

Smart support

Support for vulnerable consumers in the smart meter roll-out



March 2017

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	2
<u>Overview</u>	3
<u>Defining and identifying</u>	6
<u>Engaging</u>	9
<u>Pre-installation</u>	12
<u>Installation</u>	15
<u>Post-installation</u>	18
<u>Small suppliers</u>	21
<u>Conclusion</u>	23
<u>Appendix</u>	25

Introduction

In order to meet the deadline of installing 53 million smart meters by 2020, suppliers will need to install smart gas and electricity meters in homes and small businesses at an average rate of approximately 40,000¹ per day.

The accurate and detailed information provided by smart meters has the potential to be beneficial for energy consumers. It will mean more accurate bills, reduced costs in the supply of energy and the ability for consumers to bring down their bills through changes in consumption. However, as with all consumer benefits, particularly those resulting from technological change, the distribution could be uneven and there will be a need to protect certain consumers who are more likely to suffer distress and confusion in the process.

During the smart meter roll-out, there are two main ways in which a consumer may be more likely to be vulnerable. Firstly, if they are more likely to suffer distress and confusion through the installation process and secondly, if they are less able to take advantage of the information provided by the smart meter.

The government's [early learning project](#) found that elderly and low income households, people with a disability or long term illness, and those with no formal qualifications, were the least likely to engage with the information from their smart meter. At the moment, these groups are already losing out in other areas of the market - elderly, low income and disabled households are less likely to switch supplier.

The [Smart Meter Installation Code of Practice \(SMICoP\)](#) contains a number of safeguards to ensure vulnerability is accommodated throughout the installation process. This sets out a definition that includes long term health conditions, literacy and mobility impairments and financial insecurity.

[In 2014, Citizens Advice](#) set out a number of measures that suppliers could take to help vulnerable consumers use the information from their smart meter. This included providing tailored one-to-one support over a number of short follow-up sessions and using community groups to drive engagement. In 2015 we followed this up with a request for information, which asked suppliers how they were providing the extra help certain consumers need. The responses showed a very inconsistent picture with

¹ Most recent estimate based on the difference between the 53 million intended installations and the number of smart meters currently installed as of [30 September 2016](#) (4.89 million), divided by the number of days available before 1 January 2020. 48 million installations divided by 1187 days.

very little innovation or policies that fleshed out the basic SMICoP requirements to provide this extra support.

Due to the pressure that is now on suppliers to install smart meters at a high daily rate, the risk that vulnerable consumers are left feeling confused, distressed or unable to use the information has increased. It is therefore crucial that the necessary protections and services are put in place. Citizens Advice decided to ask suppliers again how they are interpreting their obligations and what extra support is being provided.

In the autumn we sent out a request for information to all suppliers asking them about their approach to vulnerability, specifically whether they are providing vulnerable consumers with a number of support services that could help them. This followed up on the responses from the previous request in 2015.

This report presents our analysis of the responses we received. In order to show how prevalent a given measure is across the industry we have used the [published electricity market shares](#) of the 10 largest suppliers who have advanced roll-out plans (consisting of the six incumbent suppliers and four medium ones). This can be interpreted as an approximation for the chance any given vulnerable consumer has of receiving that service during the roll-out, although this assumes that the proportion of vulnerable consumers is broadly constant across suppliers.

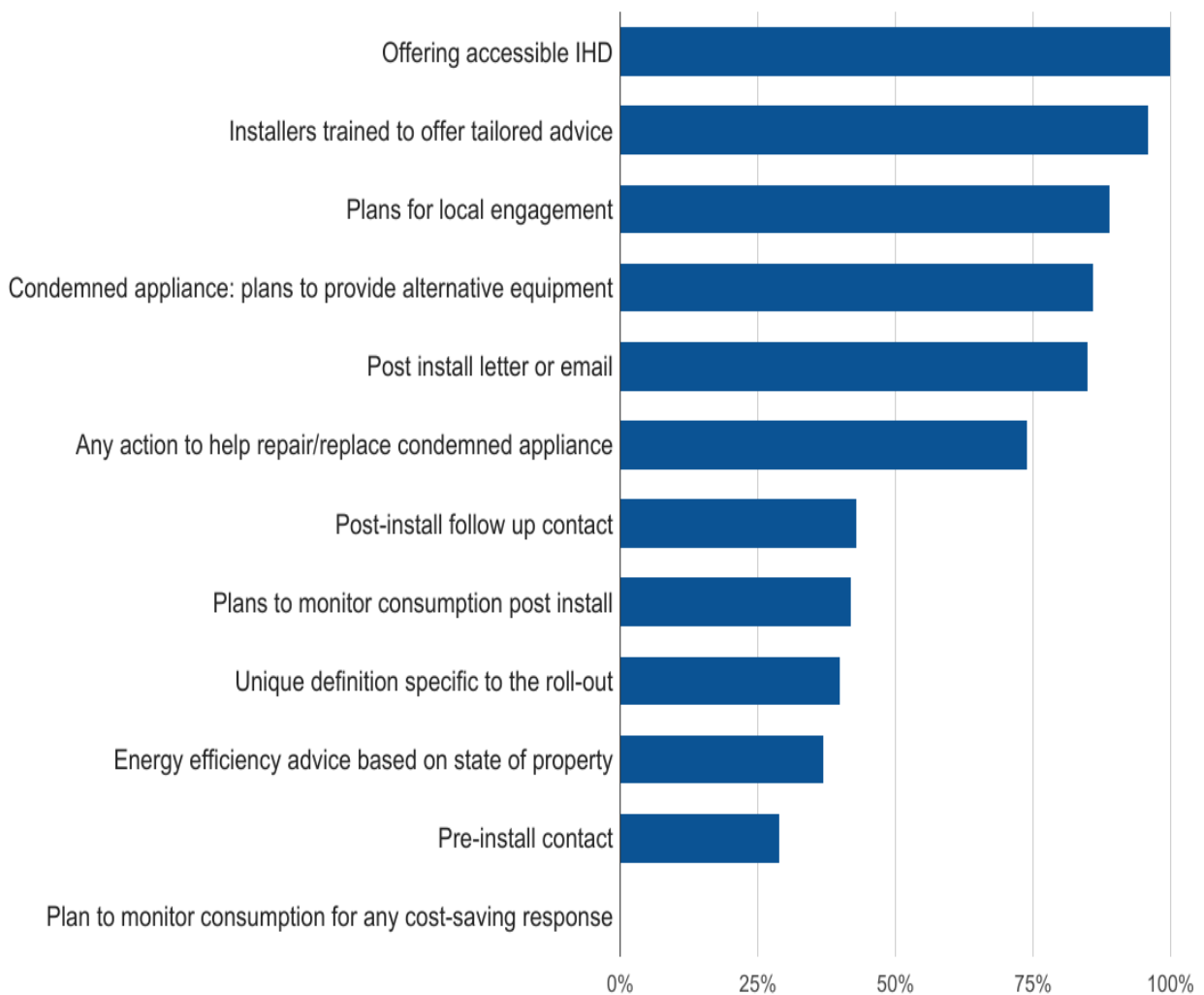
We present our analysis of the responses first in an overview of the whole process of a vulnerable consumer receiving a smart meter. Then, in order to look at the process in more detail we have split the process up into five stages: defining and identifying vulnerability; engaging vulnerable consumers; support provided before the installation, at the installation and after the installation stages. We provide a summary of each stage, picking out some of the best and most innovative approaches to help inform those suppliers who are still in the early stages of planning their approach.

Our analysis focuses on the ten main suppliers. However our information request was also sent to many of the smaller suppliers as they will also be installing smart meters in the near future. We were interested to know how far they had progressed in considering their approach to vulnerability in the rollout and have summarised their plans in the final section.

Overview

In this section we provide an overview of how far the industry has progressed in developing roll-out plans that better meet the needs of vulnerable consumers. The graph below shows the percentage of energy consumers who can currently expect to receive some of the key services if they are found to be vulnerable. A full table of all questions that were included in the information request can be found in the appendix.

Fig 1. Proportion of consumers offered each service if found to be vulnerable - some selected services



It is reassuring to see that all ten suppliers are now providing, or plan to provide, the basic requirements as mandated by SMICoP, including: proactive identification of vulnerability in the roll-out, having installers who are trained to deal with vulnerability and offering tailored advice and communication. Furthermore, it is also encouraging that all suppliers with sufficiently advanced plans intend to offer an accessible IHD.

Then there are some services that most vulnerable consumers will benefit from. Support in the event of an appliance being condemned is one such key area. All installers must conduct a safety check of appliances such as cookers and boilers. If a vulnerable consumer has an appliance condemned, most suppliers will help them repair or replace it and, if necessary, provide fan heaters and cooking rings in the interim. However, this practice has not yet been adopted across the board.

There remain significant gaps in one-to-one, personalised support for vulnerable people through the process. In our 2014 publication *Smart Meter Extra Help* we outlined the need for extra support for certain consumers. However, the responses from suppliers show that vulnerable consumers are unlikely to receive one-to-one support before or after the installation and there is little to no planned use of the consumption data to provide tailored support. While services like these may be resource intensive and therefore not feasible for every household, we think they are necessary for a minority of consumers who are most at risk of missing out on the benefits offered by smart meters.

Recommendations

1. Government to establish industry-wide standards on follow-up support for vulnerable consumers. The government have set up a working group to develop principles for post-installation support. We believe these should inform standards against which industry performance in this area can be assessed.
2. Government to monitor support for vulnerable consumers in the roll-out.
3. Industry to collectively develop techniques for the use of smart data to identify households in need of extra support with using their smart meter, reducing consumption or staying on supply.
4. Industry to review engagement communication to ensure it does not put pressure on consumers to have a smart meter, with particular regard for vulnerable consumers more likely to suffer confusion or anxiety in the process. This should include making information regarding consumers' rights readily available.
5. All suppliers to guarantee that no vulnerable consumer be left without means to cook or heat their home should a gas appliance be condemned.

1. Defining and identifying

Ofgem have made their expectation of suppliers clear. Suppliers should take a flexible approach to vulnerability, going beyond the core characteristics of age, disability and ill-health in the priority services licence conditions. The new SMICoP definition of vulnerability now incorporates this approach by listing core characteristics but leaving it open for others to be included.

The smart meter roll-out will affect millions of consumers who have very specific needs. Smart Energy GB provided a comprehensive list of characteristics that are likely to represent barriers through the rollout in *Smart energy for all*². We expect suppliers to consider which situations lead to a greater risk of vulnerability during the roll-out and proactively identify consumers in these circumstances.

It is positive to see that all suppliers are attempting to identify vulnerable consumers before making first contact, using resources such as the priority services register and training staff to pick up on vulnerabilities throughout the process.

However, a review of responses shows that only three suppliers have defined vulnerability with specific reference to the roll-out and in a way that goes beyond the minimum requirements of SMICoP. These suppliers have elaborated on the core definition, highlighting both additional and particularly relevant vulnerabilities, such as those associated with learning difficulties, living in the private rented sector and a lack of internet access.

Household energy efficiency is a key indicator of fuel poverty and requires special notice during the rollout. However, while four of the 10 largest suppliers (representing half of the market) have trained suppliers to note the state of the property, only one of these will consider tenure as an indicator of vulnerability.

² Smart Energy GB, 2015, *Smart energy for all*, [smartenergygb.org/en/resources/press-centre/press-releases-folder/smart-energy-for-all-updated](https://www.smartenergygb.org/en/resources/press-centre/press-releases-folder/smart-energy-for-all-updated)

Key facts and figures

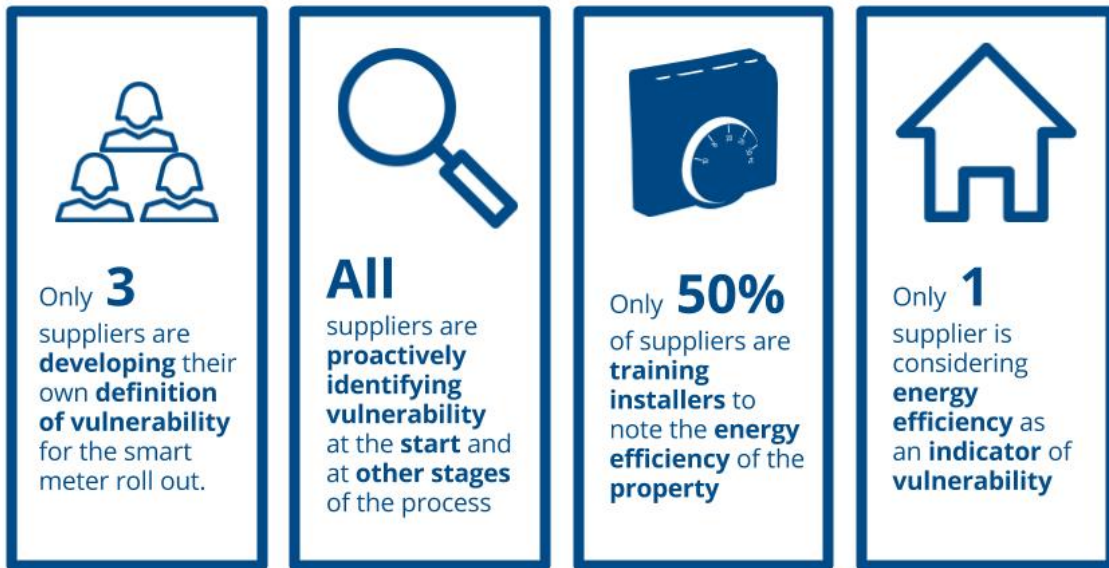
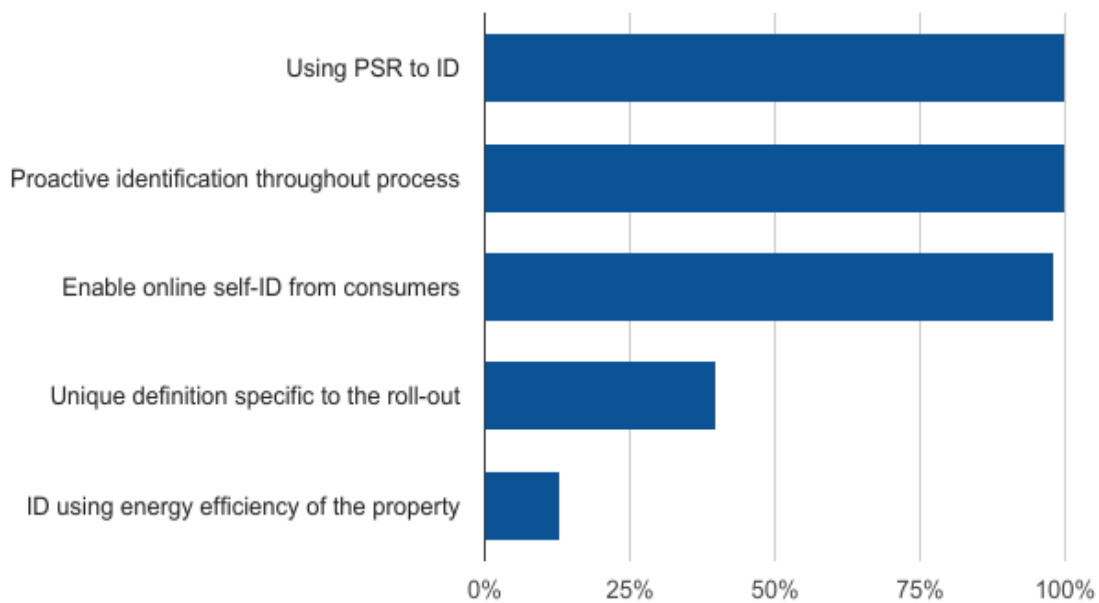


Figure 2. Proportion of market using the following methods to define and identify vulnerability



Good practice

Positive progress has been made in adapting **definitions** and processes within industry. Some techniques which have been used to do this include:

- **enhancing the definition of vulnerability** - some suppliers have built on the content of Ofgem's Vulnerable Consumer Strategy to broaden their definition of vulnerability specifically for the roll-out. For example, one supplier has included characteristics such as housing tenure, internet access and the energy efficiency of the property in their definition.
- **engaging with charities and other organisations to develop insights into different forms of vulnerability**. As a starting point, some suppliers have used relevant characteristics from the new PSR data-sharing codes to develop definitions. From this, one supplier has collaborated with organisations who have expertise in particular forms of vulnerability. This knowledge has been transferred into developing a stronger definition and subsequent improvements to their smart meter offer.
- **analysing gaps in developing insights** - some suppliers are conducting a gap analysis with their existing partners to consider which vulnerabilities need further examination and where there is potential for new partnerships.

Identifying vulnerability can prepare suppliers for how best to communicate with the customer. Good practice in this area includes:

- **training staff to recognise vulnerability** - One example is a 4 hour face to face training session alongside annual e-Learning courses. Many suppliers also now have systems in place to ensure this information is shared reliably across the organisation.
- **using established scripts or conversation guides when conversing with customers** - these are designed to elicit information about the specific needs of customers. Ultimately, this information allows suppliers to alter any ongoing engagement they have with the customer, to best suit the consumer's circumstances.
- **creating platforms for customers to self-identify any vulnerabilities** - most suppliers recognise the importance of allowing consumers to register their own circumstances and have digital platforms for customers to do this. Some suppliers have also provided pre-installation literature, which reminds consumers to self-identify any needs they have.

2. Engaging

Vulnerable consumers face a number of barriers to engaging with the smart meter roll-out. The stage of 'engaging' represents the start of the process for consumers. Suppliers need to make sure their offer reflects the specific needs of consumers, both in terms of functionality and reliability.

Case Study 1

The consumer is a 59 year old single male with a long term health condition, who required clarification on a smart meter offered by the supplier. The consumer was confused and stated he would have given up on the first phone call, if he hadn't come in to speak to an advisor at Citizens Advice. He was told the new meters would benefit him as he would be eligible for different tariffs. The consumer was nervous about how payment methods would change. At this stage, the variety of payments left him unsure. The consumer said the communication with the supplier was 'time consuming and confusing'.

Overall the industry appears to be performing well on the offer they are using to engage vulnerable consumers. It is encouraging to see that all suppliers with sufficiently advanced plans intend to offer an in-home display (IHD) with accessibility features and 90% of the market have definite plans to offer the RNIB IHD³. Nearly all suppliers (representing 90% of the market) have a specific strategy in place to ensure vulnerable consumers are only targeted once issues such as availability of accessible IHDs have been resolved.

In previous reports, Citizens Advice has highlighted the benefits of working with local organisations such as housing associations, councils and community groups to engage and support vulnerable consumers through the roll-out. Responses to our information request showed that all the incumbent suppliers⁴ have considered area-based engagement to prepare vulnerable consumers for the smart meter roll-out, although only two reported having moved beyond the trial stage.

As to be expected, local approaches are less prevalent among medium sized suppliers who lack an historic connection to a particular area. However, two out of the four suppliers have explored ways of engaging consumers in this way.

³ This is the IHD developed by RNIB in collaboration with Geo, which has been optimised for blind or partially sighted individuals to use.

⁴ The big 6 energy companies that took over supply of specific areas at privatisation: British Gas, SSE, EDF Energy, E.ON, npower and Scottish Power

Another area of concern is around the potential for pressure to be put on vulnerable consumers to accept a smart meter. The roll-out targets and regulations around ‘taking all reasonable steps’ mean that suppliers must try to install meters in as many households as possible. However, it is essential that consumers, particularly vulnerable households, are never put under pressure to accept a smart meter. Most suppliers have information in FAQs or other processes to explain that the meters are optional if a consumer enquires about it. Clarity on the consumer’s rights are particularly important for those suffering certain vulnerabilities, such as those related to mental health, in preventing distress.

Key facts and figures

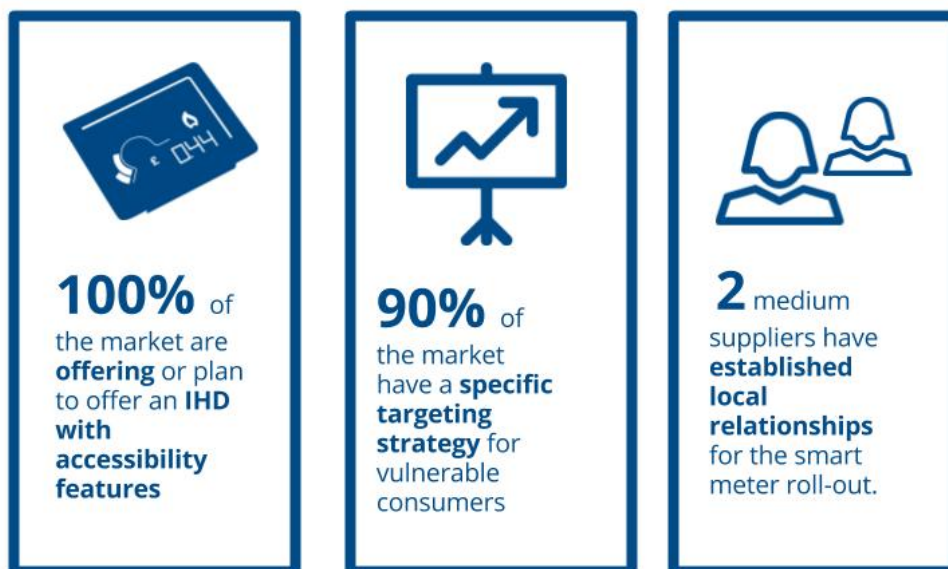
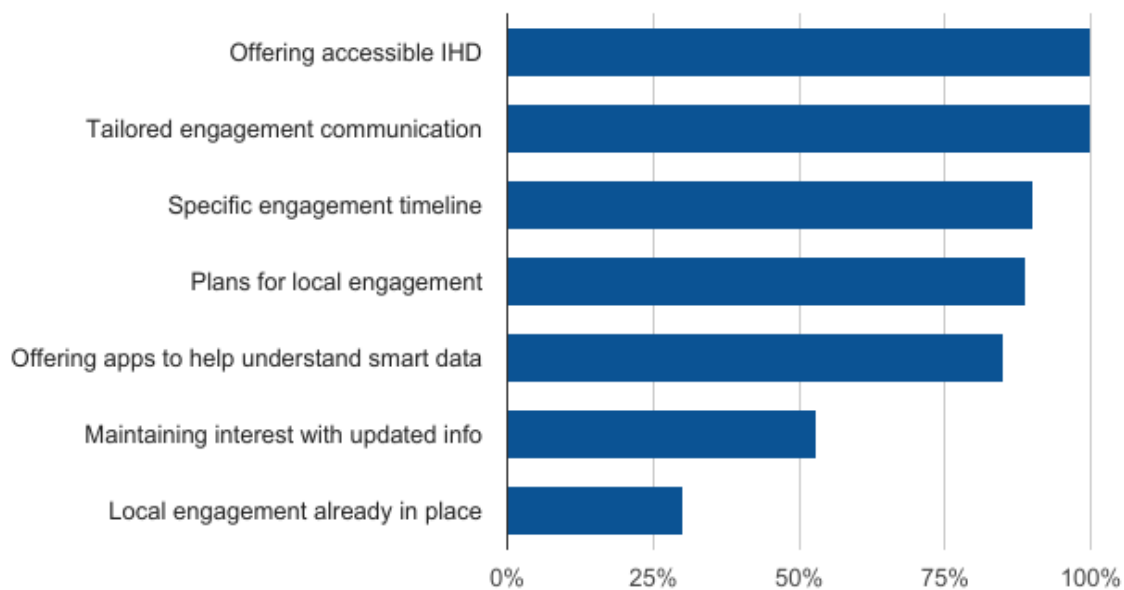


Figure 3. Proportion of market who are using the following methods to engage with vulnerable consumers



Good practice

Some good approaches include:

- **engaging with customers early and applying their understanding of specific needs to their smart meter offer**- For example, some suppliers recognise there may be language barriers during the roll-out. One supplier has begun collecting information through their customer survey, to provide evidence of which languages are prevalent within their customer base.
- **building relationships with organisations such as local authorities, housing associations, charities, Smart Energy GB and Registered Social Landlords** - these relationships allow suppliers to identify specific types of vulnerability and engage appropriately. Furthermore, partners can help suppliers to raise awareness of the smart meter rollout. One example includes a registered social landlord who sent dual branded engagement letters to their tenants. One medium sized supplier uses their default supplier agreements with housing associations to install smart meters.
- **using local community centers as a point of contact for customers** - this offers the consumer familiar surroundings in which to discuss any smart meter related issues. One supplier did this through an existing project they were involved in. SEGB have funded a programme to train all frontline Citizens Advice staff to ensure they can support consumers as the rollout progresses.

3. Pre-installation

Once a vulnerable consumer has agreed to the installation, there are a number of ways that suppliers can help them prepare for what could be a very disruptive process.

Case Study 2

The consumer, a 46 year old male with a disability, was contacted about installing smart meters. An installation date was arranged but the consumer was unsure about exact dates and the supplier never called back to confirm the installation time. Every time the consumer tried to contact them to check, he was on hold for over 20 minutes. The installation of the smart meters has yet to go ahead.

The consumer has been given no information about smart meters. He had no idea what they were or how they worked and how they might benefit him. He does not know any disadvantages either.

The responses show that, as is now expected, certain schemes are now widespread across the industry. For example, use of a password to identify the installer and the ability for consumers to nominate someone to help handle the process for them.

The vast majority of the market offers flexibility in their appointments to account for consumer needs, as well as some type of pre-installation reminder.

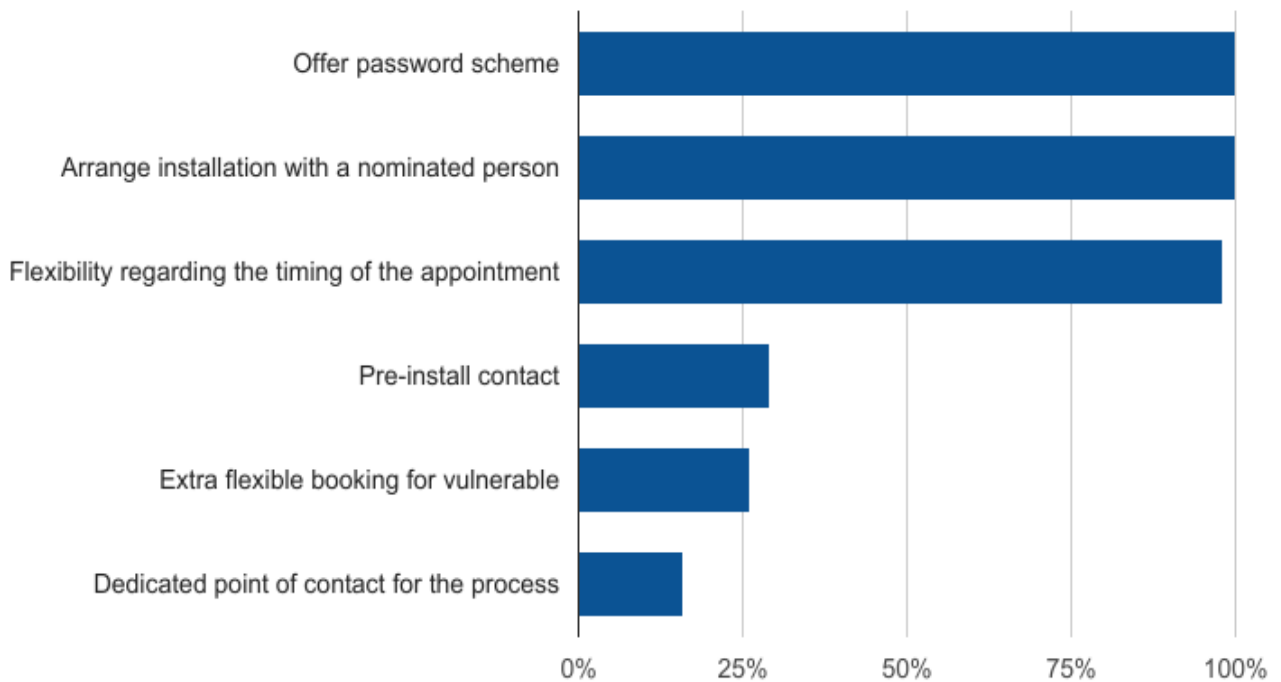
However, what are much less prevalent are policies that seek to provide the extra support and assurance that many vulnerable consumers will need. For instance, only four suppliers have appointment policies that make specific allowance for vulnerable consumers. While most suppliers are providing some form of pre-installation contact, only four (representing just 30% of the market) are doing so on a one-to-one basis (i.e. through phone call or home visit). Similarly, only one large supplier is offering a dedicated point of contact to help vulnerable consumers through the process.

During these pre-installation contacts, information is exchanged that relates to the smart meter and the day of installation. Many suppliers discuss the consumer's data sharing options at this point. A few suppliers assume a default of either daily or monthly data and offer, through a letter, an option for the consumer to change this preference. Only half of suppliers (around 60% of the market) proactively discuss the consumer's preferences during the booking call. The degree to which the customers of these suppliers are informed about their choices will of course depend on the content of these discussions.

Key facts and figures



Figure 4. Proportion of market who are using the following methods before an installation



Good practice

Before installing a smart meter, most suppliers have processes in place, which are intended to make the installation go as smoothly as possible. Companies are already adapting these processes for vulnerable customers, to include:

- **using identified knowledge to adapt how an appointment is made** - for example, one supplier is trialling appointment booking forms for deaf customers to fill and return. This could be extended to other important exchanges of information, such as data sharing consent.
- **a series of warm up communications in different formats to prepare consumers** - these range from appointment confirmation texts to sending consumers literature related to the smart meter or contacting the consumer by phone the day before the appointment. One supplier also plans to use their customer relations team to conduct home visits for some vulnerable customers prior to installation.⁵
- **offering vulnerable consumers a dedicated point of contact** - assigning a single member of staff who to help these consumers through the installation process, including contacting them before and after the installation.
- **producing easy to understand videos** - these videos introduce smart meters to the consumer ahead of the installation and explain how they can be more energy efficient. It allows those who may struggle during the installation process to engage with information in their own time and in a different format.
- **offering fixed/flexible appointments** - understanding the needs of the customer may mean one is more appropriate than the other. This will differ with circumstance. Some suppliers offer fixed appointments for customers with a medical dependency on electricity or if a nominated person/carer is required, making the appointments more manageable.

⁵ [SEGB have suggested](#) this as best practice, in order to ensure consumers are ready for the installation and can benefit from it/

4. Installation

The installation is the most important stage to get right in terms of protecting vulnerable consumers. Suppliers need policies to ensure consumers are not left feeling distressed or confused at the end of the install.

Case Study 3

The consumer is deaf and has stated that his energy supplier did not explain how to use his in-home display. The engineer who came was hearing so there was no proper communication. He has now visited a local Citizens Advice, who have advised him on how to use his IHD.

It is positive that all suppliers with roll-out plans in place have tailored their approach to installation, including training installers to deal with vulnerabilities, tailoring the demonstration, and adapting the format of the manual. It is particularly important that vulnerable consumers are given time to fully understand the smart meter and the functions of the IHD. It is positive to see five of the incumbent suppliers and one medium supplier ensure there is no pressure on installers to meet time targets for appointments with vulnerable consumers. The additional time may be needed to explain the smart meter in more detail or signpost the consumer to relevant organisations. A significant number of suppliers are not doing this, however, which may lead to installation visits that leave consumers feeling confused.

All suppliers are making an attempt to tailor their information and advice but the interpretation of tailoring varies significantly. Only two of the ten largest suppliers (just over a third of the market) have trained installers to offer energy efficiency advice based on the actual characteristics of the property. This means over half of the market is missing out on a unique opportunity to provide tailored one to-one advice for vulnerable consumers.

All suppliers with sufficiently advanced plans will complete a visual safety check of the boiler and other appliances before they begin an installation. If appliances need to be condemned, most suppliers (84% of the market) have plans to offer some form of alternative heating, lighting and cooking facilities to vulnerable consumers but only four suppliers (just over half the market) are currently offering this service.

In the event of a boiler being condemned there are some companies who are not offering any help to arrange a repair or replacement. This can be detrimental in two ways: it can delay the issue being resolved and cause confusion if the consumer does not understand the problem or know who to call.

It is worrying that 16% of the market could be left without heating or cooking facilities at the end of their installation, especially if they are vulnerable. All suppliers should be sending their installers out with spare electric heaters and cooking rings in case an appliance is condemned.

Key facts and figures



Figure 5. Proportion of market who are using the following methods for dealing with unsafe appliances

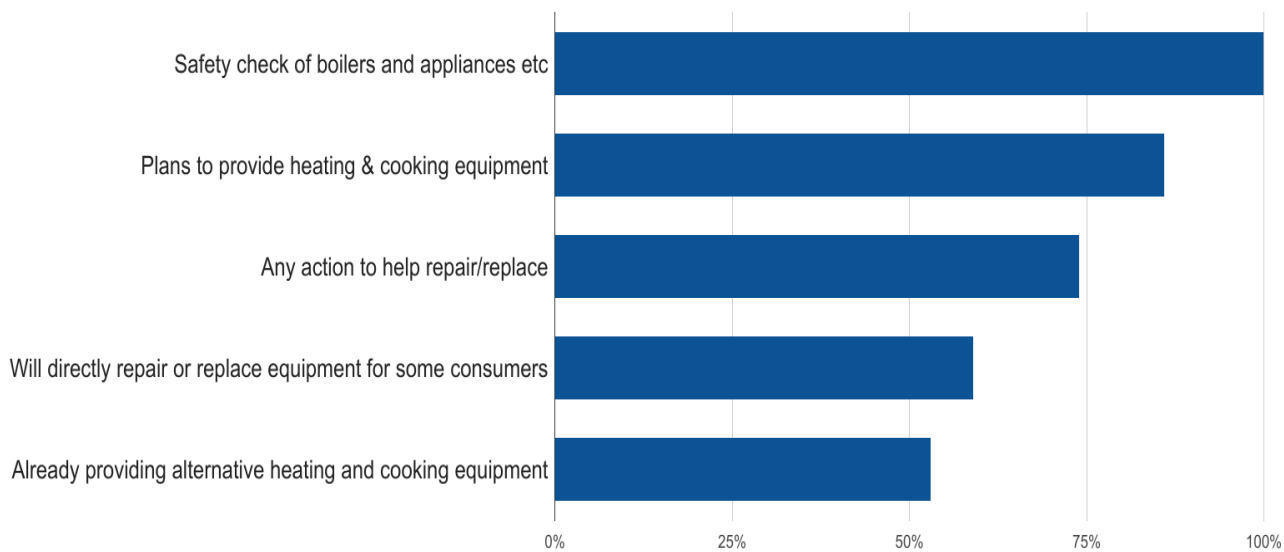
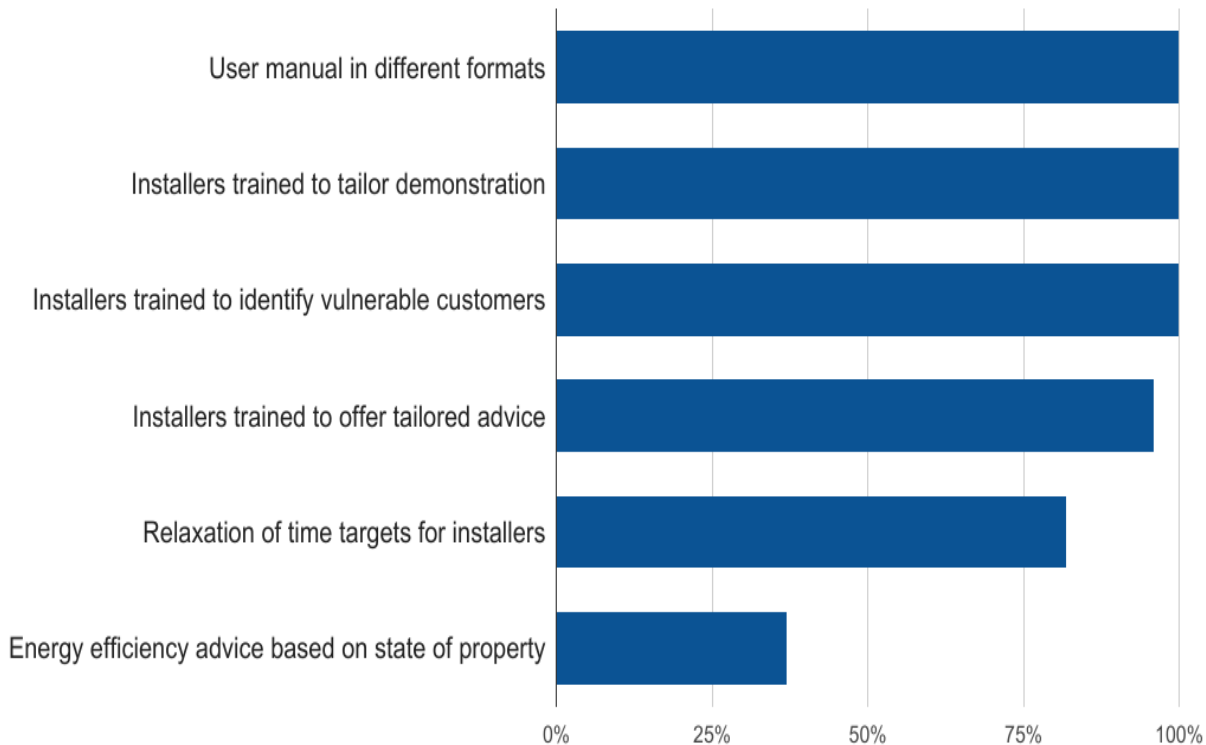


Figure 6. Proportion of market who are using the following methods during an installation



Good practice

Despite processes being in place, sometimes vulnerabilities are not identified prior to the installation. In such cases, there are examples of how industry can effectively anticipate and deal with these situations. Some suppliers are:

- **ensuring their installers provide tailored advice** - one supplier trains installers to explain their IHD in different ways, depending on the needs of the customer. Some suppliers adjust their advice based on their situational knowledge, gained throughout the process. Others will use knowledge gained on site to give energy efficiency advice based on the consumer's property characteristics. Furthermore, one supplier is collaborating with their external partners to explore how best to tailor advice.
- **giving literature to the consumer on the day, which signposts to other sources of information** - in one example, the literature points them in the direction of an online support tool the supplier has designed. Others use relationships with energy charities to provide further advice.
- **monitoring third party contractors** - some suppliers who choose to outsource smart meter installations are able to retain information about potentially vulnerable customers through regular reports, which are requested from the contractor. Other suppliers are considering adding performance indicators, such as handling vulnerability, into their contract. Good performance may be rewarded, whereas unsatisfactory performances may lead to financial penalties.

5. Post-installation

In some cases, vulnerable consumers can benefit more from the capabilities of smart meters than other consumers. However, they may face difficulties accessing these benefits or operating smart meters. Post-installation engagement can help to deal with this and provide a much needed platform for consumers to discuss any issues they are having.

Case study 4

The consumer is a single woman with physical health problems. She has recently had smart meters installed and reports that she finds them 'un-nerving' and 'intimidating'. She states that as the weather is getting colder she needs the central heating on to help with her health conditions but because she can see her usage increasing each time she doesn't want to put it on. She says she feels 'silly' about this, as knows she can afford to have the heating on, even if she has to make savings elsewhere, but being able to see the usage increasing puts her off of using it.

After an installation, the most common proactive form of contact by suppliers is a post-installation letter, 80% of the market provide some follow up in this format. However, in terms of one-to-one contact where consumers have the opportunity to discuss any issues (i.e. face to face or on the phone), the figures are very low - only three suppliers are offering this service. Proactively offering an opportunity to discuss the smart meter and use of the IHD following the installation will be important for vulnerable consumers who may struggle to cover everything during the installation.

Smart meters have the potential to disrupt the energy costs of some vulnerable consumers. "Bills or usage increasing/backdated billing" are currently the single biggest source of complaints to our consumer service on smart metering. The more accurate consumption data means that where a supplier had been underestimating household usage, customers could find their bills rise. Also, confusion around the information provided by the IHD could lead some households to change their consumption in unintended ways - for example a vulnerable consumer might significantly reduce their heating in response to seeing a red light on the IHD.

In previous research⁶ Citizens Advice has emphasised how information about household consumption offers an unprecedented opportunity to understand when households are struggling. The responses show that very few (just two suppliers, representing 40% of the market) have any plans to look at the actual consumption

⁶ Citizens Advice, 2016, On supply, in control, citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/energy-policy-research-and-consultation-re-sponses/energy-policy-research/on-supply-in-control-using-data-to-identify-and-support-energy-consumers-in-financial-difficulty/

data provided by the smart meter. Similarly the majority of suppliers will continue to apply usual processes around billing, only four have specific processes for monitoring following a smart meter install. Only one supplier has plans to set up alerts for dramatic changes in usage and no suppliers plan to analyse whether vulnerable consumers are saving money as a result of the smart information.

Key facts and figures



Figure 7. Proportion of market who are using the following methods after an installation



Good practice

Some effective examples of post-installation engagement include:

- **follow-up communication** - the majority of the market provide some form of follow-up communication. One supplier will call the consumer after 1 week and send a subsequent letter or email after 2 weeks. In addition to this, the same supplier is currently in the middle of a trial where they call consumers after 6 and 9 months to give further energy efficiency advice. Two suppliers will use information obtained during the follow-up telephone call to identify consumers who would benefit from a home visit.
- **checking smart meter functionality** - one supplier uses the follow-up call to check whether the consumer's IHD is displaying the correct tariff. This is useful for some vulnerable consumers who may need support in identifying or discussing issues.
- **looking for ongoing signs of vulnerability** - there are a range of techniques suppliers are using. Some plan to look at consumption patterns for signs of inability to pay and evidence of repeated self-disconnection.
- **preparing customers for the prospect of increasing bills after a smart meter installation** - one supplier is sending letters to consumers who have had estimated bills with their standard meter. The first communication is sent after the smart meter installation and explains the usage on the customer's standard meter from their last bill until the date of the smart meter installation. Such a communication could reduce the impact of a potential bill 'shock'. Another supplier reviews any bill post-installation that does not align with previous bills. These are investigated internally and, if necessary, the consumer will be contacted to discuss the issue.

7. Small suppliers

This project has focussed mainly on the ten suppliers who, if not already installing smart meters, have sufficiently advanced plans to do so. Other respondents to our information request included two medium sized suppliers (at least 1% market share) that did not yet have advanced plans in place for installing meters and ten small suppliers (less than 1% market share) who responded with details of their existing plans.

For these smaller suppliers, this project aims to inform their developing strategies for supporting vulnerable consumers in the roll-out. However, the responses show that some of these smaller suppliers are already thinking about how they can support their vulnerable consumers. We will be following with interest to see how far these aspirations become a reality.

All of the companies who responded are making plans for how they will proactively identify vulnerability through the process and one supplier is adapting their definition specifically for the roll-out. Most said they were planning to offer an accessible IHD and many were also planning to be upfront in their communications about the consumer's right to refuse a smart meter.

Local engagement strategies can be more difficult to develop for smaller suppliers but those that already focus on supplying a local area or working with local partners are planning to combine their smart offer with these strategies.

During the installation, two of the ten smaller suppliers are planning to provide alternative facilities where a vulnerable customer has an appliance condemned. All suppliers that responded are thinking about how to tailor the installer's approach to vulnerable consumers.

Post-installation, three of the smaller suppliers are planning to call their vulnerable consumers to check they are happy with the process and the information. One is considering how consumption data could be used to improve protection of vulnerable consumers with a smart meter.

As mentioned above, for the vast majority of these suppliers, smart meter planning will be at an early stage. We will be monitoring with interest what policies are put in place as these plans become more advanced.

Conclusion

The responses to our information request demonstrate that there are some innovative approaches to help guide vulnerable consumers through the smart meter roll-out. When suppliers anticipate the needs of vulnerable consumers and respond effectively, these consumers are more likely to have a positive experience and are less likely to be left behind.

Every supplier at an advanced stage in their roll-out planning has a developed policy in place with respect to vulnerable consumers. All vulnerable consumers can expect an installer that is trained to identify and adapt their approach to specific needs. Across the board, suppliers are tailoring advice, communications and the IHD to the specific needs of vulnerable consumers.

However, suppliers diverge greatly on how they tailor the approach and for whom. For some, this means a basic approach that offers alternative formats for communication, general sensitivity on the part of the installer and a helpline for further queries. Good practice goes a step further, looking at all the circumstances of the consumer and providing a more personalised service. This involves one-to-one contact before the installation, advice based on circumstances and property characteristics, as well as monitoring and follow-up to ensure they are getting the best from the technology.

Our research shows that the above level of support is not provided consistently across the industry and that more needs to be done to give vulnerable consumers assurance that they will get the extra help they need. It is hoped that the data and good practice in this report will help suppliers to improve their strategies. We also think there are some concerns which require policy changes from government.

Recommendations

1. Government to establish industry-wide standards on follow-up support for vulnerable consumers. The government have set up a working group to develop principles for post-installation support. We believe these should inform standards against which industry performance in this area can be assessed.
2. Government to monitor support for vulnerable consumers in the roll-out.

3. Industry to collectively develop techniques for the use of smart data to identify households in need of extra support with using their smart meter, reducing consumption or staying on supply.
4. Industry to review engagement communication to ensure it does not put pressure on consumers to have a smart meter, with particular regard for vulnerable consumers more likely to suffer confusion or anxiety in the process. This should include making information regarding consumers' rights readily available.
5. All suppliers to guarantee that no vulnerable consumer be left without means to cook or heat their home should a gas appliance be condemned.

Appendix

Table 1: All services offered by suppliers in the rollout - in order of prevalence

	Service	Market share	Number of suppliers
1	Offering accessible IHD	100%	10
2	Feedback survey	100%	10
3	User manual in different formats	100%	10
4	Installers trained to tailor demonstration	100%	10
5	Installers trained to identify vulnerable customers	100%	10
6	Safety check of boilers and appliances etc	100%	10
7	Offer password scheme	100%	10
8	Arrange installation with a nominated person	100%	10
9	Tailored engagement communication	100%	10
10	Using PSR to ID	100%	10
11	Proactively identification through process	100%	10
12	Signposting for more information at install	98%	9
13	flexibility regarding the timing of the appointment	98%	9
14	Enable online self-ID from consumers	98%	9
15	Specific prepay demonstrations	97%	9
16	Installers trained to offer tailored advice	96%	8
17	Offering Energy UK and RNIB accessible IHD	91%	8
18	Specific engagement timeline	90%	9
19	Plans for local engagement	89%	8
20	CA: plans to provide heating & cooking equipment	86%	8
21	Post install letter or email	85%	7
22	Offering apps to help understand smart data	85%	8
23	Relaxation of time targets for installers	82%	6
24	Process for preventing bill shock	81%	6

25	Using local organisations to support post-install	81%	6
26	CA: Contact landlord and/or nominated person	74%	7
27	CA: Any action to help repair/replace	74%	7
28	Using community groups to engage	64%	5
29	Using local authorities to engage	63%	6
30	CA: directly repair or replace equipment for some consumers	59%	4
31	Maintaining interest with updates and info	53%	5
32	CA: already providing alternative heating and cooking equipment	53%	4
33	Providing seasonal hints for saving energy	46%	4
34	Process for bill-shock monitoring following install	46%	4
35	Post-install follow up contact	43%	3
36	Post-install telephone call	43%	3
37	Using RSL's to engage	41%	5
38	Unique definition specific to the roll-out	40%	3
39	Plan to monitor consumption for signs of inability to pay	40%	2
40	Energy efficiency advice based on state of property	37%	2
41	Local engagement already in place	30%	3
42	Pre-install contact	29%	3
43	Pre-install phone call	29%	3
44	Post-install home visit	27%	2
45	Extra flexible booking for vulnerable	26%	4
46	Plan to monitor consumption for detrimental response	16%	1
47	Dedicated point of contact for the process	16%	1
48	ID using energy efficiency of the property	13%	1
49	Pre-install home visit	11%	1
50	Plan to monitor consumption for any cost-saving response	0%	0

*CA - Condemned appliance

We help people find a way forward

Citizens Advice provides free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems.

We advocate for our clients and consumers on the issues that matter to them.

We value diversity, champion equality and challenge discrimination.

We're here for everyone.



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