

## Feed-in Tariffs ? make money from solar panels on your property

First let's get one thing straight - we are NOT a solar installer - nor do we have any intention of becoming one! If you are considering having a solar 'PV' system we *are* happy to recommend a small handful of companies that are experts in the industry. These are businesses with whom we regularly work (either employing them for our own clients OR working for them in our capacity as independent structural consultants providing expert building assessment and, where necessary, structural advice, ahead of system installation... The structural implication of a new PV system is something that far too many installers are failing to consider and, in our opinion, they are potentially putting properties at risk and, at best, wasting their customer's money.

If you are interested in having a system installed (or getting a quote to do so) from a recommended and trustworthy company - please call us first - we're happy to point you in the right direction!



Every property is different but did you know that you *can* make around £900 a year for the next 25 years just by having solar panels or a similar micro-generation system installed at your property?

The FIT scheme was launched by the government in 2010, to date it has resulted in around 50,000 new renewable technology installations! The scheme provides an income to those who install renewable generating technology such as small wind turbines, micro hydro-electric schemes and photovoltaic (PV) panels with guaranteed index linked payment for the energy they produce. The Feed in Tariff scheme is part of the government's plan to reduce the country's overall carbon emissions by 80% by 2011.

### How does the FIT work?

To take part in the FIT scheme, you must hire a member of the **Micro-generation Certification Scheme** (MCS) to install your system (any unregistered installer will be unable to sign you up). They will register you on the FIT database (administered by OfGEM) and provide you with certification to prove your new

systems' FIT compliance. Once your system (PV or other micro generation system) is commissioned you can notify an energy supplier (British Gas, Powergen etc) who will then provide your regular payments.

## **The scheme works across two payment tariffs:**

### **Generation tariff**

This provides a fixed payment for every kilowatt hour (kWh) of electricity your PV system generates for a guaranteed 25 years. This rate is paid whether you use the electricity that you generate or not. The payable rate is set each year for new entrants but and remains index linked (i.e. tracks inflation) once you've entered the scheme.

### **Export tariff**

In addition to the generation tariff you also earn money for each kWh of electricity you don't use (and of course any you do use is free!). If you require extra electricity aside from that which you are generating this will *still* be taken from the national grid.

## **How much can you make under the FIT scheme?**

Both tariffs are 'index linked' to resist the effects of inflation and to ensure a guaranteed return on investment. The rates vary depending on the size and type of technology you install; New rates will be introduced for those joining the scheme in or after August 2011.

The Energy Saving Trust (EST) advise that a typical domestic solar PV system of just 2.7 kWh will earn around £900 per year from the generation tariff and £140 per year from the export tariff (assuming that 50% of the electricity generated is exported).

## **How much will you save?**

As well as the estimated £900+ per year you can earn with FITs, the EST reckon that with a typical 'small' domestic system you will save around £140 on your electricity bills. However if you change your usage to suite daylight hours (like enconmy 7 - but during the day) you ought to save substantially more (again every system is slightly different)

## **How much do solar PV panels cost?**

The EST says that a typical solar PV system (2.7kWp) costs around £12,000 to buy and install, including VAT. However our experience is that a good sized system (up to 4kWp) will be in the region of £14,000 + VAT. We would strongly recommend looking around and getting a quote from a recommended supplier - as every property is different and each case needs to be assessed on an individual basis.

**Interested? If you are planning to take the next step and invite an installer to take a look at your property what are the questions to**

ask?

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## **How long have you been trading?**

A good electrician should not need to justify himself - but be aware that there are 'sparks' out there straight out of college, that have been lead through the MCS accreditation scheme and have very little real life experience in site work. Experience is the key here...

- **What are your qualifications?**

We would favour an NICEIC qualification, but any of the competent person schemes that allow an electrician to sign off 'Part P' installations is acceptable. If they can't sign off 'Part P' (building Regulations) themselves, or if they need someone to come in to commission the system - steer well clear!

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## **Are you registered with MCS?**

MCS registration is essential to ensure that you will receive the FIT payments due to you.

- **How many PV systems have you installed?**

Again, experience is the key thing here.

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## **Can I have references?**

You need to ask for references from say their 3 most recent jobs... Any discrepancy here should be viewed with total suspicion.

- **Is my roof in good enough condition - will it take the load?**

If the electrician say "Yes", "No problems", "Of course", "My systems hardly weigh anything - it'll be fine" - again - walk away.

A typical system will weigh anything up to around 500kg... that's not even taking into account snow-loading and other structural matters. Your installer is an electrician NOT a surveyor or structural engineer... You know who to call if you need the building checked out!

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## **What is the life expectancy of my roof?**

See above!

To make your investment worthwhile your roof needs atleast 25 years of servicable life. Any less (or infact anything within 10 years short of this figure) and the roof will need attention to make the most of your investment opportunity.

- **For how long do you guarentee your work?**
- **Are your systems covered by an extended warrantee?**
- **How will you fix panels to my roof?**

If there's any talk of 'drilling through tiles' - we would suggest either taking advice (we're happy to help!) or walk away. Rafter bolts are a cheap-and-cheerful way of putting PV systems up. They are quite 'agricultural' and potentially horrible. There is limited risk of failure of these bolts, however there is a high risk of problems being created by them; We would expect most (but not all) systems installed with these to need attention inside 5-10 years... Any removal and replacement of the pannels during maintenace (at any stage of the system life cycle) will significantly affect your investment...

Rafter hooks or 'in-roof' systems are the order of the day!

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