

# Delivering clean, fair and affordable energy

Dec 2023

**Sustainability**  
*first*

Image: Isabella Martin

## Foreword

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*At National Grid our vision is to be at the heart of a clean, fair and affordable energy future and we are calling for more ambitious action to move towards this.*

*To us, a fair transition means no matter who or where you are, your income or background, everyone should be able to benefit from the clean energy future. No one should be left behind in the transition to a net zero and climate-resilient future. This includes access to clean energy, job opportunities and economic development.*

*In our work to deliver this vision, we have been discussing how we ensure economic benefits associated with net zero technologies are evenly shared, how we bring communities with us in the transition to net zero and how businesses can create a fair transition and boost social value, while limiting emission rises.*

*In June 2022 we published 'a fair transition: our approach and engagement'. Since then we have continued to engage with stakeholders both in the UK and US. This report builds on this work, and explores our role in delivering a fair transition, what more needs to be done, whilst ensuring the solutions are people centric.*

*We examined these issues with a diverse group of stakeholders, including direct engagement with citizens. We have captured their thoughts, feelings, ambitions and constructive challenge, and in doing so, we have a set of recommendations both for us at National Grid as well as the wider energy sector and government. Thanks to the team at Sustainability First for their facilitation throughout.*

### **Rhian Kelly**

Chief Sustainability Officer, National Grid

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**Cover image: Isabella  
Martin Cloud Canopy, 2018**  
North Sea Artist  
in Residence with  
Sustainability First and  
National Grid





**Helen Birnbaum, Terra Firma Leaky boat, 2021**  
Shortlisted for the Sustainability First Art Prize 2021

# Executive summary

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## Sustainability First and National Grid citizen and stakeholder engagement

Sustainability First worked with National Grid to deliver six online engagement events in March 2023, that focussed on promoting clean, fair, and affordable energy. The events included three roundtables with stakeholders from the energy sector and wider community, and three workshops with citizens from across England and Wales.

This programme of engagement was designed to help facilitate a fair transition to clean energy by fostering discussion and collaboration, empowering citizens, and developing effective recommendations for National Grid and decision makers that respond to the opportunities and challenges associated with the shift to clean energy.

Sustainability First is a charity working in energy and water, aiming to improve environmental, social, and economic well-being. National Grid is an energy company that helps deliver electricity to homes and businesses and manages the major electricity networks in England and Wales. National Grid also operates in the United States.

“No matter who or where you are, your income or background, everyone should be able to benefit from the clean energy future. No one should be left behind in the transition to a net zero and climate-resilient future.”

### **National Grid’s definition of a fair transition**

A fair transition to clean energy in the UK involves a shift away from fossil fuels to clean energy. This shift must be achieved in a way that is equitable and inclusive.

National Grid published [A Fair Transition: Our Approach and Engagement](#) in June 2022, which identified five key focus areas: affordability; education, jobs, and skills; community; nature and resilience; and accessibility. National Grid has been engaging with staff, stakeholders, and members of the public on the key issues shaping its ‘Fair Transition Framework’, including through roundtables, workshops and two ‘Equity and Energy Summits’ in the US. This fair transition work will dovetail with National Grid’s ongoing work embedded in its [Responsible Business Charter](#).

# Recommendations for National Grid

The main recommendations for National Grid from across the engagement events, on how to achieve a fair transition are:

## Demonstrating leadership

- Clearly set out what National Grid are already doing to achieve a fair transition, what they can do directly, what they can do in partnership with others, where they can advocate for wider change and what is outside their remit.
- Build long-term relationships and collaborate with the energy industry, organisations, and government, to plan and deliver fair transition projects and communicate this work publicly.
- Advocate for positive change, such as promoting energy efficiency, technologies that make the electricity grid smarter, using data for the public interest, keeping consumer tariffs simple, and planning local area energy. National Grid needs to prioritise and decide which issues are most appropriate to focus on.

“We need national programs to demonstrate that there is a different future. And that’s where National Grid’s role is key, to help solve some of the issues within the energy system. It is big enough to corral the rest of the energy sector into action, working with charities and helping policy makers to see alternative solutions.”

**Matthew Cole, Fuel Bank**

## Affordable energy support

- National Grid launched a support fund of £50 million in November 2022 to help those affected by rising energy costs. This emergency support package included donations to charities that help and advise people who are struggling to pay energy bills. National Grid envisaged this as a one-off scheme. The steer from stakeholders, is for National Grid to develop a longer-term funding strategy for a fair transition, which provides on-going financial security to charities and support their staff; and allows other organisations to apply for project funding through an open and transparent process. National Grid is considering options but is conscious this level of funding might not be available long-term.
- Decide what pro-bono support (i.e. free support for the public good) is available to smaller organisations and charities that work towards a fair transition, to help build their capacity and resilience. National Grid should communicate what they can offer.
- Citizens feel it is deeply unfair that they are struggling with high energy bills whilst some energy companies are making huge profits. National Grid needs to respond to public concerns, including by ensuring transparency about profits in regulated and commercial parts of the business and making its annual report headlines clear and visible to the public.

## Communications and engagement

- National Grid needs to enable a shift to clean energy in a way that is fair and affordable and communicate the scale of the challenge. They should develop an ongoing public dialogue with better information, using clear, simple, and accessible language, through multiple-media channels, helping the public understand the role of National Grid in delivering a fair energy transition, including how the costs of this will pass through to energy bills.
- Forge effective partnerships with a range of parties, including energy companies, communities, local, regional and national groups and citizens.
- Convene people, hear their views and concerns, and amplify their voices, especially people who are typically underrepresented in decision-making.

“I think National Grid should be reaching out to communities”

**Sonal Parmar, participant, citizens’ workshops**

- Engage communities early and meaningfully in the planning process. National Grid can take communities on a journey, sharing plans through models and timelines, and offering financial support to enable people to engage. They can also develop innovative approaches that enhance community and natural resilience.

## Skills and employability

- National Grid should publicise potential opportunities for green jobs and skills, to inspire young people and give confidence to educational institutions and local decision makers.
- Share good practice, learning, and training online.
- Empower staff to advocate for a fair transition and improve their ability to raise issues at board level.
- Focus on increasing diversity and improving social mobility amongst staff. National Grid can collaborate with peers and the supply chain to do this across the wider energy sector.
- Support a sustainable supply chain, by paying organisations on time, ensuring fair contract terms, and sharing expertise and advice.
- Engage and inspire the next generation about clean energy and a low carbon future. This could include offering new supply chain apprenticeships, in collaboration with other companies in the sector, and develop peer-to-peer approaches to communication.

National Grid will respond to these fair transition recommendations in spring 2024.







# Recommendations for government and the energy regulator Ofgem

- **Demonstrate leadership** – prioritise a fair transition to clean energy and actively share progress, plans, and advocacy efforts. Citizens want the government to show greater leadership and engage in a comprehensive campaign to achieve net zero.
- **Implement clear, coordinated, and simple communications** – through various channels to emphasise the need for a fair transition to net zero. This includes social media, traditional media including newspapers, TV and radio, and community events. Central coordination will help to ensure consistent messaging.
- **Work collaboratively** – with stakeholders from across the energy sector to deliver a fair transition. Engage citizens throughout the process and consider their input.
- **Address the root causes of the energy crisis** – by reforming the energy market structure. Directly engage citizens in these changes, such as in the Review of Electricity Market Arrangements.
- **Keep tariffs simple and transparent** – citizens do not want an entirely new charging structure or locational charging, despite some interest in incentivising off-peak energy usage and promoting energy conservation.
- **Ensure low carbon solutions are accessible to everyone** – such as energy efficiency measures, renewable energy and smart technology. Address barriers to access, particularly in rental properties and social housing, by working with the private rental sector and social housing providers to retrofit housing stock.
- **Promote green jobs and skills development** – understand and communicate the scale of the challenges and opportunities in the transition to net zero. Highlight the importance of education, job creation, and skill development in the clean energy sector.

“There are not enough people to retrofit our homes. We are desperately short of the trades needed to do so and there’s no skills strategy or investment to match the capital spend. The government doesn’t seem to recognise the scale of the challenge, people are starting to shout from the rooftops, but they don’t seem to be getting the message.”

**Ian Preston, Centre for Sustainable Energy**

- **Encourage greater coordination in local area planning** – foster collaboration between local government and companies to ensure a cohesive approach to energy transition within each locality.
- **Tailor community benefits** – some communities may prefer direct compensation, such as home energy efficiency measures, while others may prioritise projects that benefit the whole community.
- **Reassess the definition of people in need** – beyond benefits-related criteria. Consider individuals in vulnerable situations or those struggling to pay bills, including the “squeezed middle.” Provide appropriate support during the energy transition.

## Recommendations for energy companies

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- Demonstrate transparency in prices and profits – provide clear and transparent information about energy company profits and pricing structure. Show how profits are reinvested in energy infrastructure, new technologies, and social projects. This transparency will help build trust following public concerns about excessive profits.
- Focus on making energy affordable and accessible – including for those who are financially struggling. Flexible payment options, support for low-income customers, and investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency measures that reduce costs in the long term, would all help achieve this.
- Ensure clear and accessible communications – communicate with customers in plain language, avoiding jargon and technical terms. Provide accessible formats such as large print, audio, or braille for customers with disabilities. Clear and understandable breakdowns of energy bills should be provided and explaining why prices change. Work with energy suppliers to make bills and tariffs more easily comparable between energy providers.
- Keep energy tariffs simple and transparent – avoid complex charging structures and listen to citizens' concerns and preferences. Locational pricing is not favoured by the citizens we engaged.
- Support energy literacy – through educational initiatives in schools, universities and working with communities. Provide information about energy bills, energy-saving practices, and the shift to clean energy. Explain changes in energy prices, such as why energy bills do not go down straight away when the gas price falls.
- Engage in ongoing public dialogue – with citizens and stakeholders on a fair transition to clean energy. Host events, workshops, and use various communication channels such as social media can help raise awareness, address concerns, and listen to the public.
- Actively involve local communities – in decision-making for processes related to energy projects. Engage communities from the outset and throughout the planning and implementation stages to gain insights, build trust, and identify potential issues early on. Collaboration should include public meetings, community events, and digital tools to reach diverse demographic groups.
- Maximise benefits and minimise impacts – Energy companies should look for innovative approaches to maximise the direct and wider benefits of infrastructure development, such as supporting local businesses, providing training and job opportunities, and enhancing community and natural resilience. They should also mitigate potential negative impacts, such as noise, pollution, and disruption, by implementing pollution controls and restoring damaged habitats.
- Collaborate on skills development and supply chain – Energy companies should collaborate with industry stakeholders to identify skills gaps and job opportunities in the energy sector. By investing in skills development programs and collaborating with educational institutions, energy companies can help build a skilled workforce for the clean energy transition.





# Introduction

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## What is a fair transition?

Energy is essential for many aspects of our lives. We need energy to heat our homes and water, power our appliances, travel around, produce food, make clothes and more. Businesses, hospitals schools and other organisations need energy to operate. We need it to heat our homes, produce food and travel; for our health and wellbeing.

We need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to tackle climate change. This means using energy more efficiently and shifting away from fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources, such as renewable energy from natural resources like the sun, wind, or water, that are not depleted when used.

Around 40% of UK power generation came from renewable resources in 2023, mostly offshore and onshore wind. We only get renewable energy when the natural resource is available. Therefore, we need to find ways to store energy or shift our patterns to use energy when it is available. The UK is also investing in other technologies such as hydrogen and nuclear power. Upgrades to existing systems and new networks will be needed to connect clean energy to homes and businesses.

A fair transition involves making the shift away from fossil fuels to clean energy in a way that is equitable and inclusive, where costs and benefits are shared fairly, and no one is left behind. A fair transition must balance economic, social, and environmental considerations, and be based on a commitment to social responsibility, sustainability, and social justice.

It is critical to engage citizens, communities, and stakeholders – especially those impacted by new energy infrastructure. People must be given a voice in decisions that affect their lives and their environment, through public consultations and community engagement. A fair transition may involve providing financial support for low-income households and communities. Smart and green products and services must be accessible and easy to use regardless of income, location, internet access or additional needs.

A fair transition involves training, skills development, and new job opportunities, including supporting those leaving fossil fuel industries. It is important to focus on protecting the natural environment, increasing biodiversity, and reducing waste, as well as cutting greenhouse gas emissions.





**Liz Elton, Hill, 2019**

Second prize winner for the Sustainability First Art Prize 2020



## Aims and objectives

Sustainability First has been working with National Grid on a programme of engagement with the aim of delivering a fair and inclusive transition to net zero in the energy sector that meets the needs of all customers and citizens. This includes understanding the role of National Grid and the actions they need to take; and ensuring that citizens and stakeholders feel heard and engaged in decision-making on the transition to clean energy.

The objectives of this work include:

- Bringing together stakeholders from the energy sector and the wider community, and engaging citizens, to collaborate and develop solutions that respond to the opportunities and challenges associated with the shift to clean energy.
- Empowering citizens by providing them with opportunities to learn about the shift to clean energy and enabling them to influence and shape decision-making in a way that reflects their needs and priorities.
- Developing effective recommendations that can be implemented by National Grid, the energy industry, or public policy, which considers stakeholders' and citizens' needs and perspectives.
- Developing more inclusive engagement and governance process within National Grid which would enable improved accountability to stakeholders and citizens.

## Scope of the work

The programme of engagement focused on electricity and heating for citizens and communities in England and Wales. It did not cover the perspectives of business customers. There was a particular emphasis on what National Grid can do and what they can influence, including when delivering electricity infrastructure projects. There were also some recommendations for the wider energy sector, government, and energy regulator.



## Stakeholder roundtables

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In March 2023, National Grid planned and delivered three roundtables with stakeholders on a fair transition to clean energy, with advice and support from Sustainability First. These events enabled a diverse range of stakeholders to discuss common challenges and opportunities; identify potential solutions and areas for collaboration; build relationships; and inform decision-making processes.

The roundtables covered the following topics: affordable energy; local synergy (including community engagement in infrastructure projects); and education, jobs and skills. The sessions began with a presentation by National Grid, and they were structured around a series of discussion questions. The Sustainability First team chaired each session, summarised main themes and produced a discussion note.

The roundtables involved 29 external stakeholders, including energy companies, business associations, environmental and fuel poverty charities, citizen / consumer representatives, local government, and partnerships, think tanks and a trade union. The National Grid team involved people they already work with, as well as extending their reach to wider organisations. National Grid's teams and senior leaders participated in the roundtables, enabling them to take forward the recommendations straight into their part of the business.



**Nerissa Cargill Thompson, Small World, 2020**

Second prize winner for the Sustainability First Art Prize 2021

## Citizens' workshops

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It is critical to involve citizens in debates and decision-making in relation to climate change and the shift to clean energy, so there is a public mandate for change. This engagement must be meaningful for both citizens and decision-makers. This means listening to people's lived experiences, insights, local knowledge, and expertise. Citizens' workshops can raise awareness and understanding, empowering citizens by giving them a voice and involving them in the design of solutions that align with their values and priorities.

The impacts of climate change will be felt unequally, due to geographic and socio-economic factors. We must listen to a diverse group of people. We know the transition will have an impact on people in different ways.

Sustainability First planned and delivered three workshops with citizens in March 2023, starting with an introduction to clean, fair and affordable energy, then focusing on affordability and community engagement. The citizens' workshops involved 34 people from a diverse range of socio-demographic backgrounds across England and Wales. To help ensure the workshops were accessible, including for those with disabilities or language barriers, Sustainability First developed materials to be read beforehand and worked with accessibility specialists to produce easy-read documents. We also made the online format simple, with sessions held on Zoom. Participants did not need to learn about new digital platforms.

The workshops were held for 2 hrs in the evenings over three consecutive weeks. Participants were paid for their time and most attended all three sessions, with an added incentive to do so. The sessions began with a presentation from National Grid, followed by questions and answers, then two break-out discussions in smaller groups, with feedback to the main group. Each break-out group had an external facilitator and a scribe. The scribes were from National Grid, including from their graduate programme and sustainability specialists in the UK and US.

The design of the workshops, built on lessons learned from citizens' assemblies, which typically follow a format of: information gathering and learning, with background information and presentations from experts; deliberation and discussion often in small groups to explore different perspectives and reach a consensus or set of recommendations; and reporting and follow-up. The main difference with this workshop format, from other citizens' assemblies, was that the pre-read materials and presentations were kept short to enable more time for discussion between participants, and open feedback was encouraged without the need to narrow down options and reach consensus.

## Participant recruitment

Citizens' workshops can never be exactly representative of the wider population, but can reflect a diversity of views – with a broad mix of ages, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, disabilities, political preferences, working status, locations etc. Finding citizens to involve in an assembly or workshop can be challenging. There are several approaches that can be taken to ensure a diverse and representative group of citizens is selected, such as: random selection; outreach and engagement (including working with community organisations, conducting outreach events, and using social media); and stratified sampling (where the population is divided into sub-groups based on criteria relevant to the study).

**“I really enjoyed the workshops and I enjoyed the fact that we split up into groups. So we had more of a chance to ...say what we thought. It was nice to ...hear other people's views from all around the country.”**

**Janet Whur, participant, citizens' workshops**

Sustainability First used stratified sampling to ensure that citizens were selected from different demographic groups in society. We worked with a specialist research recruitment firm to develop quotas which were designed to reflect the population of England and Wales. We purposefully had higher quotas for groups typically underrepresented in decision-making, such as people with disabilities. Charts of the participant demographics can be found in Annexe A. The advantage of using such a recruitment firm is that they have expertise in finding people, a large pool of potential participants; they met quotas quickly and within budget. Some disadvantages of this approach are that participants may be regularly involved in focus groups, and in our sample, they tended to be clustered in geographic hubs, such as a city, likely to be the location of local recruiters.

Initially, we recruited 41 participants, (predicting some drop-outs), and 34 participants joined the workshops. We engaged an external peer-reviewer to evaluate the demographic composition of the group and suggest any changes. We included four participants with disabilities and two with limited digital literacy. However, we found gaps in representation, as no participants from social grade A, i.e., higher managerial and professional occupations, were included, and we would have liked to engage more people with limited digital literacy. People with mental or cognitive restrictions were not represented; two people initially recruited in this category dropped-out.



## Insights and recommendations

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This section includes the main insights and recommendations from across the stakeholder roundtables and citizens' workshops. The focus of the work has been on clarifying National Grid's role in a fair transition. Many of the recommendations will apply to other energy companies and we have also included suggestions relevant to regulators and policy makers.



## Demonstrating leadership

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**The UK government has set an ambitious target to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This is a major challenge and everyone in the energy sector needs to work together to make it happen. National Grid, as a major player in the sector, can help lead the way by prioritising a fair transition across their businesses and supply chains. They are already starting to work towards this goal, so it is important for them to share their progress, tell their story and develop their plans. National Grid needs to clearly set out what they can do directly to support a fair transition, what they can do in partnership with other organisations, what changes they can advocate for and what they cannot do.**

### **Build long term relationships to deliver plans.**

Stakeholders and citizens have recommended that National Grid collaborate and build long term relationships with people across the energy industry, organisations, and government, to plan and deliver fair transition projects, and share them with the public. Citizens feel that the UK government needs to do more to back up its net zero ambitions with tangible plans and wider educational campaigns. Citizens need support and incentives to shift to net zero lifestyles and a clearer timetable about upcoming changes.

### **Tackle root causes of the energy crisis.**

Citizens argue that achieving a fair and affordable transition to clean energy means tackling underlying problems, including the structure of the energy market and wider inequalities. Some suggest nationalising the energy system, while others feel that the government, regulator, and energy companies need to reform market design so clean and renewable energy sources are favoured, and the energy system is decentralised. Ongoing government support for fossil fuel projects seems in direct contradiction of net zero goals.

### **Advocate for wider change.**

National Grid have the power to make a real difference in promoting positive change in the energy sector. Citizens are more aware of energy issues, due to the ongoing energy and cost of living crises. This presents an opportunity for National Grid and others to promote positive change. Such as promoting energy efficiency, low-carbon technologies, use of smart data for the public interest and a smarter energy system, which will help people reduce energy usage and cut peoples' energy costs. Citizens highlighted the importance of ensuring that everyone, including those who live in rental properties or social housing, can benefit from clean energy choices, not just home-owners and wealthy individuals.

## Affordable energy support

**The UK is currently facing a cost-of-living crisis, which means that the costs of essential goods and services including housing and food, have risen faster than people's incomes. At the heart of this crisis is a surge in energy costs and many are struggling with energy bills. There are three main reasons why energy bills have gone up over recent years: the costs of wholesale gas and electricity have increased; more people staying at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic has led to higher household demand for energy and resulted in higher bills for some customers; and more than 30 energy suppliers going bust has increased costs for all consumers.**

### **Be transparent about prices and profits.**

Citizens expressed concern about paying high energy bills, while some energy companies have made excessive profits, which they believe is deeply unfair. Energy companies should be more transparent about their profits and consider if they are reasonable, given the wider context. They should communicate clearly about how they reinvest profits in energy infrastructure, new technologies and social projects. Most citizens do not understand how cost, profit, investment and return on capital work in the energy market. There needs to be a more effective dialogue about how these issues inter-connect, and some choices have inherent negative consequences for consumers. Additionally, companies need to explain how external factors, like buying gas in advance, affect pricing, and why consumers may not immediately feel the benefit when gas prices fall.

### **Decide which issues to focus on.**

Stakeholders recommended that National Grid should be clear about the affordability and accessibility issues they are addressing. It is important that National Grid focus on addressing the challenges they are best placed to solve, rather than trying to tackle everything at once. Affordability issues in energy include high energy bills, rising levels of debt, and people in fuel poverty. National Grid Electricity Distribution must also consider specific accessibility needs when engaging individuals and communities, such as offering extra assistance to people in vulnerable circumstances due to illnesses or disabilities, those with limited digital skills to use smart meters and choose tariffs, and engaging with communities where English is not their first language.

"I'm 67 years old. I've never owed a penny to anybody. You know where my bills are concerned. I'm in massive debit to my electric company. Now it's out of my control... when is it going to stop, how's it going to change? You know, when are the bills going to come down, when is the sustainable form of power going to be ... in the marketplace?"

**Steven Mann, participant, citizens' workshops**





**Joanne Coates, Hornsea Rescue, 2023**  
North Sea Artist in Residence

**Support people who are vulnerable and/or struggling financially.**

Energy companies need to make sure that everyone, including those who are financially struggling, can afford and access energy. Providing flexible payment options and support for vulnerable customers and those on low incomes would enable this. They can also invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency measures that reduce costs for customers and society in the long term. Citizens also recommended that the government and energy companies take a fresh look at how they define those who are vulnerable or struggling to pay their energy bills or vulnerable. People expressed concern about the practice of using state benefits to identify those in need, which they feel fails to capture all those requiring help.







### **Ensure clear, accessible communications.**

It is essential that energy companies communicate with their customers in plain English and without using jargon, as well as provide accessible formats such as large print, audio, or braille for customers with visual impairments or other disabilities. Many citizens expressed concern that energy bills are hard to understand. Energy companies should make the breakdown of energy bills clearer and explain why energy prices change. It is important to train staff and conduct user testing with citizens, including people with disabilities, to ensure that their communications and services are accessible and meet their needs. Energy regulators should require energy companies to provide standard services, such as telephone lines in different languages or real-time translation, to better support non-native English speakers. It is crucial to consider accessibility concerns when using artificial intelligence, interactive voice response, and chatbots as substitutes for human interactions in call handling.

### **Keep energy tariffs simple.**

Citizens were asked to provide feedback, during the affordability workshop, on the fairness of potential energy tariff arrangements, including where the cost of energy varies depending on the time of day, the amount used, or where it is produced and used. Citizens expressed scepticism about these ways of charging; they felt energy tariffs and bills are already complex and difficult to understand, without further complicating matters.

While some saw the benefits of incentivising people to use energy off-peak or use less, they did not support an overhaul of the entire charging structure. Citizens were clearly opposed to locational pricing, expressing concerns about unintended consequences on house prices and people's choices to live in certain areas. They felt local communities should benefit in other ways if low carbon infrastructure is developed in their area.

Some citizens asked whether excess renewable energy could be given to low-income households locally, instead of turning off wind turbines when demand on the system is low. It is important to ensure energy tariffs are transparent and easy to understand, and that citizens' concerns are considered when implementing changes to the energy system.





## National Grid's support package

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**National Grid launched a support fund of £50 million in November 2022 to help those affected by rising energy costs. The fund provides significant donations to charities and organisations which advise and support people struggling with their energy bills. Stakeholders supported this effort but warned of the risk of creating a sudden future funding gap for charities if the support is only a one-time contribution. Some citizens appreciated National Grid's approach and suggested that a proportion of the funds could be targeted to smaller local charities. A few citizens disagreed with the idea of a commercial organisation like National Grid funding charities, suggesting that it is the government's responsibility to help people in need. They argued that National Grid should focus on finding ways to lower costs for consumers.**

### **Create a longer-term funding strategy.**

Stakeholders urged National Grid to create a funding strategy that would provide longer-term support for a fair transition. This strategy should offer financial security for both charities and their staff, with funding being allocated in an accessible and predictable way. National Grid's funding strategy should support underrepresented groups and promote inclusivity. Additionally, there should be a part of the fund accessible through an open and transparent application process with regular funding rounds, and a simple application process for charities and organisations. It is important for National Grid to collaborate with charities and other key stakeholders to co-create projects and build the capacity of frontline staff. National Grid should also evaluate and learn from the outcomes of their funding, measure the impact, and share best practices with the sector.

"National Grid could support its charity partners with training and bespoke advice, for examples in IT, Human resources, communications, legal issues, tax and perhaps even offering office accommodation."

**Matthew Cole, Fuel Bank**

### **Offer pro-bono support to smaller organisations.**

National Grid can also support smaller organisations and charities working towards a fair transition by offering pro-bono (i.e., free) support to build their capacity, expertise, and resilience. Stakeholders suggested that this could include support with IT, data, customer relationship management systems, human relations, stakeholder engagement, communications, guidance on regulatory and policy issues, bespoke advice (e.g., legal, tax), and office/meeting spaces. National Grid could offer mentoring, coaching, partnership, and advocacy to promote the work of smaller organisations and highlight their achievements. National Grid should highlight the support they already provide and decide what else would be appropriate to offer.



## Communication and engagement

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**The transition to net-zero is one of the most significant challenges of our time. It is crucial that politicians, the government, regulators, energy companies and everyone involved in the issue, work together to raise awareness about the scale of the challenge and promote change.**

**The government has a key role to play in communicating with the public about the need for a fair transition. This involves explaining why it is so important, what it means for us, and how we plan to achieve these ambitious goals. To do this, some citizens suggested that the government could create a central hub or website that provides easy-to-understand information about energy issues, policies, and initiatives. This information should be shared using a variety of communication channels, such as social media, traditional media, and community events, while also engaging with stakeholders. This would help ensure that everyone understands what we need to do to make the necessary changes to achieve a more sustainable future and address climate change.**

### **Develop an ongoing public dialogue.**

It is important for National Grid to communicate with the public about the shift to clean energy. They should make it easy for everyone to understand what they do and how they are working to ensure a fair transition. This means developing ongoing public dialogue, hosting events and workshops where people can learn about the issues and ask questions, while also reaching out to underrepresented groups and collaborating with stakeholders. As above, National Grid can use a variety of communication channels, including social media and traditional media, to share information with the public. It is important that they use clear and simple language that is free of jargon and technical terms, to ensure everyone can understand what is going on.

“National Grid have got to be making everybody aware throughout the whole process, whether it be adverts on social media or on TV or newspapers getting out there into communities.”

**Janet Whur, participant, citizens' workshops**



**Still/Moving Projects, To be Heard, 2021**  
Shortlisted for the Sustainability First Art Prize 2021

### **Build energy literacy.**

Energy literacy is all about understanding the role of energy in our lives and its impact on our environment, society, and economy. It means having the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about energy use and understanding the benefits and challenges of different energy sources and technologies. In the UK, improving energy literacy is essential for a successful transition to clean energy. This can be achieved through various means such as educating people in schools and universities, supporting community-led initiatives, clear communications, and engagement with underrepresented communities to ensure that they have a voice in the transition. Citizens called for more information about how energy bills are made up, why energy prices fluctuate, and how to save energy at home. By improving energy literacy, individuals can make better choices about their energy consumption, reduce their carbon footprint, and help promote innovation and investment in clean energy.





**Andrew Bolton, Ayla 2, 2021**  
Shortlisted for the North Sea Artist Residencies



## Local engagement

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**The UK needs to make radical changes to the way it produces and uses energy to tackle climate change and shift to clean energy. This requires building new energy infrastructure to generate electricity and distribute it to homes and businesses. It is critical to involve and listen to local communities and stakeholders affected by the shift to clean energy in decision-making. Community engagement can create a sense of ownership, build trust and credibility for the project. By engaging communities in the planning and decision-making processes, project developers can gain insights and feedback to improve the project and mitigate risks. Early and meaningful community engagement can help avoid delays, conflicts, and costly legal challenges.**

### **Engage early and meaningfully.**

Local communities, governments, and organisations should be engaged from the outset of the planning process and at every stage of decision-making. This involves mapping key stakeholders, including community groups, local organisations, charities, businesses, and local government officials. For example, working with wildlife and environmental organisations to identify the best approaches to protect habitats and species, while social justice charities can help share the perspectives of vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. In an open and meaningful consultation process, people's views, concerns, and suggestions are listened to, and their feedback is incorporated into the project design. It is vital to find out what communities want and ensure that plans incorporate local requirements and expertise.

“When delivering large infrastructure projects, community engagement is critical. This means getting the community involved at the start and bringing them along with you. It is crucial to quantify local benefits from the outset. Literally down to what it means for an individual household.”

**Debby Skellern, Western-Gateway Partnership**

### **Use various approaches to involve people.**

A variety of approaches can be used to engage local communities and stakeholders, such as public meetings and community events, (which provide opportunities for people to ask questions and learn more about the project), and interactive workshops to discuss potential benefits and impacts of the project, which can address concerns in a more in-depth way.



Digital tools can also be used, such as websites, social media, and email newsletters to share information and gather feedback. It is helpful to communicate proactively across multiple channels to reach different demographic groups. Local governments and companies should provide training and potentially financial support to build capacity for local communities and organisations to participate effectively in the planning process.

### **Tell the story of why new energy infrastructure is needed.**

National Grid will need to build wider understanding and trust about why new infrastructure is needed to support the shift to clean energy, and how their role is pivotal. They can also work with local authorities, energy actors, transport providers, and others to tell the net-zero story in local and regional areas, developing a common language and vision for a fairer future. Project developers should provide clear and transparent communication about the purpose, benefits, and potential impacts of new infrastructure developments, using simple language and accessible approaches. It may be helpful to share plans using visual aids, such as models, timelines, and infographics. It is important to be honest when changes occur in the project timeline, costs, or impact, and be available to answer questions.

“Do the people that make policy have any idea what it’s like on the ground where they’re proposing that things should happen?”

**James Manning, participant, citizens’ workshops**

### **Tailor and quantify the benefits for communities.**

When planning infrastructure projects, it is crucial to quantify the benefits they will bring in a consistent and reliable way. Community benefits are an integral part of infrastructure projects, and they must be customised to meet the specific needs and desires of the communities involved. Different communities have different requirements and preferences; community benefits should be tailored accordingly.

Direct compensation to individuals can include home energy efficiency measures and smarter systems, which can provide tangible benefits to households and can help to reduce energy bills. This can be particularly important for low-income households. Some communities may prefer projects that benefit the wider community, such as solar panels on public buildings or community wind turbines, which can generate income for the community and provide a sense of ownership and involvement in the shift to clean energy. Projects do not need to be clean energy related; they could include investment in public amenities, such as libraries, schools, or leisure centres. A community fund could be made available to support local projects with small grants.

### **Maximise wider benefits, minimise impacts.**

There can also be wider benefits of infrastructure development, such as support for local businesses, training, and job opportunities for residents. National Grid and other infrastructure developers should look for innovative approaches that help unlock co-benefits, including improving community and natural resilience. It is also important to mitigate potential negative impacts of developments on local people and nature, such as their appearance, noise and pollution caused by building works, disruption to local traffic or waterways, and impacts on the land and wildlife. Plans should incorporate a commitment to enhancing the natural environment and biodiversity, restoring damaged habitats, and implementing pollution controls

### **Focus on local and regional planning.**

Successful infrastructure planning requires long-term relationships with the communities involved, as well as collaborative approaches to regional engagement. Local area planning allows for a coordinated and collaborative approach to address the specific needs and opportunities of a particular area or community. Clear communication channels should be established between energy infrastructure developers, local authorities, and communities.

Common goals and a shared vision for the area's energy future should be developed. It is also helpful to pool resources and develop partnerships. Standardising processes and sharing good practices between local authorities on local area energy planning should be encouraged. Providing contact details for members of the community to ask questions and provide feedback is also crucial, during and after the project has been delivered.



**Zillah Bowes, Allowed, 2020**

Shortlisted for the Sustainability First Art Prize 2021



## Jobs, skills, and the supply chain

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**The transition to clean energy will require a wide range of green jobs. These jobs include creating new low-carbon industries that will require renewable energy and energy efficiency, network infrastructure and energy storage, as well as transforming existing high-carbon industries such as gas power stations and steel plants. With the impact of the climate crisis being felt across the economy, most jobs will need to change to some extent. It is important to distinguish between different types of green jobs, rather than grouping them together, such as those directly related to the low-carbon transition versus general skills across a range of businesses.**

### **Mapping skills gaps and green jobs opportunities across energy sector.**

Collaborative work is needed to identify skills gaps and job opportunities across the energy, other utility sectors, such as water, waste, and communications, and the wider economy. Stakeholders felt that the UK government is falling short in understanding and communicating the scale of the challenge and opportunities in the transition to net zero. As a result, many colleges, further education institutions and local decision-makers are not yet promoting opportunities in green jobs as much as they could.

The energy industry faces significant reputational and trust issues, particularly regarding the cost of energy. Mistakes made by some companies can affect the entire industry, making it challenging to convince young people that these sectors are a great place to work. To build trust and confidence that there will be a stream of green jobs, industry players could work together to demonstrate the scale of opportunity. National Grid, can drive collaboration within the energy and utility sectors, raise awareness with national government, and work with higher educational institutions to promote green jobs and skills. They can also offer apprenticeships and training and engage with local communities to demonstrate and communicate potential opportunities.

Collaboration across utility sectors will be essential to develop a comprehensive view of green job opportunities. It is important to start imagining future green jobs now to inspire future generations to join the energy sector. National Grid should be clearer about what green jobs are available and work collaboratively with Human Resource departments internally and in the wider energy sector to identify and communicate these opportunities. Workforce planning should begin with schools to ensure that people have the skills required for these jobs in the future.



“There’s a need to raise awareness and visibility of the opportunities that exist within an organisation like National Grid and the wider supply chain in the energy sector because there are vast numbers of roles that will be required in the future.”

**Russell Winnard, Young Enterprise UK**

### **Share good practice, training, and skills.**

National Grid can help promote wider learning by sharing its skills training and knowledge online with its charity partners and communities. By sharing its approaches, and good practices, National Grid can support the development of skills and knowledge in the energy sector. National Grid can provide valuable support to smaller organisations by offering secondments and pro-bono support, to develop their skills, knowledge, and capabilities.



### **Maintain a sustainable supply chain.**

National Grid can support a sustainable supply chain by sharing expertise and advice, establishing fair contract terms, and paying organisations on time. By sourcing materials, equipment, and services from sustainable suppliers, National Grid can reduce the environmental impact of its operations, reduce supply chain disruptions, and enhance its reputation as a responsible business. National Grid can collaborate with suppliers to identify ways to improve sustainability, incorporate sustainability requirements into procurement contracts, and select suppliers based on their sustainability credentials.

“National Grid’s engineers and staff go back to their communities. They have conversations and they’re going to be asked questions. They need to be equipped with the skills to point neighbours, friends, and people down the pub in the right direction. So there there’s a degree of advocacy, they need to be seen as green and be able to help other people behave in the right way as well to meet our energy aspirations.”

**Duncan McCombie, YES Energy Solutions**

### **Empower staff as advocates of clean energy.**

National Grid’s staff members can be advocates for green jobs in their homes and communities, helping to raise awareness about the range of roles and opportunities available and the many ways people can contribute to net zero. National Grid can provide training and development opportunities, encourage staff engagement in discussions and debates, recognise and reward active engagement, and provide communication resources and tools. This would equip employees to think in a different way, live greener lifestyles and be advocates in their local areas. National Grid runs a programme of staff volunteering with charities and other organisations.

### **Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion.**

National Grid can also focus on workforce development opportunities and equality, diversity, and inclusion across the organisation. Stakeholders suggested that National Grid could create the right culture and attract people to join, by matching jobs to people instead of people to jobs, providing flexible portfolio jobs, and recruiting based on skills rather than qualifications.

They could find and share examples of recruitment best practice, anonymise the recruitment process, and engage worker representatives and unions in planning and conversations. The recruitment process can be daunting, and National Grid could have informal conversations rather than formal interviews. National Grid can also use its procurement power to promote equality, diversity, inclusion and improve social mobility across the wider energy sector.

## **Engage and inspire the next generation.**

National Grid can help inspire young people and promote green jobs by raising awareness of the wide range of roles and potential career pathways available in the energy sector. This includes building skills and pathways from an early stage and making opportunities more visible. Stakeholders suggested that National Grid can help change the perception that academic learning is prioritised over applied learning, showing how maths, literacy, and science can be used in a practical way. National Grid could work in collaboration with other organisations to provide work experience in different parts of the energy sector, such as developing supply chain apprenticeships. National Grid could also use social media platforms like TikTok and Snapchat to communicate with young people and support them to communicate peer-to-peer about fair transition issues.





# Messages from citizens

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Below are some of the main messages from the citizens involved in our three workshops on achieving a fair and affordable shift to clean energy:

- **Benefits of clean energy are clear** – clean energy offers clear benefits for the planet, public health, and potentially reduced costs. Citizens recognised the need to shift to clean energy to address the climate crisis.
- **Energy as an essential service** – citizens viewed access to energy as a basic right, as it is essential for all aspects of life. Some suggested that there should be a minimum energy allowance to ensure peoples' basic needs are met.
- **Government leadership** – the government has set an ambitious target to reduce greenhouse gases and other emissions and it is essential that this is backed up with plans and leadership. Citizens expect clear communication, a democratic approach that involves communities, and a focus on addressing root causes of the recent energy crisis, including the structure of the energy system and wider pre-existing inequalities. Some citizens proposed nationalising the energy system.
- **Protect the environment** – National Grid needs to give assurances that they can meet the demand for clean energy while safeguarding the environment, including land and natural habitats. Citizens wanted assurance that any new projects will be conducted in a way that does not harm nature. The choices made, such as using pylons or underground cables, should be clearly explained, and justified.
- **Costs of the shift to clean energy** – citizens wanted more clarity on the costs of shifting to clean energy and the impact on energy bills. It is important to ensure costs are distributed fairly and that measures such as renewables and electric vehicles remain affordable.
- **Energy prices and profits** – citizens expressed concern about soaring energy bills while energy companies continue to make significant profits. They suggested that energy companies should reduce returns to shareholders, reduce costs to consumers and reinvest more into renewable energy. Some also proposed capping energy company profits.
- **Support for low income and vulnerable people** – citizens believe that low-income and vulnerable individuals should receive support during the transition to clean energy. They think it is important to have fair pricing structures and to reconsider how assistance is provided, not relying on state benefits as an indicator of need.
- **Difficulties for renters and social housing** – people who rent or live in social housing can face additional challenges in adopting energy efficiency measures or renewable energy, as they may not be able to make alterations to their properties. Citizens stressed the need for equal access to clean energy choices, regardless of your income level and whether you own your home .

- **Simple tariff structures** – citizens wanted energy tariffs to be simpler, easier to understand and consistent across suppliers. They oppose charging different prices based on location, as this could create unfairness and unintended consequences. Although they recognised the benefits of encouraging people to change their energy usage habits or use less energy, they urged decision makers not to make tariffs more complicated.
- **Build trust through transparency** – citizens expressed a lack of trust in energy companies and politicians. They emphasised the need to build trust through open and transparent communications.
- **Clear communications and ongoing public dialogue** – citizens stressed the need for clear and open communication from National Grid, especially concerning infrastructure plans and their impacts on communities. They emphasised the importance of ongoing dialogue and public participation throughout the shift to clean energy, using different communication channels like workshops, online platforms, social media, and face-to-face conversations. These methods would allow the public to participate in decision-making and provide valuable feedback.
- **Collaboration and planning** – citizens called for collaboration and planning between government, local councils, energy companies, businesses, and charities within a coordinated approach to the fair transition to clean energy, avoiding duplication and promoting long-term planning and innovation.
- **Local community engagement** – National Grid must actively engage with communities impacted by the shift to clean energy and new projects. While individuals may not always identify themselves as part of a community, they desire to be heard and included in the decision-making process. It is crucial for National Grid to proactively involve communities and provide benefits, such as monetary compensation, work experience, training, and support for local services, to those directly affected by new infrastructure. These benefits can be tailored to meet each community's needs.
- **Awareness raising and advocacy for clean energy** – citizens highlighted the crucial role of National Grid in raising awareness about the transition to clean energy and educating the public about the energy system. They urge National Grid to actively advocate for energy efficiency measures, renewable energy incentives, and to tackle issues like fuel poverty, making their presence more visible to the public.
- **Develop green jobs and skills** – citizens recognise the importance of providing training and developing skills for the shift to clean energy. They suggest offering apprenticeships, skill building programmes and new jobs, especially in areas affected by infrastructure projects. National Grid can work with schools and training providers to teach young people, encourage them to change their behaviours, and inspire them to pursue a career in clean energy.



# Conclusions and next steps

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Sustainability First partnered with National Grid to organise a series of online engagement events focused on promoting clean, fair, and affordable energy. These events involved stakeholders from the energy sector, as well as citizens from across England and Wales, aiming to foster discussion, collaboration, and effective recommendations for National Grid and decision makers. The goal was to facilitate a fair transition to clean energy by raising awareness, empowering citizens, and addressing the challenges associated with this shift.

The main recommendations for National Grid included demonstrating leadership, providing affordability support, improving communications and engagement, and focusing on skills and employability. National Grid will respond to these recommendations in a spring 2024 update on their fair transition work. Building on the discussions of the workshops, Sustainability First has recommended some next steps for National Grid:

- Develop a fair transition plan, which can be implemented across the business and links in with National Grid's work on responsible business charter.
- Continue to engage and consult stakeholders and citizens on National Grid's fair transition plans to gain advice and critique.
- Conduct wider polling to gather more data and insights, to test some of the recommendations from the from citizens' workshops, such as opposition to locational charging, with the wider population.
- Maintain the citizens group and engage with them to provide feedback on fair transition plans and priorities.
- Involve workshop participants, including stakeholders and citizens, in National Grid's 'Energy and Equity Summit' to report back on progress.
- Run similar interactive sessions to our citizens' workshops with local communities on future infrastructure projects.
- Develop clear communications on the energy market, energy bills and a fair transition, tested with the citizens group, to enhance energy literacy.
- Engage diverse groups of young people through workshops to explore their aspirations and attract them to careers in the energy sector.
- Develop a longer-term funding strategy to ensure advice and support is available for people struggling with their energy bills during the cost-of-living crisis, working in partnership with charities and organisations.
- Create a local community fund to support community led projects in areas where clean energy infrastructure is being developed.

- Consider what pro-bono support National Grid could offer to smaller organisations and charities.
- Organise supply chain apprenticeships in collaboration with other companies and organisations.
- Engage in more depth on environmental and biodiversity aspects of the fair transition with stakeholders and citizens.

Sustainability First has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the project. We have gathered valuable insights through surveys before and after the workshops, targeting stakeholders, citizens, National Grid staff, and other participants. Active feedback was sought throughout the workshops, focusing on the agenda and content. Semi-structured interviews with workshop participants and key National Grid staff captured quotes and videos to share the project findings. We have analysed recruitment data to assess participant diversity and tracked attendance for session participation and retention. We also measured online reach and engagement through Google Analytics, particularly on social media and the website. We will consider how National Grid addresses the recommendations in their publications and communications. These evaluation methods will provide valuable insights into the project's effectiveness and impact.



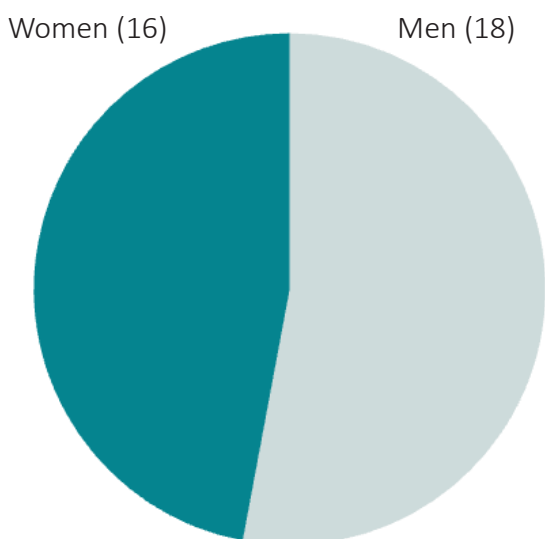


**Alison Cooke, Spin, 2023**  
North Sea Artist in Residence

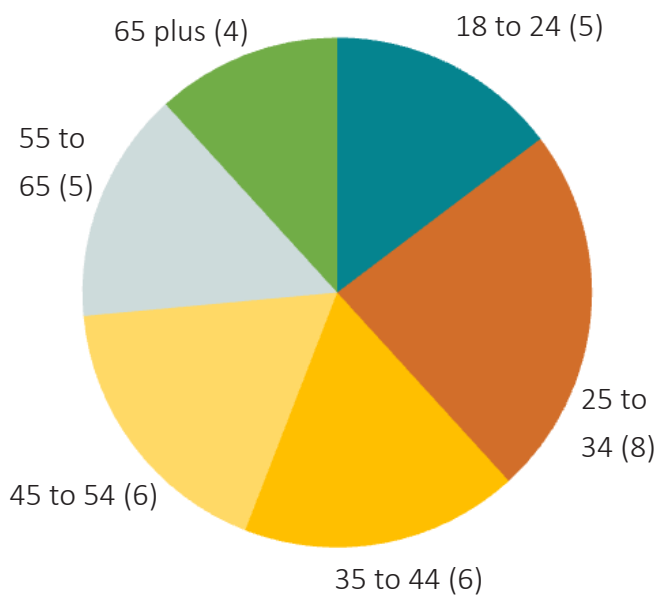
# Annexe A – Citizens’ workshops, participant demographics

This section contains graphs illustrating the demographics of the participants in the citizens’ workshops. A total of 34 people participated in the workshop series.

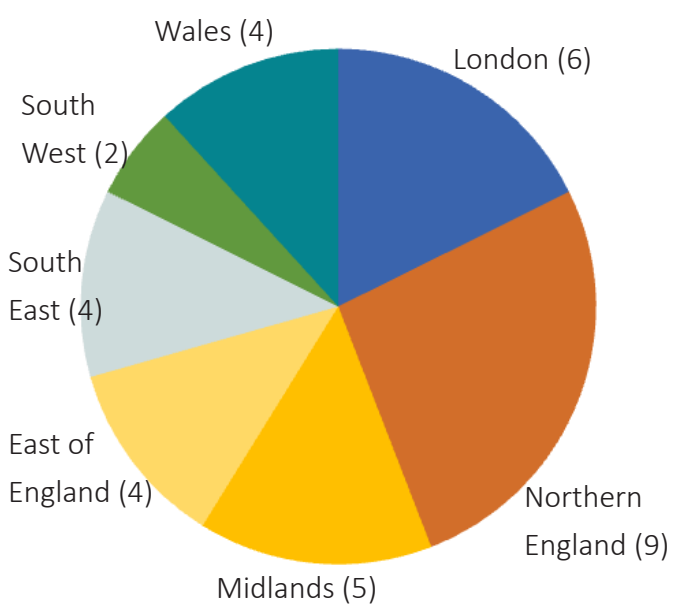
## Gender



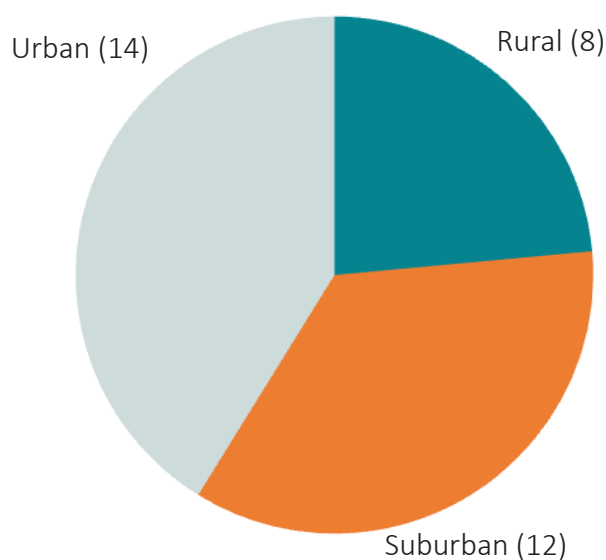
## Age



## Location

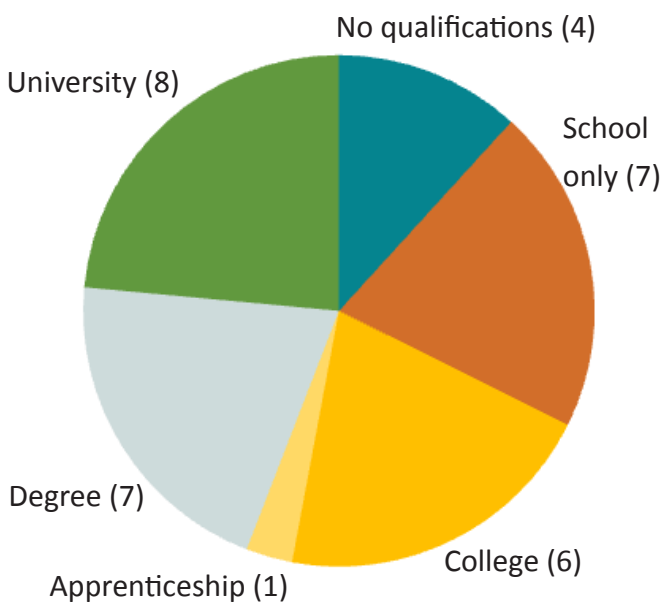


## Type of area

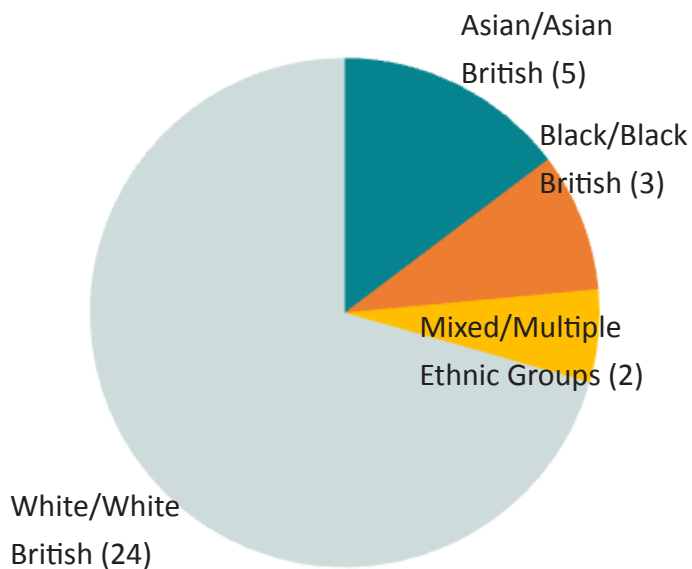




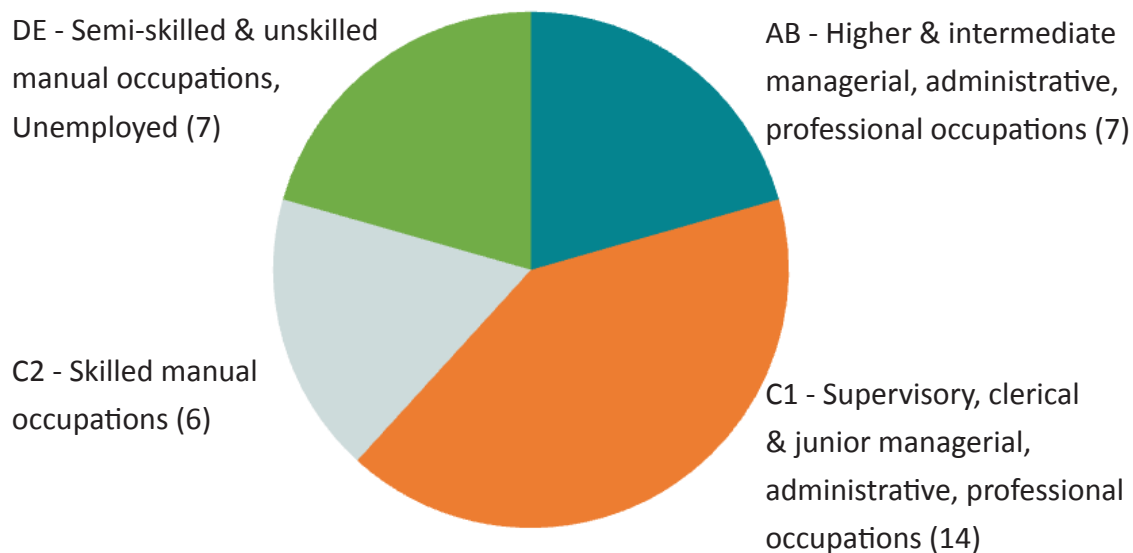
## Education



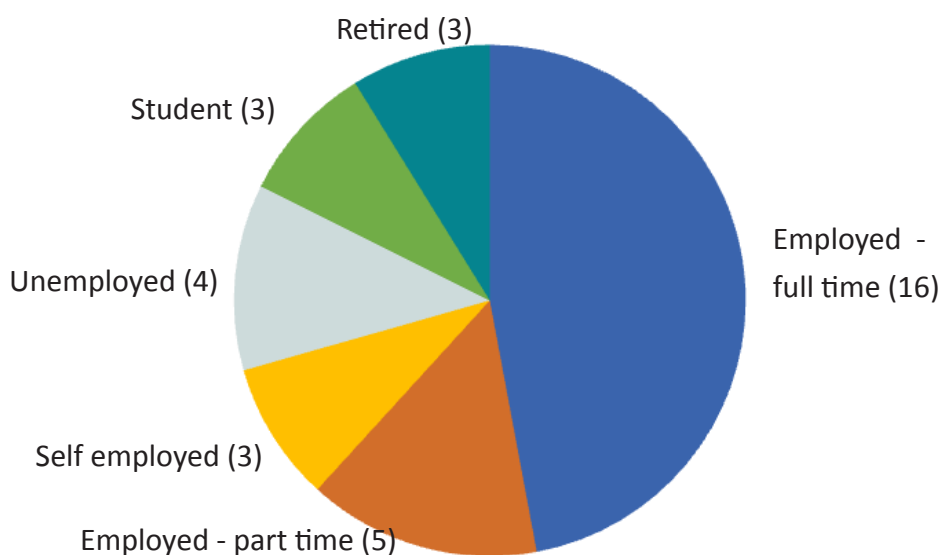
## Ethnicity



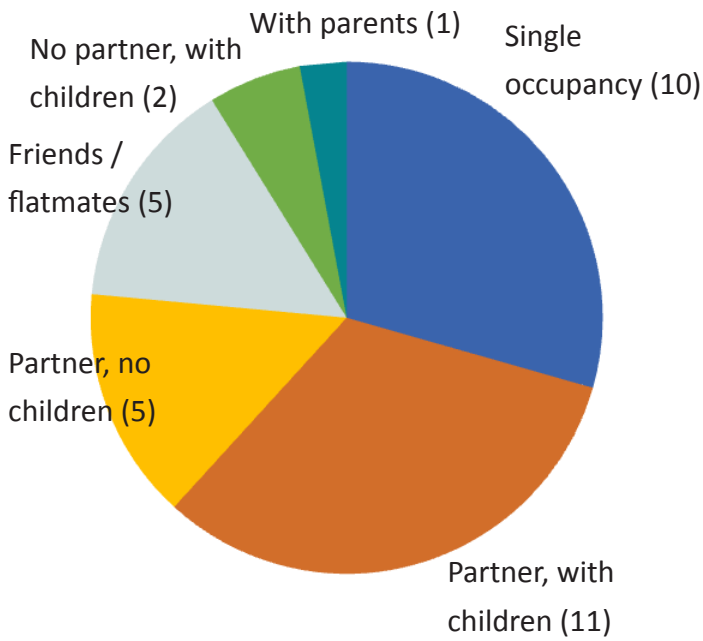
## Socio economic groupings



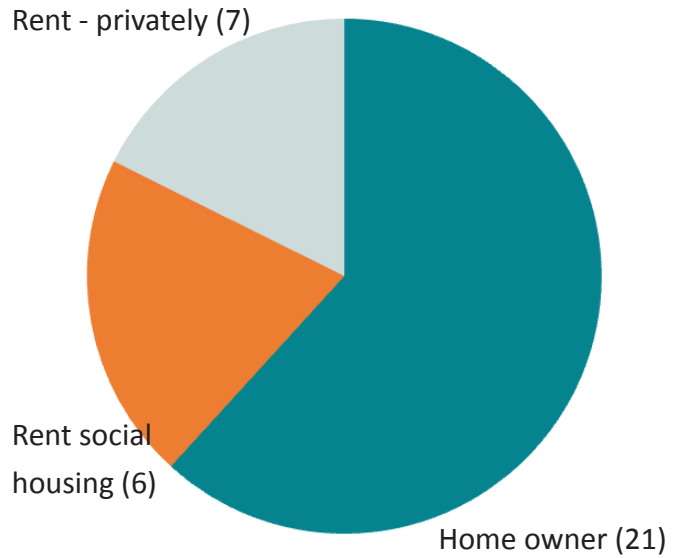
## Employment status



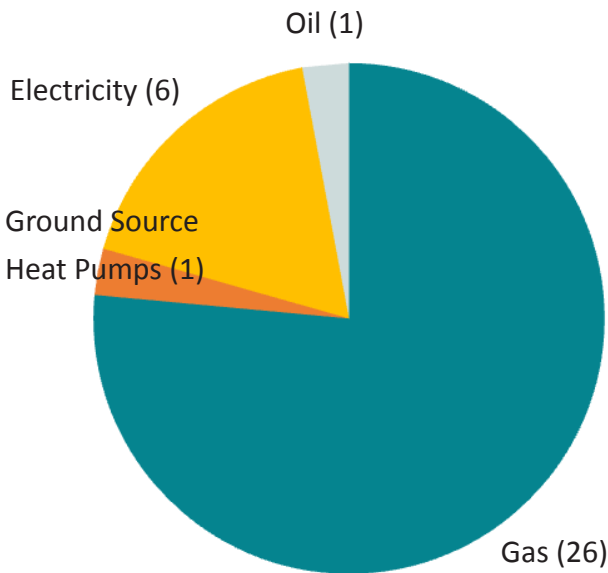
### Household composition



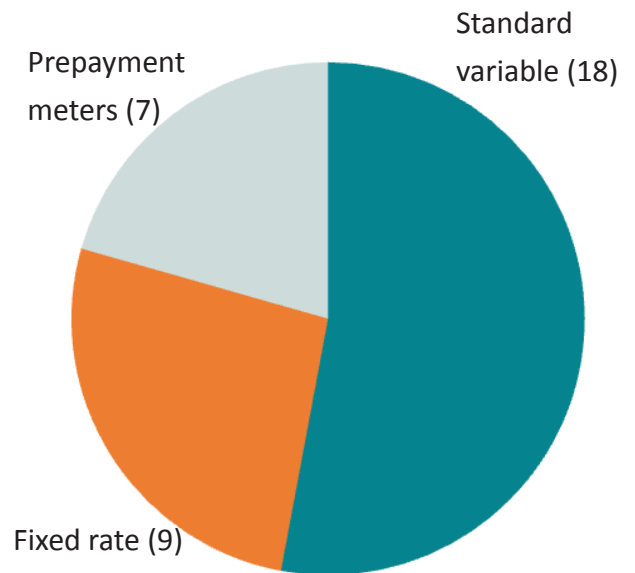
### Home ownership



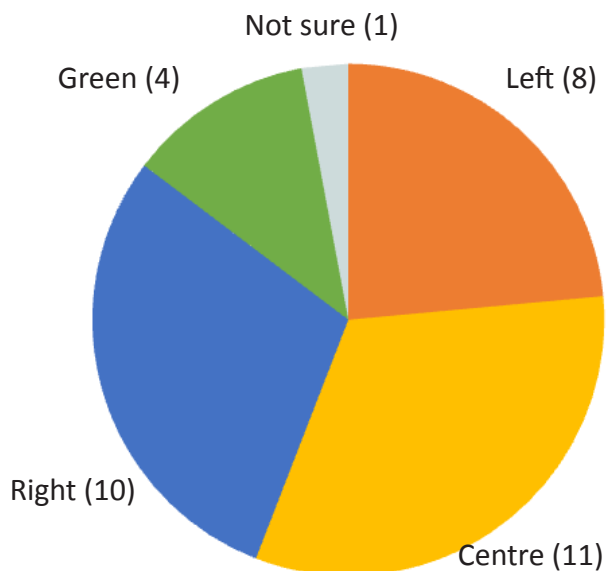
### Heating



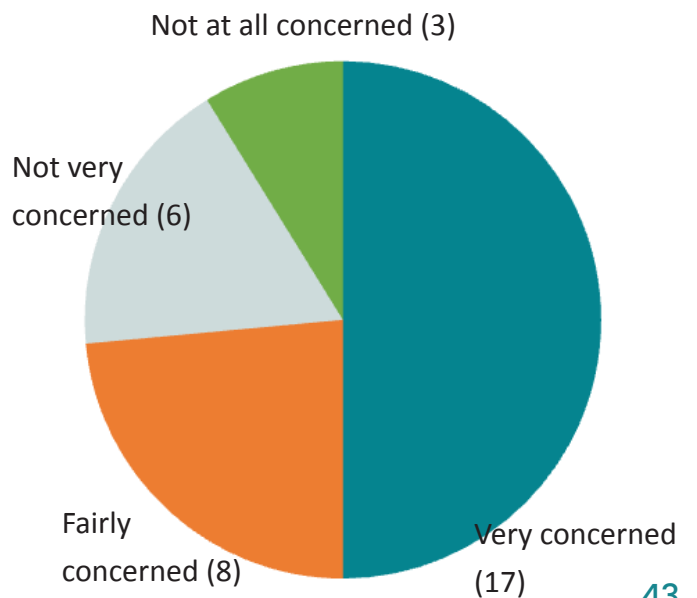
### Supply contract



### Political leaning



### Climate views





**Sustainability First is a charity working in energy and water, aiming to improve environmental, social, and economic well-being.**

We would like to thank all participants of the citizens' workshops and stakeholder roundtables for their valuable contributions. Special thanks to Laura Bartle, project lead for National Grid, the wider National Grid team and the Sustainability First staff and associates. Also to civil society consulting and Leslie Sopp for helping with advice and workshop facilitation and Taylor McKenzie for recruiting participants for the citizens' workshops.

We would welcome your feedback on this report. Please contact the project lead, Clare Dudeney at **[clare.dudeney@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk](mailto:clare.dudeney@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk)**.

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