

# nationalgrid

Youth Insights Panel

2025-2026

Session 1: National Grid Electricity Distribution -  
Understanding the Connections journey  
December 2025



PREPARED BY  
SOLUTIONS FOR THE  
PLANET

## Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Overview of the session
3. Attendees
4. Key discussion points
5. Key reflections for National Grid  
Electricity Distribution
6. Appendices

# 1. Executive Summary

The young people were invited to offer their thoughts on the success and challenges of the current electricity Connections journey, and the young people were very thorough in their responses. They highlighted marketing and awareness gaps, with some young people saying they “don’t see any ads,” and “didn’t even realise you had to apply for a connection.” Many of the panellists did not understand the key terms or requirements of the application form, and navigation and usability varied significantly. The panellists consistently asked for clearer explanations and improved support tools, especially when it came to accessibility needs.

The role of AI continues to prove a relevant topic across all facets of life, and NGED wanted to explore whether it could play a bigger role in the Connections application journey. They asked the Youth Insights Panel to explore where the balance is between useful technology and losing the human connection. Views on AI were cautious, with some of the panellists seeing potential benefits, such as efficiency or 24/7 availability, and acknowledging the potential “opportunities for AI specialists.” However most of them also wanted to stress the limits of AI. They questioned AI replacing human roles, saying it can “damage a company’s integrity”. This showed how thoroughly the young people were interrogating this complex topic.

The Youth Insights Panel identified three priorities areas:

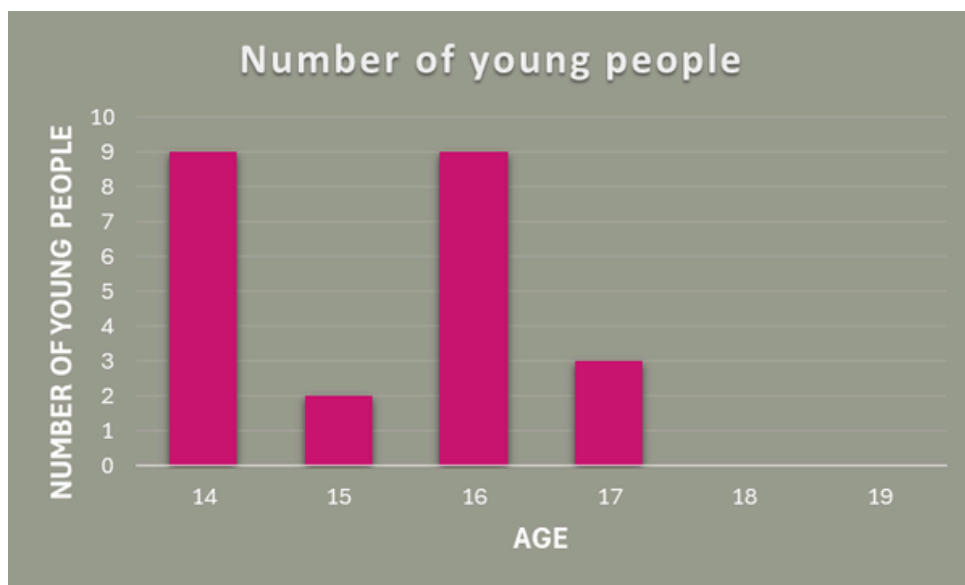
1. Guidance from the very first touchpoint and clarity of information.
2. Improved accessibility across devices.
3. Data safety and trustworthy support through transparency and visible human support.

## 2. Overview of session

### Background to the session

Session 1 was designed to capture first-impression youth insights on how easy or difficult it is for customers to find and start an electricity connection application online, via National Grid Electricity Distribution's (NGED) [Connections webpage](#). It also aimed to discuss the current digital support options available to customers in the connections process. It offered the chance to begin exploring how these support tools might function alongside the possibility of additional AI usage in helping customers overcome common challenges.

The ages of the young people who attended Session 1 are as follows:



The geographical spread of the young people who attended Session 1 is as follows:



*\*Please note: some of the young people are located outside of the NGED footprint, and so are not represented on this map.*

## Session details

**Date and time:** Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 17:15 - 16:45

**People involved:** 2 S4TP Facilitators, 3 National Grid/NGED representatives, 23 panellists

## Objectives

1. That the young people understand what an electricity connection is and that the numbers of connections needed are increasing.
2. Identify where the young people have areas of clarity, challenge, and confusion in the current NGED connection journey.
3. Discuss whether existing digital support channels are enough to help customers who experience difficulties during the connections journey.
4. Begin to understand the panellists' attitude to an increased use of digitalisation in this process, and the balance of AI and human responsibilities.

## Agenda

| Activity   |
|--|
| Welcome and Zoom poll <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Including brief introduction from Theresa Potter: why it is important to National Grid to hear from young voices</li></ul> |
| Witness presentation: setting the scene  |
| Group reflection: pre-work findings  |
| Witness presentation continued: the current customer journey   |
| Breakout rooms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• comparing real vs. current</li><li>• adequate support</li><li>• AI vs human?</li></ul>   |
| Plenary feedback and discussion  |
| Wrap-up, next steps and finish   |

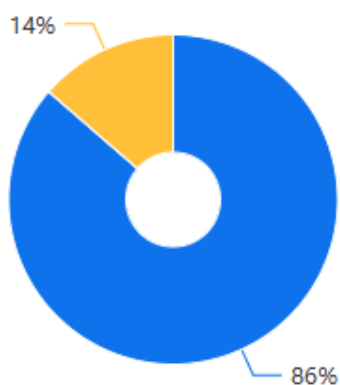
## 4. Key discussion points

### Introductions and icebreaker

National Grid Stakeholder Engagement Manager Theresa Potter explained that whilst National Grid carry out a great deal of engagement with consumers and industries, this Youth Insights Panel marks real engagement with the new age group of young people aged 14-19 years old. National Grid is excited to be listening to their insights, views and opinions, and bringing them back into the business to help shape their plans and future business

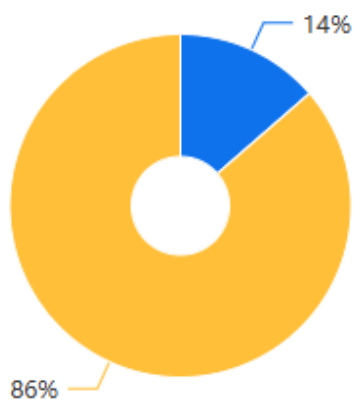
NG's Youth Insights Panel then took part in a quick poll, which served both to begin interaction with the session topic, and also to gauge some initial reactions to uninformed customer service provocations:

1. Would you rather wait five minutes to speak to a real person on live chat, or get an instant reply from an AI chatbot that might not fully solve your issue? (Single choice) \*



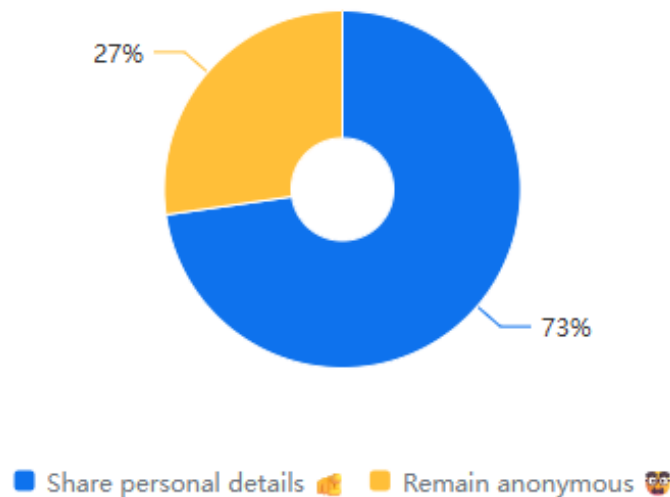
■ Wait 5 minutes to speak to a real person 🧑‍💻 ■ Get an instant reply from an AI chatbot 🤖

2. Would you rather have a website that is fast but confusing, or clear but takes longer to load? (Single choice) \*

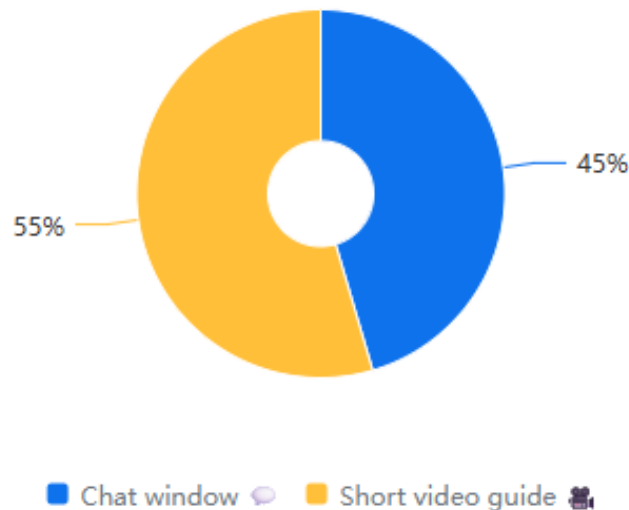


■ Fast but confusing ⚡ ■ Clear but takes longer to load ⌚

3. Would you rather share a few personal details to get personalised help, or stay completely anonymous even if it takes longer? (Single choice) \*



4. Would you rather get support by typing in a chat window, or watch a short video guide that explains the steps? (Single choice) \*



Human support is strongly preferred by the Youth Insights Panel, with 86% of the panellists voting to wait to speak to a real person rather than getting an instant reply from a chatbot. 86% of them would also prefer a clear website even if it loads more slowly, and a majority of 73% would be willing to share some personal details if it meant the help they received was more pertinent to them. It was a far more even split when it came to support channel preference, with a slight tilt towards using video guidance (55%) over typing in a chat window (45%).

#### **Witness presentation: Cuan Rowlands, Connections Strategy Manager at National Grid**

It was important that the panel were introduced to the role of connections within NGED's remit, so they heard from Cuan Rowlands. He provided additional context for this session, explaining that the road to net zero means Connections applications have risen sharply in recent years - and Connections are therefore becoming increasingly critical to NGED. He also introduced the session question of how AI might be further integrated into the Connections process, explaining that the panellists insights will help shape decisions about whether and how this might happen.

## Pre-work discussion

In order to allow the panellists some time ahead of the session to explore National Grid Electricity Distribution's connections process for themselves, they were set the following pre-work [Appendix 1]:

### Blank Screen Challenge

You are helping someone apply for an electricity connection. You will be given one of the following scenarios:

- Installing an EV charger at home
- Connecting seven new homes to the network
- Helping a small business get a commercial connection

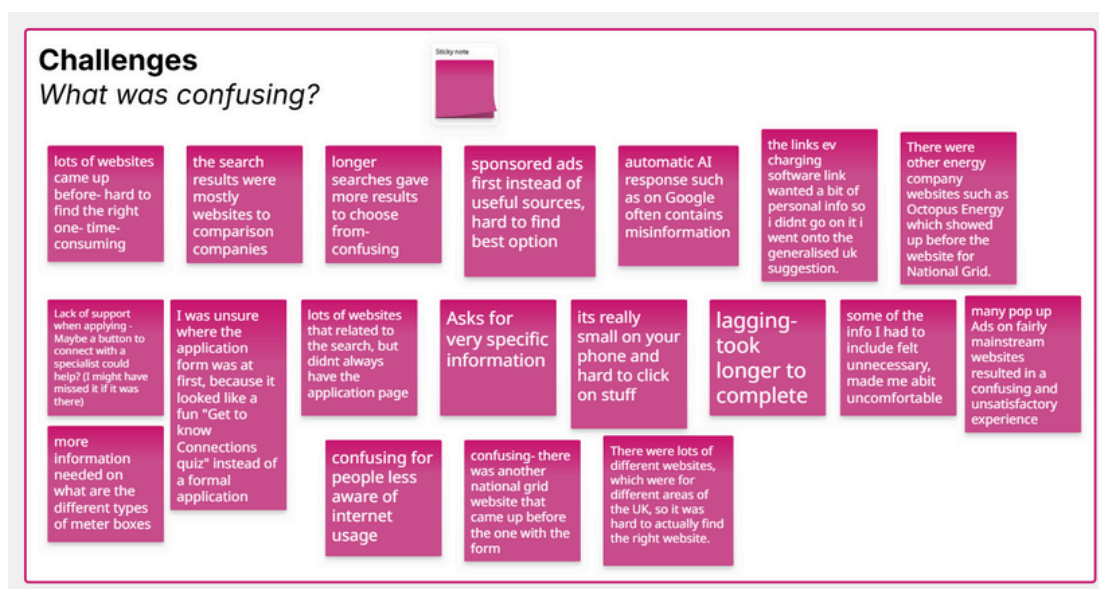
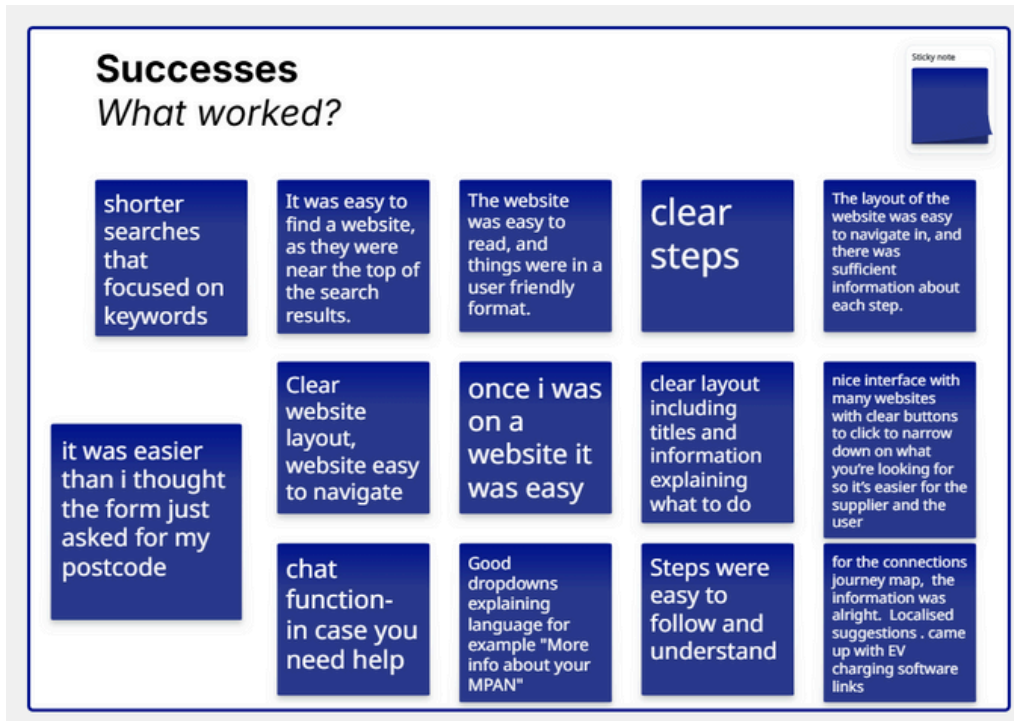
### Instructions

- Start from a blank web browser. Do not use any provided links.
- Search in the way you think you normally would (e.g., "apply for electricity connection UK", or "National Grid EV charger connection").
- Follow the results until you reach what looks like the correct National Grid Electricity Distribution "Connections" application starting page.
- Stop there. Do not fill anything in.
- Use the Customer Journey Map to note:
  - What search terms you used?
  - How many clicks it took to find the right place?
  - What was clear or helpful?
  - What was confusing or unclear?
  - What support you would have wanted at any point?

The panellists were also subsequently sent a prototype application form for each of the above scenarios. This was built especially for the panellists for NGED, to help demonstrate what the current customer application form looks like. Alongside the 'Our Current Customer Journey' video that runs through the online form, presented by Georgina Oliver during the session, this gave the Youth Insights Panel a stronger view of how a customer would typically carry out the process.

The young people were then asked to reflect on their findings from the pre-work, thinking about their experience of the customer connections journey and explaining what worked and what didn't from their perspective. They were asked to consider:

- What they expected the process to be like.
- How easy it was to get to the right starting page.
- At what point they felt confused or unsure.
- What support would have helped.



The above Zoom whiteboard was used during the session to capture the young people's responses as successes and challenges of their connections journey.



- The website layout was easy to navigate, with helpful titles and explanations guiding users through each step.
- The form was simpler than expected, often requiring only basic details.
- Steps were logical and easy to follow.
- The interactive interface elements, like dropdowns and clear buttons, were effective, and helped the young people narrow the choices and understand technical terms (e.g., MPAN).

- Sponsored ads and multiple unrelated website appeared before the official page, making it difficult to find the right page.
- Other energy company sites and regional variations caused confusion.
- Certain details felt unnecessary or intrusive, especially personal data requests.
- Small interface elements made navigation and usability difficult on mobile phones.
- The panellists wanted clearer guidance on meter box types and technical jargon.



## Breakout rooms

Before going into breakout rooms for in-depth discussions on the session topics, there was a short demonstration showing the current application form. The witness presentation then continued to outline the current digital support channels available as part of the process, to help inform the panellists' reflections on the customer experience of Connections, and how this can be improved.

*"National Grid and other big companies are exploring digital tools that could make applying for things faster and simpler.*

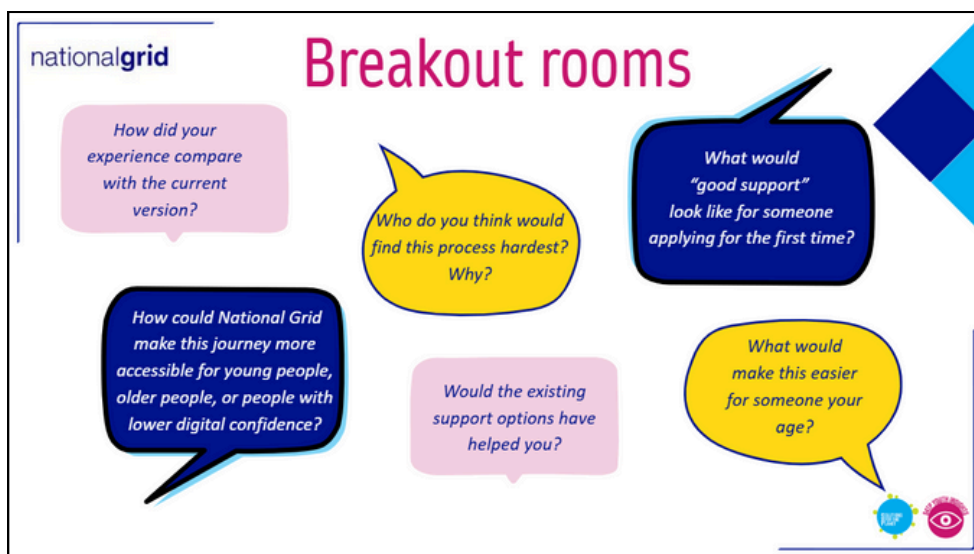
*But they also risk losing the human touch.*

*We want your take: when does technology make life easier, and when does it cross the line?"*

In two breakout rooms, the Youth Insights Panel was asked to discuss:

### 1. Having seen the demonstration of the current customer connection journey, how does that compare with your experience of it?

- Would the existing support options (chatbot, FAQ, phone, email) have helped you?
- What else would make this easier for someone your age?



### 2. Would you trust an AI system to handle something important for you - like a job, grant or energy-bill application, or connection to the grid - without ever speaking to a real person?

- Would you trust AI to make a fair decision about you?
- Who might benefit from the use of AI?
- Who might be left out if AI was used?
- What should NGED staff be responsible for vs. what should AI be responsible for?

## Understanding the process

- Many young people hadn't heard of the connections applications before this session, and didn't know what a "connection", "meter", or "site location" meant.
- Connections and electricity processes are not taught in school.
- The wording on the website was described as unclear or too simplified, while still requiring missing information.

## Searching and finding the right page

- Search results often show sponsored or irrelevant websites before NGED.
- NGED does not always appear when searching specific connection terms.
- Simple third-party "postcode-only" forms may influence people to pick the wrong provider.
- Finding the correct application page was difficult.

## Navigation and layout

- Experiences varied.
- Once on the correct page, some panellists found the layout clear and easy to follow.
- Other young people felt there were too many layers to the entire process
- The application starting point wasn't obvious - it seemed to begin a few times.

## Accessibility

- On mobile phones, text and buttons were very small and hard to click. Consistency across devices matters because many people only use phones.
- Language options are needed so non-English speakers can understand the process.
- Colour contrast and visual accessibility need improvement.

## Data privacy and security

- Panellists worried about data leaks and wanted stronger safeguards.
- Two-factor authentication was suggested.
- Sensitive information appearing after entering a postcode felt uncomfortable.

## Human vs AI support

- Many wouldn't trust AI with important tasks such as electricity connections or site plans.
- AI is seen as making mistakes, lacking sympathy, being untrustworthy, and misinterpreting unclear questions.
- Environmental impact of AI (especially water use) was a major concern.
- Human support is preferred for specific or complex issues, whilst AI could be acceptable only for simple or general queries.

## 5. Key reflections for NGED

### Ø Improve search visibility

- The Youth Insights Panel would have liked the official National Grid Electricity Distribution Connections page to rank higher and reduce clutter from competing or irrelevant webpages.
- Young people think it would be useful to help users to recognise the correct starting point more easily, using clearer signposting and simplified entry routes from search results.

### Ø Streamline navigation

- The Panel want to reduce unnecessary steps in the connections application process.
- Panellists said NGED could make sure interactive tools work consistently throughout the process, and ensure dropdowns and buttons remain intuitive.
- The young people wanted the process to be optimised for mobile phone users by redesigning for smaller screens with larger clickable elements.

### Ø Educate users to reduce uncertainty

- Young people would like the process to offer simple glossary and guides for technical terms and meter box types.
- They suggested making definitions accessible by giving short examples, e.g., a recommendation/key system showing which connection type suits which home.
- Young people said marketing or social media information explaining what a connection is would be helpful.
- They added that a list of commonly asked questions for shy or less confident users.

### Ø Enhance support options

- The panellists suggested adding a more visible chat feature or quick link to connect with a specialist.
- Improve readability and add optional language-support features to help with additional access needs and those with English as an additional language.

### Ø Build trust through data transparency

- The Youth Insights Panel want NGED to minimise personal data requests and provide clear reasons for any required information.
- Young people said that reassurance about who can access personal data and safeguards such as two-factor authentication would help increase user confidence early in the journey.
- They also would like to see more detailed information about environmental actions and sustainability commitments.

### Ø Balanced use of AI and human support

- The panellists suggested staffing live chat with real people and make that visible. Keep AI as a first layer, but funnel to a person quickly and clearly when needed.
- The panellists overwhelmingly want a human on the other end of a chat, even with a wait.
- The Youth Insights Panel saw value in AI for quick, general queries or 24/7 support, but preferred human involvement for anything personal, complex or high stakes.

# 6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of pre-work Customer Connections Journey from a Youth Insights Panel members

## Connections Journey Map



| STEP                                 | What did you type or click?   | What worked well?  | What didn't work well?   | What support would help?                                      |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Starting your search</b>          | Went on to Google - "I want to apply for electricity connection for 4 houses in UK"<br>*How to apply for electricity connection for 4 houses in UK*<br>* apply for electricity connection for 4 houses in UK* | shorter searches that focus on keywords such as "electricity connection", "4 houses" and "apply"   | longer searches gave more results to choose from, which means it will be harder to find the right from | knowing which keywords will allow for more accurate results   |
| <b>Choosing from search results</b>  | "Smaller connections- up to 4 properties- National Grid"  | websites that began with a form to apply for   | too many options to choose from- sponsored results leading to confusion                                | knowing which website is the best, ignoring sponsored results |
| <b>Navigating the website</b>        | on clicking the website link, I scrolled down to the "start my application" button  | easy to find- bold button with clear st  | I did not find any difficulties with navigating the website overall                                    | no support is required due to clear instructions              |
| <b>Reaching the application page</b> | clicked on the "start my application" button and went through the different questions   | able to look at property on a map<br>clear steps to follow<br>able to authorise another person to talk National Grid<br>ability to draw your own site boundaries | confusion on type of meter box question  | more information on the type of meter boxes                   |
| <b>Overall impression</b>            |   | clear and straightforward to navigate d to clear titles and headings chat function   | not sure whether details save automatically  | a video tutorial on how to proceed if someone unsure          |

**nationalgrid**

# Connections Journey Map



| STEP                          | What did you type or click?   | What worked well?   | What didn't work well?   | What support would help?  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Starting your search          | Commercial electrical connection for my small business                            | The result had a variety of companies , that offered this services                  | when i specified my search e.g (...in bradford ) national grid link didn't show up.  | so many options for new connections , could make yours stand out more -rather than a service , helping someone business |
| Choosing from search results  | New connections- National grid  | National grid link wasn't hard to find and was among the early links stumbled upon. | There was plenty of link options before the desired one .  | Instead of "New connections : National grid , it could be specified " ,connecting small business .."                    |
| Navigating the website        | The link - transferred me to website  | Straight forward , they knew my needs and were ready to help with my new connection | Everything worked well, easy and straight forward website .  | Don't really have any improvement   |
| Reaching the application page | Clicked options to specify what type of connection i wanted ( commercial ,small). | It was quick to get to the application page but also easy to spot where to apply.   | Thought i would immediately enter an application form , but had to fill in what type of connection first ( not a problem though) | When filling specific application , there could be a note saying , "answer questions to improve application "           |
| Overall impression            |   | Easy , simple and fast application  | They wasn't anything that went wrong that affected my application  | The heading of the link , The Application steps being specific and less a service more helping small business.          |

[Appendix 2: answers to post-session feedback form question 'Are there any ideas that you didn't get a chance to say during the session, or that have occurred to you since the session?'](#)

“Other people commented that the connections process could be taught in schools and I just wanted to reinforce that idea and how it links to subjects like Physics, where part of the curriculum is centred around the National Grid.”

“When it comes to customer service, consumers are likely to ask similar questions thus like other organisations you could adopt a similar strategy by combining AI with your customer services, with AI directing specific questions to consumers it creates less confusion when the problem is presented to the worker. Less workers will be needed and it will allow division of labour for different specific questions.”

“Perhaps use AI to analyse incoming questions/queries from different platforms and reroute them in terms of importance to an appropriate human worker so to establish a human connection.”

“I think some people had mentioned things about explaining the terminology used in websites, and I think that there was a jargon-buster feature on the connections website.”

“I just think that broader missing information can easily be put on the website without AI.”

“During the session we talked about visibility of text and I thought to help this issue that could be a magnify feature as I know my grandma has to use a magnifying glass to read and I forgot to say this during the session.”

Appendix 3: answers to post-session feedback form question 'What was the most interesting or thought-provoking part of the session for you?'

|   |
|---|
| Thinking about how AI is not good for the environment.  |
| The discussion about AI.  |
| The use of AI when it comes to personal data.   |
| The disadvantages of AI.  |
| Learning about the impacts AI has on the environment, and its negative effects, as it doesn't often get brought to light.   |
| The thought that AI uses a lot of energy to work.   |
| The most interesting aspect for me was where we explored the input of AI and its advantages and disadvantages.  |
| The breakout rooms.   |
| I really found it engaging talking about AI usage and all around learning more about the topic.   |
| Breakout rooms.   |
| The most interesting aspect for me was the impact of using AI in websites, especially its environmental impacts, and how websites have to take into account many factors such as how it will accommodate for different age groups.                  |
| The use of AI in simplifying the application for an EV charger.   |
| Discussing what could be improved in regards of the connections process and whether or not AI should be used as part of it.   |
| AI and the economy.   |
| I very much enjoyed learning about how thought out the expansion of NG connections is, with many 100's of workers aiming to innovate connections in a critical time (with the 2035 renewable energy usage prediction of tripling within this time). |
| Seeing ways people thought of ideas to solve the online issues and how people were considering different demographics of people.  |
| The discussions on how companies use AI.  |
| The discussion regarding AI usage.  |
| Helplines might not always be available so finding a solution for that that's ethical is difficult.   |
| I enjoyed hearing about how you apply for a connection as I have never actually known before how you get electricity if your house is a new build.  |
| The amount of pollution AI causes but also how AI is usually not trained on the right data but just on general data which means that it won't help as much as it should.  |



[youthinsights@solutionsfortheplanet.co.uk](mailto:youthinsights@solutionsfortheplanet.co.uk)



<https://solutionsfortheplanet.co.uk/youth-insights/>