

Connections Event Feedback

Summary of stakeholder feedback and any actions arisen from the series of connections events held September-October 2013.

Comment	SSEPD Response
CONNECTIONS & ENGINEERING APPLICATION PROCESS	
Delegates mentioned that they would like to receive a phone call or email to say that SSEPD have received their job and it is competent after sending in the load letter and plans. Many stakeholders expressed the desire to have confirmation of competency to be comfortable that their application is not paused and will be moving through the quotation process.	Connections and engineering will contact the customer if they believe there is insufficient information to be able to pass their enquiry onto a designer. As a result of your feedback, they do now also email the customer to advise them when their job has sufficient information that they have passed the job on. Our designers then within 5 days of receiving a competent enquiry, contact the customer to ensure they fully understand the customers' requirements and that they are dealing with the job. Our process is to do this, and if it is not happening, please tell us.
There was some confusion and disagreement within the stakeholder groups around call backs and clock starts. How long do SSEPD have <i>before</i> starting the clock if the job application is not sent in competent? For example, no site plan provided. Must SSEPD still call within 5 days of receiving any application?	SSEPD do not have to clock start any quote which is not competent. The clock is started if we receive an application with all the required information before 5pm on the same working day. With applications that are not competent we will tend to chase for more details from the customer on one occasion and then wait for a response. We are moving towards providing extra help and contact for progressing non competent quotes and this is an ongoing action we are addressing.
Stakeholders had concern over paused jobs being less of a priority. They feel these should be chased and followed up by SSEPD and flagged within internal systems.	A new system is being introduced where paused jobs are chased on a couple of occasions by SSEPD. The target is to have no jobs on pause for more than two weeks and to either progress them through the system, or cancel them with permission from customer. This does however, leave the onus upon the customer to get back to us with the information we are requesting.
Some delegates mention that it would be preferable for SSEPD to email stakeholders quotes. "I would like an email, followed up by a phone call to say, have you received it?"	Emailing quotes is currently an option if discussed with the appropriate connection designer.
Some delegates feel that providing sections 15 and 16 with quotes is beneficial to their business and makes their process easier.	In discussions our decision to allow this had been seen to have very positive feedback, and we are pleased with this result.

<p>“Sending quotes with S15 and S16 for me is good. We can smack it in with a single application.”</p>	
<p>Stakeholders feel it is important to know who to contact for different types and areas of jobs, and that having a good customer relationship with them makes the processes a lot better. The main issue is finding the right initial contact.</p> <p>“The application process, if you know who you’re talking to, to me now works.”</p>	<p>SSEPD understand that once initial contact to us has been established, things run smoothly from this point. We are currently working on various methods of making initial contact for the customer easier and more helpful.</p>
<p>Stakeholders generally expressed their happiness with the team and overall process across all engagement days.</p> <p>“We deal with all DNO’s across the country and SSEPD is definitely the best. We are always really impressed with the knowledge and service from the connections and engineering team. They are always helpful and call back when they say they will. I’m surprised it is such a small team!”</p>	<p>SSEPD are pleased that our customers are generally satisfied with the level of service our connections team provide and always welcome feedback to continually improve upon our service.</p>
<p>It was suggested that SSEPD provide a simple checklist with application forms to help customers ensure they provide a competent application in the first instance and prevent pausing jobs whilst awaiting more details.</p> <p>“Do you have a checklist or idiots guide for application forms, what you need or how to, like a tick list? May sound like an obvious question but it makes sense.”</p>	<p>Our connections and engineering team are always happy to help a customer with their application. They will also contact the customer if the application does not contain enough information when received, and help them provide the right information in order to progress the job. Our new website, (due for release April 2014) also helps guide the customer through the application process with ‘help’ boxes alongside each required piece of information.</p>
<p>Site visits are something that most customers wish to see more of to ensure jobs are quoted accurately and provide a better, more customer focused service. If necessary, a site visit is considered by some customers to be chargeable with a small fee.</p>	<p>Site visits are something we see as being important and beneficial. We are currently re-structuring in order to introduce flexibility for increased site visits. A day of site visits can take people away from their desks when they could create a number of quotes, so we need to ensure a balance i.e. site visits on the more involved and complicated jobs. We do use Google earth, but acknowledge this has limitations and is not always the answer.</p>
<p>PROCESSES/PROCEDURES</p>	
<p>One developer was interested to know why SSEPD have an issue with placing services at the back of houses.</p>	<p>SSEPD are reluctant to agree to place services in back gardens as householders may not expect the service to be there. This causes potential danger to the residents when they’re carrying out gardening activities, particularly associated with hard landscaping, bases for garden buildings and water features. Developers should consider the CDM aspect before making this request. SSEPD will not refuse to place services</p>

	wherever the developer requests, but will strongly advise that there are better and safer ways.
Why can't SSEPD build risk into quotes? Some stakeholders do not believe that the business is regulated to the extent where this cannot be done, and disagrees with it being an issue. Some have a view that as SSEPD used to do it, and SSEPD have always been regulated, there should be no difference.	SSEPD are a regulated business and therefore our policy is to ensure we provide accurate quotations to a margin capped by Ofgem. We believe that we should offer our connections at least cost. Therefore it would be unfair in our view to charge customers in excess of the true cost of providing the service they have asked for. In our experience, most jobs are completed without the need for additional risk provision and it is rare for us to ask the customer to pay more once the job has been accepted. Our competitors, ICPs and IDNOs (Independent Connection Providers and Independent Distribution Network Operators) can introduce risk into their quotations as they are not regulated in the same way.
Some stakeholders have the view that DNOs having no flexibility in processes and procedures causes customer service to fail.	We need to be conscious of this. There is a balance to be had where we are 100% compliant with regulatory rules and procedures, but that we can be flexible with our own procedures and take customer feedback into account when deciding on alterations to these procedures. Although we are bound by regulation, if we feel it would be beneficial to the customer to alter some regulations we will encourage regulatory bodies to consider changing these based on relevant customer feedback, however this is out of our control.
WAYLEAVES	
There was a query regarding the process of quotations where the route is crossing third party land, where delegates were interested to know how SSEPD can provide a quote crossing third party land without asking the landowner for consent first.	All quotations are subject to obtaining Wayleaves. We cannot secure Wayleaves for every quotation as a large amount of quotations are not taken up. We do look to understand where obtaining a Wayleave could be difficult, and try and plan routes around this. We know we can place our equipment on the highway, but we need to balance this with providing the minimum scheme
How often when quotes are accepted do Wayleaves become an issue and prevent the project from progressing? "Wayleaves is the dark arts; it's the stumbling block for most of our projects."	This is a small percentage of schemes, however for the customer it could be one of their only or their biggest job. We try to avoid third party land where possible but sometimes it is unavoidable.
Who takes responsibility if a route does not work out once it has been agreed and paid?	Our quotations are always subject to being able to obtain the necessary rights and consents to carry out the works as designed. It is unfortunate, however whilst we will try our best to obtain these rights and the designed route, we cannot give any guarantees on behalf of other landowners.

	Therefore, if a route cannot be agreed, it must be redesigned and alternative costs provided.
Several stakeholders were interested to know what statutory powers SSEPD have regarding wayleaves.	SSEPD do have statutory powers for necessary Wayleaves and compulsory purchase. These can take a considerable amount of time and cost without any certainty of them being granted. Our experience is that it is always better to negotiate a solution rather than use our statutory powers. It is extremely rare to use statutory powers, and in the rare cases they have been used it tends to be for government driven projects or where aspects of social responsibility and national issues are heavily impacted by it.
NETWORK REINFORCEMENT	
How do SSEPD monitor sites where network reinforcement was required, to offer cost apportionment money back to customers when necessary? What triggers this? Is there a mechanism in place? Are we doing this effectively? Customers should not have to chase DNO's on this matter.	SSEPD have a process in place where new plant and cables are registered on our drawings against a job number. That job number gives us access to connection dates from which we can establish if "rebate regulations" apply. Also, SSEPD keep a plant register for substations and associated equipment which also contains the date of energisation. Any subsequent works which benefit from these schemes are highlighted to ensure the appropriate refund is issued. The exact detail surrounding this can be found in the rebate regulations.
Some developers have stated that they believe the cost of reinforcement should not be paid by them, and should be socialised.	This is a discussion that needs to be had with the regulator. SSEPD abides by the rules that are set down by the regulator. We are conscious this is a big issue within the industry, however we conform to the rules the regulator sets. We would be willing to participate in discussions to progress this.
TIMESCALES	
Some major connections stakeholders would like quotations to be valid for a longer period of time, ideally 90 days.	We historically offered a 30 day validity period for all our quotations to minimise the risk of any quotation becoming interactive with another where there are capacity constraints on the network. However, following stakeholder feedback we have reviewed this validity period and have begun to trial a 90 day validity period. Our standard validity period has been extended to 90 days from 1 st December 2013. We are very keen to hear stakeholder feedback on this. We have initiated this as a trial and raised a change to our CCMS with OFGEM. We expect to have this change agreed and our validity period extended as business as usual by early April 2014.

<p>Connections customers would like diversions to have more standards around timescales. It was mentioned that they appear to customers to be a low priority for SSEPD and generally take the full allocated 65 days to be quoted. Customers feel that this timescale should be a back stop for SSEPD not a target.</p>	<p>We agree that we need to improve on timescales to quote for diversions. There is no guaranteed standard for these and in the future we will be looking to bring down this time, although we have not yet set a specific target. Ideally, if a customer stressed that a particular job was a priority, we would try and complete this in a shorter time period.</p>
<p>RESOURCING</p>	
<p>One stakeholder highlighted a requirement for SSEPD to invest in more resources.</p> <p>“Ofgem look at methodology, not price. What’s stopping you from increasing the team and adding that into the overheads?”</p>	<p>We are looking to increase our staffing levels to improve our level of service. However, we need to ensure we employ the correct people in the correct areas and where there is the need. Also, some other feedback from customers suggests they would rather have cheaper quotations than those produced by other DNOs.</p>
<p>“Got more work, get more resource. It makes sense. As utilities you shy away from more work, if you were a private company, you’d get the resource and be jumping all over it.”</p>	<p>As a DNO (Distribution Network Operator) we are obliged under the Electricity Act to provide an offer of connection to anyone who requests it. We are therefore unable to pick and choose where and what we quote for. We are also obliged to provide an economic service. We continue to do this within the timescales Ofgem require. Depending on the level of work this will inevitably increase and decrease the amount of time we take to provide a quotation. We do indeed try to predict these levels or work and increase staff levels where we feel the task would benefit. At present, the development market is still uncertain and volatile and the specialist nature of our service is not easy to increase staff quickly as training a new employee to our exacting standards takes some time to achieve.</p>
<p>STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT</p>	
<p>Attendees feel that an agenda should be sent along with the invitation to events to help allow stakeholders to decide whether they would benefit from attending or not based on a detailed description of the content of the day.</p>	<p>We acknowledge that this information would be beneficial to the stakeholder from the initial stages of invitation and will look to provide this information from the outset in future engagement events.</p>
<p>Some stakeholders would like the opportunity to provide input on the content of engagement days.</p> <p>“You should allow stakeholders to make comments regarding content of engagement days to provide the option to include any key concerns or discussion topics they would be interested in, that could be incorporated into the day.”</p>	<p>This feedback has been taken on board and where appropriate, applied to further events. We are keen for both our customers and ourselves to gain as much as possible from any engagement and welcome feedback and ideas to increase the value and benefit to our events. One example of where this has since been addressed is the small scale distributed generation events that were organised following this feedback.</p>
<p>One stakeholder commented on SSEPD’s commitment to culture change in respect of stakeholder engagement and consulting with customers.</p>	<p>We are delighted to hear that our engagements with customers are having a positive impact and that our stakeholders generally seem pleased with</p>

<p>“You have held a number of these, we now know who to speak to, we see willingness, and we know generally the culture has changed.”</p>	<p>the opportunities to engage and have benefited from attending various events.</p>
<p>There was a strong feeling amongst major connections stakeholders that SSEPD should be engaging with technically competent stakeholders that have a large involvement within the industry and fully understand the policies and regulations, when looking at making changes to policies, processes etc.</p> <p>“If SSEPD are looking at introducing new policies, changing policies, you should be looking to engage with people like us who are fully involved in these. It affects them. It would do SSEPD’s credibility a lot of good if you engaged with ICP’s with good new ideas. Engaging with technically competent ICPs when looking at new policies etc it may [cause concern/work for] policy and regulation teams but at least you’re gaining the views and perceptions of more technical and competent people.”</p>	<p>SSEPD acknowledge that there is a great deal of benefit in targeting certain engagement with stakeholders whom have detailed knowledge of policies, regulations and technical issues within the industry. However there are a number of forums and working groups in place which are facilitated by Ofgem, DECC and the ENA that focus on technical and complex industry challenges.</p> <p>We must also acknowledge the opinion of our entire stakeholder and customer group whom are affected by our business and our processes, procedures. Our engagement strategy aims to encompass all stakeholder groups to ensure everybody can share their views and provide input to our plans and development of our procedures, resulting in an improved service to all customers.</p> <p>An engagement event specifically for ICPs has however been agreed within SSEPD and will be organised in the near future.</p>
<p>EARTHING STUDIES</p>	
<p>Some stakeholders highlighted that the recent change to the SSEPD design approval process that requires an earthing study prior to accepting an application is causing difficulties for customers. Stakeholders agree that earthing studies are a requirement, but feel that the timing of SSEPD requiring these could be better.</p> <p>“SSEPD have recently changed the design approval process to not accepting applications until they are complete with an earthing study. This causes delays the project.”</p> <p>“Earthing studies are expensive. It is not the need for one we disagree with, it’s the timing. We know it has got to be done and 11kV will have hot sites, we understand all of that, but we believe holding the earthing study to ransom to get the design through is not right. You end up going to two or three companies asking them to do this. I end up going to six DNO panels and</p>	<p>We are not looking to makes changes to our process of dealing with earthing studies. An earthing study is required in order to establish factors which will influence the design of a scheme. Therefore, we believe the earthing study should be completed before we can approve a design, and understand how a project may influence our network. SSEPD completes earthing studies at the design stage for every internal project.</p>

arguing the same thing.”	
SAFETY	
Stakeholders feel that SSEPD should share its safety message with other parties such as developers to help prevent the occurrence of unsafe conditions on sites, and acknowledge that language can sometimes incur a communication barrier. “Give message to developers and operators regarding safety rules and so on. I am often seeing extreme unsafe conditions.”	SSEPD acknowledge this and actively try to influence a safety culture amongst others. We deal appropriately with unsafe site conditions and often refer people to the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) for further guidance.
BUDGET QUOTES / FEASIBILITY STUDIES	
The majority of stakeholders expressed that they would pay more, not for a faster quote in general, but for a more accurate and detailed budget quote. “Your budget estimates are a very good quality; [some DNO’s] aren’t worth the paper they’re written on!” “Based on the information you have given, I would pay more for a better service. I’d rather be given a quality budget quote and given alternatives to my needs i.e. you can’t have 4mW with millions of pounds of reinforcement but you could have 1mW this way, than a quote not worth the paper it’s been written on.” “Levels of feasibility studies are a good idea but there will need to be standards for timescales put in place to stop these getting left to the bottom of the pile.”	Based on customer feedback we have made alterations to our budget and feasibility quote processes and qualities. Budget estimates are now free of charge and will give a very broad cost estimate for a development. For more detail, customers can request a feasibility study which carries a charge; however these charges have been reduced. We believe by offering both services we can satisfy all our customers requirements. The option of a formal quotation remains in place and is worth noting that this is the only quotation that you can actually accept and progress.
MISCELLANEOUS	
One stakeholder suggested investing in developing SSEPD’s Long Term Development Statement to make is an active document. “LTDS is effectively useless. It needs to be changed to an active document. Develop your systems. It might take a lot of work in the beginning but it will save you in the long run. If developers know the LTDS was up to date, you wouldn’t get speculative quotes.”	We are conscious our customers need to know where we will be investing. There are a number of areas we can provide this information and we are actively looking into the most appropriate methodology and process for both stakeholders and SSEPD.
Some stakeholders felt that providing heat maps on the SSEPD website could be useful in the short term but are not the answer.	There are ongoing discussions regarding the use and the measurable benefits of heat maps. They can be useful if they are kept up to date. In

“They are better than nothing but they are definitely not the solution.”	order to keep these at a level of accuracy that will be of any real benefit to the customer will take a lot of work. At this moment in time we advocate direct conversation with designers to discuss capacity.
There is a desire to have High Voltage schematics available to stakeholders to view on SSEPD’s GIS system. “Access to HV schematics would be very useful. Is there a reason it’s not on there?”	SSEPD are currently reviewing the security of offering these schematics to the public.
Stakeholders are interested to know if Independent Connection Providers are currently operating on the HV network.	We are currently working with ICPs to operative live on our LV network and whilst there are no ICPs working on our HV network at the moment we hope that this will progress to working on HV in the future.
Some connections customers are interested in the options with accepting only non-contestable works.	Quotations for full works now also have a non contestable quotation included.
Which elements of a job are contestable and non-contestable?	Quotations carry an explanation and cost breakdown to explain contestable and non contestable elements of a job.
Some major connections delegates would like to understand why SSEPD are charging for land enquiries. They have mentioned that these are also very expensive and would like to understand why this is the case.	Budget estimates are now free of charge but carry no network study. Feasibility studies are now available at a reduced cost.
Some stakeholders do not fully understand the rules regarding business separation and do not believe that these rules are adhered to.	SSEPD are a fully regulated business. We must adhere to the rules or we run the risk of losing our licence. We are regularly audited internally and externally to ensure that we are adhering to our licence conditions and following these regulations.
Stakeholders feel that DNO’s should treat single disconnections the same as a multiple disconnection. “Every single disconnection should come through the DNO”.	This is something that has been altered and the single disconnection process now follows the same process as a multiple disconnection, therefore all disconnections do now go through the DNO.