

Professor Stephen Littlechild

Professor Stephen Littlechild, former Director General of Electricity Supply (1989-98) and now Associate of the Energy Policy Research Group at the University of Cambridge, describes how suppliers' positions in the Overall Customer Satisfaction (OCS) League have changed over the past three months.

In early October Citizens Advice published its energy suppliers' customer service scores for Q222. Expressed as percentages, the average score fell by about two percentage points, from 56 to 54. Major reductions were for Good Energy (-11), E (-9) and Shell Energy and Utility Warehouse (-7), whereas E.ON Energy (+6) showed the most improvement. EDF remained the leader on the Citizens Advice ranking (falling from 72 to 70) and Octopus Energy (now 65) replaced Outfox the Market (formerly 65) in second place. Utilita (32) remained at the bottom of that scale, with Ovo Energy next (rising from 42 to 45).

Last Thursday Ofgem published its complaint statistics for Q322. It reported that "Across the market, the number of complaints received by suppliers per 100,000 customer accounts in Q322 increased by 22% from the previous quarter and by 11% from Q321."

In the OCS league, the Ofgem complaint element gives 50% weight to this number of complaints received, and 25% weight to two other Ofgem statistics, related to the proportions of complaints resolved within 24 hours and eight weeks. As of the previous quarter (Q222), the highest ranked suppliers in the OCS league as regards this measure of Ofgem customer complaints were E (90) and Outfox the Market and Utility Warehouse (both 81). Lowest ranked suppliers were Ovo (39), Ecotricity (49), Scottish Power and British Gas (both 51).

The Q322 Ofgem statistics show a dramatic improvement for Ovo Energy (from 39 to 57) and slight improvements for Ecotricity (54) and Scottish Power (53). All other suppliers showed a deterioration, notably So Energy (down 12), Bulb Energy (down 10), E.ON Energy (down 9) and Outfox the Market (down 6).

Admittedly, the Ofgem statistics raise some questions, as noted a while ago. It is not clear whether suppliers report statistics on a uniform basis (re what is a "complaint" and what constitutes "resolved"). And the statistics reported on suppliers' own websites can differ from those reported to Ofgem. Usually any difference is quite small, and the OCS calculations are based on suppliers' own figures where there is a difference.

But Ovo Energy's data seem odd. Its Ofgem-reported number of complaints in Q222 now seems to be significantly lower than it was at the time of the last OCS report. For the first time in years, Ovo Energy is now reporting current complaints data on its own website, and those data for Q2 and Q322 are about half the levels reported by (and to) Ofgem. (They also imply Ovo Energy customer numbers increasing from 2.9m to 3.4m over the two quarters.) Ovo Energy's PAYG associate Boost now reports separate data, which in contrast show slightly higher complaints ratios than the Ofgem data. The present OCS calculations for Ovo Energy and Boost are based on the figures presently posted by Ofgem, but even so, as will be seen, the impact of recent data is significant.

The third element in the OCS League is the annual score from Which? magazine, which is unchanged from last quarter. The fourth element is the score from Trustpilot, which gradually evolves on a daily basis. Over the last quarter, EDF Energy and British Gas have improved their ratings slightly (up by 2), several suppliers remain unchanged, several have fallen slightly (again by 2), while three suppliers (Boost, E and Scottish Power) have fallen by 4.

What effects do these recent developments have on the OCS League? Figure 1 shows the scores and rankings for 13 suppliers for five dates from 6 April to 25 November 2022. (As noted before, unfortunately Which? magazine does not provide ratings for Good Energy and Ecotricity, nor for E, which still has the highest Ofgem score.)

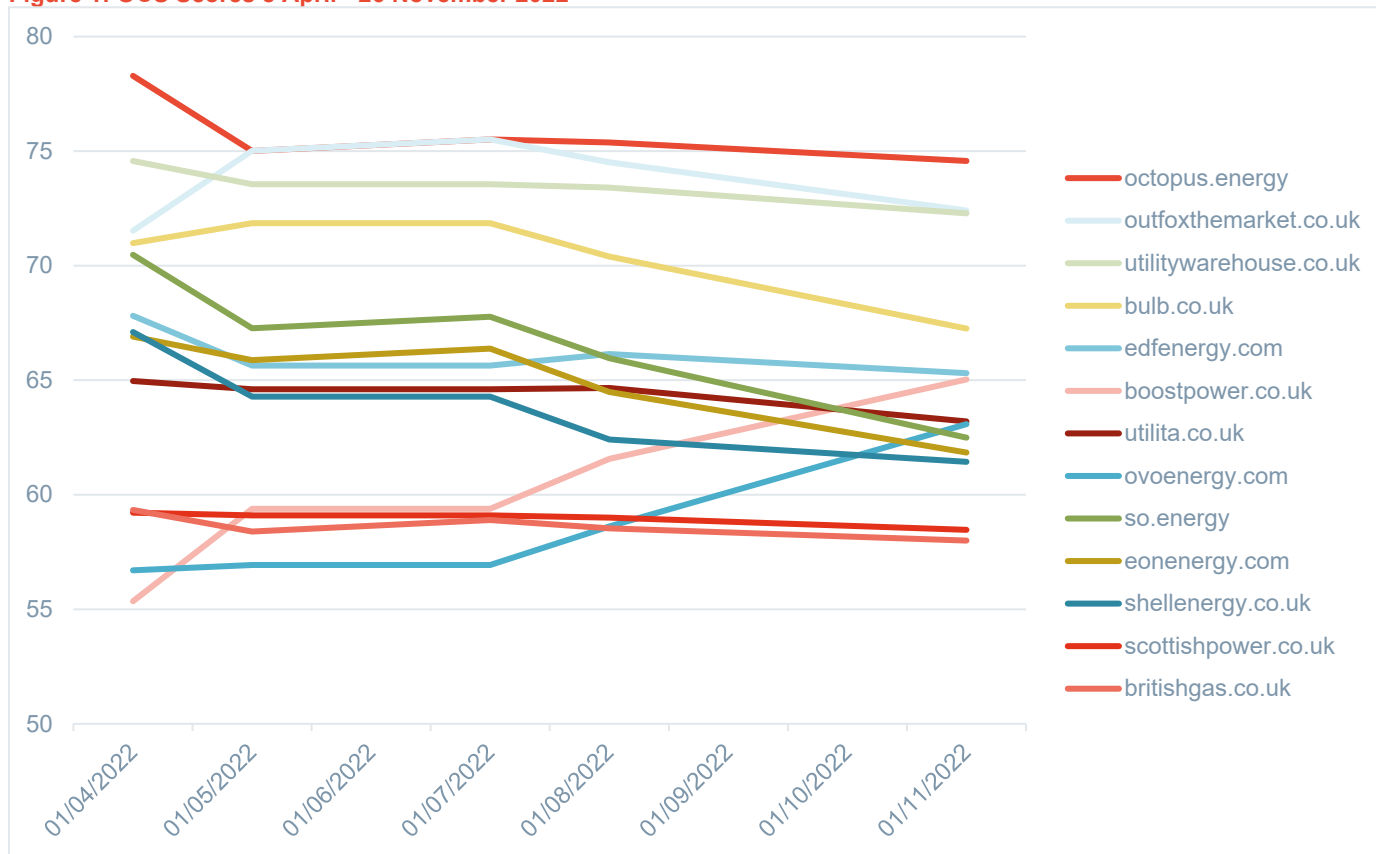
Octopus Energy, Outfox the Market and Utility Warehouse still hold their leading positions, by some margin the three suppliers rated most highly by and on behalf of customers. Bulb continues its decline but remains

above the other suppliers.

EDF Energy and Utilita moreorless hold their central positions in the League. So Energy and E.ON Energy continue to decline somewhat. Scottish Power and British Gas hold steady, but at the bottom of the League.

Most striking, of course, is the dramatic rise of Ovo Energy and Boost, from bottom of the League in April to mid-table now. (And if the complaints data on Ovo Energy’s own website had been used, Ovo Energy would now be edging the top third but Boost would be lower.) Their Ofgem complaints data require further clarification.

Figure 1: OCS Scores 8 April - 26 November 2022



Source: Professor Stephen Littlechild