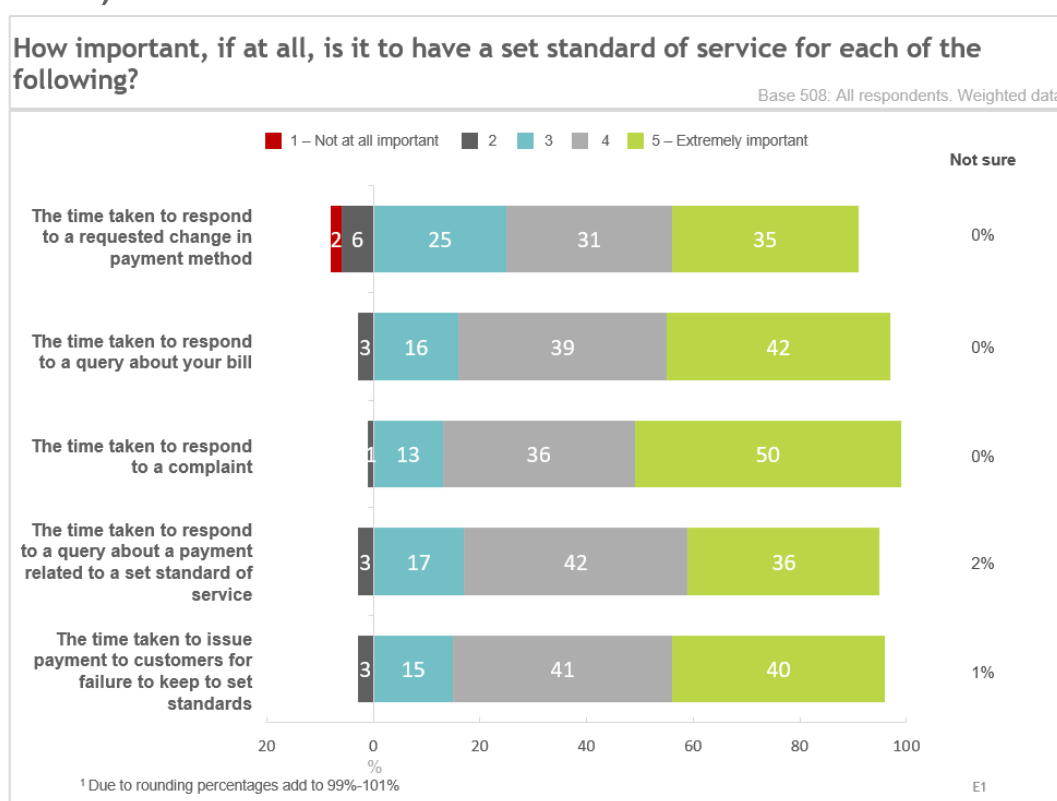
	All	1 - Most deprived	2	3	4	5 - Least deprived
<i>Base</i>	1211	263	255	242	268	183
Fewer days	66%	74%	67%	63%	59%	67%
About right	32%	23%	33%	33%	38%	33%
More days	0%	0%	0%	-	0%	-
Don't know	2%	2%	0%	5%	2%	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-domestic consumers

Overall, the majority of non-domestic customer indicated that it is important to have set standards in relation to response times to the various aspects of service including:

- Two thirds (66%) indicated that they think it is important to have set standards of service for the time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method, although 8% thought that this was of little or no importance;
- 81% believed it is important to have standards for the time take to respond to queries about a bill;
- 86% thought it is important to have standards for the time taken to respond to a complaint;
- Having standards for responding to payments relating to standards of service is rated as important by 78% of non-domestic customers, and
- 81% rated it as important for there to be standards for making payments when a standard has not been kept.

Figure 6.5: Importance of standards of service for complaints and making payments (non-domestic)



Businesses in the hospitality sector were less likely to rate having these standards as extremely important, while those with rural premises were more likely to view having these standards as extremely important.

Table 6.5: Standards of service for complaints and making payments by size, location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508/508	226/452	189/46	93/10	319/259	216/261
The time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method	35%	37%	19%	22%	36%	34%
The time taken to respond to a query about your bill	42%	45%	20%	25%	37%	46%
The time taken to respond to a complaint	50%	52%	28%	31%	42%	56%
The time taken to respond to a query about a payment related to a set standard of service	36%	38%	16%	18%	31%	40%
The time taken to issue payment to customers for failure to keep to set standards	40%	42%	22%	25%	39%	40%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
The time taken to respond to a requested change in payment method	35%	62%	49%	29%	11%	29%	36%	36%	28%
The time taken to respond to a query about your bill	42%	57%	61%	33%	11%	38%	47%	49%	24%
The time taken to respond to a complaint	50%	63%	61%	47%	16%	47%	58%	52%	30%
The time taken to respond to a query about a payment related to a set standard of service	36%	40%	48%	30%	11%	40%	40%	42%	20%
The time taken to issue payment to customers for failure to keep to set standards	40%	52%	59%	50%	11%	42%	33%	37%	29%

Non-domestic customers were asked their view of a set standard of a maximum of five working days to respond to a query about their bill. Over half (56%) believed that this timeframe was about right compared to 42% who thought that it should be set at fewer days.

Over half of those in the agriculture (51%) and community and voluntary (51%) sectors indicated that the standard should be set at fewer than five days, compared to just 17% of hospitality sector businesses. Almost half of non-domestic customers with rural premises (49%) also said it should be set at fewer than five days, compared to 36% of those with urban premises.

Figure 6.6: Responding to a query about a bill (non-domestic)

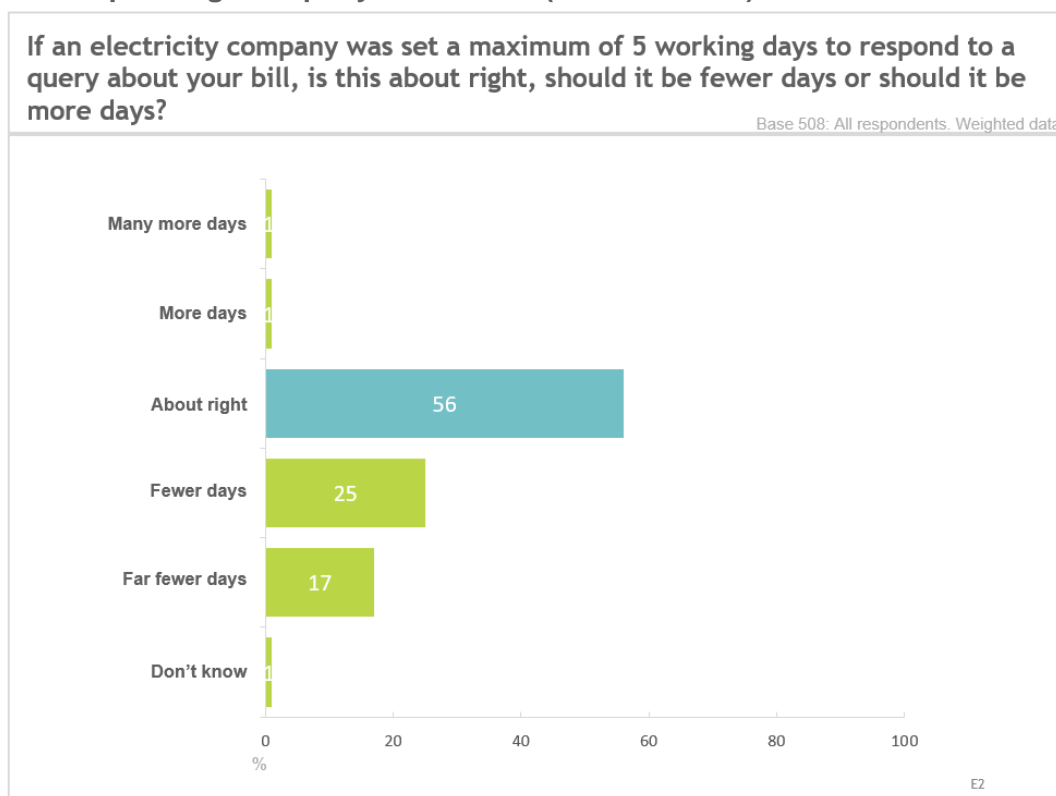


Table 6.6: Responding to a query about a bill by size, location and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10	319/259	216/261
Fewer days	42%	44%	28%	27%	36%	49%
About right	56%	54%	71%	73%	63%	48%
More days	2%	2%	1%	-	1%	2%
Don't know	1%	1%	-	-	1%	1%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer days	42%	44%	49%	28%	17%	38%	51%	48%	51%
About right	56%	51%	49%	72%	83%	54%	47%	52%	48%
More days	2%	5%	2%	-	-	3%	2%	-	1%
Don't know	1%	-	-	-	-	6%	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Almost three quarters (71%) of non-domestic customers thought that the standard to respond to an initial complaint should be set at fewer than 10 days, compared to over one quarter (27%) who said this timeframe was about right.

Those in the construction (80%) and agriculture (77%) sectors were more likely to expect a quicker response than professional service (61%) and hospitality (57%) businesses.

Figure 6.7: Time taken to provide an initial response to a complaint (non-domestic)

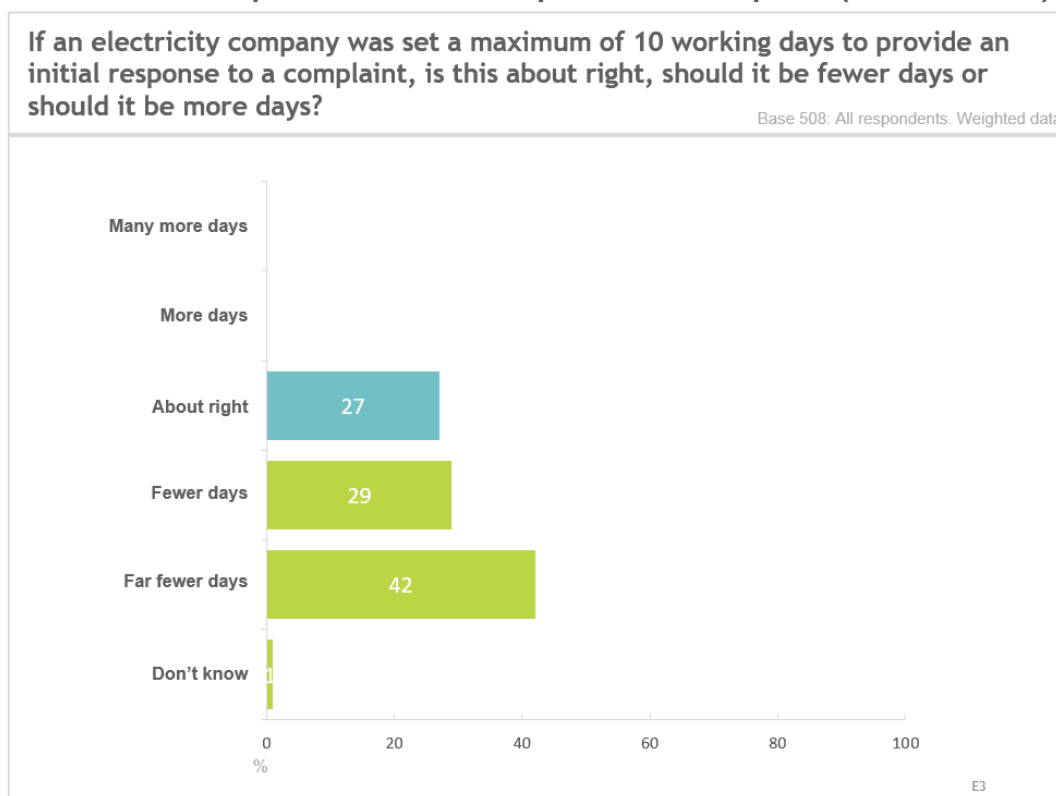


Table 6.7: Time taken to provide an initial response to a complaint by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10
Fewer days	71%	73%	54%	59%
About right	27%	25%	45%	41%
More days	0%	0%	-	-
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer days	71%	68%	80%	61%	57%	74%	77%	68%	68%
About right	27%	26%	18%	39%	38%	23%	23%	32%	32%
More days	0%	5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know	1%	1%	2%	-	5%	3%	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In relation to the standard for providing a substantive response to a complaint, two thirds (66%) indicated that it should be set at fewer than 20 working days, compared to 31% who thought that 20 working days was an acceptable timeframe. Hospitality businesses (66%) were more likely to say that 20 days is about right, while businesses with rural premises (74%) were more likely to state that it should be set at fewer than 20 days.

Figure 6.8: Time taken to provide a substantive response to a complaint (non-domestic)

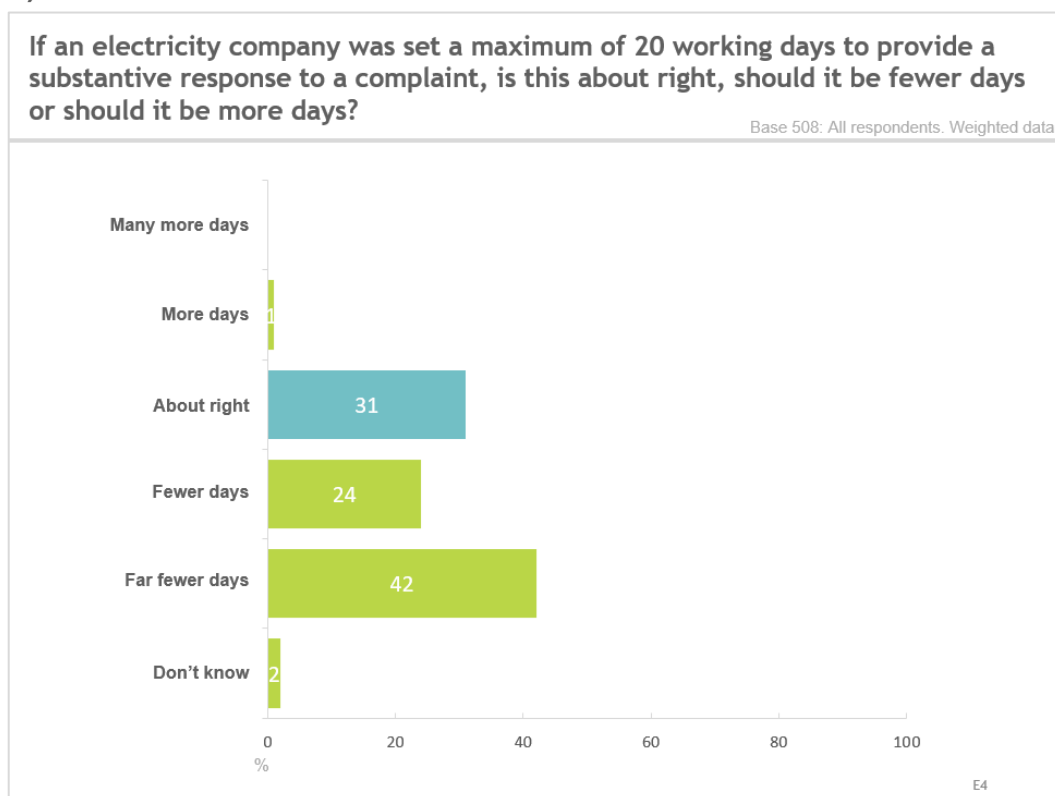


Table 6.8: Time taken to provide a substantive response to a complaint by size, location and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10	319/259	216/261
Fewer days	66%	67%	57%	60%	57%	74%
About right	31%	30%	41%	39%	40%	24%
More days	1%	1%	-	-	1%	1%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer days	66%	75%	73%	70%	29%	63%	74%	55%	62%
About right	31%	19%	25%	27%	66%	32%	24%	45%	37%
More days	1%	5%	-	-	-	3%	-	-	-
Don't know	2%	0%	2%	3%	5%	3%	2%	-	1%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

7. Supply interruptions

In this section we assess views around unplanned, planned, and multiple disconnections from consumers' electricity supply. The topics covered are as follows:

- Expectations in relation to unplanned interruptions to an electricity supply;
- Expectations in relation to planned interruptions to an electricity supply; and
- Expectations in relation to multiple interruptions to an electricity supply.

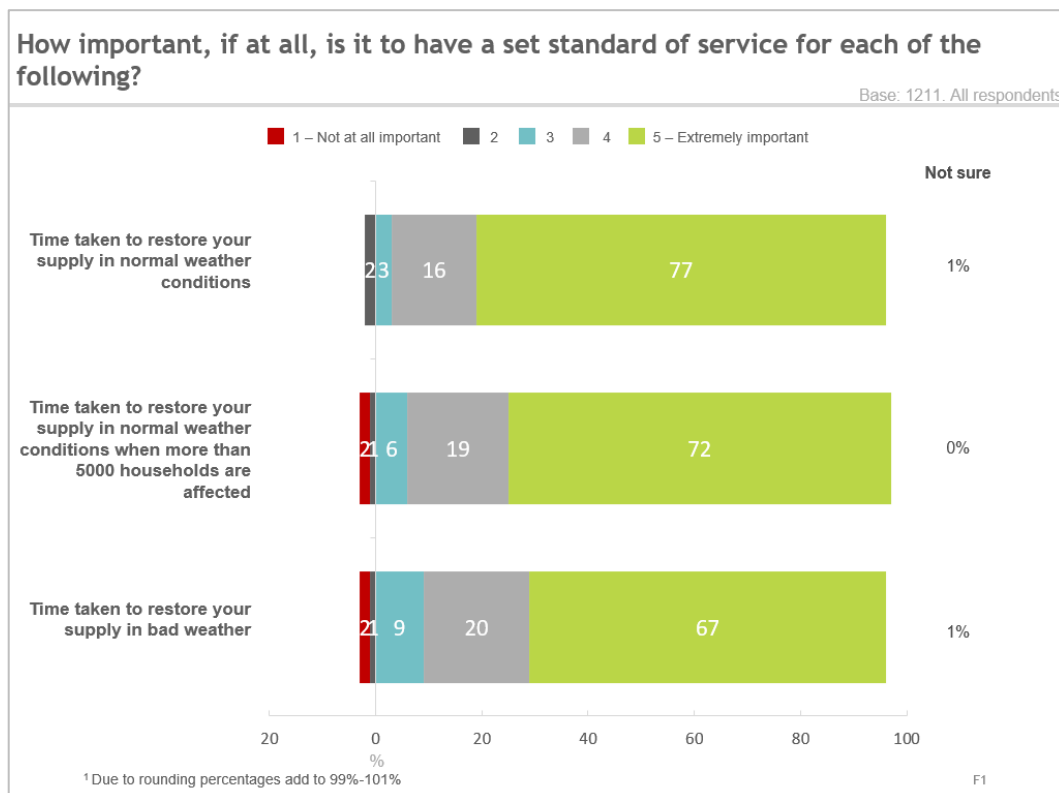
Domestic consumers

Unplanned disconnections

Domestic customers were asked their views of having standards of service for restoring their electricity supply following an unplanned disconnection in both normal and bad weather:

- 93% said it is important to have set standards for the time taken to restore their supply in normal weather conditions;
- 91% stated the same for when more than 5000 homes are affected by a disconnection in normal weather; and
- 87% felt that it is important to have standards for the time taken to restore their supply in bad weather.

Figure 7.1: Importance of standards of service for restoring electricity supply



Those who have someone in their household with a disability were more likely to place higher importance on having standards around restoring power in both normal and bad weather conditions. Rural respondents (81%) were more likely than urban respondents (75%) to place higher importance on having standards around restoring power in normal weather conditions.

Table 7.1: Importance of standards of service for restoring electricity supply by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Disability	No disability	Urban	Rural
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008	693	518
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions	77%	85%	76%	75%	81%
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 households are affected	72%	79%	70%	70%	75%
Time taken to restore your supply in bad weather	67%	78%	65%	66%	69%

When restoring supply in normal weather conditions, 80% said that the maximum time they would expect to be without a supply is fewer than 18 hours. Two thirds (66%) thought that their supply should be restored in fewer than 24 hours when more than 5000 households are affected. In bad weather conditions, 45% said that a maximum of 24 hours is about right for restoring their supply, although 49% thought that it should be restored within at a shorter timeframe. When asked whether set standards should still apply in bad weather, 79% agreed that they should, compared to 15% who said they should not apply.

Respondents who have someone in their household with a disability were more likely to say that the maximum set times should be fewer hours to restore a connection in normal (85%) and in bad weather (57%). When 5000 households are affected, those who pay their bill by cheque, cash or card (68%) or have a pre-payment meter (67%) were more likely to say the maximum time for restoration should be fewer hours. Households with someone who has a disability (84%) were also more likely than people without (77%) to say standards of service should still apply in bad weather.

Figure 7.2: Time to restore supply in normal weather conditions

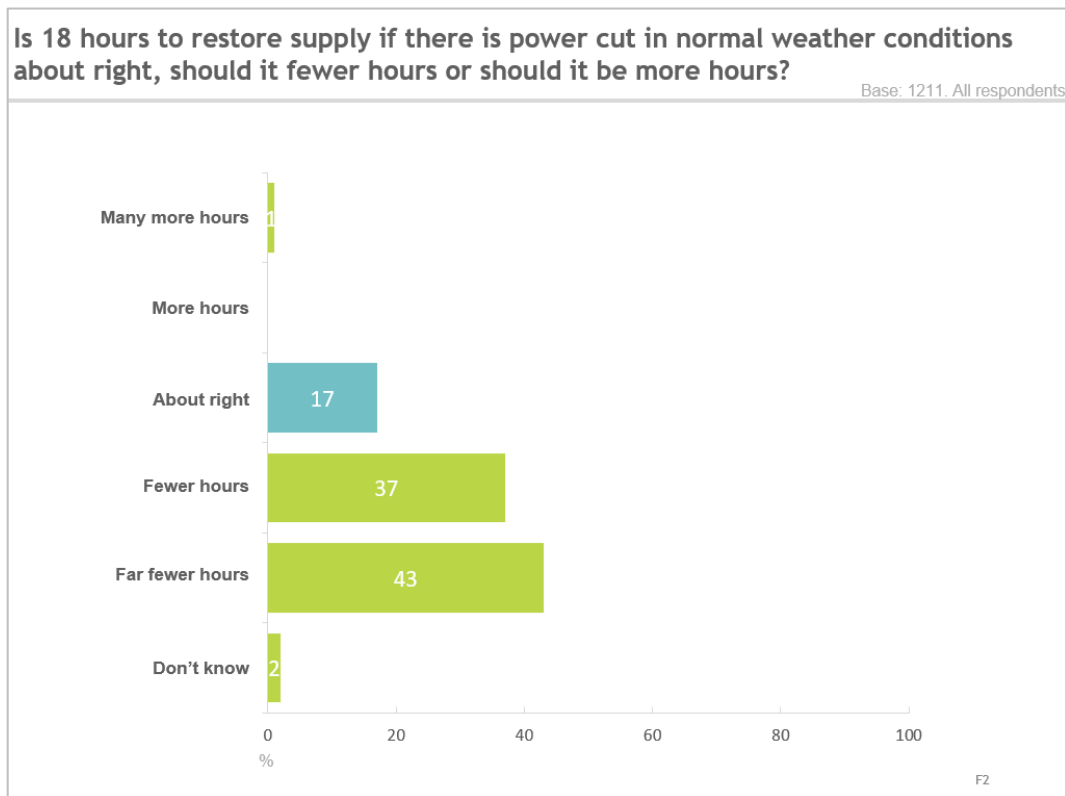


Table 7.2: Time to restore supply in normal weather conditions by disability

	All	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008
Fewer hours	80%	85%	79%
About right	17%	12%	18%
More hours	1%	2%	1%
Don't know	2%	-	2%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%

Figure 7.3: Time to restore supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 homes are affected

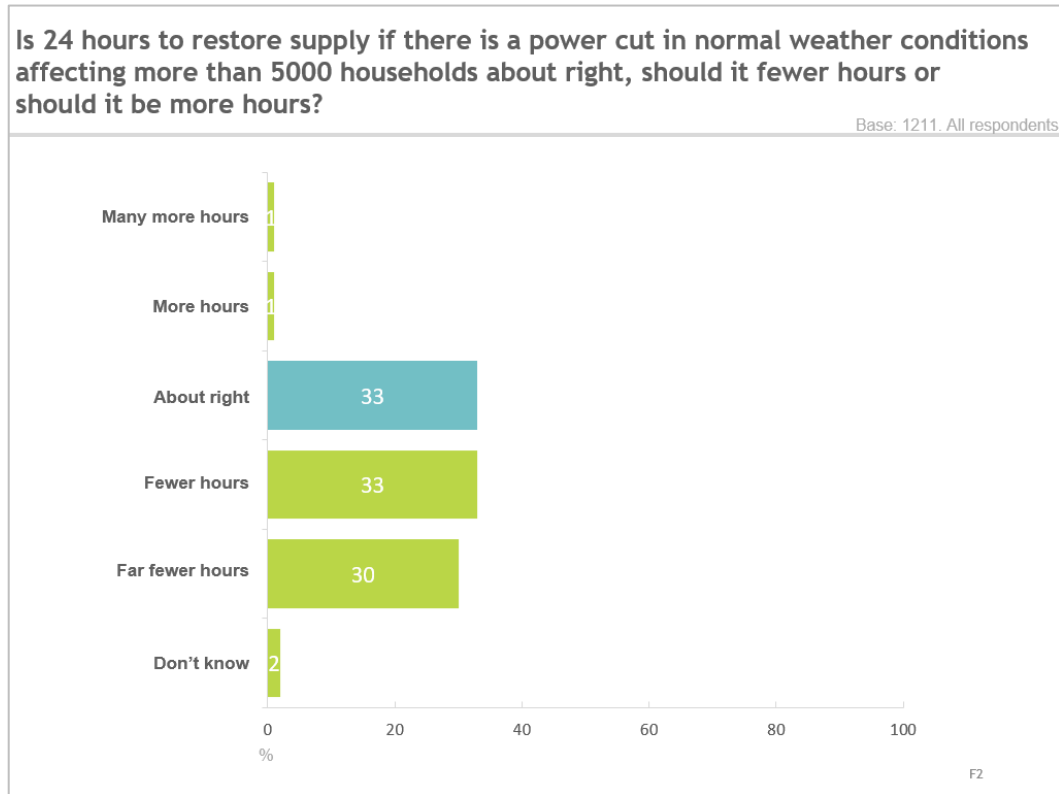


Table 7.3: Time to restore supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 homes are affected by payment method

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Fewer hours	63%	59%	59%	68%	67%	65%
About right	33%	37%	36%	29%	30%	35%
More hours	2%	1%	3%	-	2%	-
Don't know	2%	2%	1%	4%	1%	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 7.4: Time to restore supply in bad weather conditions

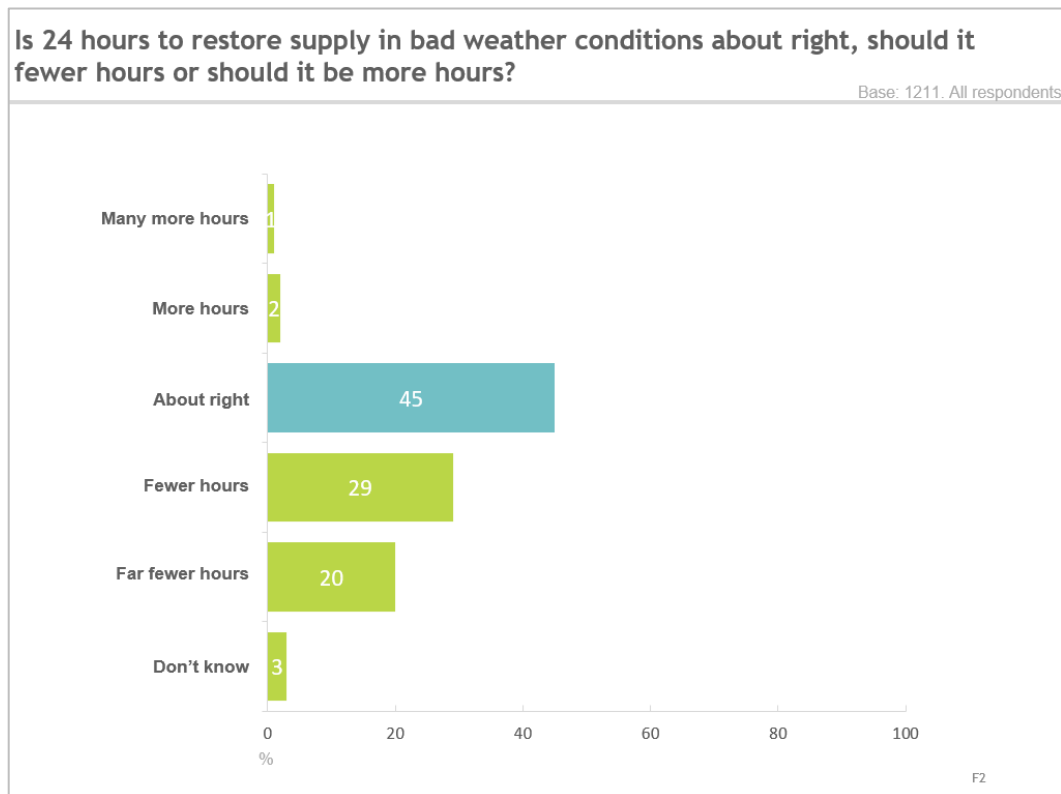


Table 7.4: Time to restore supply in bad weather conditions by disability

	All	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008
Fewer hours	49%	57%	48%
About right	45%	37%	46%
More hours	3%	3%	3%
Don't know	3%	2%	3%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%

Figure 7.5: Standards of service during bad weather

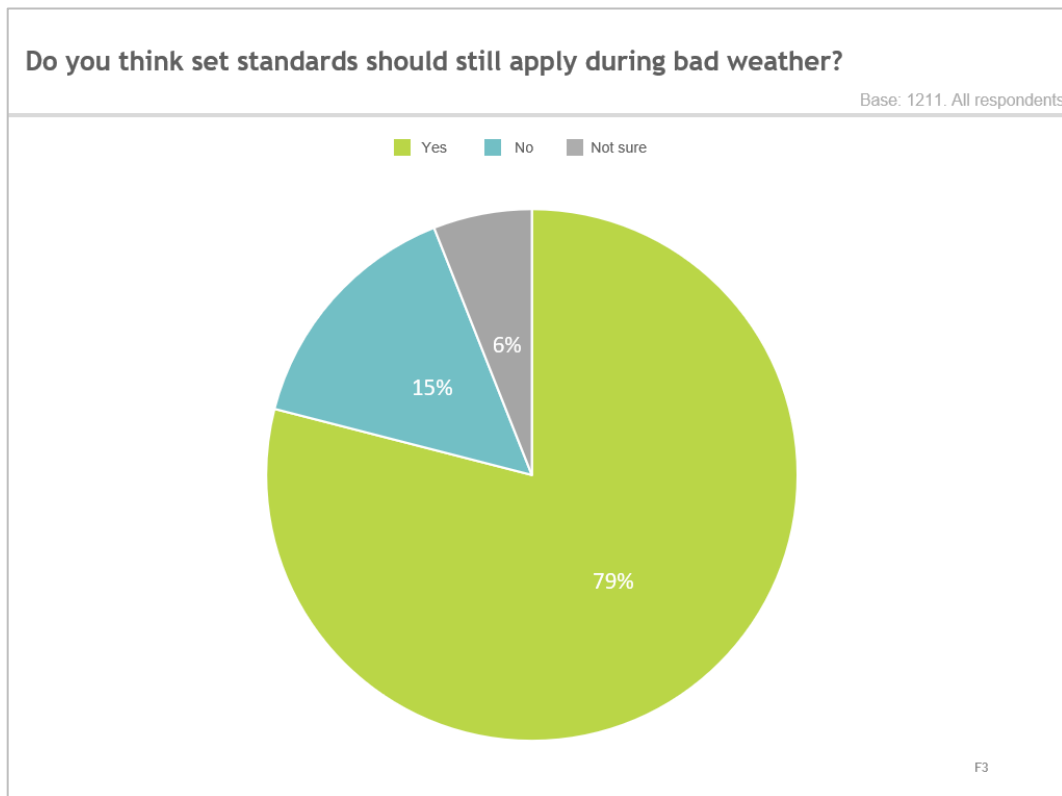


Table 7.5: Standards of service during bad weather by disability

	All	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008
Yes	79%	84%	77%
No	15%	14%	15%
Not sure	6%	2%	7%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%

Planned disconnections

When giving notice for a planned interruption to an electricity supply, the vast majority (96%) of domestic customers thought that it is important to have set standard of service. Almost three quarters (72%) indicated that three days' notice for a planned interruption is about right, compared to 27% who thought that a longer notice period is required.

Rural respondents were more likely to place higher importance on standards around notice for planned interruptions (79%, compared to 73% of urban respondents) and to say that three days' notice is too short (32%, compared to 22% of urban respondents). Those aged under 35 (40%) were also more likely to think three days is not enough notice for a planned connection.

Figure 7.6: Importance of standards of service for notice given for a planned disconnection

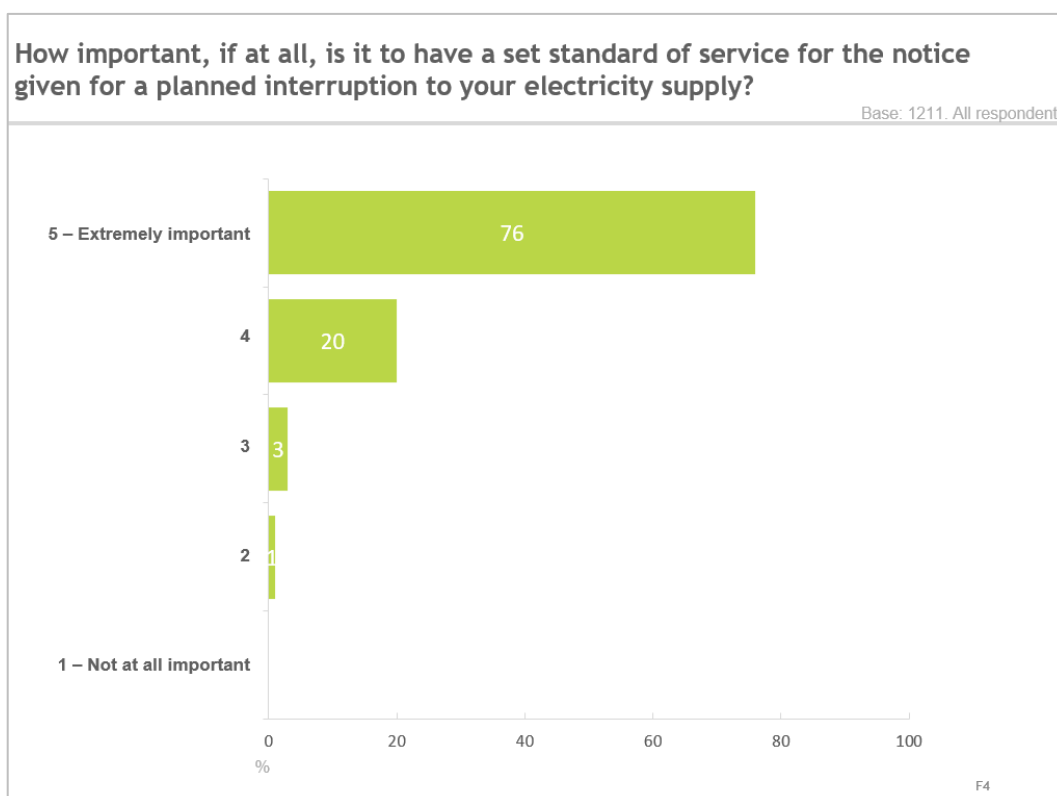


Table 7.6: Importance of standards of service for notice given for a planned disconnection by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282
Notice given for a planned disconnection	76%	66%	74%	81%	73%

	All	Disability	No disability	Urban	Rural
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008	693	518
Notice given for a planned disconnection	76%	81%	75%	73%	79%

Figure 7.7: Length of notice given for a planned interruption

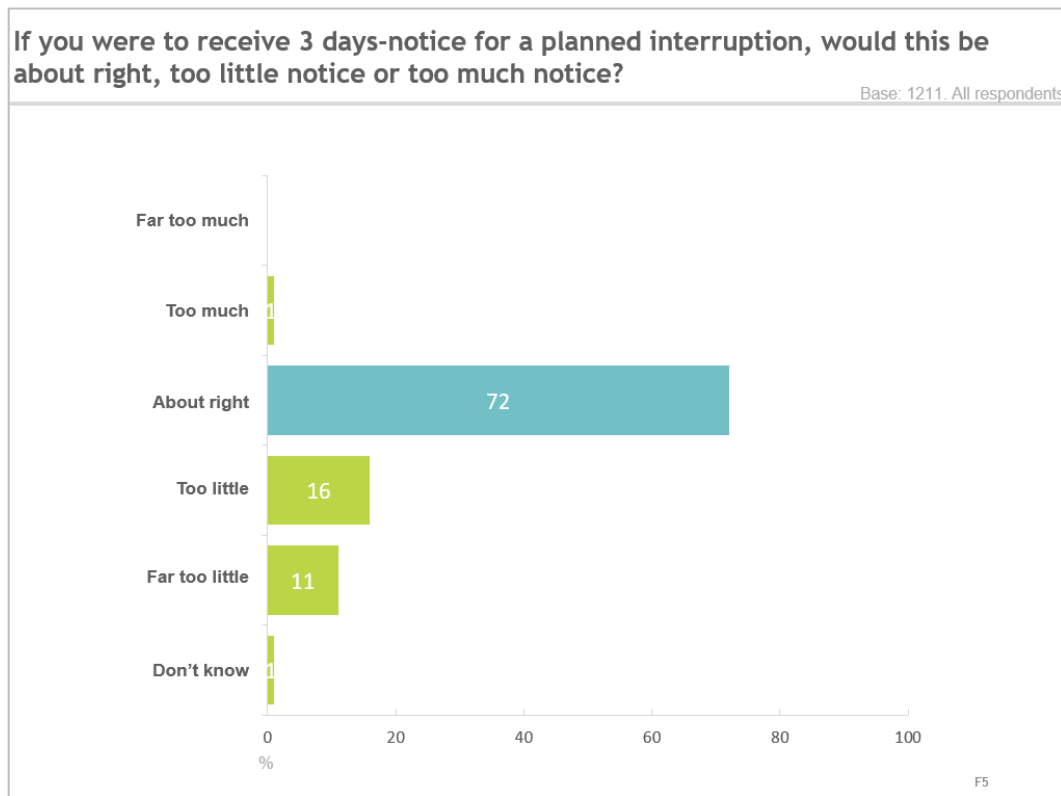


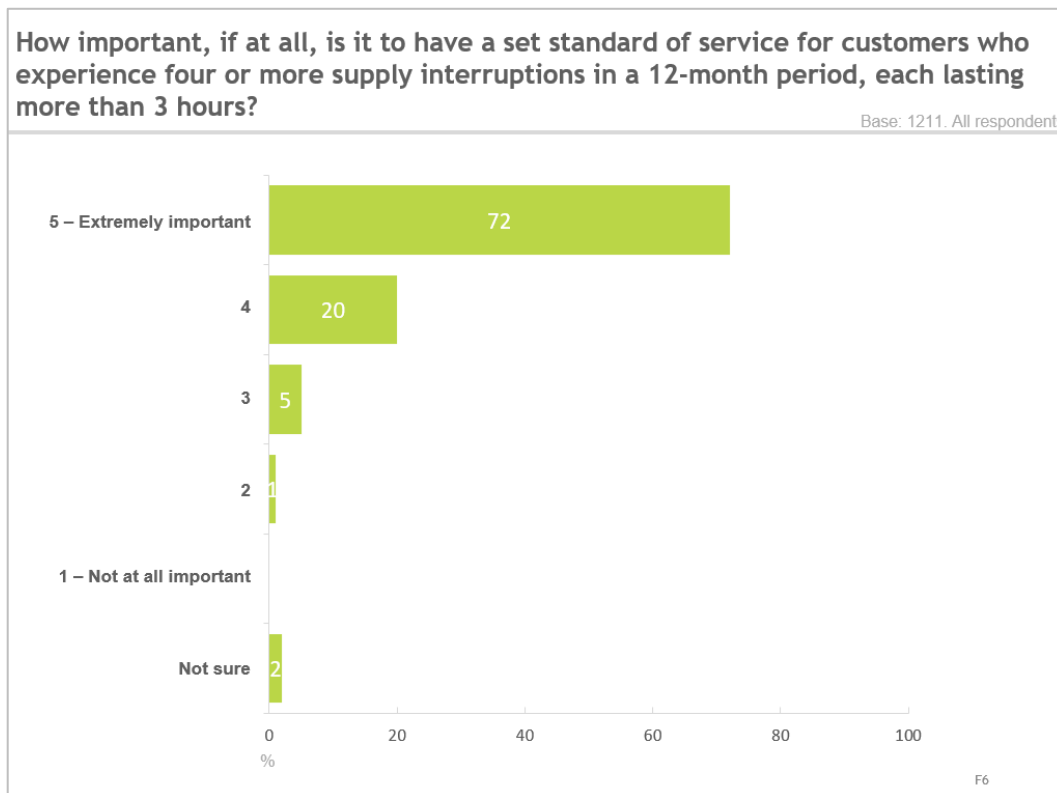
Table 7.7: Length of notice given for a planned interruption by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Urban	Rural
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	693	518
Too little	27%	40%	27%	29%	12%	22%	32%
About right	72%	60%	70%	69%	85%	76%	66%
Too much	1%	-	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	1%	-	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Multiple disconnections

Respondents were asked about the importance of having standards of service for customers who experience four or more supply interruptions in a 12-month period, with each of them lasting more than three hours. The majority of domestic customers (92%) indicated that it is important to have standards of service for when this occurs.

Figure 7.8: Importance of standards of service for multiple disconnections



Non-domestic consumers

Unplanned disconnections

The majority of non-domestic customers (96%) believed it is important to have standards of service for the time taken to restore their supply in normal weather conditions, including three quarters (74%) who said it is extremely important. Additionally, 93% thought it is important to have standards when more than 5000 premises are affected and 88% when there is a supply interruption due to bad weather. Having such standards was more likely to be rated as extremely important by those in the agriculture and professional service sectors and those with rural premises.

Figure 7.9: Importance of standards of service for restoring electricity supply (non-domestic)

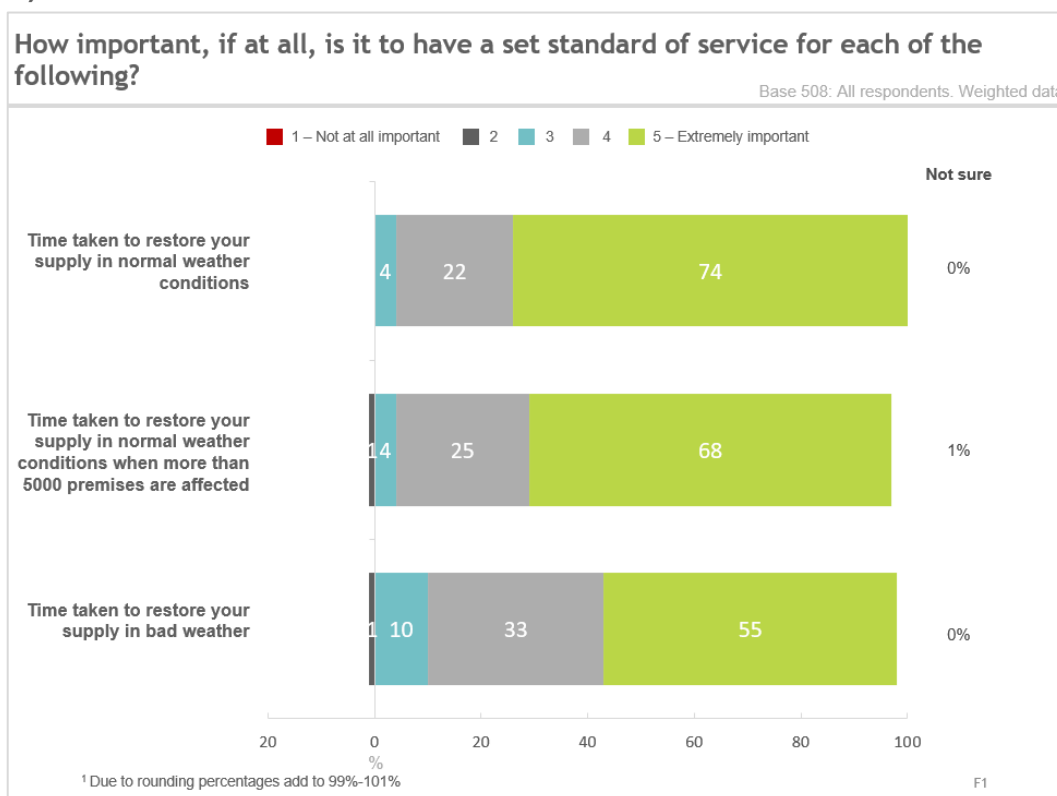


Table 7.8: Importance of standards of service for restoring electricity supply by location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508 / 508	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions	74%	65%	80%	59%	77%
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 premises are affected	68%	62%	72%	59%	70%
Time taken to restore your supply in bad weather	55%	54%	55%	51%	56%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions	74%	83%	72%	85%	51%	67%	88%	60%	48%
Time taken to restore your supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 premises are affected	68%	77%	77%	80%	46%	50%	82%	58%	44%
Time taken to restore your supply in bad weather	55%	60%	58%	72%	46%	46%	59%	40%	44%

Almost three quarters (72%) of non-domestic customer stated that it should take fewer than a maximum of 18 hours to restore their supply in normal weather conditions, compared to one quarter (26%) that said this maximum time is about right. When 5000 premises are affected,

58% of respondents thought it should take fewer than a maximum of 24 hours to restore the supply, compared to 41% that believed this maximum time is about right.

Public administration organisations were more likely to say it should take fewer hours to restore power in both instances (90% in normal weather conditions, 88% when 5000 premises are affected). Businesses with urban premises (63%) were also more likely than those with rural premises (51%) to state it should take fewer than 24 hours to restore power when more than 5000 premises are affected.

Figure 7.10: Maximum time to restore supply in normal weather conditions (non-domestic)

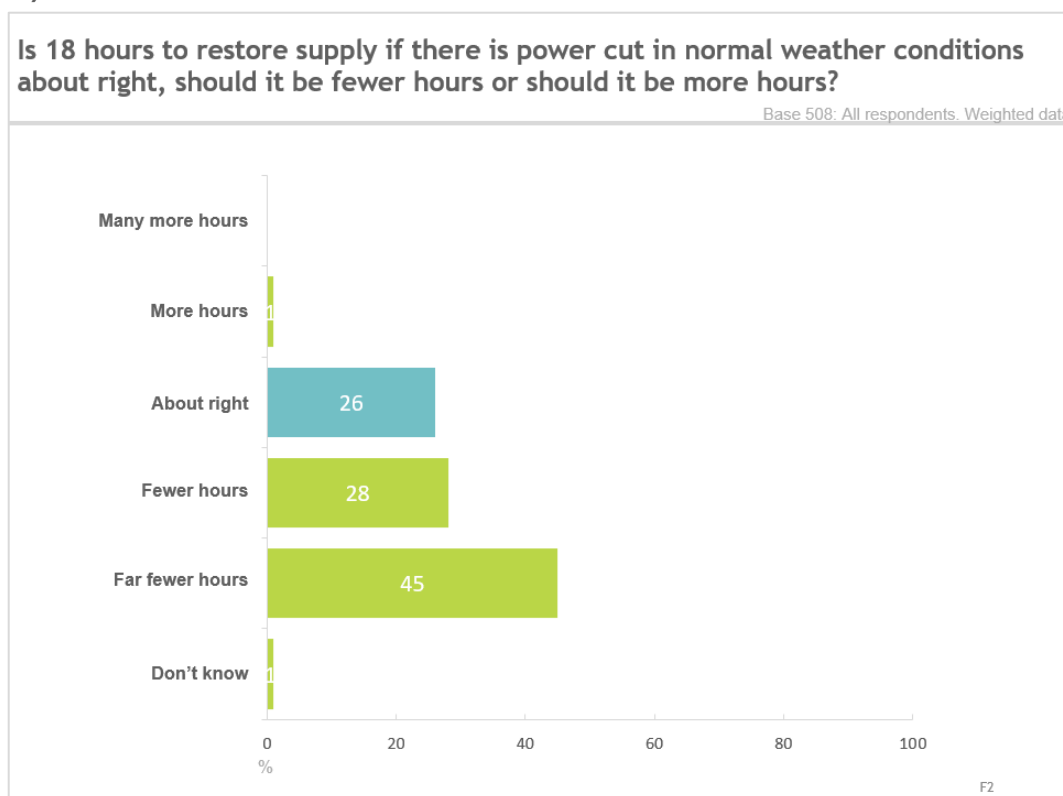


Table 7.9: Maximum time to restore supply in normal weather conditions by sector

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
Base (unweighted/weighted)	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer hours	72%	56%	74%	68%	84%	70%	68%	90%	83%
About right	26%	38%	26%	30%	11%	27%	31%	10%	16%
More hours	1%	6%	-	-	-	-	2%	-	1%
Don't know	1%	-	-	3%	5%	3%	-	-	-
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 7.11: Maximum time to restore supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 premises are affected (non-domestic)

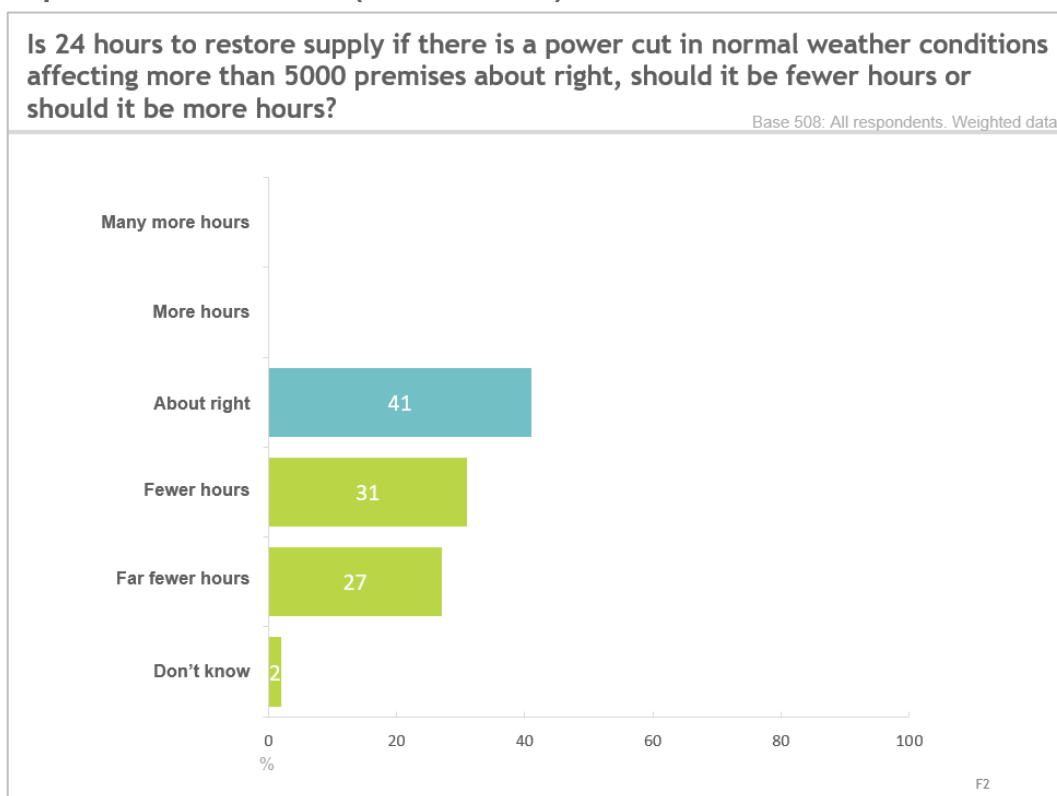
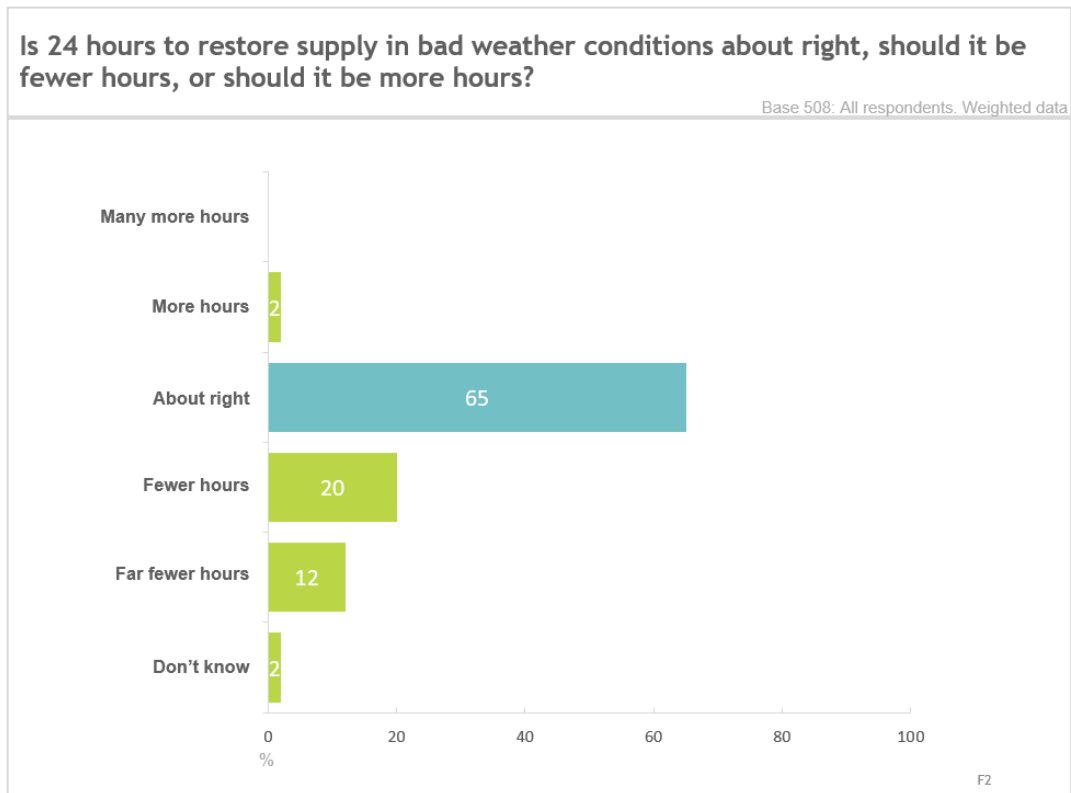


Table 7.10: Maximum time to restore supply in normal weather conditions when more than 5000 premises are affected by sector

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer hours	58%	43%	55%	68%	58%	59%	49%	88%	58%
About right	41%	57%	44%	29%	37%	37%	50%	12%	41%
More hours	0%	-	0%	-	-	-	-	-	1%
Don't know	2%	-	-	3%	3%	3%	2%	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

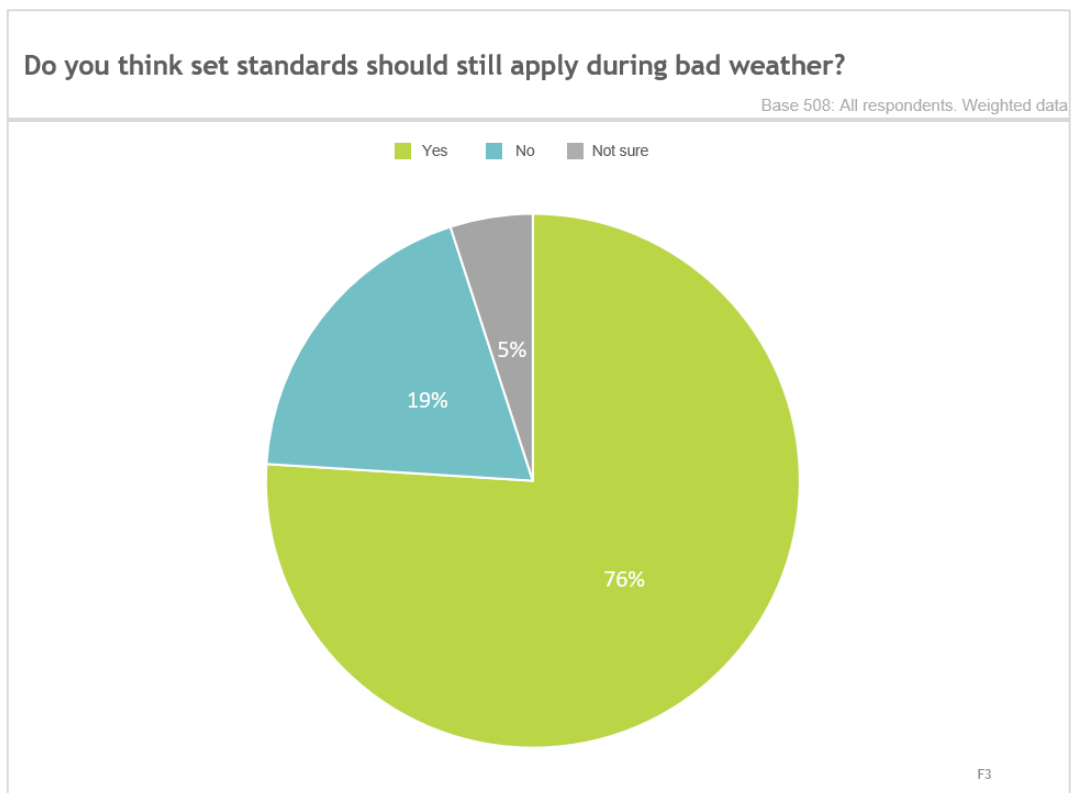
Two thirds (65%) said that a maximum of 24 hours to restore the electricity supply in bad weather is about right, whereas under one third (31%) said it should take fewer hours.

Figure 7.12: Maximum time to restore supply in bad weather conditions (non-domestic)



Three quarters (76%) confirmed that set standards should still apply during bad weather conditions, compared to 19% who did not agree with this.

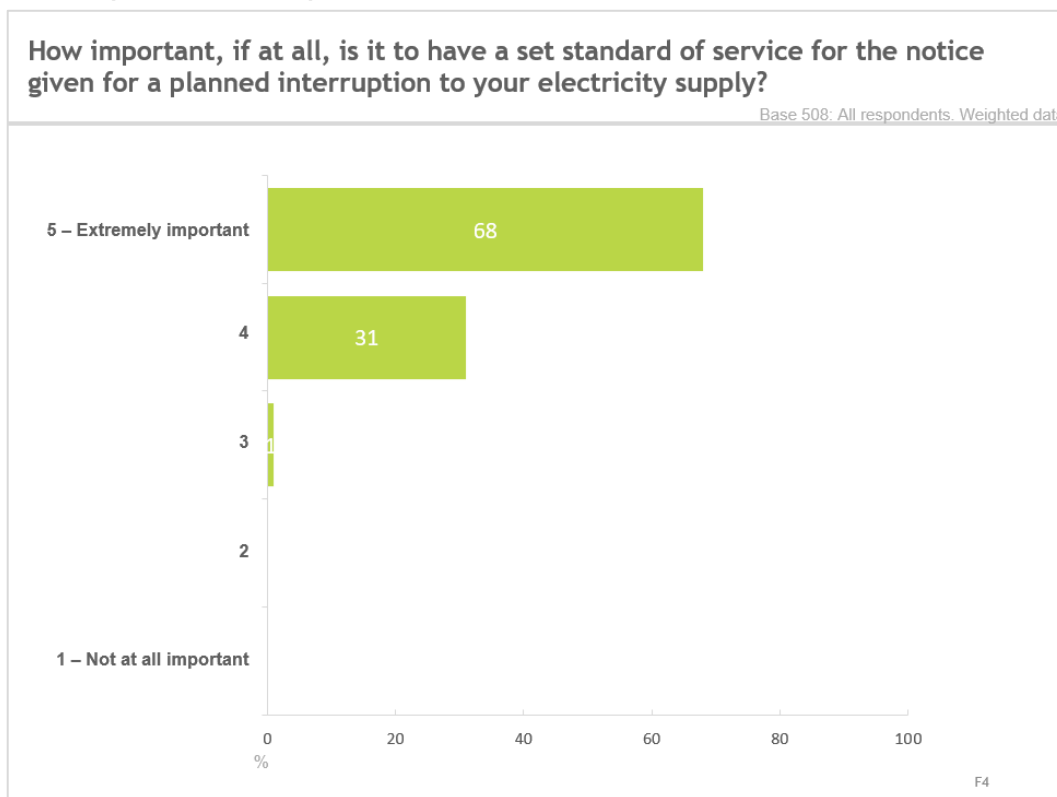
Figure 7.13: Standards of service during bad weather (non-domestic)



Planned disconnections

Almost all non-domestic customers (99%) indicated that it is important to have standards of service for the notice given for a planned disconnection.

Figure 7.14: Importance of standards of service for notice given for a planned disconnection (non-domestic)



Rural businesses (73%) and those located outside Great Belfast (71%) were more likely to rate this standard as extremely important than urban businesses (61%) and those in Greater Belfast (52%).

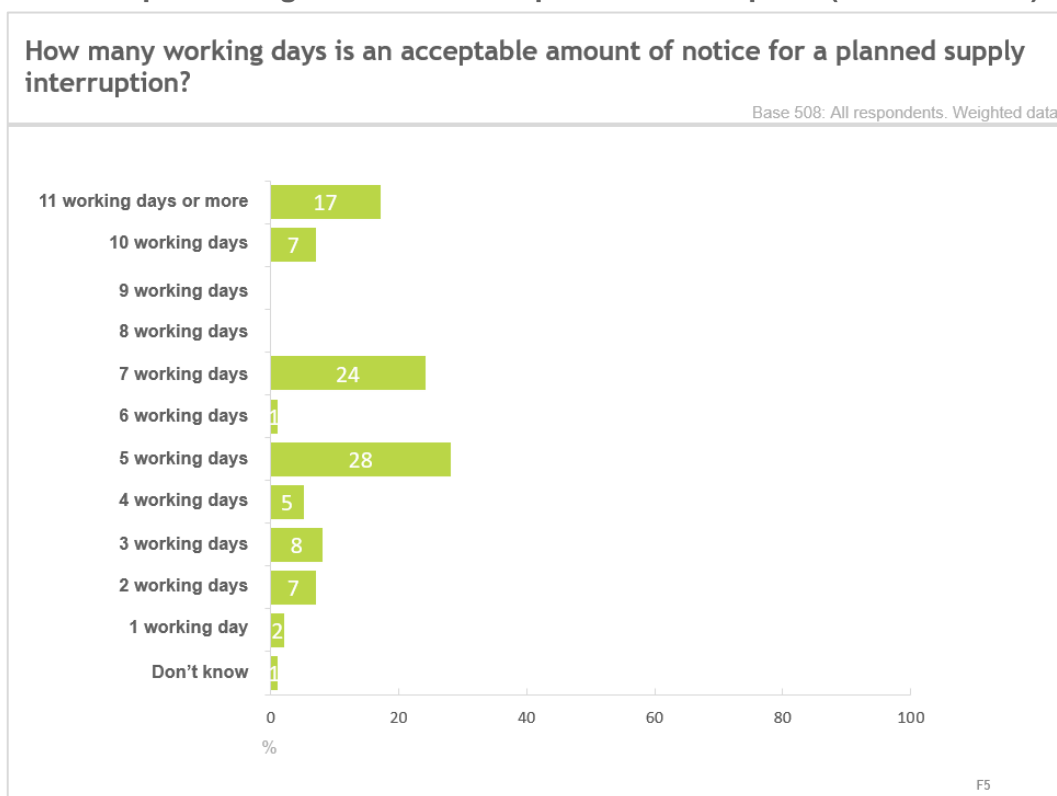
Table 7.11: Importance of standards of service for notice given for a planned disconnection by location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
Base (unweighted/weighted)	508 / 508	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Notice given for a planned interruption	68%	61%	73%	52%	71%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
Base (unweighted/weighted)	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Notice given for a planned interruption	68%	87%	82%	79%	41%	65%	69%	48%	48%

Just over half (51%) confirmed that that five working days, or less, is acceptable notice for a planned supply interruption, and correspondingly just less than half (49%) thought that the number of days' notice should be greater, with 24% saying 10 working days or more is required.

Figure 7.15: Acceptable length of notice for a planned interruption (non-domestic)



Those operating in the manufacturing sector were more likely to request a great number of days' notice for a planned interruption.

Table 7.12: Acceptable length of notice for a planned interruption by sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
Base (unweighted/weighted)	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
11 working days or more	17%	33%	19%	13%	23%	19%	15%	17%	9%
10 working days	7%	7%	3%	10%	8%	13%	3%	8%	12%
9 working days	0%	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8 working days	0%	1%	-	0%	0%	-	-	1%	1%
7 working days	24%	13%	27%	22%	18%	16%	38%	14%	12%
6 working days	1%	1%	-	1%	1%	4%	0%	1%	-
5 working days	28%	26%	30%	31%	40%	19%	13%	43%	55%
4 working days	5%	7%	0%	6%	5%	9%	5%	7%	0%
3 working days	8%	7%	6%	14%	-	12%	10%	7%	1%
2 working days	7%	1%	10%	-	5%	3%	15%	1%	5%
1 working day	2%	5%	5%	3%	-	-	2%	0%	5%
Not sure	1%	-	-	-	-	6%	-	-	-
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Multiple disconnections

Almost all (97%) thought that it is important to have standards of service for customers who experience four or more interruptions in a year, including nearly three quarters (73%) who believed this is extremely important. Hospitality businesses (40%) were less likely to rate this standard as extremely important.

Figure 7.16: Importance of standards of service for multiple disconnections (non-domestic)

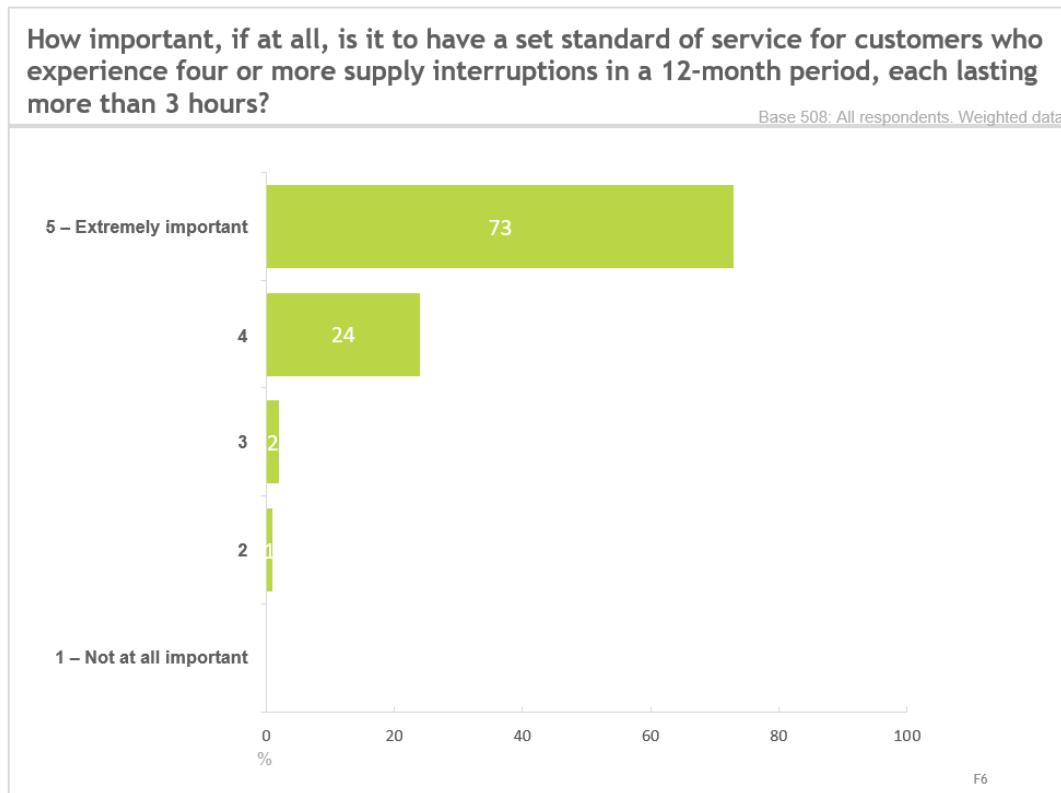


Table 7.13: Importance of standards of service for multiple disconnections by sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Customers who experience four or more supply interruptions in a 12-month period, each lasting more than 3 hours	73%	81%	85%	83%	40%	72%	77%	59%	57%

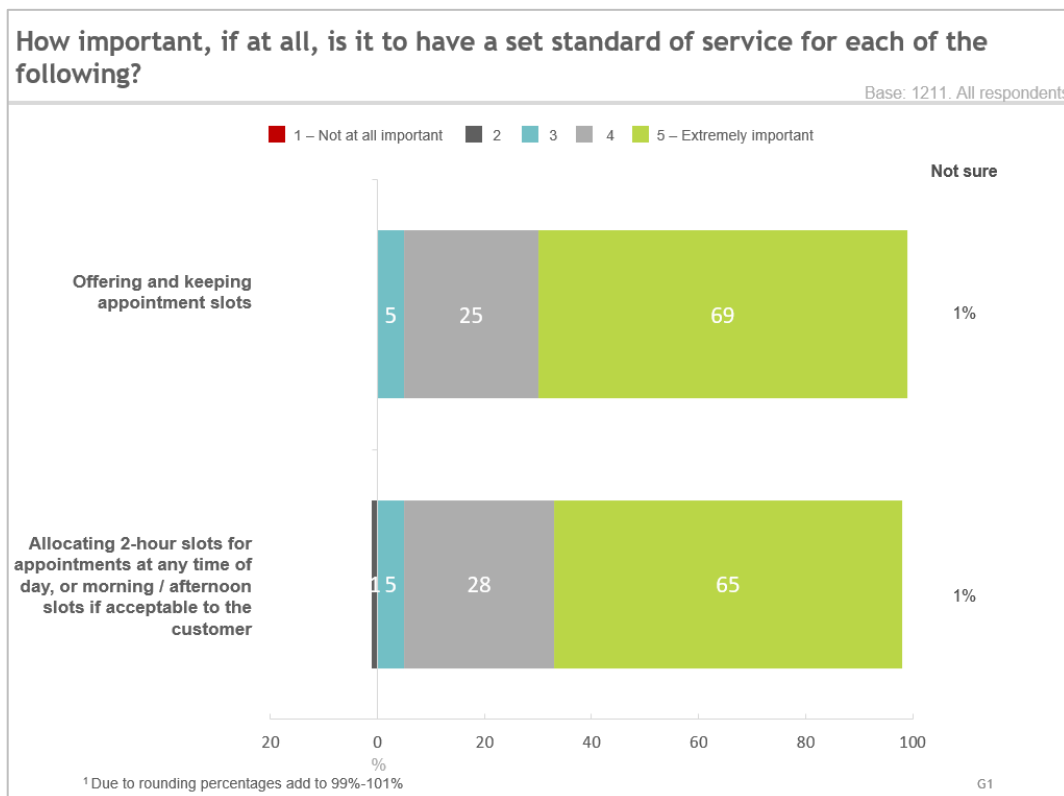
8. Appointments

In this section we explore the level of service consumers expect in relation to appointments.

Domestic consumers

The majority of domestic customers (94%) felt that it is important for electricity companies to have standards of service for offering and keeping appointment slots. Additionally, 93% indicated that it is important to have standards for the allocation appointment timeslots.

Figure 8.1: Importance of standards of service for appointments



Those who pay their electricity bill by cheque, cash or card were less likely than those who have a pre-payment meter or who pay by direct debit to say that it is extremely important to have standards when arranging appointments, while those with someone in their household with a disability were more likely to place higher importance on having such standards.

Table 8.1: Importance of standards of service for appointments by demographics (rating as extremely important)

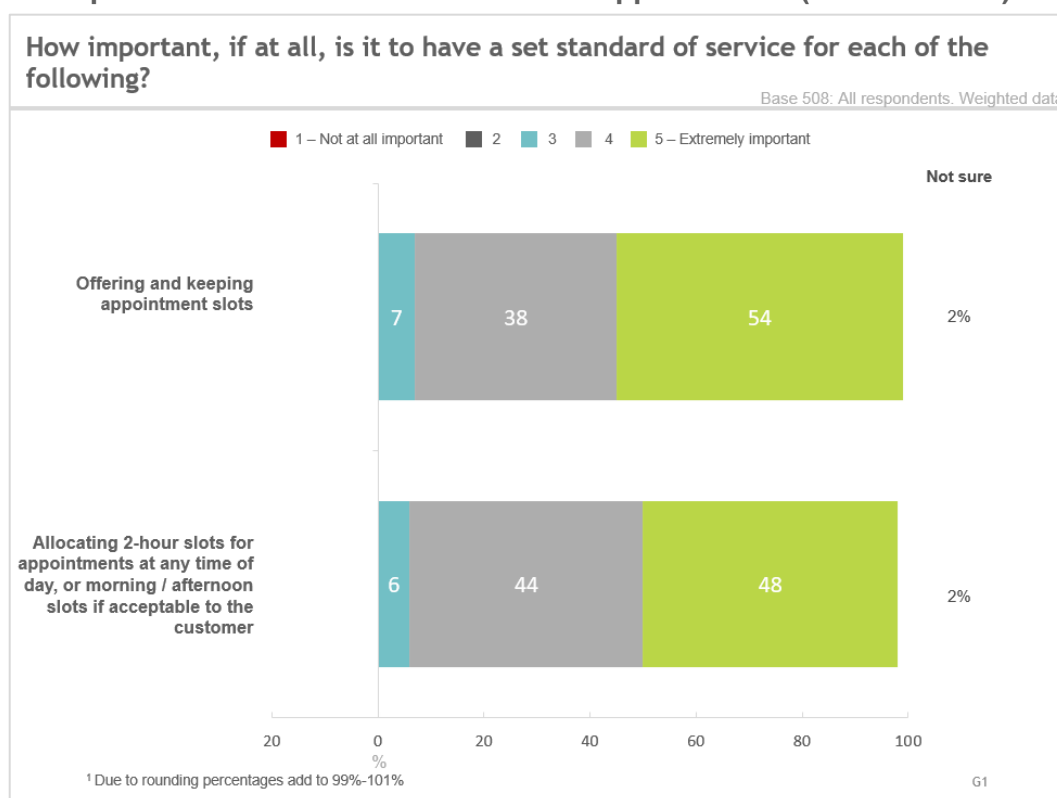
	All	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008
Offering and keeping appointment slots	69%	76%	67%
Allocating 2-hour slots for appointments at any time of day, or morning / afternoon slots if acceptable to the customer	65%	72%	64%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Offering and keeping appointment slots	69%	70%	69%	56%	71%	70%
Allocating 2-hour slots for appointments at any time of day, or morning / afternoon slots if acceptable to the customer	65%	68%	67%	50%	68%	55%

Non-domestic consumers

The majority of non-domestic customers (92%) confirmed that it is important to have standards of service for electricity companies offering and keeping appointment slots. 92% also thought that it is important to have standards for allocating appointment slots at any time of the day.

Figure 8.2: Importance of standards of service for appointments (non-domestic)



Analysis by sub-group shows that smaller businesses those in a rural setting or located outside Great Belfast and those operating in the construction and manufacturing sectors were more likely to rate the provision of these standards as extremely important.

Table 8.2: Importance of standards of service for appointments by size, location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Offering and keeping appointment slots	54%	56%	37%	44%	45%	61%	40%	57%
Allocating 2-hour slots for appointments at any time of day, or morning / afternoon slots if acceptable to the customer	48%	50%	32%	37%	41%	54%	32%	51%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Offering and keeping appointment slots	54%	66%	69%	61%	8%	55%	61%	57%	24%
Allocating 2-hour slots for appointments at any time of day, or morning / afternoon slots if acceptable to the customer	48%	59%	65%	55%	8%	48%	50%	50%	23%

9. Providing a supply

In this section, we address the expectations of consumers in relation to the standards of service they would expect to receive when requesting a brand-new electricity supply. The areas to be explored are as follows:

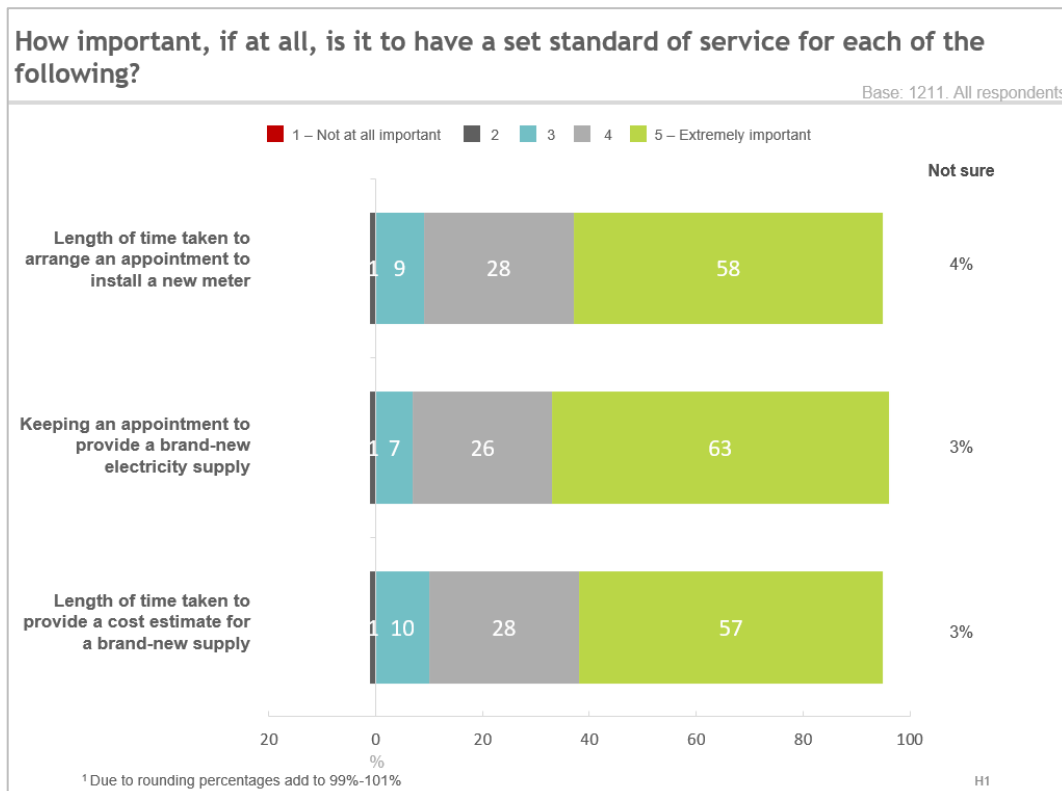
- Importance of standards for providing and keeping an appointment for a new electricity supply; and
- Expectations on the length of time to provide an appointment for a new electricity supply.

Domestic consumers

Appointments to arrange a new electricity supply

The majority of domestic customers (86%) thought that it is important to have standards of service for the length of time an electricity company takes to arrange an appointment to install a new meter, 89% said that it is important for electricity companies to have standards around keeping appointments to provide a brand-new electricity supply, and 85% regarded it as important to have a standard for the length of time to provide a cost estimate for a new supply.

Figure 9.1: Importance of standards of service for arranging and keeping appointments



Having such standards was more likely to be viewed as extremely important by those living in rural areas, while those who pay their electricity by cheque, cash or card or who are aged under 35 were less likely to rate having these standards as extremely important.

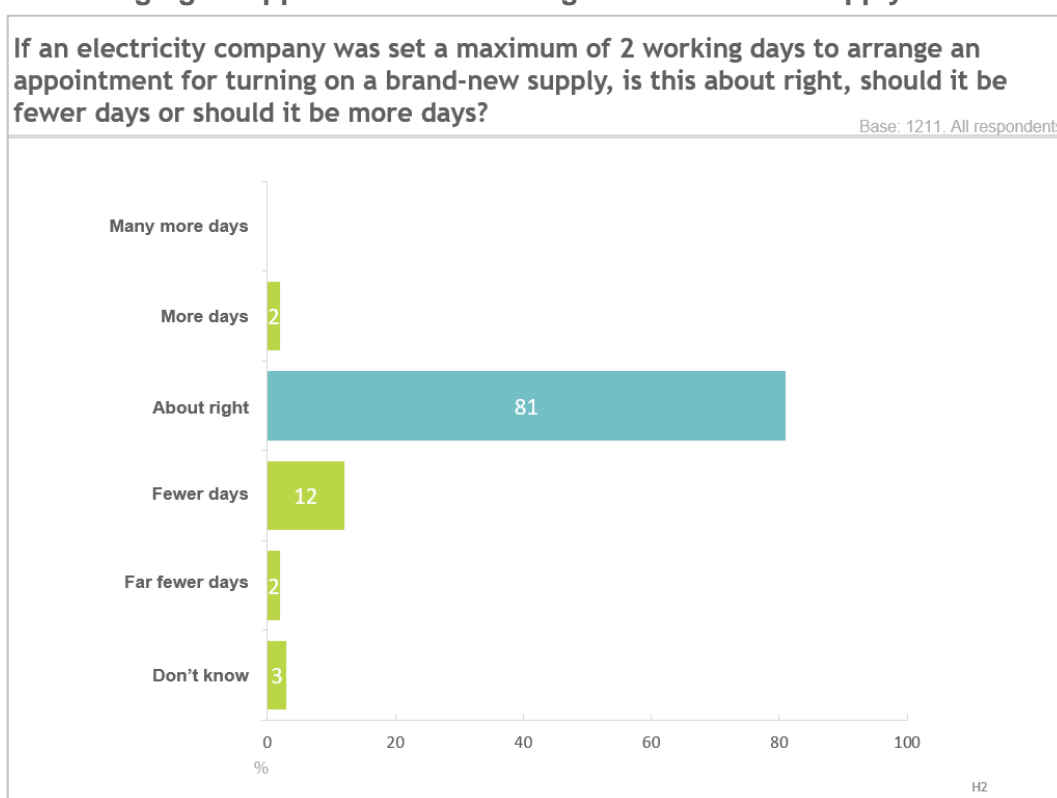
Table 9.1: Importance of standards of service for appointments by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Disability	No disability	Urban	Rural
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	203	1008	693	518
Length of time taken to arrange an appointment to install a new meter	58%	42%	55%	65%	58%	67%	56%	54%	62%
Keeping an appointment to provide a brand-new electricity supply	63%	50%	63%	70%	60%	68%	62%	59%	68%
Length of time taken to provide a cost estimate for a brand-new supply	57%	42%	54%	64%	57%	67%	55%	54%	61%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Length of time taken to arrange an appointment to install a new meter	58%	61%	56%	47%	59%	45%
Keeping an appointment to provide a brand-new electricity supply	63%	66%	64%	49%	65%	50%
Length of time taken to provide a cost estimate for a brand-new supply	57%	60%	56%	44%	59%	45%

When asked about the maximum of two working days to arrange an appointment for turning on a new supply, four out of five domestic customers (81%) considered this to be about right. This compares to 14% who thought that the maximum time should be fewer days and 2% who said it should be more days.

Figure 9.2: Arranging an appointment for turning on a brand new supply



Providing a cost estimate for a new supply

58% considered a maximum of seven working days to be about right to provide a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a small job, whereas 38% thought that it should take fewer days. For a big job, over half (55%) believed 15 working days is about right for providing a cost estimate, compared to 39% who said it should take fewer days.

Domestic customers who live in Greater Belfast were more likely to say it should take fewer days to provide a cost estimate for both a small (41%) and big (44%) jobs compared to those living in the rest of NI (35% for a small job, 36% for a big job).

Figure 9.3: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a small job

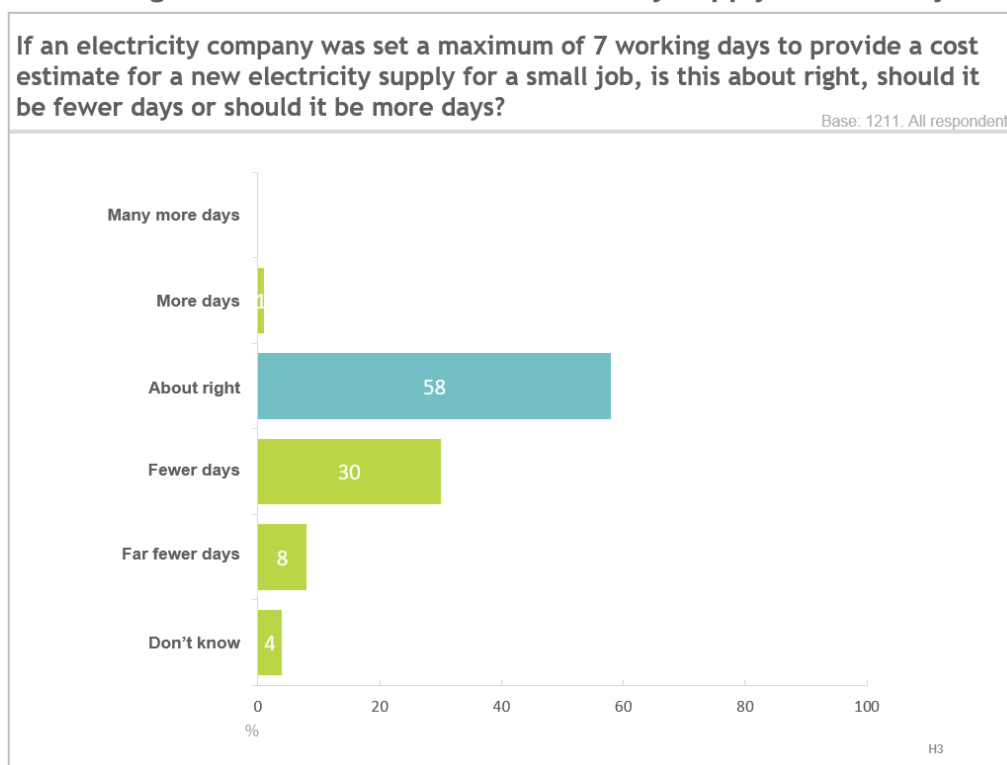


Table 9.2: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a small job by location

	All	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base</i>	1211	693	518	512	699
Fewer days	38%	40%	35%	41%	35%
About right	58%	55%	62%	53%	61%
More days	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 9.4: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a big job

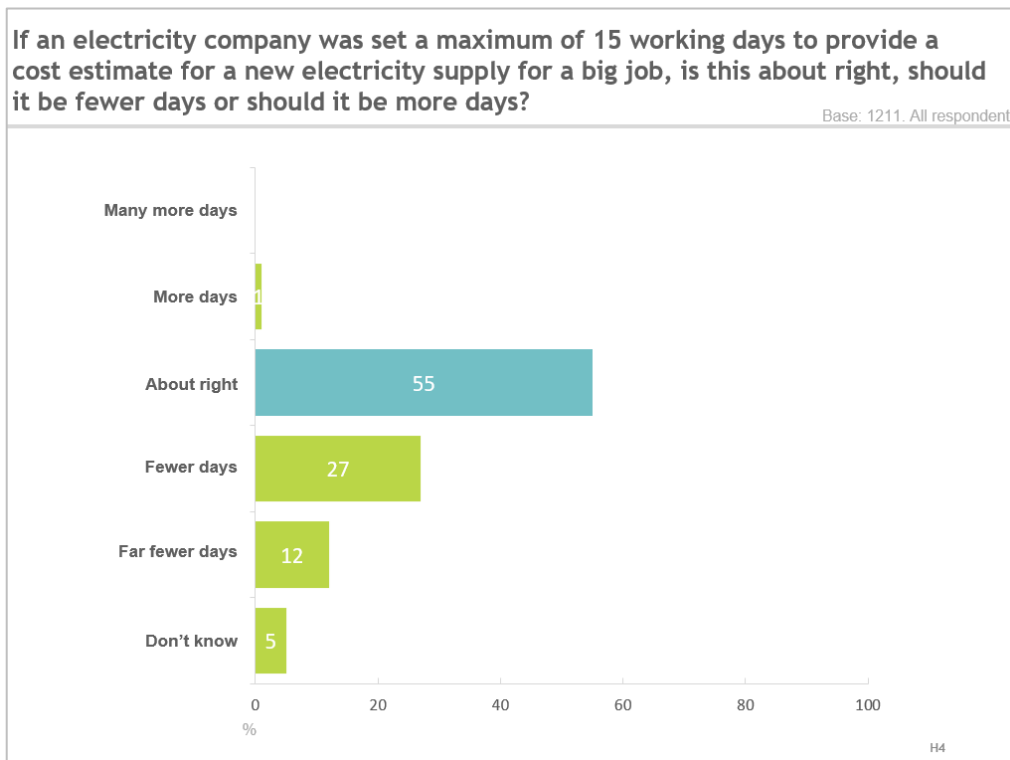


Table 9.3: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a big job by location

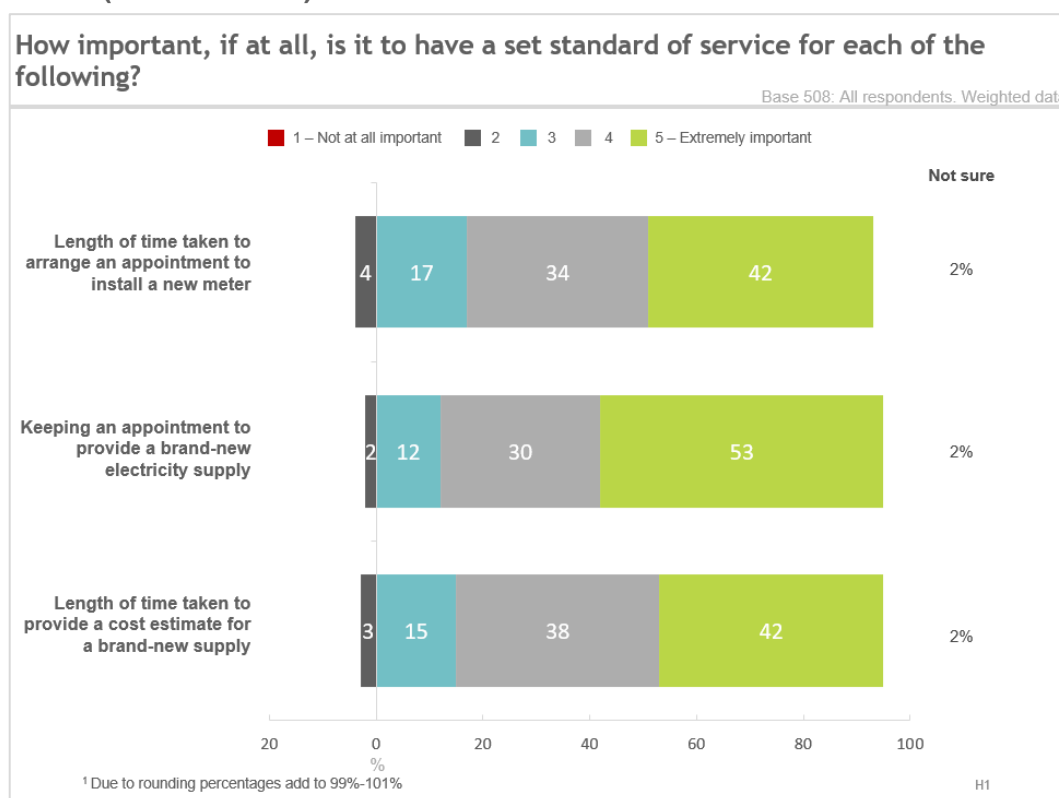
	All	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base</i>	1211	693	518	512	699
Fewer days	39%	43%	35%	44%	36%
About right	55%	50%	62%	49%	60%
More days	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	45%	6%	3%	7%	3%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-domestic consumers

Appointments to arrange new electricity supply

Three quarters (76%) of businesses indicated that it is important to have standards of service for the length of time taken to arrange an appointment to install a new meter. The majority also confirmed that it is important to have standards for electricity companies keeping appointments to provide a new supply (83%) and for the length of time taken to provide a cost estimate (80%).

Figure 9.5: Importance of standards of service for arranging and keeping appointments (non-domestic)



Small businesses, those in a rural setting and those operating in the construction sector were more likely to rate each of these service areas as extremely important.

Table 9.5: Importance of standards of service for arranging and keeping appointments by size, location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	1-9	10-49	50+	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Length of time taken to arrange an appointment to install a new meter	42%	44%	28%	26%	38%	45%	32%	44%
Keeping an appointment to provide a brand-new electricity supply	53%	55%	33%	41%	41%	63%	42%	55%
Length of time taken to provide a cost estimate for a brand-new supply	42%	43%	26%	31%	33%	49%	33%	43%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Length of time taken to arrange an appointment to install a new meter	42%	48%	55%	47%	12%	43%	46%	36%	25%
Keeping an appointment to provide a brand-new electricity supply	53%	66%	72%	48%	12%	53%	64%	45%	30%
Length of time taken to provide a cost estimate for a brand-new supply	42%	55%	64%	32%	11%	43%	45%	36%	25%

79% of businesses indicated that a maximum of two working days to arrange an appointment for turning on a new supply is about right, while 14% believed it should take fewer days, including 40% of public administration businesses.

Figure 9.6: Arranging an appointment for turning on a brand-new supply (non-domestic)

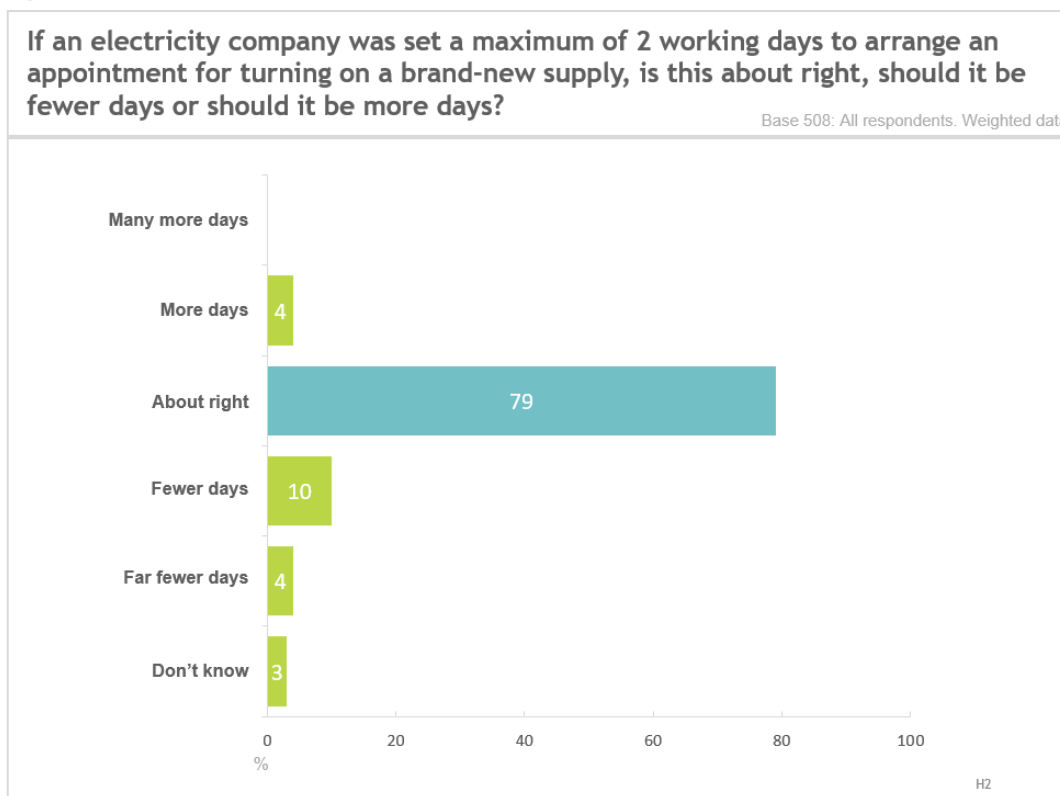


Table 9.6: Arranging an appointment for turning on a brand-new supply by sector

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer days	14%	12%	11%	21%	15%	6%	6%	40%	27%
About right	79%	77%	81%	74%	76%	83%	86%	59%	73%
More days	4%	5%	7%	3%	-	3%	8%	0%	-
Don't know	3%	5%	0%	3%	10%	8%	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Providing a cost estimate for a new supply

When providing a cost estimate for a small job, 70% of organisations indicated that a maximum of seven working days is about right, compared to one quarter (26%) who thought that it should take fewer days. When providing an estimate for a large job, nearly two thirds (64%) thought a maximum of 15 working days is about right, whereas one third (32%) believed it should take less time.

Figure 9.7: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a small job (non-domestic)

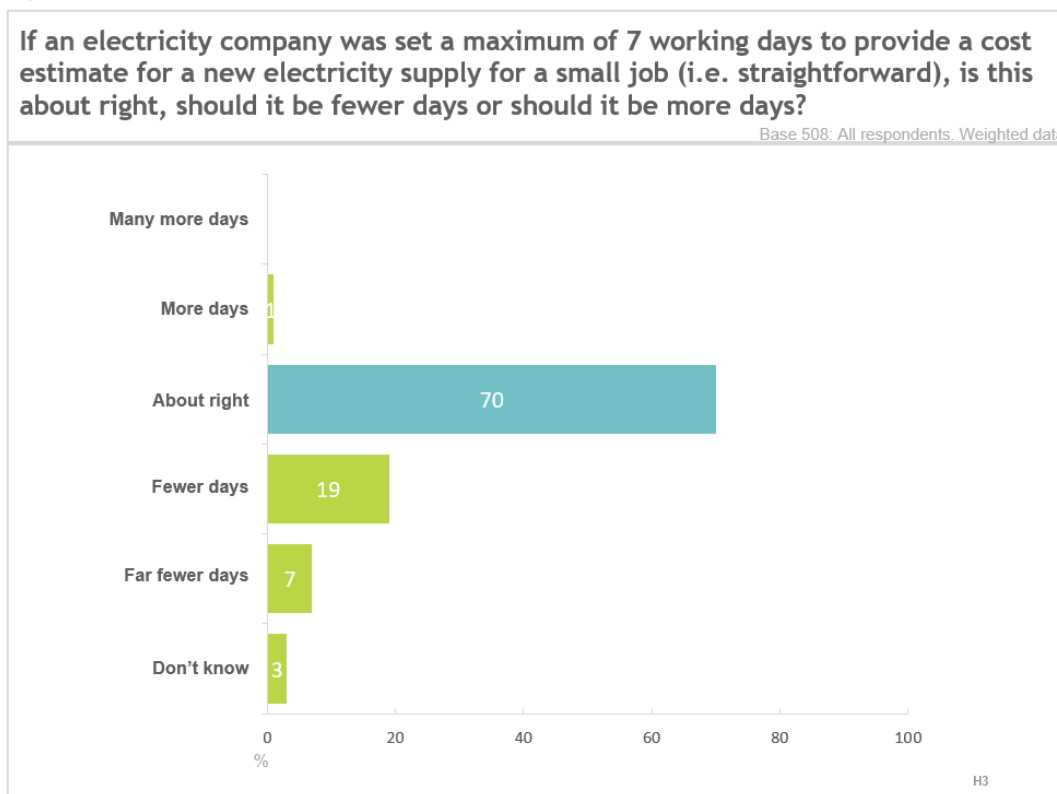
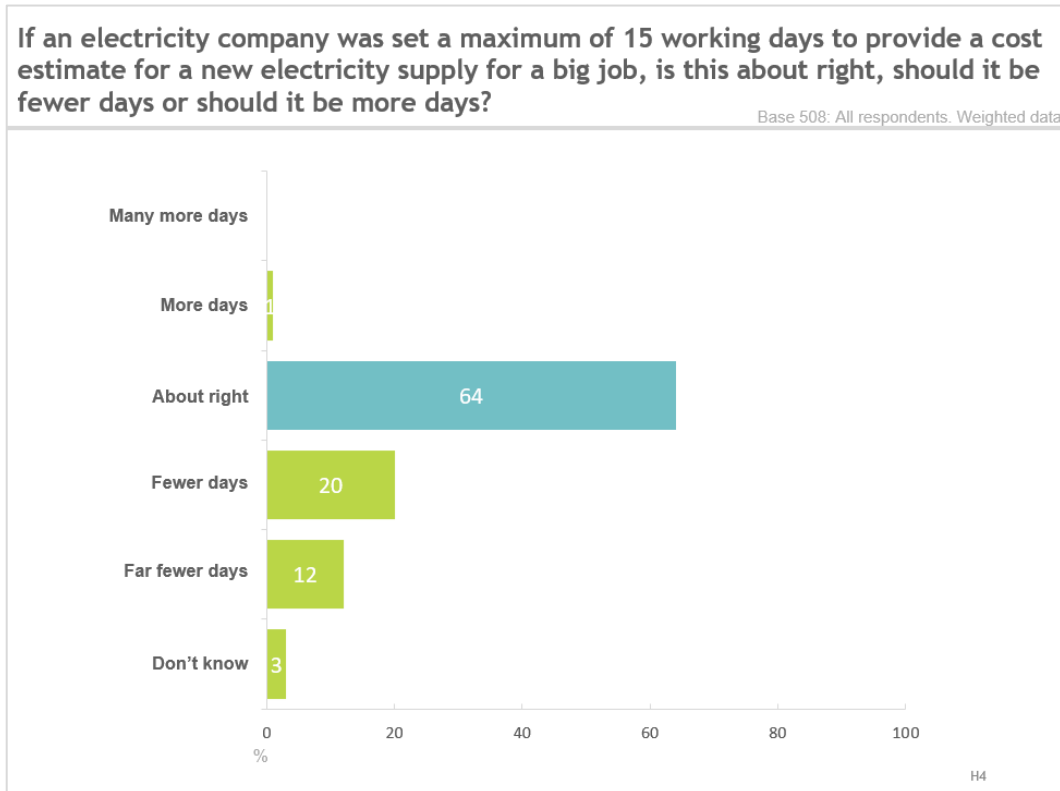


Table 9.7: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a small job by sector

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer days	26%	18%	29%	41%	25%	25%	13%	43%	32%
About right	70%	71%	68%	56%	65%	72%	84%	57%	68%
More days	1%	5%	-	3%	-	-	-	1%	-
Don't know	3%	5%	3%	-	10%	3%	3%	-	-
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 9.8: Providing a cost estimate for a new electricity supply for a big job (non-domestic)



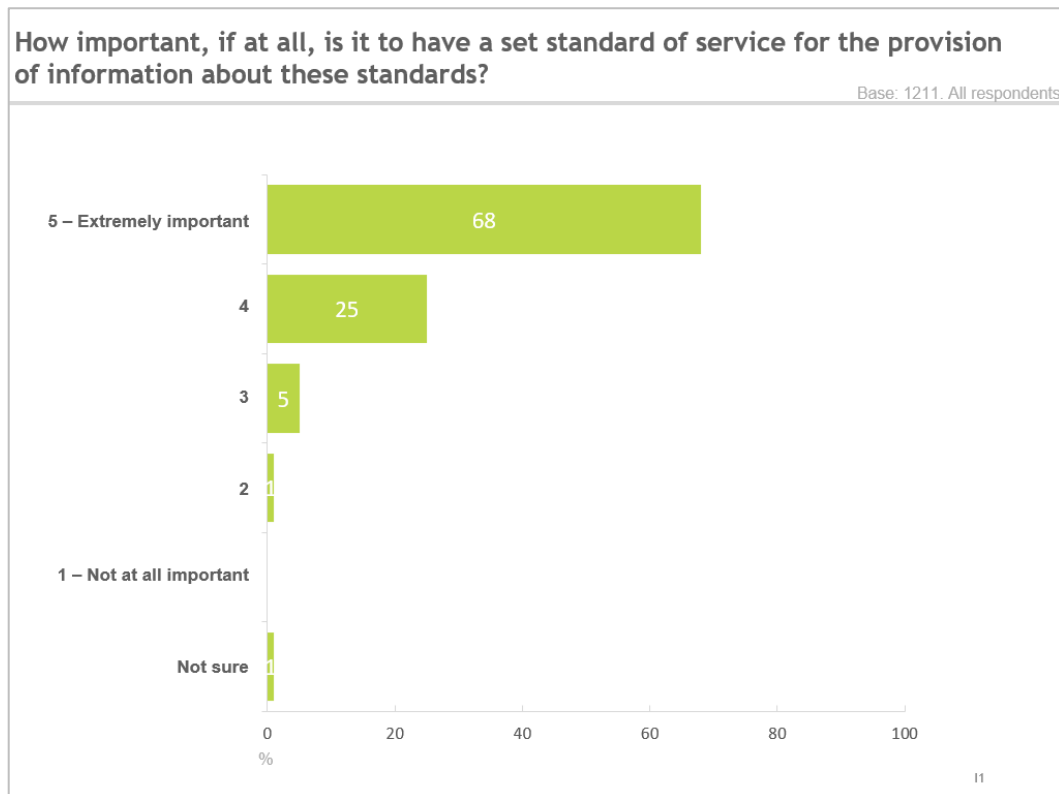
10. Notice of rights

In this section we consider the views of customers in relation to having standards of service for the provision of information about the standards discussed in the previous sections.

Domestic consumers

The majority of domestic customers (93%) confirmed that it is important for electricity companies to have a set standard of service for the provision of information about standards.

Figure 10.1: Importance of provision of information about standards of service



Respondents aged 35-44 (72%) and 45-64 (73%) were more likely than those aged under 35 (61%) and those aged 65 and over (61%) to rate this standard as extremely important, as were those people living in rural areas (71% compared to 65% of urban respondents) and those who have someone in their household with a disability (75% compared to 66% without a disability). Half (50%) of respondents who pay their electricity bill by cheque, cash or card rated having standards of service on the provision of information as extremely important, compared to almost three quarters (71%) of those who have a pre-payment meter.

Table 10.1: Importance of provision of information about standards of service by demographics (rating as extremely important)

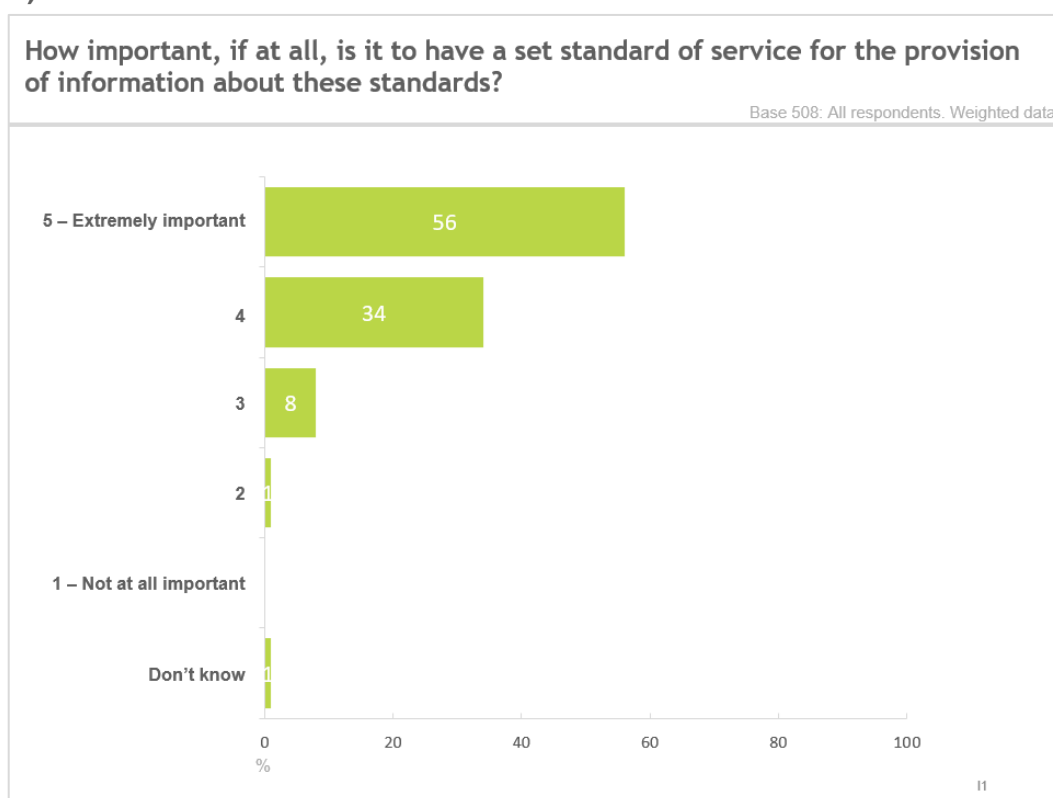
	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Disability	No disability	Urban	Rural
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	203	1008	693	518
Provision of information about these standards	68%	61%	72%	73%	61%	75%	66%	65%	71%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Provision of information about these standards	68%	70%	68%	50%	71%	55%

Non-domestic consumers

The majority of non-domestic customers (90%) also believed it to be important to have set standards of service for the provision of information about such standards.

Figure 10.2: Importance of provision of information about standards of service (non-domestic)



Construction companies (73%) were more likely to rate this standard as extremely important, as were rural organisation (61%) and those located outside Greater Belfast (58%) when compared with businesses with urban premises (50%) and those situated in Greater Belfast (44%).

Table 10.2: Importance of provision of information about standards of service by location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508 / 508	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Provision of information about these standards	56%	50%	61%	44%	58%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/ weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75/81	76/72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Provision of information about these standards	56%	64%	73%	52%	39%	53%	56%	45%	48%

11. Other services

In this section we discuss views on standards for other services, including:

- Having a rota for supply interruptions;
- Voltage problems; and
- Replacing faulty main fuses.

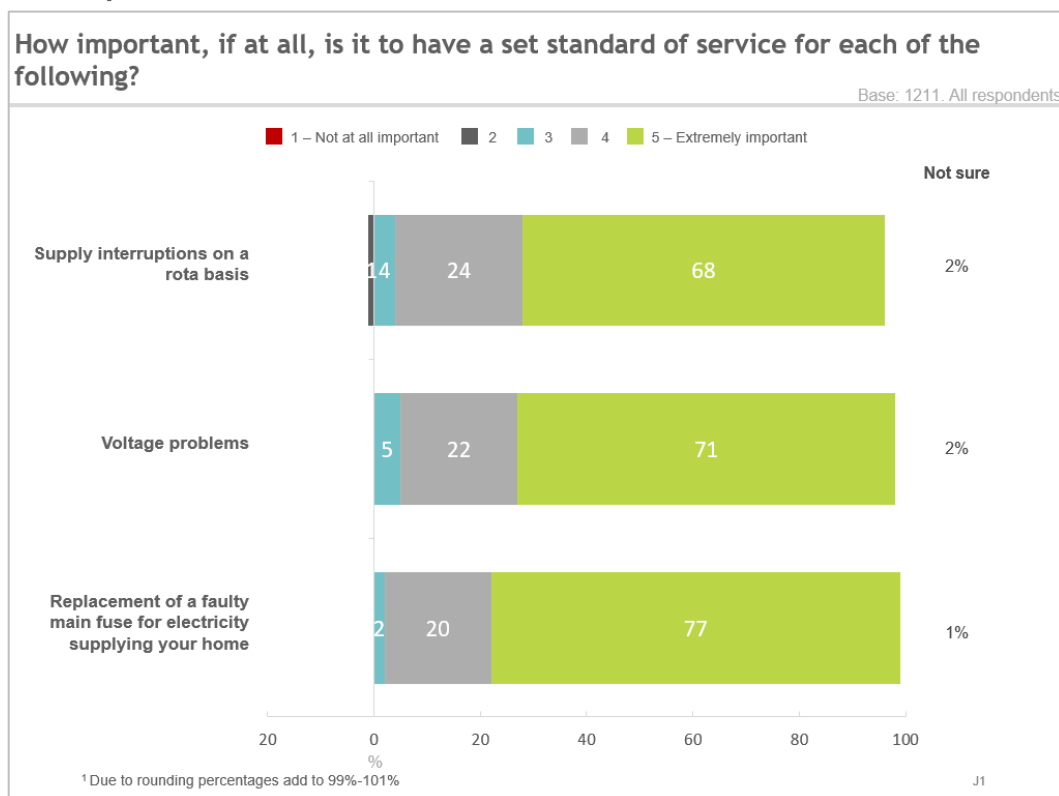
Domestic consumers

Other services

Domestic customers were asked for their views about having standards of service for several other related services:

- 92% said that it would be important to have standards for supply interruptions on a rota basis;
- 93% thought that standards of service were important for voltage problems.
- Almost all (97%) confirmed that it is important to have standards for the replacement of a faulty main fuse for electricity supplying their home.

Figure 11.1: Importance of standards of service for other services



Respondents aged between 45-64 and who have someone in their households with a disability were more likely to rate having standards of service for these services as extremely important, as well as those who pay for their electricity by monthly direct debit or who have a pre-payment meter compared to those who pay by cheque, cash or card.

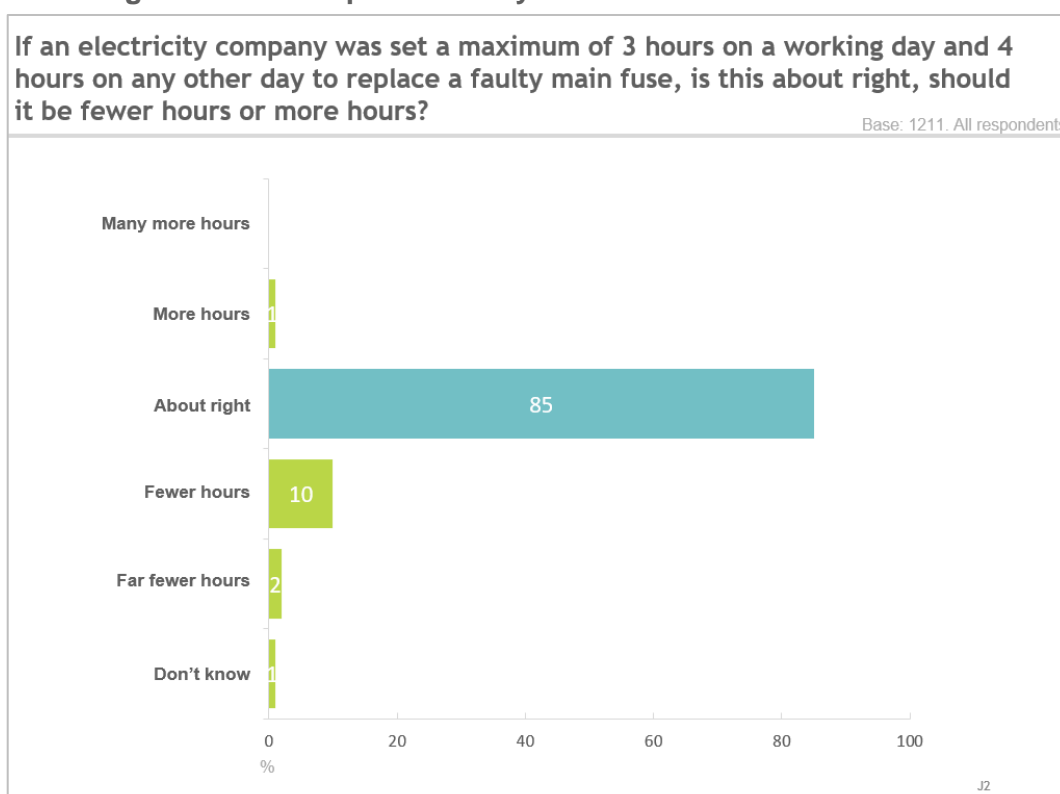
Table 11.1: Importance of standards of service for other services by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Under 35	35-44	45-64	65 plus	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	225	223	447	282	203	1008
Supply interruptions on a rota basis	68%	56%	68%	76%	65%	75%	67%
Voltage problems	71%	59%	70%	79%	70%	81%	70%
Replacement of a faulty main fuse for electricity supplying your home	77%	64%	76%	84%	74%	84%	75%

	All	Monthly direct debit	Quarterly direct debit	Cheque, cash or card	Pre-payment meter	Other
<i>Base</i>	1211	360	236	133	462	20
Supply interruptions on a rota basis	68%	71%	67%	57%	71%	55%
Voltage problems	71%	75%	68%	64%	73%	55%
Replacement of a faulty main fuse for electricity supplying your home	77%	80%	74%	68%	79%	75%

When an electricity company has to replace a faulty main fuse, 85% of people said that three hours on a working day and four hours on any other day is about right for doing this, compared to one in ten (12%) who thought it should take less time.

Figure 11.2: Length of time to replace a faulty main fuse



Other suggestions

Domestic customers were asked if there are any other aspects of service that should have a set standard of service. 28 respondents thought there should be standards around the pricing of electricity and the payment of bills, while eight respondents thought there should be standards for communication from and information provided by electricity companies. The times set for meter readings or installations (8 respondents), customer service (5 respondents) and meeting maintenance deadlines (4 respondents) were other aspects of service mentioned by respondents. 93% did not have any other suggestions.

Figure 11.3: Other suggestions for standards of service

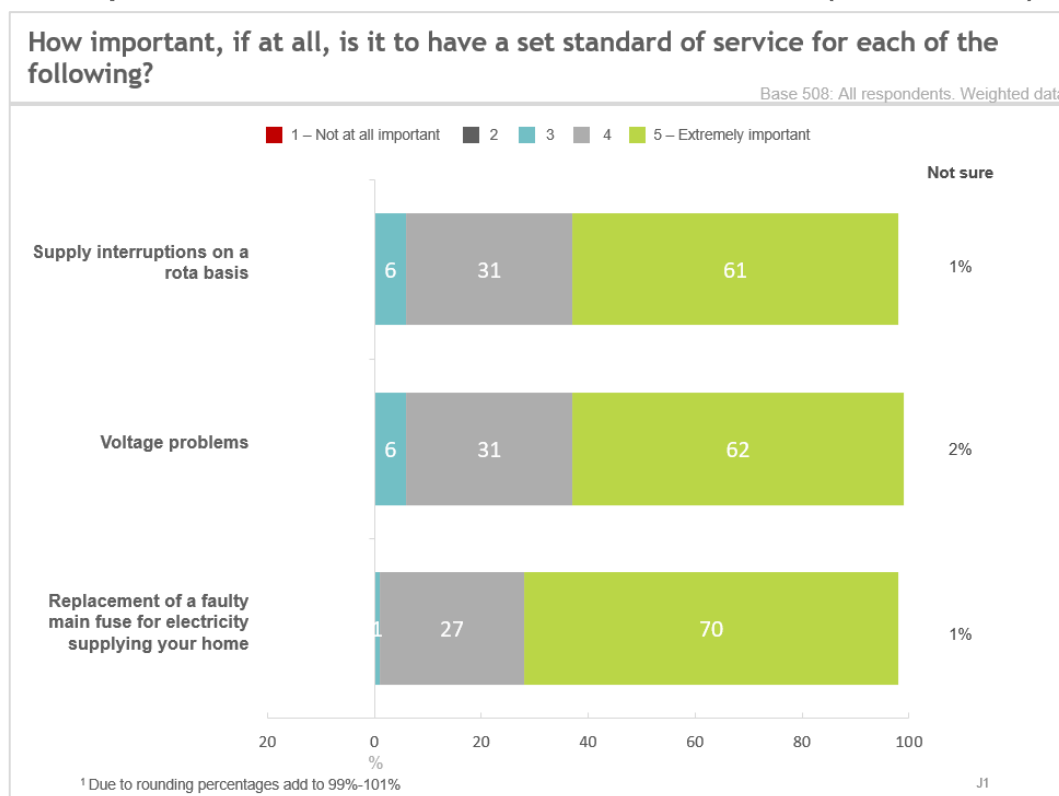


Non-domestic consumers

Other services

The majority of non-domestic customers (92%) indicated that it is important to have standards for supply interruptions that take place on a rota basis, while 93% thought it is important to have standards when there are voltage problems. Almost all (97%) non-domestic customers believed it is important to have standards of service for the replacement of faulty mains fuses.

Figure 11.4: Importance of standards of service for other services (non-domestic)



Having these standards for supply interruptions on a rota basis and for voltage problems was more likely to be rated as extremely important by manufacturing and construction companies, while hospitality businesses were less likely to rate them as extremely important. For the replacement of a faulty fuse, three quarters of rural businesses (76%) and those based in the rest of NI (72%) were more likely to rate this standard as extremely important, compared to three in five urban businesses (62%) and those based in Greater Belfast (59%).

Table 11.2: Importance of standards of service for other services by location and sector (rating as extremely important)

	All	Urban	Rural	Greater Belfast	Rest of NI
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	319/259	216/261	132/109	394/407
Supply interruptions on a rota basis	61%	57%	63%	52%	63%
Voltage problems	62%	56%	67%	46%	66%
Replacement of a faulty main fuse	70%	62%	76%	59%	72%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Supply interruptions on a rota basis	61%	72%	73%	67%	37%	59%	64%	55%	44%
Voltage problems	62%	71%	80%	61%	37%	62%	66%	49%	44%
Replacement of a faulty main fuse	70%	79%	79%	77%	42%	63%	80%	60%	49%

Replacing a fuse in three hours on a working day and four hours on any other day was seen as about right for 87% of non-domestic customers, compared to 10% who felt it should take fewer hours.

Figure 11.5: Length of time to replace a faulty main fuse (non-domestic)

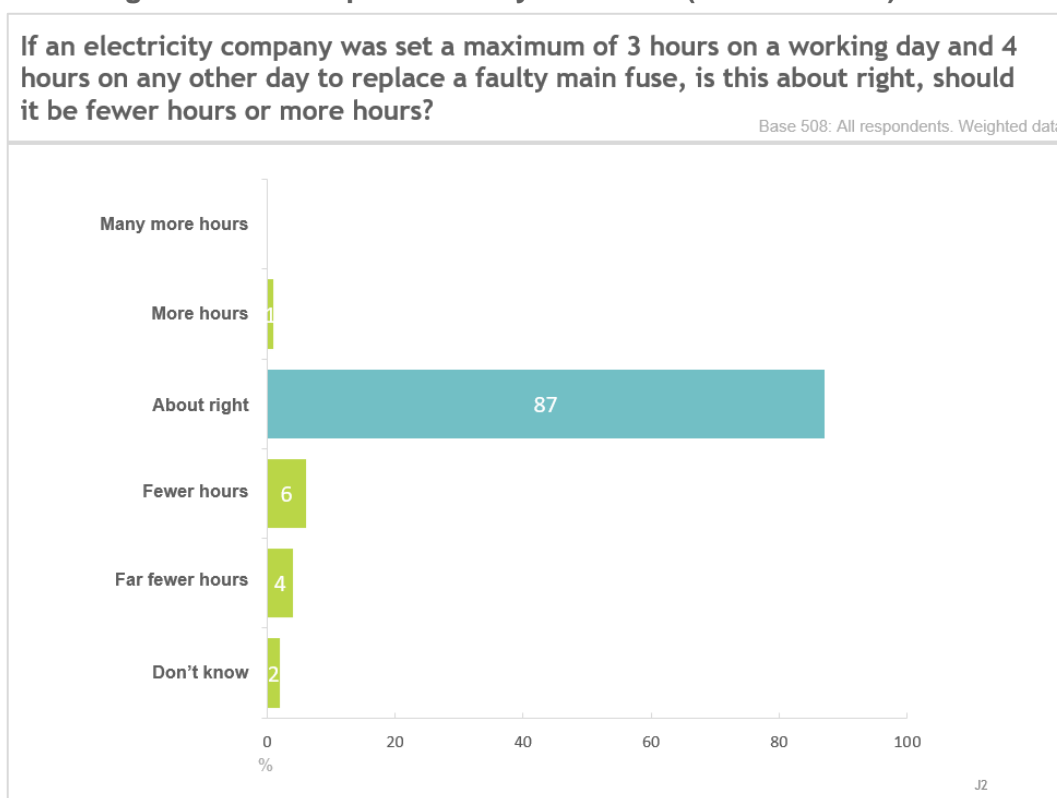


Table 11.3: Length of time to replace a faulty main fuse by sector

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Fewer hours	10%	22%	5%	12%	22%	6%	10%	27%	11%
About right	87%	67%	95%	85%	93%	91%	87%	73%	88%
More hours	1%	5%	-	-	-	0%	3%	-	1%
Don't know	2%	5%	-	3%	5%	3%	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Other suggestions

26 non-domestic customers mentioned having standards of service for the pricing of electricity and paying their bill, while 15 respondents suggested having standards for when electricity companies communicate with businesses and in the provision of information. 11 respondents said that there should be standards for when electricity is essential to the business, with one such business saying getting “*money back doesn’t solve the problem*”. Five businesses also suggested having standards for when a business deals with vulnerable customers.

Figure 11.6: Other suggestions for standards of service (non-domestic)

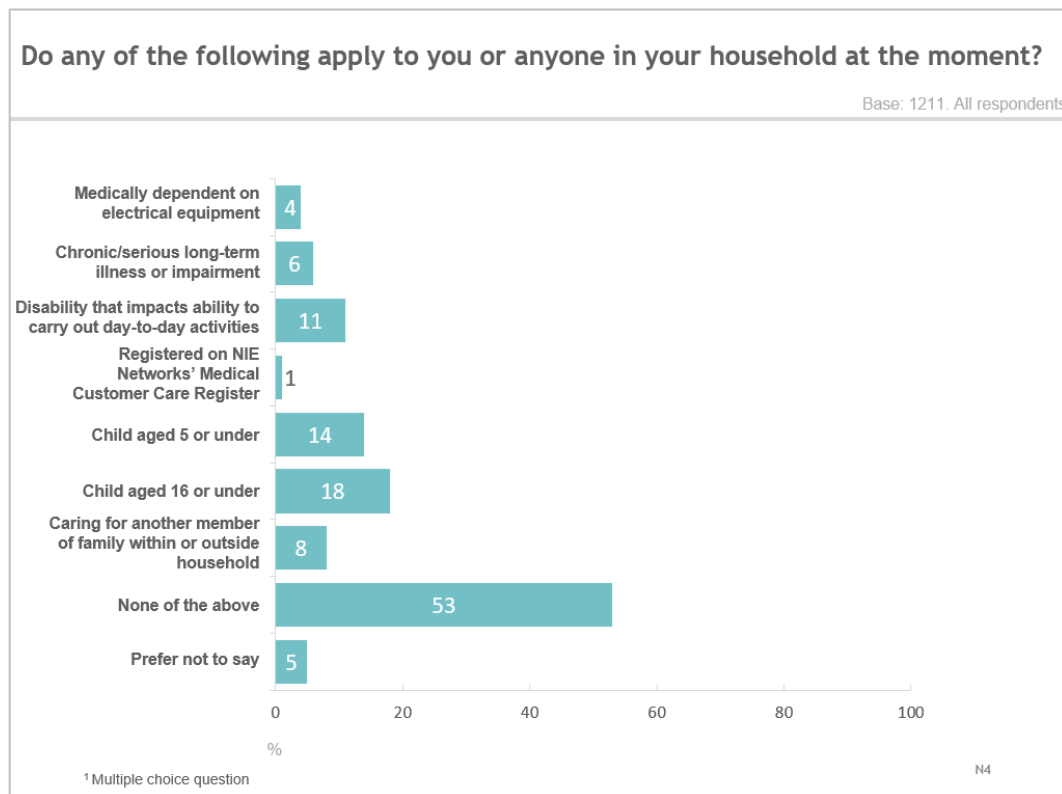


12. Medical and customer care registers

In this section we explore domestic consumers views on whether higher payments should be awarded to those on the Medical Customer Care Register and the Customer Care Register when a set standard of service is not met.

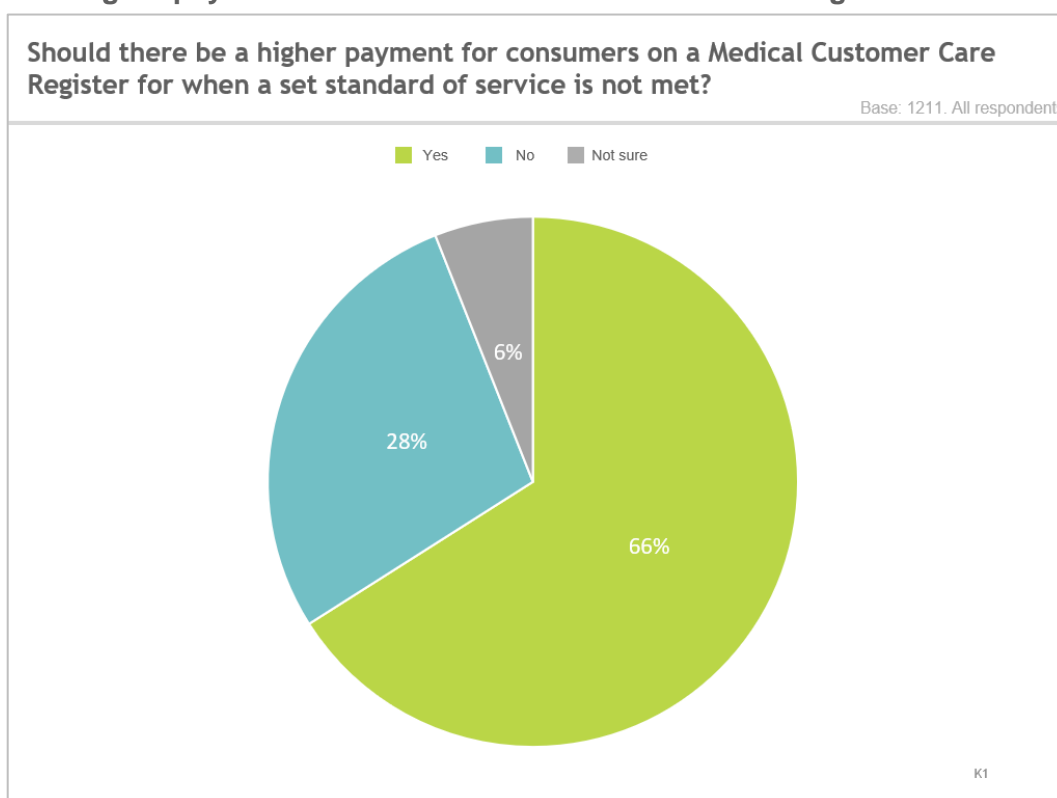
11% of those surveyed have someone in their household with a disability that limits their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, while 6% have someone in their home with a chronic or serious long-term illness or impairment. 4% of households have someone who is medically dependent on electrical equipment. Despite this, only 1% of households have someone registered on NIE Networks' Medical Care Register.

Figure 12.1: Household composition



Domestic customers were informed about the Medical Customer Care Register that electricity companies hold for consumers who depend on life supporting electrical equipment in their home. They were then asked whether consumers on this register should receive a higher payment when a standard of service is not met. Two thirds (66%) agreed that there should be a higher payment, compared to 28% who disagreed.

Figure 12.2: Higher payment for customers on the Medical Care Register



Three quarters (75%) of respondents who have someone in their household with a disability agreed that there should be higher payments, compared to under two thirds (64%) of those who do not. 71% of people living in the most deprived areas also thought a higher payment should be made, compared to 61% of those in the least deprived areas.

Table 12.1: Higher payment for customers on the Medical Care Register by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Disability	No disability	1 - Most deprived	2	3	4	5 - Least deprived
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008	263	255	242	268	183
Yes	66%	75%	64%	71%	69%	66%	62%	61%
No	28%	21%	29%	22%	27%	27%	33%	32%
Not sure	6%	3%	6%	7%	4%	7%	6%	7%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Domestic customers were also informed about the Customer Care Register that electricity companies hold for older consumers and those with a hearing, visual or physical impairment or a chronic illness. 70% of respondents thought that there should be a higher payment for consumers on this register when a standard of service is not met, compared to one quarter (24%) who thought that there should not.

There were again differences between those respondents who have someone in their household with a disability and those who do not and between those in the most and least deprived areas. Four in five (82%) of households who have someone with a disability said that there should be a higher payment compared to 68% of those with no disability, while three quarters (75%) of those in the most deprived areas agreed there should be a higher payment compared to 64% in the least deprived areas.

Figure 12.3: Higher payment for customers on the Customer Care Register

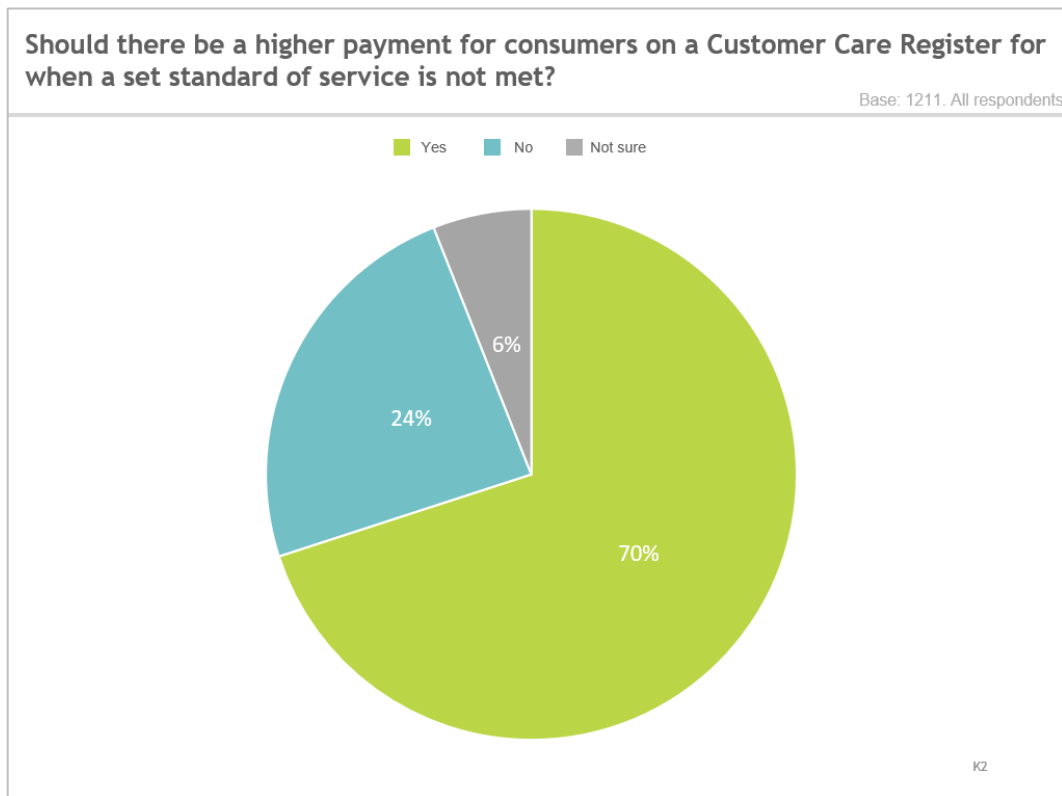


Table 12.2: Higher payment for customers on the Customer Care Register by demographics (rating as extremely important)

	All	Disability	No disability	1 - Most deprived	2	3	4	5 - Least deprived
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008	263	255	242	268	183
Yes	70%	82%	68%	75%	74%	69%	67%	64%
No	24%	15%	26%	18%	23%	25%	26%	30%
Not sure	6%	3%	6%	7%	3%	6%	7%	7%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

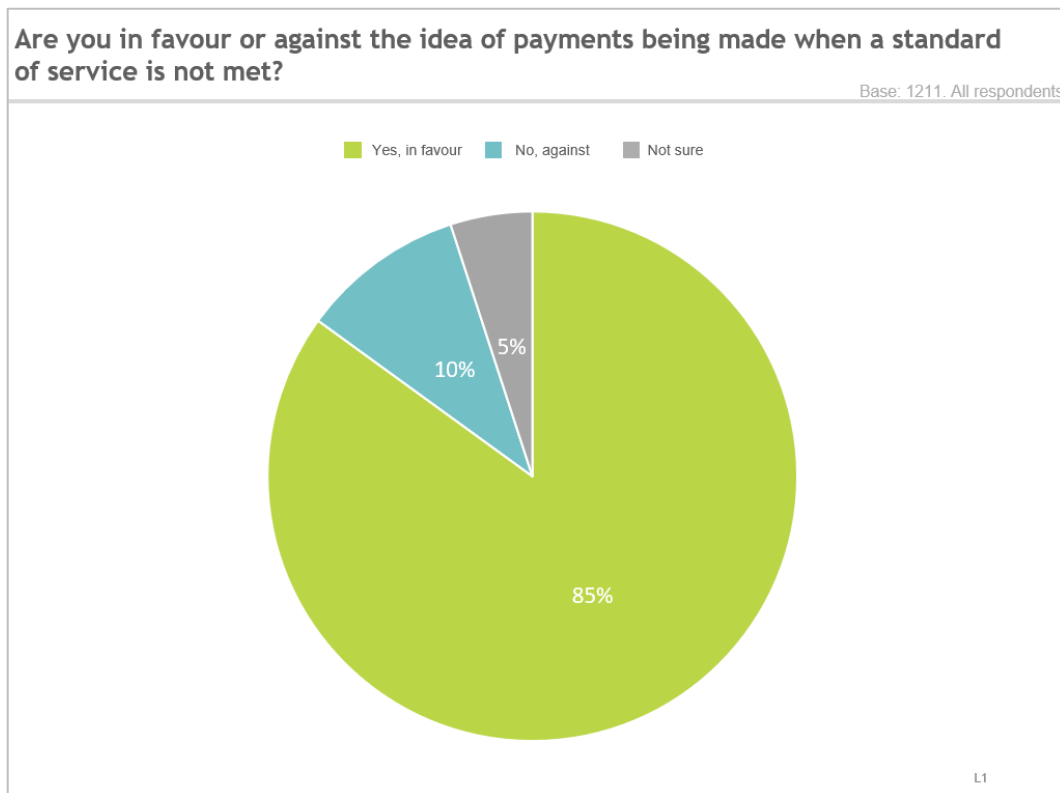
13. Payments

In this section we explore the views of consumers on being compensated when a set standard has not been met.

Domestic consumers

Domestic customers were informed that in some cases when a set standard of service is not met the electricity company might be required to make a payment to the affected customers. 85% were in favour of such payments being made, compared to 10% who were against it.

Figure 13.1: Payments being made when a standard of service is not met



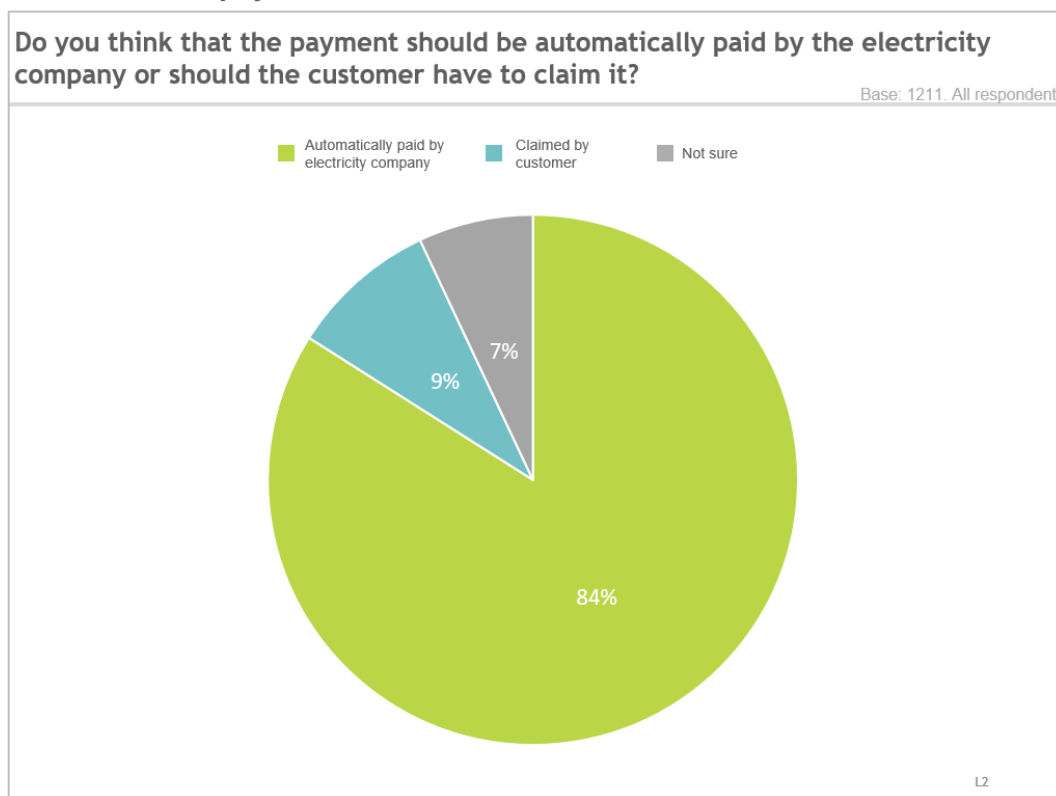
Households that have someone with a disability (93%) were more likely to be in favour of payments being made than those without (83%).

Table 13.1: Payments being made when a standard of service is not met by disability (rating as extremely important)

	All	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008
Yes, in favour	85%	93%	83%
No, against	10%	4%	11%
Not sure	5%	2%	6%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%

The majority (84%) preferred that the payment is automatically paid by the electricity company, whereas 9% thought it should be claimed by the affected customer.

Figure 13.2: Method of payment



Those living in rural areas (86%) were more likely to say payments should be made automatically paid than those in urban areas (82%), as were those households who have someone with a disability (92%, compared to 82% of those without a disability).

Table 13.2: Payments being made when a standard of service is not met by disability (rating as extremely important)

	All	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	203	1008
Automatically paid by electricity company	84%	92%	82%
Claimed by customer	9%	6%	10%
Not sure	7%	2%	8%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%

The majority (72%) also agreed that payments for meeting a set standard should increase with the cost of living, while 17% preferred that it should remain fixed.

Those in the ABC1 socio-economic group (77%) were more likely to say payments should increase with the cost of living than those in the C2 (69%) and DE (70%) groups. Households that have someone with a disability (80%) were also more likely to say this than those without (71%).

Figure 13.3: Structure of the payment

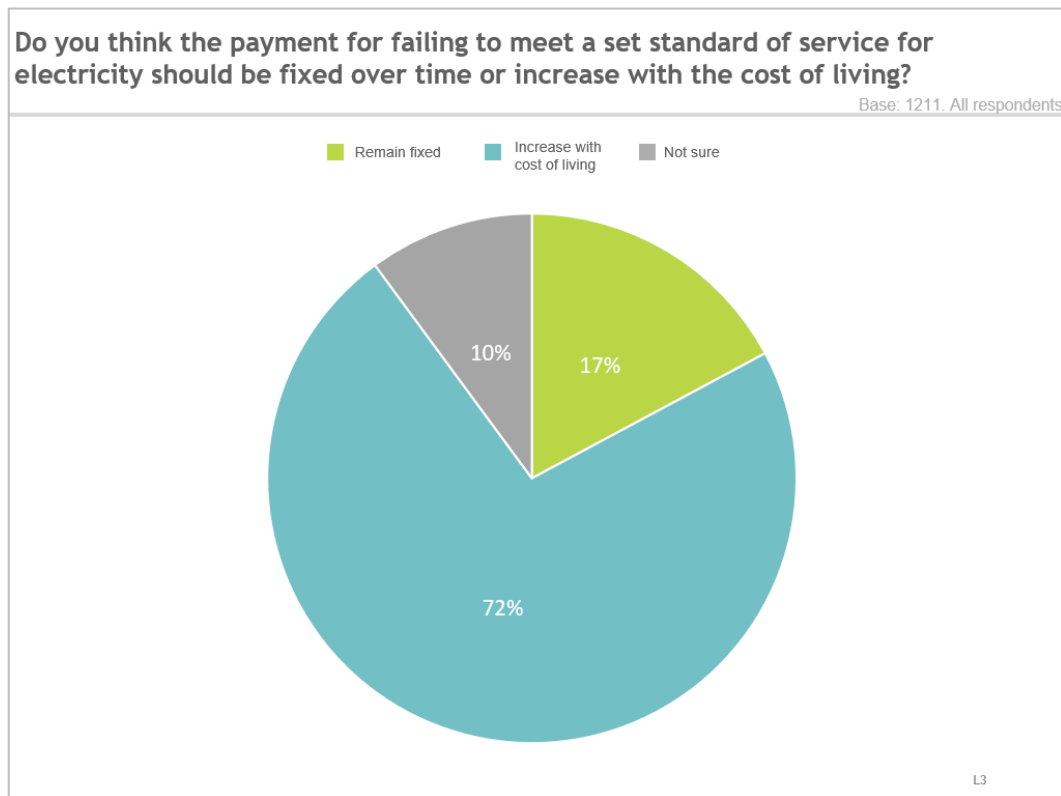


Table 13.3: Structure of the payment by SEG and disability (rating as extremely important)

	All	ABC1	C2	DE	Disability	No disability
<i>Base</i>	1211	561	216	358	203	1008
Remain fixed	17%	16%	22%	18%	15%	18%
Increase with cost of living	72%	77%	69%	70%	80%	71%
Not sure	10%	8%	9%	12%	5%	12%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-domestic consumers

The majority of non-domestic customers (87%) were also in favour of payments being made when a standard of service has not been met, with organisation with under 10 employees (89%) more likely to be in favour than those who have between 10 and 49 employees (74%).

Figure 13.4: Payments being made when a standard of service is not met (non-domestic)

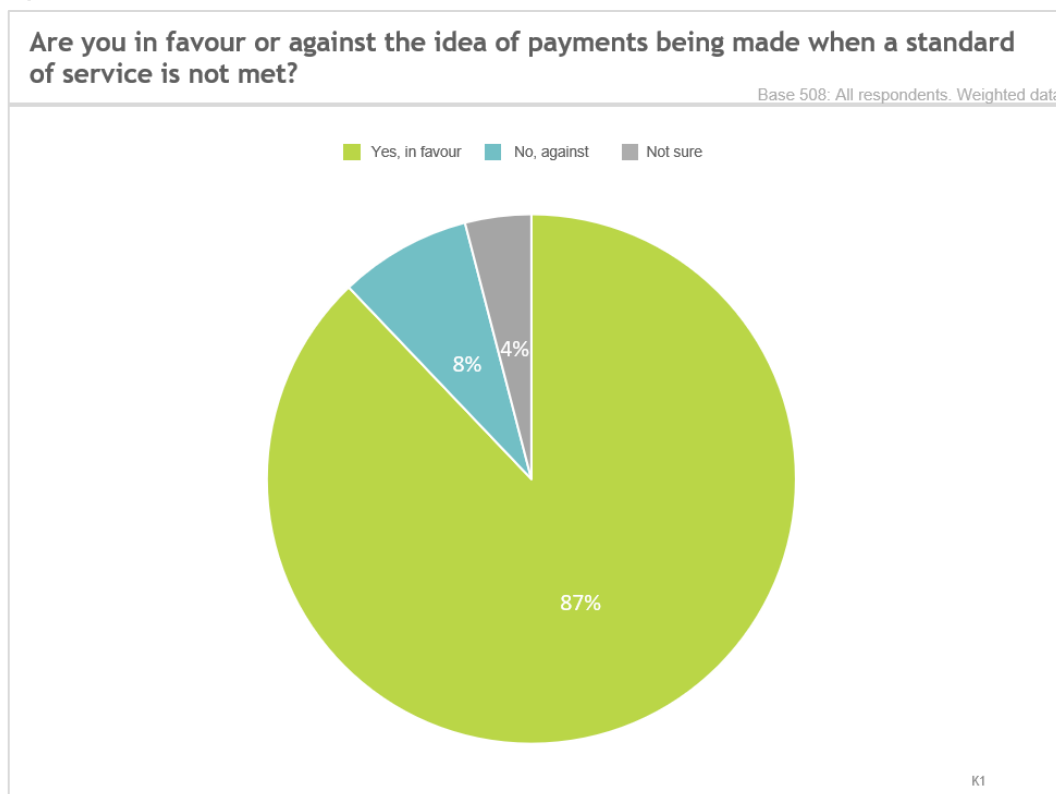


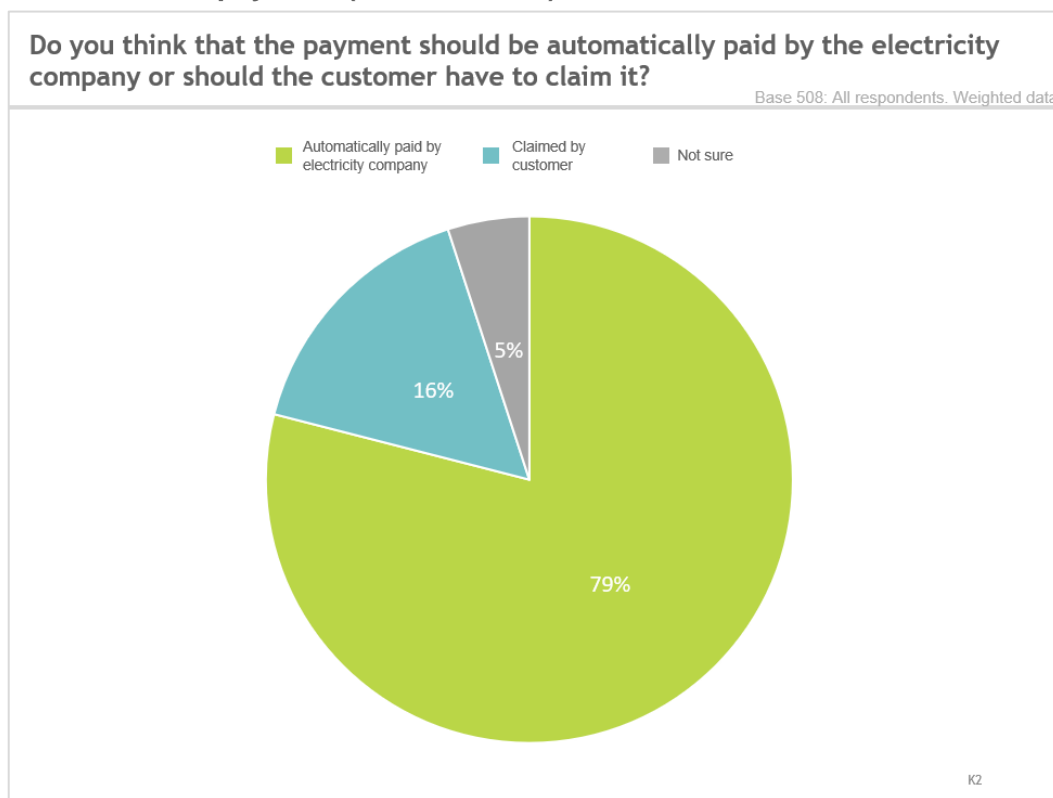
Table 13.4: Payments being made when a standard of service is not met by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10
Yes, in favour	87%	89%	74%	81%
No, against	8%	7%	19%	9%
Not sure	4%	4%	7%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Yes, in favour	87%	84%	81%	86%	88%	84%	93%	97%	86%
No, against	8%	10%	13%	10%	4%	4%	7%	3%	12%
Not sure	4%	7%	5%	4%	8%	12%	0%	0%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Over three quarters (79%) thought that such payments should be automatically paid by the electricity company, compared to 16% who said it should be claimed by the customer.

Figure 13.5: Method of payment (non-domestic)



Smaller businesses (80%) were more likely to be in favour of the payment being made automatically than medium size companies (65%).

Table 13.5: Time taken to provide a substantive response to a complaint by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10
Automatically paid by electricity company	79%	80%	65%	73%
Claimed by customer	16%	16%	17%	11%
Not sure	5%	4%	17%	16%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Automatically paid by electricity company	79%	79%	81%	70%	82%	66%	80%	97%	87%
Claimed by customer	16%	11%	13%	24%	8%	21%	19%	3%	12%
Not sure	5%	10%	6%	6%	10%	13%	0%	-	2%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The majority of non-domestic customers (70%) thought that the payments should increase with the cost of living, whereas 21% thought it should be a fixed fee.

Figure 13.6: Structure of the payment (non-domestic)

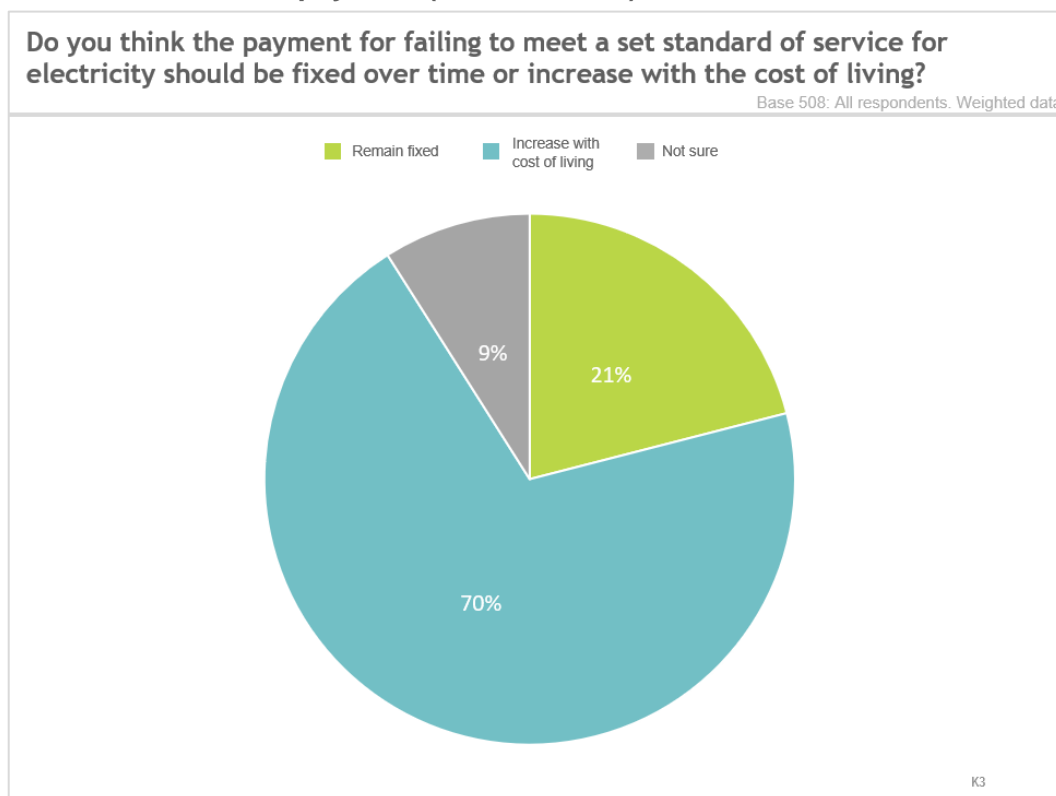


Table 13.6: Structure of the payment by size and sector

	All	1-9	10-49	50+
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	226 / 452	189 / 46	93 / 10
Remain fixed	21%	22%	17%	12%
Increase with cost of living	70%	70%	66%	71%
Not sure	9%	8%	16%	17%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

	All	Manuf.	Const.	Pro. services	Hospitality	Retail	Agri.	Public Admin	Community
<i>Base (unweighted/weighted)</i>	508 / 508	51 / 38	75 / 81	76 / 72	50 / 42	75 / 72	76 / 127	54 / 33	51 / 43
Remain fixed	21%	25%	26%	16%	10%	22%	23%	35%	15%
Increase with cost of living	70%	60%	67%	70%	81%	58%	75%	64%	78%
Not sure	9%	15%	6%	14%	10%	20%	2%	0%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

14. Overall standards of performance

In this section we assess the level of awareness of overall standards of performance for electricity companies and whether it is important to have such standards.

Domestic consumers

Awareness of overall standards of performance was low amongst domestic customers, with 86% reporting they were unaware that electricity companies in Northern Ireland had them compared to 12% that were aware. Despite this low awareness, the majority (94%) believed that it is important for electricity customers to have minimum standards, with only 3% saying they do not think it is important.

Figure 14.1: Awareness of electricity standards of service in Northern Ireland

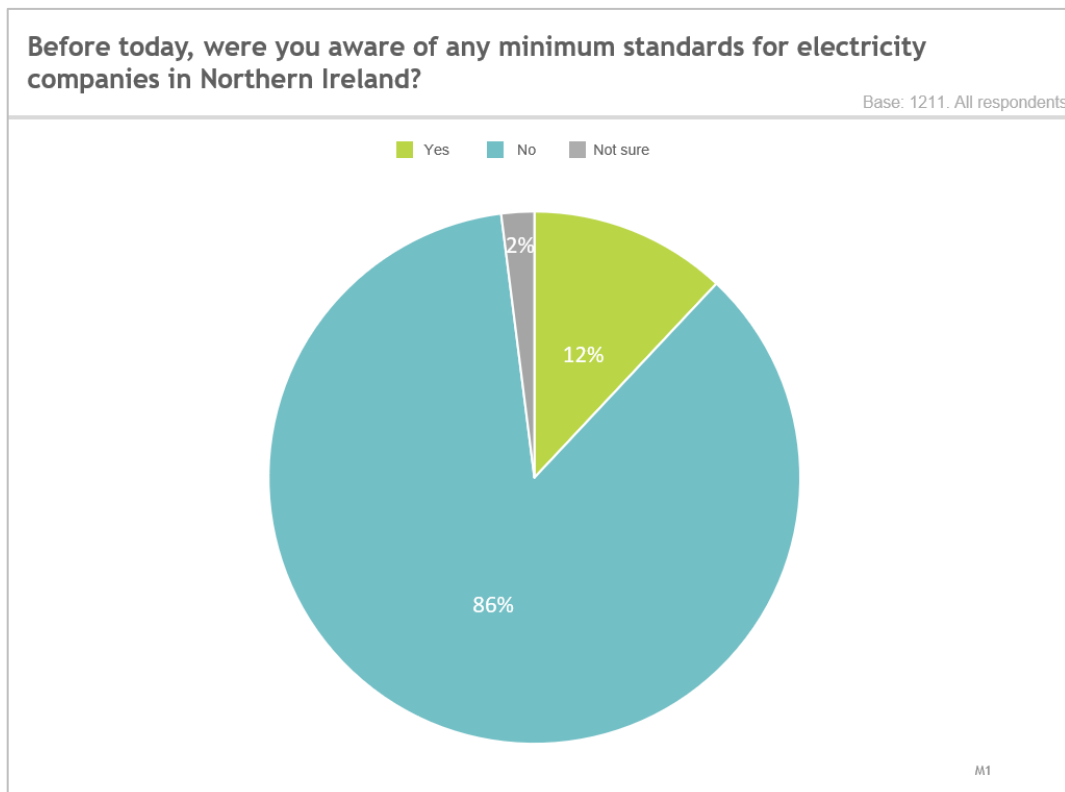
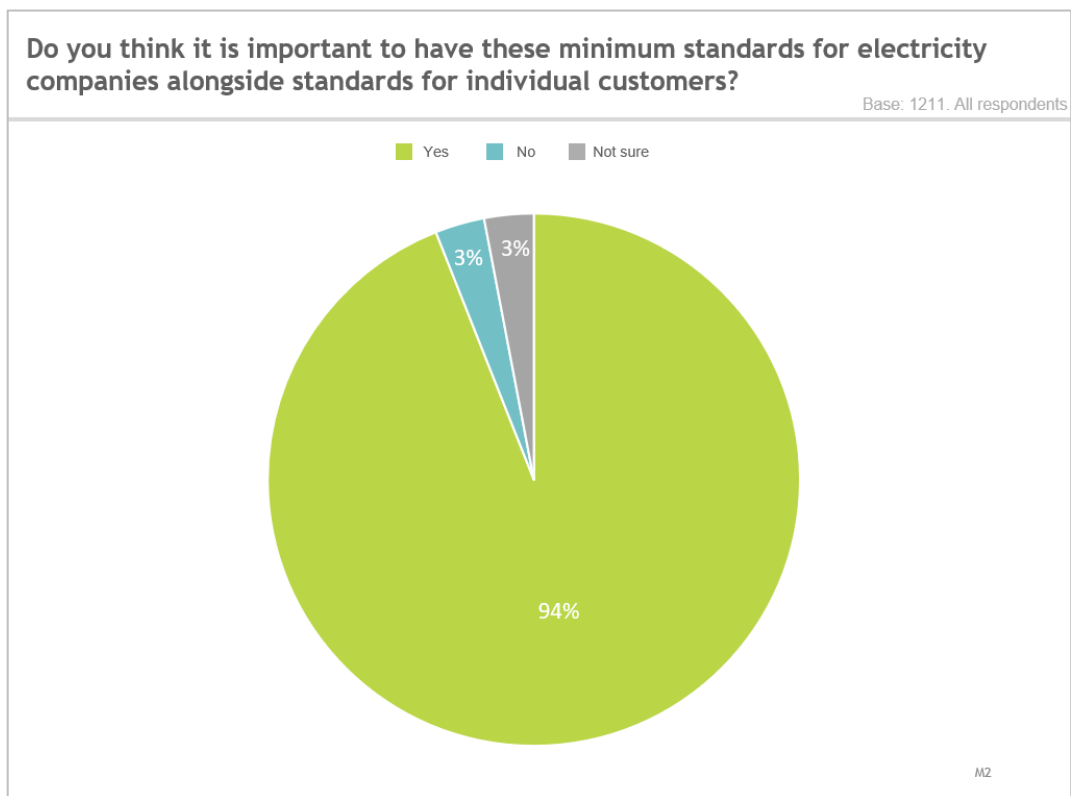


Figure 14.2: Need for minimum standards of service



Non-domestic consumers

Similarly, the majority of non-domestic customers (86%) were unaware that there are minimum standards for electricity companies, compared to 13% who were, but despite this low awareness almost all (97%) thought they should be in place, compared to 1% that are against this.

Figure 14.3: Awareness of standards of service in Northern Ireland (non-domestic)

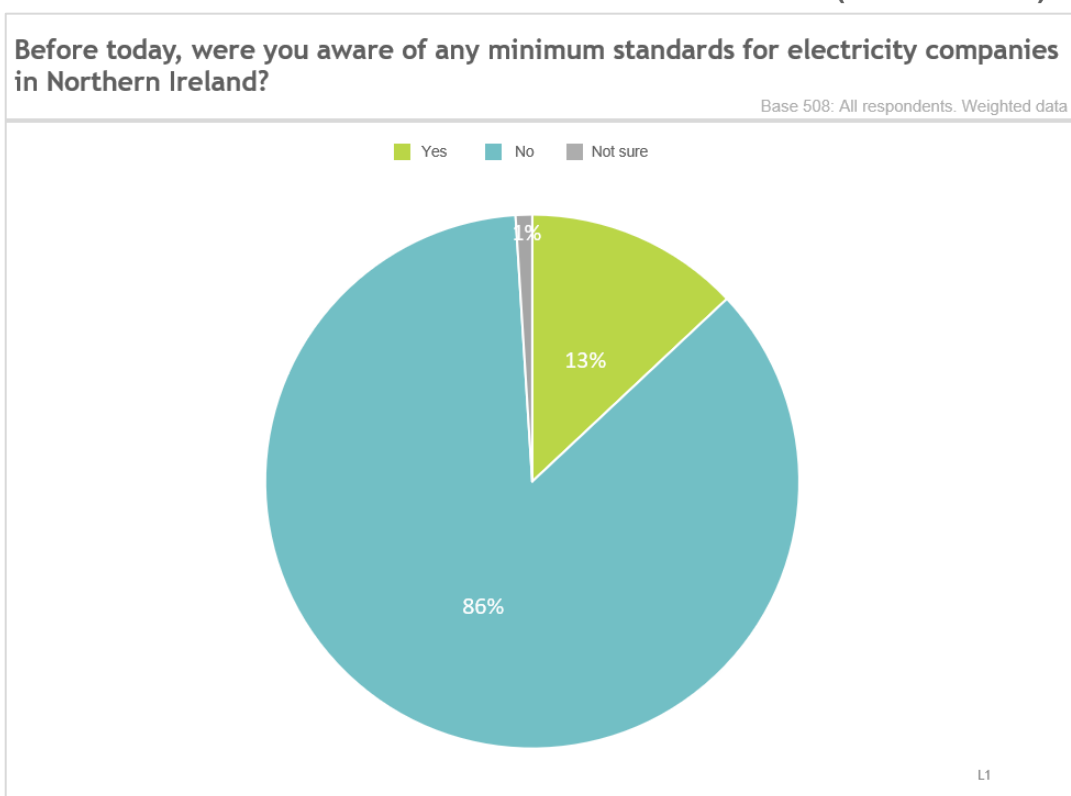
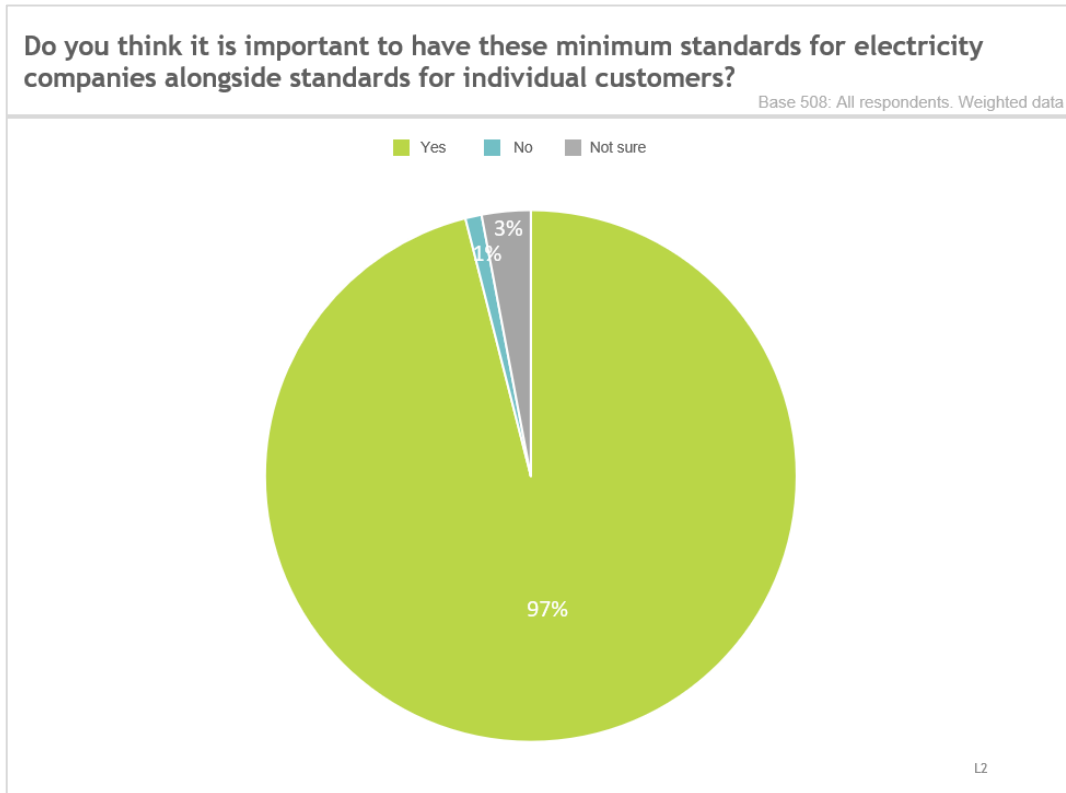


Figure 14.4: Need for minimum standards of service (non-domestic)



15. Conclusions and areas for consideration

The follow paragraphs outline several overarching trends within the data and areas which the Utility Regulator may wish to explore further.

Domestic consumers

Awareness of overall standards for electricity companies

Although the findings point to a low awareness of minimum standards among domestic consumers, the findings suggest that domestic customers recognise their importance. Only 12% of respondents had heard of any minimum standards of service for electricity companies before they took part in the research, but 94% think it is important to have these overall standards.

The findings from the research point to a desire for consistent standards across both gas and electricity companies, with nine in ten (91%) domestic respondents saying there should be similar standards in place for both utilities.

In addition, it should be noted that domestic customers want to see the promotion of standards of service, particularly those in the most vulnerable groups, with 93% of domestic consumers believing it is important to have standards for the provision of information on GSS.

Support and response times for specific GSS

There is a high level of support for having GSS in place across all of the areas of provision that were included in the research, with in excess of 82% of domestic customers rating each of the areas as important.

In relation to the maximum times that are set to respond to issues as part of the GSS, the majority of domestic customers are keen to see shorter timeframes in place for a number of areas including;

- queries about faulty meters and bills;
- responses to complaints; and
- the restoration of power in normal weather.

Level of payment and making claims

The majority of domestic consumers (85%) are in favour of payments being made when a standard of service has not been met, particularly those who have or live with someone who has a disability (93%). Most domestic consumers are in favour of having this payment being made automatically by the electricity company (84%), and that any payment set should increase with the cost of living (72%). The time it takes to make this payment is also significant with 88% of people saying it is important to have a GSS for this.

Non-domestic consumers

The findings from the non-domestic survey replicate those from the domestic survey, with a low level of awareness of the standards but a strong level of importance attributed to having them in place.

Awareness and views of GSS

Similar to domestic consumers, there was a low level of awareness of overall standards among non-domestic customers with 13% having heard of minimum standards of service before taking part in the survey. Also, non-domestic customers placed a high level of importance on having these standards, with almost all (97%) saying that it is important to have them for electricity companies alongside standards for individual customers. Non-domestic consumers also showed a desire for electricity and gas companies to share consistent standards, with nine in ten (90%) saying there should be similar standards for electricity companies as there are for gas companies.

Support and response times for specific GSS

Again, there is a high level of support for having GSS in place across all of the areas of provision that were included in the research, with in excess of 76% of non-domestic customers rating each service area as important (apart from time taken to respond to a change in payment method which had 66% rating it as important.)

In relation to the maximum times that are set to respond to issues as part of the GSS, the majority of non-domestic customers are keen to see shorter timeframes in place for a number of areas including;

- queries about faulty meters;
- responses to complaints;
- the restoration of power in normal weather; and
- the notice given for planned interruptions.

Level of payment and making claims

Non-domestic customers are in favour of being eligible to receive a payment when a standard has not been met (87%), with any payment being made automatically by the electricity company (79%) and which should increase with the cost of living (70%).

However, as one business suggested “*money back doesn't solve the problem*”, and the results suggest that businesses place greater importance on the notice given for planned interruptions (99%), replacement of faulty mains fuses (97%) and the restoration of supply in normal weather (96%) than they do on the time it takes for a payment to be made if a standard has not been met (81%). This points to businesses being more concerned with having a continuous supply to ensure they can continue operating than they are with being reimbursed if the service they receive does not meet the required standard.

Appendix A: Methodology

Perceptive Insight undertook a statistically representative survey of domestic and non-domestic energy consumers in Northern Ireland using a telephone interviewing methodology. Interviewing took place between December 2020 and February 2021, with each interview taking, on average, 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Interviewing was carried out in compliance with the GDPR 2018 and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaires were designed in collaboration with the Utility Regulator project team. Both the domestic and non-domestic questionnaires covered the same topics, although the 'Medical and customer care registers' section was not asked to non-domestic consumers.

Sample design

Survey of domestic consumers

The UR required a minimum of 1,200 surveys to be completed with a representative sample of domestic energy consumers from across NI. The survey was conducted with bill payers aged 18+. The table below details the demographic quotas applied, and the number of interviews achieved when carrying out the survey to ensure that the data is representative of the target population ³:

Table A.1: Domestic consumer survey population quotas⁴

	Category	Percentage in NI population 18+	Target number of interviews	Achieved (n)	Achieved (%)
Age	18 - 34	18%	216	225	19%
	35 - 44	20%	240	223	18%
	45 - 64	38%	456	447	37%
	65 plus	25%	300	282	23%
Gender	Male	49%	588	580	48%
	Female	51%	612	631	52%
SEG*	ABC1	50%	600	561	47%
	C2DE	50%	600	574	48%
	Refused	-	-	76	6%
Urban/Rural*	Urban	60%	720	693	57%
	Rural ⁵	36%	432	518	43%
	Mixed	4%	48		
	Total		100%	1200	1211

⁴ Age, gender and urban/rural breakdown sourced from NISRA 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimates; SEG sourced from 2011 Census.

⁵ Urban/rural is defined according to the system of classification used by NISRA.

We also monitored responses during data collection to ensure that it was representative of the population distribution across Northern Ireland by District Council Area. As part of the survey, we collected the postcode for each respondent, allowing us to analyse the data according to key location data breaks, including, Greater Belfast/Outside Greater Belfast; East of the Bann/West of the Bann; and quintile of deprivation.

Survey of non-domestic consumers

The UR also required 500 interviews to be conducted with a representative sample of non-domestic consumers. The sampling frame for this study included all non-domestic electricity consumers. Table A.2 shows the current structure of VAT registered organisations in Northern Ireland from published government sources⁶.

Table A.2: Organisations in NI by employee size and sector

Broad Industry Group	Total	Percentage
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	18,520	25%
Production	5,235	7%
Construction	10,515	14%
Motor trades	2,650	4%
Wholesale	3,255	4%
Retail	6,065	8%
Transport & storage (inc. postal)	2,475	3%
Accommodation & food services	4,145	5%
Information & communication	2,040	3%
Finance & insurance	1,250	2%
Property	2,390	3%
Professional, scientific & technical	6,025	8%
Business administration and support services	2,745	4%
Public administration and defence	50	0%
Education	675	1%
Health	2,810	4%
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	4,640	6%
All Industries	75,490	100%
Employee size band	Total	Percentage
0 to 9	67280	89%
10 to 49	6530	9%
50 to 249	1370	2%
250 plus	310	0%
All sizes	75,490	100%

Stratification was applied to the sample, for example, by number of employees to ensure that there were sufficient numbers for subgroup analysis. Data was then weighted when reporting at the overall level to reflect the NI population of non-domestic consumers.

When undertaking the interviews, we monitored the location of businesses to ensure representation by council area and by urban/rural breakdown. It should be noted that the survey was undertaken during COVID-19 restrictions, affecting the hospitality and non-essential retail sectors in particular.

⁶ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/historical-data-tables-idbr>

Table A.3: Non-domestic consumer survey proposed sample stratification

	Category	Target number of interviews	Achieved (unweighted)	%	Achieved (weighted)	%
Size	0 to 9	250	226	44%	452	89%
	10 to 49	150	189	37%	46	9%
	50 plus	100	93	18%	10	2%
Sector	Manufacturing	50	51	10%	38	7%
	Construction	75	75	15%	81	16%
	Professional services	75	76	10%	72	14%
	Leisure, hotels and catering	50	50	10%	42	8%
	Retail/ distribution/ other services	75	75	15%	72	14%
	Agriculture	75	76	15%	127	25%
	Public admin	50	54	11%	33	7%
	Community and voluntary	50	51	10%	43	8%
Total		500	508	100%	508	100%