

Stephen Littlechild

Professor Stephen Littlechild, former Director General of Electricity Supply and Associate at the Energy Policy Research Group at the University of Cambridge, describes the latest developments in his Overall Customer Satisfaction (OCS) League. He considers how scores have changed over the past two months, with Ofgem’s publication of the latest (Q221) energy supplier complaint statistics and puts this in context of the evolution of OCS scores since the beginning of 2021.

The OCS score is calculated as the average of four different ratings of energy suppliers:

- A rating based on the customer complaints reported each quarter by Ofgem.
- An annual rating by the Consumers’ Association Which? magazine.
- The quarterly rating by Citizens Advice.
- The TrustScore assigned by customers recording their views in real time on the consumer site Trustpilot.

There are currently 19 suppliers in the OCS league, this being the number of suppliers rated by both Consumers’ Association and Citizens Advice. Unfortunately, their sampling techniques mean that only medium and large suppliers have enough customers to be evaluated. In contrast, Ofgem currently provides complaints statistics for 37 suppliers, and there are TrustScores for essentially all 50 or so suppliers.

The good news is that suppliers in the League are tried and tested, they are not unknown quantities, they have attracted or kept a large number of customers.

The Ofgem complaints rating

The Ofgem complaints rating in the OCS gives a 50% weighting to the number of complaints per 100,000 customers and 25% weightings each to the proportions of complaints resolved within 24 hours and three months. Table 1 shows the complaints ratings for Q221 for those suppliers currently in the OCS, expressed as a percentage where higher means better.

Evidently Avro, Outfox and E score highest on Ofgem complaints, with ratings in the mid-80s or above. Utility Point, Octopus and Utilita also show well in the mid-70s, and So, PurePlanet, Good Energy, British Gas and Utility Warehouse in the mid-60s. EDF Energy, Ecotricity and Shell are not distinguished in the low-50s. Scottish Power and E.ON in the low-40s and Bulb in the mid-30s, look problematic. At the bottom are OVO and SSE in the mid-20s, perhaps reflecting customer concerns about the merger.

It should be noted, that the Ofgem complaints statistics themselves are not without problems. There are concerns that companies interpret differently what constitutes a complaint (“any expression of dissatisfaction”) and what constitutes “resolution” of it. And although suppliers are expected to report their quarterly statistics on their own websites, they approach this very differently. In general, the six former large incumbent companies do this promptly, but some other suppliers are a quarter or more behind in doing so: OVO’s latest complaints data is over two years old. Some suppliers, like Avro, So and Outfox, show nothing at all. Sometimes there are discrepancies (as with EDF Energy this quarter). Ofgem does not seem very interested in these issues. Nonetheless, these are

Table 1: Ofgem complaints ratings January – August 2021

90.2	avroenergy.co.uk
86.2	outfoxthemarket.co.uk
86.0	e.org
76.4	utilitypoint.co.uk
76.0	octopus.energy
75.2	utilita.co.uk
66.1	so.energy
66.0	purepla.net
65.3	goodenergy.co.uk
64.2	britishgas.co.uk
62.7	utilitywarehouse.co.uk
54.4	edfenergy.com
51.4	ecotricity.co.uk
51.1	shellenergy.co.uk
45.3	scottishpower.co.uk
43.6	eonenergy.com
34.2	bulb.co.uk
28.3	ovoenergy.com
25.3	sse.co.uk

the official regulatory data and therefore are an important part of the OCS index.

OCS scores for January – August 2021

What are the latest changes in the OCS scores? The Q221 Ofgem complaints ratings showed an improvement over the previous quarter for Bulb (and for Good Energy) but deteriorations for Utility Warehouse and SSE. Changes in TrustScores since June 2021 were generally minor, with Boost, Ecotricity (and Together) showing the biggest improvements seemingly reflecting proactive invitations to review the suppliers.

For better context, Figure 1 shows the evolution of OCS scores during the first eight months of 2021. Over the whole period:

- Outfox, Octopus and Avro retain their lead in Division One but the steadily rising E has now displaced the declining So Energy.
- Utility Warehouse falls from the top to the bottom of Division Two. Pure Planet and EDF Energy retain their places in Division Two, while Utilita is promoted from Division Three.
- Utility Point is just top of Division Three but has fallen again after a previous recovery following its earlier fall from Division Two. Bulb is recovering strongly after its fall from Division Two to Division Four. OVO, Shell and Boost retain their positions at the bottom of Division Three.
- British Gas is demoted to Division Four by a whisker. Ecotricity is up there too. SSE continues to fall after its demotion from Division Three. E.ON and Scottish Power are holding up the rest of the League.

Competition is tough. Only EDF Energy of the former large incumbents has managed to make the top half of the League, and significant entrants like Bulb, OVO and Shell are in the bottom half. But to emphasise again that some 30 other suppliers have not yet attracted sufficient customers even to make it into the OCS League. The OCS League will hopefully enable better switching rather than more switching and encourage customer loyalty where this is deserved.

Figure 1: Overall Customer Satisfaction scores January - August 2021

