

2023

By Eirini Chatzidaki

REUSABLE CONTAINERS

REPORT

Introduction

This is a report of my findings from research I conducted with businesses and consumers regarding their perspectives on reusable packaging for delivery and take-away orders between May and July 2022. The participants consisted of 30 businesses in the food sector (Restaurants, Cafes, Bistros) based in Edinburgh and 31 consumers between the ages 18-30. Business owners/managers completed a short interview while consumers completed a questionnaire.

Business Insights

From the businesses interviewed, the majority:

- currently use recyclable or compostable packaging
- weren't aware of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) or when it will be applied
- rely primarily on packaging options that are available from their providers
- weren't aware of the term Circular Economy (CE)
- had suggestions of what would encourage them to participate in a circular economy scheme for their packaging

Factors that would encourage businesses to adopt a Circular Economy model

33% GENERAL SUPPORT

from the government, whether in the form of the suggested scheme or an advisory board to support a transition into CE.

20% POLICY CHANGES

towards the prohibition of certain plastics and other harmful materials.

13% FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

that promote the adoption of the scheme.

7% PUBLICITY OF BUSINESSES

that followed green practices through advertisements, posters and other media.

*The total % doesn't equal to 100% as some businesses had no recommendations while others had more than one

Factors that would discourage businesses from adopting a Circular Economy model

36% COST

as there is a concern over the impact of such a scheme on the limited budget of their businesses, especially if it's compounded by the cost of the recycling service.

23% THE COMPLEXITY

of the system that would be applied, related to the bureaucracy around its implementation as businesses already have numerous tasks to complete in their daily operations.

7% HYGIENE

as cleaning packaging whether in the premises or through a 3rd party creates doubt about the degree of cleanliness achieved and the staff that would be required to perform that task.

7% SPACE

as storing the reusable packaging for collection would be an issue in their limited available space.

Participating businesses were given 2 examples of potential "Return Your Container" Schemes:

Option 1:

Be provided with a service that collected used packaging, sanitised and returned it to them

Option 2:

Be given financial incentives in the form of tax breaks

57% chose Option 1,
but the cost of such a
service would have to
be taken into account

Other Interesting Insights

Some businesses already have circular economy schemes in place for their packaging or other parts of the business

Some business owners feel that current policy and legislation regarding recycling is counterproductive to their efforts

The majority of the business owners were keen to discuss the issue at length and had a lot of insightful thoughts (not all of which could be covered on this occasion)

Consumer Perspectives

The majority of consumers:

- Recycled/composted food packaging in a regular fashion
- Are aware and can describe Circular Economy as a term
- Would be interested in a "Return Your Container" Scheme
- Identified convenience as their primary motivator in participating in a scheme

3 Key themes were identified as relating to Consumers interest in Participating in a RYC scheme



Convenience

**Financial
incentives**

**Care for the
environment**

Consumers were given 3 options for a scheme:

Option 1:

If there was a discount on their next order

Option 2:

If there was a collection service that picked up the packaging

Option 3:

If there was a bin in their neighbourhood, similar to a recycling bin where they could return their packaging

Options 2 & 3 showed significantly more positive responses than Option 1

Key take-aways (pun intended)

Businesses

- Businesses don't have the necessary support (through policy or financial incentives) to use a reusable packaging at the moment
- Cost and Complexity are at the forefront of their worries over such a system

Consumers

- Convenience and Cost were the main motivators for consumers to use a RYC scheme
- There is awareness and interest in the Circular Economy movement for consumers

There is interest and will from both businesses and consumers to move towards a reusable packaging system. To make the change, both sides need to encounter sufficient structure and incentives that will enable them to succeed in that transition. To support this new business model however, there is a need for new policy and the creation of government-backed schemes that will support both sides appropriately.