



For immediate release: Tuesday 28th July, 2009

ARE YOU 'QUALIFIED' TO UNDERSTAND YOUR ENERGY BILLS?

Consumers urged to take the uSwitch.com Energy Bill Challenge and to sign an e-Petition to make energy bills simpler, clearer and easier for all to understand.

uSwitch.com is campaigning for household energy bills to be made simpler, clearer and easier for consumers to understand after asking an examining board to give an independent assessment of the state of Britain's energy bills^[1]. The findings were shocking - 45% of Brits may not actually be qualified enough to understand a household energy bill^[2].

According to examiners, people would need at least a higher grade GCSE or O' level in maths to be able to get to grips with a household energy bill. This is because of the complexity and format of the information provided^[1]. But last year only 55% of GCSE maths students achieved this^[2]. Based on this pass rate, almost half of the population could be expected to struggle to understand an energy bill.

In reality, three quarters of people (75%) find energy bills confusing^[3] and 57% find it difficult to work out how their bill has been calculated^[4]. Because of this consumers are being urged to take action by:

- Joining the 'Simpler, clearer, easier' Facebook group: www.uSwitch.com/simpler-clearer-easier
- Signing the 'Better bills' petition: <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/betterbills/>
- Taking part in the uSwitch.com Energy Bill Challenge: www.uSwitch.com/bill-challenge

Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com, says: "You shouldn't need to be an 'A' grade student to be able to understand your energy bills. As things currently stand 45% of consumers are in danger of being excluded because of the complex way in which energy bills are written and presented today."

Ann Robinson continues: “Ofgem is looking to address this, but it’s vital that consumers make their voices heard too. Take the challenge, join the ‘Simpler, clearer, easier’ group on Facebook and sign our e-Petition to get energy bills made simpler, clearer and easier for consumers to understand.”

The uSwitch.com Energy Bill Challenge:

45% of people are not sufficiently qualified to understand a household energy bill – are you one of them? Find out if you’ve got what it takes to get to the bottom of a typical bill by taking the uSwitch.com Energy Bill Challenge at:

www.uSwitch.com/bill-challenge

Have paper, a pen and a calculator to hand and don’t forget to visit Facebook afterwards to let us know how you got on. And just in case you think it’s too easy, here’s what the Head of Mathematics at the examining board^[1] said:

Chair & Head of Mathematics, Edexcel: The amount of information, lack of explanations and format of the bills make them very difficult to process.....These things would make them inaccessible for most GCSE candidates unless considerable explanation was given.”

Good luck!

For more information visit www.uSwitch.com or call 0800 093 06 07

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Notes to editors:

Research conducted by YouGov online between 3rd and 8th June, 2009, among 3,015 respondents with decision making responsibility for their household’s energy. Data is weighted and representative of the GB adult population. All notes below referring to ‘the research’ refer to this data.

1. Examining Board – Edexcel. uSwitch.com gave Edexcel copies of energy bills from each of the big six suppliers in July 2009 for them to give an independent assessment. For full details of their findings see: ‘45% of people ‘not qualified’ to understand energy bills’, issued by uswitch.com on 24th July, 2009.
2. Joint Council for Qualifications: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/attachments/published/1017/GCSE%20Results%20Table%202008.pdf>. Pass rate of 55% based on candidates achieving a grade C or above. This is uSwitch.com’s interpretation of Edexcel’s opinion that: “The amount of information, lack of explanations and format of the bills would make it very difficult for even a very good GCSE candidate to process.”
3. Based on the YouGov research, Consumers were asked to rank how confusing their bills are from ‘5 – very confusing’, down to ‘1- not confusing at all’.
4. According to the YouGov research, when asked: ‘How easy or difficult is it for you to work out how your energy company (gas and/or electricity) has arrived at your billing figure?’ 33% said ‘fairly difficult’ while 24% said ‘very difficult’. These add up to 57%. 9% said ‘very easy’ and 31% said ‘fairly easy’. 3% of respondents said ‘don’t know’.

About Us:

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones, personal finance products and car insurance.

Our aim is to help customers take advantage of the best tariffs and services on offer from every supplier. To aid us in this task we have developed a comparison calculator, which evaluates a number of factors including price, location, service and payment method, and advises consumers on the best deal to suit their needs.

The service is also available via fax and post. Fax 020 7233 5933 or write to Customer Services, uSwitch.com, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 0SR, with your postcode and usage details.

uSwitch.com is not a supplier but acts as an independent advisor, giving consumers an impartial view of what's on offer.