

Ipsos MORI



Consumer Focus Reputation Audit 2010

UK report

August 2010

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Management summary

The overall aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of Consumer Focus's stakeholders and how it is viewed across sectors and each of the nations and regions. In particular this study aims to:

- Understand overall perceptions of Consumer Focus;
- Gauge perceptions on the role and remit of Consumer Focus;
- Assess the perceived level of impact and influence Consumer Focus has had in its advocacy and policy development work, and its vision and leadership;
- Understand how Consumer Focus communicates with stakeholders and how they would like be engaged in the future; and
- Gain feedback on the areas Consumer Focus should prioritise going forward to improve its relationships and effectiveness.

This report presents the findings of 71 qualitative interviews with stakeholders of Consumer Focus, Consumer Focus Scotland and Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland). Fieldwork took place between 26 May and 15 July 2010. It draws comparisons with a previous small-scale reputation audit carried out for Consumer Focus in June 2009, and also incorporates key findings from a 2009 reputation audit conducted for Consumer Focus Wales in late 2009.

Key findings

Overall perceptions of Consumer Focus

- Consumer Focus is well regarded by its stakeholders, with seven in ten saying they are favourable towards the organisation. Those who speak favourably of Consumer Focus relate this to their belief that the organisation has a worthwhile purpose in championing consumer interests, that staff are knowledgeable and professional, that the organisation is effective in standing up to vested interests, and that the work it produces is of a high standard, being well researched and evidence based. Those who speak highly of Consumer Focus are also likely to feel its work has had an impact, and to be able to point to examples of where this has happened.
- A fifth of stakeholders say they are neither favourable nor unfavourable towards Consumer Focus. These 'neutral' views are expressed by those stakeholders who feel Consumer Focus is still too new an organisation to be able to judge its performance, those who are less aware of what Consumer Focus does, and those who feel Consumer Focus's impact is good in some areas, but not in others.
- Stakeholders who are critical of Consumer Focus tend to be those from businesses or trade organisations who feel that Consumer Focus does not take their views into account enough in its work on consumer issues.
- Awareness of Consumer Focus's areas of work is mixed. Stakeholders tend to be more able to recall projects or programmes in their own sectors, but some find it difficult to give detailed information.

Role and remit

- Stakeholders describe Consumer Focus's role as that of a consumer advocate, voice and 'champion' through its lobbying and campaigns, with some also citing its policy development work. While they are familiar with Consumer Focus's work in their own sector, the organisation's broader work across other sectors is less visible to them.
- Over half of stakeholders feel they know Consumer Focus's objectives and priorities fairly well, while a further fifth feel they know them very well. However, some feel that greater clarity about Consumer Focus's role and remit would be desirable. The perception amongst these stakeholders is that Consumer Focus is not yet clear on exactly what its role is, which can in turn make it challenging for its stakeholders to understand what it is there to do. Some also feel there is a lack of clarity over which consumers are being represented by Consumer Focus; is the organisation there to represent *all* consumers, or vulnerable consumers in particular?
- Stakeholders are sometimes unsure about where Consumer Focus fits within the wider sphere of bodies which advocate consumer interests. It is felt that greater distinctiveness would help to build Consumer Focus's profile and ensure work is not duplicated. However, stakeholders in Wales felt that Consumer Focus Wales is sufficiently distinct from similar organisations, such as Which?
- Stakeholders recognise that Consumer Focus has a very wide remit, and this can make it difficult to understand how the organisation works as a whole. Some stakeholders feel that while outwardly Consumer Focus is presented as a cross-cutting body, in practice it concentrates more attention on some specific areas (such as energy or post) while paying less attention to other areas. This is seen by some as limiting the impact Consumer Focus is able to have in sectors where it is less active. This should not be read as a criticism of the organisation, stakeholders see this just as a fact resulting from the remit the organisation has been given.
- Some stakeholders feel the organisation would do well to streamline its remit, in order to ensure it achieves maximum impact and is not over-stretched. In contrast, Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders viewed the organisation as more generalist in nature, rather than being known for its expertise in specific sectors. They advocated a more focused approach, suggesting that Consumer Focus Wales could build up its sector expertise in future.
- There is confusion amongst a small group of stakeholders over what kind of organisation Consumer Focus is and how it is funded, which shapes stakeholders' perceptions of how independent it is from government. While many recognise it as a 'quango' with an arms-length relationship from government, others wonder whether it is part of government, a lobbying organisation, campaign group or think tank. There are mixed views over its closeness to government, with some feeling the relationship is too close and others believing it manages to retain its independence and strike the right balance in this regard.
- Consumer Focus Scotland stakeholders express mixed views over how closely aligned it is, or should be, to the London office. Some raise concerns that not enough attention may be paid to Scottish issues, while others feel closer working has value and helps to ensure the organisations are effective. In contrast, Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders perceived the organisation as distinctly Welsh in character and were confident in its capacity to provide insight into Welsh issues.
- Stakeholders point out that Consumer Focus is still a relatively young organisation which has recently undergone change, and will therefore require time to establish itself

fully. There is much goodwill towards the organisation and recognition that it has an important role to play, even if there is not currently as much clarity of role as some stakeholders would like.

Vision, leadership and senior management

- The effectiveness of Consumer Focus's vision and leadership is seen as difficult to gauge at this time, due to the organisation still being relatively new and recent changes of leadership, particularly for Consumer Focus. Those who are less aware of Consumer Focus's role and remit are more likely to feel that vision and leadership is not strong.
- There are positive views about the Board of Consumer Focus Scotland, Consumer Focus Wales, and Consumer Focus, with Douglas Sinclair and Lord Whitty being particularly well-regarded. Awareness of Board Members in Northern Ireland is very low. Senior management is also praised by a number of stakeholders and said to be dedicated and professional.

Impact and influence

- Stakeholders feel that Consumer Focus has had a good level of impact and influence. However, many feel unable to comment as they feel they do not have enough evidence to base a judgement on at this stage. Stakeholders are clearer about the impact Consumer Focus has had on their own work, with just over half saying Consumer Focus has made at least a fair amount of difference to their own policies and activities.
- Consumer Focus's advocacy work is well regarded. Examples of where advocacy is felt to be strong include Consumer Focus's work on price comparison websites, environmental services, e-commerce, fuel poverty, on the Legal Services bill in Scotland, on cross-border post issues in Northern Ireland, on consumer pre-payment, and on consumer experience of the Post Office. Those who rate the impact of advocacy less highly are those who are less aware of what Consumer Focus does in this area. Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders viewed advocacy positively, also giving the work done on fuel poverty as an example.
- There is low awareness of the specific services run by Consumer Focus, with few being aware of the Extra Help Unit, but better knowledge of Consumer Focus Scotland's healthy living development projects amongst the Food sector in Scotland.
- Policy development is felt to be effective, with many stakeholders viewing this as evidence-based, high quality and respected. The quality of work the organisation produces is praised, as is its work in a number of key policy areas. However, a third of stakeholders feel unable to comment on its effectiveness as they do not see any evidence of what change this work has brought about. While some say it is always difficult to measure the impact of policy, others feel that Consumer Focus could do more to follow through on its policy work, or communicate the work it is doing, to effect change.
- Amongst industry and trade organisations, there is a feeling that Consumer Focus does not always engage them fully in policy development, either not seeking their views or choosing to only represent some of them. Consumer Focus is said to be an organisation that is taken seriously by industry, but some feel its impact is compromised because it can be seen as too adversarial, rather than working in partnership with industry to bring about change. Others feel that being adversarial is in fact a strength of Consumer Focus, and means it is taken seriously.

- Some stakeholders feel that Consumer Focus would benefit from having a higher public profile, making the point that in order to represent consumer interests, Consumer Focus needs to be more visible to consumers. Raising the organisation's media profile is seen as an important element of this.

Communication, staff and working relationships

- Most stakeholders are satisfied with their current level of communication, with those who have regular personal contact with Consumer Focus staff more satisfied with the communication they receive and more favourable towards Consumer Focus. Even so, communication is seen by stakeholders as an area where there is scope for improvement, which in turn would lead to better working relationships.
- Ways in which stakeholders feel communication could be improved in future include:
 - Sending regular, tailored email updates to stakeholders; Currently, stakeholders receive a good deal of information in hard copy; while this is preferred by some, others feel that that more use could be made of email as a communications tool;
 - Putting more personal contact in place, such as one-to-one meetings to discuss issues of interest, or regular sector stakeholder meetings;
 - Seeking stakeholders' views throughout the key stages of projects, not just at the outset;
 - Ensuring that consultation and collaboration take place in a less ad hoc and more structured way, with feedback provided on how stakeholders' views have been taken into account, or explaining why it has not been possible to take them into account;

Future priorities

- Views differ on what Consumer Focus should prioritise in its future work. Some feel that Consumer Focus could look at more issues in areas of particular interest to them, with suggestions including the impact of the VAT rise and austerity more generally on consumers, copyright issues, sustainable energy and sustainable living, transparency on energy bills and product safety. Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders suggested a number of possible areas for future coverage, including looking at other providers in the postal sector as well as Royal Mail, disseminating information about smart meters, making information and forms simpler for consumers, and hidden charges on energy bills.
- Some stakeholders feel Consumer Focus ought to narrow its remit, adopting a more streamlined approach to its work and doing more in fewer areas. The need to have a clear, focused remit is felt to apply across all public sector organisations, given the current economic climate. Rather than this being unique to Consumer Focus, the perception is that everyone has to start to do more in fewer areas.
- Stakeholders also ask whether Consumer Focus needs to increase its profile among the public and ensure that it is in close touch with consumers' everyday concerns, in order to be an effective advocate on their behalf.
- Finally, some stakeholders feel Consumer Focus could work more closely with industry, believing that the organisation could understand industry's perspective more.

Introduction

Background and objectives

Consumer Focus was set up in 2008 following the merger of three consumer organisations: energywatch, Postwatch and the National Consumer Council (including the Welsh and Scottish Consumer Councils). This joined up organisation intends to offer a more powerful voice across a broad range of sectors for consumers and secure better outcomes for them on their behalf.

Consumer Focus is a devolved organisation which is run across the four nations of the UK as:

- Consumer Focus
- Consumer Focus Scotland
- Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland)
- Consumer Focus Wales

Consumer Focus's role is to be 'a strong voice for consumers on the issues that matter to them and works to secure a fair deal on their behalf'. In order to achieve this, Consumer Focus works with a variety of organisations across a broad range of sectors and industries. Vital to this is building and managing the relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders.

The 2010 Reputation Audit was commissioned to gain a comprehensive view of how Consumer Focus is viewed by its stakeholders across a broad range of measures. This piece of research follows on from an initial small scale stakeholder study conducted in 2009, a year after the formation of Consumer Focus. This study looks to build on these initial findings in order to gain an understanding of Consumer Focus's stakeholder reputation two years on from the merger. Where possible, comparisons are drawn between the 2009 survey and the 2010 survey.

Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders are not included in the 2010 study, since Consumer Focus Wales had already carried research out among its stakeholders in late 2009 and it was therefore felt to be too soon to approach stakeholders in Wales again to take part in research. However, key findings from the 2009 audit conducted for Consumer Focus Wales are included throughout this report, setting out where findings are similar or different from the 2010 audit. The Consumer Focus Wales discussion guide differed in some respects from the 2010 discussion guide. In particular, the 2010 guide included a new section on communications, and used some different questions to explore stakeholders' overall perceptions of Consumer Focus, so that these could be benchmarked against findings from similar reputation audits that Ipsos MORI has carried out for other public sector organisations. Where questions are the same or related they are referenced throughout the report.

This report will look at the overall findings from Consumer Focus, Consumer Focus Scotland and Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland), as well as commenting on similarities and differences with the previous research among Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders. Separate reports based on the findings for Consumer Focus Scotland and the GB functions of Consumer Focus are also available.

In particular this study aims to:

- Understand overall perceptions of Consumer Focus;
- Gauge perceptions on the role and remit of Consumer Focus;
- Assess the perceived level of impact and influence Consumer Focus has had in its advocacy and policy development work, and its vision and leadership;
- Understand how Consumer Focus communicates with stakeholders and how they would like to be engaged in the future; and
- Gain feedback on the areas Consumer Focus should prioritise going forward to improve its relationships and effectiveness.

Methodology

In order to meet these objectives, Ipsos MORI adopted a qualitative approach. During fieldwork between 26 May and 15 July 2010, Ipsos MORI conducted 71 semi-structured depth interviews by telephone with Consumer Focus stakeholders. These included stakeholders from the devolved bodies of Consumer Focus, Consumer Focus Scotland and Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland).

Consumer Focus provided a sample which totalled 225 stakeholders. Each was sent a signed letter by the Chief Executive (Mike O'Connor) or Chairman (Douglas Sinclair for Scotland and Rick Hill for Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland)) of each of the devolved bodies asking them if they would be willing to take part in a 30 minute interview. While most of the interviews were conducted with the initial lead given by Consumer Focus, occasional referrals of other stakeholders of a similar level were taken when appropriate.

The stakeholders interviewed included representatives from a cross-section of sectors and industries. To ensure that a broad spread of Consumer Focus stakeholders were included in the research, quotas were set. The breakdown of achieved interviews by sector for Consumer Focus UK and Consumer Focus Scotland is shown in the following tables. Due to the small sample size for Northern Ireland, a sector breakdown has not been included separately; the number of Northern Ireland stakeholder interviews is shown in the Consumer Focus UK sector breakdown.

Table 1 Sector breakdown (excluding Scotland)

Sector	Interviews
Utilities	9
Post	4
Financial	4
Businesses and trade associations	3
Government bodies and regulators	5
Consumer organisations and think tanks	7
Other sectors including communications, legal, food, housing, environmental	5
International	4
Politicians	2
Northern Ireland	8
Total	51

Table 2 Sector breakdown for Consumer Focus Scotland stakeholder interviews

Sector	Interviews
Utilities	6
Post	1
Government bodies and regulators	5
Consumer organisations and think tanks	3
Other sectors including communications, legal food, housing, environmental	5
Total	20

Fieldwork for the 2009 Consumer Focus Wales reputation audit took place between 28th October and 16th November 2009, with 15 individuals who had interacted with Consumer Focus Wales over the past year being interviewed. This study was undertaken by Opinion Research Services on behalf of Consumer Focus Wales.¹

Fieldwork for the 2009 GB reputation audit took place between 5th and 23rd June 2009, with 14 individuals being interviewed from an original sample of 30. This study was undertaken by Suze Gomme Research on behalf of Consumer Focus.²

¹ *Reputation Audit for Consumer Focus Wales – report of stakeholder perceptions of Consumer Focus Wales*. Opinion Research Services, for Consumer Focus Wales (2009)

² *Consumer Focus Reputation Audit SGR 0180 June 2009*, Suze Gomme Research, for Consumer Focus GB (2009)

The semi-structured interviews mainly consisted of open-ended questions (see the discussion guide appended to this report). These were intended to allow stakeholders to express their views in their own words and provide depth of understanding, and to provide scope for interviewers to probe on certain issues. Supplementing this were 11 closed-ended questions where stakeholders rated Consumer Focus across a range of measures.

The interviews were structured using a discussion guide, which covered the following areas:

- Relationship with and awareness of Consumer Focus;
- Overall perceptions of Consumer Focus;
- The role and remit of Consumer Focus;
- The impact and influence Consumer Focus has;
- Consumer Focus's communication with stakeholders; and
- Areas for Consumer Focus to prioritise in its future work.

Interpretation of the findings

Qualitative research is designed to provide illustrative evidence of stakeholder opinion, rather than the statistically reliable data found in quantitative studies. It is intended to shed light on *why* people have particular views and *how* the views relate to the experiences of the participants concerned. One to one interviews enable respondents to participate in an informal and interactive discussion and allow time for the complex issues to be addressed in some detail. This approach, in other words, facilitates greater insight into underlying attitudes than would be possible with a quantitative survey.

The purpose of this research is to identify where Consumer Focus is performing well, but also where it could improve in future. With this in mind, much of this report focuses on areas for improvement which stakeholders identified.

Verbatim comments from the interviews have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of all participants, but have been selected to illustrate a particular theme or conclusion.

Charts based on stakeholders' responses to the closed questions are included throughout this report. These are intended to show the balance of opinion across the sample of Consumer Focus's stakeholders. Given the relatively small base sizes for these questions, the data provided should be treated with caution. The quantitative data presented provides only an *indication* of stakeholder opinion, rather than a robust measurement of stakeholder perceptions, given the relatively small number of stakeholders involved. Where possible, comparisons with stakeholder surveys for other public sector organisations conducted by Ipsos MORI have been made against key benchmarking questions.

It is important to bear in mind that comparisons with both the 2009 Consumer Focus Wales study and the 2009 GB reputation audit are indicative only and should be treated with caution. This relates to the different timings when the studies were carried out, different discussion guide versions used and small sample sizes.

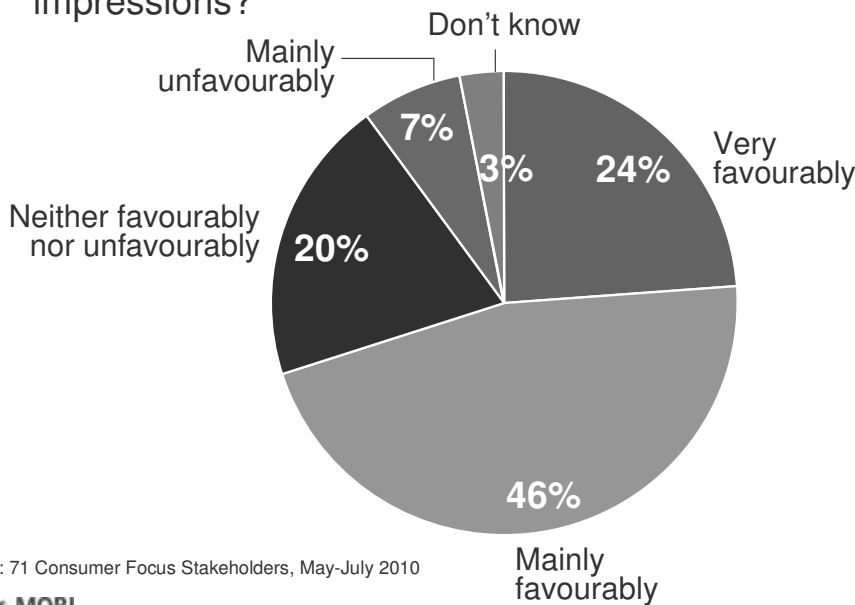
Overall perceptions of Consumer Focus

Favourability and advocacy

Stakeholders are favourable in their overall opinions of Consumer Focus. As the following chart shows, seven in ten (70%) are favourable towards Consumer Focus, including a quarter who say they regard Consumer Focus *very* favourably (24%). However, one in five (20%) say they are neither favourable nor unfavourable towards Consumer Focus, with fewer than one in ten (7%) saying they are unfavourable towards the organisation.

Stakeholder favourability towards Consumer Focus

Q9 And how favourably or unfavourably do you regard Consumer Focus, bearing in mind I am interested in your overall impressions?

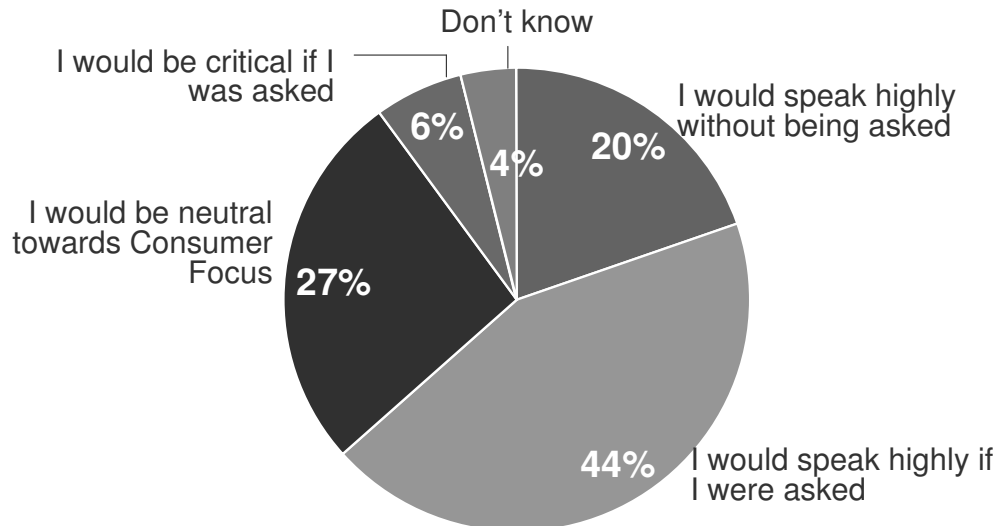


Favourability is particularly high amongst those who come from government, regulatory and consumer organisations, but lower among stakeholders from business and trade organisations.

Advocacy is a more discriminatory measure of an organisation's reputation than favourability, since it looks at how stakeholders would speak to others about an organisation. As shown in the following chart, two-thirds (64%) of stakeholders say they would speak highly of Consumer Focus, including a fifth who would do so without being asked. Those from government, the wider public sector and consumer groups are especially likely to speak highly of Consumer Focus. Around a quarter of stakeholders (27%) say they would be neutral, with a minority (6%) saying they would be critical. While benchmarking is indicative only, Consumer Focus does appear to enjoy a high level of advocacy compared to that Ipsos MORI has measured for other regulatory bodies over the past three years.

Stakeholder advocacy of Consumer Focus

Q8 Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak of Consumer Focus to other people?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Consumer Focus Wales's performance was also viewed positively by its stakeholders, with most viewing it as good. Stakeholders commented that there was potential to perform better, but that the organisation had spent time putting the right team in place.

Those who are positive towards Consumer Focus mention factors such as the organisation having an important role to play, the knowledge and professionalism of its staff and the quality of its research and evidence as underlying their positive views. Favourable perceptions relate in part to a sense that Consumer Focus's role as an advocate for consumers is an important one.

"Its mission is very close to what I'm trying to do so I have a huge desire and wish for them to succeed."

International

"I would say that they have an important remit to fulfil, particularly around people with low incomes and I think that remit is missing from many other parts of government."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Favourability towards Consumer Focus often stems from positive views of the organisation's staff, who are seen as knowledgeable and able to represent the organisation well. Stakeholders feel that members of staff are approachable and on hand to tackle queries that stakeholders may have. Others highlight the professionalism they convey, both in dealing directly with stakeholders and their overall impression of them externally when at conferences and meetings. Staff are also said to be dedicated to their job, with stakeholders describing them as diligent and passionate.

"The people I deal with tend to be well informed on their subjects. You have a distinct feeling that they really believe in what they are dealing with and understand it."

GB, Utilities

"They give the impression that they firmly believe in what they are doing. What they're doing is right and makes a difference."

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

The quality of Consumer Focus's policy work is also mentioned by stakeholders as something that causes them to speak favourably, being seen as well researched and evidence based. This is particularly the case among stakeholders from government, regulatory bodies, consumer organisations and think tanks.

"There are very clear processes in place to cope with the evidence, make sure this is objective and bring a consumer focus."

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

"There is robustness to the approach in terms of the research that they do...they don't tend to be over the top and sensationalised, you feel you can rely on the information they put out."

Northern Ireland

Stakeholders who are favourable towards Consumer Focus also feel the organisation is doing an effective job in standing up for consumers against powerful vested interests. Some identify Consumer Focus as being a body with the required funding and necessary clout to properly tackle consumer issues.

"They are prepared to stand up to some fairly significant vested interests whether they be commercial interests, political interests or indeed social interests in a way that most other organisations are not."

GB, Utilities

"Consumer Focus is particularly effective... they've built up a continuum, a considerable expertise and knowledge. They have statutory funding that gives them the impartiality, the stability, but also the autonomy that is necessary. So whereas consumer NGOs [in other countries] do not always have the funding or the stability or the expertise, the unique position of Consumer Focus gives them some attributes that not many other consumer bodies have."

International

Where stakeholders speak highly of Consumer Focus, this often relates to their belief that the organisation is having an impact. These stakeholders mention areas of policy where they have been impressed with the progress made, pointing to the quality of Consumer Focus's policy development work and the good working relationships that have been forged.

"They did extremely thorough responses to the various consultations and were also very well connected within particularly the House of Lords and those factors meant they were able to do a great deal."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Stakeholders with neutral views towards Consumer Focus divide into three groups. Firstly, there are those who feel it is still too early to tell. While these stakeholders do not see Consumer Focus as having had much impact to date, they also appreciate that it is a relatively young organisation and recognise that it can take a while before significant impact is seen. Secondly, some simply do not feel they know the organisation well enough to be able to give a view either way. Lastly, there are those who feel that Consumer Focus has performed well on some issues but not on others.

“Unfortunately it’s a difficult one to answer because it’s really topic to topic as to what stance they’re taking, they can be very pragmatic or not.”

GB, Utilities

Those who are less favourable often come from industry and trade organisations, who can feel that Consumer Focus does not take industry’s concerns and the climate it faces into account sufficiently. They also feel that Consumer Focus can be selective in its use of evidence.

“Sometimes there’s a sense of taking information to suit their view of the world and ignoring other empirical evidence.”

GB, Utilities

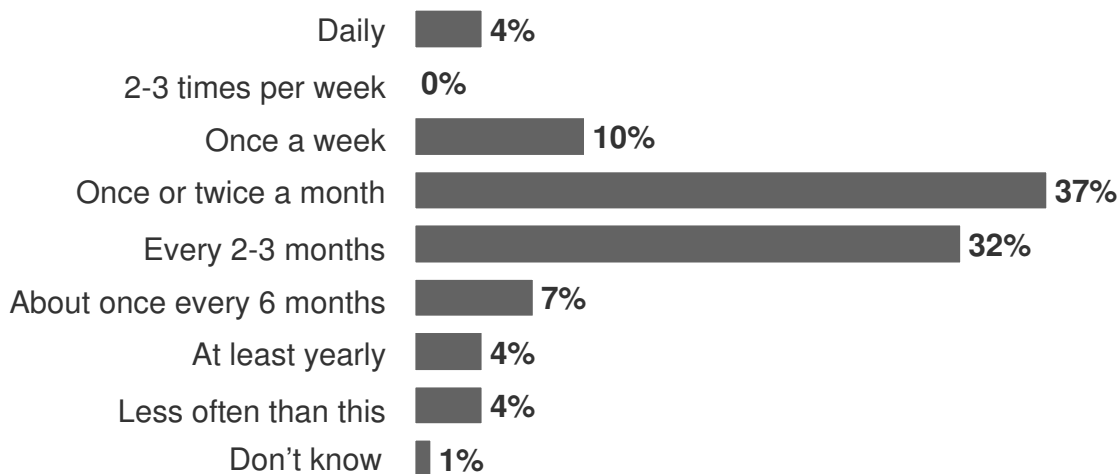
More negative views of Consumer Focus also relate to a lack of clarity over the purpose of the organisation and what it seeks to deliver. Finally, a small number of stakeholders who are critical of the organisation feel that it has not delivered sufficiently on behalf of the consumer.

Awareness of Consumer Focus

The amount of contact that stakeholders have with Consumer Focus varies markedly. The most common amount of contact is once or twice a month (37%), while around a third say they are in touch with the organisation every two to three months (32%). One in ten have contact once a week or more frequently (10%), and a small number have contact less often than every three months (15%).

Frequency of stakeholder contact with Consumer Focus

Q3 How often, approximately, would you say you are in contact with Consumer Focus?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Those with greater contact with Consumer Focus tend to be stakeholders who are more closely involved in working with the organisation, for example by partnering on specific projects. For these, contact fluctuates, working closely with Consumer Focus during the period of a project, then having less contact once the project is over.

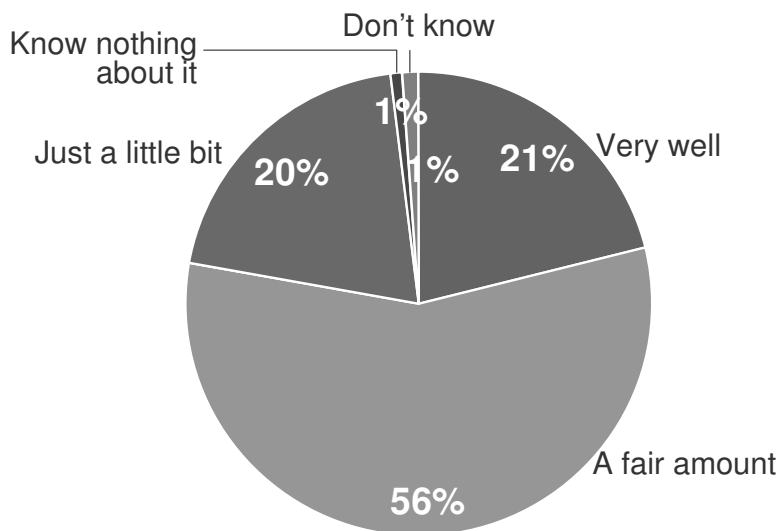
"Contact is sporadic, so for a little while I might have a lot of contact but at the moment I should think it's about once every couple of months."

GB, Financial

Knowledge of Consumer Focus is high. Nearly four in five know Consumer Focus at least a fair amount (77%), including one in five who feel they know the organisation *very well* (21%). One in five (20%) say they know just a little about the organisation. When the results for Consumer Focus are compared with those for other public sector organisations surveyed by Ipsos MORI in the last three years, they are towards the lower end. While this might be expected for an organisation that is still relatively young, it does suggest that there is scope for building Consumer Focus's profile among stakeholders further.

Knowledge of Consumer Focus

Q4 How well, if at all, do you feel you know Consumer Focus?
Would you say you know it. . .



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Awareness of specific areas of work Consumer Focus has undertaken is mixed, with some, often those who have regular contact, able to recall a range of projects, while others are not aware of any. As would be expected, stakeholders tend to be much more aware of projects relating to their own sector; for example, those in the energy industry often mention initiatives relating to meter tampering and campaigns around debt and service disconnection. However, there is some awareness of initiatives that have received media coverage, such as the super-complaint on the market for cash ISAs.

Awareness of the cross-border post initiative is high amongst Consumer Focus Post stakeholders, but there is less awareness of any other programmes run by the organisation. This finding was also seen in the 2009 GB reputation audit, where stakeholders generally had a broad understanding of Consumer Focus's work, but not detailed knowledge. This is in contrast to Consumer Focus Wales, where stakeholders were able to identify a number of areas of work that they had either been directly involved in, or had heard about through the media.

"I know about those from the media, being sent reports and from contacts in Consumer Focus...I know about their scrutiny of the energy market, their work on the Post Office, financial inclusion and the work they do on things like mobile phone carriers."

GB, Other sectors

"Well they've recently published something on access to basic Bank Accounts. They did a super-complaint to the OFT about how consumers got poor value for money."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Most stakeholders say they have not been involved directly in projects run by Consumer Focus within its areas of work. Of these, a few do say they have worked together on a more minor scale, for example by providing industry data. Others previously had direct involvement in work with the National Consumer Council, but have not worked with Consumer Focus following the merger. A third of Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders had been involved in setting up programmes or projects, including work on fuel poverty, financial inclusion and digital inclusion. In addition, some participants were in discussions about becoming involved in future programmes or projects.

"On our pre-payment meter campaign there was...a lot of operational stuff in that we were dealing directly with the policy lead and the conversations were fairly detailed around energy policy, but when our campaign moved into a new area we were talking to the Head of Communications and at the time the Deputy Chief Exec."

GB, Other sectors

"Anything that they do to do with our sector we more or less work with them on."

GB, Other sectors

Consumer Focus's role and remit

The role and remit of Consumer Focus is often mentioned by stakeholders when asked about their overall perceptions of the organisation. Most are able to say what Consumer Focus does, both in a general sense and in terms of its specific role in their sector. The organisation's role as a consumer advocate, voice and 'champion' through its lobbying and campaigns is top-of-mind for stakeholders, and some also mention its policy development work. Others see the organisation as having direct responsibility for dealing with consumers in some areas, for example by responding to consumer queries or taking up complaints. This was also the view taken by Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders, who used very similar phrases to describe the organisation. Here a change can be seen from the 2009 GB reputation audit, where the common theme amongst stakeholder perceptions was of an organisation establishing itself.

"I think its role is to champion a fair deal for consumers."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

"The representative championing consumer... interests across a wide spectrum."
Scotland, Consumer organisations and think tanks

While most are able to say what the organisation does in broad terms, some stakeholders feel that greater clarity about Consumer Focus's role and remit would be desirable. The perception is that Consumer Focus is not yet clear on exactly what its role is, which can in turn make it challenging for its stakeholders to understand what it is there to do.

"It isn't clear whether it is an organisation that would take complaints, an organisation that would press for policy changes, an organisation that is going to campaign on behalf of consumers and if it is going to campaign is it going to campaign on behalf of all consumers or just for the most disadvantaged consumers?"

GB, Utilities

"It is still trying to decide what its role is and I think that lack of clarity is one of the areas that we've had to work on in Financial Services.."

GB, Financial

There is also some lack of clarity about whether Consumer Focus is there to advocate on behalf of all consumers, whether there is a particular emphasis on advocacy on behalf of vulnerable or socially excluded consumers, or both.

"Fundamentally it is to ensure that consumers have an advocate. Secondly that within that consumer group, those most vulnerable in society have a voice to speak on their behalf."

GB, Utilities

Moreover, some stakeholders raise the issue of whether Consumer Focus should seek to build a higher profile among the consumers that it is there to represent. There is some uncertainty as to whether it is sufficient for Consumer Focus to be an organisation that is mainly there to ensure consumer interests are taken into account by policymakers, legislators and industry, or whether it is important that Consumer Focus is more visible to consumers and able to demonstrate what it has done on their behalf. This was also an issue raised by Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders, who questioned whether the organisation had a high enough public profile, particularly when compared to its predecessors.

A related issue is distinctiveness from other consumer organisations and regulators. Stakeholders are sometimes unsure about where Consumer Focus fits within the wider sphere of bodies which advocate consumer interests. They see a large number of consumer groups active within similar policy areas and question how Consumer Focus is distinct from organisations such as Which?, Trading Standards Institute, Competition Commission and industry regulators. Greater distinctiveness is seen as important, both because this is felt to shape the profile and impact that Consumer Focus is able to have and because it is seen as leading to less duplication than at present between the work of different consumer organisations.

"I think somewhere along the line, after the separate organisations became a single entity, they kind of lost... heart a bit it seems. From an outside perspective ...when I think consumer champion I don't think Consumer Focus, I would probably think of a number of other bodies first."

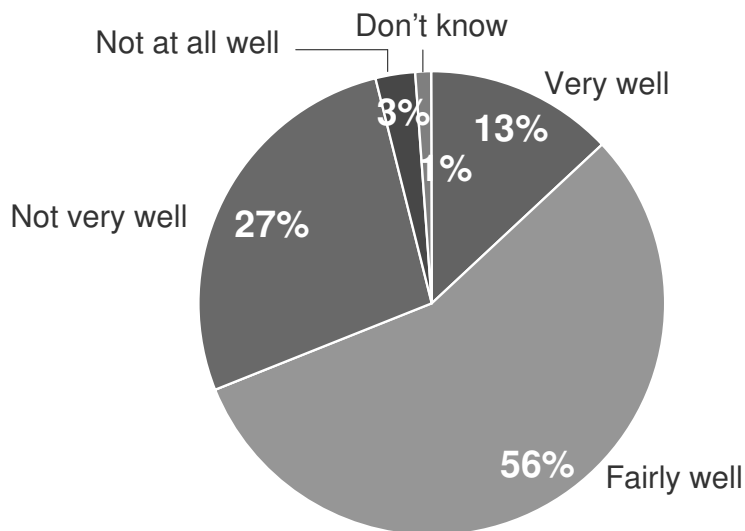
GB, Other sectors

This contrasts with the views of stakeholders in Wales, who felt that Consumer Focus Wales was distinct, had taken on areas not considered by the previous bodies, and generated new ideas. While some felt the differentiation between Consumer Focus Wales and Consumer Direct was not always clear enough, most felt it was very distinct from Which?

The question marks some stakeholders raise around clarity of role are reflected in how well stakeholders feel they understand the objectives and priorities of Consumer Focus. Around seven in ten (69%) say they understand these at least fairly well, with a quarter (27%) feeling they do not understand these very well.

Understanding of Consumer Focus's objectives and priorities

Q11 How well would you say you understand the objectives and priorities of Consumer Focus?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Stakeholders recognise that the organisation has a very broad remit, and tend to be familiar with its work in their own sector in the main. This echoes one of the findings of the 2009 GB Reputation Audit, where stakeholders identified the risk of Consumer Focus devaluing its expertise by covering too many issues. There is recognition that the breadth of its remit presents the organisation with a considerable challenge in being able to deliver across so many different sectors with the resources available to it. Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders also made this point, saying the organisation ought to focus its efforts. However, some stakeholders in Wales felt the organisation was less specialist than its predecessors and has a more generalist image. They felt it was important for Consumer Focus Wales to build its profile in specific sectors to counter this.

"I would think they are lacking in delivery because they were set up with a pretty broad remit to deliver and if they have delivered I'm not aware of it."

GB, Utilities

The breadth of Consumer Focus's remit is also seen as a challenge in terms of how it presents itself to its stakeholders. Some see a disconnect between the organisation presenting itself as cross-cutting, whereas in reality there is greater focus on some sectors such as energy and post than on others. Stakeholders feel that Consumer Focus's work on consumer issues that are not covered by these major sectors can be more limited, which in turn limits the organisation's ability to have an impact on other sectors. Some even suggest that the organisation would do well to concentrate solely on utilities, given the current weight of resources Consumer Focus currently directs towards these sectors.

"Because their remit so closely identifies energy and post it seems to me some of the other consumer issues aren't so well addressed."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Some stakeholders are uncertain about what type of organisation Consumer Focus is and how it is funded, which shapes their perceptions of how independent it is from government. While many recognise it as a 'quango' with an arms-length relationship from government, there are those who perceive it to be part of government, while others think that it may be a regulatory body, charity or think tank. Views are mixed as to whether Consumer Focus is sufficiently independent from government. There are those who allude to Consumer Focus having a civil service-like culture and feel that the organisation should be seen to be more independent from government, while others feel that the organisation is sufficiently independent and striking the right balance in this regard.

"Are they a government organisation or are they a charity? I wonder if they're a quango."

GB, Utilities

"It is always very tricky for organisations like Consumer Focus that are quangos, and my experience of them is that they haven't been pushed around by government. They have taken proper advantage of their arms-length status."

GB, Other sectors

Consumer Focus Scotland stakeholders tend to be aware that the organisation is also present in other parts of the UK. Those who feel the organisation is too embedded with Consumer Focus tend to also express concern that not enough attention is given to specific national issues. However, others feel that the organisations should in principle work together closely and influence one another, on the basis that they would have greater impact working in partnership. Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders commented on the 'Welshness' of the organisation and viewed this very positively, feeling that its role was to deal with specifically Welsh issues.

"I know that the Consumer Council there in Scotland, they previously would quite often take a slightly different stance that was suitable to the Scottish people and to the Scottish landscape and I'm not clear about Consumer Focus Scotland."

Scotland, Other sectors

Despite the sense among some stakeholders that the organisation's role and remit could be clearer and more distinct from other consumer bodies, there is much goodwill towards Consumer Focus and a view that the organisation does have an important role to play. This relates in part to the perception that Consumer Focus is still a relatively new organisation, with several stakeholders still alluding to Consumer Focus's predecessor bodies and the mergers. Moreover, stakeholders say that it takes time for an organisation to bed down and for its impact to be seen, particularly in view of the recent change in leadership, which means that the new Chief Executive requires time to put his stamp on the organisation.

"They are doing a much more improved role from our side, more actively engaging."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

"If you look at future policy in the communications industry, particularly around next generation technologies, they have an important role to play in contributing thinking on behalf of the consumer to that policy. I think it is to bring rational and analysed understanding of consumers' needs and consumer markets to the debate, whatever the debate happens to be."

Scotland, Other sectors

Impact and influence

Stakeholders are mostly positive about the impact and influence Consumer Focus has, but a sizeable number feel they do not have enough knowledge to judge them properly on each of the areas asked. This was also the case among Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders, where most were positive but some felt it was too early to judge. This links to findings earlier in this report about stakeholders still perceiving Consumer Focus as a relatively new organisation and seeing scope for greater clarity about its role and remit.

In terms of whether Consumer Focus has achieved more or less in the last year than stakeholders expected, there is favourability towards Consumer Focus, but also a feeling among some stakeholders that there is unmet potential. Some stakeholders feel that Consumer Focus has achieved more than, or at least met, their expectations and praise the work it has done. When discussing the reasons for their views stakeholders point to areas where Consumer Focus has made significant impacts and used its influence successfully, which is discussed in more detail in the rest of the chapter.

"I think the way that Consumer Focus is doing things now, I think they'll have a bigger influence on us and a bigger influence on the Government."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

Well for my own sector, they took over a situation which was not good and I would say a year later we're in a much more positive and healthy situation so I give them a lot of credit for that"

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

Another group of stakeholders feel unable to comment either because they are not sure what has been achieved, or because they have not had any expectations of what ought to have been achieved. Here the difficulty of measuring achievements is mentioned by stakeholders, who feel it is tricky to judge, as sometimes not achieving something is not a failure but rather a reflection of challenging situations.

"You can only [judge] in terms of their effectiveness in changing industry or legislative changes and some would be more successful than the others and it isn't necessarily their fault, it may be that the commercial pressures don't allow some of the things they are pressing for."

International

Others feel that expectations ought to be tempered by the fact that Consumer Focus is still a fairly new organisation and it takes time to begin to see change. This finding was also seen in the previous stakeholder research undertaken in 2009, and it is interesting to see that even a year on from that study, stakeholders still feel that Consumer Focus ought to be given time to 'settle in'.

"Well they are relatively new. They're two years old I think. And they had to merge three organisations. It probably took longer than they thought it was going to take... and they're trying to get a vision, a common culture, and I suppose most importantly a set of wings because it's still not quite there."

GB, Utilities

Stakeholders find it very difficult to comment on value for money, as they do not feel aware enough of the sums involved to make a judgement. This is similar to findings from the Consumer Focus Wales audit, where stakeholders found it very difficult to comment and remarked that they did not know the budget well enough to provide a rating. Some believe that Consumer Focus does provide value for money, while others who feel less able to comment state that although they cannot comment, they believe it is an important organisation and has a role to play.

"I think it is a really important organisation to have and if it were lost within government, if it were removed, then it would be a significant loss."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Stakeholders report that Consumer Focus is having an impact on the development of stakeholders own policies and activities. Half (50%) of stakeholders say that Consumer Focus has made a difference to their own policies and activities, with a further third (34%) saying it has made a little difference to them. It is seen by most stakeholders as an organisation to take account of, and one that they consult with because they feel Consumer Focus has something to add to the conversation, not just as a formality.

"Consumer Focus has done a great deal to influence our decision making and our future work."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

"The evidence that the organisation has been able to produce has been interesting and we've been able to make use of that in our own work."

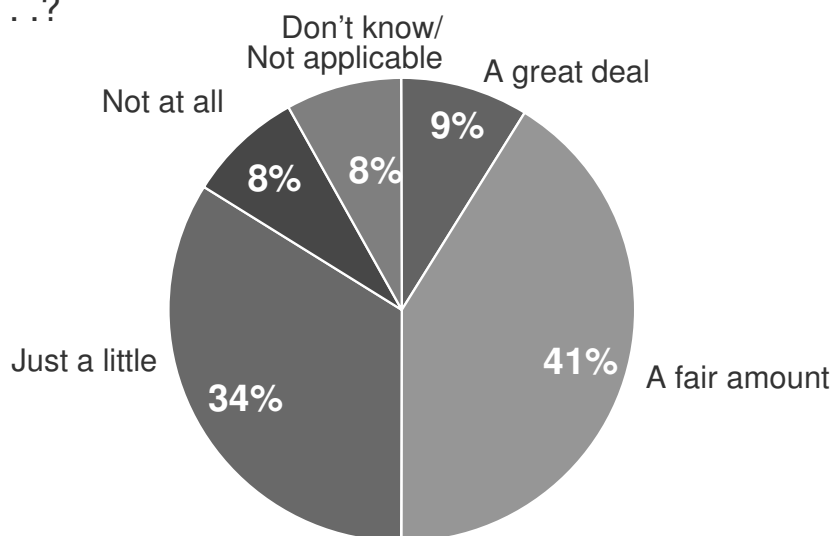
GB, Post

"It's given us certain quantifiables we wouldn't [otherwise] have been aware of."

Northern Ireland

Making a difference to stakeholders' policies

Q20 To what extent has Consumer Focus's work made a difference to any of your policies and activities? Would you say. . . ?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Vision and leadership

Most stakeholders feel Consumer Focus is performing well on vision and leadership, with similarly favourable views across all nations.

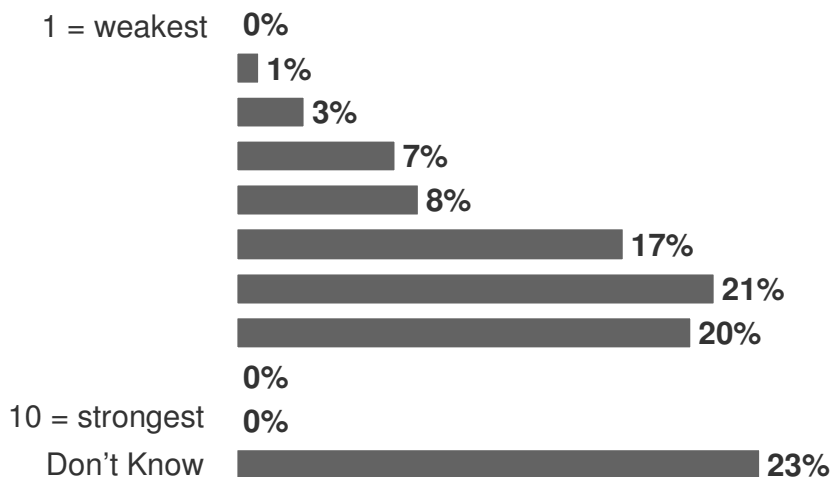
"They have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and from my dealings with them I think that they carry that out in a professional and clever manner."

International

The chart below demonstrates that most rate Consumer Focus at seven or eight out of ten in this area, although a large proportion could not answer the question. This is broadly similar for Consumer Focus Wales, with most of the Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders interviewed giving a score of between six and eight out of ten.

Vision and leadership

Q15 On a scale of 1-10, where 1=weakest performance and 10=strongest performance, how well would you rate the vision and leadership within Consumer Focus?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



The recent change in leadership at Consumer Focus is referenced by a number of stakeholders, who feel this makes it difficult to rate vision and leadership. In addition, the fact that it is still seen by many as a new institution colours their views on vision. Although in the research conducted in 2009 stakeholders felt that it was time for Consumer Focus to move beyond the bedding in period, most in 2010 still see this as a time of setting down roots for the organisation. Therefore, while they believe vision and leadership is important in setting the remit for the organisation, they recognise the difficult times the organisation has faced and feel it is doing well to shape itself and its role. This is broadly in line with ratings given by stakeholders in the 2009 GB reputation audit.

"It inherited a lot of activities that the previous organisations were doing ... I think the new Chief Executive has tried to ... grab that and make it more focused so that's an improvement"

GB, Utilities

"They're a new organisation and have in fact just had a change of leadership, so that's still working itself in."

Scotland, Post

Vision and leadership is felt to be weaker by those who are less aware of Consumer Focus's role and remit. Again this was a trend also seen for Consumer Focus Wales, where participants who gave lower scores attributed this to a lack of clear vision. There is a feeling amongst these stakeholders that more effective leadership is required to raise Consumer Focus's profile and thereby make it a more successful organisation.

"I just don't really have a sense of understanding of what their vision is."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Others feel that the complexity of Consumer Focus's role and its broad remit make leadership challenging, and this is an area where Consumer Focus needs to improve.

"Seen from the outside, there hasn't been a lot of clarity of leadership or vision. [...] But I think that a very broad remit with big in-built conflicts actually makes it very difficult"

GB, Financial

Most stakeholders are aware of one or two Board members each, who are usually those they have dealt with personally. These findings reflect those from the 2009 GB reputation audit, where most did not have a well-developed view of the Board and typically only knew one or two Board Members.

In Wales participants could typically name the Chair but were less aware of other Board members. In Scotland, Douglas Sinclair is well known and well regarded, while in Wales Viv Sugar is spoken of highly. Lord Whitty is also well thought of by GB stakeholders. For Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland), however, none of the stakeholders interviewed could name a Board member, which may relate to limited recent or ongoing contact with the organisation.

GB stakeholders know that the Chief Executive of the organisation has changed recently, but not all can name Mike O'Connor as yet, indicating that there is scope for profile-building in future. However, those who have been in contact with him, or know him from previous work, tend to speak highly of him and feel confident that he will bring good leadership to the organisation.

The previous Chief Executive, Ed Mayo, is well known by GB stakeholders and still mentioned by many of them. He is felt by some to have done well in engaging industry and moving Consumer Focus forward, particularly when compared to Consumer Focus's predecessor bodies. A small number of stakeholders feel that he was not high profile enough, and want to see the new Chief Executive as a more household name.

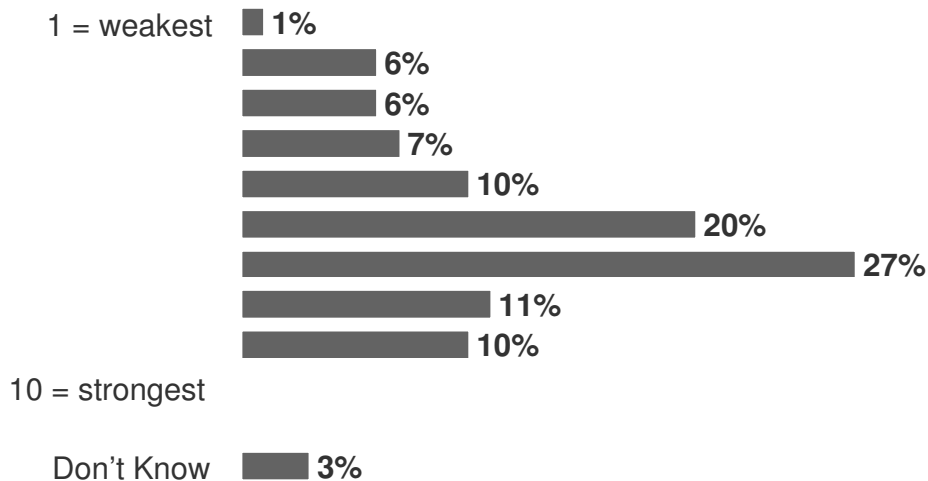
The relationship between the Board and the Chief Executive is questioned by a small number of participants, who feel it is not always clear where final responsibility for leadership lies. One stakeholder states Consumer Focus is unusual as they would expect the Chief Executive of an organisation to be the most visible person, but feel the Board of Consumer Focus is actually more visible to stakeholders and involved. A few stakeholders raised concerns that senior management within the organisation was not always visible. Similar concerns were raised in the Consumer Focus Wales audit, where participants were less aware of the Senior Director, although stakeholders felt this was due to the Senior Director being fairly new and in the process of settling in.

Advocacy

In terms of Consumer Focus’s advocacy work, stakeholders’ views are positive, as the chart below demonstrates, with most rating its impact as between six and eight out of ten. These tend to be stakeholders who feel they know Consumer Focus fairly well and have worked with them. Those with less awareness of the organisation feel less able to comment on the issue. Views amongst Welsh stakeholders appear to be a little less positive, mainly due to more stakeholders feeling unable to comment as they did not know how effective the organisation had been.

Effectiveness of Consumer Focus’s advocacy work

Q21 On a scale of 1-10, where 1=weakest performance and 10=strongest performance, how effective do you feel Consumer Focus is in terms of advocacy?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Stakeholders were asked to give examples of where advocacy has been strong, and most who feel it has been strong are able to point to examples within their sector which they believe are impressive. Examples of successful advocacy given include Consumer Focus’s work on price comparison websites, environmental services, e-commerce, on the Legal Services bill in Scotland, on fuel poverty in both GB and Wales, on cross-border post issues in Northern Ireland, on consumer pre-payment, on tackling the low carbon transition and on consumer experience of the Post Office.

"I think in garnering support around the devastation of fuel poverty they have done well".

GB, Utilities

"They have argued very strongly and constructively to get a wider community to understand that the needs of consumers need to be addressed."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

There is felt to be room for improvement, even amongst those who think Consumer Focus perform well in this area. Some feel Consumer Focus has not always kept the momentum going after beginning a successful advocacy programme. One example of this is the Legal Services Bill in Scotland, where Consumer Focus was felt to have been very successful initially, but had not followed this through. This can make it difficult to measure results, as well as losing out on further successes. It should be noted, however, that since the survey was conducted Consumer Focus Scotland has carried out a considerable amount of work in this area, including meeting with all the relevant MSPs and sending several briefings as the Bill progressed through its Stage 2 consideration.

In addition, it is sometimes difficult to see the changes that occurred as a result of Consumer Focus's advocacy. Stakeholders point out that this may not be because change has not occurred, but because the change has not been communicated or is difficult to measure.

"They started strong advocacy on the [Legal Services Bill] and then gave up half way through the process, so for example right now they are invisible in the debate."

Scotland, Other sectors

"I think they were beginning to set a good agenda on consumerism in children a year ago, but I'm not really sure what's happened to that."

GB, Other sectors

"I think that they are clearly doing quite a lot of good advocacy work but I think in some ways the advocacy work needs to be backed up ... with some overview of how things are changing."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Those who rate Consumer Focus less highly, or feel unable to give an answer at all, tend to be less aware of the organisation's advocacy work. There is a general feeling amongst these stakeholders that Consumer Focus needs to be more visible before they can give a verdict. In some cases this is felt to be linked to Consumer Focus's profile generally. If Consumer Focus is to be a true advocate, some stakeholders say it needs a higher profile with industry and the media, and potentially also with consumers. During the later interviews there are a few mentions of the Consumer Advocate during these discussions, with stakeholders saying that without the Advocate in place impact around this issue is difficult. As this coincided with press coverage of the Consumer Advocate this is likely to be the impetus behind these statements, as prior to the coverage no stakeholders mention this.

There is limited awareness of the specific services and projects Consumer Focus and Consumer Focus Scotland run. A few stakeholders have heard of the Extra Help Unit, but they do not know what it does. This is likely to reflect findings stated earlier that stakeholders are more aware of work in their own area of expertise, as the vast majority of cases referred to the Extra Help Unit are energy specific. In Scotland, there is some awareness of the various healthy living projects provided, particularly amongst stakeholders in the Food sector, and they are generally well regarded.

"[The Healthy Living Award] has improved standards of nutrition in Scotland, so I think they do that very well"

Scotland, Other sectors

"I'm not aware of Consumer Focus delivering services in the sense that I understand the word."

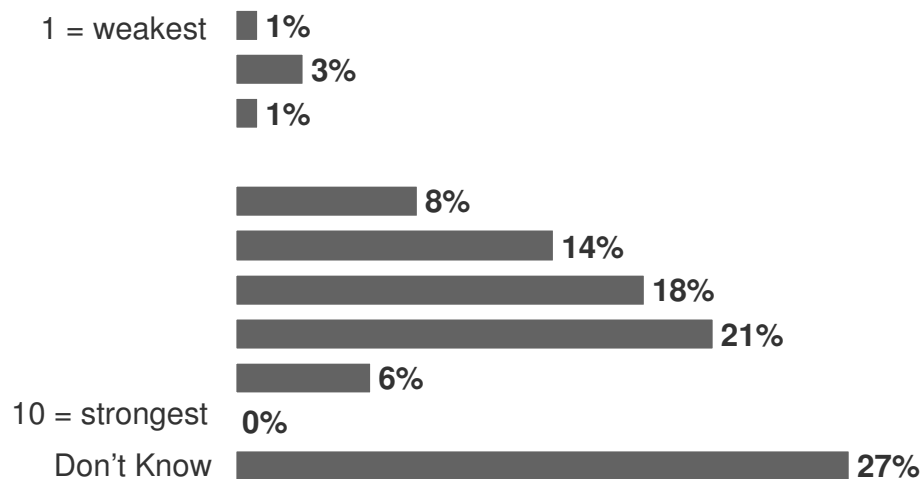
GB, Post

Policy development

Consumer Focus's policy development work is viewed positively, with most stakeholders rating its performance in this area as seven or eight out of ten. However, many feel unable to comment; almost three in ten stakeholders in the 2010 survey (27%) did not provide an answer for this question, while around half of participants in the 2009 Wales survey felt they could not say.

Effectiveness of Consumer Focus's policy development

Q22 On a scale of 1-10, how effective is Consumer Focus in terms of policy development?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



The most visible aspects of policy development to stakeholders are the reports and publications produced by Consumer Focus. These are well thought of and felt to be of high quality by most stakeholders.

"They've had a coherent point of view and they've kept on top of all of the policy developments but also produced their own point of view."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Where some stakeholders are less clear, or are critical, is on the impact that these reports have. There is a feeling amongst some participants that more could be done with the reports to then go on and change policy. They are not always clear what happens with the reports once they are released.

“The one thing that they do very well is they do produce interesting stimulating reports about certain consumer issues. [...] What impact those reports have I’m far less clear.”

GB, Utilities

“You can keep firing some excellent bullets, but you have got to make sure they hit the target.”

GB, Utilities

A small number of stakeholders within private industry think Consumer Focus’s reports draw too much on opinion, and less on a strong evidence base. Their view is that policy can sometimes fail to take into account the overall market, specifically the good reasons for companies making tough decisions. Some industry figures also feel Consumer Focus does not always take on board all the evidence available, instead selecting what they want to use and leaving out other views. One example used was over the disconnection of services through unpaid bills and the cost implications for the wider consumer if that decision were not made.

“They basically listen, take our views on board and don’t choose certain pieces of knowledge to back their case up and then ignore other empirical evidence”

GB, Financial

Stakeholders also give examples of where they feel Consumer Focus’s policy work has been effective, which include work on the smart meters issue, low carbon transition, sustainability, postal services in GB and Northern Ireland and rating retailers.

“They are tackling the low carbon transition well. They have made a commitment about doing that and are making sure the issue is given high priority.”

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

Many stakeholders recognise how challenging it is to measure an organisation’s impact on policy development. Amongst these some feel that Consumer Focus is not alone in facing challenges around measuring impact, while others would like to see more evidence from Consumer Focus itself on how its policy is having an impact. This suggests that there is scope to communicate to stakeholders how Consumer Focus is measuring performance, and how well they are doing against those measures.

“I think energy is the most difficult one. Energy policy is such a mess in government that it’s hard for Consumer Focus to have a strong impact.”

GB, Other sectors

Having an impact on decision-makers is a key aspect related to the success of policy development. There are mixed views of the impact Consumer Focus has on decision makers, with a generally positive view countered by a good number feeling unable to comment due to lack of knowledge.

Impact on Government and Parliament

Participants are generally more able to comment on the impact Consumer Focus has on Government than on Parliament. However, views are very mixed and identifying a clear consensus is difficult, even within specific sectors. This relates to stakeholders having little sight of Consumer Focus's work with Government and Parliament, which makes it difficult for many to comment on impact. Some stakeholders believe Consumer Focus is a strong influence on Government, and others are aware that Consumer Focus engages with Government, although they are not always clear what the final results of this are. Others do not see any evidence of its impact on Government and therefore feel unable to comment. Stakeholders in Northern Ireland believe that Consumer Focus Post has had limited impact on Government, but has been more successful with industry and the media.

"Given the size of the organisation, I think they definitely punch above their weight in terms of their influence both on government and indeed some of the industries."

GB, Utilities

"They are listened to by the policy makers here because they're recognised as being authoritative and credible."

International

Impact on industry

Views on Consumer Focus's impact on industry are also mixed, with many stakeholders feeling unable to comment as it is not something they have enough knowledge of. Some of the industry stakeholders interviewed say Consumer Focus does have an impact on industry, has influenced their own policies, uses the appropriate style in its conversations with industry and is an organisation to take notice of. Others feel that this is an area that needs improvement, particularly those who are less favourable towards Consumer Focus. Some stakeholders feel that industry can view Consumer Focus unfavourably as the organisation is seen as not being on industry's side, often opposing its interests. This is not always seen as a concern; indeed, some stakeholders consider this a natural part of being an effective consumer champion.

"They are a respected voice ... they're not shouters and ranters, they talk to industry in a very grown up way based on the evidence and I think that's respected by industry decision makers."

GB, Utilities

"I think the energy industry believes that Consumer Focus is just hostile towards them and I think they need to do something about that."

GB, Utilities

In the finance sector there is a feeling amongst some stakeholders that while Consumer Focus has had an impact, it has achieved this in a slightly too heavy handed way. Some stakeholders feel that it has not worked closely enough with the industry to affect change for consumers, and was too quick to move to making the super-complaint on the market for cash ISAs. They feel this has not helped build relations with the sector, and would prefer a more collaborative approach.

"In this instance, if there were issues, how much more constructively could the discussions have taken place if there hadn't been that rather aggressive regulatory intervention?"

GB, Financial

Similarly, some stakeholders in the energy sector feel that Consumer Focus does not always take their views on board fully or consult widely enough. As a result its impact is not always as high as it could be, as it can be seen as an outsider and in opposition to the sector.

Impact on media

Many stakeholders say Consumer Focus could have a higher media profile than it currently does, and is therefore not reaching its potential in this area. This is similar to the 2009 GB reputation audit, where half of those interviewed felt it was lower than they expected at that stage. It is felt that other major consumer organisations such as Which? have a greater presence in the press. In contrast, others say that Consumer Focus is doing well at garnering press coverage, but a few raise concerns that ‘going for the headline’ might mean being taken less seriously if there was not the evidence to back up their position.

“I’m impressed with their media work, of late they regularly generate some very strong media work.”

GB, Post

“They get good coverage of their initiatives and priorities within the press.”

Scotland, Other sectors

Some stakeholders feel that if Consumer Focus had greater visibility amongst consumers this might assist with its media profile, as it would be clearer who it is representing. The perception is that the average ‘person in the street’ does not know who Consumer Focus is, and stakeholders raise the issue of whether this makes it harder for Consumer Focus to have a high media profile, since the media may be more willing to cover consumer organisations that are well known to the public. At the moment Consumer Focus’s lower public profile is felt by some to put it at a disadvantage when compared to some other consumer organisations, such as Which? However, others feel that it is not critical for the general public to be aware of Consumer Focus; it can represent consumers and enjoy a high media profile without this.

Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders had similar concerns, with some doubting whether the public understood the role of the organisation or would be familiar with it. In the research conclusions for the Welsh study, the authors felt it was appropriate to consider whether Consumer Focus Wales should seek a higher public profile or should continue to have more of an ‘insider’ role. This question is also raised by stakeholders who took part in the 2010 audit.

Visibility is particularly felt to be an issue amongst stakeholders in Northern Ireland, who believe Consumer Focus Post needs a much higher profile with the general public. While stakeholders feel Consumer Focus Post (Northern Ireland) has done excellent work on cross-border post issues, and garnered some good media coverage, with a higher profile it could achieve more.

“Thinking of my circle of friends, my family and so forth. I think if I was to say Consumer Focus, I’m not sure I would get much recognition.”

GB, Post

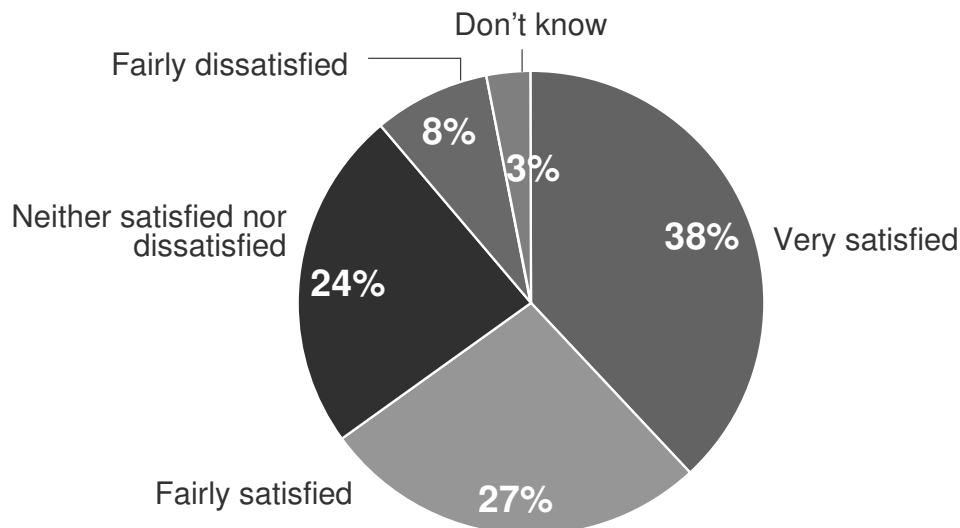
Communication, staff and working relationships

Although satisfaction with communication is high, there is still a clear feeling amongst stakeholders that the main area where Consumer Focus could improve its working relationships is through improving communication. Those stakeholders who are happy with their current relationship feel they already have good communication, while others see this as a key area for improvement. Before looking at how communication could be improved, it is first important to understand stakeholders' perceptions of how Consumer Focus communicates with them at present.

As the following chart shows, two-thirds (65%) of stakeholders are satisfied with the level of communications they currently receive, with two in five (38%) being very satisfied. A quarter (24%) say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while under one in ten (8%) are fairly dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with communications

Q26 How satisfied are you with your current level of communication with Consumer Focus?



Base: 71 Consumer Focus Stakeholders, May-July 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Stakeholders who are satisfied with the level of communication they have with Consumer Focus tend to mention personal contact with Consumer Focus staff as an important reason why they are satisfied. This reflects a typical finding across Ipsos MORI's stakeholder research, with personal relationships acting as a key driver of satisfaction. Some stakeholders, particularly those who are more senior or have a close relationship with Consumer Focus, receive information on a one-to-one level, through personal emails, telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings. This personal communication is very well received by stakeholders, who value the specific, tailored information they get from the relationship.

"We exchange agendas, we talk to each other on a regular basis at least once a month, our secretariats talk to each other. So, there is a good flow of information."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

Much of the communication that stakeholders receive comes as hard copy information in the post. Often this is in the form of a report or the 'In Focus' newsletter, which some are able to name. Some say that they like receiving hard copies as it means that they can store it and use for reference. It also makes it easy for them to share with internal colleagues when they are asked to provide information on a particular issue. A perceived disadvantage for stakeholders of hard copy information, however, is that their workload can sometimes lead them to put the information to one side and fail to read it at a later date.

"We get information in the form of written reports that we receive, we get it in the form of written comments that they provide on research and analysis that we do."

International

"I read it and then file [In Focus] for future reference."

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

Many mention that the flow of information they receive is irregular. Some point out that because most of the information they receive is in the form of sector related reports, what they receive is often dictated by what Consumer Focus is working on at the time. This can give stakeholders a good overview of what is happening in their own sector, but means they miss out on developing a broader understanding of what Consumer Focus does. If little is being done in their sector it can also mean long gaps between communications, and their knowledge of what Consumer Focus is doing can dip as a result.

"I last heard from them five months ago, so there is not a regular flow of contact."

GB, Business

While some stakeholders use Consumer Focus's website to look for specific information, there is a general preference for receiving information rather than having to actively seek it out, given the constraints they have on their time. However, there are some who will go to the website to find more information on an issue they know Consumer Focus has looked at, and these stakeholders say they have been able to find the information they require.

"Occasionally we'll go onto the website if we're interested in something they're doing and we just want to see what documents they have."

GB, Utilities

Improving communication and working relationships

When asked how their working relationships with Consumer Focus could be improved in future, stakeholders mention communication as a particular area for improvement, calling for this to be tailored, pro-active and consistent. There are a number of ways stakeholders feel this could be done:

1. Sending regular, personalised updates

There is a general feeling that Consumer Focus could be more proactive in distributing information to stakeholders. While they acknowledge information is available via reports and the website, they feel this is passive and does not actively point them to information that would be of interest to them. These general updates are welcome, but there is a desire for them to be tailored, not just ensuring relevance but also explaining to stakeholders why it should be of interest to them. Simply sending more reports is seen as of limited usefulness, since stakeholders have many demands on their time and are not always able to read reports.

"Dropping me a personalised email to say look we've posted this useful stuff on our website if you're interested would be part of then forming a relationship and equally then I would be able to think about how my organisation could relate to Consumer Focus."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

"I think I'd like to be invited to more things that are going on ... made aware of more things, without being sent more reports".

GB, Other sectors

Some stakeholders say that Consumer Focus could cascade information effectively to stakeholders through a regular email bulletin, mentioning that there are other consumer organisations that do this already. This would summarise the main emerging issues and developments within the industry or sector the stakeholder works in. They feel this should be kept concise so that they can absorb the information quickly, and should be provided regularly to assist them in keeping up to date with the latest developments, with some suggesting weekly, others monthly.

"I think they tend to send us anything they think is of interest to us. I'd be happy to get a sort of email feed or alert when anything was of interest was posted by them and that's about it really."

International

"They're one of the very few organisations that doesn't communicate as freely as others using text, email, they're very good at sending policy documents, brochures, marketing collateral which is fine, but I'd like to see them doing more in the virtual space."

GB, Utilities

2. Introducing more personal contact and dialogue

Stakeholders also express a desire for a working relationship which makes more use of personal contact, whether over the phone or face-to-face. Generally personal contact is valued, and stakeholders are receptive to being contacted personally about information that is relevant to them or their organisation.

"Whichever form of personal contact is preferable. This is opposed to generic emails and everything else."

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

Some stakeholders relate Consumer Focus's communication to their wider views about how well the organisation engages them in dialogue. Some perceive that where Consumer Focus has not followed up on dialogue with stakeholders, for example as part of a consultation, this limits the usefulness of communication.

"I'm interpreting it in a wider sense here which is, we can have good dialogue with Consumer Focus, however when you feel that dialogue gets ignored, communication on the whole is not effective, is it?"

GB, Utilities

One-to-one meetings are also highly valued by stakeholders, and a number of stakeholders feel more one-to-one meetings would improve their working relationships with Consumer Focus. Some stakeholders recognise the challenges around arranging one-to-one meetings and suggest that regular sector meetings organised by Consumer Focus would be beneficial. These could happen annually, or more frequently if appropriate, and provide an opportunity for Consumer Focus to showcase its work, establish and maintain dialogue with others in the sector and raise its profile.

3. Early and consistent communication

Stakeholders see it as important that communication happens at key milestones throughout a project, but not all perceive that this happens at the moment. Some stakeholders feel their views are sought at the beginning of a piece of work, but then they are not involved again and do not see their input until the work is published. A few stakeholders from industry feel they are not involved at all and believe they ought to be consulted at key stages while work is being carried out and their views taken on board.

"They're good at telling you what they're doing, they're good at involving you through the process but perhaps towards the end of the piece of research or work that they're doing, a bit more liaison before they make their final recommendations."

International

"Listen to us, take our views on board and don't choose certain pieces of knowledge to back their case up and then ignore other empirical evidence."

GB, Utilities

4. Establish more formal processes for consultation and collaboration

One way to ensure better communication throughout a project would be to make the consultation process more formal, as some stakeholders feel that currently it is done on an ad hoc basis. There is a definite interest amongst many stakeholders in working more closely with Consumer Focus, whether through collaborative work or feeding in information as required. However this needs to be done in a consistent manner for stakeholders to feel properly involved and valued. Getting the consultation process right, being more open at every stage of a project, and actively and consistently seeking views would all contribute towards improving relationships with stakeholders.

The final stage of this is then to let stakeholders know what has been done with their views, even if those views have been discounted. Stakeholders want to feel that their input is actually listened to, but feel that this does not always happen at present.

"I think just to up the level of consultation with key stakeholders like ourselves on a perhaps more structured basis. At the moment it tends to be project specific or on an informal or irregular basis"

GB, Utilities

"Some basic information sharing would be very useful. So what campaigns they are running or what areas that they are looking into, what their service provision is and opportunities for members of our team to perhaps get involved in some of those areas of work."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

"We would want them to come back and say "Having consulted with you and taken your views on board, this is now what we're going to do". And not quote that they've got agreement with us when they haven't."

GB, Utilities

Linked to this issue of engaging stakeholders, some feel that Consumer Focus ought to be more involved in the consultative work that its stakeholders carry out. A few stakeholders say they have invited Consumer Focus to sit on advisory panels and have not been able to get them to attend. More active engagement in this area is seen as having the potential both to improve working relationships and to raise Consumer Focus's profile through becoming more visible.

Perceptions of Consumer Focus's staff

Stakeholders are very positive about the staff they come into contact with at Consumer Focus, who they see as knowledgeable, hard working and well informed. While some described staff as passionate about their work, not all were sure that this was the case. However, the overwhelming view was positive, with staff being highly regarded.

"I think they are very knowledgeable, I think they are dedicated and committed and are ethical and professional."

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

"They're great, very friendly, amicable, competent, enthusiastic staff"

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

"I've been impressed with the staff that I've met in recent months"

Northern Ireland

Some stakeholders reference the performance of Consumer Focus staff at external events, seeing this as positive and feeling that staff always come across as very knowledgeable and ready to make their case. This again demonstrates the important role that staff play in building Consumer Focus's reputation.

"Through their attendance at our events, their credibility seems to have risen, certainly with us but I think possibly with many other external stakeholders."

GB, Government bodies and regulators

A small number of stakeholders do not have regular contact with staff, and so do not feel able to comment. In addition, a small number of stakeholders comment that there have been changes in the staff they have been in contact with, which made working relationships temporarily difficult, although they feel the situation is now improving.

Future priorities

Stakeholders' views on Consumer Focus's work priorities going forward are relatively mixed. A good number of stakeholders feel there is nothing Consumer Focus is not doing, or has not been tasked with, that it ought to do in the future. There is also a group of stakeholders who say Consumer Focus ought to cover some issues that it is not currently covering. This is contrasted by another group who believe that Consumer Focus ought to become more streamlined and needs to make some hard decisions on what areas it pursues. Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders advised the organisation to concentrate its efforts rather than spreading itself too thinly.

These views link back to discussions on Consumer Focus's role and remit, discussed earlier in this report. Those who believe Consumer Focus should streamline its work point out that in the current economic and political climate, this is a necessity, as budgets will prevent everyone from doing everything they may want to do. This is thought to be a general issue for organisations across the public sector, not one unique to Consumer Focus.

I think there is a tendency for organisations like Consumer Focus to become capsules for a whole host of issues and therefore it starts to lose its power and its impact so I would certainly like to see it focusing on specific issues with specific groups of consumers.

GB, Utilities

"They could be more focused and clearer about what their priorities are and how they are going to achieve those priorities and the way in which they're going to do it."

GB, Financial

"They will need to become harder targeted to be able to cover a reduced range and they probably will have to decide not what more do they want to get into, but if there are new opportunities, what's going to fall off."

Scotland, Government bodies and regulators

Those who feel Consumer Focus ought to deal with additional issues are often stakeholders who feel that Consumer Focus should do more in their own specific area of interest. They highlight specific policy areas where they feel Consumer Focus could have a larger role to play than it currently does. Examples of suggested policy areas include: the Legal Services Bill in Scotland (where involvement is felt to have lagged), copyright issues, sustainable energy and sustainable living more generally, the impact of the VAT rise and austerity on consumers, transparency of energy bills, and product safety. Consumer Focus Wales stakeholders mentioned areas such as looking at other providers in the postal sector as well as Royal Mail, disseminating information about smart meters, making information and forms simpler for consumers, hidden charges for energy customers, and doorstep lenders.

One key area where stakeholders differ in their views on where Consumer Focus's priorities should lie is in which consumers they ought to represent. This links with views on whether it ought to broaden or narrow its remit. Some say Consumer Focus ought to be representing all consumers, and as such needs to do more work on researching consumer views and building its consumer profile, in order to be seen as a clear consumer champion. This could also mean bringing more bodies under the Consumer Focus umbrella, such as responsibility for water.

“Certainly worth looking at whether they should all be brought together so that we can let people know that there is one body that looks after the interest of consumers, whether they be passengers, patients or whatever.”

Scotland, Other sectors

One way of doing this suggested by several stakeholders would be to run a regular consumer survey in order to identify what the key issues with consumers are and measure progress. This could also help identify the impact Consumer Focus’s work is having on improving issues for consumers. While Consumer Focus already carries out surveys of consumers, this indicates that stakeholders are not necessarily aware of the work, which may highlight an area where raising awareness could make a difference to stakeholders’ views.

Other stakeholders feel that Consumer Focus needs to make a decision on whether it is there to represent all consumers, or if it should stay focused only on the most vulnerable. These stakeholders say that a compromise has to be made, and some say they would favour a focus on the vulnerable, perceiving that this is where Consumer Focus could make more of an impact.

Some stakeholders in this group feel that Consumer Focus does well on the big consumer issues, but reiterate the need for the organisation to be in touch with consumers’ concerns and the problems that consumers encounter, in order that it can use this understanding effectively in acting as an advocate on consumers’ behalf.

“Provide more of an overview of what is happening with consumers in our consumer society. Help to understand if things are getting better or worse.”

GB, Consumer organisations and think tanks

“Understanding better what consumers really think and want in terms of protection and redress rather than what academically people might think they want. And how consumers really behave rather than how Consumer Focus thinks they should behave.”

GB, Business

Finally, there is a feeling amongst some industry stakeholders that Consumer Focus needs to understand and engage industry and business better. These stakeholders believe Consumer Focus could make more use of alternative options to bring about change on behalf of the consumer, rather than looking mainly at the legislative options. Working with industry to build codes of practice which protect consumers is seen as a better, more collaborative approach that could bring better results for consumers.

“The single most important thing would be to recognise that business also has a consumer focus. A joint and cooperative approach could be more beneficial sometimes.”

GB, Business

Of course, Consumer Focus’s role is to advocate for the consumer interest, and inevitably this means it is necessary for the organisation to challenge industry where appropriate. Nonetheless, this feedback from industry stakeholders does indicate a perception that Consumer Focus could do more to work closely and constructively with industry, without watering down its role as consumer advocate.

Appendix

Discussion guide

Consumer Focus Reputation Audit Survey Discussion Guide Final UK version – 14.05.10

Background

This discussion guide explores views on Consumer Focus amongst key stakeholders. Consumer Focus is the statutory organisation created to campaign for consumer rights in England, Wales, Scotland and, for postal services only, Northern Ireland. It was created in 2008 through the merger of three consumer organisations, energywatch, Postwatch and the National Consumer Council (including the Welsh and Scottish Consumer Councils).

Objectives

The purpose of this research is to:

- understand how Consumer Focus is viewed by its stakeholders
- enable it to take action to improve performance where required
- create a set of measures that will allow performance to be tracked over time and comparisons to be made.

To achieve this, the discussion guide includes both closed quantitative questions and open ended questions where you will follow up in more depth.

Interview structure

This table outlines the structure of the discussion guide and the purpose of each section. Timings are approximate only and will vary based on the participant's knowledge of Consumer Focus.

Section	Aim	Timings (approx)
Introduction and background	Introduce yourself, Ipsos MORI and the purpose of the research. Obtain permission to record.	2 minutes
Relationship with and awareness of Consumer Focus	To establish current awareness of Consumer Focus and the nature of the participant's relationship with them.	5 minutes
Overall perceptions	To establish top-level views/impressions of Consumer Focus and reasons for these.	5 minutes
Roles and remit	To assess how well participants understand the roles of Consumer Focus and how well they feel it performs in those roles.	4 minutes
Impact and influence	To look in more detail at the effectiveness of Consumer Focus in specific areas.	8 minutes
Communications	To seek participants' views on how Consumer Focus communicates, both with them and more widely.	4 minutes
Summary and future priorities	Identify participants' views on future priorities for Consumer Focus, allow participants to raise any other issues, wrap up discussion.	2 minutes

Introduction and background (2 mins)

Good morning/ afternoon/ evening, my name is XXX. I am calling from Ipsos MORI, an independent research company. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the Consumer Focus stakeholder survey. The survey is to help identify how Consumer Focus is perceived by its stakeholders and how it can improve its performance. The interview should take no longer than 30 minutes. We are very grateful for your time.

Is now still convenient to do the interview? IF NO, RE-SCHEDULE APPOINTMENT

I would also like to reassure you that all responses are anonymous, you will not be identified in our report of the findings (without your prior agreement) and that information about individual cases will not be passed on to Consumer Focus or any other third party.

REQUEST PERMISSION TO RECORD INTERVIEW

START DIGI RECORDER

<u>Relationship with and awareness of Consumer Focus (approx. 5 mins)</u>
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Q1. Can you tell me briefly about your current role and responsibilities?

Q2. And how long have you worked at your organisation?

Q3. How often, approximately, would you say you are in contact with Consumer Focus? LISTEN, ASSIGN CODE, CHECK CODE WITH PARTICIPANT. SINGLE CODE.

Daily	1
2-3 times per week	2
Once a week	3
Once or twice a month	4
Every 2-3 months	5
About once every 6 months	6
At least yearly	7
Less often than this	8
Don't know	9

PROBE FULLY FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- a. WHO INITIATES THE CONTACT (Consumer Focus or participant)
- b. PURPOSE OF CONTACT (e.g. policy development, reporting on and responding to issues):
- c. LEVEL OF CONTACT (e.g. whether they deal with Consumer Focus at a strategic or operational level)
- d. METHOD OF CONTACT (e.g. email, phone, face-to-face meetings, etc):

Q4. How well, if at all, do you feel you know Consumer Focus? Would you say you know it... READ OUT. SINGLE CODE. ROTATE ORDER

Very well	1
A fair amount	2
Just a little bit	3
Know nothing about it	4
Don't know	5

Q5. Which Consumer Focus initiatives or programmes are you aware of?

INTERVIEWERS NOTE: THIS INCLUDES ANY ASPECT OF CONSUMER FOCUS'S WORK, SUCH AS PUBLICATIONS, POLICIES, CAMPAIGNS (PUBLIC OR PRIVATE), ETC. PROBE FULLY FOR HOW THEY KNOW ABOUT THESE AND WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD

Q6. Have you been involved in setting up any programmes or initiatives with Consumer Focus? If so, how?

PROBE FULLY FOR WHICH PROGRAMMES/INITIATIVES AND HOW WELL THEY HAVE WORKED

Overall perceptions of Consumer Focus (approx. 5 mins)

Q7. What three key words or phrases would you use to describe Consumer Focus? PROBE FULLY: What is it that gives you that impression?

Q8. Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak of Consumer Focus to other people? READ OUT, SINGLE CODE, ROTATE ORDER

I would speak highly of Consumer Focus without being asked	1
I would speak highly of Consumer Focus if I were asked	2
I would be neutral towards Consumer Focus	3
I would be critical of Consumer Focus if I were asked	4
I would be critical of Consumer Focus without being asked	5
Don't know/No opinion	6

Q9. And how favourably or unfavourably do you regard Consumer Focus, bearing in mind I am interested in your overall impressions?

Very favourably	1
Mainly favourably	2
Neither favourably nor unfavourably	3
Mainly unfavourably	4
Very unfavourably	5
Don't know/No opinion	6

Q10. **Why do you say that?** PROBE FULLY

Role of Consumer Focus (approx. 4 mins)

Q11. **How well would you say you understand the objectives and priorities of Consumer Focus?**

READ OUT, SINGLE CODE, ROTATE ORDER

Very well	1
Fairly well	2
Not very well	3
Not at all well	4
Don't know/no opinion	5

Q12. **What do you think its role is?** PROBE FULLY

Q13. **On a scale of 1-10, where 1=weakest performance and 10=strongest performance, how well would you say Consumer Focus fulfils its role?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DK
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Q14. **Why do you say that?** PROBE FULLY

Impact and influence of Consumer Focus (approx. 8 mins)

Introduction: **I'm now going to ask you about your views on Consumer Focus's performance in some specific areas.**

AREA 1 – VISION & LEADERSHIP

Q15. **On a scale of 1-10, where 1 = weakest performance and 10 = strongest performance, how would you rate the vision and leadership within Consumer Focus?**
SINGLE CODE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DK
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Q16. **Why do you say that?** PROBE FULLY

Q17. **Which Consumer Focus Board Members are you aware of?**

PROBE FULLY FOR EACH: How would you rate them? Why do you say that?

Q18. **What is your impression of senior management at Consumer Focus?**

PROBE FULLY

AREA 2 – IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

Q19. To what extent do you feel Consumer Focus delivers high quality services?

PROBE FOR VIEWS ON:

- Extra Help Unit
- Consumer Focus Labs

Q20. To what extent has Consumer Focus’s work made a difference to any of your policies and activities? Would you say...?

A great deal	1
A fair amount	2
Just a little	3
Not at all	4
Don’t know	5
Not applicable	6

Q21. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = weakest performance and 10 = strongest performance, How effective do you feel Consumer Focus is in terms of advocacy? [IF NECESSARY: This means campaigning for change and representing consumers]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DK
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PROBE FULLY

Is there a specific example you can give where you feel Consumer Focus has performed well/poorly (ask dependent on score given)

Q22. And on a scale of 1 to 10, how effective is Consumer Focus in terms of policy development? [IF NECESSARY: This means working on directives and producing policy]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DK
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PROBE FULLY

Is there a specific example you can give where you feel Consumer Focus has performed well/poorly (ask dependent on score given)

Q23. What is your impression of Consumer Focus’s impact on decision makers?

PROBE FULLY FOR IMPACT ON GOVERNMENT, PARLIAMENT, MEDIA, INDUSTRY (PARTICULARLY AREAS RESPONSIBLE FOR: ENERGY, POST, CONSUMER RIGHTS)

Q24. Do you think Consumer Focus provides value for money to the public? [IF NECESSARY: I mean as a taxpayer/post and energy consumer funded body]

PROBE FULLY: Why do you say that?

Q25. In terms of impact, has Consumer Focus achieved more or less than you would have expected in the past 12 months?

Communications (approx. 4 mins)
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Q26. How satisfied are you with your current level of communication with Consumer Focus?

READ OUT, SINGLE CODE, ROTATE ORDER

Very satisfied	1
Fairly satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Fairly dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q27. How, if at all, could it be improved in the future? PROBE FULLY

Q28. How do you currently get information from Consumer Focus? PROBE FULLY FOR CHANNELS E.G. EMAIL, WEBSITE, TELEPHONE, POST, FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS, SEMINARS ETC

Q29. And how would you like to get information from Consumer Focus? PROBE FULLY

Q30. What is your impression of Consumer Focus staff that you have been in contact with?

PROBE FULLY: To what extent are they knowledgeable, credible, and professional?

Consumer Focus: Summary & future priorities (4 minutes)
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Q31. Is there anything that Consumer Focus has not yet done, or is not tasked with, which you believe it should be involved with in future?

PROBE FULLY: Can you give me more details about that? Why do you say that?

Q32. What is the single most important thing that Consumer Focus could do to improve its working relationship with you? PROBE FULLY

Q33. Are there any other comments you wish to make?

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Finally, we will be producing a summary of findings to send to all participants as a thank you for taking part. Would you like to receive a copy? IF YES RECORD CONTACT DETAILS CAREFULLY (EMAIL ADDRESS AND POSTAL ADDRESS)