

### How to measure quality of customer service?

There seems to be a demand for information about the quality of customer service provided by energy suppliers, but there is far from agreement on how to measure that quality. In consequence, various bodies that provide such information periodically review the approach they take and often make changes to how they do the calculations. For example, about three years ago Which? magazine decided to base its ratings not only on its own in-house assessment of each supplier but also on a survey of what energy customers thought of suppliers.

More recently, Citizens Advice has just concluded a consultation on its own in-house method of assessing the suppliers. This seems to have generated some strong views among suppliers themselves.<sup>1</sup> For example, some suppliers criticise the lack of reference to customer views, while others are concerned about an undue emphasis on time taken to respond to customers as opposed to satisfactorily resolving any problems. A third concern is around the definition of a complaint as “any expression of customer dissatisfaction”, which is open to different interpretations. The rating of any supplier can vary substantially from one body to another. For example, Citizens Advice currently ranks Utilita in the bottom three suppliers while Which? magazine puts it in the top three.

### The Overall Customer Service league

No doubt there is always scope for improvement in ratings methodologies, but it seems likely that there will continue to be differences of view between various customer bodies, and between them and customers themselves, resulting in continuing differences in their rankings of suppliers' performance. It therefore seemed sensible to look across a collection of such ratings, to get a fuller picture. An average of these different ratings would indicate which suppliers were best able to demonstrate good quality of customer service across a variety of criteria, and over time.

Hence the Overall Customer Service (OCS) league. For each supplier, I have been recording the scores it obtains in ratings by Ofgem, Which? magazine, Citizens Advice, and by customers themselves on Trustpilot. The Ofgem rating is a combination of three aspects of the complaints data filed by the companies, with 50% weight for percentage of customers making a complaint in any quarter and 25% each for percentage of customer complaints resolved by end of next working day and within eight weeks. Each of these four ratings is expressed as a percentage, and the OCS score is the average of these four percentages. I started the OCS calculations in Q4 2017, and last year surveyed six years of OCS scores.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the average Which? score, which partly reflected customers' own views, scored higher than the average Ofgem and Citizens Advice scores. The average TrustScore was significantly higher still, rising notably over the initial period as suppliers became more conscious of it. The average OCS score was higher for Large and Medium new entrant suppliers than for initial 'Big Six' suppliers. For the most part the surviving Small new entrants scored very highly, whereas the Small suppliers that exited the market had extremely variable scores.

### Revised developments in Q3 2024

More recently I looked at developments in the OCS league in Q3 2024 and also explored the suppliers who had obtained the highest scores over the whole period.<sup>3</sup> Nine suppliers scored 80% or over in at least one

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<sup>1</sup> Dorjee Wangmo, “Suppliers' verdict on Citizens Advice customer rankings”, *Utilities Weekly*, 7 February 2025.

<sup>2</sup> “Six years of customer service ratings of energy suppliers”: Part 1, *Energy Spectrum*, Issue 889, 5 February 2024, pp 23-4; Part 2, *Energy Spectrum*, Issue 892, 26 February 2024, pp 23-4; Part 3, *Energy Spectrum*, Issue 895, 18 March 2024, pp 23-4. My OCS (and other) publications are available at <https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/centres/energy-policy-research-group/publications/> then enter Littlechild in the search box.

<sup>3</sup> *Energy Spectrum*, Issue 932, 23 December 2024, pp 20-21.

quarter. In its earlier days, So Energy obtained the highest score of 90% and scored 80% or over in no less than 10 quarters. But I suggested that Octopus Energy was the customer service GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) for its maximum score of 87% and 14 quarters at 80% or higher.

In that review of developments in Q3 2024 I included the latest quarterly reports by Ofgem and Citizens Advice but failed to wait for the annual update by Which? magazine, which was published in January 2025 but refers back to scores calibrated in Q3 2024. The previous Which? scores therefore appeared, incorrectly, in five quarterly OCS calculations. So the rest of this section is a recalibration of the previous incorrect calculation for Q3 2024.

The latest Which? scores are broadly similar to last year, with Octopus Energy (74%) and Utility Warehouse (73%) at the top and British Gas, OVO Energy, and So Energy (all 58%) at the bottom. Ditto with the slightly later TrustScores, with only E and So Energy fractionally down.

Figure 1 shows the scores of all 14 suppliers presently in the OCS league. The initial score dated 5/10/2024 is for Q2 2024, the middle score dated 14/12/24 is the previous incomplete score for Q3 2024 and the third scored dated 22/01/2025 is the revised score for Q3 2024.

E (84%) is soaring away at the top. Outfox the Market (77%) is holding steady in second place whereas Utility Warehouse (76%) has dropped off a point

compared to the previous calculation but is steady relative to the previous quarter. Ecotricity (74%) continues to fall slightly. Then come Cooperative Energy and Utilita (72%) and Octopus Energy (71%). If we divide the 14 suppliers into two divisions, these are what we might loosely think of as the first division of the OCS league. Interestingly, all are new entrants into the sector.

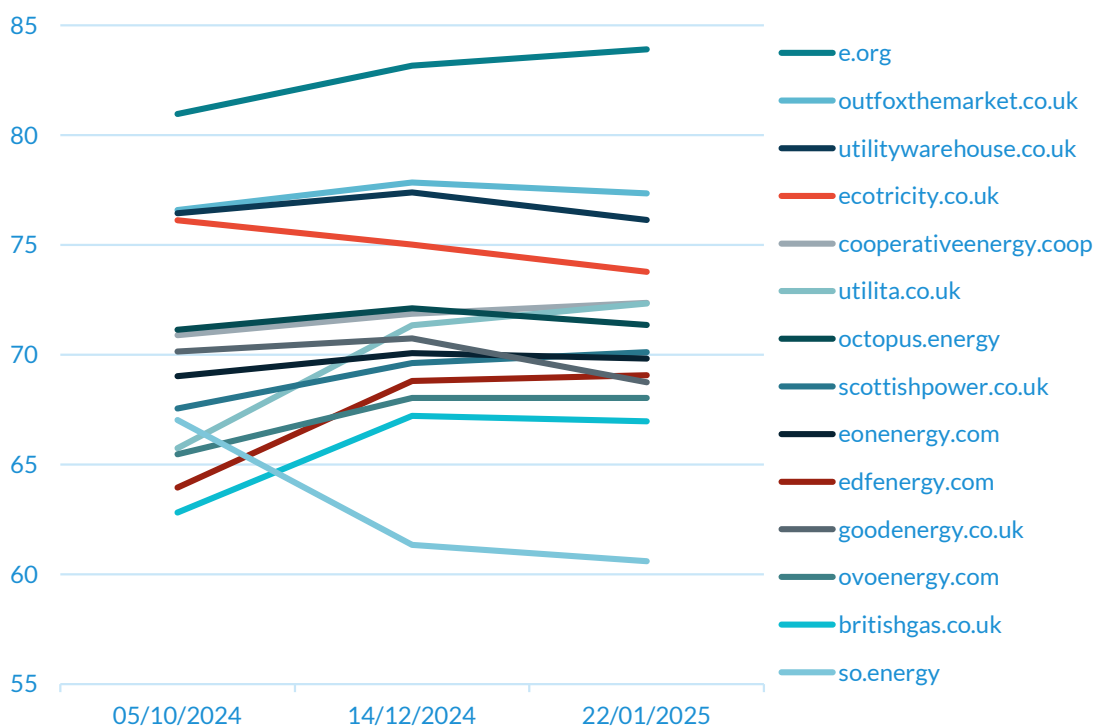
In the second division are Scottish Power and E.ON (70%), EDF Energy and Good Energy – which fell slightly – (69%), OVO Energy (68%), and British Gas (67%). Far behind, in contrast to its earlier days, is So Energy (61%).

### Possible new entrants to the OCS league

Over time, the number of suppliers in the energy sector has varied considerably, reflecting the number that were rated by all four organisations in the OCS calculation. Thus, in Q4 2017 there were 22 suppliers in the league, by Q3 2019 this had risen to 30, but by Q3 2020, just one year later, it was down to 20. By the latest quarter Q3 2024 it had fallen to 14 suppliers, the lowest number ever in the OCS league. The most recent exits were Shell Energy and BoostPower, both now absorbed into their parent organisations (Octopus Energy and OVO Energy, respectively).

What new smaller suppliers might take their place in due course? None have yet been scored by all four organisations but let's consider three potential candidates.

**Figure 1: Revised OCS League Q3 2024**



Source: Professor Stephen Littlechild

Tru Energy – whose domestic brand is Huddle Utilities – has voluntarily provided customer service data to Ofgem since 2018, achieving an average score of 67% over the last year, slightly above the average (for OCS suppliers) of 63%. This quarter, for the first time, it received a Citizens Advice rating: 2.8/5 or 56%, somewhat below the OCS average of 64%. As Huddle it has had over 1,100 reviews on Trustpilot and its present score is 3.7/5 or 74%, again well below the OCS average of 89%. However, it has not yet been reviewed by Which? because it did not get the requisite 50+ responses. More on this below.

100Green (formerly Green Energy UK) is now rated by Which? at 70%, consistent with the OCS average of 70%. It has provided Ofgem customer service information since 2018: averaging 73% in the last year, well above the OCS average. It has had over 1,200 Trustpilot reviews since 2016 and is presently rated at 4.2/5 or 84%, slightly below the OCS average. But it still has no Citizens Advice star rating, because it is said not to meet that organisation's threshold of 25,000 customer accounts, although I understand that other estimates put its number of customer accounts at about that level. And it seems that 100Green received no less than 191 customer responses in the Which? sample, putting it about mid-table, with more responses than Cooperative Energy (177) and So Energy (164), many more than Good Energy (116) and Ecotricity (115), and about double the number of responses of Outfox the Market (86). Again more below.

Rebel Energy has a very good Trustpilot rating of 4.5 (90%), having received some 3,002 reviews since January 2023. It has also received a star rating by Citizens Advice during the last three quarters: starting at 2.7/5 or 54% in Q1 and Q2 2024 but falling to the lowest position at 1.8/5 or 36% in Q3 2024. Its Which? position is slightly puzzling since it received a customer score of 64% based on 52 customer responses, even though a footnote says, "Rebel Energy received too few responses in our survey to be given a customer score". But apparently "it did not complete our survey questionnaire", so there is no Which? assessment score and hence no total score. Surprisingly, Rebel Energy does not provide Ofgem customer service data. If it does indeed have 25,000 customers – and I understand it may well be more than that – then provision of Ofgem customer service information would seem appropriate.

One final note on the Which? sample sizes, which determine whether Which? can assess a supplier. My calculations suggest that, for the six Large suppliers, the number of responses per 100,000 customers is roughly in the range 15-20. For Medium suppliers it is roughly in the range 25-50. For Small suppliers like E, Good Energy, and Rebel Energy it is in the range 100-150. But for 100Green it is over 700. These ratios seem to suggest that Which? is making an effort to focus its questionnaires on Medium and especially Small suppliers, to ensure that it assesses as many suppliers as possible. Which seems helpful. But has it gone overboard with 100Green? And can it not get Tru Energy and Rebel Energy into the fold?