**Changing to a green electricity supplier**

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**Summary**

**The greenest providers include Ecotricity and Good Energy, but they are relatively expensive. Outfox the Market, Octopus Energy and Avro Energy are cheaper suppliers of 100% renewable power but, some say, less environmentally attractive.**

If the UK is to hit its climate goals, we need to increase the use of renewable electricity, both to reduce dependence on gas-fired power stations and to replace the output of the nuclear stations due to retire before 2030.

This is where we can all help.

The UK electricity market is made up of generators who produce the power, suppliers who sell it to consumers and consumers who use it. They are joined together by the National Grid, so the electricity that you use always comes from a mixture of generation methods. But consumers can switch suppliers and tariffs, increase demand for renewable power and help tilt the market in a sustainable direction. Switching is easy and often saves you money.

**What tariff should you choose?**

There are three types to consider, using a home-grown typology:

* *Bright green:* A few suppliers generate their own renewable electricity and others buy it directly from renewable generators. This is the greenest approach, because it provides the most support to the renewables industry. Increased consumer demand for bright green power is most likely to mean more new wind and solar farms are built.

Examples of bright green suppliers are Ecotricity and Good Energy.

* *Paler green:* This is a bit complicated, so bear with me. When a megawatt of renewable electricity is generated, the generator is issued with a renewable energy guarantee of origin (REGO) certificate – like a birth certificate for a chunk of green power.

Bright green suppliers buy the certificate with the electricity from the supplier. However, the generator is allowed to detach the REGO from the power and sell it separately. Paler green suppliers buy their electricity from renewable and non-renewable sources but then procure enough REGOs to cover the non-renewable power. They are then allowed to sell all the power as renewable.

Examples of paler green suppliers at the top of *Which*’s rankings are Outfox the Market, Octopus Energy and Avro Energy.

* *Brown:* Brown suppliers buy power mostly without REGOs and mostly from non-renewable sources.

**How green is green enough?**

Paler green suppliers point out that by paying for REGOs, they stimulate demand for them and reward generators who sell them. Bright green suppliers call this green-washing; they claim that the reward effect is trivial because there is such an excess of REGOs. The price of REGOs has tripled since 2017 but is still only about £1.50 for the electricity consumed by an average household each year. REGOs are so cheap because the amount of renewable electricity generated –a third of the total in the UK now, mostly offshore wind – vastly exceeds demand for certified renewable power. This supports the separation of the REGOs from the power, which is sold to suppliers or industrial consumers who don’t want the REGOs.

**What about price?**

Bright green electricity can be more expensive. Ecotricity and Good Energy are exempt from the regulator Ofgem’s price cap because their higher prices are directly due to the support they give to expanding the generation of renewable electricity.

Some paler green tariffs are among the cheapest on the market.

**So what should I do?**

* Reduce your electricity consumption. Even bright green electricity generation causes carbon dioxide release ­– think of the manufacturing and construction of an offshore wind turbine.
* If you want to give maximum support to renewable generation even if it cost you more, select a bright green supplier such as Ecotricity or Good Power.
* If you can’t afford this or just want to know there was renewable generation to cover your consumption, choose a paler green one such as Outfox the Market, Octopus Energy and Avro Energy. You could spend the money you save in other ways, such as buying an electric car, offsetting or planting trees in your garden. You could install solar panels on your roof or invest in companies which build and operate solar and wind farms.
* Please consider moving off a brown tariff. People on brown tariffs are doing nothing to protect others from the effects of global heating. People who never shop around for electricity usually pay more than those who do. So use a price comparison website to reduce costs *and* make your electricity greener.

If you would like help moving to a greener electricity tariff, please email us (seag@btinternet.com).

* Remember it’s not just greenness and price that matter. Customer service and the accuracy and clarity of bills vary between suppliers.

**Useful websites**

https://www.which.co.uk/news/2019/09/how-green-is-your-energy-tariff This webpage includes information on the greenness of various providers, but is several years out-of-date.

https://www.goodenergy.co.uk/greenwash

https://switch.which.co.uk/energy-suppliers/energy-companies-rated.html

https://energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk