

Consumer guidance on the proposed changes to the Feed-in-Tariffs

How do I ensure that I receive the 43.3p/kWh Feed-in Tariff rate for my solar PV installation?

The application date for Feed-in Tariff registration is the date the application form is received by your electricity supply company. To ensure your installation will receive the 43.3p/kWh rate, the application must be received by the electricity supply company by 11 December 2011 at the latest, and you must be able to prove that it has been received. The application date is not the date when the electricity supply company enters the installation into the Central FiT Register which may be after 11 December. Most of the large electricity supply companies will accept applications by email. They will also accept them by post and in person. If you are posting the application, you should send it by Special Delivery no later than 8 December 2011. This will guarantee next day delivery. If you are sending it by email you should request a receipt. (See below for contact details of six large electricity supply companies, or FiT Licensees as they are known in this context.)

What do I have to include with my application?

You must include the MCS certificate with your application and make sure your name and address is clearly indicated on the application. Your installer is responsible for providing you with the MCS Certificate. You should be able to provide additional information subsequently though you should check this with the company first as their individual requirements may differ slightly. The additional information you will need includes proof that you own the system. Be sure to follow the instructions very carefully when submitting the application. The electricity supply companies should not later delay or change your application if they only need to query minor pieces of information.

What happens if the electricity supply company doesn't accept my application?

The six large electricity supply companies are obliged to accept your application if you are their customer already, if you are a customer of one of the smaller supply companies or if you are off the electricity grid. In other circumstances they are permitted to refuse your application, but in practice most will not. The smaller electricity supply companies are not obliged to accept your application unless they also supply you with your electricity.

Large electricity supply companies' FiT application details

FiT Licensee	FiT application website address	Tel. number	Application method
British Gas	http://www.britishgas.co.uk/energy-efficiency/renewable-energy/feed-in-tariff.html	0800 107 0187 (Option 2)	Email, post
EDF			
E.On	http://www.eonenergy.com	0845 301 4884	Email, post

Npower	http://www.npower.com/fit/changes	0845 078 2977	Post
Scottish Power	http://www.scottishpower.co.uk/energy-efficiency/clean-energy-cashback.aspx	08452701414	Post, in person, fax
SSE			

What happens if my Feed-in Tariff application is not received by 11 December 2011?

If your application is received by your electricity supply company between 12 December 2011 and 31 March 2012, you will receive FIT payments of 43.3p/kWh in respect of generation up until 31 March, and the lower rate in respect of generation from 1 April 2012 onwards. The Government is proposing that this new, lower rate will be 21p/kWh, but this will not be confirmed until the end of January 2012 once the consultation responses have been analysed. It could therefore be revised up or down.

How can I tell if the information the installer is providing me on income and payback is correct?

You can take a look at the Energy Saving Trust Solar Energy Calculator which will give you a realistic idea as to what level of income you can expect from a solar PV system depending on what date your application is received by your electricity supply company. Please be aware that the lower figure is still a proposal and could go up or down:

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Generate-your-own-energy/Solar-panels-PV/Solar-Energy-Calculator>

Is it too late to sign a contract for a solar PV system now and still receive the 43.3p/kWh rate?

If a company is still offering to install your panels before the deadline you need to be very careful. Make sure that the company is MCS certified and a member of the REAL Assurance Scheme. You can search for certified companies here:

<http://www.microgenerationcertification.org/mcs-consumer/installer-search.php>

<http://www.realassurance.org.uk/>

Make sure that any deposit and any other up-front payment you make is fully insured by asking to see confirmation. Make sure that the installation date is clearly written into the contract with the words *'time is of the essence'*. You should not be accepting an installation date any later than 8 December 2011 to allow for the paperwork to be in place well before the deadline for submitting your FIT application to your electricity supply company. If you take all these steps and the installation doesn't take place as agreed you will be eligible for a full refund.

What happens if the company asks me for more money even though I have already signed the contract?

You do not have to pay the higher price if you have already agreed the contract at a lower price. But, in certain circumstances, the company may decide not to proceed with the contract if it is no longer economic for them to do so. You would have your deposit refunded.

In normal circumstances you would look for another installer, but given that time is so short, you might decide to agree to pay a slightly higher price to secure the installation. Some companies have had to pay higher prices for the panels, inverters and fixings due to current shortages caused by the 11 December deadline. Make sure the installation date is clearly marked in the contract with the words '*time is of the essence*'.

What happens if the company asks me for more money even though I have already received a quotation?

The company should have told you how long the quotation would be valid for. Within that period they should not change the quotation, and you should be able to agree the contract on that basis. Remember to get at least three quotations, and to consider them carefully before you sign a contract. If the contract is dependent on an installation date, make sure it is clearly marked in the contract with the words '*time is of the essence*'.

What should I do if a company asks me to waive my seven working day cooling off period?

If you choose to waive your seven working day cooling-off period the contractor must ensure you sign a confirmation to show you understand the implications of this: you will not have the automatic right to a full refund if you cancel the contract; and, if you cancel the contract once the installation has already started, you may have to pay to return your property to its original state. So you should only do this if the installation date is very close to the date on which you sign the contract. Make sure you do not sign a waiver like this without realising what it is. Always read everything very carefully before you sign it.

What should I do if my installation was completed on time, but the installation company used equipment other than had originally been specified?

So long as the panels used were MCS-certified they still meet the same required standards as those originally specified. It may be that the output of the panels fitted is slightly different from the output of the panels originally specified. If so, you would be entitled to ask for an equivalent reduction in the price.

If other parts of the system – e.g. the inverter – were different from original, these are not certified under MCS, but the installation company will still have been obliged to use appropriate parts (in the case of the inverter, it must be G83 certified). If the installer uses an unapproved generation meter the installation will not be eligible for FITs. Ofgem is responsible for approving generation meters and electricity supply companies for checking them.

If you are still unhappy with changes that were made you can challenge the installation company on this, but it is worth considering how material the effect of any perceived difference is. Remember that if any change to the system delays you in submitting the FITS application, your installation may only qualify for the lower rate.

What should I do if the company is withholding the MCS Certificate because we are in dispute about payment?

The MCS installer standard (Section 6 of MIS 002) and the REAL Assurance Scheme Consumer Code (Section 7.3) require installers to provide you with the handover documents including the MCS Certificate once the system is commissioned. This is irrespective of whether or not there is a dispute about payment terms. You should make payments as agreed in the contract unless you have a good reason for withholding funds in respect of and in proportion to a suspected fault with the system, its installation or the basis on which it was sold to you.

My installation company has advised me that they can't complete my installation before 11 December. But they say they can still install the generation meter and inverter and provide me with an MCS certificate so that I can submit my Feed-in Tariffs application on time. Is this acceptable?

Any installation company who is found to have applied for an MCS Certificate in respect of an incomplete system will be in breach of the relevant MCS installation standard. The penalties for that can include removal of their MCS certification. A customer claiming FIT using a certificate provided in the above circumstances could not only have the FIT application rejected or their payments revoked, but also be prosecuted for fraud.

All certified installation companies must comply with the relevant Microgeneration Certification Scheme standards (MCS 001 and MIS 002 for solar PV). These set out very clearly the order in which the installer's tasks must be carried out: supply, design, installation, set to work, commissioning and handover.

Commissioning is defined as: "The activities to ensure that the installed system operates within the boundaries and conditions of the design and the product manufacturers' claims" and takes place before handover. The installers' obligations around commissioning are clearly stated in each MIS, for example, in the case of Solar PV: 'The solar PV system shall be commissioned according to a documented procedure to ensure that the system is safe, has been installed in accordance with the requirements of this standard and the manufacturers' requirements, and is operating correctly in accordance with the system design.' It is therefore not possible to commission a system that has not yet been fully installed.

The subsequent activity of handover is defined as: 'The point in a contract where commissioning and certification of the system have been satisfactorily completed to the contract specification so enabling the installation to be formally handed over to the client'. Part of that handover is the provision of documentation, including the MCS certificate. By definition therefore, handover –

including the provision of an MCS certificate – cannot take place until both the installation and the commissioning have been completed.

I signed a contract and paid a deposit but I haven't heard anything from the company and I think they may have disappeared with my money. What should I do?

The REAL Assurance Scheme requires its members to protect any deposits or advance payments. This includes insuring them in case they cease to trade before they deliver the goods to you. . You should receive an insurance policy directly from the insurance provider, or from the installer, depending on the provider, so be sure to ask for this if you have not received it.

If the company is not a member of the REAL Assurance Scheme you should contact the company that was going to carry out the installation on their behalf and discuss the situation with them. If no installation company was specified in your contract, or if you can't reach the installer, you should contact the Trading Standards department local to the company as a matter of urgency. If you have reason to think that the company has gone into liquidation you should contact the administrator. You can find the details from Companies House website: <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/>

My solar PV system is not working as it should. Who do I report this to?

If the solar panels or the inverter are not working you should be covered under the manufacturer's guarantee. In the first instance you should contact the company that installed the system and they will contact the manufacturer on your behalf. If the panels or the inverter need to be replaced the installer should arrange this for you and bear any costs.

If the system is not working because it has been incorrectly installed, this is a matter for the installer and you should contact them directly. If you do not get satisfaction from the installer you should contact the installer's MCS certification body:

<http://www.microgenerationcertification.org/mcs-consumer/installer-search.php>

The REAL Assurance Scheme requires its members to provide you with a workmanship warranty (also known as an installer guarantee) as part of the handover pack. It also requires members to insure the warranty or explain how it can be insured. Check with your installer that this warranty is insured. (It may also be called an Insurance-backed Guarantee.) If it is not in place, ask for details of how you can insure it yourself. That way, if the installer ceases to trade within the period of validity of the insurance, you will still be covered.

My solar PV system does not produce the output I was led to believe it would by the salesman who sold it to me.

If the annual output from your system has been substantially lower than that you were told it would be, you should contact the installer and provide evidence. The installer should refund you the proportion of the price you paid for the system that is equivalent to the proportion of the output that has not been achieved.

You may have access to legal expenses insurance if you need to challenge your installer to provide you with this refund. You should check your house contents insurance to see if this is offered as part of your policy.

Do I need to insure my solar PV system?

Once the installation is completed it is your responsibility to ensure that the system is fully insured as part of your buildings insurance cover. You must inform your insurance company immediately to ensure that this cover is put in place. If you do not the insurance company will be within its rights to refuse to cover the system or any subsequent impact it might have to the building.

During the installation process it is the responsibility of the installation company to ensure that they have all the necessary insurance in place to cover the safety of their personnel, including sub-contacted personnel.

Where can I get more information?

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/FITsreview

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/meeting_energy/renewable_ener/feedin_tariff/fits_review/fits_review.aspx

<http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/Sustainability/Environment/fits/Pages/fits.aspx>

<http://www.realassurance.org.uk/fit-changes>

<http://microgenerationcertification.org/news>