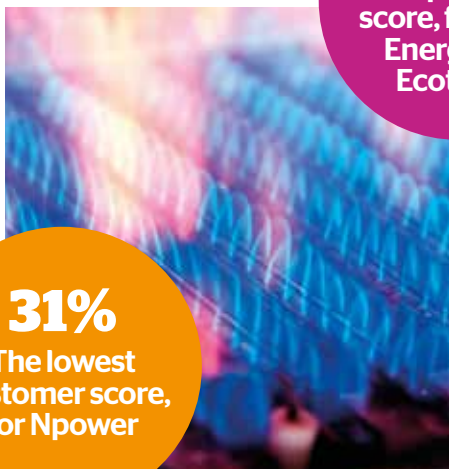




**8,525**  
people responded  
to our energy-  
company  
survey

**82%**  
The top customer  
score, for Good  
Energy and  
Ecotricity



**31%**  
The lowest  
customer score,  
for Npower

**20%**  
trust gas and  
electricity suppliers  
to act in their best  
interest

# BEST ENERGY COMPANIES 2014

More than 8,000 of you have voted in our latest energy-company survey to reveal the top-rated and least-loved energy companies of the year. Read on to see if you should consider switching

**E**nergy prices have risen again this winter, putting further pressure on already hard-pressed consumers. And only 20% say they trust gas and electricity suppliers to act in their best interest. It's little wonder then that our 2014 energy-company customer survey reveals that consumers are less enamoured with the industry than ever. This year, the overall customer score for energy firms

in Britain has dropped from an already meagre 49% to a new low of 41%.

One of the main reasons people say they don't switch energy provider is because they think all providers are the same. But the difference in the customer scores in our survey shows that this is not entirely the case. Green providers Good Energy and Ecotricity emerge jointly victorious, each scoring a table-topping

82%. At the other end of the scale, Npower picks up just 31%.

Overall, small independent suppliers are trouncing the big six energy providers on satisfaction – British Gas, EDF, Eon, Npower, SSE and Scottish Power – who all sink to the bottom of the table.

However, switching to our top-rated gas and electricity companies won't necessarily get you the lowest price. To help you get an idea of cost, our reviews of the companies rated in our survey give you the cost of the supplier's cheapest dual-fuel deal\*.

This year, for the first time, enough customers have responded to our survey

## How we rate energy suppliers

In October and November 2013, we surveyed 8,525 UK energy bill-paying adults about their energy suppliers. Customer scores are based on overall satisfaction and the likelihood of recommending the company to a friend. Results are weighted by the number of domestic accounts each company supplies, based on data from the energy firms. A company has to get at least 30 respondents to make it into our results table. We also asked respondents about attitudes to switching.

Find out more about each supplier, including how they changed prices over time, at [www.which.co.uk/energyfirmsreviewed](http://www.which.co.uk/energyfirmsreviewed)



ENERGY COMPANIES RATED							
		Customer service	Value for money	Bills (accuracy and clarity)	Complaints	Helping you to save energy	CUSTOMER SCORE
<b>ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES</b>							
1	<b>GOOD ENERGY (65)</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	<b>82%</b>
=	<b>ECOTRICITY (65)</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	<b>82%</b>
3	<b>UTILITY WAREHOUSE (129)</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	<b>75%</b>
4	<b>EBICO (98)</b>	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	<b>74%</b>
5	<b>OVO ENERGY (148)</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	<b>73%</b>
6	<b>THE CO-OPERATIVE ENERGY (148)</b>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	<b>64%</b>
7	<b>UTILITA (33)</b>	★★★★	★★★★★	-	-	-	<b>63%</b>
8	<b>FIRST UTILITY (131)</b>	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	<b>58%</b>
9	<b>MARKS AND SPENCER ENERGY (108)</b>	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	<b>51%</b>
10	<b>SPARK ENERGY (62)</b>	★★	★★★★★	★★★	★	★★★	<b>48%</b>
11	<b>SAINSBURY'S ENERGY (55)</b>	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	-	★★★	<b>45%</b>
=	<b>EON (1,107)</b>	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	<b>45%</b>
13	<b>EDF ENERGY (856)</b>	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	<b>44%</b>
14	<b>SCOTTISH POWER (846)</b>	★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	<b>41%</b>
=	<b>SSE (1,112)</b>	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	<b>41%</b>
16	<b>BRITISH GAS (2,279)</b>	★★★	★	★★★	★★	★★	<b>39%</b>
17	<b>NPOWER (892)</b>	★★	★	★★	★	★	<b>31%</b>
<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>							
1	<b>BUDGET ENERGY (39)</b>	★★★	★★★★	★★★	-	★★★	<b>63%</b>
2	<b>AIRTRICITY (94)</b>	★★★	★★★	★★★	-	★★	<b>54%</b>
3	<b>POWER NI (147)</b>	★★★	★★★	★★★	-	★★	<b>45%</b>

Sample size is in brackets. The Customer Score combines customers' overall satisfaction with their likelihood to recommend, and is not directly linked to the star ratings. Overall averages are 41% for GB and 48% for NI, and are weighted for market share of each energy company. 'Helping you to save energy' is a rating of how the supplier helps you to save energy, and 'Complaints' is a rating of how well respondents felt the company was dealing with their complaints. (-) too few responses to give a rating.

for Spark Energy and Utilita to be able to appear in our table. Utilita, which specialises in prepayment customers (or pay-as-you-go), achieves seventh place; while Spark Energy – which has been offering some of the most competitive deals on the market in recent months – scores 48%, with poor ratings for customer service and how it deals with complaints. Both companies score five stars for value for money.

While most companies score lower than last year, Ecotricity and First Utility are the exception. Ecotricity has improved its customer score in the last three years, from 77% in 2012 to 82% in 2014, putting it in top position for the first time. First Utility sees an increase from 43% in 2011 to 58% this year, with customers rating its customer service and the way it deals with complaints much better than last year. >

\* For each supplier we list the cheapest dual-fuel tariff as of 9 January 2014. This is given as a national average for average use (3,200kWh electricity and 13,500kWh gas annually) on a single standard credit meter, paying by monthly direct debit.

## EXPERT VIEW *Big six or independent?*

There are now more than 20 energy suppliers in Britain, but over 90% of the market is still covered by the 'big six'. More people are switching to independent suppliers, and our survey shows you're more satisfied with smaller firms. So should you ditch the big players? Our experts go head-to-head.

### Why I chose Good Energy

Sylvia Baron | Which? Energy expert



I switched to a small supplier because I want independent providers to increase their market share to break the dominance of the big six.

I chose Good Energy as I like the fact that when I call them, I can get through to them quickly; when we investigated waiting times on customer-service numbers (December, p7), it took only 2 minutes 25 seconds to get through, compared with 19 minutes 14 seconds for Npower.

I want to support a firm that matches every unit of electricity I buy with 100% renewable electricity. I may be paying £100 more a year than the cheapest deal, but Good Energy has said it will freeze prices until at least 31 March 2014, and has increased electricity prices only once in the last four years.

### Why I chose Npower

Natalie Hitchins | Which? Home Editor



I'm aware that Npower does badly in our customer surveys. But, like many people, my main consideration was price, and on the day I switched it was the cheapest.

My experiences have been mixed. It took a long time for my account to get set up, then a couple of calls to get an incorrect meter reading sorted out, where I waited on hold for ages. On the plus side, I can ring at weekends when some smaller firms are closed. The website is slick – I like its online monitoring tools and being able to submit meter readings online. But due to a recent computer glitch Npower says many customers will receive late (and higher) bills, and call waiting times are longer due to complaints. Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised.



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★★★**

Good Energy is a small independent supplier providing energy generated by renewables, such as wind, solar, hydro and wave power, to about 35,000 customers. Each unit of electricity purchased by its customers is matched by 100% renewable electricity, mainly from small, local independent generators across Britain.

Unlike most of the other energy providers, Good Energy has only increased its electricity prices once in the last four years. It has simple tariffs, too:

one for dual fuel, one for gas only and one for electricity only.

And households in the south-west of the country, where Good Energy's Delabole wind farm is based, can sign up to a reduced-rate tariff through the 100% South West local tariff.

**PROS** 100% renewable, green, great customer service, simple tariff

**CONS** Not the cheapest on the market

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,173 for its Good Energy and Gas+ tariff

**'We get a personal service and feel that Good Energy really cares about its customers and the environment.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★★★**

Ecotricity is joint best supplier this year, having seen its customer score improve in the last three years. Like Good Energy, it has promised to freeze its prices until April 2014. It has about 80,000 customers and, like Good Energy, scores five stars in each category in our survey.

Ecotricity prides itself in having the lowest number of complaints received per thousand customers compared with most energy providers. While it's not 100% renewable (the provider's fuel-mix data

shows that it was 68% in 2012-2013), Ecotricity says it invests about £280 per customer per year in building new sources of green energy. The company has recently simplified its tariffs further, and now offers just one simple tariff for gas and one for electricity.

**PROS** Green, great customer service, five stars in each category, simple tariff

**CONS** Not the cheapest on the market

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,232 for its Green Energy with Green Gas tariff

**'I find many of my other utility bills very confusing. Ecotricity's are always easy to understand.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★★**

Set up in 2010, this supplier is part of the Midcounties Co-operative – the largest independent co-operative in the UK. Its 150,000 or so customers own it, and members of The Co-operative can get shares of its profits. It was awarded a Which? Positive Change Award in July 2012 and offers one of the cheapest fixed deals on the market. In November 2013, the supplier reduced a planned average price rise of 4.5% to 2.5%.

**PROS** Cheap fixed tariff with no exit fees, ethical, members get share of profits

**CONS** Its customer score and some other ratings have dropped since last year

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,077 for Fixed Price to July 2015 tariff

**'I dislike the way the big six operate and The Co-op is more ethical.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★★**

Utilita is a new entrant in our annual energy satisfaction survey. It specialises in prepayment customers and has developed user-friendly ways to pay as you go using smart meters, allowing customers to top-up online or even by text message. Its customers give it five stars for value for money, although we found a range of tariffs that were cheaper than Utilita for prepayment users.

**PROS** Specialises in prepayment meters, its customers seem satisfied

**CONS** It's not the cheapest for prepayment customers

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,280 for its Smart Energy tariff (prepayment only)

**'I think it tries to be better value for money than the top firms.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

First Utility has more than 300,000 customers and joins Ecotricity as one of the only firms in our survey to improve its score this year. It scored only one star last year for complaints, but this has risen to three stars. The supplier has been offering some of the cheapest deals on the market. But when we investigated how long energy firms leave you on hold when calling their customer-service number, it came last with an average waiting time of more than 25 minutes.

**PROS** One of the cheapest fixed deals on the market

**CONS** Long call waiting times

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,037 for its iSave Fixed v14 July 2015 tariff

**'I have a cheaper tariff than before and it's frozen until 2016.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE** ★★★★★

The seventh largest supplier in Britain, The Utility Warehouse (UW) relies heavily on recommendations from its agents and customers rather than advertising. In our survey, 38% admitted to either being an agent for UW or receiving a discount for recommending someone else. They tended to rate the firm slightly higher than other customers. If we took these 'agents' out, UW's customer score would drop to 66%, falling into sixth place.

**PROS** One bill for all your utilities, receive shopping vouchers for referring friends

**CONS** Despite offering discounts for bundles of services, it's not that cheap

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,164 for Double Gold (if you take more than one other utility)

**'It offers other products that make it a very attractive package.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE** ★★★★★

Ebico is the UK's only not-for-profit energy supplier. It offers a very simple tariff structure with just one unit rate and no standing charge – though this can benefit low users more than high users. The rate is the same for all, whether or not you're a prepayment customer and regardless of your payment method. Ebico doesn't produce the energy it sells but works in partnership with SSE. It has guaranteed its prices until at least autumn 2014.

**PROS** A simple tariff with no standing charge, cheap for low users, the fastest to answer customer calls in our investigation

**CONS** Pricey for medium and high users

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,326 for its Dual Fuel tariff

**'Any dealings I've had, it has been prompt, helpful and friendly.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE** ★★★★★

Ovo is one of the cheapest energy suppliers on the market. It offers two tariffs: a New Energy Plan, which has 15% renewable electricity, and a Green Energy Plan, with 100% renewables. If you're fed up with your energy provider setting your direct debit too high, Ovo gives you the option to take control of your account and offers you a £60 discount if you manage your account online.

**PROS** The cheapest of our top-five energy suppliers

**CONS** Offers fixed deals only, which have cancellation charges

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,041 for its New Energy Fixed + Ovo Just Reward tariff

**'Competitive tariffs - my time with Ovo has been problem free.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE** ★★★

M&S Energy is a partnership between Marks & Spencer and SSE. Its Standard tariff is not the cheapest, but customers might be tempted by the £20 M&S voucher it offers when you sign up. But even with £20 off, it's still more expensive than other deals on the market. And our investigation in March 2012 showed you should generally be wary before signing up to any deal in store. Its brand association with the trusted M&S might explain why it does better in our survey than SSE.

**PROS** Well rated for customer service

**CONS** Though the M&S voucher may sound tempting, the tariff is not cheap

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,212 for its Standard Energy tariff

**'When I have had to contact M&S Energy it has been very helpful.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE** ★★

A new entrant in our survey, Spark Energy has been offering market-leading tariffs. In return, customers of its economical 'advance' tariff have to pay for about a month of use in advance, before they even consume any energy. It scores only one star for how it deals with complaints and two stars for its customer service.

In June last year, Ofgem announced that it's investigating Spark Energy amid concerns over complaints handling, billing issues and customer switching.

**PROS** Cheap, rated good value for money

**CONS** Have to pay a month in advance, low customer service and complaints scores

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,025 for its Direct Debit Advance 3 tariff

**'Spark appears to be totally confused about its own billing process.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE** ★★★

This partnership between Sainsbury's and British Gas scores well for customer service. You may come across its sales reps in Sainsbury's supermarkets. The fact that you can earn Nectar points with Sainsbury's Energy is tempting, although its tariffs are not the cheapest on the market and you would have to balance out whether the points you'll earn are worth it. Our 2012 energy-sales investigation revealed that you should generally be wary of signing up to energy deals in store.

**PROS** Scores well on customer service and billing

**CONS** Not the cheapest

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,092 for its Fixed Price February 2015 tariff

**'The bills make it clear exactly how much and what you're paying for.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

German-owned Eon is the highest scoring of the 'big six' in our survey and picks up three stars across the board. It was the last one of the big six to hike its prices this winter, by an average of 3.7%. It operates a 'loyalty' reward point scheme, where points can be exchanged for Tesco Clubcard points or put towards vouchers to spend on the high street. Eon is now the only big firm not to offer a Freephone number for its customer service department, while its sales line is free.

**PROS** Scores the best out of the big six, offers loyalty rewards

**CONS** No customer service Freephone

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,124 for its Fixed 1 Year (paperless billing) v6 tariff

**'Eon isn't the cheapest, but I have had no problems with it.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

French-owned EDF Energy produces 74% of its electricity from nuclear power. It is the only one of the six major suppliers to back Which? proposals for a single unit price for gas and electricity. It used to be the provider that received the most complaints and still scores only two stars for how it deals with them, but it is improving. In March 2012, EDF agreed to pay a £4.5m fine for misleading sales practices.

**PROS** Good-value fixed deal

**CONS** Not for you if you're against nuclear power, scores only two stars for how it handles complaints

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,084 for its Blue +Price Promise April 2015 tariff

**'My complaint over an incorrect charge was dealt with very poorly.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

Scottish Power is one of the smallest of the major six energy suppliers. In October 2013, the Spanish-owned firm was fined £8.5m by the regulator Ofgem for providing misleading information through its doorstep and telesales agents between October 2009 and January 2012. On the plus side, in November 2013 it finally changed its customer-service number to a free 0800 number (and 03 from mobile phones).

**PROS** Tends to receive the lowest number of complaints of the 'big six' energy companies

**CONS** Was fined for misselling

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,081 for its Online Fixed Price Energy February 2015 v3 tariff

**'It has never sent me anything about how to help me save energy.'**

# Northern Ireland energy firms rated

The electricity market in Northern Ireland only opened up to competition in 2010 and is regulated. Four electricity suppliers currently compete

for customers and we reveal ratings for three of these companies – Budget Energy, Airtricity and Power NI – below. The fourth supplier, Electric

Ireland, didn't receive enough respondents to be included in our survey. To compare prices of gas and electricity in Northern Ireland,

the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland publishes comparison tables on its website [www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy), which anyone can use.



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

Budget Energy entered the Northern Irish energy market after deregulation in 2010 and now has about 50,000 customers. It scores the best for value for money, but in December 2013 it put up its prices by 6.5%.

**'It seems to be slightly cheaper for me than Power NI.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

A wholly owned division of SSE, Airtricity is becoming increasingly popular. It now supplies more than 625,000 customers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It says almost a quarter of its electricity is generated from renewable sources.

**'I think it's about average for best tariffs, but could do better.'**



**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

Power NI is the largest electricity supplier in Northern Ireland, supplying around 600,000 homes. Among its tariffs is an Eco Energy tariff, which matches every unit of electricity customers use with power from local renewable suppliers.

**'Others are allegedly cheaper, but may not have good support.'**

**14** **SSE** **41%**

**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

SSE is the second biggest energy supplier in the UK. It includes household names such as Atlantic Electric and Gas, Scottish Hydro, Southern Electric and Swalec. Its customer score has dropped in our survey – for the past three years it was the best of the big six. Maybe being fined £10.5m in April 2013 for misselling, the largest-ever fine imposed on an energy supplier, has taken its toll.

**PROS** Tends to receive a low number of complaints compared with most of the other 'big six' companies

**CONS** Was fined for misselling, its score and some of its ratings have dropped

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,119 for its one-year Fixed Price

**'I was "doorstepped" and promised a better deal, but it wasn't.'**

**16** **British Gas** **39%**

**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★★**

British Gas is the largest energy supplier in the UK. It ends up at the bottom of our table along with Npower. It was one of the first to simplify its range of tariffs and also tends to be one of the first to announce price rises. In June 2013 it gave £10m to its trust to settle a dispute about whether it had overcharged customers for gas. It's not cheap, and you may get a better deal through the Sainsbury's Energy brand.

**PROS** Big UK brand, good online account-management tool

**CONS** Expensive, only gets one star for value for money

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,193 for its Fix and Gift Card May 2015 tariff

**'It's expensive and seems to be putting up prices for no reason.'**

**17** **npower** **31%**

**CUSTOMER SERVICE ★★**

Npower is owned by German group RWE. In December 2013 it increased its gas prices by 10.4% on average, but then also said it would not increase its energy prices again before spring 2015. The number of complaints keeps rising, and in December 2013 it wrote to its 3.4m domestic customers to apologise for billing glitches. It also took a long time to get through to customer services when we investigated.

**PROS** Its aim is to become number one in the industry for customer experience by 2015, so we can only hope for improvement

**CONS** Only scores one star for value for money, how it deals with complaints, and how it helps you to save energy

**CHEAPEST TARIFF** £1,119 for its Price Fix August 2015 tariff

**'I just can't get through to Npower.'**

## What tariff changes mean for you

Energy-tariff reforms from Ofgem's Retail Market Review are now starting to come into effect. Here we show you some of the changes and what they mean for you

### STANDARD OF CONDUCT

New rules to ensure that energy companies treat customers fairly.

#### What it means for you

Companies must give you accurate and relevant information, use plain English and clear presentation, and treat you fairly in any contact you have with them.

### FIXED-TERM TARIFFS

Ban on automatic rollover and price increases; introduction of a switching window and price-protection window.

**What it means for you** Your supplier can no longer tie you in to another fixed-term tariff

without your consent. It must remind you around 40 days in advance that your deal is coming to an end. No exit fee if you switch from your fixed deal during the switching window at the end of your contract, and prices can't be increased during the price-protection window.

### TARIFF STRUCTURE

Maximum of four tariffs for gas and four for electricity per supplier; standardised tariff structure; end of unfair discounts.

**What it means for you** In theory the end to hundreds of confusing tariffs, but it could

also mean some customers see their tariff withdrawn.

If so, your supplier should inform you. All tariffs will now be made up of a standing charge and a unit rate, but the standing charge can vary between suppliers and tariffs, making comparison difficult.

### CLEARER INFORMATION

Tariff information label, tariff comparison rate (TCR) and personal projection.

**What it means for you** These should make it easier to compare tariffs. But the TCR, an attempt to simplify tariffs by representing them as a single unit rate, is only accurate for medium users. So you still need to check your own consumption to work out what you'd pay on a particular tariff.

## EXPERT VIEW

### A call for better rules

**Fiona Cochrane | Which? Energy Policy Team Leader**



The low level of satisfaction with energy firms is a worrying symptom of a failing market. With the regulator Ofgem producing

its first annual review of competition this spring, our findings demonstrate that it must identify why it is failing and what needs to be changed.

We support the several changes Ofgem has recently introduced, particularly the new Standards of Conduct and the changes to fixed-term contracts. But its new rules on tariffs don't go far enough to boost competition and help consumers find the cheapest deals. It is now time for radical measures to drive competition and improve transparency – such as separating the retail arms of the big providers from the generation side.