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Eimear Smyth
Gas Supply and Distribution Division
The Utility Regulator
Queen's House
10-14 Queen's Street
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23 July 2009

Dear Eimear,

CONSULTATION ON PREPAYMENT GAS METERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Energy Saving Trust is pleased to respond to this Consultation.

For some customers Pay As You Go (PAYG) meters can help them to better manage their energy consumption. This can help them to save money and reduce their carbon emissions¹. The Energy Saving Trust is therefore broadly supportive of steps to enable an increase in the proportion of PAYG meters, where requested by consumers.

While the cost/benefit analysis in the consultation document suggests that any net cost to suppliers of PAYG meters is marginal, it is important that the Regulator takes steps to ensure that consumers do not bare unjustified costs.

Smart meters have the potential to allow households to monitor both electricity and gas consumption in real-time. Such meters can potentially offer the full advantages of PAYG meters plus additional advantages of increased awareness and better billing. Care should be taken to ensure that PAYG meters do not become stranded assets with a future roll out of smart meters.

We are currently undertaking research in to the types of information and displays which will be most useful for engaging consumers and enabling them to reduce their energy consumption. We would be happy to share the results when this work is complete.

While improved awareness of energy use is useful, householders need further support to help reduce their energy consumption. Recipients of PAYG meters must be shown how to use them properly and what information the meters provide. Installation of PAYG meters must also be linked with existing advice and support programmes such as those run by the Northern Ireland Energy Saving Trust advice centre, to ensure householders are aware of what other actions they can take to reduce their energy consumption.

Noel Williams
Head of Energy Saving Trust (Northern Ireland)

¹ Darby (2006) The Effectiveness of Feedback on Energy Consumption: A review for DEFRA of the literature on metering, billing and direct displays, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford