



Market Pulse

Energy Consumer Tracker Survey
2017 / 18 / 19

February 2020



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Executive Summary

Part of Citizens Advice Scotland's remit is to represent the views of Scottish energy consumers in devolved and reserved energy policy. We do this with the benefit of evidence wherever possible. To help us do our work effectively we track consumer attitudes to fuel costs and energy suppliers so that we can better understand peoples' views, how views might change over time, and react to new policies.

This is especially important to monitor given the flux in the GB energy retail market and the introduction of policies such as price caps. Over the last three years, we have commissioned the same attitudinal survey with a representative sample of the Scottish population (of bill-payers). The survey was undertaken between March and April in 2017, 2018 and 2019. This paper summarises the results of our third tracker survey in March 2019 and compares them to the first and second tracker results where appropriate.

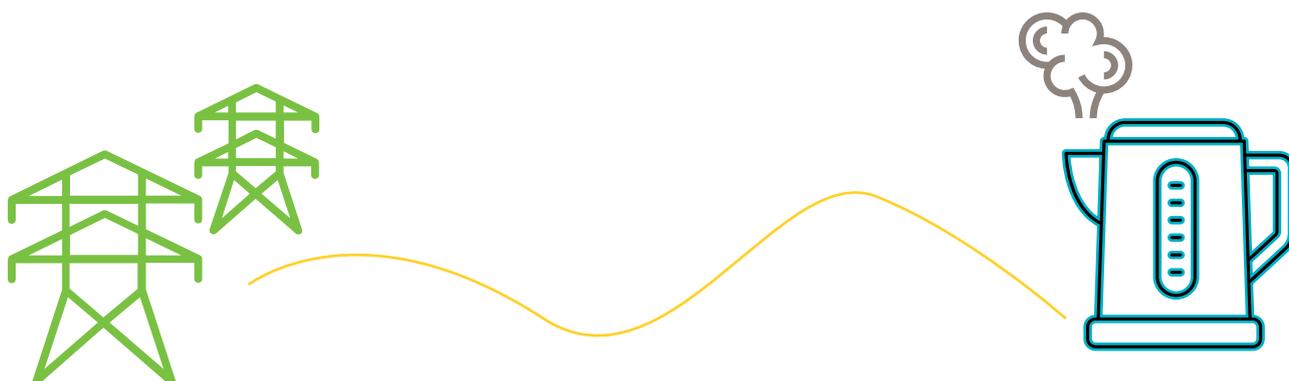
Broadly speaking, consumer attitudes towards switching and affordability of energy have not varied much in the past three years, despite wider policy changes such as the introduction of price caps, the restricted meter remedy and the collapse of a number of suppliers.

What is clear from the data is that different groups in society face very different outcomes. Our results show that a significant proportion of consumers find their energy affordable, are satisfied with their energy supplier and have the

capacity to switch to cheaper deals. However, the results also show that too many people face significant challenges in the market, with for example 12% of respondents saying their bills were unaffordable – something which evidence from the Citizens Advice Network in Scotland supports.

The survey found that almost half of all respondents associate with at least one criterion which may make them more vulnerable and it's important that these consumers are prioritised for advice and support. CAS is committed to working hard to ensure that outcomes improve for those who are struggling and using this work as a foundation, we aim to quickly improve outcomes for these consumers.

Some of the key findings are illustrated below and the remaining sections describe the results in more detail.



Survey Results

Energy Supply: Our survey results show that most Scottish residents (73%) use mains gas as their primary source of heat, while 17% use electricity and 6% rely on oil. Mains gas as the primary heat source is most common in urban areas and towns, while oil is the most common in remote rural areas. The percentage of residents using gas or oil as their primary heat sources have stayed relatively steady across the three surveys, while the use of electric heating has decreased somewhat.

Energy Supplier: The number of Scottish respondents who use Big Six suppliers for their energy dropped noticeably between 2017 and 2019, from 75% to 67%. Of this group, British Gas has the largest proportion at 18%, followed by Scottish Power at 16% and SSE at 15%.

Bill Payment: Direct debit payments for a set amount each time was the most common method of paying bills. The percentage of those paying by prepayment meters has remained largely the same as 2018, as did those paying by quarterly bills, direct debit for different amounts, paying online with a credit or debit card, and paying on delivery.

Affordability: When asked how they rated the affordability of their fuel bills on a scale of 1 to 5, with a 5 being completely affordable, 38% of respondents ranked their affordability as a 3. Just under half, 48%, rated their bills a 4 or a 5, indicating that they felt their bills were affordable, and 12% rated their bills as a 1 or 2, indicating that they felt their bills were unaffordable. 3% rated their bills “completely unaffordable”.

Attitudes towards energy suppliers: Attitudes towards suppliers did not change much over the 3 year period. 68% of respondents thought their supplier made it easy to contact

them if needed; 64% found the language used in their energy bill easy to understand (those who were not with a Big Six supplier were more likely to agree) and more than half would recommend their supplier to others.

Switching Supplier: The proportion of respondents who had switched supplier in the last twelve months increased by 5% from 21% in 2017 to 26% in 2019. More homeowners than renters had switched (28% vs 21%, and switching was most common among homeowners with a mortgage, 30% of whom had switched in the past twelve months.

Only 16% of switches were to a Big Six company, but Big Six suppliers were the most likely to lose customers¹.

- > The main reason for switching supplier was to get a lower price, which has remained consistent between years. Consideration of switching was the same percentage in 2018 and 2019 but increased significantly from 2017. The main reason those who considered switching did not follow through was never got around to it/lack of time².
- > Respondents were asked to rank three options from a multiple choice list that would encourage them to switch supplier. Lower prices with a new supplier was the main reason people would switch: 52% chose this as a top three reason.
- > Half of respondents who switched supplier used a price-comparison websites. These results are all broadly in line with previous years.
- > 80% of respondents who switched were highly or totally satisfied with the process of switching supplier.

¹ These suppliers have a large customer base. These rates reflect the number of respondents to the survey who have switched away from these companies, not a percentage of the company's customer base.

² Respondents could choose multiple answers.

Switching Tariffs: 22% of respondents had changed tariff with their existing supplier in the past twelve months. 25% of those supplied by the Big Six had changed tariff, compared to 17% of those supplied by other suppliers. The percentage of respondents who had changed tariff has decreased since 2018 and 2017. The most common reasons for switching tariff was for a lower price or because of a capped price/price freeze or because their current tariff had ended.

- > The most common method of switching tariff was through the supplier's website or by contacting the supplier directly

Our results show that 43% of respondents had either switched tariff or supplier in 2019. This number is significant as official switching rates (supplier) lie nearer 20%³ and this is considered to be the national average. We therefore think it's important that switching tariff is also considered when switching rates are used to assess broader market engagement.

Priority Services Register: Almost half of respondents met the criteria to be on the priority services register (PSR)⁴. The profile of those eligible was similar to past years, with aged 65+ and mental or physical ailments/disability or sensory impairment being the most common criteria. The percentage of eligible respondents enrolled on the PSR increased 5% between 2018 and 2019. This reflects the conclusions of CAS' report "Making it Easy," which investigated consumer experiences of the PRS and found that while there are examples of good practice and positive consumer experiences, there are still gaps in consumer awareness and in communication between service providers and the public sector.

³ Ofgem State of the Market Report 2019

https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/system/files/docs/2019/11/20191030_state_of_energy_market_revised.pdf

⁴ The Priority Services Register is a register of vulnerable consumers – consumers who are disabled or have a long-term health condition, are recovering from an injury, have mental health problems, don't speak or read English well, have children under 5 or are pregnant, or have reached State Pension Age. These are self-identified in this survey. See Section 9 for full details.



Note on Methodology

For the full methodology, please refer to the Accent report. This paper presents the results of the March - April 2019 tracker survey (3505 online interviews) and results are compared with findings from the March - April 2017 survey (2067 online interviews) and February-March 2018 survey (3501 online interviews) where possible.

Policy Overview

These results sit within a wider context of policy changes that have occurred between 2017 and 2019. Key policy developments include:

- > **The introduction of Price Caps:** In April 2017, a price cap for consumers on prepayment meter tariffs was introduced. The initial cap was raised in April 2019 and currently sits at £1,242 a year for a dual fuel customer with typical usage. On 1 January, 2019, a price cap on all default and standard variable energy tariffs came into force, capping the default standard variable tariff at £1,254 for dual fuel customers with typical usage. The prepayment meter cap is effective until June 2021. The default tariff cap is in effect until the end of 2020, but could be extended until the end of 2023⁵.
- > **Restricted meter remedy:** At the end of 2016, the Competition and Markets Authority issued the restricted meter remedy, which requires all suppliers with more than 50,000 customers to allow all customers on restricted meter tariffs to switch to non-restricted meter tariffs, without being required to pay a fee or change meter type. Suppliers must also inform their customers of this right⁶. In theory, this has made it easier for consumers with restricted meters to switch supplier.
- > **Suppliers failing:** Twelve suppliers failed between June 2018 and June 2019, which affected close to a million consumers⁷. These companies were found to have consistently poor service, unrealistic pricing, and failed to meet licensing requirements such as renewable obligation certificates. In cases of supplier failure, Ofgem appoints a supplier of last resort to take on the consumers of the failed supplier so that consumers are not disconnected⁸. The supplier of last resort (SOLR) process may help explain why some suppliers had large number of consumers switching to or away from them in a given year, or higher rates of dissatisfaction with suppliers.



⁵ Ofgem. Energy Price caps explained.

⁶ Gov.UK. 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-market-investigation-restricted-meters-order-2016>

⁷ Ofgem State of the Market Report 2019 https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/system/files/docs/2019/11/20191030_state_of_energy_market_revised.pdf

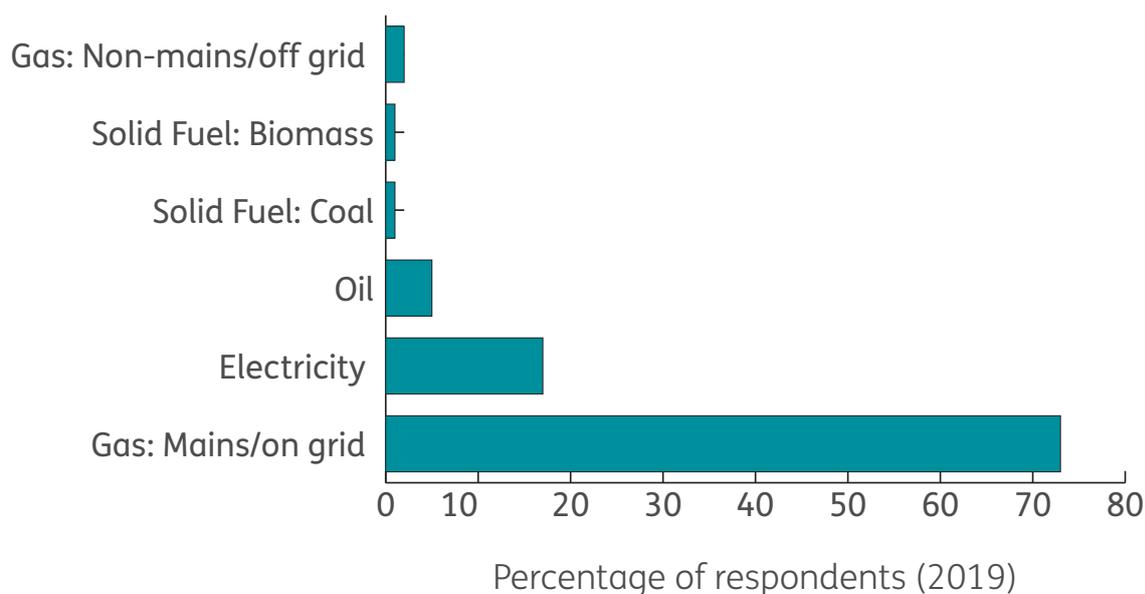
⁸ Citizens Advice. Picking up the Pieces. 2019.

Findings

1. Energy Supply

Our survey showed that mains gas heating is used by 73% of respondents, making it the most common primary heating type. A further 17% use electricity, 5% use oil, 1% use solid biomass fuel, 1% use solid coal fuel, 2% use non-mains gas like LPG or bottled gas. 55% of respondents use electricity as a primary or secondary source of heating (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Primary fuel used for heating



This is a higher proportion of electric heat users than reported by the Scottish House Condition Survey in 2017, which reported 12% of Scottish households use electric heat as their primary heat source⁹. It is unclear why this discrepancy exists.

Our survey showed that in urban areas, mains gas was the most common primary form of heating (79% in large urban areas, 83% in other urban areas) while oil was the most common in remote rural areas and was used an above average amount in accessible rural areas as well as in remote small towns¹⁰. Use of electric heating as the primary source of heating was highest in Glasgow, where 22% of respondents use it, and North East Scotland where 20% reported it as their primary heat source.

⁹ Scottish Housing Condition Survey key findings. 2018.

¹⁰ Above the national average identified by this survey of 6%

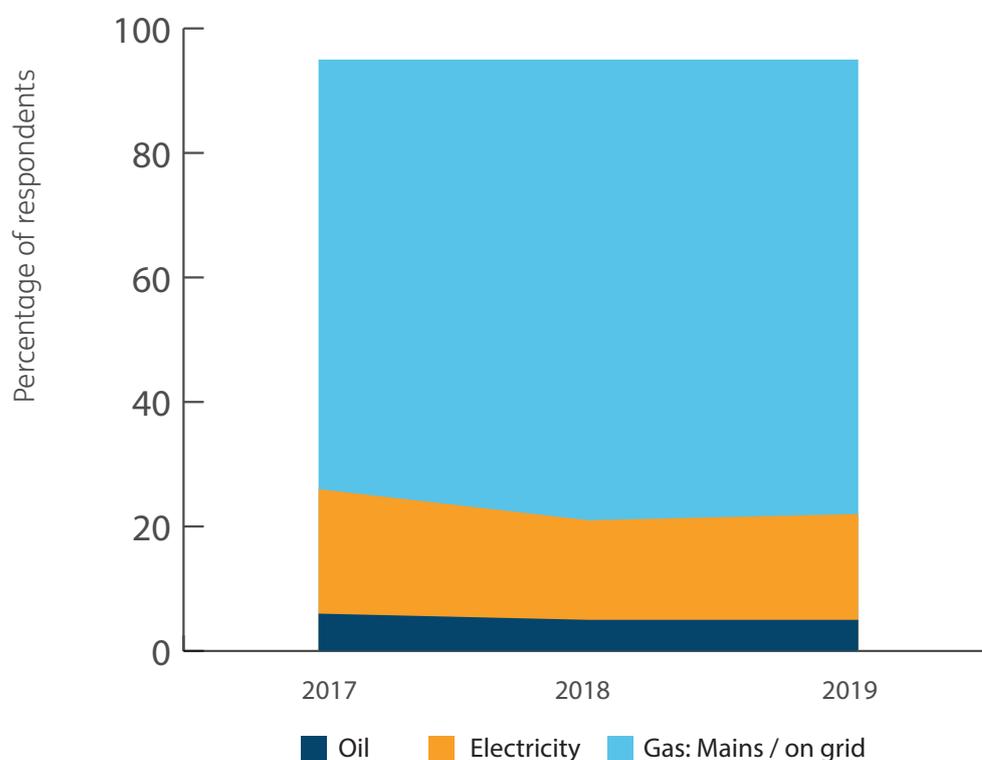


Electric heating was a more common primary source of heating in remote rural areas than urban ones (outside of Glasgow); 27% of remote rural respondents and 25% of remote small town respondents use electricity as some part of their heating.

Electricity and oil usage was highest in the Highlands and Islands. Couples over state pensionable age used oil more than any other age group. In rural areas, 3% of respondents used wood or coal, respectively, for their primary source of heat.

Since 2017, mains gas has increased 4% in use as the primary source of heat while electricity has declined 3% and oil has decreased 1%. Biomass fuel and coal have stayed consistent (See figure 2). Solar thermal heating entered the mix for the first time in 2019, and is not included in the comparative figure (figure 2) for this reason.

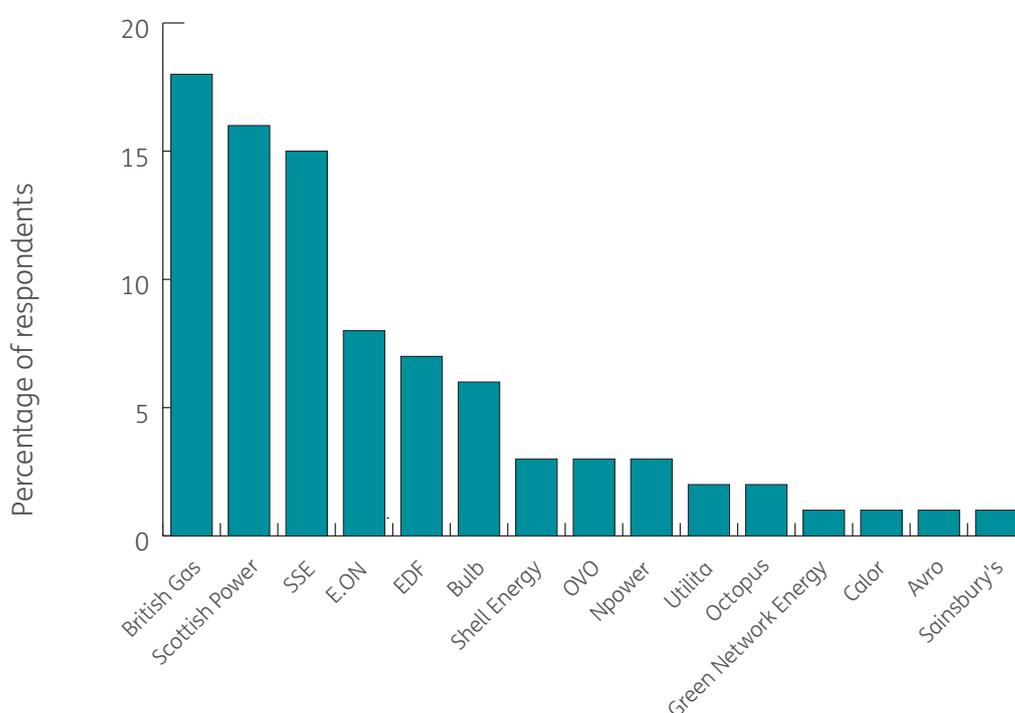
Figure 2: Primary fuel used for heating by year



2. Energy Suppliers

In the 2019 survey, two thirds, or 67% of respondents, were supplied by Big 6 suppliers. This is a noticeable drop from 2018 when 75% of respondents were supplied by the Big 6. Of this group, British Gas has the largest proportion at 18%, followed by Scottish Power at 16% and SSE at 15% (See figure 3)

Figure 3: Energy supplier



The number of respondents supplied by Bulb tripled from 2% in 2018 to 6% in 2019, higher now than Npower. Other small suppliers are also more commonly used by respondents; OVO grew from 2% in 2018 to 3% in 2019 and Utilita grew from 1% in 2018 to 2% in 2019. Both OVO and Utilita took on customers from other suppliers who failed in 2018-2019 (See figure 4)¹¹.

In remote small towns, the Highlands and Islands, and North East Scotland SSE remains the most used supplier. A fifth of respondents in large urban areas used Scottish Power, making it the most common supplier in cities. Scottish Power was particularly common in Glasgow, where it supplies 27% of respondents.

Scottish Power is much more widely used in the rented sector than by homeowners, as is SSE. Scottish Power's high share in the rented sector may be why it is a more common supplier in the under 55 age group than the over 55 age group, as consumers in the private rented sector are generally younger¹² and why it is more commonly used in large urban areas like Glasgow.

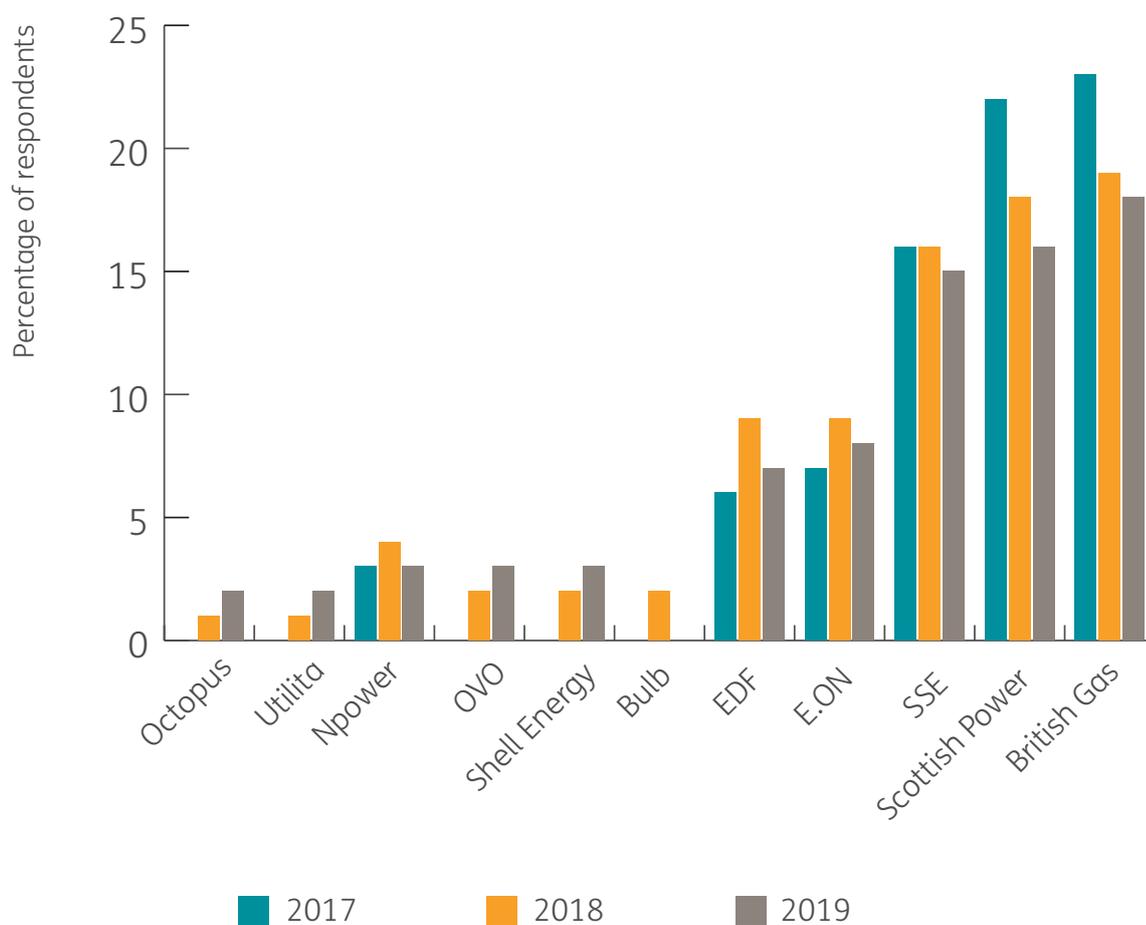
¹¹ OVO took over Economy Energy customers and Utilita took on Our Power customers when Economy Energy and Our Power went into administration

¹² SPICE. 2019. Overview of Private Rented Housing Reforms Scotland.



Additionally, Scottish Power and SSE have traditionally supplied homes with electric heating as they supply restricted meters. Electric heating is prevalent in flats in Scotland -in high rise flats, electric heating is used in 74% of properties¹³. In Glasgow and the North East of Scotland, where Aberdeen and Dundee are, respondents had the highest usage of electric heating as their primary fuel types. Scottish Power and SSE may be more commonly used in the rented sector as they are able to accommodate these heating systems.

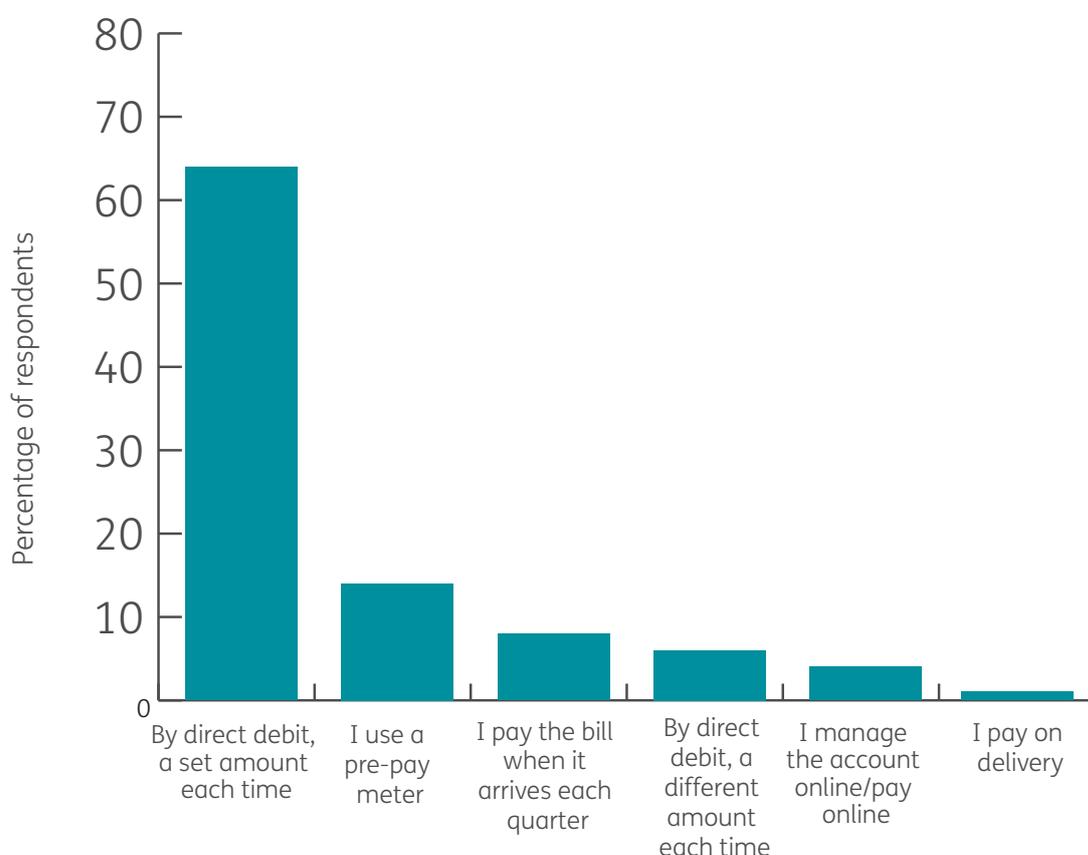
Figure 4: Energy supplier by year



¹³CAS. 2018. Off-gas consumers: Updated information on households without mains gas heating

3. Billing and Payment

Figure 5: Payment method



The most common method of payment was direct debit for a set amount each time. Almost two thirds of respondents, or 64% paid their energy bills this way. 6% of respondents paid by direct debit, but paid a different amount each time. Other methods of payment, such as paying the bill quarterly and managing the account online with a credit or debit card were much less common than direct debit payments. Only 1% of respondents paid on delivery (See Figure 5).

²⁰ Strengthening the Voice of Consumers in Energy Networks' Business Planning (Citizens Advice 2018)

²¹ A citizens' jury is generally composed of around 12-24 randomly selected citizens, demographically representative of an area, who come together to deliberate on a given issue over a number of days.

²² Community coaching involves individuals going into a community to encourage them to achieve their full potential and build social capital by working together. It recognises that local involvement in development interventions helps avoid the risk of providing unworkable solutions.

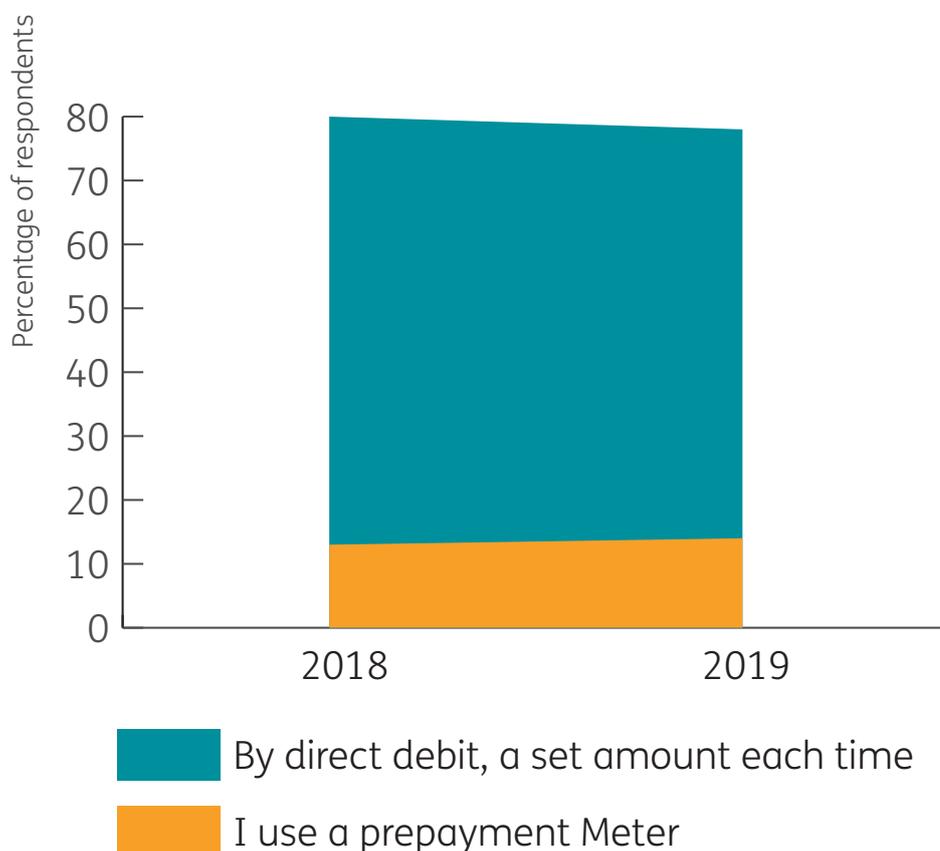
²³ What Works Scotland. Available at: <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/topics/community-engagement/>



After direct debit, prepayment meters (PPMs) were the next most common payment method, but usage varied widely among different demographics. Those most likely to use prepayment meters, could be considered to be more vulnerable than other consumer groups including single parents with dependent children and people who are unemployed. Prepayment meters are more common for those who rent, whether privately or from their council and is far more widespread among younger people than those who are older. Nearly a quarter, or 23% of younger people use prepayment meters while only 2% of older people do.

A direct debit payment for a set amount remains the most popular payment method for heating energy bills, but is used by 3% fewer respondents than in 2018 (this question was not asked in the 2017 survey). Those respondents who reported using prepayment meters increased by 1%; all other payment methods remained the same as in 2018 (See figure 6).

Figure 6: Payment method by year

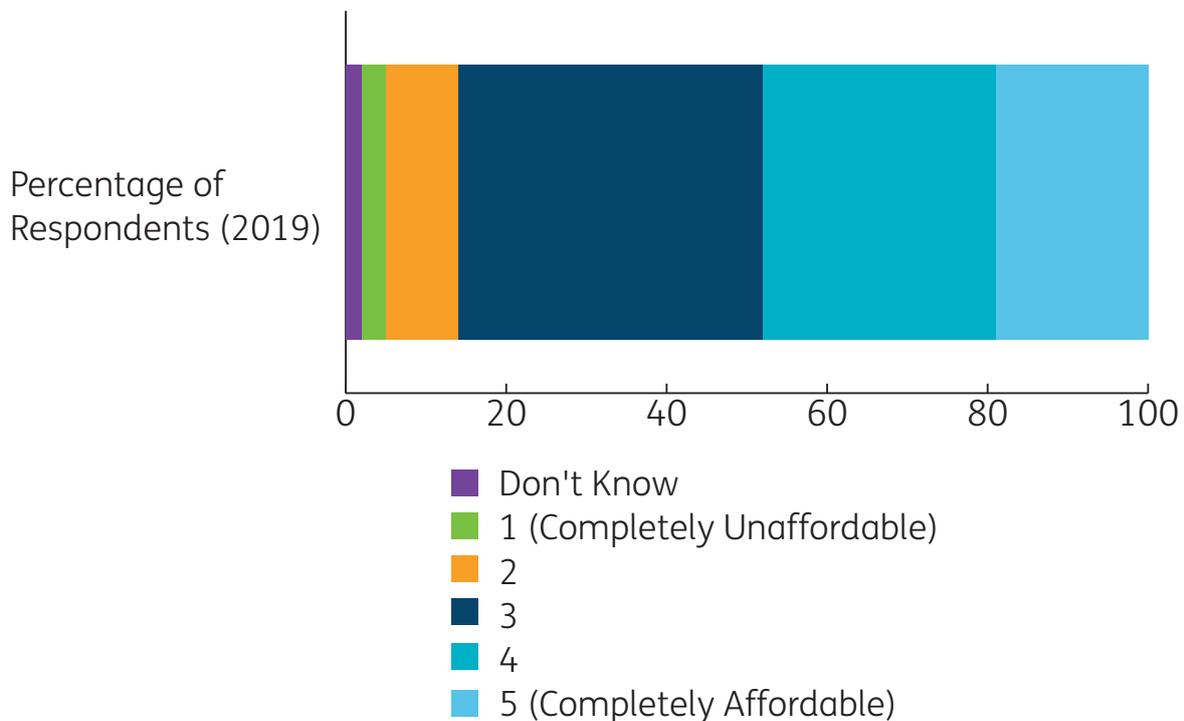


4. Affordability

When asked how they rated the affordability of their fuel bills on a scale of 1 to 5, with a 5 being completely affordable, 38% of respondents ranked their affordability as a 3. Just under half, 48%, rated their bills a 4 or a 5, indicating that they felt their bills were affordable, and 12% rated their bills as a 1 or 2, indicating that they felt their bills were unaffordable. 3% rated their bills “completely unaffordable” (See figure 7). As 25% of Scottish households have been identified as fuel poor, this number was lower than expected.

The results suggest that age and home ownership determines whether fuel bills feel more affordable, especially if there is not mortgage. A third of respondents aged 65+ and 29% of homeowners without a mortgage rated their energy bills a 5, compared to only 14% of respondents under 35.

Figure 7: Affordability of energy bills

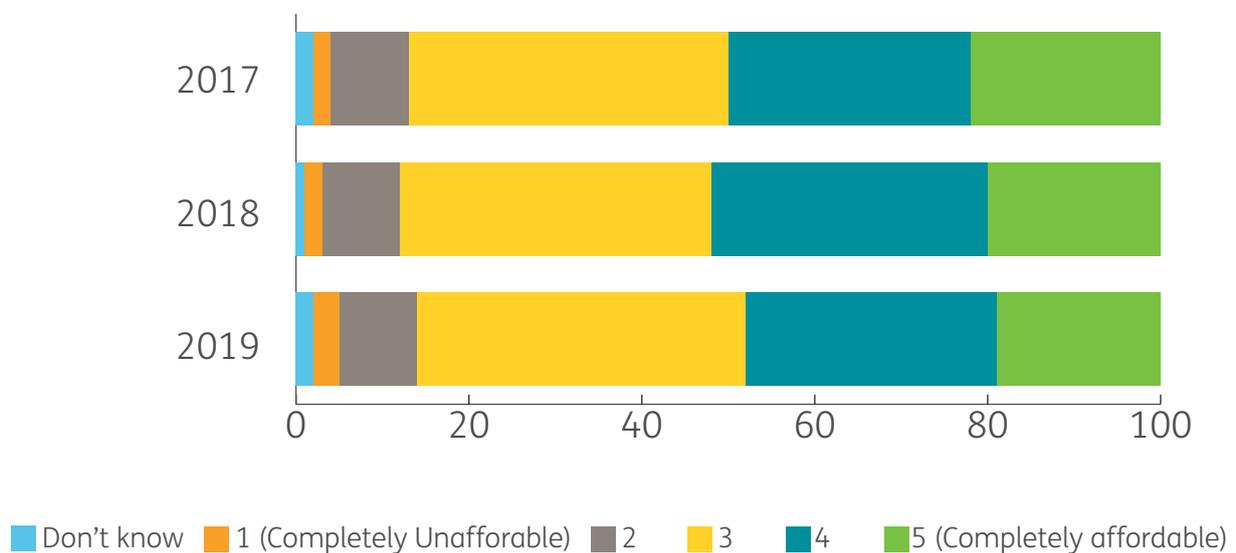




Respondents supplied by small and medium sized suppliers are more likely to find their bills affordable. Over half of small and medium supplier customers gave their bills a 4 or a 5, while only 44% of Big Six customers did.

Perceptions of affordability have decreased slightly between 2017-2019, with those rating a 4 or a 5 dropping from 52% to 48%, with the percentage of those rating a three increasing correspondingly. Those rating affordability of their bills a 5 (completely affordable) has slowly but steadily declined from 22% in 2017 to 20% in 2018, and 19% in 2019. The numbers of respondents who consider their fuel bills to be unaffordable (rating a 1 or a 2) has remained consistent (See figure 8).

Figure 8: Affordability of energy bills by years



5. Attitudes towards Energy Suppliers

Respondents were asked to rate statements about their supplier on a range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Overall, respondents had positive attitudes towards their suppliers.

Average scores for each statement were mostly the same as previous years (See figure 9)

Figure 9: Strength of agreements with statements (Mean score out of 5)

Strength of Agreement with Statements (Mean Score out of 5)	2017	2018	2019
The supplier makes it easy to contact them if I need to	3.96	4.02	3.96
The language used in the energy bill I receive is easy to understand	3.86	3.89	3.87
The energy bills I receive provide guidance on what I should do if I am worried about paying my bill	3.87	3.83	3.83
I would recommend the energy supplier I use to others	3.51	3.68	3.66
My energy supplier offers a good price for energy	3.57	3.57	3.51
The supplier I use is the only one available to me	1.90	1.79	1.84
Base:	2,469	3,501	3,505

The supplier makes it easy for me to contact them if I need to

68% of respondents felt that their supplier made it easy to contact them if needed (rating it a 4 or a 5), but this varied by location and by age. Customers of Big 6 companies were less likely to strongly agree (rate it a 5) that it is easy to contact their supplier: 44% of customers of small and medium size companies felt this way while only a third of Big 6 customers did.

The language used in the energy bill I receive is easy to understand

Less than half of respondents who use small or medium suppliers strongly agreed with this statement, and less than one third of respondents who use Big Six suppliers did. Older people were likely to agree with this statement: 41% of retired people, 41% of those over 65, and 42% of those in a household where both members were over state pensionable age agreed strongly with the statement.

²⁶ These are engagement exercises that make the issues under discussion more fun and accessible through creating games around them (e.g. running quizzes based around earlier exercises to reinforce learning and encourage reflection).



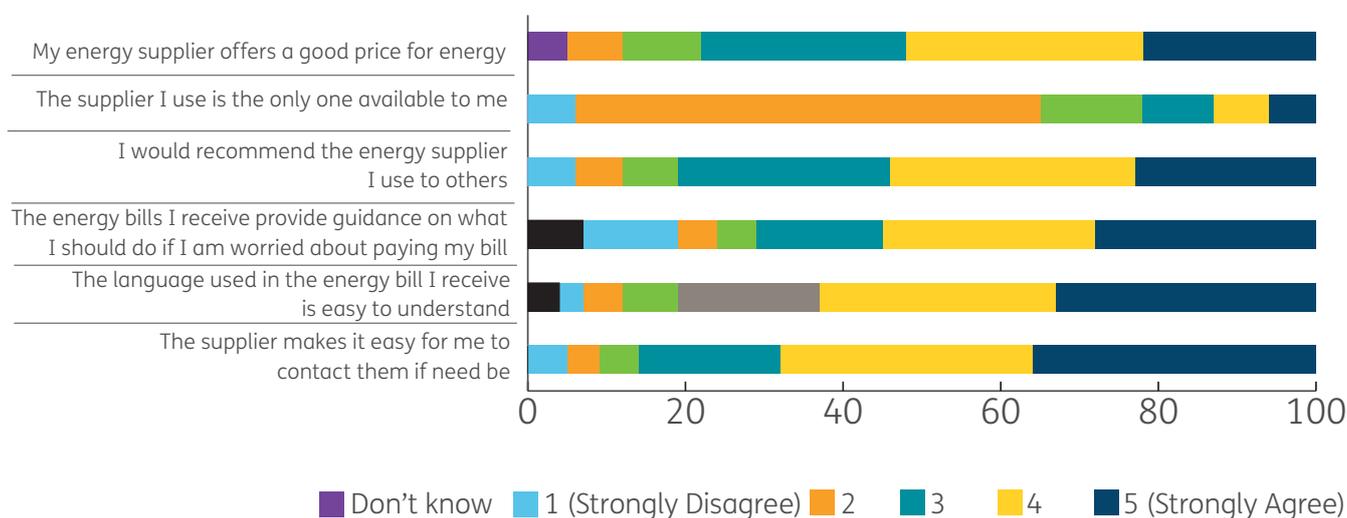
The energy bills I receive provide guidance on what I should do if I am worried about paying my bill

Just over half of respondents agreed, rating the statement a 4 or 5. Older people were more likely to strongly agree than younger and working people. Homeowners also gave a higher score overall, A fifth of respondents said they did not know or that this was not applicable to them as they do not receive an energy bill.

I would recommend the energy supplier I use to others

55% of respondents would recommend their energy supplier to others. Among those especially likely to recommend their supplier were the over 55s and those using suppliers other than Big 6. While 19% of those using a Big 6 supplier agree strongly that they would recommend, twice as many users of other suppliers do so (38%). Renters were less likely than homeowners to be willing to recommend their supplier – 10% of those renting from a Housing Association strongly disagreed.

Figure 10: Attitudes towards energy suppliers



The supplier I use is the only one available to me

Most respondents felt that their supplier was not their only option. Older people were more likely to disagree with this statement: 73% of 64-74 year olds disagreed strongly, compared to 31% of 16-24 year olds. Homeowners felt strongly that they were not limited to their supplier while renters were less sure. One tenth of renters felt they had no choice at all. Respondents in the Highlands and Islands and remote areas were more likely to agree that they were limited to their current supplier. Customers of Big 6 customers were less likely to strongly disagree with the statement than customers of small and medium size suppliers.

6. Switching supplier

Participants were asked if they had switched suppliers in the last twelve months. A quarter of respondents had done so (26%), a rise from 21% in 2017. More homeowners than renters had switched (28% vs 21%, and switching was most common among homeowners with a mortgage, 30% of whom had switched in the past twelve months.

Figure 11: Respondents who have switched supplier in the past 12 months

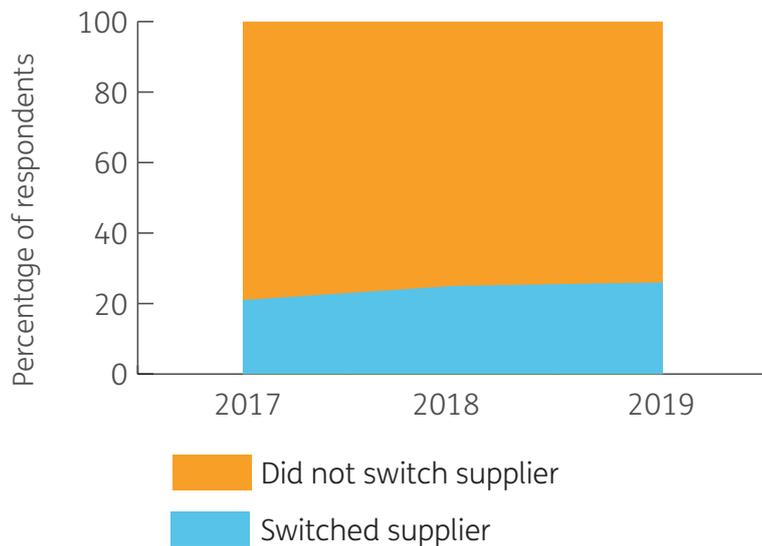
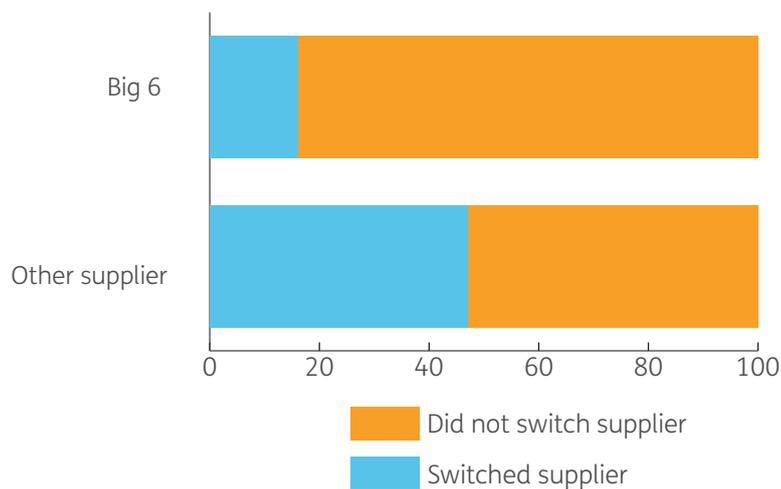
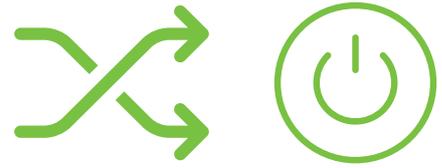


Figure 12: Respondents who switched by supplier type

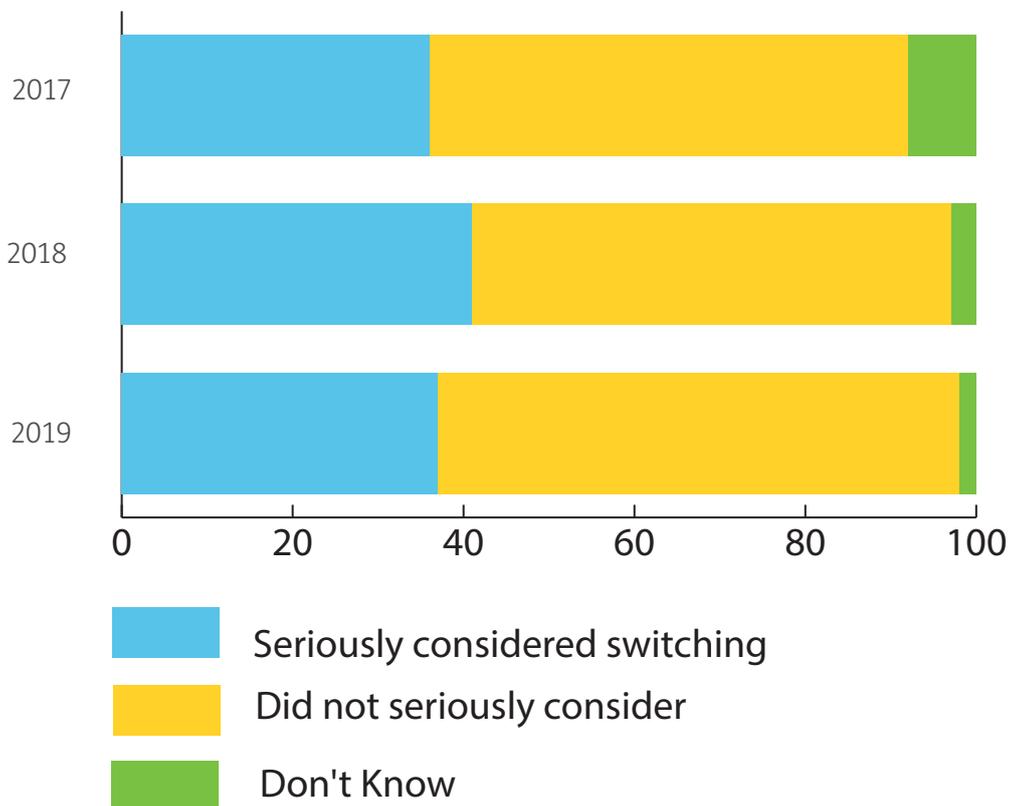




Customers of non-Big 6 companies were most likely to have switched to their current supplier in the past year.

Less than half of respondents who hadn't switched supplier had seriously considered doing so. Respondents supplied by one of the Big 6 suppliers were slightly more likely to have given switching serious consideration.

Figure 13: Respondents who considered switching by year

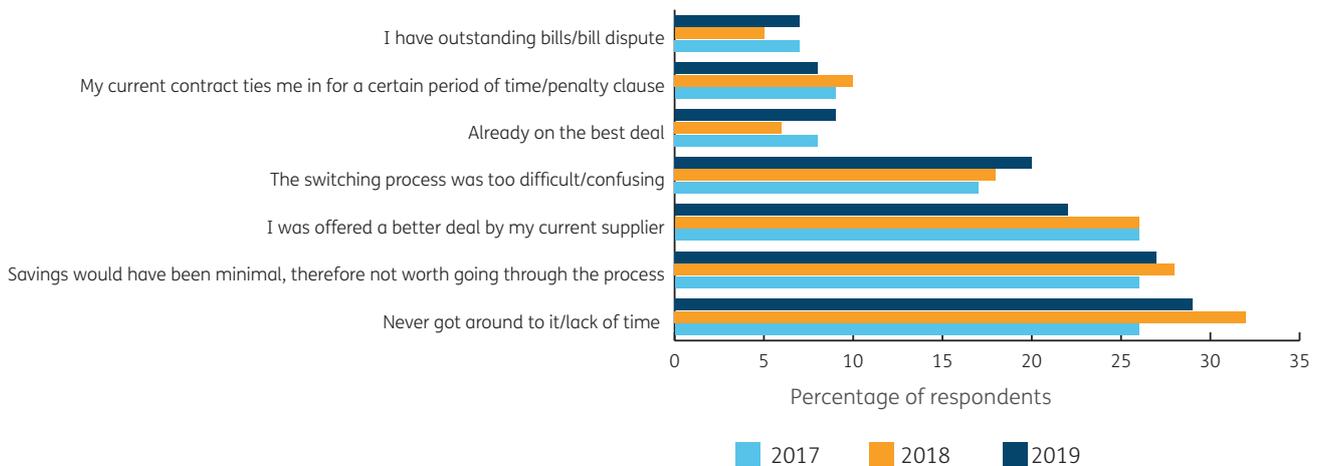


Those who had not seriously considered switching supplier were asked to choose three reasons why they had not thought about switching and rank them in order of importance. Respondents were asked “If you have given serious consideration to switching energy supplier in the past 12 months, but did not do so, why not?” Respondents could select a reason from the list, or write one in.

The most significant reason people had not considered switching was because they felt they were already on the best deal. Nearly half of respondents chose this as their top reason and a quarter ranked it in their top three. The reason chosen most often was because savings would be minimal, so it would not be worth going through the process. Half of respondents ranked this in their top three reasons, and 71% of those aged 65+ put this in their top three reasons, as did 53% of Big 6 customers.



Figure 14: Reasons for not switching (having considered doing so)



There has been a small but steady increase in the percentage of respondents who found the switching process too difficult/confusing and did not switch as a result. Respondents in 2019 were less likely to have not switched because they were offered a better deal than their supplier than in 2017 and 2018.

Encouraging Switching

Those who had switched were asked their reasons for doing so. Respondents could choose more than one reason. The main reason people had for switching supplier in the 2019 survey was price: 77% of respondents who had switched in the past year said lower prices is why they had done so. Price was especially important to homeowners and people who had switched away from a Big 6 supplier.

Switching due to a capped price or price freeze has been steadily decreasing and was much lower in 2019 than in 2017. Those respondents supplied by Big 6 suppliers were more likely to have switched because of a cost cap/price freeze while customers of small and medium suppliers were less likely to have switched because of this¹⁴.

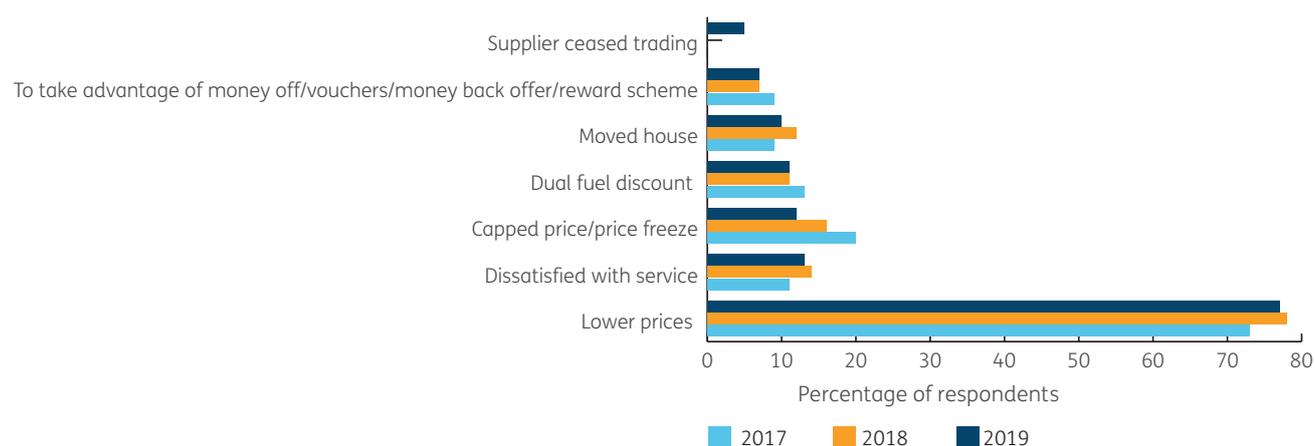
In 2019 5% of respondents said that they had switched because their supplier had ceased trading in the past twelve months. This was not a response that had occurred in previous years. (See figure 15)

¹⁴ A price cap on default energy tariffs, including standard variable tariffs, came into effect on January 1, 2019. This followed a price cap for consumers on pre payment meters that was put into place on April 1, 2017, and is expected to last until 2020. From the wording of the question we assume that respondents will have considered a 'cap or price freeze' to mean a cap/price-freeze in a specific tariff, as opposed to the wider PPM price-cap or default SVT. However there is a possibility that some respondents will have answered this question thinking of the government intervention of price caps. We can't distinguish between two different meanings and therefore cannot disaggregate the two.

(https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/system/files/docs/2019/02/information_for_elected_representatives_and_stakeholders.pdf)



Figure 15: Reasons for switching supplier



Those who had not considered switching were also asked what would encourage them to switch. They were asked to select their top 3 reasons from a list and rank them in order of priority. Like those who had switched, price was the main consideration: 52% ranked ‘lower price with a different supplier’ as one of their top three reasons they would switch supplier, with 32% ranking this as their top choice. In addition, 31% ranked an increase in their current tariff as a main reason to switch, with 16% ranking it as the most important factor.

Poor customer service was among the top choices for 18% of respondents, with 5% giving it the most important. A quarter of respondents chose an auto-switching service finding a better deal and 23% chose money off vouchers/cash back/money back offer/reward scheme as one of their top three most important reasons. However, only 4% of respondents ranked auto-switching service and 3% ranked a money off/money back scheme as most important.

Thirteen percent of respondents said that ‘an impartial advisor to help find the best deal’ and ‘help with switching’ was important.

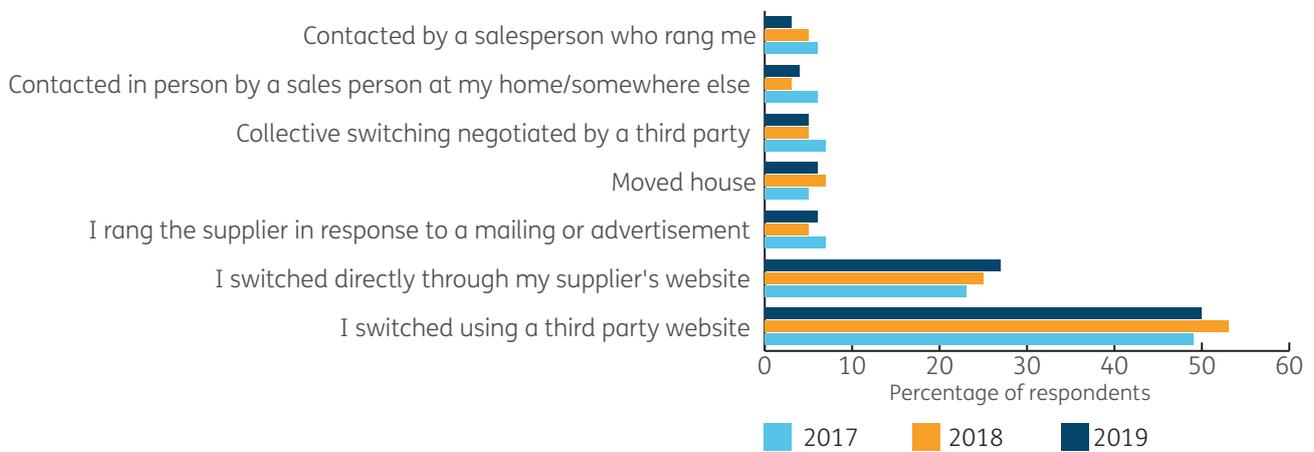
Method of Switching Supplier

Third party price-comparison websites were by far the most popular method of switching supplier. Half of respondents who switched used an independent website to do so. Switching directly through a supplier’s website was the second most common method and ringing the supplier in response to a mailing or advert was third. This is just slightly more common than moving house and as part of a collective switching agreement negotiated by a third party.

Respondents who rent were more likely to have switched supplier because they moved house and homeowners were most likely to have used a third party website to switch. More than half of respondents who use a Big 6 supplier or are over 35 used a third party price-comparison websites to switch.



Figure 16: Method of Switching Supplier by year



The popularity of each method has stayed relatively consistent over 2017 – 2019, with the exception of ‘contact by a sales person, both in person and by the telephone’ which has halved since 2017. Collective switching remained at 5% in 2018 and 2019, dropped from 7% in 2017. Switching directly through a supplier’s website has steadily grown in popularity since 2017. (See figure 16)

Satisfaction with switching supplier

The majority, 80%, of respondents who switched were satisfied with the switching process, 56% of whom were totally satisfied. Respondents were similarly satisfied with their service from the new supplier. More than three quarters were satisfied and half were totally satisfied. Two thirds of customers were content with the new price of energy and almost a third were totally satisfied. At the other end of the spectrum, 12% of respondents who switched were dissatisfied with their new price and 21% were ambivalent.

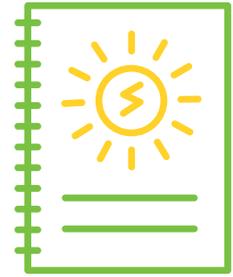
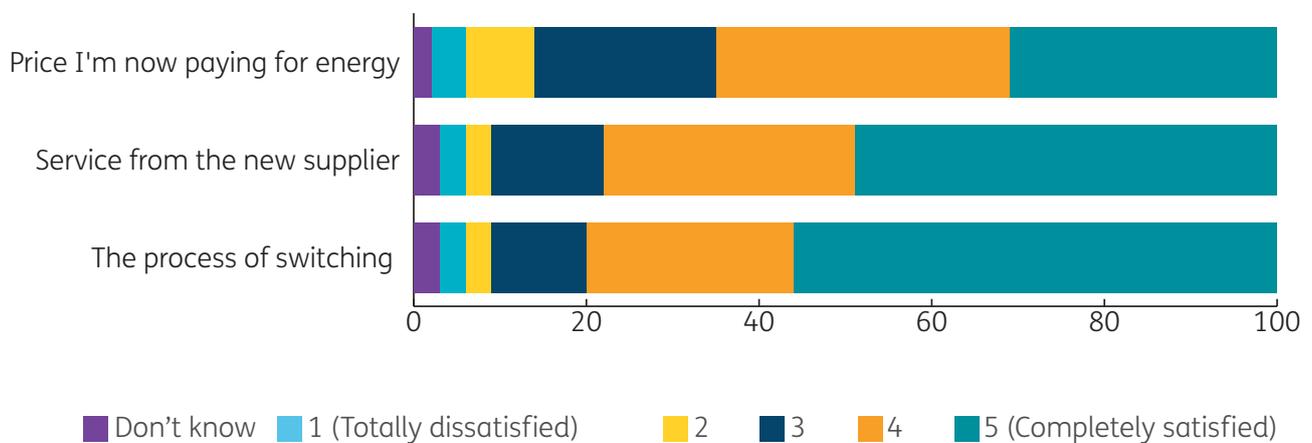


Figure 17: Satisfaction with various aspects of switching



Respondents who had switched to non-Big 6 suppliers were likely to be satisfied with every aspect of the process. Satisfaction with the process and with the service from the new supplier was likewise higher when a third party website was used to carry out the switch.

Figure 18: Satisfaction with switching supplier (Average score out of 5)

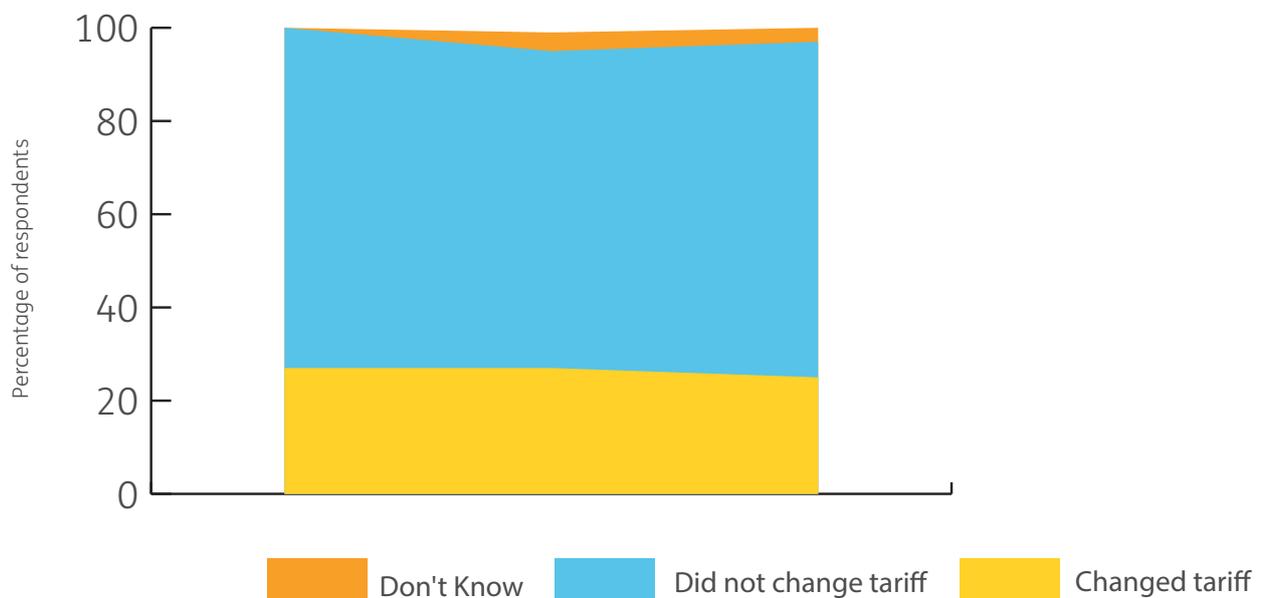
Satisfaction with switching supplier (Average Score)	2017	2018	2019
The process of switching	4.29	4.31	4.32
Service from the new supplier	4.2	4.18	4.25
Price I'm now paying for Energy	3.87	3.83	3.82

7. Switching tariff

The survey explored attitudes to switching tariff as opposed to switching supplier. This assumes that the respondents kept their account with their existing supplier but elected to change tariff with that same supplier. A little more than one in five energy customers switched tariff with their supplier in the last twelve months, a 5% decrease since 2018. Retired people, those above state pensionable age, and those aged 65+ were all more likely than average to have switched tariff – around 3 in 10 had done so.

Respondents supplied by one of the Big 6 suppliers were more likely to have switched tariffs than respondents with other suppliers.

Figure 19: Respondents who switched tariff by year

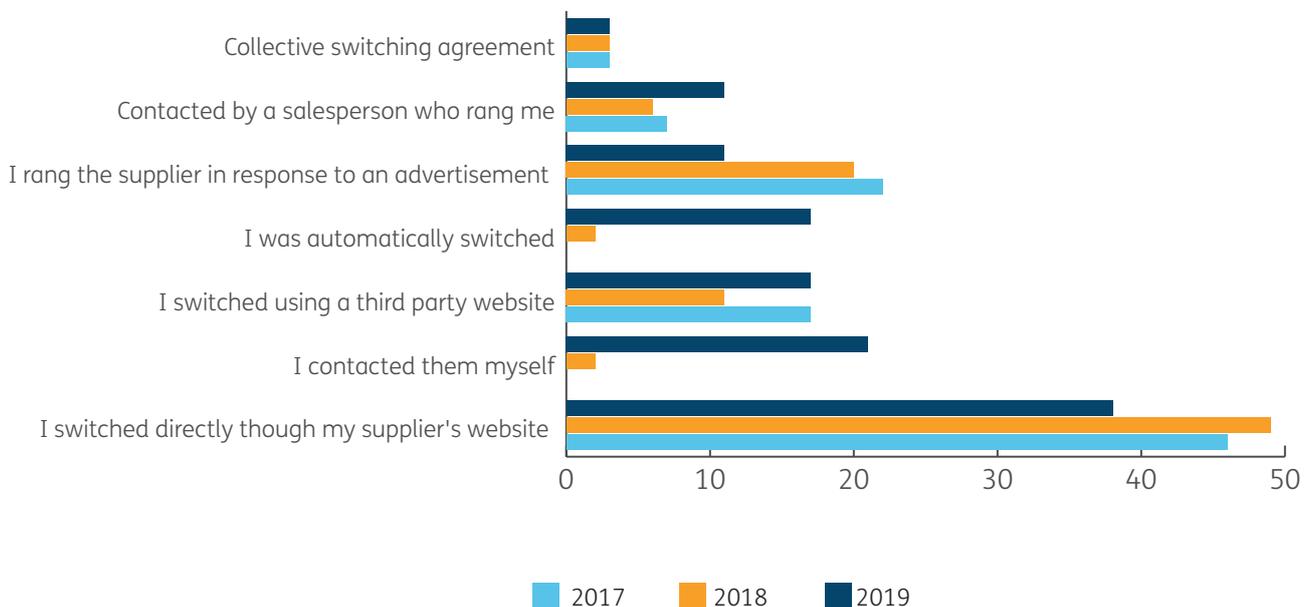




Method of Switching Tariff

The most common way for respondents to switch tariff in the 2019 survey was through their supplier's website. A quarter contacted their supplier themselves, which is a substantial increase from 2% in 2018. Ringing the supplier in response to a mailing or advertisement dropped by half to 11% in 2019 from 20% in 2018 and 22% in 2017. Ten percent of respondents who switched tariff and 23% of Big 6 customers were switched automatically. This was another substantial increase; only 2% of customers were switched automatically in 2018.

Figure 20: Method of switching tariff by year



Our results show that 43% of respondents had either switched tariff or supplier in 2019. This number is significant as official switching rates (supplier) lie nearer 20%¹⁵ and this is considered to be the national average. We therefore think it's important that switching tariff is also considered when switching rates are used to assess broader market engagement. It must be considered however that switching rates found in this survey may be slightly higher due to the characteristics of people who took part in our survey.

¹⁵ Ofgem State of the Market Report 2019
https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/system/files/docs/2019/11/20191030_state_of_energy_market_revised.pdf

8. Priority Services Register

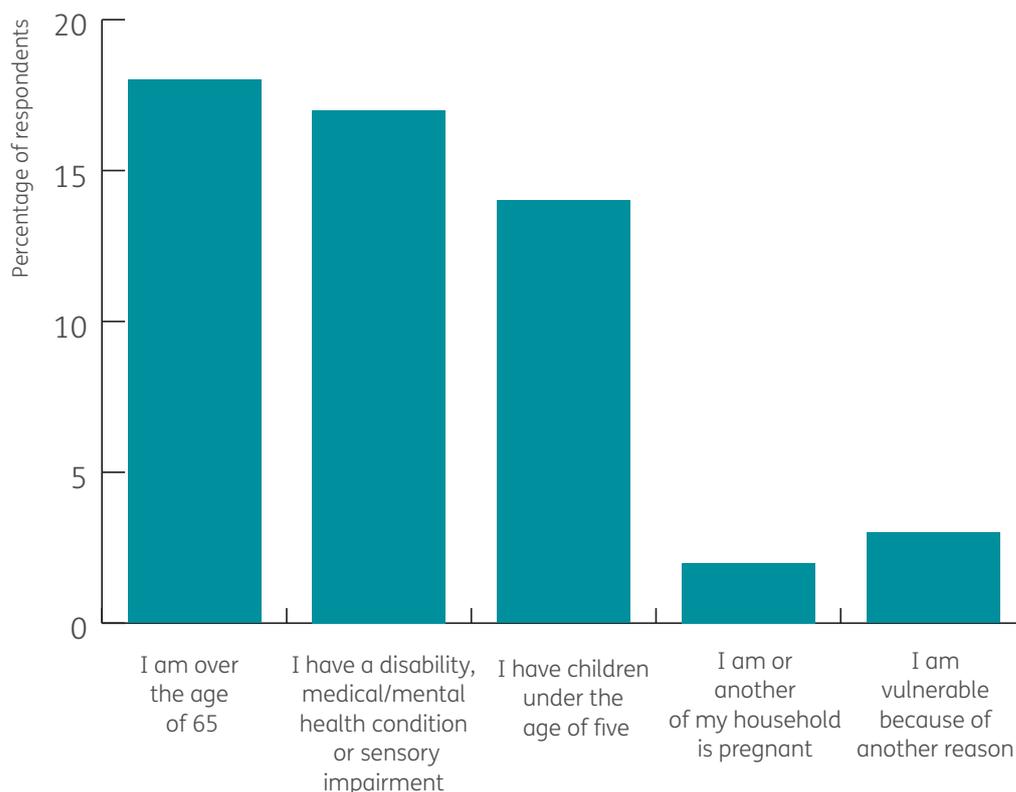
The priority services register was defined for respondents as:

“Some service providers, such as those providing energy or water, hold registers of people in vulnerable situations; for example, older people, those living with a disability, or parents of young children. These priority service registers ensure that the people on the register are offered support they might need – for example with reading bills and other communications or when engineers are visiting the property, or in the event of an emergency or an interruption to the service.”

Respondents were then given the list of factors that would qualify them for the priority services register:

- > I am over the age of 65
- > I have a disability, medical/mental health condition or sensory impairment
- > I have children under the age of 5
- > I am or other member of household is pregnant
- > I am vulnerable for another reason

Figure 21: Percentage of respondents with vulnerabilities

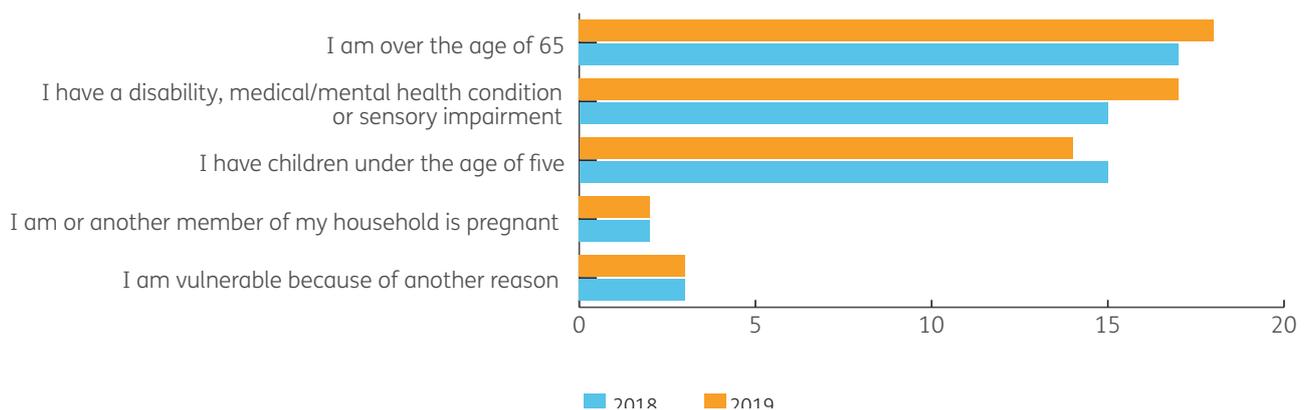




As defined, 47% of respondents met at least one criteria to be on a priority services register. The most common criteria was being over 65 or having a medical/mental health condition or sensory impairment, followed by having children under the age of 5.

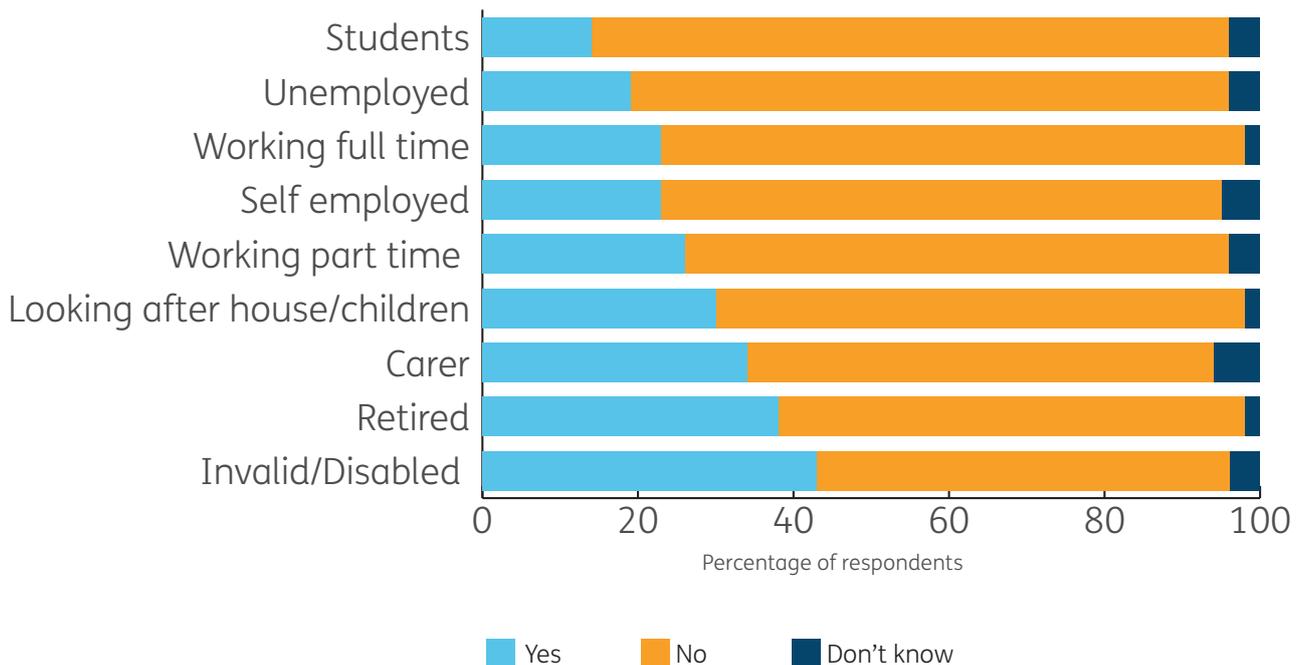
The profile of vulnerable respondents was very similar to 2018. Slightly more people felt that none of the categories applied to them in 2018 than in 2019. There was a 2% increase in people who have a disability, medical/mental health condition or sensory impairment from 15% in 2018 to 17% in 2019. More respondents had heard of priority services registers previously than in 2018. Awareness was highest among disabled respondents and retired respondents. A third of those with caring responsibilities had prior knowledge while 30% of those who look after the house or have small children did. This reflects the findings of CAS' "Making it Easier" Report, which found that there was further need for awareness raising and collaborative efforts to maximise registration. Among other things, the report recommended better consumer-facing information about support services focused on consumer needs, and further and more in depth training for staff to enable them to better identify and enrol vulnerable customers .

Figure 22: Percentage of respondents with vulnerabilities by year



A quarter of respondents who met criteria (10% of the total sample) were already enrolled on the PSR, an encouraging increase from 17% of eligible respondents in 2018. A third of people who were disabled and a third of those aged 55-64 were already enrolled. Of those who are eligible but not enrolled, 35% thought that they might benefit, and 41% were unsure. In 2018, 40% of those not enrolled thought they could benefit from being on the register, and 42% of disabled respondents and 48% of those over 65 who were not enrolled were not sure that they would benefit from doing so. People with children under 5 and those who identified themselves as vulnerable for other reasons expressed the most interest in potential benefits from enrolment.

Figure 23: Previous awareness of PSR



Conclusions

Broadly speaking, consumer attitudes towards switching and affordability of energy have not varied much in the past three years, despite wider policy changes such as the introduction of price caps, the restricted meter remedy and the collapse of a number of suppliers.

What is clear from the data is that different groups in society face very different outcomes. Our results show that a significant proportion of consumers find their energy affordable, are satisfied with their energy supplier and have the capacity to switch to cheaper deals. However, the results also show that too many people face significant challenges in the market. As shown in our results almost half of all respondents associate with at least one criterion which may make them more vulnerable and its important that these consumers are prioritised for advice and support.

CAS is committed to working hard to ensure that outcomes improve for those who are struggling and using this work as a foundation, we aim to quickly improve outcomes for these consumers.





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