

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER: 62/2019
PUBLICATION DATE: 04/12/2019

Welsh Report: Consumer research to inform the design of an effective Deposit Return Scheme

Executive Summary

1. Research Aims and Methodology

- 1.1. This executive summary presents a summary of findings from a programme of consumer research to inform the design of an effective Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). The principle of a DRS is that consumers pay an upfront fee for a drinks container in the form of a deposit. Once consumed, the container can be returned and the deposit redeemed but if a consumer chooses not to return the container, they forego the deposit.
- 1.2. The aim of a DRS is to:
 - Reduce the amount of littering
 - Increase the recycling of drinks containers within scope of a DRS, especially those disposed of 'on-the-go' (that is, away from home)
 - Improve material quality through reduced contamination (for example when the wrong materials are put into the system (e.g. nappies in the recycling bin) or when the right materials are prepared in the wrong way (e.g. food left in containers)).
 - Promote greater domestic reprocessing capacity through providing a stable and high-quality supply of recyclable waste materials.

- 1.3. Defra and the Welsh Government commissioned research in England and Wales to understand how a DRS may work.¹ This summary and accompanying report focusses on the findings in and relevant to Wales and provides recommendations for how a DRS could be designed and delivered to be as effective as possible.
- 1.4. Mixed-method research was undertaken across a series of qualitative and quantitative strands, each providing complementary perspectives into consumer attitudes towards, and likely usage of, a DRS. The Wales report focuses on the survey findings from Wales and qualitative research data from across both England and Wales.
- 1.5. The qualitative research was conducted with both English and Welsh participants. This consisted of two key strands:
 - an online diary exercise with a sample of 30 adults and six children aged 11-15, recording real-time current consumption and disposal behaviour for drinks in containers, followed by interviews to explore in-depth individual responses to the scheme; and
 - group discussions with 70 people, to encourage the sharing of views and enable a more discursive consideration of likely use and preferences for the scheme design.
- 1.6. The quantitative research was only with Welsh participants. This consisted of two online panel surveys: a 20-minute survey with 1,453 adults aged 16 or over and a 15-minute survey with 372 children aged 11 to 15. Children aged 11 to 15 were surveyed as it was felt that this age group were more likely to consume items outside of the home.

¹ A separate report has been made available for the findings in England. [Consumer Research to Inform Design of an Effective Deposit Return Scheme](#)

2. Key Findings

- 2.1. In total, 74% of adult survey participants supported a DRS (10% opposed, 16% neither supported nor opposed). However, after further consideration, most qualitative participants came to question the idea of a DRS, which they felt asked a lot from consumers with no strong environmental benefit given the existence of kerbside recycling.
- 2.2. Between 77% and 83% of survey participants reported they would use a DRS on all or most occasions for all five types of containers explored in the survey for drinks consumed at home and away from home. There were some concerns raised by qualitative participants, including the storage and retention of drinks containers, the practicalities of carrying around used cans and heavy glass bottles and not being able to crush bottles prior to return.
- 2.3. The survey found that empty drink containers were more likely to be recycled at home than away from home (94% vs between 57% and 60% depending on the type of container). This was supported by the qualitative research which found that whilst most participants have established routines for recycling at home, away from home, convenience was typically prioritised; with most participants disposing of containers in the nearest available bin, only recycling if there was a clear prompt to do so.
- 2.4. Just under half of 16-24 year old and 11-15 year old survey participants (46% and 47% respectively) said a DRS may reduce the number of bottles or cans they buy by a lot or a little. Only 5% of adult and 3% of child survey participants said they would stop buying these types of containers altogether.
- 2.5. On deposit level, 10p was the most popular amount amongst survey participants (37%). More support for a 10p deposit was seen from older people and those in lower social grades. Qualitative participants concluded that a 15-25p deposit would be most effective to ensure the cost strikes a balance between being high enough to motivate people to use the scheme but not so high as to influence affordability. Qualitative participants favoured deposit levels that are a round number and that potential consumers are able to easily 'chunk' up into larger units of value (as such

20p and 25p were typically preferred compared with 15p). There were mixed views regarding whether the deposit amount should differ depending on the size of the container.

- 2.6. Qualitative participants indicated a DRS should be designed to accommodate use as far as possible within existing behavioural norms. Return points at large supermarkets should be quick and easy to use. Machines should also be located in busy areas (e.g. transport hubs, schools and workplaces) and consideration given to returns being accommodated as part of online delivery services.
- 2.7. Both the survey and qualitative findings suggested that older people, those in lower social grades and those without access to a household car may be less able to engage with a DRS for practical and financial reasons.
- 2.8. An 'all-in' scheme, where all containers carried the same deposit cost, regardless of size, was considered to be the most effective scheme as it keeps things simple in terms of ease of use and minimal time spent at return points.
- 2.9. The survey included a series of questions aimed at providing a better understanding of the most important factors considered in people's decisions to potentially use a DRS. The location of return points was the greatest driver in terms of likelihood of use of a DRS, followed by the extra time it takes to return containers. The deposit amount was considered less important by respondents.

3. Implications and recommendations

- 3.1. Both the qualitative and quantitative research findings suggest there is underlying support for the idea of government initiatives to reduce plastic waste (an issue of high concern) and to combat littering. The report provided recommendations on the design of a DRS based on these findings.
- 3.2. *Communications*: Responses in the qualitative research suggest that it will be important for communications to counter perceptions that the scheme unfairly places the burden for recycling on consumers and offers little benefit over existing recycling kerbside recycling or the provision of better on-street recycling facilities. As such, communications should highlight the

benefits of a DRS, contextualise the consumer role and reassure about current practices (e.g. the continued role of kerbside collections).

- 3.3. *Return Points*: Return points should allow for bulk returns to be made quickly and easily. While return points should be located at large supermarkets, it will also be important to have other centrally and locally placed return points to ensure access for everyone as the survey found that individuals in lower social grades and those without access to a household car were less likely to store empty containers and take them back to return points.
- 3.4. *Keep it simple*: Design of the scheme should be kept simple and be based on the 'all-in' scheme, where all containers had the same deposit cost.
- 3.5. *Deposit*: The deposit level should use round numbers which will allow people to easily 'chunk' the value of deposits; the deposit should be clear at the point of sale and on containers; and a choice of refund methods should be provided for, though cash was considered to be necessary to ensure accessibility for all.

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Full Research Report: Fitzpatrick, A., Jouahri, S., McGee, A. and Roberts, N. (2019). Wales Report: Consumer research to inform the design of an effective deposit return scheme. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 62/2019.>

<https://gov.wales/consumer-research-inform-design-effective-deposit-return-scheme-drs>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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