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3. Thesis Title: Can Feed in Tariffs and Renewable Heat Incentives help fuel poverty and inequality in the UK, and if so, how?
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6. Abstract

The introduction of Feed in Tariffs (FITs) in 2010 and the proposed Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) planned for 2011 have re-energised the market for investment in domestic scale renewable energy by guaranteeing a reasonable payback time for new installations. While these provide great financial opportunity for those with capital to spend, for the record numbers in fuel poverty or with low incomes, these benefits may seem out of reach. This thesis reviews the literature to show that fuel poverty and inequality can be improved by renewable energy incentives and highlights opportunities for, and barriers to uptake in low income areas. This knowledge is used to build a theoretical systemic model of the potential interacting influences that could enable FITs and RHIs to benefit the fuel-poor and those on the lowest incomes.

Two case studies of renewable energy projects in low income areas are used to interrogate and adapt the model via semi-structured interviews of multiple stakeholders and viewpoints. The findings from the case study are analysed in the context of the theoretical model and by thematic analysis and used to adapt the model to better reflect reality. Analysis shows that FITs (and RHIs if implemented) can have a positive influence on fuel poverty for those who can be helped to access it. Key to this access are local energy organisations (LEOs) who facilitate uptake in low income areas, source funding, arrange the best deals for households and ensure that the needs of the community are met. Low interest finance mechanisms, availability of 'pay as you save' schemes, good information sharing and community involvement are found to be important factors in the emergence of LEOs and in securing successful uptake of renewable energy in low income areas.