

Customer experiences of installing renewable technology in Northern Ireland 2020

Consumer friendly report



Introduction

This research was conducted by Ipsos MORI for The Consumer Council to explore the consumer journey with renewable technologies using qualitative research. Ipsos MORI developed a multi-strand qualitative methodology comprising of online focus groups and an in-depth diary exercise using AppLife. Each research participant completed the AppLife diary exercise prior to participation in the group.

The research consisted of six online discussion boards using Adobe Connect across six council areas: Belfast City; Ards and North Down; Mid and East Antrim; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; and Fermanagh and Omagh. Six to eight participants were recruited to attend each group, with 35 participants in total across the sessions.

Key findings

1. Initial stages



Economic and environmental motivations for pursuing renewables are inherently linked. While the principal motivator is likely to vary from person to person, financial considerations seemed to be the key enabler for people embarking upon their journey with renewable technology.



Conversely, the initial financial outlay is likely to be the main barrier for people switching to renewables. Therefore, if uptake of renewables is to be encouraged, grants and incentives will be important.



Given the relative unfamiliarity with renewables, trust and reliable information are key. Many participants discussed the importance of finding a reputable and knowledgeable supplier who they could trust, and some commented that this was a difficult undertaking given the limited choice of providers.

2. Installation and impact



Individual experiences with providers and installers was a key determinant of satisfaction at the installation period. While most were satisfied, some had experienced issues which dampened their experience. This exemplifies the importance of oversight by a trusted body. Some believed that an independent organisation should promote a list of verified providers and an installer's standard should be produced.



The importance of aftercare and servicing was highlighted by many. Some had experienced difficulty in securing aftercare for their technology as their initial provider had gone out of business.

3. REFLECTIONS, ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND BILLING



Once people had decided to choose renewables, most were very satisfied with their decision and consider their initial financial investment to be worth it due to the energy efficiency of their technology and its subsequent impact on household bills.



While this varied according to the specific type of renewable technology, the eminent benefits of renewables were energy efficiency, reduction in bills, a sense of doing something good for the environment and ease of use. The most prominent drawbacks related to technology specific issues (e.g. the seasonal nature of solar panels or the weather dependency of wind turbines).



The relative novelty and unfamiliarity with renewable technology in Northern Ireland seemed to create a sense of apprehension and uncertainty around renewables. People therefore desire regulation, wraparound support and handholding throughout the whole journey.



There was an evident sense that Northern Ireland is on the precipice of renewables becoming more mainstream. However, it seems as though increasing uptake would be conditional upon an integrated approach between Government, industry and providers as well as significant investment and prioritisation in terms of infrastructure and financial incentives.

Final recommendation

If uptake of renewables is to be encouraged in Northern Ireland, grants and incentives will be important to enable people to overcome the initial barrier of upfront cost.



Given the relative unfamiliarity of renewables, and sense of scepticism relating to past scandals, there should be enhanced oversight by a trusted and independent body. A list of verified providers should be published, and an installer's standard should be developed.



A 'one-stop-shop,' providing independent advice for the whole journey should be established to provide wraparound support for the consumer.





Appendix 1:

Questions asked during the survey

GENERAL AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS

What does sustainability mean to you?

RENEWABLE TECHNOLOGY – INITIAL STAGES

What first prompted you to think about introducing renewable energy into your daily life?

What, if any, grants and financial support were available to you when deciding to proceed with installing renewable technology?

What advice would you give to someone who was just starting to think about renewable technologies in their home?

INSTALLATION AND IMPACT IN HOME/ DAILY LIFE

Looking back on the installation/purchase of your renewable technology, how would you describe your experience?

What, if any, technical support is available to you?

Is there anything that you think could be improved about the system in general and how it operates?

ENERGY EFFICIENCY, BILLING, COMPLAINTS

Overall, how do you rate the energy efficiency / fuel efficiency of your renewable technology?

Would you say that the financial investment made in renewables was worth it?

Have you ever had to make a complaint about any aspect of the renewable energy installation or performance of your renewable technology?

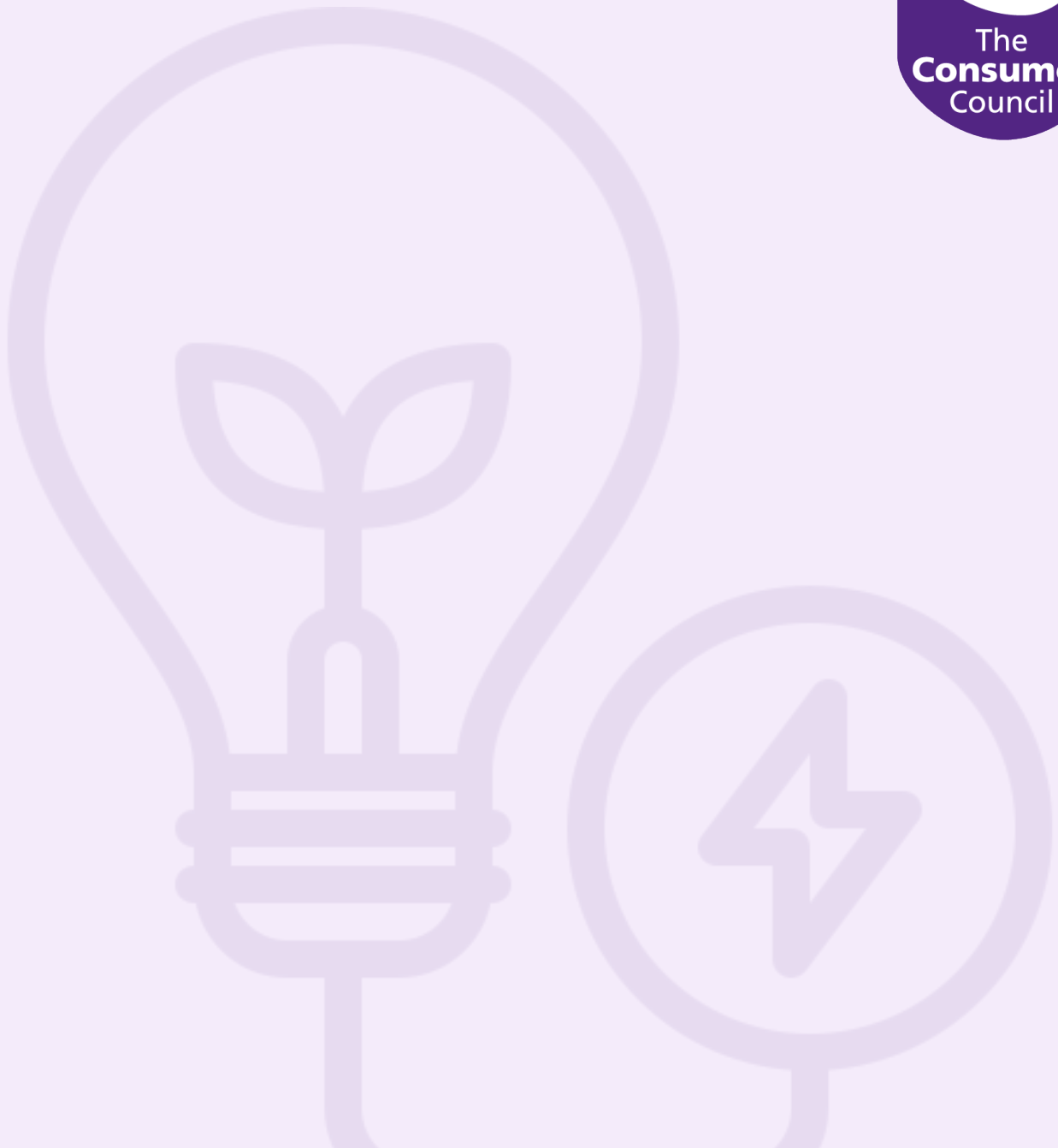
FINAL REFLECTIONS

Thinking back over your journey of switching to renewables, what, if anything, would you say has been a high point?

What advice would you give to someone considering installing a renewable energy solution like yours?

Finally, what do you think would need to happen for other consumers in Northern Ireland to take up renewable technology?





The Consumer Council

**Seatem House, Floor 3
28 - 32 Alfred Street
Belfast, BT2 8EN**

T: 028 9025 1600

F: 028 9025 1663

E: info@consumercouncil.org.uk

W: www.consumercouncil.org.uk