



## Domestic Market Opening – Airtricity entry June 2010

### General Information

The market to supply electricity to domestic customers in Northern Ireland was ‘opened’ to competition on 1 November 2007. This meant that, once registered, any number of electricity supply companies could sell electricity to domestic customers. Arrangements designed to support a limited level of market activity were put in place in 2007 to allow competition to enter the market. These included:

- some 6,000 customers can switch per month (300 per day) based on the assumption that not more than 10% of the customers who switch would be keypad customers; and
- a total of 125,000 customers can change suppliers.

To date, NIE Energy has remained the only electricity supplier operating in the domestic market, however this is about to change. In early 2010 Airtricity confirmed its intention to enter the domestic market in Northern Ireland and has engaged with the Utility Regulator, Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and NIE to develop plans for a well managed market entry process. Airtricity has confirmed that it will initially target 6,000 credit metered customers per month (300 customers per working day) from June 2010 and also intends to offer supply to keypad customers by April 2011.

NIE has worked closely with the Utility Regulator and the industry forums since early 2008 – and more recently with ESB, Commission for Energy Regulation and suppliers operating in the RoI – to develop proposals for a long-term solution which will provide unlimited customer switching capacity and greater flexibility for suppliers north and south of the border in the form of harmonised market procedures. This system is expected to go live in mid 2012.

Putting in place the systems to allow competition in the domestic electricity markets is a requirement of EU law. Market opening will give Northern Ireland consumers greater choice in terms of their electricity supplier. This competition creates the potential to push prices down and may deliver other benefits, such as enhanced customer service standards in terms of billing and additional tariffs options

NIE, the electricity network business which owns the wires and meters, will continue to provide all customers with exactly the same level of service (fault response, meter reading and customer connections) regardless of who their electricity supplier is. Changing your electricity supplier therefore will NOT affect the safety or reliability of your electricity supply.

## Questions and Answers

### Useful definitions

<p><b>What is an electricity supplier?</b></p>	<p>An electricity supplier buys energy and sells it to customers. It is the company that issues your electricity bill and deals with any queries you have about your bill.</p> <p>Suppliers need a licence from the Utility Regulator to supply electricity to customers in Northern Ireland. They buy energy from the all island electricity market (also known as the Single Electricity Market or SEM) and pay NIE 'use of system' charges to transport it over the electricity network to your home.</p>
<p><b>Who are the electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland?</b></p>	<p>If you are a domestic customer, you can presently choose from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airtricity</li> <li>• NIE Energy</li> </ul> <p>If you are a business customer, you can currently choose from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airtricity</li> <li>• Energia</li> <li>• ESB Independent Energy</li> <li>• firmus</li> <li>• NIE Energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is Supply Competition?</b></p>	<p>To date, all domestic customers have bought their electricity from NIE Energy. Arrangements have been put in place to enable a competitive market and allow customers to choose from other suppliers as they enter the market. It is expected that this extra competition will help push down the retail price of electricity and may deliver other benefits, such as enhanced customer service standards in terms of billing and additional tariffs options.</p>
<p><b>What is the Single Electricity Market (SEM)?</b></p>	<p>The SEM is an all-island wholesale market for electricity. Customers themselves have no direct link with SEM. All electricity generated on the island of Ireland is sold into a central pool which is made available to all electricity suppliers on the island to buy from and sell on to customers. Its aim is to increase security of supply and to reduce prices by making generation more efficient and competitive.</p>

## About switching suppliers

<p><b>Can I switch electricity suppliers now?</b></p>	<p>From June 2010 domestic customers will have a choice of electricity supplier. See Question 2 for the current list of electricity suppliers (at June 2010). The Consumer Council (<a href="http://www.consumerCouncil.org.uk">www.consumerCouncil.org.uk</a>) and the Utility Regulator (<a href="http://www.uregni.gov.uk">www.uregni.gov.uk</a>) will continue to keep an up to date list of electricity suppliers operating in the Northern Ireland market.</p>
<p><b>I want to change supplier, what should I do?</b></p>	<p>Switching supplier is relatively straightforward. Your new chosen company will guide you through the standard process for switching supplier. Contact the Consumer Council or Utility Regulator for more information on your choice of electricity supply companies.</p> <p>The Consumer Council is producing a simple leaflet to explain the switching process for domestic customers, which will be available from 1 June 2010. It will be available to download at <a href="http://www.consumerCouncil.org.uk/publications">www.consumerCouncil.org.uk/publications</a> or alternatively you can request a hard copy by phoning freephone 0800 121 6022.</p>
<p><b>How long will the switching process take?</b></p>	<p>Following your initial contact with your new supplier, it should take a number of weeks for your electricity supply to be switched over. This includes a statutory 'cooling off' period in case you change your mind.</p>
<p><b>Am I tied into a fixed-term contract?</b></p>	<p>There is no minimum or fixed term contract for customers who switch to a new electricity supplier, and the processes are in place to allow customers to change to a different supplier at any time.</p>
<p><b>If I change electricity supplier will anything need to change in my home?</b></p>	<p>In the majority of cases nothing will change, although there may be exceptions. Your supplier will advise you of any additional changes of equipment.</p> <p>NIE will continue to be responsible for your meter and pass any relevant information onto your supplier, for example your meter readings.</p>
<p><b>I am a tenant (i.e. I don't own the property) - can I switch supplier?</b></p>	<p>If you are the account holder i.e. the bill is in your name, then yes, you can switch supplier. If the account is not in your name, you should discuss switching suppliers with the account holder.</p>
<p><b>I'm a keypad customer, what are my options?</b></p>	<p>In the future, arrangements will be in place to allow new suppliers to offer services to keypad metered customers. It is best to check the options available directly with your chosen supplier. Airtricity will be accepting keypad customers by April 2011.</p>
<p><b>I'm putting in a new connection but don't want my electricity to</b></p>	<p>Once NIE, the electricity network business which owns the wires and meters, has fitted and energised your meter, you will receive a letter providing you with details on how to select your supplier of choice.</p>

<b>be supplied by NIE Energy. What do I do?</b>	
<b>Can I switch again if I don't like the new supplier?</b>	Yes – the processes are in place to allow customers to change to a different supplier. A customer can either switch back to NIE Energy, or chose to switch to another supplier. .
<b>Will it cost me anything to switch?</b>	There is no cost for switching supplier. However, customers should check with their new supplier if a deposit will be required and if so, how much it will be.
<b>Will I save money on my bill?</b>	The suppliers will be able to provide you with details of their tariffs and discounts they may offer.
<b>Who do I call if I have a query about my bill?</b>	If you have questions about your bill, you will need to contact your electricity supplier in the first instance. Your supplier's contact details will be clearly printed on your electricity bill as well as on the Utility Regulator and Consumer Council websites.
<b>If I have a problem with my supplier, who do I complain to?</b>	Customers who have a problem or complaint should contact their supplier in the first instance. This will allow the supplier the opportunity to put things right. If you are unable to resolve the complaint with the supplier you should contact the Consumer Council on freephone 0800 121 6022 or e-mail <a href="mailto:complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk">complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk</a> . The Consumer Council has the statutory responsibility to represent energy, water and transport consumers and can handle the complaint on your behalf.
<b>Is there help for customers with special requirements?</b>	<p>If you are registered as a customer with special requirements with your current supplier and you choose to switch, you will need to discuss this with your new supplier.</p> <p>Customers who depend on electricity for life supporting electrical equipment can join NIE's Critical Care Scheme. Details of this are available from NIE directly at <a href="http://www.nie.co.uk/customerinformation">www.nie.co.uk/customerinformation</a>, or from the Consumer Council at <a href="http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk">www.consumercouncil.org.uk</a> or by phoning freephone 0800 121 6022.</p>
<b>Will customer service standards be the same across all companies?</b>	All supply companies must submit five codes of practices (covering complaint handling, bill payment, special assistance for customers with special needs, energy efficiency and services for pre-payment meter customers) which must be approved by the Utility Regulator, after consultation with the Consumer Council. There are set minimum levels of customer service within each code of practice. These codes of practice can be found on the website of all supply companies.

## Additional queries

<b>Who will read my electricity meter?</b>	NIE will continue to read, test and inspect the meters of all electricity customers. The meter readings will be passed to your electricity supply company who will issue your bill.
<b>My meter has already been read by Airtricity. Why does NIE need to read it too?</b>	Your new supplier may take a one-off meter read to facilitate switching suppliers. This is so that it can calculate your opening bill and so your former supplier can calculate your closing bill. From then on, NIE will continue to read your meter on a scheduled (quarterly) basis and pass this information onto your new supplier. Additionally, your new supplier will accept meter reads provided by you at any time between scheduled meter reads.
<b>What will I do if there is a power cut?</b>	Regardless of your supplier, NIE, the electricity network business which owns the wires and meters, will still be responsible for transporting power to homes and businesses. If your electricity goes off, or you have a problem with your electricity, you should contact NIE on 08457 643643.
<b>Will switching affect the supply of electricity I receive?</b>	No, the quality of the supply you receive will be the same regardless of your supplier. In the event of a power cut, NIE will treat all customers equally and endeavour to get you reconnected as soon as possible. Changing your electricity supplier will not affect the safety or reliability of your electricity supply.