Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Big Energy Saving Network 2015-16: Workshop Assessment Surveys

Executive Summary

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BMG Research

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Executive Summary

Headline Findings

A survey of BESN 2015/16 workshop respondents, and a comparison survey with a non-BESN sample with similar characteristics, found the following:

- The BESN workshops successfully reached the intended vulnerable consumers.
- BESN respondents were significantly more likely to report *attempting* to switch or taking other actions that could reduce their energy costs or consumption.
- Respondents were significantly more likely to report *successfully* switching, but for the most part, there was no difference in *successfully* taking other actions that could reduce their energy costs or consumption.
- Significantly more respondents, who hadn't already attempted to do so, reported that they *intended to* switch or take other action that could reduce their energy costs or consumption *in the near-future*.
- Respondents reported significantly more *confidence in their ability* to switch or take other action that could reduce their energy costs or consumption.

Background

The Big Energy Saving Network (BESN) 2015-16 was a £1m Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) programme. It allocated c.£900,000 in grants to community and third sector organisations who provided support to vulnerable consumers via outreach workshops and frontline workers between September 2015 and March 2016. Both the workshops and frontline work were intended to help vulnerable consumers to reduce their energy costs and consumption.

BMG Research were commissioned to carry out these surveys to establish the extent to which those who attended BESN-funded workshops reported reducing their energy costs through switching supplier, changing tariff or other means as a result of the BESN workshops.

Methodology

Interviews were undertaken via Computer Aided Telephone Interview (CATI) with BESN 2015/16 workshop respondents between 4 January and 13 March 2016.

A total of 375 interviews were completed. These 375 are the ‘BESN sample’.

The data are un-weighted, as it is assumed that the BESN sample is representative of the wider BESN 2015/16 consumer population.

To put the results into context, comparisons have been drawn with a number of other data sources, although it should be noted that the surveys do differ in terms of data collection method, sampling and content:

- BMG’s online Omnibus survey (February 2016). Those surveyed via the omnibus are referred to as the “Omnibus sample”. This survey included a number of questions taken from the BESN survey and was weighted to match the profile of the BESN sample;
- The 2014 BESN evaluation;
- The sixteenth wave (February 2016) of DECC’s Public Attitude Tracker (PAT).

Caveats

The actions taken by respondents outlined in this report are **reported** rather than **actual** actions**.** Further, respondents selected themselves for the BESN sample and those who could not re-call attending a BESN workshop were screened out of the survey. Therefore, there is a risk that the BESN survey findings offer an over-estimation of outcomes across the whole BESN workshop attendee population.

Overview of findings

Successful targeting of BESN events

The target audience for the BESN programme includes, but is not limited to: fuel poor households; people on low incomes and/or on benefits; people with disabilities; those who use prepayment meters; those without internet access; and those who have not switched before.

The achieved sample profile clearly indicates successful targeting of the BESN events when compared to Census 2011 information:

- **Those who are worried about their energy bills:** Respondents were more likely than those in the PAT to indicate that they were worried about most aspects of household expenditure, including energy bills.
- **People on low incomes:** There are strong indications that the median income of the BESN sample is lower than the median in the UK population.

- **People with disabilities:** A higher proportion reported their activities are limited due to a health problem or disability. Also, the age profile of the sample was significantly older than in the 2011 Census. In the UK, the prevalence of disability rises with age.
- **Those without internet access:** Lack of internet access is more prevalent amongst older people; as above, the age profile of the sample was significantly higher than in the 2011 Census.
- **Pre-payment meters:** More of the BESN sample reported using pre-payment meters for their energy usage (21%) than the proportion that does in the UK as a whole (16%).

However, it could not be determined whether the number of respondents who had never switched before (38%) was different to the national average, nor was it possible to compare the prevalence of benefits receipt to national statistics.

Aiding understanding of tariff and billing information

Respondents were significantly more likely than the comparison Omnibus sample to rate billing information as "easy to understand" following their participation in a session. (53% compared to 45%).

Impact of involvement on attitudes and knowledge

98% of respondents felt that the help and advice provided at the sessions was helpful, particularly in relation to increasing confidence in dealing with energy suppliers, having a better understanding of the benefits of switching, knowing how to switch, and knowing where to go for advice in the future.

85% of the BESN sample say they now give a lot or a fair amount of thought to saving energy in their home, which is significantly higher than the 74% who said this was the case in the PAT.

Switching behaviour

Before the BESN Workshop

62% of respondents reported having ever switched before the session.

At/After the BESN Workshop

37% reported enquiring about switching (supplier, tariff or payment method) either at or after the BESN workshop - a significantly higher proportion than the 26% of the Omnibus sample who reported doing so in the last 4 months.

Of those who attempted to switch 68% reported going on to successfully switch.

This means that 25% of the total BESN sample reported going on to successfully switch, which is significantly higher than the 19% of the Omnibus sample who reported doing so.

Of the total sample, 18% switched energy supplier, which is higher than the 11% who reported doing so in the 2014 BESN evaluation.

The majority of those who had switched rated their experiences positively, with only 7% rating them as poor.

Positive ratings of the switching experience were significantly higher among those who tried to switch at or after the session, suggesting that the BESN sessions provided people with what they need to try and switch.

In the future

Of those who reported not switching at or after the BESN workshop, 43% claimed they intended to do so in the next month, which is significantly higher than the 17% in the Omnibus sample who stated the same.

Impact of BESN participation on actions

Respondents who had tried to switch attributed this in large part to their involvement with the BESN session, with 75% saying their decision to try was ‘completely’ or ‘to a great extent’ a result of their involvement.

Other energy saving actions

Before the BESN workshop

When respondents were asked what actions they had ever taken prior to the BESN workshop, 13% reported enquiring about the Warm Home Discount (WHD), 15% about information on other ways to reduce energy use/bills, 7% about being put on the Priority Services Register (PSR),4% about an energy assessment and 6% about other help (e.g. debt advice).

At/After the BESN workshop

Significantly more of the BESN sample reported contacting their energy supplier or someone else about each of the below than the Omnibus sample did, except for the Warm Home Discount, for which there was no statistically significant difference:

- Information on other ways to reduce energy use/bills (11% vs. 2% in the Omnibus)
- An energy assessment (11% vs. 5% in the Omnibus)
- Being put on the PSR (9% vs. 2% in the Omnibus)
- Other help (e.g. debt advice) (7% vs. 3% in the Omnibus)

Significantly more of the BESN sample reported successfully being put on the PSR and getting information on ways to reduce energy use/bills than in the Omnibus sample, but significant differences were not detected for the other options.

In the future
Significantly more of the BESN sample reported an intention to contact their energy supplier or someone else about each of the above in the month following the survey, compared to the Omnibus sample. For instance, 26% intended to get an energy assessment, compared to 3% in the Omnibus. The extent of this difference was similar across all the actions.

Impact of BESN participation on confidence to take action in the future

Switching
91% of all respondents said that they were confident that they now had the information and skills they need if they wanted to switch in future, which is significantly higher than the 70% of the Omnibus sample who said the same.

Other energy saving actions
89% said that they are confident that they now had the information and skills they need if they wanted to discuss other options with their supplier or someone else, which is significantly higher than the 68% of the Omnibus sample who said the same.

Attributing this to BESN workshops
Switching: 64% attributed their confidence levels to their involvement in the session 'completely' (34%) or 'to a great extent' (30%), and this rose to 76% of those who had not switched before the session.

Other actions (332 respondents): 60% attributed their confidence levels to their involvement in the session 'completely' (28%) or 'to a great extent' (32%).

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