

**Customer Services Standards
Report
2000/2001**

Report on Customer Services Standards 2000/2001

This report has been prepared by the Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland under Article 45 of the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

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Introduction to Standards of Performance

The promotion of good customer service is a major objective of the Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland. Each year since 1994 he has reported on the performance of Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) in providing services for electricity customers. This report sets out NIE's performance for the period 1 April 2000 - 31 March 2001 measured against a number of criteria. These are:

- **Guaranteed Standards of Performance**, which set service levels for a number of activities and which must be met in each individual case. If NIE fails to provide the level of service required, it must make a payment to each individual customer affected. The guaranteed standards are shown in table 1 opposite;
- **Overall Standards of Performance**, cover areas of service where customers in general have a right to expect pre-determined minimum levels of service from NIE. NIE is required by law to conduct its business in such a way as can reasonably be expected to lead to achievement of the standards. The overall standards are shown in table 2;
- **Exemptions from making Guaranteed Standards payments**, which generally occur when NIE's default is due to external factors beyond its control - such as severe weather;
- **OFREG referred complaints**, which occur when customers are dissatisfied with the response NIE has made to a complaint and request OFREG to take up the case on their behalf; and
- **Domestic disconnections for non-payment**, where electricity supply has been cut off to domestic premises in the reporting period.

In previous years in its annual Customer Services Report Ofreg provided customer service data from the Public Electricity Suppliers (PES) in Great Britain and this information was used to make comparisons with NIE's performance, particularly with those GB PES which were most similar in characteristics to NIE. Like with like comparison between NIE and individual GB PES is no longer possible for three reasons:

- the re-structuring of the GB electricity industry into separate distribution and supply companies (a distribution company is a company that transports electricity through regional distribution networks; a supply company provides electricity to domestic and commercial companies; NIE combines distribution and supply);
- the right of GB customers to purchase their electricity from any competing supplier in England, Scotland or Wales;
- the minor divergence in guaranteed and overall standards performance targets between NIE and GB electricity companies.

In this report appropriate tables compare NIE's performance against the aggregated performance of GB electricity companies.

Table 1 - Guaranteed Standards of Performance 2000/2001.

Service	Performance Level	Penalty Payment
1.Replacing NIE's main fuse after failure	Within 3 hours on a working day. within 4 hours on any other day	£25
2.Restoring supply after distribution faults	Within 24 hours of supplier becoming aware of fault	£50 domestic customers £125 non-domestic customers plus £25 for each additional 12 hours.
3.Installing a meter and turning on electricity supply	Within 2 working days domestic customer or within 4 working days non-domestic customers	£25 plus £50 domestic or £125 non-domestic for failure to keep appointment.
4.Providing an estimate for changing the position of a meter or for a new electricity supply	Within 7 working days for connections to existing lines and 15 working days for others	£50
5.Notice of planned interruption to supply	3 days	£25 domestic customers £50 non-domestic customers
6.Investigating voltage complaints	Within 7 working days to make an appointment. Within 5 working days to offer an explanation.	£25 plus £25 for failure to keep an agreed appointment.
7.Investigating meter accuracy disputes	Within 7 working days to make an appointment . Within 5 working days to offer an explanation.	£25 plus £25 for failure to keep an agreed appointment.
8.Responding to queries on charges or payments	Within 5 working days to reply or make a refund if required.	£25
9.Morning and afternoon appointments to be offered and kept	Between 8.30 am - 1.00 pm or 12 noon - 5.00 pm.	£25
10.Making of payments owed under the standards	Within 10 working days	£25
11. Dealing with pre-payment meter problems	Within 3 hours on a working day Within 4 hours on any other day	£25

Table 2 - Overall Standards of Performance 2000/2001.

Service	Performance Level
1a. Reconnection within 3 hours	87% within 3 hours
1b. Reconnection within 24 hours	100% within 24 hours
2. Correction of voltage fault	100% within 6 months
3a. Connection to the systems (domestic)	100% within 30 working days
3b. Connection to the systems (non-domestic)	100% within 40 working days
4. Reconnection after default	100% the next working day after arrears are paid
5. Meter relocation	100% within 15 working days
6. Changing meter	100% within 10 working days
7. Meter reading	99.5% at least once a year
8. Response to letters	100% within 10 working days.



Guaranteed Standards of Performance

Table 3 - shows that in the twelve months ended 31 March 2001, NIE made 17 payments under the Guaranteed Standards compared with 27 in the previous year.

Table 3 - Number of Guaranteed Standards payments made by NIE.

Guaranteed Standard	1999/2000	2000/2001
1. Main fuse replacement	0	0
2. Restoration of supply after distribution faults	14	10
3. Provision of new supply	1	0
4. Estimate for new supply	0	0
5. Notice of planned supply interruption	9	3
6. Voltage complaints	0	0
7. Meter accuracy (voluntary standard)	1	0
8. Billing and payment queries	0	2
9. Appointments	1	1
10. Payments	1	0
11. Prepayment meters	0	1
Total	27	17



Table 4 - Guaranteed Standards payments comparison with all GB electricity companies 2000/2001.

GS	Number of Payments		Number of Payments per 100,000 tariff customers	
	NIE	Average for all GB Electricity Companies	NIE	All GB Electricity Companies
1	0	5.1	0.00	0.30
2	10	68.1	1.43	3.98
3	0	0.1	0.00	0.01
4	0	1.4	0.00	0.08
5	3	20.7	0.43	1.21
6	0	0.9	0.00	0.05
7	0	4.2	0.00	0.25
8	2	37.0	0.29	2.16
9	1	73.5	0.14	4.29
10	0	23.4	0.00	1.37
11	1	3.5	0.14	0.20
Total	17	237.9	2.43	13.9

Table 4 indicates that NIE's performance per 100,000 customers was better than the aggregated performance for electricity companies in Great Britain when compared against each of the eleven Guaranteed Standards.

Overall Standards of Performance

Table 5 - shows that for the period ended 31 March 2001 NIE has achieved or bettered nine out of ten of the individual targets set for each Overall Standard.

OS	Service	Target	Achieved 1/4/00 to 31/3/01
1a 1b	Reconnection within 3 hours Reconnection within 24 hours	87% 100%	89.23% 100.00%
2	Correction of voltage fault	100%	100.00%
3a 3b	Connection to system (domestic) Connection to system (non-domestic)	100% 100%	100.00% 100.00%
4	Reconnection after default	100%	100.00%
5	Meter relocation	100%	100.00%
6	Changing meter	100%	100.00%
7	Meter reading	99.5%	99.51%
8	Response to letters	100%	99.79%



Table 6 - Overall Standard comparison with all Great Britain electricity companies 2000/2001

OS	Service	NIE	Average for all Great Britain Companies
1a	Reconnection within 3 hours	89.23%	89.1%
1b	Reconnection within 24 hours	100%	99.6%
2	Correction of voltage fault	100%	97.6%
3a	Connection to system (domestic)	100%	100%
3b	Connection to system (non domestic)	100%	100%
4	Reconnection after default	100%	99.5%
5	Meter relocation	100%	100%
6	Changing meter	100%	100%
7	Meter reading	99.51%	98.1%
8	Response to letters	99.79%	99.4%

Table 6 indicates that NIE's performance either equalled or bettered the aggregated performance for electricity companies in Great Britain, when compared against each of the Overall standards.



Exemptions from making Guaranteed Standards payments

Under the terms of the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 1993, NIE is exempted from making payments under the Guaranteed Standards in certain circumstances. These exemptions, set out in table 7 below, are designed to cover cases where failure to meet a particular standard is due to circumstances outside the company's control, and is therefore not directly related to its performance.

NIE has recorded 16,311 exemptions for 2000/2001. Included in this figure are exemptions related to the snow storms in February 2001 for GS2 (restoration of supply) which total 11052. Comparative figures for the number of exemptions recorded in Great Britain are not provided by the GB Electricity Companies.

Table 7 - General exemptions 2000/2001

	GS1	GS2	GS3	GS4	GS5	GS6	GS7	GS8	GS9	GS10	GS11
Cancellation of obligation by the customer											
Customer agrees alternative action by NIE	1		925	56		12			573		18
Information not supplied to proper address/number or outside reasonable hours											
Action impractical due to:											
severe weather		11052									
industrial action											
actions of third parties			839			1			132		
no access to premises			516	4		1		4	2174		3
action would be illegal											
exceptional circumstances											
Frivolous or vexatious complaints											
Intentional customer interference with plant or meter											
Account remains unpaid after disconnection notice given.											
Total	1	11052	2280	60	0	14	0	4	2879	0	21

Customer Complaints to Ofreg

Ofreg deals with complaints from customers dissatisfied with NIE's service. Customers with an electricity problem should first approach NIE. If the matter is not dealt with to their satisfaction they may refer it to Ofreg.

Table 8 indicates that during 2000/2001 Ofreg received a total of 60 complaints against NIE, a decrease of 61% compared with the 153 for 1999/2000. This equates to 9 complaints per 100,000 tariff customers, which compares favourably with the aggregated figure for all the electricity companies in GB as shown in Table 9 below. The fall in the number of complaints reaching Ofreg is a positive outcome of NIE's focus on customer care.

Ofreg welcomes this reduction in the number of complaints but will continue to pursue a pro-active role during 2001/02 to ensure its complaint handling role is known to all sectors of the Northern Ireland community.

Table 8 - Complaints received by OFREG

Year	Total complaints received	Complaints per 100,000 tariff customers
1994/95	112	18
1995/96	122	19
1996/97	281	43
1997/98	221	33
1998/99	230	34
1999/00	153	22
2000/01	60	9

Table 9- Complaints per 100,000 tariff customers - Year to 31 March 2001

Electricity Company	Complaints
NIE	9
All GB Electricity Companies	84



Domestic disconnections for non-payment

OFREG has continued to monitor the number of domestic customers disconnected for non-payment of electricity charges. Disconnections have been eradicated during the reporting period, mainly due to the installation of pre-payment and keypad meters. This means that customers disconnect themselves only if they fail to purchase the necessary pre-payment meter cards or keypad credits, instead of being disconnected by the electricity company.

Table 10 - Domestic disconnections in Northern Ireland

Year	Total domestic disconnections	Disconnections per 100,000 domestic credit customers
1999/2000	0	0
2000/01	0	0

Table 11 - Domestic disconnections for non-payment of bills per 100,000 tariff customers
- Year to 31 March 2001

Electricity Company	Disconnections
Northern Ireland Electricity	0
All GB Electricity Companies	1.3



Enquiries and further information

If you have any enquiries concerning this document, or the wider work of OFREG, please contact us as shown below.

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Corporate Document Services

Published by
Corporate Document Services
and available from:

Publications Orderline
Corporate Document Services
The Studios
89 Holywood Road
Belfast
BT4 3BD
Tel: 0845 1200386
Fax: 028 9047 1696
E-mail: orderline@corpdocs.co.uk

To order online:
www.corpdocs.co.uk

ISBN 1 841234 656



£6.00